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The Occasionality of Byzantine Didacticism: a Case Study from the Twelfth Century (Milan, Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, C 222 inf. f. 218r)*

Abstract

The paper analyses, edits and translates an unknown didactic poem on prosodic quantity attributed to John Tzetzes. The poem contains an autobiographical and personal component that has a lyrical dimension, challenging the way in which both didactic poetry and Byzantine poetry is traditionally understood. Moreover, manuscripts such as the one preserving the poem under investigation may be seen as sites for both the frozen moment of the didactic occasion and a continuation of the debate in the form of authorial comments on and to the scribe. Overall, the paper argues that didactic poetry in Byzantium was marked by improvisation and personal experience: in other words, a kind of occasionality.

Keywords

John Tzetzes, didactic poetry, Byzantine literature, improvisation, prosody.

Didactic poetry, both classical and Byzantine, has been recently examined with renewed interest. Discussions have focused on the very definition of the genre, on its literariness as well as on contexts of performance.[1] The theorization offered by K. Volk, in particular, has been favorably received among Byzantinists.[2] According to Volk, didactic poetry is defined by (1) explicit didactic intent, (2) a teacher-student constellation, (3) poetic self-consciousness, and (4) poetic simultaneity. Although at first sight convenient, such a framework might be problematic. Van den Berg, for instance, has highlighted that it does not capture the actual – not only fictional – immediacy of the communicative situation characterizing much of Byzantine di-

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1. These aspects are developed in Volk 25–68; Sider; *Hörandner,* "The Byzantine Didactic poem"; "Teaching with Verse"; Bernard 230–31; Van den Berg 285–88.

2. His theoretical framework has inspired *Hörandner,* "The Byzantine Didactic Poem" 56–57; "Teaching with Verse" 460; Bernard 242, n. 98.

dactic poetry (Van den Berg 288, n. 24). At the other end of the chronological spectrum, Sider has pointed out that such a grid is too rigid and does not account for changes across time, treating "didactic poetry" as a monolith (Sider 20–21). Sider's reflections are particularly valuable and can be extended beyond the remits of strictly classical didactic poetry. Volk too stresses that the notion of genre is perhaps too narrow when it comes to didactic poetry, thus preferring the notion of mode. Sider goes one step further, by calling attention to the fact that the very notion of 'didactic poetry' is a modern one, steeped in eighteenth-century aesthetics, as the tag features for the first time in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1756 (Sider 18). It is not coincidence then that Sider also breaks – and rightly so in my opinion – the dichotomy reinforced in the romantic era, but ultimately based on Aristotle, between didacticism and elegy.[3] Sider does so by including archaic and classical production of ethical content in elegiac verse into the didactic mode. I think, however, that the dichotomy can be broken also by looking at how immediate, personal, and not rarely occasional traits – conventionally ascribed to lyrical poetry – are expressed through didactic modes.

3. The connection is traced in Payne.

The actual simultaneity of Byzantine didactic poetry calls for this different perspective, as the classroom's communicative situation is relational by definition and teacherly performance often implies both improvisation and references to personal experiences. A distinctive characteristic of Byzantine didacticism, I would say, is to create its own occasionality. Teachers turn their own subjectivity or circumstances into a learning tool. A case in point is offered by a prolific eleventh-century poet and teacher, Niketas of Herakleia.[4] Author of several poems on grammar in a variety meters (political verse, dodecasyllable, but also hymnographic meters),[5] he wrote a 1087-political verse poem on various aspects of language.[6] This poem is seemingly interrupted by a long rant on the laziness of his students. This rant is admittedly verbose (Hörandner, "The Byzantine Didactic Poem" 65), but I would argue that it is such by design. By venting out about the unpleasantness of student behavior in class, Niketas creates the occasion to instruct his pupils about the different shades of meaning taken by one and the same verb associated to different prepositions. The following passage provides a telling example, one that I would ask the reader to keep in mind, because it presents us with some elements that we will find again in the text constituting the core of this contribution (*On Grammar* 427–36, 363 Boissonade):

4. See *Hörandner*, "The Byzantine Didactic Poem" 64–66 and Roosen, for an overview of Niketas' work.

5. In particular *On Grammar*, edited in Boissonade 341–93. Nina Vanhoutte is currently preparing the edition of a corpus of poems by Niketas.

6. Bernard 25; 106–08.

Καταπαλαίει σοῦ τὸν νοῦν ἡ φαύλη ῥᾳθυμία,
καὶ συμπαλαίειν οὐ τολμᾷς ἀρίστοις σχεδογράφοις,
ὅθεν ἀργός καθήμενος ταῖς ἅταις προσπαλαίεις.

Ὑπερφωνῶ τὸν Στέντορα πρὸς λόγους φωνῶ δέ σε,
ὅπερ σημαίνει τὸ καλῶ, περιφωνῶ τοὺς ὄχλους
καταφωνῶ τὸν αὐλητὴν,τὸν Ἰσμηνίαν λέγω
καταφωνῶ τὸν τόπον δὲ καὶ τὸ...
Σὺ δ'ὡς ἐχθρὸς οὐ συμφωνεῖς ταῖς παραινέσεσί μου.
Φωνῶ τε καὶ ἐπιφωνῶ, σημαῖνον τὸ βοῶ σοι,
πρὸς δοτικὴν μοι σύνταττε, καὶ τύχῃς οὗπερ θέλεις.

The sloppiness of laziness overcomes your mind,
and you do not dare to come up against the best schedographers,
hence sitting idle you come to fight your deceptions.

I shout louder than Stentor, but I shout out to you "to the speeches!,"
which means I call you out. I shout after the multitudes,
I shout like the aulos player, I mean Isminias,
And my shouting fills the place and the…
But you, hostile, you do not obey to my exhortations.
I shout and shout again, meaning that I yell at you,
come on, construe it with the dative and get to your point!

These lines are a fully-fledged satire offering a glimpse – if exaggerated – into a loud Constantinopolitan classroom. Disobedient pupils offer the occasion for a semantic tour de force displaying learnedness, immediacy, humor and an engaging teaching technique. Improvisation, after all, is a tool of the trade for any teacher. As such it can be systematized, theorized and therefore taught. In the twelfth-century commentary on the so-called *corpus Hermogenianum* authored by John Tzetzes – one of the leading and most controversial figures of his time – this tendency can be seen clearly. The *corpus* was the handbook of choice for rhetorical training in Byzantium and the stepping stone to further develop communicative and narrative strategies. When enlarging on the 'spontaneous speech' or ἐνδιάθετος λόγος[7] in his commentary on Hermogenes' *De ideis* II 7. 9. 1, p. 172 Patillon,[8] John Tzetzes offers precious insides on the performance and styling of improvisation (*Commentary on Hermogenes' De ideis,* 2675–80, pp. 120–21 Barili):[9]

7. On the importance of the notion in middle Byzantine rhetorical theory see Valiavitcharska, "Rhetorical Figures"; Pizzone, "Emotions and λόγος ἐνδιάθετος."

8. See Pizzone, "Tzetzes and the Prokatastasis," for Tzetzes' commentary within late twelfth-century Constantinopolitan culture.

9. The whole of Tzetzes' commentary on the corpus is still unedited. The section on *De ideis* is preserved in a complete form only in two manuscripts, the Leiden University Library, Vossianus Graecus Q1 and the Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek (SLUB), 007. Elisabetta Barili has provided the first critical edition of the text in her PhD dissertation (soon to be published in the Brill series Sources in Early Poetics).

Σχεδόν τις, μία μέθοδος ἐνδιαθέτου λόγου·
τὸ μὴ προλέγειν μηδαμοῦ ὅτι τυχὸν ὀμόσει
ἢγ᾽οὖν, ὅτι θαυμάσειεν ἢ εὔξεται ἢ ἄλλο,
ἀλλ᾽ αἰφνιδίως λέγειν τε κ᾽ ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοσχεδίου
τὸ δὲ σχεδὸν δὲ ἄῤῥητοι καὶ τὸ, σχεδὸν δὲ μία,
πάνυ τῶν ἀδιστάκτων τε καὶ τρόπου διδασκάλου.

12 There is roughly speaking one single method proper of a spontaneous discourse:
to never say beforehand that he would take an oath perchance,
or else be amazed or pray or whatever,
but to say straight and impromptu
"σχεδὸν δὲ ἄῤῥητοι" and "σχεδὸν δὲ μία"
totally belongs into the instinctive expressions and into the teaching mode.[10]

10. Critical text and translation based on Barili.

The last two lines paraphrase directly Hermogenes to show that the rhetor himself, while illustrating his own theory, made use of ἐνδιάθετος λόγος as a discursive strategy particularly suitable to teaching. The whole passage, in fact, is characterized by terms pointing to improvisation and occasionality (αἰφνιδίως, ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοσχεδίου). That the classroom, with its unpredictability – now and then – is described as a site of occasionality or improvisation does not come as a surprise. In the case of the Byzantine classroom, this also includes occasional poetry.[11] Tzetzes lengthy commentary on the best-selling rhetorical treatise of Hermogenes is after all a work of poetry, being composed in political verses.

11. See on this nexus Bernard 229–32; Hörandner, "Teaching with Verse"; Van Den Berg and below.

These examples show how didactic poetry fully complies with the norm of Byzantine poetry, which, as recently highlighted by Kristins Kubina, can ever hardly be defined as "non-occasional." (Kubina 163–68). The space of the classroom, however, is associated to occasionality in a different way as compared to the other spaces explored in this monographic issue. While occasion still matters, the classroom is not directly – or perhaps less obviously – linked to patronage. And yet, as I will try to show, such space is largely characterized by comparable compositional practices. In my contribution I deal with a text that confirms once more the porous boundaries between different areas and settings of performance.[12] It also demonstrates how 'public' modes of performative composition affect creative practices in more private settings and how such modes are by no means relegated to the oral dimension, but shape also written textu-

12. For this concept in twelfth century, see Zagklas, "Theodoros Prodromos," 53–70; for its use in the work of Konstantinos Manasses, see Nilsson 10 and 116.

al production. It thus shows how manuscripts can become the site where the above-mentioned vessels meet, so to say, and become visible, frozen on paper but still bearing traces of their original context of production and consumption. Finally, my case study will provide an example of how 'experiential aspects,' that is aspects related to biographical, lived circumstances can become part of and model performance in rather standardized situations.

The poem

I will focus on a poem of fifty-seven iambic lines preserved in the manuscript Milan, Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana C 222 inf., f. 218r. The manuscript's title ascribes the lines to John Tzetzes, an intellectual and polymath living between *c.* 1100–*c.* 1180 – we will come back to those dates toward the end of my paper.[13] The poem deals with the issue of the prosodic length of certain vowels, alpha, iota, ypsilon, the so-called *dichrona* (*i.e.* liable of being both long and short, as we shall see below), and was apparently prompted by a question addressed to Tzetzes during his teaching practice. The issue of dichrona tormented Tzetzes obsessively during his career and he comes back to it time and again, acknowledging that in his youth he also had had problems in respecting the rules of ancient prosody.[14] In what follows I will provide an analysis of some compositional features pointing to occasionality by comparing the poem with similar texts preserved in another manuscript, Leiden, University Library, Vossianus Graecus Q1. For the sake of clarity, I will first provide a short description of these manuscripts. I will then delve into the issues of oral vs. written composition as well as of performance, to highlight how Byzantine didactic poets create their own occasionality. Finally, I will illustrate how metrical technicalities, turned into "authorial branding," to borrow again Ingela Nilsson's terminology, can provide a suitable way to scaffold an intellectual biography. Finally, I will provide the first critical edition of the poem,[15] which will work as an appendix to this contribution.

13. On Tzetzes' life and work, see Nesseris 515–40 and Prodi.

14. For Tzetzes' metrical skills and the whole question of dichronic vowels see Lauxtermann, "Buffalos and Bastards."

15. In the edition I normalize punctuation, so as to make the text more legible to today's readers.

The manuscripts

In this section I will briefly introduce the two manuscripts at the core of my contribution. These manuscripts are particularly significant,

as they allow perhaps better than others to grasp the dynamics leading to the transmission of quintessentially performative and aural texts designed for the classroom. They are a perfect instantiation of that liminal space between the written and the oral described by Floris Bernard, in which Byzantine poetry often finds its place (Bernard 242–43).

The first one, Milan, Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana C 222 inf., thoroughly investigated by Carlo Maria Mazzucchi, is an important witness for ancient authors such as Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Hesiod, Pindar and others. At the beginning, the end and in between quires the manuscript was provided with blank folia, filled in at different stages with miscellaneous annotations by the main copyist, who, according to Mazzucchi, was also the owner of the manuscript ("Ambrosianus C 222 inf. I," 270; "Ambrosianus C 222 inf. II," 411–20). C 222 inf. is very rich in materials by Tzetzes, one of the '*maestri*' whose teachings are repeatedly mentioned in the miscellaneous excerpts. His name is sometimes referred to in the present, while other times he is mentioned as "blessed" – that is deceased. Combining this detail with the paleography of the manuscript, Mazzucchi reaches the conclusion that Ambr. C 222 must have been compiled in the last quarter of the twelfth century or, at the latest, at the very beginning of the thirteenth based on autograph materials by Tzetzes.

The second manuscript, the Leiden University Library Vossianus Graecus Q1, now divided into two volumes, is a paper codex including thirty quires, mostly bifolia transmitting Aphthonius and Hermogenes, complete with Tzetzes' commentary. The quires, numbered in red ink by the main copyist at the end of each quire, start with ε, thus showing that the codex is acephalous. The main copyist's handwriting bears clear analogies with informal scholarly hands that have been recently re-dated to the mid-late twelfth century, just like the professional copyist penning part of the Ambrosianus C 222 inf. The Vossianus is an important witness not only because it can be dated around the time of Tzetzes' life. Besides the text penned by the professional main copyist, it preserves also a large number of interlinear and marginal notes in the hand of Tzetzes himself (Pizzone, "Self-authorization"). At f. 41v and f. 115v he states that he finds himself in his seventieth year of life. As Tzetzes was probably born around 1110–13 (Pizzone, "Saturno contro"), the revision of the Vossianus probably took place in the 1180s, which again brings us close to the materials of the Ambr. C 222 inf.

Improvisation and occasion between orality and writing

I will now focus on the poem from the Ambrosianus C 222 inf. The manuscript provides a title for our poem in the top margin of f. 218r, which testifies to its 'occasional' nature. The title, written by the same hand, reads as follows: τοῦ μακαρίτου Τζέτζου αὐθωροὶ πρός τινα ἐρωτῶντα περὶ τοῦ ὄρνις ("Verses on the spot by the blessed Tzetzes to someone asking about ὄρνις"). This line is part of the evidence brought in by Mazzucchi to argue that Tzetzes' death might have happened while the manuscript was being copied. The description of him as "blessed," μακαρίτης, is missing in other annotations in the formerly blank folia.

As mentioned, the poem is prompted by an anonymous interlocutor, construed as a challenging member of the audience and as the primary addressee of the poem. This inscribed addressee allegedly questioned Tzetzes about an issue of prosodic quantity, that is whether to count the iota in ὄρνις as a long or a short vowel, clearly favoring the latter. In the first line Tzetzes himself mentions the occasion behind the poem – which is didactic in genre (Hörandner, "The Byzantine Didactic Poem.") – and clearly describes it as a provocation.

To understand the nature of such provocation, it is necessary to look at the context and didactic background of the student's question. At the beginning of the *Ars Grammatica*, Dionysius Thrax, in listing the seven vowels of Greek language, also specifies their prosodic quantities (*Ars Gramatica* I 1, 10):

> Τῶν δὲ φωνηέντων μακρὰ μέν ἐστι δύο, η καὶ ω βραχέα δύο, ε καὶ ο, δίχρονα τρία, α ι υ. δίχρονα δὲ λέγεται, ἐπεὶ ἐκτείνεται καὶ συστέλλεται.
>
> Of the vowels, two are long, η and ω, two are short, ε and ο, three are *dichrona*, α ι υ. They are called *dichrona*, because they get both long and short.

This seemingly harmless passage has sparked endless debates throughout the centuries among practitioners of classicizing poetry and traditional meters since in the Middle Ages sensitivity toward prosodic quantities had long been lost (Kuhn 1892; Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, II, 265–84). An awareness of the right prosodic quantities was key to learning how to properly write in exameters or

iambic trimeters (dodecasyllables) and therefore it was a competence taught and highly valued in the Byzantine classroom.

Evidence of such interest is the production of the treatises and lexica targeted precisely at teaching 'traditional' prosody.[16] Prosodic wisdom consistently features as a token of authorial branding in Tzetzes' production: times and again he positions himself as a master in the 'technical' knowledge of ancient meters. The treatise *On meters*, edited by Cramer in 1836, as well as our piece testifies to such keen engagement with metrical theory and practice.[17] More specifically, Tzetzes often showcases his skill in using (and theorizing about) *dichrona*, in open polemic against practitioners and teachers of his time. As explained by Dionysus Thrax, *dichrona* are syllables that can be both long and short. Such potentiality, however, is not absolute, but, on the contrary, contextual, *i.e.* it depends on the position of the syllable within the word and within the meter, or even, as we shall see, on the Greek dialect in which the relevant piece of poetry is written. This is where the issue becomes controversial and where Tzetzes often takes stance against current theories. The passage from Dionysius Thrax mentioned above for instance is alluded to at line 34.

16. An overview of this production in Pontani 163 and Sandri.

17. Cramer 302–33 and see Giannachi, who also announces a new edition.

The question of the student is not a peregrine one. On the contrary, it appears particularly defiant because it testifies to an awareness of the current interpretation to be found in the sources regarding *dichrona*. Once again, a seemingly 'dry' topic gives us an insight into a very lively moment in which a cheeky pupil tries to catch his teacher unprepared.

In his treatise on *dichrona*, Herodianus treats the case of ὄρνις, explaining how the iota at the end is short, except for Attic dialect – hence the mention of Attic lengthening in our text. Herodianus refers to the work on dialects by Aristokles (*Treatise on dichrona* 18.14–7). The same mention of Attic is to be found in the *Epimerismi Homerici* (O 46, p. 553). The medieval lexica recently edited by Sandri, however, show that there were strands of metrical doctrine considering the iota in ὄρνις either long or both (Sandri 106 and 114 for *loci paralleli* on ὄρνις):

42 ὄρνῑς· μακρόν
…
51 ῥαφανίδας, ὄρνις, αἰγίδια, σίδια· ταῦτα διχῶς φασί. Καὶ τὸ σηπίδιον.

42 ὄρνῑς: long
…
51 ῥαφανίδας, ὄρνις, αἰγίδια, σίδια· they say these both ways, and σηπίδιον.

Tzetzes' inquisitive student, therefore, seems implicitly to refer to Herodianus' mainstream treatment of *dichrona*. In his answer, Tzetzes compares and contrasts two doctrines: the first one presents *dichrona* as absolute ancipites (and he completely disagrees with this stance), the second one describes *dichrona* as liable to both shortening and lengthening depending on the context (and this is the stance he seconds). Knowing such context properly, however, requires expertise and experience as well as patience. The student asking the question, on the contrary, embraces ready-made, unsuitable shortcut solutions.

Beyond the technical content, what makes this piece particularly interesting to the cultural historian and the historian of literature is how Tzetzes frames and defines his answer. This is why I would like to spend a few more words on the title.

The key term in the title line is without any doubt αὐθωροί. The adjective appears in two other headings of Tzetzes' oeuvre, as highlighted by Panagiotis Agapitos: his longish synopsis of Hesiod's *Theogony* (cf. also vv. 22–23 of the same poem) and the few but violent lines against the imperial secretaries Skylitzes and Gregory.[18] In both cases we are to do with quintessentially occasional poetry. The *Theogony* is comparable to other texts addressed in this special issue: a poem, epic in content, dedicated to an influential patroness, the *sebastokratorissa* Eirene, transmitted in writing, but potentially performed and without any doubt performable. When commenting on the use of αὐθωροί in these two texts Agapitos suggest for the term the literal meaning of "immediate" and hence improvised. For sure, the adjective points to an indication of time, to the timeliness of the poems. Such a timeliness, however, could also be construed as 'occasionality.' As Agapitos himself points out the adjective in its adverbial form "makes a massive appearance in lemmata to poems of Manuel Philes (*c.* 1270–*c.* 1335), that functioned as metrical prefaces to the recitation of prose works by older authors" (Agapitos, "John Tzetzes" 37). In this context the notion of improvisation does not seem to be the most appropriate. With its semantic pointer to "being in the very moment," αὐθωροί perhaps rather stresses the fitness for a specific time, or occasion and could thus fit the very definition of occasional poetry, which might or might not be improvised. This

18. The poem has attracted much attention: Agapitos, "John Tzetzes" 36–38; "Middle Class" 157–58 and Zagklas, "Poetry" 254–55; "Satire" 297–99.

would explain the presence of the term also in contexts where improvisation is absent or only partially involved.

Our poem seems to support this interpretation also beyond its title, as shown by lines 31–32, where Tzetzes talks about the issue of expounding metrical technicalities *almost* without preparation:

> Ὡς ἐξ ἑτοίμου τὴν γραφὴν ταύτην γράφων
> τὸ τεχνικὸν παρῆκα τῶν ἄλλων πλέον.
> Ἄκουε λοιπὸν καὶ σαφέστατα μάθε.
>
> Writing this piece of writing as if improvising,
> I was more succinct in the technical part than the others.
> Now, listen to what follows and learn most clearly.

The *Etymologicum Gudianum* (Sigma, 518, 21 Sturz), most interestingly, and after him Ps. Zonaras (Sigma, 1701, 11 Tittman) in the thirteenth century, gloss ἐξ ἑτοίμου with σχέδιον "sketchy," which fully belongs into the vocabulary of improvisation. The Suda moreover (Alpha, 4313 Adler) contrasts ἐξ ἑτοίμου and μετὰ ἀποδείξεως (*i.e.* with argumentative proof) as modes of delivery. What matters here, is that Tzetzes seems to imply that we are not dealing with an exclusively oral delivery. Although the question that paves the way to the poem points to an oral setting, *i.e.* the challenging environment of the classroom, the verbs present in the poem point to compositional and consumption practices suspended between the oral and the written word, given the presence of the word γράφω. The lines 31–32 (Ὡς ἐξ ἑτοίμου τὴν γραφὴν ταύτην γράφων / τὸ τεχνικὸν παρῆκα τῶν ἄλλων πλέον) are quite telling in this respect and seem to imply a situation in which Tzetzes first jots down his poem quickly – but not properly impromptu (Ὡς ἐξ ἑτοίμου) – to then perform it in front of an audience. Such audience is invited to listen (v. 17 ἄκουε καλῶς ἐξ ἐμῶν διηγήματων; v. 33 Ἄκουε λοιπὸν καὶ σαφέστατα μάθε), supporting the idea that the intended consumption is actually aural. Later, when the composition is further copied into a manuscript – by a former pupil in this case, if Mazzucchi is right – the formerly performed poem also becomes a site of exercise, as shown by the marginal gloss at v. 34 (ζήτει εἰς τοῦ τυγχάνει ταῦτο), urging the reader to find an equivalent for τυγχάνει.[19]

Strikingly, in the poem we find several references to the teacher's shouting. The verb βοάω/ἐκβοάω (vv. 5, 10, 51) is repeated three times, in connection with metrical rules that might be written down but are possibly yelled at the pupils. In one instance the shouting is

19. On the convenience of this verb in metrical composition and didactic poetry in particular, see Bernard 231.

said to be even louder than the proverbial voice of Stentor, the Greek herald at Troy (*Iliad* 5, 785–86). I would argue that the reference is here to (loud) modes of teaching in the actual didactic setting. The coexistence of an emphasis on writing and shouting encapsulates the hybrid nature of performance in the classroom, or to put it in Shawcross' words "the constant humming of the interplay of the written and the oral – and of the verbal and the non-verbal – in the private study, the public square, the garden, and even on the battlefield" (Shawcross 34; cf. also Papaioannou and Messis).

In Byzantium, and specifically in the capital, the classroom was very much a battlefield as shown by the studies of Bernard for poetry and Valiavitcharska for prose (Bernard 253–80; Valiavitcharska, "Figure, Argument and Performance" and cf. Loukaki). Both teachers and students were engaged in verbal contests. The manuscript Ambr. C 222 inf. preserves another text, included in the commentary on Aristophanes, in which Tzetzes – in a much more aggressive tone – expresses his discontent at contemporary theory on *dichrona*. The passage has been highlighted by Lauxtermann in a chapter dealing precisely with the treatment of *dichrona* in Tzetzes. I quote here from his translation (Lauxtermann, "Buffalos and Bastards" 118):

> ἡμᾶς τε σύρει τήν θ᾽ ὁμηρείαν φύσιν
> ἀλλοπροσάλλως διχρόνοις χρῆσθαι λέγει,
> τὸ «Ἄρες, Ἄρες» πανταχοῦ βοῶν μέγα
> (Βρεντησίου μένδητος ὦ πατρὸς τέκνον!).
>
> He mocks me in public and keeps saying that Homer uses the *dichrona* as it suits him, while bellowing Ἄρες, Ἄρες on every occasion (oh that bastard from Brindisi!).

Content and terminology are like those of our lines on ὄρνις. Again, we find a reference to shouting and the same case in point, emphasizing the different prosody of Ares to be found in Homer. Unfortunately, we do not know who the bastard from Brindisi was. He might not be the same person who provoked Tzetzes by asking him about ὄρνις, however they both embody a type of challenging audience populating the Constantinopolitan classroom. The occasion must have also been comparable: a sort of dispute on the nature of the *dichrona*, as pointed to perhaps also by the mention of the "others" at line 32. The environment is comparable to that featuring in Niketas' poem quoted at the beginning of this contribution: a loud classroom allegedly populated by rather obnoxious students.

As we have seen, the fifty-seven lines of the Ambrosianus show without any doubt that occasionality is not at odds with written composition or confined to oral composition/delivery. The poems capture that immediacy of Byzantine didacticism mentioned above. The same immediacy is also at stake in the occasional – in that they are prompted by well-defined situations – verses that Tzetzes personally appends from time to time to the Vossianus. In the margins we find repeatedly iambic lines to convey both outbursts against the copyist or even additional rules or κανόνες explaining why the choices of the copyist are not to be subscribed to – often in connection with prosodic quantities.

At f. 45v. of the Vossianus manuscript, Tzetzes complains about a mistake of the scribe, throwing a sarcastic joke on the awkwardness of the resulting text:

> Ἀφεὶς ἁπάσας τὰς δυσόσμους βορβόρους,
> αἷς ὁ βδελυκτὸς βορβοροῖ Τζέτζου βίβλον,
> καὶ θηλυκὰ ἄκουε νῦν ἅπλας λόγους.
> Κἂν πῦρ κεραυνῶν τοῦτον οὐκ ἐφεψάλου
> ὁρῶν τόσον γράφοντα τῷ Τζέτζῃ πόνον.
>
> After neglecting all the stinking nonsense
> with which the accursed one contaminates the book of Tzetzes,
> everyone should now listen to speeches in the feminine!
> Provided the fire of lightning did not burn it to ashes,
> seeing how great a strain it is for Tzetzes to write.

Tzetzes addresses here the copyist using a communicative strategy he was familiar with from his practice in the classroom. This sort of satirical jokes, integral to teaching in Byzantium and a key component of its 'occasionality,' are repeated in the margins of the Vossianus. Sometimes they even find their way in the commentaries proper, as shown by the exegesis on Hermogenes *De ideis* II 6.12.4 p. 165 Patillon (Tzetzes, *Commentary on Hermogenes' De ideis* 2579–86, pp. 115–18 Barili):

> Τοῦτο, ῥῆτορ Ἑρμόγενες, τῶν πάνυπερ ἀστείων·
> γράφοντα τέχνωσιν τινὰ, μὴ λέγειν περὶ ταύτης·
> ἄλλος δὲ πόνος ἤπειγε λέγειν, ὡς σὺ νῦν λέγεις.
> οὐ νόσον οὐ δυσχέρειαν ἄλλην εἰργνῦσαν βίου,
> ἀλλά τι ἄλλο ἕτερον, ποῖον ἐκεῖνο, λέγε;
> Μὴ οἷον ἔφη τίς μωρὸς ἐν τοῖς παροῦσι χρόνοις,
> τῆς συναφείας τῷ καιρῷ τῇ σφῇ συζύγῳ λέγων,
> βούλει ποιήσω νόημα, οὐδὲν σκοποῦ προέχει.

O rhetor Hermogenes, this belongs to the most urban wit,
to not speak about a rhetorical device while treating it.
"Another task urged on me to say as you are stating here.
Neither a disease nor any hardship interfering with life,
but something else, what is that? Please speak up!
Not as a stupid from our time did,
saying at the very moment he was having intercourse with his wife:
"do you want me to think about it?," he did not reach at all his target.[20]

20. The syntax of the last line remains however uncertain.

The passage shows how Tzetzes establishes an impromptu and direct dialogue with the commented author, using again the stylistic marks of spontaneous speech (sudden questions prompted by emotions). He ironically mocks Hermogenes, since he does not deliver on his promises of explaining the characteristics of moderation, adducing some vague excuses for his failure. Tzetzes introduces a dirty joke, which seems to imply a shared knowledge of contemporary anecdotes with his audience.

A joke in the same vein is to be found at line 45 of our poem. Tzetzes mentions hyenas as ambivalent creatures, both male and female, an assumption already discussed and debunked by Aristotle (cf. *Historia Animalium*, VI, 32, 579b, 16ff; *De generatione animalium* III, 6, 756b, 18). However, the learned allusion turns into a somewhat crass joke, if one thinks of the outlook of female striped and spotted hyenas, with their conspicuous elongated genitalia.[21]

21. On the myth of hyenas through ages from antiquity to the twentieth century, see Glickman.

Prosodic quantity of vowels is pretty much center stage in the marginal glosses of the Vossianus At folio 37v. for instance, a mistake of the scribe induces Tzetzes to add a rule in dodecasyllables to explain why he has corrected the copyist's ἔνᾱτος with a single *ν* and a long alpha. The iambs here deal with very much the same issues we find the poem copied in Ambr. 222C.

In all these cases, Tzetzes remarkably turns to verse, even in the solitary endeavor of editing his own text, a behavior that has been otherwise highlighted also in later authors, as shown by Julian Bértola in his PhD dissertation (Bértola, *Using Poetry*; "Tzetzes' Verse Scholia"). This happens for two reasons in my opinion. First, the compositional modes are shaped by the agonistic setting of the classroom, which reverberates also onto individual creative practices (when the author is faced to the manuscript page). Tzetzes keeps improvising poetry also when revising his own text. Second, the manuscript space is experienced as a public, performative space. After all,

Tzetzes understood that any copyist's mistake could pass for his own and therefore be picked up by his opponents, like the bastard from Brindisi mentioned above. That is why authorial branding becomes important and also, in turn, affects teaching and delivery style, in a sort of continuous feedback loop. This dynamic emerges more clearly from manuscript pages, such as those of the Vossianus, which have been personally curated by the author, but leaves fainter traces also in later, non-authorial copies.

The *dichrona* as a temporal marker

The engagement with *dichrona*, was never a straightforward affair for Tzetzes. Their incorrect use has long been recognized as a chronological marker to date Tzetzes' oeuvre since, as he himself acknowledges, as a younger writer he was not able to control them (Cullhed). As I argue, we can go a little bit further by saying that uses of and discourses on *dichrona* are employed with full awareness by Tzetzes to make himself recognizable and clearly define the different stages of his work. In the fifty-seven lines of the Ambrosianus he defines himself as an old man, a biographical aspect that becomes an identity factor, as clearly shown by the glosses in the Vossianus, where Tzetzes consistently defines himself as "the old man" in the third person f. 41v.:

> Ὁ μιαρὸς δὲ μεταγρφεὺς καὶ ἐχθρὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, μηδὲν ἐζημιωμένος, οὕτω πάντα παρελίμπανε, ἄθλους καὶ πόνους ὑπὲρ τοὺς ἡρακλείους πολλῷ ἀσυγκρίτως παρέχων τῷ γέροντι, εἰς τὴν τούτων ἀνόρθωσιν· ὅτι πόνημα ἦν ἡ βίβλος τοῦ γέροντος. Εἰ δείνος ἄλλου σύγγραμμα ἦν κἂν μυρία κεκαινοτόμητο πάνυ λεπτῶς ἂν ταύτην κατατεμὼν πυρὶ κατετέφρωσα.
>
> That cursed man copied and, enemy of God, remaining unpunished, overlooked everything, forcing the old man to labours far greater than those of Heracles, to purge this text. And this only because the book was the work of the old man. Had it been anyone else's, even though filled with innumerable novelties – very finely – I would have torn thrown it into the fire.

Mentions of *dichrona* can become a way to situate Tzetzes' earlier oeuvre, as we see from another passage of the commentary on Her-

mogenes' *De inventione* (Pizzone, "Saturno contro"). In commenting on the *De inventione* Tzetzes gives us a glimpse into his younger self. When Tzetzes sets off to explain amplification, instead of offering the usual examples of ekphrasis taken from Homer, he gives the reader a description of a shipwreck he allegedly experienced. The setting is still the classroom, but we have here a more conventionally occasional poem (prompted by the personal experience of the shipwreck), which is elevated to the status of a new standard, as it were, substituting Homer despite the incorrect use of *dichrona*. Tellingly, the poem also offers very precise details on the life of Tzetzes. Besides having clear Homeric intertexts, the beginning of the ekphrasis is modelled after Gregory of Nazianzus' famous shipwreck poem. The interesting fact is that Gregory's shipwreck happened when he was eighteen in November 348. The time of the year is the same. It is also highly likely that the time of their life was the also same. Tzetzes' shipwreck happened on the day of St. Demetrius, which falls on the eighth of November according to the old calendar. The only possible suitable date corresponding to the astronomical description he himself provide is 1131, which fits perfectly both with Gregory's intertext and with what we know about Tzetzes' biography in the early 1130s, when he was traveling in the service of Isaac, eparch of Beroia. An occasional poem is this case subtracted to its own contingency, canonized as it where and incapsulated into another occasional setting (the classroom). Through the manuscript occasionality freezes in turn on the page and Tzetzes' exegetical work loses its situated character, becoming a neutral tool for future readers, who often dismember and merge it with other exegesis.

Conclusion

As a way of conclusion, I would say that a technical issue such as the lengthening and shortening of the *dichrona* often becomes for Tzetzes an opportunity to take stock of his life and career, providing a biographical/diachronic dimension to his authorial self. This tells us something. It has been often said that Byzantine poetry lacks the lyrical personal dimension, later heavily romanticized, that we find in the West.[22] Kristina Kubina and Ingela Nilsson have recently challenged this view, emphasizing how notions such as subjectivity and individuality in much occasional poetry are defined through author, addressee and the situation (Kubina 165 and Nilsson). The same ap-

22. See the discussion in Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, I 20.

plies here, once we put the clash between the elderly teacher and the young pupil in a context of lived, embodied experience. Subjectivity emerges poignantly in the lines where Tzetzes realizes the vanity of his efforts in learning and teaching the formal minutiae of an artificial language from a long-lost past: not even a whole life would suffice, he tells us (v. 40). The last line conveys a sense of resignation that can be hardly overlooked, with a formulaic finale that reminds one of the Euripidean resignation before the inexplicable behavior of the gods.[23] This is an important detail, especially given the well-known acquaintance of Tzetzes with Euripides' tragedies and their widespread reception in twelfth-century Constantinople.[24] Euripides has famously a formulaic five-liner with which he concludes *Alcestis*, *Andromanche*, *Helen*, *Bacchae*, and with a slight variation, *Medea*. Here is the text from *Bacchae* 1388–92:

23. I thank Andrea Capra for pointing this detail to me.

24. See Cararra. Carrara however does not believe Tzetzes had a first-hand knowledge of lost Euripidean oeuvre.

πολλαὶ μορφαὶ τῶν δαιμονίων,
πολλὰ δ' ἀέλπτως κραίνουσι θεοί
καὶ τὰ δοκηθέντ' οὐκ ἐτελέσθη,
τῶν δ' ἀδοκήτων πόρον ηὗρε θεός.
τοιόνδ' ἀπέβη τόδε πρᾶγμα.

Many are the forms of divine things,
and the gods bring to pass many things unexpectedly;
what is expected has not been accomplished,
but the god has found out a means for doing things unthought of.
So too has this event turned out (transl. T. A. Buckley)

The lines were designed to accompany the exit of the chorus and would stress the end of the performance (Dodds 242). Tzetzes jokingly adopts the same expressive module to signal the end of his performance and his own resignation in the face of both the difficult subject and the unescapable 'thickness' of his pupils. Such an attitude feeds in the occasionality of the poem. The statement according to which Tzetzes decides to give up on technical explanations (v. 54) is also a way to implicitly 'shame' the students, who, with his question has revealed a knowledge precisely of those same technical contents now deemed useless by Tzetzes.

The function of closure of these lines is also highlighted by the layout of the poem. A cross at line 45 signals the ending of a textual unit, confirmed also by the insertion of the marginal note referring to line 34. The next textual unit starts with two anaphoric lines both

beginning with πολλά, resonating with the Euripidean seal picked up again at the end of the unit in a sort of circular composition. I believe that both the reference to Euripides and the manuscript layout point to 'performative units,' which can give us an idea of the original modes in which the text was delivered.

It is also worth pointing out that a very personal, autobiographical component is present also in Tzetzes' treatise on meters, dedicated to his deceased brother Isaac. The preface and the conclusion in hexameters take us quite close to a 'Western-like' lyrical dimension (Tzetzes, "Διδασκαλία"; Giannachi; Van den Berg 288–91). This could also be a way to read Tzetzes' attachment to metrical matters, beyond the stubborn pride of his self-proclaimed ability to follow long-forgotten prosodic rules. The interest in meters he shared with Isaac and the loving bond between the two of them made the ostensibly dry issue of prosody something familiar and emotionally charged, an identity trait accompanying him throughout his life. Seen from this perspective his personal obsession with *dichrona* becomes perhaps less alien to us modern readers. It is indeed an 'authorial branding' but one that resonates with very poignant personal circumstances too and is, more broadly, in tune with twelfth-century metrical experimentation (Zagklas, "Metrical Polyeideia" esp. 48). On the other hand, the question of the student mentioned at the beginning of the composition – either real or fictional – becomes the occasion for implementing the very technical rules Tzetzes is illustrating. In so doing, he both showcase and passes on the mature metrical prowess that distinguished his later production from his younger self.

To conclude, the disenchanted view that the only poetic quality of Byzantine didactic poetry resides in its being in verse does in fact need some qualification (Bernard 232 based on Lauxtermann, "Byzantine Didactic poetry" 46). The texts with which I have opened this contribution further prove that didacticism too had its own codified expressive modes. Instructors would provide practical examples of the theories they were illustrating through their very teaching performance. On another level, the corpus of texts I have dealt with in the previous pages also offers us snippets of life way beyond their didactic content. The classroom composition of the Ambrosianus, just like the notes of the Vossianus, are fully fledged occasional literature, one that allows us to pierce through the veil of time and retrace the circumstances, the emotions, the contexts that prompted it. If we only knew how to look.

Appendix

τοῦ μακαρίτου Τζέτζου αὐθωροὶ πρός τινα ἐρωτῶντα περὶ τοῦ ὄρνις

Πειρᾷ με τὸν γέροντα παιδίου τρόπον
ὄρνις ἐρωτῶν πῶς μακρὸν ὑπηργμένον,
ἄλλοις ἔνεστι καὶ βραχὺ δεδεγμένον.
Ἔχεις πρὸς αὐτὰ τεχνικοὺς λόγους δύο·
ὧν εἷς μὲν ἐστὶ ἐκβοῶν οὕτω μέγα·
“Πάντων μερῶν μὲν συλλαβὰς τὰς ἐν τέλει,
πάσας βραχείας καὶ μακρὰς ὑπηργμένας
δέχου βραχείας καὶ μακρὰς, ὥσπερ θέλεις.”
Κανὼν μὲν οὖν εἷς τεχνικὸς ταῦτα γράφει.
Ἄλλος βοᾷ δὲ καὶ πλέον τοῦ Στέντορος,
ὅνπερ παραφθείρουσι οἱ τέχνης νόθοι,
“Τὰ δίχρονα φιλοῦσι ἐκτάσεις χρόνων
καὶ συστολὰς δέ.” Τοῦτο λοιπὸν δυστέχνοις
τὴν σύγχυσιν δέδωκεν εἰς τὰς διχρόνους.
Ποίας δὲ φασὶ διχρόνους τεχνογράφοι
ἄμφω δεδέχθαι τὰς φύσεις τὰς τῶν χρόνων,
ἄκουε καλῶς ἐξ ἐμῶν δαγμάτων.
Πάσας μὲν οὐ λέγουσι αὐτοὶ διχρόνους
οὕτω πεφύρθαι τοῖς ἐναντίοις χρόνοις
ἃς δ᾽ ἀττικοὶ φιλοῦσι ἐκτείνειν λόγοι,
ἰωνικῆς γλώσσης δὲ συστέλλει τρόπος.
Ὥσπερ τὰ πασίγνωστα ταῦτα τοῖς νέοις
Ἄρης Ἀπόλλων ὄρνις εὐκνῆμις ἅμα.
Τοιαῦτα φασὶ τὰ διπλᾶ τῶν διχρόνων
καὶ τὰ τελευταῖα δὲ τῶν λόγων μέρη.
Οὗτοι δὲ συγχέουσι τεχνικοὺς λόγους
τῶν διχρόνων ἅπασαν ἁπλῶς τὴν φύσιν
ὁμοῦ βραχεῖαν καὶ μακρὰν δεδεγμένοι.
Ἔχεις λόγων μέλισσα πανσοφωτάτη
ἄνθος πενιχρόν, ὅνπερ ἐζήτεις λόγον.
Ὡς ἐξ ἑτοίμου τὴν γραφὴν ταύτην γράφων
τὸ τεχνικὸν παρῆκα τῶν ἄλλων πλέον.
Ἄκουε λοιπὸν καὶ σαφέστατα μάθε.
Ὁ τεχνικὸς γράφων μὲν εἰς παῖδας νέους
ἑπτὰ τὰ φωνήεντα τυγχάνειν λέγει
ὧν τὰ δύο βράχιστα μακρὰ δ᾽ αὖ δύο,
εἰ μὴ μέρη γένοιντο καὶ κοινὰ τότε.

Τοῖς διχρόνοις ζάλη δὲ πολλὴ τυγχάνει.
Καιροῦ δὲ δεῖται καὶ τριβῆς πολλῆς τάδε.
Ζωῆς ὁ πᾶς γὰρ ἀρκέσει μόλις χρόνος
εἰς γνῶσιν αὐτὴν ἀτρεκῆ τῶν διχρόνων.
Ὅσοι δὲ τέχνας ἐκφοροῦσι τοῦ βίου
καὶ τὰς ἀτέχνους ἐκβαδίζουσι τρίβους
βράχιστα ταὐτὰ καὶ μακρὰ λέγουσί μοι
ὡς τὰς ὑαίνας, ἄρσενας θήλεις ἅμα.

Πολλὰ γὰρ αὐτῶν τὸν μακρὸν φθείρει χρόνον.
Πολλὰ δὲ τυγχάνουσι τῶν βραχυχρόνων.
Ὁ τεχνικὸς μὲν ἀκριβῶς εἰδὼς τάδε,
τὴν δυσχέρειαν φημὶ τὴν τῶν διχρόνων,
γράφων πρὸς ἀστοὺς τοὺς νέον κατηργμένους
βοᾷ μέγιστον ἃ δέ πως αὐτοῖς λέγων
"τὰ μὲν βράχιστα ῥᾶστα καὶ τὰ μακρὰ δέ
τὰ δίχρονα δὲ δυσχερῆ γνῶσιν ἔχει."
Καὶ νῦν μὲν αὐτὸς τεχνικῶς ἐῶ λέγειν.
Τὰ δ' εἰσαγωγῆς προσφυᾶ ταῦτα γράφω
ἐκ τῶν ἀπείρων διχρόνων τρανῶς λέγων,
"Πολλὰ βράχιστα πολλὰ μακρὰ τυγχάνει."

28. ὁμοῦ: ἅμα ssc 38. % i.m. 45. % ζήτει εἰς τοῦ τυγχάνει ταῦτο gl

Impromptu lines by the blessed Tzetzes to someone asking him about ὄρνις

He tests me, an old man, like a kid,
asking how ὄρνις can possibly be long,
according to others it might also be received as short.
On these matters you have two technical explanations
of which one is shouting out loud as follows:
"Among all the parts, the final syllables
being all short and long,
you should take them as both short and long, as you please."
One technical rule therefore writes so.
Another one shouts, even louder than Stentor,
and this one is perverted by those ignorant in the art:
"The *dichrona* love both stretching
and shortening their quantities." To those unexperienced this

has therefore caused to be confused about *dichrona*.
Yet, which *dichrona* the expert writers say
to have accepted both natures of the quantity,
do hear beautifully from my teachings.
These do not say that all *dichrona*
lie in confusion endowed with opposite quantities,
but some Attic speech tends to lengthen,
and some the fashion of the Ionic language shortens.
Such is the case, very well-known to the young, of
῞Αρης Ἀπόλλω, ὄρνις and εὐκνῆμις too.
Such they say are those with a twofold quantity
and the final syllables at the end of linguistic units.
These, however, misunderstand the technical explanations
in accepting that every *dichronon* is by nature
both short and long.
Oh very wise bee of discourses you have got
a very cheap flower, the very discourse you were looking for.
Writing this piece of writing as if improvising,
I was more succinct in the technical part than the others.
Now, listen to what follows and learn most clearly.
The expert in the art, writing to the young kids,
says that there are seven vowels,
of which two absolutely short and two long,
unless they become common syllables.
Great is the confusion with the *dichrona*.
These matters require time and a lot of practice.
For barely the time of a whole life will suffice
to get a very perfect knowledge.
Those who exclude art from their lives,
and walk the unskilled paths,
tell me that the same are absolutely both short and long,
like the hyenas, both males and females.

For many destroy the long quantity,
And many obtain shortenings.
The expert, knowing precisely these things -
I mean the difficulty of the *dichrona* -
writing to urban people who just started,
shouts most loudly saying to them somehow:
"The shortest are the easiest, and so are the long ones,
but to know the *dichrona* is very difficult."

And now I will myself avoid to speak in a technical way.
I write these words in a manner that is suitable for an introduction, 55
saying plainly, in the fashion of those ignorant of *dichrona*:
"Many happen to be very short, many happen to be long."

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