

Contesting Conceptual Boundaries

Byzantine Literature and Its History

Abstract

The paper presents the problems of writing a history of Byzantine literature in the context of postmodern anxieties about canonization, authority and narrative histories of literature. An essential difficulty for such a project is the fact that Byzantine literature has been viewed as a continuation of or appendix to Ancient Greek literature, while, on the other, it has been divided into “learned” and “vernacular”, the latter category having been defined as Modern Greek since the middle of the nineteenth century. The paper offers two sets of criteria for establishing new concepts of periodization and taxonomy. A series of examples are indicatively adduced in order to explain the scientific and ideological impasse in which Byzantine Studies have found themselves at the end of the previous century, while delineating a proposal for a different approach to content and structure of a wider synthesis. Writing a ‘new’ history of Byzantine literature is an experiment in proposing a radical paradigm shift by means of which this particular literary production in Medieval Greek can be studied within the broader context of Medieval European literatures as an integrated entity rather than as a separate and peripheral phase in the histories of Ancient or Modern Greek literature.¹

1. The present paper developed out of a lecture given at the workshop “Cosmopolitan languages and their literatures”, organized in February 2014 at the University of Ghent. I am grateful to all participants for our inspiring conversations, but especially to our host Wim Verbaal and his enthusiasm. My particular thanks go to the Henri Pirenne Institute for Medieval Studies and the Research Committee of the University of Cyprus for covering my travel expenses. The paper also profited from the workshop organized by the Centre for Medieval Literature (Odense and York) at the

Exasperated by the growing production of literary histories in Germany during the first half of the nineteenth century, Arthur Schopenhauer solemnly declared in 1851:

Corresponding to the course of human progress just outlined, literary history is, as to its greatest part, the catalogue of a cabinet of deformed embryos. The spirit, in which these are preserved for the longest time, is pig leather. However, we do not need to look there for the few, well-formed offsprings: they have remained alive, and we meet them all over the world, where they go about as immortals in their eternally fresh youth. Only these constitute what in the previous section has been characterized as true literature,

Fondation des Treilles (Provence) in April 2014, as well as from a series of fruitful conversations on matters historical with Polymnia Katsoni in Thessaloniki. Parts of sections 2 and 4 are based on my forthcoming articles “Late Antique or Early Byzantine?” and “Karl Krumbacher.”

whose poorly peopled history we, from our very youth, learn from the mouth of every educated man and not from compendia. (Schopenhauer 458; Ch. XXIV, § 297)

Schopenhauer’s aestheticist preference for a high literary canon, quite prevalent among German philologists of his time, was also the attitude with which Byzantine literature was condemned. Our post-modern age has come to criticize and to reject – partially, at least – such attitudes by promoting decentralized and antihierarchical approaches to literary history (Jauß, “Literaturgeschichte;” Wellek; Strelka). Byzantine philology, however, has not as yet profited from this change, at least in terms of participating in the current debates by contributing its own theoretical proposals within the broader frame of medieval European literatures. The twofold aim of this paper is to highlight the historical and scientific reasons for this absence and to propose a way for more interactive participation in medievalist discussions by outlining the concept of a narrative history of Byzantine literature. However, a point of clarification is necessary. The paper does not aspire to cover all aspects of textual production in Byzantium, much less does it aspire to offer full coverage of the field’s recent research. It attempts to highlight some of the main issues as to why, according to my view, Byzantine Studies have not as yet produced a narrative history of Byzantine literature. It should be more than obvious that much will be omitted and much only hinted at. What is presented here summarily will be discussed more broadly in a book I am currently preparing.

1 On Literary History and Its Discontents

Ancient and medieval literate cultures produced in various contexts and for various needs works that grouped together ‘authors’ or ‘texts’ on the basis of some unifying principle. This could be a similarity of form and purpose (*e.g.* Ancient Chinese cultic poetry), a similarity of content (*e.g.* grammars of Classical Arabic), or an ideological affinity (*e.g.* religious beliefs). It could even be the particular choices of a specific person (*e.g.* the *catalogue raisonné* of a private library). Such works were either composed in some narrative form or were given a more schematic, catalogue-like shape. Their internal organization was usually based on chronological or formal criteria, sometimes combined with each other. In either case – narrative or cata-

logue – the overall structure remained paratactic, since a series of smaller units was strung together creating a loosely coherent collection.

The narrative type of such works usually took the form of a collection of independent biographical sections. In the narrative category we find chronologically arranged portrait galleries of authors. Two examples from the Greco-Roman world of the late fourth century are Eunapios' *Lives of Philosophers and Sophists* (Penella 32–38) and Jerome's *Distinguished Men* (Rebenich 97–100). Both works are organized chronologically, the former as a continuous narrative presenting a 'succession' of lives, the latter in clearly marked and numbered brief chapters. Another form is the alphabetically organized biographical dictionary. One might mention the monumental *Obituaries of Distinguished Men* by Ibn Khallikan (d. 1282), written over a period of almost twenty years (1256–74) in Cairo (Fück). Contrastingly, the catalogue-like category usually displays a thematic rather than a chronological arrangement, while the entries are often accompanied by brief comments on various literary matters. Three examples of this type are Ibn al-Nadim's vast *Inventory* from tenth-century Baghdad (Dodge), Michael Psellos' brief and highly autobiographical essay *On the Style of Certain Books* from the middle of the eleventh century (Wilson 172–74), or even Liu Hsieh's *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, an interpretive treatise on older commentaries on the way to read poetry correctly, written in sixth-century China (Owen 183–298).

Works with such structural arrangements, when viewed from a contemporary point of view, do not display any apparent overarching principle that would shape the various separate units into a coherent whole. In other words, such works do not (and could not) adopt a historical perspective as to the way the textual material at hand was 'represented' and 'explained.' Here lies a major difference between our approach and the approach of past cultures to the study of authors and texts. What we understand today as 'history of literature' is a concept that took shape during the period of the Enlightenment and was fully developed by the middle of the nineteenth century within the political and cultural context of Romanticism and Nationalism. There were two major aims in creating such a historically defined and philosophically bolstered 'master narrative' that reached back to a remote past (Lyotard; Anderson 24–27; Jarausch and Sabrow): (i) to define a particular literature as expressing the 'immanent spirit' and 'natural characteristics' of a specific nation and

of its national language; (ii) to establish a scientific (*qua* objective) hermeneutic method by means of which this literature could be studied (Müller; Compagnon 19–213; Béhar and Fayolle). In other words, the model of a national literature developed parallel to and in conjunction with the formation of the model of a nation state, its history and its national language.

Therefore, in the sense of a nation's historical continuity and its development towards the nineteenth century as the 'age of progress,' the beginnings of a specific nation were sought in the Middle Ages, where the oldest written evidence was to be found supposedly proving the existence of a national language and a national literature. The fashioning of such master narratives was attuned to the then prevailing 'biological' concepts about the birth, growth and decay of a state or of a literature as if it were a living organism (Demandt, "Biologische Dekadenztheorien"). As a result, the concept of historical development also played an important role in the formation of a biogistic master narrative for Ancient Greek literature among German thinkers and philologists during the formative years between the lecture courses of Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824) on Greek poetry and the *Overview of Greek Literature* by Gottfried Bernhardt (1800–75), the very people against whom Schopenhauer was to protest.

The superimposition of this model on cultures removed in time and space from nineteenth-century Europe and the political and artistic ideologies prominent at the time proved simultaneously felicitous and infelicitous: felicitous, because scholars embarking on such historicist projects collected, classified, studied and presented textual material that was often unknown and difficult to access (Lewis 99–118); infelicitous, because these monuments of labor and erudition gave to the vast material collected a fixed shape and a uniform meaning that the individual texts did not have within their proper historical and geographical contexts (Said 201–25). In this way, static images of great taxonomic power came to define the study and teaching, for example, of Oriental literatures in the academic institutions of the Western world (Macfie). One such normative image was the strict separation between languages or linguistic idioms within a multilingual and geographically extended cultural environment. This separation reflected the supposed dichotomy between Latin and the *linguae vulgares* as perceived by nineteenth-century medievalists. It was superimposed, for example, on Japanese and Chinese as written by Japanese authors in Early Japan until the late eleventh century (Aston; Florenz; Keene 17–22). Another form of this separation was

the exclusion of any foreign language in the study of a literature that was viewed as national and self-contained. This attitude reflected the supposed superiority of Old French as a ‘culturally exporting’ literature over Middle High German as a ‘culturally importing’ literature. This separation was then superimposed, for example, on Arabic literature in relation to Persian or Ottoman (Brockelmann; Heinrichs). These forms of separation were of crucial importance in the modern construction of ‘national’ literatures during the Middle Ages, because they either ascertained the empowering primacy of a culturally exporting language (for example, Anglo-Norman texts were ‘absorbed’ into French medieval literature, leaving to medieval English literature only texts in Middle English), or promoted the rise to competitive superiority of a culturally importing language (Middle High German rivaling Old French).

All of the above explains why Byzantine literature had fared so badly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Because Byzantine texts had been written in Greek, they were, according to the biologicistic model, placed in the period of the final decadence of Greek literature – one only needs to read how Erwin Rohde (554–67) described the ‘decadence’ of the Greek novel from late Hellenistic to Byzantine times. Given that Byzantine literature was seen as decadent, its linguistic idiom was delegated to the position of a culturally importing language in respect to Ancient Greek, a peculiar case of ‘intralinguistic importation.’ Of course, this Ancient Greek literature was for the most part a school canon formed in the second and first century BC (Pfeiffer). Even though this school canon was not ‘naturally’ related to any modern European nation, it was also invested with national characteristics since the eighteenth century and was in the nineteenth century given a national literary history. But Byzantine literature had failed to be related to a specific modern European nation and was, consequently, seen as a nationless and mummified textual production, not dissimilar to Medieval Latin literature. To Ancient Greek ‘national’ literature, ‘nationless’ Byzantine literature was added as an appendix because it preserved much information about the ancient world and because many Byzantine texts appeared to be imitating ‘Classical’ or ‘Hellenistic’ works as to style or genre (Agapitos, *Narrative Structure* 3–19).

Even if literary history as a scientific enterprise had been subjected to various kinds of critique since the turn of the twentieth century (Perkins 4–8), histories of literature remained an established practice well after the Second World War. However, the linguistic turn of

the 1960s and 1970s brought with it a concerted attempt by literary critics, linguists and anthropologists to cancel the difference between ‘text and context’ by absorbing the context as imaginary into the text as material. Historians and philologists found themselves defending certain essential methods of their fields from the deconstructivist and postmodernist attack, while the battlefield was greatly expanded in the 1980s through the participation of feminist and post-colonial studies (Spiegel 59–72; Ankersmit 29–74). Literary history was also attacked as being a prime example of a nationalist-colonialist master narrative that established during the nineteenth century a specific Eurocentric canon of literary masterpieces in a specific language to the exclusion of anything else (Hutcheon), while it also failed to do justice to medieval European literatures (Gumbrecht). Finally, literary history was attacked either as aestheticist and fictive in its ‘narrative’ form or as unstructured and heterogeneous in its ‘encyclopedic’ form (Perkins 29–60).

2 A History of Byzantine Literature?

If, then, literary history has to a substantial extent been brought into question, the history of Byzantine literature appears even more questionable in the early twenty-first century (Odorico and Agapitos). In order to understand this problem, we will have to move briefly back in time and look at Karl Krumbacher (1856–1909), the ‘founding father’ of Byzantine Studies. After an invitation by Wilhelm von Christ (1831–1906), Krumbacher published his *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur* (= *GBL*) in 1891, as part of Iwan von Müller’s (1830–1917) immense *Handbuch der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*. The publication of the thirty-five-year-old philologist created a sensation. Contrary to the original plan, the *GBL* was a separate volume of 500 pages and not an overview integrated as an appendix to Christ’s *Geschichte der griechischen Litteratur* of 1889. Furthermore, the volume opened with a preface and an introduction wherein Krumbacher (*GBL*¹ v–vii and 1–13) argued that Byzantine literature had to be treated as an entity distinct from Ancient Greek literature, but connected to Modern Greek literature. As to the main body of the *GBL*, two large parts were devoted to *Litteratur in der Kunstsprache* (prose and poetry), what in English is conventionally called ‘learned’ literature. However, the volume included – for the first time in the history of classical philology – a final part devoted to *Litteratur in der Vul-*

gärsprache, what is respectively termed ‘vernacular’ literature. Thus was Byzantine Philology born.

Krumbacher based his argument on three major premises: (i) Byzantine literature was the most important intellectual expression of the Greek nation during the Middle Ages; (ii) there was a clear opposition between the *Kunstsprache* and the *Vulgärsprache*, the former being elitist, the latter being popular; (iii) on account of its ‘ugliness’ this literature had to be studied with objective historical methods and not interpreted with subjective aestheticist notions. By combining late Romantic ideology, liberal reformism and scientific positivism, Krumbacher furnished the newly created discipline with a powerful hermeneutic model, which I will call the ‘Krumbacher paradigm,’ using the definition furnished by Thomas Kuhn (1992–96) in his essay on *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn 10–11). To a substantial extent and in various ways scholars studying Byzantine literature operate even today under this paradigm. For example, reading through the major Byzantinist journals and some less prominent periodicals we find that the majority of papers concerned with literary analysis of Byzantine texts completely avoid any application of literary and cultural theory. Most papers are governed by a positivist and empiricist perspective, while the analysis is highly technical, fully internalized and closed to any dialogue with other medieval literatures.

In the *GBL*, Krumbacher was forced to follow the overall concept of the Munich classics compendium, which was based on three essential assumptions: (i) Antiquity ended around AD 500, more specifically in 476 in the West and 529 in the East; (ii) there existed a ‘primordial’ division of literature into poetry and prose – a distortion of Aristotle’s pronouncement on poetry and history in the *Poetics* (9; 1451b.5–7), and the adoption of Hellenistic genre classification; (iii) the volumes of the *Handbuch* had to offer concise and full information on everything. As a result, the *GBL* does not have a narrative structure but only a basic chronological frame. The taxonomic order imposed by the poetry-prose division resulted in fragmenting authors and regrouping them according to genre. Byzantine literature started in 527 with the accession of Justinian and ended in 1453 with the Fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks. This structure was also superimposed onto vernacular literature, but the chronological boundaries were differently placed. Vernacular literature begun in the twelfth century because the first longer texts in the *Vulgärsprache* appeared then, and it ended in the seventeenth century with the in-

clusion of texts written on Venetian-dominated Crete in various forms of the local dialect.

Krumbacher addressed these restrictions in the introduction to the *GBL*. There he argued that the ‘true spirit’ of Byzantine culture took shape after the appearance of Islam, and he proposed AD 640 as the upper boundary. Furthermore, he pointed to the strong relation between prose and poetry through rhetoric, suggesting that hymnography was the true poetry of the Byzantines. He also argued that vernacular literature was the true root of Modern Greek literature and had to be studied up to the time of the Late Renaissance. In the second edition of the *GBL*, which was published in 1897 as a volume of 930 pages, a series of changes took place. A whole part on Byzantine religious literature and another one on Byzantine history were added, written by Albert Ehrhard (1862–1940) and Heinrich Gelzer (1847–1906) respectively. In his introduction, Krumbacher changed his opinion about the upper boundary of Byzantine literature and argued for 324, when Constantine assumed sole rulership of the empire. It is quite instructive to realize that Krumbacher’s two different opinions about the beginning of Byzantine literature or his doubts about the poetry-prose division did not have any practical impact on Byzantine Studies given that the ‘technical’ boundary of 500 and the separate treatment of prose and poetry have retained their force until today.

No comprehensive history of Byzantine literature has been written since Krumbacher’s *magnum opus*. The substitution of the *GBL* within the Munich *Handbuch* resulted in further fragmentation of the textual material, since the ‘new Krumbacher’ was physically divided into three separate volumes: religious literature, learned secular literature and vernacular literature (Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur*; Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur*; Beck, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Volksliteratur*). Furthermore, most shorter overviews published until the 1980s retained and sometimes even deepened the boundaries and inner divisions of the *GBL*, without actually redefining Krumbacher’s vision or substituting a new one (e.g. Dölger; Browning and Jeffreys; Hunger, “Byzantinische Literatur”). At the same time, the developments in Classical and in Modern Greek Studies since the Second World War introduced radical changes in matters of periodization and hermeneutical methods. For example, we have witnessed the rise of Late Antiquity as a new period in history and a new field of study that is intrinsically related to Early Christian Studies, another new field that has begun to substi-

tute the traditional field of Patristics. To a substantial extent, both fields have risen out of Classical Studies in the areas of history, archeology, religion and philology, practically to the exclusion of Medieval and Byzantine Studies. The recent appearance of two weighty volumes on these two fields in a new handbook series launched by Oxford University Press (Harvey and Hunter; Johnson) delineates in an almost symbolic manner the expansion of a spatiotemporal and mental territory that reaches from Ireland to China and from 300 to 700. What Krumbacher had termed “Early Byzantine literature” (*GBL*² 20) has for all practical purposes been incorporated into Late Antique and Early Christian Studies, a process that is distancing this textual production more and more from the research interests of Byzantinists. At the same time, Modern Greek Studies moved the beginning of Modern Greek literature upwards to 1100 in order to include the very first samples of vernacular texts, such as the epic-like verse narrative of *Digenis Akritis* (Jeffreys) or the burlesque *Poems of Poor Prodromos* (Eideneier). Thus, Krumbacher’s *vulgärsprachliche Litteratur* was ‘re-nationalized’ by having been incorporated into the histories of Modern Greek literature (e.g. Vitti; Politis). This process has also distanced younger Byzantinists from studying vernacular literature written before the fifteenth century.

As a result, scholars and students wishing to inform themselves about Byzantine literature are confronted with two basic versions of its external boundaries: (i) the 500–1453 version with vernacular literature included (Aerts; Kambylis; Rosenqvist), or (ii) the 700–1453 version with vernacular literature excluded (James; Stephenson). The ambivalent attitude of Byzantinists can be clearly seen in the treatment of literature in the recent *Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Jeffreys and Cormack and Haldon), where the relevant chapters are organized according to the time-honored generic divisions of the Munich *Handbuch*. Though the authors of these chapters include in their brief overviews texts produced between 300 and 600, these are consistently labelled as ‘late antique.’ Vernacular literature, except for a brief mention in the poetry chapter, does not have a chapter of its own, which means that all kinds of prose texts and religious poetry written in the vernacular have been excluded. The radical solution for a ‘historically adequate’ presentation of Byzantine literature, freed from the pressures of Late Antiquity and Modern Hellenism, was presented by the eminent Russian historian Alexander Kazhdan (1922–97) in a project titled *A History of Byzantine Literature* (= *HBL*) that was conceived as a kind of companion to his

Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium. Unfortunately, Kazhdan's sudden death left his *History* unfinished. Only two of the three planned volumes appeared posthumously (Kazhdan, *HBL 650–850* and *HBL 850–1000*), though his concept becomes apparent from what was published: Byzantine literature was to cover the period from 650 to 1204, while vernacular literature, with the exception of *Digenis Akritis*, was to be excluded.

This brief presentation has made clear that the writing of a history of Byzantine literature has become doubly questionable, because, on the one hand, literary history as such has suffered a serious demotion of its scientific status, and, on the other, Byzantine Philology has not so far laid the foundations for any kind of synthetic and interpretive narrative history of Byzantine literature. As to the latter issue, the reason, in my opinion, is that Byzantinists are unwilling to face explicitly the abandonment of the Krumbacher paradigm. It is here again that Kuhn's essay offers me the necessary tool to understand what I see. Kuhn (52–91) astutely describes the symptoms of a paradigm crisis. When scientists conducting their research within the framework of a specific paradigm recognize that the physical evidence does not conform to the interpretive model, 'normal science' as an esoteric and regularized 'puzzle-solving' activity is disrupted.

In my opinion, this characterizes the state of affairs in Byzantine Philology during the past thirty years. Scholars from various areas – e.g. paleography and codicology, textual criticism, linguistics, metrics, literary criticism – have been recognizing that the 'physical evidence' they happen to study does not conform to the paradigm they are working with. To give but a few examples of such critical studies with innovative proposals:

- i. The system of accentuation and punctuation in Byzantine manuscripts has proven to be far more consistent and logical than was previously assumed, even though it is quite different from the normalizing practices of classical philology (Noret; Reinsch).
- ii. The study of Byzantine metrical practice has also changed, taking into consideration the material reality of the manuscripts rather than abstract norms of versification deriving from Ancient or Modern Greek metrics (Agapitos, "Byzantine Literature;" Lauxtermann, "Velocity;" Lauxtermann, *The Spring of Rhythm*).
- iii. Recent studies of the Greek language in medieval times have begun to yield surprising insights into the linguistic

realities of both vernacular and learned texts (Joseph; Pappas; Hinterberger, “How Should We;” Holton and Manolessou).

- iv. Editorial practice has begun to take all these phenomena into consideration, gradually moving away from the traditional, regularizing approach to the editing of Ancient Greek texts (Giannouli and Schiffer).
- v. The introduction of literary theory to the study of genre has shown that Byzantine texts are far removed from imitation as perceived in nineteenth-century terms, which means that genres in Byzantium were not the homogeneous products of mechanical application of Roman Imperial school rhetoric (as seen, for example, by Sideras, 45–68). Critical approaches to this stance have been published by Mullett, “Madness;” Hinterberger, *Autobiographische Traditionen*; Agapitos, “Ancient Models;” Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*; Constantinou, “Generic Hybrids.”

What previously, therefore, appeared as incoherent, inept, wrong or ugly, has come to be viewed in quite different terms, while a common denominator of this intense scholarly activity is provided by the critique directed against the practice of ‘normal science’ (Maltese; Agapitos, “Der Roman der Komnenenzeit” and “Genre, Structure and Poetics;” Constantinou, “Subgenre and Gender;” Hinterberger, “Die Sprache;” Manolessou; Mullett, “No Drama”). However, the scientific paradigm behind this practice has not been criticized, while resistance from different perspectives to these innovations is being expressed (*e.g.* Mazzucchi; Bydén; Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons* 36–37). In my opinion, Byzantine Philology has reached the critical point where a ‘paradigm shift’ needs to be introduced in order to escape the impasses into which the history of the field has led its practitioners. If these impasses are not removed, the study of Byzantine literature will become even more introverted than it used to be, and will not be able to develop a scientific discourse commensurate to and participating in the current developments of the relevant neighboring fields.

3 Problems of Method

We need then to address a series of methodological problems that are related to the conceptual boundaries discussed in the previous section. Let us imagine ourselves at the banks of the river of time, at a point where the river flows into a lake whose shores are not clearly visible. Somewhere here lie the shifting beginnings of Byzantine literature. As has been often stated, Late Antiquity rose out of the ‘decadence’ of the Later Roman Empire in order to satisfy specific demands stemming from pathbreaking reevaluations in Roman archaeology and history and Latin literature in the western territories of the empire (Elsner; Mazza; Liebeschuetz; Athanassiadi). The projection of these issues onto the eastern part – and therefore onto Greek literature – has superimposed a specific historical and socio-cultural framework on to another, rather different environment. However, whereas the ‘end’ of the Roman empire in 476 (Momigliano; Demandt, *Der Fall Roms* 220–35; Bowersock) created an apparent chronological fixture between Roman Antiquity and the Western Middle Ages, no such fixture can be construed for the Greco-Roman East. This is one of the reasons why the beginning of Byzantine literature, together with that of the Byzantine empire, is shifting between ‘324’ (sole rulership of Constantine I) and ‘717’ (accession of Leo III), as Late Antiquity is continuously expanding (Giardina; Cameron; Lo Cascio). This expansion has even claimed the first hundred years of Islam as part of its chronotope, to the extent that we now talk about Islamic Late Antiquity, reaching down to the beginning of the Abbasid Caliphate in 750 and the move to Baghdad (Crone and Cook; Fowden, *From Empire* 138–168; Hoyland).

Thus, a powerful chronological boundary, symbolizing the demise of Antiquity around 700, has been established, though it is now receiving some critique (Fowden, *Before and After Muhammad* 18–48). In contrast to the old 476 (*qua* 500) ‘turning point’, the new boundary encompasses the whole of the sixth and even the seventh century (AD 600 in Cameron and Ward-Perkins and Whitby; AD 700 in Stephenson). This extended boundary has also had another effect. Many scholars on both sides of the boundary between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages have begun to view the ‘Greek’ Empire and the ‘Arab’ Caliphate in the eighth century as new ‘medieval’ states (Kazhdan and Cutler; Kazhdan, *HBL* 650–850 7–16; Kennedy), comparable to the ‘Frankish’ Kingdom of the early Carolingians

in the West. This poses another problem of method because neither the ‘Greek’ Empire nor the ‘Arab’ Caliphate can be viewed as ‘medieval’ in the conventional meaning of the term, much less can they be viewed as ‘medieval nation’ states, as has been recently suggested for the Byzantine Empire (Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium* 42–119).

The gradual formation of Late Antique and Early Christian Studies during the twentieth century also added a non-chronological boundary to textual production in Greek because it deepened the distinction between secular and religious literatures. Here secular is understood either as ‘pagan’ (e.g. the historian Zosimos in the early fifth century) or as ‘classicizing’ and possibly ‘cryptopagan’ (e.g. the historian Prokopios in the sixth century), while religious is unanimously understood as Christian. Secular literature has been overwhelmingly studied by classicists and historians of philosophy, while religious literature has been studied by theologians and historians of religion, but also by classicists. The effect of this particular boundary was that the texts of the two separated domains were not read together or, if they were, the main purpose was to detect literary influences and debts, for example, the Ancient Greek generic antecedents to Athanasios’ *Life of Antony* from the middle of the fourth century or the knowledge and use of the classics by apparently classicizing Christian authors such as Gregory of Nyssa in the second half of the fourth century. I shall mention only one case where this boundary created problems for the study of the texts involved and was recently shown to be simply wrong.

Nonnos of Panopolis (second quarter of the fifth century) composed the vast *Dionysiaka* in 48 books of dactylic hexameter and epic diction, producing the longest surviving ‘epic’ narrative in Greek literature: the number of books programmatically points to the respective books of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined. But Nonnos also composed a *Paraphrasis of the Gospel According to John* in 21 books of dactylic hexameter and epic diction: here the number of books corresponds to the Gospel’s *kephálaia* (“headings”) according to the division that had developed by the late fourth century. The conventional biographical reading was that Nonnos started out as a pagan poet celebrating in grand style the deeds of Dionysus and then, in his older years, converted to Christianity and produced the feeble *Paraphrasis*. However, this is a pattern that finds no support in the two texts (Livrea). Moreover, a focused metrical analysis of the word *mártys* (“witness”) has demonstrated that the *Paraphrasis* was the earlier of the two works (Vian). The safe conversion theory collapsed and new

comparative approaches to the generic and poetological substance of the two 'epic' works began to appear (Agosti 367 and 380–82).

As we leave the lake of Late Antiquity and move downwards along the river of time, we discover that the inner periodization of Byzantine literature is exclusively argued on the basis of major historical events which, upon closer examination, prove to be military catastrophes. Most prominent among such disasters are: (i) the defeat of the Byzantine army by the Arabs at the River Yarmuk in 636 and the subsequent loss of Syria, Palestine and Egypt by 650; (ii) the defeat of the Byzantine army by the Seljuq Turks and the capture of Emperor Romanos IV at the battle of Mantzikert in 1071; (iii) the Fall of Constantinople to the Crusaders and the Venetians in 1204. Obviously, such catastrophic events were recorded in histories, chronicles and other texts, and they were also variously commented upon by contemporary or near-contemporary witnesses. Yet such disasters had no immediate impact on textual production to the degree that from a literary point of view they could be plausibly considered as boundaries marking a "structural break" as socioeconomic history has defined them (Giardina). Let me give as an example the often discussed and very popular boundary of AD 650.

The main arguments developed for this turning point are purely historical, such as the breakdown of the ancient cities, the militarization of the state, the loss of substantial territory, the settlement of the Slavs and the Bulgars, and the incursions of the Arabs. Recent research, however, tends to evaluate the old and new evidence, especially the archeological evidence, under a different light (Louth). The only argument made about 650 that relates to textual production is the breakdown of the late antique school system and the interruption in the writing of secular (i.e. classicizing) literature. As to this last argument, it should be made clear that the amount of classicizing literature produced between 600 and 650 is very small, in effect restricted to five authors (George Pisides, John of Antioch, Paul of Aegina, Stephen of Alexandria, Theophylaktos Simokattes), whereas the amount of religious literature (classicizing or not) between 600 and 750 is very large and immensely varied (Chrysos). Thus, it is the non-chronological distinction between secular and religious literature that has governed the approach of scholars in evaluating the evidence and setting the boundary, as it had guided Krumbacher in the *GBL*¹. However, the quantitative evidence of textual production in the first hundred years (650–750) of the so-called 'Byzantine Dark Ages' (650–850) shows that neither did school education

break down, nor did texts stop being written. In fact, neither did the major topics and perspectives of religious textual production change, because they are all fully present before AD 600, though, obviously, new ones were added.

The simplistic approach of equating structural breaks with military disasters provides an easy solution of fitting texts into a given historical frame organized by events, without any theoretical consideration of the textual evidence as such. Furthermore, it is because of the conventional nineteenth-century division of the Middle Ages into ‘early–high–late’ that Byzantine history was also given the respective labels of ‘early–middle–late.’ But if we pause for a moment, we will realize that these labels clearly project a biologicistic progression of the type ‘birth–maturity–death,’ since ‘early’ implies a nascent dynamism, ‘high/middle’ a powerful culmination, and ‘late’ a protracted decline. Within this context, it is worthwhile contemplating the immense conceptual contradictions latent in the term ‘Late Antiquity.’

But let us now move even further down the river of time in order to find the end of Byzantine literature. Here, as if it were a steep waterfall, the chronological boundary is unanimously fixed to 29 May 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks. No single handbook or brief overview of Byzantine literature has expressed any theoretical or plainly practical concern about this date. For example, did Byzantine literature continue to be produced after 1453 with no ‘empire’ to accompany it, as was the case with Latin literature after 476 in the West? Or, even more provocatively, did Byzantine literature possibly cease to be produced *before* the capture of the diminished empire’s depopulated capital? That such questions have not been asked makes us understand how powerful is the superstructure imposed by *l’histoire événementielle*. Irrespective of 1453, however, vernacular texts of the twelfth to the fifteenth century, as I have already pointed out in section 2, have in the minds of most scholars migrated to Modern Greek literature, leaving Byzantine literature only with its learned texts. Thus, we are faced with another potent non-chronological boundary, that is, the distinction between ‘learned’ and ‘vernacular’ language and literature (Hinterberger, “Δημιώδης και λόγια λογοτεχνία”). Let me present only one example that shows how problematic this distinction is.

The Amorous Story of Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe is a verse romance surviving in a single manuscript of the early sixteenth century (Cupane 58–213; Betts 37–90). The romance is written like a folk-

tale, with a king and three sons, an abducted princess, enchanted castles, dragons, witches, poisoned apples and other fairy-tale accoutrements. It has been mostly viewed as a prime example of early Modern Greek vernacular (*qua* popular) literature. However, Manuel Philes, a learned poet of the early fourteenth century, addressed a long poem to the prince Andronikos Palaiologos, author of a philosophical moral compendium (Knös). Philes praises the prince for the composition of an “erotic book” (ἔρωτικὸν βιβλίον) and then offers an allegorical reading of this work, whose plot is quite similar to the *Kallimachos*. As to the text of the surviving romance, it has been shown that its language is far more mixed in terms of learned and vernacular usage than was previously thought (Apostolopoulos), because it had been heavily normalized by its first editor (Agapitos, “Byzantine Literature” 254–59). Moreover, it has been shown (Agapitos, “The Erotic Bath”) that the spicy love scenes of the romance are based on erotic epigrams from the *Greek Anthology* in the edition prepared by the scholar and monk Maximos Planoudes. His edition is transmitted in the autograph Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Marc. gr. 481 of 1299–1301 (Turyn 91–96 and pls. 70–74), the very manuscript that preserves the fullest text of Nonnos’ *Paraphrasis of the Gospel According to John*. In other words, the supposedly popular folktale narrative is, in fact, a highly learned text, written around 1320–40 at the imperial court (Agapitos, “Χρονολογικὴ ἀκολουθία” 122–28). Just as the ‘Christian conversion typology’ failed to explain the complex works of Nonnos in the fifth century, so does the ‘vernacular Modern Greek typology’ fail to explain the complex composition and primary reception of *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe* in the fourteenth century.

We have seen so far that the boundaries of Byzantine literature have been defined either by historical events, such as accessions of important rulers and military disasters, or by non-chronological divisions based on ‘content’ (secular vs. religious) and ‘language’ (learned vs. vernacular). As a result, we come to note two trends in Byzantine Studies. On the one hand, Byzantine literature is gradually being pushed into the boundaries of its conventional ‘middle’ period (AD 650–1200). On the other hand, Byzantine literature was declared ‘dead’ in the Enlightenment, was then proclaimed ‘national’ in the late nineteenth century, and is currently viewed as ‘dead *qua* learned’ and ‘national *qua* vernacular.’ It is no wonder, then, that no Byzantinist or team of Byzantinists has embarked on a history of Byzantine literature, given that the obstacles set by the prevailing bound-

aries and the latent dominance of the Krumbacher paradigm make such a project seem a daunting, if not impossible enterprise.

4 Representation and Explanation

Having raised in sections 2–3 various points of criticism concerning older and more recent approaches to the history of Byzantine literature, I would like to pick up some thoughts from section 1 on the discontents of literary history. David Perkins (121–73) described at length what in his view constitutes the impossibility of such a project in its various forms, especially in its double aim of representation and explanation. At the same time, he concedes that such a project is a necessary evil, though he hides this concession behind an ambivalent critique of Nietzsche (Perkins 175–86). However, what becomes clear from a careful study of Perkins' essay is that much of his critique does not apply to premodern cultures and their textual productions. By using the German paradigm of the history of Ancient Greek poetry as his premodern case study, Perkins has fallen into the trap that the fate of books in a manuscript culture has laid for modern critics. Ironically enough, it is Byzantine teachers and readers who, to a certain extent, have laid this trap through the transmission of the school canon of Ancient Greek literature as it had been more or less stabilized in Roman Imperial times. In other words, students of Byzantine literature and its history are not bound by the postmodernist anxieties of critics like Perkins because, to use a paradox, the premodernity of Byzantine literature is essentially postmodern. In my opinion, this is one of the key concepts for approaching medieval European literatures in general, namely, to recognize the pronounced consciousness of metalinguistic and metaliterary discourses cultivated by those involved in medieval textual production.

Consequently, Byzantine Philology needs to substitute its old scientific paradigm with a new one, but it also needs to translate Krumbacher's broad vision of modernist reform into our own times. Obviously, the issue is not to exclude any discipline (such as Classical, Late Antique, Early Christian or Modern Greek Studies) from studying parts of a vast number of extremely varied texts written in equally varied forms of Greek, and spanning more than a thousand years. The issue is to propose a flexible but still coherent paradigm for the study of Byzantine literature. It must be a paradigm that will

take into consideration the texts as historical entities in order to set up a workable structure for periodization, rather than choose for this purpose any arbitrary historical events. In other words, we should allow the texts to offer us relevant criteria for such a structure that could then be profitably compared to historical structures determining rhythms of change, continuities and discontinuities on a regional or transregional level. For we should not forget that history is not the neatly synchronized succession of clearly defined units but the continuous co-existence of non-synchronisms, as the eminent Polish economic historian Witold Kula (1916–88) astutely described the notion of historical change in his essay *Reflections on History* (Kula 63–78).

Byzantine Philology urgently needs a narrative literary history in order to represent and to explain textual production in Byzantium, because so far no such narrative history has ever been written. Even though representation and explanation have been criticized in their application to literary history (Perkins 29–52), they are indispensable tools of any analytical method that aims at plausibility and validity (Ankersmit 75–103). However, we could recast these two modern concepts as Byzantine theological categories of analysis. *Apeikonizein* (ἀπεικονίζειν) was used to signify the process of pictorial depiction of divine and holy images (Clement of Alexandria, Eusebios of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa), while *exegein* (ἐξηγεῖν) signified the process of verbal exposition of divine and sacred meanings (Eusebios of Caesarea, Epiphanius of Salamis, the *Suda* lexicon). Thus, *apeikonizein* indicates the process of synthetic representation, whereas *exegein* indicates the process of analytic interpretation. Both concepts include the notion of narrative – visual in the former case, verbal in the latter.

In order, therefore, to ‘represent’ and to ‘explain’ the fluidity and multileveled character of a pre/postmodern and metadiscursive textual production like Byzantine literature, it is necessary to establish a series of criteria by means of which we might detect structural breaks. For the purposes of my proposal I have developed three types of criteria, which I shall label as ‘authorly,’ ‘operative’ and ‘sociopolitical’ respectively. The first two are textually intrinsic categories and the third one is textually extrinsic. The application of such criteria would allow us to read texts within the appropriate concrete and abstract levels of their phenomenological nexus (Ingarden 25–196; Gadamer 107–74), in other words, as textually and contextually signif-

icant entities (Jauß, *Ästhetische Erfahrung* 655–865). Let me start with the first category, where four ‘authorly’ criteria would be:

- i. The choice of at least two contemporary authors with a sizeable *oeuvre* so as to conduct a satisfactory comparison on the basis of substantial textual material.
- ii. A study of the structural, generic and stylistic characteristics of the various works of the authors chosen.
- iii. A study of the ‘consciousness’ of these authors concerning: (a) their opinion about the structural, generic, stylistic or other formative elements that are to be found in their works; (b) their more general opinions as authors, possibly in relation to their real or imagined predecessors; (c) the degree of convergence, divergence or innovation as to these predecessors.
- iv. A study of the primary and secondary reception of their works, that is, on the one hand, of their immediate addressees and their contemporary audience and, on the other hand, of later readers.

I have consistently used here the word ‘author’. By this usage I am not espousing a modernist psycho-biographical notion of the author for Byzantine texts, nor do I, however, reject the author *tout court* by adopting a structuralist stance. ‘Author’ refers to the textual – and in many cases material – construction of an authorial *persona*, even when the presence of such a *persona* is apparently denied, as in anonymous works, or when texts purport to be nothing other than collections of other texts, florilegia, various anthologies, and dictionaries.

Such a construction is the author’s ‘portrait,’ mostly preceding a collection of his works in a high-quality manuscript. An impressive example is the full-page ‘portrait’ of Niketas Choniates (†1217), an important political figure in the late twelfth century, acclaimed orator and historian (Simpson). The miniature (see Plate 1) precedes the text of Choniates’ *Historical Account* (Van Dieten; Magoulias) in Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (ÖNB) Cod. Vind. hist. gr., 53, a fine paper manuscript of the early fourteenth century. The image is carefully executed, showing Choniates in the act of writing in front of his desk, where an inkbox and loose sheets of paper are placed on the lectern. On the upper margin of the page and written in a calligraphic style with vermilion-red ink, we find the rubric: ὁ Χωνιάτης καὶ συγγραφεὺς τῆς βίβλου ταύτης (‘Choniates and author

Plate 1. Niketas Choniates as author: ÖNB, Cod. Vind. hist. gr., 53 (early 14th cent.), iv .



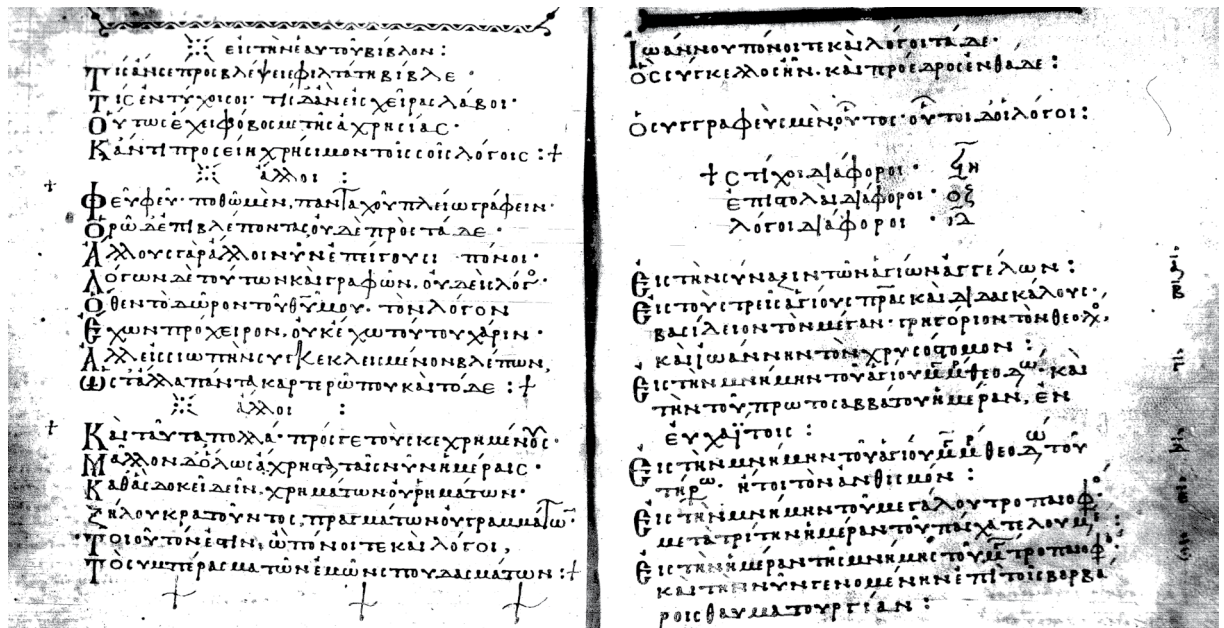
of this book”). Obviously, this layout was not prepared by Niketas himself. But the anonymous scribe of the Vindobonensis, in preparing the manuscript for his handsomely paying client, depicted Choniates as author (*syngrapheus*), identifying the manuscript (*biblos*) with the only text included therein and certainly being Choniates’ most famous work, as its textual transmission amply attests.

The authorial *persona* in the text allows us to recognize the manifold strategies employed by all sorts of textual producers (writers, compilers, anthologists, philologists, notaries etc.) in order to promote various ideological agendas, and to support or undermine change within a specific sociocultural system and its codes of communication. This system is reflected in what Gabrielle Spiegel (78–86) described as the ‘social logic’ of the medieval text. It is the way in which texts interact with their social surroundings through the changing literary forms they assume in order to express specific ‘meanings.’ Let me give one example of such an authorial *persona* from the eleventh century.

If in Choniates’ case the ‘author’ is identified with his ‘book’ as a single work, the case of John Mauropous (c. 1000–c. 1085), established teacher, writer and later bishop, presents us with another type of authorial *persona*.² Mauropous prepared some time around 1075 a collection of his works, which is preserved in the Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV), Vat. gr. 676, a fine parchment manuscript of the late eleventh century, probably the clean copy prepared by his secretary (Karpozilos 34–36). The actual collection is preceded by four pages presenting a set of prefatory peritextual material. On the open pages ii–iii (see Plate 2) we find a series of texts

2. The example discussed on the following pages was chosen as a small tribute to the splendid team at the University of Ghent who under Kristoffel Demoen have prepared a [database](#) of Greek book epigrams (see Bernard and Demoen); the team will continue with an ambitious research project dedicated to studying this immense textual material from various literary, linguistic, and sociocultural perspectives.

Plate 2. BAV, Cod. Vat. gr. 676 (late 11th cent.), ff. ii–iii.



(De Lagarde vi–vii). The left-hand page presents the reader with three poems. The first of these poems – placed under a finely drawn vermilion-red band and composed in four twelve-syllable iambic verses – bears an explicative rubric:

Εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ βιβλόν.
 Τίς ἂν σε προσβλέψει, φιλάτη βίβλε;
 Τίς ἐντύχοι σοι; Τίς δ' ἂν εἰς χεῖρας λάβοι;
 Οὕτως ἔχει με φόβος τῆς ἀχρησίας,
 κἄν τι προσεῖη χρήσιμον τοῖς σοῖς λόγοις.

To his own book.
 Who will cast his gaze at you, my beloved book?
 Who will read you? Who will take you in his hands?
 Thus does fear of disuse seize me,
 even if there might be something useful in your words.

A ‘first-person authorial voice’ addresses the book as a material and textual object. The layout of the two pages is visually dominated by an ‘authorial signature’ – it is an iambic couplet – placed under a gold and dark red decorative band on the top of the right-hand page:

Ἰωάννου πόνοι τε καὶ λόγοι τάδε.
 ὃς σύγκελλος ἦν, καὶ πρόεδρος ἐνθάδε.

These are the labors and literary works of John,
 who was a patriarchal secretary and a bishop here.

Following the signature and written out separately, we find a single iambic verse where “the author” (ὁ συγγραφεὺς) as *persona* first points to himself and then to “his works” (οἱ λόγοι) included in the book:

Ὁ συγγραφεὺς μὲν οὗτος, οὗτοι δ' οἱ λόγοι.

This then is the author, these now are his literary works.

This old device to authorize a text copied out in a manuscript is known as a “seal” (*sphragis*). The signature and the seal are placed exactly opposite the introductory poem of the left-hand page, where the name of the authorial voice is not revealed.

On the manuscript page, therefore, the poems operate both textually and visually in a performative metaliterary act that circumscribes and describes the authorial *persona* of John. The importance of these two pages for the author’s self-representation is visually even

τὸ τὸ μὲν ὁ τὸ ῥῆσ· τίω τρυφὴν τὸ ἄλλ·
 τὸν μὲν ἀσπίδ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 καὶ σπ' ἀσπίδ' ἀσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 Ὡς ἄσπ' ἄσπ'· καὶ φιλολογία μετ' ἄσπ'·
 ἀποτ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 Ὡς τὸ τρυφῆν, ἡλ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 τίω τ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 Ἐμ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'· καὶ δ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 π' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 Ὀντοὶ ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 Κόσμος ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 Ὀντοὶ καὶ τ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 μ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 Ἐμοὶ σφ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 καὶ τ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 τ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 εἰς ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
Καὶ τὰ ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 φέρε δ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 ἀσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 π' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 τ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 ὄν καὶ τ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
Εὶ χ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·

Ἐχθροὶ μαθητὸς ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 τ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 π' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 π' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
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 Ἐξ ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
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 ὄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 ὄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
Εὶ γὰρ ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 ὄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 τ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 π' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 σ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 τ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·
 π' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ' ἄσπ'·

Plate 3. BAV, Cod. Vat. gr. 676 (late 11th cent.), ff. 14–15.

more accentuated by the fact that the texts are written out in a decorative majuscule script (something rare and certainly expensive by the late eleventh century), while the main body of the manuscript is copied out in a standard minuscule of the late *Perlschrift* type (see Plate 3).

The literary works pointed to by the author on the right-hand page prove to be “verses” (*stichoi*), “letters” (*epistolai*) and “orations” (*logoi*), as the three centered lines placed under the seal disclose. The orations, in particular, are furnished with a separate title listing and numeration. Even though the three textual groups appear to have a certain formal cohesion, they represent a broad variety of genres and subgenres in verse and prose, while their composition spreads over a period of thirty years. Nonetheless, all of these “literary works” (*logoi*) constitute together a single text, the “book” (*biblos*), whose meaning is dictated by a specific social logic related to the eleventh century, the capital’s competitive literary environment, the imperial court and its sociocultural pressures (Lemerle 193–248; Agapitos, “Teachers”). A “useful” (*chresimon*) and, therefore, ‘true’ understanding of the ‘author’ requires a ‘reader’ who will literally grasp the book as a material entity with his hands and metaphorically grasp it as a textual entity with his mind. This is something new in Byzantine textual production, though it becomes visible to us around the middle of the eleventh century, if we are to judge by the surviving ‘books’ of other authors contemporary with Mauropous, for example, Chris-

topher Mitylenaios and the collection of his poems (De Groote xxi–xxiii), or the various works of Symeon the New Theologian as edited by his disciple Niketas Stethatos (Hinterberger, “Ein Editor”).

Similar to the layout on the two pages of Mauropous’ book, texts in Byzantine culture – but also buildings, paintings, manuscripts, even musical compositions for the liturgy – often appear to display certain ‘inner principles’ which determine a new aesthetic frame and a new understanding of structure, different, in my view, from those of Antiquity and Early Modernity. These inner principles form the ‘operative’ category of criteria to which I referred above. Seven such principles would be:

- i. **CENTRICITY:** The text focuses on a marked structural or conceptual centre placed within a clearly hierarchical disposition.
- ii. **COUNTERLINEARITY:** We observe the cancellation of linear *hypotaxis* that would allow the multiple and in-depth structural connection of the text’s recognizable parts
- iii. **PARATACTICALITY:** Instead of *hypotaxis*, the structure of the text presents a paratactical organization of its smaller units, all placed on the same narrative level.
- iv. **COMPARTMENTALIZATION:** The smaller units are highlighted as independent compartments through some kind of strong marking, giving, in this way, the impression that the removal or insertion of one or more compartments would not affect the text’s macrostructure.
- v. **NON-CLOSURE:** The text often seems not to reach a recognizable closure, while in some cases it gives the impression of continuously awaiting further reworking. In other words, the notion of a work completed by a subjective authorial will is substantially weakened.
- vi. **ABSORPTIVITY:** The text visibly absorbs in different ways and for different purposes a multitude of various passages from older texts.
- vii. **REVEALMENT:** The text consciously reveals the mechanisms of its own structuring with references to its structural parts and their ‘relation’ to each other.

In my opinion, the four authorly criteria and the seven operative principles are two satisfactory, textually intrinsic, tools for looking at texts in order to determine their poetical and rhetorical strategies, their structural mechanics and their social logic within a broader his-

torical frame. This brings me to the sociopolitical criterion I would like to present.

I have already pointed out that military catastrophies cannot be satisfactory boundaries of literary periodization because they do not generate some kind of dialogic discourse that would lead to a negotiation about and a reappraisal of literary practices. Therefore, I propose to introduce the concept of internal crisis as a more appropriate sociopolitical, textually extrinsic, tool for establishing literary boundaries. This type of crisis reflects ideological tensions within society, sometimes violent, certainly acted out on many different levels, emanating from the state or directed against it. An internal crisis is not a 'moment' to be easily identified with a 'historical turning point' (e.g. 18 September 324 or 13 April 1204), but a diffuse process of some duration, for example, a 'biblical generation' of thirty years or the fifteen-year taxation cycle – two units used by the Byzantines themselves in counting time.

There are at least three such crises that form useful boundaries: (i) the so-called Great Persecution under emperors Diocletian and Galerius in the early fourth century (303–13); (ii) the central phase of the Iconoclast controversy in the eighth century (754–87); (iii) and the second civil war combined with the Hesychast controversy in the middle of the fourteenth century (1341–54). These crises involved the state, religion and the Church, they encompassed broad strata of their respective societies, they erupted in violent activities against the citizens or between the citizens of the realm, they were resolved by imperial legislature and, very importantly, they led to a change in religious ideology, in state governance and in the image of the emperor. Examining the texts produced during and shortly after the crises will help us to realize that in the case of the Great Persecution and the Iconoclast controversy the crises led to the establishment of new ideological and aesthetic codes in the production of texts. However, in the case of the Hesychast controversy the crisis led to a substantial cancellation or attenuation of polyphony, variety and cosmopolitanism. More specifically, around AD 400, Greek, Latin and Syriac had developed common codes of literary aesthetics over the broad expanse of the Eastern Mediterranean in a transregional system of textual production, while around 850, Greek had entered into active dialogue with Ancient Greek literature and Arabic science, leading to new formulations of earlier aesthetic codes. However, by around 1400 Greek had broken down into regional textual productions (Constantinople and Thessalonike, Mystra,

Crete, Rhodes, Cyprus), while Bulgarian, Serbian and Russian had also fully developed their own regional literatures. It is quite instructive to compare this particular situation to premodern India between c. 950 and 1450 and the shift from Sanskrit to the vernaculars, as it has been impressively described by Sheldon Pollock (281–436).

Let me then briefly summarize my main points for a ‘new’ history of Byzantine literature. First, I believe that such a history should display a spatiotemporal narrative form. In other words, the texts should be treated as ‘characters with lives of their own.’ This means that groupings by genre should be avoided, while stronger prominence should be given to the texts as historical entities, often encapsulated through the authorial *personae* reflected in them. By using the three categories of authorly, operative and sociopolitical criteria, such a history should be structured in larger parts or sections so as to allow the narrative to unfold unencumbered by too many smaller encyclopedic chapters. At the same time, the larger parts should be divided into subsections organizing the spatiotemporal movement of the narrative. Each larger part should include a special chapter on genres and another one on book production, so as to enable readers, once they have gained a sense of the ‘story’ within each part, to form an idea about generic negotiations and to understand the important role of book production for textuality and literariness in Byzantine culture. I am still in the process of drafting this proposal in greater detail, but I believe that it opens up paths to step out of my field’s dominant scientific paradigm and to approach Byzantine literature as a variegated, dynamic and historically changing entity, rather than as a series of generic variations and failed imitative transmutations, unrelated to the other literary systems of the broader medieval Mediterranean and the northern lands of medieval Europe in their widest sense.

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