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Introduction

The current issue of the *Scripta Classica* offers an unusual selection of texts. The contributions in this volume focus on the reception of classical literature in Byzantium. This collection includes analysis of the texts penned by twelfth-century rhetoricians, scholars and historians – and goes even further, well into the period of Late Byzantium. And yet ancient culture and literature are the central focus of the discussion, which entails both the presentation as to how the ancient material was repurposed by the Byzantines, and the modern analysis of this process.

We decided to organize the papers included chronologically which has allowed us to juxtapose commented translations of three texts written by the three most important Byzantine teachers and scholars active in the Komnenian period, i.e. in twelfth-century Constantinople. These three literati are Theodore Prodromos, John Tzetzes and Nikephoros Basilakes, all known to have been not only teachers and scholars but also accomplished authors. They crossed paths in many areas¹ and they shared literary patrons at the court of Komnenoi², nevertheless they never mentioned each other in any of their works, at least not by name. A closer analysis of their literary and scholarly production allows us to conclude that each of them established his own way of teaching both classical and contemporary literature. The need for originality among twelfth-century teachers and rhetoricians was one

¹ The clearest example may be schedography – exercises popular in the twelfth century and realized by each of these authors in a different way. On schedography and Prodromic, Tzetzenian and Basilacian *schede* see P.A. Agapitos: „Grammar, genre and patronage in the twelfth century: A scientific paradigm and its implications”. *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 64 (2014), pp. 1–22.

² On the idea of patronage and how the literary networks worked in Byzantium see e.g. M. Grünbart: „Tis love that has warm'd us: Reconstructing networks in 12th-century Byzantium”. *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 83/2 (2005), pp. 301–313 and M. Mullett: *Aristocracy and Patronage in the Literary Circles of Comnenian Constantinople*. In: *The Byzantine aristocracy, IX to XIII Centuries*. Ed. M. Angold. Oxford 1984, pp. 173–201.

of the driving forces behind the activities of scholars who were trying to market their knowledge to young aristocrats or future employees of the imperial bureaucracy in Constantinople. This meant in practice that, in order to be successful, a teacher had to be interesting. This is what the above mentioned authors attempted – to display their knowledge, to impress and to attract wealthy patrons and promising students. It is beyond the limits of this short introduction to describe these three authors' literary and scholarly activities, and the choice of texts does not do justice to their vast and varied literary output. The selection of works discussed here may seem arbitrary but to attempt a more representative choice might be fruitless: it is impossible to choose the most characteristic texts of Prodrornos³, and it is equally difficult to decide if Tzetzes' main activity was to comment on, to allegorize, to adapt or to rewrite the classical literature⁴. Nikephoros Basilakes' case might be the easiest one as his teaching agenda was more homogenous than those of the other two. However, Basilakes famously claims to have invented a new teaching technique⁵, which should be researched more carefully in order fully to be understood. The single *progymnasma* that we present in this volume will not do justice to this author's method. Similarly we cannot fully acknowledge the charisma of John Tzetzes by reading only one of his treatises, such as the *De comoedia* presented here. Moreover, it is not enough to read just one work by Prodrornos, even one as innovative and interesting as *Rhodante and Dosicles*, to appreciate his originality and versatility.

The papers analyzing the abovementioned texts are preceded and followed by two other Byzantine glimpses into ancient and contemporary world. On one side there is *Epitome historiarum*, penned by John Zonaras, who based his narration, *inter alia*, on the annalistic works of Cassius Dio Cocceianus, who takes us back from the twelfth to the second century AD. On the other hand, completing this collection is a work of a fourteenth-century historian – that is, a study of a brief extract from the *History* by Georgios Pachymeres.

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³ As Nikolaos Zagklas puts it, „various literary genres, such as a novel, a hagiographical account, letters, orations, monodies, satires, schede, numerous philosophical, theological and grammatical texts, and, on the other hand, literary themes, such as autobiography (or better self-referentiality), friendship, love/eros and fiction, were inventively coupled by Prodrornos for the shape of his vast output”, see N. Zagklas: *Theodore Prodrornos: The Neglected Poems and Epigrams (Edition, Translation and Commentary)*. Wien 2014 (unpublished doctoral thesis), p. 53.

⁴ On the variety of Tzetzenian works see e.g. C. Wendel: „Tzetzes”. In: *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* VII A 2, 1959–2011; N. Wilson: *Scholars of Byzantium*. London 1983, pp. 190–196.

⁵ Basilakes in the preface to a collection of his *opera minora* describes how he had changed the way of writing school exercises in a process of their beautification (see. ed. Garzya 1984: 3, 14–37).