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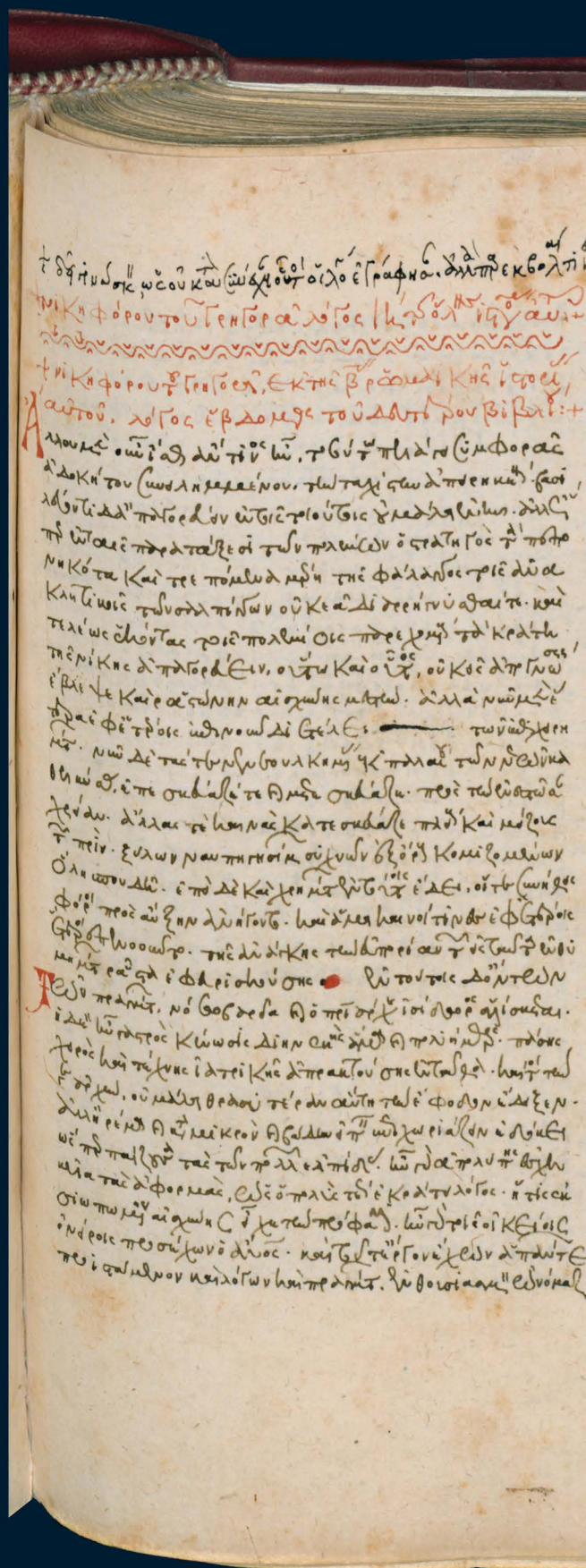
RESEARCH SERIES 8

BYZANTINE AUTHORS AND THEIR TIMES

EDITED BY

VASSILIKI N. VLYSSIDOU

ATHENS 2021



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ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ
ΙΝΣΤΙΤΟΥΤΟ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ
ΤΟΜΕΑΣ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ

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Ηλεκτρονική επεξεργασία / σελιδοποίηση &
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PREFACE

The literary production of all ages has always been at the forefront of research in the humanities. Regarding the output of the “Byzantine millennium” this research seems to be inexhaustible. This is because Byzantine texts were almost always engaged in a constant interchange between reality and myth, symbolism and allegory, invention and deliberate deception, intentional contradiction and propagation, thus forcing modern scholars to perpetually search for new ways to approach and interpret them.

In the *Souda*, the author’s simple and, at the same time, comprehensive definition of his craft also describes his peculiar position in society: *Συγγραφεύς· φησὶν ὁ μέγας Μάξιμος, ὅτι ὁ λόγους συγγραφόμενος ἢ πρὸς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ὑπόμνησιν συγγράφεται ἢ πρὸς ὠφέλειαν ἑτέρων, ἢ καὶ ἄμφω· ἢ πρὸς βλάβην τινῶν ἢ πρὸς ἐπίδειξιν ἢ ἐξ ἀνάγκης*¹. As is well known, many Byzantine authors, and especially historians, were personally involved in or witnessed events that had transpired in their own lifetimes. Their writings, therefore, reflect not only the historical context but also the literary milieu from which they originated. Ideological and political objectives, social conditions and special circumstances, personal intent and stylistic preferences are some of the basic parameters that influenced authors and the composition of their texts. These, in turn, largely dictate the different ways of reading the texts.

The majority of Byzantine authors, and once again especially historians, belonged to an “elite”, who frequented the corridors of power or was situated not far from the imperial court. To a large extent, the point of view from which these authors saw and evaluated events was determined by their relationship with authority, which “knows no satiety from applause” (*ἐξουσία κρότων γὰρ οὐκ οἶδε[ν] κόρον*), as John Mauropous aptly wrote when he abandoned the chronography he had begun to write². Byzantine authors who lived and worked

1. *Suda*, IV, 450 [Σ 1282]. For the translation of this passage, see S. PAPAIOANNOU, Voice, Signature, Mask: The Byzantine Author, in: A. PIZZONE (ed.), *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature: Modes, Functions, and Identities* [ByzA 28], Boston-Berlin 2014, 22 n. 2: “Writer: [in the words of the great Maximus] the one who writes texts does so either for his own reminding or for the benefit of others, or for both; or in order to harm some people or for the sake of display or out of necessity”.

2. *Iohannis Euchaitorum Metropolitae quae in codice Vaticano graeco 676 supersunt*, ed. P. DE LA GARDE, Gottingen 1882, Epigr. 96, p. 50. See A. KARPOZILOS, *Συμβολὴ στὴ μελέτη τοῦ βίου καὶ*

in an environment where the network of political and social relations was always fragile, and who they themselves were most often intelligent and highly educated –to the point where they sometimes become extremely vague and difficult to understand³, quite naturally devised a variety of narrative strategies, employed different literary guises, and resorted to a combination of different literary genres, in which, of course, they had been trained from an early age⁴.

As products of creativity and imagination, within which political, social and moral views were imprinted, Byzantine texts still have much to reveal about the deeper layers of their meaning. It is, therefore, constructive that they be approached not only as sources of historical information, but also as literary works⁵. From this perspective, perhaps the most apt observation which, to a greater or lesser degree, can be applied to almost all texts, is that of Paul Magdalino, who, referring to *De administrando imperio*, wrote: “The *DAI* contains a lot of historiography, it is full of stories, it is a collection, and it is a work of instruction and *παραίνεσις* [which] means that the assembly of these literary elements is itself a literary work of art”⁶.

In the present volume, historians and literacy scholars, studying sources dating from the 5th to the 14th century and focusing on issues relating to literary

τοῦ ἔργου τοῦ Ἰωάννη Μαυρόποδος, Ioannina 1982, 33-34 and 95-96; IDEM, *Βυζαντινοὶ ἱστορικοὶ καὶ χρονογράφοι*, III: 11ος-12ος αἰ., Athens 2009, 56-57.

3. For example see J.-L. VAN DIETEN, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia* [CFHB 11/1], Berlin-New York 1975, XXXII: οὐκ οἶδα τί φῆς ἐνθάδε, Χωνειάτα, // σοφὸν τὸ σαφὲς εἶναι λέγεις, // εἴτα γριφώδη καὶ βαρβαθρώδη γράφεις and S. EUSTRATIADIS, *Γρηγορίου τοῦ Κυπρίου οἰκουμενικοῦ πατριάρχου ἐπιστολαὶ καὶ μῦθοι*, Alexandria 1910, Letter 69, p. 51: Δέσποτά μου σοφώτατε, ἀνέγνω τὸν λόγον πλεῖν ἢ τετράκις, ἔγνω δὲ οὐδ’ εἰς ἅπαξ. Cf. S. KOTZABASSI, Gregorios Kyprios as Reader and Critic, in: EADEM – G. MAVROMATIS (eds.), *Realia Byzantina* [ByzA 22], Berlin-New York 2009, 82 n. 51.

4. See R. MACRIDES, How the Byzantines Wrote History, in: *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade 22-27 August 2016. Plenary Papers*, Belgrade 2016, 261 with n. 23.

5. In recent years, literary analyses of Byzantine texts have offered subtle readings; for example see the contributions to the volumes: P. ODORICO – P. AGAPITOS – M. HINTERBERGER (eds.), *L’écriture de la mémoire. La littérature de l’historiographie* [Dossiers byzantins 6], Paris 2006; R. MACRIDES (ed.), *History as Literature in Byzantium* [Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies – Publications 15], Farnham-Burlington 2010; P. ROILLOS (ed.), *Medieval Greek Storytelling: Fictionality and Narrative in Byzantium* [Mainzer Veröffentlichungen zur Byzantinistik 12], Wiesbaden 2014; CH. MESSIS – M. MULLETT – I. NILSSON (eds.), *Storytelling in Byzantium: Narratological Approaches to Byzantine Texts and Images* [Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 19], Uppsala 2018. For skepticism regarding literary approaches of historiographical texts see KARPOZIOS, *Βυζαντινοὶ ἱστορικοί*, II: 8ος-10ος αἰ., Athens 2002, 48-49 and III: 11ος-12ος αἰ. (as in note 2), 45-46; M. LAUXTERMANN, *BMGS* 37 (2013) 153-154.

6. P. MAGDALINO, A History of Byzantine Literature for Historians, in: P. ODORICO – P. A. AGAPITOS (eds.), *Pour une “nouvelle” histoire de la littérature byzantine: problèmes, méthodes, approches, propositions* [Dossiers byzantins 1], Paris, 2002, 181.

expression, ideology and society, highlight the ways in which Byzantine authors perceived and presented events and situations, which for some belonged to the distant past, while for others constituted personal experiences. Comparisons between texts of the same period often reveal the significant changes that occurred at the ideological, political, social and religious level, while comparisons among works of the same author can bring into view the said author as an individual and distinct identity⁷, expressing personal views and perspectives for the events of his/her own lifetime. The essays in the present volume do not aim to cover exhaustively the multifaceted issues relating to the study of Byzantine authors and their times; rather they aim to raise questions and suggest interpretations so as to provoke new discussions and proposals.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the contributors to this volume for their insightful texts and new approaches. The generous contribution of colleagues, who read the essays and made constructive suggestions and comments, proved significant for the final outcome. The publication of a collective volume requires addressing a variety of issues, both scientific and practical, and my colleagues Eleonora Kountoura Galaki and Anna Sklaveniti, whom I thank warmly, helped in this regard without hesitation. Furthermore, I would like to thank Dr. Michael Iliakis, who diligently edited the studies written in English. Finally, it would be an omission not to give the proper praise to Ms. Constantina Simonetatou, who, with the seriousness and sense of responsibility that distinguish her, undertook the electronic editing/pagination and the cover's editing.

Vassiliki N. Vlyssidou

7. See A. KAZHDAN – S. FRANKLIN, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Cambridge-Paris 1984, viii.