

Martin Hinterberger (ed.), *The Language of Byzantine Learned Literature*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2014 (Βυζάντιος. Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization 9), pp. VI + 228. [ISBN 9782503552378]

This volume on the language of the Byzantine learned literature fills a gap in the field. Although the Greek language, which has the longest documented history of any Indo-European language (covering nearly 3500 years of written records), has been subject to intensive linguistic research, not every period has been equally well investigated. Byzantine Greek was long pressed between Ancient Greek and Modern Greek, both vital fields of linguistic research. Byzantine Greek has been treated in a stepmotherly way in comparison with both its predecessor and its current form. As such, it has been largely disregarded until the 20th century. Moreover, Byzantinists have especially studied aspects of the language found in vernacular texts, in the conviction that these texts are the only (reliable) witnesses to the natural, spoken language of the period. The learned branch of Byzantine literature has been rather disregarded by linguists.

Indeed, Byzantine Greek literature is conventionally thought of as consisting of two branches: learned literature, which still takes – or rather: attempts to take – Ancient (in particular Classical) Greek as its linguistic model, and vernacular literature, which is written in an idiom close(r) to the contemporary spoken language. This contrast between learned literature (λόγια λογοτεχνία) and vernacular literature (δημώδης λογοτεχνία) is often reflected in the terminology, for there is a tendency to use the term “medieval” to refer to the vernacular, as opposed to the term “Byzantine” reserved for the learned language. However, in recent years, the simple dichotomy vernacular versus learned literature has been problematized. It is now acknowledged that neither the learned texts nor the vernacular ones present a pure idiom: it is not as if the former can be equated with Ancient Greek and the latter with the contemporary spoken language. Despite its “traditional” title, this volume also pleads in favour of a *continuum* from vernacular-ness to learned-ness.

Nonetheless, the assumed equation of the Byzantine learned language with Ancient Greek is, in my view rightly, considered responsible for the fact that historical linguistics has long neglected the so-called high register texts. According to the authors of this volume – and I agree with them –, there is an urgent need to fill this gap. First, the learned language is not a poor imitation of Ancient Greek literature, which is still extensively taught at school (cfr. Giannouli’s contribution), since many Byzantine authors *creatively and innovatively* deal with classical linguistic phenomena. This is especially made clear in contributions by Wahlgren and Hinterberger on the use of the dative and of the perfect respectively. Moreover, even though the learned language remains to a great extent a “Kunstsprache”, it more closely parallels the *spoken* language than conventionally thought (cfr. Manolossou’s contribution). Certain of the formerly considered “deviations” from Ancient Greek norms actually reflect the spoken language. Furthermore, the Byzantine learned language does not constitute a static system, but is in constant change, for even a so-called “dead” variety evolves according to its own internal dynamics – in the words of Karyolemou: «classicizing Greek is not a fossilized variety reproduced in inertia».

The Byzantine learned language thus definitely deserves to be studied in its own right, which is the target of the contributors to this volume. Nonetheless, most of them admit the preliminary character of their investigations: the volume does not at all pretend to be exhaustive (the opposite claim would be highly incredible).

However, the topics which are treated are varied and the order in which they are presented is very well overthought: the case-studies, of which I will give a short account below, are clearly organized according to a funnel structure. We begin with two methodologically oriented papers, which signal *desiderata* in the field (Manolossou: on the possibility of applying modern linguistic theories; Karyolemou: on adopting a modern sociolinguistic perspective). Next, the Byzantine educational system, the cornerstone in the literary production, is discussed in broad outlines (Giannouli). From then on, more specific issues from different levels of grammar (noun and ver-

bal morphology, syntax, and even accentuation) are taken into consideration. First, we get two papers which question contemporary practices (Signes: on our current tripartite division of the voices; Noret: on our modern accentuation rules). Afterwards, three linguistic phenomena which are generally acknowledged to have vanished from the everyday language are explored, especially to shed light on the extent to which these so-called “dead” features can be considered stylistic markers of a high register: the particles (Loudová), the dative case (Wahlgren) and the synthetic perfect (Hinterberger).

As the volume covers a very wide time span (circa 300-1450), the precise texts which make up the corpus of each contributor inevitably differ in nature. Noret, for instance, takes the *Corpus Christianorum* into consideration, while Loudová focuses on Nikephoros Blemmydes. Although one could raise that this devalues the coherence of the volume, it entails, in my view, a richness and gives the reader an impression of the range of the literary production at the time. Moreover, certain sources are recurrent: Giannouli, Signes, Noret and Loudová, for example, all appeal to grammatical treatises (the work of Theodore Gaza is, for instance, repeatedly mentioned) and both Loudová and Hinterberger rely on metaphrases. These metaphrases are revealed as an important source of linguistic information: it is instructive to compare them to their – more or less elaborated – original. Another type of texts revealed to be promising for further linguistic research are “schede”, which are the work pieces of pupils who had to restore deliberately distorted texts (cfr. Giannouli).

I will now give a short account of each paper. To begin with, it should be said that the contributions are – without exception – of high quality; most are written by the authority on the field. The first paper is very appropriate for the opening of the book: Io Manolessou (*Learned Byzantine Literature and Modern Linguistic*, pp. 13-33) begins by retrieving *why* the learned language of the Byzantine period has been overpassed by modern linguistics. As already mentioned, modern (historical) linguists give primacy to natural language and thus prefer to make *vernacular* texts their object of study. However, she is convinced that the learned literature can also serve as a good source for observing contemporary changes. More precisely, she thinks that especially sociolinguistics and contact linguistics constitute branches in which the learned texts can lead to more insights into the language.

Manolessou's suggestion is as it were picked up by Marilena Karyolemou (*What Can Sociolinguistics Tell us about Learned Literary Languages?*, pp. 34-51), who asserts that a sociolinguistic approach to the Byzantine literature is indeed revealing. Karyolemou first problematizes the term “literary”, which is crucial in this volume, and proposes to consider it a sociolinguistic concept (rather than a purely linguistic one). More importantly, she gives the term a more dynamic and thus scalar interpretation. Departing from the observation that in Modern Greek too the distinction between “the” *dhimotiki* and “the” *katharevousa* is not that clear-cut, but that there exist various degrees of *dhimotiki*-ness and *katharevousa*-ness, she convincingly concludes that we should also conceive the Byzantine literature as a continuum, ranging from more vernacularness to more learnedness. This is a very important methodological achievement.

Antonia Giannouli's paper (*Education and Literary Language in Byzantium*, pp. 52-71) does not really present groundbreaking research, but gives a clear survey (of certain aspects) of the Byzantine educational system, which of course plays a decisive part in the literary production. As such, this paper certainly deserves a place in this volume.

Grammars are also important means to understand the literary production. These are made the topic of Juan Signes Codoñer's contribution (*The Definition of the Middle Voice in Ancient and Byzantine Grammars: A Guide for Understanding the Use of the Verb in Byzantine Texts Written in Classical Greek*, pp. 72-95). In general, Signes attempts to show that the Greeks (including the Byzantines) sometimes conceptualized the language in a different way than we nowadays do. More specifically, he uses the example of the tripartite division of the voices to show that the ancient grammars of Classical Greek and the modern grammars of Classical Greek do not always

converge. This has consequences for our understanding of Byzantine literature, for the Byzantine Greeks of course based themselves on the former grammars.

In Noret's paper (the only one written in French – *L'accentuation Byzantine: en quoi et pourquoi elle diffère de l'accentuation «savante» actuelle, parfois absurde*, pp. 96-146), attention is drawn to a linguistic phenomenon where our modern usage likewise differs from the Byzantine one: the accentuation. After giving a concise history of the accentuation system from Ancient Greek till now, he points out several differences between the accentuation practice in the Byzantine manuscripts and the rules which editors nowadays apply. As such, it becomes clear that modern editors have for decades been “correcting” “mistakes” made by scribes, which might not come as a surprise, given the fact that we nowadays have become alienated from the original function of accentuation, i.e. means to help reading aloud.

Kateřina Bočková Loudová (*On the Category of Particles in Byzantium*, pp. 147-169) focuses on small – yet fascinating – words: the particles, which have received much scholarly attention in Ancient Greek (especially within Functional Grammar) but are indeed neglected in Byzantine philology, as she points out in a *status quaestionis*. After this overview of the (few) studies on Byzantine particles, she attempts to derive the theoretical status which the particles had in Byzantine times from grammatical treatises. Finally, she studies the various particles in the high style text of Nikephoros Blemmydes and its simplifying metaphrase. This comparative case-study yields an unexpected outcome: the allegedly “simple” metaphrase contains more archaizing particles than the original text. Hence, we are warned that we cannot define the relationship between the originals and their rewritings in too simplistic terms.

Just as surprisingly, Staffan Wahlgren (*Case, Style and Competence in Byzantine Greek*, pp. 170-175) observes that in the aftermath of the disappearance of the dative from the living speech this case starts to adopt more functions and accordingly becomes more frequent. Wahlgren relates this remarkable increase of the use of the dative in the 14th century not only to its “dead” status, but also to the heightened degree of competence of the writers: in the later Byzantine era, the authors' familiarity with the structures of the ancient classics seems more developed than in the 10th century. This is a promising suggestion. As such, the dative has become a stylistic marker, a sign of ambition on part of authors. Nevertheless, the use of the dative is not limited to high register texts and the situation is thus again more complicated than it might have seemed at first glance.

Finally, pursuing along the same lines as in his paper on the pluperfect (2007), Martin Hinterberger (*The Synthetic Perfect in Byzantine Literature*, pp. 176-204) examines the use and meaning of the synthetic perfect. It is a good thing that tense & aspect is not overlooked in this volume. Again contrary to expectations, Hinterberger discovers that the use of the allegedly “dead” synthetic perfect by itself does not necessarily indicate high style: indicative perfect forms also occur in lower register texts – they are never *entirely* absent from certain texts, as was the case with the pluperfect (in this respect, Hinterberger's article on the pluperfect was more striking). However, the perfect forms occurring in low level texts usually belong to a lexically restricted group of verbs, such as γέγονα. As for the semantics of the perfect, Hinterberger persuasively argues that the synthetic perfect forms are used as equivalents of the aorist tense or – less frequently – the present tense, by relying on (the translations/paraphrases in) lexica and on metaphrases, which once more prove their value as a source of linguistic information.

In conclusion, the authors of this volume have successfully demonstrated that the so-called learned language is worthy of linguistic research. Many of the papers raise suggestions (e.g. Hinterberger: translation of the synthetic perfect as an aorist rather than as an ancient perfect); problematize current practices (e.g. Signes: the tripartite division of voice found in modern grammars of Classical Greek; Noret: editorial practices); and – especially – put forward further questions: many contributors acknowledge that further research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn and definitive answers can be given.

The last three case-studies in particular have unequivocally shown that we cannot hastily or au-

tomatically conclude that a certain linguistic phenomenon is a high style marker in Byzantine Greek, simply because it has disappeared in the spoken language and is thus an ancient relic. In other words, Karyolemou's prediction that one single linguistic feature is not sufficient to determine the degree of learned-ness is definitely borne out. So, many challenges are awaiting us if we want to establish a list of criteria to decide on the vernacular-ness or learned-ness of a specific text. Consequently, this volume will undoubtedly foster more research.

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