



LAYERS OF AUTHORSHIP IN THE TENTH CENTURY: CONSTANTINE VII PORPHYROGENNETOS AND HIS EXCERPTOR(ES)

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Abstract

Multilayered authorship can be found in the *Excerpta Historica Constantiniana* (EC), a Byzantine collection from the tenth century. The contribution focuses on the tension between the EC primary sources and the EC context as such, exploring the conceptual tool of Distributed Authorship and engaging both with the sender/receiver functions and with the power relations between the emperor and the excerptor(es). The EC Prooemium draws on the New Testament, namely, on the epistle to the Ephesians, which in turn sheds light on Constantine VII's cultural, political and religious agenda.

Keywords: Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *Excerpta Historica Constantiniana*, excerptor(es), Distributed Authorship, multilayered authorship, collaborative authorship, Byzantine collections, primary sources, New Testament, Pauline epistles, Ephesians, Byzantine ambassadors, Attila, Priscus of Panion.

Ripreso

Negli *Excerpta Historica Constantiniana* (EC), silloge bizantina del X secolo, si può ravvisare una autorialità a più livelli (*multilayered authorship*). L'articolo lumeggia la tensione tra le fonti primarie e il contesto degli EC in quanto tali, esplorando lo strumento concettuale della *Distributed Authorship*, esaminando le funzioni di mittente/destinatario e il rapporto di potere tra l'imperatore e l'*excerptor* (o meglio gli *excerptores*). Il *Proemio* degli EC evidenzia una ripresa esplicita dal *Nuovo Testamento*, in particolare dall'epistola agli Efesini, che a sua volta getta luce sul programma culturale, politico e religioso di Costantino VII.

Parole chiave: Costantino VII Porfirogenito, *Excerpta Historica Constantiniana*, excerptor(es), *Distributed Authorship*, *multilayered authorship*, collaborative authorship, sillogi bizantine, storiografia greca, *Novum Testamentum*, epistole di Paolo, Lettera agli Efesini, diplomazia di Bisanzio, Attila, Prisco di Panion.

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*“These confessions of mine should become palatable to your colleagues
if they let themselves be persuaded that, like important political figures of their time,
I used ghostwriters”
Ihor Ševčenko (1992, 185-6)*

INTRODUCTION

The emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus and the collection of the so-called *Excerpta Historica Constantiniana*¹ (henceforth *EC*) never cease to arouse expectations in their modern readers.

Striking has been, for example, a sharp sentence by Christopher Kelly: «In cutting down Priscus’ *History of Attila*, Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ editorial team had no sense of how to finish a good story. It is not at all to their credit that one of the passages they chose to discard was Priscus’ account of the arrival of the Hun envoys in Constantinople in autumn 449.»² The background is that of the historian Priscus of Panion (5th c. AD),

¹ *EC*, I-IV.

² Kelly 2011, 162. The Hun envoys, namely Orestes and Eslas, were sent by Attila in 449 to Byzantium (Prisc. exc. 12 Carolla = fr. 15.2 Blockley).

who wrote a *History* in eight books about the reigns of Theodosius II, Marcianus and Leo I. Dealing with the apogee of Attila's power, Priscus recounts the Byzantine conspiracy that attempted to kill the king of the Huns. The plot failed, and Attila sent his envoys to Theodosius II with a hefty bill to pay³. The "arrival of the Hun envoys in Constantinople" could have been "a good story", but it is not attested. The *EC* collection reports other diplomatic missions in detail, while in this case it stops at the threshold of the episode.

Hence Christopher Kelly's judgement, which cannot represent better the distance between a modern evaluation and the tenth-century criteria of the so-called *Excerpta Historica Constantiniana* (henceforth *EC*): a distance consisting of time, space, education, cultural memories – and also underpinned by different perceptions of authorship. The present contribution points at some remarkable features of the *EC* in the latter respect, which entails issues of language, style and literary imitation. This is why the Hun envoys of Priscus and their unbearable message are worth to be taken into consideration⁴.

1. AN IMPERIAL COLLECTION

The historical collection known as *Excerpta Historica Constantiniana* (henceforth *EC*) was assembled by order of the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (945-959). The preface (*Prooemium*) voices his concerted effort to preserve and systematize Roman historiography in Greek, according to the needs and purposes of the 10th century:

³ Given 2014, 81-82: «After he seized Bigilas, who had been detected plotting against him, and the one hundred pounds of gold, which were sent by Chrysaphius the eunuch, Attila straightaway sent Orestes and Eslas to Constantinople. He instructed Orestes to go to the emperor wearing around his neck the purse in which Bigilas placed the gold that was to be given to Edekon. He was to display it to the emperor and the eunuch and to ask if they recognized it. And he instructed Eslas to say aloud: while Theodosius was a child of a well-born father, Attila too, being well-born and the successor to his father Moundiouchos, carefully guarded his good breeding. Theodosius, however, had fallen away from his good breeding and so was a slave to him insofar as he had consented to the payment of tribute. He was therefore not acting justly when he, like a worthless servant, secretly attacked his better and a man whom fortune had revealed to him as his master. He said that he would therefore not revoke the charge against those who committed offenses against him, unless Theodosius should send the eunuch to be punished. These are the reasons they went to Constantinople.»

⁴ See below the *Conclusions*.

in order to gather “the whole magnificence of history”⁵, the emperor chose to draw the best from a number of historical works. He had these examined and divided in small passages, which in turn were extracted (i.e., excerpted), “tagged” by theme and arranged in a new order, according to the subject.

A new collection was thus born, and a huge one: planned to encompass 53 sections⁶, it was perhaps confined in the imperial library and circulated in the palace school⁷. Some excerpts, which found their way to the West and resurfaced from mid-sixteenth century, were named at first *ἐκλογαί/selecta/eclogae* by the *editores principes* (1582; 1603⁸), then *excerpta/collectanea* (1634⁹), and finally were given titles similar to *Excerpta Constantini-ana* in the 19th century, when the last discovered remains were published¹⁰. Hence the abbreviation *EC*, which alludes to a plural name (*excerpta*, i.e., excerpts/extracts).

No general title of the series can be found in the manuscripts, while each surviving section bears a specific heading, according to the subject: *On Roman Ambassadors*, *On Ambassadors from the Nations*, *On Plots*, *On Virtues and Vices*, *On Wise Sayings*¹¹.

The *EC* are therefore an imperial collection. The *Prooemium* mentions Constantine VII, and him alone, as the inventor and supporter of the huge enterprise; anonymous are the scholars in charge of gathering, producing and publishing the *EC*. If the *EC* are comparable to the *Corpus Juris Civilis* of Justinian¹², none similar to Tribonianus’ team moves from the shade¹³.

⁵ *ELR Prooemium* p. 2, 7-8 de Boor ἅπασα ἱστορική μεγαλοργία. My translation tries to give an idea of ‘magnificence’ (μεγαλοργία), in the etymological sense of Latin *magnificentia*, i.e., the quality of performing “great actions” or “feats”.

⁶ Németh 2018 *Appropriation*, 71-77.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸ Ed. Orsini 1582; Ed. Hoeschel 1603.

⁹ Ed. Valesius (*EV*) 1634.

¹⁰ Mai 1827, XXVIII, XXX; C. Müller 1848, FHG IV, 9; Schulze 1866, III; de Boor 1884, 123-148; Boissevain 1884, 2-40.

¹¹ *On Roman Ambassadors* & *On Ambassadors of the Nations* = *ELR*, *ELG*. *On Plots* = *EI*. *On Virtues and Vices* = *EV*. *On Wise Sayings* = *ES*. About the *EC* series, see below §4.c.1.

¹² Cohen-Skalli 2013, 33-52, argues for a link between *EC* and Justinian’s *Corpus*. See below n. 42.

¹³ Basil Nothos had a key role in the *EC*, cf. Németh 2018, *passim*; the same Basil Lecapenus the *Parakoimomenos* was already suggested as the compiler of the so-called

„A bibliophile eager for knowledge, a diligent researcher with strong historical interests, whose only passions were study and writing, Constantine lived more in the past than in the present.”¹⁴ The famous words by George Ostrogorsky sketch a vivid portrait of the emperor -and at the same time a biased overview of his self-representation in the *EC*¹⁵. One may reasonably wonder whether such a huge enterprise about *Roman* history can be labeled as antiquarianism, given that Constantine VII was (aware to be) a *Roman* emperor. And the Roman identity of his age is probably more than just ‘living in the past’¹⁶. Also in this respect, the *EC* are a remarkable case study.

2. FASHIONABLE AGAIN: EC IN THE RECENT SCHOLARSHIP

In the late 16th century, when one *EC* volume reached the scholarly audience in the West, philologists all over Europe burned with passion for the excerpts coming from lost books of Polybius, Diodorus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Appianus and Cassius Dio. Since then, the few surviving volumes of *EC* have been never completely out of fashion for centuries, because scholars have been interested in fragments otherwise unknown¹⁷. However, genuine interest for the *EC* collection in itself was both rare and relevant for Byzantine studies along the 20th century: those were the cases of Paul Lemerle in 1971¹⁸, and of the 1973 monograph by Arnold J. Toynbee¹⁹.

A huge step forward have been Paolo Odorico’s studies about the *culture of sylloge* (collection)²⁰, as well as the specific contributions by Bernard Flusin and many

Theophanes Continuatus by Featherstone 2014, 353-372; see also Signes Codoñer – Featherstone 2015, 16*-19*.

¹⁴ Ostrogorsky 1956, transl. J. Hussey 1969, 279.

¹⁵ An all-around portrait in Shevchenko 1992; Schreiner 2018.

¹⁶ Každan 2006, II, 133-152; Kaldellis 2019, 38-80.

¹⁷ For the fortune in Late Renaissance and Early Modern Age (with further bibliography): Canfora 2001; Pittia 2002; Carolla 2008 *Non deteriores*, 129-170.

¹⁸ Lemerle, *L’encyclopédisme du X^e siècle*, in Id. 1971, 267-300. In turn, the renowned contribution has triggered more recent discussion about the notion of ‘encyclopedia’ in Byzantium: see Van Deun - Macé 2011; Flusin - Cheynet 2017.

¹⁹ Toynbee 1973.

²⁰ Collecting texts was common practice in Byzantium: a collection was usually called a *syllogé* (συλλογή), *eklogé* (ἐκλογή) or other synonyms, and could encompass such

other scholars, both on the collection as a whole and on single authors/texts included²¹.

Issues related to the *sylogai* (collections) are indeed crucial, especially for literary, ideological and social implications: as an imperial collection, the *EC* involve issues of (not only cultural) power relations, information management and dissemination.

However limited in circulation, the *EC* represent an “official version” of what could have been the best historiography according to the Constantinian ideology. Albeit (possibly) locked into the palace, their volumes should “enclose every great achievement in history”, according to the brilliant translation of the *Prooemium* by Anthony Kaldellis²². If the remains suggest that the *EC* were meant for the imperial library, and their reading was limited to the court²³, their goal would have been achieved anyway: the same *Preface* proclaims that “through this selection the eloquence of these accounts will more effectively and diligently bring itself to the attention of the students of literature and also be imprinted upon them in a more abiding way.”²⁴. That is, high quality education of a few young scholars would have brought new lifeblood into the agonizing historiography, a genre which the emperor had probably mourned for long before his own rise to power.

Never consigned to oblivion, the *EC* have grown in popularity during 2010s and, what is more, have recently deserved a focus on methodology of collecting *per se*, i.e. a

diverse texts as, e.g., technical works or warfare materials, philosophical/literary/historical writings, magic spells or pagan oracles, and so on. Texts were usually divided by genre or kind. For different reasons and purposes, *sylogai/collections* are spread everywhere in Byzantine manuscripts. Some of them are not literary collections, but only mixed notes, i.e., *adversaria*; most of them are short and might have been intended for publication to an audience not broader than the same monastery where they were collected. This is not the case of the *EC*.

²¹ For the *sylogai* see Odorico 1990; Id. 2011, 89-107. Furthermore and specifically about *EC*: Flusin 2002, 85-227; Piccione 2003, 44-63: 54-55; Treadgold 2013, 153-164 ; Németh 2016, 253-274 ; Manafis 2020, 26-42. About single authors see, e.g., Flusin 2004, 120-136; Roberto 2009, 71-84.

²² Kaldellis 2015, 43.

²³ Németh 2018, 35; see Cresci 2022 (forthcoming) about the audience of the *EL*.

²⁴ Kaldellis 2015, 43.

focus on the *sylloge* as such. András Németh's contributions have fueled a lively debate, which proves more and more fruitful²⁵.

3. DISTRIBUTED AUTHORSHIP (DA). AN OVERVIEW

Expanding on the current discussion, the present contribution scrutinizes the *EC*-related issues with the concept of *Distributed Authorship* (henceforth *DA*). *DA* was focused in 1980s “in studies of copyright and intellectual property and adopted in avant-garde art circles in 1983”²⁶ and has seen a growing importance in digital domain performances/productions -and related studies. In 2018, an international conference addressed the perspectives and prospects of *DA* in Humanities, especially in North America and in Classical Studies, a field which more and more needs *Bridging the Ancient to the Digital Contemporary*²⁷. The conference explored not only the practice and potential of authorial distribution in the digital domain, but also the *DA* insights into ancient media, from the *Life of Ahiqar* to the *Barlaam and Joasaph*. First results show that *DA* conceptual tools apply to a number of cases beyond the digital domain; furthermore, the collapsing of ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’ functions into one another, as well as the processes of decomposition/recomposition over time by multiple agents, shape the self-representation(s) by the author, whatever the latter can be – and be perceived²⁸.

It is true that, of course, every anthology in any (classical or modern) literature entails issues of multifaceted and distributed authorship.

To oversimplify, text-1 of author-no.1 (e.g., Polybius' *History*) becomes *also* text-I in text-2 (i.e., the first chapter in the anthology) by author-no.2 (the compiler/collec-

²⁵ Németh 2010; Id. 2013, 232-258; Id. 2016, 253-274; Id. 2018, esp. 77-91. *Contra*, Odorico 2017, 23-42; Manafis 2020, 39-42. See also Treadgold 2013; Kaldellis 2015; and the dossier «*Excerpta Constantiniana*» in *BSI* 72.2 (2017), 3-324; Odorico 2017, 203-220; Agati - Ciolfi - Monticini - Panoryia – Vukašinović 2017, 221-249; Manafis 2017, 250-264; Németh 2017, 265-290; Rafiyenko 2017, 291-324.

²⁶ Gray 2013, 88-111: 66.

²⁷ Crawshaw – Novak (University of California, Santa Barbara) 2018, at the conference *Author.net* (UCLA) <<https://humanities.ucla.edu/event/author-net-a-transdisciplinary-conference-on-distributed-authorship/>>.

²⁸ *Author.net* <http://acrsn.org/conferences_archive.html>.

tor/editor). The process entails a tension between primary sources and final results, however respectful the ‘box’/anthology/collection can be; furthermore, the situation is increasingly complicated by the number of selected authors and relevant collectors, range of times/ages, not to mention social and cultural contexts, which cannot be overestimated. Byzantium is no exception in this respect²⁹.

However, trying a *DA* test in *EC* has something of irony, because the single definition we can find in the preface is *oikeiōsis*, a term usually translated as “appropriation”³⁰, which is exactly the opposite of “distribution” (below §5). To look for *DA* features in the *EC* sounds paradoxical, yet it can be worth the try.

4. EC PECULIARITIES

Paolo Odorico is absolutely right when he writes that a genre of “historical collections” has no meaning in Byzantium up to the 10th century: “C’est pourquoi ce n’est pas en séparant par type formel ou de contenu les différents recueils que nous parviendrons à en cerner leur fonction: celle-ci est d’un côté lié au sens de chacun d’entre eux, au message que chaque recueil véhicule, et d’autre côté à la nature même de cette transmission du savoir confiée à la production des *syllogai*, considérant cette façon d’agir comme typique d’une «culture». Il n’y a pas, en ce sens, une différenciation entre recueils historiographiques et recueils de citations d’autre genre”.

This is true; moreover the reader can compare a number of eclectic collections prompted by (or dedicated to) Constantine VII.

(a) related to the duties of the emperor, i.e., “texts for administrative use”³¹: *De Thematibus* (internal politics), *De Administrando Imperio* (diplomacy), *De Cerimoniis* (court rites and protocols).

(b) agricultural and veterinary treatises: *Geoponica*, *Hippiatrica*³².

(c) hagiographical texts for liturgical use: the *synaxarion* of Evaristus.

²⁹ For an overview about the Byzantine author(ship) in diverse traditions and media, see Pizzone 2014.

³⁰ *ELR Prooemium*, p. 2, 12 de Boor [...] οὐ συνόψεως, ἀληθέστερον δ’ εἰπεῖν οἰκειώσεως.

³¹ Definition by Schreiner 2018, 238.

³² McCabe 2007.

(d) the composite collection of imperial biographies from 815 to 961: *Theophanes Continuatus* (*ThC*), where Constantine himself is credited to have written the *Life* of his grandfather Basil I (*ThC V*).

Such diverse items form hardly an exception in the culture of *sylloge*.

And yet, in the ‘ocean’ of Byzantine literary *syllogai*, the *EC* stand out for some reasons, when one thinks of their origin, structure and relevance³³.

4a. The Origin(s): The Emperor’s Collection

Constantine VII was a sort of bibliophile and scholar, who directly and indirectly penned several works both before and after his access to the throne and to the real power. The latter event was far from granted, because Constantine became sole emperor very late, aged 39, in spite of the fact of being the heir to his father Leo VI and a co-emperor since his childhood³⁴. When he concluded his private life and started his ‘public ministry’, he credited the miracle to the Image of Edessa and to his beloved patron Gregory of Nazianzus, whose books he had devoured³⁵.

By no coincidence he ordered a new and comprehensive work of historiography: he asked for a tool he probably had been missing all along his studies. The *Prooemium* is clear on this point³⁶, which in turn entails that the emperor is the *EC* first audience as well³⁷, and that the ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’ functions collapse into one another.

To summarize, the *EC* were an authoritative text already at their birth. It was not only an imperial collection, but the collection of *that* emperor who

³³ Holmes 2010, 55-80: 59; *contra*, Odorico 2017, 17. See also Cresci 2017, 51-80.

³⁴ Németh 2018, 30-34.

³⁵ Flusin 2011, 253-277.

³⁶ *ELR Prooemium*, p. 1, 19-21 de Boor: ἀδηλία συσκιάζεσθαι τὴν τῆς ἱστορίας ἐφεύρεσιν, πῆ μὲν σπάνει βιβλῶν ἐπωφελῶν, πῆ δὲ πρὸς τὴν ἐκτάδην πολυλογίαν δειμαινόντων καὶ κατορρωδούντων. Kaldellis 2015, 43: “[..] the discovery of history was obscured by uncertainty, in part because of the scarcity of really useful books and in part because people feared and dreaded their excessive verbosity.”

³⁷ See also Agati - Ciolfi - Monticini - Panoryia – Vukašinović 2017, 221-249.

wanted to be represented in (and by) an array of cultural projects, including historiography³⁸.

4b. The Structure: A Multifaceted and Multilayered Authorship

In a synchronic perspective, different authors contribute differently to the *EC* collection: this is what can be named a ‘multifaceted’ authorship, on the one hand. On the other hand, ‘multilayered’ authorship suggests a diachronic perspective: the *EC* collection consists of contributions from various centuries and ages.

The *EC* collection as such had many authors at different layers.

(a) the emperor, who commissioned and shaped the work.

(b) the anonymous *exceptor* and his collaborators, who chose the best suitable passages, inserted short explanations and accommodated the texts in a new context.

(c) the ancient, late antique and Byzantine Greek historians, who had written the ‘primary’ texts (text 1,2,3...n > to become text I, II, III...n).

Afterwards, the *EC* had other intervention:

(d) by the scribes in 16th century, who tampered with names and authorship.

So far, the same as any other *sylloge*, except for the personal involvement of the emperor.

With a peculiarity: the text had to show, says the *Prooemium*, its fathers and the place of birth, in order not to be anonymous, i.e., not to become both illegitimate and spurious as a son.

The metaphor of the father and the son, namely, the author and his text, paves the way to the list of the excerpted authors and works – a list which follows the Proem and should have featured at the beginning of each volume: something like a modern table of contents.

The importance of such a list cannot be overstated, because the emperor wanted to highlight not only the provenance of the extracts, but also the primary authorship, before the excerption. We are going to return to the point later.

³⁸ The relevance of such a self-representation for power legitimacy is fully explained by Magdalino 2013, 187-209.

It is worth dwelling on the last part of the metaphor. If the father is the author, can the ‘birthplace’, i.e. the historical work, be understood as the mother of the text? The importance given to the legitimate son/text seems to endorse this interpretation, also because every incipit of a “sub-section” (i.e., where the excerpts of an author start) adds the name of the author *and* of his work, after the title of the thematic volume. We thus read, e.g., *On Roman Ambassadors from Dionysius Halicarnassensis’ Roman Antiquities*, then *On Roman Ambassadors from Polybius’ History*, and so forth).

To the best of my knowledge, this was very rare in Byzantine historiography: chronicles and historical monographs used to be continuous narrations, like e.g. the *Wars* by Procopius of Caesarea, the chronicle by John Malalas in the 6th century or the one by George the Monk in the 9th³⁹. Some of them provided a list of sources at the beginning and/or some (unsystematic) mentions of the same sources scattered through the text, according to their relevance. Usually, titles did not bear names of the sources, because the latter were *incorporated* in the new text⁴⁰.

To put it briefly, the *EC* structure entails a tension as regards authorship:

- the collection displays a structurally multifaceted and/or multilayered authorship,
- while the names of the primary sources must never be forgotten.

Hence, the *EC* give appropriate credit to the sources⁴¹.

4c. The Relevance: a Re-interpretation Of the Past

The *EC* had a universal scope of Roman history and an educational aim as well: they were intended for “the nurslings of the humanities”, to feed the ‘babies’ with appropriate cultural ‘food’⁴².

³⁹ Signes Codoñer 2016.

⁴⁰ Farkas –Horváth 2016; Fontana 2021.

⁴¹ As regards layout and auxiliary texts referring to historians see Németh 2018, 220-224; about the table of contents in each volume, Id. 2010, 205.

⁴² *ELR Prooemium*, p. 2, 3-4 de Boor εἰς τοὺς τροφίμους τῶν λόγων. For “the whole magnificence of history” see above n. 4.

So far, not much of a difference with what the historical genre had proclaimed and performed at least from Polybius onwards. The change lies in methodology, both because of the thematic sections and because of the re-interpretation of sources.

4c.1. The 53 thematic sections

To supply the “great magnificence of history” to freshmen in humanities, the emperor ordered the excerpts to be systematically re-collected into 53 topics, from the proclamation of an emperor (no. 1) to the examples of virtues and vices (no. 50) and beyond⁴³.

Limited remains are preserved nowadays, from which we can infer that (i) every single topic was separate from the others, (ii) the huge series was planned to consist of many thousands of pages, (iii) it included excerpts from (at least) twenty-six authors⁴⁴ and (iv) it spanned fourteen centuries of historiography.

Consequently, a team of *excerptores* was needed to finish the collection in a reasonable timeframe. This, in turn, had consequences for authorship.

Németh has painstakingly tracked down the clues on workflow, human resources and their traces throughout the five (mutilated) volumes in our possession⁴⁵. However we can imagine the work of de-composition and re-composition, it was impressive and really analogous to the *Corpus Justinianum* in the 6th century⁴⁶.

Another consequence of the large scale is that nobody was likely to read throughout the entire collection; thus, a specialized audience for each volume or a selected consultation had to be expected.

This fact, along with the well-known tragical breaks in Byzantine textual traditions⁴⁷, might have caused the loss of the *EC* vast majority. We have remains of only five sections out of 53; and for each of the five, we know of only one medieval manuscript.

⁴³ Ca. half section titles are unknown (Németh 2018, 58-60).

⁴⁴ Büttner-Wobst 1906; Lemerle 1971, 285-287; Flusin 2002, 540; Németh 2010, 2-3; Id. 2018, 4-11.

⁴⁵ Németh 2010, esp. 197-245; Id. 2018, 88-120.

⁴⁶ The comparison of *EC* with legal texts was advanced by Magdalino 2011 and 2013. Closer connection has been investigated by Cohen-Skalli 2013, see e.g. 33: “We could therefore consider the *Excerpta* as *Pandecta* of the texts of historians”.

⁴⁷ E.g., the 4th Crusade in 1204 and the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

- *On Roman Ambassadors & On Ambassadors of the Nations* (*ELR*, *ELG*) the Escorial B.I.4, lost (at the latest) in 1671⁴⁸.
- *On Plots* (*EI*) the Escorial Ω.I.11⁴⁹.
- *On Virtues and Vices* (*EV*) the Turonensis C 980 (T)⁵⁰.
- *On Wise Sayings* (*ES*) the palimpsest Vaticanus graecus 73⁵¹.

4c.2. The re-interpretation of sources

The *Preface* calls the *EC* “no *synopsis*, but (...) *oikeiōsis*”⁵²: this means no compendium (*synopsis*) whatsoever, i.e., no usual summary of previous sources. The *EC* pick up the very texts of those ancient authors, as regards wording and sequence, as well as language and style, *and* incorporate them in a new whole.

The incorporation was a traditional process in historical genre: every historical monograph, ecclesiastical history, universal chronicle or chronographical work was supposed to incorporate their sources. Yet the *EC* show a peculiar ‘implementation’: minor changes of the source text are the rule, with a few exceptions. Minor, but not insignificant changes, which we can appreciate whenever we are in the position of comparing a direct tradition as well.⁵³

⁴⁸ De Andrés 1968, 43; Carolla 2008, 129-131; see 153-154 for the codex possibly bought by the ambassador of queen Christina of Sweden, Mattias Palbitzki. A dozen Renaissance copies of the lost volume(s) about the ambassadors (*ELR* & *ELG*) are attested. *ELG* & *ELR* were bound together in a single codex when they reached Spain in the second half of 16th c. (Carolla 2008). Yet the *Proem* and the list of the enclosed authors/works show that *ELR* were a separate volume from *ELG*. From the very beginning, the issue of relationship between *ELR* and *ELG* has involved the European scholars, see e.g. the ed. Valois 1634 (*EV*), XXIII-XXIV.

⁴⁹ De Andrés 1967, 131-133; Carolla 2016.

⁵⁰ Ed. Buettner-Wobst I, VIII-XLII; Németh 2010 and 2018, *passim*; Ferrara 2020, *passim*.

⁵¹ Mercati-De Cavalieri 1923, 67-78; Németh 2010, 127-134; Id. 2015, 281-330; Id. 2018, 271-272 *et passim*.

⁵² *ELR Prooemium*, p. 2, 12 de Boor οὐ συνόψεως, ἀληθέστερον δ’ εἰπεῖν οἰκειώσεως.

⁵³ That is, a text preserved also in those manuscripts which bear the name and the work of the (original) author: Agati - Ciolfi - Monticini - Panoryia – Vukašinović 2017, 221-249 ; Carolla 2021, 31-48.

No doubt, the minor changes were operated by the *excerptores*, who may have been a team under a main *excerptor*: they extracted passages from the authors, adjusted the text in order to be understood by the readers and re-collected them into the 53 sections.

What is most interesting here, they dragged the single passage out of its context and created a new context of its own, thus revealing a re-interpretation of the past -and of the ancient sources.

So, for example, old Sasanid Persia may represent the new eastern enemy of Constantinople, i.e., the Arabs; and special attention is paid to Attila and his Huns, because Constantine VII is attentive to the Christianization of the Hungarians.

The incorporation, in turn, generates some historical short circuits. For example, passages from Herodotus and Thucydides were collected under the section *On Ambassadors of the Nations to the Romans*, except that the “Romans” here consisted of Greeks, namely of the 5th-century BC Athenians. Elsewhere, the emperor Nicephorus I Logothetes (802-811), who was often blamed for ineffectiveness, became a role model for Christian ambassadors to the Arabs⁵⁴.

The meanings of similar short circuits, which are frequent in the *EC* collection, deserves to be investigated in depth both in a historical perspective and in a literary one elsewhere.

For the moment, it is time to get back to the *EC* features as regards *DA*.

No wonder, the distributed author must be involved also in a re-interpretation of the past, which had always been a task of each and every historian, starting from Herodotus.

Here the moderns can look at the re-interpretation like a multilayered one: the *EC* collection is at the same time:

- (a) a way to understand the past.
- (b) a handbook of many subjects.

Moreover, the *Preface* insists on the fact that, before Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, “the discovery of history was obscured by uncertainty, in part because of the scarcity of really useful books and in part because people feared and dreaded their

⁵⁴ Carolla 2019, 219-236.

excessive verbosity”⁵⁵. Because the *EC* treasure of knowledge was unearthed from the bulk of the previous histories, whose verbosity used to scare readers, the *EC* collection becomes also, in our modern perspective,

- (c) a discovery in itself;
- (d) an introduction to the present.

Probably, in the 10th-century perspective, all four (a)-(d) aspects were perceived as referring to their present time.

5. APPROPRIATION, INCORPORATION, RECAPITULATION

In this perspective and context, what does “appropriation” properly mean?

András Németh takes it as a synonym of distribution into the 53 topics/sections, that is, as a “special form of anthologisation”⁵⁶. Panayotis Manafis interprets the word as adaptation, hence leaving room for correction by the *excerptores* (which is often the case)⁵⁷. Yet we can take a step further.

In Greek, the term is *oikeiōsis* (οικείωσις, from οικειώω “make or claim as one’s own, appropriate”⁵⁸, which in turn comes from οικεῖος “one’s own”). Hence, the excerpts are appropriated by the collection ‘distributed author’, i.e., at the same time, the anonymous *excerptor*, the collaborators and the emperor behind all of them. Ultimately, it is the emperor who attracts the excerpts into the new collection, via the others’ selection work. He is at the same time the commissioner, the ultimate author, the guarantor of the text authority and the first audience.

This is why we can detect here a collapsing of various functions as well. The emperor gives the input, the criteria, the purpose(s), and, most of all, a (new) methodology; he also offers the results, i.e., the usefulness of historiography, first to himself, then to a learned audience of students, in order to recover a high level of language and style among the future intellectuals.

⁵⁵ See above n. 35.

⁵⁶ Németh 2018, 59 (anthologisation); 185 (redistribution).

⁵⁷ Manafis 2020, esp. 38-40.

⁵⁸ *LSJ* s.v.

We can conclude that the emperor makes those excerpted texts his own, i.e., it is he himself who incorporates them to give them to others.

This interpretation, far from being forced, is documented at the end of the *Preface*: “And there is nothing of the contents that will escape the present enumeration of topics, absolutely of nothing is deprived the narrative sequence by the distinction of concepts, indeed preserves the whole in one body and adapts to each topic the present non-synopsis, but rather οἰκείωσις.⁵⁹”

The collection saves everything it encompasses “together in one body”, i.e., in an organic whole: the latter is a metaphor of “incorporation”, which is the translation I am tempted to apply to οἰκείωσις in this specific context. After all, the *corpus* can display a figurate sense related to books, whatever their format.

However, a closer reading of *oikeiōsis* would be rather “becoming familiar” because of the link with *oikos*, which in turn connects with “home” and “family”⁶⁰.

Be as it may, one may wonder whether it is only the emperor who incorporates the *EC*. Actually, the metaphor “the whole in one body” is by no means a trivial one: the adjective here is *syssōmos* (σύσσωμος), which apparently is attested in literature for the first time in the *New Testament*, namely, in the *Letter to the Ephesians* 3,6, and is used about the Gentiles who are called to share the same legacy, to form the same body (σύσσωμα) and to share the same promise of salvation as the Jews⁶¹.

Whatever the background of the *Ephesians* epistle and the issue of authorship⁶², the beginning of the same letter (*Ephesians* 1, 9-10) draws an impressive picture of the role of Jesus Christ as the one who “recapitulates” everything, in heavens and earth,

⁵⁹ My translation of the *ELR Prooemium*, p. 2, 8-12 de Boor κούκ ἔστιν οὐδὲν τῶν ἐγκειμένων, ὃ διαφεύξεται τὴν τοιαύτην τῶν ὑποθέσεων ἀπαρίθμησιν, οὐδὲν τὸ παράπαν ἀφαιρουμένης τῆς τοῦ λόγου ἀκολουθίας τῇ διαιρέσει τῶν ἐννοιῶν, ἀλλὰ σύσσωμον σωζούσης, καὶ ἐκάστη ὑποθέσει προσαρμοζομένης τῆς τηλικαύτης οὐ συνόψεως, ἀληθέστερον δ’εἰπεῖν οἰκειώσεως.

⁶⁰ *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* 989 sv οἰκεῖος [οἶκος]; Chantraine 1968, II 750; *LSJ* 1202 sv οἰκείωσις, *becoming familiar with* (Jambl. *VP*). Special thanks to Myrto Veikou, who called my attention on the etymology. For the philosophical meanings of οἰκείωσις, see Radice 2000.

⁶¹ *Eph.* 3.6 εἶναι τὰ ἔθνη συγκληρονόμα καὶ σύσσωμα καὶ συμμετοχα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας.

⁶² Van Roon 1974 <doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004266216>>.

under himself as a head⁶³. On the other hand, the role of the Christian emperor cannot be overestimated, starting from the 4th-century *Life of Constantine* by Eusebius of Caesarea, where the sovereign is Christ's 'acting deputy' on earth. Furthermore, in a theological perspective, Christ is expected to 'recapitulate' everything on earth as well, like a center where all the lines meet.⁶⁴ Moreover, Constantine VII was an icon painter (*iconographos*), who probably knew *Ephesians*' text by heart and had meditated Chrysostomos' homiletic commentary on it⁶⁵. By the allusion to *Ephesians* 3,6 Constantine VII can proclaim his own duties as a Christian emperor, who imitates Christ by His will, and is allowed to call the *EC* collection to recapitulate words, texts and the whole Roman histor(iograph)y into Christ's salvation plan.

6. "CENTRALIZED" AUTHORSHIP? EC & DA

What does this mean in terms of authorship? Firstly, one may wonder whether this is a really *distributed* authorship. Would not it be better to label it as a "centralized" authorship? After all, the emperor is also the only author who has his name on this work. The *excerptores* remain anonymous, in perfect Medieval style.

And yet, the *Prooemium* speaks of the emperor in the third person: hence, either it is written by the anonymous *excerptor* alone, or the emperor himself wrote it, or they concerted the text together. However, the emperor wanted the reader to believe that the *Preface* was written by another person. What is more, the emperor wanted his authorship to be shared with the collaborators and transmitted to the audience as such. This also had been expected from a Christian emperor for long: to quote Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* (the First), the emperor sheds his lights on earth through his sons when he is alive, as well as when he is already in heaven, according to the biographer⁶⁶.

⁶³ *Eph.* 1.9-10 γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν αὐτοῦ ἦν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· ἐν αὐτῷ. «With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.» NRS translation, <<https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/ephesians/1.html>>

⁶⁴ Max. Conf. *Mystagogia*, ed. Boudignon (CCSG 69), 233.

⁶⁵ Flusin 2011, 253-277.

⁶⁶ Eusebius, *VConst.* I 1,3-2,2.

The *EC* ‘implementation’ is also likely to rest on the collaborators’ shoulders, who have tasks distributed according to a plan. Hence, what is alive and well here is no “distributed”, but a “cooperative” authorship⁶⁷, in so far as it is planned and consciously accepted.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The *excerptores* do not account for the reshaping of sources: albeit a modern scholar detects numerous variations, Constantine’s collaborators claim a complete loyalty to the ancient texts –a remarkable position in their perspective.

Strangely enough, the *EC* collection follows the rule of giving appropriate credit: they report each and every name and work title of the excerpted authors, so that the readers can quote them as well. One can say that the emperor’s authority ‘absorbs’ and remixes his delegates’ work; but his authority stops in front of the primary authors and refrains from anonymity or, worse, pseudonymity⁶⁸.

In both respects, the *EC* appear to follow the culture of the *sylloge* although criticizing the *praxis* of the historical genre. Moreover, the imperial collection shows consistent –although still largely obscure– methodology and selection criteria⁶⁹.

It is time to go back to the start: why did the *excerptor(es)* omit the delivering of the Hun ambassadors’ speech that could have thrilled their audience⁷⁰?

Firstly, the *EC* recorded the departure of the Hun envoys from Attila’s camp and we do not know whether the primary author, Priscus of Panion (5th c. AD), had ful-

⁶⁷ Rabello Lopes - Moro - Krug Wives - Palazzo Moreira de Oliveira 2010, <<http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-619/>>.

⁶⁸ *ELR Prooemium*, p. 2, 16-18 de Boor Ἐμφαίνει δὲ τοῦτὶ τὸ προοίμιον τίνας οἱ λόγοι πατέρας κέκτηνται καὶ ὅθεν ἀποκρίσκονται, ὡς ἂν μὴ ὤσιν αἱ κεφαλαιώδεις ὑποθέσεις ἀκατονόμαστοι καὶ μὴ γνήσιοι, ἀλλὰ νόθοι τε καὶ ψευδώνυμοι. “This preface will specify who authored each passage, i.e., what its attribution is, so that these subject-headings not be anonymous and inauthentic, like illegitimate children bearing a false name” (Kaldellis 2015, 44).

⁶⁹ Rafiyenko 2017, 291-324; Cresci 2017.

⁷⁰ Above, §1.

ly reported their arrival in Constantinople⁷¹. Therefore the *excerptores* are hard to be charged with careless.

Secondly, while the Hun diplomatic mission was meant to collect more gold for Attila, Priscus' goal was to ridicule the Byzantine emperor Theodosius II, such an unwise man that, in that historian's opinion, he deserved to be blamed and crushed by the 'barbarian' king.

More importantly, Constantine VII and his audience were hardly as interested in external relations management as a modern reader can be. It is difficult to assume that the end of a "good story", as Christopher Kelly puts it⁷², could be the staging (or the repression) of the *hybris* performed by the two Hun ambassadors: the audience was likely to expect the death of Attila the *hybristes* instead. Which was recorded by Priscus in due time⁷³, of course without entering the *EC* sections about the ambassadors.

⁷¹ Kelly 2011, 162.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Priscus (*apud Jordanem*), exc. 23 Carolla; Given 2014, p. 112: «Unwound by the excessive partying at his wedding and weighed down by wine and sleep, he [Attila] was lying on his back. He often had nosebleeds, but his blood now flowed backward, since it was prevented from following its accustomed course, and spilled down a deadly journey into his throat, killing him. Thus intoxication brought a shameful death to a king glorious in war.» See also *Chron. Pasch.*, Prisc. fr. 64* Carolla = fr. 21, 1 Blockley; Given 2014, p. 101: «Attila died similarly, carried off by a nasal hemorrhage while he slept at night with his Hunnic concubine. It was suspected that this girl killed him.»

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