

Byzantine Book Epigrams: A pragmatic analysis of medieval meter

Byzantine book epigrams constitute a corpus of texts that has never been fully exploited before, but has recently become available through the UGent Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams. Book epigrams are texts written in the margins of the main text of many manuscripts. Despite their great diversity in length, style and erudition, all epigrams have a certain literary ambition, which is reflected in their metrical structure. Even the less erudite epigrams were written according to a metrical pattern, in contrast with western medieval manuscripts, where paratexts were as a rule written in prose.

It seems as if the innovative Byzantine meters (dodeca- and decapentasyllable) fitted the Greek language cognitively better than the traditional Greek meters still in use (hexameter and elegiac), which would explain the apparent ease with which metrical texts were produced. To justify this hypothesis, I will analyze the colometry of the dodeca- and decapentasyllable from the pragmatic perspective of information units, assuming that all speech is segmented into a series of cognitive information units. By applying this modern linguistic theory to the colometrical structure of the Byzantine meter, I hope to come to a better understanding of the perception of meter in Byzantine times.