

## PREFACE

This book was supposed to have come out in 2006. It is now 2019. What happened? Life intervened, as it does. It had other plans for me, or to put it in the words of that great poet, John Maupous: τοιοῦτον ἡ βλάβη τούσα τὸν νοῦν κουφότης / πείθει νομίζειν ὡς ἑαυτοῦ τις κρατεῖ / καὶ τὸν βίον τίθησιν ὡς αὐτῷ φίλον, ‘So injurious is levity of mind that it makes one believe that one is in control of oneself and may arrange one’s life as one seems fit’.<sup>1</sup> No illusions there.

On the plus side, the delay meant that I had the good fortune of seeing many important texts finally published in reliable editions and witnessing a booming interest in Byzantine poetry in recent years. I am especially grateful to the new generation of Byzantinists who were kind enough to share their research with me one way or another: Eirini Afentoulidou-Leitgeb, Floris Bernard, Jonas Christensen, Kostas Chrysogelos, Björn Isebaert, Krystina Kubina, Emilie van Opstall, Giulia Paoletti, Georgi Parpulov, Jorie Soltic, Foteini Spingou, Maria Tomadaki, and Nikos Zagklas. I am also much indebted to various other colleagues, too many to list here, though I should like to single out one person in particular: Wolfram Hörandner, without whose encouragement, generosity and wisdom this two-volume study of Byzantine poetry would never have seen the light of day. Those who know me know how much I owe to my wife, Marjolijne Janssen, who read the book from beginning to end and made many improvements, including some to this very preface. Thanks to you all.

Though this second volume hopefully forms a fairly comprehensive survey of non-epigrammatic poetry written between c. 600 and 1000, I do not claim to have covered the whole ground because that would be levity of mind indeed. Firstly, certain genres are hardly represented before the year 1000: a number of verse epistles are attested in the ninth century (Theodore of Stoudios no. 123; pleasantries exchanged between the Graptoi and Patriarch Methodios) and a few metrical prefaces to saints’ lives are found in the literary output of the Anonymous Patrician (nos 34 and 35), but these two genres only really kick off in the twelfth century if not later. There are even certain poetic genres without any pre-1000 literary pedigree: a good example is synaxarion verses, the popularity of which starts with Christopher Mitylenaios. Secondly, though I have no doubt that the *Song of Armouris*, the balladic material that is still recognizable as such in *Digenes Akrites* E, and some of the folk songs (particularly those found in early

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<sup>1</sup> LAGARDE 1882: 48 (no. 93.19–21). Read with the ms. κρατεῖ, not κράτει as in the edition.

manuscripts) circulated in some form in the ninth and tenth centuries, I have excluded the genre of the heroic ballad from the discussion because of the difficulty of reconstructing its oral tradition in any detail. Thirdly, and more importantly, it would be an illusion to think that all poems can be classified and subsumed under a fixed number of categories. There will always be exceptions and exceptions to exceptions and exceptions to exceptions to exceptions, etc. We will have to recognize that poems may refuse to conform and go their own separate ways. Many of these less-than-pliable texts are traditionally put into the catch-all category of the ‘epideictic’ which, as it defies definition and analysis, basically has no explanatory value.<sup>2</sup> Take the grumbling comments of Constantine the Sicilian that things are not as they used to be, culture is going down the drain, and injustice, mendacity, violence and all kinds of evil are thriving.<sup>3</sup> The poem is too short to be a moral essay or a polemic (see chapter 16) and too serious to be a satirical poem (see chapter 15): it falls in between. A generic approach does not work for poems like this one.

However, as this book hopes to demonstrate, genre is a valuable tool for understanding most forms of Byzantine poetry. The first three chapters (10–12) discuss encomium, ekphrasis and *ethopoia* — the three archigenres or discursive modes that, together with narration, inform the whole of Byzantine literature. The next two (13–14) deal with specific rhetorical genres: monody and epithalamium. This is then followed by an account of satire, diatribe and catanyctic poetry (chapters 15–17), all three of which tend to be rather personal: they are all forms of self-representation. The next two chapters (18–19) take us to school: the first deals with didactic poetry; the second with metaphrasis, a school exercise. The last chapter (20) treats oracles, riddles and dream keys. There is also an ‘appendix metrica’, which offers a detailed account of Byzantine metrics.

References to Geometres’ iambic poems are to the edition of Tomadaki: as this PhD thesis is still unedited, I add the old Cramer numbering between brackets. The five-digit numbers, also between brackets, after manuscript shelfmarks, are *Diktyon* numbers: see <http://www.diktyon.org>. These have been added at the first mention of each manuscript.

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<sup>2</sup> See LAUXTERMANN 1998b.

<sup>3</sup> Ed. SPADARO 1971: 202.