

Michael Psellus, *Epistulae*. Vol. 1–2, edidit STRATIS PAPAIOANNOU (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana 2030). Berlin – Boston: de Gruyter 2019. CLXXXV, 1207 pp. – ISBN: 978-3-11-062201-0 (€ 139,95 / \$ 160.99 / £ 127.00)

- DMITRIJ CHERNOGLAZOV, St. Petersburg State University
(d_chernoglazov@mail.ru)

The publication of this book is an important milestone in Byzantine studies. Michael Psellos is one of the key figures in the history of Byzantine literature and the need for a critical edition of his epistolary heritage has been felt acutely for many years.

A systematic study of Psellos' letters, which revealed to us their great importance both in historical and literary aspects, began in 1978, when JAKOV LJUBARSKII published his monograph about Psellos' personality and oeuvre:¹ one of its chapters, "Michael Psellos and his Contemporaries" represents the first systematic and comprehensive study of Psellos' letter collection. Unfortunately, until 2004,² when it was translated into Modern Greek, this book, written in Russian, was little known to the European research community. Further decades were marked by a significant increase in interest in Psellos and, in particular, in his letters. Among general works on this subject two should be especially noted: Paul Moore's monograph on the manuscript tradition of all writings of Psellos³ and the extensive study on Psellos' personality published by Michael Jeffreys and Marc D. Lauxtermann including in particular, a detailed summary of all Psellos' letters.⁴

The publication of the full-fledged critical edition of all letters of the 11th c. erudite and writer deepens our knowledge significantly and opens up fundamentally new horizons for research.

1. Яков Н. Любарский, Михаил Пселл. Личность и творчество. К истории византийского предгуманизма. Moscow, 1978 (the 2nd edition: St.-Petersburg, 2000).

2. JAKOV N. LJUBARSKIJ, Η προσωπικότητα και το έργο του Μιχαήλ Ψελλού: Συνεισφορά στην ιστορία του βυζαντινού ουμανισμού (trans. A. TZELESI). Αθήνα 2004.

3. PAUL MOORE, *Iter Psellianum: A Detailed Listing of Manuscript Sources for All Works Attributed to Michael Psellos, Including a Comprehensive Bibliography* (Subsidia Mediaevalia 26). Toronto 2005.

4. MICHAEL JEFFREYS – MARC D. LAUXTERMANN (eds.), *The Letters of Psellos: Cultural Networks and Historical Realities*. Oxford – New York 2017.

The Greek text is preceded by an extensive preface. At the beginning, PAPAIOANNOU designates its main tasks: firstly, to give “an overview of the creation and reception of Psellos’ letter collection, from Psellos’ lifetime to the latest manuscripts” and secondly, to present “the main editorial choices adopted in putting together the Greek text printed below” (p. XXXIII). In accordance with these tasks, the preface consists of two parts: the first deals with the manuscript tradition and discusses how the letter collection emerged and developed during the Byzantine period; the second sets forth the principles underlying the present edition.

The first part of the preface (“Psellos’ letter collection”) opens with a general observation of the text history of the text: PAPAIOANNOU demonstrates that a single and coherent collection of Psellos’ letters never existed in Byzantium: the material at our disposal originates in a number of proto-collections created by Psellos’ students or by recipients of his letters. Further, manuscripts containing Psellos’ letters are examined in detail. For each manuscript, information is given not only about letters themselves but also about the context in which they are set in the codex; the text of the letters is analyzed in the aspect of its correlation with other codices, which contain the same epistles. At the same time, the absence of a single archetype, to which all known manuscripts would go back, precluded the possibility of presenting their interrelation in the form of a general stemma.

At the beginning of the second part of the preface (“The present edition”) the editorial strategy is formulated: “to restore the text and collection of Psellos’ letters as much as possible and keep a delicate balance between not straying too far from what is supported by the manuscripts and providing the modern reader with enough tools – by means of notes, textual interventions, and normalization in the appearance of the text – that will make the Psellian letter-corpus accessible and comprehensible” (p. CXLVI). Further, the main principles of the present edition are described in detail: we are told what texts have been chosen for publication, in what order they are arranged, by what rules manuscript readings are preferred or corrected, how punctuation marks are placed, in what form the headings are given, how *critical apparatus* and *apparatus fontium* are built, and what indices accompany the edition.

All aspects of the edition are discussed in full detail with the exception of a few things that could have been given more attention. So, speaking of *variae lectiones*, PAPAIOANNOU notes that by choosing among “equivalent readings” in manuscripts, the factor of prosaic rhythm was taken into account:

it is argued that Psellos' favourite *clausula* is the double dactylus, but this statement is not supported by any precise data or observations (p. XLVI). However, since the editor has touched on this topic, it would be appropriate to consider it in a separate chapter, where one could present statistics regarding the relevance of Meyer's law and other rhythmical patterns in Psellos' letters.

Another case where one could examine the subject in more detail is the "Digression" (Παρέκβασις) on Psellos' modes of citing (pp. CLXII–CLXIII). The "Digression" occupies only one page: PAPAIOANNOU confines herself to a few general observations (which are not quite unexpected) about what sources Psellos draws from. Thus, it is noted that the Byzantine scholar actively quotes Gregory of Nazianz and Synesios of Cyrene and skillfully uses the vocabulary of late antique rhetoricians and neoplatonists. What this chapter does not consider at all are the modes or methods of citation. It is clear that a detailed analysis of this topic could be the subject of a separate extensive work, but some general patterns would still be worth identifying. A convenient typology of citation methods has already been developed by FOTEINI KOLOVOU with regard to Eustathios' letter collection.⁵

Having briefly analyzed the preface, we turn to the Greek text itself. The edition includes 563 letters. This number, in addition to Psellos' genuine letters (more than five hundred), also includes dozens of *epistolae dubiae* and *spuriae* as well as several texts whose genre affiliation is unclear (e.g., epp. 87, 111, 112 etc.) – "likely non-letters", which have been considered and published as letters by modern scholars but are contained in manuscripts among texts of other genres.

Letters are grouped by their addressees. PAPAIOANNOU admits that this classification is his "own creation" (p. CXLIX). This editorial decision seems to be the only correct one. Firstly, as it is clearly demonstrated by the editor, such a principle is already followed – though not consistently – in many manuscripts reflecting the structure of proto-collections. Secondly for that reason the edition turns out to be as convenient as possible for readers and researchers, who get the opportunity to trace the relationship between Psellos and his friends and other contemporaries. Of course, one faces serious difficulties in classifying Psellos' letters this way – an addressee indicated in the manuscript, for example, as a judge of a cer-

5. FOTEINI KOLOVOU (ed.), *Die Briefe des Eustathios von Thessalonike*. Einleitung, Regesten, Text, Indizes (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 239). Munich – Leipzig 2006, pp. 25*–75*.

tain *thema*, may be identical with one of Psellos' close friends – but in all disputed cases, PAPAIOANNOU approaches the material with utmost care.

As already mentioned, the editor states the principle of the “golden mean” – not to go too far from the manuscript material but at the same time create a modern critical edition convenient for the reader. This strategy is followed not only in the classification of letters but also in the transmission of the text itself – in particular, selection of manuscript readings, introduction of conjectures and placement of punctuation marks. As our selective analysis of the text shows, only a few editorial decisions seem problematic.

As far as we can judge, PAPAIOANNOU tries, as far as possible, to preserve manuscript readings avoiding too bold “corrections”. But sometimes, nevertheless, he makes conjectures, which in our opinion are not necessary. So in ep. 107. 4–5 manuscripts and the previous edition (ed. SATHAS, p. 290. 45) contain the following text:

ἐκ κυμάτων γὰρ γαλήνην ἐώρακα, καίτοι τὸ βρῶμα πελάγιον

PAPAIOANNOU corrects πελάγιον to ποτάμιον apparently on the grounds that the gift received by the author is a river fish (ὁ ποτάμιος ὕς). But is there any reason for such serious interference in the text confirmed by all the manuscripts? It seems that the adjective πελάγιον in this context is quite acceptable, since the proverb ἐκ κυμάτων... γαλήνην ἐώρακα is associated with the metaphor of a sea storm, which is why the food turns out to be “of the sea”.

In ep. 450.34 the editor (following the previous edition) corrects κυπελλεῖον to κυπελλίον, while in other texts this rare word has a different accent – κυπέλλιον. In our opinion, one should choose between two options – either (which is preferable) to save the manuscript version, which is linguistically quite acceptable, or to change it to κυπέλλιον, recorded in other texts.

The problem of punctuation in editions of Byzantine texts is now widely debated by scholars. PAPAIOANNOU follows the “basic principle of adding a punctuation mark whenever a punctuation mark exists in the manuscripts” (p. XLVIII). But we can still find some cases where the editor undeservedly departs from this rule. E.g., in ep. 96. 3–4 we find:

καὶ ταῦτα οὔτε ὑπερήφανος ὦν οὔτε τῆς ἡμετέρας φιλίας καταφρονῶν

Meanwhile, in the manuscript Vat. gr. 912, which preserves this letter, after ὦν there is a comma separating two homogeneous participle clauses. This comma could be kept – after all, it is quite appropriate here also according

to modern punctuation rules. Another example from the same ep. 96. 5:

Σὺ μὲν οὖν ὅπως ἂν ἐθέλοις ἔχου τῶν ἠθῶν·

In the manuscript after ἐθέλοις there is a comma separating the subordinate clause. In our opinion, this sign could be preserved.

Besides the text itself, it is also necessary to consider its detailed apparatuses and indices. The text is accompanied by two apparatuses – *apparatus criticus* and *apparatus fontium*. In the latter PAPAIOANNOU quotes the full fragment of a parallel source, if it does not literally coincide with the text of Psellos' letter. This decision greatly facilitates the work of readers if they want to compare the texts themselves.

The book ends with five indices: I. *Numerorum epistolarum tabulae*; II. *Initia epistolarum*, referring not only to serial numbers of the letters but also to their titles in all manuscripts; III. *Index nominum*; IV. *Index verborum memorabilium*; V. *Index locorum*.

The largest and most important is the latter index: its volume eloquently testifies to Psellos' high level of education and wide range of interests. In the preface, PAPAIOANNOU writes that the index includes five sections in accordance with the five categories of quotes and other parallels in *apparatus fontium* (p. XLXI). In fact, the index is divided into six parts: (1) "Quotations, acknowledged and tacitly embedded"; (2) "Likely references, allusions, and parallel words/phrases/passages"; (3) "Uncertain references and allusions"; (4) "Common places / phrases"; (5) "Words, short locutions, or concepts that are fairly common in ... an author or type of text" and (6) "Possible allusions to Psellian words or phrases in post-Psellian authors". PAPAIOANNOU himself admits that the division into these categories is arbitrary and the boundaries between them are uncertain but such a classification – both in the apparatus and in the index – seems to be justified because it allows us to differentiate various levels of similarity between Psellos' letters and other ancient and medieval texts.

Only occasionally the assignment of a parallel to a particular category raises questions. For example, the word χρησιμολόγος is classified as *vox ex Herodoto* and therefore, falls into the category 5 (p. 1198), while in fact it is found in the texts of many ancient authors, for example, Aristophanes, Thucydides, Xenophon, Plutarch, etc. In our opinion, this widespread word should not be considered an allusion or quotation at all. The forms of address ὦ βέλτιστε and ὦ λαῶσ τε are named in the apparatus *junctionae Platonicae* and accordingly, placed also in the category 5 (p. 1200), while in

fact both forms (especially ᾠ βέλτιστε) were common in Byzantine letter writing of both the Early and the Middle Byzantine period. Rather, each of them should be described as a *locus communis* of the epistolary genre. Another question arises with regard to proverbs. Psellos, like other Byzantine authors, uses ancient proverbs very often and in the index they are categorized as (1) exact quotations and (2) “likely allusions”. In our opinion, it would be more logical to attribute all the proverbs to common places (4): they are common *par excellence*, since they are not borrowed from a certain text written by a certain author.

The flaws that we found in the present book are not fundamental. In conclusion, I would like to note: we have before us a critical edition made at the highest professional level. The preciseness, accuracy, and reasonableness of editorial decisions make it especially valuable for readers and researchers. The book will surely become an incentive for numerous works on the personality and work of Michael Psellos. Another important *desideratum* is a selective translation of Psellos’ letters into modern languages. Many of these texts are small literary masterpieces, which would be of great interest to a wide range of readers.

Keywords

Michael Psellos; letter collection; epistolography; critical edition