
ANNE P. ALWIS – MARTIN HINTERBERGER – ELISABETH SCHIFFER (eds), *Metaphrasis in Byzantine Literature* (Byzantios 17). Turnhout: Brepols 2021. 179 pp. – ISBN 978-2-503-59344-9 (€ 65.00)

• PHILIP RANCE, Centre for Advanced Study, Sofia
(philip.r.rance@gmail.com)

As a pervasive, multivalent and characteristic phenomenon of Byzantine literature and literary culture, metaphrasis has attracted heightened scholarly interest over the last four decades, including important studies by contributors to this volume, while recent symposia, research projects and collective studies bear witness to increasing diversity of approach and interpretative sophistication.¹ Succinctly defined by the editors as ‘the transposition of a certain text to a different stylistic and/or linguistic level’, metaphrasis, whether narrowly or broadly construed, is found in a wide range of genres, literary traditions and fields of knowledge, indicative of its compositional versatility and its rootedness in Byzantine education. The study of metaphrastic processes and techniques elucidates contemporary awareness and notions of stylistic differentiation as well as attitudes to textual fixity and literary creativity, which, beyond purely lexical dimensions, can also reveal changes in authorial objectives, audience expectations and socio-cultural milieu.

The greater part of this volume originated in papers presented at an identically named round table organized by ANNE ALWIS, MARTIN HINTERBERGER and ELISABETH SCHIFFER at the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, in Belgrade in 2016, supplemented with a couple of commissioned papers. A concise and clear Introduction, co-written by the three editors, surveys particular concerns and general trends in recent and ongoing research, with a view to introducing individual chapters and identifying fruitful avenues for inquiry. Addressing the use and usefulness of the term ‘metaphrasis’, with its essential meaning of ‘rewriting’, they acknowledge a lack of precise and comprehensive distinction – conceptual and terminological – between metaphrasis and paraphrasis, both in Byzantine texts, where usage may imply synonymity, even allowing for

1. See most recently STAVROULA CONSTANTINOULOU – CHRISTIAN HÖGEL (eds), *Metaphrasis: A Byzantine Concept of Rewriting and Its Hagiographical Products* (The Medieval Mediterranean 125). Leiden – Boston 2020.

later diachronic development, and in modern scholarship, where opinions differ even among specialists. The editors raise definitional and analytical questions, especially with respect to the possible variety and varying combination of modes of adaptation – substitution, transposition, reduction, expansion, omission, addition – and the consequent relationship between the model-text and the rewritten text, noting an understandable but potentially distorting tendency of researchers to privilege what has been altered above what is left unchanged. This discussion also touches on the utility and application of literary theory, specifically the work of Roman Jakobson and Gérard Genette, and unresolved issues of whether and/or how to mark changes when editing a metaphrased text. The editors then survey the particularities of metaphrasis – lexical, syntactical, stylistic, ideological (or doctrinal), narratological – with respect to different genres, as both a literary phenomenon and a (re)writing process. Two ‘main types’ naturally dominate the scholarly landscape. First, hagiography, characterized by linguistic and/or stylistic ‘upgrading’ and rhetorical elaboration of model-texts, notably in the ninth/tenth centuries and early Palaiologan era. In this sphere, scholarly inquiry has gradually escaped the immediate orbit of Symeon’s massive *Menologion*, though many, usually anonymous metaphraseis remain unexplored.² Second, historiography, typified by linguistic ‘downgrading’ or simplifying of a much smaller number of classicizing/Atticizing historical and rhetorical compositions of the Komnenian and Nicaean periods, where metaphrasis operates at a more purely lexical level. A glance at some other fields embraces various verse-forms, rhetorical exercises, scholia and catenae, legendary narratives, chronicles and ‘practical’ writing. In all cases, metaphrasis has elicited much less interest. The editors’ concluding remarks on desiderata for future research will be addressed below. The Table of Contents of the volume appears at the end of this review.

The initial contribution by CHRISTIAN HØGEL provides an insightful overview of the development, character and modern study of hagiographical writing and rewriting in Byzantium. Some fundamental observations on codicology, transmission and hagiographical corpora, as well as questions

2. As a minutial observation: the references to single volumes of the Metaphrastic *Menologion* cited at p. 15, n. 22, can be supplemented with a book inventory (1428/9) in Sofia, *Dujčev gr.* 253, f. 290r: Μεταφραστικῆς τὸ ἡμῶν τοῦ δεκαρίου (> δεκε(μβ)ρίου), see PHILIP RANCE, A Late Byzantine Book Inventory in Sofia, *Dujčev gr.* 253 (olim *Kosinita* 265) – a Monastic or Private Library?. *ByzZ* 115.3 (2022) pp. 977–1029 at 982, 985, 1002–4.

of (sub)genre and generic labelling, clarify what we can know or reasonably infer about the continuing readership and socio-cultural contexts of hagiography, distinct from immediate compositional circumstances. HØGEL distinguishes two developmental currents, ‘standardization’ and metaphrasis, which partly overlap, in period and effect, but, in other, more important respects, act as countervailing tendencies. Largely shaped by liturgical priorities, standardization promoted uniformity in narrative content and textual format, suppressing authorial voice and narratorial identity, deleting historical, geographical and local particularities, and generally homogenizing episodes, in both wording and substance. Subsequent metaphrastic processes evident in Symeon’s *Menologion* not only elevated the vocabulary and style of source-texts but also (re)installed previously excised historical details, using supplementary historiographic or documentary texts, apparently in response to criticism of the banality of prior hagiographical writing. Metaphrasis thus becomes a more broadly reactive phenomenon, reflecting shifts in readers’ expectations and exhibiting ambitions beyond linguistic/stylistic considerations.

DARIA RESH’s reassessment of fragmented evidence for the life, ecclesiastical career and writings of John of Sardis aims to reconstruct the prosopographical background and literary-cultural setting of two early specimens of hagiographical metaphrasis, *vitae* of St Barbara (BHG 2151) and St Nikephoros (BHG 1334),³ while addressing the wider interaction of authors, genre and audience in the early ninth century. Having affirmed aspects of John’s biography, RESH’s demonstration of textual affinities between the *vitae* and similarly ascribed rhetorical commentaries both reinforces their common authorship and deepens understanding of his metaphrastic activity. Exploration of John’s possible socio-intellectual networks aligns him with a contemporary fashion for rhetorical-linguistic learnedness in hagiographical writing, while the shared experience of defending Orthodoxy during the Second Iconoclasm becomes fundamental to his re-envisioning of the discourse of veneration and martyrdom for a like-minded urban elite.

LAURA FRANCO undertakes a detailed analysis of Symeon Metaphrastes’ compositional methods in the *Menologion*, primarily through a case study of his hitherto unpublished *Passio* of St James the Persian (BHG 773) and

3. RESH’s critical edition of the *Vita* of St Barbara is due to be published in DAVID KONSTAN and DARIA RESH, *Fragile Saints: The Legends of Barbara and Katherine in the Greek Tradition (4th–10th centuries)* (Atlanta, forthcoming).

its relationship to preceding textual traditions. This inquiry is executed with commendable delicacy, given the difficulty of determining which, if any, of the four pre-Metaphrastic versions was the (or a) source-text, and insofar as the varying extent, nature and impact of Symeon's modifications throughout his version allows differing opportunities for comparison. Carefully charting a repertoire of adaptive techniques employed in the Metaphrastic *passio*, which variously omit, transpose, amplify and condense material, as well as elaboration of rhetorical devices and protagonists' psychologies, FRANCO plausibly infers authorial purpose within an overall absence of clear and systematically applied criteria. The mooted possibility that apparent inconsistency of approach, if correctly discerned, may partly reflect collaborative teamwork under Symeon's supervision adds further complexity that future studies should address.

ELISABETH SCHIFFER investigates the complex hagiographical dossier relating to John Chrysostom prior to the redaction in Symeon's *Menologion*, which seemingly attests the rich narrative potential that Byzantine authors/redactors found in this material. She first surveys what is known or believed about four extant pre-Metaphrastic versions – one dated to the seventh/eighth century, the others tenth-century – and considers their sources and sometimes obscure relationships, direct and indirect, including at least one demonstrable lost intermediary text. The main part of this study is a meticulous comparative analysis of sample parallel episodes in these four *vitae* and the Metaphrastic *Menologion*, through which SCHIFFER elucidates their respective authors' adaptive methodologies and linguistic/stylistic tastes, while further clarifying intertextuality. Generally, her inquiry affirms the view that characterization of specific cases of rewriting should seek to identify underlying tendencies rather than uniform patterns or systematic adherence to rules. Specifically, even if, compared to Symeon's *Menologion*, the more tenuous manuscript transmission of the tenth-century pre-Metaphrastic *vitae* limits the scope for determining compositional contexts, by examining a nexus of successive, near-contemporary redactions, SCHIFFER raises broader questions about authors and audiences that might be applicable to the study of metaphrasis in other cases or genres.

In a fascinating contribution, MARTIN HINTERBERGER explains the methodology, challenges and results of two interrelated collaborative research projects, hosted by the University of Cyprus (2014–18), which undertook comparative linguistic analysis of sample works existing in two or more

versions.⁴ Initial investigation of the original and metaphrased texts of a large historical composition (Niketas Choniates' *History*) systematically recorded and categorized 'high-style' (classicizing) to 'low-style' (literary koine) lexical substitution and created a concordance database of register-related correspondences in vocabulary. The scope of inquiry was subsequently extended to include other simplifying Palaiologan metaphraseis of rhetorical and historical works, but also tenth-century and Palaiologan hagiographies in which the metaphrastic process, in contrast, entailed 'low'-to-'high(er)' adaptation. Generally confirming the findings of prior, mostly single-work studies, but now based on significantly broader evidential foundations, the results reveal general trends and specific characteristics in metaphrastic technique. In particular, a high degree of consistency in the equivalence of high-level and low-level words, varying in extent according to genre-specific criteria, points to coherent underlying linguistic practices and assumptions, which, in some cases, appear to remain diachronically stable from the Middle to Late Byzantine periods. In this latter respect, HINTERBERGER considers the use and impact of *lexica* and *scholia*. The database will become an evolving tool that can assist modern researchers in evaluating the literary-stylistic quality of vocabulary, even – or especially – outside of metaphrastic scenarios. However, the process of this project is equally important, insofar as it has fostered thoughtful consideration of definitional and functional complexities of lexical substitution, not least the large proportion of model-texts that metaphrasts left unchanged, and thus contributes to a more nuanced understanding of 'high' and 'low' registers in Byzantine literature as a whole.

STAFFAN WAHLGREN explores possibilities for extending metaphrastic analysis beyond conventional categorizations of metaphrasis. His subject is an anonymous, undated continuation to the tenth-century *Chronicle* of Symeon the Logothete, covering the period 945–1118, which retains the overall structure and narrative conventions of its antecedent but differs in linguistic/stylistic form.⁵ Having first demonstrated alternating 'high-' and 'low-level' diction in different sections of this work, indicative of composite, multi-authored composition, WAHLGREN analyses linguistic features of the first four chapters, apparently a homogeneous unit, for both their intrinsic interest and what they might reveal about the competence and ambitions of the author of this 'immediate continuation', directly conjoined

4. <https://websites.ucy.ac.cy/byz/en/news-and-announcements.html>

5. An edition is in preparation: STAFFAN WAHLGREN (ed.), *Symeonis magistri et logothetae versiones et continuationes* (CFHB, Series Berolinensis).

to and potentially in dialogue with Symeon's *Chronicle*. WAHLGREN proposes that, although the continuation is not a metaphrasis in any recognised sense, its dependent and reactive relationship to a prototype, in certain respects, could be deemed analogous to that between a metaphrasis and its model, with corresponding implications for authorial motivation and projected readership.

CORINNE JOUANNO's contribution elaborates her previous extensive research on the exceptionally diffuse tradition of the Greek *Alexander Romance*, traversing more than a millennium, from Late Antiquity into the Ottoman era. She classifies extant rewritings into two categories: 'conservative', largely retaining narrative arrangement and gradually diverging through episodic additions and omissions, and 'innovative' (*recensio* ε and its descendants), distinguished by radical modifications to narrative, characterization and chronology, and ideologically recast in a Christianized 'Byzantine' guise. JOUANNO investigates this wide spectrum of adaptation through a close study of a single common episode, the young Alexander's encounter with the Persian ambassadors, charting successive modifications, minor and major, whereby each author/redactor nuanced or transformed the story and its protagonists. Even if, as JOUANNO concedes, medieval or modern definitions of 'metaphrasis' may not embrace all the adaptive processes discussed, changes at a linguistic/stylistic level, and especially Late and post-Byzantine versifications, presume that authors endeavoured to satisfy the shifting tastes and competence of contemporary audiences.

LEV LUKHOVITSKIY concludes the collection with a perceptive study of two hagiographical *vitae* – of the Empress Theophano and Patriarch Anthony II Kauleas – composed by Nikephoros Gregoras around the mid-fourteenth century on the basis of tenth-century source-texts. Preliminary observations address definitional and interpretative questions posed by the comparatively understudied early Palaiologan corpus of hagiographical metaphraseis, especially regarding their place in the overall consumption and transmission of hagiographical literature, as well as more individualized objectives and priorities, which evidently transcended linguistic/stylistic transposition. Establishing Gregoras' primary interest in embellishing the initial, more stereotyped 'childhood' sections of both *vitae*, where hagiographical clichés predominate, LUKHOVITSKIY's analysis demonstrates Gregoras' distinctive sensitivity to the emotional state and psychological motivations of protagonists, both child and parent(s), which, in combination with his 'scientific' digressions on human nature, minimize miracles

and preternatural qualities, and accentuate his characters' inner world, personal interrelationships and accessible humanity.

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In their Introduction, the editors hope that this volume, in its own terms, will 'further stimulate an already fruitful discussion of the phenomenon of "metaphrasis"'. That seems a highly likely prospect. They single out two avenues of future inquiry. First, definition and usage of 'metaphrasis' remain variable and elastic, even in this selection of papers, where it is variously conceived as process(es), technique(s) or/and genre, while diverse and potentially unrelated aspects of rewriting end up under a 'metaphrastic' umbrella. Scope seems a crucial criterion: 'Is metaphrasis ultimately an all-encompassing concept like "rewriting" ... or should we restrict the term's application to specific forms of rewriting that fulfil certain requirements and therefore can be identified as, *sensu stricto*, metaphrasis?' (p. 23). Certainly, this is not an unexamined issue, especially in recent scholarship. Semantic difficulty partly arises from the common application of 'metaphrasis' to both a process and a product – the rewriting of a text is or involves 'metaphrasis' and the resultant rewritten text is or can be termed 'a metaphrasis', though its author might, in fact, have also employed other adaptive techniques or pursued alternative priorities. Ultimately, scholars may be reluctant to choose between practicality and purism: either the self-aware convenience of using 'metaphrasis' as a modern *terminus technicus* for multi-faceted rewriting or the satisfying precision of a narrower linguistic/stylistic definition, which may more accurately reflect medieval/Byzantine usage, but excludes aspects of rewriting that must then be otherwise categorized and labelled. The fate of other literary terms, not least 'paraphrase' (as a modern *terminus technicus*), is not easily separated. Second, more specifically, the editors propose that renewed debate about the place of Symeon in the Metaphrastic tradition might further elucidate the identities and writings of his predecessors and his attitude to their texts, and thereby clarify the nature of his achievement and subsequent popularity. In this context, the focus of several contributors on pre-Metaphrastic hagiography is consistent with a longer-term broadening of investigative horizons. By extension, as this reviewer's interest in metaphrasis began, at least, with neither hagiography nor historiography, but rather with Byzantine 'practical' or 'technical' literature, it may be hoped that inquiry can extend beyond these conventional spheres and admit into the debate other

genres that clearly offer important perspectives. For example, the potential interest of military treatises is briefly noted (p. 18). This long-established literary tradition exhibits exceptional metaphrastic complexity, which features ‘upgrading’ and/or ‘downgrading’ metaphraseis/paraphrases of not only earlier Byzantine compositions but also Classical Greek/Greco-Roman texts, a dimension of metaphrasis for which (even ‘classicizing’) Byzantine hagiography and historiography can offer few parallels.⁶ Furthermore, the remarkable number of sequential rewritings, which, in some cases, successively ‘upgrade’ and ‘downgrade’ (and ‘upgrade’ again) the linguistic register of the same work, from century to century, even decade to decade, complicate interpretation of metaphrasts’ goals and techniques and readers’ tastes, at least in terms of identifying uniform or unilinear development.⁷ Such multi-version texts would be in good company with those studied in this volume.

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Introduction

ANNE P. ALWIS – MARTIN HINTERBERGER – ELISABETH SCHIFFER

Rewriting in Byzantium: Standardization and Metaphrasis

CHRISTIAN HØGEL

The First Metaphrast: John, Bishop of Sardis

DARIA RESH

6. For successive Byzantine linguistic/stylistic rewritings of classical treatises see e.g. FRIEDEL SCHINDLER, *Die Überlieferung der Strategemata des Polyainos* (ÖAW phil.-hist. Klasse Sitzungsberichte 284.1). Vienna 1973, pp. 205–225; PHILIP RANCE, *The Reception of Aineias’ Poliorketika in Byzantine Military Literature*. In: MARIA PRETZLER – NICK BARLEY (eds), *Brill’s Companion to Aineias Tacticus*. Leiden – Boston 2017, pp. 290–374.

7. Among Byzantine military compositions, the extent and nature of metaphrastic variability are well illustrated by Nikephoros Ouranos’ *Taktika* (c. 1000). The first 55 (of 178) chapters incorporate a ‘downgrading’ metaphrasis of Leo’s *Taktika* (c. 905), using an exemplar of its ‘Ambrosian recension’ (pre-950s), itself an early ‘upgrading’ metaphrasis of Leo’s original text. Leo’s *Taktika*, in turn, largely comprised a selective re-writing of Maurice’s *Strategikon* (c. 590s), which is transmitted in an ‘authentic recension’ and a (pre-minuscule) metaphrased ‘interpolated recension’ as well as an ‘Ambrosian paraphrase’ (c. 959). This process does not end with Ouranos’ *Taktika* 1–55 (unedited), as his work survives in two versions, one representing Ouranos’ original wording (Oxon. Barocc. 131 and Istanbul TSMK G.İ. 36), the other a later ‘upgrading’ metaphrasis (Monac. gr. 452). A complete edition of Ouranos’ *Taktika* is in preparation by this reviewer.

Observations on the Methods of Metaphrastic Rewriting: The Case of the *Passio* of St James (BHG 773)

LAURA FRANCO

Rewriting the *Life* of St John Chrysostom in Tenth-Century Byzantium

ELISABETH SCHIFFER

Metaphraseis as a Key for the Understanding of Different Levels in Byzantine Vocabulary

MARTIN HINTERBERGER

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STAFFAN WAHLGREN

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CORINNE JOUANNO

Emotions, Miracles, and the Mechanics of Psychology in Nikephoros Gregoras' *Lives* of Empress Theophano and Patriarch Anthony II Kauleas

LEV LUKHOVITSKIY

Keywords

Byzantine literature; metaphrasis