

ALEXANDER RIEHLE, *Die Briefsammlungen des Nikephoros Choumnos*. Einleitung, Edition, Übersetzung (Byzantinisches Archiv 43). Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter 2023. xxxv + 529 pp. – ISBN 978-1-614-51601-9

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The book provides a new edition of roughly 180 letters written by Nikephoros Choumnos, close collaborator of emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos and important intellectual of the early Palaiologan period. Older editions of these crucial documents, mainly by BOISSONADE, are inadequate, and RIEHLE succeeds in providing the scholarly community with a readable and trustworthy one. He states in the introduction (p. 2) that his aim was not only to reedit the letters according to the standards of modern scholarship but also to clarify how they came into being (*Textgenese*). In pursuit of this, he publishes separately two collections of Choumnos' correspondence found in manuscripts A (Ambr. C 71 sup.)¹ and B (Paris. gr. 2105)², linking the two through a relevant *apparatus criticus* and through a system of internal references.

The introduction contains a short biography of Choumnos, based on recent studies dedicated to him. RIEHLE then gives a detailed description of Choumnos's letter collections, emphasising the care that this author took for the survival of his literary output. Manuscript A belonged to Choumnos himself, who periodically revised and enriched it: by reconstructing the gradual formation of this codex, RIEHLE is able to clarify and establish the chronological sequence of several works that Choumnos included in it. Manuscripts B and P (Patm. 127)³ preserve two almost identical versions of Choumnos' works and are both copied by the same hand: they constitute an authorised, final edition. After describing further codices containing the letters of Choumnos (T = Vat. gr. 2660, V = Vat. gr. 112)⁴, RIEHLE concludes that BPTVA all draw from the same archetype, viz., Choumnos' personal copy, which he continuously revised over time. Rather than a bound volume where letters would be entered chronologically, this copy was evidently a stack of loose quires where the author could insert new pieces at

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1. Diktyon # 42421.
 2. Diktyon # 51734.
 3. Diktyon # 54371.
 4. Diktyon # 69286 and # 66743.

will and without hassle (a practice also followed by Demetrios Kydones, as well as by several contemporary western intellectuals). B and P themselves seem to have consisted at first of disbound quaternia. Thus, no manuscript of Choumnos' letters presents them in their proper chronological sequence, while their oldest collection is the one contained in A.

As usual in modern editions of Byzantine epistolography, RIEHLE gives a list of Choumnos' addressees and a short biography for each of them. There are remarks on the historical information provided by the letters, as well as on their dating. Summaries (*Regesten*) are also included.

An important section of the book addresses several literary aspects of the correspondence. Choumnos himself classified his letters according to their purpose: some served practical ends, others kept him in touch with friends whom adverse circumstances had separated from him, a third group, where he shows off his learning, was meant to enhance his reputation among fellow-intellectuals. The editor points out that this third category in particular comprises texts from a variety of literary genres. Choumnos' grouping together of letters written at different times demonstrates his desire to give an autobiographical account of his life and career. RIEHLE briefly surveys the letters' formal elements and the main characteristics of their language. He outlines Choumnos' literary predilections, especially his artful handling of several hypotexts in order to emphasise his literary preferences and concerns.

RIEHLE carefully explains his editorial principles and the orthographical conventions of his manuscript sources. His treatment of scribal punctuation is exemplary, as he establishes the main rules governing it with great clarity and precision. Indeed, future editors would do well to study RIEHLE's treatment of the punctuation in Choumnos' text and to adopt (or adapt) RIEHLE's approach in their own editions. The introduction also discusses several difficult or corrupt passages, explains how the *apparatus criticus* and *apparatus fontium* are organised, and states the principles of the accompanying German translation.

The edition and translation themselves are almost impeccable. A few remarks on the latter:

B6, 31 καὶ μόνον τῆς χρυσόστομος φωνῆς ἀκούοντα, ζητεῖν ἀποκρύπτεσθαι – “wenn du nur dessen Stimme vernimmst”. In my view Choumnos means: “even when you hear the mere word *Chrysostom*”.

B14, 7 καὶ μὴν τῷ βιάζεσθαι καὶ μάλα δεδυνῆσθαι, μακάριοί τινες δοκοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς – “und schätzen sich selbst durch die Ausübung von Gewalt und

großer Macht glücklich”. The infinitive βιάζεσθαι is the object of the infinitive τῷ ... δεδυνῆσθαι, therefore a better rendering of the text would be: “they consider themselves blessed because of their ability to use violence (against their enemies)”.

B19, 6 οἱ ἀφανῶς πολεμοῦντες. I think that the author refers not to the demons but to his real enemies who were scheming against him in collaboration with Satan, hiding themselves in various ways.

B20, 23–24 καὶ συνάγει τούτους οὐκ εἰς ἐμὰς ἀποθήκας. Cf. Matthew 6:26.

B43, 75 ἐπὶ δευτέρων αὐθις ἀμεινόνων. Cf. Diogenianus 4, 15.

B44, 15–16 ταῖς κοιναῖς ἐννοίαις καὶ γνώμαϊς. I think the editor’s rendering “Volkswisheit und -meinung” is somewhat misleading and should be revised. The so-called κοιναὶ ἐννοιαὶ (a Stoic concept) are the axioms, or general ideas: see LSJ⁹, s.v.

B133, 14–15 καὶ τῆς ἐντεῦθεν ἡδονῆς ἐκ τόπου δὴ τινος τοῖς συνιοῦσι καὶ μετ’ ἐπιστήμης ἐπιβάλλουσιν, ἐγγιγνομένης. Ἐκτόπου (“extravagant”) should be written as a single word.

Overall, RIEHLE’s new, monumental edition of the letters of Nikephoros Choumnos is a major contribution to the study of the early Palaiologan renaissance.

Keywords

Nikephoros Choumos; edition; epistolography