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Greek Poetry in a Multicultural Society: Sicily and Salento in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries

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Abstract

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, southern Italy experienced a period of relative political stability and economic prosperity under the Normans as well as the Hohenstaufen dynasty that succeeded them. These cultural conditions fostered a cultural resurgence, which included the composition of Greek poetry. Poets in Sicily wrote from within a multicultural context, including the presence of Arabic- and Latin-speaking communities. Many of their poems illustrate the generative intersections between the Byzantine-Constantinopolitan, Latin, and Arabic traditions. Later in Salento, poetry was written in a rather closed Greek-speaking, Orthodox society. Comparing Greek poetry from Sicily and Salento shows some differences between composition in the two regions. Whereas Sicilian poetry includes especially creative narrative poems, composed for the rich and sophisticated courts of the island, the Salentine poetry bears the stamp of the schoolroom. In fact, most poems from both Sicily and Salento survive in manuscripts that can be traced to a pedagogical environment. While the circulation of these poems was limited to their surrounding regions, their literary sophistication betrays remarkable creativity and the multicultural

conditions of composition, further evidence of the vitality of Greek literary culture far from the heartland of the Byzantine Empire.

Keywords

southern Italy – Greek poetry – Byzantine literature – multiculturalism – storytelling – rhetorical writing

1 Introduction

Throughout the Middle Ages, Sicily and the wider area of southern Italy experienced various shifts of political power between the Latin West, Byzantium, and the Arabs.¹ During the eleventh century, Normans coming from northern Europe conquered the region, eventually establishing the Kingdom of Sicily in 1130. The Normans, along with the Hohenstaufen dynasty that succeeded them, established a political stability and economic prosperity that had been unknown in the eleventh century. Culture and science benefitted from the multicultural environment and flourished. In the art and architecture of the period, one can trace a multitude of different influences from the Arabic, Latin, and Greek cultures.² Many private documents were written in two languages: Greek and Arabic, or Greek and Latin.³ An illumination in a manuscript of

1 For an overview of both the history of Medieval Sicily and southern Italy and the related scholarship, see Sarah C. Davis-Secord, "Medieval Sicily and Southern Italy in Recent Historiographical Perspective," *History Compass* 8, no. 1 (2010): 61–87, on the eleventh to the thirteenth century, especially 67–70; on Salento, see Linda Safran, *The Medieval Salento: Art and Identity in Southern Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). On social hybridization in Sicily see Benjamin Scheller, "Migrationen und kulturelle Hybridisierungen im normannischen und staufischen Königreich Sizilien (12.–13. Jahrhundert)," in *Transkulturelle Verflechtungen im mittelalterlichen Jahrtausend: Europa, Ostasien, Afrika*, ed. Michael Borgolte (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2012), 167–86.

2 See Rosa di Liberto, "Norman Palermo: Architecture between the Eleventh and Twelfth Century," in *A Companion to Medieval Palermo: The History of the Mediterranean City from 600 to 1500*, ed. Annliese Nef (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 139–94.

3 See Jeremy Jones, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily: The Royal Dōwān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). The languages used in twelfth-century Palermo included, besides Greek, Latin, and (Muslim) Arabic, various Italian dialects, Norman French, Judaeo-Arabic, Hebrew, and others; see Benoît Grévin, "Linguistic Cultures and Textual Production in Palermo, from the End of the Eleventh to the End of the Fifteenth Century," in *A Companion to Medieval Palermo*, ed. Nef, 413–36, at 416–22.

the Latin *epos* by Petrus de Ebulo, celebrating the Hohenstaufen rule in Sicily, emblematically illustrates this multiculturalism by depicting the chancellery with Greek, Arabic, and Latin scribes.⁴ The Norman kings and Frederick II fostered translations between Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew; the production of scientific and philosophical texts; and Arabic, Latin, Italian, and Greek poetry.⁵ After the death of Frederick II in 1250, however, political insecurities soon brought this golden age to an end. The later medieval history of the area saw fragmentation and the loss of political security, and with them the decline of the non-Latin populations.

Unlike in the tenth and eleventh centuries, when Greek seems to have played a less significant role in southern Italian textual production,⁶ the political stability and its resulting thriving cultural activity seem to have contributed to the transformation of this region into an important center of Greek literature and book culture for the next two centuries. Greek became not only the language of liturgical texts,⁷ but was also used frequently for the composition of various kinds of works, including hagiographies, homilies, and various theological treatises. Similarly, the practice of writing poetry both within the court and outside it started to become very common. Sicily in the twelfth century, and Salento in the thirteenth, were particular hotspots of poetic production.

Even this sketchy description of medieval southern Italy reveals the uniqueness of its culture, which was constituted by the diversity of its cultural expression. This article will focus on a specific cultural expression of this society: the composition of poetry in Greek. To achieve a more nuanced understanding of the place of Greek poetry in this multicultural setting, we will take advantage

4 Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 120 II, fol. 101r. On the manuscript, see Florian Mittenhuber, "Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Cod. 120.II," last modified February 2018, <https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/de/description/bbb/0120-2/Mittenhuber>.

5 On Sicilian literature, see Karla Mallette, *The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100–1250: A Literary History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), which, however, does not deal with the Greek tradition. On Sicilian poetry, see Carolina Cupane, "Byzantine Poetry at the Norman Court of Sicily (1130–c.1200)," in *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry*, ed. Wolfram Hörandner, Andreas Rhoby, and Nikos Zagklas (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 353–78; on poetry in Salento, see Augusta Acconcia Longo, "Poesia greca nel Salento medievale," *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 51 (2014): 245–80; revised edition published in *Bisanzio sulle due sponde del Canale d'Otranto*, ed. Marina F. Castelfranchi and Manuela de Georgi (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 2021), 15–49; and Paolo Cesaretti, "Da Marco d'Otranto a Demetrio: Alcune note di lettura su poeti bizantini del Salento," *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 37 (2000): 183–208.

6 See Cristina Torre, "Per una lettura dei cosiddetti giambi per un giovane calabrese," *Commentaria Classica* 6 (2019): 243–69.

7 As has previously been argued in Mallette, *The Kingdom of Sicily*, 29.

of some theoretical considerations by the French philosopher François Jullien. In a recently published study titled *Il n'y a pas d'identité culturelle: Mais nous défendons les ressources culturelles*, he proposes a theoretical model for understanding cultures not as an entity with a collective (and fixed) identity, but as situated in relationship to other cultures.⁸

Although based on considerations about modern society and the growing identitarian and nationalistic movements (and despite the objections that can be raised against them), Jullien's approach contains many ideas which can fruitfully be applied to the research of pre-modern literature, especially in contact zones where different cultures met, intermingled, and sometimes clashed. Jullien emphasizes that a culture develops from a specific point in time and space, but its focus will be subject to constant change, and can never be satisfactorily defined. Instead, a specific culture is formed by certain cultural resources – such as language, script, behavior, religion, or customs – that are open to everyone and must be activated and exploited in order to survive. In this sense, “defending” cultural resources does not mean an apologetic or confrontational stance which would exclude others from one specific culture, but it means to make use of such resources and constantly transform them. A productive use of cultural resources, Jullien argues, is first and foremost facilitated by a dialogue with other cultures, not in order to ossify one's own resources, nor to assimilate them with others, which would create a uniform culture, but in order to explore the “tensions” that might be created by the “interspace” between two cultures. This would enable the fecundity of a culture to be demonstrated, and the relationship between what is individual to that culture and what is shared between cultures to be explored. Culture can thus not be defined or categorized, but only explored. The concept of literary resources will help us to discern the tensions created in the multilingual, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic southern Italy of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, leading to the production of poems unique in the history of the medieval Greek tradition.

Sicilian and Salentine poetry have both received ample attention from modern scholarship over the last decades.⁹ Yet they have often been treated

8 See François Jullien, *There is no Such Thing as Cultural Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2021); first published in French, François Jullien, *Il n'y a pas d'identité culturelle: Mais nous défendons les ressources d'une culture*, (Paris: L'Herne, 2016). For the concept of contact zone, see Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession* 91 (1991): 33–40.

9 See, for instance, Cupane, “Byzantine Poetry at the Norman Court of Sicily”; Augusta Acconcia Longo, “La letteratura italogreca nell'XI e XII secolo,” in *La Sicilia e Bisanzio nei secoli XI e XII: Atti delle X giornate di studio della Associazione italiana di studi bizantini* (Palermo, 27–28 Maggio 2011), ed. Renata Lavagnini, *Byzantino-Sicula* 6 (Palermo: Istituto Siciliano di

separately, with only occasional references to each other. However, we will argue that it is only by looking at both regions together that we can acquire a wider, more complete picture of Greek poetry in southern Italy. The main hypothesis of this article is that there is a lack of symmetry between the influence these authors received from other traditions and the influence they exerted on other authors (belonging to both their tradition and to other traditions). To test this hypothesis, the paper will not proceed chronologically, but rather focus on different aspects of the corpus and their diversity at different times and in different places.

In the first part of this paper, we survey the places and authors, as well as the texts and the manuscripts which transmit those texts, in order to provide a clear picture of the extant corpus and its circulation. The second part then discusses the cultural resources that southern Italian poets activated by incorporating elements from various literary cultures (classical, Byzantine, Latin, and even Arabic) for the creation of their texts. Finally, the third part shifts to the contexts of production and consumption of poetry in southern Italy, singling out as major contexts patronage, politics, education, and the church, and discussing some convergences and divergences between Sicily and Salento.

2 Places, Agents, and Transmission

In the late twelfth century, the otherwise obscure Roger of Otranto, an imperial notary from Salento, addressed a poem to the high-ranking Sicilian state official Eugenios of Palermo (ca. 1130–after 1202).¹⁰ Roger praises his addressee for his noblesse, his grandeur, and, most importantly, his education and literary skills, calling him a son of the muses Clio and Calliope (lines 3–4). Stressing their former intimacy, Roger now utters his deep longing to see the absent Eugenios, as he is suffering the pains of Glauke, Tantalos, and Ixion (lines 8–10).¹¹ These

Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici “Bruno Lavagnini”, 2014), 107–30; Acconcia Longo, “Poesia greca nel Salento medievale,” 245–80.

10 For Eugenios, see Evelyn Jamison, *Admiral Eugenius of Sicily: His Life and Work and the Authorship of the “Epistola ad Petrum” and the “Historia Hugonis Falcandi Siculi”* (London: British Academy, 1957), and Vera von Falkenhausen, “Eugenio da Palermo,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, ed. Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 100 vols. (Rome: Treccani, 1960–2020), 43:502–5. Roger’s poem is edited by Marcello Gigante, *Eugenii Panormitani versus iambici* (Palermo: Istituto siciliano di studi bizantini e neoellenici, 1964), 12–14. The poem cannot be dated with precision, but its *terminus ante quem* is Eugenios’s death soon after 1202.

11 Ixion is not referred to by name, but by an allusion to his illegitimate relationship with Hera.

comparisons not only give proof of the interest in classical learning that Roger and Eugenios shared, but also aim to adequately express the grief of the former when Eugenios broke with him because Roger had allegedly wronged him. Just like the mythological figures mentioned, Roger is suffering great pains for his misdeeds. This poem not only bears witness to the social significance of such rhetorical, highly learned texts in the southern Italian Greek community, but it also marks the strong ties between authors in Sicily and Salento, both in literary and in personal terms.

Although Greek poetry experienced a period of prosperity in twelfth-century Sicily, because of the relatively small Greek population it never became a large-scale cultural phenomenon involving the participation of a large number of authors and patrons, as was the case for Constantinople around the same time.¹² In addition to some metrical inscriptions, mainly from the regions of Palermo and Messina,¹³ the majority of the surviving Sicilian works were written by three individuals: one anonymous poet (sometimes called Anonymous Malta); an author known as Leo the Grammarian, or Leo of Centuripe; and the already mentioned Eugenios of Palermo.

Anonymous Malta is the author of a single work, dated to the second quarter of the twelfth century.¹⁴ One of the longest poems in Greek dodecasyllables extant from the Middle Ages, this text consists of more than four thousand verses. From the information the first-person narrator provides, we learn that he was a senior official in the Kingdom of Sicily who, for an unspecified reason, was sent into exile, most probably to Malta.¹⁵ With his verses he addresses

12 For the strong ties between patronage and poetry in twelfth-century Constantinople, see Elizabeth Jeffreys, "Why Produce Verse in Twelfth-Century Constantinople?," in *Doux remède ... Poésie et poétique à Byzance: Actes du 1^{re} colloque international philologique, Paris, 23–24–25 février 2006*, ed. Paolo Odorico, Panagiotis A. Agapitos, and Martin Hinterberger (Paris: Centre d'études byzantines, neo-helléniques et sud-est européennes, EHESS, 2009), 219–28, and Nikos Zagklas, "How Many Verses Shall I Write and Say?: Writing Poetry in the Komnenian Period," in *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry*, ed. Hörandner, Rhoby, and Zagklas, 237–63.

13 Andreas Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung*, 4 vols. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009–2018), 1:390–92 (M5) and 3:464–99 (IT 22–33).

14 The authoritative edition is Ioannis Vassis and Ioannis Polemis, "Ένας Έλληνας εξόριστος στην Μάλτα του δωδέκατου αιώνα (*Henas Hellēnas exoristos stēn Malta tou dōdekatou aiōna*)" (Athens: Ekdoseis Kanakē, 2016); on dating, see p. 23.

15 Information about his life is scarce; see Marc D. Lauxtermann, "Tomi, Mljet, Malta: Critical Notes on a Twelfth-Century Southern Italian Poem of Exile," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 64 (2014): 155–76, at 157–58, and Vassis and Polemis, "Ένας Έλληνας εξόριστος," 24–26. Furthermore, the place of the poet's exile has been an issue of debate. The first editors of the poem have argued that the anonymous poet was exiled to Gozo; see Joseph Busuttill, Stanley Fiorini, and Horatio R.C. Vella, *Tristia ex Melitogaudio*:

George of Antioch (*emir of emirs* and *archon ton archonton*), the most powerful official in the Norman court of Sicily during the second quarter of the twelfth century, asking him to persuade the king of Sicily, Roger II (1095–1154, r. 1130–1154), to set him free from his exile. What sets this poem apart from other supplicatory texts is the wealth of stories and anecdotes that the author includes in his account.

Although known by name, Leo the Grammarian (sometimes called Leo of Centuripe) is a similarly obscure figure. The only evidence we have comes from Messina, Biblioteca Regionale Universitaria “Giacomo Longo”, MS San Salvatore 30, fol. 70v [hereafter Mess. San Salv.], dating to 1307, which informs us that he was a monk and a grammarian.¹⁶ More recently, it has been suggested that Leo might have been the same person as a certain grammarian called Leo who was active in eleventh-century Constantinople.¹⁷ Even if Leo had spent part of his life in Constantinople, it cannot be excluded that he returned to Sicily and eventually wrote his works at the Monastery of the Holy Saviour in Messina, a place with its own scriptorium which fostered the copying and production of Greek texts in southern Italy throughout the Middle Ages. The exact period of Leo’s activity too remains uncertain, but one of his texts survives in a twelfth-century quaternion, later bound into the fifteenth-century manuscript Mess. S. Salv. 49, providing the twelfth century as a *terminus ante quem*.¹⁸ Furthermore, since the literary characteristics of his work demon-

Lament in Greek Verse of a XIIth-Century Exile on Gozo (Malta: Farsons Foundation, 2010). More recently, it has been argued that he was exiled to Malta, see Lauxtermann, “Tomi, Mljet, Malta,” 156–57. Fiorini and Vella have attempted to refute Lauxtermann’s view, but their arguments are not based on solid evidence, see Stanley Fiorini and Horatio R.C. Vella, “Reactions to Tristia ex Melitogaudio: A Response,” *Literatūra* 58, no. 3 (2016): 75–87, at 76–80.

- 16 See the rubric of the manuscript in François Halkin, “L’Éloge du patriarche S. Nectaire par Léon de Sicile (BHG 2284),” *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 22–23 (1985–1986): 171–89, at 172. Similarly, the rubric in Messina, Biblioteca Regionale Universitaria “Giacomo Longo”, MS 49 reads: “Λέοντος Κεντρωρυπίτου χαμαλοῦ γέροντος, τάχα δὲ γραμματικοῦ” (By Leo of Centuripe, the humble monk as well as grammarian). On the manuscript, see Maria Teresa Rodriguez, *Catalogo dei manoscritti datati del fondo del ss. Salvatore* (Palermo: Assessorato reg. dei beni cult. e amb. e della Pubbl. istruzione, 1999), 57–62.
- 17 Paolo Cesaretti and Stephanos Efthymiadis, “Per Leone di Centuripe e i suoi? Encomi di s. Nettario (BHG 2284) e di s. Giacomo Maggiore (BHG 768d),” *Nea Rhōmē* 14 (2017): 275–95, at 279–81.
- 18 It is a twelfth-century quaternion that was added at the beginning of the manuscript. This has already been pointed out in Enrica Follieri, “Per l’identificazione del grammatikòs Leone Siculo con Leone da Centuripe,” *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 24 (1987): 127–41, at 128; reprinted in Enrica Follieri, *Byzantina et Italograeca: Studi di filologia e di paleografia*, ed. Augusta Acconcia Longo, Lidia Perria, and Andrea Luzzi (Rome: Edizione

strate important twelfth-century characteristics, we can most likely date him to this period. Leo is the author of two hagiographical works, on the lives of ss. Nektarios and James the Great.¹⁹ Both of these are mixtures of poetry and prose, constituting – strictly speaking – the only prosimetric hagiographic works in the medieval Greek tradition.²⁰

The best-known Sicilian poet is Eugenios of Palermo, a high-ranking state official and admiral under the Norman and early Hohenstaufen rulers in Sicily and skilled translator in Greek (his mother tongue), Latin, and Arabic. In the course of the dynastic transition from the Normans to the Hohenstaufens at the end of the twelfth century, he was exiled from Palermo to Germany, but regained the favour of Emperor Henry VI and ended his life as a master chamberlain of Apulia and Terra di Lavoro. His poetic corpus consists of twenty-four miscellaneous poems of diverse contents,²¹ mainly poems on moral themes, epigrams, some verse letters, and an encomium to King William II (1153–1189), as well as a number of unedited dodecasyllabic hymns,²² and (possibly) a book epigram and a metrical coda attached to a prose prologue produced for *Stephanites and Ichnelates*, his translation of *Kalila wa-Dimna*.²³

In the thirteenth century, the center of Greek poetry production in Italy shifted from Sicily to Apulia – just as Frederick II transferred the court of the Kingdom of Sicily from Palermo to Foggia in Apulia. In particular, authors whose lives can be traced historically were active in Salento, especially in and around Otranto and Gallipoli. In this, the otherwise obscure Roger, who also penned a metrical debate between the personified cities of Otranto and Taranto, is not only a link between Sicily and the mainland, but also one of the

di storia e letterature, 1997), 399–411. For the manuscript, see Augusto Mancini, *Codices Graeci monasterii Messanensis S. Salvatoris* (Messina: Typis d'Amico, 1907), 78–101.

19 For the former, see Halkin, “S. Nectaire par Léon de Sicile,” 171–89. The text for Saint James the Great remains unedited apart from some parts in Follieri, “Per l'identificazione,” 127–41. For a discussion of the two works, see Cesaretti and Efthymiadis, “Per Leone di Centuripe e i suoi,” 275–95.

20 Lauxtermann, “Tomi, Mljet, Malta,” and Nikos Zagklas, “Experimenting with Prose and Verse in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: A Preliminary Study,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 71 (2017): 229–48.

21 *Eugenii Panormitani Versus*, ed. Gigante.

22 Andrea Luzzi, “Hymnographica Eugeniana: Inediti giambici e ritmici in una interessante silloge italogreca tramandata nel ms Scorial. x.iv.8 (gr. 403),” in *Studi bizantini in onore di Maria Dora Spadaro*, ed. Tiziana Creazzo, Carmelo Crimi, Renata Gentile, and Gioacchino Strano (Catania: Bonnano, 2016), 215–35.

23 Marc D. Lauxtermann, “The Eugenic Recension of *Stephanites and Ichnelates*: Prologue and Paratexts,” *Nea Rhômē* 15 (2018): 55–106 and *Stephanites and Ichnelates, Animal Fables of the Courtly Mediterranean: The Eugenic Recension of Stephanites and Ichnelates*, eds. Alison Noble, Alexander Alexakis, and Richard P.H. Greenfield (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), 2–7.

first representatives of this literary culture. The pioneer of the cultural blossoming of Salento, however, was Nicholas-Nektarios of Otranto, abbot of San Nicola di Casole (1155/60–1235), a teacher, author of various theological treatises, translator of mainly religious and liturgical texts from and to Latin, and interpreter on voyages to the (formerly) Byzantine world in the service of the Hohenstaufen king and emperor Frederick II.²⁴ He refurbished the monastery of San Nicola of Casole, which saw a special florescence of literary activities and manuscript copying in the thirteenth century.²⁵ His own poetic oeuvre is small, comprised mainly of epigrams.

Even so, among his pupils we find several poets:²⁶ the otherwise unknown scribe Palaganos of Otranto penned two book epigrams in 1201;²⁷ John Grassos

24 Originally named Nicholas, he took the monastic name Nektarios on becoming a monk. To avoid confusion with Nicholas of Otranto, son of John Grassos, we will henceforth refer to the abbot of Casole as Nektarios. On Nektarios, see Johannes M. Hoeck and Raimund J. Loenertz, *Nikolaos-Nektarios von Otranto, Abt von Casole: Beiträge zur Geschichte der ost-westlichen Beziehungen unter Innozenz III. und Friedrich II.* (Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag, 1965), 25–29; for a detailed account of his literary learning and knowledge of both Greek and Latin literature, see Claudio Schiano, “Letture classiche e cristiane di Nicola-Nettario di Otranto,” in *La tradizione dei testi greci in Italia meridionale: Filagato da Cerami philosophos e didaskalos: Copisti, lettori, eruditi in Puglia tra XII e XVI secolo*, ed. Nunzio Bianchi (Bari: Edipuglia, 2011), 73–94; Claudio Schiano, “Nicholas-Nektarios of Otranto: A Greek Monk Under Roman Obedience,” in *Greek Monasticism in Southern Italy: The Life of Neilos in Context*, ed. Barbara Crostini and Ines A. Murzaku (New York: Routledge, 2017), 208–26, and Claudio Schiano, “*Omnes civitates nostre obediunt venerationi*: Nicola di Otranto e le fonti latine,” *Rudiae. Ricerche sul mondo classico* n.s. 3, 26 (2017): 153–90. His poetic work is mainly published in Marcello Gigante, *Poeti bizantini di Terra d'Otranto nel secolo XIII*, second rev. ed. (Naples: Congedo, 1979), 73–100 and by Antonio Rocchi, *Versi Di Cristoforo Patrizio* (Rome: Tipografia poliglotta di propaganda fide, 1887), 68.

25 See Daniele Arnesano and Elisabetta Sciarra, “Libri e testi di scuola in Terra d'Otranto,” in *Libri di scuola e pratiche didattiche, dall'Antichità al Rinascimento: Atti del Convegno internazionale di Studi, Cassino, 7–10 maggio, 2008*, ed. Lucio del Corso and Oronzo Pecere (Cassino: Università di Cassino, 2010), 425–74, at 433–40. On the monastery's history, see Hoeck and Loenertz, *Nikolaos-Nektarios von Otranto*, 9–21.

26 The authorship of quite a number of poems is debatable (and debated), especially in case of Nektarios and Nicholas of Otranto, since the former's lay name was also Nicholas. It seems that in some cases the problem cannot be solved. Some poems have been attributed to Nicholas on grounds that their content is similar to the content of other poems by the author; see Augusta Acconcia Longo and André Jacob, “Une anthologie salentine du XIV^e siècle: Le Vaticanus gr. 1276,” *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 17–19 (1980–1982): 149–228, at 172–78 reattributing the poems 24 and 25 edited by Gigante, *Poeti bizantini*, 83–84, under Nektarios's name as well as some anonymous poems to Nicholas, and attributing anonymous poems to him. In a group of authors so closely related to each other such an attribution is especially difficult and inconclusive.

27 See André Jacob, “Une épigramme de Palaganos d'Otrante dans l'Aristénète de Vienne et le problème de l'Odyssée de Heidelberg,” *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 25 (1988): 185–203.

was a notary at Frederick's court from at least 1219 to 1236 (d. after 1250), belonging to the emperor's closest circle, and he wrote several poems on ancient mythology as well as a political poem in favor of the emperor;²⁸ his son, the judge Nicholas of Otranto, mainly wrote religious epigrams.²⁹ Less is known about other poets: George of Gallipoli, *chartophylax* in that city, wrote poems praising Frederick II;³⁰ in the second half of the thirteenth century, the priest and teacher Drosos of Aradeo penned epigrams and poems related to a school context;³¹ Demetrios, author of some epigrams, is but a name to us;³² and the same holds true for Theodotos of Gallipoli, author of various monodies (d. after 1273/74),³³ as well as for the teacher Stephanos of Nardò, who composed a prosimetric *schedos* (circa thirteenth century).³⁴ In addition to this group of poets, some manuscripts include important poetic collections (mainly of epigrams) by anonymous authors. Whether or not all of them originated from Salento is impossible to tell. Finally, a number of epigrams on various objects or buildings with a Salentine origin has survived *in situ*.³⁵

This brief survey of southern Italian Greek poetry in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries demonstrates important characteristics of this textual corpus. Not only do we know far fewer authors from Sicily, but their texts are

28 On John, see Hoeck and Loenertz, *Nikolaos-Nektarios von Otranto*, 126–27 and at length (although focusing on his notarial activity) Michael B. Wellas, *Griechisches aus dem Umkreis Kaiser Friedrichs II.* (München: Arbeo-Gesellschaft, 1983), 37–56. John's work is mainly published in Gigante, *Poeti bizantini*, 103–44.

29 On Nicholas, see Hoeck and Loenertz, *Nikolaos-Nektarios von Otranto*, 128, Acconcia Longo and Jacob, "Une anthologie salentine," 172–78, Augusta Acconcia Longo and André Jacob, "Poesie di Nicola d'Otranto nel Laur. gr. 58,2," *Byzantion* 54, no. 1 (1984): 371–79, and Acconcia Longo, "Poesia greca nel Salento medievale," 252–54, with important remarks on his life. Nicholas' work is mainly published in Gigante, *Poeti bizantini*, 147–61, and in Acconcia Longo and Jacob, "Une anthologie salentine."

30 See Gigante, *Poeti bizantini*, 59–66. George's work is edited by Gigante, *Poeti bizantini*, 165–212.

31 See Acconcia Longo and Jacob, "Une anthologie salentine," 165–68, and Diether R. Reinsch, "Einige Verse aus dem Kreis des Drosos aus Aradeo (Salento) im Parisinus gr. 2062," in *Alethes Philia: Studi in onore di Giancarlo Prato*, ed. Marco D'Agostino (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 2010), 575–86. Drosos of Aradeo's oeuvre is only partially published.

32 See Acconcia Longo and Jacob, "Une anthologie salentine," 178.

33 See Augusta Acconcia Longo, "Un nuovo codice con poesie Salentine (Laur. 58, 25) e l'assedio di Gallipoli del 1268–69," *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neellenici* 20–21 (1983–1984): 123–70, at 133–52 and 158–68.

34 See Acconcia Longo, "Un nuovo codice," 133–37.

35 See Andreas Rhoby, "The Greek Inscriptions of Norman-Staufian Apulia in the Late Eleventh, the Twelfth and the Thirteenth Centuries: Texts and Contexts," in *Oltre l'alto Medioevo: Etnie, vicende, culture nella Puglia normanno-sveva* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi dell'alto Medioevo, 2020), 393–417, at 402–10.

either very long (as in the case of Anonymous Malta and Leo the Grammarian) or written by an important statesman (Eugenios of Palermo). In contrast, the Salentine corpus is much more varied, including works by a much higher number of authors, but they wrote rather short texts and few of them. However, these two traditions are deeply entangled, as a brief examination of the manuscript transmission demonstrates.

The longest texts from our corpus are those by Anonymous Malta and Leo the Grammarian. Leo's case is special, because the medieval manuscripts transmitting his works (Mess. San Salv. 29, 30, and 49) were likely copied in the monastery where the author must have spent part of his life and have survived as part of the collection of this monastery. All other important manuscripts relevant to our field of interest, however, come from Salento.

Anonymous Malta survives solely in Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 4577 [hereafter Matrit. 4577], which, on paleographical grounds, can tentatively be dated to the first half of the thirteenth century and placed in a Salentine scriptorium.³⁶ While this demonstrates the interest in Sicilian poetry in Salento some decades after the text's composition, the case of Eugenios of Palermo shows the most intricate relationship between the two regions. His miscellaneous poems are exclusively transmitted in one of the most important collections of poetry from Salento, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Plut. 5.10 [hereafter Laur. Plut. 5.10], dating to the beginning of the fourteenth century.³⁷ Although copied some decades after the lifetimes of most Salentine poets, it reflects both the availability of, and the interest in, earlier Greek poetry in the region. Apart from some miscellaneous texts such as homilies, the codex almost exclusively includes poetry, where the poetry of famous Byzantine writers, some known primarily as poets, others not (such as Gregory of Nazianzus, George of Pisidia, John Geometres, Ignatios Diakonos, Anna Komnene, Theodore Prodromos, and patriarch Germanos II), is intermingled with the Sicilian author Eugenios of Palermo and the most important Salentine poets that we know of (Nektarios of Casole, Nicholas of Otranto, John Grassos, George of Gallipoli, and Roger of Otranto), as well as a number of anonymous texts.

The second important collection of Salentine poetry is Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS gr. 1276 [hereafter Vat. gr. 1276], dating from the second

36 Santo Lucà, "La produzione libraria," in *La Sicilia e Bisanzio nei secoli XI e XII*, ed. Lavagnini, 131–74, at 160–61. For an overview of the different datings of this manuscript, see Lauxtermann, "Tomi, Mljet, Malta," 160.

37 See Daniele Arnesano, *La minuscola barocca: Scritture e libri in Terra d'Otranto nei secoli XIII e XIV* (Galatina, Lecce: Congedo, 2008), 87, and, for the content, Josephus N. Sola, "De codice Laurentiano x plutei v," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 20 (1911): 373–83.

decade of the fourteenth century and likewise written in Salento.³⁸ It was probably copied in loose quires for use in school, and transmits a wide variety of different texts, including homiletic, theological, and grammatical texts, and, most importantly, a large number of poems. As in Laur. Plut. 5.10, here too we find renowned Byzantine authors and texts (Gregory of Nazianzus, Theodore the Stoudite, Ignatios the Deacon, Christopher of Mitylene, Michael Psellos, Theodore Prodromos, and the *Spaneas*) together with Salentine authors (Drosos of Aradeo, Nektarios of Casole, John Grassos, Nicholas of Otranto, and Demetrios).

Our final example is Grottaferrata, Biblioteca della Badia Greca, MS Z.α. XXIX, dating from the second half of the thirteenth century and dominated by school texts and the only full version of Christopher of Mitylene's collection of occasional poems, again written in Salento. At the end, the scribe has added some poems of Nektarios of Otranto, John Grassos, and Nicholas of Otranto.³⁹ In general, even in cases where one Salentine author is presented in more than one manuscript, the overlap between these is usually small, so that most poems survive in only one copy.

Although the manuscripts presented here are not the only witnesses of Salentine and Sicilian poetry, they are certainly the most important ones. Their history of transmission exhibits two main particularities: firstly, the bulk of the poems has survived in *codices unici*; secondly, most manuscripts, including those with Sicilian poetry, were written in Salento. Hence, the context of production of the Salentine manuscripts is vital to our understanding of southern Italian poetry. We need to keep in mind that our picture of Sicilian poetry is mediated through manuscripts copied in Salento, likely in a school context. Moreover, they demonstrate the strong ties that Greek Italian poets had with Byzantium and its literary heritage, as they copied their own poems alongside some of the most important Byzantine poets. Unlike their fellow Constantinopolitan authors, however, whose works traveled from Constantinople to southern Italy, the Sicilian and Salentine poems first and foremost circulated within the area of their composition, most probably never reaching late Byzantine Constantinople.

38 See Acconcia Longo and Jacob, "Une anthologie salentine,"; Arnesano, *La minuscola barocca*, 80–81.

39 See Daniele Arnesano, "Il 'copista del Dioscoride': Un anonimo salentino del secolo XIII," *Bollettino dei Classici* 24 (2003): 29–55, at 33–36; Marc de Groote, *Christophori Mitylenai versuum variorum collectio Cryptensis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), XXVII–XXIX; and Arnesano, *La minuscola barocca*, 97.

3 Activating Cultural Resources

The Greek-speaking communities in southern Italy were part of a complex and multifarious culture. With both Sicily and Salento being part of the Norman Kingdom and the Hohenstaufen Empire, their political adherence was undoubtedly western. But religiously, they were deeply connected with the Byzantine world, through their adherence to the Greek Orthodox rite. At the same time, the education they enjoyed was based on the centuries-old Byzantine school curriculum, making the ancient, late antique, and Byzantine texts the pivotal point of reference for their learning and their own literary production. In practice, however, boundaries were never as clear-cut as this would suggest. In fact, individuals such as Eugenios of Palermo and Nektarios of Casole acted as interpreters and diplomats; the Orthodox liturgy, although rooted in Byzantine practice, differed from the Constantinopolitan rite and also included elements of liturgies from Syria-Palestine, Egypt, and even the Roman rite translated into Greek;⁴⁰ and, as we shall see, some poets must have been familiar with Latin literature – even if not as familiar with it as they were with their own Byzantine educational traditions – and used elements of it in their own texts.

3.1 *Disentangling the Web between Classical Antiquity, the Medieval West, and Byzantium: Smaller Poetic Forms*

The Greek school curriculum developed a stable form during the Hellenistic and late antique eras, when a canon of literary texts to be studied in school was established and the textbooks in use for the next millennium were composed or compiled. In this way, Greek texts from the classical and Hellenistic eras became a cultural resource available to everyone with more than an elementary education and shaped the literary production of the Byzantine authors both directly and indirectly. The southern Italian Greek poets followed suit.

Several authors directly engaged with rhetorical exercises known from rhetorical training. Eugenios of Palermo composed a rebuke of the fly (poem 15), a rhetorical showpiece that offers a correction of Lucian of Samosata's paradoxical *Praise of a Fly*, which inspired similar compositions throughout the Byzantine period.⁴¹ Eugenios quite aptly describes the rhetorical character of

40 For a summary, see Safran, *The Medieval Salento*, 140–51, with references to earlier research (mainly conducted by André Jacob).

41 Eugenios of Palermo, poem 15, *Eugenii Panormitani versus iambici*, ed. Gigante, 99–101. On the text, see Przemysław Marciniak, "The Paradoxical Enkomion and the Byzantine Reception of Lucian's *Praise of the Fly*," *Medioevo greco* 19 (2019): 141–50, at 145–50, and Panagiotis Roilos, "Satirical Modulations in Twelfth-Century Greek literature," in *Satire in*

Lucian's work at the beginning of his poem, saying that the author aimed to prove the "dexterity of his words" (τὴν ἐν λόγοις δύναντα, line 2) by composing an encomium of an entirely unworthy creature. With his poem, Eugenios aims to set things right by composing a refutation of Lucian's encomium, reminiscent of the rhetorical exercise of *anaskeuē* (refutation), taught in rhetorical textbooks such as that of Aphthonios. Of course, the intention of this poem is not to correct Lucian's judgment – everybody would have understood the ironic character of his piece – but to enter into dialogue with a famous ancient author and to showcase his own erudition and literary mastery to his audience (the composition of which, however, we cannot identify). That Eugenios does so in verse might be seen as a choice intended to enhance this claim.⁴²

The Salentine John Grassos, whose work has been preserved in the same manuscript (Laur. Plut. 5.10), wrote another rhetorical exercise: a lament written from the perspective of the Trojan Queen Hecuba, given after the fall of Troy.⁴³ The poem largely depends on ancient tragedy in terms of both structure and wording,⁴⁴ with Euripides' *Hecuba* and *The Trojan Women* standing out as an inspiration.⁴⁵ The rubric of the poem informs us that it is a rhetorical exercise (μελέτη) and, more specifically, an example of a pathetic *ethopoia* (impersonation), a school exercise used to teach prose composition.⁴⁶ In fact, in the most important textbook of prose composition, Aphthonios's *Progymnasmata* (fourth or fifth century), we find as an example

the Middle Byzantine Period: The Golden Age of Laughter?, ed. Przemysław Marciniak and Ingela Nilsson (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 254–78, at 270.

42 Another example of such engagement with Greek literature would be Eugenios's Poem 10, a text of fifty-seven iambic verses, containing a description of Palermo and the water lily. While the description can be set in the context of the rhetorical exercise and figure of *ekphrasis*, later in the poem Eugenios draws heavily on Theophrastos's description of the lotus in his major work botanical book *Enquiry into Plants* (as noted in the apparatus by Gigante, *Eugenii Panormitani versus iambici*, 92).

43 Poem 9, *Poeti bizantini*, ed. Gigante, 108–11, with commentary at 131–36.

44 He is likely to be identified with a *notarios* mentioned in a list of the book loans of San Nicola di Casole, who borrowed Aristophanes' comedies from the library at the behest of the abbot, offering direct proof of his interest in ancient literature; see Henri Omont, "Le typicon de Saint Nicolas di Casole près d'Otrante," *Revue des Études Grecques* 3, no. 12 (1890): 381–91, at 390.

45 See the *apparatus fontium* to the edition.

46 On this poem as an *ethopoia*, see Daniele Arnesano, "Ermogene e la cerchia erudita: Manoscritti di contenuto retorico in Terra d'Otranto," in *La Tradizione Dei Testi Greci in Italia Meridionale*, ed. Bianchi, 95–111, at 105–6. On the influence of rhetorical training and school exercises on Salentine poetry, see Onofrio Vox, "Sulla retorica nella poesia otrantina di XIII secolo," in *Circolazione di testi e scambi culturali in Terra d'Otranto tra Tardoantico e Medioevo*, ed. Alessandro Capone, Francesco G. Giannachi, and Sever J. Voicu (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2015), 95–106.

of the pathetic *ethopoïia*: τίνας ἂν εἴποι λόγους Ἐκάβη κειμένης τῆς Τροίας (What Hecuba would have said on the fall of Troy) – the exact wording of the rubric to Grassos's poem.⁴⁷ On the textual level, too, we find direct references to Aphthonios's own sample *ethopoïia*, treating Niobe's loss of her children, for instance in the wordplay on ἄπαις (childless), εὖπαις (with good children), πολύπαις (with many children), and καλλίπαις (with beautiful children), or various (desperate) rhetorical questions.⁴⁸ At the same time, Grassos's Hecuba is a creative retelling of a story from the Trojan War, where the author combines the historical events about the city of Troy with the feelings of the protagonist as a mother. The poem was prompted by one of the most common school exercises but was turned into an independent literary work.

Even more complex in their relationship with Greek poetry and education are three long poems by Grassos, which form dialogues between a stranger and various mythological figures (Aphrodite, Leandros and Hero, Apollo), pondering on the forces of love (Eros). However, they are not love poems as we know them from western literature, including the famous contemporary *Scuola siciliana*, but deal with Eros and his power rather theoretically. They include references not only to ancient, but also to twelfth-century Byzantine literature in general, and in particular to the novel *Drosilla and Charikles* by Niketas Eugenianos.⁴⁹ This text not only influenced the verbal and rhetorical structure of the poems, but their very theme – the power of eros – is a focal point in Eugenianos (who, for his part, is deeply involved in a love discourse prevalent in twelfth-century Constantinople).⁵⁰ The first poem is called στίχοι πεπλασμένοι (fictional verses) in the rubric,⁵¹ which should be understood as

47 Aphthonios, *Progymnasmata* 11.2, *Corpus rhetoricum 1: Anonyme: Préambule à la rhétorique. Aphthonios: Progymnasmata. Pseudo-Hermogène: Progymnasmata*, ed. Michel Patillon (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 2008), 145.

48 See the sample *ethopoïia* by Aphthonios, "What Niobe would have said on her children's death," *Progymnasmata* 11.4, ll. 3–4, *Corpus rhetoricum 1*, ed. Patillon, 145–46, and John Grassos, Poem 9, l. 17, ed. Gigante, *Poeti bizantini*, 109.

49 Poems 10–12, *Poeti bizantini*, ed. Gigante, 111–17 with commentary at 136–42. For the allusions to the romances see Gigante's commentary; also the earlier work of Giovanni Mercati, "Deux poésies dialogiques sur les fables d'Héro et Léandre et d'Apollon et Daphné," *Byzantinoslavica* 9 (1947–1948): 3–8.

50 See Carolina Cupane, "Metamorphosen des Eros: Liebesdarstellung und Liebesdiskurs in der byzantinischen Literatur der Komnenenzeit," in *Der Roman im Byzanz der Komnenenzeit: Referate des internationalen Symposiums an der Freien Universität Berlin, 3.–6. April 1998*, ed. Panagiotis A. Agapitos and Diether R. Reinsch (Frankfurt am Main: Beerenverlag, 2000), 25–54, at 31–33 and *passim*.

51 It is interesting to note that some metrical *ethopoïiai* by Theodore Prodromos use a similar wording in their rubrics, ὑποθετικοὶ στίχοι (hypothetical verses); see Nikos Zagklas, *Theodoros Prodromos: Miscellaneous Poems: An Edition and Literary Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), poems 69 and 70–72.

an equivalent to the phrase τίνας ἂν εἶποι λόγους (“what ... would have said”), a common opening to the rhetorical exercise of *ethopoia*. In a way, these dialogues are indeed dramatized *ethopoiiai*, while the “stranger” as a dialogue partner is well known from tomb epigrams.⁵² Interestingly enough, the myth of Daphne and Apollo is used as an example by Aphthonios for the *progymnasmata* of *anaskeuē* (refutation) and *kataskeuē* (confirmation).⁵³ The incorporation of the topic of love into rhetorical exercises, which can themselves be seen as literary achievements, resembles the work of Nikephoros Basilakes (ca. 1115–after 1182), who in his *Progymnasmata* gives Eros a prominent position in his treatments of ancient mythology, for instance the story of Myrrha.⁵⁴ John Grassos, activating the cultural resources of the classics and the literary trends that emerged in Constantinople some decades before his lifetime, makes ample use of rhetorical exercises and devices to produce mythological dialogues without parallel in Byzantine poetry.

On other occasions, our authors did not only reach back to the cultural resources of ancient Greek literature, but also to Latin literature, which was unavailable to most writers in the Byzantine empire. One of the best examples in this respect is Eugenios of Palermo’s Poem 1, a long text extending to 207 iambic verses. According to the rubric, the poem was written while the author was in prison (exiled in Germany) and laments the unstable nature of fate.⁵⁵ The text has mainly been discussed for its imagery at the beginning of the poem (lines 16–41), which draws both from the Greek and Latin literary traditions. To describe the perils of fate, Eugenios refers to the ancient Greek *Moirai*, who spun the thread of fate, as well as to the wheel of fortune, which changes unpredictably the fate of individuals.⁵⁶ The latter is a direct reference not only to iconographic trends of the time, but also to the *De consolazione philosophiae* of Boethius (c.480–524), in which the personified Philosophy describes at length the unstable conditions of life as a wheel, where one could be up at one moment, but down at the next. *De Consolatione* was extremely popular in the Latin West and an archetype of the *prosimetrum* (which will

52 See Herbert Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, 2 vols. (Munich: Beck, 1978), 1106–7 and 146.

53 See Aphthonios, *Progymnasmata* 5 and 6, *Corpus rhetoricum* 1, ed. Patillon, 120–26.

54 See Stratis Papaioannou, “On the Stage of Eros: Two Rhetorical Exercises by Nikephoros Basilakes,” in *Theatron: Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter*, ed. Michael Grünbart (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 357–76.

55 *Eugenii Panormitani versus iambici*, ed. Gigante, 51–60.

56 Paul Speck, “Review of *Eugenii Panormitani Versus iambici; edidit, italice reddidit, commentario instruxit M. Gigante*. Palermo 1964,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 58 (1965): 80–97 at 85–86; Carolina Cupane, “Fortune rota volvitur: Moira e Tyche nel carme nr. 1 di Eugenio da Palermo,” *Nea Rhōmē* 8 (2011): 137–52.

concern us again later). Thus, we find in Poem 1 a combination of ancient Greek myth (and hence common cultural inheritance in Byzantine literature) with a reference to a Latin “bestseller,” which was, however, largely unknown in the Byzantine world until Eugenios’s time.

In other southern Italian poems (mainly from Salento), the influence of Greek or Latin literature is less clearly expressed. Roger of Otranto is the author of a dispute between the cities of Taranto and Otranto, in which the latter denigrates Taranto, who tries to defend herself with the use of various biblical examples.⁵⁷ While the personification of the cities can be understood as a mode of the rhetorical exercise *prosopopoia* (corresponding to the other form of personification, *ethopoia*, but concerned with inanimate subjects), its eristic character does not find parallels in Byzantine learned literature. The rhetorical genre of *synkrisis* (comparison) does not include personalized opponents, but is usually written from a third-person perspective.⁵⁸ The verses are called *στίχοι ... ἐριστικοί* (debate verses) in the rubric, a notion without parallel in Byzantine poetry collections. Dialogical poems have a certain tradition in Byzantium, albeit there are only few examples, stemming from various centuries.⁵⁹ Debate or combat poems in which two (or more) opponents fight over their superiority are rare.⁶⁰ By contrast, they have a long tradition in western literature and enjoyed a particular heyday at the court of Frederick II and his *Scuola siciliana* in the guise of love combats.⁶¹ Direct influence of other

57 Carlo O. Zuretti, ed. “Ἰταλοελληνικά II: Il contrasto fra Taranto e Otranto,” in *Centenario della nascita di Michele Amari: Scritti di filologia e storia araba, di geografia, storia, diritto della Sicilia medievale*, 2 vols. (Palermo: Stab. Tip. Virzi, 1910), 1:173–83; see also Silvio G. Mercati, “Note critiche al ‘Contrasto fra Taranto e Otranto’ di Ruggero d’Otranto,” *Rivista degli studi orientali* 9 (1921): 38–47, with important corrections.

58 On *synkrisis*, see, among others, Aphthonios, *Progymnasmata* 10, ed. Patillon, *Corpus rhetoricum* 1, 140–43 and Ps.-Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata* 8, ed. Patillon, *Corpus rhetoricum* 1, 198–99.

59 As an overview, see Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, 2:142–48.

60 The German term *Rangstreitdichtung* describes this group of texts well. Günter Prinzing, “Zur byzantinischen Rangstreitliteratur in Prosa und Dichtung,” *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* 45 (2003): 241–86, who is the only Byzantinist who has studied the matter seriously, names only two such examples, both vernacular poems from the fourteenth century: the *Poulologos* and the *Entertaining Tale of Quadrupeds*.

61 On combat poetry, see Hans Walther, *Das Streitgedicht in der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, with the assistance of Paul G. Schmidt (Hildesheim: Olms, 1984 [reprint from the edition 1920]) and Joerg O. Fichte et al., eds., *Das Streitgedicht im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel Verlag, 2019). The Italian *contrasto*, which was to become an important genre of popular poetry in Italy, has its roots in the *scuola Siciliana*; see Dorothee Heller, *Studien zum italienischen “Contrasto”: Ein Beitrag zur gattungsgeschichtlichen Entwicklung des Streitgedichtes* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1991). Interestingly enough, there are a number of early modern *contrastisti* that contain a dispute between two cities; see Heller, *Studien zum italienischen “Contrasto”*, 124–83. There is also a handful of combat poems between

linguistic traditions on Roger, however, cannot be proven. What is more, Roger of Otranto's poem does not include a full fight between both cities, but only Otranto attacking and Taranto defending itself. Furthermore, there is no judge to decide over the case at the end of the text, so that, overall, the poem cannot be classified as a debate poem (or *Rangstreitgedicht*) proper but remains a remarkable piece of versified polemic.

While the examples discussed so far especially demonstrate knowledge of the Byzantine school curriculum with all its connections to classical and late antique texts, as well as a certain explicit or implicit appropriation of Latin texts, we also find direct textual connections with (near) contemporary Constantinopolitan literature. In the twelfth century, we know of one poem written by a Byzantine poet who traveled all the way to Sicily. It is a short dedicatory epigram of six verses, written in honor of the Theotokos. The epigram was likely given as a gift to George of Antioch, to be inscribed on an icon. The author of the epigram is Theodore Prodromos, the chief poet in Constantinople in the second quarter of the twelfth century:

5 Ὁ μὲν σὸς υἱὸς καὶ Θεὸς, Λόγος, κόρη,
 λύθροις ἑαυτοῦ τὸ πρὶν ἡγόρασέ σε·
 σὺ δὲ πραθέντα ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις πάλιν
 ἐξαγόρασον ταῖς λιταῖς σου, παρθένε,
 Γεώργιον σὸν λάτριν Ἀντιοχέα
 τῆς εὐτυχοῦς προὔχοντα Σικελαρχίας.⁶²

Your son and God, the Word, maiden,
 ransomed you before with his own blood.
 But you, Virgin, redeem with your prayers
 the one who was in turn sold because of his sins,
 5 your servant George of Antioch,
 head of the prosperous state of Sicily.

The poem is transmitted in a single manuscript (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, ms Suppl. Gr. 125), which does not provide us with any hints about the original circumstances of its composition. Most probably, it was presented as a gift to George of Antioch sometime before 1147, when

two cities in Arabic and Persian literature, see Moritz Steinschneider, *Rangstreit-Literatur: Ein Beitrag zur vergleichenden Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte* (Wien: A. Hölder, 1908), 29, 44, 48, and 49.

62 Theodore Prodromos, poem 67, *Miscellaneous Poems*, ed. Zagklas, 244.

Corfu was seized by the Norman fleet.⁶³ In the epigram, the Virgin is asked to intercede with her son and set George free from his sins. What is interesting is that this short epigram resembles two anonymous dedicatory epigrams written for the Martorana church founded by George of Antioch, still extant as an inscription on a mosaic that includes a donor portrait.⁶⁴ Compare the dedicatory epigram inscribed next to the image of George bending his knees before the Mother of God:

Τὸν ἐκ βάρθρων δείμαντα τόνδε μοι δόμον
Γεώργιον πρῶτιστον ἀρχόντων ὄλων,
τέκνον, φυλάττοις πανγενεὶ πάσης βλάβης
νέμοις τε τὴν λύτρωσιν ἀμαρτημάτων
5 ἔχεις γὰρ ἰσχὺν ὡς Θεὸς μόνος, Λόγε.⁶⁵

Him, who has built me this house from the foundations,
George, the first and foremost of all archons, may you,
O Child, shield from every harm along with his entire family,
and may you grant him the remission of his sins,
5 for you alone, O Logos, as God, have the power.

This dedicatory epigram revolves around the same idea as the one by Prodromos, perfectly in line with the centuries-long tradition of epigrammatic writing. The Mother of God intercedes with her son to grant George and his family the remission of their sins. This is a good example of how two authors active around the same time in two different regions of the eastern Mediterranean wrote poetry which follows the same conventions (and even for the same addressee).

A number of Salentine epigrams are even directly modelled on poems by famous Byzantine authors, most importantly Christopher Mitylenaios and

63 Peter Rassow, "Zum byzantinisch-normannischen Krieg 1147–1149," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 62 (1954): 213–18; see also Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 137; Ewald Kislinger, "Giorgio di Antiochia e la politica marittima tra Normanni e Bisanzio," in *Giorgio di Antiochia. L'arte della politica in Sicilia nel XII secolo tra Bisanzio e l'Islam: Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Palermo, 19–20 Aprile 2007)*, ed. Mario Re and Cristina Rognoni (Palermo: Istituto siciliano di studi bizantini e neoellenici "Bruno Lavagnini", 2009), 47–63.

64 See Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme*, 1:390–92 (M5) and 3:492–94 (1T30).

65 Ivan Drpić, trans., *Epigram, Art, and Devotion in Later Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 82.

Theodore Prodromos.⁶⁶ Some epigrams on saints by Nicholas of Otranto rely entirely on the metrical calendar by Christopher Mitylenaios.⁶⁷ In fact, these tetrasticha can be seen as an amplification of the latter's distichs.⁶⁸ Compare, for instance, the epigrams on the Dormition of the Theotokos by Nicholas and Christopher:⁶⁹

Nicholas:

Μηδεὶς νοεῖσθω κοσμοσώτειραν κόρην
 ὑπηρετοῦσαν φυσικοῖς νόμοις βλέπων·
 τέθνηκε καὶ γὰρ σαρκικῶς Θεοῦ Λόγος
 ὁ κοσμοπλάστης, μὴ φυγεῖν μόρον θέλων.⁷⁰

Nobody, seeing her, should think that the world-saving maid
 is subject to physical laws.
 For even the Word of God died, in the flesh,
 the creator of the world, who did not want to flee fate.

Christophoros:

Οὐ θαῦμα θνήσκειν κοσμοσώτειραν κόρην
 τοῦ κοσμοπλάστου σαρκικῶς τεθνηκότος.⁷¹

It is no wonder that the world-saving maid died,
 when the creator of the world died in the flesh.

66 See, on selected examples, Cesaretti, "Da Marco d'Otranto a Demetrio," 199–208.

67 Enrica Follieri, *I calendari in metro innografico di Cristoforo Mitileneo*, 2 vols. (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1980), 1:235–36.

68 See poems 6, 9, and 11, *Poeti bizantini*, ed. Gigante, 149–51 (commentary with indication of the source texts at 158–61). On Nicholas' *amplificatio*, see Cesaretti, "Da Marco d'Otranto a Demetrio," 198–201.

69 Similar epigrams, but without indication of an author, can be found in Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS gr. 1276; see Acconcia Longo and Jacob, "Une anthologie salentine," which includes a detailed description of the manuscript as well as the edition of some epigrams (anonyma no. 2.2, 19.1, 19.5–19.7, 19.12–19.16, 19.18–19.42, 19.44–19.46, 19.48–19.61; Drosos of Aradeo no. 9.1–9.14, 11 [uncertain] and 14.1–14.3; George Bardanes [bishop of Kerkyra, uncertain] 19.17). The proximity of these anonymous epigrams to Nicholas' epigrams makes his authorship likely; see among others, numbers 19.20, 19.21, 19.23, 19.24, 19.26, 19.35, 19.38, 19.39, 19.40, 19.41, 19.42, 19.44, 19.45, 19.49, and 19.50, ed. Acconcia Longo and Jacob, "Une anthologie salentine," 200–207.

70 Nicholas of Otranto, poem 11, *Poeti bizantini*, ed. Gigante, 151.

71 Christophoros Mitylenaios, distich for August 15, *I calendari in metro innografico*, ed. Follieri, 2:412.

One of the manuscript witnesses of these epigrams, the codex Vat. gr. 1276, also contains parts of an epigram cycle by Theodore Prodromos, namely the Tetrasticha on the Old and New Testament (ff. 1–4 and 30–31).⁷² These were already enormously popular during the author's lifetime and are extant in about 140 manuscripts. In a rubric of the Vatican manuscript, one learns that the exemplar of the Tetrasticha for this manuscript was incomplete. To solve this problem, Nicholas of Otranto penned substitute verses: Οὔτοι δὲ ἔλιπον ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀντιγράφου, ἦτοι τοῦ λογιζέματος καὶ τῆς ἀποκαθηλώσεως, οὓς ἀνεπλήρωσε Νικόλαος Ὑδροῦντος (These [verses] were missing from the exemplar, namely those on the thrust of the lance [of Longinus] and on the descent from the Cross, which Nicholas of Otranto filled in).⁷³ In accordance with this note, two epigrams in Prodromos's style follow. There is no doubt that these epigrams are decidedly oriented towards Constantinople, where the composition of epigrams had flourished for centuries.

Although not as closely connected to other poems as these epigrams by Nicholas, a dialogical epitaph by his compatriot Theodotos of Gallipoli clearly took inspiration from the twelfth-century poet Nicholas Kallikles.⁷⁴ Not only did he imitate the dialogue form (of which earlier examples survive, especially from the *Palatine Anthology*), but he also repeats entire phrases.⁷⁵ In other poems, Theodotos's verses are also highly dependent on other Salentine poets in terms of wording and rhetorical style.⁷⁶ George of Gallipoli was a special point of reference for him. Compare the close verbal parallels in Theodotos's first epitaph, lines 41–42 (ὦφθη καταγώγιον εὖμουσον πάσης | τῆς ἐρμαϊκῆς πανσόφου <τεχνουργίας> [He was seen as a graceful lodging of every all-wise work

72 Grigorios Papagiannis, ed., *Theodoros Prodromos, jambische und hexametrische Tetrasticha auf die Haupteinzählungen des Alten und des Neuen Testaments* (Wiesbaden: Beerenverlag, 1997).

73 Acconcia Longo and Jacob, ed., "Une anthologie salentine," 193. These poems have been attributed to Nektarios of Otranto by Hoeck and Loenertz, *Nikolaos-Nektarios von Otranto*, 115, and Gigante, *Poeti bizantini*, 78–79, while Acconcia Longo and Jacob, "Une anthologie salentine," 172–78 argue for Nicholas of Otranto for reasons of content. The matter cannot be settled entirely, but it seems reasonable to ascribe all epigrams resembling a metrical calendar to one author: Nicholas of Otranto.

74 Theodotos, Epitaph 4, Acconcia Longo, ed., "Un nuovo codice," 165–68; Nicholas Kallikles, poem 9, *Nicolao Callicle: Carmi*, Roberto Romano, ed. (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1980), 83–85.

75 See in the same metrical *sedes*, "Μὴ πλανῶ, ξένε" (Kallikles, poem 9, v. 1, Don't be misled, stranger!) and "Μὴ πλανῶ, τάφε" (Theodotos, Epitaph 4, v. 31, Don't be misled, tomb!) as well as "εἰπεῖν ἔχεις" (Kallikles v. 8 and Theodotos v. 9, can you say?). On further similarities, see Acconcia Longo, "Un nuovo codice," 150–51; on dialogical epitaphs, see Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, 2:106–7 and 146, and Krystina Kubina, *Die enkomiaistische Dichtung des Manuel Philes: Form und Funktion des literarischen Lobes in der frühen Palaiologenzzeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 281–84.

76 See Acconcia Longo, "Un nuovo codice," 145–51.

of Hermes' art]) and George of Gallipoli's propemptikon (a poem expressing good wishes for a journey) for John Komnenos Batatzes, an official from Kerkyra (Corfu; Poem 1, lines 15 and 19: μαίευμα Μουσῶν, ἔρμoxίνητε λύρα | ... | ὠφθῆς καταγώνιον ἀρετῆς πάσης [A child of Muses, a lyre struck by Hermes, ..., you were seen as a lodging of every virtue]).⁷⁷ We find here two individuals working in the same city, Theodotos probably slightly younger than George, with close literary links.

Taking the diverse evidence from Sicily and Salento together, we find a complex and interwoven literary culture, where, in varying degrees, resources from classical antiquity, the Latin West, and Byzantium were activated. However, the Sicilian and Salentine poets do not always activate the same cultural resources, or when they do it is not manifested in the same way. In twelfth-century Sicily, the influence from the Latin tradition is expressed more explicitly than in Salento in the following two centuries. On the other hand, the importing of Constantinopolitan middle Byzantine poetry is documented to a much greater degree in Salento in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In Salento, there is a rather unusual degree of direct references to poets from the middle Byzantine period, suggesting that Byzantium, especially in terms of devotion and cult (as is the case with most epigrams), as well as education, was the most important point of reference for the southern Italian Greek culture of this time.

3.2 *Storytelling in Verse: Sicilian Innovations*

While in the case of smaller poetic forms disentangling the web of intertextual connections is a matter of close reading of single passages, the long narrative by Anonymous Malta offers a special case, where intertextuality and innovation are already visible on a structural level. As we have said, this mammoth supplicatory poem, addressed to George of Antioch, is one of the longest texts in dodecasyllables extant from the Byzantine period. However, more than sheer length, the compositional method stands out for its creativity and learned connections to literary tradition and trends. The bulk of the verses revolve around various independent stories, which are embedded in its framing narrative.

After the end of the prologue, the poet begins with a long excursus from Roman history which extends for approximately the next 160 verses (lines 50–197). Lines 50–175 recount how Julius Caesar rose to power thanks to his excellent military skills, and they even include the story that Rome appeared

77 Acconcia Longo, ed., "Un nuovo codice," 149 and 159, and *Poeti bizantini*, ed. Gigante, 165. On this and other connections between these two authors, see Acconcia Longo, "Un nuovo codice," 149–50.

in his dreams asking him not to attack the city.⁷⁸ The poet then seeks to explain the origin of the name “Caesar” by referring to the story of his alleged birth by caesarean section (lines 176–87). In the final part of the story (lines 188–97), he speaks about the bronze statue in the temple of Divus Iulius, to which the people in Rome fled when they needed asylum. The digression about Julius Caesar, which actually consists of three different stories without strong links to each other, is only one of the many stories in the poem. The author makes use of a large number of such lengthy stories relating to various celebrated historical, mythological, and biblical figures, ranging from Julius Caesar and Justinian to Phaethon and Tantalos and Abraham and Moses. Dozens and dozens of names and stories of varying length make their appearance throughout the narrative. However, there is a thread weaving all these stories together: the strong self-referential nature of the poem as expressed through the ubiquitous appearances of the first-person narrator.⁷⁹

A story is frequently a starting point for the author to complain about his current situation, put forward a request, and argue for his innocence and devotion to the Norman power. Take, for example, lines 1809–24, which recount the tale of Tantalos, who, when a guest at a banquet held by the Olympian gods, stole nectar and ambrosia in order to offer it to the people. As a result of his wicked act, the poet says, Tantalos was punished by being made to stand in a river in India, completely unable to drink or reap fruits and eat.⁸⁰ Using this story as a point of departure, the speaker goes on to assert that he never did such a bad thing. Even so, his punishment was even more severe than that of Tantalos. Unlike Tantalos, who was thrown into a river, he was exiled to a place in the middle of the boundless sea. Although he had been completely devoted to Roger II, following him in all the battles the latter waged, he was nevertheless mistreated by his emperor. He was first sent into exile in Djerba⁸¹ and then to a place on the open sea (probably Malta). The anonymous author even introduces some descriptive passages about his situation during his exile,

78 This story was borrowed from Lucan, as has rightly been observed by Lauxtermann, “Tomi, Mljet, Malta,” 162.

79 As has been noted by Lauxtermann, “Tomi, Mljet, Malta,” 162: “Every single argument, every desperate plea for mercy, every lament is bolstered by a series of exemplary tales, parallels of all sorts, mythological, biblical, historical, and even analogies from the natural world.”

80 The story of Tantalos is described slightly different in the poem. Typically, Tantalos was made to stand in a lake beneath a fruit tree with low branches. Every time that he tried to seize fruits, the branches raised the fruits away. Every time that he bent down to drink, the water moved back before he could drink.

81 The Greek texts reads “Σεπβίτζ,” which is a mistake, see Lauxtermann, “Tomi, Mljet, Malta,” 158, note 19.

all of which are intended to underscore the intensity of his sufferings (lines 1877–96). There he was insulted and humiliated beyond bearing by barbarian foreigners; he was not even allowed to speak or sing any hymn;⁸² he was locked up hungry, thirsty, and completely naked in a tower; he had to sleep on the floor of his prison cell, which was full of red fleas, wild lice, bed bugs, and cockroaches. In addition to the story of Tantalos, this part of the poem (lines 1809–2178) teems with various other mythological stories (involving Phaethon, Thereus and Prokne, Syrinx and Pan), all of which aim to emphasize the poet's guiltlessness and his full devotion to Roger II and George of Antioch.

The poem frequently includes themes which are popular in works written in Constantinople around the same time. Lines 2112–20 ponder the destructive power of envy (*phthonos*), a motif that permeates the narrative of many texts written in Constantinople around the same time.⁸³ By quoting John Chrysostom, the poet asserts that envy gives birth to murder.⁸⁴ To illustrate this maxim for his addressee he goes on to recount the entire story of the Thracian king Tereus, who caused the envy in his wife Procne when she learned that he had raped her own sister (lines 2126–72): a borrowing from the opening of book 5 of Achilles Tatius's novel *Leucippe and Clitophon* and thus another example of the complex intertextual interconnections of this text.

Furthermore, throughout the poem there is a strong interest in local history and mythological tales associated with Sicily. In lines 1188–328 the anonymous poet recounts the story of the region. He starts with a brief reference to the king Italos born in Sicily, but then the narrative switches abruptly to the mythological background of the region, referring to Scylla and Charybdis as well as the sirens and the cyclops.⁸⁵ The poet even mentions the story of Empedocles who threw himself into Mount Etna to prove his immortality.⁸⁶ He then refers to the provinces of Italy and says that Sicily is the sixteenth.⁸⁷ This emphasis on the history of the author's (and the addressee's) place of dwelling, taken together with the many motifs and stories which are commonplace

82 At another point, the anonymous poet claims that at the place of his exile there is even a shortage of wine and for this reason he is obliged to drink beer (lines 1782–85).

83 See Martin Hinterberger, *Phthonos: Mißgunst, Neid und Eifersucht in der byzantinischen Literatur* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2013).

84 John Chrysostom, Εἰς τὴν Γένεσιν, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, 166 vols. (Paris: 1859), 54:473, l. 20: “Ῥίζα γὰρ τοῦ φόνου φθόνος,” (for the root of murder is envy) as noted by Vassis and Polemis, “Ἐνας Ἑλληνας ἐξόριστος. The author slightly alters Chrysostom's wording: “Φυτοσπ[ό]ρος πέφυκεν ὁ φθόνος φόνου” (the father of murder is envy).

85 Anonymous Malta, “Ἐνας Ἑλληνας ἐξόριστος,” ed. Vassis and Polemis, 152–56, lines 1204–38.

86 Anonymous Malta, “Ἐνας Ἑλληνας ἐξόριστος,” ed. Vassis and Polemis, 156–58, lines 1239–65.

87 Anonymous Malta, “Ἐνας Ἑλληνας ἐξόριστος,” ed. Vassis and Polemis, 162–64, lines 1289–328. For the source of this story, see Lauxtermann, “Tomi, Mljet, Malta,” 163.

in Byzantine literature, mirror on the level of content what we have discerned on a structural level: the combination of ancient and medieval Greek literature and learning with references to specific Latin texts and more general trends in the medieval West.

The narrative structure of the poem and the use of so many embedded tales have been the subject of some scholarly discussion in recent years. Marc Lauxtermann has described most of these tales as *exempla* (παράδειγματα), arguing for a strong relationship between the Greek poem and the Latin literary tradition because of the popularity of *exempla* in medieval Latin texts.⁸⁸ According to the same scholar, the use of *exempla* along with the use of Latin sources (mainly Ovid and Boethius), the occasional use of Latin-like grammatical constructions, and the inclusion of entire verses in Latin sets the work of this anonymous poet apart from the works of contemporary Constantinopolitan peers and indicates his position at the intersections of the two traditions.⁸⁹ Carolina Cupane has followed Lauxtermann's suggestion about the relationship between the poem and the western Latin tradition of *exempla*, although she has also pointed out some differences from the Latin tradition. For example, unlike western texts, the poem makes little use of hagiographies.⁹⁰ At the same time, it should be emphasized that not all the references to stories of the past are so lengthy. Some of them are shorter digressions resembling techniques typical of poetry written in Constantinople.⁹¹ For example, the story of Rahab, who helped the Israelites to conquer Jericho by hiding two spies, is told in just three verses (lines 3226–29).⁹²

Other scholars have been harsh in their appraisals of the poem's narrative structure, maintaining that the text lacks a narrative coherence, since the ties between the various stories are not particularly strong and the transitions from one story to another are not always smooth.⁹³ When compared to works of Theodore Prodromos, it has been argued that it is void of any coherence.⁹⁴ However, one must underline that most of Prodromos's works are much shorter

88 Lauxtermann, "Tomi, Mljet, Malta," 163–67.

89 Lauxtermann, "Tomi, Mljet, Malta," 161–62.

90 Cupane, "Byzantine Poetry at the Norman Court of Sicily," 361–63.

91 However, the hagiographies that represent the lion's share of medieval *exempla* are lacking in the poem, as has been pointed out in Cupane, "Byzantine Poetry at the Norman Court of Sicily," 362.

92 The anonymous poet says that there were three, but this seems to be an inaccuracy; it has been argued that all these mistakes are due to the fact that the poet was depending on his memory; see Lauxtermann, "Tomi, Mljet, Malta," 169.

93 See Vassis and Polemis, "Ένας Έλληνας έξόριστος," 29.

94 See Vassis and Polemis, "Ένας Έλληνας έξόριστος," 29.

than the anonymous poem and very different in character. Furthermore, in a medieval text, coherence and narrative follow rules that are very different from what some modern readers would expect.⁹⁵ Another factor might be that the episodic structure is inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which are composed of various narrative units. Finally, the author stays in control of the narrative of his work by inserting various metapoetic statements. For example, in line 2636 he addresses himself saying: "Μᾶλλον μέμνησαι σοῦ προγεγραφήκото" (Rather, remember what I have written before), which is a reference to lines 693-1063, which include the story of the tabernacle and a comparison of Roger to the Holy of Holies and George of Antioch to the Holy Place.

Even so, the wealth of information and stories as well as the labyrinthine character of the narrative are likely to have posed various challenges both for the initial recipient of the poem (George of Antioch) and its later readers. To cope with this challenge and facilitate the reading, the scribe of Matrit. 4577 added, approximately one hundred years later, a large number of marginal notes (226 in total) to various sections of the poems.⁹⁶ These notes aim to inform the reader about the theme treated in a particular section of the poem. For example, in the second line of the section about Julius Caesar (line 51) the scribe notes: Καίσαρος ὄντως: περὶ [τοῦ Ἰουλίου] [Κ]αί[σαρος] (Caesar verily: about Julius Caesar). On the one hand, this would have offered the reader the possibility of deriving benefit from these stories without reading the entire text. On the other hand, even when reading the poem from beginning to end, these notes would help the reader to keep track of the narrative.

The pragmatic aim of Anonymous Malta was to persuade George of Antioch of the innocence of the author, but the author's literary and aesthetic ambitions are clearly visible from the elaboration and the richness of his text, presumably seeking to instruct and amuse the recipient of the poem. We must therefore infer that the poet and his addressee shared a vivid interest in storytelling and the use of poetry as its medium. Around the same time, textual production in Constantinople experienced the emergence of a close relationship between storytelling and verse form. Many authors started writing and telling various kinds of stories in a metrical form. This fashion was not limited to the Komnenian novels, most of which prove to be long narrative poems – though with a very different narrative structure and thematic focus

95 See, for example, the excellent discussion of Digenis Akrites in Markéta Kulhánková, "Narrative Coherence in Digenes Akrites (G)," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 45, no. 2 (2021): 184–98.

96 See Lauxtermann, "Tomi, Mljet, Malta," 169.

than the anonymous Sicilian poem.⁹⁷ Two other long narrative poems from mid-twelfth-century authors lend themselves as comparative texts.

The first of these is a chronicle by the well-known author Constantine Manasses (ca. 1115–1175),⁹⁸ a work addressed to Eirene the Sevastokratorissa, comprising a narrative history from the creation of the world through the year 1081, when the Komnenian dynasty acceded to the Byzantine throne. The second work is the so-called *Histories* by John Tzetzes (ca. 1110–1180), an extensive commentary (over 12,000 lines in political verse) written for his own letter collection. Both texts are structured around a large number of different stories. Unlike most of the Byzantine chronicles, in which the description of events is arranged year by year or according to reigns, Manasses's work is divided into self-contained episodes which aim to retain the interest of his addressee.⁹⁹ Tzetzes's work mainly consists of numerous episodes describing in detail a wide array of historical, mythological, and biblical events. However, it should be emphasized that the *Histories* were not meant to be a coherent self-contained text, although they are represented as such in their modern edition. All these tales were meant to be read in conjunction with the letters and to be used as explanatory accounts for the complicated references included in these texts.

The Sicilian poem shares some characteristics (mainly the accumulation of knowledge and the element of instruction) with these two contemporary Constantinopolitan narrative poems, but it also exhibits many major differences regarding method and structure. Unlike Manasses and Tzetzes, the anonymous poet narrates the majority of his stories through the use of *exempla*. We noted that the poet was well versed in Latin and was probably influenced by the Latin literary tradition and language in many respects. However, the background of the creation of this work might be even more complicated. A certain text from a third tradition (beyond the Latin and the Byzantine ones)

97 For the emergence of novels in metrical form across the Mediterranean, see in this thematic cluster Cameron Cross, "Poetic Alchemy: The Rise of Romance from a Persian Perspective," in *Why Write Poetry? Transcultural Perspectives from the Later Medieval Period*, ed. Krystina Kubina and Nikos Zagklas (*Medieval Encounters* 30/5–6) 2024, 586–637.

98 Odysseus Lampsidis, ed., *Constantini Manassis Breviarium chronicum*, 2 vols. (Athens, 1996).

99 These episodes, revolving around various events in a chronological sequence, are linked together with various techniques, ranging from careful openings and closings of episodes to authorial interventions and summaries of the events described; see Ingela Nilsson, "Discovering Literariness in the Past: Literature vs. History in the *Synopsis Chronike* of Konstantinos Manasses," in *L'écriture de la mémoire: La littérarité de l'historiographie*, ed. Paolo Odorico, Panagiotis A. Agapitos, and Martin Hinterberger (Paris: Centre d'études byzantines, neo-helléniques et sud-est européennes, EHESS, 2006): 15–31, at 19.

may have inspired the anonymous author in the way he structured the narrative of his text: that is, the Arabic work *Kalila wa-Dimna*, which was translated into Greek in Byzantium under the new title *Stephanites and Ichnelates*. This text became fully accessible to the Greek-speaking communities of Sicily much later, through the so-called Eugenian version,¹⁰⁰ but it was known in this region as well as in the Byzantine empire long before Eugenios's time. Firstly, the first Greek translation survives in fragments in a southern Italian manuscript of the early eleventh century: New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. M 397.¹⁰¹ And secondly, Symeon Seth, sometime towards the end of the eleventh century, produced a Greek adaptation of *Kalila wa-Dimna* in Constantinople. It is even possible that the original *Kalila wa-Dimna* was circulating in Sicily, since Arabic featured prominently in the multi-cultural environment of the court.

It is not certain that the author had direct knowledge of this work either in the Arabic original or via a Greek adaptation. What is certain is that the general narrative structure of this eastern work and the anonymous poem is very similar. Both works consist of an overarching narrative framework filled with numerous *exempla*. In *Kalila wa-Dimna/Stephanites and Ichnelates*, the narrative framework is a dialogue between the king of the Indians and a philosopher, mainly revolving around the concept of friendship. All the embedded stories assume the form of *exempla*, in which the protagonists are animals. In the Sicilian poem by Anonymous Malta, the narrative frame is the supplication addressed to George of Antioch to prove the author's innocence, while the *exempla* include myths, as well as historical and biblical tales. Even the manuscript transmission of the anonymous poem and *Stephanites and Ichnelates* in southern Italian circles in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries has some similarities. Like the manuscript transmitting the anonymous poem, the Eugenian version of *Stephanites and Ichnelates* includes many rubrics which guide the reader through the wealth of stories.¹⁰² This is an example of how

100 Noble, *The Eugenian Recension of Stephanites and Ichnelates*.

101 Elinor M. Husselman, *A Fragment of Kalilah and Dimnah: From MS. 397 in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (London: Christophers, 1938).

102 See the Greek text in the edition by Noble, *The Eugenian Recension of Stephanites and Ichnelates*. However, it should be noted that marginal rubrics were very popular in Byzantine vernacular narrative poems. Take, for example, the late Byzantine romance *Livistros and Rhodamne*, ed. Panagiotis A. Agapitos, *Ἀφήγησις Λιβίστρου καὶ Ροδάμνης: Κριτικὴ ἔκδοσις τῆς διασκευῆς «ἄλφα»* (*Aphēgēsis Libistrou kai Rhodamnēs: Kritikē ekdosē tēs diaskeuēs "alpha"*) (Athens: Morphōtiko Hidryma Ethnikēs Trapezēs, 2006). Even the twelfth-century novels *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* by Theodore Prodromos and *Drosilla and Charikles* by Niketas Eugenianos include such marginal titles in the manuscripts in which they are preserved.

two texts which include so many narrative layers and embedded stories in the form of *exempla* were copied and read in southern Italy.

Anonymous Malta was the first Greek-speaking author to make use of this type of narrative in southern Italy, approximately fifty years before the translation of Eugenios of Palermo. Presumably, this type of narrative would have satisfied George of Antioch, the addressee of the poem, who knew Arabic and was possibly familiar with *Kalila wa-Dimna*. As we will see, in the opening lines of the poems the author even calls for the attention of the addressee, since he frequently pays heed to the barbarians (presumably the Arabic-speaking Muslims) and their stories.

Be that as it may, the anonymous poem, with its double narrative structure (narrative framework and *exempla*), represents a new development in the history of Greek narrative in verse in the medieval period. Even though it is not the only narrative Greek poem in the twelfth century to be based on an agglomeration of various single episodes, it is very different from the projects undertaken by Constantine Manasses and John Tzetzes in Constantinople. It is a paramount example of a Sicilian innovation resulting from the activation of various cultural resources (Greek, Latin, and possibly Arabic).

4 Contexts of Production and Reception

While Anonymous Malta clearly took a personal situation as an occasion for the composition of his long poem, most other poems originated from within more institutional contexts. In Sicily and Salento these were, most importantly, the court and aristocratic families, churches and monasteries, and school. Even so, some important differences between Sicily and Salento can be identified, especially in the case of the addressees of our poems.

4.1 Patronage and Politics at and around the Court

Aristocratic patronage, both by the emperor and larger aristocratic circles, has been amply demonstrated to have been a driving force behind the production of Byzantine poetry, especially from the eleventh century onwards, when more and more authors tried to make their living, at least partially, from writing (and selling) rhetorical texts.¹⁰³ In addition, poets used their literary products to

¹⁰³ See, for example, Floris Bernard, *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry, 1025–1081* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 291–333; Ingela Nilsson, “Words, Water, and Power: Literary Fountains and Metaphors of Patronage in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Byzantium,” in *Fountains and Water Culture in Byzantium*, ed. Brooke Shilling and Paul Stephenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 265–80; Ingela Nilsson,

foster their social position and strengthen their relationship with the highest echelons of society. Patronage could thus take different forms: direct financial remuneration, lifting (or lowering) a poet's social position, or fulfilling (or denying) an author's pleas.

However unusual the text of Anonymous Malta might be, its direct social environment is very familiar from Byzantine supplicatory poetry. Unfortunately, the poem lacks its title and the opening lines in its single manuscript. What survives from the prologue are thirty-nine verses,¹⁰⁴ which constitute a typical *captatio benevolentiae* directed to the poem's addressee, George of Antioch. The following verses, however, demonstrate its profound embeddedness in the multilingual and multiethnic Sicilian society:

- 15 Τὰς ἀκοάς μοι σὰς ποληκόους δίδου
(δίδως γὰρ αὐτάς πολλάκις καὶ βαρβάροις
μὴ δυσχεραίνων μὴ δὲ δυσφόρως φέρων),
καί μοι σεαυτὸν εὐμένεστατον δίδου.¹⁰⁵

Grant me your much-listening ears
(for you give them often to the barbarians
without feeling annoyed or dissatisfied),
and incline yourself most favorably towards me.

The request to an addressee to heed the speaker's words is commonplace in supplicatory poems. Yet, to undergird his argument, the anonymous poet claims that George even lends an attentive ear to "barbarians," presumably Arabic-speaking Muslims, thus implying that as part of the Greek community the author was in a higher position and should thus all the more be heard.¹⁰⁶ As explained above, the primary aim of Anonymous Malta was to convince his addressee that he did not do any harm. Hence, he asks George to convince

Writer and Occasion in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Authorial Voice of Constantine Manasses (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), especially 58–85; Zagklas, *Theodoros Prodromos*, 31–70; Krystina Kubina, "Tuning the Pen: Poetry Writing and Patronage Networks Around the End of the Byzantine Empire," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 47, no. 1 (2023): 18–36.

104 The first letter of verse 40 in the manuscript is marked with a capital letter to indicate the transition to another section. Moreover, the first folio is lost. Since each folio has seventeen lines, it means that the prologue originally consisted of fifty-eight verses.

105 *Anonymous Malta*, "Ένας Έλληνας ἐξόριστος," ed. Vassis and Polemis, 38, lines 15–18; translated in Busuttill, Fiorini, and Vella, *Tristia ex Melitogaudio*, 3 (with modifications).

106 Giuseppe Mandalà and Marcello Moscone, "Tra latini, greci e 'arabici': ricerche su scrittura e cultura a Palermo fra XII e XIII secolo," *Segno e testo* 7 (2009): 143–238, at 180–94.

the emperor forgive him. The poet further asks the addressee to forgive him in advance for all the shortcomings of his composition. If some parts of his work make no sense and seem to be inappropriate, it is, the poet claims, because he has been overcome with grief. Despite the difficulty of his current situation, he wishes, with the help of the divine *Logos*, to be able to reach his final destination, comparing his endeavor to that of a ship that strives to reach a secure harbor while seeking protection from the perils of the sea – a common metaphor in Byzantine panegyric and supplicatory poetry.

It is difficult to reconstruct all the details of the original occasion and the exact circumstances of how the poem was performed. Was it read in the Norman court upon the return of the anonymous poet, or in Malta during a visit by George of Antioch? Due to its length, further questions arise such as whether it was read without interruption or with breaks, and whether the poet in fact experienced hardships in Malta as severe as described, or whether the situation recorded by the literary persona differed widely from the actual events.¹⁰⁷ In any case, the poem amply demonstrates how the desire to elicit help from George was the reason behind the composition of this innovative narrative poem, which contains many encomiastic sections dedicated to both George of Antioch and Roger II.

George of Antioch also seems to have fostered the increase in the production of verse in Sicily in the second quarter of the twelfth century, not only in the case of Anonymous Malta. In the beginning of the 1140s, he finished the building of the Martorana church in Palermo (now called Santa Maria dell' Ammiraglio), which manifests the apex of his socio-political position in the Norman capital.¹⁰⁸ On this occasion he commissioned an anonymous author to write metrical inscriptions and even epitaphs for him, his wife, and his mother.¹⁰⁹ As we have mentioned earlier, Theodore Prodromos penned an epigram for George, thus proving his popularity and activity as literary patron far beyond the borders of the Norman kingdom. On a broader level of literary patronage, George might even have been the person who commissioned the well-known manuscript Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS Vit. 26–2 [hereafter Madrid Vit. 26–2], copied in the scriptorium of the

107 Marc Lauxtermann has argued that the poet refers to factual events, see Lauxtermann, "Tomi, Mljet, Malta," 158–59. Even so, it cannot be excluded that the final version of the poem was drafted after his return to Palermo.

108 For the date of the building of this church, see, more recently, Augusta Acconcia Longo, "Considerazioni sulla chiesa di S. Maria dell'Ammiraglio e sulla Cappella Palatina di Palermo," *Nea Rhômē* 4 (2007): 267–93, at 274–75.

109 For the texts of the four metrical inscriptions, see Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme*, 3:479–94 (IT 27–30).

monastery of San Salvatore in Messina (not for Roger II, as has recently been argued),¹¹⁰ the famous illuminated copy of the historical account by the eleventh-century Byzantine author John Scylitzes.¹¹¹ The text of the *History* is accompanied by eleven poems added in various places across the manuscript.¹¹² Two of the poems seem to be of southern Italian provenance, probably by a Sicilian copyist,¹¹³ while the remaining nine poems are of Constantinopolitan origin, which is another example of how poetry from the capital was imported into southern Italy. Even though the textual remnants of Sicilian poetry are much fewer in number than those from Constantinople, we can discern that the general pattern of patronage by high-ranking officials is similar to that of Byzantium.

In contrast, we know of only one Greek poem which was directly addressed to a Norman king: a panegyric by Eugenios of Palermo to King William (most likely William II, 1153–1189, r. 1166–1189). As suggested by Carolina Cupane, the poem might have been performed during William's second enthronement, held on the day of his second marriage in 1177. This is further supported by poem 21, a text of essayistic nature about the political system of kingship, written for a newly crowned king.¹¹⁴ One could argue that poem 22 was given as gift together with poem 24 to William, to impart political knowledge to the king. In general, poem 24 follows the rules of the imperial oration: King William was chosen by God (lines 3–7), he is of imperial birth (lines 29–35), he performed deeds of war (vv. 36–55) and deeds of peace (lines 56–80).¹¹⁵ Eugenios even makes use of imagery from Constantinopolitan imperial panegyrics that

110 Santo Lucà, "I Normanni e la 'rinascita' del sec. 12," *Archivio Storico per la Calabria e la Lucania* 60 (1993): 1–91, at 36–57; Santo Lucà, "Dalle collezioni manoscritte di Spagna: Libri originari o provenienti dall'Italia greca medievale," *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neellenici* 44 (2007): 39–96, at 79–81.

111 For the manuscript, see Vassiliki Tsamakda, *The Illustrated Chronicle of Ioannes Skylitzes in Madrid* (Leiden: Alexandros Press, 2002) and Elena N. Boeck, *Imagining the Past: The Perception of History in the Illustrated Manuscripts of Skylitzes and Manasses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

112 See Ihor Ševčenko, "Poems on the Deaths of Leo VI and Constantine VII in the Madrid Manuscript of Scylitzes," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23/24 (1969): 185–228.

113 This has been argued for poems 10 and 11 on fol. 159r and 182v of the manuscript Madrid Vit. 26–2; see Marc D. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres: Texts and Contexts*, 2 vols. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2003–2019), 1:312–14; for the texts of the poems, see Ševčenko, "Poems on the Deaths," 190–91.

114 See poem 21, lines 27–28. The poem is edited in Gigante, *Eugenii Panormitani versus iam-bici*, 113–17.

115 Interestingly enough, lines 76–78 even refer to the building activity of the king. His palace would even cause the envy of the Cretan king Minos. It is also interesting that the

were especially popular during the reign of William's slightly older contemporary, Manuel I Komnenos (1118–1180, r. 1143–1180), fostered, among others, by Theodore Prodromos. For example, the king shines even more brightly than the sun (lines 8–9), or he is compared to a lion, whose sharp claws and roaring make all his enemies tremble with fear (lines 41–42). However, images such as the ruler as a master over time or the victor over fate might also link the text to Arabic encomiastic poems.¹¹⁶

The strong connection to the highest court circles in the case of Anonymous Malta and Eugenios do not come as a surprise when looking at their position. In many places in his work the anonymous poet claims that he was in the service of George of Antioch,¹¹⁷ while Eugenios of Palermo was an official holding the titles of magister and director of the *duana baronum* and ἀμυρᾶς (admiral). However, there must have been a larger Greek-speaking local elite with an interest in poetry.¹¹⁸ Again, epigrammatic poetry provides us with some apt evidence. Take Messina, Biblioteca Regionale Universitaria 'Giacomo Longo', s.s. San Salvatore, MS 20 [hereafter Mess. S. Salv. 20], a twelfth-century manuscript transmitting John Chrysostom's homilies on the four gospels, which on fol. 222v includes a short poem of seventeen lines that offers more details about the circumstances of the production of the book and its content.¹¹⁹ The poem is a book epigram, a very popular type of metrical text in Byzantium.¹²⁰ According to the text, the book was commissioned by a *logothetes* called Leo and his wife Anna.¹²¹ Leo also had the title of *protoproedros*, a middle-ranking court title created during the time of the emperor Alexios I (1048–1118, r. 1081–1118). He was also listed next to Norman rulers in the will of Gregory (1105), the

building of palaces was a main point of praise of the Normans by some contemporary Arabic-speaking poets; see Mallette, *The Kingdom of Sicily*, 17–46 and 140–43.

116 For a general discussion of the poem, see Carolina Cupane, "Eugenios von Palermo: Rhetorik und Realität am normannischen Königshof im 12. Jahrhundert," in *Dulce Melos 11: Lateinische und griechische Dichtung in Spätantike, Mittelalter und Neuzeit. Akten des fünften internationalen Symposiums* (Wien, 25.–27. November 2010), ed. Victoria Zimmerl-Panagl (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2013), 247–70, at 255–70; on possible interrelations with Arabic panegyrics, see Cupane, "Byzantine Poetry at the Norman Court," 369–70. The topic deserves further research.

117 Lauxtermann, "Tomi, Mljet, Malta," 158.

118 This has been argued quite often for the production of Greek literature in this region; see, for example, the recent paper by Eleni Tounta, "The Italo-Greek Courtiers and their Saint: Constructing the Italo-Greek Elite's Collective Identity in the Twelfth-Century Norman Kingdom of Sicily," *Mediterranean Studies* 28, no. 1 (2020): 88–129.

119 For the text of the poem, see Mancini, *Codices Graeci monasterii Messanensis*, 31.

120 See, for example, Floris Bernard and Kristoffel Demoen, "Byzantine Book Epigrams," in *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry*, ed. Hörandner, Rhoby, and Zagklas, 404–29.

121 Mancini, *Codices Graeci monasterii Messanensis*, 31, lines 6–7.

abbot of the monastery St. Philip of Fragalà, which might have been the original place of the manuscript's production.¹²²

In the thirteenth century, the court of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II became a focal point of poetic production, first and foremost in the Italian vernacular.¹²³ The famous *Scuola siciliana*, a group of poets inspired by the Occitan troubadours, wrote poems about courtly love in Italian and were to become some of the main models of later Italian poetry and literary language.¹²⁴ Additionally, we possess numerous Latin poems from Frederick's lifetime and connected to his court, as well as Greek poems which are connected to the Hohenstaufen regime in their polemical and political tone (and entirely different from the Italian poetry).¹²⁵ The Salentine poets leave no doubt about their support of the crown and, maybe because of the (more ideological than merely geographical) distance from the Byzantine empire, their texts show a special degree of literary freedom and experimentation. Yet patterns of patronage and literary readership changed dramatically.

Deeply entangled with the politics of its day is a poem by John Grassos, who served as an imperial notary at the Hohenstaufen court and fully supported the emperor and the Ghibelline party. As a court official, he was responsible for the translation of Frederick II's letters to Epiros and Nikaia into Greek, and hence would have been intimately familiar with the court and its political affairs.¹²⁶ From a letter of George Bardanes (d. c.1240), metropolitan of Kerkyra, dated to early 1230, we know that John wrote encomiastic texts, possibly poems, in favor of Frederick II, for which the letter writer praises him with regard to his accurate language and script.¹²⁷ While no (verse) panegyrics by John survive,

122 Vera von Falkenhausen, "I funzionari greci nel regno normanno," in *Giorgio di Antiochia*, ed. Re and Rognoni, 165–202, at 172–73.

123 On Frederick as a patron of the arts and literature, see David Abulafia, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 251–89. On Latin literature in Norman Apulia, see Edoardo d'Angelo, "La produzione letteraria latina nella Puglia normanno-sveva," in *Oltre l'alto Medioevo*: 339–64, on poetry at 351–61. Arabic poetry, on the other hand, ceased to be produced, although Arabic continued to be important in the context of translations, which Frederick used in order to gain access to Muslim learning (see Mallette, *The Kingdom of Sicily*, 54–61).

124 See Roberto Antonelli, Costanzo di Girolamo, and Rosario Coluccia, eds., *I poeti della Scuola Siciliana*, 3 vols. (Milano: A. Mandadori, 2008).

125 On the contrasting character of the Italian and Greek poetry, see Antonio Lanza, "Il carattere etico-politico della poesia italobizantina della Magna Curia," *Rassegna della letteratura italiana* 93 (1989): 59–77.

126 See Hoeck and Loenertz, *Nikolaos-Nektarios von Otranto*, 126–27.

127 See Bardanes, Letter 7, ll. 14–17, *Nikolaos-Nektarios von Otranto*, ed. Hoeck and Loenertz, 185–86. "Sed tu, o Musarum proles et sapientiae alumne, illustraris felicitatibus tui imperatoris et calamum in ipsis intingis, acute scribens omnia et lingua et manu." (But you, oh

we possess one metrical pamphlet, written during the siege of the city of Parma under Frederick II in 1247/48, when the emperor fought against the papal party (and ultimately experienced a bitter defeat). The rubric explains the events in detail and mentions that John composed the verses “on the spot” (αὐθωρί), documenting that John was an eyewitness. In the text, Parma itself is addressed and dispraised for her infidelity.¹²⁸ In an etymological wordplay, John explains that the city was built out of mud on a swamp (πάλμα), but was later called Parma (Πάρμα).¹²⁹ Yet, he argues, in reprisal for the city’s renunciation of the emperor in favor of the pope, Frederick will once again turn her into mud. Noteworthy for its content in itself, the reception of this poem tells us even more about the circulation of Greek political poetry in southern Italy. John’s pupil George, *chartophylax* of Gallipoli and as such responsible for the archive of the church, wrote a poem on the same occasion intimately related to John’s poem in thought and wording.¹³⁰ George too plays with etymology (slightly less skillfully than John), stating that instead of the palm of the hand (παλάμη), Parma should now be translated as the sole of the foot (πέλμα), and would soon be trampled down by the imperial troops, as it was experiencing unbearable throbbing (παλμός) and pain of the heart.

While the importance of the siege of Parma for Frederick’s war against the papacy explains why John and, following him, George commemorated the event, the audience of their poems is not completely clear. It has been suggested that John found his audience amongst the Greek troops present at Parma in Frederick’s service.¹³¹ Leaving aside the question of the historicity

offspring of the Muses and nursling of wisdom, are elucidated by the successes of your emperor and you dip your pen in them, writing with sharp tongue and hand). As with most of Bardanes’ letters, the Greek original was lost, while a Latin translation survives, see Hoeck and Loenertz, *Nikolaos-Nektarios von Otranto*, 148.

128 Poem 13, *Poeti bizantini*, ed. Gigante, 117–18, with commentary on pp. 142–44. On this poem, see Wellas, *Griechisches aus dem Umkreis Kaiser Friedrichs II.*, 80–82.

129 Lanza, “Il carattere etico-politico,” 69–70, argues that the numerous alliterations and assonances here and in other poems by John are influenced by the style of the *magna curia*, above all Piero delle Vigne. Yet the argument is inconclusive, as similar literary features, including etymological word plays, are part of the standard repertoire of Byzantine rhetorical writing.

130 Poem 14, *Poeti bizantini*, ed. Gigante, 180, with commentary on pp. 209–10. On this poem, see Wellas, *Griechisches aus dem Umkreis Kaiser Friedrichs II.*, 82–85.

131 Wellas, *Griechisches aus dem Umkreis Kaiser Friedrichs II.*, 87–89. We possess Greek letters written on behalf of Frederick II which may have been composed in an Otrantine milieu, further pointing to the importance of this region in relation to the imperial court, but also to the dependence of Greek life on the local community in Salento; see Andreas Kiesewetter, “Grecia,” in *Enciclopedia Treccani: Federiciana* (Treccani, 2005), accessed on 29 May 2024, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/grecia_%28Federiciana%29/.

of this account, it is unlikely (and would be highly unusual) for John to have penned his rhetorical, high-register verses for soldiers, whose classical education (if existent) would not have been very advanced. More telling is the information from the poem's rubric stating that he sent it to his son, Nicholas of Casole (πρὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκείθεν τούτους ἀπέστειλεν). Seen in this light, it seems that, while triggered by the political situation, the poem was primarily written for the Salentine literati and not for Frederick's court. Presumably circulated in Salento by Nicholas of Casole, the poem inspired a poetic response from George, who, as a *chartophylax* of Otranto, was part of the local elite. Thus, despite the obvious ideological connection to the Hohenstaufen regime, there is no evidence that the text would have circulated outside the Greek Salentine community.

Another poem by George of Gallipoli is for the most part a *prosopopoeia* (personification) of the city of Rome, who laments her current state, praises Frederick abundantly, and expresses her highest hopes of regaining her ancient splendor when he arrives and introduces a new pope.¹³² The text is a Ghibelline propaganda piece, wholeheartedly supporting Frederick in his war against the papacy after Pope Gregory IX had excommunicated him when his attempt to start a new crusade had failed. Literarily, however, the inspiration for this poem may have come from a poem by Theodore Prodromos, in which the personified city of Constantinople speaks and welcomes the emperor back on the occasion of a triumphal entry into the city.¹³³ Despite some attempts by other scholars, it is not possible to draw direct connections to the literary tradition of the Hohenstaufen court.¹³⁴ For instance, the expression “τὸ θαῦμα τῆς οἰκουμένης” (marvel of the inhabited world, line 21), cited as a proof of western influence, appears in several Greek poems, among them texts by Theodore Prodromos and Eugenios of Palermo, and does not echo similar motifs in the

132 Poem 13, *Poeti bizantini*, ed. Gigante, 175–79, with commentary on pp. 204–9; see also Marcello Gigante, *Roma a Federico Imperatore Secondo Giorgio di Gallipoli* (Rome: De Luca, 1995), an updated version of his comments in his book. On this poem, see Wellas, *Griechisches aus dem Umkreis Kaiser Friedrichs II.*, 89–130.

133 Theodoros Prodromos, *Historische Gedichte* 5, *Theodoros Prodromos: Historische Gedichte*, ed. Wolfram Hörandner (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1974), 214–17. The reference to Prodromos is given by Gigante, *Poeti bizantini*, 204.

134 Henry of Avranches (d. after 1259) wrote a verse dispute in 1215, in which the personified Rome argues with pope Innocent III about the legitimacy of Otto IV or Frederick II as emperor; see Konrad Bund, “Studien zu Magister Heinrich von Avranches: II. Gedichte im diplomatischen Umfeld Kaiser Ottos IV. 1212–1215,” *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 56 (2000): 525–45, at 537–43. However, it is unlikely that George knew of this poem, as further parallels (apart from the personification of Rome) are missing.

Latin tradition (in particular Frederick as the *stupor mundi*).¹³⁵ The description of the emperor and the ideal of a new pope, too, is rooted in Greek traditions of imperial and ecclesiastical virtues.¹³⁶ In sum, George wrote a perfect political pamphlet in favor of the Hohenstaufen court, which was, however, entirely couched in Greek (Constantinopolitan and Sicilian) literary expression.¹³⁷

Yet the concluding lines of the poem offer further insights into its intended reception. George, calling himself a humble servant and *chartophylax*, offers the text to Frederick as a tribute (φóρος) (lines 101–3), suggesting that the author tried to use the piece to get closer to the emperor. This is confirmed by a short epigram following the text and directed to John Grassos, in which George asks the latter to use his verses to gain Frederick's goodwill.¹³⁸ However, there is no evidence that George substantially advanced his career, as the only office that is mentioned in the text and rubrics of his poems remains *chartophylax*. His poem is the only one from Salento directed to the emperor to gain patronage – a marked difference to the poetry from the Byzantine Empire, where this was among the most important aims of poets. Moreover, this endeavor seems to have borne little fruit.

George's political standing is further elucidated by two poems dealing with the doors of the episcopal palace and the church respectively. The first one was written on the occasion of the (re-)building of the palace.¹³⁹ The personified door (πύλη) reports that no bars or bolts were necessary for the church's protection; instead, the artist had put an eagle on the top and two lions on each side

135 See Prodromos, *Historische Gedichte* 17.3, Theodoros Prodromos, ed. Hörandner, 287; Eugenios, Poem 24.63, *Eugenii Panormitani versus iambici*, ed. Gigante, 130. Scholars who have argued for a direct influence include Gigante, *Roma a Federico Imperatore*, 31 and Wellas, *Griechisches aus dem Umkreis Kaiser Friedrichs II.*, 110–11.

136 In particular, there is no reason to believe that the description of the new pope (lines 85–96) mirrors the idea of an eschatological *papa angelicus*, which became popular in the thirteenth-century Latin tradition, as suggested by Wellas, *Griechisches aus dem Umkreis Kaiser Friedrichs II.*, 113–30.

137 Similarly, George wrote a farewell poem (a *propemptikon*) to John Komnenos Batatzes, probably a dux of Kerkyra, in which he not only praises his addressee, but also shows his political loyalty to the Hohenstaufen court, when he describes the emperor, ruler over the whole *oikoumene* (cf. lines 22–23). Yet, instead of applying this to the Byzantine emperor, who was traditionally described in this way, George refers to Frederick II. Poem 1, *Poeti bizantini*, ed. Gigante, 165–66, with commentary on pp. 191–93. The addressee's identity is not entirely clear, but Augusta Acconcia Longo, "Per la storia di Corfù nel XIII secolo: II. Giovanni Comneno Vatatzes: Nota prosopografica," *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 22–23 (1985–1986): 230–43, at 236–41 argues convincingly that John was an official from Kerkyra.

138 Poem 13a, *Poeti bizantini*, ed. Gigante, 180, with commentary at 209.

139 Ed. Gigante, *Poeti bizantini*, 173, with commentary at 202–3.

of the door, representing the imperial protection of Frederick II (thus offering the *terminus ante quem* of the poem, namely Frederick's death in 1250). It ends with the statement that bishop Pantoleon had erected this gate.¹⁴⁰ George wrote a second poem considerably later, when the political winds had changed. The occasion was the plundering of the church by some unnamed priests, who had broken in through the doors (πύλαι), by the order of their bishop.¹⁴¹ The unspecified speaker expresses bitter hatred for the invaders and their leader, whom he calls Ahab (line 3), an Israelite king, who is presented in the Bible as a wicked worshipper of Baal who, supporting his wife, suppressed the Jews and destroyed their temples (see 1 Kings 16:29–34). As demonstrated by Acconcia Longo, George here refers to Charles I of Anjou's siege and plundering of Gallipoli in 1268–69.¹⁴² In his contempt for Charles, George proves his lasting Ghibelline attitude, strongly condemning the new Angevin dynasty. But the texts are also noteworthy from a non-political perspective, as a poem by Nicholas of Otranto should be placed in largely the same historical context. It is written from the perspective of a mansion (παλάτιον) and bemoans the threats posed to it by jealous Otrantines, presumably followers of Charles of Anjou.¹⁴³ The similarities between these poems (speaking buildings, external threats, etc.) are too obvious to be a mere coincidence. It is reasonable to suggest that these poems were written in a literary exchange between George and Nicholas, with Nicholas referring back to George's poem written some two decades earlier, and both responding to each other's works in dramatically changed political circumstances.

The political poems from Salento are extraordinary in their multiformity. Ideologically in strong support of the Hohenstaufen regime, but literarily couched in the Byzantine tradition, these texts exhibit an enormous degree of literary freedom and (idiosyncratic) creativity. However, although they were partially written in proximity to Frederick, unlike the poetry of the *Scuola siciliana*, his court was not the nucleus of their literary activities. John Grassos is the only poet who was evidently close to Frederick, in his position as a secretary,

140 George wrote two further poems for Pantoleon, poem 5, ed. Gigante, *Poeti bizantini*, 168 and (likely) an inscribed epigram preserved on a stone slab, *Byzantinische Epigramme*, 3:417–20 (IT4).

141 Ed. Gigante, *Poeti bizantini*, 174, with commentary at 203–4.

142 See Augusta Acconcia Longo, "L'assedio e la distruzione di Gallipoli (1268–69)," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 146, no. 1 (1988): 3–22, at 13–15, and Acconcia Longo, "Poesia greca nel Salento medievale," 256–58.

143 Ed. Gigante, *Poeti bizantini*, 84 as poem 24 by Nektarios of Otranto, but see Acconcia Longo, "Poesia greca nel Salento medievale," 250 on the attribution and the historical context of the threats by the Angevins.

while the other poems were without doubt penned in Salento. The question who the audience for these political poems was remains partially unanswered. George of Gallipoli's poem on Rome is the only one directly addressed to a non-Greek member of the court, namely to Frederick himself, but even so it is mediated through John Grassos, who is asked to deliver it to the emperor. Since the evidence as to whether Frederick knew Greek is inconclusive, it seems unlikely that he would have understood a difficult high-register Greek poem.¹⁴⁴ Even Grassos's Parma poem is not addressed to the court but was sent to his son in Salento. In the case of the two Parma poems, as well as that of the three poems written from the perspective of a building, it is obvious that the poets wrote their verses in dialogue with each other.

Overall, it seems that these poems were written for the Greek-speaking community in Salento: an Orthodox group with a strong cultural background in Byzantine literature, but indisputably Hohenstaufen subjects. When compared to twelfth-century Sicily, one important difference can be spotted: while Sicilian poetry, with all its peculiarities, resembles contemporary Constantinopolitan poetry in terms of patronage mechanisms – including the relationship with the court of bureaucrats –, patronage played a minor role in poetry writing in Salento. Political events, and not persons belonging to the court and its circle, triggered the composition of poetry, which would then circulate within the learned community of the area.

4.2 *Education and Verse Writing*

Schools were another hotspot of both composition and consumption of poetry throughout the Byzantine era, including the continual preoccupation with ancient poetry and the composition of new poems for classroom use. As in Constantinople, rhetorical theory and training were essential to verse writing in southern Italy, and traces of it can be found in the corpus of every author. Just think of Anonymous Malta and the wealth of mythological and historical stories he tells, inconceivable without a solid education.

In the Salentine poetic corpus, however, education plays a much more vital role, and its importance can be traced back to the very “founder” of the Salentine poetic community, Nektarios of Casole. His pupil Palaganos, for instance, penned a metrical rewriting of the first half of a letter by Aristainetos (c. fifth to sixth c.), likely produced in an educational setting, and added it in the margins of the prose letter in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS

144 On Frederick's knowledge of Greek, see Wellas, *Griechisches aus dem Umkreis Kaiser Friedrichs II.*, 144–45.

phil. gr. 310.¹⁴⁵ The mythological dialogues and the *ethopoia* by John Grassos that we discussed above might likewise have a school context, but there is insufficient evidence to prove this hypothesis. Most important, however, are the numerous southern Italian manuscripts including *schede*, composed by both Constantinopolitan and Salentine authors.¹⁴⁶

Schedography emerged in eleventh-century Constantinople and then took off as a school, and even literary, practice in the twelfth century.¹⁴⁷ *Schede* often consisted of two parts – one in prose and one in verse – and were designed to teach orthography and grammar. Salentine schoolmasters wrote *schede*

145 Letter 1.22 by Aristainetos. On this epigram, see Jacob, “Une épigramme de Palaganus d'Otrante,” 186–89. There is another versification made for didactic purposes which probably originated from Salento. It is a metrical adaptation of the eleventh-century theologian Nicholas of Andida on the eucharist, probably designed as a learning aid for future priests (edited under the Ps.-Pselliana by Leendert G. Westerink, *Michaelis Pselli poemata* [Stuttgart: Teubner, 1992], 399–406). On the attribution to thirteenth-century Salento, and possibly to Nektarios of Casole, see André Jacob, “Un opusculé didactique otrantais sur la liturgie eucharistique: L'adaptation en vers, faussement attribuée à Psellos, de la Protheoria de Nicolas d'Andida,” *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 14–16 (1977–1979): 161–78, at 174–78.

146 Most of them date from the second half of the thirteenth to the beginning of the fourteenth century: cf. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Barb. gr. 102; Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Palat. gr. 92 (alternatively, an Epirote provenance has been proposed; see Ioannis. D. Polemis, “Μία υπόθεση για την προέλευση της σχεδoγραφικής συλλογής του κώδικα Vaticanus Palatinus graecus 92,” in *Αντιφιλισις: Studies on Classical, Byzantine and Modern Greek Literature and Culture: In Honour of John-Theophanes A. Papademetriou*, ed. Eleni Karamalengou and Eugenia D. Makrygianni [Stuttgart: Steiner 2009], 558–65; on the collection, see Ioannis Vassis, “Τῶν νέων φιλολόγων παλαισµατα: Ἡ συλλογή σχεδῶν τοῦ κώδικα Vaticanus Palatinus gr. 92,” *Hellenika* 52 [2002]: 37–68. Epirus, however, was closely connected to Salento, as is demonstrated, for example, by George Bardanes and his correspondence with the Salentine poets); Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Conv. Soppr. 2; Modena, Biblioteca universitaria, MS Frammenti B.12; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS gr. 2556; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS gr. 2572; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS gr. 2574; Rome, Biblioteca Vallicelliana, MS gr. 257. On these manuscripts, see Arnesano, *La minuscola barocca*, 78–122.

147 Schedography has aroused wide interest in recent years. Cf. among many others, Panagiotis A. Agapitos, “Anna Komnene and the Politics of Schedographic Training and Colloquial Discourse,” *Nea Rhōmē* 10 (2013): 89–107; Panagiotis A. Agapitos, “Literary Haute Cuisine and Its Dangers: Eustathios of Thessalonike on Schedography and Everyday Language,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 69 (2015): 1–17; Panagiotis A. Agapitos, “New Genres in the Twelfth Century: The Schedourgia of Theodore Prodromos,” *Medioevo Greco* 15 (2015): 1–41; Panagiotis A. Agapitos, “John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners: A Byzantine Teacher on Schedography, Everyday Language and Writerly Disposition,” *Medioevo Greco* 17 (2017): 1–57; Antonella Conte, “Il difficile ruolo del maistor: Le testimonianze in versi del codice Vaticanus Palatinus gr. 92,” *Commentaria Classica* 6 (2019): 107–29.

themselves, among them the twelfth- or thirteenth-century teacher Nicholas of Soletto and his colleague Stephanos of Nardò, who must be dated to between the second half of the twelfth and the fourteenth century.¹⁴⁸ Stephanos of Nardò, for example, wrote a *schedos* in the form of a hagiographical account of the martyrdom of Blaise of Sebaste. The text opens with the teacher asking his student to pay heed to his tale, before the former starts narrating the story of the martyr and how he was persecuted and beheaded. The *schedos* concludes with verses addressing the twelve apostles, asking them to accept Blaise as a new apostle.

Schedography also connects teachers from the early thirteenth century to their colleagues one hundred years later. In fact, the codex Vat. gr. 1276 (cited above) was produced in Aradeo in the context of the school led by Drosos of Aradeo around the year 1300, as was Laur. Plut. 5.10.¹⁴⁹ This schoolmaster, preacher, and philosopher, expert in Aristotle and liturgical theory,¹⁵⁰ wrote an epigram addressed to the Theotokos, in which he asks the Theotokos herself to help him master schedography.¹⁵¹ Other poems by him can be placed with ease into a classroom context. Among them is a tetrastichon designed to help students memorize the aorist of φαγεῖν (to eat) and πειν (to drink).¹⁵² More sophisticated is an epigram that he wrote for the entrance of a school

148 On Nicholas of Soletto, see Francesco G. Giannachi, "Una nota sull'istruzione grammaticale bizantina in Terra d'Otranto: Lo schedografo Nicola da Soletto," in *Circolazione di testi e scambi culturali in Terra d'Otranto*, ed. Capone, Giannachi, and Voicu, 114–20. On Stefano of Nardò, see Francesco G. Giannachi, "Per la storia dell'istruzione bizantina in Terra d'Otranto: La schedografia di Stefano di Nardò," *Medioevo Greco* 13 (2013): 115–25. For further schedographic texts, see Arnesano and Sciarra, "Libri e testi di scuola in Terra d'Otranto," 460–61 and 465–66.

149 Arnesano and Sciarra, "Libri e testi di scuola in Terra d'Otranto," 442–46 (on Vat. gr. 1276) and 449–50 (on Laur. Plut. 5.10).

150 On the school in Aradeo, in which Drosos featured prominently, see Arnesano and Sciarra, "Libri e testi di scuola in Terra d'Otranto," 440–54, and Philippe Hoffmann, "Une lettre de Drosos d'Aradeo sur la fraction du pain (Athous Iviron 190, A.D. 1297/1298)," *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neellenici* 22–23 (1985–1986): 245–84, at 247–50. Unfortunately, a large part of Drosos's oeuvre remains unedited, hence a conclusive treatment of his work remains a desideratum.

151 André Jacob, ed., "Une bibliothèque médiévale de Terre d'Otrante: Parisinus gr. 549," *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neellenici* 22–23 (1985–1986): 285–315, at 287–88: "Ἐπεὶ σχεδῶν κλίμακα βαίνειν δευτέραν | κατάρχομαι νῦν, ὦ κλίμαξ, ἄγαγέ με" (lines 3–4) (Since I now start to climb the second ladder of schede, ladder, lead me). Drosos speaks of a "second ladder of schede," suggesting that there were different levels of difficulty in schedography. On this poem, see Giannachi, "La schedografia di Stefano di Nardò," 107–11.

152 See line 1 for the didactic character: ed. Reinsch, "Einige Verse aus dem Kreis des Drosos aus Aradeo," 579: "φαγεῖν· ἔφαγον· φάγε· φάγοιμι· φάγης" (to eat; I ate; eat!; may I eat; should you eat).

where two dogs were depicted and warns those wanting to enter that the dogs would “secretly bite” (λαθροδάκνης) every disrespectful person. The pun is that the text refers to an epigram by Antiphanes (first c. BC), which is transmitted in the *Greek Anthology*.¹⁵³ This latter text vituperates teachers as enemies of true poeticality, who afflict their pupils with their quibbles, and the author describes them as “bitter and dry dogs” and “bugs that secretly bite” (λαθροδάκνης) the eloquent.”¹⁵⁴ Drosos inverts this image, since his secretly-biting dogs are the watchdogs of the school, who help to humble the haughty.¹⁵⁵ Whether the epigram was in fact inscribed at a school entrance cannot be proven and might be doubted, in view of the lack of comparative examples; it might just as well have been used in the classroom. The one, of course, does not exclude the other.

Coincidence or not, the picture which emerges from the school context is quite the opposite from the one relating to patronage. Education was a major background for poetry composition in Salento, whereas we do not possess a single poem from Sicily that can be ascribed with certainty to an educational context.¹⁵⁶ While Sicilian poets partook of patronage relationships not unlike those in Constantinople, Salentine poets were closer to the capital when it came to the use of poetry in a teaching setting.

4.3 Church and Monasticism

Practical needs in churches and monasteries inspired the literary production of Byzantium. Likewise, although extremely diversified, the southern Italian Greek poetic corpus was highly shaped by devotional and liturgical practices, reflected in the production of religious epigrams, metrical *vitae*, and even liturgical hymns.

Most of the liturgical poetry from twelfth- and thirteenth-century southern Italy seems to have been written by Eugenios of Palermo. A group of unedited canons addressed to the Mother of God and St. Demetrios is attributed to him. These hymns are not transmitted together with his “secular” poems

153 Reinsch, “Einige Verse aus dem Kreis des Drosos aus Aradeo,” 578.

154 Poem 11.322, lines 4: πικροὶ καὶ ξηροὶ ... πρόκυνες (bitter and dry little dogs) and 6: ἐὺφώνων λαθροδάκναι κόριες (bugs secretly biting the silver-tongued) ed. Hermann Beckby, *Anthologia Graeca*, second revised ed., 4 vols. (München: Heimeran, 1965), 3:700.

155 See Andreas Rhoby, “Hunde in Byzanz,” in *Lebenswelten zwischen Archäologie und Geschichte: Festschrift für Falko Daim zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Jörg Drauschke, et al., 2 vols. (Mainz: Verlag des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 2018), 2:807–20, at 813 on the importance of watchdogs in Byzantium.

156 On schools and education in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Salento, see Giannachi, “La schedografia di Stefano di Nardò,” 103–14.

or religious epigrams in the Salentine manuscript Laur. Plut. 5.10. Instead, they were included in Escorial, Biblioteca Real, MS X.IV.8, a liturgical manuscript copied in Messina in the thirteenth century.¹⁵⁷ The particularity of these hymns is that they were written in iambic meter (some of them have even a hexametric acrostich), which is a rather uncommon type of hymnography in Byzantium.¹⁵⁸ It has been suggested that these hymns are addressed to the Mother of God and St. Demetrios in Palermo, two popular religious figures in many iconographic programs in Norman churches, also serving the Sicilian imperial propaganda machine.¹⁵⁹

Throughout the Middle Ages, hagiography was highly popular in southern Italy, both in the reception of earlier texts and in the production of new texts.¹⁶⁰ Hagiography being perhaps the most popular narrative form in Byzantium, this is hardly surprising. However, in Sicily, hagiography is in several cases connected with poetry – a rather rare nexus. For, unlike the medieval Latin literary tradition, which saw an immense popularity in the use of verse for the composition of *vitae*,¹⁶¹ in Byzantium writing hagiographic works in verse form was not a widespread practice.¹⁶² Two poems by Eugenios of Palermo give us information about such compositions. Eugenios's poems 17–19 are addressed to an Apulian priest called Kalos, who was based in the region of Brindisi, and poems 17 and 18 in particular seem to be one part of a correspondence of these

157 Andrea Luzzi, "La silloge innografica del manoscritto italogreco Scorial. X.IV.8: Descrizione analitica," *Nea Rhōmē*, 15 (2018): 107–36.

158 Similar works were written in Byzantium by various authors, including *Anastasios Quaestor*, Nikephoros Blemmydes, and Merkourios Grammatikos. For a list and overview of authors, see Andrea Luzzi, "Canoni ecclesiastici in dodecasillabi bizantini composti in età medievale," *Spolia: Annual Journal of Medieval Studies* 14, no. 4 (2018): 139–70, and Andrea Luzzi, "Canoni 'giambici' d'epoca bizantina e postbizantina: Un' 'isola' nella produzione innografica della Chiesa greca," *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici* 56 (2019): 223–48.

159 See Luzzi, "Hymnographica Eugeniana," 135–36; Luzzi, "Canoni 'giambici,'" 238–39.

160 Mario Re, "Italo-Greek Hagiography," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, 2 vols., ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011–2014), 1:227–58.

161 Jean-Yves Tilliette, "Les modèles de sainteté du IX^e au XI^e siècle d'après le témoignage des récits hagiographiques en vers métriques," in *Santi e demoni nell'alto medioevo: Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, XXXVI* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo 1989), 381–409; see also François Dolbeau, "Un domaine négligé de la littérature médiolatine: les textes hagiographiques en vers," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 45 (2002): 129–39.

162 Stephanos Efthymiadis, "Greek Byzantine Hagiography in Verse," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, ed. Efthymiadis, 2:161–81. The few other metrical *vitae* were written in the late Byzantine period, including iambic lives on St. Theodore Stratelates and St. Theodore Teron by the grammatikos Merkourios and the iambic narration of the life and miracles of St. Nicholas written by Nikephoros Xanthopoulos.

two. In poem 17, Eugenios addresses the priest by calling him a friend of *logoi*, saying that he will respond to his request to compose an account of the life of St. Agatha because the one composed by the priest Kalos did not live up to the standards of good metrical writing. Poem 18 is once again addressed to the priest Kalos, asking him to accept the verses he asked for. While poem 17 was sent to Kalos before the production of the metrical *vita* by Eugenios, poem 18 seems to have been sent together with the *vita* after its composition. The first poem seems to have been sent after Kalos had sent a poem to Eugenios together with the metrical *vita* of Agatha. While this is an indirect witness of the innovative features of Sicilian hagiography, luckily we possess some texts that confirm this practice.

The codex Mess. San Salv. 30, written in the monastery of San Salvatore in Messina in the year 1307 by the scribe Daniel, is the first part of a menologion in two volumes, the second of which survives in the same library, Mess. San Salv. 29. A menologion, a book that contains hagiographical texts in the order of the liturgical year, was used for readings in church or in the monastic refectory. The special value of the volumes in Messina lies in their content, for they contain not only metaphrastic and pre-metaphrastic texts, but also various *vitae* of local saints, for which they provide the *codex unicus*. What is more, in southern Italy the Greek liturgical practice, although very close to the Byzantine one, included the veneration of some western saints, which of course necessitated the production of Greek texts for these figures. One way to solve this challenge was to translate western *vitae*, and indeed our manuscripts include a number of Greek translations from Latin *vitae*.¹⁶³ Most importantly in the present context, however, Mess. San Salv. 30 preserves several metrical texts, namely two anonymous verse *vitae* or miracle stories and two prosimetric *vitae* by Leo the grammarian.

The first is the *Life and Miracles of Saint Nicholas* (BHG 1350m),¹⁶⁴ which in fact focusses on a single miracle: the story of the three generals who were saved by the saint after having been accused of treachery by the city eparch Ablabius, who had been bribed.¹⁶⁵ Unfortunately, the composition of the text cannot be

¹⁶³ See Albert Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand der hagiographischen und homiletischen Literatur der griechischen Kirche von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts*, 4 vols. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1937–1952), 3:449–50.

¹⁶⁴ Here and hereafter, the abbreviation BHG refers to François Halkin, ed., *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 3 vols. (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 31957) and François Halkin, ed., *Novum auctarium Bibliothecae Hagiographicae Graecae* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1984).

¹⁶⁵ Silvio Mercati, "Vita giambica di S. Nicola di Mira secondo il codice Messinese greco 30," in *Collectanea Byzantina*, 2 vols. (Rome: Pont. Inst. Orient. Studiorum, 1970), 1:44–65. For

dated, but the copying of the codex in 1307 provides us with a (very tentative) *terminus ante quem*. Interestingly enough, from the synaxarion of the monastery of S. Salvatore, founded in 1131, we learn that the metaphrastic *vita* would have been read during *orthros* of December 6, Nicholas's feast day, while the story of his miracles would have been read later in the refectory.¹⁶⁶ We are even told that one should look for the miracles in "the great panegyrikon" (ζήτηι αὐτὰ εἰς τὸ πανηγυρικὸν μέγα βιβλίον). Some later additions in the synaxarion confirm the use of Mess. San Salv. 30 and 29 in the liturgy, as they specify that the readings of certain texts come from the book "by our brother Daniel," that is the scribe of our menologion.¹⁶⁷ Although it is not entirely clear if the menologion Mess. San Salv. 30 and 29 is the "great panegyrikon" mentioned in the synaxarion, we would expect the meal time in the refectory to be the place where our verse *vita* would have been read.

The second metrical work is the *vita* of Leo of Catania in 407 political verses (BHG 981c), intended to be read out loud in a monastic context, as suggested by the manuscript that transmits the text and the rubric, which includes a request to the priest to pronounce the blessing (εὐλόγησον πάτερ).¹⁶⁸ As with the prose versions, it mainly recounts the wicked deeds of the mighty sorcerer Heliodorus, the antihero of the story. Unfortunately, we do not know the exact relationship of the metrical life to the prose *vita* of Leo of Catania and whether

the sources of this story, see Gustav Anrich, *Hagios Nikolaos: Der heilige Nikolaos in der griechischen Kirche*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1913–1917), 1:67–96 (under the title *Praxis de Stratelatis*) and Nancy P. Ševčenko, *The Life of Saint Nicholas in Byzantine Art* (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1983), 115.

166 Miguel Arranz, ed., *Le typicon du Monastère du Saint-Sauveur à Messine codex Messinensis GR 115 A.D. 1131* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1969), 66–67. On the liturgical commemoration of Nicholas, see Nancy P. Ševčenko, "The Evergetis Synaxarion and the Celebration of a Saint in Twelfth-Century Art and Liturgy," in *Work and Worship at the Theotokos Evergetis, 1050–1200: Papers of the Fourth Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, Portaferry, Co. Down, 14–17 September 1995*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Anthony Kirby (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1997), 386–99, at 386–93.

167 See Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand*, 3:443.

168 For the text of the *vita*, see Dino Raffin, "La vita metrica anonima su Leone di Catania: Dal cod. Messin. gr. 20," *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata* 16 (1962): 37–48. For discussions of the text, see Augusta Acconcia Longo, "Note sul dossier agiografico di Leone di Catania: La trasmissione della leggenda e la figura del mago Eliodoro," *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 44 (2007): 3–38; Augusta Acconcia Longo, "La Vita metrica di Leone di Catania: Un testo tra agiografia e narrativa profana," in *Bisanzio e le periferie dell'impero: Atti del Convegno internazionale nell'ambito delle celebrazioni del millenario della fondazione dell'Abbazia di San Nilo a Grottaferrata* (Catania, 26/28 Novembre 2007), ed. Renata Gentile Messina (Acireale: Bonanno, 2011), 17–27; see also Efthymiadis, "Greek Byzantine Hagiography in Verse," 168–69.

it is a later rewriting of the prose account. If this is the case, not only the choice of meter in general, but also the specific choice of the political verse is surprising, given that no other such hagiographical text exists.

The last two works were written by Leo the Grammarian sometime in the twelfth century. The first is devoted to the life of St. Nektarios (BHG 2284), the other to James the Great (BHG 768d). Unlike the two anonymous *Vitae* and the two lost *Vitae* on St. Agatha by Eugenios and the priest Kalos, which are exclusively written in verse, these two works have a mixed form. Some parts of both texts are written in prose, others in verse. Unfortunately, only the *vita* of St. Nektarios has been edited so far, providing us with some evidence about the composition method of the author and the way poetry and prose coexist within a single textual entity. Leo used iambs in different places throughout the work, without causing an interruption to the narrative of his text. The *vita* concludes with a verse coda of twenty-eight iambic verses which acquire the form of an epigram praising the saint. Nektarios is praised for his deeds, which have “prevailed over wit and reason and every measure.”¹⁶⁹ The verse part even includes an image of paradise, in which Nektarios stands next to God and all the angels.

The composition of such hagiographic works in *prosimetrum* was particularly popular in Latin from the ninth to fourteenth centuries.¹⁷⁰ In fact, Leo the Grammarian was not the only author writing prosimetric hagiography in this region. In the second quarter of the twelfth century, on the occasion of the translation of the relics of the Sicilian St. Agatha (the very saint who was venerated in verse by Kalos and Eugenios) from Constantinople back to Catania, the local Latin-speaking bishop Maurikios wrote a prosimetric *vita*.¹⁷¹ Hence, two contemporary authors in Sicily wrote prosimetric hagiography: one in Greek, the other in Latin. Leo here appropriated Latin traditions to produce works without equal in medieval Greek literature.

It is not a coincidence that the MSS Mess. San Salv. 30 and 29 contain both metrical and prosimetric *vitae*, since both genres were highly popular in western hagiography. Taken together with the translations from Latin, we here find an important witness to how Greek Orthodox traditions were enriched with western elements, resulting in a creative and innovative collection of texts that mirrors the multifaceted engagement with various local (textual) communities.

169 Halkin, ed., “S. Nectaire par Léon de Sicile,” 189: Νικῶντα καὶ νοῦν καὶ λόγον καὶ πᾶν μέτρον.

170 Bernhard Pabst includes sixty-five hagiographical texts in his study of Latin *prosimetrum*; see Bernhard Pabst, *Prosimetrum: Tradition und Wandel einer Literaturform zwischen Spätantike und Spätmittelalter*, 2 vols. (Cologne: Böhlau, 1994).

171 Pabst, *Prosimetrum*, 2:767–70.

In Salento, the only case where liturgical practice fostered the production of new poems in a significant way was the tetrasticha penned for the synaxarial cycles by Nicholas of Casole (on which see above). They, however, lead us to another poetic genre (indeed one of the most important poetic genres in Byzantium), namely epigrams (metrical inscriptions, transmitted either in manuscripts or actually inscribed on objects). Without doubt, epigrams were produced in Sicily in the same way as in all Greek-speaking areas. For example, poem 11 by Eugenios of Palermo was written for an image of John Chrysostom; poems 12 and 13 are concerned with the themes of last supper and crucifixion, respectively; poem 14 celebrates the creation of a cemetery in the Monastery of the Holy Saviour by Onouphrios, the abbot of the monastery.¹⁷² Even so, the corpus is rather small (probably because of the vagaries of transmission). By contrast, textual evidence from Salento is rich and further elucidates the unique culture of this area.

Epigrams, mainly votive and dedicatory epigrams as well as epitaphs, make up about two thirds of the Greek verses surviving from Salento. The content as well as the form of the Salentine epigrams are deeply rooted in the Byzantine tradition, while there are only a few local characteristics, including, most importantly, the recurring phenomenon of including an exact date in metrical form in dedicatory epigrams.¹⁷³ This practice, however, is more often than not witnessed by epigrams transmitted *in situ*, and only occasionally in manuscripts. We find such an example in two anonymous epigrams transmitted alongside some works by Drosos of Aradeo, dedicatory epigrams for a church dedicated to All Saints and another for John the Baptist, written at the behest (παράκλησει) of two priests, John and Petros respectively.¹⁷⁴ These texts not only exhibit Salentine poetic traits, but also show the mechanism of commissioning poems for specific objects, well-known from the Byzantine world.

The epigrams by Nektarios of Otranto in particular must have sparked interest in the genre. He wrote a cycle of eight epigrams on the seven abbots of the monastery St. Nicholas of Casole, including himself as the seventh abbot and

172 Eugenios of Palermo, poem 14, *Eugenii Panormitani versus iambici*, ed. Gigante, 97–98, lines 20–21.

173 See Andreas Rhoby, “‘When the Year Ran Through Six Times of Thousands ...’: The Date in (Inscriptional) Byzantine Epigrams,” in *Pour une poétique de Byzance: Hommage à Vassilis Katsaros*, ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis, Charis Messis, Paolo Odorico, and Ioannis D. Polemis (Paris: Centre d’études byzantines, néo-helléniques et sud-est européennes, EHESS; De Boccard, 2015), 223–42.

174 See Reinsch, “Einige Verse aus dem Kreis des Drosos aus Aradeo,” 583–86.

one dedicated to his successor.¹⁷⁵ His epigrams each consist of four verses and are designed as inscriptions, probably written next to depictions of the abbots in the church, as various deictic elements demonstrate.¹⁷⁶ It is not unlikely that the epigram he wrote for himself was also written next to an image of him, just as other people who supported monasteries (such as, for instance, founders, re-founders, or other patrons) perpetuated themselves in dedicatory epigrams and depictions. His activity as a patron is further evidenced in an epigram that John Grassos dedicated to him, in which Grassos stresses Nektarios's efforts to restore the monastery and his gifts of golden vessels, books, and precious cloths.¹⁷⁷

Yet Nektarios's impact transcended Salento. On one of his voyages to Constantinople, he wrote an epigram for the fountain of the Evergetis monastery in Constantinople, which was, in fact, inscribed on this monument.¹⁷⁸ He praised the painter who had decorated the fountain, a certain Paul, who was also of Otrantine origin. The epigram thus combines the admiration for a Constantinopolitan monument with a reference to the artist's Otrantine origin. In turn, a monk of the Evergetis monastery, Markos, penned a second epigram, praising Nektarios for his skills and the composition of this epigram.¹⁷⁹ Its inscription at this monument gives proof to the high esteem in which Nektarios must have been held, as an epigram on the author of another epigram is truly extraordinary. The interdependence of these texts and their object offer a final example for the strong connection between Salento and the Byzantine Empire.

175 Gigante, ed., *Poeti bizantini*, 73–76.

176 See, for instance, Poem 1.3 (κἂν ἦδε θήκη λείψανά σου κατέχη, [even if this tomb contains your remains] the verse refers explicitly to the reliquary which contained Joseph's relics) and Poem 6.4 (an exhortation to the reader to look at Nikodemos [ἴδε]); both in Gigante, ed., *Poeti bizantini*, 73 and 75.

177 Poem 1.4–7: μονὴν ἐφεύρες τήνδε Κασούλων λάχος, | ἦν χρυσοτεύκτοις σκεύεσσι τε καὶ βίβλοις | ὑφάσμασι δώροις τε τοῖς πολυτίμοις | κατηγλαΐσας ... (you rediscovered this monastery of Casole, a piece of land, which you embellished with vessels wrought of gold and with books and woven textiles and very costly gifts ...), in Gigante, ed., *Poeti bizantini*, 103.

178 Poem 10, Gigante, ed., *Poeti bizantini*, 77; see Paul Magdalino, "The Evergetis Fountain in the Twelfth Century: An Ekphrasis of the Paintings in the Cupola," in *Studies on the History and Topography of Byzantine Constantinople* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 432–46; Hoeck and Loenertz, *Nikolaos-Nektarios von Otranto*, 114.

179 Magdalino, ed., "The Evergetis Fountain in the Twelfth Century," 446. On these poems, see also Krystina Kubina, "Mapping the Poetic Landscape of Late Byzantium," in *Poetry in Late Byzantium*, ed. Krystina Kubina (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 3–19, pp. 3–5.

5 Conclusion

In her study on the literary history of the Kingdom of Sicily from 1100 to 1250, Karla Mallette argues that “[Arabic] is the language of poetry.”¹⁸⁰ To support the Norman dynasty or oppose it, many Arabic-speaking authors wrote poems during this period. Although this statement is fully valid, it describes only part of the literary history of Sicily and southern Italy more broadly. Verse composition was an important part of cultural expression for the Greek-speaking community of the Norman Kingdom and the Hohenstaufen Empire in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as well, used in various contexts. The multicultural environment of southern Italy inspired poets, all of them part of the Orthodox church and trained in the classical Greek school curriculum, to activate multifarious literary resources. Most important were, without doubt, the conscious and powerful connections the authors had to the literary world of Byzantium, especially in their connection to classical poetry and their reverence for, and appropriation of, medieval Greek poetry, along with the wider literary trends of their time.

However familiar most of the southern Italian Greek poetry might sound to a reader of Byzantine poetry, in all of these cases we can discern important, though often veiled, references to other linguistic traditions, mostly Latin, but also Arabic.¹⁸¹ This holds especially true for Sicily, where in both Palermo and Messina the court and the church respectively lived in close symbiosis with Latin and Arabic communities. The most important impact these cultures had on Greek poetry was in the realm of storytelling: the loose, episodic structure based on *exempla* (popular in both the Latin and the Arabic tradition), the explicit reference to Latin texts as we encounter it in the Malta poem, and the composition of hagiographic works in verse or in *prosimetrum*. In Salento, however, poets adhered much more closely to Byzantine authors, actively imitating these models. Some elements from Latin literature, such as debate poems, can be discerned, but on a much smaller scale than in Sicily.

Why did these Greek-speaking authors write poetry? Judging from the social position of both authors and addressees we can conclude that literary patronage – vital for much Byzantine poetry – was an important condition of

180 Mallette, *The Kingdom of Sicily*, 29.

181 Note that there are some blind spots in our analysis, most importantly the question of how Hebrew literature influenced Greek literature. Nektarios of Casole, for instance, is known to have been fluent in Hebrew, and Salento had an important Jewish community. However, the Hebrew poetry of this area is not often edited, and certainly not translated into any western language, so it has been inaccessible to us.

poetry writing in Sicily, while in Salento there was a circle, mainly comprised of intellectuals and school masters, who composed their verses for consumption within their own community. On the other hand, educational and school contexts have barely left traces on the Sicilian poetry that we possess. At the same time, we find texts that are deeply political and decidedly supportive of the Hohenstaufen regime. Yet, while one might expect these poems to be part of the court culture around Frederick II, it seems that they were (mainly) circulated among Salentine Greek intellectuals. Greek poets here opted for a slightly different vehicle to serve imperial propaganda. Instead of using ceremonial poetry, they composed political pamphlets in verse to support the court.

Even though the Greek poetry was the product of a multitude of influences, its influence on other Byzantine or non-Byzantine texts was limited. Sicilian poetry was mainly read by Salentine authors, and Salentine poetry was principally consumed in the region of its composition, reflecting the paradoxical story of Greek poetry in southern Italy: its literary motifs and tropes exhibit a multicultural character, its circulation a regional one. However, it would be wrong to see these poems as some kind of appendix to Byzantine poetry or, even worse, as an appendix to the literary history of southern Italy during this period. On the contrary, the active dialogue with surrounding cultures and the tensions this produced resulted in highly individual poems, mirroring a community well aware of the cultural resources they had at hand. It is the diversity of the texts that makes this textual corpus so appealing, as it represents not a static southern Italian Greek identity, but an active, ever-evolving literary culture.

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