

ANDRÁS NÉMETH – PETER SCHREINER – VASILIKI TSAMAKDA (eds.), *Fragmenta carminis picti quod dicitur Epithalamium (Vat. gr. 1851): Text, Critical studies, Reconstructed facsimile (Documenti e Riproduzioni n.s. 5)*. Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 2026. 517 pp. + a folder with a facsimile. – ISBN 978-88-210-1136-8

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The volume under review¹ is a major work of scholarship devoted to MS Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 1851 (Diktyon 68480), one of the most fascinating Byzantine manuscripts to survive. The book brings together eighteen philological, historical, artistic, and palaeographico-codicological studies devoted either to the manuscript itself or to the period to which it is assigned, namely the reign of Michael VIII Palaiologos. The contributions are organised into four sections, with the historical-artistic studies divided between those describing the manuscript and those dealing with its context or with particular artistic details and parallels. Section IV, as substantial as the preceding three sections combined, includes, after PETER SCHREINER's opening contribution in support of the Palaiologan dating to 1272, a number of studies on topics only incidentally related to the codex.

Of the volume's three editors, it was probably ANDRÁS NÉMETH, Deputy Director of the Editorial Service of the Vatican Library, who bore the brunt of the immense work involved in coordinating it. No expense was spared in the provision of the abundant visual material accompanying the text, some of it reproduced repeatedly, and the editorial work is generally impeccable, although there are a few minor inconsistencies.² More importantly, the edi-

1. I would like to thank VERÓNICA ABENZA, DIMITER ANGELOV, MANUEL CASTIÑEIRAS, JON CUBAS DÍAZ, MARTIN HINTERBERGER, and THERESE MARTIN for answering some of the questions raised by my reading of this book.

2. The order of the authors MITSIOU and PREISER-KAPPELLER differs between the chapter heading and the Table of Contents; the title of BORECZKY's contribution mistakenly gives the year 1100; the use of italics in references to the manuscript is also inconsistent.

tion and translation of the poem would have benefited from a final round of revision.³

Vat. gr. 1851 consists of four parchment bifolia, whose dimensions (227 × 170 mm) are nowhere stated. The eight surviving folios belonged to two quires, which may have constituted the entire codex.⁴ The content is an illustrated vernacular poem (of which only 109 verses survive) on the arrival of a Western princess in Constantinople to marry a Byzantine prince. The facsimile accompanying the publication supplements the surviving folios with the remaining leaves of the two quires, now lost, whose ruling and, in some cases, the presence of miniatures and initials can nevertheless be reconstructed from the offset impressions they left on the surviving folios before the ink had dried. Generally speaking, a decorated initial may be visible on the reverse side of a folio owing to ink penetration through the parchment, and it may also leave traces of ink on the facing page; it could hardly, however, leave an impression on a folio with which it was never in contact, as is proposed (NÉMETH pp. 26–27) for the T on fol. a2r, which is said to have left an offset impression on fol. a3r–v(=8), or for the M on fol. a8v, which according to the reconstruction left a mirror-image impression on fol. b2r–v(=3). If the traces of these initials are indeed the result of offset transfer, the accepted reconstruction of the quires cannot be correct, and the production of the codex was more complicated and eventful than is currently assumed. We shall return below to the problem posed for the reconstruction of the codex by the supposedly lost fol. b6.

Since STRZYGOWSKI discovered Vat. gr. 1851 in 1886,⁵ numerous studies have been devoted to this rare example of Byzantine secular art, whose significance outweighs its artistic quality. All of them have had to contend

3. The translation contains a number of typographical errors (lines 5, 11, 50, notes 38, 43), while the critical apparatus omits the manuscript reading at line 55 (πρόκειπτας) and fails to note the absence of accent and breathing marks in line 90 ναὶ καὶ γνῶθην. The editor has chosen to mark precisely the scribe's accentuation, but not the absence of iota subscript, which is never used in the manuscript. In the edition of the text, the decision to mark the manuscript's miniatures with [...] was unfortunate, since [...] suggests to the reader a textual lacuna or omission, and not anything else.

4. See pages 25–27. The facsimile accompanying the volume presents the surviving folios in the order that has been accepted since the reconstruction proposed by PAUL CANART, rather than in that of the original foliation. Throughout the study, references are given using a double numbering system, indicating the quire as either 'a' or 'b' followed by the original folio number, e.g. fol. b4v(=5).

5. JOSEF STRZYGOWSKI, *Das Epithalamion des Paläologen Andronikos II.* *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 10 (1901) pp. 546–567.

with the absence of firm points of reference provided by the codex itself, which has lost its beginning (and with it the title, the author, and probably also the dedicatee) as well as its end, which may have contained a colophon with information about the work of art itself. Neither the iconography of the seven miniatures nor the poem in political verse that they illustrate can be readily assigned to a particular tradition or genre, to the extent that there is no agreement as to whether the poem is more appropriately regarded as an *epithalamion*, a song or poem in honour of a bride and bridegroom, or as an *eisiterios*, a welcome poem.⁶ Vat. gr. 1851 enjoys the distinction of being, together with Paris. gr. 228 (Diktyon 49800), containing Michael Glykas' *Poem from Prison*, the earliest manuscript preserving a text in the Greek vernacular.⁷ Moreover, it is the only surviving Byzantine book containing a secular poem accompanied by illustrations. An illuminated manuscript with vernacular texts is Seragliensis 35 (Diktyon 33981), copied in Eubea in 1461, where the verses known as Διήγησις τῶν ζώων τῶν τετραπόδων (*Tale of Quadrupeds*) are illustrated with drawing of the animals. Another example is the famous Scorialensis Ψ-IV-22 (Diktyon 15267), dating from the late fifteenth century, whose copies of *Livistros and Rhodamne* and *Digenis Akritas* were intended to receive miniatures that were never painted. We shall never know whether these belonged to an established Byzantine tradition or whether they were intended to be an entirely new creation (like the illustrations added by Angelos Vergekios to the poems of Manuel Philes in the sixteenth century).

Although STRZYGOWSKI identified the Western princess who features in the poem and its illustrations as Anna of Hungary, the wife of Andronikos II Palaiologos since 1272, this hypothesis was dismissed only a year later by PAPADEMETRIOU, who associated the work instead with the marriage of Agnès (Anna) of France, daughter of Louis VII, and Alexios II Komnenos in 1179/80.⁸ In addition to other proposed identifications, which need not be discussed here because of their improbability, the dates 1179/80 and

6. As proposed by MICHAEL JEFFREYS, *The Vernacular εισιτήριοι for Agnes of France*. In: ELIZABETH JEFFREYS et al. (eds.), *Byzantine Papers: Proceedings of the First Australian Byzantine Studies Conference (Byzantina Australiensia 1)*. Canberra 1981, pp. 101–116.

7. I am grateful to MARTIN HINTERBERGER for drawing my attention to this fact. The script of MS Par. gr. 228 is characteristic of a number of codices from the reign of Michael VIII, such as Oxford, Bodleian Library, Barocci 131 (Diktyon 47418). If the Palaiologan dating of Vat. gr. 1851 is accepted, the two manuscripts would be contemporaneous.

8. SYNODES PAPADEMETRIOU, 'Ο ἐπιθαλάμιος Ἀνδρονίκου II, τοῦ Παλαιολόγου. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 11 (1902) pp. 452–460.

1272 have polarized scholarship on the manuscript. While examining the text or the miniatures, scholars have directed their efforts towards defending one or the other date on the basis of historical arguments. SCHREINER published in 2019 the most recent attempt to compensate for the absence of proper names in either the poem or the codex through a detailed examination of every possible historical clue; its study lies at the origin of the facsimile project accompanying the volume under review.⁹ Of the three editors, NÉMETH (pp. 25–48) argues in his palaeographical study that the script must be dated to the thirteenth century; TSAMAKDA, in the chapter describing the miniatures (pp. 117–158), considers that there are no decisive arguments in favour of either date; by contrast, SCHREINER (pp. 231–241) clearly favours the Palaiologan dating. The remaining contributors likewise support the Palaiologan date and provide substantial studies of the manuscript's illumination (ARNE EFFENBERGER) and text (CAROLINA CUPANE). Both EFFENBERGER and CUPANE had previously argued in favour of different dates. Most of the studies in Part IV do not advance new arguments in support of the date of 1272;¹⁰ rather, with considerable erudition and detail, they elaborate on the historical circumstances that the poem and the book would be celebrating, namely the marriage of Andronikos II and Anna of Hungary in 1272.¹¹

The present reviewer undoubtedly belongs ‘among those who have not studied the manuscript closely’, to quote NÉMETH (p. 35), a category apparently comprising scholars inclined to regard the book as a Komnenian production.¹² To atone for my own sin of superficiality, I have agreed to

9. PETER SCHREINER, *Anna von Frankreich (1180) oder Anna von Ungarn (1272)? Historische und prosopographische Anmerkungen zum illustrierten Brautgedicht im Vaticanus gr. 1851*. In: ERIKA JUHÁSZ (ed.), *Byzanz und das Abendland VI: Studia Byzantino-Occidentalia (Antiquitas – Byzantium – Renascentia 38)*. Budapest 2019, pp. 81–108.

10. In this regard, a passage (p. 54) in the interesting and insightful chapter by MARTA GRIMACCIA, OLIVER HAHN, and IRA RABIN is somewhat puzzling. The authors state that they did not perform a radiocarbon (C14) test on a fragment of plant fibre adhering to one of the manuscript's pages, although a simulation yielded a precise calibration range between 1219 and 1280. The impression is that any indication supporting a thirteenth-century date, even a technically simulated one, was welcomed.

11. This is particularly evident in the highly insightful chapter by KALOPISSI-VERTI, which, among the many works of art dating from the reign of Michael VIII discussed therein, only briefly mentions, without exploring them, the similarities between the miniatures of Vat. gr. 1851 and the cycle of St Demetrios in Mistra, c. 1270–1285.

12. Indeed, I am guilty of having written a short note in 2019, INMACULADA PÉREZ MARTÍN, *Mi gran boda bizantina. El epitalamio ilustrado del Vat. gr. 1851*. Boletín de

revisit the question in these pages. With all due caution, if the aim of this collection of studies was to provide definitive arguments in favour of a date of 1272, it does not succeed. The text, script, miniatures, and zoomorphic initials provide arguments in favour of both datings, although the balance of the evidence within the volume is far from even. In any case, the problem appears to be irresolvable, since three fundamental elements, the script, the text, and the miniatures, lack sufficiently close parallels. Viewed from a more positive perspective, however, challenges such as that posed by Vat. gr. 1851 may lead us to a better understanding of Byzantine culture and of the importance within it of the freedom enjoyed by artists and writers in reworking visual and textual models. The dates 1180 and 1272, separated by almost a century, would thus be linked for modern scholarship by a codex ostensibly defined by mimesis and tradition. It stands as evidence that Byzantine culture is shaped by connections across time.

The Poem

The poem is the subject of two indispensable studies, a literary one (CUPANE) and a historical one (SCHREINER), both of which also take the illustrations into account, since in some cases these provide unique evidence for locating the arrival in Constantinople and reconstructing the ceremonial held in honour of the bride. In addition to the study itself (pp. 71–91), CUPANE's chapter includes a new edition of the poem with an Italian translation and commentary (pp. 92–107).¹³ The Epithalamion may be defined as a partly dramatized narrative of the bride's journey to Constantinople and her reception at the imperial palace, and CUPANE has rightly drawn attention to the mixture of genres that characterizes it (p. 73). Her study continues to develop the idea, already advanced in 2018,¹⁴ that Komnenian encomiastic literature constitutes the poem's immediate literary context. Although the absence of poems in honour of imperial brides in the

la Sociedad Española de Bizantinística 33 (2019) pp. 6–11, out of enthusiasm for the manuscript's delightful warm-toned images. The Boletín has neither doi nor a peer-review process. My goal was to provide a 'light' introduction to the codex, whose content did give me the opportunity to make a pun based on the Hollywood blockbuster *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (released in Spain as *Mi gran boda griega*).

13. On pages 109–113, a 'trascrizione paleografica' of the surviving verses is provided which, like the facsimile, takes the lost folios into account.

14. CAROLINA CUPANE, Volkssprache und Volksliteratur in Byzanz. In: ELKE KORTZ et al. (eds.), Anfangsgeschichten / Origin Stories. Der Beginn volkssprachlicher Schriftlichkeit in komparatistischer Perspektive / The Rise of Vernacular Literacy in a Comparative Perspective (MittelalterStudien 31). Paderborn 2018, pp. 39–70, at 52–53 and n. 50, where the Epithalamion is dated to the reign of Manuel Komnenos.

Palaiologan period is noted (p. 72), other textual features, such as the emotional mode of presentation and the insertion of letters and monologues, find literary parallels in vernacular fiction of the Palaiologan period (p. 73). Among the contributions of this chapter, particular mention should be made of the linguistic analysis (pp. 82–85) and of the hypothesis identifying the author as Manuel/Maximos Holobolos (pp. 78–81), the author of a short poem composed on the occasion of the marriage of Anna of Hungary and Andronikos II,¹⁵ and therefore a text complementary to the Epithalamion if both are contextualized within the same wedding.

The poem survives in four fragments. The first (lines 1–50, quire a) contains the bride's father's lament over the separation, the communication of the agreement with the Byzantine emperor, and the arrival of a second message to that emperor. In quire b, the second fragment (lines 51–60) recounts how the emperor sends all the women of his family, more than seventy in number, to welcome the bride and entrusts a noblewoman with dressing her as an augusta. The third fragment (lines 61–89) describes the foreign retinue accompanying the bride to meet the emperor and a second encounter, outside the city walls, between the emperor's daughter and the bride. The fourth and final fragment (lines 90–109) connects perfectly with the end of the preceding one, describing the meeting of the two women;¹⁶ I therefore do not believe there are grounds for inferring a textual lacuna corresponding to the lost fol. b6 between the third and the fourth fragments. That folio either contained only miniatures or was removed as the result of some mistake or accident, as not infrequently happens.

The work closest to the Epithalamion is the poem composed by Theodoros Prodromos on the arrival of Bertha/Eirene von Sulzbach to marry Manuel Komnenos in 1142; it is in connection with this marriage that Byzantine sources first explicitly mention the existence of a reception ceremony (see SIMEONOV p. 348). In contrast to Prodromos' poem, with its highly elaborate linguistic and rhetorical register, the choice of the vernacular in the Epithalamion is presented as more appropriate for the young foreign bride

15. This text has been examined by CUPANE in a 2023 contribution that serves as a complement to the present study: CAROLINA CUPANE, "Perchè tramonti, o sole?" La poesia di Manuele Olobolo per la prokypsis di Anna di Ungheria, linguaggio metaforico e rilevanza politica. In: LUIGI SILVANO et al. (eds.), *Virtute vir tutus. Studi di letteratura greca, bizantina e umanistica offerti a Enrico V. Maltese* (Colibri 4). Gent 2023, pp. 183–206.

16. Lines 89–90: Μετὰ δὲ ποίας λαμπρότητος καὶ ποταπῆς ἐξέβην; / Ἐξέβην, ναί, καὶ ἐνώθην σε [...].

for whom the book was intended, since from her arrival in Constantinople she would have needed to learn the everyday language rather than the learned one. Moreover, in the milieu of the Komnenian court, the use of the vernacular may have become normalized under the influence of linguistic practices at the native courts of the Frankish empresses.¹⁷

Two texts provide valuable evidence for the ceremonial surrounding the reception of an imperial bride and form an important backdrop against which the Epithalamion can be interpreted: the Λόγος ἐπιβατήριος composed by Eustathios of Thessalonike in honour of Agnès of France¹⁸ and Pseudo-Kodinos.¹⁹ CUPANE (pp. 72, 104–105) points to affinities in the metaphorical language of the Logos and the Epithalamion. SIMEONOV (pp. 345–346), for his part, highlights two discrepancies: that Eustathios does not speak of the reception by the emperor's more than seventy female relatives (as the poem does, lines 51–54), and that he mentions the maiden's entry into the palace after her arrival in the city, contrary to the Epithalamion, which speaks of a meeting outside the city walls (lines 78–79) with the emperor's daughter, apparently prior to her entry into the palace. This is an important argument, but Eustathios does not narrate the two moments as consecutive events; rather, he describes the aesthetic effect of the Genoese ships sighted from the city (p. 254.24–32) and then mentions how much literary material there is in the rejoicing, the songs, and the displays of hospitality that accompanied the maiden's installation in the palace (p. 254.32–35). It appears to be a literary device for moving the narrative forward quickly while leaving the details to others.

Like CUPANE (pp. 73–74), SIMEONOV (pp. 349–352) also compares the Epithalamion and Pseudo-Kodinos, bringing to light both similarities and differences in protocol, as well as the shared use of certain terms, such as αὐθεντόπουλος, which favour a Palaiologan date.²⁰

17. JEFFREYS, Vernacular εἰσιτήριος, p. 105, noted the connection between Maria of Antioch and Agnès of France 'to the courts where vernacular French was becoming a major vehicle of expression for written literature'.

18. See TSAMAKDA pp. 145–147, MALAMUT pp. 306–307; SIMEONOV pp. 345–349. The Logos was edited by PETER WIRTH, *Eustathii Thessalonicensis Opera minora* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae. Series Berolinensis 32). Berlin 2000, Logos Ξ, pp. 250–260.

19. RUTH MACRIDES – JOSEPH A. MUNITIZ – DIMITER ANGELOV, *Pseudo-Kodinos and the Constantinopolitan Court: Offices and Ceremonies* (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies 15). Farnham–Burlington 2013.

20. See MACRIDES et al., *Ps.-Kodinos*, p. 47 n. 52 regarding ῥηγάρχης (line 21), which had been regarded as an *hapax* of the Epithalamion, ANDREAS RHOBY, *Varia*

SCHREINER's chapter seeks to date the poem by proceeding in the reverse direction from that usually followed, that is, from the poem to the images, through a prosopographical analysis of kinship relations, court titles, and historical context. SCHREINER's pages constitute a model exercise in interpretation, but the method he has chosen seems to have led him to overlook two important earlier contributions on two specific issues: that of FAILLER on the date of the coronation of Andronikos II²¹ and that of BENSAMMAR on the titulature of empresses.²² Both ought to have been taken into account, and FAILLER's contribution in particular is important at least as a point of comparison, since it addresses one of the main obstacles to dating the poem to 1272, namely the fact that the prince is described as *porphyrogennetos*. The title or epithet porphyrogennetos (unfortunately misspelled as πορφυρογέννεντος on p. 237) appears twice in the poem, in lines 25–26 and 50. Andronikos II is never described as *porphyrogennetos* in the sources, unlike his younger brother Konstantinos, who was born in Constantinople in 1261.²³ Without revisiting the contradictory testimonies of Georgios Pachymeres and Nikephoros Gregoras concerning Andronikos' date of birth, SCHREINER briefly states the problem (p. 237) and merely reproduces (p. 240 n. 41) an autograph note by Gregoras according to which Emperor Andronikos turned sixty-six on 25 March, the Feast of the Annunciation, of the eighth indiction (1325). Therefore, since Andronikos II was born on 25 March 1259 and Michael VIII was first crowned on 1 January 1259, Andronikos would technically have been a *porphyrogenetos*. FAILLER, however, points out that Pachymeres dates the birth of Andronikos II to 1258 and that 25 March was in fact the birth date of his

Lexicographica II. Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik 62 (2012) pp. 111–138, at 133, identified the term in a document of 1216 issued by King Hugh I of Cyprus.

21. Esp. ALBERT FAILLER, La proclamation impériale de Michel VIII et d'Andronic II. *Revue des études byzantines* 44 (1986) pp. 237–251, at 243–244), but also IDEM, La restauration et la chute définitive de Tralles au 13^e siècle. *Ibid.* 42 (1984) pp. 249–263, at 256–257, 260–261.

22. ELIZABETH BENSAMMAR, La titulature de l'impératrice et sa signification : Recherches sur les sources byzantines de la fin du VIII^e siècle à la fin du XII^e siècle. *Byzantion* 46 (1976) 243–291.

23. In the imperial orations of Manuel Holobolos, Andronikos II is never referred to as porphyrogennetos. In Pachymeres' *Historia brevis* (ed. ALBERT FAILLER, Paris 2001/2), § 3.7, the enumeration of the children of Michael VIII is quite clear in this respect: Empress Theodora bore him three sons: πρώτον μὲν τὸν Μανουήλ, ὃς δὴ καὶ τεθνηκῶς ἦν, εἶτα δὲ καὶ τὸν περιόντα Ἀνδρόνικον, ὃν βασιλικῶς ὁ πατὴρ ἔτρεφε, καὶ τρίτον τὸν ἐπὶ τῆς πόλεως γεννηθέντα τὸν πορφυρογέννητον Κωνσταντῖνον.

grandson Andronikos III.²⁴ Quite apart from whether Andronikos was born before or after Michael VIII's usurpation, the fact that the heir to the throne is never described as *porphyrogennetos* remains a strong argument against identifying him with the prince of the poem. If Vat. gr. 1851 is not an updated version of a Komnenian work, the identification with Alexios II and the date of 1179/80 rest on a stronger foundation.

The second weak point in SCHREINER's prosopographical analysis concerns the identity of the emperor's daughter who meets the bride and the titlature of imperial women (pp. 232–233, 237). According to him, Maria Komnene cannot be τοῦ βασιλέως ἡ πρώτη θυγάτηρ (lines 86–87) because in 1180 she was Manuel I's only daughter, her sister Anna having died in 1158. It is evident, however, that Maria, as Alexios' elder sister, was the first of Manuel's two legitimate children and nothing in the expression 'first daughter' requires the existence of a second daughter. The princess is referred to in the poem (line 87) as 'basilissa', and, according to SCHREINER, this title was reserved for empresses in the twelfth century. BENSAMMAR, however, demonstrates that literary sources of that period used the title basilissa not only for empresses but also for the princesses Anna and Maria Komnene.²⁵

Illumination

Art historians share the view that Vat. gr. 1851 belongs to the private sphere rather than to the imperial apparatus (KALOPISSI-VERTI pp. 410–411), an understanding of the codex suggested both by the style of the miniatures, far removed from the monumentality and neoclassicism of Palaiologan art, and by the use of the vernacular, likewise distant from courtly rhetoric. As regards this contextualization of the manuscript, the volume under review may be seen as a missed opportunity to explore predominantly female social and cultural spheres, an absence not compensated for by the chapters of MALAMUT and MITSIOU/PREISER-KAPPELLER on foreign princesses at the Palaiologan court. Although the book includes studies on the Árpád dynasty, on the lost portrait of Andronikos II and Anna of Hungary in the monastery of the Pammakaristos, and on the tent depicted on fol. b5r(=6), none is devoted to the literary interests of Komnenian or Palaiologan empresses and princesses, to their patronage of works of art, and especially to their involvement in illuminated manuscripts.

24. FAILLER, *Restauration*, pp. 260, 262.

25. BENSAMMAR, *Titlature de l'impératrice*, p. 278 and n. 35.

And yet, what makes Vat. gr. 1851 a unique Byzantine book is precisely that it constitutes an exceptional example of a female book, by which I mean a codex defined by the prominence of women both in the story it tells and in its illustration. The miniatures of the second quire, on fols b2v(=3) and b5r(=7), recreate a ceremony in which women play the principal roles. The upper miniature on fol. b2v(=3), in particular, emphasizes the vulnerability of the child princess, in contrast to the poem itself, which, rather than seeking a dramatic element in the emotional condition of a child separated from her family and surroundings and facing a potentially threatening court, explores the inner conflict of her father, the king, and the grief that his daughter's absence will cause.

Part of the puzzlement provoked by the upper scene on fol. a5r(=7) stems from its principal figure, a woman dressed and crowned as an empress who may nevertheless be the bride. The volume devotes many pages to this unresolved question (TSAMAKDA pp. 127–134; EFFENBERGER pp. 187–189), on which I shall venture an opinion. If one opens the book at the pages reproducing fols. a4v(=2) and a5r(=7), it becomes apparent that the letter arriving in Constantinople serves as a connecting thread from the messenger's arrival by ship (lower part of the left-hand page) to its reading before the emperor, his son, and the female figure who, in my view, can only be the empress (upper part of the right-hand page). The difficulty in identifying this larger frontal figure, towards whom all gazes converge, as the empress lies in the fact that the poem mentions no intervention by the empress in the negotiation of the marriage.

Had the Komnenian hypothesis been explored more thoroughly, or had greater attention been paid to the dialogue between objects connected despite their temporal distance, it might have become apparent that the empress, rather than a child or adolescent prince, was the most likely commissioner of the book. Indeed, within a Komnenian chronology, the ideal patron of a codex such as Vat. gr. 1851 would be Maria of Antioch, wife of Manuel Komnenos and mother of Alexios II, who was destined to marry Agnès of France.²⁶ Maria of Antioch would then be represented in the upper miniature on fol. a5r(=7), a miniature probably intended for another location in the codex, and she would be portrayed not only as the commissioner of the gift presented to the maiden-bride, but also as the principal agent in the negotiations for the marriage of her son to a French bride like

26. To the best of my knowledge, no Western examples of illustrated books devoted to a bride are known.

herself. Moreover, the poet's rather impertinent remark (lines 99–101) concerning the inferior beauty of the emperor's eldest daughter (Maria, daughter of Bertha/Eirene) in comparison with the bride would be easier to explain if the poem had been commissioned by the empress, her stepmother, rather than by the emperor or his son.²⁷

As EFFENBERGER acknowledges (pp. 161–162, 200–201), analysis of pictorial style and technique provides no arguments in favour of a Palaiologan date, since no comparable manuscripts from the reign of Michael VIII survive. Nor has the detailed examination of the figures' dress and of the symbols of imperial power yielded unequivocally Palaiologan results, even if the imperial attire depicted in the scenes on fols a4v(=2), a5r(=7), and a6r(=1) points in that direction, according to EFFENBERGER (p. 187). The scholar has, however, sought to downplay the significance or validity of iconographic elements previously used in support of a later date: the decoration with eagles, noted by IACOBINI (though barely visible) on the textiles represented on the suppedia of fol. a4v(=2),²⁸ which would correspond to Palaiologan heraldry (EFFENBERGER p. 182); or the imperial sword held by an official standing to the emperor's left on fol. a6r(=1), which appears in the same position in Paris. gr. 1242 (Diktyon 50849), fol. 5v (with John VI Kantakouzenos presiding over a Church Council), but which cannot be ruled out as having existed at an earlier date.²⁹

TSAMAKDA provides evidence in her study (p. 119) that the illustrations were executed before the historiated initials.³⁰ However, in the chapter devoted to the latter, DŽUROVA (p. 209) assumes without further discussion that they were executed before the miniatures. It should be noted that the zoomorphic initials, *omega* on fol. a5v(=7), *chi* on fol. a6v(=1), *mu* on fol.

27. On the rivalry between Maria of Antioch and her stepdaughter, see Niketas Choniates, ed. JAN LOUIS VAN DIETEN, *Nicetae Choniatae historia* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae. Series Berolinensis 11.1). Berlin 1975, pp. 230–231: καὶ ἄλλως δὲ θερμούργιαν ἀσπαζομένη καὶ ἀνδρική τὸ φρόνημα οὔσα, προσκτωμένη δὲ καὶ τὸ φύσει πρὸς τὴν μητρὶαν βαρύνζλον, οὐχὶ στέγουσα δὲ καὶ τὸ παρευδοκιμεῖσθαι καὶ ὡς ἀντικαθισταμένη τις [...]. (Maria Komnene) reckless and masculine in her resolution, by nature exceedingly jealous of her stepmother, and unable to endure that she had been bested and was held suspect as a rival [...], transl. by HARRY J. MAGOULIAS, *O city of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*. Detroit 1984, p. 130.

28. ANTONIO IACOBINI, *L'epitalamio di Andronico II. Una cronaca di nozze dalla Costantinopoli Paleologa*. In: ANTONIO IACOBINI – ENRICO ZANINI (eds.), *Arte profana e arte sacra a Bisanzio* (Milion 3). Rome 1995, pp. 361–387, at 364.

29. EFFENBERGER p. 182, MACRIDES et al., *Ps.-Kodinos*, p. 121 n. 295.

30. IACOBINI, *Epitalamio*, p. 370 and NÉMETH pp. 26, 33, share the above opinion.

b2r(=3), *pi* on fol. b5r(=6), and *epsilon* on fol. b7r(=4), are probably the most accomplished element of the codex in terms of execution. Moreover, scholars aligned with either the Komnenian or the Palaiologan hypothesis have drawn attention to very similar examples from both periods.³¹ It thus constitutes a far more evident element of continuity, yet one fully consistent, with the miniatures and the script.

Script

NÉMETH's study offers the first detailed analysis of the script of Vat. gr. 1851,³² and explains the scribe's effort to arrange the verses so as to create a text block whose lines extend to the right margin and reach, or even slightly exceed, the line of justification through the use of decorative strokes. The decision to write in a relatively large script and to employ few ligatures was presumably intended to facilitate reading for a recipient unfamiliar with the Greek minuscule script. In this respect, the scribe displays features that verge on the eccentric, such as the position of *kappa* and *lambda* in relation to the writing line,³³ or the compression of *xi*, which scarcely extends beyond the middle zone of the script, as is also the case with certain forms of *chi*.³⁴

31. DŽUROVA's chapter, which could have presented the parallels identified in previous scholarship, merely mentions those studies on page 207 without specifying, for each manuscript cited, the particular contributions they made. The thread of these pages is difficult to follow, oscillating between the acceptance and the rejection of the essentially Komnenian character, or imprint, of such a precise and distinctive type of initials. The discussion of the initials is repetitive and accompanied by reflections that are at times mutually contradictory. The clearest example is the assertion (DŽUROVA p. 214) that zoomorphic initials are absent from decorated manuscripts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with the sole exception of Sinait. gr. 339 (Diktyon 58714, years 1136–1155). Later, however (p. 222), she adds two Komnenian codices: Hagion Oros, Μονή Σταυρονικήτα, 1 (Diktyon 30062) and 56 (Diktyon 30117). Some of the manuscripts discussed bear no apparent relationship to Vat. gr. 1851; images are even reproduced from MSS Sofia, Center Ivan Dujčev, D. gr. 339 (Diktyon 62593) and D. gr. 226 (Diktyon 62480), which do not constitute genuine parallels.

32. LIVIA BRIASCO, *La produzione libraria formale in età comnena tra persistenze calligrafiche e vocazioni mimetiche*. Scripta 17 (2024) pp. 9–54, where a study of the handwriting in Vat. gr. 1851 was announced, which will focus also on the comparison with documentary scripts.

33. It is anomalous that the uncial *kappa* is written extending beyond the lower midline but not the upper one; at times it exceeds the former only slightly, like *lambda*, when the first stroke begins free of the ruling.

34. In the Greek minuscule system, the point at which the two strokes of *chi* intersect lies on the baseline of the script, rather than above it, as is sometimes the case in Vat. gr. 1851.

NÉMETH draws attention to a number of features of the script that point towards a date of 1272. Among these, however, some are uncertain as markers of modernity, such as the ligature of $\alpha\rho$ with an enlarged open rho (NÉMETH p. 36), which is frequently employed by Arsenios of Petra (c. 1125–1250) and by other twelfth-century scribes, or the insertion of letters within omicron, a practice attested before the thirteenth century (an example from 1192 is Patmos, *Μονή Αγίου Ιωάννου του Θεολόγου*, 9 (Diktyon 54253), though earlier examples exist). More significant appears to be the abundant use of the diaeresis over iota and upsilon. These signs are not absent from earlier minuscule scripts (cf. the aforementioned MS Patmos 9), but they are certainly employed here with great frequency. The scribe's aim may have been to enhance clarity, but where the vowels are written in isolation the diaeresis would be purely decorative. Another significant feature noted by NÉMETH is the looped extension of letters at the ends of lines, especially alpha and eta, and, in that position, the final loops that surround the full stop or semicolon. This is an ornament that might be regarded as highly modern, although it is not in fact comparable to the forms used by fourteenth- and fifteenth-century scribes and should not assure a Palaiologan dating. Curved extensions of the final strokes of letters can already be found in twelfth-century manuscripts, such as MS Paris. gr. 550 (Diktyon 50126; fols. 9r, 12r, 30r, etc.) or Monac. gr. 3 (Diktyon 44446); the scribe of the latter manuscript employs an *omicron* ligature in which the vowel takes a form equivalent to the enclosing loop of the sign at the end of the verse.

Nevertheless, and although there is no shortage of features linking the scribe of Vat. gr. 1851 to manuscripts of the reign of Manuel I,³⁵ one must accept that the script is extremely artificial and, consequently, difficult to assess. In this respect, NÉMETH's reliance on palaeographical categories such as *Fettaugenmode* and *Perlschrift* (pp. 40–44) seems misguided. These labels provide a quick and convenient way of describing the general appearance of a script, but they do not constitute a sound basis for dating a manuscript. Generally speaking, rather than resorting to such categories, it is preferable to focus on features that are constitutive of Greek minuscule, such as the letters' module, the inclination of linear strokes, the modular contrast, and the decoration of serifs, balls, and loops. A script displaying modular con-

35. *Zeta* with a pronounced superior loop: see Archivio di Stato di Genova, Archivio Segreto, 2737 D, doc. E (AD 1199), but also the similar *zeta* by Theoktistos of Petra (Diktyon 51190). Ligature of minuscule *eta*: see MS Città del Vat, Pal. gr. 13 (Diktyon 65746), from AD 1163. Square capital *nu*: Sinait. gr. 180 (Diktyon 58555), from AD 1186.

trast is not thereby a *Fettaugen* script, nor does such contrast in itself imply a date in the second half of the thirteenth century.³⁶ As for the *Perlschrift*, it is not a model followed by the Vat. gr. 1851's scribe, who consistently employs oblong or angular letter forms (most notably *upsilon*) and can even write the two rounded elements of *omega* independently, separating them from one another.

By the end of this review, it becomes inevitable to abandon the dissection of Vat. gr. 1851 and recover the manuscript as a unique object: the precious illustrated book that would once have been read and contemplated by empresses and princesses at the Byzantine court. For them, words and images would have evoked the dramatic and romantic experiences of a young girl who arrived on the shores of a foreign land and who may have found comfort and support among the women she encountered there.

Keywords

Byzantine poetry; vernacular Greek; manuscript illumination; *mimesis*

36. Nor is it defining of a scribe associated with the Kokkinobaphos manuscripts, such as that of Moskva, ГИМ, Syn. gr. 153 (Vlad. 293; Diktyon 43778); modular contrast also characterizes a script dated to 1193, that of Hagion Oros, Μονή Αγίου Παντελεήμονος, 20 (Diktyon 31751).