23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies – Belgrade

Language and Society:

Historical Sociolinguistic Patterns in the Greek of Late Byzantine Historians

Thursday, August 25, 2016

A Round Table convened by Andrea Massimo Cuomo and Niels Gaul

Speakers

Andrea M. Cuomo

*Language and Society: Historical Sociolinguistic Patterns in Medieval Greek. A Thematic Introduction to the Round Table*

Klaas Bentein

*Historical Sociolinguistics: How and Why? Some Observations from Greek Documentary Papyri*

Stefano Valente

*Education and Lexicography in the Palaiologan Age: Some Short Remarks*

Isabella Proietti

*Byzantine Text-Books as a Major Source for Historical Sociolinguistic Studies on Medieval Greek*

Staffan Wahlgren

*Database Design and Sociolinguistics: Considerations for ByzTec (The Byzantine Tagged Electronic Corpus)*

Divna Manolova

*Regulating the Page, Guiding the Experience: Practices of Textual Organization in Nikephoros Gregoras’ Roman History*

Aslıhan Akışık

*Laonikos Chalkokondyles’ Revolutionary Classicizing and Audience*

Niels Gaul

*From Pachymeres to Chalkokondyles: Concluding Remarks on the Societal Function of Atticism in Late Byzantium*
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Among linguists, the term ‘sociolinguistics’ (SL) is notoriously ambiguous. Its peculiar ambiguity has led to different conceptualizations and even misunderstandings within and across the discipline. For example, Trudgill (1978: 1) pointed out, “the difficulty with sociolinguistics […] is that it is a term which means many different things to many different people;” Bolton (1992: 8) argued that “‘Sociolinguistics’, since its beginnings, has regularly faced a range of issues related to the adequate definition of its terms, and there have been frequent debates about its status as a field of study;” and, concerning the nature of the discipline, Lavandera (1988: 2) wrote that “we find among the various parts of the field considerable overlapping along many dimensions, so that two areas that share the same basic subject of investigation may disagree on methodology, while the methodology of one of them may be shared by researchers in an entirely different area of investigation.”

The ambiguity of the term sociolinguistics may relate to the notion that ‘language’ is itself a concept which can only be considered in its social dimension. In 1972, William Labov wrote, “I have resisted the term sociolinguistics for many years, since it implies that there can be a successful linguistic theory or practice which is not social” (Labov 1972: xiii). In this sense, the term sociolinguistics would actually be a pleonasm. However, more widespread and detailed definitions of the term, which we also follow for the purposes of our present Round Table (RT), consider sociolinguistics as “a branch of linguistics which studies all aspects of the relationship between language and society” (Crystal 1985: 281) or, as a field concerned with the description of language use as a social phenomenon that attempts—where possible—to establish dialogical or even causal relationships between language and society.

In the light of the complexities of defining sociolinguistics per se, our RT will deal with problems concerning the definition of historical sociolinguistics and its applications in the interpretation of Medieval Greek literature.

Historical Sociolinguistics (HSL) has been conceived of as an independent sub-discipline of sociolinguistics. Romaine (1982) marked the initiation of historical sociolinguistic studies. While she actually uses the label ‘socio-historical linguistics’, since Milroy (1992), the term ‘historical sociolinguistics’ has become the most commonly used term and therefore the one to be used here as well (see Auer 2015: 2), with the exception of Bentein, who prefers Romaine’s label of the discipline.

HSL employs insights and principles from modern-day sociolinguistics according to the so-called uniformitarian principle (Auer et al. 2015: 4; Bergs 2012: 80–98; Joseph 2011: 69–70) which holds “that the processes which we observe in the present can help us to gain knowledge about processes in the past. […] This means that when we analyze a historical phenomenon we should first look at known causes in order to explain it, before we turn to unknown causes” (Bergs 2012: 80). Within studies in Greek linguistics, Teodorsson (1979) is a salient application of this principle: as to the role of gender-lectal variation in Koine Greek, he applied the tenets of contemporary sociolinguistic investigation and interpretation to a past situation (see Joseph 2011: 70). In our RT, Klaas Bentein will look into methodological issues concerning HSL as a discipline, and illustrate how to conduct HSL inquiries by discussing case studies from his own corpus of documentary texts.

HSL also differs from SL in some important regards. While SL focuses on concepts such as language change in progress by dealing with its data from the point of view of contemporary language use, HSL
concentrates on variations and changes from a diachronic perspective, and on the social role played by a language in a given historical speaking community. On this point, I will include examples concerning my studies, undertaken alongside Vrato Zervan, on the loanwords in late Byzantine historiography and the causes which made possible the introduction of these words in both low- and high-register texts.

Additionally, it can be argued that, whereas SL is located at the intersection of mainly two different fields, namely sociology and linguistics, HSL finds itself dealing with four different fields: history, philology, linguistics, and social sciences. Bergs, actually, mentions only three dimensions: “Historical Sociolinguistics (Milroy 1992) or socio-historical linguistics (Romanie 1982) is to be found at the intersection not of two, but of three different fields: history, social sciences, and linguistics. As such, it not only has to incorporate theories, practices, and paradigms from all three fields, but it also has to struggle with and in conflicts that originate in all three areas” (2005: 12; see also figure 1 p. 8). I added a fourth dimension, philology, because a historical-philological approach to written sources helps HSL to fight the accusation of ‘ideational anachronism’ (Bergs 2012: 82sq.) effectively. In fact, we may incur this critique, as “we transpose modern concepts such as social class, gender or prestige to historical settings” (Auer et al. 2015: 5). However, we can solve the problem concerning the validity and the diachronic universality of sociolinguistic principles and categories by studying the socio-cultural context in which a language was used (both by authors and their audiences). Consequently, these studies are indispensable preludes to HSL inquiries (see Auer et al. 2015: 5).

In my presentation, I will discuss some examples to show the limits of HSL studies. In particular, I will focus on concepts such as ‘idiolect’ and ‘sociolect’. As far as the applications of HSL to our discipline (i.e. of philology. Greek linguistics) are concerned, I will particularly stress textual criticism and pragmatics. More specifically, I will demonstrate that interpreting a text according to HSL methodology entails disentangling and privileging that very interpretation which was in line with the cultural competences of the receiver, at the time when the text was conceived. The socio-historically legitimate interpretation is only one of endless possible interpretations that every text potentially holds.

So, I will concentrate on the description of an act of communication, popularized by Roman Jacobson. This will allow me to show that historical sociolinguistic criticism mediates, so to speak, between author-oriented criticism and reader-oriented criticism. The first privileges the role of a producer in the act of communication, and aims to recover the authorial intention as the only legitimate way of interpreting messages. This view assumes that every producer/author writes with a deliberate intention to communicate a particular message. Reader-oriented criticism, in turn, considers texts as open works, for they can be viewed as ‘generators of interpretations’; any of which is legitimate as far as it is economic and coherent in se. (I will discuss Heinz Bergner’s The Openness of Medieval Texts. In: Jucker 1995: 37–54). Reader-oriented criticism also states—paraphrasing Eco’s Postille a ‘Il nome della rosa’—that it would be better if an author dies immediately after having completed his work and, if possible, even without entitling his text, for titles influence and limit the free interpretation of the reader. All in all, then, HSL plays the role of a conciliator between these two strands of criticism. In order to demonstrate this, I will develop the concepts of liminal author, reader’s cultural competence, and of contexts of production and reception of texts. Furthermore, I will discuss works by Hirsch (Validity in Interpretation and The Aims of Interpretation), Eco (Open Work of Art and Interpretation and Overinterpretation), and Scholes (Semiotics and Interpretation). Our RT will host two case-studies on hermeneutic concerning Nikephoros Gregoras and Laonikos Chalkokondyles, discussed by Manolova and Akışık respectively. Manolova’s paper will look at marginal comments on Gregoras’ Roman History “penned by the author’s own hand”, which witness contemporary audience’s response. Akışık, in turn, will explore the openness of Chalkokondyles’ text.

My paper will additionally deal with the very well-known issue of the data. In my “Historical Sociolinguistic Pragmatics, Textual Criticism, and Medieval Greek Literature” (in: Cuomo – Trapp
2016), I suggested that we should consider the data that we use as neither ‘bad’ (Labov 1994: 11) nor ‘imperfect’ (as Joseph 2011; see also Janda and Joseph 2003: 14), but rather as ‘difficult to be recovered and used’ (this leads to the problem of the collection of data, with which Wahlgren’s talk in our RT will deal later). On the one hand, it is true that even the most complete collection of data in our field will always be incomplete, if compared with collections in present-day sociolinguistics, as it will be always lacking—at least—first-hand speakers’ perspectives and phonetic records. On this point, Labov (1994: 11) stated that “our knowledge of what was distinctive and what was not is severely limited, since we cannot use the knowledge of native speakers to differentiate nondistinctive from distinctive variants.” On the other hand, as far as Medieval Greek is concerned, I argue that ‘the knowledge of native speakers’ can in fact be recovered (although with difficulty), in so far as the Byzantines used a standardized and codified Greek which they learnt at school and which we, in turn, can learn by analyzing and using their contemporary text books. As an editor of Manuel Moschopulos’ scholia on the Byzantine Triad of Sophocles, I will give some examples of how the Byzantines themselves described the varieties of Medieval Greek. Further discussion on this point is to be found in other presentations as well, namely in those by Valente, Proietti, and Wahlgren. The latter will stress the importance of databases for HSL studies.

In conclusion: historical sociolinguistics deals with any aspect of philological and linguistic analysis, such as phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, meta-textuality, and pragmatics. Note that I refer to pragmatics in the broadest understanding of the term, which considers an act of communication to be essentially depending on the producer, the receiver, as well as linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts (see Bar-Hillel 1970: 271 and the collective volume edited by Jucker 1995). HSL can focus on any historical period, carefully and coherently defined. It studies and describes the social role played by a language in a certain speaking community. It concentrates on hermeneutical issues. It links linguistic approaches—because it uses the language and its variants according to linguistic principles—with a) sociological approaches, for it describes how a society shaped and was shaped by its own language; and b) historical approaches, as it takes into account historically situated social dynamics, political events, and cultural currents as factors of linguistic change.
As Hasan (2001: 2) notes, the discipline of linguistics has changed much over the course of the twentieth century. Not so long ago, “context was a notion remarkable by its absence from the discourse of dominant linguistics: to express concern with context was to banish oneself to the outer periphery of the legitimate boundaries of that discipline.” Nowadays, context has captured a center-stage position: after the establishment of sociolinguistics in the 1960s, historical sociolinguistics, too, has come to maturity as a (sub)discipline. Situated at the intersection of corpus linguistics, historical linguistics, philology and sociolinguistics, historical sociolinguistics has as its main goal “applying the tenets of contemporary sociolinguistic research to the interpretation of material from the past” (Conde-Silvestre – Hernández-Campoy 2012a: 1).

In the field of Classics, too, scholars have come to apply the methods of historical sociolinguistics. Diachronic linguists, for example, no longer attempt to ‘reconstruct’ the spoken language on the basis of lower-register texts; rather, they compare evidence from all sorts of texts, approaching Ancient Greek as a corpus language (Bentein 2013). Synchronically, several publications have shown the added value of a sociolinguistic perspective: for example, in a groundbreaking article Lee (1985) pointed out that in the New Testament there is a tendency for linguistic features having a “formal, dignified tone” (such as the adverb εὖ, the optative, the connective particle οὖν, the vocative particle οὐ, οὐ μὴ with a subjunctive or future, the verb ὅραω, etc.) to be situated specifically in the words of Jesus, as a sign of importance.

Despite the unanimity regarding the importance of context, there is no generally accepted theory of how context can be captured and related to language, in part because of its seemingly “boundless” nature (see e.g. Cook 1990, who refers to context analysis as an exercise in “capturing infinity”). Several important proposals have been formulated—including Accomodation Theory, Politeness Theory, and Audience Design—but these theories typically focus on specific aspects of context and are less concerned with the workings of language (see further Bentein 2016). One theory that is firmly grounded in linguistic theory, and aims to provide a coherent and unifying account is the Functional sociolinguistic framework, which, in the most general terms, is ‘concerned with explaining language in relation to how it is used’ (Martin – Williams 2004: 120). Within this framework, a number of contextual variables have been developed, and explicitly connected to the functional resources of language (see e.g. Hasan 1995, 1999). By means of these contextual variables, varieties of language or ‘registers’ have been described in various degrees of delicacy.

In this paper, I will be applying the Functional sociolinguistic framework to the language of Post-classical and Byzantine documentary papyri (I–VIII AD) – contracts, letters, and petitions in particular. I will concentrate on one specific area, complementation (see Bentein 2015b). This is an area which underwent considerable change: in Classical Greek, the indicative, optative, subjunctive, infinitive and participle are used, based on a number of semantic parameters such as factivity, event integration, and aspecto-temporal reference (see e.g. Cristofaro 1996). In later Greek, however, the Classical system is destabilized due to the progressive disappearance of the optative, participle, and infinitive. As a result, context plays an ever more important role when it comes to the distribution of complementation patterns in our corpus. For example, the accusative and infinitive tends to be used in formal texts, most often when officials are addressed. ὅτι with the indicative, on the other hand, is largely...
avoided in these (con)texts: it tends to be used in informal texts, particularly when family members are writing to each other. Both in higher-register and lower-register contexts, extensions of these patterns beyond their Classical usage can be found, serving a pragmatic function.

Applying a socio-historical methodology to this material has a number of important advantages. First, it allows us to give a much more in-depth account of language change. Second, it allows us to better understand the message conveyed by the ancient document, with language being a key ‘meaning-making’ mode, next to lay-out, handwriting, material, etc. (see Kress – van Leeuwen 1996). Third, it allows us to better understand ‘decontextualised’ texts, that is, texts of which little or no context is known.
Education and Lexicography in the Palaiologan Age: Some Short Remarks

Stefano Valente

In Italy, between the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries, Dante Alighieri reflected upon the co-existence of two layers of language in his *De vulgari eloquentia* (1.2f., trans. Botterill 1996: 3, modified):

(....) I call “vernacular language” that which infants acquire from those who take care of them when they first begin to distinguish sounds; or, to put it more succinctly, I declare that vernacular language is that which we learn without any (grammatical) rule, by imitating our nurses. Of course, we are also given a secondary kind of language, which the Romans called *gramatica*. The Greeks and others—but not all peoples—also have this secondary kind of language. Few, however, achieve complete fluency in it, since we are only fully instructed in it over time and with persevering study.

Of course, Dante did not know Greek at all, but inferred from his Latin sources the existence of different layers within this language. Dante’s text can by analogy also be applied to the linguistic situation in Palaiologan Byzantium where two strata of language happened to co-exist: namely the κοινή or “Common Greek,” and the fictional Atticist sociolect characterising official culture. The “fashion of Atticism” – as Nigel Wilson (1996: 5) aptly called this phenomenon – still dominated the literary horizon, possibly in a more dogmatic way than in the previous centuries. In order to learn the correct use of Attic language as required for literary composition, old Atticist lexica dating from the Imperial age to Late Antiquity were rediscovered and re-activated both in form of new transcriptions and as sources for new compilations (Valente 2016; see more generally Gaul 2008 with further ref.).

To this purpose, Terttu Nevalainen’s category of “ideology of linguistic correctness” (2015: 251) can be applied to the Atticist literary production of the Palaiologan age as well (and, in fact, more generally to the previous centuries since this model controlled the Greek language of the cultivated classes). She defines this concept as “a megatrend that crosses linguistic and geographical boundaries. Although its influence varies over time, one of its manifestations is language standardisation, which today is associated with prescription.” Striving to write (and speak) good Attic implied the need to possess Atticist lexicographic and syntactic textbooks containing the codified rules of this linguistic variety. As Paul Canart (2010: 449) rightly stressed, Palaiologan scholars not only produced new editions of classical texts, but also schoolbooks intended for basic education. Among these, there were “des lexiques élémentaires, par exemple de mots attiques, utiles pour qui veut écrire de manière élégante”, such as Moschopoulos’ *Collection of Attic Names*. Atticist glosses can also be found in the lexica of the past, such as the etymologica, and were also inserted into more recent works, such as the so-called lexicon of Zonaras dating to the beginning of the thirteenth century. But for the purposes of the present RT, the monographic lexica dealing programmatically with the Attic dialect are of primary relevance.

Before using Byzantine lexicographical works for historical sociolinguistic research, it is necessary to understand what kind of corpus of texts we possess and how they took effect. The issues can be subsumed under seven key-words as summarized by Hernández-Campoy and Schilling (2012: 66 and 73f.) concerning the problems faced by historical sociolinguists: “i) representativeness, ii) empirical validity, iii) invariation, iv) authenticity, v) authorship, vi) social and historical validity, and vii) standard ideology.” In particular, we should be aware that the surviving manuscripts represent but a small, randomly preserved sub-set of a much wider scholarly production. Furthermore, each manuscript or even each copy of a lexicon usually represents a new “version”—if not a new “edition”—of a
given work: the copyist(s) or the user(s) normally considered the text as a kind of cultural commons that could be shortened, enlarged or modified according to current requirements. Against this background, Labov’s assertion (1972:99) that “historical linguists [...] have no control over their data” and that their great art is “to make the best of this bad data” should always be kept in mind. Moreover, the highly conservative character of Byzantine erudition as well as the standardization of Byzantine education ought to be considered. When using the same sources, lexicographers of different centuries reproduced their content reasonably verbatim while compiling new lexica.

Nevertheless, lexicographical sources can be used to detect the linguistic categories employed by the Palaiologan scholars to analyze their own language—with special focus on the linguistic categories “Attic” vs “Common Greek”—provided that their nature is properly studied. In lexicography, the prescriptive value of the scholarly tradition usually prevented innovation content-wise. Generally speaking, Palaiologan lexicographers inherited their attitude toward the literary sociolect as well as the labels “Attic” and “non-Attic” from their sources – i.e. the distinction between “literary” words which could be used in cultivated literary production and conversation on the one hand, and words to be avoided on the other. For instance, the Atticist lexicon by Moeris (third century CE?) served the needs of Palaiologan scholars particularly well thanks to its binary structure. An entry in this lexicon usually reads: ‘\(x\) <say> the Atticists (\(\text{Ἀττικοί}\)), \(y\) the Greeks (\(\text{Ἑλληνες}\)’), whereby only the Attic term is admitted for the literary production, while the common Greek form is to be rejected as not being attested in the works of the ‘exemplary’ authors contained in the canon of Attic writers. Sometimes, instead of—or in addition to—\(\text{Ἑλληνες}\), the second term in opposition is the “common language” (κοινόν): such terms obviously were to be avoided in literary practice as well (Maidhof 1912). The work by Moeris quite neatly suited the needs of Palaiologan scholars. It is not a coincidence that, out of the eight surviving copies of this lexicon from tenth to fifteenth century, six were produced during the Palaeologan age (Hansen 1998: 14–35). They were mostly copied by scholarly hands in miscellany manuscripts, such as the Parisinus gr. 1630, a “personal encyclopedia” copied by the monk Chariton of the Hodegos monastery (Pérez Martín 2011, 2016). Furthermore, Moeris’ lexicon was inserted into the new lexicographic compilations by Palaiologan scholars.

The case of Moeris’ work can be extended to many other Atticist lexica during the Palaiologan age. For instance, Thomas Magistros incorporated newly rediscovered Atticist lexica into his Ecloga of Attic words (Gaul 2008: 184–90). In it, references to classical and more generally exemplary authors were later supplemented on the basis of further readings, at first within the scholarly framework of the author, later on within Nikephoros Gregoras’ circle in Constantinople (Gaul 2007: 296–328). In general, lexicographic texts rarely contain precise hints for reconstructing the setting of their composition and use, thus the textual tradition of Magistros’ Ecloga is an exceptional case. From a different angle, another case is ms. inv. nr. 2626 of the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków (formerly Berolinensis gr. qu. 13, fourteenth century: Maas 1938; Gaul 2005: 693–702; Pontani 2009:10 with n. 36). It preserves “a much altered and expanded version of \(\Sigma\) [= Synagoge]” (Cunnigham 2003:18). In its margins, an anonymous scholar (or school-master) who lived in the Peloponnese added much heterogeneous material, some of it containing terms and expressions taken from contemporary language as well as remarks concerning his personality and life.

The study of some “minor” lexica can also provide interesting insights. Let us consider, for instance, a small collection of glosses assembled during the Palaeologan age. According to the title in some manuscripts, this is a work by Nikephoros Gregoras. As Sigfrid Lindstam suggested (1929/30: 307), it may well have been a juvenile work of him, possibly inspired by his teacher Johannes Glykys. The lexicographical excerpts were taken from different sources and the entries show no identifiable arrangement but the order in which they had been collected. To date, the only modern publications of this lexicon are transcriptions of the text as it is transmitted in a single manuscript each: the most complete ones were published by Gottfried Hermann (1801: 319–352) on the basis of the Monacensis gr. 529 (fourteenth century; fols. 86–100; see Lindstam 1912: 426f.) and by John Cramer (1841: 245–64)
based on the Parisinus gr. 2720 (fifteenth century, fols. 228v–234v). The lexicon is today still known as lexicon Hermanni because of Hermann’s transcription. The study of the text and its relationship to Gregorios’ works is complicated by the fact that there is no critical edition of this lexicon, not even a study of its manuscript tradition (Faranda 2012; Lorenzoni 2013). The intention of the compiler was to select some useful information concerning the meanings and usage of words from a bunch of sources, as well as some syntactic entries with particular focus on Attic usage. I shall consider only two examples.

Concerning lexical varieties, a quite long entry comments upon the dialectal forms of the name λαγός, “hare” (gl. 9 Hermann = p. 245.22–28 Cramer; see Faranda 2012:9f.):

τὸ μὲν λαγός κοινὸν ὄν εὑρήσατε παρὰ Σοφοκλεῖ· “γλαῦκες, ἰκτῖνοι καὶ λαγοί.” ὡσπερ δὲ ναὸν καὶ λαὸν λεγόντων τῶν κοινῶν οἱ Ἀττικοὶ νεῶν καὶ λεῶν φασίν, οὕτω καὶ τὸν λαγόν λαγόν φασίν, καὶ Εὔπολις: “μπατίδες καὶ λαγῷ καὶ γυναικεῖς εἰλίποδες.” τὸ δὲ λαγοῖς Ἰωνικὸν ἔστιν.

“The form ‘λαγός’ (‘hare’) is common and found in Sophocles (fr. 111): “Little owls, kites, and hares”. As the Attic-speakers say νεῶν (temple) and λεῶν (people) whereas the common forms are ναόν and λαόν, so they use the form λαγῶν for hare instead of the form with οmicron. And Eupolis (fr. 174.2f. Kassel/Austin) says: “skate and hares (λαγῷ) and shambling-footed women.” The form λαγωός is Ionic” (my trans., modelled on Olson 2008: 363–65).

There, the focus lies on the opposition between the forms used in the common language and those employed by speakers of Attic. The entry comes from a passage in the epitome of Athenaeus’ Learned banqueters (9.400b/d): “Because our form of the word is lagos; and just as we say naos (‘temple’) and laos (‘people’), whereas they say neōs and leōs, so too we say lagos, whereas they say lagōs [ἐπεὶ τὸ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἐστι λαγός, ὡσπερ δὲ ναὸν λεγόντων ἡμῶν ἐκεῖνοι φασίν νεῶν καὶ λαῶν λεῶν, οὕτω λαγόν ὀνομαζόντων ἐκεῖνοι λαγὼν ἐροῦσι].” The form of the nominative plural used in Sophocles’ satyr play Amycus (fr. 111 Radt) is consistent with the accusative singular lagon: “cranes, tortoises, little owls, kites, hares (lagoi).” The form lagoi pronounced with an omega and analogous with lagōn, on the other hand, is found in Eupolis’ Flatterers (fr. 174.2–3 Kassel/Austin): “where skate and hares (lagōi) are present, as well as shambling-footed women.” [...] But even Attic authors use lagos [...] But as for the phrase (Il. 22.310) “or a cowering hare (lagōon).” if this is an Ionic form, the omega is superfluous, whereas if it is Attic, the omicron is” (Olson 2008: 363–65).

It is evident how the compiler of the lexicon Hermanni worked when excerpting from his source and how he selected only the relevant information he needed, concerning his Atticist interests in this case. In line with his own interests, the compiler summarised the information he found in Athenaeus concerning the opposition Attic vs common language.

Data concerning dialectal labels in this work—and of course in every Byzantine lexicon—can nevertheless be misleading if not studied within the wider framework of the lexicographic and grammatical tradition. An interesting counterexample may be found in another entry of the lexicon Hermanni (nr. 27 Hermann = p. 247.22 Cramer; see Faranda 2012: 20) concerning the correct name for mallow:

μαλάχη κοινόν· μολόχη Ἀττικόν.

“maláche is the common form, molóche the Attic one”.

This gloss falls within another group of entries taken from Athenaeus (2.58d; trans. Olson 2006: 329):
“Malachē is the Attic form. But, says [Athenaeus], I found the word written with an omicron in many copies of Antiphanes’ Minos (fr. 156 Kassel/Austin): ‘eating mallow (molochē) root’. And Epicharmus (fr. 151 Kassel/Austin): ‘I am milder than a mallow (molocha).’”

The orthographic question is chiefly Atticist and is attested in many lexica, such as in Moeris (μ 24 Hansen: μαλάχη Αττικοί· μολόχη Ἕλληνες) and Orus (fr. B 95 Alpers, on the basis of Photios’ lexicon, μ 64 Theodoridis: μαλάχη, οὐ μολόχη· παρ’ οὐδενὶ γὰρ κέται κτλ.) (Alpers 1981:234). According to these texts and to the evidence for both forms in the Greek and Byzantine literature, it is clear that the Attic form is μαλάχη. Gregoras—or the compiler of the lexicon Hermanni—either misunderstood his source or made a mistake in excerpting the information from it.

This last case shows the importance of a careful textual analysis in order to offer a usable dataset for historical sociolinguistic research. Before using lexica copied or produced during the Palaeologan age as sources to determine the linguistic categories of the scholars of that period, comprehensive manuscriptological and philological studies of each single work should be carried out. Otherwise, false interpretations may alter the analysis (see Alpers 1990: 31).

An agenda for future synergistic research might therefore consider some of the following items: every single manuscript of each lexicon produced and/or copied in the Palaeologan period should be studied not only from a modern scholarly perspective usually aiming to produce critical editions of the original works, but also applying a more historical attitude aiming to discover those details in each copy which may lead to reveal their user(s) and reader(s): one can consider, for instance, the investigations on the manuscripts of Magistros’ Atticist lexicon (Gaul 2007). Each manuscript can contribute to clarify some aspects regarding the perception of language in the Byzantine world and provide more data for modern historical sociolinguists. Fully searchable and multi-layered editions which distinguish all textual strata and variant (or trivial) readings in each manuscript will therefore be important to a sociolinguistic approach.

Thus, mapping the field of linguistic categories used by the Palaeologan scholars to analyse their own language requires a concurrence of many skills and competences from different disciplines – which is actually what the present RT aims to.
Byzantine Text-Books as a Major Source for  
Historical Sociolinguistic Studies on Medieval Greek

Isabella Proietti

In my paper I will be concentrating on late Byzantine text-books, the tools by which the Greeks – as well as the historiographers – learned how to use Greek. I will mainly focus on the sociolinguistic relevance of this particular kind of manuscripts, as they reveal how the Greeks themselves considered and described the varieties of Medieval Greek. My paper will be divided into three parts, where I will respectively 1) discuss the concepts of ‘school’ and ‘schooling system’ in late Byzantium; 2) define which sources are necessary, if we want to a) understand how the Byzantines would learn Greek in early Palaeologan era, and b) know how they described the two most important varieties of Medieval Greek, namely ‘Attic’ and ‘Koine’ Greek; 3) outline the potentialities of historical sociolinguistic studies on Medieval Greek beyond Byzantium.

‘School’ is the inevitable starting point of any inquiry on the relationship between a language and its community. Effectively, it is at school that a society learned its language, and teachers shaped and customized teaching methods, in order to address contemporary social needs. So, the better we know how the Byzantines learned and were taught Greek, the better we can understand the relevance and the social role which Medieval Greek played in Byzantium. This is one of the goals of sociolinguistic studies, the one which I would stress in my presentation.

In the second part of my presentation, I will focus on the definition of ‘text-books’. As it is known, recent studies (e.g. Bianconi 2015) pointed out that ‘text-book’ is a very problematic concept. For example, it is difficult to unequivocally define whether a book, which has been commented and annotated by an erudite on personal use only, was also employed in didactic contexts. Moreover, it is impossible to exclude that very old manuscripts (even these dating back to the IX/X centuries) were used by Palaeologan teachers. However, in a sociolinguistic perspective, whether if it is a book used at school, or annotated by a scholar, the manuscript gives us back the language that was taught, that people wanted to learn and, therefore, that could be studied individually too, and shows how the Byzantines perceived and used their language.

The concept of ‘text-book’ will also enable me to define which are the most important sources for historical sociolinguistic analysis on Medieval Greek, which 1) reveal us how the Greek language was taught in Palaeologan schools; and 2) allow us to reconstruct which words, syntactic constructions, etc., were considered to be ‘Attic’ and which ‘Koine’ by the Byzantines themselves. In respect thereof, I will underline that not only Lexica, but also commentaries on Greek classics, Schedographia, and Erotemata are sociolinguistically relevant genres.

In the third point of my presentation, I will be discussing the problems related to the choice of the corpus of manuscripts, which may enable historical sociolinguistic studies on Medieval Greek. Among Palaeologan scholars, I will focus on Manuel Moschopulos, the didactic issue being a regular feature in all his exegetical and grammatical works. Clearly, there is a trail of evidence linking Moschopulos to his educational path and his target audience: Moschopulos’ didactic purposes were in step with the social goals of the educational system of the early Palaeologan era, which was mainly aimed at building civil and religious functionaries and at increasing the social prestige of the educated elites. As mentioned in part two, these were required to master the Atticizing variation of Medieval Greek, as communication and performing skills in this variety of Greek would affect one’s career. As to Moschopulos’ didactic production, I will be looking at 1) the sociolinguistically relevance of his commen-
taries on Greek classics; 2) the characteristics of his *Schedographia* and *Erotemata*; 3) the success of Moschopulos’ didactic works.

In this part of my presentation, I will also stress two important aspects related to sociolinguistic studies on Moschopulos’ didactic production, namely 1) the difficulties of collecting and storing sociolinguistically relevant data (this will give me the opportunity to link mine to Wahlgren’s presentation on databases); 2) Moschopulos beyond Moschopulos. This last point concerns the fact that Moschopulean manuscripts have been constantly copied throughout the centuries and readers, as well as later users, have added commentaries and notes even to the oldest manuscript witnesses. These notes aimed to bridge Moschopulos’ exegetical gaps, but also reveal how the didactic of Greek had changed during the centuries and in the Renaissance, when western scholars learned Greek on (although not exclusively) Moschopulos’ text-books.

In conclusion: historical sociolinguistic studies are aimed at defining the social role of Medieval Greek within its speaking community cannot be undertaken without a thorough investigation of contemporary Byzantine manuscripts, particularly those related to the teaching of Greek. Manuscripts must be studied both in the context of their production and in the context of their reception, this will discloses new horizons to our research, for Byzantine manuscripts lived long after Byzantium and served to didactic purposes in the Humanistic period as well. Scholars undertaking historical sociolinguistic studies on Medieval Greek should not been discouraged by the amount of data and the difficulty of analyzing these. On the one hand, historical sociolinguistics has sensibly advanced in the last decade: for example, see the series edited by Nils Langer et al. “Historical Sociolinguistics. Studies on Language and Society in the Past”, the Viennese forum for Sociolinguistics (http://www.oew.ac.at/sociolinguistics/), the project on Moschopulos’ commentaries on Sophocles (http://www.oew.ac.at/byzanz/sophok.htm), the newly established Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics (http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/jhsl). On the other hand, new technologies and advances in the field of Digital Humanities will provide historical sociolinguists with more and more properly designed databases, which are indispensable tools for storing and effectively use the great amount of data.
The chief aim of my presentation is to highlight the need for electronic corpora in sociolinguistic research. First, I will devote some time to presenting a tagged corpus of Byzantine texts (called ByzTec) currently in preparation, as well as to discussing the background of this undertaking and some aspects of the design, aims and content of this corpus. Proceeding from this, I will discuss how such a corpus may be employed in sociolinguistic research.

My own starting-point (which ultimately took me to electronic corpora) was an interest in the use of formal varieties of Greek in Byzantine times, and especially an interest in syntactic rules. It can be said that this kind of Greek has been generally ignored by scholars, and that there has been a tacit agreement that formal Byzantine Greek is nothing but Ancient Greek and not worthy of independent study. Therefore, there has been almost no research undertaken with a view to finding out to which extent Byzantine Greek has a dynamic of its own and follows its own rules—rules that we, if we care to, might be able to identify and describe. However, it should be mentioned that a certain change is in the air, and it can be predicted that Byzantine Greek linguistics will establish itself as an independent branch of scholarship in the years to come. (For an overview of the state of the art, see Hinterberger 2014; yet even here, any discussion of the need for the development of tagged corpora as a research tool is lacking.)

My current research justifying the need for an electronic corpus (i.e. explaining why I have turned to linguistic markup and electronic tagging) is focused on syntactic variation in formal Byzantine Greek of the middle and late periods, especially of the tenth and fourteenth centuries (the concept of “formal Byzantine Greek” is used here in a deliberately vague sense; for different reasons, I do not restrict myself to only the most high-level texts, but I do exclude texts of a clearly Modern Greek type). Focus lies on diachrony and irreversible change: how do all texts of the fourteenth century differ from all texts of the tenth century? Further, attention is paid to register and text type: what correlation is there between language form and subject matter?

Texts of different kinds, from the tenth as well as the fourteenth century, have been included in my corpus. So far, there is a special focus on epistolography (including authors such as Nikolaos Mystikos, Symeon the Logothete, Nikephoros Gregoras and Nikephoros Choumnos) and historiography (including authors such as Symeon the Logothete, Leo Diakonos, Nikephoros Gregoras and Michael Panaretos).

The markup I introduce into the corpus includes tags for case and particles and will, in the next stage, hopefully, also take word order into account. In my research I pursue questions of semantics and pragmatics.

At the outset, data were compiled with highly traditional methods: texts printed on paper were marked up, indices were consulted, and searches in databases such as TLG were conducted. Approximately two years ago, the project went 100 % electronic (and we may say that this was the point at which my undertaking became corpus linguistic in a proper sense; it was the moment when ByzTec was born). This was done in order to make data easier to handle and, ultimately, with a view to sharing with others (indeed, the success of a database should probably not be measured by its usefulness to its original compiler but by its interest to others). In the first stage of working electronically, files of texts were collected and basic tags, marking up morphological and syntactic features, were tested out in Word documents. In a subsequent stage, XML-files were produced using the Oxygen XML Editor (see https://www.oxygenxml.com/). During the last half-year, the Arethusa Annotation Framework (“Are-
thusa Editor” below) available through the Perseids platform (see http://sites.tufts.edu/perseids/) has been used.

Ideally, what editor we use in order to produce XML-files should not be all-important, since the desired result should not be dependent upon the methods used to arrive there (see, however, the following). In my presentation I will discuss the pros and cons of different kinds of editors, with special attention paid to the Arethusa editor, which is a very user-friendly option, but with some pre-set functions. This editor provides readymade solutions for morphological, morpho-syntactic-semantic markup, and for treebanking. I will discuss what these functions are and what we can, and cannot, do with them, and what potential there is for individual adaptation, one problem being functions we could wish for, but do not find included by the designers, another, perhaps more serious, problem being functions designed so as to take us into a specific field of linguistic theory and force us to look at language in a particular way (as exemplified by treebanking, which implies a specific kind of syntactic theory rather than one of the investigator’s choice).

In sum, we have to weigh readiness and simplicity against specific needs. The good news is that technical solutions are rapidly improving, and some of the limitations currently experienced are probably going to disappear within a short period of time.

Finally, my presentation will turn to sociolinguistic research, and I will argue that this could profit by the existence of tagged corpora. These could be designed with different aims in mind, and we will briefly discuss two kinds of corpora that may appeal to the sociolinguist.

First, the sociolinguist may want to use corpora containing linguistic markup of the conventional kind, such as that currently included in my corpus (ByzTec), and I will discuss how ByzTec may be used as a tool for sociolinguistic research already in its present form. The feature of ByzTec most likely to attract the sociolinguist may be that it includes texts written by people with different positions in Byzantine society. There is, in ByzTec, a special focus on epistolography, which is a very promising field for the inquiry into the construction and understanding of social status. The implications of knowing that you write to your superior, or your subordinate, have been an object of some research already but could yield a lot more. Also, questions of gendered language could be addressed. A possibly more subtle link to sociolinguistics could be constructed by putting to intelligent use the fact that texts from the tenth and fourteenth centuries respectively are included in the ByzTec corpus. As I have tried to show elsewhere, it can be argued that there is a subtext, tension, in the fourteenth century because of the existence of a more clearly different kind of Greek in the form of Modern Greek as an alternative. How writers handle this tension may be of interest to the sociolinguist.

Secondly, the sociolinguist could consider the compilation of a metalinguistic corpus dealing with attitudes towards language. This corpus would naturally have a strong focus on descriptive and normative literature, such as that of the grammarians, or rhetorical literature, but it could also include other kinds of texts. There are several ways to proceed here. To establish correlations between words and value judgements pertaining to them (what is “right,” “wrong,” “Attic,” “Koine,” or even “good” or “bad”?) is one way to go. Further, we may want to look into other disciplines and their use of Digital Humanities (Semantic Web?) and discourse analysis.

At last, a very tentative parting shot. The sociolinguistic concerns outlined are very much questions of normativity. However: what is normativity, and how do we recognise it? Some texts on grammar (as indeed some very important ones from Antiquity, such as Dionysios Thrax) are, at least on the surface, strictly descriptive, and they do not (directly) tell us anything about right and wrong. Yet in their reception (at the very latest) they turn out to be highly normative. How do we include them in the equation?
Regulating the Page, Guiding the Experience: 
Practices of Textual Organization in Nikephoros Gregoras’ *Roman History*

Divna Manolova

Nikephoros Gregoras (d. ca. 1360) wrote and circulated his *Roman History* in Constantinople in several instalments starting from the 1340s. Today the work is preserved in more than forty manuscripts, two of which—codd. Vat. gr. 165 and 164—were partially copied, annotated and revised by Gregoras himself. The *pinakes* and chapter titles in both codices indicate that the latter were designed as an edition of the first seventeen books of the *History*. My contribution to this RT analyzes the “editorial” decisions the two Vatican manuscripts display, such as the chapter division and its relationship to the *pinax* of each volume, and the role of chapter titles in guiding the readers’ attention, memory, and emotional response or alternatively, in directing how the text should be performed.

In the introduction to his *Roman History*, Gregoras stated that history told the story not only of people, cities and empires, but also of the heavenly movements and thus, provided knowledge of the past, which in turn, together with the ability to read the celestial signs divine providence furnished, assured that people could make predictions about the future: “But now it <history> makes those who come next prophets […], since they guess the future events based on the past.” Eleven books later, on a rather different note, Gregoras remarked that his historical œuvre was not only intended to satisfy the desires of those interested in the new and recent affairs, but also to indulge him as it brought him no small pleasure to pursue the diverse and varied stories.

The beginning of book XII, that is, the beginning of the second instalment of the *History*, written probably after 1344, contains one of the very few autoexegetical reflections related to the meaning of writing history and to the readership of Gregoras’ work (italics mine):

> So such among the advantages of the history persuaded me also to describe the events that happened in my time, both to deliver *stories great and worthy of earnest hearing* to those men who love the beautiful and to inspire great comprehension with regard to what is suitable in *those who desire to receive experience of ever newer affairs*. For, in a way, also to me the deed brings not insignificant *gratification* in relation to a certain state of the character, as well as no small *pleasure*, when I pursue more extensively the *diverse and varied* among the stories from one to another …

Thus, Gregoras emphasized the appeal of the novel and the importance of the aesthetic principle of diversity or ποικιλία. While the rhetorical character of Byzantine historiography is yet to be explored more thoroughly, the tension between truthfulness and accuracy, on the one hand, and aesthetic appeal and entertainment, on the other, is recognisably essential to ancient and medieval Greek history-writing and has a long tradition going back at least to Lucian and his essay titled *How to Write History*.

The present contribution examines a copy of Gregoras’ *Roman History* which comprises the first seventeen books and is designed as a two-volume edition of the work. Numerous corrections, titles and marginalia are penned by the author’s own hand. The inquiry is particularly interested in two groups of chapter titles and marginal notes. The first group suggests that a particular emotional response is required from the reader, such as lament or sorrow. The second group emphasizes the authorial presence in the (hi)story by pointing out either interpolated orations and letters written by Gregoras, or by
referring to his auto-reflections on his own role as a writer of history or simply as the author of the work. Based on the examples surveyed, the autograph interventions in both manuscripts and the larger context of the self-exegetical remarks in Gregoras’ œuvre, the present contribution argues that the *Roman History* was intended not only as an authentic description of recent and eye-witnessed events, but also as a vivid and emotional read, not due to its use of rhetorical devices, but rather to the very nature of the events it told.

The pinakes of both volumes list the chapters each *logos* or ‘book’ is subdivided into. The chapter titles, of which the existing critical edition does not give an indication, usually concern topics such as battles, embassies, the emperor’s coronations, ascension and descent from the patriarchal throne, the death of important historical actor, explanations of the causes of a particular event or of the motivation for an action, especially if performed by the emperor, character descriptions, wars, and speeches delivered, but also more curious topics such as the measuring of a sculpture and its horse indicated on fol. 4r, l. 17 in Vat. gr. 165. In line with Gregoras’s astronomical expertise, celestial phenomena such as eclipses and their descriptions are also singled out.

The chapter titles as found in the pinakes are also found in the margins next to the relevant subsections. Importantly, speeches and orations of every kind are marked as separate chapters and usually labelled as δημηγορία. Letters are titled and indicated as separate items as well.

**Case study I: Evoking emotion**  
Vat. gr. 165 or *Roman History*, vol. 1 and Vat. gr. 164 or *Roman History*, vol. 2

We find pinax entries suggesting what the readers’ emotional response to a given topic or event should be in Vat. gr. 165 fol. 3r, ll. 13 and 26, both of them indicating terrible events worth lamenting and crying for. Like Vat. gr. 165, the second volume of the *Roman History* also contains marginal notes which guide the reader to noteworthy passages and, moreover, to passages which should evoke a particular emotional response, usually lament, grief and tears, for instance, on fols. 94v and 110r, both written with red ink in the outer margin. Occasionally, the volume’s ‘editors’ note that the feeling should be further intensified, for instance, on fol. 101r.

**Case study II: Authorial presence**

Some chapter titles in Vat. gr. 165 emphasize the author’s involvement, for instance, as listed on fol. 4v, ll. 4, 11 and 12. The same principle is kept throughout Vat. gr. 164 as well, for instance on fols. 43r and 142r.
Laonikos Chalkokondyles composed his Herodotean style history, Ἀπόδειξις Ἱστοριῶν, concerning the rise of the Ottomans and the fall of the Hellenes sometime after 1464, when Laonikos’ narrative ends with the events of the Ottoman-Venetian war. Information on Laonikos’ biography is scarce and ambiguous and does not allow one to definitively conclude where and when he wrote his History. In the Ἀπόδειξις, Laonikos provided an account about his aristocratic family who were expelled from their native Athens after the murder of the Florentine Duke of Athens, Antonio I Acciajuoli, as well as a story about his father George Chalkokondyles, who was sent on an embassy to the Ottoman Sultan Murad II by Antonio I’s widow. Cyriac of Ancona, in his diary entry for late July/early August 1447 when he was visiting George Gemistos Pletho in Mistra, mentions meeting the youthful Nikolaos Chalkokondyles, who was “remarkably learned in both Latin and Greek literature.” Furthermore, students of Laonikos have noted the inclusion of extensive portions of Ottoman Turkish lore in the Ἀπόδειξις and have pointed out its correspondence with contemporary Ottoman historiographical narratives, concluding that Laonikos must have had access to such material when he was living under Ottoman rule in the aftermath of the fall of Constantinople, Athens, and Mistra to Mehmed II. Laonikos’ narrative on Islam is exceptionally well informed in contrast to Byzantine tradition and he introduces Islam as a cultural system comparable to Christianity and Judaism. In addition, a pro-Venetian and pro-Unionist perspective informs the Ἀπόδειξις from the proem through the end of book 10, when Laonikos sets up Venice as the most worthy and virtuous opponent to the tyrannical rule of Mehmed II. Thus, it is difficult to address questions of audience and authorial point of view as the text is multi-layered and contains shifts in perspective. However, Laonikos’ linguistic and historiographical choices contain precious information on his intended audience, on Laonikos’ authorial persona, and on the correct reading of the text.

On first glance, Laonikos uses a classicizing language, imitating both Herodotus and Thucydides. He indiscriminately employs both the Attic and Ionic forms of the same words. With respect to morphology, Laonikos attempts to reproduce pure Attic forms albeit not systematically. He also imitates Thucydides and Herodotus by repeating phrases that are common to the classical authors. Similar to Herodotus, Laonikos often uses the accusative with infinitive construction. (Darkó II: 350–360) In addition to morphology and syntax, Laonikos consistently adopts a classical vocabulary to refer to contemporary ethnicities and geographies. However, commentators on the text have also noted that Laonikos’ language is artificial, formulaic, and not fluent when compared with other fifteenth-century classicizing Greek texts (private communication with Professor Marc Lauxtermann). It is clear that Laonikos attempted to produce a high-register Greek text, which would only be available, in terms of vocabulary, morphology, and syntax, to an elite group of literati who had extensive education in classical Greek language and classical historiographical models. It is also evident that Laonikos was less than successful in reproducing Attic Greek, when compared with Kritoboulos, the contemporary eulogizing historian of Mehmed II. While Kritoboulos’ text was not disseminated, only surviving in the autograph copy that was presented to Mehmed II which was not discovered until the nineteenth century, Laonikos enjoyed wide popularity and the Greek text survives in more than thirty manuscripts, and was first printed in Latin translation in 1556. Thus, Laonikos’ success with his audience did not coincide with proficiency in the high register as had been the case with previous classicizing Byzantine historians, possibly indicating a shift in the make-up of the target audience from well-educated native speakers of Greek to western readers less in tune with the demands of the language. While the author delivered a less than perfect version of the high register, the audience was expected not to be surprised
at, for example, the interchangeable use of the Ionic and Attic forms, and to be able to follow the language, attesting to schooling in classical Greek. Linguistic virtuosity was not Laonikos’ strong point and the popularity of his text demonstrates that it was valuable to his audience for other reasons, most importantly the innovative Herodotean structure, originality in developing a Hellenic point of view in lieu of the standard Christian-Roman identity of Byzantine historiography, and authentic historical and ethnographic information directly translated from contemporary Turkish sources.

The organization of the Απόδειξις closely follows the Herodotean model. Similar to Herodotus, who had integrated the wide-ranging information by a narrative structure focused on the military campaigns of the Persians, and the dynastic succession of the Persian Kings, Laonikos roughly divided the books according to the reigns of the Ottoman rulers and provided information on numerous peoples that were connected in some way with Ottoman campaigns and the decline of the Hellenes. While Herodotus was not used as a historiographical model but only as a source of information by the Byzantines before the fifteenth century and was virtually unknown in the medieval west, his text was translated into Latin by Lorenzo Valla in 1457. Valla belonged in the intellectual circle of Cardinal Bessarion, a student of Pletho, as well as of Laonikos’ cousin (or brother) Demetrios Chalkokondyles and he had asked Bessarion for help with the translation. Bessarion himself had studied Herodotus along with Pletho in Mistra and copied it in 1436 (Marc. gr. 365) before he emigrated to Italy to become Cardinal. Pletho owned a fourteenth-century copy of Herodotus, now the Laur. gr. 70.06, which still contains a bifolio in Pletho’s handwriting and an epigram on Herodotus, which was composed by Laonikos. Alberti has demonstrated that Valla had used Laur. gr. 70.06, the manuscript closely associated with Pletho’s Mistra Circle, as one of his three master copies for the translation (Alberti 1960: 287–90). By the end of the fifteenth century, Valla’s Latin Herodotus had already been printed three times in addition to its numerous manuscript copies, bearing testimony to its wide appeal. The Byzantine émigrés, who had the requisite linguistic and literary training to bring classical texts such as Herodotus to the west, individuals such as Valla, who had ties with those Byzantine émigrés, and the intellectual openness to revive dormant classical models provided the Italian setting for the renewed interest in Herodotus. While we do not have biographical information on Laonikos to definitively conclude that he was living in the west circa 1464, the congruence of Italian interest in Herodotus, Laonikos’ close study and emulation of Herodotus during the same time, and the proximity of the intellectual circles that revived Herodotus to Laonikos, at least suggest that he was conversant with and responded to that milieu. Thus, we should look for Laonikos’ intended audience among those elite western intellectual circles, having knowledge of classical Greek and receptive towards new trends, as they would be able to decode Laonikos’ Herodotean program and to appreciate the application of an ancient and forgotten model to understand contemporary reality and the imminent Ottoman threat.

Laonikos’ code-switching by referring to the protagonists of his narrative as Hellenes rather than as Romans (the self-representation of the contemporary historians Kritoboulos and Doukas as well as of traditional Byzantine historiography more generally), provides clues to Laonikos’ intended audience and to mutual assumptions about historical memory within that elite group. In the proem, Laonikos was explicit that historically and culturally the people inhabiting the land were Hellenes and drew attention to the dissonance of the onomastic practice of the rulers, who called themselves “emperors of the Romans.”

και ιδονεύουσαν μὲν καὶ ἣθη διὰ τὸ πολλῷ πλέονας Ῥωμαίων Ἑλλήνας αὐτοῦ ἐπικρατεῖν διὰ τέλους φυλάξας, τούτων μὲντοι μηκέτι κατὰ τὸ πατρίου καλουμένου ἄλλαξασθαι, καὶ τούς γε βασιλεῖς Βυζαντίου ἐπὶ τὸ σφᾶς αὐτοὺς Ῥωμαίων βασιλεῖς τε καὶ αὐτοκράτορας σεμνύνεσθαι ἀποκαλεῖν, Ἑλλήνοι δὲ βασιλεῖς οὐκέτι σωδιμῆ ἄξιοιν. (Darkó I, 4)
“guarded their (Hellenic) language and customs until the very end because they (Hellenes) were much more numerous than the Romans. However, they (Hellenes) no longer called themselves according to their (Hellenic) hereditary tradition and the name was changed. And, thus, the Emperors of Byzantion were proud to call themselves emperors and autocrats of Romans and never found it worthy to be called emperors of Hellenes”

This passage has been repeatedly quoted in the secondary literature to argue that it presents one of the earliest specimens of Greek protonationalism and Laonikos has been hailed as harbinger of modern Greek identity (Vacalopoulos 1970). However, this anachronistic analysis configures Laonikos, as well as Pletho, whose Advisory Letter to Manuel II concerning the Peloponnese dated 1418 provides the intellectual framework for the systematic and wholesale application of Hellenic identity to contemporaries, to be the only fifteenth-century representatives of an ideological position that looks forwards rather than backwards. Should one contextualize Laonikos as a protonationalist historian working under the formative influence of Tourkokratia and belonging in the Ottoman Peloponnese and Athens? Who was Laonikos writing for? The answer partially lies in the reception of Laonikos’ text. When the Ottoman polymath Kâtip Çelebi (1609–1657) set out to translate portions of the Ἀπόδειξις into Ottoman Turkish as part of a book project focusing on Constantinople, Târih-i Kostantantiyye ve Kayâsire, he used the 1587 Latin print edition, Historia rerum in Oriente gestarum, rather than a Greek manuscript or the 1615 Greek print edition, which illustrates that the text was not as well-known nor as well-circulated in the east as it was in the west. (Kâtip Çelebi, Târih-i Kostantantiyye ve Kayâsire, ed. İbrahim Solak, [Konya, 2010]). The answer is also related to the ways in which intellectuals such as Bessarion and other émigré Byzantines represented themselves as Hellenes, distanced themselves from the Roman-Christian model, conceptualized Roman rule over the Greek east as an external power mechanism, and increasingly invoked a pre-Christian and pre-Roman classical Greek past when they negotiated their identities within the larger Italian society (Akışık 2011; Lamers 2015). Laonikos similarly forged Hellenic identity by distinguishing between the Romans and the native Greeks and by self-consciously invoking the pre-Christian and pre-Roman historiographical model of Herodotus. Laonikos’ formulation does fit in with the assumptions of this western elite group, pointing the way to the circles wherein Laonikos became the most popular fifteenth-century historian writing in Greek.

Laonikos holds a unique and privileged position among contemporaries writing in Greek, Latin, or one of the western vernaculars, for incorporating and translating considerable material from Ottoman Turkish sources. Furthermore, Laonikos’ surprisingly gracious and veracious presentation of Islam is part of a greater religious discourse, in which he studies the three monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as comparable cultural and administrative systems and does not ascribe metaphysical importance to them. Thus, students of Laonikos sensibly argued that he must have lived, worked, and learned Turkish under Ottoman rule, possibly returning to Athens as a branch of his family resettled there after 1458. However, this conjecture has deterred historians from correctly evaluating his target audience as that western elite group, versed in classical Greek. A close reading of the Ἀπόδειξις reveals that Laonikos negotiated between the Ottoman stories and genuine Islamic practices that he must have experienced first-hand and the expectations of his western audience. Profoundly, in spite of Laonikos’ comparative and relativistic religious framework, the civilized people are invariably Christians and the barbarians are always Muslims in the Ἀπόδειξις, with the exception of the Armenians who interestingly belong among the barbarians. On another note, Laonikos sometimes inserts Turkish words in the text but these are often accompanied by a description, such as when he quotes various Ottoman military posts: “the wine-pourers whom they call σαραπτάριοι,” “the standard bearers who are called ἐμουραλάμιοι”, and “the καρίπιδες, who are called the foreigners coming from Asia and Egypt and also Libya” (Darkó II: 9). Laonikos’ Herodotean model allows for the inclusion of such
alien material but these are promptly translated into classicizing Greek for his supposedly uninformed western audience. Laonikos’ repeated references to Mohammed as the hero is the most startling instance of this negotiation process. Laonikos frequently employs this term in speeches by Muslim characters, fictive rhetorical devices expressing the point of view of the orator but also in his own descriptions and commentary on events. Translating the Prophet’s status as the warrior champion in the Islamic context with a value-laden and illustrious term in Greek culture since the time of Homer, Laonikos successfully bridges the gaping space between Renaissance Italy and Ottoman lands, preserving some of the exotic taste while making it at least palatable for his readers.
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