
NIKOS ZAGKLAS, *Theodoros Prodromos: Miscellaneous Poems. An Edition and Literary Study (Oxford Studies in Byzantium)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2023. XVI, 382 pp. – ISBN 978-0-19-288692-7

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Everyone knows that Theodoros Prodromos was a star poet. In the eventful reigns of John II and Manuel I Komnenoi, he was a go-to writer for all sorts of imperial occasions: coronations and births, deaths and marriages, but above all, military triumphs of the aristocracy. Prodromos often addressed the Emperor himself and did not hesitate to remind of his (virtually prophetic) role in bringing about the glory of the Romans. Despite the (informal) status of a poet laureate, Prodromos suffered a few setbacks in his career, and had to seek patronage from the less powerful members of the Komnenian system. These include the disgraced imperial siblings Isaac and Anna Komnenoi as well as high-flying official Alexios Aristenos, whose hat trick appointment as the protekdikos, the nomophylax and the orphanotrophos Prodromos celebrated in a series of poems in four different meters. The outlined poetic record – even if one takes out of the equation Prodromos’ satirical, philosophical and novelistic works – would be enough to overwhelm Byzantinists with literary-cum-historical information on the Komnenian period. While scholars make the best use of Wolfram Hörandner’s landmark edition of Prodromos’ occasional poems conventionally known as the *Historische Gedichte*¹, the study of this corpus is far from complete. Yet, no matter how one is enthusiastic about Prodromos’ warmongering verses, there is a new development to consider: NIKOS ZAGKLAS of the University of Vienna has published a monograph that introduces a completely new Prodromos.

1. WOLFRAM HÖRANDNER, *Theodoros Prodromos. Historische Gedichte* (Wiener byzantinistische Studien 11). Vienna 1974. MARIA TZIATZI-PAPAGIANNI, *Theodoros Prodromos. Historisches Gedicht LXXVIII*. *ByzZ* 86–87 (1993–1994) pp. 363–82. MARINA BAZZANI, *The Historical Poems of Theodore Prodromos, the Epic-Homeric Revival and the Crisis of the Intellectuals in the Twelfth Century*. *Byzantinoslavica* 65 (2007) pp. 211–28. PAUL MAGDALINO – RUTH MACRIDES, *Theodore Prodromos, Carmina historica, I. Translation and commentary*. In: LIZ JAMES – OLIVER NICHOLSON – ROGER SCOTT (eds), *After the Text: Byzantine Enquiries in Honour of Margaret Mullett*. London 2021, pp. 29–40.

Entitled *Theodoros Prodromos: Miscellaneous Poems*, the book presents a new critical edition, translation and study of 76 texts that have been neglected by previous generations of scholars. The title appropriately reflects the thematic, stylistic and functional diversity of the edited texts. Among them, one finds invocatory dedicatory epigrams, a riddle, philosophic reflections on the transience of life, ethopoeiai, and many more. Despite its motley appearance, the *Miscellaneous Poems* share a number of thematic and structural patterns that lend unity and coherence to the entire volume. Firstly, many of the *Miscellaneous Poems* are allegoric: for example, the longest poem in the collection (poem 76) presents a drama of Friendship (Φιλία) that is forced to depart the World (Κόσμος) as a result of her abuse. Secondly, the poems tend to have paraenetic tone: consider twenty six epigrams on Virtues and Vices (poems 29–54), which effectively constitute a concise manual of the Christian ethics. Thirdly, the texts are often arranged in cycles: this can be illustrated by a series of invocatory hymns (poems 1–6), whose structural similarity is reinforced with cross-references of the poetic *persona*.

That ZAGKLAS' edition will prove an invaluable source for scholars of Byzantine literature is beyond doubt. Yet, I would argue that the *Miscellaneous Poems* would be of interest to specialists in other fields too. An art historian, for instance, would be delighted to read an epigram commemorating the restoration of an icon of the Virgin (poem 25). A historian of religion would refine his understanding of liturgy after considering Prodromos' verse proem to a homily (poem 9). Finally, a social historian could learn a lot about class structure and dynamics from Prodromos' lamentations about miserable conditions of intellectuals (poems 73–75). Regardless of one's expertise, one is simply spoiled for choice.

The metabolic versatility of the poet is matched by the erudite scholarship of his editor. ZAGKLAS does not simply bring the heretofore scattered poems under one cover but goes an extra mile in establishing the right text. In case of the *Miscellaneous Poems*, this is not a trivial task. The 76 poems of the collection are transmitted by 87 manuscripts, a number, which suggests that the *Miscellaneous Poems* have been far more popular than the *Historische Gedichte* (35 manuscripts). Of all the available manuscripts, one, *Vaticanus Graecus* 305, is particularly important as it dates back to the thirteenth century and preserves a significant share of the *Miscellaneous Poems* along with other works by Prodromos. ZAGKLAS acknowledges this fact with an instructive codicological survey that highlights the circumstances of the manuscript's production, circulation and usage. Turning to

other manuscripts, ZAGKLAS carries out a methodical comparison of similar witnesses, which allows him to eliminate from the subsequent collation everything but a relatively small cluster of *codices* that are relevant to reconstruction of the text. These editorial principles result in a bilingual publication that is accompanied by three *apparatus*: an *apparatus codicum et editionum*, an *apparatus fontium et locorum parallelorum*, and an *apparatus criticus*. These supplementary sections are informative but generously conceal the herculean efforts required for such an accomplishment. Indeed, most of the poems fit into a single page.

The publication of the *Miscellaneous Poems* is introduced by extensive prolegomena that help a reader to navigate Prodromos' poetic world. In addition to the manuscript tradition and editorial history, ZAGKLAS discusses problems of authorship, socio-economic context of Prodromos' work as well as metrical and prosodic features of his poems. One of the chief innovations of ZAGKLAS' study is the suggestion that genre classifications are not very helpful in approaching Prodromos' poetry. ZAGKLAS demonstrates that Prodromos was skilled in producing texts that could fit into multiple contexts and occasions: a piece initially produced for the court was often recycled in classroom or rhetorical theatron, and vice versa. Defying standard categorization, Prodromos' works need to be read with a consideration of their immediate function, mediality and audience.

ZAGKLAS' general study of Prodromos' poetics is supplemented by a commentary on each of the *Miscellaneous Poems*. In his concise yet informative notes, ZAGKLAS draws on his expertise in different subject areas. He points out relevant classical allusions, explains obscure contemporary realia, and, where possible, makes insightful suggestions about the circumstances of production and performance. Arguably, ZAGKLAS is at his best in identifying parallels with contemporary literature, not least with other works by Prodromos. Consideration of the complex interplay within contemporary sources allows ZAGKLAS to flesh out experimentation, reuse and variation as the guiding principles of Prodromos' poetics.

The *Miscellaneous Poems* have been published at the right time. With increasing popularity of Prodromos, one has been waiting for a publication that would supply new material, ideally, along with guidelines on its use. ZAGKLAS' edition does precisely that.

Keywords

Theodoros Prodromos; edition; epigrammatic poetry; allegory; paraenesis