

EIRENE-SOPHIA KIAPIDOU, *Byzantine Historiographical Prefaces (4th–15th Centuries): A Study on the Praxis and Culture of Writing History in Byzantium* (Byzantios: Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization 23). Turnhout: Brepols 2025. 268 pp. – ISBN 978-2-503-61251-5

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EIRENE-SOPHIA KIAPIDOU's monograph is an ambitious study of a long-neglected textual genre: the historiographical proem. Drawing upon GERARD GENETTE's theory of paratexts, it treats proems not merely as ancillary introductions, but as independent microtexts with their own generic identity. By combining classification, typology, and thematic analysis, the book provides a panoramic overview of this material, tracing its origins in ancient Greek and Latin literature and mapping its evolution through the Byzantine period. It is certain that LIEBERICH's old work on ancient and Byzantine historiographical proems¹ no longer satisfies the needs of contemporary scholarship. In this respect, KIAPIDOU was justified in making these peculiar prefatory pieces the subject of her research: to some extent she incorporates into her study the conclusions of previous scholarship, while simultaneously attempting to classify the historiographical proems and to characterize them as literary genre.

The introduction offers a succinct survey of the proems in ancient Greek and Latin historiography. The classification undertaken in the first chapter is generally well conceived: the author distinguishes historiographical texts according to whether or not they contain a proem, then further investigates the length, position, and function of proems within the overall composition. While it is self-evident that proems are typically located at the beginning of a historiographical work, KIAPIDOU highlights the phenomenon of 'internal' proems, unexpectedly embedded within other parts of the text (see, for example, the case of Michael Psellos). She also notes that most proems were likely composed after the main historical narrative had been completed, and that they often serve as the space where the historian outlines his

1. HEINRICH LIEBERICH, *Studien zu den Proömien in der griechischen und byzantinischen Geschichtschreibung* II. Teil. Die byzantinischen Geschichtschreiber und Chronisten (Programm des Kgl. Realgymnasiums München für das Schuljahr 1899/1900). Munich 1900.

methodology or approach. A useful distinction is also made between prose proems and proems of a metrical character and/or those written in epistolary form. An exceptional case is the proem to Theophylaktos Simokattes' history, structured as a dialogue between philosophy and history. Other cases discussed by KİAPIDOU include non-original proems, such as George Kedrenos' opening, which reproduces that of John Skylitzes.

The second chapter, devoted to the content of Byzantine proems, is perhaps the one most open to criticism. Although KİAPIDOU's approach is valuable, it remains somewhat superficial, since she often relies on other scholars' observations without attempting to reconstruct more fully the intertextual dialogue between Byzantine historians and their sources. Moreover, her failure to take into account important earlier articles is yet another limitation of her research, as we shall see below. KİAPIDOU undertakes a horizontal reading of the texts, focusing on typological patterns rather than in-depth interpretation. No doubt this constitutes a legitimate approach to the subject, yet without a meticulous source analysis such texts become unclear and somehow obscure. KİAPIDOU's aim is to extract her own conclusions about the authors' methods and modes of composition – an undoubtedly commendable undertaking, but not always entirely convincing, since she hardly examines the relevance of the prologues to the main text of each historical work in order to see to what extent the prologue truly reflects the specific positioning of the historian toward his material. For instance, KİAPIDOU's claim that Eunapius criticized Dexippus' excessive reliance on chronological arrangement not because he neglected the value of chronology, but merely because he wanted to make clear the difference between himself and his predecessor, seems to be an unnecessary reopening of a settled debate (p. 129). Likewise, her attempt to reject BRIAN CROKE's theory of a unified composition of Procopius' three historical works cannot rest solely on the assertion that their proems reveal the unified mind of a single author (p. 135). One would expect a more thorough analysis of both Eunapius' and Procopius' texts in their entirety. KİAPIDOU's treatment of Agathias (p. 139) is also open to objection: although she offers an extensive discussion of his reflections on the relationship between history and poetry, she limits his sources to Lucian, thereby overlooking a much older tradition going back to Aristotle's school. Hellenistic historians had long sought to identify the tragic essence within historical events, sometimes composing their narratives with the explicit or implicit conviction that history itself was a form of tragedy. Polybius, for example, criticized historians such as Phylarchus for precisely this practice. Thus, Agathias' engagement with poetry

has deep roots in late antique traditions, which KİAPIDOU's analysis does not sufficiently address. Had she taken WALBANK's old but still valuable article into account,² she could have arrived at a more balanced handling of the matter. Another related issue is her placement of sixth-century historiography within Byzantine literature: these works are arguably better understood as products of Late Antiquity, and analysis would be more effective if grounded in that context rather than in somewhat tenuous connections with later Byzantine texts.

Let us now move on to other issues. KİAPIDOU's reading of George the Monk's proem as 'anachronistic' is rather unconvincing: she emphasizes the spiritual benefit of readers and contrasting the religious wisdom (p. 149) with secular knowledge, which supposedly was the characteristic mark of the Macedonian Renaissance. But such contrasts were entirely consistent with the Christian literary tradition of the ninth century, which cannot be reduced to a narrative of secularization. Secular and religious tendencies in Byzantine literature coexisted always – sometimes harmoniously, sometimes less so. KİAPIDOU's overemphasis on the 'secular' character of historiography is also apparent in her interpretation of Anna Komnene's proem. KİAPIDOU overlooks recent work by TZIATZI, who demonstrated Anna's dependence on Gregory of Nyssa,³ as well as KAMBYLIS' classic article.⁴ She could have taken advantage of KAMBYLIS' careful investigation into what Anna adopts from the earlier tradition and what she leaves out: for instance, Anna's methodological remarks make no mention of the usefulness of history. In other cases, too, KİAPIDOU does not seem to have consulted some older but still useful work: she claims that no study has been undertaken on the sources of Nicephoros Gregoras' proem to the *Roman History* (p. 188, n. 273), although HOHLWEG's article has long established several intertextual resonances and affinities of Gregoras with Poseidonius and Diodorus of Sicily, and convincingly situated Gregoras' proem and other similar passages within the intellectual milieu of the fourteenth century.⁵ She could also have taken advantage of VON IVÁNKA's remarks

2. FRANK WILLIAM WALBANK, *History and Tragedy*. *Historia* 9 (1960) pp. 216–234.

3. See, e.g., MARIA TZIATZI-PAPAGIANNI, *Über Zitate und Anspielungen in der Alexias Anna Komnenes sowie Anklänge derselben in den späteren Geschichtsschreibern*. *ByzZ* 97 (2004) pp. 167–186, esp. 172.

4. ATHANASIOS KAMBYLIS, *Zum Programm der byzantinischen Historikerin Anna Komnene*. In: ΔΩΦΗΜΑ Hans Diller zum 70. Geburtstag: Dauer und Überleben des antiken Geistes. Athens 1975, pp. 127–146.

5. ARMIN HOHLWEG, *Astronomie und Geschichtsbetrachtung bei Nikephoros Gre-*

on the proem of Kritoboulos, which explains how and why that historian distances himself from the Byzantine traditional theory of their state, arguing instead that Byzantium too is subject to the changes of Fortune and is deprived of the eternal and continuous protection of divine Providence.⁶

The concluding chapters are particularly useful for the reader, offering a systematic classification of the material. One can consult with profit the tables on pp. 194–196 (Table V: Proems written with an eye to fellow scholars, Table VI: Proems written with an eye to the political powers as well to fellow scholars, Table VII: Conventionally functional proems). ΚΙΑΡΙΔΟΥ summarizes the results of her investigation of the ways historians construct their self-presentation, articulate methodological reflections, and define the boundaries of their genre.

Somewhat alarming are the various mistakes in the translations of the texts quoted by ΚΙΑΡΙΔΟΥ. For instance, the passage of Theodoros Anagnostes on p. 81 (εὐλογον ᾠήθην τὰ κοινῶς αὐτοῖς συμφωνούμενα διὰ τοῦ σαφέστερον καὶ εὐφραδέστερον διηγούμενου τῇ παρούσῃ βίβλῳ κατατάξαι) is translated: ‘by way of a clearer and more accurate narration’, while the meaning is: ‘I prefer to introduce the events described by two authors identically through the narrator who is clearer’ (διηγούμενου refers to the author more clearly narrating the events described by other authors as well). ΚΙΑΡΙΔΟΥ’s choice to quote the texts of Niketas Choniates in the translation of HARRY J. MAGOULIAS was most unfortunate; although she seems to be aware of that translation inadequacies, and tries to revise it (see, e.g. p. 175, notes 208–209), she evidently does not realize that MAGOULIAS’s entire translation is flawed: for example, on pp. 174–175 the participles προθεμένων and ἡγαπηκότων do not refer to the incompetent historians criticized by Choniates but to Choniates himself; the phrase of p. 176 ἡ ἱστορία ... ἐρῶσα δ’ ὅμως προκεῖσθαι σκαπανεῦσί τε καὶ σιδηρεῦσι does not mean ‘she passionately desires to be the reward of diggers and of smiths’, but ‘she wants to be accessible to diggers and smiths’.

Naturally, one cannot expect a single study to exhaust all aspects of so complex a subject. ΚΙΑΡΙΔΟΥ’s book does deserve recognition for providing a broad panorama of Byzantine historiographical proems. The reservations

goras. In: WERNER SEIBT (ed.), *Geschichte und Kultur der Palaiologenzeit: Referate des Internationalen Symposions zu Ehren von Herbert Hunger* (Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Byzantinistik 8). Vienna 1996, pp. 51–63, esp. 52–53.

6. ENDRE VON IVÁNKA, *Das Fall Konstantinopels und das byzantinische Geschichtsdenken*. Jahrbuch der österreichischen byzantinischen Gesellschaft 3 (1954) pp. 79–94, esp. 83–86.

noted above do not diminish the merit of her work, though they do suggest the need for further research – particularly in the direction of source analysis and contextualization within the broader intellectual frameworks of each period.

Keywords

historiography; literary theory; microtexts; paratexts; proems