Introduction
*Poetry in Byzantine Literature and Society (1081–1204)**

Nikos Zagklas and Baukje van den Berg

In his well-known *On his Own Verses*, Gregory of Nazianzos elucidates the advantages of writing in verse: the poetic form promotes moderation in writing, possesses significant pedagogical qualities, and follows the example of the Bible, which contains a good deal of poetry, with the Psalms of the poet-king David as the principal representatives of biblical verse.[1] Despite the abundance of poetic production in the centuries after Gregory, few Byzantine texts provide theoretical considerations about the special qualities associated with verse. Byzantine poets rarely speak about the reasons behind their choice of verse over prose or of a specific metre. Apart from commentaries on ancient poetry, we have no Byzantine *ars poetica* with programmatic reflections on the aesthetics and practice of poetic production, such as we find in the medieval West.[2] To understand the formal and social dynamics of Byzantine poetry, therefore, we need to study the texts themselves, along with their contexts of production and consumption. Continuing the trailblazing work of recent studies devoted to the Byzantine poetry of the seventh to eleventh centuries, which have forged new scholarly approaches to the poetic tradition of the Byzantines, the present volume is the first to focus exclusively on the poetry of the twelfth

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1 The relevant poem is Gregory of Nazianzos 2.1.39; on Gregory's arguments for writing verse, see Bernard and Demoen (2021: 373–4). On David as poet-king, see Ricceri in this volume.

2 See Conley (1995) and Bernard and Demoen (2021: 373). However, for reflections on the special qualities of political verse, see M. J. Jeffreys (1974). While Aristotle's *Poetics* seems not to have enjoyed a wide reception in Byzantium, Horace's *Ars poetica* continued to be studied in the medieval West. See e.g. Fredborg (2014) for the eleventh and twelfth centuries. During approximately the same period, Geoffrey of Vinsauf wrote his influential *Poetria nova* and Matthew of Vendôme produced his *Ars versificatoria.* Concerning these works, see the relevant chapters in Copeland and Sluiter (2009). On medieval *artes poeticae*, see also the foundational Faral (1924).

century, one of the most fertile periods in Byzantine literary history, not least when it comes to literature in verse.[3]

The volume of poetic production dating from the time of the Komnenian emperors is immense and even central texts are still awaiting (updated) editions. A comprehensive discussion of the poetry of this period therefore lies beyond the scope of a single volume. Instead, the present collection of fifteen contributions aims to advance our understanding of Byzantine poetic culture – and twelfth-century literature more broadly – by concentrating on texts that presently remain poorly studied, by offering the first editions of hitherto unpublished texts, by placing individual poems within their broader literary contexts, and by studying well-known texts from new perspectives. It explores the broader tendencies that shaped twelfth-century literature in both prose and verse (Part I); it examines the school as an important venue for the composition and use of texts written in verse (Part II); it sheds new light on the relationship between poetry, patronage and power by studying texts that have received little or no scholarly attention so far (Part III); and it offers the first editions and interpretive studies of unknown or neglected works (Part IV). By combining wide-ranging surveys and close readings, and by tying in with recent developments in the study of Byzantine literature, this volume takes an important step towards a better understanding of the abundant poetic production of the twelfth century. In this way, it will not only help to complete our knowledge of the history of Byzantine literature but will eventually enable us to situate Medieval Greek poetry in the broader literary world of the medieval Mediterranean. In-depth studies of individual traditions and texts are essential if we wish to make the poetry of the Byzantines part of cross-cultural Mediterranean or global perspectives.[4]

The Age of Poetry

This volume takes as its point of departure the period beginning from the moment that Alexios I Komnenos ascended the imperial throne in 1081 to the Latin sack of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1204. As Elizabeth Jeffreys has noted, 'one aspect of the literature produced in the

3 Lauxtermann (2003–19) for the seventh to tenth centuries; Bernard (2014) for the period of 1025–81. The poetry of the Palaiologan period (from the Fourth Crusade to the fall of Constantinople in 1453) is the focus of the project 'The Power of Poetry in Late Byzantium', led by Krystina Kubina at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

4 For cross-cultural approaches to Mediterranean poetry and occasional literature in general, see the papers collected in Kubina and Zagklas (2024a) and Nilsson and Zagklas (2024).

twelfth century that is in marked contrast to either the eleventh or the thirteenth, is that there was a very great deal of writing in verse'.[5] A provisional estimate of the quantity of surviving poetry from this period amounts to *c.* 150,000 verses in various metres, a number that would expand even more if one took into account the large amount of anonymous poetry surviving in manuscripts or in the form of inscriptions on various objects. By contrast, the oeuvre of the three most important poets in the period between 1025 and 1081, Christopher of Mytilene, John Mauropous, and Michael Psellos, does not exceed 10,000 verses. Even though this comparison should not be taken in absolute terms, it demonstrates the popularity of poetry throughout this century and the tendency of many authors to opt for verse for much of their literary output. This remarkable development in the history of Byzantine literature denotes a change in the balance between prose and verse: even though prose continued to be the dominant mode of literary expression, there was an unprecedented increase in poetic production and poetry started to be used for purposes hitherto reserved for prose.[6] Around the same time, prose and poetry started to join forces more systematically than they had previously, with the composition of works in a mixed form as the result.[7] The boundaries between prose and poetry thus became more fluid than ever before and many authors embellished their prose writings with a poetic style, as Emmanuel Bourbouhakis argues in his contribution to this volume.

The premise that this period saw unprecedented growth in the production of poetry is based on the presumption that the years between 1081 and 1204 form a distinct phase in the history of Byzantine poetry and literature more broadly. In his study of eleventh-century poetry, Floris Bernard has argued that the timespan between 1025 and 1081 constitutes a distinct period on account of common sociohistorical tendencies, including a high degree of social mobility and the quick succession of many reigns, as well as the lack of a strong dynastic family, in sharp contrast with the preceding and subsequent periods, when the Macedonian and Komnenian dynasties, respectively, controlled the political landscape.[8] Even though the towering figure of Michael Psellos dominated intellectual life in the capital during much of this period, it is rather Psellos' contemporaries John Mauropous

5 E. M. Jeffreys (2009: 222).

6 One could therefore compare this period with the fifth century BC, when the prominent place of poetry in Athens was challenged by the emergence of oratorical prose; on this shift from poetry to prose, see e.g. Godzich and Kittay (1987), Russell (1989), Cole (1991), Goldhill (2002), Graff (2005).

7 See Zagklas (2017); see also Agapitos in this volume.

8 Bernard (2014: 10–17).

and Christopher of Mytilene who have been praised by modern scholars for the unique traits of their poetic craft.[9]

Approximately forty years before the publication of Bernard's book, Wolfram Hörandner chose the year 1118 as the bookend of his survey of eleventh-century poetry, a year marked by the death of the emperor Alexios I Komnenos and the succession to the throne of his son John II Komnenos.[10] The different time periods chosen by Bernard and Hörandner remind us that chronological boundaries are modern constructions, often following a political timeline that does not neatly map onto literary developments. Chronological bookends should thus not be taken as hard dividing lines that artificially separate one period from another but as permeable boundaries delimiting time periods with recognizable literary and social tendencies.[11] This volume therefore does not claim that the period between 1081 and 1204 is completely independent, as lacking strong ties to the periods before and after. Rather, it claims that this period features certain historical and social tendencies that shaped poetic production in distinct ways. It is exactly the distinct nature of twelfth-century poetry (and prose) on which the different studies in this volume shed new light.

For the poetry produced between 1081 and 1204, we lack a systematic study comparable to those written by Marc Lauxtermann on the poetry of the seventh to tenth centuries and Floris Bernard on that of the eleventh century. Recent decades have seen significant progress regarding the study of individual authors and works as well as specific clusters of poetry. For the ceremonial poetry of the twelfth century, for instance, Wolfram Hörandner's 2003 study remains the main point of departure.[12] Seminal studies by Ivan Drpić and Foteini Spingou have significantly advanced our understanding of the epigrammatic poetry of the period: while Drpić has shed new light on the ties between epigrams, art and self-representation from the beginning of the twelfth until the fifteenth century, Spingou has opened a new perspective onto the Komnenian epigrammatic poetry preserved in the codex Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, gr. Z. 524 [Diktyon 69995] by addressing questions of authorship, performativity and transmission.[13] Ingela Nilsson's recent monograph on Constantine

9 Bernard (2019: 213). For the poetry of the eleventh century, see also Bernard and Demoen (2012) and Bernard and Livanos (2018).

10 Hörandner (1976).

11 On the periodization of Byzantine literature, see Agapitos (2012) and (2020).

12 Hörandner (2003: 75–85). For a focus on Theodore Prodromos, see Hörandner (1974: 79–109). For a study of ceremonial poetry of the earlier period, see Lauxtermann (2003-19: 2:49–56).

13 Drpić (2016); Spingou (2014) and (2021).

Manasses and his occasional writings, many of which are in verse, has moreover contributed a great deal to a better understanding of how an author commissioned by aristocratic patrons used poetry.[14]

Even so, we do not have many studies that provide a synthesis of the verse production of this period, with the exception of an article by Elizabeth Jeffreys entitled 'Why Produce Poetry in Twelfth-Century Constantinople?', published in a volume dealing with questions of poetry and poeticality in Byzantium, and a chapter by Nikos Zagklas that examines the different poetic trends and the ties between patronage and poetry during this period, published in Brill's *Companion to Byzantine Poetry*.[15] The former offers useful reflections on the question of what may have motivated twelfth-century authors to write poetry; the latter is the first study seeking to identify different phases in twelfth-century poetic production, attempting to recognize continuities and discontinuities in this long timespan. The present volume is an important step towards filling the gap that remains.

Such an endeavour is greatly helped by the many modern editions published since the 1970s, including those of Theodore Prodromos' 'historical poems' by Wolfram Hörandner and his 'miscellaneous poems' by Nikos Zagklas,[16] as well as editions of the poems of Nicholas Kallikles by Roberto Romano and the Ptochoprodromic poems by Hans Eideneier.[17] Again, however, much remains to be done. An important missing piece of the puzzle is the long-anticipated edition of the entire corpus of Manganeios Prodromos, of which Elizabeth and Michael Jeffreys offer a tantalizing foretaste in their contribution to this volume. We will not be able to shed light on the complete poetic production of this period without an edition of his entire oeuvre. Many other poems likewise remain either unpublished or accessible only in outdated and unreliable editions, such as the well-known astrological poems by Constantine Manasses.[18] The oeuvre of the prolific poet and teacher John Tzetzes is another good example: his *Allegories of the Iliad* may be read in Boissonade's outdated edition from the mid-nineteenth century;[19] his little-known didactic poem on Porphyry's *Eisagoge*, which runs to more than 1,700 dodecasyllabic verses, is still

14 Nilsson (2021a). On patronage in the twelfth century, see Mullett (1984). For Prodromos as a poet to commission, see Zagklas (2023: 31–70).

15 E. M. Jeffreys (2009); Zagklas (2019).

16 Hörandner (1974); Zagklas (2023). On Prodromos' historical poems, see also Ricceri in this volume.

17 Romano (1980); Eideneier (1991) and (2012). For Kallikles, see Gerbi in this volume; for Ptochoprodromos, see Kulhánková in this volume.

18 See Chryssogelos in this volume.

19 Boissonade (1851). For an English translation, see Goldwyn and Kokkini (2015). Alberto Ravani is currently preparing a partial critical edition of the text.

completely unedited;[20] and his extensive verse commentary on the Hermogenean corpus is only partially available in a modern edition.[21] With much editorial work still in progress, our understanding of twelfth-century poetic culture will gradually grow. The present volume contributes to this by including editions of completely unknown material. In addition to the *editio princeps* of a poem by Mangeneios Prodromos, Julián Bértola offers the first edition of an unedited cycle of book epigrams on Herodotus, while Aglae Pizzone shares completely new Tzetzean material from the important manuscript Leiden, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Vossianus Gr. Q1 [Diktyon 38108].

Poetry, Patronage and Power

In 1081 Alexios was proclaimed emperor, paving the way for the family of the Komnenoi to rule for more than 100 years and thus to become one of the longest-ruling imperial dynasties in Byzantium. By contrast, the next dynasty, that of the Angeloi, lasted a mere twenty years due to the events of 1204, which to some extent were the result of bad political decisions on the part of members of the Angeloi family themselves. Throughout these 120 years the social and bureaucratic structures of the capital were reformed in such a way as to foster a system of constant self-promotion for the ruling family. The historian Zonaras reports that the ascension of Alexios Komnenos to the throne was followed by the distribution of offices and state land to family members, making them the wealthiest and most powerful family in the empire.[22] These developments created a close connection between literature and patronage as the former came to serve the agenda of the new imperial family on various levels and occasions. The court became one of the main settings for the composition and consumption of poetry in many different genres.[23] Poetry became an important means for expressing

20 A critical edition of this text is currently under preparation by Rogelio Toledo Martin at the University of Vienna.

21 Elisabetta Barili, Aglae Pizzone and Baukje van den Berg are preparing a complete edition of Tzetzes' commentary on Hermogenes. Until now, only Tzetzes' commentary on *On Types of Style* has been edited; see Barili (2022). For an edition of some further excerpts of this work, see Cramer (1837: 1–138) and Walz (1832–6: 3:670–86).

22 Zonaras, *Chronicle* 767.2–10 ed. Büttner-Wobst (1897). The most authoritative study of this phenomenon remains Kazhdan and Franklin (1984); see also Magdalino (1993: 180–227) on what he terms the 'Komnenian system'.

23 The term 'court poetry' tends to be used for the production of ceremonial poetry, but it should rather be understood as an umbrella term for various kinds of poetry produced and consumed at the court, ranging from ceremonial and didactic to epigrammatic and epistolary poetry. For an example, see the rubric of Manganeios Prodromos' *Poem* 15 (edited by Elizabeth and Michael Jeffreys in this volume), which argues that Emperor Manuel I Komnenos had ordered the poet to compose his verses.

imperial policy and propaganda, as well as for fashioning the crucial role of poets in doing so, as the contributions by Rachele Ricceri and Elizabeth and Michael Jeffreys clearly demonstrate in the cases of Theodore Prodromos and Manganeios Prodromos, respectively.

Although the Komnenians monopolized most high-ranking positions, various prestigious offices were still open to those who did not belong to the imperial family by blood or marriage. Take, for example, the high-ranking bureaucrat and courtier Theodore Styppeiotes, who held a prominent position at the Komnenian court before he fell from grace in the mid-twelfth century.[24] Styppeiotes was a fervent admirer of the poetry written by his teacher Theodore Prodromos and was the recipient of various of his epistolary poems.[25] A number of other high-ranking officials produced their own poetry, such as the *logothete of the dromos* Michael Hagiotheodorites, who wrote a vivid verse *ekphrasis* of a horse race addressed to an unnamed friend.[26] Less eminent court positions were likewise occupied by learned individuals with an interest in poetry. A certain imperial secretary by the name of Gregory, for instance, was involved in a literary polemic with Tzetzes and criticized the poetic qualities of the latter's verse.[27] Poetry and the court were thus inextricably connected.

Other twelfth-century poets held church offices and teaching positions in the capital and provinces of the empire. Many of them started their careers as deacons and acquired teaching positions before moving to bishoprics outside the capital. For example, Constantine Stilbes (*c.* 1150–1225) became teacher of the Apostle before moving to Kyzikos to take up the city's bishopric.[28] His *Fire Poem* describing the devastating fire sweeping through Constantinople in 1197 counts among the most impressive works of the period.[29] Approximately a century earlier, Theophylaktos of Ohrid (*c.* 1050–after 1108) had been ordained as deacon at Hagia Sophia and obtained the coveted position of master of the rhetoricians before being appointed Archbishop of Bulgaria sometime after 1088. Despite its important position as a turning point between the era of Christopher of Mytilene and John Mauropous and the time of the Komnenians, his poetic production remains largely unstudied.[30] Niketas of Herakleia, who was

24 See Kresten (1978) and Koufopoulou (1989).
25 Hörandner (1974: 516–23). On epistolary poetry more broadly, see Kubina and Riehle (2021).
26 Ed. Horna (1906) and Papadimitriou (1911). For a literary analysis of the text, see Marciniak and Warcaba (2014); for an English translation and commentary, see Marciniak and Warcaba (2021).
27 See Zagklas (2021: 298) with bibliography.
28 Stilbes' death used to be dated to *c.* 1208; a new date (1225) is suggested in Kotzabassi (2009: 442).
29 Ed. Diethart and Hörandner. On Stilbes' poem, see Magdalino in this volume, with further bibliography.
30 For some introductory remarks, see Gautier (1980: 118–26) and Mullett (1997: 243–7).

born sometime in the mid-eleventh century, followed a career path similar to that of Theophylaktos: he was first appointed director of the school of Chalkoprateia and became a teacher of the Apostle sometime after 1088; he served as deacon in the church of Hagia Sophia and was promoted to the bishopric of Herakleia in 1117. During his time as a teacher he produced various didactic poems on topics of grammar, various unedited examples of which are discussed by Floris Bernard in his contribution to this volume in order to offer new insights into the characteristics of such poetry and its important role in preparing students for schedographical contests. The similar professional trajectories of these twelfth-century poets owe much to the so-called Patriarchal school, which offered successful teachers prominent positions in the educational and ecclesiastical establishment.[31] Others, however, did not follow this career path. Theodore Prodromos and John Tzetzes, for instance, two of the leading poets and grammarians of the period, continued to work independently, without official teaching posts or positions in the church hierarchy.

Poetry and Twelfth-Century Literary Culture: Between Court, School and *theatron*

The twelfth century saw various new developments in literary production, among the most significant of which is the use of the vernacular or the 'mixed language'.[32] The twelfth century has been described as containing the 'seeds of modern Greek literature', and some Neohellenists have even gone so far as to include some of the vernacular works of the period in discussions of modern Greek literature.[33] Various vernacular texts in metrical form date from this period, covering a wide variety of genres: the long narrative poem *Digenis Akritis*, a group of begging or petitionary poems by Ptochoprodromos alongside the so-called *Maiuri poem* or fifth Ptochoprodromic poem, a poem from prison by the historian and intellectual Michael Glykas and an admonitory poem with the title *Spaneas* addressed by an aristocratic father to his son.[34] Vernacular features, however, permeated

31 Browning (1977).

32 For an introduction to this issue, see Hinterberger (2019), with further bibliography. For a new approach to this phenomenon, see Kulhánková in this volume.

33 'Seeds of modern Greek literature': Bernard (2014: 4). See Agapitos (2017) for a detailed discussion of the birth of so-called 'Medieval Neohellenic' texts around 1830–60.

34 The most important studies of the mentioned works include E. M. Jeffreys (1998) for *Digenis*; see also Kulhánková (2021). Markéta Kulhánková is currently preparing a narratological commentary to *Digenis Akritis*. For the Ptochoprodromic poems, see Kulhánková in this volume, with further bibliography. On Glykas' prison poem, see Bourbouhakis (2007). For *Spaneas*, see Danezis (1987).

much of the textual production of this time and can be found in texts ranging from ceremonial works to didactic poems and *schede*.[35] Moreover, poems in the vernacular were probably presented together with highbrow poems to various imperial recipients, which illustrates the close connection between the different linguistic registers.[36] Switching between different registers was employed as a deliberate and sophisticated literary technique. In her contribution to this volume, Markéta Kulhánková explores this issue in detail by revisiting the Ptochoprodromic poems and other texts.

Much of the poetry produced during this period was written for ceremonial purposes, in parallel with an abundant production of imperial panegyric in prose.[37] Encomiastic and congratulatory poetry was composed to celebrate a wide range of occasions at the court, including imperial victories and triumphal processions, coronations, weddings and the birth of imperial offspring. Ceremonial poetry had not played such a central role since the reign of Emperor Herakleios and his court poet George of Pisidia in the early seventh century.[38] As pointed out above, the new imperial dynasty very much depended on this kind of literature for the propagation of their self-representation and political ideology. On the other hand, poets themselves benefited from the production of court poetry as it helped them to secure a position closer to the imperial family, the source of power and the distribution of wealth, even though such positions were often neither official nor permanent. The surviving evidence suggests that ceremonial poetry enjoyed its heyday in the second and third generations of the Komnenian dynasty, corresponding to the time of Theodore Prodromos (*c.* 1110–58), who was active from the early 1120s to the mid-1150s. Prodromos' use of political verse and of stanzas with the same number of verses is not only characteristic of court poetry more broadly, but especially of the ceremonial hymns dedicated to the demes, of which we encounter an example in Paul Magdalino's contribution to the present volume.[39] Prodromos' poetry shares much imperial imagery with other panegyrical literature from the period, including the analogies drawn between the emperor and the sun, between the emperor and various heroes of the ancient Greek

35 See the case of a *schedos* by Theodore Prodromos addressed to a *sebastokratorissa*, most probably the *sebastokratorissa* Irene. For the text, see Polemis (1995).

36 See Agapitos (2015: 23–37).

37 See e.g. Magdalino (1993: 413–88) on the panegyrical oratory in both prose and verse from the reign of Manuel I Komnenos and its imagery. For panegyrical oratory of the Palaiologan period, see, most recently, Leonte (2023).

38 For very few exceptions from the eleventh century, see Bernard (2014: 108–10).

39 On deme hymns, see Hörandner (2003) and Magdalino (2016: 60–2).

past and between the emperor and David or even Christ.[40] His contemporary Manganeios Prodromos (*c.* 1110–?) employed similar imagery, as the panegyrical poem in praise of Manuel I Komnenos in the chapter by Elizabeth and Michael Jeffreys demonstrates. These parallels demonstrate how poets and orators from the period shared a common grammar or vocabulary of praise tailored to the self-image of the ruling family.

The anonymous poet Manganeios Prodromos started composing ceremonial poetry for the Komnenian court in the early 1140s, frequently writing for the very same occasion as his colleague Theodore Prodromos. For example, both of them contributed to the celebrations held at Christmas in the year 1149, following the successful military campaigns of Manuel I, which included the recapture of Corfu from the Sicilian Normans and the emperor's triumphal return from Serbia.[41] Prodromos wrote a long encomiastic poem of 424 verses together with hymns for Christmas and for Epiphany, while Manganeios composed a panegyrical poem for Manuel that mocks the Serbians for their cowardice.[42] It has been argued that the rise of Manganeios Prodromos as court poet alongside Theodore Prodromos suggests a change in the tastes of contemporary recipients of ceremonial poetry, or that the former had lost the high regard as imperial rhetor that he had enjoyed during the reign of John Komnenos, but this remains a hypothesis which is not supported by other sources.[43] Manganeios himself praised Prodromos as the leading rhetor of his time, which points to the high esteem the latter continued to enjoy also after the appearance of Manganeios.[44] More than anything, the parallel poems of the two Prodromoi indicate that more than one rhetor performed his works during the same imperial celebration, whether joining forces to increase the sense of triumph or competing with one another for the appreciation of the imperial audience.[45]

The popularity of ceremonial poetry did not increase immediately following the ascension of the Komnenian family to the throne. Before the time of Theodore Prodromos we have very little poetry of this kind. The

40 Hörandner (1974: 89–108). For the parallel between John II and David, see Ricceri in this volume; for Manuel I and David, see Magdalino (1993: 447–50, 469). On Old Testament kings as models of kingship more generally, see e.g. Rapp (2010). For Manuel and Christ, see also Magdalino (1993: 434, 451, 469).

41 Magdalino (1993: 440).

42 Prodromos, *Historical Poems* 30, 31 and 32 ed. Hörandner (1974); Manganeios Prodromos, *Poem* 26 ed. Miller (1881: 761–3).

43 For these hypotheses, see Stanković (2007: 214–15).

44 Manganeios Prodromos, *Poem* 10.21–32 ed. Bernardinello (1972); English trans. in Alexiou (1999).

45 For a case of competition between rhetors, see Agapitos in this volume; for competition in a school context, see Gerbi in this volume. For the theatrical nature of imperial ceremonies, see also Magdalino in this volume.

physician-poet Nicholas Kallikles wrote for the court, but none of his poems cover ceremonial occasions, as is the case with the poems of the two Prodromoi. What survives from the reign of Alexios Komnenos are two works by a certain Stephanos Physopalamites, which include an encomiastic alphabet for the emperor and a poem celebrating the recapture of a settlement during Alexios' struggles against the Normans.[46] For reasons that remain unclear, most ceremonial poetry was produced during the second and third quarters of the twelfth century, during the reigns of John II and Manuel I. While the two Prodromoi are responsible for a large part of the ceremonial poetry of the period – and hence feature prominently in this volume – additional examples survive in the codex Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, gr. Z. 524 [Diktyon 69995], which transmits a cycle of five decastichs celebrating a victory of Emperor Manuel I during a triumphal procession in the city and a cycle of hexastichs for the same emperor on the occasion of Easter.[47] Niketas Eugenianos and Niketas Choniates, moreover, wrote *epithalamia* to celebrate imperial weddings, which shows that not only 'court poets' but also other rhetors active in the capital employed verse for their praise of the imperial family.[48]

In addition to the court, schools were responsible for many verse compositions during the twelfth century, a period that saw a continued increase in the production of didactic poetry that had started in the eleventh century, with Michael Psellos as its most prolific representative.[49] Other teacher-poets in the last quarter of the eleventh century and the mid-twelfth century followed suit by producing verse treatises on various grammatical and theological topics: Niketas of Herakleia wrote various works on grammar, some of them composed in hymnographic metres;[50] Philip Monotropos wrote his theological-philosophical *Dioptra*, a didactic poem of over 7,000 political verses that originated in a monastic milieu and is structured as a dialogue between the body and soul;[51] the patriarch Nicholas III Grammatikos (1084–1111) produced a verse treatise on the

46 See Welz (1910).

47 For the texts of these poems, see Lampros (1911: 57–9 and 187–9); for this kind of poetry in stanzas, see Lauxtermann (2003–19: 2:376).

48 For these texts, see van Dieten (1972: 45–6) and Gallavotti (1935).

49 On the emergence of didactic poetry in the eleventh century, see Hörandner (1976). Psellos' didactic poems have been edited by Westerink (1992); for introductory remarks on Psellos' didactic poetry, see Hörandner (2012: 57–62) and (2019: 459–86); see also Bernard (2014: 229–40). On literature and education, see also Agapitos in this volume.

50 See Bernard in this volume.

51 Eirene Afentoulidou is preparing an edition of the entire text, which has been edited only in part; see Lavriotes (1920). For an overview of the work, see Afentoulidou and Fuchsbauer (2019), with previous literature.

canonical rules for fast days.[52] In the mid-twelfth century the production of didactic poetry is linked to the oeuvre of two authors in particular, John Tzetzes and Constantine Manasses.[53] Both Tzetzes and Manasses produced thousands of verses, mainly in the form of political verse, which aimed to impart knowledge to their recipients on a variety of subjects, including grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, history, mythology and astrology. Both therefore feature prominently in the present volume, in the contributions by Baukje van den Berg (Tzetzes' *Carmina Iliaca*), Aglae Pizzone (Tzetzes' verse commentary on Hermogenes) and Konstantinos Chryssogelos (Manasses' astrological poem).

The category of didactic poetry thus covers a wide variety of texts, in different forms and on different subjects. Some are edifying texts that aim at teaching Christian ethical rules (such as Monotropos' *Dioptra*), others have strong ties to grammatical and rhetorical education (such as various works by Niketas of Herakleia and verse treatises on ancient poetry by John Tzetzes). Some are paraphrases of and commentaries on earlier texts (such as Tzetzes' *Theogony* or his *Allegories of the Iliad* and *Allegories of the Odyssey*), others assume the form of a chronicle (such as Manasses' *Synopsis Chronike* and Tzetzes' unfinished world chronicle).[54] Some were written for anonymous addressees, probably students, such as the poetry of Niketas of Herakleia that Floris Bernard discusses in the present volume; others are addressed to powerful imperial patrons, including the *sebastokratorissa* Irene or Bertha von Sulzbach, such as various works by Tzetzes and Manasses.[55] The extant corpus suggests that each poet had his own specialization and was known among audiences for particular types of poetry: Manganeios and Theodore Prodromos wrote ceremonial poetry for the *sebastokratorissa* and left the didactic works to their colleagues. Indeed, when Prodromos was commissioned to write a work providing basic instruction in Greek grammar for the *sebastokratorissa*, he opted for prose instead of verse.[56]

Closely related to education is the practice of schedography, a type of school exercise that had become popular in the eleventh century and underwent significant transformations in the twelfth. Even if it has attracted little attention from modern scholars, schedography was the most popular

52 Ed. Koder (1970). On the poem, see also Afentoulidou (2012: 92–5).

53 For Tzetzes' didactic poetry, see e.g. van den Berg (2020); for Manasses, see Nilsson (2021a: *passim*).

54 On Tzetzes' *Theogony*, see Tomadaki (2022); on Tzetzes' *Allegories*, see e.g. Goldwyn (2017), Haubold (2021) and Ravani (2022); on Tzetzes' verse chronicle, see Hunger (1955) and Braccini (2022).

55 On the *sebastokratorissa* Irene as a patron, see e.g. E. M. Jeffreys (2014); on Tzetzes as a commissioned poet, see also Rhoby (2010). For Manasses, see Nilsson (2021a: *passim*).

56 For some introductory remarks on this work, see Zagklas (2011).

method for teaching grammar and rhetoric until the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453.[57] Some eleventh-century *schede* already combine prose and verse, but this practice became more popular towards the end of the eleventh century or the beginning of the twelfth. For example, during his tenure as director at the school of Chalkoprateia, Niketas of Herakleia wrote three *schede*, one on St John the Forerunner, one on the Epiphany and one consisting of a paraphrase of Gregory of Nyssa's encomium for the forty martyrs.[58] All of these are prose texts, except for the one on the Epiphany, which concludes with a line conforming to the basic rules of a dodecasyllable.[59] Around the same time, three out of four surviving *schede* by Nicholas Kallikles in Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, pal. gr. 92 [Diktyon 65825], a thirteenth-century manuscript copied in southern Italy, combine prose and verse, concluding with two or four iambic verses.[60] One of the most ardent adherents of this practice is Theodore Prodromos, who composed most of his *schede* in this mixed form.[61] In addition to Prodromos, Constantine Manasses and Niketas Eugenianos also wrote *schede* in a mixed form, while Vaticanus pal. gr. 92 contains 212 twelfth-century *schede*, with approximately half of them written in a mixed form.

The ways in which Byzantine *schede* combine prose and verse varies: the verse part can either open or close the *schedos*, while in some cases it does both. Consider, for example, a twelfth-century *schedos* from the same Vatican manuscript, which has a complex tripartite structure (verse-prose-verse).[62] The *schedos* was written by a certain Leo, a teacher at the Orphanotropheion of St Paul in Constantinople, who asks the director

57 On schedography, see Vassis (1993–4), Agapitos (2014) and Nousia (2016); see also Bernard in this volume.

58 The texts are still unedited; see Vassis (2002: nos. 36, 134 and 152). No. 36 is also preserved in Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. gr. PP Pio II 54 [Diktyon 66413], fols. 386v–387; for the dating of the *schede*, see Nesseris (2014: 74).

59 The *schedos* ends as follows: Πᾶσιν βραβεύων τοῖς πιστοῖς σωτηρίας.

60 See Kallikles 116 (an *ethopoiia* with 4 verses), 164 (an *ethopoiia* with 2 verses), 184, 188 (an *ekphrasis* with 2 verses). For the verse parts of these *schede*, see Vassis (2002).

61 For a list of Prodromos' *schede* and an edition of two of his works, see Vassis (1993–4). The remaining *schede* are edited in various studies: see Papadimitriou (1905: 422–4 and 429–35), Polemis (1995) and Nesseris (2014: 407). See also Agapitos (2015) and in this volume.

62 See the edition by Miller (2003: 14–16), which fails to signal that both the opening and ending of the *schedos* are written not in prose, but in iambic verse: Ἐπαχθὲς ἔργον πᾶσα διδασκαλία, | πολὺ πλέον δὲ παιδοδιδασκαλία, | τοῖς δὲ τριγηράσασιν εἰσέτι πλέον. | [approximately twenty lines of prose text] | Ἀνδρὸς τὸ λοιπὸν τληπαθοῦς ὑπερλάλει. | Τὸν Παῦλον ἔξεις τὸν μέγαν συνεργάτην, | ὃν πρέσβιν αὐτὸν ἀγαθαῖς ἐπ' ἐλπίσι | προσῆξα τῷ ῥηθέντι τὴν τόλμαν βλέπεις. | Τούτῳ δὲ καὶ σὲ σήμερον συνεισφέρω. | Καὶ γὰρ ὅσος μοι Παῦλος ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις, | τοσοῦτον αὐτὸς ἐν βροτοῖς· ἔρρει φθόνος. Ioannis Vassis did note the metrical parts of the *schedos*; see Vassis (2002: 58–9).

of the school (the *Orphanotrophos*) to intercede with the patriarch on his behalf for a promotion and relief from his teaching responsibilities.[63] More research on schedography is required to better understand its formal and didactic dynamics, and thus to enhance our picture both of the poetry written during this period and of grammatical education more broadly, where it featured alongside the didactic poetry to which the contributions by Bernard and Van den Berg are dedicated.[64] Giulia Gerbi, moreover, studies a poem by Nicholas Kallikles that refers to schedographical contests and may be closely related to a still unedited *schedos* by Kallikles.

In addition to ceremonial and didactic texts, a third major part of twelfth-century poetry consists of stories narrated in verse form, another practice which came to prominence for the first time in the twelfth century.[65] Most of the novels written in the second quarter of the twelfth century are long poems in dodecasyllable or political verse, probably performed in the *theatra* or literary gatherings of the capital.[66] The composition of lengthy love stories in verse form is not only a feature of Medieval Greek literary production, but is also found in Georgian, Persian and French literature from around the same period, perhaps as the result of interactions between these four literary traditions in the contact zone of Anatolia during this time.[67] Be that as it may, Byzantine literature from the twelfth century displays a general interest in long narrative texts composed in verse. In addition to *Digenis Akritis* (see above) and the three novels (Prodromos' *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, Manasses' *Aristandros and Kallithea* and Eugenianos' *Drosilla and Charikleas*), we know of a long self-referential poem written in southern Italy in the second quarter of the twelfth century, which features dozens of embedded stories from the biblical and Greco-Roman traditions.[68] Manasses' verse chronicle assembles stories in an episodic form to narrate a universal history; Tzetzes' *Histories*, conceived as a commentary on his own letters, collects historical, legendary and mythological tales referred to throughout his correspondence.[69] Other nar-

63 This teacher is most likely identifiable as Leo of Rhodes, who obtained the metropolitan see of Rhodes around 1166; Miller (2003: 10).

64 Ugo Mondini is currently conducting a research project on eleventh-century schedography at the University of Oxford.

65 As already noted in E. M. Jeffreys (2009: 224); on this aspect, see also Agapitos in this volume.

66 The Komnenian novels have received much attention in recent scholarship and therefore remain outside the focus of this volume. For an introduction, see Nilsson (2016); for an English translation of the novels, see E. M. Jeffreys (2012). See further Roilos (2005) and Nilsson (2014: 39–86); for later verse romances, see also Beaton (2019), with further references. On the *theatron*, see e.g. Marciniak (2007).

67 See Cross (2024).

68 See Lauxtermann (2014) and Cupane (2019: 357–64).

rative works in verse include Prodromos' *Katomyomachia* and *On Friendship's Departure*, the anonymous *Christos Paschon*, Haploucheir's so-called *Dramation*, and the *Hodoiporikon* or *Itinerary* by Constantine Manasses, as well as the *Fire Poem* by Constantine Stilbes.[70] The strong interest in storytelling in verse may tie in with the theatricality of much of the poetry of this period. Indeed, it is in this context that Paul Magdalino and Marc Lauxtermann discuss Stilbes' *Fire Poem* and Prodromos' *Katomyomachia* in their respective contributions to this volume. While Magdalino discusses Stilbes' poem alongside a coronation poem by Theodore Prodromos and the verse chronicle by Constantine Manasses to highlight the 'theatrical turn' in twelfth-century poetry, Lauxtermann focuses on the dramatic features of the *Katomyomachia* as a text intended for a school environment and demonstrates how it functioned both as a parody of earlier texts and as a piece of beast literature.

While the production of poetry for all these 'secular' ceremonial, didactic and theatrical purposes flourished, the composition of verse for liturgical purposes did not follow suit. There is only scant evidence of the production of hymns in this period: Eugenios of Palermo produced hymnographical works for the Mother of God and St Demetrios, while the lesser-known George Skylitzes authored a hymn on the *Translation of the Holy Stone*.[71] Even so, many poets took an interest in hymnographic poetry, and some of them, including Gregory Pardos and Theodore Prodromos, commented on the well-known hymns of John of Damascus and Kosmas of Jerusalem.[72] Many twelfth-century poets, moreover, composed iambic poetry that acquired a supplementary role during the church liturgy. Examples include the metrical prefaces that were intended to introduce the reading of a hagiographical work or a sermon as composed by Theodore Prodromos, Manganeios Prodromos, Nikephoros Chrysoberges and John Apokaukos.[73] Metrical calendars, too, may have played a role in the liturgy. Following the example of Christopher of Mytilene, Prodromos composed

69 Manasses' chronicle has been extensively studied by Ingela Nilsson: on its literary – and poetic – form, see e.g. Nilsson (2006), (2019) and (2021b). See also Magdalino in this volume. For Tzetzes' *Histories*, see e.g. Pizzone (2017).

70 On the *Christos Paschon*, see most recently Mullett (2022); on Haploucheir's poem, Marciniak (2020); on the *Hodoiporikon*, Chryssogelos (2017) and Nilsson (2021a: 46–54), all with references to previous bibliography.

71 For the respective works, see Luzzi (2016) and (2018); Antonopoulou (2013).

72 On twelfth-century commentaries on hymnography, see Demetracopoulos (1979), Giannouli (2007), Cesaretti and Ronchey (2014). On Byzantine hymnography in general, see Giannouli (2019) and Papaioannou (2021), with further references.

73 For an excellent overview of this type of poetry, see Antonopoulou (2010).

a metrical calendar in monostichs that once again illustrates the wide scope of Prodromos' poetic production.[74]

Even though this liturgical poetry remains largely outside the scope of the present volume, we do encounter religious sentiments in verse compositions of different kinds, most prominently perhaps in epigrammatic poetry. Epigrams with religious themes appear, for instance, on reliquaries and other objects, while dedicatory inscriptions in various Byzantine churches shed light not only on the dynamics of patronage but also on the patrons' devotional motivations for founding churches and other religious establishments.[75] In his contribution to this volume, Nektarios Zarras discusses some twelfth-century examples from Kastoria and elsewhere, which remain largely neglected in current scholarship. Ugo Mondini gives a detailed analysis of a poem with eschatological themes by Michael Choniates, whose poetic work has received little scholarly attention to date. Giulia Gerbi offers a close reading of Kallikles' celebration of spring, a poem that may have featured in the context of a school contest and draws parallels between the arrival of spring and the worldly renewal of Christian revelation. These and other texts may serve as an important reminder that the categories of 'religious' and 'secular' were not as clearly separated in the minds of the Byzantines as modern scholarship tends to suggest.

Geographical Distribution and Material Circulation

During the period between 1081 and 1204, the geographical scope of poetic production became broader than it had been in the eleventh century, and it would extend even further from the thirteenth century onwards due to the territorial fragmentation of the empire. Twelfth-century Constantinople continued to be the centre for the production of poetry written in Greek, which explains the dominance of Constantinopolitan poets in the present volume. A great deal of poetry, however, was written in regions far from the capital, as we can see in the examples from medieval Greece in Zarras' contribution. As mentioned above, many intellectuals acquired metropolitan sees across the empire and wrote some of their poetry there.

74 Acconcia Longo (1983). On Byzantine metrical calendars, see also Darrouzès (1958). For Christopher of Mytilene in particular, see Bernard (2019: 224, 229) with further bibliography.

75 For the connections between epigram, art and devotion in Byzantium, with a focus on the period 1100–1450, see Drpić (2016). Brad Hostetler is currently preparing a monograph entitled *Inscribing Sacred Matter in Medieval Byzantium* that aims at exploring the meaning of relics and reliquaries in Byzantine devotional practice through inscriptions. See in the meantime his unpublished doctoral dissertation (2016) and a dossier of examples collected in Hostetler (2022).

Theophylaktos, for example, addressed his poems 1 and 2 to individuals in Constantinople during his time in Ohrid. Similarly, Michael Choniates – who is the subject of Mondini's contribution – wrote most of his poems during his tenure in Athens, while John Apokaukos produced some of his poetic work as bishop of Naupaktos. However, all these individuals were trained in Constantinople; they had close ties to the cultural and literary milieu in the capital, and as a result their poetry closely follows the literary developments manifest in texts produced in Constantinople.

Slightly different is the case of southern Italy. In the twelfth century, Sicily became a hotspot for poetry written in Greek, with a number of poets active in the Greek-speaking circles both within and outside the Norman court.[76] An anonymous author addressed the above-mentioned narrative poem (approximately 4,000 verses) to the admiral George of Antioch;[77] Leo the grammarian wrote two hagiographical works in a prosimetric form;[78] and Eugenios of Palermo composed twenty-four poems on various themes and in a variety of genres, ranging from self-referential and epigrammatic poetry to epistolary and ceremonial poems.[79] In addition to these works, there are numerous metrical inscriptions for buildings and other objects.[80] To a large extent, the language, metre, imagery and generic features of many of these works are in keeping with the poetry composed in Constantinople; at the same time, however, they display peculiar traits of their own, often borrowed from the Latin and Arabic literary traditions with which they coexisted in Norman Sicily and southern Italy.[81] Even though poetry from this region is not featured in the present volume, it is important to keep in mind that Greek poetry was produced across the Mediterranean world, in places far away from Constantinople. The cultural and political history of the empire was closely interwoven with that of other regions, and the military struggles between the Byzantines and the Normans during this period find their way into the realm of literature, as the poem by Manganeios Prodromos discussed in the chapter by Elizabeth and Michael Jeffreys demonstrates.

76 See Cupane (2019); Kubina and Zagklas (2024b).
77 For the text, see Vassis and Polemis (2016); for introductory discussions of the text, see Lauxtermann (2014), Cupane (2019: 357–64) and Kubina and Zagklas (2024b).
78 See Halkin (1985–6) and Follieri (1987).
79 Ed. Gigante (1964); for a discussion of various of these poems, see Cupane (2011), (2013) and (2019: 366–70); see also Marciniak (2019), Roilos (2020) and Kubina and Zagklas (2024b).
80 Rhoby (2014: IT 22–33).
81 See Cupane (2019).

Despite the richness of the surviving material, much remains unclear about the ways in which twelfth-century poetry circulated within and beyond the borders of the empire. While collections or anthologies of contemporary poetry survive from other periods, the twelfth century offers only scant evidence. Master copies of Byzantine poetry written before the twelfth century circulated during this time, such as the poetic collection in Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, gr. 676 [Diktyon 67307], which most likely continued to be read by twelfth-century poets.[82] Some twelfth-century authors copied and possessed manuscripts with ancient Greek poetry: it has, for instance, been argued that Niketas of Herakleia copied Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, gr. 476 [Diktyon 69947], a manuscript transmitting Lycophron's cryptic *Alexandra* as well as Aratus' *Phenomena* with scholia for didactic purposes.[83] Even so, most of the manuscripts of twelfth-century poetry date from the Palaiologan period.

The late thirteenth century, when a significant number of manuscripts was copied, was a turning point for the transmission of Komnenian poetry. Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, gr. Z. 524 [Diktyon 69995] transmits a rich anthology of both anonymous and well-known authors;[84] Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, gr. XI.22 [Diktyon 70658] includes most of the poetry by Manganeios Prodromos;[85] and Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, gr. 305 [Diktyon 66936] is the most important collection of Prodromos' poetry (as well as his prose works).[86] Many of these collections or anthologies may go back to twelfth-century manuscripts, even though we should also consider other channels of circulation and consumption of poetry in the twelfth century. In addition to oral circulation, the market for *logoi* fostered a dissemination of literature not only in manuscripts, but also in looser forms, such as leaflets or scrolls, which commonly preceded publication in book form. Indeed, some Byzantine authors mention these two stages of publication and the transition from one stage to the next. Psellos, for instance, notes in various places throughout his oeuvre that he only had drafts of his works, which consisted of loose sheets, small scrolls or rollable pieces of paper or parchment, which were kept in boxes before they were copied into a book – if they ever were turned into book form.[87] This practice is documented well before the

82 For a discussion of the manuscript, see Bianconi (2011) and Bernard (2014: 128–48).
83 Mioni (1985: 267–9); see Nesseris (2014: 77–9), with previous bibliography.
84 Spingou (2021: 13–22), with further bibliography.
85 Mioni (1970: 116–31).
86 Zagklas (2023: 122–30).
87 See e.g. Boissonade (1938: 116.13–25). The same passage has been discussed in Papaioannou (2019: xl).

time of Psellos: in the ninth century, Photios noted in his *Amphilochia* that many of his books were put together from drafts (σχεδάρια).[88] Psellos and Photios thus provide us with some rare insights into the materiality and practicalities of Byzantine literary production. We can add to their testimonies the various comments of John Tzetzes, who repeatedly refers to the publication process of his books and the many problems involved with it, as we see in Pizzone's contribution to the present volume.[89]

A type of poetry that particularly seems to have circulated in unbound quires and leaflets is that of invective, which attacked other individuals – often professional rivals – and was sent in epistolary form. The Pseudo-Psellian poem 68, an invective in political verse likely written by a twelfth-century poet, directly testifies to this kind of circulation. The anonymous poet recounts that at some point a page of text had arrived at his place: a letter filled with abuse and attacks sent by an intellectual adversary of his.[90] The anonymous poet cared so little about his rival's message that it was left forgotten in a corner of his home, only to be rediscovered much later, when he was searching for something else. He read it and immediately started laughing and clapping his hands at his enemy's lack of education. We may not have surviving poetry books with contemporary material, but this anonymous poem is a good example of the hidden aspects of the circulation and consumption of poetry in twelfth-century Byzantium, on which future research will undoubtedly shed further light.

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The broader poetic context outlined in the previous pages forms the essential framework in which each of this volume's chapters finds its place and to which each of the contributions adds further detail and nuance. In her essay 'Why Produce Poetry in Twelfth-Century Constantinople?', Elizabeth Jeffreys argues that Komnenian authors wrote poetry in ancient and Byzantine metres for two sets of reasons: first, 'to demonstrate [their] credentials as a potential mandarin to future employers'; and second, 'to make sensible communication with an audience'.[91] These two reasons are of course inextricably connected: in order to impress patrons or peers, poets had to establish meaningful communication. Jeffreys' essay places a great deal of emphasis on the social aspects of poetry, in line with a

88 Photios, *Amphilochia* 148.40–2 ed. Westerink and Laourdas (1986): Ταῦτα μὲν ἀπὸ σχεδαρίων ὡς ἠδυνήθημεν μετεγράψαμεν, τὰ δὲ βιβλία, ὡς καὶ ἡ σὴ ἀρχιερατικὴ τελειότης συνεπίσταται.

89 See also Pizzone (2020).

90 Vv. 57–8 ed. Westerink (1993: 453); English translation in Bernard (2021: 195).

91 E. M. Jeffreys (2009: 228).

well-established tendency in modern scholarship. Indeed, the composition of verse in the twelfth century continued to serve social needs and practical demands, but it is important not to overlook the aesthetic qualities of poetry, its ability to provide (private) literary enjoyment and (public) theatrical entertainment, or its didactic and devotional dynamics. In addition to the social dimension of twelfth-century poetry, therefore, the contributions to the present volume focus on the literary aspects of Byzantine poetry beyond erudite self-fashioning and communicative functionality. Taken together, this volume explores the complex entanglements of poetry in the social and literary world of the time in order to enrich and bring nuance to the interpretation of the poetic production of a period that left behind an abundance of verse that still awaits a more systematic engagement. This volume is one step in that direction.

A Note on Style

Following a common practice in Byzantine Studies, we have adopted a mixed system of transliteration. Late antique and Byzantine names are generally transliterated or anglicized, following the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium.* Ancient names appear in their common Latinized or Anglicized form, following the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Titles of ancient and Byzantine texts are given in English or, where this is conventional, in Latin. Abbreviations of journal titles in chapter bibliographies follow those used in *L'Année Philologique*. All translations are by the authors unless otherwise stated.

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