





GREECE

BOOKS

AND

WRITERS

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PUBLICATION COMMITTEE

VANGELIS HADJIVASSILIOU  
STEFANOS KAKLAMANIS  
ELISABETH KOTZIA  
STAVROS PETSPOULOS  
ELISABETH TSIRIMOKOU  
YORYIS YATROMANOLAKIS

*Sourcing of illustrations*

SANDRA VRETTA

*Translations*

JOHN DAVIS (sections I-III), ALEXANDRA KAPSALI (sections IV-V)  
JANE ASSIMAKOPOULOS (sections VI-VII)  
ANNE-MARIE STANTON-IFE (introductory texts, captions)

*Textual editing*

JOHN LEATHAM

*Secretariat*

LENIA THEOPHILI

Design, selection of illustrations and supervision of production  
STAVROS PETSPOULOS

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4 Athanasiou Diakou St, 117 42 Athens, Greece

Tel.: (301) 92 00 300 - Fax: (301) 92 00 305

<http://www.books.culture.gr>

e-mail: [info@ekebi.gr](mailto:info@ekebi.gr)

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MINISTRY OF CULTURE

Cardinal BESSARION (black and white engraving 17x13 cm.  
National Historical Museum, Athens)

The most celebrated of the Greek scholars who worked in Italy was Cardinal BESSARION (1403-1472). An enthusiastic supporter of the union of the Eastern and Western Churches, he worked tirelessly to bring about the political and cultural conditions that would allow this to take place. He made a major contribution to the flowering of humanist studies in Italy and played a key role in gathering and preserving the ancient Greek, Byzantine and Latin cultural heritage by systematically collecting and copying manuscripts of rare literary and artistic value, frequently at great personal expense and sacrifice and with the help of various Greek refugee scholars and copyists (*Conati autem sumus, quantum in nobis fuit, non tam multos quam optimos libros colligere, et singulorum operum singula volumina, sicque cuncta fere sapientium graecorum opera, praesertim quae rara errant et inventu difficilia, coegimus*). Bessarion chose to bequeath this collection of manuscripts (one of the largest of its day: in 1468 it contained 482 Greek and 264 Latin codices) to the Venetian Republic, which he described as ‘almost another Byzantium’ (*quasi alterum Byzantium*), on the condition that Venice should safeguard these unique cultural treasures and use them for the benefit of all (*ad communem hominum tam graecorum quam latinum utilitatem*). Bessarion did not see his wishes fulfilled during his lifetime, for it was not until several decades later, in the mid sixteenth century, that his collection was finally housed in a proper space – today’s Library of St Mark’s (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana) – in Venice, where readers could have access to his unique books that came to play such an important role in the formation of modern European culture.







## FOREWORD

***E**VEN THE MOST OBSCURE GREEK POET today considers himself to be a member of the same literary and linguistic community as Homer. The history of Greek literature is coextensive with the history of the Greek language, and language is the main field in which the collective memory, the constitution and the self-image of a community are asserted.*

*The National Book Centre has brought together the wealth, the immense variety and the unbroken continuity of Greek literature in this special volume to mark the 2001 Frankfurt Book Fair, where Greece is to be the Guest of Honour.*

*Naturally, such a vast corpus is out of proportion for a country of such a relatively small population and a language which numbers fewer than 20 million users worldwide, and obviously difficult to present. The first thing that needs to be done is to restore the great but little-known periods in the history of Greek letters (such as the Mediaeval period) to their rightful position.*

*Perceptions of Greek literature abroad have, to a great extent, reflected perceptions of 'Greekness'. If 'literariness' is a problem common to all national literatures, it is particularly problematic in the case of Greece. The universality of humankind and of human speech (and by extension of literature) cannot of itself stamp national identity on a literature. No, such an identity can emerge only through history: history as collective experience, history as a subject of writing and history as a source of inspiration. History, language and literature all contribute in equal measure to the constitution of a unified cultural reserve.*

*In view of this, the central problem of Greek literature can be seen to lie primarily in the relationship between the universality of what it attests and the authenticity of local and particular experience, and secondly in trying to locate a Greek identity between the cultural poles of East and West. Greek identity is perched precariously on many a peripheral front: European, Balkan and Mediterranean. However, this national identity and its relationship with the West cannot be adequately contained by concepts such as the East, or various appropriations of it such as Orientalism; neither is Balkanism sufficient, nor even the wider ethnographic view of the Mediterranean.*

*The relationship of this 'Greekness' with the West is based on the pursuit of authenticity, for the label 'Greek literature' embraces as much the ancient texts as the birthplace of Western rationalism as the New Testament writings. This pedigree functions as the magnetic field on the horizons of which Greek literary production is located.*

*This volume provides a comprehensive introduction to Greek literature and will enable the reader to appreciate all the books and writers it presents in their historical and contemporary contexts. Congratulations are due to all those who have contributed to this publication, and of course to the National Book Centre.*

2 July 2001

Professor EVANGELOS VENIZELOS  
Minister of Culture

## THE STORY OF MODERN GREEK LITERATURE

*FOR THE NON-GREEK-SPEAKING PUBLIC* modern Greek literature is probably a somewhat obscure subject. Today it presents a diverse, dynamic countenance that shares many features with European literature in general while at the same time containing other aspects that have yet to be thoroughly explored. Its future appears to hold much promise and looks set to be prolific. Its past extends back many centuries, gradually merging with the Byzantine tradition and, earlier still, with antiquity.

A few writers of the twentieth century – Cavafy, Seferis, Kazantzakis, Elytis and Ritsos – are familiar names to just a small audience outside Greece. And Greek literature sometimes gives the appearance of being marked by gaps, by omissions, by the impression that continuity has been irrevocably interrupted, that the present lacks a past.

That said, it is generally agreed that the history of modern Greek literature begins in the eleventh century with texts written in a language that is more familiar to the ears of Greeks in the twenty-first century than is the language of the Byzantine literati, the compilers of the Gospels, or, of course, the classical authors of the fifth or fourth centuries BCE. And it is this language that continued to be spoken and fashioned through all subsequent centuries, at times going through years of leaner literary production, at other times producing masterpieces.

The chronicle of Greek literature or, to put it another way, the history of Greece as seen from the perspective of its books and writers is the subject of this work, which seeks to combine scholarly analysis with narrative interest. Its principal aim is to guide the reader through the key moments in this literature and to acquaint him or her with the men and women who moulded the Greek language into literary form. It attempts to describe the special qualities of this literature, its moments of innovation and originality, as well as its place in the European literary tradition and in the major literary and intellectual currents that have shaped the modern world. If the reader acquires a feeling for the historical depth and perspective from which this literature has evolved, and an appreciation for the landmarks in this evolution, then the writers of this volume will not have failed in their purpose.

Greece – Books and Writers is the fruit of collective labour. The contributors belong to the younger generation of literary scholars and critics. While each section bears the style and views of the particular contributor it is hoped that a common tone runs throughout, giving the work a uniform character and internal cohesion.

Special care was devoted to providing extensive illustrative material alongside the text: Greek-speaking centres beyond the traditional boundaries of the modern-day Greek state, and the activities of printers and publishers in these regions and their contribution to the making of modern Greek literature are amply represented in the illustrations that supplement the text.

It is hoped that the present work combines pleasure and instruction in such measure as to meet with the reader's approval. It is hoped, too, that on putting it down the reader will be sufficiently curious as to want to travel further through the landscape of modern Greek literature.

CHRISTOS G. LAZOS

Director of the National Book Centre

## BOOKS AND WRITERS

*THIS BOOK introduces the major works and authors in modern Greek literature from the 11th century to the present. The progress of Greek letters through the centuries, like that of the modern nation itself, has been neither smooth nor even. The nation has found itself alternately scaling great creative heights and plumbing the depths of cultural stagnation, with its impulse for creativity almost extinguished. However, this impulse was never entirely smothered, not even during the endless years of enslavement, the dark ages following the fall of Constantinople in 1453.*

*Modern Greek literature belongs to the wider family of modern European literature. However, there are many features of it which distinguish it from the rest of the group. It is a literature which once featured prominently on the European literary scene, but today is, regrettably, regarded as one of the so-called 'minor literatures', and the Greek language itself is a linguistic loner and therefore relatively inaccessible to foreign readers. But however 'marginal' it may have been at certain points in its development, it is a literature which has never isolated itself from the centre; indeed, it has been in constant dialogue with the literatures of other European nations. Moreover, the overwhelming Classical literary legacy and the inevitable 'anxiety of influence' have at times worked against Greek writers; the separation of history and emotion has proved difficult to sustain. On the other hand, the interaction between Ancient and Modern has often been extraordinarily fruitful, as the poetry of the 20th century amply demonstrates.*

*Naturally, the attempt to trace the long, tortuous course of modern Greek letters and to represent its many facets and manifestations within the confines of a relatively short volume has been no mean task. Practical constraints have led to the inevitable omission of certain writers and works. The central organising principles of this volume have been first of all to trace the relationship between Greek and world literature (especially European) and secondly, to outline the importance of these writers for their times, highlighting the historical context of their literary output and showing how they renew the traditions they work within. The editors have therefore taken care to map out very clearly the main stages in the development of this literature, emphasising certain central aspects common to each: linguistic, thematic and ideological, but never losing sight of the unique features of each period.*

*The title is self-explanatory: this is a book about books and writers, and thus prominent writers and their works provide the focus throughout. This volume does not aim to serve as a literary history in the conventional academic sense; rather, it seeks to recast the history of Greek letters in a fresher, more personal narrative, supported by a vast array of illustrations and photographic material. So while the various stages in the development of Greek literature are presented in a linear manner in parallel with modern history, Books and Writers regularly sidesteps the main historical narrative to make fascinating literary detours. This is the history of the literature of a modern nation involved in a constant process of enrichment and renewal.*

THE PUBLICATION COMMITTEE

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Most of the captions of the illustrations have been compiled by the Publication Committee.  
The Introductory Notes to each section were written by Yoryis Yatromanolakis.

Q15TAWTTHOPÖL



CONSTANTINOPLE

From *Liber insularum archipelagi*  
by Cristoforo Buondelmonti,  
early 15th century (Bibliothèque Nationale,  
France: ms. Paris. lat. 4825, f. 37v.)

*SECTION I*

THE EMERGENCE  
OF MODERN GREEK LITERATURE

(11th-15th century)



Details taken from the ms. volume *S. Joannis Damasceni sacra parallela* which depict a notary, a blacksmith and an itinerant pedlar. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris: Gr. 923, fol. 201v and 335r)



**T**HE MAIN FORMS AND THEMES of this first period included scholarly and popular epic songs celebrating the new champions of Hellenism, the young warrior Armouris and Digenis Akritas, defender of the Byzantine Empire; long compositions; verse romance, which bore the stamp of influence from Western courtly tradition, but a genre nevertheless rooted in the Hellenistic and imperial Roman ages; ancient stories reviving mythical and historical figures such as Achilles and Theseus and Alexander the Great; and didactic, sardonic texts, concerned with philosophy and the allegory of daily life, with birds and animals taking the leading roles. But these will prove to be also the mainstay of modern Greek literature, modified, of course, by the various aesthetic and other values specific to each era.

This period can be dated from the 11th century to the Fall of Constantinople; its literature developed throughout the Greek world, although the cultural and educational centre was undoubtedly Constantinople. This is where everything began, where everything was planned and where everything developed, and where the centuries-old Byzantine Empire came to an end - hence the map of Constantinople at the beginning of this section, to represent both the geographical and symbolic centre of this world.

The entire corpus of this literature, both scholarly and popular, has survived into spoken modern Greek, through which there echoes the ancient word lexis (diction), bringing the linguistic residues of previous eras to the surface, and breathing new life into them. The entire corpus is written in verse, dominated by the iambic fifteen-syllable line, the modern Greek metre par excellence. Although we are familiar with several of the literary names of the writers of the period, there is no single major figure who dominates; personalities do not seem to play the part they do in subsequent times.

# THE BEGINNINGS OF GREEK VERNACULAR LITERATURE



A Byzantine scholar at his desk (Niketas Choniates)  
(Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna:  
Ms. Vindobonensis hist. gr. 53, f. 1v)

From the third of the *Ptochoprodromika* poems.

The poet of the third of the so-called *Ptochoprodromika* poems, evidently a penniless scholar, envies the life of his neighbours who are simple artisans and tradesmen, and he curses the day that his father told him to acquire an education.

When I was still a youngster, my father said to me,  
“Just look to see you prosper, boy, and learn your abc.  
You see that chap, my boy, who sometime used to walk –  
well, now he rides a fancy mule that’s fat as any pork...  
When he started school – just think! – he never saw a bath  
but now – well now, thrice a week he soaks his precious... body.  
His jacket was a nest of lice as big as nuts and beans  
but now – well now, gold sovereigns line his seams...”  
So I studied all my lessons and slaved away and read.  
The result? Now that yours truly with grammar filled his head? –  
Oh, for some scraps of food, some crumbs, look at my tears!  
I curse the days I went to school, I curse those wasted years!  
The devil take them all, dear God! and all who want their lore!  
The devil take them all, yes, let them go to hell!  
and cursèd be the day when I was led to school!  
To learn, they said! my abc, that I might profit well!...  
Now, if they’d made of me an artisan instead,  
say, a tailor of rich embroidery whose line is golden thread,  
and just suppose I’d learnt this much despised skill  
of sewing gold-embroidered clothes, fancy trims and frills,  
well, I’d now open my cupboard and find there tasty things,  
stacked with wine, cooked tunny, mackerel and sardines.  
Whereas in fact my cupboard’s shelves – this may sound incredible –  
are stuffed with paper-bags crammed with papers quite inedible.  
And what happens when I search the bread bin for a slice or crust?  
Well, I find more papers inside paper-bags and nothing else but dust.

(Translation by John Davis for *The Byzantine Festival in London*, 1998)

The term ‘modern Greek literature’, so often used to describe vernacular Greek literary production of the Byzantine and post-Byzantine age, is something of a misnomer. For the cultivation of the vernacular does not mark the birth of a new literary tradition that appears to assert itself in the face of the ‘high’ and ‘middle’ learned stylistic levels that owed so much to perceived ‘classical’ models. Rather, it is seen to emerge and grow *alongside* the already existing tradition. The conventional practice of tracing the awakenings of a specifically modern Greek consciousness to these early examples of the literary use of the vernacular is far from unproblematic. The cultural context within which the first known works of vernacular literature were created was undoubtedly Byzantine. The earliest group of such works dates mainly to the twelfth century: satirical poems known as the *Ptochoprodromika*, the moralizing poem *Spaneas*, the autobiographical and didactic verses written in prison by Michael Glykas, a verse oration on Princess Agnes of France, and a few examples of heroic poetry such as the *Song of Armouris* and the epic *Digenis Akrites* (11th-12th century). It is extremely difficult, in these works, to trace, even in embryonic form, some kind of modern Greek consciousness that differs to any notable extent from the Byzantine identity and ideology. A complex issue, the first appearance of a distinctly modern Greek consciousness needs to be placed much later than this period. We need, therefore, to be aware of the fact that when using the term ‘modern’ Greek literature for the early vernacular works of the Byzantine period, we are using it for the sake of convenience in order to describe the linguistic form of our texts rather than their association with a particular national consciousness or literature.

The overwhelming majority of literary works in the vernacular has survived anonymously. Furthermore, it has proved difficult to assign a precise date to many of them. The latter problem is exacerbated by the fact that the form in which the works have survived is often somewhat protean. Many have survived in a number of manuscripts, each of which preserves substantial variants or a different version. This phenomenon is met with also in the medieval West and is due largely to the methods by which texts were copied and disseminated in the age of the manuscript. During the process of copying out a text it may be subject to a greater or lesser degree of alteration due to ignorance or carelessness on the part of the scribe, or even to deliberate intervention on the part of the redactor. This can be explained in part by the fact that in the Middle Ages the notions of originality, personal style and intellectual property were quite different to ours. However, the differences between the various versions of a text might also be due to the mechanisms of traditional oral poetic composition, whether at the initial moment of composition or during the later dissemination of the work in question. Orality, that is, the technique of oral improvisation which is based on a traditional system of formulas that correspond to particular poetic conceptual and metrical units, constitutes a compositional device that, although not relying on the aid of writing, nevertheless influences the techniques of written composition. Some characteristic systems of formulas are assimilated by the written tradition and contribute to the creation of a traditional style that displays, to a greater or lesser extent, features more commonly associated with oral poetry.

*continued on p. 20*



Arabs besieging a city. From the *Chronicle* of Ioannes Skylitzes. (Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid: ms. Vitr. 26-2, f. 214)

*They mounted at once and they came to the battlefield.  
They hissed like serpents, they roared like lions,  
They soared like eagles, and the two clashed.  
And then you could see a fight between fine brave youths.  
In the heat of the battle they struck continuously,  
and from the great clashing and the cut and thrust  
trees were uprooted and the sun was darkened.  
Blood flowed down over their horse-trappings  
and their sweat ran out over their breastplates.  
Constantine's black horse was speedier,  
and its rider was a marvellous young man.*

*He charged at the emir and struck him a blow with his stick,  
and then the emir began to tremble and flee.  
A Saracen addressed the emir in his own tongue:  
'Seize the youngster, my lord, and grab a quick victory,  
so that he doesn't take your head off with his sudden turn.  
He has made a fine attack on you and now he might finish you off.  
I don't think, my lord, you are going to do him much harm,  
but don't let him boast that he routed an army.'  
When the emir heard this, he withdrew some way from the youth,  
he threw away his spear and showed him his finger,  
and with this gesture said these words:  
'May you live and rejoice, young man, for victory is yours'.*

(Translation by Elizabeth Jeffreys, *Digenis Akrites*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 241-2)





David kills a bear. From a late 10th/early 11th-century *Psalter of St Basil* (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice: ms. Marc. gr. Z. 17 (= 421), f IVv).



David the Psalmist. A woman, symbolizing the spiritual flock, is seated next to him. From an 11th-century *Psalter* (Monastery of Vatopedi, Athos: ms. cod. 761, f11r).



David and the Lion. From an 11th-century *Psalter* (Monastery of Vatopedi, Athos: ms. cod. 761, f11v).

### *The Song of Armouris – Digenis Akrites*

The Byzantine-Arab conflicts that lasted from the seventh to the early eleventh century provide the context for Byzantine heroic poetry written in the vernacular Greek language. The most important and oldest of these works are the *Song of Armouris* and the epic romance *Digenis Akrites*.

The first of these works, the *Song of Armouris*, 197 lines of which survive, relates the deeds of the young Arestis as he battles against the Saracens on his way to Syria where his father, Armouris, is being held hostage. Arestis crosses the Euphrates and succeeds in defeating the Arab armies single-handed. Just one Arab survives the encounter, although he has lost a hand, and it is he who bears the news of the defeat to the Arab emir. Arestis threatens to slay the Arabs if they fail to release his father. The emir, alarmed by these developments, yields, releases Armouris and proposes that their respective children seal the deal in marriage. Although the plot is complex, the narrative is fast-moving and lively. And while the style is plain it has considerable descriptive power. The poem contains much of the formulaic texture of oral poetry.

By comparison, *Digenis Akrites* is a far more extensive narrative text, although it is not in a pure epic-heroic style. It survives in many manuscripts and versions. The oldest two versions are the Escorial version (=E, 1867 lines) and the Grottaferrata version (=G, 3749 lines), from the names of the libraries in which the respective manuscripts are held. Besides being descriptive of his dual origins (*digenis*: of dual birth, that is, Arab and Byzantine, Muslim and Christian), the name of the central hero of the tale also reveals something of his social role. The *akrites* of the Byzantine empire of this period were a military class responsible for safeguarding the frontier regions of the imperial territory from external enemies and freebooting adventurers who operated on the fringes of the empire.

The work is comprised of two parts. In the first, the ‘Lay of the Emir’, which bears more obviously the characteristics of epic poetry, an Arab emir invades Cappadocia and carries off the daughter of a Byzantine general. The emir agrees to convert to Christianity for the sake of the daughter and resettle in ‘Romania’ (i.e. within Byzantine, ‘Roman’, territory) together with his people. The issue of their union is a son, Digenis Akrites. The second part of the work relates the development of the young hero and his superhuman feats of bravery and strength: like his father, he carries off the daughter of another Byzantine general and then marries her; he kills a dragon; he takes on the so-called *apelates*, a group of bandits, and then defeats their three leaders in single combat. No one, not even the amazingly strong Amazon Maximo, with whom he commits the sin of adultery, can match him. Having defeated all his enemies Digenis builds a luxurious palace by the Euphrates, where he ends his days peacefully.

While it should be noted that the form (or forms) in which *Digenis Akrites* has survived is not the product of oral composition, it has nevertheless retained a considerable number of features of its oral origins. The common core of the two versions preserved in the E and G manuscripts goes back to the twelfth century. The text of E appears to be closer to the original composition while G represents a version that is heavily

marked by learned reworking. Both texts give enchanting descriptions of the life of the martial societies of the border regions of the empire, while in the figure of Digenis are concentrated the legends that had accumulated around local heroes. The Escorial version is the superior of the two in respect of the power and immediacy of the battle scenes and austerity of style. The epic descriptions of the mounted knights and battles are marked by drama, a swift pace and lively visual detail.

Judging by its style, the original composition of the *Song of Armouris* may well date to an earlier period than *Digenis Akrites*. The features of oral epic composition and a certain 'archaic' poetical economy found in *Armouris* are more marked. Likewise, there are important differences with regard to content: the encounters between Byzantines and Arabs appear to comprise the historical present of the poem; the narrative begins within the climate of military conflict and the shadow of Roman defeat at the hands of the Arabs (*Armouris* has already spent twelve years in captivity and his war horse has been grieving all this time in its stable) and it finishes with the emir's proposal that Arestis become his son-in-law. Yet such an optimistic outcome (which on a symbolic level, through nuptial union, might represent the establishment of

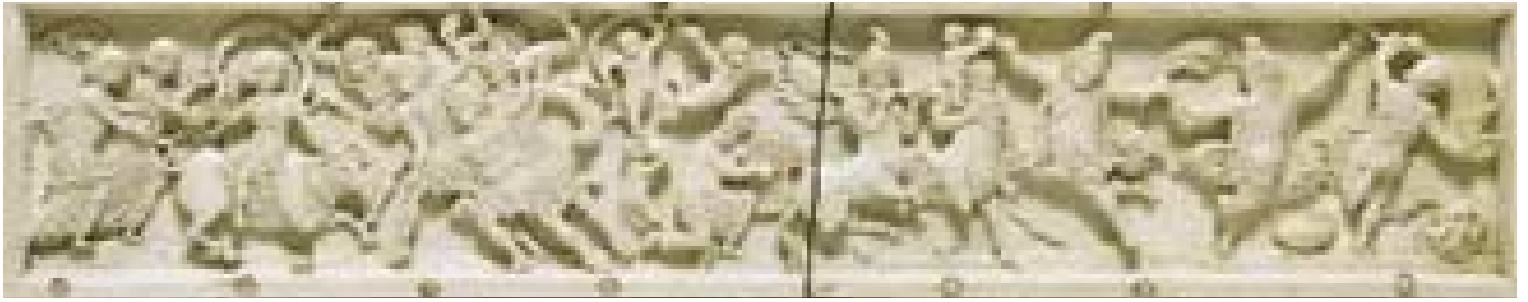
peace between the two peoples) is not recounted, and the tension between the Byzantine and Arab sides remains enigmatically unresolved. This stands in marked contrast with *Digenis Akrites*: while, in *Digenis*, the Arab incursions into Byzantine territory are the context within which the first part of the tale unfolds, the events in the part of the narrative concerning the family history of the central hero seem to be located (perhaps deliberately) beyond a climate of conflict. The reconciliation of the two peoples through the marriage of the leading figures of the tale and the triumph of Christianity over Islam, achieved through the conversion and reception of the emir and his people into Byzantine society, is the key theme of the first part of *Digenis Akrites*. The rest of the story unfolds against a background of peaceful coexistence of the two peoples.

The Byzantine *Digenis* continued to be read and enjoyed in later centuries, as the text survives in various versions dating to as late as the seventeenth century. The epic tale of *Digenis Akrites* gave rise also to a cycle of oral 'akritic' songs, some of which survived down to the twentieth century. In the later tradition *Digenis* is eventually defeated only by death, in the figure of Charos, after fierce single combat on 'the marble threshing floors'.



Byzantine ceramic (12th-13th century) decoration showing a warrior holding a shield and sword and wearing a helmet, breastplate and short tunic, while his mantle billows in the wind (Benaki Museum, No. 13601).

The four poems known as the *Ptochoprodromika* (the 'Poor Prodiges' poems) are examples of the satirical genre in the 12th century. They have been attributed by some to Theodoros Prodromos, a scholar at the court of the Comnenian emperors. In the first poem, the narrator – a poor teacher and scholar – asks for financial assistance from the emperor in order to escape the complaints of his nagging wife and the humiliation to which she subjects him. In the second, the narrator asks for financial help from the emperor in order to find relief from his poverty. In the third poem, the narrator describes and compares the livelihood of the learned teacher with that of his illiterate neighbours who ply their humble trades. The narrator bewails his fate as he recalls how he naively believed the advice of his father, who assured him – misleadingly it appears – that learning leads to riches. In the fourth and last poem, the narrator – now a poor monk – satirizes the luxurious lifestyle of the wealthier monks in his monastery as well as his own tendency to envy their self-indulgence. In all four poems the subject of material poverty is associated and paralleled with the subject of linguistic poverty through the use of the vernacular language.



Scenes with cupids carved in ivory from the Veroli Casket (10th century). (Victoria & Albert Museum, London)

## ROMANCES



A mounted hunter. A mirror from Anatolia, first half of the 12th century. (Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul: 2/1792)



Lovers in a garden. Plate from Corinth 12th-13th century. (Archaeological Museum of Ancient Corinth: 1934-0054)

The verse romances are among the finest achievements of medieval Greek literature, continuing as they do the long tradition of the love story whose roots go back to the Hellenistic and late antique periods. Sophisticated literary works of a learned character, these romances were the product of a literary elite that experimented by extending traditional narrative forms into the vernacular language while also exploring the potential of this language for the creation of a new lyrical idiom and a distinct poetic sensibility.

Broadly speaking, these texts can be divided into two groups: one containing works that are original compositions in the Greek language, and the other containing works that are translations or adaptations of West European compositions. The majority of works belonging to the first group were written in the period extending from the second half of the thirteenth century to the sixteenth century. The translations and adaptations of West European romances into the vernacular Greek of the day date to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: the *Theseid* is a translation of Boccaccio's *Teseida*, while *Imberios and Margarona* and *Florios and Platziaflora* were both based on the Italian versions of the Old French romances *Pierre de Provence et la Belle Maguelonne* and *Floire et Blanchefleur*. To this group of works can also be added *The War of Troy*, a translation of Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*. However, it should be noted that these 'translated' works are generally adapted to the poetical conventions that developed around the romance genre during the Palaiologan period, with the result that the translated text often became considerably distanced from its original. All of these works are anonymous.

Besides the fifteen-syllable verse, a key feature of the common poetical language of the romances is its inventiveness and obvious delight (sometimes to excess) in creating new compound words. In spite of the conventionality of much of the poetical language, the style of the romances is frequently refined, lively and sensitive. The influence of rhetoric is clearly strong and is testimony to the fact that the writers of the romances were familiar with the 'high' literary tradition of the classical language. Examples of this tendency are to be found in various *ekphrases*, rhetorical descriptive exercises, of works

*continued on p. 24*





Battle with lances. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris: cod. Parisinus gr. 2878, f. 112v)



The worship of Venus (Aphrodite). From a manuscript of homilies of Gregory Nazianzus (the Theologian), 12th century. (Monastery of St Panteleimon, Mount Athos: cod. 6, f. 164r)



Mounted warrior

From the zodiac for March, *Typikon* of the Monastery of Vatopedi, 14th century. (Monastery of Vatopedi, Mount Athos: cod. 1199, f. 150v)

Allegories of virtues were a popular subject in both Byzantine and European literature of the middle ages. Allegorical treatment of this type can be found, for instance, in the *Romance of the Rose* (12th century), as well as in Byzantine works such as *Ysmine and Ysminias* by Eustathios Makrembolites, and *Livistros and Rodamne* (13th/14th century), where descriptions of virtues personified are accompanied by personifications of the twelve months of the year. The allegorical representations of the months were popular in the medieval West and East. The illustration here shows a mounted warrior who represents the month of March. The warrior as portrayed in this manuscript illustration of the 14th century bears all the basic characteristics of the heroes of the romances of the Palaiologan years.

of art, gardens, women, a bath or a wonderful palace, that follow the precepts of traditional rhetorical practice.

The subject matter of the original romances rests upon a shared core of standard narrative material. A king or prince who ignores or despises love departs from his country either on a quest for heroic adventure or in search of a beautiful maiden (with whom, however, he is not yet acquainted). He meets the maiden in a wonderful castle. The young knight and maiden declare their love for one another (and in the majority of cases their love is consummated before marriage). The element of adventure is usually introduced or reaches its climax following the union of the couple. The couple's happiness is abruptly interrupted. In some cases (for instance, in the *Achilleid*) the outcome proves fatal and the story has a tragic end. In other cases the heroes are separated, one of them (sometimes both) is considered dead, and after various adventures and wanderings they are brought back into one another's arms thanks to an intermediary (a friend of one of the lovers, or a woman with magical powers). It is the translated and reworked romances that differ from this general pattern: the *Theseid*, *The Old Knight* (based on the romance of *Guiron le Courtois*, a French work centred on the Arthurian legend), *The War of Troy* and the *Tale of Troy* (*Diegesis genamene en Troia*: see the next Section).

The Byzantine romance began its revival in the twelfth century with *Ysmine and Ysminias* by Eustathios Makrembolites, *Rodanthe and Dosikles* by Theodoros Prodromos, *Drossilla and Charikles* by Niketas Eugenianos and *Aristandros and Kallithea* by Konstantinos Manasses (the first in prose, the following two in iambic hexameters, and the last in fifteen-syllable 'political' verse, and all in the learned idiom). The differences (and the similarities) in the case of the romances of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are clear. The plot has been reduced considerably; only *Livistros and Rodamne* maintains a sub-plot (a secondary romance that evolves alongside the romance of the protagonists). The element of adventure becomes less prominent as the description of the action is reduced. The number of characters taking part in the action also becomes smaller. The social origins of the protagonists changes: no longer simply well-to-do, they derive for the most part from royalty. Furthermore, fairy-tale elements (for instance, dragons, winged horses and magical objects) are incorporated into the story while the erotic aspect of the romance is given particular emphasis: for instance, the sensuality of the bathing scene in *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe*, the passionately entwined Velthandros and Chrysantza whose cries of pleasure echo around the garden, and the obvious erotic symbolism of Achilles' entry with his lance into the maiden's garden in the *Achilleid*. The heroes are either of Byzantine or Roman lineage, though the 'co-stars' are sometimes of eastern origin. The action no longer evolves within a Mediterranean, classical setting; the scenery is contemporary, but with obvious utopian elements and a liking for the scenery of the folktale.

The triad of original works – *Livistros and Rodamne*, *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe*, *Velthandros and Chrysantza* – as well as the *Achilleid* clearly echo the treatment of love found in their ancient forerunners. The theme of the invincibility of



Eros, or Love, whose personification acquires the characteristics of the Byzantine emperor, is developed in numerous variations; he is described as armed with bow and arrow, as an infant cupid, as a child, as a youth or old man. The amorous adventures of Venus are recounted; love is identified with death; the sensation of desire is likened to a flame and to ice, and so on and so forth.

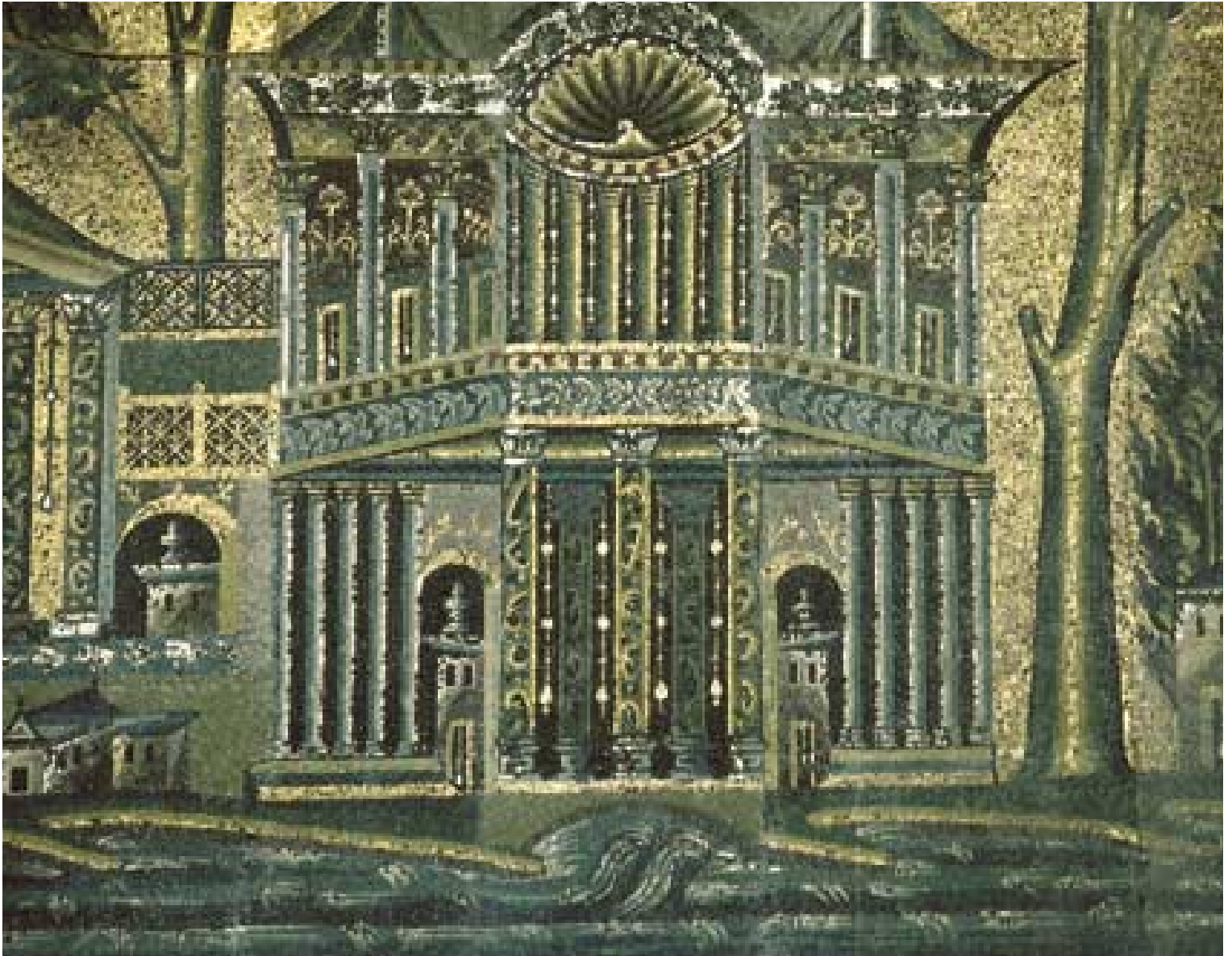
A number of scholars have termed the Greek verse romances as 'chivalric'. Although the authors of the romances may have been familiar with western works of this kind, the original Greek romances appear neither to imitate nor to have assimilated anything of the western chivalric ideal. The similarities of the central hero to the knight of the western courtly romance are limited to the external characteristics of the noble knight, in his capacity both as a warrior and as a hunter, and to his exceptional valour and beauty. The codification of the system of values of feudal society as expressed in the ideal of western chivalry is absent from the Byzantine and post-Byzantine works (the social and ideological base of the Greek romances is, after all, quite different). There is a total absence of the feudal and Christian dimension of the chivalric code of

conduct; furthermore, the ideal of love that is portrayed is substantially different to the standards of courtly love in the western tradition, while there is considerable difference with regard to the subject of adultery, which appears only very rarely and was quite foreign to the Byzantine notion of love. Apart from the story of Helen and Paris, which in any case was handed down from antiquity, as related in the *Tale of Troy*, the Byzantine *Iliad*, 'the notion of love' is encountered only in *Livistros and Rodamne*, where the sub-plot concerns an adulterous relationship. While the extra-marital relationship is not commented on in negative terms, nor is it praised in any way, and the incident is related only summarily.

There are, of course, a number of common poetical motifs to be found in both medieval Greek and western romances, such as the subject of the amorous pursuit, the allegiance to Love (Eros), love from afar, divine figures and exemplars taken from mythology, or the allegorical treatment of virtues and other abstract qualities. The similarities between Greek and western production are due principally to the shared classical heritage, a poetic repertoire of great historical depth that is subject at the same time to reworking.



Cupid shoots his arrows at the other gods. (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice: cod. Marc. gr. Z. 479 (=881), f. 33r)



Palace set in a garden. Mosaic decoration in a late 7th/early 8th-century Umayyad mosque, Damascus, executed by Byzantine craftsmen. It is probable that the same group of artists produced the mosaics in the Christian church of the Mother of God, Bethlehem. (photograph: George Hadjimichalis)

Descriptions of gardens were a stock feature of romances ever since antiquity. Frequently the encounters of the protagonists and the love scenes take place within the setting of the garden. They are usually closed spaces with trees, plants and fountains, as in the plate above. The description of the garden is usually combined with a description of a marvellous palace.

## TALES SET IN THE CLASSICAL WORLD

The average Byzantine had a very different idea of the classical world to us. In the chronicles, the key historical manuals of the Byzantine world, the standard notion of world history presented a single, uniform course of events that led from the Creation (Year One) to the Second Coming, expected, according to Byzantine chronological reckoning, in 7000 *anno mundi* (1492 CE). This historical course was marked by the succession of four world powers, the fourth being Roman.

Just one historical figure from antiquity enjoyed an undisputed place in the world chronicles of Byzantium: Alexander the Great, the third of the four masters of the world. Achilles held second place, although it was not so much Achilles himself who was at the centre of interest as the subject of the Trojan War and the events that followed it, including, most prominently, the flight of Aeneas to the West and the foundation of Rome.

Narrative literature of the late Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods numbers many works whose theme is Alexander the Great or the Trojan War. A similar range of interest in the narrative and literary treatment of subjects taken from antiquity is to be found in the French works of the twelfth century, with the so-called *romans d'antiquité* (*Roman d'Eneas*, *Roman de Thèbes* and *Roman de Troie*). The Byzantine poets, however, show greater independence as they adapt the themes of antiquity to their own notions of the world and its past.

An outstanding example of the adaptation of the figure of Alexander the Great to the literary needs of the age is provided by the fourteenth-century *Greek Alexander Romance*, consisting of 6120 lines of 'political' verse. The audience follows the hero on his conquest of the ancient world and at the same time is taken on a tour to the corners of the earth, and even beyond. In the work, the geographical perception of the world stems from the Scriptures rather than from classical or empirical geographical knowledge. Alexander departs from Macedonia and makes his first stop in Rome. From there he proceeds to the western edge of the world, which is encircled by the great Stream of Ocean. Then he marches along the coast of North Africa until he reaches Egypt, where he establishes the city of Alexandria. He then continues east until he reaches Jerusalem, where he is welcomed by the prophet Jeremiah; he carries on to Babylon, where he visits the site of the Tower of Babel, and then heads for the uninhabited regions of the eastern end of the world. In this last part of his travels he passes through the land of eternal damnation for the sinners of this world, while he also has the good fortune to get a glimpse of the earthly paradise, although he is unable to enter here as no living man is allowed entry. Like another Messiah, this Alexander struggles to free the world from the bonds of idolatry.

This version of the *Greek Alexander Romance* was popular reading material for no less than five centuries, undergoing linguistic adaptation and various narrative alterations in the course of time. As early as the fourteenth century it was translated into Slavonic and from Slavonic into other languages, including vernacular Greek. The audience for the text was broadened substantially with the expansion of the Ottoman Empire north and west, and it came to be identified, in general terms, with the limits of Orthodox Christianity. The Greek audience increasingly identified the Persian heathens of the



The Trojan Horse: woodcut from the *Iliad* of Loukanis (1526).  
(Gennadius Library, Athens)



Philip lying asleep: woodcut from the *Iliad* of Loukanis (1526).  
(Gennadius Library, Athens)

In its day, the printed edition of the *Iliad* of Nikolaos Loukanis (1526) was the most lavishly illustrated edition of any vernacular Greek work. The woodcuts in Greek books printed in Venice are similar to those in popular Italian editions of the same period. Various woodcuts from Loukanis' *Iliad* were used in editions of other works, such as the *Alexander Romance*.





Saint Sisoies before the tomb of Alexander.  
(Byzantine Museum, Athens: T 2279-BM 4117)

The subject of death is found in all the versions of the Life of Alexander. In the late-Byzantine period, the 'vanity of human existence' was a favourite theme in art and literature, and the early death of Alexander was a classic case in point. In wall paintings and icons of the 16th and 17th centuries we sometimes see the figure of St Sisoies before Alexander's open tomb. Because Alexander was such a widely known figure, he provided the most readily available example of the vanity of worldly affairs.



Theophilos Hadjimichail, *Alexander the Great*, early 20th century, wall-painting. (Museum of Greek Folk Art, Athens)

From the predecessor of the Byzantine emperors, the image of Alexander developed, in the age of the Enlightenment and beyond, into the symbol of the glorious Greek past. The *Phyllada* most probably helped make Alexander a popular and familiar figure among a large number of Greeks, regardless of the fantastical tales that came to be associated with him over the course of the centuries. This process of fiction-building, particularly within the context of 19th-century attitudes, helped form both the national consciousness of the modern Greek people, and the creation of a fictional Greek universe, in which Alexander was a brother of Digenis Akrites and Erotokritos.

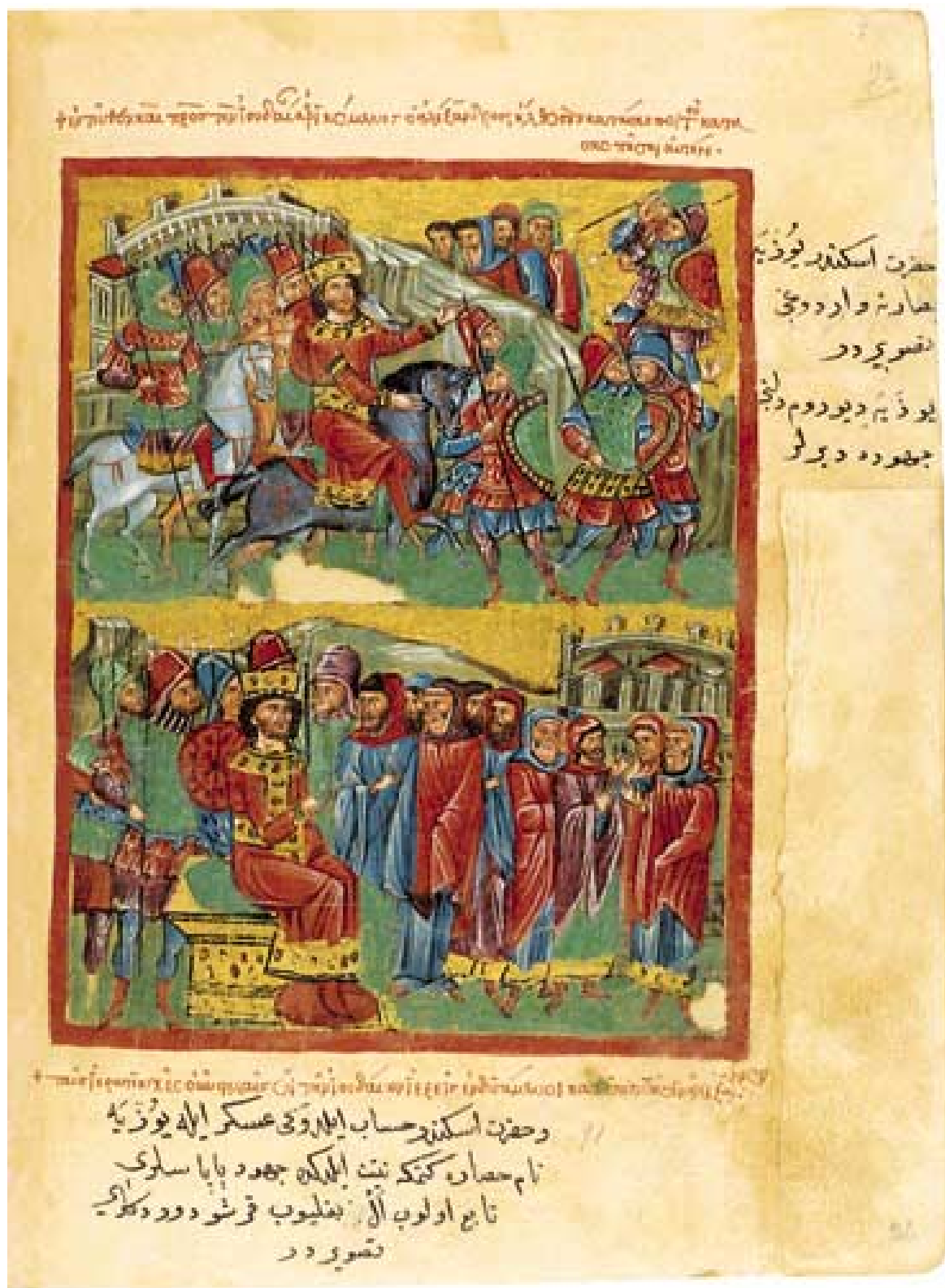
*Greek Alexander Romance* with their Turkish overlords. A revised version of the *Life* was printed for the first time in Venice in 1750 under the title *Phyllada tou Megalexandrou* (Chap-book of Alexander the Great), while in the same year the first 'researched' biography of Alexander was published in the modern Greek language as part of the *Palaia Istoría* of Charles Rollin. Gradually the historical figure of Alexander the Great took the place of the legendary Alexander of the Byzantine tradition. The cover pages of editions of the *Phyllada* in the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth show Alexander wearing a crown of indeterminate ancient augustness and supposedly historical armour.

From the late fifteenth century onwards, a further *Life* of Alexander, known as the *Rimada tou Megalou Alexandrou*, again portraying him more as a fictional than as an historical character, was published, though this account owed more to the ancient sources than the *Phyllada*. When Dimitrios Zenos, a Greek scholar living in Venice, made the first collection of Greek vernacular literature he preferred to use this thematically more venerable version for inclusion in his printed collection. The collection in question represented an effort to combine both the 'delightful' and the 'edifying' elements of Greek lore. Similar criteria lay behind the selection, for printing, of other such texts of a superficially classical content but written in the vernacular: the *Theseid* (a translation and reworking of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Teseida*), the *Battle of the Frogs and Mice* (a parody of the Homeric epics), the *Iliad* of Nikolaos Loukanis, and a collection of Aesop's *Fables*.

The subject of the Trojan War is found not only in texts dating from late antiquity but also from the Byzantine period. Within this context, it is necessary to bear in mind that in both medieval West and East tales of the Trojan War were familiar, as a rule, from the *Ephemeris belli Troiani* by Dictys Cretensis and the *De excidio Troiae historia* by Dares of Phrygia, or at second hand, via such texts as the chronicles of Ioannes Malalas and Konstantinos Manasses, who again drew on these two texts. The motive behind the western Europeans' desire to tackle the subject of the Trojan War was similar to that of the Byzantines: they considered themselves to be the successors of the Romans and, ultimately, the descendants of Aeneas.

The vernacular literary production of the fourteenth century also includes three long verse accounts of the Trojan War, each presenting a different treatment of the subject. The most popular of these, judging by the seven manuscripts preserving the text, was the *Polemos tes Troados* (War of Troy), an anonymous work that in essence comprises a loose translation, or paraphrase, in 14,400 lines of fifteen-syllable 'political' verse, of the *Roman de Troie* by Benoît de St. Maure (mid twelfth century). The Greek version of the *Roman de Troie* was composed in accordance with the rules of the genre of the late Byzantine romance, though not without some divergences: it does not relate the love story of a central couple, but of many more characters, as the narrative recites the fortunes of successive generations and moves its focus of attention from one set of characters to another. The second of these works, the so-called Byzantine *Iliad*, or *Diegesis genamene en Troia* (Tale of Troy), by an anonymous author, also observes the conventions of the

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Top: When Alexander arrived in Judea, spies came to spy on him.

Bottom: Dressed in priestly robes the Hebrew priests of Jerusalem go out to meet Alexander.

From the *Greek Alexander Romance*. (Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and post-Byzantine Studies, Venice: cod. 5, f. 92r)

One of the Byzantine versions of the *Alexander Romance* is preserved in a manuscript that is remarkable for its wealth of illustrations: cod. 5 of the Hellenic Institute in Venice (14th century). The person who commissioned the manuscript was most probably the Emperor of Trebizond, Alexios III Komnenos. This would explain the de luxe quality of the manuscript. In the miniature illustration on f. 92r of the manuscript we see Alexander being greeted by the Jewish priesthood of Jerusalem. In the printed version of the *Phylla-*

*da*, the scene is described as follows: ‘And Alexander again saw in his sleep the Prophet Jeremiah dressed in his priestly robes, who said to him: “Come, my child Alexander, and pay homage to Jerusalem, to Holy Zion, and worship the God of heaven and earth. And then you can go from here to Darius and defeat him with your troops”. And Alexander woke up and set out for Jerusalem. And when Jeremiah heard that Alexander had arrived, he ordered a meeting at which young and old were told to go and greet Alexander. And the Prophet put on his priestly garb, and a thousand priests holding gold and silver censers, and ten thousand people holding candles went out to meet him and pay homage to him’ (ed. G. Veloudis, Athens 1977, pp. 45-46).

In the margins can be seen comments written in Arabic. The manuscript thus links the Byzantines, Jews and Arabs.

romance. The central hero is Paris in the first part and Achilles in the second. The work is comprised of 1166 fifteen-syllable lines and is written on the lines of the tales of fate: in the beginning we are told of an oracle predicting that the as yet unborn Paris will be the cause of the destruction of Troy. However much those around him may try to prevent this evil from occurring, they will succeed only in hastening the realization of the oracle. The third work, a vernacular paraphrase of the

*Iliad* made by Konstantinos Hermoniakos at the court of the despotate of Epirus in about 1330, seems to follow the Homeric text fairly closely. However, in the twenty-four books of 8800 non-rhyming eight-syllable lines of Hermoniakos' paraphrase, the narrative also relates the events that preceded the action described by Homer as well as the sequel to the sack of Ilium, all in an affected idiom comprised of both vernacular and learned linguistic features.



From the *Greek Alexander Romance*: Instead of accepting the gifts offered by the Jews, Alexander dedicates them to their God. (Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and post-Byzantine Studies, Venice: cod. 5, f. 92v, top)

Two miniature illustrations on the verso of the same folio. This scene is described in the *Phyllada* with further details so as to assimilate Alexander to the Christian world order. By paying homage to the God of the Old Testament, Alexander is seen to embrace the God of the Christians: ‘Then Alexander entered and worshipped Holy Zion. And they showed him how

Solomon, the wise king, built it. And he asked: ‘Of what god is this place?’ And the prophet answered, ‘We believe and worship one God, who made the heaven and the earth’. On hearing this Alexander said: ‘Truly, you are servants of God the Highest and I too believe in Him and worship Him. And I grant to you the gifts and the taxes that I had intended to take from you. And may God be with me and help me in whatever I try to achieve.’ And the Prophet Jeremiah went with the lords to offer gifts to Alexander and to pay homage to him. And Alexander did not want to take the gifts, and said: ‘May these be gifts to the Lord of Hosts’.



## ANIMAL FABLES

Tales whose characters are animals have been popular since antiquity, through medieval times down to the present day. The most famous such stories are perhaps Aesop's *Fables*, short tales in which human traits are projected on to the animal world. These tales focus on a didactic message, the so-called 'moral'. In Byzantium, Aesop's *Fables* were widely read. The Byzantines, following the advice of Pseudo-Hermogenes, used them as models for literary-rhetorical exercises, known as *progymnasmata*, for beginners in the art of rhetoric.

In other texts we see the projection of human behaviour on animals serving a comic or satirical end. The ancient satire *The Ass*, attributed to Lucian, is one such example. The hero of the tale, Lucius, is transformed into a donkey and is thereby put in the position of being able to watch the doings of men from a quite unusual angle.

The hero of the *Synaxarion of the Estimable Donkey* of the fourteenth century is also an ass. A Fox and a Wolf have decided to travel with a Donkey to the Holy Land. At some stage during their voyage across the sea they force the Donkey to confess his sin of having eaten a lettuce in the garden of his master, and they condemn him to death. The Donkey then lets them in on a secret: God has granted him a special talent, a special power in his hind legs. He tells them that it would be very regrettable if this special talent, granted him by God, were to perish with him. The Wolf is impatient to find out more about this special power and, going round the back of the Donkey, finds himself on the receiving end of a mighty kick. The Fox, alarmed at the unexpected power of the Donkey, tries to flee. Finally, both Fox and Wolf realize how unjustly they have underrated their companion and, on account of his great feat, award him the name of Nikos (Victor) and variants thereof.

In the *Synaxarion of the Estimable Donkey* the Fox and the Wolf get their come-uppance because they made the mistake of believing the Donkey to be a dullard, a rustic simpleton. The sly fox is the hero of tales that became popular both in the Byzantine East and the Medieval West, and many of them share the same features, such as can be seen in the thirteenth-century Old French *Roman de Renard*. Human social stratification is to be found with the lion, king of the quadrupeds, and the eagle, king of the birds. Usually these texts relate the disputes and quarrels of animals that break out at an assembly of the beasts called by the king. Of course, the atmosphere and the action of the heroes reflect the culture and the society that produced and read these works.

The plot of the *Tale about Quadrupeds* develops around an assembly, or parliament, of animals; that of the *Poulologos* (Bird Book), around the wedding of the son of the eagle, king of the birds, to which all the bird kingdom has been invited. At the wedding of the eagle's son, the birds are seated around a long table and a debate commences between the pairs of birds, with each bird directing words of odium and scorn at the bird seated opposite it: 'you foolish hen, you shameless slut, feeding off excrement and snot, getting laid by whatever cock comes your way, even by your sons, you whore and daughter of a whore'. Behind the humble story of the *Poulologos* there appears to be a veiled attack on the rising political

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Birds (National Library of Athens: cod. 701, f. 217r).

In the Byzantine tradition of animal illustration, the eagle, as king of the birds, was generally depicted wearing a crown on his head. In classical Greek literature the eagle is not only the king of the birds, but also the favourite bird of the king of the gods, Zeus. The Romans were the first to use the eagle as a symbol of power. The two-headed eagle was initially the emblem of the Byzantine family of the Palaiologoi, the last dynasty of the Empire. It eventually came to serve as the emblem of the Byzantine Empire itself. On the page prefacing the text of the *Poulologos* in Athens Library ms. 701 (17th century) is a picture of a two-headed eagle. An association is thus created between the king of the birds in the *Poulologos* with the symbol of the Byzantine Empire. The matter is confused further with the description of the picture of the *basiliskos*, or gold crest (*basiliskos* in Greek is a diminutive of *basileus*, 'king'). The illustrations in the various manuscripts containing the *Poulologos* reflect more generally the Byzantine tradition of animal illustration.



Groups of animals, Job's flock. Miniature illustration from a Greek codex in Sinai, written in the late 11th century, preserving an illustrated version of the story of Job. (Monastery of St Catherine, Sinai: cod. 3, f. 8r)

In the *Tale about Quadrupeds*, the panther attacks the leopard using the following argument: 'You're no natural thing, but a half-cast, / you're part like a lion, and part like me'. The view that certain types of animal were the result of cross-breeding went back to antiquity. In Oppian's *Cynegetica* III, 482-3, for instance, Oppian observes: 'Yea and another double breed have I beheld with mine eye, a mighty marvel, Camel united with Sparrow'.

Damaskinos Stouditis in the 16th century links the existence of supposedly mixed breeds of animals with the unicorn, which, among other things, is capable of curing the deleterious effects of poison: 'The unicorn has another property. Deep in the desert, where there are no rivers, only a tiny amount of water can be gathered in hollows in the ground. And even this water becomes bad from the heat of the sun. All the animals gather around to drink, but the water is bitter, and so they can't. So they wait for the unicorn to come and drink. And when he bends to drink, and his horn touches the water, the water becomes fresh. He drinks of it and then the other animals follow. And it is while the other animals are gathered and waiting for the unicorn to arrive that the varied species mate with one another. And so we have the strange mixed breeds, like the panther (*pardos*) that mates with the camel to produce the giraffe (*kamelopardos*). Also, the wild wolves of India mate with the great dogs of India to produce wolfhounds (*lykokynes*), or jackals. Likewise, panthers mix with lions to become leopards (*leontopardoï*).'



Unicorn. (Bodleian Library, Oxford: MS. Barocci 145, f. 246v)

The myth of the unicorn probably originated in India. In the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament there are references to the unicorn, the first to be found in Greek: ‘Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee?’ (Job 39.9), ‘Save me from the lion’s mouth; for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns’ (Psalms 22.21), and ‘But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn’ (Psalms 92.10), and so on. The Church fathers understand the unicorn, on the basis of Psalms, as symbolizing Christ. In Byzantine and post-Byzantine literature we find the unicorn in *Varlaam and Ioasaph*, in the various versions of the *Physiologos*, in *On Animals* by Manuel Philes, and in the *Collection* of Damaskinos Stouditis. The unicorn was a popular subject for illustrators of Byzantine manuscripts containing the story of Job and *Varlaam and Ioasaph*. – This illustration is taken from MS. Barocci (12th/13th century), containing the *Oracles* of Leo the Wise and other texts.



Elephant (Bodleian Library, Oxford: MS. Auct. F.4.15, f. 27).

In the *Tale about Quadrupeds* reference is made to the ancient zoological tradition that viewed elephants as not having joints, thus explaining why they cannot get up if they fall down. (Aristotle, however, in his *History of Animals* had believed this view to be wrong.) When elephants want to sleep they prop themselves up against a tree so as not to fall. Hunters, so the theory goes, would saw through a tree’s trunk just enough to let it stand until an elephant leant against it. This method of hunting elephants was described by Diodorus (*Library of History* III, 27) and by Strabo (*Geography* XVI, 4.10). In both Byzantium and Western Europe this interpretation was sustained in the chapter on elephants in the *Physiologos*. – This illustration is taken from MS. Auct. F. 4.15, f. 27 (dated 1564), in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, containing the 14th-century work of Manuel Philes *On animals* (*Peri zoon idiotetos*).



Fox (Bodleian Library, Oxford: MS. Barocci 145, f. 249).

The sly fox and the bad wolf are the principal characters of many of Aesop’s *Fables*. In the Western European medieval beast fables, such as *Renart* and the tale of *Reineke*, the sly fox plays the lead role. The wickedness of the Renart does not have its counterpart, however, in Byzantine beast fables. For instance, in the *Synaxarion of the Estimable Donkey* the roles of the fox and the wolf are reversed: the seemingly gullible but clever donkey ends up defeating the refined abess fox and her accomplice the wolf. – MS. Barocci 145, from which this illustration was taken, preserves the *Oracles* of Leo the Wise and other texts. The illustration is Venetian and dated 1656/1570.



figure of Alexios Apokaukos (d. 1345), written perhaps by someone belonging to the pro-Cantacuzene camp.

The fourteenth century was an age of protracted internecine strife and intermittent civil war for the Byzantine Empire. While the *Poulologos* gives us an aristocratic slant on the age, the *Tale about Quadrupeds* appears to reflect a more popular ideology: even the power of the emperor himself is open to debate, while the internal disputes weaken the smaller centres of Byzantine power (the Morea, Nicaea and Epirus) to such an extent that they were barely able to muster adequate defence against foreign incursions. It may be noted that both the *Poulologos* and the *Tale about Quadrupeds* are written in ‘political’ verse and the vernacular of late-Byzantine narrative literature.

The animals in the *Tale about Quadrupeds* do not conduct their disputes in pairs but one after another. The text begins with separate gatherings of, on the one hand, plant-eating and domesticated animals (described as ‘clean’, *kathara*, and ‘useful’, *euchresta*), and, on the other, the carnivores (‘blood-thirsty’, *haimobora*, and ‘abominable’, *bdelykta*). The lion king, a carnivore, invites the plant-eating animals to a meeting so that each side can air its complaints to the other and, it is hoped, come to some kind of reconciliation with each other. The smaller carnivores speak first, then the plant-eating ani-



From I. Leschi, *Djemila*, Algiers 1953.

His hind legs are not the only miraculous weapon that the Donkey possesses. To the Fox and Wolf the Donkey sounds like ‘horns and trumpets’, while ‘from his belly a long lance-like thing extended, fat and with a hood on its tip’. The Donkey defeats the Fox and Wolf, and he is thus named ‘Nikos’ (and derivatives thereof: the Greek word *nike* meaning victory). The humour here is more complex than at first appears. Its origins lie in antiquity where similar wordplay is associated with the victorious donkey. Since the *Synaxarion of the Estimable Donkey* is a work of the fourteenth century, we need to take into account the fact that the vernacular Greek of this time also had the word *to nikon* for ‘donkey’, with the stress on the last syllable (derived from *onos*, *onikon*, the ancient noun and related adjective for ‘ass’). Another name that the Fox and Wolf give the Donkey – ‘Niketas’ – could be a monastic derivation from the layman’s ‘Nikolaos’. The Fox in the *Synaxarion* is an abbess, and the central scene of the tale comprises a parody of the rite of confession. The text thus contains various satirical references to monastic life, which perhaps also explain the satirical use of the word ‘Synaxarion’ in the title of the tale.

The illustration reproduces a Roman mosaic in Djemila, Algeria. The inscription (*asinus nica*) suggests that the Greek wordplay was not translatable into Latin.

mals, and lastly the ‘lords’ of the animal kingdom. The cat listens to the complaint of the mouse; then the mouse hears the complaint of the fox, and so it goes on. Only the bull has a good word to say about the cow (he seems to have a soft spot for her: ‘I am the sun, and she is the moon’), but she does not appear to be impressed by his flattery. Gradually the situation gets out of hand and violence breaks out. The lion king attacks the cow and slays her. The enraged bull lunges at the lion. This leads the flesh-eating animals and the plant-eating animals to form two opposing camps.

The categorization of speakers and the tidy alternation of discourse betray the rhetorical bent of the anonymous poet of the *Tale about Quadrupeds*. Details of a zoological or mythological nature – it is assumed that the elephant does not have wrinkles, that the leopard originates from the union of the lion and the panther (Greek: *pardos*) – link the work with ancient and Byzantine zoological tradition, which was less concerned with the observation of nature and more interested in reproducing fantastical accounts of varied origin. According to its anonymous author, the *Tale* “was written to combine the beneficial with the delightful”. The delightfulness of the tale, coupled with its gruesome ending, renders it, of course, tragi-comical.

A related text, the *Porikologos*, or Fruit Book, is more clearly a parody than a satire. The word *porika* indicates fruits of all kind: fruit, pulses, nuts and so on. The comic element perhaps works more effectively here than in the *Poulologos* or the *Tale about Quadrupeds* because supposedly rational behaviour is projected not onto animals but motionless, humble plants. Various plant species appear in the prose text as high-ranking, and they behave accordingly. The Grape accuses Pepper of plotting high treason against King Quince, but the lawyer for the defence succeeds in proving the accusation groundless. The Grape is condemned henceforth to be trodden by man and to be used for the production of must and wine.

Another type of beast fable is the *Physiologos*. From the fourth century onwards, this text was current in Greek (in numerous versions) and in translations into Latin and, later, Romance languages. For instance, the account of the unicorn in both East and West is the same in all the various versions of the work. Besides real and fictional animals, the *Physiologos* describes other animate and inanimate natural objects such as plants and precious stones, each of which is given the character of a symbol. The *Physiologos* is arranged in chapters that are crammed with biblical quotes, particularly from the Psalms. The allegorical interpretation of animals, plants and stones was endemic to the medieval understanding of the natural world, and was clearly far removed from the scientific approach familiar to us from some of the ancients. Another work, which, in literary terms, may be classed in the same physiognostic tradition, is the *On the characteristics of animals* by Manuel Philes, written in the early fourteenth century and dedicated to the Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos. Christian nature symbolism serves as the raw material for a literary work. In the sixteenth century, this approach was continued in the *Selection from books of the ancient philosophers* by Damaskenos Stoudites, a work that belongs to the Byzantine zoological tradition, though with a clear focus on narration, on episodic structure and content of an unusual character.



Mistra and Sparta. (Gennadius Library, Athens: Scrapbook Φ 48B, quire 36, Topographia I, Peloponnese II)

In the wake of the sack of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204 southern Greece and the Peloponnese came under the control of the Franks, though not without the spirited resistance of the local Byzantine aristocracy. The events surrounding the Frankish conquest of the traditional Greek heartland comprise the subject of the *Chronicle of the Morea*, an anonymous verse history written in the mid fourteenth century in 9000 lines of 'political' verse. The historical events are seen from the point of view of the invaders under the leadership of William de Villehardouin (1246-1278), while the account breaks off in 1292. It is possible that the *Chronicle* is based on a French 'Livre de la conquête' composed some time between 1320 and 1330. Other versions were written in Italian and Aragonese, which were dependent either directly or indirectly on the French and Greek texts.

Detail from an imaginary map of Candia, Crete. From the book of Bernard von Breydenbach, *Peregrinationes in Terram Sanctam* [Speir] (per Petrum Drach, 1502). 3rd edition, the c. Fairfax Murray copy, as described by H.W. Davies. (Gennadius Library, Athens)





*SECTION II*

**CRETAN LITERATURE**

(Mid 14th-17th century)



**A**LTHOUGH it was under Venetian hegemony from 1211, Crete was without doubt the cultural centre of the Greek world throughout its rule. The Venetian presence in Crete was to endure for above 450 years, until 1669 when it was newly conquered by the Turks. This long period was marked alternately by phases of creativity and stagnation, war and peace, struggle and hardship, and the dream of independence. Nevertheless, during the 17th century the long literary course of the island reached its peak, and in the space of only a few years a vast number of important works were produced. Apart from the lyric romance *The Shepherdess* and the matchless modern Greek epic *Erotokritos*, all these works were theatrical. Georgios Chortatsis, a contemporary of Shakespeare and the head of a group of dramatists, restored the lost lustre of the Greek theatre with his tragic masterpiece *Erophili*, the exquisite comedy *Katzourbos*, and the ornate pastoral *Panoria*. This was also a time when religious drama held a dominant position with works such as *The Sacrifice of Abraham*. But the definitive work of this period, and a work which was to influence and inspire successive generations of writers was, Vitsentzos Kornaros' *Erotokritos*, which marks the end of the Cretan school.

These great works are all notable for western influences, as the cultural horizons of the island extended through Venice to the West. But these influences are barely perceptible beneath the originality and independence of the text. This is not due simply to the fact that Cretan Greek was then at its highest point of development, nor to the fifteen-syllable and other verse forms used with such consummate skill and power, but because the compositions and the beguiling dramatic genius of the Cretan masters were such that their works became paradigmatic texts, unique examples of the Greek renaissance. The compelling qualities of Kornaros, Chortatsis, Andreas Troilos and Marcos Antonios Foskolos set the standard for the future. It is no accident that the national poet, Dionysios Solomos, studied these works in detail, especially the *Erotokritos*, and partly through them shaped his linguistic and poetic ideals.



Giorgio Sideri, Portolan and geographical map of Crete (*La Isola de Candia*), 1562.  
(Biblioteca del Civico Museo Correr, Venice)

## CRETAN LITERATURE (MID 14TH-17TH CENTURY)

*For a period of more than 450 years, beginning in 1211 and ending in 1669, Crete was ruled by Venice. During this period a unique cultural phenomenon occurred, the product of the coexistence of two peoples each possessing rich cultural traditions. At first, however, their coexistence was not peaceful. As long as Constantinople remained the capital of the Orthodox Byzantine State, the Cretans derived from it their political, religious and intellectual inspiration. Not only did they receive material support from Byzantium whenever rebellion against Venetian rule broke out on the island, but the population also followed Byzantine doctrine when it came to doctrinal confrontation between the Western and Eastern Churches. Similarly, there was also a steady stream of scribes, scholars and artists that came to Crete from the waning Byzantine capital. After the suppression of the St Titus rebellion (1363-1364), which had sought to make Crete an independent republic and succeeded in bringing the two ethnic groups on the island – native Cretans and Venetian colonists – into conflict with the metropolis, Venice, a spirit of tolerance and mutual understanding between the two groups began to prevail, thus benefiting the material and cultural life of the island. The fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 finally loosened the sentimental ties between the island and the ancient capital of the East Roman Empire, and fostered yet greater convergence and productive coexistence between Cretans and Venetians, eventually creating a shared Veneto-Cretan cultural consciousness.*



## THE BEGINNINGS

A major event marking the transition from the medieval to the modern world was the Black Death (1348-1350), the pandemic of plague that swept across the entire continent of Europe and whose moral, social and economic impact on the unfortunate population of the day was immense. In Florence, Boccaccio and his friends fled to the countryside in order to escape the horrors of the plague, the 'blow of death', and spend their time entertaining one another with stories that served to affirm their faith in the value of earthly life. In Crete, Stefanos Sachlikis (1330-1400), the first Cretan poet whose name we know, chose to describe in his verses the sweet experience of his reckless youth and the *joie de vivre* that pervaded his island in the wake of the plague in his *Praise of Pothotsoutsounia* and the *Council of the Whores*. Born into a wealthy family, he wasted his inheritance and youth in the brothels, inns and taverns of Candia (modern Iraklio) before ending up in prison: he was found guilty of immoral conduct towards his lover, the widow Koutagiotaína. Following his release from prison, he withdrew for a spell to his estates, then later returned to the city to work as a lawyer (*Remarkable Story of the Humble Sachlikis*). When he was asked to advise the son of a good friend on how to conduct his life, he was able to draw on his rich and instructive past (*Advice to Frantziskis*).

A quite different personality was that of Leonardos Dellaportas (1330-1419). His life, again, was lived to the full – he not only travelled to the ends of the known world of his time but also spent time in the cells of Candia's prison – but he drew on his experiences to enrich his literary talents. In his major work, *Dialogue Between an Unfortunate Man and Truth*, he exploits allegorical figures whose lineage extended far into the past in order to demonstrate the inconstancy and vanity of worldly things, the nature and sources of sin, and the salutary power of faith, while he also used many sources that had inspired the later Byzantine literary tradition.

Two other poets, of the early fifteenth century, serve to remind us that the medieval world was changing: Ioannes Pikatoros (*Mournful Rhyme on the Bitter and Insatiable Hades*) and Bergades (*Apokopos*), both from the town of Rethymnon. Pikatoros emphasized the corrupt and transient nature of our worldly existence. Bergades, on the other hand, stressed its uniqueness and called on his readers to enjoy life to the full. His weary hero dreams of going on a strange journey to the Underworld where he meets the dead whose nostalgia and curiosity about the world of the living emphasizes for us

something that we are inclined to forget: the importance of enjoying the light of the sun, the beauties of nature and the humble challenges of our daily existence.

The works of the young noble Marinos Falieros (1397-1474) and his anonymous contemporary, the author of the *Rhyme of a Girl and a Boy*, are paeans to deceit in love and carnal desire. Falieros, in his *Story and Dream* (1418), a love vision in the form of a dialogue that takes place between the poet, his future wife Anthousa, Fortune, and Pothoula abandons the code of pure love so common to vernacular romances and proposes instead an amoral and earthly description of the emotion of love, thereby seeking to persuade his beloved to let him enter her room and kiss her. The love dialogue echoes the 'Contrasti d'amore', an Italian genre that was certainly familiar to Falieros and a key practitioner of which was the Venetian poet Leonardo Giustinian (c. 1385-1446).

All the works of this period are in verse. Poets employed the fifteen-syllable verse line with or without rhyme, regardless of their subject matter. The language is the standard vernacular marked by a few features of the Cretan dialect. The authors were clearly well aware of the vernacular romances and the various religious, didactic, legendary and historical works of the day, while they were familiar also with the techniques of oral poetry. Besides the great Italian writers such as Dante and Boccaccio, the Cretan poets also knew minor Italian works, particularly those written in Venice and northern Italy. Their literary debt to Italy is evidenced in the light style and the earthy subject matter of the work they produce – to such an extent that it would not be inaccurate to describe it as 'Italianate'.

The poets belonged to the island's well-to-do classes that were concentrated mostly in the towns. Many served the Serenissima as high-ranking state officials and undertook difficult diplomatic missions for the Venetian Republic. Seen beside their western medieval counterparts, the Cretan poets nevertheless display independence of spirit and confidence in their choice and handling of literary subjects. For instance, they do not avoid but rather seek to speak of themselves in their work (often prompted by imprisonment, following conviction for various misdemeanours) and they describe the positive and negative aspects of life, sometimes with little evidence of regret or remorse. We see them using the same bold and unbridled manner in their descriptions of their erotic escapades, scandalous feats and lively dealings with their fellow citizens in the town or village where they chanced to spend some of their colourful lives. At times they contemplate the realm of death with awe and respect, at others they cannot hide their love for life and their worldly ambitions.



Cretans of the 16th century (frescoes from various churches in Crete).  
Reproduced from G. Geron, *Monumenti Veneti Nell' Isola di Creta*, Venice 1908.

# THE FIRST CRETAN RENAISSANCE FALTERS

The gay and careless spirit of the Cretan writers of the early Renaissance was extinguished by the news of the fall of the imperial capital, Constantinople, to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. The now very real possibility that the Christian world was heading for collapse caused many to seek the reasons for this startling change in fortune, the manifest result of the sin and moral corruption that had led their world to this sorry state. The Turkish conquest of the 'City' was accompanied by other ominous events, such as natural disasters, famine and plague, which caused many to believe that the end of the world was nigh. The realistic, satirical and erotic themes of the previous age were succeeded by a clear preference for religious and moral subjects more familiar from the Byzantine tradition. The doctrinal differences that had earlier been such a divisive issue between the two populations of the island resurfaced, leading to mutual distrust and introversion. The urge to cast out perceived evils and the call to repent and return to the straight and narrow way of God dominate the writings – prose and verse – of the hieromonk Nathaniel-Neilos Bertos and the future Bishop Ioannis-Joseph Plousiadenos of Modon (1429-1500), and of others, and were clearly intended to fulfil the



Plan of Rhodes town, from Giuseppe Rosaccio's *Viaggio da Venezia a Constantinopoli per mare e per terra, & insieme quello di terra Santa*, Venice 1598. (Gennadius Library, Athens)

Lyric poetry was very popular in the Greek islands under western rule, such as Rhodes, the base of the Knights of St John (1308-1522), and Cyprus, which came under Venetian rule after a long period under the Lusignan dynasty (1192-1489). A few texts have survived from Rhodes, such as the *Erotopaignia*, a collection of unpretentious, simple love songs written in the vernacular.

purpose of sermons and moral instruction. Works such as the *Verses to this Seventh Age* by Bertos, the *Lamentation of the Mother of God on the Passion of Christ* by Plousiadenos, or the *Lamentation of Death* by an anonymous poet were particularly popular judging by the number of manuscript copies of them that have survived.

Religious and didactic writing continued at its usual pace until approximately the end of the fifteenth century. At around that time, writers began to experiment again, albeit hesitantly, with western forms and genres, primarily so as to meet the needs of their Catholic readership, who, finding it increasingly difficult to understand the Latin of their church and doctrine, sought the assistance of translations. These two trends can be seen to coexist for a considerable while. Most of the generally short works by the Catholic priest Andreas Sklentzas (fl. 1470-1500), particularly his prayers and hymns, are translations, paraphrases and reworkings of Latin religious writings (for instance, the *Prayer for the Holy Communion of St Thomas Aquinas, teacher of the Church* is a translation of *Adoro te devote latens veritas*, a hymn attributed to Aquinas himself). On the other hand, the *Creation of the World* by the notary Georgios Choumnos (fl. 1480-1500), whose narrative is inspired by the first two books of Genesis, renders in 2800 fifteen-syllable couplets the Byzantine *Historia tou Palaïou* (The Story of the Old Testament) and the text – or perhaps a lost vernacular paraphrase – of the Old Testament. While these reconfigurations were clearly linked to literary trends in Italy, they are too few and too minor in quality and influence to bear worthy comparison with the Cretan writings of the early fifteenth century. And while lyric love poetry was the dominant mode in the literature of the Renaissance ('neo-Petrarchism'), it had yet to find its practitioners in Crete. It is possible to detect certain traces of lyricism in various hymns

by Plousiadenos (*Lamentation of the Virgin*) or Sklentzas (*To the All-Holy Virgin*). However, such lyricism as these works do contain is quite unrelated to the Italian, Petrarchan type; instead it is concerned with the figure of the Virgin and stems from a long tradition whose roots lie elsewhere. Contemporary historical events became the subject of verse narratives and were employed for the purpose of moral edification. In the *Catastrophe of Crete* Manolis Sklavos gives a detailed description of the terrible earthquake of 29 May 1508, which flattened much of the capital, Candia, and he looks back nostalgically on the earlier years of prosperity, attributing the change in fortune to the sins of his fellow men.

The reappearance of rhyme marked the beginning of a new phase in literary tastes and ultimately constituted the key innovative feature of literary verse production in Crete and elsewhere in this period. Many of the works of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, whether erotic, satirical, entertaining or didactic, were subjected to a systematic process of revision and reworking by talented and experienced *littérateurs* into rhyming verse and an idiom closer to that of the spoken standard of the day, littered with local Cretan dialect forms (the *Tale of Apollonius* by Gabriel Akontianos dates to 1500, while the *Rimada of Belisarius*, the *Chap-book of the Donkey* and various other, anonymous works can be dated to shortly afterwards).

In contrast with the previous period, these writers belonged to the middle and lower social strata of Cretan society; they were for the most part monks or priests of either Catholic or Orthodox persuasion, frequently supported the union of the Eastern and Western Churches (Sklentzas and Plousiadenos), and were town dwellers (Choumnos, Sklavos, Akontianos, and others). They all shared the religious and didactic temperament of the age and believed in the edifying mission of their literary activities.

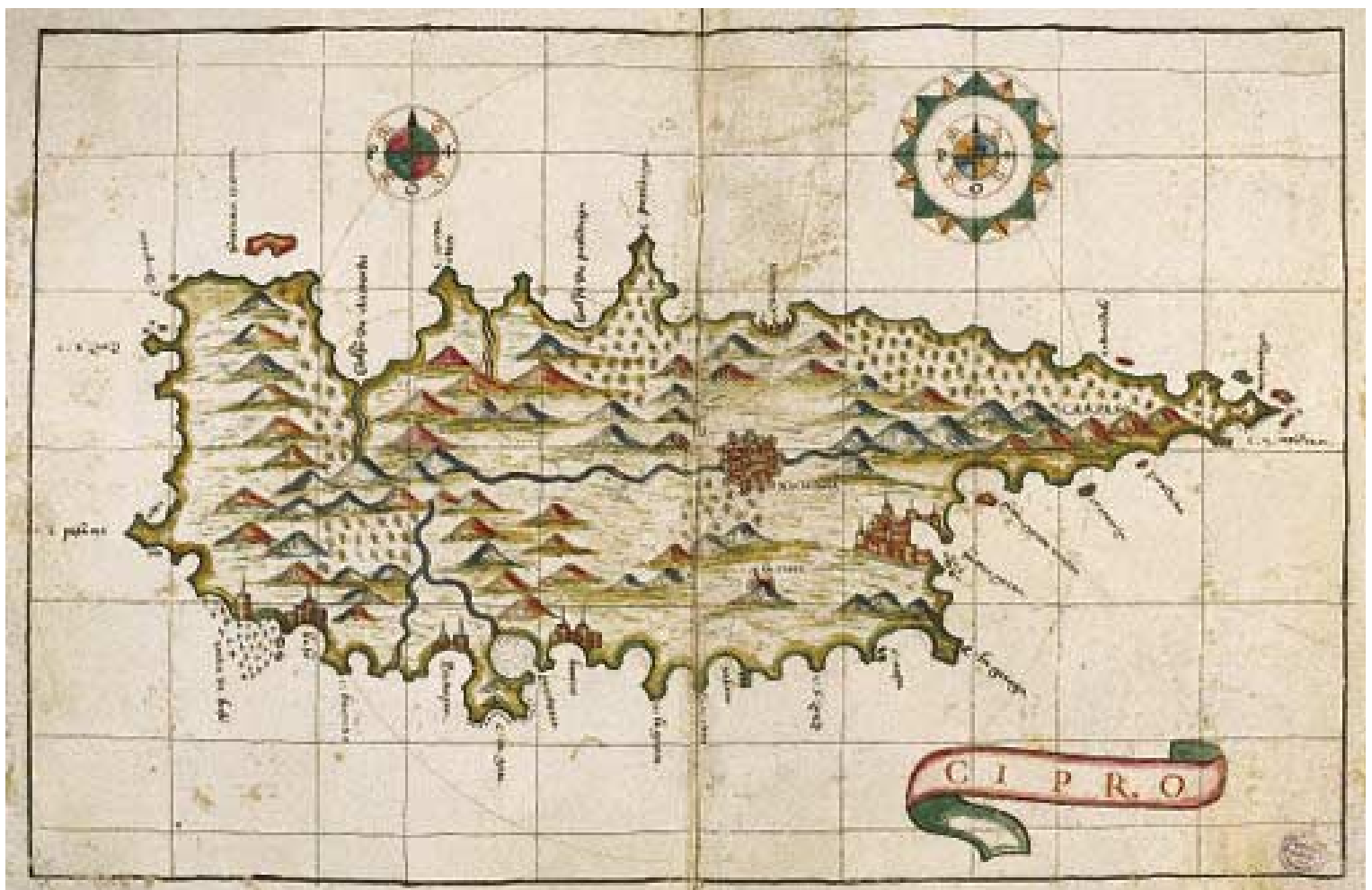


A Rhodian 'concupina' and a Greek merchant. From Vecellio Cesare, *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo*, Venice 1598. (Fondazione Scientifica Querini Stampalia, Venice)



## A NEW AGE DAWNS

From about 1510 until 1570 literary production in Crete went through a prolonged hiatus. Unlike other Venetian-ruled dominions such as Cyprus and, to a lesser extent, Zante and Corfu, where literary production flourished, Crete produced no work of especial literary merit. These years mark a period of conservation and stock-taking in literary activity, indicative of a desire in Cretan society to reassess its aims and move on to a new phase of development. The manuscripts preserving the works show uniformity in terms of content; at the same time, from the printing houses of Venice, there emerges the first corpus of printed books in modern Greek. Several of these were Cretan, notably Bergadis' *Apokopos* (first edition, 1509), the *Rimades of Apollonios* (1524), *Imberios* (1525) and *Belissarios* (1526), the *Chap-book of the Donkey* (1539), and various compilations such as *The Father's Counsel to his Son* (1544) by Markos Defaranas, a less than accomplished blend of the synonymous work by Falieros and the *Advice to Frantziskis* by Sachlikis. Works of a moral, religious, exhortatory, romance, satirical or allegorical, with animal protagonists, content were printed during this period, reaching an increasingly wide au-



Portolan map of Cyprus, from Antonio Millo's *Atlas with six portolan charts and two topographical maps*, c. 1580-1590. (Biblioteca del Civico Museo Correr, Venice)

The finest lyric poetry of this period was composed in Cyprus in the local dialect, which had gradually developed into a refined literary medium. The 156 poems that comprise the Cypriot *Canzoniere* – a manuscript anthology that echoed a like-named collection of Italian poems – are

translations or imitations of poems by Petrarch and the neo-Petrarchan poets of the early 16th century (Jacomo Sannazaro, Pietro Bembo, Niccolò Delfino, Leonardo Giustiniani, and others). These poems are written in eleven- or eight-syllable verse in a variety of sophisticated forms – sonnet, ballad, *terzina*, madrigals – and exhibit a confident style that gives elegant and graceful expression to the atmosphere of love and the sentiments of the protagonists.



dience. The reading of literature, which had once been the refined entertainment of a privileged few, was now becoming a popular pastime as the readership base broadened. The person who commissioned the copying of a manuscript, and who more often than not was one and the same as the reader of it, gave way to the professional printer, whose editorial decisions aimed at generating profit but nevertheless influenced the literary and aesthetic preferences of an ever greater reading public, and even came to determine the literary canon of the period.

During this period of transition, Cretan literature presented no significant change in style or content; however, older texts were copied and read more widely and the printed book made its presence felt to an increasing degree. At the same time, the rapid economic development of the island that resulted from Venice's moves to defend itself against the Ottoman threat to its dominions in the East, together with an expanding and increasingly confident middle class, contributed to the flowering of a culture whose manifestations were clearly Renaissance in character. The towns of the island underwent an architectural transformation that reflected the more refined and discerning tastes of the local population. The relationship between the reading public and literature also

underwent transformation, and readers' intellectual and aesthetic horizons broadened. In general, Cretans in this period show a growing tendency to identify themselves intellectually and artistically with Venice and Renaissance Italy. As the contact with contemporary trends in Italian literature increased, so the dialogue between the two cultures became steadily more creative. At the same time, the desire of Cretans to compose new works in the old style and on the old themes became gradually less marked, since the most representative examples of these works were widely available in printed form at affordable prices. These years were a period of remarkable synergy between the social and intellectual forces of Venetian-ruled Crete, and eventually led to the emergence of a new cultural identity. The first literary manifestations of this emerging identity may indeed appear hesitant and of uneven quality (for instance, *In Praise of Women* and the *Synaxarion of Noble Ladies*), but the second wave of works (such as *The Cat and the Mice*, the *Chap-book of the Donkey* and *The Siege of Malta*) was definitely surer and more promising. These were not 'lost' literary generations, as some scholars have hastened to define them. Rather, they worked keenly and conscientiously, preparing the ground for the following 'golden' age of maturity.



#### APOKOPOS (1509)

Title page and beginning of the first printed edition of the poem. (Humanist Library, Sélestat)

*Apokopos* by Bergadis was written in the early 15th century. It consists of 556 lines of rhyming 'political' verse and was the first modern Greek literary work to be published in printed form, in Venice in 1509 at the printing house of the celebrated copyist and editor of Greek books Zacharias Kalliergis with the assistance of his son Nikolaos. *Apokopos* became one of the most perennially popular works of the modern Greek literary tradition and went through numerous reprints right up to the 19th century. The poet narrates the tale of his descent into the Underworld and his extraordinary conversations with the dead. In contrast with other works of its kind, *Apokopos* does not describe the horrors of death, nor does it appear to serve didactic ends. Its importance lies in its particular conception of the transience of earthly life and its optimistic view of this life. It satirizes also the attitude of women and the clergy towards the property and the memory of the dead.

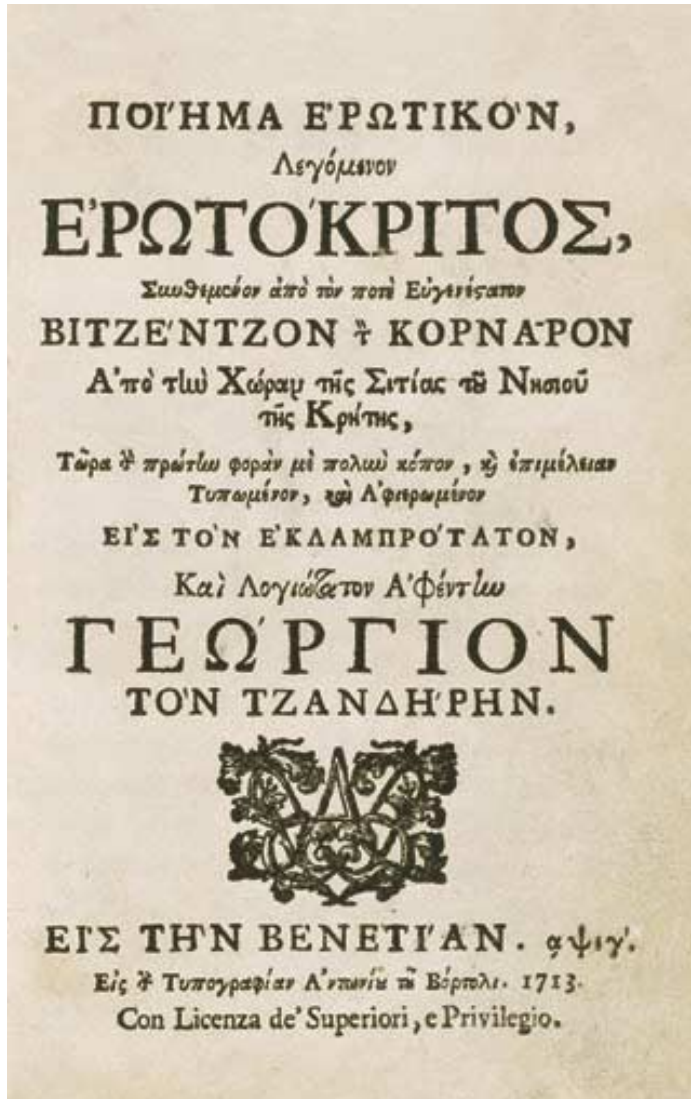
#### GRECO IN VENICE (opposite page)

Illustration reproduced from G. Franco, *Habiti d' Huomeni et Donne Venetiane*, Venice 1610. (Fondazione Scientifica Querini Stampalia, Venice)

This is an imaginary scene of the players of the commedia dell'arte in St Marks Square, Venice. Among the audience we can see a Greek (Greco), bottom left. The Cretan plays of the time, particularly during the period of the Carnival, must have looked something like this, performed in open spaces or the central squares of towns and cities, or in the courtyards of large public buildings and the mansions of the aristocracy. In Crete, theatrical works enjoyed the support of the Academies, which sponsored performances and promoted the cultivation of poetry, philosophy, oratory, and so on. A particularly popular Cretan tragedy was *Erophili*, and, according to the account of a contemporary, Nikolaos Komninos Papadopoulos, it regularly attracted large audiences. In 1611 the pastoral drama *Il Pastor Fido* by Guarini was performed. It is quite possible that professional troupes of players from the commedia dell'arte visited Crete.



# THE GOLDEN AGE



The oldest surviving edition of *Erotokritos*. Title-page of Antonio Bortoli's edition of 1713. (Gennadius Library, Athens)

“A pamphlet poorly printed on newsprint, in which, setting aside the typographical errors, the publisher presumes to alter every word as he pleases, while the cover is the colour of sugar-almonds, either pink or pistachio, and that's what *Erotokritos* looked like when it was circulating [...] among the poorer classes in the islands, in the provinces of Greek lands and in the large metropolises of the Nation. It was sold mostly by pedlars. I remember when I was a boy in Smyrna every afternoon, always at the same hour, the voice in the street: ‘I’ve all sorts of books! *Erotokritos* and *Aretousa*! The History of Geneviève! The History of Halima!’. At the time, I was attracted by those rather squalid publications. On the cover *Erotokritos* was a mettlesome fellow glancing askant with a grim light in his eyes, wearing a tasselled kerchief on his head, a cloak folded across his chest, behind him a spindly Byzantine colonnade, his buckler and lance suspended in the space between the columns. To me he was one with *Digenis* and *Alexander the Great*, one of triplet brothers. If anybody had asked me, I couldn’t have told the one apart from the other, just as I couldn’t have found anything to distinguish *Aretousa* from *Alexander’s* mermaid sister.” GEORGE SEFERIS (Translated by John Leatham)

The spread of literacy and education among the urban population of Crete, the organized network of the book trade (most books at this time were printed in Venice), the availability of the cultural goods of western Europe and the growth of private libraries, particularly those built up by the wealthy bourgeoisie and nobility who had studied in Italy (primarily Padua and Ferrara), were the key components of the cultural and intellectual life of Crete from the mid sixteenth century onwards. The foundation of a number of academies (the Academy of the Vivi in Rethymnon in 1561, of the Stravaganti in Candia in 1590, and of the Sterili in Chania in c. 1630) based on Italian models was the result of the Cretans’ first-hand experience of the cultural and intellectual life of Italian cities and their desire to recreate something of this life in their homeland. During the last century of Venetian rule in Crete the society of the island attained a confidence and maturity such as it had never seen before.

## EROTOKRITOS

*Erotokritos* is undoubtedly the masterpiece of this period, and perhaps the supreme achievement of modern Greek literature. It is a verse romance written around 1600 by Vitsentzos Kornaros (1553-1613). In over 10,000 lines of rhyming fifteen-syllable couplets, the poet relates the trials and tribulations suffered by two young lovers, *Erotokritos* and *Aretousa* (daughter of *Herakles*, the king of Athens). Caught in their love for one another, their faith and virtue are subjected to various ordeals until they are eventually united in wedlock. Serenades, gallant deeds, secrets and revelations, jousting, tears, finger-rings, vows of unending love, fatal duels and tournaments all serve to compose the tale of the love-sick hero and his beloved. It was a tale that enjoyed enormous popularity among its Greek readership and succeeded in making *Erotokritos* something of a folk hero, whose pedigree was as brother to *Digenis Akritas* and *Alexander the Great*. The plot of the poem was hardly original: Kornaros borrowed it from an Italian prose translation of a standard medieval French romance, *Paris et Vienne*, by Pierre de la Cypède. However, the Cretan poet, in true Renaissance fashion, turned the themes of love and war in the prototype entirely to his own purposes, showing himself to be a skilled storyteller and a sensitive interpreter of the human heart. He arranged the plot into five parts, much like a work for the theatre, and subtly balanced his narrative with dialogues so as to create a rhythm that sustains brilliantly the interest of the reader. With exemplary internal consistency and focus, he assembles the components of his imaginary world – located in the Greek East and centred on Athens, ‘the seat of majesty and the river of learning’ – in unique fashion, while his characters are alive with real feeling and a passionate thirst for life. His portrayals are remarkable for their rich and unaffected expressiveness, their visual power, the extended similes, and rich lyrical treatment of nature by which the subtlest facets of the human soul are explored. Kornaros does not hesitate to draw on the Greek poetic tradition, particularly the vernacular romances, of which *Erotokritos* comprises not only the natural development but also the supreme example.

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Theophilos Hadjimichail, *Erotokritos and Aretousa*, c. 1930. (Private collection)



Sketch by Yannis Tsarouchis for a stage design of *Erophili*, 1937. (Archive of the Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation, Maroussi, Athens)



*EROPHILI*

The finest achievement of the Cretan theatre was *Erophili* by Georgios Chortatsis, a five-act tragedy written along the lines of Italian classicizing drama. The love of Erophili, daughter of the king of Memphis (Egypt) Philogonos, for the youth Panaretos, is discovered by her father and he furiously demands revenge. Philogonos kills the poor young lover and offers his heart and limbs to his daughter as a wedding gift. In her despair Erophili kills herself, and then the chorus of maidens kills the cold-hearted king. The action is unrelenting and the dialogues are fast and vivid and serve to highlight the psychological strength of the tragic heroes who defend their actions with consistency and conceptual depth. In spite of its tragic conclusion, *Erophili* is a work of deep humanity and dignity, and stresses the right to follow the calling of the heart. This explains its enormous popularity. It went through numerous reprints, and many of its verses became popular sayings or entered the oral literary tradition, while the tale itself passed into folk legend.

Programme from a production of *Erophili* at the theatre of Karolos Koun, 1934. (Archive of the Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation, Maroussi, Athens)



## CRETAN THEATRE

Towards the end of the sixteenth century new genres unknown to the Byzantine vernacular literary tradition began to emerge in Crete. The most prominent among these genres, whose practitioners displayed the very finest literary and poetical expression, was the theatre. Through his prolific and diverse literary work, Georgios Chortatsis (c. 1550-1610) of Rethymnon played a leading role in bringing the theatrical form from Italy to Crete and radically recast the methods, aims and expectations of literary production on the island, thus opening the way for the birth of the modern Greek theatre. He was followed by many other writers, most of whom remain anonymous. To the traditional types of drama (tragedy and comedy), which at last re-emerged after centuries of silence, were added the 'mixed' genre of the pastoral and religious drama, which, it may be noted, was not related to the late medieval mystery plays. The pastoral is represented by the elegant and light-spirited *Voskopoula* (Shepherdess). The lyrical form pervades the theatrical works, whether in its true dimensions (in tragedy) or concealed by a tone of subtle irony in the soliloquies of the comedies. Lyricism also pervades the literary production of poets such as Andreas Kornaros and the members of the Academy of the Stravaganti written in the Italian language and composed in the verse forms of their Italian counterparts.

Only a very few plays have survived from the dozens that were composed during this golden age of Cretan theatre, due to the abrupt termination of Venetian rule by the Turks: two tragedies, *Erophili* (post 1595) by Chortatsis and *King Rodolinos* (1645) by Joannes Andreas Troilos, while a third, *Zenon*, was written by a Cretan in Zante circa 1680; three comedies, *Katzourbos* (shortly after 1581) by Chortatsis, *Stathis* (early seventeenth century), whose author is unknown, and, later in the century, *Fortounatos* (1655) by Markos Antonios Foskolos; *Panoria* (post 1590) by Chortatsis is a pastoral play, as is the anonymous translation of Guarini's *Il pastor fido*; the religious drama *The Sacrifice of Abraham* (early seventeenth century) attributed to Kornaros; eighteen *intermezzi*, diverting interludes that were commonly staged between the acts of the larger dramatic works; and, lastly, the satirical *Lament of Poor Fallidis*, performed perhaps as a musical intermezzo. Besides the works written in Greek, there are a number of Cretan works written in Italian, either by native Cretans or by hellenized Venetians, such as the tragedy *Fedra* (first published in 1578) by Francesco Bozza, and *Amorosa Fede* (first published in 1620), a pastoral play by Antonios Pantimos. The Cretan plays present a wide range of affinities with one another, whether on the level of the structure and organization of the dramatic material or on the level of verbal expression, rendering them a distinct literary group characterized by specific content, style and grades of development. The highpoint, then, of Cretan theatre can be viewed as extending from the works of Chortatsis to the appearance of *Stathis* (1580-1610), followed by a second phase (c. 1620-1655) showing a degree of influence from Italian theatrical production and tradition.

One of the key features of European culture during the Renaissance was the free traffic and use of cultural property.

Playwrights such as Shakespeare did not hesitate to borrow their plots from other better or less known texts of the times. The Cretans were no exception to this. They systematically delved into the rich Italian literary heritage of the High Renaissance, Mannerism and Classicism in order to find subjects, motifs, conventions, techniques and poetic styles. The Italians of the early sixteenth century whose influence was considerable in this respect included Lodovico Ariosto (*Orlando Furioso*, 1532), Gian Giorgio Trissino (*Sofonisba*, 1524), and Antonio Cammelli (*Filostrato e Panfila*, 1508). Those whose influence was prolonged as well as profound were Giambattista Giraldi (*Orbecche*, 1547), Torquato Tasso (*L'Aminta*, 1573, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 1581, *Il Re Torrismondo*, 1587), Luigi Groto (*Calisto*, 1583, *Lo Isach*, 1586) and Battista Guarini (*Il pastor fido*, 1590), who brought about a revival of interest in narrative and dramatic poetry, and dominated the intellectual scene of the second half of the sixteenth century through their literary and critical work. The Cretans adapted the content of their models to the ideological, social and psychological conditions of their island and reproduced in their works the concerns and anxieties of the people of their troubled time. It is possible to detect states of emotion that arise from the protracted instability of political affairs in Europe, as well as in Crete from the incubus of the constant threat of the Turk. The ideological world of the pre-Baroque is clearly echoed in works such as *Erophili*, although it should be said that these echoes are limited and not fully developed, and seem also to have lost their original ideological force.

The rhyming couplet became the cornerstone of the poetic production of the age, principally thanks to the originality and poetic virtuosity of Chortatsis and Kornaros. On the margins of their experimentation poets adopted other, complex verse forms from the Italian tradition (hendecasyllable, *terzina*, *ottava*, sonnet), for the most part achieving the same high standards.

The poets of this period use the spoken Cretan dialect, freed of the medieval vernacular. The tendency to purge the language of foreign elements (both vernacular and Italian forms) was above all represented by Chortatsis, Kornaros and the anonymous poets of *Voskopoula* and *The Sacrifice of Abraham*, whose works highlight the expressive power of the dialect. As dictated by the pseudo-Aristotelian theory of decorum, the heroes of the works use a vocabulary analogous to their social and educational background. It was thanks to this convention that the Cretan comedies were written in a language that was an amalgam of Italicisms, Latinisms and the local dialect, thereby approximating to the actual language of the middle class of the Cretan towns. The time span separating Antonios Achelis, the poet of the historical verse narrative known as the *Siege of Malta* (1570), and Chortatsis and Kornaros is too short to allow for the formation, from scratch, of the Cretan dialect we see in the texts of the latter two. The only explanation, therefore, is that the poets at the end of the sixteenth century were consciously employing a particular linguistic preference – they were aiming at a pure style of language for their literature and, via that language, a separate identity for the Greek literary production of their homeland.

The poets, as well as their patrons and political supporters,

belonged to the aristocratic classes of Cretan society. Vitsentzos Kornaros and his brother Andreas, a historian and poet who wrote in Italian, were members of one of the most powerful families in the island; Georgios Chortatsis, too, was perhaps a member of one of the twelve great noble families – the so-called *archontopoula* – of the island, whose pedigree went back well into the legendary age of Byzantium. It is known

that the patrons of the performances of *Panoria* and *Erophili* in Chania were the Veneto-Cretan noble Markos Antonios Viaros and the lawyer Ioannis Mourmouris, both prominent figures in the city. The Cretan plays were written for an audience that was comprised of the well-to-do classes of the urban centres, the members of the Academies and all those who were imbued with the intellectual and cultural life of Italy.



Nikos Engonopoulos, *Vitsentzos Kornaros and Georgios Chortatsis*, charcoal and pencil drawing on paper, 1979. (Private collection)

‘Take tragedy or comedy, sacred drama or simple pastoral, this work or any indifferent intermezzo – and what skill, what wealth, what poetry we have here! And what a procession of varied characters: tender-hearted maidens, whether princesses, ladies or shepherdesses; wildly infatuated youth; cold-hearted kings; arrogant generals; foolish old men that suddenly and unexpectedly rediscover reason and feeling; swashbuckling sea captains; lost children; confiding friends and no end of women – tender young damsels and shameless madams, charming peasant girls, affectionate friends, cold ladies of the court, scheming social climbers, simple prostitutes, and servant girls; loyal and devoted companions, or greedy tricksters, peasant soldiers, Turks, foreigners, pirates, slaves, schoolmasters, physicians, apothecaries, henchmen, and – to boot – ghosts, Echo, Death, Fortune and heaven’s Angels. It is a boundless world where passions, desires, interests, misunderstandings both deliberate and unintended, chicanery, tears and laughter all rival one another. And what action, what a plot, what unexpected twists to the tale! And all this in such a polished style, in the most exquisite language, in perfectly crafted verses, often masterpieces in their own right.’ NIKOS ENGONOPOULOS



Map of the city of Candia (modern Iraklio), Crete. Giorgio Corner, *Il Regno di Candia*. (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice: MS. It. VI, n. 75 (= 8303) ff. 6v-7r)

## INTROVERSION AND DECLINE

In the seventeenth century the cultivation of the literary styles and forms of the preceding period was continued, though momentum gradually waned as writers of the calibre of Chortassis and Kornaros, competent to undertake the task of renewal, did not materialize. At the same time, Cretan literary composition in Italian gained greater currency. Its organic incorporation into the literary environment of Crete required further abilities and skills that the younger writers either did not possess or, possessing them, failed to exploit sufficiently. Although Cretan literature had experienced the pastoral genre and its formal demands with works such as *Panoria* and *Voskopoula*, the mediocre anonymous rendering in Greek of the Italian *Il pastor fido*, together with the *Amorosa Fede* by Pantimos, while including a number of local features, provide clear evidence of the new literary climate that emerged in Crete during the first decades of the century. Lastly, the rejection of Baroque as a means of artistic expression and as a source of inspiration led to a decline in the inflow of cultural models from Italy, which in turn led Cretan writers to look increasingly towards their own literary production for inspiration and to reproduce material that extended to a more limited geographical area, namely, the Aegean and Ionian Islands. The plays written in the seventeenth century reproduced the structural characteristics and the achievements of the recent past. This dependence is reflected in the literary career of Markos

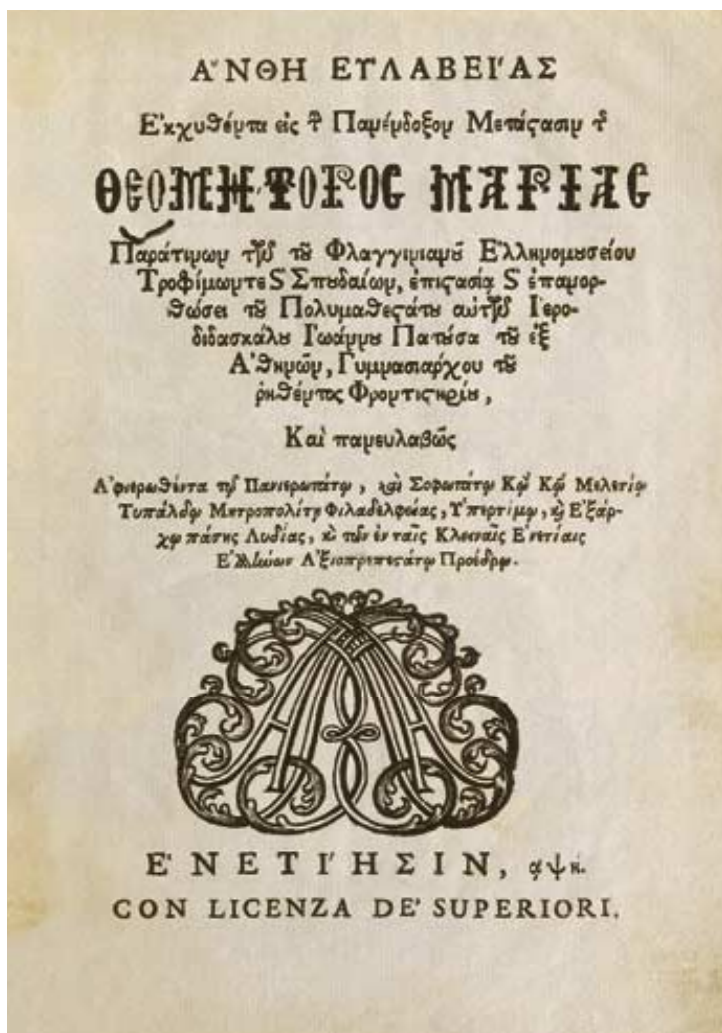


Antonios Foskolos: he copied *Erophili* and wrote a comedy, *Fortounatos* (1655), adopting the solutions earlier established by Chortatsis in *Katzourbos* in his handling of the form, language and comic roles. Troilos wrote a tragedy, *King Rodolinos* (1587), taking *Erophili* as his model, while drawing the plot from Tasso's celebrated *Il Re Torrismondo* (1587). The dissemination of Chortatsis' works in both manuscript and printed form, and their frequent performance, served to accelerate developments and consolidated this tendency in the literary life of Crete. A number of examples of the lyrical genre in Cretan dialect make their first appearance and display an inspiration and expressive quality that may well be due to their relatively short length.

Prose, which went through a particularly productive period, was cultivated in a language that, in contrast to poetry, differed only very little from the standard speech of the time: sermons, saints' lives, synaxaria, religious works that popularized sacred and patristic texts (for instance, *Bed of Solomon* by Ioannis Morezinos and *Salvation of Sinners* by Agapios Landos), re-workings and translations of historical works or romances of

western or eastern provenance (for example *Varlaam and Iosaph* by Nikephoros Venetzas) and practical manuals (*Geoponikon*) comprise a substantial chapter in the literary history of Crete that has yet to receive the scholarly treatment it deserves.

The refined cultural life of the island was abruptly interrupted by the Turkish invasion of 1645. The hostilities that followed, with the capture of Chania in 1645 and of Rethymnon in 1646, and then the titanic siege of Candia, which managed to withstand the invader until 1669, provided authors with the material to compose lengthy historical narratives. The most important of these works, both from the point of view of scale and quality, was *The Cretan War* by Marinos Tzanes Bounialis, first published in 1681. Despite his popular poetical technique, this poet, whom Seferis described as "one of the most likeable personalities in Crete during this time", relates the disaster that befell the island and its people with genuine emotion and force. In the verse history, *Dispute between Candia and Rethymnon*, he laments in bitter and nostalgic tones the former greatness of an island that had now been cast into the abyss like another Atlantis.



*Flowers of Piety*, Venetian edition of 1708. (National Library, Athens)



The Flanginian School and the Church of St George of the Greek community in Venice. (Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and post-Byzantine Studies, Venice)

*Flowers of Piety* 'poured out for the glorious translation of Mary, the Mother of God' (Venice 1708) is a pamphlet containing classical Greek and Latin epigrams, Sapphic odes and a number of sonnets written in Italian and modern Greek. In these poetical exercises written by the students of the Flanginian School in Venice it is possible to discern the various literary and cultural influences that had steadily made their mark on the emerging literary output of modern Greek. *Flowers of Piety* reflects eloquently the cultural climate that with the passing of time had gradually developed in the Greek community of Venice, the oldest and, politically and economically, strongest Greek community outside Greek lands during the difficult centuries of Turkish domination in the East. The building of the Flanginian School today houses the Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and post-Byzantine Studies in Venice.



*Etymologikon Mega* (Grand Etymological Dictionary), alphabetically arranged, Venice 1499. (National Library, Athens)

GREEK PRINTING HOUSES

Although the earliest known printed book in Greek was the *Summary of the Eight Parts of Speech* by Constantine Laskaris, dated 1476 and produced in Milan, the unrivalled centre for Greek printing during the first three centuries of the printed book was undoubtedly Venice, the pre-eminent capital of printing in Europe. The most celebrated of these printing houses was that of Aldus Manutius; however, alongside this were scores of other Greek and Italian publishers and printers who not only produced books to satisfy the European demand, within the context of the

humanist interests of the age, for works of the classical Greek corpus, but also ecclesiastical and liturgical books that were destined for the needs of the Orthodox Church and for the basic education of the Greek-speaking population of the East. From 1509 onwards their ambitious publishing projects included modern Greek literary texts that gradually generated a broader reading public for such works. The people that contributed to this early flowering of the printed Greek book included Zacharias Kalliergis, Nikolaos Vlastos, Andreas Kounadis, Damianos di Sancta Maria, Nikolaos Sofianos, Manolis Glyzounis, Nikolaos Glykys, Nikolaos Saros and Antonios Bortoli.





*Wounded Greece supported by Rigas Pherraios Velestinlis and Adamantios Korais.*  
Adam, black and white lithograph. (National Historical Museum, Athens, Print Collection, no 11920)

*SECTION III*

THE ERA OF ENLIGHTENMENT

(Late 17th century - 1821)



**A**FTER THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE in 1453 the only Greek regions which had not fallen to the Turks were Crete, Cyprus, Rhodes and the Ionian Islands, which were already under Venetian control. In these islands, and especially in Crete, literary production continued uninterrupted to a very high standard. However, in Turkish-controlled Greece, it is not possible to talk even of education, let alone literature, as for over a century after the Fall of Constantinople, the subjugated people were without any form of state organisation or leadership and cultural expression was at a minimum. Having said that, the scholars who headed for the West, many of them to Italy, gradually built up the earliest pockets of Hellenism and the Greek enlightenment, as well as providing much of the focus for the struggle for national independence.

This period of approximately 150 years from the fall of Crete to the beginning of the Struggle for Independence (1821) produced some of the greatest texts of the Greek Enlightenment, texts produced by Greek humanists, lay and clerical, which were not only portents of the national revival but also sought for the education and training of the subjugated nation which would guide them through a process that was to achieve a national consciousness and full independence. It was indeed a golden age in Greek letters and history in that the Greeks, having benefited from various treaties between their fellow Orthodox Russians and the Turks, had managed to achieve a certain degree of economic and social power not only in the West but throughout the Ottoman Empire. This was especially true of the Greeks in the Danubian principalities and the educated and politically powerful class of Phanariots.

There was no shortage of prominent individuals contributing to the Enlightenment. But the two who played the most decisive roles were the 'bard' and leader of the national uprising Rigas Velestinlis, and the scholar and spiritual leader Adamantios Koraïs. The former published a number of books urging the education of the Greeks, and with his revolutionary songs and political manifestos called the people to rise up against the Ottoman oppressor. Rigas, protomartyr Greek poet, and liberal European, was arrested by the Austrian secret police and was turned over to the Turks who tortured and executed him, while the latter, Adamantios Koraïs, researcher into ancient Greek writers, inspired philologist and the publisher of classical texts, from his base in Paris (where he lived and died) tried to influence conditions in the homeland, again, by laying particular emphasis on education and the development of the language of neo-Hellenism.

# LIGHT AND SHADE

*sapere aude*

*Aufklärung, Enlightenment, Illuminismo, Lumières*: all these terms use the loaded metaphor of light to stress the contrast with the preceding intellectual darkness, to emphasise the current of new ideas that was sweeping across Europe around the mid eighteenth century. This revolution, bringing 'light', implied unqualified faith in the power and the potential of Reason, in the sciences and their never-ending progress, in the call for freedom, justice, and individual happiness and dignity. The Enlightenment was optimistic; it promoted national, living languages as opposed to dead languages; it cultivated critical thought; it sought to secure access to free, unfettered knowledge; it preached religious tolerance and the rights of man, the advancement of the sciences and the arts, and the need for independent and democratic education available on an equal basis to all levels of society.

If one wished to place loose chronological limits around the Greek Enlightenment, with all its special pleading and exceptional characteristics, one could do worse than take the broad period 1750-1830, with the years 1774-1821 marking the high point: in essence, the historical cycle of the Enlightenment for the Greeks ends with the outbreak of the War of Independence, some time after the end of the European Enlightenment, which also closed with a major political and social upheaval: the French Revolution of 1789. The special nature of the Greek Enlightenment lies in the fact that it grew and flourished under Ottoman rule. The agents of the European Enlightenment in the Turkish-ruled areas of the Greek world were inevitably from the cultured and educated classes of society, including figures from the clergy, the Phanariots of Constantinople, and the mercantile bourgeoisie. It was via these groups that the new learning and attitudes of 'enlightened Europe' found their way to the wider masses of the subjugated Greeks.

The Greeks of the Enlightenment had more cause than most to want to approach the future through a revival of the past. While they may have lost out on the Renaissance owing to the adverse conjunction of historical circumstances in their part of the world, and while they may have entered the Age of Enlightenment somewhat ill prepared and late, the Greeks nevertheless had the advantage of a collective memory that interacted dynamically and tirelessly with the notion of Hellenism and apprehended the greatness of antiquity through living myths and legends. Both the popular and the learned traditions proudly kept alive the memory of the bonds with their ancient predecessors and cultivated a respect for this heritage that was so admired by the rest of Europe. The important thing now, however, was not so much to keep the past alive, but to bring the hopes of the past to fruition: the past acquired a dynamic that it had never had before, as witnessed, for instance, by the habit of archaising names or depicting prominent personalities, such as Rigas Velesinlis, dressed in ancient Greek fashion. The example of Sparta, which inspired supporters of the French Revolution, also haunted the revolutionary dreams of the subjugated Greek world.

In the initial phase, the Church embraced and gave decisive support to the spread of the new ideas (giving rise to what came to be termed 'religious humanism'), thus showing a progressive, bold spirit: the Patriarchate in Constantinople set up



Νέκταρ ἡμῶν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἀθέλως διαβῆναι,  
Βολτῆρα; ἢ δὲ Ρωσοῦ Φέρτηρος Εὐχόμενος.

Pictorial satire by Christodoulos Pamplekis (1793). From the *Acolouthia of the other-eyed and antichrist Christodoulos of Acarnania* (reproduced in G. Ladas and A.D. Hatjidimos, *Elliniki Vivliothiki ton eton 1791-1795*, Athens 1971). The philosophical teaching of Pamplekis (1733-1793) and his liberal and anticlerical ideas served to provoke the wrath of the Orthodox Church. Although excommunicated as an atheist, his friends and supporters erected a monument to his memory in a public garden of Leipzig, clearly risking the censure of the Church. In a pamphlet that opposed him, Pamplekis is depicted as writing his texts at the dictation of the devil.





Evgenios Voulgaris. Engraving by C.W. Sediger based on a painting by T. Janenko, St Petersburg, 1805.

Evgenios Voulgaris (1716-1806) was the first great figure of the Greek Enlightenment. When the Athonias Academy was founded on Athos in 1753, he was invited to organize and direct it. Subsequently he taught in the Patriarchal College in Constantinople, and later went to the Danubian principalities, eventually ending up in Leipzig where he published part of his work, including his *Logic* (1766), in which he makes reference both to the great European intellectuals of the day and to the ancients. In 1768 he published a translation of a work by Voltaire with an extensive commentary of his own (*Essai historique et critique sur les dissensions des églises de Pologne*), as well as an *Essay on Religious Tolerance*. Catherine of Russia, as part of her programme to create an intellectual centre in Russia, invited him to her court where his activity became more clearly nationalist and in line with the Russian political ideology: he wrote tracts calling for the liberation of the Greeks, he published anti-Turkish pamphlets, he translated subversive texts by Voltaire, and corresponded tirelessly. He continued writing pamphlets and books and translating up to the time of his retirement to a monastery in 1801. Voulgaris' writings had a decisive impact on the course of the Greek Enlightenment.

schools and a printing house, promoted the education of young Greeks more generally and the use of the popular language, and even encouraged the translation of the Scriptures into the contemporary idiom. As a rule, the prestige of the clergy – the main providers of education – was very considerable. And even when the progressive trend lost momentum and the Church began to lose its enthusiasm and eventually became decidedly reactionary in its stance (imposing censorship and excommunicating various individuals), there were always a number of prominent ecclesiastical figures who stood out for their courageous and liberal outspokenness in the face of superstition and ignorance: figures such as Antonios Kati-foros, Nikiforos Theotokis and, above all, Evgenios Voulgaris, a particularly forcible character who was prolific in his writings, fired by a spirit of curiosity, and the first to introduce the thought and style of Voltaire into Greek letters.

One significant feature of the realignment of social forces in Ottoman-ruled Greek society from the mid seventeenth century onwards was the emergence of the Phanariots. Deriving their name from the Greek district of Constantinople where the Orthodox Patriarchate is located, these well-to-do, highly educated Greeks in time formed a select group within the Ottoman administration, eventually attaining positions of great power, particularly in the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia. Their knowledge of foreign languages, their desire to set up small, autonomous and enlightened courts along the lines of those of western Europe, their markedly Franco-centric education, their flexible political profile (their critics would accuse them openly of Machiavellian opportunism), and the *modus vivendi* that they established with the central Ottoman power all served to elevate them into a 'ruling class' in the eyes of the ordinary Greek Orthodox subjects of the Empire. The Phanariot mentality, long to be a dominant force in Greek life, was represented above all by the Mavrokordatos family (Alexandros, Nikolaos and Konstantinos).

The growing participation of Greeks in trade and shipping throughout the Mediterranean quickly rendered them competitors of the French and British merchants, and substantial profits started flowing into Greek coffers. Within the Ottoman Empire, the Greeks had control of virtually all the trade in the Balkans. They became increasingly prosperous, with an economy that was founded on the provision of privileges that came into direct conflict with the archaic institutions of the Ottomans.

From 1774 onwards, thanks to a range of special agreements with and privileges granted by the state to the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire, Greek trade and shipping expanded at a rapid pace. Greek capital needed to break free from the constraints of the Ottoman state, and this led to the birth of a national consciousness among the Greek Orthodox middle class: gradually we see the emergence of the historical significance of the merchants and shipowners who came to play such an important role in the struggle for national liberation in Greece. The tradesmen, middlemen and sea captains became the key to the spread of the new ideas that were current in Europe and that exercised so much influence on the French Revolution. It was people of this ilk who provided

the money to found and maintain schools and colleges, who sponsored the publication of books, periodicals and journals, who paid for translations and funded scholarships for the talented younger generation. It was they who were the driving force behind the Europeanization of the Greek East.

It was the advocates of the ideas of Voltaire, the Encyclopédistes and proponents of new ideologies (Koraïs being the most prominent of such figures) who provided historically the framework of the Greek Enlightenment. A key feature of this movement was the vision of a specifically national awareness and education, although there was no lack of broader objectives. The explosion in publishing activity, chiefly during the three decades leading up to the outbreak of the War of Independence, saw printed literature in both the popular and the learned idiom reaching the very limits of the Greek world. The number of translations of foreign works (principally French, though also some Italian) increased dramatically and is indica-

tive of the Greeks' knowledge of foreign languages. In Constantinople, the Danubian principalities, Vienna, Venice, Trieste, Paris and wherever else the Greeks had established themselves, there are tangible examples of the new enlightened spirit.

The Greek Enlightenment, as with every great social and intellectual movement, was marked also by contradictions, contention and disagreement. Alongside those that sought to bring light were also those that sought to extinguish it – groups of reactionaries who set up pockets of resistance to the new ideas. The trials and tribulations of Christodoulos Pamplekis, who was eventually excommunicated in 1793, the persecution of Josephus Moisiodax, and the silencing of Dimitrios Katartzis on account of his outspoken demoticist views tarnished the general progress of Greek affairs that reached their height, or nadir, with the terrible death of Rigas Pherraios Velestinlis and the condemnation by the official Church of the Greek bid for emancipation and independence.



A

C.Th. Dimaras: *La Grèce au temps des Lumières*, Geneva 1969.



B

Philippos Iliou: *Greek Bibliography of the 19th Century. Books and Pamphlets (1801-1818)*. Bibliographical Workshop, Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive, 1997.

A. In various studies and articles C.Th. Dimaras (1904-1992), literary historian, attempted to demonstrate the unity and the singularities of the Greek Enlightenment. His conclusions have been largely backed up by subsequent scholars, who have produced substantial evidence in support of the view that there was a coordinated intellectual Enlightenment within the Turkish-ruled Greek lands.

B. The literary production of the years of the Greek Enlightenment points to clear intellectual trends: a turn towards the classics and the sciences, the formation of a new moral order, and, above all, emancipation from Church authority. The Phanariots, merchants and city-dwellers found entertainment and learning in books written for pleasure and for instruction, while literature, the theatre and music became an integral part of their lifestyle.

In the cities where Greek and Balkan trade flourished and religious or political censorship was more relaxed, lively publishing enterprises started

to emerge alongside the long-standing production of the Venetian printing houses: cities such as Amsterdam, Budapest, Bucharest, Moscow, Vienna, Paris and Yannina supplied the book market with textbooks, dictionaries, guides for writing letters, edifying works, practical dialogues and a mass of translations from *Don Quixote* and Molière's comedies to philosophical tracts and scientific treatises.

The world of the book was changing: authors, translators, proof-readers, editors, printers, illustrators, sponsors, book dealers and subscribers all tended to belong to the middle classes or to a small group of clerics associated with the Enlightenment. The readership more generally was also changing: women were becoming a part of the reading public, as well as people with a rural background and the vast ranks of the unlettered, many of whom now sought to learn their ABC. The book reflects a society undergoing transformation. In the first two decades of the 19th century the situation reached its climax, as the forces of innovation as well as resistance to this innovation acquired greater coherence.



*Ermis o Logios (Hermes the Scholar)*, Vienna, Austria, 1818.  
(E.L.I.A. Archive)

Of the many journals to appear during the years prior to the Greek War of Independence, *Ermis o Logios (Hermes the Scholar)*, which commenced publication in 1811, was the most important and the longest running. It came out regularly until 1821 when the Austrian authorities required the editors to publish the excommunication issued by the Orthodox Patriarch

Gregorios V against the architects of the call to arms. *Hermes the Scholar* was warmly in favour of the views of Korais and reflected the style and tastes of other European periodicals. It reviewed developments in the arts and sciences and was an important channel for bringing contemporary intellectual movements to the attention of the Ottoman-ruled Greeks.



*Palace at Bucharest.* Hand-coloured copperplate engraving. 0.32x0.46 m. From Luigi Mayer, *Views in the Ottoman Dominions in Europe, in Asia and Some of the Mediterranean Islands*, 1810. (National Historical Museum, Athens)

## WITH A SMILE AND A TEAR

### SATIRICAL AND LYRICAL WRITINGS

The once widely held view that the eighteenth century – the century of philosophers and the apologists of Reason – was a plainly ‘unpoetic’ age, perhaps even not literary, has lately been subjected to extensive revision. Scholars are progressively demonstrating that Greek letters in this period present a somewhat unusual aspect; indeed, it is possible to talk of their Janus-like aspect, or, to quote a phrase from the *Democritheraclitus*, a lengthy allegorical poem published in 1817, of a two-faced creature, which on the one hand laughs and jokes about the ills of the world, like Democritus of old, but on the other weeps and laments these ills, like Heraclitus.

With regard to the Phanariots, whose influence marked virtually the entire Greek Enlightenment, it is interesting to note that humorous writing, and particularly satire, was cultivated with enthusiasm. The *Korakistika* (1819), a lampoon written by Jakovakis Rizos Neroulos and directed against the Greek intellectual Koraiis, is a good example of its kind. Until recently, the first satire in the modern Greek tradition was thought to be the *Anonymous* of 1789. Today, however, an earlier work, dated 1785, and bearing the title *Alexandrovodas the Callous*, can claim to be the first of this genre in Greek. Written by Georgakis Soutsos Dragoumanakis, the target of its invective is Alexander Mavrokordatos, the *voivode*, or ruler, of Moldavia, referred to in the work as the Firaris (‘Fugitive’). Firaris is depicted as the inheritor of an illustrious name and



the living representative of the great dynasty of the Mavrokordati. Indeed, Alexander Mavrokordatos, a Freemason, received his political and intellectual education within the liberal atmosphere of St Petersburg during the reign of Catherine II of Russia, and was drawn to the European ethos and style of public and private life. In the early 1780s he had published various youthful verses in manuscript anthologies of the day, most of which, having been ousted from his principality, he subsequently included in his *Bosporus on the Dniepr* (1810), a collection of poems printed in Moscow that give a clear indication of the state of modern Greek lyricism shortly before the appearance of Christopoulos and Vilaras.

It was not only the conflict between two prominent Phanariot families (the Soutsis and the Mavrokordati) that provoked the cholera of Dragoumanakis. Disputes between the various Phanariot families, as well as shifting alliances of convenience, were a regular feature of Greek high society that parcelled out for itself the various titles and offices of the Danubian principalities. The portrait of the libertine presented in this satire owes its character primarily to the moralizing tone and conservative ideology that tend to colour the satire of the period. As with all satire and invective it is marked by exaggeration, though the discourse attains a high standard of realism – the lords and ladies of the day with their colourful titles (*domna*, *hatmanis*, *spatharis*, *kamaris*, and so on) and flowing speech bring to life the microcosm of the ruling elite, the intrigues and shifting political alliances, the leading players and the hangers-on, the motivating passions and antipathies. ‘Whoever knew not his Machiavelli, knew not how to survive’, or so Alexandrovodas claims, giving Soutsos the moralist an opportunity to make a generalized condemnation of the declining moral standards, the worsening corruption and licentiousness of the court.

In the *Anonymous* of 1789, an artfully cryptic work, we see the first example of creative prose writing in the modern Greek language. A *roman à clef*, it is violently abusive and clearly directed against a specific (though unidentified) person, while a large part of the narrative undoubtedly unfolds in the northern Romanian city of Jassy. It is obvious that it was written in imitation of *Le Diable boiteux* of Alain-René Lesage; it contains various references to the writings of Voltaire and other enlightened authors and thinkers of the period. The clergy is the butt of much of its humour, as scandalous erotic scenes involving Church figures are described in a language rich and inventive.

For reasons that become plain on reading the work, the author of the *Anglofrancorussian* (1805) has also remained anonymous. Following the bugle-call of the French Revolution and the execution of the Greek revolutionary Rigas Velestinlis, and with the general turmoil that prevailed among Greek intellectual circles of the day and the reaction – and persecution – that enlightened Greeks suffered at the hands of the official Church, a considerable number of the books and pamphlets that were published during this time were not merely progressive in their views, but frankly revolutionary. The *Anglofrancorussian* was a verse dialogue whose content was directed against the leaders of the day, the Phanariots, the merchants and prominent Church figures – in short, against



Princeps D.D. Ioannes Nicolaus Alexandri Mavrocordato se Scarlati celsiis Atq. Sapientiss totius Vallachiae. Wolfgang, black and white copperplate engraving, Berlin 1721. 0.24x0.19 m. National Historical Museum, Print Collection no. 6015.

Nikolaos Mavrokordatos (1680-1730). A distinguished scholar and polyglot, Mavrokordatos was the first Greek ruler of Moldavia and Wallachia during the great ‘period of tulips’ of the Ottoman Empire and marks the opening of the century of the Phanariots in the Danubian principalities. Besides the modern Greek of his day, he knew classical Greek, Latin, Turkish, French, Italian, Arabic, Persian, Hebrew and Romanian. His *Parerga of Philotheos* (1718) circulated only in manuscript form during the 18th century, and was eventually printed in Vienna in 1800 at a crucial moment for the world of Greek letters. This work is generally held to be the first modern Greek novel despite the fact that it is written in an archaizing style: a linguistic preference that reflects an intense intellectual curiosity both about the contemporary West and the East. The narrative is in the first person and evolves in the gardens of Constantinople, where Philotheos and his friends discuss all manner of subjects with foreigners dressed in Persian robes, with a crypto-Christian, and with Ottomans. The text is full of western references, and revolves around a loose plot on which hang the various digressions and episodes. To appreciate this genre more fully it is useful to bear in mind theatrical reviews or a similar western work of the day, Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes*.





Kaisarios Dapontes. (Reproduced from M.I. Gedeon, *Patriarchikai Ephemerides*, Athens 1936, Gennadius Library, Athens)

Kaisarios Dapontes (1714-1784) was generally considered to be the great poet of the age. He set virtually everything to verse – his autobiography, his travels and the adventures, both private and public, of his contemporaries – in a spirit of voracious intellectual curiosity. Born in Skopelos, he went first to Constantinople and later to Moldavia. Eventually fortune and political scheming led him behind prison bars. Having lost his wife and tormented by despair, in 1753 he assumed the habit of a monk and died on Mount Athos. The wisdom, vivacity and unflagging wit of the verse of this man of the world turned monk have secured him a place in the history of Greek letters with works such as the *Mirror of Women* (Leipzig, 1766), *History of Sosangi*, *Garden of Graces*, and *Spiritual Table*. Another of his works, *Concise Canon of Many Amazing Things to be Found in Many Cities, Islands, Nations and Animals* (1778), was much admired later by Dimaras, Seferis and Savvidis, reason enough for this neglected writer to be reassessed by modern scholarship.

local and external tyranny. Highly critical of the social status quo, the poem became a kind of manifesto for the new ideology of the Enlightenment in its most extreme version.

Two works from the mid eighteenth century – the *Stoicheiomachia* (Venice, 1746) and the *Bosporomachia* (Leipzig, 1766), printed by Evgenios Voulgaris and attached to a verse translation of Voltaire's *Memnon* – were the products of Phanariot circles. Both texts display a growing awareness of the natural landscape (in the first, the natural elements contend with each other; in the second, the two shores of the Bosphorus are praised for their natural beauty) and foreshadow the age of lyricism that was to follow, while also legitimizing to an extent the mixed linguistic register of the Greek then spoken in Constantinople, with its mingling of a great number of Turkish words, a feature that was to appear in Phanariot poetry a few years later.

In the fifty or so years prior to the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence, a large number of manuscript anthologies of verses and songs began to circulate, usually anonymously. These Phanariot anthologies (frequently by female writers) cultivated a *poésie fugitive*, a love poetry replete with melancholy and sorrow, producing a harmonious blend of western pre-Romanticism and the voluptuousness of the East, written in the ordinary Greek speech of the day that included a rich admixture of Turkish terms and words. These lovelorn lays gave expression to a new sensibility and were often translations or paraphrases of Italian or, primarily, French poems. They tend to dwell on the theme of unrequited, thwarted love, the fickleness of fortune that treats human beings as mere toys, the breaking up of friendships, the exchanging of youth for old age and decline, and of wealth for poverty, and finally of preparing the ordinary mortal for inevitable death. The amateur versifiers stuck doggedly and monotonously to standard patterns whose lilting cadences remained in the mind, but which worked variously by creating complex verse structures that heralded the sophisticated Anacreontics of the *Lyrics* (1811) of Athanasios Christopoulos (1772-1847).

Ioannis Vilaras (1771-1823), a yet more sophisticated verse writer, belonged to the enlightened intellectual circles of Yannina. He composed delightful pastoral poetry and came much closer to the inner strength of the demotic song. He, too, praises Love, but his plain, graceful and elevating verse resembles the contemplative tone of the poetry of Solomos, while his ruthlessly caustic satirical work, *O Stolidiaris*, is more akin to *Characters*. Ridicule is the prime feature of the satire, as well as anger and a passionate desire to expose meanness, dishonesty and corruption.