

The *Historiai* of John Tzetzes: a Byzantine ‘Book of Memory’?*

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The paper provides for the first time a full-fledged analysis of the structure and compositional principles sustaining John Tzetzes’ Chiliades or Historiai. The article is divided into three sections. The first focuses on the developments of commentary literature in late twelfth-century Byzantium, showing how exegesis is used to textualize the authorial self and create autobiographical narratives. The second delves into the purpose of the work and its audience. The final section, focusing on the first part of the work, explores the role of memory in the Historiai and in particular, the interplay between cultural memories and experience in Tzetzes’ self-presentation.

Keywords: memory; authorship; self-commentary; John Tzetzes; *Historiai/Chiliades*

One of the most striking features of literary production in the Late Middle Ages is the emergence of auto-exegetical self-commentaries. Between the late thirteenth and the early fifteenth century, several authors devote themselves to glossing their own works, penning commentaries designed to be circulated and consumed with the base text. This process, often viewed as an anticipation of constructions of selfhood and subjectivity surfacing in the Renaissance, has gathered much scholarly attention,¹ especially after

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1 See among others S. Roush, *Hermes’ Lyre: Italian Poetic Self-Commentary from Dante to Tommaso Campanella* (Toronto-Buffalo-London 2002); Z. Baranski, ‘Dante Alighieri: experimentation and (self) exegesis,’ in A. Minnis and I. Johnson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. II, *The Middle Ages* (Cambridge 2005) 561-82; A. R. Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge 2008).

Minnis' pioneering work on medieval authorship.² Dante's *Vita Nova* and *Convivio*, in particular, are considered 'the most spectacular forms of this phenomenon.'³ The dominant narrative regards auto-exegesis as the product of a new, typically western European, self-awareness. In point of fact, the first instances of the genre emerge at a much earlier date in the Mediterranean world. In the early eleventh century, the Arab poet Abul 'Ala Al-Ma'arri authored commentaries on his own letters as well as on his poetic collection.⁴ A little more than a century later, in Constantinople, John Tzetzes also put together a massive commentary on his letter collection. Although belonging to different cultures, these authors were both immersed in a world characterized by fiery competition between intellectuals – for patronage, pupils and ultimately social/authorial recognition. Both therefore felt the need of powerful and effective self-legitimizing (and self-protecting) practices, finding in exegesis a convenient medium to achieve their goal.⁵

Tzetzes' substantial work has been utterly disregarded by Byzantinists, if we exclude Leone's philological enquiries in preparation for his critical edition.⁶ The *Historiai* or *Chiliades*⁷ are more often used as a repository of ancient material, devoid of a self-conscious design. And yet, Tzetzes' self-commentary is the result of years of polishing and reworking and was probably regarded by the author as his flagship work.⁸ Its structure is nothing but random. The *Historiai* also provides invaluable information

2 A. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia 1988); Minnis, 'Amor and Auctoritas in the self-commentary of Dante and Francesco da Barberino,' *Poetica* 32 (1990) 25-42; Minnis, 'Image trouble in vernacular commentary: the vacillations of Francesco da Barberino,' *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 56 (2012) 229-45; R. Hanna, T. Hunt, R. G. Keightley, A. Minnis and N. F. Palmer, 'Latin commentary tradition and vernacular literature,' in Minnis and Johnson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. II, 363-422.

3 Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*, 176.

4 P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W. P. Heinrichs (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. vol. V (Leiden 1984) 927-35.

5 A thorough comparison between early Byzantine and Arabic literary self-commentaries is still a desideratum. I am tackling the issue together with Kevin Blankinship in a forthcoming paper devoted to the emergence of the genre in both traditions.

6 P. L. Leone, 'Significato e limiti della revisione delle *Historiae* di Giovanni Tzetzes,' *Aevum* 37. 3/4 (1963) 239-48; Leone, 'Ioannis Tzetzae iambi,' *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici*, n.s. 6-7 (1969-70) 128-156; Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzae Historiae*, 2nd ed. (Bari 2007). I dwell on similarities and differences between Tzetzes' self-commentary and the Western ones (notably Francesco da Barberino's *Documenti d'amore*) in the forthcoming paper 'Autography and strategies of self-authorization in John Tzetzes,' *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies*.

7 The title *Historiai*, ἱστορίαι, comes from the title given to the commentary on the verse epistle to Lachanas opening the work (see Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzae Historiae*, 1). The title *Chiliades* comes from the *editio princeps* prepared by N. Gerbel in Basel in 1546. Gerbel divided up the work into sections of 1000 lines each.

8 See Leone, 'Ioannis Tzetzae iambi,' 134, v. 1, where the *Historiai* is called βιβλος Ἄλφα, probably suggesting the fact that it was designed to open the collected works edition (Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzae Historiae*, lxxv) prepared by Tzetzes in his old age (cf. *scholia on Aristophanes' Frogs*, v. 843a, 936.16-19 and 897a, 954.15-955.4 Koster).

about the processes lying behind the ‘publication’ of a book in twelfth-century Byzantium. The work is a gold mine as regards the dynamics underlying the construction of an authorial persona, as the commentary often unravels the social conventions regulating the epistolary communication of the base text.

In this paper, I highlight the compositional principles sustaining Tzetzes’ self-commentary. In the first section I disentangle the strategies through which Tzetzes ‘textualizes’ his authorial Self, using the commentary to trace his autobiography. In the second section, I shed light on the purpose of the work and on his audience, focusing on the role played by the notion of memory in the *Historiai*. In the final section I examine the first part of the commentary, that is the verse epistle to Lachanas complete with exegesis, in order to show how Tzetzes exploits shared cultural memories to build an idealized self-portrait for the generations to come.

The structure of the *Historiai* and the textualization of the Self

The *Historiai* has a complex textual genesis. Tzetzes’ self-commentary is divided into three parts⁹ and each part is labelled by the author as *πίναξ*:¹⁰

- 1) a) *Historiai* I 1-IV 470 commentary on the verse epistle *To Lachanas*
 b) *Historiai* IV 466–780 verse epistle *To Lachanas*
- 2) *Historiai* IV 780-V 193 commentary on the opening epistle of the letter collection, addressed to a certain Epiphanius.
- 3) *Historiai* V 202-XIII 668 commentary on the remainder of the letter collection.

The first part of the *Historiai* was designed as an autonomous piece of self-commentary. The verse epistle to Lachanas (IV 471–779, pp. 142–151 Leone), which I shall tackle in the third section of this paper, was written purposefully to serve as a starting point for Tzetzes’ exegesis. In the prose *subscriptio* to the epistle, Tzetzes proudly declares his ability to use judicial, deliberative, and encomiastic rhetoric.¹¹ The letter is

9 See H. Spelthahn, *Studien zu den Chiliaden des Johannes Tzetzes* (Munich 1904) 18–22. The *Historiai* is multilayered also in terms of chronological composition. The manuscript tradition has preserved traces of three different editions prepared by Tzetzes himself. A first edition, following the publication of the letter collection in 1066 and probably never properly published (called α by Leone), was later revised, amended and provided with scholia. The revision according to Tzetzes was carried out for the benefit of Constantine Kotertzes, the patron who supported Tzetzes while writing the second part of the *Allegories* (see below n. 24). This second published ‘edition’ is preserved in two *recensiones* (A and B according to Leone): the main difference between the two is the textual arrangement of letters and commentary. In A the commentary is interspersed with the letters (commentary on the epistle to Lachanas-letter to Lachanas-commentary on the first letter-letter 1- commentary on the rest of the corpus-letters 2-107), while in B the commentary is copied without interruptions. A scholion on the first epistle accounts for Tzetzes’ change of mind while having the exemplars of his book properly copied from his original (p. 159, 8–23 Leone). See again Spelthahn, *Studien* and Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzae Historiae*, xvi and xxxix-lxi.

10 See for instance VI 62, 587; VI 63, tit. 1; VII 106, tit.; VII 120, 198 etc.

11 *Historiai*, p. 142 Leone, prose note.

an attack against the grammarian Lachanas, working in the Zabareion.¹² It is dotted with learned references to mythological anecdotes and facts, which spark the creativity of the commentator. Such a display of knowledge is functional to the aim of the letter, ultimately motivated by professional rivalry. This is also the overarching concern underlying the first part of the *Historiai*.

The second part of Tzetzes' self-commentary is devoted to the epistle opening the author's letter collection. The missive to Epiphanius, nephew of the Metropolitan of Side,¹³ has a strong programmatic character and was surely composed – or revised – to function as a prologue to the collection.¹⁴ Following the rules of proemial rhetoric,¹⁵ the letter has a strong apologetic tone, with Tzetzes playing the role of the author victim of unfair attacks and therefore needing to strike back.¹⁶ Tzetzes alludes to colleagues he despises, comparing them to celebrated idiots of the ancient tradition.¹⁷ The commentary consists of 23 *ιστορίαι* and it provides important information about the structure, chronology and the phases of composition of the work.¹⁸

Finally, in the third part, Tzetzes proceeds to comment on the letter collection in its entirety, which gives him occasion to make even more personal attacks and polemical statements. In the third *πινάξ*, however, one can notice a shift in the target of Tzetzes' anger. While in the first two parts he aims mostly at colleagues, the last section of the work is characterized by an overarching polemic addressed against one of his former powerful patrons, Andronikos Kamateros,¹⁹ who had promoted Gregory, a rival of

12 The Zabareion was the Imperial arsenal. On the relevant office and the lexical evolution of the term ζάβα, see T. G. Kolias, 'Zaba – Zabareion – Zabareiotēs,' *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 29 (1980) 27–35 and C. Stavrakos, *Die Byzantinischen Bleisiegel mit Familiennamen aus der Sammlung des Numismatischen Museums Athen* (Mainz 2000) 55–157.

13 *Letters*, pp. 1–4 Leone.

14 See C. Wendel, 'Ioannis Tzetzes,' *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* VII A (1948) 1992, 21–22 and M. Grünbart, 'Prosopographische Beiträge zum Briefcorpus des Ioannes Tzetzes,' *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 46 (1996) 175–226 (here 177, n. 9).

15 See K. Dunn, *Pretexts of Authority. The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance Preface* (Stanford 1994) 1–18.

16 *Letter to Epiphanius*, 1, p. 1.5–7 Leone and p. 2. 9–21, where Tzetzes expresses his willingness to take action and fight.

17 *Letter* 1, pp. 1.3–2.1. The idiots are Melitides, Mammakuthos and Makko. More or less the same catalogue is to be found in a still undetected para-hymn composed by Tzetzes and included in the *scholia* to Aristophanes (*Scholion in Ranas* 990 b, pp. 989–991 Koster). The para-hymn is written in the mode of 'I will open my mouth' (Ἀνοιξω το στόμα μου – καὶ πληρωθήσονται), that is, it follows the metrical scheme of a very famous canon by John of Damascus, devoted to the Dormition of the Theotokos. Cf. also *Historiai* IV 6, 877–880, where Makko is mentioned in relation to a servant of Kotertzes.

18 IV 780–82 (structure of the commentary on the letter-collection and definition of *ιστορίαι*); IV 8, 918–922 (composition subsequent to the commentary on Hesiod; scarcity of available paper); V 23, 186–192 (compositional phases of the work).

19 See M. J. Luzzatto, *Tzetzes Lettore di Tuciddide: note autografe sul Codice Heidelberg palatino greco* 252 (Bari 1999) 74, n. 19.

Tzetzes as a ‘rhetor in the royal house’.²⁰ Indeed, in the third part Tzetzes often delves into problems related to rhetorical theory, putting forward his interpretation of the Hermodgenian doctrine against the views of Kamateros and, we may assume, his protégé.²¹ The resentment against Andronikos is a recognizable strand throughout the third part. What is more, in the second *recensio* of the *Historiai* three iambic poems follow the text proper.²² They revolve around the education of children and, again, rhetorical matters. Both the titles and the content of the poems resonate with the *ιστορίαι* targeting Andronikos Kamateros.²³ Exemplars of the second *recensio* of the self-commentary, with its explicit and all-encompassing polemical target, were probably circulated (also) with the aim of repositioning Tzetzes within his social network of patrons and supporters. This statement of allegiance fits well with the new patronage of Constantine Kotertzes,²⁴ for whom a clean edition of the self-commentary was prepared. The scholion on V 23, 201 states that Tzetzes is revising the work soiled by the copyists’ malpractice for the sake of Constantine.²⁵ It also expresses the worry that the author’s old age might prevent him from completing the task.²⁶ On this basis it has been argued that the work was in fact properly published long after the raw material was first written down.²⁷ However, Tzetzes’ complaints might well be a traditional *topos* rather than reflect biographical reality.

The different aims and targets of the three parts affect also the way Tzetzes refers to himself in the commentary. References in the third person are more frequent in the third *πίναξ*. In the first two parts, on the contrary, Tzetzes devotes more room to first person narratives, which are also autobiographical in a more traditionally eulogistic way. In the commentary on the epistle to Lachanas and on the first programmatic letter, Tzetzes gives voice to an idealized self, whereas in the third part he often takes an external point of view, accounting for his, or at least one of his, social selves. In so doing, he ironically takes up the social persona that he felt others assigned to him. Thus, the multilayered structure of the commentary leads to a multifaceted representation, in which the self is inscribed and refracted in the text in different ways.

20 *Historiai* XI 369, 212-222.

21 On the life of Andronikos Kamateros, see A. Bucossi, *Andronici Camateri Sacrum Armamentarium, Pars Prima* (Leiden 2014) xix-xxiv.

22 The pieces are not published in Leone’s edition, but appear separately in Leone, ‘Ioannis Tzetzae iambi’.

23 See Leone, ‘Ioannis Tzetzae iambi,’ 127-130.

24 On Constantine Kotertzes, see M. Grünbart, ‘Paideia Connects,’ in S. Steckel, N. Gaul and M. Grünbart (eds.), *Networks of Learning: Perspectives on Scholars in Byzantine East and Latin West, c. 1000-1200* (Berlin, Münster, Vienna, Zürich, London 2016) 17-32 and on his role in Tzetzes’ network of patronage see E. Cullhed, ‘The blind bard and ‘T’: Homeric biography and authorial personas in the twelfth century,’ *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 38 (2014) 49-67.

25 *Historiai*, schol. V post v. 201, pp. 549.25-550.5 Leone. The scholion comes after the section of the *Historiai* where Tzetzes recounts the theft in the imperial palace of part of the work.

26 *Historiai*, schol. V post v. 201, p. 550, 4 Leone.

27 Leone, ‘Significato e limiti’.

Such a multilayered structure, while accounting for the different phases of composition, was integral to Tzetzes' final editorial programme, as he himself explains at the end of the second part:²⁸

Τῆς πρώτης νῦν ἐπιστολῆς ἔχεις τὰς ἱστορίας,
εἰκοσιτρεῖς εἰς ἀριθμὸν τὰς πάσας ὑπηργμένας.
Νῦν δὲ δεκάδας γράφοντες ἐπιστολῶν τὸ πρῶτον,
εἴτ' οὖν ὀπόσας κρίνομεν αὐτῶν γραφῆναι δέον,
ἔπειτα διαγράφομεν τὰς τούτων ἱστορίας.
Καὶ δὴ μετὰ τὴν πρώτην μοι ἐπιστολὴν γραπτέον
τὸ κείμενον δευτέρας τε, τῆς τρίτης καὶ τῶν ἄλλων.
Αἶδε μὲν ἱστορία πεντηκόσια πισύρων ἄνευ,
εἴκοσι δ' ἦσαν ὀπισθε πρὸ τῶνδε, ἰδὲ τρεῖς ἄλλαι,
γίνονται πεντηκόσια δέκα, σὺν δ' αὖ ἑννέα.
Ἄλλαι δ' αὖ ἑκατὸν καὶ τεσσαράκοντα μία τε
πρώτην τάξιν ἔχουσιν ἐνὶ προθύροισι βιβλοιο-
λοιπὸν ὁμὰς τελέει τῆσδ' ἱστοριῶν βιβλοιο
ἕξ ἑκατοντάδες, ἕξ δεκάδες, πλέον οὔτι δὲ τῶνδε.
Ἄς δέ τινες σύλησαν ἀνακτορίων ἀπὸ δόμων
τῶνδε τόποι κενεοί. Ταύτας γράφε δ' εἴ που [τις] ἐφεύρης.

Here you get the histories pertaining to the first letter,
they are, all of them, twenty-three in number.
now, after writing dozens of letters,
let's decide how many we have to copy,
and finally let's copy the relevant histories.
And after the first letter, I must write
the text of the second, of the third and of all the others.
These histories are five hundred minus four,
but there were twenty before them, and here you get three more,
they are five hundred ten, plus nine.
But there are also a hundred forty-one more and
they take the initial place, at the beginning of the book:
so, on the whole this book of histories is made of
no more than six hundred sixty pieces.
For those that were stolen from the palatial buildings,
their spaces have been left blank. Write them down, if you find them.

Lines 188–189 testify to the process of anthologization underlying both Tzetzes' letter collection and the *Historiai*. Tzetzes clarifies his working method: the letters pre-exist the commentary, then the pieces to be commented upon are chosen and finally the

28 *Historiai* V 23, 186–202, p. 169 Leone.

‘stories’ proper are drafted. The passage must also be read as a sort of direction intended for future copyists and as such it reveals Tzetzes’ intention to control his own textual production. Tzetzes makes lines 193–202 stand out by changing the metrical form and introducing hexameters in the textual fabric. His concerns were not unmotivated. The publication of the letters had been stalled by a major accident, leading to the division of the collection into two parts, including respectively letters 1–69 and letters 70–107. At the beginning of the second part, the manuscripts have preserved the following notation:²⁹

Τὴν γὰρ προτέραν τὴν τε σχεδίαν καὶ ἀνακάθαρσιν χρηστός τις ἀφελόμενος ἄνθρωπος, τὴν μὲν ἠφάνισε παντελῶς, τὴν δὲ παρέφθειρέ τε καὶ ἀλληνάλλως συνέθετο.

A man, good indeed, taking away the first file with the clean copy, made the former disappear completely and damaged and mixed up the latter.

A few letters later, epistle 76 is introduced by a note in which Tzetzes explains how he managed to retrieve his material:³⁰

Κἂν αἱ ἐπιστολαὶ ἀλληνάλλως συνετέθησαν, ὡς τὰ σχεδάρια τούτων ἐτύχομεν ἐφευρεῖν καὶ ὡς ταῦτα ἠδυνήθημεν ἀναγνῶναι.

Even if the letters were all mixed up, even so, we were able to read these as well, since we managed to find their first drafts.

These short notes show that, after a first process of selection and anthologizing, Tzetzes had to start from scratch, retrieving his drafts in order to reconstitute the collection in the right order. In this respect the commentary, with its rigid structure and its *πίνακες*, serves the purpose of ‘freezing’ the letter-collection against further manipulation. The commentary itself, however, was not immune from accidents. The final lines of the passage quoted above allude to the loss of material due to a theft at the imperial palace.³¹

The lines closing the second part of the *Historiai* fulfil a twofold function: on the one hand, they are designed to keep Tzetzes’ book production under control; on the other, they emphasize the (unauthorized) diffusion of his work. Tzetzes tends to construe himself as an author under attack, depicting his production as threatened by distortions and plagiarism³². His texts have a life as precarious as that of their author, constantly struggling for social recognition. Textual and personal identities somehow collapse. By exposing the textual layers of the *Historiai*, Tzetzes also reveals the biographical layers underpinning the narrative of his life. As said, the three parts of the

29 P. 99, 3-6 Leone.

30 P. 112, 3-5 Leone.

31 *Historiai* VI 40, introductory prose note, p. 210 Leone.

32 Tzetzes had actually been the victim of plagiarism, as shown by Cullhed, ‘The Blind Bard’.

Historiai have different targets and as such account for different facets and different periods of Tzetzes' biography. Even more crucially, Tzetzes uses textual marks as biographical signposts. The book appears as a constant work in progress, or else a living creature, subject to continuous transformation in the form of accidents, second thoughts, amendments, rewriting. Change is often associated with, or motivated by, well-defined life events. The connection between textual and extra-textual 'incidents' is duly emphasized and the material aspects add to the identification of the author with his work.

This technique emerges clearly also in the arrangement of the epistle collection. The most blatant case is represented by letter 10, which, in fact, does not exist. In the initial design, letter 10 was intended to be an iambic poem for Tzetzes' recently deceased brother. However, Tzetzes states that he grew stylistically and emotionally dissatisfied with it and eventually decided not to include the letter in the collection:³³

ΤΩΙ ΓΛΥΚΥΤΑΤΩΙ ΑΔΕΛΦΩΙ
ΚΥΡΩΙ ΙΣΑΑΚΙΩΙ ΘΑΝΟΝΤΙ ΕΝ ΡΟΔΩΙ
ΕΝ ΤΩΙ ΥΠΟΣΤΡΕΦΕΙΝ ΕΚ ΤΗΣ
ΜΙΑΡΑΣ ΕΚΣΤΡΑΤΕΙΑΣ ΤΟΥ ΧΑΛΕΠ

Ἦν διὰ τὸ ὑπερπαθῆσαί με καὶ διὰ τὸ καταχρήσεις πολλὰς αὐτὴν ἔχειν τῶν διχρόνων—διὰ στίχων γὰρ ἦν ἰάμβων—χιώσας συνεπάτησα.

To my sweetest brother,
sir Isaac, who died in Rhodes,
while coming back from
the wretched mission to Alep.

Because of my excessive grief and the excessive use of two short syllables – for it was composed in iambics – after crossing it off, I trampled it under my feet.

Once again, Tzetzes lays bare the compositional process underlying his work. He informs the reader about the private circumstances affecting his writing and shaping the collection. He allows his readership to peek into his scribal workshop. The decision to keep the record of the verse epitaph for Isaac serves an autobiographical purpose, embedding the memory of his deceased brother into the structure of Tzetzes' work. Letter 10 represents a textual pause, a silence replicating Isaac's absence from the author's life in the fabric of the collection.

Tzetzes shows without ambiguities how challenging and problematic the publication of a letter collection was. In so doing, he demonstrates full awareness of the 'fragility' of the genre, to put it in Stratis Papaioannou's words.³⁴ And yet, he exploits such

33 P. 19, 1-7 Leone.

34 S. Papaioannou, 'Fragile literature: Byzantine letter-collections and the case of Michael Psellos,' in P. Odorico (ed.), *La face cachée de la littérature byzantine. Le texte en tant que message immédiat* (Paris 2012) 289–328.

fragility for his own purposes. Revisions, textual mishaps, losses of material are not obliterated or concealed. On the contrary, they are highlighted so as to build a sort of stratigraphy, a 'biographical' outline which applies to both the collection and its author. Tzetzes inscribes himself and his personal experience deeply into the text. On the other hand, through self-commentary he overcomes the risks entailed by a fluid manuscript tradition.³⁵ For one thing, the commentary prevents further textual movements, securing the order of the letter collection. Moreover, exegesis, having primarily a didactic purpose, achieves the goal of tearing Tzetzes' letter collection out of historical contingency. The *Historiai* is an assortment of cautionary tales, proverbs, mythological anecdotes, excerpts from ancient literature, literary criticism *and* individual recollections. Personal and cultural reminiscences are blended together in a unique mix. Tzetzes' biographical experiences are thus 'universalized' and put on the same footing as other exemplary narratives presented in the *Historiai*. Within this framework, memory plays a crucial role, as we shall see in the next section.

The *Historiai* as a 'Book of memory'

Memory is a pervasive motif throughout the *Historiai*. The title introducing the commentary on the verse letter to Lachanas emphasizes Tzetzes' ability to remember many 'stories', i.e. anecdotes, narratives, literary and mythological details, in a single piece of work:³⁶

Ἱστορία Ἰωάννου γραμματικοῦ τοῦ Τζέτζου
ὄνπερ ἐμνήσθη ἐν μιᾷ τῶν αὐτοῦ ἐπιστολῶν

Histories by the grammarian John Tzetzes,
which stories he recalled in one of the letters.

The emphasis on memory is crucial to the way Tzetzes conceptualizes the creation of his work. In the *Historiai* he portrays himself as ἀβιβλῆς, claiming that he does not possess any book. The composition of the *Historiai*, he asserts, is the result of his prodigious memory as well as of his ability to write fast and off the top of his head. In this framework, small lapses of memory become evidence of the way the *Historiai* were conceived and are therefore highlighted throughout the volume. In VIII 176 a memory lapse concerning a Homeric line is used as a pretext to provide information on the different compositional phases of the work:³⁷

Ταχὺν τὸν κόρον Ὅμηρος εἶναι φησὶ τοῦ θρήνου.
Τίνα δὲ φέρει λέγοντα καὶ ποία δὲ τῶν βιβλῶν,

35 As highlighted by Grünbart, 'Prosopographische Beiträge', 176, n. 4, the collection has been preserved in the arrangement Tzetzes himself decided upon.

36 P. 1 Leone

37 VIII 176, 169-183.

εἶτ' οὖν ἐν Ἰλιάδι γε εἶτε τῇ Ὀδυσσεΐα,
οὐκ ἔχω λέγειν ἀκριβῶς· τέως Ὀμήρου τοῦτο.
Ὁ Τζέτζης κἄν ἀβιβλῆς γὰρ κἄν γράφῃ καὶ σχεδίως,
ἄπερ ὀρᾶτε σύμπαντα καὶ τάχει ταχύτερω,
εἴπερ ὀρῶν μετέγραφεν ἔκ τινων ταῦτα βιβλῶν,
ἀλλ' ὅμως ἀτρεκέστατα πᾶσαν γραφὴν συντάττει.
Βαρὺς δὲ πᾶσι γίνεται τοῖς ψευδοσυγγραφοῦσιν.
Ἄν δ' ἀπιστῆ τῷ τάχει τις καὶ τοῖς αὐτοσχεδίοις,
καὶ τὸ βιβλίῳ ἄνευθε γράφεσθαι τάδε πάντα,
εὐθύδρομείτω πρὸς ἡμᾶς κἄξ ἔργων μανθανέτω,
καὶ μὴ γινέσθω ἀπιστος, γνοὺς ἀκριβῶς τῇ πείρᾳ.
Θάνατος ἀντικρὺς ἐστὶ τῷ Τζέτζῃ μεταγράψαι·
σπανίοις τοῦτο δε ποιεῖ, βαρέως δυσχεραίνων.

Homer says that satiety of grief comes fast.
Who utters these words and in which book,
whether in the *Iliad* or in the *Odyssey*,
I cannot say with exactitude; surely by Homer they are.
Indeed, Tzetzes even though without books and even if he writes sketchily
all that you are seeing here and faster than fast,
even if he transcribed these matters looking into some books,
nevertheless he composes all his writing most accurately.
For he is inflexible against whomever writes falsehood.
And if you do not believe in his rapidity or in improvisation,
or that all this was written without books,
come straight to me and learn it from facts,
and do not be skeptical, gaining instead solid knowledge from experience.
To copy from other books is like dying for Tzetzes,
but some rare times he does it, feeling heavily annoyed.

Tzetzes' statements may seem contradictory. While he asserts to be ἀβιβλῆς, he also admits to copying, if rarely, from other books. In fact, what Tzetzes wants to stress is that *he himself* did not possess any book. This does not mean that he could not refer to books owned by *others*. From those books he takes notes, he corrects them, or else, he supplies them with marginal and highly critical glosses. The manuscript of Thucydides studied by M. J. Luzzatto, for instance, most likely bears traces of this sort of activity.³⁸ However, Tzetzes could not rely on a personal library while he was in the process of composing the *Historiai*, nor had he time for slow consumption of the texts with which he dealt. And yet Tzetzes claims accuracy and truthfulness for himself. Indeed, as we have seen, the *Historiai* underwent a painstaking process of revision. Copyists' work

38 M. J. Luzzatto, *Tzetzes lettore di Tucidide*. Criticism of ancient authors is quite common in the *Historiai*. A case in point is Isocrates, heavily criticized by Tzetzes in XI 382, 642-684.

was constantly supervised. Moreover, second thoughts on the arrangement of the work led to two different editions ‘published’ one after the other. However, the ultimate source of Tzetzes’ accuracy does not lie as much in this process of revision and rewriting as in his prodigious mnemonic power.

Tzetzes’ memory is depicted as a powerful tool, one that enables him to recall all the books ever written, a storehouse containing even more material than that available in the *Historiai*. In a *ιστορία* belonging to the third part of the work, Tzetzes voices his concerns that the codex he is using might not be large enough to contain all the planned material. This notation is partly functional to his self-portrait as an intellectual doomed to poverty and as such it fits well with the notion of his being ἀβιβλῆς.³⁹ On the other hand, however, it also provides important details about the composition, the consumption and the transmission of the work, as well as about its underlying ideology.

As we have seen, Tzetzes speaks about himself both in the first and in the third person and in so doing he breaks down the writing subject, as it were. This strategy allows him to project different identities onto the *Historiai*. The use of the third person creates an artificial distance and at times grants him the possibility of taking upon himself the criticisms voiced by his adversaries. Tzetzes also impersonates different roles. He does not appear just as the *author-compiler* of the *Historiai*, he also plays the part of the *copyist*. Such is the case with regard to the *ιστορία* VI 50, where a change in the compositional strategy is accounted for as follows:⁴⁰

Ἀλλὰ στενοῦν ὡς δυνατὸν πάντα χρεῶν ἐντεῦθεν.
 Ἄν γὰρ ὡς Τζέτζης πλατυσμῷ τὰς ἱστορίας γράφω,
 “πολλάκι κεν δεκάδες δευοίατο οἰνοχόοιο,”
 πολλαὶ ἂν ἀπολείψαιαν γραφήναι ἱστορίαι
 τῶν προσγραφή τοῦ πίνακος οὐσῶν συντεθειμένων.
 Ἡ βίβλος γραφομένης γὰρ εἰς πλάτος οὐκ ἀρκέσοι·
 μὴ καὶ στενωῶς δε, δέδοικα· μέχρι γὰρ οὗ νῦν γράφω,
 ἐχρῆν κατ’ ἀναμέτρησιν καὶ τὸ ποσὸν τῆς βίβλου
 τρίτην πρὸς ἑβδομήκοντα γράφειν με ἱστορίαν·
 γράφω δὲ νῦν πεντηκοστήν· διὸ στενοῦν με δέον,
 ὡς προσγραφῆς τοῦ πίνακος τὴν πᾶσαν ἱστορίαν
 ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ δυνηθῶ συμπερικλεῖσαι βίβλω.
 Εἴπερ στενωῶς ἐντεῦθεν δε τις ἱστορίας βλέπων,
 Τζέτζην κακὸν καὶ ἀναλκιν πρὸς ἱστορίας φήσει·
 “ἀλλ’ οὐ πείσονται Τρῶες καὶ Δαρδανίωνες.
 καὶ Τρώων ἄλοχοι μεγαθύμων ἀσπιστάων,
 τᾶων ἐν κονίησι βάλεν θαλεροὺς παρακοίτας.”

39 Tzetzes uses again such a self-description in VI 53, 469–470: “And it is hard for me, as if I were a god, to tell everything” (*Il.* 12, 176) // since I am devoid of books: you know what I mean (“Ἀργαλέον δέ μοι ἔστι, θεὸν ὡς πάντ’ ἀγορεύειν,”/ἀβιβλῆ πεφυκότη μοι οἶδατε οἷσπερ λέγω).

40 VI 50, 382–403

Οἱ ποιηταὶ καὶ συγγραφεῖς, ῥήτορες, λογογράφοι,
ἱστορικοὶ καὶ χρονικοὶ καὶ τεχνικοὶ παντοῖοι,
ὧν περ κατέχων ἐν χερσὶ τὰς βίβλους, ὧν ἀβίβλης,
ἐκείναις παρενέγραφε τοὺς λογισμοὺς οὓς ἔδει,
αἱ μὲχρι νῦν κατάγραπτοι γραφαῖς τελοῦσι τούτου.

But from now on it is necessary to be as concise as possible.
If, like Tzetzes, I were to write the stories profusely,
“then would many tens lack a cup-bearer” (*Il.* 2, 127),
many stories would be left behind unwritten,
from those listed together in the title list of this volume.
This codex would not be enough for them, if they were written profusely.
Not even if written concisely, I am afraid. Up to this point,
I should have written, according to the estimate, as much of this codex
as to include the seventy-third story;
I am writing now the fiftieth instead; therefore, I must be concise,
so as to be able to include in the present codex
every story listed in the title list of the volume.
And if anyone, looking at the *Historiai*, which from now on is concise,
says that Tzetzes is bad and a weakling as regards the stories,
“yet will not the Trojans or the Dardanians hearken to him,
nor the wives of the great-souled Trojans, bearers of the shield,
they whose lusty husbands thou hast hurled in the dust” (*Il.* 2, 225–227).
Here you will find the poets and contemporary historians, orators
and prose writers, historians of the past and chroniclers and all sorts of
technical writers;
holding the volumes that they wrote up to the present day
he interspersed them with the necessary criticisms
although he himself does not possess any book.

This passage probably reflects real preoccupations. If we look at the number of lines composed for each ἱστορία in the commentary to letters 2–107, corresponding to the third part of the work, it turns out that from the fiftieth ἱστορία onward Tzetzes wrote an average of 16.32 lines for each lemma (7238 lines and 447 ‘stories’) against an average of 23.81 for each lemma in the first part (1167 verses and 49 ‘stories’). Apparently Tzetzes actually reduced the overall amount of material offered to the reader in each lemma.

The material constraints hampering Tzetzes’ writing are mentioned again in *Historiai* X 332. At the end of the lemma, dedicated to Cadmus, Tzetzes addresses the problem of the invention of writing. He counters the hypothesis that Cadmus introduced the alphabet to Greece by bringing in a Delphic oracle implying the existence of written language already at that time. Given the lack of space, he confines himself to quoting only the first three verses:⁴¹

41 X 332, 444–457.

εἰ Κάδμος εὗρε γράμματα καὶ ἤγαγεν Ἑλλάδι,
 εἶπατε πρὶν ἔλθειν αὐτὸν σχεδὸν εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα,
 πῶς τοῦτω εἶρητο χρησὸς λέγων κατ' ἔπος οὕτω·
 “Φράζσο δὴ τὸν μῦθον, Ἀγήνορος ἔκγονε, Κάδμε,
 ἠοῦς ἐγρόμενος προλιπὼν ἴθι Πυθῶ διαν,
 ἔνθα δ' ἔχων ἐσθῆτα καὶ αἰγανέην μετὰ χερσὶ.”
 Καὶ πᾶν τὸ λείπον τοῦ χρησμοῦ, ὅπερ ταῖς μνήμης δέλτοις
 ἐν τηλαυγέσι γράμμασιν ἐγγεγραμμένον φέρων
 ὁ Τζέτζης οὐχὶ βούλεται καὶ τῆδε παρεγγράφειν,
 μήπως καταναλώσειε τοῖς πλατυσμοῖς τοὺς χάρτας.
 “Πολλὰ δὲ δεκάδες δευοῖατο οἰνοχόοιο,”
 πολλαὶ ὑπεσχημέναι δε γραφῆναι ἱστορίαι,
 τῇ θέσει τῇ τοῦ πίνακος ἐκλείψωσι γραφῆναι,
 οἷα τῆς βίβλου τῶν χαρτῶν τῆσδε προπληρωθέντων.

If Cadmus invented the alphabet and introduced it to Greece,
 tell me how it is possible that before he came to Greece,
 this oracle was given to him, literally saying as follows:
 “Cadmus, son of Agenor, mind the word:
 waking up at dawn, go, leaving behind the divine Pythos,
 where, with clothes and javelin in hand” (*Orac. Delph.* 374, 1–3).
 The rest of the oracle, which he carries
 engraved in his mind in shining letters,
 Tzetzes does not want to transcribe here,
 lest he waste paper with abundance of details,
 “then would many tens lack a cup-bearer” (*Il.* 2 128),
 many stories which were promised to be written,
 shall remain unwritten in the composition of the *pinax*
 as the previous pages of this book were already filled.

Tzetzes had already highlighted the shortage of paper at the end of *Historiai* V 28. There he does not make reference to the volume's πίναξ, but he declares that he must be careful not to waste space. Again he deals with the ‘invention’ of the alphabet, quoting the first three lines of the oracle:⁴²

τὰ δ' ἄλλα τὰ ἐκκαίδεκα, μὴ θάψω σε καὶ Τζέτζην,
 οὐ Παλαμῆδης εὖρηκεν, οὐ μὲν οὖν οὐδὲ Φοῖνιξ,
 οὐ Κάδμος, οὐδ' αὐτὸς Ἑρμῆς ὁ ὢν ἐξ Ἀρκαδίας,
 ἰσόχρονοι τυγχάνοντες ἀμφοτέροι τῷ χρόνῳ.
 Ἄλλ' ἦσαν ὡς ὁ Τζέτζης σοὶ δεικνύει καὶ πρὸ Κάδμου,
 χρησμὸν ῥηθέντα πρὸς αὐτὸν τὸν Κάδμον παρεισφέρων·

42 V 28, 815-825.

“Φράζο δὴ τὸν μῦθον, Ἀγήνορος ἔκγονε, Κάδμε,
ἦοῦς ἐγρόμενος προλιπὼν ἴθι Πυθῶ διάν,
ἔνθα δ’ ἔχων ἐσθῆτα καὶ αἰγανέην μετὰ χερσί.”
Καὶ τὰ λοιπά δε τοῦ χρησιμοῦ ἄπερ ἐν στήθει φέρων
τῷ γράφειν οὐχὶ βούλομαι παραναλοῦν τοὺς χάρτας.

The other sixteen – That I might not bury you and Tzetzes – were not invented by Palamedes, nor for sure by Phoenix, nor by Kadmos or by the Arcadian Hermes himself, who were both contemporary; on the contrary they already existed before Cadmus, as Tzetzes shows you by introducing an oracle uttered to Kadmos himself: “Cadmus, son of Agenor, mind the word: waking up at dawn, go, leaving behind the divine Pythos, where with clothes and javelin in hand...” And carrying the rest of the oracle in my heart, I do not want to waste paper by writing it down.

By taking up the scribal persona, Tzetzes turns material limitations (as well as his apparent miscalculation) into a source of pride. His strategy also reveals the liberty that copyists were expected to take in reshuffling and reworking compilations such as the *Historiai*.⁴³ More crucially, however, Tzetzes’ split persona supports the construction of his all-encompassing authorial prowess. The *Historiai* are presented as a sort of book of books, including all the possible secular knowledge, duly stored in Tzetzes’ memory. In another passage of his commentary on the epistle to Lachanas, he describes himself without hesitation as a breathing library;⁴⁴

Οἶδας δὲ πάντως ἀκριβῶς πῶς πᾶσαν οἶδα βιβλον
ἐκ στήθους τε καὶ στόματος οὕτως ἐτοίμως λέγειν.
Οὐδὲ γὰρ μνημονέστερον τοῦ Τζέτζου θεὸς ἄλλον
ἄνδρα τῶν πρὶν τε καὶ τῶν νῦν ἐξέφηγεν ἐν βίῳ.

You are very well aware that I know every book by heart and that I am ready to declaim them by heart and mouth. And God never let appear a man endowed with a stronger memory than Tzetzes, neither among those of the past nor among those of the present.

43 The surviving manuscripts show time and again additions to the text penned by later copyists. See for instance Ox. Bodl. Misc. gr. 188 (O), from the 16th century, which carries a later interpolation in political verses dated to the first decades of the 15th century (f. 58v, after line 702 of the letter to Lachanas); Barocc. Gr. 194³ (N), from the 15th century: the copyist does not hesitate to interpolate his own verses into the text (see Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzae Historiae*, xx-xxiv).

44 I 11, 278-281.

On another occasion, Tzetzes argues that his memory is unmatched among his contemporaries. Again, it is an occasional lapse that triggers his boast:⁴⁵

Ὅστις δ' ὁ γεγραφὼς ἐστὶ περὶ Βοσπόρων δύο,
καὶ τίς ὁ τὸν Ἑλλήσποντον γράψας θαλαττογράφος
ἀπὸ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν πολλῶν ἱστορικῶν, οὐκ οἶδα.
Τέως τὸν Τζέτζην ἀψευστεῖν ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις νόει,
ὡς ἀκριβέστερον εἰπεῖν ἱστορικῶν ἀπάντων,
καὶ πάντων μνημονέστερον τῶν ὄντων νῦν ἐν βίῳ.

Who is it who wrote about the two Bosphoruses
and which sea-writer described the Hellespont
from among the great number of many historians, I do not know.
Be aware that hitherto Tzetzes has not been lying in such things,
so much so that he is more accurate than any other historian
and endowed with a better memory than any other person alive.

The *Historiai* truly represent Tzetzes' own 'book of memory', to use Carruthers' seminal definition.⁴⁶ And yet, the space available is not enough to include all the author's accumulated knowledge. Tzetzes could write more, but lack of space prevents him from exhaustiveness. In turn, as we have seen, his mind is represented as an inscribed tablet from where he reads and reproduces what he needs. This image was common in both the Western and Byzantine Middle Ages, ultimately originating in ancient Greek literature.⁴⁷ Thus, through the *Historiai*, Tzetzes turns rote memorization – one of the Byzantine 'inscribed' practices of memory highlighted by Amy Papalexandrou⁴⁸ – into a self-standing literary work. In doing so, he uses traditional tropes associated with the notions of cultural memory as well as with literary production and consumption. First, he depicts himself as a sort of 'breathing library'. This image surfaces also in the more or less contemporary letter collection of Michael Italikos, in connection with Nikephoros Bryennios who is referred to as ἔμψυχος βιβλιοθήκη.⁴⁹ The same image, developed with greater detail, is to be found in Eustathios' speech in honour of the patriarch Michael *o tou Anchialou*:⁵⁰

τίς δέ, ὃς τὴν σὴν ὑπερναβέβηκε μνήμην, ὅτε ἀναλογίσασθαι χρὴ τὰ τοῦ
πνεύματος; ἢ πάντως οὐδεὶς, καὶ τούτων αὐτὰ τὰ τῆς πείρας διδάσκαλος· εἰς

45 I 31, 845-850. Cf. also II 48, 708-710 "... as Pindar says somewhere. I cannot say the lines,/for they are only fragments of verses and they escape my memory./However it is surely true, as I told you already"; X 332, 406-407 "And it was rebuilt by a Theban athlete,/whose name escapes my memory".

46 M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge 2008).

47 See below n. 59.

48 A. Papalexandrou, 'The memory culture of Byzantium', in L. James (ed.), *A Companion to Byzantium* (Chichester-Oxford) 108-122.

49 *Letter to Nikephoros Bryennios*, 14, p. 142, 20 Gautier.

50 P. 118, 59-67 Wirth.

τοιαύτην μνημοσύνην οὐσίωσέ σε θεός, ἀφ' ἧς οὐ Μουσῶν ἐννεάς, γνώσεως δὲ προβέβληται πολυπλήθεια· εἴποι τις ἂν ἐπὶ στόματός σε φέρειν, ὅτε καλέσει καιρός, πάντας μὲν λόγους, πάντας δὲ βίους ἀνδρῶν σοφῶν καὶ ὅσοι πρὸς ἀρετὴν ἐζήκασιν φθάσαντες· οὕτω πανδεχὴ παντὸς καλοῦ τόπον τέθεικας τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ εἰς βιβλιοθήκην σοφίας μνήμονος ἀνέπτυξας ἢ καὶ ὡς ἐν πολυτιμῆτι τύμβῳ τῷ βάθει τῆς μνήμης τοὺς ἀξίους ταφῆς τοιαύτης ἐντέθεικας.

Who has ever surpassed your memory when spiritual matters are to be debated? Surely enough, no one and we learn it from experience; God endowed you with such great memory from which not the ennead of the Muses is brought forward but rather a multitude of knowledge; one could say that, whenever the right moment comes, you have on the tip of your tongue all the discourses, all the wise men's lives and those who happened to live following virtue; thus you have made your soul a receptacle of any beauty and you have developed it into a library of mnemonic wisdom or else you have put those worthy of such a grave in the depth of your memory as if in a much revered sepulchral chamber.

Nikephoros and the patriarch⁵¹ are depicted as repositories and sources of inexhaustible wisdom and rhetorical ability. Such a representation is uncontroversial. Both are seen as authoritative role models, sources from which listeners can draw fully. Michael and Nikephoros belong to a well-established system of power and knowledge. Their eulogy follows widely accepted patterns of communication and takes place in formalized, if not institutional settings: epistolary exchange in the case of Michael; a public ceremony involving the μαίσιτωρ of the rhetors and his pupils in the case of Eustathios.⁵² Yet, as Yun Lee Too has shown for the Graeco-Roman period, the trope of the 'breathing library' can effectively be used also to express criticism toward established networks of authority.⁵³ It can serve the purpose of countering marginality and as such it is a means of self-empowerment. Seen from this angle, the embodied library becomes 'a focus of intellectual power' and a source of independent criticism on past and present authorities. Intellectuals who label themselves as breathing libraries stand against the monumentalized and imposing supremacy of physical collections. This is exactly how Tzetzes uses the image, by attributing the trope to himself in a unique act of self-legitimation.

In Tzetzes' highly competitive world, memory was an important cultural commodity, one that books could boost and enhance. Having free and easy access to libraries was a sign of social prestige. An established intellectual and public figure as Eustathios

51 On the context of Eustathios' simile, see A. Pizzone, 'History has no end: originality and human progress in Eustathios' second oration for Michael III o tou Anchialou', in V. Katsaros, F. M. Pontani and V. Sarris (eds), *Reading Eustathios of Thessalonike* (Berlin 2017) 331–55.

52 See M. Loukaki, 'Le samedi de Lazare et les éloges annuels du patriarche de Constantinople', in F. Evangelatou-Notara and T. Maniati-Kokkini (eds), *Κλητόριον. In memory of Nikos Oikonomides* (Athens-Thessaloniki 2005) 327–46.

53 Y. Lee Too, 'The Breathing Library: performing cultural memories', chap. 3 in *The Idea of the Library in the Ancient World* (Oxford 2010).

of Thessalonike, for instance, is often depicted and depicts himself as the owner of many books and as an avid collector.⁵⁴ Against this background, Tzetzes boasts of his autonomy, fashioning himself as a self-sufficient and self-contained literary archive. He does not need social recognition, just as he does not need books to compile the *Historiai*. The claim of knowing by heart every book ever written is a powerful statement of cultural supremacy, one that goes hand-in-hand with the criticism exerted by Tzetzes on past and present authors. After all, the image of the walking library was associated with the notion of criticism as early as Eunapius, who describes Longinus as ‘a breathing library and walking museum, (...) entrusted with the task of judging ancient [authors]’.⁵⁵

The trope of the ‘breathing’, ‘living’ or ‘walking’ library is certainly a long-lived one. Tzetzes’ method of exploiting it, however, is truly Byzantine in that the *Historiai* represents an extreme development of traditional didactic tools. The title suggests a collection of exemplary stories from the past and the letter to Lachanas is designed precisely so as to contain as many references and quotations as possible and to become a suitable starting point not only for commentary but also for the insertion of narratives and paradigmatic anecdotes. In other words it is a pretext for the ensuing compilation. In the three lines introducing the first ‘story’ about Croesus, Tzetzes addresses a pupil who has been assigned the task of learning with the greatest care the narratives alluded to in the letter to Lachanas.⁵⁶ Throughout the work, moreover, the address ὦ τέκνον surfaces time and again.⁵⁷ Such an address points to the original purpose of the single ‘stories’ – as if didactic ‘units’ – or, perhaps, even to the inscribed intended audience of the work, that is an ideal unnamed pupil. At least at a formal level, the commentary presents itself as a learning tool. Tzetzes’ mnemonic power is used to train the memory of (potential) students who are expected to incorporate their teacher’s ‘stories’.⁵⁸

And yet, the work’s aim goes well beyond its declared didactic purpose, as we have seen. The compilation-commentary is ultimately used to sustain and shape Tzetzes’ biographical persona. Tzetzes combines two traditional formats, the commentary and the compilation, into a new product, a self-commentary wherein the self pervasively informs

54 See the primary sources collected in Paolo Cesaretti, Silvia Ronchey (ed.), *Eustathii Thessalonicensis exegesis in canonem iambicum pentecostalem. Recensuerunt indicibusque instruxerunt* (Berlin, Munich, Boston 2014) *29.

55 Eunapius, *Lives of the Sophists* 456.

56 P. 1, 1 Leone.

57 I 17, 414; II 53, 839; II 60, 979; VIII 206, 516; VIII 206, 521; X 341, 549.

58 Didacticism is in fact crucial to understand the *Historiai*. As already mentioned (see above n. 38), Tzetzes often criticizes well-established authors of the past, such as, for instance, Isocrates (XI 382). Such criticism revolves around Isocrates’ ability as a teacher and orator. He is accused of being unable to handle two pupils at the same time. Equally, Tzetzes stigmatizes his slowness in composing, arguing that it took him ten years to complete the *Panathenaic Speech*. Needless to say, throughout the *Historiai* Tzetzes presents himself as the opposite: a fast writer and a skilful teacher.

the text. The tablet metaphor through which Tzetzes emphasizes his own mnemonic power is another traditional trope⁵⁹ leading to the same result. Tzetzes describes the books he has memorized as fully internalized, inscribed in his mind and heart. Memorization of books and authors, literary composition and personal/affective memories are inextricably intertwined. In the letter 13 addressed to Manuel Gabrielakites,⁶⁰ Tzetzes mentions again the death of his brother, recalling how his 'mnemonic mind' was annihilated precisely by the memory of Isaac:⁶¹

οὐκ οἶδα ὅ τι ἄρα καὶ γράφω ἢ φθέγγομαι, οὐδέ τί μοι τῷ βίῳ δοκεῖ βλεπτόν ἢ στερεκτόν ἢ προσήγορον. Οὕτω μοι πάντα καὶ ἡ μνήμων δὲ φρήν ἐκείνη, δι' ἣν μακαριστὸς ἀγαστὸς ἐδόκουν πολλοῖς, συνετεθνήκει τῷ ἀδελφῷ καὶ οὐδ' ἀπολοφύρασθαι τοῦτον ἐξόν μοι μετροσυνθέτοις γραφαῖς· πωροῦμαι γὰρ ὑπὸ τοῦ πάθους εὐθέως τούτου μνησθεῖς καὶ γράφειν οὐ δύναμαι ὁ περὶ τοὺς ἄλλους γράφων ἀυθημερὸν τὰ μετρικὰ μακρὰ ἐπιτάφια. Ταῦτά τοι, ὦ λῶστέ, οὐδ' ἀμηγέπη κάλλους λόγων φροντίζομεν καὶ τὸ τῶν λοιπῶν δὲ φροντίδων φροντι<στήρι>ον οὐχ ἦττον ἀποτορνεύσεως λόγων ἀπάγει με.

I do not know what I write or say, nor do I know what there is for me to look forward to in life, what is amiable or agreeable. Thus, that famous mind of mine, which is capable of recalling everything and made me blessed in the eyes of others, died together with my brother and it is not even possible for me to bewail him in metrically composed writings; for I am petrified by sorrow, as soon as I remember him and I can't write, I who compose quickly long verse epitaphs for all the others. Therefore, my most honourable friend, we could not care less about rhetorical beauty and the preoccupation of our other worries equally distracts me from polishing my discourses.

Letter 13 shows that memory, while integral to the creative process, is not a neutral storehouse. Literary and historical reminiscences are deeply ingrained in the psychological fabric of the individual. In the self-commentary on the letter to Lachanas Tzetzes explains that for him such a process of internalization began during childhood, when his father was in charge of his education.⁶² Surely, his personal experience adds to the exemplarity of the stories presented in the commentary-compilation, blurring the line between cultural and personal memories.

Ultimately the *Historiai* can be defined as Tzetzes' 'book of memory' in three ways: it is designed as a comprehensive sample of Tzetzes' prodigious memory; the first part is explicitly intended as a learning tool to be memorized by pupils; it encompasses Tzetzes'

59 The metaphor goes as far back as Plato (*Theaetetus*, 191c-e). See J. Penny Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind* (London 2004) and D. Draaisma, *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind* (Cambridge 2001) 24–48.

60 See Grünbart, 'Prosopographische Beiträge', 185 and 'Paideia Connects', 28.

61 Letter 13, p. 24, 4–15 Leone.

62 IV, 556–598

biographical reminiscences naturally boosted by the epistolary sub-text. In the next section I will explore the strategies through which Tzetzes blends together experience and exemplarity in the epistle to Lachanas and in the relevant self-commentary.

The letter to Lachanas: exemplarity and experience

The composition of the *Historiai* as an independent work was prompted, as we have seen, by the verse epistle to John Lachanas, designed by the author for self-commentary. We know Lachanas also from Tzetzes' letter collection, in which he features as addressee of Ep. 105.⁶³ The letter is a short and apologetic missive in which Tzetzes tries to defend himself from the allegation of malicious gossip:

Ὀλιγώθησαν αἱ ἀλήθειαι ἀπὸ τῶν υἱῶν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐγὼ δὲ ὁ μάταιος, ὃ χρυσὲ δέσποτα, ταῦτόν τι ἐπεπόνθειν τῇ τοῦ Ἱέρωνος γυναικί. Ἐδόκουν γὰρ ὁποῖοι τοῦ ἐμοῦ στόματος ἐξέρχονται λόγοι, τοιοῦτους καὶ πάντας ἀνθρώπους ἐκφέρειν.

The truth is always rare among the children of men, but I, useless me, am possibly suffering the same fate as the wife of Hiero,⁶⁴ my golden lord. I thought that the words which leave my mouth, such words can be uttered by all men.

The letter, composed in 1155,⁶⁵ proves that the relationship between Lachanas and Tzetzes was already strained at that date. In a typical move, Tzetzes does not try to deny the allegation; rather, he acknowledges it through a learned allusion, indirectly reaffirming its inherent truth.⁶⁶ The addressee, Lachanas, is known also from Eustathios' letter collection,⁶⁷ where he is praised as a man well versed in literature and rhetoric. In the letter, Eustathios also speaks about his own didactic activities and his public performances as an orator.

The relationship between Tzetzes and Lachanas seems to worsen when the latter is granted the office of ζαβραιότης, or official responsible for the arsenal. Tzetzes' social resentment and, apparently, Lachanas' new contemptuous demeanour provide the pre-text for the verse epistle 'opening' the *Historiai*.

63 P. 152, 16-22 Leone. See Grünbart, 'Prosopographische Beiträge', 221-22.

64 Hiero scolded his wife for never having told him that his breath was disagreeable and she replied that, not having known any other man, she thought that it was a normal phenomenon (for the *loci paralleli*, see Leone's apparatus).

65 Grünbart, 'Prosopographische Beiträge', 221-22.

66 The appellative of "golden lord", moreover, seems to anticipate the tones of the verse epistle included in the *Historiai*. At its very beginning, Tzetzes compares the new appointment of Lachanas (and the ensuing pride shown by the former friend) to the riches of Croesus and the gold of Midas.

67 Ep. 48 Kolovou.

The letter consists of lengthy lists of mythological and historical examples, interspersed with more narrative, autobiographical sections. The first section of the letter (IV 471–555) includes a series of mythical exempla, designed to illustrate Lachanas' enormous pride about his new office.⁶⁸ Mythical parallels begin with Croesus, boasting his treasure and end, in a mock-epic crescendo, with Sesostris, whom the Assyrians regarded as a God *κοσμοκράτωρ*. Besides providing abundant material for the self-commentary,⁶⁹ the quantity and quality of the exempla serve the obvious purpose of caricaturing Lachanas' arrogance. The learned introduction is followed by a narrative section (IV 556–603), in which Tzetzes eventually declares the reason for his resentment toward his former correspondent and recalls the education received by his father. The final mention of the 'bonds of friendship' broken by his former friend paves the way to a further section of exempla, in which Tzetzes tries to demonstrate that even senseless objects are more grateful than Lachanas (IV 604–714). The anticlimax is: barbarians, animals, plants, inanimate objects. A parenetic section follows, wherein Tzetzes again reminds his addressee that only virtue and friendship can escape the powerful hands of oblivion (IV 715–730). This prompts a new list of paradigmatic narratives about forgotten glories (IV 731–767). A final parenetic section closes the piece (IV 767–779). Overall the tone of the letter is stern and judgmental. The final lines, however, cast some doubts on the 'reality' of Tzetzes' grudge:⁷⁰

ἀλλὰ ταυτί μεν εἶπον σοι, δεόντως ὄνειδίζων,
καὶ παραινῶν τὰ πρέποντα, τὸν τῦφον καταστέλλων,
ἐν λόγοις ἴσως στυπτικοῖς, ἀλλὰ λυσιτελοῦσι.
Νῦν δὲ τοῖς ἀστείσμασι τὸ σκυθρωπὸν ἐλάσω.

And I told you these things, reproaching you in full measure,
admonishing you, as to what is appropriate, stifling your pride,
with words that might sound bitter, but are nevertheless useful.
Now, however, I will chase away the gloom with jokes.

Tzetzes is referring here to a series of vernacular insults that followed the text in his master-copy and that did not find their way into the final editorial product to be published.⁷¹ Such insults are labelled as *ἀστείσματα*. Floris Bernard has recently highlighted

68 IV 471-472: "Lachanas Zabareiotēs, you pride yourself on that, just like Croesus on his treasures and Midas on his gold" (*Ζαβαρειώτα Λαχανᾶ, τούτοις καὶ γὰρ ἀβρύνη / ἥπερ ὁ Κροῖσος θησαυροῖς καὶ Μίδασι τῷ χρυσίῳ*).

69 Each one of the characters named in the exempla has his own rubric (I, 1 4-III 69, 104).

70 IV 776-779.

71 *Historiai* Schol. V, 779, p. 548.3-6 Leone. Panagiotis Agapitos explains the rationale of this choice in 'John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners: a Byzantine teacher on schedography, everyday language and writerly disposition,' *Medioevo Greco* 17 (2017) forthcoming.

the social value (they worked as a sort of ‘glue’) of witticisms and urban jokes, especially within groups sharing, or having shared, the same educational setting.⁷² It is therefore likely that in his master copy Tzetzes had put on paper the sort of satirical banter usually exchanged orally in school environments.

In fact, reproaches against (former) friends who all of a sudden stop corresponding are common currency in Byzantine letter-collections. To confine myself just to one example from the twelfth century, I will mention the similar case of Michael Italikos and Theodore Prodromos reproaching one Lizix of having forgotten them.⁷³ While Michael’s letter is milder, Prodromos does not hesitate to use harsh tones against their friend. In the first letter, he mentions a new ‘honour’ which is apparently keeping Lizix so busy as to prevent him from writing to his old friends. He accuses Lizix of betraying *belles lettres* in favour of more mundane occupations. In the second and more resentful letter Theodore reminds Lizix of the time they spent together as students when he, Lizix and possibly Michael, were so close that they wished they had been born from the same mother.⁷⁴ Theodore goes on to reproach Lizix for his present life choices. The old friend has now turned into an orator à la mode, wrapped in lavish clothes, exuding perfume and enjoying luscious food. Theodore seems to voice a deep nostalgia for a time that is now lost forever and the frequent exclamations as well as the rhetorical questions interspersed in the letter lend a very personal accent to it. And yet, by reading the description of the ‘new’ Lizix, one gets a sense of déjà-vu. Indeed, the picture drawn by Theodore resonates with the portrait of the vain professional performer traced by Michael Choniates in Πρὸς τοὺς αἰτιωμένους τὸ φιλένδεικτον.⁷⁵ The two descriptions share also the striking detail of the fat mule carrying around the successful orators.⁷⁶ In both Theodore’s letter and Choniates’ pamphlet culture and *belles lettres* are contrasted with social climbing, a strategy occurring also in Tzetzes’ epistle to Lachanas as well as in the relevant commentary. An assiduous frequenting of old books and authors is wilfully preferred by Tzetzes over boasting material riches and such choice starkly defines his persona. Equally, Theodore stresses that his personal ‘boast’ (ἔχομεν οἷς ἀρχήσομεν) lies in the books delivered (quite literally: ὠδινῆθεις) by the ancient authors as well as in those that he himself delivers (ὠδινάντες ἀποτέκνοντες) by reading the former (ἐκεῖθεν).⁷⁷

72 F. Bernard, ‘Humor in Byzantine letters of the tenth to twelfth centuries: some preliminary remarks’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 69 (2015) 179-195, here 184.

73 Michael Italicus, *Ep.* 25, p. 178-180 Gautier; Theodore Prodromos, *Ep.* 12 and 13, J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 133, 1285-1286. On Lizix, a medical doctor, see P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel Komnenos 1143-1180* (Cambridge 2002) 361-2.

74 Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 133, 1286 A, ll. 1-2.

75 Pp. 7-23 Lambros. On the work see M. Bourbouhakis, ‘The end of ἐπίδειξις. Authorial identity and authorial intention in Michael Chōniatēs’ Πρὸς τοὺς αἰτιωμένους τὸ φιλένδεικτον’, in A. Pizzone, *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature. Modes, Functions and Identities* (Berlin-New York 2014) 201-24.

76 Τὸ φιλένδεικτον, p. 9, 17-28 Lambros.

77 Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 133, 1286 A-B, ll. 13-17.

Recently, Manolis Bourbouhakis has cast some doubt on the seriousness of Choniates' concerns in τὸ φιλένδεικτον.⁷⁸ The similarities with Lizix's portrait in Theodore's letter suggest indeed that we have to do here with stock accusations, which perhaps do not entail a real acrimony between the actors involved. Tzetzes' four final lines seem to imply exactly the same rationale.

Regardless of the real relationship between Tzetzes and Lachanas, the aims and the literary strategy underpinning the letter are clear. Lachanas' alleged misdemeanour is the pretext allowing Tzetzes to trace his ideal self-portrait. In the epistle to Lachanas we find a significant consistency between the tone of the letter and that of the self-commentary. The persona embodied by Tzetzes is ultimately one and the same both in the served and in the serving text: Tzetzes preaches modesty, advocating – and seemingly accepting – his 'unsuccessful' life-style. Panagiotis Agapitos has shown that such an apologetic move is actually typical of him and testifies to his belonging to the middle strata of Constantinopolitan society and to his ultimately conservative attitude.⁷⁹ Therefore, Tzetzes claims for himself the education received from his father, who used the same stories now displayed by his son in order to teach him the vanity of life:⁸⁰

Ἵπὲρ ἐκείνους ὁ πατήρ ἀεὶ νυξὶ παρήνει,
ἀρχὰς ἀνθρώπων λέγων μοι καὶ βίων μεταπτώσεις
(...)
Οὓς μοι δεικνὺς ἐκέλευε βλέπειν τὸν βίον οἶος,
οὐκ ἐκ ξυλίνου τοῦ νεκροῦ, κατὰ τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους,
οὐδὲ κατὰ τοὺς Λάκωνας μεθύσκων τοὺς οἰκέτας,
καὶ μύθους πλάττων ἔλεγε συντείνοντας πρὸς τοῦτο.
Οὕτω μοι νυξὶ παραίνεσις ὑπῆρχε πᾶσα τότε,
ἡμέρα δὲ διδάσκαλος ὑπῆρχε μαθημάτων
μετὰ σωφρόνων τῶν πληγῶν καὶ μᾶλλον ἀτακτοῦντι.
Καὶ πρακτικῶς ἐπλήρου μοι τότε τὰς παραινέσεις.
Εἰς βαλανεῖον γὰρ ποτε δεῆσαν γεγονέναι,
τοῖς δούλοις ἂν ἐκέλευσεν εἰς ἔσχατον κλιντῆρα
θεῖναι τὸ στρωματόδεσμον, τοὺς δ' ἄλλους παρατρέχειν,
καὶ τοι σχεδὸν τυγχάνοντος λουτρῶνος ἡμετέρου.
Τὰς δ' ἄλλας λέγειν παρεῶ πάσας αὐτοῦ παιδεύσεις.
Οὕτως, ὡς ἔφην, παιδευθεὶς μηδὲν δοκεῖν τὸν βίον,
οὐκ ἐπαλγύνομαι ποσῶς σαῖς ἀπροσηγορίας.
Θλίβομαι δέ σε καθορῶν βλαπτόμενον ἐσχάτως.
Καὶ γὰρ βαρβαρωδέστερος δοκεῖν βαρβάρων σπεύδεις,

78 See above, note 71.

79 See P. Agapitos, "Middle-class" ideology of education and language, and the "bookish" identity of John Tzetzes', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* (forthcoming).

80 IV 577-603. On Tzetzes' family see P. Gautier, 'La curieuse ascendance de Jean Tzetzes', *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 28 (1970) 207–20.

ἀλόγων ἀλογώτερος τιμώμενος ἐν λόγῳ,
 ἀναισθητότερος αὐτῶν αὐτῶν τῶν ἀναισθητῶν,
 τῷ μὴ μεμνήσθαι μηδαμῶς πάντως θεσμῶν φιλίας.

My father used to advise me about them at night,
 telling me about the origins of men and the changes in life.
 (...)

And thanks to these characters he pushed me to look at the meaning of life,
 neither through a wooden corpse, as the Egyptians do,
 nor by getting the slaves drunk, as the Spartans do,
 and he used to shape myths aiming at the same goal.
 So, nights were always a source of moral exhortation to me,
 while days would teach me the lessons to be learned,
 accompanied by prudent blows, especially when I was undisciplined.
 And the admonitions were then perfected in practice.
 So, when we needed to go to the bath,
 he would order the servants to bring the sack to the last seat
 and to let the others go first, even though the bathhouse was almost ours.
 But I won't mention all his different educational methods.
 Since I was educated to deem life nothing, as I said,
 I couldn't be less saddened by your refusal to address me.
 I am just saddened because I see you terribly misled,
 for you are trying your best to look more barbarian than the barbarians
 themselves,
 to be regarded more irrational than the irrational creatures,
 and more senseless than the senseless beings,
 as you are completely oblivious of the bounds of friendship.

As we have seen, this autobiographical cameo comes after a long string of exemplary tales. Tzetzes intertwines personal and cultural memories, using them for the same moralizing purpose. Moreover, the biographical account gives Tzetzes the opportunity to enlarge on more historical examples: Cato, Solon (with Croesus) and the doctor Theodore who turned Chaganos into a friend of the Romans by telling him the story of Sesostris.⁸¹ The exempla partially overlap with those already treated in the first part. The tale about Sesostris, for instance, features both here and among those used by Tzetzes to criticize Lachanas. Finally, if we take the perspective of the inscribed audience (potential or actual pupils), autobiography and paradigmatic histories/myths become part of the same textbook, designed to be memorized (and re-performed?). Tzetzes' private life events are thus turned into a didactic tool. His own experience is turned into an exemplary, cautionary tale and thus saved from temporality and oblivion. The goal of

81 III 71-73, 235-251 with Leone's apparatus.

such a design is arguably to have future generations look at Tzetzes' life as a full-fledged 'story', side by side with those of Cato or Solon. In other words, Tzetzes exploits the potential of contemporary didactic practices so as to bequeath to contemporary and future audiences the memory of his idealized Self. The association of paradigmatic examples and personal experience is a quite common rhetorical strategy. Tzetzes' text stands out precisely in that his own experience is memorialized and transformed straight away into a model to be studied and commented upon. His endeavour is all the more exceptional as the Byzantines, while keen commentators of ancient authors, were not so much inclined to comment on their own literature. In this respect Tzetzes' work represents a very distinctive break with tradition, as he regards not only his work but his own persona as worthy of commentary.

It should be noticed, once again, that the most striking hallmark of this ideal persona is the ability to remember. Such skill places Tzetzes in a position of superiority towards literary tradition. Memory allows him to judge any book ever produced:⁸²

Ὅθεν τὸ δῶρον εἰληφῶς εὐχαριστῶ τῷ δόντι,
κἄν τριβῶ βίον πενιχρὸν σειρᾶς ὧν γένους πρώτου·
ἔκων ἔκων καὶ τοῦτο δε φάναι με κατ' Αἰσχύλον·
ἦγῃμαι πάντα λῆρον γαρ τοῦ βίου τῶν ἀνθρώπων
ὄθε τὸν φιλογώνιον ἡρετισάμην βίον.
Εἰ δέ τις μνήμων ἕτερος εἶναι τοῖς λόγοις λέγει
ἐπεὶ τινὰ τῶν πάροιθεν ἀνενεγκεῖν οὐ σθένω,
δεῦρο τῶν νῦν τις πρὸς ἡμᾶς· οὐ γὰρ φυγομαχοῦμεν,
κἄν οἰκουροκαθέδριον εἰλόμεθα τὸν βίον,
ὡς ὁ Σκυρίτης Ἀχιλεὺς τοῦ Χείρωνος τὸ θρέμμα
οὐδ' ὡς Κοννᾶς τριόδους τε καὶ θύρας πανδοχείων.
Καὶ μάθε φύσιν τὴν ἡμῶν καὶ τῶν φρενῶν τὸ μνήμον,
καὶ πῶς νῦν πάσας ἔγνωμεν κρίνειν ἀρχαίων βίβλους,
καὶ μετ' οὐδὲν μετὰ μικρὸν κόνις, σκιά καὶ τέφρα.
Θρηνῶν δε πᾶν ἀνθρώπινον τὸ Σολομῶντος λέγε·
εἶδον τοῦ κόσμου τὰ λαμπρὰ καὶ τὰ τερπνὰ τοῦ βίου,
ὅσα ὑπὸ τὸν ἥλιον καὶ πάντα ματαιότης.
Ὅμως, ὦ χρῆζων ἐκμαθεῖν πάντων σοφῶν τὰς χρήσεις,
εὐτρήτους θεῖς σὰς ἀκοὰς τῶν λόγων ἄκουέ μου·
οὐ μοι θυμὸς σιδήρεος ἐστὶν ἀλλ' ἐλεήμων.

Therefore, I gratefully accept this gift,
even if, while stemming from a prominent lineage, I lead a life of poverty,
of my own will, yes, of my own will,⁸³ to put it with Aeschylus.

82 I 11, 282-301

83 Aeschylus, *Prometheus* 266.

I am well aware of the misery of all human life,
 that is why I opted for a life in the corner.
 If anyone argues that he has good memory in discourses,
 I ask this man to come and see me,
 since I am not able to resuscitate one of the ancients:
 I did not shun fighting, even if
 I chose a life at home, just like Achilles from Skyros, the pupil of Chiron,
 and unlike Konnas, who was familiar with trivia and tavern doors.
 Be aware of my nature and of the mnemonic power of my spirit,
 and of the fact that we know how to judge any kind of book,
 and after a short time, everything will be dust and shadows and ashes,
 pitying human nature, do say with Solomon:
 I saw the splendours of the world and all the sweetness of life,
 and all are nothing but vanity.⁸⁴
 And yet, you, who want to learn the behaviours of all the wise men,
 Keep your ears open and listen to my speeches:
 My spirit is not stern, but compassionate.

Along the same lines, the iambic verses following the second edition of the *Historiai* include a seal, or *sphragis*, wherein Tzetzes appoints himself ‘auditor of the ancients and of the moderns’:⁸⁵

Ὡς ἀντεβλήθη ταῦτα πρωτογράφοις
 ταῦτα δ’ ἐφευρέθησαν ἰσχυροῦ λόγων,
 Τζέτζου κατεστρώθησαν ἐν τῷ σεκρέτῳ,
 ὑπογραφήν δ’ ἔσχηκεν ἦν τινα βλέπεις.
 Τζέτζης λογιστῆς τῶν παλαιῶν καὶ νέων.

As they were collated with the original,
 and invented by the power of words,
 these texts were deposited in the archive of Tzetzes,
 and obtained the signature you see here:
 Tzetzes, auditor of the ancients and the moderns.

Tzetzes imitates here the bureaucratic language of notaries and imperial officers. Thanks to his memory he can become a self-titled ‘auditor’ or accountant. In comparison with this title, which nullifies geographical and chronological boundaries, actual appointments, such as Lachanas’, pale and become meaningless.

To conclude, by putting together the *Historiai* Tzetzes truly composed a Byzantine book of memory. Memory with all its facets is the work’s backbone: memory as

84 *Ecclesiastes* 2, 3 ff. On Solomon as a model for authorial personae, see A. Pizzone, ‘Anonymity, dispossession and reappropriation in the prolog of Nikephoros Basilakes’, in Pizzone, *The author*, 225-44.

85 355-360. The text is published in Leone, ‘Ioannis Tzetzae iambi’, 146.

recollection of the past, be that cultural (anecdotes, myths, stories, fragments of ancient authors) or personal (autobiography), memory as the ability to both memorize and write, memory as exercised by the inscribed reader (i.e. as a didactic tool) and, finally, memory as a desire to be remembered by the generations to come. Undoubtedly, this was Tzetzes' ultimate and most important goal when writing the *Historiai*. Judging from the number of manuscripts preserving such an idiosyncratic work, it was actually a successful endeavour.