

## BYZANTINE AND MODERN GREEK STUDIES

GOLDWYN (A.J.) and KOKKINI (D.) **John Tzetzes, *Allegories of the Odyssey*** (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 56). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019. Pp. xxiv + 347. £28.95. 9780674238374.

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This book comprises the first English translation of John Tzetzes' *Allegories of the Odyssey*, a long allegorical commentary on Homer's *Odyssey* in 15-syllable verse. It is the authors' second work on Tzetzes to be published in recent years, following their translation of the *Allegories of the Iliad* (Cambridge 2015). The book includes an introduction (vii–xxiv), an English translation of the *Allegories of the Odyssey* along with the edition of the Greek text by Herbert Hunger (2–281), notes on the Greek text followed by a list of the translators' emendations of Hunger's edition (285–88), a commentary that identifies Tzetzes' quotations from the *Odyssey* and offers brief explanatory notes on the mythological and historical figures of the *Allegories* (289–336), a bibliography (337–39) and an index of the names and places mentioned in the Greek text (341–47).

The introduction provides useful information on a variety of topics, such as the content of the work, its audience, commission, date of composition, the life of Tzetzes, his allegorical method and the Homeric criticism of Eustathios of Thessaloniki. This section ends with some notes on the challenges that the translators encountered due to the complexity and obscurity of Tzetzes' allegorical interpretations. Although the introduction is carefully written, it could have included more information about Tzetzes' writing style, his allegorical method and his sources. A detailed analysis of these topics could have helped familiarize readers with the nature of this uncommon composition, especially those unacquainted with ancient allegorical exegesis of Homer.

Tzetzes divides his commentary into 24 sections corresponding to the Homeric books. After a short summary of each book, he interprets allegorically the Homeric verses that refer to the pagan gods. His *Allegories* are full of repetitions (for example, his interpretation of Zeus as 'destiny' and Athena as 'wisdom'), and as a result, the reader may wonder why Tzetzes had this 'obsession' with demonstrating that all pagan gods were physical elements, psychological powers and planets. It would be interesting to explore Tzetzes' intention to present the *Odyssey* as a fully appropriate text for a Christian audience and whether this is related to the tensions between the official church and some intellectual circles during the eleventh and twelfth centuries (see the case of John Italos). Other characteristics of the Tzetzean style, which are not discussed in the book but an analysis of which could assist the reader to understand better the didactic character of the *Allegories*, include the mixture of different linguistic styles (for instance, the epic and the everyday) with the 15-syllable verse, the use of digressions (usually genealogical, geographical or philological), as well as the occasional use of different speaking voices (for example, of Tzetzes, Zeus, Odysseus). With regard to the sources of the *Allegories of the Odyssey*, Tzetzes himself mentions them in the Prolegomena A, vv. 35–36 (Demo, Heraclitus, Palaiphatos, Michael Psellos). He also specifies three different methods of allegorizing in 11.95–96: 'psychologically' (ψυχικῶς), 'physically' (στοιχειακῶς) and 'pragmatically' (πραγματικῶς). I would thus favour these terms for describing his allegorical methods (cf. P. Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia: A Poetics of the Twelfth-Century Medieval Greek Novel* (Cambridge MA 2005), 125), rather than the characterizations 'rhetorical, natural and mathematical allegory' proposed by the authors (xvi). Another question that arises when one reads the book is how faithfully Tzetzes reproduces the Homeric text and whether his Homeric quotations could be of any value for a future edition of the *Odyssey*?

As far as the translation is concerned, the authors have done an admirable job of rendering such a difficult composition into clear and understandable English while remaining faithful to the Greek text. Recently, two other reviewers (Johannes Haubold in *BMCR* (2020) and Valeria Lovato in *The Byzantine Review* (2020)) have proposed many, often useful, corrections on the translation and on the Greek text. A full evaluation of these emendations would require a thorough examination of the poem's manuscript tradition, which is impossible to do here. I shall only propose a few suggestions for improvement that have not been mentioned before: 'extensively' instead of 'in broad strokes' (1.18); 'dislike' instead of 'counteract' (4.65); 'narrate' instead of 'relate' (7.5); αἰματομοντεία instead of αἰμοντομοντεία (11.135); 'comes ... will kill' instead of 'came ... would kill' (17.4); 'kindle' instead of 'shine' (18.13); and 'tender hearts' instead of 'simple minds' (24.280).

This English translation of Tzetzes' *Allegories of the Odyssey* is welcome in the fields of Byzantine and classical studies, as it makes available to a broader audience an atypical medieval text that can redirect our ways of approaching Homer, while offering us insight into the interesting methods of an idiosyncratic philologist.

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DAIM (F.) (ed.) **History and Culture of Byzantium** (Brill's New Pauly – Supplements, Volume 10). Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019. Pp. xxv + 574. €299/\$344. 9789004339330. doi:[10.1017/S0075426922001008](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426922001008)

The *History and Culture of Byzantium* is a great scholarly undertaking with an impressive array of contributors who between them have created a multidisciplinary handbook for Byzantine civilization and culture. There are many interesting topics covered within this volume, ranging from narrative sweeps of the main political events to more niche topics such as hospitals, pottery, travel, state budgets and much more. All sections have dedicated bibliographies, allowing the reader to study topics of interest in their own time. The list of contributors boasts some of the most eminent historians within Byzantine studies alongside other more specialist academics who have contributed on nuanced and interdisciplinary topics.

The book opens with a historical survey of the Byzantine state, AD 395–1453, though it wisely also covers events of antiquity that pertain to the permanent division of the Roman Empire in 395. The survey is not simply a running historical narrative of political events, but covers a wide array of interconnected themes, such as 'internal transformation', or 'ecclesiastical policy'. The different sections of the historical survey are diverse in character, substance and viewpoints, reflecting the authors who wrote them. Such variety can attract wider audiences, but it can lead to some questionable choices of content and tone. For example, the sudden divergence from the chronological account of the reigning emperors after Leo V in the 'Byzantium ca. 600–1000' section of the historical survey, alongside the decision to end the section in 1000, rather than 1025, when the next section, 'Byzantium 1025–1204', begins. Indeed, there are some other peculiarities found elsewhere, such as the decision to split the topic of 'ethnicities' found in 'Demographics: Languages, Ethnicities, Migration' (164–69) from the later section 'Minorities in the Empire' (526–31).

There is indeed throughout the volume an element of confusion as to who the Byzantines were and how they identified. Sometimes contributors use the term 'Byzantine' or 'East Roman' while others use 'Greek' or 'Greek-speakers' as descriptors. The chapter entitled 'The Idea of Empire and Emperor' does shed light on how the Byzantines saw themselves and understood their polity, but the diversity of language in terms of identity indicators