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Imitatio – aemulatio – variatio

We are standing on the shoulders of giants.¹ Giants were much in evidence in the conference and the volume which has followed: Erich Auerbach, Ernst Curtius, Bernhard Bischoff.² Also I would add Wolfram Hörandner: so many of the contributors are his pupils, not because of any provincial preference for home talent on behalf of the organisers, but because they are so very good. The great generation now retiring has been replaced by that of the organisers of the conference and editors of the volume. This conference is a tribute to his bearing of the torch of literature in Vienna since the foundation of the Institut für Byzantinistik und Neogräzistik and the Academy commissions. However hard the organisers tried to persuade us that this project was not about *mimesis*, we always knew that the real giant is the genius of the house where we began the conference, the Herbert-Hunger-Haus.

The conference began with a realisation that there had not been a scholarly meeting on literature in Vienna for a long time, and an international galaxy of stars was brought together for this event, from Washington and Baltimore and Oxford and Berlin and Paris and Gent and Uppsala. *Mimesis* is the perfect subject for such a conference: it unites both Quellenforschung and literary criticism, in the terms of the *Symbolae Osloenses* debate,³ or – even better – philology and literary theory.⁴ Whether you talk of manuscript tradition or transtextuality *mimesis* is at the heart of literary study, and this is a literary study of a Byzantine literature now accepted as worth scholarly time. It was not always so. When Hunger's article was published in *DOP* 1969–70, he points out that

“this paper ... does not deal at all with the question of the aesthetic value of Byzantine rhetoric, nor with the problem of the public for which the Byzantine authors wrote, both of these subjects having been treated exhaustively by R.J.H. Jenkins ... in *DOP* 17 (1963)”.⁵

You will remember that that article concludes that a) no work of Byzantine literature could be read for pleasure alone and that b) there was no point in discussing literary society ‘since no such public existed’.⁶

Hunger

Ten years later things were beginning to change. This is the blurb for a book written on Latin *mimesis* published in 1979:

“The poets and prose-writers of Greece and Rome were acutely conscious of their literary heritage. They expressed this consciousness in the regularity with which, in their writings, they imitated and alluded to the great authors who had preceded them. Such imitation was generally not regarded as plagiarism but as essential to the creation of a new literary work: imitating one's predecessors was in no way incompatible with originality or progress.’ These views were not peculiar to the writers of Greece and Rome but were

¹ Saying attributed to Bernard of Chartres by John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*. Ed. C.C.J. WEBB. Oxford 1929, 136. On its significance see the classic observation by R. SOUTHERN, *The making of the middle ages*. London 1967, 194.

² AUERBACH, *Mimesis*; E. CURTIUS, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*. Bern 1948; B. BISCHOFF, *Das griechische Element in der abendländischen Bildung des Mittelalters (Mittelalterliche Studien I)*. Stuttgart 1966, 251ff.

³ J. LJUBARSKIJ, *SO Debate: Quellenforschung and /or literary criticism: narrative structures in Byzantine historical writings. Symbolae Osloenses* 73 (1998) 5–73.

⁴ See for example A. MELBERG, *Theories of mimesis (Literature, Culture, Theory 12)*. Cambridge 1995.

⁵ HUNGER, *On the imitation* 16.

⁶ R.J.H. JENKINS, *The Hellenistic origins of Byzantine literature. DOP* 17 (1963) 37–52.

adopted by many others who have written in the ‘classical tradition’ right up to modern times. *Creative imitation and Latin literature* is an exploration of this concept of imitation. The contributors analyse selected passages from various authors – Greek, Latin and English – in order to demonstrate how Latin authors created new works of art by imitating earlier passages of literature”.

It is hard to imagine at that date, ten years after the publication of Hunger’s ‘Mimesis’ that such special pleading would be necessary in a Byzantine milieu. This shows how advanced Hunger’s view was, and it contributed enormously, the single most important contribution, to the new attitude to Byzantine literature which Antony Littlewood and I discussed in Athens in 1971 and which led to Cyril Mango’s ‘Distorting Mirror’⁷ and the reaction to it a few years later. Classics had already engaged with New Criticism, as can be seen in the book in question, Woodman and West’s *Creative imitation and Latin literature*:⁸ Byzantium was saving itself for poststructuralism. But on the subject of *mimesis* (how seldom we can say this!) it predated the classical classic by ten years.

The conference

The conference was four days hard with 27 papers. We heard from the Gent eleventh-century project,⁹ celebrated the Vienna epigram project and its first book,¹⁰ and a new Demosthenes project as well. We heard about Kassia, Theophanes and George synkellos, Psellos, Christopher of Mytilene, Manuel Philes, Neophytos, Jakobos monachos, Niketas Choniates, Theoktistos the Stoudite, and Gennadios Scholarios. We looked at Digenes and the Alexander poem as well as the twelfth-century romances. Theodora Antonopoulou introduced us to the phenomenon of the verse prologue to homilies, actually performed in the liturgy.

We found many ways to explore *mimesis*. We examined centos with Elizabeth Jeffreys and Alice-Mary Talbot. We considered quotations and citations in all their forms and Sonja Schönauer, Efthymia Pietsch-Braounou, Martin Hinterberger and Elizabeth Jeffreys showed us the different levels at which they can work. We looked at imagery with Henry Maguire, and heard about it from Antony Littlewood. We considered the possibilities of variation in the genre of parainesis addressed to the emperor, and chased the ignorance topos in ninth-century historians. Vocabulary was at the forefront with Erich Trapp’s wonderful word-hoard from Neophytos, and Alexandru Cizek’s fascinating evocation of those pretentious Latin twelfth-century titles which bear the same resemblance to Greek as spells in Harry Potter do to Latin. We looked at plot motifs with Homère-Alexandre Théologitis and levels of style and the process of metaphrasis with Eirene Afentoulidou. Niels Gaul made us think about the big picture of literary institutions and outlawed third, fourth, and fifth sophistic to the exile home of renaissances, dark ages and literary circles. (We still believe in *theatra* though).¹¹

We asked various questions. Everyone asked how does *mimesis* work? But some also asked at what level does it work? And their answer was: not only at the highest level of style: Kulhánková replied for begging poetry, Aerts for the Alexander poem and Cupane for vernacular narrative. We also asked at what point in the creative process does it work? At the beginning we were surprised to learn that the author was dead and to be asked to consider reception rather than the creative processes concentrated on by Jeffreys and Talbot. Reinsch and Demoen, Schiffer and Grusková were instrumental here. And we asked also what does *mimesis* tell us about the aesthetics of the period in which it operates? Hinterberger concentrated on hagiography in a

⁷ C. MANGO, Byzantine literature as a distorting mirror. An inaugural lecture delivered before the University of Oxford on 21 May 1974. Oxford 1975.

⁸ D. WEST – T. WOODMAN, *Creative imitation and Latin literature*. Cambridge – New York 1979.

⁹ See now as firstfruits, F. BERNARD, *The Beats of the Pen. Social Contexts of Reading and Writing Poetry in Eleventh-Century Constantinople*. Proefschrift voorgedragen tot het bekomen van de graad van Doctor in de Taal- en Letterkunde: Latijn en Grieks, Academiejaar 2009–2010 (Gent).

¹⁰ A. RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken (= Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung, vol. 1)* (*Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung XV*) Wien 2009.

¹¹ M. GRÜNBART (ed.), *Theatron: rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter (Millennium-Studien 13)*. Berlin – New York 2007.

recognisable period and offered a variety of ways in which *mimesis* and intertextuality worked. Some people tried to disentangle the different processes of *imitatio*, *aemulatio* and *variatio*, and the particular nature of medieval text, or certain kinds of medieval text, though we really agree that all are different parts of a single process, the creation and reception of all literature. We asked how can we detect *mimesis*, and we asked whether vocabulary is a safe method, as well as bravely revealing limitations of an earlier stage of research.

The book

Andreas Rhoby and Elisabeth Schiffer with efficiency and insight have brought a brilliant conference through into an impressive book. Few papers have been lost, and the alphabetical arrangement indicates not so much a deliberate anxiety of influence¹² but more Kristeva's sense of a mosaic in which all texts are a mosaic of quotation; every tessera adds to a single picture but also has its own independent value. What it demonstrates is that there are very few literary issues (reception, originality, genre, rhetoric, pastiche, performance, representation, plagiarism), figures (metaphor, simile) or approaches (Quellenforschung, transtextuality) which are not touched by the reuse of privileged text. The incorporation of handouts and tabulated evidence into the volume will help the reader to decide where in future effort is best expended.

The future

And where indeed will this go in future? I hope that all would agree that there will be and should be more studies like those of Ingela Nilsson's exemplary application of Genette's transtextuality¹³ to the life of St Theoktiste. We did not really begin to examine Kristeva's concept of intertextuality first formulated in a paper on Bakhtin given to Barthes' seminar as early as 1966,¹⁴ though she and Ricoeur and Riffaterre were all mentioned by Théologitis,¹⁵ and Emmanuel Bourbouhakis reminded us in discussion that intertextuality is not *mimesis* in the sense of 'creative imitation', just as Hunger's *mimesis* is not Auerbach's. We need more teasing out of the processes concerned.

And I think we would all agree that we need more work like Stratis Papaioannou's brilliant demonstration of what Byzantine theorists thought about *mimesis*, which will appear in his forthcoming book on autography in Psellos.¹⁶ In Platonic terms, *mimesis* is performance, as Stratis demonstrated, and there is far more to say about performance in Byzantine literature, from the most basic level of performance indicators to the subtle teasing out of political discourse from fictional we enjoyed in his paper. We are only beginning to appreciate the nature of fiction, *plasma kai mythoi*, in Byzantium, and there is a long road ahead.¹⁷ But *mimesis* is also representation as distinct from narration, showing not telling, and there is much work here still to do as well.¹⁸ 'Theory from within' is a constant desideratum in Byzantine Studies: to think that it outlasts 'transient theoretical fads' would be a misapprehension. The interaction of texts and their producers and users even at our distance from the rest of the creative process is a dynamic one, and we need to take seriously the issue of reception, raised for us by Diether Roderich Reinsch in the first paper and deftly picked up by Kristoffel Demoen. *Mimesis* can prove reception, reception enacts *mimesis*.

We are infinitely more equipped now to carry out this work than were Hunger's or Kristeva's or Woodman's contemporaries. For many participants, a highlight of the four days was Alice-Mary Talbot's demonstration of how technology can improve and enrich scholarship. The difference between her original work on

¹² H. BLOOM, *The anxiety of influence: a theory of poetry*. New York 1973.

¹³ G. GENETTE, *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré*. Paris 1982.

¹⁴ J. KRISTEVA, *Seméiotiké. Recherché pour une sémanalyse*. Paris 1969.

¹⁵ See above, H.-A. THÉOLOGITIS (261–272) for a remarkable reading of the theoretical literature.

¹⁶ E. PAPAIOANNOU, "Michael Psellos and the history of literary subjectivity" is currently with the publisher.

¹⁷ See my "Gendered fictions in Byzantium: the construction and performance of sanctity" (Rydén lecture, Uppsala, 10 October 2008). *Bysantinska Sällskapet Bulletin* 26 (2008) 53–82 and "History and lies, truth and fiction: Byzantium and the classical tradition, thirty years on" (forthcoming). See also the proceedings of a conference on fictionality in Harvard 2009, and the forthcoming cross-cultural volume ed. P. AGAPITOS – L. B. MORTENSEN, *Medieval narratives between history and fiction: from the centre to the periphery of Europe, c. 1100–1400*.

¹⁸ See *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*. Ed. S. HALL. Milton Keynes 1997.

the Athanasios texts and what she can now do with *TLG* is all the difference between the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. And from Antony Littlewood's paper (highlighting Niketas Choniates' sixty-eight species of animals as against Psellos's four¹⁹) it became very clear what could be done with an electronic version of Alexander Kazhdan's concordance to Niketas.

I said that this was intended to be a literary enterprise, *Sprache und Literatur*, but it also became clear that any future *mimesis* project would neglect art at its peril. Henry Maguire's paper, as so often, highlighted the strange mismatch between image and text in conveying the same idea through similar metaphors. We need many more studies of this kind. The very word *Vorbild*, and the core assumption of art historical method that art copies art, make us believe that this will happen. The *Life of Theoktiste* with its column bases lying around the landscape signals the literary spolia which indicate what Nilsson calls the rings of composition²⁰ (known more familiarly as Chinese box structure) of that text; Michael Grünbart showed two classic images of visual cutting and pasting: the arch of Constantine in Rome and the Little Metropolis in Athens: in future we need to understand how this kind of palimpsestuous interlithography works.

But we also need more literary studies with the depth of Elizabeth Jeffreys' understanding of Jakovos, which is archaeological in its stratigraphy: at one level the cento, at a deeper level the biblical and classical references within it, and beyond that, self-quotation. Several of us believe that the time has come to try once more to solve the problems of that other cento, several times mentioned at the conference, the *Christos Paschon*,²¹ grounded in the twelfth century by Wolfram Hörandner and Herbert Hunger.²² In that text, as in other narratives which include²³ cited material, as in Odorico's culture of compilation or *sylloge*,²⁴ florilegium material for example in a saint's life,²⁵ what matters is who speaks the 'borrowed' text. (Like others I dislike the term 'borrowed': it is not as if the text were ever returned). Hearing, or visualising,²⁶ the Theotokos voice Medea, Agave, Phaidra must have been chilling for an audience which had studied the Euripidean texts over and over²⁷ at school, especially in a text which reads not just as a cento but also as a tragedy.

So we should all hope that this volume is not a one-off celebration of the best that Vienna could and can offer the literary scholar. I would hope that Hunger's legacy is developed and transformed in true intertextuality as we continue to carry out the tasks that the editors set the contributors: they said that it was the mastery of the tripartite process of *imitatio – aemulatio – variatio* which enabled the Byzantines to achieve their special kind of originality and take their place in the ranks of world literature. After the conference and now the publication of this volume we know a great deal more about how that happened and what else we need to know.

¹⁹ Lions, monkeys, snakes and griffons (LITTLEWOOD, at note 8, above, p. 182). On animals and hybrids and the possibility that Byzantine thought of griffons as an animal like any other see H. and E. MAGUIRE, *Other icons: art and power in Byzantine secular culture*. Princeton – Oxford 2007, 9.

²⁰ 'Ring-composition' is more familiar to us from studies of classical verse than the structural analysis of a prose text like hers, but she makes the point well that 'Chinese box' focuses the attention on the interior, 'ring-composition' on the frame and its texture, noted by others in the volume also, of repeated reference.

²¹ Christos Paschon, ed. A. TUILIER, *La passion du Christ, tragédie*. Introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et index (SC 199). Paris 1969.

²² See M. MULLETT, No drama, no poetry, no fiction, no readership, no literature, in: *A companion to Byzantium*. Ed. L. JAMES. Oxford 2010, 227–239.

²³ Technically in genre terms, see F. CAIRNS, *Generic composition in Greek and Roman poetry*. Edinburgh 1972, 158–176; A. FOWLER, *Kinds of literature: an introduction to the theory of genres and modes*. Oxford 1982, 179–181.

²⁴ P. ODORICO, *La cultura della silloge*. 1. Il cosiddetto enciclopedismo bizantino. 2. Le tavole del sapere di Giovanni Damasceno. *BZ* 83 (1990) 1–21.

²⁵ Nicholas Kataskepenos, *Life of Cyril Phileotes*, ed. E. SARGOLOGOS, *La vie de saint Cyrille le Philéote moine byzantin (Subsidia Hagiographica 39)*. Brussels 1964 and M. MULLETT, *Literary biography and historical genre in the life of Cyril Phileotes by Nicholas Kataskepenos*, in: *Les vies des saints à Byzance. Genre littéraire ou biographie historique? Actes du IIe colloque international philologique Paris, 6–7–8 juin 2002*. Ed. P. ODORICO – P. AGAPITOS (*Dossiers byzantins* 4). Paris 2004, 387–409.

²⁶ On performance issues cautiously P. MARCINIAK, *Greek drama in Byzantine times*. Katowice 2004; K. POLLMANN, *Jesus Christus und Dionysos. Überlegungen zu dem Euripides-Cento Christus Patiens*. *JÖB* 47 (1997) 87–106.

²⁷ R. CRIBIORE, *Gymnastics of the mind: Greek education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*. Princeton 2001, esp. 198–199 on the processes of re-reading the same texts at different stages of schooling.