

## INTRODUCTION I

# *Byzantium: a Bookish World*

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Among the works composed by Photios – the captain of the guard, ambassador and chief imperial secretary who served two terms as patriarch under the emperors Michael III and Basil I – is one known as the *Myriobiblos* (the ‘Myriad Books’) or *Bibliotheca* (the ‘Library’).<sup>1</sup> A huge endeavour, it consisted of around 279 reviews of varying length that summarised the content of a text or group of texts, and provided remarks on the style as well as biographical details of the authors. Assuming knowledge of works that were considered canonical and therefore used as textbooks, Photios explicitly excluded these from discussion. Instead, his reviews represented forays further afield, pointing to the voracious breadth of his interests. Theological writings dominated, as one would expect of an ecclesiastic, but secular works of greater or lesser antiquity, including a number of considerable rarity, were not neglected: alongside reviews of philosophical disquisitions, histories, biographies, novels, and poems there are ones of scientific compendia such as lexica, medical treatises, herbals, and agricultural manuals. The quality of the collections to which Photios had access is evident from the fact that he often constitutes our fullest or indeed only source for an ancient text. In many instances, he consulted multiple versions, making an effort to seek out reliable, old manuscripts. Where he could secure access to only a fragmentary copy of a particular work, or had to abandon reading it before he had finished, he would leave space at the end of his draft review in the hope he could return to the task later. There were occasions, too, when he appears to have produced a preliminary evaluation based solely on others’ excerpts and summaries. In some cases at least, he explicitly acknowledged that he had not yet managed to find or read the text in question.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Greek are the work of the author of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> R. Henry, ed., *Photius. Bibliothèque* (Paris, 1959–91); W. Treadgold, *The Nature of the Bibliotheca of Photios* (Washington, D. C., 1980); N. G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* (London, 1996), 89–111;

To be sure, Photios' is a striking work that offers an unrivalled insight into the books available to one individual as well as the approach he took when reading them. The familiarity and engagement with books to which it attests should be considered an extreme, but nonetheless representative, example of a broader tendency among those within the Byzantine Empire's sphere of influence. Institutional and personal libraries played a significant role in the accumulation of knowledge and information within society. Inventories produced during surveys of property together with other records (such as notes of shelfmarks) provide us with snapshots of the contents of particular manuscript collections at specific moments, while monograms and other marks of ownership allow us to reconstruct these collections' materiality.<sup>3</sup> Outside Constantinople, some 960 and 330 books respectively have so far been associated with the monastic libraries of the Great Lavra on Mount Athos and of St John on Patmos, and some 150 with the private library of Constantine Laskaris in Messenia.<sup>4</sup> When Nikephoros Moschopoulos, the titular metropolitan of Crete, moved to Mistra, he may have decided to take with him as many as a couple of hundred volumes, for he travelled with four horseloads of books.<sup>5</sup> Eustathios Boilas, a retired military commander who had received a land grant in the remote and recently annexed province of Tayk, assembled 80 books, which he then housed in the monastery he founded on his estate, while Gregory Pakourianos donated 30 books to his monastic foundation near Plovdiv in Bulgaria.<sup>6</sup>

These numbers are likely to be the tip of the iceberg: anecdotal evidence indicates that the collections attached to the palace, patriarchate, institutions of higher learning and monasteries in the imperial capital were far larger, although today their holdings cannot be reconstructed with any

C. Mango, 'The Availability of Books in the Byzantine Empire, A.D. 750–850' in W. C. Loerke et al., eds., *Byzantine Books and Bookmen: A Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium* (Washington, D. C., 1975), 39–43.

<sup>3</sup> N. G. Wilson, 'Books and Readers in Byzantium' in Loerke et al., eds., *Byzantine Books*, 4–8; N. G. Wilson, 'The Libraries of the Byzantine World', *GRBS*, 8 (1967), 66–8, and N. G. Wilson, 'Libraries' in E. M. Jeffreys, J. Haldon and R. Cormack, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford, 2008), 823; E. K. Litsas, 'Palaeographical Researches in the Lavra Library on Mount Athos', *Ελληνικά*, 50 (2000), 217–30; F. D'Aiuto, 'Note ai manoscritti del Menologio imperiale', *RSBN*, 32 (2002), 189–214; G. Cavallo, *Lire à Byzance*, P. Odorico and A. Segonds, trans. (Paris, 2006), 3, 86–7. Information on Byzantine libraries is collected together in K. P. Staikos, *The History of the Library in Western Civilisation* (New Castle, DE, 2007), vol. III.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, 'Libraries', 822–4.

<sup>5</sup> I. Levi, 'Cinque lettere inedite di Manuele Moscopulo', *SIFC*, 10 (1902): 57–8.

<sup>6</sup> P. Lemerle, *Cinq études sur le XI<sup>e</sup> siècle byzantin* (Paris, 1977), 25; P. Gautier, 'Le typikon du sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos', *REB*, 42 (1984), 121–2.

degree of accuracy. Describing the library he had refounded at the Chora Monastery, Theodore Metochites claimed he had made it 'a treasury' of 'countless books' of various sorts, including not only books 'of our Wisdom / most Divine, which are greatly useful', but also books 'of the Hellenic wisdom that is beyond the gates, / almost as numerous'.<sup>7</sup> While the declaration that in 1453 there had been 120,000 tomes in Constantinople must be an exaggeration, it reflects the sense of one contemporary collector and dealer that very substantial libraries had been in existence prior to the city's sack by the Ottomans.<sup>8</sup> Some 60,000 manuscripts in Greek alone have survived down to our day, to which should be added those in Armenian, Arabic, Syriac, Georgian, Latin, and other languages current in the empire.<sup>9</sup>

Although particular books might be kept under lock and key, their perusal strictly forbidden, most were not merely collected and deposited, but also consumed. One visitor described a small space at the entrance to the imperial palace in such a way as to suggest that manuscripts were considered part of the ordinary contents of the complex. The space, which was a kind of *loggia*, roofed but open on the sides to the elements, was located on the ground floor and was easily accessible. It was furnished with stone tables and benches and had 'many books and ancient writings and histories and, next to them, gaming boards – for the emperor's dwelling is always well supplied'. The founding abbot of the Stoudios monastery, Theodore, similarly indicated in the rule for his community that reading was a normal occupation: 'on days when we perform no physical labour the librarian bangs a gong once, the brothers gather at the place where books are kept and each takes one, reading it until late'.<sup>10</sup> In addition to being available for consultation like this on site, volumes could also circulate, sometimes widely. They might be lost as a result of private theft, shipwreck, or even the plundering activities of a local mob or – as was the case with the library of the metropolitan of Athens, Michael Choniates – a foreign army. To discourage this, notices of ownership placed in books

<sup>7</sup> I. Polemis, ed., *Theodori Metochitae carmina* (Turnhout, 2015), 44–6.1106–74; translation adapted from J. M. Featherstone, 'Metochites's Poems and the Chora' in H. A. Klein et al., eds., *The Kariye Camii Reconsidered* (Istanbul, 2011), 221, 225–6.

<sup>8</sup> A. Pertusi, 'Le epistole storiche di Lauro Quirini sulla caduta di Costantinopoli' in K. Krautter et al., eds., *Lauro Quirini umanista* (Florence, 1977), 182–3.

<sup>9</sup> M. Richard and R. Olivier, eds., *Répertoire des bibliothèques et des catalogues de manuscrits grecs* (Turnhout, 1995); J. Waring, 'Byzantine Book Culture' in L. James, ed., *A Companion to Byzantium* (Chichester, 2010), 276.

<sup>10</sup> M.-A. Pérez, ed., *Andanças é viajes de Pero Tafur* (Seville, 2009), 100; PG 99, 1713; Wilson, 'Byzantine World', 54, 63.

were frequently accompanied by curses against those contemplating theft or vandalism, while the depredations that still occurred were followed by attempts to seek redress and recover the property.<sup>11</sup> More often, however, collections were disseminated because people actively decided to share the material in their possession with others. The monastery of Patmos, for example, made a list of loans to institutions (fifteen items) as well as to individual monks and laypeople (nineteen items) located across a radius of several hundred miles.<sup>12</sup>

This introductory chapter explores the relationship those who lived within the Byzantine Empire – or came within its ambit – had with books and other objects inscribed with the written word. Tempering the evidence from prescriptive sources with that gleaned from surviving examples of practice, it seeks to identify some of the defining characteristics of textual production, collection, circulation, and, above all, consumption. In addition to reconstructing the ways in which individuals could engage with and experience the process of reading, it considers the institutional framework that rendered possible the formation of a readership in the first place. And it draws attention to the extent and composition of that readership. As we shall see, the acquisition of the skill of literacy remained the prerogative of a minority whose boundaries were defined by gender, class and location. This does not mean, however, that we should ignore the tremendous potency of literate culture in determining forms of solidarity that cut across social stratification. Interactions of a religious and political nature habitually emphasised the inclusionary role of texts, whose message was rendered accessible to the illiterate and transmitted to them through visual representation and oral performance.

### How Should One Read?

Books, of course, could cause disappointment and frustration. The teacher John Tzetzēs, who had a rather high opinion of his own interpretative capabilities, frequently disagreed with the views expressed in the scholia that accompanied the works he was studying, and in the margins scribbled

<sup>11</sup> F. Kolovou, ed., *Michaelis Choniatae epistulae* (Berlin, 2001), 156, 166, 168, 190, 196, 206; J.-F. Boissonade, ed., *Anecdota nova* (Paris, 1844), 3; M. Grünbart, 'Byzantium: a Bibliophile Society?', *Basilissa*, 1 (2004), 120.

<sup>12</sup> C. Astruc, 'Les listes des prêts figurants au verso de l'inventaire du trésor et de la bibliothèque de Patmos dressé en septembre 1200', *TM*, 12 (1994), 495–9; J. Waring, 'Literacies of Lists: Reading Byzantine Monastic Inventories' in C. Holmes and J. Waring, eds., *Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission in Byzantium and Beyond* (Leiden, 2002), 265–86.

insults against the ‘ignorant buffoons’ who had added ‘dross’ to what was valuable; at times, he even railed against the content of the works themselves.<sup>13</sup> One late medieval reader of a late antique illustrated manuscript of a herbal struggled to make out the old-fashioned majuscule script employed in the labels of the plants and decided for ease of reference to write the names again at the tops of pages in his own hand. Another took a history to task for having promised a narrative written in simple prose yet gone on to use so convoluted a style it gave the reader vertigo and hindered comprehension.<sup>14</sup> An even more acute cry of despair was penned by the mathematician John Chortasmenos next to a specific number problem in a copy of Diophantus’ *Arithmetica*: ‘Diophantus, may your soul rot in Hell because of the difficulty of the other theorems of yours, and in particular of the present theorem!’. We should feel some measure of sympathy, for the passage that elicited this exclamation was almost certainly the very one from which is derived the theorem, formulated by Pierre de Fermat in 1637 but not proven until 1994 by Andrew Wiles, that is considered to represent the most difficult mathematical problem of all, attracting the largest number of unsuccessful proofs.<sup>15</sup>

Mostly, however, books were seen as a source of gratification. If epistolographic exchanges allowed people in different locations to stay in contact with one another, books were the means by which an even more pronounced form of separation, caused by time, could be surmounted. They made it possible to commune not only with the living, but also with those long dead.<sup>16</sup> Bishop Basil the Lesser related that in reading the homilies of Gregory of Nazianzos he felt it was as if he were in the presence of the man himself and could benefit from his personal companionship.<sup>17</sup> The courtier Michael Psellos expressed his reaction to Gregory’s work in even less moderate language, describing himself as having undergone a process of seduction after which he was overcome by an ecstasy similar to the

<sup>13</sup> M. J. Luzzato, *Tzetzēs lettore di Tucidide: note autografe al codice Heidelberg Palatino Greco 252* (Bari, 1999), 18–20, 49–53; W. B. Stanford, ‘Tzetzēs’ Farewell to Thucydides’, *Greece & Rome*, 11 (1941), 40–1; A. Kaldellis, *Byzantine Readings of Ancient History: Texts in Translation, with Introductions and Notes* (London, 2015), 65–79.

<sup>14</sup> J.-L. van Dieten, ed., *Nicetae Choniatae Historia* (Berlin, 1975), 1: xxxii.

<sup>15</sup> Wilson, *Scholars*, 233; P. Tannery, ‘Les manuscrits de Diophante à l’Escorial’, *NAMSL*, 1 (1891), 393; J. Herrin, ‘Mathematical Mysteries in Byzantium: the Transmission of Fermat’s Last Theorem’, *Dialogos*, 6 (1999), 22–44, reprinted with some modifications in J. Herrin, *Margins and Metropolis: Authority across the Byzantine Empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2013), 312–34; but see J. Acerbi, ‘Why Chortasmenos Sent Diophantus to the Devil’, *BMGS*, 53 (2013), 379–89.

<sup>16</sup> E. Boulgares and T. Mandakase, eds., *Ἰωσήφ μοναχοῦ τοῦ Βρυεννίου τὰ παραλειπόμενα* (Leipzig, 1784), 179; Cavallo, *Lire*, 53–4.

<sup>17</sup> R. Cantarella, ‘Basilio minimo II. Scolii inediti con introduzione et note’, *BZ*, 26 (1926), 3–4.

transports produced during an act of love-making to which one has willingly surrendered oneself: 'I am taken over, in an inexpressible way, by the beauty and grace of his [Gregory's] eloquence . . . I feel vanquished by the rosaries of the burgeoning terms and abase myself to the sensations they create in me . . . I embrace and kiss the one who has ravished me in this way.'<sup>18</sup> Again and again, individuals commenting on the effect the writings of a particular author had scribbled expressions of delight in the margins, such as: 'Oh! Libanius, what a pleasure to read you!'<sup>19</sup>

Reading was considered capable of having an effect resembling that of the coolness of water or the sweetness of honey on a parched or sick palate.<sup>20</sup> But for it to comfort and sustain in this way, the act needed to be carried out in an appropriate fashion. On the most basic level, readers were enjoined to concentrate fully on the text in front of them, denying themselves the diversion of glancing up or speaking to others while reading.<sup>21</sup> A lazy person, it was explained, is easily distracted and turns his gaze 'away from the book and fixes it on the ceiling' or, flicking through 'to see how much is left for him to finish', counts the pages and – assessing the amplex of the images and other decoration, and the size of the writing – even calculates the lines. A fellow of this sort, who is bored and given to yawning, believes in his heart of hearts that the best use for a volume is as a pillow on which he can lay his head as he nods off; consequently, the profit he draws from texts is less than that of someone who exercises proper self-discipline.<sup>22</sup> But a more subtle though equally detrimental kind of behaviour was that of approaching texts with an eye to style over substance.<sup>23</sup> Those who do not know how to read in order to gain serious knowledge 'of places, nations, and actions' and thus attain familiarity with the 'treasures of learned writings of all types' are to be pitied as having been duped by the educational methods of charlatans who, though they pretend to impart learning, fail to do so and instead

<sup>18</sup> A. Mayer, 'Psellos' Rede über den rhetorischen Charakter des Gregorios von Nazianz', *BZ*, 20 (1911), 49.

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, *Scholars*, 232–3.

<sup>20</sup> F. J. G. La Porte-du Theil, 'Notices et extraits d'un volume de la Bibliothèque nationale, côté MCCIX parmi les manuscrits grecs, et contenant les opuscules et les lettres anecdotes de Théodore l'Hirtacénien', *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale et autres bibliothèques*, 6 (1800), 42; J. Darrouzès, ed., *Épistoliers byzantins du xe siècle* (Paris, 1960), 150; E. Kurtz and F. Drexel, eds., *Michaelis Pselli Scripta Minora* (Milan, 1941), vol. II, 135; L. M. Leone, ed., *Joannis Tzetzae Epistulae* (Leipzig, 1972), 34; Cavallo, *Lire*, 52–4.

<sup>21</sup> G. Gorce, ed., *Vie de Sainte Mélanie* (Paris, 1962), 178, 180, 188; A. Giardina, 'Melania, la santa' in A. Frachetti, ed., *Roma al femminile* (Rome, 1994), 277–83; Cavallo, *Lire*, 12.

<sup>22</sup> *PG* 79, 1160B; Cavallo, *Lire*, 103. <sup>23</sup> Mayer, 'Psellos' Rede', 49.

peddle figures and tropes in such a way as to lose their students in 'a tortuous labyrinth' of rhetoric.<sup>24</sup>

True readers, resisting the gratuitous immersion in linguistic pyrotechnics that accompanies 'reading for its own sake', should turn to books in order to sharpen and train the intellect, and attain the ability not only to think perceptively and profoundly but also to express their thoughts adequately and communicate them clearly and effectively to others.<sup>25</sup> To this end, they needed to undertake a combination of an intensive (*epimeles*) reading – what we would call close reading – of each text during which they paid careful attention to the glosses and other apparatus that accompanied it, with an extensive (*entribes*) reading of a range of texts through which they covered a large amount of ground in order to 'learn a lot'.<sup>26</sup> The pages of manuscripts allow us to trace how actual individuals approached this double task. Arethas, bishop of Caesarea, crammed the margins of his copy of Aristotle's *Organon* with jottings of various types, while Tzetzes added a copious series of notes in his copy of the *History of the Peloponnesian War* of Thucydides, addressing questions of orthography, grammar, syntax, as well as clarifying chronology and commenting on ancient culture and customs.<sup>27</sup> Some readers, of course, went beyond mere annotation, copying out excerpts or indeed whole works.<sup>28</sup> Manuscripts written in a rapid, idiosyncratic hand with abundant abbreviations, and combining a main text with a heavy apparatus of notes, represent the working copies of scholars who intended to use them as part of a programme of private study, or as preparation for teaching. Sometimes readers worked in groups and divided the labour between them. Seventeen different hands, for example, contributed to the copying and interpretation of a miscellany of astronomical, geographical, and mathematical texts.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> P. L. M. Leone, ed., *Ioannis Tzetzæ Historiae* (Naples, 1968), 372.

<sup>25</sup> M. D. Spadaro, ed., *Kekaumenos. Raccomandazioni e consigli di un galantuomo* (Alessandria, 1998), 190, 198; C. M. Mazzucchi, 'Ambrosianus C 222 inf. (Graecus 886): Il codice e il suo autore', *Aevum*, 78 (2004), 416–17.

<sup>26</sup> Cavallo, *Lire*, 7, 18; B. Wassiliewsky and V. Jernstedt, eds., *Cecaumeni Strategicon et incerti scriptoris de officiis regis libellus* (St Petersburg, 1896), 158–9.

<sup>27</sup> P. Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantin. Notes et remarques sur enseignement et culture à Byzance des origines au xe siècle* (Paris, 1971), 204–37; Luzzato, *Tzetztes*, 21–139.

<sup>28</sup> A. Markopoulos, 'La critique des textes au xe siècle. Le témoignage du Professeur anonyme', *JÖB*, 32 (1982), 31–7; G. Cortassa, 'Un filologo di Bisanzio e il suo committente: la lettera 88 dell'Anonimo di Londra', *Medioevo greco*, 1 (2001), 97–138.

<sup>29</sup> G. Cavallo, 'Sodalizi eruditi e pratiche di scrittura a Bisanzio' in J. Hamesse, ed., *Bilan et perspectives des études médiévales (1993–1998)* (Turnhout, 2004), 645–65; D. Bianconi, 'Eracle e Iolao: aspetti della collaborazione tra copisti nell'età dei Paleologi', *BZ*, 97 (2004), 521–56; D. Bianconi, 'Libri e mani. Sulla formazione di alcune miscellanee dell'età dei Paleologi', *Signo e testo*, 2 (2004), 311–63; P. Canart, 'Quelques exemples de division du travail chez les copistes byzantins' in P. Hoffmann,

More active intervention on the part of the readers resulted in editions aiming to restore or improve upon an original through the collation of multiple sources; or paraphrases or adaptations; or even wholly new works.<sup>30</sup>

In the case of the philosopher George Gemistos Plethon, it is possible to trace the complete range of these activities, from his marginal notes in manuscripts, to his excerpts and summaries of material, to his editions and commentaries, and, finally, his own original compositions, some of which, such as the *Book of Laus*, were considerable in extent. A detailed picture can be reconstructed not only of Plethon's own working method, but also of the extent of its influence on students of his such as Laonikos Chalkokondyles.<sup>31</sup> In most instances, however, the evidence is more indirect. Much of what is known about the reading habits of Byzantines comes from their output as authors who, in discussing, quoting or even tacitly including in their own writings elements from works that had in some way affected their cast of thought or style, reveal the existence of sometimes very elaborate intertextual relationships.<sup>32</sup> While the abbess Kassia has – unlike her contemporary, Photios – left us no autobiographical notes of her readings, the allusions in her poems suggest knowledge of a wide range of texts.<sup>33</sup>

ed., *Recherches de codicologie comparée. La composition du codex au moyen âge en orient et en occident* (Paris, 1998), 49–67; on the relationship between scholars who copied out texts for personal use and professional scribes, Wilson, 'Books and Readers', 9–11 and J. Irigoien, 'Centres de copie et bibliothèques' in Loerke et al., eds., *Byzantine Books*, 17–27; on scholarly collaboration, S. Steckel, N. Gaul and M. Grünbart, eds., *Networks of Learning: Perspectives on Scholars in Byzantine East and Latin West, c. 1000–1200* (Zurich, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> P. Maas, 'Sorti della letteratura antica a Bisanzio' in G. Pasquali, ed., *Storia della tradizione e critica del testo* (Florence, 1962), 490–1; Wilson, 'Books and Readers', 11–14.

<sup>31</sup> A. Diller, 'The Autographs of Georgius Gemistus Plethon', *Scriptorium*, 10 (1956), 27–8; D. Dedes, 'Die Handschriften und das Werk des Georgios Gemistos (Plethon): Forschungen und Funde in Venedig', *Ελληνικά*, 33 (1981), 66–83; F. Pagani, 'Un nuovo testimone della recensione pletoniana al testo di Platone: il Marc. Gr. 188 (K)', *Res publica literarum*, 29 (2006), 5–125; F. Pagani, 'Damnata verba: censure di Pletone in alcuni codici platonici', *BZ*, 10 (2009), 167–202; for a general survey of Plethon's writings and their circumstances of composition, see C. M. Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes* (Oxford, 1986). For Chalkokondyles, see A. Kaldellis, *A New Herodotus: Laonikos Chalkokondyles on the Ottoman Empire, the Fall of Byzantium, and the Emergence of the West* (Washington, D. C., 2014), 45–8, 259–62.

<sup>32</sup> Cavallo, *Lire*, 3, 133. For example, for Iakovos the Monk's assembly of quotations and other compositional practices, see C. Laga, 'Entering the Library of Jacobus Monachus. The Exemplar of Jacobus' Quotations from the Commentary on the Song of Songs by Gregory of Nyssa' in K. Demoen and J. Vereecken, eds., *La spiritualité de l'univers byzantin dans le verbe et l'image* (Turnhout, 1997), 151–61, and E. M. Jeffreys, 'The Sevastokratorissa Eirene as a Literary Patroness: the Monk Iakovos', *JÖB*, 32 (1982), 63–71.

<sup>33</sup> E. V. Maltese, 'Lettura di Cassia' in F. de Martino, ed., *Rose di Pieria* (Bari, 1991), 339–61; E. V. Maltese, 'Una contemporanea di Fozio, Cassia: osservazioni sui versi profani' in M. Salvador, ed., *La poesia tardoantica e medievale* (Alessandria, 2001), 71–83.

Some readers who turned their hand to writing can be shown to have conceived of their intellectual projects on a notably grand scale. They arranged for copies of the great canonical works, which they claimed had acted as their inspiration, to be purchased and rebranded or, even better, to be produced from scratch according to a set design with regard to format and layout.<sup>34</sup> They also arranged for their own compositions to be issued according to the same specifications, doubtless hoping that this uniformity in outward garb would mean that some of the credentials of more august writings would rub off, aiding the transmission of what was contemporary alongside what was classic. Such was the case with Theodore Metochites, who entrusted the entire contents of his library, including not only the copies of others' works he had assembled but also his own original writings, to a favourite student, Nikephoros Gregoras, whom he appointed as his literary executor.<sup>35</sup> Explaining that the careful curating of the collection as a whole had as its underlying objective the preservation of its creator's compositions, Metochites indicated that these 'offspring' of his 'soul' needed most particularly to survive so that they could constitute his 'monument' for subsequent 'generations of mortals', providing him posthumously with 'immortal glory' and 'renown'. He urged the younger man to dedicate himself to the preservation of his teacher's finished works and drafts from 'all harm' so as to ensure that they stood the greatest chance of remaining intact until 'the end of time'.<sup>36</sup>

### Acquiring Literacy

To become educated was to go 'dancing with rhetoricians in the gardens of the Muses'.<sup>37</sup> Instructors at all levels acted as cultural guardians and

<sup>34</sup> J. Irigoin, 'Centres de copie', 19–22.

<sup>35</sup> To be fair, it is not clear how much was ordered by Metochites himself, and how much was decided upon by his pupil and friend Gregoras on his behalf. See I. Ševčenko and M. Featherstone, 'Two Poems by Theodore Metochites', *GOTR*, 26 (1981), 28; E. Bianconi, 'La biblioteca di Cora tra Massimo Planude e Niceforo Gregora: una questione di mani', *Segno e testo*, 3 (2005): 41–430; I. Ševčenko, 'Some Autographs of Nicephorus Gregoras', *ZRVI*, 8 (1964), 435–50; I. Pérez Martín, 'El scriptorium de Cora: un modelo de acercamiento a los centros de copia bizantinos' in P. Bádenas et al., eds., *Ἐπίγειος οὐρανός. El cielo en la tierra. Estudios sobre el monasterio bizantino* (Madrid, 1997), 203–23; C. Förstel, 'Metochites and his Books Between the Chora and the Renaissance' in Klein et al., eds., *The Kariye Camii Reconsidered*, 241–66. For the material form of Byzantine books and aspects of their production: H. Hunger, *Schreiben und Lesen in Byzanz: Die byzantinische Buchkultur* (Munich, 1989), 23–124.

<sup>36</sup> Polemis, *Theodori Metochitae carmina*, 95–7.285–361; translation adapted from Featherstone, 'Metochites's Poems', 221–2, 235–6.

<sup>37</sup> G. T. Dennis, ed., *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus: Text, Translation and Notes* (Washington, D. C., 1977), 37–9.

facilitators. 'I am prepared to answer all your questions', Psellos told his class, 'and I have opened doors to the sciences and all the arts'.<sup>38</sup> Under professional guidance, students would be exposed to a variety of texts. During these encounters, they could not but become aware of the weight of tradition. It was a humbling experience, but not necessarily one meant to discourage them to the extent that they would give up on the possibility of developing a voice of their own. Though Manuel Palaiologos acknowledged 'if it could be made a law that because there are superior authors the inferior authors should remain silent, why then there should not be one person among the present generation who would dare open his mouth in view of the clear pre-eminence of the ancients', he nonetheless went on to claim that such muteness would in fact 'be a supremely bad thing' (*kakiston*).<sup>39</sup> Of course, students were to delve deep into vocabulary and syntax in order to understand the writings they had inherited from the past; but, beyond that, they were to seek out models that they could then imitate not mechanically, but for a purpose. Ultimately, their aim was to achieve a fluent familiarity with literary antecedents that would enrich their own command of language, allowing them to deploy a range of registers: from the refined Atticism or the more stolid *koine* gleaned from books, to the pungent colloquialisms of their own times – depending upon the context and desired effect. This meant communicating by using an allusive style while at the same time, to the best of their capacity, making it new.<sup>40</sup>

When their offspring were sufficiently grown, good parents were supposed to discourage them from the behaviour associated with toddlers – described as chanting nursery rhymes in a singsong voice and running about naked – and send them to 'pedagogues' or 'if you prefer, teachers'.<sup>41</sup> While an exceptionally gifted child might be entrusted to a schoolmaster at the tender age of five, and prefer studying over playing, most would begin when they were between six and eight years old. For those whose families were able to afford it, personal tuition was available; at the other end of the

<sup>38</sup> M. J. Kariaklis, 'Student Life in Eleventh-Century Constantinople', *Byzantina*, 7 (1975), 383.

<sup>39</sup> K. N. Sathas, ed., *Μεσαιωνική βιβλιοθήκη* (Venice, 1872–94), vol. v, 60; Dennis, *Letters of Manuel II*, 149.

<sup>40</sup> For these issues, see H. Hunger, 'On the Imitation (Mimesis) of Antiquity in Byzantine Literature', *DOP*, 23–4 (1969–70), 17–38; M. E. Mullett and R. Scott, eds., *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition* (Birmingham, 1981); A. R. Littlewood, ed., *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music* (Oxford, 1995).

<sup>41</sup> F. Halkin, ed., 'La vie de saint Nicéphore fondateur de Médikion en Bithynie (†813)', *AB*, 78 (1960), 406; A. Moffat, 'Schooling in the Iconoclast Centuries' in A. Bryer and J. Herrin, eds., *Iconoclasm* (Birmingham, 1977), 89.

spectrum, impecunious orphans might receive instruction from charitable institutions. The majority, however, attended elementary schools as fee-paying pupils. Privately run and directed by a *grammatistes*, these taught the introductory skills of literacy. Beginning with the recitation of the name of all the letters in alphabetical order, pupils would first learn to recognise the shape of each letter, and then to pronounce and copy it out on a wooden tablet. From there, they would progress to syllables, words, and eventually whole phrases.<sup>42</sup>

After this stage, which typically took four to six years, lasting until the age of ten or twelve, pupils might continue with a *grammatikos* who taught the *enkyklios paideia* or liberal arts with a focus on grammar. Here, lessons took the form of line-by-line reading and commentary (*epimerismoi*), supplemented by word-puzzles with deliberate errors which the student had to correct, and by the drafting of short analytical notes (*schediographia*).<sup>43</sup> In some schools, where both advanced elementary and intermediate education were carried out under the same roof, the possibility existed for the study under the *grammatikos* of rhetoric in the form of the practice of ‘preliminary exercises’ (*progymnasmata*) on a variety of themes that encouraged pupils to use their knowledge and imagination to tell stories, express opinions, and moralise (e.g. ‘The history of Atlantis’; ‘What words might Pasiphaë have said when in love with the bull’; ‘What words might Hades have said upon witnessing Lazarus rise from the dead after four days’; ‘Doing good always gives rise to gratitude’). Alternatively, teenagers might come under the more expert instruction of a *rhetor* in order to learn composition and oratory.<sup>44</sup>

Some schoolteachers had the expertise to round off their instruction by inducting their more advanced pupils into the basics of philosophy, mathematics and the sciences. For the most part, however, these disciplines were pursued at centres of higher learning and were the preserve of

<sup>42</sup> U. Criscuolo, ed., *Michele Psello. Autobiografia: encomio per la madre* (Naples, 1989), 95; E. V. Maltese, *École et enseignement à Byzance* (Paris, 1987), 21, 28–9; D. R. Reinsch and A. Kambylis, eds., *Annae Comnenae Alexias* (Berlin, 2001), vol. 1, 482–5; T. S. Miller, *The Orphans of Byzantium: Child Welfare in the Christian Empire* (Washington, D. C., 2003), 209–46; A. Markopoulos, ‘De la structure de l’école byzantine: Le maître, les livres et le processus éducatif’ in B. Mondrain, ed., *Lire et écrire à Byzance* (Paris, 2006), 85–96; A. Markopoulos, ‘L’épistolaire du “professeur anonyme” de Londres: Contribution prosopographique’, *Αφιέρωμα στον Νίκο Σβορώνο* (Rethymno, 1986), vol. 1, 139–44.

<sup>43</sup> Maltese, *École*, 28–9.

<sup>44</sup> C. Roueché, ‘The Rhetoric of Kekaumenos’ in E. M. Jeffreys, ed., *Rhetoric in Byzantium* (Oxford, 2001), 23–37; for the tradition, see R. J. Penella, ‘The Progymnasmata and Progymnastic Theory in Imperial Education’ in W. M. Bloomer, ed., *A Companion to Ancient Education* (Malden, MA, 2015), 160–71.

students who had already attained their late teens or were in their early twenties.<sup>45</sup> The Patriarchal School, while providing grounding in influential ancient authors, mainly focused on the forms of exegesis and religious reasoning considered to have superseded pagan learning.<sup>46</sup> The Imperial School of Philosophy – organised around charismatic members of the faculty who disputed with one another and lectured until the members of the audience ‘stopped taking notes and were so overwhelmed with fatigue they could not concentrate’ – was characterised by a ferocious climate of intellectual competition that encouraged individual professors to issue statements to their students in which they disparaged the instruction provided by opponents and insisted on the superiority of their own classes: ‘Should there have been anyone able to give a better explanation than I of any of the things I have discussed, you might have directed yourselves to him. But, until such an individual should present himself, you are to pay attention to my teaching!’<sup>47</sup> Despite a partial reliance on debate as a means of instruction, the Imperial School of Law offered rather more sober training in jurisprudence and legal practice.<sup>48</sup>

The emergence of such institutions notwithstanding, we should imagine higher education for the most part not as conforming to a rigid framework, but rather as a more fluid set-up, in which those avid for learning were attracted by the reputation of scholars, in turn creating a demand for classes. Because there was room for experimentation with the curriculum and also because some professors offered courses in more than one speciality, disciplinary boundaries often became blurred. Nor, for that matter, should every person who was described as a ‘teacher’ (*didaskalos*) be assumed to have been a professor, since individuals granted a remit to

<sup>45</sup> Lemerle, *Premier humanisme*, 261–6; P. Speck, *Die kaiserliche Universität von Konstantinopel* (Munich, 1974); for the issue of the official nature and continuity of these arrangements, see A. Markopoulos, ‘Education’, in Jeffreys, Haldon and Cormack, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, 790–1.

<sup>46</sup> R. Browning, ‘The Patriarchal School at Constantinople in the Twelfth Century’, *Byzantion*, 32 (1962), 167–202.

<sup>47</sup> P. Gautier, ed., *Michaelis Pselli Theologica* (Leipzig, 1989), vol. 1, 73; Lemerle, *Cinq études*, 193–248; W. Wolska-Conus, ‘Les écoles de Psellos et de Xiphilin sous Constantin IX Monomaque’, *TM*, 6 (1976), 223–43; E. V. Maltese, ‘Michele Psello commentatore di Gregorio di Nazianzo: note per una lettura dei Theologica’, *Syndesmos. Studi in onore di Rosario Anastasi* (Catania, 1994), 289–309.

<sup>48</sup> W. Wolska-Conus, ‘L’école de droit et l’enseignement du droit à Byzance au xie siècle: Xiphilin et Psellos’, *TM*, 7 (1979), 1–103.

interpret and preach religious dogma, as well as to perform specific pastoral duties, were sometimes also designated in this fashion.<sup>49</sup>

### Educational Asymmetries

Describing the instructional programme at the School of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, the deacon Nicholas Mesarites noted that teachers referring to ‘books spread open’ explained the ‘preparatory steps’ to beginners who could not themselves yet read. As these beginners acquired skill in reading, he added, they would pore over their lessons continuously and pace ‘up and down through the porticoed enclosure’ in order to memorise them; having succeeded, they would then carry ‘their papers under their arms’ and recite ‘what is written in them’. Those who were more advanced studied the rudiments of composition by attempting to rehearse ‘problems completely from the beginning’. The most qualified of all employed the full resources of their training in order to weave with ease ‘webs of phrases’.<sup>50</sup>

The question, however, was not just that of progressing through the curriculum, but also of being granted entry to it in the first place. Access did not depend on ability, but was unevenly distributed according to an individual’s location, social background, and, above all, gender. Girls were utterly excluded from the classroom. This bias was underscored in the twelfth century by Tzetzes’ scathing attack on a woman who, eager to accede to the study of grammar, was trying her hand at a series of literary exercises (‘Instead of weaving you take up a tome, / A quill instead of a shuttle!’). The poet declared that the fairer sex should realise its feebler capacities could not cope with the challenges posed by books and restrict itself to the role traditionally assigned to it of homemaker and childbearer:

O, woman!  
 What do you think you are up to? I am amazed at these books!  
 You should return to your distaff and to the drawing of thread!  
 Go ply the spindle! Knit together your warps and wefts!  
 Letters and learning are appropriate to men.

And he concluded by condescendingly quoting a tag, which he explained, was taken from no less an authority than one of the main representatives of the male literary canon: “*It is for man, and woman should not want it.*”

<sup>49</sup> See P. Gautier, ‘L’édit d’Alexis Ier Comnène sur la réforme du clergé’, *REB* 31, (1973), 172–3.

<sup>50</sup> G. Downey, ‘Nikolaos Mesarites: Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople’, *TAPhS*, 6 (1957), 899.

/ Speaking thus the good Aeschylus persuades you.' His point was that women should not have the temerity to wish to learn to read, but rather should unquestioningly accept the authority of men who had the twin prerogative of interpreting the classics and applying their precepts.<sup>51</sup>

The occasional female did not surrender to such admonishments and acquired an education in defiance of society's behavioural norms. Examples included Tzetzes' own contemporaries Anna Komnene and Eirene the *Sebastokratorissa*: the one was Emperor John II's elder sister, who penned the *Alexiad*, a notable historical work produced within the empire, and the other was his sister-in-law, who studied grammar and rhetoric, and whose knowledge of epic, history, oratory and other genres made her a leading intellectual light.<sup>52</sup> But these princesses were very much the exception. The author of Komnene's funeral elegy noted that she had been allowed to have tutors and study rhetoric, philosophy and all the sciences, including medicine; but he added that, despite her passion for reading from a young age, she had been granted access to such instruction only after a long period, during which – because her parents were worried about the danger of exposing her to books – she had had to read the texts she was attracted to secretly, like a young maiden looking 'with furtive eyes' through a keyhole at the man intended to be betrothed to her.<sup>53</sup> The metaphor reflects the fact aristocratic girls were groomed as future wives and, if they were permitted to learn letters at all, generally were taught in the confines of their homes by their mothers, who themselves could pass on only the rudiments.

Despite having had a predisposition for learning, the mother and daughter of one the most prominent Byzantine intellectuals, Psellos, were limited to the acquisition of sufficient letters to read the psalter and parse a few other simple religious texts. The elder, Theodote, was said to have suffered 'anguish' because as a woman she could not study freely: trained in the 'working of the loom', she had to acquire the 'basic principles of letters' on her own and 'in secret'. Brought up more liberally, the younger,

<sup>51</sup> S. G. Mercati, 'Giambi di Giovanni Tzetzes contro una donna schedografa' in A. Acconcia Longo, ed., *Collectanea Byzantina* (Bari, 1970), vol. 1, 555–6.

<sup>52</sup> Komnene, *Alexias*, ed. Reinsch and Kambylis, vol. 1, 5–6; Choniates, *Historia*, ed. van Dieten, vol. 1, 10; S. P. Lampros, 'Ο μαρκιανός κωδιδίξ 524', *NE*, 8 (1911), 24–5; Jeffreys, 'Sevastokratorissa Eirene'; D. R. Reinsch, 'Women's Literature in Byzantium? The Case of Anna Komnene' in T. Gouma-Peterson, ed., *Anna Komnene and Her Times* (New York, NY, 2000), 83–105, and J. C. Anderson, 'Anna Komnene, Learned Women and the Book in Byzantine Art' in *ibid.*, 125–56; E. V. Maltese, 'Donne e letteratura a Bisanzio: per una storia della cultura femminile' in Francesco de Martino, ed., *Rose di Pieria* (Bari, 1991), 362–93.

<sup>53</sup> J. Darrouzès, ed., *George et Dèmètrios Tornikès. Lettres et discours* (Paris, 1970), 243–5.

Styliane, was allowed to divide her days between practising ‘the careful labours of the loom’ and learning ‘her letters’ with teachers, but even so her father’s plans for her do not appear to have included the continuation of her lessons after she had reached the marriageable age of puberty.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the almost total illiteracy of women appears to have been the norm across all social strata: an analysis of women who wrote their names in contrast to those who made their mark in an indicative sample of documents relating to urban centres in Asia Minor shows that the latter represented 84 per cent in the thirteenth and 98 per cent in the fourteenth centuries.<sup>55</sup>

A large proportion of Byzantine boys, especially in the countryside, were also unschooled. Of the different educational establishments available within the empire, the most advanced were found uniquely in the imperial capital, while even elementary schools rarely existed outside major provincial cities and towns. There were almost no village schools. These inequalities in the distribution of opportunities for schooling resulted in the creation of a vast gulf between those men who knew how to read and write fluently enough to be able to compose in a suitably elevated style texts of an elaborately technical nature, and those who were merely able to draw their names in laborious fashion. Most did not even possess the latter skill. It is true that, according to a sample of documents mainly involving those belonging to the monastic profession, illiteracy in Macedonia decreased between the tenth and the fifteenth centuries from 36 per cent to 0 per cent. But a more mixed sample of ecclesiastics and laymen from Asia Minor indicates that during the thirteenth century 38 per cent in Smyrna and 77 per cent in Mantaia still could not sign their names.<sup>56</sup> When men were called upon to act as witnesses, clerics, monks, local landed gentry, soldiers and burghers relatively often penned their own signature, while craftsmen and especially peasants were almost never able to do so.<sup>57</sup>

Portraits of emperors, dignitaries, and other males of substantial social status, fairly often showed their subjects holding books, scrolls or other

<sup>54</sup> Psellos, *Autobiografia*, ed. Crisuolo, 89–90; Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική*, vol. v, 65–6.

<sup>55</sup> A. E. Laiou, ‘The Role of Women in Byzantine Society’, *JÖB*, 31 (1981), 253–7.

<sup>56</sup> N. Oikonomides, ‘Mount Athos: Levels of Literacy’, *DOP*, 42 (1988), 167–78; N. Oikonomides, ‘Literacy in Thirteenth-century Byzantium: an Example from Western Asia Minor’ in J. S. Langdon et al., eds., *Τὸ ἑλληνικόν. Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis Jr.* (New Rochelle, NY 1993), 253–65.

<sup>57</sup> J. Bompaire, ed., *Actes de Xéropotamou: édition diplomatique* (Paris, 1964), 79; F. Miklosich and J. Müller, eds., *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana* (Vienna, 1860–90), vol. iv, 225 and 233–5; R. Browning, ‘Literacy in the Byzantine World’, *BMGS*, 4 (1978), 50; Oikonomides, ‘Literacy in Thirteenth-century Byzantium’, 262; M. J. Jeffreys, ‘Literacy’, in Jeffreys, Haldon and Cormack, *Oxford Handbook*, 796–802.

texts. In the double frontispiece accompanying one theological work, the *Dogmatic Panoply*, Alexios I Komnenos, his hands covered by a liturgical cloth, was painted receiving a scroll containing Christian doctrine from the Church Fathers, and then offering up the exegetical text he commissioned to Christ, who blesses both him and it (Fig. 1.1); similarly, in the frontispiece to his *History* the chancellor Niketas Choniates was drawn scribbling away furiously, his hat pushed back from his brow.<sup>58</sup> By contrast, the women shown perusing or creating texts tended to be outsiders and deviants, such as barbarian women of various stripes, including the queens not only of the Persians and Indians, but also of the mythical Amazons, who were portrayed in a copy of the *Romance of Alexander* receiving and sending letters (Figs 1.2–1.3).<sup>59</sup> While a monumental palatine mosaic in Constantinople – of the emperor Basil I and his family – depicted not only the princes but also the princesses ‘holding books’, the image was considered unusual enough to require justification. The artist was said to have represented all the emperor’s offspring as educated in order to compensate for the fact their sire bore the stigma of having been raised illiterate.<sup>60</sup> One has to wait until the early modern period to find a portrait of a well-nurtured young girl from the Greek-speaking world reading (Fig. 1.4).<sup>61</sup> And certainly no ‘digger’ or ‘washer-woman’ was ever depicted taking respite from his or her labours, and finding solace in a book.<sup>62</sup> It should be emphasised that manuscripts, because of the materials and labour involved in their production, were a commodity that was prohibitively expensive for the majority of the population. Ownership of, for example, a copy of the works of Plato that cost

<sup>58</sup> Vaticanus gr. 666, fol. 1v., 2r-v; Vienna, Hist. gr. 53, fol. 1v.

<sup>59</sup> Istituto ellenico di studi bizantini e postbizantini di Venezia 5, fols 168r–v, 171r–v., etc. Even the female figure Byzantine artists most frequently depicted accompanied by books and scrolls, the Mother of God, can be considered transgressive in the sense that many attributes associated with her, such as martial ones, were not considered appropriate for most women. In any case, while she holds texts she is not shown actually engaged in the acts of reading or writing. See, for example, the cycles of illuminations in Vaticanus gr. 1162 and Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1208 and, for analysis, Anderson, ‘Anna Komnene, Learned Women’; M. Evangelou, ‘Pursuing Salvation Through a Body of Parchment: Books and their Significance in the Illustrated Homilies of Iakobos of Kokkinobaphos’, *Medieval Studies* 68 (2006), 239–84; K. Linardou, ‘Mary and her Books in the Kokkinobaphos Manuscripts: Female Literacy or Visual Strategies of Narration?’, *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*, 29 (2008), 35–48.

<sup>60</sup> I. Ševčenko, ed., *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur liber quo vita Basilii imperatoris amplectitur* (Berlin, 2011), 292 (89).

<sup>61</sup> Symeon Aentis, Donor panel from the Church of the Archangel (Theotokos) at Galata, Cyprus (1514); reproduced in S. Frigerio Zeniou, *Luxe et humilité: se vêtir à Chypre au xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Limassol, 2012), 47.

<sup>62</sup> van Dieten, ed., *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, xxxii.



Fig. 1.1 Miniature depicting Alexios Komnenos offering Christ the *Dogmatic Panoply* he commissioned from Euthemios Zigabenos. Vaticanus gr. 666, fol. 2v, twelfth century (© Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana)

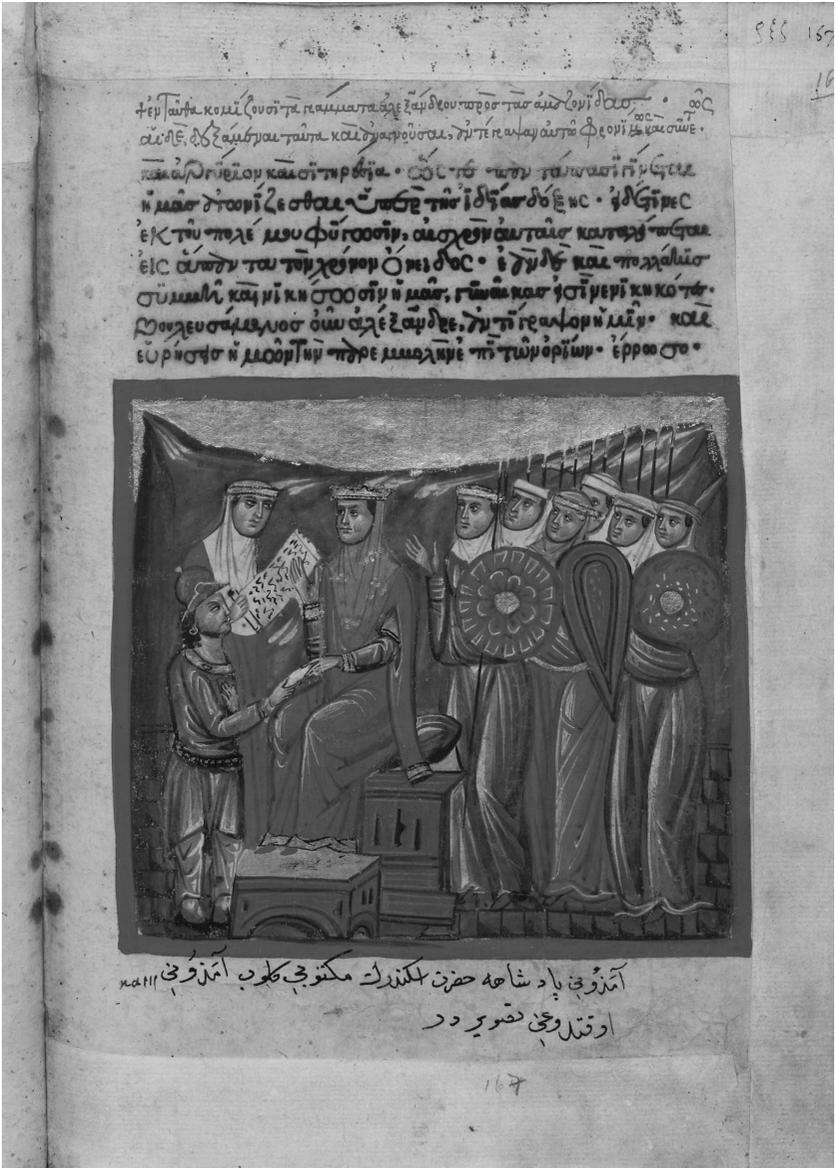


Fig. 1.2 Miniature from the *Romance of Alexander* in which the Amazons are depicted receiving a letter from Alexander the Great. Istituto ellenico di studi bizantini e postbizantini 5, fol. 168r., fourteenth century (© Istituto ellenico di studi bizantini e postbizantini, Venezia)



Fig. 1.3 Miniature from the *Romance of Alexander* in which the Amazons are depicted writing a letter of reply to Alexander the Great. Istituto ellenico di studi bizantini e postbizantini 5, fol. 168v., fourteenth century. (© Istituto ellenico di studi bizantini e postbizantini, Venezia)



Fig. 1.4 Girl reading. Symeon Axentis, Donor panel from the Church of the Archangel (Theotokos) at Galata, Cyprus (1514). Courtesy of: Department of Antiquities, Cyprus, the Bishopric of Morphou, and Stella Frigerio-Zeniou (photograph by © Vassos Stylianou)

8 gold *nomismata* for its parchment and 13 for its transcription, while well within the reach of someone of elevated rank who received an annual court stipend of 3,500 *nomismata*, was not easily contemplated by an entry-level administrator whose basic remuneration was set at 72 *nomismata*. It was inconceivable for a manual labourer earning 6–10 *nomismata*.<sup>63</sup>

Yet even those without the advantages of a formal education or the financial means of purchasing books could have had contact with the written word. Seeking to define textuality, John Mauropous, bishop of Euchaita, described it as a bird whose hybrid nature combined the outward appearance of the swallow – in so far as ‘on the white of the parchment the black of the letters stood out’ – with the sound of a nightingale able to sing out with a ‘melodious voice’ that ‘enchants my ear’.<sup>64</sup> Although silent reading was known, the oral rendition of texts remained widespread.<sup>65</sup> Accustomed to reading particular types of works aloud even in solitude, the literate expected, through performances that involved declamation and improvisation, to transform the written into the spoken, facilitating reception by others.<sup>66</sup> Thus, a verse chronicler envisaging the fate of his poem after publication emphasised its communication by aural means. He enjoined those who knew letters to take up the manuscript and read it, and those who were unlettered to form an audience:

if you are educated . . .  
and are knowledgeable in matters of writing  
. . . then take this and read it,  
and if, again, you are illiterate, then sit . . . and listen.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Wilson, ‘Books and Readers’, 2–3; Mango, ‘The Availability of Books’, 39.

<sup>64</sup> A. Karpozilos, ed., *The Letters of Ioannes Mauropous Metropolitan of Euchaita* (Thessalonike, 1990), 43; G. Karlsson, *Idéologie et cérémonie dans l'épistolographie byzantine. Textes du xe siècle analysés et commentés* (Uppsala, 1962), Psellos, *Scripta Minora*, ed. Kurtz and Drexel, vol. II, 135, 311; Tzetzes, *Epistolae*, ed. Leone, 34.

<sup>65</sup> P. Saenger, ‘Silent Reading: its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society’, *Viator*, 13 (1982), 367–414.

<sup>66</sup> G. Cavallo, ‘Le rossignol et l'hirondelle: Lire et écrire à Byzance, en occident’, *Annales*, 56 (2001), 849–61 and Cavallo, *Lire*, 49, 62; C. Cupane, ‘Leggere e/o ascoltare. Note sulla ricezione primaria e sul pubblico della letteratura greca medievale’ in A. Pioletti and F. Rizzo Nervo, eds., *Medioevo romanzo e orientale. Oralità, scrittura, modelli narrativi* (Naples, 1994), 83–105.

<sup>67</sup> P. Gautier, ed., *Michel Italikos. Lettres et discours* (Paris, 1972), 145–51; Schmitt, ed., *The Chronicle of Morea*, 92–3, 1351–2; T. Shawcross, ‘The Chronicle of Morea: Historiography in Crusader Greece (Oxford, 2009), 150–65; T. Shawcross, “Listen, All of You, Both Franks and Romans”: the Narrator in the Chronicle of Morea’ in R. Macrides, ed., *History as Literature in Byzantium. Papers from the Fortieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, April 2007* (Farnham, 2010), 91–111; H.-G. Beck, ‘Der Leserkreis der byzantinischen Volksliteratur im Licht der handschriftlichen Überlieferung’ in Loerke et al., eds., *Byzantine Books*, 47–67.

The reception of texts could be further supplemented by the recourse to visual representation.<sup>68</sup> A foreign princess, probably to be identified with the daughter of Louis VII of France, Agnès-Eirene, was the recipient of a manuscript consisting of only a few lines of text composed in the vernacular and copied using simple calligraphy, accompanied by a series of very large illustrations. Essentially a picture book, it was intended to introduce the young girl – who had recently been betrothed to Alexios II Komnenos, the heir to the imperial throne, and needed to be taught to fulfil the role of consort – to the world of court etiquette and ceremonial inhabited by her in-laws.<sup>69</sup> Outside the confines of the palace, ordinary citizens who viewed the depictions of emperors on banners, boards and walls in the streets of the capital were expected to engage with formal iconographic features, interpreting the message correctly despite being unable to decipher the accompanying explanatory inscriptions. In the case of Andronikos I, who murdered Agnès-Eirene's husband of a few months and took his place, they refused to play along and expressly offered alternative interpretations.<sup>70</sup> More banally, even if the peasants working the fields could not themselves puzzle out the letters of the word 'Limit' (*horos*) on a cylindrical boundary marker on Patmos, they were expected to understand the significance of the inscription and modify their conduct accordingly.<sup>71</sup>

These complementary modes of communication through sound and image allowed the illiterate to be transformed, almost by proxy, into members of the literate class. Indeed, although the knowledge of how to read and write was distributed across society in a decidedly patchy manner, the insistence that everyone should be integrated – even if only symbolically – within a literate culture was a feature of the empire. It is no coincidence that, on his accession to the throne, the emperor Basil I, a former stable-hand, demonstrated his prowess as a ruler not only by setting out to rectify his own illiteracy upon obtaining access to the necessary resources, but also by promulgating a decree according to which calculations of taxes that were due – typically written out in fractions of the highest monetary denomination, the gold *hyperpyron* – were to be inscribed

<sup>68</sup> K. Weitzmann, 'The Selection of Texts for Cyclic Illustration in Byzantine Manuscripts' in Loerke et al., eds., *Byzantine Books*, 69–109 and plates.

<sup>69</sup> C. J. Hilsdale, 'Constructing a Byzantine Augusta: a Greek Book for a French Bride', *ArtBull*, 87 (2005), 458–83; but see C. Hennessey, 'A Child Bride and her Representation in the Vatican *Epithalamion*, cod. 1851', *BMGS*, 30 (2006), 115–50.

<sup>70</sup> P. Magdalino and R. S. Nelson, 'The Emperor in Byzantine Art of the Twelfth Century', *ByzF*, 8 (1982), 123–83; A. Eastmond, 'An Intentional Error? Imperial Art and "Mis-interpretation under Andronikos I Komnenos"', *ArtBull*, 76 (1994), 502–10.

<sup>71</sup> Museum of the Monastery of St John the Divine on Patmos (seen August 2012).

in ledgers in longhand and in capital letters so that everyone, including the simple folk (*agroikoi*), could read them. All those who were expected to fulfil fiscal obligations – and therefore possessed the status of free men and were eligible for imperial citizenship – had to be conceived of, if not as actual readers, at least as potential ones.<sup>72</sup> Indicatively, although Theodore Metochites exhorted the monks of his monastery to have recourse to its library, he explained that the collection of books therein contained was not for them alone, but instead meant to represent a ‘great universal work of philanthropy, at the disposition of all mortals’. Acting in conscious imitation of God who, ‘rich in bounty, made the air for the common use of all men, as well as the earth and the water’, the donor granted use of the entirety of the library’s holdings without exception not solely to the ‘wealthy’, but also to the ‘very poor and needy’, so that ‘inexhaustible’ access would be ‘common to all’ (*pankoinos*).<sup>73</sup> The library was envisaged as a public foundation, irrespective of who actually graced its doors.

### The Reader as Imperial Citizen

Reading allowed individuals not only to experience personal growth – as Cyril of Thessalonike put it, ‘without letters the soul is blind’ – but also to become incorporated into society.<sup>74</sup> On the local level, the sharing of texts reinforced the bonds that organised people into households and other small communities defined by kinship, friendship or profession.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, it served to connect these communities to a broader collective identity that was characterised by its emphasis on the importance of the written word. In the memoirs he composed for the edification of his family, Kekaumenos, a grizzled war veteran turned landowner, considered it appropriate to chastise those who put forward their military or farming professions as justification for having ‘no need of reading’. He declared that such excuses were not merely detrimental to those who made them but rebounded on everyone with the result that ‘we are all deficient’.<sup>76</sup> Becoming a reader was about contributing to the common good. It was through literacy that one was

<sup>72</sup> Theophanis Continuatus, *Chronographia*, ed. Ševčenko, 121–4; Cavallo, *Lire*, 28–9.

<sup>73</sup> Polemis, *Theodori Metochitae carmina*, 44–6.1120–73; translation adapted from Featherstone, ‘Metochites’s Poems’, 220–1, 225–6.

<sup>74</sup> A. Vaillant, ed., *Textes vieux-slaves* (Paris 1968), vol. II, 65–6.

<sup>75</sup> A. Markopoulos, ‘Überlegungen zu Leben und Werkes des Alexandros von Nikaia’, *JÖB*, 44 (1994), 313–26; P. M. Leone, ed., *Nicéphori Gregorae Epistulae* (Matino, 1982–3), vol. II: 180–3; 4; L. Canfora, ‘Le cercle de lecteurs autour de Photios: une source contemporaine’, *REB*, 56 (1998), 269–73.

<sup>76</sup> Kekaumenos, *Strategicon*, ed. Wassiliewsky and Jerstedt, 83.

thought to transcend the status of a private person (*idiotes*) and became a public citizen (*polites*), with the rights and duties this entailed.

Such attitudes stemmed from the fact that a peculiar kind of bookishness lay at the heart of the empire's perception of itself. The imperial regime claimed that, having at its origins received in Christ the Divine Word Incarnate, it had inherited a mission to disseminate that Word, enshrined in the Old and New Testaments, to humanity through the expansion of its dominion to the furthest corners of the earth and the end of time.<sup>77</sup> The first texts future citizens would encounter when learning their letters were the psalms, together with passages drawn from scripture, hagiography and other religious writings. Those who had already been fully inducted into the empire's civilisation, and were therefore considered to rank among the citizenry, were expected to continue to 'Examine the Scriptures, as the Lord commanded' and meditate on them throughout their lives.<sup>78</sup> It is no coincidence that 90 per cent of manuscripts dating from between the ninth and twelfth centuries (including 700 exemplars of Symeon Metaphrastes' compendium of saints' lives) can be shown to have been of biblical, patristic, ascetic, hagiographical and liturgical texts. Members of the elite and more ordinary folk participated in an outpouring of acts of piety in the form of offerings to churches and monasteries of religious manuscripts. Though of uneven quality, these manuscripts were generally intended to give the impression of considerable expenditure through the use of parchment or paper with wide margins, of archaising scripts, and of coloured borders or other decorative elements. Often superfluous to the receiving institutions' immediate catechetical or liturgical requirements, they affirmed by their very existence the donors' desire to be seen as having received illumination and being numbered among those who belonged within the community of believers.<sup>79</sup>

Imperial government was considered to protect the faith by interpreting its message and ensuring the implementation of its basic tenets.

<sup>77</sup> D. Nicol, 'Byzantine Political Thought' in J. H. Burns, ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350–c. 1450* (Cambridge, 1988), 49–80; R. Browning, 'Further Reflections on Literacy in Byzantium', in J. Landon, S. Reinert and J. Allen, eds., *Τὸ ἑλληνικόν: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis, Jr.*, vol. 1, *Hellenic Antiquity and Byzantium*, 73–4.

<sup>78</sup> Kekaumenos, *Raccomandazioni e consigli*, ed. Spadaro, 158–9; Maltese, *École*, 25–6; A. Giannouli, 'Education and Literary Language in Byzantium' in M. Hinterberger, ed., *The Language of Byzantine Learned Literature* (Turnhout, 2014), 54.

<sup>79</sup> Wilson, 'Byzantine World', 70; P. Evangelatou-Notara, *Χορηγοί, κτήτορες, δωρητές σε σημειώματα κωδίκων. Παλαιολόγιστοι χρόνοι* (Athens, 2000), 17–270; P. Evangelatou-Notara, 'Χορηγοί και δωρητές χειρογράφων τον 11 αιώνα' in V. N. Vlyssidou, ed., *Η αυτοκρατορία σε κρίση: Το Βυζάντιο τον 11ο αιώνα* (Athens, 2003), 483–96; G. Cavallo, 'Il libro come oggetto d'uso nel mondo bizantino', *JÖB*, 31 (1981), 411–5.

Consequently, the aura of sanctity that surrounded scriptural and theological texts rubbed off on the business of the state, providing the impetus for and justification of a model of rulership that was closely associated with bureaucracy. The emperor and his ministers assembled centralised collections of documentation with extreme deliberateness. While only 1,500 documents are known today in their originals, something of the extent of the archival mentality that had existed but whose records are lost to us is hinted at by the survival of more than 60,000 disks of metal that had once been used to seal and guarantee the authenticity of texts of an official nature. The imperial chancery communicated important governmental policy, published new legislation, and, under certain conditions, circumscribed the privileges of institutions and persons. Its personnel followed rigorous guidelines, producing documents in accordance with set formulas. All acts opened with a religious invocation, followed by the name and titles of the issuing authority, and those of the addressee or addressees; they concluded with the date and, at the very end, the various subscriptions. Among the types issued by the imperial chancery in the later medieval period that had legal force were: the *gramma*, *horismos*, *prostaxis*, *prostagma*, *symbolaion* and *symphonia*. While such acts drew on precedents stretching back to the period when the empire had been pagan, their aspect had evolved in such a way as to emphasise the notion that the Christian God's will was being enacted on earth by his chosen representative. Of them all, the most solemn was the *chrysoboullous logos* ('golden-sealed word'), which ritually repeated the word *logos* three times at its end and was then signed in autograph by the 'most faithful ruler and emperor in Christ' with ink whose red colour evoked Christ's Blood, which had been spilled at the Crucifixion in order to redeem humanity and which guaranteed the replacement of old Mosaic law by the New Covenant. Ink was conceived of as representing the empire's salvific lifeblood.<sup>80</sup>

The extent to which imperial subjects perceived a connection between appropriation of the written word and possession of citizenship can be seen from a marginal note from southern Italy scrawled in Greek in an inexpert hand. Perhaps reflecting its author's internalisation of frequent dressings-down connected with his ethnic origin, this note, which is located only a

<sup>80</sup> N. Oikonomides, 'Le support matériel des documents byzantins' in J. Glénisson et al., eds., *La paléographie grecque et byzantine* (Paris, 1977), 385–415; N. Oikonomides, 'La chancellerie impériale de Byzance du 13<sup>e</sup> au 15<sup>e</sup> siècle', *REB*, 43 (1985), 190–3; N. Oikonomides, 'The Usual Lead Seal', *DOP*, 37 (1983), 147–57; T. Shawcross, 'Languages, Record-keeping and Collective Memory in an Imperial Eastern Mediterranean' in A. Law, ed., *Mapping the Medieval Mediterranean, c. 300–1550* (Leiden, forthcoming).

few pages after the beginning of the text, declares: 'On many occasions the desire to study seized me. But I abandoned my studies because I am stupid and above all because I am Calabrian, and the Calabrians are a barbaric race inimical to the truth'.<sup>81</sup> However, others from Calabria together with those from the sister provinces of Lucania and Italia – all of which were territories that at various times were either brought back under imperial control or targeted with that object in mind – did not allow themselves to be discouraged so easily, but chose instead to spell out their identity on documents as best they could in Greek, declaring by this means their yearning to belong within the administrative framework of the empire and share more fully in government.<sup>82</sup>

The behaviour of populations located within the heartlands of empire confirms the legitimising role of writing. Individuals and establishments would petition for formal written recognition of their status and, upon receiving it, take great care to store and preserve the documents in question.<sup>83</sup> The ambition to extend one's share of power was frequently articulated through texts. Secret societies recorded the specifics of their activities and membership in statute books. Rebels and usurpers of various kinds communicated with each other by letter, exchanged mutual guarantees of solidarity in the form of written pledges, and announced their credentials for government by publishing manifestoes.<sup>84</sup> Even more routine were attempts to play the system by producing forged books and documents that copied existing administrative procedures: episcopal sees, monasteries and lay households were all inveterate corruptors of chronicles and fakers of imperial edicts.<sup>85</sup> While these texts might seem to have been criminal in nature, or at the very least to have contained revolutionary or subversive elements, in fact they reinforced the empire's way of governing through paperwork. In their emulation of imperial models, they constituted a tribute of sorts. That the regime itself recognised this was so is

<sup>81</sup> P. Canart, 'Gli scriptoria calabresi della conquista normanna alla fine del secolo XIV', *Calabria bizantina. Tradizione di pietà e tradizione scrittoria nella Calabria greca medievale* (Reggio Calabria Rome, 1983), 158–9.

<sup>82</sup> V. von Falkenhausen, 'A Provincial Aristocracy: the Byzantine Provinces in Southern Italy (9th–11th Century)' in M. Angold, ed., *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX to XIII Centuries* (Oxford, 1984), 223.

<sup>83</sup> Gautier, 'Typikon', 125–31; C. Holmes, 'Political Literacy' in P. Stephenson, ed., *Byzantine World* (London, 2010), 143.

<sup>84</sup> G. F. L. Tafel, ed., *Eustathii metropolitae Thessalonicensis opuscula* (Frankfurt, 1832), 98; H. Hunger, 'Anonymes Pamphlet gegen eine byzantinische Mafia', *RESEE*, 7 (1969), 95–107; H.-V. Beyer, 'Personale Ermittlungen zu einem spätbyzantinischen Pamphlet', H. Hörander et al., eds., *Βυζάντιος. Festschrift für Herbert Hunger* (Vienna, 1984), 13–26; Holmes, 'Political Literacy', 141–2.

<sup>85</sup> *MGH* 19, 55–98; N. Oikonomidès, 'Temps des faux', *Αθωνικά σύμμεικτα*, 4 (1997), 69–74.

suggested by the extreme reluctance with which it ordered the dissolution of texts that met with its disapproval: it rarely destroyed documentary records or burned codices even after rejecting their content as invalid or, for that matter, heretical.<sup>86</sup>

This does not mean that the written word was associated exclusively with running the empire. The notaries active in the empire included a large group known as the *taboullarioi*, who – as opposed to their colleagues who served in government departments as secretaries and scribes – administered to a private clientele. Yet even these professionals were organised into guilds that were placed under the supervision of imperial officials. The documents they issued usually underwent a process of registration with the state and could therefore, if necessary, be produced as evidence at an official court that would then arrange the enforcement of their terms. Moreover, since only citizens of good standing were allowed to dispose of their property, decisions by testators to bequeath in their last wills and testaments some part of their fortunes for church services or to liberate their household slaves represented political acts in themselves.<sup>87</sup>

### The Value of Letters

The Byzantine empire was remarkably long-lived, lasting for over a thousand years and transforming itself significantly during that period. Had a legal student from the era of Justinian been catapulted by some miracle into the school of jurisprudence newly founded (or refounded) under Constantine IX, he might have responded with a spark of recognition, but he would hardly have felt at home. It cannot be denied that centres of learning changed in size, scope and organisation; that new exercises were assigned by teachers; that the literary canon lost and acquired works; that certain genres of writing emerged and certain others fell into abeyance; even, on the most basic material level of all, that parchment and paper replaced papyrus. These shifts in practice affected people's interactions with texts, sometimes in very profound ways. So too did other aspects of life: the frequent presence in manuscripts of accidental or deliberate

<sup>86</sup> J. Chabot, ed., *Chronique de Michel le Syrien* (Paris, 1889–1924), vol. III, 166; E. Dulaurier, ed., *La chronique de Matthieu d'Édesse* (Paris, 1858), 71; J. Herrin, 'Book Burning as Purification' in P. Rousseau and M. Papoutsakis, eds., *Transformations of Late Antiquity: Essays for Peter Brown* (Farnham, 2009), 205–22, reprinted with some modifications in Herrin, *Margins*, 335–56.

<sup>87</sup> See, A. Kazhdan, 'Asekretis', *ODB*, vol. 1, 204; B. Nerantze-Barbaze, 'Οι βυζαντινοί ταβουλλάριοι', *Ελληνικά*, 35 (1984), 261–74; H. Saradi-Mendelovici, 'Notes on a Prosopography of the Byzantine Notaries', *Medieval Prosopography*, 9 (1988), 21–49.

damage, as well as of marginalia that have nothing obviously to do with the passages next to which they were written, hints at the disparate physical and psychological conditions under which readers found themselves operating.<sup>88</sup> According to Psellos, something as mundane as damp and overcast weather, or conversely too hot a sun, could be guaranteed to upset his students' attentiveness.<sup>89</sup> Each and every act of reading – representing as it did friction created by contact of a specific mind with a specific text at a specific time and in a specific context – must have been unique in some way.

Still, appreciation of writing as a useful and important skill remained constant. The Byzantines belonged to a fundamentally bibliophile culture. This was in part due to their association of cultural refinement with the ability to read and understand the works they had inherited from the ancient Greeks. But even more important was the state religion's emphasis on Holy Writ. While reading and writing were to some extent a matter of personal intellectual development and personal salvation, they were also seen as connected to notions of citizenship and political liberty. The claim to be 'lettered' was linked to duties and rights: the duty to pay taxes and the right to participate in government. The empire's expansionist project was framed as one not just of military conquest, but also of the dissemination of civilising values through texts.

Actual levels of literacy, of course, depended on a variety of external factors. The majority of the inhabitants of the empire never learned to read or write with any fluency. Even among the most educated members of society, only the smallest handful devoted themselves to the more rarefied intellectual pursuits that earned them the name of scholars (*ellogimoi*).<sup>90</sup> Nonetheless, people who possessed little skill in letters, or none, devoted hard-won resources to the commissioning of psalters and lectionaries. They also endeavoured to sign their name on wills, deeds, charters and other administrative documents as best they could. Those whose position at the periphery of the empire contributed to their precariousness appear to have felt the pressure even more keenly to display accomplishments relating to literacy.

There were always going to be a few cynical individuals who would describe themselves as reaching out for the necessities of life – food and

<sup>88</sup> Cavallo, *Lire*, 133–4.

<sup>89</sup> A. R. Littlewood, ed., *Michaelis Pselli Oratoria minora* (Leipzig, 1985), 21–4; A. P. Kazhdan and A. Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley, CA, 1985), 125.

<sup>90</sup> Cavallo, *Lire*, 3, 6, 8; Browning, 'Further Reflections', 68–81.

drink, and a roof over their head – only to find that their hands knocked ineffectually against piles of paper.<sup>91</sup> However, these lamentations exemplified general attitudes less than did the words of a father who, out on a walk with his son in the streets of Constantinople, took pains to point out prosperous government officials and administrators and present their biographies as being worthy of emulation:

See that man over there, my child? He used to go  
 On Shanks's pony and now he has a fat mule with a fine harness.  
 This one here, when he was a student, was barefoot  
 And see him now in his pointed boots!  
 And that one in his student days never had the entrance fee for the  
 bathhouse,  
 Whereas now he can bathe himself three times a week:  
 Where once his breast was full of lice as big as almonds,  
 Now his purse is full of gold coins and bezants.

This sermonising was addressed to a boy for whom learning represented the surest way to achieve success within an imperial framework. The parent framed his stories with repeated injunctions to his child to “Learn your letters as much as you are able” so as to “get on!” and be “greatly honoured, and of good fortune”. Education was above all a matter of material profit – and social aspiration.<sup>92</sup>

The extent to which hopes and anxieties for the future were associated with the acquisition of an education can be gauged from evidence concerning superstitious practices. Horoscopes were cast in order to determine the most propitious date on which to introduce a child to learning. Masses were said that called upon the Holy Spirit to descend ‘on this present child so-and-so’ and, implanting ‘the Holy Letters in his heart’, turn him from ‘unlettered’ into ‘lettered’. Prayers were uttered in which saints famous for their scholarship were asked to illuminate a pupil and assist him in acquiring the rudiments of learning. There was even recourse to *graphiphagy*: magical formulas, addressed to angels such as the ‘Teaching-One’ or the ‘Most-Wise-One’, were written out on paper then mixed together with consecrated wine and given to a slow learner to swallow so as to assist his progress.<sup>93</sup> Appeals of this type to the supernatural continued into more advanced educational contexts: as a young man, the poet and

<sup>91</sup> H. Eideneier, ed., *Ptochoprodromos: Einführung, kritische Ausgabe, deutsche Übersetzung, Glossa* (Cologne, 1991), 120–2 (III.81–107).

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 119–20 (III.56–77).

<sup>93</sup> Browning, ‘Literacy’, 51–2; A. Vassiliev, ed., *Anecdota graeco-byzantina* (Moscow, 1893), 342.

historian Agathias, desirous of acceding to the final year of the training that would qualify him as a lawyer, made a votive offering to one of the archangels.<sup>94</sup>

### The Scope of this Volume

Given that the Byzantine Empire had such an investment in the written word, it is incumbent upon us to investigate how its population engaged with texts and responded to them. How did books and humans interact? What was the effect of the diversity of humanity – its gender, class, language etc. – on these interactions? Why were these interactions important in the medieval period, and why, for that matter, might they still be important today? At a time when we find ourselves increasingly described as belonging to a ‘post-Gutenberg’ culture, we might wish to ask what we can learn from a civilisation that loved books but flourished not only before the internet but also before the printing press. Though a vast technological distance seems to separate the early twenty-first-century world from the early fifteenth-century one, it is worth pondering the underlying similarities found at either side of the parenthetical era of print.<sup>95</sup> It may not be too much of a stretch to compare the instability of the web with the mutability of manuscript tradition. In both cases, a definition of textuality’s essence and limits is demanded that is highly radical.

Recent shifts in the ways in which we maintain records and communicate with one another have highlighted the fact that scholarship, up until the third quarter of the twentieth century, tended to take a print environment for granted and therefore to view the millennium of the Byzantine Empire as representing at best a linking period between, on the one hand, the emergence of modern scholarly editions and scientific philological analysis, and, on the other, the original verve of ancient literary creation.<sup>96</sup> However, following the milestone publication of W. C. Loerke et al., eds., *Byzantine Books and Bookmen: A Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium* (Washington, D. C., 1975), our approach to books, readers and reading has undergone substantial revision. At the forefront of efforts to re-examine

<sup>94</sup> A. M. Cameron, *Agathias* (Oxford, 1970), 5.

<sup>95</sup> See Tom Pettitt, ‘Before the Gutenberg Parenthesis: Elizabethan–American Compatibilities’, originally at [http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit5/papers/pettitt\\_plenary\\_gutenberg.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit5/papers/pettitt_plenary_gutenberg.pdf) (accessed May 2016) but now to be found at [http://www.academia.edu/2946207/Before\\_the\\_Gutenberg\\_Parenthesis\\_Elizabethan-American\\_Compatibilities](http://www.academia.edu/2946207/Before_the_Gutenberg_Parenthesis_Elizabethan-American_Compatibilities) (accessed 5 December 2017).

<sup>96</sup> See the comments on this matter in Wilson, ‘Books and Readers’, 14.

the issues surrounding the production and circulation of texts have often been scholars publishing not only in English, but also in German, Italian, French and other languages.<sup>97</sup> Strides have been taken in the study of education.<sup>98</sup> Monographs and edited volumes have drawn attention to the structure of texts, the representation of authorship, and the modalities of reception.<sup>99</sup> They have also explored the interplay of the written word with different media.<sup>100</sup>

Byzantine texts are identifiable as inanimate objects that have the ability to exercise influence over people. But they can also be shown to depend on people's willingness to engage with them and provide them with a semblance of life. And no man or woman has ever been an island. If we are to study the attitudes of the Byzantines towards reading (and, in so doing, perhaps also start to understand our own attitudes a little better), we need to consider the intellectual and emotional responses of individual readers against the contexts in which these readers operated. This requires teasing out the relationship between texts on the one hand and, on the other, the diverse political, social and cultural pressures that defined people's horizons.

How did an individual's degree of access to the written word affect his or her trajectory through life? To what extent did the shared characteristic of literacy, or conversely of illiteracy, generate networks and create communal allegiances? If we are to answer these questions we have to gather evidence regarding not only the formal training through which the Byzantines acquired an education, but also the manner in which they subsequently displayed their literacy and gave it currency in a variety of situations. The spaces one can most straightforwardly identify as performative are those of the classroom and the literary salon, for it is there that the

<sup>97</sup> Apart from E. M. and M. J. Jeffreys, *Popular Literature in Late Byzantium* (London, 1983), see, for example: Hunger, *Schreiben und Lesen in Byzanz*; Cavallo, *Lire*; and G. Cavallo, *Leggere a Bisanzio* (Milan, 2007); Mondrain, ed., *Lire et écrire*.

<sup>98</sup> Important studies include: C. N. Constantinides, *Higher Education in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries (ca.1204–ca. 1310)* (Nicosia, 1982); Maltese, *Ecole*; S. Mergiali, *L'enseignement et les lettrés pendant l'époque des Paléologues (1261–1453)* (Athens, 1996); Holmes and Waring, *Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission*.

<sup>99</sup> Representative of the range of approaches are: P. Odorico and P. A. Agapitos eds., *Pour une "nouvelle" histoire de la littérature byzantine: problèmes, méthodes, approches, propositions* (Paris, 2002); A. Markopoulos, *History and Literature of Byzantium in the 9th–10th Centuries* (Aldershot, 2004); I. Nilsson, ed., *Plotting with Eros: Essays on the Poetics of Love and the Erotics of Reading* (Copenhagen, 2009); V. Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm in Byzantium: The Sound of Persuasion* (Cambridge, 2013); A. Pizzone, ed., *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature. Modes, Functions, Identities* (Boston, MA, 2014); P. Roilos, ed., *Medieval Greek Storytelling: Fictionality and Narrative in Byzantium* (Wiesbaden, 2014).

<sup>100</sup> See, for example: L. James, ed., *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture* (Cambridge, 2007).

vectors of exchange are most readily apparent although they do not lack complexity. However, there is in addition the constant humming of the interplay of the written and the oral – and of the verbal and the non-verbal – in the private study, the public square, the garden, and even on the battlefield. Writing, after all, is only one form of communication among those that human beings can use. It is only one of the many means we have at our disposal in order to store our memories and feed our imagination.

These are the themes the studies collected in this volume set out to explore. Part I, 'For Love of the Written Word', opens with an examination by Marina Bazzani and Michael Angold of the ways in which two individuals – the eleventh-century bishop John Mauropous and the fifteenth-century patriarch Gennadios Scholarios – valued the written word in their roles not merely as readers of others' texts, but also as authors in their own right who left behind autobiographical writings revealing facets of their personalities. Both cases concern prominent ecclesiastics who played significant roles as intermediaries and policymakers. Focusing not just on the individuals themselves, but also on their role within society, Judith Ryder analyses imperial orations in order to look at the relationship of a churchman, John the Oxite, with his ruler, Alexios I, and identify the ideological ground the two men shared, together with that on which they clashed. Paul Magdalino draws our attention away from the imperial court, asking us to think about education and literacy in the context of the activities of a successful religious confraternity; similarly, Tassos Papacostas pieces together from manuscript marginalia the story of a monastery that, under siege from plague, coped and even thrived in the face of the crisis.

A more detailed examination of the formation and circulation of texts within a range of communities is undertaken in Part II, 'Contact with a Living Culture'. These communities included the relatively small – but still by many counts privileged – households of the gentry in the provinces as well as the rather more substantial entourages of magnates, the patriarch, and the emperor in the imperial capital. Starting with an assessment of the type of education available to Byzantines, Panagiotis Roilos and Jonathan Shepard show that rhetorical training drawing on the classical tradition was not merely prized for its own sake, but was also set to work to achieve distinct political goals within a contemporary context, while Niels Gaul indicates how these goals could be achieved at the gatherings referred to as *theatra* through readings and recitations of texts.

These studies emphasise that manuscripts and documents existed within an environment where the non-written generally dwarfed the written. Shedding light on the larger cultural framework, David Gwynn and

Johannes Koder scrutinise the diverse sources that shaped the religious preoccupations of a pair of late antique and early medieval authors, John Malalas and Romanos the Melode, while Manolis Patedakis and Alessandra Bucossi take us on into the middle Byzantine period by looking at strategies of quotation and allusion in Symeon the Theologian and Andronikos Kamateros. Although similarly concerned with intertextuality, Peter Frankopan, Günter Prinzing and Ulrich Moennig choose secular writings as their subject, assessing the impact of oral discourse and texts on the *Alexiad*, *Digenes Akrites* and the *Tale of Troy*. Ultimately, these chapters insist on the formation within Byzantium of both a spiritual lexicon and a worldly lexicon, which, while serving to shape norms in their distinct ways, should be seen as having complemented one another and indeed as having often converged.

Investigating this issue of vocabulary further, Part III, 'Communication and Influence', addresses the challenges to, but also the opportunities for, creativity provided by the barriers erected by language and artistic medium. Dimitrios Skrekas considers the school curriculum's role in disseminating exegetical material such as glosses and paraphrases. Liz James compares the visual and literary depictions of *erotes* or *putti* and Margaret Mullett discusses the ways in which an object (in this case the tent used by the imperial household when on campaign) is represented in ekphrastic poetry; both papers comment on the subversive potential of representation. The relationship between text and image is also probed by Maja Kominko, who looks at how the geographical *antipodes* were presented in the texts and illustrations of Byzantine and Latin manuscripts; in so doing, she touches on two issues, that of conveying the unfamiliar and that of crossing a linguistic divide, which are developed in this section's final three chapters. Here, Tim Greenwood and James Howard-Johnston tackle the transmission of information from Armenian and Norman to Byzantine contexts, while Roderick Beaton looks at a reverse movement from the Greek-speaking to the French-speaking world. As these studies show, inter-linguistic translation can be associated with the translocation of a particular political culture into a new environment. While Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligès*, as Beaton argues, could not have been written without the prior existence of Byzantine texts such as *Hysmine and Hysminias* by Eumathios Makrembolites, it is also a text that seeks, by reinventing the literary form of the ancient and medieval Greek 'novel', to achieve a transfer of power (*translatio imperii*). In France, the nascent genre of romance articulated a chivalric ethos that would become pre-eminent in western courtly settings of the later medieval period.

Reflecting on the different kinds of methods that have been used to interrogate the traces of medieval textuality, the final section of the volume, Part IV, 'Modern Reading as Textual Archaeology', turns the spotlight on modern scholars, highlighting the ways in which they too, because of their concern with the recovery and revitalisation of Byzantine authors, works and discourses, should also be identified as readers. In their discussions of rhetorical works dedicated to the emperor Anastasios and of epistolographic works associated with John Daphnopates, Fiona Haarer and John Duffy provide us with an exemplary demonstration of the kinds of stylistic and thematic analyses that allow us to identify marks of medieval authorship and correct misattributions. Building on this approach, the concluding series of papers, by Marjolijne Janssen and Marc Lauxtermann, Erich Trapp and Manolis Papathomopoulos, looks at three vernacular texts (the *Ptochoprodromika*, *Digenes Akrites* and the *Theseid*) with a view to showing that linguistic expertise not only makes it possible for us to inch towards more accurate reconstructions of the words of the author, but also teaches us about the reception of texts by highlighting how translators and scribes contributed to the generative corruption of content.

Efforts to excavate the past through work on grammar and lexicography, and, above all, the production of editions, have a long tradition stretching back not just to the early humanists of fourteenth-century Thessalonike, but also to the ecclesiastical fathers of fourth-century Caesarea. As a discipline, philology has a venerable pedigree. And it remains highly relevant today: the backbone of much of what we do. In other respects, however, our love affair with the history of the Byzantine book is only just beginning.

### Further Reading

An edition of all of Photios' book reviews can be found in R. Henry, ed., *Photius. Bibliothèque*, 8 vols. (Paris, 1959–91). Introductory studies of books, readers and reading include: W. C. Loerke et al., *Byzantine Books and Bookmen: A Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium* (Washington, D. C., 1975); C. Holmes and J. Waring, eds., *Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission in Byzantium and Beyond* (Leiden, 2002); G. Cavallo, *Lire à Byzance*, P. Odorico and A. Segonds, trans. (Paris, 2006); B. Mondrain, *Lire et écrire à Byzance* (Paris, 2006).