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SYMEON METAPHRASTES AT WORK*

Symeon Metaphrastes' revision of the hagiographic corpus, undertaken with the encouragement of the emperor, was a remarkable enterprise which required substantial resources and organisational skills. Michael Psellus in his encomium of Symeon gives a famous description of Symeon and his team at work. The most important fact is stated in the following sentence:

καὶ ἦν αὐτῷ ἡ παρασκευὴ ἕξ ἐτοίμου κύκλος τε οὐ βραχὺς τῶν τε πρῶτως ἐνοσημαινομένων τὴν λέξιν καὶ τῶν μετὰ ταῦτα τιθέντων (ed. FISHER, p. 285 lines 334-335).

The object of the present note is to express doubts about the interpretation of that passage which appears to be generally accepted. A typical translation of the phrases describing the production of the new and stylistically elegant version is «some taking down the words in shorthand, others writing out the text» (HÖGEL, p. 93). This is taken to mean that Symeon dictated his revised text to shorthand-writers, who were then succeeded by regular scribes for the production of copies (*ibid.*, p. 94). If this implies that Symeon was able to read one of the old texts and compose the new version extempore, I would argue that this is most implausible. One only has to look at specimens of the old and new versions set

* BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ABBREVIATIONS:

BEKKER = MICHAELIS ATTALIOΤΑΕ *Historia* (...) recognovit I. BEKKERUS, Bonnae 1853 (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae).

FISHER = MICHAELIS PSELLI *Orationes hagiographicae* edidit E.A. FISHER, Stutgardiae-Lipsiae 1994 (Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana).

HÖGEL = C. HÖGEL, *Symeon Metaphrastes: rewriting and canonisation*, Copenhagen 2002. *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität = Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität, besonders des 9.-12. Jahrhunderts*, erstellt von E. TRAPP [ET AL.], I-..., Wien 1994-...

LSJ = H. LIDDELL - R. SCOTT - H.S. JONES, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, (...) with a *Revised Supplement*, Oxford 1996⁹.

PÉREZ MARTÍN = MIGUEL ATALIATES, *Historia*, introducción, edición, traducción y comentario de I. PÉREZ MARTÍN, Madrid 2002 (Nueva Roma, 15).

WIRTH = *Eustathii Thessalonicensis Opera minora* (...) recensuit P. WIRTH, Berolini-Novi Eboraci 2000 (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, 32).

side by side (*ibid.*, p. 97) to see that the revision was thorough, not limited to occasional changes of phrasing and vocabulary, and it could only have been carried out by a process of extremely careful and necessarily slow drafting. If that is so, ought we to infer instead that Symeon is described as reading aloud from his new version to shorthand-writers? But that does not yield a satisfactory picture of what was going on; once the new version was ready there was no need for stenographers, because any member of the team could have dictated from the master copy to ordinary, less highly qualified scribes in order to produce copies efficiently, if indeed dictation was employed. One could imagine as an alternative procedure that the master copy was advertised as being available for anyone who had the necessary writing material and wished to possess a personal copy.

These difficulties have led me to raise the question whether Psellus' Greek has been translated correctly. According to the *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität* nouns from the same root as the verb ἐνοημαίνουμαι mean «Aufzeichnung»/«Eintragung», i.e. «list»/«register»; this is clearly not appropriate in the context that we are dealing with. But LSJ, which gives no support to the idea that the verb refers to shorthand, offers as one of the meanings of the verb in the middle voice «impress»/«stamp upon», and this is what is needed. The noun which follows can also be translated more precisely: it surely indicates that Symeon left his mark on the style of the texts. And there is a further question to be asked: as the verb is in the plural, a fact which has perhaps not been given sufficient consideration hitherto, does this mean that Symeon had colleagues who were able to follow the stylistic principles he had laid down and perform the same task of revision? That seems to be the obvious meaning of the words, and it is not a trivial detail.

The next problem is to determine the meaning of the words that follow: what exactly were the other members of the team doing? The usual translation is «writing out the text». If that is correct, the verb τιθέντων is to say the least unexpected, and though this verb has a number of usages, it is hard to see what it can mean here. Can it really refer to the production of copies? LSJ do not appear to support such a rendering. In the context one expects a verb referring to other members of the team who took over and organised the remainder of the task. Since the verb as transmitted by the manuscripts is so difficult I have taken the trouble to verify that it is indeed the reading in both authoritative manuscripts (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Barocci 131, and Vatican

City, Barberinianus gr. 240). Despite their agreement one has to consider whether this is what Psellus wrote. On the assumption that it may not have been I offer some possible alternatives. One might conjecture τῶν ταῦτα μετατιθέντων, which would mean «and substituting these (new) texts». That is a simple transposition, and no textual critic would regard it as a violent emendation. A bolder proposal would be to read τῶν ταῦτα μεταγραφόντων, «and transcribing these (new) texts». At the cost of making a more serious alteration one obtains wording that would appear to describe the procedure better.

NIGEL G. WILSON
Lincoln College, Oxford
(nigel.wilson@lincoln.ox.ac.uk)

POSTSCRIPT

The editors have kindly drawn my attention to two occurrences of the verb ἐνσημαίνομαι in prose texts from the middle Byzantine period: Michael Attaleiates, p. 9 ed. PÉREZ MARTÍN (p. 11 BEKKER) and Eustathius, *Oration 6*, p. 83 ed. WIRTH. In the first of these passages shorthand cannot possibly be in question, while in the second I think «copy» or «transcribe» may be the correct rendering in a rather obscure passage.

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