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I here present my report on the doctoral thesis “Gluttons, drunkars and lechers. The discourses of food in 12th-century Byzantine literature: ancient themes and Byzantine innovations” by Tomasz Labuk.

1. Aim, state of research and originality

The present thesis offers an investigation of discourses of consumption and the consumptive body in the so-called long 12th century (c. 1050–1204). The candidate wishes to show how certain changes in society brought about a change in attitudes towards the body and its consumptive urges, reflected in a literature that, at the same time, relied on a rewriting of ancient Greek and patristic literature. The candidate thus wishes to show how texts previously analysed by historians in order to find out what people ate and how much that food cost, instead (or in addition) can be analysed from literary and intertextual perspectives and thus reveal a different kind of information (pp 12-13). The introduction presents an overview of what the candidate calls “food studies” in Byzantium along with an introduction to the study of 12th-century Byzantium, thus offering a basis for his analysis of a selection of texts. Methodologically, the candidate draws on Nancy Worman’s study of abusive talk in ancient Athens (2008), so-called “iambic discourse”, which is here applied to the 12th-century texts with a particular focus on the use of Aristophanes. The aim is to show how various authors employ iambic discourse for “comic interpolations” (p. 21) in different genres. This is a field that has not been investigated in any detail, which makes the thesis original and innovative from the perspective of both material and approach.

2. Content and Structure

The thesis opens with an introduction (chapter 1), presenting the overall aim and method, along with the state of research (see above). Four analytical chapters follow, each focusing on a separate text or group of texts but always in the search of Aristophanes and/or iambic discourse. In chapter 2, the candidate analyses how Michael Psellos (11th c.) subverts the

Byzantine (religious) *kanon* form by introducing the ancient (pagan) iambic discourse, employing crude and physical language but at the same time using expressions drawn from the Biblical tradition. In chapter 3, the candidate enters the 12th century, offering a prelude on the case of Eustathios of Thessaloniki and then focusing on the *Timarion*. Here, the presentation of previous research is slightly muddled, following no specific order and with no clear indications of how the candidate relates to the very different interpretations (pp. 68-69). By contrast, the analysis itself is solid, arguing that the *Timarion* satirizes a Komnenian “greediness for fancy and idle talk” (p. 71).

Chapter 4 deals with Niketas Choniates, arguing that he too consciously recycled and alluded to Aristophanes in his *History* and employed the iambic discursive scheme in numerous passages. For the “clarity of the argument” (p. 90), this chapter has been divided into two “thematic sections”: 1) comic interpolations into the discourse of history; and 2) iambic discourse in the portrayal of Andronikos I Komnenos. Again, the analysis itself is solid, but to this reader the distinction between these two “thematic” units remains unclear, since both are dealing with characterization. In the final analytical chapter, chapter 5, the candidate turns to four different accounts of John Komnenos the Fat, analysing representations of the obese and monstrous body and the intertextual play with the ancient tradition. It is shown how the different sources employ different strategies while describing basically the same event. The thesis curiously ends with a “Foreword”, which I presume to be a typo (see also below). One would expect this section to contain some concluding remarks, but it remains rather a summary of the analyses and a repetition of the premises for the analysis presented in the introduction.

Overall, the structure is clear and the order of textual analysis logic. To some extent, however, the introduction anticipates the conclusions (in the “Foreword”), in answering the question of “why” before even conducting the analysis. What is defined as the aim of the thesis (to understand the use of iambic discourse in the long twelfth century) thus in practice becomes the hypothesis on which the investigation is based (it was a result of social change).

3. Methodology and theoretical framework

As already mentioned, the methodological framework for the present thesis is drawn from Worman’s study of so-called “iambic discourse” (2008). The application of this approach is well performed by the candidate and could be useful for other scholars, so it seems like a good choice. The only time I feel unsure about the use of the term “iambic discourse” is on p. 90, when it is described as a “stylistic device”, which seems to go against earlier definitions of

it as rather a socio-cultural discourse. The thesis does not make a clear distinction between theory and method, referring to Worman's concept sometimes as methodological, sometimes as theoretical. This is not necessarily a problem, but a statement of theoretical stance is always useful, especially when dealing with new fields of study. When the candidate states on p. 20 that Byzantine literari were familiar with the "corrective functions" of comedy in ancient Athens, such a statement would certainly have needed more both theoretical and empirical underpinning. But on the whole, Worman's framework offers a firm ground for the present thesis.

4. Presentation and style

The thesis is written in an English that is very uneven, ranging from idiomatic and even elegant to unidiomatic and difficult to understand. There are numerous mistakes and typos, some of which really should have been noted by the candidate or his readers, such as Manuel instead of Alexios being the protagonist of the *Alexiad* (p. 11), "Foreword" (supposedly for "Afterword") in chapter 6, and the "far-fetched consequences" (p. 155) that hopefully are "far-reaching". These are only a few examples of numerous mistakes. Also the bibliography contains numerous typos and mistakes, once even in a title by the candidate himself (no journal and year for the JÖB 2016 item). While such stylistic problems do not necessarily diminish the scholarly quality of thesis, they certainly contribute to a rather sloppy impression. This is a pity, because the thesis as such is well structured and the arguments are in most cases presented in a clear and lucid manner.

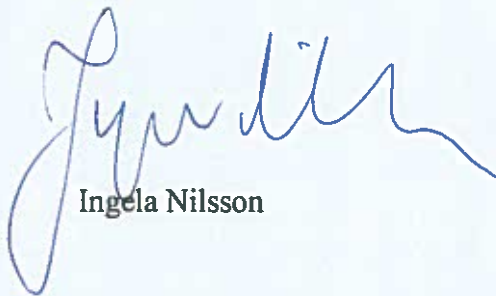
5. Quality of empirical work and selection of sources

The thesis is based on what seems to be a logic selection of sources, all rather well known and discussed in previous research, though not always from the angle that the candidate proposes here. The treatment of sources is fine, the literary analysis is well performed and the candidate's knowledge of ancient literature is clearly solid. There are a few gaps in the use of secondary literature. It is not entirely true that no scholar has payed attention to monstrosity in Byzantium (as stated on p. 14); for example, the excellent study by Charis Messis ("*L'impureté corporelle suprême : la monstrosité à Byzance, ses perceptions et ses élaborations littéraires*", 2012) has not been taken into account by the candidate. Several studies on Paphlagonians by the same author have also been excluded (but are certainly called for on p. 86), and in the discussion of Choniates and tragedy/comedy (chapter 4) one would have expected a reference to Stanislas Kuttner-Homs' article on that topic in *Storytelling in*

Byzantium (2018), a volume in which the candidate has a contribution of his own and thus should know rather well. This gives the impression that the candidate has excluded publications in French, an impression that is strengthened by the severe typos in the title of the cited article by Anagnostakis, 2016. This is not a huge problem for the thesis as a whole, but it does give an impression of unnecessary haste or sloppiness. That said, the overall quality of the empirical work is high.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, this is an innovative and original study by a promising young scholar who makes a considerable and independent contribution to the study of Byzantine literature. The analysis brings out new aspects of already known texts and offers new paths for investigating discourses of food and gluttony in Byzantium and beyond. The literary analysis is excellent, the candidate's knowledge of ancient literature is impressive, and this thesis will be a much appreciated contribution to Byzantine Studies. It is thus clear that the present thesis meets the requirements stipulated by the Act on academic degrees and titles in Art (13.1 Act 14.03.2003).



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