

Paolo Cesaretti, Silvia Ronchey (ed.), *Eustathii Thessalonicensis exegesis in canonem iambicum pentecostalem. Recensuerunt indicibusque instruxerunt. Supplementa Byzantina, Bd 10.* Berlin; München; Boston: De Gruyter, 2014. Pp. xi, 385*, 492. ISBN 9783110195217. €179.95.

Reviewed by Marc D. Lauxtermann, Exeter College, Oxford (marc.lauxtermann@exeter.ox.ac.uk)

Though nowadays probably best known for his Homeric *παρεμβολαί* ("Commentaries"), Eustathios of Thessaloniki (c. 1115-1195) was a prolific Byzantine intellectual and teacher who has left behind many prose writings. One of his later works is his commentary on the iambic pentecostal hymn variously attributed to John the Monk, John of Damascus and John Arklas. One of the problems Eustathios seeks to solve in his learned commentary is exactly that of authorship. Following an earlier scholar, John Merkouropoulos (of the mid twelfth century), he avers in the proem that the style and the language are so unlike anything written by John of Damascus that the hymn cannot be his; in fact, it is the work of one John Arklas. Eustathios even adds that those who maintain that the church father adapted his style to the occasion – talking in tongues as the apostles did on Pentecost – should think again. But then, at the very point of acknowledging that the orthodox tradition may be wrong, he reneges on his earlier statements and aligns himself with the majority view. This remarkable volte-face is indicative of the precarious situation he finds himself in: the mental split between being the archbishop of Thessaloniki and the leading scholar of his time. It is this balancing act that explains Eustathios' often self-contradictory statements and the unevenness in his treatment of the iambic kanon. It also explains why the style is at times turgid and opaque, as happens when the philologist in Eustathios loses out to the co-habiting theologian.

Until recently the only edition available was that of cardinal Mai, reprinted in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*. The book under review is the first critical edition of the text, based on all manuscripts and text witnesses; the emphasis rests here on the words 'critical' and 'all'. The edition is a major break-through, and Cesaretti and Ronchey are to be applauded for making this splendid text available to all those interested in the history of Byzantine scholarship, the intellectual climate in the later twelfth century, and the reception of hymnody in the Comnenian educational system. As the Greek of both the source text and the commentary is well above the level of the average Byzantinist, my only complaint is the absence of a translation. It is not just the growing Greeklessness in the Humanities; it is also the fact that translations form the best commentaries one could wish for.

The edition has a very long and learned introduction: nearly 400 pages of impeccable scholarship and staggering erudition. Cesaretti is responsible for the first part: life and works of Eustathios; history of hymnography and, in particular, the kanon; the three iambic kanons traditionally attributed to John of Damascus; their reception and study in later times; the place of Eustathios' commentary in this tradition of Byzantine scholarship; its date; Eustathios' scholarly approach; the problem of the hymn's authorship; the structure and the contents of the commentary; the literary sources (Homer, Pindar, Aristophanes, etc.); and Eustathios' critical judgment and aesthetic evaluation of the text. Ronchey signs up for the second part, which deals with the manuscripts, the text witnesses, the manuscript tradition, the stemma codicum, the previous editions, and the editorial principles that lie at the basis of Ronchey's and Cesaretti's edition.

Since there are basically only two manuscripts, Vat. gr. 1409 (s. XIII ex.) and Alex. Patr. 62 (s. XIII ex.), both of which are fairly reliable copies of the hyparchetype, the main task of the two editors has been to elucidate the text as found in these two manuscripts. This they have done, largely satisfactorily and successfully, in their extensive introduction, the elaborate apparatus fontium, and the helpful indices at the back of their edition. It is to their credit that the editors have decided to intervene as little as possible in the text, and whenever they think there is a textual problem that justifies intervening, they are usually right.

However, there is one passage where the editors and I seem to radically disagree on what Eustathios is trying to say, and as it is an important issue, it deserves to be discussed here. It has to do with the text tradition of the iambic kanon Eustathios is commenting upon. Thanks to the investigative work of Dimitrios Skrekas (*Studies in the Iambic Canons attributed to John of Damascus: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Commentary*. Unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2008), we now know that the oldest manuscripts (s. VIII-IX) can be found among the spectacular New Finds of the library of St Catherine's at Mount Sinai. It is worth noting that already the oldest manuscripts offer many variant readings, including readings that for various reasons are problematic. And some of these variant and problematic readings recur in the later manuscript tradition. Similarly, at the beginning of his commentary (Acrost. 63-65), Eustathios observes that the kanon here and there poses textual problems 'because of the long history of faulty manuscript copies' (διὰ τὸ τῶν ἀντιγράφων ἐκ μακροῦ ἐφάμαρτον). And throughout the commentary we see Eustathios the philologist struggling with the text, trying to make sense of it, suggesting emendations, proposing alternative readings, and constantly referring to faulty manuscripts. Eustathios the theologian, too, occasionally objects to certain readings and interpretations, but we should leave the discussion of such things to those who know better.

According to Cesaretti and Ronchey, however, while writing his commentary, Eustathios miraculously managed to find a 'faultless copy' of the iambic pentecostal hymn, which, if it ever existed, has unfortunately not come down to us because all surviving manuscripts are, to a greater or lesser degree, problematic. They base this on the following passage (153, 1-4):

εὐζόμεθα ἐν τῷ παρόντι τροπαρίῳ περιτυχεῖν ἀντιγράφῳ ἀσφάλτῳ· οἷς γὰρ ἐνεκύρσαμεν, οὐκ ἔστι μέμψιν ἀξίαν ἐπενεγκεῖν. τῷ τέως δὲ γράψαντες πρὸς τὰ παρευρημένα ὅπως ἰσχύσομεν, ὕστερον δὲ ὀρθῆ ἐκδόσει περιτευζόμεθα τότε ἀνακάμψομεν τὸ οὐκ εὐθύ.

The editors needlessly correct *ισχύσομεν* to *ισχύσαμεν* and translate the Greek as follows (at pp. 77*-78*):

'Vantiamoci, nel presente tropario, di esserci imbattuti in un manoscritto senza pecche. Là dove l'abbiamo riscontrato [ad litteram: nei passi che incontrammo, o anche: là dove l'abbiamo accostato] non gli si può muovere alcun biasimo. Finora avevamo scritto [scil. il testo dell'inno] in base a ciò che avevamo trovato e come meglio ci era riuscito; d'ora in avanti, ogni qual volta saremo provvisti della giusta versione, correggeremo gli errori'.

Their translation does not make sense: why would Eustathios, having discovered his faultless manuscript, keep returning to problematic copies and correct their faulty readings? And the verb *ἐγκύρω*, 'to encounter', has a negative connotation in Greek: the things one 'encounters' are enemies, illnesses, trouble, death, but, alas, not faultless manuscripts. The right translation, at least in my view, is: 'Let us pray that we may find a faultless copy for this troparion, because one cannot [but] justly find fault with the ones I've come across. At present I will, to the best of my power, comment on the text as it is, but later when I find a correct edition, I shall return to what is faulty'. As luck has it, the text of the two manuscripts is not faultless: the negative marker *μή* is missing before the word *μέμψιν*, perhaps because of the laborious double negation, perhaps because of haplography of *μ*.

There are many points where Eustathios (usually correctly) thinks that the text as transmitted in the faulty manuscript copies he had access to is problematic if not simply erroneous. But there are also many points where he implicitly, in carefully worded language and cautious terms, criticizes not the manuscript tradition, but the author himself. This is where it gets interesting. Having first stated on stylistic grounds that John of Damascus cannot be the author, and then retracted his statement because it is not in line with the majority view, he keeps referring to the author in terms that strongly suggest he is still not convinced that this is the work of John of Damascus. In other words, he pays lip service to Orthodoxy, but willfully undermines his pledge of allegiance by stealthily suggesting that, unlike the real John of Damascus, this is actually not an accomplished poet. His main problem are the many compound words, the most notorious of which is the majestic *ἀκτιστοσυμπλαστουργοσύνθρονον*, 'uncreated co-creating co-ruler'; there are also a number of vernacular-sounding compound verbs, such as *ξενηκούσθησαν* (cf. *γλυκοασπάζομαι*, *μυριαναστενάζω*, *συχνοκάμνω* in medieval Greek), which are clearly not to his liking. According to Eustathios (172, 5-7), the poet is as fond of compounds 'as mount Lebanon of its tall cedars, or another forest of its lofty poplars and soaring cypresses'; elsewhere (206, 14-15) he likens these lengthy compounds to 'words stretched out like ship timbers'. In the proem (286-307), he states that the style suffers from a lack of purity and clarity, resulting in it being as bright as 'starlight on a stormy night'; he then continues by saying that one should not criticize the poet for seeking to convey 'the depth of theological thoughts' in a language that in any other genre would be seen as obscure and pedantic. But the fact that he feels the need to defend the poet, I think, betrays some unease on his part: a sense that the hymn fails to offer the usual grandeur and forcefulness of John of Damascus.

It is unusual for a Byzantine text to be commented upon by other Byzantines. The reason for this is that the Byzantines themselves do not think of their own literature as part of the literary canon. There are many commentaries on classical authors and the church fathers, but there are hardly any dedicated to authors living after c. 600, with the exception of a number of hymnographers admired and studied because of their liturgical significance: Andrew of Crete, Kosmas the Melode, and John of Damascus. The iambic kanons that bear his name receive scholarly attention as early as the ninth century, but the first fully-fledged commentaries date from the twelfth century: Gregory of Corinth, Theodore Prodromos, and Eustathios of Thessaloniki. If one compares Eustathios' commentary on the pentecostal hymn with that of Gregory of Corinth, which is basically little more than a paraphrase – or, for that matter, with those of Prodromos on the other iambic hymns – it is not difficult to see that his commentary is a quantum leap forward. It shows refinement and academic rigour; it engages with theology and hymnody in a profoundly professional manner; and it uses the tools of classical scholarship with great skill. As one would expect of this Homeric scholar, Homer is often quoted, and so are Aristophanes, Euripides, and other ancient authors; but the source text most often referred to is, of course, the Bible. Eustathios deftly applies his monumental knowledge of the ancients, the Bible and the church fathers, thus elevating the scholarly discussion of Byzantine hymnody to a much higher level than the other commentaries of his time.

It is thanks to the edition by Cesaretti and Ronchey that we may begin to understand how exceptional Eustathios' commentary is. In fact, this edition offers two monuments of scholarship: theirs and his, and I can strongly recommend both to anyone interested in Byzantine philology.

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