An Introduction to the Palaiologan Romance
Narrating the Vernacular

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> How, then, shall I write from the beginning and how shall I narrate |
> a narrative most beautiful, amorous, magnificent, | of how from the
> beginning that wondrous maiden, | that most outstanding and beau-
> tiful Margarona suffered, | and how the circular motion of years
> turned again? | Well, let me write and tell and narrate![1]

So begins the unrhymed version of *Imperios and Margarona*, with the
narrator's query on how to tell his story. The Greek *Imperios and Margar-
ona*, probably composed in the second half of the fifteenth century and
often seen as the latest of the Byzantine romances, is an adaptation of the
French prose romance *Pierre de Provence et la belle Maguelonne*, composed
some decades earlier, but as noted by Panagiotis Agapitos in his discussion
of this particular passage, the French original has no such prologue. The
author of the Greek version accordingly 'decided to include a prologue in
the Byzantine tradition, just as he turned the late medieval French prose
into Byzantine verse'.[2] In doing so, he drew on the prologues of two earlier
Byzantine romances: the *Tale of Achilles* and *Velthandros and Chrysantza*.[3]
By contrast, the translator of another French romance, Benoît de Sainte-
Maure's twelfth-century *Roman de Troie*, which was turned into the Greek
War of Troy a century later and accordingly may be seen as one of the

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[1] *Imberios and Margarona* **N**, 3–8: Καὶ πῶς να γράψω ἐκ τας ἀρχὰς και πῶς να τὸ ἀφηγήσω, |
ἀφήγησιν πανέμορφην, ἐρωτικήν, μεγάλην, | πῶς ἔπαθεν ἐκ τὰς ἀρχὰς ἡ θαυμαστὴ ἐκείνη, | ἐκείνη ἡ
πανεξαίρετος ἡ ὡραία ἡ Μαργαρώνα, | καὶ πῶς τὸ κυκλοχρόνισμαν ἐγύρισεν αὐτίκα; | Λοιπόν, να
γράψω καὶ να εἰπῶ καὶ να τὸ ἀφηγοῦμαι. Text and trans. cited from Agapitos 2012: 319. This
unrhymed Naples **N** redaction, preserved in Neapol. gr. III-B-27, remains unpublished. On the five
different versions of *Imperios and Margarona*, see Agapitos 2012: 318, n. 304. On the same romance,
see also Chapter 5 in the present volume.
[2] Agapitos 2012: 319. On prologues and epilogues of Byzantine novels and romances, see also Cupane
2013: 76–84.
[3] Agapitos 2012: 319–20. The *Tale of Achilles* **N** has been preserved in the same manuscript as *Imberios
and Margarona* **N**; see Agapitos 2012: 318, n. 306; for a description of the manuscript, see Smith
1999: 1–5.

earliest of the Byzantine romances,[4] included no prologue, in spite of all
other translators into European languages doing so. It seems almost as if
no such readers' instructions on the work's intentions and usefulness
were needed when the Trojan story was returned to its originally Greek
context – or perhaps the translator wanted the readers to determine such
things for themselves. At the same time, the Greek-speaking audience of
the thirteenth century was obviously far removed both linguistically and
culturally from the original audience of the Homeric epics.[5]

This situation illustrates well the kind of issues we are facing when
entering the world of the late Byzantine romance: the relation between
'originals' and 'translations' or 'adaptations', the relation between Byzantine
and western traditions, linguistic and cultural transfer, as well as questions of
narrative, rhetoric and aesthetics – how to narrate a story in a manner that
pleases the audience. These latter concerns may be seen as central to any
work of literature, but the particular position of the late Byzantine romance –
between the learned and the 'popular', the East and the West – necessitated
certain narratological choices that may not have been as central to earlier
Byzantine storytellers. The authors of the learned novels of the twelfth
century, for instance, relied much more on the ancient novelistic tradition
and wrote primarily for a limited and highly educated audience in the
courtly circles of Constantinople.[6] The authors of the later romances, by
contrast, have a much less explicit debt to the classical heritage; as this
volume shows, allusions, type scenes and plot motifs were drawn from the
ancient sources, but the learned citations and other direct markers are not
evident. The narratological choices of the authors of the later romances
could include prologues of the kind cited above, preparing the audience for
what kind of story to expect, but also the handling of time, the representa-
tion of a suitable storyworld and the construction of characters.[7] While both
the so-called Komnenian novels (twelfth century) and the Palaiologan
romances (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries) could be seen as part of the
same Byzantine romance tradition, they differ not only as regards form and

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[4] For a detailed discussion of the dating of the *War of Troy*, see Chapter 8 in the present volume. For
   its inclusions among the romances, see further below.
[5] On linguistic and cultural concerns in the *War of Troy*, see Chapters 7 and 12 in the present volume.
[6] On the audience and context of the twelfth-century novels, see Burton 2008 and Roilos 2016. For a
   general introduction to the twelfth-century novels, see Nilsson 2016. See also below, n. 11.
[7] On the audience of the late Byzantine romances, see Cupane 2016b; Agapitos 2012: 296–330, along
   with his afterword in the present volume (Chapter 15). See also Agapitos 2012: 285–95 on four types of
   settings that mark the storyworld of Palaiologan romances (and accordingly also characterization):
   occidentalism, historicism, antiquarianism and utopianism. Cf. Cupane 2013 and 2014.

audience, but also as regards overall plot structures.[8] Carolina Cupane has defined this narratological difference between the novel and the romance in terms of the focus on 'adventure' (*avanture*) versus 'love' (*amour*) in the plots, arguing that the learned novels contain no quest of adventure, presenting the protagonists as passive, whereas the quest for adventure is introduced at the beginning of the vernacular romances but then dropped in favour of passivity.[9] The romances, however, are much more than just love stories; indeed, these texts (like the Komnenian novels) are a product of their time: a time of shifting geographic borders, changing cultural and social mores – particularly around issues of gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity – and deepening cultural and political interaction with neighbouring cultures. Thus, as much as they are stories marked by the aesthetic 'sweetness' and 'charm' that Walter Pater identifies as the primary importance of their western counterparts,[10] careful readings of the texts reveals a window into the Zeitgeist of late Byzantium.

In the present volume we have chosen to focus on the Palaiologan romances, even if the relation to the Komnenian novels is seen as highly relevant for our scholarly understanding of the later romances. While the novels have been receiving an increasing interest over the past decades, partly because of their close affinity with the ancient Greek novels, the Byzantine romances have not received as much detailed treatment.[11] This volume is accordingly an attempt to offer an overview not only of the texts

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[8] The terms 'Komnenian' and 'Palaiologan' derive from the imperial dynasties of the time and carry no ideological implications as such when used in this volume. On the Komnenian novels as a significant part of twelfth-century literature, see Nilsson 2014. The terms 'novel' and 'romance' are used throughout this volume in order to distinguish the twelfth-century texts (with a close relation to the ancient novels) from the later romances (related rather to the western romance of chivalry). Cf. Beaton 1996, who referred to both groups as 'romance'.

[9] This is a somewhat simplified summary of Cupane's careful analysis, which includes also the western romances, in which Cupane identifies a balance between the quest for adventure and the role of love in this quest; the Palaiologan romances thus represent a sort of mixture between the Komnenian and the western. See Cupane 1986 and 1999; cf. Agapitos 2004: 27–8 and the following analysis, in which he defines Komnenian novels as 'erotic dramas' and Palaiologan romances as 'erotic tales' (esp. 50–1). See also Agapitos 1991 for a narratological analysis of three of the Palaiologan romances.

[10] As, for instance, 'Here and there, under rare and happy conditions, in pointed architecture, in the doctrines of romantic love, in the poetry of Provence, the rude strength of the Middle Ages turns to sweetness; and the taste for sweetness generated there becomes the seed of the classical revival in it, prompting it constantly to seek after the springs of perfect sweetness in the Hellenic world' (1873: 2).

[11] On the Komnenian novels, see e.g. Beaton 1996: 9–88, esp. 70–88, Jeffreys 1998, Agapitos and Reinsch 2000, Nilsson 2001 and 2016, Roilos 2005. The English translation of all four Komnenian novels by Jeffreys 2012 has been very helpful in making them available to a larger audience, as has the edition and Italian translation by Conca 1994. For a recent volume that includes both the Komnenian novels and the Palaiologan romances within the frame of a larger Eastern Mediterranean tradition, see Cupane and Krönung 2016.

themselves and their research history, but also to point out new directions
and trends in the study of the late Byzantine romances, both in relation to
the Greek tradition and in relation to the western romances. Standing at a
critical juncture in the history of Greek language, literature, culture and
politics, the romances demonstrate, from a historical perspective, Byzan-
tium's position at the crossroads between East and West; it was the centre
of important intercultural exchange among European, Middle Eastern and
Mediterranean peoples. From a linguistic perspective, the romances repre-
sent a turning point in the history of the Greek language: they are often
considered the earliest works of the modern Greek language and a reposi-
tory of both oral storytelling and the multilingual Byzantine environment.
This particular position in the history of Greek literature and language has
also influenced the reception of the romances: they were not included in
the Renaissance editions of Greek texts and remained more or less forgot-
ten until they were picked up by nineteenth-century philologists, whose
interest in these works was less for their literary merits than their historical
and linguistic ones.[12]

Several scholars have contributed to the rise in the study of romances
over the last few decades, and the already mentioned Cupane and Agapitos
should certainly be seen as leading in that development. Working on both
learned and vernacular literature, as well as both western and eastern
romances, Cupane and Agapitos have been able to bring out both the
similarities and the differences between the various traditions, underlining
the need for a wide and encompassing study of romance literature.
Building on the foundational work of Cupane and other scholars, Roder-
ick Beaton's *Medieval Greek Romance* (1989, revised in 1996) proved to be
a seminal work in the field, establishing a canon whose centre and
periphery are still being debated. Beaton outlined the evolution of the
genre from its roots in the ancient Greek novel (first centuries CE), its so-
called revival in the twelfth century and, eventually, its flowering under the
Palaiologan dynasty.[13] Three years after Beaton's book, Agapitos and Ole
Smith published their sharply critical book-length response to Beaton, *The
Study of Medieval Greek Romance* (1992).[14] The friction between these two

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[12] Cupane 2016a: 119–20. For a history of the study of vernacular romance, focusing on the
nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Agapitos 2004: 9–12. See also below, n. 22.

[13] Beaton 1996.

[14] Agapitos and Smith 1992. This study was in turn reviewed by, among others, Kechayoglou 1994.
Beaton also offered a response to various reviews in the Afterword to his 2nd edition; Beaton 1996:
207–27.

volumes energized a generation's worth of scholarship, leading to insights which bore directly on the romances themselves on issues such as date and place of composition, chains of influence and formal elements of oral and literary composition as well as larger aspects of Byzantine literature and culture, such as issues of cultural contact between Byzantium and its eastern European and western Asian neighbours, gender relations, martial ideology and contributions to Byzantine editorial and manuscript practices. This decade of growth in the field culminated in an article written by Agapitos and followed by several responses under the title 'Genre, structure and poetics in the Byzantine vernacular romances of love' (2004). The so-called 'SO debate', named after the journal in which it appeared (*Symbolae Osloensis*) analysed the genre from a variety of then current theoretical and critical approaches.[15]

Since then, the study of the late Byzantine romance has been concerned with several major debates, and the chapters in this volume attempt to both engage with these debates and identify new avenues for future investigation. Perhaps chief among these debates is the question of cultural exchange between the Byzantines and the neighbouring countries East and West. These questions have recently been the subject of comparative study,[16] and also bear upon related questions of composition and aesthetics such as tradition versus innovation and linguistic and generic debates about translation and intertextuality. Among Beaton's principal goals for the *Medieval Greek Romance* was to establish the generic and compositional categories under which each individual work in the genre could be classified. Thus, though the Komnenian novels in his scheme are walled off temporally from the romances of the Palaiologan period, their inclusion in the volume emphasizes the genetic similarities between them, specifically the ways in which all the texts reinstantiate the marriage plot among young aristocrats. And yet, the Komnenian novels were written in a learned atticizing register that recalled the ancient Greek novels. The romances of the Palaiologan period, by contrast, were written in the vernacular and in different verse and metre; perhaps more importantly, the storyworlds in which they are set draw on the fictional imaginations of the neighbouring cultures of Europe and the Mediterranean, that is, not principally from the earlier Greek but from cultural contacts beyond

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[15] Agapitos 2004, with responses by Carolina Cupane, Martin Hinterberger, Elizabeth Jeffreys, Marc Lauxtermann, Ulrich Moennig, Ingela Nilsson, Paolo Odorico and Eustratios Papaioannou.
[16] See esp. Agapitos 2012; Moore 2014; Yiavis 2014 and 2016; Cupane and Krönung 2016.

Byzantium – Latins, Turks and Persians. Beaton then separates those works he considers 'originals' from those he considers 'translations and adaptations'.[17]

Beaton's articulation of the canon thus offers a clean taxonomy for distinguishing among the various works in the corpus; indeed, he rightly argues that 'no literary text is produced or written in a vacuum, and one of the tasks facing the historian of literature is to disentangle the networks of relationships which combined to establish a framework for the new literary text at the time when it was introduced'.[18] The *Medieval Greek Romance*, therefore, remains indispensable in establishing a canon and in demarcating the principal means of differentiating the various species of work within the broader family. And yet no attempt at categorization, however necessary and valuable, is without problematic instances that transgress those borders. Indeed, one of the principal critiques of Beaton by Agapitos and Smith is the rigidity of the boundaries and the ways in which they oversimplify the constellation of similarities and differences – in tone, in subject matter, in poetics, in source, etc. – that define them. Suggesting a revision of what they call Beaton's 'tripartite division of genetic development',[19] for instance, they propose more amorphous means of intertextuality in addition to the more identifiable models of allusion and citation: 'a common ground of training' that gave authors a catalogue of widely shared metaphors (the example they offer is the figure of Eros). Similarly, they challenge Beaton's assumptions that the genealogy of translated texts is easier than the so-called originals,[20] since 'the analysis of the "translated" romances has not so far conclusively proven how this translation question was handled'.[21]

The questions of how to understand the enforcement and transgression of this genetic model informs the first chapters of the volume. In 'The Categories of "Originals" and "Adaptations" in Late Byzantine Romance: A Reassessment', Kostas Yiavis (Chapter 2) offers a new way of thinking about the divide between the 'original' romances and the so-called translations. Yiavis argues against 'originality' as a sufficient category for vernacular Byzantine literature, suggesting instead that medieval writers were configured to apply themselves to authorities, and writers addressing more demanding audiences 'authorized' and 're-authorized' sources even when writing 'original' works. Both translations and 'original' romances, then,

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[17] Beaton 1996: 146.   [18] Beaton 1996: 146; see further for his discussion of intertextuality.
[19] Agapitos and Smith 1992: 75.   [20] Agapitos and Smith 1992: 75.
[21] Agapitos and Smith 1992: 75.

used the same narrative strategies of appropriating and exploiting type scenes, archetypical characters and narrative patterns, yet did so in a manner that called attention to translation and originality in ways contingent not upon abstract conceptions of genre (as Beaton might have it) but depending on the political and aesthetic contexts of the authors' literary purposes. As a result, Yiavis argues, there is no vernacular Byzantine 'translation' which is not a free adaptation which resets its original.

The theoretical discussion outlined by Yiavis is complemented in Chapter 3, by Carolina Cupane's 'Intercultural Encounters in the Late Byzantine Vernacular Romance'. Cupane analyses the twelfth-century Old French romance *Partonopeu de Blois*, which tells the story of how the eponymous hero reached Constantinople with the aid of the magic skills of the empress Melior and won her in marriage – thus realizing the union between East and West under French domination – to demonstrate the ways in which the story spread throughout Europe and the Mediterranean. While the versions in Dutch, German, Middle English, Italian, Spanish, Catalan and Old Norse represent more modern notions of translation as adhering to word-for-word fidelity, its passage into Greek is evident in ways that, though perhaps more oblique or indirect, nevertheless suggest a certain kind of intertextuality. Cupane's discussion of the ways in which similar story patterns and imagery can be seen in both *Partonopeu de Blois* and Palaiologan romances such as *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe* offers a method for suggesting cross-cultural and interlinguistic contact in the absence of philological proof. From a broader perspective, Cupane challenges the concept of generic hybridity, which assumes *a priori* iterations of pure exempla; rather, she suggests, stock motifs and genres show the seamless transportability of such conventions among folk tales, romances and related narrative forms.

The ensuing chapters similarly engage in comparative East–West analyses of the romances, though from perspectives yet different still. Efthymia Priki's 'Dreams and Female Initiation in *Livistros and Rhodamne* and *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*' uses a combination of Proppian narratology and anthropological initiation theory to explore the kinds of indirect cultural transfer suggested by Cupane. The first part of *Livistros and Rhodamne* and Book 1 of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* both explore how the male protagonists undergo a process of initiation in the mysteries of love, preparing them for their union with the women they desire. Dreams provide the necessary ritual spaces where these initiation processes can be accomplished, but they also perform a mediating function in the relationship of the protagonist couples. Even though they belong to

two different historical and sociocultural contexts, the two texts present striking similarities in the initiation processes of their male and female protagonists.

Romina Luzi's 'The Acculturation of the French Romance *Pierre de Provence et la belle Maguelonne* in the Byzantine *Imperios and Margarona*' (Chapter 5) furthers the exploration of the blurry boundary between translation and adaptation. Luzi argues that the deep similarities at the level of plot evince the Greek author's deep familiarity with the French work, and yet, he does not adhere to a fidelity model of translation. Rather, Luzi argues that the mechanics of the text's transmission can best be understood as a form of aesthetic and ideological translation, that is, a process of domestication by which a foreign work is made familiar to its new audience at the levels of plot, characterization and theme. The Greek work, therefore, is neither an adaptation nor an original in the modern sense of those terms, and thus Luzi's chapter exemplifies the ways in which Byzantine writers sought to make works considered too removed from the Byzantine literary canon more amenable to an audience with tastes other than those of the readership of the French romances.

Francesca Rizzo Nervo's 'Chronotopes between East and West in *Apollonios of Tyre*' (Chapter 6) adds to this discussion by offering a Bakhtinian analysis of another story that moved easily across cultural, linguistic and temporal boundaries. The story of Apollonios of Tyre, though based on a now lost ancient Greek source, was translated into Latin and its vernaculars and then again back into Greek. In each of the various retellings of the same fundamental plot – perhaps even drawn from the same Latin translation of the ancient Greek novel – not only language was translated, but rhetoric, style and genre as well. Thus, Rizzo Nervo argues, the story adopts a chronotope familiar to hagiographical writing when rendered in Greek, a moralizing discourse on Fate in Italian and an epic-romance in French.

While the chapters by Cupane, Priki, Luzi and Rizzo Nervo all focus on both direct and indirect forms of literary borrowing between East and West at levels such as plot, aesthetics and theme, Theodore Markopoulos's exploration of intercultural exchange focuses on linguistics. In 'Linguistic Contacts in the Late Byzantine Romances: Where Cultural Influence Meets Language Interference' (Chapter 7), he explores the *War of Troy*, a thirteenth-century translation of Benoît de Sainte-Maure's twelfth-century *Roman de Troie* to demonstrate how, under the Palaiologan dynasty, a number of works of western origin were translated into Greek. Like the *Apollonios of Tyre*, the *War of Troy* exists in complicated relation

to its western source material. But where Rizzo Nervo focuses on chronotopes, Markopoulos focuses on language. The status of the vernacular works as evidence of the everyday language of their time has often been disputed, and the *War of Troy* contains a most particular mixture of learned and vernacular elements, a fact which has remained largely ignored by linguists working on the history of Greek. Though this chapter is concerned primarily with the details of specific morphosyntactic properties of the *War of Troy* (verbal periphrases, participial forms and analytic adjectival comparatives), the conclusions it draws are accessible and far-reaching: it demonstrates the ways in which the source language (Old French), leaves visible traces at the linguistic level in the target language (medieval Greek). Not just the presence of French loanwords, but the frequency and variety of French grammatical and syntactical structures suggest the deep cultural and linguistic links which bound the languages and which also indicates the very different model of translation/adaptation employed in the case of the *War of Troy* as opposed to the other works addressed in the previous chapters.

Taken individually, the opening chapters address the multiplicity of ways in which cultural interaction manifests itself in specific iterations of East–West cultural exchange and the resulting aesthetic, ideological and generic manipulations that enable these works to be domesticated into new cultural, literary and political milieus. Taken as a whole, however, these chapters re-enforce the parameters of the debate established by Beaton – that is, they all seek, in one way or another, to answer questions about how the romances fit into or defy categories of original, adaptation and translation. Their lines of dissent follow from Agapitos and Smith's critique, arguing that the complex mechanisms of cultural and literary transfer belie seemingly easily delineated borders, and the evidence of these chapters seems to support such a reading. This blurring of boundaries, however, also has significance for the aesthetic and political positions of these works. Since the discovery of these works at the end of the nineteenth century, the late romances have often been seen through the lens of Greek nationalism.[22] In fact, Roderick Beaton groups them under the

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[22] Not only the late vernacular romances were treated in this manner, but even more so *Digenis Akritis*, 'discovered' in 1868 and published in 1875 under the title 'épopée byzantine'. The diplomat, politician and folklorist Nikolaos Politis proclaimed the newly discovered *Digenis Akritis* 'the national epic of the modern Greeks' in a lecture of 1907, when the territorial struggles of the early twentieth century were just heating up; see Mackridge 2009: 202 and 284. On this issue in the case of the Palaiologan romances and Byzantine literature at large, see Agapitos 1992 and 2004: 9–10; Cupane 2016a: 119–209. See also below, n. 26.

chapter heading 'The First "Modern Greek" Literature',[23] and while
Agapitos and Smith take issue with many of the claims made in the chapter
as a whole, they do not dispute the underlying assumption.

Given the importance of the romances to Greek nationalism, it follows
that the distinction between original and translated romances would have
important political ramifications; indeed the distinction is in large part a
way of measuring which works are original and therefore hold greater
political prestige, and which are translations and therefore less important
to the formation of an autonomous modern Greek identity free of external
influences. These distinctions, then, are as much questions of politics,
nationhood and ideology as they are of aesthetic, genre or philology. The
turn towards East–West literary relations, too, has its roots in a broader
cultural turn away from traditional positivist philology and towards a
postmodern subjectivity that prioritizes a certain kind of cosmopolitan
ideal that favours an analysis of cultural difference. A studied consideration
of the political and literary contexts within which the revival of these works
took place in the early-twentieth-century Greek literary imagination and
their reinterpretation from a transnational perspective in the last few
decades is an important consideration which may be a profitable area for
future study.

While the first six chapters of the present volume engage in the syn-
chronic question of literary relations, of Byzantium's relationship with its
neighbours, a second pressing question is the romances' status within the
broader Greek tradition, both in diachronic terms – specifically the rela-
tion of the Palaiologan romances with antiquity – and as regards the
relationship between the romances and related genres within the broader
corpus of Byzantine literary production. In Chapter 8 'From Herakles to
Erkoulios, or the Place of the *War of Troy* in the Late Byzantine Romance
Movement', Elizabeth Jeffreys shows how the *War of Troy* is linguistically
and narratologically related to the Palaiologan romances.[24] This text is not
just a translation of a western source – and thus subject to a synchronic
East–West paradigm of cultural exchange – but also an example of the
appropriation of the ancient Greek literary inheritance by Byzantine
writers. Though Greek writers in the Middle Ages had access to both
Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as well as to a variety of learned commentaries,
summaries and other Byzantine literature about the Trojan War, the
author of the Greek *War of Troy* opted instead to import a French source –
a decision, Jeffreys argues, that reflects the work's production in the mixed

[23] Beaton 1996: 91–100.   [24] See also Chapter 12 in the present volume.