

WRITER AND OCCASION IN TWELFTH-CENTURY BYZANTIUM

In twelfth-century Constantinople, writers worked on commission for the imperial family or aristocratic patrons. Texts were occasioned by specific events, representing a link both between writer and patron and between literary imagination and empirical reality. This is a study of how one such writer, Constantine Manasses, achieved that aim. Manasses depicted and praised the present by drawing from the rich sources of the Graeco-Roman and Biblical tradition, thus earning commissions from wealthy 'friends' during a career that spanned more than three decades. While the occasional literature of writers like Manasses has sometimes been seen as 'empty rhetoric', devoid of literary ambition, this study assumes that writing on command privileges originality and encourages the challenging of conventions. A society like twelfth-century Byzantium, in which occasional writing was central, called for a strong and individual authorial presence, since voice was the primary instrument for a successful career.

INGELA NILSSON is Professor of Greek and Byzantine Studies at Uppsala University and currently Director of the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul. Her most recent publications include *Raconter Byzance: la littérature au XIIe siècle* (2014) and, edited with Adam J. Goldwyn, *Reading the Late Byzantine Romance: A Handbook* (Cambridge, 2019). Nilsson is a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities.



Thirteenth-century Byzantine manuscript of Oppian, *De venatione*

WRITER AND OCCASION
IN TWELFTH-CENTURY
BYZANTIUM

The Authorial Voice of Constantine Manasses

INGELA NILSSON

Uppsala University, Sweden



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-82426-2 — Writer and Occasion in Twelfth-Century Byzantium
 Ingela Nilsson
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.
 It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
 education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108824262
 DOI: 10.1017/9781108910217

© Ingela Nilsson 2021

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
 no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
 permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2021
 First paperback edition 2022

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

NAMES: Nilsson, Ingela, author.

TITLE: Writer and occasion in twelfth-century Byzantium : the authorial voice of Constantine
 Manasses / Ingela Nilsson, Uppsala University, Sweden.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, UK ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2020. | Includes bibliographical
 references and indexes.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2020023801 (print) | LCCN 2020023802 (ebook) | ISBN 9781108843355
 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108824262 (paperback) | ISBN 9781108910217 (epub)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Manasses, Constantine, -1187—Criticism and interpretation. |
 Byzantine Empire—In literature.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC PA5319.M3 N55 2020 (print) | LCC PA5319.M3 (ebook) | DDC 880.9—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020023801>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020023802>

ISBN 978-1-108-84335-5 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-82426-2 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or
 accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in
 this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,
 or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	page vii
<i>A Note on Texts and Translations</i>	ix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	x
1 The Authorial Voice of Occasional Literature	1
Writer, Text and Occasion	4
Constantine Manasses and His Texts	13
Narrative Strategies and Extraliterary Ends	20
2 Praising the Emperor, Visualizing His City	25
In Praise of the Emperor	28
Imperial Praise in Ekphrastic Guise	35
A Constantinopolitan in Temporary Exile	46
To Be on the Outside or the Inside	54
3 The Occasion of Death: Patronage and the Writer on Command	58
Your Sorrow is My Concern	64
Yours, As Ever	71
My Goldfinch is Dead!	76
The Good Teacher and the Generous Donor	82
4 In Times of Trouble: Networks and Friendships	86
Rhetorical Skill at Work	91
The Need to Address the Logothete	99
With a Little Help from My Friends	106
5 On an Educational Note: The Writer as <i>Grammatikos</i>	113
Gazing at the Stars	117
An Ancient Life in Verse	124
Enigmatic Exercises	130
The Model Author and the Teacher	138

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
6	Life, Love and the Past: Self-Quotation and Recycling	142
	A Pleasant Reading of the Past	145
	Excerpted Love and Envy	153
	A Moral Poem à la Manasses	160
	Whose Emotions, Whose Life?	166
7	Occasional Writing as a Creative Craft	170
	Recycling the Past, Recycling the Present (1)	171
	Recycling the Past, Recycling the Present (2)	176
	Occasional Literature Between History and Fiction	181
	The Voice, Story and Career of Constantine Manasses	185
	<i>Bibliography</i>	191
	<i>Index locorum</i>	215
	<i>General Index</i>	217

Acknowledgements

I have spent many years in the company of Constantine Manasses; too many years, perhaps, but I seem to have needed them in order to decide how to deal with the persistent voice that was calling for my attention. The time has come to ‘relax the oar and let the ship rest’, as he may have put it, and I feel more than ready to say farewell.

My interest in Manasses was first prompted by D. Roderich Reinsch, who suggested that I should look more carefully at the *Verse chronicle*. Under his direction, my postdoctoral years in Berlin helped to shape not only the first part of the project, but also me as a scholar. I am most grateful for the guidance and support that Roderich still offers, and I wish to thank the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung and Wenner-Gren Foundation for their financial support during my Berlin years. Various research environments have followed in Uppsala, Paris, Oslo, Vienna and Istanbul; I feel privileged to have worked in such favourable milieus, willing to give me both the peace and the stimulation that I needed for this and for various other projects. A fellowship at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study gave me the opportunity to develop a first expanded version of the project that eventually turned into this monograph; Riksbankens Jubileumsfond for the Advancement of the Humanities and Social Sciences sponsored a sabbatical that made it possible to actually write it.

Many colleagues have offered their encouragement and support over a long period of time and in very different ways, ranging from discussions of problems to the reading of drafts: Panagiotis Agapitos, Beata Agrell, Lars Berglund, Carolina Cupane, Adam Goldwyn, Olof Heilo, Martin Hinterberger, Krystina Kubina, Karin Kukkonen, Marc Lauxtermann, Margaret Mullett, Paolo Odorico, Stratis Papaioannou, Andreas Rhoby, Roger Scott, Fredrik Sixtensson, Myrto Veikou and Nikos Zagklas. Panagiotis and Stratis were kind enough to read all translations and offer their advice at the very end of the journey, Nikos checked numerous

last-minute references for me in the Vienna library and Adam took the time to read the entire manuscript and revise my English, regardless of how tired he must have been of Manasses by then. I am most grateful for their generous help. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for useful remarks. Needless to say, any mistakes remain my responsibility.

There is one person in particular who has been instrumental in bringing this project to an end: Charis Messis, without whose relentless support this book would never have come into being. When I was ready to give up, he was the one who convinced me that the book was already in my head – *il faut juste sortir*. I truly cannot thank Charis enough for being such a knowledgeable, kind and critical colleague and friend.

Last but not least, many thanks to Michael Sharp for good advice and for graciously guiding me through the process of publishing with Cambridge University Press. I am also grateful to my content manager Bethany Johnson, who has been most patient and helpful in the final production phase of the book, and to my copy-editor Malcolm Todd, who has saved me from numerous inconsistencies and mistakes.

A Note on Texts and Translations

Many of the texts by Constantine Manasses cited in this book have not previously been translated into English. Many of them were also edited more than a century ago and accordingly appear in old and sometimes unreliable editions. It was my decision to go ahead nevertheless with what I had at my disposal and not do any manuscript studies for this monograph, which means that I cite the available editions even when I find them problematic (in which case I comment on that in the notes). My translation is an attempt to follow the Greek without producing unreadable English and although each translation is an interpretation and thus always open for discussion, I hope the reader will find them useful.

I also decided to use English titles for all works cited here instead of the traditional mixture of Greek and Latin. Accordingly, I speak of, for example, the *Verse chronicle* and the *Origins of Oppian* rather than of the *Synopsis Chronike* and the *Vita Oppiani*. I hope this will not be confusing for the reader. A complete list of works, indicating editions and translations (in the case they occur), is to be found at the beginning of the bibliographical section.

My hope is that the material presented here will encourage other scholars to engage in new editions, translations and studies of Manasses' literary output.

List of Abbreviations

BMGS	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
BSI	<i>Byzantinoslavica</i>
Byz	<i>Byzantion</i>
ByzF	<i>Byzantinische Forschungen</i>
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CFHB	<i>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae</i>
CSHB	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i>
DBBE	Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams (www.dbbe.ugent.be)
DNP	<i>Der Neue Pauly</i> = <i>Brill's New Pauly online</i> , ed. H. Cancik and H. Schneider
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
JÖB	<i>Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
LBG	<i>Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität besonders des 9.–12. Jahrhunderts</i> , ed. E. Trapp et al. (Vienna 1994–2017)
MEG	<i>Medioevo greco</i>
ODB	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> , 3 vols., ed. A. P. Kazdan (Oxford and New York 1991)
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris 1857–66)
REB	<i>Revue des études byzantines</i>
RSBN	<i>Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici</i>
VizVrem	<i>Vizantiiskii Vremennik</i>
WSt	<i>Wiener Studien</i>