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Pizzone, Aglae

*Published in:*  
Byzantinische Zeitschrift

*DOI:*  
10.1515/bz-2021-0063

*Publication date:*  
2021

*Document version:*  
Final published version

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Pizzone, A. (2021). Christmas presents for John Tzetzes: A new verse epistle from the letter collection. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 114(3), 1303-1320. <https://doi.org/10.1515/bz-2021-0063>

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Aglae Pizzone

## Christmas presents for John Tzetzes: a new verse epistle from the letter collection

**Abstract:** The corpus of Tzetzes' epistles edited by Pietro Luigi Leone in 1972 includes 107 letters. However, two of the earliest manuscript witnesses of the collection bequeath a 108<sup>th</sup> letter consisting of 16 iambs and closing the corpus. The short missive is addressed to one Konstantinos Phyteianos. The present paper provides the first edition and translation into English of this letter, analysing its authorship and contents as well as its rhetorical function within the corpus.

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**Adresse:** Dr Aglae Pizzone, Danish Institute for Advanced Study/Department of History, University of Southern Denmark, Campusvej 55, 5230 Odense, DENMARK; pizzone@sdu.dk

As recently noted by Nikolaos ZAGKLAS, John Tzetzes' letter collection includes three epistles with iambic epilogues.<sup>1</sup> Tzetzes was also the author of a poetic letter addressed to the grammarian John Lachanas,<sup>2</sup> designed to provide the base text for the first section of his self-commentary, the *Historiai*. The epistle, therefore, was not part of the letter-collection proper. The latter, currently available in the edition by Pietro Luigi LEONE, consists of 107 letters,<sup>3</sup> none of them being in verse.<sup>4</sup> Yet, a closer examination of the two earliest manuscripts transmitting the corpus, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vaticano greco 1369 and

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Research leading to this publication was supported by the Danish Institute for Advanced Study and the Independent Research Fund Denmark, within the project "Medieval Self-Commentaries Beyond Europe".

**1** N. ZAGKLAS, *Experimenting with prose and verse in twelfth-century Byzantium: a preliminary survey*. *DOP* 71 (2017), 229–248 (here 237). For the overlap between poetry and letter writing in the twelfth century see *Id.*, *Epistolarity in twelfth century Byzantine poetry*, in K. Kubina/A. Riehle (eds.), *Epistolary poetry in Byzantium and beyond. An anthology with critical essays*. London 2021, 64–78 (65–67 for Tzetzes). See also the introduction of the editors (1–29), especially for epistolary poetry as a genre (17–29) and the letter as closely connected with gift giving (11, with previous bibliography), which is a theme central also to the text dealt with in the present paper.

**2** On its structural relevance, see A. PIZZONE, *The Historiai of John Tzetzes: a Byzantine 'book of memory'?* *BMGS* 41 (2017), 182–207.

**3** P.A. LEONE, *Ioannis Tzetzae Epistulae*. Stuttgart 1972.

**4** Ep. 10, to his deceased brother could have been the exception, but sorrow prevented Tzetzes from composing in 'publishable' way: see PIZZONE, *Historiai* (as footnote 2 above), 189.

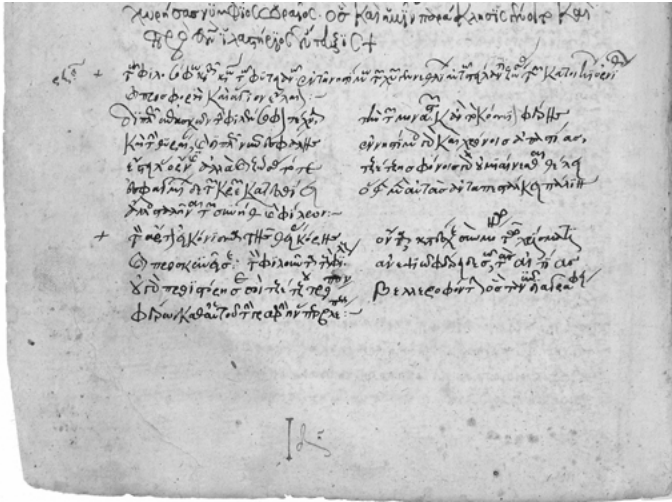


Fig. 1. Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vaticano greco 1369, f. 104<sup>v</sup>. Copyright Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Grec 2750,<sup>5</sup> shows the presence of one last short letter in dodecasyllables copied immediately after ep. 107 and numbered as 108 (fig. 1 and 2). In the present paper I will offer the first edition and translation into English of this letter, as well as an analysis of its tradition, contents and authorship.

## Text and translation

Τῷ φιλοσόφῳ κυρίῳ Κωνσταντίνῳ τῷ Φυτειανῷ ἐν τῇ νηστήμῳ τῶν Χριστοῦ γενεθλίων αὐτῷ στειλάντι ζώσας τῶν κατοικίων ὀρνίθων καὶ προσφορὰν καὶ ἅγιον ἔλαιον.

Διπλῶς ἐπασκῶν τὴν φιλένσοφον τέχνην,  
τὴν τῶν μοναστῶν κἄν τὸ κόσμιον φέρης  
καὶ τὴν θυραΐαν, καὶ διπλῶς νῦν ἐσφάλης  
ἐν νηστήμοις γὰρ καὶ χρόνοις ἀπαστίας,

<sup>5</sup> The two manuscripts belong respectively into the first and second recension of the collection cum *Historiai*, according to Leone's reconstruction: see P.A. LEONE, *Ioannis Tzetzae Historiae*. Bari 2007, here xvi – lxxvi. For further analysis, see below.

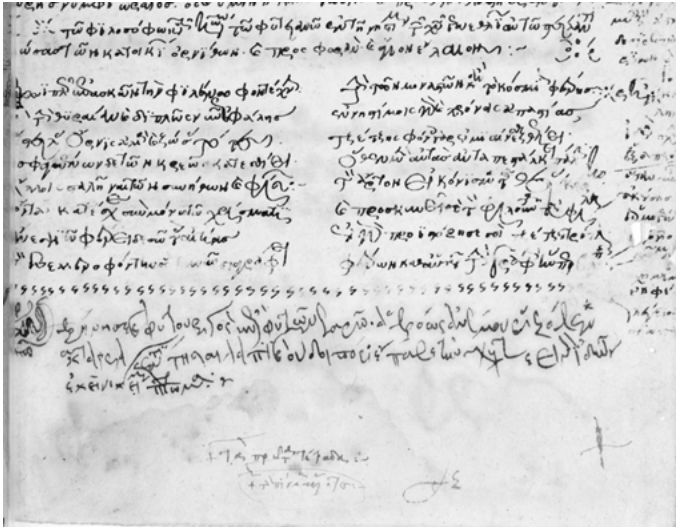


Fig. 2. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Grec 2750, 235'. Source gallica.bnf.fr

- 5 ἔστειλας ὄρνις ἀλλὰ καὶ ζώσας τότε.  
 Τζέτζης φόνους γὰρ οὐ μιαινέσθαι θέλει,  
 ἔσφαγμένων δὲ τῶν κρεῶν κατεσθίει.  
 Ὅθεν μὲν αὐτὰς ἀνταπεσάλκει πάλιν  
 ἄλλοις σταλῆναι τῶν συνήθων καὶ φίλων.
- 10 Τὸν ἄρτον εἰκόνημα τῆς θείας κόρης  
 ὄντα δὲ κατέσχε σὺν μόνῳ τῷ χρίσματι  
 καὶ προσκυνεῖ σὲ τὸν φιλοῦντα τοὺς φίλους·  
 ἀνεπιῶ φέρει δὲ σῶ τὰς αἰτίας  
 οὐ γὰρ προϊστόρησε σοὶ Τζέτζου τρόπον.
- 15 Τὸν Βελλεροφόντην ὃς τανῶν διαγράφει  
 φέρων καθ'αὐτοῦ τὴν γραφὴν ἥπερ βλέπεις.

15 Τὸν om. V

(Written) during the Nativity fasting to the philosopher sir Konstantinos Phyteianos who sent him alive exemplars from his home poultry and oblation and holy oil.

You, who practice twice the wisdom-loving art,  
 that of the monks, even if you carry the ornaments,  
 and that of the pagans, you have now failed twice:  
 for during fasting and in times of abstention,

you sent me birds,<sup>6</sup> and still alive at that!  
 Tzetzes does not want to be polluted by any killing,  
 he eats only from slaughtered meats.  
 Therefore, he had sent them back,  
 to be dispatched to some other relatives and friends.  
 The bread, which is an image of the godly Virgin,  
 he did keep with the chrism alone  
 and he salutes you, who do love your friends;  
 he puts however the blame on your nephew,  
 for he did not explain in advance the ways of Tzetzes.  
 Now he makes an image of Bellerophon,  
 carrying with himself the accusation that you see.

## Textual tradition and authorship

I will disentangle the textual tradition of the short letter, pinpointing at the same time the elements – in terms of both vocabulary and content – supporting Tzetzes' authorship. All the witnesses of Tzetzes' letter-collection are described by Leone in the introduction to his critical editions.<sup>7</sup> In what follows, therefore, I will not describe the manuscripts in detail. Instead, I will confine my self to underlying those features that might help explain the presence of the short mis-sive at the end of the collection and/or have been overlooked by Leone's description.

Vat. gr. 1369 (V, in LEONE's stemma codicum)<sup>8</sup> is dated by LEONE between the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>.<sup>9</sup> It is one of the most ancient manuscripts preserving the letter collection and the *Historiai*, as well as

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6 Both manuscripts have ὄρνις with long ι, a form of accusative plural attested also in Aristophanes (cf. *Birds* 717, 1250, 1610) and in the ancient tragic poets (cf. for instance Eur., *Hippolytus* 1059). Although the term per se does not offer any information on the kind of birds with which Tzetzes is dealing, the title of the letter suggests that they are not game, but domesticated animals.

7 See footnote 5 above and LEONE, *Tzetzae Epistulae* (as footnote 3 above), here ix–xx.

8 LEONE, *Ioannis Tzetzae Historiae* (as footnote 5 above), xvi–xviii. The manuscript is fully digitized and can be consulted at [https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Vat.gr.1369](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1369).

9 The manuscript, however, is probably earlier and to be dated to the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, as it does not show yet fully developed Fettaugenmode modules. I thank Stefano Martinelli Tempesta for discussing with me this issue (which deserves further inquiry) as well as the question of the dating of the hand who copied letter 108 in V.

the best witness for recension a. Our letter is copied at f. 104v (**fig. 1**). The manuscript is penned by three different professional hands. The letter collection, stretching from f. 71r to f. 104v, was copied by one and the same hand, who transcribed ff. 67r–104v.<sup>10</sup> The material is arranged in such a way that the *Historiai*-commentary is interspersed with the text of the letters. In the case of the first section (ff. 1r–63v), the commentary comes before the verse letter to Lachanas (ff. 59r–63v), while in the second (ff. 63v–70v) and third one (ff. 71r–255v), the relevant letters (ep. 1: ff. 63v–64r; epp. 2–107: 71r–104v) come before the *pinakes* and the *Historiai*-commentary.

*Pinakes* and titles in the Vat. Gr. 1369 are very detailed. The manuscript probably derives from a copy edited by Tzetzes himself and preserves traces of his work on the text. Thus, at 67r – right after the first epistle to Epiphanius – we find the prose note explaining Tzetzes’ second thoughts on the work’s organization and his subsequent troubles with copyists: such a note explains the reasons of the twofold recension testified by the surviving manuscripts.<sup>11</sup>

The letters are all numbered: ours is numbered 108 (**fig. 1**). The epistle is written on two columns by a different hand than the rest of the collection. The handwriting points more distinctively than the main text to the Palaeologan era, as shown by a comparison with Michael Loulloudes’ hand, for instance (RGK I 281). The text maintains the same margins as the epistles copied previously. For the epistles from 1 to 107, however, numbers are mostly written in full and embedded in the address line, whereas for 108 the copyist uses alphabetic numbering, added in the margin. The title of the epistle occupies the full width of the written page. There is no decorative band separating it from the previous epistle.

The corpus of letters is not introduced by a general title. The *Historiai*, however, are. The title can be found at f. 109r before the *pinax* (f. 109r–115r) detailing all the “entries” of the commentaries on letters 2–107. The title reads as follows:

Πίναξ ἱστοριῶν τῶν ἐν τῇδε τῇ βίβλῳ γεγραμμένων ἐπιστολῶν, ἐξ ἀρχῆς αὐτῆς δευτέρας ἐπιστολῆς μέχρι τέλους τῆς ρζ ἐπιστολῆς

Summary of the stories to the letters written in this book, from the beginning of this second letter to the end of letter 107.

<sup>10</sup> LEONE, Ioannis Tzetzae Historiae (as footnote 5 above), xvi – xvii.

<sup>11</sup> The note can be read in LEONE, Ioannis Tzetzae Epistulae (as footnote 3 above), 159 – 160.

This title, which is to be found also in other manuscripts of both recensions,<sup>12</sup> is most likely one of the reasons why the verse letter to Konstantinos Phyteianos has been previously disregarded: it exceeds the number of letters indicated by the title of the *Historiai*. WENDEL, for instance, in what still is the most comprehensive published survey of Tzetzes' life and work to date, asserts, on the basis of this title: "Die erhaltene Sammlung von 107 Briefen ist von T. selbst angelegt und in eben diesem Umfang veröffentlicht worden".<sup>13</sup> The title, however, could be compatible with the presence of one more letter, given that the verse epistle is actually not commented and, as we shall see, was probably conceived of as a humorous appendix.

The Par. gr. 2750 (A, in Leone's stemma codicum), whose handwriting can be ascribed to the style beta/gamma, described by WILSON on the basis of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Baroccianus graecus 131,<sup>14</sup> is dated to the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Our letter is to be read at f. 235r (**fig. 2**). The manuscript was copied by a single hand, with the exception of three folia (208v and 237r–v) and few marginal notes, added in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

As a witness of recension b, the manuscript shows a different organization of the material than the Vaticanus. The *Historiai* are copied all together (1r–202v), the letter to Lachanas being part of the first textual unit (ff. 4r–20r). Internal partitions are marked by titles (ff. 4r; 71r; 202v) and two *pinakes* (ff. 1r–3r; 71v–77v), accounting for the histories commenting on the letter to Lachanas and on the first letter of the collection. The third *pinax*, however, is missing. The *Historiai* are followed by the so-called "iambos", as per LEONE's definition (203r–208v).<sup>15</sup>

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**12** See Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Grec 2644 (B), f. 105v (LEONE, Ioannis Tzetzae Historiae, as footnote 5 above, xix); Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auctarium T I 10 (O), f. 125<sup>v</sup> (ibid., xxi); Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Grec 2750 (A), f. 63r (ibid., xxvi); Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Graecus 338 (C), f. 92r (ibid., xxvii); Cambridge, University Library, Ee VI 35 (E), f. 96r (ibid., xxviii); Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Greco 69, 14 (L), f. 30v (ibid., xxix).

**13** C. WENDEL, Tzetzes, Johannes. *RE* Band VII A,2. Stuttgart 1948, coll. 1959–2010, here col. 1992).

**14** See the information provided by Gallica <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52510946d/f423.item.r=Par> and <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52510946d/f423.item.r=Parxxvixxvii>. T. PRESSEL's edition (Joannis Tzetzae Epistolae. Tubingae 1851) was based on this manuscript and on the Par. gr. 2644. However PRESSEL too seems to ignore letter 108 and stresses that the letters were 107 (iv). See also LEONE, Ioannis Tzetzae Historia (as footnote 5 above), xxvi – xxvii.

**15** P. A. LEONE, Ioannis Tzetzae Iambi. *RSBN* 16–17 (1969–1970), 127–156. In fact, the texts published by Leone include also a poem in hexameters. On the function and meaning of these texts see now C. D'AGOSTINI/A. PIZZONE, Clawing rhetoric back: humor and polemic in Tzetzes hexameters on the *Historiai*. *Parekbolai* 11 (2021), 123–158.

The letter collection is introduced by the title Τζέτζου ἐπιστολαὶ διὰ ἱστοριῶν τινῶν τῶν προγεγραμμένων (210r), which testifies to the fact that not all the letters commented on by the stories included the manuscript are present in the relevant textual unit: the first letter copied after the “iambus” is, in fact, letter 15. Each letter is preceded by the address, mostly framed by two asterisks. Contrary to the Vaticanus, however, the numbers are given in alphabetic characters in the margin: the numbering starts with the second letter copied, correctly marked as ις (f. 210r). The copyist therefore was aware that the selection was not complete.

Our letter is to be found at f. 235 r (**fig. 2**), copied with no interruption after letter 107. The verse epistle, introduced by a title occupying the full width of the written page, is written on two columns by the same hand as the rest of the collection, following the same layout that we find elsewhere for verses occasionally embedded in the prose letters (see for instance f. 234v). After the letter, there is a rough decorative band of hook-shaped *obeloi*, which seems to signal the end of the textual unit, similar, for instance, to the more sophisticated one traced in red at f. 77v, after the end of the second section of the *Historiai*. The presence of the metric letter might have created some puzzlement also to late medieval/early modern readers: underneath the decorative band, the 15<sup>th</sup> century annotator starts copying again letter 107, stopping however after a couple of lines.

The examination of the two manuscripts suggests that the letter was integral to the manuscript’s layout in A, while in V it was added at a later point, perhaps by someone who had access to or knew it from a copy belonging to the later recension. Although to the best of my knowledge the letter is not preserved by other manuscripts, it has left some traces in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Baroccianus graecus 194, belonging into recension a and dated to the mid of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (N, in LEONE’s *stemma*).<sup>16</sup> As recently stressed, this manuscript is a “multi-text” book, likely produced for educational purposes. Besides the *Historiai*, it contains miscellaneous material, partly related to grammatical and rhetorical instruction.<sup>17</sup>

The copyist-compiler, the Makarios writing the acrostic cento at ff. 48<sup>r-v</sup> and leaving his name also on f. 105v and 174r, has a rather free attitude toward the

<sup>16</sup> See LEONE, Ioannis Tzetzae *Historiae* (as footnote 5 above), xxiii–xxiv. The manuscript is now digitized at <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/8498c2c6-6930-4cda-b8a0-f7e-f806ee7de/>. F. SPINGOU has argued for the mid of the century based on writing style (minuscule of the “Hodegon type”) and watermarks, see: A poem on the refortification of Dorylaion in 1175. *Byzantina Symmeikta* 21 (2011) 137–168 (here 148).

<sup>17</sup> See for the definition of multi-text book applied to this manuscript R. MEESTERS/R. PRAET/F. BERNARD/K. DEMOEN, Makarios’ cycle of epigrams on the Psalms Bodleian Baroccianus 194. *BZ* 109 (2016), 837–860 (here 838–840).



texts he copies, adding or excepting material.<sup>18</sup> In the case of the *Historiai*, he heavily “appropriates” Tzetzes’ text, as it were, abridging, cutting and adding lines to fit his own needs.<sup>19</sup> The text, moreover, is written continuously without any separation between verses. The *terminus post quem* is provided by a lengthy passage inserted at f. 81v after *Historiai* IV 133, in which the compiler mentions the death of Antonio Acciaiuoli, the second Florentine *doux* of Athens, which happened in summer 1435.<sup>20</sup>

From further lines added at f. 80v, after *Historiai* IV 118, 33, we learn that the section of the manuscript containing the *Historiai* was copied in Methone, while the compiler was waiting to sail back to Constantinople. Oppressed by his busy daily routine, he complains about the lack of time, preventing him from engaging in intellectual occupations.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, given the hurry and the risk of getting bored, he decides to skip some portions of the text, urging the most dedicated readers to look elsewhere for the missing parts, in a quintessentially Tzetizian move.<sup>22</sup> In writing so, the compiler also specifies that the gaps are

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**18** See SPINGOU (as footnote 16 above), 149–149 and MEESTERS/PRAET/BERNARD/DEMOEN, Makarios’ cycle (as footnote 17 above), 839–840 and p. 854–855 on the fact that Makarios must refer to a personal name.

**19** The relevant texts are partly published in P. L. LEONE, Significato e limiti della revisione delle *Historiae* di G. Tzetzes. *Aevum* 37 (1963), 239–248, partly in: Gli scolii alle “*Historiae*” di Giovanni Tzetzes. *SIFC* 33 (1961), 190–229 (here 192–196).

**20** See the contribution: P. L. LEONE, Un “documento” su Antonio Acciaiuoli e Maria (Melissena) nel cod. Barrocc. gr. 194. *Quaderni Catanesi di Studi Classici e Medievali* 7/13 (1985), 5–9. On Acciaiuoli’s death see also C. UGURGERI DELLA BERARDENGA, *Gli Acciaiuoli di Firenze*, vol. 1. Firenze 1962, here 392.

**21** Vv. 14–16, p. 193 Leone: ὄλας ἡμέρας φεῦ μοι φεῦ, περισπασμῶ συγχύσει / κατηναλίσκων (sic) πάσας μου ἄκαρ’ ἀδιαφόρως (Pity me, wasting away all my days amidst distraction, confusion and invariably ill-timed activities). These historical details concerning the compiler of the manuscript have escaped the attention of scholars previously engaging with the Barrocc. gr. 194, because a) they are inscribed seamlessly in the text of the *Historiai*; and also probably because b) Leone’s contribution is not listed in the Pinakes database. In my opinion these details might offer insights into the identity of Makarios. A viable hypothesis could be that the compiler was part of the delegation following John VIII to Florence in 1436, now on the way back to the capital. The successor of Antonio Acciaiuoli, Neri II, was in Florence at the time. Since the Byzantine delegation had carried with them a number of books, this would explain why the compiler had at his disposal Tzetzes’ *Historiai*. It should be noted that the manuscript contains also other ἱστορίαι, that is those of the Ps. Nonnos, devoted to the exegesis of mythological details in Gregory of Nazianzos’ and Basil’s orations. Pursuing this avenue of enquiry, however, goes beyond the scope of the present contribution. I intend to come back to the topic in a future publication.

**22** Vv. 4–5, p. 193 LEONE: ἀλλ’ὡς φιλομαθέστατος αὐτὸς καὶ φιλολόγος / ζῆτει ἐμπόνως πανταχοῦ, καὶ πάντως ἀνευρήσης (But anyone, particularly devoted to learning and to the *logos* /

due to his own choice and not to the state of his *antigraphon*, which preserves the text in its entirety<sup>23</sup>. The same compiler, after copying the stories commenting on the first letter, signals again (86r) that he will not copy the rest of the letter collection. The note builds on the inscribed *pinax* provided by Tzetzes himself at V 23, 186–192 (the first two lines are actually from the original text)<sup>24</sup> and runs as follows:<sup>25</sup>

Ἴδου τῆς νῦν ἐπιστολῆς ἔχεις τὰς ἱστορίας  
 εἴκοσι τρεῖς εἰς ἀριθμὸν τὰς πάσας ὑψηρογμένας  
 τὰς δ’ ἄλλας τὰς ἐπιστολάς Τζέτζου τὰς γεγραμμένας,  
 δεκάδεκα τὸν ἀριθμὸν, πρὸς δὲ ἑπτὰ σὺν τούτοις,  
 ἐὼ ταύτας ὡς περιττάς, καὶ μὴ τῶν ἀναγκαίων  
 κομψολογίαν φερούσας κτλ.

There you get the stories of the present letter,  
 all together they are twenty-three in number;  
 the other letters written by Tzetzes, however,  
 hundred in number plus seven more,  
 are left out: redundant as they are, they show  
 the vanity of things superfluous, etc.

The compiler deems the letters on which the *Historiai* comment too trivial in content to be copied. And yet, he provides an indication of the amount of text he skips. We thus learn that *besides* the first letter to Epiphanius, his *antigraphon* contained 107 letters, which leads to the conclusion that the manuscript from which he copied had a collection of 108 letters in total.

From all these data, we can conclude that the letter was present in the early manuscript transmission of the collection (at least of recension b) and was still considered integral to the corpus in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. I will now move on to exam-

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needs to look everywhere with effort, and he will totally find them). Tzetzes does something very similar when he reminds his readers of the loss of material and of the need to look elsewhere for the missing parts, which could not be copied: see for instance *Historiai* IV 779, 4 and prose note before VI 63.

**23** Vv. 15–16, p. 193 (Leone ascribes the lines to f. 78 v, whereas they belong at the beginning of the next cluster of text and they are to be found at f. 80 v): Ἐὼ καὶ ταύτης τὸ λοιπὸν ἦδη τῆς ἱστορίας, / τὸ γάρ μοι ἀθηβολαίον οὕτω καὶ ταύτην εἶχε / σῶαν, καθὼσπερ ὄπισθεν ἐάσαμεν καὶ ἄλλας (I now omit also the remainder of this story, for my antigraph had this story too in its entirety, just as I have already omitted the others before).

**24** See *Historiai* V 23, 186–202.

**25** See LEONE, *Significato e limiti* (as footnote 19 above), 243.

ining some salient traits of the letter's content, which point to Tzetzes' authorship.

The letter, written during the Nativity fast, which lasted from the 15<sup>th</sup> of November to Christmas eve, revolves around the presents sent by the addressee and the writer's habit of not eating fresh meat. This is a detail that comes up also elsewhere in Tzetzes' letter collection. There are two missives, in particular, in which he voices his dislike for fresh meat: letter 93 to Alexios Pantechnes and letter 104 to a former servant.<sup>26</sup> The situation described in letter 93 is very similar to the one we are presented with in the metrical epistle: together with spices, Alexios had sent Tzetzes birds and alive partridge on different occasions. Tzetzes seizes the opportunity to remind his friend that he only eats either cured or freshly slaughtered meat, provided the task of killing the animals were carried out by others.<sup>27</sup> We are to do more or less with the same situation as in letter 108: given the Nativity fast Tzetzes cannot ask anyone to kill and prepare the meat for him. The assumption is here that he lives already in the monastery of Pantokrator,<sup>28</sup> hence the mention of monastic rules.

Form too reinforces the idea of Tzetzes' authorship. To begin with, the adjective φιλένσοφος at v. 1 is extremely rare and one of its few instances is to be found in the *Allegories on the Verse Chronicle* by Tzetzes.<sup>29</sup> But it is above all the metric structure of the letter that turns out to be revealing.

As mentioned above, the short missive is written in iambs. The verses are prosodic dodecasyllables, allowing, as we shall see, occasional substitutions and resolutions.<sup>30</sup> The metrical scheme is as follows:

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<sup>26</sup> See pp. 123–125,7 and 150–152,15 LEONE.

<sup>27</sup> On the two letters and Tzetzes' dietaries habits see A. A. DEMOSTHENOUS, The scholar and the partridge: attitudes relating to nutritional goods in the twelfth century from the letters of the scholar John Tzetzes, in W. Mayer/S. Trzcionka (eds.), *Feast, fast or famine. Food and drink in Byzantium*. Leiden/Boston, 2005, here 25–32; M. GRÜNBART, Store in a cool and dry place: perishable goods and their preservation in Byzantium, in L. Brubaker/K. Linardou (eds.), *Eat, drink and be merry (Luke 12:9) – food and wine in Byzantium*. Aldershot/Burlington 2005, 38–49. The reference to pagan wisdom might point to the revulsion for blood expressed by treatises such as Plutarchus' *De esu cranium* and Pprhyrius, *De abstinentia*.

<sup>28</sup> See M. GRÜNBART, Tis love that has warm'd us. Reconstructing networks in 12th century Byzantium. *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 83 (2005), 301–313 (here 306).

<sup>29</sup> V. 70, referred to “men” and to ‘dualistic’ allegorical techniques: ἀλλ' ἡ δυὰς μὲν τῶν τρόπων φιλενσόφοις / ὁ δ' αὖ τρίτος ῥήτορσιν ἀνδράσι φιλενσόφοις. See H. HUNGER, Johannes Tzetzes, *Allegorien aus der Verschronik*. *JÖBG* 4 (1955), 13–49, here 20.

<sup>30</sup> For a survey on Byzantine meters see now the Appendix *Metrica* in M. LAUXTERMANN, *Byzantine poetry from Pisides to Geometres: texts and contexts II*. *WBS*, 24/2. Wien 2019, here 265–384.

υ - υ - - || - υ - υ - υ -  
 - - υ - - || - υ - υ - υ -  
 - - υ - - || - υ - - - υ -  
 - - υ - - || - υ - υ - υ -  
 - - υ - υ || - υ - - - υ υ  
 - - υ - υ || - υ - - - υ -  
 - - υ - υ || - υ - υ - υ -  
 υ - υ - - || - υ - - - υ -  
 - - υ - - || - υ - - - υ -  
 υ - υ - υ - υ || - - - υ -  
 - υ υ υ - υ - || υ - - - υ υ  
 - - υ - υ || - υ - υ - υ -  
 υ - υ - υ - υ || - - - υ -  
 - - υ - υ - υ || - - - υ -  
 - - υ υ - - - || υ - υ - υ -  
 υ - υ - - || - υ - - - υ -

These lines belong into the category of “technical iambs”, as per Tzetzes’ definition:<sup>31</sup> the meter follows as closely as possible the rules of the ancient iambic trimeter, while maintaining the isosyllabic structure.<sup>32</sup> As recently noted, Tzetzes is one of the few Byzantine poets who, in writing prosodic iambs, occasionally includes lines longer than 12 syllables, due to resolutions and/or substitutions in the sequence of feet.<sup>33</sup> The present letter shows two of such instances:

- υ υ υ - υ - υ - - - υ υ  
 v. 11 ὄντα δὲ κατέσχε σὺν μόνῳ τῷ χρίσματι  
 - - υ υ - - - υ - υ - υ -  
 v. 15 Τὸν Βελλεροφόντην ὅς τανῦν διαγράφει

31 Cf. *Historiae* XII 399, 252–256 and *Versus de poematum generibus*, title introducing the section 2 and vv. 1–10 (W.J.W. KOSTER, *Prolegomena de comoedia*. Scholia in Acharnenses, Equites, Nubes. Groningen 1969, here 84). On the technical iambs see Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzae Iambi* (as footnote 15 above), 130–131 and G. PACE, *Giovanni Tzetzes. La poesia tragica: edizione critica, traduzione e commento*. Naples 2011, here 30–39. See also M.J. LUZZATTO, *Tzetzes lettore di Tucidide*. Bari 1999, here 17.

32 On the transition between ancient iambic trimeter and Byzantine “dodecasyllable”, see A. RHOBY, *Vom jambischen Trimeter zum byzantinischen Zwölfsilber: Beobachtung zur Metrik des spätantiken und byzantinischen Epigramms*. *WS* 124 (2011), 117–142.

33 LEONE, *Ioannis Tzetzae Iambi* (as footnote 15 above), 131 and LAUXTERMANN, *Byzantine poetry* (as footnote 30 above), 289.

In the first case the addition of δέ – written using the tachygraphic notation<sup>34</sup> – looks like an intervention to ‘redeem’ the verse. Without it, the line would have shown the typical sloppy use of *dichrona* – an incorrect lengthening of α in ὄντα, an inflected form – for which Tzetzes used to reproach both his less talented colleagues – the “buffaloes” – and his younger self.<sup>35</sup> With δέ on the contrary, the first iambic foot, a spondee, is resolved into a dactyl and one more syllable is added to the verse.

In the second case the difficulty is created by the proper name Βελλεροφόντην, structurally unfit for the iambic rhythm, due to the sequences of two shorts syllables ποφο. Not surprisingly, this is the only point in which the two manuscripts are not in agreement with each other, as the Vaticanus omits the article before the name of Bellerophon. Although the text of the Vaticanus would bring the iamb back to the correct number of syllables and although Βελλεροφόντου is to be found in the same exact metrical position in the poem on the Great Fire written by Konstantinos Stilbes,<sup>36</sup> I do believe that the correct *lectio* is the one transmitted by the Parisinus. On one hand, the omission of the article would require a lengthening of the second ε, a vowel that does not even count among the *dichrona* – even if this kind of ‘leniency’ was deemed acceptable with proper names.<sup>37</sup> On the other, the variant τὸν Βελλεροφόντην is evidence of virtuoso ability in fitting an impossible name into the verse, in the footsteps of an authoritative model such as Aristophanes. In the *Acharnians* we find Bellerophon accommodated into the trimeter through the same substitution in the second foot (vv. 428–429):

ᾶ Βελλεροφόντης εἶχ' ὁ χωλὸς οὔτοσί;  
οὐ Βελλεροφόντης· ἀλλὰ κάκεῖνος μὲν ἦν

Although the *Acharnians* are not among the plays commented upon by Tzetzes, there is abundant evidence that the text was known in 12<sup>th</sup>-century Constantinople. It is often quoted by authors such as Niketas Choniates and Gregory of Cor-

**34** In the Vaticanus the tachygraphic sign is barely visible.

**35** On this issue see, most recently, LAUXTERMANN, Byzantine poetry (as footnote 30 above), 268–273 and IDEM, Buffaloes and bastards: Tzetzes on metre, in E. Prodi (ed.), Τζετζικάι ἔρευνα. Bologna 2021, forthcoming.

**36** *Carmen de incendio* 82: Βελλεροφόντου μηχανὰς ὑπερτρέχεις (see J. M. DIETHART/W. HÖR-ANDNER, *Constantinus Stilbes, Poemata*. Munich/Leipzig 2005, here 12). Not coincidentally Stilbes’ “poetry typifies the dodecasyllable’s emphasis on stress accent over classical vowel quantity” (T. LEYMAN, *The incineration of the New Babylon. The fire poem of Konstantinos Stilbes*. Genève 2015, here 23 and 20–25 more broadly on Stilbes’ meter).

**37** For criticism on Tzetzes’ own juvenile iambs see for instance the *scholion* on the verses inserted at the end of letter 1 to Epiphanius: 4, 8 (148–149 LEONE). See also LAUXTERMANN, Byzantine poetry (as footnote 30 above), 273.

inth, who probably was also one of Tzetzes' direct competitors.<sup>38</sup> The metric solution, moreover – an anapestic substitution in the second foot – finds parallels elsewhere in Tzetzes' work.<sup>39</sup>

To sum up, the technical quality of the metrical letter, as well as its content and vocabulary make Tzetzes' authorship highly likely. Two questions arise at this point: what is the function of the letter within the corpus? And why was it written in meter?

My hypothesis is that the letter was probably conceived of by Tzetzes as a joking marginal note appended to the body of the collection. There are other letters detailing Tzetzes' alimentary habits and, interestingly, those letters all belong into the final part of the collection, one being in the fourth last position. They are therefore part of the δευτέρα συναγωγή of epistles put together by Tzetzes, after the first one had been damaged at the hand of a careless copyist.<sup>40</sup> I argue that Tzetzes – possibly in a copy belonging to the *editio altera* singled out by LEONE,<sup>41</sup> but it is hard to tell with certainty – decided to complement the collection with our missive. I take it as an ἀστέϊσμα comparable to those following the letter to Lachanas in Tzetzes' master copy, which he decided not to transcribe. Unlike the jokes at the end of that missive, however, the lines addressed to Phyteianos were not ἐρριμμένα καὶ ἀτελῆ.<sup>42</sup> Iambs were undoubtedly among Tzetzes' favorite means of expression for his marginalia,<sup>43</sup> a fact probably connected with the casual/inscriptional nature, broadly conceived, of *scholia*.<sup>44</sup>

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**38** See the evidence collected in T. LABUK, Aristophanes in the service of Niketas Choniates – gluttony, drunkenness and politics in the Χρονική Διήγησις, *JÖB* 66 (2016), 127–152, here 30–31.

**39** See LAUXTERMANN, Byzantine poetry (as footnote 30 above), 290.

**40** See LEONE, Tzetzae Epistulae (as footnote 3 above), 99 and xviii. On the meaning of such a specification and the relevance to how transmission of letters worked in Byzantium, see A. RIEHLE, Letters and new philology, in idem (ed.), *A Companion to Byzantine epistolography*. Leiden 2020, 466–502, here 478–480.

**41** LEONE, Tzetzae Epistulae (as footnote 3 above), xvi.

**42** See the scholion IV 779 to the *Historiai* printed at p. 548 in Leone's edition. Tellingly, Tzetzes adds at the end: ὃς δ' ἂν ἐθέλοι καὶ ταῦτα ζητείτω ἐτέρωθεν (whoever wants that too, they shall look for it elsewhere), which might imply that there were circulating copies carrying also those lines. On these ἀστέϊσματα and their nature, see P.A. AGAPITOS, John Tzetzes and the blemish examiners: a Byzantine teacher on schedography, everyday language and writerly disposition. *MEG* 17 (2017), 1–57 (here 21–22). Agapitos advances the hypothesis that the joking lines were written in political verses and in the vernacular.

**43** As proven for instance by his intervention on the Palatinus of Thucydides: see LUZZATTO, Tzetzes (as footnote 31 above).

**44** On the overwhelming preponderance of dodecasyllable in Byzantine epigrammatic poetry see RHOBY (as footnote 32 above), 121, with previous bibliography.

The title as it appears in the Vaticanus, moreover, shows how the later hand, adding the letter numbered it so as to insert it into the body of the collection. The number is given in alphabetic characters, and not embedded into the address line. The address line itself is much more informal than the ones present in the letter collection, mostly highlighting titles and relationships of the addressees.<sup>45</sup> The form – meter –, the content – everyday humor –, and finally the ‘marginal’ nature of the text are some of the reasons why the letter has been disregarded until now.

## The addressee and questions of chronology

I will now advance some thoughts on the identity of Tzetzes’ addressee. The letter is addressed to one Konstantinos Phyteianos, qualified as “philosopher”. An individual with this name is not otherwise known. WASSILIOU-SEIBT has pointed out that the surname Phytianos/Phyteianos is not attested in middle Byzantine written sources. It emerges in documents only in the late Byzantine period. For the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century, however, we have several seals and inscriptions, which show that members of the family were covering high-ranking roles at court and in the administration, from *patrikios* to *protospatharios* and *taxiarchos*.<sup>46</sup> One more witness comes from the work of Eustathios of Thessalonike. In ep. 33, presumably dated to 1178,<sup>47</sup> Eustathios introduces one Phyteianos – his personal name is not given – who carries and delivers to Thessalonike a letter sent by the Patriarch.

If the surname does not give away much more information, further clues come from the label “philosopher”. In the collection, there is one more letter addressed to one Konstantinos the philosopher, namely ep. 83 sent to Konstantinos, bishop of Dalisandos and brother of the metropolite of Ephesos. As shown by GRÜNBART, the Konstantinos of ep. 83 is one of the bishops participating in and signing off the acts of the process against Soterichos Panteugenes, which took place on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 1157. For this reason, GRÜNBART dates ep. 83 to the period 1150–1154.<sup>48</sup> A dating to the second half of the 1150s

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<sup>45</sup> See GRÜNBART, *Tis love that has warm’d us* (as footnote 28 above), 305–306.

<sup>46</sup> A.-K. WASSILIOU-SEIBT, *Corpus der byzantinischen Siegel mit metrischen Legenden*, Teil 1. *WBS*, 28/1. Wien 2011, here 293.

<sup>47</sup> See F. KOLOVOU, *Die Briefe des Eustathios von Thessalonike: Einleitung, Regesten, Text, Indices. Beiträge zur Altertumskunde*, 239. Berlin/New York 2001, 147\*–149\*.

<sup>48</sup> M. GRÜNBART, *Prosopographische Beiträge zum Briefcorpus des Ioannes Tzetzes*. *JÖB* 46 (1996), 175–226 (here 214–215).

would fit indeed our short missive. The letter was most likely written when Tzetzes was already a host of the Pantokrator monastery, as we have seen, and therefore after 1147. The treatment of the iambic trimeter, moreover, points toward Tzetzes' later years. Finally, if written in the second half of the 1150s the short missive would be close in time to the actual compilation of the corpus, to be dated to the first half of the 1160s, according to WENDEL's reconstruction.<sup>49</sup>

I should add that the specification *κᾶν τὸ κόσμιον φέρης* could also support an identification with the bishop. The phrase suggests that, despite his expertise, Konstantinos was *not* a monk. The "ornament" Tzetzes refers to might be the vestments of the bishop.<sup>50</sup> As demonstrated by Ivan DRPIĆ, in inventories *κόσμος* and its derivatives, including *κόσμιον*, were "consistently employed (...) to single out objects – icons in particular – adorned with gold, silver, gems, pearls, and the like".<sup>51</sup> At the same time, liturgical vestments, and not least the episcopal *omophorion*, were designed to create a counterpart of the icons' rich display on the body of the priest.<sup>52</sup>

All this remains, however, purely hypothetical, unfortunately,<sup>53</sup> even though the bishop of Dalisandos is the only individual ever addressed by Tzetzes as "philosopher" in the collection. One might wonder why our address line does not mention explicitly the bishopric. Tzetzes is in fact very consistent when it comes to titles in his address lines. A possible answer lies in the informal character of the short note. If my interpretation is correct, the missive was not designed to become part of the main body of the corpus but was only inserted as a paratext and is therefore characterized by a more personal and direct tone.

## **Realia from liturgy**

The letter to Konstantinos Phyteianos, although very short, includes precious details about the liturgy and every-day ecclesiastical/monastic life. The two

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<sup>49</sup> See WENDEL, Tzetzes (as footnote 13 above), coll. 1992–1993 and cf. KOSTER, Prolegomena (as footnote 31 above), xl, with LEONE, Ioannis Tzetzae Historiae (as footnote 5 above), xvi.

<sup>50</sup> The phrase is to be found for external ornaments (beauty) just once, in Psellos, *Poemata* 17, v. 36.

<sup>51</sup> I. DRPIĆ, Epigram, art, and devotion in later Byzantium. Cambridge 2016, here 129.

<sup>52</sup> See W. WOODFIN, The embodied icon: liturgical vestments and sacramental power in Byzantium. Oxford 2011, here 16–20 and 92–93.

<sup>53</sup> *κόσμιον* could also simply point to Konstantinos' love for ornaments, clashing with monastic doctrine.



presents retained by Tzetzes, chrism and holy bread, are associated to the eucharistic liturgy as well as to the liturgy of the Holy Thursday, as we will see.

The προσφορά mentioned in the letter is the eucharistic bread.<sup>54</sup> Tzetzes is very specific in describing his friend's present and reminds him that the loaf he received is "an image of the Virgin". Eucharistic ritual, according to the liturgy of John Chrysostomos, included in fact five distinct oblations and therefore five loaves, from which particles were extracted and arranged on the holy paten during the prothesis:<sup>55</sup> while the first loaf, stamped with the eucharistic formula and called holy bread is the προσφορά proper, the second loaf, whose particle was called All Holy, is in honor of the mother or god.<sup>56</sup> Canonical sources show that what was left of this loaf after the extraction of the particle could also be eaten separately. The canons of Patriarch Nicholaos III, in particular, contribute to further illuminate the meaning of Tzetzes' missive. Speaking of the second oblation for the Virgin Mary, in canon 14 Nicholaos gives the following prescription:<sup>57</sup>

Ὅ δὲ μετὰ τὴν σφραγιθεῖσαν εἰς τὴν τιμὴν τῆς παναγίας Θεοτόκου καὶ ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας μόνην βρωθήσεται, μεμονωμένος ἀπὸ τῶν πιστῶν, μὴ μετὰ κρέατος ἢ γάλακτος, τυροῦ καὶ ὠῶν μυγίς.

What will be left after the portion blessed in honor of the all-holy Mother of God and forever virgin Mary shall be eaten, separately from the believers and without mixing it with meat or milk, cheese or eggs.

This passage makes the point of the letter even clearer. Not only the time of fasting and personal habits prevent Tzetzes from eating the birds. Even under normal circumstances, Tzetzes could not have consumed the bread sent to him together with meat – or any animal produce for that matter.

The Chrism or Myron, also listed by Tzetzes among the gifts sent by Konstantinos, takes us to the liturgical ceremonies of the Holy Thursday. In Constantino-

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54 On the bread for the oblation see G. GALAVARIS, *Bread and the liturgy: the symbolism of early Christian and Byzantine bread stamps*. Madison 1971, here 40 – 108, 09 – 166. Eucharistic bread was also marked by specific bread stamps, defining the particles that were consecrated during the liturgy. On this topic, see B. CASEAU, *Les marqueurs de pain, objets rituels dans le christianisme antique et byzantin*. *RHR* 231 (2014), 599 – 617, with previous bibliography. More broadly on Eucharistic Liturgy, see M.-H. CONGOURDEAU, *L'eucharistie à Byzance du 11e au 15e siècle*, in M. Brouard, *Eucharistia: Encyclopédie de l'Eucharistie*. Paris 2002, here 145 – 166.

55 GALAVARIS, *Bread* (as footnote 54 above), 66 – 68.

56 GALAVARIS, *Bread* (as footnote 54 above), 65.

57 J.B. PITRA, *Spicilegium Solesmense*, vol. 4. Paris 1858, here 471.

ple the Chrism was consecrated by the Patriarch on the Thursday before Easter. The consecration was part of the Eucharistic Liturgy, taking place in the early evening and “associated with the Vespers”, since at least the middle of the eighth century.<sup>58</sup> The Chrism itself was and is still today the result of a complex preparation involving several perfumed essences.<sup>59</sup> Besides being used for the sacraments, it was employed also for the blessing of objects or buildings. This could in fact be a further element supporting the identification of Konstantinos with the bishop of Dalisandos, especially if we think of winter 1157, before the synod of the Blachernae, which took place in May, as we have seen.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusions: Bellerophon and letter writing

Despite the solemn liturgical background, the short missive has a humorous tone. I would like to argue that Tzetzes’ joke is not only on Konstantinos, but on the readers of the collection too. The last lines of the letter concern the unnamed letter bearer, a relative of the addressee. He is blamed because he has not told his uncle about Tzetzes’ dietary habits and now he carries the letter that condemns him, just as Bellerophon did with the sealed tablets delivered to Iobates.

The story of Bellerophon, embedded in the *Iliad* (VI 155–203), was particularly dear to Tzetzes.<sup>61</sup> In the *Historiai*, he mentions Bellerophon as one of the figures that forged his character during the years in which he was educated by his father.<sup>62</sup> Stories related to the hero come up time and again in his work, as it happens with other unjustly accused characters.<sup>63</sup> In this case, Tzetzes takes up the role of the accuser. The very reference to Bellerophon’s story, however, in-

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**58** M. M. MOROZOWICH, Holy Thursday in the Jerusalem and Constantinopolitan traditions: the liturgical celebrations from the fourth to the fourteenth centuries. PhD dissertation, Pontificium Institutum Orientale 2002, 156, 181. See also M. ARRANZ, La consécration du saint myron: Les sacrements de l’ancien euchologe constantinopolitain 10. *OCP* 55 (1989), 317–338.

**59** See L. PETIT, Du pouvoir de consacrer le Saint-Chrême. *EO* 3 (1899) 1–7, and IDEM, Composition et consécration du Saint-Chrême. *EO* 3 (1900) 129–142.

**60** On the dispute, see F. SPINGOU, A Platonising dialogue from the twelfth century: the logos of Soterichos Panteugenos, in A. Cameron / N. Gaul, Dialogue and debate from late Antiquity to late Byzantium. London 2016, 123–136, here 123–124.

**61** See P. A. ROSENMEYER, Ancient epistolary fictions: the letter in Greek literature. Cambridge 2001, here 40–44.

**62** *Historiae*, III 70, 10.

**63** See V. F. LOVATO, Portrait de héros, portrait d’érudit: Jean Tzetzes et la tradition des eikonismoi. *MEG* 17 (2017), 137–156.

validates his allegations against the letter bearer, given that, as we know, the accusations contained in the tablet addressed to Lobates were preposterous.<sup>64</sup>

In my opinion the short letter, with its final *pointe*, which is also the last word of the whole collection, works as a sort of *mise en abîme*. The words τὴν γραφὴν ἦνπερ βλέπετε seem to support this idea. Once the short missive is transcribed on the manuscript, the onlooker/reader is not Konstantinos anymore, but the consumer of the collection, who gazes upon the whole book. Γραφή itself is a highly ambiguous word, potentially pointing to any written or inscribed text, and therefore to the book itself. From this perspective, one could even hypothesize that Tzetzes had in turn sent the book as a gift to Konstantinos, via the anonymous relative, in exchange for the Christmas presents he had received. In any case, the choice of sealing the collection with this missive reinforces the ambiguity intrinsic in epistolography. It is a statement about both the power and the danger – especially from a social point of view – of (letter) writing.

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<sup>64</sup> I translated ἀνεψιός with the generic “relative” as Tzetzes is not consistent in using this term. In the *Historiai* he argues several times for the meaning of “cousin”, following the ancient usage (see for instance *Historiai* VI 50, 376–381; X 359, 870–871; XII 424 but also *Allegories on the Iliad* XV 162–163). However, he also uses it with the meaning of “nephew”, according to the common medieval usage: see for instance *Historiai* IX 253, 23. Therefore it cannot be completely ruled out that Tzetzes means here “nephew”, writing κοινῶς, as he would put it. If we must understand “nephew”, Phyteianos’ anonymous relative might have been “sponsored” by the uncle for a position as a deacon, which was customarily indicated by the form ὁ τοῦ attached to the name, see P. MAGDALINO, The reform edict of 1107, in M. Mullett/D. Smythe (eds.), Alexios I Komnenos. *Belfast Byzantine texts and translations*, 4. Belfast, 1996. 199–218 (here 206 and n. 11).