

the first chapter alludes of Christ crowning imperial figures. Thus, strictly speaking, the portraits that are the focus of this book would have to be called ‘contact portraits depicting patrons of buildings or works of art’, or some such formulation. Perhaps in the future, when more studies of this nature have been made, an agreed terminology will be found.

Such problems and questions may not be fully resolved; nevertheless, the reader must thank F. for raising them. His text is complex, and at times difficult, but always rewarding.

Henry Maguire  
*Johns Hopkins University*

Ingela Nilsson, *Writer and Occasion in Twelfth-century Byzantium: the authorial voice of Constantine Manasses*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. x, 222.  
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This book is set to become a trendsetter, and anyone interested in early, middle, or later Byzantine literature should read it. Pushing back against the strictly contextual reading of literature that has dominated Byzantine studies for decades, Nilsson proposes a fresh, thought-provoking approach to Byzantine texts. N. views a literary text written in medieval Greek as a balancing act between fiction and reality. Arguing that a thorough understanding of a Byzantine text as a purely historical event is unattainable (given that it was created in irretrievably lost historical contexts), N. invites modern readers to employ current theoretical strategies to approach medieval texts. N. reads the work of Constantine Manasses (c.1115–after 1175) from different theoretical angles, as a test case for her approach. Manasses was a typical Constantinopolitan author of his time who composed many kinds of occasional texts on behalf of different patrons or instigators. It is not Manasses’ biography that N. seeks to uncover but his authorial voice: the author’s recognizable style or ‘brand.’ That authorial voice is composed of recurring motifs, images, and allusions, and can be adjusted to confer different meanings on different occasions. In the process of uncovering the authorial voice of a pre-modern author, N. challenges modern assumptions that works created on demand for a particular occasion are pretentious or dull and argues that ‘writing on command privileges originality and encourages the challenging of conventions’ (p. 4).

The seven chapters focus on well-defined thematic strands and specific works from the voluminous corpus attributed to Manasses. Chapter 1, ‘The authorial voice of occasional literature’ (pp. 1–24), introduces the reader to Manasses’ work and maps out the methodological approach followed in the book. Chapter 2, ‘Praising the emperor, visualizing his city’ (pp. 25–57), scrutinizes encomiastic accounts that Manasses’ authorial voice wove for Constantinople and Manuel I Komnenos (r. 1143–1180). The

focus here is primarily on three texts: the *Encomion of Emperor Manuel Komnenos*, the *Description of a Crane Hunt*, and the *Itinerary*. N. underlines the critical social function of ekphrases, the various references to the writer's individual circumstances in commissioned works, and the necessity of connecting the author's past and present through referencing and quotation. This last point is a recurrent theme throughout the book. Chapter 3, 'The occasion of death' (pp. 58–85), focuses on the *Monody on the Death of Theodora*, the *Consolation for John Kontostephanos*, the *Funerary Oration on the Death of Nikephoros Komnenos*, and, perhaps surprisingly, the enigmatic *Monody on the Death of his Goldfinch*. The chapter investigates patronage-related phenomena, not through the lens of a patron-writer relationship (as customary), but through the texts themselves. This approach allows N. to highlight the multiple personae that both author and patron were willing to adopt to serve genre conventions or the textual content. Here, N. adapts and applies interpretive strategies developed by Claudio Annibaldi for exploring aspects of musical patronage in the Renaissance and Baroque. Chapter 4, 'In times of trouble' (pp. 86–112), underlines the intertwined relationships between Manasses and his 'friends'; that is, individuals willing to promote his authorial voice. The texts treated in this chapter are passages from the *Moral Poem*, the *Encomion of Michael Hagiotheodorites*, Manasses' letters, and the *Address by the Way*. The discussion in Chapter 5, 'On an educational note' (pp. 113–41), centres around the works that Manasses composed in relation to his potential teaching activity: the *Astrological Poem*, the *Origins of Oppian*, five *schede*, and the *Sketches of the Mouse*. N. disputes the view that texts were composed within occupational silos and convincingly demonstrates that Manasses' educational writings were informed by his activity as a court orator and official and reveal the distinctiveness of his authorial voice. Self-quotation and recycling are the topics of Chapter 6, 'Life, love and the past' (pp. 142–69). Through passages from the *Verse Chronicle* and the *Moral Poem* and fragments of the novel *Aristandros and Kallithea*, N. demonstrates how an authorial brand was created, regardless of the permutations of genre, thanks to the repetition of patterns and stylistic models. The final chapter, 'Occasional writing as a creative craft' (pp. 170–90), offers an overview of the argument and highlights overall trends. Here, N. returns to the issue of the repetitive citation of classical references and quotations – a topic that runs subtly through the previous pages as well. N. notes that a single author can employ different versions of the same ancient story, given that the same reference can bear diverse messages in different textual and occasional contexts. The chapter concludes with a tentative historical outline of Manasses' literary production, thus satisfying the modern appetite for a more traditional approach. The book also includes a detailed bibliography (pp. 191–214), an *index locorum* and a general index.

N.'s approach proves particularly productive when treating *dubia*. Instead of avoiding the discussion of texts with contested authorship, N. fully incorporates them in the analysis, highlighting the characteristics that make them appear genuinely

‘Manassean.’ She thus demonstrates, not only how modern scholars may understand Manasses’ authorial voice, but also how medieval readers could distinguish his ‘brand’ and attribute (or accept the attribution of) works to his pen.

Overall, N. encourages modern readers of medieval texts to listen attentively to the distinct ‘tweets’ of an author’s pen and not to be on the lookout for clues to that person’s experiences and emotions. Additionally, though N. does not fully subscribe to a text-without-context approach (she maintains methodological ties with New Historicism), she asks readers to remember that when it comes to approaching Byzantine literature, it is exclusively themselves (with their experiences) and the text in the room.

Foteini Spingou  
*The University of Edinburgh*

*Konstantinos Dapontes, Selected Writings: Translated with an Introduction and Notes* by Elina Tsalicoglou. Cambridge, MA 2019, Pp. lxxvii, 128  
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Konstantinos (Kaisarios) Dapontes [1713/14–1784], one of the most intriguing figures of the Greek eighteenth century, does not fit easily into the categories applied when discussing intellectuals of the period: supporters vs adversaries of the Enlightenment; clerical vs lay; premodern vs modern. Dapontes had impressive careers both as an administrator for members of the Phanariot elite and as a travelling monk collecting alms. He spent time in jail and exile, and was an informed reader and copyist of manuscripts. An author of compilations and long original texts (in verse and prose), he managed to have only a small proportion of his immense textual output published during his lifetime (and complained about his publishers). A prolific writer, with previously unknown texts still being discovered to this day, he presents us with copious literary reworkings of his life story and numerous copies of letters sent and received, but a biography remains a desideratum. A complete list of his works and, likewise, critical editions are lacking, so that despite continuous interest — Dapontes must be one of the most discussed Greek authors of the period — his texts are barely taught.

Tsalicoglou’s bilingual edition of a small selection of this prolific author’s works constitutes a great service to teaching Greek early modern texts in translation. T. has an intimate knowledge of the complexities of translating Dapontes and his contemporaries. Research for her 2004 Oxford doctorate, ‘Satire in the Greek Enlightenment 1750–1821’, supervised by the late Peter Mackridge, generated an early experiment in translation. In the same year she was awarded the MGSA Elisabeth Constantinides Translation Prize for an early version of the *Canon of Hymns*