Joint Byzantine and Classical Text Seminar – Trinity 2022

John Tzetzes’ Little-and-Big Iliad (Carmina Iliaca)

Ioannou Centre, Friday mornings, 10-11:30 am

This term’s Byzantine Text Seminar will be a Classics-Byzantine joint venture dedicated to one of the most intriguing instances of medieval Homeric reception. Composed in the 1130s, John Tzetzes’ Little-and-Big Iliad (Μικρομεγάλη Ἰλιάς, often known as Carmina Iliaca) is a retelling in 1,676 hexameters of the story of the Trojan War, from the birth of Paris to the fall of Troy. In overt competition with Homer and the Epic Cycle, but also with the Late Antique epics of Quintus Smyrnaeus, Colluthus, and Tryphiodorus, Tzetzes’ poem is one of the quirkiest and most intriguing specimens of Byzantine Classicism. Furnished with Tzetzes’ own detailed scholia, the poem aimed to teach, to entertain, and to showcase its author’s poetic and scholarly skills at their finest.

There is something in it for every taste. Battle scenes. Character portraits. Grandiloquent Greek. Love. Intrigue. Allegory (the Judgement of Paris, and more). The ekphrasis of a shield (Penthesilea’s). Dark humour. Toilet humour (occasionally). Source criticism. Authorial self-promotion. Rants against the wife of the Eparch of Beroia. Whatever rocks your boat, ‘the lovable buffoon John Tzetzes’ (M.L. West) will have something to offer. This text is of great interest for ancient Greek literature, for medieval Greek (‘Byzantine’) literature, and for Classical reception alike. We hope for contributions from a broad range of angles, all contributing to a richer understanding of the whole.

We solicit proposals from colleagues and graduate students in both Classics and Byzantine Studies to present in slots of roughly half-an-hour each. A proposed subdivision of the text can be found below, to be adapted according to need. Speakers will have broad freedom to choose what to focus on within the passage, including broader topics for which the passage might function as a test case.

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<td>Iliad I-VI</td>
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<td>Merits and death of Palamedes</td>
<td>Iliad XXIV (ii)</td>
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<td>Deaths of Ajax and Polyxene; Neoptolemos</td>
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No prior knowledge of the poem, or of Tzetzes, is required: we will be exploring this fascinating text together as we go, and that is precisely the point. The poem is in fairly straightforward Homeric (ish) Greek: if you have studied the Iliad or the Odyssey, it should not pose a major challenge.

The standard critical text, with scholia, is P.A.M. Leone, Ioannis Tzetzae Carmina Iliaca, Catania: CULC 1995. No library in Oxford has a physical copy, and they are difficult to procure because the original print run is sold out and the publisher is no longer trading. For these very reasons, however, we have been given permission to circulate a scan: Leone - Carmina Iliaca.pdf. Please note that the text included in the TLG is Lehrs’ outdated one from 1840 (without scholia).
There are two published translations, one in Italian and one in Spanish: P.L.M. Leone, *Giovanni Tzetzes. La leggenda troiana (Carmina Iliaca)*, Lecce: Pensa MultiMedia 2015, and C.A. Messuti, *Tzetzes. La guerra de Troya, también conocida como Carmina Iliaca o como Pequeña Gran Iliada*, [s.l.]: En Arjé 2020. Leone reprints and translates the Greek text of his own critical edition (without the scholia); Messuti, unfortunately, translates Lehrs. There is a copy of Leone’s translation in the Sackler (Lower Ground Floor, N.i.622of).

Studies on the Little-and-Big Iliad:


F. Conca, ‘L’esegesi di Tzetze ai Carmina Iliaca, fra tradizione e innovazione’, *Koinonia* 42 (2018) 75-114


Background reading on Tzetzes:


N.G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, London: Duckworth 19962, 190-196

On the Byzantine hexameter:


On the Trojan War in Middle Byzantine literature:


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