

SCANDINAVIAN JOURNAL  
OF  
BYZANTINE  
AND  
MODERN GREEK STUDIES

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## Editorial

In this third volume of the Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, we are happy to welcome a guest-editor, Dr AnnaLinden Weller, who has edited five articles from a conference that she organized at Uppsala University in 2016 within the frame of the ‘Text and Narrative in Byzantium’ research network. The articles are written by Baukje van den Berg, Stanislas Kuttner-Homs, Markéta Kulhánková, Jonas J. H. Christensen and Jakov Đorđević, provided with an introduction by AnnaLinden Weller. In addition, the journal includes two more articles – one by David Konstan, based on his 2016 lecture in memory of Professor Lennart Rydén, and one by Adam Goldwyn – and two book reviews.

In October 2018, Modern Greek Studies in Lund will organise the 6th European Congress of Modern Greek Studies, and according to the number of submitted abstracts it promises to be an interesting event for scholars from many countries around the globe to come together.

The journal is open for unpublished articles and book reviews related to Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies in the fields of philology, linguistics, history and literature. It is published in collaboration with Greek and Byzantine Studies at Uppsala University and we welcome contributions not only from Scandinavian colleagues, but from scholars all around the world.

Vassilios Sabatakakis  
Modern Greek Studies  
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# Narrative & Verisimilitude in Byzantium – an Introduction

*AnnaLinden Weller*

Καὶ πάντως λέγοντα τὸ δὴ εἰκὸς διωκτέον εἶναι, πολλὰ εἰπόντα  
χαίρειν τῷ ἀληθεῖ.

[...] and in brief, a speaker must always aim at verisimilitude, and  
send the truth packing.

Plato, *Phaedrus* 272E

**T**he five articles in this special section of *The Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* arise from a conference held at Uppsala University in November of 2016 under the auspices of the research project ‘Text & Narrative in Byzantium’, on narrative and verisimilitude in Byzantium. The conference brought together a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives – art history, hagiography, philology, and history were all represented – and the diversity of approaches reflected the multivalent nature of the conference’s central line of inquiry: how did Byzantine persons deal with questions of believability, authority, and accuracy in their production of texts and objects – and can we, as scholars, fruitfully explore the employment of narrative strategies in Byzantine approaches to verisimilitude?

Verisimilitude is, most simply, the *lifelikeness* – the success at imitation – of a piece of media. What it is imitating – what the copy is a copy *of* – varies. In literary studies, one can differentiate between a *cultural* verisimilitude and a *generic* verisimilitude: whether the thing being imitated is the culture which produced the piece of media, or the rules of the genre that the piece of media belongs to.<sup>1</sup> One is not sur-

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<sup>1</sup> Bonilla 1992.

prised to find, for example, faster-than-light travel in a science fiction novel – or apparitions of the Virgin in Byzantine miracle stories, though neither of these occurrences is strictly possible under the rules of *cultural* verisimilitude (whether 21<sup>st</sup>-century or 7<sup>th</sup>-century). As Byzantinists, we have heretofore mostly been interested in verisimilitude in fictional texts or texts that employ fictional and semifictional strategies<sup>2</sup>: novelistic and hagiographical narratives or ‘novelistic’ chronicles and poems. If we have investigated generic verisimilitude, we have done so via an interrogation of the shared rhetorical tradition that formed the basis of Byzantine education for more than a millennium.

This conference asked its participants to go beyond questions of *how narrative is employed* in Byzantine media – but it also asked them to consider whether there are differences between what Byzantinists recognize as techniques or tactics to create verisimilitude and what Byzantine persons would have recognized *as* such techniques. Taking as a foundation that narrative strategies are employed by Byzantines outside of “narrative” texts<sup>3</sup> – they are found in epistolography, philosophy, rhetoric, commentaries and poetry, and perhaps also in iconography, ekphrasis, wills, administrative documents of all kinds – we are then free to inquire as to how narrative is employed by Byzantines to produce *either* cultural or generic verisimilitude, to interrogate whether ‘the real’ – accuracy, truth, etc. – is a valid arena of analysis for Byzantinists – or whether instead we ought to be listening to Byzantine authors and Byzantine media in the act of mimesis. How does any given narrative relate to the lived experience of the author or the lived experience of the reader – either a Byzantine reader or a modern one? Are narrative and experience opposed, complementary, or intertwined? Where does persuasion shade into deception or falsehood, and is this a problem – for Byzantine

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<sup>2</sup> A selection of a wide bibliography includes: Agapitos 2012, Bourbouhakis, and Nilsson, 2010, Krueger 2014, Macrides (ed.) 2011, Pizzone, (ed.) 2014, amongst many others.

<sup>3</sup> Ljubarskii 1998, 15; Nilsson 2006.

authors<sup>4</sup> or for Byzantinists<sup>5</sup>?

Some preliminary disambiguations are necessary when making use of narratological tools in doing Byzantine studies: first, and most perniciously, the narratological definition of *mimesis* differs quite profoundly from the most common use of this term employed by Byzantinists. More frustratingly still, both definitions are of use to the examination of verisimilitude. In Byzantine studies, ‘mimesis’ tends to refer to the process of Byzantine authors engaging in citation, imitation, or quotation of texts and tropes from the Classical or Biblical world; however, ‘mimetic’ in its narratological sense has been defined by James Phelan as the complement of ‘synthetic’, i.e. mimetic narrative copies the ‘real world’ – it is inherently possessed of verisimilitude – while synthetic narrative emphasizes the created, constructed, and non-‘real’, highlighting the audience’s attention to the artificiality of narrative-which-is-produced.<sup>6</sup> When we consider the strategies employed by Byzantines to negotiate realism, rhetorical authority, and truth-telling in their literary and artistic production, we clearly need both kinds of mimesis: the kind that specifies the real, and the kind that specifies the allusive. Disambiguating between the two creates space for imagining a ‘realistic’ allusion – an allusion employed to create a sense of verisimilitude, belonging, or cultural in-grouping.

Toward this end we might also consider the narratological concept of the ‘storyworld’—a piece of media or a fiction-internal universe with its own rules, rules which can either map to those of the ‘real’ world or be independently constructed. It is in fact possible to identify *multiple* storyworlds in a Byzantine text: the storyworld *within* the text, bound by generic verisimilitude or by adherence to Byzantine mimetic practice, but also the storyworld which *produced* the text – the storyworld of Byzantine society, which has ideological world-internal rules of its own. We can in fact imagine all of Byzantine society as a storyworld:

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Papaioannou 2013, 29-45, on the development of rhetoric as an art of lying and persuasion, and its reintegration with philosophy in the 11th and 12th century in the works of Psellos.

<sup>5</sup> Cameron 2014, 7-25.

<sup>6</sup> Phelan and Rabinowitz 2012.

a collection of *typoi*—independent from any particular composition but collectively conceived of in the minds of the literati of Constantinople.<sup>7</sup> Such a storyworld locates its force in ideology and in the replication of stock ideal character types and identifies that ideology as causal force – in contrast to the ‘real’ universe where people (not ‘characters’) and systems (not ‘ideologies’) behave in ways which can be quite independent from any expected set of storyworld rules, whether or not they possess verisimilitude.

These tools and vocabularies of narratology present us with some ways in to the locked room of Byzantine questions about narrative and experience; about how Byzantine persons reported persuasively to their audiences. The articles in this special section explore some uses of the concepts in a variety of disciplinary and chronological locations.

Stanislas Kuttner-Homs and Baukje van den Berg bring narratological theory to bear on historiographic and literary texts: Kuttner-Homs discusses the authorial choices made by Niketas Choniates in his forsaking of strict ‘truth’—events-as-they-occurred—for greater ‘verisimilitude’ in his attempts to convey the events surrounding the fall of Constantinople to the Crusaders in 1099 CE; and van den Berg discusses Eustathios of Thessalonike’s considerations of the uses and abuses of hypocrisy in ancient epic, and how it interacts with his own contemporary (12<sup>th</sup>-century) ideas about truth and falsehood in his interpretation of and commentary on ‘truth-loving’ Homer.

Moving from epic literature to the hagiographic, Markéta Kulhánková discusses the use of scenic narration, or *the showing mode*, as a method for inducing a sensation or impression of *witnessing* rather than *reading* in the audience of the 6<sup>th</sup>-century *Daniel Sketiotes Dossier*, a collection of hagiographic improving texts. Kulhánková’s work deals with vividness, the reader/perceiver’s experience of hagiographic material, and the use of narrative modes for creating verisimilitude alongside immediacy and immersion in Late Antique spiritual literature.

Finally, Christensen and Đorđević find narrative voices in unusual and unexpected locations: Christensen in the biographic aspects of the

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<sup>7</sup> Weller (forthcoming).

Typikon of Constantine Akropolites, and Đorđević in the pictorial program of the Ossuary of the Bachkovo Monastery. Both of their articles consider the infusion of narrative and lifelikeness into texts and places which are often neglected in narrative approaches to Byzantine studies.

It is my hope that these papers and the work done at the 2016 conference, as well as the general research production of the Text & Narrative in Byzantium project, will point towards the varied uses of narratological tools and thinking in doing Byzantine studies, particularly as we consider elements of verisimilitude, lying, deception, and allusion in Byzantine artistic and cultural production.

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