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BOOK REVIEW

Julia Chatzipanagioti-Sangmeister, Mary Roussou-Sinclair & Spyridon Tzounakas (eds.), *Textualising the Experience – Digitalising the Text: Cyprus through Travel Literature (15th–18th Centuries)*. Athens: Sylvia Ioannou Foundation 2023. 256 pp. – ISBN: 978-618-83044-8-2

The present volume includes selected papers from the 4th International Conference on the Greek World in Travel Accounts and Maps: “Textualising the Experience – Digitalising the Text: Cyprus through Travel Literature (15th–18th c.)”. As can be seen, the title of the conference, which was held on 6-8 February 2019 at the University of Cyprus in Nicosia, gave its name to the book under discussion, and rightly so, for all the papers are the intellectual offspring of the research program “Zefyros”. The said program, based on the large collection of the Sylvia Ioannou Foundation, brought together a significant number of scholars located in seven different countries, in order to trace information pertaining to the island of Cyprus from texts written in eleven languages and dating from the 15th to the 18th century. The data collected have been indexed and entered in a digital platform created specifically for the needs of the research program. The fruit of “Zefyros” is a free-access electronic platform available to scholars conducting research associated directly or indirectly with Cyprus and its cultural and intellectual history, but also with travel literature as a genre in general. Within this context, among the conference’s aims was to disseminate the work of the “Zefyros” team and to demonstrate ways in which the material collected in the electronic platform can be utilized.

The volume is structured in three parts. Part one, entitled “Zefyros”, is made up of three quite useful “introductory” texts. More specifically, Jacques Bouchard (“Opening Address on Behalf of the Scientific Committee”, pp. 25–28), a renowned scholar with an enduring presence in the field of Modern Greek studies, sets the tone of the conference held and, by extension, of the papers in the book. Leonora Navari (“The Travel Book Collection in the Sylvia Ioannou Foundation”, pp. 29–38), author of *Cyprus and the Levant: Rare Books from the Sylvia Ioannou Foundation* (3 vols.; Athens 2016), presents in a concise manner the

rich collection of the Sylvia Ioannou Foundation, which comprises, not only travel accounts related to Cyprus (upon which the studies of the volume are primarily based), but also chronicles, historical narratives, rare manuscripts, literary texts, geographical and cartographical works, as well as scientific treatises on specific subjects (dialectology, geology, etc.). Furthermore, Navari offers a useful typology of the travel literature in the Foundation's collection (pp. 31–37), arguing that in earlier times pilgrimage was the primary reason for traveling to the East, whereas the field of interest gradually became broader: Diplomacy, knowledge or even the sheer thirst for adventure were added in the 17th century, whilst the 18th century sees the advent of the “traveller-scientist”, who leads organized missions to foreign lands, often accompanied by hired artists, who contribute their images to the written account. The Age of Enlightenment (18th century) is characterized also by a growing interest in discovering and collecting antiquities. Last, Julia Chatzipanagioti-Sangmeister's “Textualising the Experience – Digitalising the Text: The Zefyros Research Programme and the Journey of Information from Text to Electronic Database” (pp. 39–54) is both a fascinating recital of how “Zefyros” came to life and a detailed report on the methodology that lies behind the program. In addition, the scholar provides information on how the digital database works, as well as offering yet another typology of the travel literature from the 15th to the 18th century (pp. 43–46), with further insightful remarks on the genre's poetics, with regard to its evolution in time.

Five papers form the second part of the volume, which is titled “Travellers and Travel Literature”. Chryssa Maltezou (“Cyprus of the Travellers (15th–16th Centuries)”, pp. 57–66), an acknowledged scholar whose scientific work includes major contributions to the study of the Venetian rule in Greece, focuses here on what she defines as the “late medieval and Renaissance years” (p. 57). Maltezou argues that in this period there are basically three kinds of travelers, namely pilgrims, merchants and those who travel for other reasons, such as adventurism, espionage, etc. She concentrates on pilgrims, but we also get a glimpse of other aspects of traveling in general, such as the living conditions aboard the ships carrying voyagers to the East (pp. 59–61). The general

feeling this paper gives is that travelers of this era are deeply influenced by the literary tradition, as well as by their own prejudices, making it rather difficult to take their accounts at face value. The second paper in this section, by Cornel Zwierlein (“European Travel Literature, the European Merchants on Cyprus, Households and Libraries: Comparing Archival and Printed Sources”, pp. 67–99), is a well-written essay, based on laborious and diligent research, on the presence of merchants in Cyprus, mainly in the 17th and 18th centuries, and, by extension, on commercial and consular networks on the island during the period. Zwierlein’s method uses the meticulous study of data gathered from travel accounts, archives and other sources (e.g. inventories), in order to trace the material culture of Europeans active in Cyprus over these two centuries.

The next paper is by Chariton Karanasios (“The Representation of Cyprus by the German Traveller Carsten Niebuhr in 1766”, pp. 101–110). The protagonist here is the German scientist Carsten Niebuhr, who was a member of the “Danish Expedition”, the first European scientific mission to the Arabian Peninsula, which was supported by King Frederick IV of Denmark. Karanasios informs us (pp. 102–103) that Niebuhr wrote a series of books and articles about his journey, in which there are also remarks concerning Cyprus. He deals first and foremost with Niebuhr’s book *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien...*, the third volume of which, including his account of Cyprus, was published posthumously, in 1837. Of special interest is Niebuhr’s encounter with the Italian Giovanni Mariti (p. 105), who, as Leonora Navari states in her contribution, is “one of the most important writers on Cyprus” (p. 35). It is also noteworthy, both with regard to Niebuhr’s scientific credentials and to the general spirit of his time, that the German traveller’s main purpose in visiting Cyprus was to look for Phoenician inscriptions (p. 109). All in all, Karanasios argues that Niebuhr is trustworthy and his account by and large objective, since he was not in the service of the colonial powers (p. 109).

Vassilios Sabatakakis (“Two Swedish Travel Accounts of Cyprus from 1733–1751”, pp. 111–120), brings forth two descriptions of Cyprus in Swedish, the first written in 1733 by Edvard Carleson (although

another author is co-credited; see p. 114), and the second by Fredric Hosselquist, a botanist and a student of Carl Linnaeus, who visited the island in 1751. The paper opens with some useful remarks on the *Zeitgeist* of the 18th century with regard to travel literature, and also on the historical context of the two accounts, namely Sweden's spread of influence over the Mediterranean during that period (pp. 111–112). Sabatakakis concludes that both books offer a fairly objective picture of Cyprus and thus “they increase our knowledge of the actual situation” (p. 120). Still, he notes that, to some extent, self-representation is involved in both travelogues (p. 119), while he traces also a “European perspective”, inherent in the travel literature written by Europeans for a European readership. Nonetheless, he rejects a possible “colonial gaze” for these two Swedish travellers, since Sweden had no such aspirations at the time (p. 120).

The last paper in this section is by Dimitris Dolapsakis (“Travel and Fiction: The Case of the French Explorer, Geographer, Astronomer and Encyclopaedist Charles-Marie de la Condamine (1701-1774)”, pp. 121–137). Although he is not mentioned in the title, the actual protagonist here is Nicolas Tollot, a Frenchman who worked as a “nouvelliste” – that is, a sort of early reporter for the bourgeoisie in 18th-century France. Tollot accompanied the explorer Charles-Marie de la Condamine on his journey to the Levant. La Condamine's account of the places he visited are preserved in a recently edited manuscript, which, as shown by Dolapsakis, was used as a primary source by Tollot in his book *Nouveau voyage fait au Levant...* (1742). Dolapsakis first argues that the “sieur Tollot” mentioned on the cover of the book is not, as hitherto believed, the Swiss pharmacist Jean-Baptiste Tollot, but Nicolas Tollot, an adventurer –and also a talented writer– who led a rather tumultuous life that involved several spells of incarceration, due to his shady affairs (pp. 124–130). The scholar then showcases how Tollot appropriated and largely reworded la Condamine's travelogue, as found in the manuscript (pp. 133–134). In this way the “nouvelliste” creates a novelistic text that differs in style, for the explorer's version is more refined and subtly ironic, whereas Tollot's is more entertaining, as it focuses more on adventure and significantly downplays la Condamine's anthropological

observations (pp. 134–137). Dolapsakis’ final conclusion is that Tollot’s version, with its author’s intention to entertain, but also in a way to instruct, is a piece of literature that mirrors the aesthetics and the ideology of the European Enlightenment (p. 137).

The third part of the volume comprises seven papers under the title “Representations of Space and People”. First comes Eleftheria Zei’s “Cyprus in the Italian *Isolarii* of the 16th and 17th Centuries: Political Representations of Different Virtual Dominions” (pp. 141–153). The subject of this contribution, as the title states, are the “books of islands” (“*isolarii*” in Italian), a genre that first appeared in 15th-century Florence and then flourished exclusively in Venice. Zei notes that the genre is highly influential in the formation of modern geographical sciences, but her focus here is on the politics involved in the composition of such texts, in the light of several Italian cities’ need to expand and to absorb new territories, in the face of the new historical challenges that arose from the 15th century onwards (p. 142). Therefore, the scholar makes a case that the “*isolarii*” are relevant to modern discussions, not only in relation to their impact on understanding and defining geographical space, but also in terms of their political significance and their contribution to the analysis of political discourse (p. 143). Within this frame, the paper explores how Cyprus is placed within the political debates that emerge from such texts. Interestingly, this research is linked also to the clashes between Venice and the local Cypriot elites, such as the house of Lusignan (pp. 149–152).

Pavlina Sipova’s contribution (“Cyprus in the Transformations of the 15th and 16th Centuries through the Eyes of the Czech Pilgrims Jan Hasistejnsky of Lobkowitz, Oldrich Prefat of Vlkavov and Krystof Harant of Polzice and Bezdruzice”, pp. 155–167) places Cyprus within the milieu of changes taking place in Central Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries. The travel accounts of three Czech pilgrims are examined, along with the profile of each author, all members of the higher echelons of society – two of them were noblemen and the third came from a well-to-do upper middle class family. Their travelogues are set against the backdrop of history, thus allowing the scholar to highlight both the similarities and the differences in what each traveller says.

Particular emphasis is placed on the way the maritime space evolved from the 15th to the 16th century. In the scholar's words: "maritime traffic in the 16th century had dramatically increased compared to the 15th century", and this shortly before the conquest of Cyprus by the Ottoman Turks (pp. 166–167). Sipova's paper is strategically followed by Spyridon Tzoumakas' "The Ottoman Occupation of Cyprus in Johann van Kootwyck's *Itinerarium Hierosolymitanum et Syriacum*" (pp. 169–184). Indeed, the reader is now transferred to the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest, as seen through the eyes of a Dutch traveler who came to Cyprus in 1598. Tzoumakas underlines the "scientific accuracy" of Kootwyck ("Cotovicus" in the Latinized version), but also shows how his bigotry against the Ottomans prevents him from saying anything positive about them (p. 169 ff.). Two interesting points that should be noted: First, the traveller treats the Cypriot Christians as part of the broader European Christian family, due to the fear of Ottoman expansion to the West (p. 182). Second, he employs the rhetoric of the past (i.e. classical Latin literature) in order to criticize the Ottomans (p. 183). All this shows that Kootwyck's perception of Cyprus was shaped simultaneously by reality, national / religious prejudice and the classical tradition.

Maria-Tsampika Lampitsi's paper ("The Representation of Cyprus in the Work of Olfert Dapper (1688): Images of the Mediterranean in the Travel Literature of the Late Dutch Golden Age", pp. 185–198) offers a complex picture with regard to the intentions lying behind a Dutch traveller's book published in 1688, entitled, following Lampitsi's translation, *Accurate Description of the Islands in the Archipelago of the Mediterranean Sea*. The author, Olfert Dapper, was a "never-travelled travel writer" (p. 187), in other words an "armchair traveller" of the 17th century. According to Lampitsi, Dapper's depiction of space, both through the text and the illustrations in his book, creates a geographical "hierarchy", in which Cyprus plays a leading role (pp. 189–191). The scholar also stresses Dapper's special interest in economy as a cultural concept that underlies historical continuity from ancient times until his day (pp. 193–195). As regards the engravings in the book, those of Cyprus are less exotic than those of Africa, as, according to Lampitsi,

Dapper wished to educate and inform his readers about places such as Cyprus, and not merely to fascinate them with “other-worldly” images of faraway lands – as was the case with Africa (pp. 195–198).

Mary Roussou-Sinclair’s contribution (“Mapping the Empire: Colonial Perceptions in 18th Century Traveller’s Texts”, pp. 199–207), deals with the travel accounts of two Britons, Richard Pococke and Alexander Drummond, and one Frenchman, Comte de Volney. Here, the 18th-century colonial aspirations of Great Britain and France are set against the competitive rivalry between the two nations. Thus, the scholar stresses that these accounts do not merely diffuse knowledge, but also give information on lands in which colonial powers could expand in the future (p. 199). As regards each traveller, Pococke’s account (publ. 1745) is dry in style, whereas Drummond’s reports (publ. 1754) are deemed more accurate and detailed. The latter also displays his anti-French sentiments – only Freemasons are spared, due to the fact that Drummond was one himself (pp. 200–205). Volney’s account was published in the 1780s, at a time when both Great Britain and France were concerned about the future of the Ottoman Empire, an issue that concerned neither Pococke nor Drummond (pp. 205–206). It should be noted that Volney has in fact little to say about Cyprus, but his account is useful in understanding how the colonial powers’ approach to the Mediterranean evolved over time.

The penultimate contribution is by Ioannis Zelepos (“Interreligious Contact and Interaction in Ottoman Cyprus: Orthodox, Muslims, Catholics, Armenians and Jews in European Travelogues from the 15th to the 18th Century”, pp. 209–225). Almost from the outset the scholar declares: “The present paper attempts to outline interreligious contacts and interactions in Cyprus based on selected sources in order to highlight their multifaceted character” (p. 211). The keyword in this excerpt is “multifaceted”. The paper presents and discusses a variety of reports from Western travelers of different periods, which often differ significantly from each other. The scholar takes into consideration the travellers’ religious bigotry, which in certain cases may explain negative attitudes towards specific religious groups (p. 214), whilst attempting, when possible, to corroborate some of the information from these

accounts with other source material. It appears that at times the travellers' accounts are indeed in agreement with what we know from other sources (p. 213 and 215). Of particular importance is the scholar's conclusion that reports of a peaceful interreligious co-existence in Cyprus are sometimes challenged by others, suggesting tensions between religious groups. Furthermore, he proposes that the living together of these groups may have in fact resulted in the intensification of religious identities, not in their loosening (p. 224). As a whole, this is a well-thought survey of what travel literature tells us about the interreligious relations in Cyprus.

The last paper is written by Hervé R. Georgelin ("Western Travellers in Cyprus: Locating the Armenians in Ottoman Cypriot Society and History", pp. 227–233). The scholar looks into the relative absence of the (Cilician) Armenian community in Cyprus from travel accounts. Throughout the centuries only a handful of travellers mention Cypriot Armenians, and in every instance in few words (pp. 227–228 and 231–233). Apparently, the most significant imprint of the Armenian community on the island are two churches that still stand (pp. 228–229). One of them, Sourp Asdvadzadzin in Nicosia, is mentioned both by Richard Pococke and Olfert Dapper, although the former does not name it (p. 232). In conclusion, over the centuries travel accounts have not been generous in giving information on the Armenian community in Cyprus.

To conclude, the present volume, which is completed by a list of illustrations, an extensive index, as well as by abstracts in Greek of the papers, is a more than welcome addition to the study of travel literature, especially in relation to the history and culture of Cyprus over the centuries. The whole package is enticing –the publication is tasteful and the text is largely devoid of typographical errors– and all the contributions are of high quality. This means that the three editors of the volume have most certainly done an excellent job. Since the book is the fruit of the conference, which in turn is the fruit of the "Zefyros" scientific program, all the people involved in these projects should be commended. One can only hope that the future holds many more initiatives of this kind.

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