

# Preserving, Commenting, Adapting: Commentaries on Ancient Texts in Twelfth-Century Byzantium

*An international workshop at the University of Silesia in Katowice  
organised by the Centre of Studies on Byzantine Literature and Reception*

Dates: 20-21 October 2017

## Organisers:

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## Keynote speakers:

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## Call for papers

Every commentary first and foremost is an interpretation or specific reading of the text that is commented upon. In commenting on ‘their’ text, commentators construct questions of meaning and problems perceived as complicating this meaning, neither of which are inherent in the text. Commentaries, therefore, are firmly grounded in their intellectual and socio-cultural context and ‘may come to be studied as cultural or ideological texts in their own right, with didactic aims of their own, steering the “primary” text in a direction intended to answer very contemporary questions of meaning’.<sup>1</sup> This ‘contemporariness’ of commentaries involves both their production and their reception: on the one hand, commentators tend to read their own (didactic) programme into the ‘primary’ text and address questions of meaning relevant to their intellectual context; on the other hand, commentaries serve to preserve, comment, and adapt a text for contemporary purposes and for a contemporary target audience.

As ‘documents of their time’, commentaries thus may be said to form an excellent starting point for exploring the reception of authoritative texts in a certain period. In this workshop, we propose to do exactly this: to explore the use of ancient texts in twelfth-century Byzantium through commentaries. Classical scholarship flourished in twelfth-century Constantinople; scholars such as Eustathios of Thessalonike and John Tzetzes undertook ambitious projects of Homeric exegesis, while Eustratios of Nicaea produced commentaries on various of Aristotle’s works. In a broader sense, treatises like those by John Tzetzes on ancient tragedy and comedy or literary works such as Theodore Prodromos’ *Katomyomachia* and *Bion Prasis* can also be said to comment on ancient texts and, thus, reveal the manifold ways in which Byzantines dealt with their ancient heritage.

We therefore invite abstracts that explore commentaries on ancient texts in twelfth-century Byzantium in order to shed light on the ways in which the Byzantines used—

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Kraus. 2002. Introduction: Reading Commentaries / Commentaries as Reading. In: *The Classical Commentary: Histories, Practices, Theory*. Eds. R.K. Gibson & C.S. Kraus, 1-27. Leiden: Brill. The quotation is from pp. 6-7.

preserved, commented, adapted—the ancient texts in question. We define ‘commentary’ in a broad sense, to include generically diverse texts that in one way or another comment on the ancient literary heritage. Questions that might be addressed include but are not limited to the following: What (contemporary) questions of meaning do Byzantine commentators seek to answer? What is their hermeneutic and/or didactic programme? How do commentators perceive their own role in preserving or defending the authority of the ancient text? What function do these commentaries fulfil within their intellectual and socio-cultural context? What is the relationship between commentaries on ancient texts and the transtextual use of ancient texts in Byzantine literary practice? Since we would like to put the activity of twelfth-century commentators in a wider context, we would also consider proposals dealing with commentaries on ancient texts in other periods (e.g. antiquity, Palaiologian Byzantium etc.).

### Deadline for abstracts

Please send abstracts of no more than 300 words to [baukje.van-den-berg@us.edu.pl](mailto:baukje.van-den-berg@us.edu.pl) by 30 April 2017. Any enquiries about the conference may also be addressed to this email address.



Eustathios of Thessalonike, Commentary on Homer's *Odyssey*, in the autograph manuscript Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Gr. 460, fol. 1r. (Wikimedia Commons)

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