

THE BOOK EPIGRAMS ON PROMETHEUS, ASCIBED TO JOHN TZETZES

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ABSTRACT. This article presents the Byzantine book of epigrams on Prometheus, found at the end of *Prometheus Bound* in a considerable part of Aeschylean manuscripts. It offers a critical edition, translation, analysis, commentary, and demonstrates John Tzetzes' authorship. The detailed reading of the text aims at showing the presence of theatrical effects which characterise these poems, as well as illustrating the author's poetic technique and interpreting his reproach to Aeschylus. By doing so we will touch upon broader issues, such as the interpretation of Prometheus from a Byzantine perspective and the authorship of the *A-commentary* on Aeschylus, the most popular among mediaeval students.

KEYWORDS: John Tzetzes, Book epigram, *Prometheus Bound*, *A-commentary* on Aeschylus.

* This paper is part of the research project № 18-011-00669 funded by the *Russian Foundation for Basic Research*.

1. Introduction

Aeschylus was a classical Greek dramatist whose works were popular during the 4th and 3rd centuries BC. In the next period, however, he lost the favour of the public, and became the property of scholars and grammarians. Of about 80 tragedies only seven came down to us, inasmuch as only these seven plays were included in the Byzantine school curriculum that ensured its survival and transmission via school manuscripts (see Simelidis 2017). Since the language of Aeschylus was always obscure, the Byzantine teachers and scholars were obliged to accompany the original text with commentary (as marginal scholia) in order to facilitate reading for young pupils. For this reason, most of the preserved manuscripts of Aeschylus (about 150) contain such commentaries and are preceded by prefaces (see Dawe 1964, Turyn 1943). In this paper, we cannot deal with the entire corpus of these commentaries. Here, we will examine the Byzantine book epigrams

placed at the end of *Prometheus Bound*, in the manuscripts with the so-called *A-commentary* (Herington 1972, 240), the most popular among mediaeval students; the epigrams that also appears in the *Greek Anthology* (Cougny 1890, 414). Despite their brevity, these texts could reveal an attitude of late Byzantine professors and their students toward the classical heritage and give an indication of how they thought or were supposed to think about *Prometheus Bound*.

The term 'book epigram' has become standard in Byzantine studies (see De-moen 2013; Lauxtermann 2003, 197). In fact, the book epigrams were an important element of Byzantine book production, intended to define the reading experience and an approach to the book (see Bentein 2012, 71). They can be found in thousands and thousands of Byzantine manuscripts, including school textbooks, scientific treatises, letter collections, Gospels, lectionaries, Psalters, manuscripts of the church fathers and other texts.

The book epigrams on literary works or authors are supposed to guide and advise the reader in the matter of interpretation and can, therefore, provide us with information on Byzantine concepts and appreciations of Classical and Byzantine literature in different periods and regions and help to answer questions including what reactions were expected from the reader, what was the status and the perception of ancient and contemporary authors, and what interpretative practices applied to Classic Literature and to Byzantine Literature.

In this paper, we would like to show how the Byzantine readers were supposed to read and interpret the figure of Prometheus by offering an analysis and a commentary on the Byzantine book epigrams at the end of *Prometheus Bound*.

2. Manuscript Tradition

Our investigation reveals these poems on Prometheus preserved in 23 manuscripts dating from the 13th to the 16th century,¹ and it also shows that there are more such witnesses to discover. In the codices, the epigrams were placed immediately after the final words of *Prometheus Bound* and became as important as the text of the play itself. For the most part, the poems were supplemented with such embellishments as decorative borders, red initials, or decorative flourishes.

The manuscripts have a total of 4 epigrams (we label them with letters *abcd*), but in each manuscript, there is a different number of epigrams. Although C.J. Herington edited the epigrams *ab* as one entity (Herington 1972), we presented them separately, because the marks of punctuation, colophons as well as visual

¹We started our investigation with help of *Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams*, www.dbbe.ugent.be (an online corpus of metrical paratexts collected through the systematic consultation of manuscripts and relevant secondary literature). A further investigation of available materials allowed us to identify more manuscripts.

aspects seem to suggest that we are dealing with two epigrams instead of one. We list all found witnesses in the table below, which uses the notation established by the work of A. Turyn for the manuscripts of Aeschylus (Turyn 1943); for the full description of the manuscripts see the same work of A. Turyn.

B	FLORENCE, <i>Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana</i> , Plut. 31, 3 (f. 181 ^r), 1287 – <i>abc</i>
O	LEIDEN, <i>Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit</i> , Voss. gr. Q ^o 4 (f. 13 ^v), late 13 th c. – <i>abc</i>
Nc	FLORENCE, <i>Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana</i> , Plut. 28, 25 (f. 67 ^v), late 13 th c. – <i>abcd</i>
H	HEIDELBERG, <i>Universitätsbibliothek</i> , Palat. gr. 18 (f. 111 ^r), late 13 th c. – <i>abc</i>
W	VATICAN, <i>Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana</i> , Vat. gr. 1332 (f. 88 ^v), late 13 th c. – <i>abc</i>
V	VENICE, <i>Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana</i> , gr. Z. 468 (coll. 653) (f. 59 ^r), late 13 th c. – <i>abc</i>
Ea	PARIS, <i>Bibliothèque Nationale de France</i> , suppl. gr. 110 (f. 23 ^v), 1326–1375 – <i>abd</i>
P	PARIS, <i>Bibliothèque Nationale de France</i> , gr. 2787 (f. 39 ^r), 1340–1360 – <i>ab</i>
D	MILAN, <i>Biblioteca Ambrosiana</i> , G 56 (f. 76 ^v), not later than 1372 – <i>abc</i>
Lc	CAMBRIDGE, <i>University Library</i> , Nn. III. 17 (f. 30 ^v), 14 th c. – <i>ab</i>
Xc	FLORENCE, <i>Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana</i> , Conv. Soppr. 98 (f. 156 ^r), 14 th c. – <i>c</i>
Fd	FLORENCE, <i>Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana</i> , Plut. 91, sup. 5 (f. 40 ^r), 14 th c. – <i>ab</i>
X	FLORENCE, <i>Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana</i> , Plut. 31,2 (f. 46 ^v), 14 th c. – <i>ab</i>
Rc	FLORENCE, <i>Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana</i> , Conv. Soppr. 7 (f. 39 ^r), 14 th c. – <i>abc</i>
Y	LEIDEN, <i>Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit</i> , Voss. gr. Q ^o 6 (f. 8), 14 th c. – <i>d</i>
NE	VATICAN, <i>Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana</i> , Vat. gr. 58 (f. 43 ^r), 1401–1450 – <i>ab d</i>
Ya	VIENNA, <i>Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (Phil. gr. 197)</i> (f. 180 ^r), 1413 – <i>abcd</i>
Xa	MILAN, <i>Biblioteca Ambrosiana</i> , N 175 sup. (f. 21 ^r), 15 th c. – <i>ab d</i>
Sp	St PETERSBURG, <i>Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences</i> , Q N ^o 2 (f. 94 ^r), 15 th c. – <i>ab</i>
Wb	VATICAN, <i>Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana</i> , Reg. gr. 155 (f. 33 ^v), 15 th c. – <i>b</i>
N	MADRID, <i>Biblioteca nacional de España</i> , 4677 (f. 152 ^v –153 ^r), 1458–1465 – <i>abd</i>
Zb	LEIPZIG, <i>Universitätsbibliothek</i> , Rep. I 43 (f. 49 ^r), 15 th –16 th – <i>a</i>
Ub	BOLOGNA, <i>Biblioteca Universitaria</i> , ms. 2700 (f. 118 ^r), 16 th – <i>ab</i>
Yd	PARIS, <i>Bibliothèque Nationale de France</i> , gr. 2782A (f. 128 ^v), 16 th – <i>abd</i>

Couigny E., COUGNY, *Epigrammatum anthologia Palatina cum Planudeis et appendice nova*, vol. 3, Paris, 1890, p. 414 – *abc* (Insofar as we cannot identify the manuscripts used in Couigny's edition of the *Greek Anthology*, we introduce it in the apparatus).

It is noteworthy to mention that some manuscripts contain an extra poetic line at the beginning of the first epigram, as follows:

1. τέλος πέφυκ(εν) ένθαδι Προμηθέως (Fd)
2. Προμηθέως δράματος Αισχύλου τέλος (Lc, P).
3. Προμηθέως δράματος Αισχύλου πέρας (Ξa)
4. ένταύθα τέρμα Αισχύλου Προμηθέως (Wb, Zb)
5. ένταύθα τέρμα Προμηθέως Αισχύλου (W)
6. πρώτου όρα δράματος τέρμα Αισχύλου; όν προς προμηθέ' έλλείπον τά Προμηθίας (Ya)

The constraints of brevity and the typical scholiastic contamination make it impossible to draw up a stemma. Seeing as there are no families, and the manuscript readings are always very minor and purely orthographical, or accidental, we simply choose the only reading which gives the required sense. The epigram *c* is edited with two variants, because it is doubtful to specify, which text should be seen as the “original” in this case. This edition follows the punctuation of Phil. gr. 197 (Ya) and its rules of accentuation as far as this codex contains all the texts in perfectly legible fashion, and it is also distinguished by good spelling and clear script.

3. The cycle on Prometheus: Edition and Translation

The Greek text with our own translation we present as follows:

Στίχοι εἰς τὸν Προμηθεῖα τοῦ Τζέτζου

a

- ¹ Ἄνθ' ὦν τὸ πῦρ δέδωκας ἀνθρώπων γένει,
- ² τρύχη βία φάραγγι προσπεπηγμένος ·
- ³ τὸ πῦρ Προμηθεῦ ὃ βροτοῖς ἐχαρίσω,
- ⁴ ὕλη πρὸς ἀκάματον εὐρέθη φλόγα,
- ⁵ ὀργῆς κατὰ σοῦ πρὸς θεῶν πυρσομένης:–

b

- ⁶ Αἰσχύλε τί φῆς · τοὺς θεοὺς σου προσφέρεις
- ⁷ πάσχοντας αἰσχροῦς ἐκ θεῶν ὁμοτρόπων;
- ⁸ καὶ πῶς ἄρα λέληθας σαυτὸν εἰς τέλος,
- ⁹ θεοὺς σεβάζων τοὺς παθητοὺς τὴν φύσιν,
- ¹⁰ καὶ μὴ δυνατοὺς ἐκφυγεῖν τιμωρίας:–

c

- ¹¹ Οὐαὶ Προμηθεῦ κράξον οὐαὶ σοὶ μέγα ·
- ¹² χάριν βροτῶν γὰρ ἠπατήσας τὸν Δία ·
- ¹³ καὶ λάθρα τούτου, πῶς τὸ πῦρ ἐκεκλόφεις ·
- ¹⁴ εἴτ' οὐδ' ἐπέισθης ὦν περ ἔσταυρωμένος
- ¹⁵ τὸν ἐκβαλοῦντα τῶν θρόνων εἰπεῖν Δία,
- ¹⁶ τῷ τοι κεραυνὸς ἐκ πόλου κατηγμένος,
- ¹⁷ ἔργον τίθησι συντριβῆς σε τὸν τάλαν ·
- ¹⁸ αἶαζε τοῖνυν· τοῦτο γὰρ πάρεστί σοι:–

Ἴτεροι παλαιοί

d

- ¹⁹ Κλέψας τὸ πῦρ παρέσχε τοῖς θνητοῖς γέρα ·
²⁰ καὶ κάμπτεται μᾶστιξι ταῖς Διὸς τάλας ·

Variant NYaYd

- ²¹ ψευδώνυμον λέλογχε τὴν κλήσιν μόνος ·
²² προμηθείας δεῖται γάρ, ἢ προβουλίας:–

Variant Y

- ²¹ ψευδωνύμως ἔλαχε τὴν κλήσιν μόνον ·
²² προμηθείας δεῖται γάρ ἢ προβουλία:–

a BFdHLc(1–4)NNcNeP(1–4)RcUbV(non potest legere)WXXaYaYd Ξa(1–4) Cougny

b BFdHLcNNcNePRcUbV(non potest legere)W(7,8,10)WbXXaYaYd(6–8)ZbΞa Cougny

c HNCNeRcV(non potest legere)W(11,13,14,16,17)XaXc

d NYYaYdΞa(1,2)

Tit.: στίχοι εἰς τὸν προμηθεά BHNCWΧa post προμηθεά add. τοῦ τζέτζου Χa αὐτοῦ τζέτζου W 2 τρύχη] τρύχει FdHNe || βία] ὠία Ub || προσπεπηγμένος] πρὸς πεπηγμένος Ξa 3 τὸ] ὁ Rc || τ.π.Π. ὁ β.έ.] Π. σὸς β.έ. Ub 4 ἀκάματον] ἀκάμαντον NePUBXYaYdΞa ἀκάματον Χa 5 πρὸς] πρὸ Ub || θεῶν] θεὸν BH || πυρσομένης] πυρσομένης Χa || versum om. LcPΞa 6 Αἰσχύλε] Αἰσχύλος Lc || προσφέρεις] προφέρεις PΞa || versum om. W 7 πάσχοντα] om. Nc. || αἰσχρῶς] αἰσχρά Χa 8 ἄρα λέληθας] ἄρ' ἐλέληθας WbZb^{ac} ἄρ' ἐλέλυθας Zb^{pc} || σαυτὸν] αὐτὸν FdNeUbWbXZb 9 παθητοῦς] παθῆ τοῦς Ξa || versum om. W 10 καὶ μὴ δυνατοῦς] om. Nc. || τιμωρίας] τιμωρίαν Ξa Cougny 11 Οὐαί] αἰαῖ Ne || κράζον] κράζων BHXCYa κρώζων Nc Cougny κράζον W 12 ἠπατήσας] ἠπάτησας Cougny || versum om. W 13 καὶ λάθρα τοῦτο] om. Nc || πῶς] πως coni. Cougny 14 εἴτ' οὐδ'] εἶδ' οὐκ ΧaYa (εἴτ' οὐδ' in marg. Χa) || ἐπίσθης] ἐπίσθεις H 15 ἐχβαλοῦντα] ἐχβαλλόντα BHNCNeYa ἐχβαλλόντα Χc || τῶν θρόνων] τὸν θρόνον BNcW τοῦ θρόνου Cougny || versum om. W 16 τῶ τοι κεραυνὸς ἐκ] om. Nc || τῶ τοι] ταῦτο Χa || πόλου] πόλλου BHNCW Cougny 17 ἔργον] ἔργου W || συντριβῆς σε] σὺν τριβῆ σε Χc συντριβῆσε BD συντριβῆς δὲ H 18 versum om. W 19 lemma in marg. ἔτεροι παλαιοί YaYdΞa στίχοι παλαιοί εἰς προμηθεά N 21 μόνον YN μόνος YaYd 21-22 versus om. Ξa

a

*Since you have given fire to mankind,
 you wear away, being nailed to a cliff by Violence.*

*The fire, Prometheus, you granted to mortals,
 found to be the fuel for an unrelenting fire,
 an anger flamed on you by gods.*

b

*Aeschylus! What are you saying? you exhibit your gods
 suffering shamefully from their fellow gods.
 How did you elude after all, that gods, you are venerating,
 are able to suffer by nature,
 and unable to evade the punishment.*

c

*Oh woe, Prometheus, shout aloud: oh woe oh woe!
For the sake of mortals, you have cheated Zeus,
and unknown to him, you stole fire.
even crucified, you refused
to reveal who would overthrow Zeus from throne.
That is why you have been struck by thunderbolt from the high sky,
that reduce you, wretched, to rubbles.
So now cry, because that's all you can do.*

d

*He stole the fire and gave it to man as a gift,
he bows to the whip of Zeus, the wretched.
He has been only falsely named:
v.1 because he lacked some foreknowledge (promethia) or forethought
(proboulia).
v. 2 because the forethought (proboulia) lacked some foreknowledge (promethia).*

4. Analysis

The cycle of epigrams, as could be easily noticed, makes a direct reference to drama as content and imitation of theatrical form. The first epigram depicts Prometheus nailed by Violence to a cliff, such as the opening scene of *Prometheus Bound* shows us, this scene also explains us the cause of the wrath of all the gods. At the end the author criticises Aeschylus for his portrayal of the gods as capable of suffering. In the third epigram, he addresses against a silent Prometheus, it ends with Prometheus annihilated by Zeus' thunderbolt as in the final scene of the play. Theatrical effects are not restricted to a formal resemblance with the script of *Prometheus Bound*, another type of dramatic effect is due to the power of the direct address to the characters to mimic a play and create the illusion of performance. Thus, the reader may feel that the dramatic scenes are actually performed in front of his eyes, as on a stage.

It is remarkable that the sixth line directly refers to a question by Dionysus in another standard school text, the *Frogs* by Aristophanes: "Αἰσχύλε τί σιγᾶς" (Why are you silent, Aeschylus?) (*Frogs* 833). Dionysus is acting there as a judge in a contest between Euripides and Aeschylus for the seat of "the Best Tragic Poet," which takes place at the dinner table of Pluto in the underworld. By taking up the role of actor, the author of the epigrams assumes the character of κριτής, the literary judge, who is appointed to judge *Prometheus Bound*. As such he addresses Aeschylus and Prometheus directly with questions.

Here, it remind that, in the *Frogs*, Dionysus acts not as literary judge, but as a typical spectator; being incapable of appreciating poetic language and dramatic methods, he makes absurd comments, asks silly questions and reveals his misunderstanding of Aeschylus' point. As we have seen, the author of the epigrams also is not preoccupied with Aeschylean literary technique, style, dramatic methods or iambic metre. We may notice that he does not value the mythological oddities of the play; he employs oxymoronic questions to suggest foolishness of Aeschylus' play instead of giving praise to Aeschylus: "*How can Aeschylus venerate such weak gods? How could a god be judged not by superior gods but by similar gods? How could a god be subjected to eternal punishment? How could it be that a god is not able to evade punishment? How could a god suffer by nature?*"

The nature of divinity and the impassibility of god turns out to be the main subject of these questions. For centuries, in the Greek philosophical tradition, going back even before Plato and Aristotle, there had been a strong resistance to the assumptions about deity that were part of the traditional stories about the gods. Each philosophical school came up with its own revision of popular religious beliefs, but all of them believed that divinity is by nature free of passion. The mind of the Greeks was held so captive to the philosophical concept of divine impassibility, that this attribute was ascribed to God at a very early stage in Christian theology, and become a major concern to the theologians and a question discussed at all the ecumenical councils. Cyril of Alexandria in his 2nd Letter to Nestorius defined the Catholic creed: "*We do not mean that God the Word suffered blows or the piercing of nails or other wounds in his own nature, in that the divine is impassible because it is not physical. But the body which had become his own body suffered these things, and therefore he himself is said to have suffered them for us. The impassible was in the body which suffered*" (Wickham 1983, 4.5, 6.28). In contrast to Prometheus' portrayal by Aeschylus, the Catholic creed also affirmed that God, being able to evade the punishment, freely accepted suffering and death on the cross.

At first it seems a little odd that the author felt no need to defend or explain the passionate nature of the gods and, on the contrary, poses the theological questions about their divine nature. In fact, allegory was a popular interpretative tool in Byzantine scholarship, which made the ancient texts more interesting to a Christian readership (see Hunger 1954). Due to the fact, that the Evangelical *passio* is topologically comparable to *Prometheus Bound*, the Prometheus myth was allegorically understood as a prefiguration of Christ's descent to man's salvation and his suffering (Pietropaolo 2010, 400; Roilos 2006, ch.3; see also Tomadaki 2019). As if following this interpretation, the epigram even said that Prometheus was 'crucified' (ἐσταυρωμένος), although this word is alien to the Aeschylean trag-

edy, which contains ‘δεσμῶι προσπορπατός’ (bound with chains). However, this explicit similarity is possibly the reason for judging the two stories equally by the same philosophical standard and the same approach. We can suppose that in the readership’s cultural background, the theme of the death on the cross for humankind was so closely associated with Jesus Christ, that anybody could easily fall into the trap of direct or indirect comparison between older gods and the Christian God.

Finally, there is still another observation that can be made. The author of the epigram *c* even identifies himself with the Kratos, who mocks Prometheus’ name as a misnomer, given how he seems to particularly lack the ‘forethought’ (προμήθεια) by which he might have avoided being crucified (*Prometheus Bound* 85–87). Indeed, this makes it more evident again that the epigrams appreciate Hesiod’s version of Prometheus’ myth. In sheer contrast to Aeschylean Prometheus, the Hesiodic Prometheus demonstrates a manifest lack of forethought (προμήθεια) as otherwise he should have been able to ‘foresee’ both humanity’s and his own fate². Hesiod, in both *Works & Days* and the *Theogony*, painted the negative picture of Prometheus as a trickster figure who made the most significant contribution to the misery of human existence. In this way, the author considered Prometheus’ punishment was not the suffering of the *Agnus Dei* for mankind, but the suffering of a fallen angel responsible for his own crime, condemned, as said the epigram, to the biblical “unrelenting fire”. It shows that the author of the epigrams wanted to reproach Aeschylus for his version of the myth, for how he reworks the original motif.

5. The Date and Authorship of the Epigrams

There is only one piece of external evidence as to the date of the epigrams—the earliest date of their known sources. The earliest manuscripts, containing these verses, date from about the second half of the 13th century, not later than 1300. Since none of these codices appears to be the original, the *terminus ante quem* could not be later than 1250. As regards internal criteria, the sole means of attaining a very approximate result are metre and language. These epigrams are written in dodecasyllables with a caesura after the 5th or the 7th syllable, and every verse ends with a paroxytone word. The combination of metrical and linguistic features dates it to the Middle Byzantine period, not earlier than the 9th century, which,

² His actions much better fit the profile of the Indo-European proto-Prometheus, whose name did not originally mean ‘forethought’, but rather “one who loves to generate things through various forms of occasionally predatory behavior: snatching, grasping, robbing...” (Šulek 2011, 28).

therefore, serves as the epigram's *terminus post quem*. However, we do believe that the composition of the epigrams should fall between 1000 and 1200.

The majority of the manuscripts have no title author, except two codices: the Vaticanus gr. 1332, dating about 1290, contains “στί<χοι> εἰς τὸν προμηθέα αὐτοῦ τζέτζου” (*Tzetzes’ poems on Prometheus*) before the epigrams *abc* (f. 88^v) and the 15th-century codex 560 from the *Biblioteca Ambrosiana* (N 175 sup., f. 21^r) also adds “στίχοι εἰς τὸν προ<μηθέα> τοῦ τζέτζου” before the epigrams *abd*. These notices mean Isaac Tzetzes (†1138) or most probably his brother John Tzetzes (c.1110–1180/1185), one of the most prominent Byzantine classical scholars and professors, who produced numerous surviving commentaries on classical authors: commentary on Homer's *Iliad*, Hesiod's *Works & Days*, Aristophanes comedies and Lycophron's *Alexandra*, and other ancient texts. The rest of the manuscripts do not contain any indication of authorship.

This ascription, however, might be suspect, and could be easily explained by the frequent tendency on the part of Byzantine copyists to ascribe anonymous texts to famous authors. Nevertheless, we can attempt to date and attribute the epigrams not only on the basis of their scribal attribution but also with respect to their style and content.

What can be said, then, about the author of the epigrams from his creations? We can observe that its direct address and reproach to Aeschylus appear to reflect a striking similarity with the typical sarcastic tone of Tzetzes, sometimes abusive when he defines Thucydides' style as wooden. Hence, from a stylistic point of view, the epigrams could be easily attributed to Tzetzes.

The lexical similarities are evident as well. Sandro Allegrini observed that Tzetzes very often starts a poetical line with ‘ἀνθ’ ὦν’ like the author of the epigrams (Allegrini 1971). Indeed, the TLG database gives 43 entries of using ‘ἀνθ’ ὦν’ by Tzetzes, which is enormous as compared with other Byzantine writers. The reference to the *Frogs* by Aristophanes could very likely point again to Tzetzes, because Aristophanes was his favourite dramatic author, which Tzetzes often interferes in his commentary.

In fact, Tzetzes does express more elaborately his opinion on Aeschylus' Prometheus in another treatise, the *Commentary on Hesiod*, where he elaborates the rationalistic version of a Prometheus myth (Gaisford 1823, 74.14-20). He appreciates Hesiod's myth of the Golden Age and make it more plausible. Tzetzes' relationship to this theme is rather different and more creative, in a sense, more personal. He skilfully accumulated and adapted many various ancient sources, largely supplemented with rationalistic comments on his own authority to construct a scientific picture of cultural history. The condemnation of fire and its bringer is a central to Tzetzes' interpretation of the Prometheus' myth (see Cole

1967, 21, 150-151). Prometheus grants men fire; the inevitable result, which Zeus (or destiny) brings to pass—is the arrival of Pandora (or technology) with her box of evils, i.e. civilisation. In essence, Tzetzes argues that the invention of fire and the subsequent introduction to the technology (such as the smelting of metals, fashioning tools and arms to slaughter animals) has brought a great calamity upon the people. Before, according to Tzetzes, they lived in harmony with nature at the level of bare subsistence that saved people from the tyranny of superfluous desires. Tzetzes admires their freedom from jealousy and hate, their strict vegan diet and the bountifulness of the earth. In fact, their simple, happy, free and peaceful life was quite wretched by later standards, but they knew of nothing better and so did not notice their misery.

If the hypothesis about Tzetzes' authorship, at least epigrams *abc*, is correct, the reproach to Aeschylus for his Prometheus could be easily explained by Tzetzes' interest in the cultural history of humankind and his disesteem for Prometheus' role in this history.

6. Relationships with the *A-Commentary*

The book epigrams on Prometheus are transmitted together with the *A-Commentary* (on the Byzantine Triad: *Prometheus, Septem, Persae*), which is the most famous, elaborate and most voluminous commentaries on Aeschylus, found in, at least, 45 manuscripts in whole or part (Herington 1972, 4). The evidence of the tight connection between two texts raises the question whether these epigrams were placed next to *Prometheus Bound* by the author of the *A-Commentary* himself, or even composed by the same author; or neither placed next to the *Prometheus Bound* by the author of the *A-Commentary* nor composed by the author of the *A-Commentary* and were copied along with the *A-Commentary* from a certain moment in time.

It stands to reason that without the autograph of the *A-Commentary*, we will never answer these questions for certain, but we do not actually have the autograph manuscript and we should proceed in another way. Usually, scholars can rely on the reconstruction of the original text in the critical edition, but there is again a problem because the manuscripts with scholia have not really a text to be taken apart, corrected, and collated. The Byzantine scribes of scholia, in fact, were incredibly greedy in collecting explanatory material to add to their scholia, they compared other manuscripts containing the scholia, they searched in lexicons and in encyclopaedic works, and some of them were even accustomed to including something out of their own heads (Herington 1972, 26). As a consequence, the manuscripts with scholia, in fact, resemble a snowball, which picks up layer after layer with each copying; an able editor might gradually peel off this

snowball, layer by layer, in order to disengage the original texts, but it is obviously impossible to restore the text of the scholia in its original shape.

An examination of the earliest and ample manuscripts, referred to *A-Commentary*, or used to supplement the *A-Commentary* in Herington's edition, reveals that such manuscripts as usual contain these verses, and that there is a tight connection between the *A-Commentary* manuscripts and these epigrams. Additional evidence comes from the observations that the other commentaries on Aeschylus' plays as well Tzetzes' commentary on Aristophanes have the same epigrams at the end. Hence, we are inclined to think that at least the book epigrams *abc* were included by the *A-commentator* in the original scholia. We may also notice that the viewpoint of the epigrams coincides with the position of the *A-commentator*. The epigrams do not value the mythological oddities of the play that is in conformity with such a distinctive feature of the *A-commentary* as the absence of allegoric interpretations of pagan myths. The Hesiodic character of the *A-commentary* is consistent with the epigrams' reproaches.

Who was the *A-commentator*? Indeed, the method of the *A-commentary* is very similar to that of John Tzetzes' commentary on the Triad of Aristophanes. The following features are common to both: paraphrase as the predominant instrument of exegesis, earlier scholia reused in the same way, similar syntax, many common synonyms, the similar book epigram at the end, the rationalistic interpretation of the myths, some common quotations from Tzetzes' previous works³, and the verbatim extracts from Eustathius' commentary on the *Iliad*. C.J. Herington, editor of the *A-Commentary*, even concludes that it "was written under the influence of Iohannes Tzetzes, or at least in the same period and place". However, he doubts the authorship of Tzetzes because "it shows none of their extensive learning, nor the aggressive and bitter personality of John" (Herington 1972, 44).

On the other side, Ole Smith finds proof of Tzetzes' authorship in codex *ATHOS, Ivion* 161, where he discovered several long additions from the *A-commentary*. One of them (on f.56^r) was ascribed to Tzetzes (Smith 1980, 395). But at the same time, he mentions an evident obstacle to his own hypothesis: the text of the scholia misses the self-promotion and the disrespect for other scholars' work so often found in Tzetzes' commentaries (Smith 1980, 399). Thus, O. Smith was forced to conclude: "if the commentary is by Tzetzes, it is a late work and might have been left unfinished. Also, the fact that only one manuscript ascribes the commentary

³ For instance, Marco Ercoles finds the same etymology in the *A-Commentary* and in Tzetzes' commentaries on Aristophanes, on Lycophron, in his *Historiae*, and in the *Etymologicum Genuinum* entry (Ercoles 2014, 98-99). However, there is a possibility that it is a result of simple borrowing from Tzetzes' works or other common sources.

to him might point this way: the *A-commentary* was not finished in the way that Tzetzes' other commentaries were" (Smith 1980, 399).

We believe that the possible explanations for these complexities can be found in the school context. First and foremost, Tzetzes was a private teacher in Constantinople. He earned his living by teaching that pushed him to compete fiercely for his pupils (see Agapitos 2017), and to write very different sorts of works for self-promotion. Given the wide gap between the vernacular and learned languages, and especially Aeschylus' obscurity of the language, the Byzantine teachers were obliged to accompany the original text with commentary. It was therefore almost inevitable that a great teacher such as Tzetzes also composed a commentary on Aeschylus for private school use. This material was not destined for publishing, and was distributed by copying at school. Tzetzes always talked about his commentaries being practical and useful (see Budelmann 2002, 163). This means that he made sure that the delivery methods used adopt to each level of learning or aptitude found in the classroom. Hence, each of his texts reflects the specific purpose for what it was composed. His commentaries on the *Theogony*, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* allegories, or his *Carmina Iliaca*, does not reflect a schoolroom situation; in fact, these commentaries resemble not a learner's guide, but rather literary works worthy of being published under his name. The *A-commentary* offers the assistance needed for the basic linguistic understanding of the text, relevant for the Byzantine schoolboy and served an immediate aid for the elucidation of the Aeschylean text (see also Smith 1996). Thus there is no reason not to believe that Tzetzes' commentary on Aeschylus existed in the manuscript tradition. In this connection, it is noteworthy to mention that the list of lost books in the disastrous fire of 1671 at El Escorial preserve such a title – a 16th-century codex of *Ioannis Tzetzae scholia in 5 libros Halieuticon Oppiani, in Promethea, in Septem ad Thebas, in Persas*, with the commentary on Aeschylus on the ff. 061–139. (see Andres 1968, 128, no. 286=E.I.17). That means that the most probable that the author of both, the commentary and the epigrams, was John Tzetzes.

7. Conclusion

These epigrams of Prometheus, attributed to Tzetzes, appear to be probably the most hostile verdict on Aeschylus ever expressed by a classical scholar. The origin of the radical contempt for the ancient play, impossible in the modern scholarly interpretation, must have been rooted in the different Byzantine perception of classical heritage.

The mere fact that they have been faithfully transmitted, that they are found in a considerable part of Aeschylean manuscripts, and are present in almost all manuscripts of the most widely read Byzantine commentary on Aeschylus, allows us to believe that the author's point of view was consistent with the scribes' point

of view. For these epigrams would not have been copied if they had not been thought to serve some purpose, if they had not been thought to be relevant for students and worth their attention. In any case, the epigrams written in the same manuscripts as the ancient text were difficult to ignore, so that they inevitably became a factor affecting the school reading and interpretation of Aeschylus' Prometheus.

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