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## **Editions of literary and non-literary texts: some comparisons**

The corpus of texts on which our grammar will be based consists primarily of printed editions produced from the 19th century onwards, mainly because it would take far too long to transcribe all the texts that interest us from the manuscripts that preserve them. It would not be a responsible use of the limited resources of the project. Two conclusions follow from this:

- 1) We need to have a very clear understanding of the principles which editors have followed, in each case, so that we are not misled into treating normalisation or other instances of editorial intervention as if they were primary evidence.
- 2) We are, to some extent at least, at the mercy of the editors who stand between us and the manuscripts, although we shall occasionally consult the actual manuscripts (or microfilms, digitised images or photocopies) in order to check dubious readings.

As we have made clear, our project has a particular interest in utilising the evidence of non-literary texts, which have never been systematically exploited as a source of linguistic evidence by scholars working on the history of the language. The main aim of this conference is to bring together scholars who work with non-literary materials written in the medieval vernacular, in order to get a better understanding of the kinds of material that exist, their availability in published form, and the ways in which experts in various disciplines use documents and other

forms of written evidence for the purposes of their own research.

The idea behind this slot in the programme was to invite a scholar who has hands-on experience of editing both literary and non-literary texts to discuss the editorial practices involved in both cases, to explain the different kinds of difficulties which the editor faces, and to indicate how they can be overcome. We thought it would be particularly interesting to examine texts with a known dialectal background. The phrase “known dialectal background”, however, is a rather imprecise way of referring to the sorts of texts we have in mind. You might object that, in the period that concerns us, every speaker/writer’s vernacular was in some sense a dialect, in the absence of a widely accepted standard language. That may be true, but the fact is that it is often impossible to assign texts to a particular “dialect”, for a multitude of reasons. One possible reason is that authors themselves deliberately avoided dialectisms that might not be understood outside their own region. “Toning down” of dialect features may also be due to the process of transmission, as scribes consciously (or unconsciously) adapted the language of a text to suit the needs of their intended audience. In addition, we need to recognise the existence of some kind of supra-dialectal koine, or possibly two kinds: one used for oral communication when speakers from different parts of the Greek-speaking world came into contact, and one used in written texts. The latter might involve some recourse to more learned linguistic features, in phonology and morphology as well as syntax, while still being recognisable as a form of the vernacular, rather than the formal learned style of, for example, Byzantine scholars or ecclesiastics. A third form of koine that has been proposed, with particular respect to literature, has been termed either a *Kunstsprache*<sup>1</sup> or (by Hans Eideneier) “Koine der Dichtersänger”,<sup>2</sup> both of which can be seen as attempts to account for the mix of linguistic forms found in late medieval literary texts. While the second kind of koine can be identified in prose texts of various kinds, the third stresses the oral/formulaic characteristics of verse texts. In all these cases – it might be argued – a supra-dialectal linguistic form obscures the existence of the real vernacular, in its various

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<sup>1</sup> See E. and M. Jeffreys, “The oral background of Byzantine popular poetry”, *Oral Tradition* 1.3 (1986) 504-47.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, H. Eideneier, *Von Rhapsodie zu Rap: Aspekte der griechischen Sprachgeschichte von Homer bis heute* (Tübingen 1999), pp. 96-111.

dialectal or regional forms. One consequence of this situation is that, in the absence of external evidence, it is impossible to localise a large proportion of literary texts written from, let's say, the 13th to the 15th centuries. Reputable scholars have proposed, for the same romance text, an origin in Crete, Asia Minor, or even Southern Italy. Or, in the case of one of the laments for Constantinople (*Ανακάλυψα της Κωνσταντινόπολης*), scholars are divided between Cyprus and Crete, or perhaps one of the islands in the Eastern Aegean.

The first text which is conventionally described as written in a dialect is the *Assizes* of Cyprus, dating from the 13th century. More importantly, we have the Cypriot chronicles of Machairas and Boustronios, dated to the 15th century. In Crete poetry exhibiting what Peter Mackridge has called “tinges of local dialect”<sup>3</sup> is extant from the last decades of the 14th century, though it is not until the late 16th century that Cretan dialect is encountered in a more evolved, consistent and literary form. Substantial written evidence for other dialects appears even later.

So what do I mean by “texts with a dialectal background”? In the case of non-literary texts, particularly documents, such as notarial acts, which have a specific known provenance, if the basic linguistic form is non-learned (whether or not consistently), we would be justified in assuming that the natural language of the particular area underlies the written text. In other words, *some* linguistic features in the text are characteristic of the local form of Greek. The same could be argued, in principle, for literary texts. But if there is no evidence as to where the text was originally composed – and we are often dealing with anonymous texts – or where it was subsequently copied, we are on very shaky ground. In the past some editors have attempted to identify particular forms or words as characteristic of a particular dialect with which they are familiar, ignoring the fact that in the late medieval period these features had a much wider distribution. In other cases, where a text is known to originate from a specific area, editors have sought to restore “genuine” dialect elements to the text, relying on their own “linguistic sensibility”. Perhaps the most extreme case is the critical edition of the Cretan romance *Erotokritos* made by Stefanos Xanthoudidis (1915). Fortunately we have moved on

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<sup>3</sup> P. Mackridge, “Literature in the Modern Greek dialects, in: M. Roussou and S. Panteli (eds.), *Greek outside Greece – II* (Athens 1990), pp. 69-75 (p.70).

from there.

In both literary and non-literary texts which can be associated with a particular geographical region, the problem is *which* linguistic features were in fact characteristic of the local dialect or idiom of the time of writing, as opposed to panhellenic forms or forms borrowed from a higher linguistic register. One of the aims of our project is to use all the evidence at our disposal in order to attempt to provide answers to such questions: we are interested in diatopic as well as diachronic variation, and variation according to register or genre.

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After these preliminary thoughts, I will now proceed to the promised comparison of editorial practices in literary and non-literary texts. We invited Professor Yannis Mavromatis to speak on this topic, precisely because he has published editions of documents, as well as of a literary text. Unfortunately he is not able to be here. Since I presume that, in his paper, he would have drawn on his personal experience as an editor, I intend to restrict myself to editions for which he was responsible.

In 1995 Mavromatis published his edition of the text known as *Περί της Ξενιτείας* (On exile).<sup>4</sup> The text is preserved in two manuscripts, both of the 16th century. The language of the text contains a number of archaising or learned features, but on the basis of various elements which are supposed to be Cretan, several scholars from Krumbacher onwards, and including Mavromatis himself, have proposed a Cretan origin. Mavromatis lists about half a dozen linguistic phenomena which he regards as “characteristic of and exclusive to” the Cretan dialect, whereas there are no elements that suggest a different place of origin. While he may be on dangerous ground in asserting that given features are “exclusive to” Cretan dialect, the evidence is otherwise quite persuasive. What is particularly interesting is the fact that the scribe of the later of the two manuscripts seems to have eliminated or adulterated the features regarded as Cretan – “perhaps consciously”, Mavromatis suggests.

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<sup>4</sup> Y. Mavromatis, *Τα «Περί της Ξενιτείας» ποιήματα*. Κριτική έκδοση με εισαγωγή, σχόλια και λεξιλόγιο (Heraklion 1995).

The editorial principle which follows from this observation is that the critical edition should be based primarily on the older, more Cretan, manuscript (Vindobonensis theol. gr. 244), although the Athens manuscript is utilised when V has a problematic reading. The editor has not attempted to “Cretanise” the text; he merely gives priority to the manuscript which contains more authentic “Cretan” features – reasonably so, in my view, since it is also the older of the two, and slightly more extensive (V has 14 lines not in A, while A has 9 lines not found in V). The editor states that he has respected the linguistic and metrical form of the text as handed down to us, though in fact a small number of corrections *metri gratia* are noted in the apparatus criticus. He preserves the stress accents of the manuscripts, even where synizesis can be assumed, but he adapts the orthography to modern spelling conventions. He further informs us that orthographic and accentual errors in the manuscripts are not noted in the apparatus criticus, unless they are significant.

The edition could be characterised as generally conservative. Although it is based on a thorough and careful comparison of the two manuscripts, no claim is made for the re-establishment of an authorial original. Arguing on the basis of certain older features in the language, Mavromatis proposes a dating for the poem at the beginning of the 15th century. This would mean that about 100 years separate the Vienna manuscript from the original text, and, in order to account for the differences between A and V, both of which have errors of copying – not all of them common to both – there would presumably have been at least one lost intermediary. At one point a correction proposed by Linos Politis, and accepted into his edition by Mavromatis, involves a matter of considerable linguistic significance (l. 276): the first half of the line is hypermetric by two syllables in both manuscripts: θέλω ν’ αναστενάξω εκ καρδιάς. The excision of two syllables creates a kind of future formation (θέλω στενάξω) which is not well attested in Cretan texts, and in 15th-century texts seems to be limited to the second person singular. Surprisingly, Mavromatis makes no mention of this type of future periphrasis in his chapter on the language of the text. In principle, a correction made on metrical grounds (by itself a dubious pretext for editorial intervention) should not introduce a linguistic form which cannot be precisely paralleled in the same text. While this edition

generally approaches textual and linguistic issues in a careful and responsible way, the historical linguist would be well advised to read the small print before making assumptions.

The year before he published this edition, Mavromatis edited a very different kind of text: the documents of a Cretan notary, Ioannis Olokalos, from Ierapetra.<sup>5</sup> The edition contains 251 documents covering the period 1496 to 1543 (with some gaps). The largest category of document represented is dowry contracts, but there are also wills, sales of land and goods, gifts, powers of attorney, promissory notes, receipts, and various other kinds of documents recording financial transactions. As may be expected, the collection provides a wealth of material for the social and economic historian of Crete in the relevant period. Its linguistic interest is also enormous. The editor characterises the language as the typical language of notaries, with many archaic and formulaic elements, and a considerable use of Italian loanwords. But it also incorporates features of the dialect of Eastern Crete. About three pages of the editor's introduction are devoted to a listing of various linguistic phenomena which are characteristic of Cretan dialect. The list is longer than in the case of the poem *On exile*, where the objective was to identify features that are exclusively Cretan in order to prove a Cretan provenance.

The edition of the notarial acts is done in accordance with the diplomatic conventions used for Byzantine documents. The orthography and accentuation of the original are retained, but word division and punctuation are corrected in line with modern practice, and the apostrophe is added to indicate vowel loss, in phrases such as *μού 'δωκε* or *να 'ναι*. Personal and place names are capitalised, as are *Θεός* and *Κύριος*. Other capitals, however, are tacitly changed to lower case. Abbreviations are tacitly expanded (without the use of parentheses). Editorial corrections, when necessary, are indicated in the apparatus criticus. An array of different kinds of brackets is used to indicate: words supplied by the editor where the paper is damaged, editorial additions, marginal and interlinear additions by the notary, deletions or dittographies.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Ιωάννης Ολόκαλος, νοτάριος Ιεράπετρας. Κατάστιχο (1496-1543). Έκδοση: Γιάννης Κ. Μανρομάτης (Venice 1994).*

<sup>6</sup> Similar principles are followed by Mavromatis in another edition of documents from Crete: *Ανέκδοτα βενετικά έγγραφα για τους Κορνάρους της Σητείας και του Χάνδακα. Διαθήκες*

A few comments on the differences inherent in the two sorts of edition:

1) The diplomatic edition aims at preserving the actual form of the document as far as possible. The principal interventions relate to word division, punctuation and capitalisation, in the interests of readability. Apart from these, almost no concessions are made to the modern reader. The edition is essentially a modified transcription. But with the literary text matters are very different. It is not just word division, punctuation and the use of capitals that are brought into line with modern practice, but spelling, breathings and accentual rules too. Everything possible is done to reduce the sense of alienation the modern reader might feel – everything from normalisation of spelling to layout on the page; everything, that is, short of changing the essential linguistic form of the text.

2) The poem is preserved in two manuscripts, which differ from one another in a multiplicity of ways, and are the result of an unknown number of copyings. The manuscripts are dated a hundred years or more after the presumed original composition. The notarial acts are extant in a single copy, and in almost all cases bear specific dates. Moreover, we know where they were written, and by whom. The best the editor can suggest for the poem *On exile* is that it was written by an anonymous Cretan, who may or may not have been a monk, and was probably living outside Crete at the time. So we can sum up: autograph manuscripts of literary works are extremely rare, divergent later copies are the norm; documents are almost always “autograph”, unique and dated.

3) In both cases the editor has to establish a text: the task of the editor of the documents is to make sense of the manuscript he has before him, to decipher what its compiler actually wrote, or meant to write, or may be assumed to have written on the parts of the manuscript now torn off, eaten away, or rendered illegible. If he can do this, his work is mostly done. The editor of a literary text has to do all this too, possibly several times, i.e. once for each extant manuscript. But his ultimate goal lies beyond the manuscripts, which are the imperfect witnesses to a lost original. At this point principles and practices can differ widely, but that would take

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μελών της οικογένειας του Ιακώβου Κορνάρου (Athens 1986).

us away from the main issues I am concerned with. I think those who have produced editions of both literary texts and documents (including at least one in this audience), would agree that, while certain essential skills are common to both processes, diplomatic editions and what we may call philological editions are very different things.

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To conclude this brief presentation, I will adopt the position of the historical linguist and ask: what kinds of linguistic information, if any, are lost in editions such as those I have been discussing? In diplomatic editions one would expect very little to be lost, if the editor is well-equipped to decipher what is written and sensitive to the linguistic peculiarities that such texts may contain. However, editors normally employ modern word division, rather than reproducing the running together of two or more words, which is a common phenomenon in medieval texts. To the best of my knowledge, there is no detailed study of such groupings of words in vernacular texts, though it might be very interesting indeed to the syntactician to see what sorts of phrasal units are typically written without a break.

Editions of literary texts involve much greater risks. Tacit correction or normalisation, which may not even be declared in the editorial principles, is the worst sin, though not one (I hasten to add) which Mavromatis should be accused of. While standardisation of spelling is desirable, nothing should be done to alter the phonology or morphology of the transmitted text. In a verse text, attempts to correct metrical defects or rhyme may result in changes of a linguistic kind, with implications perhaps not fully appreciated by the editor. However, if the apparatus criticus is used properly, both by the editor himself and by linguists studying the text, no potentially vital evidence should be lost.

Fortunately, modern editions of both sorts of text (with certain notable exceptions on both sides) are generally quite reliable in terms of their respect for the linguistic form of the text which has come down to us. If I had taken my examples from editions published in the 19th or early 20th century, I could have presented a very disturbing picture of ways in which linguistic evidence has been

perverted or concealed, or simply lost through ignorance. What is really sad is that some linguists are still using the unreliable old editions.