



СУДЬБА МАЛОЙ АЗИИ В ВОСПРИЯТИИ ВИЗАНТИЙЦЕВ ПАЛЕОЛОГОВСКОГО ВРЕМЕНИ =

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THE MYSIAN SPOILS IN LATE BYZANTINE LITERATURE (SEVERAL EXAMPLES)¹

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Abstract. The ancient Greek literature used the term *Mysian Spoils* (Μυσῶν λεία) to describe some territories or properties that the neighboring and enemy armies could plunder without retaliation. More generally speaking, the term was used to describe the plunder, enslavement, and hardship in general. The term *Mysian Spoils* could be found in the works of many ancient authors, and it also became part of the rich collection of Old Greek proverbs. As such, it continued to exist and could be found in the vast array of various forms of expression by the Byzantine authors. This text showcases examples of usage of this term in the historical works by the Late Byzantine authors George Pachymeres and Nikephoros Gregoras, as well as the examples from the satirical text *Mazaris' Journey to Hades*. The mentioned historians used the term *Mysian Spoils* quite appropriately, being aware that well-trained readers will not only understand the meaning of this expression, but also appreciate their own scientific knowledge of the literary heritage of antiquity. Pachymeres and Gregoras emphasized the basic meaning of the term, sometimes with elegant wit, as a designation of robbery, before which the defenders were powerless. The author of the satirical essay *Mazaris' Journey to Hades* advanced further, turning the expression *Mysian Spoils* into the metaphor of a disease that beats the mortal body of the satire hero, with the typical color of a writer

Key words: *Mysian Spoils*, Byzantine literature, Mysians, George Pachymeres, proverbs, Nikephoros Gregoras, Mazaris.

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«МИЗИЙСКИЙ ПЛЕН» В ПОЗДНЕВИЗАНТИЙСКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ (НЕСКОЛЬКО ПРИМЕРОВ)¹

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Аннотация. В древнегреческой литературе использовался термин «Мизийский плен» (Μυσῶν λεία) для того, чтобы описывать некоторые территории и собственность, которые вражеские армии соседних стран могли бы грабить без угрозы возмездия. Говоря в общем, указанный термин применяли в описаниях грабежа, порабощения и покорения народов, и в целом, отображая лишения и муки. Термин «Мизийский плен»

возможно найти в сочинениях многих древних авторов. Он стал также неотъемлемой частью богатого собрания древнегреческих пословиц и поговорок. Как таковой, он продолжает использоваться и встречается в обширном массиве разнообразных форм выражения экспрессии и у византийских авторов. Настоящее исследование репрезентирует примеры употребления термина «Мизийский плен» в исторических трудах поздневизантийского времени – Георгия Пахимера и Никифора Григоры, а также в сатире «Путешествие Мазариса в Ад (подземное царство)». Названные историки прибегают к термину «Мизийский плен» вполне подходящим образом в осознании того, что хорошо обученные читатели не только поймут значение этого выражения, но и оценят высоко их собственные научные познания литературного наследия античности. Пахимер и Григора акцентировали основное значение термина «Мизийский плен», иногда с изящным остроумием, как обозначение грабежа, перед которым защитники оказывались бессильны. Автор сатирического сочинения «Путешествие Мазариса в Ад» продвинулся дальше, превращая со свойственной писателю колоритностью выражение «Мизийский плен» в метафору болезни, одолевающей брненное тело героя сатиры.

Ключевые слова: «Мизийский плен», византийская литература, мизийцы, Георгий Пахимер, пословицы, Никифор Григора, Мазарис.

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Introduction. In his classic and today generally accepted definition of Byzantine civilization, almost eighty years ago, George Ostrogorsky emphasized three main elements that determined the historical phenomenon of the Byzantine Empire. Those were the Roman state framework, Greek culture and the Christian faith [36, p. 27]. Byzantium would be inconceivable without any of those three cornerstones. It is only this synthesis that Byzantium came into being. It has been well known that, spiritually, Byzantium was a medieval continuation of the Hellenic spirit [1; 43, p. 53–73; 18; 37, p. 120–122].

Bearing this in mind, it is no wonder that Byzantine literates very often reminisce Ancient Greek history and mythology. Most commonly these are allusions to and loanwords from Homer, but also from the works of many others, like Hesiod, Aesop, Aristophanes, or Plutarch. One of those reminiscences refers to proverb “the Mysian Spoils”.

Mysia (Μυσία) is a region in Northwest Asia Minor [31, col. 608–610; 17, p. 149–160; 19; 35, p. 331–341; 44, p. 93–99; 45], which Pausanias, Greek travel writer and authors of the work *Description of Greece*, describes as “facing the sunrise” [12, c. 78]. At the time of the Greeks’ engagement in the Trojan War, this region was under the rule of Telephus. The Greek army landed in Mysia by mistake and, convinced that they landed in Troy, began with plundering. Telephus bravely confronted the violent newcomers and killed many Greek heroes in the battle that ensued. He was only halted and made

to run by the hero above all heroes – Achilles. Later, after many trials and tribulations, Telephus lead the Greek fleet happily to the shores of Troy [14, c. 408]. Anyway, it is necessary to differentiate Mysians from Asia Minor and Mysians from Balkan Peninsula [40, p. 299–333]. By the way, the Mysians from Asia Minor were considered to be weak and spoilt, and thus many who would attack their land would easily and without retaliation get their hands on rich spoils [21, p. 88, n. 1]. Thus the term was coined “the Mysian Spoils” (Μυσῶν λεία), that is, the saying about those who find themselves in the hopeless situation, about the territories and properties without protection and easily accessible to any outlaw or destruction-prone army. At the same time, it is also a synonym for any easy prey. Generally speaking, “the Mysian Spoils” has become a sort of a second word for the plunder, enslavement and any kind of hardship in general, and it could also be used for those whose theft would go unpunished. This term was, for example, used both by Aristotle and Demosthenes [3, c. 1016; 20, p. 1176; 25, p. 1034], as well as the rhetorician Libanios in the 4th century [15, c. 49]. This term, for obvious reasons, was included in the collections of the ancient Greek proverbs [28, S. 122].

Methodology. The heuristic part of the research attempted to search for and find the passages that contain the term “Mysian Spoils” (Μυσῶν λεία) in the late Byzantine sources. Of course, the goal was not to review all the available sources and do a completely comprehensive

research, but rather to take into consideration several appropriate examples which should represent a good research sample. Therefore, we have paid special attention in our research to the historiographic works by George Pachymeres and Nikephoros Gregoras on the one hand, and the satirical text “Mazaris’ Journey to Hades”, on the other.

Further on, after having translated the passages containing the term “Mysian Spoils”, a special classification of the meaning of this term would be made as well as evaluation of the way it was accepted in the written legacy of the Byzantine authors. One of the expected results of the research might be gaining a new meaning of this term in the works of the afore-mentioned Byzantine authors. In any case, it is reasonable to expect the continuity in the usage of the term “Mysian Spoils” within the thousand-years-long Byzantine literature and civilization.

Analysis. George Pachymeres, patriarchal official and historian, who lived in the second half of the 13th and the first decade of the 14th century [26, S. 447–453; 7, с. 1–11; 39, p. 1550], used the term “Mysian Spoils” as many as seven times in his historical text. The first time it was mentioned was in the description of the well-known events from August 1258, death of Theodore II Laskaris, and then, the massacre at the monastery of Sosandra near Nymphaion, and the murder of the Mouzalon brothers. Those who committed the slaughter, wrote Pachymeres, also plundered the homes and property of the Mouzalon brothers, and turned them into “Mysian Spoils” (λείαν Μυσῶν) [21, p. 89.13–14].

The second mention of “the Mysian Spoils” in the work by George Pachymeres related to the events in Egypt under the Mamluk dynasty rule. With the assistance of the battalion of the Turkish tribe Cumans, who with the permission of the Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus, they traveled from Crimea, via Bosphorus, to Egypt, expanded the territories of their Sultanate and, in the second half of the 13th century, conquered Syria and Palestine, having pushed back the Christians [21, p. 240–241, n. 3]. They turned this entire territory, as described by Pachymeres, into “the Mysian Spoils” (τὴν γῆν Μυσῶν, τὸ λεγόμενον, λείαν ἐποίουν) [21, p. 241.14–16].

The third mention of the term “Mysian Spoils” describes the Eastern borders of the

Byzantine Empire, at the time after the restoration (1261). That was the time when the Empire of Nicaea “grew into” the Byzantine Empire, and the restored Byzantium, limited by the new obligations that the return to Constantinople was imposing, somewhat neglected the Eastern borders. The population in Asia Minor, as reported by George Pachymeres, was decreasing, as many people were moving away, and thus the border on the river Sangaris weakened. Having in mind the ancient Greek saying, the Byzantine historian there creates a witty but also bitter pun, when he pointed out that these areas had become spoils not of the Mysians, but of the Persians (Turks) (λείας γεγονότων οὐ Μυσῶν, ἀλλὰ γε Περσῶν) [22, p. 405.12–14].

In the fourth mention, Pachymeres wrote about the time of the rule of the Emperor Konstantin Tih (1257–1277) the Tatars had plundered the Bulgarian lands and truly turned it into “the Mysian Spoils” (καὶ Μυσῶν ὄντως λείαν τὰ Μυσῶν τιθέντες) [22, p. 551.12–14; 8, с. 172]. Then appeared Ivaylo, man of the unknown background, who defeated the Tatars heavily in the summer of 1277, and then became the Bulgarian Emperor (1277–1280) [10, с. 549; 6, с. 516–517]. Here the author again uses the interesting pun relating to the Mysians, i.e. Bulgarians on one hand, and “the Mysian Spoils” relating to the Asia Minor nation, and not the Balkan one. It is well known that the Byzantine authors, using the archaic terms for their neighboring nations, used the old ethnonyms, and thus, for example, they used the term Tribals for Serbs, and Mysians for Bulgarians [30, S. 207–209, 329].

The fifth mention described the Tatar invasion of Bulgaria, in the first half of 1285, when ten thousand of their horsemen crossed the Danube river, plundered the Bulgarian lands and reached Thrace and Macedonia during their campaign, expecting to bring spoils from there that was described as Mysian (καὶ τὰ τῆς Μακεδονίας καὶ Θράκης λείαν ποιῆσον τὴν τῶν Μυσῶν ὑμνουμένην) ([23, p. 93.5–6; 8, с. 185]; cf.: [6, с. 539]).

Describing the events in the Asia Minor region at the beginning of the 14th century, George Pachymeres used the term “Mysian Spoils” for the sixth time in his historical text. The year in question was 1303 and the event one the rare

Byzantine victories over the Turks in that region. One of the local Turkish governors set his mind on the Lydia region in order to obtain the “Mysian”, and not the “Lydian Spoils” (καὶ λείαν Μυσῶν, οὐ Λυδῶν) [24, p. 441.30–443.1; 5, c. 23]. However, he failed. It is evident that Pachymeres also played with words here, this time with the adjectives “Mysian” and “Lydian”, and thus created a true literary bravura.

And, finally, the seventh mention of the term “Mysian Spoils” in the work of George Pachymeres again described the war between the Byzantines and the Bulgarians. In August 1304 the Byzantine Emperor-Co-ruler Michael IX Palaeologus invaded the region of Romania – Zagora and Sub-Balkan region [6, c. 547] – and plundered it, and turned the areas between Rheachoubis, Stilbnos and Kopsis into the “Mysian Spoils, bringing to life the ancient proverb” (τὴν παλαιὰν παροιμίαν ἀνανεούμενος, λείαν Μυσῶν...) ([24, p. 491.22–23; 8, c. 206; cf.: [6, c. 547]).

Nikephoros Gregoras, on the greatest Byzantine historiographers, and, generally speaking, one of the leading intellectuals of the Byzantine world in the second quarter of the 14th century [26, S. 453–465; 38, p. 874–875; 11, c. 21–29], also had mentions of the “Mysian Spoils” in his literary collections. His literary biography shows clear evidence of his exceptional knowledge of the ancient literary legacies [7, c. 145–153]. In his “Romeian History”, a voluminous historical text encompassing the events from 1204 to 1359, he used the term “Mysian Spoils” three times.

So, for example, describing the hardships of Thrace and Macedonia in the first decades of the 13th century, Gregoras used this term. Describing the role of the Archbishop of Ohrid in the anointment of the Ruler of Epirus, Theodore I Angelos (1215–1230), he briefly recounted the Bulgarian settlement in the old times and wrote: “They later on set off together with women and children ... a great many of them crossed the Danube River. They passed through both of the Moesias across the Danube, and turned everything into the “Mysian Spoils” (λείαν Μυσῶν), as the saying goes, plundering everything like locusts or thunder from the sky” [32, p. 26.21–27.3; 9, c. 126; 34, p. 75, 220, n. 36; 7, p. 155].

The second mention described the end of the civil war between Andronicus II and Andronicus III Palaeologus, where Gregoras wrote about the futility of such internal conflicts in the Byzantine Empire that turned children against their parents, parents against their children, brothers against their brothers, neighbors against their neighbors. If, however, the Emperor had not put a stop to such acts by the soldiers and the people, then the temples and homes of the Byzantines would soon become “the Mysian Spoils” (Μυσῶν λείαν), while many people would also be killed [32, p. 426.13–20].

Nikephoros Gregoras used the term “Mysian Spoils” for the third time while describing an event from the period of the civil war in the Byzantine Empire in the 1340s. The year in question is 1346, when the Turks, almost six thousand of them, crossed the Hellespont, and marching towards the Byzantion (Constantinople), plundered and obtained the “Mysian Spoils” (λείαν Μυσῶν) [33, p. 763.20–24].

The term “Mysian Spoils” was also mentioned in a Byzantine satirical text from the 15th century. It belongs to a Byzantine literary genre that dates back to the ancient times. The Greek sophist and satirist Lucian, from the town of Samosata, who lived in the 2nd century, had a considerable influence on certain, otherwise very popular, literary genres in the Byzantine Empire, most particularly the satirical dialogue, imaginary travel and the dialogue of the dead [4, c. 5–32; 42, p. 65 sq.]. In the late Byzantine period, the most famous “reply” to the works of Lucian was the satire about Mazaris’ journey into the underworld, that is, the realm of the dead, text that was created in 1414/1415 [46, S. 195–206; 47, σ. 88–93; 2, p. 158–165; 38, p. 1324–1325; 16, p. 345–358]. The great plague epidemic that hit Constantinople in 1414 also had Mazaris infected. He was bed-ridden for days, while the disease had its ups and downs. The following was recorded: “Since, as I said, the misery struck each and every one, it has mercilessly struck me as well, dear gentlemen. It has tortured my weakened body like a storm for twenty one days, at times with high fever, at times with shivers, and vertigos, with great pain and paralysis of the limbs at times, and as the proverb goes, my body has become the Mysian Spoils (Μυσῶν λείαν), that is, it has enslaved every limb of my body” [29, p. 2.12–4.4].

At one point his medical condition got some much worse that he slipped into the Hades itself, where he stayed for a while and talked to a number of the deceased. However, when the disease lost its potency, Mazaris returned to his life and put on paper everything he had experienced in the underworld.

Conclusion. In all of the above-mentioned examples the Byzantine authors, George Pachymeres in his history and Nikephoros Gregoras in the “Romeian History”, as well as the author of the text “Mazaris’ Journey to Hades”, used the term “Mysian Spoils” quite fittingly, aware of the fact that the well-educated readers would not only understand its meaning, but also be able to appreciate their own scholarly knowledge of the ancient literary legacy. The historians Pachymeres and Gregoras mostly focused on the basic meaning of the term “Mysian Spoils”, sometimes with the witty usage of puns, as a sort of easy and undisturbed plundering that accentuates the powerlessness of the potential defenders. The author of the text “Mazaris’ Journey to Hades”, however, took a step forward into a metaphor, and thus equated Mazaris’ body, overpowered by the disease, with the “Mysian Spoils”. He did so with inquisitive creativity and quite colorfully.

There is a great number of similar ancient Greek terms, such as, for example, “the Scythian Desert” [41, p. 683–688] or “the Lemnos Crimes” [13, c. 7–12], or the expression about the friendship between Orestes and Pylades [27, c. 191–195], which, just like “the Mysian Spoils”, continued to exist in the Byzantine literature. They all in their own way show and prove a well-known fact about the Byzantine literature being the continuation of the Hellenic spirit and the Hellenic literature throughout the entire medieval period.

NOTE

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