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DECONSTRUCTING THE NARRATIVE, CONSTRUCTING A MEANING: WHY WAS THE *ALEXIAD* WRITTEN?

In the present article I offer a narratological approach to Byzantine historiography and an aim to elucidate the key elements of narrative theory that would be useful for investigating medieval Byzantine histories and their complex narrative structures. The focus is put on the key narratological aspects – genre, author, text and the audience – as those elements represent the core of literary criticism and contemporary studies of Byzantine literature. Through useful examples from the *Alexiad*, I intend to show how this theoretical vehicle functions and I hope to open a new field of scholarly communication on the matter of approach towards Byzantine historiography.

Keywords: *Alexiad*, history, genre, narrative theory, narratology, Anna Komnene, audience

The venturous title of this paper might recall the basic concept of Derrida's poststructuralist theory about the elusive nature of terms that can never be defined in their own right, but only with a help of other terms, in a process that devoid us of their core.¹ Thus the reading of a narrative turns out to be just a single interpretation out of innumerable readings. We would not go that far to accept the impossibility of readings, but we would agree that there is a considerable amount of *différance*² that

¹ *Derrida*, *Grammatology*, 42-44. This theory was actually a product of Ferdinand de Saussure's theory on semiology, who was considered as the mastermind of the structuralism. For his main ideas see *Saussure*, *General Linguistics*

² This term was used for the first time by Jacques Derrida in 1963, and was further elaborated in his *'Grammatology'*, where he discussed on the history of the idea of the sign. For further reading on the concept of difference between readings see *Derrida*, *Grammatology*; *Idem*, *Writing and Difference*, 353-356; *Idem*, „*Différance*.”

happens in any interpretation. This theory is conveniently applicable for the reading of Byzantine sources since it mostly consists of our efforts to understand figures and tropes used in search for an inner meaning of a text. Deconstructive readings³ insist on the unavoidable concept of misreading and deviations from the text and its true meaning. What is even more helpful for our approach is that ‘narrative texts and narrative theories exist only in persistent dialogue’⁴ and that ‘literary commentary may cross the line and become as demanding as literature.’ These two needs should come to the fore in our readings of Byzantine literature – a persistent scholarly dialog and an incessant literary commentary that further develop and contribute to theoretical discussions on Byzantine literary heritage.

I have intentionally used the question mark as an indicator of a query which I pose to myself and simultaneously to the audience I am addressing in an intention to initiate a theoretical discussion. How can we apply narratology, that is, the *what* and the *how* of narration, in our search of the true meaning of a text? Is there a possibility to reach the true meaning or do we only provide innumerable interpretations of the texts we deal with? Can literary criticism help us in the unification of various interpretations? How do our cognitive abilities influence our interpretations and what are the differences of text readings in our own modern terms, and their own medieval ones?

IN SEARCH OF MEANING

The Poststructuralist thought denies the possibility of understanding terms in their essential, truthful meaning and some of them went so far as to deny the possibility of a reading a text, stating that metaphors are defined through metaphors and that the only chance we have is to produce an ‘allegory of reading’⁵. This theory would lead us to chaos of meanings and interpretations, had not there been a whole rhetorical system that helped with understanding the Greek ways of narrative conceptions. Luckily, there are ancient rhetorical exercises, called *progymnasmata*, that were produced as manuals for prose compositions and were taught in grammar schools.⁶ Thus, the remnants of the ancient Greek educational system, preliminary rhetorical exercises, represent a cornerstone in our narrative deconstruction. These manuals provide a handful of terms and their meanings. In addition to this, we have also extended the rhetorical corpuses that encompass a vast array of rhetorical manuals: *On Method*, *On Ideas*, *On Invention*, *On Staseis*.⁷ As for the Byzantines themselves, and

³ Deconstructive readings are mainly the work of Jacques Derrida and the Yale circle that was particular for their approach to narrative. The following work is considered as their manifesto - *Man, Derrida, Hartman, and Hillis Miller*, Deconstruction and Criticism

⁴ *Herman, Jahn, Ryan*, Narrative Theory, 160

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ The most helpful recent publications on *progymnasmata* are *Kennedy*, *Progymnasmata* and *Gibson*, *Libanius' Progymnasmata*.

⁷ As for Hermogenic corpus there is a general introduction to various rhetorical treatises in *Kennedy*, *Greek Rhetoric*, 54-103; He had also published two rhetorical treatises *On Invention* and *On*

us nowadays, the most important corpuses were those from the time of the Second Sophistic, that is, Hermogenes' and Aphthonius' corpuses.⁸ Thanks to these corpuses, and the literary legacy of the Second Sophistic, we are able to come quite close to the concepts of 'true' meanings of important rhetorical terms we come across in our reading of Byzantine sources.

The next stance of Derrida's thought claims that terms can only be explained with other terms, which inevitably lead us to the process of defining the meaning with the help of other terms, and in this respect, we face a phenomenon of intertextuality, which is absolutely inevitable when we deal with Byzantine literature. What was popularly perceived as a method of *mimesis* in Byzantine literary compositions brought up a serious amount of allegations about the value and originality of Byzantine texts, and especially Byzantine histories. And although Byzantine historiography is constantly being reassessed,⁹ we face very similar conclusions that usually emphasise their classical heritage, their mimetic mannerism and reliance or non-reliance upon their historical facticity. Because of this stumbling stone, I suggest a turn towards narratology in approach to Byzantine sources with special focus on the following narratological aspects:

- Genre and its boundaries
- Author and text
- Distinction between story and discourse
- Audience – synchronic and diachronic reading

GENRE AND ITS BOUNDARIES

It seems that no discussion about Byzantine literature can start without turning first to the matter of genre and its importance for our reading and interpretation of Byzantine sources.¹⁰ A genre has its twofold, synchronic and diachronic importance, although modern theories prevail upon the notion that genre was mostly important for modern scholars and their tendency to systematise a diverse compound of literature into useful and manageable categories.¹¹ In regard to histories, which is of prime concern for us, Byzantines themselves were highly aware of the genre in which they wrote and they insisted upon the established rules that prevailed for this specific sort of prose composition.¹² As for Anna Komnene, the matter of genre was of prime

Method and supplied them with an extensive commentary. See *Kennedy, Invention and Method*

⁸ *Rabe, Hermogenis Opera; Idem Aphthonii*

⁹ The most important recent collaborative projects in the field of Byzantine historiography *Odorico, Agapitos, Pour une „nouvelle“ histoire; Odorico, La littérarité de l'historiographie; Burke et al, Byzantine Narrative; Macrides, History as Literature; Nilsson, Raconter Byzance*

¹⁰ *Mullett, Madness; Nilsson, Archaists and Innovators*

¹¹ On genre theory see *Fowler, Kinds of Literature; Todorov, Genres in Discourse, Genette, The Architext; Duff, Modern Genre*

¹² Here again one should refer to the rhetorical manuals for prose compositions.

importance, since a significant part of her programme was dedicated to her exposition of the explicit rules of a history, and the ways, patterns and limitations of the presupposed genre.¹³ Nevertheless, we should not fall into Anna Komnene's trap and define her work as a genre-static history. There are other forms of prose compositions, apart from *diegesis* and *diegema* that we come across in the multifaceted surface of Anna Komnene's narrative.¹⁴ Here we think of the various encomia and invectives that are woven into the main body of the historical narrative, but apart from these smaller groups of rhetorical compositions we come across, I argue the existence of the two *basilikoi logoi* in the story of Alexios' deeds. One is the panegyric for the emperor Alexios and other one is for Anna Komnene herself.¹⁵

Anna's main concern on the matter of genre was to stand by the rules of history and to avoid slipping into various encomia. The keywords that function as codes of her genre are history (ιστορία) and truth (ἀλήθεια), which are in direct opposition to *encomion* (ἐγκώμιον) or self-praise (περιαυτολογία) and falsehood (ψεῦδος). Anna states that she is writing according to the law of rhetoric (νόμος ῥητορικός) which refers to the rules for prose compositions, and to the presupposed necessities of historical *diegesis* that include an agent in temporal and spatial setting, an action and manner of action and cause or motive (αἰτία), and are arranged according to the rule of history (θεσμός ιστορίας) that is inextricably connected with the truth. Anna deals with it in the following way:

But here again I must deprecate being censured on the score that I am caught bragging (ὅτι περιαυτολογοῦσα καταλαμβάνομαι); for in my defense I have several times said that it is not love for my father that suggests these remarks, but the nature of the circumstances. For does anything, in the name of truth itself (πρὸς τῆς ἀληθείας αὐτῆς), prevent a person being fond of his father (φιλοπάτορα) and fond of truth also (φιλαλήθη)? for I have chosen to write a truthful history (τάληθῆ) and that of a good man; but if that man happens to be the father of the historian, let the father's name be added to it as a mere appendage; but the history must be dedicated to natural truth (τῇ δὲ φύσει τῆς ἀληθείας ἀνακείσθω τὸ σύγγραμμα). In other matters I have declared my love for my father and by so doing have sharpened the spears and whetted the swords of the ill-disposed against myself, as all those know who are acquainted with the facts of my life. But in shaping my history I would certainly not betray the truth (οὐ μὴν ἐν τῷ τῆς ιστορίας χρήματι καταπροδοίην ἄν τὴν ἀλήθειαν). There is a time for showing love to a father (ἄλλος μὲν γὰρ καιρὸς ἐστὶν εὐνοίας πατρικῆς) (and at such time I have shown courage) and another time when truth is the main consideration (ἕτερος δὲ

¹³ This was treated as a specific phenomenon in *Kambylis*, Zum 'Programm', 127-146. The same applies to two recent studies: *Stanković*, *Lest we forget*, 59-65; In relation to Bryennios' Material for History, *Сіванковић*, *Увод у Материјал историје*, 137-147; I have dealt with this issue in my doctoral thesis, *Vilimonović*, *Aleksijada Ane Komnin*, 22-36.

¹⁴ On various kinds of rhetorical forms that are embedded into historical narratives see *Vilimonović*, *Aleksijada Ane Komnin*, 36-54

¹⁵ *Vilimonović*, *Aleksijada Ane Komnin*, 79-107; 120-123

καιρὸς ἀληθείας) and now since that time has fallen my way, I cannot regard it lightly. But if, as I have said, this time also combines to show me fond of my father, I do not fear men's censure for having suppressed the truth (τὰ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐπιλυγᾶσαι). However my story must now go back to its subject.¹⁶

This metanarrative comments¹⁷ about rules and distinctions of the historical genre, which Anna claims to respect, is very important for our understanding of the Byzantine conceptions of history. Contrary to the modern disputes on the impossibility of grasping the ultimate historical truth, in the 12th century, historical writing was intermittently interconnected with the idea of the truth, wherefore the author/narrator was the ultimate holder of the truth that was being revealed in her/his writing, which had to be in the form of a history. As Anna stresses through her word ploys, the word history is inherent with the truth, wherefore the writer purports to have an epistemic role in his or her communication with the audience. And genre serves precisely for the purposes of communicating a certain agenda through the established forms and categories of which the aimed audience was already cognisant. Choosing a history as a presupposed genre of writing, Anna emphasised the ultimate truthfulness of her writing, which, in her case, had significant political weight. The most important are her omissions and silences about the role and place of her brother John in the time of Alexios' reign.¹⁸ Her distorted historical perspective had been moulded, throughout the whole narrative, with abundant metanarrative comments which were in the greatest part dedicated to her explanations of the rules of history, to her self-conscious lapses in the course of her narrative, and to the excurses that were contrary to the rhetorical rules of *diegetic* prose compositions, but which she intentionally stressed she was aware of.

As Anna puts it, history has its own nature (τὴν φύσιν τῆς ἱστορίας) and it functions as an entity that dictates specific forms to authors for articulating their narrative and managing the structure and composition of a text. This nature of history hinders the authors to express their emotions and include *pathos* in their creative activity. Apart from nature, history also has its character, *ethos*, a word that alludes to an ontological feature. In Anna Komnene's case, her greatest struggle was to avert from the *pathos* for her beloved ones, since it leads her astray in the construction of a historical narrative. In her metanarrative utterances she presented herself as a self-conscious writer that was able to handle all the aggravating circumstances of her closeness to the protagonists which could menace the form of history which she chose as a mould for telling a story.

¹⁶ For English translation of the *Alexiad*, I refer to Elizabeth Dawes' edition, although I make some textual emendations, when I find them necessary for the more precise context. Since my reading and analysis is based on the Reinsch's critical edition of the *Alexiad*, I quote his edition and use Greek excerpts from it – *Alexias* XV 3,4 (40.56), 468

¹⁷ On metanarrative comments see *Herman, Jahn, Ryan*, *Narrative Theory*, 423. A recent study on Herodotus is very useful for the application of this narratological aspect in interpretation of the ancient histories, *Vignolo Munson*, *Telling Wonders*, 20-44

¹⁸ For Anna Komnene's omissions see *Leib*, *Les silences*, passim; *Stanković*, *John II Komnenos; Vilimonović*, *Aleksijada Ane Komnin*, 272- 275

A writer, in the composition of a history, should respect the following patterns:

HISTORY/ (ιστορία)		ENCOMION/ MONODY
1. The nature of history (φύσιν τῆς ιστορίας) – opposed to natural love (ἡ φυσικὴ στοργή)	VS	PATHOS Τὸ πάθος τὸ πατρικὸν
2. The character of history (τὸ τῆς ιστορίας ἦθος) – to laud the enemies and blame the ones that are close		
3. The rule of history (θεσμὸς τῆς ιστορίας)		
TRUTH (ἀλήθεια)		BOASTING (κολακεία), LIE (ψεῦδος)
BARE FACTS (γυμνὰ τὰ πράγματα διηγουμένων)		LITERARY EMBELISHMENT (ῥητορεία κομψή)

This thumbnail sketch helps us to discern the basic conceptions of history as seen through the eyes of a 12th century Constantinopolitan writer. History has its own nature, character and ordinance, it is devoted to the truth and conveys bare facts. These are the main features that denote an ontological entity, especially the word nature, which is juxtaposed with natural love and natural affection. Anna elaborates further:

And truly when writing this, partly from the nature of history and partly because of the extravagance of the events, I forgot that it was my father's deeds that I was describing. In my desire to make my history free from suspicion, I often treat my father's doings in a cursory way, neither amplifying them nor investing them with sentiment (πάθος περιτιθεῖσα). Would that I had been free and released from this love of my father (τοῦ πάθους τούτου τοῦ πατρικοῦ), in order that I might have, as it were, laid hold upon the rich material and shown the licence of my tongue, how much at home it is in noble deeds. But now my zeal is hampered by my natural love (ἡ φυσικὴ στοργή), for I should not like to afford the public a suspicion that in my eagerness to speak about my relations I am serving them with fairy tales! Indeed very often I recall my father's successes, but I could have wept my life away in tears when recording and describing the many ills that befell him, and it is not without monody and lament (ἄνευ μονωδίας καὶ θρήνου) that I transgress this subject. And to prevent the elegant rhetoric (ῥητορεία κομψή) from corrupting this part of my history, I pass lightly over my father's misadventures, as if I were an insensible piece of adamant or stone [...] However, let my father's woes be a subject of marvel and lamentation to me alone (τὸ μὲν πάθος τὸ πατρικὸν ἔμοι μόνῃ καταλείψω καὶ θαυμάζειν καὶ ὀλοφύρεσθαι), and let us proceed with our history (τὰ δὲ τῆς ιστορίας ἐχέσθω).¹⁹

¹⁹ Alexias IV 8,1 (72.91), 139

We have φύσις, ἦθος and θεσμός in opposition to the πάθος that pertains to another generic category precisely defined in the *Alexiad*. *Pathos* is the main feature of an *encomion* (ἐγκώμιον) or of a *monody* (μονωδία), and it is not suited for a proper history. The antagonism between history and *encomion* is not an occurrence of the 12th century. It was stressed in a Lucian's detailed manual on how to write a proper history, where he wrote:

*Between history and panegyric there is a great gulf fixed, barring communication [...] The panegyrist has only one concern--to commend and gratify his living theme some way or other; if misrepresentation will serve his purpose, he has no objection to that. History, on the other hand, abhors the intrusion of any least scruple of falsehood.*²⁰

This important literary trait was deeply rooted in the long tradition of historical prose compositions, where we come across the main postulates, such as not to commingle history and panegyric, to stick to the truth when writing a history, and to attain brevity (συντομία), clarity (σαφήνεια) and plausibility (πιθανότης).²¹ Anna shows her awareness of these crucial literary features of historical genre precisely in her metanarrative comments. A summary of main categories of Anna's self-reflective utterances would look like this:

- she is writing (συγγράψασθαι προειλόμην/ διηγήσασθαι/ διὰ τῆσδέ μου τῆς γραφῆς) a history (ὁ γε λόγος ὁ τῆς ἱστορίας) and telling a story (παραμυθησαίμην/ τὰ δέ γε κατ' ἐμὲ διηγήματα)
- she is aware of her audience (τοῖς ἀναγινώσκουσι/ τὸν ἀκροατὴν) and communicates with them (ἀρκτέον τοίνυν ἐνθὲνδε τῆς ἱστορίας τοῦμοῦ πατρός, ὅθεν καὶ ἄρχεσθαι ἄμεινον- ἄμεινον δὲ ὅθεν σαφέστερός τε καὶ ἱστορικώτερος ὁ λόγος γενήσεται)²²
- she interrupts her story with certain episodes (ἀλλὰ τι μικρὸν παραδιηγῆσομαι/ καὶ ἴνα τι βραχὺ παραδράμωμεν τοῦ λόγου τῆς ἱστορίας μικρὸν ἀποστάντες²³/ μικρὸν δὲ ἐνταῦθα τὴν τοῦ λόγου διήγησιν διακόψασα, ὅπως καὶ τοὺς Παυλικιάνους κατηγωνίσαστο, διηγῆσομαι²⁴)
- and she returns to the main subject (ἀλλ' ἐξετραπόμην τοῦ λόγου/ ἐπανελεύσομαι δ' αὖθις ἀφ' οὐπερ ἐξετραπόμην)²⁵,
- she recalls a memory of her audience (πρὸς ἄνωθεν εἰρημένον/ καθάπερ ἄνωθεν εἴρηται),

²⁰ ὡς οὐ στενῶ τῷ ἰσθμῷ διώρισται καὶ διατετείχισται ἡ ἱστορία πρὸς τὸ ἐγκώμιον [...] εἴ γε τῶ μὲν ἐγκωμιάζοντι μόνου ἐνὸς μέλει, ὅπως οὖν ἐπαινεῖσαι καὶ εὐφραῖναι τὸν ἐπαινούμενον, καὶ εἰ ψευσαμένῳ ὑπάρχει τυχεῖν τοῦ τέλους, ὀλίγον ἂν φροντίσειεν: ἡ δὲ οὐκ ἂν τι ψεῦδος ἐμπεσονὴ ἱστορία, οὐδὲ ἀκαριαῖον ἀνάσχοιτο - Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 7

²¹ *Προγυμνάσματα retora Aftonija*, 179

²² *Alexias Prologos* 4,3 (37.39), 10

²³ *Alexias* V 9,3 (56.57), 165; VI 7,2 (7.8), 181

²⁴ *Alexias* VI 2,1 (63.64), 170

²⁵ *Alexias* I 12,4 (93.94), 40

- she reminds the audience of the previously mentioned characters, (ὁ νεανίσκος, περι οὗ κἀνταῦθα καὶ ἀλλάχόσε εἰρήκειμεν/ ὡς προῖων ὁ λόγος σαφέστερον παραστήσειε)
- she alarms the audience when there is a slight possibility of transgressing the law of history (ἄλλος μὲν οὖν νόμοις ἐγκωμιαστικοῖς ὑπέικων πατρίδα τῆς θαυμασίας ἐκείνης μητρὸς ἐπαινείτω καὶ γένος [...], ἔμοι δὲ ἱστορίαν ξυγγραφούση [...] ὅποσον ὁ τῆς ἱστορίας ὑποτίθεται λόγος)²⁶.
- she comments on the sources of her information (ταῦτα ἐγὼ ἐκείνου διηγουμένου πολλάκις ἤκουον)²⁷

These traits denote that her deflections in storytelling are deliberate, and they are a strong communicative means between the author and the audience and a sign of her assertion that she is writing in a genre that has its established rules and requirements. It was not enough for Anna Komnene to define the form of her narrative in the Prologue of her work. She had to communicate with her audience continuously through her narrative on the matter of her genre, and to assert her authorial self-consciousness with the help of her self-reflective utterances. Metanarrative comments are crucial proof of just how important genre was to a Byzantine author. Genre was a form of conveying specific messages within a specific category to which text can be assigned, a history. Emphasis that Anna put on the ‘historicity’ of her narration designated her storytelling as a transmission of the truth.²⁸ This further implicates that all embellishments, distortions and omissions are intentional and part of her political agenda.

Anna Komnene proclaimed that she was writing a history, but every modern reader would certainly be aware of the generic complexity of the *Alexiad*. Anna was aware of this generic aspect, and this can be seen in several episodes: when she was trying to avoid an *encomiastic* style, that is, against introducing an *encomion*, a *monody* or a self-praise to her history.²⁹ An important term that she uses is a word *περιαντολογία*, a self-praise,³⁰ and it introduces another layer of narrative – an autodiegetic one – a first-person narration where the narrator features as the story protagonist. This is a very important generic aspect of Anna Komnene’s work, as these kinds of metanarrative comments create an impression of an autobiography that is inseparably entwined in the history of Alexios’ reign. However, the issue of genre of the *Alexiad* is not that simple at all. The closest we get in defining it is that the *Alexiad* could be perceived as a generic hybrid that features history, autobiography, memoirs and *basilikos logos*.³¹ It

²⁶ Alexias III 8,1 (57.63), 105

²⁷ Alexias I 6,9 (85.86), 27

²⁸ Cf. *Сїѡанковић*, Увод у Материјал историје, 144-145

²⁹ *Vilimonović*, Aleksijada Ane Komnin, 36-54

³⁰ Cf. *Macrides*, Historian, 219-220.

³¹ A very appropriate term for the generic situation of the *Alexiad* - see *Riehle*, Authorship and gender identity, 256

is a compound of different genres, a mixture or *mixis* of various literary forms.³² In addition, we should pay attention to the synchronic value of the genre. Is that how the *Alexiad* was, in generic sense, perceived by its own author and received by its contemporary audience? Another set of explanations is reserved for the diachronic value of the genre, and the reception of the *Alexiad* in our own time. Even if it is hard to grasp the reception of the *Alexiad* in the 12th-century Constantinople, there are some indicators that might help us in this task. First are to be found in the text. If we follow closely Anna Komnene's metanarrative comments, we can extract precisely those narrative units that do not pertain to the main narrative, and, even though Anna stressed otherwise, we can detect other generic forms. The question that imposes itself is why did Anna call for the audience's attention precisely where she was disfiguring the form of history but by introducing other generic forms thus, intentionally breaking the law of history? Here, a slight turn to an intertextual analysis might be of great help, since there is a significant connection of Anna Komnene's metanarrative comments with those of Michael Psellos. Instead of the usual comparison of Anna Komnene's work with her husband's, I suggest the importance of observing the intertextual level of the *Alexiad* in search of an inner meaning of the narrative.³³ Michael Psellos' *Chronographia* and Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* are intertextually bound, since they have some common narrative traits³⁴. Here I would turn to the term *periautologia*³⁵ used by Michael Psellos at the beginning his work. It structurally and semantically corresponds with Anna's use of the same term, and he introduces irony as a structural principle, since both works are overwhelmingly directed to the construction of the narrative self,³⁶ and could be defined as heterodiegetic in intention, but autodiegetic in the outcome and reception. Both writers begin with similar statements that their writing was not intended for self-praise, but this utterance is in direct contradiction with the story as it unfolds, where the authors not only vividly comment the events, but retell those that are attractive mainly for the purposes of their political agenda. Another crucial generic aspect that we can come across in Psellos' *Chronographia* is the demarcation line between *encomion* and history.

³² For the term *mixis* of genres see Nilsson, *Archaists and Innovators*, 414; Nilsson, *Scott*, *The Case of Historiography*, 320; Macrides, *Magdalino*, *Perception of the Past*, 126.

³³ Our general inclination towards comparison of Nikephoros Bryennios' and Anna Komnene's histories is still more present than that of Psellos' *Chronographia* and Komnene's *Alexiad*. For Psellos' and Komnene's parallels see, *Chronographia and the Alexias*; Ljubarskij, *Why is the Alexiad a Masterpiece?*, 176-180. The latest critical edition of Psellos' *Chronographia* by D. R. Reinsch, focuses on interdiegetic parallels, between these two works. Psellos' work, was indisputably a powerful impetus for Anna's own construction of the narrative Self, and the use of history as a means of political self-promotion.

³⁴ On the intertextuality see Herman, *Jahn, Ryan*, *Narrative Theory*, 366-372; Nilsson, *Raconter Byzance*, 72-86; Nilsson, *Troy Matter in Byzantine Literature*

³⁵ Ruth Macrides analysed this term as a specific trait of Attaliates', Psellos', Anna Komnene's histories. All of these works were politically engaged and were constructed in a self-apologetic manner.

³⁶ For Psellos construction of a narrative Self see Papaioannou, Psellos, 129-232; For Anna Komnene's see Vilimonović, Aleksijada Ane Komnin, 107-124; Neville, *The Authorial Voice*, passim; Riehle, *Authorship and gender identity*, 254-258

ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐκ ἐγκώμιον τὰ γραφόμενα, ἀλλ' ἀληθῆς ἱστορία³⁷

εἰ μὲν οὖν ἐγκωμιάζειν προειλόμην· ἀλλὰ μὴ συνοπτικὴν ἱστορίαν ποιεῖν, ἀπέχρησεν ἄν μοι τοῦτο τὸ διήγημα εἰς πᾶσαν εὐφημίας ὑπερβολήν.³⁸

Psellos' irony³⁹ is obvious in his characterisation of Constantine Doukas and later Michael VII, where his statement of composing a history serves directly to call the audience's attention to his irony. In this part of the text, just a slight gaze is enough for detecting typical encomiastic vocabulary:

“ὁ δὲ τῆς φιλανθρωπίας λόγος [...], ὡς δὲ καὶ ὁ τῆς φρονήσεως. τὸν γὰρ τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἀποδεδώκαμεν.”⁴⁰

As for Michael Doukas, he stressed that his writing here might arouse suspicion against his sincerity and readiness to write a truthful history since it was written while Michael was still alive.⁴¹ And then he proceeds in the same manner as with Constantine Doukas, but here the *encomiastic* composition is even more apparent and bluntly ironic. Michal Psellos deploys *encomium* as a mocking means,⁴² which corresponds with Lucian's negative treatment of this form of delivery since it serves only to please and entertain, and is subject to falsehood:

*It is further to be remarked, that in history sheer extravagance has not even the merit of being agreeable; and the extravagance of eulogy is doubly repulsive, as extravagance, and as eulogy; at least it is only welcome to the vulgar majority, not to that critical, that perhaps hypercritical audience, whom no slip can escape, who are all eyes like Argus, but keener than he, who test every word as a moneychanger might his coins, rejecting the false on the spot, but accepting the good and heavy and true; it is they that we should have in mind as we write history, and never heed the others, though they applaud till they crack their voices. If you neglect the critics, and indulge in the cloying sweetness of tales and eulogies and such baits, you will soon find your history a 'Heracles in Lydia.' No doubt you have seen some picture of him: he is Omphale's slave, dressed up in an absurd costume, his lion-skin and club transferred to her, as though she were the true Heracles, while he, in saffron robe and purple jacket, is combing wool and wincing under Omphale's slipper. A degrading spectacle it is--the dress loose and flapping open, and all that was man in him turned to woman.*⁴³

³⁷ Psellos, *Chronographia* VII, 109, 257.

³⁸ Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 115, 260.

³⁹ Psellos irony is a literary phenomenon, specific for its multidimensional and multilayered structural and semiotical principles. A very interesting paper on this issue reveals complexity of Psellos ploys with words, signs, sentences and dialectic - Repajić, *Žanr u funkciji ironije*, passim

⁴⁰ Psellos, *Chronographia* VII, 110, 258

⁴¹ Psellos, *Chronographia* VII, 165, 285

⁴² This is especially true for his treatment of Constantine Monomachos reign. See, Repajić, *Žanr u funkciji ironije*, passim.

⁴³ Luc. Hist. Conscr. 9.13 -10.14; Translation is taken from Fowler's edition - *Fowler*, Luc. Vol II, 115

Anna's use of *encomium* appears to be contextually different than Psellos', since the time when she was writing *encomiastic* literature was flourishing and had the unique role of lauding and celebrating the emperor and his majesty. It was a typical and expected form of addressing the emperor.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, despite of the general use of the *encomia* in celebrating the emperor's majesty at the end of John II Komnenos' rule, and during Manuel's I, an aura of deviousness did not left the genuine perception of the *encomia* and *basilikoi logoi*.⁴⁵ Anna's ploys with *encomia* are sometimes hard to grasp, but her treatment of Alexios is not unvaried and completely positive, and a strong sense of irony is present, especially in those passages that deal with Alexios' relationship to his mother.⁴⁶ On the other hand, she used *encomium* also as a political tool for self-promotion and one cannot exclude the ironic treatment of her brother as a perfect proof of her generic ploys. She used *encomiastic* pattern to embellish herself in the passage of her birth, and when she treated her brother's birth, she switched to the rules of history and allegedly truthful writing, putting the focus on the baby's physical traits in a fashion not suitable for an imperial heir.⁴⁷ The most important *encomiastic* excurses are those that pertain to her *periautologia*.⁴⁸ And here, in view of our contemporary generic conceptions, we are not talking about an autobiography, but more suitably about an autobiographic impulse.⁴⁹ The aim of Anna's self-praise was not to report a story of her life, but only to stress the politically crucial aspects as a means of a self-promotion. We do not have a unifying story, a *diegesis*, about Anna Komnene's life, but a set of narrative units, *diegemata*, that are interconnected under the same ideological frame. In addition, apart from the narrative units as a whole, we have a set of different narratological aspects that help us in defining the multifold generic layers of the *Alexiad*.

To conclude, according to its synchronic value, the *Alexiad* was a history in its inception, conception and construction. Its form was regulated according to the genre requirements, ancient historiographical tradition and rhetorical manuals for prose compositions. According to our modern perceptions of historical genre, we could not define the *Alexiad* as a history, since our modern concept of a history is based on the following pattern: "The historical text should contain as few traces as possible of the historian, no portrait whatsoever of the narrator; personal reflection must be abandoned for the objective patterns of history."⁵⁰ The chronological gap between our time

⁴⁴ On rhetorical practices at the Komnenian court see *Magdalino*, Manuel, 413-488; *Сїанковїћ*, Комнини, 265-321

⁴⁵ Anna Komnene stresses the impossibility of writing a truthful history during the lifetime of an emperor. She noted that at the time when she was writing, all were praising and lauding the current emperor. See Alexias XIV 7,5 (48.52), 452

⁴⁶ *Vilimonović*, Aleksijada Ane Komnin, 247-254

⁴⁷ See *Vilimonović*, Text and Context, 50-53

⁴⁸ On Anna Komnene's self praise and applied literary forms see *Vilimonović*, Aleksijada Ane Komnin, 107-124

⁴⁹ On autobiographic impulse in Byzantium see Angold, *Autobiographic Impulse*, passim.

⁵⁰ *Nilsson*, To Narrate The Events of the Past, 53

and Anna Komnene's is not that important as another aspect: the establishment of history as a scientific discipline. A new set of rules and requirements was inaugurated, and from this perspective, this specific discourse, we refer nowadays to medieval histories and question their historicity and the historicism of their authors. That is why it is very complicated to talk about genre exclusively from our own viewpoint. It is important that we simultaneously make a leap backwards and examine the system which the Byzantines themselves respected. Somewhere between these two approaches, we can come to terms with the issue of the genre.

AUTHOR AND TEXT

It seems that the most complicated question in the studies of Byzantine literature is the author, his or her importance, meaning and positioning. In the narrative theory, the status of the author remains highly controversial, and it went even to the complete siding of the author and her or his importance in the process of literary criticism. Barthes' *Death of an Author* has led to serious questioning, even in the historical theory, whether the author is really important and what if the author is not known at all, can we subject a work to contextual and literary analysis?⁵¹ Foucault pointed to the deployment of discourses as a crucial means of understanding historical works when the author is unknown.⁵² His theory might be especially useful for the analysis of 'chronicles', since most of those works are conceived as heterodiegetic narratives, where the narrator-author is not featured in his or her own work as one of the protagonists.⁵³ Therefore we might consider these forms of historical representation as somewhat deprived of the authorial presence, but only at the story level, which does not mean that we lack the authorial presence at a structural and discursive level. When it comes to 'classicizing' Byzantine histories, and especially those from the 11th century onwards, the problem of the author and his or her connection to the text is of essential importance. It is impossible in these kinds of writings to understand the text without any reference to its author, her or his inclinations, intentions and final aims. Nevertheless, a popular usage of Barthes' theory might be useful for us – that 'the meaning of a text is the product of its interaction with a potentially infinite number of pretexts.'⁵⁴ This occurrence is in complete accordance with the Byzantine mimetic mannerism, and the Byzantine use of innumerable pretexts, which lead to the popular belief that a sense of plagiarism was deeply rooted in the Byzantine conceptions of writing. Another way of approaching this matter is an intertextual analysis of Byzantine texts that would seek to detect and frame those 'pretexts' that were inserted in narratives from previous texts, their function and their significance. The role of the

⁵¹ Barthes' theory was addressed in two important articles by *Mullett*, *Madness*; *Nilsson*, *Archaists and Innovators*.

⁵² *Foucault*, *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, 205-222

⁵³ Very important for the narratological approach to chronicles is *White*, *The Content of the Form*

⁵⁴ *Herman*, *Jahn*, *Ryan*, *Narrative Theory*, 85

author in this sense can be diminished, if we pay attention strictly to the semantical and semiological values of embedded texts. However, in making final conclusions and for the purposes of historical contextualisation, we have to turn to the issue of the author.

When dealing with the question of the author, in narratological theory, there is a distinction between an author, an implied author⁵⁵ and a narrator.⁵⁶ A narrator is connected directly to the story level and she or he is the one who tells a story. This distinction is more suitable for fictional literature, since we come across a lot of novels where someone – a person or a voice⁵⁷ – tells a story, and that is not the author of the work herself or himself. In regard to Byzantine historiography, and in our case to Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*, the narrator and the author are the same person, and this is usually the case with historiography in general.⁵⁸

There are three levels of narrative communication,⁵⁹ of which one pertains to the extratextual level, and another two to the intratextual levels.

1. author ----- reader
(extratextual – the author and the reader do not communicate in the text itself)
2. narrator ----- addressee
(intertextual – level of fictional mediation/ level of discourse)
3. character ----- character
(intertextual – level of action)⁶⁰

The next step is narrative situations which are of essential importance for our understanding of Anna's intrusions in her text. According to Genette,⁶¹ there are two basic narrative situations and they are based on the positioning of the narrator in relation to the story she or he is telling. One is a homodiegetic narrative, and the other is heterodiegetic. Their main features are following:⁶²

⁵⁵ Because of the scope of this work and the complexity of the subject I will not address the issue of an implied author.

⁵⁶ On the issue of author and narrator see *Herman, Jahn, Ryan, Narrative Theory*, 85-86, *Bal, Narratology*, 19-75; *Fludernik, Narratology*, 13-20; *Jahn, Theory of Narrative*, N.2.3.

⁵⁷ *Genette, Narrative Discourse*, 212-227

⁵⁸ *Fludernik, Narratology*, 3-4

⁵⁹ On narrative structures see *Fludernik, Narratology*, 26-39

⁶⁰ *Jahn, Theory of Narrative*, N2.3.1.

⁶¹ *Genette, Narrative Discourse*, 188

⁶² *Genette, Narrative Discourse*, 247-249;

HOMODIEGETIC NARRATIVE	HETERODIEGETIC NARRATIVE ⁶³
Story of personal experience Presence of the 'experiencing I' First-person pronouns Narrator is present as an acting character in the story	Story about other people's experiences Absence of the 'experiencing I' Third-person sentences Narrator is absent as an acting character in the story

These two basic categories of narrative situations are useful for the understanding of the phenomenon of 'writer's intrusion' that was discussed in the scope of 11th- and 12th-century Byzantine histories.⁶⁴ This term is not precise about the type of the intrusions, and some readers might find it difficult to understand fully the scope of these intrusions. In this sense, the Genette's theory is quite applicable for the phenomenon of Byzantine histories, especially those since Michael Psellos onwards. Intrusions are actually the amount of authorial presence in the text, and his or her positioning in relation to the text, at the first level, and his or her positioning in relation to the narrative within the story world, at the second level. We have already stressed that it is difficult to split the author and the narrator, since we are not dealing with fictional literature. The story world is not a figment of the author's imagination, but a precisely defined factual world, as it transmits a story about historical events, and must correspond with the necessities and requirements of the genre. In the case of Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*, the author is the narrator simultaneously, and she communicates incessantly with the readership at the textual and narrative levels. The *Alexiad* is specific since it can be defined as both a heterodiegetic and a homodiegetic narrative. In addition to this basic division, we should add the third category of narrative situations – an autodiegetic one.⁶⁵

For a history writer, the role of a heterodiegetic narrator is the most plausible one, since she or he does not feature in the story as one of the protagonists. In this case we are not dealing with a biased account where the focalisation of events is one-sided and partial.⁶⁶ When it comes to historiography, the most convenient example would be Stanzel's authorial narration which refers to telling a story from the point of view of an authorial narrator, someone who never features as a character in a story, but who claims the power of omniscience.⁶⁷ It is a position of absolute authority that allows her or him to know everything about the story's world and its characters, including their conscious thoughts and unconscious motives.⁶⁸ One definition is particularly useful, "The

⁶³ Jahn, *Theory of Narrative*, N3.1.5.

⁶⁴ See *Ljubarskij*, *Writers Intrusion*, 435-441 and *Macrides*, *Historian*, 205-224

⁶⁵ Cf. *Genette*, *Narrative discourse*, 245-254

⁶⁶ The aspect of 'focalization' is one of the crucial aspects in narrative theory. See *Genette*, *Narrative Discourse*, 185-194; *Bal*, *Narratology*, 142-160; *Bal*, *Reader*, 3-38

⁶⁷ *Stanzel*, *A Theory of Narrative*, 47-56

⁶⁸ *Jahn*, *Narratology*, N 3.3.1

prevailing characteristic of omniscience [...] is that the author[ial narrator] is always ready to intervene herself or himself between the reader and the story, and that even when he does set a scene, he will render it as he sees it rather than as his people see it.”⁶⁹

A heterodiegetic narrative presupposes the third-person sentences, and the *Alexiad* for the most part bears these marks. But we should make a slight pause here and explain the word ‘part’ when speaking of a composite work such as the *Alexiad*. If we apply also the aspect of narrative levels⁷⁰, the *Alexiad* can be defined as a matrix narrative, since it contains embedded narratives, or ‘hyponarratives.’ To put it simple, we are dealing with stories within stories. In the case of the *Alexiad*, we can extract four narratives, out of which one is the matrix – the story of Alexios’ deeds – and the other three are subordinated to this main narrative.

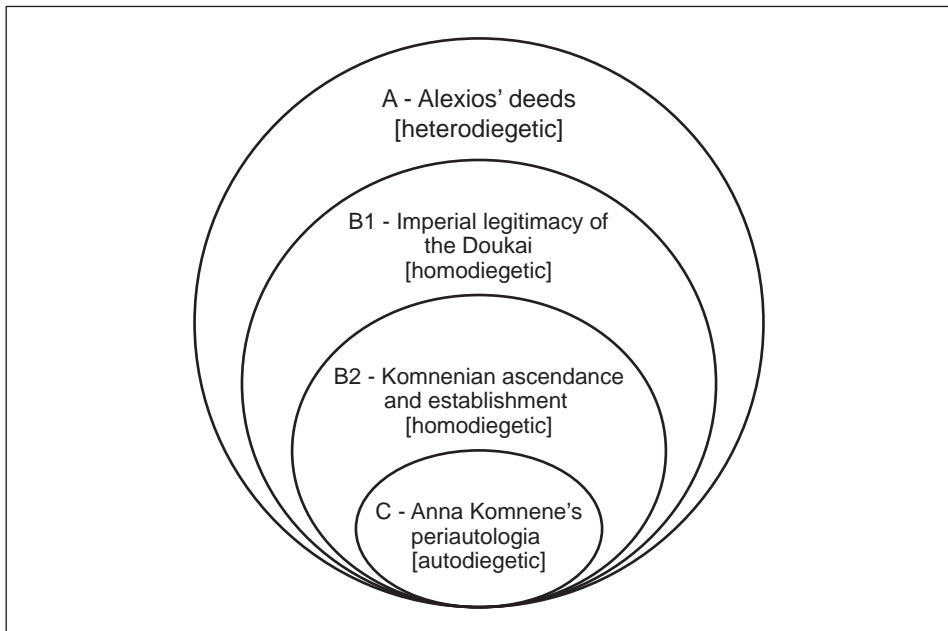


Figure 1 – The four narratives of the *Alexiad*: the *matrix* – A, and the subordinate tales

The ‘A narrative’ is the matrix narrative and it is the story of Alexios’ deeds. It is the leading narrative, a first-degree narrative that is not embedded in any other narrative and functions as a frame for all other subordinated narratives that are embedded in this one. The following two are: the ‘B1 narrative,’ about the imperial legitimacy of the Doukai,⁷¹ and the ‘B2 narrative,’ which deals with the rise and establishment of

⁶⁹ Idem., N. 3.3.5

⁷⁰ Idem., N 2.4

⁷¹ On the aspect of Ducases imperial legitimacy, and Anna’s favoritism of her mother’s *genos*, see Vilimonović, Aleksijada Ane Komnin, 140-242

the Komnenian rule.⁷² These two narratives begin to unfold in the first book, and the Doukai-Komnenoi confrontation reaches its climax in the third book, after which we come across the establishment of the Komnenoi on the Byzantine throne, and we follow the rule of Alexios Komnenos. Nevertheless, at the story level, and the discourse level, this antagonism of the two imperial *oikoi* is present until the end of the *Alexiad*. These two narratives are in mutual opposition and are deeply ingrained in the story of Alexios' deeds. The third level is the narrative of Anna Komnene's legitimacy and her personal political agenda, which is embedded in both the first-degree (A) and the second-degree narratives (B1 and B2).

On the one hand, we have narrative situations, and on the other, we have narrative levels. I have made a graphic scheme in order to show one way of understanding the narrative core of the *Alexiad* and its basic elements, without discussing other narratological issues as they supersede the scope of this article which aims only to emphasise the key issues.

This method shows how unsatisfying the definitions of the *Alexiad* as a generic hybrid or a mixture of different genres are, without elaborating further the reasons for such a conclusion. The same applies to the 'writer's intrusion' term in the text, since we have the author and the text, the narrator and the story, the character and the fabula. All these levels need to be taken into consideration when dealing with any kind of literature, since they provide us with more comprehensive terminology and defined categories. I do not completely discard the use of the aforementioned term, but I contend that the narratological methodology supplies us with richer possibilities for reading and interpretation of Byzantine literature.

In case of historiography, the statuses of the author and narrator are inherent – the person that writes the text is the same agent that tells the story. The question here is whether this is a story of his or her own life, in which the author/narrator takes the role of a character, or even protagonist, or is it a story about somebody else's life, completely independent of the narrator, where he or she is just a spectator and not an agent? Here we enter the scope of narrative situations, which are quite complicated in case of the *Alexiad*. Anna Komnene's work can be defined as heterodiegetic in intention, autodiegetic in conception and homodiegetic in reception.

The basic distinction between heterodiegetic (third-person narrative)⁷³ and homodiegetic (first-person narrative)⁷⁴ is that the first one purports to be an objective

⁷² On the presentation of the Komnenoi in the *Alexiad* see *Vilimonović*, Aleksijada Ane Komnin, 247-284

⁷³ These terms are not equivalent, but I have put them in the brackets in order that a text be followed easier. The scope and the subject of this paper prevents me in elaborating in detail all categories of a narrative voice. For a concise review see Jahn, *Narratology*, N3.1

⁷⁴ The division of narrative situations on heterodiegetic, homodiegetic and autodiegetic is mentioned for the first time in Gerard Genette's work. In addition to that theory, we have Stanzel's approach

account of events, whereas the second one is intended to focus the attention to the agency⁷⁵ of the narrator at the story level, and her or his involvement in the recounted events. The *Alexiad* mainly intends to be a heterodiegetic narrative in which Anna tells a story of her father's deeds. But even in this case, one must pause and think, since we are not dealing with just any person's deeds, but with the deeds of our author/narrator's father, so we instantly switch to the homodiegetic and autodiegetic levels. The homodiegetic level is the one where the 'experiencing I' is involved. It is undoubtedly the case with Anna Komnene, since she constantly brings forward the fact that she was present on various occasions, and had heard and seen the things she recounts in her work. This is enough for a homodiegetic narrative, since it presupposes that the narrator could have been only a witness of actions. In the *Alexiad*, Anna was witness of a great number of events, and if she did not witness some of them directly, she was informed of them by her closest relatives. Here we have a collision of two important traits – the personal experience and other people's experience, and the presence/absence of the 'experiencing I'. These two are sometimes hard to detach as Anna Komnene was a prominent member of the imperial house and the first born daughter of the emperor she had chosen to write about. For these reasons I have chosen to include an autodiegetic narrative situation which refers directly to Anna's autobiographical discourse and the narrative units in which she talks about herself.

A useful example of the complicated narrative situation we find at the beginning of the *Alexiad* where Anna opens the first chapter of her history with the following line:

Ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξιος καὶ ἐμὸς πατὴρ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ τῶν σκήπτρων ἐπειλήφθαι τῆς βασιλείας μέγα ὄφελος τῇ βασιλείᾳ Ῥωμαίων γεγένηται [...]⁷⁶

Even though the sentence starts as the third-person narration, we have an apposition ἐμὸς πατὴρ that features as an explanatory trait of the subject. However, this does not mean that the narrative is homodiegetic, since Anna does not feature as a character at the story level. In this part of the narrative, the events that are told happened before Anna was born, so it is not possible for her to be part of the fabula. But her authorial presence at the text level as an omniscient narrator refers to the direct communication with the audience. She uses this specific apposition as an important discursive marker, which pertains to an embedded, autodiegetic, narrative. This same trait appears in relation to the key protagonists of the *Alexiad*, when Anna makes direct connection with them, positioning herself in relation to both imperial houses.

that discerns the first-person narrative, authorial narrative and figural narrative - Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, 186-236

⁷⁵ For 'agency' see Herman and Jahn, *Narrative Theory*, 55-56

⁷⁶ Alexias I 1,1 (2.3), 11

Alexios Komnenos	ὁ ἐμὸς πατήρ/
Isaac Komnenos	ὁ θεῖος ἐμὸς Ἰσαάκιος
Anna Dalassene	ἡ ἐμὴ μάμμη ⁷⁷
Eirene Doukaina	ἡ δὲ γε βασιλὶς Εἰρήνη καὶ μήτηρ ἐμὴ/ τὴν βασιλίδα καὶ μητέρα
Imperial house of the Doukai	-”τῶν καθ’ αἶμά μοι προσηκόντων [...] καὶ γὰρ κάμοι τὰ πρὸς μητρὸς ἐκείθεν καταρρεῖ” ⁷⁸
Maria of Alania and Constantine Doukas	οὐ νέμεσις, εἰ τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἐπαινοίην
Michael and John Doukas	πρὸς μητρὸς ἐμοὶ θείων ⁷⁹
Nikephoros Bryennios	τοῦμοῦ καίσαρος

The first-degree narrative of the *Alexiad* is the story about Alexios’ deeds. Nevertheless, the opening line of the *Alexiad* shows the nature of the focalizer – the narrator tells the story of her family, that is, of her father. We come across the formula ‘emperor Alexios and my father,’ or just ‘my father,’ for astonishing 92 times in the course of the whole narrative. This is a crucial element for serious questioning of the heterodiegetic elements of the first-degree narrative, since we are not given break from Anna’s constant assertions on her close connection with the protagonist. The formula ‘the emperor Alexios and my father’ introduces a layer of the ‘experiencing I’, and the story that unfolds in front of us becomes a sort of family reminiscence and family memoirs. Anna’s connection with the protagonist never fades, and in this way, the audience’s attention is constantly turned towards the author/narrator and the conception that this story is her personal one. Her father’s story is vested with her self-reflections, and some episodes are told from her perspective, which introduces a phenomenon of focalisation, and another layer of author/narrator’s recollections. Anna Komnene’s remarks of being present in with the protagonists and personally listening to their stories inevitably leads us to the conclusion that we are facing a rather complicated narrative situation in the *Alexiad*. Alexios’ deeds can be perceived as a heterodiegetic narrative, since they include third-person narration about other people’s experiences. Nevertheless, we need to be careful, since even this heterodiegetic narration bears distinctive personal traits of the author/narrator who aims to emphasise her connection with the protagonists. But this trait pertains to the field of discourse, which will be addressed in the next chapter.

⁷⁷ Alexias III 6,7 (16), 103

⁷⁸ Alexias I 10,2 (23.24), 35

⁷⁹ Alexias XIV 7,7 (78), 453

STORY AND DISCOURSE⁸⁰

The essential part of narration is the story level, where we focus our attention on the characters and events in which they feature. For the analysis of a story it is important to note that each story has its fabula, the basic element of a narrative unit, which by virtue of discourse is transformed into a story. So, to put it simply, the story is *what* is told, and the discourse is *how* something is told.⁸¹ Various narratological schools have offered distinctions between content and form,⁸² signified and signifier,⁸³ matter and manner.⁸⁴ In order to extract the basic elements of a fabula, we can turn to ancient *progymnasmata*, since they offer the key elements for constructing a narrative unit. According to both ancient and modern narratological conceptions, we have the following requirements that need to be fulfilled:

- agent (τὸ πρᾶξαν πρόσωπον)
- time (χρόνος καθ' ὄν)
- place (τόπος ἐν ᾧ)
- deed (τὸ πραχθὲν πρᾶγμα)
- manner of action (τρόπος ὅπως)
- cause or motive (αἰτία δι' ἣν)⁸⁵

For the purposes of the analysis, I cite the extensive chapter of the second book of the *Alexiad*:

VII [Chapter unfolds as heterodiegetic, third-person narration about other people's experiences] *They were all gathered together, in suspense, eagerly looking forward to the outcome and were waiting to see who will be proclaimed Emperor. The majority made a vow to Alexius, but neither did Isaac's partisans give up their exponent, but they all gathered together to manage the situation. And they could not come to terms, since ones desired to see the elder, and the others desired to see the younger one becoming the helmsman of the empire. Amongst the men present at that time were several of Alexius' kinsmen, for instance, the above-mentioned* [metanarrative comment recalling a memory of the audience] *cesar John Ducas* [the focaliser, the story is arranged from his perspective, he is the agent], *a man clever in council and swift in action (whom I also saw once for a short time)* [the author/narrator connects herself with the character of the story/ elements of homodiegetic narration] *and Michael and John, his*

⁸⁰ Todorov, 'Les catégories du récit littéraire'; Chatman, *Story and Discourse*; Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, *White*, *The Content of the Form*; *Idem*, *Tropics of Discourse*

⁸¹ Herman, Jahn, Ryan, *Narrative Theory*, 730

⁸² White, *The Content of the Form*, 1-25

⁸³ Foundations of the semiotic theory pertain to Saussure's linguistics, who introduced the concept of signified and signifier. For further developments in semiology see Eco, *Semiotics*

⁸⁴ Genette, *Architext*, 10-16

⁸⁵ *Progymnasmata*, 137

grandsons, as well as the husband of their sister [discursive marker – Anna Komene’s political discourse], George Palaeologus. These [agency] helped each other and worked hard to convert all people’s opinions to their own, and letting out every reef, as they say, skilfully used every possible expedient for getting Alexius proclaimed. Consequently they [agency] won people over to agree with them, with the result that the number of Isaac’s partisans gradually diminished. For wherever the cesar John was, not a single person was able to resist him [agency], as he was unrivalled in the dignity of his principles, the size of his body, and his king-like appearance [discourse marker – physical description]. What did the Ducases [association to the previously mentioned agents] not do? What did they not say? What good thing did they not promise both to the leaders and the whole army [manner/ tropes of action], if Alexius was raised to the Imperial eminence? For example they would say [focalisation/ Ducases’ perspective], “He will requite you with very great gifts and the highest honours in accordance with each man’s merit, not in a haphazard way, as the ignorant and inexperienced among leaders do, for he has borne the title of “Military Commander” for a long time now and “Great Domestic of the West”; he has shared your salt, in war he has fought nobly at your side, be it in ambush or in close combat, never did he grudge his body, limbs, or even his life to ensure your safety; he has often traversed mountains and plains with you, and learnt the hardships of warfare; finally, he knows you all both as a body and individually, and being himself dear to Ares, he above all longs for brave soldiers.” [rhetorical discourse] In this manner spoke the Ducases, but Alexius [turn from Ducases’ to Alexios’ perspective] deemed Isaac worthy of much honour and treated Isaac very respectfully, by letting him in all things precedence [authorial omniscient narrator], either from brotherly love [discursive marker/ political discourse], or rather, and this must be mentioned, for another reason. For, as the whole army was veering to his side and advocating his claims while it did not favour Isaac even in the slightest, Alexius saw that strength and power and the realization of his hopes were going to his favour, he supported his brother to assume the imperial throne [manner of action], knowing that he would not suffer anything unwanted from the side of his brother, if he was snatched up and raised by the whole army to the pinnacle of earthly honours he would flatter [discursive marker/ manner of action] the brother with words and pretended [discursive marker/ manner of action] that he wanted to retreat and let him go first in the position of power. [authorial narrator/ political discourse] After some time had been spent in this manner, the whole soldiery were assembled near the General’s tent in a great state of excitement and each anxious for the accomplishment of his wish. Then Isaac rose and taking the red buskin tried to put it on to his brother’s foot [political discourse]; but the latter refused several times until Isaac cried, [Isaac’s perspective – focalisation/ the reason why Isaac gave up the throne] “Let me do it, for through you God wishes to restore the dignity of our family.” He also reminded Alexius of the prophecy once addressed, to him by a man who- appeared, to them somewhere near Carpianum as they were returning home from the palace. For they had reached that spot when a man suddenly met them, perhaps belonging to a race higher than mortal, but in any case gifted with very clear insight into the future. From his appearance he seemed to be a priest, with his bare head, grey hair and shaggy beard; he took hold of Alexius’

*leg and being on foot himself, he dragged down Alexius, who was on horseback, by the ear and recited to him this line of David's psalm: "In thy majesty ride on prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness," and address him by the title Emperor Alexius!" With these words which sounded like a prophecy he vanished. And Alexius could not capture him though he looked round carefully in all directions in order, if possible, to catch sight of him, and then pursued him at full speed if perchance he might catch, him and ask more in detail who he was and whence he came. But what had been seen had completely vanished. On their return home Isaac was very inquisitive about this vision and asked Alexius to disclose the secret: and as he insisted strongly, Alexius at first made a pretension [discursive marker] of refusing but finally repeated what had been said to him in secret. Now in discussing this openly with his brother he treated the words and incident as a fraud and deception [discursive marker], but in his private meditations [authorial omniscient narrator] upon this man in priestly garb who had appeared to him, he likened him to the theologian, the Son of Thunder [*St. John the Theologian]. Therefore when Isaac saw what the old man had prophesied was being fulfilled in deed and expressed in words, he insisted more vehemently and by force put the red buskin on his brother's foot [political discourse], especially because he saw the ardent longing of all the soldiers for Alexius. After this act the Ducases [turn from focalisation to Ducases' perspective – framing the narrative unit] led the acclamations for they favoured this man for many reasons and especially because [cause/ motive for action] their relation, Eirene, my mother [homodiegetic feature/ discursive marker] had been legally married to my father [homodiegetic feature/ discursive marker], And simultaneously all those akin to them by blood did likewise with a will, and the rest of the army took up the shout and sent their voices almost to the heavens. And then was witnessed a curious phenomenon – for those who before had held opposite opinions and preferred death to failure in their desire, became in one moment of the same opinion, and that too, so decidedly, that nobody could have even suspected there had been a variance of opinion between them.⁸⁶*

In parenthesis, I have stressed the key elements for narratological analysis. The matter of agency⁸⁷ is very important, since we have three main characters/agents that act in a specific manner with certain intention. Those are the Doukai, Alexios and Isaac. Even though the Doukai have four members, I will not dwell on the particular characters, since their agency is unified and has the same motive and same action that is directed towards agitation for Alexios as their choice for the imperial throne. In the cited chapter, we do not have a precise spatial and temporal setting, since it was mentioned earlier in the text, and the whole narrative unit is constructed as a compound of several stories – the agitation of Doukai for Alexios, Alexios' ploys with his elder brother Isaac, and Isaac's ceding of the imperial dignity to his brother Alexios.

⁸⁶ Alexias II 7,1-7, 72-74

⁸⁷ A crucial article on this matter in regard to Byzantine histories analyses is *Angelou*, The case of Niketas Choniates, passim. It is an essential study for approaching the rhetorical core of Byzantine histories. See also *Kaldellis*, Paradox, passim. For an extensive study on this matter, see *Papaioannou*, *Psellos*, 129-232.

We have two issues to discuss – the story and the discourse. Characters that are presented here are the protagonists of the second and third books of the *Alexiad*. Anna's shifts in focalisation present the story from different perspectives, although the role and the influence of the Doukai represents the unifying element of the story since it unfolds with them and focuses on their powerful agitation for Alexios as their choice for the imperial throne. It seemed like their role ended in the third section with the author's utterance “ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν οἱ Δοῦκαι”,⁸⁸ but we come back to the Doukai in the seventh and last section of this chapter, where their motive (αἰτία) is finally explained. They lead the first acclamations since Eirene, the wife of Alexios, was their kin – “διότι ἡ τούτων προσγενῆς Εἰρήνη καὶ μήτηρ ἐμὴ κατὰ νόμους συνῆπτο τῷ ἐμῷ πατρὶ [...]”.⁸⁹ This micronarrative can be perceived as a first-degree narrative in opposition to the Alexios-Isaac narrative which is an embedded one. In this story we have an intriguing report about Alexios' insincere ploy with his elder brother Isaac. Here we should turn our attention to the issue of discourses, since I have mentioned a set of discursive markers that appear in this text and pertain to various discourses of the *Alexiad*. The graphic scheme would be following:

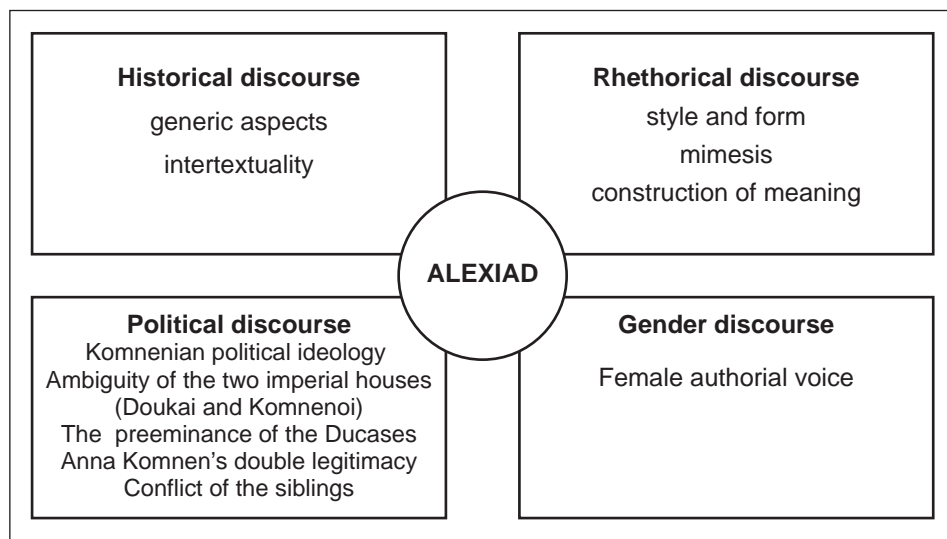


Figure 1 – The four discourses of the *Alexiad*

There are four main discourses which denote Anna's narrative mannerism and her ways of arranging the events, and folding the fabula into a story. The most useful ones are 'discursive markers' since they usually refer to a word or some specific

⁸⁸ Alexias II 7,3 (67), 73

⁸⁹ Alexias II 7,7 (14.15), 75

formulas that pertain to Anna Komnene's different discursive typologies. The crucial one is Anna Komnene's political discourse which helps us to reconstruct her political agenda. In this particular chapter, the focus is put on the pre-eminence of the Doukai, and the relationship of the siblings, which is, when speaking of the younger brother Alexios, insincere and ironic. The author blatantly referred to Alexios' words as a flattery (ὁ δὲ λόγοις ὑποσαίνοι), his action towards his brother as a pretence (καὶ πρόσχημα ποιεῖται), and how he discussed the prophecy with his brother openly, whereas secretly he had the opposite opinion. This narrative unit has the powerful rhetoric of sibling conflict, where we see the younger one ascending the throne instead of the older one. Alexios' offer to withdraw before his elder brother is presented as false and insincere. Nevertheless, the climax of the unit is the moment in which Isaac offers red buskins to his younger brother, and therefore symbolically performs the translation of the imperial ordinance to his younger brother. When analysed from the perspective of Anna Komnene's 'experiencing I,' it is strikingly comparable with her own life story, and with the conflict between an elder and a younger sibling – Anna Komnene and John Komnenos. The aforementioned discourses mutually overlap and create a multi-layered level of presentation of historical events, in which the crucial component of rearrangement of events is the author/narrator. I have emphasised that even in this part of the *Alexiad*, before the inception of Anna Komnene's own life story, we still have important discursive markers that pertain to the category of the princess' political discourse, and are imbued with specific Komnenian political ideology in which accent was put on interfamilial relations. Anna Komnene's constant connection with her parents at structural and discursive levels represents a crucial element where her allegedly objective history (a heterodiegetic narrative) lapses into a personal history (both a homodiegetic and autodiegetic narrative).

AUDIENCE

The question of the Byzantine literary audience still represents an empty field for investigation. We lack basic knowledge about the reception of Byzantine historiography, about the scope of the readership, and their role and influence on the authors who wrote for them. In this regard, it is easy to apply the reader-response theory⁹⁰ as the first step, and to measure the reader's contribution to the meaning of the narrative and the interaction between the narrative and the reader.⁹¹

Was a narrative shaped according to its readers and did the readers' expectations influence the content and form of the narrative, the manner and modes of representation? It was and they did, indisputably, since every work had its implied or intended readers. In narrative theory, this means that the reader is an ideal one, a construction

⁹⁰ Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*; Dixon, Bortolussi, *Psychonarratology*; Eco, *The Role of the Reader*; Suleiman, Crosman (eds), *The Reader in the Text*

⁹¹ Herman, Jahn, Ryan, *Narrative Theory*, 632

of an author whose role is to decode, deconstruct, decipher and interpret the text in a way the author herself or himself intended. However, this is never the case and the ‘implied reader’ is a theoretical construction. This does not mean that readership does not and will not ever achieve to decode the authors’ messages. Another useful category of readers is the so-called ‘informed reader’ or ‘competent reader’ which pertains to the diachronic audience and the possibility of readers to interpret the work according to cultural, historical and linguistic contexts of texts.⁹²

I suggest the following partition⁹³ of the audience and the reader:

Synchronic ----- ‘Implied Reader’

Diachronic ----- ‘Informed Reader’

Based on the facts when certain work was composed, distributed and received by its audience, we have two possible ways of interpretation: the synchronic interpretation, which refers to an epoch in which all three events (composition, distribution and reception) occurred and which necessitates historical contextualisation and thorough analysis of the epoch, culture, relations and social networks; and the diachronic interpretation, which would be an interpretation of a text through the discourses of our own time, and with the help of our acquired knowledge.

In case of the *Alexiad*, we are fortunately able to grasp some features of its synchronic perception and the response of its readership. The first step we undertake when looking for synchronic reception of a Byzantine literary work is to question its manuscripts. When it comes to the *Alexiad*, it is not the number of manuscripts that interests us, nor their distribution throughout the Byzantine epoch in the following centuries. What is a crucial trait of the *Alexiad*’s manuscript tradition is that we come across significant alterations in the text of a manuscript of a politically sensitive vocabulary which was replaced by politically neutral terms.⁹⁴ This essential occurrence with the *Alexiad*’s manuscript is a significant proof in favour of the theory that it was a controversial work. And apart from being controversial, it was also influential and therefore required some important modification in order to be distributed.⁹⁵ The reception of the *Alexiad* at the end of the 12th century provides us with unique evidence of Komnenian censorship.

⁹² On implied reader see *Herman, Jahn, Ryan*, Narrative Theory, 629-630; *Schmid*, Implied Reader, passim; *Genette*, Narrative Discourse 260-261; *Fludernik*, Narratology, 23

⁹³ As Ingela Nilsson noted „works display literary and rhetorical preferences of the time, the author’s own perception of history writing and the audience’s expectations, both of which are significant for our understanding of history“. - *Nilsson*, To Narrate The Events of the Past, 56

⁹⁴ This important occurrence was treated by *Reinsch*, Zum Text, 245-247

⁹⁵ On the distribution of the *Alexiad* after the 12th century see *Davis*, The fourteenth-century Byzantine metaphrases

Another clue for the synchronic perception of Anna Komnene's history is found in another literary work that was composed probably simultaneously with the last chapters of the *Alexiad*. It is George Tornikes' Eulogy for the deceased Komnenian princess.⁹⁶ In Tornikes' Eulogy we have the verification of Anna Komnene's conflict with her brother John Komnenos, which apparently coloured all her life, since it was addressed in detail in Tornikes' work composed thirty years after the siblings' rivalry.⁹⁷ Tornikes' work is essential for its intertextual traits, having inserted a whole narrative about the brother-sister conflict, with an apologetic purpose of defending and justifying Anna Komnene's *basileia*, bringing them together to a male and female imperial equilibrium.⁹⁸ The reception tradition of the *Alexiad* provides us with several important clues for investigating the perception and response of the synchronic audience, that is, the immediate audience, the one that the *Alexiad* was aimed for in the first place.

As for the diachronic perception, we can investigate it from the 18th century onwards, and question the differences in the interpretation and presentation of Anna Komnene's history. The prevailed political, sociological and ideological discourses influence our cognitive possibilities, that is, the observation and evaluation of a reading material. And the only history written by a woman historiographer, a first-born Komnenian princess, certainly opens the field for continuous scholarly research. This sentence, as I have constructed it, is an unintentional bifocal product of an informed and implied reader. A woman historiographer is a discursive marker of diachronic audience (which is I) that approaches the subject from the gender perspective female discourse, and 'a first-born princess' is a discursive marker of Anna Komnene's political discourse and an encoded message to her implied reader. If we search for the truth we will never succeed in finding it, since we are always in clash of at least two different perspectives, the one from those times, and the other from our own. An important question is whether there is only one perspective⁹⁹ in our time, or many of them, as many as there are national, cultural, political, religious and gender discourses? Nevertheless, this inflation of perspectives and interpretations should not discourage us in our efforts to understand the work and reach the level of an 'implied reader.' On the contrary, we should be content if we succeed to initiate a stimulating dialogue, since only a variety of opinions and possibilities provides a field for a science to develop further.

⁹⁶ Tornikès, Euloge

⁹⁷ Tornikès, Euloge, 269 (8.16)

⁹⁸ Vilimonović, Aleksijada Ane Komnin, 293-297

⁹⁹ Nilsson, To Narrate the Events of the Past, 54 "we make choices based on who we are and what cultural and intellectual context we belong to, and we accordingly make history that reflects both our predecessors and ourselves."

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ДЕКОНСТРУИСАЊЕ НАРАТИВА, КОНСТРУИСАЊЕ ЗНАЧЕЊА: ЗАШТО ЈЕ АЛЕКСИЈАДА НАПИСАНА?

Алексијада Ане Комнин представља једно композитно дело, које по савременим научним оценама, када је реч о литерарном приступу, пружа врло богато поље истраживања. У домену литерарног критицизма, најважнија питања представљају питање жанра, аутора, односа аутора и текста, приче и дискурса али и публике. Наша је намера да применом метода наратологије, дисциплине која се убрзано развијала од средине шездесетих година 20. века, а паралелно са идејама структурализма, пост-структурализма и постмодернизма, покушамо да укажемо на бројне могућности тумачења, како *Алексијаде* у овом случају, тако и свих других византијских извора.

Питање жанра одувек је било примамљиво истраживачима и теоретичарима византијске књижевности и оно је потпуно усаглашено са потребом науке да се изворни материјал систематизује и разврста према тачно утврђеним категоријама. Међутим, овакав научни приступ је одгурнуо у други план само схватање Византинаца о жанру због чега је наш покушај у овом раду усмерен на тумачење византијске перцепције жанра, односно дефиниције историје према историографи 12. века. Посебну пажњу смо усмерили на метанаративне коментаре, који као значајан наратолошки аспект, осликавају ауторкин угао гледања, њена схватања историје, односно закона историје, природе историје и правила историје.

Друго поље истраживања представљало је питање односа аутора према тексту. На овом месту смо применили наратолошке принципе о трипартитном приступу тексту у односу на аутора, наратора и лика. У случају историографије, како смо истакли, аутор и наратор представљају исту особу, због чега је бављење овом проблематиком унеколико олакшано. У том смислу смо *Алексијади* приступили према наративним ситуацијама и наративним нивоима, истичући наративну комплексност *Алексијаде* и тумачећи специфичан однос аутора/наратора према свом тексту и причи. Улога Ане Комнин није улога објективног приповедача, већ и учесника у одређеним догађајима или сведока догађаја, што додатно компликује причу о наративним нивоима, али пружа бројне могућности за даља истраживања.

Трећа значајна тема је била усредсређена на специфичности приче и дискурса, односно на њихову међусобну повезаност. У том смислу, истакли смо четири кључна дискурса Ане Комнин кроз која су исприповедани догађаји у *Алексијади* и који су њој користили за уобличавање свог наратива. За студију случаја узели смо један подужи цитат из *Алексијаде*, на ком смо показали како се могу распознати сви споменути наратолошки принципи.

Четврта област која нужно заокружује наративни приступ представља питање публице. У наратологији постоји широко поље истраживања на тему одговора публице и утицаја читалаца/публице на само стварање и уобличавање дела. У том смислу, ми смо се усредсредили на два приступа у изучавању проблематике публице. Један се односи на проучавање рукописне традиције, а други на изучавање дела других аутора исте епохе у потрази за разумевањем Анине поруке у контексту њеног времена.

Применом основних начела наратологије на тумачење *Алексијаде* Ане Комнин желимо да отворимо ново поље истраживања и покренемо конструктиван научни дијалог. Питање на одговор зашто је *Алексијада* написана лежи у самом тексту, односно наративу који је конструисала Ана Комнин. Пред нама је двоструки задатак - да објаснимо *Алексијаду* у контексту времена и тадашње публице, као и да је дефинишемо у контексту нашег времена. Између те две хронолошки веома удаљене тачке лежи одговор на постављено питање. Одговор и перцепција публице нису есенцијално другачији, али је дискурс епохе променио приоритете и угао гледања. Метода коју предлажем није потрага за истином, већ потрага за тумачењем знакова и разумевањем дискурса.