



Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry, 1025-1081 (Oxford Studies in Byzantium)

Floris Bernard

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In the mid-eleventh century, secular Byzantine poetry attained a hitherto unseen degree of wit, vividness, and personal involvement, chiefly exemplified in the poetry of Christophoros Mitylenaios, Ioannes Mauropous, and Michael Psellos. This is the first volume to consider this poetic activity as a whole, critically reconsidering modern assumptions about Byzantine poetry, and focusing on Byzantine conceptions of the role of poetry in society.

By providing a detailed account of the various media through which poetry was presented to its readers, and by tracing the initial circulation of poems, this volume takes an interest in the Byzantine reader and his/her reading habits and strategies, allowing aspects of performance and visual representation, rarely addressed, to come to the fore. It also examines the social interests that motivated the composition of poetry, establishing a connection with the extraordinary social mobility of the time. Self-representative strategies are analyzed against the background of an unstable elite struggling to find moral justification, which allows the study to raise the question of patronage, examine the discourse used by poets to secure material rewards, and explain the social dynamics of dedicatory epigrams. Finally, gift exchange is explored as a medium that underlines the value of poetry and confirms the exclusive nature of intellectual friendship.

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