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Byzantium in the Time of Troubles: The Continuation of the Chronicle of John Skylitzes (1057-1079). Introduction, translation and notes by Eric McGeer, prosopographical index and Glossary of Terms by John W. Nesbitt (Brill: Leiden, 2022).

The Synopsis of John Skylitzes is one of the most important middle-Byzantine historiographical texts. Traditionally, it was seen to cover the period between 811 and 1057, and a helpful translation by John Wortley appeared in English in 2010 following a French one in 2003.

For the earlier period the Synopsis relies on other extant texts and offers a useful check on Genesis, covering 814-866, and Theophanes Continuatus which covers 813-961. Skylitzes has helpful additions, from no-longer-extant sources to snide remarks (Romanos II's fiancée elsewhere humble and beautiful becomes an 'inkeepers' daughter'). From the mid tenth century onwards, it's our primary narrative source for the high politics of the region, offering the main account of the Rus occupation of the North-eastern Balkans and the region's eventual conquest by Basil II (976-1025), the last emperor of the Macedonian dynasty.

But in five of its nine manuscripts, the Chronicle of Skylitzes does not stop at 1057, but at 1079. This Continuation has now largely been accepted as Skylitzes' own work by most scholars, but its omission in Wortley's translation (and its French original) has meant the text has remained marginal in Byzantine historiography. McGeer's exposition in this volume should be enough to convince remaining doubters that Skylitzes composed both parts of the Synopsis at some point in the first half of the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118). My own doubts have been persuasively assuaged. In place of the often-dubious attempts to attribute all surviving (and often anonymous) Byzantine texts to a handful of known named individuals, McGeer puts together a robust body of inter- and intra-textual evidence for Skylitzes' authorship of the whole Synopsis. This besides, it is a most welcome contribution to the study of the eleventh century.

The Continuation, like its predecessor, is uneven in its value for the historian. For the period 1057 to 1071, Skylitzes uses two extant sources, Attaleiates (covering 1034-1079) and Psellos (covering 976 to sometime in the 1070s), though he much prefers the former. As with the ninth century, his contributions to this material vary: from interesting manoeuvring on how responsible Romanos Diogenes was for the defeat at Manzikert (1071), to some "new" gossip about the financial payments involved in Leichoudes' elevation to the Patriarchal throne.

But for much of the information about the last emperor in the Synopsis, Michael VII Doukas (1071-8), Skylitzes is our only source. His account of Doukas is damning and contradictory. A mild-mannered and useless emperor, at one moment 'an old man among young men' (135), yet on the next page a 'child-like sovereign' devoted to 'childish past-times and occupations thanks to the consul of the philosophers', foremost of which of course is 'Psellos, who had rendered him unsuited and useless for every task' (137). Michael is too much under the influence of Nikephoritzes, a eunuch and for Skylitzes the ultimate villain of the chapter, a 'master at evil deeds' (147). These are bad times for the empire: Turks attack on the East, Croats and later Latins and Pechenegs venture into the West, the empire is struck by famine and plague, whilst the emperor is stingy and distracted by books.

Around 1072-3, the Croats send a ruler named Constantine and the local elites in the province of Bulgaria re-name him Peter, after the tenth-century Bulgarian ruler. Skylitzes sheds unparalleled light on the history of the West Balkans in this period. Peter's rebellion has long preoccupied historians: was it a precursor so national or ethnic revival by the Slavs or simply fiscal dissatisfaction by a local aristocratic and fairly Romanised elite? Skylitzes reveals both that some of the Roman sympathisers

were of Slavic descent (Boris David) but also that various *strategoi* of the local themes feared what Skylitzes calls the 'indigenous Bulgarians' ('τῶν ἰθαγενῶν Βουλγάρων'), a curious concept which begs a number of questions about the ethnic identity of the Byzantine elite in Bulgaria. This 'dossier' alone makes the publication worth celebrating, but there are several other fantastic resources here: the detailed scholarly introduction, the facing Greek text (which the original translation of Skylitzes lacks), and the copious notes by McGeer which offer a mixture of historical context, historiographical referencing, and textual comparison with other contemporary sources. Better still, there is a full table of 'concordance' showing where Skylitzes drew on Attaleiates and where in turn Zonaras drew on Skylitzes. All in all, McGeer and Nesbitt have done Byzantine studies and more generally historians of the eleventh century Mediterranean a service. Although perhaps Skylitzes himself would have lamented such a 'foolish and vain preoccupation with literary studies' (163), the only thing for historians to lament here is the hefty price.