

Hate Speech, Ethnoreligious Prejudices, and Stereotypes in Byzantine Literature

Outline of an Ongoing Research Project

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Abstract In this article, the Author presents the theoretical framework for the research project *LiDoBIPH: A Linguistic Dossier of Byzantine Interreligious and Interconfessional Prejudice and Hatred*. The project examines Greek derogatory verbs and epithets used by Byzantine writers to describe Muslims and Latins. It focuses on terms found in Byzantine literature from the seventh to the mid-fourteenth century (anti-Islamic) and from the ninth to the early thirteenth century (anti-Latin). The framework includes an overview of the historiographical debate on identity and alterity in Byzantine studies and evaluates the concept of hate speech and its socio-psychological implications. It also proposes a distinction between literary invective and hate speech in Byzantine texts. Furthermore, the article discusses related studies, the adopted methodology, and the criteria for selecting the literary corpus, highlighting the project's potential contribution to Byzantine studies.

Keywords Alterity. Byzantine literature. Collective identity. Derogatory labels. Ethnic and religious stereotypes. Greek language. Hate speech. Interdisciplinarity. Invective. Latins. Methodology. Muslims. Theory.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 A Theoretical Framework. – 3 Hate Speech and Derogatory Language. – 4 Hate Speech in Byzantine Literature. – 5 Some Notes on Methodology.

1 Introduction

The present essay provides a theoretical framework for the research project entitled *A Linguistic Dossier of Byzantine Interreligious and Interconfessional Prejudice and Hatred* (hereinafter referred to as LiDoBIPH), which I am currently carrying out at Sapienza University of Rome.¹ The LiDoBIPH project consists of a linguistic and philological-literary investigation into Greek derogatory verbs and epithets – many of which can be classified as outright insults – employed by Byzantine writers to describe or refer to Muslims and Latins, that is to say, two of the major adversaries of the Byzantine empire in a religious context. Regarding the chronological frame, the study examines this specific typology of terms in Byzantine literature from the seventh to the mid-fourteenth century – as for the anti-Islamic dossier –, and from the ninth to the early thirteenth century –, as for the anti-Latin dossier.² These derogatory terms do not solely convey religious-based issues, nor are they limited to explicit religious polemics (e.g., theological-controversial writings). Instead, they are deeply rooted in, while also emphasising, the widespread perception of cultural, ethnic and ‘ethical’ differences between the Byzantines and the Others. Byzantine writers crafted the representations of Muslims and Latins through derogatory labels that conveyed identity-related concerns and aligned with political agendas. In Byzantine literary sources, ethnic, ethical, linguistic, religious aspects frequently intertwine and overlap, manifesting themselves in a rich array of words and expressions that recur with varying degrees of standardisation across works of all genres and periods.

This kind of language entirely fits within the sociological phenomenon known today as ‘hate speech’. Moreover, the cyclical and persistent nature of such ‘vocabulary’ of prejudice and hatred unveils a deeply ingrained and widespread repertoire of stereotypes regarding Muslims and Latins, and it demonstrates how Byzantine authors moulded the Greek language to convey and perpetuate such stereotypes.

1 This essay develops a specific topic discussed in the paper “Language and (Hate) Speech in Byzantine Literature: Towards a Linguistic Dossier of Religious Prejudice”, which I presented at the 24th International Congress of Byzantine Studies (Venice-Padua, 22-27 August 2022).

This project was awarded the ‘Seal of Excellence’ from the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions in both 2021 and 2022. In 2023, it was ultimately granted the Marie Skłodowska-Curie European Fellowship for Horizon 2022 (Call: HORIZON-MSCA-2022-PF-01). However, it is currently funded by the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PN-RR) (Missione 4 ‘Istruzione e ricerca’ Componente 2 ‘Dalla ricerca all’impresa’ - Investimento 1.2 - Finanziamento di progetti presentati da giovani ricercatori - Avviso n. 247 del 19/08/2022).

2 For the rationale behind the choice of these chronological boundaries, see *infra*, § 5.

Each lemma of this peculiar vocabulary, predominantly made up of insults, possesses its own etymology and historical trajectory, allowing for examination of both diachronic and synchronic perspectives. This approach highlights not only its morphological and semantic evolution over time but also its nuanced variations across different contexts of usage, as explored within the framework of Historical Semantics. In relation to contexts of usage, it is relevant to consider how several actors and dynamics involved in literary communication come into play, thereby opening the door to the application of hermeneutical tools of Discourse Analysis. It becomes evident that exploring this specific aspect of Byzantine works through an interdisciplinary approach can enrich our understanding of the rhetorical mechanisms employed to shape the literary image of Muslims and Latins as 'collective identities'. Moreover, it sheds light on the psychological and sociological implications of certain rhetorical strategies within Byzantine literature, aimed at both stigmatising adversaries and fostering consensus among literary and political elites.

2 A Theoretical Framework

As is well known, since the very beginning of the Byzantine era, literature has always been a powerful and effective *instrumentum* for disseminating the political, social and religious ideology of the emperor, as well as the cultural values of the ruling class. Indeed, in societies that pre-date the emergence of printing and typically modern forms of large-scale propaganda, strategies of persuasion gained momentum through the art of literary rhetoric and writing.³ While literary works were crafted by cultivated individuals, who constituted a distinct minority in Byzantine society, their intended audience was not always equally exclusive or confined. For instance, while readers of Byzantine historiography may be identified in "a small highly educated and self-contained cultural elite around the

³ Although "Byzantine propaganda was ubiquitous, embodied in objects, actions and words" - being enacted through different tools such as coinage, ceremonies, iconography, the use of colours, and so forth - "the word was certainly the most important means" (Kazhdan 1983, 13, 18). Koutrakou 1994 examined, among other things, the texts, themes, and impact of Byzantine imperial propaganda on 'public' opinion, with a special focus on two key audiences: the populace of Constantinople on the one hand, and the army on the other. For an examination of imperial propaganda through rhetoric during the empire of Nicaea, cf. Angelov 2007, 29-77. For some selected case studies on imperial propaganda through literary works, cf. e.g. Luzzi 1991; Odorico 2001; Paidas 2006; Koder 2008; Andriollo 2011; Spanos 2014; Kantaras 2021; Antonopoulou 2022. In close alignment with the reflections and approach outlined in my MSC proposal, Rotman 2022, esp. 201-8, 226-7, highlights the significance of rhetorical devices within Byzantine literature in shaping 'public' consensus and channelling the audience's animosity towards religious adversaries.

court and government at Constantinople”,⁴ in contrast, hagiographical writings,⁵ hymns, and homilies⁶ were primarily performed within monastic or public liturgical offices, being addressed to a much broader and diverse audience.

As predictable, when discussing the ideology propagated by a culturally or politically dominant group, one cannot overlook the notion of identity, which, albeit overused and contentious, remains readily understandable to everyone in its most prevalent meaning. Over the last decades, historians have vigorously debated the concept of identity in Byzantium. This includes enquiries into whether a singular or multiple Byzantine/Roman identity/ies existed, the manner in which it/they changed across centuries, the essential components thereof, the identities accessible to us through extant sources, and those that remain obscured; and still, whether Roman identity had a ‘national’, ethnic or social character, whether it was confined to a small elite in Constantinople or socially pervasive among the vast majority of the empire’s population.⁷ However, these questions have turned into a fashionable academic dispute, yielding a plethora of studies, which unveil a multifaceted narrative, intermittently intricate and at times perplexing, marked by a scarcity of certainties, scant coherence, and a profusion of nuances and exceptions. Nonetheless, in general terms, it can be stated that Byzantine identity is no longer regarded by scholars as a fixed and immutable conglomerate of characteristics and modes over time. Instead, it is seen as a dynamic phenomenon sensitive to contexts and contacts, whose ‘ingredients’ can vary in their balances and mutual (sometimes, hybrid or contradictory) relations.

In this paper, I shall refrain from engaging in such a heated historiographical debate, opting instead to initiate the discussion from a self-evident premise, namely that, in general, Byzantine literates consistently espoused certain ideals and widely acknowledged certain ideological or cultural stances – often linked to, or influenced by, the imperial office. This array of common beliefs, attitudes, and

⁴ Croke 2010, 53. On audiences and functions of Byzantine historiography, cf. also Lilie 2014, 201, 209; Neville 2018, 17-21.

⁵ On the socially differentiated audience of Byzantine hagiographical literature, cf. Efthymiades, Kalogeras (2014), with further bibliography.

⁶ Cf. e.g. Antonopoulou 2022, 101-2, 120. Various contributions are dedicated, among other topics, to the recipients of Byzantine homilies in Cunningham, Allen 1998.

⁷ To offer an overview of the extensive literature dedicated to this topic, hereafter, I will list publications from the 2000s onwards, while other select studies will be cited as needed throughout this article: Vryonis 1999; Koder 2000; 2003; 2011; 2012; De Boel 2003; Kaldellis 2007; 2017; 2019; Page 2008; Rapp 2008; Malatras 2011; Malamut 2014; Papadopoulou 2014; Stouraitis 2014; Smarnakis 2015; Vashcheva 2016; several Byzantine papers in Pohl et al. 2018; Durak, Jevtić 2019a; Steiris 2020; Müller 2022; Stewart et al. 2022.

political, ethnic, or cultural 'markers' is evidenced within literary compositions and, presumably, was embraced by both the authors and their target audience. Besides, this set of elements was not exempt from diachronic changes, and we may rightly understand it as an expression of a dynamic 'collective identity'.⁸ Indeed, this communication act through literature involved, at a minimum, two indispensable participants. Firstly, the Byzantine 'literate elite', denoting with this the whole cohort of learned writers and readers.⁹ Secondly, a variable spectrum of recipients, occasionally confined to a select audience, while, at other times, encompassing even the illiterate masses. As mentioned earlier, even the latter could enjoy certain literary pieces through oral performances during liturgical ceremonies and public speeches. However, whether such a collective identity holds a real or fictional character is a separate consideration: rather than objective, it appears to reflect an intellectual construct, with a discernible degree of intentionality and self-consciousness.¹⁰ In this case, the notion of collective identity approaches that of (dominant) ideology, if we understand the latter as:

particular programmatic sets of values and assumptions, bundles of ideas that evolved in order to legitimate and justify a particular order of things – usually a political order. In this context, ideology becomes entangled with 'identity' – that is, collective attachment to a politically organised community which is the outcome of people's adherence to a set of dominant operative ideas and values.¹¹

8 One of the earliest scholarly works to examine how Byzantines portrayed themselves and their collective identity was Koder 2011. A theoretical elucidation of the contemporary concept of collective identity, drawn from sociology and applied to Byzantine studies, can also be found in Papadopoulou 2014, 161-2. This paper examines the self-concept of the Byzantines during the first half of the thirteenth century as delineated by the names Ῥωμαῖος, Ἕλλην, and Γραικός. For a thorough exploration of Byzantine collective identity in literary sources from the middle-Byzantine period, cf. Papadopoulou 2015, 11-59 (detailed analysis of contemporary theories of 'collective identity' and 'nation'); from the late-Byzantine period, cf., e.g., Steiris 2020. On the employment of these categories in modern and contemporary historiography on the European, Byzantine, and Arab Middle Ages, cf. Mavroudi 2022, translated into German and further developed in Mavroudi 2023. The category of collective identity offers greater suitability when compared to the more specific and contentious concept of 'national identity', cf. e.g. Papadopoulou 2014, 158-9, 162; Steiris 2020, 2-3; Jovanović 2023, 298; Stouraitis 2023.

9 In referring to the 'literate elite' here, I am consciously alluding to one of the many elites identifiable in Byzantium, which can sometimes overlap with one another, cf. Kaldellis 2017, 177. For example, in the eleventh century, the intellectual elite partly overlapped with the social elite, as many of its members held privileged positions and exerted political influence, even over the emperors, cf. e.g. Bernard 2014, 175.

10 Cf. e.g. Smythe 1996, 29.

11 Haldon, Stouraitis 2022, 9.

A dominant discourse of identification becomes apparent in those passages where Byzantine writers depict the Byzantines and the Others within the framework of a formalised, if not stereotyped, polarity.¹² The issues of otherness and alterity in Byzantium have been explored in political, legal, and socio-economic terms, as well as through the lens of ethnography,¹³ but, overall, to a lesser extent if compared to the theme of Roman/Byzantine identity. On the other hand, many authors have focused on Byzantine literary views and perceptions of their neighbours/adversaries, especially on Muslims (Arabic or Turkish as well, depending on chronology)¹⁴ and Latins.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the dynamics of identity construction “as a response to the Other and the process of ‘othering’” have not yet received much attention.¹⁶ Therefore, one of the objectives of the LiDoBIPH project is precisely to analyse a still underexplored process of ‘othering’: the practice of hate speech in Byzantine literature against Muslims and Latins, when perceived as Others on religious grounds and beyond.

For our purposes, it is noteworthy that Dion C. Smythe was among the first to employ sociological theories of ‘deviancy’ in order to analyse the depiction of outsiders (by gender, religion, ethnicity or social position – *taxis*) in the works of some prominent Byzantine authors between the eleventh and the twelfth centuries.¹⁷ In Smythe’s studies, literature is interpreted as a reflection of the prevailing Byzantine elite ideology, fervently engaged in constructing or defending models of conformity against instances of non-conformity (both within and beyond Byzantine society), where non-conformity also represents one facet of otherness. Such an interpretation of Byzantine literary works underpins LiDoBIPH’s approach to its sources.

¹² As pointed out by Koder 2011, 69, a “separation of auto- and heterostereotypes is impossible, because the self-sight of individual or collective identity becomes clear-cut only by comparison with the ‘Other’, be it in similarities or in contrasts; it is formed in reaction to the behaviour or the policy of others”; cf. also Müller 2022, 6-9; Durak, Jevtić 2019b, 10-21.

¹³ Cf., e.g., the various articles by Angelike E. Laiou from the 1990s, posthumously collected in Laiou 2012; Kaldellis 2013.

¹⁴ For the perspective relevant here, I confine myself to citing, e.g., Jeffreys 1986; 2004; Koutrakou 1993; 2009; Letsios 2009; Sahas 1997; 1998; Ducellier 2001, 136-8, 272-6 (on Byzantine stereotypes regarding Muslims); Stavrakos 2013; Leszka 2019; Hassan 2013.

¹⁵ As for the image of Latins in Byzantine literature, cf. e.g. Hunger 1987; Schreiner 1992; Hörandner 1993; Gounaridis 1994; Schmitt 1997; Kazhdan 2001; Jeffreys, Jeffreys 2001; Kolbaba 2001; Spadaro 2008; Koder 2002; Kislinger 2008; Messis 2011; Tounta 2010 (limited to the period from 1017-18 until 1086); Hinterberger 2011; 2022; Papadopoulou 2012; Cupane 2015; Mitsiou 2015; Pelech 2016; Neocleous 2020; Szegvári 2020; Müller 2022.

¹⁶ Durak, Jevtić 2019b, 9.

¹⁷ Smythe 1992; 1996; 1997.

The efficacy of these narratives of the Self and the Others, and the extent to which they were received and embraced by all subjects of the empire beyond the literate elite centred around the capital and the imperial court, can be a matter of discussion. Similarly, one should not assume that Byzantine literate elite had any real intention or interest in promoting its worldview outside its own narrow circle.¹⁸ Nonetheless, the collective identity surfacing in Byzantine literature, although hardly representative of the entire Byzantine society, clearly embodies a self-perception – or, at least, a desire for self-representation – of the literate elite.

At this juncture, one might also wonder about the extent to which the ideological propaganda disseminated in Byzantine literature effectively guided the thoughts of its readers and listeners, influencing events and behaviours. To this question, a possible answer comes from a recent essay by Dionysios Stathakopoulos on violence and the formation of collective identity in late twelfth-century Byzantium.¹⁹ The implicit assumption from which the scholar initiates his enquiry is that one of the key components of Byzantine collective identity is undoubtedly the Christian (Orthodox) faith, although, as underlined by several scholars, the ‘religious marker’ was neither sufficient on its own, nor the most important one for every Byzantine in every period.²⁰ From the late eleventh century onwards, in the formation of a Byzantine collective identity, a substantial role is accorded to the dynamic of interactions and conflicts with Westerners, notably the Normans and the Crusaders: “Despite (or perhaps as a result of) close proximity, the self-perception of each side [*scil.* Greeks and Latins] crystallised into a form that was unlike, or even the polar opposite of, that Other”.²¹ Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that the Byzantine identity discourse within the political-intellectual elite began to emphasise ethno-cultural connotations, alongside religious divergences, as a result of the escalating conflictual relations with the Venetians and, more broadly, the Latins. Naturally, this emphasis gained even greater significance – at times taking on a mythologised character – after the events of 1204.

18 Cf. Smythe 1992, 15, 20-1; 1996, 34-6; 1997, 230-1; Stouraitis 2014, 197, 204, 212; Müller 2022, 7-8, 42-3. On this topic, cf. also Koder 2022.

19 Stathakopoulos 2022.

20 The role of the Christian religion, particularly in comparison to Islam, and that of orthodoxy – in contrast, for example, to the Latin faith – in shaping Byzantine identity, is a topic naturally addressed in nearly all the publications listed in fn. 7. According to Paul Magdalino, “[t]he Orthodox faith certainly meant more to the majority of Byzantines than the other components of their identity, their Roman imperial tradition and their Hellenic culture” (Magdalino 2010, 22). However, as recently highlighted by Jovanović 2023, 299, in late Byzantium, “religion gradually stopped being one of the fundamental criteria for distinguishing Byzantines from other (above all, Western) Christians”; cf. also Steiris 2020, 10 (references to Trapezuntius’ statements); Müller 2022, 23-4.

21 Stathakopoulos 2022, 269.

In tackling this combination of ethno-religious differences between Greeks and Latins, Stathakopoulos has drawn inspiration from the theoretical and methodological reflections of sociologist Rogers Brubaker and political scientist David D. Laitin on ethnic violence.²² Focusing on two bloody events preceding the sack of Constantinople in 1204 – namely, the massacre of the Latins in Constantinople (1182) and the sack and occupation of Thessalonike by the Normans (1185) – Stathakopoulos has examined the relationship between (actually perpetrated) violence, as described in the sources (Eustathios of Thessalonike and William of Tyre, the latter providing an account only for the massacre of the Latins), and the process of collective identity formation.²³ Stathakopoulos emphasises that these two pivotal events – which are often linked together and seen as a precursor of the fourth Crusade in scholarly literature – are, in fact, quite different.²⁴ The massacre of the resident Latins in Constantinople, instigated by the usurper Andronikos Komnenos, is interpreted by Stathakopoulos as “a case of violence meted out to a minority group with a distinct ethnic and religious background [...] by a mercenary force and an urban mob representing the dominant ethnic group of the empire”.²⁵ Conversely, Thessalonike was primarily targeted for strategic reasons and as a lucrative urban centre for looting.²⁶ Nevertheless, bringing into focus the ethno-religious ‘veining’ of such enacted violence offers valuable insights into its process and manifestations.²⁷ According to Stathakopoulos,

we are confronted with a wide range of violent acts that transcend the usual repertoire of violence in warfare. They constitute instances of ritualized violence encompassing the violation or desecration of sacred spaces, times, or objects, as well as the manifestation of power through disrespect and humiliation, including upon the bodies of the ethno-religious Other.²⁸

Indeed, in comparing the sacrilegious acts of violence committed by both the Byzantines against the Latins and the Normans against the inhabitants of Thessalonike, Stathakopoulos highlights the

²² Brubaker, Laitin 1998.

²³ For insights into why the scholar finds the acts of violence described in the referenced sources credible, cf. Stathakopoulos 2022, 274.

²⁴ Cf. Stathakopoulos 2022, 270, 272. On the accounts on the massacre of the Latins in Constantinople in 1182, cf. also Müller 2022, 113-20.

²⁵ Stathakopoulos 2022, 272.

²⁶ Cf. Stathakopoulos 2022, 273, 277-8.

²⁷ Cf. Stathakopoulos 2022, 277-8.

²⁸ Stathakopoulos 2022, 276.

ethnoreligious manifestations of prejudice, if not outright hatred. As he suggests, some of these acts, despite arising from opposite perspectives, “clearly echo items found in the popular literature of prejudice, for example, the lists of errors of the Latins circulated in Byzantium”.²⁹ It is as if “the discourse leapt off the page and into the streets”.³⁰ Naturally – cautions the scholar –, the correspondence between the acts of violence and the motifs found in the literature of prejudice cannot be definitively linked in a direct cause-and-effect relationship. Nonetheless, such literary motifs might be regarded “as a narrative strategy to reinforce the discourse of difference”.³¹ Indeed, the culturalist analyses of ethnic violence generally characterise the latter as “culturally constructed, discursively mediated, socially saturated, and ritually regulated”.³² This issue pertains to the cultural construction of fear, a theme widely discussed, for example, in social psychology. As explained by Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin:

one major focus of attention [of culturalist analyses] has been on the cultural construction of fear, on rhetorical processes, symbolic resources, and representational forms through which a demonized, dehumanized, or otherwise threatening ethnically defined ‘other’ has been constructed. [...] Once such ethnically focused fear is in place, ethnic violence no longer seems random or meaningless but all too horrifyingly meaningful.³³

Moreover, the culturalist approach to ethnic violence has acknowledged the crucial role of elites “in engendering ethnic insecurity through highly selective and often distorted narratives and representations, the deliberate planting of rumors, and so on”.³⁴

At this juncture, beyond the effective capacity of the discourse of difference to transcend written texts and impact historical events, it is crucial to recognise the presence of another type of violence, which resides within language, words, and literature. Whether such verbal violence preceded, accompanied, or followed physical acts of violence, thereby mutually reinforcing each other, is a distinct and

²⁹ On the Byzantine lists of Latin errors, cf. Kolbaba 2000.

³⁰ Stathakopoulos 2022, 279.

³¹ Stathakopoulos 2022, 280.

³² Brubaker, Laitin 1998, 441.

³³ Brubaker, Laitin 1998, 442.

³⁴ Brubaker, Laitin 1998, 442. On the cultural establishment of ‘Islamophobia’ in Byzantine society, cf. Merantzas 2013. Regarding the purported ‘endemic’ Byzantine animosity against the Latins, cf., e.g., Garland 1992, esp. 34-8; Simpson 1999, 64-82; Neocleous 2013; 2020; Müller 2022, 450-61.

challenging question. This question involves the so-called performative and 'perlocutionary' dimension of hate speech,³⁵ a topic extensively debated in contemporary societies across diverse fields of study, both theoretically and in relation to dramatic acts of violence stemming from intolerance and hatred. Therefore, it is worth considering the potential insights and contributions that adopting the interpretative perspective of hate speech could provide to this specific aspect, which, as previously noted,³⁶ embodies a process of 'othering'.

3 Hate Speech and Derogatory Language

Hate speech is a topic extensively investigated across diverse disciplines including sociology, law, psychology, and philosophy of language. Its notion encompasses a diverse array of verbal or non-verbal manifestations of hatred – words/phrases, as well as images, symbols, caricatures, and gestures –, intentionally wielded in any language to strike, wound, ridicule, or humiliate the Others. However, hate speech can also be practised unintentionally. Such linguistic devices frequently serve to virtually confine the Others to a state of inferiority, control, or subordination. It goes without saying that the most direct and conspicuous manifestation of hate speech takes shape through insults.³⁷

Hate speech is primarily directed towards collective entities (e.g., ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender, sexual groups) or individuals who are seen as representatives of those entities. It specifically concerns, therefore, the social dimension of verbal violence. The identification of social groups often coalesces into an entrenched litany of ideas, stereotypes and prejudices, i.e., characteristics of the groups that are either real or perceived as such. In this framework, language plays a fundamental role in creating, shaping, and modifying identities, both individual and collective, and can thus be extensively employed in constructing or consolidating the discourse of difference.

³⁵ See *infra*, § 3.

³⁶ See *supra* in this section.

³⁷ For a discussion of the various definitions, forms and effects of hate speech, cf. e.g. Neu 2008, 153-61 and *passim*; Waldron 2012; Brown 2017a; 2017b; Mihajlova et al. 2013; Kareem al-Utbi 2019, esp. 21-3; Bianchi 2014b; 2015; 2021; Cepollaro 2015; Brambilla, Crestani 2021, 86-98; Fronzi 2023. Vergani et al. (2024) underscore, among other things, how definitions and measurement tools within the research on hate speech tend to focus more on ethnic and religious identities (e.g., racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia) compared to sexual, gender, and disability-related identities. Finally, when discussing hate speech, one cannot overlook the seminal work of Butler 1997.

As is known, in contemporary society hate speech represents one of the foremost plagues afflicting social networks.³⁸ An emblematic example is provided by the former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's tweet about Emmanuel Macron, Olaf Scholz, and Mario Draghi's visit to Zelensky on 16th June 2022: "European fans of frogs, liverwurst, and spaghetti love visiting Kiev". Medvedev's post resorted to short and pointed labels, based on ethno-cultural trivial commonplaces concerning alleged eating habits. This episode naturally needs to be placed in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which has exacerbated the dichotomy between East and West (presented as a political, military, and cultural threat), Russian orthodoxy vs. Catholicism or other Orthodox Churches. However, in a certain way, it apparently echoes the typical Greek-Byzantine way of crafting a verbal attack against the Others, in this case, the Westerners. French, German, and Italian people are treated as 'unified entities', as 'blocks of people who are unlike' Russians, to paraphrase, respectively, Alexander Kazhdan's and Dionysios Stathakopoulos' remarks on Byzantine-Latin relations in the twelfth century.³⁹

Returning to the notion of hate speech, as philosophers of language point out, language goes beyond merely mirroring reality (descriptive function). Rather, it can actively shape and mould it (performative function).⁴⁰ The performative function becomes more effective when, through speech acts, language is utilised by a dominant elite or a group of power.⁴¹ In this case, it can also assume a 'normative' character, ordering reality according to specific patterns and labels, which reflect the dominant ideology.⁴²

Words have the potential to inflict harm, akin the stones thrown to cause injury, and not infrequently they trigger acts of violence. This represents the primary and most obvious goal of hate speech. Nonetheless, there is a second dimension, more relevant to our purposes, which could be defined as 'propagandistic'. It emerges when language is aimed at affirming a specific identity – be it political, cultural, ethnic, or religious – and allegiance to the dominant group

38 Studies on this matter are plentiful. Restricting ourselves to those published in more recent years, cf., e.g., Nazmine Khan et al. 2021 (on religious or gender-based attacks); Castaño-Pulgarín et al. 2021; Paasch-Colberg 2021; Pacelli 2021 (with several articles focused on this topic); Sheth et al. 2022; Gracia-Calandín et al. 2023; Lupu et al. 2023; cf. also the monographs by Bromell 2022 and Ermida 2023.

39 Cf. Kazhdan 2001, 86; Stathakopoulos 2022, 269.

40 A classical reference is Austin 1962; cf. also Bianchi 2014a.

41 Cf., e.g., Weiss, Wodak 2003, 14.

42 From this perspective, the words expressing hate speech can also be considered within the semiotic category of 'ideologems', understood as "words that convey ideological marks" (Segre 1988, 119) as well as "segnali o indizi della presenza di una posizione ideologica o discorsiva [nel testo]" (Bernardelli 2010, 12); cf. also Smythe 1992, 101.

vis-à-vis a discriminated or marginalised counterpart. In this case, hate speech clearly assumes the role of propaganda, because it 'publicises' discriminatory assertions by presenting them as widespread and objective, thereby legitimising them. Consequently, hate speech is employed not solely for the purpose of injuring the Others, but also to relegate them to roles of inferiority and subordination, stigmatising and dehumanising them. In such performative effect, hate speech goes beyond the mere expression of hostility, derision, or contempt towards the Others: it undertakes a form of 'proselytism', inciting discrimination and fostering violence.

In this regard, some empirical studies have shown how hate speech directed towards a particular social group can also affect individuals who do not belong to the targeted group. When these individuals witness hate speech – as bystanders, listeners, or readers –, both their perception of the 'victims'⁴³ and their self-conception and behaviour can be altered.⁴⁴ Hence, the use of hate speech can be aimed at directly harming the targeted group, as well as at encouraging others to share a certain derogatory or discriminatory perspective on that group. As a result, hate speech reinforces individuals' adherence to the dominant viewpoint, strengthens their own identity, widens the gap between them and the Others, and fosters polarisation.⁴⁵ From this perspective, hate speech can certainly – and most of the time does – tell us more about the speaker than the target of hatred.⁴⁶ The philosopher Lynne Tirrell, known for her research on the utilisation of denigratory epithets during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, where the Hutu targeted the Tutsi minority ethnic group, elucidates the mechanisms (especially violence acts) that such terms can trigger, when directed at human beings. She asserts that

using such terms helps to construct a strengthened 'us' for the speakers, weakens the targets, and thus reinforces or even re-aligns social relations [...]. Such speech acts establish and reinforce a system of permissions and prohibitions that fuel social hierarchy.⁴⁷

As earlier mentioned, hate speech is pervasive in the realm of social networks, where it takes on a special emphasis due to two phenomena which data scientists have termed the 'confirmation bias'

⁴³ Cf. e.g. Greenberg, Pyszczynski 1985; Kirkland 1987.

⁴⁴ Cf. e.g. Carnaghi et al. 2011; Fasoli et al. 2012; 2015.

⁴⁵ Cf. Bianchi 2018, 192-6.

⁴⁶ In light of this, one could speak of 'forms of hatred in the first-person plural', cf. Moss 2003.

⁴⁷ Tirrell 2012, 174-5. Cf. also Tirrell 2013.

and the 'echo chamber effect'. In disseminating and selecting information on the web, the confirmation bias represents the innate human inclination to seek out information that reaffirms pre-existing beliefs.⁴⁸ Indeed, despite the vast array of available information on the internet, online users tend to segregate into 'bubbles', each characterised by its own narrative and perspective. Such 'bubbles' are commonly referred to as 'echo chambers'.⁴⁹ Within the latter, individuals who share the same interests converge, selectively consume information, engage in discussions, and bolster their beliefs around a collectively accepted worldview. The dissemination of information is steered by both confirmation bias and 'homophily', the tendency for individuals to associate and create connections with those who are like them. Consequently, users gravitate towards polarised groups whose members share a common narrative, and within these echo chambers, they assimilate information that aligns with their worldview.⁵⁰

At this point, one might venture to enquire whether these concepts, drawn from other disciplinary domains and concisely presented here, could find applicability, or suggest parallels within our own research context, potentially offering a valuable interpretative framework. Let us start with the initial observation that gave rise to the idea for this project. The present research focuses on the extensive use of derogatory nouns, adjectives, and verbs by Byzantine authors against two specific targets: Muslims and Latins. These lexical elements are recurrent and pervasive within the Byzantine 'literary system', where citations, allusions, metaphrases, and other re-writing techniques engender an endless interplay of linguistic and lexical echoes.⁵¹ Consequently, derogatory terms often con-

⁴⁸ Cf. e.g. Nickerson 1998; Oswald, Grosjean 2004.

⁴⁹ Cf. e.g. Del Vicario et al. 2016; Cinelli et al. 2021b.

⁵⁰ On the behavioural tendencies of online users within toxic debates and in relation to hate speech on the Internet, cf. e.g. Cinelli et al. 2021a; Dyda, Paleta 2023; Avale et al. 2024.

⁵¹ Interestingly enough, Kareem al-Utbi (2019, 33), focusing specifically on hate speech against Muslims on Facebook, has demonstrated the difficulty in accurately assessing the extent of posts published by online users against Islam, precisely because they are "being overused again and again on many other pages on Facebook". Furthermore, Kareem al-Utbi has noted that recurrent issues in the hate posts against Muslims pertain to their beliefs and religious and disciplinary practices (e.g., the Quran, the mosque, veiled women, prayer performance, and *halal*). Should such a juxtaposition appear daring to some, I would draw attention to the study by Palermo (2020). In this paper, the author compares the linguistic expression of insults in medieval Tuscan texts with selected examples of hate speech from an online case study. The analysis underscores, among other things, the enduring stability of semantic domains related to offense. According to the author, such stability would illustrate the persistence of premodern cultural elements and their resurgence through the remediation offered by social media platforms.

tribute to the formation of a formulaic and standardised language that, alongside rarer or less conventional words, constitutes a vocabulary of hatred.

Without intending to draw forced and anachronistic parallels, one might enquire as to the purpose or, at the very least, the unintended effect of this pervasive hateful language within Byzantine works. Referring back to the aforementioned discussion, it can be inferred that the primary objective of Byzantine hate speech was not to 'harm' the polemical targets, namely Muslims or Latins. In fact, the vast majority of such writings were intended to be read/heard – and could only be understood – by other Byzantines. Therefore, one might then consider whether the propagandistic function of hate speech comes into play, as well as the effect of consciously or unconsciously solidifying the readers'/listeners' allegiance to a dominant group, namely the Byzantine intellectual elite and its particular viewpoint. In this respect, and to make what may seem a rather bold analogy, but which I believe will prove effective, it can be argued that the Byzantine 'literary system' functioned in a similar way to the echo chamber described above.

Lastly, it would be beneficial to offer a brief additional clarification, or rather, to articulate a desideratum for future research. In general, the study of hate speech in Byzantine literature against Muslims and Latins (but also against other polemical targets, such as Jews or Armenians) would greatly benefit from the application of various methodological approaches and interpretative perspectives offered by Discourse Analysis, including, among others, Historical Discourse Analysis (HDS, also termed 'New Philology')⁵² and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).⁵³ The application of these perspectives and method-

⁵² The Discourse Analysis has been employed across diverse fields of ancient studies, undergoing a significant development in the domains of Biblical exegesis and linguistics, cf., e.g., Porter, Carson 1995; Porter, Reed 1999; Lee 2010; Runge 2010; Varner 2010; Stovell 2012, 137-52, 183-98, 224-41, 258-68, 281-93; Scacewater 2020; Starwalt 2020; Kurschner 2022; Porter, O' Donnell 2024. Furthermore, there are instances of theoretical reflections on and attempts to apply Discourse Analysis to patristic texts, cf., e.g., Perdicoyianni-Paléologou 2002; Osseforth 2017; Gomola 2018; Hovorun 2020, as well as to the *Acts of the Councils*, cf. e.g. Amirav 2015. In this respect, I also highlight the still unpublished doctoral thesis by Gaetano Spampinato, *Les pratiques rituelles comme marqueurs d'identités: la construction de la 'ritualité hérétique' dans le Panarion d'Épiphane de Salamine* (Université de Fribourg, 2023). This work analyses how late antique heresiologists, particularly Epiphanius of Salamis and his *Panarion*, constructed the image of heretics through their descriptions of (real or imagined) rituals from the fourth century onwards. This enquiry into ritual practices as presented in heresiological texts has revealed, according to Spampinato, the development of a "heresiological model", which influenced both late antique and later authors in how they portrayed Otherness (e.g., John of Damascus and the Ishmaelites – the Muslims).

⁵³ Cf., e.g., Gee 2011, 8-10, 68-9; Brinton 2001; Van Dijk 2001; cf. also Wodak, Reisigl 2009. Particularly interesting in this context is the usefulness of a socio-cognitive

ologies would facilitate the analysis of units of language higher than single (hate) words or sentences, considering how authors used those units of language to accomplish communicative purposes. In essence, it would contribute to establishing a more profound comprehension, across various levels, of how Byzantine writers employed writing to carry out actions, construct collective identities, and influence related perceptions. For instance, from the realm of CDA, the analytical model developed by Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl could be beneficial, describing types of discursive strategies employed for both positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation.⁵⁴

However, a single scholar could conduct such an analysis on a single work or, at most, on a limited corpus of writings, for which there may already be, ideally, a modern translation (a circumstance not at all guaranteed in Byzantine studies). Instead, as previously stated, LiDoBIPH aims to catalogue and analyse minimal units of language (lexemes), which are relatively easier to identify within a much larger corpus of sources among those digitised and lemmatised in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG) Online*. It goes without saying that such words need to be examined in their semantic context, paying attention to recurring phrases, manners of speech and argumentative patterns. The *TLG*, indeed, facilitates the investigation of co-occurrences and, consequently, makes the study of multi-layered concepts particularly fruitful. Consequently, historical-semantic analysis will be complemented by quantitative investigation.⁵⁵

4 Hate Speech in Byzantine Literature

The understanding of hate speech has also evolved in the modern debate on the dangers associated with unbridled and reckless freedom of speech.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, the question itself is not novel, paralleling concerns such as those surrounding the practice of *παρρησία*

approach to critical discourse studies, when analysing collective identities, highlighted by Koller 2012.

⁵⁴ For example, Wodak and Reisigl (2001, 585) distinguish, among other things, 'nomination strategies', which "construct and represent social actors [...] via membership categorization devices, including making reference by tropes, such as naturalizing and depersonalizing metaphors and metonymy, as well as by synecdoche", and 'predicational strategies', realised, for instance, "as stereotypical attributions of negative and positive traits in the linguistic form of implicit or explicit predicates".

⁵⁵ For some experimental computational approaches to Historical Semantics and History of Concepts, cf., e.g., Cimino et al. 2015; Wevers, Koolen 2020; Perrone et al. 2021. For some case studies focused on single words, cf., e.g., Schwandt 2015; Geelhaar 2015; Keersmaekers, Van Hal 2021.

⁵⁶ For example, on the relationship between freedom of speech and religious hate speech within European anti-Islamic rhetoric, cf. Howard 2018.

'freedom of speech' in ancient democratic Athens.⁵⁷ For instance, it appears that a problem akin - but *not* identical - to our today's issue of hate speech existed and was even legally regulated in ancient Athens. This would be evidenced, for example, by the γραφή ὕβρεως 'suit for slander', which permitted the prosecution of individuals who had committed acts of *hybris* against another person.⁵⁸ Unlike hate speech in its technical sense, which targets a group based on shared feelings of alterity and hostility, practices such as defamation and false accusation focus on personal grievances against an individual. However, the definition of *hybris* in this kind of accusation, namely whether it encompassed solely physical harm and actions or it extended to disrespectful speech that could bring dishonour upon the victim, remains unclear.⁵⁹ Such kinds of verbal attacks abound in classical Greek literature. The Greeks referred to them using a diverse vocabulary:⁶⁰ αἰσχρολογία 'shameful speech', βλασφημία 'defamation, slander', διαβολή 'false accusation, slander, prejudice', σκώμματα 'jests, jibes', λοιδορία 'railing, abuse, reproach', κακολογία / κακηγορία 'evil-speaking, abuse, slander', ὕβρις 'deliberate affront to another's honour', or the verb κωμωδέω 'satirise, lampoon, ridicule'.⁶¹ Particularly interesting is

57 Cf., e.g., Sluiter, Rosen 2004; Saxonhouse 2006; Bejan 2019, esp. 98-102. However, this topic has also been investigated in relation to the Latin late antique and early medieval period, cf. Van Renswoude 2019.

58 Cf. Demosthenes, *In Midiam*, 32: "Ἰστε δῆπου τοῦθ' ὅτι τῶν θεσμοθετῶν τούτων οὐδενὶ θεσμοθέτης ἔστ' ὄνομα, ἀλλ' ὅτιδῆποθ' ἐκάστω. ἂν μὲν τοίνυν ἰδιώτην ὄντα τιν' αὐτῶν ὕβρισήν τις ἢ κακῶς εἴπῃ, γραφὴν ὕβρεως καὶ δίκην κακηγορίας ἰδίαν φεύξεται, ἐὰν δὲ θεσμοθέτην, ἄτιμος ἔσται καθάπαξ. διὰ τί; ὅτι τοὺς νόμους ἤδη ὁ τοῦτο ποιῶν προσυβρίζει καὶ τὸν ὑμέτερον κοινὸν στέφανον καὶ τὸ τῆς πόλεως ὄνομα· ὁ γὰρ θεσμοθέτης οὐδενὸς ἀνθρώπων ἔστ' ὄνομα, ἀλλὰ τῆς πόλεως "You know of course that of the judges who sit in this court none has the name of Judge, but each has some name of his own. Therefore if a man is guilty of assault or slander against anyone of them in his private capacity, he will stand his trial on an indictment for assault or in a suit for slander; but if he assails him as judge, he will incur total disfranchisement. Why so? Because at once by the mere act he is outraging your laws, your public crown of office, and the name that belongs to the State, for Judge is not a private name but a state-title" (transl. by Vince 1935, 27).

59 Saxonhouse 2006, 28 fn. 23. On this law, cf., e.g., Fisher 1992.

60 Cf. Kamen 2020, 9-10.

61 In Christian Greek, through the verb κωμωδέω, the noun κωμωδία came to signify not just the theatrical genre but also 'derision, mockery', cf. Lampe 1961, s.v. Alternatively, see the brief but famous passage in Niketas Choniates, *History*, 19.4 (τὸ δέ γε ἀντίπαλον ἐν ἀσελγείαις ἦν καὶ τρυφαῖς, καὶ τούτων ταῖς ἀσέμνοισι μάλιστα καὶ τῶν Ῥωμαϊκῶν ἐν κωμωδίᾳ ἔθων "The enemy reveled in licentious and wanton behavior, and, resorting to indecent actions, they ridiculed Roman customs" [transl. by Magoulias 1984, 326]), ed. van Dieten 1975, 594, ll. 83-5, where κωμωδία recounts the parody of Greek customs by the Latins during the sack of Constantinople in 1204. Additionally, the same meaning of mocking and ridiculing is also conveyed by various other verbs, such as βομβάζω, διασύρω, ἐμπαίζω, χλευάζω, μωκάομαι, σκώπτω, τωθάζω, and so forth. Some other words take on a special significance or context of usage in Christian and

the term *κακολογία*: *κακολόγος* is a 'slander', a person who speaks badly of other people.⁶² The corresponding legal term, however, is *κακηγόρος*,⁶³ whose verbal root specifically implies public speech. At least in the fourth century BC, the Athenian laws prohibited to use certain words, known as *ἀπόρρητα* 'not to be spoken', to deliver slanderous speeches in public spaces, to disgrace the dead, and to disparage official authorities.⁶⁴

As observed, a wide range of phenomena and topics potentially linked to hate speech have been explored in classical studies, with particular attention paid to the category of insults.⁶⁵ One can also find similar attempts to trace this phenomenon in medieval literatures.⁶⁶ However, in the field of Byzantine studies, the topic of hate speech is still understudied.⁶⁷ When examining pre-modern liter-

Byzantine Greek: among these, *δυσφημέω* / *δυσφημία* and *καταλαλέω* / *καταλαλία*, respectively brought to my attention by Luisa Andriollo and Martin Hinterberger (whom I thank) and which I intend to investigate in another publication. However, on the semantic polyvalence of *δυσφημία* in ancient Greek, cf., e.g., Sandin 2018. On *καταλαλέω* / *καταλαλία*, understood as the slandering of one's neighbour (e.g., due to envy), a sin stigmatised by the Fathers of the Desert, cf. already Wortley 2013, 732-5; cf. also Iliopoulos 2021, 71, with reference to John Klimax's list of vices, which also included *καταλαλία* (John Klimax, *Ladder of Paradise*, 10, PG 88, col. 845-9).

62 Arist., *Rh.*, 1384b, also regards writers of comedy as slanderers, as they often depict the shortcomings and vices of their fellow individuals: *ἐξαγγελτικοὶ δὲ οἱ τε ἡδίκημένοι, διὰ τὸ παρατηρεῖν, καὶ οἱ κακολόγοι: εἴτε γὰρ καὶ τοὺς μὴ ἀμαρτάνοντας, εἴ τι μᾶλλον τοὺς ἀμαρτάνοντας. καὶ οἷς ἡ διατριβὴ ἐπὶ ταῖς τῶν πέλας ἀμαρτίας, οἷον χλευασταῖς καὶ κωμωδοποιοῖς. κακολόγοι γὰρ πῶς οὗτοι καὶ ἐξαγγελτικοὶ* "Now those who are inclined to gossip are those who have suffered wrong, because they always have their eyes upon us; and slanderers, because, if they traduce the innocent, still more will they traduce the guilty. And before those who spend their time in looking for their neighbors' faults, for instance, mockers and comic poets; for they are also in a manner slanderers and gossips" (transl. by Freese 1926, 217).

63 Cf., e.g., Dover 1997, 104-5.

64 For precise references to the sources, cf. Volt 2007, 102. On the relationship between freedom of speech and *κακηγορία*, cf. Guieu-Coppolani 2014.

65 In addition to Kamen 2020, which focuses on insults in daily life, some other studies have put emphasis on invective as a literary genre or trope. Most interestingly, Rosen 2007 distinguishes between the fictional essence of literary mockery and its real-life (potentially harmful) counterpart. The significance of the context (where and when an insult is delivered, by whom, and against whom) in determining the effects and degree of severity of Greek insults has been highlighted by Ressel 1998 and Bremmer 2000. Worman 2008 examines the insults directed at the mouth and its associated activities (i.e., eating, drinking, sex, talking) in classical Athens; more recently, cf. Lateiner 2017. Finally, I would like to draw attention to the oral presentation by Emiliano J. Buis, entitled "Hate Speech and its Limits in Classical Greek and Roman Sources", delivered at the conference *Religion, Hateful Expression and Violence* (Florence, 8-9 April 2022), the recording of which can be viewed online at <https://www.cilrap.org/cilrap-film/220409-buis>.

66 Cf., e.g., Pintarič 2018.

67 It is noteworthy that, although one of the eleven sessions of the second Annual International Conference on Classical and Byzantine Studies (Athens, 2019) was

atures, it should be noted that the boundary between hate speech and forms of literary invective or satire may appear unclear. Consequently, let us first attempt to better delineate and bring into focus the object of our enquiry.

In 1980, Severin Koster delineated Greek and Roman literary invective as

eine strukturierte literarische Form, deren Ziel es ist, mit allen geeigneten Mitteln eine namentlich gennante Person öffentlich vor dem Hintergrund der jeweils geltenden Werte und Normen als Persönlichkeit herabzusetzen,⁶⁸

a distinct literary genre tailored for the purpose of disparaging individuals within the framework of contemporary ethical and moral standards. The same definition is essentially applicable to Byzantine literary invective as well. Certain features of Byzantine invective have been recently outlined by Ioannis Polemis, who acknowledges, however, the challenges inherent to defining such a concept.⁶⁹ As Polemis observes, the rhetorical notion of invective (ψόγος) – one of the types of speech theorised among Byzantine *progymnasmata* – denotes “an autonomous type of speech, one that lays bare the magnitude of a somebody’s wickedness”.⁷⁰ It is characterised by a narrative structure modelled on that prescribed for the *enkomia*, albeit with inverted intents. It also implies an “unequivocal verbal attack that follows the author’s intention to blacken the reputation of his/her opponent(s)”.⁷¹ Closely related to the *psogos* – as Polemis pinpoints – is the concept of κοινὸς τόπος ‘common topic’, another kind of fictional discourse designed to criticise or support an imaginary representative of a certain category (e.g., a criminal, a benefactor, or further subcategories). In this context, flaws or virtues of the addressee

specifically dedicated to “Hate Speech in Greek Literature of the Ancient and Byzantine Period”, no paper addressing Byzantine topics was submitted. In contrast, during the Tenth Conference of the Greek Byzantinists (Ioannina, 2019), Panagiotis Iliopoulos presented a paper entitled “Τα ζῶα στον προσβλητικό λόγο των Βυζαντινών: Προλεγόμενα” (Animals in the invective language of the Byzantines: a preliminary study), which was later published in an extended version in Iliopoulos 2021. In this paper, Iliopoulos states that his work is part of a broader research project aimed at writing a doctoral thesis dedicated to the forms and themes of hate speech in middle-Byzantine literary sources. Unfortunately, I could not duly consider this important study in the present article, as Iliopoulos had not yet defended his doctoral thesis at the time of writing.

68 Koster 1980, 39. On this topic, cf., more recently, Papaioannou, Serafim 2021.

69 Cf. Polemis 2021.

70 Polemis 2021, 337. On the rhetorical notion of *psogos* in the late antique period, cf., e.g., Quiroga Puertas 2021.

71 Polemis 2021, 337.

are rhetorically amplified.⁷² According to Polemis, however, this definition of invective, primarily based on theoretical principles, proved insufficient to establish a distinct genre in Byzantine rhetorical practices.⁷³ Instead, invective would rather resemble a 'mode', that is

a discursive habit that may share some formal characteristics with progymnastic *psogos* (e.g., the sequential defamation of a person's origins and actions), but whose defining feature lies in the intended persuasive effect – namely, blame, defamation, and libel.⁷⁴

The Byzantine invective examples selected by Polemis find their place within the fields of forensic rhetoric or literary lampoons. These examples reveal that Byzantine invective primarily targeted individuals who were perceived as rivals or antagonists in political, cultural, or theological-spiritual matters. In such instances, Byzantine writers expose and vehemently condemn various vices and deviations (impiety, avarice, heretical thoughts, homosexuality, and so forth). At times, invective turns into a formal accusation or charge presented before a higher authority. On other occasions, however, it could also manifest in the form of polemical pamphlets and satirical vignettes, devoid of any further purposes. In all the cases examined by Polemis, Byzantine writers frequently employ tropes that are characteristic of progymnastic invective, as well as additional rhetorical strategies, drawing, at the same time, from a well-attested repertoire of stereotypes and commonplaces. This aspect also emerges from Panagiotis Iliopoulos' study on animal metaphors and similes employed in Byzantine 'abusive speech' against an adversary, which draw upon commonplaces from Ancient Greek and Christian traditions as well as common knowledge about animals.⁷⁵

Furthermore, Polemis also observes that invectives are often incorporated and scattered within broader compositions falling under various literary genres – such as historiography or theological-controversial literature –, whose overarching nature and objectives

⁷² Polemis 2021, 337. The rhetorical notion of *koinos topos* should not be confused with the modern concept of a commonplace or *topos*, whether literary, narratological, rhetorical, etc., cf. Messis, Papaioannou 2021, 150-1.

⁷³ Polemis 2021, 337.

⁷⁴ Polemis 2021, 337-8. For the Aphthonian concept of 'modes' (to be interpreted as habits and methods, rather than 'genres'), in which students should be trained, refer to Papaioannou 2021, 79 and passim. In this regard, Martin Hinterberger has aptly drawn my attention to the modern theoretical-literary distinction between 'mode' and 'kind' as elaborated, for example, by Fowler 1982, 106ff.

⁷⁵ Cf. Iliopoulos 2021, esp. 99-107, regarding the use of animals in hate speech against the ethnoreligious Others, namely barbarians and heretics.

evidently differ from those of invective *stricto sensu*, as codified by rhetorical handbooks.⁷⁶ For instance, Polemis includes in such cases the invective directed against the adversaries of Byzantine orthodoxy (e.g., the Latins). In this regard, he asserts that

it appears as if almost every Byzantine theological treatise contains elements of invective, as even texts that purport to handle theological matters in a neutral manner (e.g., hermeneutical works on the Bible) are seldom without contentious points, giving rise to brief invectives against those who advocate a different point of view.⁷⁷

In such cases, however, we could alternatively invoke the concept of hate speech. While invective and hate speech can easily be conflated or at least partly overlap, on the other hand, we can attempt to draw some distinctions. Invective *ad personam*, namely personal attacks directed at an individual and targeting his/her own vices and shortcomings, cannot be considered hate speech, since, as observed in the preceding paragraph, hate speech solely concerns the social dimension of language and is directed either against an entire social group or an individual considered as a representative of that group. In light of this latter scenario, hate speech can also be invoked in a literary writing whose recipient or character, whether real or fictitious, is targeted through hate speech solely because, within that context, he/she represents an entire group (e.g., the Muslims or the Latins).⁷⁸

Furthermore, it can be observed that, contrary to what one might expect, hate speech is far more widespread and vitriolic in literary genres (e.g., in historiography, hagiography, official poetry and court orations) other than theological-controversial literature. This is due to the fact that, in the latter, the debate is typically portrayed as being engaged in by 'experts' and learned men from both factions⁷⁹ and

⁷⁶ Polemis 2021, 338. Numerous studies have been conducted on individual Byzantine poetic invectives: among the most recent, I will limit myself to citing Carrozza 2023. An additional example of 'disguised' *psogos* in Byzantine literature can be considered the famous anti-Photian *Life of Saint Ignatius* by Niketas David Paphlagon (*BHG* 817), as kindly reminded to me by Martin Hinterberger.

⁷⁷ Polemis 2021, 338.

⁷⁸ Consider, for example, the speakers of a theological-controversial work in dialogue form.

⁷⁹ See, for example, how Muslim interlocutors are defined in some anti-Islamic pamphlets: Theodore Abu-Qurrah, *Pamphlet*, 18 (*Prooem.*): Πολλάκις γὰρ πρὸς τοὺς δῆθεν ἔλλογιμωτάτους αὐτῶν [*scil.* Ἀγαρηνῶν] τὰς ἀντιρρήσεις πεπονημένου ἔτυχον παρῶν ἐγὼ 'For it happened that I was often present when he engaged in arguments with their purportedly greatest theologians' (ed. Gleib, Houry 1995, 88, ll. 47-8); *Pamphlet*, 21: Τῶν ἔλλογιμῶν Σαρακηνῶν τις θαρρῶν τῇ ἰδίᾳ τῶν λόγων εὐπρεπεῖα συναγαγὼν τοὺς

is more focused on the rational dismantling of the doctrines and beliefs of the adversary rather than on 'emotional' defamation.⁸⁰

In conclusion, hate speech does not coincide with any structured literary form, genre, or autonomous speech. It pervades the entire Byzantine literature, cutting across literary genres.⁸¹ It can be correctly defined as a 'mode', in accordance with Polemis' definition of invective, and, akin to the latter, it can be practised in many ways, utilising the entire rhetorical arsenal known to the Byzantines. However, a distinctive aspect of hate speech is its placement within the space of tension between collective identities and their clashes on ethnic, religious, and/or cultural grounds. Thus, hate speech is never directed at an individual, unless the latter is synecdochically considered as a mere representative of a broader group. Finally, unlike invective, it may not even be entirely intentional, such as when it resorts to some generic derogatory epithets,⁸² so common and entrenched that they became, antonomastically, mere synonyms for the name of the Others.

ὁμοθρήσκους... 'One of the learned Saracens, relying on his own eloquence, called together his fellow believers...' (ed. Glei, Khoury 1995, 102, ll. 1-2); *Pamphlet*, 32: 'Ἐν ἐτέρῳ συλλόγῳ τις τῶν κομιοτέρων Σαρακηνῶν ἐρωτῶν τὸν ἐπίσκοπὸν φησιν... 'During another assembly, one of the more educated Saracens asked the bishop and said...' (ed. Glei, Khoury 1995, 124, ll. 1-2). On this aspect, cf. Khoury 1969, 118.

80 Cf. Koutrakou 1993, 213-15 fn. 11, 219. Koutrakou mentions a "principle of mutual respect" (213) underlying these laudatory epithets directed, in some specific contexts, by Byzantines towards eminent figures among the Muslim Arabs. This custom is said to stem from the necessities of protocol and international policy.

81 Even within hymnography, there is no lack of examples of hate speech. An interesting case is represented by a canon for the *Theotokos* attributed to John Mauroπος (acr. 'Υπερμάχησον τῶν πολιτῶν σου, κόρη· ὕμνωδία Ἰωάννου, inc. 'Υπὸ τὴν σκέπην καὶ τὴν εὐσπλαγχνίαν σου...). This canon was published by Spyridon Lauriotes 1937, seemingly based on MS 'Ἅγιον Ὅρος, Μονὴ τῆς Μεγίστης Λαύρας, I 77 (Eustratiades 1161; AD 1345). In this manuscript, the canon is introduced by the following heading: 'Ἐπὶ προσδοκίᾳ βαρέος πολέμου κατὰ τὴν μεγαλόπολιν ἐκ διαφόρων ἔθνῶν τῆς Ἰταλῶν γλώσσης συγκροτηθεομένου (Expecting a heavy war against the Capital, about to be launched by various populations of Italian language). The most widely accepted hypothesis is to interpret the populations of Italian language as a reference to the Norman attack on Constantinople in 1082, within the context of the expedition organised by Robert Guiscard against the Byzantine empire (1081-85), cf., e.g., Lauxtermann 2022, 395. In this canon, Mauroπος employs some 'traditional' Byzantine derogatory adjectives for the Latins: see, for instance, in the first troparion of the fourth ode of the canon: Νοῦς ἀλαζῶν (...) τοὺς σκληροτραχίλους καὶ ἰταμοὺς καὶ ὕψαρχένας (...) καθ' ἡμῶν τῶν σῶν δούλων ἐξήγειρεν 'A boastful mind... raised against us your servants the stubborn and bold and haughty' (Spyridon Lauriotes 1937, 35), or in the fourth troparion of the seventh ode: 'Υπερήφανον γένος (...) γαυρούμενον ἰσχύτι... 'Arrogant people (...) proud of their strength...' (Spyridon Lauriotes 1937, 37).

82 Consider the classical terms ἄθεος 'godless', ἄνομος 'lawless, impious', βάρβαρος 'barbarian', παράνομος 'lawless, violent', and so forth.

5 Some Notes on Methodology

As previously mentioned, LiDoBIPH will exclusively concentrate on a specific and partial aspect of Byzantine hate speech directed towards Muslims and Latins. This aspect pertains to the derogatory language – comprising nouns, adjectives, and verbs – utilised in Byzantine literary texts to address or characterise these two groups. The identified lexical items will be compiled into a comprehensive linguistic dossier, which will be structured akin to an annotated dictionary, drawing inspiration from Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, and will include explanatory notes alongside a catalogue of the most significant occurrences of lemmas in the sources. Each lemma will be clarified through its etymology, meaning, and, where possible, early attestations in the wider hate speech perspective, documenting, moreover, any semantic shifts over time or in similar contexts. In referring to the various occurrences of a certain word in the sources, it will be specified, for example, whether it pertains to the Others as a collective entity or to an individual who represents that entity (e.g., Muhammad in the anti-Islamic dossier).

Theoretically, such words could be also categorised according to their 'stigma-typology', distinguishing, for instance, between those perpetuating ethnographic motifs, even of ancient or pre-Christian origin;⁸³ those condemning or mocking particular aspects of religion, from beliefs to ritual practices;⁸⁴ and those stigmatising specific psycho-physical characteristics (i.e., ethnotypes), moral vices and intellectual deficiencies.⁸⁵ Some others are mere and more generic insults.⁸⁶ However, some of these words cannot always be eas-

83 An example is the widely used βάρβαρος 'foreign, barbarian'. For semasiological and onomasiological approaches to this term, which ultimately attempt to trace the evolution of concepts over time (the so-called Conceptual History) through a 'distributional' semantic model, cf. Keersmaekers, Van Hal 2021.

84 E.g., of the Muslims, εικονοκλάστης 'iconoclast'; μισόχριστος 'hating Christ'.

85 E.g., of the Muslims, ἀτάσθαλος 'presumptuous, wicked'; βαρυνκάρδιος 'slow of heart, obstinate'; γαστριμαργία 'gluttony'; ἐμβρόντητος 'thunderstruck, stupid'; ἐπιτωθάζω 'mock at, jeer' or κερτομέω 'taunt, sneer at', referring to their hateful sarcasm and foolish arrogance; κύων λυσσῶν 'rabid dog', metaphor alluding to their aggressive recklessness, and so forth. Of the Latins, e.g., ἀταπεινότης 'devoid of humbleness'; ἀγέρωχος 'arrogant'; ὑψαύχην 'haughty'.

86 E.g., of the Muslims, βδελυρός 'disgusting, loathsome, blackguardly'; βλαβερός 'harmful'; δειλαιός 'wretched, paltry'; δυσώνυμος 'bearing an ill name, hateful'; ἐβδελυγμένος 'loathsome, abominable'; τελματώδης 'muddy', etc. It should be noted that among the most generic insults, several lemmas were reclaimed from the past and reused for new polemical targets, similar to what notoriously occurs in Byzantine literature with ethnonyms or designations of new heresies. In this respect, this kind of speech holds a high degree of cross-fertilisation, with many derogatory epithets, adjectives, and verbs being shared by Muslims, Latins, and other polemical targets, thus showing a considerable overlap. Besides, one might also discern a parallel between the

ily categorised within a single typology, belonging, instead, to more than one.⁸⁷ At this juncture, it is also necessary to specify that many of the insults conveyed by these words may be expressed in Byzantine texts through periphrases. The latter are much more challenging to identify and, above all, to lemmatise within an alphabetical lexicon. However, they will be recorded – not systematically, but as *per specimina* – under the equivalent or semantically closest lexical entry. Generally speaking, the decision to limit the analysis to nouns, adjectives, and verbs also has the advantage of facilitating the grouping of these elements into semantic families.

The idea of establishing a taxonomy for insults is not new. For instance, in 1910, Wilhelm Süss categorised insults found in ancient Attic oratory according to their content. He identified a series of ‘tropes’, namely various allegations addressed against an opponent.⁸⁸ In 2016, the Italian linguist Tullio De Mauro developed the lexicon *Le parole per ferire* for the ‘Jo Cox’ Committee of the Italian Chamber of Deputies on intolerance, xenophobia, racism, and hate phenomena. The lexicon consists of more than 1,000 Italian hate words organised along different semantic categories of hatred.⁸⁹ In Byzantine studies, Niki Koutrakou has placed significant emphasis on the use of derogatory words employed by representatives of the opposing factions in the iconoclastic struggle to refer to one another.⁹⁰ In particular, Koutrakou has stressed rhetorical strategies, dynamics of recuperation and resemantisation of pre-existing lexical heritage, as well as the semantic fields of words. Furthermore, in a previous

attitudes by which Byzantine writers utilised linguistic markers over the centuries to denote and ‘otherise’ various targets in an ethno-cultural sense and the ‘pictorial vocabulary’ employed by Byzantine artists to delineate ethnic distances through stereotypical and anachronistic portrayals of peoples and figures. On this latter aspect, cf., e.g., Gasbarri 2023.

87 E.g., when referred to the Muslims, ἀλλοπρόσαλλος ‘fickle, unstable’, hence, ἄπιστος ‘untrustworthy, unreliable’, ὀλιγόπιστος ‘of little faith’, etc., stemming from ethnographic prejudices toward nomadic lifestyle, as in the case of pre-Islamic Arabs – similarly, all the words evoking beastly and uncivilised nature, e.g. βοσκηματώδης or θηριώδης ‘brutish, bestial’; μαιφόνος ‘bloodthirsty, murderous’ or αἱματοχαρής ‘delighting in blood’ denote not only a beastly nature and the brutal killing of Christians, but also the practice of animal sacrifice; ἀσελγής, in the meaning of ‘lascivious, lewd’, or φιλόσαρκος ‘loving human flesh’, can encompass both a general moral connotation, inherent to their *ethos*, and allude to the practice of polygamy.

88 Süss 1910.

89 Cf. De Mauro 2016. De Mauro’s lexicon has constituted the starting point for an even broader and more complex digital project, entitled *HurtLex. A Multilingual Lexicon of Hate Words*, whose main objective is to develop a lexicon of hate words that can be used as a resource to analyse and identify hate speech in social media texts in a multilingual perspective, cf. Bassignana et al. 2018. I would like to thank Niccolò Zorzi for informing me about a similar tool dedicated to insults in the Venetian dialect, edited by Panontin 2021.

90 Cf. Koutrakou 1999.

study, within some literary works of the Middle Byzantine period, she identified, for example, a small group of derogatory epithets directed at Muslims, notably observing how many of them were also employed against iconoclasts.⁹¹

As previously mentioned, hate speech against Muslims and Latins can be detected in numerous Byzantine works across various literary genres. Therefore, the search for hate words must necessarily be conducted within a corpus as extensive as possible of works demonstrating some relevance to Byzantines' relations with Muslims and Latins. In order to identify such works, systematic reviews or comprehensive studies on Byzantine-Islamic and Byzantine-Western relations have proven particularly useful.⁹²

At the same time, however, it was necessary to define the chronological boundaries of the research. As for the anti-Islamic dossier, it was decided to examine works from the seventh century – when Byzantium first encountered Islam – until the mid-fourteenth century. The latter period is marked by the Greek translation by Demetrios Kydones of the treatise *Against the Law of the Saracens* by the Florentine Dominican Riccoldo of Monte di Croce (1243-1320), which exerted a significant influence on the Byzantine debate on Islam (e.g., on Kantakouzenos or Manuel II Palaiologos). During this period, Byzantine literature on Islam, whose 'formative stage' is situated between the eighth and ninth centuries, started to be contaminated by Western elements.⁹³ Regarding the anti-Latin dossier, it was decided to approximately adhere to the chronological framework (900-1204) chosen, for instance, by Nicolas Drocourt and Sebastian Kolditz for their *Companion*, starting already from the ninth century, the epoch of Photios and Niketas Byzantios, up to the drama of the Fourth Crusade, which heavily impacted on Byzantine perceptions of the Westerners.

In conclusion, this article has sought to delineate a theoretical framework within which to situate the LiDoBIPH project, focused on a specific aspect of hate speech in Byzantine literature. While hate speech has been addressed within the study of other ancient and medieval literatures, it remains unexplored within the field of Byzantine studies, which are notoriously 'theoretophobic',⁹⁴ leaving Byzantine lit-

⁹¹ Cf. Koutrakou 1993, 216, 218-19, 222-3.

⁹² As for the anti-Muslims dossier, cf., e.g., Thomas, Roggema 2009; Thomas, Mallett 2010; 2011. As for the anti-Latin dossier, cf. Drocourt, Kolditz 2022, and the online database *RAP. Repertorium Auctorum Polemicorum*.

⁹³ Cf., e.g., Rigo 1998, 214; Fanelli 2017, 42 and passim; 2022.

⁹⁴ Stathakopoulos 2022, 270 fn. 8.

erature 'undertheorised'.⁹⁵ Therefore, the reflections articulated so far may, hopefully, contribute to constructing an additional and different perspective or interpretative lens on literary production in Byzantium. Furthermore, LiDoBIPH aims at providing a useful tool for scholars to navigate, from a historical-linguistic perspective, the derogatory vocabulary attested in selected sources to represent the ethnoreligious Others, thus contributing to the debate on the concept of identity in Byzantium. Finally, such a study could also integrate with other research strands, such as the history of emotions and certain negative sentiments (e.g., hatred or anger).⁹⁶ Certainly, the same approach could be applied in future research to hate speech directed towards other targets based on ethno-cultural and/or religious alterity, such as Jews, Armenians, 'heretics' of different kinds, Slavs, and so forth.

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⁹⁵ Cameron 2014, 111.

⁹⁶ See, for example, the following publications, albeit almost exclusively dedicated to the sentiment of anger: Dombrowski 1998; Rosenwein 1998; Zagacki, Boleyn-Fitzgerald 2006; Nikolaou, Chrestou 2008; Crislip 2011; Kalimtzi 2012; Spencer 2019, Part 3 ("Anger and its Management"); Saputo 2022.

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