

Katerina Nikolaou*

Byzantium and its perception in the mid-twentieth century “Classics Illustrated” comic books¹

A business endeavor launched in the United States in October 1941 was destined to change the way people approached world literary classics. Aiming at multiplying its theretofore select, numerically limited reading public, as well as expanding the latter’s age range by incorporating children and adolescents, Russian-born publisher Albert Lewis Kanter came up with the idea of creating a series that would combine the benefits of a “popular” narration with cheap illustrated publications.²

Elliot Publishing Company placed the literary masterpieces of the great authors in the service of the “ninth art,” in a series originally called *Classic Comics*.³ The first issue of the New York-based publication, *The Three Musketeers*, marked the nascence in the publishing firm’s comic book department of a product with stories that were not all about the antics, sentimental adventures or comedic goofs of pulp

* National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

¹ At the core of this study lies my paper on “Byzantium and Byzantine women in the mid-twentieth century Greek ‘Classics Illustrated’ comic books,” which I delivered at the conference *Transformation and adaptation – the reception of Byzantium between the 16th and 21st centuries* held in Poland (5-6 September 2014, University of Silesia in Katowice). I would like to thank the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and its Special Account for Research Grants for funding to attend the meeting. The text of that presentation has been modified and expanded, while keeping within the limits imposed by publishing in a scholarly periodical. The earliest discussions with my dear friend and colleague Konstantinos G. Tsiknakis on the topic of the presence and presentation of Byzantium in general, and of Byzantine women in particular, in the *Classics Illustrated* series date back many years. Once again I thank him.

² As noted in Thanasis Karagiannis, *Ο Βασίλης Ρότας και το έργο του για παιδιά και εφήβους. Θέατρο–Ποίηση–Πεζογραφία–«Κλασικά εικονογραφημένα». Ερμηνευτικές, θεματολογικές, ιδεολογικές, παιδαγωγικές προσεγγίσεις* [Vassilis Rotas and his work for children and adolescents. Theater–Poetry–Prose–“Classics Illustrated.” Interpretational, topical, ideological, and pedagogical approaches] (Athens: Synchroni Epochi, 2007), 531, there is a wealth of bibliography, both local and international, on the theoretical approaches to, and the study of, illustrated magazines. As a whole, this literary production goes far beyond the scope of the present study; for the needs of the latter, only brief references to the genre in question and some of its particular characteristics were deemed necessary. For the theoretical approaches to the comic-book genre, simply on an indicative basis and because its subject matter is closely related to the focus of our study, see Giannis Skarpelos, *Ιστορική μνήμη και ελληνικότητα στα κόμικς* [Historical memory and Greekness in comic books] (Athens: Kritiki, 2000), 27-52.

³ For a history of the *Classics Illustrated* series, see Dan Malan, *The Complete Guide to Classics Illustrated*, v. I-II (USA: Classics Central Com., 2006).

heroes; instead, in its pages it summarized the best-known works of literature. Lacking the development, depth and storytelling skills of their famous authors, but with the help of the pen of exceptional artists, it had the ability to stir an emotional reaction from the product user, thereby liberating his or her imagination, thus putting the literary text's invisible description on display for everyone to see.⁴

Starting with the fourth issue, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1942), Kanter (under the pseudonym Albert W. Raymond, a combination of the co-owners' first names) switched the publication to a company owned by himself, called Gilberton Publishing Co., and apart from editor, also served briefly as art director.⁵ In March 1947, with the series now numbering 34 titles, it began to be published under the banner *Classics Illustrated*; the next year saw a reduction in the number of pages from 56 (originally 64) to 48. Another series, *Classics Illustrated Junior* (1953-1971), was also published, containing fairy tales and stories for younger children. The visualization of the classical novels was done by pencilers and inkers that were well-known in the comic-book industry, such as Malcolm Kildale, Louis Zansky, Rolland H. Livingstone, Enter Iger, Henry C. Kiefer, Alex A. Blum, Lou Cameron, Norman Nodel, Reed Crandall, George R. Evans, Gray Morrow and others.⁶

The publication continued until 1962, when it ceased after 169 issues and sales that totaled 200,000,000 copies in the US alone. Its titles continued to be reprinted and in the following decades various unsuccessful attempts were made to revive the series.

After World War II, with American comic books beginning to flood the European market, *Classics Illustrated* were translated and published in many countries.⁷ Among them, Greece was a relative latecomer in becoming acquainted with the product in question, due to the Greek Civil War and subsequent political turmoil, and and so the flourishing of comics in Greece may be dated to the 1950s and later.

Despite the fact that magazines such as *Η Διάπλασις των Παιδών* [*Children's Edification*]⁸ had laid the groundwork for comic books to be more easily accepted by

⁴ This particular description of the *Classics Illustrated* series by Aris Malandrakis, «Οι Αριστοκράτες των Κόμικς» [“The comic-book aristocrats”], *Εννέα (Ελευθεροτυπία)*, no. 36, 2/5, may be found online at <https://www.mycomics.gr/classics/36ennea.htm> (accessed July 10th, 2017).

⁵ William B. Jones, Jr., *Classics illustrated: a cultural history* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2011 2nd ed.), 35.

⁶ Panayota Feggerou, «Τα “Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα” και το ιστορικό μυθιστόρημα για παιδιά: μύθος και πραγματικότητα» [“Classics Illustrated” and the historical novel for children: Myth and reality”] (PhD diss., National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, 2012), 281.

Aris Malandrakis, «Η λογοτεχνία στο περίπτερο» [“Literature on the newsstand”], *Επιλον (Ελευθεροτυπία)*, no. 42 (January 26, 1992), 27-30.

⁷ The second volume of Malan, *The Complete Guide*, is devoted to the publication of *Classics Illustrated* outside the United States.

⁸ On the role and significance of this magazine for children, which dominated the field of children's literature for almost seven decades, see Vicky Patsiou, «*Η Διάπλασις των Παιδών*» (1879-1922). *Το πρότυπο και η συγκρότησή του* [“*Children's Edification*” [1879-1922]. *The role model and its construction*]. (Athens: General Secretariat for Youth, 1987).

the Greek reading public, the printing initiative of Atlantís Publications that hit the stands on March 1st, 1951,⁹ caused bewilderment and made fanatical enemies, as well as passionate supporters. Ten years after the series had made its first appearance in America, the Pechlivanídes brothers (Michális, Kóstas and Giórgos), experienced in publishing children's books as well as in offset printing, transplanted in Greece and its milieu the *Classics Illustrated* comic books they had come to know during one of their trans-Atlantic voyages – complete with four-color prints.¹⁰

It is true that the comic books in question were not noted for their strict to the rules of their genre: their illustrations did not promote the comical element, did they present recognizable formulaic heroes, frozen in time and in the series' tenuity.¹¹ They were in effect illustrated narratives, with proportionate amounts of text (speech) and image; in fact, speech played the principal part and did not function merely in support of the image, as was the case elsewhere. Thus, a certain degree of theatricality was achieved and the story evolved along with the text and the frame-by-frame successive images. Furthermore, there was also a narrator with a heavy workload: he explained the evolution of the plot, provided necessary information and connected the various parts of the work.¹²

The debut issue, Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, similar in appearance to the corresponding American title, contained a set of instructions on how to read the book, but also a note from the publishers with which they wished to convey the new books' mission statement, while at the same time attempting to mitigate the expected backlash. Within a framework of widespread anti-Americanism that permeated many sections of Greece's post-Occupation society, a product that appeared to cheapen classical literature offered itself for negative criticism.¹³ So they

⁹ Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables*, was the first issue in the Greek series, 10 years after it was originally published in the US series. An analytical presentation of the first issue and its reprints may be found in Feggerou, *Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα*, 451-71.

¹⁰ The appearance of *Classics Illustrated* played a key role in their success. The quality of printing was excellent; the four-color process was used throughout, and they were printed the new offset system, on white European-standard paper. See Malandrakis, «Οι Αριστοκράτες», 3/5.

¹¹ Panagiota Feggerou, «Το Ιστορικό Μυθιστόρημα και τα Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα. Το Παράδειγμα του Ιβανόη» [“The Historical Novel and Classics Illustrated. The Case of Ivanhoe”], 5, old.primedu.uoa.gr/Forum%20neon%20epistomonon/Panagiota%20Feggerou.doc (accessed July 18th, 2017).

¹² Karagiannis, *Ο Βασίλης Ρώτας*, 532.

¹³ Feggerou, *op. cit.*, 4. Regarding the reactions, debates and controversies –including those that took place in the Greek Parliament– caused by the circulation of *Classics Illustrated*, see *ibid.*, note 7.

An interesting point is the criticism leveled against comic books in general by Giannis Barges, «Τα κόμικς του Βασίλη Ρώτα. Μια άγνωστη προσφορά του Κορινθίου ποιητή στο χώρο του παιδικού βιβλίου» [“The comics of Vassilis Rotas. The Corinthian poet's unknown contribution to children's literature”], *Πρακτικά Γ' Τοπικού Συνεδρίου Κορινθιακών ερευνών (Κόρινθος 28-30 Νοεμβρίου 1997)* (Athens, 1999), 170: “These pulp-fiction magazines mostly derive from the US sub-culture products of mass consumption, their subject matter revolving around war, crime, money, and romance. They abuse humanitarian ideas, disfigure and debase the language in a nightmarish fashion, lead to attitudes of contempt of human life, undervalue patriotic feelings and high ideals such as liberty and fatherland (words and terms that are nowhere to be found in their pages), and generally

wrote: “publication of these books throughout the world has limited the insipid, shallow and harmful pulp editions, the criminal, pornographic, gangster stuff. So, taking this into account as well, parents ought to recommend *Classics Illustrated* to their children, for in this way they help both develop their minds and protect their souls.”¹⁴

True to their aim, the Greek *Classics Illustrated* series [*Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα*] included, apart from the successful translations of corresponding American can titles, a number of issues with themes taken “From the Mythology and History of Greece”¹⁵ that did not depend, at least as far as History was concerned, on pre-existing literary texts, but constituted completely new creations. In this way, Greek children would not only come in contact with the works of great literature that, due to political, social and economic conditions, were not always within their reach;¹⁶ they would also receive an education by fortifying their knowledge of history, since illustrated magazines or books are more easily and willingly understood and assimilated by children in the course of the learning process.¹⁷ A panorama of Hellenism unfolded in 83 titles¹⁸ dedicated to the full range of Greek history, from Antiquity and Byzantium to the War of Independence and the Cretan revolution, as well as to classical, medieval and Modern Greek literature, all viewed through the prism of ethnocentrism prevalent at the time.

After its rehabilitation in the minds of scholars during the second half of the nineteenth century, Byzantium had finally taken its place in official Greek historiography. Integrated as an inextricable link in the unbroken chain of national continuity, it was no longer treated solely as keeper of the legacy of Antiquity, but also as a creative force from which modern age flowed.¹⁹ It was this perception, this outlook of

maim children’s souls and emotions, gradually leading them to moral degeneration.” All these negative characteristics attributed to comic books are the extreme opposite of the utterly positive image of *Classics Illustrated* according to the same author; *ibid.*: “...they exuded humanitarianism and, what’s more important: they were fragrant with the sweet smell of Greece!”

¹⁴ Malandrakis, «Οι Αριστοκράτες», 3/5.

¹⁵ Greek-themed issues debuted in October 1951. The first issue produced by Greek contributors and inspired by a Greek theme was no. 43, *Perseus and Andromeda*, with text by Vassilis Rotas and illustrations by Kostas Grammatopoulos. See Giannis D. Barges, «Τα “Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα” του Βασίλη Ρώτα. Θεματική και ιδεολογία» [“The “Classics Illustrated” by Vassilis Rotas. Subject matter and ideology”], *Ερευνα*, no. 13 (98), January 2001: 59 and note 5, with relevant literature. The names of the contributors are not recorded in the publication; the name of the scriptwriter is divulged in a list of *Classics Illustrated* printed by Atlantis Publications at a later date, while the paternity of the illustrations may be deduced by comparing them to similar ones from another issue which bore the artist’s signature. See Barges, «Τα “Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα” του Βασίλη Ρώτα», 62 note 6.

¹⁶ Peggy Kounelaki, «“Κλασσικά” με τους ήρωες του Ομήρου. Τα μυθικά πρόσωπα της Ιλιάδας και της Οδύσσειας στη νέα σειρά των “Κλασσικών Εικονογραφημένων” της “Κ” σε διασκευή Βασ. Ρώτα» [“Classics” with Homer’s heroes. The mythical personages of the Iliad and Odyssey in the new series of “Classics Illustrated” by *Kathimerini*, revised by Vas. Rotas], *Καθημερινή* (February 16, 2003).

¹⁷ Karagiannis, *Ο Βασίλης Ρώτας*, 546.

¹⁸ Skarpepos, *Ιστορική μνήμη*, 19 and 20, note 9, mentions 83 issues with Greek titles and content deriving from Greek history, mythology, and literature. Feggerou, *Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα*, 271, states that there were as many as 90 titles.

¹⁹ Vaggelis Karamanolakis, *Η συγκρότηση της ιστορικής επιστήμης και η διδασκαλία της Ιστορίας στο Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών (1837-1932)* [*The Formation of Historical Scholarship and the Teaching of History*]

Byzantium, that exceptional men (and women) of letters,²⁰ as well as distinguished painters and engravers, set out to serve.²¹ However, what must be particularly mentioned is the fact that 70% of the titles were the creation of militant members of the intellectual Left, Vassilis Rotas and Sophia Mavroeidi-Papadaki. The former was a notable playwright, poet, critic, prose writer and translator.²² The latter distinguished herself as a humanities educator, prose writer, author of plays for children, translator, and essentially a poet. Her poem *Εμπρός ΕΛΑΣ* [Forward ELAS!], written in the spring of 1944, had become the anthem of the Greek People's Liberation Army.²³ These creators, in an effort to make ends meet (at least that was the explanation provided by those close to Vassilis Rotas),²⁴ attempted to present a version of the past that would conform both to their own left-wing beliefs and to the right-wing perceptions forced upon society; the latter, nevertheless, ultimately gained complete dominance. However, even if the commitments they had undertaken vis-à-vis the publisher did not allow them to be completely true to their own ideas,

ry in the University of Athens (1837-1932)] (Historical Archive of Greek Youth 42), (Athens: Secretariat for Youth – National Hellenic Research Foundation/Institute of Neohellenic Research, 2006), 317-24.

²⁰ The names of scriptwriters (Vassilis Rotas, Sophia Mavroeidi-Papadaki, Georgia Deligianni-Anastasiadi, Stephanos Xenos, Th. Synodinos, Eirene Photeinou, Eleni Papadaki, Voula Damianakou) are recorded in 67% of the issues: Barges, «Τα “Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα” του Βασίλη Ρώτα», 59. As noted by the author, *ibid.*, a systematic study of all the texts and illustrations in the Greek series of *Classics Illustrated* could yield the creators of even more issues: the names of illustrators would be easier to ascertain, those of the scriptwriters rather more difficult – and less complete.

²¹ Only 21% (19 out of a total of 90, according to G. Barges) of the issues contain illustrators' signatures. Thus, we only know the names of Kostas Grammatopoulos, Nikos Kastanakis, Vassilis Zissis, Giorgos Vakalo, Paulos Valasakis, Giannis Dragonas, Mentis Bostantzoglou (Bost), Nitsa Theologou-Savrami, Takis Katsoulidis, Gerasimos Livieratos, and Alkmini Grammatopoulou. See Barges, «Τα “Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα” του Βασίλη Ρώτα» 59; Malandrakis, «Οι αριστοκράτες», 5/5; Feggerou, *Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα*, 282-3.

²² On the work of Vassilis Rotas for children and adolescents, see Karagiannis, *Ο Βασίλης Ρώτας*, and with regard to his contribution to *Classics Illustrated* in particular, *ibid.*, 531-48.

²³ On Sophia Mavroeidi-Papadaki see, among others,

http://www.mavroidi.gr/smp/smp.gr/smp_menu_main_gr.htm (accessed July 13th, 2017);

<http://www.ekebi.gr/frontoffice/portal.asp?cpage=NODE&cnode=461&t=523> (accessed July 13th, 2017) with literature.

²⁴ Vassilis Rotas translated texts from the US series, but also wrote texts for Greek issues, in order to supplement his income, since “he was divorced at the time, and he needed the money for alimony,” according to an interview given by his last partner, Voula Damianakou; see Marili Margomenou, «Τα εικονογραφημένα τριών γενεών Ελλήνων. Πενάκι ανά χείρας και φύγαμε!» [“The illustrated publications of three generations of Greeks. *Drawing pen in hand, and away we go!*”], *Το Βήμα* (August 25, 1996). It was perhaps because he saw his involvement in this as a sideline that he never mentioned it while he lived; references to his participation in *Classics Illustrated* may be found in *Βασίλης Ρώτας*, a slim volume on his life and work published by Voula Damianakou after the author's death: see Barges, «Τα κόμικς του Βασίλη Ρώτα», 170, and Idem, «Τα “Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα”», 61.

they maintained their own high standards when it came to issues of literary and theatrical ethics.²⁵

The Greek series of *Classics Illustrated* dedicated a total of 13 issues to the history of Byzantium, eight to male protagonists or men in general and five to members of the female gender. The number may seem –and probably is– rather low when compared to the total number of 83/90 Greek titles; it should be noted, however, that *Classics Illustrated* was the only Greek comic-book series ever to deal with Byzantium and the history of Modern Greece.²⁶

Their pages sing the praises of the personalities and achievements of (in chronological order of reign) Constantine the Great, Julian the Apostate, Justinian, Heraclius, Basil the Bulgar-Slayer, Constantine Palaiologos, while they also describe the heroic deeds of Byzantine *akritai* and especially of Digenes Akrites. The five women selected were Athenaïs–Eudokia, Eirene the Athenian, Theodora the Blessed, Blessed, Kassiane and Anna Comnena – or rather her work, *Alexias*.²⁷

The questions that we will try to answer here is why them and not some others and, by extension, in what way were those particular personages presented.

The answers have to do both with the more general educational/ pedagogical role these comic books were called upon to perform and with the perception of Byzantium it was decided they would support and reinforce. As far as the first aim is concerned, comic books in general were and are, without a doubt, carriers of many and various role models, either positive or negative, that influence the edification and socialization of individuals and thus contribute, to a great degree, to shaping the personality of their readers, including for the most part the younger reading public. Their content is related to fundamental life relations and promotes values such as heroism, friendship, love of country or of nature, dignity etc., that appear as eternal truths. Their principal motif is the opposition between good and evil²⁸ and the continuous struggle to secure justice, harmony and balance between the

²⁵ At least that was the case with Vassilis Rotas, whose work has been the focus of dedicated studies and has been praised by the authors for its high quality; see e.g. Karagiannis, *Ο Βασίλης Ρώτας*, 546. Cf. Barges, «Τα κόμικς του Βασίλη Ρώτα», 170: “even when he ‘worked’ under some publisher and according to standards that most probably did not satisfy him personally, onto even the most insignificant (to him) page he outlined he would pour all those juices that flowed through his more authoritative and personal literary work.”

²⁶ Skarpelos, *Ιστορική μνήμη*, 20.

²⁷ See Fig. 1. For the study at hand the following issues were used: *Ο Μέγας Κωνσταντίνος* [*Constantine the Great*] – no. 1231; *Ιουλιανός ο παραβάτης* [*Julian the Apostate*] – no. 1254; *Ιουστινιανός ο αυτοκράτωρ* [*Justinian the emperor*] – no. 222; *Ηράκλειος. Αυτοκράτωρ του Βυζαντίου* [*Heraclius. Emperor of Byzantium*] – no. 1193; *Βασίλειος ο Βουλγαροκτόνος* [*Basil the Bulgar-Slayer*] – no. 1041; *Κωνσταντίνος Παλαιολόγος* [*Constantine Palaiologos*] – no. 1110; *Βυζαντινοί Ακρίτες* [*Byzantine akritai*] – no. 1187; *Διγενής Ακρίτας* [*Digenes Akritas*] – no. 1035; *Αθηναΐς. Η αυτοκράτειρα του Βυζαντίου Ευδοκία* [*Athenais. The Byzantine empress Eudokia*] – no. 1219; *Ειρήνη η Αθηναία* [*Eirene the Athenian*] – no. 1241; *Θεοδώρα η Μακαρία* [*Theodora the Blessed*] – no. 1246; *Η Κασσιανή* [*Kassiane*] – no. 1229; *Άννα Κομνηνή (“Η Αλεξιάς”)* [*Anna Comnena (“The Alexias”)*] – no. 1222.

²⁸ Skarpelos, *Ιστορική μνήμη*, 63.

world's beings. In every case Good defeats Evil and the villains are punished for their deeds.

The Graeco-Christian image of the Byzantine Empire had to conform to these positive role models and values, which brings us to the second intended aim. With the subject matter of the titles connected to the curriculum of elementary and secondary education, the point was to promote those heroes of a fundamentally Greek and dominantly Christian Byzantium who served that particular purpose. Thus, preference was given to historical figures who either gave utterance to the ideals of Hellenism through their work and their actions, supported the dominance and spread of Christianity, and defended or restored “Greek” territorial integrity, or – and I am referring here to the case of Julian – through their misplaced naïveté and concomitant failure highlighted, although this was not their intention, the grandeur of that which they vainly sought to fight. Therefore, one can easily perceive the rationale behind both the selection of protagonists and the orientation of the content; the latter is briefly presented in the following paragraphs.

Constantine I was portrayed as helping the Christians at a very young age, ing that he stood up for justice,²⁹ while he was made *augustus* by his dying father, who furthermore placed the crown upon his son’s head himself.³⁰

The issue is dedicated almost in its entirety to the protagonist’s course to single rule. His successive clashes first with Maxentius and then with Licinius are not presented as a fight for the survival of the strongest, but as the struggle of a just, wronged *augustus* to liberate the persecuted Christians in both West and East, to unite the whole population under the protection of the symbol of the Cross, to “re”build churches, to open the prisons and give properties back to those who had been deprived of them because of their faith.³¹ The story ends with his decision to build Constantinople; the latter’s consecration was celebrated by a mass in the newly-built magnificent temple of the Christians (!).³² Almost simultaneously with

²⁹ *Κωνσταντίνος ο Μέγας*, 6.

³⁰ *Κωνσταντίνος ο Μέγας*, 11.

³¹ Constantine cries out: “The people of Italy expect us to liberate them” (*Κωνσταντίνος ο Μέγας*, 14); when he presents the *In hoc signo vinces* symbol to his soldiers, he declares: “We are not waging war to conquer, but to help those enslaved!” (*ibid.*, 17). The crowds receive the victorious Constantine in Nicomedia with the acclamation “Welcome, the liberator of Christians!” (*ibid.*, 39).

³² *Κωνσταντίνος ο Μέγας*, 43. Both text and illustration allude to the Hagia Sophia. The Justinian issue also makes a specific reference to the church of Hagia Sophia destroyed during the Nika Revolt having been built by Constantine the Great (*Ιουστινιανός*, 16). However, the earliest Hagia Sophia (a basilica, not the building depicted in the illustrations) was built by Constantius II, the son of Constantine; see Peter Schreiner, *Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ιστορία και Αρχαιολογία* [*Constantinople. History and Archaeology*], trans. Annete Fosvinkel (Athens: National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation, 2014), 42.

The works of Constantine in the New Rome are almost unknown, as precious little is mentioned in contemporary sources. Only Eusebius, the emperor’s biographer, made an effort to praise the city’s Christianization, which he arbitrarily attributed to the emperor; see, Cécile Morrisson, «Η πρωτεύουσα», in ed. Cécile Morrisson, *Ο βυζαντινός κόσμος, τ. Ι. Η Ανατολική Ρωμαϊκή Αυτοκρατορία (330-641)* [*The Byzantine world, v. I. The Eastern Roman Empire (330-641)*], trans. Anastasia Karastathi

the foundation of the New Rome (AD 324), the emperor's mother, Helena, set off on her journey to the Holy Land in order to find the True Cross.³³

Julian's stance against Christianity was attributed to the sensitive disposition of the the protagonist, who was adversely influenced during his traumatic childhood by the the insistence of his first tutor, Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, on Christian education and practice.³⁴ His philosophical studies at Pergamum, Ephesus and Athens, at the feet of pagan teachers and Neoplatonic philosophers, brought him closer to the Greece he loved. Julian's mistake, according to his crypto-Christian wife Helena, was that he sought to return to the worship of the Twelve Olympians, looking upon "the brilliance of a beautiful culture as the work of a specific religion."³⁵ But was it not so? The emperor acted as a dreamer, with the heart of a child, and, finding himself himself in the grip of a fallacy, he wished, like the Greek he claimed to be,³⁶ to revive Ancient Greece.

Justinian diverges from the absolute ideal served by the *Classics Illustrated* with regard to Byzantium. Yes, he was the Christian emperor whose "jewel in the crown" was the church of Hagia Sophia, but he was also the ruler that "restored the ancient Roman Empire as a unified global power."³⁷ Of the 13 "Byzantine" titles this is the one that stays more faithful to the historical sources, although it also includes the legends regarding the architectural plan of Hagia Sophia. The Nika Riot, narrated with a relatively high degree of accuracy, considering the genre, the imperial couple's love relationship and the friendship between Justinian and Belisarius that triumphs despite all the calumnies form the canvass on which the era of Justinian was embroidered. The work's highly knowledgeable author³⁸ did not allow himself to get carried away by jingoistic slogans; perhaps that is the reason why the issue has not reprinted in one of the series' repeated later republications.

(Athens: Polis, 2007), 270. Both pagan and Christian rituals marked the inauguration of Constantinople; see Albrecht Berger, *Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ιστορία, τοπογραφία, θρησκεία* [*Constantinople. History, topography, religion*], trans. Christos Tsatsoulis (Athens: Herodotos, 2013), 27-30.

³³ In actual fact, the emperor's mother set off on her journey to the Holy Land after the dramatic family events that took place in the palace in 326, i.e. the execution of Crispus, Constantine's first-born son, on his father's orders. Crispus' stepmother, Fausta, accused him of violating her honor. A few months later, Fausta was also put to death, having been charged with adultery. Helena began her journey in the summer of that year; Aikaterini Christophilopoulou, *Βυζαντινή Ιστορία, τ. Α': 324-610* [*Byzantine History, v. I: 324-610*] (Athens: Herodotos, 2012), 195 and note 78.

³⁴ *Ιουλιανός*, 5.

³⁵ *Ιουλιανός*, 26, while in *ibid.*, 28, Helena prays for the salvation of her husband: "Have mercy on him, Lord! He knows not what he does! And yet he has the heart of a child."

³⁶ When his counselors advised him to initiate a persecution of Christians, he responded: "No, no, I will not become a Nero! I am a Greek!": *Ιουλιανός*, 27.

³⁷ *Ιουστινιανός*, 45. Cf. *ibid.*, 30: "The great Roman state is restored," and *ibid.*, 31: "You have restored the Roman Empire." However, the "Brief Introduction" [Σύντομη Εισαγωγή] to the plot notes: "Thanks to his skills... the Byzantine Empire was organised into a highly efficient state and spread to Asia, Europe, and Africa, supplanting the decayed Roman Empire." There is no doubt that the terms are used here in a "Byzantinocentric"–"Hellenocentric" fashion, with no grounding whatsoever in rigorous academic work.

³⁸ The events are depicted according to the narratives of Procopius, John Malalas and the *Chronicon Paschale*.

Heraclius, on the other hand, is totally embedded in the Graeco-Christian ideal. Revenge for the True Cross being carried away and for the destruction of presented as the sole motive behind his offensive campaign against the Persians (628).³⁹ The restoration of territorial integrity, in order to remedy the consequences of those lands having been previously lost,⁴⁰ is only deemed worthy of a single mention when recording the terms of the treaty Heraclius imposed on Siroes (Kavadh II);⁴¹ however, the first term is still the return of the True Cross.⁴² A crusading spirit dominates the whole book,⁴³ while Khosrau II's demand that the Byzantines change their faith and bow to his own Sun God is impressive.⁴⁴ A large part of the narration and the action is given over to the contribution of the Church in securing funds for the expedition, but also in the part it played during the siege of Constantinople by the Avars. Finally, during his long victorious march the emperor is seen liberating Greek men and women prisoners.

A distance of more than 300 years separates the next emperor. Was Byzantium from the seventh to the end of the tenth century really unable to produce a single iconic figure worthy of treatment? Based on what was presented above, the answer be a resounding "No!" The Iconoclastic emperors were excluded from the pantheon of Byzantine heroes. According to the school of thought that dominated historiography, it was the members of the Syrian⁴⁵ and Phrygian dynasties that fought against the Church, sought to destroy the monasteries and eliminate the holy icons, persecuted and tortured the defiant "orthodox" Iconophiles. In other words, Iconoclasm and its instigators or supporters were cast out, regardless of the work they had accomplished in saving the empire, strengthening its position in the East and shaping its new character. This was done solely because on the one hand they had opposed the Church and the spirit with which the latter, through education, infused

³⁹ *Ηράκλειος*, 5-7, 10.

⁴⁰ The consequences of the Persian conquest of vital Byzantine living space were disastrous, and by the early 620s the empire was in a desperate state of affairs. Weighted down by these circumstances, Heraclius made the decision to launch a counteroffensive; see on this Morrisson, *Ο βυζαντινός κόσμος*, 118-21.

⁴¹ *Ηράκλειος*, 40.

⁴² *Ηράκλειος*, 39.

⁴³ *Ηράκλειος*, 10: "Onward for the faith and the Lord's Cross," says Heraclius when addressing his troops. It is true that the reclamation of the True Cross from enemy hands and its return to Jerusalem has led many historians to view Heraclius as a forerunner of the Crusades. Although similarities do exist, they are superficial and mostly the result of propaganda on the part of the Crusaders, in order to justify the movement. The Persians conquering the Holy Land and carrying away the True Cross were in no way the root cause behind the wars of Heraclius. His ideological platform was completely different. See Katerina Karapli, "*Κατεπόδωσις στρατού.*" *Η οργάνωση και η ψυχολογική προετοιμασία του βυζαντινού στρατού πριν από τον πόλεμο (610-2081)* ["*Bidding farewell to the troops.*" *The organisation and psychological preparation of the Byzantine army before war (610-1081)*], v. I (Athens: Myrmidones 2010), 174-5.

⁴⁴ *Ηράκλειος*, 5.

⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the issue dedicated to Eirene the Athenian contains an appendix titled "The 'Iconoclastic' emperors. What was happening in Byzantium at the time of Eirene," which expounds the –rather sober for their time– theories of Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, who viewed the reforms of Leo III and Constantine V in a positive light.

the youth, and on the other because the treatment and interpretation of Iconoclasm at the time were one-sided and biased.

The first emperors of the subsequent Macedonian dynasty also had their fair share of weak and/ or dark spots. The founder of the dynasty, Basil I, was his predecessor's "ungrateful" assassin,⁴⁶ his son, Leo VI, went through four marriages, having previously lived with his mistress under the same roof,⁴⁷ while the third member of the family, Constantine VII, boasted no personal military achievements. None of the three measured up to the standards the *Classics* sought to promote.

On the contrary, the great military victories scored by the usurpers Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes against the infidels were included in the issue bearing the the misleading title *Basil the Bulgar-Slayer*, although hardly any "slaying of Bulgarians" was done by the emperor in it. The book did not narrate the war against the Bulgarians, while the "Historical Introduction" stated that the readers did not have before their eyes "a faithful retelling of history, but a literary presentation." An effort was also made to accurately record the historical events, but it was not completely successful. The brief account of the life and times of Basil II (written by the publisher? by Vassilis Rotas as scriptwriter?) erroneously states that the sobriquet "Bulgar-Slayer" was attributed to Basil by the people of Constantinople on the day he returned to the City from his pilgrimage to Athens. With regard to the punishment (blinding) of large numbers of Bulgarian prisoners, it was claimed that it was unhistorical and that most researchers of Byzantine history found it questionable.⁴⁸

One wonders why this specific issue received that particular title, as it dealt mainly with the years between the death of Romanos II and the assumption of power by Basil and his brother. There was a deliberate effort to adapt and distort the events, with the writer having been influenced by Penelope Delta's historical novel *Στον καιρό του Βουλγαροκτόνου* (*In the times of the Bulgar-Slayer*).⁴⁹ The truth is that Vassilis Rotas

⁴⁶ See Irene Chrestou, *Αυτοκρατορική εξουσία και πολιτική πρακτική. Ο ρόλος του "παραδυναστεύοντος" στη βυζαντινή διοίκηση (τέλη 8^{ου} - αρχές 11^{ου} αιώνα)* [*Imperial authority and political practice. The role of the 'paradynasteuon' in Byzantine administration (late eighth – early eleventh century)*] (Athens: Herodotos, 2008), 143-151; Shaun Tougher, "Michael III and Basil the Macedonian: just Good Friends?" in ed. Liz James, *Desire and Denial in Byzantium. Papers from the Thirty-first Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, March 1997* (Aldershot, 1999), 149-58.

⁴⁷ See Shaun Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886-912). Politics and People* (Leiden – New York – Köln: Brill, 1997), 133-63; Paolo Cesaretti, *Οι γυναίκες του αυτοκράτορα. Το σκάνδαλο της τετραγαμίας του Λέοντος ΣΤ' του Σοφού* [*The emperor's wives. The scandal of the four marriages of Leo VI the Wise*], trans. Efi Kallifatidi (Athens: Okeanida, 2016).

⁴⁸ There is a rather rich body of literature on the subject. In one of the more recent studies of Basil II it is claimed that the legends surrounding his person are not grounded in reality. He was called "Bulgar-Slayer" 150 years after the Byzantine subjugation of Bulgaria, and the use of the sobriquet intensified during the nineteenth and twentieth century for political and nationalist reasons. See Paul Stephenson, *The legend of Basil the Bulgar-Slayer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), passim (but esp. chapters 5-8).

⁴⁹ On the decision of Penelope Delta to combine her educational forays with Byzantium, a decision which was partly due to her worries regarding the nation, but also to the way she approached Byzantine history, see Tonia Kiousopoulou, «Η Π. Σ. Δέλτα και το Βυζάντιο» ["P. S. Delta and Byzantium"], in ed.

had his work cut out for him, since he had to deal with –and justify– assassinations (like that of Nikephoros Phokas), revolts and rebellions (for instance those of and Bardas Skleros), the power of the people behind the throne (key among them were Joseph Bringas and Basil Lakapenos), as well as to suppress the fact that the adulteress Theophano, the hero's mother, was implicated in the murder of her husband.⁵⁰

This is the issue that contains the greatest amount of fiction, but it also stands out for another reason. When republished in the 1970s, the original cover, harmless as well as unfaithful to history, was replaced by a new one, in a style different from that of the rest of the issue's artwork. During the Colonels' dictatorship (1967-1974), Basil II was portrayed as the vanquisher of the Bulgarians behind the Iron Curtain (who look suspiciously like *Komitadji* rebels), thus serving the official Two titles dedicated to the heroic *akritai* and to Digenes aimed, as was stated in the Introduction, at instilling a sense of triumphalism and pride in the "Greek" military virtue⁵¹ of those who had been appointed to guard the empire's frontier, in other words to protect Hellenism and its territorial integrity, preserving intact its core values and ideals. In the person of Digenes one could recognize Hercules, Theseus and Alexander the Great, while the battles fought by Byzantine *akritai* were also linked to the later struggles –wars of liberation or expansion– and uprisings from the period of Ottoman rule to World War II and the Resistance.⁵²

The last Byzantine emperor, the man who personified Byzantium's quintessence, became the focus of the *Classics'* first Byzantine issue published.⁵³ The depiction of the empire's agonizing final years before the fall of Constantinople was more or less faithful to the main events, the only possible exception being a reference to Constantine XI's triumphal coronation at Mistra.⁵⁴ However, the issue also

Al. P. Zannas, Π. Σ. Δέλτα – Σύγχρονες προσεγγίσεις του έργου της [P. S. Delta – Modern approaches her work] (Athens: Hestia, 2006), 291-312.

⁵⁰ For a brief presentation of the events, see ed. Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Ο βυζαντινός κόσμος, τ. Β'. Η βυζαντινή αυτοκρατορία (641-1204)* [*The Byzantine world, v. II. The Byzantine Empire (641-1204)*], trans. Anastasia Karastathi (Athens: Polis, 2011), 118-25.

⁵¹ «Εισαγωγή στο έργο» ["Introduction to the work"], *Βυζαντινοί ακρίτες*: "Let us transport ourselves, for a moment, to their land and age, to feel proud of their Greek valor!"

⁵² Skarpelos, *Ιστορική μνήμη*, 144-5.

⁵³ The commemorative issue –published May 1953, on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the fall of Constantinople– was the fruit of the collaboration between Eirene Photeinou (text) and Mentis Bostantzoglou (illustrations). It is considered one of the finest comic books in the Greek series. In one of his interviews, Bost has commented upon the way he worked and the sources he used in order to render the period. Malandrakis, «Η λογοτεχνία στο περίπτερο», 22, 27-30; cf. Feggerou, *Κλασικά Εικονογραφημένα*, 282.

⁵⁴ *Κωνσταντίνος Παλαιολόγος*, 8-9. However, research has definitely shown that the ceremony which took place at Mistra was the acclamation of Constantine XI, through which he was invested with imperial authority. An actual coronation of the last Byzantine emperor in church by the Patriarch never took place. On this see Aikaterini Christophilopoulou, *Εκλογή, αναγόρευσις και στέμμις του βυζαντινού αυτοκράτορος* [*Election, acclamation, and coronation of the Byzantine emperor*] (Athens: Academy of Athens, 1956), 204-6.

included folk legends pertaining to the fall of Constantinople,⁵⁵ while every page extolled the Greeks' bravery and manliness, qualities that made the defenders of the City far superior to the enemy. With his self-sacrifice, Palaiologos "saved the soul of the nation," which "in the fullness of time spread its wings for new epic-making adventures."⁵⁶

Beyond the pantheon of Byzantine fighters, emperors and border warriors, the creators of the Greek version of *Classics Illustrated* also brought to the fore those Byzantine women who, by dint of either their personality, the decisions they took during their reign or, finally, their work, contributed to the shaping as well as to the ascendancy of the empire's Graeco-Christian identity, in the form that the latter was constructed and promoted by *Classics Illustrated*.

Athenaïs-Eudokia became, according to the publisher (or the script-writer, Sophia phia Mavroeidi-Papadaki), a leading figure in the development of "Graeco-Christian Christian civilization."⁵⁷ Across the issue's pages unfolds the story of the Athenian philosopher's educated daughter. After her father's death she was taken to Constantinople by her aunt in order to protest the injustice done to her regarding her patrimony.⁵⁸ The Emperor's sister Pulcheria chose her as the most appropriate bride for her brother, and Athenaïs became a devout Christian and Emperor Theodosius' devoted wife, in other words the embodiment of the ideal Byzantine *augusta*.⁵⁹

Given the pedagogical role of the *Classics*, one might think that a foray into the life and deeds of Eirene the Athenian would have been considered taboo.⁶⁰ However, in order to serve the higher purpose of highlighting her role in the ascendancy of Christian orthodoxy, i.e. the veneration of icons, the empress appeared as the first restorer of icon worship⁶¹ and not as a mother who blinded her own son, thus becoming

⁵⁵ As is to be expected, references are made to the Ottomans entering the City through the Kerkoporta postern (*Κωνσταντίνος Παλαιολόγος*, 42), the story of the monk's half-fried fish (*ibid.*, 43), and the last Byzantine emperor's burial, as well as to the latter's location (*ibid.*, 47). A four-page appendix titled «Όταν θα ξαναπάρουμε την Πόλη» ["When we reclaim the City"] relates all the legends connected to the Fall of Constantinople, including the Holy Altar of Hagia Sophia sinking into the sea, as well as the legend of the Marble King.

⁵⁶ *Κωνσταντίνος Παλαιολόγος*, 48. Cf. *ibid.*, 7: "...all the forces of the nation".

⁵⁷ *Αθηναΐς*, «Περίληψη του έργου» [Summary of the work].

⁵⁸ For the reasons that led Athenaïs to the Great Palace, see Katerina Nikolaou, "The Contribution of Women to Byzantine Family Properties. Hagiographical, Epigraphical and Legal Evidence", in ed. Ria Berg, *The Material Sides of Marriage. Women and Domestic Economies in Antiquity* [Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae vol. 43] (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2016), 153.

⁵⁹ In actual fact, Eudokia was not the perfect wife for Theodosius, as is mentioned below, p. 73. The better part of the study of Kenneth G. Holm, *Theodosian Empresses. Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 79-228, is devoted to Theodosius II's sister and wife.

⁶⁰ The work of Ralf-Johannes Lilie, *Byzanz unter Eirene und Konstantin VI. (780-802) Mit einem Kapitel ueber Leon IV. (775-780) von Ilse Rochow* (Berliner Byzantinistische Studien 2) (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996), esp. 48-146, 220-91 (on the relation between Eirene and Constantine), is still one of the more fundamental studies of the reign of Eirene the Athenian. See also Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001), 51-129.

⁶¹ The part played by Eirene on the issue of icon worship was recognized by the Church and is mentioned in the *Synaxarium* of Constantinople: Hippolyte Delehaye (ed.), *Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum*

the first *augusta* ever to exercise imperial power in her own name. This dark side of Eirene was obscured even more, or rather patently distorted. Her order to imprison the rebellious Constantine VI was disobeyed and, at a time when Eirene, in order to preserve the holy icons,⁶² was crowning herself “emperor of the Romans,” the executioner, under orders from her eunuch advisers, committed the atrocious act of blinding the legitimate ruler.⁶³ The writer was noncommittal regarding the origin of the decision and presented a grim image of the empress who, cut off from the world, gradually wasted away, tormented by guilt.⁶⁴ However, she does not appear to have completely forsaken the joys of life, since she briefly considered tempting her successor, Nikephoros, and become his co-ruler, even if in the end she stood by her decision to become a nun.⁶⁵

The next female issue was dedicated to the life of the second restorer of the a life full of adventures, achievements and adversities. Theodora prevailed over siane in the bride show⁶⁶ that was organized by Theophilos’ stepmother and included elements borrowed from the one which, according to the Byzantine sources, was organized by Eirene for her son, to which the granddaughter of Saint Philaretos had participated.⁶⁷ This is perhaps the only digression in an otherwise

Novembris, Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanum e codice Sirmondiano nunc Berolinensi, sels, 1902), August 7, 782, 1.2.

⁶² *Ειρήνη η Αθηναία*, 40: “I remain here for my work, to protect the holy icons.’ [...] The imperial regalia were brought to her. She took the crown and placed it herself on her head. She then took hold of the scepter and shouted in joy ‘I rule... Sole *Basilissa* of the Romans.’” The event is devoid of any historical basis. Eirene was crowned *augusta* before her wedding to Leo IV [C. De Boor (ed.), *Theophanis Chronographia*, v. I (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1883), 444] and there was no need for her to be “crowned” anew, nor did imperial protocol make provisions for such an eventuality.

⁶³ *Ειρήνη η Αθηναία*, 41. In actual fact, even contemporary Iconophile supporters of Eirene’s work, although they tried to justify her decision, were unable to completely exonerate her; see Katerina Nikolaou and Irene Chrestou, «Οι αντιλήψεις των Βυζαντινών για την άσκηση της εξουσίας από γυναίκες (780-1056)» [“Byzantine perceptions on the exercise of power by women (780-1056)”], *Σύμμεικτα* 13 (1999): 55-6, 59.

⁶⁴ Not a single Byzantine source portrays Eirene in a similar fashion.

⁶⁵ *Ειρήνη η Αθηναία*, 65-7. Eirene was exiled after the successful palace coup of Nikephoros, the *logothetes* of the *genikon*.

⁶⁶ Bride shows have been studied by numerous researchers. Some accept their historicity; others reject it *in toto*; still others accept the historical accuracy of only some of these shows. See Lennart Rydén, “The Bride-shows at the Byzantine Court - History or Fiction?” *Eranos* 83 (1985): 175-91; Dimitry Afinogenov, “The Bride-show of Theophilos: Some notes on the Sources,” *Eranos* 95 (1997): 10-18; Warren Treadgold, “The historicity of imperial bride-shows,” *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 54 (2004): 39-52; Gerasim Petrinski, *Конкурсите за красота във византийския императорски двор: реторика, литература, пропаганда* [Bride-shows in the Byzantine imperial court. Rhetoric, literature, propaganda] (Sofia, 2015), with a comprehensive bibliography of earlier works on the subject.

In any event, even if bride-shows had been organised, the candidates came from within the boundaries of the Byzantine Empire, not from Egypt, Babylon, or the Indies and Russia, as is mentioned for the ninth century in the Kassiane issue; *Κασσιανή*, 13-5.

⁶⁷ *Θεοδώρα η Μακαρία*, 2-7. The scriptwriter was probably familiar with the story of St Philaretos, the great landowner of Paphlagonia whose granddaughter was selected in a bride show by Eirene, the emperor’s mother, to become the wife of Constantine VI. The meeting between the imperial envoys and Philaretos’ family, the fact that they received hospitality in his house, the inquiry about

faithful rendering of the reign of Theodora, which in any case offers itself to a fictional retelling. The court jester Denderis, Theophilos' daughters and the veneration of the icons, the *augusta's* merchant ship and the emperor's wrath, Petronas' unjust treatment of a widow, the emperor personally acting as judge,⁶⁸ all these unfold before the eyes of the reader.⁶⁹ The image of the *augusta* was supplemented with the emphatic presentation of her mental skills, the spirit of thriftiness that characterized her, and was rounded off with her reluctance to proceed with the restoration of the icons after her husband's death out of fear that it might besmirch his name.⁷⁰ Her people, however, led her to the right decisions and Theodora herself triumphed along with the icons, while the image of her son as Michael the Drunkard became the dominant perception of her successor.⁷¹

One of the individuals that played a key role in the aforementioned story, Kassiane, starred in a separate issue, one that obviously deserved to be dedicated to perhaps the most important woman hymnographer of Byzantium.⁷² This issue, however, did not feature the protagonist's exceptional work; it focused instead on a great unrequited love, one that led the well-educated intelligent woman to the monastery.⁷³ Pure, idealized love, pervasive throughout the Byzantine *Classics*,⁷⁴ was the dominant element in this drama and was even depicted as the reason that forced Euphrosyne, Theophilos' stepmother, to abandon the monastic habit in order to marry her beloved Michael II.⁷⁵

the female members of the household, the fitting of the model shoe to the candidate's foot, all these events may be found in the narrative contained in the saint's *vita*: Lennart Rydén, *The Life of St Philaretos the Merciful Written by his Grandson Niketas: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Translation Notes and Indices* (Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia, 8) (Uppsala, 2002), 82-8.

⁶⁸ See on this Katerina Nikolaou, «Οι γυναίκες στο βίο και τα έργα του Θεοφίλου» ["Women in the life and works of Theophilos"], *Σύμμεικτα* 9 (1993), 137-51.

⁶⁹ *Θεοδώρα η Μακαρία*, 19-25, 26-7, 29-30, 31-4, 36-7.

⁷⁰ Sharpness of mind was a male characteristic, according to the perceptions of the Byzantines, a positive trait which the latter recognized in women who exercised authority in a dynamic and determined fashion, but also in those whose actions conformed to the views of the historians who recorded their reigns. On the way that Theodora was generally portrayed by Byzantine authors, see Nikolaou and Chrestou, "Αντιλήψεις," 57-9, 63-4.

⁷¹ *Θεοδώρα η Μακαρία*, 44.

⁷² Ilse Rochow, *Studien zu der Person, den Werken und dem Nachleben der Dichterin Kassia*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1967; Eva Catafygiotou-Topping, "Women Hymnographers in Byzantium," *Diptycha* 3 (1983): 104-7; Niki Tsironi, *Κασσιανή η Υμνοδός [Kassiane the Hymnographer]* (Athens: Ekdoseis tou Phoinika), 2002.

⁷³ *Κασσιανή*, 26.

⁷⁴ Contrary to what took place in the texts of Byzantine authors, particularly those pertaining, or referring, to the period in which the events mentioned in the issue in question take place. See Paolo Odorico, "L'amour à Byzance. Un sujet de rhétorique?" *Europe* 822 (octobre 1997): 34-46, on the absence of mentions or descriptions of romantic love in Middle Byzantine literature.

⁷⁵ *Κασσιανή*, 2. On the true reason behind this wedding, i.e. the wish of Michael II to attach himself to the Syrian dynasty by marrying Euphrosyne, great-great-granddaughter of Leo III, see Warren T. Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival 780-842* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988), 246-7.

The circle of Byzantine women is rounded off with the presentation of Anna Comnena⁷⁶ and the deeds of her father, Alexios I. The gifted emperor managed to instill respect to both friend and foe, to reap huge benefits for the beleaguered empire. Thus, in its struggle with various enemies, Hellenism⁷⁷ proved victorious. Despite a general tendency to whitewash individuals and events, the story of Anna Comnena does not shy away from the protagonist's ambition and the plots in which she participated in order to ascend the throne.⁷⁸ However, the emphasis given to contemporary military operations attests to the fact that the subtitle, "The Alexias," i.e. the emperor's deeds, was at the forefront. Anna Comnena was just a vehicle used by the dramatist (the script was written by Sophia Mavroeidi-Papadaki).

Generally speaking, every one of the Byzantine issues of *Classics Illustrated* rested on historical truth and, with the exception of Basil II, followed the historical realities of the age. However, there were distortions, fabrications and suppressions that have already been mentioned or implied, but not exhaustively. It is impossible, within the constraints of a limited study of the subject, to highlight and analyze the deliberate misrepresentations, historical mistakes and anachronisms –most of them blatant– that have been located both in the text and in the illustrations. After pointing out that each title could by itself form the subject of a separate study, I will limit myself here to only a handful of characteristic mistakes and misses.

Historical realities that failed to conform to the ideals set forth above and to the general educational policy were suppressed.

For instance, no mention is made to Eudokia's love affair with Paulinus, her husband's closest friend, an affair that led to her being banished from the palace and Constantinople, while costing her lover his life.⁷⁹ Whenever suppression of facts was not possible, whitewashing had to suffice. Thus, Justinian's Theodora

⁷⁶ On Anna Comnena and her times, as well as for an evaluation of her work, see ed. Thalia Gouma-Peterson, *Anna Komnene and Her Times* (New York – London: Garland Publishing, 2000).

⁷⁷ This issue too is full of clear references to Hellenism. See for instance *Άννα Κομνηνή*, 19: "The most powerful rulers of Europe presented themselves to the Greek emperor and swore allegiance and vassalage to him"; *ibid.*, 26: "There also arrived a unit of Greek troops led by one of Alexios' top generals"; *ibid.*, 28: "The Greeks of Nicaea received the great liberator with enthusiasm"; *ibid.*, 31: "Alexios declared holy war against the usurper Bohemund, who had betrayed the mutual agreements by capturing Greek cities."

⁷⁸ For instance, even when she was standing next to Alexios' deathbed, she and her mother would conspire in order for her to secure the succession to the imperial throne. *Άννα Κομνηνή*, 40: "... we must come up with some stratagem: Some sort of chrysobull, or a will appointing me heiress to the throne."

⁷⁹ For the actual events, see Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 176-94.

In the *Classics* issue, Eudokia decided on her own to leave Constantinople and retire in self-imposed exile to Jerusalem, because she could no longer tolerate the spineless, inactive Theodosius. On the other hand, at a later date Paulinus was accused of conspiracy by Pulcheria and the emperor ordered him executed (*Αθηναϊς*, 43-6).

kept herself from starving to death by working in a circus,⁸⁰ a venue both familiar and endearing to the *Classics*' young readers, which in no way insinuated what Procopius described as Theodora's life before her marriage.⁸¹ Likewise, Martina was depicted as Heraclius' beloved wife – which she actually was. However, there is no reference to the negative feelings that prevailed among the ecclesiastical circles, as well as among palace officials, due to the illicit, incestuous union, since Martina was the daughter of the Emperor's sister.⁸² Finally, Theophano decided to murder Nikephoros Phokas out of fear for the life of her underage children, while she went on to become John Tzimiskes' wife.⁸³ And all that because the works' readership were on the one hand minors and on the other they had to be nurtured to have faith in heroes whose image no flaw could ever tarnish.

As far as the artwork is concerned –for which those who are more qualified than than me would have plenty to observe and comment upon– howlers are both numerous and diverse. Despite the fact that talented artists and engravers worked on the the illustration, the period was not faithfully rendered.⁸⁴ For example, Romanos II looks like someone out of the times of Peter the Great of Russia or of the *Three Musketeers* issue.⁸⁵ Members of the clergy and of the monastic world are all attired in the garb of their modern counterparts,⁸⁶ and churches are decorated with images in the midst of the Iconoclastic period.⁸⁷ During the siege of Constantinople, Flantelas and his sailors wear the much later blue-and-white striped navy shirts,⁸⁸ Saracen ships and

⁸⁰ Theodora and her “two little sisters” helped their bear-keeper father at the circus, after his death they danced as “goddesses and nymphs” in *tableaux vivants*, and when she grew up she was forced to earn a living the hard way, by burning the midnight oil – according to the illustration, she stayed up all night knitting: *Ιουστινιανός*, 10.

⁸¹ On the way Procopius portrays Theodora before her marriage, see Paolo Cesaretti, *Θεοδώρα. Η άνοδος μιας αυτοκράτειρας [Theodora. The rise of an empress]*, trans. Leonidas Karatzas (Athens: Okeanida, 2003), esp. 108-26.

⁸² See George Charizanis, «Αιμομικτικές σχέσεις Βυζαντινών αυτοκρατόρων. Οι περιπτώσεις του Ηρακλείου (610-641) και του Μανουήλ Α' Κομνηνού (1143-1180) και η στάση της Εκκλησίας» [“Incestuous relationships of Byzantine emperors. The cases of Heraclius (610-641) and Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180) and the attitude of the Church”], *Βυζαντινός Δόμος* 19-20-21 (2011-2012-2013), 65-72.

⁸³ Theophano was definitely worried lest the legitimate heirs, Basil II and Constantine VIII, be elbowed out of power in favor of the children of the *kouropalates* Leo Phokas; furthermore, she was indignant at the austerity of her pious husband. On the other hand, there were serious suspicions that a romantic liaison existed between her and John Tzimiskes, whom she never married, since he gave in to the demand of the Patriarch to cast her out of the palace. This was one of the terms imposed by Polyeuktos in order to crown Tzimiskes; see Cheynet, *Ο βυζαντινός κόσμος*, 120.

⁸⁴ Apart from the fidelity –or lack thereof– in rendering the age in which each legend or historical event took place, a more general view has been put forward, claiming that the Greek-content *Classics Illustrated* series, although featuring many notable artists, did not manage to stand out artistically, because the creators were unaware of the basic formulations with which their American colleagues were familiar: Malandrakis, «Οι αριστοκράτες», 5/5; Feggerou, *Κλασικά Εικονογραφημένα*, 282.

⁸⁵ *Βασίλειος ο Βουλγαροκτόνος*, 1, 5 (fig. 2).

⁸⁶ *Αθηναίς*, 29, 39; *Ειρήνη η Αθηναία*, 8, 22, 25 (fig. 3).

⁸⁷ *Κασσιανή*, 27, 47 (fig. 4)

⁸⁸ *Κωνσταντίνος Παλαιολόγος*, 20, 34 (fig. 5).

forts fly the Jolly Roger,⁸⁹ women dancing at taverns or in the Hippodrome are dressed and coiffed like contemporary nightclub dancers or wear ballet shoes,⁹⁰ and Basil II's tutor has a globe in his study.⁹¹ Let us add to those few samples the depiction of bearded eunuchs,⁹² so that we can understand the artists' reasoning: on the one hand, they were using easy correlations; on the other, they did not wish to mystify their young readership or provoke negative impressions.

Particular reference should be made to the non-historic, intensive use –taking vantage of every possible or impossible opportunity– of the double-headed eagle the symbol of Byzantium, as early as the “highly Romanized” times of Theodosius II.⁹³ Another weakness that courses through the texts may be attributed to the writers: having only a general historical framework of Byzantium in mind and, in several occasions, not being familiar with the specific constituent elements of Byzantine culture at any given period, they made references to institutions, names, offices and titles irrespective of chronological period, as if these had been frozen in time.⁹⁴ Finally, the writers replaced stereotypes, such as Byzantine women busying themselves with weaving and knitting, with the female hobby popular in their own time, needlepoint,⁹⁵ thus projecting images and figures friendly and much closer to the young readers. Within the same framework, benefits such as girls' education, which the creators wanted to make desirable to their public, were made to look like the vested right for the whole Byzantine female population.⁹⁶ Occasioned by the

⁸⁹ Βασίλειος ο Βουλγαροκτόνος, 1, 2 (fig. 6).

⁹⁰ Ιουστινιανός, 10; Βασίλειος ο Βουλγαροκτόνος, 27 (fig. 7).

⁹¹ Βασίλειος ο Βουλγαροκτόνος, 28 (fig. 8).

⁹² Ειρήνη η Αθηναία, 1, 21, 24; Θεοδώρα η Μακαρία, 39, 45 (fig. 9).

⁹³ As there are too many instances, see e.g. Αθηναίς, 30-1; Ιουστινιανός, 30, 34; Βασίλειος ο Βουλγαροκτόνος, 12.

The eagle –though not a double-headed one– as a symbol of Rome was also one of the symbols of Byzantium (its presence is rather conspicuous in the Constantine the Great issue: *Κωνσταντίνος ο Μέγας*, passim). The date of the introduction of the double-headed eagle in Byzantium has been much discussed. It was definitely employed by the Palaeologan dynasty, but it was never the official emblem of the empire, although it was used as a decorative pattern on the emperor's saddles, socks, footwear, and the cushions on which he rested his feet. See ed. in chief Alexander P. Kazhdan, *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), s.v. eagles, 669.

⁹⁴ For instance, the captain of Heraclius' palace guard bore the title of grand *domestikos* (*Ηράκλειος*, 2); as early as the fifth century there was a *zoste patrikia* in the court of Pulcheria (*Αθηναίς*, 16), Thekla was Martina's *zoste patrikia* (*Ηράκλειος*, 3), while ladies bearing that title form the entourage of Justinian's wife Theodora (*Ιουστινιανός*, 12). On the other hand, Theoktiste, the empresses' mother, is mentioned in the Theodora issue as “the first *zoste*” *patrikia*, which she actually was; see Kazhdan, *The Oxford Dictionary*, s.v. *zoste patrikia*, 2.231.

⁹⁵ For instance, Martina embroiders double-headed eagles on cloth, in order to make sandals for Heraclius (*Ηράκλειος*, 4). Also, “sewing-kit baskets” are among the presents for the newborn daughter of Theodosius II and Eudokia (*Αθηναίς*, 29).

⁹⁶ Education was a commodity that was neither accessible to, nor necessary for, Byzantine women. Very few had either the opportunity or the ability to acquire basic reading and writing skills, while women who advanced beyond that level, especially in the Middle Byzantine period, were even fewer in number. See Katerina Nikolaou, *Η γυναίκα στη μέση βυζαντινή εποχή. Κοινωνικά πρότυπα και καθημερινός βίος στα αγιολογικά κείμενα* [*The Woman in the Middle Byzantine Period. Social*

cases of Eudokia, Kassiane, and Anna Comnena, who were actually the exceptions to the rule, the claim was put forward that “many women added luster to Byzantium in the field of culture.”⁹⁷ Also on the subject of women, who drove chariots⁹⁸ and moved freely about town, their outlined participation in the war effort alluded to the Greek women of Antiquity and the fighters of the recent Greek-Italian War. They took an active part in defense during sieges and publicly expressed their joy or sorrow for current developments.⁹⁹ The role models used in depicting the Byzantine mother and wife were the Spartan woman, who proudly saw her son off to war, and the Greek woman of 1940, who stoically faced the loss of son or husband in the Albanian front.

This last observation recapitulates everything that has been stated above and confirms the standing dualities in contemporary historiography: Antiquity-Byzantium and Byzantium-Modern Hellenism. Beyond the projected epic, Graeco-Christian dimension of Byzantium and the exemplary substance of the works’ main protagonists, there was a manifest tendency on the part of creators and publishers to help their young readers find in the pages of *Classics Illustrated* recognizable situations, familiar figures and known characters that would lead them to realize the direct connection to their historical past.

Models and Everyday Life in the Hagiographical Texts] (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation/Institute of Byzantine Research, 2005), 185-213.

⁹⁷ «Περίληψη του Έργου» [“Summary of the work”], *Αθηναΐς*.

⁹⁸ *Αθηναΐς*, 36-7.

⁹⁹ *Κωνσταντίνος ο Μέγας*, 36, 37.

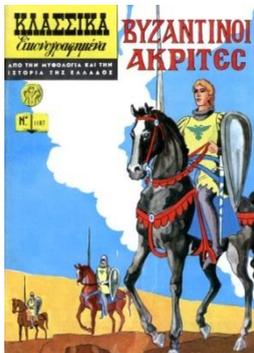
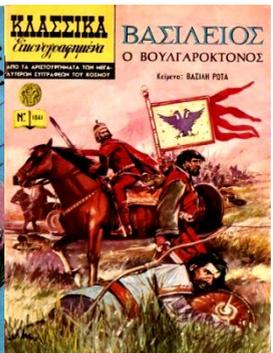
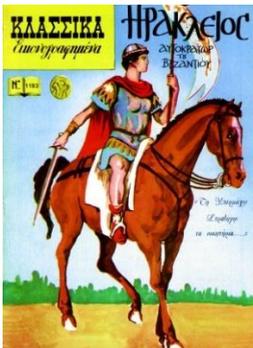
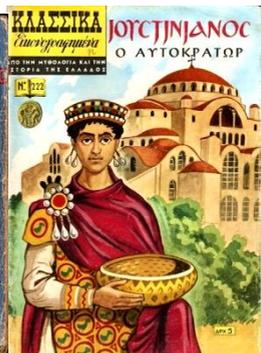
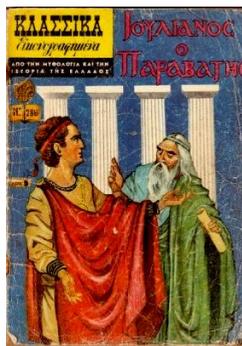
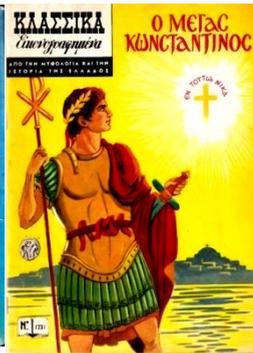




Fig. 1



Fig. 2

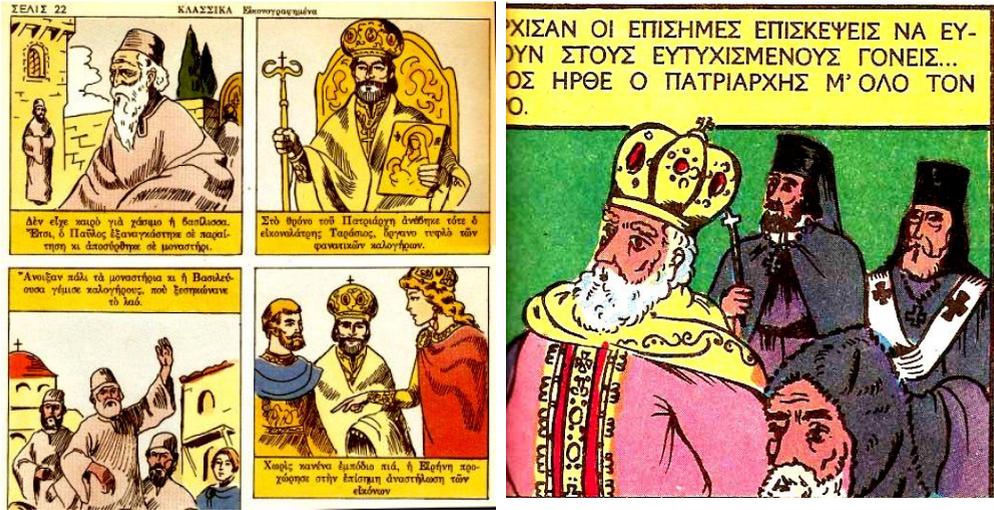


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

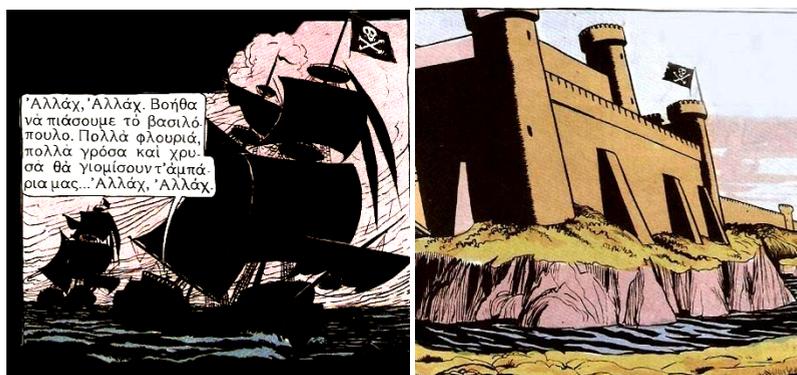


Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

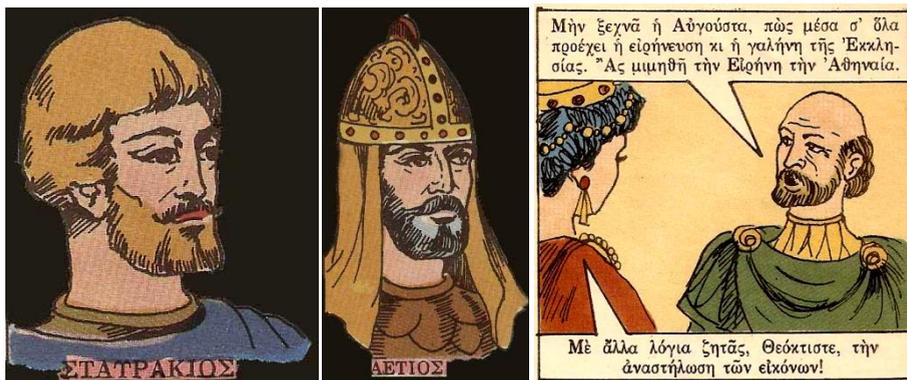


Fig. 9