



Summary :

Theodore Meliteniotes was one of the most prominent figures in letters and sciences in the Late Byzantine period (second half of the 14th century). He had his part in the political and ecclesiastical developments of his time, on the side of the supporters of Gregorios Palamas. He held senior ecclesiastical offices, such as *megas sakellarios* and *didaskalos ton didaskalon*, and wrote various works. His writings delved into theological, mathematical and astronomical matters. His *Three Books on Astronomy* (also known as the *Astronomical Tribiblos*) as well as a long commentary on the four Gospels are of particular importance.

Date and Place of Birth

Early 14th century, place unknown

Date and Place of Death

1393, place unknown

Main Role

Patriarchal official, scholar and writer, *didaskalos ton didaskalon* and *megas sakellarios*.

1. Biography

Theodore Meliteniotes came from a notable family of [Constantinople](#). He was active during the second half of the 14th century and was a patriarchal officer that distinguished himself as a scholar, a teacher and a writer. Little evidence has been preserved about his life and work in a few sources, such as letters,¹ while his action is mentioned in the *Short Chronicles*² and in some documents of his time.³ The year and the place he was born remain unknown. He must have been born in the early (first or second decade) 14th century.⁴ As regards his early life, he is known to have studied in accordance with the Byzantine education system: Grammar, Rhetoric and Logic (*Trivium*) as well as Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy and Music (*Quadrivium*). Early on he showed an aptitude for the Euclidean Geometry and was well aware of the astronomical works from [Trebizond](#), which was an important centre of scientific activity at the time, while he had also studied the works of the Alexandrians Claudius [Ptolemy](#) and Theon.⁵

As to his ecclesiastical career, Meliteniotes was a member of the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Byzantium. Until 1360 he had served in several offices, such as deacon, *megas sakellarios* of the [Great Church](#) and *didaskalos ton didaskalon*.⁶ Moreover, he served as an archdeacon ("of the charitable imperial clergy") in the imperial court from 1368 to 1393.⁷ As a senior official in the clergy and a scholar, Meliteniotes corresponded with outstanding literary Byzantine figures of the 14th century, such as Joseph Bryennios, Demetrios Kydones and Makarios Chrysokephalos.⁸

Meliteniotes died on 8 March 1393 under uncertain circumstances.⁹

2. Writings

As regards his writing activity, Theodore Meliteniotes was a prolific writer with various research interests. His most important work was the [Three Books on Astronomy](#) («Astronomical Tribiblos») – a handbook of astronomy with 3 books on the astronomical developments of his time. In order to write this guide (1361), Meliteniotes was based on the works of Claudius Ptolemy and Theon, as well as on various Arabic sources. The *Astronomical Tribiblos* has not been published as a whole.¹⁰ The content of this specific work is strikingly similar to that by Isaac Argyros because they have the same sources, although it is not easy to determine which one was written first.¹¹

Meliteniotes also wrote *Diatessaron* ("composed of four"), where he tried to make detailed comments on the Gospels. The book consisted of 9 volumes (about 2,500 sheets), only 3 of which have survived.¹²



Meliteniotes is considered to have written a poetic work titled «On Temperance».¹³ The poem consists of 3,062 verses in fifteen (fifteen syllables per line) and refers to the meeting of the writer with Temperance, which is described as a female figure who shows him around her kingdom. Through numerous descriptions (*ekphraseis*) of various objects the poet makes allegorical-moralistic remarks and provides a wealth of encyclopaedic information. The descriptions of Sophrosyne's bed with the extensive list of precious stones and minerals as well as the recital of the fish of the lake are most characteristic. Due to its structure and content this particular work should be examined as a sample of allegorical-instructive poetry of encyclopaedic character rather than as an ordinary poem. According to Beck, it is a «concoction full of thousands of lettered thoughts in the form of a love story without love».¹⁴ The piece reminds strongly of earlier Byzantine poetic works and novels, such as *Digenes Akritas* and *Libistros and Rhodamne*,¹⁵ while, on the other hand, it has things in common with the allegorical-instructive poetry of the West, which makes it a rare sample of Byzantine literature.¹⁶

Finally, some letters that Meliteniotes exchanged with scholars and officials have also been preserved.¹⁷

3. Ecclesiastical Matters – Ideology

Meliteniotes took actively part in ecclesiastical and wider religious matters of his time and supported the ideas of Gregorios Palamas. Because of his anti-Latin feelings and his ideology, which was influenced by Palamas, he signed in 1368 the synodical *Tomos*, which condemned the ideas and the attitude of Prochoros Kydones towards religious matters and the relations of the [Patriarchate of Constantinople](#) with the Pope.¹⁸

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1. Letter no. 151 of Demetrios Kydones to Meliteniotes, c. 1371-1372, Loenertz, R.-J. (ed.), *Demetrius Cydones II* (Vatikan 1960), pp. 20-22; transl. in German by Tinnefeld, F. [s.u.] I 2, pp. 503-506. See also Letter no. 1 of Joseph Vryennios to Meliteniotes, c. 1382-1393, Mandakases, Th., *Werke III* (Leipzig 1784), p. 127.
 2. *Βραχέα Χρονικά*, no. 10.11, Schreiner, P. (ed.), *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken I* (Wien 1975), p. 104.
 3. References to Meliteniotes: document no. 2427 by Patriarch Kallistos, November 1360 (Miklosich, F. – Müller, I., *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi I* (Wien 1860), p. 394), and *Συνοδικός Τόμος Β'* to Prochoros Kydones (Migne, J.-P. [ed.], *PG* 151, column 716C). For more details about sources, see *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* (1998), see entry 'MELITENIOTES, Theodoros' (G. Fatouros), <http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/m/meliteniotes.shtml>
 4. According to Fatouros, Meliteniotes was born in the second decade of the 14th c. See *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* (1998), see entry 'MELITENIOTES, Theodoros' (G. Fatouros), <http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/m/meliteniotes.shtml>
 5. Vogel, K., 'Byzantine Science', in *The Cambridge Medieval History*, part II (Cambridge 1966), p. 278.
 6. Walther, R., 'Weitere Briefe an Makarios, den Metropoliten von Philadelpheia (1336-1382)', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 23 (1974), p. 223.
 7. *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 2 (1991), pp. 1336-1337, see entry 'Meliteniotes, Theodore' (A.-M. Talbot).
 8. Walther, R., 'Weitere Briefe an Makarios, den Metropoliten von Philadelpheia (1336-1382)', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 23 (1974), pp. 223-227.
 9. Beck suggests that Meliteniotes probably died in 1397, see Beck, H.-G., *Ιστορία της βυζαντινής δημόδους λογοτεχνίας* (Athens 1988), p.



203.

10. *Théodore Méliténote, Tribilos Astronomique, Livre 1*, Régine Leurquin (ed.), Gieben, Amsterdam 1990, Corpus des Astronomes Byzantins IV.
11. Vogel, K., 'Byzantine Science', in *The Cambridge Medieval History*, part II (Cambridge 1966), p. 278.
12. Astruc, C., 'Le livre III retrouvé du commentaire de Théodore Méliténiotès sur les Évangiles (Parisinus Graecus 180)', *Travaux et Mémoires* 4 (1970), pp. 411-429.
13. According to Dölger, F., the poem is attributed to Meliteniotes, 'Die Abfassungszeit des Gedichtes des Meletiniotes auf die Enthaltbarkeit', *Annuaire Inst. Phil. Hist. Or. Slav.* 2 (1934), pp. 315-330. This opinion was accepted by most researchers, see Beck, H.-G., *Ιστορία της βυζαντινής δημόδους λογοτεχνίας* (Αθήνα 1988), pp. 202-203, 236 and Hunger, H., *Βυζαντινή Λογοτεχνία, Η λόγια κοσμική γραμματεία των Βυζαντινών*, vol. 2 (Athens 1992), p. 524, vol. 3 (Athens 1994), p. 94.
14. Beck, H.-G., *Ιστορία της βυζαντινής δημόδους λογοτεχνίας* (Athens 1988), p. 202.
15. Tiftixoglu, V., "Digenes, das 'Sophrosyne' - Gedicht des Meliteniotes und der byzantinische fünfzehnsilber", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 67 (1974), pp. 1-63.
16. Hunger, H., *Βυζαντινή Λογοτεχνία, Η λόγια κοσμική γραμματεία των Βυζαντινών* 2 (Athens 1992), p. 524.
17. As for the correspondence with the metropolitan of Philadelphiea Makarios Chrysokefalos, see Walther, R., 'Weitere Briefe an Makarios, den Metropolitan von Philadelphiea (1336-1382)', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 23 (1974), pp. 223-227.
18. *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 2 (1991), p. 1336, see entry 'Meliteniotes, Theodore' (A.-M. Talbot).

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	Hunger H. , <i>Βυζαντινή λογοτεχνία. Η λόγια κοσμική γραμματεία των Βυζαντινών, 2: Ιστοριογραφία, Φιλολογία, Ποίηση</i> , Μ.Ι.Ε.Τ., Αθήνα 1992, Κόλιας, Τ. – Συνελλή, Κ. – Μακρής, Γ.Χ. – Βάσσης, Ι. (μτφρ.)
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	Dölger F. , "Die Abfassungszeit des Gedichtes des Meletiniotes "Auf die Enthaltbarkeit"", <i>Annuaire Inst. Phil. Hist. Or. Slav.</i> , 2, 1934, 315-330
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	MELITENIOTES, Theodoros, http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/m/meliteniotes.shtml
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Glossary :

	didaskalos ton didaskalon A layman or a priest who was teacher of religious matters. The title also designated a teacher on matters of faith and the Holy Scriptures in the Patriarchal School of Constantinople.
	megas sakellarios Ecclesiastic official. The sakellarios was responsible for supervising the monasteries of his bishopric. In late 11th c. the sakellarios of the Patriarchate of Constantinople was given the epithet «megas» (great). By that time the office had lost any economic responsibilities and was responsible for supervising the monasteries of Constantinople, as well as for composing and seeing to the application of patriarchal acts concerning the <i>charistikai</i> donations.

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Quotations

On Avarice

'ὅτι τῶν δαιμονιζομένων οὐδέν διαφέρουσι πάντες οἱ τὰς διαβόλου ποιῶντες ἐπιθυμίας, μάλιστα δέ οἱ φιλάργυροι'

Theodore Meliteniotes in *Patrologia Graeca* 149, col. 913-920^A

It is better to live with a myriad of demons rather than an avaricious person



'(Οί φιλάργυροι) ἀφορῶντες ἀποκλειστικῶς καί μόνον εἰς τήν δύναμιν τοῦ χρήματος ζοῦν βίον ἀνειρηένευτον καί τόν οὐδέν ἡδικηκότα ἐχθρόν ἡγοῦνται καί δοῦλον λαβεῖν βούλονται τόν ἐλεύθερον ὄντα'

Theodore Meliteniotes in *Patrologia Graeca*, 149, col. 916^A

Chronological Table

first quarter of 14th century: Birth of Theodore Meliteniotes

until 1360: Posts of deacon, *didaskalos ton didaskalon* and *megas sakellarios*

c. 1361: *Three books on Astronomy* (Astrological Tribiblos)

1368: Archdeacon «of the charitable imperial clergy» in the imperial court; remains there until 1393

1393: Death of Meliteniotes

Auxiliary Catalogs

WORKS

- 1) *Αστρονομική Τριβιβλος* (Astronomical Tribiblos), c. 1368 (only the first part published by Migne, J.-P., PG 149, columns 988-1001).
- 2) *Των εις Τριάδα τριπλήν εξηγήσεων του Διά Τεσσάρων Αγίου Ευαγγελίου βιβλίοι* – commentary on the Synopsis of the four Gospels, preserved only for the three last parts (3-5) (Migne, J.-P. (ed.), PG 149, pp. 884-988).
- 3) *Εις την Σωφροσύνην* (Miller, E. (ed.), "Poème allégorique de Méliténiote", *Notices et Extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale* 19/II (1858), pp. 1-138).
- 4) Letter of Meliteniotes to the metropolitan of Philadelpheia Makarios, before 1360 (Walther, R., "Weitere Briefe an Makarios, den Metropolitan von Philadelpheia (1336-1382)", *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 23 (1974), pp. 225-226, translation in pp. 226-227).