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Vertical mobility and its displacements in Byzantine poetry

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Abstract:

Learned poetry played an important role in vertical mobility in Byzantine society, as it was an ideal tool for the display of technical literary virtuosity. Aspiring teachers, courtiers, and bureaucrats profited from occasions of display to build a reputation and to attract the attention of the powerful. In many cases, social mobility mirrors geographical mobility, as talented young people flocked to Constantinople to find chances for social improvement.

Vertical mobility engenders different, sometimes contradictory sociological forces. Hence, poets developed different strategies dependent on their position on that upward social ladder: excluded from it, ascending it, threatened to fall from it, etc. As a consequence, poetry also displays aversion towards the phenomenon of social mobility. The geographical aspect of social mobility gains particular weight in light of the ideal of “urbanity”, but also in light of the opposite ideal of reclusion.