

The Views of Theodoros Metochites about the Adoption of Prototypes in the Education of the Wise Men's Life

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ABSTRACT--- *Byzantine thinker Theodore Metochites in a brief chapter of his extended work *Hypomnismata and Seimeiosis gnomikai* developed his views on the significance of the works and reasons of the actions of ancient people on the life of the descendants. Metochites assumed that the words and actions of the ancients can be a pattern for the younger ones and as a historic being they contribute in exercising the preparation and the education of the art of life.*

Keywords--- pattern, wisdom, knowledge, education, art of life

1. THE “PATTERN” AS A BASIC ELEMENT FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE WISE MAN

Theodoros Metochites (1260-1332) was a Humanist, who lived in the Palaiologan period. He studied astronomy under the private tuition of Manuel Bryennios (Pingree, 1964; Constantinides, 1982; Haramoundanis, 2007). Furthermore, he seems to have studied theology, and continued his studies in Aristotle's logic, physics and ethics. He trained himself in the art of rhetoric (Treu, 1985; Constantinides, 1982). He was influenced to a great extent by the tradition of Michael Psellos significantly and interpreted Aristotle's works with the help of Neoplatonic commentators (Tatakis, 1977). Probably, because he was a polymath Metochites had in mind the teaching of Stoics for the imitation of pattern. M. C. Nussbaum points out that the significance of patterns was crucial to stoic teaching. According to Stoics the pattern joins theory to actions, the philosophical reason to the everyday life of the wise man. The pattern constituted the embodiment of theory and at the same time the empirical proof of truth. The preparation on proper thinking and action becomes easier and shorter through the patterns (Nussbaum, 1994).

Theodoros Metochites in his extended work *Hypomnismata and Seimeiosis gnomikai* (Metochites, 1966;) analyzed the meaning of the actions and words of the ancient people as a means of an educational preparation for the art of life. As a result a human being eliminates his mistakes by controlling one's choices and actions through the imitation of the model and therefore easily achieving a happy life.

Metochites specially emphasized the importance of the actions and words of ancient people have in the education of humans, providing that they guide their lives. It concerns patterns which comprise the embodiment of theory and action for the education of the wise (Metochites, 1966)¹. According to Metochites:

“Οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅλως ἀνύσαι τί μέγα τὰ τῆς σοφίας πράγματα ... καὶ τῆ τῶν ἀρχαίων πραγμάτων πείρα μεστὸν ἐνευθηνούντα καὶ ἐνακμάζοντα τὸν νοῦν εἰς ἅπαντα ἔστι γόνιμον ἀπαντᾶν, καὶ κάλλιστ' ἐνεργὸν κατὰ πρόθεσιν” (Metochites, 1966, 735).

“There is nothing more important than coping with the wise actions of the ancient people which were full of experience, and this experience strengthens the mind to be productive in everything that happens around him and be better active in every purpose by hand”.

Metochites said that:

“Καὶ μέγας δὴ παιδοτρίβης ὄντως τοῖς περὶ τὴν σοφίαν ἐσπουδακόσιν ὁ χρόνος ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὰ καὶ τὰ καθοδηγούμενος, πάντα γυμνάζων, καὶ ὑποδεικνύων τοῖς παλαιοῖς τύποις καὶ ὑποδείγμασιν ἐκ μακροῦ

¹. Metochites, Theodoros, 1966, 734: Τὸ περὶ τὰς ἱστορίας φιλόπονον τῶν παλαιῶν πράξεων τε καὶ ὅλως τῆς τοῦ βίου καὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων τὸ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἀγωγῆς προὔργου ἂν εἴη πανυ τοι τῷ σοφῷ....

τὰ τῆς ἐκάστοτε χρήσεως, καὶ τῆ ἀσκήσει πίστιν ἐντεῦθεν διδοῦς, καὶ πᾶν τὸ ἀσφαλὲς καὶ τὴν ἀκρίβειαν τῆς ἔξεως” (Metochites, 1966, 735).

“A great educator is the teacher who will teach wisdom and will lead them (meaning the students) from the beginning, training them on everything and indicating the ancient patterns which every one of them has its own everlasting use and will offer trust through exercise and all the security and the stability of the habit”.

Metochites was inspired by the teaching patterns of Epictetus and considered that wise man to have received from God the ability to reach wisdom and knowledge by exercising oneself through the recollection of models. Consequently, wise humans learn from their patterns who are the great people called “lovers and creators of wisdom” (Metochites, 1966)². Metochites, inspired by stoicism, praises the existence of numerous ideal and perfect people whose works and actions constituted a theatre for the whole world at all times and the pattern of love for the nice (Metochites, 1966, 737; Metochites, 1995, 231; Beck, 2000; Simplicius, 1842, 205; Democritus, 2013, 88)³. The life and work of the ideal personalities is the temple of education which constitutes the mind diligent and prepares it with the treasures of knowledge so that it always seems brilliant and bright. The wise man will achieve happiness in the erudition and in the experience of the ancient patterns, that is where he will study the theories of being, will discover the “good” and train oneself on it, and will learn to contemplate everything well and behave according to specific patterns (Metochites, 1966,737).

Epictetus urged his students to bear in mind the moments of life, the behavior and “apofthegmata” or the sayings of models. In this way, students may recall upon them when facing a difficult situation or are in need of moral and psychological support, which will encourage their actions (Long, 2002)⁴. Metochites expressed a similar point of view as Epictetus and supported that:

“Παρασκευὴ γὰρ ἐκ τῶν ὑποδειγμάτων καὶ ἄμιλλα κινεῖται, καὶ πῦρ φλέγον ζήλου καὶ χαρακτήρες εὐστομίας ἀνατυποῦνται καὶ προδείκνυνται, καὶ διὰ μνήμης ἐνευθηνεῖσθαι τῆ χρήσει παρέχονται, καὶ οὐχ ἦκιστ’ ἐν τῶν παλαιῶν ἐκείνων ἐργασίας πορισμοὶ γίνονται, καὶ παμφορία πρὸς τὰ ξυμπύμπτονθ’ ἐκάστοτε, καὶ πίστεις μὲ οὖν κατὰ καιρὸν ταῖς προθέσεσι καὶ δυναμοποιοὶ συμμαχία κάλλιστα τελέσφοροι τῷ λέγοντι ... Καὶ που τὶ παλαιὸν ἀφήγημα πράξεως ἤστινος ἄρα, ἢ λόγου καὶ ἀποφθέγματος κατευστοχήσαντος ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν ἐπελθὼν ... καὶ τοῖς ἀκροωμένοις εὖ μάλ’ ἔδοξεν ἐπαγωγὸν ξυμμαρτυροῦν εἰς τὰ προκείμενα καὶ προέτρεπον, ἢ ἀποτρέπον ἐν τοῖς πρακτέοις” (Metochites, 1966, 738).

“The preparation through patterns motivates to a good fight, boosts zeal and forms good characters which are manifested and become known through the beauty of speech. Memory holds the patterns so as to be used in the future. Therefore, the acts of ancient humans become a proof and a productive fruit in the particular, they can become arguments for periodically said statements and strong alliances which give the best possible result to the speaker... The narration of a historic event or a saying (apofthegma) contribute in persuading the audience and they can constitute tangible testimonies which will encourage or discourage actions”.

Metochites considered that life and the works of the great ancient humans, who constitute the patterns for the younger generation, is an account of everything that has happened and is regarded as a guide for the life of their descendants and functions as an art of life (Polemis, 1999). Metochites explained the meaning of the patterns from the viewpoint of mental and social history. From this viewpoint Metochites continued with the consideration of Ancient and Hellenistic ethic and supported that natural knowledge is absolutely necessary for the wise people. He adopted the view of Aristotle that, it is in people’s nature to desire knowledge which has to do with tangible things. Learning is a even more important thing for wise humans, through which this they learn to think and act in the right manner. Therefore, the knowledge which derives from the patterns is called erudition and with this the wise man can supervise life that humans can perform (Metochites, 1966, 739; Featherstone, 2011; Koumakis, 2001). Metochites reinforced his original point of view, according to which the whole previous life of people, since the beginning of time, is the “theatre of life and conduct” of human affairs. In this theatre everything is mentally conceived; not only what happened in the past but also

². Metochites Theodoros, 1966, 736: Καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλως ἀνύτειν, ὅτι μὴ ταῖς ἐκεῖθεν ἀνθοφορίας ταῖς ἐρασταῖς καὶ δημιουργοῖς τῆς σοφίας.

³. Ibid. 737: ... οὐδ’ ἔστι θέατρον κόσμων παντοίων καὶ πάσης ὥρας καὶ φιλοκαλίας; According to H.-G. Beck “Metochites likes to compare the process of world with a great theater”. Obviously, Metochites drew this view either by *Handbook* (or *Encheiridion*) of Epictetus (chapter 17), or by intermediate source Neoplatonist Simplicius.

⁴. A. A. Long points out that “Epictetus can be explored from many different perspectives. These include intellectual and social history, the interpretation of Stoicism, ethics and psychology, both ancient and modern, the theory and practice of education, rhetoric, and religion”.

those that happen at present and those that will happen in the future (Metochites, 1966; Featherstone, 2011)⁵. Metochites expressed a rather innovative view for his time. To be exact, he regarded the sayings and acts of all ancient humans as patterns which compose historical affairs and form a living reality which always contributes to human cultural affairs composing a guide or an art manual of human life.

Metochites mediated on the teaching benefits that a human acquires from the moral and social history of patterns and appointed them as educational tools so as to combine theory and practice. This combination of the philosophical speech with the virtuous act was exactly what he wanted to make known by promoting his own models. What is particularly important is that Metochites called upon as patterns, philosophers like the historian, biographer and essayist Plutarch (416-119 A.D.), the author and philosopher Dion Chrysostom (40-120 A.D.), the Neoplatonist philosopher Synesius (370-413/414 A.D.) and Socrates, who was the main pattern of a wise man for Epictetus (Long, 2002).

2. THE PHILOSOPHICAL “PATTERNS” IN THE EDUCATION OF THE ART OF LIFE

Metochites chose as patterns of wise men some stoic philosophers who excelled in their way of thinking and behavior. He specifically mentioned Plutarch, Dion Chrysostom, Synesius and Socrates. The main characteristic of all these models is that all four of them regarded the use of the experience of ancestors as a prime requirement in order to deal with difficulties and achieve happiness in life.

Metochites first mentions Plutarch from Chaironea (46-119 B.C.) who was the most important historian, biographer and philosopher to exist at the time. His philosophy was selective and he derived elements from the stoics, the Pythagoreans, the Peripatetics and as the main core Plato (Ploutarch, 2008, 60-61; Triantari, 2005). According to Metochites, Plutarch was a wise man with great knowledge whose treasure was stored in his memory. Plutarch recalled upon this knowledge depending on different life situations. Plutarch had the ability of an intellectual preparation (“*παρασκευῆς*”) due to the fact that he could bring to mind the actions of heroic men, their morals and their sayings at any given time. In this way Plutarch improved his life, ensured his personal happiness as he recalled at any time what was useful from the treasure of his knowledge. Furthermore he taught his audience important as well as less important things offering worthwhile inferences which improved their morals, their thought and their views (Metochites, 1966, 741-742; Featherstone, 2011; Tartaglia, 1987). Plutarch gave the impression of a superior, moral man who demonstrated clearly his erudition in all things. Metochites showed off Plutarch’s ability to use his knowledge in order to improve his morality and achieve happiness.

Dion of Prusa or Chrysostomos (40-120 A.D.) was Plutarch’s contemporary. Metochites mentioned Dion as the second pattern of a wise man. Dion was well-known for his education and his innate talent of words (innate ability to make speeches). These two factors provided him with the ability to deliver public speeches. Dion derived his philosophical views from cynicism and stoicism. He belonged to the second sophistic school and was one of the stoic philosophers, due to his moral and political content of his works (Triantari-Mara, 2005; Sheppard, 1984).

According to Metochites, Dion is the pattern of the wise man that stood out for his excellent use of speech, which is used not to impress but to advise his audience to practice the words and actions of the ancient on a daily basis. He was the pattern of a free man who advised his audience to study history particularly the “historical prescription” (“*τὰ ιστορικὰ συντάγματα*”). Studying history renders the human wise because it broadens his mind, enhances his genius for the understanding of beings and enables him to comprehend “the science about the things of life” (“*κατὰ τὸν βίον πραγμάτων ἐπιστήμη*”) (Metochites, 1966, 743; Epictetus, 2004; Featherstone, 2011; Hult, 2004).

Metochites stressed that the art of life for a wise man follows the principle of philosophy. The Neoplatonist philosopher and thereafter Christian Synesius of Cyrene (370-413.414 A.D.), bishop of Ptolemaida (Kennedy, 2000; Triantari-Mara, 2005) is the pattern of a wise man who taught his students to desire and search for the knowledge of all that occurred in the past. It concerns the universal knowledge, the philosophy which provides “experience” (“*πείρα*”) in whatever is happening in life and this experience is beneficial for the human life (Metochites, 1966, 744). Metochites called upon Synesius who was an important public speaker/rhetorician in his time and with his moral and political views

⁵. Metochites, Theodoros 1966, 740: ... καὶ ἐξόραστωνευμένης ἐποπτείας εὖ μάλα διαθρῶν τὸ ξύμπαν ἐξ ἀρχῆς τοῦ βίου καὶ τῆς τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων ἀγωγῆς θέατρον, καὶ δολιχεύων καὶ περῶν ἀπόνως πάντῃ τοῖς τῆς διανοίας ὀφθαλμοῖς, καὶ μὴ τὰ πρόχειρα μόνον ζῶν, μηδ’ ὅσον τὰ πρὸ ποδῶν, ὡς φασὶν, ὄρῶν, ἀλλ’ ἅμα πάνυ τοι πορῶτάτω, πρόσω καὶ ὀπίσω, καὶ μηδὲν ἤττον ἐπιδεξιά καὶ ἐπιθάτερα.

advised many emperors. Synesius advised his audience to use as examples the difficulties that their ancestors faced in order to avoid dangers, govern well, ensure welfare and accomplish a happy life. In an accurate way Metochites presented Synesius as a pattern of a wise man, in order to indicate that this prior knowledge, which is history, is embodied in the wider field of philosophy, which is not a theory but a way of life, “science of life” (“ἐπιστήμη τοῦ βίου”). Synesius as well as Dion were writers of consultive speeches towards emperors. Therefore their teaching was not only an art of life but also an art of governing. According to Metochites those two wise men with their advice attempted to ensure the right governing of their life and their city. The previous knowledge alienates the person from the necessity of luck (Metochites, 1966, 743-745; Sevcenco, 1962; Featherstone, 2011)⁶.

According to Metochites, Socrates was a brilliant example because he taught the young ones to learn from the experience of the elder in order to progress in life. Socrates through Plato taught the importance of the sayings and acts of the predecessors, making known “the usefulness of history” (“τῶν ἱστοριῶν χρῆμα”) for the behavior of the descendants (Metochites, 1966, 747). Metochites chose the specific patterns and on top of all these Socrates in order to show that the eventual aim is the life of the ancient humans and most importantly the wise ones and this can be considered as a pattern for the descendants so as to be improved morally and to accomplish a happy life which philosophy ensures, the knowledge of the past and the present, which is a way of life for the future.

3. THE PATTERNS AS “HISTORICAL INJUNCTIONS” AND THEIR USEFULNESS

Metochites perceived the actions of the ancient people as necessary and useful acts of life, which the descendants will regard as examples for the preparation and the practice of the strategic and governing art; they are examples for the magistrate/lordship and the incipient, for those who possess in common and examine them together, for those who contemplate about the present and the future, for peace and war, for friends and foes and for those without children as well as for those who have many children. All past actions is a “preparation” (“παρασκευή”) or power which helps people encounter different situations and the gradual changes of things (Metochites, 1966, 745).

Metochites regarded the previous life of men and especially that of wise men as a guide for the future life of wise men, who possess a sound reasoning and have comprehended that there is no life without any dangers. Life and the acts of the ancient patterns constitute a method of supervision and control over life for the people who desire to have the sympathy of God. The wise people whose lives depend on their strengths will have the providence of God (Metochites, 1966, 746; Featherstone, 2011; Var de Velden, 1987). Metochites implied that the choices and actions of these people will be led by the experiences and actions of ancient patterns and based on these, the ways of their behavior will be defined so that they will act logically. The advice of the ancient men is necessary for the training of the wise so long as they prepare the way for a happy life with fewer mistakes (Metochites, 1966, 746). Metochites indirectly referred to the view of Socrates, according to which “anyone who does not control his life is not worth living it” (Plato, Apology, 38A; Raabe, 2002; Dellis, 2005). Metochites suggested that the examination of life is to be based on the examination of words and actions of ancient people, who will be the patterns called upon by the wise humans every time they need to possess constant self-control depending on the situations they have to deal with.

Metochites perceived all the previous patterns from the life of people as “historical injunctions” (“ιστορικές ὑποθήκες”) which increase in time and constitute a preparatory stage for logical people who want to conserve this treasure of knowledge (Metochites, 1966, 748). Metochites presented these patterns as a guide of moral teaching for those who desire to derive benefits from them achieving the Socratic “know yourself” (“γνώθι σαυτόν”) which is a way to the achieve inner happiness.

Metochites referred to general and specific patterns so as to teach that a rational and wise human should use these “historical injunctions” (“ιστορικές ὑποθήκες”) to benefit his life. Ignorance will alienate him from prudence and wisdom:

“ὅς δ’ ἂν μὴ εἰδείη, ὄνος κάθηται κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν, ἀποτυχῶν, καὶ βουκολεῖ βόας αὖ ... καὶ ὄντως ἐνεργὸς τῇ ζωῇ, ἀλλ’ ὡς φόρτος ἄλλος ἐπικείμενος τῇ γῆ, λίθος, ξύλον, ἢ ἄλλό τι τῶν ἀψύχων ἄχθος αὐτῇ” (Metochites, 1966, 750).

“Who, if he doesn’t know, will stay as a donkey, according to the saying, and graze here and there... and even if he is active in life will be a burden on Earth, like the rock or the wood or any other lifeless weight”.

⁶ . Metochites emphasized the eloquence of Synesius and Dion, as well as, Plutarch. So he apparently did the same. Even if he was well served in old rhetorical practice, he fashioned his own eccentric style.

At the end of the chapter Metochites used this contrast to highlight the difference between the educated and wise man, who has the conduct of life of the ancient people as a pattern, whereas the ignorant and irrational man who is constantly being misled and cannot avoid his mistakes (Featherstone, 2011).

In Metochites consideration the sayings and acts of ancient people are the patterns, which are regarded as a spiritual vehicle of human *proairesis* or choice and prudence, and function as a self-preparation, practice and self-control to a wise man.

4. CONCLUSION

Metochites based his moral teaching on patterns which are the words and actions of the ancient humans which he called “historical injunctions” (“ιστορικές υπόθηκες”) and a method of preparation for the art of life. The views of Metochites, on the one hand, reinforced and broadened the method of education in the moral teaching of a pattern which can be encountered in his predecessor Epictetus. On the other hand, they point up the educational importance that the patterns may have as historical knowledge for the education of students and the life of citizens. And finally, he put forward the words and actions of the ancient humans in a practice of control and preparation which leads the descendants to a happy life by avoiding important mistakes. Metochites presented the patterns in the form of history which functions as a tool of guidance and education in the art of life.

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