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***Tradition and innovation
in the transmission of acritic songs in Cappadocia***

by

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Illustration: "Digenes Akritas", Christos Yannopoulos

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Cappadocia is the cradle of the so-called acritic songs (ἀκριτικά ᾠσματα / τραγούδια) celebrating the heroic deeds of the frontier guards (ἀκρίται) of the eastern borders of the Byzantine Empire during the Arab-Byzantine wars from the 7th until the 11th c. The most famous of these is *Digenes Akritas*, an epic composed in the popular decapentasyllabic political verse (πολιτικός στίχος) of the late Byzantine period. Many of the acritic songs recorded in the 19th and 20th centuries center around the death of Digenes (N.G. Politis, "Ἀκριτικά ᾠσματα ὁ θάνατος τοῦ Διγενῆ, *Λαογραφία* 1, 1909, 169-275). An unpublished manuscript by A.M. Levidis (Πραγματεία περὶ τῆς ἐν Καππαδοκίᾳ λαλουμένης γλώσσης, 1892) contains several important acritic songs from Cappadocia, two of which have been published by R.M. Dawkins (Some Modern Greek Songs from Cappadocia, *American Journal of Archaeology* 38, 1934, 112-122). One of these was recorded by Levidis at Ferteke, but the language reflects the dialect of the neighbouring village Delmeso, which is geographically Southwest but dialectologically Northeast Cappadocian. The song is composed in traditional political verse and contains many features which are very different from Delmeso and the other Cappadocian dialects as described in Dawkins' *Modern Greek in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1916). In this talk I will discuss these features as archaisms going back to the late Byzantine period, which have been preserved in the oral transmission of the song and mixed with innovations from the local Cappadocian dialect of Delmeso. The 'mixed language' of the song is thus comparable, *mutatis mutandis*, to the *Kunstsprache* of the Homeric epics and is characteristic of songs which have been orally transmitted through the ages.

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