1. The initiative
This book presents the eighteenth volume of the ‘Dictionary of the Medieval Greek Vernacular’, covering the words προβιδίαζω to ραβέντι. This new edition is warmly welcomed by Byzantinists, for it is virtually impossible to study late medieval and early modern vernacular Greek literature without ‘Kriaras’ dictionary’, as it is popularly called. After all, it was the philologist E. Kriaras who in 1968 has begun the systematic lexicographical study of the vernacular Greek of the Middle Ages. Since 1997, the Centre for Greek Language (KEΓ) of the University of Thessaloniki has taken over the editorial task; this volume is the fourth one published under the direction of I.N. Kazazis, the current President of KEΓ.

2. The magnitude of the project
The significance of this very ambitious project can hardly be underestimated: it is considered one of the greatest lexicographical accomplishments in Modern Greece and has even been called ‘one of the most important European medieval dictionaries’. It involves an immense labour, both because of the dimension of the sources it includes and because of the nature of this material. Let me first clarify the former, extralinguistic, reason: the dictionary covers an extremely long period, namely a time-span of almost six centuries (1100–1669), i.e. the last centuries of Byzantium. It is indeed from the 12th c. on (1100) that the vernacular starts to become extensively used for literary purposes. The year 1669, in which the Ottoman conquest of the Byzantine empire is completed, has been assigned as the symbolic end. Moreover, the sources on which the lexicon relies include various types of texts, following Kriaras’ attempt to be exhaustive: it takes into account subliterary texts as well as literary genres (historical, poetic, theological, liturgical texts, etc.).

The second complication can be called language-intrinsic: although carrying the label ‘vernacular’, the texts from 1100–1669 cannot be equated with the spoken, everyday language and are thus not of a purely ‘δημώδης’ nature. On the contrary, the so-called ‘vernacular’ idiom presents much variation and has therefore even been labelled a ‘mixed or macaronic language incorporating vernacular and learned elements’. This fluctuation can (at least partly) be considered the result of the absence of a codified vernacular standard. As a consequence, the lexicon has to deal with many variants: phonetic (πρόβλεμα vs. πρόβλημα), morphological (προπάτορας vs. προπάτωρ; προπατώ vs. περιπατώ) and orthographic ones (προφύλλι vs. προφίλι). With regard to this last type of variants, the lexicon has – perhaps undeservedly – been criticized for its prescriptive spelling (cf. monotonic entries), which would reflect its demoticist bias.

The fact that the lexicon is composed in Modern Greek – and not in English – has been called another flaw. However, this possible demerit is countered by the lexicon's comprehensiveness: beside the basic information (gender, word class, etc.), a definition of the different meanings and of the different nuances is given. Other than that, each lemma contains representative examples, whose source is always indicated. Etymological facts (origin in Ancient Greek, loanword, etc.) may also be added and sometimes we even find a list of idiomatic expressions.
3. Future prospects
Therefore, as Byzantinists we all look forward to the publication of the remaining volumes, and also to the digitalisation in its concise form. To date, the abridged online version, which is of course accessible to a much larger audience, comprises only the first 14 volumes (up to παραθήκη).
When the first Grammar of Medieval Greek, which covers the same period as Kriaras’ lexicon (1100–1669), will as well be published (by the University of Cambridge), this would mean an enormous step forward for the field of the vernacular language of the Middle Ages, which has long been treated in a stepmotherly way in comparison with Ancient and Modern Greek.

Jorie SOLTIC.