

# The Discontinuous History of Imperial Panegyric in Byzantium and its Reinvention by Michael Psellos

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THE MATRIX OF BYZANTINE LITERATURE was training in rhetorical theory and rhetorical performance, which shaped the form, language, goals, argumentation, nuances, and other compositional modalities of most written texts. Rhetorical training also provided the templates for actual speeches, such as homilies and funeral orations.<sup>1</sup> For modern historians of Byzantium the most important type of speech is the imperial panegyric, formal speeches in praise of an emperor, because they contain precious historical information, push the propaganda of each court, or at least the speaker's political thought, and supposedly reveal the Byzantines' basic assumptions about their empire and ruler. Panegyric was an ancient genre and practice, and by the early Byzantine period formalized recommendations had emerged for praising emperors. We have one such textbook (attributed to a certain Menandros) with advice and templates for the *basilikos logos*.<sup>2</sup> We have many

<sup>1</sup> The standard survey of rhetorical genres is H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* I (Munich 1978) 63–196; a more engaging survey in G. A. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors* (Princeton 1983); a briefer and more recent one in E. Jeffreys, "Rhetoric in Byzantium," in I. Worthington (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric* (Chichester 2010) 166–184; the papers in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium* (Aldershot 2003), and M. Grünbart (ed.), *Theatron: Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter* (Berlin/New York 2007), reveal the scope of its cultural and literary importance.

<sup>2</sup> For a brief history of the genre see C. E. V. Nixon and B. S. Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini* (Berkeley 1994) 1–3; for an introduction to the social context of late Roman panegyric, citing previous

specimens of the genre from the early Byzantine period (ca. 284–640) and then again from the later periods, starting mainly in the eleventh century with the works of Konstantinos (later Michael) Psellos (d. ca. 1075). After Psellos, the genre flourished again in the twelfth century and thereafter, though not without gaps due to the loss of texts and possible remissions of the genre. Yet the gap that will be discussed here lasted for four centuries, between 640 and 1040.

To my knowledge, panegyric is universally assumed by scholars to have been a constant feature of Byzantine imperial culture and court life. We may not have many such works from the period 640–1040, and the production of literary texts generally did experience a steep decline after the Arab conquests,<sup>3</sup> but it is assumed that the performance of panegyrics defined court life, even if the actual texts did not subsequently survive. This article will challenge this assumption and argue for a significant rupture in the production and delivery of imperial panegyrics. While the rhetorical tropes of the imperial oration were known to Byzantine authors of that period and even used in their composition of other types of works, the tradition of their delivery by an orator in the emperor's presence was apparently not maintained on a regular basis. This study will survey the delivery of imperial orations in the early period; examine panegyric works of the middle Byzantine period that come closest to the normative earlier precedent; and conclude by looking anew at the reinvention of imperial orations by that most influential thinker, writer, and impresario of the middle Byzantine court: Psellos.

Most of the surviving imperial orations of the early Byzantine period date to the fourth century, but it is safe to conclude that their production and delivery continued into the seventh cen-

literature, see R. Flower, *Emperors and Bishops in Late Roman Inveective* (Cambridge 2013) 33–49. For Menandros see D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford 1981). For the performance of rhetorical texts see E. Bourbouhakis, “Rhetoric and Performance,” in P. Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine World* (London/New York 2010) 175–187.

<sup>3</sup> For a survey see A. Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (650–850)* (Athens 1999), and *A History of Byzantine Literature (850–1000)* (Athens 2006).

tury, if perhaps less frequently after the accession of Justin II in 565. Having as we do the *Panegyrici Latini* along with the speeches of Themistios, Libanios, Himerios, Julian, Priscianus, Corippus, and others, and from stray references to the delivery of speeches, we know that panegyrics were delivered before emperors on formal ceremonial occasions including imperial accessions, promotions (e.g. from the rank of Caesar to Augustus), anniversaries, birthdays, and marriages; as well as to celebrate the birthday of Rome (21 April), a recent success, the grand entry of an emperor into the speaker's city (*adventus*), the anniversary of the foundation of the city in which the speech was given; on the first day of the year, when the consuls took office and gave thanks to the emperor, or when the emperor became consul; also, by speakers sent on behalf of a city council to address the emperor, thank him, and perhaps make a request (which would likely not be made in the speech itself); by a speaker appointed by the court to impress visiting ambassadors; and others.<sup>4</sup> Americans might imagine these performances as relentlessly celebratory State of the Union speeches, except they were delivered to, and not by, the head of state.

Performance was crucial: this was no mere textual genre. On any of these set occasions, "many who were illustrious for their eloquence wrote panegyrics in honor of the emperor, and recited them in public ... Some were stimulated by the desire of being noticed by the emperor; while others were anxious to display their talents to the masses, being unwilling that the attainments they had made by dint of great exertion should be buried in obscurity."<sup>5</sup> The delivery of such a speech before the court might

<sup>4</sup> The most detailed discussion of the contexts of individual speeches is by Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise* (which also contains the Latin text and translations of the speeches). For the interplay of speech and ceremony, especially in the *adventus*, see S. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley 1981). For papers on late antique panegyric see M. Whitby (ed.), *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Leiden 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Sokrates *HE* 7.21, transl. A. C. Zenos, in P. Schaff et al., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, SER. 2, II (Edinburgh 1890) 164.

include props, such as paintings of victories, maps, or the very architecture of the setting, to which the speaker might refer.<sup>6</sup>

We have only a tiny fraction of the panegyrics actually delivered before the emperor in the early period. In fact, more than one speech may have been made on a given ceremonial occasion (one orator refers to the other speakers on that day).<sup>7</sup> We also have imperial panegyrics that were delivered without the emperor being present but *as if* he were. The speakers likely gestured toward an imperial image as they addressed it in the second person.<sup>8</sup> Prokopios of Gaza's oration for Anastasios (491–518) was given on the occasion of the presentation of a statue of the emperor at Gaza, and Prokopios addresses the emperor through his statue.<sup>9</sup> The number of panegyrics given throughout the empire in a single year might have been quite large. "Celebrations of imperial anniversaries"—to pick one appropriate occasion—"took place throughout the empire,"<sup>10</sup> although it is possible that in the emperor's absence such speeches were more perfunctory or pro forma, for example a few lofty words at the local council meeting. Panegyrics could also be addressed to high state officials. Indeed, given the flexibility and universal intent of rhetorical theory, almost any thing, concept, event, or person could be praised following the same rules, even baldness.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> E.g. D. Potter, *Constantine the Emperor* (Oxford 2013) 52; see also 58, 125, 127, 135.

<sup>7</sup> Pacatus to Theodosius I in *Panegyrici Latini* 2.47.3–4, transl. Nixon and Rodgers 515.

<sup>8</sup> Nazarius to Constantine in *Panegyrici Latini* 4.3.1, transl. Nixon and Rodgers 345. Himerios' oration 41 in praise of Constantinople and Julian (jointly) seems to have been delivered in that city but in the emperor's absence: text A. Colonna, *Himerii declamationes et orationes* (Rome 1951); transl. and discussion R. J. Penella, *Man and the Word: The Orations of Himerius* (Berkeley 2007) 34–35, 44–46, 58–65.

<sup>9</sup> Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric* 174–175.

<sup>10</sup> Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise* 345 n.11.

<sup>11</sup> Synesios' *Praise of Baldness*: N. Terzaghi, *Synesii Cyrenensis opuscula* (Rome

Conversely, we have the written texts of panegyrics that were likely not actually delivered, though it is hard to be certain in every case. All of Julian's panegyrics of his cousin Constantius II except the first were not delivered in person by Julian (or likely anyone else); rather, the texts were sent to the court as declarations of loyalty and subordination (and also as a subtle warning to back off, in the case of the second one). One of the most idiosyncratic panegyrics from the early Byzantine period, Prokopios' *Buildings*, was also probably not delivered orally, certainly not its long lists of the names of Balkan forts, and it underwent revisions as the author added material to the work as if it were a history that had to be updated.<sup>12</sup>

We seem not to have from the early period imperial panegyrics delivered by Christian priests in church. We have one by a bishop, Eusebios of Kaisareia's *In Praise of Constantine*, but this was delivered in the palace for the emperor's tricennial celebration (where and when many other, now lost speeches were also delivered). The speech is Christian but not aggressively so; it follows a more or less conventional format and uses some classical allusions.<sup>13</sup> Otherwise, we do not find many full-blown panegyrics of emperors embedded in the rhetorical works of the Church Fathers, though the conventions of the genre were used to praise saints and biblical figures. We do, by contrast, find bishops often directing invective against emperors whom they regarded as heretical (usually after they were safely dead), or

1944) 190–232.

<sup>12</sup> F. Montinaro, "Byzantium and the Slavs in the Reign of Justinian: Comparing the Two Recensions of Procopius's *Buildings*," in V. Ivanišević et al. (eds.), *The Pontic-Danubian Realm in the Period of the Great Migration* (Paris/Belgrade 2011) 89–114.

<sup>13</sup> I. A. Heikel, *Eusebius Werke I* (Leipzig 1902) 83–127; transl. and discussion H. A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Orations* (Berkeley 1975). Eusebios discusses the context of the speech's delivery in his *Life of Constantine* 4.46: F. Winkelmann, *Eusebius Werke I.1* (Berlin 1975); transl. and discussion Av. Cameron and S. G. Hall, *Eusebius, Life of Constantine* (Oxford 1999) 171, 331–332.

exhibiting a critical stance toward the regime, for example in the sermons of John Chrysostom (which landed him in exile).<sup>14</sup>

The last extant specimens of early Byzantine panegyric that were likely delivered at the court, whether in the emperor's presence or absence, are the poetic works of Georgios of Pisidia praising the emperor Herakleios (610–641).<sup>15</sup> We then enter a Dark Age of imperial panegyric that lasts for centuries. We have no texts of imperial panegyrics, no references to such orations being delivered, and no direct or indirect references to the existence of such texts by later authors who were writing about imperial history. Granted, we have less evidence for all things Byzantine between the mid seventh and the ninth centuries, especially for literature. But the dry spell experienced by panegyric lasted far longer than for other genres of writings, especially considering that panegyric is supposed by modern scholars to have been fundamentally constitutive of imperial ideology. It is therefore important to explore the contours of this silence that lasted for four centuries and to ascertain exactly when it ended. Let us then begin our survey of the middle Byzantine period. We are looking in particular for the model of the orator who delivers a panegyric at the court in accordance with the rules of the ancient rhetorical templates. This is not a question that seems ever to have been posed, possibly because continuity has been taken for granted.

Some texts that are candidates for panegyric (in the precise sense defined above) cluster around Photios, the learned patriarch of Constantinople (in office 858–867, 877–886). We have a

<sup>14</sup> K. M. Setton, *Christian Attitude towards the Emperor in the Fourth Century* (New York 1941); and Flower, *Emperors and Bishops*.

<sup>15</sup> A. Pertusi, *Giorgio di Pisidia: Poemi I* (Ettal 1959). Many studies on Georgios and Herakleios, especially by M. Whitby, are cited by J. Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford 2010) 16–35. For the performance of poetic panegyrics see W. Hörandner, "Court Poetry: Questions of Motifs, Structure and Function," in Jeffreys, *Rhetoric* 75–85, who makes light of the four-century middle-Byzantine gap in the evidence.

poem in honor of Basileios I (867–886) that has been plausibly attributed to Photios. It includes some of the tropes of Menandrian panegyric but was only 231 verses long, of which the first 60 are missing. Because of this loss we cannot reconstruct the occasion for which it was written, and there is no indication that it was orally delivered. The most recent study proposes that it was a laudatory (textual) dedication that prefaced a collection of works which Photios offered to the emperor after he was restored to the patriarchal throne in 877.<sup>16</sup> Brief laudatory poems were written for emperors and dedicated to them throughout the middle Byzantine period, often to accompany books or other gifts that were given to them.<sup>17</sup> Until someone can prove that they were recited at the court in the emperor's presence, they are not what we are looking for here. We also have three hymns written by Photios for Basileios, but, even if they were chanted in church, none of them have the form or really the content of a panegyric. The first was written to be chanted as if by the emperor; the second by "the Church" to Basileios; and the third is an encomium of the emperor of which 20 verses survive.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, among Photios' *Homilies* four were delivered in the presence of the emperor. They are more florid in style than the patriarch's other sermons,<sup>19</sup> and they address the emperors (Michael III and Basileios I) in the second person, but their purpose is not to praise the emperor. One of them, *Homily* 18, begins like a panegyric, with an admission of the speaker's inability to do justice to the emperor's virtues and then a sum-

<sup>16</sup> A. Markopoulos, "An Anonymous Laudatory Poem in Honor of Basil I," *DOP* 46 (1992) 225–232, with a transcription of the poem.

<sup>17</sup> M. D. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres* I (Vienna 2003); see e.g. P. Odorico, "Il calamo d'argento: Un carme inedito in onore di Romano II," *ĴÖB* 37 (1987) 65–99.

<sup>18</sup> Edition and discussion in F. Ciccolella, "Three Anacreontic Poems Assigned to Photius," *OCF* 64 (1998) 305–328.

<sup>19</sup> B. Laourdas, *Φωτίου Ὁμιλίαι* (Thessalonike 1966); transl. C. Mango, *The Homilies of Photius Patriarch of Constantinople* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1958) 138; they are nos. 7, 10, 17, 18 in both editions.

mary of his accomplishments, although this section is only one paragraph long.<sup>20</sup> Photios repeatedly states that it is not his intention to praise the emperor and then moves on to his topic, a celebration of the defeat of all the heresies. It was clearly possible for a homilist to veer into panegyric in the emperor's presence, but these were sermons, not imperial orations.

At this point, we must make a key distinction in order to maintain our focus. Authors of the middle Byzantine period were trained in rhetoric and so they were familiar with the modes and tropes of imperial panegyric. They were capable of using those tropes in written works, but the existence of such texts does not automatically prove that panegyrics were delivered by orators before emperors on ceremonial occasions, as happened in the past. One such text is the famous biography of the emperor Basileios (*Vita Basiliū*), which was written by scholars in the mid-tenth century at the behest of his grandson Konstantinos VII Porphyrogenetos (d. 959). This long work includes many panegyric elements, in addition to historiographical and biographical elements, "but nowhere does it create the impression that it is a speech delivered at a particular occasion,"<sup>21</sup> or that it was part of a generalized culture of rhetorical performance under Basileios I or Konstantinos VII. This is instead an inventive written composition. There is no reason to think that it is based on a lost panegyric delivered under Basileios,<sup>22</sup> though it might have been based on a prior encomiastic *text*, which is a different matter.

When Basileios I died in 886, his son and heir Leon VI (a former pupil of Photios) composed a funeral oration for him. We

<sup>20</sup> *Homily* 18.1–2. The panegyric material in *Homily* 10 also amounts to a single paragraph.

<sup>21</sup> L. van Hoof, "Among Christian Emperors: The *Vita Basiliū* by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus," *J ECS* 54 (2002) 163–183, here 179. For the text and a translation see I. Ševčenko, *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur liber quo Vita Basiliū imperatoris amplectitur* (Berlin 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Pace W. Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (New York 2013) 167–168.

can be generously inclusive and treat this as a panegyric, as it follows the relevant ancient guidelines (ancestry, virtues, etc.), for all that it is in fact a funeral oration.<sup>23</sup> What is important for our purposes is that it was possibly delivered by its own author, the former prince and now emperor, possibly in 888, on the anniversary of Basileios' death. During his reign Leon VI was a prolific author, homilist, and public speaker,<sup>24</sup> so it is possible that he delivered this speech as well, though its context and audience elude us.<sup>25</sup> But in other respects this text does not point to a panegyric culture like that of the early period or the period after 1040. It is an oration in praise of an emperor but it was delivered by another emperor, an exceptionally learned one, who was also his heir and successor. Earlier panegyric was fundamentally a form through which subjects addressed emperors, but this speech is different: it was a medium by which an emperor directly crafted and promulgated an aspect of his dynasty's propaganda. Be that as it may, nothing in Leon's speech hints at the existence of a broader culture of court orators praising emperors on set occasions. In ritual and ceremonial terms, it probably belongs to the world of anniversary funeral orations (which remains unexplored).<sup>26</sup> Thus, it was a coincidence that funerary and imperial genres overlapped in this case, because an

<sup>23</sup> T. Antonopoulou, *Leontis VI Sapientis imperatoris Byzantini Homiliae* (Turnhout 2008) 195–218 (no. 14); for its generic makeup see P. Agapitos, “Ἡ εἰκόνα τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα Βασιλείου Α΄ στή φιλομακεδονική γραμματεία, 867–959,” *Hellenika* 40 (1989) 285–322, here 297–306.

<sup>24</sup> T. Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI* (Leiden 1997) 36–48, and “Homiletic Activity in Constantinople Around 900,” in M. B. Cunningham et al. (eds.), *Preacher and Audience: Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics* (Leiden 1998) 317–348, esp. 327.

<sup>25</sup> A. Markopoulos, “Οἱ μεταμορφώσεις της ‘μυθολογίας’ του Βασιλείου Α΄,” in V. Leontaritou et al. (eds.), *Antecessor: Festschrift für Spiros N. Troianos zum 80. Geburtstag* (Athens 2013) 946–970, here 960, citing previous bibliography.

<sup>26</sup> For relevant texts see A. Sideras, *Die byzantinischen Grabreden: Prosopographie, Datierung, Überlieferung* (Vienna 1994). A major advance in this direction has been made by E. C. Bourbouhakis, *Not Composed in a Chance Manner: The Epitaphios for Manuel I Komnenos by Eustathios of Thessalonike* (Uppsala 2017).

emperor took the initiative in praising his father. In the early period, it does not seem that anniversary funeral orations were delivered for emperors, and certainly not by their imperial descendants (though, again, such *texts* were sometimes written, e.g. by Libanios for Julian).

It is in the reign of Leon VI (886–911) that we find the only orator in the period before Psellos known to have spoken at more than one formal occasion at the court: this was Arethas, a native of Patras, polemicist, learned patron of book production, and bishop of Kaisareia (902 to after 932, though often in residence in Constantinople). Arethas is an understudied figure and his complex, allusive, and angry prose has not endeared him to scholars.<sup>27</sup> Among them are a number of short speeches that, according to their titles, were spoken before the emperor.<sup>28</sup> Opus no. 57 (five pages in the modern edition) was delivered on 1 March 901 on the occasion of the appointment of the patriarch Nikolaos Mystikos. It is not exactly an imperial oration: it is too brief and does not survey the emperor's background, virtues, and achievements. It only praises his choice of Nikolaos as leader of the Church. Its end is devoted to the topic of what this wise emperor might himself accomplish by speaking, and exhorts him to speak and advise the new patriarch, so it is possible that with op. 57 Arethas was only introducing another (now lost) speech, by Leon VI.

More interesting are five addresses (op. 61–65) that Arethas delivered at festal dinner-table occasions (ἐπιτραπέζιοι) in the emperor Leon's presence. The earliest (op. 63) was given on the feast of the Epiphany (6 January), 901. It is less than four printed

<sup>27</sup> The basic introduction remains S. B. Kougeas, *Ὁ Καισαρείας Ἀρέθας καὶ τὸ ἔργον αὐτοῦ* (Athens 1913); his rhetorical works are in L. G. Westerink, *Arethae scripta minora I–II* (Leipzig 1968–1972); all the works discussed below are in II. For a study of this group see M. Loukaki, “Notes sur l’activité d’Aréthas comme rhéteur de la cour de Léon VI,” in Grünbart, *Theatron* 259–275.

<sup>28</sup> There is no reason to discuss op. 58–59 (on the translation of the relics of Lazaros from Cyprus in 901 or 902). The emperor may have been present, but these are pieces of religious rhetoric.

pages long, but it is a mini-panegyric. Arethas praises the simplicity of the emperor's table and comments on his recent victories against the Saracens. We can imagine it as a formal toast before the other business of the banquet (more talking, praying, and eating). Op. 62 is even shorter and probably dates to late 901. It focuses on recent military achievements and compares Leon to Greek heroes, including Alexander. Op. 64 was given on the anniversary of the elevation of Nikolaos to the patriarchate, so in 902, in connection with a religious feast. This work is rather a brief sermon on the feast itself, though the emperor is praised at the end for caring for the Church. This is reminiscent of the sermons that Photios delivered in the imperial presence: they focus on the religious issue at hand but praise the emperor *pro forma* because he is present. Finally, we have two linked brief table-talks from the same day, the feast of the prophet Elijah on 20 July 902 (op. 61 and 65). Op. 65 is a sermon on the religious occasion, but 61 is panegyric: the speaker is self-deprecating, compares the emperor to Plato's philosopher-king and to other past rulers (favorably), praises and describes his virtues, and refers to his military victories, all in seven full pages of printed text. At the beginning, Arethas implies that there may have been other speakers on that occasion, but this may be a reference to what people were saying informally. At any rate, op. 61 is a panegyric, albeit a brief one, and we can be certain that it was delivered. In Arethas' other table-talks, panegyric is either not much present or tacked on to the religious rhetoric of the occasion.

What conclusions can we draw from this survey? We should not assume that panegyrics on the late ancient and post-Psellos model were being delivered throughout Byzantine history, and that these pieces by Arethas happen to be the only ones that survive from 640–1040.<sup>29</sup> With no other evidence that this

<sup>29</sup> This is the impression given by, among others, Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur* I 122; and G. T. Dennis, "Imperial Panegyric: Rhetoric and Reality," in H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204* (Wash-

practice was being maintained at the court, we cannot place much weight on Arethas' op. 61. Obviously, imperial banquets and religious feasts would have involved a fair amount of speaking, some of which would have been laudatory of the emperor. But we are looking specifically for orators giving formal epideictic speeches, and for this there is no other evidence until long after Arethas. It is just as likely that Arethas' pieces—more like glorified toasts—resulted from a unique interaction between a learned emperor and a classicizing court deacon. One scholar who has studied these short speeches has cautioned against seeing them as representative of court culture generally, and has proposed that they were designed by Leon to bolster his position during the Tetragamy controversy; after all, the patriarch was present when they were delivered.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, the ritual context from which even this short-lived experiment emerged seems to have been pious and homiletic, not panegyric. The speeches given by Arethas at these banquets were primarily supposed to fit the religious occasion, and it seems that op. 61 was spun off that practice. This reinforces the argument for a rupture in panegyric practice. Arethas was making baby-steps toward reviving the panegyric form from within the different conventions and context of the sermon or feast-day celebration. It is also important to note here—because this too is not generally known—that the *Book of Ceremonies*, the tenth-century compilation from which we have most of our information about imperial celebrations in the middle period, does not refer to speeches by trained orators as part of the celebrations but only to acclamations by groups and sometimes to brief remarks given *by* the emperors (and not *for*

ington 1997) 131–140, here 135–136, though he notes the uneven chronological distribution. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric* 270, mentions a gap of two centuries, but he is talking about composition in the full spectrum of rhetorical genres, not imperial panegyric or (crucially) its delivery.

<sup>30</sup> Loukaki, in Grünbart, *Theatron* 259–275. For the Tetragamy see S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912): Politics and People* (Leiden 1997) ch. 7.

them).<sup>31</sup> I have spoken with Byzantinists who reason that, because imperial panegyrics were such a staple of court life, they must be attested in the *Book of Ceremonies*. They are not. Moreover, the western envoy Liudprand of Cremona describes a number of ceremonial occasions to which he was invited in 949–950 at the court of Konstantinos VII, including a banquet on Christmas day, but he does not mention any displays of oratory.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast to the early Byzantine period, homiletic was the main form of court rhetoric being performed in middle Byzantium. I have proposed that panegyric no longer had an independent life but emerged from time to time, from Photios to Arethas, as a subordinate modality in homilies. This is confirmed by two more works from the first half of the tenth century. We have a speech delivered in 927 on the peace agreement between the Romans and the Bulgarians, a text that some scholars attribute to the high official Theodoros Daphnopates. The genre of this oration is hard to specify, but it is more a sermon than anything else, thanking God in biblical imagery for the blessings of peace. The speaker does praise the emperor too (Romanos I, 920–944), in the same allusively frustrating language that he uses for everything else, and even addresses him in the second person.<sup>33</sup> But this is no imperial panegyric: the main honorand is God, and the speech ends in a prayer. Scholars have been

<sup>31</sup> For the Elijah and Epiphany banquets see A. Moffatt and M. Tall, *Constantine Porphyrogenetos: The Book of Ceremonies* (Canberra 2012) I 114–118, 139–147; for spoken remarks made by emperors see e.g. I 155, II 545–548. Dennis, in *Byzantine Court Culture* 136, added the speech to the standard template for such events based on Arethas' evidence; he says that Arethas "seems to have been the official palace orator, although no specific title is given."

<sup>32</sup> Liudprand *Antapodosis* 6; transl. P. Squatriti, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona* (Washington 2007) 195–202.

<sup>33</sup> For the text and an analysis see I. Dujčev, "On the Treaty of 927 with the Bulgarians," *DOP* 32 (1978) 219–295; for Romanos, 277, 279. Historians have paid far more attention to the ceremonial interactions between the patriarch Nikolaos and the Bulgarian king Symeon (discussed so allusively in the speech) than to the ceremonial context of the speech itself.

unable to deduce where it was delivered; all we can say is that it was “at some sort of ceremony.”<sup>34</sup>

In the tenth century, and especially its second half, authors began to experiment with classical literature in order to highlight the achievements of generals who were expanding the borders of the empire. This resulted in generically innovative works, including a poem by a certain Theodosios the Deacon *On the Capture of Crete*, which narrates and celebrates the conquest of the island in 960–961 by Nikephoros Phokas, a general under the emperor Romanos II (959–963). Theodosios uses heroic (but allusive) Homeric language and many classical comparisons. This is a heroic poem of battle, not a panegyric in the Menandrian style, but it attributes the victory to the emperor (who was in the capital) and praises him in prominent passages. The poem was likely meant to be performed, as it is divided into five “hearings” (ἄκροάσεις), but it seems that Theodosios had failed to perform it before Romanos’ death on 15 March 963. So he added a new preface and rededicated it to the victorious general himself, who was celebrating his triumph over Aleppo in April 963 (and would soon seize the throne, later in that year). It is possible, therefore, that the poem was delivered in connection with Nikephoros’ triumph.<sup>35</sup> There was likely no religious occasion on which such a text could be appropriately performed, so the ceremonial planners of the court would have been improvising to stage its performance.

There is no evidence that previous triumphs had been graced with the delivery of such epic poems. A similar classicizing heroic narrative, albeit in prose, was written ten years later to celebrate

<sup>34</sup> J. Shepard, “A Marriage too Far? Maria Lekapena and Peter of Bulgaria,” in A. Davids (ed.), *The Empress Theophano: Byzantium and the West at the Turn of the First Millennium* (Cambridge 1995) 121–149, here 130. Shepard usefully discusses the historical context of the speech.

<sup>35</sup> U. Criscuolo, *Theodosius Diaconus: De Creta Capta* (Leipzig 1979); for the date of the rededication see G. T. Tserebelakis, *Ο Νικηφόρος Φωκάς και η απελευθέρωση της Κρήτης από τους Άραβες (961 μ.Χ.)* (Thessalonike 2009) 18–19 (with a translation of the text).

the emperor Ioannes Tzimiskes' conquest of the Rus' and Bulgarians in 971. This text is lost but was used by later historians of that war, Leon the Deacon and Ioannes Skylitzes. There is no way to ascertain whether it was delivered as a panegyric, or whether it was even a speech to begin with (as opposed to just a panegyric narrative), but it seems to have been associated with Tzimiskes' triumph in 971. Perhaps it was meant to one-up the poem by Theodosios the Deacon (Tzimiskes had murdered Phokas in 969 to take the throne).<sup>36</sup> In this greater engagement with classical genres, we can see the Byzantines flirting with the reconstitution of a panegyric culture, albeit still in improvised ways that did not fully reproduce the early Byzantine script.

Therefore, for the middle Byzantine period down to 971, we do not have evidence for a continuous, regular production and delivery of imperial orations on set ceremonial occasions. We have instead scattered evidence of idiosyncratic speeches for ad hoc occasions that were separated by decades and not repeated in their particular configurations (funeral orations, sermons, banquet speeches, and triumphs). In other words, we have a discontinuous history. It is statistically unlikely that panegyrics were delivered in great numbers, but failed to survive. We do not even have historical references to the practice itself at the court. But before we turn to Psellos, whose rhetorical career at the court began in the 1040s, two texts must be mentioned.

The first is a four-page speech in praise of Basileios II (976–1025) written by Leon the Deacon ca. 980, before he wrote his *History* of the years 959–976 (which, at the end, includes critical comments against that emperor).<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, Leon's panegyric contains no indication of the ritual occasion for which it was written, if any, but its main purpose was to thank the emperor for enrolling the speaker among the palace clergy. We also cannot know whether it was orally delivered at all. Many works

<sup>36</sup> For this lost source see A. Kaldellis, "The Original Source for Tzimiskes' Balkan Campaign (971) and the Emperor's Classicizing Propaganda," *BMGs* 37 (2013) 1–18.

<sup>37</sup> I. Sykoutris, "Λέοντος τοῦ Διακόνου Ἀνέκδοτον ἐγκώμιον εἰς Βασίλειον τοῦ Β΄," *EpetByz* 10 (1933) 425–434.

of praise that remained text-bound were written to give the *impression* that they were being spoken, e.g. by using second-person forms of address. At any rate, Leon's speech is an imperial oration, albeit a short one. His *History* shows that Leon was willing to imitate ancient authors even in ways that had not been done since late antiquity,<sup>38</sup> and the same, as we saw, was true of the heroic texts written for the triumphs of 963 and 971. This, then, was a generation whose authors were willing to experiment in a direction that might have led to the revival of dormant rhetorical modes.

The second text we know through a passing reference in the *Commentary on Hermogenes' Peri Ideôn* by Ioannes Sikeliotes. Among the speeches that he claims to have delivered on various occasions throughout his career, he says that he remembers a speech that "Basileios the Second encouraged me to deliver in the Pikridion [a monastery near Constantinople], which began as follows: 'Formal addresses (προσφωνητικός), O emperor, ask to be exempted from great length'."<sup>39</sup> We do not know exactly when Sikeliotes lived during Basileios' extraordinarily long reign (976–1025), but from this reference it would appear that the emperor was dead when he wrote the *Commentary* and that some time had passed since the occasion in question.<sup>40</sup> We do not know exactly what the speech was about, but it was evidently short. Psellos later portrayed Basileios II as indifferent to high culture, a picture that may not be entirely accurate.<sup>41</sup> At any

<sup>38</sup> See the introduction, detailed notes, and index locorum in A.-M. Talbot and D. F. Sullivan, *The History of Leo the Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century* (Washington 2005).

<sup>39</sup> Walz, *Rhet.gr.* VI 447–448.

<sup>40</sup> S. Papaioannou, "Sicily, Constantinople, Miletos: The Life of a Eunuch and the History of Byzantine Humanism," in Th. Antonopoulou et al. (eds.), *Myriobiblos: Essays on Byzantine Literature and Culture* (Berlin 2015) 261–284, here 275.

<sup>41</sup> Psellos *Chron.* 1.29–30, 1.36; text D. R. Reinsch, *Michelis Pselli Chronographia* I–II (Berlin 2014); transl. E. R. A. Sewter, *Michael Psellus: Fourteen Byzantine Rulers* (London 1966). For a rehabilitation of Basileios II see B. Crostini, "The Emperor Basil II's Cultural Life," *Byzantion* 66 (1996) 55–80.

rate, after that we have no traces of imperial panegyrics until the era of Psellos himself. To that we can now turn.

We cannot here adequately treat Psellos as an orator, a writer of rhetorical works, and theorist of rhetoric.<sup>42</sup> He was the first person since Georgios of Pisidia in the early seventh century whom we can call a court orator. A number of his panegyrics for emperors survive, beginning with Konstantinos IX Monomachos (1042–1055), and he wrote encomia and funeral orations for his friends, teachers, students, relatives, patrons at the court, and others.<sup>43</sup> It is not clear whether his (encomiastic) funeral orations were delivered in the way in which they pretend to be: they were sometimes written years after the person's death, and are long and difficult to understand even in print, but they definitely take the imagined form of an oral address.<sup>44</sup> Even so, there is no question that with him the delivery of imperial orations at the court begins again in Byzantium and continues with growing force to the end of the empire. On the assumption that imperial orations were a staple feature of courtly life, this part of Psellos' corpus has never seemed especially problematic or ground-breaking, but in light of the preceding survey it acquires new interest. Is it possible that Psellos re-instituted that genre as he did so much else in Byzantine intellectual and literary life?<sup>45</sup> If so, how and why?

We cannot answer these questions fully here. As for why, Psellos gives us part of an answer in the intellectual autobiography

<sup>42</sup> See S. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (Cambridge 2013).

<sup>43</sup> The main works in these genres are edited by G. T. Dennis, *Michaelis Pselli Orationes Panegyricae* (Stuttgart/Leipzig 1994); I. Polemis, *Michael Psellus: Orationes funebres I* (Berlin/Boston 2014); and A. R. Littlewood, *Michaelis Pselli oratoria minora* (Leipzig 1985).

<sup>44</sup> See the introductions in A. Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons, Fathers and Daughters: The Byzantine Family of Michael Psellos* (South Bend 2006), and in A. Kaldellis and I. Polemis, *Psellos and the Patriarchs: Letters and Funeral Orations for Keroullarios, Leichoudes, and Xiphilinos* (South Bend 2015).

<sup>45</sup> A. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge 2007) ch. 4.

that he embeds in his account of the reign of Konstantinos IX in his history, the *Chronographia*. Psellos, we must remember, did not come from a noble family, did not have much wealth, and did not have a military background or backing. His assets were his education and, as he puts it immodestly, his great ability and charm as a speaker (*Chron.* 6.44–45). It would have been in his interest to revive the custom of public speaking at the court, because it played to his strengths. Crucially, and unlike the other quasi-panegyrists we have seen so far, he was not a churchman and had no interest in becoming one. He did not have a career in the Church to fall back on, and was not regularly called upon to display his rhetorical skills in church. Psellos was a pioneer in trying to succeed as a layman on the basis of his secular knowledge and classical *paideia*. He was fortunate in that Konstantinos IX was himself eager to reform higher education and to promote learning and the arts.<sup>46</sup> It is not important to weigh who was using whom here; the arrangement was probably mutually beneficial. Rhetorical display at the court gave Psellos the prestige to promote his career and philosophical agenda while Konstantinos IX was the first emperor in over four centuries to be immortalized in a series of secular panegyrics, praised in classical orations before the court and in the eyes of posterity.

The first meeting between the young secretary and the new emperor is revealing. Psellos says that the emperor interviewed him about his background and studies and was impressed by the charm and rhetorical skill with which he answered these questions (*Chron.* 6.46). This set the tone of their future relationship and also set the stage for the revival of imperial panegyric at the court. Thus, Psellos' long digression in the *Chronographia* regarding his own rhetorical skills and about the shameful lapse of higher learning in the empire prior to his arrival on the scene is more than just narcissistic self-promotion: it signals the reintro-

<sup>46</sup> P. Lemerle, “‘Le gouvernement des philosophes’: L’enseignement, les écoles, la culture,” in *Cinq études sur le XI<sup>e</sup> siècle byzantin* (Paris 1977) 193–248; S. D. Hondridou, *Ο Κωνσταντίνος Θ΄ Μονομάχος και η εποχή του (ενδέκατος αιώνας μ.Χ.)* (Thessalonike 2002) 151–244. This was noted in Psellos' orations for the emperor and in *Chron.* 6.35.

duction of rhetoric to the Roman court after a period of neglect, and, more specifically, the revival of rhetorical performance. That digression thus acquires greater historical weight.

As is well known, Psellos quickly promoted the careers at the court of his former teacher Ioannes Mauropous and his colleague Ioannes Xiphilinos. By the mid 1040s Mauropous was also delivering imperial orations for Konstantinos IX.<sup>47</sup> In other words, the 1040s witnessed the reemergence of a culture of imperial orations centered on Psellos and his learned friends. Unfortunately, we have no descriptions of the ceremonial occasions on which the surviving orations (and the others that are no doubt lost) were performed at the court. The festival date of only one of Psellos' imperial orations (no. 6) is known: Epiphany, 6 January, like one of Arethas' table-talks (though the year is unknown). This day became established for the performance of panegyrics thereafter.<sup>48</sup> Mauropous' surviving orations were given on the feast day of St. George for the dedication of the saint's new church built by Monomachos (23 April, also noted as being "the third day of Easter," but discussing topics of war and peace too); and on 29 December ("on the fifth day after Christmas"), so not an important feast day.<sup>49</sup> There is also evidence that the new regime promoted public speaking as a part of rhetorical training. The contemporary historian Michael Attaleiates notes that Monomachos "exhorted young men to train in wise speeches and studies under the skillful guidance of their teachers [i.e. Psellos and Xiphilinos], and rewarded them with imperial titles [or "prizes"] when they declaimed in his

<sup>47</sup> A. Karpozilos, *Συμβολή στη μελέτη τοῦ βίου καὶ τοῦ ἔργου τοῦ Ἰωάννη Μαυρόποδος* (Ioannina 1982) 29–31, with further references. The main study is J. Lefort, "Rhétorique et politique: Trois discours de Jean Mauropous en 1047," *TravMém* 6 (1976) 265–303. N. Mauche and J. Roskilly, "There and Back Again: On the Influence of Psellos on the Career of Mauropous," *BZ* 111 (2018) 721–746, doubt that Psellos had much influence on his friend's career.

<sup>48</sup> Dennis, in *Byzantine Court Culture* 136.

<sup>49</sup> Karpozilos, *Συμβολή* 141–142.

presence.”<sup>50</sup> Attaleiates notes this because it was new and unusual: previous emperors had apparently not done this. In his Epiphany oration (no. 6), Psellos also presented his own students to the emperor, “the offspring of my planting ... who have sharpened their tongues for rhetoric.”<sup>51</sup> Among Psellos’ students (though probably from a later decade) was possibly Theophylaktos, a panegyrist of future emperors and archbishop of Ohrid.<sup>52</sup>

In conclusion, rhetorical training had always been cultivated in Byzantium. It was part of higher education, though less a matter of public speaking than a method of conceptual clarity and expression, i.e., an epistemology. Rhetoric was primarily a *theoretical* science in middle Byzantium. This is the impression that emerges from Psellos’ accounts of his own education and that of his friends: training in rhetoric for him means being able to classify things in a certain way and make conceptual distinctions and correlations.<sup>53</sup> For him it was therefore an ancillary discipline to philosophy (to which he claimed to be primarily devoted). The *practice* of secular rhetoric had, by contrast, been secondary. For four centuries, as we have seen, imperial panegyric was primarily an ideological template and literary ideal. It was rarely actually *done*. This study has highlighted a gap that has so far gone unnoticed. It has not, however, ventured an explanation for this gap, which, to repeat, concerns

<sup>50</sup> Michael Attaleiates *History* 21; text and transl. A. Kaldellis and D. Krallis (Cambridge [Mass.] 2012).

<sup>51</sup> Dennis, *Orationes panegyricae* 98 (no. 6.261–265). Later in life, Psellos recalled the rhetorical competitions of his days as a student: *Funeral Oration for Ioannes Xiphilinos* 9. Unfortunately, we have little information about these, which were presumably classroom exercises.

<sup>52</sup> For Theophylaktos and Psellos see S. Papaioannou in Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons* 167–178. For the works of Theophylaktos in general see M. Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid: Reading the Letters of a Byzantine Archbishop* (Birmingham 1997).

<sup>53</sup> See how he presents rhetorical education in his funeral orations for the three patriarchs: Kaldellis and Polemis, *Psellos and the Patriarchs*, esp. 135–140, 184–193, 212–214.

mostly the ceremonial life of the court and less the literary practice of Byzantine authors. Many aspects of ancient life lapsed in the crisis that overtook Byzantine society in the seventh century, and the performance of courtly rhetoric seems to have been among them.<sup>54</sup> The system of courtly power hesitated in this one respect, it became unsure how to use this part of its ancient inheritance, and did not revive it fully until the eleventh century.

Reinstituting the performance of panegyric was, therefore, possibly the most lasting contribution of the “regime of philosophers” behind Konstantinos IX in the 1040s, especially considering their many failures. Psellos considered himself more a philosopher than an orator.<sup>55</sup> But his reputation as a public speaker tended to predominate in some circles. In the generation after his death, he was met in the underworld by a student of philosophy who wrote about his own journey to Hades under the satirical name Timarion. Psellos there wants to be accepted by the philosophers, but the shades hold that he belongs better with the orators. The shades give him the nickname “Sun King.” When Timarion asks them what that means, he is told that it was from a speech that Psellos had once given before the emperor.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> For another aspect that lapsed and was later revived see A. Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity: Foreign Lands and People in Byzantine Literature* (Philadelphia 2013).

<sup>55</sup> A. Kaldellis, *The Argument of Psellos' Chronographia* (Leiden 1999).

<sup>56</sup> *Timarion* 45; text and transl. R. Romano, *Pseudo-Luciano: Timarione* (Naples 1974); transl. B. Baldwin, *Timarion* (Detroit 1984); for a close reading, citing previous studies, see D. Krallis, “Harmless Satire, Stinging Critique: Notes and Suggestions for Reading the *Timarion*,” in D. Angelov et al. (eds.), *Power and Subversion in Byzantium* (Farnham 2013) 221–246. Psellos uses that image in a number of speeches for Konstantinos IX, most notably in *Orationes panegyricae* no. 1.