



The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation in Medieval Studies

of

Florin Leonte

on

**Rhetoric in Purple: the Renewal of Imperial Ideology in the
Texts of Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos**

will be held on

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Nádor u. 9, Budapest

Examination Committee

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the forms and the ideological contents of the political messages embedded in the texts of a late Byzantine emperor, Manuel II Palaiologos (r. 1391-1425). I focus on four of his writings: *The Dialog with the Empress-Mother on Marriage*, *The Foundations of Imperial Education*, *The Seven Ethico-Political Orations*, and *The Funeral Oration for His Brother Theodore, Despot of Morea*. At a time of deep political and social transformations the emperor tried to maintain his position of authority not only by direct political agency, but also by advertising his ideas about the imperial office and about the issues at stake in late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Throughout his reign, confronted with numerous challenges to his authority, Manuel II created a parallel literary court where he presided over a group of peer literati without his position being contested. It was from within this group that several of his texts were produced and subsequently disseminated in order to promote a renewed version of the idea of imperial authority. His ideological commitments valued education and the use of rhetorical skills as instruments of social and political change. Since my investigation involves the study of the underlying ideological assumptions of the emperor's political discourse, the present study takes into consideration two main areas of research: on the one hand, the political and social contexts in which the emperor's political messages appeared, and, on the other hand, the rhetorical forms and strategies used in the construction of his ideological stance.

The first chapter offers a survey of the major social and political shifts in late Byzantium. Here, I document the emergence of a new class of entrepreneurial aristocracy with tight connections in both the old landowning Byzantine families as well as in the commercial groups of Italian merchants. The picture of late fourteenth and early fifteenth century Byzantine political history is outlined by a presentation of four different instances of challenge to imperial authority: the ecclesiastics' claims to preeminence in both spiritual and worldly matters, which triggered the emperor's more energetic involvement in Church affairs; the attempts to overthrow Manuel II made by John VII, the inheritor of Andronikos IV, attempts which were ultimately thwarted by the implementation of a regime of dual rule, with John VII receiving the titles of *basileus* and *autokrator* in Thessalonike (1403-1408); the demands for autonomy exerted by the *archontes* from the Peloponnese that in the end called for Manuel's direct involvement in the affairs of the peninsula; and finally, the threats with extinction of the Byzantines coming from the Ottomans.

In the second chapter of the first unit of my dissertation I dealt with the profile of the group of literati the emperor gathered at his court. I start from the observation that the emperor maintained a strong relationship with them as attested by their intense exchange of letters. After a presentation of the performances of literary writings taking place in the framework of the so-called *theatra* I focused on the major groups of the literati active in Constantinople: on the one hand, there were those oriented towards closer connections with the Latin West like Demetrios Kydones, Manuel Kalekas, Manuel Chrysoloras, Demetrios Skaranos, or Maximos Chrysoberges. They partook in common intellectual projects such as the translation into Greek of the Dominican liturgy as well as in coordinated diplomatic pursuits. On the other hand, the written sources present us the image of another group of individuals who upheld strict Orthodox views, a group which includes Patriarch Euthymios II, Joseph Bryennios, Theodore Potamios, or Makarios Makres. As indicated by their correspondence and manuscript evidence, they were connected by intense intellectual exchanges.

The examination of the emperor's group of literati led me to conclude that the network of the scholars in Manuel's entourage served various purposes. At a basic level, some of these literati used this network to obtain material benefits for themselves and for their families. The network was also used for the cooperation amongst scholars as the manuscript evidence indicates. It appears that often authors commented on each other's texts including the emperor himself. Manuel also actively engaged his literary friends in his political activities, as the example of Manuel Chrysoloras, teacher of Greek in Florence and later the emperor's envoy to the West, shows. A significant outcome of the scrutiny of the emperor's literary court pertains to the modality in which the emperor used the scholarly circle as a platform to advertise an image of his authority. In the absence of an officially appointed μαῖστωρ τῶν ῥητόρων the emperor himself acted as such an official court orator. Especially before 1403, *theatra* offered the opportunity for the emperor to broadcast his literary skills. With the temporary normalization of the situation after the Battle of Ankara the emperor could rely on several members of this network, such as Demetrios Chrysoloras, Manuel Chrysoloras, Makarios Makres, and John Chortasmenos, to write panegyrics or pieces of public oratory which extolled his military and political merits in pacifying the state. Furthermore, the importance of the emperor as a major patron of letters and promoter of literary activities in the late fourteenth century appears even more clearly through a comparison with other contemporary similar sponsors. Owing to the decline in economic resources, the activities of other patrons proved rather limited in scope while, on the contrary, it seems that Manuel II not only was active in literary circles but he also sponsored a workshop for copying manuscripts.

In the second unit of my dissertation (chs. 3-6) I turned to the emperor's political texts composed during his reign: the *Dialog with the Empress Mother on Marriage* (1396), *The Foundations of Imperial Conduct* (1406), *The Seven Ethico-Political Orations* (1408), and *The Funeral Oration for his Brother Theodore, Despot of Morea* (1411). After a survey of the late Palaiologan literary landscape and of the emperor's substantial oeuvre comprising theological, liturgical and political writings, I proceeded to a close reading of each of these texts and used notions drawn from both modern literary theory as well as from ancient rhetorical handbooks. This double perspective enabled me to analyze more in depth categories such as genre and authorial voice which in turn support a better understanding of the topics approached in these writings and of their functions in the given contexts. In addition, in this section, I tried to place the production of these texts in their historical and literary contexts.

The analysis of the emperor's political texts reveals that all four of the emperor's political compositions were conceived and transmitted as different ways of expressing moral and political advice: deliberative (*Dialog on Marriage*), “gnomic” (*Foundations*), based on diatribe (*Orations*), and narrative (*Funeral Oration*). In the *Dialog on Marriage* which draws on both orality and sophisticated rhetorical theories of topics, praise for decisive action or for political design was replaced with a deliberative stance. In the *Foundations*, by combining the categories of father and teacher into one authorial voice, the emperor played with his needs as a father, on the one hand, and the service to the prince elect, on the other hand. This strategy had the advantage of creating a migrating voice between paternal intimacy and court solemnity. Using multiple voices as well as several generic strands (*centuria*, *hypothekai*, gnomic literature, “princely mirrors”) the author operated a multifaceted and stronger self-authorization. Tightly connected by the same intent to provide an educational model for his son, John VIII, are the seven *Orations*, the text that in most manuscripts followed the *Foundations* and was connected to it. Here, the author organized the material of his seven texts with different topics in the manner of a diatribe, a form of speech popular in antiquity and defined as a group of lectures or orations on a moral theme characterized by vividness

and immediacy in language. Thus, it appears that the seven *Orationes* were intended as something different from a series of seven orations unconnected among themselves. Noticeably, the apparent indetermination of this collection of different types of *logoi* allowed for a greater freedom in the use of philosophical or theological themes. As a result of the configuration of the *Orationes*, the educational message is constructed through an accumulation of arguments and representations which culminate in the admonition addressed to John to regard humility (ταπεινοφροσύνη) as the highest imperial virtue. In the last text here analyzed, the *Funeral oration on his brother Theodore*, Manuel appears to have emulated both the traditions of panegyric oration and of epic/chronicle. The subject matter, the praise for his brother, is treated in the form of an historical account and the author offers a wealth of details about the events he recounts. With regard to the construction of the authorial voice, I argue that the author weaves into his narrative three different plots: one following Theodore's deeds in the Peloponnese, one about the emperor-author himself who presented his actions as decisive in the pacification of the region, and one about the history of Morea.

In all these four texts, the elaborate construction of political advice is reflected in their deliberative contents, the ethos which the emperor strove to construct, and, not least, by their inclusion in a single codex, the Vindob. phil. gr. 98, dedicated to John VIII and part of a series of four manuscripts which comprised most of the emperor's literary texts. From this viewpoint, it can be suggested that the texts were conceived as elements in a comprehensive didactic project envisaged by the emperor Manuel II. In addition, the author often subverted the common tenets of the imperial representation and presented himself as a “defeated” interlocutor in the debate of the *Dialog*, as a teacher-rhetorician of his son in the *Foundations* and the *Orationes*, or as his brother's helper in the *Funeral oration*. Furthermore, noticeably, the emperor constantly suggested and explicitly stated that rhetoric and the ability to speak in a persuasive manner were correlates of power.

Building on the investigation of the underlying socio-political developments and of the authorial rhetorical strategies, in the third unit (chs. 7-9), I deal with the ideological claims that shaped the different approaches to the nature and exercise of political authority in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. I proceed from the observation that in late Byzantium, as everywhere else, different social groups adhered to aims that suited their interests. As a result, the late Byzantine political sphere presents the picture of an arena where various political discourses sometimes competed and sometimes intersected with each other. In the first two chapters of the unit (chs. 7 and 8) I focused on the discourses put forward by the two groups of authors with which the emperor interacted most: the ecclesiastics, defined as members of the Church hierarchy, and the court rhetoricians. In the last chapter (ch. 9), I discussed the differences in the emperor's discursive representation of imperial authority. In order to identify the differences but also the common genealogies of these three competing discourses I dealt with four major themes of discourse shared by all authors of the later Byzantine periods: the cleavages between various segments of society and particularly between the emerging entrepreneurs and the impoverished citizens of Constantinople and Thessalonike; the approach to the question of Byzantium's alliances; the formulation of Byzantine individuality either in cultural terms as identification with Hellenism, or in religious terms as Orthodox, or within a political framework as Roman; and the conceptualization of the idea of imperial rule.

The analysis of political discourses in late Byzantium reveals several important developments. Concerning the ecclesiastics' discourse it emerges that the members of the high ranking hierarchy like Symeon of Thessalonike or Joseph Bryennios adopted a radical position concerning their wealthy contemporaries, whom they rebuked for the widening gap

between the different social classes and for not participating in the defense of the City. Their discourse acquired even more radical hues regarding the authority of the emperor in the question of the patriarch's appointment. If the roots of this radicalization of the ecclesiastics' discourse, most evident in the treatises of Makarios of Ankara, can be traced back to the early Palaiologan period, its echoes are to be found in the texts of later Church officials like Sylvester Syropoulos and Mark Eugenikos as well.

Unlike the ecclesiastics, the imperial rhetoricians continued to support the idea of the omnipotence of imperial power in Byzantium. Even George Gemistos Plethon, who preached extreme political reforms that entailed the return to the values of ancient Sparta, agreed upon the appropriateness of a monarchical rule. In their panegyrics, they praised extensively the emperor's deeds, his dynastic lineage and direct successor, John VIII. Among the usual virtues identifiable in panegyric texts, they often described the emperor as a skilled rhetorician and teacher not only for his son but also for his people. Furthermore, unlike the ecclesiastics who preached a kind of Orthodox utopia, they emphasized the Byzantines' specificity reflected in their Romanness.

A slightly different picture with regard to the emperor's political authority emerged from the analysis of the emperor's own discursive representation of imperial authority. He reworked the ancient representation of a philosopher-king in the form of a rhetorician-king and put forward a personal version of the hierarchical system of kingly virtues with humility (*ταπεινοφροσύνη*) on top. He often pictured himself in guise of a *didaskalos* not only of his son to whom he addressed his texts but also of his subjects as he suggested in his very short *Oration to the Subjects*. Furthermore, his preaching activity probably indicated a tendency to absorb into his office the function specific to the Church's spiritual authority. The analysis of the three competing political discourses reveals the antagonisms emerging in the last decades of the Byzantine Empire, between on the one hand, the Church, and, on the other hand, the emperor. By contrast to the orators' project, often driven by personal aspirations, Manuel's project seemingly also sought to compensate for the lack of previous enlightened statesmanship, in the aftermath of the conflicts with the Ottomans. Unlike the court rhetoricians, Manuel's discourse of imperial authority linked rhetoric to the idea of best governance. Clearly each program undertook to fulfill a special need: whereas the orators' program conceived rhetoric as key to social survival, Manuel's transformed it into a guide to salvation of the Byzantine state. Thus, Manuel's rhetoric deliberately omitted praise and engaged more intensely with the political present.

Ultimately, my investigation unveils the picture of the emperor Manuel II as a political thinker concerned with the construction of a functional representation of the imperial office. He assiduously cultivated the alternative image of an emperor-writer very much different from the image of his father, John V, who was more interested in the day-to-day state administration. Yet, unlike other Byzantine philosopher-kings, through his texts he strove to shape a new role for the imperial institution in an environment increasingly controlled by forces like the Ottomans, the Italian merchants, or the Byzantine *nouveaux riches*. This new role entailed the large scale use of rhetoric, one of the very few tools which he could use in order to maintain a certain cohesion in the collapsing Byzantine political sphere. By this account, his political writings echoed the emperor's personal experiences that underpinned his attempts to advertise a new imperial ethos adapted to the new social realities in which the Byzantine emperor represented little more than a *primus inter pares*.

Curriculum vitae

Degrees:

- 2006 **MA Medieval Studies**, Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest
- 2003 **MA European Studies**, Department of European Studies, “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iasi, Romania
- 2000 **BA Classical Studies**, Department of Classical Studies, “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iasi, Romania

Scholarships, Grants, and Awards:

- 2011-2012 **New Europe College, Institute for Advanced Studies, Bucharest, Romania**, fellowship
- 2011-2012 **Koç University's Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations**, junior fellowship (declined)
- 2011 **University of Vienna, Institute for Byzantine Studies**, research travel grant
- 2011 **State University of Yerevan, Armenia and Matenadaran Institute for Ancient Manuscripts**, teaching fellowship
- 2009-2010, **Harvard University, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington D.C.**, junior fellowship
- 2008-2009, **National and Kapodistrian University of Athens**, Fellowship in the framework of "Marie Curie" European Doctorate Program, European Science Foundation
- 2008, **Central European University**, Best Advanced Doctoral Student Award
- 2008, **Harvard University, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections**, Medieval Greek Summer School
- 2008, **Oxford University**, April- May 2008: research travel grant
- 2006, **University of Toronto**, Certificate of Proficiency in Medieval Latin, PhD level

Publications

"A brief history of the Morea as Seen Through the Eyes of an Emperor Rhetorician: The Funeral Oration for His Brother Theodore by Manuel II Palaiologos." In *Viewing the Morea*, ed. Sharon Gerstel. Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, (submitted; forthcoming 2013)

“Between Constantinople and Italy: scholarly circles and imperial patronage in Byzantium before the Fall (c. 1350-1453),” in *Annual of The New Europe College*,

Institute of Advanced Studies, Bucharest: NEC Publications, 2012 (submitted; forthcoming)

Review of Nevra Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins. Politics and Society in the Late Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. In *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, September 2011, 111-113.

"A Late Byzantine Patroness: Helena Kantakouzene Palaiologina," in *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte. Proceedings of the Conference Byzantine Female Founders, Vienna, 2008*. (submitted; forthcoming)

"Advice and Praise for the Ruler: Making Political Strategies in Manuel II's Dialogue on Marriage." in *Sailing to Byzantium*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publications, 2009, 163-182.

"Role Playing Strategies in Demetrios Kydones' letters to Manuel II Palaiologos," in *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 13 (2007): 21-38.

Conference participations

July 2012, Leeds, **International Congress of Medieval Studies**

Breaking genre codes in late Byzantine rhetoric: the cases of Demetrios Chrysoloras and John Chortasmenos

August 2011, **22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Sofia**

Late Byzantine Literary Salons

June 2011, **Central European University, Graduate Student Day, "Legacies and Discontinuities in the Eastern Mediterranean"**

Makarios of Ankara on Kingship: Defending or Challenging Political Orthodoxy?

March 2011, **University of Oxford, Graduate Conference "Between Constantines"**

No Triumphs, Just Words: Competing Political Discourses in Late Byzantium.

March 2010, **University of Birmingham XLIII Spring Symposium in Byzantine Studies**

Genre Matters: Didactic Voices and the Political Stage in Late Byzantium

December 2009, **Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, Washington DC.**

Rhetoric and Ideology in Late Byzantium

November 2009, **Central European University, International Symposium on Constantine VII Porphyrogenetus**

The Politics of Deliberation: Constantine VII Addressing his Soldiers

November 2009, **Sarasota, Florida, 43rd Byzantine Studies Conference of the Byzantine Studies Association of North America**

Narrative and Discourse of Legitimization in Manuel II Palaiologos' Funeral Oration for his Brother Theodore

June 2009, **Bielefeld, Concluding Seminar of the "Marie Curie"- European Doctorate Program**

Social Elites, State, and Society in Byzantium (1354-1425)

September 2008, **Vienna, International Colloquium “Female Founders and Patronesses” in Byzantium**

Demetrios Kydones' letters addressed to Helena Kantakouzene Palaiologina

May 2008, **Dublin, Trinity College, 2nd Postgraduate Forum in Byzantine Studies**

Making Political strategies in the Dialogue on Marriage with the Empress Mother

March 2008, **Budapest, Central European University, Medieval Urban Fauna Workshop**

Representations of Authority in Manuel Philes' Poems on Nature

April 2007, **Chicago, Midwest Political Science Association Annual Conference**

Patterns of Kingship in a Late Byzantine Princely Mirror