

FLORIN LEONTE, *Ethos, Logos, and Perspective*. Studies in Late Byzantine Rhetoric (Routledge Research in Byzantine Studies). London – New York: Routledge 2023. 229 pp. – ISBN 978-1-032-34336-5

• VESSELA VALIAVITCHARSKA, University of Maryland
(vvaliav@umd.edu)

This book discusses a representative sample of panegyric texts by fifteen intellectuals from the period between the mid-1300s and 1453, all known for their public careers and close connections with the imperial families. It contains a brief introduction that sets out its aims and methodology, four substantive chapters, a conclusion, a brief index of names and terms, and an appendix that offers helpful summaries of thirty-two epideictic texts in prose and verse (including didactic *kephalaia*) by fourteen authors from Demetrios Kydones to Bessarion and George Scholarios. With some notable exceptions,¹ late Byzantine epideictic has not been studied as a whole (although in-depth studies on individual writers are frequent), and LEONTE makes an important step by considering questions of genre, methodology, and general themes, as well as function. His introductory chapter focuses on several interrelated problems: the definition of ‘rhetorical praise’ and its relationship to established epideictic genres, the difficulty of limiting the scope of the book, the ecology of encomiastic discourse and its intertextuality, as well as his choice of methodology. Part of the complexity, LEONTE points out, is that encomiastic elements are widely present across a large number of genres, including poetry, epistolography, history, hagiography, didactic literature – and even imperial charters – which makes the task of identifying a representative corpus rather challenging (pp. 2–4).² In

1. For example, IDA TOTH, *Imperial Orations in Late Byzantium*. DPhil thesis. University of Oxford 2003 and DIMITER ANGELOV, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204–1330*. Cambridge 2007.

2. LEONTE cites HERBERT HUNGER, *Prooimion*. *Elemente der byzantinischen Kaiseridee in den Arengen der Urkunden* (Wiener byzantinistische Studien 1). Vienna 1964; NIKOLAOS ZAGKLAS, *Experimenting with Prose and Verse in Twelfth-Century Byzantium*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 71 (2017) pp. 229–248; HELEN SARADI, *Rhetoric and Legal Clauses in the Byzantine Wills of the Athos Archives*. *Prooimia and Clauses of Warranty*. *Travaux et Mémoires* 32 (2019) pp. 357–389. See also IDA TOTH, *Rhetorical Theatron in Late Byzantium*. *The Examples of Palaiologan Imperial Orations*. In: MICHAEL GRÜNBART (ed.), *Theatron*. *Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter / Rhetorical Culture in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Millennium-Studien 13). Berlin – New York 2007, pp. 429–448.

addition, even rhetorical epideictic writing ‘proper’, for which Menander Rhetor’s handbook articulates a number of genres and subgenres, cannot be reduced to defined literary forms in the traditional sense of that word (p. 3). Acknowledging recent work on modes of praise in late Byzantine poetry,³ LEONTE defines ‘praise’ in general as a ‘*poetic mode of public and private address* [italics in the original] that combined form and authorial presence across many kinds of texts’. This definition, while recognizing the traditional link between poetry and praise, still appears rather broad to help with a selection of texts. NORTHRUP FRYE and ALASTAIR FOWLER are referenced as sources for the term ‘mode’ (p. 13 n. 34). The reader here is required to do some inferencing: FRYE does not identify a ‘poetic mode’ but rejects the notion of formally fixed genres, while FOWLER constructs a ‘family resemblance’ theory to account for genre permanence and change, a theory that highlights the mutability of genre characteristics and their rhetorical deployment in subsequent literary texts; in other words, what FRYE and FOWLER share in their understanding of ‘mode’ is a rejection of the traditional literary-critical idea of ‘genre’ as a category of texts that share a defined literary structure, content themes, stylistic characteristics, and levels of language. LEONTE, following Aristotle, adopts a working understanding of the epideictic genre as defined by the ‘constituents of the speaking situation’, that is, the audience, the occasion, the orator’s office and duties, and the patronage involved, ‘balanc[ing] biographical information, historical context, and metapoetic statements by focusing on one single source or one group of texts from a single author or a single period’ (p. 5). Each chapter, therefore, focuses on a different selection of encomiastic texts grounded by author and occasion, thus showcasing the broad relevance of LEONTE’s analysis.

Pointing out the fact that epideictic texts have been, on the one hand, a source of frustration for fact-oriented historians, and on the other, a target of complaints for literary critics who see them as drab recycling bins of rhetorical prescriptions, LEONTE reaches for both ancient and contemporary rhetorical theory in order to work out a methodology by which late Byzantine epideictic could be studied on its own terms (pp. 5–8). His starting point are two of Aristotle’s three *pisteis* as articulated in Rhetoric I.2: *ethos* and *logos*. At this point, LEONTE provides a brief discussion of how to understand *ethos* (pp. 7–8), a discussion that continues in the next chapter

3. KRISTINA KUBINA, Die enkomiasische Dichtung des Manuel Philes. Form und Funktion des literarischen Lobes in der frühen Palaiologenzeit (Byzantinisches Archiv 38). Berlin 2020..

(pp. 15–17) – while *logos* is taken up in Chapter 2. Besides Aristotle, a major inspiration for LEONTE’s approach comes from the work of twentieth-century American rhetorician KENNETH BURKE, who posits that rhetorical persuasion frequently emerges in the interplay between permanence and change, that is, old, immutable, or transcendent patterns versus meaningful alterations of certain aspects. Therefore, says LEONTE, the argument of the book is that late Byzantine epideictic, although subscribing to many of the standard rhetorical *topoi*, generated a tension between two perspectives, one of transcendent ideals and models, and another that looks to effect real social or political change, emphasizing pragmatic action (p. 7).

The value of LEONTE’s approach is in searching for a meaningful methodology that makes sense of Byzantine rhetorical texts *as rhetoric*, that is, rejecting the procrustean bed of either (twentieth-century) historical study or (twentieth-century) literary criticism, but looking at the spectacular creations of late Byzantine epideictic as intended to celebrate and delight as much as to teach and advise. It asserts the serious purpose behind these texts, their immense erudition and verbal dexterity, as well as their philosophical and ethical grounding. At the same time, as he (rightly) complains that rhetorical analysis is often reduced to an explication of the historical context (p. 6), LEONTE focuses on strategies and structures well-familiar to ancient and Byzantine rhetoricians alike. The book, therefore, offers a real contribution toward a study of Byzantine rhetorical texts, especially valuable now, when we are at the cusp of a break-through in understanding how rhetorical theory was read, commented on, and employed in practice in middle Byzantium and later.⁴ However, as a reviewer who has been looking at ancient and Byzantine rhetorical handbooks for some time, I found LEONTE’s discussion of both *ethos* and *logos* uncommon.

Ethos is considered in more detail in Chapter 1, ‘Late Byzantine Court *Ethos*: Contemplation and Action’. At the outset, LEONTE leads the reader to believe that he would provide a historical overview of changing notions of *ethos*, but these are just briefly referenced on pp. 14–16 in a way that might prompt misinterpretation. For example, Hermogenes is said to have ‘followed in the footsteps’ of both Aristotle and the Stoics in equating *ethos* with character, a perspective ‘confirmed’ by Joseph Rhakendytes and Joseph Bryennios in the fourteenth century (p. 15). I believe LEONTE

4. The work on editing the Byzantine commentaries on Hermogenes is ongoing with the project *Thinking through Rhetoric with Hermogenes*, led by AGLAE PIZZONE and including as team members CHIARA D’AGOSTINI, ELISABETTA BARILI, BYRON MACDOUGALL, DARIA RESH, MARIA MUSHINSKAYA, and UGO VALORI.

means that for Aristotle as well as for Hermogenes, *ethos* emerges as a textual feature, that is, they both focus on how *ethos* can be created verbally and/or inferred from the text. However, since these two authors are really very different, it would have been less confusing for the reader to hear that no straight line can be drawn from Aristotle, through the Stoics, to Hermogenes and late Byzantine handbooks such as that of Joseph Rhakendytes. The chapter does point out that ‘*ethos* remains an ambiguous and versatile concept with several meanings’ (p. 14), a point that would have been made well by highlighting the contrasts among the referenced authors of what rhetorical *ethos* implies.

Immediately afterwards, LEONTE moves to discuss recent scholarship on late Byzantine *ethos* as self-representation,⁵ which, he says, is an important perspective but insufficient to ‘illuminate the nuances of *ethos*’ across genres (p. 16). *Ethos* must be conceptualized as a ‘dynamic textual device’ constituted through an ‘unlimited number of choices, permutations, and variations of discourse’ (p. 17).⁶ As LEONTE’s writing pivots abruptly from ancient, to medieval, to contemporary concepts, from studies of the Byzantine texts to studies on contemporary rhetoric, and from a literary to a rhetorical framework, one feels rather disoriented. I was repeatedly left with the impression that the author is trying to cover too much ground.

The texts selected for analysis in this chapter are all forms of public address to rulers or members of the ruling families. LEONTE argues that encomiastic *ethos* shifts continuously between the personal and self-referential point of view and the impersonal-collective point of view that aims at ensuring objectivity (pp. 18–19), thus producing two perspectives: static, which ‘privileged contemplation’ and expressed awe for the object of praise, and dynamic, which called for public action (p. 19). Much and convincing evidence is provided from John Argyropoulos, John Chortasmenos, Manuel Chrysoloras, John Dokeianos, and Isidore of Kiev, tracing, through a multitude of self-references, the themes of modesty and sincerity (one can-

5. JUDITH RYDER, *The Career and Writings of Demetrios Kydones. A Study of Fourteenth-Century Byzantine Politics, Religions, and Society*. Leiden 2010; NIELS GAUL, *Rising Elites and Institutionalization*. In: SITA STECKEL – NIELS GAUL – MICHAEL GRÜNBART (eds), *Networks of Learning. Perspectives on Scholars in the Byzantine East and the Latin West, c. 1000–1200*. Münster 2014, pp. 235–280; DIMITER ANGELOV, *The Byzantine Hellene. Theodore Laskaris and the Transformation of Byzantine Culture in Exile*. Cambridge 2020.

6. LEONTE cites ANNA FAHRAEUS – ANN JONSSON (eds), *Textual Ethos Studies or Locating Ethics*. New York 2005.

not help but hear the Hermogenean precepts here), which, according to LEONTE, serve a double purpose: to present the speaker as a ‘benevolent and skilled mediator for the common good’ (p. 31) while countering suspicion toward rhetoric as deceitful discourse (p. 30). At the same time, the impersonal viewpoint appears as an ‘inherited set of general statements about values (p. 33), as general encomiastic *topoi*, and as the use of impersonal third-person formulae (p. 33). All these enable the speaker to ‘dissolve the distance’ between author and addressee and to become the voice of the community. LEONTE’s argument is very much in line with LAURENT PERNOT’s view of late antique encomiastic discourse (whose term ‘grammar of praise’ he also adopts, p. 6) as an opportunity to amplify social values in a philosophical framework while offering advice on matters of political importance. The chapter develops this line of inquiry further by offering what LEONTE calls a ‘comparative typology’ of late Byzantine *ethos*, which he divides into *ethos* expressing gratitude, awe, supplication, or expertise and historical knowledge – an important list that offers a broad view of the rhetorical strategies for self-positioning in encomia for the royal family, which then allow the speaker to advance political and social messages. Here, the chapter engages also the nexus between projected persona and the cluster of emotions the speaker seeks to activate – for example, by adopting the voice of a historian or, in the case of Bessarion, by openly borrowing language from Aristides or Libanius and thereby assuming their personas as well (p. 35). Since as I reviewer I have to find something to question, I would ask why a simple comparison between the *laudandus* and a Homeric hero (as required by the genre) should count as a substitute Homeric persona for the rhetor (p. 35)? However, the occasional lack of clarity is outweighed by the large number of texts as well as the multiple aspects of *ethos* discussed in this chapter.

Logos is the subject of discussion in Chapter 2. As *logos* is traditionally understood to refer to well-established and easily recognizable structures of reasoning (for example, the *enthymeme* or the *epicheireme*), which are generally more typical of judicial pieces and not very apparent in epideictic rhetoric, I was eager to see how LEONTE approaches this tricky question.

As of now, we are sorely in need of more work on Byzantine rhetorical argumentation; such work is beginning to appear,⁷ but is still very much a subfield in development – which may be the reason why the author reaches for modern studies on Aristotelian *logos* (p. 63 n. 8). However, as popular as Aristotle's *Organon* was in Byzantium, his *Rhetoric* did not enjoy the same status; the Hermogenean treatises *On Stases* and *On Invention* appear to have been much more influential in shaping Byzantine views of structures of informal reasoning, which structures are generally well-defined and exemplified in the rhetorical commentaries. Modern scholarship, by contrast, leans heavily on Aristotle, but also eschews a definitive account of Aristotle's theory of rational rhetorical argument – something also acknowledged in the chapter (p. 63). LEONTE resolves the conundrum by using the term '*logos*' to mean 'textual features that make the argument effective' (p. 63). From here on, '*logos*' is used in the sense of 'thematic analysis of content and devices', followed by a 'typology of argument' (in a way that mirrors the structure of the previous chapter). Topical analysis according to handbook precepts is regarded as meaningless, because 'Byzantine rhetoricians... constantly sought to identify new paths of effective communication and often cultivated innovation' (p. 64). Instead, the chapter offers a thematic analysis of a large number of texts, identifying two large thematic clusters: idealism, prominent in descriptions and references to an idealized state of affairs or an ideal set of values, and realism, which appears in forward-looking, action-oriented advice (as in the previous chapter). This is produced by tending to rhetorical devices such as allusion, hyperbole, amplification, and break-offs, as well as vivid imagery. Here the reader may again notice some idiosyncratic use of established terminology, as on pp. 66–67, where straightforward references are read as 'allusions', or on p. 75, where they are read as 'digressions', – but regardless of that, one is offered a tour through a number of literary strategies in authors: Bessarion, Demetrios Chrysoloras, John Chortasmenos, Manuel Chrysoloras, Demetrios Kydones, and John Dokeianos, and Mark Eugenikos and Manuel Palaiologos. The reader gains valuable insights, being walked through the creation of a 'mythical geography' that extends from antiquity to the present, especially in ekphrastic texts, in

7. For example, the excellent studies published by BYRON MACDOWELL, John of Sardis' Commentary on Aphthonius' Progymnasmata. *Logic in Ninth-Century Byzantium. Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 57.3 (2017) pp. 721–744; CAMILLE RAMBOURG, Les diagrammes syllogistiques des scholies de Stephanos à la Rhétorique d'Aristote (CAG 21.2). *Classica et mediaevalia* 63 (2012) pp. 279–315.

which references to and descriptions of ancient *spolia* and myth-related architectural detail serve to reinforce the mythological paradigm (pp. 90–91).⁸ As the empire contracts, the representation of space and, along with it, time, become fraught subjects that preoccupy speakers’ attention (93–105). LEONTE likewise reaches important conclusions on the political use of Homeric similes: they highlight some qualities while excluding others, thereby laying out communal expectations (as in Dokeianos’ or Kydones’ *prosphonemata*, pp. 113–117). Another important contribution is the analysis of places where certain rhetorical devices predominate because of the character of the occasion—for example, amplification by means of synonyms as a preferred rhetorical choice in funeral speeches, which need to avoid too much ornamental detail because of the gravity of the event. Ultimately, in addition to these devices, the author describes encomiastic argument strategies as produced by large-scale comparisons, by the use of historical narratives and digressions, as well as by monologic and dialogic structures, all of which aim to contrast models of leadership, to set immediate political action goals, or to reflect on moral-political themes.

Chapters 3 and 4 offer specific case studies illustrating some of the general principles outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 3 is an analysis of the construction of the ideal space of empire in Isidore’s *Encomium for John VIII Palaiologos*, where ‘space becomes a core component of a strategy to mediate between the necessity to praise and the intention to construct discursively a symbolic reality that would reflect the challenges of a collapsing state’ (pp. 133–134) and a ‘self-standing symbol [that] corresponds to a distinct vision of imperial authority’ (p. 134). Encomiastically constructed ideal space functions as a ‘force organizing textual evidence and praise’ in lieu of direct exposition of an emperor’s virtues (p. 155); it highlights ‘symbolic undertones’ (p. 156), while inviting the intended audience to envision themselves in specific locations. LEONTE suggests that Isidore emphasizes the magnificence of Constantinople, in purposeful contrast with Plethon’s radical proposal of a Hellenic state centered in the Peloponnese (p. 156), while presenting Morea as distant and turbulent. Therefore, he says, the encomiastic representation of space is instrumental in articulating a response to political changes occurring in the empire (p. 157). Previous representations of ‘horizontal space’ that encompasses an endless stretch of imperial territory have been replaced with space organized in vertical

8. LEONTE cites ALEXANDRA VOUDOURI, *Αυτοτελή εγκώμια πόλεων της ύστερης βυζαντινής περιόδου υπό το πρίσμα της προγενέστερης παράδοσής τους*. PhD dissertation. University of Athens 2016.

hierarchical terms, thus opposing attempts to assert ‘other urban centers as major landmarks of Byzantine statehood’ (p. 157). While an excellent study of encomiastic constructions of space, the chapter departs somewhat from the goal originally stated in the Introduction. *Ethos* is present here, but not as a major focus.

Chapter 4 extends the monograph’s scope beyond the traditional panegyric genres in order to look at Joseph Bryennios’ *Forty-Nine Chapters* (composed between 1402 and 1406), a book on the acquisition of virtue, structured in the didactic tradition of *erotapokriseis* (questions and answers). With this chapter, LEONTE returns the focus to *ethos*, considering how, in order to present an effective teaching persona, Bryennios projects the character of one learned in both Scripture and ancient literature as well as experienced in spiritual matters. The thematic dichotomy common to the rest of the book, that is, an opposition between the ideal world of the divine sphere and its reflection in the physical world and the reality of fallen human nature (vividly described as the sins of the Cretans), is present here as well. LEONTE reasons that it is precisely this opposition of idealistic vision versus pragmatic reality that makes Bryennios’ *Chapters* resemble epideictic literature, even though the text is not strictly encomiastic (pp. 169–170). (Is this opposition then a hallmark of all Palaiologan epideictic, one wonders, and does its presence warrant that a piece belongs to the genre?) The arguments of the *kephalaia*, he says, are likewise advanced by means of the analogy and the imagery, something we see repeatedly in panegyric. Unlike similar didactic *kephalaia*, such as Gregory of Sinai’s, who ‘emphasized ontological differences between the created and the divine worlds’, Bryennios’ analogies advance a ‘positive relations between the two realms’ (p. 185), which allows for more effective moral teaching. Overall, the reader here is treated to a very good analysis of the interplay between *ethos* and didactic technique in the form of imagery and Biblical references; however, the ‘epideictic perspective’ could perhaps have been brought out more clearly.

In summary, *Ethos, Logos, and Perspective* spans an impressive number of authors and texts from the last hundred years of Byzantium. Despite some idiosyncratic use of established terminology, an uncritical tangling of contemporary with ancient approaches, and some challenges in the selection and definition of texts, the book offers a valuable contribution to the study of Palaiologan rhetoric. It proposes a methodology more germane to the analysis of rhetorical pieces than what we have been generally employing; it considers the epideictic pieces as opportunities for promoting communal

values as well as for arguing for political change (or for the status quo); and it offers important insights into how amplification – as well as the economy of creating rhetorical presence in general – can function to promote certain qualities over others, by virtue of which they also promote paths of political action. I hope that the book inspires similar lines of inquiry.

Keywords

Greek rhetoric; Palaeologan period