Abstract

In this study I focused on the discourse of praise emerging in the last century of Byzantium, roughly from mid-fourteenth century until 1453, a period coinciding with a series of political events and social transformations that culminated in the fall of Constantinople. This period is particularly rich in works of epideictic rhetoric which, contrary to the common image of a deteriorating political landscape, flourished concomitantly with a lack of other genres like historical narratives. For practical reasons, this study does not cover all the instances of court praise but addresses only a substantial sample of laudatory speeches with a diverse range of forms and topics. I deal with the epideictic works of the most representative authors active in that timeframe: Demetrios Kydones, Manuel II Palaialogos, Manuel Chrysoloras, Demetrios Chrysoloras, Makarios Makres, John Chortasmenos, Mark Eugenikos, John Eugenikos, Isidore of Kiev, John Argyropoulos, John Dokeianos, Michael Apostoles, Bessarion, and George Scholarios. The works of all these authors represent instantiations of what can be described as *the epideictic field* or *discourse* emerging at the intersection of specific representations, themes, and stylistic features. Despite the differences in approaches, their careers and *oeuvres* display many common features like their close connections with the imperial families (the Kantakouzenoi and the Palaiologoi in Constantinople or the Komnenoi in Trebizond), the frequent instances of textual inter-influences and the common scholarly interests attested by their manuscript or epistolary exchanges. Praise offered a stage for authors to display their mastering of techniques like character development, accounts of achievements in times of war and peace, city descriptions, or narratives of contemporary events like diplomatic expeditions and civil unrest.

Even if the pervasiveness of praise renders problematic an overarching argument concerning the practices of praise, modern tools of rhetorical criticism offer guiding principles that can help us better understand its configuration and functions. Here I relied on several major notions delineated by scholars who dealt with epideictic and rhetorical communication: first, Laurent Pernot's idea of *a grammar of praise* that can explain the connections between various pre-established topics and stylistic devices; and second, the idea that a text encapsulates more perspectives and frameworks of references that, when juxtaposed, can extend the meaning of praise and engender tensions reflecting ongoing political or social issues. I argue that the late Byzantine praise was contingent on two principal perspectives that underpin the *grammar of praise*: one informed by timeless symbols of eternal authority and by the permanence of ideals; and another rooted in a political reality that required immediate action to confront the problems of a state in dissolution. In Kenneth Burke's terms, late Byzantine authors used these perspectives *incongruously* for, while the dominant perspective was always symbolic and idealistic, they introduced slight changes of tone and topical emphasis to guide the addressees towards agency based on the interpretation of concrete facts.

Several key questions guide this study. Primarily, I consider how authors delineated their intentions by shifting their personas according to the intended messages and on how argumentation was developed with the help of specific rhetorical devices and themes. The answers to these initial questions will open a path to considering the workings of praise into

specific texts where we can ask more focused questions about the function of praise in the historical, social, and cultural contexts of late Byzantium. Which higher authorities did authors invoke in their praise? How did praise function in a deterritorialized empire like the late Byzantine one? How did praise shape and how was it shaped by other purposes like giving moral advice?

In answering these questions, the present study was informed by several assumptions. Without doubt, while the encomia of this period did not represent something radically novel, they stand as a contextualized development of an existing rhetorical mode. The late Byzantine rhetorical encomium inherited nuances, contexts, forms, and functions which had been refined in the rhetorical tradition of epideictic rhetoric that started long before. However, we must not be misled by these features common in many other periods and geographical spaces. Every single encomiastic composition responded to specific conditions, accommodated the speaker's needs, and constructed a unique relationship with its predecessors and sources. Concomitantly, the aesthetic dimension of a speech of praise was delineated by political and ideological statements for distinct systems of virtues, whether Aristotelian or Platonic, intellectual or physical, were conveniently used whenever necessary.

All four chapters of this study have emerged in response to the lack of an investigation of the deeper structures of praise that would look beyond the use of common topics and devices. The first two chapters address two key categories of rhetorical analysis: *ethos* and *logos*. While they have received the first substantial treatment in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, a text mostly ignored in Byzantium, *ethos* and *logos* have received more attention in modern scholarship. Taking clues from this area, in the first chapter I argue that an author's *ethos* was dynamically generated within the authors' strategies to present themselves as trustful orators who performed their eulogies in correlation to various parameters: the speaking situation (the *kairos*), the personality of the addressee, the choice for a rhetorical genre, and the audience. With regard to late Byzantium, all authors, from Kydones to Apostoles, reflect the use of multiple categories of *ethos*. The study of *ethos* projected by the authors of this period indicate that they used a two-point perspective (personal and impersonal) determined by the speaker's implied distance or proximity to the object of praise. The various permutations of personal and impersonal approaches engendered two main kinds of *ethos*, a contemplative and a dynamic one, which are perceivable in the choice and arrangement of laudatory topics.

In the second chapter dedicated to elocution or *logos*, I moved closer to the style, contents, and argumentation of late Byzantine speeches of praise. Two perspectives seem to inform and extend the meanings of late Byzantine praise: an idealistic and a pragmatic one. The tensions between these two perspectives reveal a gradual transition towards a realistic model of eulogy in which ideals were increasingly confronted to concrete features and facts.

The second part of the study examines two case studies that highlight how the use of various kinds of ethos and the tensions between the perspectives used in approaching the matter of praise informed the encomiastic messages. In Isidore's *Encomium for Emperor John*

VIII we notice a shift in the compositional structure of the speech: while panegyrics were commonly structured according to the four cardinal virtues, here Isidore arranges the contents according to two types of spaces, inside and outside, that emerged out of the interplay between the above-mentioned perspectives. In another case study, I look beyond standard texts of praise and see how the encomiastic perspectives affected other rhetorical forms, in particular hortatory texts. In this sense, I explored Joseph Bryennios' *Forty-Nine Chapters*, a composition written in the tradition of moralizing *kephalaia* but which makes a large scale use of contemplative and dynamic analogies. Arguably, the analysis of these pervasive devices reflected the common approach to praise compositions that combined idealistic and realistic approaches.

All in all, the present study is an attempt at reconfiguring the late Byzantine praise as a phenomenon at the intersection between aesthetics and politics. The different kinds of *ethos* adopted by the authors and the perspectives embedded in the encomia reveal new facets of late Byzantine intellectual landscape.