

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant

Florin Leonte, PhD

Habilitation thesis

Ethos, Logos, and Perspective: Studies in Late Byzantine Encomiastic Rhetoric

Reviewer

Alexander Riehle, Ph.D.

Reviewer's home unit, institution

Harvard University, Department of the Classics

Dr. Leonte's Habilitation thesis makes an important contribution to the study of post-classical and Byzantine rhetoric. Although Byzantine, and especially late Byzantine, literature is extraordinarily rich in various forms of rhetoric, particularly of the epideictic type, the field still lacks broader studies of the kind that Dr. Leonte offers in his thesis. From this perspective, Dr. Leonte's project comes to fill a significant gap and is bound to inspire further scholarship on the topic.

Dr. Leonte's selection of texts covers the period from the mid-fourteenth century (which he rightly considers a turning point in political and cultural history) to the end of the Byzantine Empire and includes examples from a variety of genres that he labels "the epideictic field or discourse" (p. 5): encomiastic orations in the narrow sense (speeches of praise for individuals, funeral orations/monodies, city encomia), ekphraseis, letters and poems (the last two are perhaps slightly underrepresented). These texts are conveniently assembled and summarized in the Appendix.

The thesis is judiciously divided into two parts: The first two chapters conceptualize the "epideictic field" based on ancient and modern rhetorical theory, with examples from the above-mentioned text corpus serving as illustrations, while the third and fourth chapters each present a case study on one text. The conceptual part operates mainly on the basis of the ancient logical and rhetorical strategy of definition and (mostly binary) division: *ethos* and *logos* (the former divides into a static or contemplative one and a dynamic one), individualization vs. typification, pragmatic vs. idealistic, metaphors involving movement vs. "tarrying" ones, proximal vs. distant space, etc. Some of these intersecting categories have a long pedigree (esp. that of *ethos* and *logos*), while others are inspired by modern theory (esp. the work of Kenneth Burke) and still others introduced by Dr. Leonte himself. This is a quite novel approach that deliberately departs from traditional, more formalistic classifications, which makes much sense for a thesis that is ultimately interested in rhetoric as a vehicle for "produc[ing] social and political meanings" (p. 16). Regarding the examples cited to illustrate these key aspects of late Byzantine encomiastic rhetoric, it would have been perhaps more efficient to focus on fewer passages and to discuss these in greater detail.

The division into *ethos* and *logos* takes its starting point from Aristotle but goes beyond the Aristotelian understanding of these pivotal terms. *Ethos* for Dr. Leonte represents a variety of elements pertaining to the author in their relationship with their text, the performative context, the addressee and the audience. It is probably due to this expanded view of *ethos* that Dr. Leonte refrains from a discussion of *ethopoeia*—an omission I found surprising. The chapter on *logos*, on the other hand, is less about argument in the technical (forensic or deliberative) sense and focuses instead more generally on form and content

(rhetorical devices, themes, etc.). It is not clear to me why Dr. Leonte has opted to dismiss the third element in the traditional tripartite division of speechmaking into *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos*. Especially for his discussion of funerary rhetoric with its strong focus on emotion and on the audience (see, e.g., pp. 83-5) the concept of *pathos* would have provided a useful framework.

The case studies presented in chapters three and four offer the first literary-rhetorical interpretations of two highly interesting texts: Isidore of Kiev's Encomium for John VIII Palaiologos and Joseph Bryennios' Forty-Nine Chapters. While Dr. Leonte's reading of Isidore's Encomium focuses on the representation of space as a tool for creating a "dynamic tension between an idealistic and a realistic perspective" (p. 202) which he considers characteristic of late Byzantine praise, the chapter on Bryennios zeros in on the author's didactic strategies. These readings partly draw on the conceptual framework established in the first two chapters, but the thesis would have certainly benefitted from stronger cohesion between the more general first part and the specific case studies of the second part. Especially the chapter on Bryennios, persuasive as it is as a self-standing interpretation, is only loosely connected to the rest of the thesis.

Overall, this is a well-researched, lucidly structured and eloquently argued thesis that engages with a wide array of primary and secondary sources and that convincingly highlights the importance of hitherto little-studied texts for the social, cultural and political history of the final decades of Byzantium's millennial existence. Once turned into a book, it has the potential to leave a significant mark on the landscape of Byzantine and rhetorical studies.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence (number of questions up to the reviewer)

- 1) Could you explain the reasons for excluding the second element of Aristotle's tripartite classification of rhetorical proofs—*pathos*—from your discussion?
- 2) Could you talk about the potential significance of the tradition of *ethopoeia* for your understanding of authorial *ethos*?
- 3) In the final chapter, you discuss a didactic text in the context of epideictic rhetoric. As advice literature could be argued to fall under the purview of deliberative rhetoric, I was wondering if you could elaborate on your interpretation of this text as a specimen of epideictic and, more specifically, encomiastic rhetoric.

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled *Ethos, Logos, and Perspective: Studies in Late Byzantine Encomiastic Rhetoric* by Florin Leonte, PhD **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Classic Philology.

Date:
June 15, 2022

Signature: