

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant

Florin Leonte, PhD

Habilitation thesis

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

Reviewer

Prof. Dr. Michael Grünbart

Reviewer's home unit, institution

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The project of Florin Leonte focuses on aspects and contexts of rhetorical texts in Late Byzantine Society. He continues his studies concerning late Paleologan literature (his latest major publication was "Imperial Visions of Late Byzantium: Manuel II Paleologus and Rhetoric in Purple." 2020).

The basis of his research forms almost all extant documents of epideictic respectively paraenetic literature (an extensive catalogue and useful evaluation is presented in an appendix, pp. 295–314). L. convincingly avoids the term "Fürstenspiegelliteratur".

Chapter one is devoted to *ethos*. That concept starts in classical antiquity (it is discussed in works of philosophy and rhetoric, e.g. Plato). It is surprising that the concept of *vir bonus* (the term has been coined by Cicero) is not discussed in more detail (e.g. p. 16, 19). *Vir bonus* means that an orator is apted to speak/present/compose in a correct manner, because he is both talented in rhetoric skills and characterized (or defined) by high moral qualities. Traces of that concept can be found in various middle Byzantine texts, but also in the Paleologan period (it could be perfectly linked to Western humanistic perceptions).

It goes without saying that all rhetoricians had to deal with performance and self-promotion, L. correctly notes that they "continuously emphasized either their personal stance or the universal authority inherent to court rhetorical eulogies" (p. 19).

Chapter two directs the readers' attention to *logos*. The performer had to cope with two diverging aspects: On the one hand he had to play with or to instrumentalize traditional forms (idealistic *typoi* of encomiastic speech) and on the other hand he had to accept reality. Due to the precarious political situation, reflections on political/imperial conditions increasingly took more space. For this reason, it is a small step to political consultation (the candidate published on that topic recently). L. analyses the textual material in three steps: the rhetorical **inventory** of *logoi*, their **contents** and a **typology** of arguments. The inventory comprises amplification (pp. 118–125), imagery (pp. 125–135), break-off (pp. 135–139) (break-off is the strategy of orators signaling the close connection between them and their audiences; characteristic features form interrogative elements). The contents of epideictic texts emphasize on and include space and time (pp. 172), moral-political matters and ideological statements: The last point includes 1. triumphal destiny of Byzantium, 2. dynastic continuity, 3. virtues continued from the past 4. virtues reflecting worldly harmony 5. equation of enemies 6. Roman tradition. The notion of innovation (*kainotomia*, p. 181) proves to be an important factor in the Paleologan

period. Some reflections concerning typology are added (p.183). The argumentation follows two types of dramatization: ethical-political positions /stating facts and relating chains of events (p. 185)

Chapters three and four are case studies devoted to an encomium by Isidoros of Kiev and the *Forty-Nine chapters* of Joseph Bryennios. L. chose these two texts in order to apply his approaches developed in the first two chapters. However, the methodological tools L. presented should have been considered more. Bryennios' text has not been listed in the appendix, it forms a didactic piece focusing on moral and spiritual advice (the last aspect seems to be the link to other texts discussed by the authors; that may also be the reason that the text is not included in the appendix of encomiastic texts). The *Forty-Nine Chapters* also lack an audience that is present and therefore disrupts the carefully sketched model of interaction between orator and receiver(s). A brief conclusion and afterword close a well written piece of scholarship.

L. discusses relevant literature (although some titles in German are missing, e.g. articles in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*). L. tried to find theoretical models that can be adapted to Late Byzantine texts. B.I. Brock's investigations prove useful, because the concept of metabiology (explaining political, social, ideological, or cultural discourses, pp. 14–15) can be adopted to Byzantine texts as well. The component "audience" is crucial in L.'s discussion: It can be influenced and manipulated, its expectations can be supported or disappointed. L. notes that in rhetorical texts the importance of recording concrete events increases (p. 9).

In conclusion, the habilitation of L. is an important step to understand rhetorical culture and its function in a fading empire that is still proud of its Hellenic and Byzantine tradition. L. highlights the function of informal advice in a formalized manner. He accompanies his argumentations with many translated passages.

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

- 1) May the classical concept of *vir bonus* add to the understanding of rhetorical culture in the Late Byzantine period?
- 2) Can the arguments of L. on historical contextualisation of rhetoric be supported by other texts (e.g. Plethon's political philosophy)?
- 3) And a more general question at the end: how does the author judge the textual (material) evidence he examines? Are the preserved documents concepts or revised and polished presentations?

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.

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Signature: