

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant	Florin Leonte, PhD
Habilitation thesis	Ethos, Logos, and Perspective: Studies in Late Byzantine Encomiastic Rhetoric
Reviewer	Associate Professor Aglae Pizzone
Reviewer's home unit, institution	University of Southern Denmark, Department of History

This thesis analysis the epideictic strategies – with a focus on *ethos* and *logos* – of late Byzantine rhetors. It is an ambitious work that goes through a very wide arrays of text, providing new tools for analysis. The corpus taken into account spans across one century and a half (mid-14th century-1453) and includes 14 key authors associated with Constantinople's and Trebizond's courts. The thesis is informed by the overarching claim that this period offers particularly abundant examples of court praise. The author provides a partial explanation of this popularity by pointing to the mutual interconnection between the authors themselves and between authors and court in this period (p. 5). He does not provide further qualification for this key statement, but it could be of interest to establish a comparison with earlier periods of Byzantine literature and to introduce some reflection on the material circumstances of textual transmission. The latter might have impacted on the quantitative outlook of the evidence at our disposal (e.g. for the 12th century). The first pages of the introduction deal with the many inflections of praise, aptly showing that epideictic discourse could become a site of criticism. It could be interesting here to look deeper (for a hint at cross-cultural comparison, see p. 10) into comparable processes in contemporary Western vernacular literature (cf. for instance K. Bourassa, *Using Dedications to Charles VI to Convey Political Messages: Honorat Bovet, Philippe de Mézières, Christine de Pizan and Pierre Salmon*, *French History* 3.35 (2021), 291-308). Leonte also delves into the generic modulations of praise, which are both extending across different genres/practices and fragmented into several subgenres, even within epideictic field (p. 9). Building on Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, Leonte opts for a broader working definition of the discursive typology

he sets out to investigate, consciously avoiding the term “genre”: “a poetic mode of public and private address that combined form and authorial presence across many kinds of texts” (p. 10). This choice in the long run allows him to strike an effective act of balance and consider both the pragmatic and literary aspects of the relevant sources (p. 16).

After defining his corpus, in the first two chapters Leonte proceeds to qualify the two main concepts addressed in his analysis: *ethos* and *logos*, beginning with the former and the Aristotelian definition. Although Menander Rhetor and Hermogenes are duly considered here, a more in-depth look at how Byzantine rhetors engaged with Hermogenes’ theory could have been beneficial. In the commentaries on Hermogenes, issues of character, sincerity and spontaneity are often addressed, in particular in relation to *endiathetos logos*. The reliance on Aristotle, moreover, might provide a skewed picture, as the *Rhetoric* was famously not a favorite read in Byzantium. A notion like *pistis*, for instance, which is taken for granted by Leonte, is criticized in some authoritative earlier Byzantine commentaries on Hermogenes (cf. for instance John Doxapatres, *Introduction to Aphthonios’ Progymnasmata* Rabe 14 1931, 127). Equally, it would have been interesting to see how commentators deal with the notion of epideictic discourse, which, according to some authors (e.g. Planudes *scholia* on Hermogenes, p. 226 and 252 Walz), conflates with panegyric and could neither be structured/analyzed through the categories of Hermogenes’ *On the Issues* nor follow the rules of necessity. This might complicate, from an emic point of view, how to assess the use of enthymemes in the epideictic texts taken into account by Leonte. I also believe that the commentaries could provide useful exegetical tools to evaluate how the authorial markers described in the central part of the first chapter (collective, individual and interpersonal ethos; presence or lack of emotions; sincerity and modesty) are represented in the different epideictic modes.

In the last part of the chapter Leonte offers a useful typology of encomiastic ethos (4 grounds: emotional, moral, epistemic, sociopolitical/ideological; 2 types: contemplative and dynamic – pp. 70-71), based on the communicative situation, the actors involved and their relationship. At p. 81 there is an insightful paragraph on the changing perspective according to the changing ethos, with some observations on the weaving of narrative into praise. I believe that here a reference to the rhetorical mode *κατὰ ἰστορίαν* picked up for instance by Planudes (*Prolegomena in Artem rhetoricam* 69, 15 Rabe, but already present in earlier rhetorical treatises such as *Rhetorica Anonyma* 42, 5 Rabe) could have been in order, as this represented a viable option for rhetors and was explicitly theorized. At p. 87 Leonte speaks of “the principles to which the Byzantines adhered”. Such a statement, seemingly unproblematic, uncovers an issue that runs through the whole work: a lack of distinction

between the emic and the etic. The typology proposed by Leonte is – I would say – mostly located within the etic. This is an important methodological point, one that perhaps deserved more space, especially because the Byzantine *did* have their own theorization on the aspects with which Leonte's work deals. Putting their theories in dialogue with our own is highly beneficial. At p. 92 the author sums up his first chapter with the words: "I proceeded from the assumptions of rhetorical criticism, both ancient and modern, which has long discussed ethos as a category of proofs for persuasion." But what about the proof of persuasion and epideixis in the Byzantines' own theory?

The question is partly addressed at the beginning of the second chapter on *logos*, but with no regards for the exegetical tradition on Hermogenes, where it is possible to find some of the "new paths of effective communication and innovation, *kainotomia*" mentioned at p. 104.

Leonte articulates his analysis based on two hermeneutic poles: idealism and pragmatism (106). These two poles subsume the tension between the temptation of escapism and the need to shape reality, especially in historically challenging times. In the next pages Leonte explores the oscillation between formulaic epideixis (e.g. comparisons, hyperbole) and innovations introduced by the relevant authors. A particular focus is devoted to the devices of the techniques practiced in this period: allusiveness, amplification, imagery, interruptions/break-offs (p. 109). Some more typologies are introduced along the way: e.g. allusions are divided up into mythological, historical and spiritual. P.111 offers a brilliant example of how allusions in Chrysoloras' *Encomium* can work together with reality to convey topical ideas about architecture, military history, ethnicity. Some of the allusions in turn come charged with a long history that perhaps could have been more emphasized. For instance, the line *Il. IX 443*, quoted in Dokeianos' *Prosphonemation* has a huge tradition in addresses to princes, starting at least from Synesius of Cyrene, a beloved model in late Byzantium. At p. 121 the mixture of forms and style is considered as a hallmark of late Byzantine encomiastic rhetoric, but in fact, this was already a tenet for middle Byzantine encomia, and the model for it was Demosthenes, who was famously considered able to use all of the styles in a single speech. Toward the end of the chapter, Leonte is able to identify specific functions for the rhetorical devices outlined at p. 104, proving that digressions, break-offs and narratives point to recommended action while imagery and allusiveness focus on idealized models. Further sections of chapter 2 are devoted to representations of space, time and political matters. In the paragraph devoted to space there seem to be a mismatch between the examples provided and the descriptive tags adopted. This applies in particular to the representation of the proximal space, which, while described as "monolithic" (p. 157 and also p. 227) are represented as varied in the examples offered by the author. Perhaps a better

description would be “centripetal”, as the space of the city appears to hold a central position in the geographical *taxis*, both proximal and distant. On the other hand, the distant space is represented as centrifugal and opening toward several directions. A last section, focused on argumentation, shows the different argumentative strategies such as parallels, juxtapositions, loaded questions, causes and effects, which again reflect the dynamic between reality and idealism. The author begins here with talking about enthymematic reasoning (p. 184 and *pistis* 186): a better definition is needed especially as far as the meaning of enthymeme is concerned. The Aristotelian sense (evoked earlier at p. 97), i.e. “a sort of syllogism”, does not fully match the strategies described in the section (though causes and effect could fit *Rhet.* I.2, 1357a32–33), which are more in tune with the Hermogenian notion, pointing explicitly to comparison (*On Invention* 3.8.152). The large scholarly debate on enthymemes and their meaning needs to be addressed or at least mentioned.

After the first two theoretical chapters, Chapter 3 and 4 offer case studies to test the typologies previously outlined. I would like to point out that the analysis of Isidore’s *Encomimum* could profit from the most recent enactivist approaches to *energeia* (in particular L. Huitink’s work), accounting for the bodily dimension and advocating for a more dynamic interpretation of *ekphrasis*.

To conclude, as stated at the beginning, Leonte’s work shows a remarkable command of a wide array of texts. Although some of the categories might need fine tuning, it has the merit of devising a highly needed systematization of epideictic techniques. This dissertation enriches our understanding of how overarching “ideological” trends are translated into specific stylistic modes, offering a practical map and the tools to navigate highly complex texts.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence

Besides the points raised in my report, I would like to add the following questions:

1. When using allusiveness do rhetors ever show any awareness of cultural and historical distance from the classical past?
2. In which way does the use of digression differ in late Byzantine encomiasts from the earlier ones?
3. Isn’t the borrowing from the language of the arts quite standard (p. 132)? In which respect is it specific of the late Byzantine period?
4. How are the notions of *kainotomia* and the temporal dimension of future related?

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: