Stratis Papaioannou, Michael Psellos: rhetoric and authorship in Byzantium. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2013. xv, 347 S. ISBN 978–1–107–02622–3.

Despite an increasing amount of scholarship in recent years, Michael Psellos continues to be a perplexing figure in Byzantine intellectual and literary history. Energetic to the point of clamorous, sophisticated to the point of disingenuous, and erudite to the point of pedant, the author is remarkably present in his numerous works, spanning many genres and disciplines. He casts himself in many roles and even explicitly draws attention to his ambivalent nature. Already contested by his contemporaries, Psellos uneasily hovered between the cherished self-representation of a disinterested "philosopher" (whatever that means exactly) and the charms and exigencies of "rhetoric".

Many scholars (even when they professed not to do so) have fallen into the trap of choosing one Psellos out of these multiple voices, and have gone so far as to portray him either as a humanist champion of pagan philosophy, or as an insincere hypocritical turncoat. With perhaps the exception of Jakov Ljubarskij,[66] there has been no attempt to do justice to the multifacetedness of Psellos' œuvre as a whole, while there has been no sustained effort at all to situate his metadiscursive statements within existing philosophical and rhetorical traditions, or within an overarching conception of authorship.

Stratis Papaioannou's book sets out to do this, and much more besides. Papaioannou is interested in how Psellos, in theory and practice, carved out a space for himself that enabled him to maximize his talents for independent, aesthetically appealing rhetorical creation. Self-representation, with all the problems it engenders, is a major red thread through this book.

The introduction starts with a balanced and well-informed portrait of Psellos, also providing a brief biography and a sketch of the contemporary intellectual climate. Papaioannou also surveys the tradition of texts that were of importance to eleventh-century Byzantines, distinguishing between a core tradition known to a wider audience, and a more sophisticated discursive field appropriated by the educated elite.

The core of the book consists of six chapters, evenly divided over two parts. The first part focuses on the place of rhetoric and authorial agency in Psellos'

66 J. Ljubarskij, Михаил Пселл. Личность и творчество. К истории византийского предгуманизма. Moscow 1978. Greek transl. by A. Tzelesi, Η προσωπικότητα και το έργο του Μιχαήλ Ψελλού. Athens 2004.

theoretical conception of authorship, while the second part extends this theoretical discussion to the rhetorical *ethos* or persona that is shaped by Psellos.

Chapter 1, "The philosopher's rhetoric", takes on the question of how Psellos combined the image of the "rhetor" with the morally more rewarding role of the "philosopher". Bending existing Neo-platonic traditions to his advantage and reviving ideas formulated by Synesios of Kyrene, Psellos promotes rhetoric above the level of style and technique, appropriating it as a prominent part of his intellectual persona. This stance is related to the contemporary rhetoricization of culture and to a social context calling for self-advertisement.

Chapter 2, "The rhetor as creator: Psellos on Gregory of Nazianzus", shows how Psellos manipulated existing traditional notions of authorship, as found in rhetorical manuals, Christian hermeneutics and Neoplatonic philosophy. His idea of the ideal rhetor is modelled after Gregory of Nazianzus. In a discourse on Gregory's style, which is minutely analyzed here, Psellos portrays Gregory's rhetoric as coming from within the rhetor himself, thus promoting authorial subjectivity and emphasizing the autonomous creative powers of the author.

Chapter 3, "The return of the poet: mimesis and the aesthetics of variation", delves deeper into the aesthetic side of Psellos' model rhetor. Instead of reading Gregory's effective rhetoric in a moralizing, action-oriented way, as others have done before him, Psellos foregrounds the pleasurable and sensory aspects of Gregory's style. His ideal rhetor is able to change and to refashion himself. This mimetic, indeed theatrical, aspect verged on the morally rejectable, but Psellos managed to associate Gregory's "panegyric" discourse with literary (and partly fictional) texts from Antiquity.

Chapter 4, "Aesthetic charm and urbane ethos", begins by considering the issue of how Byzantine authors could present themselves in their texts. This was constrained by moral standards. Gregory of Nazianzus' apologetic writings provide a framework for acceptable authorial self-portraits. In Psellos' texts reacting to opponents, he represents himself as a charming, urbane personality, with an inclination to change and to play roles. Psellos stresses how he possesses these features by nature, "nature" being a force that creates variation and spontaneity. This self-portrait shines through in portraits of others. For example, Psellos idealizes Symeon Metaphrastes as a thoroughly rhetorical, aesthetically minded author saint. Papaioannou concludes that Psellos' first-person rhetoric takes distance from existing types of self-speech by explicitly pointing to the constructed and theatrical nature of his persona.

In chapter 5, "The statue's smile: discourses of Hellenism", Psellos' dialogue with the Hellenic cultural heritage is in focus. While existing appropriations of Hellenic culture by Byzantine learned authors had attempted to keep the more perilous aspects of that heritage at bay (excessive self-speech, rhetorical artistry

and theatricality), Psellos includes these in his self-image. By identifying with Narcissus looking in the mirror, he provides a very conscious self-reflection that goes beyond traditional codes of self-speech. His image of Socrates likewise emphasizes Phaedrus' Socrates who is amazed at his own complexity. Psellos' appropriation of the statue metaphor is consciously at variance with the more moralizing tradition and stresses his aestheticized ethos, representing rhetoric as an object of aesthetic admiration. In these evocations, Psellos rather harks back to the more playful, "panegyric" rhetoric: Lucian, Philostratus and novelists, with their aestheticized and eroticized gazes at statues.

Chapter 6, "Female voice: gender and emotion", considers the place of emotions in the rhetorical *ethos* that Psellos presents of himself. Psellos shows a marked interest in the flexible features of gender, acknowledging the "feminine" inclination in his nature to succumb to *pathe* and feel strong emotions, while he could have resorted to a viable masculine discourse of emotions. In spite of a prescriptive discourse in Byzantium which firmly situated female speech in a submissive position, Psellos represents his speech as an object of desire, further feminizing and eroticizing his rhetorical persona. The fecundity and multiformity of his rhetoric is associated with this female nature.

A brief chapter with conclusions, an appendix on Psellos' reception by later Byzantines, a bibliography and helpful indices (including the texts of Psellos that are discussed) make this book complete.

Papaioannou's book draws many important conclusions. It gradually makes clear to the reader that Psellos proposes a novel conception on textual creation, approaching what we would call "literature". The book counters the prevalent view that Byzantines promoted only a reading habit that was beneficial to the soul or satisfying to the intellect, and makes a powerful case for a sensory, aesthetic experience of texts in Byzantium. Rhetoric, instead of a set of techniques duly passed on, is shown to constitute a form of cultural capital, appropriated by Psellos to create a self-image that alters the relationship between author and text. In doing so, Psellos revolutionizes the rules for self-speech in Byzantium.

This book constitutes a landmark in Byzantine literary studies for many reasons. To begin with, for the first time we have a sustained *literary* study of Psellos' texts, demonstrating their relationship to earlier literary models and traditional Byzantine ideas about literature. By sketching out the map of textual referents in relation to which Psellos positions himself in his many metadiscursive statements, the book enables us to have a clear view on the innovative intellectual program of this ambitious author.

Beyond the study of Michael Psellos in particular, Papaioannou's book is an important contribution to our understanding of Byzantine literature in general. Textual creation, authorial agency, imitation, the moral constraints on authorship are all important issues of Byzantine literature that receive a thorough and well-informed discussion. This book also enables us to better understand the internal developments in Byzantine literary history, as fuelled by a continuous dialogue with late antique texts.

It is also an important contribution to the history of the self in Byzantium: how discourses of the self are influenced by, and in Psellos' case go beyond, prevalent views on individuality, gender, and self-promotion.

Throughout the book, Papaioannou's main subject serves as a starting point to launch many pertinent observations; see for example the admirably subtle (and, in my view, entirely correct) formulation of what Hellenic culture meant to the Byzantine educated elite (pp. 168–169). The Byzantine appropriation of Gregory of Nazianzus, the place of myth in Byzantine thinking, Byzantine aesthetics and sensory experience are all important and hitherto unsatisfactorily investigated topics that are greatly elucidated by Papaioannou's analysis. He makes also frequent recourse to John Sikeliotes and John Doxapatres, thus shedding light on two eleventh-century rhetoricians who are poorly studied.

The effectiveness of this book rests on many strengths. Papaioannou is deeply steeped not only in texts of the Neoplatonic tradition, but also in late antique and Byzantine rhetorical theory and in the literature of the fourth century, so seminal to later Byzantines.

Also, the readings of Psellos' texts are unusually nuanced, based on impeccable and meaningful translations of the complex Greek. Texts that were once seen as insipid imitations or empty rhetoric suddenly acquire vivid sense in Papaioannou's readings, when set against the background of cultural codes or Psellian parlance. The canvas of existing philosophical and rhetorical discourse that Papaioannou helpfully provides, enables us to appreciate the unique coloring that Psellos applies to his subject. Out of the vast œuvre of Psellos, Papaioannou considers texts that have barely received any attention (many letters fall into this category).

Moreover, Papaioannou brings a sizeable portion of theory to his subject, but refreshingly this theory does not take center stage. It rather shines through in the richness and depth of thinking present in this book (to which the above summary does no justice). Concepts from scholarship on Late Antiquity and Western medieval literature expand the methodological toolbox. Papaioannou's formulations are precise and balanced, avoiding gross generalizations and only rarely veering off into the jargon of cultural theory. The presentation of the material is impeccable and printing errors are too few to be mentioned.

Despite these obvious strengths, there are elements that could have been included to achieve a fuller understanding of Michael Psellos. This book is avowedly about Psellos the rhetor (see p. 4), while there are many more Pselloi. It is advisable that readers keep this in mind. As Papaioannou is well aware of (see also p. 238), Psellos also voices ideas about authorship and style that may conflict with the main thrust of argument presented here (for instance, some letters enthusiastically arguing for a plain, simple style: Sathas 27, Kurtz/Drexl 25 and 264). The remarkable polyphony in Psellos' œuvre is acknowledged, but is sometimes swallowed up by Papaioannou's prevalent narrative.

Second (and related), while Papaioannou does attempt to situate Psellos' ideas in a contemporary cultural and intellectual context, his readings of specific texts do not sufficiently bring out the more immediate and mundane historical circumstances. Also in very theoretical discussions, Psellos' discourse is informed, and indeed often inspired, by factors such as his present position and status, the relationship to his addressee, or the various issues that Psellos had to deal with as a teacher, as a court orator, or as a power-broker in the capital. As Psellos himself makes clear enough (for instance in letter Gautier 7, translated at p. 225–226), he adapts his words to the circumstances and the audience he has to persuade or charm.

One such case is Psellos' relationship to Pothos, recipient of the discourse on Gregory's style, a central text for Papaioannou's argument. Several letters provide further clues as to the deeply intellectualized, quite intimate, but ultimately unequal relationship between these two men, which helps to explain the arguments presented in the *Discourse*.

Likewise, the letter to John Doukas where Psellos likens himself to Narcissus (Gautier 5), is considered by Papaioannou as a "compelling moment in the history of concepts of self-reflection in Greek writing" (p. 171). But the discourse of this letter is also influenced by nitty-gritty historical circumstances. Psellos wrote the letter in a period when the *kaisar* John Doukas was his only liaison to the emperor, John's brother Constantine X; he thus very much depended on the *kaisar*'s patronage, which he sought through extolling John's supposed refined literary tastes. The letter was prompted by a letter of John praising Psellos' letters. In Psellos' argumentation, John's compliments of his eloquence so elate him and are so powerful that they give licence to transgress the rules of self-speech. The exceptionality of his self-congratulation is thus used as a ploy to flatter his protector and to confirm him in his literary tastes. Papaioannou's insistence on the equation Psellos-Narcissus ignores the other important comparandum in Psellos' simile: John Doukas' letter is the mirror. But the value of this mirror, and the value of Psellos' letter as a conscious contribution to the history of concepts (as Papaioannou's presentation may give the impression), is relative when we

think of the fact that Psellos still had to *explain* the myth of Narcissus: John Doukas, the literary dilettante, had obviously never heard of it. Hence, while the intertwining of theoretical discourse and immediate social exigencies in Psellos' texts is evoked in the introductory chapter and again, very helpfully, in the conclusion (pp. 237–239), it is often left unexplicated in the specific readings themselves.

These observations only show the many complexities awaiting the reader of Psellos. Papaioannou's book is a huge step forward in disentangling these complexities. It is a book that will be cherished and avidly read by scholars of Psellos, students of Byzantine rhetorics, and anyone interested in Byzantine literature as a literature with its own dynamics and preoccupations.

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Mihailo S. Popović, Mara Branković: eine Frau zwischen dem christlichen und dem islamischen Kulturkreis im 15. Jahrhundert. *Peleus, Studien zur Archäologie und Geschichte Griechenlands und Zyperns*, 45. Mainz / Ruhpolding, Rutzen 2010. 238 S. ISBN 978–3–938646–49–6.

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Mara Branković is indeed considered one of the most interesting figures in 15th century Balkan history. As the daughter of Despot Đurađ Branković, wife of Sultan Murat II and stepmother to Mehmed II, who conquered Constantinople in 1453, she came to play a significant role in diplomatic negotiations of the Ottoman Empire. She acted as an intermediary between the Ottoman Empire, Serbia, the Kingdom of Hungary, Ragusa and Venice. She had her own palace in Ježevo, where she gathered Byzantine and Serbian nobility and artists and issued charters and letters. She was renowned for her acts of patronage and benefaction, especially in connection with the Holy Mountain monasteries of Hilandar and Saint Paul to which she bequeathed all her estate.

The book is divided into five sections. A text entitled "The development of studies about women and gender studies in Byzantine studies" dominates the introductory chapter given that the author wished to shed light on her character from the standpoint of this relatively new approach. The gender perspective is reflected both in the overview of the image of Mara, formed by her male contemporaries, and the analysis of the manner in which Mara referred to herself,