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EDIT

From the time of the imperial capital Constantinople to the Ottoman Turkish Byzantium flourished as an empire in the eastern Mediterranean. The empire not only survived but on neighboring empires, reinterpreted its own distinctive identity.

Recent scholarship has placed Byzantine studies at the forefront of ancient history. This development presents some of the original approaches, methodologies, and emotions, central to Byzantium. The complexity of its legacy in the modern world is explored.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

No Drama, No Poetry, No Fiction, No Readership, No Literature

Margaret Mullett

It used to be thought that Byzantium was a society without a literature, or that if it had a literature, it was without a readership, without literary merit, without poetry, without fiction. Byzantium has also been characterized as a society without a drama. But recent research has demonstrated that it was a highly performative society with a rich rhetorical literature, with a demanding and critical readership, a sophisticated (though to us surprising) use of prose and verse, and a handling of fiction which goes far beyond the novels or romances of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. This chapter explores some of these preconceptions and complexities.

Drama

“Today almost nobody believes in the existence of a real theatre in Byzantium” (Spadaro 1994). But that Byzantium did not have a drama is not certain (Baldwin 1986). Ancient theaters were used for church councils, the hippodrome for entertainments but not for Greek tragedy or Roman comedy (Roueché 1993), but tragedy (or certain tragedies) continued to form a basis for Byzantine education (Easterling 1997). Greek tragedies were represented on ivories like Iphigeneia on the tenth-century Veroli casket (Beckwith 1962; Hanson in this volume) and Medea in the mid-eleventh-century Pseudo-Oppian manuscript (Spatharakis 2004). Gestures in some manuscripts as late as the ninth-century Khludov Psalter (Bernabò forthcoming) have been seen to indicate awareness of ancient theatrical traditions. Mimes were defended by Chorikios of Gaza (Webb 2006), outlawed by the Council in Trullo, and continue to attract interest afterwards (Tinnefeld 1974), as in the *Life* of Eirene Chrysobalanton, where demons mock Eirene “like mimes” (Rosenqvist 1986). By the turn of the eleventh century, there was a clear fashion for tragedy (Agapitos 1998): Michael Psellos wrote a treatise comparing Euripides with George of Pisidia (Michael Psellos, ed. Dyck 1986). In the early twelfth century, Nicholas Mouzalon’s

poem about his abdication from the archbishopric of Cyprus contains passages in stichomythia, dialog in alternate lines of verse (Doanidou 1934), and this awareness of tragic forms developed into more extensive parodic treatments like the *Katomyomachia*, *the War of cats and mice*, by Theodore Prodromos (Hunger 1968). The twelfth century also saw the composition of little plays complete with protagonists and choros: the *Friendship in exile* of Theodore Prodromos personifies friendship (Grünbart forthcoming); while the *Dramation* of Michael Haploucheir stages the conflict between Tyche and the Muses for the hero, the wise man (Romano 1999). The culmination of this interest is the only Byzantine tragedy, the *Christos Paschon* (Tuilier 1969). It comprises 2,610 iambic lines on the subject of the passion of Christ taken from (in order) *Medea*, *Hippolytos*, *Rhesos*, and the *Bacchae*, plus rather fewer from *Hecuba*, *Orestes*, and the *Troades*; there are some quotations from *Prometheus Bound* and from the *Agamemnon*. But the vast majority of the text is drawn from the four plays, and the vast majority is spoken by the Theotokos, the Mother of God, its protagonist. It is attributed in all manuscripts to Gregory of Nazianzos, but, since Hunger (1978: vol. 2, 102–4), it is believed to be a product of the mid-twelfth century, though the authorship and dating remain to be decided.

Drama may also have found its way into certain church festivals, whether on the streets or in church. The only full-scale play we have is the Cyprus Passion Play (Tsangaridis 2001), and it is unclear whether this was influenced by the West, or vice versa. There is also a reference to a dramatization of the ascension of Elijah in a tenth-century traveller's account (Squatitri 2007), and there is a late Byzantine office dealing with the children in the burning fiery furnace, the *Office of the three children* (White forthcoming; Marciniak 2005). This required scene-building in the naos, three soloists who "dance," and an icon angel that descends as the children are saved. Three eyewitness accounts are preserved, and five versions of the *akolouthia*. Whether it represents drama was an issue in the fourteenth century, and still is now. In general, the case has been made for the dramatic performance of hymns, particularly the kontakia of Romanos (Schork 1963), and of dialog-homilies, providing a liturgical context for drama which either grew out of ancient drama (Solomos 1987; Ploritis 1999) or reacted against it (Cottas 1931). For every scholar who takes either view, there is another to criticize them (La Piana 1912, 1936). Definitions of drama can include or exclude the Byzantine examples: "a man walks across an empty space while someone else is watching him" (Brook 1968), or "where the actor speaks in the name of somebody else" (Marciniak forthcoming) would both include Byzantium.

But to look specifically for drama may be a mistake: we should instead look at the way performance suffused Byzantine civilization (Mullett (ed.) forthcoming). Leo the Deacon said that the inhabitants of Constantinople were fonder of spectacle than all other peoples (*History*: Talbot and Sullivan 2005). Liturgy in churches, street processions, ceremony in palaces and private houses, and feasts in monasteries all provided employment for architects, artists, musicians, dancers, and above all the rhetoricians of the empire (see Whitby in this volume). Schools gave training in rhetoric and gesture, and competed against others; students graduated to the theater of lawcourt and religious disputation. Their works were tried out in literary gatherings called

theatra, presided over by emperors or imperial women (Mullett 1984; Magdalino 1993; Grünbart 2007; Gaul forthcoming). Liturgies for the regular Eucharists, monastic hours, and commemorations like the panegyris of a saint combined prayer, hymnography, procession, and homily in large urban churches designed to hold them (Mathews 1971). From the few prescriptive texts we have (Vogt 1935–40; Verpeaux 1966; Mateos 1962–3), we can see that ceremony involved music and dancing as well as feasting and processing, and was to be found in the Great Palace and lesser palaces, but also in the churches, on the streets, in the imperial polo ground (McCabe forthcoming), and in the hippodrome (A. D. E. Cameron 1973, 1976). Punishments (Bjørnholt forthcoming), the arrival of embassies, and the movement of exotic animals (Ševčenko forthcoming) were everyday events. This performance environment has profound implications for literature in Byzantium.

Poetry

Gibbon said of Byzantine authors that "their prose is soaring to the vicious affectation of poetry, their poetry is sinking below the flatness and insipidity of prose" (Gibbon ed. Bury 1907). Poetry in Byzantium is not always easy to detect. Certainly Byzantines wrote, with varying success, in classical meters, but rhythm was all-important in both prose and verse (Lauxtermann 1999). Gibbon was right in that the features we attribute to poetry may appear in Byzantine prose, and that verse is used for what we may regard as very unpoetic functions. For example, letters, of which we have 15,000 in 150 major collections, were expected to be short, emotional, decorated, intense, elegant. They dealt with major human themes like death, love, friendship, and exile, and were expected to reveal the author's soul (Mullett 1981; Hatlie 1996; Papaioannou 2004; Grünbart 2005). These are all functions which can be expected to be fulfilled by poetry in other cultures. But there are also poems of autobiography like Gregory of Nazianzos (Demoen 1996), of intense religious experience like Symeon the New Theologian (Markopoulos 2008; Krueger forthcoming), and about heroic exploits, like the late antique epics, both posthomeric and Nonnian (Mary Whitby 1994), and the heroic poems about the Byzantine frontier revived from the twelfth century (Beaton and Ricks 1993). On the other hand, verse is used for unexpected functions: didactic, ceremonial, and epigraphic. From the long epigram inscribed around the church of St Polyeuktos (Mary Whitby 2006), extolling the imperial credentials of its Theodosian patroness, to the shortest metrical lead seal (Laurent 1931–5), material objects and verse had a symbiotic existence in Byzantium: verse was very visible, and very functional. But hymnography, to take one example, has always had a grudging (Mango 1975) or vainglorious (Topping 1969) press as to whether it is worthy of the term "literature." This applies both to the *kontakia*, verse sermons, of Romanos the Melode (sixth century) with their lush vegetable imagery, developed characterizations, and tensely dramatic structures (de Matons 1977), and to canons, with a very different aesthetic, more in symbiosis with music and with the biblical texts they elaborate and comment on. These were

also, with the bronze (and to a lesser extent gold), coins of the empire, mass media in which emperors or patriarchs could try out new ideas or publicize decrees (Trypanis 1968).

But these functions are not overdetermined in Byzantium: some kinds of writing, like consolation, could come in the form of a prose speech, a letter, or a poem (Littlewood 1999). Homilies could be in simple prose, in heavily rhythmic prose (Hörandner 1981), or in verse (Cunningham and Allen 1998). The novel could be in either prose or verse, or in neither. One function of the Middle Byzantine development of a 14-syllable rhythmic meter, which was to become the national meter of Modern Greece, was as an *ametros metros*, a form of discourse which was neither prose nor verse. This, together with the sophisticated metrical form of the *kontakion*, each one specific to the poem itself, and the apparent ability of Middle Byzantine poets to write verse which both scanned aurally in terms of meter and on parchment conformed to classical scansion (Lauxtermann 1999), suggests that Byzantine writers saw verse as a way of demonstrating learned skills, a weapon to be deployed in the interests of effective and powerful communication of emotion and religious feeling as well as pragmatic communication.

Fiction

Fiction has a date in Byzantium, though it is much debated. The revival of the ancient novel in the mid-twelfth century has long been hailed as “the revival of fiction.” Three complete novels (two in verse, one in prose) and one fragmentary example in *politikos stichos* are dated in various different orders to the 1140s and later (Beaton 1996). Like the novels of the second sophistic, which were much read in Byzantium (MacAlister 1996), they describe the fortunes of a pair or more of lovers who are separated by events and are finally reunited. They include speeches, poems, dream-narratives, and letters (Agapitos and Reinsch 2000). Two more groups from the thirteenth century onward include romances translated from Western languages and others specific to Byzantium. Some deal with the period of the Trojan War, others with a fairy-tale or Greek city-state past (Jeffreys 1983).

But other forms of narrative also have fictional elements: Todorov, after all, defined as fiction anything which told a story as if it were fiction (Todorov 1990). Byzantine writers of history were very aware of the twin tasks of a historian to purvey the truth and to tell a good story, and writers of different kinds of history (world chronicle, classicizing history, ecclesiastical history) balanced these two tasks in different ways, sometimes criticizing bitterly predecessors who they thought had got the mix wrong (Scott 1981 and in this volume). Historiography was governed by the rhetorical demands of *diegesis*, however, which ensured that a persuasive story with all the trimmings of speeches and letters was the most important aim. Byzantinists have generally suggested (on spurious grounds) that historiography was the greatest (Runciman 1995) and even the most numerous (Scott 2009) achievement of Byzantine writers (Odorico 2006; Macrides 2008).

A third major narrative form in Byzantium, the saint's life, also had a close relation to fiction, as the Bollandists, Jesuit scholars devoted to the critical study of saints' lives, saw: their task was to weed the chaff from the straw and present truly credible saints for the Church (Delehaye 1920). Apocryphal acts which told of the missions of St Paul and Thekla (Bremmer 1996), and indeed apocryphal gospels, which filled out the gaps in the gospel narratives between the birth and ministry of Christ and from the end of the *Acts of the Apostles* to the *Koimesis*, or death, of the Virgin (*Apocryphal New Testament*), recounted events necessary for Christian understanding, without necessarily representing historical accuracy. This set the tone for hagiography throughout the Byzantine centuries. The accounts of the trial and combat of martyrs during various persecutions offer vivid characterizations and stirring dialog as well as exciting miracles, in which persecutors get their deserved comeuppance (Musurillo 1972). The lives of saints which succeeded them offered models for emulation of perfect human lives in various walks of life—bishop, doctor, soldier, housewife, stylite—and various genders—man, woman, eunuch (Constantinou 2005). They contain engrossing temptations, engaging miracles, direct speech, sometimes recipes or jokes. They may give us more information than the narrator should be able to know (Rosenqvist 1986) or fit too neatly into a predetermined agenda (Odorico 2004), but in these cases, it can be seen that an invented life might be just as effective as an authentic one. Lives were necessary for commemoration of the saint at his or her feast day, which was an opportunity for the cult site to accrue capital, to strengthen the resolution of the faithful in times of persecution, to show to emperor and bureaucracy the usefulness of saints for the running of the empire, and to demonstrate the sanctity of the subject for emulation by the faithful as they heard them in the cathedral liturgy day by day in the Orthodox year. They were read silently in private houses, aloud in monasteries, and declaimed in church. They, with the novel and historiography, form part of the great storytelling tradition of Byzantium which is celebrated in John Moschos's *Pratum Spirituale*, or *Spiritual Meadow*, where the author and his friend, the patriarch, travel round the monasteries of the Near East and are taken in, fed, watered, and told stories (*Spiritual Meadow*, Wortley 1992).

These are the three fundamental genres of modern literature: the novel, poetry, and drama, and it is clear that Byzantium has very largely been judged by conformity to this modern norm. If these modern genres do not exist in Byzantium, or if their use is strange to us, or if Byzantine achievement is adjudged bad in our terms, it has been assumed that there is no literature in Byzantium, or possibly only a bad one.

Deciding what is literature is one of the hardest tasks of any literary scholar, and need not involve aesthetic evaluation by modern readers (*DOP* 1999), though Byzantinists have traditionally felt it their duty to add another pejorative judgment to the pile. In the twentieth century, it was particularly professors of Byzantine language and literature who felt the need to defend their own taste by criticizing Byzantine achievement (e.g. Jenkins 1940). The change came very slowly, though it was accelerated by the second inaugural lecture of Cyril Mango (Mango 1975). In 1930, Sykutres suggested that Byzantine letters might even have outclassed the classical letters that preceded them (Sykutres 1932). In 1969–70, Herbert Hunger offered an alternative aesthetic of imitation and emulation which echoed recent work in

classics on creative imitation. In 1973, George Kustas showed that all Byzantine rhetoric depends on a knowledge of rhetoric which underlay all education and literary composition. In the 1970s, Antony Littlewood and Emily Albu Hanawalt made the case for Byzantine literature and problematized the issue of evaluation (Hanawalt 1986; Mullett 1990). George Dennis offered one of the last examples of blame and then made a generous repentance (Dennis 1977, 1997). Paul Magdalino argued that Byzantine literature was far closer to everyday life than had previously been thought, particularly by Mango (Magdalino 1991). Margaret Alexiou included Byzantium in her *longue durée* treatment of Greek lament, though not, unfortunately, rhetoric (Alexiou 1974). It was only with the appearance of Alexander Kazhdan on the scene that the picture drawn by academics of an unchanging Byzantine literature, supported by the prevalent use of scholarly Handbücher, which separated popular literature from learned, and church literature from both, all organized by genre, began to change by embracing the notion of change (Kazhdan and Epstein 1985). Kazhdan's historical sense saw literature as reflecting and influencing culture in a dynamic relationship within Byzantium. When he worked with art historians (e.g. Kazhdan and Cutler 1982), it was possible for literary study to interact with art history, and for literature to take its place in a sense of Byzantine culture which was not dominated only by art; this work set the scene for important considerations of the relationship of art with literature, or text with image (already Maguire 1981; most recently James 2007). It was Kazhdan also who saw the need for a true history of Byzantine literature (Kazhdan 1999), and Christine Angelidi who ensured that two volumes of his saw the light of day (Kazhdan 2006). A Cyprus meeting in 2000 (Odorico and Agapitos 2002) considered the need for such histories, and they have begun to appear (Rosenqvist 2007); others are in production by individuals but the most urgent need is for a collaborative history of Byzantine literature, like the many Cambridge histories of literature. By 1997, it was clear that alternative approaches to Byzantine studies were available and were surveyed in an issue of *Symbolae Osloenses* (Ljubarskij 1998); the dichotomy between "Quellenforschung" and "literary criticism" is perhaps more properly formulated in terms of the applications of the tools of philology and literary theory.

In all this, from the beginning, from Hunger and Kustas, it was clear that the main desideratum was to write the Byzantine theory of literature which does not survive in Byzantine treatises, to determine how we know what Byzantines liked, how we know literature evolved, how we know whether individuals achieved success or failure. Certain texts do help us (Agapitos and Mortensen forthcoming): the *Bibliotheca* of Photios is a set of book reviews (Photios: Wilson 1994); Psellos's treatises on Euripides and George of Pisidia, and on Heliodoros and Achilles Tatios (Michael Psellos: Dyck, 1986) involve aesthetic judgment. And certain handbooks of rhetoric were for practical use either in training the young in rhetoric, as was the case with the *progymnasmata* or preliminary school exercises (Webb 2001 and 2009), or as on-the-job manuals like Menander Rhetor (Menander: Russell and Wilson 1981) or the *Typoi epistolikoi* (Weichert 1910), which dealt respectively with particular public or private speeches (to the emperor, birth, marriage, death, arriving at and departing from places), and with letters of every kind. The *progymnasmata* help us understand the

principles involved in certain tools of writing, in narrative (*diegesis*) or characterization (*ethopoiia*) or description (*ekphrasis*): they show us that *ekphraseis* of works of art are not supposed to allow us to reconstruct them (Mango 1963; Maguire 1974), but to act as aids in narrative to bring them (or events, or people, or places) vividly before the eye—a very different function (Webb 1999a and b; James and Webb 1991; Agapitos and Hinterberger 2006; Webb 2009). Menander allows us to see how writers deployed *topoi* in works which would not immediately be thought of as rhetorical: *adventus* material (MacCormack 1981) appearing in a *kontakion* (Topping 1977), *basilikos logos* material (Dennis 1997) in hagiography (Vinson 2003).

Readership

The argument about Byzantine readership is an even more complex one than that dealing with Byzantine literature itself. Lemerle (1960) argued that it was a "littérature sans public et sans problèmes;" Jenkins (1963) that "no secular literature was written for a wide public, since no such public existed." Mango (1975) suggested that there was a literary class isolated from the rest of society. Beck (1974) argued that writers were fully integrated members of the bureaucracies of Church and State. The authors of *Books and bookmen in Byzantium* (1975) posited a very small reception for Byzantine literature. A figure of 600 literati at any one time capable of appreciating the great works of the period has been passed on from secondary work to secondary work (Lemerle 1971). These literati were of course male, with very few exceptions (Rochow 1967; Gouma-Peterson 2000; Constantinides Hero 1986). There is no question that Byzantine literature was read: the large number of manuscripts for various works, commentaries on them, quotation and mimesis of other Byzantine works, the practice in the late Byzantine period of producing *metaphraseis*, translations of texts at a lower level of style for easy reading (Hunger 1981), all attest to that. The question is by how many people was literature read, or was it that authorship and readership presented two sides of the same coin? (See also Waring in this volume.)

Browning attempted to answer this question by determining the level of literacy in the empire. He was not a fan of Byzantine literature: he described the literature of the Komnenian period as "an age of uncreative erudition, of sterile good taste" (Browning 1975). Time has modified this judgment as we now realize that, possibly with the sixth century, this was the period *par excellence* of creativity and experiment, with the revival of satire and the novel, the emergence of *politikos stichos* and literary works in the vernacular. But Browning's work on literacy, arguing for a wider functional literacy than in comparable societies (McKitterick 1990; Franklin 2002), opened up new debates (Mullett 1990; A. M. Cameron 1994; Holmes and Waring 2002). Female and lay literacy may be more common in Byzantium than in the medieval West, clerical illiteracy far commoner. A project led by Nikos Oikonomides (Oikonomides 1997) attempted to quantify literacy through looking at the orthography of the originals of monastic documents. This, sadly uncompleted, project would have had various questions to answer: did the Byzantines care about spelling (one wonders after reading

inscriptions on works of art)? How typical were monasteries in the context of literacy? Was there regional variation? Was signing with a cross a literacy practice in Byzantine eyes? But Oikonomides had already demonstrated (Oikonomides 1983) that the use of a "usual lead seal" was a literacy practice which might not have gone hand-in-hand with the ability to write rhetoric or read imperial decrees.

Another approach to this question is the importance of orality in Byzantium. Books were read aloud, most kinds of literature were performed, and an oral version may have preceded the written text. Reception of any one text may have taken place at different levels in different settings: getting the plot and the message, enjoying characterization and verbal color, appreciating elements of wordplay and parody available only to other literati. These could involve hearing the original delivery, getting hold of a text and hearing it retold, or read privately in a study, or they could all be achieved by parts of the same audience. And it is likely that aural reception facilitated understanding of passages which would have been difficult to receive visually. Alongside this performative certainty, and partaking in it (Papalexandrou 2007), we must also be aware that Byzantines, at least urban Byzantines, were surrounded by the written word on public buildings, wall paintings, placards, circulating broadsheets, in processions in church (Roueché 2006). It was part of their world.

Education was decreasingly available as the student progressed (Cribiore 2001). Primary-level education across the provinces, studying grammar from Homer, led to a training in rhetoric in fewer centers (Markopoulos 2000), until the highest level of teaching was available only in Constantinople. The specialization of the Early Byzantine Empire (philosophy in Athens, law in Beirut, rhetoric in Gaza) died with the great cities. The literati of the Middle Byzantine period bewailed ever leaving the capital (Mullett 1997). The acquisition of rhetoric was vital for the production of literature but probably not for its reception: the hymns and homilies we have seen as mass media; literary aspects of ceremony, public religious polemics, chants of the circus factions at the hippodrome, panegyrics of saints in candlelit festivals, tales told by monk to visitor, all could be received without benefit of rhetoric. So it could be argued that Byzantine literature was formed by rhetoric, but that a rhetorical education was not necessary to receive it, that there was in fact a Byzantine literary public wider than the *theatra* of the capital or the combined number of writers and patrons.

Some kinds of writing were perhaps received only by the rhetorate, though the rhetoricity might have been at different levels: various kinds of learned treatises, commentaries, *didaskaliai*, and the staples of the *theatron*, *dramatia*, improvised *progymnasmata*, satire and parody. But in general, it seems more helpful to look at Byzantine literature in terms of performance content and context, and in terms of form. Many works were interactive, composed in the present. Advice in council to the emperor, a religious polemic or a speech in court might expect immediate response in terms of a rebuttal. Of these, enormous numbers of polemics (A. M. Cameron 2003; Kolbaba 2000), very little dikanic rhetoric (Macrides 2000) and only written-up advice literature (Roueché 2002) has survived. Epideictic, whether a speech to the emperor, or a speech on the death of a relative, could, by virtue of its display quality, be in verse or epistolary form. All of these might be delivered, and might attract immediate response, indeed should attract emotional response; but only the letter by

its form would expect a literary reply, and that perhaps not immediate. Hymns might be interactive, in terms of a refrain, and the participation of different *psalteis*, the homily was *ex cathedra* but enclosed in the interactive form of the liturgy. In a storytelling or dream-explaining context, one story might attract another.

Other kinds of writing were backward looking and written to be received at a distance and applied to the future. History, hagiography, and heroic poetry might all be delivered orally, perhaps in a family gathering, during lunch in a *trapeza* (monastic refectory) or after dinner at an aristocratic feast, but they required no response. Emotional response, reflection, and emulation were the inscribed modes of reception for all. And they could equally be read visually in private to achieve the latter two responses. Additional literacy practices were involved in preparing material for aural or visual reception: the pruning of saints' lives for the right length for an appropriate liturgical book (Høgel 2002), or the process of collection and selection for a *florilegium* (Wortley 1994), in which the reader could wander aimlessly and find wisdom wherever the eye should light.

Other literary strategies were forward looking: the rich parainetic material written for emperors, or by fathers for children, suggested above all advice for the future despite other, praise or autobiographical, accretions. Apocalypses (Baun 2007), ascetic anthologies (Duffy 1999) and katanyktic confessions (Giannouli 2009) looked to the Last Judgement; dream books, and other works of occult science, looked to the traps awaiting the unwary in life. Whether delivered orally or not, they were meant to be read and absorbed, and lives were to be changed accordingly. Even inscriptions in public buildings might have been performed orally, and one kind of epitaph in particular implies conversation between traveler and deceased (Goldhill 1994), though of all kinds of writing, the visual response was most important in the epigram. Though commissioned from a writer, its execution made it part of the object whose response was primarily aesthetic and visual. Epigrams look forward and back, and in the moment of reading, the most immediate of all Byzantine literature. They demonstrate the importance of patronage in Byzantine literary production, and the ability of literature to transcend the needs of the patron (Hörandner and Grünbart 2003).

Two more subtle arguments, however, suggest (a) that all Byzantine literature was written for a purpose, and (b) that there is a subliterate level, at which authors who were unable to write prose like Demosthenes or verse in meter like Callimachus could still compose some works. The first would suggest to a modern reader that Byzantine literature was no such thing, since literature (it is often believed) is what we write without utilitarian purpose. The second could be used to show that educated literature is recognizable to a classicist and therefore literature, or alternatively that the subliterate was more spontaneous and so authentic, and thus literature. The reality was rather different.

Reading Byzantine literature is difficult: it requires a knowledge of Byzantium. Just because "no literature can be read for pleasure alone" (Jenkins 1940; Mango 1975), even if it were true, it does not mean that Byzantines wrote all their literature, their privileged text, for a purpose. It has recently been argued that we should read Byzantine text always at two levels: at the level of posterity, aimed at by writers learned in rhetorical art, *rhetorike techne*, and at a more immediate, functional level (Odorico

forthcoming). While there are difficulties with this view, for example that there was no such thing as pure entertainment in Byzantium (Angelidi forthcoming), it is a working assumption that allows us to date texts, to make room for them in a cultural context. And some texts lend themselves particularly to this view. The two hymns by Romanos on the Forty Martyrs appear to be timeless celebrations of a night of super-human bravery: one also served as part of the celebration of the *enkainia* of a church holding the relics; the other as part of the ceremony of the *profectio bellica* at the time of the invasion of Bulgars in the 550s (Mullett forthcoming a). And two poems of abdication from an episcopal see can be seen as act of resignation, and as revenge against enemies, as well as autobiographical sketches (Mullett 2009). Very little Byzantine literature which has survived is other than functional, or other than rhetorically decorated. Lists of castles (as in Prokopios's *Buildings*) or assorted ethnographical accounts (as in the *De administrando imperio*) are incorporated into works of *enkoinon* or *parainesis*; seating plans at imperial banquets (Oikonomides 1972) and charters transferring land grants (*Archives de l'Athos*) or setting up monasteries (Thomas and Hero 2000) are decorated with elegant *prooimia* (Hunger 1964; Browning 1966). All of this brings us to the subliterate.

The closest word for literature as used by the Byzantines is *logoi*, "words," which also, revealingly, means "learning." The Byzantines who thought about these things expected texts to be executed at the highest rhetorical level possible that was suitable for the kind of writing, though they might choose to read similar works as translated downwards in a *metaphrasis* (Hunger 1981). Works which did not meet this standard were burnt (like the *Life* of St Paraskeve at the hands of patriarch Nicholas Mouzalon, 1147–51) and/or translated upwards (Høgel 1996). Religious works were just as subject to these concerns, perhaps more so, since clerical literacy or rhetoricity could not be taken for granted, and religious writing was in some way an act of piety (Krueger 2004). Genres of writing, however, required different levels of language and rhetoric for the different kinds of writing (Mullett 1992): a speech to an emperor was very different from a simple autobiographical poem; a story about a desert father was very different from an elaborate letter about book exchange. Byzantines were very skilled at balancing all these needs: they also managed to write in a language which aimed to be indistinguishable from the Athenian masters of the fourth century BC, but which in its spoken form had changed considerably. When, in the twelfth century, authors of the highest achievement and fame began to write certain kinds of texts (satire, begging poetry, an appeal from prison) in something which grammatically and syntactically resembled the spoken language, they also evolved a literary form of it with spectacular coinages and brilliant wordplay (M. Jeffreys 1974). They were able to write (we have seen) in meters recognizable to Homer and Callimachus in poems which scanned for use in the street. This can be assumed for most of what has survived in the genres discussed above, a remarkable self-control of language, meter, and rhetoric. Such authors were able also to balance the demands of secular and religious literature to create sometimes a surprising effect or to meet a different audience. Again, awareness of the *topoi* allowed striking effects. Originality was not an aim of Byzantine writers (Littlewood 1995): what they aimed for, like their

classical predecessors (West 1979), was learned and creative imitation. The ability to combine lines and half-lines from four Euripidean tragedies to create a Byzantine tragedy was not plagiarism but genius.

An earlier generation of scholars, however, looked for literature which was fresh, personal, untouched by rhetoric, and found very little. This quest explains the attraction to modern scholars (see for example Alexiou 2002) of *Digenes Akritas* (Théologitis 2004), particularly in the Escorial version (Jeffreys 1998), of folksong (Beaton 1980), of hymns, of works of vernacular experiment, of the poem of confession of a matricide and cannibal (Macrides 1985), of some satire (Alexiou 1982–3 and 1986), of the stories collected in *gerontika*. All might have been produced at a lower level of education than that of the least competent mandarin literati of the capital. Byzantines might have agreed with their selections but for different reasons: it is important to realize that literary criteria other than this brilliant balancing act of past and present, high, middle, and low sometimes came into play. Occasionally it is possible to find a text which reads to the classically educated as incompetent, with no charming vernacular features, and yet is highly sophisticated and innovative at a level of construction and narrative, which suggests that Byzantine storytelling had an aesthetic of its own. The *Diegesis Merike*, which is seldom read as a literary text at all, is the closest we come to an epistolary narrative, and combines multiple first-person narrators with letters and documents, in a frame narrative with episodes and a denouement (Mullett forthcoming b). In a monastic milieu this may have been valued highly: in Constantinople it would have been another matter, which perhaps explains why we have no other texts of this kind.

We have seen that Byzantine literature was not homogeneous, that it was produced sometimes in places other than Constantinople, though between the age of the great cities and the late Byzantine city-state, this was exceptional. It also underwent change over the twelve hundred years of its history, sometimes disguised by the dominant aesthetic of mimesis and Atticism. The historical forms of the early period changed into a more rough and ready distinction between autoptic and synoptic history (Mullett 2006); *kontakion* gave way to canon around Iconoclasm, and both were unnecessary from the eleventh century (Wellesz 1961); hagiography disappeared in the twelfth century and reappeared in the fourteenth (Magdalino 1981). The major watersheds of the "dark age" (c.650–790) and the Latin conquest (1204–61) disrupted to different degrees the literary production of the empire. But we have seen drama, poetry, fiction, literary society, and many different receptions of a very varied literature.

All that this demonstrates is that in any society the place of literature is different and needs to be determined and defined in the terms of that society itself. We may, for example, think that rhetoric is bad because it is dry and artificial, unspontaneous and far removed from the lives and utterances of ordinary people (unless it is the bridegroom's speech, which we think of as extended stand-up, or an inauguration address, in which case we call it oratory); Plato thought rhetoric was bad because it was partial (Vickers 1989); the dominant aesthetic of Byzantium saw it as necessary commentary on the human lifecycle and the careers of individuals, a way to manage

and showcase emotion (Hinterberger 2006 and in this volume), though sometimes unavailable and replaced by an alternative aesthetic. Byzantine literature is very different from our own. But then, so was Byzantium.

FURTHER READING

For drama, Marciniak 2004 and Webb 2009; for poetry Lauxtermann 2003; and for fiction Nilsson 2001 and Agapitos and Mortensen forthcoming are good places to start. On rhetoric, anything by Webb, on letters, Grünbart and Papaioannou, and on epigrams, Hörandner are always stimulating. Averil Cameron's books on Agathias and Prokopios are models of works on single authors. The EHESS *Dossiers byzantins* series, edited by Paolo Odorico, publishes the Hermeneia colloquies on Byzantine literature and is always useful. The Handbücher are still essential reference material; for an excellent survey see A. Littlewood on literature in Harris 2005: 133–46.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Rhetorical Questions

Mary Whitby

In the mid-1060s, Michael Psellos, scholar, statesman, historian, man of letters—in fact one of the brightest luminaries of the entire Byzantine era—composed a work, *On Rhetoric*, in fifteen-syllable political verse (a recognized didactic medium: M. Jeffreys 1974) addressed to an emperor. It appears to be part of a teaching program, which also includes poems on religion, grammar, and law, devised for the emperor, Michael VII Doukas, who would have been in his early teens at this time. The editor, Westerink (1992: 103–22), and a recent analyst, Walker (2001), saw that the work is a synopsis of four rhetorical texts associated with Hermogenes (c.160 to c.230), *On Staseis* (or *Issues*, arguments for deliberative or judicial cases), *On Invention*, *On Types of Style* (or *Ideas*) and *On the Method of Forcefulness*. Walker argues that, while the other three texts are given summary, at times even cursory, treatment, *On Invention*, a text dealing with the parts of a political speech not now thought to be an authentic work of Hermogenes is analyzed much more fully and even expanded with new examples from the fourth-century church fathers Gregory of Nazianzos and John Chrysostom as well as from Psellos's own writings. It seems that this was the text Psellos considered to be of most practical use in his own world. Another synopsis, perhaps written a century later by John Tzetzes, devotes more attention to *On Staseis* (Walker 2001: 15).

This work offers a convenient introduction to key issues in Byzantine rhetoric: (1) it remained central to the educational system through all periods; (2) it was based on a very small corpus of handbooks, most dating from late antiquity; (3) it was taught because it continued to be of practical use; and (4) emphasis might be adjusted by succeeding generations in line with evolving interests and needs. While the first two statements have long been agreed, the others have emerged from more recent case-studies that have signaled the dynamism of this unfashionable yet crucial topic. A focal point of modern studies is the desire to understand why and how rhetoric held its central position in the late-antique and Byzantine world and to appreciate the range and depth of its penetration. This represents a significant enrichment of