THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Performative reading in the late Byzantine theatron

Citation for published version:
Gaul, N 2018, Performative reading in the late Byzantine theatron. in I Toth & T Shawcross (eds), Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 215–233. DOI: 10.1017/9781108289993.011, 20.500.11820/1716a986-d62a-47de-b396-757d7f2e3b13

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):
10.1017/9781108289993.011
20.500.11820/1716a986-d62a-47de-b396-757d7f2e3b13

Link:
Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:
Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond

OPEN ACCESS

Performative Reading in the Late *Byzantine* Theatron

Niels Gaul

The Byzantines regularly either referred to or implicitly conceptionalised the physical and social space in which rhetoric was read or performed as a *theatron*.[1] Derived from ancient theatre, the term is first attested, in this specific meaning, in late antiquity.[2] From the eleventh century at the latest, *theatron* described a circle of learned men who gathered around a patron, patroness or host either to listen to letters or texts that the latter had received, selected, or written, or to perform their own compositions.[3] For official occasions that involved the performance of rhetoric, such as the *synodos endemousa* or deliberations of the emperor's council, the sources seem to prefer the largely synonymous term *syllogos* over *theatron*,[4] and for a reading circle of learned friends, *kyklos* or *choros*.[5] Regardless of the context, expressions such as stepping 'into the middle' (εἰς τὸ μέσον) or

---

[1] I am very grateful to the editors of this volume as well as Anna Adashinskaya, Florin Leonte, Divna Manolova, Andrea Mattiello, Mihail Mitrea, and the late Anna Christidou for their pertinent remarks on various draft versions of this chapter.

For present purposes, 'reading' includes performance of rhetorical compositions from memory. On the *theatron*, see I. Medvedev, 'The So-called *Theatra* as a Form of Communication of the Byzantine Intellectuals in the 14th and 15th Centuries' in N. G. Moschonas, ed., *Πρακτικὰ τοῦΒ΄ Διεθνοῦς Συμποσίου «Ἡ ἐπικοινωνία στὸ Βυζάντιο»* (Athens, 1993), 227–35; P. Marciniak, 'Byzantine *Theatron* – a Place of Performance?' in M. Grünbart, ed., *Theatron: Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter* (Berlin, 2007), 277–85; I. Toth, 'Rhetorical *Theatron* in Late Byzantium: the Example of Palaiologan Imperial Orations' in ibid., 429–48; G. Cavallo, *Lire à Byzance* (Paris, 2006), 57–66.

[2] See N. Gaul, 'The Letter in the *Theatron*: Epistolary Voice, Character, Soul and their Audience' in A. Riehle, ed., *A Companion to Byzantine Epistolography* (Leiden, forthcoming) with further bibliography.

[3] Rhetoric in this sense includes compositions in learned and presumably also vernacular verse.

[4] N. Gaul, *Thomas Magistros und die spätbyzantinische Sophistik: Studien zum Humanismus urbaner Eliten in der frühen Palaiologenzeit* (Wiesbaden, 2011), 17 n. 1, 19 and 27.

[5] Especially in the Komnenian period: M. Mullett, 'Aristocracy and Patronage in the Literary Circles of Comnenian Constantinople' in M. Angold, ed., *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX–XIII Centuries* (Oxford, 1984), 176.

placing oneself 'in the middle' (ἐν τῷ μέσῳ) often denoted a 'theatrical' setting.[6] Such performance indicators suggest that a *theatron* was a some-what fluid affair whose occurrence may be assumed even when the term itself, or any of its near-synonyms, is absent from a source. In analysing the performative elements that made up such occasions of 'theatrical' reading, this chapter draws, *inter alia*, on approaches advanced by performance studies: even if not fully, dramatically acted out, 'theatrical' readings of rhetoric were certainly staged occasions whose performative – and conse-quently, also political and social – ramifications are all too easily ignored by the modern scholar.[7]

Of course, the *theatron* was merely one ritualised practice among the many social performances that structured Byzantine society, particularly in the late period.[8] In Palaiologan Constantinople, performances clustered around the imperial court as well as the numerous religious foundations, many of which were restored or revivified in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.[9] By this time, mechanical wonderworks (famously described by Liudprand of Cremona), imperial triumphs and appearances in the hippodrome had given way to the radiant ceremony of *prokypsis*. The urban liturgies established by the late antique emperors, and practised in a modified form in the tenth century, still existed in the fourteenth although the destinations of imperial processions had undergone signifi-cant changes.[10] Oaths of allegiance to the senior emperor in

---

[6] Such as Andronikos II stepping forward to defend his patriarch, Athanasios I: 'When he had positioned himself in the middle (οὗ δὴ καὶ ἐς μέσον τεθέντος), he delivered a loud and far–sounding harangue' (A. Failler, ed., *Georges Pachymérès. Relations historiques* (Paris, 1984–2000), vol. IV, 569.27–9 (XII.21)). The present chapter uses the adjective 'theatrical', in quotation marks, in the meaning of '(Byzantine) *theatron*–style'.

[7] But see recently E. C. Bourbouhakis, 'Rhetoric and Performance' in P. Stephenson, *The Byzantine World* (London, 2010), 175–87 and E. C. Bourbouhakis, 'The End of ἐπίδειξις. Authorial Identity and Authorial Intention in Michael Choniates' Πρὸς τοὺς αἰτιωμένους τὸ ἀφιλένδεικτον' in A. Pizzone, ed., *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature. Modes, Functions, Identities* (Boston, MA, 2014), 201–24.

[8] Evoking associations with Geertz' concept of the 'theatre state': P. Roilos, 'The Sacred and the Profane: Re-enacting Ritual in the Medieval Greek Novel' in D. Yatromanolakis and P. Roilos, eds., *Greek Ritual Poetics* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 213.

[9] V. Kidonopoulos, 'The Urban Physiognomy of Constantinople from the Latin Conquest Through the Palaiologan Era' in S. T. Brooks, ed., *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)* (New York, NY, 2006), 105–9.

[10] R. Macrides, 'Ceremonies and the City: the Court in Fourteenth–century Constantinople' in J. Duindam, T. Artan and M. Kunt, eds., *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective* (Leiden, 2011), 217–35; P. Magdalino, 'Pseudo-Kodinos' Constantinople' in P. Magdalino, *Studies on the History and Topography of Byzantine Constantinople* (Aldershot, 2007), Item XII, 1–14, and A. Berger, 'Imperial and Ecclesiastical Processions in Constantinople' in N. Necipoğlu, ed., *Byzantine Constantinople: Monuments, Topography and Everyday Life* (Leiden, 2001), 73–88.

Constantinople were sworn on the gospels, while intrigues against him took the form of written prophecies placed on his empty throne.[11] As was the case elsewhere into the Renaissance and beyond, the performance of the miraculous had political power: carefully staged processions of relics and icons through the imperial city sought to avert God's wrath, or visually resolve theological schisms and controversies.[12] Churches and monasteries in Constantinople and across the empire gave structure and meaning to days, months and years through a recurrent cycle of liturgies that were fixed in writing and brought to life by regular and unchanging performances.[13] Just as was true of the medieval West, diplomatic exchanges, the delivery of justice and many other events depended on ritualised communications, as did performances that were more occasionally staged.[14]

By analysing readings in the *theatron*, the following paragraphs seek to highlight the highly interconnected elements that were characteristic of performance. Borrowing terminology from Jeffrey C. Alexander's recent work on social performances in the public and political spheres, this chapter looks in turn at: the script and its cultural background; the actors or rather, in the context of the *theatron,* the actor (performer) in the singular; the audience; the means of symbolic production and *mise-en-scène*; and, finally, the distribution of social power.[15] Adapting Austin's well-known analysis of speech-acts,[16] Alexander suggests that social performances are judged as either successful or unsuccessful (infelicitous). Success comes when the audience experiences an authentic re-fusion – or even flow – of the 'increasingly disentangled' elements of performance: '[i]n a fused performance, audiences identify with actors, and cultural

[11] A. Failler, ed., *Georges Pachymérès. Relations historiques* (Paris, 1984–2000). vol. IV, 599 (XII.31), 629–31 (XIII.5).

[12] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, in F. Bausi, ed., *Edizione nazionale delle opere di Niccolò Machiavelli* (Rome, 2001), vol. I, 84–5 (I.12); trans. in E. Crick, ed., *Niccolò Machiavelli: The Discourses* (London, 2003), 143. Patriarch Athanasios I gained a reputation for ever-multiplying processions, see Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, ed. Failler, vol. IV, 675.30–1 (XIII.23) and 689.14–15 (XIII.27). For prominent cases of relic translations see the cases of Arsenios Autoreianos (discussed in Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, ed. Failler, vol. III, 94–9 (VII.31); L. Schopen and I. Bekker, eds., *Nicephori Gregorae Historiae Byzantinae* (Bonn, 1829–55), vol. I, 167) and Athanasios I (discussed in A.-M. Talbot, *Faith Healing in Late Byzantium* (Brookline, MA, 1983),12–20).

[13] A. W. White, *Performing Orthodox Ritual in Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2015); R. Nelson, 'Emphatic Vision: Looking at and with a Performative Byzantine Miniature', *Art History*, 30 (2007), 489–502.

[14] G. Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale. Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter*, second edition (Darmstadt, 2012).

[15] I adopt the system and terminology proposed by J. C. Alexander, 'Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy' in J. C. Alexander, B. Giesen and J. L. Mast, eds., *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual* (Cambridge, 2006), 32–7. More recently, J. C. Alexander, *Performance and Power* (Cambridge, 2011).

[16] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge, MA, 1962), 12–24.

scripts achieve verisimilitude through effective *mise-en-scène*'.[17] Certain axioms facilitating successful performances highlighted by Alexander certainly coincide with the rules of rhetoric, such as cognitive simplification and moral agonism.[18] However, as the sources at our disposal provide few certain answers to the types of questions modern literary criticism raises, some of the conclusions put forward in the present chapter must remain to some extent speculative.

Scripts and Background Symbols

For a performance to be successful, its script must ring true, or authentic, to the receiving culture – or, according to Alexander, to that culture's symbols and collective representations.[19] Defined as 'meaning primed to performance',[20] a script – more often than not unwritten – was brought to life by an actor invested with props and placed in a certain setting (*mise-en-scène*). The late Byzantine *theatron* actualised two intertwined background symbols in particular: a longstanding tradition of public performances on the one hand and adherence to the rules of classicising rhetoric and Atticising grammar on the other. In a wider sense and depending on the content of the text performed it is worth noting that virtually all discourses circulating in late Byzantium could potentially contribute symbols that informed the text and captivated the audience.[21]

By the early fourteenth century rhetorical 'theatre' had enjoyed a long history. The basic script of *theatron*-style performance ran as follows: the audience gathered, either at a prearranged time or in a more *ad hoc* fashion; the performer stepped 'into the middle'; he read, or improvised, a rhetorical (philosophical, theological) text, which may occasionally have required multiple sittings; the audience was expected to pass judgement, usually applause (clapping and stamping of the feet); the *theatron* dissolved.[22] A successful performance became the topic of conversations, just as an unsuccessful one was subjected to gossip. In the context of the

---

[17] See Alexander, 'Cultural Pragmatics', 54–76, quote at 29.

[18] Alexander, 'Cultural Pragmatics', 59–60. On repetitiveness and predictability, see below p. 223 and n. 49; H. Hunger, 'Die Antithese. Zur Verbreitung einer Denkschablone in der byzantinischen Literatur', *ZRVI*, 23 (1984), 9–29.

[19] Alexander, 'Cultural Pragmatics', 33; also see R. Schechner, *Performance Theory*, second edition (New York, NY, 1988), 66–111.

[20] Alexander, 'Cultural Pragmatics', 58.

[21] Compare S. Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley, CA, 1988).

[22] The technical term is διαλύω, see P. L. M. Leone, ed., *Niceforo Gregora. Fiorenzo o Intorno alla sapienza* (Naples, 1975), 126.1672: ἐντεῦθεν ὁ σύλλογος καὶ τὸ θέατρον διελύετο.

theatron, the core of the performative script, i.e., the actual performative reading of rhetoric, was often fixed in written form;[23] however, it is not always clear whether the extant version – on which we have to base our analysis – was finalised before or after performance and thus, to what degree it reflects the script actually performed in the *theatron*. Either way, it is important to keep in mind that in terms of performance theory, the text read did not constitute the whole performative script but merely its central part. The fact that such *theatra* were intricately connected to networks of learning and therefore closely tied to literary practices privileged the *theatron*'s chances of leaving traces to posterity.

The rules of grammar of the predominantly 'Attic' or Atticising sociolect, and of ancient rhetoric, constituted the second symbol.[24] As was true of the concept of the *theatron* itself, the purposeful and adjustable traditionality – as opposed to unreflected tradition – of grammatical and rhetorical *paideia* created a link of every present performance to the past, fusing by means of multilayered, complex *mimēsis* the voices of past rhetors with those of the present.[25] 'Attic' Greek, rather than distorting reality,[26] thus emerges as a feature instrumental in creating Byzantine reality and authenticity: *mimēsis* not necessarily evoking and imitating an extratextual reality, however defined, but rather a linguistically eclectic past adding rhetorical verisimilitude to the present. The Byzantine focus on rhetorical traditions that to the modern ear sound decidedly unoriginal, and thus inauthentic, thus merely emphasises that authenticity is a culturally determined quality. It was with regard to these two symbols that each new 'theatrical' script positioned itself.

Actor(s)

It fell to the actor (performer) – 'literature that walks and talks before the [audience's] eyes' – to bring any script to life.[27] For the most part, the learned actors in the late Byzantine *theatron* were members of the

---

[23] Alexander, 'Cultural Pragmatics', 58: 'meaning sketched out beforehand'.

[24] For a rare imitation of the Ionian dialect see Gregoras' oration dedicated to Emperor Andronikos II: P. L. M. Leone, ed., 'Nicephori Gregorae ad imperatorem Andronicum II Palaeologum orationes', *Byzantion*, 41 (1971), 510–15. The 'theatrical' performance of vernacular texts is a case apart.

[25] For concepts of *mimēsis* see D. A. Russell, 'De Imitatione' in D. West and A. J. Woodman, eds., *Creative Imitation and Latin Literature* (Cambridge, 1979), 1–16; S. Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton, 2002); H. Hunger, 'On the Imitation (μίμησις) of Antiquity in Byzantine Literature', *DOP*, 23/24 (1969/70), 15–38 and the contributions in A. Rhoby and E. Schiffer, eds., *Imitatio – Aemulatio – Variatio* (Vienna, 2010). For the Latin side C. M. Chin, *Grammar and Christianity in the Late Roman World* (Philadelphia, PA, 2008).

[26] See the famously insightful C. Mango, *Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror* (Oxford, 1975).

[27] M. Boulton, *The Anatomy of Drama* (London, 1960), 3.

somewhat blurry second-tier elite that emerged during the tenth and flourished in the eleventh, twelfth, late thirteenth, and early fourteenth centuries. Best understood to have belonged below the high aristocracy but on a level with or indeed above the upper middlemen – *mesoi*, in late Byzantine sources – this class was affluent enough to afford proper *paideia* for their sons. In the Palaiologan period, its members were often scions of the Constantinopolitan, Thessalonian, or provincial urban elites, to whom *paideia* provided a means of participating in public discourse, securing one's social status and advancing one's career.[28] Thus access to the *theatra*, and accordingly to late Byzantine public discourse, was by and large limited to the upper strata of urban society.[29] To acquire the *paideia* necessary to participate or compete successfully in the *theatron*, the designated sons of aspiring families accumulated years of grammatical and rhetorical training first in the house of a schoolmaster, such as Theodore Hyrtakenos, Hyaleas, Chalkomatopoulos, and Maximos, and later possibly the circle of a gentleman scholar, such as Maximos Planoudes in Constantinople or Thomas Magistros in Thessalonike.[30] A few talented boys of petty means were also singled out, for reasons unknown to us, to acquire grammatical and rhetorical education, occasionally by working in a gentleman scholar's household, as young Philotheos Kokkinos in the *oikos* of Magistros; but they constitute the exception that proves the rule.[31] By contrast, members of the imperial aristocracy by birth could choose to display learned as well as aristocratic behaviour.[32]

In order to perform successfully, the actor needed to fuse the audience's hopes, fears, and expectations with his own, or rather, with those which he alleged to be his own. While the toolbox of rhetoric provided the perfect means for engaging the audience, one aspect of *paideia* that came under

---

[28] For *pepaideumenoi* who were genuine members of the urban, semi-aristocratic elite (i.e., not dependent on teaching for their livelihood), I adopt Browning's term of 'gentlemen scholars', see R. Browning, 'Teachers' in G. Cavallo, ed., *The Byzantines* (Chicago, IL, 1997), 105.

[29] In contrast to competing legitimate competences, such as emerging *hesychasm*.

[30] Following D. Bianconi, *Tessalonica nell'età dei Paleologi: Le pratiche intellettuali nel riflesso della cultura scritta* (Paris, 2005), 92, I am reluctant to use the term 'school'. On Hyrtakenos, who is the only source of information on Hyaleas and Chalkomatopoulos, see A. Karpozilos, 'The Correspondence of Theodore Hyrtakenos', *JÖB*, 40 (1990), 275–84. Insights into Neamonites' letters now offered by M. Mitrea, 'A Late Byzantine πεπαιδευμένος: Maximos Neamonites and his Letter Collection', *JÖB*, 64 (2014), 197–223. On the circle around Planoudes, C. N. Constantinides, *Higher Education in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries (1204–ca. 1310)* (Nicosia, 1982), 66–89; on Magistros, Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, 230–71.

[31] Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, 237–39; A.-M. Talbot, 'The *Miracles of Gregory Palamas* by Philotheos Kokkinos' in Stephenson, ed., *Byzantine World*, 237.

[32] Such as Andronikos II, John Kantakouzenos and Manuel II in the Palaiologan period; or along different trajectories Isaac Komnenos and Anna Komnene in the twelfth century.

particular scrutiny was the actor's rhetorically construed *ethos* ('character'). Its significance can be easily glimpsed in a number of sources, including the following passage from Nikephoros Choumnos' correspondence:[33]

> What else? I have received the letter that you have sent to us, who had asked for it, and which you have sent not so much for reasons of necessity as of ambition [i.e., in order to show off]. For it knew to show forth every aspect of beauty. I for one didn't know which features to praise first, or rather, which one above all the others. The easy flow of thoughts that were so cleverly organised and all appeared equally admirable? The harmony and precision of expression? The (prose) rhythm? Or composition before rhythm? Or, above all the rest, that which caught me more than everything, *the beauty of your character,* creating the letter with your soul, as it were, so that you did not seem to lead the conversation with paper and ink but in person, communicating with your living voice.[34]

Choumnos' long list of positive attributes pays due attention to formal aspects but culminates in the concept of a 'character' that shines forth from the letter – an evocation of the well-known epistolary concept of the letter as an 'icon of the soul'.[35] Late Byzantine rhetors-in-training learnt to fashion their *ethos* through memorising, and occasionally composing, progymnasmatic *ethopoiiai*, which had enjoyed renewed popularity from the tenth century onward (expanding on the stock transmitted from late antiquity). Not accidentally, their repeated rise to prominence coincided with the reappearance of the *theatron* as a performative practice. The production of new progymnasmatic materials reached a peak in the twelfth century (Basilakes) and continued through the early (Hexapterygos) and late thirteenth century (George of Cyprus, George Pachymeres).[36] Studying *ethopoiiai* provided the perfect means of learning how to add rhetorical and emotional colour to one's 'own' *ethos* for the purpose of 'theatrical'

---

[33] See Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, 38–50.

[34] J. F. Boissonade, ed., *Anecdota Nova* (Paris, 1844), 94–5 (Nikephoros Choumnos, *ep.* LXXVIII): πῶς πλέον; τὴν ἐπιστολὴν δεξάμενος, ἣν οὐ κατὰ χρείαν μᾶλλον ἢ φιλοτιμίαν αἰτησαμένοις ἡμῖν ἔπεμψας. εἶχε γὰρ, ὡς ἐν βραχεῖ φάναι, καλῶν εἶδος ἅπαν ἐν ἑαυτῇ δεικνῦσα· κἀγὼ δ᾽ οὐκ εἶχον ὅτι πρῶτον ἢ μάλιστα τῶν αὐτῆς ἐπαινέσομαι, πότερον τὴν τῶν νοημάτων εὐπορίαν οὕτω πυκνῶν καὶ θαυμαστῶν πάντων ὁμοίως φαινομένων, ἢ τὴν ἁρμονίαν ἢ τὴν ἀκρίβειαν τῶν ὀνομάτων, ἢ τὸν ῥυθμόν, ἢ πρὸ τοῦ ῥυθμοῦ τὴν συνθήκην, ἢ πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων πάντων, ὅ με καὶ πλέον τῶν ἄλλων εἶλε, τὸ τοῦ *ἤθους καλόν*, ἔμπνουν, ὡς εἰπεῖν, τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἐργαζόμενον, ὡς μηδ᾽ ἐν χάρτῃ σε δοκεῖν μᾶλλον καὶ μέλανι τὴν ὁμιλίαν, ἀλλ᾽ αὐτοπρόσωπον ποιεῖσθαι, ζώσῃ φωνῇ προσδιαλεγόμενον.

[35] A. R. Littlewood, 'An "Icon of the Soul": the Byzantine Letter', *Visible Language*, 10 (1976), 197–226.

[36] See N. Gaul, 'Rising Elites and Institutionalization – Ethos/Mores – 'Debts' and Drafts' in S. Steckel, N. Gaul, M. Grünbart, eds., *Networks of Learning: Perspectives on Scholars in Byzantine East and Latin West, c. 1000–1200,* (Zurich, 2014), 259–69. Generally, E. Amato and J. Schamp, eds., *Ethopoiia: la représentation de caractères entre fiction scolaire et réalité vivante à l'époque impériale et tardive* (Salerno, 2005).

performance; indeed one can be certain that language and quotations (intertextual *mimesis*) were adjusted, and occasionally gendered, to match both the character on display as well as to meet the audience's expectations.

A rhetor's rhetorical *ethos* was composed of many facets including musical voice modulation (*euglottia*), gestures, posture, appearance, in short, of the elements that constituted the actor's demeanour.[37] While nothing comparable to ancient instructions on voice training survives from the Byzantine period, a skilled rhetor's voice was expected to sound just as sweet as music.[38] Manuscript interpunctuation (*stixis*) can help us recover the vocal mode of Byzantine performances and reveal the rhythm of performance.[39] When performing a dialogical piece or dialogue, more elaborate acting may have been involved, in the sense of giving a distinct 'voice' to each *prosopon*,[40] but probably without props such as costumes, masks, or panels.[41] Excessive gestural behaviour could be turned against the one whose texts were performed.[42] With actors largely sharing the same social background and *paideia*, and thus level of (political) insight and information, any dispute seemed to have been about details even though on occasion the tone could get fierce, reflecting growing insecurity among the learned stratum.[43] Ambition (*philotimia*) was often thought to drive 'theatrical' performances.[44]

---

[37] M. W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, 1995) and A. L. Boegehold, *When a Gesture Was Expected* (Princeton, 1999) await Byzantine companions.

[38] Cavallo, *Lire*, 50–1. C. Gastgeber, 'Manuel Meligalas. Eine biographisch-paläographische Studie' in C. Gastgeber, ed., *Miscellanea Codicum Graecorum Vindobonensium*, vol. 1 (Vienna, 2009), 71–4. M. Grünbart is preparing a study on middle Byzantine *euglottia*, a term that seems absent from Palaiologan epistolography.

[39] D. R. Reinsch, 'Stixis und Hören' in B. Atsalos and N. Tsironi, eds., *Πρακτικά του Ϛʹ Διεθνούς Συμποσίου Ελληνικής Παλαιογραφίας*, (Athens, 2008), vol. 1, 259–69; V. Valiavitcharska, *Rhetoric and Rhythm in Byzantium: The Sound of Persuasion* (Cambridge, 2013); and the contributions in A. Giannouli and E. Schiffer, eds., *From Manuscripts to Books* (Vienna, 2011).

[40] Many late Byzantine dialogues contain linguistic markers indicating a change of speaker; when delivered orally, a mild modulation of the voice would have sufficed to transmit any change to the audience.

[41] In all cases of late Byzantine dialogical writing I have studied to date, there seems to have been a single actor as was the case in deuterosophistic rhetoric. See N. Gaul, 'Embedded Dialogues and Dialogical Voices in Palaiologan Prose and Verse' in A. Cameron and N. Gaul, eds., *Dialogues and Debates from Late Antiquity to Late Byzantium* (New York, NY, 2017).

[42] I. Ševčenko, ed., *Études sur la polémique entre Théodore Métochite et Nicéphore Choumnos* (Brussels, 1962), 253 (Theodore Metochites, *Or.* 14.27.1–11).

[43] See I. Polemis, 'The Treatise *On Those who Unjustly Accuse Wise Men, of the Past and Present*: a New Work by Theodore Metochites?', *BZ*, 102 (2009), 203–17 and Ševčenko, *Études*, 276–96.

[44] Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, 23–5; fundamental on the role of *philotimia* in connecting ruling and cultural elites is P. Magdalino, 'Byzantine Snobbery' in Angold, *Byzantine Aristocracy*, 173–201.

Audience

The success of any performance depended on the degree to which the actor managed to fuse his act with the audience's expectations, or – a more delicate business – the degree to which he succeeded in pushing the audience's boundaries.[45] In turn, the audience drew on those symbols (described above) that created, as it were, a 'horizon of expectation'.[46]

Regarding the audience's social background, there is little to add to the preceding remarks about the actor. Members of the late Byzantine literate elite – coinciding to a fair degree with courtiers and ecclesial officials in Constantinople and the urban elites, members of the *gerousia* as well as upper middlemen, in other places such as Thessalonike – are likely to have constituted the largest part of it, led by members of the (educated) higher aristocracy. Frequently, the audience must have been composed of those who performed on another occasion. One aspect that does not yet seem to have received sufficient attention is the differentiation between active and passive command of the Atticist sociolect.[47] Judging from the correspondence of schoolmasters such as Hyrtakenos and Neamonites, the sons of courtly and urban elites were expected to master the basics of grammar and rhetoric. Accordingly, they must have been able to follow a performance passively (and to converse pleasantly, with a modest stock of archaising phrases and quotations memorised from Homer and Euripides, the two first authors of the grammatical curriculum), without necessarily themselves having the ability to actively compose rhetorical set-pieces.[48] The repetitiveness and 'lacking originality' of learned rhetoric allowed especially the group with limited exposure to Atticism to pass judgement on a performance: 'People inured to stereotype are highly receptive to' – stylistic and generic – 'variation'.[49] How much the common populace (*demos*), when present, would have understood remains an open question.

---

[45] Emotional responses to rhetorical performances were one core aspect of the new Edinburgh-based network on 'Emotions through Time: From Antiquity through Byzantium'; http://emotions.shca .ed.ac.uk (accessed 1 December 2017).

[46] Borrowed from H. R. Jauss, 'Literary Theory as a Challenge to Literary History', *New Literary History*, 2 (1967), 11–19.

[47] Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, 163–8.

[48] C. Holmes, 'Political Literacy' in Stephenson, *Byzantine World*, 137–48; for an eleventh-century example, C. Rouెché, 'The Literary Background of Kekaumenos' in C. Holmes and J. Waring, eds., *Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission in Byzantium and Beyond* (Leiden, 2002), 111–38; C. Rouché, 'The Rhetoric of Kekaumenos' in E. M. Jeffreys, ed., *Rhetoric in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2003), 23–37; see also the chapter by Jonathan Shepard in the present volume.

[49] T. Schmitz, *Bildung und Macht: Zur sozialen und politischen Funktion der zweiten Sophistik in der griechischen Welt der Kaiserzeit* (Munich, 1997), 160–75 and 220–31 emphasizes this for the second

Reminiscent of ancient and Renaissance theatre, the audience was fully visible and, indeed, encouraged to participate by constantly displaying reactions to the text performed. The means of expressing satisfaction were collective cheering, clapping and stamping of the feet, while an infelicitous performance might be jeered at and was subjected to scorn and ridicule afterwards.[50] Generally, though: the more engaged the audience, the more successful the performance.[51]

Means of Symbolic Production and *Mise-en-Scène*

Bringing a script to the 'stage' (*scène*) required temporal sequencing and spatial choreography, yet comparatively little attention has been paid to the means of symbolic production, i.e., the props of 'theatrical' performances, and *mise-en-scène*.

Different genres of texts (scripts) prompted different venues, whose specific architectural configuration in turn influenced the *mise-en-scène* and regulated the spatial movements of both actor and audience.[52] The reading of a philosophical treatise took place in a circle of literati and friends or, at least under Andronikos II, in a court setting: occasionally the emperor himself expounded his – controversial – ideas.[53] Funeral orations or poems were presumably performed next to the tomb of the deceased in the *katholikon* of an aristocratic monastic foundation, with relatives, monks, or nuns in attendance: as specified in *typika*, they could involve splendid lighting arrangements as well as other visual, and perhaps musical, effects.[54] Widows and exiles – such as Theodora Raoulaina, Andronikos II as monk Antonios, George of Cyprus, Maximos Planoudes or Nikephoros

---

sophistic; P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180)* (Cambridge, 1993), 353–4 (quotation ibid. 353) for the Komnenian period.

[50] Gaul, *Thomas Magistros,* 32–34; it is difficult to arrive at reliable data as any instance of failure in the *theatron* is usually reported in the context of overall criticism of a certain individual. See also below, p. 229.

[51] See G. A. Karla, 'Rhetorische Kommunikation in den Kaiserreden des 12. Jhs.: Der Kontakt zum Publikum', *JÖB*, 57 (2007), 83–94 and Toth, 'Rhetorical *Theatron*', 445–6; for the second sophistic, M. Korenjak, *Publikum und Redner: Ihre Interaktion in der sophistischen Rhetorik der Kaiserzeit* (Munich, 2000).

[52] Compare Magdalino, *Empire of Manuel I*, 353: 'verbal recitation was only part of a total orchestration, in which architecture, décor, dress, music and choreography also played a part'.

[53] R. Romano, ed., *Costantino Acropolita: Epistole* (Naples, 1991), 257–66 (195.51–2); Nikephoros Choumnos, *Anecdota Nova*, ed. Boissonade, 13–14 (IX.4–5).

[54] S. T. Brooks, 'Poetry and Female Patronage in Late Byzantine Tomb Decoration: Two Epigrams by Manuel Philes', *DOP*, 60 (2006), 223–48.

Gregoras – received literati and convened gatherings in their monastic lodgings.[55] Occasionally, gardens or other outdoor venues may have been preferred.[56] Actors must have been accustomed to changing venue frequently.

The staging of 'theatrical' state occasions required especially careful choreography, for which venues as different as the various *triklinoi* of the palaces, the Church of Hagia Sophia, or the hippodrome could be used.[57] An imperial oration was integrated into court ceremonial, presupposing an altogether more formal *mise-en-scène*. The partially surviving great halls of Tekfur Saray in Istanbul, the Laskarid-period palace at Nymphaion, or the Mystras palace offer an idea of the possible setting.[58] A feastday homily in Hagia Sophia, whose vocal and ceremonial elements were acted out in the vast space of the church, was tied to the liturgical calendar – again with ramifications for the script – as well as subordinate to the ritual of the liturgy. When used for the ongoing theological or juridical debates of the tumultuous fourteenth century, Hagia Sophia was frequently referred to as a *theatron*. On such occasions, the cathedral seems to have been teeming with emperors, courtiers, bishops, clergy and common folk, providing the background for a '*theatron* of state' perhaps not too far removed from Nikephoros Choumnos' hyperbolic description thereof.[59] The image of John Kantakouzenos presiding, in full imperial regalia, over the council of 1351 surrounded by bishops, abbots and, in the background, courtiers, comes close to offering us a visualisation of such a setting.[60]

---

[55] George of Cyprus and Planoudes taught at Christ Akataleptos, and Gregoras at Christ in Chora where Emperor Andronikos II spent the last years of his life.

[56] M.-L. Dolezal and M. Mavroudi, 'Theodore Hyrtakenos' Description of the Garden of St. Anna and the Ekphrasis of Gardens' in A. Littlewood, H. Maguire and J. Wolschke-Bulmahn, eds., *Byzantine Garden Culture* (Washington, D. C., 2002), 105–58.

[57] Magdalino, *Empire of Manuel I*, 352, hints at the possibility of performances on the galleries of Hagia Sophia in the twelfth century.

[58] Toth, 'Rhetorical *Theatron*', 436–40.

[59] For example Magistros describes Patriarch Niphon performing before Emperor Andronikos II (*PG*, 145:392A–B). See Toth, 'Rhetorical *Theatron*', 440 on Choumnos' detailed description of a truly universal *theatron* (*or.* 19.52.14–53.2).

[60] Preserved on fol. 5v of ms. Paris. gr. 1242, this image was produced in the 1370s under the ex-emperor's close supervision. See I. Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden, 1976), 148–51 and figures 96–7, and C. Förstel, *Trésors de Byzance: manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque nationale de France* (Paris, 2001), 28 (no. 42) and 30 (plate 42). Although the setting was the Theotokos church at Blachernai, no architectural details are rendered. For a Trapezuntine '*theatron* of state' see J. O. Rosenqvist, ed., *The Hagiographic Dossier of St. Eugenios of Trebizond in Codex Athous Dionysiou 154* (Uppsala, 1996), 308–35 (John Lazaropoulos, *Synopsis*, ll.1141–599).

Public assemblies (*ekklesiai*) featured performances of deliberative ora-
tory in the ruins of the Constantinopolitan hippodrome.[61] Andronikos II's
harangue following the devastating earthquake of June 1296 must have
been a memorable event, and was seemingly successful in averting poten-
tial unrest: the emperor led the patriarch and his bishops, many lords and
the whole populace of Constantinople in a huge procession (λιτανεία) to
the hippodrome, where there was enough room for everyone (μέχρι καὶ
τοῦ ἱπποδρομίου ... ὡς χωρήσαντος ἅπαντας); facing an icon of the
Theotokos he intoned a loud and far-sounding impromptu harangue to
the people, which befitted the occasion (σχεδιάσας δημηγορίαν [μακρὰν
καὶ διωλύγιον] πρέπουσαν τῷ καιρῷ), explained the earthquake as
evidence of 'God's wrath' (μήνιμα θεῖον), and, finally, promised and
immediately enacted judicial reforms.[62]

Architectural and decorative features, as well as lighting, are likely to
have influenced the audience's experience of the scene, and in particular of
the actor's position in relation to these elements. In locations such as the
Blachernai palace, the imperial palace of Trebizond, and possibly even the
Pammakaristos church, marble incrustations could provide a splendid
background, as could frescoes or mosaics showing religious or worldly
motifs that were sometimes accompanied by epigrams – all of which served
to reinforce a certain message, and perhaps even lend additional emphasis
to the tropes of an encomium.[63] Brad Hostetler's thought-provoking
work on the interaction of epigraphical, visual, and architectural elements
(e.g. in the Theotokos Pammakaristos church) suggests that late Byzantine
master builders, poets and mosaic-makers may well have paid attention to

---

[61] C. N. Tsirpanlis, 'Byzantine Parliaments and Representative Assemblies from 1081 to 1351',
Byzantion, 43 (1973), 432–81.

[62] Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, ed. Failler, vol. III, 261.15–63.14 (IX.15–16). The question arises
as to what degree this event would have been perceived as 'theatrical'. In Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*,
22, I maintained that the venue of a *theatron* ought to be closed, i.e., fitting a limited number of
people; this idea has rightly been questioned by A. Riehle, 'Review: Niels Gaul, *Thomas Magistros
und die spätbyzantinische Sophistik* ', *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 2012.05.37 (http://bmcr.brynmawr
.edu/2012/2012-05-37.html, accessed 1 December 2017). As every so often, boundaries may have
been somewhat blurred.

[63] On Blachernai, F. Tinnefeld, 'Der Blachernenpalast in Schriftquellen der Palaiologenzeit' in
B. Borkopp and T. Steppan, eds., *Λιθόστρωτον. Studien zur byzantinischen Kunst und Geschichte*
(Stuttgart, 2000), 277–85; compare C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453*
(Toronto, 1986), 247–8; on Trebizond, ibid., 252–3; on Pammakaristos, H. Belting,
D. Mouriki and C. Mango, *Mosaics and Frescoes of St. Mary Pammakaristos (Fethiye Cami
Istanbul)* (Washington, D. C., 1978), 12. A.-M. Talbot, 'Epigrams in Context: Metrical
Inscriptions on Art and Architecture of the Palaiologan era', *DOP*, 53 (1999), 75–90 especially at
77–9 provides a useful reminder of how much the reading of an epigram *in situ* differed from
listening to the same poem in a 'theatrical' setting, a not unlikely scenario.

such detail.[64] Lighting – sun-lit venues, or spaces illuminated by flickering candles, candelabras, or torches – was used to create specific impressions. Current work on acoustics certainly suggests that venues were designed to maximise the effect.[65]

While there is no evidence for 'costumes' proper, one may contemplate to what degree court and ecclesial costumes gave a distinctive aspect to performances. Many actors and members of the audience pursued a career at court or in the church, and Maria Parani has aptly described ceremonial costume as 'principally rhetorical in function'.[66] Not by chance, the re-codification of dress and colour codes under Michael VIII and Andronikos II – as evidenced by pseudo-Kodinos – coincided with the peak of late Byzantine 'theatrical' performances:[67] both testify to the early Palaiologan effort of restructuring and controlling Byzantine public discourse. Depending on the numbers assembled and lighting available, these costumes must have created a splendid scene, as is suggested by the miniature of John Kantakouzenos mentioned above. For its part, the audience would have been impressed by the actor's outfit and regalia – such as a staff of office, which could have potentially played a role in the performance, by lending additional emphasis to gestures. The surviving images of Theodore Metochites in the esonarthex of the Kariye Camii or Alexios Apokaukos in the Paris. gr. 2144, fol. 11r – depicted as the *ktetor* of the codex – are indicative.[68]

Finally, the role of manuscripts – whether these were full codices on display or '(manu)scripts of speeches' – must be considered briefly.[69] This has an immediate bearing on the question of the nature of a complex text's

---

[64] Hostetler's paper was presented at the 49th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies at Exeter College, Oxford, in March 2016.

[65] See, for example, L. James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art* (Oxford, 1996); R. Franses, 'When All That is Gold Does Not Glitter' in A. Eastmond and L. James, eds., *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2003), 13–24. With regard to sound, see Sharon Gerstel's current work on the acoustics of late Byzantine churches (http://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/measuring-the-sound-of-angels-singing, accessed 14 November 2017).

[66] M. Parani, 'Cultural Identity and Dress: the Case of Late Byzantine Ceremonial Costume', *JÖB*, 57 (2007), 95–134 at 95 and M. Parani, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images: Byzantine Material Culture and Religious Iconography (11th–15th Centuries)* (Leiden, 2003), 54–71; W. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon: Liturgical Vestments and Sacramental Power in Byzantium* (Oxford, 2012), 133–63; R. Macrides, J. Munitiz and D. Angelov, eds., *Pseudo-Kodinos and the Constantinopolitan Court: Offices and Ceremonies* (Farnham, 2013), 319–58.

[67] Macrides, Munitiz and Angelov, eds., *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 34–69.

[68] See Spatharakis, *Portrait*, 129–39 and figures 86–91 and Spatharakis, *Trésors de Byzance*, 25–8 (no. 41) and 27 (plate 41).

[69] See Cavallo, *Lire*, 47–55 and 139–58.

performance: surely often it would have been either impromptu, or by heart. One imagines that on festive occasions, sermons or pieces of epideictic rhetoric, such as encomia, were memorised before performance.[70] In yet other cases the existence of a 'script' can be surmised like the few autograph folia from the quill of John Katrarios surviving in the composite Paris. Suppl. gr. 1284, fols. 7v–9v.[71] Remarkably, the folia carry autograph revisions: above all, Katrarios added quotations from ancient authors spicing up, as it were, his original composition.[72] However, we cannot know whether he – or someone else – actually held these sheets in hand while performing, as a modern orator would; whether he performed from memory on the basis of this draft, and then subsequently revised it; or whether he jotted down the whole draft only after a first impromptu performance, and embellished it at a later stage. When Theodore Metochites criticised Nikephoros Choumnos' *theatron* in the 1320s, he implied the presence of a 'script' that was perhaps already in the form of the codex. Philosophical and astronomical treatises of considerable complexity are likely to have been read out from parchment or paper rather than recited from memory, while letters, at least on first performance in the addressee's circle, must have been declaimed from the very sheet of paper or parchment on which they had been received.

Related to these matters is the question of illuminated manuscripts, of which a fair number survive from the late Byzantine as well as earlier periods, though the content of very few of these is 'worldly'. Were their images displayed in any way during performance, or were they merely intended to regale an individual reader? In a Trapezuntine context, Trahoulia suggests that the former may have been the case with the Venice codex of the *Alexander Romance* (Istituto Ellenico, MS gr. 5), arguing that the images, large enough to be visible when displayed on a bookstand, were 'most effective if viewed while' the intended audience, composed of Emperor Alexios III (r. 1349–90) and possibly his *theatron*, was 'listening to an oral recitation of the narrative'.[73] Beyond manuscripts, panel icons

---

[70] Due to the silence of sources, Byzantine studies are lacking an equivalent of M. Carruthers' *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 2008).

[71] For the publication of the text and a facsimile of fol. 7v see A. Sideras, *Eine byzantinische Invektive gegen die Verfasser von Grabreden: Ἀνωνύμου μονῳδία εἰς μονοδοῦντας* (Vienna, 2002), 48–61, but compare my review, N. Gaul, 'Review: Alexander Sideras, Eine byzantinische Invektive gegen die Verfasser von Grabreden', *BZ*, 100 (2007), 257–61.

[72] D. Bianconi, 'Qualcosa di nuovo su Giovanni Catrario', *Medioevo Greco*, 6 (2006), 69–91.

[73] N. S. Trahoulia, 'The Venice Alexander Romance: Pictorial Narrative and the Art of Telling Stories' in R. Macrides, ed., *History as Literature in Byzantium* (Farnham, 2010), 148–9 and 161. The argument of size excludes other late Byzantine illuminated manuscripts, such as the 'pocket'

are likely to have been included in the performance of certain literary genres, such as funerary or commemorative orations or poems.[74] Yet whether texts of other genres would have been supported by illustrative material, as was the case with late medieval mendicant preaching in the west, cannot be known for certain.

Social Power

Social power, at the most fundamental level, determined not only who had access to a *theatron,* but also which venue and which props were available for the *mise-en-scène*. Hierarchy controlled, or attempted to control, whether a performance was successful or not, as well as the amount of prestige (social capital) an actor gained from it or lost in its wake. At the same time it defined the very parameters within which a performance could be judged: the importance of the highest-ranking attendee or patron (the two were not always identical) and the formality of the occasion determined what other members of the ruling elite would be present and, therefore, affected the magnitude of the potential gains or losses of symbolic capital an actor might incur. Significantly, in many cases the presiding member, patron or patroness of the *theatron* controlled access to it. Convening '*theatra* of state' was at the discretion of the emperor, his ministers, or the patriarch; such as Gregoras' encounter with Barlaam of Calabria in the palace of John Kantakouzenos, which Gregoras himself subsequently dialogised in the *Phlorentios*.[75]

Equally, an actor's standing within society would have exerted an influence over the judgement that was inversely proportional to the audience's power, and occasionally even pre-empted any open criticism. When a performer commanded a large amount of cultural or economic capital, was of high social standing, or backed by a power beyond the reach of the presiding member or any other member of the audience, the audience had little choice but to 'judge' the performance publicly to have been a success

menologion commissioned by the *despotes* Demetrios Palaiologos, Andronikos II's youngest son (MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, gr. th. f. 1); see I. Hutter, 'Der *despotes* Demetrios Palaiologos und sein "Bildmenologion" in Oxford', *JÖB*, 57 (2007), 188–214 with further bibliography.

[74] Brooks, 'Poetry and Female Patronage'. A *caveat* arises regarding the degree to which such commemorative performances were perceived as *theatra*.

[75] S. Mergiali, *L'enseignement et les lettrés pendant l'époque des Paléologues (1261–1453)* (Athens, 1996), 73–83; D. Manolova, 'Nikephoros Gregoras' *Philomathes* and *Phlorentios*' in Cameron and Gaul, eds., *Dialogues and Debates*, 203–19.

regardless of its actual achievement. An actor's social power was certainly capable of forcing an audience to award praise.

The success of a performance was thus rarely decided by a majority vote. The correspondence of Manuel II Palaiologos preserves a striking example of how judgement fell to the highest-ranking person present.[76] Overall, the possibility for participants of exercising control over the distribution of symbolic or social power turned the *theatron* into an efficient political tool. Every performance, for reasons justified or fabricated, had the potential of altering an actor's social standing. In certain instances, the display of rhetoric was a façade (a mandatory and superficial ritual) behind which politics was negotiated. However, even high up the social ladder, one was never entirely secure, and this was especially true when there was an opponent of equal standing, as happened during the controversy between Choumnos and Metochites.[77] Although a hierarchical aspect had been inherent in the *theatron* from its reappearance in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the early Palaiologan emperors – especially Andronikos II and his ministers – seem to have perfected a pecking order of *theatra* that permeated the entire learned stratum of society. That is, different *theatra* were assigned different levels of prestige: those convened in a gentleman scholar's *oikos* ranked lowest, those in the imperial palace highest; and fully public ones higher than more private occasions. Especially in a political climate increasingly critical of imperial prerogatives, steering public opinion mattered:[78] the rewards awaiting expressions of loyalty – as in the well-known cases of Choumnos and Metochites, and many others, who transformed the symbolic power of 'theatrical' careers into political power and whose offspring married into the Palaiologos clan – may have induced others to follow the examples they set.[79] Perhaps not purely by chance, both Michael VIII and Andronikos II

---

[76] See G. T. Dennis, ed., *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus. Text, Translation and Notes* (Washington, D. C., 1977), 24–5 (IX.11–19) for a well-known example from the correspondence of Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos.

[77] Ševčenko, *Études* and now A. Riehle's convincing reinterpretation, A. Riehle, 'Literatur, Politik und Gesellschaft unter Andronikos II. Palaiologos: Untersuchungen zu den Briefen des Nikephoros Chumnos', unpublished doctoral thesis, LMU Munich (2011).

[78] D. G. Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium 1204–1330* (Cambridge, 2007), 161–80; T. Shawcross, 'In the Name of the True Emperor: Politics of Resistance after the Palaiologan Usurpation', *BSl*, 66 (2008), 203–27.

[79] N. Gaul, 'All the Emperor's Men (and his Nephews): *Paideia* and Networking Strategies at the Court of Andronikos II Palaiologos, 1290–1320', *DOP*, 70 (2016).

emerge as apt, and frequent, performers of public harangues (δημηγορίαι), as is clear from Pachymeres' account.[80]

If one scrutinises references to the 'informal' and 'classless' atmosphere that allegedly prevailed in late Byzantine *theatra*,[81] one discovers that the sources where these references occur in fact acknowledge and reaffirm existing social hierarchies by following rhetorical formalities. Usually a socially inferior participant congratulates his social superior on the success of the latter's composition in a *theatron*, as in the following example by Hyrtakenos, who praises Choumnos. The sentiment it conveys has very little to do with 'classlessness' as Hyrtakenos hastens to confirm Choumnos' success in the *theatron*, and thus implicitly acknowledges the latter's higher standing:[82]

> The treatise was performed. We enjoyed listening and were enthused from our focusing on the text declaimed with a ready mind. When we left the *syllogos* and made our way home, there was only one topic of conversation: this was entirely, without exception, your treatise's achievement in not accomplishing the same [as earlier writings; i.e. it was new and stimulating]. For there was none who did not applaud, offer praise, or was full of joy and enthusiasm.[83]

Conclusion: Felicitous and Infelicitous Performances

Examples of felicitous and, more rarely, infelicitous performances can be found in late Byzantine sources. A well-known example of a successful performance is provided by Philotheos Kokkinos in his *Life of St Gregory Palamas*. After interrogating young Palamas, Theodore Metochites was

---

[80] Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, ed. Failler, vol. I, 72–9 (I.17); 142–7 (II.8); 208–15 (II.30); vol. II, 328–33 (IV.1); vol. IV, 508–27 (XII.2). Pachymeres frequently employs the phrase 'loud and far-sounding' (μακρὰν καὶ διωλύγιον κατέτεινε τὴν δημηγορίαν), as in vol. IV, 533.21–2 (XII.5), and compare with nn. 6 and 62 above).

[81] Medvedev, 'So-called Theatra'.

[82] In similar terms, Gregory Akindynos, ed. A. C. Hero, *Letters of Gregory Akindynos* (Washington, D. C., 1983), 66–9 (XVIII) congratulated Gregoras on the success of his *Life of St. Constantine* in Thessalonian *theatra*; tellingly, both Hyrtakenos and Akindynos preserved in their collections the letters they wrote to doyens of *paideia* and power (Choumnos, Gregoras), while Choumnos chose not to include any letters sent to Hyrtakenos: hardly an accident of transmission.

[83] F. J. G. La Porte-du Theil, 'Lettres de Théodôre l'Hyrtacènien', *Notices et Extraits*, 5 (1798), 709–44 at 727 (V): ἀνεγινώσκετο μὲν ὁ λόγος· ἡδόμεθα δ' ἡμεῖς ἀκροώμενοι καὶ ἦμεν ἐκθειάζοντες, ὅσοις ἦν ἔργον τοῖς ἀναγινωσκομένοις συννοίᾳ προσέχειν, ἐξιοῦσι δὲ τοῦ συλλόγου καὶ προιοῦσιν οἴκαδε οὐκ ἐσθ' ὅπως οὐκ ἦν κοινὴν πεποιημένοις τὴν ὁμιλίαν· ἥδ' ἦν ἅπασα περὶ τοῦ λόγου, μὴ ταὐτὰ δρᾶν τοῖς προτέροις· οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἦν ὃς οὐκ ἐκρότει καὶ ἐπήνει καὶ ἐνεθουσία ὑφ' ἡδονῆς.

allegedly so impressed that he could not restrain himself and could not conceal his wonder but, turning to the emperor, said, full of marvel:

> 'Even Aristotle himself, I believe, if he had been seated here in our presence listening to this young man, would have bestowed more than moderate praise on him . . .' Therefore the emperor took, as it were, pride in the noble young man, and was full of joy and imagined great things for the youth, and formed plans on his behalf. The young lad, however, having his gaze fixed on the Heavenly Emperor and His kingdom and the imperishable and undecaying Senate [of angels], and being completely filled with that purpose and matter, declined the emperor's offer to join the court hierarchy.[84]

Late Byzantine hagiography also provides a striking example of an unsuccessful performance:

> That Andronikos [II] Palaiologos was great among the emperors, who was later [as a monk] renamed Anthony. Therefore, after he had invited the holy man [St Maximos] to the palace, the emperor began to converse with him in the midst of many. The holy man, as was his custom, answered by quoting words from the Theologian [St John the Evangelist] in response to the emperor's words, and he made the rhetors marvel at how he declaimed by heart the words of the Theologian and the whole Holy Bible. As this holy man had not been trained in grammar, however, he was considered to be lacking in rhetorical skills: Therefore, after he had heard from the *megas logothetes* [Metochites] [and/or?] the *epi tou kanikleiou* [Choumnos] "*his voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau* [Gen 27.22]", he [the holy man] left the palace in a hurry, calling those men weak-minded and foolish. And he was never to enter the imperial palace again.[85]

---

[84] D. G. Tsames, ed., *Φιλοθέου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως τοῦ Κοκκίνου ἁγιολογικὰ ἔργα, Α′· Θεσσαλονικεῖς ἅγιοι* (Thessalonike, 1985), vol. I, 438 (§ 11): ὡς μηδὲ παρ' ἑαυτῷ κατασχεῖν μηδὲ κρύψαι δυνηθῆναι τὸ θαῦμα, ἀλλὰ τὸν λόγον εὐθὺς μετ' ἐκπλήξεως τρέψαντα πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα, 'καὶ αὐτὸς Ἀριστοτέλης', εἰπεῖν, 'εἰ παρὼν ἀκροατὴς καθίστατο τούτου, ἐπήνεσεν ἂν οὐ μετρίως, ὥς γε ἐγὼ νομίζω . . .' διὰ ταῦτα καὶ βασιλεὺς ἐγκαλλωπιζόμενος ἦν ὡσανεὶ τῷ γενναίῳ καὶ χαίρων καὶ μεγάλα τινὰ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ φανταζόμενος ἅμα καὶ βουλευόμενος, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνος πρὸς τὸν ἄνω βασιλέα καὶ τὰ βασίλεια καὶ τὴν σύγκλητον τὸν ἄφθαρτον καὶ ἀγήρω βλέπων ἐκείνην καὶ ὅλος τοῦ κατ' ἐκεῖνα σκοποῦ γιγνόμενος καὶ τοῦ πράγματος.

[85] F. Halkin, 'Deux vies de s. Maxime le kausokalybe, ermite au Mont Athos (xive s.)', *AB*, 54 (1936), 38–112 at 71 (Theophanes of Peritheorion, *Life of Maximos Kausokalybes*): Ἀνδρόνικος ἦν ἐκεῖνος ὁ μέγας ἐν βασιλεῦσιν ὁ Παλαιολόγος, ὁ καὶ μετονομασθεὶς Ἀντώνιος . . . ὅθεν καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος εἰς τὰ βασίλεια τοῦτον ὁ βασιλεὺς ἤρξατο ὁμιλεῖν τὸν ὅσιον μέσον πολλῶν. αὐτὸς δ', ὡς ἔθος εἶχεν, ἐκ τοῦ Θεολόγου πρὸς τὸν λόγον τοῦ ἄνακτος λόγους φέρων ἀνταπεκρίνετο· καὶ τοῖς ῥήτορσιν ἔπληττεν, πῶς ἀπὸ στήθους τὰ τοῦ Θεολόγου ἀναφωνεῖ καὶ πᾶσαν θείαν γραφήν. ἐπεὶ δὲ γραμματικὴν οὐ μεμάθηκεν οὗτος ὁ ὅσιος, ἐν τοῖς ῥήμασιν ἀδαὴς ἐνοεῖτο· διὰ τοῦτο καὶ παρὰ τοῦ μεγάλου λογοθέτου ἐκείνου ἀκούσας τοῦ κανικλείου τό· "ἡ μὲν φωνὴ φωνὴ Ἰακώβ, αἱ δὲ χεῖρες χεῖρες Ἠσαύ" ἀπελθὼν ᾤχετο, ματαιόφρονας καλέσας ἐκείνους καὶ ἄφρονας· καὶ πλεῖον εἰς τὰ βασίλεια οὐκ ἐγένετο.

While it is true that examples of infelicitous performances are both difficult to find and also usually a feature of sources unsympathetic to the actor(s), there cannot be any doubt that the system allowed for both success and failure.

In conclusion, the *theatron* emerges as a seminal social performance of the early Palaiologan period. On the one hand, *theatra*, as social spaces, connected literati with each other. On the other, they linked the learned stratum with the aristocracy by means of patronage and social inclusion. The learned orbited around the nucleus formed by the ruling elites, the Palaiologoi, Kantakouzenoi and their associates – as had been the case in the twelfth century with the Doukai, Komnenoi and Angeloi –, who played their roles as patrons, members of the audience, and, occasionally, as performers. 'Theatrical' acts of public reading, in all their complexity and with all their social ramifications as outlined in this chapter, no doubt contributed to efforts to keep the early Palaiologan polity together.

Further Reading

Key studies include: J. C. Alexander, 'Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy' in J. C. Alexander, B. Giesen and J. L. Mast, eds., *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual* (Cambridge, 2006), 29–90; E. C. Bourbouhakis, 'Rhetoric and Performance' in P. Stephenson, *The Byzantine World* (London, 2010), 175–87 and E. C. Bourbouhakis, 'The End of ἐπίδειξις. Authorial Identity and Authorial Intention in Michael Choniates' Πρὸς τοὺς αἰτιωμένους τὸ ἀφιλένδεικτον' in A. Pizzone, ed., *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature. Modes, Functions, Identities* (Berlin, 2014), 201–24; N. Gaul, 'The Letter in the *Theatron*: Epistolary Voice, Character, Soul and their Audience' in A. Riehle, ed., *A Companion to Byzantine Epistolography* (Leiden, forthcoming); I. Toth, 'Rhetorical *Theatron* in Late Byzantium: the Example of Palaiologan Imperial Orations' in M. Grünbart, ed., *Theatron: Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter* (Berlin, 2007), 429–48.