# The reception of Plutarch in George Pisides' panegyrical poems*

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**Abstract:** This article examines the reception of Plutarch's figure and works in George Pisides' poetry. The first section argues in favour of Pisides' familiarity with Plutarch's writings, mainly in view of verbatim quotations and other thematic connections or allusions. The second section explores Pisides' more creative use of Plutarch by discussing his direct addresses to the Chearonean philosopher and comparing them with Pisides' similar apostrophes to Homer and Demosthenes in the context of the *The Persian expedition* and the *Heraclias*. Pisides criticises the project of the *Parallel Lives* suggesting new ways of presenting the ancient material. By seeking to 'rewrite' the heroic past, Pisides presents himself as a skilled emulator of his ancient predecessors, thereby enhancing his self-fashioning as the imperial spokesman *par excellence*.

**Keywords**: Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, George Pisides, early Byzantine imperial panegyric, reception of classical literature

## I. Introduction

George Pisides, a verse panegyrist active at the court of Heraclius (r. AD 610-41) in Constantinople, is best known for his encomia celebrating the Byzantine emperor and his military exploits in the face of the assaults of the Avars and the Persians at the beginning of the seventh century. One of the overarching features of his poetry is its prolific fusion of mythical, classical and biblical references,[1] which has been generally considered to have assisted the dynamic presentation of his pieces before the emperor and/or his entourage,

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[1] E.g. J. D. C. Frendo, 'Classical and Christian influences in the Heracliad of George of Pisidia', *The Classical Bulletin* 62.4 (1986) 53-62, at 53; M. Whitby, 'A New Image for a New Age: George of Pisidia on the Emperor Heraclius', in E. Dabrowa (ed.), *The Roman and Byzantine Army in the East* (Cracow 1994) 197-226. For the use of mythological exempla in various Byzantine genres including Pisides' panegyrics, see H. Hunger, 'On the Imitation (ΜΙΜΗΣΙΣ) of Antiquity in Byzantine Literature', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23/24 (1969/70) 15-38, at 23-4.

decisively effecting the adulation received by the honorand.[2] What has hitherto attracted less attention, however, is Pisides' sustained, and often (self-)assertive, dialogue with ancient authors and their heroic subjects, and how this provided another powerful means of heightening his emphasis on imperial authority.

In this article, I would like to focus on the reception of the figure and works of Plutarch in Pisides' encomiastic poetry and use that as a case-study that will enable us to assess the breadth and depth of Pisides' critical engagement with ancient literature, especially by casting fresh light on his leanings towards rhetorical invective, irony and denunciation. The discussion falls into two main parts. In the first, I shall argue in favour of Pisides' familiarity with Plutarch's writings, mainly in view of verbatim quotations and other thematic connections or allusions, all of which testify to the central role that Plutarch occupied in late antique and early Byzantine literary tradition as a repository of historical information and miscellaneous knowledge. Furthermore, it will be shown that some of these references and allusions to Plutarch's texts are instrumental in evoking apt comparisons between the emperor and figures from the past, building upon *synkrisis* as a salient ingredient of traditional panegyrics.[3] In the second section, I shall focus on Pisides' more creative use of Plutarch by discussing his direct addresses to the Chearonean philosopher and comparing them with the author's similar apostrophes to Homer and Demosthenes in the context of *The Persian expedition* and the *Heraclias*. Pisides criticises and ultimately belittles the project of the *Parallel Lives* and Plutarch's treatment of the career of Alexander the Great, suggesting new ways of formulating the ancient material. As I aim to demonstrate, by seeking to 'rewrite' the heroic past, Pisides fashions himself as a skilled emulator of his ancient predecessor, thus enhancing his self-projection as the imperial spokesman *par excellence*. In the light of the above, the article seeks to indicate that the Greek literary heritage in Pisides' panegyric discourse does not simply provide him with a wide range of material with which to infuse his high-flown poetry;[4] rather

[2] For the public recitation of Pisides' panegyrics, see G. T. Dennis, 'Imperial panegyric: rhetoric and reality', in H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine court culture from 829 to 1204* (Washington, DC 1997) 131-40, at 133; reprinted in G. Nagy, *Greek literature, vol. 9: Greek literature in the Byzantine period* (New York-London 2001) 235-44, at 237; Ph. Rance, 'Simulacra Pugnae: The Literary and Historical Tradition of Mock Battles in the Roman and Early Byzantine Army', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 41 (2000) 223-75, at 226; M. D. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine poetry from Pisides to Geometres*. *Vol. 1 Texts and contexts* (Wien 2003) 56; J. D. Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a world crisis: historians and histories of the Middle East in the seventh century* (Oxford 2010) 21.

[3] E.g. H. Maguire, 'The art of comparing in Byzantium', *Art Bulletin* 70 (1988) 88-103 for the use of comparison in Byzantine literature and art.

[4] For a useful overview of the history of the genre, see the Introduction to M. Whitby (ed.), *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Leiden 1998) 1-13; D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor; edited with translation and commentary* (Oxford 1981) xi-xxxiv; R. Rees 'Panegyric', in W. J. Dominik and J. Hall (eds), *A Companion to Roman rhetoric* (Chicester 2007) 136-48. Cf. R. Webb, 'Praise and persuasion: argumentation and audience response in epideictic oratory', in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium* (Aldershot

it becomes part and parcel of his professional identity with interesting implications for the workings of imperial ideology and patronage in seventh-century Constantinople.

## II. George Pisides in context

Before proceeding to the heart of the analysis, a brief sketch of Pisides' career in the context of his contemporary political and cultural landscape will highlight the main strands of his literary agenda as well as help to explain its deeper incentives, particularly in connection with the poet's self-presentation. One important element in this sketch is Pisides' central role in the religious and political structures in Constantinople; although details of his life are scarce, we do know that he held prominent positions in ecclesiastical circles, serving as a deacon, guardian of the sacred vessels (*skeuophylax*), referendary responsible for the emperor's communications, and keeper of the records (*chartophylax*) in the church of Hagia Sophia, while maintaining a close relationship with the Patriarch Sergius I (AD 610-38), who acted as his patron. On the other hand, he was well connected with imperial dignitaries, such as Bonus the *patrikios*, and, most importantly, was a personal friend of the emperor himself, possibly accompanying him on some of his campaigns, and composing epigrams and long poems of imperial propaganda at the latter's behest.[5] Pisides' high-profile connections seem to account for his role as the foremost imperial courtier in a crucial time of cultural shift and fluctuation, as modern historiography has described the early seventh century.[6] This was indeed a period of difficulty and anxiety mainly by dint of witnessing a series of military attacks on the east

2003) 127-35; G. L. Kustas, 'The function and evolution of Byzantine rhetoric', *Viator* 15 (1970) 55-73; reprinted in Nagy, *Greek literature*, 179-97. For Latin panegyrics, notably R. Rees, 'The private lives of public figures in Latin prose panegyric', in Whitby (ed.), *The Propaganda of Power*, 77-101. Regarding Byzantine panegyrics, the scholarly focus has been on imperial encomia in later Byzantium; see e.g. Cf. D. G. Angelov, 'Byzantine imperial panegyric as advice literature (1204-c.1350)', in Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium*, 55-72, who stresses that from the thirteenth century onwards imperial panegyrists voiced their own views on political issues advising the emperor and occasionally warning him.

[5] For Pisides' life and work, see *ODB*, vol. II, 838, s.v. George of Pisidia; A. Adler (ed.), *Suidae lexicon*, i (Leipzig 1928), entry 170, p. 517. Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a world crisis*, 16-35 provides an excellent starting point for any newcomer to Pisides. For a brief description of Pisides' works, see M. Whitby, 'George of Pisidia and the persuasive word: words, words, words...', in Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium*, 173-86, at 174-6. See also A. Pertusi (ed. and transl.), *Giorgio di Pisidia, Poemi I. Panegiici Epici, edizione critica, traduzione e commento*, Studia Patristica et Byzantina, 7 (Ettal 1959) 11-31; L. Tartaglia (ed. and transl.), *Carmi di Giorgio di Pisidia* (Turin 1998), 39.

[6] J. Haldon, 'The Reign of Heraclius: A Context for Change?', in G. J. Reinink and B. H. Stolte (eds), *The Reign of Heraclius (610- 641): Crisis and Confrontation* (Paris 2002) 1-16; J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the seventh century: The transformation of a culture* (Cambridge 1990). See also A. Cameron, 'New themes and styles in Byzantine literature, 7th-8th centuries', in A. Cameron and L. Conrad (eds), *The Byzantine and Islamic Near East I. Problems in the Literary Source Material: studies in late antiquity and early Islam* (Princeton 1992) 81-105; A. Cameron, 'Byzantium and the past in the seventh century: the search for redefinition', in J. Fontaine and J. N. Hillgarth (eds), *Le septième siècle: changements et continuités = The seventh century: change and continuity* (London 1992) 250-76.

and west front of the Byzantine empire, and a serious internal conflict between Heraclius and Phocas (r. AD 602 to 610) leading to the latter's violent overthrow. Heraclius' early reign was then validated by a cultural resurgence in the capital, with literature and philosophy receiving imperial patronage.[7] It seems, therefore, that Pisides, as Heraclius' official publicist, had ample opportunity not just to valorise the emperor's political and religious policies through his panegyrics and even invectives (e.g. *Against Wicked Severus*),[8] but also to propagate his own poetry amidst a flourishing of the arts and letters, perpetuating his poetic skill for centuries to come.[9] One strategic tool in fulfilling that target was his intricate deployment of Plutarch, a topic to which I now turn.

## III. Plutarch as source material for imperial praise: quoting, alluding and reworking the ancient intertext

Pisides' familiarity with individual *Lives* and essays of the *Moralia* is most clearly reflected in his direct quotations from the Plutarchan intertext on a number of occasions throughout his writings. Some of these quotations have been identified in the apparatus of parallel passages in the modern editions by Pertusi and/or Tartaglia, but have never been examined from an interpretative point of view in the context of a comprehensive study.[10] In such instances Pisides retains the original formulation inasfar as this is possible, given that he also needs to conform to the requirements of prosody in constructing quantitative iambic trimeters, which is the verse type of his panegyrics.[11] Interestingly, when Plutarchan lines are extracted from their original context and re-applied, not only are they not heralded or hinted at, but at the same time they are tailored with considerable variety in their new setting, as we will see below. Both devices

[7] Whitby, 'A New Image for a New Age', 199. Other sources for the cultural revival include the Dialogue between History and Philosophy in the preface to the historical work by Theophylact Simocatta, the *Chronicon Pascale* and the sermons by Theodore Syncellus.

[8] George attacks Severus, Patriarch of Antioch (AD 512-18), for embracing Monophysitism, see e.g. L. S. B. MacCoull, 'George of Pisidia, Against Severus: In Praise of Heraclius', in R. Dahood (ed.), *The Future of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Problems, Trends and Opportunities for Research* (Turnhout 1998) 69-79; A. J. Ekonomou, *Byzantine Rome and the Greek popes: Eastern influences on Rome and the papacy from Gregory the Great to Zacharias, A.D. 590-752* (Lanham, Md.; Plymouth 2007) 80-5. Cf. J. D. C. Frendo, 'Religion and politics in Byzantium on the eve of the Arab conquests', *Florilegium* 10 (1988-91) 1-24.

[9] In fact, parts of Pisides' panegyrics were acclaimed in the ninth and tenth centuries, featuring in Theophanes as a historical source for Heraclius' reign, and in the Suda as lexicographical material. In the eleventh century George Pisides' verse was preferred to Euripides' own in a comparison of the two by Michael Psellos. Strikingly, Theodosius the Deacon in the tenth century, in his panegyric for the Byzantine emperor Romanos II (r. 959-63) entitled *On the conquest of Crete*, adopts a similar critical approach to Plutarch, which points to his reliance on Pisides. This is a topic I plan to explore in a future study.

[10] Pertusi (ed. and transl.), *Giorgio di Pisidia*; Tartaglia (ed. and transl.), *Carmi di Giorgio di Pisidia*.

[11] A poetic innovation and a stylistic achievement anticipating the later Byzantine dodecasyllable, also known as political verse. See J. D. C. Frendo, 'Classical and Christian influences in the Heracliad of George of Pisidia', *The Classical Bulletin* 62.4 (1986) 53-62, at 53.

point to the sophistication of Pisides' encomia and to the high educational standards expected of or possessed by his immediate and later audience.[12] On another level, by making use of Plutarchan passages Pisides also seems to be scratching at a very contemporary itch, as at that time the ancient biographer was mentioned or cited in the *Chronicon Pascale*, in some fragments of the historian John of Antioch, and, as we shall see below, in the history of Theophylact Simocatta.[13]

The following example will help get to grips with Pisides' working technique. It comes from one of his shorter poems entitled *On Bonus*, dedicated to the magister with the same name who, together with Patriarch Sergius I, defended the capital during the Avar siege of AD 626 while Heraclius was away on a campaign in the East.[14] The concluding section of this poem revolves around the bold presentation of Heraclius as divine Logos,[15] with Pisides tapping into imagery pertaining to the natural world and the physiology of the human body, shying away from the scriptural associations one would normally expect. The most pervasive image of the emperor, developed in elegant ways as the poem reaches its conclusion, is that of him as a meticulous physician who strives to heal what appears to be a 'universal malady' (86, Pertusi 166). In fact, Heraclius' medical role is presented as extending well beyond general tasks traditionally assigned to doctors to include performing surgery targeted at healing the pain of the body politic and eliminating disease (87-120, Pertusi 166-8).[16] Against this backdrop, the Plutarchan phrase from the *Life of Marcellus* 'abatement of the disease' (τῆς νόσου παρακμὴν, *Marcellus* 24.2) is used in the form of a vocative extolling Heraclius' ability to treat the infection of the Byzantine empire: 'Come on, you who knew how to diminish the diseases that once bothered us. May you go on, giving back to everyone the previous energy, and power to the empire which gave birth to you' (ἀλλ᾽ ὦ παρακμὴ τῶν παρελθουσῶν νόσων | μένοις

[12] Lauxtermann, *Byzantine poetry*, 39. One should point out the wide-ranging interests of Byzantine learned men, including the emperor himself. Heraclius is said to have 'enjoyed a reputation for being very learned', W. E. Kaegi, *Heraclius, emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge; New York 2003) 22. Although we lack precise details on the type of education he received during his formative years (see Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 22-23) and despite the fact that he does not seem to have composed any works of his own, his later intellectual aspirations of reviving philosophy and history after the deposition of Phocas might attest his interest in learning, at least to some extent. See also Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 58; cf. 210-11.

[13] See also M. Pade, *The reception of Plutarch's Lives in fifteenth-century Italy* (Copenhagen 2007) 54-5.

[14] On Bonus, see Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 112, 120, 134-9. Edition of *The Persian expedition* and *Heraclias* by Pertusi (ed. and transl.), *Giorgio di Pisidia*; reproduced by Tartaglia (ed. and transl.), *Carmi di Giorgio di Pisidia*. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine poetry*, 12 provides a handy list of the modern editions of Pisides' works. Useful summaries of Pisides' works in Tartaglia (ed. and transl.), *Carmi di Giorgio di Pisidia*, 13-38.

[15] Cf. Whitby, 'George of Pisidia and the persuasive word', 183-6. Heraclius was celebrated in Pisides' poems as a representative of God on earth, especially for waging war against the infidel Persians and restoring the True Cross in Jerusalem in 630. See e.g. C. Zuckerman, 'Heraclius and the Return of the Holy Cross', *Travaux et mémoires* 17 (2013) 197-218.

[16] J. D. C. Frendo, 'Special aspects of the use of medical vocabulary in the poems of George of Pisidia', *Orpheus* 22 (1975) 49-56, at 53-4, examines the section on surgery.

ἅπαντας εἰς ἀνάκτησιν φέρων, | καὶ τῷ σε γεννήσαντι τῷ κράτει κράτος, 162-4, Pertusi 170).[17] A compare and contrast with the Plutarchan intertext shows the creativity of Pisides' retexturing. In *Marcellus* the phrase under discussion is used with reference to Fabius Maximus' persistent policy of abstaining from war with the Carthaginians, a position which Marcellus regarded as entirely erroneous, according to Plutarch's narrative, on the grounds that from a medical point of view considering 'the consumption of the patient's powers to be the abatement of the disease' is a characteristic of 'physicians who are timid and afraid to apply remedies'. What functions as a criticism of a political opponent in Plutarch's text is transformed into an authoritative statement of imperial acclaim in Pisides, who emphasises Heraclius' skill in eradicating previous disorder and reviving the morale of both the army and the people alike.[18] Here, therefore, an implicit comparison between Fabius Maximus' military reticence and Heraclius' energetic expeditions against the empire's opponents is brought into play, with Pisides creating a refined interaction with his source, in order to maximise its appeal on (future) readers and provoke new ways of translating the ancient story in the light of contemporary exigencies.[19]

[17] Editions of Plutarch's *Lives* are taken from K. Ziegler (ed.), *Plutarchi: Vitae Parallelae*, 4 vols (Leipzig 1957-80); for the *Moralia* those by M. Pohlenz, C. Hubert, et al. (eds), *Plutarchi Moralia*, 7 vols. (Leipzig 1929-78). Translations are taken from the Loeb Classical Library, often with minor modifications; for the *Moralia* by F. C. Babbitt and various other translators, *Plutarch Moralia*, 16 vols. (Cambridge Massachusetts-London 1927-2004); for the *Lives* by B. Perrin, *Plutarch's Lives*, 11 vols. (Cambridge Massachusetts-London 1914-26). Pisides' direct consultation of Plutarch's *Lives* is confirmed by his employment of another verbatim quote, this time from the *Life of Caesar* 17.5. The quote features just a few lines before the quote from *Marcellus* in the peroration of *On Bonus*, in a context in which Pisides wishes to express the public anguish at Heraclius' absence and to connect this with an emotional appeal to the emperor to accept the embassy that was meant to be sent to prompt his return (122-5, Pertusi 168).

[18] Pisides is well familiar with the content of the *Marcellus*, since he also used an anecdote featuring Archimedes in his poem *In Alypius*, addressed to his fat clerical friend of the same name. As is shown below, there are linguistic resemblances (indicated in bold) between *Marc*. 14.12-15 and Pisides' passage, with Pisides' dense section reproducing recurring terms that are central to Plutarch's original: 'τὰς πέντε **δυνάμεις Ἀρχιμήδους** εἰς μίαν συνάψας | ὅλην, εἰς τὸ **κινῆσαι** μόλις | τῶν δυστραχήλων ἐξ ὀχῶν τὰ **φορτία**.' (Pisides, *In Alypium*, 11-13, Tartaglia 458); 'καὶ μέντοι καὶ **Ἀρχιμήδης**, Ἱέρωνι τῷ βασιλεῖ συγγενὴς ὢν καὶ φίλος, ἔγραψεν ὡς τῇ δοθείσῃ **δυνάμει** τὸ δοθὲν **βάρος κινῆσαι** δυνατόν ἐστι, καὶ νεανιευσάμενος ὥς φασι ῥώμῃ τῆς ἀποδείξεως εἶπεν ὡς εἰ γῆν εἶχεν ἑτέραν, **ἐκίνησεν** ἂν ταύτην μεταβὰς εἰς ἐκείνην. θαυμάσαντος δὲ τοῦ Ἱέρωνος, καὶ δεηθέντος εἰς ἔργον ἐξαγαγεῖν τὸ πρόβλημα καὶ δεῖξαί τι τῶν μεγάλων **κινούμενον** ὑπὸ σμικρᾶς **δυνάμεως**, ὁλκάδα τριάρμενον τῶν βασιλικῶν πόνῳ μεγάλῳ καὶ χειρὶ πολλῇ νεωλκηθεῖσαν, ἐμβαλὼν ἀνθρώπους τε πολλοὺς καὶ τὸν συνήθη **φόρτον**, αὐτὸς ἄπωθεν καθήμενος, οὐ μετὰ σπουδῆς ἀλλ' ἠρέμα τῇ χειρὶ σείων ἀρχήν τινα πολυσπάστου, προσηγάγετο, λείως καὶ ἀπταίστως ὥσπερ διὰ θαλάσσης ἐπιθέουσαν. ἐκπλαγεὶς οὖν ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ συννοήσας τῆς τέχνης τὴν **δύναμιν**, ἔπεισε τὸν **Ἀρχιμήδην** ὅπως αὐτῷ τὰ μὲν ἀμυνομένῳ τὰ δ' ἐπιχειροῦντι μηχανήματα κατασκευάσῃ πρὸς πᾶσαν ἰδέαν πολιορκίας. οἷς αὐτὸς μὲν οὐκ ἐχρήσατο, τοῦ βίου τὸ πλεῖστον ἀπόλεμον καὶ πανηγυρικὸν βιώσας, τότε δ' ὑπῆρχε τοῖς Συρακοσίοις εἰς δέον ἡ παρασκευή, καὶ μετὰ τῆς παρασκευῆς ὁ δημιουργός'. (*Marc*. 14.12-14).

[19] What Frendo terms 'the method of producing panegyric by indirection', which encompasses 'describing a past situation in terms suggestive of a contemporary one'; J. D. Frendo, 'History and Panegyric in the Age of Heraclius: The Literary Background to the Composition of the "Histories" of Theophylact Simocatta', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 42 (1988) 143-56, at 151.

But the medical imagery itself is not free of contemporary implications either. It is interesting that the earliest surviving manual that systematically discusses the genre of epideictic to which the panegyric belongs, namely *On Epideictic Speeches* (*Περὶ Ἐπιδεικτικῶν*) by Menander Rhetor dated to the late third or early fourth century AD, contains a section where the author advises orators composing an imperial oration (*basilikos logos*) to exemplify the emperor's wisdom by using comparisons that present him as being 'the planner, the commander, the discoverer of the moment for battle, a marvellous counsellor, champion, general, and orator' (ὁ διαταττόμενος, αὐτὸς ὁ στρατηγῶν, αὐτὸς τὸν καιρὸν τῆς συμβολῆς εὑρίσκων, σύμβουλος θαυμαστὸς, ἀριστεύς, στρατηγός, δημηγόρος; 374, 23-5, ed. Russell and Wilson 88). Menander's list does not include the physician, and even though the comparison of the ruler to a doctor is well attested in other branches of ancient literature other than rhetoric, I would be inclined to argue with Frendo that Pisides' employment of medical diction is a matter of personal choice.[20] I also think, counter to Frendo's silence or aporetic suggestions on the subject, that Pisides' systematic use of medical terminology must have something to do with the surrounding medical trends of his age, particularly the establishment of the medical school in Alexandria and the composition of medical works of considerable importance for their discussion of late antique medical developments, such as those by Paul of Aegina or the medical commentaries by Stephen, all encapsulating the concentration of educated physicians in a scholastic environment.[21] Heraclius' fashioning as a contemporary physician, therefore, most probably adds a strong contemporary nuance to Pisides' praise, which is intrinsically occasional, as previously mentioned, specific to the 'here and now' (*hinc et nunc*). To link this up to Plutarch's use of the medical comparison in the case of Fabius Maximus, where the physician is reluctant to apply any efficient therapy for fear of the consequences, Pisides' reconfiguring acts as a forceful expression of the role of Heraclius the physician, who is by far more therapeutically ambitious and brave enough to counter cosmic disease.

Thus far we have seen that Pisides exploits Plutarchan passages from the *Lives* word-for-word without acknowledging his source. The same tacit use of Plutarch occurs in other writings by Pisides, where one notices his eagerness to exploit stories and events from the

[20] Frendo, 'Special aspects'. Michael Psellus, *Who Versified Better, Euripides Or Pisides?* 113-15, ed. A. R. Dyck, *Michael Psellus: The essays on Euripides and George of Pisidia and on Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius* (Vienna 1986) 39-50, at 48 stresses Pisides' interest in medicine: 'If, for instance, he [i.e. Pisides] mentions a disease, he soon wheels in the entire field of medicine, taking into account both the causes of diseases and the methods of treating them' (νόσημα γοῦν εἰπὼν ἐν τῷ λόγῳ εὐθὺς τὴν ἰατρικὴν πᾶσαν ἐπεισκυκλοῖ μήτε τῶν [αἰτ]ιῶν φειδόμενος μήτε τῶν οἷς θεραπεύεται τὰ νοσήματα.)

[21] A. Z. Iskandar, 'An attempted reconstruction of the late Alexandrian medical curriculum', *Medical History* 20.3 (1976) 235-58; M. Roueché, 'Did Medical Students Study Philosophy in Alexandria?', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 43 (1999) 153-69.

realm of history and science, but this time without necessarily reproducing Plutarch's wording. Such cases are sometimes connected with Heraclius' glorification, but at other times point more to the encyclopaedic significance of Plutarch's work in Pisides' age. To give just one example of the first category, in *The Persian expedition* Pisides refers to Xerxes' wrath and overwhelming haughtiness after his defeat in a sea battle with the Greeks, which culminated in his obstinate wish to 'mix opposing natures' by attempting 'to petrify the sea and inundate the land with sea water' (*Exp. Pers.* II, 303-5, Pertusi 112: Ξέρξην μὲν οὖν λέγουσι λυσσώδει τρόπῳ | μῖξαι θέλοντα τὰς διεστώσας φύσεις | ὕδωρ πετρῶσαι καὶ θαλαττῶσαι χθόνα|). A number of antique sources report the above story, e.g. Herodotus 7.24, Isocrates' *Panegyricus* 89, Diodorus Siculus 11, but the close verbal and notional similarities with *Themistocles* 16.1 and *Consolation to Apollonius* 110D coupled with the fact that only in Plutarch's text do we find reference to Xerxes' moral behaviour, which is also central in the Pisidean passage, makes Plutarch the most likely archetype.[22] As in the case from *Marcellus* above, the reformulation of Xerxes' story – in this instance through the elaborate word play ὕδωρ πετρῶσαι καὶ θαλαττῶσαι χθόνα, which is not entirely thus narrated in Plutarch – renders the Persian king a counter-example to Heraclius, whose moderation belied any disruption of nature's laws, as he, by contrast, was pursuing disciplined military advances (*Exp. Pers.* II, 327-34, Pertusi 113).

The encyclopaedic use of Plutarchan passages from the *Moralia*, on the other hand, is employed to back up rare scientific or popular interpretations of natural phenomena. For instance, in one of Pisides' longest religious poems, the *Hexaemeron*, a Christian celebration of the Creation, the reference to the versatile nature of eggs (*Hexaem*. 1198-202) seems to have been drawn from Plutarch's Problem 3 of Book 2 of his *Table Talk* (636A-E), which deals exclusively with the perplexing question 'Which was first, the chicken or the egg?'. In similar manner, *Hexaemeron* 1077-8, referring to the mysterious phenomenon of vultures who can reproduce without fertilisation by sperm is similar to a section from Plutarch's *Roman Questions* no. 93, which reports an Egyptian fable according to which the whole vulture species is female, and so they conceive by receiving the breath of the East Wind (286C). These two instances from Plutarch's writings on problemata incorporated into Pisides' *Hexaemeron*, also a text of a naturalistic character, attests to the other major use of Plutarchan material in the

[22] *Cons. ad Apoll.* 110D: 'ποῦ γὰρ τὰ σεμνὰ κεῖνα, ποῦ δὲ Λυδίας μέγας δυνάστης Κροῖσος ἢ Ξέρξης βαρὺν **ζεύξας θαλάσσης αὐχέν**' [cf. ὕδωρ πετρῶσαι καὶ θαλαττῶσαι χθόνα] Ἑλλησποντίας; *Them*. 16.1: 'Μετὰ δὲ τὴν ναυμαχίαν Ξέρξης μὲν ἔτι **θυμομαχῶν** [cf. λυσσώδει τρόπῳ] πρὸς τὴν ἀπότευξιν ἐπεχείρει διὰ χωμάτων ἐπάγειν τὸ πεζὸν εἰς Σαλαμῖνα τοῖς Ἕλλησιν, **ἐμφράξας τὸν διὰ μέσου πόρον** [cf. ὕδωρ πετρῶσαι καὶ θαλαττῶσαι χθόνα]'. Verbal connections with Pisides' *Exp. Pers.* II, 303-5, Pertusi 112, are indicated in square brackets introduced with cf.

transitional period between late antiquity and early Byzantium: that it played to the intellectual capacity and tastes of the audience, one advantage of Plutarch's literature already underlined by Menander Rhetor in the same treatise on imperial orations (392, 28-33, ed. Russell and Wilson 122), but also stressed by Pisides' contemporary, the historian Theophylact Simocatta, in whose work Plutarch is called 'a wealth of knowledge' (τὸν τῆς ἐπιστήμης πλοῦτον, *Quast. Phys.* 38, 7).[23] Although not encompassing any revision of Plutarch's script aimed at the emperor's praise, the two case-studies nevertheless show Pisides' rhetorically conscious use of Plutarch, which adds authority and sophistication to his poetic narrative, helping him to solidify its encyclopaedic character.

## IV. Pisides in dialogue with Homer and Demosthenes: literary criticism in *The Persian expedition*

The previous section has discussed the way in which Plutarch's passages inspired Pisides to effect direct or opaque comparisons between Plutarchan subjects and the Byzantine emperor, which resulted in the affirmation of the latter's admirable qualities as a leader. In this section, we shall turn to a number of passages from the two main panegyrics dealing with Heraclius' Persian campaigns of 622-8, i.e. *The Persian expedition* and the *Heraclias*, in which Pisides shifts the focus to ancient authors rather than heroes, engaging in lively dialogue with them. Two main features mark this dialogue: firstly, the explicit addresses to the authors by name each time, making the apostrophes more pointed and confrontational, and secondly the varying levels of invective operating in contexts of strict literary criticism.

I start with Pisides' first address in *The Persian expedition*, which comes just after a highly elaborated proem where Pisides, adjusting a classicising poetic invocation to the Muses, appeals to the Holy Trinity. What is interesting in this respect is that Pisides does not ask for inspiration for his literary endeavour, but rather requests that the Holy Trinity teach him how 'to use his sword most successfully', a metaphor he uses for his 'tongue' which he describes as 'a sharpened weapon against the enemies' (*Exp. Pers.* I, 13-14, Pertusi 84). The start of the narrative introduces the element of the invective (*psogos*) as the complementary component to praise (*epainos*) in traditional panegyrics. At first glance, the reference to invective leads one to think that this will be targeted at Heraclius' enemies, such as Phocas or Chosroes II, who are

[23] L. Massa Positano, *Teofilatto Simocata. Questioni naturali*, 2nd edn. (Naples 1965). For a brief overview of Plutarch in late antiquity, see L. Niccolai, 'Julian, Plutarch, and the Dangers of Self-Praise', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 57 (2017) 1058-84, at 1061-6, who also argues that Plutarch's essay *On Self-praise* inspired Julian.

indeed the recipients of vilifying comments on several occasions throughout.[24] Nonetheless, taking into account the self-referential proem seen above together with the poet's ensuing address to Heraclius, where in a mode of self-effacement the poet states that he will not be able to do justice to the emperor's virtue, one wonders if the term 'enemies' could refer to what Pisides sees as his own scholarly rivals, not necessarily – or not exclusively – contemporary poets,[25] but rather classical precursors in a process of literary emulation.

The reference to Homer might help throw some interpretative light on this suggestion:

> Homer, whom they speak of (λέγουσι) as the source of eloquence (πηγὴν τῶν λόγων), – is in fact the poet who broadens the veins of eloquence, floods the thoughts of a youthful mind and nourishes them while quenching them, and <the poet who>, even when exhausted, remains inexhaustible, – <Homer> divides the innate and acquired virtues in his two poems; however, <he does so> out of necessity (πλὴν ἐξ ἀνάγκης). The time when the common receptacle of strength and wisdom, and of the <other> virtues linked to them, would be shown was still far off. But if he had had available your own image and had discovered, as appropriate, your perfect nature, after abandoning the many stories/fabrications (ἀφεὶς τὰ πολλὰ τῶν λόγων μυθεύματα), he would have displayed the intellectual education you possess, adding to all other attached virtues the single one and four-fold image joined in you.
>
> *Exp. Pers.* I, 66-81, Pertusi 87-8[26]

The emphasis on the emperor's excellence permeates this whole passage, but it is also evocative in the way it presents Homer as being potentially equally incapable of depicting Heraclius' unique character, a quandary which Pisides had also mentioned a few lines earlier with reference to himself. Besides making this link between Homer and Pisides, the rest of the extract brings out Pisides' reproach of the ancient poet in the following ways: a) Homer 'is said' to be the source of eloquence, with the use of the verb λέγουσι casting doubt on communal evaluations of him. b) The ensuing lines included within dashes in the translation seem to reproduce a number of positive reactions to Homer's poetry, which Pisides nevertheless hastens to qualify by adding that any discussion of virtues (what is technically termed *aretology*

[24] E.g. Phocas: *Her*. II, 5-11, Pertusi 251-2; Chosroes: *Her*. I, 9-14, Pertusi 240; *Her*. I, 20-64, Pertusi 241-3.
[25] Lauxtermann, *Byzantine poetry*, 58.
[26] Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

in rhetorical theory) in his epics is the result of necessity (ἐξ ἀνάγκης). Homer's weakness, according to Pisides, lies in the fact that he lacked truly inspirational paradigms to discuss, since Heraclius had not yet been born. c) By means of a counterfactual scenario, Pisides goes on to explain precisely what Homer could have done with Heraclius as his subject matter, this time censuring Homer's abundant use of what he calls μυθεύματα. This is a word that tends to acquire negative connotations in Byzantine texts, denoting false or inaccurate speech, a figment of the imagination,[27] with Pisides playing upon this understanding of the term to reinforce his criticism. d) The reference to Homer is linked up with Pisides' comparison between Nestor and Heraclius, which assesses the latter as being much the more eloquent and effective public speaker (*Exp. Pers*. I, 82-99, Pertusi 88-9), but again the emperor's acclamation seems to be conditioned upon a trope of self-reference or 'personal intervention'.[28] In order to end his literary reflection on Homeric poetry without generating any suspicion of self-absorption or conceit, Pisides claims that it was Heraclius' 'pleasantness of speech' that had led him to this 'digression' (ἀλλ᾽ ἐν παρεκβάσει με τοῦ προκειμένου | ἡ τῶν καλῶν σου τερπνότης ἀπήγαγεν, *Exp. Pers*. I, 100-1, Pertusi 89), a technique we shall encounter again below.[29] Interestingly, the spontaneous and situational character of Pisides' digressions adheres to the requirements for inoffensive self-praise as formulated, for example, in the *On the method of forceful speaking* of the Hermogenic corpus or the *Rhetoric* of Pseudo- Aristides.

The second address to an ancient author, this time to Demosthenes through a direct vocative, and not a third-person reference as in Homer's case, gives additional support to this

[27] Demetrakos, s.v. μύθευμα. The term in Byzantine texts usually appears in contexts in which children's inarticulate speech (ψελλίσματα) are connected with old wives' tales (μυθεύματα), e.g. Nicephoros (AD 8-9), *Refutatio et eversio definitionis synodalis anni 815* ch. 21, lines 36-7, ed. J. Featherstone, *Nicephori Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Refutatio et Eversio Definitionis Synodalis Anni 815*. Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca 33 (Turnhout 1997); elsewhere it is accompanied by the adjective 'false': Niketas (AD 9), *Confutatio falsi libri, quem scripsit Mohamedes Arabs* ch. 4, section 15, line 378: τὰ ψευδῆ αὐτοῦ μυθεύματα; ed. K. Förstel, 'Schriften zum Islam', *Corpus Islamo-Christianum. Series Graeca 5* (2000) 2-198.

[28] Whitby, 'George of Pisidia and the persuasive word', 182; M. Whitby, 'George of Pisidia's Presentation of the Emperor Heraclius and his Campaigns: Variety and Development', in G. J. Reinink and B. H. Stolte (eds), *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641)*: *Crisis and Confrontation* (Leuven 2002), 157-73, at 165-6 and 169-70. Cf. Frendo's [1986: 55] limited explanation of the accumulated presence of ancient heroes and authors: 'a bewildering assortment of figures from Greek and Roman antiquity – Homer, Apelles, Demosthenes, Scipio, Plutarch, Timotheos, Aristotle – are addressed or invoked, summoned up from the dead, and perfunctorily dismissed once they have fulfilled their purpose of further demonstrating the overwhelming superiority of Heraclius' achievement to any example past history or legend can hope to offer' seeing antique examples as an 'extended rhetorical *tour de force*'.

[29] It is worth pointing out that the reference to Homer as a source of eloquence and the numerous educational benefits young readers of Homer were likely to enjoy, as noted in item b above, echo a section from the treatise *On Homer* which circulated under Plutarch's name in Pisides' time (*De Hom*. B, 1-4; A, 85-86). In addition, the emphasis on Nestor's sweet speech also features in *On Homer* (*De Hom*. B, 2160-2161), so that taking into account also that the treatise enjoyed considerable popularity in Byzantium, the possibility that it might have acted as Pisides' source in this case is not wholly unsubstantiated.

interpretation. It features in the opening lines of the second *akroasis* or cento of *The Persian expedition*, in a passage that has been adduced as evidence that the performance of the second cento most probably took place in the presence of Heraclius.[30] The same passage is also important from a metapoetical point of view, and most specifically for what it can tell us about its author's aims and the nature of his poetry. It reads as follows:

> Demosthenes, step forward with free speech (πρόελθε σὺν παρρησίᾳ),[31] words prevail (λόγοι κρατοῦσι); be not now convulsed with fear (μὴ ταράττου νῦν φόβῳ). It is not Philip here, but the master. There is no danger, even should silence come upon you (καὶ σιωπὴν εἰ πάθοις), since all are commonly and gloriously defeated. The words are pressing to run back (παλινδρομεῖν δὲ τῶν λόγων ἠπειγμένων) and again I fly to the course from the beginning (πρὸς τοὺς ἀπ᾽ ἀρχῆς αὖθις ἵπταμαι δρόμους).
>
> *Exp. Pers.* II, 1-7; transl. Whitby 173[32]

Its brevity notwithstanding, the section is replete with a strong sense of allusiveness no less because of the ancient story involved here; what lies behind the lines is a malignant anecdote reported by Aeschines, Demosthenes' most arduous opponent, in the *On the embassy* 34-6, who ridicules Demosthenes for failing twice to deliver his proem for Philip of Macedon due to stage fright. The classical anecdote is astutely modified to suggest that Demosthenes' collapse was due to extreme fear of Philip, thereby prompting the comparison between Philip and Heraclius, emphasising how the latter endorsed a culture of free speech and flexible artistic expression unlike Philip's austerity.[33]

Nevertheless, the passage's implications for the author's craft have gone unnoticed by modern scholarship. The similarities with the Homeric passage above are instructive, reflecting as they do a progression in Pisides' invective against the ancient orator: Homer's *mytheumata* are now superseded by Demosthenes' pitiable cowardice, with Pisides expressing moral assessment, which is much sharper than a simple accusation of constructing poetic fabrications. In addition, the passage is shot through with irony (of a sort we have not encountered in the

[30] E.g. L. Tartaglia, *Carmi di Giorgio di Pisidia* (Turin, 1998) 15.
[31] Cf. *In Alypium* 29-32, where the same formulaic expression 'Δημόσθενες πρόελθε' is couched in irony.
[32] Whitby, 'George of Pisidia and the persuasive word'.
[33] See J. D. C. Frendo, 'The poetic achievement of George of Pisidia', in A. Moffat (ed.), *Maistor. Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning*, Byzantina Australiensia 5 (Canberra 1984) 159-87, at 180.

Homeric passage), which is reinforced by Pisides' caustic encouragements towards the petrified Demosthenes: 'step forward with free speech', 'be not now convulsed with fear', 'There is no danger, even should silence come upon you'. Furthermore, the extract concludes with Pisides deploying the technique we have seen used above, stating that this is just a trivial digression that now needs to be brought to a conclusion, so that the emperor's narrative can resume. This strikes me as a kind of *paraleipsis* (*praeteritio*), a rhetorical device aiming to call attention to a point by pretending to disregard it. In my reading, this section is far from an insignificant parenthesis; a) it contributes to Pisides' self-presentation as a fearless, daring public spokesman, b) it suggestively emphasises his own successful rhetorical career as he inveighs against Demosthenes' failure to speak (σιωπὴν) – a recurrent motif later on too, as we shall see –, and c) provides a commentary on the history of the genre by reshaping a powerful setting of *psogos* from antiquity, thus advancing Pisides' professional claims as imperial panegyrist. The next section will explore how Pisides' dialogue with Homer and Demosthenes prepares the ground for his more elaborate engagement with Plutarch, in which the elements of authorial invective and self-advertisement are developed.[34]

**V. Classical Invective and Self-advertisement in the *Heraclias*: Plutarch attacked**

The *Heraclias*, chronicling the emperor's exploits from the overthrow of Phocas to the defeat of Chosroes II in 628, glorifies Heraclius' victories both at home and abroad. The poem has been examined for its historical merits as well as for its various rhetorical contributions to the eulogy of its dedicatee, however, as will be shown below, it is an important source for its author's self-fashioning too. Interestingly, such indications of self-awareness as there are can be detected in sections that place considerable emphasis on the inferiority of ancient comparative paradigms and, in close connection with that, on the professed artistic and literary impotence of ancient intellectuals.

Following a highly celebratory proem in which the celestial bodies are described as rejoicing at Chosroes' death, Pisides embarks upon Heraclius' eulogy by apostrophising Homer in order to castigate him, this time for praising Heracles as a god, something that Pisides considers 'pointless' (ἀσκόπως, *Her*. I, 65-6, Pertusi 243). As he goes on to explain, it is entirely unreasonable to admire Heracles as the saviour of the world simply for having slayed

[34] For praise as self-advertisement in Themistius, see R. J. Penella, 'The Rhetoric of praise in the private orations of Themistius', in T. Hägg and P. Rousseau (eds), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley 2000) 194-208, esp. 195-8.

a boar and suffocated a lion.[35] The true redeemer of humanity, Pisides amends, is Heraclius, who succeeded in the unsurmountable task of recovering all the cities taken by the Persians (*Her*. I, 67-79, Pertusi 243). The refined wordplay involving Heracles and Heraclius, and the name of the poem itself, *Heraclias*, which echoes *Ilias* in its form and high epic-tone style, both frame Pisides' judgmental observations against Homer, so that the entire passage betrays that Pisides' (ab)use of Homer is not limited to the mere praise of his subject, but is also aimed at negotiating Pisides' superiority in relation to his epic predecessor: unlike Homer, Pisides is in a unique position to construct truly meaningful 'epic panegyrics',[36] with a powerful and immediate impact on the emperor, thereby far surpassing Homer's 'pointless' accounts.

And Heraclius' laudation as a framework for Pisides' self-definition does not stop here. Just after presenting the emperor as a Noah of the new world (*Her*. I, 84-92, Pertusi 244), Pisides introduces the subject of the contemporary lack of appropriate artistic and rhetorical validation of Heraclius' grandeur, using ancient exempla:

> Now where is Apelles, where is the speaking Demosthenes, so that the former can give a body to your labours (ὅπως ὁ μέν σου σωματώσας τοὺς πόνους), and the other expressing the strength of your thought (ὁ δ᾽αὖ τὰ νεῦρα τῶν λογισμῶν ἁρμόσας), can raise up your living image? (ἔμπνουν ἀναστήσωσι τὴν σὴν εἰκόνα;)
>
> *Her*. I, 93-6, Pertusi 244

On the primary level, the main aim of this passage is to highlight Heraclius' bodily and intellectual magnificence that cannot easily be described in art and public speech, hence the reference to Apelles, a renowned painter, and Demosthenes, Apelles' contemporary and orator *par excellence*. On another level, however, Pisides seems to be at work here, reassuring the present emperor that his current spokesman, i.e. Pisides himself, is the most accomplished person to prolong his immortality, a notion that the emperor would have duly enjoyed.[37]

The inadequacy of orators in capturing the full extent of Heraclius' prominence is consistently linked to the notion of silence mentioned above. In another apostrophe, this time

[35] A point reiterated in *On Bonus*, 1-9, Pertusi 163.
[36] The term seems to have been suggested by Th. Nissen's study, 'Historisches Epos und Panegyrikos in der Spätantike,' *Hermes* 75.3 (1940) 298-325. It is also used by Pertusi; it is labelled 'epos encomiastico', in Pertusi (ed. and transl.), *Giorgio di Pisidia*, 32-7. Cf. the recent study by C. Ware, *Claudian and the Roman Epic Tradition* (Cambridge; New York 2012), which examines the manipulation of the epic genre in Claudian's corpus.
[37] Cf. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine poetry*, 38-9 on the opportunistic relationship between poet and patron.

to Scipio Africanus, one of the greatest Roman generals and military strategists of all time, Pisides bids him be silent (σίγησον, *Her*. I, 97, Pertusi 244). The language of the apostrophe from line 102 to 109 seems to encapsulate feelings of public resentment against Heraclius,[38] which are, however, strongly disputed by Pisides in his response. The section imagines Heraclius as the accused in a law court with Pisides acting as his defence lawyer:

> You have a testimony, but not suspicion (οὐκ ἔχεις ὑποψίαν). You have countless arrows that testify for you (μαρτυροῦντά σοι); you have the wounds, your natural allies (συνεργοὺς ἐμφύτους); you have battles, your eloquent public advocates (εὐφραδεῖς συνηγόρους); you have fights, your noble shorthand writers (εὐγενεῖς ταχυγράφους), who will write the law not in spurious characters, but in purple letters, as is appropriate: for your own blood will suffice for the scribes (τοῖς γραφεῦσιν ἀρκέσει).[39]
>
> *Her*. I, 102-9, Pertusi 244-5

Pisides' commentators have rightly emphasised that the passage in question is impenetrable, suggesting that the most reasonable approach is to understand it in the light of Pisides' rhetorical artifice.[40] In addition to the legal vocabulary, which starts back in the obscure lines 97 to 101 that precede the quoted section, it is interesting that Pisides continues to use similar legal terms in the latter, all given in the Greek original above. Closer examination shows that most of these terms are ambivalent in meaning, liable to refer to an author as much as to an advocate: the 'testimony' can implicitly refer to Pisides' own text testifying to Heraclius' feats in the face of any public disbelief; similarly Pisides could well be Heraclius' 'natural ally', his 'eloquent public advocate' and 'noble shorthand writer', self-promotional statements consolidating his professional role at the imperial palace, especially by emphasising a new service to the emperor this time, that of Pisides as Heraclius' public defender. This is particularly pertinent if one considers the exact details of the comparison with Scipio; Scipio was acclaimed as a hero by the Roman populace for his significant contributions to the struggle

[38] The reasons behind this staged questioning of the emperor are unclear; the later dating of the *Heraclias* (post 628) makes it less likely that what is being hinted at here is Heraclius' incestuous union with his niece Martina in 623.

[39] There seems to be a sophisticated wordplay with Plutarch's *Solon* 17.3-4 here: διὸ Δημάδης ὕστερον εὐδοκίμησεν εἰπών, ὅτι δι' αἵματος, οὐ διὰ μέλανος, τοὺς νόμους ὁ Δράκων ἔγραψεν. I thank Delfim Leão for bringing this passage to my attention.

[40] Pertusi (ed. and transl.), *Giorgio di Pisidia*, 266-7, Tartaglia (ed. and trans.), *Carmi di Giorgio di Pisidia*, 200-1, n. 27; cf. Whitby, 'A New Image for a New Age', at 205, n. 46 with further references.

against the Carthaginians, but later on such praise was offset by charges of bribery and treason brought by a number of his upper-class peers. Distraught at the unfair accusations, Scipio eventually abandoned politics. The inference behind the comparison with Scipio is not just a tribute to Heraclius, whose personal merits – his wounds and blood, as Pisides stresses – render him immune to vile charges of any kind. Pisides' contribution to the protection of the emperor's public profile is also strongly emphasised.

Plutarch is introduced into the discussion to corroborate once again Pisides' competent enacting of his role as imperial spokesman. The direct apostrophe to Plutarch is associated with the familiar by now theme of silence, which in this case too anticipates the concept of verbal ineffectiveness that is imposed on the ancient biographer:[41]

> Πλούταρχε, σίγα, τοὺς Παραλλήλους γράφων·
> τί πολλὰ κάμνεις καὶ στρατηγοὺς συλλέγεις;
> τὸν δεσπότην ἔκφραζε, καὶ γράφεις ὅλους.
>
> Plutarch, remain silent, you who wrote the *Parallel Lives*. Why are you tiring yourself collecting [lives of] generals? You should describe my monarch, and you have described them all.
>
> *Her*. I, 110-12, Pertusi 245

Two aspects merit attention here. Firstly, Pisides' bitter remark that Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* is nothing more than a pointless endeavour that should be doomed to silence, and a task that does not have a pay-off for its author consonant with the effort it required. Unlike the hitherto opaque or semi-opaque literary criticisms we have seen, this one here is painfully direct to the extent that it disparages Plutarch and his work. Secondly, Pisides' criticism is enhanced by his intentional selection of oblique vocabulary: Plutarch is said to be 'collecting' lives of generals, with the verb συλλέγω insinuating a process of compilation rather than illumination. The implied comparison with Pisides' own working method is part of the point, suggesting as it does that Pisides is following none of Plutarch's ways with respect to casual and perhaps

[41] The theme of silence imposed on ancient authors seems to have been a standard one among Byzantine writers. E.g. an epitaph epigram addressed to the late Byzantine scholar George Pachymeres (1242-1310) penned by Manuel Philes (c. 1275-1345) reflects the competitive relationship between Pachymeres and Aristotle through the theme of silence: 'Do you still boast, oh Aristotle? / Alas! You should close your own books and hide in silence, / because the skilful teacher of your doctrines / had an excellent and admirable end.' (Ἀριστότελες, ἆρα κομπάζεις ἔτι; / Καὶ μὴν κρυβῆναι δεῖ σε καὶ σιγὴν ἄγειν, / Κλείσαντα σαυτοῦ δυστυχῶς τὰ βιβλία. / Ὁ γὰρ κατὰ σὲ τεχνικὸς διδάσκαλος / Ἄριστον ἐκτήσατο καὶ φίλον τέλος), Philes, *Carm*. 39, 33-7, ed. E. Miller, *Manuelis Philae Carmina*, vols. 1-2 (Paris 1855-7), v. 2, p. 402.

uncritical collection of material. But, of course, the need to avoid appearing insolent before one's patron leads Pisides to shift the focus more explicitly onto the emperor's praise by explaining that Plutarch's weaknesses resulted from the fact that he never had the chance to have Heraclius as his subject, a trope we have also observed in the example with Homer, *Exp. Pers.* I, 66-82, in the previous section.[42]

It is noteworthy, however, that Pisides' fictional encounter with Plutarch continues for quite a few lines that display a certain literary scepticism, specifically with regard to Plutarch's treatment of Alexander the Great:

> ἤδη γὰρ ὁ Πλούταρχος ἐξᾶραι θέλων
> τὸν τοῦ Φιλίππου καὶ πρὸς ὕψος ἁρπάσαι,
> ἔσπευδε δεῖξαι πᾶσιν ὡς ἐναντίαι (115)
> κατεῖχον αὐτὸν ἀντιπράττουσαι τύχαι·
> οὐκ ἠγνόει γάρ, δεινὸς ὢν λογογράφος,
> ὡς εἴπερ αὐτὸν εὐτυχοῦντα συγγράφοι,
> δώσει τὸ νικᾶν ἀντ' ἐκείνου τῇ τύχῃ·
> ἀλλ' εἶχεν, ὦ Πλούταρχε, τῆς τύχης πλέον
> ὁ σὸς στρατηγὸς δραστικοὺς τοὺς συμμάχους. (120)
>
> For Plutarch, wishing to praise Philip's son (sc. Alexander) and raise him up to great heights, rushed to show to everybody that opposing fortunes, which fought against him, controlled him. Because he knew very well, being a skilful historian, that if he had described him as a fortunate man he would have assigned his victory to his luck and not to Alexander himself. But, Plutarch, your leader had at his side energetic soldiers much more than luck.
>
> *Her*. I, 113-21, Pertusi 245

In similar vein, these lines are dominated by derogatory overtones in respect of Plutarch's methodology and literary value, or at least an element of ambiguity, enough to give Pisides plausible deniability: Plutarch is depicted as being in favour of his subjects so that he deploys

[42] Pisides uses direct apostrophes in a positive way only when admiring Paul; e.g. 'ὦ Παῦλε, μύστα τῶν ἀπορρήτων λόγων', *In restitutionem sanctae crucis* 39, Pertusi 227; 'Παῦλε, τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν μεγαλοφωνότατε ῥῆτορ', *Laudatio sancti Anastasii Persae* 7, ed. B. Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du viie siècle*, vol. 1 (Paris 1992).

his biographical material incautiously (he 'rushed') and exaggerates the merits of his heroes (he 'elevated' Alexander 'up to great heights').[43] On the other hand, Pisides' labelling of Plutarch as 'δεινὸς λογογράφος' should be subject to more suspicious readings due to the ambiguity of the term, which can mean either a prose-writer, a historian, but also a professional speech-writer as a term of reproach,[44] most probably echoing Pisides' previous accusation of Plutarch as providing subjective, self-interested accounts.

As a matter of fact, the abusive connotations of the term λογογράφος appear more clearly in a direct polemic which Pisides levelled against the Neoplatonic philosopher Proclus in his religious piece *Hexaemeron*. In a deeply obnoxious section, Pisides venerates God as the admirable creator of the world (*Hexaem*. 55-59), while reprimanding Proclus and with him the whole group of pagan philosophers for the views they held regarding the uncreated nature of the universe. Full of irony and targeted refutation, Pisides calls Proclus a λογογράφος, and indeed uses exactly the same line applied to Plutarch above (οὐκ ἠγνόεις γάρ, δεινὸς ὢν λογογράφος, *Hexaem*. 71). The rest of the numerous and ferocious accusations against Proclus in the same context are conducive to the interpretation that λογογράφος is a strategic term in Pisides' arsenal, used to undermine the value of antique authorities.[45] Another such strategic tool is the imposition of silence, which Pisides applies to his censure of Proclus too, as a way of vilifying pagan philosophy.[46]

Additionally, the use of the term λογογράφος in the *Heraclias* passage cited above also makes more sense when considering the fact that Pisides' attack against Plutarch's discussion of Alexander seems to be based on Plutarch's early declamation *On the fortune or the virtue of Alexander* rather than on the biography of the hero in the *Life of Alexander*. In this rhetorical treatise Plutarch aims to refute those who believed that Alexander's success was due to his luck, and he does that by means of a threefold argument: a) by maintaining that Alexander was far from fortunate, since he experienced indescribable setbacks in the course of his life (e.g. *De fort. Alex*. 327A-E, 333D-F, 340E-F, 341B, 344A-B), b) by emphasising that, even amidst setbacks, Alexander would always overcome his problems because he was philosophically minded (e.g. *De fort. Alex*. 327E, 331E, 332A, 332C,), c) by demonstrating that, even in cases

[43] Cf. F. Ahl, 'The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome', *American Journal of Philology* 105 (1984) 174-208.
[44] LSJ s.v.
[45] *Hexaem*. 60-79. Pisides' polemic in the *Hexaemeron* encompasses Aristotle (*Hexaem*. 546-7 and 583-8 in all cases accused of vainglory); cf. Hippocrates and Galen in *Hexaem*. 931-6; Galen also in 1117-18 and 1499-1501; Euclid in 1147-50. Edition by F. Gonnelli, *Giorgio di Pisidia, Esamerone* (Pisa 1998) reproduced in Tartaglia (ed. and transl.), *Carmi di Giorgio di Pisidia*.
[46] 'σιγῶσι Πρόκλοι καὶ λαλοῦσιν ἀγρόται' with the structure of the phrase reflecting the controversy between pagan and Christian authors; in *Hexaem*. 80.

in which Alexander would seem to have benefitted from incidents of good fortune, he knew exactly how to make wise use of them, since he was virtuous (e.g. *De fort. Alex*. 339A, esp. 340A-C; cf. 344D). In light of this, Pisides' interpretation of the content of *On the fortune or the virtue of Alexander* seems appropriate in its essentials, if less so in his evaluation of Plutarch's motives for his rhetorical argumentation. A judgmental tone is not hard to recognise, and it is indeed made manifest in the second and final direct address to Plutarch; here Pisides openly disagrees with Plutarch's thesis that Alexander's success was due to his virtue, contributing the dissenting view that it was by and large the result of his efficient army ('But, Plutarch, your leader had at his side energetic soldiers much more than luck'). Pisides' shrewd revision of Plutarch's treatise taps into a detail not to be found in a similar way in Plutarch, whose references to Alexander's army – although on occasions laudatory – are not directly linked to the hero's success (e.g. *De fort. Alex*. 342E; cf. *Alex*. 42.6, 47.1-2).[47]

Moreover, Plutarch's treatise is structured around the contrast between luck and virtue, whereas Pisides' summary of the Plutarchan treatise stresses the antithesis between luck and military prowess. This, of course, seems perfectly permissible in a praise of a military emperor, but it also appears to be in line with the ensuing comparison between Alexander and Heraclius, in which the latter's relationship with his army is extensively highlighted, particularly through Pisides' focus on Heraclius' verbal communication with his soldiers.[48] Heraclius again wins the day in the comparison with his ancient counterpart, here by being depicted as using encouragement and persuasion so that he was eventually able, Pisides tells us, to convert his soldiers' cowardly natures into an acquired state of enduring bravery (*Her*. I, 122-30, Pertusi 245-6).[49] The educational role assigned to Heraclius by Pisides is couched in highly Aristotelian terminology of training and habituation being second nature to the learner (esp. *Her*. I, 124, Pertusi 245: φύσις τε λοιπὸν ἐξ ἔθους ἐγίνετο; cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1147a). All the above show Pisides' novel use of the commonplace *synkrisis* with Alexander; Eusebius too in his praise of the emperor Constantine uses Alexander as a comparative model for

[47] The theme of Alexander's luck is also dealt with in Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*, 17.1-4, 20.4, 26.7. As regards the theme of the army's contribution to Alexander's success, Plutarch even describes incidents in which his relationship with the army experienced tension: e.g. *Alex*. 57.1-2, 62.

[48] On military tactics and the training of Heraclius' army, see Rance, 'Simulacra Pugnae'.

[49] In *Exp. Pers*. III, 48-53, Pertusi 117-18, the comparison between Alexander and Heraclius again favours the latter: 'You then, o sovereign, dared to implement a plan more daring than that of Alexander, but without danger (ἀλλὰ κινδύνου δίχα). Not because you did not want to face the danger, but because you did not want to succumb to recklessness: a commander is safe and yet even safer not when bold, but when wise'. The implication here is that unlike Alexander, Heraclius is considerate and not subject to the passions of recklessness. Plutarch does refer to the risks Alexander faced but only in passing (e.g. *Alex*. 32.4; *De fort. Alex*. 342D) without insinuating that he was overbold, which makes Pisides' reworking more obvious.

Constantine's kingship (*The Life of the blessed Emperor Constantine*, ch. 7-8), but the focus stays unequivocally on the emperor's eulogy without any engagement with the sources for Alexander's life and career, and without any mention of the role of luck that is so dominant in Pisides' passage.

Pisides is keen to discuss further the role of luck in the interpretation of the careers of great generals, and so he cites the anecdote about the general Timotheus (4th BC), whom the Athenian painters depicted sleeping in the middle of the battle with Fortune controlling his hands, rendering him a puppet (*Her*. I, 131-4, Pertusi 246). Pisides addresses those painters of the past, advocating new ways of representing the theme of fortune artistically:

> δέον γὰρ αὐτοῖς νῦν ἐναντίως γράφειν,
> τὴν μὲν Τύχην σοι πανταχοῦ κοιμωμένην,
> μᾶλλον δὲ τοῖς σοῖς ἀντερίζουσαν πόνοις,
> σὲ δὲ στρατηγὸν διπλοκινδύνου μάχης
> καὶ πρὸς τύχας καμόντα καὶ πρὸς βαρβάρους.
> But now it would be appropriate for them to paint the picture in the opposite direction, with Fortune in your case sleeping everywhere or seeking rather to oppose your efforts, and with you, the supreme leader, fighting your perilous battle on two fronts: the one against Fortune and the one against the barbarians.
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> *Her*. I, 135-9, Pertusi 246

The passage is then taken up by a discussion of how Heraclius' military policy is immune to fortune, but a couple of points are worth emphasising here. With the reference to the artistic depiction of Fortune coming just after its rhetorical treatment in the light of *On the fortune or virtue of Alexander*, Pisides appears to have pretensions to control both art and literature in praising Heraclius as the paradigm of an emperor who had defeated any misfortune. Again, imperial praise is subordinated to the self-projection of the panegyrist: intriguingly, the story about Timotheus shares common vocabulary with the treatment of the same story in Plutarch's *Life of Sulla* 6.3-4 (indicated in bold), which seems to be Pisides' most likely source.[50] By

[50] Plutarch, *Sull*. 6.3: 'But he (sc. Sulla) did not feel about this as Timotheus the son of Conon did, who, when his adversaries ascribed his successes to Fortune, and had him represented in a painting as lying asleep, while Fortune cast her net about the cities, was rudely angry with those who had done this, because, as he thought, they were robbing him of the glory due to his exploits, and said to the people once, on returning from a campaign in which he was thought to have been successful: "In this campaign, at least, men of Athens, Fortune has no share".' (ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔπαθε ταὐτὸ **Τιμοθέῳ** τῷ τοῦ Κόνωνος, ὅς, εἰς **τὴν τύχην** αὐτοῦ τὰ κατορθώματα τῶν ἐχθρῶν τιθεμένων καὶ **γραφόντων** ἐν πίναξι; **κοιμώμενον** ἐκεῖνον, **τὴν** δὲ **Τύχην** δικτύῳ **τὰς πόλεις** περιβάλλουσαν, ἀγροικιζόμενος

introducing a new guise to the Plutarchan intertext, Pisides proposes a radical disconnect between luck and imperial success. This is reflected in the details Pisides eliminated from his source, the most important of which is that, in Plutarch's version, Timotheus is said to be infuriated by the fact that his enemies depicted him as a victim of fortune, while Sulla rejoiced in the good fortune he received (*Sull*. 6.2). Pisides' retexturing not only presents Heraclius as emotionally unaffected by fortuitous events, but also classifies fortune with Heraclius' enemies, right next to the barbarians, in order to dismiss it as a factor of imperial panegyric. This presents a stark contrast with Menander's suggestion to authors of imperial speeches, who are instead advised to present their subjects as fortunate (e.g. 371, 30-2, ed. Russell and Wilson 82; 376, 24-31, ed. Russell and Wilson 92). It is also at odds with Pisides' recurrent emphasis on the instability of fortune in his *On the vanity of life* and *On human life*, thereby attesting his rhetorical experimentation particularly in relation to his sense of imperial praise and self-praise.

This section has lent weight to the idea that Pisides was critical in reviewing Plutarchan material. His aggressive encounters with the ancient biographer suggest that the latter is introduced only to be contemptuously dismissed. The rhetoric of Pisides' dismissal of Plutarch may be aptly elucidated by two combined passages from Michael Psellus – an author who admired Pisides as can been seen from his comparative treatment with Euripides –, and particularly from two extracts of praise and blame that are also facilitated through references to ancient authors. In Psellos' first panegyric oration for the emperor Constantine Monomachos, the emperor's public speaking is likened to that of Demosthenes, Plato, Herodotus, Pindar and Homer – to mention only a few of the names from the long list of authors summoned; still, the comparison between the ancients and the present subject is not based upon any scornful rejection of the classical predecessors, and references to them only serve to enhance the reader's impression of the emperor's rhetorical abilities.[51] An example of clear abuse of antiquity's representatives is found in a poem addressed to an arrogant monk, whom the author now attacks for being conceited about his intellectual learning. In this case Psellos employs strong irony to reinforce themes familiar in Pisides' invective, most notably the

καὶ χαλεπαίνων πρὸς τοὺς ταῦτα ποιοῦντας ὡς ἀποστερούμενος ὑπ᾽ αὐτῶν τῆς ἐπὶ ταῖς πράξεσι δόξης, ἔφη ποτὲ πρὸς τόν δῆμον, ἐπανήκων ἐκ στρατείας εὖ κεχωρηκέναι δοκούσης, 'ἀλλὰ ταύτης γε τῆς στρατείας οὐδέν, ἄνδρες **Ἀθηναῖοι**, τῇ τύχῃ μέτεστι.'). Pisides, *Her*. I, 131-134, Pertusi 246:
ποῦ τῶν **Ἀθηνῶν** οἱ πρὸ τούτου ζωγράφοι
οἱ τὸν στρατηγὸν **Τιμόθεον** ἐν ταῖς μάχαις
**κοιμώμενον** γράφοντες, εἶτα **τὴν Τύχην**
ἐκεῖθεν ἔνθεν ἐνδιδοῦσαν **τὰς πόλεις**;

[51] Michael Psellus' *Oration panegyricae* 1 for the emperor Constantine Monomachos, l.151-68, ed. G. T. Dennis, *Michael Psellos, Orationes panegyricae* (Stuttgart 1994).

injunction of silence upon Homer, for instance, and the notion of the literary defeat of Plutarch, among others (Poem 68, l. 29-70).

**VI. Conclusions**

The aim of this study has been to compensate for the one-sided focus on imperial adulation as the main purpose of Pisides' encomia, giving prominence to the poet's self-advertisement in the context of his panegyrics. As we have seen, Pisides makes use of various strategies for conjuring up self-reflective commentaries on his poetry, in order to praise it as a startling form of poetic expression that revises its antique formative sources and aspires to establish its own place in the newly emerging Byzantine literature. One of these strategies is the dialogue with ancient authorities, and most specifically with the main exponents of epic, rhetoric and biography of rulers, i.e. Homer, Demosthenes and Plutarch respectively. This is a novel approach compared to earlier panegyrics: e.g. Libanus' *Oration* 12 to the emperor Julian, Claudian's first speech against Rufinus or Procopius' panegyric to the emperor Anastasios do not encompass any direct apostrophes to or dialogue with classical authors; not even a text that has been long suggested as a possible model for Pisides' panegyric, namely Paul the Silentiary's *ekphrasis* of Hagia Sophia treating the praise of the emperor Justinian (921-58) and the patriarch Eutychius (978-1029), does that.[52] Apart from consolidating Pisides' rhetoric of self-praise, addressing the authors of antiquity lends vividness and a sense of immediacy to it. The same holds true for his provision of contemporary nuances in his belittlement of classical authors, which is not monolithic or formulaic but tailored to the needs of his self-promotion.

The subversive tone of Pisides' panegyric, which, it has been argued, is integral to the construction of his personal commentary on his poetic art, is nicely reflected in another direct address, this time to the personified Rome, at the beginning of the second cento of the *Heraclias*. Rome is ordered to reach an impartial judgment as to which general from the vast group of antiquity's generals Heraclius can be compared with (*Her*. II, 1-3, Pertusi 251). The nexus of a terse rhetorical question, Rome's *prosopopoeia* as a *topos* in encomia, and the apostrophe marked by imperatives prepares the ground for the affirmative reply Pisides puts in the mouth of Rome: 'He should be classified on his own … no one can be compared with him' (μόνος τετάχθω, …, οὐκ ἔχων ἴσον. *Her*. II, 4, Pertusi 251). Given the many efficient comparisons with military figures discussed in the context of the two panegyrics for Heraclius,

[52] Cf. Frendo, 'The poetic achievement', 163-6.

their explicit rejection here cannot not be taken at face value, as it would be absurd to assume that Pisides suddenly opposes that medium that had enabled him to build his encomia.[53] True, Rome's answer does exalt the emperor, who comes off as incomparable, simply the epitome of military excellence, but it is also suggestive of the nature and purpose of Pisides' imperial praise: through his careful analogies with mythological and historical figures and his constructive connection with classical material, Pisides has created a work of adulation for a distinguished emperor. Unique panegyric poetry is put to the service of a unique emperor, with Pisides too apparently forming a category by himself, both in his rhetorical repertoire and the emulation of earlier peers, especially as seen in his imagined addresses to Homer, Demosthenes and Plutarch.

Pisides' acute modifications of ancient authorities tie in very well with the distinctive place critics have assigned him in Byzantine literature. He has been called 'the first Byzantine court poet'[54] and 'a man of extraordinarily wide literary culture and high intelligence',[55] which all square with the bold self-depiction we have noted throughout; while it has been rightly emphasised that he 'appears to stand apart from the high-brow poets of the sixth century with their affected and apologetic classicism', since his own mode of expression 'looks forward to the new and explicitly Byzantine literature'.[56] The cited remark is mainly based on Pisides' revolutionary preference for the iambic metre over the bombastic, classicising hexameter, and his confidence in fusing the sacred with the profane without any need for self-apology, but I hope to have shown that his exultant denunciation of classical characters and texts is another major feature of his work that anticipates some of the truly innovative aspects of later Byzantine literature, including poetic independence and self-confidence.[57]

Earlier and contemporary panegyric conventions dictated that the eulogy for the living emperor should be strengthened by the vituperation for the emperor's deceased foes.[58] In Pisides' hands this rhetorical convention stretches well beyond that; it is adjusted to include the vituperation of his own 'deceased foes', thus serving the validation of his poetry not just before his patron, it seems, but in the context of a more grand, long-term personal programme.

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[53] *Pace* Whitby, 'A New Image for a New Age', 205-6.
[54] W. Hörander, 'Court poetry: questions of motifs, structure and function', in Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium*, 75-85, at 76.
[55] Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a world crisis*, 28.
[56] Whitby, 'George of Pisidia's Presentation', 172.
[57] Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a world crisis*, 31-2 argues convincingly for his taking an independent stance in the context of his panegyric as opposed to the view of him as a faithful mouthpiece of the emperor. E.g. p. 32: 'This suggests that George was no imperial stooge, that the tone and dominant themes of his political poetry were of his choosing, and that he preferred at times to adopt an original line of his own.'
[58] Frendo, 'History and Panegyric', 150.

That might well explain the motif of the failure of antique art and literature in praising exceptional leaders and especially the recurrent theme of the injunction of silence upon classical writers, one of Pisides' chosen themes which aspires to veil earlier epic, oratory, and historical biography with silence upon the advent of his own work. To modern tastes, that would surely seem audacious and over-confident, but not for a poet with a declaredly high opinion of himself, who authored the self-aggrandising line 'Pisides is by nature a great author' (ὁ Πισσίδης πέφυκε συγγραφεὺς μέγας).[59] Of course, the line comes from a brief poem addressed to himself (εἰς ἑαυτόν) and not a piece of public recitation, where such explicit self-praise would have been considered unpleasant and morally ambiguous, as we know from a range of rhetorical treatises documenting similar reactions. But it is important that, rather than opting for a completely different rhetorical approach to avoiding the dangers of public περιαυτολογία (the 'discourse about oneself') by insisting, for example, on disclosure of one's intentions alongside self-defence, in his staged episodes with ancient authors, Pisides preferred a concealed and highly allusive promotion of his poetry, confidently dispensing with modest self-apologetics that would have been so much at odds with his supercilious authorial personality.

[59] Cited in Pertusi (ed. and transl.), *Giorgio di Pisidia*, 14.