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IMAGINING PRE-MODERN IMPERIALISM:  
THE LETTERS OF BYZANTINE IMPERIAL AGENTS OUTSIDE THE  
METROPOLE

By

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Imagining Pre-Modern Imperialism:  
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This dissertation examines the letter collections of Byzantine agents in order to consider how Byzantine epistolary literature was used to project Byzantine imperial power in non-Byzantine or disputed zones. It is comparative and focuses on two loci of Byzantine imperial interests outside of Byzantium proper: the Eastern frontier and Bulgaria. Letters and other literary texts in both Greek and Classical Armenian are used to investigate Byzantine/non-Byzantine relations. The dissertation describes acculturation and normative images of Byzantines and non-Byzantines, as well as the maintenance of those images via epistolary constructions, placing this form of literary production in the context of both political history and the use of literature as a communicative act of cultural maintenance. Three case studies are presented in geographic and cultural comparison. The first case study examines the letter collection of an early-10<sup>th</sup> century envoy, the *magistros* Leo Choïrosphaktes and the Bulgarian tsar Symeon the Great, and discusses the use of epistolary as an attempt to maintain cultural superiority. The second case study examines the correspondence network of an eleventh-century Byzantine general on the

Eastern frontier, Nikephoros Ouranos, and discusses epistolary as a method of bringing Constantinopolitan values and culture outside of Constantinople. The final case study the correspondence in Classical Armenian of Grigor Magistros Pahvaluni, whose letter collection can be used to consider the mentality of a non-Byzantine person embedded in local, non-Byzantine power structures who acquired a place within Byzantine imperial authority when it became politically impossible to not interact with such authority.



## DEDICATION

*For every friend I've exchanged letters with.*

Particular thanks are owed to Tia Kolbaba, for seven years of exemplary support and advice while supervising this project; Theo van Lint, without whom I would never have been able to read Grigor Magistros; and Margaret Mullett, for encouragement and critique beyond all necessary expectations. Thanks also to the History Department at Rutgers University, the Oriental Institute at Oxford, and especially Dumbarton Oaks, whose library and community supported me in the writing-up process.

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## INTRODUCTION

The 'Byzantine empire' portrayed in normative texts like the *De Administrando Imperio* clearly portrays a Byzantine self-conception which is imperial and universal, a hegemony co-extensive with the entire civilized world which derives from continuity with classical Rome. However, this is indeed a normative vision: even in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, at the height of its re-expansion into the Balkans and Anatolia, Byzantium would not always have the practical control of territory, economy, or culture which characterized the classical Roman imperium. It is thus necessary to question how the imagined landscape of Byzantine imperialism and imperial ideology responds to the actual state of imperial control on the ground. This dissertation explores the idea of 'Byzantine imperialism' through a consideration of the internal thought-worlds of Byzantine imperial agents, particularly those agents who move into the liminal space of the frontier and encounter there non-Byzantine persons. The pressure of the encounter with the foreign – the barbarian, un-Byzantine and uncivilized, persons and cultures by definition outside the *oikumene* – has an effect on the stability of imperial ideology as experienced by these individuals as an image of the world. This is not an elucidation of the nature of Byzantine imperial ideology, nor an exploration of its practical function. Instead it is a consideration of the mentality and individual self-definition of the Byzantine imperial agent, which responds to both ideological and practical pressures. The question is not *how did the Byzantine empire function?*, but rather *how is the image of the empire preserved outside the empire?*

In talking about the preservation of an image of empire, it is necessary to contextualize the authoritative claims of Byzantines outside of Constantinople with their

actual experiences, and then to contrast them with the experiences and authoritative claims of non-Byzantine locals. However, these claims and experiences are not easy to locate. The thought-worlds of medieval people are in general foreign and distant from the contemporary historian, and they are obscured by a scrim of designed self-presentation: the contemporary historian is never the intended audience for a text produced by a Byzantine Roman or any other medieval person. Instead they produce these texts for their own purposes and to accomplish their own goals. Byzantine texts are especially prone to this sort of difficulty, as the Byzantines were consistently engaged in reinforcing a worldview which can, to present-day eyes, look like a deliberate or obscuring fiction.

In light of this problem, this dissertation seeks to investigate the thought-worlds of Byzantine imperial agents through reading the letters which they produced. Selecting the Byzantine letter as a source corpus foregrounds how writing, even personal writing, is a political technology. These personal communications produced by agents of empire were used both to project and to negotiate the presence of Byzantine imperial power in non-Byzantine or disputed zones because they recount and display the internal concerns and ideologies of their writers. The Byzantine letter has often been considered too recursive, elusive, and self-referential to shed much light on Byzantine social and political ‘realities’. However, it is through this very self-referentiality – through exchanging letters which evoke via citation, allusion, and common rhetorical practice a shared education and community between reader and sender – that Byzantine imperial agents express to one another their impressions of the imperial ideology which pervades their presence on the frontier. Specifically, through thinking of the Byzantine letter as an *eidolon* – an image – of the soul of its writer (an idea based in the theoretical and

philosophical underpinnings of Byzantine letter-writing), it is possible to see how letters were used to describe normative images of Byzantines and non-Byzantines, as well as to maintain those images via epistolary constructions. The letter is a site of both acculturation to the pressures of the frontier and defense against those pressures. It shores up normative ideology and simultaneously expresses anxiety over the necessity of this shoring up.

A single letter collection belonging to one individual Byzantine imperial agent would, by the individual and personal nature of epistolary communication, give only one view of Byzantine imperialism on the frontier. Therefore, this dissertation is explicitly comparative, and focuses on two loci of Byzantine imperial interests outside of Byzantium proper: Bulgaria at the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and the Eastern frontier in the late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Three case studies, each dealing with a separate letter collection, provide geographic and cultural points of comparison: an early-10<sup>th</sup> century envoy, the *magistros* Leo Choïrosphaktes; the late-10<sup>th</sup>/ early 11<sup>th</sup>-century provincial administrator and military commander, Nikephoros Ouranos; and the Armenian governor of Byzantine Mesopotamia in the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century, Grigor Magistros Pahvaluni. Each of these persons is a different sort of Byzantine agent: a Byzantine diplomat, a Byzantine provincial administrator, and an Armenian aristocrat who had a Byzantine title and controlled Byzantine territory on the disputed Eastern frontier. Nevertheless, all three produced correspondence which contains contact between Byzantine agents and non-Byzantines, and all three also display networks of 'internal' correspondence – either Byzantine-to-Byzantine or, in the case of Grigor Magistros, Armenian-to-Armenian.

These three case studies show different aspects of the internal response to the challenges of Byzantine imperialism's encounter with the frontier. The letters of Leo Choïrosphaktes, particularly his correspondence with Symeon of Bulgaria, demonstrates how Byzantine letters can express, via the employment of rhetorical tropes and in-group signals, an 'appropriate', *taxis*-respecting vision of the world for its audience, despite external situations which endanger this orderly view. This is the letter as a normalizing instrument which reifies the contrast between Byzantine (civilized) and non-Byzantine (barbarian) space. By contrast, the letters of Nikephoros Ouranos demonstrate how Byzantinity could be maintained in a non-Byzantine or liminal location, by reassembling networks of communication and friendship which had been established within the empire out on its fringes. Here the letter produces cultural continuity. Lastly, in the letters of Grigor Magistros Pahvaluni, which written in Armenian but demonstrating a deep acquaintance with both Greek grammar and Byzantine literary practices, it is possible to see one man negotiating the process of acculturation: in service to Byzantine authority, Grigor nevertheless writes in Armenian to Armenians, but is simultaneously beholden to Greek intellectual and literary cultures. His letters are a window on the internal landscape of foreigners – people whom the Byzantine Romans would call *barbaroi*, no matter what titles they held or how accomplished their Greek – who were inside the Byzantine civil service, and thus compelled to negotiate their own relationships to Byzantine imperial ideology.

While the internal experience of the Byzantine empire – the experience of being a Byzantine or encountering Byzantines in their imperialist capacity on the edge of the empire – is both obscure and sometimes contradictory, letter collections allow the work

of community maintenance and ideological defense to be visible to the historian. In the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, despite – or perhaps because of – great territorial gains, Byzantine imperialism is not stable. Thus, the action of preservation of community and ideology is interesting to the historian, and it is also clearly visible through letter collections.

## 1. BYZANTINE IMPERIALISM IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

When we talk about the polity which emerged from the Eastern Roman Empire as the 'Byzantine Empire', a practice so commonplace to be nearly – but certainly not entirely – without scholarly remark, we make two framing assumptions. Firstly, that there is a medieval polity best referred to as 'Byzantine'. The members of that polity only rarely used a word derived from the name of the pre-Roman town of Byzas to refer themselves and their dominions. Instead, they most often referred back to their sense of continuity with the ancient Roman empire: i.e., οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι (*hoi Rhomaioi*). Secondly, that this polity is in fact an 'empire', having sovereignty over a number of multivalent peoples and cultures. These assumptions are more interrelated than they initially appear. The self-conception of the Byzantines, who called themselves *Romans* and considered their hegemony to be co-extensive with the entire world based on that ancient connection, is an imperial self-conception. The nature of this imperium – and whether or not it functioned in a way which is recognizable to modern historians as 'imperial' – is complex. Nevertheless, there is an indubitable strain of universalizing imperial ideology in Byzantine political thought, one which is rooted in perceived continuity with the classical Roman model. 'Perceived' is as significant here as 'continuity'. Byzantium would not always, or even often, have the practical control of territory, economy, or culture which characterized the classical Roman imperium, but the ideological presentation of Byzantine hegemony by the Byzantines themselves suggests that ideas of God-given, universal rule were never entirely absent from the Byzantine experience. They are particularly present when the Byzantines encountered non-Byzantine cultures and modes of life.



Any definition of empire and imperialism must deal with a multiplicity of interactions between imperial polities and subordinated polities. These interactions fundamentally deal with questions of sovereignty. Michael Doyle's classic *Empires* suggests that a functional definition for empire is behavioral: "effective control, whether formal or informal, of a subordinated society by an imperial society."<sup>1</sup> However, such a definition is extremely broad, and does not differentiate between formal sovereignty and informal sovereignty. Under formal sovereignty, the imperial society directly controls the political decision-making of the subordinate society and is thus able to exploit the resources (economic, cultural, and military) of that society through the mechanisms of the state. By contrast, under informal sovereignty the imperial society's influence over the decision-making of the subordinate society is exercised by cultural or economic supremacy. Nevertheless, some of Doyle's definition for empire forms a base schematic for empire which is useful in considering Byzantine imperialism: empire as a *relationship*, whether formal or informal, "in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society."<sup>2</sup>

This definition is incidentally useful in pointing toward the essential instability of empire. If empire is a relationship with an unequal power balance between two polities, then *an empire* may have a multiplicity of such relationships with various subordinate societies on multiple borders. Each of these relationships is negotiated separately. Multiplicity requires a shift in focus from uniform questions of sovereignty to those of imagined or *efficacious* control: what counts as imperial behavior? Further, what counts

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<sup>1</sup> Michael W. Doyle, *Empires*. Cornell Studies in Comparative History. (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1986), 30.

<sup>2</sup> Doyle, *Empires*, 45.

as *effective* rather than *failed* imperial behavior? Direct employment of the resources of the subordinate society is not necessarily required; cultural or economic *influence* is also an imperial behavior.

This conception of empire is necessarily composite, made of, as Karen Barkey suggests in her analysis of the Ottoman empire, "multivalent, networked, vertical, and horizontal linkages and the malleable compacts established between state and social actors."<sup>3</sup> It is about the negotiation of authority between a central political power and many differentiated entities. This representation highlights the instability of the imagined imperial narrative at the edges of empire by pointing out the essential unevenness of medieval imperial authority, particularly far away from the metropole. Unevenness is, however, problematic for a consideration of Byzantine imperial authority, as Byzantium's own ideology of imperium is universalizing, emphasizing the cultural and religious hegemony of their empire over all other peoples.

Universal empire – as a general category describing a *type* of imperial ideology rather than the practical efficacy of a particular polity – is an ideal model for how Byzantine power was promulgated. A universal empire can be defined as a "hierarchical conception of rulers and statehood", i.e. a conglomerate of subordinated territories at different degrees of submission which might include directly controlled territories, client states, and distant kings. These people and polities might only be *symbolically* beneath the emperor, expressing their subordination by gifts and embassies.<sup>4</sup> The Byzantine

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<sup>3</sup> Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5-9, 15, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, "'Elephant of India': universal empire through time and across cultures", in *Universal Empire*, eds. Bang and Kołodziejczyk, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 11-12. See also J.L. Hevia, *Cherishing*

Romans considered their empire to be "coextensive with the civilized universe".<sup>5</sup> This is a primary characteristic of universal empires, which justify their rule as an expression of correct cosmic order. Here is the *oikoumene*, a term which has gained a certain cachet amongst world historians, who recognize that the concept of the 'inhabited' world – the world which contains imperial citizens and those non-citizens who recognize the authority of the empire – being coterminous with the 'civilized' universe well-describes multiple pre-modern imperial systems.<sup>6</sup> Thus the emperor of a universal empire rules in accordance with the forces of the cosmos: his rule is moral and divine as well as natural.<sup>7</sup> Therefore deviation from strict alignment with cosmic forces on the emperor's part does not destabilize the *empire* but instead disqualifies that emperor from rule, a subject which will be significant in the Byzantine case below. These linked ideological arguments – the

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*Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), chapter 5; A. Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: a comparative historical analysis* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2009), chapter 12.

<sup>5</sup> Dmitri Obolensky. *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500-1453* (1971; repr. London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 272-3.

<sup>6</sup> See P. Brummett, "Imagining the Early Modern Ottoman Space, from World History to Piri Reis," in Aksan and Goffman, eds., *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 20-4, 56-8; Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and Hisotry in a World Civilization*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) I, 109-10, for the world-historical use of 'ecumene'. For practical examples, the Ottoman sultan described as "the prosperous padishah of the inhabited portion of the earth" (*sa'adetlu padishah-I rub'-I meskun*) in an address from the Crimean Khan Islam III Giray in 1649, discussed in Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania: International Diplomacy on the European Periphery (15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century). A Study of Peace Treaties Followed By Annotated Documents* (Leiden, 2011), 959-63; Aelius Aristides, *To Rome*, chapters 9-10, 28-9, 31, 33, and 61, for descriptions of the Roman empire as a world-empire ruling the oecumene.

<sup>7</sup> See D.A. Howard, "Genre in Myth in the Ottoman Advice for Kings Literature", in *The Early Modern Ottomans: remapping the empire*, ed. V.H. Aksan and D. Goffman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 137-66; C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); C. Noreña, "The Public Communication of the Emperor's Virtues," *Journal of Roman Studies* 91 (2001): 146-68.

rule of the emperor being an expression of cosmic order and the hegemony of the empire as including all of the civilized world – are then promulgated outward through, on the one hand, symbolic ceremonial and diplomacy, and on the other, a literary high culture.<sup>8</sup> In these ways the ideology of universalizing rulership is communicated to both imperial citizens and subordinated polities.

The Byzantine case demonstrates all of these characteristics of universal empire. Byzantium had a profoundly symbolic and ritualized system of ceremony and diplomatic activity, as well as an aristocratic literary culture focused on the remembrance and restatement of the empire's historically-rooted sovereignty. Byzantine imperial ideology is built on Roman imperial ideology. As previously noted, the Byzantine Romans considered themselves to be Romans, and their hegemony – their βασιλεία (*basileia*) – was that of the Roman imperium. Roman universalism was longstanding. The belief that Roman authority was without restriction was a common theme of panegyric literature from the second century CE; Aelius Aristides wrote that Rome not only had universal mastery, but that it had created within itself a sort of general citizenry, a new form of man.<sup>9</sup> Byzantine conceptions of hegemony, at least in their most idealized and rhetorical form, adhered closely to this Roman vision.

This hegemony was tempered with an additional layer of universalist triumphalism which derived from the idea that the Byzantine emperor was the viceroy of God on earth for all the peoples within the universal body of the Christian Church. As

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<sup>8</sup> Bang and Kołodziejczyk, "'Elephant of India': universal empire through time and across cultures," 27.

<sup>9</sup> David Olster, "From Periphery to Center: the transformation of Late Roman self-definition in the seventh century," in *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, ed. Ralph Mathisen (Aldershot, Hampshire ; Brookfield, Vt: Variorum, 1996), 95; citing Aelius Aristides, *Works*, ed. G. Dindorf (Lipsiae: Libraria Weidmannia, 1829), 346.

early as 336 CE, Eusebius of Caesarea wrote that the empire was an imitation of God's eternal kingdom, with the emperor "outfitted in the likeness of the kingdom of heaven"<sup>10</sup> – portraying the emperor of a *Christian* Rome as someone with cosmically ordained right to rule. The adjective 'divine' was commonly used in Byzantine chancery documents to refer to both the empire and the emperor<sup>11</sup>, and this conception of Byzantium as being in imitation or *mimesis* of heaven would persist as a commonplace in Byzantine imperial rhetoric for as long as Byzantium existed.<sup>12</sup>

The imperial imitation of divine order is summarized in the concept of τάξις (*taxis*), right order. *Taxis* is a central theme in Byzantine political culture and the ritual that reinforced it, especially at the height of the empire's efficacious power in the world: the tenth and eleventh centuries. Participation in political culture meant participation in the ceremonial relationships between emperor and aristocracy which ritually reinforced the empire's ideological universalism.<sup>13</sup> This ritual reenactment of universal God-given authority helped the imperial government of Byzantium maintain at least the image of "unitary features": a centralized administration, a specialized and salaried bureaucracy,

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<sup>10</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Orations*, trans. H.A. Drake, California library reprint series ed, University of California Publications, v. 15 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 87.

<sup>11</sup> Herbert Hunger, *Prooimion: Elemente Der Byzantinischen Kaiseridee in Den Arengen Der Urkunden*. Wiener Byzantinische Studien, Bd. 1. (Wien: In Kommission be H. Böhlau Nachf, 1964), 47-75.

<sup>12</sup> Dimiter Angelov and Judith Herrin, "The Christian Imperial Tradition – Greek and Latin", in *Universal Empire*, ed. Bang and Kołodziejczyk, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 155.

<sup>13</sup> Leanora Alice Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 14.

and a monopoly on the use of legitimate force.<sup>14</sup> However, this centralization appears much more complete at the ritual level than at the level of political action. The pattern of imperial expansion in which empires laid claim to vast stretches of territory but exercised control over only narrow bands, or corridors, and over enclaves of various sizes,"<sup>15</sup> is a more accurate description of the Byzantine empire's expansion into Eurasia during the high middle ages. After the losses inflicted by the Arab conquests and the movements of the Slavs and Avars, as well as the loss of Italian territory after the reign of Justinian, Byzantium was much reduced in immediate power from its heights as the Eastern Roman Empire. Even after the tenth-century reconquests of large swaths of Eastern Anatolia, Byzantium exerted only a tenuous political and economic dominion over the area brought back into their orbit. The government in Constantinople was only briefly capable of collecting taxes from or successfully defending the vast span of territory acquired via these reconquests,<sup>16</sup> and what influence it did possess was mediated through engagement with local authorities via ceremonial and ritualized submission.

Imperial control need not be direct. Despite the fact that "empires did not cover territory evenly, but composed a fabric that was full of holes, stitched together out of pieces, a tangle of strings,"<sup>17</sup> the impression of empire – the imagined universal empire which is a whole, not a net composed of areas under direct control – is of a continuous and solid power. Byzantium's cultural and political power, applied over a distance greater

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<sup>14</sup> T.S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers: Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy, A.D. 554-800* (London: British School at Rome, 1984), 145.

<sup>15</sup> Lauren Benton, "Legal Spaces of Empire: Piracy and the Origins of Ocean Regionalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47.4 (October 2005): 702.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Shepard, "Byzantium's Overlapping Circles," in *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies. vol. 1* (Aldershot, 2006), 19.

<sup>17</sup> Benton, "Legal Spaces of Empire", 700.

than the physical extent of the empire, could and did have a heavy, deciding influence on the development, political loyalties, and cultural allegiance of neighboring polities. The expression of this cultural power is tightly linked to the Byzantine articulation of their essential 'Romanity' – their continuity with the historical Roman empire. In short, while "[Byzantine] Cultural prestige is a phenomenon of the present; Byzantine universalism is based on a consciousness of the past, a teleology of history."<sup>18</sup>

In a purely historical sense, there is a break in strict continuity between the Eastern Roman empire and the 'Byzantine' empire. The collapse of the empire's territory in the seventh century was a transformative event which had far-ranging effects on urban density, cultural production, and military capacity.<sup>19</sup> The polities which emerged on the other side, however – both Byzantine and Latin – still looked back to Roman antiquity for the origins of the idea of a single imperium that spanned the civilized world. The common foundation for this imperium was the Emperor Constantine the Great, the first Christian Roman emperor, who represented the ideal leader of a Christian universal empire.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the next millennium of Byzantine imperial ideology and rhetoric, Byzantine emperors would return to the image of Constantine to legitimize their own rule

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<sup>18</sup> Simon Franklin, "The Empire of the *Rhomanioi* as viewed from Kievan Russia: Aspects of Byzantino-Russian Cultural Relations," *Byzantion* 73 (1983), 511.

<sup>19</sup> While the literature on the seventh-century crisis is vast, the state of the field is still John Haldon's *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: the transformation of a culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Shepard, "Adventus, Arrivistes and Rites of Rulership in Byzantium and France in the Tenth and Eleventh Century," in *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean: Comparative Perspectives*. The Medieval Mediterranean : Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400-1500, volume 98. (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2013), 337-8.

and link their power to this initial, idealized source.<sup>21</sup> The impression of continuity of rulership was visible not only in the invocation of the name of Constantine by individual Byzantine emperors, but also in the performance of ritual symbols of the Roman imperial court. Two salient examples are *proskynesis*, prostration before the ruler, which is referenced in the tenth-century Byzantine ceremonial manual *The Book of Ceremonies*, and which was practiced in the court of pre-Christian Rome; and the *akakia*, a pouch full of dust used in ceremonial by the emperor and shown in pictorial representations of him, which was originally the *mappa*, a white kerchief which in the Roman period represented consular authority.<sup>22</sup> The political capital which Byzantium acquired via continuity with Rome enabled the empire to position itself rhetorically as an authentic repository of imperial status, despite major setbacks.

However, when the political unity of the Roman Empire fractured in Late Antiquity, and was further threatened during the seventh-century crisis in the East, the self-identity of citizens of that empire became difficult to maintain unchanged. In what sense was a subject of seventh or eighth century Byzantium a 'Roman', as he called himself – and in what way did this self-conception interact with the threatening presence of persons who were definitely *not* subjects of the emperor, as they were actively involved in threatening that emperor's sovereignty? Late Antique ideas of Romanity were

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<sup>21</sup> An entire collected volume of essays on 'new Constantines' appeared in 1994, showing the longevity and power of this rhetorical trope in Byzantine culture. (*New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries: Papers from the Twenty-Sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St Andrews, March 1992*, ed. by Paul Magdalino. Publications / Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies 2. (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain : Brookfield, Vt., U.S.A: Variorum ; Ashgate Pub. Co, 1994).)

<sup>22</sup> Angelov and Herrin, "The Christian Imperial Tradition", 158-9.



quite flexible<sup>23</sup> and were primarily employed to preserve a sense of similarity amongst *Rhomaioi* over space and time, in opposition to a group who were *not* Roman. Against the *Rhomaioi* were the *barbaroi*, the barbarians. This opposition had deep historical roots, stretching back to Attic Greek conceptions of uncultured nomadic barbarians existing in contrast with urban and educated Greeks.<sup>24</sup> 'Barbarian' came to be similarly contrasted with the civilized world of Roman imperial systems, and this contrast was maintained by Byzantine rhetorical culture.<sup>25</sup>

When this sort of comparative self vs. other construction is used to establish and maintain an internal sense of imperial identity, being a subject of the Byzantine empire – a *Rhomaios* – is associated with being a civilized human, a citizen of a world which is in accordance with cosmic order. Byzantine Romans are thus *fundamentally* different from non-Byzantine persons: participating in the culture defined by Byzantine imperial ideology means that first, one is *not* a barbarian, and second, that there is a specific set of behaviors and beliefs which make one a Byzantine Roman *and therefore subject to* the empire. Being *Rhomaioi* was a state of having a group identity with strong associations with race and the past; it was a subjective act of belief by members of the group, rather than an objective observation about them; and it required the existence of a contrasting

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<sup>23</sup> Conant, *Staying Roman: Conquest and Identity in Africa and the Mediterranean, 439-700*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, fourth series, [82]. (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2-5. Conant suggests that what made a 'Roman' citizen could be transformed by contact with local cultures, political necessity, and religious syncretism, without much trouble to the essential concept of Romanity.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Homer, *Iliad*, 2.867; Aristotle, *Politics*, I.1324b10 and 2.1252a34-b9; Herodotus, *Histories*, 1.1; Thucydides, 1.1.

<sup>25</sup> Gill Page, *Being Byzantine: Greek Identity before the Ottomans* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 42. While Page discusses the 'ethnic identity' of the Byzantines, I here am using some of his language to discuss a non-blood and non-race-based sense of group identity amongst the Byzantine Romans.

Other.<sup>26</sup> Conceiving of the *Rhomaioi* as an identity defined in this manner emphasizes the contrast between Byzantine Romanity and the state of being barbarian; between being within the empire and being outside of it. It also suggests the existence of a problematic third category: subjects of the empire, or persons subject *to* the empire, who are nevertheless not Byzantine Romans by virtue of lack of Byzantine behaviors.<sup>27</sup>

As this dissertation is concerned with the *internal* experience of Byzantine imperialism, as experienced by the Byzantines themselves and as represented in literary, ritual, and symbolic expressions produced by them and those who interacted with Byzantium, it will refer to the people of the Byzantine empire as 'Byzantine Romans' or 'Rhomaioi', in accordance with their own use of language. However, the wider field of Byzantine studies has standardized language for referring to the empire as 'Byzantium' with the adjectival form 'Byzantine'. Anthony Kaldellis' valuable contribution to this discussion in his *Hellenism in Byzantium* points out that use of 'Byzantium' by modern scholars does perpetuate a biased, pro-Western view of Byzantium, in which Byzantines cannot be true Romans and thus must acquire other, 'oriental' essences. Referring to the Rhomaioi as 'Byzantium' thereby at best reduces Byzantine culture to a reception of

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<sup>26</sup> Page, *Being Byzantine*, 11ff.

<sup>27</sup> Non-Roman imperial subjects are the topic of Dion Smythe's "Why do barbarians stand round the emperor at diplomatic receptions?" in *Byzantine Diplomacy: Papers of the Twenty-Fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990*, eds. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin, Publications / Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies 1, 304-14. (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain : Brookfield, Vt: Variorum ; Ashgate, 1992), in which he suggests that "barbarians within" could actually improve the prestige of the emperor, giving the example of the Varangian Guard. Having barbarians in service to the emperor himself reinforced the idea that Byzantine imperial power was capable of civilizing and controlling areas which were not under its direct control, and thus contributed to its universalism.

Roman culture rather than being in continuity with it.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, Byzantium is different from the Rome of antiquity. It was subject to different pressures to its self-conception as a universal empire, and responded to them with different methods. Thus 'Byzantium' is in some ways a useful shorthand, particularly when speaking about the contrast in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries between areas controlled by the empire and those which are not, where using 'Byzantine Rome' or 'Rhomaia' would introduce confusion. I will draw a distinction between the polity, 'Byzantium', and the ideological construction, 'Byzantine Rome'. This is most easily conveyed to the reader by using 'Byzantine' as an adjectival pointer toward the *specific* set of ideological constructions and imperial self-representations held by the Rhomaioi, as opposed to the Romans.

Nevertheless, *Rhomaioi* was the most important self-identifying name for the Byzantine Romans, and its significance cannot be overstated. The word was pervasive, appearing in all forms of documents aside from the strictly theological, and was employed by individuals from a wide variety of social and geographical origins throughout the entire thousand-year span of Byzantium's existence as an independent polity. It possessed a dual definition: it was both a political loyalty and a set of cultural criteria. These cultural criteria included the practice of Chalcedonian Christianity, being a native speaker of Greek, and a general state of 'civilized' behavior.<sup>29</sup> In the sense of political loyalty, *Rhomaioi* appears as clear shorthand for 'the political entity ruled by the

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<sup>28</sup> Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 42-43.

<sup>29</sup> Page, *Being Byzantine*, 44. See also Speros Vryonis, "Greek Identity in the Middle Ages," in Odorico, Paolo, ed. *Byzance et L'hellénisme: L'identité Grecque Au Moyen-Âge: Actes Du Congrès International Tenu À Trieste Du 1er Au 3 Octobre 1997*. Etudes Balkaniques 6. (Paris: Association Pierre Belon : Diffusion, De Boccard, 2000), 29-31.

emperor', and is in fact a synecdoche for that entity. In the *De Administrando Imperio*, the *Rhomaioi* receive tribute, rule territory, and conduct diplomacy.<sup>30</sup> The Byzantine Romans also referred to their empire as *Rhomania*, a geographical term which had connotations of extent of territory,<sup>31</sup> but this usage was rare in official documentation until the Komnenian period; instead, imperial officials referred to the extent of Byzantine political power as the ἀρχή (*arche*, rule) or ἡγεμονία (*hegemonia*, hegemony) of the Rhomaioi. The empire was Roman. Thus, cultural behavior appropriate to a citizen of it was subsumed inside this Romanity even if that cultural behavior was specifically Greek. In the *Chronicle* of Theophanes, when discussing the proposed marriage alliance between the Charlemagne's daughter and the Empress Irene's son Constantine, Theophanes writes:

“κατέλυπον ἐλίσσαϊον τὸν εὐνοῦχον καὶ νοτάριον πρὸς τὸ διδάξαι αὐτὴν τὰ τε τῶν γραικῶν γράμματα καὶ τὴν γλῶσσαν, καὶ παιδεῦσαι αὐτὴν τὰ ἥθη τῆς ῥωμαίων βασιλείας.” [She sent the eunuch and notarios Elissaios to teach her (Charlemagne's daughter) about Greek literature and language, and to educate her in the customs of the imperium of the Romans.]<sup>32</sup>

Here the process of learning Greek, a language which the prospective bride of the emperor would require to function in her new home, is an essential part of becoming a subject of the Roman imperium. In engaging in this kind of cultural education, Byzantine Romans employed their sense of their own continuity with ancient Rome as both a justification of universal imperium and a method by which universal imperium is performed.

The performance of Byzantine imperial ideology was effective. Despite the lack of the mechanics of statecraft which characterize modern empires and nation-states, like

<sup>30</sup> *DAI*, 22.11m 23.14, 28.9, 33.1-2, 46.133, cited in Page, *Being Byzantine*, 47.

<sup>31</sup> For examples of this usage see *DAI* 22.22, 44.125-8.

<sup>32</sup> Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. Carolus de Boor, (Hildesheim, 1966), I.455.

mass media and rapid dissemination of information, ideology did have a visceral and powerful effect on the social and political life of pre-modern empires. Nearly all empires which expressed universalizing ideologies in the pre-modern period were serious in their investment in the ritualistic and symbolic aspects of power.<sup>33</sup> These self-images, in a sense, *are* the empires. The ideal imperial system for the Byzantine Romans was conveyed both within and outside the empire's physical borders by a rhetorical expression of their ideology of power. To be politically orthodox – to stand within the system of *taxis* – involved demonstrating "correct thinking about the civil and institutional life of the empire." The responsibility of articulating this correct thinking fell, in Byzantium, to the literary elite, who communicated it to the citizens and to foreign powers via rhetoric.<sup>34</sup> This rhetoric took multiple forms, including imperial panegyric and diplomatic embassies. All of these forms are *expressions* of imperial ideology, which are primarily based in ritual and symbolism rather than in direct encounters in the world. The Byzantine imperial system did have methods for dealing with its presence in the world, but these methods were themselves grounded in the continuing function of the ritual and symbolic portions of the ideology. The ideal empire was preserved via rhetorical methods – "praise of the emperor [in panegyric] is praise of the system", as George Dennis has pointed out – and this rhetoric, as expressed in ritual and ceremony, was part of what Byzantine Romans carried with them as they interacted with one another as well as with non-Byzantines.

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<sup>33</sup> John A. Hall, "Imperial Universalism – further thoughts," in *Universal Empire*, ed. Bang and Kołodziejczyk, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 305.

<sup>34</sup> George T. Dennis, "Imperial Panegyric: rhetoric and reality," *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. by Henry Maguire. (Washington, D.C. : [Cambridge, Mass.]: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection ; Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1997), 131.

Ritual is a tool which employs a known set of symbols in sequence in order to enable an individual to identify with a political regime. It thus allows rulers to legitimate themselves, via spectacle and stylized forms of communication.<sup>35</sup> It is a use of language and symbolism as a political technology. It is also central Byzantine forms of internal imperial experience, and thus reflects that, when Byzantine Romans encountered non-imperial spaces or persons, they employed linguistic and rhetorical modes of political technology most easily. Byzantine Roman authors (of historiography as well as of statecraft manuals like the *De Administrando Imperio* and the *De Ceremoniis*) were used to recording ritual and ceremony as a means of conveying their empire's legitimacy of rule. When it was necessary to defend this legitimacy, ritual and ceremony were a logical and instinctive methodology.

This is clearly visible in the ceremony of *adventus*, the entrance of the emperor or other important praiseworthy personage (including military commanders, relics, and bishops) in triumph into a city, where they would be greeted by local elites and invoke the supernatural protectors of that city or community. *Adventus* had been a ritual of imperial power since the Principate, and had existed even in the Republican era. It continued to be a method of expressing Byzantine imperial authority to conquered peoples and foreign visitors through the eleventh century. Christian Roman emperors had reframed the *adventus* ceremony to be a triumphal procession deeply associated with Constantinople, the "God-protected city": upon returning from military activity, the emperor would process from the Golden Gate to the Hagia Sophia and Great Palace, being greeted by important representatives of city corporations and the church, and being

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<sup>35</sup> David I. Kertzer, *Rituals, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

witnessed by the citizenry. The ceremony reinforced imperial power by linking the emperor's triumph to the supernatural protectors of Constantinople and by demonstrating his success in public.<sup>36</sup>

Foreigners visiting Constantinople were invited to witness *adventus* ceremonies and to attend routine processions. Liutprand of Cremona attests to this practice during his stay in the Queen City in 968 CE.<sup>37</sup> Visitors like Liutprand would see the power of the emperor at these ceremonies: he was capable of summoning up and organizing the political elite as well as the ordinary citizens of Constantinople to act together in concert, recognizing his authority. He showed to them (and to foreign visitors) the benefits of victories won and relics and trophies received.<sup>38</sup> Here ritual is used to reinforce imperial power via spectacle; making this spectacle visible to foreign diplomats helped to convince them of the legitimacy of Byzantine imperialism. Similar spectacles in memoriam of military achievements were a prominent feature of tenth and eleventh century imperial ideology, particularly highlighting the subjecting of peoples and the expansion of the empire's territory which were features of this period. Celebrations of military triumphs are described in Skylitzes's *History*<sup>39</sup> and Psellos's *Chronographia*<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> For *adventus* and triumphs in Constantinople, see M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: triumphal rulership in late antiquity, Byzantium, and the early medieval West*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 14-16, 189-90, 208-26; Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 64-5; and Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions*, ed. and trans. J. Haldon (Vienna, 1990), 259, 268-9.

<sup>37</sup> Liutprand of Cremona, *Legatio*, ed. P. Chiesa, *Liutprandi Cremonensis. Opera Omnia*, CCCM 156 (Turnhout, 1998), 191.

<sup>38</sup> Shepard, "Adventus, Arrivistes, and Rites of Rulership in Byzantium and France in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," 344.

<sup>39</sup> Skylitzes, *Synopsis historiarum*, ed. Thurn, pp. 364-5, for Basil II's triumphal celebration of defeat over the Bulgarians in 1019 CE, where he entered through the Golden Gate wearing a golden crown.

Triumphs were even celebrated outside of Constantinople, bringing imperial ceremony to distant parts of the empire: in 1159, Manuel II celebrated a triumph at Antioch, which, according to John Kinnamos, was modeled on the ritual traditionally performed in Constantinople.<sup>41</sup> These ceremonial representations of imperial power were thus mobile – they were exported from the center of Byzantine power to the edges, where their cultural effects could radiate outward and defend the legitimacy of Byzantine universalism.

The dissemination of Byzantine imperial ideology to neighboring polities has been the subject of a substantial amount of modern scholarship, not insignificantly because of the ritual and ceremonial aspects of that dissemination. In fact, Byzantine imperial power has been interpreted as being *primarily* expressed through cultural and ceremonial factors. The cultural hegemony of Byzantium, as expressed through the spread of Chalcedonian Christianity and therefore the simultaneous spread of the idea that the Byzantine emperor is the head of a cosmic Christian order, has been seen as both the most common and the most effective method of Byzantine imperialism. This is the argument first expressed by Dmitri Obolensky in *The Byzantine Commonwealth*.

The 'Byzantine commonwealth' itself, at least within the form conceived of by Obolensky, is the idea that beyond the areas which the Byzantine empire directly controlled – i.e. the territory under their administration and military influence – was a far-reaching socio-political community which considered itself independent from but was nevertheless subordinate to Byzantium in terms of culture, religion, and ultimate political

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, ed. and trans. Renauld, 2:6, for Constantine IX's triumph for Stephen Pergamēnos after his defeat of George Maniakes; the soldiers were given *aristeioi stephanoi*, 'crowns of valor'.

<sup>41</sup> John Kinnamos, *Epitome rerum*, ed. A. Meineke (Bonn, 1836), 186-88.



authority.<sup>42</sup> According to Obolensky, Byzantine foreign policy opted for bringing peoples within their cultural orbit rather than attempting to control their territories by use of military force. In the Balkans, these policies were intricate, reoccurring, and aimed at controlling the barbarian polities while keeping the flow of trade goods to and from them unimpeded. This was accomplished in a wide variety of ways, ranging from simple trade subsidies to the complexities of imperial marriages and royal conversions to Christianity.<sup>43</sup> Acceptance of Byzantine culture was enough to bring a group within the orbit of Byzantine control. By accepting the cultural values which proclaimed Byzantine supremacy – the Roman imperial heritage and the Orthodox Church – the Slavic peoples joined the Byzantine Commonwealth and were subject to, if not Byzantium's direct power, Byzantium's political and cultural influences.

Obolensky is arguing for an extremely tight link between religious and cultural assimilation, one which allows for conversion to be an act of cultural control as much or more powerful than military force in bringing a region or people under the sway of the Byzantine Empire. Accepting Byzantine-missionized Christianity acts to tie the converted people directly to Byzantine authority. This conception of the functioning of Byzantine imperial power has been severely criticized by more recent scholars, particularly Anthony Kaldellis, who has pointed out that Obolensky has projected the cultural continuum which eventually developed in the Balkans back onto the Byzantine Romans, assigning to them a deliberateness of 'conversion diplomacy' which does not seem to have existed in Byzantine foreign policy. There is not a Byzantine primary source which equates *Rhomaioi* with Orthodoxy; the fact that the *Rhomaioi* were Christian did not mean that

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<sup>42</sup> Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, 275.

they intended to Christianize neighboring polities *in order to* bring them under cultural control.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, Byzantine cultural capital did exist. Jonathan Shepard's reconception of the Byzantine Commonwealth thesis, in his 2006 article "Byzantium's Overlapping Circles", directly acknowledges both Byzantium's lack of *intention* in spreading cultural power to 'barbarian' polities<sup>45</sup> and nevertheless points out the presence of a Byzantine 'soft power': a culturally based and coercive sort of power which operates outside of state boundaries and could shift, "protean", depending on the circumstances required.<sup>46</sup> This 'soft power' extended beyond the Slavic polities. It encompassed first, the Christian-Islamic Orient – marked by Muslim reaction to Byzantium, defining itself as what Byzantium was not, a sort of inverse reflection which nonetheless acknowledged the long classicizing history of Byzantine authority<sup>47</sup> – and second, the Latin West, for whom Byzantium became a foil to be superseded and co-opted.<sup>48</sup> This politico-cultural complex was the visible manifestation of an imagined ideology of empire, and was the mutable result of interactions between Byzantine Romans and *various different* non-Byzantines.

Of some use in interpreting this multiplicity of empires which emerges out of universal imperial ideology is the theory put forth by George Stienmetz, a modern

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<sup>44</sup> Anthony Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity: Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 137-8.

<sup>45</sup> "Byzantine statesmen were not overtly concerned with broadcasting law-codes among the 'barbarians' [...] The dearth of fully formulated acknowledgments of an interventionist role for the *basileus* by outsiders tells against the existence of an association of orthodox polities in *any institutional sense*." (emphasis mine) Shepard, "Byzantium's Overlapping Circles", 3.

<sup>46</sup> Shepard, "Overlapping Circles," 26, 30.

<sup>47</sup> Shepard, "Overlapping Circles," 14.

<sup>48</sup> Shepard, "Overlapping Circles," 30.

historian of the German Empire. By comparing three sites of German colonialism Stienmetz demonstrates that the machinery of imperial control is variable and dependent upon the interaction between the imperial society and *each specific* colonized society. He resists the notion of a particular "national colonial style", claiming that the Germans enacted three very different modes of empire in each of their colonies.<sup>49</sup> The "sheer variability" in German colonial policy cannot be explained by any overarching theoretical approach to the question of empire. Steinmetz considers several options for the presence of this multiplicity, including variable metropolitan economic interests or socioeconomic conditions in the colony, but comes to the conclusion that the most significant factor is the fact that "effective sovereignty resided with the legendary 'men on the spot', the 'real chiefs of empire' or 'little governors' who were in direct contact with indigenous leaders and communities."<sup>50</sup> The multiplicity of empire results from the multiplicity of individual interactions between imperial agents and subordinate peoples: i.e. it is a result of the interaction between the self-image of empire and the other-image of native people held in the minds of imperial agents. When an imagined conception of empire is put into practice, a proliferation of 'empires' emerges.

Multivalence is a central characteristic of the effects of Byzantine imperial ideology – i.e. diplomatic and military activity. Much recent scholarship has emphasized the defensive nature of Byzantine diplomacy, pointing out that even in times of expansion, the empire was focused on using diplomacy to keep the territory of the empire stable against constant incursion and raiding. Khazdan sees the origin of this

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<sup>49</sup> George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>50</sup> Stienmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting*, 19-20, 29.

defensiveness in a universalizing classicism: since the Byzantine Romans are in fact the Roman Empire, preserving the borders of *that* polity preserves Byzantine legitimacy.<sup>51</sup> However, within this general rubric of defensiveness and preservation, Byzantine diplomacy transformed to meet disparate situations along all of its varied borderlands: it was, in fact, in constant flux.

The shifting power relations between Byzantium and the polities on its edges required re-imaginings of the relationship between Byzantium-as-empire and the satellite states which it sometimes exerted control over. Shifting diplomacies were a necessity for the Byzantine Romans because they dealt with so many different non-Byzantine persons. Even in the ritualized world of Constantinople-based ceremonial, there is a visible flux determined by the relationship between the imagined powers and nature of the empire and the imagined response of the imperialized. Byzantium used the diplomacy of hospitality to control weaker polities, such as dignitaries from minor kingdoms or nomadic tribes, by forcibly placing them in the position of supplicants who were indulged in the glorious capital city.<sup>52</sup> By contrast, when Alexios I Komnenos dealt with the presence of the Crusader lords in Constantinople at the beginning of the First Crusade, he both first instigated and then attempted to control the Crusade's progress through Western rules of vassalage.<sup>53</sup> This process is quite different from the baseline palace diplomacy which people like Liutprand of Cremona experienced – but it shows quite clearly how

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<sup>51</sup> Kazhdan, Alexander. "The Notion of Byzantine Diplomacy," in *Byzantine Diplomacy*. (Aldershot, GB: Variorum, 1992), 8.

<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Shepard, "Byzantine Diplomacy, 800-1204: Means and Ends" in *Byzantine Diplomacy*. (Aldershot, GB: Variorum, 1992), 43, 46, 63-5.

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Shepard, "Aspects of Byzantine Attitudes and Policy towards the West in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 13 (1988): 67-118; H.E.J. Cowdrey, "The Gregorian Papacy, Byzantium, and the First Crusade," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 13 (1988): 145-170.

Alexios's attempt results from his imagining of the relationship of Latin Christendom with the Byzantine Empire and its claims upon the Holy Land.

Because of multivalent experiences of empire on the ground, even a universalist ideology of empire had to be vast and contain multitudes. The rhetoric of empire was "paradoxical, simultaneously proclaiming universalism and limitation, defense and aggression."<sup>54</sup> Despite periods of expansion, a standard epithet for the emperor was 'peacemaker' and he was referred to as a Christlike bringer of a 'new peace' to mankind in panegyrics.<sup>55</sup> In the middle of the eleventh century, in a period where military expansion had become problematic but military strength was still a necessity for dealing with Seljuk incursions into the east, Constantine IX Monomachos was praised for his support of learning, his philanthropy, and his construction of aqueducts, fountains, and gardens.<sup>56</sup> John Haldon has argued that the combination of the image of a peacemaking emperor with consistent military activity created a diplomatically-focused, conflict-averse empire, which, while exceptionally capable in a military sense and relying on military activity to support both economic and political stability, nevertheless could be thought of as a polity where most international relations took place between embassies rather than on the battlefield.<sup>57</sup>

The encounter between Byzantine imperialism and non-Byzantine persons occurred most often on the edges of the empire, in the frontier zone which was comprised

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<sup>54</sup> Olster, "From Periphery to Center", 96.

<sup>55</sup> Jonathan Shepard "Aspects of Moral Leadership: the imperial city and lucre from legality", in *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. Pamela Armstrong. (Publications of the Center For Hellenic Studies, King's College London: 14, 2013) 9.

<sup>56</sup> Dennis, "Imperial Panegyric", 135.

<sup>57</sup> John Haldon, *Warfare, State, and Society in the Byzantine World 565-1204* (London: UCL Press, 1999).

of the most distant provinces and the area just beyond them. This was also the place where this encounter was the least controlled. In Constantinople, ritual and ceremony could be performed with full rhetorical weight; out in the provinces, the presence of non-Byzantines with established local structures of authority required more direct engagement with the process of empire-building. This process was not as cleanly edged as the rhetorical construction of Byzantine authority which divided imperial space into the *oikumene* and the uncivilized world, Rhomaioi and *barbaroi*. The *barbaroi* were right next to the Rhomaioi; in fact, they sometimes moved into the very structures of Byzantine power which were used to control the provinces, holding high administrative positions. Even less stable was the position of nominal Rhomaioi whose loyalties and ties were not directed inward towards Constantinople, but instead were rooted in these local authority structures which the Byzantine empire preserved in order to better execute control over widespread territories.<sup>58</sup> The encounter between the maintenance of Byzantine imperial ideology and the necessary forms of Byzantine imperial practice in the provinces is therefore a place where the experience of living within the empire becomes visible to the modern historian.

Despite the multi-ethnic span of the empire, Byzantine self-image remained profoundly xenophobic, and Byzantines criticized the presence of ξένοι (*xenoi*, foreigners) and ἐξωτικοὶ (*exoticoi*, having the precise meaning of "foreign to the capital at Constantinople")<sup>59</sup> within the highest ranks of the administration and military, which

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<sup>58</sup> See Catherine Holmes, "How the East was won in the Reign of Basil II", in A. Eastmond (ed.), *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium* (Aldershot: 2001), 41-56, and also chapter 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>59</sup> J. and P. Zepos, ed. *Jus graecoromanum*, 8 vols., (Athens, 1931, reprinted Aalen, 1962). VI, 364, 398, 411.

would give them authority over Byzantine Romans. Kekaumenos advised the emperor to keep such people at the lowest ranks, even within the army, which was otherwise one of the core methods for integrating foreigners into Byzantine life.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, distance from Constantinople became a source of de-culturation – Rhomaioi from the provinces could have a dubious status as actual Rhomaioi, becoming instead μιζοβάραιοι (*mixobarbaroi*) or μιξέλληνες (*mixhellenes*).<sup>61</sup> The centrality of Constantinople and the perils of venturing too far away from it – as if physical remove from the Queen City could induce a state of uncivilization – forms one of the central arguments for the nature of Romanity for Byzantine Romans, and thus for the righteousness of Byzantine imperial rule. However, the emphasis on Constantinople developed in the Byzantine period – after the crisis of the seventh century – and also reveals how the provinces and the frontier had become problematic places for Byzantine Romans to experience and promulgate empire.

There is a lack of protracted literary attention to the 'frontier' as a physical barrier or limit – i.e. as a border – of imperial rule in Byzantine writing after the 7<sup>th</sup> century. It did not reemerge as a conceptually *physical* idea until the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. This is broadly because there was little for encomiasts or chroniclers to celebrate about the frontier zone from the seventh-century crisis until the tenth-century expansion. Drawing attention to the diminution of the territories under the control of the emperor would

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<sup>60</sup> Helene Ahrweiler, "Byzantine Concepts of the Foreigner: the case of the nomads", in *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. Helene Ahrweiler and Angeliki Laiou, (Washington D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Press, 1998), 2-3.

<sup>61</sup> Choniates is the primary source for these terms, usually referring to peoples in the Balkans, and also the source for the advance of the Seljuks into Asia Minor and subsequent de-Byzantinization of that territory. See especially Speros Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), for the primary source evidence in detail.

undermine the Byzantine claim of continuity with the ancient Roman empire. A Byzantium which was not holding on to the territory of Rome is more difficult to equate with Rome.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the idea of a physical frontier delineated by borders dropped out of rhetoric in favor of a discourse of radiating culture and the possibility of Romanization via exposure to the *oikumene*.

Constantinople could remain a source of universal authority even if the ancient territory of Rome was no longer universally within the scope of Byzantine power. David Olster has argued that as the area of the empire shrunk, the idea of 'borders' – specific, geographically-based delineation of territory – was no longer central to the definition of universal empire. Instead of filling a space defined by borders (which were unstable and therefore clear *limitations* on imperial authority), the *oikumene* became a property which radiated outward from a central source of Romanity, namely Constantinople. The seventh and eighth centuries were marked by the sudden prominence of the Queen City in every literary genre:<sup>63</sup> it was the seat of culture, unconquerable, everlasting, and essentially Roman. In the face of a fracturing *realpolitik* of empire, Constantinople became a bastion of historical Romanity – and a center point from which Byzantine universal imperial ideology emerged.

This is not to say that expansionism dropped out of Byzantine imperialist rhetoric entirely along with the de-emphasis of the physical borders in favor of the central capital city. The subjecting of peoples and the expansion of territory – however loosely defined the borders defining this territory might become – is a function of universalist rulership, and thus this theme continued to be present in Byzantine ideology even when the empire

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<sup>62</sup> Shepard, "Expansionism," 58-60.

<sup>63</sup> Olster, "From Periphery to Center," 94, 100-1.



was not capable of direct expansion.<sup>64</sup> When military victories did occur – particularly military victories which led to the reclamation of previously Roman or Byzantine Roman territory, or victories over representatives of longstanding enemies, like the Muslim emirs of Aleppo and Antioch during the 10<sup>th</sup> century reconquest of the east – the rhetorical tropes which celebrated these victories reinscribed the continuity between Byzantium and Rome. Conquest became a positive virtue, and the enlargement of territory a goal.

The 10<sup>th</sup> century saw the revival of borrowing of rhetorical flourishes from the Principate and the Justinianic period.<sup>65</sup> Byzantine Romans began calling themselves 'Ausonians' from the mid-tenth century onward, a term with overtones of imperial rule and destiny.<sup>66</sup> They also referred to the peoples whom they conquered by the ancient ethnic names which were far more appropriate to the early Roman empire: i.e. the Balkan peoples were called Dalmatians and Mysians, the Arabs and then the Seljuks, Scythians, etc. Modern scholarship has most often identified this renaming as an example of the Byzantine obsession with classicizing, the 'calcification' of the Byzantine worldview to a willing suppression of reality in favor of rhetorical flourishes that remembered a more stable and powerful empire.<sup>67</sup> However, in the context of imperial victories, referring to conquered peoples by the names that referred to the denizens of the reconquered territories back when they had been initially incorporated into the ancient empire helped to legitimize Byzantine conquest of the contemporary peoples who now occupied those

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<sup>64</sup> Shepard, "Adventus," 345.

<sup>65</sup> Shepard, "Expansionism," 66.

<sup>66</sup> John Geometres, *Carmina varia*, PG, 106, 902, 903, 934, 980; *Suidae Lexicon*, ed. Adler, vol. 1, 417; Michael Psellos, *Poemata*, ed. Westerink (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1992), 257-8; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, ed. I. Bekker, (Bonn, 1853), 31, 214.

<sup>67</sup> For example, Paul Speck, "Further Reflections and Inquiries on the Origins of the Byzantine Renaissance," in *Understanding Byzantium: Studies in Byzantine Historical Sources*, ed. S. Takács. (Aldershot: Burlington 2003), 183.

same territories.<sup>68</sup> This is a remapping of the early Roman empire's provinces onto the topography of the Byzantine empire. It is both hopeful – it looks toward a future in which the Byzantine empire is not only in continuity with the ancient Roman empire, but is in fact identical again with it – and engaged in using Byzantium's Roman past to legitimize its present activities in the frontier zone.

Not all Byzantine imperial endeavor in the provinces and beyond was as easily represented in Romanizing rhetoric as was expansion and conquest. Sometimes conquest was impossible or impractical, and non-Byzantines needed to be dealt with via embassies and through ambassadors; sometimes conquest was less effective than cooption, and the Byzantine Romans suborned local authorities via absorbing them into Byzantine administrative structures. In both cases, the Byzantine Romans showed the nuance and multivalence characteristic of imperial contacts with non-imperial persons at the edges of empire.

Byzantine titulature was an invaluable diplomatic tool, enabling the emperors to disseminate their authority to particular foreign princes, and therefore recognize them as part of the hierarchy of polities which made up the *oikumene*. They were carefully guarded: the *De Administrando Imperio* warns of the 'greediness' of barbarian princes, who would request crowns, imperial vestments, and even *porphyrogenneta* princesses to marry, and must be denied all of these things.<sup>69</sup> However, when imperial regalia was granted, as it was to Armenian satraps in the sixth century (who were permitted the

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<sup>68</sup> Paul Stephenson, "Byzantine Conceptions of Otherness After the Annexation of Bulgaria (1018)", in *Strangers to themselves: the Byzantine Outsider* (Aldershot: Burlington, 2000), 253-56.

<sup>69</sup> *DAI*, 66-7.

imperial fibula and red shoes)<sup>70</sup> and to the Hungarian rulers, who were sent imperial crowns,<sup>71</sup> it served to place these rulers in submission to the suzerainty of the emperor in Constantinople. Authority is both spread and managed by the movement of these symbols.

Authority could also be distributed by providing Byzantine titles to local authorities, thus both symbolically and actually moving them inside the structure of imperial administration. During the tenth century reconquest of Eastern Anatolia, local Arab elites were given the opportunity to recognize the authority of the emperor in Constantinople in exchange for court titles, payments of salary in Byzantine gold coinage, and Byzantine military protection if required.<sup>72</sup> The titles granted could be quite significant: the Mirdasids of Aleppo acquired ranks as high as *patrikios*, *anthypatos*, *vestes*, *magistros*, and *proedros* between the years 1032 and 1055 CE, due to their significance as allies for Byzantium against the Fatimid Caliphate's claims in the Syrian region.<sup>73</sup>

These titles and rewards were ample reason for local authorities to at least nominally and rhetorically accept Byzantine authority. Naturally, the degree to which this acceptance was more genuine than expedient is debatable. However, some men on the

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<sup>70</sup> Cyril Mango, ed. *Oxford History of Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>71</sup> Angelov and Herrin, "The Christian Imperial Tradition," 160.

<sup>72</sup> A. Beihammer, "Strategies of diplomacy and ambassadors in Byzantine-Muslim relations," in Becker, Audrey, and Nicolas Drocourt, eds. *Ambassadeurs et Ambassades Au Coeur Des Relations Diplomatiques: Rome, Occident Médiéval, Byzance (VIIIe S. Avant J.-C. - XIIe S. Après J.-C.)* (Metz: Centre de recherche universitaire Lorrain d'histoire, Université de Lorraine, site de Metz, 2012), 372.

<sup>73</sup> Wolfgang Felix, *Byzanz Und Die Islamische Welt Im Früheren 11. Jahrhundert: Geschichte Der Politischen Beziehungen von 1001 Bis 1055* (Vienna, 1981), 100-1, 113, 117.

ground with more local connections than Constantinopolitan ones were given substantial responsibilities in diplomatic negotiation by their distant emperor. George Drosos, who conducted the first Byzantine embassy to the Seljuk Turks in 1049 CE, was of comparatively low rank for such an important post: he was the *hypogrammateos* of the chancery of the *vestes* Aaron, the governor of the formerly Armenian province of Vaspurakan. Nevertheless, Constantine IX chose him to negotiate for a peace treaty and the release of the imprisoned Georgian ruler Liparites.<sup>74</sup> Drosos, despite his insignificant rank, would have had first-hand experience with the situation on the ground in the Armenian provinces and frontier areas, and would have also had direct contact with the customs of the Seljuks, making him uniquely suited to this specific diplomatic task.<sup>75</sup> Here we see the flexibility of Byzantine imperial policy in the provinces. It is unclear what George Drosos thought of his task, his emperor, or his position as a *Rhomaïos* in a province which had only been part of the Byzantine empire for a few short years – if he thought of himself as a *Rhomaïos* at all. Nevertheless he was engaged in spreading Byzantine imperial power; as a negotiator and diplomat he was in some senses a synecdoche for the emperor in Constantinople.

The constructed projection of empire which is endemic to the presence of imperial agents outside of the metropole contains in itself a promulgation and promotion of the state. It is therefore imperative to attempt to understand how those agents understood the empire they represented. As Byzantine Romans, they were surrounded by an ideology of universalist rule which appeared in visible ceremony, literary and poetic rhetoric, and

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<sup>74</sup> Skylitzes, 454; Felix, *Byzanz und die islamische Welt*, 164, 170.

<sup>75</sup> Beihammer, "Strategies", 381.

visual imagery.<sup>76</sup> They carried this ideology with them. Nevertheless, when they encountered non-Byzantines, Byzantine imperialism necessarily became mutable, flexible, and situation-dependent. The self-identity of the Byzantine Roman imperial agent is thus made problematic: how does such a person maintain his position as one of the *Rhomaioi* when surrounded by and needing to interact with *barbaroi* – especially *barbaroi* whose local authority and culture was in fact useful to Byzantine imperial interests?

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<sup>76</sup> i.e. the image of the emperor on coinage; for a recent analysis see Cecile Morrisson, "Displaying the Emperor's Authority and Kharakter on the Marketplace", in *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. Pamela Armstrong (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 65-82.

## 2. BYZANTINE EPISTOLOGRAPHY AND COMMUNICATION ON THE FRONTIER

The qualifications of Byzantine epistolography as a tool for Byzantinists are no longer under debate. Letters and letter collections, far from being relegated to dustbins inscribed with "the stigma of mimesis"<sup>77</sup>, or considered, as G. Dennis once wrote in the introduction of his edition of the letters of Manuel II Palaiologos, "about as concrete, informative, and personal as the modern mass-produced greetings card,"<sup>78</sup> have instead been recognized first as literary sources with documentary value for historians, and then as works with independent literary merit. Dennis himself has recanted his opinion. Studies in the 1990s by Littlewood, Mullett, and Hatlie have additionally suggested that the Byzantine letter can be usefully read as a subjective document: a window onto both the inner character and the social network of its author.<sup>79</sup> Epistolography, particularly in analyses of the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries (at the height of polished, literary communication between Byzantines) – and recently, of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, in Adam Schor's network-theory-based monograph on Theodoret of Cyrrhus<sup>80</sup>, has earned itself a substantial platform for scholars engaged in exploration of how Byzantine Romans communicated with one

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<sup>77</sup> Alexander Kazhdan, "Innovation in Byzantium," in *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art, and Music*, ed. A.R. Littlewood. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1995), 8.

<sup>78</sup> George Dennis, *The Letters of Manuel II Palaiologos*. Dumbarton Oaks Texts 4, *Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae* 8, (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Press, 1977), xix.

<sup>79</sup> c.f. Mullett, Margaret. "The Classical Tradition in the Byzantine Letter", in *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition, Papers of the Thirteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies (University of Birmingham, March 1979)*, eds. M. Mullett and R. Scott (Oxford: BAR, 1981) amongst a large range of other articles; A.R. Littlewood, "An 'Icon of the Soul': The Byzantine Letter," *Visible Language* 10 (1976): 197–226.; P. Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 20 (1996): 213–48.

<sup>80</sup> Adam Schor, *Theodoret's People: Social Networks and Religious Conflict in Late Roman Syria*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

another about their world(s), as well as a source base for considerations of Byzantine literary forms and their employment.

This dissertation does not aim, therefore, at an unnecessary rehabilitation of Byzantine epistolography, as the last thirty years of scholarship have more than accomplished that task<sup>81</sup>; neither does it intend to explore the uses of the Byzantine letter in constructing narrative or social histories of Byzantium. Instead it begins from the position that Byzantine letters possess literary merit, and that this literary merit was recognized and acknowledged by the Byzantine Romans themselves. Thus, every epistle is simultaneously a communicative act between author and audience(s), a rhetorical exercise, and – particularly in the context of reception theory – a social object embedded in an interpretive community.<sup>82</sup> The epistolary mode itself allows for these functions, as Byzantine letters were valued on both artistic and social merits. Margaret Mullett, to whose scholarship on the letters of Theophylact this study is deeply indebted, tells us that for a Byzantine Roman, "letters were evaluated by recipients on literary grounds, but those literary criteria verged frequently on the social".<sup>83</sup> The social world of Byzantine

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<sup>81</sup> Some of the most recent scholarship includes: M. Grünbart, "L'epistolografia" in G. Cavallo, ed. *Lo spazio letterario del medioevo. 3. Le culture circstanti. Volume I. La cultura bizantina* (Rome, 2004), 345-78; M. Mullett, "Epistolography" in E. Jeffreys, J. Haldon, and R. Cormack, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford, 2008), 882-93; Stratis Papaioannou, "Letter-writing," in P. Stephenson, ed. *The Byzantine World* (London/New York, 2009), 188-99.

<sup>82</sup> Here, and throughout this dissertation, the conception of the interpretive community and the ability of such a community to create collective meanings is based upon the thinking of Stanley Fish, particularly his *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1980). Reader-response criticism allows for the consideration of the letter as not only a two-way communication, author to recipient, but also a communication which is mediated by the social mallei of both participants, and open to a wider public.

<sup>83</sup> Margaret Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid: Reading the Letters of a Byzantine Archbishop*. (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Variorum, 1997), 30.

epistolary was the social world of the ecclesiastical and secular administration of the Byzantine state. The exchange of letters amongst these men links them together in a social and intellectual community which, while centered in and dependent on Constantinople, where all of them received the education which ensured their admission to the group, extended outside of the metropole whenever an individual left on state or church business.

Because the letter is a social object in Byzantium, it is also innately a rhetorical one. Here I mean *rhetorical* first in the practical sense of *writing or speech intended to persuade*, but also in the sense that the letter is part of the taught traditions of formal rhetoric in Byzantium. Letter-writing had its place in the *progymnasmata* and rhetorical handbooks which were the backbone of the education of the Byzantine official along with encomia and panegyric. Further, the shared language of rhetorical training provided Byzantines with a rubric by which to read and evaluate epistolary documents which they received. Letter-writing is thus placed within the sphere of an educated man's artistic arsenal as well as his regular activity. It is this common standard which underscores the social nature of epistolary communication in its specifically Byzantine context. While all letters are in some sense social – documents produced for consumption by a specific intended reader, which emphasize the relationship between that reader and the document's author – Byzantine letters are also social in that they require membership in a particular, specifically trained societal group for 'correct' interpretation. They thus also become vehicles for the social advancement, via reinforcement of in-group norms and worldviews, of the author. The specific sociality of the Byzantine letter is fundamentally rooted in its rhetorical nature.



Absent a reliable postal service, which had declined significantly from the *cursus publicus* of the Roman and early Byzantine empires by the middle Byzantine period<sup>84</sup> (here defined as between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries), letters moved from author to recipient via letter-bearers. These bearers (*komistai*, singular *komistes*), carry the scroll to the letter's recipient, a process preserved in illustration in the Madrid Skylitzes.<sup>85</sup> The bearer might travel on horseback<sup>86</sup> or on foot, and the process of handing over the letter to its recipient (or his representative or aide-de-camp) was highly ceremonial and marked as a public event.<sup>87</sup> The letter was accompanied by various gifts, which might include foodstuffs, art, or books.<sup>88</sup> Mullett points out that the presence of gifts in the process of receiving a letter point to the reception's more-than-literary aspects<sup>89</sup> – being the intended audience of a letter was a multimedia experience, including textual, gift-based, and aural communication, all of which took place in public and could be seen by the recipient's social milieu.

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<sup>84</sup> See MacKay, Camilla Martha. *The Road Networks and Postal Service of the Eastern Roman and Byzantine Empires (First-Fifteenth Centuries AD): Social Effects on the Provincial Population*. (PhD diss. University of Michigan, 1999). See also Jason Fossella, forthcoming dissertation.

<sup>85</sup> On the use of this manuscript to explore the representation of narrative in Byzantine illumination, see Margaret Mullett, "Writing in early medieval Byzantium", in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. R. McKitterick. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), particularly pp. 169-170.

<sup>86</sup> Illustrated in the Madrid Skylitzes several times: Fol19va=E35=GM29; fol.19vb=E36=GM30; fol.230rb=E569=GM562, fig. 270.

<sup>87</sup> Mullett, "Writing", 156-185.

<sup>88</sup> Mullett, *Theophylact*, 32, note 98. See especially John Geometres, who sent apples and encomia (Littlewood, A.R., ed. *The Progymnasmata of Ioannes Geometres* (Amsterdam: 1972)), and Theodore of Kyzikos in correspondence with the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, whose gifts include wine, cake, fish, incense, and in one case lettuce from Olympos. (ep. 7, 10, 11, 12, ed. Darrouzès, *Épistoliers Byzantins du X<sup>e</sup> Siècle*. Archives de l'Orient Chrétien 6. (Paris: Institut français d'études byzantines, 1960).

<sup>89</sup> Mullett, *Theophylact*, 34-5.

The *komistes* bore more than just the letter and its accompanying gifts: he also carried a verbal message, which often possessed the meat of the communication between letter-writer and letter-recipient. "The bearer has the details," writes the *strategos* Nikephoros Ouranos to John the Orphanotrophos in a brief missive which is otherwise concerned with mutual expressions of sympathy over illness.<sup>90</sup> The content of Byzantine letters, even between politically active individuals, is often missing political or even *practical* content; this content seems to have often been carried instead by the *komistes*. The text of the letter might be primarily rhetorical-social – in the sense of being a demonstration of rhetorical skill on the part of the author, and also evidence of the social relationship between author and recipient – while the necessity of political communications might be the responsibility of the bearer. However, the letters of Nicholas Mystikos also suggest that the *komistes* might carry the same message as the text of the letter – but emphasize different aspects of that message. Letter 6, to Symeon of Bulgaria, discusses the oral response of the *komistes* who have returned to Nicholas, questioning – possibly for effect – whether they could have possibly reported Symeon's antipathy and bloodthirstiness toward Byzantium correctly: "I was greatly astonished and greatly grieved at these words, and wondered (if they spoke the truth, and if the whole was not a falsehood and deliberate fabrication of my informants) how you could think of such a thing or make such a remark..."<sup>91</sup> Here the letter-bearers communicate a more troubling version of the relationship between the archon of Bulgaria and the Patriarch in

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<sup>90</sup> Nikephoros Ouranos, ep. 14. *Épistoliers Byzantins du Xe siècle*, ed. Darrouzès, Jean. Archives de l'Orient Chrétien 6. (Paris: Institut français d'études byzantines, 1960).

<sup>91</sup> Nicholas Mystikos, ep. 6. *Letters [of] Nicholas I, Patriarch of Constantinople*, eds. Jenkins, Romilly James Heald, and Leendert Gerrit Westerink, Dumbarton Oaks Texts 2. (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1973).

Constantinople than the one which seems to have existed in the letter sent from Symeon to Nicholas which they carried.

Mystikos is, however, engaging in high-level diplomatic activity, writing to such individuals as Symeon of Bulgaria and the Pope in Rome, amongst similarly-powerful others. Nevertheless, the job of the *komistes* is demonstrably more complex than conveying some 'true' message while handing over a textual piece of rhetorical frippery. Both *komistes* and letter-text were vital parts of the reception of the Byzantine epistle; not only was the letter fundamentally social in its role as communication between two individuals, it was also presented publicly and commanded a wider social dimension than solely its addressee.

The presentation of the letter by the *komistes* places it firmly into public space by virtue of its ceremonial and ritualized aspect; but the fate of a letter once received was equally public. A letter is "real but literary"<sup>92</sup> – even while containing a message of immediate practical consequence, it also acts as a literary construction, employing held-in-common rhetorical tropes which signal the skill and allegiances of the author. Any letter conveys information; it is the function of a letter to pass information from one location (and individual) to another. But a letter-writer also offers a picture of himself which has a specific targeted effect, either negative or positive, on his reader.<sup>93</sup> Even simply conveying information thus becomes a rhetorical exercise; there is not some pure and uninflected 'true' reportage of events or request for information, as all epistolary communication is embedded in the cultural rubric which the recipient uses to decode that

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<sup>92</sup> Mullett, *Theophylact*. 16-17.

<sup>93</sup> Patricia Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions: The Letter in Greek Literature* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 10-11.

communication – a cultural rubric which consists of specific rhetorical forms. Rhetoric and its accompanying literatures of praise and persuasion were fundamentally creative in that they both exhibited the skill of the practitioner in composing aesthetically impressive pieces, and required him to have the ability to distill the depths of Byzantine classicizing culture to a *correct* reference which would have his desired effect on his audience. The orator selects from a multitude of possible realities the one which he believes will best make his point and achieve his aims; Byzantine Roman rhetors were extremely well-trained in this selection, and their model exercises (such as those of Aphthonios, who both confirms and refutes the story of Daphne) demonstrate that training.<sup>94</sup>

The *theatron* (θέατρον), here defined in its middle and late Byzantine sense as a gathering of literati who came together to hear works of literary merit read aloud,<sup>95</sup> is key to understanding both the aesthetic and social function of Byzantine rhetoric. It is through participation in a *theatron* that rhetors were able to make a living, and through theater that their patrons were able to employ their skills to establish their own cultural and political positions.<sup>96</sup> Presentation of a rhetorical work in a *theatron* created a dynamic between the work's author and a live listening audience of peers who could immediately react to and judge that work's merit on literary, aesthetic, and ideological terms. The

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<sup>94</sup> Ruth Webb, "Praise and persuasion: argumentation and audience response in epideictic oratory," in E. Jeffreys, ed., *Rhetoric in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-Fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, University of Oxford, March 2001*. Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies. Publications 11 (Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003.), 133-35.

<sup>95</sup> By the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Byzantine use of the term θέατρον had evolved substantially from its roots as a referent to a theatrical performance of drama. Much of this change is explored in Przemysław Marciniak, *Greek Drama in Byzantine Times*. Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Śląskiego W Katowicach nr 2306. (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2004).

<sup>96</sup> Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143-1180* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 340.

author might, if his work was well-received, achieve both literary and social distinction, as suggested by a multitude of references to the Greek term φιλοτιμία in discussions of *theatron*.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, performance of a work in the space of the *theatron* reflected upon the ἦθος (*ethos*) – the 'character' – of the author: it was a crafted presentation of a persona in accordance with the rhetorical training which young Byzantine aristocrats received. This 'character' could (and indeed was required to) vary according to the context (audience) and content (genre and subject) of the rhetorical work.<sup>98</sup> Despite this variation, the *theatron* was a place where an author's peers could witness and assemble an account of his self-presentation: both his self-fashioning as a rhetor or philosopher and his individual character and relationship to his community, his emperor, and the empire within which he lived.<sup>99</sup>

The Byzantine letter, in its function as a rhetorical object, was also read aloud in these rhetorical theaters. There, its audience widened from a single recipient to a larger group of intellectuals and patrons who had come to experience the rhetorical skill and ability to employ reference of the letter-writer. This is a communal activity, and one which relies on a communal knowledge of the Byzantine 'source canon' – that is, Biblical

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<sup>97</sup> Niels Gaul, *Thomas Magistros und die Spätbyzantinische Sophistik: Studien zum Humanismus urbaner Eliten der frühen Palaiologenzeit*. Mainzer Veröffentlichungen Zur Byzantinistik Bd. 10. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 25-32.

<sup>98</sup> Gaul, *Thomas Magistros und die Spätbyzantinische Sophistik*, 42-50.

<sup>99</sup> For further discussion of the *theatron* see Margaret Mullett, "Aristocracy and Patronage in the Literary Circles of Comnenian Constantinople", in M. Angold, ed., *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX to XII Centuries*. BAR International Series, 221. (Oxford, 1984), 174-80; I.P. Medvedev, "The so-called θέατρα as a Form of Communication of the Byzantine Intellectuals in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries", in N. G. Moschonas, ed., *Ἡ ἐπικοινωνία στό βυζάντιο· πρακτικά τοῦ β' Διεθνoῦς Συμποσίου, 4-6 οκτωβρίου 1990*. (Athens, 1993), 227-235; Ida Toth, "Rhetorical *Theatron* in Late Byzantium: the example of Palaiologan Imperial Orations", in M. Grünbart, ed. *Theatron: Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter/Rhetorical Culture in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* Millenium-Studien 13. (Berlin; New York, 2007), 429-448.

and classical texts. The structure of the *theatron* provides a methodology for interpretation of the letter; a location for evaluation and interpretation of its success as a literary object and as a representation of the author's interests, views, and ideologies.<sup>100</sup> The language of repetition, evocation, and retelling which characterizes the letter – the efflorescent language of friendship and the quotation of or allusion to Biblical or classical models -- was useful in maintaining community; it also provoked an emotional response. It should be impossible to read a Byzantine letter without keeping this Byzantine perception of the letter's literary power in mind. Read aloud, it becomes a spectacle – a thing which is watched, comprised of a sender, a set of receivers, and a message.<sup>101</sup> The message – whether comprised of 'true' or 'politic' information or of rhetorical tropes arrayed for social or persuasive use – is both perceived and created via the relationship of expectation between the receivers and the senders.

The earliest evidence for the reading aloud of letters in the *theatron* appears in Synesios and Procopios of Gaza; it is also attested in Psellos, Nikephoros Gregoras, and John VI Kantakouzenos, and in the letters of Manuel II Palaiologos.<sup>102</sup> In the twelfth century, Michael Italikos writes to Nikephoros Bryennios, describing the effect of his letter being read aloud at a *theatron*: "... such rhetoric that I cannot describe it. How it

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<sup>100</sup> Grünbart, "L'epistolografia", 356-8.

<sup>101</sup> Przemysław Marciniak, "Byzantine *theatron* – a place of performance?", in M. Grünbart, ed. *Theatron: Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter/Rhetorical Culture in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* Millenium-Studien 13. (Berlin; New York, 2007), 283.

<sup>102</sup> Synesios, ep. 101, R. Hercher, ed. *Epistolographi Graeci* (Paris, 1873), 698.; Manuel II, epp. 9, 24, 32, 34, 44, 61, ed. G.T. Dennis (Washington D.C., 1977), 25, 37, 87, 95, 119, 171. See also Mullett, "Aristocracy and Patronage in the Literary Circles of Comnenian Constantinople", 173-201; H. Hunger, *Reich Der Neuen Mitte. Der Christliche Geist Der Byzantinischen Kultur* (Graz, Wien, Köln: Verlag Styria, 1965), 341.

sang, how it filled us with joy ... were it not for the form, the regularity of rhythm, and the suitability of the language we should all have been carried away with enthusiasm, both the reader of the letter and the audience."<sup>103</sup> Here the literary effect of the letter is visible: the qualifications for the enthusiasm and joy of the audience are the *form* of the letter, its *rhythm*, and the *suitability* of its language. These are both rhetoric-based evaluations – appropriate *form* and correct *suitability* – and also distinctly oral ones. It is the *rhythm* of Bryennios' prose that is praised; not merely the content of his communicative act in sending a letter to Italikos, but the sound-pattern of his sentences when read aloud by Italikos in the company of his peers. It is the elegance of the letter in oral performance which produces κορυβαντιῶ (*korubantio*), enthusiasm.

The *theatron* setting for the reception of letters highlights their fundamental nature as rhetorical objects bearing social currency. The minimum entrance fee for admittance to *theatron* circles was a command of rhetorical form and training;<sup>104</sup> both the authors of letters and the audiences which heard them belonged necessarily to the same social groups. Thus a letter can act as a form of maintenance of social ties and as a reinforcement of the views – which may be aesthetic but also may be political or ideological – of that social group.<sup>105</sup>

Therefore in locating and defining the ways in which epistolography and its reception could reinforce social ties and ideological positioning, it is necessary to

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<sup>103</sup> Paul Gautier, ed., *Lettres et Discours [de] Michel Italikos*, Archives de l'Orient Chrétien 14. (Paris: Institut français d'études byzantines, 1972), 154.

<sup>104</sup> Mullett, "Aristocracy", 183.

<sup>105</sup> For an example of how this sort of maintenance via aesthetic and cultural cues might occur, see Adam Schor, *Theodoret's People: social networks and religious conflict in late Roman Syria*, particularly the chapter entitled "Traces of a Network: friendship, doctrine, and clerical communication", 19-39.

examine the common education which endowed a Byzantine with that minimum entrance fee. The rhetorical training of an educated Constantinopolitan in Middle Period Byzantium – the prospective members of a *theatron*, letter-writers and letter-receivers, whether private or public – indoctrinated the student into both a society and a self-identity.<sup>106</sup> This training focused primarily around the second-century writings of Hermogenes. By the 5<sup>th</sup> century, when commentaries on Hermogenes began to appear, the Byzantines were aware of five of his works: the *Progymnasmata*, the *De Inventione*, the *De Statibus*, the *De Methodo Vehementiae*, and the *De Ideis*, the last of which discussed the seven stylistic features of a successful speech, as well as the differences between rhetoric and philosophy. Both the *Progymnasmata* and the *De Inventione* do not actually belong to Hermogenes and display a very different compositional style. Nevertheless, the Hermogenean corpus attracted a significant amount of commentary and analysis throughout the entire history of Byzantium. The companion to Hermogenes in rhetorical education was the *Progymnasmata* of Aphthonius, who defines 14 kinds of prose composition;<sup>107</sup> these two authors form the basis of Byzantine rhetorical practice. Byzantine scholiasts treated the joint corpus of Aphthonius and Hermogenes as a resource for locating, as necessary, both a defense of the aesthetic of obscurity (*asepheia*) or the aesthetic of clarity (*sapheneia*).

Letter writing was of interest to rhetoricians from antiquity onward, but only

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<sup>106</sup> See Tim Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: the politics of imitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) for a discussion of education as self-fashioning in the Greco-Roman world; education "involves the enculturation of certain habits, signs, and semiotic modes" (p. 94), i.e. it allows the student to enter into a mimetic repetition of a particular social group and thus claim membership, identity, and the power to use the knowledge and lifeways of that group, whether supportively or subversively.

<sup>107</sup> George Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*. Analekta Vlatadōn 17 (Thessalonikē: Patriarchikon Hidryma Paterikōn, 1973), 20-23.



gradually became embedded in the rhetorical system which was codified in handbooks. One of the earliest discussions of the subject appears in Demetrius of Phalerum's *De Elocutione*, dated somewhere from the third century BC to the first century CE, but the text treats letter-writing only in an excursus where a letter is described as one half of a dialogue, and thus should be written in the same "plain style" of such dialogues.<sup>108</sup> The integration of letter-writing into taught rhetorical practice emerges in the third century CE, where Philostratus of Lemnos produced a short treatise and Gregory of Nazianzus a brief letter on epistolary style. There were also two handbooks on appropriate forms in letter composition: the earlier attributed erroneously to the aforementioned Demetrius of Phalerum, and the latter attributed either to Libanius or Proclus in separate manuscript traditions. Both of these manuals were used by middle period Byzantine epistolographers, though the Pseudo-Libanius proved to be more popular.<sup>109</sup>

The Pseudo-Demetrius manual, dated between 200 BC and 300 AD,<sup>110</sup> provides descriptions of twenty-one types of letters, with an example of each type. It assumes its reader does not need instruction in basic rhetorical technique, but instead presents letter-writing as an exercise in selecting a style appropriate for the circumstances.<sup>111</sup> All of the types – which include 'friendly', 'advisory', 'inquiring', 'allegorical', and 'blaming' letters, as a sample of range – should be employed for particular purposes selected by the writer.

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<sup>108</sup> Demetrius of Phalerum, *Demetrius on Style: The Greek Text of Demetrius's "De Elocutione."* Ed. W. Rhys Roberts. (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 223-235.

<sup>109</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, ed. *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*. Sources for Biblical Study no. 19 (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1988), 5-7.

<sup>110</sup> G.M.A. Grube, ed. and trans. *A Greek Critic: Demetrius on Style* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1961).

<sup>111</sup> Pseudo-Demetrius, in *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, ed. A. Malherbe, (Atlanta, GA; Scholar's Press, 1998), 1-3.

Pseudo-Demetrius therefore solidly locates epistolary craft within the rhetorical art, marking it as innately persuasive, even if the manual does not explicitly discuss a wider theory of rhetoric.

The Pseudo-Libanius manual emerged somewhat later, between the fourth and sixth centuries AD, and is substantially more theoretical, including a definition of the letter (§1-3) and instruction on appropriate styles for different types of letters (§46-51) as well as a list of letter-types, carefully defined with accompanying models. For the author of Pseudo-Libanius, a letter "is a kind of written conversation with someone from whom one is separated, and it fulfills a definite need."<sup>112</sup> Here again we see the letter as a rhetorical and persuasive art, and as an instrument of closing wide distance. The manual also suggests that the letter should be composed ἀττικίζειν μὲν μετρίως – in a moderate Attic style, avoiding "excessive loftiness, verbosity, and Atticism", which are "foreign to the epistolary style, as the ancients bear witness".<sup>113</sup> The ancients in question are Philostratus of Lemnos, whose third-century *De Epistulis* instructs the letter-writer to imitate Apollonius of Tyana and Dio Chrysostom, if they prefer philosophers, or Marcus Aurelius, if they prefer emperors – while at all times keeping to the principles of brevity, clarity, and composition style which are "more Attic than everyday speech, but more ordinary than Atticism"<sup>114</sup>. Libanius, in citing Philostratus, places his manual in a stylistic tradition which focuses on simplicity and ἐτρέπες – (*etrepes*), suitability – of style; the letter is composed in specific fashion for specific circumstances. It also moves to more firmly situate epistolography within a rhetorical theory, precisely defining various types

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<sup>112</sup> Pseudo-Libanius, in *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, §2.

<sup>113</sup> Pseudo-Libanius, in *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, §47.

<sup>114</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, ep. 51 to Nikoboulos, in *Lettres Théologiques.*, ed. Paul Gallay. Sources Chrétiennes no. 208. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1974), 66.

and elaborating on stylistic concerns.<sup>115</sup>

Theoretical discussions of the letter, as opposed to instructional manuals, were found in the oeuvres of educated rhetoricians like the aforementioned Pseudo-Demetrius and Philostratus, as well as Cicero and – perhaps most significantly for later Byzantine epistolographers – Gregory of Nazianzus, who claims that brevity (συντομία), clarity (σαφηνεία), and grace (χάρις) are the necessary components of a good epistolary style. Both Photios and John Mauropous name Nazianzus as their model for epistolary rhetoric.<sup>116</sup> Brevity is relatively straightforward, and is chiefly employed in order to prevent letters from becoming treatises, a danger pointed out by Pseudo-Demetrius in the *Peri Hermeneias*.<sup>117</sup> Slippage between a letter, which contains a *personal* communication from the author to the recipient, and a treatise, which seems to be a more general excursus on a subject, unlimited by any social bond between two individuals, is to be guarded against. However, many Byzantine letter-writers ignore the strictures of συντομία for the sake of political necessity, specific requests on the behalf of the recipient for more detailed information, or the sheer luxury of writing to a dear correspondent.<sup>118</sup> Brevity is an ideal guideline, rather than a definition of the epistolary genre. Nevertheless, the suggestion that brevity is amongst the qualifications for excellent style does suggest that a letter should remain allusive, short, and precisely keyed to its particular message, even if that message is merely the desire for communication itself.

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<sup>115</sup> Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, 5-7.

<sup>116</sup> Photios, ep. 207 (233), ed. B. Laourdas and L.G. Westernink, *Photii epistolae et Amphilochia*, II (Leipzig, 1984), 107; on Mauropous, *The Letters of Joannes Mauropous, Metropolitan of Euchaita* (CFHB, 34, Thessalonike, 1990), 33-34.

<sup>117</sup> Demetrios, *Peri Hermeneias*, ln. 228, ed. Roberts, 174.

<sup>118</sup> For political expediency, the letters of Nicholas Mystikos to Symeon of Bulgaria; for the necessities of composition, Theophylact of Ochrid to Adrian the Grand Domestic, cited in Mullett, *Theophylact*, p. 150.

Clarity is more problematic. A key principle of Byzantine rhetorical theory is that ἀσάφεια – (*asapheia*), obscurity – is a virtue of style. This directly contradicts Aristotle's *Rhetoric* which requires clarity foremost of all stylistic virtues.<sup>119</sup> While Hermogenes' defense of ἀσάφεια is limited -- the *De Ideis* tells us that obscurity is not necessarily a *fault* in particular kinds of composition -- the Byzantine commentaries on this text extend the idea of an "approved obscurity" (ἐπαινουμένη ἀσάφεια).<sup>120</sup> The commentators link this sort of obscurity to one of Hermogenes' other Forms of appropriate rhetoric, variously Force or Amplitude, thus reducing Clarity – the first of those Forms – to an option which is appropriate in some situations, while obscurity is a better method in others. Obscurity allows for an epigrammatic style,<sup>121</sup> for referents and encodings, for the construction of common intellectual community which has been discussed above. For the letter-writer, the play of ἀσάφεια and σαφηνεία can be a pleasurable exercise in friendship<sup>122</sup> or employed to produce pathos and persuasion. A prime example of this latter use is in Theophylact, ep. G79, to the Grand Domestic Adrian Komnenos, in which Theophylact begs for consolation on the departure of his local governor, Gregory, by asking plaintively if he should now "draw away the veil of ἀσάφεια " which has previously marked his communications with Adrian.<sup>123</sup>

The last of Gregory of Nazianzus' three requirements for epistolary style is χάρις, grace. Gregory here uses χάρις to discuss the correct employment of figures of speech: a

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<sup>119</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Γ 2.1, 1404b2. "ὁρίσθω λέξεως ἀρετὴ σαφῆ εἶναι"

<sup>120</sup> Siceliotes, 6.203.4, ed Walz, *Rhetores Graeci, Ex Codicibus Florentinis, Mediolanensibus, Monacensibus, Neapolitanis, Parisiensibus, Romanis, Venetis, Taurinensibus et Vindobonensibus*, (Stuttgart, 1832).

<sup>121</sup> Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, 193.

<sup>122</sup> Theophylact of Ochrid, G71, to Opheomachos, II, 383.19-21.

<sup>123</sup> Theophylact of Ochrid, G79, to Adrian Komnenos, cited in Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 154.

graceful letter is one which is sweetened appropriately by maxims and proverbs, or even by "jokes and enigmas". However, too much of these figures of speech is as harmful as too little – Gregory would prefer that the letter remain modest and "as natural as possible".<sup>124</sup> Here again there is a tension between the recommended simplicity and the ability of the Byzantine letter to convey, by allusion and efflorescence, a local community maintained over distance.

Kustas, in his *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, points out that the theory of the composition of the letter which survives from Late Antiquity is mostly included as addenda to more general discussions of literary or rhetorical analysis, and consists in great majority of the above-discussed stylistic concerns. However, Theon, the earliest author to describe the system of *progynasmata* as it existed in Late Antiquity, classes the letter as *ἡθοποιία*, alongside panegyric and protreptic. All three of these types of writing are thus historically associated with "a fictional re-creation of the thoughts and feelings of a historical or mythological figure at a critical point."<sup>125</sup> Both *fictional* and *re-creation* as descriptors are worth further consideration. A letter is not usually considered to be a *fiction*, as it conveys 'real' information from sender to receiver. However, the information encoded in the letter is necessarily *fictionalized* in the sense that it is *interpreted* – its message is mediated by its format, by the distance it covers, and by the necessary decoding performed by the recipient during its reception.

The *re-creation* of thoughts and feelings in *ἡθοποιία* bears more significance for the Byzantine conception of the nature and force of the letter. The letter carries not only a message to be interpreted but also an image, a re-creation, of its author's thought

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<sup>124</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, epp. 51, PG 37, 105.

<sup>125</sup> Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, 45-6.

processes. Thus, to an educated Constantinopolitan, a letter, like most other rhetorical creations<sup>126</sup>, is believed to accurately portray the ἦθος of the sender. The letter fashions a persona of the writer – and thus allows him to present to a distant person his self-justifications, self-promotions, or self-assertions. The reception of letters was also a reception of visible and public self-representation which made, through rhetorical skill and commonly known tropic language, the writer's *good* character known to the receiver.<sup>127</sup>

Returning for a moment to Demetrius's identification of a letter as one half of a dialogue, it is worth noting that there is a close connection between dialogue and *ethos* in Hermogenes: διαλόγου πλοκή ἠθικοὶ λόγοι.<sup>128</sup> Character is manifested through the dialogue; the ethical standpoint of the speaker is demonstrated via a fictionalized speech. A letter, as one half of a dialogue, also has the power of presenting its author's ethical standpoint. Hermogenes also describes the letter as supplying an outlet for the personal, a sort of writing which gives outward form to inner emotion.<sup>129</sup>

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century Hierotheos wrote to one of his correspondents, asking that he "not cease to see us through the mirror of letters"<sup>130</sup> – that his recipient use his written communiqué as a method of 'seeing' Hierotheos without his actual presence. This is the letter taken as "a mirror which shows not the features of the recipient but of the

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<sup>126</sup> Malcolm Heath, *Hermogenes: On Issues. Strategies of Argument in Later Greek Rhetoric* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995), 3-22.

<sup>127</sup> Alexander Riehle, "Epistolography as autobiography: remarks on the letter-collections of Nikephoros Choumnos," *Parekbolai* 2 (2012), 14-15.

<sup>128</sup> Hermogenes, *De Meth. Vehem.* 455:1.

<sup>129</sup> Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, 34.

<sup>130</sup> Hierotheos, ep. 186, see Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins*, 326.

sender,"<sup>131</sup> i.e. the letter as the icon of the soul, an image which appears as early as the *Peri Hermeneias* and then reoccurs in the letter collections and commentaries on epistolary of Julian the Apostate, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, as well as more contemporaneous middle Byzantine sources, such as Symeon Metaphrastes.<sup>132</sup> Embedded in the letter is the *χαρακτήρ* (*character*) and *ἦθος* (*ethos*) of its author; these attributes are carried with the letter out of the presence of the author and into that of the recipient, despite the fact that the author himself is physically absent.

This position on the function of the letter is perhaps most fully stated by Michael Psellos, in his Epistle 11, in which he describes the letter as an εἶδωλον (*eidolon*, image) of the absent sender; an image which is equivalent to conversation in person (i.e. with an 'animate' presence -- ἔμψυχος πρόσωπον) for demonstrating the character of the soul (χαρακτήρα τῆς ψυχῆς).<sup>133</sup> Kustas, in his discussion of Byzantine rhetoric, has pointed out that this conceit appears as early as Paul's epistle to the Cornithians, in which he describes himself as being absent in body but present in spirit (1 Corinthians 5:3).<sup>134</sup> In this passage, Psellos is referencing terms from one of the most popular rhetorical treatises amongst middle Byzantine literati, namely Hermogenes. Both ἐνδιάωετος and ἔμθυχος are Hermogenes' terms for *sincerity*, one of the rhetorical virtues.<sup>135</sup> The letter is thus a

<sup>131</sup> Mullett, *Theophylact*, 26.

<sup>132</sup> C.f. Littlewood, "An Ikon of the Soul: the Byzantine Letter", 197-226, for the reoccurrence of this image throughout Byzantine epistolary.

<sup>133</sup> Psellos, ep. 11, *Mes. Bibl.* V, Paris 1976. The passage is worth quoting in full: "οὐ μὴν ἀρκεῖ πρὸς εὐφροσύνης λόγον ἢ φαντασία, ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἐμψύχου προσώπου εἶδωλόν ἐστι τὸν εἰκονιζόμενον – παρόντες μὲν διὰ τῆς κατὰ πρόσωπον ὁμιλίας, ἀπόντες δε δι' ἐπιστολῶν ὁμιλήσομεν – μάλιστα γὰρ τὸν φίλον ἀπεικονίζεται καὶ τὸν χαρακτήρα δείκνυσι τῆς ἐκείνου ψυχῆς..."

<sup>134</sup> Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric* 45.

<sup>135</sup> Hermogenes, *Hermogenis Opera*. *Rhetores Graeci* VI ed. H. Rabe, (Liepzig, Teubner 1913), 352.16.

vehicle for reproducing the sincere, accurate observation of the character of the author, just as if the author was in fact present with the recipient, ἔμθυχος and παρόντες. Letters provide, at a distance, the same bona-fides of character which the presence of an individual would; they are rhetorical objects which demonstrate ἥθος as well as convey information.

In 1978 the Russian scholar Ljubarskij, in the process of attempting to 'unmask' the 'role' of Michael Psellos in the literary society of the 11<sup>th</sup> century via an examination of his letter exchanges, argued that the author of a Byzantine letter "adapted not only his words, but also his choice of thoughts and feelings to the addressee, manifesting one and the same *'prothesis'*, which was considered to be one of the fundamental virtues of a clever orator."<sup>136</sup> In this conception of the function of Byzantine epistolary rhetoric, the audience is fundamentally central to the composition of the letter: it is *for them* that the author writes. Both his personal style and the content of his missives are cued to the response he wishes to engender in his reader(s). Here the letter is not precisely functioning as a pure image of the soul, but instead as some sort of *designed* image – an attempt to portray the author appropriately, in the best light, in the most persuasive fashion.

Stratis Papaioannou has suggested that the character which is exposed in the letter is not merely the interior state of the author, but in addition a reflection of the author's place in social relations. John Mauropous, when writing to a friend (letter 42), not only explains that his letter "bears witness to the character of me, your friend", but also that

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<sup>136</sup> J.N. Ljubarskij, *Michail Psell. Lichnost' I Tvorchestvo. K Istorii Vizantijskogo Presgumanizma* (Moscow 1978), 39. Translation Paul Hatlie, in "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography", 223.



this character is demonstrated by the author's relationship to the addressee in "both word- and gift-giving".<sup>137</sup> Papaioannou suggests that this "intimate yet hierarchical relation" is an example of *self-representation* rather than self-revelation.<sup>138</sup> The *ethos* revealed here is an *ethos* grounded in moving through the social community. Letter-writers not only presented themselves as possessed of a particular character, but placed themselves within a larger social rubric via that presentation.

That larger social rubric might be quite extensive. As discussed above, a letter is fundamentally a communication over distance. Separation is embedded in the very act of sending a letter from author to receiver: it both brings together individuals who had been displaced spatially from one another and simultaneously emphasizes their distance from one another. "I have just set foot in Ochrid and I long for the city that holds you,"<sup>139</sup> Theophylact writes in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and Mullett has pointed out that it is the act of composing, sending, and receiving the letter of the absent friend which invokes both the trope of distance and the bonds of community.<sup>140</sup> A letter is thus also a solid link which describes movement -- specifically the movement of information, whether cultural, personal, or political -- between two nodes of a spatial network.

This proposed network in which each link is an epistolary communication therefore assumes that each node is therefore a sender, a receiver, or an audience (or all three, at differing moments). Such a network is not confined to one form. Byzantine letters can describe friendship networks, patronage circles like that surrounding the 'salon'

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<sup>137</sup> Mauropous, epp. 42.

<sup>138</sup> Stratis Papaioannou, "Letter-Writing", 192-193.

<sup>139</sup> Theophylact, G6, II, 147.2-3.

<sup>140</sup> Mullett, *Theophylact*, 13.

of Anna Dalassena in the 12th century, as one prominent example of many<sup>141</sup>, or, as Adam Schor has recently explored in his study of the correspondence of Theodoret of Cyrrus,<sup>142</sup> multiple and overlapping communications concerning ecclesiastical politics and policies. This is in no sense an exhaustive list. The Byzantine Romans themselves saw epistolary communication as a collapse of distance, fundamentally concerned with maintaining bonds between disparate persons and places – disparate nodes. An epistolary network can thus be a map of nearly any sort of multi-nodal, multi-vocal community.

Using epistolary collections to describe networks of communication in Byzantium has focused primarily on the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries – Mullett's essential *Theophylact* and the aforementioned Schor monograph, respectively – and on intellectual bonds which are maintained, reinforced, and used via the exchange of epistolary communication. This project, while being heavily based in the conceptions of interlaced friendship and patronage which appear in the Mullett and Schor studies, focuses particularly on the networked letter as it interacts with the Byzantine state apparatus.

If, as discussed in the prior chapter on imperialism and its interactions with the frontier, we must consider Byzantium to be an empire with a universalizing ideology which came under pressure through interactions with non-Byzantines, then the network(s) which are produced by epistolary communication can be employed to demonstrate not only the maintenance of that ideology over distance – much like the maintenance of the bonds of friendship over distance – but also function as a map of the

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<sup>141</sup> See Mullett, "Aristocracy", and Magdalino, *Manuel I*.

<sup>142</sup> Schor, Adam. *Theodoret's People: social networks and religious conflict in Late Roman Syria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

extent of imperialized space: "an imperial spatiality consisting of networks".<sup>143</sup> Network theory seems to provide a useful methodology for examining the interaction of imperial ideology and social systems in Byzantium. However, as Schor has usefully noted, there are several limitations to applying it to historical situations – a network map constructed from epistolary communication necessarily simplifies the social and ideological experience of its nodes (which are live, culturally embedded men and women). It is incomplete and may overemphasize particular relationships while ignoring others of equal importance. Schor suggests a partial solution which this dissertation intends to follow: to draw on network models for hypotheses and confirm them through other means, while maintaining a separation between "the *intersubjective* networks of ancient people and their *perceptual/mental* networks, and both from the *network maps* of modern observers."<sup>144</sup> When letters are considered as the manifestation of a network of communication which may represent Byzantine imperial interests, care must be taken to distinguish between the network map produced by the historian and the network which actually existed; they are not identical, nor are they inflected in the same directions. The network map of imperial interests produced by an epistolary collection only makes visible those connections which were preserved in that collection; it is neither complete nor inclusive of all of one individual's conception of the extent of Byzantine influence.

However, letters do provide a lens onto the geography of empire. The letters of Photios, as one example amongst many, are addressed to individuals in Venice, the more distant West, and the Arab world, as well as to individuals in Constantinople. These

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<sup>143</sup> Lambert and Lester, "Imperial spaces, imperial subjects," in Lambert and Lester, eds. *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 1-30.

<sup>144</sup> Schor, 11-12.

addressees produce a map of the foci of Byzantine political and spiritual interests in the 10<sup>th</sup> century: it is unsurprising that Constantinople looms exceedingly large in this map, but the letter collections of Photios also demonstrate some unlikely locales of Byzantine interests. Michael McCormick makes particular mention of the number of letters addressed to prelates in Venice, and suggests that, despite the Venetian church not being exceptionally replete with significant individuals with whom a Patriarch of Constantinople would correspond, Venice may have served as a hub of an epistolary network. Communications from points more distant to the West (for example, Rome or France) would pass through Venice, thus producing more reason for Photios to communicate with the church centers there.<sup>145</sup> The geographical map created by Photios' epistolary network allows for new insights into the locations and extent of Byzantine imperial influence; they produce a window onto the "multiple and continually fragmenting and reforming imperial networks of communication."<sup>146</sup>

Writing is a political technology.<sup>147</sup> In particular, writing which crosses multiple imperial locales, moving from provinces or borderlands to centers or vice-versa is a political technology which both preserves and reproduces the ideologies of its authors.<sup>148</sup>

Travel, and travel writing – which includes epistolary documents composed by imperial agents and sent back toward the metropole or to other imperial agents – *produces* the

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<sup>145</sup> Michael McCormick, "Byzantium on the Move: imagining a communications history", in Macrides, R. J., ed. *Travel in the Byzantine World: Papers from the Thirty-Fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, April 2000*. Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies Publications 10. (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate/Variorum, 2002), 11.

<sup>146</sup> Lambert and Lester, "Imperial Careering", 9.

<sup>147</sup> Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: the wonder of the New World*. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991), 21.

<sup>148</sup> Ogborn, Miles. "Writing travels: power, knowledge, and ritual on the English East India Company's early voyages," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2001): 9-10.

"rest of the world"<sup>149</sup>: i.e. it makes the illegible, the foreign, and the non-Roman legible and thus comprehensible to the audience at home. The network of epistolary communication is also a network of constructed ideology, which by collapsing the distance between the extended points of Byzantine influence allows for the maintenance as well as the creation of images of the foreign which are controllable, relatable, and coherent.

But this network is not stable. It is imperiled by the vicissitudes of weather, the distance between the nodes, and the difficulties of travel in the medieval period.<sup>150</sup> A letter at its fastest moves only as fast as a ship, and usually moves instead at the speed of a horse or a man on foot. The imperial network which emerges from these epistolary collections is not a modern or even an early modern version of an imperial state. The channels by which information moves are slow, difficult, and operate on a narrow band, only influencing the letter's recipient and his immediate social group who might hear it read aloud in a *theatron*. Thus, the network of imperial power which is manifest in an epistolary collection is *necessarily* hemmed in by the pace of medieval travel and the paucity of active voices. Such a network describes an 'empire' which may only exist in the interstices of that network, an epiphenomena with 'real' effects; a literary construction of Byzantine power which is nonetheless firmly believed in.

This dissertation primarily considers the letter in the tenth and eleventh centuries, during the Macedonian dynasty. This period is rich in epistolographic sources. In many ways, the Macedonian dynasty saw a revival of the great days of patristic letter-writing; it

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<sup>149</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: travel writing and transculturation* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 5-7.

<sup>150</sup> McCormick, "Byzantium on the Move", 27.

was a new golden age of Byzantine letters.<sup>151</sup> Approximately one thousand letters survive from the period, primarily in the collections of Choïrosphaktes, Leo of Synada, Symeon Metaphrastes, Nikolas Mystikos, and Philetos Synadenos, as well as a plethora of smaller collections. These include highly political letters: on both the state level (such as the correspondence of Nikolas Mystikos with Symeon of Bulgaria), and also within the synods of the church (taken together, the collections of Alexander of Nicea, Leo of Synada, Theodore of Nicaea, and Theodore of Kyzikos).<sup>152</sup> Other letters include the day-to-day correspondence of an anonymous schoolteacher,<sup>153</sup> the correspondence of the Strategos of the Armies of the East to both friends and political acquaintances,<sup>154</sup> and letters written by minor officials in a diplomatic capacity to individuals quite outside the borders of the Byzantine literary community.<sup>155</sup>

The vast variety of epistolary collections which date from this period are, however, a small fraction of letters composed. Grünbart has compiled a list of all extant Byzantine letters, which numbers approximately 280 letter-writers producing 15,480 individual letters. However, these letters are all preserved in literary letter collections, and may in fact bear little resemblance to the majority of Byzantine letters composed.<sup>156</sup> Nevertheless, far more letters are preserved *in* collections than are found separately or with other forms of literature<sup>157</sup>; and thus the collection process itself had some value to the Byzantines. Pappioannou reminds us that Byzantine writing of all kinds, no matter

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<sup>151</sup> Mullett, "Writing", 174.

<sup>152</sup> All edited in Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle*.

<sup>153</sup> Anonymous Londiniensis, ed. B. Laourdas, Markopolis CFHB.

<sup>154</sup> Nikephoros Ouranos, ed. Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle*.

<sup>155</sup> Such as Arethas of Caesarea's *Letter to the Saracen Emir*; for this text see P. Karlin-Hayter, "Arethas, Choïrosphaktes, and the Saracen Vizier", *Byzantion* 35 (1965).

<sup>156</sup> Mullett, "Writing", 173, 182. See also Papaioannou, "Letter-writing", 193.

<sup>157</sup> Mullett, *Theophylact*, 41-43.

how rhetorical or intended for oral performance, was also functional and pragmatic: all texts, and particularly epistolary texts, are produced for concrete reasons and intended to create specific effects.<sup>158</sup>

Thus we can assume that a Byzantine letter-collection was compiled for specific, historically relevant, and directly time-bound purposes. These collections were not systemized; they were not organized by subject or by purpose, but instead in a loose chronology – manuscripts like Patmos 706 and Patmos 178, which contain major letter collections preserved in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, seem to be organized around date, rather than on thematic grounds. Nevertheless, some manuscripts may have served as composition models for educational purposes.<sup>159</sup> We thus have far fewer letters preserved than were produced; of the 280 letter-writers preserved from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, not one is represented by his entire letter collection. In fact, most survive in small collections which lack the responses from the addressees attested in the letters. Papaioannou has compiled a nearly exhaustive list of all the manuscripts in which these letters appear; from inspection, this list reveals that most Byzantine letter-collections survive in only one manuscript, and were not recopied. These letters were written for "direct and immediate communication" with chronological peers; once their concerns had passed along with the progression of time, they could no longer serve a communicative function and thus were less frequently copied into manuscripts.<sup>160</sup>

A generalized study of the thematics of 10<sup>th</sup>-century letters remains to be composed; however, two thematic concerns are immediately apparent, all aside from the

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<sup>158</sup> Papaioannou, "Fragile Literature", 289-291.

<sup>159</sup> Robert Browning, "The Patriarchal School at Constantinople" *Byzantion* 32-33 (1962-63): 11-40, 167-201.

<sup>160</sup> Papaioannou, "Fragile Literature", 293-297.

language of friendship and common cultural practice (particularly the practice of making allusions to Classical and Biblical referents earlier discussed as an example of *asepheia*). These thematic concerns are first, the exile letter, and second, the illness letter. Both convey a preoccupation with the hazards of distance and separation, and a concern for the integrity of the bond between author and recipient. The inclusion of intimate details of physical illness, and equally intimate expressions of longing for a place and people left behind, highlight this sharp focus on the possibility that the letter can act as a stand-in for the physical presence of the absent author. As the great majority of authors in the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup>-century epistolary corpus are either provincial administrators (whether military or civil), envoys and diplomats like Leo Choirosphaktes, or ecclesiastical officials sent out of Constantinople to take up bishoprics or metropolitanates in distant parts of the empire, it is therefore unsurprising that these themes which focus on distance, separation and the maintenance of the integrity of bonds of loyalty and friendship become exceptionally prominent.

The theme of exile and longing for the community of the metropole<sup>161</sup> appears especially in the collections of provincial administrators like Philetos Synadenos, judge at Tarsus, or Nikephoros Ouranos, governor of Antioch. While these individuals had not been inflicted with political or social exile, their careers had carried them outside of the orbit of the queen of cities. They write that they find the new lands they inhabit intellectually and socially bereft; their postings surround them with of barbaric, un-

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<sup>161</sup> The Byzantine exile letter is well-attested in the 12<sup>th</sup> century; see Mullett's *Theophylact* study, as well as her "Originality in the Byzantine Letter: the case of exile," in *Originality in Byzantine literature, art and music*, ed. A.R. Littlewood (Oxford, 1996): 39-58.

While exile is a confirmed theme in the 12<sup>th</sup>, it also appears extensively earlier.



Byzantine peoples. They fear that extensive contact with these non-Byzantines will induce a sort of barbarism-by-proxy. "When you get my letter, favor me with a reply, not lofty and sublime, but what I, who have grown into a barbarian with the stupid Cilicians, can understand,"<sup>162</sup> writes Synadenos, referencing Euripides, *Orestes* 485 ("You have become a barbarian, living so long among barbarians"), and expects that communications via epistolary with those he has left behind in Constantinople will alleviate the peril of being surrounded by those who have not received a Constantinopolitan *paideia*.

Exile is described in Byzantine epistolography as a sense of loss, a fixation on the contrast between current circumstances and locales and those which the author has been compelled to abandon. From the 10<sup>th</sup> century corpus, Synadenos, John Geometres, and John Mauropous all describe how their experiences abroad have changed them, removed them from Constantinople and Constantinopolitan life, and rendered them barbarians in a barbarian land. Even Nicholas Mystikos, who was safely ensconced in the patriarchate in the capital, reflected in a letter concerning episcopal service outside of Constantinople "on the desolate nature of the place and the strangeness of their [the parishioners'] manners".<sup>163</sup> While exile literature as a genre – in which letters played a significant role – did not fully emerge in Byzantium until the Komnenian period,<sup>164</sup> 10<sup>th</sup>-century letter writers were no less fixated on the idea of being separated from the addressees of their letters. However, those writers who express lamentation for the city of their birth are not, in this earlier period, the political exiles who would dominate the genre in the 12<sup>th</sup>.

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<sup>162</sup> Philetos Synadenos, ep. 7, ed. Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins*, 254.

<sup>163</sup> Nicholas Mystikos, ep. 79, ed. Jenkins and Westerink, 334.

<sup>164</sup> For a discussion of the *topoi* of exile in Komnenian literature, see Mullett, "Originality in the Byzantine Letter: the case of exile", in *Originality in Byzantine Art, Literature, and Music*, 1979.

Instead, they were provincial administrators, both military and civil, like the aforementioned Philetos Synadenos, or Nikephoros Ouranos during his stint as governor of Antioch. It is in the letters of these imperial agents, out doing the empire's business in the distant provinces, that we see longing for home and the deep sense of loss of community which moving outside the borders of the intellectual world of Constantinople caused. Ouranos describes his image of Constantinople as follows: "gatherings of friends and conversations, and indeed the greatest of all, my gold-pourer – that is to say, your mouth and its flowers, the flow of graces and the waters of teaching."<sup>165</sup>

As Mullett has explained, the Byzantine letter-writer capitalizes on the function of the letter as a collapse of distance. Their continuous use of "the difficulties of travel, their feelings of loneliness, the dangers of absence, polarities of presence and absence, soul and body, separation and unity"<sup>166</sup> is an outgrowth of both the nature of epistolary as a form and of the particular fixations of the Byzantine mentality on which areas are properly *Byzantine* and which are irredeemably barbarous – including places as close as Euchaita or as far as Bulgaria. Letter-writing both emphasizes these difficulties and presents a possible cure for them – bringing the writer back into the orbit of civilization, which is fundamentally Byzantine and made possible via rhetorical education and communication. The Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos justified taking time away from his office to write letters to friends and acquaintances, claiming that he was setting an example for his subjects "of the love of letters, so that as they mingle so much with

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<sup>165</sup> Ouranos, ep. 47, ed. Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins*.

<sup>166</sup> Mullett, "Originality", 48.

barbarians they might not become completely barbarized".<sup>167</sup> Even in the last days of Byzantium, letter-writing is a panacea against the destruction of Byzantine-ness via encroachment of outsiders or presence of Byzantines in non-Byzantine places.

The perils of leaving the metropole also figure in the other major theme of tenth-century epistolary: the illness letter. Letter-writers write about their own illness and respond to the reports of illness from others. Being ill seems to emerge as part and parcel of being absent from home; illness, while sometimes severe (the symptoms described include fevers, nausea, dizziness, and general malaise, occasionally to the point of incapacitation), is both an actual event and a metaphor made physical, a sort of psychosomatic response to extended separation. The theme of illness in epistolary writing often seems to be an outgrowth of homesickness.

Homesickness and its physical manifestations appear in narrative accounts written by Byzantines who travel outside of Constantinople. These accounts, such as those written by Constantine Manasses and Nicholas Mouzalon in the twelfth century, demonstrate that physical illness in the Byzantine traveler can become "yet another metaphor for their [the Byzantine traveler's] intensely felt cultural alienation."<sup>168</sup> In Manasses' account, he is stricken by illness in Cyprus when he is removed from the company of the only other Byzantine official, a *sebastos*. But when the *sebastos* finally arrives in Cyprus, Manasses' symptoms are relieved; he feels as if springtime and calmness have come again.<sup>169</sup> Culture shock has induced physical symptoms. The letter-

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<sup>167</sup> Manuel II Palaiologos, epp. 52. Ed. & trans. Dennis, *Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus*, 150.

<sup>168</sup> C. Galatariotou, "Travel and Perception in Byzantium" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47 (1993): 229.

<sup>169</sup> *Manasses*, 335.1-337.83; 339.1-343.35; 344.69-81.

writer experiences something similar when he writes of his illness to his recipients: "Both the turbulent difficulties of my mission and the sickness borne of living in exile make me speak laconically," writes the envoy Leo Choirosphaktes from his post in Baghdad to a fellow official back in Constantinople.<sup>170</sup> Foreignness and foreign places – the dangers of travel and separation – underlie the continual emphasis on health in epistolary communication.

The tenth century epistolary corpus is marked by an exceptionally strong presence of the theme of illness, though this thematic element had emerged as early as the letters of Gregory of Nazianzus.<sup>171</sup> Nikephoros Ouranos, Symeon Magistros, and Alexander of Nicea all inquire after the health of their correspondents and express dismay when they hear of illness.<sup>172</sup> Ouranos goes so far as to experience the symptoms of illness himself when he hears of those of his friend, in a kind of transference: "I was prostrate with shivering when the report announcing your illness maimed my soul and my tongue completely." The recitation of physical and mental ailments at either the beginning of a letter or at its close functions to bring the physical – the very personal physical – experienced by the author into the presence of the letter-receiver. Mullett has suggested that the give-and-take of intensely personal information, including that of illness and hardship, is a way to build up a spiritual portrait of the correspondent – and thus to

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<sup>170</sup> Leo Choirosphaktes, ep. 15, ed. George Kolias, *Léon Choerosphactès, Magistre, Proconsul et Patrice: Biographie--Correspondance (texte et Traduction)*. Texte Und Forschungen Zur Byzantinisch-Neugriechischen Philologie Nr. 31. (Athen: Verlag der "Byzantinisch-neugriechischen Jahrbücher," 1939).

<sup>171</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, ep. 80.

<sup>172</sup> Nikephoros Ouranos, ep. 36, ed. Darrouzès; Simeon Magistros, ep. 37, ed. Darrouzès; Alexander of Nicea, ep. 8, ed. Darrouzès.

accurately achieve an icon of the soul encoded into writing.<sup>173</sup> This is a very particular sort of use of the letter as an *eidolon* of the soul; the letter is also an *eidolon* of *nosos* or other poor circumstances.

However, friendship, especially the friendship which is maintained and cultivated through epistolary, can cure this sort of illness. Gregory of Nazianzos writes to Eudokios: "Sickness is cured by friendship. What better remedy than a friend's conversation?"<sup>174</sup> Hearing of, inquiring about, and commiserating about sickness is a remedy; a cure for loneliness and cultural alienation. A letter is soothing relief; according to Pseudo-Libanius, it can heal yearning and desire: τοῖς γούν γράμμασι θεραπεύειν τὸν πόθον ἐπειγόμεθα.<sup>175</sup> The idea is carried through Procopius of Gaza and to the tenth-century example of Theodore of Kyzikos.<sup>176</sup> If the letter emphasizes the distance between sender and receiver, it can also relieve some of the perils of living distantly from one's culture and social group.

These letters of illness and exile are sent from one Byzantine to another. But a letter is, as mentioned, a political technology – it is also the primary method available to Byzantines of communicating with non-Byzantines. Any consideration of the letter as being capable of representing a network of Byzantine imperial ideologies must therefore consider as well the diplomatic letter, sent not from one member of the Constantinopolitan intelligentsia to another, however far-flung, but instead from a Byzantine to a non-Byzantine with political intent. The properties of the Byzantine letter

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<sup>173</sup> Mullett, *Theophylact*, 105-6.

<sup>174</sup> Gregory of Naziansos, ep. 64, ed. Gallay, I, 83.

<sup>175</sup> Libanios, *Epistolimanaioi charakteres*, ed. V. Weichert, *Demetrii et Libanii qui feruntur typoi epistolikoi et epistolimaiai charakteres* (Leipzig, 1910), 38.

<sup>176</sup> Theodore of Kyzikos, ep. 55, ed. S. Lampros, *NE* 20 (1924), 151.

as discussed here extend somewhat to the properties of the Byzantine diplomatic letter: certainly they were penned by the same sorts of people. More significantly, the diplomatic letter did not deviate significantly in form or in tone from the personal letter. The diplomatic letter is a letter-type like any other. Specifically, it is the *presbeutike*, Libanius' twenty-fifth type of letter, a letter δι' ἧς πρεσβεύομεν περὶ τίνος, 'by which we negotiate about something'. The examples of *presbeutike* letters in Libanius demonstrate concerns of friendship, separation, and the reciprocity of affection between letter-writer and letter-receiver.<sup>177</sup> In this sense they bear a great deal of similarity to the inter-Byzantine letters which have already been discussed. Since these exempla come from one of the rhetorical manuals employed by the Byzantine intelligentsia, it is also possible that they had some effect on Byzantine diplomatic practice.<sup>178</sup>

Diplomatic letters display the same *topoi*, the same referentiality to Classical and Biblical models, and the same expectation of rhetorical acuity that personal letters do. While diplomatic letters are often necessarily longer and contain more concrete information than the standard personal letter, there remains both a concern for *syntomia* and a necessity for elegant composition<sup>179</sup> – an elegance which can be employed to express the *political* belief that rhetorical education and rhetorical skill are necessary communicative tools. These tools are held by the educated Byzantine letter-writer, and they become weapons in his hands, weapons that persuade, overwhelm, and culturally influence the negotiation between him and his non-Byzantine counterparts.

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<sup>177</sup> Libanius, *Epistolimaioi Charakteres*, 25, ed. V. Weichert, 37-8.

<sup>178</sup> Mullett, "The Language of Diplomacy" in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, ed. J. Shepard and S. Franklin (SPBS, 1, Aldershot, 1992), 215.

<sup>179</sup> Mullett, "The Language of Diplomacy", 212.

The language of letters, Mullett tells us, is a language of friendship – but the language of diplomacy is *also* a language of friendship, marked by the same gift-giving, negotiation, and emphasis on bonds between distant kinsmen, whether spiritual or actual. The use of the letter as a diplomatic tool demonstrates that it is by drawing upon the bonds which a letter, with its presentation of the image of the soul of the author, can create, maintain, and enforce, that Byzantine diplomacy – a friendship bought with gifts<sup>180</sup> – could reach beyond the center and metropole of the empire towards, and beyond, its edges.

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<sup>180</sup> F. Dvornik, *Origins of Intelligence Services: the ancient Near East, Persia, Greece, Rome, Byzantium, the Arab Muslim Empire, the Mongol Empire, China, Muscovy* (New Brunswick, 1974), 46ff.

### 3. THE DIPLOMAT: LEO CHOIROSPHAKTES

The Byzantine diplomat, moving outside of the metropolitan center of Constantinople and beyond the borders of Byzantine imperial control, carries with him an internalized image of Byzantine ideology and Byzantine authority. It is his purpose to demonstrate, negotiate for, and represent that authority to non-Byzantines. The personal communications of a Byzantine diplomat – his participation in Byzantine epistolary culture – are therefore locations where Byzantine ideology is both normative and marginalized. Normative, as the diplomat is embedded in a letter-writing society which reinforces itself – and marginalized, as the diplomat encounters and interacts with subordinated or foreign peoples who offer alternatives to that ideology.

Tracing an imperial career – the life of a man or woman who moves from one post to another in service to an empire – demonstrates "the continual reformulation of imperial discourses, practices, and culture"<sup>181</sup> which necessarily occurs when imperial ideology encounters the liminality of empire at its edges. It also points out that there is no possibility of a single imperial discourse, as the relationship between metropole and subordinate polity is actualized in an individual human being's experience and mentality. The lives of imperial careerists are sites of the experiences instability of empire.

A Byzantine imperial careerist might be sent to multiple non-Byzantine sites; diplomatic missions were variable and could take a single envoy to both the western, northern, and eastern frontiers of Byzantine power. Constantine-Cyril, before his famed mission to Pannonia, was an envoy in Khazaria and Baghdad. Once there, what was the project in which he was engaged? – i.e., what was 'Byzantine diplomacy', and did it have

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<sup>181</sup> Lambert and Lester, "Imperial spaces, imperial subjects," 2, 9.



a peculiarly imperialist character? Kazhdan notes that in a late example (1299 CE) of an ambassadorial speech, Theodore Metochites describing his diplomatic mission to the Serbian *kral*, Stefan Milutin, there emerges a highly centralized vision of Byzantine diplomacy, in which the envoy is in many senses the extended hand of the "perfect and great" Emperor in Constantinople, being sent out by and returning to that emperor and possessing authority described as *basileos*, imperial.<sup>182,183</sup> Here the methods of Byzantine diplomacy – which variously could involve the presentation of gifts, the threat of military intervention, and the complex politics of marital alliances<sup>184</sup>, amongst other activities – are focused on a centralized authority structure. It is the re-iteration of that authority outside its boundaries, the production and preservation of *taxis* in the *oecumene* (the right order of the world), which Metochites and other Byzantine envoys portray themselves as being engaged in.

Kazhdan has referred to this sort of universalism as being inherently conservative rather than expansionist: it is not the end-goal of Byzantine diplomacy to bring the entire world under the aegis of Byzantine power, but instead to preserve the glory of the Roman Empire as it once was.<sup>185</sup> Even the great expansionary movements under emperors like Justinian or Basil II were aimed at a restoration of former territory, rather than acquisition. Even a conservative universalism, however, is still universalist and imperial: envoys like Metochites portray the work of Byzantine diplomacy as the work of imprinting the world with a Byzantine vision of order. Or, at least, this is how Metochites

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<sup>182</sup> Theodore Metochites, ed. L. Mavromatis, *La fondation de l'empire serbe. Le kralj Milutin* (Thessalonica, 1978), 89-119; 1.399-400, 1.277-8.

<sup>183</sup> Kazhdan, "The Notion of Byzantine Diplomacy", 9-10.

<sup>184</sup> Shepard, "Byzantine Diplomacy, A.D. 800-1200: Means and Ends", 42-43.

<sup>185</sup> Kazhdan, "The Notion of Byzantine Diplomacy", 11, 14.

describes his work when he is writing for the audience of his friends and colleagues back in Constantinople. What he and his fellow-envoys were *actually* doing is more nebulous.

As Chapter 1 has detailed, Byzantine imperialism (and thus Byzantine diplomacy), despite the claims of its agents in text, is composite; it requires the negotiation of authority between a central political power and many differentiated entities. These many negotiations produce an unevenness of imperial authority, particularly far away from the metropole. An envoy encounters multiplicity, and must respond with multiplicity; while he may write that his authority derives from a universal emperor, in practice he would necessarily have to encounter and deal with disparate situations along all of its varied borderlands. The texts produced by Byzantine diplomats, if they are similar to Metochites' account of his embassy, seem to mask this instability.

The collected letters of Leo Choiosphaktes in particular suggest the possibility of exploring the self-identity and narrative coherence of the Byzantine imperial agent – i.e., toward what ends does a Byzantine diplomat produce texts, particularly epistolary ones? Examining the representation of Byzantine imperialism through the epistolary texts produced by its agents is a process of asking not only what the story of Byzantine imperial power is, but who is telling it. Choiosphaktes may serve as a model of a Byzantine diplomat, a sort of ur-envoy: a man of distinguished and educated background, in receipt of several high titles, related by marriage to the imperial house, a producer of poetry and encomia intended for the receptive ears of the Constantinopolitan court – and who was, more than occasionally, sent on imperial business to the edges of Byzantine power.

A summary of his career and background demonstrates what a Byzantine diplomat might be called upon to do and what qualified him for such activities. Choirosphaktes was born sometime in the mid-ninth century, and died at a relatively advanced age, in or shortly after 919 CE.<sup>186</sup> His family was well-off enough to allow him to acquire an education suitable for a member of the secular administration: he was versed in both the classics and in the Scriptures, and studied with Leo the Mathematician. He also composed a poem in iambic verse dedicated to the wisdom of Photios upon the latter's death<sup>187</sup>; this suggests that Choirosphaktes was at least partially embedded in the Photian intellectual milieu of the ninth century – concerned, as many of the students of Leo the Philosopher and Photios were, with classical and Neoplatonic philosophy and astrology as well as with theology.<sup>188</sup> Choirosphaktes' own literary output reveals his interest in and commitment to classical studies and astrological inquiry, as well as his position high in the constellation of literary figures at the court of Leo VI.<sup>189</sup> He produced both poetry and prose, including several anacreontic poems in celebration of court occasions (three on various imperial marriages, one on the opening of a palace bath built by Leo VI<sup>190</sup>) and a substantial theological treatise in twelve-syllable verse, the

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<sup>186</sup> His juvenile poem, "Xilostixos Theologia", is dedicated to the Emperor Michael III, and must date from the end of that emperor's reign, which gives Choirosphaktes a birth year of somewhere between 845 and 855 CE. His last datable production is the 919 anacreontic poem; he would have been approximately 70 at the time of composition, and likely died shortly thereafter.

<sup>187</sup> Εἰς Φώτιον τῶν ἐν ἁγίοις, circa 981 CE.

<sup>188</sup> Kolias, 64-5.

<sup>189</sup> Paul Magdalino, "In search of the Byzantine courtier: Leo Choirosphaktes and Constantine Manasses," in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829-1204*, ed. Henry Maguire, (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Press, 1997) 146-8.

<sup>190</sup> This last discussed in detail in Paul Magdalino, "The Bath of Leo the Wise," in *Maistor: Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning*, ed. A. Moffatt, *Byzantina Australiensia* 5 (Canberra, 1984), 225-40; idem, "The Bath of Leo

*Thousand-Line Theology*, dedicated to either Leo VI or the young Constantine VII. This latter work, his most ambitious in both literary complexity and theological demonstration, can be read as a subtle apologia for the science of astrology and the necessity of possessing *logos* – here a sort of 'science of reading the codes which God has written into creation' for the highest communion with God.<sup>191</sup> The poem, along with Choirosphaktes' other literary works, suggest that he was comfortable with and a proponent of a more philosophically-aligned ideology, which presents the possibility of spiritual progress through knowledge of astrology and other laws of nature. This position would, later in his life, open him to charges of impiety and contribute to his exile from Constantinople to the monastery at Petra. While in service to Leo VI, however, Choirosphaktes' knowledge of astrology and appreciation for the wisdom of the philosophers only contributed to his qualifications as an envoy for an emperor equally known for his focus on 'wisdom'.

He was successful on his first foreign mission, to Symeon of Bulgaria in 896 CE, but foundered politically upon returning from his second, to the Emir of Baghdad in 905-6 CE. He became embroiled in internecine plots at court, resulting in his exile from Constantinople proper in the fortress of Petras, from whence he wrote long and pleading exile letters to his former patron, the Emperor Leo VI, requesting readmission into his good graces. All efforts toward rapprochement eventually came to naught, however, as Choirosphaktes became involved with the rebellion of Constantine Doukas in 913 CE<sup>192</sup>, and was subsequently tonsured and exiled to the monastery at Stoudios. It is from

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and the 'Macedonian Renaissance' Revisited: Topography, Iconography, Ceremonial, Ideology," *DOP* 42 (1988): 97-188.

<sup>191</sup> Magdalino, "In Search of the Byzantine Courtier", 157.

<sup>192</sup> Theophanes Continuatus, *Theophanes Continuatus: Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus*, ed. Immanuel Bekker. *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* 33. (Bonnae: E. Weber, 1838), 381-4; Scylitzes, *Historia*, 281.

Stoudios in 919 that we last hear from him; he is approximately 70 years of age, and has written an anacreontic poem in celebration of the marriage of Constantine Porphyrogennetos to Helen, the daughter of Romanos Lekapenos<sup>193</sup> -- still attempting to return to the center of power. Leo Choirosphaktes is an exemplary product of late-ninth/early-tenth secular high society; his activities as an envoy can be taken as representative of a type.

This type, broadly described as the Middle Byzantine diplomat, sent out from Constantinople toward external polities on Byzantine business, is not as well-attested in our sources as its inverse counterpart, the non-Byzantine envoy come to Constantinople to be impressed by metropolitan ceremonial. It is therefore worth asking why the Byzantines sent envoys out on embassy – what powers such an envoy had, what tasks he was expected to be able to accomplish, and what sort of person he usually was.

Skylitzes, describing John the Grammarian's 830 CE embassy to the Abbasid Caliphate at Baghdad, writes that Theophilus sent John "βουλόμενος δὲ καὶ τοῖς σαρακηνοῖς τὴν τῆς βασιλείας δύναμιν ποιήσασθαι κατάδηλον",<sup>194</sup> 'desiring to display to the Saracens the strength of the empire'. This is a dramatic gesture, an embassy which is meant to intimidate a rival power via some sort of show of strength, which tended to be – at least in the case of John's embassy to Baghdad – a display of Byzantine wealth. In the accounts of this embassy in Theophanes Continuatus and Zonaras, John gives away over 28,000 gold coins. These were distributed liberally to essentially anyone who came to visit him. The embassy seems to be intended to make the point that Theophilus was both

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<sup>193</sup> "Εἰς τὴν Αυγουσταν Ελλην Κωνσταντινου τοῦ νεοῦ συζογον", ed. Th. Bergk. *Poetae Lyrici Graeci* III (Lipsiae, 1914), 361-2.

<sup>194</sup> Skylitzes, *Historiarum compendium* II (Bonn, 1839), 108.

profligate and powerful<sup>195</sup> – Theophanes describes him as 'magnificent and marvelous' (μεγαλοπρεπής καὶ θαυμαστός)<sup>196</sup> – superior in wealth and thus in authority to the Caliph. This sort of dramatic gesture of an embassy is primarily ideological; it presents a portrait of Byzantine authority. The envoy here acts as a decentralized representative of Byzantine centralizing power, carrying with him an idealized image of the capabilities of the polity.

However, the activities of envoys were not always confined to the ideological realm; other embassies to Baghdad (including that of Choirosphaktes in the early tenth century) demonstrate more practical ambitions. Envoys were often in charge of arranging prisoner exchange as well as negotiating foreign marriages and distributing large gifts of money and precious objects. The propensity of certain Byzantine emperors to engage in diplomacy to the near-exclusion of other sorts of foreign policy – particularly Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos – is noted with both praise and criticism by contemporary Byzantine court intellectuals.<sup>197</sup> The extent of this diplomacy was quite wide. The chronicle of Theophanes Continuatus, a source sympathetic to Constantine VII, describes his initial diplomatic activity as follows: "When letters were sent to and from the governors in all regions, and imperial *prnotarioi* and those in villages, provinces, and towns, and also indeed letters to and from leaders of foreign nations, these too were read by him and immediately his judgment determined what needed to be done about matters in the east and matters in the west, and generally he went over these affairs as if he had

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<sup>195</sup> J. Rosser, "John the Grammarian's Embassy to Baghdad and the Recall of Manuel," *Byzantoslavica* 37:2 (1976): 169.

<sup>196</sup> Theophanes Continuatus, *Chronographia*, 99.

<sup>197</sup> Skylitzes, 371; Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum*, ed. T. Buttner-Wobst (Bonn 1897), 570, 677, cited in Shepard, "Byzantine Diplomacy, A.D. 800-1204: means and ends", 41.

wings, receiving embassies, sending instructions to officials..."<sup>198</sup> Letters and letter-writing were essential to diplomacy in this era; as was sending envoys out from Constantinople bearing these letters and carrying out the instructions therein.

Despite the above, we nevertheless have far more contemporary information on the activities of *foreign* diplomats at the Byzantine court than we do about Byzantine diplomats who left it, primarily due to the Byzantine monofocus on activities at Constantinople. The great majority of modern historiography on Byzantine diplomacy – including the 1992 volume, *Byzantine Diplomacy*, devoted entirely to the subject – also, not unexpectedly, reflects this Constantinopolitan focus. Our sources for Byzantine foreign policy are mostly concerned with describing the court ceremonial which was designed to impress and intimidate any representatives who had come to the capital from outside Byzantine territory. Thus modern historiography also focuses on this richer source of data; the primary figures in a discussion of Byzantine foreign policy are not the envoys but instead the logothete of the drome and his extensive staff, who formed a sort of 'foreign office' in charge of protocol and internal ceremony involving non-Byzantines.

It is to the logothete of the drome that one logically looks to discover what sort of individuals became Byzantine envoys, and what sort of structure and authority surrounded those who did. The position of the logothete of the drome emerges in the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century as part of the wide changes in imperial administration which were occurring after the iconoclastic crisis.<sup>199</sup> His sphere of influence covered that of the former *curiosus cursus publici praesentalis*, the Roman and Late Antique office in charge of both the

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<sup>198</sup> Theoph. Cont. VI.17, pp.441-9. Translation from Jonathan Shepard, "Byzantine Diplomacy, A.D. 800-1204: means and ends," in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, 41.

<sup>199</sup> Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century: With a Revised Text of the Kletorologion of Philotheos*. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1958), 7.

postal routes and the imperial postal agents, who sometimes doubled as emissaries. He also inherited portions of the rubric of the Master of Offices, a position which became defunct during the aforementioned reorganization of imperial administration and whose powers were distributed amongst a larger group of officials from the 8<sup>th</sup> century forward. By the late 9<sup>th</sup> or early 10<sup>th</sup> century, during the period in which Choïrosphaktes was active as an envoy, sources such as the *Kleterologion* of Philotheus and the *De Cerimoniis* reveal the logothete of the drome as supervising the following: what remained of the postal networks; control of the ceremonial reception of foreign ambassadors; and control over a number of lesser officials involved in foreign diplomacy, including *cartularii*, *notarii*, postal inspectors (ἐπισκεπτῆται, *episkeptetai*), and a group of interpreters familiar with languages of significant foreign polities. There is no record, however, of the logothete of the drome himself going out on embassy to any foreign power, in direct contrast to holders of the former position of Master of Offices. After 781 no logothete acted as an envoy to foreign powers outside of Byzantine territory.<sup>200</sup> However, the Logothete of the Drome was instrumental in assigning individuals of various ranks to diplomatic missions – such as the *cartularius* Sinoutes and his accompanying interpreter, Krinites, who appear in Chapter 43 of the *De administrando imperio* on embassy to the vassal state of Taron.<sup>201</sup> Nevertheless, Miller points out that it is incorrect to conceptualize the Drome as a sort of 'foreign service' in any modern sense; it was not a pool of trained diplomats, nor was it the only origin point for diplomatic missions,

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<sup>200</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the evolution and powers of this office, see Miller, "The Logothete of the Drome in the Middle Byzantine Period", *Byzantion* 36 (1966); and Guillard, "Les logothetes: etudes sur l'histoire administrative de l'Empire byzantin", in *Revue des études byzantines* 29 (1971): 5–115.

<sup>201</sup> *DAI*, 188–98.



particularly those which left Byzantine territory or Byzantine subsidiary polities.<sup>202</sup> As a representative example, ninth-century embassies to Baghdad – a vitally important foreign post – seem to have been conducted primarily by members of the intellectual and social elite, bearing titles more lofty than that of a *cartularius*.<sup>203</sup> While they may have been selected by the Logothete of the Drome and his office, the powers and authority of these envoys to extra-Byzantine territory derived from elsewhere.

Returning now to the career of Leo Choïrosphaktes, it is clear that his career was not only typical of an envoy, but demonstrates that he was highly regarded and highly placed in the civil administration. At the time of both his embassies to Bulgaria in 896 and to Baghdad in 904-6 CE, he held the title of *magistros*. Choïrosphaktes held both honor-rank and administrative titles during his tenure at the Constantinopolitan court. Under Basil I, Leo VI's father, he became *mystikos*,<sup>204</sup> during his service to Leo VI, which occupied the majority of his career, he attained the ranks of *magistros*, *anthypatos*, and *patrikios*, titles with which he signs his correspondence. While *patrikios* (patrician) was strictly an honor-rank in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, *magistros* was a specifically administrative position, open only to those of patrician rank, and conferred for life. By the time Choïrosphaktes held it, he was one of as many as twenty-four.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Miller, "The Logothete of the Drome", 449.

<sup>203</sup> The envoys to Baghdad in the 9<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> centuries include John the Grammarian, Photios, and Constantine-Cyril, as well as Leo Choïrosphaktes; all extremely highly-placed in either ecclesiastical or intellectual social circles.

<sup>204</sup> G. Shlumberger, *Sceaux Byzantins Inédits (cinquième Série)* (Paris: Rollin et Feuarent, 1905), 9; N. Oikonomides, *Les Listes de Préséance Byzantines Des IXe et Xe Siècles*. Le Monde Byzantin. Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1972), 324.

<sup>205</sup> This figure comes from Liutprand of Cremona and may have been smaller during the period of Choïrosphaktes' diplomatic activity, sixty years prior to Liutprand's arrival in Constantinople.

The original scope of the office involved being head of the senate and representative for the emperor in his absence. The *magistros*, like the logothete of the drome, derived its authority from the old Master of Offices position, and is still mentioned as a ceremonial authority in some early-dated ceremonies in the *De Cerimoniis* (i.e. ceremonies 68 and 70).<sup>206</sup> But by the early 10<sup>th</sup> century, the rank of *magistros* seems to have been associated closely with the activities of diplomacy, its senatorial-supervision component having been subsumed in favor of representation-of-the-absent-emperor. Some of its capability for substitution for imperial authority persists in Choirosphaktes' activities as an envoy. On embassy to Bulgaria and to Baghdad, he had the authority to speak on behalf of the emperor, and stood in for Leo VI in negotiations. In an official capacity, Choirosphaktes was responsible for the projection of Byzantine *taxis*: when he was on embassy, he was the representative hands and mouth of the distant emperor.

Choirosphaktes' presence on the diplomatic stage first emerges in the last decade of the ninth century, in which he was sent as envoy three separate times to Bulgaria, interacting directly with Symeon I of Bulgaria in an attempt to negotiate both prisoner exchanges and cease-fires during the first period of Symeon's offensives against Byzantine territory and interests in the Balkans. This diplomatic interaction also acts as the subject of the first fifteen letters in Choirosphaktes' letter collection. We know from both the *Logothete's Chronicle*, a portion of Theophanes Continuatus, and from Skylitzes that Leo VI sent Choirosphaktes, who by this time had already achieved the rank of *magistros*, to Bulgaria in order to negotiate a peace treaty in 897 CE. Central to this treaty

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<sup>206</sup> Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century*, 29-33.

was the release of prisoners. On this first embassy, Choirosphaktes was detained by Symeon as a prisoner himself,<sup>207</sup> before successfully completing the treaty negotiation in Byzantine favor. On subsequent embassies, he negotiated for the return of forts along the border at Dyrrachium and arranged for further exchanges of prisoners and an end to Symeon's military positioning toward Byzantine territory.<sup>208</sup> Choirosphaktes thus had ample direct experience of the conditions of Byzantine imperial power out in Bulgaria – he himself, as *magistros* and envoy, *was* a representation of that power. Despite this, an examination of the first fifteen letters in Choirosphaktes' letter collection – a correspondence between himself and Symeon – does not seem to reveal much concerning his actual experiences in Bulgaria.

Choirosphaktes was not silent on his activities in Bulgaria. In a later letter in the collection (Letter 33), addressed to Emperor Leo VI, he describes in broad strokes the political successes he achieved on embassy. In this letter, Choirosphaktes is pleading with his sovereign to be allowed to return from political exile. He provides an accounting of the ways in which he has been useful to the empire, including his three Bulgarian missions. On the first of these, he recovered "12,000 prisoners from there, and concluded a written peace treaty"; on his second mission, he prevented Symeon from attacking "the 30 forts of Dyrrachium, snatching the liver from the lion's mouth"; on his last, he "recovered Thessalonica, by persuasion and pursuit, when the Bulgarians wanted to settle in it after its capture by the Moslems".<sup>209</sup> Choirosphaktes is being self-interested here; he

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<sup>207</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus*, p. 358; *GMC* p.854.

<sup>208</sup> A short-lived end; Symeon would continue to maneuver towards greater power in the Peloponnese until his death, more than a decade after Choirosphaktes' Bulgarian embassies.

<sup>209</sup> Leo Choirosphaktes, Letter 33, ed. Kolias, 112-3.

is attempting to justify his existence and get himself recalled to public life. Nevertheless, we can assume that some version of these events did occur – the number of prisoners and forts might be smaller, and he may not have singlehandedly prevented the Bulgarian settlement of Thessalonica, but he was deeply involved in Byzantine imperial projects in the Balkans. Nevertheless, the exchange between Choirosphaktes and Symeon in letters 1-14 does not reflect on these activities, but instead seems concerned with proving Choirosphaktes' linguistic and cultural superiority to the Bulgarian ruler.

In order to contextualize the epistolary exchange between Symeon and Choirosphaktes, it is necessary to look at it in the context of the other letters in his epistolary collection. As a whole, the collection includes letters to the Bulgar *archon* Symeon, internal (Byzantine-to-Byzantine) correspondence dating from Choirosphaktes' embassy to Baghdad in 905-6 CE, and exile letters written to Leo VI during the period of his political disfavor around 910 CE. Choirosphaktes' correspondents demonstrate the usual range of addressees for the Byzantine epistolary collection: when Byzantine Roman, they are either his peers in rank<sup>210</sup> or titled members of the court at lower rank.<sup>211</sup> In addition to these members of Choirosphaktes' social network, the collection contains six letters to the Emperor Leo VI, all being the aforementioned exile letters, and the previously discussed group of 14 letters which comprise a correspondence between Choirosphaktes and the Bulgar *archon* Symeon.

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<sup>210</sup> Genesios and Stephanos, the writers of letters XV, XVI, and XXVI respectively, are titled *magistros*, *anthupatos*, and *patrikios*, just as Choirosphaktes is, while Thomas (of letter XVIII) is only a *patrikios*. Genesios and Stephanos are Choirosphaktes' companions in both honor-rank and administrative rank.

<sup>211</sup> Such as Prokopios in letter XIX, a *spatharios*.

There exists only one manuscript witness for Choirosphaktes' letters, Patmos MS 178. Choirosphaktes' epistolary collection occupies the final folios of the manuscript, no. 268-282. The remainder of Patmos 178 consists of a selection of epitomes of the books of the Old Testament, composed by Leo Choirosphaktes, and three other letter collections: one belonging to Nicholas Mystikos, one belonging to Photios, and one belonging to Niketas the Philosopher of Paphlagonia. It is both the single source for Choirosphaktes' correspondence and the primary one for the letters of Nicholas Mystikos; as a collated and collected object, it is an assemblage that necessarily asks why and for what purpose Byzantine letter collections were preserved.

The manuscript itself is a material culture object: it is constructed for contemporary use and then preserved for contemporary reasons. Sakkelion has dated Patmos 178 to the late 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>212</sup>, and I see no obvious reason to object to this dating. The entirety of the codex is written in a 10<sup>th</sup>-century *Perlschrift* hand, with the opening addresses of each letter – in all four of the letter collections, not only Choirosphaktes' – in majuscule, while the remaining text is miniscule. Some of the earlier folios in the codex (none numbered after 200 – thus, the epitomes of the Old Testament, the letters of Niketas of Paphlagonia, and a portion of the letters of Nicholas Mystikos) show prick marks where the parchment has been ruled. Most interestingly, between folio 267 and folio 268 – that is, between the conclusion of the letters of Photios and the incipit of Choirosphaktes' letters, there is evidence that a previously bound-in folio (perhaps a flyleaf) has been cut away – the remains of the former flyleaf are visible as a small strip

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<sup>212</sup> Ioannes Sakkelion, *Patmiakē Vivliothēkē, Ētoi Anagraphē Tōn En Tē Vivliothēkē Tēs Kata Tēn Nēson Patmon Geraras Kai Vasilikēs Monēs Tou Hagiou Apostolou Kai Euangelistou Iōannou Tou Theologou Tethēsaurismenōn Cheirographōn Teuchōn* (Athēnēs: Ek tou typ. Alexandrou Papageōrgiou, 1890), 98-99.

of parchment. Further, unlike the transitions between any of the previous authors in the manuscript, the shift from Photios' letter collection to Choirosphaktes' is marked by a large unused piece of parchment, beginning on the recto of folio 267 and continuing for the whole of the recto of the same folio. It appears that the original conclusion of this codex was meant to be the Photios letters, and that the letters of Choirosphaktes were added at a later point and attached to the remainder of Patmos 178 when it was rebound into its current form. This may have occurred because of the presence of the epitomes by Choirosphaktes which begin the MS; upon rebinding, the scribe may have thought to add another work by the same author.

All of the texts in Patmos 178 are datable to the late ninth and early tenth centuries, implying that the manuscript was written within a century of the majority of the authors included. In Jenkins and Westerink's discussion of the manuscript tradition of the Nicholas Mystikos epistolary, they note that there are no copies made from Patmos 178 of any of these texts until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>213</sup> -- including the Photios corpus, for which this manuscript (Lourdass and Westerink's 'J') is a dead end.<sup>214</sup> Thus, despite the initial collection of these epistolaries, they do not seem to have been relevant to the interests of later copyists. The 10<sup>th</sup> century letter collection as an object is not reproduced outside of its own time unless it has some specific relevance to a particular copyist (i.e. 'letters' 1 and 2 of Photios, which are highly interesting to later Byzantines

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<sup>213</sup> Jenkins & Westerink, eds. *Letters [of] Nicholas I, Patriarch of Constantinople*, xxxii. The 16<sup>th</sup>-century copy is that of Luigi Lollino, archbishop of Belluno, *Vaticanus gr. 1780*.

<sup>214</sup> Lourdass & Westerink, eds. *Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia*. xii.

writing on the errors of the Latins).<sup>215</sup> Whatever the reasons were for the compilation of Choirosphaktes' letters into the collection as witnessed in Patmos 178, they were reasons particular to the tenth century. Stratis Papaioannou has recently considered the reception of the Byzantine letter-collection within the larger sphere of Byzantine book culture, and has noted the relatively narrow cultural utility of letter collections: *because* they were functional objects, their survival beyond the initial copy was "fragile."<sup>216</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Byzantine letter is not a private form of literary production; it is always intended for at least one recipient, if not additionally for an entire public audience. Thus, Choirosphaktes' letter collection, even considered as a compilation of individual units, letters addressed to specific individuals for specific (often diplomatic) purposes, is aimed, *as a collection*, at an audience of his Constantinopolitan peers. It, like all similar letter collections, is embedded in "the socio-political moment of [its] creation"<sup>217</sup>. Taken as a collection, it speaks to Choirosphaktes' self-represented *character* and *ethos*. It is important to Choirosphaktes that he presents himself as an exemplary envoy who achieved a multitude of diplomatic successes and thereby was worthy of being re-admitted to Constantinopolitan society from a sort of 'exile' – when he was confined in a monastery, which he discusses in detail in letters to the emperor Leo VI. The collection is a claim of rhetorical and diplomatic skill, a sort of dossier.

For example, the letters which date from the period of Choirosphaktes'

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<sup>215</sup> For further discussion of this use, see Tia Kolbaba, *Inventing Latin Heretics: Byzantines and the Filioque in the Ninth Century* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2008), particularly the first and second chapters.

<sup>216</sup> Papaioannou, Stratis. "Fragile Literature: Byzantine letter-collections and the case of Michael Psellos", in *La face cachée de la littérature byzantine le texte en tant que message immédiat*. (Paris, 2012), 289.

<sup>217</sup> Papaioannou, "Fragile Literature", 296-7.

Baghdad embassy are comprised of correspondence addressed to him from other Byzantine officials during his stint in Baghdad, between 905 and 907 CE – which al-Tabari and the *Life of Euthymios* tell us ended badly for him. Nevertheless, all of these letters present Choirosphakes' diplomatic successes as deriving from his own skills and merits. The first of his missions to Baghdad was, similarly to his Bulgarian embassies, intended to negotiate an *allagion*, an exchange of Byzantine and Saracen prisoners. This prisoner exchange began near Tarsus in late September 905, and continued successfully for four days, upon which, according to the Chronicle of al-Tabari, the Byzantine delegation abruptly broke off the negotiations.<sup>218</sup> Romilly Jenkins suggests that this abrupt abandonment of a successful diplomatic exchange resulted from the concurrent revolt of the Byzantine general Andronikos Dukas at nearby Kabala. His revolt and eventual defection to the Caliphate (in March 906) put Choirosphakes' delegation in an awkward position and forced them to retreat.<sup>219</sup>

When again Choirosphakes returned to Baghdad in spring 906, he had become responsible for three interconnected Byzantine objectives: first, to arrange for and complete the interrupted prisoner exchange; second, to negotiate a settlement with the caliph in Baghdad; and third, to retrieve envoys from the three patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, bringing them back to Constantinople with him in early 907 so that they could weigh in on the tetragamy controversy engulfing Leo VI's court.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Alexander Alexandrovich Vasiliev, *Byzance et Les Arabes*. Corpus Bruxellense Historiae Byzantinae 1-3. (Bruxelles: Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales, 1935), 406; citing Al-Tabari.

<sup>219</sup> P. Karlin-Hayter, "The Revolt of Andronicus Ducas," *Byzantinoslavica* 26 (1966): 23-25.

<sup>220</sup> *Vita Euthymii patriarchae CP*, ed. P. Karlin-Hayter. (Bruxelles : Éditions de Byzantion, 1970), 86-7.



According to Choirosphaktes himself, he accomplished all of these tasks fully: he lists them in his recounting of his own accomplishments to the emperor in his efforts to be reconciled to the court.

Why, then, was Choirosphaktes arrested on charges of treason and impiety, charges which seem directly linked to the results of the Baghdad embassies? The letters which appear in the Patmos 178 collection point only to Choirosphaktes' successes. Further, they seem to be designed to contradict any accusation of anti-imperial activity on Choirosphaktes' part. Letter 15, from Genesios, Choirosphaktes' fellow-*magistros* stationed at Constantinople, refers to Choirosphaktes as μέγιστε πρεσβεύτων – the 'greatest of ambassadors', citing his three Bulgarian embassies and claiming an assurance of similar success in Baghdad. Prokopios *spatharios*, in letter 19, tells Choirosphaktes that he is the "greatest mediator between two nations", foiling three times the plots of the Scythians – namely, the Bulgarians – and now bringing back the representatives of the Eastern patriarchs and thus ensuring, according to Prokopios, an ensuing ecclesiastical peace. Letter 19 goes on to note that the emperor Leo VI himself has vocally praised Choirosphaktes for his good work: Choirosphaktes' name circulates at the royal table like one of the dessert-sweets. Surely such an envoy could not have fallen into seditious behavior – at least according to this compiled letter collection.

The network of epistolary correspondents present in Choirosphaktes' letter-collection is characteristic of Byzantine letter collections in general: men of the highest administrative and honor-ranked positions. They are Choirosphaktes' peer group; by producing letters which circulate amongst them he portrays himself as a member of their circle, an accomplished rhetorician and politician as well as an envoy. The collected

letters which Choirosphaktes produced – in which he re-creates an image of normative Byzantine imperial power and is recognized as capable of doing so by his peers – are a presentation of Choirosphaktes' awareness of his culture and usefulness within it. The final letters of his collection revolve around his attempt to regain political standing with Leo VI; these letters make use of the accomplishments mentioned in the previous letters in order to prove Choirosphaktes' usefulness to his Emperor.

If we imagine this collection of letters as a sort of dossier, presented to an audience of Constantinopolitan intellectuals and courtiers much like Choirosphaktes himself, we can see a presentation of Byzantine imperial ideology which runs parallel to the 'historical' narrative which emerges from chronicle sources. This presentation of Byzantine imperial ideology is partially a rhetorical exercise for an appreciative – or at least persuadable – audience; partially an image of the world outside Constantinople brought inside the city; and partially a reinforcement of the imperial narrative as Leo Choirosphaktes understood it and wanted to communicate it.

Choirosphaktes' letter collection seems to demonstrate that, in private as well as diplomatic correspondence, he attempted to reproduce this representation. The collection includes letters to the Bulgar *archon* Symeon, internal (Byzantine-to-Byzantine) correspondence dating from Choirosphaktes' embassy to Baghdad in 905-6 CE, and exile letters written to Leo VI during the period of his political disfavor around 910 CE. Choirosphaktes' correspondents demonstrate the usual range of addressees for the Byzantine epistolary collection: when Byzantine, they are either his peers in rank<sup>221</sup> or

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<sup>221</sup> Genesios and Stephanos, the writers of letters XV, XVI, and XXVI respectively, are titled *magistros*, *anthupatos*, and *patrikios*, just as Choirosphaktes is, while Thomas (of

titled members of the court at lower rank.<sup>222</sup> In addition to these members of Choirosphaktes' social network, the collection contains six letters to the Emperor Leo VI, all being the aforementioned exile letters, and a group of 15 letters which comprise a correspondence between Choirosphaktes and the Bulgar *archon* Symeon. These last appear to be legitimate 'diplomatic' letters, in the vein of those written by Photios to Khan Boris or Nicholas Mystikos to the same Symeon; their subject matter is broadly the exchange of Byzantine prisoners of war, and they represent communication by a Byzantine imperial agent to a foreign power. Significantly, however, letters I-XV are a collected *exchange*; they include not only Choirosphaktes' letters to Symeon but Symeon's purported direct replies.

There are few instances of similar 'conversations' – sequential letters back and forth between two individuals – which survive in Byzantine collections of correspondence. Most collections are either single-author or compiled by a recipient from multiple correspondents. The primary criteria for preserving a letter in a collection does not seem to have been anything like an attempt to preserve a communicative act between two persons for posterity, but rather to enshrine particularly exemplary instances of literary merit. Byzantine letters were "seen as having permanent value only in that they succeeded as works of art."<sup>223</sup> This literary quality of preserved letters is central to interpreting the collection of Leo Choirosphaktes, and I will return to it shortly; taking *literary merit* as a baseline for collection practice, however, highlights the oddity of a

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letter XVIII) is only a *patrikios*. Genesios and Stephanos are Choirosphaktes' companions in both honor-rank and administrative rank.

<sup>222</sup> Such as Prokopios in letter XIX, a *spatharios*.

<sup>223</sup> Mullett, "Writing", 173.

fourteen-letter direct exchange between a foreign ruler and a Byzantine envoy, preserved along with other, more standard correspondence attributed to that envoy.

Only the first ten letters of the Symeon-Choirosphaktes correspondence are a sequential conversation; their ostensible primary topic is Choirosphaktes' request for the release of some Byzantine prisoners of war. What the letters are mostly concerned with, however, is Choirosphaktes' attempts to prove his own linguistic acuity at the expense of Symeon's. Choirosphaktes' responses to Symeon's communiqués are exercises in grammatical trickery, manipulating Symeon's punctuation in order to twist his prose into different interpretations of his intentions: the question of whether he wishes to release the prisoners or not becomes a matter of locating particles. This is, as A.R. Littlewood has succinctly put it, "one of the strangest exchanges of notes in diplomatic history."<sup>224</sup>

The letters become even stranger when compared to those sent by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Nikolaos Mystikos, to the same Symeon. Nicholas Mystikos' correspondence with Symeon spans from 913 CE, when Nicholas became Regent, and thus nominally head of the Byzantine government, until 925 CE, when he died. There are 25 extant letters, along with two letters written to the Bulgarian archbishop and one to an agent of Symeon's, all of which point to the same goal: Nicholas' attempts to manage and control Symeon's threats toward Byzantium, whether ideological or military. The letters themselves are rhetorical and stylized, as is expected from high-level Byzantine epistolographic prose. Mystikos' rhetoric, however, is employed in clear and direct service of his attempts to delineate a difference between claims of Byzantine imperial and Bulgarian *archontic* power. His letters to Symeon treat the *archon* as, if not a spiritual

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<sup>224</sup> Littlewood, "An 'Ikon of the Soul': the Byzantine Letter", 211.

nor a temporal equal, at least a rhetorically astute correspondent. Mystikos also refers repeatedly to Symeon's knowledge of the teachings of the Apostle Paul<sup>225</sup>, and to his acquaintance with Homer's *Iliad*<sup>226</sup>, as well as to his education in "ancient history"<sup>227</sup>. This is in direct contrast to Choïrosphaktes' correspondence, which is by turns dismissive, marginalizing, and engaged in portraying the ruler of Bulgaria as barely capable of coherent communication in Greek.

The Choïrosphaktes-Symeon conversation has been treated as genuine, albeit peculiar, by Byzantinists. It has been mined for historiographical information regarding the events surrounding Choïrosphaktes' first embassy to Bulgaria<sup>228</sup> – a common fate of diplomatic letters in the hands of historians aiming to extract objective factual information about the Byzantine milieu from epistolography.<sup>229</sup> The exchange has also been used as a vehicle for exploring Symeon's acculturation and background in Greek. The 1939 editor of the Choïrosphaktes manuscript, G. Kolias, takes these letters to be

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<sup>225</sup> Nicholas Mystikos, ep. 24, ln. 103-7.

<sup>226</sup> Nicholas Mystikos, ep. 11, ln. 87-8.

<sup>227</sup> Nicholas Mystikos, ep. 20, ln. 92-3.

<sup>228</sup> Jonathan Shepard, "Symeon of Bulgaria – Peacemaker," *Annuaire de l'Univerite de Sofia 'St. Kliment Ohridski'* 83 (1989): 9-48; Stephenson, Paul. *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier: a political study of the northern Balkans, 900-1204* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>229</sup> This mode of epistolographic analysis has its first incarnation in Deissman on New Testament-era letters (later much-debated; c.f. Sister Monica Wagner's "A Chapter in Byzantine Epistolography. The Letters of Theodoret of Cyrus", *DOP* 4 (1948), amongst others); it finds its particularly Byzantinist form in Ioannes Sykutris's early (1930s) articles, which dismiss Deissman's distinction between real 'letter' and literary 'epistle' while keeping the emphasis on *historical interpretation* of letters; letters as decoding-blocks for historical events: "much knowledge of persons and things to be gained if one undertakes a more exact interpretation, and grasps – amidst the effusive verbiage – the emphasis in expression and the hardly detectable refinements." (Sykutris, "Epistolographie", *Paulys Real-Encyclopdie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Supplementband V (Stuttgart 1931), 219-220.) It has been substantially critiqued in the last few decades by Mullett and Littlewood, amongst others, who push for a greater emphasis on the literary/textual aspects of Byzantine letters.

evidence of Choirosphaktes' awareness of Symeon's Greek education, and therefore a dig at his persistent barbarianhood<sup>230</sup> -- Symeon remains incapable of constructing a proper Greek argument despite his Constantinopolitan childhood, being a Bulgarian after all, and Choirosphaktes can show him up with a skilled rhetor's tricks. Jonathan Shepard, on the other hand, reads these letters as being evidence of *Symeon's* fondness for wordplay; his participation in a rhetorical game with Choirosphaktes reveals the depths of education he had acquired.<sup>231</sup> Shaun Tougher, in his monograph on the reign of Leo VI, suggests that these letters imply that the actual negotiations for peace and prisoners took place between Symeon and Leo VI directly, while Symeon and Choirosphaktes rhetorically fenced,<sup>232</sup> and Gioaccino Strano, in the introduction to his 2008 Italian edition of the letters, follows this line of interpretation.<sup>233</sup>

Nevertheless, the abnormality of this exchange persists. It is unlike any other correspondence addressed by a Byzantine to Symeon, such as his correspondence with Nicholas Mystikos, of which only Mystikos' letters survive. It is also markedly dissimilar to what appears to be Byzantine diplomatic practice in epistolary. Even letters which advise, instruct, or admonish foreign rulers – Photios' letters to Khan Boris, or the aforementioned letters of Nicholas Mystikos to Symeon – couch their less-than-approving sentiments in the effusive language of friendship. In this sense the Byzantine diplomatic letter is not functionally different from the Byzantine personal letter: not only is epistolary language the language of friendship, but the language of diplomacy is also

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<sup>230</sup> Kolias, 58.

<sup>231</sup> Shepard, "Symeon of Bulgaria – Peacemaker", 18.

<sup>232</sup> Shaun Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886-912): Politics and People*, Medieval Mediterranean v. 15. (Leiden ; New York: Brill, 1997), 180-1.

<sup>233</sup> Gioaccino Strano, *Corrispondenza*. (Catania: Centro studi sull'antico cristianesimo Università di Catania, 2008), 10-12.

so: the Byzantine diplomatic embassy came bearing gifts.<sup>234</sup> Choirosphaktes' dismissive, provoking letters to Symeon do not fit within the schema of the standard Byzantine epistle, whether diplomatic or personal.

What could Choirosphaktes be up to? He is an accomplished rhetorician and an experienced epistolographer; we know that he is also a successful and well-known diplomat. For what reason would he break from standard practice in his conversation with the *archon* of Bulgaria? And if letters 1-14 are indeed a break in practice, why would they be included in a letter collection? I would like to posit the possibility that Choirosphaktes had chosen to place these responses in the collection of his letters for the purpose of portraying himself as a particularly astute envoy. His letters, as a collected rhetorical object which had a specifically Constantinopolitan audience, acts as a reinforcement of Byzantine *taxis* and imperialist propaganda. Choirosphaktes' successful embassies to Bulgaria are presented as a dialogue between the skill of the Byzantine imperial agent and the fumbling of the Bulgarian khan. Choirosphaktes himself comes off well – not only does he succeed in negotiating for the prisoner exchange, he shows up his opponent using a specifically Byzantine cultural rubric.

There is a substantive difference between observing that, as Metochites suggests, Byzantine envoys are engaged in a universalizing re-iteration of a centralized authority structure, and claiming instead that those envoys have a vested interest in portraying the former engagement *to one another*. The production of texts which demonstrate the Byzantine envoy as a representative of a universal, powerful, and imperial Byzantine state are useful within the social and intellectual milieu of that individual envoy.

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<sup>234</sup> Mullett, "Language of Diplomacy", 212-14.

Therefore the repetition of universalizing language in "private" communication, like letters – all of which is at least partially meant for public consumption -- functions as a method of normalizing the multivalent experience of that envoy outside of that essentially hypothetical universal state. When standard, normative-metropolitan ideas about the legitimate power of the state break down under the weight of experienced diplomatic activity, the envoy's production of normativizing texts act to restabilize the image of Byzantium for that envoy's social network. Thus, Leo Choirosphaktes' letter collection becomes a vehicle for examining not only his activities as a Byzantine envoy, but how he presented those activities to his Constantinopolitan peer group. When Choirosphaktes writes to Symeon of Bulgaria in letters 1-14, he is not so much engaged in active diplomacy as he is presenting an image of that diplomacy to his eventual audience, which is Byzantine.

Thus, when Choirosphaktes writes letters to his fellow administrative officials in Constantinople, he is bridging the physical gap between his current location – out on diplomatic mission in Baghdad or Bulgaria – and their reception in Constantinople. Furthermore, when he writes letters which *describe* his diplomatic missions, he is, by sending these observations and impressions in a letter, bringing *them* inside Constantinople from the wider, less-centralized and controlled world. It is thus vitally important that he produce letters which not only reinforce his individual social position within the literati in-group but also recreate the larger Byzantine vision of the correct functioning, the *taxis*, of the outside world which he has experienced.

The Symeon-Choirosphaktes correspondence is not, therefore, most usefully read as a record of an actual diplomatic correspondence between a Byzantine envoy and a



foreign ruler. Instead, it can be read as Choirosphaktes' attempt to renormalize the image of an unusually threatening Bulgarian ruler by systematically reducing his threatening attributes – his command of Byzantine-esque characteristics, such as competent Greek rhetoric and knowledge of astrology.

Of all Byzantium's East-Central European neighbors at the beginning of the tenth century, only the Bulgarian khanate was a long-term companion. Bulgars in one political configuration or another had occupied the former Roman provinces of Moesia and Thrace, only a few days journey from the imperial capital at Constantinople, since the late seventh century. The proximity of Bulgaria and Byzantium, coupled with Bulgaria's comparatively complex socio-political structure, produced a continuous and multifaceted conflict between the two polities. Byzantine universalism, with its proclamatory imperial titulature and political imagery which situated the Byzantines as the New Rome at the center of the world, was a direct threat to Bulgarian independent sovereignty. Bulgarian rulers needed to counteract the cultural magnetism of Byzantium while simultaneously making use of Byzantine forms and modes of power which had a profound influence on the Slav and Greek populations over which they exerted authority.

The reign of the khan Symeon on the Bulgarian throne (r. 893-927 CE) is particularly marked by the effects of Byzantine-Bulgarian proximity. Symeon, one of Bulgaria's most dynamic leaders, was often at war with the Byzantines over territories in Dyrrachium and Thrace, and these conflicts were a serious threat to Byzantine interests in the area. Warfare was not continuous, however, but interspersed with periods of truce, marriage negotiations, and extensive trade between the two polities. Furthermore, Symeon himself spent a significant period of his childhood living and being educated at

the Constantinopolitan court before returning to his native Bulgaria and somewhat unexpectedly ascending to the throne. The cultural links between Byzantium and its nearest and most dangerous neighbor to the West demonstrate the multivalent and sometimes contradictory exercise of Byzantine imperial policy. Byzantine attempts to control Bulgaria, whether through negotiations or open warfare, could not avoid dealing with Bulgarian awareness, and occasional inspired use of, Byzantine forms of imperial ideology. Symeon appears as a pious ruler, eager to bring Orthodox Christianity – and Greek learning and justice – to his people: he disseminated a Slavonic translation of extracts from the *Ekloga* of Leo III,<sup>235</sup> and built his new capital at Preslav in imitation of Constantinople, with upwards of eight monasteries, all decorated with painted tile in the Byzantine manner.<sup>236</sup> Therefore, Bulgaria during the reign of Symeon is a particularly rich location in which to examine Byzantine attempts to exert imperial power over areas which had not for several centuries been a viable part of the Eastern Roman imperium.

If, as previously considered in Chapter 1, Constantinople was the center of the Byzantine consciousness, the Balkan territories necessarily comprise a sort of "frontier zone" – a place where there is a transition between the civilized and the barbarian realms<sup>237</sup>. The continued proximity of the Bulgarian state required a policing of what was Byzantine and what was barbarian in the Balkans. The proximity also asks the question of whether individuals actually living in the disputed territories were aware of the

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<sup>235</sup> See Novgorodskaiâ Sinodal'naia Kormchaia, *Zakon Sudnyj Ljudem = Court Law for the People*, Horace William Dewey and Ann M. Kleimola, eds. Michigan Slavic Materials no. 14. (Ann Arbor: Dept. of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan, 1977); Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, ed. A. P. Kazhdan, 3 vols., Oxford (1991), III, p. 2219.

<sup>236</sup> Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, 20-22.

<sup>237</sup> Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, 5.

particulars of the border between Byzantium and Bulgaria. We have some archeological evidence of a firm linear border dating from the reign of Symeon – a series of inscribed boundary stones along major thoroughfares.<sup>238</sup> These boundary stones were recognized by both the Byzantine and Bulgarian governments in bilateral treaties<sup>239</sup> as the functional division between their territories, but as has already been mentioned, these territories were under constant dispute, and the placement of boundary stones in accordance with one treaty did not create anything like a permanent or universally recognized linear frontier.

Neither did the normative image of Byzantine imperialism acknowledge a linear frontier in the Balkans. The only evidence in any Byzantine text from the ninth and tenth centuries of a conceptualization of a linear frontier appears in the mid-10<sup>th</sup>-century encyclopaedia and lexicon, the *Souda*, where the frontier is defined as an outer limit in need of forts and defenders – but this outer limit is delineated by the borders of the Roman empire under the third-century Emperor Diocletian.<sup>240</sup> The Byzantines do not talk about a frontier because to do so before the expansion of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries would be to talk about a series of depressing diminishments. In short, there is very little for

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<sup>238</sup> Veselin Beshevliev, *Die Protobulgarischen Inschriften*. Berliner Byzantinistische Arbeiten Bd. 23. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1963), 215-19, nr. 46 a-b.

<sup>239</sup> Theodore Daphnopates, *Correspondance*. Edited by Jean Darrouzès and Leendert Gerrit Westerink. Le Monde Byzantin. Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1978), 65.

<sup>240</sup> *Suidae Lexicon*, ed. A. Adler, 5 vols (repr. Stuttgart, 1971), vol. 2, s.v. *eschaita*, p. 432; P. Stephenson, "The Byzantine frontier at the lower Danube in the late tenth and eleventh centuries", in *Frontiers in Question: Eurasian Borderlands 700-1700*, ed. D. Power and N. Standen (London, 1999), 81.

encomiasts or chroniclers to celebrate.<sup>241</sup> Instead, the Byzantines emphasize the power and glory of their center at Constantinople, and define what is not Constantinopolitan as non-Byzantine<sup>242</sup> – this is a cultural definition, not a territorial one. The Bulgarians are not Byzantine; they are therefore lesser, and barbarian. The rhetoric of empire required Byzantium to remain dominant over them, not necessarily in a territorial sense, with occupation of peripheral regions, but certainly in that incursions from Bulgaria into Byzantine territory were not to be tolerated. Such incursions would imply that the reigning emperor was incapable of asserting Byzantine authority, and produced demeaning criticism from both military men and the metropolitan elite of Constantinople.<sup>243</sup> Bulgaria is a consistent threat to Byzantine interests because it upsets this central *taxis* of the Byzantine normative imperial ideology.

As suggested in the prior chapter, one method of examining dominant, socially acceptable images of the world held by the Byzantine intellectual class is to work with the epistolary corpus, as letters are used not only to communicate factual information, but also to maintain and form in-group ties between physically separate individuals. Letters, exchanged, can act as a representative snapshot of the ideology of the group with which the letter-writer identifies or wishes to identify. It is thus unsurprising that letters exist which demonstrate the fundamental barbarism of the Bulgarian state and its leader, a representation congruent with the normative rhetorical image of Bulgaria in 10<sup>th</sup> century Byzantium. "I serve barbarian slaves," writes Theophylact concerning his Bulgarian

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<sup>241</sup> Jonathan Shepard, "Emperors and Expansionism: Rome to Middle Byzantium", in J. Shepard, ed. *The Expansion of Orthodox Europe: Byzantium, the Balkans and Russia*. (Hampshire, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2007), 59-60.

<sup>242</sup> See particularly the *De thematibus* and *De cerimoniis* of Constantine VII.

<sup>243</sup> Shepard, "Emperors and Expansionism: Rome to Middle Byzantium", 69.

parishoners, "impure and reeking of stinking goatskins, poorer in their way of life than they are rich in evil disposition. Release me from this dreadful servitude. For what inhabitant of Ochrid is not a headless neck, understanding how to honor neither God nor man?"<sup>244</sup> Here, in epistolary correspondence, Bulgarians were irredeemably barbarous; their lifestyle was foreign and displeasing, and they were insufficiently Christian. However, this image is substantially complicated by examining 10<sup>th</sup>-century prescriptive diplomatic and ceremonial manuals, in which the Bulgarians are acknowledged as a local power with a specific place in the hierarchy of states.

Despite there being no specifically Bulgarian chapter in the *De Administrando Imperio*, it is entirely possible to construct a detailed picture of imperial policy in the Balkans, including imperial policy in Bulgaria. It was standard Byzantine practice to buy the loyalties of the peoples beyond Bulgaria (such as the Serbs, Pechenegs, and Croats) in order to put pressure on the Bulgarian states.<sup>245</sup> This was done for the express purpose of keeping Byzantine power visible to the Bulgarian government: "To the Bulgarians the Emperor of the Romans will appear more formidable, and can impose on them the need for tranquility, if he is at peace with the Pechenegs, because the said Pechenegs are neighbors to the Bulgarians also, and when they wish, either for private gain or to do a favor for the Emperor of the Romans, they can easily march on Bulgaria..."<sup>246</sup>

The *De Cerimoniis* -- with its vision of *taxis*, the ideal order of the Byzantine world -- shows that Bulgaria occupied a defined place amongst Byzantium's satellites, beneath and subordinate to the imperial power in Constantinople, and was acknowledged

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<sup>244</sup> Letters of Theophylact, *Patrologia Graeca*, CXXVI, 508.

<sup>245</sup> *DAI*, 156.97-158.99.

<sup>246</sup> *DAI*, 52:3-13.

as such via a system of addresses and appropriate gifts. The ruler of Bulgaria was an *archon*, who was either the spiritual grandson or at times the spiritual son of the Byzantine emperor.<sup>247</sup>

During the reign of Symeon, however, this ideal *taxis* was upset by the growing and genuine threat of Bulgarian power, and evidence of the upset exists even within the *De Cerimoniis*. Symeon is referred to as the spiritual *brother* of the Byzantine emperor, rather than the spiritual son, and there is a suggestion that his appropriate title would be *emperor* of Bulgaria (*basileus*), rather than *archon*. In the section of the *De Cerimoniis* referred to as the 'Diplomatic Stylesheet', the instructions for writing to the ruler of the Bulgarians are as follows: "To the God-appointed Archon of Bulgaria. 'In the name of Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, our one and sole true God. Constantine and Romanos, Emperors of the Romans, whose faith is in God, to our desired spiritual son (*pneumatikon teknon*), the God-appointed Prince (*archon*) of the most Christian people (*ethnos*) of the Bulgarians.' The recent formulation. "Constantine and Romanos, pious Autocrats, Emperors of the Romans in Christ who is God, to our desired spiritual son, the lord [Name] Emperor (*basileus*) of Bulgaria."<sup>248</sup> The 'recent formulation' here is the point of departure from the established order – somehow, Symeon has become nearly equal to the Byzantine Emperor, differing only in that he is not the emperor of the *Romans*, with all of the connotations of deep history and centrality that that title conveys.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> *De Cerimoniis*: 681:2.

<sup>248</sup> *De Cerimoniis*, II:48.

<sup>249</sup> See Chapter 1 of this dissertation, as well as Vachkova, Veselina, "Danube Bulgaria and Khazaria as Parts of the Byzantine *Oikoumene*," in *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages: Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, and Cumans*, ed. Florin Curta. (Brill, 2008), 339-362.

The point at which Symeon arrived at this high place is, remarkably, also preserved in Byzantine sources – a rare example of Byzantium actually including in its ideological historical memory an episode where *taxis* is disturbed. This suggests that Symeon's incursion into Byzantine territory, which eventually resulted in a negotiation in which he received some sort of imperial crown (what the precise nature of this crown was is a subject of significant scholarly debate<sup>250</sup>) was so significant to the continuing political relations of Byzantium and the Balkan powers that it could not be ignored. The crowning episode appears in our primary narrative history for the period, *Theophanes Continuatus*, and also in a Byzantine court oration written by Theodore Daphnopates over a decade afterward. The oration does not, of course, allow Symeon's imperial title to be portrayed as anything but a disastrous pretension, an upset of what should be:

12. [...] Then followed insurrection, or rather apostasy: for the proclamation [of Symeon as emperor] came, and the other [titles] with which he profaned his seals, and the evil was born, and he [Symeon] appropriated the fruits of his father, and rejected his father [Constantine VII], and rejected the spirit in which lay the pledge of his sonship.

13. But he [Patriarch Nicholas I Mystikos, in 913], after enquiry of what he knew already, excluded for that time the lords of the senate, out of his reverence for the imperial office and for Him Who gave it. But he [Symeon], hidden beneath his helmet of darkness, called for fellow celebrants and proposed the confirmation of the covenant. But he [Nicholas] opposed this and said straight out that it was abominable for Romans to do *proskynêsis* to an emperor ( *basileus* ) unless he

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<sup>250</sup> See Shepard, "Symeon of Bulgaria – Peacemaker", 24, 27-31; and earlier discussions in Franz Dölger, 'Bulgarisches Zartum und Byzantinisches Kaisertum', in *Actes du IVe Congrès international des études byzantines*, 1, Bulletin de l'Institut archéologique bulgare, 9 (Sofia, 1935), 57-68; R. J. H. Jenkins, "The peace with Bulgaria (927) celebrated by Theodore Daphnopates," in: *Polychronion, Festschrift F. Dölger zum 75. Geburtstag* (Heidelberg, 1966), 298-301; P. Karlin-Hayter, "The homily on the peace with Bulgaria of 927 and the 'coronation' of 913," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 17 (1968): 29-30; Robert Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria: A Comparative Study across the Early Medieval Frontier* (London: Temple Smith, 1975), 62; Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, 22.

was a Roman; “Rather wear your makeshift diadem for a little, and let your fellow celebrants [Bulgarians] do you *proskynêsis* .”<sup>251</sup>

Daphnopates is careful to specify that merely being recognized as Emperor does not allow Symeon access to the devotion or obedience of the Byzantines, only of the Bulgarians. Even when Symeon's power is symbolically and ideologically recognized in Byzantium, the position of Bulgaria in the hierarchy of states must remain beneath that of the Empire.

Still, there is actual recognition of Bulgarian power in the normative, metropolitan conception of Bulgaria in the Byzantine 10<sup>th</sup> century. Symeon was able to achieve this recognition in part due to Bulgaria's proximity and genuine threat to Byzantine territory; but he was also able to capitalize on an unusual level of personal acculturation – he spent a great deal of his childhood at the Byzantine court.

Symeon, in both modern historiography and in a plethora of Byzantine sources, is portrayed as aggressive and tyrannical, ambitious for the throne at Constantinople to go along with his seat in Preslav and willing to shed as much blood as necessary to achieve his aims. Symeon certainly did engage in wars of territorial conquest against Byzantium, and several times approached the walls of Constantinople. Some historians have linked these attempts to claim the center of Byzantine authority to Symeon's childhood spent within the Byzantine imperial court and his exposure there to Byzantine habits, ideology, and practice. Thus, Obolensky: "Symeon, impelled by restless ambition, convinced of the innate superiority of all things Byzantine, and well-grounded as he was in the East Roman political philosophy, was driven to the only course of action he could logically

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<sup>251</sup> Theodore Daphnopates, *Oration*, ed. I. Dujcev (after A. Stauridou-Zafraka), trans. R. J. H. Jenkins in *Polychronion* (1966).



adopt: to try and make himself master of an enlarged Byzantine Empire. [...] To achieve this he needed to capture Constantinople and to seat himself on the imperial throne."<sup>252</sup> This is a Symeon whose Byzantine cultural inculcation drives him to attempt to claim Byzantium for himself; a ruler of Bulgaria profoundly influenced by the mutual liminality of the Byzanto-Bulgarian frontier, and essentially hostile to Byzantium thereby. Jonathan Shepard, however, writing with reference to the Russian Byzantinist I. Bozhilov, presents Symeon's Byzantine acculturation as the source of a more complex relationship between Bulgaria and the Byzantines during the lengthy period of Symeon's rulership. Shepard argues for a relatively peaceful Symeon who responded with violence to equally violent and aggressive Byzantines.<sup>253</sup>

Symeon's Constantinopolitan childhood is only known to us through a non-Byzantine source, the *Antapodosis* of Liudprand of Cremona. Liudprand tells us that Symeon spent his "boyhood" in Constantinople, and "learned the rhetoric of Demosthenes and the syllogisms of Aristotle" while he was there<sup>254</sup> -- suggesting that the future Bulgarian khan had a formal Greek education. Evidence of Symeon's abilities to speak fluent Greek (if with a "barbarous accent"<sup>255</sup>) also appear in the text of a Byzantine treaty with Bulgaria in 927 CE. Symeon's tenure in Constantinople was likely unremarkable – he was a third son, and not supposed to inherit his father Khan Boris' throne in Bulgaria. There is no reason to disbelieve Liudprand's assertion that the young Symeon intended to join a monastic order. Neither was the presence of a Bulgarian prince

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<sup>252</sup> Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, 105.

<sup>253</sup> Shepard, "Symeon of Bulgaria – Peacemaker".

<sup>254</sup> Liudprand of Cremona, *Anapodosis* III.29, in *Opera omnia*, ed. P. Chiesa, (Turnhout, 1998), 81.

<sup>255</sup> I. Dujcev, "On the treaty of 927 with the Bulgarians," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 32 (1978): 78-9.

at the Constantinopolitan court an unusual instance: there is a long precedent for 'guest children' at Roman and Byzantine courts. In the Roman period, these children (often the sons of Persian kings or 'barbarian' leaders) were not quite hostages, but sent both as vouchsafes for the behavior of their parents and to acquire Roman *mores*, in hopes that their loyalties to Rome and Roman culture would persist when they inherited power as adults.<sup>256</sup> In the Byzantine period this process becomes complicated by a lack of clarity as to the free-will status – were they permitted to leave and under what circumstances? – of those foreigners at court referred to as 'friends of the emperor', though it is clear that a large number of these were present, including young men like Symeon.<sup>257</sup> We can thus assume that during his childhood and adolescence, Symeon was embedded in Byzantine culture, aware of its ideology, and capable of making use of it when he later found it necessary to do so – and that he was equally susceptible to being influenced by its application. In short, Symeon was *acculturated* to Byzantium, and his Byzantine contemporaries were aware of this fact.

I am here considering acculturation as a strategy – an attempt to manage, through both internal attitudes and external behaviors, the stress of being embedded in a culture not one's own.<sup>258</sup> Symeon's acculturation to Byzantine norms allowed him to employ

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<sup>256</sup> Jonathan Shepard, "Manners Maketh Romans? Young barbarians at the emperor's court," in E. Jeffreys, ed. *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilization. In Honour of Sir Steven Runciman*. (Cambridge, 2006), 136. Cf. Tacitus, *Annales* XI.16; XII.10; Braund, *Rome and the Friendly King: The Character of the Client Kingship*. (London : New York: Croom Helm ; St. Martin's Press, 1984), 9-15.

<sup>257</sup> Lists of foreign friends at the 10<sup>th</sup>-century court appear in Philotheos, *Kleterologion*: N. Oikomides, *Les Listes de prestance byzantines des IX<sup>e</sup> et Xe siècles* (Paris, 1972), 162-9, 176-7, 200-11.

<sup>258</sup> The International Organization for Migration defined 'acculturation' in 2004 as "the progressive adoption of elements of a foreign culture (ideas, words, values, norms, behaviors, institutions) by persons, groups, or classes of a given culture" – this definition

them when he found them useful, but was not sufficient to mark him as not-barbarian (or not-Bulgarian); his level of integration into Byzantine culture was consistently a source of stress to the Byzantines surrounding him. Symeon's adoption of the methods and ideological power-complexes of the Byzantine state was not unique to him; in a milder and less threatening (to Byzantine interests) mode, it seems to be the desired effect of the 'Byzantine commonwealth'<sup>259</sup> – Byzantine cultural influence extending beyond Byzantine territorial control, and operating instead on axes of cultural/imperialist 'soft' power.

Neither is Symeon the only non-Byzantine to make use of acculturation to Byzantine norms for reasons of anti-Byzantine policy. Byzantine symbology and ideology can be employed as a weapon of supersession, as seen in the much-later attempt of Muscovy to claim the title of the 'third Rome', and seize from a disintegrating Byzantine polity the cultural weight of the authority of the *basileus*. Symeon seems to be engaged in an earlier use of the same idea, taking authority from Byzantium by use of Byzantine methods; while the Muscovite supersession is accomplished via an invocation of the pervasive cultural infix of Orthodox Christianity (present via both the Byzantine appointment of metropolitans, and the concept of a centralized, sacral-historical autocratic ruler), Symeon's supersession is personal and experiential; he has *witnessed*

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is by necessity broad, but serves as a starting point. A more specific conceptualization of acculturation as a strategy for coping with cross-cultural stress (not necessarily successful or conscious, merely a strategy) is presented in Berry, 1970.

<sup>259</sup> Not, perhaps, in the original sense of a supranational conglomeration of subordinate polities influenced by conversion to Byzantine forms of Christianity, as presented by Dmitri Obolensky, but closer to Jonathan Shepard's 2006 reconceptualization: a system of "popular religion and political culture to provide the coordinates, scales of positive and negative values, which those societies under Byzantium's pastoral wing could modify, deny, or partially ignore, but which nonetheless determined the choice of political structures and communal value-systems available." Shepard, "Byzantium's Overlapping Circles", 10.

Byzantine culture, and both *recreates* it (in his imitation of Byzantine architecture at Preslav and his translations of Byzantine and Hellenistic law-books) and *claims* it (his imperial ambitions). If Symeon is to be neutralized – if the Byzantine *taxis* is to be restored – it is necessary for him to be culturally returned to his subaltern/barbarian state.

Therefore, when Choirosphaktes writes to Symeon, belittling the archon's skill at astrology and Greek rhetoric, he is reinforcing for his Constantinopolitan audience the normative image of Bulgaria and Bulgarians which is disturbed by Symeon's particular circumstances. Quite unusually for a collection of Byzantine letters, and uniquely in Choirosphaktes' collection, his letters to Symeon are interspersed with three answers *from* the Bulgarian ruler – a direct sequence of replies. These answers are short and simply written. They also become the source text for Choirosphaktes' linguistic manipulation. Much of the text of letters 5-12 consists of Choirosphaktes playing grammatical games with the text that 'Symeon' has produced. A full English translation of these 14 letters follows in Appendix I.

The opening salvo – Letter 1 – arrives from Symeon to Choirosphaktes, and makes an immediate attack on the 'wisdom' of the reigning Byzantine emperor, Leo VI: Symeon demands that, if the emperor is so skilled at astrology as to have predicted a solar eclipse down to the minute of its appearance, surely he will now be able to perform a feat of prognostication, and tell Symeon whether or not Symeon will release a number of Byzantine prisoners of war. These prisoners, and their captivity or release, will be the primary subject of discussion during the exchange. The subject of the debate between the envoy and Symeon, however, is located firmly in the question of education and ability as determined by knowledge of the cosmos – particularly Byzantine knowledge which

'Symeon' demands that Choirosphaktes maintain. Choirosphaktes responds, in Letter 2, by declaring that Symeon *will* release the prisoners – not because of any astrological knowledge on his or Leo VI's part, but because of Symeon's philanthropic nature, installed in him via his exposure to his 'divine father' – the Byzantine emperor, spiritual father influencing spiritual son in the correct hierarchy of polities.

It is the text of the remaining 'Symeon' responses, i.e. Letters 3 and 5, in which Symeon denies that he will release the prisoners in two separate short, brusque notes – declaring that the predictions of Choirosphaktes and Leo VI are invalid and that therefore no exchange of prisoners will take place – which Choirosphaktes makes use of in order to make Symeon appear to be nothing more than a barbarian, despite his 'innate' philanthropic nature and his Constantinopolitan training. Choirosphaktes' weapon of choice is grammar. In letters 4, 6, and 7, he presents three ways that, by moving negative particles or reading interrogatives as substantives, the text as presented in letters 3 and 5 can be read to state that Symeon *will* return the prisoners, despite the apparent, surface implication that he will not. Letter 6 is particularly clear in describing the manipulation of language which Choirosphaktes resorts to:

**Letter VI** – *From Leo, magistros, to Symeon, archon of the Bulgars*

I have received in my hands your letter, o greatest of archons, which was as follows: οὐχ ὑπεσχόμην περὶ αἰχμαλώτων • οὐ σοὶ ἐλάλησά τι • οὐκ ἐξαποστελῶ. Now I will make into a letter of agreement the starting-point of your refusal – concerning this, the first colon after the second negative particle is placed at the end, like so: *I didn't promise nothing concerning the hostages*, instead of *I did not promise **no***, but rather *yes*, in which, according to Stagerites, two negatives customarily become an agreement. Further, one must read the σοὶ ἐλάλησας agreeably, just as if you wrote, *You know what I said to you*. And if one gives to the τί an interrogative sense, and then carrying through the οὐκ ἐξαποστελῶ ironically, I might have made the whole power of your words into your accustomed philanthropic beneficence. But someone might say that he makes an ambiguous way of reading. But to the one who says this, I would say the

following. Ambiguous, yes; since there are many ways of reading it. And if it is ambiguous, let philanthropy be victorious. And philanthropy releases the hostages. So release them. For you are just with your philanthropy, which has been seen clearly by everyone. And if somebody should wish to go the whole of your letter with this appropriate punctuation, then he would not find the meaning of your letter unadorned.

This sort of manipulation is difficult to render in English, which relies on word order to provide syntactical meaning. What Choirosphaktes is doing is making use of Greek's freer word order, along with the possibility of different accentuation giving different meanings (τῖ as opposed to τὶ) in order to show Symeon that his command of the language is so poor as to allow his meaning to be inverted – not only once, but three times, via three different methods. More significantly, the inclusion of this sort of blatant deconstruction of the language of an (exceptionally powerful) foreign potentate is designed to appear to Choirosphaktes' *eventual* audience – his peers in Constantinople, along with his emperor, Leo VI – as a restatement of innate Byzantine superiority and command of Greek, despite any pretensions Symeon might have towards questioning that superiority, as he did in the challenge in Letter 1.

The letters which follow, numbers 8-14, continue along this path – having demonstrated how Symeon's imprecise use of Greek leaves him vulnerable to three distinct interpretations of his text which read it to the advantage of the Byzantines, Choirosphaktes then demonstrates via philosophical principles (Letters 10, 11) and an invocation of Homer (Letter 8) that Symeon meant all along to make these mistakes – they are in his nature, and what is more, the multiplicity of readings possible in the letters are placed there by God (who is able to "change not only speaking, and the thoughts

before speaking, but also the hand which writes unjust things"<sup>260</sup>) for Symeon's own benefit. These latter letters marshal Byzantine superiority in culture (philosophical and literary) and sacrality (it is, after all, the Orthodox Christian God who is responsible for the felicitous misreadings, the same God to whom Symeon's father, Khan Boris, converted, and to whom Symeon himself was planning to dedicate his life had he not ended up *archon* of the Bulgars.) Choirosphaktes employs these signals of Byzantine supremacy not only in order to compel Symeon to release the prisoners but also to reframe him as a barbarian being instructed by his Byzantine betters in his own use of language, the constitution of his own philanthropic soul, and the magnanimity of the God he professes to worship.

This reframe may not have been specifically intended to produce a diplomatic response – it is difficult to imagine Symeon being compelled to release prisoners or in any other fashion capitulate to Byzantine interests based on being roundly and carefully insulted by a Byzantine envoy. In fact, Symeon's eventual agreement to Byzantine terms seems to have had little relationship to these letters.<sup>261</sup> Furthermore, the evidence of other correspondence between Symeon and the Byzantine political establishment in Constantinople suggests that the usual modes of diplomatic interaction with the Bulgarian leader were not nearly so flippant as those which appear in the Choirosphaktes correspondence.

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<sup>260</sup> Choirosphaktes, letter 8.

<sup>261</sup> These letters actually seem to have had little effect on the ultimate outcome of the negotiation – letter 13 implies that Symeon had communicated directly with Leo VI about the prisoner release, and one of Choirosphaktes' later letters (Letter 21), written to his emperor in an attempt to return to political good grace during his first exile from Constantinople, presents the outcome of the Bulgarian embassy as being due to personal interaction with Symeon, as opposed to letter exchange.

This other evidence is mostly found in the letter collection of Nicholas Mystikos, who was at the time of writing serving as Patriarch of Constantinople. No letters from Symeon have been preserved in the collection, but a 'Bulgarian dossier' of 29 letters (letters 3-31 in Westerink & Jenkins' edition) addressed to Symeon exist and are attested in all three of the major manuscripts for this collection. Most of these letters are quite long and include serious discussion of both geopolitical and spiritual matters, both subjects often described via Biblical and philosophical referents. The Mystikos episolarly assumes the existence of a Symeon who is not only capable of reading Greek at an exceptionally educated level, but who is an intellectual opponent to be taken seriously; Nicholas' attempts to return Symeon to the Byzantine fold treat the Bulgarian ruler as anything but a figure to be adroitly dismissed with linguistic and grammatical games.

Throughout these letters, Nicholas' political vocabulary reflects the current ideology of the Byzantine state, presenting a vision of Christian/Byzantine universalism which has prescriptive force.<sup>262</sup> His letters to Symeon comprise only part of his collected epistolography. The collection of his work appears in one independent manuscript and piecemeal in several others. The manuscript containing the Symeon letters also holds letters to the Emir of Crete and the Pope, and dates to the tenth or eleventh century – i.e. shortly after their composition. It is not far-fetched to assume that the letters are collected for the purpose of preserving a prime example of diplomatic correspondence.

More specifically, Nicholas' letters to Symeon focus on controlling his activities by appealing to his position within the Byzantine hierarchy of states. He demonstrates in multiple letters that a Christian ruler (which Symeon was) would be a good and respected

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<sup>262</sup> Simeonova, Liliana. "Power in Nicholas Mysticus' Letters to Symeon of Bulgaria", in *Byzantoslavica* 54:1 (1993): 94.



ruler if he retained allegiance to the Byzantine Empire and thus recognized Byzantine supremacy over all of Christendom.<sup>263</sup> Nicholas points out that the power Symeon inherited from his father, Boris, is *ἀρχή*, not the *βασίλεια* which belongs to the Byzantine Emperor.<sup>264</sup> When Nicholas attempts to prevent Symeon from attacking Byzantine territory, he couches his admonishments in this language of *taxis* – if Symeon is behaving as the Christian sovereign he claims to be, then he must acknowledge fundamental Byzantine imperial supremacy, and cease from making untoward advances on Byzantine territory.

Nicholas is also extremely interested in policing what sort of authority Symeon claims for himself. In letter 6, dated to 914 CE, right after Symeon was crowned by Nicholas outside the walls of Constantinople with some sort of crown, Nicholas spends a great deal of time defining usurpation for Symeon, in the context of reminding him that no Roman subject was required – or even permitted – to perform *proskynesis* (a form of ritual bow) before him. "No other demand be made," he writes, "not even the demand that our imperial agents should come to you and give you *proskynesis*."<sup>265</sup> Nicholas insists that Symeon can only receive this honor from his Bulgarian subjects. This seems to be an attempt to manage the ideological difficulties which emerged from the 914 meeting outside of Constantinople, the same meeting which produces the aberrations of address which will later appear in the *De Cerimoniis*. We can see both the destabilization of Byzantine ideology and Nicholas' attempts to repair it.

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<sup>263</sup> Simeonova, "Power in Nicholas Mysticus' Letters to Symeon of Bulgaria", 90.

<sup>264</sup> Nicholas Mystikos, ep. 18, 25.

<sup>265</sup> Ibidem, ep. 6, ln. 30-1.

Symeon is also referred to as Nicholas' spiritual son in multiple letters, most of which date from the period where Nicholas was serving as Regent, and was therefore acting with equivalent authority to an Emperor.<sup>266</sup> This salutation matches the appropriate salutation for the ruler of Bulgaria found in the *De Cerimoniis*. It also suggests that Nicholas was attempting to use Symeon's childhood acculturation in Constantinople to influence his actions now that he had returned home to assume the Bulgarian throne. Nicholas praises Symeon's virtues in asking him to desist from bloodshed, saying that Symeon was a man "who for his great wisdom, for the favor shown to him by Heaven, has led the Bulgarian nation to a height of glory, who more than ever any man detests knavery, who honors justice, who abominates injustice, who is above sensual pleasures, who stints his belly like a hermit on the mountains, who tastes no wine, who differs from those who profess to live out of the world in nothing except only in his government of the rule granted to him by God."<sup>267</sup> Here Symeon is portrayed as a virtuous, educated, and ascetic Christian, whose power in Bulgaria is God-given, and thus *beholden to God*. Nicholas also refers repeatedly to Symeon's knowledge of the teachings of the Apostle Paul<sup>268</sup>, and to his acquaintance with Homer's *Iliad*<sup>269</sup>, as well as to his education in "ancient history".<sup>270</sup> Here, the evidence of Symeon's childhood in Constantinople, where he receives a Greek education, is levered to bear on his behavior as an adult – despite his position as a *foreign*, barbarian potentate, he is expected by Nicholas to behave appropriately within the Byzantine imperial schematic. This is in direct contrast to

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<sup>266</sup> Ibidem, ep. 5, 6, 16, 24, 25.

<sup>267</sup> Ibidem, Ep. 14, ln. 60-66.

<sup>268</sup> Ibidem, Ep. 24, ln. 103-7.

<sup>269</sup> Ibidem, Ep. 11, ln. 87-8.

<sup>270</sup> Ibidem, Ep. 20, ln. 92-3.

Choirosphaktes' marshaling of Symeon's inevitable barbarism as an explanation for conduct outside the sphere of Byzantine interests. While Nicholas invokes the commonality created by Symeon's acquisition of Byzantine *mores*, Choirosphaktes invokes this commonality and then dismisses it. Nicholas is communicating directly with Symeon – several letters refer to replies written by Symeon's hand<sup>271</sup> – and the letters in the 'Bulgarian dossier' seem to be a record of a lifelong correspondence between the two men.

This is not to suggest that Nicholas' letters are 'private' while Choirosphaktes' are 'public' – all Byzantine letters, including diplomatic letters, were in some sense public objects, as previously discussed. What instead emerges is a difference between Choirosphaktes' attempt to renormalize for his *eventual audience* – necessarily Constantinopolitan intellectuals and the Emperor whom he served – a diplomatic embassy which had been at points disastrous, and Nicholas' record of a high-end diplomatic correspondence between the highest religious authority in Byzantium and a foreign potentate. Choirosphaktes had been imprisoned; the Byzantines had been forced to deal with a genuine threat on the part of the Bulgarians which was unusual in its ability to break *taxis*. Choirosphaktes, in including in his letter collection a sequence of letters in which he intellectually and culturally dismisses Symeon, is engaged actively in presenting an image of Byzantine imperial power which maintains its normative values and is unchallenged by Bulgarian attempts on power. Since Choirosphaktes had actually been outside of Constantinople and directly engaged with Bulgarian power, his word bears a certain authority when repeated and read aloud in the intellectual circles of his

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<sup>271</sup> Ibidem, ep. 10.

peers back in Constantinople. He has more power to reinforce the normative image of Bulgaria by expressing in epistolary form Symeon's essential barbarism because of his own periods of leaving the Queen of Cities. He also has more to gain from demonstrating his own *ability* to reinforce normative Byzantine images of power: if taken in context with the letters in his collection which date from his embassy to Baghdad, it becomes clear that the Symeon correspondence is one element of a larger presentation of Choirosphaktes as an exemplary *envoy*.

Thus we see that the letters of this Byzantine diplomat, considered as a single collected object, can be considered as an attempt by Choirosphaktes to bring, via the power of letters to be an *eidolon*, an image of the character and true face of the letter-author, a normative impression of Byzantine diplomatic activity to an audience in Constantinople. This normative image, in which Leo Choirosphaktes bests the Bulgarian *archon* grammatically and is also the greatest negotiator Byzantium could provide to Baghdad, serves to preserve both Byzantine *taxis* and Choirosphaktes' own personal position. Letter writing here is a method of social propaganda, meant to be appreciated as a rhetorical argument.

#### 4. THE 'MASTER OF THE EAST': NIKEPHOROS OURANOS & HIS COLLEAGUES ON THE EASTERN FRONTIER

In the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, the easternmost territory of the Byzantine empire had been newly reconquered by the imperial armies. This reconquest occurred between the reigns of Romanos Lekapenos (920-44 CE) and John Tzimiskes (969-76) CE, in response to the collapse of the Abbasid caliphate and the following realignment of local powers, including those of the Armenian and Georgian princes. By the time Basil II had ascended to the throne in 976, the 'new' provinces in the east were divided into three regional katepanates – Antioch, Mesopotamia, and Chaldia. This number would increase during his reign by the addition of the katepanate of Iberia (claimed via the absorption of the Georgian principality of Tao) and the katepanate of Vaspurakan (after the Armenian principedom of the same name was annexed).<sup>272</sup> This new territory had not been under direct Byzantine administration for centuries. While the empire might have recalled these reclaimed regions as being historically Byzantine, their local populations were heterodox and had been so for generations: most neither practiced Chalcedonian Christianity nor spoke Greek as their native language. Alongside a small number of Greek settlers were native Armenian, Syrian, and Muslim communities,<sup>273</sup> all of whom were embedded in a political structure of local patron-and-client systems which did not vanish when the Byzantines arrived.

Thus, despite great territorial gains, the 11<sup>th</sup>-century Byzantine empire in the East was faced with a significant administrative problem of governance: how could the newly-

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<sup>272</sup> N. Oikonomides, "L'Organisation de la frontier orientale de Byzance aux Xe-XIe siècles et le taktikon de l'Escorial," in *Acts of the 14<sup>th</sup> International Congress 1971*, 3 vols., (Bucharest, 1974), i. 285-302; Haldon, John, *Warfare, State, and Society*, 84-9.

<sup>273</sup> Holmes, *Basil II*, 304-5.

regained borderlands be integrated into the imperial system? The eastern frontier was therefore a site where imperial ideology had to become practical; authority, radiating from the center of the empire at Constantinople, had to be exercised over an area which was not well-integrated into Byzantine culture. It is thus a place where the tension between the internal conception of empire carried by Byzantines and the actual execution of imperial authority are simultaneously present.

In her 2005 volume on the governance of imperial provinces under Basil II, Catherine Holmes described the common practice of sending senior Byzantine officials to frontier regions as "one part of a highly flexible form of governance which sought to adapt to the heterogeneous nature of the local populations."<sup>274</sup> Civil governance in the newly reclaimed eastern provinces was thus multivalent and did not involve introducing alien administrative practices and practitioners, but instead provided a thin layer of Constantinopolitan natives as a veneer over a persistent local administration. The epistolary network of Nikephoros Ouranos and his correspondents provides a method of seeing how Byzantine imperial authority was projected onto the East during this period of expansion. These letter collections provide example of how imperial officials in frontier areas attempted to reassemble Constantinopolitan networks of friendship – and thus, Constantinopolitan networks of power and authority – outside of Constantinople.

Nikephoros Ouranos was embedded in the highest echelons of the Byzantine aristocracy under Basil II. His political, diplomatic and military accomplishments were extensive, ranging from Baghdad to Bulgaria to the borderlands of the newly-reclaimed eastern provinces. He was also regarded as a man of letters, composing alongside his

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<sup>274</sup> Catherine Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, Oxford Studies in Byzantium. (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 300-1.

well-known military manual, the *Taktika*, a number of works of poetry and hagiography.<sup>275</sup> His epistolary collection is large, containing 50 letters by his hand,<sup>276</sup> a number which can be expanded to over seventy if letters addressed to him in the collections of other Byzantines are included. Both his literary and epistolographic work display a highly educated, eloquent mind, expressing itself in high Atticizing style.

The earliest appearance of Ouranos in the sources describes his service as an envoy on the matter of Bardas Skleros to the Buyid emir of Baghdad, Adud al-Dawla, in the early 980s. He continued to engage in diplomatic work in his capacity as the *kanikleios*,<sup>277</sup> the keeper of the imperial inkstand, and supervised a later negotiation between a Buyid ambassador, Ibn Shahram, and Basil II when he arrived in Constantinople to continue the negotiations regarding Skleros. Ibn Shahram's report<sup>278</sup> portrays Ouranos as a close ally of Basil II against the machinations of the *parakoimomenos* Basil Lekapenos. Ouranos's entanglement with the *parakoimomenos*

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<sup>275</sup> Ouranos' literary production includes: the *Taktikon*, a military manual; a parainetic poem, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *βυζαντινὰ ἀνάλεκτα*, *BZ* (1899), 66-70, with later commentary by E. Kurtz, "Das parainetische Alphabet des Nikephoros Ouranos," *BZ* 25 (1925), 18; a poem on the death of Symeon Metaphrastes, ed. S. G. Mercati, "Versi di Niceforo Uranos in morte de Simeone Metaphraste", *AnalBoll* 68 (1950), 126-34; and two hagiographical works, the first a life of St. Theodore, edited by F. Halkin, "Un opusculé inconnu de Nicephore Ouranos: La Vie de St. Theodore le conscrit," *AnalBoll* 80 (1962): 308-24, and the second a life of St. Symeon Stylites the Younger, in *PG* 86 (2), cols. 2987-3216.

<sup>276</sup> Ouranos' epistolary collection has been edited by J. Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle* (Paris, 1960), 217-48.

<sup>277</sup> A seal of a Nikephoros ἀνθύπατος πατρίκιος καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ κανικλείου has been published by V. Laurent in *Corpus des sceaux, II: L'administration central* (Paris, 1981), no. 19. Laurent identifies this seal as belonging to Ouranos, but Eric McGeer has pointed out that this identification cannot be verified due to a lack of a family name on the seal. Letters 3-9 in Ouranos' epistolary, however, confirm his appointment as the Keeper of the Imperial Inkstand in the 980s.

<sup>278</sup> Translated into English by H.F. Amedroz and D. Margoliouth, *The Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*, VI (London, 1921), 23-35.

resulted in Ouranos being incarcerated on suspicion of either poisoning Skleros or colluding with him in 986 CE, but he returned to Constantinople and the emperor's favor in 987 after Basil Lekapenos had been removed from power. In the following decade, Ouranos maintained his political status both inside and outside of Constantinople: he was named the first lay guardian (ἐπίτροπος) of the Great Lavra on Mount Athos,<sup>279</sup> and in 996/7, despite a lack of prior military experience, was named Domestic of the Schools of the West by Basil II. In this post, he then virtually destroyed the Bulgarian army of Tsar Samuel, eliminating for the moment the Bulgar threat to Byzantine Greece.<sup>280</sup> Ouranos was by all reports a commander of skill and energy, despite the apparently political nature of his initial appointment.<sup>281</sup>

Ouranos' career as a Byzantine official was clearly multifocal: both military and civil, not only localized to Constantinople but also extending out into areas of dubious Byzantine influence. It was therefore not surprising that when Basil II returned from his three-month campaign against the Fatimids in December 999, having restabilized the Byzantine position in northern Syria after the death of the previous governor of Antioch,

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<sup>279</sup> See P. Lemerle et al., *Actes de Lavra*, I (Paris, 1970), 19-21 and 189-92, for a 1052 chrysobull of Constantine IX Monomachos, detailing Ouranos' successful execution of this office; as well as the *Diatyposis* of Athanasios.

<sup>280</sup> Skylitzes, 341.23-342.51; Zonaras, 558.12-559.10. See also Bojana Krsmanovic, *The Byzantine Province in Change (On the threshold between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century)*, Monographs / Institute for Byzantine Studies, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts no. 37. (Belgrade : Athens: Institute for Byzantine Studies, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts ; Institute for Byzantine Research, National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2008), 52-55, for further discussion of Ouranos's activities during his tenure as *domestikos* in the West.

<sup>281</sup> Leo of Synada, in his letter to Ouranos (ed. M. P. Vinson, *The Correspondence of Leo, Metropolitan of Synada and Syncellus*, CFHB 23 (Washington, D.C. 1985), 22-23), reports the fame that Ouranos won as a result of his victories on this campaign, particularly at the battle of the Spercheios River.



he appointed Ouranos as the next *doux* there.<sup>282</sup> Ouranos served in this capacity until 1007 CE. During his tenure, he conducted campaigns and negotiations throughout the East, including the annexation of the lands formerly belonging to David of Tao,<sup>283</sup> a major expedition into Armenia in 1001-2 against the Georgian king Gurgen,<sup>284</sup> suppressions of multiple Bedouin revolts,<sup>285</sup> and engagements with the rebel al-Afar and his allies.<sup>286</sup> While the literary and historiographical sources refer to Ouranos as the *magistros* or *archon* of Antioch during this period, a seal edited and illustrated by E. McGeer (Fogg Art Museum no. 1576)<sup>287</sup> refers to him as ὁ κρατῶν τῆς ἀνατολῆς, the "master of the East", implying a plenipotentiary office. That Ouranos had wide-ranging and ill-defined power over Byzantine interests in the East is further supported by the literary sources, including Yayha ibn Sa'id, Stephen of Taron, and Philetos Synadenos, who all refer to Nikephoros as merely *magistros*.<sup>288</sup> As earlier noted in the discussion of Leo Choïrosphaktes, the title of *magistros* had by the 10<sup>th</sup> century become a shorthand for an official who could act in lieu of the Emperor himself.<sup>289</sup> A century later, when Ouranos held this position, the range of his powers seems to have extended far beyond

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<sup>282</sup> The previous governor of Antioch, Damianos Dalassenos, was defeated and killed at the battle of Apamea in 998 CE. See Forsyth, *The Byzantine-Arab Chronicle (938-1034) of Yahyā B. Sa'īd Al-Anṭākī* (Ann Arbor, Mich: University Microfilms International, 1980), 501-15; also see W. Farag, "The Aleppo Question: a Byzantine-Fatimid Conflict of Interest in Northern Syria in the Later Tenth Century A.D." *BMGS* 14 (1990): 44-60.

<sup>283</sup> Ouranos, ep. 19 to Leo *anthypatos patriokios* and *epi tes sakelles*.

<sup>284</sup> Forsyth, *The Byzantine-Arab Chronicle*, 557-59.

<sup>285</sup> Skylitzes, 345.34-43.

<sup>286</sup> A series of letters addressed to Ouranos from Phileto Synadenos congratulate Ouranos on his victorious campaigns and probably refer to these events. See Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins*, 254-59 (ep. 8-13).

<sup>287</sup> E. McGeer, "Tradition and Reality in the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991): 129-140. Appendix.

<sup>288</sup> Holmes, *Basil II*, 350.

<sup>289</sup> See chapter 3 of this dissertation.

governing the city of Antioch and commanding the field army which was garrisoned there. Ouranos' appointment may have relied as much on Basil II's impression of his ability to keep peace with the Fatimids as on the possibility that, if war did break out, he would be able to bring it to a successful conclusion.<sup>290</sup> His history as a diplomat in the East as well as the positions he had held in the central administration in Constantinople all speak to the sort of governance that Basil may have hoped for in Antioch: stable and diplomatically oriented, but with the capability of exercising military dominance over rebellious populations.

Ouranos is an example of a Byzantine official who brought with him outside of the Byzantine metropole an exceptional amount of invested imperial trust. Having been handed a position of seniority and ambiguously-powerful authority over the Eastern frontier, he demonstrated the potential flexibility and creativity of Byzantine imperial policy. His letter collection, however, provides a further qualification: while immersed in the cultural milieu of the east, Ouranos maintained a Constantinople-style social network, and employed the methods of cultural maintenance particular to the intellectual court of the metropole in order to strengthen his local network. This network produces an extra-Constantinopolitan recreation of Byzantine high culture. It is a representation of how the top layer of the imposed governing structure on the reclaimed eastern provinces talked to one another – and a method of retaining, for that top level of officials, their Byzantine cultural codes and norms. This practice has a long history in Byzantine Roman culture: the Roman gentleman has consistently engaged in literary pursuits and maintained

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<sup>290</sup> Holmes, *Basil II*, 351-2.

epistolary ties as a source of his identity as a Roman,<sup>291</sup> and continued to do so in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

The letter collection of Nikephoros Ouranos exists in only one manuscript, Patmos 706, which has been edited by Darrouzès in his *Epistoliers Byzantins du X<sup>e</sup> Siècle*. This manuscript is entirely made up of letter collections, all dating from the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries, and of these, Ouranos' collection is the largest.<sup>292</sup> Patmos 706 itself dates to before the 12<sup>th</sup> century, based upon both paleographic and codicological evidence.<sup>293</sup> It is the unique witness to many of its epistles, including the collection of Ouranos. Here again it is necessary to recall that letter collections are primarily useful to their direct contemporaries, aside from those which have become part of the canon of exemplars. Patmos 706 is mixed between the two types: some letters collected within it are common exemplars, and for others, 706 is the sole manuscript record.

Along with Ouranos in contemporaneous service in the East were a small collection of fellow Constantinopolitans, including Philetos Synadenos and John the former *chartophylax* of the Hagia Sophia, now archbishop of Antioch. Ouranos' epistolary correspondence with these fellow servants of the Byzantine state in the East, as

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<sup>291</sup> Conant, Jonathan *Staying Roman*, 12-13, note 49. See also T.S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers: Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy AD 554-800* (London, 1984).

<sup>292</sup> The collections in Patmos 706 include letters of Isidore of Pelus, Alexander of Nicaea, Theodoret of Cyrrhus and Gregory of Nyssa, Theodore the patrician and sacellan, Symeon magistros and the logothete of the drome; Leo, the metropolitan of Synada; an extract from Julian the Apostate; the monk John of Latros; Ouranos; Philetos of Synada; and a number of other diverse letters without colophon. This group of writers is mixed between contemporary and patristic models of letter writing, the latter represented by Theodoret and Gregory of Nyssa, and the former by the leading intellectuals of the 10<sup>th</sup>-century Byzantine aristocracy.

<sup>293</sup> Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins*, 10. In particular, the paper used in this manuscript is of the type common to Greek manuscripts prior to the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

well as with his former compatriots in the metropole, suggest the maintenance of an intellectual and social network which, while displaced from Byzantine cultural centers, nevertheless preserved Byzantine cultural norms. The use of epistolary modes of relationship maintenance allowed this group of Constantinopolitan officials to maximize successful working relationships amongst one another on the frontier as well as maintain their connections to the ideology and culture of the capital which they had left behind.

Ouranos' epistolary can be usefully read as a record of his intellectual and social ties. The network which is constructed via epistolary correspondence combines elements of the social (such as patronage relationships and political ties between correspondents) with the cultural (the performative maintenance of the network – i.e. signaling of mutually recognizable cues between different nodes).<sup>294</sup> I am here following Adam Schor's definition of a node in a medieval epistolary network: a node is a person who transmits particular gestures or cues: in this case, he sends a letter to a Byzantine official on the Eastern frontier between 1000 and 1007 CE. By defining a node in this fashion I am attempting to move beyond the model of an ego-centered network for examining Byzantine epistolary collections. While an ego-centered network describes the personal order around a single 'self' (i.e. Ouranos) as the central node and then moves outward to demonstrate that node's connections to other selves (i.e. a sociometric star)<sup>295</sup>, such models leave open important problems of analysis, as Mullett has pointed out.<sup>296</sup> These

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<sup>294</sup> Schor, *Theodoret's People*, 9-10.

<sup>295</sup> Scott, J. *Social Network Analysis: a Handbook*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles, Calif. ; London: SAGE, 2013,) 28-33.

<sup>296</sup> Margaret Mullett, "The Detection of a Relationship in Middle Byzantine Literary Texts: the case of letters and letter-networks," in *L'Epistolographie et la poesie epigrammatique: actes de la 16e Table ronde du XXe Congres international des Etudes byzantines*. (Paris, 2003).

problems are twofold: first, whether it is possible to define, in Byzantium – or any medieval period – the nature of the 'self' that forms the center of that sociometric star; and secondly, whether we can usefully understand the relationships which each link in such a network represents. In what fashion are these people acquainted? Is their act of communication one which represents kinship, friendship, teaching, collegiality?<sup>297</sup>

Mullett suggests several solutions which are particularly applicable for examining the presence of friendship – particularly pointing out that we must pay attention to symmetry and reciprocity in relationships expressed through letters, that we must not neglect emotional or even erotic charge in the letter, and that we need to clearly and transparently delineate what we mean by each 'relation' in a network.<sup>298</sup>

Here I would like to suggest that the work of Harrison C. White on "relational sociology" may be useful, as White's formulation of social networks shifts the focus of a social network from the individual actor and his actions and cognitions to the behavior they exhibit as part of a network. Thus, an individual identity – a 'self' – arises from efforts to position that constructed-self within a matrix of other identities. The important element in the network is no longer the actor but the communication between actors.<sup>299</sup>

This is particularly significant for the Byzantine epistolary network, which is explicitly framed by the signaling of cultural cues. As participation in an epistolary relationship requires some level of membership in a group of commonly-educated and commonly-aculturated persons in Byzantium, defining the relationships present in an epistolary network by means of *what cues are transmitted* via those letters allows us to move away

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<sup>297</sup> Mullett, "The Detection of a Relationship", 68-9.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 71, 73.

<sup>299</sup> White, Harrison C. *Identity and Control: how social formations emerge*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008.

from the question of whether the self portrayed is the 'actual' self: it is the constructed self which is actively communicative. This constructed self was explicitly intellectual, explicitly Constantinopolitan, and explicitly 'Byzantine Roman'. It was assembled via the public reception of rhetoric, which included the public reception of letters, both as they were sent and later as collected objects.<sup>300</sup>

This is not to say that shifting from a network analysis considered primarily in terms of individual selves to one which focuses on the relationships between those selves is to claim that the individual was insignificant. On the contrary, this analysis of Ouranos' letter collection is explicitly concerned with actual Byzantine Romans and their personal experiences of imperial authority and activity. However, it claims that the selves which have these personal experiences mediate them through self-presentation to others, and that this mediation occurs along lines of connection visualizable through an epistolary network. The constructed self of a Byzantine Roman imperial agent did not exist alone, but instead in relation to other Byzantine Romans. The self constructed was a *Rhomaioi* self, whose Romanity was visible when it was performed.

While the individuals who appear in and around Ouranos' letter collection are also present in other sources, the letters are where they are caught in the act of communicating with one another, trading cultural cues which reinforce their in-group ties. By looking at the relationships between individuals on the Eastern frontier as nodes in a network defined by the cultural practice of writing letters in the language of intellectual, Constantinopolitan friendship, it is possible to begin to construct a social approach to Byzantine imperial presence.

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<sup>300</sup> Riehle, "Epistolography as Autobiography", but see also Michael Angold, "The Autobiographical Impulse in Byzantium" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998): 225-57.

Ouranos's letter collection comprised fifty letters with at least twenty-eight separate addressees (several letters have either an unclear salutation or lack an addressee entirely). It represented both a friendship network and a patronage network. While the connection between some of these correspondents was brief – only one letter, and that of insignificant length – even temporary or ephemeral relationships transmit cultural cues<sup>301</sup>. A prosopographical list of Ouranos's correspondents follows this chapter (Appendix 1). Analysis of this group of correspondents reveals that Ouranos wrote to members of the Byzantine aristocracy both inside and outside of Constantinople. Here it is crucial to observe that, with rare exceptions,<sup>302</sup> Byzantine letters did not circulate within the same city: i.e. we do not have preserved in letter collections the communication from someone in Antioch to someone else who was also contemporaneously in Antioch. Several consequences of this lacuna emerge for the historian: firstly, that it is hard to detect relationships between members of a local administrative organization via an analysis of epistolary networks<sup>303</sup> (a subject which I will return to when considering Ouranos' interaction with his Antiochean colleagues); and secondly, that it is possible to assign some dates to Ouranos' communication with those situated in Constantinople through observation that he composed certain letters while outside of the city. These letters will

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<sup>301</sup> Schor, 11.

<sup>302</sup> i.e. letters to the Emperor, like those written by Leo Choïrosphaktes to Leo VI while Choïrosphaktes was in political exile in a Constantinopolitan monastery – however, even these can in a sense be considered to be 'from a different city', as confinement in a monastery removes the author from the political life of the capital.

<sup>303</sup> Jean-Claude Cheynet, "The Duchy of Antioch During the Second Period of Byzantine Rule," in Ciggaar, Krijnie, ed., *East and West in the medieval Eastern Mediterranean. 1: Antioch from the Byzantine reconquest until the end of the crusader principality: Acta of the congress held at Hernen Castle in May 2003*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 147 (Leuven, 2006), 5.

form a snapshot of Ouranos' intellectual and social community – the his network of communication while outside of Constantinople.

In this analysis of Ouranos's correspondence while he is outside Constantinople, we can first eliminate several letters dated to his time in the civil administration in the city. These include letters 3 through 6, which discuss chrysobulls that he issued as the keeper of the Imperial Inkstand. With the exception of letter 5, which is addressed to Stephen, the Metropolitan of Nikomedia (who is also the addressee of letters 7, 9, and 47), the other addressees of these letters do not receive further communication from Ouranos. Similarly, letters 30 and 38 deal with Ouranos's involvement in administrative issues surrounding the monastery of St. Tarasius, and also date from this period of civil service.<sup>304</sup> We can also securely date letter 39, which is doubly addressed to Symeon of Euchaita and John the Chartophylax, to before October 4, 996 CE, when John the Chartophylax became John III, Patriarch of Antioch.<sup>305</sup> Ouranos will remain in touch with this John, but no correspondence between them is preserved from the period in which they worked side-by-side in Antioch.

We can also securely date several letters to the time of Ouranos's service outside of Constantinople, either because of their subject matter or because they are addressed to Constantinopolitan officials. Letter 19,<sup>306</sup> which describes in brief Ouranos' participation in the reclamation of Iberia for Byzantium after the death of the Curopalate David in

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<sup>304</sup> Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins*, 47.

<sup>305</sup> Vinson, *The Correspondence of Leo Metropolitan of Synada and Syncellus*, 140.

<sup>306</sup> And by inference, letter 17, addressed to the same Leo as letter 19. Both of these letters are also addressed particularly to someone in service at the court in Constantinople – this Leo was a sakellan, as well as holding the honorary titles of *anthypatos* and *patrikios*.



1001 CE,<sup>307</sup> is a particularly clear example of a letter which must have been written from Antioch. Additionally, all the letters addressed to individuals holding positions in Constantinople are probably dateable to some period in which Ouranos was elsewhere: i.e. John the *ostiarios*,<sup>308</sup> who receives six letters, several of which (letter 25 and letter 50) make explicit reference to Ouranos's time in the East; and letters addressed to an *asekretis*, Stephen (letter 10) and an *augustalios*, Pothos (letter 11). Of particular interest as well are letters 40 and 41, addressed to a Manuel Vestes, which Darrouzès has identified as being written directly before Ouranos left Constantinople for Antioch.<sup>309</sup>

The great majority of Ouranos's remaining correspondents held the title of *krites*, and most of them were situated in positions which are themselves on the Eastern frontier – a marked change from the period of his service as keeper of the Imperial Inkstand, in which the majority of his correspondents were metropolitans. Those metropolitans which received letters dated from the period of Ouranos's appointment as *doux* of Antioch seem to all have been metropolitans with whom he initially corresponded while he was not on the Eastern frontier – these are relationships which he *maintained*, rather than created. Much of the preserved correspondence from the period of Ouranos's service on the Eastern frontier is related to maintaining ties with people who can help him successfully execute his assigned tasks as *doux*. He maintained these ties, however, not through a discussion of practical necessities, but via the language of friendship and the passing of Byzantine cultural cues: the ability to understand and interpret and participate in the

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<sup>307</sup> Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins*, 45.

<sup>308</sup> The *ostiarios*, an office specific to eunuchs, was in charge of important aspects of imperial ceremonial, including controlling direct access to the emperor's person; he was therefore certainly based in Constantinople.

<sup>309</sup> Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins*, 240.

intellectual culture of the Constantinopolitan aristocracy from which his correspondents are drawn.

As previously noted, Ouranos was an accomplished intellectual, educated in Constantinople and possessed of the sort of skill with high-style Greek which permitted the composition of verses dedicated to Symeon Metaphrastes on the occasion of his death as well as a parainetic poem and two hagiographies. His letter collection is equally erudite and demonstrates a depth of education which is characteristic of the Constantinopolitan aristocracy. Within the corpus of his letters he alludes to or directly quotes eight separate books of Scripture, from both the Old and the New Testament;<sup>310</sup> both the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* of Homer; a substantial number of proverbs, likely from either the collection of Zenobios or the *Popular Proverbs* attributed to Diogenianos;<sup>311</sup> and a number of works from the classical tradition, including Hesiod's *Theogonia* and Theocritus. He is also acquainted with the poetry of Sappho, referencing "the speaking of roses" as an allusion to speaking both well and about good things in his letter to Niketas the Metropolitan of Amasia, a document which otherwise concerns a request for Niketas to leave off from eulogizing the death of his friend Maurice and to send Ouranos instead proper news.<sup>312</sup> The collection is in general rich in allusion and these allusions are elegantly employed – Ouranos was not merely showing off a hard-won competence, but was a fluid user of high style.

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<sup>310</sup> Ouranos's scriptural references are as follows: **ep.7** ln.10 - Hebrews 13:3; **ep.29**, ln.22 - II Corinthians 12:4; **ep.35** ln.11 - 1 Corinthians 5:1-6, ln. 21 - Matthew 10:17, ln.29 - Hebrews 11:36, ln.30 - Exodus 23:3, ln. 31 - Sirach 12:13; **ep.45** ln.1 - Genesis 18:28; **ep.47**, ln.51 - Jeremiaiah 4:19.

<sup>311</sup> Hans Georg Beck, *Geschichte Der Byzantinischen Volksliteratur*. Handbuch Der Altertumswissenschaft Abt. 12: Byzantinisches Handbuch, T. 2, Bd. 3. (München: Beck, 1971), 206ff.

<sup>312</sup> Ouranos, ep. 18.

Further, Ouranos Atticized to the point of using poetic or Homeric forms of common words while simultaneously adding to them prefixes which are rarely seen outside of the Middle Byzantine period: for example, in letter 13, addressed to an Anthimos *protospatharios*, Ouranos uses κατακέχυτο – this form derives from the Homeric χέω, but here appears in the pluperfect, a form which is not found in Homer, and with the addition of the κατα- prefix. Similarly, several lines later he employs ἐβηβήκες, which is a second singular form of the Homeric pluperfect of βαίνω.<sup>313</sup> Ouranos is familiar enough with Homeric Greek to use it to back-form new verb forms – and he assumes that his audience will be able to interpret those verb forms, i.e. be similarly familiar with Homer's grammar. Ouranos wrote to those who shared his own education and erudition, and his audience was able to interpret his letters adequately.

Ouranos's most frequent correspondents were addressed in the formal language of friendship. His praise of the "honeyed words" and "sweetly-speaking tongue" of his administrative colleague John the Orphanotrophos<sup>314</sup> is characteristic. But this is the *formal* language of friendship: it is tropic, and it does not necessarily suggest genuine depth of feeling. Ouranos' emotional tone is in general effusive; while he does not address the majority of his correspondents with any of the traditional forms of address that accompany many Byzantine letters,<sup>315</sup> he refers over and over to the 'sweetness' and 'delight' which he finds in his friends, as well as to the (equally tropic) grief of being

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<sup>313</sup> ἐβηβήκει, the 3rd sing plpf. indic. act. of βαίνω is common at line-end in the Iliad (e.g. Il. 6.513).

<sup>314</sup> Ouranos, ep. 16.

<sup>315</sup> Only 7% (3 of 50) of Ouranos's letters contain recognizable forms of address, such as ὦ κεφαλή. See Grünbart, *Formen der Anrede im byzantinischen Brief vom 6. Bis zum 12. Jahrhundert*, 57-58. It is thus difficult to apply Grünbart's excellent and useful analysis of the Byzantine epistolary mode of address to Ouranos's correspondence.

absent from them.<sup>316</sup> He is sociable and expansive. Second-guessing whether or not Ouranos meant these expressions of friendship and solidarity is not as useful a mode of inquiry as considering why he might employ them. The 'self' which he is constructing through epistolary effort may be clad in the expected garb of exile, longing, and intense (but generic) expressions of companionship, but it is a self which performs a useful function: it enables him to claim rhetorical authority, to present himself as a member of an in-group with specific social and intellectual requirements, and to maintain relationships which are otherwise strained by distance and the pressure of being immersed in a non-Byzantine cultural milieu.

This constructed self is, for Byzantine Romans, a cultural type – it is modeled on and through rhetoric, which, while instilled educationally, is a recognized and accepted pattern for the presentation of a person-in-the-world. Rhetorical models are how Byzantines constitute themselves.<sup>317</sup> If there is a 'self' without a social persona, it is not one which was particularly important or necessary to middle Byzantine aristocratic culture. A non-constructed self would not have enabled Ouranos to maintain relationships with his Constantinopolitan peers while far away from them. It is the constructed self which contains a programmatic expectation of particularly 'Byzantine Roman' behaviors.

Byzantine Romans recognized the presence of a constructed authorial self in multiple literary sites, including historiographic and encomiac works. In historiographic work of the middle Byzantine period, the authorial self is 'present' – i.e. he makes literary choices derive from both personal circumstances and the tradition of authorial presence in

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<sup>316</sup> Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins*, 48.

<sup>317</sup> I am indebted to Leanora Neville, whose 2013 talk at the Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Colloquium on "Visualizing Community: City and Village in Byzantine Greece", and subsequent personal discussion, have shaped my thinking on this subject.

historiography which originates in Herodotus and Thucydides.<sup>318</sup> Byzantine authors, educated in the classical rhetorical tradition, were entirely aware of the uses of *plasma* in historiographic narrative, and as early as the Chronicle of Theophanes were employing 'fictionalized' or 'novelized' strategies of managing historical narratives and the characters – particularly emperors and other powerful men – who appear within them. As "Byzantine systems of reading and rhetorical performance were strategically open to manipulation so as to fit a variety of contexts, audiences, and arguments",<sup>319</sup> the 'rhetor' – the constructed self which wrote – was able to use techniques specific to Classicizing Byzantine Roman high culture to produce effects which were both literary and self-promoting; that placed the rhetor in a position to declare his cultural competence and make use of it.<sup>320</sup>

When Ouranos wrote to the Metropolitan of Neocaesarea, Nicholas, he described how his loneliness is assuaged by the receipt of letters from such a friend: "As for myself, I might take encouragement from a fortunate event, [seen] according to my eyes, and the small of soul (namely I, obsessed with trifles) might long for more of this. But somehow, secondly, to be otherwise continuously in the company of the desired person through written things – I have considered such writings an image of that presence..."<sup>321</sup> Here is

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<sup>318</sup> Ruth Macrides, "The Historian in the History", in Constantinides, Panagiotakes, Jeffreys, and Angelou, eds. *Φιλελλην: studies in honour of Robert Browning* (Venice, 1996), 205-24; *ibid.*, "Editor's Preface" in *History as Literature in Byzantium* (Farnham, 2010), ix-xi; Dion Smythe, "Experiencing Self: how mid-Byzantine historians presented their experience", in *Experiencing Byzantium* (Ashgate, 2013), 251-266.

<sup>319</sup> Stratis Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 55.

<sup>320</sup> Stratis Papaioannou, *Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium*. See especially chapter 2, "The rhetor as creator".

<sup>321</sup> Ouranos, ep. 21. ἀλλ' ἐμὲ καὶ τῆς κατ' ὀφθαλμοὺς συντυχίας ἔχοι ἐπιθυμία καὶ τούτου γλίχοιτο μᾶλλον ὁ μικρὸς τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ μικρολογος ἐγώ, εἰ δ' ὄν, ἀλλά γε δεύτερον

the common epistolary trope of a letter bearing the image of the presence of its writer: the letter, as Psellos writes, is the *eidolon* of a soul, bringing two people in disparate locations into direct contact.<sup>322</sup> Via the medium of 'written things' Ouranos summoned the presence of distant friends. Despite being stationed far outside Constantinople, he maintained a personal connection with both those who work there and those who have also been assigned to posts distant from the imperial center. These personal bonds of friendship, reinforced by the employment of a common epistolary language – one which was Atticized, elaborate, and studded with references to both the classical canon and the New Testament – helped to reinforce and stabilize the process of 'being Byzantine Roman' while embedded in a non-Byzantine cultural matrix.

The closing of spatial distance via epistolary communication – which in the Byzantine case is intimately entwined with the ability of letters to contain a living image of their authors<sup>323</sup> – is especially important in the analysis of Ouranos's letters, since it is through this collapse of distance that he maintained his own cultural ties and ideologies. Many of Ouranos's letters contained impassioned requests for letters written in reply, using language which relied upon the rhetorical trope of letters as a sinecure for absent friends. Letter 1 begins "You give me the full measure of joy by these letters, by writing, just as you gave me joy by being present," contrasting *παρὼν* and *γράφων*<sup>324</sup>, being present and writing, as opposite sides of a balanced parallel structure. Similarly, letter

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γράμμασι τοῦ ποθοῦμένου συνεχῶς ὁμιλεῖν, ἃ καὶ τῆς ἐκείνου παρρησίας εἰκόνας πεποιήμαί...

<sup>322</sup> Psellos, Psellos, ep. 11, *Mes. Bibl.* V, Paris 1976.

<sup>323</sup> See the previous chapter, "Byzantine Epistolography", but also Paul Holloway, "Portrait and Presence: a Note on the *Visio Procli* (George of Alexandria, Vita Chrysostomi 27)", in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* Bd. 100/1 (2007); K. Thraede, "Grundzüge griechisch-römischer Brieftopik," in *Zetemata* 48 (1970).

<sup>324</sup> Ouranos ep. 1, ln 1.

17's closing sentence, " Therefore speak out fearlessly and send your letters to me densely, so that we may enjoy each other now through them, since we are deprived with regards to the happenstance of eyes,"<sup>325</sup> contrasts the ability of letters to convey the pleasures of friendship with the pleasures offered by in-person communication. Here Ouranos speaks of presence as a lucky coincidence – a *συντυχία* – which is enjoyable but unnecessary to maintain the bond between two people who are willing to communicate often with one another by letter. Admittedly these letters have to be sent *πυκνοτέρως*, thickly (by which we can interpret 'often') in order to keep this bond adequately active – and we see that in over 40% of his letters, Ouranos asked or demanded reciprocal letters be sent to him. While epistolary communication could preserve the ties of a previously-existing friendship when the friends were separated over long distances, the collapse of distance via the reception of letters was not simple or effortless; it instead required participation on both sides and simultaneous entrance into an emotionally and rhetorically charged exchange.

Ouranos is not unique in penning this sort of exchange – it could belong to any 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup>-century Byzantine aristocrat. However, his letter collection can shed light on particular and important circumstances of Ouranos's situation as an imperial official on the Eastern frontier. His letters reveal the effect of his circumstances on his network of relationships not only through tropic expressions of distance and loss, but through specific attempts to negotiate his distance from Constantinople and his assignment to the East. While Ouranos is physically removed from his intellectual and cultural community,

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<sup>325</sup> Ouranos, ep. 17. "Φθέγγου τοιγαροῦν ἀδεῶς καὶ γράμματά σου πυκνοτέρως φοιτάτω ἡμῖν, ἵνα κἂν τούτῳ οὖν ἀπολαύωμεν ἀλλήλων, ἐπεὶ τῆς κατ' ὀφθαλμοὺς συντυχίας ἀποστερήμεθα."

he uses letters to reinforce his social bonds, reassemble at a distance his participation in intellectual exchange, and contextualize his experience of being outside of the center of the empire.

In Letter 22, Ouranos asks Petros, a *protospatharios* and *krites*, to acquire for and send to him a book: the *Commentaries on Attic Orators* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Ouranos refers to this book as a volume beloved of 'that logothete', who Darrouzès has identified as Simon Metaphrastes (on the occasion of whose death Ouranos had written an epitaphic poem).<sup>326</sup> He asks for this volume out of 'necessity' and promises to return it as soon as he is finished with it. . Ouranos also asks for a book to be sent to him in letter 21, where he asks that Nicholas, the Metropolitan of Neocaesarea (who he maintains a continuous correspondence with, including letters 15 and 26) send him a menologion of the saints<sup>327</sup>. These requests demonstrate two things: one, that Ouranos was not cut off entirely from the cultural life of the capital while in the East, but he had to arrange specially for access to important reference volumes. Two, his friendships with people like the metropolitan of Neocaesarea enabled him to make such requests; by maintaining these relationships through 'densely' exchanged letters, he was able to requisition luxury objects of large cultural value. The reach of Constantinopolitan culture extended to the Eastern frontier – albeit only in limited ways and only through narrow and highly-policed channels of intellectual friendship maintained through steady epistolary contact.

The presence of Constantinopolitan culture on the Eastern frontier is not the only visible evidence in this letter collection of how Ouranos made use of his network of friends and colleagues to maintain Byzantine authority in the East. These methods are

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<sup>326</sup> Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins*, 228.

<sup>327</sup> Ouranos, ep. 21, lns 9-13.



embedded in and arise organically from the situation in which Ouranos found himself when he arrived to Antioch: namely, a Byzantine attempt to deal with a multivalent and multicultural social system with longstanding local authority structures.

The re-conquest of the Eastern provinces in the 10<sup>th</sup> century was designed neither to acquire new land nor to push a long-standing linear frontier outward against an imagined monolithic Caliphate. Instead, panegyric and military treatises both spoke of "natural frontiers" and a durable peace. Emperors seemed to have a conception of the 'natural size' of the empire, which derives from the old size of the ancient Roman empire. These limits were what conquest and military activity in the East was meant to achieve – not an expansion into Caliphal territory, but a resumption of Byzantine Roman control over areas which were remembered as being Roman in historiography and imperial ideology.<sup>328</sup> Thus, this expansion under the military emperors was both reactive and preemptive, and designed to bring about and maintain stability inside the old borders of the Roman Empire. The goals of reconquest were to break the power of a dangerous emir in a troublesome locale like Melitene or Theodosiupolis, and thus demilitarize the frontier. This demilitarization brought in the possibility of lucrative revenue from tribute. Conquest was oriented toward population centers with substantial trade potential,<sup>329</sup> of

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<sup>328</sup> Jean-Claude Cheynet, "La conception militaire de la frontiere orientale (IX-XII siècle)", in Anthony Eastmond, ed., *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-Third Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry, March 1999*. Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies Publications 9. (Aldershot ; Burlington [Vt.] USA: Ashgate, 2001), 57. See also chapter 1 of this dissertation, "Byzantine Imperialism", for further discussion of this idea.

<sup>329</sup> Jonathan Shepard. "Constantine VII, Caucasian openings and the Road to Aleppo," in Anthony Eastmond, ed., *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-Third Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry, March 1999*. Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies Publications 9. (Aldershot ; Burlington [Vt.] USA: Ashgate, 2001), 20-21.

which the district of Antioch was perhaps the most important, comprising not only Northern Syria but the Cilician plain and its access-points through the Taurus Mountains. This emphasis on a "durable peace" therefore encouraged a reliance on diplomacy and the use of local cultural and social capital rather than on heavy military force. Engaging directly with the local powers in the East was a necessary part of defending the newly-reclaimed territories.<sup>330</sup>

Both Holmes and Shepard have demonstrated that the pre-existing administrative structures of the newly reconquered Eastern provinces were largely left in place after the 10<sup>th</sup> century reconquest. A thin layer of Byzantine officials, often imported from Constantinople or the Western provinces, were installed over these pre-existing structures. This is suggested by both the sigillographic record (particularly by the presence of *kouratores*, estate administrators whom Holmes argues were involved with the extraction of tribute from the newly-reclaimed cities) and by the presence of *basilikoi*, who were key intermediaries between the Byzantines and the resources of the former emirates. These *basilikoi* were often non-Greek, like Kulayb and Ubayd Allah, successive *basilikoi* at Antioch who appear in the account of Yahya ibn Sa'id as independent operators whose loyalties to Byzantium were dependent on what Byzantine authority could provide for them.<sup>331</sup> This is the ethnic and religious plurality which makes up the local, heterodox frontier population, and forms the solid structure of administrative apparatus over which Constantinopolitan officials such as Ouranos were the top layer. At Antioch especially, it is likely that the Byzantines at first entrusted financial and civic administrative positions to the locals. Only later, in the eleventh century, were these fiscal functions fulfilled by

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<sup>330</sup> Cheynet, "La conception...", 62-63.

<sup>331</sup> Holmes, Catherine, "How the East Was Won in the Reign of Basil II", 47ff.

members of the Constantinopolitan aristocracy.<sup>332</sup> This is the 'pragmatism' which Holmes ascribes to Basil II: an emperor who worked with rather than against the structures of local sociocultural power, leaving indigenous dignitaries in place<sup>333</sup> and only installing a few Byzantines over them. The underlying forms of authority – which were based in non-Byzantine local intermediaries – did not change, except perhaps in the granting of a Byzantine title to an already-present functionary.<sup>334</sup>

The Byzantine system was centered on the person of the emperor in Constantinople (from whom all power flowed, ἐξούσαι ἐκ βασιλείας).<sup>335</sup> Although this centralization could lead to rigidity, the system was capable of responding to the day-to-day needs of the frontier by directly appointing officials with plenipotentiary authorities not described in the specific functions registered in normative sources such as the *Taktikon*.<sup>336</sup> Cheynet usefully warns us to remember that the Escorial *Taktikon* is in fact a list of seating arrangements for imperial ceremonial, and must therefore not be used as a personnel checklist<sup>337</sup> – the positions described within it were not always filled. While the *Taktikon* describes a *doux* with civil authority and a *strategos* with military authority for each theme, in Ouranos' case, his position as the *doux* of Antioch was not accompanied

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<sup>332</sup> Cheynet, Jean-Claude, "The Duchy of Antioch", 6-7.

<sup>333</sup> There were many foreigners in service to the duchy of Antioch, particularly Armenians and Franks. See N. Garsoian, "The Problem of Armenian Integration in to the Byzantine Empire", in *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. H. Ahrweiler and A.E. Laiou (Washington D.C., 1998), 53-124.

<sup>334</sup> Holmes, "How The East Was Won", 45, 53-4. Holmes gives the examples of Armenian functionaries in Ani who were charged with executing the decrees of the *katepan* of Iberia, Bagrat Vxkac'i (himself also of Armenian origin), under new Byzantine rule during the reign of Constantine Doukas: these functionaries have Armenian names and minor Byzantine titles (Mxit'ar *hypatos*, Grigor *spatharokandidatos*, and Sargis *spatharakandidatos*, respectively.)

<sup>335</sup> Skylitzes, 320.

<sup>336</sup> Krsmanovic, 10, 45.

<sup>337</sup> Cheynet, "Antioch", 2-3.

by a corresponding *strategos*. No contemporary seal for such an individual exists. Thus, it is presumable from the seal record – and, as I will detail below, from the example of Ouranos himself – that the *doux* of Antioch had civil as well as military capacities of governance, and was an instance of this "highly flexible form of governance" which developed as a response to the conditions on the Eastern frontier. Similarly, the seal record for civil authorities such as judges and officials concerned with fiscal matters (the *epi ton oikeiakon*) and customs receipts (the *kommerkiarios*) is extremely sparse considering the number of separate 'Armeniac themes' attested in the ceremonial record of the Escorial Taktikon.<sup>338</sup> The picture of frontier administration which emerges is one which is resolutely flexible and makes use of local powers in its response to a difficult geographic and sociopolitical situation.

Both literary and sigillographic material suggest that Ouranos, as *doux* of Antioch, exercised broad responsibilities over a considerable geographical area – as previously mentioned he ranged as far as Taron, and his seals issued from Antioch bear the following inscription: "Nikephoros Ouranos, *μαγίστρος* and *ὁ κράτον* (ruler) of the East".<sup>339</sup> Most of the contemporary literary sources refer to Ouranos as *magistros*, not as *doux*,<sup>340</sup> and as discussed in prior chapters, the title of *magistros* contained in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries the suggestion of unspecified but wide-ranging powers including the ability to assume the authority of an absent emperor. By appointing Ouranos to Antioch, with titulature which was simultaneously plenipotentiary in nature (*magistros*) and specifically

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<sup>338</sup> Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, 369-75.

<sup>339</sup> Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks*, iii.99.11; also published in McGeer, "Tradition and Reality", 139-40.

<sup>340</sup> i.e. Stephen of Taron, Yahya ibn Sa'id, and Philetos Synadenos. This habit was pointed out by Holmes, in *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, p. 350-1.

geographic but plenipotentiary in practice (*doux* of Antioch) Basil II was able to manage the Eastern frontier through a trusted subordinate while he himself was on campaign in the Balkans.<sup>341</sup> This appointment perhaps represented a desire to bring a Constantinopolitan alternative to the major military families with large eastern power-bases – such as the Phokades and the Skleroi, both of whom had recently caused Basil II considerable trouble through revolts based in the East – to the position of imperial representative on the frontier.<sup>342</sup> Ouranos, with his proven track record in the Balkans and as a diplomat in Baghdad, and his longstanding relationship to the Emperor in Constantinople, is thus a logical choice for the particularly delicate position of *doux* in Antioch.

Once installed in Antioch, Ouranos began to communicate by letter with fellow former Constantinopolitans and with local judges and metropolitans – and by doing so, he reinforced the thin layer of Byzantine authority which floated above the local administrative structures in the East. As noted earlier, there is a lack of epistolary record of communication between Ouranos and other Byzantines who served in Antioch – presumably for the very logical reason that Ouranos did not need to write to them, as he could instead easily speak to them face to face. However, some evidence of the nature of Ouranos's subsidiary organization is visible in the extant letters. Writing to John the *ostiarios*, in letter 25, Ouranos notes that the letter in question will be sent through his 'taxiarch'<sup>343</sup> – while this lower-ranked official is not named, and might be of either Constantinopolitan or local origin, it is clear that Ouranos does have a trusted

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<sup>341</sup> Holmes, *Governance*, 352.

<sup>342</sup> Mark Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600-1025*. New Studies in Medieval History. (London: Macmillan, 1996), 376-7.

<sup>343</sup> Ouranos, ep. 25 ln. 4.

administrative structure below him, and that portions of this structure's responsibilities were designated by Byzantine titulature. The existence of these lower-ranked Byzantine officials are supported by non-Byzantine sources, such as the Arabic writer Ibn Butlan, who after visiting Antioch in the 1040s wrote of the "halls in which are accommodated the judges of the [Byzantine] government, and the teachers of grammar and language"<sup>344</sup> which adorned the city. Ouranos possessed a support staff who, whether local or Constantinopolitan, knew Greek and Byzantine law. He also had particular trusted servants: letters 40 and 41, addressed to a Manuel Vestes, seem to refer to an individual who was already present at Antioch by the time Ouranos arrived there. In letter 41, Ouranos accuses Antioch of stealing Manuel away from him (via Manuel being assigned there by βασιλικὸν τὸ ἐπίταγμα – imperial command), as if the city was a woman with whom Manuel was committing adultery against the friendship he shared with Ouranos.<sup>345</sup> This letter is clearly written from before the time in which Ouranos himself was assigned to Antioch, as otherwise he would have no reason to blame that city for removing his friend from him. Darrouzès points out that this Manuel was likely a high official in the Byzantine civil government at Antioch,<sup>346</sup> someone with whom Ouranos had formed a friendship with in Constantinople before either of them went East. Here Ouranos's epistolary preserves a relationship which not only suggests that a whole group of

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<sup>344</sup> Joseph Schacht and Max Meyerhof, *The Medioco-Philosophical Controversy between Ibn Butlan of Baghdad and Ibn Ridwan of Cairo: A Contribution to the history of Greek learning amongst the Arabs* (Cairo: the Egyptian University, 1937), 54-5, cited in Susan B. Edgington, "Antioch: medieval city of culture", *Antioch from the Byzantine Reconquest Until the End of the Crusader Principality*, ed. K. Ciggaar and M. Metcalf, Peeters, Leuven, 2006.

<sup>345</sup> Ouranos, ep. 41. "οὐκετι τοῦτο φορητὸν ἔμοι τὸ ἀνόμημα καὶ γραφομεν σὲ μὲν, εἰ καὶ τολμηρόν, παρὰ νόμον φιλίας, ταύτην δὲ — πῶς ἂν εἴποιμι καιρίως; — μοιχείας, οὕτως ὑπερχομένης καὶ διασπώσης τοὺς ἠνωμένους ταῖς γνώμαις, μᾶλλον δὲ αὐτὴν πρὸς ἑαυτὴν τὴν μίαν ψυχὴν διαιρούσης, εἰ καὶ δύο φορεῖ σώματα."

<sup>346</sup> Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantines*, 240.

Constantinopolitans who were mutually acquainted with one another were sent out to the Eastern frontier at approximately the same time, but also reminds us that Ouranos was at times the friend 'at home' – in Constantinople – who was being kept in touch with by those who had preceded him into service in the East. One can only imagine the pleasant reunion of these two men when Ouranos too arrived in Antioch. The relationship which had been cultivated and maintained during their separation via letter exchange might allow them to more seamlessly take up the task of dealing with Byzantine Antioch together.

While Ouranos's relationship with Manuel Vestes once he met him in Antioch remains hypothetical, analysis of his communication with another frequent correspondent reveals more about the use of epistolary to normalize inter-Byzantine relationships when both parties were on the frontier. Amongst Ouranos' more significant correspondents was Philetos Synadenos, the *krites* of Tarsus, who wrote six letters addressed to Ouranos which are dateable to between 1005 and 1007 CE by internal reference to one of Ouranos' military campaigns against the rebel al-Asfar and his Bedouin allies.<sup>347</sup> This Synadenos, who is known only through his epistolary (which includes letters to the Patriarch of Antioch and to his own family members), is the earliest attested member of a noble family which would rise to prominence throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries and become especially significant in the thirteenth when they intermarried with the Palaiologoi. The name is a geographical toponym, referring to an inhabitant of the Phrygian town of Synada.<sup>348</sup> Philetos Synadenos, being assigned as *krites* to Tarsus in

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<sup>347</sup> Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantines*, 254-59 (ep. 8-13).

<sup>348</sup> Polemis, Demetrios. *The Doukai: a contribution to Byzantine Prosopography*. (London: The Athlone Press, University of London, 1968), 178-82.

Cilicia, is thus an example of a member of an aristocratic family with Anatolian estates being moved from his native seat to take up a post on the frontier.<sup>349</sup> He is thus displaced from both his local culture – the aristocratic families of agricultural central Anatolia – and also from the center of Byzantine cultural power, namely Constantinople. Out in Tarsus, he wrote to his family – presumably back in Phrygia – and to members of his new local network of colleagues, which included the Patriarch of Antioch and Ouranos, who at the time of Synadenos' communication with him, was firmly secured in the position of *doux* of Antioch and military commander in the East.

The letters to Ouranos suggest an ongoing exchange of correspondence between the two men – Synadenos mentions having received three separate messages from Ouranos before he had a chance to properly respond<sup>350</sup> -- and markedly demonstrate how an epistolary exchange could preserve and enshrine 'Byzantine'-ness for Byzantine Roman imperial officials outside of Constantinople. Synadenos has high praise for Ouranos, describing him in glowing terms that demonstrate his awareness of Ouranos' local power. In letter 13, he opens by making a pun on Ouranos' surname and the word for 'heaven', comparing the earthly Ouranos to his celestial namesake:

"Heaven (ὁ οὐράνιος) is the first work of God; and to men it is always the most beautiful, longed-for, and lovely; to the sun, which is known to give light throughout the earth, it is that which is made splendid; to the dance of the stars it is what has been worked in embroidery; and to the campaigns of the angels it is what is walked about within above; and it has been recognized as the great throne

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<sup>349</sup> See Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, 346-7, for a number of examples, including the positioning of the Argyroi in Southern Italy and the Balkans and the service on campaign in the East of various eunuchs whose loyalties were more tightly tied to the court at Constantinople than any particular family, including the future *parakoimomenos* Basil. See Theophanes Continuatus, pp. 453-4, 462-3, 466, 480; and Skylitzes, 245-6.

<sup>350</sup> Synadenos, ep. 8



of God. Therefore, you eloquent Ouranos, are always incredible and casting light..."<sup>351</sup>

He follows this extravagant praise with a specific recounting of Ouranos's earthly good qualities, particularly his feats on campaign, which reflect the campaigns of the angels in the celestial *ouranos*. Synadenos recognizes Ouranos' local power and ingratiate himself to him via expression of literary, educated praise. In this same letter (letter 13), Synadenos references several Psalms and the Odyssey, demonstrating his membership in the cultural in-group he shared with Ouranos – at least at a basic level, as these are the minimum required known texts for an educated Byzantine Roman – and uses these references to appeal to Ouranos as a patron and a local locus of Byzantine cultural and military authority.

Beyond this simple sort of literary friendship, which appears in a multitude of the Ouranos letters, the correspondence between Synadenos and Ouranos speaks of Ouranos as having a particularly civilizing effect on the territories of the East. Synadenos was not particularly fond of his posting out away from his ancestral land of Synada and the central provinces around Constantinople: he found Tarsus and the surrounding East overheated – "the furnace of Tarsus", compared to the fires of Mt. Etna<sup>352</sup> – and unloveable. He writes, "Tarsus is no friend of mine. Nor do I love Antioch – having left Constantinople on campaign, I have been moored in Cilicia."<sup>353</sup> Here the familiar epistolary theme of exile from the capital is demonstrably present: the locations in which

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<sup>351</sup> Synadenos, ep. 13. ἦν μὲν αἰεὶ ἀνθρώποις τὸ περικαλλὲς τόδε καὶ θεοῦ πρῶτον ἔργον ὁ οὐρανός, ποθεινός καὶ ἐπέραστος, ἡλίῳ μὲν, ὅς τῇμ πείγειον οἶδε φωρίζειν, λελαμπρυσμένος, ἀστρῶν δὲ χορεία πεποικιλμένος, γγέλων δὲ στρατείαις ἐμπεριπατούμενος ὑπερθεν, καὶ τὸ μγέιστον θεοῦ θρόνος κατωνομασμένος. ἥς δὲ ἄρα καὶ ὁ λογικὸς οὐρανὸς σύ, πειλαμπής αἰεὶ καὶ περιδοξός...

<sup>352</sup> Synadenos, ep. 12.

<sup>353</sup> Synadenos, ep. 11.

Synadenos now dwells are inhospitable to his educated Byzantine soul. But there is an offered salvation: the presence of Nikephoros Ouranos in Antioch, and communication with him, brings not only Byzantinism but the cultural cachet of the capital at Constantinople itself into the depths of the Eastern frontier.

Ouranos himself is explicitly described as possessed of τὸ βυζαντίς – 'Constantinopolitan-ness' – in letter 11, and this quality spreads to the area which he governs. "Hence I am driven on to run towards Antioch, inasmuch as that place seems to stand in the midst of everything Constantinopolitan. For that man [Ouranos] is everything Constantinopolitan..."<sup>354</sup> Antioch is not usually a place referred to as being replete with Byzantinism<sup>355</sup>: it is still recently reconquered, a cultural space which contained as much local Syrian, Armenian, and Arab presence as Greek. Sources from the Crusader period show that Westerners found there a populace which was multi-covenantal even within the bounds of Christianity: Greek, Syrian, and Armenian Christians all were present.<sup>356</sup> A mix of languages and peoples characterizes eleventh-century Antioch in general. Under Byzantine control it was a center of intellectual life, but it remained steadfastly plural, not particularly Byzantine in nature.<sup>357</sup> It is the presence of Ouranos within Antioch which brings βυζαντίς there; his own Constantinopolitanity radiates outward and renders an

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<sup>354</sup> Synadenos, ep. 11. Κἀντεῦθεν ἐκτρέχειν ἐπὶ τὴν Αντιόχου ἐπειγομαι, ὅτι καὶ Βυζαντίς ἐκεῖσε μεταστῆναι πᾶσα δοκεῖ. Πάντα γὰρ ἦν ἀνὴρ ἐκεῖνος τῇ Βυζαντίδι...

<sup>355</sup> Aside from Libanius' 4<sup>th</sup>-century *Oration 11, In Praise of Antioch*, which suggests that Antioch ought to be the capital of the Eastern Roman empire rather than the upstart Constantinople, most discussion of Antioch in Byzantine source material focuses on the city as a local power with local interests: i.e. the Patriarchate of Antioch and the indigenous Syrian Christian, Manichean, and Armenian populations.

<sup>356</sup> Walter the Chancellor, describing the earthquake of 1114 CE, refers to the presence of 'Latins, Greeks, Syrians, Armenians, strangers and pilgrims' in Antioch at the time. See Thomas B. Asbridge and Susan B. Edgington, *Walter the Chancellor's 'The Antiochene Wars': a translation and commentary* (Aldershot, 1999), 81.

<sup>357</sup> Edgington, "Antioch: medieval city of culture", 249.

inhospitable landscape hospitable for his correspondent Synadenos. Ouranos and Synadenos were both part of the thin veneer of Byzantine authority figures installed by Basil II over the local authorities in the Eastern frontier. Here that thin layer of authority is reinforced for Synadenos by his epistolary communication with someone who is as educated and erudite as he – if not more so – the 'celestial' – οὐράνιος -- magister, Nikephoros Ouranos, whose presence instills Byzantium where Byzantium is not.

Considering that travel and its concomitant 'exile' from Constantinople were very difficult for the Byzantine psyche,<sup>358</sup> the ability of Ouranos to bring βυζαντίς with him beyond the reach of Constantinople is significant. The word itself is a middle/late Byzantine genitive form of the toponymic adjective βυζαντιος, which appears as early as Thucydides to describe an inhabitant of Constantinople (then-Byzantion). This form, which has acquired connotations of being Constantinopolitan (as an attitude or mode of life) as well as being *from* Constantinople, becomes common in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>359</sup> is most commonly employed, when not used precisely to refer to someone's origins, to contrast the Constantinopolitan with the non-Constantinopolitan – Rhomaioi with barbaroi.<sup>360</sup> Thus, when Synadenos uses it to talk about Ouranos's ability to bring

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<sup>358</sup> Whether or not this difficulty was primarily tropic or represented a 'real' psychological phenomenon is not a particularly useful question for the purposes of this investigation – as the Byzantine 'self' which speaks in epistolary communication is a constructed self, created to be intelligible to other Byzantines and to fit their cultural paradigms, the presence of travel/exile imagery and themes in epistolary writing at all is significant; it signified *for its audience*.

<sup>359</sup> A TLG search finds that this form is most common in Psellos (both the *Chronographia* and the orations), Anna Komnene, and Attelates, as well as appearing over 20 times in the *Brief Chronicle* of Constantine Manasses and more than 10 times in Zonaras.

<sup>360</sup> See particularly Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 6.11.3.

Byzantinity with him out of Constantinople, he is implicitly contrasting the barbarous Eastern frontier with Ouranos's own innate expression of Byzantine Roman culture.

This sort of mobile Byzantine-ness is occasionally visible in other literary locations. A clear example is found in the *Hodoiporikon* of Constantine Manasses. In this text, Manasses reported on his journey in the company of the *sebastos* John Kontostephanos through Asia Minor on a political mission which eventually would go awry in Samareia – and thereby result in Manasses being separated from the *sebastos* and essentially marooned in Cyprus. Alone in Cyprus that Manasses succumbed to illness, homesickness, and cultural loneliness<sup>361</sup> -- an example of physical illness and emotional distress caused by separation from Byzantine cultural norms. This illness and depression is relieved when the *sebastos* was returned to Manasses' company<sup>362</sup> -- he instantly recuperated, both physically and mentally, and became able to appreciate his surroundings again. The *sebastos* – a fellow Constantinopolitan – had, in essence, brought Constantinople to him via his presence. The company of other Byzantines, particularly those who share the experience and background of the aristocratic civil society of the metropole, allowed for pockets of Byzantine culture to exist, like bubbles, outside of their usual areas of influence. For Synadenos, writing to Ouranos with this trope in mind, the arena of Constantinopolitan functionality – where social relationships are mediated by the exchange of demonstrably-expert literary epistles – expands to include Tarsus and Antioch.

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<sup>361</sup> Manasses, *Hodoiporikon*, in "Das Hodoporikon des Konstantin Manasses", ed. K.Horna, *BZ* 13 (1904), 313-55; § 335.7-344.71.

<sup>362</sup> Manasses, §344.76-94.

The remainder of the letters which Synadenos wrote to Ouranos discuss the aforementioned military campaign against the rebel al-Asfar and his Bedouin allies which Ouranos conducted around 1006 CE. Ouranos was required to deal with the incursions of al-Asfar and over 6000 Bedouins from the Numair and Kilab tribes, who were approaching the area around Antioch. After besieging them at Kafar Azuz for nearly a month, Ouranos captured a multitude of prisoners, including al-Asfar's family, and substantial booty, and returned in triumph to Antioch.<sup>363</sup> Synadenos writes to Ouranos both while he was engaged in this campaign and when he was returning to celebrate in Antioch, assuring Ouranos that he would attend the celebrations if his duties as krites in Tarsus weren't keeping him in Cilicia.<sup>364</sup>

It is difficult to retrieve specific information about this military campaign from Synadenos's correspondence with Ouranos, as they are – as is expected – primarily rhetorical and literary in content. However, they employ this rhetorical and literary style to vividly convey Synadenos's impressions of what military life is like. They present both a vision of suffering which is shared between him and Ouranos as well as Synadenos's opinion that Ouranos has skills far more appropriate to military life than he himself does. Synadenos describes himself as "not strong-hearted, nor the most steadfast, but rather someone unwarlike and feeble."<sup>365</sup> Being such, he is distressed by the difficulties of war: he is "greatly worn down by war" and flees from "the rattling of swords and the drawing of bows".<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> Yahya, *PO* 23, pp. 466-67; Skylitzes 345.34-43. (p. 327-28, Wortley 2011). See also W. Felix, *Byzanz und die Islamische Welt*, 51-53.

<sup>364</sup> Synadenos, ep. 10.

<sup>365</sup> Synadenos, ep. 8.

<sup>366</sup> Synadenos, ep. 8.

Yet, Synadenos recognized in his friend Ouranos the qualities that he himself lacks as a military man, and linked those qualities explicitly to Ouranos' education and erudition. He writes effusive praise: "For nothing escapes your notice at all, you who know to arrange such things with a general's head. For you are a philosopher as well as a strategos in these matters -- you have power over these tales [of your exploits] in both respects: neither do you despoil philosophy with trophies nor do you get no benefit from the trophies and victories due to your mindfulness, but rather you are marvelously wreathed with both."<sup>367</sup> For Synadenos, Ouranos deals with the privations of campaigning skillfully and with the eloquence of a philosopher; it is his membership in the intellectual elite of Constantinople which enables him to so adroitly manage and experience warfare. Ouranos' victories are something experienced by Synadenos through the medium of epistolary communication. He hears of them via letter – "a misty and winged report" – and participates in the victory celebrations also via letter, since he cannot leave his duties in Tarsus to come to Antioch. This epistolary mediation of military life allows him to valorize Ouranos's skill and associate his victories with his ability to communicate in the mode of the Byzantine intellectual aristocracy.

It is unsurprising that Synadenos uses epistolary communication to describe and reframe his experience of warfare and campaigning in the East. Warfare, as John Haldon has noted, was a constant and familiar companion to Byzantines.<sup>368</sup> Warfare permeates

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<sup>367</sup> Synadenos, ep. 9. Οὐδέν γὰρ σε τῶν ἀπαντων διέλαθε, τῶν ὅσα στρατηγικὴν οἶδε κοσμεῖν κεφαλὴν. Φιλοσοφῶν γὰρ ἅμα καὶ στρατηγῶν ἐν τοῖς πράγμασι, τοῖς ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων κρατεῖς διηγήμασι, καὶ μήτε φιλοσοφίαν τροπαίων ἀποστερεῖν, μήτε τὰ τρόπαια καὶ τὰς νίκας ἀμοιρεῖν τῆς φρονήσεως, ἀλλὰ θαυμασίως ἀμφοτέρα ἐπιπλέκεσθαι.

<sup>368</sup> Haldon, *Warfare, State, and Society*, 234. See also Kolia-Dermatziki, "Byzantium at war in sermons and letters of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries: an ideological approach," in

Byzantine cultural production: tactical manuals, historiographies, and imperial panegyrics all address it. The process of mediating personal experiences of war, however, is less clearly discerned. Robert Nelson's recent article on the 'art of war' in the 10<sup>th</sup> century suggests some methods by which visual representation of warlike emperors and military saints brought justification of war to large numbers of Byzantines,<sup>369</sup> but warfare imagery as imperial propaganda is only personal to the audience who witnesses it. The communicative experience of being at war as a Byzantine can be better located in textual production.

Ouranos himself mediates his experience of warfare in the East via written communication in several categories: both personal epistolary communication and the production of his most well-known literary work, the *Taktika*, an encyclopedic military manual. The *Taktika*, despite being composed in a direct and uncomplicated vernacular,<sup>370</sup> demonstrates Ouranos's education and his fluent participation in the intellectual milieu of Constantinopolitan society. The *Taktika* was written during the period of Ouranos's governorship of Antioch,<sup>371</sup> and is comprised of four main sections, three of which are reprisals or derivations of Byzantine and Classical military treatises –

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Tsiknakēs, Kōstas G., ed. *To Empolemo Vyzantio: 9.-12. Ai.* (Athēna: Hidryma Goulandrē-Chorn, 1997), 213-38.

<sup>369</sup> Robert S. Nelson, "And So With The Help Of God: the Byzantine Art of War in the Tenth Century", *DOP* 65/66 (2012): 169-193.

<sup>370</sup> Eric McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century*. Dumbarton Oaks Studies 33. (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 85.

<sup>371</sup> Frank Trombley, "The *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos and Military Encyclopaedism" in Binkley, Peter, ed. *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts: Proceedings of the Second COMERS Congress, Groningen, 1-4 July 1996*. (Leiden, The Netherlands and New York, New York: Brill), 269; McGeer, "Tradition and Reality", 131ff; Alphonse Dain, *La "Tactique" de Nicéphore Ouranos*. Collection D'études Anciennes. (Paris: Société d'édition "Les Belles lettres," 1937), 136.

specifically the *Taktika* of Leo VI and a wide collection of ancient tacticians, summarized in epitome. The fourth section is a revised and expanded version of Nikephoros Phokas' *Praecepta militaria*, and contains Ouranos's primary original contribution: both a discussion of siege warfare and one describing the variable allegiances of the local populations of Northern Syria have been added to Phokas's text. These additions demonstrate that Ouranos was both making use of the tactical system outlined by Phokas and adapting it to the conditions he found while governing Antioch.<sup>372</sup>

Further, Ouranos is translating his personal experience into a practical handbook, much as other composers of military manuals, like the emperor Nikephoros II Phokas, had before him. This process certainly suggests a systematic approach to warfare amongst the Byzantine military aristocracy,<sup>373</sup> a view of battle as something which can be codified, taught, and executed according to a method – but it also suggests that the experience of warfare was, for men like Ouranos, something which could be translated into written form and communicated thereby to a circle of fellow-Byzantines who shared the necessary cultural background and specialized vocabulary to interpret it. The handbooks thus produced were used for the training of prospective military commanders and active soldiers – they enshrine experience and become part of the Byzantine educational tradition as much as they do the Byzantine military tradition.<sup>374</sup> In the *Chronographia*, Psellos mentions that Basil II prepared the formations of his army by

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<sup>372</sup> See McGeer, "Tradition and Reality in the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos", for further discussion of Ouranos' achievements in military strategy in the *Taktika*, as well as additional bibliography.

<sup>373</sup> McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 191.

<sup>374</sup> McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 192.



"taking some from the handbooks and devising others by virtue of his own expertise"<sup>375</sup>, and Nikephoros Bryennios, describing the education of the Komnenian heirs John and Isaac, adds to a description of the teaching of the arts of war that the boys should learn "to study the *taktika* so that they would know how to deploy a phalanx and array the files, how to prepare a camp correctly and set up a palisaded encampment, and the many other things which the tactical treatises teach."<sup>376</sup> The *taktika* mediate the experience of warfare by becoming part of the educational process of training up new generals.

This view of the *Taktika* – as not only a military manual but as a communicative act – is supported by the rich vein of encyclopaedic knowledge of prior military handbooks which accompany Ouranos's contributions of military strategy. Compilation literature – a literary category which encompasses manuals like the *Taktika* – has been described by Holmes as being an example of "political culture", i.e. a rubric for the behavior and expectations which frame political action and ideas.<sup>377</sup> Trombley, in his article "The *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos and Military Encyclopaedism", has argued that the sections of the *Taktika* taken from Classical military manuals are not haphazard, but instead demonstrate Ouranos's profound engagement with the Byzantine culture of *sylloge*, and thus with the habits of intellectual life in the Byzantine state. His selection of the compiled texts shows both his access to preserved manuscripts and his knowledge of the ultimate provenance of his citations.<sup>378</sup> Further, Ouranos himself acknowledges that

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<sup>375</sup> Psellos, *Chronographia* I.20-21.

<sup>376</sup> Bryennios 75.15-77.4, trans. Eric McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 193.

<sup>377</sup> Catherine Holmes, "Byzantine Political Culture and Compilation Literature in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Some Preliminary Inquiries", in *DOP* 64 (2010), 55-56.

<sup>378</sup> The title of the *Taktika* as given in the *Codex Constantinopolitanus Graecae* 36 is given as "The *Taktika* or *Strategika* of Arrian, Aelian, Pelops, Polyainos, Onasander, Alkibiades, Artaxerces, Syrianos, Annibas, Plutarch, Alexander, Diodoros, Polybios,

the vast majority of the techniques which he has collected were obsolete.<sup>379</sup> The goal of producing compilation literature like the *Taktika* is as much about the productions of political and intellectual authority as it is for instruction – and it is on this base of preserved written culture that contemporary practices, like Ouranos's analysis of the allegiances of the North Syrian local population, can be introduced and legitimated.<sup>380</sup> The production of the *Taktika* as a whole is thus demonstrably a creation of an educated and intellectually-engaged member of the Byzantine aristocracy<sup>381</sup> -- and is a method by which a member of that intellectual and cultural group can communicate his experiences of the frontier using signals which reinforce his membership in the group.

While Ouranos's use of written mediation of the experience of war is implicitly communicative in the *Taktika*, it is explicitly communicative in his letters. A illustrative example is found in letter 47, one of several addressed to the metropolitan of Nikomedia. In this letter Ouranos discusses at length the banal horrors of campaigning: the poor food and drink, the endless marching and sleepless nights, the infighting and arguing amongst the men. The impression is of general chaos, grimly suffered through. Ouranos compares the experience to that of the Greeks at Troy, quoting Iliad X: he is surrounded by "the noise of flutes and pipes and the din of men' even during sleep".<sup>382</sup> In this letter Ouranos uses the description of the unpleasantness of campaigning<sup>383</sup> in order to draw a contrast

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Herakleitos, Muarice, Nikephoros, and certain others, collected by Nikephoros *magistros* Ouranos from many historical [texts], as was said, with much care." Cf. Trombley, 270-1, and Dain, 13.

<sup>379</sup> McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 160-2.

<sup>380</sup> Holmes, "Compilation Literature", 62.

<sup>381</sup> Trombley, 271.

<sup>382</sup> Ouranos, ep. 47, quoting Iliad X.13

<sup>383</sup> The campaign in question is Ouranos's expedition into Armenia to consolidate the lands previously belonging to David of T'ao; see Ouranos ep. 19.

between his current circumstances and the life he shared with his addressee while they were both in Constantinople. In the remainder of the letter he reminisces about the streets and churches of what he refers to as 'my City', calling up a sensory image of a Constantinople which he holds onto as a balm in his exile of service in the East. He closes the letter by asking for prayers for his return, even if that return happens by means of flying through the air, as if he was a character in the *Odyssey*.<sup>384</sup> Thus Ouranos's description of military life becomes a part of a contrast between current exile and hoped-for return to civilization, framed in references from both the military epic of Homer and the epic on journeying.

For Ouranos, the lived experience of the campaign is employed to link him more closely to his distant peers via literary reference. Similarly, Synadenos uses of Ouranos's campaigning as a synecdoche for Ouranos's achievements as a member of the intellectual class of Constantinopolitan officials – which is what allows him to possess *byzantidos*, to bring Byzantine-ness out of Constantinople and onto the Eastern frontier.

The process of epistolary communication which Ouranos, Synadenos, and the rest of Ouranos's correspondents engaged in was in great part not a method by which they accomplished the day-to-day processes of governing the Eastern frontier; these daily processes are too local to be easily visible in the epistolary record. However, Ouranos's letter collection strongly demonstrates that the day-to-day process of *living* as a source of Byzantine authority on the Byzantine frontier was something which could be usefully mediated by letter exchange. Letter exchange produced opportunities to reinforce and maintain a particularly 'Constantinopolitan' constructed self which could then be

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<sup>384</sup> Ouranos, ep. 47.

employed to obtain favors, good will, and the amelioration of cultural loneliness from other constructed selves – fellow correspondents, with equal expertise – who were also placed outside of the intellectual centers at the metropole.

The Byzantines who lived and worked for imperial interests on the Eastern frontier were immersed in a culture which, while vibrant, intellectually robust, and complex, was not that of the Byzantine center. Throughout the period of reconquest in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, Antioch remained culturally multivalent, and Ouranos, surrounded by this multivalence, had to expend effort to maintain his ties to Byzantine high culture. It should not be surprising that his letters are erudite and Atticizing – nor that they serve as a locus for 'Byzantine-ness' for his correspondents. There is an intellectual strain in keeping the world closed – in preserving a culture outside of the boundaries of that culture. To remain Byzantine in Antioch necessitated bringing someone possessed of 'Constantinopolitan'-ness to Antioch – someone who could reassemble a circle of friendship and obligation which would be more familiar at the imperial court than in the City of God, and maintain this circle despite the perils of distance and travel.

## 5. THE ARMENIAN: GRIGOR MAGISTROS PAHVALUNI

The epistolary collection of Nikephoros Ouranos sheds light on Byzantine imperial authority and its projection into the liminal/'frontier' space on the Eastern edge of the Empire in the early eleventh century. The reconquest of major Eastern cities such as Antioch and Aleppo, followed by the annexation of the independent Armenian and Georgian kingdoms in the first half of the eleventh century brought Byzantines whose cultural and social identities were primarily oriented towards the imperial metropole of Constantinople into areas which had multiple political, social, and even religious loyalties. While Ouranos's correspondence reveals the mentality of Byzantine actors as they move into that liminal space, a consideration of how Byzantine imperialism was experienced is incomplete if it does not consider the mentality of non-Byzantine actors. In this period of rapid expansion, many such people were brought into Byzantine or Byzantinized space, and their experiences are also necessary to understand the process of Byzantine cultural interpolation into contested multi-cultural areas. Non-Byzantine actors now came into close and necessary contact with Byzantine cultural norms and expressions of imperial authority. Encountering Byzantium on the Eastern frontier was unavoidable; what varied were the actions and reactions of non-Byzantines who confronted Byzantine authority in areas where it had previously been absent or at least diminished.

The range of non-Byzantine actors in these areas is vast. It includes Seljuk raiders and local emirs; displaced Muslim citizens from Tarsus and Aleppo moving ahead of the leading edge of the Byzantine advance and Syrian immigrants who moved in to fill the

space left by those Muslims;<sup>385</sup> and Georgian and Armenian aristocrats whose networks of power and loyalty shifted with the decline of the Caliphate and the advent of Byzantine control.<sup>386</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, which examines Byzantine imperial agents and their roles in adapting to and promoting the ideology of empire outside of Constantinople, the wide field of non-Byzantine actors on the Eastern frontier is best narrowed to ethnically or religiously Armenian (and, in some cases, Georgian or Syrian) holders of Byzantine titulature and Byzantine posts. These are people who, in the changing dynamic of the early 11<sup>th</sup>-century East, found it useful or necessary to accept and *participate in* sources of legitimate authority which derived from Byzantine presence, either as a substitute for or in addition to prior indigenous authoritative structures.

Even this is not a small category. The longstanding Byzantine practice of assigning honorary titles (such as *patrikios*) to non-Greeks and thereby integrating them into the social structure of Byzantine authority and dependence upon the Emperor continued in the first half of the eleventh century. But, as discussed in Chapter 4, the Byzantines often maintained local structures of authority and sometimes integrated them into the larger framework of imperial control by assigning imperial titles with actual responsibilities and powers to individuals who had been powerful in these local authority structures. Thus, on the frontier a non-Byzantine actor might acquire the titulature and responsibilities, as well as some of the cultural powers and network, of a Byzantine actor.

Armenian actors were a significant subset of non-Byzantines who acquired these visible signals of Byzantine authority in Byzantine spaces. Their acquisition of cultural

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<sup>385</sup> Gilbert Dagron, "Minorités ethniques et religieuses dans l'orient byzantin à la fin du x<sup>e</sup> et au x<sup>e</sup> siècle: l'immigration syrienne," *Travaux et Mémoires* 6 (1976), 179-80.

<sup>386</sup> Lynn Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium: Aght'amar and the visual construction of medieval Armenian rulership*. (Burlington, VT Ashgate, 2007), 5-11.

markers which belonged to an empire that had largely succeeded in destroying their local sovereignty can only be understood in relation to the peculiar characteristics of Armenian structures of authority. This is true particularly because a dominant trend in scholarship on Bagratid Armenia has imagined 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>-century Armenian polities as independent, singular, and nationalistic. As the most compelling of both Armenophone and Western-language recent analyses have noted, however, this period in Armenian history is better marked by plural and inclusive definition of 'Armenian', in terms of both doctrine and culture, rather than a singular, nationalistic one.<sup>387</sup> There were a multitude of Armenias and ways of being Armenian in the eleventh century, and the existence of independent Armenian kingdoms did not produce an isolate 'Armenia' which, suddenly and for a brief time, was not deeply interpolated with both Byzantine and Caliphal cultures and power-structures.

This multivalent, pluricultural Armenia has been most vigorously presented in the recent multi-volume work by Seta Dadoyan, *The Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*. The central thesis of this work is a claim that "if historical Armenia as well as the modern Republic have always been between central Asia Minor, the southern Caucasus, and the Islamic world [...] their history too was naturally part of these locations and peoples."<sup>388</sup> Dadoyan demonstrates that the history of the Armenian people is fundamentally linked with that of the surrounding Islamic world, despite what either medieval or modern Armenian historiography – which focuses on the singularity of the

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<sup>387</sup> Timothy Greenwood, "Armenian neighbours (600-1045)", in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. J. Shepard. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 333-5.

<sup>388</sup> Seta Dadoyan, *The Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World: Paradigms of Interaction: Seventh to Fourteenth Centuries* (New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 147.

Armenian case, for either nationalistic or ethno-cultural reasons – would suggest. Her evidence for the 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries focuses on the interwoven nature of the alliances that the autocephalous Armenian kingdoms made with the local emirates, the Caliphate, and the Byzantines. This was a multiply-sided interpolation of identities, in which the medieval Armenians accessed layered loyalties and self-definitions: Bagratuni (or Artsruni, etc.), Armenian Christian (or Chalcedonian), of Armenian (or Arab) descent, loyal to one empire or another (or both, in sequence or simultaneously). Eleventh century Armenians made alliances and gave loyalties free of particular institutional, ethnic, or covenantal constraints,<sup>389</sup> but instead in accordance with a *realpolitik* which dynamically responded to the pressures of political realignment in Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus.

Grigor Pahlavuni, commonly known in both contemporary literature and modern historiography as Grigor Magistros after his Byzantine title, is an example *par excellence* – perhaps even an example *sui generis* in degree and kind – of a man embedded in local, non-Byzantine power structures who acquired a place within Byzantine imperial authority when it became politically necessary to interact with such authority. Grigor Pahlavuni acquired the last name of *Magistros* in the Armenian historical record after receiving that title from the Byzantine emperor Constantine IX Monomachos in 1044 in exchange for his Pahlavuni ancestral domains. Grigor's surrender of his patrimony – the town of Bjni and the fortresses of Kayean and Kaycon<sup>390</sup> -- to the Byzantines was part of the empire's mid-eleventh century absorption of the previously independent Armenian polities. In concert with the increase of Seljuk Turkish raiding, this absorption would

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<sup>389</sup> Dadoyan, 3-5.

<sup>390</sup> "The Historical Compilation of Vardan Arewelc'i", trans. and ed. Robert Thomson, *DOP* 43 (1989), 193.



spell the end of Armenian self-governance in the medieval period. Grigor, a member of the influential princely family of the Pahlavuni which traced its ancestry to the old Armenian Arshakunid royal dynasty and more particularly to St. Gregory the Illuminator,<sup>391</sup> was intimately involved in the political events which would eventually result in this disintegration of the Bagratuni kingdom at Ani, the last independent Armenian polity. For handing over his own portion of that kingdom to the Byzantines, Grigor would become *magistros* – but would also receive the title of *doux* of Mesopotamia, and would in this fashion serve the Byzantine imperial project during its most extensive and final outthrusting into Eastern Anatolia.

More significantly, however, Grigor Pahlavuni was deeply embedded in Byzantine cultural norms and practices, while retaining a specifically Armenian outlook: a man who spent extensive time amongst the cultural literati in Constantinople but never converted to Chaldedonian Christianity; who knew the classics of Greek literature well enough to translate them, and translated them into his native Armenian; whose political loyalties were mutable and complex enough that substantial literature, both medieval and modern, has been expended on determining whether or not he was a traitor to the Bagratuni Armenian kingdom. Grigor would hold the titles of both *magistros* – like Choirosphaktes in Bulgaria in the 10<sup>th</sup> century – and *doux* (of Mesopotamia) – like Ouranos just decades before Grigor's own period – and, like these two Byzantine imperial agents, would compose a letter collection which preserved his network of communication and some of his views and expressions of interaction with Byzantine imperial power.

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<sup>391</sup> This ancestry for the Pahlavuni is claimed by Catholicos Nerses Shnorhali, the Graceful, Grigor Magistros' great-grandson. Nerses Shnorhali, *Vipasanut'iwn (Poetical Work)*, ed. Manik Mktrech'yan (Erevan, 1981), 108-10.

This letter collection, composed between approximately 1030 CE and 1059 CE, comprises eighty-eight letters to forty-six correspondents, of which sixty-seven are to twenty-six known persons and twenty-one have unclear or missing addressees. The collection was edited by Karapet Kostaniant's in 1910 from the three most complete manuscripts<sup>392</sup>, and a new edition, taking into account the full manuscript tradition from the Matenadaran, is currently in preparation. Grigor's most frequent correspondents are other Armenians of similar erudition and political achievement: the Catholikos Petros Getadarj, the Archbishop Yovhannes Siwenc'i, and the bishop of Mokac' (also named Grigor); but his collection also includes philosophical letters composed to a Muslim emir named Ibrahim and multiple letters addressed to Grigor's own students, as well as some letters which speak directly to Grigor's activities as a Byzantine agent possessing a Byzantine title. The most discussed of this latter type are those letters concerning Grigor's persecution of the Tondrakian sect on Byzantine orders,<sup>393</sup> but the collection also includes more prosaic communiqués which are of interest, such as letter K78,<sup>394</sup> written to an otherwise unnamed *protospatharios* concerning the movements of merchants from Melitene.

The epistolary is written in a convoluted high-style Armenian which has been a notorious bane of scholars; perhaps the most common adjective applied to Grigor

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<sup>392</sup> K. Kostaniant's, ed. *Grigor Magistrosi T'ght'ere* (Alexandropol, 1910), 249-250.

<sup>393</sup> Magistros, *T'ght'ere*, pp. 64-66, 148-70; see Conybeare, F. C., ed. *The Key of Truth, a Manual of the Paulician Church of Armenia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), 141-151, for English translations, though these translations have lately been called into question by Federico Alpi in his forthcoming thesis from Leiden University. For studies of the T'ondrakian movement in general, see Nina Garsoian, *The Paulician Heresy* (The Hague and Paris, 1967) and Vrej Nersessian, *The Tondrakian Movement* (London, 1987).

<sup>394</sup> This dissertation will use the numbering of the letters as they appear in the Kostaniant's edition.

Magistros in modern scholarship is 'inaccessible'. This is however a fiction: Grigor's letters were not inaccessible to his contemporaries. He was known among them for his erudition, not for his incomprehensibility. The eleventh-century Armenian historian Aristakes Lastivertts'i writes of Grigor that he "... was a sagacious man deeply versed in divine books, and there was none like him."<sup>395</sup> What distinguishes Grigor's epistolary is the interpolation of Grecizing grammatical structures and loanwords into his Armenian, alongside elaborate classical syntax. The use of this hybrid grammar and syntax in his epistolary demonstrates the depths to which Grigor was educated both in his native tongue and in Greek – and the depths to which the two languages were intertwined in his most expressive and intellectual accomplishments. Grigor's epistolary expresses the multivalent methods by which Grigor negotiated being an Armenian aristocrat in service to a foreign power. Furthermore, this was not just any foreign power, but Byzantium – a power which had one extensive cultural capital in Grigor's own home culture, as well as being in the process of dismantling that home culture's political independence. While Grigor is an Armenian intellectual, his own aesthetic preferences valued Greek culture highly. He could not simply reject Byzantine imperial ideology and culture any more than he could simply adopt it by virtue of its Hellenism.

The previous chapters of this dissertation have dealt with the very particular social and political characteristics of the Byzantine letter as a primary source for exploring the thought-worlds of Byzantine imperial agents. It is therefore necessary to ask how an Armenian letter collection – no matter the degree to which that collection displays Grecizing syntax or deals with political interests relevant to Byzantine presence – can be

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<sup>395</sup> Aristakes Lastivertts'i, *History*, (*Patmut'iwn Aristakisi Lastivertts'woy*), ed. K.N. Yuzbashyan (Erevan, 1963), 62.

analogously interpreted. Not all eleventh century Armenian epistolary can be treated similarly to eleventh century Byzantine epistolary. However, the basic functions of epistolary communication are the same no matter what language the epistolary is written in: letter exchange is a collapse of distance between writer and receiver, which brings the presence of one individual to another without the benefit of physical proximity; and letter writing is a process of communicating and projecting a designed self to an audience. These reasons alone are sufficient to begin to look at the epistolary of Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni as a source for the thought-world of a non-Byzantine agent of Byzantine interests in the East. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that Grigor is not a Byzantine, and that the long Byzantine traditions of letter-writing which emerge from rhetorical manuals and had, by the eleventh century, developed a taxonomy of forms and tropes which are legible to the modern reader as well as to the Byzantine recipient, are not necessarily present in an Armenian epistolary collection.

This is, however, an epistolary collection belonging to someone who was, even beyond the standards of an educated man of his time and place, immersed in Greek learning: both conversant and invested.<sup>396</sup> It is equally short-sighted to imagine that because Grigor Magistros wrote in Armenian to a majority-Armenian audience that he did not participate in the literary traditions surrounding epistolary communication which pervaded the Anatolian plateau. Armenia, as Dadoyan has shown, is not an isolate culture in the tenth and eleventh centuries, but a profoundly interpolated one. This interpolation is both political and cultural, and the heritage of Greek learning was not an exception. Further, the specific nature of Grigor's letter collection demonstrates that if there was an

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<sup>396</sup> This investment is particularly visible in his translations of Greek works into Armenian, which include Plato's *Timaeus* and *Phaedo* alongside others, such as Euclid.

Armenian letter collection which would share characteristics with Byzantine letter collections, it would be this one – Grigor is demonstrably interested in and conversant with Byzantine rhetoric, having produced a commentary on the *Grammar* of Dionysius Thrax<sup>397</sup> which contains some of the basic building blocks of the Byzantine epistolographic tradition,<sup>398</sup> a tradition which was explicitly part of Grigor's education.

Grigor was born in the town he would both rule and surrender, Bjni, in the Armenian province of Ayrarat on the Zangu River, between 980 and 990 CE, though the latter date is more likely.<sup>399</sup> He was educated either in that town or in the Bagratuni palace in Ani. There he received the sort of training in philosophy and theology, in both the Greek and Armenian traditions, which allowed him to produce Armenian translations of Greek rhetorical and philosophical texts. An anonymous 1240 CE biography of his famed great-grandson Nerses Shnorhali would later describe Grigor's youthful training as comprising the "internal and external sciences", Armenian and Greek literature, and ending in an attainment of the ranks of rhetor and philosopher.<sup>400</sup> As an adult, he transmitted this education to younger Armenian students, teaching "various subjects

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<sup>397</sup> See N. Adontz, ed. *Dionisii Frakiiskii I armianskie tolkovateli*, (Petrograd: Tip. Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1915), 221-249.

<sup>398</sup> See chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion of the development of this tradition and its links to the larger subject of Byzantine rhetoric.

<sup>399</sup> This date is calculated based on the death of the sparapet Vahram (Grigor's uncle) in 1047 CE at age 80, as attested in letter K11; this implies that he was born in 967 CE. Grigor's father Vasak is two years younger (b. 969 CE), and thus the date of Grigor's own birth is more likely to be closer to 990 CE. See also Kostaneanc', p. xxix, note 2.

<sup>400</sup> In Lewond Alishan, *Hayapatum: Patmut 'iwn Hayots'* (Venetik: I Vans S. Ghazaru, 1901), 108-10.

pertaining to the *trivium* and *quadrivium*".<sup>401</sup> In later Armenian iconography he would be depicted as a *vardapet*, a doctor of the church, despite being a layman.<sup>402</sup>

Grigor received this princely education because he was a member of the Pahlavuni family, who were, as previously mentioned, exceptionally influential in the Bagratuni kingdom of Ani. Grigor's uncle, Vahram Pahlavuni, was *sparapet* (chief military commander) of that kingdom. The Pahlavuni family would remain influential in both Armenian and Byzantine politics beyond the lifetime of Grigor: his oldest son, Vahram, would become catholicos of the Armenian church (1066-1105 CE), taking the name Grigor II Vtakaser (the Martyrophile); another son, Vasak, would become Byzantine *doux* of Antioch until 1077 CE.<sup>403</sup> He had four daughters: one would marry Vest Sargis, the regent for the Bagratuni king Hovhannes-Smbat,<sup>404</sup> and another was the grandmother of the renowned catholicos Nerses Shnorhali (the Graceful). The family had a distinguished history in promoting monastic piety and learning: Grigor's parents and grandparents sponsored the construction and restoration of several monasteries, and his uncle Vahram the *sparapet* built the famous monastery of Marmashen.<sup>405</sup> Grigor himself was responsible for the restoration of the monastery of Hawuts' T'ař near Garni, that of

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<sup>401</sup> Three letters from Magistros to his students appear in the *Epistolary*, ed. Konstaniants', 105-107, 234-237.

<sup>402</sup> Abraham Terian, *Magnalia Dei: Biblical History in Epic Verse by Grigor Magistros*. Hebrew University Armenian Studies 14. (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 10. Terian cites two manuscripts of Grigor's thousand-line Biblical verse, J3333 and M6988, in which Grigor appears holding a Christian flag depicting the lamb of God, facing down his Muslim challenger Manazi.

<sup>403</sup> Vardan Arewelts'i, 104; Agelian, *Smbatay Sparapeti Taregirk'*, ed. Father Serobe (Venice, 1956), 83-4.

<sup>404</sup> Aristakes Lastiverts'i, *History*, 62.

<sup>405</sup> On Grigor Magistros' family and their accomplishments in monastic philanthropy, see Karen Mat'ewosyan, "Grigor Apirat Magistros and his clan in the 11<sup>th</sup> century," in *Banber Matenadarani*, 18 (2008): 67-93.

Surb Astuastsatsin in his natal town of Bjni (where he also constructed a church bearing the same name in 1031 CE), and finally, the monastery of Kech'aris in Tsaghkotn in 1051 CE.<sup>406</sup> Grigor desired to – and possibly succeeded in – retiring to one of these monasteries when he was of advanced age.<sup>407</sup>

Like many members of the Pahlavuni family, Grigor Magistros was deeply embroiled in the politics of the kingdom of Ani. His political life spanned multiple loyalties and multiple polities: he was a fixture of the court of Ani as well as being a welcome guest at the Byzantine court in Constantinople, particularly during the reign of Constantine Monomachos. Grigor emerges as an independent political actor circa 1021 CE, and his entire political career was marked by internecine strife at the Bagratuni court, and negotiating pro-Byzantine and anti-Byzantine factions in Ani would be a major factor in Grigor's political life. The situation in Armenia during his career was critical and volatile: in the period between 1000 and 1049 CE the formerly independent polities under the control of the Bagratuni and Artsruni houses all came under Byzantine domination, and their nobility was displaced from their ancestral lands and redistributed around the Empire, in accordance with Byzantine best practice.<sup>408</sup> By 1000 CE, the advancing line of Byzantine reconquests of Arab territory had surrounded the Bagratuni kingdom of Ani from the north and south, and in 1022 CE, the emperor Basil II threatened to conquer

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<sup>406</sup> A. Sanjian, "Gregory Magistros: an Armenian Hellenist" in Vryonis, Speros, John Springer Langdon, Jelisaveta S. Allen, and Andreas Kyprianides, eds. *To Hellenikon: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis, Jr.* (New Rochelle, N.Y: Artistide D. Caratzas, 1993), 131; Terian, *Magnalia Dei*, 7-8.

<sup>407</sup> See the discussion in Avedis K. Sanjian and Abraham Terian, "An Enigmatic Letter of Grigor Magistros" in Terian, Abraham, ed. *Opera Select Teriana: A Scholarly Retrospective*. New Rochelle, N.Y: St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, 2008.

<sup>408</sup> For an overview of Byzantine redistribution of newly conquered aristocracy (and, in fact, Byzantine aristocracy with stronger local ties than imperial ones), see Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium: 600-1025*, especially Chapter 8.

them by force. Instead, King Hovhannes-Smbat sent the Catholicos, Petros I Getadarj, to Trebizond where he signed a will which ceded Ani to the Byzantines upon the king's death, which defused the immediate military threat. However, in 1041 CE, when Hovhannes-Smbat died without an heir, the regent Vest Sargis (who was Grigor Magistros' son-in-law) sought to usurp the throne with Byzantine help. This action failed when the *sparapet* Vahram Pahlavuni, Grigor's uncle, along with over thirty other Pahlavuni family members including Grigor himself, crowned Prince Gagik, son of the anti-king Ashot IV, in 1042 CE. Bagratuni independence would be short-lived, however, as the Byzantine emperor Constantine IX Monomachos summoned Gagik II to Constantinople under threat of military force. Gagik was convinced to go to the Byzantine capital by the pro-Byzantine faction at Ani, which included the aforementioned Vest Sargis and the Catholicos Petros Getadarj, and while there he was convinced under threat to give up his kingdom. In 1045 Ani became a Byzantine territory and Gagik received the themes of Charsianon and Lykandos in Cappadocia in exchange. By 1049 all the other independent Armenian polities had followed suit.<sup>409</sup> Grigor Magistros' involvement in this gradual dismantling of independent Armenian power was not passive; his political life is intimately intertwined with the fate of Ani, from his efforts to enthrone Gagik II in opposition to his own son-in-law Vest Sargis, to his

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<sup>409</sup> Sanjian, "Grigor Magistros: an Armenian Hellenist", 132-133. This narrative is assembled from Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 366-7; Yahya, *PO* 47, pp. 459-69; Aristakes Lastiverts'i, *Récit Des Malheurs de La Nation Arménienne*. Edited by Marius Canard and Hayk Pērpērean. Bibliothèque de Byzantion 5. (Bruxelles: Éditions de Byzantion, 1973), 11-25; Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia and the Crusades: Tenth to Twelfth Centuries: The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*. Edited by Ara Edmond Dostourian. Armenian Heritage Series. ([Belmont, MA.] : Lanham: National Association for Armenian Studies and Research ; University Press of America, 1993), 44-9; *K'art'lis C'xovreba: The Georgian Royal Annals and Their Medieval Armenian Adaptation*, ed. Stephen Rapp. 1st ed. Anatolian and Caucasian Studies. Delmar, N.Y: Caravan Books, 1998), 281-4.



longstanding friendship with Petros Getadarj, to his later conflict and strained relations with the selfsame Gagik II, who may have gone so far as to send Grigor into exile under the influence of Vest Sargis, who remained a powerful force at court.

In approximately 1045 CE Grigor traveled to Constantinople – not for the first time – and remained there for several years. During his time in the center of Byzantium he composed his *Thousand-Word Poem* or *Magnalia Dei* versification of the Bible.<sup>410</sup> He also became closely acquainted with the Emperor, Constantine IX Monomachos, under whom he would proceed to conduct a military campaign which earned him the Byzantine title of *doux*<sup>411</sup> and to whom he would surrender his ancestral lands in exchange for territory in Mesopotamia. Grigor would then govern these areas, performing various services for the Byzantines including the suppression of the T'ondrakian heretical movement, until his death in 1059, whereupon he was buried in the Church of the Holy Theotokos in Hasankale, an estate of the extended Pahlavuni clan.<sup>412</sup>

Grigor Magistros' association with pious learning and philosophical education, while certainly in the tradition of the Pahlavuni family, was – as previously mentioned – unusual in its depth and intensity. Modern scholarship, both in Armenia and the West, has thought of Grigor as a philhellene, with a particularly Greek emphasis to his participation in Armenian intellectual culture (and Armenian political life, a problem which will be taken up in some detail below). In doing so Grigor is often placed within

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<sup>410</sup> For translation and commentary, see Terian's *Magnalia Dei: Biblical History in Epic Verse by Grigor Magistros. Critical Text with Introduction, translation, and commentary*. Hebrew University Armenian Studies 14, 2012.

<sup>411</sup> Aristakes Lastiverts'i, *Recit des malheurs*, 18-19; see also Jonathan Shepard, "Skylitzes on Armenia in the 1040s and the role of Catacalon Cecaumenus", *REArm* (1975-6): 296-311.

<sup>412</sup> Terian, *Magnalia Dei*, 7.

the tradition of the 'Hellenizing School' of Armenian translators from the Greek, albeit as a late and isolated member. This Hellenizing School refers to the vast corpus of 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century Armenian translations of Greek texts which maintain in some fashion Greek word order or syntax in the produced Armenian. They were active between 570 and 730 CE in Constantinople, and their activities were within the general rubric of other contemporaneous Byzantine 'schools' of translators and teachers.<sup>413</sup> Grigor Magistros, translating in the eleventh century, is in no sense a true 'member' of this 'school', i.e. there is no direct continuity between him and the translators who were active in the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, the Hellenizing aspects of Grigor's lexicon and his translations of Greek philosophical texts do place him in a more loosely construed continuity with the Hellenizing School as an intellectual movement:<sup>414</sup> for both these early translators and for Grigor, Greek was the language of cultural aspiration.<sup>415</sup>

Armenians since the 4<sup>th</sup> century had gone to Greek centers of learning to acquire rhetorical skill. Libanius of Antioch's correspondence provides the names of his Armenian students,<sup>416</sup> and Armenians seeking Greek knowledge ranged much farther afield: Anania Shirakac'i, sometimes known as the "father of exact sciences in Armenia", and whose writings display a strong dependence on the translations of the Hellenizing

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<sup>413</sup> Abraham Terian, "The Hellenizing School: its time, place, and scope of activities reconsidered", in Terian, Abraham, ed. *Opera Select Teriana: A Scholarly Retrospective*. (New Rochelle, N.Y: St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, 2008), 183.

<sup>414</sup> Weitenberg, Jos. "Hellenophile Syntactic Elements in Armenian Texts," in *Actes du Sixieme Colloque international de Linguistique armenienne*, SLOVO, v. 26-27, (1999): 64-72. pp. 67.

<sup>415</sup> Robert Thomson, "The Reception of Greek Literature in Armenia", in Koumoulides, John T. A., ed. *Greek Connections: Essays on Culture and Diplomacy*. (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 29.

<sup>416</sup> Robert Thomson, "The Origins of Caucasian Civilization: the Christian Component," in Ronald Grigor Suny (ed.), *Transcaucasia: Nationalism and Social Change*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Ann Arbor, 1996), 29.

school,<sup>417</sup> left an account of his own education in the seventh century, in which he describes his efforts to, having already studied the Scriptures and all other literature available to him in Armenia, learn philosophy and "arithmology". To do so he left Armenia and went "to the country of the Greeks", which variously meant the Byzantine province of Fourth Armenia and later, after considering and rejecting a trip to Constantinople, the city of Trebizond, where he learned a great deal from the library of one Tychikos, a Greek who knew Armenian.<sup>418</sup>

Early Armenian intellectuals clearly made it a habit to go to centers of Greek learning and translate texts found there into Armenian. These translations were from the beginning adapted to the interests and sensibilities of an Armenian audience but also maintained Greek syntactical and lexical formulations, a kind of hybridity which demonstrates the degree to which Greek was considered the highest language of scholarship amongst the Armenian intellectual class. The archetypal example, which is considered also to be the founding document of the Hellenizing School, was the τέχνη γραμματική of Dionysius Thrax, whose instructions on writing would become a primer for later translation efforts and the subject of a multitude of Armenian scholia.<sup>419</sup> In this early translation, Armenian substitutions for Greek examples abound, particularly those referring to geography. The translator names cities in west Armenia, including Taron and C'ronk', where the Greek text refers to Greek polities. This substitution reveals some of

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<sup>417</sup> Several translations of the school, particularly that of the pseudo-Aristotelian *De mundo* and the Armenian version of Philo, find strong echoes in Anania, particularly in his *Yalags šrjagayowt'ean erknic'*. Cf. Abraham Terian, "The Hellenizing School: its time, place, and scope of activities reconsidered", 180.

<sup>418</sup> Anania Shirakac'i, trans. H. Berberian, "Autobiographie d'Anaias Širacac'i," *REArm* n.s. 1 (1964): 189-94.

<sup>419</sup> Terian, "The Hellenizing School", 177. See also Adontz, *Thrax*, 159-79.

the function of the Hellenizing School – to make Greek philosophy both accessible and *intelligible* to Armenian intellectuals. Many of the produced translations are interlinear, with Armenian beneath the Greek, and it has been suggested that this practice was meant to help Armenian students who were enrolled in Byzantine schools grapple better with the material.<sup>420</sup> However, the influence of the school extended beyond Constantinople and back into the Armenian cultural heartland: the texts translated in this period form the central philosophical corpus for later Armenian scholarship. Nevertheless, it is clear from later scholia on these texts that the Hellenizing syntax which is characteristic of this period of translation was confusing to later Armenian scholars: the texts were regarded as so obscure as to be accessible only to men of the most profound ability.<sup>421</sup> To be able to access Greek knowledge and Greek philosophy, even in Armenian translation and recension, was to be a member of the highest intellectual class.

It is in this context that Grigor Magistros' own translations must be considered, along with his letters. Both show a sort of imitation of the Hellenizing School which is reminiscent of Middle Byzantine Atticizing at its most obscure. Grigor's epistolographic writing makes use of the hyper-Hellenic lexicon which is characteristic of the Hellenizing School.<sup>422</sup> It displays extensive use of words with prefixes calqued from Greek to deal with philosophical terminology, an exemplary feature of Hellenizing Armenian from the earliest translations of Dionysius Thrax onward,<sup>423</sup> as well as occasional examples of Hellenizing syntax, such as the presence of accusative-infinite constructions and the

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<sup>420</sup> N. Akanean, "Yownaban dproc'e," *Handes amsorya*, 46 (1932): 285.

<sup>421</sup> Terian, "The Hellenizing School", 184.

<sup>422</sup> Gohar Muradyan, Gohar. *Grecisms in Ancient Armenian*. Hebrew University Armenian Studies 13. (Leuven ; Paris ; Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2012), 24.

<sup>423</sup> Muradyan, *Grecisms in Ancient Armenian*, 28-29.

genitive absolute.<sup>424</sup> However, two points of differentiation between Grigor and the Hellenizing School must be maintained. First, Grigor's Hellenizing elements are, as previously noted, localized to his lexicon and only appear in a limited fashion in his syntax.<sup>425</sup> Second, and more significantly, Grigor is writing in imitation of a group of translators multiple centuries removed from his circumstances, on the other side of the lacuna of Greek-Armenian relations caused by the Arab conquests of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>426</sup> His use of the lexical and syntactical habits of the Hellenizing School is a conscious archaizing move which gives his writing an intellectual cachet similar to that employed by Byzantine writers who make use of pseudo-Attic forms and syntax in order to demonstrate their erudition. His letters are thus described as "unique in Armenian literature, [...], conscious imitations of Byzantine epistolography."<sup>427</sup>

Grigor's choice of Hellenizing archaisms does function as an in-group signal to his peers; we cannot forget that all of Grigor's letters had an audience, and that – with some exceptions<sup>428</sup> -- he wrote with an expectation of being understood, and presumably

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<sup>424</sup> Magistros, *T'ght'ere*, Letter K2, ln. 8-9. "Եւ զի գայսնսիկ նչ ալ ինչ իմաստասիրէր, բայց միայն վասն իյրոյ ումենն Հերմեայ առակերտի, զի նորա, տողեալ զիմաստասիրութեանն..."

<sup>425</sup> Muradyan, Gohar. "Style hellénisant des *Progymnasta* arméniens dans le context d'autres écrits originaux," in *Actes du Sixieme Colloque international de Linguistique arménienne*, SLOVO, v. 26-27, (1999): 83-94.

<sup>426</sup> For an overview of these topics, see Nina Garsoian, "The Arab Invasions and the Rise of the Bagratuni (640-884)", in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, Volume I. (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1997), 116-142; and Greenwood, Tim, "Armenian Neighbours (600-1045)", 333-364.

<sup>427</sup> Sanjian, "Gregory Magistros: an Armenian Hellenist", 140.

<sup>428</sup> See particularly Sanjian and Terian, "An Enigmatic Letter of Grigor Magistros", 85-95, which discusses Letter K12, addressed to Hovhannes the Archbishop of Siwnik', whose deliberately obscure metaphors concerning fish are intended as a symbolic pointer towards a particular scriptural passage (Matthew 17:24-27) concerning the disposition of money obtained from donors. Also worth noting is Letter K71, addressed to the Muslim Emir Ibrahim on philosophical principles, which is perhaps the most difficult of the

with a hope of demonstrating his great intelligence and depth of knowledge. His correspondence with the Catholicos Petros Getadarj is a prime example of an ideal audience for Grigor's 'flood of references' – an immensely educated, equally politically active man who moved in the same aristocratic circles as Grigor himself. If anyone was capable of interpreting Grigor's Hellenizing and obscure style, it would be the Catholicos to whom Grigor composed nine letters. Getadarj's extensive contacts with the Byzantine authority in Constantinople – contacts which have been interpreted as pro-Byzantine in terms of arranging for the will of King Hovhannes-Smbat promising the kingdom of Ani-Shirak to the Emperor upon his death, and the similar persuasion of Gagik II to journey to Constantinople where he too would be persuaded to renounce his throne (but never to convert to Chalcedonian Christianity)<sup>429</sup> – also provide him with a common source of cultural influence. If Grigor was to produce letters in a particularly 'Byzantine' mode, or letters which particularly reflect Byzantine letter-exchange practices, it would be in the correspondence with Getadarj – and indeed, it is within these nine letters that we see substantial evidence for both common appreciation of particularly 'Greek' references as well as evidence for Byzantine-esque practices of letter exchange.

Letter K2, sent to Getadarj in consolation when the city of Ani was sharply displeased with his actions<sup>430</sup> – i.e. in response to his encouragement of Gagik II's transfer of sovereignty to the Byzantine emperor – demonstrates the depths of Grigor's

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letters stylistically and claims that philosophy can only be achieved with substantial effort (see Theo van Lint, forthcoming publications, for detailed analysis.)

<sup>429</sup> Matthew of Edessa, pp.77-79; Aristakes trs. Yuzb., 84-5. See also Shepard, Jonathan., "Skylitzes on Armenia in the 1040s and the Role of Catacalon Cecaumenos", in *ReArm* 11 (1975-76), and Gérard Dédéyan, ed. *Histoire Du Peuple Arménien* (Toulouse: Privat, 2007), 285.

<sup>430</sup> "ի ժամանակի խուժման յառնելոյ ի քաղաքին ի վերայ նորա" – "in the time of the tumult rising against him in the city", Magistros, Letter K2 §2

Hellenizing references. He discusses the travails of famous philosophical and historical figures as comparisons to Getadarj's current situation, attempting to inspire and reassure the Catholicos and strengthen his resolve to do well by the Armenian people. He comments on the exile of Pericles at the hands of Appinos, "արտալածի սակս իբաւացի գոլոյ նմս ի խուժանէ" – "as a result of an uprising, despite being righteous",<sup>431</sup> and then goes on to list a whole collection of similar exemplars: Plato, sold to Sicily; Socrates, killed by "the stubborn"; the Homeric Melampos; Demosthenes; and Odysseus, here called 'the rhetor'. These figures from Greek history are held up to Getadarj as models for behavior and strength in times of opposition from his native land, and Grigor chooses them as a framing preamble to a more expected exhortation based in Scriptural references in the next paragraph. Grigor presents Getadarj's situation as a common one for the righteous, writing, "For whoever in this world lives according to the will of God will not be opposed?" and then demonstrating that there have always been those opposed to righteous men, dating from the time of Moses and Aaron and culminating in those Jews who allowed Christ to hang on the cross.<sup>432</sup> As a final step in this chain of contextualizing references, Grigor moves to Aristotelian philosophy as transmitted through the works of the sixth-century Armenian philosopher David the Invincible, and from there to a discussion of bodily and spiritual ills with reference to Hippocrates.<sup>433</sup> The entire effect is certainly of a "thicket of references". They are employed to great rhetorical effect – letter K2 positions Getadarj as a worthy successor to Greek statesmen, righteous martyrs, and eventually the first Catholicos, Grigor the Illuminator, all while demonstrating Grigor's

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<sup>431</sup> Magistros, Letter K2, §7

<sup>432</sup> Magistros, Letter K2, §11

<sup>433</sup> Magistros, Letter K2, §19-23

great friendship with the Catholicos and his credentials in assuring him about his political and spiritual situation: i.e. by using this series of references, including those which recall pagan antiquity, Grigor claims the authority of the philosopher – and then extends that authority to shore up Getadarj's, which has been damaged by the disorder which led to his exile from Ani.

This sort of referentiality is, as amply demonstrated in earlier chapters of this dissertation, entirely characteristic of Byzantine high style. Though Grigor adorns his references with local, specifically Armenian examples (i.e. David the Invincible and Grigor the Illuminator) as well as Scriptural and classical allusions, the general pattern is strikingly similar. In performing this sort of referentiality in personal correspondence, Grigor may be unique amongst contemporaneous Armenians. Robert Thomson notes that, while the Hellenizing School did inject a substantial amount of Greek literature into Armenian literary culture, these translations were mostly of 3rd to 6th century Christian literature, like the works of the Church Fathers – alongside Philo and Josephus and some classical philosophy and rhetoric. In short, there is little translated literature from Greek to Armenian which actually dates from the Byzantine period.<sup>434</sup> It seems that for most Armenian intellectuals, Byzantine literature was not a model to be emulated<sup>435</sup> – even where Greek is the language of intellectual aspiration, it is the *language* and its classical expression in philosophy and the theology of the Church Fathers which is aspirational, not Byzantine stylistics. Thus Grigor's Byzantine-esque use of allusions to pagan antiquity in the context of epistolary writing is somewhat outside of the mainstream of

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<sup>434</sup> The exceptions being the *Hexameron* of George of Pisidia and letters sent to Armenia by Greek patriarchs.

<sup>435</sup> Thomson, "The Reception of Greek Literature in Armenia", 41.



Armenian cultural activity, even amongst his peers. While not forgetting that, in writing to people like Petros Getadarj, Grigor was certainly writing with the expectation of being understood – and with the expectation that his allusions and referents would have an efficacious meaning to his recipient (letter K2 is a letter of consolation, after all) – one must nevertheless presume that Grigor's Byzantine habits of letter-writing style are particular to Grigor. They are thus a place where Byzantine culture has a visible influence on him outside the norm of his colleagues. For whatever reasons – and these may remain obscured by the impossibility of directly inquiring of Grigor what he personally found useful or pleasurable about allusion and referentiality – here we can see that this sort of writing *did* have a particular utility to Grigor which differed from that of his fellow Armenian intellectuals.

Nevertheless, the process of sending and receiving letters within the community of Armenian intelligensia to which Grigor Magistros belonged bears some deep functional similarities to the process of sending and receiving contemporaneous Byzantine letters. Merely within Grigor's nine letters to Petros Getadarj, there is evidence of gifts accompanying letters, the use of letters to request scholarly or literary material from a fellow member of the literati, and perhaps most significantly, the intense, nearly physical joy which was caused by the reception of letters from a friend. This sort of response to receiving a letter is central to the Byzantine conception of the power and possibility of communication by epistolary: the recipient experiences near-rapture at the arrival of a letter because this letter contains an image of the soul of his friend, the sender. Great physical distance is eliminated, and the somatic effects of distance – which, in the

Byzantine memetic universe, include illness<sup>436</sup> – vanish in the face of the real presence of the author in the object of the letter.

When, in letter K5, Grigor writes of his reaction to the receipt of a letter from Getadarj, he describes a response which is both physical and emotional.

"Then, receiving your deeply-wanted letter tablet, I desired once more to faint – and after a little while being weakminded through thinking and removed from the sensations of wisdom, kissed it with my lips and placed it against my eyes with affection and mystical thought, praising our Lord, and shed tears over it..."<sup>437</sup>

The letter induces a strong somatic response in Grigor (he feels as if he is about to faint, he sheds tears) and then engenders further physical action (kissing with the lips and gazing with the eyes) as well as emotional contemplation (his gaze is one which is full of affection, and it induces within him a mystical/mysterious contemplation, which is akin to praising Christ.) This is an analogous process to that which is experienced by the receiver of a Byzantine letter, though expressed in an idiom which frames the somatic reaction to letter reception in specifically Christian grounds. However, Grigor is in general immersed in the imagery of religious contemplation when addressing Getadarj. For example, earlier in the same letter, he addresses Getadarj as a "bright sun of righteousness", the "axe of heterodoxy", whose actions are likened to that of Christ and whose leadership is akin to that of David and Moses.<sup>438</sup> The contemplative aspect of

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<sup>436</sup> See discussion in chapter 2, concerning illness, exile, and somatic complaints arising from both. Also see Mullett, Margaret, *Theophylact of Ochrid: reading the letters of a Byzantine archbishop*, pp. 31ff and 274ff.

<sup>437</sup> Magistros, letter K5, §3, ln. 16-19.

<sup>438</sup> Magistros, letter K5, §1, ln. 1-5; §4; §5. See also J.R. Russell's article "Here Comes the Sun: a poem of Konstadin Erznkats'i" in *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 3 (1987), where he addresses the term 'sun of righteousness' and its cooption by Armenian Christians from Zoroastrian traditions. The term appears in the *Teaching* attributed to St. Gregory the Illuminator, where it describes Jesus: "Who is the sun of righteousness if not He who humbled himself and cast his rays on all the infirm and those

Grigor's response to receiving a letter fits within this framework, as well as not being at all alien to Byzantine models of emotional reception of letters.

As far back as Basil the Great of Cappadocia – who was, along with the other Cappadocian fathers of the church, well-known in Armenia – the emotional response to meeting a friend's presence through a letter was framed in the experience of faith and communion with the Lord. Writing to Peter of Alexandria, Basil says,

"... true love is formed by the gift of the spirit, which brings together objects separated by a wide space and causes loved ones to know each other, not through the features of the body but through the peculiarities of the soul. This indeed the favor of the Lord has wrought in our case also, making it possible for us to see you with the eyes of the soul [...] and to enter into a single union with you through communion according to faith."<sup>439</sup>

Here the experience of a closure of space through the reception of an object is expressed by the presence of the spiritual gift of discernment – "through the peculiarities of the soul" – and the intervention of God, who allows the presence of the friend to emerge where the friend physically is absent. Grigor's description of his experience of receiving and reading Getadarj's letter is thus in line with Byzantine norms for letter-writing culture, and produces a similar type of divinely-mediated connection with a member of his intellectual community.

The process of receiving a letter was, of course, mundane as well as emotionally rapturous, and the everyday aspects of letter reception can also be read within Grigor's letters. Here we see almost exactly the same process which marks the reception of the Byzantine letter: a letter arrives with a bearer, who may or may not have an additional

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who have fallen into sin by woe?" Grigor Magistros' use of this term to describe Petros Getadarj is of a kind with his other referential associations of the Catholicos with Christ and other religious figures, such as Moses and David.

<sup>439</sup> Basil the Great, ep. 133, ed. Deferrari, II, 302. Translation M. Mullett.

verbal message which clarifies the letter's meaning, and often is also accompanied by a gift. Still in Letter K5, Grigor writes about how he received the letter that inspired in him such an intense emotional response: it is borne by a servant of Getadarj's named Stephanos, who performs his duties on the orders of Getadarj. Grigor is honored to receive Stephanos, who he considers to be within the protection of Christ which also extends around Getadarj.<sup>440</sup> Grigor does not mention in this case whether or not Stephanos bore a separate message from Getadarj, but he is specifically identified as someone who is a trusted member of Getadarj's household and whom Grigor treats with respect and honor. It is not unexpected that the physical process of bringing a letter from one friend to another would be nearly identical in Armenia and Byzantium in the eleventh century; all of the considerations about the difficulty of travel, long distances, and use of younger friends and protégés as letter-bearers still apply. In short, the movement of letters in Armenia is part of the same process which moved letters in Byzantine territory; there was no particular system in place in Armenia which necessitates a further exploration of the movement of written communication.

Grigor's letters also often came with, or went out with, gifts, in common with Byzantine practice. The letter itself could be directly related to the gift, as in letter K9, where Grigor sends a cross-shaped crosier to Getadarj along with a letter which contains a poem describing the gift as well as a comment on the poem, in which Grigor explains the genre of his poem in order to emphasize the meaning he wishes to convey alongside his gift.<sup>441</sup> The poem which Grigor writes is composed in mono-rhyme in *—nlpłmfi*, which

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<sup>440</sup> Magistros, Letter K5, §7.

<sup>441</sup> Theo Maarten van Lint, "A Letter by Grigor Magistros Pahlawuni to Catholicos Petros Getadarj: On the Gift of a Crosier", forthcoming, 10.

is not a difficult rhyme in Armenian, and each line contains fifteen syllables each, a meter which Grigor refers to as 'homeric', a classification which he elaborates on in the commentary which follows the poem (and which I will return to below). The poem itself explains the symbolic qualities of the gift of the crosier: it places the gift within a precise framework of Old and New Testament allusions and connotations, emphasizing the interpretation of a crosier as foreshadowing of the cross of Christ.<sup>442</sup> Grigor then continues by enumerating a number of oppositions in the form of "not X, but Y", which show how the crosier (and thus the Cross) is more effective than wooden devices from the classical religious world:

This is not an Olympic branch, but one transposing the waters of bitterness,  
Not another planting of the olive, but a shepherd's one of authority for you.  
Not tied to the branch of Hercules, but to the lance of vigor.  
Not a planted olive-wood spear, but a four-armed one, superimposed.<sup>443</sup>

The gift is thus intimately linked to the content of the letter, and reinforces the message of the letter – which communicates Grigor's opinion of Getadarj's worthiness to be Catholicos as well as his responsibilities *as* Catholicos, i.e. he receives the gift of the crosier because he is worthy of leading the Armenian people (like Moses did the Jews out of Egypt – the crosier is "of the going-out of Egypt, a great escort for our salvation") and as a spur to behave in the fashion which he ought, as Catholicos, to behave: "Enjoy, rock of Kephas, you foundation of all dominion / you decider between goats and sheep, opener of the gate of the Kingdom for us." Here Getadarj appears as the spiritual descendent of St. Peter, and his role as Catholicos is extended to the end of days. Grigor has employed both his gift and his letter to reinforce the common community which he has with

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>443</sup> Magistros, Letter K9, §5.

Getadarj via a shared referential language, and to reaffirm Getadarj's presence within the larger Armenian community. It is the latter which is most significant, as Getadarj's politics and loyalties were often in doubt.<sup>444</sup> In this portion of Grigor's letter collection a sort of defense of interpolated loyalties and *Realpolitik* emerges: Grigor's use of communication by gift and letter acts to position Getadarj as an exemplary Catholicos, despite his pro-Byzantine activities and the public resentment they engendered.

Grigor also used letters to maintain his own access to the scholarly and cultural resources of the capital of the Bagratuni at Ani when he was outside of the city, either at his ancestral stronghold of Bjni or later when he has been sent to the lands he was granted by the Byzantines in Mesopotamia. Similar behavior is visible letters of Nikephoros Ouranos, as discussed in the previous chapter, who requests material from Constantinople to be sent to him in Antioch.<sup>445</sup> Grigor, for his part, requests from Getadarj in letter K2 a volume of the work of Anania of Shirak, which he describes as a book "in which not only the arts are subsumed, not only the *arts of the four* [the quadrivium], but all the essentials of thought".<sup>446</sup> Anania of Shirak was a famed Armenian intellect, but here Grigor frames his request in the Greek educational tradition: Anania's work contains the information of the *quadrivium*, and then goes beyond it. Furthermore, this volume of Anania's has apparently been unavailable before Petros

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<sup>444</sup> Getadarj's travel to Constantinople and interactions with the Byzantine church would result in episodes of both cooperation and opposition with Byzantine authorities – he was detained in Constantinople and later exiled, which did not win him support amongst the Armenians at home. Cf. Mahe, "L'Eglise arménienne de 611 à 1066", in *Histoire du Christianisme*, ed. J.M. Mayeur et. al. (Paris, 1993), 521-29; and Gérard Dédéyan, "L'immigration arménienne en Cappadoce au xie siècle," *Byzantion* 45 (1975):72-73.

<sup>445</sup> See Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>446</sup> K2, §8, ln. 33

Getadarj arrived at the dominical house and retrieved it: "which is now in the dominical house, which before you had been obscured and have been kept hidden under a bushel."<sup>447</sup> Letters allow Grigor access to important works of scholarship which allow him to participate in the common literary and social culture which he shares with his friend Getadarj. They also provide a method by which Grigor can bring items of cultural value out of a cultural center (Ani) to more distant areas where he is stationed. The gift exchange which comes with correspondence by letter functions similarly for Grigor as they do for Byzantine letter-writers; this particular exchange also demonstrates that the requested objects – objects with cultural value – are, for Grigor, objects of learning in the Greek (if not specifically in the Byzantine) style. The universe in which Grigor's correspondence moves is not isolated from the Byzantine one; it is culturally linked through both practice and value.

It is noteworthy that Grigor did not reserve his use of Byzantine-style referentiality, including references to classical and pagan antiquity, for men like Petros Getadarj who could be expected to at least comprehend the majority of the textual allusions by virtue of common educational background and cultural immersion. Grigor also makes use of this style in writing to a Muslim Emir, Emir Ibrahim, to whom he composed two letters (K70 and K71), the first on matters of faith and the second on matters of philosophy. K70, on faith, is relatively straightforward (for definitions of straightforward which are appropriate to Grigor Magistros – K70 is not simple syntactically, nor does it spare Emir Ibrahim a heavy burden of biblical and historical referents), but K71, on philosophy, is exceptionally challenging. Emir Ibrahim is

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<sup>447</sup> K2, §8, ln. 35.

expected to not only comprehend Grigor's difficult Armenian, but also to understand references to Origen's image of Christ as the captain of a ship in the context of philosophy being a discipline within which one feels at sea,<sup>448</sup> and difficult problems in cosmology and numerology (Grigor closes this letter with a geometry exercise which presents the hexagon as a perfect form created by God.)<sup>449</sup>

From Letter K70 we learn that Ibrahim, possibly identified as one of the generals of Tughrul Beg, an 'Ibrahim' who entered with him into Armenia in 1050,<sup>450</sup> while a Muslim, is an Armenian on his mother's side: she is from the family of Sisak.<sup>451</sup> Presumably Emir Ibrahim learned Armenian from her, and it may have been his first or co-first language. It is not impossible that he also would have encountered a basic education in Christian literary culture in this context. Nevertheless, the degree to which Grigor assumes that Ibrahim can understand complex allusions to Christian theology as well as philosophical treatises – he specifically references Plato and Aristotle on ratios<sup>452</sup> -- implies that Grigor's habit of performing Byzantine-esque allusions in letter communication is not an affectation which he reserved only for his own cultural peers. The use Grigor found in Byzantinizing forms of letter writing was wider than simply communicating with a cultural in-group. While this sort of employment of allusion is clearly useful to cement in-group ties and to preserve bonds of cultural commonality when those bonds are under threat, it seems as if for Grigor, referentiality could also be

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<sup>448</sup> K71, §5

<sup>449</sup> K71, §15

<sup>450</sup> Thorassian, H. "Grigor Magistros et ses rapports avec deux emirs musulmans, Manowce et Ibrahim", in *Revue des Etudes islamiques* (1947): 66; citing Matthew of Edessa, *Chronicle* II, ch. 102.

<sup>451</sup> K70, §2.

<sup>452</sup> K71, §4, §9



an invitation – an open door which Emir Ibrahim could step through, with sufficient effort,<sup>453</sup> which would, when passed beyond, open into a world where Christian faith prepares the way for Hellenic philosophy. Yet, this invitation into a cultural in-group present in letter K71 is not precisely an invitation into an *Armenian* cultural in-group – even if that group is made up of Armenians like Grigor Magistros. Instead, the references and allusions present in letter K71 are, when not Biblical or associated with the Church Fathers, predominated by Hellenism. The invitation is not into an isolate Armenian culture, but into an intellectual community whose aspirational heights are Greek, and classicising: the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. While writing to a powerful and erudite Muslim, Grigor Magistros demonstrates how his own conception of the heights of erudition is fundamentally influenced by the Greek language and the values of Byzantine intellectual exchange. Here we see the interpolated nature of the Armenian cultural experience in the eleventh century made manifest: an Armenian prince and scholar, writing to a Muslim, speaking about the heights of Greek philosophy as a point towards which that Muslim should aspire.

But is this interpolation a consequence of Grigor's exposure to Byzantine incursions into Armenian cultural space? Does Grigor's profession of the cultural heights of Greek learning correspond to an attempt to move through newly Byzantinized areas – or at the very least, areas in which a newly powerful Byzantine presence could not be denied? Grigor certainly displays cultural fluency, but his reasons for such fluency are more difficult to determine. The direction of cultural influence is a particularly significant

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<sup>453</sup> The opening of K71 specifies that this letter on philosophy can only come after the previous letter, K70, on faith; it is not until Emir Ibrahim recognizes the Christian faith that he can enter fully into philosophy, which, as K71 goes on to explain, derives from the Logos (§3).

issue: is Grigor's acculturation to Byzantine practice a result of Byzantine expansion into Armenian space, or is it constructed by Grigor in order to better move through spaces now occupied by Byzantines? In short: how much of Grigor's Hellenism is a constructed identity which he is displaying through his letters, for a deliberate purpose?

Some scholars have seen Grigor Magistros' philhellenism as a straightforward source for his political activities; i.e. he was willing to exchange his patrimony for Byzantine title and powers, after a long history of choosing pro-Byzantine factional alliances within the Bagratuni court, because he was personally driven by and attracted to Greek culture. This view is most clearly stated by Yarnley, writing that "what he sought was to be a member of the Holy Kingdom of the Romans, because the Byzantines were heirs of the culture which meant most to him."<sup>454</sup> This is, in the light of more modern views of Armenian *Realpolitik*, a simplification; it is clearly possible for Armenians to shift between Byzantine, internal, and Arabic loyalties in order to maintain personal, aristocratic, or polity-level power, and Grigor's intense and unusual philhellenism does not automatically make him a supporter of a Byzantine agenda. To assume that it does also assumes a Grigor Magistros who is, as an Armenian, extremely isolated from the larger frame of Eastern Anatolia – in short, to present an Armenia which was so isolated that philhellenism is an automatic sign of love of Byzantium. But eleventh-century Armenia is not isolate at all, and Grigor is demonstrably integrated into a vast internecine world of communication. His Hellenic referents are not thrown into a void. His letters are

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<sup>454</sup> Yarnley, C.J. "The Armenian Philhellenes: a study in the spread of Byzantine religious and cultural ideas among the Armenians in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries AD," in *Eastern Churches Review* 8/1 (1976): 50-1.

communicative acts and they assume that his audience would be listening with some degree of both understanding and approval.

It is worth recalling that Grigor Magistros is not the only Armenian in the eleventh century to express positive opinions toward Byzantine culture – or even toward Byzantine imperial power. Arutjunova-Fidanjan, in her study of the image of the Byzantine empire in Armenian historiographical sources, points out that by the eleventh century, historians like Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i and Stephen of Taron present a very positive and glorious representation of Byzantium, particularly of its emperors.<sup>455</sup> Drasxanakertc'i goes so far as to describe Constantine VII as follows: "Pious autokrator and emperor Constantine, crowned by God and glory, great and victorious king of the universe, faithful and pious, protector of the illumination of the people and truest conciliator that exists."<sup>456</sup> Similarly, Stephen of Taron in his *Universal History* describes with great praise the campaigns of the Byzantine emperors against the Arabs, and goes so far as to blame the advent of the Seljuk Turks on rebellions against and within the Byzantine state.<sup>457</sup> Arutjunova-Fidanjan suggests that this predominance of positive imagery of Byzantium in Armenian historiography is a direct result of Byzantine presence in and expansion into Armenian spaces. Inevitable interaction with Byzantine power produces a historiographical record of that power. It is in general remarkable how much Byzantine –and Caliphal and Turkic – persons and locations figure in Armenian

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<sup>455</sup> Arutjunova-Fidanjan, V. "L'image de l'empire Byzantin dans l'historiographie arménienne médiévale (Xe-XIes.)" in *L'Arménie et Byzance: histoire et culture. Byzantina Sorbonensia 12* (1996): 10-11.

<sup>456</sup> Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i, *History of Armenia*. Edited by Krikor H. Maksoudian, (Erevan, 1973), 190-191.

<sup>457</sup> Arutjunova-Fidanjan, V. *Les Arméniens chalcédoniens sur les frontières orientales de l'empire* (in Russian). (Erevan 1980), 15-17.

historiography, as compared to the historiographies produced within Byzantium or the Caliphate.<sup>458</sup> The thought-world of Armenian intellectuals was not closed or isolated; it was deeply interpenetrated with the activities of the polities which surrounded Armenia.

This interpenetration is visible in non-historiographical texts as well. Grigor Narekatc'i, in his hagiographic description of the Cross of Aparank', narrates the deposit of a relic of the True Cross at Aparank' during Easter 983 which was attended by the three brothers from the Artsruni house who were then ruling the principality of Vaspurakan (namely, Ashot-Sahak, Gurgen-Kach'ik, and Sennacherim-John). Aparank' is an isolated site, difficult to reach during the winter, and the presence of the kings of Vaspurakan for the arrival and installation of a Byzantine relic implies both respect for and close diplomatic relations with the empire.<sup>459</sup> Narekatc'i writes in his description of the ceremony that, "the divine will is clear: it is that the empire of the Romans, spread out like the sky across the vast surface of the whole world, will gather in its ample bosom innumerable multitudes..."<sup>460</sup> This is not only a positive view of individual Byzantine emperors, but a positive, even triumphalist vision of Byzantine imperial expansion, which Narekatc'i seems to invoke as being inevitable, the will of God. These contemporaries of Grigor Magistros, both historiographers and poets and monks like Narekatc'i, are also demonstrating an appreciation for and political alignment with – at least in a literary sense – Byzantium; however, a literary appreciation is not a guarantee or even necessarily an implication of political *alliance*, or of being 'pro-Byzantine' in terms of fundamental

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<sup>458</sup> Arutjunova-Fidanjan, V. "L'image de l'empire Byzantin dans l'historiographie arménienne médiévale (Xe-XIes.)", 14.

<sup>459</sup> Greenwood, "Armenian Neighbors", 359.

<sup>460</sup> Grigor Narekatc'i, *The Cross of Aparank'*, in *Discourses*, ed. Awetik'ean, p.11.

emotional loyalties<sup>461</sup>. It is instead better read as a signal of awareness of a complex political situation in which the presence of Byzantine imperial power was significant and necessary to grapple with, both intellectually and culturally.

While the bare narrative of Grigor Magistros' political career can be read as 'pro-Byzantine', claims that he was complicit in the dismantling of Armenian sovereignty – which emerged as early as the twelfth-century Armenian historian Samuel Anets'i, who alleged that Grigor had been allied with Petros Getadarj and Vest Sargis in the betrayal of Gagik II in Constantinople<sup>462</sup>, have been thoroughly discounted by modern historians like Hrach' Bart'ikian.<sup>463</sup> Furthermore, Grigor's acceptance of Byzantine titleature does not mark him out as unique amongst Armenians; nor does his record of service for the Byzantines. Nina Garsoian's seminal article, "The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire", which follows on from Peter Charanis's *The Armenians in the Byzantine Empire*, amply demonstrates that Armenian presence in Byzantine service is longstanding and complex. Armenians had been moving within Byzantine space and serving Byzantine interests long before the eleventh century. Armenians usually made their way into imperial society via the military<sup>464</sup>; they served in the army at every level, and were often accused of indiscipline, rebellion, or treason in Byzantine

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<sup>461</sup> Dagron, "Minorites ethniques", 211-12.

<sup>462</sup> Samuel Anets'i, *Hawak'munk' i grots' patmagrats'* (A Compilation from Historical Writings), ed. A. Ter Mik'ayelian (Vagharshapat, 1893), 107.

<sup>463</sup> H.M. Bart'ikyan, "Grigor Magistrosi k'aghak'akan koghmnosroman karts'i shurjč" (Concerning Gregory Magistros' Political Orientation), in *Ejer hay zhoghovrdi patmut'yan ev banasirut'yan, Hodvatsneri Zhoghovatsu* (Erevan, 1971), 63-72.

<sup>464</sup> Garsoian, Nina. "The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire", 61-63.

historiographical sources.<sup>465</sup> They often received Byzantine titles for their service, and the assignment of Byzantine titulature was for a long time used to Byzantinize Armenians: to integrate them into Byzantine society and encourage assimilation. This sort of integration is visible as early as the reign of Heraclius.<sup>466</sup> Three Armenian inscriptions dated to the 630s all give a regnal year of Heraclius and assign to him a laudatory epithet, and each of the founders named in these inscriptions also possess a Byzantine title. The titles range from decidedly middle-grade (*illustris*) to quite powerful (David Saharuni, the founder of a church at Mren, is titled *patrikios*, *kouropalates*, and *sparapet*).<sup>467</sup> This is a sign of Byzantine investment in Armenian clients, and it would continue throughout the next several hundred years: worth noting are the titles granted to the Armenian lord Mleh (known to the Byzantines as Melias), detailed in the *De Administrando Imperio*'s chapter on dealing with Armenian clients. Mleh was given military command by Leo VI, and after a number of successes, he was appointed *strategos* of the theme of Lykandos in 915 CE.<sup>468</sup> Mleh is thus given administrative and legal identity within the Byzantine state; he was a local lord whose acquisition of Byzantine titulature gave a Byzantine veneer to his successes and allowed for further Byzantine penetration into the East.<sup>469</sup> Neither was Grigor Magistros the first of his family to hold titles like *magistros* – or even the first Pahlavuni to hold *that* title. His uncle Vahram, the *sparapet* of the Bagratuni kingdom at Ani, is accorded the title based

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<sup>465</sup> Though this accusation may have been an example of convenient scapegoating: see Jean-Claude Cheynet, . *Pouvoir et Contestations À Byzance (963-1210)*. Publications de La Sorbonne 9. (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1990),348, noting the loyalties of the Armenians to Romanos IV Diogenes.

<sup>466</sup> Greenwood, "Armenian Neighbors," 340.

<sup>467</sup> Greenwood (2004), inscriptions A.4, A.5, and A.7, pp. 43-7, 62-78.

<sup>468</sup> *DAI*, ch. 50, pp. 238-41.

<sup>469</sup> Greenwood, "Armenian Neighbors", 352.

on the evidence of an inscription at the monastery of Marmashen.<sup>470</sup> Grigor Magistros' acceptance of a Byzantine title is clearly not unusual within the Armenian aristocracy, and is not a sign of particular or outsize loyalty to Byzantium – rather, it is part of a long-standing record of Armenians in Byzantine service, and a sign of both Armenian willingness to accept title and power from Byzantium when this was politically expedient, and Byzantine willingness to render Armenian actions on the eastern frontier 'Byzantinized', and thereby integrate new local powers into the superstructure of Byzantine authority.

We must move away from titlature to cultural assimilation to more closely examine Grigor Magistros' attempts to negotiate Byzantine presence in Armenian cultural space. A significant and useful metric of Armenian cultural assimilation to Byzantium is doctrinal difference, as the Byzantines were Chalcedonian and the Armenians determinedly not so. The ecclesiastical quarrel between the sects formed a consistent basis for Armeno-Byzantine interaction, as well as for polemic directed from either side toward the other.<sup>471</sup> Conversion to Chalcedonian Orthodoxy clearly was one route to a successful career in the upper echelons of the Byzantine military or civil aristocracy,<sup>472</sup> but it was not required – and the choice to remain a non-Chalcedonian while accepting other signals of Byzantine acculturation like titles, honors, and territories demonstrates a complex affinity for cultural markers of 'Armenianity'. This is in fact what Grigor Magistros achieved: he maintained non-Chalcedonian faith throughout his life. This

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<sup>470</sup> Terian, *Magnalia Dei*, 9.

<sup>471</sup> Garsoian, "The Problem of Armenian Integration," 68ff.

<sup>472</sup> Conversion was certainly a prerequisite for certain forms of integration into Byzantine society, like intermarriage, especially with the imperial family or other powerful aristocratic houses.

choice is visible in the names of his children and grandchildren:<sup>473</sup> all of his offspring have early Armenian names like Vahram, Vasak, and Nerses, and when Vahram was elected to the Catholicosate, he selected the name of Grigor – in honor, perhaps, of his father, but more pointedly, in remembrance of the name of Grigor Lusavorich, the Illuminator, who legendarily brought Christianity to Armenia and back to whom the Pahlavunis traced their ancestry.

How would Grigor Magistros portray his own complex web of loyalties and cultural affinities? His letter collection – which is a presentation of a constructed self, a self which travels to friends and colleagues over distances and is both designed and deliberately projected – demonstrates the multivalence of his loyalties, and his attempts to move through a Byzantinized cultural space while maintaining both his own autonomy and some of his Armenian cultural markers. We have already seen Grigor's profound attachment to and easy employment of Byzantine modes of writing in his letters; but the content of those letters also includes information on the practical ways that he negotiated Byzantine presence in Armenian spheres.

The letters shed some light on Grigor's involvement with the intense politicking surrounding the ascension – and then dethronement under Byzantine hands – of Gagik II. Grigor describes a relationship with the young king which is quite severely strained, but not on grounds of pro- or anti-Byzantine feeling – precisely. Grigor writes that the king is youthful, inexperienced, and overly influenced by "infamous courtiers"<sup>474</sup> – who might in fact be Grigor's own son-in-law, Vest Sargis, and his close friend, Petros Getadarj, both of whom certainly had moments of pro-Byzantine political affiliation (though Vest Sargis

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<sup>473</sup> Garsoian, "The Problem of Armenian Integration," 99.

<sup>474</sup> Magistros, *T'ght'ere*, pp. 52-53, 67-69.



seems to have employed this affiliation for his own political gain in Ani, and Getadarj was embroiled in negotiations concerning the unity or disunity of the Chalcedonian Orthodox church in Constantinople and the non-Chalcedonian Catholicosate of Armenia). These "infamous courtiers" have influenced Gagik II against Grigor Magistros. This is more demonstrative of the internecine fighting at the court of Ani, in which different branches of the Pahlavuni family attempted to jockey for position behind different factions of the Bagratunis, than it is demonstrative of some pro-Byzantine impulse of Grigor Magistros which poisoned him against Gagik II. In fact, the most significant evidence in the letters of the strain in the relationship between Gagik II and Grigor, a letter in reply to Gagik II's offer of reconciliation, is a rebuff on Grigor's part: he claims that he could not associate with a king who is surrounded by such troublesome individuals.<sup>475</sup> Grigor's political entanglements at the court of Ani are not, from the evidence of his letter collection, presented by Grigor as being *about* the presence of Byzantium. They are instead about Grigor's personal interactions with members of the court whose shifting and multivalent loyalties sometimes intersected with Byzantine interests.

The record in the letter collection of Grigor's service once he had obtained a Byzantine title is also worth examination: which events, accomplishments, and commands does he find worth mentioning when describing his service in epistolary communication? It is first clear that Grigor's 1048-49 military service for the Byzantines, in which he was sent on campaign by the Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos against the Seljuk Turks along with the generals Katakalon Kekaumenos and Liparit, is *not*

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<sup>475</sup> Magistros, *T'ght'ere*, pp. 62-63.

mentioned significantly in the letters. We primarily know about this campaign from the historiographical sources, both Byzantine and Armenian<sup>476</sup>. What is present in Grigor's letters are claims of infrastructure rebuilding in his newly assigned territories in Byzantine Mesopotamia, which he describes as being well-known in that area. This letter, addressed to Sargis Vardapet, claims that Grigor had constructed towns, villages, palaces, and churches in Mesopotamia and Casparakan, and has kept the southern flank of his territory free from invasion by the Seljuk Turks.<sup>477</sup> What is important to Grigor in this communication is that he is portraying himself as a competent administrator and defender of territory; it is not significant that this territory is no longer his ancestral land of Bjni, but instead territory in Mesopotamia given to him by the Byzantine empire. It is worth noting that this is a report of his activities to a fellow member of the Armenian aristocracy, not to a Byzantine; yet, it is still important to Grigor to demonstrate that he is taking excellent administrative care of his holdings.

The action during his tenure as *doux* of Mesopotamia which Grigor best described in his letters is, in fact, his suppression of the T'ondrakians, which he discusses in three letters, the longest and most detailed being addressed to the Catholicos of the Syrians at Amida (Letter K67), who had shown some support for members of the sect. This letter is essentially a heresiological letter, in which the heretical tendencies of the T'ondrakians are explained in vicious detail. Most significantly, however, Grigor asks the Syrian catholicos to not show the T'ondrakians any mercy. In the following letter, K68, Grigor describes his suppression of the sect with pride, and explicitly associates this suppression

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<sup>476</sup> Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 366-7; Aristakes Lastiverts'i, *Recit des malheurs*, 11-25; Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia and the Crusades* 44-9.

<sup>477</sup> Magistros, *T'ght'ere*, 65.

with the command of the Byzantine emperor Monomachos, on whose orders he had gone to T'ondrak, their stronghold, and endeavored to root out "the hidden embers of wickedness". He specifically associates his admonishments of the T'ondrakians with the Byzantine command to adhere to imperial Orthodoxy: "Leave us and our land in Mesopotamia, and all who are under the supremacy of the holy kingdom of the Romans, in peace and quiet – teach and confirm your evil heresy neither by writing nor by speech."<sup>478</sup> It is by Byzantine command that Grigor is engaged in this suppression and it is Byzantine authority which he invokes in completing it. However, he also takes credit for his own personal contribution, making explicit that he is *not* a Byzantine: he claims that he did not harm any of the heretics physically, but instead was merciful to them, in opposition to the violent punishments inflicted on them by previous Byzantine generals in Mesopotamia, who commonly put out their eyes or murdered them outright.<sup>479</sup> In describing his activities to his fellow Armenians, Grigor does not shy away from acknowledging the authority under which he is operating – he is clearly working in the Byzantine interest – but he nevertheless maintains a personal autonomy and individual differentiation from that authority.

Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni was undoubtably Hellenophile, fluent in and enamored with a classical Greek education which animated his life as a teacher and scholar, and equally fluent in and enamored with Byzantine-style literary communication and maintenance of cultural ties. What is less clear from his letter collection is whether this Hellenophilia can be read as Byzantinophilia; Grigor's political activity is dependent on the shifting and multivalent Armenian *Realpolitik* of alliances and necessity which

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<sup>478</sup> Magistros, K68, p. 148.

<sup>479</sup> Sanjian, "Grigor Magistros: an Armenian Hellenist", 137.

characterizes the eleventh century, and when he describes his service to Byzantine masters in his letters, he does not demonstrate an affection for Byzantine imperial policy as much as a employment of the portions of Byzantine culture which he found valuable, while attempting to maintain personal and cultural loyalty to his own native Armenia.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

When taken together, these three case studies – the letter collections of a diplomat, a plenipotentiary governor, and a non-Byzantine nobleman with a Byzantine title – display a reaction to Byzantine imperialist ideology which is deeply rooted in the maintenance of community and culture despite outside pressures. This maintenance is performed through the exchange of letters which are literary objects. As a literary object, the letter is a site where its author reiterates rhetorical tropes which signal his membership in a coterie – an in-group with shared training, aesthetics, and cultural values. When letters are exchanged, both sender and receiver experience a strengthening of these in-group ties. For the men who composed the letters which make up these case studies, those ties reinforced and responded to a vision of the world which was ideologically charged by centuries of Byzantine universalist imperialism. Therefore, the work of maintaining imperial ideology is visible in these letter collections. They are written by people whose life-experiences included challenges to the normative image of the Byzantine empire, and who were invested in either maintaining that normative image or defending themselves from its imposition. Their letters are a record of how they used personal communication to shore up an internal ideological picture of how the world ought to function, even when their actual experience of the world belied ideology. For these letter-writers, Byzantine imperialism is an active force in the world, but one which must be maintained by its performance. The Byzantine Romans amongst them performed Byzantine imperialism by writing to one another; Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni, a Hellenophile but not a Byzantinophile, does not precisely perform Byzantine imperialism

but nevertheless is a participant in a discourse of exchange which relies on Byzantine cultural norms to function.

Choirosphaktes and Ouranos are both invested in the maintenance of Byzantine imperial ideology – in preserving *taxis* where it might come under assault. These assaults occurred in places where the line between the *oikumene* and the uncivilized world was blurred: on the frontier and when interacting with *barbaroi*. The letter collection of Nikephoros Ouranos shows how the experience of the frontier was communicated back to the metropole. Ouranos uses letters to maintain relationships which he had before he was sent to serve on the frontier. He writes to the Metropolitan of Nikomedia both while he is Keeper of the Imperial Inkstand in Constantinople and when he is *doux* in Antioch, and the latter letter is a long discourse on the experience of being in a kind of exile out on the edges of the empire, complete with rhetorical invocation of Homer. Ouranos also uses letters to improve and maintain his relationships with other Byzantine agents stationed in the East. In these letters, which are often brief and formulaic, but are nevertheless written at a high emotional pitch characteristic of the language of friendship, Ouranos establishes a relationship with other Byzantines who are similarly 'exiled' to the East, and reinforces their perceptions of their shared culture. Both kinds of letters are ideologically performative, and both reinforce the presence of Byzantine imperial ideology even in locales where that ideology is challenged on a daily basis by encounters with non-Byzantine environments, peoples, and administrative structures. By participating in epistolary exchange, Ouranos and his correspondents bring Constantinopolitan culture outside of Constantinople; they carry Byzantinity wherever they have been stationed, no matter how alien.

On diplomatic mission in Bulgaria, Choirosphaktes encountered Symeon I, whose position as a Constantinopolitan-educated, Greek-speaking monarch of a 'barbarian' polity was innately problematic to Byzantine imperial ideology. Symeon's acculturation to Byzantine norms was simultaneously desirable and destabilizing: while his acquisition of Byzantine Roman cultural markers reinforced the possibility that Byzantium was in fact universal in power and capable of suborning all other polities, it also became problematic when Symeon refused to be suborned, and instead posed a legitimate threat to Byzantine power in the Balkans. Symeon was neither *Rhomaioi* nor entirely *barbaroi*. Choirosphaktes' 'letters' to Symeon are a Byzantine attempt to return Symeon to his appropriate place in the schema of Byzantine universalist empire. They accomplish this through proving that Symeon was not capable of being a member of the in-group which comprised the audience of the Byzantine letter: i.e. he was not able to function as someone who had had the rhetorical training which was necessary to read and appreciate the letter as a literary object.

Choirosphaktes' letters to Symeon are not addressed, ultimately, to Symeon. They are instead addressed to the audience of Choirosphaktes' peers in Constantinople who would have heard them read aloud in a *theatron*. It is for this audience that Choirosphaktes is engaged in making Symeon a barbarian. Even if he is able to threaten Byzantine imperial power, he cannot become Byzantine Roman, because he is a stranger to the tropic and rhetorical statements of what being Byzantine Roman is. In writing these letters, Choirosphaktes makes use of the *form* of the Byzantine letter – which is a method of collapsing distance and reifying the correct image of the world – in order to show his audience that *taxis* has been preserved. The letter is expected to be able to act as an

instrument of *taxis*; even though the Symeon-Choirosphaktes correspondence is not aimed at convincing *Symeon* of his proper place in the imperialist conception of the world, it nevertheless is convincing to Choirosphaktes' Constantinopolitan peers. The reception of letters as acts of public rhetoric enable this reinforcement of Byzantine imperial ideology, despite the very real experience of Symeon as a cultural threat.

In relationship with these two case studies, the letters of Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni present a useful counterpoint. Grigor is not invested in maintaining Byzantine imperial ideology; he instead must cope with the presence of that ideology in the form of Byzantine efforts to dismantle independent Armenian sovereignty in the mid-eleventh century. Nevertheless, he is aesthetically compelled by Greek literature and philosophy. This aesthetic appreciation is widely visible in his letters, which, in their employment of referentiality and use of epistolographic tropes like the idea of the letter as an image of the soul of the sender, are particularly Byzantine despite being written in Armenian and mostly addressed to other Armenians. In Grigor's letters Byzantine imperialism exists as a constant undercurrent which problematizes his employment of Greek literary culture in communicating with his fellow Armenians. Byzantinity is suggested by Grigor's epistolary production, which makes use of Byzantine letter-writing tropes. Coupled with Grigor's political career, his shifts of loyalty between strictly Armenian and Byzantine power, his letters present a view of Byzantine imperialism as a kind of mimetic infusion. Was Grigor threatened by Byzantine imperialism? His choices in composing letters to other Armenians suggest that if he was, this threat was not as important to him as was the aesthetic pull of Greek literature and culture.



All three of these case studies present the defense of community ties as being an activity which requires work. On the edges of the Byzantine empire, being or staying Byzantine Roman was not an effortless process. The encounter between *Rhomaioi* and *barbaroi* required a constant action of contextualization and reinforcement of the normative ideal of Byzantine universal rule in order to not be ideologically traumatic. In the letter collections of Byzantine imperial agents, some of this action is made visible to the historian, through the constructed and presented selves of the letter-writers, who are engaged in performing ideology in order to preserve their sense of stable cultural community.

APPENDIX I: AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF LEO CHOIROSPHAKTES,  
LETTERS 1-14

**Letter I** – *From Symeon, archon of the Bulgars, to Leo, magistros and ambassador during his first embassy to that place.*

Your most-wonderful emperor, having disclosed secrets to us two years ago, brought to light the solar eclipse and its timing, not only as far as which month, but which week, the hour, and the very moment; and even showed the duration of the eclipse of the sun. But they say that he knows many things of the motions and movements of heaven. If these things are true, and he knows about the hostage-taking, and knowing, spoke to you, as to whether I will hold them or release them. Now, tell me which of the two and if you come to know my internal opinion, you have the prize of both the prediction and the embassy, God knows, to receive the captives. Be well.

**Letter II** – *From Leo, magistros, to the archon of the Bulgars.*

You are ahead of yourself in communicating what you've communicated, most philanthropic of archons. Therefore we are not communicating through living voice, for the most precarious speech is that which is translated by an interpreter from one to another. We predict in writing the that you would free the Byzantine hostages, possessing them further in no way, but rather you will let them go, [compelled] neither by gifts nor by fines. And you will do this following the example of your divine father. For who would be able to constrain you concerning this, you having both an innate and self-chosen enmity toward evil, and an opinion set firm against it. You have our prediction, and you will do such things. Be well.

**Letter III** – *From Symeon, archon of the Bulgars, to Leo, magistros.*

Magistros Leo, you didn't know the secret of the future, writing to us the things which you wrote. Moreover, your astrologer emperor in no way knew the coming future. Now I was having in mind, God knows, the returning of the hostages. But now I will not return them, since, neither knowing the future, nor knowing falsely that I would not release them, you cannot take the prize for his prediction. Be well.

**Letter IV** – *From Leo, magistros, to Symeon, archon of the Bulgars.*

If you had secretaries who could transcribe well, most philanthropic of archons, or if you were of those who make use of appropriate punctuation, you would know, yes, you would know that, reading our letter, we, knowing the future, explained this to you through it. For it had it thus: "You will release the hostages, holding onto them in no way". Therefore if they punctuated for you after the ἀποστελεῖς, then the οὐδαμῶς pertains to κατέχων αὐτήν and if they had not passed by the apodosis, acting incorrectly and punctuating quite close to the negative particle, but rather had placed the οὐ negative upon the δώροις δὲ ἢ τιμήμασιν, and then also if the ἦτα now having the power of a conjunction, not in any way whatsoever used as a disjunction, you would have learned that we had written that you would not give, but rather would release the hostages, without gifts or some tribute.

And in order that I might make visible the remaining things, if they had not construed badly the ἀντιμimούμενος and the βιάσασθαι and the αὐθαίρετον and the ἐνδιάθετον and

the πόλεμον and the ἀντικαθεζομένην γνώμην κακοῖς and even the ἀντὶ as meaning 'equal', and not 'opposite', and also misconstrued the remaining words about the spirit and battle, but rather had understood that it was about your opinion – which is battling and throwing out the evil and inhumanity in your former decision. Then I myself would be able to be praised as one who knew the future and its secrets; and not only would I be able to be praised but to receive back the hostages, which is the prize for my prediction.

**Letter V** – *From Symeon, archon of the Bulgars, to Leo, magistros*

Magistros Leo, I did not promise concerning the hostages. Nor did I prattle of anything to you. Nor will I release them, especially since you do not know the future clearly.

**Letter VI** – *From Leo, magistros, to Symeon, archon of the Bulgars*

I have received in my hands your letter, o greatest of archons, which was as follows: οὐχ ὑπεσχόμην περὶ αἰχμαλώτων ἃ οὐ σοὶ ἐλάλησά τι ἃ οὐκ ἐξαποστελῶ. Now I will make into a letter of agreement the starting-point of your refusal – concerning this, the first colon after the second negative particle is placed at the end, like so: *I didn't promise nothing concerning the hostages*, instead of *I did not promise **no***, but rather *yes*, in which, according to Stagerites, two negatives customarily become an agreement. Further, one must read the σοὶ ἐλάλησας agreeably, just as if you wrote, *You know what I said to you*. And if one gives to the τί an interrogative sense, and then carrying through the οὐκ ἐξαποστελῶ ironically, I might have made the whole power of your words into your accustomed philanthropic beneficence. But someone might say that he makes an

ambiguous way of reading. But to the one who says this, I would say the following.

Ambiguous, yes; since there are many ways of reading it. And if it is ambiguous, let philanthropy be victorious. And philanthropy releases the hostages. So release them. For you are just with your philanthropy, which has been seen clearly by everyone. And if somebody should wish to go the whole of your letter with this appropriate punctuation, then he would not find the meaning of your letter unadorned.

**Letter VII** – *To Leo, Magistros, from Symeon, archon of the Bulgars*

Having received two ways of reading from me, which at once transform your meaning into an ambiguous one, now receive a third, which is different from the others. For taking *I have not promised* as sarcastic, and reading from *concerning the hostages* to *I said to you* with the adoption of an injured tone, I will think that the remaining τί οὐκ ἐξαποστελῶ was completely interrogative, since, just as you took all of them, you will release all of them, and thus we might think that this letter, which seems inhumane to the unlearned, is the most humane, being similar to both your opinion and your nature. Be well.

**Letter VIII** – *The same, to Symeon, archon of the Bulgars.*

One knows, o marvelous archon, that God knows how to turn the tongue in the wrong direction toward contradictions, since we might wish to choose the falsehood over the truth, and inhumaneness over humaneness; books convey this, and life points out these things over and over. Now God not only changes speaking or the thought before speaking, but also the hand which was writing unjust things in that other letter. For there is writing

without ambiguity, even if someone should force what has been written to change to another meaning. Having this ability to be read in three ways, instead of one, your first communication is a proof of divine providence, which oversees all things, both law-abidingness and hubris, according to the poet [Homer, Od. P487]. You have God directing you, and your own hand having been moved by Him, wrote some things instead of others, ambiguously, against you – or rather, *for* you, somehow. Farewell.

**Letter IX** – *The same, to Symeon, archon of the Bulgars*

We understood the secret of your letter, greatest of archons, even if we might make the reading contrary to you. You love to be believed by all completely as a true man who lives virtuously, and you attempt this in reference to what you write. And if someone will believe things written down without humaneness, because he doesn't have a mind, and because he doesn't assume that you are good, you wouldn't listen, feeling rightly that you were hateful to him, having been abused by hubris. And if he wouldn't believe what is written thus, because he does have a mind, and assuming that you are good, you would be honored and enchanted by his friendship, you would pay heed to him. Now we have not believed that you are wicked, and because of this we will be loved; and being loved, we might find those things that are dear to you; and it is dear to you to release the hostages. Farewell.

**Letter X** – *The same, to Symeon, archon of the Bulgars.*

Man is double, greatest of archons, I mean, arising from both the body and from the soul. And language is double also, an utterance and a written thing, both intellectual and

residing in the mind. Sometimes, indeed sometimes, the utterance and the written thing follow from what resides in the mind and from the soul, we might believe them to be true, and having believed, we might be content; but wherever they do not follow, we will not believe it and we will send it away from ourselves. But now, recognizing that the utterance and the written thing do not follow from what resides in the mind and from the intellect, we, not being content, deny them. But someone says, "How do you know what resides in the mind?" And I might say, "From good actions." For wherever the deeds of a man are good, it is thought that also the writings are good. But if the one who sends is good right down to the soul, and if everyone agrees with this through his deeds; but if the things written only once are not good, then we might say they are approved of but not true, and childish play not in earnest, or else a false step of the secretary, not of the one who orders the writing. For no one of the good knows how to fight himself, nor does the utterance carry the battle to the internal thought, nor some singular deed fight with his daily habits. For this is of those who are disordered because of evil, against themselves and us and other people. Farewell, farewell to me, you who are not double as concerns language nor double in mixture.

**Letter XI** – *From the same, to Symeon, archon of the Bulgars.*

The whiteness and purity, magnificent archon, which you have in the depths of your nature and which every day you increase and confirm in thought, are not able to be conquered by letters from darkness; for the one is bred-in and hard-to-get-rid-of, but the other, coming into being through skill applied through a suitable manner, is fading and can be washed out by water. I know well that the natural thing will remain, and what is

appearance and craft in such a letter will be expunged. For neither is glass able to conquer the translucency of precious stone, nor a dyed thing conquer a flower, nor a portrait conquer life, nor a house heaven. Thus writing is not victorious from darkness, just as, coming first, the word appears from the soul, since it is not possible for appearance and the possession of craft to conquer nature. Farewell.

**Letter XII** – *From the same, to Symeon, archon of the Bulgars.*

You are confident in the truth, most truthful of archons, and confident in praiseable things; you wish also that your word to be believed not in equal measure like that of others; yes, and you wish what seems to be your denial to be out of play, and to be considered the same as if it was a true acceptance from other people. Now the letter, being truthful in fact, reveals, although it seems to deceive through words, so that a false mythos in which you are playing a joke skillfully, speaking like a comic poet, would be above the alleged truth of others. And this is a wonder, and a weight of philanthropy, so that if thinking to lie, you speak truthfully, you having verified someone who is able to have believed, that you have ever yet lied? O, lying writer, let truth be within your power! Thus thinking to lie you speak truthfully, and being truthful you turn back again from falsehood. Farewell.

**Letter XIII** – *Leoo, magistros, proconsul, patrician, to Symeon, archon of the Bulgars.*

Even as I am just able to understand, that you had informed your father and emperor, that you would release the hostages which you have in captivity. You wrote to us that you would not release them, so that we might think this reading to be opposed to you. Now,



keep your promise toward your most philanthropic father, but not [the promise] toward his servant (namely, myself), playing at denial, both on the one hand deserving of the fulfillments of your virtue, and on the other wishing the good and the destined not to prevail via the extreme and the evil. For in this way you will completely prove yourself and your father un-insulted, and you will inherit an undying reward. And you will not prove us only without pain as not supplanted, but you will procure [for me] victory in being a good ambassador. Farewell.

**Letter XIV** – *Leo, magistros, proconsul and patrician, to Symeon, archon of the Bulgars.*

I received your letter, not marked with the sign of the cross as is habitual, and I marvel at the greatness and fame of your truth-telling, at how that small letter was ambiguous, and at the unengraved sign of the cross, the truth of which was not quietly implied in any way at all. Now we will believe, regarding what you have written down, that it is not only the most humane and unambiguous and for your father and emperor, but also that even if there is no mark, you intended to cross it, as is custom. And we do not believe your letter, or rather, this small childish delay, because it seems to be the entire opposite of what was obtained first.

## APPENDIX II: A PROSOPOGRAPHY OF OURANOS' NAMED CORRESPONDENTS

The following prosopographical list follows the numbering of Ouranos' letters as given in Darrouzès.

ANASTASIOS, metropolitan of Laodicea in Syria (L3)

- Attested by a c. 1000 CE seal which reads 'Mother of God, Theotokos, help your servant, Anastasios metropolitan of Laodikaea'.

<http://db.pbw.kcl.ac.uk/pbw2011/entity/boulloterion/6152>

- Held his position as metropolitan during Ouranos' tenure as Keeper of the Imperial Inkstand (L3)

ANTHIMOS, protovestarios and krites (L13)

- Most likely the Anthimos who was krites of the hippodrome, attested in an early 10<sup>th</sup>-century seal in the Schlumberger collection (Schlumberger, *Sigillographie* p. 522, no. 2)

EUTHYMIOS, patrikios, anthypatos, vestarios (L4)

- Held these titles during Ouranos' tenure as Keeper of the Imperial Inkstand (L4)

GEORGIOS, son of the protovestarios (L1)

- Not otherwise attested.

GREGORY, metropolitan of Caesarea and synkellos (L6)

- This is likely Gregory of Nicaea who wrote a discourse on the baptism of the Jews (Darrouzes 220), see *Revue des Et. Byz.* 7, p. 64.

JOHN the CHARTOPHYLAX (L39)

- This John the Chartophylax will later be John III, Patriarch of Antioch. Thus we can date this letter to before October 4, 996, when he was named Patriarch of Antioch (*Yahya*, 445).

JOHN ORPHANOTROPHOS (L14, L16)

- Politician, died on Lesbos 13 May 1043; Psellos says he advised Basil II (*Chron.* 1:44 no.18.5-7). Much political intrigue in the 1030s etc.) see *EO* 30 (1931) and Lemerle, *Cinq etudes*.

JOHN OSTIARIOS, nephew of LEO the Protovestarios (L20, L25, L38, L43, L49, L50)

- Also a correspondent of Leo, Metropolitan of Synada. A eunuch, as the office of ostiarios is peculiar to eunuchs. Probably the nephew of Leo, protovestarios, the eunuch who commanded the imperial forces against the revolt of Bardas Skleros. Based in Constantinople since this office involved imperial ceremonial and ushering petitioners into the presence of the emperor.

The JUDGE OF THE COLONIAN THEME (L24)

- Probably Niketas, based on seal date: DO 55.1. 1577, dated to 1000 CE, publishing history: McGeer - Nesbitt - Oikonomides IV no. 48. 4

#### The JUDGE OF THE THRAKIAN THEME (L42)

- Not clearly identifiable.

#### LEO, protovestarios, krites of the Anatolian theme. (L2)

- A seal belonging to this individual is published in Nesbitt - Oikonomides III no. 71. 14 / DO 55.1. 2799, dated to 1038 CE.

#### LEO, anthypatos, patrikios (L17, L19)

- Based on the communication between Ouranos and Leo in L19, this Leo is most likely the katepano of Mesopotamia, attested in a seal as 'anthypatos, patrikios, and katepano of Mesopotamia' (DO 58.106. 3498).

#### MALAKEINOS, krites (L31, L33)

- Krites of the Anatolikon theme; also in seals DO 55.1. 2054, published in Nesbitt - Oikonomides III no. 86. 29. Also a correspondent of Leo the Metropolitan of Synada. Held the office of *protospatharios*, but in 997 CE he was accused of Bulgarian sympathies (Skylitzes, 343) and transferred (presumably to Anatolia.)

#### MANUEL, patrikios (L36)

- Not otherwise attested.

MANUEL, vestes (L40, L41)

- Not otherwise attested.

MICHAEL, kyr (L48)

- Not otherwise attested.

MICHAEL KEKLASMENOS, protospatharios (L8)

- Not otherwise attested.

The METROPOLITAN OF SEBASTEIA (L23)

- Possibly Georgios, mentioned in Alexios Stoudites 19.17, 26.9

NICHOLAS, metropolitan of Neocaesarea (L15, L21, L26)

- Politician, died on Lesbos 13 May 1043; Psellos says he advised Basil II (*Chron.* 1:44 no.18.5-7). Much political intrigue in the 1030s etc.) see *EO* 30 (1931) and Lemerle, *Cinq etudes*.

NIKETAS, metropolitan of Amasia (L12, L18)

- This is the same metropolitan who was involved heavily in the politics around the ascension of the patriarch Sinnisius.

PAUL, krites (L29, L30, L33, L35)

- Almost certainly, based on the contents of the letters, Paul the *krites* of the Armeniac themes, who was also protospatharios and kourator, and who is attested in a seal published in McGeer - Nesbitt - Oikonomides IV no. 56. 10 (DO 47.2.47)

PETROS, protovestarios and krites (L22)

- Possibly the Petros whose c.1000 CE seal (DO 55.1. 2728) attests him to be protovestarios and krites of the Boukellarion.

PHILETOS SYNADENOS, krites of Tarsus (letters not preserved)

POTHOS, protospatharios and nephew of the augustalios (L11)

- This is possibly Pothos Monomachos, who has a seal bearing this title (Fogg 1542), and who was later appointed krites of the Anatolikon theme.

STEPHEN, metropolitan of Nikomedia (L5, L7, L9, L47)

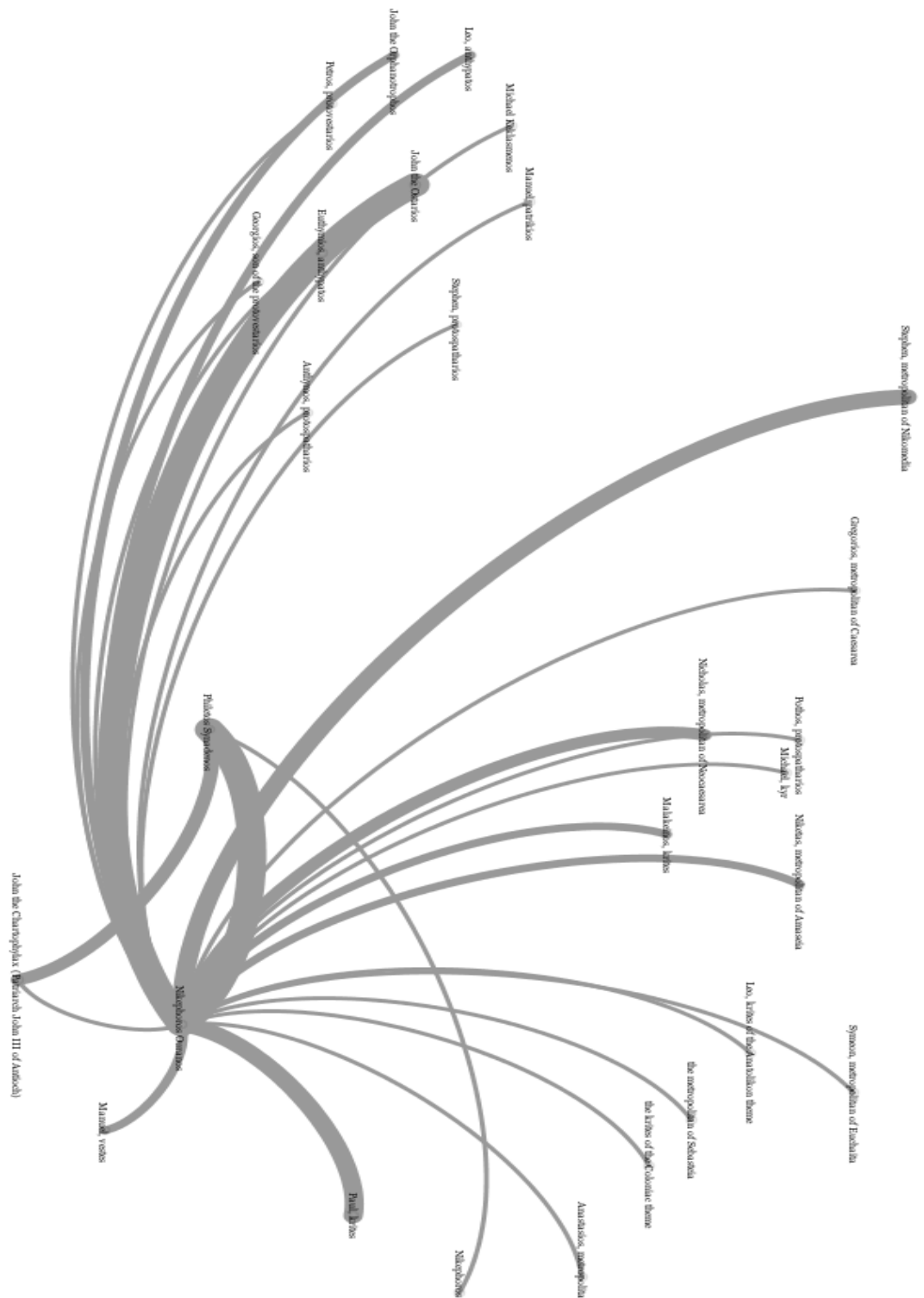
- This is the infamous Stephen who was extremely involved in political affairs both inside and outside of Constantinople. In 975 he was sent to negotiate with Bardas Skleros to get him to lay down arms (Skylitzes 317); in 1003 CE he got involved in a dispute over the cult of Symeon Studites with Symeon the New Theologian (this episode appears in the *Life* of Symeon the New Theologian, edited by Hausherr). His seal exists (Laurent, *Corpus*, V, 1, p. 272, no. 378).

STEPHEN, protospatharios and aseketis (L10)

- Not otherwise attested.

SYMEON, metropolitan of Euchaita (L39)

- This Symeon is not one of the many metropolitans of Euchaita for whom there is a seal record. He likely predates Michael, metropolitan of Euchaita, who served c. 1005 CE.





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