The Byzantine Self

ABSTRACTS

Poetry to the Self: Individuality and Convention in Poems "eis heauton"

Floris Bernard (Ghent)

The poems "eis heauton" (to one's self) constitute a distinct genre of Byzantine poetry. Several authors wrote in the genre; those of the early and middle Byzantine periods will especially be treated in this paper. These poems are presented as introspections into the self. But which 'self' is portrayed here? To what degree is this self a generic self, shaped by the conventions of the genre, and to what degree can it reflect an individual's own voice. This paper attempts to provide an answer from two points of view. First, a study of this genre, together with related genres, can reveal the conventions that had an influence on self-expression. Second, the personal interests of the author may form a background to his selection of this medium. The paper will address the case of John Mauropous, whose poems "eis heauton", while clearly using the conventions of the genre, betray the desire of Mauropous to represent his own *ethos* and defend his peculiar position within the eleventh-century intellectual community.

Dia cheiros emou: the Byzantine Scribe between Reality and (Self-)Representation

Daniele Bianconi (Rome)

Any study concerning the realities and self-representation of Byzantine scribes must bring into question the categories pertaining to writing that Byzantium inherited from its ancient and late antique past and elaborated in its own peculiar way. Writing was, first of all, an *ergocheiron*, i.e. manual work that had to be done for monetary compensation and then offered to God. This was the case for both scribes of the first Christian communities and monks/scribes of the later Constantinopolitan *koinobia* tou Stoudiou and ton Hodegon. Compensation was always rather high and – thanks to the Christian rehabilitation of writing – was able to rescue both the act of writing and its labourers from the connotations of mere manual work. Consequently, those who claimed that writing was an intellectual practice did not refrain from collecting a salary by copying books. We know many penniless scholars, school professors and intellectuals – such as the so-called Anonymous Professor, John Mesarites or Gregory of Cyprus – who copied books for pay.

This continuous combination of practices and persons compromises the possibility of recognizing with any precision the social status of a particular scribe. Driven by all sorts of needs – Christian *askesis*, expiation, gain, necessity, poverty –not only monks, saints, and lay craftsmen, but also intellectuals, school professors, officials and even emperors worked as calligraphers.

By studying manuscript colophons and book-epigrams and by combining them with literary sources,

this paper will also try to reconstruct some scribal identities such as those of the monk-scribe, the scholar-scribe, the bibliophile-scribe, the artist-scribe etc. An attempt will be made to evaluate, also in a diachronic perspective, how central or important such skills were to one's own self-representation.

The Patron's "I": Art and Selfhood in Later Byzantine Dedicatory Epigrams

Ivan Drpić (Cambridge, MA)

Byzantine epigrammatic poetry constitutes a rich yet largely untapped resource for exploring the nexus of artistic patronage and self-representation in Byzantium. Focusing on the evidence of dedicatory epigrams from the twelfth to the fourteenth century, the present paper examines how these texts in their symbiotic relationship with images and objects construct, stage, and perform the patron's identity.

Most dedicatory epigrams in later Byzantium take the form of a personal prayer: the patron, speaking in his or her own voice, presents a pious gift to Christ, the Virgin, or a saint, and gives thanks for favors received in the past or asks for future favors or for the eternal repose of his or her soul in the hereafter. With their personal tone, affective diction, and the frequent use of an autobiographical mode, ultimately informed by the rhetorical genre of *êthopoiia* (character study), these inscribed prayers supply the patron with a dramatic persona, an "I", and hence may be read as a kind of ego-document in which personal devotion and self-representation are inextricably intertwined. In constructing an identity for the patron, dedicatory epigrams follow certain patterns, which can be plotted along two axes: the horizontal axis of social positioning and the vertical axis of devotion. In social terms, the patron's identity is typically defined through title, rank, and lineage. This emphasis on the conventional markers of status, which serve to determine the patron's place in a network of social relations and hierarchies, points to a mode of self-representation that privileges conformity over individuality. To look for more individualized forms of self-representation, one needs to turn to the vertical axis of devotion. It is in the realm of personal piety that the patron's "I" truly emerges as the bearer of a distinct self. This self is fundamentally relational insofar as it is constituted by its connectedness to a divine or saintly Other. Through a comparative analysis of textual and visual evidence, this paper explores some strategies of devotional self-fashioning available to Byzantine patrons.

The Philosopher's Self-Portrait in Thirteenth-Century Byzantium

Katerina Ierodiakonou (Athens)

Nikephoros Blemmydes is presented by his contemporaries as well as by the following generations of Byzantine scholars as the leading philosopher of his time, as someone who actually fulfilled the

role of a philosopher, as the true philosopher. But how did Blemmydes for his part choose to portray himself? Some modern scholars have described his twin autobiographies as religious and hagiographical, others as revealing the world of a neurotic. Still, is it also possible to detect in these self-portraits suggestive signs of a true philosopher's character and behaviour? How, if at all, does philosophy, feature in the events that, according to Blemmydes, gave significance to his existence? Would the narrative of his pursuit of virtue and wisdom recommend in any respect philosophy as a way of life? These are the issues addressed in this paper with a view to gaining a better understanding of the figure of the philosopher in thirteenth-century Byzantium.

Identities in Context: Social Belonging and the Built Environment in Byzantium

Fotini Kondyli (Amsterdam)

This paper considers the built environment as a means of investigating the relationship between self and society among non-elites in the Byzantine world. More specifically, I explore houses and graves as sites where identities were formed, transformed, and negotiated. I consider the function and the meaning of the architectural layout of houses, the activities associated with them, and the materials used in their construction. I reassess the idea that the Byzantine house was exclusively associated with the need for safety, privacy, separation and seclusion. For Byzantine houses must be understood as expressions of both the self and society where boundaries between the public and the private were often blurred. Similarly, graves and burial sites offer a unique opportunity to explore the importance of social belonging even after death. Although the deceased passed initially into the isolation of death, their family and community reaffirmed their ties with the dead through post-burial activities, including exhumation and re-deposition of the body. My aim is to highlight the need to consider the Byzantine self in context, where identities can be multiple and constantly shifting.

The Liturgical Formation of the Self

Derek Krueger (Greensboro, NC)

Byzantine religious experts and professionals understood that repetition effected the formation of interior religious dispositions. Thus, this paper explores Byzantine theories of subjectivation through liturgy, prayer, and interior dialogue in the period from the sixth to the eleventh century. The Eucharist was understood largely as a penitential rite. Liturgical hymnography composed for Lent offered Byzantine Christians models for knowledge of the self as sinner. Ritual repetition inculcated patterns of self-accusation and self-formation, as participants became the subjects of liturgy. Moving beyond Foucault's insight that Christian subjectivity emerged in acts of confession in monastic settings, this paper seeks to understand how collective confessional practices and the witnessing and patterning of anguished first-person performances of compunction effected the formation of the

self.

Vernacular as an Expression of the "Self"? Parallel Trends in Byzantine and Arabic literature

Maria Mavroudi (UC Berkeley)

The paper will examine whether the beginning of a written literature in the vernacular, attested from around the year 1100 onwards, also marks a shift in how the Byzantines experienced and expressed selfhood. The paper will examine the parallel trend of the emergence of a written literature in the Arabic vernacular evidenced around the same period and will seek explanations for this phenomenon as they may apply to both the Greek- and the Arabic-speaking world.

Voix littéraires des eunuques: Genre et identité de soi à Byzance

Charis Messis (Paris)

The objective of this paper is to follow the traces of two types of discourse in Byzantine literature: on the one hand, the stories of eunuchs, presented as autobiographical and as personal testimonies to their physical reality and sexuality, issued mainly by non-eunuch authors; on the other hand, the stories that reveal the true voices of eunuchs and the image they have of themselves in the literary creations sponsored or written by them and in the adoption of the perspective of non-eunuchs. In both cases, the voices of eunuchs are mediated by a strict grammar of gender that perpetuates stereotypes liable to reveal the attitudes of both eunuchs and, most importantly, non-eunuchs on aspects of sexual identity in Byzantium.

Expressions and Narratives in a Rhetorical Tradition

Stratis Papaioannou (Providence)

One's experience of oneself was defined in Byzantium by varied and often disparate elements: views and narratives, practices and relations, as well as possessions, contexts, and ritual. This paper will attempt to set some parameters for the study of Byzantine selfhood, especially in what pertained to the discursive creation of identity in the heavily rhetorical tradition of Byzantium. Attention will be paid to the limits imposed on first-person speech in rhetorical manuals and the liberties allowed by rhetorical practice.

Seals and Identity

Claudia Sode (Cologne)

Sigillography brings to our attention a host of individuals that would otherwise have remained unknown. Thousands of seals survive that bear, together with religious images, inscriptions indicating the name of their owner, a title and the office held. Based upon published seals, the paper investigates the contribution of lead seals to our understanding of identity in Byzantium. A large number of sigillographic studies have focused on an attempt to understand the motives that dictated an individual's choice of iconography. Homonymity, gender, family associations, or offices in the bureaucratic administration of the empire have been cited as determining factors in the selection of images for one's seals.

The geographic expansion of Byzantium in the tenth and eleventh centuries brought a host of populations within the empire's frontier which for the most part were not Greek-speaking, including Armenians, Georgians, and Christian Arabs. As a consequence, oriental languages appear on Byzantine seals. The seals often show an image of the Virgin or a saint on one side and an inscription on the other side, or they bear inscriptions on both sides. The legends can be in Arabic or Syriac, Armenian or Georgian alone or are sometimes "mixed" for instance in Arabic and Greek or Arabic and Syriac. The paper will discuss the function of inscriptions and images found on this kind of seal as a means to understanding an individual's or a group's ethnic, social, cultural and linguistic features. It will also look at Western sphragistic practices, which involved many iconographic features determining identity that are totally missing on Byzantine seals for reasons that still have to be explained.