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RHETORIC, EDUCATION AND LOCAL IDENTITY IN 11TH — 13TH CENTURIES' BYZANTIUM

Byzantine literature was largely seen in historiography as «Christian» and «medieval»; therefore, its Greek and Roman roots and continuity were often disregarded [Kaldellis 2007, p. 3–5]¹. Rhetoric was the dominant element in Byzantine intellectual culture, never more than in the twelfth century [Magdalino 1993, p. 335]. Above all, rhetoric was an instrument of politics [Dennis 1997, p. 131]. The flourishing of rhetoric had to do with snobbery, and hence the ambivalent social status, of those educated Byzantines who originated from the urban middle classes or local gentry and did not belong to the Comnenian «extended family» nobility [Magdalino 1993, p. 339]². Education was a career investment, and rhetoric skills presumably provided them patronage and promotion in imperial, ecclesiastic or magnate service.

Two factors determined the identity and the high social status of the elite during the Comnenian period — good birth (presumably as a reaction to increasing social mobility) and proficiency in Greek literacy. The latter was a privilege available only to the wealthy classes on the one hand, and an impetus in a political or church career on the other. Many sources of that time stress that books were relatively scarce and dispersed among different owners, which meant a narrowing of the availability of education. Reading was a private affair, with wisdom subordinate to wealth [Magdalino 1993, p. 339]. According to Theodore Prodrome, it was only John IX Agapetos, Patriarch of Constantinople (1111–1134), who managed to establish kind of a public library and scriptorium. Anyway, however, access to literacy and education remained a privilege, and book collections were small and isolated. It was centralized and managed in the capital — the upper echelons of the teaching profession formed a singular hierarchy.

The Byzantine schools were attached to Hagia Sophia (three senior scriptural *didaskaloi*) and other

churches of Constantinople (nine non-scriptural *didaskaloi*, among them — *maistor ton rhetoron, ipatos ton philosophon, nomophylax, didaskalos ton ethnon*, etc.). Therefore, the educational institutions got the name of Patriarchal School although governmental in their origin and mainly secular in their curriculum. Paul Magdalino stressed the non-institutionalized and partially informal character of the school and the private character of the transmission of knowledge; however, this seems so only if one compares the Byzantine educational system to the system of the contemporary European university. In addition, it is true that (like books) education still came most easily to those who were able to pay³. Nevertheless, it was an important social advance for the middle classes and provided them an opportunity to be incorporated into the imperial or ecclesiastical machine of administration. The above mentioned school produced a circle of trained rhetoricians who could be promoted to the different offices, especially in the Church.

The twelfth century was also very specific in the sense that the offices of bishops were largely received and held not by monks, but by the well-educated clergy of Constantinople. In a way, this phenomenon was predetermined not only by the revival of literacy, but also by the peculiarities of the ecclesiastic development of that time. Monastic circles, on one side, competed with the capital's educated clergy of Hagia Sophia on the other to be the spiritual leaders of the laity. The scandals that disrupted the monasteries of Mount Athos during the reign of Alexios I, causing numbers of Athonites to drift to Constantinople, created a climate in which the pretensions of monastic holy men, and the influence they enjoyed in lay society, tended to be viewed with suspicion as potentially heterodox [Magdalino 1993, p. 318]. Many monks were condemned during trials of heretics. Finally, monks became marginal to the theological debates of the twelfth century.

At the same time, this suspicion only emphasized the pastoral authority and social standing of the

¹ The same is true for the system of Byzantine *paideia*, which was, in fact, a later development of the Greek Hellenic school. The adoption of Christianity did not mean that the literary traditions of antiquity were forgotten or neglected.

² Although Magdalino writes that the rising merchant class could challenge the positions of the *literati*, these very *nouveaux riches* often cared about the proper education and career for their sons.

³ Although the introduction of *schedographia* at Orphanotropheion made education available to the lower social strata.



educated bishops coming from Constantinople. The patriarchates of John IX Agapetos (1111–1134) and Leo Stypes (1134–1143) strengthened the positions of the patriarchal clergy. The focus of the religiosity shifted from the ideal of individual salvation, monasticism and mysticism to the sense of Eucharistic community under the rule of bishops, which was reflected in the Byzantine church art (depictions of the Last Supper in the apses; the scene of the «Three Hierarchs» celebrating Episcopal wisdom became then quite popular). Art thus proclaimed the central role of the bishop in a Christian society by virtue of his mediating role between Christ and humankind, and the dignity of the Episcopal service was the issue of the eleventh — twelfth centuries [Angold 1995, p. 155]. Hence, the twelfth century became an epoch of the ecclesiastic domination of the *literati*, which actually meant trained rhetoricians. They were the ones who were appointed bishops and, more importantly, were the ones who acquired considerable influence over their flocks, able to speak to the imperial administration on behalf of their communities.

Though Comnenian bishops were often subjected to strong pressures, they gradually occupied a central role in Byzantine society. Sometimes the political significance of a bishop became really immense. For instance, the archbishop of Bulgaria was a key figure of the Byzantine policy of pacifying the local population there, and virtually a viceroy. Even in more modest cases, the hierarchs were the essential link between the local communities and central authority. In the whole twelfth century, the balance of power was shifting decisively towards the church [Angold 1995, p. 6]. Comnenian bishops had the advantages of education, culture, connections with the patriarchal see and a strong feeling of corporative self-identity, which is reflected in their correspondence [Angold 1995, p. 156]. Not only did they possess common background, they also kept in touch and were often well informed about the news from the capital and made use of it for their communities.

The revival of Classical learning in the tenth century seems to have spread to the provinces in the next two centuries with the diffusion of bishops and officers educated in the capital. The urban decline of the previous *Dark Ages* and, closer to the period in question, what Warren Treadgold called «Erratic government» [Treadgold 1997, p. 583] led to the situation where the bishop and his church were often all that was left of the civic tradition associated with *polis* [Angold 1995, p. 139]. Therefore, in spite of sometimes-disastrous state of their dioceses, those bishops could have felt themselves the keepers of

the traditions of antiquity. The education of these people included reading Classical literature about ancient cities and their glorious past. Later, having received official posts and been sent throughout the empire, they obviously and inevitably faced a different reality from that they knew from the sources of antiquity.

Their first reaction to the reality of the provincial cities was pessimistic. It is reflected in the «letters from the exile» of the Byzantine bishops. Margaret Mullett writes that exile often stimulated Byzantine intellectuals to write letters and that it was a characteristic theme of the epistolography of the Comnenian period [Mullett 1995, p. 39–58]⁴. Besides the technical inconveniences and lack of comfort, the *literati*, bound to each other by a common education and personal friendship dating back to their students' days in the capital, could hardly find the same level of culture and relevant society in the provinces. Later, a new discourse of complaining about the miserable state of once-great cities like Athens was introduced. However, if the eleventh-century bishops hardly ever mentioned their cities in their letters⁵, the twelfth-century the bishops were becoming increasingly aware of their pastoral responsibilities on the one hand [Angold 1995, p. 8], and showed a growing local consciousness, engagement with their dioceses, and care about their communities both in their letters and in their *encomia* on the other hand. They assumed more active role in the lives of their flocks and became a powerful force in local society in the course of twelfth century.

This changing attitude was reflected in their writings (which can be traced only since the twelfth century). It could be the case that these bishops and officers began to remind the citizens about their historical past. This provided rhetoric of civic patriotism, expressed in *encomia*, a political and social language of ancient Hellenism, for the emerging local communities, revived a city-state mentality, and presumably provided an ideological basis for the will of self-government. Moreover, the clerics educated in Constantinople could still have seen many of the institutions and customs in the capital, preserved since Late Antiquity and in concordance with the image of the ancient *polis* of their sources. This could also have contributed to

⁴ However, this tradition of letters of lamentation from exile or the provinces, written in terms of loss and contrast with the past, existed long before. There were probably some *topoi* and even clear patterns both for the letters from exile and for the responses to them. Probably the letters of John of Nazianzes could be named among the first lamentations about being sent to an episcopal see. A good example of the early epistolography of penal exile is the bulk of letters of John Chrysostom to Olympias.

⁵ For instance, only one of fifty-two letters of Leo, metropolitan of Synada (c. 900 — post 1000), is actually about Synada.

their wish to see the same features in the provincial cities (even if they were lacking there), and promoted the ideological argumentation and conceptual framework for the emerging local urban development. Moreover, besides the cities famous long time before, there were the ones grown in the Middle Ages (and sometimes elevated in their rank and had the status of the metropolitan sees received), and their prosperity required both legitimization and praising as well⁶.

This was not just a process of the growing local consciousness of bishops or even of their intellectual influence on the local identity and their contribution to the ideological revival. Besides the urban development of the Comnenian period, a number of factors contributed to the emergence of revival. There is also evidence of the spread of literacy itself from the center to the peripheries; hence, kind of a devolution of the privileged position of Constantinople in terms of education. *Literati* who came to the provinces from the capital began training people in their dioceses. Bardanes, trained in Athens by Choniates, is only one example of this phenomenon. Those educated in the province could well become suffragan bishops later on. This process can be in a certain way compared to the establishment of cathedral schools in the cities of Western Europe. Undoubtedly, the spread of literacy to the provinces promoted the rebirth of local ideologies based on references to history and the further growth of local consciousness of the urban population.

The cities themselves were not the only object of the rhetoric praising for the bishops or officers coming from the capital to the province. Alongside with the growth of towns, an economic revival, the growth of newly forming middle classes and the growth of trade, there was a growth of large estates in Byzantium. Thus, it was not only the glorious past of the cities, but also the growing power of the local dynasts (often originating from the military elite, or landed gentry, or both) which could become an object of rhetorical praise [Magdalino 1993, p. 339]. These dynasts could find support for opposing the central government through self-identification with ancient patricians and despots. It is not an easy question to answer, whether the rise of these elites enhanced or inhibited the development of the cities; what one can say for sure is that both phenomena contained local separatism in embryo.

Magdalino writes that during the period in question, the role of local *archontes* rose and they became used to being looked up to by their inferiors

as the spokesmen for local interests in the face of the central government and its often oppressive demands [Magdalino 1993, p. 152]. It seems that even the offspring of the families of local gentry who chose careers at the imperial court began to care more about the use of their promotion for their provincial families and local communities (in dealings with tax officials, etc.). They apparently maintained strong local roots and often spent their wealth for the benefit of their hometowns. The cities especially lucky in this respect were Adrianople, Monemvasia, and Thessalonica. Therefore, there was probably some sort of decentralization of the elites as well as an obvious growth of urban diversity and local urban consciousness (if it had ever been lost) and self-identification with the hinterland.

Coming back to the influence of rhetoric on society, one can summarize that by the twelfth century the revival of Classical learning and the decline of trust in monastic authority resulted in appointments of bishops coming from the middle class, educated in the schools of the capital and trained in rhetoric. In the provinces, this newly emerged learned class spread their understanding of *polis* and *patria*, formed partly based on their educational background, partly on the urban traditions of Late Antiquity that they saw preserved in Constantinople. In addition, Byzantine institutions elsewhere, the ideology, beliefs, and patterns of behavior were generally laid down in late antiquity and were highly resistant to change [Angold 1995, p. 6]. The rhetoric of civic patriotism reminded the locals about the glorious past of their cities and created an ideological framework for urban revival and development. Because of the dispersion of bishops, not only was the consciousness of provincial identities promoted, but also a new generation of the local *literati* was trained and educated (although the scale of this phenomenon is unknown and was presumably not large).

The emerging self-identity of the common citizens went along with the growing power of the local elites, who became more oriented to the interests of their communities. This meant that the provinces became more and more eager to gain some kind of autonomy from the «Queen City». In Late Antiquity, Constantinople was the City par excellence, competing with Alexandria and Antioch, the ancient centers of the Eastern Mediterranean. Later, after the loss of Egypt and Syria, it was second to none among the urban communities of the Byzantine Empire. It has been argued that the continuing role of Constantinople as the New Rome kept alive the notion of the empire as an association of the cities tributary to the ruling city, but not integrated with it in

⁶ Though Angold claims that the pattern of the bishoprics at the end of the eleventh century was, at least on paper, much as it had been in late Antiquity [Angold 1995, p. 139].



a larger unit that transcended them all [Magdalino 1993, p. 153].

There were no urban constitutional governments parallel to the Italian communes in Byzantium. In their rhetoric, the bishops sometimes admired the governmental order of the Latins. However, in practical life the formation of communes would have threatened their own authority and that of the emperor for whom they spoke to their flocks as often as they spoke up for their flocks to the emperor. Of all Byzantine dynasties, the Comnenoi came closest to realizing the Caesaro-papist ideal. Alexios I Comnenos took the challenge of the increasing influence of the church and tried to subject it to the empire, becoming a disciplinarian figure. Eventually, the growing church influence only benefited from it, for the church emerged from Alexios' reign politically weaker, but institutionally stronger [Angold 1995, p. 7]. Michael Angold claims that Comnenian control over the Orthodox Church was both deceptive and damaging: deceptive because the church's institutional strength increased, and with it its hold over lay society; damaging, because the church's leadership was demoralized by subservience to imperial authority. This subservience, according to Angold, contributed significantly to the malaise that characterized Constantinople on the eve of the fourth crusade [Angold 1995, p. 8]. Thus, the

church found itself in a dilemma: it had the strength but not the will to assert itself against an imperial establishment that was in rapid decline by 1180; and neither side was in position to provide Byzantine society with a sense of purpose [Angold 1995, p. 138]. Therefore, any attempts to change the political order to be similar to that of the Western European communes were condemned as riots and rebellions.

One can say that at least in the mind of ruling elite Constantinople still retained its unique status, and the urban revival was disregarded. «The exclusiveness, with which Constantinopolitans treated outsiders, was replicated and reciprocated in good measure by provincials» [Magdalino 1993, p. 153]. Surely, the utmost poverty often provoked the rebellions or separatism. However, as the experience of many revolutions and wars for independence shows, it is rather the growing wealth and the will to protect new incomes from the parasitic central power that makes the middle classes rebel. Even if one cannot see any apparent strong separatism — did not the events of the 1204⁷ happen so easily exactly because the central role of Constantinople seemed too burdensome for the growing middle classes and local rulers of the developing Byzantine urban communities, while the self-identification was by that time connected rather with the church, than with the empire?

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⁷ And later the final fall of the Byzantium in 1453.



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RHETORIC, EDUCATION AND LOCAL IDENTITY IN 11TH — 13TH CENTURIES' BYZANTIUM

In the twelfth century, rhetoric was one of the dominant elements of the Byzantine intellectual culture, and rhetorical education was an important lift for social mobility. The flourishing of rhetoric was associated with the social rise of the urban middle class, and that part of the Byzantine nobility, who was not connected with the imperial family. Rhetorical skills ensured promotion and protection on the service in the government and the church. Education was a privilege available only to the wealthy segments of society and provided the opportunity for career growth. Books have been relatively scarce and were mostly in private hands. The creation

of the patriarchal schools in Constantinople made education accessible to a wider public. This period was characterized by the appointment to bishoprics not monks, but rather the clergy of the capital, who received the rhetorical training. The pupils of the capital's schools formed a relatively close circle of intellectuals connected to each other in a personal network. The growth of significance of the episcopal authority in the province was followed by the spread of classical education in the province. Combined with the revival of interest towards the history of ancient Greek *polis*, this process seems to have contributed to the development of the local urban identity.

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РИТОРИКА, ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ И МЕСТНАЯ ИНДИВИДУАЛЬНОСТЬ В ВИЗАНТИИ В XI–XIII ВВ.

РЕЗЮМЕ

В XII в. риторика была одним из доминирующих элементов византийской интеллектуальной культуры, а риторическое образование — важным лифтом социальной мобильности. Расцвет риторики был связан с социальным возвышением городского среднего класса и той части византийской знати, которая не была связана с императорской семьей. Навыки риторики обеспечивали продвижение и покровительство на службе в государственном аппарате и в церкви. Образование было привилегией, доступной только состоятельным слоям общества и обеспечивавшей возможность карьерного роста. Книги были относительно редки и находились преимущественно в частных руках. Создание патриарших школ

в Константинополе сделало образование доступным более широкому кругу лиц. Для этого периода было характерно назначение на епископские кафедры не монахов, а столичного духовенства, получившего риторическую подготовку. Воспитанники столичных школ образовывали сравнительно узкий круг связанных между собой интеллектуалов. Рост значения епископской власти на местах сопровождался распространением в провинции классического образования. В сочетании с возрождением интереса к античной истории греческих полисов, этот процесс по всей видимости внес вклад в развитие местного городского самосознания.

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РИТОРИКА, ОСВІТА ТА МІСЦЕВА ІДЕНТИЧНІСТЬ У ВИЗАНТІЇ У XI–XIII СТ.

РЕЗЮМЕ

У XII в. риторика була однією з домінуючих елементів візантійської інтелектуальної культури, а риторична освіта — важливим ліфтом соціальної мобільності. Розквіт риторики був пов'язаний із соціальним піднесенням міського середнього класу і тієї частини візантійської

знаті, яка не була пов'язана з імператорською родиною. Навички риторики забезпечували просування і заступництво на службі в державному апараті і в церкві. Освіта була привілеєм, доступним тільки заможним верствам суспільства і забезпечувала можливість кар'єрного росту.



Книги були відносно рідкісні і перебували переважно у приватних руках. Створення патріарших шкіл у Константинополі зробило освіту доступною ширшому колу осіб. Для цього періоду характерне призначення на єпископські кафедри не ченців, а столичного духовенства, що отримав риторичну підготовку. Вихованці столичних шкіл утворювали порівняно вузьке коло

пов'язаних між собою інтелектуалів. Зростання значення єпископської влади на місцях супроводжувався поширенням в провінції класичної освіти. У поєднанні з відродженням інтересу до античної історії грецьких полісів, цей процес по всій видимості вніс вклад у розвиток місцевого міського самосвідомості.