

Aglae Pizzone

A rhetoric for the empire: education, politics, and speech-making in the Byzantine Millennium.

Rhetoric and politics, rhetoric and ethics, rhetoric, and truth: since ancient Greece the difficult relationship between these concepts has kept many a thinker busy. Including the Byzantine. “A rhetoric for the empire” explores how the Greek Middle Ages (527-1453) creatively navigated these notions by engaging with a *corpus* of rhetorical treatises bequeathed under the name of Hermogenes (2nd-3rd c. CE). Byzantine attitudes toward the art of discourse seem to be marked by contradiction. Public life was shaped by rhetorical performance, and yet in the wake of the Church Fathers prescriptive texts warned against the dangers of unbridled rhetoric. The young elites of an Empire whose territory at times exceeded Alexander’s conquests were trained to perform Demosthenes’ words of civic liberty. Intellectuals living in a Christian theocracy soon resumed the old Greek democratic notion of *politikos logos* (political discourse). Rhetoric belonged into the lesser liberal arts of the *trivium* (Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric), yet its theorists used Arithmetic, Geometry and Music, the superior arts of the *quadrivium* (together with Astronomy), to explain its power. Looking at the Byzantine reception of Hermogenes helps make sense of these apparent contradictions.

While Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* was mostly disregarded in Byzantium until the 12th century (1) (2), Hermogenes became a staple in the curriculum for anyone who aspired to a career in the imperial administration, the military or the church. The *corpus* first consolidated between the 5th and the 6th c. CE out of both authentic and spurious treatises (*On the Issues*, *On Invention*, *On the Types of Style*, *On the Method of Forceful Speaking*) and was transmitted with Aphthonios’ *Preliminary exercises* (4th-5th c.). This composite “handbook” was read throughout the Empire, from Constantinople to Sicily. Generation after generation, a wealth of introductions and commentaries were produced. Much of this material is unpublished and certainly understudied but taken together it shows a distinctive philosophy of language in the making. This project aims to unpack such philosophy and make accessible key sources now available only in manuscript form.

STATE OF ART While Byzantine studies have frequently addressed rhetorical practice (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8), Byzantine rhetorical theory is still ill understood and “has attracted little attention” (7, 104) (9, 78-88). Exegeses on Hermogenes are only partly available in 19th and early 20th c. editions. Progress has been made on specific aspects (10) (11) and authors from the 11th and 12th c. (12) (13) (14) (15) (16) (17) (18) (19) (20). Yet, we still lack both an overview and data on key texts and figures who, though authoritative in their time, are little known to the modern reader. This proposal supersedes the state of the art by posing three hypotheses, which, if proven, will show how the Byzantines ingeniously resolved the age-old conceptual clashes listed above: 1. Rhetoric and politics. The deliberative and judicial practices of the *corpus* were embedded in the civic cosmopolitanism of

the major Greek-speaking centers in the Roman Eastern provinces, which, while being subjects of the Emperor, still “formally resembled the democracies of the classical period” (21, 234). Thus, in Byzantium the *corpus* fostered a discourse of the *polis* coexisting with a discourse of Empire, appealing to the rising urban elites; 2. Rhetoric and ethics. The logical reorganization of rhetoric promoted by Hermogenes according to his Byzantine interpreters (for late antiquity: (22)) turned it into an ethically neutral art of thinking; 3. Rhetoric and truth. Hermogenes provided the tools to make inner speech manifest (23), thus bridging the gap between performance and truth and offering what De Certeau would label the “illusion of transparency” (24).

METHODOLOGY • Rhetorical instruction is read through the lens of **cognitive history** (25). To avoid anachronisms (26), we distinguish (27): - **the emic (observer’s point of view)** and **the etic (point of view within the observed group)**. Building on Valiavitcharska (28) (29) (30)) we look at how rhetorical training shaped the cognitive structures of the elites, priming broader collective and individual discursive practices.

- Manuscript material is considered both individually and as part of a network. With Bäckvall (31) we focus on scribal and readerly behaviors and use the concepts of **descriptive and reconstructive philology** instead of old/new philology (32) (33): we are interested in both reconstructing the original texts and describing how users engaged with them. We consider manuscripts as “archaeological sites” (34) (35) with diachronic strata of texts whose production/consumption is integral to the process of rhetorical teaching and learning.

TEAM AND IMPLEMENTATION The project will be hosted for 3 years (3/2023-2/2026) at SDU’s Centre for Medieval Literature. The team (PI, 3 postdocs, 1 PhD, 2 senior researchers), supported by an advisory board, works on Byzantine commentaries from the 9th-13th centuries, across 3 WP: 1. *De inventione* and reshaping of ancient judicial and deliberative rhetoric within the Empire’s discursive practices; 2. *On the Issues* and the enthymematic structure of rhetorical arguments; 3. *On the Types of Style* and *On the Method of Forceful Speaking* and the rhetoric of truth.

NETWORK AND PERSPECTIVES Designed as part of a larger research on Hermogenes’ impact on European culture, this project will profit from the results of the action “Necessity by Design” funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation and focused on the Byzantine diagrams of the *Corpus*. A parallel project on the impact of the “Byzantine Hermogenes” on Renaissance education will be submitted to the Velux Core Group Programme in November (PI co-leader). Senior visiting researcher Van Den Berg will apply with the Austrian Science Fond (FWF) to support the edition of further texts related to but not included in the present proposal.

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Research group, project organization and international network

TEAM MEMBERS

PI Aglae Pizzone (PI 3/2023-2/2026). Applicant capitalizes on well-documented experience in ambitious interdisciplinary research projects and groundbreaking work on Middle Byzantine rhetoric (21). Within the DFF-funded project1 “Medieval Self-Commentaries” she has discovered and published new texts on Hermogenes by John Tzetzes (12th c.), including the authors’ autograph notes on the *corpus* – a unique finding in the landscape of Byzantine studies (18) (22).

PhD Ugo Valori (UV 3/2023-2/2026, 100%). Enrolled in a joint degree with the University of Milan (main home institution: the budget has been drafted accordingly), he will be co-supervised by PI and prof. Stefano Martinelli Tempesta (CV attached). He is proficient in ancient languages, philology, paleography, manuscript studies and has worked for his MA on Byzantine rhetorical theory.

Post doc 1 Daria Resh (DR 9/2023-8/2025, 50%) is an expert on narrative in Middle Byzantine Literature and has worked extensively on 9th century Hermogenes’ commentator and hagiographer John of Sardis, clarifying the author’s intricate biographic tradition (11).

Post doc 2 Elisabetta Barili (EB 3/2023-2/2025, 100%) is completing a PhD (submission 30/11/22) on John Tzetzes’ exegesis on Hermogenes’ *On Types of Style* and coediting with PI Tzetzes’ autograph notes on the commentary on Aphthonios’ *Progymnasmata* and Hermogenes’ *Staseis*.

Post doc 3 (NN 3/2024-2/2026, 100%) will be hired after advertising the position timely and widely in year 1 through the Centre for Medieval Literature’s and PI’s networks.

Senior researcher 1 Manfred Kraus (MK University of Tübingen, professor) is an expert on ancient and Byzantine rhetoric and has published widely on the reception of Aphthonios’ *Preparatory Exercises*. He will spend one year at SDU in two installments (year 1 and 2) and will both contribute to the project’s outputs and offer guest-lectures, thus enriching the educational offer at SDU.

Senior researcher 2 Baukje Van den Berg (BVB Central European University, Associate professor) has published substantially on 12th-century Constantinopolitan literati and will spend two visiting periods (year 2 and 3) in Odense and contribute to the project outputs and network activities by applying for further funding.

The international advisory board includes major and emerging players in the field of Byzantine literature, early modern rhetoric, classical philology: Vessela Valiavitcharska, Stratis Papaioannou, Cristina Pepe, Paolo Scattolin (see CVs attached).

Both team and the advisory board are structured to ensure balanced gender representation. The project will prioritize mentoring of post-doctoral researchers. The presence of mid-career female scholars in

the team and advisory board is therefore particularly important to provide guidance to the younger colleagues in a particularly demanding – and at times unsettling – phase of their academic path.

WORK PACKAGES

WP1 MK prepares the edition and translation of John Tzetzes (12th c.) commentary on Aphthonios' *Preliminary Exercises*. **DR** focuses on John of Sardis' (9th c.) unedited commentary on *On invention*, producing a preliminary study in preparation for a critical edition and an article on the implementation of Hermogenian structures in John of Sardis' own narrative work (debates, judicial settings etc.).

1 critical edition and translation (Brill's Sources in Early Poetics); 2 journal papers (*Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*; *Medioevo Greco*).

WP2 includes the preparation of the first modern critical editions of John Doxapatres' (11th c.) and John Tzetzes' (12th c.) commentaries on *On the issues* (Doxapatres: **NN**; Tzetzes: **PI**). **PI**'s (and **EB**'s see WP3) work is facilitated by a Unicode transcription (completed) of Tzetzes' commentaries on Hermogenes from the ms Vossianus Gr. Q1, edited by the author himself. **UV** will produce a study on the impact of Hermogenian theory on readings of Aristotle's rhetoric in the 12th c.

2 critical editions (Doxapatres: *Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia* and Tzetzes: Brill's Sources in Early Poetics).

WP3 EB will prepare the first critical edition and translation of John Tzetzes' commentary on *On the Method of Forceful Speaking*. **PI** will work on a monograph surveying the theoretical approaches to language and truth in the commentaries on Hermogenes from the 9th-13th c. **Baukje Van den Berg** will prepare a study on Gregory of Corinth's (12th c.) commentary focusing on the use of Hermogenian rhetoric within homiletics and the ecclesiastical context.

1 monograph (Oxford University Press); 1 PhD dissertation; 1 chapter in edited volume, see below.

Work across the WPs The team will prepare a collective volume with further external contributors coedited by **PI** and Paolo Scattolin titled *From John of Sardis to John Tzetzes: the corpus Hermogenianum in the Middle Byzantine era* (Palgrave) as well as present panels at three major conferences (Byzantine Studies Conference 2023, Society for the History of Rhetoric 2024 International Medieval Congress 2025). The volume will also feature substantial contributions from scholars external to the project (Maria Tomadaki, Masha Mushinsky) on a further 10th century commentator (John Geometres), including new critical editions. Baukje Van den Berg and **PI**, sitting respectively in the editorial and advisory board, will ensure the liaison with the series Brill's Sources in Early Poetics. The project's advisory board will be involved in two on-line events in 2024 and 2025, providing feedback on the project's implementation. In January 2026 the project will run its own final conference at SDU.