

From John Geometres to John Tzetzes: reading the *corpus Hermogenianum* in the Middle Byzantine Period

Call for contributions

In a recent contribution (2019), Elizabeth Jeffreys writes that “Byzantine rhetoric continues to be an understudied subject, and also an ill-understood one with a reputation for difficulty.” Such a statement certainly applies to the exegetical tradition revolving around the *corpus Hermogenianum*.

In the centuries after the end of the iconoclastic period (842), Byzantine culture shows a keen interest in rhetoric, testified by sustained engagement with the popular *Corpus Hermogenianum*. The corpus consolidated between the 5th and the 6th c. CE out of both authentic and spurious treatises (*On the Issues*, *On the Types of Style*, *On Invention*, *On the Method of Forceful Speaking*). It was transmitted together with the preparatory exercises (*progymnasmata*) by Aphthonios of Antioch (5th century). While Aristotelian rhetoric was disregarded until the 12th century, the *corpus* was a staple in the curriculum for any individual aspiring to a career in the imperial administration, the military, or the church. Between the 9th and the 13th century, every generation produced *accessus* (introductions) to Hermogenes and authoritative commentaries in competition with each other, which are nowadays unpublished or, at best, understudied.

This material offers precious insights into debates and theories on the value of rhetoric, showing links with the discursive practices of other fields of knowledge. Our understanding of the development of theories and concepts is still inherently wanting as we lack data on key texts and figures who, while being authoritative in their time, are little known to the modern reader. Moreover, while specific aspects or authorial exegeses such as John of Sardis’, John Sikeliotes’ and John Doxapatres’ have received more attention, no comprehensive effort has been made to look at the interconnectedness of the commentaries – both authorial and anonymous – produced from the middle Byzantine period onward. The task is not an easy one, texts are fluid and often difficult to date. And yet, while studying individual commentaries and *prolegomena* in isolation can be – and has proven – fruitful in many respects, it fails to capture the quintessential dialogic and entangled nature of these texts, in conversation both with the commented treatises and – sometimes even more vehemently – with each other as well as with contemporary society.

The planned edited volume, to be submitted to the Palgrave series *New Approaches to Byzantine History and Culture* aims to be a first step toward a more integrated understanding of the exegetical work done around the *corpus Hermogenianum*, with a focus on the period from the 10th to the 12th century.

Current contributors include:

- Elisabetta Barili, John Tzetzes and Minucianus: Polemic and Self-Representation in the Commentary on Hermogenes
- Anna Bistaffa, In the Footsteps of John Geometres: A Comparative Study of Four Byzantine Commentaries on Ps. Hermogenes’ “On Method of Forceful Speaking”
- Chiara D’Agostini, Diagrams in the Byzantine commentaries on Hermogenes: toward a typology
- Maria Mishinski, John Geometres’ Scholia on Gregory of Nazianzus’ *Or.* 45

- Aglae Pizzone, Rhetoric or Logic? Figuring Out the Epistemic Status of Hermogenian Theory in Byzantium
- Daria Resh, John of Sardis on Narrative
- Paolo Scattolin, An All-encompassing Library: Classical and Christian Authors in John Geometres' Commentary on Ps. Hermogenes' "On Method of Forceful Speaking"
- Vessela Valiavitcharska, Diagrams and the Oral-Visual Nexus in Argumentation Training

We welcome contributions of 8000-9000 words maximum including bibliography. Possible topics include:

- Key figures such as John of Sardis, John Geometres, Gregory of Corinth and in particular John Sikeliotes and John Doxapatres
- Exegetical trends in both scholia and authorial commentaries
- Aspects of textual criticism and manuscript tradition
- Cultural variations across time in the approach to rhetoric and dialectic
- Rhetorical theory of the emotions
- The commentaries in the educational curriculum
- Classical tradition in the commentaries

We expect to receive a short abstract of 600 words max by the 15th September 2022. Accepted contributors will be notified by the 30th of September 2022. Deadline for submission of the final paper is set on the 31st of January 2023. We plan to submit the volume to the publisher by end of August 2023

For further queries please write to the volume's editors: Aglae Pizzone pizzone@sdu.dk and/or Paolo Scattolin paolo.scattolin@univr.it