

MYRSINI S. ANAGNOSTOU, "Ένας ρήτορας τῶν χρόνων τῆς παρακμῆς. Ὁ βίος καὶ τὸ ἔργο τοῦ Νικηφόρου Χρυσοβέργη. Athens: Ἄρμὸς 2020. 554 pp. – ISBN: 978-960-615-289-4 (€22.95)

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The book “A Rhetor of the Years of Decline. The Life and Work of Nicephorus Chrysoberges,” as the title translates, is a study of an ecclesiastic and literary figure of the turn of the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, mostly known for his imperial and patriarchal orations. This is the publication of the author’s doctoral dissertation, submitted to the Department of Philology of the University of Athens in 2013, with almost no revision.

The book is clearly philologically orientated. It begins with a preface (ΠΡΟΛΟΓΟΣ, pp. 13–14), a bibliography (ΒΙΒΛΙΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ, pp. 15–56), and a general introduction (ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗ, pp. 57–64) before it proceeds to the first part (Πρῶτο Μέρος) dedicated to the historical context of Chrysoberges’ work (I. ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΟ ΠΛΑΙΣΙΟ ..., pp. 67–88) and the prosopography of his family through the centuries (II. ΠΡΟΣΩΠΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΑ, pp. 89–115). The author, MYRSINI ANAGNOSTOU, introduces here the people – emperors and patriarchs –, whom Chrysoberges addressed in his panegyrics as well as the rebels whose defeat by emperor Alexius III Angelus (1195–1203) was praised by the orator. This part essentially functions as a second extensive introduction, which closes with a significant contribution to medieval (Eastern) Roman prosopography, as it presents for the first time a collective list of fifty persons bearing the surname Chrysoberges from the 10<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the Middle Ages. By the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the house of the Chrysobergae could already take pride in two patriarchs of Constantinople and one of Antioch.

The second part (Δεύτερο Μέρος) starts with the biography of Nicephorus Chrysoberges (I. Ο ΒΙΟΣ ΚΑΙ Η ΔΡΑΣΗ ..., pp. 119–140), about whose early life little is known with certainty. Nicephorus was born at about the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and pursued an ecclesiastic career. He is thought to have been admitted to the so-called Patriarchal School by the late 1180s; he was designated master of the rhetors by 1201–1202. After the fall of Constantinople in 1204, we meet Chrysoberges again as bishop of Sardis

in Asia Minor. He served there at least up to 1213, after which date he disappears from the historical record.

Next, *ANAGNOSTOU* deals with Chrysoberges' literary production (II. Η ΕΡΓΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ ..., pp. 141–257); this is actually the point where the main part of the book begins. She gives a short introduction to each work followed by a summary of its content. Chrysoberges' most important works from a historical point of view are his six orations (II.1. ΛΟΓΟΙ, pp. 144–212): three imperial – two addressed to Alexius III and one to Alexius IV Angelus (1203–1204) –, two patriarchal – to Nicetas II Muntanes (1186–1189) and to John X Camaterus (1198–1206) – and one addressed to the civil official Constantine Mesopotamites. If the introductory texts often repeat information already given in the first part of the book coupled occasionally with rather unsatisfactory attempts to provide a better dating of the orations, the summaries are more than useful. They succeed in retaining the essence of these typically circumlocutory panegyrics despite a couple of inaccurate interpretations of their content, including some misunderstanding of related secondary bibliography (*e.g.*, pp. 161–162). Next comes the only extant letter written by Chrysoberges, dated before 1200 and addressed to the bishop of Demetrias in Thessaly (II.2. ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ, pp. 212–217). It is followed by the author's rhetorical exercises (II.3. ΠΡΟΓΥΜΝΑΣΜΑΤΑ, pp. 217–238), which are thought to have served teaching purposes (five *Μῦθοι*, two *Διηγήματα* and two *Ἡθοποιίαι*), inspired by various classical, historical, and biblical themes. Finally his nine versed epigrams (II.4. ΕΜΜΕΤΡΑ ΕΠΙΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΑ, pp. 239–257) are presented, of which five are funerary, dedicated to persons such as the author's uncle, i.e. the former bishop of Sardis Theodore Galenus, the unnamed son of the protostrator John Ises, a noblewoman “stemming from the Ducae (δουκοφύης)” called Irene, and a member of the Prosuch(us) family. Three of the other four epigrams were presumably inscribed on works of religious art.

*ANAGNOSTOU* then presents the six manuscripts transmitting Chrysoberges' works, most of which are preserved in a single codex, including a useful synoptic chart (III. Η ΧΕΙΡΟΓΡΑΦΗ ΠΑΡΑΔΟΣΗ ..., pp. 258–274). The rest of the book's second part is more or less a catalogue dedicated to the author's language and style (IV. ΓΛΩΣΣΑ-ΥΦΟΣ, pp. 275–304), that is his vocabulary and the figures of speech he employs, followed by a list of sources (V. ΠΗΓΕΣ-ΚΑΤΗΓΟΡΙΟΠΟΙΗΣΗ, pp. 305–315). It concludes with summarizing remarks on the texts' contribution to the historiography and prosopography of his era, including another useful chart (VI. ΣΥΜ-

ΒΟΛΗ ΤΟΥ ΕΡΓΟΥ ..., pp. 316–327), and a short general conclusion (VII. ΣΥΜΠΕΡΑΣΜΑΤΑ, pp. 328–331).

The third part (Τρίτο Μέρος, pp. 335–528) of the book is the critical edition and commentary of six of the author's texts. Firstly, the reedition of the three imperial orations, already published at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the patriarchal oration to John Camaterus, published four decades ago.<sup>1</sup> The commentaries of these orations are worthwhile additions to the bibliography, especially the one dedicated to Chrysoberges' third imperial panegyric, which was written in 1203 at the high point of the Fourth Crusade (1198/1202–1204), being thus the only Greek source that is contemporary to this cataclysmic event. Secondly, Chrysoberges' patriarchal oration to Nicetas Muntanes along with his letter to the bishop of Demetrias are published for the first time. This is the book's major contribution, coupled by all six works' commentaries, which are quite extensive and helpful regarding one's navigation through these highly rhetorical texts.

ANAGNOSTOU's book concludes with three indexes (pp. 529–543) and a quite short summary in German (pp. 545–547).

The book suffers from extensive repetition. While it succeeds in giving an overview of Nicephorus Chrysoberges' literary production, this is often done through unnecessary wordiness. The first part of the book (save the prosopographical part) could have been easily omitted, as its content is dealt with later too. The same holds true for the works' (often quite long) excerpts inserted in the footnotes, whose text has been edited in full in the third part. In this latter part, however, ANAGNOSTOU's study makes new material accessible and provides useful commentaries that help the reader better approach the author's work and the age he lived in. Along with the summaries of Chrysoberges' works in the second part, this is the most valuable section of the book. Nevertheless, if a historian cannot be fully satisfied with the book's treatment of the material, a philologist may appreciate the part dealing with language, style and the author's sources, which seems to have been treated most meticulously. All in all, despite its shortcomings, ANAGNOSTOU's book is a useful guide to the literary

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1. Nicephori Chrysobergae ad Angelos orationes tres, ed. MAXIMILIAN TREU (Programm des Königlichen Friedrichs-Gymnasiums zu Breslau 127,2). Breslau 1892; ROBERT BROWNING, An Unpublished Address of Nikephoros Chrysoberges to Patriarch John Kamateros of 1202. *Byzantine Studies / Études Byzantines* 5 (1978) pp. 37–68 (= ROBERT BROWNING, *History, Language and Literacy in the Byzantine World* [Variorum reprints, CS 299]. Northampton 1989, no. IX).

production of Nicephorus Chrysoberges – a significant figure of this time of transition for the polity of Rhomania –, a study that takes into account and presents all the available material originating from his pen.

**Keywords**

Fourth Crusade; Nicephorus Chrysoberges; prosopography; rhetoric