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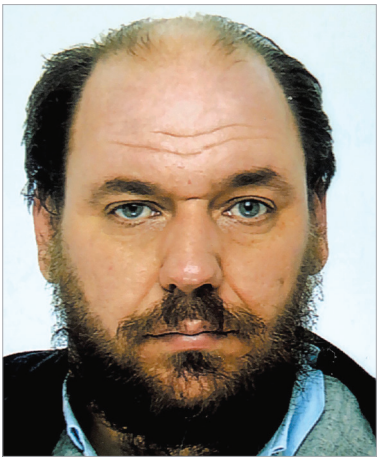

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Biographical note

Roman Shliakhtin is a scholar of the Eastern Mediterranean. He focuses on the relations between Byzantium and its many neighbors in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

PROTECTING THE PATRON, DEFLECTING THE BLAME. THE BATTLE OF MANZIKERT AND THE DEATH OF ROMANOS DIOGENES IN THE *CHRONOGRAPHIA* OF MICHAEL PSELLOS*

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Abstract

The article investigates the portrayal of the Battle of Manzikert (1071) in the *Chronographia* by Michael Psellos. The main aim of the final part of the Chronographia was to remove the blame for the internal crisis in the eleventh-century Byzantium from Michael Psellos and his patron, emperor Michael VII Doukas. To reach this aim, Psellos constructed a "rhetoric of veracity" based on repetitions, breaks of internal chronology, omissions, a single Classical allusion and switches from first-person to third-person narrator in the key moments of the story. The resultant narrative allowed Psellos to claim a position in the internal Byzantine debate about Manzikert and identify Romanos IV Diogenes as single culprit for the major military defeat,

Keywords: Michael Psellos, Byzantium, Battle of Manzikert, Romanos Diogenes, narratology

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The clash which the scholarship now calls the Battle of Manzikert took place on 26 August 1071 in the vicinity of the city of Malazgirt (Türkiye) between the emperor of Byzantium, Romanos IV Diogenes (r. 1068–1071), and the sultan of the Great Seljuks, Alp Arslan (r. 1062–1072).[1] The Byzantine army was defeated with some of its generals captured, some wounded, and some fleeing from the field. Some contemporaries blamed Romanos's general, Andronikos Doukas, for commencing the retreat from the battlefield, while others held Emperor Romanos Diogenes responsible. According to both Byzantine and non-Byzantine sources, Romanos Diogenes fought bravely on the field, but in the end he was defeated, captured alive, recognized and brought in front of the victor, Sultan Alp Arslan I.

The victory was a major symbolic achievement for the Great Seljuks, who had migrated from the steppes of present-day Turkmenistan just one generation before. The triumphant sultan Alp Arslan sent the good tidings to the Caliph of Baghdad. He humiliated the defeated emperor and then, to the surprise of many, made a political pact with him, allowing Romanos Diogenes to return home with some of his entourage as a Seljuk ally (Beihammer, 2017, pp. 155–160). The circumstances in Constantinople did not allow Romanos to regain his throne. As soon as the news of his defeat reached the capital, the courtiers installed his wife, Eudokia, and her son, Michael VII Doukas, (r. 1071–1078) as legitimate rulers. Romanos tried to secure Eudokia's support but failed. Michael Doukas then exiled his mother to a monastery and Romanos found himself branded as a rebel. Subsequently, Doukai's army defeated Romanos twice (Theotokis, 2024, pp. 165–174; Cheynet, 1970). After the second defeat, he surrendered to Andronikos Doukas and agreed to become a monk. On the way to Constantinople, he was cruelly blinded by an inexperienced torturer and died on the island of Proti near Constantinople in October 1072 (Vryonis, 2003). His victorious opponent, Alp Arslan did not outlive him, dying in the same year. The next ten years saw a massive migration of the semi-pastoralist Turks to Anatolia, turning it into "Tourkia," or the land of the Turks as Crusaders would call it some twenty years later.

The battle of Manzikert remains a focal point in many narratives about Byzantine-Seljuk relations, with a major study calling the battle "a supreme disgrace" for the Eastern Roman Empire (Vryonis, 1970, p. 102). Whether the battle was indeed a disgrace remains an open question. Recent generations of Byzantine military historians have expressed skepticism about the totality of the military failure and its role in Seljuk

migration (Cheynet, 1980, pp. 424–426). Most recent monograph attempts to reconstruct the event in some detail and switch focus from the person of the emperor to the situation on the battlefield, which was problematic for both sides (Theotokis, 2024, in particular pp. 140-160).

The present article is an analysis of the description of the events connected with the battle of Manzikert in a contemporary historical narrative, the *Chronographia* created by Michael Psellos (b. 1018 – d. after 1078), one of Romanos' advisers who played a central role in many of the events he recounts. This is important, as the sections in *Chronographia* addressing Manzikert were written in 1072-1073, very soon after the battle was over. The *terminus post quem* was the death of a mercenary, Crepin (Crispinos: PBW, c. Robert, 101; Psellos, 2014, p. 280). The article focuses on the literary devices that Psellos used in the seventh book of the Chronographia. For the sake of analysis, the narrative of Psellos is divided into three parts - description of the events before the battle (1069-1071), description of the battle itself (1071) and the description of the events after the battle and before the death of Diogenes (1071-1072). Methodologically, I use narratology as the main set of instruments to analyze Psellos. A few technical terms I used are borrowed from a work of Mieke Bal (Bal, 2009). In addition to this, article benefits from occasional comparison of factoids present or absent in Psellos with factoids present not only in Byzantine sources, but a major Turko-Arabic narrative about Manzikert created by Ibn al-Athir in some hundred years after the events.

1. The source and the author: Psellos and his works

Prominent courtier and rhetorician Michael Psellos was born in Constantinople around 1018. He attended a standard course of grammar taught by prominent poet John Mauropus, in which he excelled. At the beginning of his career, Psellos worked as a judge in the imperial provinces. Upon his return to Constantinople in the 1040s, Psellos became an imperial secretary and rapidly advanced through the court ranks, gaining a status of importance under the reign of Constantine Monomakhos (r. 1042–1055). At the end of the reign of the latter, Psellos left the court but soon returned and regained his high standing. For the next thirty years, he enjoyed a prominent position at the court and became one of the chief advisors to both Michael VI (r. 1055–1057) and Isaac I Komnenos (r. 1057–1059). After Isaac abdicated the throne following

his advice, Psellos shifted his allegiances to the powerful family of the Doukai. He served as an advisor to Constantine Doukas (r. 1059–1068) and had a complex relationship with Romanos Diogenes (r. 1068–1071), the Byzantine emperor who suffered defeat at Manzikert. He maintained cordial relations with Michael VII Doukas (r. 1071–1078), while simultaneously serving as the "Philosopher-in-Chief" and an acclaimed teacher. His influence conveniently peaked between 1071–1078, when he played a crucial role at the court; the position attracted considerable criticism associated with the emperor's rule. Psellos' contemporary (and possibly his student), Michael Attaleiates, had a particular grudge against the philosopher-in-chief and later wrote a work which is more often than not in direct polemic with the *Chronographia* (Krallis, 2006, pp. 175-180).

The exact date of Psellos' death is uncertain: some scholars place it at the end of the 1070s, others suggest the 1080s (Kaldellis, 2011). Indirect evidence includes Attaleiates writing in 1080 (date confirmed), who criticized one particularly well-educated advisor to the Doukai—quite likely Psellos—for orchestrating the blinding of Romanos. The absence of the advisor's name in this passage may indicate that Psellos was still alive when Attaleiates finished his *Historia* in 1081. Frederick Lauritzen correlates the time of his death with the disappearance of Eastern Anatolian magnates from court (Lauritzen 2007). Psellos's absence in the narratives of Nikephoros Bryennios and Anna Komnene also suggests 1081, the time of the Komnenian revolution, as the year by which Psellos was either dead or had left the Byzantine political landscape for good. The absence of his figure in the other Byzantine narratives that deal with events of the eleventh century (Zonaras and Skylitzes Continuatus) may hint at the uneasy relations between Psellos and the Komnenian dynasty. While Skylitzes's claim that Psellos's works brought more harm than good to his readers needs further nuanced analysis, his uneasiness about Psellos in the Komnenian era is palpable. This apprehension (which did not turn into open critique until after 1081) might be connected with Psellos's literary activity before, during, and after Manzikert part of which is the *Chronographia*.

Michael Psellos's literary output prompted Jakob Lyubarskiy to call him a "great author and artist," while Stratis Papaioannou referred to him as "many Pselloi" on account of his prolific body of work (Ljubarskij, 1992; Papaioannou, 2013, p. 4). Psellos was not only famous as a philosopher and a grammar teacher but primarily as a rhetorician and a paragon of style. His speeches and letters addressed to different rulers, ranging from Constantine Monomakhos to Michael VIII Doukas, are available in critical

editions, which allow the detailed study of his methods. Consequently, Psellos has become one of the most studied Byzantine authors, alongside Procopius, Theophanes, and Niketas Choniates.

As for Psellos, the present study will not deal with the many facets of his person, focusing instead on his main historical work—the *Chronographia*—and his views on Manzikert, as expressed in his writings. The *Chronographia* was written in several installments between the 1060s and the early 1070s (Rheinsch, 2013b). The first part of the work covers the period from the death of Basil II to the rule of Isaac Komnenos, while the later parts were written right after the battle of Manzikert, in 1072–1073. As with many other works of Byzantine rhetoric, the *Chronographia* was divided into "ruling periods" by a later editor, not Psellos himself, and some scholars consider its surviving version unfinished.

Focusing on the emperors' deeds and Psellos's own actions, the *Chronographia* presents a comprehensive narrative of Byzantine history. The narrative is very personal and centers on the protagonist himself, which provides insights into details of his career. Its audience included Psellos's contemporaries such as Michael VII Doukas as well as people "at and around the imperial court" (Reinsch 2013b). His readers, thus, were expected to be aware of the events described at least to some degree, which may explain the absence of a precise date in the *Chronographia* (Jeffreys, 2017).

The claims that Psellos made in his *Chronographia* are not always easy to substantiate precisely due to the many gaps in his narrative and lack of precision about important milestones. Nevertheless, the *Chronographia* remains a unique document produced by a person who was close to the center of power in Constantinople in the 1060s and 1070s. As it is evident from the abundance of his writings, Psellos was active in many fields and communicated with many people, not focusing on one group or clan.

In the *Chronographia*, Psellos presents himself as a successful opportunist, always close to the throne and always right—while those in power are portrayed weak and usually wrong. This seems to be the case not only regarding his political allegiances but also the patronage of some of his non-historical works. According to the latest scholarship, Psellos's study on the Church council was re-dedicated to *several* emperors and was a popular reading in later Byzantine years. His letters were considered exemplary pieces of rhetoric in the Komnenian era and beyond and were similarly well received. However, the *Chronographia*, albeit famous, enjoyed a mixed reputation, as reflected, for example, in the ambiguous remarks of a younger contemporary, John Skylitzes who qualified Psellos

work in the preface to his own *Synopsis of History* as an "attempt" to write history (Skylitzes, 2010, p. 1)

The reason for the work's ambiguous reception is directly connected with the Battle of Manzikert. While Psellos was absent from the battlefield, he took part in many events after the battle that led to the establishment of his pupil, Michael VII, on the throne of Byzantium. Contemporaries (e.g., Michael Attaleiates) also criticized Psellos for his role in the events, namely the blinding of Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes. As will be demonstrated below, the post-Manzikert portion of the *Chronographia* is effectively an early attempt to deflect blame for the cruel blinding and murder of Romanos. The fact that Psellos's name is absent in surviving sources from the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries indicates that his attempt failed. There is no evidence that either Alexios I Komnenos (crowned with the support of Romanos Diogenes's sons) or his court intellectuals held Psellos in high esteem. Instead, official historiography (e.g., Zonaras) seems to have avoided the mention of the prominent philosopher altogether. In general, he was more famous as a teacher than as a historian (Littlewood, 2006, p. 15).

The situation changed in the middle of the twelfth century. Anna Komnene, for example, probably had the *Chronographia* at her disposal in her library, although no direct surviving evidence attests to this. As Stratis Papaioannou notes, the *Chronographia* survived in one manuscript, *Paris BNF gr. 1712*, made up of two parts (Papaioannou, 2013, p. 256). The first part of the manuscript contains poems and the *Chronographia*, while the second part consists of fifteenth-century works describing embassy to the leader of the Aq Qoyunlu Turkomans, Uzun Hasan (1423–1478), and the reign of Murat I (1326–1389), sultan of the Ottomans. Both works immediately follow the text of the *Chronographia* in the manuscript. This means that even the context of the physical preservation of the *Chronographia* relates to the Turks and indirectly the Manzikert. To analyze the attitude of Psellos towards the battle, I will examine the passages that precede the battle in the *Chronographia*, the description of the battle itself and, more importantly, the part describing the aftermath of the battle.

2. Before Manzikert: Psellos and Romanos as a courtier and an emperor before 1071

The analysis of the aforementioned events in the *Chronographia*, written after 1071 and the following the Doukai coup, present a deconstruction

of the panegyric. Instead of praising Romanos, Michael Psellos draws upon a vivid picture of imperial decline that began with the moment when Romanos Diogenes came to power and thought about himself as a supreme being. The main characteristic of Romanos in Psellos is his megalomania and inability to focus on singular goals. Before becoming a ruler, says Psellos, Romanos addressed him in the most servile manner (δουλοπρεπέστατα), while after seizing the throne, Romanos still respected him but did not heed his advice, and their relationship became tense (Psellos, *Chronographia* 2014, p. 267). According to Psellos, the breakdown of Romanos's relationships and his inability to seek counsel from Psellos led to the disaster of 1071.

In the *Chronographia*, Psellos presents the events leading to Manzikert as a series of personal mistakes that eventually ruined his life. The description of these three campaigns (1069, 1070, and 1071) follows a certain repetitive pattern. First, Psellos expresses his objections before each campaign but the emperor pursued his own course. Then, Psellos describes the disastrous results of the campaign. The author introduces each with critique directed against Romanos. While the narrative is not a *psogos*, a speech aiming to denigrate Romanos, it is not that far from that genre, since the *Chronographia* hardly has anything pleasant to say about Romanos (on *psogos* see Krallis, 2006, p. 175). Instead, the text depicts the disastrous progress of a boastful warrior from one campaign to the next, each bigger in scale than the previous, leading to the monumental catastrophe of 1071. Each of them merits detailed analysis to reveal how Psellos constructs the Romanos's image across the narrative.

The account of the first campaign (1069) begins in the imperial council room. Psellos informs his readers that he advised the emperor against the campaign, suggesting to gather allies, attend to the army, and draw up a catalogue of the troops instead. The suggestions seem to correspond with the problems that Romanos ended up facing on his way to Manzikert, but whether Psellos had really made these recommendations is, of course, not certifiable. It is also unclear who his opponents were at the time. They probably included the future survivors of the Battle of Manzikert who were influential enough in the 1070s to deter powerful courtiers from including their names. Both Psellos and his intended audience were likely familiar with the people in question, so names are omitted, leaving modern readers guessing their positions. Michael Attaleiates, a military judge and Romanos's close associate, may have been one of them. Alternatively, and perhaps more likely, Psellos's antagonists have included a Byzantine

noble from the older generation who played a role in the "troubles," such as Bryennios, the Komnenoi brothers, or even Nikephoros Botaneiates himself. Often referred to by the outdated term "military aristocracy"—although they were *stricto sensu* neither military nor aristocratic—this group of people had vested personal interest in military campaigns. They had every reason to support Romanos's cause, as their position in the army made any imperial expedition a likely opportunity for promotions and profits. Consequently, Romanos decided to take up arms and, according to Psellos, made an appearance in front of his palace in full armor, carrying a twenty-two-arms-long spear.

The description, referring to a spear of 9.8 m length that was originally designed for naval combat, is a quote from the *Iliad* (Book XV, lines 677–678). The similarity between the emperor's spear and that of Ajax is used to demonstrate Romanos's inability to choose his weapons correctly: preparing to fight the Seljuk Turks—a land-locked enemy—with a weapon intended for maritime warfare. The description may also have referred to a courtly ritual of the emperor leaving the palace to go to war, which as Attaleiates notes, could be quite intricate and lengthy. The choice of the quote is also of importance: in Homer, the spear belonged to Ajax, who was famous for his bravery but eventually lost his mind and killed himself after committing a series of atrocities. In sum, in three short phrases, Psellos is able to paint the image of a proud warrior ill-equipped for the fight awaiting him.

After the first expedition against the Turks, Romanos failed to bring back trophies (σκῦλον, i.e., "spoils" or "prey") to Constantinople. Despite the lack of trophies, the emperor managed to acquire grounds for his primary flaw, ἀλαζονεία, or boastfulness, which only grew over time and, according to Psellos, ultimately led to his defeat at Manzikert. Psellos claims to do his best to turn the emperor from his wrong way.

> "As for myself, I swear by the God whom philosophy refers, that I try to turn him from his ambitions, I knew his treacherous designs. I feared for the empress and the commonwealth lest all should be lost in revolt an disorder." (Psellos, 2014, p. 268; tr. Sewter, p. 352)

This piece of narrative is an effective precursor of following events, that happened after Manzikert, namely revolt of the defeated emperor and following disorder. Thus, Psellos provides the reader with another thing that Mieke Bal calls an anticipation. In her classification, "anticipations

serve to generate tension or produce a fatalistic vision of life" (Bal, 2009, p. 93). Bal also note that some authors introduce to the reader a series of anticipations. Psellos is the one who do it by a description of Romanos defeats in a long consequence, each time distancing himself further and further from the emperor. He stil gives to him an advice, which does not really help. According to Psellos, between the first and second expeditions, Romanos turned away from Theodora, stopped listening to his advisors (καὶ τῶν συμβούλων ἀφέμενος), and became his own teacher and counsellor, thus reversing his previous relationship with Psellos. The philosopher sought to maintain the dialogue between Romanos and Empress Theodora and reminded him of the existing diplomatic situation (τῶν συνθηκῶν ὑπεμίμνησκον)—likely referring to short-term peace treaties (συνθήκη) between Romanos and his main enemy, probably the Seljuk Turks. The question of the treaties that Romanos probably concluded after the first campaign is intriguing but, unfortunately, Psellos does not provide any details.

Although Psellos's advice was seemingly ignored, Romanos took him to the second expedition against the Turks. During this expedition, the philosopher and the emperor engaged in polemics about military tactics, and Psellos claims that Romanos was impressed by his knowledge. Psellos claimed that Romanos envied him, and once again disregarded his counsel. Despite this, Psellos claimed to keep his loyalty to the emperor. "Nobody can accuse me in any disloyalty to him nor blame me because all his plans went astray" – concludes Psellos in the finish of the short description of his expedition. (Psellos, 2014, p. 269; tr. Sewter, p. 353). According to Psellos (but not Attaleiates), the second expedition did not yield substantial results aside from a few captives and much ado. The presence of sounds in the description of the two expeditions is interesting: the clamor of the councilors' applause prompted by Romanos's appearance in full armor in the first instance is mirrored by the noise that Psellos describes as the sole outcome of his second expedition.

In Psellos's narrative, Romanos is successful on another front. He compensates for the absence of direct actions against the Seljuk Turks with his actions against Empress Theodora. After the first expedition, he suspends communication with her, and after the second expedition, he effectively imprisons her. Instead of trapping the Turks, the emperor imprisons the empress. It is notable that despite the dire military situation, Seljuk prisoners and runaways were brought to Constantinople with some regularity: in 1070, for instance, Alexios Komnenos's older brother, Isaac, brought to Romanos

Erisgen-Chrisoskoulos, a Seljuk princeling who had decided to switch sides in the conflict. Romanos did not bring many prisoners from his expedition, but instead "captured" empress Theodora in the palace.

A recurring motif in the *Chronographia* before Manzikert is the futility of Romanos's actions and his gradual transformation from a humble listener to someone who heeds only himself and brings destruction to all. Romanos who, as Psellos puts it, "wandered in Persia and Syria" and did not bring any trophies from either (Psellos, 2014, p. 275). Importantly, these wanderings are in direct contrast with the wise stasis of another warrior emperor, Isaac Komnenos, who was able to solve problems with the enemy in the East, namely with the "Parthian sultan" (Toghrul Beg of the Seljuk Turks, Alp Arslan's father) without significant effort (Psellos, 2014, p. 237). The contrast here is obvious: Isaac Komnenos succeeded by means of diplomacy, without even leaving Constantinople, while Romanos Diogenes launched one expedition after the other without much result. While Romanos, as Psellos duly notes, rejected his counsel from the very start of his reign, both Doukas and Isaac Komnenos accepted Psellos as a mentor and philosopher and both ruled (allegedly) successfullyWhile Psellos's narrative is, as usual, tend to be self-centered, certain features reveal the author's uneasiness about certain events.

In the beginning of Romanos's story, Psellos generally follows the chronological order of the events without breaking the consequence by many digressions. Psellos highlights the importance of his advice and his connection with the emperor, who hung on his every word. Psellos's counsel is present in other biographies but never to this extent. In his description of the reigns of Romanos and Eudokia, Psellos digresses from the plot five times as if to answer cues in an invisible internal dialogue, calling into his narrative eyewitnesses of the battle and claiming to know some things and not to know others, using I-statements. Mieke Bal qualifies this switch from third-person narrative to the first-person narrative as a "switch from the external narrator to a character-bound narrator" (Bal, 2009, p. 21). As Bal points our, the presence of character-bound narrator is a rhetorical device that aims to increase the veracity of the narrative. In this particular case, Psellos uses this device to highlight his loyalty to Romanos. Another way to reach the same purpose is his appeal to "God of philosophers" in the episode concerning empress Eudocia. Therefore, Psellos use a panoply of methods to enhance his position and to demonstrate his loyalty both to the emperor, empress and the community in general.

3. Psellos and Manzikert: The battle

According to a modern analysis, the campaign which ultimately led to the disaster of Manzikert, was not particularly ill-prepared. Despite many problems, Romanos managed to mobilize his followers and planned the campaign in some detail, with Attaleiates being one of the advisors behind the planning of the third, and final expedition to the east. (Krallis 2016, 179). Psellos again criticizes the advisors who gave Romanos wrong directions, saying that the "the evil councellors to whom he listened let the emperor completely astray" (Psellos, 2014, p. 270; tr. Sewter, 1953, p. 354). The word used for the bad adviser here (παραινέτης) hints at the utmost misguidung with personal gains for the people who give the bad advice. Romanos became suspicious of his Doukai allies and made many things wrong. In the description of the ill-fated expedition, Psellos points to many mistakes in planning and lack of decisive actions. He blames the emperor for his inability to reach peaces, and more importantly, to being subject of misinformation which led to the disastrous consequences.

> I was aware (though he was not) …that the sultan himself was present in person with his army. Romanos…refused to believe anyone who detected the Sultans' influence in these successes…he thought he would capture a barbarian camp without a battle. (Psellos, 2014, p. 270 ; tr. Sewter, p. 355)

The historicity of Psellos interpretation of this passage somehow problematic. A well-informed Arabic source claims, that before the battle Alp Arslan and Romanos did not have a clear idea about one another. It seems likely, the appearance of Romanos at a head of a major army in the region of lake Van was a surprise for Alp Arslan who was heading back to his domains in Iran and literally happened to be in a relative vicinity (circa 400 km) from the theater of actions (Ibn al-Athir,1864, 44). Resultantly, Alp Arslan could not mobilize his main forces and decided to attack Romanos with several thousand of mounted warriors available at the moment. This factoid contradicts opinion of Psellos about the omnipotence and well-preparedness of the Sultan, which seems to be a part of critical construction directed against Romanos. The contrast between the two is highlighted by the critique of Romanos' arrogance, switch of narrators (from third person and first person) and claims of the access to the crucial military information are all familiar. Thus, in the description of the battle Psellos enhances his previous line of critique

against Romanos, demonstrating how his wish for glory and inability to listen to the well-informed advisors led to his failure. Yet the final decision to attack the Turks lied solely on the emperor and was a result of his ignorance.

> Unfortunately for him (Romanos - R.S.), through his ignorance of military science (ἀστρατήγητον) he had scattered his forces. Some were concentrated around himself, others had been sent off to take up some other position. So instead of opposing his adversaries with the full force of his army less than half were actually involved (Psellos, 2014, p. 270 ; tr. Sewter, p. 355)

Whether the remaining contingent was really small is an open question: both the available Arabic sources and Attaleiates's later pro-Romanos narrative speak of significant troops, able to withstand the assault of Alp Arslan's army. It is noteworthy that the opposing Seljuk army was not in top form, maneuvering through unfamiliar terrain and not in contact with the enemy until the very last moment. These conditions forced Alp Arslan to first suggest a peace treaty in a genuine fashion and then rely on the advice of the current *imam* of the Hanafi school to determine when to start the battle (Ibn al Athir 1864, p. 45). Therefore, Psellos's claims about the reduced size of the remaining forces are an insufficient explanation for the military defeat. By describing the troops as "only a small part," Psellos amplifies the scale of Romanos's error, emphasizing that the boastful emperor failed to come to his senses, even in the face of a large-scale conflict.

What follows is not a description of the battle, but Psellos' analysis of the behaviour of Diogenes, which is going to happen. Instead of describing the battle, Psellos goes at length to warn his readers about wrong actions of the emperor.

> Although I cannot applaud his subsequent behaviour, it is impossible for me to censure him. The fact is, he bore the whole brunt of the danger himself. His action can be interpreted in two [272] ways. My own view represents the mean between these two extremes. On the one hand, if you regard him as a hero, courting danger and fighting courageously it is reasonable to praise him: on the other when one reflects that a general, if he conforms to the accepted rules of strategy must remain aloof from the battle-line, supervising the movements of his army and issuing the necessary orders to the men under his command, then Romanus's conduct on this occasion would appear foolhardy in the extreme, for he exposed himself to danger without a thought of the consequences (ἀλόγιστος). I myself am

> more inclined to praise than to blame him for what he did. (Psellos, 2014, pp. 270-271; trans. Sewter 1953, p. 355)

The episode is a culmination of the critique that Psellos builds against Romanos IV Diogenes. Before the very battle Psellos blamed Diogenes for being ignorant, boastful, uneducated literary matters, bad with his wife and bad with his advisors. Now Psellos blamed Romanos for being strategically ignorant, and now, finally, being open to danger without any idea of consequences. Many characteristics of Romanos starts with a negative prefix ἀ-. This is hardly a complimentary image for the emperor and yet another proof of a highly biased narrative. Here Psellos again switches narrative from third person to the first person, a device he uses to boost his veracity. In this particular moment of the story, this is important since Psellos himself was not on the field. The narrator switch goes together with the pause of the narrative which Psellos uses to provide a context for the next episode, namely the decision of Romanos to fight against the Turks with the sword in hand.

> However that may be, he put on the full armour of an ordinary soldier and drew a sword against his enemies. According to several of my informants, he actually killed many of them and put others to flight. Later, when his attackers recognized who he was, they surrounded him on all sides. He was wounded and fell from his horse. They seized him, of course, and the Emperor of the Romans was led away, a prisoner, to the enemy camp, and his army was scattered. Those who escaped were but a tiny fraction of the whole. Of the majority some were taken captive, the rest massacred. (Psellos, 2014, p. 271, trans. Sewter, 1953, p. 356)

The brevity of the summary of such a crucial milestone of Romanos's reign may indicate Psellos's choice to avoid describing the conflict, which was purportedly well-known to his 1070s audience. The details that he did include are also telling: Romanos appears as a warrior in armor, armed with a sword, which evokes his depiction with the enormous shield and spear before the battle. Psellos again claims to have a veritable narrative about the battle in the discourse which contained many narratives about this event. At the same time, the description is fairly short. The avoidance of battle descriptions was highly unusual for Michael Psellos: when he wants to describe a battle he does so in detail (e.g., Romanos III Argyros's failed expedition of against Aleppo or the rebellion of Tornikes), in the

vein of Theophanes or Leo the Deacon (Psellos, 2014, pp. 34–38). Yet, the description of Battle of Manzikert is reduced to a curt account of the key events for some reason.

While no surviving sources are known to directly praise the Romanos's actions, the emperor became a hero of sorts through his failures. Cheynet argues that Romanos had been viewed as a hero before the battle and kept his status long after his tragic death (Cheynet, 1980). When in 1081, ten years after Manzikert, another Byzantine general, Alexios I Komnenos, claimed the throne, his support of the Diogenoi helped solidify the new rule. Romanos Diogenes's popularity was enough for his sons to claim the throne in the 1090s. Therefore, Psellos, writing in the 1070s, had to choose his words carefully and craft an ambiguous interpretation of this key moment in his story. How accessible Psellos's text was is not known, but Romanos's behavior was certainly a subject of speculation and the emotional stakes in the discussion were high. Finally, *caesar* Andronikos Doukas is simply not in the text at all. The complete absence of Andronikos Doukas who is known to have participated in the battle, and whom eyewitnesses later connected with the early retreat of the Cappadocian division is a similarly intriguing authorial decision.

The summary of the battle is followed by a very short description of subsequent events with a focus on the capture of Romanos Diogenes. For some reason, Psellos, known to narrate events of the past at length, limits the description to a few short and abrupt phrases, creating a rhythm by several verbs and the combination of "καὶ" and "τὸ":

> εἶτα δὴ ἑαλώκει· καὶ δορυάλωτος εἰς **το**ὺς πολεμίους ὁ βασιλεὺς Ῥωμαίων **ἀπάγεται·** καὶ **τὸ** στράτευμα **διαλύεται·** καὶ **τὸ** μὲν διαφυγὸν μέρος βραχύ τι· τῶν δὲ πλειόνων οἱ μὲν **ἑάλωσαν·** οἱ δὲ μαχαίρας ἔργον γ**εγόνασιν**. (Psellos, 2014, p. 271, lines 5-9)

They seized him. the emperor of the Romans was led as a prisoner in the enemy camp. And the army dispersed and those who ran away were a small part of it. Of the majority some were captured, the others were massacred (Sewter 1953, p. 356)

As is sometimes the case in the *Iliad*, the absence of conjunctions may imply a dramatic military scene. Psellos here uses short phrases to intensify the drama and demonstrate the results of the disastrous decision of Romanos. While the other main Byzantine text on Manzikert, Attaleiates' is very personal and expresses negative emotions—both those of his own and

of his characters—in many different ways (Attaleiates, 2013, pp. 157-167; trans. Kaldellis and Krallis, 2014, pp. 287-298l); Psellos distances himself from the situation by removing himself from the scene and claiming to be neutral narrator. The scene is devoid of any emotions. This allows him to condensate suspense and demonstrate the totality of the military disaster in a very few words.

Fragmentation is another important feature in Psellos's narrative of Manzikert. Splitting the description of the battle into two parts (introduced by a special phrase) looks like a literary device, it might also be a sign of complex emotions that author experienced in connection of Manzikert. Some things are suspiciously missing: the Doukai brothers are absent from this part of the *Chronographia*. Interestingly, the name of Romanos's main opponent, Alp Arslan of the Great Seljuks is also missing. He is introduced first as "the sultan, king of the Persians or the Kurds" (ὁ σουλτὰν, ὁ τῶν Περσῶν ἢ Κούρτων βασιλεὺς) (Psellos, 2014, p. 270). A very foreign title of the Alp Arslan and it's spatial definition in the text of the *Chronographia* adds to the foreign and exotic image of this character who behaves unpredictably and (as the audience and the author knew) after the battle set Romanos free. . One reason for omitting the name may be that Psellos focuses his narrative on Byzantium and generally avoids the names of the barbaric enemy leaders who do not deserve the attention of the audience. However, another explanation seems more plausible: Psellos may have tried his best to avoid the very name of the sultan who caused him and his patron so much trouble by releasing Romanos Diogenes. This is all the more interesting because later in the 1070s (before or after writing Manzikert episode of the *Chronographia*), Psellos in person participated in the exchange of letters between Michael VII Doukas and the next sultan of the Great Seljuks, - the son of Alp Arslan, Malik Shah (r. 1072 -1092) (Gautier, 1977).

4. After the battle: Psellos and the death of Romanos in the *Chronographia*

Psellos follows the summary of the battle with the scene of the empress and her sons waiting in Constantinople for the outcome of the battle (Psellos, 2014, p. 271), which probably took place some days if not weeks after the actual event. In a rare example of nature imagery in this part of the *Chronographia*, Psellos claims that the situation after Manzikert

was similar to a wave hitting the imperial capital (Littlewood, 2006, p. 26). Psellos here consciously decided to disrupt the chronology, stating to his audience that the account of Romanos's capture should wait until later (ἀναμεινάτω) (Psellos, 2014, pp. 271–272). The introduction of the events is impersonal, recounted using phrases without subjects, which makes the text a serious challenge for modern language translators. The absence of subjects depersonalizes the narrative: the events are happening as if on their own, without anyone's agency. While the tense is formally present, time remains undefined, as found in many other places in the *Chronographia*. This is further accentuated by the previously discussed fact that many characters go unnamed and impossible to identify.

In the scene after the battle, three horsemen are shown to arrive in Constantinople, bringing news of the disastrous defeat in Asia Minor. The presence of the three riders of woe (one explicitly named ἄγγελός) evokes either the apocalypse or a fairy tale—both very rarely referenced elsewhere (Elizbarashvili, 2010, pp. 446-448). The first three horsemen are followed by another group of riders—described in the plural and using collective forms—bringing different news to the empress. Some participants of the battle claim that they had *seen* Romanos Diogenes being brought to the enemy camp, which is the first verb of perception in the whole paragraph. When the situation came to the attention of the counsellors, the empress finally asked them what to do and they together (σύμπασιν) advised the empress to take over the throne. Thus, the passage both starts and finishes with sentences that have no identifiable agents. While Psellos is known for his penchant to include himself in his own narrative—which Marc Lauxtermann, using Gerard Genette's terminology, defined as metalepsis—the episode in question contains no such self-references (Lauxtermann, 2023, p.351). Besides Psellos's absence, other members of the council are equally missing. The decision is made collectively ("taken together"), based on the similarly collective news of the group of anonymous horsemen riding into the capital.

Psellos goes on to state that he supported the idea of the empress and her son ruling together, explicitly stressing that he does not lie to his readers: "My personal opinion—I will not say a lie (οὐ γὰρ διαψεύσομαί)—was that both should act in concert" (Psellos, 2014, p. 272;). This personal claim (inserted where the narrator disrupts the spatial and temporal causality of the events) highlights the "narrative constraint"—as defined by narratologist Mieke Bal—of the *Chronographia*. While the verb διαψεύδω can certainly be found elsewhere in the *Chronographia*, this is the only

instance where Psellos uses it at face value to support the veracity of his account of the events immediately following the battle.

Psellos is not ready to acknowledge his responsibility in the *Chronographia*. Instead, he shifts the blame first to Romanos Diogenes, who lost the battle due to his poor strategy; then to the unidentified people who rushed to the palace and removed Romanos Diogenes from power; and finally to an anonymous collective of councilors who remained in Constantinople during Romanos's expedition and supported a new regime under Eudokia and her son Michael. Psellos unequivocally downplays his role in all three instances, and uses the present tense for his claim that he is not lying to corroborate his position.

The absence of personal pronouns and personal names in the passage relating the first reaction of the Constantinopolitan elite to the Battle of Manzikert is instructive, especially since Psellos is well known for his omnipresence in the narrative of the *Chronographia*. The introduction of epic elements, such as the three riders/angels of woe, and the absence of temporal definition further create the surreal impression that the events unfold by themselves, without any clear agency and without the author. The key decision to remove Romanos Diogenes from power, for example, is made by an anonymous and unanimous collective of counsellors, allegedly in complete agreement. The absence of names of Doukai brothers and Alp Arslan of the Great Seljuks in the passage describing a battle itself can be a sign of both narrative constraint and uneasiness of Psellos about the events described and/or conscious omission of moments and persons uncomfortable for Psellos and his patrons and the name of the sultan, who created for Byzantine elite a good deal of trouble.

He says that the new emperor, who was twenty-one years old at the time (and thus considered a young adult in Byzantium), listened to his advice. Psellos played a key role in advising to ban Romanos Diogenes from the state and remove him from power. He goes to great lengths to demonstrate that he was not involved in the next putsch in Constantinople that succeeded in removing the ruling empress and Romanos wife, Eudokia Makrembolkitissa from power and to the monastery. Psellos claims that he did not want to be a part of a new administration but the new emperor, Michael VII Doukas, forcefully demanded him to serve as his advisor. As a courtier, Psellos argued that he had had nothing to do with the removal of the empress from the palace . "It was decided to do it," (κυροῦται) writes Psellos, using an impersonal formula similar to his description of the removal of Romanos Diogenes from power (Psellos, 2014, p. 275).

He supports his claim by calling on God as his witness and stating that Emperor Michael had no hand in the removal of his mother either.

The story continues with a description of the military prowess of the Doukai brothers. One of them, Constantine, defeated the army gathered by Romanos in an open battle. After this, Romanos runs away and finds refuge with an Armenian noble, Khachatur (Chataturious), whom Psellos calls "a man… strictly opposed to us" (δυσμενὴς ἡμῖν τῆς προαιρέσεως) (Psellos, 2014, p. 278; trans. Sewter, 1953, p. 276). The description of this first defeat is limited to a brief sentence. Psellos either lacked information about Constantine Doukas's victory or chose to not publicize it. The question of whether Constantine achieved a total victory is left open in the *Chronographia*. Psellos writes that immediately afterwards, Michael VII and his advisors considered making peace with Romanos and sent him a benevolent letter, which is certainly not a customary way of exhibiting military power. The agency behind the letter is once again obscured by the omnipresent "we," with Psellos making clear that he did not make this decision alone; others, including the emperor's councillors, were also involved. (Psellos, 2014, p. 278).

The *Chronographia* then reports that the negotiations failed, and Michael VII sent his best forces against Romanos and Khachatur (on him see *PBW* c. 106867), under the command of *caesar* John's oldest son, Andronikos Doukas. Psellos expressed more sympathy towards him, describing him as "an amazingly tall man, generous, kindly, and extremely fair" (Psellos, 2014, p. 279; trans. Sewter, 1953, p. 362). His assistant was a Frankish mercenary named Crispinos. As noted above, thanks to Crispinos, this episode of the *Chronographia* can be dated precisely, as Psellos says that he wrote these lines on the day of Crispinos's death which happened in 1073. In a foreboding of further destiny of Romanos, Psellos also specifically mentions that the ruling emperor Michael VII ordered his troops to spare Romanos: "Meanwhile the emperor was terribly worried in case his rival should be caught by our soldiers, and either fall fighting, or having been taken alive be mutilated in some part of his body." (Psellos, 2014, p. 280; trans. Sewter 1953, p. 363).

Much like the description of events before Manzikert, Psellos makes this remark to prepare the reader for subsequent events to come, namely, the blinding and death of Romanos Diogenes, the thing that narratology would call prolepsis. This is the second warning: the audience should be ready. The expedition of Andronikos Doukas against Romanos and his Armenian allies is the reverse of Romanos's expedition against the

Turks. While Romanos was shown to have poor planning, Andronikos ran his campaign smoothly and motivated his warriors to stick to the plan. Thanks to thoughtful preparation and effective command, Andronikos and the Franks approach the enemy in secret, attack them in time, and defeat Romanos once again in the open field. The defeat is complete, and the enemy leader, Chachatur, is captured alive, stripped naked to be humiliated, and brought before the victorious Andronikos Doukas.

Romanos's capture after the siege is similar to the scene at Manzikert, except it is even more degrading; in this instance Romanos is betrayed by his own soldiers who effectively hand him over to the enemy. Andronikos Doukas also responds to the capture of his opponent similarly to the unnamed "King of Persians and Courtians": "Instead of receiving him in a high-handed, arrogant fashion, he actually sympathized with the prisoner. He shook hands and invited him to his own tent. Finally, he asked him to be his guest at the table, where a magnificent banquet was prepared," (Psellos, 2014, p. 283; trans. Sewter 1953, p. 365). This parallelism and the reference to a banquet is not coincidental—as Psellos himself notes earlier: history repeats itself.

This scene demonstrates that the Doukai were merciful with their defeated enemy, as opposed to Romanos's arrogance. Albeit somewhat tenuous, the combination of two words (σκηνη and τραπεζα) may suggest another parallelism with the scene in which another emperor, Constantine Monomachos, is threatened by murder by the hands of a false friend (Psellos, 2014, p. 164). If, however, this is not the case, the scene of Romanos's submission can be interpreted as Psellos's attempt to fabricate yet another precursor of the fallen emperor's murder in the future. Concerning the Doukai brothers (the two uncles of Michael VII), Psellos's focus on Adronikos Doukas is interesting: in 1072 at least, he seems to sympathize more with Andronikos than with Constantine, who was soon removed from power. This explains both his previously mentioned absence in the Manzikert scene and his conspicuous presence in the fight and victory against Romanos Diogenes.

The blinding of the disgraced Romanos Diogenes after his capture is no doubt the culmination of the emperor's tragic story. Psellos explicitly expresses his disagreement with the blinding: "To pass on to what happened thereafter is a most disagreeable task. I am reluctant to describe a deed that should never have taken place" (Psellos, 2014, p. 283; trans. Sewter, 1953, p. 279). He also remarks that it goes against the Holy Scripture, yet he proceeds to describe what happened: he seems to

insinuate that while the blinding was unacceptable for his audience, the presence of the account is another instance of narrative constraint in his history, sharing different perspectives with the readers:

> On the one hand, the scruples of religion, as well as a natural unwillingness to inflict pain, would forbid such a deed: … the state of affairs at the time, and the possibility of sudden changes in the fortunes of both parties, proclaimed that it must be done. (Psellos, 2014, pp. 283–284; trans. Sewter 1953, p. 365)

Psellos takes care to absolve himself of all blame and interpret the cruel measure as a collective action, recommended by the group of anonymous courtiers "well-disposed" towards Emperor Michael (Psellos, 2014, p. 284; trans. Sewter 1953, p. 279). These people are then portrayed as wary of Romanos, and their apprehension prompts them to draw up a letter later sent to the person in charge of the prisoner. Psellos continues the story with the emperor's reaction, who had no desire to capture or harm Romanos. The author goes to great lengths to describe a range of emotions the emperor displayed at the news of the blinding, even stating that he wished to mourn the former emperor: "God knows I am not saying that to flatter Michael," says Psellos, once again calling upon God as a witness to his words.

Interestingly, Psellos entirely forgoes describing the blinding, a detail that is covered in other sources more favorable to Romanos (Attaleiates, 2011, pp. 177–178; trans. Kaldellis and Krallis, 2014, pp. 322–333). In his narration, the advisers are shown sending the order, and then, very abruptly, the former emperor appears already blinded, transported to the island of Proti (Buyukada) near Constantinople. This gap is significant. Considering the brevity of time between the event and the creation of the text, it can be the sign of a thorny issue that the author tried to circumvent by skipping some details, which, again, bears out the narrative constraint shaping the discourse in the *Chronographia*.

The other question concerns ethics. How did Psellos address the blinding of the emperor? Was it favorable or detrimental for him? A search for the words "take out" and "eye" in the text of the *Chronographia* yields another similar episode in which an emperor was blinded after the revolt of his relatives who put a female on the throne. The emperor in question is Michael V Kalaphates, whose removal from power and blinding in 1042 Psellos describes in detail in the earlier part of his work (Psellos,

2014, pp. 104–105). According to his account, in 1042, the people of Constantinople instigated by Empress Theodora's courtiers succeeded in removing Michael V from the throne and chased him and his chief counsellor, John Orphanotrophos, to the Hagia Sophia. Psellos, who began his career at the court as undersecretary, was in fact at the Hagia Sophia at that time and acted as an important intermediary between the two factions, communicating with the emperor (Lauritzen, 2009).

As in 1071, the earlier episode features unnamed people who decide to blind Michael V and communicate the order in a letter. And much like in 1071, Psellos himself is in the center of the events. In both instances, members of the elite took pity on the people destined to be blinded. Finally, in both cases, Psellos expresses his disgust with the procedure. The difference lies in the details and in the author's motivation. In 1042, Psellos meticulously describes the procedure of the blinding and goes to lengths to explain how disgusting and humiliating the procedure is (Psellos, 2014, pp. 105-106). Despite the similarities, the 1071 episode goes the opposite way:

> As for Diogenes, he in his blindness was brought to the monastery which he himself had founded on the island of Proti and there he died not long afterwards. His reign had lasted less than four years. Michael was now again the undisputed ruler of the Empire. (Psellos, 2014, p. 284; tr. Sewter, p. 366)

Psellos justifies the act but completely omits the tragic description of the cruel process present in some other Byzantine and even later non-Byzantine sources (Anetsi, 2014, p. 193). Here once again Psellos omits the possible reasons for the death, namely the consequences of badly organized blinding (for blinding see Vryonis 2003). In her reference book of narratology, Mieke Bal labels this missing as an *anachrony*, and mentions that the omitted events are sometimes important for the author (Bal, 2009, p. 91). In the case of Psellos, his own writing testifies to the missing events: he did send to Romanos Diogenes' a letter trying to console him after the blinding. The interpretations of this consolations vary (Pietsch-Braounou, 2010)

What follows is a thing that Mieke Bal would call a summary: Psellos introduces a phrase about the length of the reign of Diogenes, thus connecting him with other rulers and then concludes, that "Michael was now undisputed ruler of the Empire" (Psellos, 2014, p. 284; tr. Sewter, p. 366). The absence of such statements in the end of the other chapters of

the *Chronographia* demonstrates, again, that the description of Romanos is an exceptional one. One can hypothesize that this very reign and the problems it caused stimulated Psellos to create (or at least to finish) his major historical work. At the very least, repetitions, many changes of actors, anachronies and most importantly and many omissions allow one to conclude that the reign of Romanos in the *Chronographia is* one of the climaxes of the later part of the story. The author, Michael Psellos, clearly manipulates the narrative following his political aims.

5. The battle and the philosopher

As noted above, the narrative of the *Chronographia* up to the battle of Manzikert is an interesting example of the deconstruction of a panegyric. In the *Chronographia* Psellos, who had supported Romanos in the early 1070s and wrote at least one panegyric for him, changed allegiance and depicted the emperor as a man stumbling from one mistake to the next. In the passage leading up to the battle scene, Psellos uses Homeric allusions to portray Romanos as a *miles gloriosus*, armed with a disproportionately big shield and lance to assert his masculinity, yet unable to achieve significant results. The description paints Romanos as a failure who could never achieve his goals. Contrary to other contemporaries, especially Michael Attaleiates and later John Skylitzes, who highlight the emperor's bravery in his attempts to repeal the Turks, Psellos's Romanos is a man who never attained victory but still celebrated his triumph. His actions *outside* the palace are in stark contrast with those *within*: Romanos offends Empress Theodora and ignores the counsel of the people who want to help him. The enumeration of Romanos's three failures works as a precursor of Manzikert, a kind of *prolepsis* preparing the reader for the imminent disaster.

The description of the battle is a culmination of emperors' personal failure. Psellos accepts here a mantle of expert and claims to understand all the bad decisions that Romanos took at Manzikert. The emperor is not able to command the army properly and is devoid of military talent (ἀστρατήγητον), which leads him to a bad result. In a wish to behave recklessly, Romanos loses the ability to judge the consequences of his actions (ἀλόγιστος). Psellos claims neutrality in the discussion of emperors' behavior during the battle, that received compliments from the other contemporaries, but limits the description to a few phrases. The episode is

also interesting for the omission of the name of the main opponent (sultan Alp Arslan of the Great Seljuks) and the discussion about the possible defection of Doukai. The first omission might be a wish of Psellos to remove from the history the enemy ruler who caused so much trouble, the second is understandable, since Psellos wrote the Chronographia during the rule of Doukai and had no interest to criticize his patrons.

While describing the aftermath of Manzikert, Psellos positioned himself as a powerful and sensible player in the Byzantine game of thrones. It is Psellos who restores order after the battle, effectively returns the Doukai to the throne and establishes Michael VII Doukas as the sole ruler. It is Psellos who organizes the defense against the "waves" of attack threatening Constantinople from all sides. And it is Psellos who selects and supports the right leaders to face the rebellious Romanos—quite possibly being the one responsible for Romanos' demise too. At the crucial turning point of his narrative, the description of Romanos' death, Psellos writes about "the conditions" that prompted the fateful decision, thus distancing both himself and his patron Michael VII Doukas from the violent end of the political struggle.The episode of blinding of Romanos is shortened to a few phrases and seems, in this moment of the narrative, a logical end of Romanos career.

Psellos deploys a number of methods to enhance his credibility. Besides constant repetitions, which are rather typical for Psellos (see Littlewood, 2006, p.15), he uses frequent narrative switches from third person-narrator to first-person narrator, at least one classical reference (the spear from the Iliad), calls upon God as a witness twice. The story of the battle of Manzikert is notable for the omission of some factoids, absence of any signifier of emotions and the lack of images of nature and classical allusions that are present in other parts of the *Chronographia* in some abundance (see Littlewood, 2006). To add credibility, Psellos asserts that he does not not lie to his audience. All thus aims to enhance the negative image of Romanos, blame him for the events before, during and after Manzikert and to defend Psellos and his patrons, the Doukai, the attempt solidified by many literary devices that all aim to produce a thing that Mieke Bal called a "rhetoric of veracity" (Bal, 2009, p. 24). Psellos constructs a psogos, a discourse that attacks Romanos and claims that Romanos was dangerous for the empire itself. This rhetoric of veracity was necessary since other versions of the same story were present in the discourse and had a ready audience.

When Romanos was defeated and Psellos and Doukai took over the power, at least some people were not happy with these events. Many did adapt to the new regime, but buried their hostility for at least a short while (Krallis, 2016, p. 190). Writing after 1079, former military judge of Romanos Diogenes and an eyewitness to Manzikert, Michael Attaleiates, set out to write the story of his age and Romanos's military campaigns (Krallis, 2016; Vratimos, 2017). Being servant of many emperors himself, Attaleiates (writing after the Doukai were removed from power) contained the following philippic against Michael VII Doukas and the people who blinded Romanos.

> What do you have to say, oh emperor, oh you and those who crafted this unholy decision with you? The eyes of a man who had done no wrong [Romanos Diogenes - R.S.] but risked his life for the welfare of the Romans and who had fought with a powerful army against the most warlike nations when he could have waited it all out in the palace without any danger and shrugged off the toils and horrors of the military life? (Attaleiates, 2011, p. 176; trans. Kaldellis and Krallis, 2014, p. 319).

This accusation was probably an integral part of the prevailing political discourse as early as the 1070s. To answer the critics, Psellos crafted his tale about the proud emperor, the battle he failed to win, the empress in distress, and the young prince and his clever courtier who outwitted them all. We may never know whether his literary effort earned him any peace, but it is evident that he disappeared from public life soon after finishing the *Chronographia*. His version of Manzikert story did gain some attention, but not much attention: the next generations of Byzantine historians, including Skylitzes and Vryennios preferred Attaleiates' version of the events even in altered state. In the twelfth century Psellos was famous mostly as a teacher and rhetorician, and not so much as a historian. One can wonder if the Byzantine literati had some problems with bias of the *Chronographia*. Psellos' wits and critique against an emperor who like war much more than peace found a ready audience much later, among the modernist literati of Western Europe in the nineteenth century - but this is a subject of another article.

Endnotes

[1] The name seems to be a later designation. Neither the Byzantines nor their non-Byzantine contemporaries called it the Battle of Manzikert. Instead, they either refer to it as “that battle”, or in some cases, “the expedition to Khliat” (e.g. Ibn al Athir, 1864, p. 44).

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