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Prescribing Grief: Emotion, Restraint, and Rhetoric in Byzantium, 803–1204

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Abstract

Historians have explored the experience of grief amongst Byzantine communities, but largely within the general period of late antiquity, and with limited reference to its prescriptive norms. Focusing on the period of 803-1204, this thesis contributes to the study of emotionology in Byzantium by revealing how prescriptive literature about grief was reflected in different contexts of grieving as they were represented in primary sources. Prescriptive texts provided a pathway through grief, and a set of emotional norms when grieving, centred on the desire to reach a state of *apatheia*. However, chronicle and literary representation of grief also show it was used for other purposes in negotiating power and politics, often through the use and performance of Classical traditions.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the summer of 1118, Emperor Alexios Komnenos I dies and passes from this world to the next. The women at his bedside, his wife and daughter, shriek and howl in despair.¹ John, his son, however, is nowhere to be seen.² He is not by the bedside, weeping for his deceased father. Instead, he is marching into the Palace to assume immediate control of the Byzantine bureaucracy.³ Nowhere in any of the sources does he weep or mourn for the loss of his father. He does not even attend the funeral.⁴ It seems that he is entirely unconcerned with his death. In another example of grief at the Byzantine court, a chronicler describes the tears at the bedside of the deceased Emperor Constantine VII as “senseless and vain”.⁵ These behaviours appear strange when looked at through modern eyes. They seem utterly divorced from modern, ‘western’ notions of what grief is, what it looks like, and how it ought to be handled. Though John’s behaviour could be explained away with reference to the unfortunate realities of Byzantine politics (so famous that the phrase “byzantine” is now associated with duplicity or covertness), the chronicler’s assertion seems out of place, perhaps even cruel. There seems to be a lack of compassion for the mourners, or respect for the deceased.

This investigation seeks to illuminate the emotional standards (otherwise the “emotionology”) of the Byzantine world.⁶ It shows how Byzantines expressed and understood grief which we might define as the feeling of loss in its many forms, not just as an acute reaction to death.⁷ This study uses prescriptive literature to determine the ideals of emotional behaviour expected of Byzantine people, and compares prescribed

¹ Anna Komnene, *The Alexiad*, trans. E. Dawes (In Parentheses Publications, 2000), 301-2.

² Niketas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, trans. Harry J. Magoulias (Wayne State University Press, 1984), 6.

³ Niketas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 6-7.

⁴ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 7.

⁵ Anonymous, "Theophanes Continuatus Book 6, Years 944–961," in *The Rise and Fall of Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas*, ed. Denis Sullivan (Brill, 2018), 55.

⁶ Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (1985): 813.

⁷ American Psychological Association, "grief," in *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, ed. Gary VandenBos (American Psychological Association, 2023).

ideals with the ways grief is represented in historical chronicles and ritual. It argues that Byzantine grief showed strong continuity with Classical traditions of grieving, but that it was also tempered by the Christian ideals expressed in the prescriptive literature. A comparison between the prescriptive ideals and representations of grief shown in *The Alexiad* and Choniates' *Historia* reveal that Byzantines often aligned themselves closely with these ideals, which required a degree of restraint in the expression of grief. Despite this, the Byzantines cultivated a complex emotional culture that balanced Classical modes of grief with Christian ideals of *apatheia*.

The period of Byzantine history covered in this thesis stretches from 803, with the rise of Emperor Nikephoros I, to 1204, when the Byzantine Empire ceased to be a contiguous political unit following the Sack of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade. There are several reasons this period was chosen for this study. It begins at the point when doctrines relating to grief had stabilized into a clear system of belief and thought. John of Damascus (c. 749) was one of the final authors at the end of what is generally recognised as the patristic age. Although Orthodox construction of doctrine and theology was an ongoing process, the writings of John Damascene are often seen as a watershed moment. His *Exposition on the Orthodox Faith* gives a consolidated summary of the passions, and their effect on the soul. The rich variety of primary sources appearing later, such as *The Alexiad*, *De Ceremoniis* and Choniates' *Historia*, reflects this system of thought, and these sources have yet to be meaningfully explored from the perspective of the history of the emotions.

The period 803 to 1204 also covers just over four centuries of a deeply volatile political environment. It includes moments of restoration, such as the Macedonian Renaissance (867 - 1056), but also moments of catastrophe, such as the disaster that was the Battle of Manzikert and the resulting loss of Anatolia (1071). The wounds of the Iconoclast debate still festered beneath the surface, both politically and theologically. The overall arc of the period could be described as one of decay and deterioration even though there were episodes of resurrection and restoration. There were a few important shifts in court culture during this time, too. The Macedonian Renaissance, the compilation of *De Ceremoniis*, the “victory” of the military faction over the court under

the Komnenian regime are all examples of these shifts.⁸ This is key for the study of court rituals (in conjunction with historical chronicles) in the context of grief. The period ends, though, with the collective trauma of the Fourth Crusade, an intense moment in which Byzantines, such as Choniates, experienced an almost existential grief for a world order that seemed completely overturned. The empire would never be the same again, emotionally, politically, and arguably, socially.

Key to an understanding of Byzantine emotions (called “passions”) is the central concept of *apatheia* (απαθεια), a state of passionlessness. *Apatheia* is a complex concept, and difficult to do justice (and thus needs further explanation - see Chapter 2). *Apatheia* is not a state of being apathetic (as in the modern derivative term, *apathy*), but of being in peace and love, detached from the emotional whims of the material world. God, for example, exists within a state of *apatheia*. *Apatheia* as a concept found its way into several Christian traditions. Western Latin doctrine would adopt and integrate it.⁹ *Apatheia* would go on to play a role in a number of western monastic traditions, as well as in western mysticism, and several western theologians would also write on it.¹⁰ However, its role in the various forms of Eastern Christianity has not been given as much attention in the West, at least not until recently. This study will explore how Byzantines understood the passions and *apatheia*, but also how ideas of them were complemented and complicated, in certain situations and contexts.

Literature Review: Historiography of Death, Grief, and Emotions

A key feature of the experience of grief in the medieval world, both in the Latin West and the Greek East, is the synthesis of ancient models of the emotions with Christian modes of thought. This is true for all emotions that medieval people acknowledged, but doubly so for grief, for grief forces a confrontation with mortality, which can have a profound effect on any worldview. The historiography of Byzantine grief crosses

⁸ Alexander Kazhdan and Charles M. Brand, “Komnenian Dynasty,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan (Oxford University Press, 1991), 1143.

⁹ This matter is complex and contested. For further discussion, see Joseph Nguyen, *Apatheia in the Christian Tradition: An Ancient Spirituality and Its Contemporary Relevance* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018).

¹⁰ Henry Chadwick, “The Ascetic Ideal in the History of the Church,” *Studies in Church History* 22 (1985): 1-23.

boundaries between a multitude of different disciplines as part of a still developing scholarship of emotions in past societies.

Medieval death has long been subject to analysis and research. *Mentalités* historian Philippe Ariès, for example, explored medieval attitudes regarding death.¹¹ Binski gave an influential overview of the period's ideas about death, the rituals associated with it, and its general representation in art and culture.¹² However, such histories focus on Western Christendom, though they are of relevance because of a shared Christian heritage with the East, despite their significant doctrinal differences. The Byzantine way of death has since been variously explored. There are the histories of a more general nature, such as those by Marinis and Dennis.¹³ More specialized work includes studies of death at court, as well as the death of children.¹⁴ Moore's work on material culture introduces the use of new methodological vocabulary.¹⁵ It overlaps significantly with work on the emotional element of the Byzantine death. A recurring theme within this historiography is the heavily religious element of Byzantine death, an element admittedly not unique to Byzantium in the Middle Ages, but worth acknowledging all the same. To Byzantines, attitudes towards death were associated strongly with the afterlife. Death was a transition from this world to the next.¹⁶ Another reoccurring theme is the interest in Byzantine death rituals, particularly those of

¹¹ Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

¹² Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹³ George Dennis, "Death in Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001); Vasileios Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium: The Fate of the Soul in Theology, Liturgy, and Art* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁴ Cornelia Horn, "Children and the Experience of Death in Late Antiquity and the Byzantine World," in *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*, ed. Christian Laes and Ville Vuolanto (Routledge, 2016), 300-17; Claudia Rapp, "Death at the Byzantine Court," in *Death at Court*, ed. Karl Heinz Speiss and Immo Warntjes (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014), 267-86.

¹⁵ Sophie Moore, "A Relational Approach to Mortuary Practices within Medieval Byzantine Anatolia" (PhD diss., Newcastle University, 2013); Sophie Moore, "Experiencing Mid-Byzantine Mortuary Practice: Shrouding the Dead," in *Experiencing Byzantium*, ed. Claire Nesbitt and Mark Jackson (Routledge, 2011), 195-210.

¹⁶ Dennis, "Death in Byzantium," 1.

emperors.¹⁷ This extends to those emperors who met violent ends, the number of which was not insignificant.¹⁸

Whilst studies of medieval death have provided a strong foundation for the study of grief, the historiography of emotions offers key methodological tools for analysing grief. This historiography is extensive. The most pertinent is the debate over methodological frameworks, such as the ideas of ‘emotional community’, developed by Barbara Rosenwein, the ‘regime’, developed by William Reddy, and the ‘emotional style’, developed by Peter and Carol Stearns (see Methodology below).¹⁹ Boddice points out that all of these terms exist to describe the emotional standards of a community, though they each highlight slightly different aspects of the emotionology of a place and time.²⁰ Rosenwein’s model has proven to be the more popular method in medieval scholarship on the emotions.²¹ Recent scholarship such as the work by O’Connell has shown that ideas concerning the relationship between power and emotion work just as readily within a medieval context. O’Connell’s thesis pays special attention to King Richard II’s grief over the loss of his wife, Anne of Bohemia, and how that grief was reflected through “public performance and actions which signalled his kingly authority and power.”²² Other studies have also demonstrated that emotional responses to royal death, including the presence, absence, or inversion of expected grief norms, can themselves be treated as political commentaries on kingship, administration and the overall cohesion of an emotional community.²³ This emphasis on the relationship

¹⁷ Rapp, “Death at the Byzantine Court”, 275-8; Gregory Dobrov, “A Dialogue with Death: Ritual Lament and the Ὁρῆνός Θεοτόκου of Romanos Melodos,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 35, no. 4 (1994).

¹⁸ Bogdan-Petru Maleon, “Imperial Death in Byzantium: A Preliminary View on the Negative Funerals,” *Transylvanian Review* 19, no. 4 (2010).

¹⁹ Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions* (Manchester University Press, 2017), 85.

²⁰ Boddice, *The History of Emotions*, 85.

²¹ Barbara Rosenwein, “Even the Devil (Sometimes) has Feelings: Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages,” *The Haskins Society Journal: Studies in Medieval History* 14 (2003): 1–14; Melissa Raine, “Searching for Emotional Communities in Late Medieval England,” in *Emotions and Social Change: Historical and Sociological Perspectives*, ed. David Lemmings and Ann Brooks (Routledge, 2014), 65-76; Maria Doerfler, “Emotional Communities and the Loss of an Individual: The Case of Grief,” in *Managing Emotion in Byzantium: Passions, Affects and Imaginings*, ed. Margaret Mullet and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Studies in Byzantine Cultural History* (Routledge, 2023), Ch. 11.

²² Julia O’Connell, “Grief, Emotional Communities and Anglo-French Rivalry in Late-Medieval English and French Literature” (PhD diss., Trinity College, 2021), 12.

²³ Lindsay M. Diggelmann, “Laughter and Grief in Twelfth-Century Accounts of the Death of William Rufus,” *Emotions: History, Culture, Society* 5, no. 2 (2021): 187–208.

between emotional performance and power provides a useful methodology for analysing the Byzantine court.

The study of Byzantine emotions was specifically established by Martin Hinterberger in 2010.²⁴ There were precedents, for example, the historiography surrounding the depiction of sorrow, and the role of lamentation in ritual.²⁵ However, Hinterberger brought this research into the current historiography on emotions. Hinterberger also went on to analyse the Byzantine view of emotive acts, such as weeping.²⁶ Major themes across the Byzantine emotion historiography include the matter of *apatheia* (the tendency towards the refusal to express emotion in the pursuit of godliness), and discussion of the early Church Fathers such as John Chrysostom and Jacob of Serugh who derided the overt expression of emotions.²⁷ *Apatheia* as a spiritual concept also has its own historiography; its themes mostly surround its theological experience.²⁸ Another major theme is the concept of the “passions”. This derived from a Stoic model of the emotions that was integrated into early Christianity to become the dominant model of the emotions in Christian thought in Byzantium, and arguably throughout Christendom.²⁹

The historiography surrounding medieval grief is young, though already quite vast. Much of the scholarly attention has been devoted to the Latin West rather than the Greek East. This includes the thesis on late medieval grief by O’Connell.³⁰ Carol Lansing’s *Passion and Order* is also relevant here since it deals with themes of

²⁴ Martin Hinterberger, "Emotions in Byzantium," in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 123-34.

²⁵ Henry Maguire, "The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977); Hans Belting, "An Image and Its Function in the Liturgy: The Man of Sorrows in Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 34/35 (1980); Gregory Dobrov, "A Dialogue with Death: Ritual Lament and the Ὁρῆνς Θεοτόκου of Romanos Melodos".

²⁶ Martin Hinterberger, "'Messages of the Soul': Tears, Smiles, Laughter and Emotions Expressed by Them in Byzantine Literature," in *Greek Laughter and Tears*, ed. Margaret Alexiou and Douglas Cairns (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 125-45.

²⁷ Martin Hinterberger, "Emotions in Byzantium," 125-32.

²⁸ Alice-Mary Talbot, "Women's Space in Byzantine Monasteries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998); Andrew Summerson, "Christ the Healer of Human Passibility: The Passions, Apatheia, and Christology in Maximus the Confessor's Quaestiones ad Thalassium" in *The Unity of Body and Soul in Patristic and Byzantine Thought* ed. Anna Usacheva, Jorg Ulrich, and Siam Bhayro (Brill, 2021).

²⁹ Damien Boquet and Piroska Nagy, "The Christianization of Emotion," in *Medieval Sensibilities: A History of Emotions in the Middle Ages* (Polity Press, 2018), 9-31; Hinterberger, 126-9.

³⁰ O’Connell, "Grief, Emotional Communities and Anglo-French Rivalry in Late-Medieval English and French Literature," 7-8.

emotional regulation in the face of grief.³¹ Much attention has also been given to the death of children during this time.³² Grief poetry, laments, psalms, and other textual representations of grief have also received much attention, as well as the gendered experience of grief.³³

Grief in the Greek East has received less attention. Hinterberger's "Emotions in Byzantium" touched upon it briefly as part of a broader overview, including discussion of *charmolupe* (χαρμολύπη).³⁴ *Charmolupe* is an emotion that has a multitude of expressions throughout Byzantine life, and not just in the mourning for an individual. The first (and arguably seminal) study on the topic of *charmolupe* (and as a result, grief tangentially) came from Irénée Hausherr, a French theologian in the early twentieth century.³⁵ Hausherr's study, however, focused primarily on *penthos*, or compunction: a form of spiritual sorrow concerned with repentance and the soul's relationship to God, rather than grief for the dead specifically. The distinction between "worldly" sorrow and spiritual sorrow is discussed by Hunt, rather than as a direct summary of Hausherr's position.³⁶ Maria Doerfler's work is important here because it turns more directly to grief for the loss of an individual. She emphasises that Byzantines were not so "unkind" as to

³¹ Carol Lansing, *Passion and Order: Restraint of Grief in the Medieval Italian Communes* (Cornell University Press, 2008), 6-11.

³² Viktor Aldrin, "Parental Grief and Prayer in the Middle Ages: Religious Coping in Swedish Miracle Stories," *Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and the Social Sciences* 18 (2015); Danielle Nicole Greigo, "Child Death, Grief, and the Community in High and Late Medieval England" (PhD diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 2018); Andrew Lynch, "'he nas but seven yeer olde': Emotions in Boy Martyr Legends of Later Medieval England," in *Death, Emotion and Childhood in Premodern Europe*, ed. Katie Barclay, Kimberley Reynolds, and Ciara Rawnsley (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 25-44; Jan M. Ziolkowski, "Laments for Lost Children: Latin Traditions," in *Laments for the Lost in Medieval Literature*, ed. Jane Tolmie and M. J. Toswell (Brepols, 2010), 81-108.

³³ Anne L. Klinck, "Singing a Song of Sorrow: Tropes of Lament," in *Laments for the Lost in Medieval Literature*, ed. Jane Tolmie and M. J. Toswell (Brepols, 2010), 1-20; M. J. Toswell, "Structures of Sorrow: The Lament Psalms in Medieval England," in *Laments for the Lost in Medieval Literature*, ed. Jane Tolmie and M. J. Toswell (Brepols, 2010), 21-44; Mary Ramsey, "Dustsceawung: Texting the Dead in the Old English Elegies," in *Laments for the Lost in Medieval Literature*, ed. Jane Tolmie and M. J. Toswell (Brepols, 2010), 44-66; L. Templeton, *Grief, Gender, and Identity in the Middle Ages: Knowing Sorrow* (Brill, 2021); Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama* (Routledge, 2006); Jim Casey, "Feeling It Like a Man: Masculine Grief in Medieval and Early Modern Texts," in *Grief, Gender, and Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Lee Templeton (Brill, 2022), 235-57.

³⁴ Hinterberger, "Emotions in Byzantium," 129-30.

³⁵ Irénée Hausherr, *Penthos: La Doctrine De La Componction Dans L'orient Chrétien* (Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1944).

³⁶ Hannah Hunt, *Joy-Bearing Grief: Tears of Contrition in the Writings of the Early Syrian and Byzantine Fathers* (Brill, 2004), 14.

deny compassion to the grieving.³⁷ Though Doerfler did not dwell long on *charmolupe*, her study is a key starting point for the arguments developed in this thesis. Furthermore, Doerfler brought forward the idea that Byzantines did provide space for grief, but in certain specific ritual or religious contexts.

The central context discussed in this thesis is the Byzantine court. Beyond the experience of individual grief, the Byzantine court provided a highly ritualized space where ceremony was key. A variety of emotions were performed, controlled, and shaped in this very public environment. Some account of the historiography on Byzantine court culture needs to be taken, notably Henry Maguire's edited volume on the subject.³⁸ One of its key and recurrent themes is the strictly hierarchical nature of the court and the extensive number of its ceremonies. Many of these ceremonies (such as the ceremonial dispensing of wages) provide an excellent backdrop to circumstances that invigorate and propagate certain emotions (such as envy in this example), which can complicate the experience of other emotions such as grief.³⁹ Another important theme is the highly symbolic nature of court rituals. Every ceremony in the Byzantine court had a deeper, more significant meaning, intending to instil certain emotions in those taking part and those observing. Ivanov's "Power and Fear" provides an excellent insight into this.⁴⁰ Averil Cameron's work also analysed the construction of court ritual, and its attempts to provide continuity with the past, particularly how this is represented in Constantine VII's *De Ceremoniis*, a key source for the study of the ritual of the Byzantine court.⁴¹ A significant area of contention in the literature on this text is the purpose behind the text's composition. Anthony Kaldellis wrote that the "...ideological thrust remains elusive."⁴² Despite the ambiguous nature of its construction, Cameron notes the significance of the desire to establish continuity with

³⁷ Doerfler, "Emotional Communities," ch. 11.

³⁸ *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Dumbarton Oaks, 1997).

³⁹ Kazhdan and McCormick, "Social World of the Byzantine Court," in Maguire, *Byzantine Court Culture*, 188.

⁴⁰ Sergey Ivanov, "Power and Fear: Awe Before the Emperor in Byzantium," in *Managing Emotion in Byzantium: Passions, Affects and Imaginings*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Studies in Byzantine Cultural History* (Routledge, 2023), ch. 16.

⁴¹ Averil Cameron, "The Construction of Court Ritual: The Byzantine Book of Ceremonies," in *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, ed. David Cannidine and S. R. F. Price (Cambridge, 1987), 106-36.

⁴² Anthony Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. To the First Crusade* (Oxford University Press, 2017), ch. 1.

the past, but also the desire of the administration to push towards further autocracy over the Byzantine court.⁴³ These are contexts that are significant for the expression of emotions. The general environment of court ritual, ceremony and its often-religious component, which Maguire described as the “heavenly court”, is thus significant for any study of emotions, including grief.⁴⁴ However, very little attention has been given to the role of grief or its possible place within the ceremonies and hierarchies of court.

Key to the Byzantine experience of grief was the distinction made between genders. The gendered emotionology of Byzantine women has seen considerable scholarship, notably in the edited collection *Emotions and Gender in Byzantine Culture* in 2019.⁴⁵ It includes an important analysis by Neville of one of the principal sources for this period, *The Alexiad*, and its depiction of emotion and the role that Komnena’s gender as a woman plays in her depiction of lamentation.⁴⁶ This study informs the analysis of *The Alexiad* in Chapter 2. Lamentation was one of the main ways that grief was expressed through literary means in Byzantium. Also relevant is the work that explores the place of eunuchs, the complex attitudes towards ideas of their gender, and how their grief is depicted because of that gender.⁴⁷ The discussion in this study focuses primarily on the male-female dichotomy, but this scholarship on the matter of the eunuch’s ambiguous positioning within Byzantine gender norms is worth bearing in

⁴³ John Bagnell Bury, “The Ceremonial Book of Constantine Porphyrogenetos,” *English Historical Review* 22 (1907): 211-2; Cameron, “The Construction of Court Ritual: The Byzantine Book of Ceremonies,” 106-36.

⁴⁴ Alexander Beihammer, Stavroula Constantinou, and Maria G. Parani, *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean: Comparative Perspectives* (Brill, 2013); Henry Maguire, “The Heavenly Court,” in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Dumbarton Oaks, 1997), 247-58.

⁴⁵ Stavroula Constantinou, “Gendered Emotions and Affective Genders: A Response,” in *Emotions and Gender in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Stavroula Constantinou and Mati Meyer (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 283-306; Andria Andreou, “‘Emotioning’ Gender: Plotting the Male and the Female in Byzantine Greek Passions and Lives of Holy Couples,” in *Emotions and Gender in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Stavroula Constantinou and Mati Meyer (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 35-59; Niki Tsironis, “Storge: Rethinking Gendered Emotion apropos of the Virgin Mary,” in *Managing Emotion in Byzantium: Passions, Affects and Imaginings*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Studies in Byzantine Cultural History* (Routledge, 2023), ch. 7; *Emotions and Gender in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Stavroula Constantinou and Mati Meyer (Springer International Publishing, 2019).

⁴⁶ Leonora Neville, “Pity and Lamentation in the Authorial Personae of John Kaminiates and Anna Komnene,” in *Emotions and Gender in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Stavroula Constantinou and Mati Meyer (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 65-89.

⁴⁷ Shaun Tougher, “Gendering Grief: Emotional Eunuchs—Consoling Constantine the Paphlagonian,” in *Emotions and Gender in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Stavroula Constantinou and Mati Meyer (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 93-102.

mind, as it provides a broader social view of how mourning was depicted in feminine terms.

Methodology

Before discussing specific historical methodology, grief in the context of human psychology is relevant. This would seem counterintuitive, considering the thesis' premise of the cultural and historical specificity of emotions. However, it is important to be cognizant of the body of literature that supports the study of grief in modern terms. Beginning with Freud, the psychological study of grief has developed into a subfield of its own.⁴⁸ More recent work has defined grief, particularly "acute grief", as the "loss of regulation".⁴⁹ This is relevant in the context of Byzantine emotions, which, as discussed before, were heavily concerned with ideals of restraint. Other themes worth taking account of are the unique nature of grief, as an emotion, in the sense of its relationship with death, and therefore, mortality. Though this is more a matter of philosophy than it is history, it is worth acknowledging the existential element of loss and how this can affect grieving.⁵⁰ This plays a role, if only partially, in the analysis of the spiritual themes of the prescriptive literature discussed in Chapter 2, as well as some of the themes that emerge in Chapter 5. It should also be noted briefly that this thesis also draws on rhetorical analysis as a methodological tool (see Primary Sources below).

Communities, Regimes, and Emotionologies

Studying the emotional standards of the Byzantine court requires many different tools and concepts.⁵¹ The Stearns coined the term 'emotionology', effectively a general term for the emotional standards of a community.⁵² This term will be used throughout for simplicity's sake. Additionally, this study will principally make use of two concepts, the

⁴⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*, trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works* (Hogarth Press, 1957), 237-58.

⁴⁹ M. F. O'Connor, "Grief: A Brief History of Research on How Body, Mind, and Brain Adapt," *Psychosom Med* 81, no. 8 (2019): 2.

⁵⁰ Carlo Leget and Mai-Britt Guldin, "The Existential Dimension of Loss and Grief," in *Spiritual Care in Palliative Care: What It Is and Why It Matters*, ed. Megan C. Best (Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 361-72; Irvin D. Yalom and Morton A. Lieberman, "Bereavement and Heightened Existential Awareness," *Psychiatry* 54, no. 4 (1991): 334-45.

⁵¹ Stearns and Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," 813.

⁵² Stearns and Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," 813.

‘emotional community’ and the ‘emotional regime’, to characterize the emotional world of the Byzantine court, though with some nuances.

The idea of the emotional community emphasizes that emotions exist within communities, in which certain emotional norms are “...what communities define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others’ emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore.”⁵³ Rosenwein’s emotional community model puts less emphasis on the internal world of emotions, arguing that ideas about ‘emotional authenticity’ are a modern concept that may not have applied in certain historic communities.⁵⁴ An emotional community puts more emphasis on the emotional interrelations between groups of people, emphasizing the possibility that there may not be such a thing as a true inner emotional world, and that one’s internal emotional world is shaped by the community of which one is a part.⁵⁵

The regime, on the other hand, is primarily a political expression of emotion in which someone in a position of power (or perceived power) enforces or prescribes a certain set of emotions.⁵⁶ The regime, in many ways, posits an internal emotional world that can be repressed (or exploited) by a political regime. This leads to the possibility that these ideas exist in contention with one another. In some ways, therefore, these ideas contradict one another, though one could argue for a situation where, for example, an emotional *community* was being repressed or shaped by an *emotional regime*. To reconcile these positions, this study compromises by keeping the ideas and theory present throughout the analysis but never fully committing to either model. Both perspectives are kept in play, as this is what best reflects the Byzantine emotional norms. These norms reflected both *regime*-oriented negotiation with systems of power, and *community*-oriented variance. As a result, the study employs and is openly

⁵³ Barbara Rosenwein, “Worrying About Emotions in History,” *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 842.

⁵⁴ Katie Barclay, *The History of Emotions: A Student Guide to Methods and Sources* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 35.

⁵⁵ Barbara H. Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History,” 84-6.

⁵⁶ William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 129. ,

cognizant of the theory behind these models, without direct application of either one, save for in specific situations.

Chapter 3 directly uses the *emotional community* model with reference to gender. A significant amount of the language surrounding women and their experiences in Byzantium is quite misogynistic to modern perceptions of women's emotions. For example, in primary sources, their feelings are treated as unnecessary and overly emotional. To describe women's experiences as part of an *emotional regime*, where their internal experiences are separate from how they behave, would also run the risk of invalidating their internal experiences. The 'emotional community' model potentially allows us to place the experiences of men and women on the same footing. Functionally, in the context of the analysis there is little practical difference in the findings of the Chapter if one were to use the *community*, the *regime*, or even the Stearns' less considered model of the *emotional style*. However, language is important, even if the implications are abstract. These theories and models have influenced the study even when not used explicitly. The ideas and concepts regarding variance, the negotiation of power, and the power of emotional expression on its own terms are key to the findings of the study.

Rituals, Politics, and Material Culture

Some methodologies from studies of ritual are also employed, particularly when dealing with the ritual world of the court. A vast number of techniques for the study of the relationship between emotion and ritual have been developed over the years. Those used here include the ideas of *emotional solidarity* and *emotional contagion*.⁵⁷ Ritual theory has its own long history of analysis, but key to this study is the emotional capacity of ritual. This was first noted and explored somewhat by Émile Durkheim with his theory of *collective effervescence*.⁵⁸ A more modern example would be the ideas of *shared mood* and *solidarity*, explored in the work of Randall Collins.⁵⁹ Durkheimian

⁵⁷ Carolina Herrando and Efthymios Constantinides, "Emotional Contagion: A Brief Overview and Future Directions," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021); Robert N. Bellah, "Durkheim and Ritual," in *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander and Philip Smith (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 184.; Randall Collins, "Stratification, emotional energy, and the transient emotions," 27-57.

⁵⁸ Bellah, "Durkheim and Ritual," 184..

⁵⁹ Randall Collins, "Stratification, Emotional Energy, and the Transient Emotions," 27-57.

concepts are admittedly dated, but the principal concepts of a shared state of emotion in a sacred ceremonial space are still serviceable. Alongside the angle of general ritual theory, there is also the matter of death rituals, especially funerals. The approach used in this study is that provided by Sas and Coman, who discuss aspects of a “successful” grief ritual.⁶⁰ This is one that allows the mourners to process and express their grief in a way that allows them to validate their grief, but also to gain a sense of closure. This approach is particularly useful as it offers clear models and ideas about what funerary and death rituals are meant to achieve emotionally.

Anthropological theories of funerary ritual inform this chapter as well. Sas and Coman’s work suggests that there are five key qualities to a ‘successful’ grief ritual: *structure, sacred symbolism, liminality, socialities, and uniqueness*. However, this study draws the most attention to the matter of *uniqueness*, which has interesting implications for some of the nuances in the emotional expression surrounding the emperor’s funeral. This model is used for much the same reason as the earlier ideas of *emotional contagion*, and *solidarity*: it is practical, and highly adaptable. However, unlike the previous set, these models are specialized to be used almost entirely in the context of grief rituals (such as funerals). They also serve the same purpose: they can explain what is left unsaid in *De Ceremoniis*, either intentionally, or unintentionally. All these models, both generalized and those more specialized, are practical and highly adaptable tools to interpret the unsaid emotional displays occurring beneath the surface in these rituals.

Throughout, this analysis is placed against the backdrop of court politics. This approach elucidates the relationship between the emotions present and how they are expressed, and grief’s relationship with power and hierarchy. It can be useful to apply anthropological models to descriptions of funerals to understand what the rituals were designed to achieve. However, by placing them in the context of court politics, one can also see how the grief for the emperor was being used politically to assert certain ideas about the emperor and his position as a title of office. One can also determine the relationship between grief and power by observing who is placed where during the

⁶⁰ For this and the following, see: Corina Sas and Alina Coman, "Designing Personal Grief Rituals: An Analysis of Symbolic Objects and Actions," *Death Studies* 40 (2016): 1-21.

proceedings, and what exactly it is that they are doing. Observations of these roles reveal how grief was used in this ceremony, and how, in some ways, it enforced a relationship of power, or, more explicitly, subordination. This echoes the themes of the emotional regime discussed earlier, although the term itself is not used here. Its central concerns, particularly the relationship between power and emotion and how the two are negotiated together, inform the analysis methodologically.

This chapter also draws briefly on theories of material culture, especially Harris and Sørensen's concept of "affective fields."⁶¹ These fields are specifically focused on the "bier of grief".⁶² An affective field could be described as an emotional aura around an object or piece of material culture, drawing emotions forth from those viewing or interacting with it.⁶³ The sparseness of material culture's use in this analysis is due to the limited survival of much of it, but attempts have been made to include it where possible.

Primary Sources

Chronicles, hagiographies, art, and material culture are the main primary sources used in this thesis. They all present problems. Surviving material culture (funerary biers, epitaphs and court costumes) is limited. Chronicles are more plentiful, but notable ones like those of Niketas Choniates and Anna Komnena are partial accounts with their own agendas that need assessing. As is common in Byzantine historiography, they slip into literary modes which also must be understood. There is also the problem of language. The Greek East, or controversially, the broader 'Byzantine commonwealth', spoke and used a great variety of languages. Even simply within the Empire itself, there were a multitude of varieties of Greek in use. Much of the historical writing is in a medieval facsimile of Attic Greek. Many religious works were written in *Koine* (and still are in the Orthodox Church). Fortunately, many of these sources have been translated into modern languages. Others are available in older Latin translations, such as in the

⁶¹ Oliver Harris and Tim Flohr Sørensen, "Rethinking Emotion and Material Culture," *Archaeological Dialogues* 17, no. 2 (2010): 145-63.

⁶² Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Ann Moffatt and Maxeme Tall, *Byzantina Australiensia* 18 (Brill, 2017), 275.

⁶³ For more information on affective fields, see: Harris and Sørensen, "Rethinking Emotion and Material Culture," 145-63.

Corpus Scriptorum.⁶⁴ There are few that exist only in their original language and in no other translation. But reliance here on the translated texts is admittedly a limitation of this thesis.

There is a certain necessity for a close analysis of primary sources. This is a given, as one might expect, but it becomes even more important when dealing with one source in depth, as is the case of Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Sometimes this analysis will, by its nature, lead into territory that is undeniably literary. This comes up somewhat when dealing with the *Alexiad* in Chapter 3. However, this is most important in Chapter 5 when dealing with Choniates' historical account of the Sack and loss of Constantinople in 1204. To clarify, literary analysis in this study does not mean specific literary *theories*, but more literary *techniques*, such as symbolism, metaphor, and allegory. This is done in the context of broader patterns, traditions, and styles in general Byzantine writing both within its historical genres, but also within its poetic genres.

In Chapter 3, this approach is used to analyse Komnena's *Alexiad*, though with decidedly less focus on metaphor and allegory. This chapter involves inspecting the text for how her grief is discussed, but also with an eye on the author's female gender. This involves relating how she discusses her own grief, and that of others, to the position of women in Byzantine society. Much attention is also given to the literary techniques of lament and monody, which are key to Byzantine expressions of grief, with both lament and monody having precedents in Greek expressions of grief going back to the Classical era.

The Alexiad by Anna Komnena is a biography of Komnena's father, Emperor Alexios Komnenos (c. 1057–1118). This study uses the version translated by Elizabeth Dawes, which is generally regarded as robust.⁶⁵ Dawes' translation has also often been judged relatively close to the original Greek, making it suitable for the close textual analysis undertaken here.⁶⁶ Potential complications are from the *Alexiad*'s larger

⁶⁴ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, ed. Johann Jakob Reiske, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, 2 vols. (Bonn: Weber, 1829–30).

⁶⁵ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. E. Dawes (In Parentheses Publications, 2000). Later translations exist; Peter Frankopan's revised edition is consulted selectively for comments made in his introduction.

⁶⁶ Halsall, Paul, ed. "Medieval Sourcebook: Anna Comnena: *The Alexiad*." *Internet History Sourcebooks Project*. Fordham University. February 2001. Accessed May 15, 2026. <https://sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/basis/AnnaComnena-Alexiad.asp>

political messaging and ideological origins surrounding Komnena herself, and her fitness for the imperial throne, compared with that of her brother, John (1118–1143).⁶⁷ This means that some of the emotional reactions displayed in the text may have existed to promulgate a broader political message. There are also some questions regarding the authorship of *The Alexiad*. Most modern scholarship tends to agree that Komnena wrote it, relying on her husband to source some of the military-based information of which she may have had little or no knowledge.⁶⁸ A particular problem with the text is that the chapter most relevant here (the final one narrating the death of Alexios) exists in fragments, stitched together in such a way that there is still a clear narrative.⁶⁹ Though pieces are missing, the effect on the text's overall narrative is negligible. However, that does lead one to question what was left out and why. Leonora Neville suggested that the original copyists thought these sections were simply not necessary or important enough to copy.⁷⁰ This may reflect the wider disparagement of feminine grief in Byzantine society. This points to some of the potential limitations in using *The Alexiad* as a source for feminine grief.

Nicetas Choniates' *Historia* is another important source.⁷¹ The translation used (by Margoulis) is one of the most modern and accessible translations of Choniates' *Historia*. One cannot be completely certain when exactly Choniates wrote his *Historia*, but evidence suggests that it was partially written before 1204, then completed after the Sack of Constantinople. The chief difficulties with Choniates' *Historia* are its very clear ideological agenda and its literary bent. Choniates had political motives and didactic messages for his readers regarding the capture of Constantinople (see Chapter 5). Strong attention to the techniques of Byzantine rhetoric is especially crucial for Choniates' *Historia*, the analysis of which concludes this thesis. Choniates' approach to describing the experience of the Sack of Constantinople in 1204 is deeply rhetorical, but also oscillates between historiographical, spiritual, and political styles. It must be

⁶⁷ Larisa Vilimonović, "Observations on the Text and Context of Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*," *Belgrade Historical Review* 5 (2014): 43–58.

⁶⁸ Kyle Sinclair, "Anna Komnene and Her Sources for Military Affairs in the *Alexiad*," *Estudios Bizantinos* 2 (2014): 145–85.

⁶⁹ Leonora Neville, *Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 74.

⁷⁰ Neville, *Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian*, 74.

⁷¹ Niketas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*.

read with attention to metaphor, symbolism, and intertextuality, as well as with an active awareness of its genre as a work of history. Much like others in his genre in Byzantine historical writing, he also drifts into the world of literary storytelling, engaging in the historical events often on the level of metaphor and allegory. However, this study is interested less in what exactly happened in 1204 than in Choniates' perception of the event: his rhetorical and metaphorical flourishes illuminate his grief and trauma caused by the catastrophe.

Prescriptive Literature

One of the most important elements (perhaps *the most* important) of the methodologies used in this study of emotions is the concept of "prescriptive literature".⁷² Coined by the emotionologist Peter Stearns, the term is defined as "...materials designed to tell people how to behave, how to react to others, and in some cases what kinds of emotions are appropriate or inappropriate..."⁷³ In the case of the early Fathers, this literature is inherently prescriptive, as it often instructs and dictates the norms required of its readers or (in some cases) listeners. In the case of hagiography, this still applies, as fiction also seeks to provide emotional instruction.⁷⁴ Of course, this is not to say that those hearing, writing and reading the hagiographies believed these works to be fiction, *per se*, but they exist within the same sphere, in the sense that they provide a narrative in which models of behaviour are clearly prescribed.

The term prescriptive literature allows one to cast the net over a wider selection of texts that can be considered instructional: a text that provides any kind of instruction, whether directly or indirectly, is an example of prescriptive literature. Examples of the kinds of sources that fall under the category of prescriptive literature will be discussed later in this chapter. The use of the term prescriptive literature also allows the analysis to subtly shift the lens away from abstract theology, and towards the rules and instructions that Byzantine writers used to articulate an emotional life. The texts themselves cannot directly tell us how people grieved, but they do reveal the ideals against which the lived emotional experiences of Byzantines could be measured. As

⁷² Peter Stearns, "Prescriptive Literature," in *Sources for the History of the Emotions*, ed. Katie Barclay, Peter Stearns, and Sharon Crozier De-Rosa (Routledge, 2021), 53.

⁷³ Stearns, "Prescriptive Literature," in *Sources for the History of the Emotions*, 53.

⁷⁴ Stearns, "Prescriptive Literature," 54.

Stearns stated, “Prescriptive materials, suggesting what emotional responses should and should not be, are not, themselves, evidence of emotional experience.”⁷⁵ Treating these texts as prescriptive allows one to explore the gulf between the ideal, what people were told to express and do, and the lived emotional reality.

The most notable source of prescriptive literature for Byzantines was the Bible.⁷⁶ Patristic writings were also important sources. The first of these are those by John Chrysostom (c. 347-407). For the purposes of this study, Homily(s) 27 on Matthew and 18 on Acts were used as they directly touch on the topic of the passions and grief, respectively.⁷⁷ One of John’s letters, a letter to a young widow, was also used in this study.⁷⁸ The letter is dated at c. 378, due to a reference to the defeat and death of Emperor Valens (364-378) as a recent event.⁷⁹ Venerated as a Hierarch in the Eastern Orthodox Church, Chrysostom is still celebrated by the Church in a feast day known as the *synaxis*, alongside his fellow Hierarchs, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus.

Basil the Great (330-369) also wrote an epistle to a grieving man called Nectarius.⁸⁰ There has been some debate about the identity of this person, who may have been the future Bishop of Constantinople.⁸¹ The letter is dated at circa 358.⁸² Particularly significant for this study is the work of another Church Father, Gregory of

⁷⁵ Stearns, "Prescriptive Literature," 61.

⁷⁶ Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title*, 2nd printing (Oxford University Press, 2009), electronic edition, <https://septuaginta.uni-goettingen.de/ioscs/nets/edition/>. Unless otherwise noted, biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version for the New Testament and from *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* for the Old Testament. The Septuagint is used for Old Testament passages because it was the biblical text most relevant to Byzantine readers.

⁷⁷ John Chrysostom, “Homily 27 on Matthew,” trans. George Prevost, rev. M. B. Riddle, in *Delphi Collected Works of John Chrysostom (Illustrated)*, Ancient Classics Series (Delphi Classics, 2022); John Chrysostom, “Homily 18 on Acts,” trans. J. Walker et al., rev. George B. Stevens, in *Delphi Collected Works of John Chrysostom (Illustrated)*, Ancient Classics Series (Delphi Classics, 2022).

⁷⁸ John Chrysostom, “Letter to a Young Widow,” trans. W.R.W. Stephens, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 9, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1889), revised for New Advent by Kevin Knight, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1904.htm>.

⁷⁹ John Chrysostom, “Letter to a Young Widow.”

⁸⁰ Basil of Caesarea, “Letter 5: To Nectarius,” trans. Blomfield Jackson, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 8, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1895), revised for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3202005.htm>

⁸¹ Basil of Caesarea, *Letter V*, in *Letters*, *CatholicLibrary.org*, accessed April 2, 2025, <https://catholiclibrary.org/library/view?docId=/Synchronized-EN/npnf.BasilOfCaesarea.Letters.en.html&chunk.id=00000011>.

⁸² Basil of Caesarea, *Letter V*, *CatholicLibrary.org*.

Nyssa (c. 335 – c. 395), one of the three Cappadocian Fathers. Nyssa wrote frequently of grief and mortality. *On the Soul and Resurrection* is a deathbed dialogue between him and St Macrina, modelled after the death bed dialogue in Plato's *Phaedo*.⁸³ The two discuss death, the soul, the resurrection, and mortality. It is suggested that it was composed shortly after St Macrina's death, in 379.⁸⁴

Hagiographies can also be useful sources on grief. Gregory of Nyssa also wrote the hagiography, the *Life of St Macrina*.⁸⁵ The exact date of its creation is unknown. The piece is addressed to Gregory's friend, Olympius, a monk. Little can be gleaned about Olympius, save that he was present at the Council of Antioch (341), so the work was probably written after that date.⁸⁶ The other three hagiographies featured in this study are those of St Daniel the Stylite, the Lives of St Athanasia and St Andronikos, and Barlaam and Ioasaph. The authors of the first and second are unknown. The first is drawn from *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies of St. Daniel the Stylite, St. Theodore of Sykeon and St. John the Almsgiver*, the second is touched on briefly in the analysis, which is discussed indirectly through Andria Andreou's discussion (see Literature Review above). The version employed in Andreou's discussion is taken from the 'Daniel cycle' which is one of three different versions, but is the most detailed and "autonomous" of the three.⁸⁷

Barlaam and Ioasaph is an interesting piece of ambiguous origin. The authorship is traditionally ascribed to John of Damascus.⁸⁸ However, this is heavily contested;

⁸³ Brian Ephrem Fitzgerald, "Saint Gregory of Nyssa: On the Soul and the Resurrection," presented at St. Philip's Antiochian Orthodox Church, Souderton, PA, May 23, 2004, https://www.st-philip.net/files/Fitzgerald%20Patristic%20series/Gregory-Nyssa_soul_and_resurrection.pdf, 2.

⁸⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection*, trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893), revised for New Advent by Kevin Knight, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2915.htm>; Fitzgerald, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, 2.

⁸⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of St. Macrina*, trans. W.K. Lowther Clarke (Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1916).

⁸⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of St. Macrina*, 11.

⁸⁷ Andreou, "'Emotioning' Gender: Plotting the Male and the Female in Byzantine Greek Passions and Lives of Holy Couples," 37.

⁸⁸ John of Damascus, *St. John Damascene: Barlaam and Ioasaph*, trans. G. R. Woodward and H. Mattingly (Harvard University Press, 1914).
<http://mcclibrary.org/Barlaam/parts31-35.html>

many have noted its similarities with the tale of the Buddha.⁸⁹ It would have reached Constantinople in translation by Euthymios of Althos circa 1028.⁹⁰ It was clearly in circulation throughout the Middle East (and therefore available and circulating amongst Byzantine populations there) for some time before that.⁹¹ This study approaches the text less with regard to its original purposes and more through the eyes of Byzantines who were reading it. Its purposes are difficult to ascertain, but it is emblematic of certain trends associated with other prescriptive literature of the time.

John of Damascus' *An Exposition on the Orthodox Faith* (dated c. 726 – 749) is also useful to this study.⁹² It discusses the passions in depth and during a period much closer to that of this thesis than many of the other prescriptive texts used here. It encapsulates the consensus reached among Orthodox theologians about the passions, and is thus a crucial point of departure in this thesis for the prescriptive ideals on grief. Also used are the writings of Maximos the Confessor through Summerson's analysis of them, since it highlights the role of *apatheia* in Maximos' writings.⁹³

The most overt example of a prescriptive text is Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *De Ceremoniis*, to which an entire chapter is devoted. *De Ceremoniis* is arguably the definition of a prescriptive text, giving explicit instructions in how something (in this case, ceremony) ought to be carried out. The translation of *De Ceremoniis* followed in this thesis is the one by Moffat and Tall, which provides a full English rendering alongside the original Greek. Earlier translations of portions of the work exist, but Moffat and Tall's edition is used here because of its completeness, accessibility, and suitability for the present analysis.⁹⁴ *De Ceremoniis* has unclear motives for its composition, though there is general agreement as to the origins of its component

⁸⁹ J. P. Asmussen, "Barlaam and Iosaph," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. III, fasc. 8 (1988): 801, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/barlaam-and-iosaph-persian-belawhar-o-budasaf-a-greek-christian-or-christianized-novel-of-buddhist-origins-which-througho>.

⁹⁰ Frederick Cornwallis Conybeare, "The Barlaam and Josaphat Legend in the Ancient Georgian and Armenian Literatures," *Folklore* 7, no. 2 (June 1896): 132–42.

⁹¹ Conybeare, "The Barlaam and Josaphat Legend," 132–42.

⁹² John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., vol. 9, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1899), <https://agape-biblia.org/orthodoxy/Exposition-of-the-Orthodox-Faith.pdf>.

⁹³ Andrew J. Summerson, "Apatheia and Interpreting Human Experience: Body, Soul, and Apatheia in Maximus the Confessor's Quaestiones Ad Thalassium," *Eastern Theological Journal* 5 (2019), 250–5.

⁹⁴ Ann Moffatt and Maxime Tall, introduction to *The Book of Ceremonies*, by Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *Byzantina Australiensia* 18 (Brill, 2017), xxiv.

parts. Furthermore, *De Ceremoniis* only provides prescriptions, and does not, by the nature of its genre, provide specific accounts of examples of the rituals it outlines in practice. Scholars are still debating why this text was created. Kaldellis points out that if it had a clear ideological agenda, this would only have mattered to a small group of people who were familiar with it.⁹⁵ Even so, *De Ceremoniis* provides a brief but detailed account of what was expected at the death of the sitting emperor.

Much of the prescriptive literature used in this study was written in antiquity. The theology of Christianity was in flux at this time, though this is a theme throughout much of the history of Eastern Orthodoxy; this is even truer for pre-Nicene Christianity. It saw the rise and fall of an incredible number of different schools of thought, denominations, cults, and belief systems.⁹⁶ Many of them, perhaps controversially in some cases, had an influence on the movement that Bart Ehrman called “proto-orthodoxy”.⁹⁷ This needs to be kept in mind, especially considering that any statement as to what Church Fathers considered was or was not doctrine or canon scripture would be extremely controversial.

Surviving examples of Byzantine ‘fiction’ (or a series of epic poems, called the ‘novels’ in one modern collection) can also be treated as prescriptive literature.⁹⁸ These ‘novels’ are left out of this study. These are complex works of art, largely forgotten by mainstream scholarship until very recently, and are written to emulate Classical modes of writing.⁹⁹ Their characters perhaps behave and act in ways that were expected of Classical protagonists, not so much contemporary Christian ones. Analysis of them is outside the scope of this study.

Chapter Outline

Each chapter explores a different aspect of how the passion of grief was understood and expressed by Byzantines, starting with an exploration of the prescriptions

⁹⁵ Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood*, ch. 1.

⁹⁶ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

⁹⁷ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 1-7.

⁹⁸ Stearns, "Prescriptive Literature," 54; E. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels* (Liverpool University Press, 2014).

⁹⁹ Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, ix-x.

associated with grief from a religious perspective. Subsequent chapters lead into the different situations where these ideas were expressed and complemented.

Chapter 2 deals with the passions, the bedrock of Byzantine emotionology. Passions were analogous to 'emotions', though with some important differences in how they were understood. The passions were a concept that emerged out of Classical schools of thought, and were later adopted by early Christians. The teaching of early Christians was to resist the passions, with the goal of reaching *apatheia*. Grief was one such passion. This chapter uses the prescriptive literature to deduce how the Byzantines viewed this passion, and how to overcome it. In doing so, the prescriptive literature provides a pathway for those grieving to overcome their own grief but also provides advice on how to console the grieving of others. The passion of grief was one that had the potential to compromise one's faith in the Resurrection and the promise of eternal life available to all Christians. However, it was an unavoidable emotion - to feel is to be human after all - but there was a way through the darkness of grief. This chapter, ultimately, shows how these prescriptive ideas set the stage for the way that grief was expressed strategically in later representations. In some cases, the prescriptions are strongly adhered to, while in others they are complicated and complemented. They form the rock, if you will, on which the house of Byzantine emotional expression is built.

Chapter 3 turns to a case study in Komnena's *The Alexiad*. This text gives an example of how the prescriptions associated with grief were expressed through the lens of gender. It allows an insight into the roles established for men and women when it came to grieving. *The Alexiad* also provides a unique example of how these grieving roles were both subverted, complemented and re-emphasized by Komnena's unique role as the story's narrator and, most importantly, as a historian. The text shows that Komnena's approach to grief draws from the same set of traditions and ideas that the prescribed literature emphasizes, particularly in relation to women's grief. However, the text also shows the Classical traditions that Byzantine grieving draws from. This emphasis on historical continuity colours much of Komnena's account and expression of her grief for her father. This chapter contributes to the overall thesis by showing how Komnena's portrayal of women's grief draws on both Classical traditions of lament and

Christian expectations of *apatheia*, as well as revealing the complexities of the different emotional communities that men and women inhabited in Byzantium.

Chapter 4 turns to the elaborate ceremonies undertaken upon the death of an emperor. This imperial funeral allows an insight into the ritualistic methods in which the Byzantine court experienced and expressed their grief for the deceased emperor in a way that complements the notions of *apatheia*. The key source for this is *De Ceremoniis*, which gives instructions for the funeral for an emperor. This chapter includes an analysis of how the rituals were supposed to be undertaken (as outlined in *De Ceremoniis*) and, in contrast, how they were recorded to have been undertaken in the written record. The political purposes behind the rituals are also discussed. A brief commentary is included on biers and other elements of material culture that relate to these rituals, and their possible use in the expression of grief during the funerary arrangements. These rituals are then analysed through the lens of ritual theory and anthropological models (see Methodology above) regarding funerals to develop a more nuanced interpretation of how these rituals provided a vehicle for the grief for the emperor. Effectively, these rituals provided an outlet for grief so that *apatheia* and physical restraint of grief could be maintained. Funerary proceedings were carefully curated to express grief, but also to reinforce certain political and hierarchical ideas about the deceased emperor's status.

Chapter 5 deals with the writings of Nicetas Choniates, concentrating on his account of the Sack of Constantinople in 1204. This account provides an insight into an experience that was likely deeply traumatic for Choniates. It was an experience that involved the loss of not an individual, but the loss of Constantinople, and of a way of life. The ransacking of the city by Latin Crusaders also added a feeling of a loss of sacredness. The experience recounted is unique in accounts of grief: it was traumatic, but also almost existential in its emotional ramifications. This chapter explores how Choniates falls back on the prescribed notions of how to deal with this loss, but also how he compares it to the loss of Jerusalem in Lamentations. The political dimensions and agenda of this account are also examined; how his grief becomes a vehicle to compel the reader to accept the need to retake Constantinople. The chapter brings together many of the themes discussed in the thesis. Choniates' lament for

Constantinople blends inherited rhetorical Classical styles of grieving with Christian concepts, showing how grief, even in a large-scale tragedy like this, could be harnessed to advocate a broader political (almost didactic) agenda, but also to reinforce a broader Roman identity in the face of the loss of Constantinople. Choniates' training as a rhetor means also that rhetoric plays an important role in his delivery and expression of his grief, drawing on a similar set of prescriptions and traditions to those used by Komnena, but adapted for a different set of circumstances and a different context of loss.

Conclusion

The historiography of Byzantium has come a long way since Gibbon reduced centuries of its history into a single chapter in *Decline and Fall*.¹⁰⁰ When it comes to emotion, though, there is room for further research and analysis of Byzantine emotional communities, especially with regard to situating these communities in the period of the Middle Ages and within the imperial court. Grief remains an emotion that is relatively unexplored in Byzantine historiography. There is also a distinct lack of literature looking at emotions of other polities and regions in the Greek East, such as the Rus, Armenia, or Bulgaria, whether in English or in other languages, so comparative work within the Eastern Orthodox world is rather limited. Furthermore, the research on grief (and emotions in general) has somewhat overlooked the specific community of the Byzantine court, and how its emotionology might differ from emotionology found outside of it. This thesis brings together and builds on earlier discussions of grief, especially within the context of the court, to contribute to a subject still in its infancy.

¹⁰⁰ Steven Runciman, "Gibbon and Byzantium," *Daedalus* 105, no. 3 (1976): 103.

Chapter 2

The Passions of the Soul

The foundation of the Byzantine emotionology of grief in court in the Middle Ages centred on the concept of *apatheia*. The Church Fathers such as John Chrysostom (c. 347 – 407) and Maximus the Confessor (c. 580 – 662), amongst many others, built a corpus of prescriptive literature that emphasized overcoming grief by reaching a state of *apatheia*. This was because grief had the potential to compromise people's faith in the promise of eternal life in Christ. This model was established and prescribed in the writings of the Church Fathers, but it was also present in hagiography and the general theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Grief was a dangerous emotion. This chapter explores the ways in which the various forms of prescriptive literature presented grief, what it was and how it might be overcome.

Unrestricted grief showed a potential lack of faith in the promise of eternal life through Christ. The feeling of grief (and overt emotions in general) led one to be more distracted by the material world at the expense of the spiritual one, and was considered improper behaviour for Christians, for whom eternal life awaited. There were nuances to this general view, as some types of grief were considered acceptable, as will be discussed. However, the prescriptive literature had a consensus view that grief for the dead had to be overcome, for doing so brought one closer to God and made one's faith stronger. Even so, it did not necessarily prescribe unkindness and made ample room for compassionate consolation in the face of one of the most human and universal of emotions.

Early seminal work by Irénée Hausherr emphasized *penthos*, or compunction, as a form of spiritual grief directed toward sin and the soul's relationship with God..¹ However, this framework only partially explains Byzantine attitudes toward grief for the

¹ Irénée Hausherr, *Penthos: La Doctrine de la Compenction dans l'Orient Chrétien*, (Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1944), 8-9, as quoted in: Maria Doerfler, "Emotional Communities and the Loss of an Individual: The Case of Grief," in *Managing Emotion in Byzantium: Passions, Affects and Imaginings*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Susan Ashbrook Harvey (Routledge, 2023), ch. 11.

dead.. Doerfler complicated this picture, emphasizing that Byzantines provided space in certain ritualized contexts to grieve for the loss of individuals.² Hinterberger's work also partially qualifies this view, emphasizing the ascetic nature of Byzantine emotional thought, and arguing that the Byzantines were less concerned about the relationship between emotion and reason, and more concerned about whether some emotions were good, and others bad.³ The evidence supports some elements of this notion when it comes to grief, less so others. It points to a more nuanced view, which implies a closer relationship between emotion and reason, as well as a more complex view of the virtue of certain emotions than some historians have argued.

The Passions

Key to this exploration of the passion of grief in the religious and theological literature in the Eastern Orthodox Church are *apatheia* and the 'passions'. Historians have already explored the complexities of *apatheia*, which can be described as the state of passionlessness.⁴ Passions, to the Byzantines, were roughly analogous to emotions in the modern sense of the word.⁵ There were many different passions, which were first listed and defined by the Stoics. *Apatheia*, too, has its origins in Stoicism. The concept was eventually integrated into early Christianity.⁶ Christian 'passions' were not born of the body or the mind, as modern conceptualizations of emotion consider them, nor were they "judgements" in the original Stoic sense.⁷ They were something that befell the soul, as the soul was subject to them.⁸ As a result, the thought was that they could be overcome.⁹ There were many passions, though the lists of passions varied across the centuries. The passion most relevant for this study is *lupe* (λύπη) which appears

² Maria Doerfler, "Emotional Communities and the Loss of an Individual: The Case of Grief," ch. 11.

³ Martin Hinterberger, "Emotions in Byzantium," in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 133.

⁴ Martin Hinterberger, "Emotions in Byzantium," 128.

⁵ Hinterberger, "Emotions in Byzantium," 126.

⁶ Andrew J. Summerson, "Apatheia and Interpreting Human Experience: Body, Soul, and Apatheia in Maximus the Confessor's Quaestiones Ad Thalassium," *Eastern Theological Journal* 5 (2019): 24; Hinterberger, "Emotions in Byzantium," 127.

⁷ Hinterberger, "Emotions in Byzantium," 127; Leendert F. Groenendijk and Doret J. de Ruyter, "Learning from Seneca: A Stoic Perspective on the Art of Living and Education," *Ethics and Education* 4, no. 1 (2009): 81-92.

⁸ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., vol. 9, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1899), 591-2. <https://agape-biblia.org/orthodoxy/Exposition-of-the-Orthodox-Faith.pdf>.

⁹ John of Damascus, "An Exposition on the Orthodox Faith," 592.

consistently in lists of the passions from the Stoics through to Christian writers as late as John of Damascus (c. 675 – c. 749 CE).¹⁰ *Lupe* is pain, or distress, of which grief is a subtype.¹¹ The result of this battle with the passions was ideally a state of *apatheia* in which one was free of being subject to them.¹² The following will explore what exactly the prescriptive literature emphasized for good Christians, particularly within the Orthodox tradition.

Classical and Biblical Grief

The Bible was the primary authoritative source to which Byzantine discussions of grief turned. The gospels are full of accounts of grief, and its consolation; for example, Christ's Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4), the despairing of Christ at the death of Lazarus, even knowing that He would raise him from the dead (John 11:35), and the many tears shed over Christ as He endured his Passion (John 20:11-28). The Old Testament emphasized the full expression of grief and despair in the face of death and loss.¹³ Depictions of grief in the Old Testament were often overt, such as the "very great and strong lamentation" at the funeral procession of Jacob (Genesis 50:10) or the weeping for Moses' death (Deuteronomy 34:8). The Old Testament also includes descriptions of the rending of one's clothes in response to grief (Genesis 37:29; 2 Chronicles 34:27). It also specified rules of mourning, including mandated periods of grieving for major figures, such as Kings of Israel, or Jacob and Moses (Genesis 50: 1-6; 1 Samuel 25:1).

Byzantine commentators on grief also turned to Classical Antiquity. Roman and Greek writers stressed both the necessity of consoling grief, and the importance of moderating it.¹⁴ For the Stoics, emotions were judgements based on premises and conclusions one reached about the world, and therefore, could be controlled and understood through one's ability to reason. This does not mean that they rejected the

¹⁰ Marcus Tullius Cicero, "The Tusculan Disputations," in *Cicero's Tusculan Disputations; Also, Treatises on the Nature of the Gods, and on the Commonwealth*, trans. C.D. Yonge (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1887), 117; Damascus, "An Exposition on the Orthodox Faith," 621.

¹¹ Damascus, "An Exposition on the Orthodox Faith," 621.

¹² Hinterberger, "Emotions in Byzantium," 129.

¹³ R. Scott Sullender, "Saint Paul's Approach to Grief: Clarifying the Ambiguity," *Journal of Religion and Health* 20, no. 1 (1981): 64.

¹⁴ Sullender, "Saint Paul's Approach to Grief: Clarifying the Ambiguity," 65.

notion of feeling. Humans had a natural “psyche” for a reason; Cicero (106 – 43BCE), for example, stated that to shrink from pain was a natural reaction.¹⁵ However, Stoics emphasised that one must master oneself and reach a state of *apatheia* in which these ‘natural’ (or perhaps *involuntary*) tendencies would be overcome.¹⁶

But perhaps the most important authority besides the New Testament was Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE). Aristotle’s ethics meant that the virtues he espoused in the *Nicomachean Ethics* were inexorably linked to emotion. They were tied to “spheres of action or feeling”.¹⁷ The virtues outlined in this text include courage, modesty, and temperance amongst others. Virtues applied in excess could become problematic (courage becoming rashness, for example) but virtues applied too little were also flawed (lack of courage creating cowardice).¹⁸ One must reach for the middle point, not too much, nor too little, of any specific virtue; all things were to be held in moderation. Temperance was one of these key virtues, a golden mean.¹⁹ It was the crux on which all other virtues depended, for temperance had to be applied to achieve moderation in other virtues.²⁰ This emphasis on moderation was taken up as foundational by many early Christian writers. Also notable in this framework of virtue and its relationship with emotion, is the idea of some emotions being “bad” and others “good.” This idea of emotions and their relationship to virtue would be adopted by the early Christian writers. Furthermore, the earlier Stoic idea of emotions being related to reason would emerge in the prescriptive writings. These writers would also inherit the idea emotions were a natural part of the human condition, that nevertheless, needed to be overcome. These models are present in the writings of apostle, Paul (c. 5 – c. 64CE).

Paul’s writings coalesced in a time when the old traditions of Hebrew grief were encountering Roman and Greek ideas about emotions. Paul “lived at the crossroads of

¹⁵ Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum Et Malorum*, trans. H. Rackham (W. Heinemann, 1914), 215-98; M. Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, trans. H. Rackham (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 35-60; Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, "The Stoics on the Mental Mechanism of Emotions: Is There a ‘Pathetic Syllogism’?," *Elenchos* 39, no. 2 (2018): 359.

¹⁶ Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum Et Malorum*, 255-9.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics: Translation with Commentaries and Glossary*, trans. H.G. Apostle (Springer Netherlands, 1980), 35-8.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 52-5.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 52-5.

²⁰ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 52-5.

these two great traditions.”²¹ What followed in Pauline scripture, it seems, is a synthesis and a Christianisation of these ideas. Aristotelian ideas about moderation are evident. Paul is swift to remind the grieving to be steadfast, for the Parousia is near.²² One should be like Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1), which requires enduring one’s pain and suffering as he did.²³ Furthermore, Paul appears averse to the overt or “free” expression of emotion, and only tolerated the traditions of lamentation that persisted in the early Church.²⁴ Paul’s writings make up more than half the New Testament: the New Testament is arguably Paul’s voice directing and instructing early Christians. However, Paul’s views on the emotions still required interpretation, and early theologians had to infer what Paul meant on various matters. The Greek cultural *milieu* likely provided the primary impetus for the emergence of moderation as an important virtue, and of *apatheia* as a theological concept. Uncertainty in the interpretation of the New Testament may have also contributed to early debates about grief in Christianity.

Patristic Writings

The consensus of the Church Fathers, even in early Christianity, was that grieving for the dead was an expected and natural reaction to losing one’s loved ones. However, such grief was believed to weaken one’s spiritual strength, for it compromised one’s faith in Christ’s promise of eternal life (John 3:16). Possibly the most influential of the Church Fathers, John Chrysostom (c. 347 – 407), often addressed grief in his homilies and writings. When it came to the passions in general, Chrysostom frequently condemned them harshly. Chrysostom wrote of the virtue of overcoming the passions, describing them in one homily as “tearing” at the soul, likening the effect of unruly passions upon a soul to that of wild beasts tearing someone apart.²⁵ In another of his homilies, Chrysostom, when reflecting on the martyrdom of St Stephen, he remarks that:

... devout men, it says, carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. Acts 8:2. If they were devout, why did they make great lamentation over him? They were not yet perfect. The man was gracious and amiable: this also

²¹ Sullender, “Saint Paul’s Approach to Grief: Clarifying the Ambiguity,” 66.

²² Sullender, “Saint Paul’s Approach to Grief: Clarifying the Ambiguity,” 67.

²³ Sullender, “Saint Paul’s Approach to Grief: Clarifying the Ambiguity,” 68.

²⁴ Sullender, “Saint Paul’s Approach to Grief: Clarifying the Ambiguity,” 68.

²⁵ John Chrysostom, “Homily 27 on Matthew,” trans. George Prevost, rev. M. B. Riddle, in *Delphi Collected Works of John Chrysostom (Illustrated)*, Ancient Classics Series (Delphi Classics, 2022).

shows that they were men — not their fear alone, but their grief and lamentation. Who would not have wept to see that mild, that lamb-like person stoned, and lying dead?²⁶

Chrysostom is implying that it was unvirtuous to make lamentation and to grieve over the young Stephen. He does not judge them, though. They are only men. In fact, Chrysostom was more than willing to console the bereaved. Chrysostom goes further when writing to a young widow in a letter, traditionally dated to circa 378. He emphasizes that the dead have received eternal life through God. They are not dead, as in “ceased to be”, but instead have sailed to the “tranquil haven”.²⁷ This returns to the idea of grief compromising belief in the Resurrection. When one has received eternal life through Christ, there is no reason to grieve as though the deceased has gone forever. However, Chrysostom quickly consoles the bereaved woman in the letter, despite believing that grief carries inherent spiritual dangers. Early Christian writers did not entirely condemn grief and were quick to console those who grieved.

Other Church Fathers followed a similar pattern. Basil of Caesarea (the Great) (330 - 378), addressing a bereaved man named Nectarius, writes:

I need not tell you how I sighed and wept. Who could be so stony-hearted, so truly inhuman, as to be insensible to what has occurred, or be affected by merely moderate grief? In a moment, by a demon's malice, all the happiness of the house, all the brightness of life, is destroyed, and our lives are made a doleful story. If we wish to lament and weep over what has happened, a lifetime will not be enough and if all mankind mourns with us they will be powerless to make their lamentation match our loss. Yes, if all the streams run tears they will not adequately weep our woe.²⁸

²⁶ John Chrysostom, “Homily 18 on Acts,” in *Delphi Collected Works of John Chrysostom (Illustrated)*, Ancient Classics Series (Delphi Classics, 2022).

²⁷ John Chrysostom, “Letter to a Young Widow,” trans. W. R. W. Stephens, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 9, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1889), <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1904.htm>.

²⁸ Basil of Caesarea, “Letter 5: To Nectarius,” trans. Blomfield Jackson, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 8, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1895), <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3202005.htm>.

Basil is more than willing to share in the grief; he speaks of weeping and uses intense language about his sorrow regarding the death of the young man, who it seems is the recipient's son. However, he goes on to adopt a similar stance to Chrysostom, stating that it "...is God's command that we who trust in Christ should not grieve over them who are fallen asleep, because we hope in the resurrection."²⁹ He also states that: "We have not lost the lad; we have restored him to the Lender. His life is not destroyed; it is changed for the better. He whom we love is not hidden in the ground; he is received into heaven."³⁰ Grief itself was not the problem. The problem was whether your sadness derived from a sense of being separated temporarily from a loved one, or from a sense that you had lost that person forever. The difference between these two states of mind was important. The former situation would not rouse as much sadness, but the latter would. Basil and Chrysostom, who preached on the virtue of being free of the passions, were perhaps pointing to this distinction. Therefore, they encouraged a mode of grieving that provoked less pain than the other.

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335 – c. 394) struggled with grief throughout his life. His work, *On the Soul and Resurrection*, gives an insight into how grief ought to be understood by Eastern Christians. The impetus for *On the Soul and Resurrection* was the death of his close friend Basil, and the impending death of Basil's sister.³¹ Gregory goes to visit her and admits that he is still grieving for Basil. He wishes to see Basil's sister, for she may sympathize with his grief, thereby bringing him some measure of peace. Gregory states he is "yearning for an interchange of sympathy over the loss of her brother" and his soul is "right sorrow stricken by this grievous blow and I sought for one who could feel it equally, to mingle my tears with."³² As he confronts Basil's sister, he is overwhelmed by his pain for Basil. It does not help that as he visits her, she is also dying. Just as the statements of Basil of Caesarea and John Chrysostom suggest, she is swift to comfort him: "She gave into me for a little while, like a skilful driver, in the ungovernable violence of my grief." But, following the pattern of other writers, she

²⁹ Chrysostom, "Letter to a Young Widow."

³⁰ Chrysostom, "Letter to a Young Widow."

³¹ Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Soul and the Resurrection," trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893), <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2915.htm>.

³² Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Soul and Resurrection," opening paragraphs.

attempts to get Gregory to see reason. She quotes the “apostle’s words about the duty of not being grieved for them that sleep, because only men without hope have such feelings.” She is comforting him as is expected. However, she is reminding him of the hope of the Resurrection and eternal life through Christ. Gregory, though, is not so easily swayed. He asks how could such a thing be practised by mankind? The fear of death, he believes, is instinctive. He argues that:

[t]here is such an instinctive and deep-seated abhorrence of death in all! Those who look on a deathbed can hardly bear the sight; and those whom death approaches recoil from him all they can. Why, even the law that controls us puts death highest on the list of crimes, and highest on the list of punishments. By what device, then, can we bring ourselves to regard as nothing a departure from life even in the case of a stranger, not to mention that of relations, when so be they cease to live?

He continues to question why men of medicine were so renowned and why men wore armour when going into battle, if they did not fear to die. He asks: “Death then being naturally so terrible to us, how can it be easy for a survivor to obey this command to remain unmoved over friends departed?” Gregory continues in this vein until Basil’s sister, who has been named “teacher” at this point in the text (likely to echo the Gospels’ use of the term for Christ) interrupts and calls this the “common talk of unthinking persons”. Even so, Gregory is not swayed. It is not until she points out that perhaps Gregory’s true fear is the possibility that the soul does not continue after death.³³ Gregory admits that his judgement is clouded by his grief:

Divine utterances seemed to me like mere commands compelling us to believe that the soul lasts for ever; not, however, that we were led by them to this belief by any reasoning. Our mind within us appears slavishly to accept the opinion enforced, but not to acquiesce with a spontaneous impulse. Hence our sorrow over the departed is all the more grievous; we do not exactly know whether this

³³ For this and the following, see Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Soul and Resurrection,” opening paragraphs, *New Advent*.

vivifying principle is anything by itself; where it is, or how it is; whether, in fact, it exists in any way at all anywhere.

Of course, the Teacher remains steadfast. To speak this way, she argues, is to abandon virtue, and to live in the material moment, instead of considering “the life of eternity, by which alone virtue claims the advantage.” Gregory continues the debate, wondering how one can be so sure of the soul’s continuance after death. Teacher says that this is precisely the view of the Stoics: to them, the “visible was the limit of existence” and that they were “incapable of seeing anything in the intelligible and immaterial world, just as a man, who is imprisoned in a cabin whose walls and roof obstruct the view outside, remains without a glimpse of all the wonders of the sky.” This brings Gregory out of his grief, allowing him to regain some control of himself. After this, the conversation between the two regains some decorum, and Gregory speaks little more of his grief for the rest of the episode. The significance of this piece for views of grief is that it re-affirms the key ideas about consolation, which Teacher demonstrates early in the dialogue. However, it also re-affirms to the bereaved the notion of eternal life and how death is of the material world, and that one must not close the eyes of the soul, as she puts it, to the eternal and immaterial world. This emphasizes the distinction between the material and eternal worlds, and how humans with souls should orient themselves towards the spiritual and everlasting realm.

Hagiography

Prescriptive ideas on responses to grief were also expressed in hagiography.

Hagiography is more susceptible, though, to the use of literary embellishment due to its narrative and story-telling nature. The reactions to loss in hagiography are far more varied than those that appear in other prescriptive literature of orthodoxy. However, there are a few examples of saints who, when met with grief or distress, are depicted as finding spiritual strength and not faltering. The most overt example of this is Saint Athanasia and Andronikos, the married couple whose children are both struck with deadly fevers.³⁴ Athanasia is in utter mourning, crawling into bed with her children

³⁴ Andria Andreou, “‘Emotioning’ Gender: Plotting the Male and the Female in Byzantine Greek Passions and Lives of Holy Couples,” in *Emotions and Gender in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Stavroula Constantinou and Mati Meyer (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 39.

attempting to comfort them.³⁵ Andronikos, meanwhile, heads to a local chapel and prays. When he returns, the children have died. Athanasia is desolate, wailing and despairing.³⁶ However, Andronikos remains stoic and does not weep, attempting to console her by reminding her of the Resurrection and that the children live on in the hereafter.³⁷

As discussed earlier, ‘reason’ was integral to the Roman and Greek understanding of the passions and their mastery. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, inherited this idea. In Gregory’s dialogue, it is “reason” that compels Basil’s sister to rebuke him in his grief-stricken despair.³⁸ This is not the only time that reason is used to compel strength in grief. In “The Life of St Macrina”, also written by Gregory, we see that same “reason” at play. One of Macrina’s brothers, Naucratis, a seasoned philosopher and ascetic, went out hunting one day. He did not return.³⁹ His death is sudden, which Gregory acknowledges, emphasizing:

No previous sickness had prepared them for the blow, nor did any of the usual and well-known mischances bring death upon the young man. Having started out on one of the expeditions, by which he provided necessities for the old men under his care, he was brought back home dead, together with Chrysapius who shared his life.⁴⁰

Gregory describes Macrina’s mother’s response as that of a “grievous and tragic affliction” and blames the Devil for such a calamity.⁴¹ He states that though she was “perfect in virtue”, she collapsed in utter despair.⁴² Notably, Gregory states that her “reason failed her under the disaster [of Naucratis’ death], and she was thrown to the ground by the assault of evil tidings, like some noble athlete hit by an unexpected

³⁵ Andria Andreou, “‘Emotioning’ Gender: Plotting the Male and the Female in Byzantine Greek Passions and Lives of Holy Couples,” 40-1.

³⁶ Andreou, “‘Emotioning’ Gender: Plotting the Male and the Female in Byzantine Greek Passions and Lives of Holy Couples,” 42.

³⁷ Andreou, “‘Emotioning’ Gender: Plotting the Male and the Female in Byzantine Greek Passions and Lives of Holy Couples,” 41.

³⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Soul and Resurrection.”

³⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina*, trans. W.K. Lowther Clarke (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1916), 968b. <https://sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/basis/macrina.asp>

⁴⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina*, 968b-968d.

⁴¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina*, 968d-970a.

⁴² Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina*, 970a.

blow.”⁴³ Gregory frames her response to her son’s death as a moment in which grief overwhelms her rational composure. . Macrina, seeing her mother’s distress, faces the disaster in a “rational spirit”, and prevents herself from falling into despair.⁴⁴ Macrina then compels her mother to do the same, saving her from her “weakness” and raising her up from the “abyss of grief.”⁴⁵ What it meant here to face the grief in a “rational spirit” is not clear.⁴⁶ Perhaps it referred to the ideas of reason and the passions that were inherited from Classical writers, such as the Stoics, who emphasized that the passions originated from judgements on the world around them. In the case of Macrina’s mother’s grief, the reader is given little insight into what judgements she makes that led to her irrational grief. However, in the case of Gregory of Nyssa’s conversation with the Teacher in *On the Soul and Resurrection*, several judgements about life lead him to grieve, for example, his fear of death and his inability to convince himself of the world beyond the material. The implication is that one must reason one’s way, though judgement and observation, into being unafflicted by such grief.⁴⁷ One must reason to recognize God and the immaterial world that awaits ahead of the departed. Although Gregory’s phrasing is unique, there are a few situations in which those who grieve seem to appeal to *logos* and regain temperate composure.

God Himself is also quick to help those who grieve. How this is shown varies significantly. In the life of St Daniel, Daniel is met by a woman upon leaving a shrine. The woman is deliberately likened to the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:22.⁴⁸ She cries out, telling Daniel that her daughter has been bedridden from a mysterious disease for three years, and no one has thus far been able to help her. She tells Daniel not to “despise her tears for I am sorely distressed about her.”⁴⁹ This suggests she understands her tears are not becoming of a Christian woman. However, her grief for her daughter is far too overwhelming for her to be able to engage her *logos* and reason her way out of despair. However, Daniel unexpectedly sees her grief and begins to weep

⁴³ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina*, 968d.

⁴⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina*, 970a.

⁴⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina*, 970a.

⁴⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina*, 970a.

⁴⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Soul and Resurrection.”

⁴⁸ Anonymous, *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies of St. Daniel the Stylite, St. Theodore of Sykeon and St. John the Almsgiver*, trans. Elizabeth Dawes (Mowbray, 1948), 55-6.

⁴⁹ Anonymous, *Three Byzantine Saints*, 55-6.

alongside her. He calls on God to help her, and God aids her daughter through a miracle.⁵⁰ God swiftly aids the grieving woman.⁵¹ Another example of God's direct intervention in the grief of someone is in "Barlaam and Ioasaph" in which there are a few depictions of grief. In one, Ioasaph, while grieving for a deceased priestly elder, engages in various ascetic activities:

Such were the prayers and intercessions that he made unto God, by the space of seven full days, never leaving the grave, and never thinking of meat or drink, and taking no refreshment of sleep: but he watered the ground with his tears, and continued praying and moaning unceasingly. But, on the eighth day, he went back to his palace and distributed amongst the poor all his wealth and riches, so that not one person was left in want.⁵²

Such behaviour could be characterised as an indirect method of drawing closer to God to overcome grief. Compunction is central to Eastern Orthodox asceticism itself, so it is more than likely that these various acts of compunction are designed to bring Ioasaph closer to God. In doing so, he overcomes his grief.⁵³ However, the most interesting depiction of grief in this hagiographical life comes at the very end. At the death of his father, Ioaseph lays his body in his sepulchre.⁵⁴ Following a similar pattern, Ioasaph offers prayer to God, and lays down outside the sepulchre.⁵⁵ But this time, Ioasaph is beset by a vision of a multitude of angels. After a brief conversation, Ioasaph awakes with a feeling of warmth and lightness in his heart, his grief seemingly banished.⁵⁶ He goes on to lead "on earth the life of an angel" and lives in "severer austerity."⁵⁷ In this sense, God directly intervened in Ioaseph's grieving and presented him with a vision that provided him a sense of spiritual consolation (or in modern terms, a sense of closure) on his struggles with grief. These acts are twofold in their purpose. They exist within the

⁵⁰ Anonymous, *Three Byzantine Saints*, 55-6.

⁵¹ Anonymous, *Three Byzantine Saints*, 55-6.

⁵² John of Damascus [attributed], *St John Damascene: Barlaam and Ioasaph*, trans. G. R. Woodward and H. Mattingly (Harvard University Press, 1914), 543, <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.232211>.

⁵³ *St. John Damascene: Barlaam and Ioasaph*, 543.

⁵⁴ *St. John Damascene: Barlaam and Ioasaph*, 599.

⁵⁵ *St. John Damascene: Barlaam and Ioasaph*, 601.

⁵⁶ *St. John Damascene: Barlaam and Ioasaph*, 603.

⁵⁷ *St. John Damascene: Barlaam and Ioasaph*, 603.

narrative to remind those who are suffering that indeed, the suffering shall be comforted, as was promised in Matthew (5:4). But they also exist as a literary device, instructing the reader on how the grieving person is reminded of God's presence, and the necessity of overcoming grief.

Grief as a Passion

Much of this portrayal of grief returns to the concept of 'passions'. Grief was a passion and therefore had to be overcome in the striving for the state of 'passionlessness'. John of Damascus wrote extensively on the passions. He claimed that they were animalistic in nature.⁵⁸ They were something that befell the soul and were not an inalienable part of it.⁵⁹ The soul was made up of many forces and components, and passions were things that occurred *to* the soul but did not originate *from* it.⁶⁰ What separated man from the animals is what he called "mind", which can be best understood as reason.⁶¹ The passions were unnatural and animalistic because they dragged one down to the lower status of the animal. Of course, this idea is situated within wider patristic debates about whether animals had souls, or what parts of the soul they had, or whether they were subject to passions in the same sense as man. In relation to this debate, Damascene emphasizes the capacity for reason as a distinctly human quality that does not belong to animals. Moreover, the passions were also uniquely dangerous for:

...the liberty to attack man has been granted to them, they have not the strength to over-master anyone: for we have it in our power to receive or not to receive the attack. Wherefore there has been prepared for the devil and his demons, and those who follow him, fire unquenchable and everlasting punishment.⁶²

In this excerpt, John emphasizes the struggle to overcome passions, but he also links them with demonic forces. Even so, when speaking of grief, many of the earlier Church Fathers state that to feel the passion of grief was a natural part of being human. One cannot help but feel it. Basil of Caesarea in his letter of consolation to Nectarius, for

⁵⁸ John of Damascus, "An Exposition on the Orthodox Faith," 557.

⁵⁹ Hinterberger, "Emotions in Byzantium," 127-30.

⁶⁰ John of Damascus, "An Exposition on the Orthodox Faith," 630.

⁶¹ John of Damascus, "An Exposition on the Orthodox Faith," 630.

⁶² John of Damascus, "An Exposition on the Orthodox Faith," 591-2.

example, asks how one could be so “inhuman” not to weep.⁶³ He explicitly states that it is only “natural” to be touched by Nectarius’ grief:

And how is it possible, you ask, not to grieve, since I am only a man? Nor do I say that you should not grieve: I do not condemn dejection, but the intensity of it. To be dejected is natural; but to be overcome by dejection is madness, and folly, and unmanly weakness.⁶⁴

Chrysostom also states that the window’s mourning is “natural”.⁶⁵ It is evident that both consider the feeling of the passion of grief as normal and human, but one must overcome it, in much the same way that Damascene is intimating. This presents an intriguing dilemma. After all, how can grief be natural, as Basil and Chrysostom suggested, and at the same time, inherently ‘animalistic’ as Damascene claims, in which they are a force that befalls the soul and disorders it?

It is possible, considering that there is over three centuries of potential development between Basil, Chrysostom, and John of Damascus in Orthodox theology, that ideas about the passions had changed somewhat, and a belief had developed that one should avoid feeling them altogether. However, the answer to this dilemma may lie in the writings of Maximus the Confessor. Grief remained a passion to be battled and overcome, yet it was perhaps the most unavoidable of all of them. This is an idea attested in Maximus’s *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, in which two forms of ‘temptations’ are emphasized, voluntary and involuntary ones.⁶⁶ Maximus ultimately conflates pain (*lupe*) with grief (*penthos*) and does not divide the two into subsets in the way that John of Damascus or other Church Fathers did.⁶⁷ Instead, he speaks of *lupe* as a whole.⁶⁸ He suggests that *lupe* is an involuntary temptation and therefore sees it as a natural part of human existence.⁶⁹ In this reflection, Maximus echoes the early Stoic idea that some passions are involuntary. However, Christianity recontextualized these ideas. To these

⁶³ Basil of Caesarea, "Letter 5: To Nectarius."

⁶⁴ Basil of Caesarea, "Letter 5: To Nectarius."

⁶⁵ Chrysostom, "Letter to a Young Widow."

⁶⁶ Andrew J. Summerson, "Apatheia and Interpreting Human Experience: Body, Soul, and Apatheia in Maximus the Confessor's Quaestiones Ad Thalassium," *Eastern Theological Journal* 5 (2019), 250.

⁶⁷ Summerson, "Apatheia," 250-5.

⁶⁸ Summerson, "Apatheia," 250-5.

⁶⁹ Summerson, "Apatheia," 250-5.

early Church writers, and consequently to the Byzantines, humans naturally perceive the world as material, and this earthly condition leads one to be subject to the vagaries of the material world.⁷⁰ The flesh and blood of the human body are of that material world. The soul is affected by those things of the material world but is not *of* the world. It is to be expected that the soul will be struck by the involuntary temptation to weep and mourn for loss. The passions are not ‘natural’ in the sense that they belong to the material world, and do not arise from God, who is passionless and devoid of negative emotion. To rise above the material world, one must be like God and not fall into mindless grief.

Gender and Grief

Gender also played a role in these dynamics. Women were often portrayed in these prescriptive narratives as weak and less likely to have the same capacity for reason that men had. Women were more likely to be sensitive and ruled by the whims of their emotions. Not all women were considered so sensitive to their emotions as to be without reason, but most were believed to be more susceptible to the influence of the passions. The origins of this idea go back to Classical Greece, where women were often portrayed as having a weaker capacity for reason than men, and thus more prone to losing the rational control needed to contain the passions. As a result, in Classical art and literature, women are often shown engaging in expressive displays of mourning, lamenting, beating their breasts, and tearing at their hair.⁷¹ This is depicted in Classical pottery, as well as in the *Iliad*.⁷² The administration of Athens in Classical Greece passed laws to prevent this behaviour, suggesting that this behaviour attracted some derision.⁷³ However, the weaknesses of women were relative rather than absolute. On the power of determination, Aristotle said that a slave could have none, but a woman could at least have a “weak one, [and] a child an imperfect one...”.⁷⁴ Plato had a similar idea, stating

⁷⁰ Summerson, “Apatheia,” 250-5.

⁷¹ Wayne Robertson, “Speaking for the Dead: Funeral Rhetoric and Women's Lament in Ancient Athens” (Master's diss., University of Oregon, 2000), 4-5.

⁷² Funerary amphora with scenes of mourning, 720-700 BCE, terracotta, Getty Museum Collection, Los Angeles, <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/109MCQ>; Christopher A. Faraone, *Hexametrical Genres from Homer to Theocritus* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 155–90.

⁷³ Leonora Neville, “Lamentation, History, and Female Authorship in Anna Komnene's Alexiad,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 53 (2013): 200-1.

⁷⁴ Aristotle, *A Treatise on Government*, trans. William Ellis (J. M. Dent & Sons, 1912), Bk. I, Ch. XIII.

that women had a weaker nature than men, so they ought to be given the lighter share of the work, but in most situations their duties ought to be the same.⁷⁵

These ideas about women's inherent sensitivity and weaker capacity for reason were incorporated into the broader Christian mindset. Gregory of Nyssa, when writing of St Macrina's mother's grief over her deceased son, describes her as hurling herself against the floor in grief.⁷⁶ He describes this grief as "womanish".⁷⁷ In the earlier example of St Athanasia and Andronikos, Athanasia is in utter despair over the loss of her two children, wailing in anguish, climbing into bed with the children, and wishing to die so that she can be in death with them.⁷⁸ Chrysostom also states that women were more sensitive to grief than men.⁷⁹

In contrast to women, men were considered more likely to have the capacity to reason their way through grief. This naturally raises the question as to what the ideal masculine response to grief looked like. The male protagonists in the examples given above offer some clues. Andronikos goes to church to pray, showing piety in the face of grief, which allows him to reconcile to his belief that his children live on through Christ.⁸⁰ However, it was expected that men would show kindness and understanding towards unreasonable grief. Andronikos, when seeing his wife's grief, attempts to console her, explaining that the children live on.⁸¹ John Chrysostom does the same for the grieving widow, consoling her.⁸² The fact that the prescriptive ideal is largely a *masculine* ideal comes as little surprise, considering these prescriptive texts were written by men. It is men's voices instructing and speaking.

⁷⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (P.F. Collier & Son, 1901), 147.

⁷⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina*, 968b-970d.

⁷⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina*, 968b-970d.

⁷⁸ Andria Andreou, "'Emotioning' Gender: Plotting the Male and the Female in Byzantine Greek Passions and Lives of Holy Couples," in *Emotions and Gender in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Stavroula Constantinou and Mati Meyer (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 39-42.

⁷⁹ Chrysostom, "Letter to a Young Widow."

⁸⁰ *Saint Daniel of Sketis: A Group of Hagiographic Texts*, Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 10 (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2007), as quoted in Andria Andreou, "'Emotioning' Gender: Plotting the Male and the Female in Byzantine Greek Passions and Lives of Holy Couples," in *Emotions and Gender in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Stavroula Constantinou and Mati Meyer (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 39-42.

⁸¹ Andreou, "'Emotioning' Gender: Plotting the Male and the Female in Byzantine Greek Passions and Lives of Holy Couples," 39-42.

⁸² Chrysostom, "Letter to a Young Widow."

This does not mean men were incapable of stumbling when coming to terms with grief. They also weep, although the role of tears in the broader emotionology of Byzantine culture makes this expression of grief more complex.⁸³ Yet to feel was to be human, and as imperfect human creatures, inherently sinful to some degree by existing within the world, men and women weep when faced with such an overwhelming emotion as grief.⁸⁴ The difference between the sexes, however, was that men had more capacity to control themselves. But this expectation meant that men faced a much harsher reality than women. A man's uncontrolled grief was a massive breach of masculine norms, and possibly even spiritually dangerous. For women, it was just part of their nature.

Weeping played a role in the active theology of grief as well. Weeping was an act of spiritual cleansing of sin.⁸⁵ This meant that men engaging in the act of *charmolupe* were expected to be ridding themselves of the sin of grief, and thus shedding yet another fetter that tied them more tightly to the material world. Their ability to do so was arguably an expression of their reason. It was the dwelling on grief, throwing oneself to the ground, contemplating suicide, and similar behaviours attributed to women in these texts, that was unmasculine.

This did not mean that women were incapable of acting in a masculine way. With the help of consolers, for example in the cases involving Andronikos, the widow in Chrysostom's letter, and St Macrina, they could rise above their emotional nature. Women *could* show masculine traits when it came to grief; they had to work harder for it. It was the application of reason that allowed them to overcome grief. Again, the difference between men and women was relative. Women could be rational, but it was harder for them, and they often required the help of men. Moreover, some women were more capable than others. A woman's capacity for reason existed in varying degrees across a spectrum, though rarely on par with a man. When consoled, those doing the consoling often invoked direct religious truths, avoiding language that could push their grief further. Chrysostom, for example, emphasizes that the widow's husband now lives

⁸³ Hinterberger, "Emotions in Byzantium," 130.

⁸⁴ For Orthodox views on Original Sin, see John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 2nd ed. (Fordham University Press, 1979), 143-6.

⁸⁵ Hinterberger, "Emotions in Byzantium," 130.

on in the “tranquil haven” of heaven.⁸⁶ He is not gone forever, and they are only parted for a short while in this life.⁸⁷ It is this call to think logically that is important, and to remember the spiritual truths involved. Women were more likely to tilt towards “simplicity”, as one manuscript puts it.⁸⁸ Women were less inclined to reason than men in this sense because women were simple creatures. So, the prescriptive literature emphasized a tangible, if vague, set of rules about addressing women’s grief from a male perspective. One should console them and be kind and understanding for it is in their nature to grieve as they do and guide them towards reason through direct religious truths.

Although much of this discussion is situated in Antiquity, the writings of these saints and Church Fathers would be shared well into the medieval period. An icon of Nikephoros III receiving a book of homilies written by John Chrysostom, flanked by holy figures, suggests that this prescriptive literature remained in circulation.⁸⁹ An important element of Orthodox theology is that the Church Fathers were divinely inspired, but also human, therefore capable of human fallibility. As a result, they did not have to agree on *everything*, but those things on which they had consensus became doctrine. There was a clear consensus among the early Fathers on how grief should be addressed and defined religiously. Grief was a natural reaction to loss, but one had to overcome it and avoid being consumed by it. However, this did not mean that one should be unkind and cruel to those grieving; one should be ready to console them and remind them of the eternal life awaiting the departed.

Conclusion

As far as the early Christian Fathers were concerned, grief was a troublesome emotion. Grieving for the dead implied a lack of belief in eternal life, a key tenet of Christianity. However, grief was an involuntary emotion; to feel was simply to be human. Therefore, it behoved humans to rise above it and console those who suffered under it. This shows that, in many ways, Byzantine prescriptive emotionology was heavily tied to its religious

⁸⁶ Chrysostom, "Letter to a Young Widow."

⁸⁷ Chrysostom, "Letter to a Young Widow."

⁸⁸ Helen Saradi-Mendelovici, "A Contribution to the Study of the Byzantine Notarial Formulas: The *Infirmetas Sexus* of Women and the *Sc. Velleianum*," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 83, no. 1 (1990): 72-83.

⁸⁹ Anonymous, Emperor Nikephoros III receives a book of Homilies, 1074–1081, illumination, Coislin 79, fol. 2v, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8470047d/f10.item>.

beliefs. As this chapter has shown, there were ill-defined ideas about how to deal with grief, but there were definitive pathways for understanding and processing grief, or at least a sense of an ideal that Byzantine Christians were to strive for. Orthodoxy placed heavy emphasis on the teachings of the early Fathers, and upon the lives of saints as models for good Christian lives to lead. But it also seems that there was no one strict rule about emotions and their relationship to the goal of *apatheia*; grief was different, so arguably it was treated differently to other emotions. The goal of reaching *apatheia* was not forgotten when it came to grief but treated somewhat on its own.

These findings complicate and build on the conclusions of Hinterberger. There seems to have been at least some concern with the relationship between emotion and reason, especially when it came to grief. His tentative conclusion that Byzantines were heavily concerned with the moral value of some emotions is supported, though it requires nuance. Byzantines were concerned with the moral character of certain emotions, in this case, grief, but there was room for kindness, and there was a shared understanding of the limitations of the human experience. The prescriptive literature emphasized that grieving was a human reaction to loss, and that to feel was to be human. However, grieving for too long and without reason showed a lack of faith in God's promise of eternal life. Furthermore, the Byzantines were not so unkind as to deem kindness and consolation unnecessary when confronted with the grieving. As the following chapters will show, these ideas, prescriptions and ambiguities were present in the world of the court.

Chapter 3

Gender and Grief in the *Alexiad*

Byzantine prescriptive literature presented an emotionology that valued stoicism and emotional restraint. One was to resist the temptation to express certain emotions, particularly grief, as excessive grief was tantamount to suggesting one did not have faith in the resurrection and the promise of eternal life to all Christians. However, the emotional standards for women were more complex than this simple prescription. Anna Komnena's *The Alexiad* provides a distinctive, and in some ways unique, portrayal of female grief. This chapter shows how *The Alexiad* negotiates the differences between the expected feminine emotional excess of grief and masculine norms of grieving, and how Anna Komnena herself hybridizes the two norms. In doing so, she establishes her own personal and political identity. This complex model of expression provides even more insight into the norms of women's grief during this period but also shows how these norms derived from older Greek traditions dating back to the Classical period. Komnena does this by drawing on the emotional norms of Byzantium, and by articulating her grief through Classical rhetorical forms.

Authorship and Narrative Framing

There are issues of authorship and narrative framing that need to be addressed first. Although Komnena is generally credited as *The Alexiad*'s author, some have argued that she did not write its entirety.¹ Some scholars contend that her husband, Nicephorus Bryennios, contributed to it significantly. Given that Komnena mentions her exile in the text, one can be certain that she wrote most of it after her involvement (allegedly) in a coup against her brother, John Komnenos.² Some scholars have suggested that the information on military manoeuvres and doctrines was written by Bryennios, or at least sourced from him.³ However, the role Bryennios played in the final completed

¹ A. Komnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. E.R.A Sewter, revised with an introduction by Peter Frankopan (Penguin, 2009), xiv.

² Komnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. Sewter, xiv.

³ Kyle Sinclair, "Anna Komnene and Her Sources for Military Affairs in the *Alexiad*," *Estudios Bizantinos* 2 (2014): 145-85.

manuscript remains contentious.⁴ Modern scholarship leans towards accepting that the majority of the text was written by Komnena.⁵

A poststructuralist approach would be to consider the text independent of its authorship in Barthes' "death of the author" sense.⁶ However, what makes *The Alexiad* crucial to understanding the gendered experience of grief in Byzantium is that it was written by a woman. This renders the text unique in Byzantine historiography. Women writing about grief were rare in Byzantium, with Kassia the Nun in the ninth century offering one of the few comparable examples.⁷ *The Alexiad*'s female authorship is precisely what makes this text invaluable in understanding how grief might have been constructed through a feminine lens. Other depictions of feminine grief from this period are written by men about women. Komnena's account provides an example of how a woman in Byzantium may have constructed her grief within a heavily patriarchal environment.

Moreover, Komnena was a woman of high status; she was a princess, an embedded member of the imperial elite, trained in Classical historiography and rhetoric. Attempting perhaps to emulate her historiographical predecessors in Thucydides and Xenophon, Komnena adopted the tone of the dispassionate historian. However, in her depictions of grief, she had to balance this with the expected image of emotional excess in a grieving woman, both in her portrayal of her own grief, and of the grief of other women. Komnena's readers would have been, overwhelmingly, perhaps *solely*, men. These men would have been elite *literati* with extensive training in Classical rhetoric. She therefore had to navigate the expectations that these men had about emotional expression. Too much emotional honesty could be perceived as weakness. Too little, however, risked being seen as inauthentic. To overcome this challenge, she adopted a dual authorial persona to balance the male-coded dispassionate, neutral

⁴ James Howard-Johnston, "Anna Komnene and the Alexiad," in *Alexios I Komnenos: I. Papers*, ed. M. Mullett and D. Smythe (Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1996), 289-302.

⁵ Kyle Sinclair, "Anna Komnene and Her Sources for Military Affairs in the Alexiad," 145-6.

⁶ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. and ed. Stephen Heath (Fontana Press, 1977), 142-48.

⁷ Anna M. Silvas, "Kassia the Nun c. 810–c. 865: An Appreciation," in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience AD 800–1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (Routledge, 2017), 17-39.

tone of a historian with the expected emotional expression of a grieving daughter and woman.

Komnena also wrote *The Alexiad* while in exile. Irene Doukainia, the wife of Emperor Alexios, pressed for Komnena to be considered as his successor.⁸ Alexios refused.⁹ Doukainia continued to press, and Alexios continually refused.¹⁰ The emperor's reasoning is unclear; Choniates simply states that he "favoured" John more.¹¹ Moreover, the Eastern Roman Empire was an intensely patriarchal society. A woman being considered for the succession may have destabilized confidence in the Komnenoi regime. Whatever his reasoning, Anna Komnena was left out of the succession. Upon Alexios' death, John was named Emperor after forcibly taking control of the Byzantine bureaucracy at the Palace.¹² In the months after, there was a plot to place Komnena on the throne.¹³ John became aware of this plot through Komnena's husband, Nicephoros.¹⁴ She ultimately, albeit narrowly, escaped punishment for her plot and entered a convent upon the death of her husband, where she wrote *The Alexiad*.¹⁵

This political background complicates matters. *The Alexiad* might be read as an attempt at reconciliation with the imperial household and her brother. However, this seems unlikely. Some scholars go so far as to suggest that Komnena was attempting to reinforce her legitimacy as Alexios Komnenos' successor.¹⁶ Though some scholars have challenged this interpretation, it appears convincing. Throughout the text, Komnena goes out of her way to present John in an unfavourable light. When born, he does not resemble his father, whereas Anna does.¹⁷ Later, when John returns to the capital with his newborn twins, Komnena reports that a sudden wind knocks down the statue of

⁸ Niketas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, trans. Harry J. Magoulas (Wayne State University Press, 1984), 5-6.

⁹ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 5-6.

¹⁰ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 5-6.

¹¹ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 5-6.

¹² Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 6-7.

¹³ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 8.

¹⁴ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 8.

¹⁵ R. Browning, "An Unpublished Funeral Oration on Anna Komnena," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 8 (1962): 5, 11-12; Choniates, 8-9.

¹⁶ Larisa Vilimonović, "Observations on the Text and Context of Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*," *Belgrade Historical Review* 5 (2014): 43-58.

¹⁷ Anna Komnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. E. Dawes, (In Parentheses Publications, 2000), 108; Larisa Vilimonović, "Observations on the Text and Context of Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*," 51.

Constantine the Great, stating that it was an omen of Emperor Alexios approaching death, as well as a grim portent of John's return.¹⁸ In doing so, she implies that John's arrival with his twin sons is linked to her father's imminent demise.¹⁹ It is possible, then, that the emotional displays by her and her mother in the text are an exaggeration designed to advance a broader political message. It may be that the reactions of the women in the text are emotionally consistent with other depictions of feminine emotion in a multitude of other Byzantine sources. Yet, the political subtext helps to contextualize her depiction of grief. Her failed dreams of the imperial throne underline her emotions, but they do not define them.

One should be cautious not to reduce her grief to posturing and performance. Her grief, although stylized and complicated through the patriarchal ideals of the time, aligns with the existing depictions of feminine grief. It is this complex dichotomy between the sincere and the performed, that makes the text valuable for a case study of feminine grief. Komnena writes as a woman, but she writes as a woman who is aware of the genre she is writing in, her audience, and the politics of her position in exile.

The Emotional Communities of Women

As discussed in Chapter 2, women's grieving was expected to be intense and excessive. John Chrysostom stated that women are more sensitive to grief than men.²⁰ In describing Macrina's mother's grieving over her son, Gregory of Nyssa characterized her emotions as "womanly".²¹ *The Alexiad* participates in this tradition, showing women to be quick to express intense and evocative displays of grief. While the Emperor is ill and dying, his wife Irene Doukania remains at his side, utterly devoted to him. Komnena describes her as weeping for his condition, shedding tears "more abundant than the waters of the Nile."²² The text even uses the adjective "excessive" to describe it at one point, as if to imply that such grief may be unnecessary.²³ As for her own grief, Komnena

¹⁸ Vilimonović, 55; Komnena, 219.

¹⁹ Vilimonović, 55-6; Komnena, 219.

²⁰ John Chrysostom, "Letter to a Young Widow," trans. W. R. W. Stephens, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 9, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1889), <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1904.htm>.

²¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina*, trans. W.K. Lowther Clarke (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1916), 968b-970d. <https://sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/basis/macrina.asp>

²² Komnena, *The Alexiad*, 298.

²³ For this and the following, see: Komnena, *The Alexiad*, 300-1.

describes herself as “no better than a madman” during this time caring for the emperor. In her own words, she is “wholly absorbed in the grief”. By likening herself to a madman, she again signals that her grief is excessive and unnecessary. The fact that she also describes herself as being completely absorbed and ruled by it seems to run counter to the ideals of *apatheia*. Perhaps she chose to represent herself in this way in order to conform to the expectations of her male readership, who would doubt her account’s veracity if she appeared insufficiently grief-stricken. Yet she also derides her own expression of grief. In this way, she balances potentially incompatible expectations by performing both a feminine role as a character in her own story while simultaneously adopting a more masculine authorial persona.

In the final pages of *The Alexiad*, Emperor Alexios dies quietly. Komnena checks for a pulse and finds none. The Empress lets loose a painful shriek. Barely able to hold herself together, Komnena clasps her hands over her face and steps away. In doing so, it is possible she is attempting to imitate some level of masculine emotional courage in this moment. Yet it is in vain, for she begins to weep. The grief and sudden sharp acute moment of grief is all encompassing. Komnena remarks: “How can I possibly picture the disaster which overtook the whole world? or how deplore my own condition?” Although such weeping does not entirely contradict the behaviour permitted in the prescriptive literature, her comment that the whole world has been overcome by grief borders on excess. Even so, she “deplores” her own condition, suggesting again that her grieving behaviour is shameful and unnecessary. Moreover, during this passage, nothing is said of the grief of male courtiers or physicians by the emperor’s bedside. Komnena’s focus is exclusively on herself and Empress Irene. Absorbed in her grief, she reflects the Byzantine expectation of the grieving woman.

It was not just that women were deemed more actively emotional and sensitive to their feelings than men; it was often implied also that they had no control over them altogether. Komnena as a narrator underscores this repeatedly. She writes that she must silence herself from speaking more of her grief, lest those emotions get the better of her. She does this once when she relates how the emperor died, stating that she must

“transgress the laws of history and relate my father’s death.”²⁴ She repeats this move in her lamentation in the text’s final passages. She compares herself to the mythological Niobe, saying that even if she were turned to stone like Niobe, she would still be made to feel the pain for the loss of the emperor and her father. She silences herself at the end of her lamentation by remarking that she must stop herself now “lest I become bitter,” and so write endlessly about her woe. Again, Komnena’s narration is orientated toward validating her role as a woman writing history. Neville notes this tension in connection with Komnena’s need to avoid the imputation of arrogance as a woman commenting on men in history. She lessens the imputation by invoking a sense of pity in her readers for her plight.²⁵ She acknowledges her dual role as both a woman, lamenting her grief, and as a dispassionate historian, narrating events as though she has no emotional investment in them.²⁶ Either way, it is emblematic of an emotional community in Byzantium that expected women’s emotions to run out of control and to require restraint from both genders.

Another element of this expected emotional outpouring of grief was the tendency towards self-harm. This could involve the beating of the chest but also threats of suicide and the declaration of wishing to die alongside the deceased. *The Alexiad* contains several such examples. When the emperor is dying, Komnena states that the empress:

... threw herself down on the [floor] and kept on [lamenting] and beating her breast and bemoaning the ills that had befallen her, and wished to pour forth her life on the spot, but could not.²⁷

This was a dramatic, yet expected, act of feminine grief condemned by the standards of prescriptive literature. As the emperor’s illness progresses and his death comes nearer, the Empress begins to declare statements such as “let everything go to destruction”. She throws herself against the floor “still dressed”. Both the Empress and Komnena tear

²⁴ For this and the following, see: Komnena, *The Alexiad*, 297, 302.

²⁵ Leonora Neville, “Pity and Lamentation in the Authorial Personae of John Kaminates and Anna Komnene,” in *Emotions and Gender in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Stavroula Constantinou and Mati Meyer (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 80-8.

²⁶ Leonora Neville, “Lamentation, History, and Female Authorship in Anna Komnene’s *Alexiad*,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 53 (2013): 212.

²⁷ For this and the following, see: Komnena, *The Alexiad*, 300-1.

at their hair. Hagiography often depicted such acts of self-harm and self-inflicted violence. The *Holy Men of Mount Athos*, for example, describes a dying saint asking the women not to “beat their chests” at his death.²⁸ The *Lives of Athanasia and Andronikos* depict Athanasia beating her chest.²⁹ The mother of St. Macrina hurled herself on the floor when hearing of the death of her son.³⁰

Moreover, such self-harm often goes even further, involving a desire for death. Irene desired to “pour forth her life on the spot.” While caring for the dying Alexios, the physicians remark that she herself is likely to die alongside him.³¹ Komnena’s sister sprinkles roses on the emperor, but also on the Empress. Komnena states that the empress’ soul was “hastening to depart” alongside the emperor. After the emperor has passed, Komnena writes of her own grief, stating that she wishes she had died with him, and asks “if that was not to be my fate, why did I not throw myself down from some high and lofty place or cast myself into the waves of the sea?” Measured against the contemporary understanding of grief, all this pining for death and suicide appears extreme. Even for Byzantines, the desire to take one’s own life was considered a grave sin.³²

However, a key point of the Byzantine ideal of femininity was that women should be in complete obedience and servitude to the men in their lives.³³ Komnena is thus subservient to her father and Irene to her husband. To them, the emperor is their whole world: his death means expressing a grief that is all encompassing; obedience as wife or daughter means following him into death. Even so, suicide was un-Christian and even *contemplating* it might have been viewed as damning.³⁴ Whether or not women were more likely to have suicidal thoughts, or whether they were judged more harshly for

²⁸ R.P.H. Greenfield and A.M. Talbot, *Holy Men of Mount Athos* (Harvard University Press, 2016), 45.

²⁹ Andria Andreou, “‘Emotioning’ Gender: Plotting the Male and the Female in Byzantine Greek Passions and Lives of Holy Couples,” in *Emotions and Gender in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Stavroula Constantinou and Mati Meyer (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 39-42.

³⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina*, 968b.

³¹ For this and the following, see: Komnene, *The Alexiad*, 300-2.

³² G. Tsoukalas et al., “Suicide in the Byzantine Empire,” *Psychiatriki* 24, no. 1 (Jan-Mar 2013): 55-60.

³³ Leonora Neville, *Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 43.

³⁴ Judith Herrin, Alexander Kazhdan, and Anthony Cutler, “Women,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan (Oxford University Press, 1991), 2202.

doing so, is a moot point. However, the mere expression of such thoughts seems to conform to ideas about female emotional excess and spiritual weakness.

Classical Continuity and Greek Tradition

Such acts of self-violence also hark back to various Classical traditions of feminine mourning.³⁵ The continuity Byzantine culture retained with ancient Greece tended to influence public and private life alike, as well as scholarly and historiographical traditions.³⁶ The *Alexiad* itself is an example of that historiographical continuity.³⁷ The style of the text imitates Classical Greek historiography in many ways, particularly in its willingness to echo the *Iliad*.³⁸ The repeated allusions to Classical ideas, concepts, philosophies, stories and legends, such as Komnena referring herself to Niobe, are evidence of this.³⁹ The text also emphasizes those links to Classical Greece when narrating certain emotional displays. Greek women were frequently depicted as highly expressive with their mourning, often lamenting, tearing at their hair, and beating their breasts.⁴⁰ One cannot be sure how widespread this was in the politically fragmented world of Classical Greece, but it was certainly present in Athens.⁴¹ It is described in the *Iliad*, and depicted in classical art, such as pottery.⁴² The behaviours depicted closely parallel the behaviour of the women in the *Alexiad*. Laws were passed to prevent this behaviour in Classical Athens.⁴³ No such laws were passed in Byzantium, which may suggest a grudging acceptance of the practice, even though it was proscribed in prescriptive literature. Feminine lament in *The Alexiad* might therefore be read as another gesture towards Classical Hellenic tradition.⁴⁴

³⁵ Glanville Downey, "Byzantium and the Classical Tradition," *Phoenix* 12, no. 3 (1958): 125-9.

³⁶ Claudia Rapp, "Hellenic Identity, Romanitas, and Christianity in Byzantium," in *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity from Antiquity*, ed. Katerina Zachira (Routledge, 2016), 132.

³⁷ Vilimonović, *Structure and Features of Anna Komnene's Alexiad: Emergence of a Personal History* (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 81-119.

³⁸ Larisa Vilimonović, *Structure and Features of Anna Komnene's Alexiad: Emergence of a Personal History*, 81-119.

³⁹ Komnena, *The Alexiad*, 302.

⁴⁰ Wayne Robertson, "Speaking for the Dead: Funeral Rhetoric and Women's Lament in Ancient Athens," (Master's diss., University of Oregon, 2000), 4-5.

⁴¹ Robertson, "Speaking for the Dead," 1.

⁴² Funerary amphora with scenes of mourning, 720-700 BCE, terracotta, Getty Museum Collection, Los Angeles, <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/109MCQ>.

⁴³ Neville, "Lamentation, History, and Female Authorship in Anna Komnene's Alexiad," 200-1.

⁴⁴ Christopher A. Faraone, *Hexametrical Genres from Homer to Theocritus* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 155-90.

As noted, the act of lamentation was relegated to women in the Classical period. So too was the singing of the monody, a form of funeral dirge. Komnena's brief monodies during the text once again hark back to Byzantium's Hellenistic past.⁴⁵ The major techniques of monody were codified in the treatises of Menander Rhetor.⁴⁶ These techniques centred on the age of the deceased and the world's loss of their beauty. Menander's second treatise includes direct instructions on how to write a funeral oration.⁴⁷ He moves through several characteristics that a good monody should represent, but the key emphases are on the beauty that is lost to the world, and the positive qualities of the deceased:

You should base your encomium on all the encomiastic topics: family, birth, nature, nurture, education, accomplishments. You should divide 'nature' into two – physical beauty (to be mentioned first) and mental endowment.⁴⁸

It is notable that Menander's orations were meant to be spoken by a polemarch or equivalent.⁴⁹ These orations were separate from the dirges that women were to sing.⁵⁰ Yet, Komnena delivers orations that are often stylistically in line with encomiums, emphasizing the beauty and vigour of the dead.⁵¹ When her younger brother, Andronikos, is slain in battle after falling from his horse, she composes a brief monody that emphasizes the physical beauty of his 'nature' (as Rhetor put it). She writes: "Oh, youth and physical beauty and your light leaps on horseback, where in the world have you gone?"⁵² She emphasizes his youth by writing that he was in "the most charming period of his life" and that in "war he displayed prudent boldness, a quick hand, and abundant wisdom."⁵³ Here, the text is emphasizing his positive qualities as much as possible. She also employs imagery of light by describing him as light leaping from

⁴⁵ Robertson, "Speaking for the Dead in Ancient Athens," 6-9.

⁴⁶ Menander Rhetor, *Menander Rhetor: A Commentary*, ed. and trans. D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson (Clarendon Press, 1981), 171-81.

⁴⁷ Menander Rhetor, *Menander Rhetor: A Commentary*, 171-81.

⁴⁸ Menander Rhetor, *Menander Rhetor: A Commentary*, 175.

⁴⁹ Menander Rhetor, *Menander Rhetor: A Commentary*, 171.

⁵⁰ Menander Rhetor, *Menander Rhetor: A Commentary*, 171.

⁵¹ Komnena, *The Alexiad*, 285.

⁵² Komnena, *The Alexiad*, 285.

⁵³ Komnena, *The Alexiad*, 285.

horseback. She uses similar imagery in her monody for her betrothed, Constantine Doukas, when he dies as well.⁵⁴

The Hybridization of Gendered Emotions

Komnena shows a strong awareness of the conflicting expectations placed on her as a woman and as a historian. In each case, she begins to lament, only to stop and restrain herself.⁵⁵ This reminds the reader that she is a woman whose nature inclines her towards lamentation, yet her text is not proper place for such an expression as she is writing history.⁵⁶ Notably she shifts from talking about the deceased, to describing her personal grief and how it pains her to have lost these people in her life. This is in line with the Classical tradition of feminine grieving.⁵⁷ Even so, she also intertwines these more Classical ideas of monody with those of medieval origin. Medieval traditions of monody from Byzantium, for example, often feature imagery of light. This is present in her writing of the death of her betrothed, Constantine, where she describes him as belonging to the “Golden Age fabled by the Greeks”. We might think of this allusion to the Greek “golden age” as further Classical imagery. However, since this monody is a medieval invention, designed perhaps to mimic the style of the lament in the Book of Lamentations, it is absent from Rhetor’s stylistic prescriptions.⁵⁸

Dirges and monodies were meant to be sung primarily by women, but the structure and stylistic conventions Komnena draws from are those of funeral orations that were meant to be undertaken by men. In this sense, her depiction of grief crosses borders between the prescriptions applied to men and those applied to women. This is perhaps a compromise between the feminine and masculine roles that seem to be at odds with one another throughout the text. Merging the two styles and conventions was perhaps an attempt to legitimize her grief as being more profound than the simple wailing of a grieving old widow.

⁵⁴ Komnena, *The Alexiad*, 23.

⁵⁵ Komnena, *The Alexiad*, 23, 285, 301.

⁵⁶ Komnena, *The Alexiad*, 23, 285, 301.

⁵⁷ Neville, “Lamentation, History, and Female Authorship in Anna Komnene’s *Alexiad*,” 206-7; Robertson, 7.

⁵⁸ Menander Rhetor, *Menander Rhetor: A Commentary*, 171; Neville, “Lamentation, History, and Female Authorship in Anna Komnene’s *Alexiad*,” 205; Komnena, 23.

It was also believed that women could rise above their nature as over-emotional creatures. In fact, it was considered virtuous and brave for women to do so.⁵⁹ Throwing off feminine traits and adopting more masculine ones earned women respect. Prescriptive literature implies this dynamic: St Macrina, for example, helps her mother to see reason, while the mother is portrayed as irrational due to her feminine nature.⁶⁰ Much work has been done on the role of “womanly simplicity” in legal and business laws of the Byzantine era throughout the Middle Ages.⁶¹ As historians have emphasized, femininity and masculinity were roles that could be performed by Byzantines, male and female.⁶² The passages where Komnena ceases writing of her grief lest it get out of control, for example, arguably signal to the reader that she is rising above her grief to perform a masculine role, in this case, the writing of history.⁶³ She does so again when she provides medical care for her father alongside the male physicians, despite her grieving as a woman throughout the scene.⁶⁴ The best example of this dynamic at play is within Komnena’s depiction of her mother, the empress. She is the ideal picture of feminine behaviour in that she shows utter devotion to her husband but can rise above her womanly emotions and be brave. Irene is described as caring for him constantly, changing his position to help him breathe, nursing him, and changing his bedding. She has effectively become the Byzantine equivalent of a modern nurse for the dying emperor. Despite all of this, he does not improve. As time passes, the text states that “all things pointed to the end”, indicating that she was aware of the emperor’s imminent fate. Yet Empress Irene remains “brave”, curbing her “passionate grief” in this time to care for the emperor. Her devotion to her wifely role outweighs any perceived necessity for overt grief. She is showing an almost manly quality by evidencing *apatheia*, suppressing her grief for him at this point. She has no time to grieve for who he once was, or to grieve in anticipation of his death, for she has risen above her ‘over-emotional’ nature of womanhood. She even stood “like a conqueror in the Olympic games,” invoking an achievement associated only with men. In this way, the text is

⁵⁹ Neville, *Life and Work of a Medieval Historian*, 18.

⁶⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina*, 968b-970d.

⁶¹ Helen Saradi Mendelovici, “A Contribution to the Study of the Byzantine Notarial Formulas: The *Infirmis Sexus* of Women and the *Sc. Velleianum*,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 83, no. 1 (1990): 72-83.

⁶² A. Walker, review of *Byzantine Gender*, by Leonora Neville, *Speculum* 96, no. 3 (2021): 866-69.

⁶³ Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 297, 302.

⁶⁴ For this and the following see: Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 298-301.

ascribing to women the possibility of acting in masculine ways while taking on traditionally feminine tasks, she cares for her husband while he is ill, but in doing so, rises to the height of a man.

However, assuming such a masculine burden takes a psychological toll:

For she was wounded in soul and anguished in heart at seeing the emperor in such a state. But she pulled herself together and remained firm in face of these sufferings, and, though she was mortally wounded and pierced to the marrow with grief, nevertheless she bore up. And yet her tears fell in floods and the beauty of her face became withered, and her soul seemed suspended in her nostrils.

She is after all, still a woman, an emotional creature at heart. There is only so much she can do to fight against her nature. Her grief still manifests physically. It suggests that perhaps it was considered normal for a woman suppressing her overly emotional nature with masculine strength to become withered, and to lose her “beauty”, thereby losing an element of her feminine quality. One might ask therefore what this same dynamic might have meant for Komnena, the narrator, acting also as a physician for her father, and showing interest in masculine topics, as well as writing as a historian. One could argue that these were extensions of her role of care and devotion to her father and his memory. Furthermore, if Komnena possibly had political intentions in her writing of the *Alexiad*, then the adoption of these more masculine roles of writing history and acting as a physician was perhaps a demonstration of her potential capacity to be an Empress herself.

Conclusion

Some historians have written that the displays of emotion in the *Alexiad* are exaggerated to advance a specific narrative agenda.⁶⁵ Yet Komnena’s behaviour throughout the text, both in her depiction of her mother and her own narration is perfectly in line with the established emotional communities active in Byzantine society at the time. *The Alexiad* offers a hybrid model of the feminine excess of grief observed in the prescriptive literature with that of a masculine ideal of self-restraint. This allows Komnena to express

⁶⁵ Neville, *Life and Work of a Medieval Historian*, 8.

herself while retaining her authority as a historian. She strategically adopts the dual authorial persona of the dutiful daughter of the emperor but also polices her own expressions of emotion. She shows, and then critiques, excessive feminine lamentation, self-harm, and suicidal rhetoric. Irene's care of Emperor Alexios in his final days also shows how women could endure emotionally difficult situations, and in doing so, display their virtue. However, this had a physical cost that withered their feminine qualities. The Classical echoes throughout also legitimize Komnena's grief through her narration. Altogether, this shows that Komnena inhabited the emotional community as outlined in the prescriptive literature but did not live in strict obedience to it. Perhaps one might say that *The Alexiad*'s depiction of Komnena's grief was a form of 'soft power', allowing Komnena the historian to bolster her moral and intellectual superiority over her brother, John, and thus quietly undermining him. In this sense, grief has become a rhetorical and political tool.

The Alexiad thus challenges the binaries that seem implicit in the prescriptive literature. It also suggests there was more fluidity in the emotional world of Byzantine gender than this literature implies. It illuminates how grief and prescriptive ideas about it could be used to negotiate power. Things were often more complex than the ideals that the prescriptive literature sometimes suggested. It shows how Byzantine women, and perhaps Byzantines in general, could make use of apparently narrow Christian expectations of *apatheia* alongside Classical modes of emotional expression to serve their own ends, all the while appearing to conform to acceptable emotional norms.

Chapter 4

The Grief Rituals of the Imperial Funeral

Grief can be expressed in a multitude of ways. Funerals, in particular, are often emotionally charged events. They are key to expressing and processing grief. The same maxim can be applied to the Byzantines and their experience of grief over the death of the emperor. In his Book of Ceremonies (*De Ceremoniis*), Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913-959) outlines how an emperor's funeral must be undertaken. This text remains one of the best available sources for the prescribed ceremonies of an imperial funeral. These rituals provide a vehicle for mourning and complement notions like *apatheia* which sought to restrain overt expressions of grief.

This chapter examines how the rituals surrounding the death of the emperor, particularly the funeral, provided a means to manage grief. Rituals, through symbolism, the evocation of a shared mood, and material culture offered avenues for the emotional expression of grief. Grief became channelled in symbolic actions rather than released in immediate physical reactions. Applying anthropological models of grief rituals developed by Sas and Coman helps to categorise the specific form of grief expressed through rituals for the deceased emperor. These expressions of grief were not necessarily a reflection of personal loss, but rather a powerfully political and symbolic one. *De Ceremoniis* will provide the immediate foundation for the analysis of ritual, supplemented by other sources for additional context or further clarification.

To analyse the emotional undercurrents of the imperial funeral, this chapter uses modern theories of the *affective field*, *emotional contagion*, and *solidarity*, as outlined in the Introduction. An affective field can be defined broadly as emotional connections that are formed between people, relationships, and objects.¹ These connections were arguably generated through one of the funeral's key focal points: the bier of grief. The inherent symbolism of this object facilitated the development of emotional networks among the participants of the funeral. Affective fields can also produce 'emotional

¹ Oliver Harris and Tim Flohr Sørensen, "Rethinking Emotion and Material Culture," *Archaeological Dialogues* 17, no. 2 (2010): 151.

binding' to those present, akin to what Émile Durkheim called *solidarity*.² Solidarity is the sense of unity in a social group based on shared values and goals.³ Emotional solidarity applies this concept to the *shared mood* of individuals within a group.⁴ Finally, *emotional contagion* can be defined as the tendency of individuals to mimic the behaviours and gestures of others, "and consequently, [for them to] converge emotionally", in this case among the ritual participants of imperial funerals.⁵ This chapter also draws on the models for grief rituals outlined by Sas and Coman, which will be considered later.

The Book of Ceremonies (*De Ceremoniis*)

The tendency of the Byzantines to emphasize tradition in sacred and ceremonial matters, while hardly unique, should not be understated.⁶ Most of the rituals and ceremonies in *De Ceremoniis* were taken from earlier manuscripts.⁷ Though Constantine is often identified as the book's author, the scholarly consensus is that large parts of the book were probably written before or after his reign, with sections from chapter 83 onwards being written at different times, likely by different people.⁸ Some sections appear to date as far back as Justinian, and others appear to have been written after the reign of Constantine VII and added later.⁹ Nevertheless, a significant portion was compiled under Constantine VII's jurisdiction.¹⁰ Chapter 60, the section under

² Harris and Sørensen, "Rethinking Emotion," 151.

³ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford University Press, 2001), 3-21.

⁴ Randall Collins, "Stratification, emotional energy, and the transient emotions," in *Research Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions*, ed. T.D. Kemper. (State University of New York Press, 1990): 27-57.

⁵ Elaine Hatfield, John T. Cacioppo, and Richard L. Rapson, "Emotional Contagion," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 2, no. 3 (1993): 96.

⁶ The extent of this tendency is debated. See Glanville Downey, "Byzantium and the Classical Tradition," *Phoenix* 12, no. 3 (1958): 125-9; Claudia Rapp, "Hellenic Identity, Romanitas, and Christianity in Byzantium," in *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity from Antiquity*, ed. Katerina Zachira (Routledge, 2016), 132; N.H. Baynes, *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (Greenwood Press, 1974), 25-46; A.P. Kazhdan and G. Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 117-8.

⁷ Averil Cameron, "The Construction of Court Ritual: The Byzantine Book of Ceremonies," in *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, ed. David Cannadine and S. R. F. Price (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 106-36.

⁸ John Bagnell Bury, "The Ceremonial Book of Constantine Porphyrogennetos," *English Historical Review* 22 (1907): 211-2.

⁹ John Bagnell Bury, "The Ceremonial Book of Constantine Porphyrogennetos," 211-2.

¹⁰ Averil Cameron, "The Construction of Court Ritual: The Byzantine Book of Ceremonies," 110-1.

consideration here, was likely written by Constantine, or someone commissioned by him, during his reign as emperor.¹¹ There is little to no evidence to suggest otherwise.¹² With all this in mind, *De Ceremoniis* should be understood as a compilation, and not a single “unitary work”.¹³ It is highly likely that the original purpose behind this document was to codify the rules by which the emperor could control the court. The document was a “thrust from the government to an even greater degree of autocracy.”¹⁴ Furthermore, the text also functioned to reattach Byzantium to its Roman past.¹⁵ These themes are crucial when for understanding the expressions of grief embedded in the text’s funeral prescriptions. Contextually, it is an important source for court ritual (though not the only one), for it provides a vignette of a period in which the Byzantine bureaucracy was transitioning out of the forms developed in antiquity. *De Ceremoniis* sought to echo these ghosts of the past, while also attempting to assert the authority of the imperial office as one of overwhelming power. In this sense, the text presents an idealised image of imperial power, rather than the more complex reality to which any autocracy like Byzantium was beholden. Byzantine court ritual was “memories in action, encoded into action.”¹⁶

The Imperial Funeral

Funerals for Byzantine emperors were a complicated affair. In some cases, the funeral was forgone or adjusted to reflect the political circumstances in which the emperor died.¹⁷ Those who were unseated during a coup, or were assassinated, or who died while outside the imperial office were not typically given the honour of a full imperial funeral. The imperial funerals, as outlined in *De Ceremoniis*, were reserved for reigning emperors in good standing. Living emperors who had abdicated (rare) or been deposed (less rare), but were not killed during the administrative transition, did not receive a full imperial funeral. No source mentions such a ceremony taking place for an abdicated or

¹¹ John Bagnell Bury, “The Ceremonial Book of Constantine Porphyrogennetos,” 211-2.

¹² John Bagnell Bury, “The Ceremonial Book of Constantine Porphyrogennetos,” 211-2.

¹³ Cameron, “The Construction of Court Ritual: The Byzantine Book of Ceremonies,” 110.

¹⁴ Cameron, “The Construction of Court Ritual: The Byzantine Book of Ceremonies,” 123.

¹⁵ Cameron, “The Construction of Court Ritual: The Byzantine Book of Ceremonies,” 136.

¹⁶ R. Schechner and S. Brady, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2013), 45.

¹⁷ Bogdan-Petru Maleon, “Imperial Death in Byzantium: A Preliminary View on the Negative Funerals,” *Transylvanian Review* 19, no. 4 (2010): 13.

deposed emperor, allowing for the tentative conclusion that they did not occur. As for the emperors killed during coups, the funerals were sometimes omitted or undertaken as a theatrical political performance, designed to parade and humiliate the deceased emperor. Examples include Leo V (813-820), whose body was mutilated and dragged through the streets of the city, or of Andronikos Komnenos (1183-1185), whose body was placed atop a camel and marched through the streets.¹⁸

The following discussion focuses on cases in which the emperor's funeral took place during a stable and peaceful transition between administrations. If funerals following the violent deposition of an emperor are "negative", as Maleon called them, then those honouring deceased emperors are "positive" ones.¹⁹ These can be divided into phases. The first involves the washing and dressing of the body. The second involves the funeral service inside the church and the third is the burial itself.²⁰ Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *De Ceremoniis* gives detailed instructions for conducting the second phase of the Byzantine imperial funeral.

The *De Ceremoniis* calls this the «ἐπιτάφιος βασιλέων.»²¹ This (roughly) translates as "funerary procession" or "funereal arrangements for the emperor". Translations (both into Latin and English) give this as simply "funeral".²² Proceedings are as follows. The funeral is to take place within the Great Palace of Constantinople.²³ The deceased emperor is brought into the Palace reception hall (called the Hall of the Nineteen Couches), and placed on a gold bier, called the "bier of grief". Here, the body lies in state, dressed in the imperial attire of a *chlamys* and a *divestion*. The guildsmen, clergy, and the senate enter and begin singing, reciting "in accordance with ritual". It is unclear who the text means when it says "guildsmen". The original text uses the term «γηλῶνες», derived from Latin *gildones*, which means a member of a guild. The

¹⁸ Maleon, "Imperial Death in Byzantium: A Preliminary View on the Negative Funerals," 18.

¹⁹ Maleon, 13.

²⁰ Elena Velkovska, "Funeral Rites According to the Byzantine Liturgical Sources," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001): 37-8.

²¹ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Ann Moffatt and Maxeme Tall, *Byzantina Australiensia* 18 (Brill, 2017), 275.

²² Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae Libri Duo*, ed. and trans. Johann Jakob Reiske, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* (Bonn: Weber, 1829), 275; Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 275..

²³ For this and the following, see: Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 275-6.

translation notes of the edition used in this study tentatively suggests that this refers to a professional guild of mourners attached to the Hagia Sophia. The other two groups of mourners, the senate and the clergy, are self-explanatory.

After this is done, the *praipositos* (the Grand Chamberlain of the Palace, typically a eunuch) would signal the Master of Ceremonies, who would then proclaim, "Go out, emperor, the Emperor of Emperors and Lord of Lords summons you." He does this three times. At this point, the body is then carried to the Chalke (the main ceremonial vestibule of the Palace) by the emperor's men (the text names them as the *prosparatharoi*). The body lies there in state while they do "what is usual". The *praipositos* again signals the Master of Ceremonies and then repeats the earlier chant thrice. The body is then taken out of the Palace along the Mese. The Mese was the main thoroughfare of the city of Constantinople, and the customary route for many imperial processions. The body is carried along the Mese to its place of burial. Once the body reached the location it was interred, the *praipositos* repeats his earlier chant, but with a slight alteration: "Go in, emperor, the Emperor of Emperors and Lord of Lords summons you." This is said again three times. He then states: "Take the imperial crown from your head." The crown is removed from the emperor's head by the *praipositos* and "a band of plain purple is set in place". The body is then buried, ending proceedings. *De Ceremoniis* instructs that these rituals must also be undertaken for the death of the empress.

Despite the detail of its funeral prescriptions, *De Ceremoniis* neglects to mention a few funerary procedures that are attested in other sources. Several of these omitted rituals are important for considering how they provided an outlet for grief. The washing of the body in preparation for the funeral is case in point. This is considered the first of the three key stages of the Byzantine funeral.²⁴ As noted before, it is mentioned in *Theophanes Continuatus*' account of the funeral for Constantine Porphyrogenitus.²⁵ It is also attested in earlier sources, suggesting that this was a longstanding process.²⁶ One might therefore argue that this procedure was omitted because it was assumed.

²⁴ Velkovska, "Funeral Rites According to the Byzantine Liturgical Sources," 37.

²⁵ Anonymous, "Theophanes Continuatus Book 6, Years 944–961," in *The Rise and Fall of Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas*, ed. Denis Sullivan (Brill, 2018), 55.

²⁶ Velkovska, "Funeral Rites According to the Byzantine Liturgical Sources," 36-7.

Another procedure that is curiously omitted is the monastic tonsuring of the body. This is attested a number of times amongst the sources, such as Manuel Komnenos (1143-1180), who demanded a monastic habit for himself when he realized he was dying, or Michael IV (1034-1041), who was tonsured in the clothes of a monk before his death.²⁷ Perhaps this garb was required for the active process of dying, in preparation for the soul leaving the body. Alternatively, it may have been an individual request by each of the emperors involved, and not something that happened ritualistically. *De Ceremoniis* gives specific guidelines as to what the emperor should be wearing while lying in state.²⁸ These discrepancies point towards uncertainties surrounding the accuracy or comprehensiveness of the procedures described in *De Ceremoniis*.

Comparisons can also be drawn between *De Ceremoniis* and descriptions of imperial funerals in other sources, though these are often fragmentary. The most detailed description comes from *Theophanes Continuatus*' account of the death of Constantine Porphyrogenitus VII himself. The ceremony of this funeral shows some discrepancies with *De Ceremoniis*' prescriptions but also shares similarities. Constantine's body was washed, as per Orthodox tradition.²⁹ Then he was placed in the Hall of the Nineteen Couches and from there, carried out through the Chalke gate, where rites were enacted, and psalms were recited. The account describes many court dignitaries coming by, taking a "final embrace".³⁰ Then, as was outlined by *De Ceremoniis*, the Master of Ceremonies gave his announcement for the emperor to depart, and he was taken along the Mese. According to this account, the route was lined with citizens of the Empire who had come out to observe. This account states the entire Senate escorted him. There is no mention of the *prosparitharoi* or any of the other groups outlined in the book. Few other sources describe funerals in any detail. Choniates, for example, mentions a funerary procession for Alexios Komnenos, but does not specify how this was carried out.³¹ Manuel Komnenos is described being

²⁷ John Skylitzes, *John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057: Translation and Notes*, trans. John Wortley (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 389; *Niketas Choniates, O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, trans. Harry Margoulis (Wayne State University Press, 1984), 125.

²⁸ Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 275-6.

²⁹ Velkovska, "Funeral Rites According to the Byzantine Liturgical Sources," 37; Anonymous, "Theophanes Continuatus Book 6, Years 944–961," 55-6.

³⁰ For this and the following, see: Anonymous, "Theophanes Continuatus" 55-6.

³¹ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 8.

carried on a funerary bier to his resting place, perhaps in a partial imitation of the ceremony, since he died on campaign far from Constantinople and the Great Palace, the fulcrum of the ceremony.³²

This suggests that the rituals described in *De Ceremoniis* were not always followed to the letter, even when Constantine Porphyrogenitus VII himself received his final treatment. *De Ceremoniis* thus represents a certain idea of how the funeral *ought* to be carried out, rather than how it always was.

Constantine's Legacy and Classical Continuity

The ideal prescriptions given in *De Ceremoniis* also reflect a broader Byzantine tendency to echo the past. *De Ceremoniis*' description of an imperial funeral closely resembles the protocol that was followed upon the death of Constantine the Great (306-337), as described by Eusebius (c. 260 – 339). Constantine, for example, was laid in a “golden coffin”.³³ The funerary bier in *De Ceremoniis* is also instructed to be made of gold.³⁴ Emperor Constantine was laid in the “principal chamber” of the Great Palace.³⁵ Eusebius likely means the Hall of the Nineteen Couches as described in the Book of Ceremonies.³⁶ In Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*, the Emperor's “soldiers” carry Constantine's body; this role is performed by the *protospatharoi* in *De Ceremoniis*, who were often military leaders.³⁷ The senators come by to kneel before Constantine in Eusebius' account.³⁸ In *De Ceremoniis*, the senators also pay homage, though they sing for the Emperor.³⁹ The slight differences suggest developments in these ceremonies, or perhaps more defined courtly roles in the case of the *protospatharoi*. The singing rather than kneeling senators may reflect the senate's changing role in Byzantine

³² Ioannes Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, trans. Charles M. Brand (Columbia University Press, 1976), 33.

³³ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine*, trans. Ernest Cushing Richardson, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890), bk. 4, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/25024.htm>.

³⁴ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 275.

³⁵ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine*, bk. 4.

³⁶ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 275.

³⁷ Alexander Kazhdan and Anthony Cutler, “Protospatharios,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan (Oxford University Press, 1991), 1748; Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 276.

³⁸ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, bk. 4.

³⁹ Porphyrogenetos, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 276.

administration. The members of the senate occupied more of a notary position by the time of Constantine VII, with the ceremony thereby reflecting a different political dynamic.⁴⁰ Either way, the proceedings in *De Ceremoniis* strongly resemble the proceedings as they were carried out by Constantine. By linking the funeral rituals to those associated with Constantine, the funeral ceremony, as described in *De Ceremoniis*, draws legitimacy from the legacy of Constantine the Great and his significance to the cultural identity of Byzantines. This connection to the past affirms the legitimacy of the present emperor but also intensifies the immediate emotional conditions of the ceremony.

Furthermore, according to Eusebius, Constantine was buried near to a series of monuments to the Apostles.⁴¹ Eusebius states that even in death, Constantine was “holding on to empire.”⁴² There is contentious debate regarding the implications of being buried near to the apostles in the first place.⁴³ It is possible that Constantine saw himself as being equal to the apostles; Averil Cameron remarks that this came near to a sort of resurrection by being buried in such a location.⁴⁴ Alternatively, even in death, Constantine was perhaps symbolically clinging on to imperial power in a sense. This may have contributed to later efforts to evoke Constantine symbolically within funerary ritual. The idea of the emperor being treated as if still alive had historical precedent in the imperial Roman funerals of antiquity, where, if the emperor died abroad, he would be treated as living until the funeral was completed.⁴⁵

Either way, by bringing forth the memory of Constantine, the ceremony strengthens the shared mood of grief for the deceased emperor, encouraging the mourners to perceive him (or her, in the case of the funeral for the *augousta*) as a continuation or a reflection of Constantine himself. In this sense, Constantine’s spirit is evoked by the replication of the various rituals and ceremonies performed at his death.

⁴⁰ Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 324.

⁴¹ Claudia Rapp, “Death at the Byzantine Court,” in *Death at Court*, ed. Karl Heinz Speiss (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014), 271.

⁴² A. Cameron and S.G. Hall, *Life of Constantine* (Clarendon Press, 1999), 181.

⁴³ Rapp, “Death at the Byzantine Court,” 271.

⁴⁴ Cameron and Hall, *Life of Constantine*, 348.

⁴⁵ Karissa Hurzeler, “Roman Imperial Funeral: The Emperor’s Final Triumph,” *Pithos Classics Journal* (2018): 2.

His death is re-enacted. Perhaps this meant that deceased emperors would receive one of the highest honours possible: being farewelled from the world in the same manner as one of their greatest predecessors. It was, perhaps, a reminder that Byzantine emperors, even in death, were embodiments of antique imperial greatness.

Affective Fields, Solidarity and Emotional Contagions

Key to the funeral's ability to elicit emotion is the "bier of grief."⁴⁶ *De Ceremoniis* gives a brief description of the bier. It is instructed to be made of gold. To date, none of these imperial funerary biers have been unearthed, so their exact appearance and symbolic associations are not certain. However, a 'gold' bier would likely signify power, prestige and wealth, at the very least.⁴⁷ Perhaps the use of gold as an overlay for the bier imparted a sense of sacredness. Many liturgical objects are, after all, made of gold. The use of gold would likely have amplified the bier's affective power, as funerary biers were rarely inlaid with gold. Funerary biers unearthed from the Levant and dating to the time of its Byzantine and Roman occupation in antiquity show that they were often made of wood or other materials, never of gold or "inlaid" with gold, as *Theophanes Continuatus* puts it.⁴⁸ Excavations, closer to the medieval period, show a complete disintegration of the bedding and biers, leaving little behind but splinters and nails, suggesting they were also made of wood.⁴⁹ Gold would have survived, unless it was stolen. In either case, it seems difficult to believe that this was a widespread practice. Gold was expensive, and to use it in funerary biers everywhere, or even if it was amongst the very wealthy, would be excessive. The golden bier, the bier of sorrow, is reserved only for the emperor himself.

The bier is also described as the "bier of grief". This specific language is key, as it implies, at least on some level, that the object itself embodies and carries the collective

⁴⁶ For this and the following see: Porphyrogenetos, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 275-6.

⁴⁷ Todd Holland, "The Symbolic Power of Gold," *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 25, no. 2 (2005): 139-140.

⁴⁸ Anonymous, "Theophanes Continuatus," 55; Béatrice Huber, "The Funerary Beds from the Monastic Cemetery at El-Ghalida (El-Kom El-Ahmar/Saruna)," in *Clothing the House: Furnishing Textiles of the 1st Millennium Ad from Egypt and Neighbouring Countries; Proceedings of the 5th Conference of the Research Group "Textiles from the Nile Valley," Antwerp, 6-7 October 2007*, ed. Antoine Moor, Cäcilia Fluck, and Susanne Martinssen-von Falck (Lannoo Publishers, 2009), 57-72.

⁴⁹ J. L. Rife, *The Roman and Byzantine Graves and Human Remains* (American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2012), 91-8.

grief of the mourners. The Greek text refers to it as “...ἡ χρυσοῦ χλίνη ἡ ἐπονομα ζομένη λύπης.”⁵⁰ (“the golden bier of sorrow.”) Moffat and Tall choose to translate this as “the bier of grief.”⁵¹ However, the root term of ‘λύπη’ conveys a wide variety of sorrowful emotions, as John of Damascus points out in his treatise on the passions.⁵² The original wording implies a much greater sense of sorrow than just the single passion of grief (though, as noted in Chapter 2, Byzantine texts could conflate the two).⁵³ Semantics aside, the funerary bier’s emotional symbolism is relevant. The bier is carried by the soldiers of the emperor; they have burdened themselves with the rawness of the grieving sorrow, the weight of grief made manifest in the bier, as they transport it to its various destinations throughout the ritual, culminating in its journey to its final resting place.⁵⁴

In this sense, the bier has become an “affective field”; the grief is not just experienced by individuals, but is also embedded within and transmitted through the bier itself.⁵⁵ The bier has thus become “sticky with emotion” and focuses the grief of those who come into contact with it.⁵⁶ The funerary bier thus functioned as an intense focal point for the mourners’ grief. The presence of the body atop the bier would likely amplify the feelings of grief for those who view the body and the bier, but also for those who physically must touch it. The body lying on top of the bier likely facilitated the transformation of the bier into an affective object. The sight of a dead body, particularly the emperor’s, would have roused strong emotions.

In Byzantine art, it is not uncommon to see images of the deceased lying in state surrounded by mourners in scenes of visible distress. Within Byzantine artistic conventions, mourners are frequently depicted with their hands raised, palms facing

⁵⁰ Porphyrogenetos, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 275.

⁵¹ Porphyrogenetos, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 275.

⁵² John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., vol. 9, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1899), 621 <https://agape-biblia.org/orthodoxy/Exposition-of-the-Orthodox-Faith.pdf>.

⁵³ Andrew J. Summerson, "Apatheia and Interpreting Human Experience: Body, Soul, and Apatheia in Maximus the Confessor's Quaestiones Ad Thalassium," *Eastern Theological Journal* 5 (2019): 250.

⁵⁴ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, 276.

⁵⁵ Oliver Harris and Tim Flohr Sørensen, "Rethinking Emotion and Material Culture," *Archaeological Dialogues* 17, no. 2 (2010): 145-63.150-1.

⁵⁶ Harris and Sørensen, "Rethinking Emotion and Material Culture," 190.

upward, heads bowed, bodies writhing or backs bent.⁵⁷ Hands may also be clasped over mouths or faces, an artistic convention far more recognisable to the modern eye. For example, in a fresco that depicts the death of Jacob, one figure stands at the head of the bier, palms raised, head bowed, while what appears to be a priest stands in a similar posture, with his hands open and head bowed.⁵⁸ A crowd of mourners lines the right side of the panel, their faces clasped in their hands.⁵⁹ This can be seen again in another artwork that depicts the death of Jacob, though in a more restrained fashion. Here, the mourners in the foreground cover their faces, mouths open and drawn while a crowd of mourners stand in the background at the opening of Jacob's tomb in more traditional poses, with their hands drawn skyward.⁶⁰ In other depictions of grief, where there is no bier, the grief depicted seems markedly more restrained, as in scenes of the Descent from the Cross or the Lamentation.⁶¹ However, this could be due to the tendency of Byzantine artists to portray mourning and sorrow in more restrained terms when depicting scenes from the New Testament, rather than the Old.⁶²

Nonetheless, these Old Testament depictions suggest that the image of the body and the bier itself was enough to trigger affective responses. There are a few elements of the traditional Byzantine funerals that would have amplified such an effect. The preparation of the body through washing was one such element.⁶³ The act of preparation transitioned the body from being recently deceased, a corpse, to something sacred, now integrated into the broader choreography of the imperial mourning rituals. It perhaps helped confirm to those who were having trouble processing the death that the deceased was indeed dead. In the language of Victor Turner, this ritual could be described as 'liminal'. It is a transitional moment where the participants are suspended between states. The body may undergo a symbolic transformation of sorts, but it is the mourners who actively experience the emotional passage of the emperor. The performers, in this case, the mourners, emerge after the ritual having processed the

⁵⁷ Henry Maguire, "The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977): 123-74.

⁵⁸ Henry Maguire, "The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art," fig. 70.

⁵⁹ Maguire, "The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art," fig. 70.

⁶⁰ Maguire, "The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art," fig. 54.

⁶¹ Maguire, "The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art," fig. 63, 72, 77.

⁶² Maguire, "The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art," 172.

⁶³ Anonymous, "Theophanes Continuatus" 55-6.

concrete fact of the emperor's death. This process may have been reinforced by the monastic tonsuring of the deceased, attested in some sources. It signalled the virtue of humility, and by emphasising that the deceased was a good Christian, further intensified feelings of grief. Furthermore, it amplified the sense of transition by signalling that the emperor had relinquished his imperial regalia, presenting himself before God as a humble servant entering the hereafter. The uniqueness of a bier of "inlaid gold", as *Theophanes Continuatus* describes it, probably enhanced this effect.⁶⁴

A more affective trigger than simply laying eyes on the bier was the act of touching it, allowing grief to become more palpable. In this way, the bier begins to transcend its practical role as a vehicle to carry the dead emperor and becomes a physical manifestation of communal sorrow. It carries the weight of the emperor's death. The soldiers are bearing the burden of grief, exemplifying their loyalty to their emperor, even in death. The bier is an object literally designed to be borne by others, figuratively carrying their grief, further reinforcing the affective experience of shared grief. The physical act of a group of people lifting and moving the bier signifies the effort required to bear the weight of their grief and loss, carried communally by all who bear witness to, or take part in, the ceremony.

The collective experience of the bier of grief can be identified as one expression of "solidarity."⁶⁵ When affective fields are active, they bind the agents involved together.⁶⁶ This would have fostered emotional solidarity and the shared mood of the proceedings. However, the rituals outlined offer multiple opportunities for the expression of solidarity. In emotional terms, solidarity refers to the sense that others are present, expressing and experiencing the same emotions. This is achieved through the cultivation of a "shared mood".⁶⁷ In the case of carrying the bier, the emperor's men and the *prosparitharoi* are participating in a communal act of emotional solidarity. One could interpret a number of the rituals presented in *De Ceremoniis* as fostering this sense. For example, when the body is brought before the senators, clergy and guildsmen in the Hall of the Nineteen Couches those present are to sing together in

⁶⁴ Anonymous, "Theophanes Continuatus" 55-6.

⁶⁵ Randall Collins, "Stratification, Emotional Energy, and the Transient Emotions," 27-57.

⁶⁶ Harris and Sørensen, "Rethinking Emotion and Material Culture," 150.

⁶⁷ Collins, "Stratification, Emotional Energy, and the Transient Emotions," 27-57.

“accordance with ritual”.⁶⁸ This singing constitutes a collective act. To achieve a shared mood amongst individuals, there must be an emotion already present, in this case, a sense of grief, loss and sadness. The various grieving courtiers would then sing together, all focusing their attention on the body of the emperor lying in state before them. This focused attention may have triggered an “attunement” reaction, allowing mourners to register and mirror one another’s emotional responses to the affective-field-generating bier.⁶⁹ This would have further amplified feelings of grief, creating an “emotional contagion” that infects the various individuals.⁷⁰ Once again, this served to emphasize a feeling of shared loss. The communal experience thus provided a structured capacity for grief.

The Politics of Ritual

The emotional responses that the rituals and objects seem designed to generate were not, however, the only purposes of the ceremonies described in *De Ceremoniis*. Their purposes were also overtly political. The communication of power through symbolism appears in several other rituals in *De Ceremoniis*, including non-funerary ones.⁷¹ As argued, the presence of the *protospatharoi* and the singing senators echoes the funeral of Constantine the Great, and thus served to establish continuity with Rome in antiquity.⁷² However, it also served as a show of power. The *protospatharoi* are used to carry the bier, and the senators sing for the deceased emperor. The “emperor’s men” carry the body through the Chalke.⁷³ It is unclear who the text means exactly by the “emperor’s men”.⁷⁴ It was likely shorthand for the *protospatharoi* considering their role later in the ceremony in carrying him down the Mese.⁷⁵ In both cases, the participation of the *protospatharoi* and the senators in the proceedings was symbolic. The utilization of these offices throughout the ceremony may have communicated the idea that these offices that such positions were held through the emperor’s favour. Their carrying of the

⁶⁸ Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 275-6.

⁶⁹ Harris and Sørensen, "Rethinking Emotion and Material Culture," 151.

⁷⁰ Hatfield, et al., "Emotional Contagion," 96-100.

⁷¹ Cameron, "The Construction of Court Ritual," 123.

⁷² Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, bk. 4.

⁷³ Porphyrogennetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 275-6.

⁷⁴ Porphyrogennetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 275-6.

⁷⁵ Porphyrogennetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 275-6.

emperor's funerary bier and the singing for him may have also functioned as a reminder that their authority and prestige were derived from imperial grace. It acted as a public demonstration of loyalty and service. In doing so, the tightly ordered imperial hierarchy was reinforced, even in death.

Senatorship was prestigious.⁷⁶ In the tenth century, when *De Ceremoniis* was compiled, admission to the senate was hereditary, or one could be appointed by the emperor or the senate itself.⁷⁷ The fact that the latter could happen ensured at least a degree of subordination of the senate to the emperor. At the appointment of the president of the senate, senators were required to kiss the feet of the emperor, signifying their subordination to him.⁷⁸ This was also done when the proconsul was appointed from among the senate. However, the kissing of the feet was not limited to the appointment of senators or proconsuls and appeared in other appointments as well.⁷⁹ Even so, the evidence suggests that senatorial positions were dependent upon the emperor's generosity and good will (or at least were meant to be seen as such). Therefore, it would stand to reason that they must pay tribute at his funeral. This shows the emperor's power. Through his own hand, he can control the good fortune and status of these officials at will. Their prestige was a gift easily given, and the emperor could take it away just as easily. They exist at the emperor's pleasure. Moving into the Komnenian period, in the centuries after the compilation of *De Ceremoniis*, senatorship became a purchasable commodity. Members of the elite could buy the office outright if they chose. Due to a lack of evidence, one cannot be sure if this changed how the senators were used in funeral proceedings.

The role of the *protospatharoi* presents its own complexities, owing to the changing and often ambiguous nature of their position within the government. They were higher military officials, but the title could sometimes be bestowed upon foreign princes.⁸⁰ It was also a title that could be given to the emperor's bodyguards, though probably less commonly after the establishment of the Varangian Guard under Basil II

⁷⁶ Nicolas Oikonomides, "Title and Income at the Byzantine Court," in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Dumbarton Oaks, 1997), 205-8.

⁷⁷ John Bagnell Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (MacMillan and Co., 1923), 19.

⁷⁸ Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 440.

⁷⁹ Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 706, 239, 256.

⁸⁰ Kazhdan and Cutler, "Protospatharios," 1748.

(976-1025).⁸¹ Though the position of *protospatharoi* was unclear, it was still one that the emperor could bestow, and possibly reserved *only* for the emperor to appoint. Furthermore, it was a martial position in most cases, one that was filled by soldiers, or people closely related to the imperial military.⁸² It was also one of the highest titles the court could bestow.⁸³ Therefore, their appearance in the funeral serves a similar purpose to that of the senators. They are there to serve him, even in death. The use of these soldiers is to emphasize their continuing loyalty to the emperor, and the imperial office, extending even into death as they carry him to his last resting place. It conveys the idea that the emperor's authority, power and significance endure beyond death.

By using both sets of officials, the ceremony emphasizes the two arms of the court and the Byzantine administration. Both the civic arm and the military arm are represented, showing respect and tribute to their shared head of administration, the emperor. Perhaps the senators' role in proceedings had begun to shrink, particularly in the Komnenian period, when it can be confidently said that the military "faction" of court triumphed over the civic one.⁸⁴ Even so, the ceremony that is meant to imply or elicit mourning suggests that the Byzantines saw grieving the death of the emperor as not just a matter for the family and persons close to the emperor, but also as a matter of state and politics. To understand the nature and multiple functions of the ceremony, it is useful to adopt a more anthropological approach.

The Anthropology of Funerals and Grief

The political nature of the ceremony, its attempts to establish continuity with the past and the presence of the officers of state, show that the mourning of the emperor was not merely a personal affair. Anthropological models for 'grief rituals' suggest ways in which rituals provide context and room for the emotions of those participating in them. Sas and Coman note five key properties in a 'successful' grief ritual: *structure, sacred*

⁸¹ Simon Franklin and Anthony Cutler, "Varangians," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan (Oxford University Press, 1991), 2152.

⁸² Kazhdan and Cutler, "Protospatharios," 1748.

⁸³ Kazhdan and Cutler, "Protospatharios," 1748.

⁸⁴ Alexander Kazhdan and Charles M. Brand, "Komnenian Dynasty," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan (Oxford University Press, 1991), 1143.

symbolism, liminality, socialities and uniqueness.⁸⁵ However, the key element that this analysis will focus on is the notion of *uniqueness*. The others can indeed be said to be represented in the funeral for the emperor, but *uniqueness* is of most import. It refers to the designing of rituals to meet the specific needs of the deceased.⁸⁶

In this respect, the process was highly distinctive. No other individual received this sort of treatment. There are some elements of the funerary rituals that are the same for any recently deceased Byzantine person, such as the washing of the body.⁸⁷ However, as discussed earlier, the golden bier, the bier of sorrow, was reserved only for the emperor himself. The death of the patriarch, another courtly and highly sacred, office followed a different ceremonial structure. There are some similarities, such as the presence of the senators alongside the funerary procession, as it was for Constantine VII, though not in the form outlined in *De Ceremoniis*.⁸⁸ The only other person who receives a similar ritual is that of the *augusta*.⁸⁹ Some aspects of *uniqueness* are missing: the character and personal qualities of the deceased emperor are not referred to, nor do the rituals allow any room for adjustment based on the personality or interests of the deceased. An emperor who had engaged in many a campaign, such as Basil II the 'Bulgar-Slayer' would not have his military achievements called out during the funeral or honoured, despite the fact that these traits were highlighted in art, and on the epitaphs of his tomb.⁹⁰ Yet these unique elements of their stay in office were not represented or afforded space in the outlining of the rituals. The same could be said for exceptionally religious emperors such as Alexios Komnenos and his son.⁹¹ The text does not outline a specific point in proceedings when someone would bring forth items of significance to the deceased as if they were grave goods, or for courtiers to give

⁸⁵ Corina Sas and Alina Coman, "Designing Personal Grief Rituals: An Analysis of Symbolic Objects and Actions," *Death Studies* 40 (2016): 5-7.

⁸⁶ Sas and Coman, "Designing Personal Grief Rituals: An Analysis of Symbolic Objects and Actions," 5-7.

⁸⁷ Velkovska, 37.

⁸⁸ Porphyrogennetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 630; Anonymous, 55-6.

⁸⁹ Porphyrogennetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 276.

⁹⁰ *Psalter of Basil II/Psalter of Venice, Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, MS Gr. Z. 17, fol. 3r*; Philip Grierson, Cyril Mango, and Ihor Ševčenko, "The Tombs and Obits of the Byzantine Emperors (337-1042), with an Additional Note," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16 (1962): 9; "Epitaph for Basil II Bulgaroktonos," in Asdracha, *Insc. Byz. (AD 47/48A)* 310,102, *Packard Humanities Institute Byzantine Inscriptions Database*, after 1025 AD, PHI166142, <https://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/166142>.

⁹¹ Iakovos Menelaou, "Alexios I Komnenos and His Church Policy," *Icoana Credintei* 4 no. 7 (2018): 118.

speeches, eulogies, laments or monodies for the deceased. The whole funerary process appears rather impersonal.

A further degree of impersonality appears in another aspect of the ceremony: Sas and Coman also refer to rituals of *honouring* (alongside two other types of grief ritual, those of *letting go* and *self-transformation*). *Honouring* is defined by Sas and Coman as rituals that:

...help elicit and externalize positive emotions associated with the past love relationship. They are performed to celebrate the bond and honor that relationship “for however long it was, for what one learned and the gifts that came forth, [because] the more you honor it, the easier it is to move on.”⁹²

It is clear that elements of *honouring* are present in the emperor’s funeral rituals. Yet on a personal level, the honouring phase is curiously absent for those who grieve. On a communal and political level, it is more than present. The emperor’s role is honoured: his body remains dressed in his imperial robes while lying in state.⁹³ The summoning of the senate to sing for the deceased also serves as an act of honouring.⁹⁴ The *praipositos* also continues to call the deceased emperor “emperor” even as he lies dead.⁹⁵ This is particularly significant considering that, often, the new emperor would have been already crowned by the time these rituals were undertaken. For example, after the death of Alexios Komnenos and before his funeral, his son John Komnenos, had already been named emperor by the Patriarch at the Hagia Sophia.⁹⁶ Absent again is any reference to the deceased emperor’s positive qualities in life, associated with their character and individuality. These rituals are clearly more concerned with the emperor’s political and sacred stature in life. They were honouring the loss of the office of emperorship, rather than the person. This is not unlike the “king’s two bodies” discussed in western medieval scholarship.⁹⁷ As Kantorowicz and, later, Giesey illustrated, the rituals of the royal funeral in Renaissance France actively deployed the two natures in ritual, to the

⁹² Sas and Coman, 10.

⁹³ Porphyrogennetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 275-6.

⁹⁴ Porphyrogennetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 275-6.

⁹⁵ Porphyrogennetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Moffatt and Tall, 275-6.

⁹⁶ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 7.

⁹⁷ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, “Mysteries of State: An Absolutist Concept and Its Late Mediaeval Origins,” *Harvard Theological Review* 48, no. 1 (January 1955): 65–91.

point that the king's funeral effigy was given his breakfast.⁹⁸ This acted as a reminder that the office of kingship lived beyond the mortal man the effigy symbolized. Just as the western medieval king had this body natural and the body politic, so perhaps the Byzantine emperor had the same two natures. Giesey noted that this was a Roman custom and reflected a broader movement of "romanization" in the Renaissance court.⁹⁹ It is possible that this ritualistic idea may well have derived from the same Roman traditions that informed Byzantine practice. The imperial funerals of antiquity have been called "the second funeral" for the public, which may therefore have been the purpose of the Byzantine funeral ceremony.¹⁰⁰ These rituals are mourning the emperor, and not the person wearing the crown. Perhaps in Byzantine terms, honouring the emperor's role was inseparable from honouring him as a person. Even in death, his identity remained bound to his office, and it was this political and sacred identity that was elevated and remembered.

The place of funerary orations in the funeral is also relevant in the context of honouring emperors. Evidence for when and where these orations would be carried out is scant, though the content of some of them survives. These orations often follow a highly rhetorical style, evoking Menadrian conventions (see Chapters 3 and 5).¹⁰¹ These orations might be expected to provide opportunities for the expression and honouring of an emperor's personal or individual qualities. In some cases, this was true, as with Eustathios of Thessalonika's (c. 1115 – c. 1195/6) funeral oration for Manuel I Komnenos (1143 – 1180), which acknowledged Manuel's bravery, his excellent debating skills, among other qualities.¹⁰² These orations were sometimes delivered next to the burial site, for example, in the case of Leo VI's (886 – 912) oration for Basil I (867 - 886), though this oration was delivered two years later.¹⁰³ Yet, these orations are omitted from the

⁹⁸ Ralph Giesey, *The Royal Funeral Ceremony in France* (Librairie Droz, 1960), 171-2.

⁹⁹ Giesey, *The Royal Funeral Ceremony in France*, 171.

¹⁰⁰ Hurzeler, "Roman Imperial Funeral: The Emperor's Final Triumph," 1.

¹⁰¹ Theodora Antonopoulou, "The Funeral Oration of Emperor Leo VI the Wise for His Parents, Basil I the Macedonian and Eudocia Ingerina: A Rhetorical Source for Politics, Ideology and Propaganda," in *Escribir la historia en Bisancio*, ed. E. Motos Guirao and P. Papadopoulou, Serie de Estudios Bizantinos (Centro de Estudios Bizantinos, Neogriegos y Chipriotas, 2024), 201-2

¹⁰² Andrew Stone, "The Funeral Oration of Eustathios of Thessaloniki for Manuel I Komnenos: A Portrait of a Byzantine Emperor," *Balkan Studies* 41, no. 2 (2000): 255, 268.

¹⁰³ Theodora Antonopoulou, "The Funeral Oration of Emperor Leo VI the Wise for His Parents, Basil I the Macedonian and Eudocia Ingerina," 197-8.

official state-prescribed ritual outlined in *De Ceremoniis*. The orations, when they occur, serve to supplement the impersonal rituals of the imperial funeral. The fact that they were even needed in the first place indicates that the ritualized mourning of the emperor was a matter of public, political and symbolic grief, rather than the personal commemoration of the deceased emperor.

Conclusion

The personal grieving was meant to take place, perhaps, at the bedside where courtiers and family members wept, as was the case for Manuel I, or at the bedside of Constantine VII (much to the frustration of the chronicler who recorded it), or by the wife and daughter at the bedside of Alexios Komnenos in the *Alexiad*.¹⁰⁴ The rituals were meant to depersonalize the funeral and direct grief towards the loss of an emperor, not the person wearing the crown. In addition, for those within court or perhaps the emperor's family, these rituals may have provided a structured and ritualized outlet for personal grief, one shaped by the ceremonial norms of court, rather than private emotion. The rituals were there to mourn Emperor Constantine, or to mourn Emperor John, but neither Constantine nor John as individuals. Research on the deaths of public figures, in modern times, suggests that their passing is experienced symbolically, as an end of an era.¹⁰⁵ This may be analogous to the reactions of Byzantines to the loss of an emperor, with the key difference that Byzantium possessed protocols for achieving this end.

As a result, the mourning displayed here, and the mourning processed and understood, would have been more for this symbolic type of grief, and not for the more immediate, personal grief experienced by those who would have known the emperor personally. The mourning rituals outlined in *De Ceremoniis* appear to be geared towards this more symbolic grief than the immediate emotional loss experienced by loved ones. In this way, the rituals operate more as vehicles for political emotion. The rituals

¹⁰⁴ Anonymous, "Theophanes Continuatus," 55; Ioannes Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenos*, 30-1; Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. E. Dawes, (In Parentheses Publications, 2000), 298-302.

¹⁰⁵ Daniel A. Nolan, "Souvenirs and Travel Guides: Cognition, Culture, and Grieving Public Figures," *Poetics* 84 (2021).

undertaken upon the death of the emperor existed to convey and express a set of emotions that were primarily associated with the politics of the court, and by extension, the Empire. They existed to convey legitimacy and sacred ideas about death, the passage of the emperor's soul from this world to the next, and the transition of an age rather than to provide the time and place for personal grieving.

Chapter 5

The Rhetoric of Grief in Choniates' *Historia*

Grief has many uses. The Byzantines were acutely aware of this. There are few sources that illustrate this better than Niketas Choniates' account of the Sack of Constantinople in his chronicle, *Niketæ Choniatae Historia* (published and translated into English as *O City of Byzantium*).¹ Choniates uses his account of the Sack to express his profound grief for the loss of the city, offering insight into the emotional experience of this event for Byzantines. He does this by drawing on Christian imagery, themes and ideas, alongside Classical Greek stylistic traditions. In Choniates' *Historia*, Constantinople becomes like Jerusalem in the Book of Lamentations, mirroring its structure and stylistic techniques in the lamentation for the city. Choniates also draws on the guidelines of Menander Rhetor, adopting the stylistic techniques of Classical lamentation and monody, and thereby hybridizing Classical and Christian forms. Choniates draws from a rich rhetorical language that provides an avenue for a loss that is more abstract than that felt for any single individual.

This grief, and the emotional semi-existential crisis that arises from the Sack of Constantinople, lead Choniates to reinterpret the events of 1204 as a testing of the Roman people. This emotionally profound experience also causes him to use the emotions and feelings he felt in 1204, and its immediate aftermath, as an impetus for fulfilling broader socio-political goals. This grief, personal, but also rhetorically presented, is not merely an emotional reaction to a traumatic situation. Choniates' impassioned account of history, albeit rhetorical, is a partial departure from established Byzantine historiographical traditions. This allows for a rhetorical strategy that uses his, and the broader culture's, grief to criticize the Byzantine elite and the Western invaders, as well as to reframe the Byzantine people as a chosen people, fallen from grace (not

¹ Niketas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, trans. Harry J. Magoulas (Wayne State University Press, 1984).

unlike the Jews of the Old Testament), and to reclaim a moral high ground. This ultimately takes the form of a call for action to the Roman people.

Choniates' *Historia*

Niketas Choniates considered himself a student of rhetorical studies.² He wrote several letters and other orations in addition to his *Historia*.³ The precise date of the *Historia*'s composition is unclear, but it was likely written during his time at the court of Theodore Laskaris I (1205-1221), sometime between 1207 and 1217. The text exists in two versions. The first version was written before 1204 and shared among his circle of friends and peers.⁴ The second version, the version used in this chapter, was the one that was likely written at the court of Laskaris. Though this first version is not used in this chapter, its existence and its (possible) intended audience of Choniates' peers give some insight into the intended audience of the second version. If the first version was meant to be read by Choniates' peers, who would likely have had training in rhetoric, and been familiar with Byzantine literary traditions and styles, then it is possible that he expected the same of the audience of his second version. These peers would have hailed from the same (or very similar) demographics as Choniates – urban elites, either living in Constantinople, or in the case of the second version's composition, living in Nicaea, perhaps directly involved in the court of Emperor Laskaris. However, Choniates was no longer a civil servant in the Byzantine bureaucracy by the time he composed the *Historia* in Nicaea. Alicia Simpson suggests this provided him certain freedoms which may have been constrained by the *realpolitik* of court while composing the original version of the text.⁵ She also suggests that Choniates actively transcribed the first, more neutral version into a far more scathing narrative when he composed the second version of his *Historia*.⁶

² Niketas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 326.

³ Niketas Choniates, *Niketae Choniatae Orationes et Epistulae*, ed. J. L. van Dieten, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, Series Berolinensis* 3 (De Gruyter, 1973).

⁴ Leonora Neville, "Niketas Choniates," in *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing*, ed. Leonora Neville (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 220.

⁵ Alicia J. Simpson, "Before and after 1204: The Versions of Niketas Choniates' 'Historia,'" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 60 (2006): 220.

⁶ Warren Treadgold, "Alicia Simpson. Niketas Choniates: A Historiographical Study," *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 4 (2015): 1542-3.

The historiography of Choniates has generally emphasized his position as a historian, resulting in greater attention to the “*kaiserkritik*” of his observations, rather than the personal dimensions of the narrative.⁷ Although the emotional content of the narrative, particularly concerning the Sack of Constantinople, have not escaped the notice of some historians, such as Alicia Simpson, the observations of Choniates’ stylistic approach as a historian are useful. Harris, for example, places Choniates firmly in the Byzantine tradition of historiography.⁸ Efthymiadis notes Choniates’ use of *varatio*, which allows for diversity in how he presents events: it is a style of writing that presents the past in “epic, tragic and comic hues”.⁹ Angold, on the other hand, frames Choniates’ account as the deterioration of the Byzantine body politic, with 1204 being the epitome of this collapse.¹⁰

This historiography suggests that one might view Choniates’ *Historia* either as a rhetorical text for political and historiographical purposes, or as a genuine personal account of history. The two views are not mutually exclusive. The text contains elements that are both personal *and* rhetorical in nature. Perhaps this seamless oscillation between the political, moral, historical, and personal is itself an expression of *varatio*, as Efthymiadis argued. Choniates’ account is rhetorical, but it is not without a personal flavour, and how he marshals his grief in response to context and experience, suggests a genuine experience of grief and loss. There is precedent for this interpretation of his rhetoric, Alicia Simpson argues that “[h]is despair is personal, not a literary trope, and magnified by the tragedy of his own situation.”¹¹ Yet even if the text’s depiction of emotion is not genuine, the way it seeks to elicit and shape the grief of the elite who read it is of key interest here.

⁷ Alicia Simpson, *Niketas Choniates: A Historiographical Study* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

⁸ Simpson, “Before and after 1204: The Versions of Niketas Choniates’ ‘Historia,’” 218; Neville, “Niketas Choniates,” in *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing*, 218.

⁹ Simpson, *Niketas Choniates: A Historiographical Study*, 6.

¹⁰ M. Angold, *The Fourth Crusade: Event and Context* (Routledge, 2003), 8.

¹¹ Simpson, “Before and after 1204: The Versions of Niketas Choniates’ ‘Historia,’” 218.

Choniates' Constantinople and the Trauma of Grief

Choniates was present in Constantinople, having resided there during the events that led up to the Sack.¹² He witnessed first-hand the dramatic siege that culminated in the unseating of an emperor, the failure of the subsequent emperors to manage the situation with the Crusaders, and the final Sack in 1204 that led to his flight from the city alongside a band of other survivors. Choniates lived in the district of Sphorakion, northeast of the Forum of Constantine, and close to the Great Church (Hagia Sophia).¹³ This put him close to the Great Palace but also within the city's main urban epicentre. Palace bureaucrats and courtiers often lived within the city and throughout its various districts.¹⁴ Like many bureaucrats, Choniates would have walked these streets, known the people, the merchants working market stalls, recognized his neighbours, and passed by the ancient monuments attesting to the grandeur and heavenly status of the city, that were looted and raided during the Fourth Crusade.¹⁵

Constantinople as a city was the beating heart of the Empire. It was central to Byzantine identity and, at least among Constantinopleans, understood as the continuation of the Eastern Roman Empire.¹⁶ It represented the political centre of the Empire, being the seat of the emperor, arguably the centre of the geopolitical network sometimes referred to as the 'Byzantine commonwealth.'¹⁷ It was also a place of considerable wealth, perhaps a source of envy and bitterness to the provincial population of the Empire.¹⁸ Moreover, it was a sacred place. It was founded as a Christian seat of power by Constantine the Great, its namesake. It was this Christian

¹² Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 197-321.

¹³ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 323, 407.

¹⁴ Alexander Kazhdan and Michael McCormick, "The Social World of the Byzantine Court," in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Dumbarton Oaks, 1997), 187-9.

¹⁵ P. Magdalino, *Roman Constantinople in Byzantine Perspective: The Memorial and Aesthetic Rediscovery of Constantine's Beautiful City, from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Brill, 2024), 1.

¹⁶ Jean-Claude Cheynet, "Provincial Rebellions as an Indicator of Byzantine 'Identity' (Tenth–Twelfth Centuries)," in *Identities and Ideologies in the Medieval East Roman World*, ed. Yannis Stouraitis (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 231-49; Helen Saradi, "The Antiquities in Constructing Byzantine Identity: Literary Tradition Versus Aesthetic Appreciation," *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 17 (2011), 95-113; Paul Magdalino, "Byzantium = Constantinople," in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 43.

¹⁷ D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500-1453* (Cardinal, 1974).

¹⁸ Magdalino, "Byzantium = Constantinople," 44.

and ancient heritage that placed Constantinople at the centre of Byzantine identity.¹⁹ It was the seat of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the *primus inter pares* of the Orthodox world, and host city of a vast collection of holy relics; most notably, the Church of the Holy Pharos contained many relics associated with the Passion.²⁰ These relics contributed to the idea that Constantinople was a “god-guarded” (*theophylaktos*) city.²¹ There was a strong spatial dimension to the city’s sacred quality as well.²² It was a “theatre of cosmic excellence”.²³ Its monuments, its hippodrome, the grand Mese, interconnected as a unified whole, contributed to a strong aesthetic construction of this idea.²⁴

Under such circumstances, there is every reason to suggest that losing all of this would have been devastating. The Sack becomes a civilizational and emotional catastrophe. Choniates’ account of the immediate aftermath conveys a distinct sense of loss and disorientation, yet his grief is expressed through the established emotional conventions of Byzantine historiography. Choniates’ background as a rhetor also shapes the way he constructs and communicates his grief.

Choniates is swift to make it clear that it wounds him deeply to see the city ravaged by the Latins. As he flees the “horrors” of the Latins’ raiding and pillaging, he lets loose a lamentation, describing himself and the cohort of survivors “emptying out their vexations from their souls” while weeping and “casting lamentations like seeds”.²⁵ Choniates grieves in a manner that aligns, generally, with the established rules of Byzantine grieving. Choniates resists the urge to weep at first, only to break down after giving a lamentation for the city.²⁶ Through weeping and shedding tears, Choniates can be read as dispelling the sin of grief from his body. The placement of this episode of emotionality seems to engage with the norms established in the prescriptive literature,

¹⁹ Michèle Longino, "Constantinople: The Telling and the Taking," *L'Esprit Créateur* 53, no. 4 (2013): 124; Paul Magdalino, "Byzantium = Constantinople," in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 43, 50-52.

²⁰ John Wortley, *Studies on the Cult of Relics in Byzantium up to 1204* (Ashgate, 2009), xiv.

²¹ Wortley, *Studies on the Cult of Relics in Byzantium up to 1204*, xiv.

²² Magdalino, *Roman Constantinople in Byzantine Perspective: The Memorial and Aesthetic Rediscovery of Constantine’s Beautiful City, from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*, 1.

²³ Magdalino, *Roman Constantinople in Byzantine Perspective*, 1.

²⁴ Magdalino, *Roman Constantinople in Byzantine Perspective*, 1.

²⁵ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 319, 326.

²⁶ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 326.

suggesting that grief must be overcome while simultaneously legitimizing the emotional character of his rhetoric. This legitimizing is important, as Choniates is demonstrating, at least rhetorically and narratively, that he is pious rather than wallowing in his grief, and therefore worth listening to.

Losing the city and his home, Choniates experiences a distinct loss of status and identity. This is key to understanding the grief that he uses to shape his rhetoric. As Choniates flees the city across the countryside alongside a band of other survivors, he is taunted and taken advantage of by the provincials they encounter. He describes the provincials as “baseborn” and “rustics”.²⁷ The relationship between the provincials and the urbanites of the Empire has been the subject of much historical debate. Generally, the scholarship suggests that there was some level of bitterness between the two populations.²⁸ Economically, palace bureaucrats were certainly well paid in comparison to many of the provincials, many of whom, from the eleventh century onwards, were economically dependent on local landowners and elites.²⁹ This disparity between urban elites and provincials likely fostered stereotypes of superiority among the urban elite about provincials, who in turn may have resented the urban dwellers as privileged.

Choniates’ portrayal of the provincials as sneering and mocking suggests therefore that he is playing on a broader rhetorical strategy, one that is now laced with grief. The stereotypes are applied in changed circumstances: it is now the provincials who deride Choniates and his urbanite fellows fleeing into the countryside. He describes the provincials as “mocking” them and declaring it is “the equality of civil rights” that allows them to do so.³⁰ These same “rustics” proceed to take advantage of the fleeing survivors: “[m]any seized upon lawlessness and said, ‘Blessed be the Lord, for we have become rich,’ and they paid very little for the possessions of their

²⁷ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 326.

²⁸ Magdalino, “Byzantium = Constantinople,” 43; Catherine Holmes, “Provinces and Capital,” in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 55-66; Anthony Kaldellis, “Provincial Identities in Byzantium,” in *The Routledge Handbook on Identity in Byzantium*, ed. Michael Stewart, David Parnell, and Conor Whately (London: Routledge, 2022), 248-62; Judith Herrin, “Realities of Byzantine Provincial Government: Hellas and Peloponnesos, 1180-1205,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 29 (1975), 253-84.

²⁹ Judith Herrin, “Realities of Byzantine Provincial Government: Hellas and Peloponnesos, 1180-1205,” 253-84.

³⁰ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 326.

countrymen which were offered for sale.”³¹ Choniates goes on to describe them as “vulgar members” of a “wicked company”.³² The opportunism and lawlessness of the situation also suggest a certain inversion of Choniates' world, and the provincials exploiting (and celebrating) that inversion makes them no better than the Latins. It is this humiliation that seems to strike Choniates so deeply in his grief for the loss of Constantinople. For him, it is not just a loss of his home, but also a loss of his station and everything that represented. One can never be certain of Choniates' true feelings about provincial people, but prejudices about them provided fertile ground for rhetorical exploitation. In doing so, he transforms stereotype into invective. Furthermore, the symbolic descent into the wilderness emphasizes a loss of dignity. This allows Choniates to stage a *peripeteia*, a reversal of fortunes, in which he loses his station, title, wealth and home, alongside other members of the elite who are dispossessed and left to the whims of a predatory countryside. His journey through the countryside also mirrors an exilic *catabasis*, and the passage as a whole works as an example of *tapeinosis* (a humbling, or abasement). This combination of reversal, exile, and humbling would have provided a strong sense of *pathos* for the other members of the urban elite *literati*, who were invited to identify with Choniates' narrative, accentuating their feelings of collective grief, loss, and crucially, indignation.

Choniates' use of prejudice to bring out feelings of loss did not end there. The Barbarian Latins, the “enemy,”

... reveled in licentious and wanton behavior, and, resorting to indecent actions, they ridiculed Roman customs. They dressed themselves in the broad-bordered robes, not because of need but for the purpose of mockery, and roamed the streets. They covered the heads of their mounts with head veils of the finest linen and tied the white linen bands which hang down the back around their snouts and rode hither and thither through the City. Others, holding reed pens and inkwells, pretended to be writing in books, mocking us as secretaries.³³

³¹ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 326.

³² Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 326.

³³ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 326.

The crusaders have “snouts” while they mock the Roman way of life. They are beasts who are therefore illiterate. They are pathetic, insulting and, ultimately, inhuman. It is a metaphor of inversion; the animals are ruling the roost. They are only able to mimic the grandeur and the sophistication of the Byzantine lifestyle. It is a parody of the Roman way of life, or rather a parody of Choniates’ way of life. Barbarians and rustic provincials are mocking him and his fellow members of the elite, who may have once mocked and believed themselves to be above provincials. Byzantine rhetoric had a long history of depicting outsiders and social upstarts as beasts.³⁴ It was often used to describe pagans before their conversion to Christianity.³⁵ Choniates thus also summons forth an ancient cultural memory of paganism to create a distinct, terrifying *other* that goes beyond a simple feeling of prejudice.

The grief evident in Choniates’ rhetoric is not limited to the personal loss; it also relates to a sense of spiritual trauma caused by the defilement of what was meant to be sacred. The hawkers and scalpers who exploit the fleeing, displaced Constantinopleans traffic in sacred works and goods, as if they were “common silver.”³⁶ This sense of violation reoccurs throughout the text. While narrating the events in Constantinople, Choniates repeatedly describes churches and chapels being looted.³⁷ He describes the Latins making: “no distinction between profane and sacred furnishings and vessels but they used everything equally for their bodily needs, paying no heed whatsoever to God and Themis [Divine Justice].”³⁸ They desecrate the “sacred images of Christ and the saints by sitting upon them and using them as footstools.”³⁹ He even recounts a (likely apocryphal) story of the Crusaders breaking open the church of the holy apostles, and happening upon the un-decomposed body of Justinian, still lying *in situ* where he was

³⁴ Katell Berthelot, “Introduction,” in *Reconsidering Roman Power: Roman, Greek, Jewish and Christian Perceptions and Reactions*, ed. K. Berthelot (École Française de Rome, 2020), 24. <https://books.openedition.org/efr/5097?lang=en>

³⁵ Béatrice Caseau, “Dogs, Vultures, Horses and Black Pudding,” in *Multidisciplinary Approaches to Food and Foodways in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Sylvie Yona Waksman (MOM Éditions, 2020), 10. <https://books.openedition.org/momeditions/10194?lang=en>

³⁶ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 302.

³⁷ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 302.

³⁸ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 302.

³⁹ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 302.

laid to rest over five hundred years prior. Despite their awe, the Crusaders show no solemnity or reverence and go to work looting the tomb.⁴⁰

This sort of humiliation and violence could easily shake one's faith. The Sack of Constantinople in 1204, for Choniates, is also an absurd and shocking event. The "god-guarded" city, full of relics, fell – torn apart by foreigners.⁴¹ As Choniates flees Constantinople, he laments:

As for the fate which befell the queen of cities, neither celestial nor terrestrial sign was given, as happened often in the past, portending the calamities of mankind and the pernicious attacks of evils. Bloody raindrops did not pour down from heaven, nor did the harvest turn blood red, nor did fiery stones fall out of the sky, nor was anything new observed...⁴²

These were signs or portents that typically preceded catastrophic events in the Bible or Classical literature. Other Byzantine writers made use of them. Komnena's *The Alexiad*, for example, uses divine portents to indicate that catastrophe was approaching, such as a foul wind portending an aggravation of a rheumatic illness.⁴³ In the Bible, there are often portents of doom. The Nile turned to blood in Exodus before the plagues are unleashed upon Egypt (7:17-25); ominous signs appeared in the Book of Daniel (5:1-31). Divine foretelling of doom is more frequent in Classical literature. In the *Iliad*, Zeus sends a blood rain to warn of an impending slaughter in battle.⁴⁴ Hesiod also mentions a blood rain, and so does the Roman historian, Livy, who directly calls it a bad omen.⁴⁵ But although Choniates invokes well-established cultural, biblical and literary *topoi* of divine portents, he does so only to emphasize that they did not happen in 1204. Moreover, later in the text, Choniates (and the other survivors) experience trials that echo the tribulations of Job. Job remarks that he is mocked by those he once thought beneath him: "But now they have laughed me to scorn, / now the least of them reprove me in turn—, / whose fathers I used to disdain / whom I did not deem worthy of my

⁴⁰ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 357.

⁴¹ Wortley, *Studies on the Cult of Relics in Byzantium up to 1204*, xiv.

⁴² Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 322.

⁴³ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. E. Dawes (In Parentheses Publications, 2000), 297.

⁴⁴ Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Samuel Butler (Dover Publications, 1999), 112.

⁴⁵ John S. P. Tatlock, "Some Mediaeval Cases of Blood-Rain," *Classical Philology* 9, no. 4 (1914): 442.

shepherd dogs.” (Iob 30:1). The absence of these portents, as well as these recognizable allusions to Job, rhetorically aligns the situation with the punishment of Job. This was sudden, without warning, and seemingly unjust. Job’s suffering was arbitrary, a trial meant to test and strengthen his faith.

Despite this, Choniates does not stay in Job’s framework of arbitrary trial completely. He alludes to Jeremiah-style divine punishment, whose catastrophe was not arbitrary but an act of corrective judgement. This framework supplies moral legibility which the absent *topoi* could not provide. The frameworks are not logically consistent, but they are rhetorically complementary. Job accounts for the shock, horror and incomprehension, applying *pathos*, and Jeremiah provides for the meaning afterwards. By turning to religion both to comfort himself and to explain what has happened, Choniates aligns his account with the prescriptive ideals of Byzantine grieving on a grander scale. The displaced survivors, fleeing the city of Constantinople on their own, could easily be likened to the Judeans, wandering aimlessly without a home to call their own – a ‘chosen people’, who have fallen from God’s grace. Choniates quotes Jeremiah 14:19, declaring “Why hast thou smitten us, Lord, and there is no healing for us?”⁴⁶ God works through the barbarians as an instrument of his wrath (Isaiah 13:3): “Giants are coming to fulfil my wrath, rejoicing at the same time and dancing; for they are blessed and I bring them.”⁴⁷ Elsewhere, “If he breaks the reed, he also rebukes the wild beasts of the reed.”⁴⁸ It is notable too that Choniates chooses Jeremiah here, whom tradition held wrote the Book of Lamentations in reaction to the Sack of Jerusalem.⁴⁹ As far as Choniates is concerned, God will have his justice; this is an intense moral reckoning in which Constantinople’s Sack is part of a larger divine plan. He likens his plight to the Israelites to explain what happened as the consequence of a failure to uphold God’s moral order. God’s judgement is corrective, though. Choniates has adopted the narrative of a spiritual trial which he and his fellow survivors must overcome to endure and redeem themselves in God’s eyes. From this, he draws strength and hope:

⁴⁶ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 318.

⁴⁷ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 318.

⁴⁸ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 319.

⁴⁹ Delbert R. Hillers, *The Anchor Bible: Lamentations* (Doubleday, 1972), xx-xvi.

I affirm that what is needed is not a writing of divorcement given us by God, nor should we consider the ensuing horrors a grafting of the barbarians as a wild olive tree into our good olive tree. What is needed is a small chastening which God knows how to lay on, in which excess is foregone and all things are not permitted to the tempters, but those who are sorely tried are spared.⁵⁰

God will not strike him with something that is beyond what he and his fellows can endure. The Roman people are still in His sight, and His covenant with them is not yet broken. This is an expression of the prescriptive rules about grief. Choniates has experienced a traumatic loss and rationalizes an interpretation of events to draw comfort and consolation from the divine order.

Jeremiah's framework carries the implicit promise of restoration, which is necessary to maintain congruence with the prescriptive literature. However, whereas an individual is not lost for ever, there is no guarantee that Choniates will be reunited with Constantinople, at least in the way that it was before the Sack. This complicates the pathway through grief that is explored in the prescriptive literature, as spiritually speaking, the loss of an individual is temporary. The same may not be said for Constantinople. There is indeed a possibility of its restoration to its former state, as we will see, but there is no guarantee that this will occur. Given the scale of the damage and violence enacted upon the city, it is also possible that it will never be restored to its former glory, at least not within Choniates' lifetime. This makes the loss a lot more personal for Choniates, as it is quite possible that the Constantinople preserved in his memory is gone forever.

Choniates is experiencing loss, first and foremost. All of this offers insight into how the average Constantinoplean may have experienced the loss of the city. It was not just the loss of a home that provoked such grief. A deeper rupture, a loss of identity, both personal and collective, had occurred in 1204. The people of Constantinople, particularly the elite, lost their secure sense of their identity as civilized and superior Romans, living as Christians under the protection of God and His saints. For a loss so massive and profound, the prescriptive literature has little in the way of direct guidance,

⁵⁰ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 319.

save perhaps to reference it to the Sack of Jerusalem. This was a comparison that contemporaries were quick to pick up on, as we will see. As a result of the uniqueness of their situation, the grieving were also forced to adapt their pre-existing approaches to grief.

Lamentation

Choniates' tries to rationalise the loss Constantinople, and the grief it engendered. He does this by modelling it on concepts that were familiar to him. Magdalino has described this as "conventional" since it was not uncommon for medieval historians to regard divine justice as punishment for the sins of people.⁵¹ Magdalino's observations, though challenged, are generally correct in the broader tradition of medieval historiography.⁵² However, this does not diminish the emotional depth of Choniates' experience as he reacts to an "absurd" and irrational situation (in the philosophical sense), and writing about an experience in which he was a direct participant.⁵³ It may have been conventional for Byzantine historians to interpret events with regard to sacred history, but Choniates' emotional tenor carries weight.

Choniates makes use of established literary styles associated with grieving. This was familiar to his elite urban audience, and it rhetorically aligned his performance of grief with cultural expectations of how that ought to be expressed in a literary context. In *The Alexiad*, Komnena had also blended Classical and Christian imagery, alongside the structure and stylistic conventions of Classical rhetoric (see Chapter 3). Whether Choniates was aware of Komnena is unclear; certainly, he made use of the guidelines outlined by Menander Rhetor, much the same as Komnena had. These guidelines indicated that the speaker must first describe the positive qualities of the person that were lost. Then the speaker must compare the subject with its current state, emphasizing what was lost. After that, the speaker must then self-denigrate, and

⁵¹ Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143-1180* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13-15.

⁵² Jonathan Harris, "Distortion, Divine Providence and Genre in Nicetas Choniates's Account of the Collapse of Byzantium 1180-1204," *Journal of Medieval History* 26, no. 1 (2000): 21.

⁵³ Ted Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 123.

continue the juxtaposition, elevating the subject beyond its current state. Rhetor specified the lamentation to be for an individual; Choniates applies it to a city.

As Choniates describes the sacking, he writes a lamentation for the city of Constantinople.⁵⁴ He begins with the city's positive qualities, describing it as "...queen of the queens of cities, song of songs and splendour of splendours, and the rarest vision of the rare wonders of the world...", while also describing it as the "city of the great King."⁵⁵ This is juxtaposed with its state after the Sack: the city had become "... a plain of desolation and a valley of weeping, trampled by armies and despised and rejected..." in which he and his followers are dressed in "...these shriveled and tattered rags which, like fig leaves and garments of skins, suffice not to cover the whole body...", all but naked before the now lost Constantinople.⁵⁶ He also denigrates himself and his companions, aligning their state with that of Constantinople itself.⁵⁷ Choniates therefore generally adheres to Rhetor's structure. This rhetorical framework, based on Classical tradition, heightens the sense of grief while remaining stylistically and culturally legible to his audience.

Much as Komnena had done, this rhetorical style is then married to Christian ideas and morals. Choniates' use of imagery echoes Komnena's style.⁵⁸ He describes the city in the most exalted terms, in keeping with Christian lamentation. It is the "tabernacle of the most High", and asks:

Shall I ever more look upon thee, O holiest and greatest of all temples, O terrestrial heaven, O throne of God's glory, O chariot of the cherubim, O thou second firmament proclaiming the work of God's hands, a work singular and wondrous and a gladness resounding through the whole earth?⁵⁹

The imagery of light is also used. The quote above implies the city is shining with glory, a chariot of the angelic cherubim. Jeremiah in Lamentations called Jerusalem the "altar"

⁵⁴ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 317-19.

⁵⁵ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 325.

⁵⁶ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 325.

⁵⁷ Menander Rhetor, *Menander Rhetor: A Commentary*, ed. and trans. D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson (Clarendon Press, 1981), 171-81.

⁵⁸ Leonora Neville, "Lamentation, History, and Female Authorship in Anna Komnene's Alexiad," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 53 (2013): 192-218.

⁵⁹ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 324-6.

of God, and his “footstool”, once the “Crown of splendor, joy of all the Earth.” (Lamentations 2:1-15). The final lines of the above quote seem to mimic Lamentations 2:1-15 very closely, presenting the city as so beautiful the whole earth marvels. Choniates also likens Constantinople to a feminine figure, not unlike Jerusalem’s depiction in Lamentations. He describes Constantinople as a “wet nurse”, but also describes its inhabitants as her “children” and likens Constantinople to a mother hen of sorts, who gathers her baby chicks beneath her wings to protect them.⁶⁰ The inhabitants are even attached to her breast, as a baby held in their mother’s arms would be.⁶¹ In Lamentations, Jerusalem is a “widow” (Lamentations 1:1-2). It is also robbed of its various jewels (1:10); Constantinople is robbed of sacred icons and other liturgical objects. As in Lamentations (2:1-10), so in Choniates’s *Historia*, God’s wrath is a judgement meted out to His people to strengthen their resolve and their covenant with Him.⁶² The Book of Lamentations states that “Jerusalem sinned sin/so she became shaken” and her “uncleanness was from her feet...and she brought down/things of great size.” (Lamentations 1:8-9). Choniates also chooses to drive home this sense of punishment and the necessity to stand in His sight, so that such punishment may never happen again (cf. Lamentations 3:40-42).

Reclamation and the Political Dimension of Grief

Deploying the stylistic conventions of Christian lamentation, Choniates’ call to action also takes on a clear political dimension.⁶³ Choniates’ grief and despair is transformed into something more politically useful: outrage and anger. Prescriptive literature considered grief, especially wallowing in it, not just unmanly, but also spiritually dangerous. To maintain the emotional norms of Byzantine culture, Choniates’ grief is transformed into a politicized outrage, directed towards both the Byzantine elite and the Latin invaders.

Choniates presents the transformation of emotions almost as though it is happening in real-time. At the opening of Chapter X, he mentions that he must cease

⁶⁰ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 318.

⁶¹ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 318.

⁶² Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 319.

⁶³ Leonora Neville, "Niketas Choniates," 220.

describing the sorrows, for otherwise they will become far more “acute”.⁶⁴ Choniates begins to describe the Crusaders as greedy and “gold loving”.⁶⁵ Their desire for gold is insatiable. They melted down several ancient artefacts and cultural monuments, afflicted with “gold madness”.⁶⁶ They treated women as prizes to be gambled over. They are illiterate, and ignorant, unaware of the “epic verses”, and of how *The Iliad*’s ancient knowledge testifies to the proper treatment of women.⁶⁷ This shift comes in the very next paragraph, underscoring how quickly Choniates redirects grief into anger.⁶⁸ This redirection paves the way for Choniates’ broader political aims.

The Crusaders’ behaviour is not the only thing that draws Choniates’ ire. Following another historiographical convention, his attention turns to the failings of emperors. Byzantine historiography was often concerned with the character of successive emperors, commonly narrating history through the deeds and failures of each reign, which were presented as discrete episodes in a single narrative. Harris states that “for Choniates, the main reason for the collapse of the empire was the weaknesses of the emperors ruling at the time, and their failure to live up to the divinely ordained ideal.”⁶⁹ Choniates’ ire, or transformed grief, therefore is also directed at the immoral character of the Angeloi emperors themselves. Choniates does provide some examples of their positive traits, writing perhaps as a historian.⁷⁰ But successive Angeloi emperors failed to uphold what Choniates calls «το κοινον», a term that can be roughly understood as the “common good”. They were light-hearted and indecisive.⁷¹ Since God’s judgement is fair and necessary in His plan, Choniates looks to those responsible for bringing divine judgement down on them. This is all part of his processing of the grief. If, as was established earlier, God’s judgment is corrective, Choniates seeks to articulate exactly how to ensure that this corrective order is upheld.

⁶⁴ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 357.

⁶⁵ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 357.

⁶⁶ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 360.

⁶⁷ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 360.

⁶⁸ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 357.

⁶⁹ Jonathan Harris, "Distortion, Divine Providence and Genre," 19.

⁷⁰ Harris, "Distortion, Divine Providence and Genre," 30.

⁷¹ Harris, "Distortion, Divine Providence and Genre," 30.

His anger, and its political purpose, become more evident when he moves on to describe those who personally wounded him upon arriving at Nicaea. It is not just the failure of the emperors that upsets him; the failure of the people of Constantinople, the soldiers, and bureaucrats all anger him, and are “deserving of tears”.⁷² It is a source of grief that they were cowardly and too open to appeasing the Latins in the first place.⁷³ His treatment upon reaching Nicaea also angers him, stating that the people there:

... should have commiserated with us over our vicissitudes, deprived of City, home, and means of livelihood, we who were known to be celebrated in the past for abundance of wealth and the splendor of political office. They led us about in ridicule and scourged us with words of reviling, something we had hoped never to see permitted by the authorities.⁷⁴

As with the treatment he and his fellow refugees from Constantinople received from the hawkers and provincials, so it now seems that the whole world has turned on him. This characterisation of his plight relates to his political goals, as it suggests that the administration-in-exile (and perhaps the others in Epirus and Trebizond, by extension) is but a pale imitation of the glorious administration of Constantinople, which ought to be restored.

Some of this emotion appears to be contrary to the traditions of Byzantine historiography which emphasized emotional dispassion (see Chapter 3). Choniates’ voice, full of emotion words like “sorrow”, and describing himself in “tears” at the loss of Constantinople, does not sound like a dispassionate Byzantine historian. Choniates deliberately departs from this model by emphasizing grief and indignation. However, this does not suggest a lack of restraint or a loss of emotional control. It is strategic, and part of a broader rhetorical performance. Choniates wanted to outrage and anger his readers, provoking a shared sense of profound loss. By being made to feel this, they would be driven to recapture Constantinople from the Latins and restore imperial glory. Choniates’ description is not dispassionate in tone, but it is calculated. Choniates is not

⁷² Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 354.

⁷³ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 354.

⁷⁴ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 354.

emotionally detached from the events he is depicting but is instead directing his emotion in a rhetorical way to strengthen his political strategy.

Conclusion

The Byzantines were aware of the power of grief, and Choniates used this awareness to drive broader rhetorical and political goals. Historians' views on Choniates have varied considerably over time.⁷⁵ However, his chronicling of the loss of Constantinople offers significant insight into how Byzantines experienced the unique grief of losing a city that was central to their identity. It also shows how the inhabitants of Constantinople themselves interpreted, processed, and wrote about this loss. Choniates' account shows how Byzantines could harness their grief for broader purposes, both political and historiographical. The merging of Christian and Classical rhetorical styles, applied to traumatic grief and loss, both complicates and complements the emotional norms of the Byzantine world. By expressing, rehearsing, and performing grief rhetorically, he rouses his audience's emotions; by politicizing it into outrage and anger, he frames an account that conforms to the emotional norms governing grief. Moreover, by doing so, Choniates' *Historia* galvanizes its audience into pursuing what mourners often seek: reunion with what has been lost.

⁷⁵ Harris, "Distortion, Divine Providence and Genre," 19.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to determine how grief was prescribed and experienced in Byzantium, particularly in the Byzantine imperial court, from 803 to 1204. It was found that the prescriptive literature of Orthodox Christianity warned against excessive mourning, advocating for restraint in the face of loss, yet it did not entirely condemn mourning. Its prescriptions, centring on *apatheia*, were derived from Classical modes of emotional expression which had been Christianised in late antiquity. Byzantines would engage with these prescriptions, using grief as a method to negotiate politics and gender, and also to perform Classical tradition.

The implicit premise of this study is that emotion is historically contingent. This idea may seem well established, yet the debate remains ongoing. In line with the emerging historiography of emotions, this study analysed grief with the underlying assumption that its expression was shaped by historical circumstances. Rosenwein's 'emotional communities' and Reddy's 'emotional regimes' informed this assumption. The former stressed the importance of emotional traditions within historical communities, whilst the latter encouraged attention to the uses of emotion to support hierarchies and power. In addition, studies of ritual have been used to add further insight into the ways in which status, power and emotion were communicated, channelled, or performed. Gender studies, likewise, have been used to illuminate the gendered nature of these processes.

The theoretical foundations underpinning this thesis are supplemented by specific studies on emotion and grief in the Byzantine context. Hinterberger, whose own study provided much inspiration for this one, stated that emotions often extend far beyond the notion of simple *feeling*, and emerged in diverse modes.¹ As other studies, such as those by Doerfler, have already shown, grief in Byzantium had specific

¹ Martin Hinterberger, "Emotions in Byzantium," in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 123-4.

contexts.² This research reinforces and expands that notion by exploring some of the ways in which these contexts emerged in the Byzantine court. The anthropological analysis of funerals, particularly, offers insight into how grief was channelled through ritual and material culture. Though other studies have explored ritual contexts before, some even explicitly examining the imperial funeral, its emotional dimensions have gone largely neglected.³ This research contributes to filling that gap. This study has also sought to deepen our understanding of Byzantine grief norms, prescriptions, and structures in Byzantium between 803 and 1204. It has traced how grief was situated within Classical and patristic traditions that advocated *apatheia* and emotional restraint while acknowledging grief as a natural passion, even if potentially a spiritually dangerous one. These prescriptions set in place the rhetorical and moral bounds within which Byzantine grief could be expressed. This study also considered the ritual world of court, where imperial funerals acted as a choreographed performance of collective public grief. The anthropological analysis of these grief rituals elucidated the nature of the grief in the imperial funeral, revealing the emotional tenor of the ceremony and allowing insight into how Byzantines may have felt about the loss of their emperor.

Within Byzantine historiography, grief was depicted but also performed rhetorically. In *The Alexiad*, Anna Komnena negotiated the gender boundaries of grief and restraint, using emotion to construct her authorial persona and to position herself within a lineage of Classical and Christian lamentation. In his *Historia*, Choniates transformed this style of lament into political commentary, using grief for Constantinople to expose the collapse of order, identity, and divine protection on both personal and political levels. Across these works, grief is both a personal matter, and a political one. Taken in conjunction with the tenor of proceedings in the imperial funerals, grief becomes a means of negotiating broader socio-political hierarchies and ideas.

² Maria Doerfler, "Emotional Communities and the Loss of an Individual: The Case of Grief," in *Managing Emotion in Byzantium Passions, Affects and Imaginings*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Susan Ashbrook Harvey (Routledge, 2023), ch. 11.

³ Claudia Rapp, "Death at the Byzantine Court," in *Death at Court*, ed. Karl Heinz Speiss (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014), 273-5; Bogdan-Petru Maleon, "Imperial Death in Byzantium: A Preliminary View on the Negative Funerals," *Transylvanian Review* 19, no. 4 (2010): 9-32.

The prescriptive literature analysed in Chapter 2 showed that grief and mourning were viewed as problematic emotions as they suggested a lack of faith in eternal life. To counteract these problems, a distinction was made between grief that was problematic (sorrow born of permanent loss) – and grief that was acceptable (sorrow born of a temporary parting). Furthermore, the Church Fathers and the later writers of hagiography were not so uncompassionate as to completely admonish those who grieved, and they regarded grieving as a natural part of the human experience. The resulting prescriptive corpus therefore distinguishes between different kinds of grief, outlines methods for overcoming it, and emphasizes restraint, alongside gendered expectations of who mourns and how.

Chapters 3 through 5 showed how these prescriptions intersected with rhetoric, literature, politics and gender. They also revealed the ways these ideals were complemented by specific cultural traditions and forms. Anna Komnena deployed grief to assert authority and filial devotion, negotiating the expectations of her role as a woman by merging her depiction of grief with Classical lament and Christian piety. Choniates turned lament into indictment: his mourning for Constantinople became a tool for moral and political critique, employing grief as a result of, and a protest against, imperial failure. Chapter 4's study of ritual and imperial funerals showed how grief could be transformed into a collective performance that served political and emotional purposes. This complex interplay of ritual symbolism, performance, and gesture reasserted imperial hierarchy while imparting the emotional sense that what was transitioning was not merely an administration, but an age. From a modern perspective, these rituals register wider political and social change, shaping how grief for the end of an era could be publicly expressed. When taken together, these findings demonstrate that Byzantine grief was not static, nor did it conform exactly to the prescriptions discovered in Chapter 2. Instead, it was reworked within diverse contexts, allowing a wider latitude for expressions of grieving that could then be marshalled towards specific ends.

These findings demonstrate that Byzantine grief operated at an intersection of theology, politics, and gender. Emotional norms were upheld but also subverted and negotiated. The prescriptive literature set out how grief ought to appear and how it ought

to be handled, yet individuals like Komnena and Choniates engaged with those prescriptions to serve new expressive or political ends. This study extends the current scholarship by showing how grief simultaneously functioned as a social regulator and a marker of cultural identity.

Further Research

There are many angles for further research into Byzantine grief that could not be developed here. Paucity of evidence from the lower classes has limited this study to discussion of the grief of courtiers. It may be possible to examine available sources using approaches adopted by the many studies of ‘history from below’ that have developed since the mid-twentieth century. Moreover, the funerals examined here were imperial ones, but those of other public officials also deserve more attention. The imperial funeral was shown in this study to be a complex interplay of ritual and grief. Perhaps this is true of other major public figures as well, such as high-ranking bureaucrats, members of the imperial royal family, or even the patriarch. *De Ceremoniis* even includes a record of the funeral for Patriarch Sergios I (610-638) and the ceremonies used therein.⁴ Perhaps the emotional tenor of proceedings may have differed due to the religiously charged nature of the funeral for a patriarch.

As was seen with Choniates, the literary often overlaps with the rhetorical in Byzantine literature. The study of Byzantine literature as a distinct sub-field has begun emerging in recent years.⁵ It remains to be seen if other forms of Byzantine writing follow on from the specific conventions of writing grief that were observed in *The Alexiad* or Choniates’ *Historia*. It is possible that similar emotional styles appeared in other forms of Byzantine literature. For example, Byzantine poetry, which was omitted from this study, could provide intriguing insights into the emotionology of Byzantine grief that may have complemented the ideals of *apatheia*. Other forms of art are ripe for analysis as well, such as Byzantine hymns, particularly those sung in funerals, or even Byzantine court performances or theatre (insofar as they survive).

⁴ Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *Constantine Porphyrogennetos: The Book of Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Ann Moffatt and Maxeme Tall, *Byzantina Australiensia* 18 (Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2012), 630.

⁵ Margaret Mullett, “The Madness of Genre,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992): 233.

The focus in this thesis has been on the imperial court, but how far did its prescriptions of grief exist in other corners of the Orthodox world? Perhaps a different set of traditions and emotional norms operated through the prescriptive literature of the Church. The Russian Orthodox Church, for example, developed under very different circumstances from the one in Byzantium. This may have affected the way emotional norms were expressed. Future research could also look further east to Oriental Orthodoxy and the Christian populations throughout the Levant during this same period. A shared heritage may elucidate a similar set of emotional prescriptions, or ones perhaps strikingly different. This is especially salient with recent Byzantinist scholarship beginning to broaden the meaning of what can be considered 'Byzantine' to include the Balkans and Levant.⁶

This study joins a growing body of literature that supports and reinforces the notion that emotions are tied to culture, geography, and history. Findings such as these complicate the world of human psychology and neuroscience in new ways, challenging ideas about emotional universals from theorists like Paul Ekman.⁷ Though ideas like those of Ekman have long attracted criticism, universalist conceptualizations of emotion akin to Affect Theory remain popular.⁸ Even now, some modern psychological studies define acute grief as a "loss of regulation".⁹ Some studies have been more careful with their wording, focusing on the neurophysiological relationship between loss and neurochemicals such as cortisol.¹⁰ Despite this, the American Psychological Association includes concepts such as "absent grief".¹¹ The very existence of such a term implies an assumption that there is an inherent pathology to those who do not overtly show distress while grieving. Such language leads one to ask how far this is true of cultures (both past and present) who actively sought and seek to regulate and

⁶ "A Conversation with Margaret Mullett (OBE) and Alexis Torrance on the Mathews Byzantine Lectures" posted March 11, 2022, by Medieval Institute, YouTube, 8 min., 3 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOhW9rR85RU>

⁷ Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions* (Manchester University Press, 2017), 121.

⁸ Boddice, *The History of Emotions*, 121.

⁹ M. F. O'Connor, "Grief: A Brief History of Research on How Body, Mind, and Brain Adapt," *Psychosom Med* 81, no. 8 (2019): 731–738.

¹⁰ Nicole J. LeBlanc, Leslie D. Unger, and Richard J. McNally, "Emotional and Physiological Reactivity in Complicated Grief," *Journal of Affective Disorders* (2016) 194: 98-104.

¹¹ American Psychological Association, "absent grief," in *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, ed. Gary VandenBos (American Psychological Association, 2023).

negotiate their grief as the Byzantines did through varying modes other than overt physical expression. Byzantine grief, by its very nature, challenges these modern assumptions. Psychologists do not design their paradigms for long-dead cultures, yet recognising cultural diversity in expressions of grief helps us to understand the complexities of forms in which people have dealt with the unbearable ache that is loss.

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