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The Byzantine Letter of Consolation in the Macedonian and Komnenian Periods

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"Let the foreign critic beware how he meddles with style, that impalpable essence which surrounds thought as with an atmosphere, giving to it its life and peculiar tone of colour, differing in different nations, like the atmospheres which envelop the different planets of our system, and which require to be comprehended that we may interpret the character of the objects seen through their medium. None but a native can pronounce with any confidence upon style, affected as it is by so many casual and local associations that determine its propriety and its elegance."[1] Thus wrote William H. Prescott, the historian of Mexico, in his discussion of the work of his predecessor Antonio de Solís. One must reject such a wary, indeed pessimistic, approach to the literature of an alien culture since it would, of course, preclude any critical literary comment on Byzantine literature today; but at the same time one may also regret that Prescott's scruples have rarely troubled the Byzantine scholar in the past. In his blind adherence to modern literary aesthetics, he has too often assassinated—with a bludgeoning crudity or, yet more effectively, with a deftness more silken than even a Thug's rumal—the character of Byzantine literature for his generation. But now, fortunately, the telling of this tale is supererogatory at last, for modern scholarship, led by figures such as Jakov Ljubarskij and Alexander Kazhdan, is at last choosing the briar-entangled path of disinterested assessment.

One genre, however, is frequently omitted in this recent trend and is, together with the *progymnasma,* the last area of Byzantine literature to attract sympathetic understanding. It is the genre of the letter. As long ago as 1932, at the Third International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Athens, Joannes Sykutris called upon his colleagues to divest themselves of their modern prejudices and take into account Byzantine criteria in their

I wish to express my thanks to M. Mullett of the Queen's University, Belfast, for generously sending me portions of her Ph.D. thesis and of her book *Theophylact of Ochrid: Reading the Letters of a Byzantine Archbishop,* Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs 2 (Birmingham, 1997), before its publication; to M. P. Vinson of Indiana University for helpful suggestions; and especially to my colleague M. R. Cole for not only introducing me to some of the recent psychological literature on the subject but also instigating and discussing with me this article's final paragraph.

[1] W. H. Prescott, *The Conquest of Mexico,* bk. 2, chap. 8.

judgment of Byzantine letters;[2] but his clarion sounded a lonely note and few have taken their stand beneath his banner. Frustrated in their desire to extract precisely detailed information and irritated by yet another variation of a beloved cliché,[3] most scholars have tended to castigate the Byzantine letter as either a tortuous Chinese puzzle or little more than the Byzantine equivalent of the modern commercial greeting card.[4] Valentin Smetanin has attempted to construct a methodology for approaching these letters (creating his own field of Byzantine "epistolology") for both theoretical and practical purposes,[5] thereby "unlock[ing] hidden meanings and decipher[ing] elaborate codes which would otherwise be inaccessible,"[6] but his efforts do not appear to have achieved much success, at least on the practical side, and he has had few disciples. Other scholars, most notably Apostolos Karpozilos,[7] have conscientiously scrutinized letters of different periods to extract factual information, while Ljubarskij has subjected the letters of Michael Psellos to a thorough and penetrating analysis largely to reveal the personality of the author.[8] It is, however, Gustav Karlsson who has, by his meticulous cataloguing of epistolographic formulae,[9] laid the groundwork for the more literary examination of the letter. In recent years this direction has been most successfully followed by Margaret Mullett,

[2]J. Sykutris, "Probleme der byzantinischen Epistolographie," in *Actes du IIIe Congrès international d'Études byzantines* (Athens, 1932), 295–310, following similar comments in his article "Épistolographie," in *RE,* suppl. 5. I should also note the slightly earlier pioneering work of Sister Agnes Clare Way in *The Language and Style of the Letters of St. Basil* (Washington, D.C., 1927) (for later work on Basil's letters, see the summary in P. Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," *BMGS* 20 [1996]: 235–37).

[3]There appears to be a double standard employed here: when Shakespeare makes Gertrude say to her son Hamlet "All that lives must die," we have a literary gem fit for a dictionary of quotations; but when, centuries earlier, a Byzantine says the very same thing, we have a hackneyed commonplace. It may be well to heed the words of S. Medcalf commenting on the Western medieval attitude, which is analogous to the Byzantine: "All literature is necessarily involved with commonplaces—situations, relations, places and other things which are familiar to the audience; but the modern writer tends to be embarrassed if this use of commonplaces is too obvious, whereas the medieval took it for granted as a technique. Geoffrey of Vinsauf (ca. 1200) . . . thought that one of the writer's principal choices was whether to amplify his subject matter or to abbreviate it. On the whole, medieval writers tended to amplify and to rely on traditional commonplaces" (in *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain,* ed. B. Ford [Cambridge, 1988], 2:98).

[4]This has been most memorably expressed by G. T. Dennis in *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus,* CFHB 8 (Washington, D.C., 1977), xix, but notice his change of attitude in "The Byzantines as Revealed in Their Letters," in *Gonimos: Neoplatonic and Byzantine Studies Presented to Leendert G. Westerink at 75,* ed. J. Duffy and J. Peradotto (Buffalo, N.Y., 1988), 155–65.

[5]See V. A. Smetanin, "Epistolologija pozdnej Vizantii: Postanovka problemy i obzor istoriografii," *ADSV* 14 (1977): 60–76; idem, "Epistolologija pozdnej Vizantii: Proelevsis (konkretno-istoricheskaja chast')," ibid., 15 (1978): 60–82; idem, "Teoreticheskaja chast' epistolologii i konkretno-istoricheskij efarmosis pozdnej Vizantii," ibid., 16 (1979): 58–93; idem, "Idejnoe nasledie Vizantii i 'dekonkretizatsija' (na primere epistolografii)," ibid., 21 (1984): 95–108; idem, *Vizantijskoe obshchestvo XIII–XIV vekov po dannym epistolografii* (Sverdlovsk, 1987).

[6]Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," 214; see ibid., 213–16, for a brief but useful summary of Smetanin's theories.

[7]See A. D. Karpozilos, "Realia in Byzantine Epistolography, X–XII c.," *BZ* 77 (1984): 20–37; idem, "Realia in Byzantine Epistolography, XIII–XV c.," ibid., 88 (1995): 68–84.

[8]J. N. Ljubarskij, *Mikhail Psell: Lichnost' i tvorchestvo. K istorii vizantijskogo predgumanizma* (Moscow, 1978). For a summary of other modern work on Psellos's letters, see Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," 241–43.

[9]See G. Karlsson, *Idéologie et cérémonial dans l'épistolographie byzantine,* 2d ed. (Uppsala, 1962).

who has struck an exemplary balance between contemporary and modern criteria.[10] Much, nevertheless, remains to be done, as has recently been pointed out by Peter Hatlie in his excellent survey of the trends, over the years, in the modern scholarship on Byzantine epistolography.[11]

A possibly fruitful approach is to consider letters written on the same subject both by the same writer and by different writers.[12] The letter of consolation is chosen here for two reasons. It ought, because of its importance to the recipient, and in some cases to the writer as well, to demand of the latter his best efforts.[13] At the same time it provides the author with a severe challenge—to show his literary artistry despite the difficulty of avoiding a mere unadorned and unintegrated parade of hackneyed quotations and paramythetic *topoi,* such as "death is common to all," "death brings an end to earthly sufferings," "the deceased is with God," "it is impious to criticize God's dispensation," "excessive lamentation shames the deceased," or "self-control is an example to others."[14] This challenge could be forcibly shown by a comparison with the texts of cards of sympathy in our modern, much vaunted society. Religious cards rarely claim more than that God will comfort the bereaved, or assert the theologically unsound conviction that the

[10] Of Mullett's many articles on letters, those most concerned with literary aspects are "The Classical Tradition in the Byzantine Letter," in *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition,* ed. M. E. Mullett and R. D. Scott (Birmingham, 1981), 75–93; "Writing in Early Medieval Byzantium," in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe,* ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1990), 156–85, esp. 172–85; "The Language of Diplomacy," in *Byzantine Diplomacy: Papers from the Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies,* ed. J. Shepard and S. Franklin (Aldershot, 1992), 203–16; "Originality in the Byzantine Letter: The Case of Exile," in *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music,* ed. A. R. Littlewood (Oxford, 1995), 39–58; and *Theophylact of Ochrid.* It is sad that even in the recent edition of *The Letters of Ioannes Mauropous, Metropolitan of Euchaita,* CFHB 34 (Thessalonike, 1990), Apostolos Karpozilos's commentary barely touches on matters literary.

[11] "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," 213–48. As Hatlie points out (ibid., 230–31), new directions may be suggested by looking into the work of John White and his Ancient Epistolography Group, which itself considers the very early Byzantine centuries in its examination of the Semitic, Persian, Greek, and Roman epistolographic traditions. Hatlie also encourages (ibid., 231–34) the greater use of "computer-aided text analysis." For bibliographies of primary sources and modern scholarship, see N. B. Tomadakes, Βυζαντινὴ ἐπιστολογραφία: Εἰσαγωγή, κείμενα, κατάλογος ἐπιστολογραφῶν, 3d ed. (Athens, 1969); V. A. Smetanin, *Epistolografija: Metodicheskaja razrabotka k spetsial'nomu seminaru dlja studentov-zaochnikov Istoricheskogo fakul'teta* (Sverdlovsk, 1970); T. V. Popova, "Vizantijskaja epistolografija," in *Vizantijskaja literatura,* ed. C. C. Averintsev (Moscow, 1974); H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (Munich, 1978), 1:234–39.

[12] This was done for letters of exile by Mullett, "Originality," while I briefly considered letters of consolation and letters to the emperor written by men awaiting trial, in "An 'Ikon of the Soul': The Byzantine Letter," *Visible Language* 10 (1976): 217–19. Limited to a single author, some types of letter, including the consolatory, were long ago usefully compared by Sister M. Monica Wagner in "A Chapter in Byzantine Epistolography: The Letters of Theodoret of Cyrus," *DOP* 4 (1948): 119–81.

[13] See, however, below, p. 22.

[14] Byzantine writers themselves were, of course, aware of this difficulty. An interesting early example is Julian's letter to the recently widowed Himerios (*Ep.* 201 in *L'empereur Julien: Oeuvres complètes,* ed. J. Bidez [Paris, 1924], 1.2:229–31), in which the emperor admits that it would not be fitting to offer the usual condolences to an orator so adept himself in using them to instruct the bereaved who through ignorance lack the necessary self-control. He consequently relates a fable, which, he claims, may be unfamiliar to Himerios: the grief of Darios for his dead wife was so excessive that Demokritos saw fit to attempt to shame the king out of it by asking for the names of three persons who had never mourned for anyone. Even here, however, Julian cannot refrain from alluding to a famous Homeric passage (*Odyssey* 4.220–21; see below, note 79), while his tale is unlikely to have been unknown to Himerios since it had earlier appeared in Lucian, with the names of Herodes Attikos and Demonax (*Demonactis vita* 25).

deceased is with God, while secular efforts rarely do more than either encourage happy memories or declare that although the sender cannot think of any adequate words, his or her thoughts are with the bereaved.[15] As an indication of the sort of material that, I think, would be unearthed by a thorough examination of all surviving Byzantine letters of consolation, in this preliminary survey I deal only with the letters of the Macedonian and Komnenian periods that I have found adequately edited for my purpose;[16] and I have chosen to examine their style primarily in terms of content rather than in terms of verbal expression. My selection of nineteen letters is, therefore, to some extent random and not in any way specifically designed to exhibit diversity of treatment. However, it is impossible to know how typical this sample is of the letters of consolation from the *literati,* since such letters are surprisingly uncommon in the epistolary collections (it is hard to believe that patriarchs in particular wrote so few).[17] By my estimate only 1 to 2 percent of surviving Byzantine letters are consolatory. This could be an anomaly of survival, but it may also suggest one of two possibilities: either that consolation was conventionally offered orally, letters being a "second best" dictated by absence,[18] or that many were written hastily, to meet the immediate need, and were then not considered of sufficient literary merit to be copied into collections by either writer or recipient. With only two exceptions,[19] all the letters that I have selected are addressed to men; but the relationships of the deceased to the recipients are very varied—wife (in 2 cases), father (2), mother (2), brother (2), sister (2), friend (2), husband, son, daughter, brother-in-law, unidentified male relation by marriage, abbatial predecessor, and exiled priest.

The Byzantines had many literary treatments of death, such as the ἐπικήδειον, the

[15]The following are typical modern examples (ellipses indicate not my omissions but the actual punctuation on the cards): "May He walk with you during this difficult time"; "May God be with you in this time of sorrow . . . comforting you, guiding you, sending you warm reminders of His love"; "God knows the sadness you feel at losing one you loved so much, so let Him help to ease your burden with His tender, loving touch"; "May it comfort you to know that your loved one is safe in God's care and that friends are praying for you in your time of sorrow"; "Even though our faith tells us that we should rejoice that your loved one is with God, it is still difficult for those left behind not to feel sad and lonely. May the peace and the comfort of friends see you through this difficult time"; "May the joys you knew help comfort you in this, your time of sorrow"; "Your loved one will always be remembered"; "Your loss is my sorrow too"; "Sharing in your sorrow and wanting you to know that this brings far more sympathy than words could ever show"; "May you somehow know the sympathy that words cannot express"; "I wish I knew the perfect thing to say right now. I can only tell you that you're special, and that you're in my thoughts now more than ever"; "So many thoughts and feelings fill our hearts right now, but the words are difficult to find. We want you to know that we care . . . and we're so very sorry"; "At times like this, 'I'm sorry' sounds so empty, compared to what you're going through. And yet, it's all I know to say." The above are a random selection, the complete message being given in each instance. Byzantine confession to aphasia (e.g., Photios *Ep.* 201) is ever but a temporary aberration.

[16]Thus, unfortunately, I have not considered, *inter alia,* the corpus of letters by Michael Psellos.

[17]For instance, among the 115 published letters of Athanasios I of Constantinople there is not a single letter of consolation. They seem to have been more common among the early church fathers: for instance, Basil wrote fourteen, and Theodoretos twelve; but there are only four consolation letters surviving of Gregory of Nazianzos (including one to Gregory of Nyssa on the death of the latter's brother, Basil) and only three of John Chrysostomos (figures are taken from S. K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* [Philadelphia, 1986], 148–49, 152).

[18]I suspect that some letters (e.g., *Epp.* 47 and 156 of Nikolaos Mystikos, discussed below, pp. 27–28) may have been written to court officials, and especially members of the imperial family, in addition to oral consolation in the self-preservatory desire to exercise tact and diplomacy in dealing with rivals or superiors.

[19]*Ep.* 245 of Photios (below, pp. 25–26) is addressed to an abbess, and *Ep.* 5 of Gregory of Oxeia (below, p. 32), to a daughter of John II Komnenos.

ἐπιτάφιος λόγος, the θρῆνος, the μονῳδία, and the παραμυθητικὸς λόγος, all of which were interrelated, overlapped with each other, and sometimes replaced each other.[20] Their subject matter was a combination of Christian and pagan elements. Although the latter have a very long history, with ancient authors tracing them back to Achilles' words of comfort addressed to Priam,[21] the Byzantines chiefly employed the rhetorical formulations crystallized in the late third century A.D. by Menander of Laodikeia on the Lykos.[22] The letter of consolation, however, stands somewhat apart from such literary treatments: they were public, it generally private; they were addressed to a group, it usually to an individual;[23] they commonly celebrated an important public figure, it usually consoled a man[24] on the loss of a parent, wife, child, or sibling; they were principally encomia of the deceased delivered at funerals and memorial services, it dealt principally with the feelings of the bereaved.

The Byzantine letter of consolation shares much of its Christian content with the other funerary genres, but places a greater emphasis, especially in the early centuries, on 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. The first two verses of this passage were much quoted: "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." The final words, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words," were naturally taken as a divine directive to use the passage.[25]

For its non-Christian content[26] the Byzantine letter of consolation, unlike the other genres, depends not so much on the Menandrian tradition as on Stoic (especially Chrysippan) and Cynic theories.[27] These ultimately derive from the now lost work *On Grief* (Περὶ Πένθους) of the early Academic philosopher Crantor of Soli, which the Stoic Panaitios recommended be learned by heart. Philosophers, and during the Second Sophistic rhetoricians as well, considered it part of their practical duty to give oral or, if that were not possible, written consolation to their less fortunate fellow citizens. Dio Chrysostomos indeed claims that many men of their own accord invited philosophers "to come and speak

[20] See, further, M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge, 1974).

[21] Homer *Iliad* 24.507–51. In general, see K. Buresch, *Consolationum a graecis romanisque scriptarum historia critica* (Leipzig, 1886); and R. Kassel, *Untersuchungen zur griechischen und römischen Konsolationsliteratur* (Munich, 1958).

[22] *Menander Rhetor,* ed. D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson (Oxford, 1981), 2.9, pp. 160–65; 2.11, pp. 170–79; 2.16, pp. 200–207.

[23] Doubtless, the letters of consolation were often read to other relatives at the time and subsequently perhaps to friends at a home *theatron,* but in the first instance they were intended for a specific individual, as the contents often make very clear (e.g., "you knew when you married her that she was mortal," from a letter [*Ep.* 156] of Nikolaos Mystikos, on which see below, pp. 27–28).

[24] Far less common are letters of consolation addressed to women, but see *Ep.* 245 of Photios (below, pp. 25–26), *Ep.* 5 of Gregory of Oxeia (below, p. 32), Plutarch's letter to his own wife (below, note 70), and Basil's letter to the wife of Nektarios (below, note 89).

[25] As A. J. Malherbe observes, "To the Church Fathers, who knew the classical genres, this section of the letter appeared close to a consolatory epistle" ("Exhortation in I Thess.," *NT* 25 [1983]: 254). It is one of the few passages to be found in two letters of this selection (see below, note 79). On Christian aspects of consolation in general, see R. C. Gregg, *Consolation Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975).

[26] The two sides, Christian and non-Christian, do, of course, have certain things in common, of which Malherbe gives a brief summary ("Exhortation," 255).

[27] See, in particular, A. J. Malherbe, *The Cynic Epistles* (Missoula, Mont., 1977).

comforting words" upon the death of a relative.[28] The professed experts thus built up a number of arguments,[29] which may be found employed by classical authors such as Cicero and Plutarch[30] and later by the Byzantines. It is, however, in a short treatise of the second or first century B.C. on the different types of letter, ascribed to a certain Demetrios, that we find the basic format of the letter of consolation, which, like many of the later Byzantine letters, begins with the συμπάθεια and proceeds to the παραίνεσις. The author's model letter, dealing not just with bereavement but with any calamity, is as follows: "When I heard of the terrible things that you met at the hands of thankless Fate, I felt the deepest grief, considering that what had happened had not happened to you more than to me. When I saw all the things that assail life, all that day long I cried over them. But then I considered that such things are the common lot of all, with nature establishing neither a particular time nor age in which one must suffer anything, but often confronting us secretly, awkwardly and undeservedly. Since I did not happen to be present to comfort you, I decided to do so by letter. Bear, then, what has happened as lightly as you can, and exhort yourself just as you would exhort someone else. For you know that reason will make it easier for you to be relieved of your grief with the passage of time."[31]

We may now look at our selection of Byzantine letters.[32] To consider their writers in roughly chronological order, we begin with five letters by the scholarly Photios that were perhaps all written in the period between his two patriarchates yet exhibit huge differences in both content and tone.[33]

The first letter (*Ep.* 234) is a lengthy consolation that Photios sent his brother Tarasios who had lost his daughter in the bloom of her youth and ripe for marriage. Photios emits a *cri de coeur* for Elijah, Elisha, Peter, and Paul—all of whom, the Bible says, brought the dead to life—to open a lengthy and dolorous exordium in which he gruesomely describes the once comely girl's awful appearance in death, her lips "contracted for dissolution," her eyes "having poured out their vital stream, cover[ing] over what remains with inani-

[28] Dio is complaining that men treat philosophy like medicine, the rich not seeing fit to employ a philosopher until they have encountered misfortune, which alone renders them "tolerant of philosophers' words and admitting that they need comfort" (*Or.* 27.8–9). See also Julian's letter to Himerios (above, note 14).

[29] Stowers finds (*Letter Writing,* 142) the most common arguments to be as follows: "1. Death is inevitable. 2. Death is the fate of all, kings and beggars, rich and poor. 3. The person's memory and honor will live on in spite of death. 4. Death releases one from the evils of life. 5. The funeral and the tomb are a great honor to the deceased. 6. Either death is nonexistence and does not occur to the dead or it leads to some happier state." In respect to this last argument, it should be pointed out that some pagan writers (e.g., Seneca in *Consolatio ad Marciam* 25.1, 26.3) come closer to Christian, and therefore Byzantine, belief in claiming that the deceased is now in the company of the blessed souls. Stowers warningly goes on (*Letter Writing,* 144) to note *Ep.* 164 of Gregory of Nazianzos, which advises that philosophical arguments are to be reserved for the educated, others being offered instead sympathy, exhortation, and often a rebuke for their despair.

[30] E.g., Cicero *Tusculanae disputationes;* Plutarch *Moralia* 101F–22A, 608B–12B.

[31] Translated by Stowers, *Letter Writing,* 144. Stowers gives further translations of six real letters of consolation from the 1st (?) to the 6th century A.D., including three from papyri.

[32] All summaries and translations of letters in the selection are my own.

[33] *Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia,* ed. B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink, 6 vols. (Leipzig, 1983–88), 2. The five consolatory letters have been rendered into English by D. S. White, *Patriarch Photios of Constantinople: His Life, Scholarly Contributions, and Correspondence Together with a Translation of Fifty-two of His Letters* (Brookline, Mass., 1981), nos. 1–5, pp. 115–35. Her translations, with brief notes, of *Epp.* 234 and 245 had earlier appeared in *GOTR* 18 (1973): 47–58, and *Classical Folia* 29 (1975): 31–43, respectively.

mate lids." He then admits that he has been carried away by grief, in itself a thing of destructive nature and one with which they would insult their ancestors' patient endurance of even more cruel deaths. He proceeds to find and give comfort by reflecting that death is common to all and that there are worse deaths than that of this girl who expired in her parents' arms and left no children to grieve for her. There follow a philosophical argument that longevity or brevity of life is irrelevant to happiness, and a theological argument that her youthful death not only is God's will but also enables her to pass into immortal life with fewer bodily defilements. In a touching section Photios then visualizes the girl herself comforting her parents: "Why do you strike yourself in grief, my father, why do you bewail me as if I have departed to evils? Paradise has been allotted to me as my abode, a sweet sight to gaze upon with my eyes, and a sweeter thing to enjoy, and my experience of it exceeds all belief. . . . We are all wise [there] in divine and heavenly wisdom . . . and our life is all feast and festival. . . . Some day you will go there too together with my dear mother. . . ."[34] Photios continues by urging his brother "not to give way to lamentation, for men must set a good example to women,[35] or where will they get their comfort? . . . We must not act like women." He ends with numerous scriptural arguments and a prayer that they may be courageous.[36]

Ep. 245 was written for an abbess named Eusebia, and is Photios's sole surviving letter addressed to a woman.[37] It is an extraordinary missive and was presumably well merited since otherwise it would have been highly insulting to a recipient in her position. To the complete exclusion of all other topics commonly found in letters to the bereaved, its 138 lines are devoted entirely to deploring excessive lamentation. It may be briefly paraphrased thus: "Since we are not the first human beings, we cannot be upset by an unexpected occurrence. You complain that your sister, your 'sole consolation after God, the comfort of [your] sorrows, the dissolution of [your] sufferings, the prime cause of [your] joys, has abandoned [you],' but so have your parents and all your ancestors back to Adam, and you yourself will abandon others. You should not be upset that she has now been released from corruption. She has not disappeared into non-existence but is at peace with her Maker. Why should we be angry against the law of nature? Plants, animals, and even the sun, which traverses the heavens 'like a happy giant,' are mortal. Will you risk divine wrath in lamenting God's gift of immortality to his handiwork? By sullenly bewailing the fact that your sister's soul is now being rejoicingly received by the angels, you are disgracing your marriage with Christ, your immortal bridegroom, for whom you

[34]The passage even includes a verbal reminiscence of a line in the opening lament, surely meant to console the writer who had bewailed the fact that the crooked serpent had crept into Paradise and who is now assured that it is no longer there. This reminiscence is also improved by *variatio,* for, while Photios asks πῶς εἰς τὸν παράδεισον εἵρπυσεν ὁ πονηρὸς ἐκεῖνος καὶ σκολιὸς ὄφις; (ll. 13–14), the deceased says ἀλλὰ νῦν μὲν οὐδὲ ὁ σκολιὸς ἐκεῖνος καὶ πονηρὸς ὄφις χώραν ἔχει ὑφερπύσαι (ll. 134–35).

[35]The need to set a good example, be it to a specific individual, to women in general, or even to everyone, had become a *topos* long before Photios's time. An early example specifically in a work of consolation occurs in Seneca *Consolatio ad Polybium* 5.4 f.

[36]This too is an ancient *topos.* The most famous examples are probably the words that Propertius puts into the mouth of the dead Cornelia when she bids her surviving husband weep for her in private but "deceive [their children's] kisses with dry cheeks" (4.11.79–84), and the Younger Pliny's eulogy of Arria (*Ep.* 3.16.3–6) who cheerfully reported to her seriously sick husband Caecina Paetus the imaginary convalescence of their son, whose funeral she was at that time having to arrange on her own.

[37]Out of a total of 299 letters.

abandoned all family ties. Mourning would have been legitimate if your sister had been a sinner, but she was a pious virgin and you are insulting her. Cease your lamentation and immerse yourself in 'the blessed and indestructible love of Christ, your pure and immaculate bridegroom'!"

In *Ep.* 201 Photios claims that he wished to write in consolation to George, metropolitan of Nikomedia, as soon as he heard of the death of their mutual friend, a priest who had died in exile and had clearly been a member of the persecuted Photian party; initially, however, he found that he was unable to do so owing to his own sorrow.[38] He then reflects that though the death is like the ancient offering of first-fruits to God, yet the root remains to produce further fruit. They should not take it amiss that in dying young their friend beat them in the race to attain virtue. That he died amid hardships and persecution is consoling, for an athlete should be tested "amid struggles . . . and the bloodthirstiness of his persecutors" and "appear before the judge still dripping in the sweat of the contest." He was the first offering, chosen for his outspokenness, and his release from toils must not be mourned since his virtues now have their reward. He died before being able to enjoy the restoration of the church (i.e., the Photian party), but the attainment of earthly happiness precludes the recompense of heavenly blessedness; nevertheless, by his closeness to God he may now perhaps be able to expedite that restoration. Photios ends with the hope that George may take additional consolation in the knowledge that their friend's successes depended upon George's "instruction and zeal."

Another George[39] must have been startled to read the opening words of his letter from the patriarch (*Ep.* 105): "I forbid you, best of friends, to be called anymore my friend." Photios's explanation is that a mutual friend has deserted his earthly friends for eternal ones, and that, since he himself has thus yet again been grieved by the death of a friend who meant much to him, he should imitate Timon: as Timon, perhaps after meeting with unusual human wickedness, called himself a misanthrope, so Photios should now become a "misophile." He then rails against the source of his sorrow (ὅστις ποτέ ἐστιν ἐκεῖνος), a plaint that appears at first to verge on blasphemy until we learn that this same source may quite soon put an end to him and drive him away to God for whom he yearns. The letter ends with a plea to George, who, Photios claims, is the sole remaining comfort of his life, to attend to the rites in his place and protect and lighten the sorrow of the relatives. The letter is unusual for this survey both in that it alone appears to break the news of the death to the recipient and in that the sole consolation contained therein is that to be extracted by the writer from the recipient.

The final letter of consolation (if it can be so classified) by Photios (*Ep.* 131) is by far the shortest, a mere three lines addressed to his brother Tarasios on the death of a mutual friend. In full it runs thus: "Our friend has died in the body; but not even you would deny that he left behind his goodness (ἀρετή) throughout his life as an imperishable monument. Shall we, then, call anybody happy at all if we take thought to bewail him?"

[38] Westerink (Laourdas and Westerink, *Photii,* 2:98) argues rightly, I think, against J. Hergenröther (*Photius, Patriarch von Constantinopel: Sein Leben, seine Schriften und das griechische Schisma,* vol. 2 [Regensburg, 1867], 267–71) in maintaining that this letter was written before rather than after Photios's recall from exile.

[39] Identified in the lemma simply as "deacon and *koubikoularios,*" he was possibly, as Westerink (Laourdas and Westerink, *Photii,* 1:144) suggests, the same as the "deacon and *orphanotrophos*" of *Ep.* 136.

The letters of another well-educated patriarch, Photios's friend Nikolaos Mystikos,[40] are of especial interest in that we know something of their recipients. The first (*Ep.* 47)[41] is addressed to Constantine, a Paphlagonian eunuch who had been castrated in his infancy by his father in the hope of a successful career in the civil service, which was triumphantly fulfilled by his appointment in 908 as Grand Chamberlain (*parakoimomenos*), a position he held until 919 except during the brief interlude of Alexander's reign. Since Constantine was devoted to Nikolaos's bitter foe Zoe Karbonopsina, and inherited much of Nikolaos's power when Zoe seized control from the council of regency in 914, he was certainly the patriarch's most important opponent after the empress herself. There exist two versions of a *consolatio* sent by Nikolaos to the chamberlain on the death of the latter's sister, perhaps the wife of Leo Phokas. The first version, which was left unfinished,[42] is principally a lengthy lamentation over the bitter event, which temporarily robbed the patriarch of voice, hearing, and even reasoning powers. Nikolaos finally goes on to say that he himself took comfort from reflecting on the dispensation of the Creator, who orders all things for the best, expresses his hope that Constantine's sister will reach Paradise, and exhorts the chamberlain to terminate his own natural grief. The second version is far less personal: lamentation and what can almost be described as self-pity have all but vanished, and in their place are found further arguments and an elaboration, with many examples, on the theme of the dispensation of the Creator.

Why are there two versions? Since Nikolaos's relations with Constantine must have been strained, to say the least, he probably found this letter rather hard to write, despite the vast experience with this sort of thing that was surely a concomitant of his lofty ecclesiastical office. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to suppose that in an attempt to carry out what he held as his humane and Christian duty he emphasized his own personal involvement in the sad event, but before sending his letter had the good sense to realize that he had gone too far and that his protestations would smack of insincerity—perhaps even that they were a little unbecoming for a patriarch. Accordingly, he composed and sent a more restrained and dignified letter of condolence that was less likely to jar on the sensibilities of the chamberlain, but by some chance kept his earlier attempt, which found its way into a collection of his letters and has been thus fortuitously preserved as indication of Nikolaos's personal difficulties in writing the letter.[43]

The recipient of the second letter (*Ep.* 156) is Romanos I Lekapenos, who lost his wife Theodora in 922. The opening remarks may be thus summarized: "God has been good even in this, for, if such a thing had to happen, it was far better that you should

[40] For a brief summary of recent work on this letter collection, see Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," 239–40.

[41] *Nicholas I, Patriarch of Constantinople: Letters,* ed. R. J. H. Jenkins and L. G. Westerink, CFHB 6 (Washington, D.C., 1973).

[42] It concludes, in the only manuscript that contains it (Cod. Patmiacus 178), with the last few sentences of the second version, itself preserved only in Cod. Vind. Phil. gr. 342.

[43] Jenkins believed that the second version was written first ("A 'Consolatio' of the Patriarch Nicholas Mysticus," *Byzantion* 35 [1965]: 159–66), but J. F. Mitchell showed convincingly that this was not so, on the grounds that the juncture of the first version with the conclusion of the second is both ungrammatical and nonsensical and that it involves repetition of ideas ("A *Consolatio* of the Patriarch Nicholas Mysticus: Further Remarks," ibid., 37 [1967]: 136–42). Westerink believed that the first version "was probably left unfinished because of the negative tone of its first paragraph" (Jenkins and Westerink, *Nicholas I,* 548).

have to bear the grief rather than she, who in her womanly weakness would have given way to blasphemy. Let us thank the Lord who cares for those who trust in him, amongst whose number you are! Let us cast aside our grief lest God condemn us for our mutterings of complaint (γογγύζοντες)." Mention of the resignation of David is followed by two classical examples, which lead the writer back to Romanos: "Therefore, do nothing unworthy of yourself, but, since you knew when you married her that she was mortal and you have enjoyed her love, do not be downcast and sullen (κατηφὴς καὶ σκυθρωπάζων) as if you have suffered an injustice from God. Is it not a fearful thing to imagine ourselves punished by God when he has raised you to your sacred position? Let us not grieve any longer, I beg you, but let us rather thank and glorify him in this as in other matters and trust that he will increase his benefits if we strive to serve him with all our strength." From this hard-hitting exhortation it is not unnatural to assume that Romanos, who appears to have been devoted to his wife, momentarily gave way to a grief that was considered hardly consonant with his eminence and which prompted Nikolaos to express himself with such bluntness, and perhaps gave him the opportunity vainly to attempt to establish a position of psychological ascendancy over a remarkable emperor.[44]

The third consolatory letter of Nikolaos (*Ep.* 46) was sent to a man whom the patriarch did not know personally, Gurgen II of Abasgia, whose father, Constantine III, died in 915/6. Here the condolence is perfunctory: in the very first sentence, despite its only moderate length, Nikolaos manages to express not only his own grief at the death of Constantine, but also sympathy toward his son and successor and praise of the widely known virtues of the deceased. He adds at greater length that he himself is consoled by the fact that Gurgen is the image of his father whom, the patriarch prays, he may even outshine. Before closing the letter with an item of business, Nikolaos mentions that he is sending the king a new robe (as token of Byzantine recognition of his accession). This letter is simply a piece of diplomacy; Nikolaos makes no attempt to pretend to a personal relationship where none existed.

It is interesting to compare the letters by the two patriarchs, both of whom had enjoyed secular careers prior to their elevation, with one by a contemporary and, again, scholarly archbishop. As can well be imagined, Arethas has little time for softness and sentiment. In a letter to Kosmas Magistros[45] he dwells at length upon the superior and blessed state of death, a belief for which he has both classical and scriptural authority, and ends with a *demand* to Kosmas to refrain from lamentation as an example to the other relations of the deceased. He is far more distant than Nikolaos (even when allowance has been made for his contorted style), and his tone suggests that he would have little sym-

[44]The tone of this letter may be compared with that of a much milder imperial consolation, which was probably sent by Gabriel, metropolitan of Thessalonike, most likely to John VII Palaiologos on the death of his young son sometime during the opening years of the 15th century (for the text, summary, and discussion, see G. T. Dennis, "An Unknown Byzantine Emperor, Andronicus V Palaeologus [1400–1407?]," *JÖBG* 16 [1967]: 175–87). The writer grieves at the death of the son who he had prayed would one day succeed his father, expresses sorrow for his own absence, claims that it is his duty to write a consoling letter to the emperor despite the fact that the latter is not so small-minded as to require it, envisions the son by the throne of God, and adduces theologically comforting biblical passages and tales of the saints, from whom paradeigmatic lessons may be learned in just the way that artists use their models. For further letters of consolation sent to members of the imperial family, see below, pp. 31, 32.

[45]*Arethae archiepiscopi Caesariensis Scripta minora,* ed. L. G. Westerink (Leipzig, 1968), 1: no. 22.

pathy for any weakness; we must hope that he knew his man, but in any case his letter allows us to know *him* a little better.

A world away in tone is a brief letter of consolation by an anonymous *protonotarios*, possibly Symeon Metaphrastes,[46] to a friend who has lost his mother. He begins by assuring the mourner that the blow he has suffered is enough to vanquish a soul of adamant, and "thus it is no wonder that you are in this state since you have lost your mother who was your pride and comfort" and who made "our life of pain and peril seem to you all sweet and kind." Having thus gently excused his friend's grief and allowed his mind to linger on his mother's virtues, the writer reminds him firmly that they (the sympathetic use of the first person plural should be noted here, as so often elsewhere) are not the first to suffer such a loss, since it is of human nature to die. He then directs the attention of the bereaved to his mother's placid, dignified, and almost happy death, which should be an inspiration to him. Our anonymous author ends thus: "And be yourself an example even to others of fortitude and endurance in the face of your sorrows, and let all marvel at your courage and congratulate you on your stoutheartedness and nobility, and your mother on being blessed in offspring and on her dignified mien." Thus, in only twenty-eight lines, his friend has been brought on a gentle but firm rein from helpless despair, with tears almost openly encouraged, through bitter-sweet memories to a manly resolve that is forged by his mother's noble end and is perhaps reached also for her sake. This little letter was not written in haste or thoughtlessly[47] and does great credit to its author's tact and sensibilities.

There survives from the tenth century another letter composed to console a man sorrowing at the death of his mother.[48] It was written by Theodore, bishop of Nicaea, to the *protospatharios* Leo, and may be summarized as follows: "You grieve much at the death of your mother, but not unreasonably, for how could you not since you lived with her for so long? She had borne her widowhood of nearly forty years with exemplary austerity and piety. Now you have nobody to whom to turn, neither father, wife, nor children. Even a man of adamant would be overcome by grief in this situation, yet your mother would not want you to be downcast because of her. So put off your excessive sadness, show yourself worthy of her, and console your brother who is not as strong in the face of afflictions, for you will thus please her, be an instructive example to others, and not act contrary to God's will." Despite similarities with the previous letter, this one exhibits some notable differences, for the good bishop is at pains to consider the specific situation of the bereaved: he indicates his sympathy for what was clearly excessive grief by expatiating not only on the mother's virtues but also on the comforts that would in normal circumstances have been available from other members of the family, before he concludes with a demand for a more manly attitude.

The last of our consolatory letters from the Macedonian period is the most overtly rhetorical, and approaches nearest to what in an author of the Greco-Roman world

[46] Ed. S. P. Lampros, "Ἐπιστολαὶ ἐκ τοῦ Βιενναίου κώδικος Phil. Gr. 342," Νέος Ἑλλ. 21 (1927): 27–28. On the authorship, see J. Darrouzès, "Inventaire des épistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle," *REB* 18 (1960): 128.

[47] A good example of the care taken in the letter is the repetition of the word ἀποκρούω, not the commonest of words, which occurs both when the writer reminds the son of how his mother comforted him during her life and when he urges the son to take inspiration from his mother after her death.

[48] *Ep.* 6 in *Épistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle,* ed. J. Darrouzès, AOC 6 (Paris, 1960), 276–77.

would be termed the Grand Style. It was written by Philetos of Synada[49] to Nikephoros Balanites, the *strategos* of Melitene in Cappadocia, on the death of the latter's son. Philetos assures his friend that he can understand his grief, since he is a son of a father if not a father himself, but that death is the common lot of man. Nikephoros must make no ignoble[50] utterance, must not say that his son was snatched away "in the very bloom of youth just when the down was appearing on his cheeks"; instead he must accept the unfathomable decisions of God, must take David, the mother of the Maccabees, and Job as his examples, must be happy that he has sent his son ahead to God, who desires such a soul released from mortal toils. For another example Philetos suggests himself who lost his father at birth and his mother in his infancy, and then (in language reminiscent of Hellenistic epigrams) "my only brother, in whom I had placed all my hopes, I suddenly saw by a gravestone hidden" (ἐπ᾽ ἀδελφῷ δὲ μόνῳ τὰς ὅλας ἐλπίδας ἔχων, ἄφνω καὶ αὐτὸν εἶδον . . . λίθῳ καὶ τάφῳ κρυπτόμενον). He concludes with a reminder that no good will accrue from grief. In this letter one notices Philetos's insistent involvement in his friend's sorrow,[51] which is marked by the anaphora in the first three sentences, each beginning with a dominant οἶδα ("I know"); in a nice touch the very last word, οἰόμεθα ("we believe"), is clearly intended, although a different verb, to recall the first word—but now, after the description of the losses that both have experienced, the sympathetic singular has been changed into a united plural.[52]

Before we turn to the Komnenian period, notice should be taken of another letter in which the author does not offer consolation to the bereaved but instead both expresses his delight that the report he has had of the recipient's death has proved false and recalls his own earlier thoughts and emotions. It was written by an anonymous schoolteacher (the so-called Anonymus Londiniensis) to a metropolitan of Neokaisareia.[53] A summary demonstrates well the Byzantines' ambivalent attitude toward death: "The news of your death was not unexpected, but, thank God, proved to be untrue. I did not know whether to be sad or joyful. I was sad when I thought of your good character, but joyful when I thought of the rewards that await a life well lived and of your unassailable reputation. When we thought you dead, such were the considerations that moved us. Now that we know you to be alive, they move us no less. May I see you soon."[54]

We may now consider examples from the Komnenian period. The three surviving

[49] *Ep.* 4 in ibid., 251–53.

[50] It must be hoped that Philetos intended no pun, and that his friend saw none, in using the word ἀγενής, for which "childless" is also an attested meaning.

[51] Compare with the letter of the anonymous *protonotarios* (above, p. 29). Wagner noted Theodoretos's "personal share in the sorrow of his friends" in his condolatory letters ("A Chapter," 160 and n. 133).

[52] In any study of this genre in the Macedonian period, one should also note a second letter by Philetos (*Ep.* 1 in Darrouzès, *Épistoliers byzantins,* 249–50), wherein a boy briefly laments the death of his mother and requests consolation. Darrouzès, arguing from the fact that this contradicts *Ep.* 4 where Philetos mentions his mother's much earlier death, concludes that this lament is "soit *d'un* enfant en général soit d'un particulier au nom duquel parle Philétos: c'est une lettre fictive ou un exercice de rhétorique" (ibid., 252 n. 2). The letter opens with apostrophes of the mother and the grave and closes with a specific message that gives it at least the appearance of authenticity (even if it was written by Philetos on behalf of another); but, whether genuine or fictitious, it nevertheless represents contemporary Byzantine attitudes toward bereavement.

[53] *Ep.* 73 in "The Correspondence of a Tenth-Century Byzantine Scholar," ed. R. Browning, *Byzantion* 24 (1954): 447.

[54] Ibid., 416.

consolatory letters of Theophylact of Ochrid[55] exhibit great dissimilarities, but, in view of Mullett's study,[56] the discussion here will be brief. His most regular *consolatio* is that to Michael Pantechnes on the death of his father (*Ep.* 39). The writer opens with the usual lamentation, but then insists that though the earth has lost a star, yet God has gained a sun: since the merits of the deceased are worthy of heaven, "why do you grieve that they have gone to their proper abode?" It would be selfish, he claims, for Michael to begrudge his father the blessedness of heaven simply because he enjoyed the latter's presence on earth. In the last dozen lines Theophylact encourages his friend in his personal knowledge that the father's virtues are continued in the son.

Still following the normal forms of such letters, but much briefer (only thirteen lines long in Paul Gautier's edition), is a consolation on the death of Michael Psellos that was sent to the latter's brother (*Ep.* 132). Theophylact's words of sorrow shared sound more stark than is usual: "I am not unaware that you are in pain, . . . but I too grieve, smitten by the pangs of friendship." His sorrow is doubled because through distance he can give only epistolary comfort by reminding that Michael is not dead but has gone to live with God. His last words, "you are not the only one to know his life, but we all know what sort of a man he was," may be, as Mullett opines, a curt ending because Psellos was too great a man to be mourned "in a more obviously eloquent—or personal—manner," but they could equally be a disguised criticism of the recipient's unwillingness to share his brother with the world, especially if taken in conjunction with the opening words.[57]

Very different from both these letters is one addressed to the caesar Nikephoros Melissenos (*Ep.* 73). This is a fairly lengthy piece of diplomatic tact. The consolation itself is brief, for Theophylact may have deemed it improper to make any remarks that the caesar could possibly have found patronizing (the tone is quite the opposite of that exhibited by Nikolaos Mystikos toward Romanos I). The opening has a unique twist: the archbishop hopes that as he himself takes consolation in letters from Melissenos, so will Melissenos, in his sorrow at the death of his brother-in-law, the *sebastokrator* Isaac Komnenos, take consolation in God. Then, as if abashed at making so plain the relationship between writer and recipient of the letter, Theophylact proceeds to pose the question of Melissenos's preparations for his own death, but this is done with extreme delicacy. The letter ends, rather incongruously, with the hope that the accompanying gift of fish will be good for both the caesar's appetite and his spiritual health.[58]

A fourth letter of Theophylact (*Ep.* 37) reacts to the news of a death, but it can hardly be classed as a letter of consolation since the archbishop makes little attempt to console.[59] Addressing Symeon, his spiritual father and the new abbot of a monastery at Anaplous on the European shore of the Bosporos,[60] Theophylact expresses his pleasure at the death of

[55] *Théophylacte d'Achrida: Lettres,* ed. P. Gautier, CFHB 16.2 (Thessalonike, 1986).

[56] *Theophylact,* 138–44.

[57] Ibid., 143. Psellos is not otherwise known to have had a brother; for a discussion of the problem, see Gautier, *Théophylacte,* 113–15.

[58] Theophylact sent either fifty or five hundred fish. On an earlier occasion he had sent Melissenos two hundred salted fish (*Ep.* 13).

[59] Mullett indeed calls it "a celebration rather than a consolation" (*Theophylact,* 138).

[60] This may be the monastery of Philotheos; see Gautier, *Théophylacte,* 252 n. 1, and R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin,* vol. 1, *Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat œcuménique,* pt. 3, *Les églises et les monastères,* 2d ed. (Paris, 1969), 494.

his correspondent's spiritual father and predecessor, whose desire to become a hermit he found troubling. Here we can therefore see a critical type of honesty that rarely appears in such letters.

About half a century later Gregory, abbot of Oxeia, writes a letter of condolence to Alexios Komnenos Euphorbenos upon the death of his wife (*Ep.* 2).[61] Taking advantage of the letter to send both greeting and consolation, he quotes the Thirty-fifth Psalm to the effect that Alexios must put the fear of God before his eyes in accepting what has happened, which he finds terrible to say but which is necessary for his Majesty to hear. He reminds Alexios of his wife's sufferings and asks how he could wish her to suffer yet more on earth. There follows a rare element in Byzantine letters, a description, albeit brief, of the funeral, after which Gregory assures Alexios that his wife's soul is now in heaven and concludes with the hope that they may both attain the crown eternal. Despite his deference he is far blunter than Theophylact in the letter to the caesar Nikephoros Melissenos without approaching the peremptory tone of Nikolaos Mystikos's hard-hitting advice to Romanos I Lekapenos.[62]

There is a second letter of condolence by Gregory to a member of the imperial family (*Ep.* 5), in this case Theodora, the third daughter of John II Komnenos, who had lost her husband, the gloriously styled *Panhyperprotosebastohypertatos* Manuel Anemas. Every sinner who genuinely repents on his deathbed, Gregory begins, will be saved, and one who dies "in the angelic profession" of monasticism will be assuredly restored by God to the image of the Creator; but he adds delicately that he knows that letters of consolation can be as irritating to grieving spirits as "the softest cloth to an inflamed eye."[63] He proceeds to expatiate on man's tendency to think in human terms, and on the uncertainty of human life, which flows continually but not always calmly. Quoting the apostle Paul amid an avalanche of quotations, he reminds Theodora that suffering brings patience, and patience testing: "He who runs from the suffering runs from the testing."[64] She should not be distressed at what has happened, for Abraham, the prophets, and even Christ himself have all died. Our abbot ends with a lengthy apostrophe to the dead husband who now enjoys the numerous blessings of heaven and is himself blessed in the eyes of Gregory and his fellow monks for all his benefactions to them.

To conclude our selection, John Tzetzes provides a remarkable letter of condolence[65] addressed to Leo Charsianites upon the death of the latter's brother. In all types of Byzantine letters may biblical and classical allusions be found, appearing on their own, mixed together, or in separate sections (although letter-writers had the good taste and courtesy to indulge in classical allusions only in correspondence with those who had the learning to appreciate them).[66] In a truly Christian society, however, as Byzantium was, comfort

[61] "Les lettres de Grégoire, higoumène d'Oxia," ed. P. Gautier, *REB* 31 (1973): 203–27. On the identification of this Alexios Komnenos, see ibid., 206–8.

[62] Above, pp. 27–28.

[63] This is a quotation from the opening sentence of Basil's letter of condolence to the wife of Nektarios (*Ep.* 6; see below, note 89).

[64] Rom. 5:4.

[65] *Ep.* 38 in *Ioannis Tzetzae Epistulae,* ed. P. A. M. Leone (Leipzig, 1972).

[66] This can be seen best in the epistolary collections of churchmen, many of whose correspondents had little or no classical training; see further Mullett, "The Classical Tradition," 92, and A. R. Littlewood, "A Statistical Survey of the Incidence of Repeated Quotations in Selected Byzantine Letter-Writers," in Duffy

for the bereaved must be drawn largely from Christian convictions—yet this letter of Tzetzes is completely devoid of biblical allusions while at the same time drawing extensively on pagan writers, such as Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Plutarch, and Plato. Another remarkable feature of this letter is Tzetzes' justification of the immoderate grief with which, in traditional manner, he opens his letter. He tells the tale of Crassus who, when taunted by his political opponent L. Domitius Ahenobarbus for burying and mourning a pet moray eel, retorted that, though he had indeed done that, yet Domitius had buried three wives without a tear: if Crassus had thus bewailed a single eel, how could he, Tzetzes, not mourn a much greater loss?

While there appears to be no clear difference between the Macedonian and the Komnenian letters, our examples are sufficient to show that in both periods, despite a general compositional tripartite form of lamentation, consolation, and encouragement, there is yet a surprisingly wide range of subjects and tone that demonstrates remarkable *variatio* in a highly circumscribed subgenre.[67] Our surviving letters, of course, are not necessarily typical. They were written by, and largely for, members of the intelligentsia who delighted in their precious artistry. They were considered worthy of preservation, not in a desk drawer to be read over by some poor aged widow or mother hoping to recall the sympathy offered by her friends as she continued to grieve, but for their own inherent merit. They were sent mainly to men and kept, at least in part, as pieces of literary art, and perhaps read aloud to friends who admired them and desired copies—or how else should there be so many, and found so often in more than one manuscript? How effective, however, were these letters in their primary purpose, which is to console?

Unless we believe that Byzantine epistolographers were all Thespians indulging themselves in an enormous charade completely divorced from reality (and the only inference to be drawn from the remarks of some scholars is that they think that they were), we must accept the supposition that recipients delighted in receiving letters—there is assuredly an abundance, indeed a superabundance, not only of thanks for them but also of expressions of joy at them. One example must suffice. Symeon Metaphrastes writes to a friend: "When your letter reached me, these worries were dissipated like the shadows of dreams after awakening. When I got it into my hands, I loosed its fastenings and immediately looked at its length, just as the thirsty gaze at the size of the cup before drinking; then, slowly, dwelling on every syllable, I read it, prolonging for myself the pleasure and desiring not to stop the cause of my pleasure until I was satisfied. . . ."[68] Over the whole chronological range of Byzantine literature a letter was valued as a consolation for the absence of the writer;[69] how much more so, one must assume, was the letter that attempted to share the grief of the bereaved. And the fact that they were genuine

and Peradotto, *Gonimos* (as above, note 4), 149. The Byzantines similarly adapted their imagery, style, and, on occasion, even level of language to suit their correspondents; see Ljubarskij, *Mikhail Psell,* 72–74; I. Ševčenko, "Levels of Style in Byzantine Prose," *JÖB* 31.1 (1981): 307; and R. Anastasi, "Michele Psello al Metropolita di Euchaita ('Epist': 34 pp. 53–56 K.-D.)," *Studi di filologia bizantina* 4 (1988): 108–15.

[67] The mid-14th century can extend the range remarkably through a letter in which Nikephoros Gregoras, with tongue in cheek, consoles a friend over his beautiful, young wife, just recently wed but already unfaithful (*Ep.* 129 in *Correspondance de Nicéphore Grégoras,* ed. R. Guilland [Paris, 1927], 221–25 = *Ep.* 123 in *Nicephori Gregorae Epistulae,* ed. P. A. M. Leone [Matino, 1982], 2:318–20).

[68] *Ep.* 89 in Darrouzès, *Épistoliers byzantins,* 150. Darrouzès believed that the friend was Niketas of Smyrna.

[69] See in particular Karlsson, *Idéologie,* 45–47.

letters, written with the practical purpose of giving consolation to a specific individual and not simply as artistic variants on a set theme, is shown, I believe, both by the specific personal details that they contain and by the wide range of tone that they exhibit, including, as has been seen in the letter of Theophylact to his spiritual father, even pleasure.

Byzantine letters of consolation are, then, genuine letters actually sent to and, at least initially, intended for the bereaved.[70] Those that have survived, however, are all carefully written and to some extent depend upon the artifices of rhetoric. Rhetoric today has an opprobrious connotation for most people, but one must never forget that rhetorical devices are simply devices that speakers have found effective over the years and that frequently spring to the lips of even the unlettered when they are emotionally aroused. To a modern reader a highly literary letter of consolation would smack of insincerity; to a Byzantine a hastily bought sympathy card would demonstrate lack of true friendship. For a modern reader "it is the thought that counts"; for a Byzantine reader it is both the thought and the time and effort spent that count.

To begin, here is an example of the confidence that a writer has in his own rhetorical ability. In the late twelfth century Constantine Manasses opens a consolation to the recently widowed *sebastos* John Kontostephanos[71] in the following way: "I have come again[72] to mix another bowl for you, most noble lord. I have come to you as an orator, . . . not to tear open the wounds of your grief . . . but to restrain the anger and subdue the tumult of your soul . . . and soon this draught will seem to you to banish pain and allay your anger, more potent as it is than the drugs with which Helen sweetened the bowl of Telemachos." But does the reception of such compositions justify such confidence?

Of help here are three letters of Niketas Magistros,[73] which he wrote in the second quarter of the tenth century. With the first (*Ep.* 1) he informs the *protasekretis* Gregory of the death of an unknown *magistros*. To modern ears it sounds as little more than a rhetorically composed lament, lacking personal applicability to the recipient. In his reply Gregory may have offered commiseration, but in any case he indubitably eulogized his correspondent's style, for Niketas's second letter (*Ep.* 3), which is itself replete with allusions to Homer, expresses his delight at compliments received: "Thrilled by my letter more than the young son of Philip was by Lysippos's painting, you exalt me by your praises and write that those who read it are more eager to approach my guiding rudder than those who listened to the lyre of Arion and were charmed by his songs." He proceeds to aver that his letter was not a literary exercise written for display but a genuine expression of his feelings, on which he expatiates for some lines. Although it could be argued that Niketas was not emotionally traumatized by this death, since the deceased was not

[70] Not only do all these letters easily fall within the Byzantine *metron* of a letter, but their comparative brevity indicates that they could have been written fairly soon after receipt of news of the death (although, of course, that alone cannot prove that they actually were). They are thus very different from Plutarch's letter of condolence to Apollonios (*Moralia* 101F–22A), which is really a treatise that must have taken many days to compose. His letter of condolence to his wife on hearing of the death of their daughter Timoxena (*Moralia* 608B–12B) is perhaps just short enough to be a genuine letter, although it is hard to believe that his wife could have found any solace in it at all.

[71] "Dva proizvedenija Konstantina Manassi, otnosjashchiesja k smerti Theodori Kontostefanini," ed. E. Kurtz, *VizVrem* 7 (1900): 636–45.

[72] Constantine had previously composed a more public monody (ibid., 630–35).

[73] *Nicétas Magistros: Lettres d'un exilé (928–946),* ed. L. G. Westerink (Paris, 1973).

a relative, he does claim that the *magistros* was a "second father" to him; and our third letter (*Ep.* 12) concerns the death of his own son. This is addressed to his friend John the Patrician, who had heard of the death by means of a letter from a third party, a certain Rhodophylles, whose excessive rhetoric John had clearly found distasteful. "You have criticized the letter of Rhodophylles," writes Niketas, "and not only ridiculed him for having played the tragedian with his laments of Hekuba, but reproached me too, the old man wasted away by his great grief. . . ." His subsequent long and rhetorical threnody, which abounds in classical allusions, serves both to emphasize his point made in the letter to Gregory and to remind us that for a Byzantine rhetoric and emotion were not incompatible.[74] Further support may be found in Michael Italikos's claim[75] that, despite the fact that he is unconsolable at the death of his friend Constantine Hagiotheodorites, he is still grateful to his brother for a letter of consolation whose composition, rhythms, and beauty of diction have made him more cheerful. The bereaved today may take pleasure in the picture on the card of sympathy and still grieve; the Byzantine could clearly take pleasure in the artistry of the letter and still grieve.

Allusions and quotations themselves are not necessarily mere padding and decoration. It is extremely rare for them not to be entirely apposite,[76] and it is surprising, given the narrow scope of paramythetic quotations, how many different ones authors manage to find—even references to Job are usually to different passages. In the twenty letters of consolation mentioned above,[77] their respective editors have identified 143 different quotations and allusions;[78] of these only four are used by two writers, two by three, and none by more than three,[79] although Photios does twice use the same passage.[80] We may thus infer that the writers depended upon their own memory rather than delved into a handbook of quotations (that is rather a modern vice; if every Byzantine writer had his

[74] Nevertheless, one may wonder how often a Byzantine played the precious game simply in order not to be excluded from the small circle of *literati.* Symeon Metaphrastes revealingly condemns rhetoric on the grounds not of emotion but of intelligibility when he informs a bishop that if he had intended his letter to be obscure he had assuredly succeeded (*Ep.* 94 in Darrouzès, *Épistoliers byzantins,* 154–55).

[75] *Op.* 4 in *Michel Italikos: Lettres et Discours,* ed. P. Gautier (Paris, 1972), 89–91.

[76] Nikolaos Mystikos criticizes the Bulgar khan Symeon on two different occasions for what he believes are inapposite quotations (*Ep.* 21, ll. 105–12; *Ep.* 25, ll. 67–72).

[77] To the nineteen letters summarized above (excluding the letters of Anonymus Londiniensis and Niketas Magistros) I have added the lengthy consolation of Constantine Manasses (above, p. 34).

[78] I have added four quotations from the consolation of the anonymous *protonotarios,* since the edition is without *apparatus fontium,* and one that was missed by Gautier from the letter of Gregory of Oxeia (*Ep. 5,* ll. 12–13), which is interesting in that, of all the quotations, it alone is taken from an earlier letter of consolation (see above, p. 32 and note 63).

[79] Homer *Odyssey* 4.220–21 is quoted by Arethas, the anonymous *protonotarios,* and Manasses; Phil. 1:23 is quoted by Theophylact, Gregory of Oxeia, and Manasses; 2 Kings 12:15–23 is summarized by Photios and alluded to by Nikolaos Mystikos; Isa. 35:10 (= 51:11) is quoted by Photios and Gregory; 2 Cor. 12:2 is quoted by Manasses and alluded to by Photios; 1 Thess. 4:13 is quoted by Photios and, with the subsequent four verses, referred to by Arethas. Of the 143 passages, 57 are from seventeen books of the Old Testament, 39 from fourteen books of the New Testament, 45 from twenty-three pagan authors, and just 2 from church fathers (Gregory quotes Basil, and Manasses perhaps alludes to a passage in the funeral oration by Gregory of Nazianzos for his brother Kaisarios).

[80] In one instance, he accurately quotes the famous words of John 11:25 (ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμέ, κἂν ἀποθάνῃ, ζήσεται) in two different letters (*Ep.* 234, l. 157, and *Ep.* 245, l. 116); the other instance should perhaps not be counted since it is simply a combination of a quotation and an allusion to Matt. 9:15 in the same letter (*Ep.* 245, ll. 119–20 and 102).

book of commonplaces at hand, we should expect an abundance of such manuscripts, but they are in fact rare).[81] Photios opens his letter to Tarasios with a call for Elijah and his other resurrectionary colleagues from the Bible before proceeding to a plethora of quotations. He was on good terms with his brother; is one to believe that in a letter of consolation he wishes to distress his brother with superfluous scholarship and insincere rhetoric?[82]

Finally, let us briefly examine Byzantine letters of consolation in terms of the needs of the bereaved as indicated by modern psychology and psychiatry.[83] Here we must bear in mind four things. First, the Byzantines were probably better able to cope with loss than are citizens of the so-called developed world today. Death, because of its irremediable finality, is always a shock, even if it has been expected throughout a lingering illness and even when it has perhaps been hoped for to terminate pain or a vegetal state. Never-

[81] Although there are about forty manuscripts of tags from Menander the Comedian, the compilation of Stobaios and collections of riddles were not commonly employed by epistolographers. The best-known individual collection of extracts is probably that in Cod. Heidelb. Palat. gr. 129, long attributed to Maximos Planoudes but ascribed to Nikephoros Gregoras by A. Biedl ("Der Heidelberger *Cod. Pal. Gr.* 129—eine Notizensammlung eines byzantinischen Gelehrten," *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft* 3 [1948]: 100–106), an attribution corroborated by I. Ševčenko's claim that the hand is that of Gregoras himself ("Some Autographs of Nicephorus Gregoras," *ZRVI* 8.2 [1964]: 447–50). For a more detailed discussion of the use of quotations, see Littlewood, "A Statistical Survey," 137–54.

[82] Moreover, in the Zeitgeist of Byzantium a desire for the skill of the prophets and the apostles was perhaps not as far-fetched as it would be in the Western world today. One only has to recollect the rumor that through the necromancy of Photios's friend Theodore of Euchaïta the deranged emperor Basil was able to embrace the phantom of his dead son Constantine—and that in the Orthodox world of the 20th century, if one can believe Nikos Kazantzakis (Ἀναφορὰ στὸν Γρέκο, chap. 19), the poet Angelos Sikelianos expended his strength in a valiant but anguishingly frustrated attempt to raise a corpse from the dead by stretching his own body over it all night and breathing into its mouth, just as Elisha had done.

[83] Although the modern study of grief may be said to have its beginning with Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy,* which was first published in 1621 (with the final edition in 1651/2), proper scientific examination of the matter really began with Josef Breuer's investigations into the mental health of Anna O., a young woman disturbed by the terminal illness and subsequent death of her father. These researches, which began in 1881, were eventually made public in 1893 in the short but founding study of modern psychoanalysis, Breuer's and Sigmund Freud's "Über den psychischen Mechanismus hysterischer Phänomene: Vorläufige Mitteilung," *Wiener medizinische Presse* 3 (1893): 121–26, 165–67 (more accessible in the collected *Studienausgabe* [Frankfurt am Main, 1971], 6:13–24). Although subsequently Freud published in 1917 his brief "Trauer und Melancholie," *Internationale Zeitschrift für ärztliche Psychoanalyse* 4:288–301 (more accessible in *Studienausgabe* [Frankfurt am Main, 1975], 3:197–212), and M. Klein in 1940 her "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic Depressive States," *The International Journal of Psycho-analysis* 21:125–53, almost no interest was taken in the *normal* person's reaction to death until an address by Pope Pius XII to the World Union of Family Organizations at Castel Gandolfo in 1957. Welcoming greater care for widows, he claimed that this was a "sujet auquel jusqu'ici on n'a pas prêté assez d'attention, en partie à cause de l'impuissance même où se trouvent ces foyers sur le plan de l'action sociale" (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 49, ser. 2.24 [1957]: 899). The last twenty-five years have seen a substantial body of work on the subject of bereavement. To the layman the most sound and useful treatments seem to be Y. Spiegel, *Der Prozess des Trauerns: Analyse und Beratung* (Munich, 1973); J. Schneider, *Stress, Loss, and Grief: Understanding Their Origins and Growth Potential* (Baltimore, Md., 1984); D. Klass, *Parental Grief: Solace and Resolution* (New York, 1988); C. M. Sanders, *Grief: The Mourning After. Dealing with Adult Bereavement* (New York, 1989); G. H. Pollock, *The Mourning-Liberation Process,* 2 vols. (Madison, Wisc., 1989); and especially B. Raphael, *The Anatomy of Bereavement* (New York, 1983), and C. M. Parkes, *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life,* 2d ed. (London–New York, 1986). I am grateful to the late Alexander Kazhdan for pointing out to me that one of the most perceptive psychological studies of mourning appears in Thomas Mann's novel *Joseph und seine Brüder* (Frankfurt am Main, 1962), esp. chap. 7, "Der Zerrissene" of *Der Junge Joseph.*

theless, in his everyday life a Byzantine was usually far more aware of the possibility of death than is modern man with his trust in modern medicine.[84] This is especially true in the case of children: Byzantine parents, due to the high mortality rate of children, were, if not resigned to, at least unsurprised by losing half or even more of their children; parents of today rarely contemplate the chance of losing a single child.[85] Second, although most people even today can cope with their grief aided only by family and friends, psychiatric textbooks are primarily concerned with the small percentage of those who cannot; and most of the case studies are of women rather than men, since the former more frequently survive their spouses. Third, grief is a process, not a state. We do not know exactly how soon after a death any particular letter reached its recipient, and therefore we do not know at what stage of his grief he was and what, consequently, were his needs. Moreover, letters are not winged words but permanent records of sympathy designed to give comfort long after their initial reading, and they should therefore be suitable not only for early but also for later stages of grieving, and indeed for the whole long period that should follow its resolution. Fourth, the emphasis of modern psychiatric counseling is on listening. Although at least since the time of Artemon, the editor of Aristotle's letters, it had been considered that "a letter should be written like a conversation since it is like one half of a conversation,"[86] it is still only half, and, despite the possibility of a reply that not only expresses thanks but also details the feelings of the bereaved, the letter must necessarily be at a great disadvantage in comparison with a genuine dialogue.

All modern authorities emphasize that there are stages in the grieving and healing process,[87] though they disagree on certain particulars and even on the number of stages

[84]The still scanty evidence for the life expectancy of the Byzantines is summarized by A.-M. Talbot in "Old Age in Byzantium," *BZ* 77 (1984): 267–78. She concludes that "for most Byzantines life was cut short, in youth or middle age" (ibid., 269). There is as yet little evidence from skeletal remains, but the samples that have been published, from different periods and different areas of the empire, suggest that the mean age of death for adults (reports define adults as those surviving to either 15 or 17.5 years) was around 35 for men and some five or six years fewer for women. Epigraphers concur in calculating "that only half the adult Byzantine population reached the age of 35" (ibid., 268). In the capital itself, Talbot quotes two surveys of skeletal remains, one giving an average age at death of 28 to 29 years from a sample of seventy-six individuals in a 12th-century cemetery at Saraçhane (the church of St. Polyeuktos), and the other, surprisingly different, of 46.2 years for men and 37.3 for women from Kalenderhane (ibid., 267). See further E. Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance, 4e–7e siècles* (Paris–The Hague, 1977), 73–112. As may be expected, however, the situation is not the same with the educated upper class, to which all the writers and recipients of our letters of condolence belong. Talbot cites Kazhdan's figures of 62 years as the average age at death for a group of thirteen authors (Greek and Latin) from the 6th century, and 71 years for another group of fifteen from the late 11th and 12th centuries (A. P. Kazhdan, "Two Notes on Byzantine Demography of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," *ByzF* 8 [1982]: 117), as well as her own finding of 67.3 years for the *literati* of the Palaiologan period (ibid., 269).

[85]Modern North American cards of condolence, like other types of cards from that continent, aim to save the purchaser from the toil of writing anything but a signature and in consequence specify the relationship of the deceased to the bereaved. It is, therefore, worthy of note that although cards are frequently designed to give solace for a lost father, mother, grandfather, or grandmother (or even pet), I have never seen one for a son, daughter, child, or baby (but one well-known maker did announce in early 1998 that it was now commercially viable to produce cards of sympathy for a death by suicide).

[86]Demetrius *De elocutione* 223. See further Karlsson, *Idéologie,* 34–45.

[87]This is often presented as if it were a modern discovery, but it was understood, even if not closely analyzed, by ancient writers (e.g., Seneca *Consolatio ad Marciam* 1.8; Pliny *Ep.* 5.16.10–11; Plutarch *Moralia* 102A).

(from three to six; for the following comments I have arbitrarily concluded that there are four distinguishable stages). The first stage is that of shock, characterized by disbelief, numbness, confusion, alarm, and tears, and in the normal person this tends to end soon after the funeral. A letter would arrive, therefore, sometime toward the end of this phase or, probably more frequently, a little after; and, as already concluded, the actual shock to a Byzantine was probably less than it is nowadays since he was far more accustomed to the ever imminent possibility of death. For both of these reasons a Byzantine letter had less need to deal with many of the reactions mentioned by psychologists and psychiatrists. One element, however, is outstanding. Almost all letter writers realized the psychological benefit of giving way to tears[88] and opened their letters with either an encouragement to cry or sympathetic laments of their own. This is particularly notable in that most of the recipients were male rather than female,[89] for—despite the tradition of heroic crying first found in Homer[90] whose warriors cry with as much gusto as they fight—tears were still often considered somewhat more womanly than manly in both ancient Greece and Byzantium.[91] Today, especially in northern Europe, valiant attempts to stifle tears are frequent, but these attempts, especially if they are successful, tend merely to postpone, sometimes indefinitely, the process of healing. Modern scientific theory here corroborates the intuitive understanding of Byzantine (and classical) letter writers.[92]

[88] There existed even the separate genres θρῆνος and μονῳδία that were devoted to lamentation (see Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*).

[89] Outside the chronological bounds of this survey are two letters of St. Basil (*Epp.* 5 and 6) that, even with allowance made for the different personalities of the recipients, reveal something of what Basil considered the needs of men and women to be, since they are addressed respectively to Nektarios (probably the future Constantinopolitan patriarch) and his wife on the death of their son.

[90] See H. Monsacré, *Les larmes d'Achille* (Paris, 1984), esp. 137–57. Edward Gibbon makes a sardonic comment about the Crusaders' propensity to give way to tears: "A reader of Villehardouin must observe the frequent tears of the marshall and his brother knights. . . . They weep on every occasion of grief, joy, or devotion." (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* ed. J. B. Bury [London, 1912], 6:400 n. 49.)

[91] On Byzantine display of grief, see J. Kyriakakis, "Byzantine Burial Customs: Care of the Deceased from Death to the Prothesis," *GOTR* 19 (1974): 37–72; D. Abrahamse, "Rituals of Death in the Middle Byzantine Period," *GOTR* 29 (1984): 125–34; and H. Maguire, "The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art," *DOP* 31 (1977): 123–74. Christian teaching seems gradually to have curbed, if not eradicated, the excessive wailing of antiquity, against which the early church fathers frequently inveigh. St. Basil thus decrees in his homily *De Gratiarum Actione:* "Therefore neither men nor women should be permitted too much lamentation and mourning. They should show moderate distress in their affliction, with only a few tears, shed quietly and without moaning, wailing, tearing of clothes and grovelling in the dust, or committing any other indecency commonly practised by the ungodly" (PG 31:229C, trans. in Alexiou, *Ritual Lament,* 28; see further her second chapter, "From Paganism to Christianity," ibid., 24–35).

[92] This intuitive understanding is, of course, widespread among many disparate cultures. An outstanding example is that of the Huli in the Southern Highlands of Papua, whose women have, for therapeutic purposes, a *duguanda* or "crying-house" in which those close to the deceased even sleep for several weeks after the funeral (S. Frankel and D. Smith, "Conjugal Bereavement amongst the Huli People of Papua New Guinea," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 141 [1982]: 303). Parkes claims that this need to cry was recognized by Pius XII: "The encyclical [*sic*] of Pope Pius XII delivered in September 1957 to the World Federation of Family Organizations points out that there is nothing ignoble in tears and that the widow should withdraw from the activities of the world for a 'reasonable period of mourning'" (*Bereavement,* 180, n. 1). Unfortunately, the pope says no such thing either in his address to that organization or in any encyclical, although in the former he does compassionately mention the widow's "douleur ineffaçable" and "l'angoisse qui l'enserre comme d'une infranchissable muraille" (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 49:900). It is worth noting that Menander Rhetor, in his formulation for funeral orations, says that those delivered soon after the death should open with lamentations that should be "fully worked out," whereas those delivered much later should be merely enco-

The second phase of grieving is one of awareness of the loss and is generally marked by yearning, anger, and frustration. It is at this phase, we may perhaps assume, that most letters arrive, especially if they had to travel a long distance.[93] The love and yearning of the bereaved for the deceased are frequently mentioned; sometimes, as in the case of Manasses' letter to John Kontostephanos,[94] they are ennobled by being presented as a final gift to the deceased wife who has not herself been left to mourn a dead husband. The second feeling, anger,[95] is today generally directed at doctors and nurses[96] who, it is believed, could have saved the beloved if they had been more competent. Lacking the modern delusion in the paramountcy of medicine, the Byzantine tended to blame God.[97] If one can rely on our letters, this trait was especially feminine, Nikolaos Mystikos even believing[98] that her own prior death saved Romanos's wife from the possible blasphemy in both words and deeds that she might have committed had she been the one widowed. Nevertheless, men too were resentful, and our writers argue that this is improper because it is contrary to the wishes of God, and that the deceased has now escaped the pain of illness here, or, if there has been no sickness, simply the troubles of earthly life and that he or she must consequently be better off in heaven. The bereaved should, therefore, accept the will of God, be happy for the deceased, and, despite the pain, not be broken-hearted.[99] The third diagnostic feeling at this stage, which is the frustration that many bereaved feel today at their inability to cope with daily life, plays only a small role in Byzantine letters, perhaps partly because it may have been considered a little insulting, especially if addressed to men.

As already noted, psychiatrists always emphasize that anyone counseling the bereaved must primarily be a good listener, especially at the first and the second stages of mourn-

mia except when the speaker is closely related to the deceased, for "memory does not grant him relief from sorrow even after a year" (Russell and Wilson, *Menander Rhetor,* 2.11, pp. 172–74). Wagner, not comprehending psychological needs, finds an "inconsistency" in "the first part of the funeral speech which sought to heighten the grief and the second part which endeavored to allay it" ("A Chapter," 160 n. 134).

[93] See above (p. 22) where I suggest that these letters may usually have been sent only when absence made oral consolation impossible. The time taken for the news of a death to reach the writer may also have been frequently greater than the time taken for the letter to reach its destination.

[94] Above, note 71.

[95] As with lamentation, anger's repression in grief is considered harmful; see D. C. Maddison and W. L. Walker, "Factors Affecting the Outcome of Conjugal Bereavement," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 113 (1967): 1057–67. However, no Byzantine letter writer, to my knowledge, encourages the expression of anger. For a general study of anger and its practical outlet in aggression, see K. Lorenz, *Das sogenannte Böse: Zur Naturgeschichte der Aggression* (Vienna, 1963). Lorenz demonstrates how deep-rooted this emotion is in humans in comparison with other animals, a connection first seriously studied, in a much larger context, by Charles Darwin in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London, 1872).

[96] And, in cases of widows and widowers, anger can even be directed at the deceased for abandoning the spouse.

[97] This is not uncommon even today; see Parkes, *Bereavement,* 100. Thomas Mann's Jacob indulges in a particularly complex expostulation against his God who "nicht Schritt gehalten hat in der Heiligung" since "er im Übermut umbringt die Frommen und Bösen" (*Joseph und seine Brüder,* 1:644).

[98] *Ep.* 156.

[99] The complaint of a broken heart is not just romantic fiction but is medically verifiable: three-quarters of the increase in mortality in the first six months of bereavement are attributable to coronary thrombosis and arteriosclerotic cardiac disease; see Parkes, *Bereavement,* 34–49, 214–16 with extensive bibliography. Parkes notes (ibid., 34) that in Doctor Heberden's Bill classifying the 1,357 deaths in London in 1657 ten are attributable to "Griefe."

ing. Although this is clearly impossible for a letter-writer, it is worth noting that he may be trying to compensate for this lack by writing about what he assumes the bereaved is feeling, and therefore emphasizing the sense of loss and sympathetically sharing it when he too knew the deceased. The bereaved is thus in a sense himself telling the writer his own grief. Eulogy comes in here too,[100] although modern psychiatrists, worried as they are by excessive attachment to the deceased in abnormal cases, tend not to consider its comforting aspects to the healthy.

The third phase is often one of withdrawal,[101] and here the Byzantine epistolographer helps the bereaved to move into the fourth phase, that of healing, by giving him a purpose in life—he must be worthy of the deceased. Further help in this direction would be given in subsequent letters that did not allude to the death but took the recipient's mind away from it by dealing with other subjects. Rarely, however, can we date letters so precisely as to know which were sent within the few weeks following the letter of sympathy. Nonetheless, there is one brief letter from the tenth century that is of significance in this context: Leo of Synada[102] thanks his correspondent for his letter of sympathy but now asks for something "bright and gay (χαροπόν τι καὶ χαρμόσυνον) so that I may know that you are cheering me up with your letters."

The single major difference between the underlying ideas of Byzantine epistolary consolation and the standard modern therapeutic approach is the latter's affective, rather than cognitive, emphasis. Effective psychotherapy, according to Carl Rogers, demands on the part of the healer empathy, genuineness, and an "unconditional positive regard" for a client.[103] "Rogerian" psychotherapy, though a general methodology not specifically developed for bereavement, is employed today by an overwhelming majority of clinicians. The uncritically sympathetic understanding and sharing of emotional suffering, which are the staple ingredients of the wording of modern cards of condolence, are thus in line with medical practice. This affective element is also, of course, found frequently in Byzantine letters, but there it is usually balanced, overshadowed, and occasionally even obliterated by a cognitive emphasis, which is realized in the demand for changes in thinking: the Byzantine writer attempts to wrest the bereaved from an absorption in self-pity by stressing theological and other implications. Herein the Byzantines foreshadow the

[100]The role of eulogy is, however, generally not great in letters, since it more properly belongs to other funerary genres, such as the ἐπιτάφιος λόγος.

[101]This is exacerbated today by a tendency to shun the widow, sadly mentioned by Pius XII (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 49:899) and constantly addressed in modern treatments of bereavement. It has, however, little part in Byzantine letters, probably because widows, if they did not enter a monastery, still had an important role to play within their own families.

[102]*Ep.* 38 in *The Correspondence of Leo, Metropolitan of Synada and Syncellus,* ed. M. P. Vinson, CFHB 23 (Washington, D.C., 1985), 62.

[103]"[Optimal therapy] would mean that the therapist feels this client to be a person of unconditional self-worth: of value no matter what his condition, his behavior, or his feelings. It would mean that the therapist is genuine, hiding behind no defensive façade, but meeting the client with the feelings which organically he is experiencing. It would mean that the therapist is able to let himself go in understanding this client; that no inner barriers keep him from sensing what it feels like to be the client at each moment of the relationship; and that he can convey something of his empathic understanding to the client. It means that the therapist has been comfortable in entering this relationship fully, without knowing cognitively where it will lead, satisfied with providing a climate which will permit the client utmost freedom to become himself." (C. R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* [Boston, 1961], 185; see also esp. 47–48, 283–84.)

psychotherapeutical theory of Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck, which is still not widely accepted and has not yet been applied, at least to any appreciable extent, in "grief-counseling." This theory holds that, since distress is the result of disordered thinking, the inappropriate emotional responses engendered by such thinking can be countered by diverting the patient into new lines of thought.[104] Did the Byzantines instinctively feel that their insistence on challenging the bereaved to direct their minds to what they believed were appropriate thoughts would the more swiftly allay feelings of grief? Another controversial modern theory, that of Martin Seligman, teaches that a major reason for depression, which is a condition akin to that of grief, is the patient's belief that no actions taken by him can have any effect upon his life, a misapprehension that can be remedied only by encouraging him to bestir himself and thus disprove it by becoming again "an effective human being."[105] According to this theory, the Byzantine letter writers, by urging not only new mental activity but also new actions in the form of exemplary behavior, would again be materially aiding the bereaved to overcome their grief.

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[104] "The depressed . . . individual has certain idiosyncratic cognitive patterns . . . which may become activated either by specific stresses impinging on specific vulnerabilities or by overwhelming, nonspecific stresses. . . . Cognitive psychotherapy may be used symptomatically during depressions to help the patient gain objectivity toward his automatic reactions and counteract them." (A. T. Beck, *Depression: Causes and Treatment* [Philadelphia, 1970], 318; see further esp. 228–40, 253–73; and also A. Ellis, *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy* [New York, 1962], 105–6.)

[105] M. E. P. Seligman, *Helplessness: On Depression, Development, and Death* (San Francisco, 1975), 100 (cf. p. 105: "The central goal of therapy for depression . . . is the patient's regaining his belief that he can control events important to him").