

**PSellos' EARLY CAREER AT COURT:  
A SECRETIS AND PROTOASECRETIS  
(1034–1042)**

Michael Psellos (1018–1081?) altered his past according to present circumstances. It is agreed that he liked to speak about himself<sup>1</sup>, though not much attention has been drawn to the fact that he is vague about the beginning of his career at court<sup>2</sup>. P. V. Bezobrazov (1859–1918) defined a sequence of events for his early career which has not been substantially altered<sup>3</sup>. Psellos characteristically goes beyond a simple factual reconstruction and reveals an interpretation for his own life. Two contradictory statements in the *Chronographia* allow one to establish his own view about his early career and incidentally clarify the compositional strata of his chief history<sup>4</sup>.

Both passages (*Chronographia* V.27 and VIIa.7) mention that Psellos arrived at court as a *hypogrammateus*. The tenth century encyclopaedia, the *Souda*, informs us that this was an alternative name for a notary<sup>5</sup>. Thus it would seem that Psellos was actually a *notarios*, though he never uses the term in the *Chronographia* and employs it rarely in other works<sup>6</sup>. The main exception is in poem 16 where he addresses the emperor to obtain the position of *notarios* at court<sup>7</sup>. The poem was written before Psellos had a position at court<sup>8</sup>. He had probably gone through the ceremony described by Christopher of Mytilene's poem<sup>9</sup> and had been accepted

<sup>1</sup> See Každan life of Saint Auxentios. A. Každan, "Hagiographical notes (1–4). 3. An attempt at Haghio-Autobiography: the Pseudo-Life of 'Saint' Psellus?" *Byz* 53 (1983) 538–558 in *Alexander Kazhdan. Authors and Texts in Byzantium*, Aldershot and Brookfield, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Monographs which deal with the problem are the following: Ja. N. Ljubarskij, *Dve Knige o Mihail Pselle*, Sankt Petersburg 2001, P. V. Bezobrazov, *Vizantiskij pisatel i gosudarstvenij dejatel in Ljubarskij* (2001), Ljubarskij, *Ličnost i tvorčestvo Mihail Psella*, in Ljubarskij (2001), Greek translation of the latter book is Ljubarskij, *He propositoteta kai to ergo tou Mihael Psellou*, Athens, 2004, Chr. Zervos *Un Philosophe Néoplatonien du XIe siècle Michel Psellos*, Paris, 1920. Of course the internet project of the Prosopography of the Byzantine World ([www.pbw.kcl.ac.uk](http://www.pbw.kcl.ac.uk)) based at King's College London is invaluable source of information for the life of Psellos.

<sup>3</sup> Bezobrazov in Ljubarskij (2001) 19–20. More detailed in Ljubarskij (2001) 216, Ljubarskij (2004), 44–45.

<sup>4</sup> The edition of the *Chronographia* used is that of Impellizzeri *Imperatori di Bisanzio, La Cronografia di Michele Psello*, Milan 1984. Corrections are to be found in J.C. Riedinger "Remarques sur le texte de la Chronographie de Michel Psellos", *REB* 63, 2005, 97–126. For a bibliography one must now turn to T. Moore, *Iter Psellianum*, Toronto, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> *Νοτάριος · ὁ γραμματεὺς. νότα γὰρ τὰ γράμματα. Ῥωμαῖσι ὁ ὑπογραφεύς.* (Suda № 505.1–2). N. Oikonomidès, *Les listes de présence byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles*, Paris, 1972.

<sup>6</sup> In the TLG cd version one could find only the following four references: Orat. For. 4.60; Orat Min 16.11,16, Poem. 16.17. Though not a complete survey, it is indicative of a trend.

<sup>7</sup> Westerink *Michael Pselli Poemata*, Leipzig, 1992, 16, See Moore [1068] Poe. 16 Translated in appendix.

<sup>8</sup> Ljubarskij (2001) 216, Ljubarskij (2004) 45.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher of Mytilene poem 136 in E. Kurtz, *Die Gedichte*, Leipzig, 1903.

as part of the guild of notaries under the rules described in the book of the eparch<sup>10</sup>. This framework should be supplied with a date in order to understand the circumstances of his promotion and to see what sort of emperor Psellos thought he could successfully address as well as to understand who would promote a cultured and talented young man.

In the first passage, when describing the riot which broke out and eventually deposed Michael V Kalaphates (1041–1042), Psellos says:

*Ἐκαστος γοῦν τῶν πάντων καθώπλιστο, ὁ μὲν πέλεκυν διηγκαλισμένος, ὁ δὲ ῥομφαίαν τινὰ κραδαίνων τῇ χειρὶ βαρυσίδηρον, ἕτερος δὲ τόξον μετακεχειριστο καὶ ἄλλος δόρυ, ὁ δὲ πολὺς ὄχλος, τῶν ἀδροτέρων λίθων τοὺς μὲν κολπωσάμενοι, τοὺς δ' ἐν χεροῖν ἔχοντες, ἀτακτότερον ἔθειον. Ἐγὼ γοῦν τηνικαῦτα πρὸ τῶν βασιλείων εἰστήκειν εἰσόδων, πόρρωθεν ὑπογραμματεύων τῷ βασιλεὶ καὶ ἄρτι μεμνημένος τὰ προεισόδια· καὶ με εἶχεν ἢ ἔξω στοὰ γρα φάσ τινας τῶν μυστικωτέρων ὑπαγορευόντα· ἀθρόον δὲ βοή τις ἡμῖν προσβάλλει ὡσπερ ἱππόκροτος καὶ διέσεισε τὰς τῶν πολλῶν ὁ ἦχος ψυχάς· ἔπειτά τις ἦκεν ἀγγέλλον, ὡς ὁ δῆμος ἅπας ἐπὶ τὸν βασιλέα κενίηται καὶ ὡσπερ ὕφ' ἐνὶ συνθήματι πρὸς τὴν αὐτὴν γνώμην συνείλεται. (Psellos, *Chronographia* 5.27.1–13 Impellizzeri).*

*Everyone was armed. One was handling an axe, another was brandishing a heavy iron sword with his hand, another was holding an arrow and another a spear. The majority of the crowd were running without any order, some had placed rather large rocks in the folds of their robes, others were holding them with their hands. At that time I was standing in front of the entrance of the imperial palace, I was a secretary for the emperor since a while back and recently I had been admitted to the vestibule. I was under the outside porch and was dictating some rather secret documents. Suddenly an outcry reached us as the sound of galloping horses and its echo shook the hearts of many. A messenger arrived saying that the whole citizen body was moving to the imperial palace and was gathered as if in unison and with the same aim.*

This personal digression introduces the lively description of Psellos' galloping to the Studios monastery and seeing the emperor Michael V Kalaphates being blinded<sup>11</sup>. The author clearly states in these few lines that he was a *hypogrammateus* (*notarios*) at this time, under Michael V Kalaphates. Later in the *Chronographia*, when discussing the reign of Constantine X Doukas (1059–1067), Psellos contradicts himself. He claims that he was made a *hypogrammateus* (*notarios*) under Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055):

*ἀνάγει με ὁ λόγος εἰς τὰ βασίλεια καὶ ὑπογραμματεύειν ἐδίδου τῷ βασιλεὶ, Κωνσταντῖνος δὲ οὗτος ἦν τοῦ τῶν Μονομάχων γένους ὡς ἀληθῶς τὸ κεφάλαιον, ἔτος δὲ μοι τῆς ἡλικίας πέμπτου ἐπὶ τοῖς εἴκοσι ἦν. (Psellos *Chronographia* 7a.11–15 Impellizzeri).*

*Culture elevated me to the imperial court and made me become secretary to the emperor. This Constantine of the Monomachos family was the true beginning. I was twenty four years of age.*

<sup>10</sup> Book of Eparch edited by Sjuzumov, *Vizantiskaja Kniga Eparha*, Moscow 1962, 72–76, J. Koder, *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen*, Vienna, 1991, 74–84.

<sup>11</sup> *αὐτίκα τὸν ἵππον ἀναβάς διὰ μέσης ἦεν τῆς Πόλεως καὶ γε τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῖς ἐωράκειν περὶ ὧν νῦν ἔπεισί μοι ἀμφισβητεῖν* (Psellos *Chronographia* 5.27.18–20 Impellizzeri).

Psellos cannot mean that he had been merely a secretary under Michael V Kalaphates and then promoted under Constantine IX Monomachos since both passages specify that he was *ὑπογραμματεὺς τῷ βασιλεῖ*, notary for the emperor<sup>12</sup>.

The two passages offer an insight into the development of Psellos' mind precisely because they are contradictory. The reason for the discrepancy is that book five and seven were composed at different times and for different reasons<sup>13</sup>. Thus his first account is due to the fact that some of Psellos' audience viewed Constantine IX Monomachos negatively at the time of writing. In the second account the same emperor is well considered reflecting a later date of composition. As Psellos explains he went to live in the Doukas household at the behest of Constantine IX Monomachos<sup>14</sup>. This would imply that the future emperor Constantine X Doukas had a positive view of that emperor. This confirms the idea that the whole of book seven was written while a Doukas emperor was in power, namely during the period 1059–1078<sup>15</sup>. However it also implies that book five was written earlier when the memory of Constantine IX Monomachos was not positive. It would seem that it could have been written during the time after the death of Constantine IX Monomachos and before the reign of Constantine X Doukas namely under the reign of Isaac I Comnenos (1056–1059). A negative view of Constantine IX Monomachos is adopted also in book six which is written specifically about him<sup>16</sup>. Therefore it would seem that this book was written in Comnenian times as well, as seems confirmed by the following letter addressed to Machetarios and where the time of writing is placed during the reign of Isaac I Comnenos:

*Ἐγὼ δὲ μὰ τὴν ἀγαθὴν σοῦ ψυχὴν, Χρονογραφίαν συντάττων καὶ μεμνήμενος γενναίων ἀνδρῶν ἐν τοῖς πρώτοις σε τέθεικα ὡς μεγαλόφρονα ὡς ὑψηλόνοον ὡς πεπαρρησιασμένον ὡς φίλον ἐμοὶ· ἀλλὰ νῦν τί ποιήσω; Γράψω τὰ ἐνάντια; οὐ μὰ τὴν φιλίαν ἡμῶν, κὰν πλέον ὑβρίσης, κὰν τῦψης, κὰν ἄλλο τι ποιήσης τῶν δεινοτέρων· ἀλλ' εἰ βούλει, καὶ τὰς ἐμὰς χεῖρας δεσμήσω σοι, καὶ προσκυνήσω δουλικὸν καὶ βαθύ· μόνον, ἀδελφε, μὴ δυσχέραινη ἐφ' οἷς μὲ τετίμηκεν ὁ μέγας Ἰσαάκιος καὶ πάντων βασιλέων ὑπέρτερος (Sathas V.352)*<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>12</sup>This is not simply a generic term since Scylitzes refers to there being a notary for an imperial minister. *Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ Ῥοδίου, ὃς ὑπεγραμματεὺς τῷ Σαμωνᾷ* (Scylitzes Synopsis Historion Leob.32.22–23 Thurn).

<sup>13</sup>The hypothesis that the *Chronographia* was composed in two moments is described by Ljubarskij (2001) 409–410 Ljubarskij (2004) 262 with different considerations from the present ones.

<sup>14</sup>Psellos in Doukas household 7a.15–19.

<sup>15</sup>Other evidence points to a composition specifically under Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078), as indicated for example by Zervos 133.

<sup>16</sup>For example one may turn to how he is introduced: *Παραλαβὼν δὲ ὁ ἀνὴρ οὗτος τὸ κράτος, οὔτε ἐγκρατῶς οὔτε εὐλαβῶς εἶχε περὶ τὰ πράγματα, ἀλλ', ὡς ἔοικεν, εὐδαιμονίαν καινὴν τινα καὶ ἀσυνήθη τῷ βίῳ ἀναπλαττόμενος πρότερον καὶ πραγμάτων ἀθρόαν μετὰθεσιν καὶ μεταποιήσιν σὺν οὐδενὶ λόγῳ καὶ τάξει, ἐπειδὴ βασιλεύειν ἔλαχεν, ἔργῳ τὰς ἀναπλάσεις ποιεῖν εὐθὺς ἐπέχειρησε.* (Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.29.1–6 Impellizzeri).

<sup>17</sup>Letter to Machetarios the *Drungarios* of the *Vigla*. The reference to Isaak I Comnenos means it probably should be dated to between 1057–1059. Sathas (1876) 352. For a discussion of this letter in relation to the time of composition of the *Chronographia* see Ljubarskij (2001) 410–411 and Ljubarski (2004) 263.

*My dear friend, as I am arranging the Chronographia and I am mentioning men of worth, I have placed you among the best since you are magnanimous and high minded, open and dear to me. But now what will I do? Shall I write the opposite? However, by our friendship, even if you insult me further, even if you beat me, even if you do something worse, if you want I will bind my hands up for you and I will prostrate myself deeply like a servant; but, my brother, do not be upset because the great Isaac, the best of all emperors has given me an honour.*

This letter also strengthens the idea that he was writing for his contemporaries and not for future generations. Psellos altered the judgement of the emperor described according to his audience. He felt he could not say that he had been at the service of the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos during the time of Isaac Comnenos and could not say he had been at the service of Michael IV Paphlagon when writing to the Doukas family. This simple fact would explain the discrepancy between book 5 and 7 about his early career.

Thus Psellos interprets his early career according to his audience, leaving the modern reader in the dark about the course of his promotions. A careful reading reveals that Psellos says he had been a secretary to the emperor since a long time (*πόρρωθεν υπογραμματεύων*) but that he had recently received a promotion (*ἄρτι μεμνημένος εἰς τὰ προεισόδια*)<sup>18</sup>. What Psellos says is that he had recently been given access to the *proeisodia*, or rather he had been initiated to them. Such a usage may refer to his promotion as *protoasekretis*. At 5.27 he says that he was dictating texts which may fit with such a title, since one of the complaints of his previous position (*a secretis*) was that he was working and writing all the time, and it appears it was under dictation:

*Πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ ὑπερπληθῆς ἡ ταλαιπωρία καὶ ἡ πρὸς τὸ γράφειν σύννευσις, ὡς μήτε τὸ οὖς κνᾶσθαι δύνασθαι, τοῦτο δὴ τὸ λεγόμενον, μήτε τὴν κεφαλὴν ὑπερᾶραι, μὴ ποτοῦ κατὰ καιρὸν, μὴ βρώσεως γεύσασθαι, μὴ τὸ σῶμα καθᾶραι λουτροῖς, εἰ μὴ τις τοῖς ἐκ φύσεως φήσειεν (ιδρώσι, φημί, βία τοῦ μετώπου καὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς καταρρέουσιν) (Psellos *Oratoria Minora* 11.24–28 Littlewood).*

*In the first place the work and the compulsion to write was overwhelming so that it was not possible to scratch one's ear, as one says, nor raise one's head, to have the occasion to drink or taste some food, nor to clean one's body at the baths, except from those natural things, I mean such as sweat which used to gush violently from the forehead and head.*

If indeed he received the promotion under Michael V Kalaphates that would explain his eagerness to see the fate of the emperor who had promoted him and would explain why he galloped from the imperial palace across the city to the Studios Monastery.

There is a confirmation of this state of affairs in Psellos' early writing style. In the speech where he comments on the promotion to *protoasekretis* (orat. Min. 8) one sees many classical allusions, probably an attempt to prove his literary worth to a sceptical audience. It was under the reign of Michael IV Paphlagon and Michael V Kalaphates that one sees the development of such literary activity

<sup>18</sup> In *Chronographia* 5.27.

as that of Christopher of Mytilene and possibly John Mauropous. Both these authors reflect common interests with the younger Psellos. Moreover, Psellos' words of praise for Michael IV Paphlagon<sup>19</sup> reflect a similar background in the civil aristocracy<sup>20</sup>. The most surprising coincidence is that Michael IV Paphlagon had also entered the court at a young age as a notary for the emperor Romanos III Argyros<sup>21</sup>. Thus Michael IV Paphlagon and Psellos had held the same position at court at different times. Therefore under the reign of Michael IV Paphlagon and Michael V Kalaphates Psellos seems to have continued this path and was promoted<sup>22</sup>. Subsequently, Psellos remained a *protoasekretis* during the first years of Constantine IX Monomachos' reign. Indeed during the events which lead the emperor's mistress, Skleraina, to court one still finds Psellos among the notaries:

Ἀμέλει τοι συνειλεγμένων ποτὲ τῶν ὑπογραμ ματευομένων ἡμῶν, πομπὴν αἰ περὶ τὴν βασιλίδα ἐποιοῦντο. (Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.61.1–2 Impellizzeri).

*Of course, once we notaries were gathered together, the retinue of the empress made a procession.*

During Skleraina's time at court it was Psellos' interest in classical mythology that made her approach him:

Ἐμὲ γοῦν ἤρει ἐπανερωτῶσα πολλάκις μύθους ἑλληνικοὺς, καὶ αὐτὴ προστιθεῖσα εἰ τινος τῶν ἀκριβούντων περὶ ταῦτα ἀκήκοεν. (Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.60.9–11).

*She sought me often and asked me about pagan myths and she added [something] if she had heard one of specialists of these matters.*

Psellos' mythological interests give an insight into his career. At 7a.7 he claims that the true beginning (ὡς ἀληθῶς τὸ κεφάλαιον) of his career was under Constantine IX Monomachos<sup>23</sup>. This point is part of a digression describing his rhetorical ability and subsequent career<sup>24</sup>. Indeed there was a clear break from his previous training. Under Constantine IX Monomachos, Psellos became prominent for his rhetorical abilities and even for his philosophy. His next most important position was that of *ὑπατος τῶν φιλοσόφων* which he obtained in 1047<sup>25</sup>. This demonstrates that he had been promoted sideways and was probably no longer in

<sup>19</sup> Καὶ ἀποπεφάνθω μοι περὶ τοῦδε τοῦ ἀνδρός, ὡς εἰ μὴ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἢ μερὶς μοῖρα προσεφύη κακῆ, κἀντεῦθεν οὔτε καταλύειν εἶχε τὸ γένος παντάπασιν, οὔτ' ἐπιστρέφειν πρὸς τὸ συμφέρειν διὰ τὴν ἀνωμαλίαν τῶν τρόπων, οὐκ ἂν τις ἐκείνῳ τῶν περιωνύμων βασιλέων ἀντήρισην (Psellos, *Chronographia*, 4.10.17–21 Impellizzeri).

<sup>20</sup> Každan claims that both the Psellos and Paphlagon families belonged to the civil aristocracy. See A. Každan, *L'aristocrazia bizantina*, Palermo, 1999, 261 and 266.

<sup>21</sup> ὑπογραμματαὺν δὲ τῷ βασιλεὶ Ῥωμανῷ, οὐκ ἐκείνῳ μόνῳ προσήκων ὄππο τοῖς πράγμασιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῇ βασιλίδι ἐρασμῶτατος ἔδοξεν, ἔνθεν τοι καὶ αἰτίαν ἔσχεν, ὡς λεληθότως τῷ ἀνδρὶ πλησιάζοι. (Psellos *Chronographia* 6.13.3–6 Impellizzeri)

<sup>22</sup> ἄρτι μεμνημένος τὰ προεισόδια (Psellos *Chronographia* 5.27.7–8 Impellizzeri).

<sup>23</sup> This view is somehow confirmed elsewhere: ἐγὼ τε εὐθύς ἐκείνῳ βεβασιλευκότι ὑπηρετηκὸς διὰ πάντων καὶ εἰς τὴν κρείττω τάξιν ταχθεὶς (Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.14.9–10 Impellizzeri).

<sup>24</sup> ἀνάγει με ὁ λόγος εἰς τὰ βασιλεια καὶ ὑπογραμματαὺν ἐδίδου τῷ βασιλεὶ (Psellos *Chronographia* 7a.11–12 Impellizzeri).

<sup>25</sup> J. Lefort "Rhétorique et politique: trois discours de Jean Mauropous en 1047", *TM* 6, 1976, 265–303.

charge of transcribing or dictating secret documents. The reason for his sideways promotion was his connection with the reign of Michael IV Paphlagon as *asecretis* and his promotion under Michael V Kalaphates to *protoasecretis*. Both these emperors represented a different time with different people at court. Michael IV Paphlagon had actually exiled Constantine Monomachos<sup>26</sup>. When the tide turned and Constantine Monomachos became emperor, he associated Psellos with those who had been part of the previous regime. The new emperor had him transferred into the household of Constantine Doukas:

*ἐπεὶ δέ μοι λαμπροτέρου ἐδέησε σχήματος καὶ περιφανεστέρας οἰκίας, οὐδὲ τοῦτό μοι τὸ μέρος ἀσπού δαστον ἀφήκεν ὁ βασιλεὺς, ἀλλὰ μοι πολλοῦ τὸν τοῦδε τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἀνταλλάττεται οἶκον, καὶ εἰς ἀκριβεστέραν φιλίαν ἀλλήλους ἀπὸ ταύτης ἐνοὶ τῆς προφάσεως·* (Psellos, *Chronographia* 7a.15–19 Impellizzeri).

*When I needed a richer appearance and smarter house, the emperor did not leave this matter unresolved for me. He assigned me to the household of this man and for this reason we were united in a stronger friendship.*

Such a passage affords an insight since Constantine Doukas had also found an enemy in Michael IV Paphlagon, just as the Constantine Monomachos had done:

*βάλλεται δὲ καὶ ἐν τινι πύργῳ ὁ ἐπὶ θυγατρὶ γαμβρὸς αὐτοῦ Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ Δουκάς, ὅτιπερ ἐπεβοᾶτο τὴν ἀδικίαν καὶ τὴν παράβασιν τῶν ὄρκων ἐξήλεγχε καὶ τὸν θεὸν ἐμαρτύρετο* (Scylitzes, *Synopsis Mich* 4.5.23–25 Thurn).

*Constantine Doukas, his nephew on his daughter's side, is thrown into custody, since he had denounced the injustice; that the oaths had been broken and swore before God.*

Therefore it appears that once Constantine Monomachos had gained power he had a *notarios* of the previous regime, Psellos, transferred to the household of Constantine Doukas, whom he considered a close ally. The latter was trusted by the emperor since they had both been exiled by Michael IV Paphlagon. The result was that Psellos from this time on focused more on rhetoric and philosophy rather than administrative work, thus he separated his culture from his political career. This had not been the case when he was younger since he thought that he could combine philosophy and rhetoric with politics. In other words he could mix the style used for administration together with more abstract ideas. One can still see Psellos thinking he can combine these two aspects in his speech about his promotion to *protoasecretis* under Michael V Kalaphates:

*Ἐγὼγ' οὖν, ὦ φιλοσοφίας τροφίμοι, δυοῖν ὁδοῖν ἐκ πρώτης ἐμαντὸν ἐπιστήσας τῆς ἡλικίας, τῇ μὲν ἐπὶ λόγους καὶ φιλοσοφίαν φερούσῃ, τῇ δὲ ἐπὶ*

<sup>26</sup> Exile of monomachos *Ἐντεῦθεν γοῦν καὶ πρὸς τὸ κράτος ἐπίδοξος ἔδοξε, καὶ ὑπώπτενε τοῦτον ὁ Μιχαὴλ, ὃς δὴ μετὰ Ῥωμανὸν εἰς τὸ κράτος ἀναβηθήκει· ἔνθεν τοι καὶ βασιλεύσας οὐδ' οὕτω τὸ κατ' ἐκείνου ἀφήκε ζηλότυπον, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν πρώτα εὐμενῶς εἶδεν, εἴθ' ὕστερον αἰτίας τινὰς ἐπ' ἐκείνου πλασάμενος καὶ τινας σχεδιάσας λογοποιούς, ἀπελαύνει τῆς Πόλεως καὶ περιγράφτοις τοῦτον ὀρίως κολάζει· ἡ νῆσος δὲ Μυτιλήνη τὸ ὄριον, ἔνθα δὴ ἑπταετῆ διήλθησε συμφορὰν, τὸ μέτρον τῆς τοῦ Μιχαὴλ βασιλείας διηγητικῶς κληρονομεῖ δὲ τὸ κατ' αὐτοῦ μῖσος καὶ ὁ δεῦτερος Μιχαὴλ* (Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.17.1–10 Impellizzeri).

πολιτείαν καὶ πράγματα, οὐ τὸ τῶν πολλῶν φιλοσόφων πέπονθα, μάλλον δὲ τῶν ἄκρων καὶ ὀλίγων, ὥστε πρὸς μὲν τὴν εὐθύς ἰέναι, τῆς δὲ παντελῶς ἀποσχέσθαι, ἀλλὰ κατατείνας ἑμαυτὸν ὥσπερ ἐπὶ ζυγοῦ καὶ τὰς ὁδοὺς πρὸς ἀλλήλας ἀντισυγκρίνας προσεθέμην μὲν τῇ καλλίονι, ἀφωσιωσάμην δὲ καὶ τῇ χείρονι. διὰ ταῦτα οὔτε ἐν οἰκίσκῳ καθείρξας ἑμαυτὸν φιλοσοφεῖν μόνον ἐκέλευον, οὔτε παρῳσάμενος τὰ βιβλία ταῦτα δὴ τὰ ἐν δικαστηρίοις μόνον ποιεῖν, γράφεσθαι τε καὶ διώκεσθαι καὶ ξυνηγορεῖν τοῖς ἐκάτερα δρῶσιν ἢ πάσχουσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν χερσὶν ἔχων ὅσα δὴ ἐς μνήμην τῆς ἑαυτῶν προαιρέσεως ἄνδρες φιλόσοφοι ξυγγεγράφασιν, οὐκ ἠμέλουν τῶν ἐν ταῖς πολιτείαις γινομένων καὶ πολιτεύων δὲ ἐναργῶς ἐρωώμην φιλοσοφῶν· ὅθεν καὶ τοῖς μὲν μόνως πολιτεύουσι καλλίων ἐφαινόμην τὰ πολιτικά, τοῖς δὲ φιλοσοφοῦσιν (Psellos *Oratoria Minora* 8.121–134 Littlewood).

*I set out for myself two paths from my youth, the first leading to culture and philosophy and the other to civil life and administration. I did not feel what is typical of many philosophers, or rather of the highest and few, to go directly to one life while setting aside completely the other. On the contrary I stretched myself as if under a yoke. I compared the two paths one to another I applied myself to the more beautiful subject but was elevated by the lower enterprise. For this reason I did not confine myself in a small house and forced myself to pursue philosophy, nor did I set aside those books in order to keep books in the law courts, to accuse, to prosecute and defend those accusing or accused. I used to keep in my hands what philosophers have written of their view for the future, but I did not neglect political events and while I was political I appeared to be a philosopher. Therefore I used to seem capable in politics to those who were only politicians and a philosopher to philosophers.*

Psellos claims that in order to become a philosopher one must be confined to a small room, while pointing out he had wider interests which included administration. Such a passage must have been written precisely before Psellos had been confined to the house of Constantine Doukas and therefore forced to abandon what he terms as politics and to specialize in rhetoric and philosophy. Therefore when at 7a.7 he claims that Constantine IX Monomachos was the true beginning of his career, this is confined to his subsequent rhetorical and philosophical progression.

Thus there are two apparently contradictory passages in the *Chronographia* about Psellos' early career. The conflict can be resolved by supposing two different dates for their composition. The first (5.27) was written when Isaac Comnenos was in power and described Psellos' role as a *notarios* within the court. The second passage (7a.7) was written for the Doukas family and illustrates Psellos' rhetorical talent and points out that his first literary role at court was under Constantine IX Monomachos. These two careers are in some form of opposition and the first passages may reveal Psellos' attempt to be part of the actual administration under Michael IV Paphlagon, Michael V Kalaphates and finally Isaac Comnenos. The second passage reveals his cultural role under Constantine IX Monomachos and the Doukas Dynasty. Such discrepancy reveals the two different dates of composition for the two books. Book five was written under Isaac Comnenos and book seven was written under the Doukades. The contradiction does not illustrate Psellos' wily nature. The two passages are only in apparent opposition for two main reasons. The first is that each context has a precise aim which is not that of establishing the

correct dates of the author's career, but rather to explain his point of view during important events. The second is that Psellos was interested in the present rather than the future. The audience knew the events he was narrating and were seeking his point of view since they were fully aware of the path of his advancement. Thus these two passages afford yet another example of Psellos' belief that interpretation is more important than the facts assembled for the narrative.

## APPENDIX 1

Ἐμοί, κραταιὲ φωσφόρε στεφηφόρε,  
μέλημα καὶ σπούδασμα καὶ βίος λόγοι,  
ἐξ ὧν φανῆναι καὶ προκόψειν ἐλπίσας  
πάντων κατεφρόνησα καὶ ζῆν εἰλόμην  
τέως ταπεινὸν καὶ κεκρυμμένον βίον,  
πόνους ὀμιλῶν καὶ σοφῶν βίβλοις μόνον.  
πλήν οὖν ἰδεῖν σου τὸ κράτος προσηυχόμεν  
εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ δεδραμηκὸς ἀξίαν,  
τοῦ προσπεσόντος ἐν μέσῳ δεινοῦ νέφους  
καὶ πειραθέντος σὰς σβέσαι λαμπηδόνας  
αὐθις ῥαγέντος καὶ ῥυέντος εἰς χάος.  
οὐκοῦν θεωρῶ τῆς ἐμῆς εὐχῆς τέλος.  
τῇ γὰρ προνοίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ δεσπότη  
ἔχεις ἀνεμπόδιστον ἀκραιφνὲς κράτος.  
δέδεξο λοιπὸν οἰκέτου δῶρον λόγον.  
σὺ δ' ἀντιδοίης τὴν κατ' ἀξίαν δόσιν  
τοῖς σοῖς με πάντως συμβαλὼν νοταρίοις.

(Psellos *Poemata* 16, ed. Westerink, Leipzig, 1992)

Powerful, luminous crown bearer,  
Words are my concern, pursuit and life.  
From them I expected to emerge and advance.  
*I disdained everything and chose to live*  
a humble and segregated life for a while,  
Only toiling and engaging with the books of the wise.  
However, I prayed to see your reign  
Reach the level of your worth,  
Though, in the meantime, a terrible cloud fell over it  
And attempted to extinguish your lights  
And then again froze over and flowed into chaos.  
So I see the goal of my prayer:  
By the consideration of God and Lord,  
You hold power without impediment and danger.  
Therefore accept the poem of a servant as a present;  
and may you reward my appropriate offering  
by including me among your secretaries.