

# Classifications of political philosophy and the concept of royal science in Byzantium

DIMITER G. ANGELOV

Recent years have seen a new rise of interest in the history of Byzantine political and social thought. Almost no attention has been paid, however, to the ways in which Byzantine authors classified and defined politics as a philosophical discipline on the basis of the ancient premise that the intellectual inquiry into politics belonged to the field of philosophy.<sup>1</sup> The Byzantine divisions of philosophy (*divisiones philosophiae*) and other classificatory texts are particularly revealing in this regard. They contain in a nutshell a description of the preoccupations of politics as a philosophical discipline, and comment on the connection of politics with other areas of philosophical knowledge. The taxonomic descriptions are a rich source material for studying continuity and change in the usage of political concepts with philosophical origin and content. My discussion will consist of three parts: first, an examination of the classification of political philosophy in the divisions of philosophy; second, an attempt at historicizing some notably divergent views on political philosophy voiced in a classificatory context; and third, an investigation of the usage and significance of the Platonic concept of royal science (βασιλική ἐπιστήμη), which was sometimes applied to the taxonomic description of philosophy and its divisions.

A note should be made at the outset about the methods, approaches and limitations of the following discussion. The discussion aims to highlight salient tendencies in the classification of political philosophy and is not comprehensive. The time span covered is mostly the period after the eleventh century, but occasionally material will be drawn from late antique as well as ancient philosophy. Historical factors are intentionally taken into consideration, because my guiding assumption is that no corpus of political ideas, regardless of its intellectual and discursive context, can evolve in isolation from surrounding forms of social organization. Therefore I will ask questions about the historical relevance of the examined notions of political philosophy—that is, the extent and ways in which the human good, the ob-

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<sup>1</sup> I take the present opportunity to continue the preliminary observations made in Angelov (2007: 9).

jective of political philosophy, is also recognizably the human good of contemporary Byzantium. No attempt will be made to broach the issue of whether or in what ways the term ‘political philosophy’ is an appropriate label for the field of Byzantine political and social thought. The resolution of this issue depends ultimately on modern conceptions and judgements. Rather, my narrow goal is to address the problem of definition on its own terms, through the conceptual vocabulary used by Byzantine authors. The source material used consists mostly of philosophical texts, but also includes texts belonging to other genres. This broader scope is in a way inevitable. In their most developed form, the *divisiones philosophiae* are found in predominantly scholastic works composed in the context of teaching activity and reflecting educational tradition. The concepts framed or used in the classroom had a circulation beyond its narrow confines. It has been aptly noted one should search for Byzantine philosophy not only on the pages of treatises and commentaries on ancient philosophical works, but also in a broader generic context, including orations and letters with philosophical content.<sup>2</sup> The investigation of Byzantine political thought needs also to consider genres normally disassociated with philosophy: primarily epideictic rhetoric, letters, and historiography, but also devotional and ecclesiastical literature, and even poetry. For the Byzantine philosophers were often authors with encyclopedic interests and a prolific literary output where they presented and discussed philosophical ideas.

### *Divisions of philosophy: the place of politics*

The natural starting point for examining the divisions of philosophy known in Byzantium is the influential Alexandrian tradition of the *Prolegomena philosophiae*: basic introductions to the discipline which normally precede the line-by-line commentaries on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. The *Prolegomena* succinctly define and classify the philosophical disciplines in a way useful for the beginning student. Their authors—Ammonius, Olympiodorus, David, Elias and Pseudo-Elias (Stephanus)—were professors of philosophy with a Neoplatonic outlook who taught, at least for some periods of their lives, in Alexandria between the late fifth and the early seventh century.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ierodiakonou (2002: 6).

<sup>3</sup> On the Alexandrian school, see Lloyd (1967: 314–19); O’Meara (2003: 23–26); Watts (2006: 143–256). Pseudo-Elias has been plausibly identified as Stephanus of Alexandria by Wolska-Conus (1989: 69–82) (see also Roueché 1990: 123–27). A comparative summary of the prolegomena to philosophy by Ammonius, Elias, David and Pseudo-Elias (that is, Stephanus) can be found in Westerink (1990: 344–47).

Each *Prolegomenon* responds to or builds on earlier *Prolegomena*; the resulting educational literature testifies to contemporary as well as past debates in the philosophical schools. All surviving *Prolegomena* divide philosophy into theoretical and practical, subdividing further the branch of practical philosophy into ethics, economics and politics.<sup>4</sup> The *Prolegomena* derive this tripartite division of practical philosophy from Aristotle by referring to Aristotle's distinct treatises on each subject. As a further supporting argument, they highlight the different scales of engagement of each kind of practical philosophy with the human good: ethics deals with the good of an individual; economics, with the good of a single household; and politics, with that of an entire city.

This neat tripartite division of practical philosophy was not universally accepted in late antiquity. The sixth-century *Prolegomena* of David, Elias and Pseudo-Elias (Stephanus) mention opposition to and disagreements with the Aristotelian interpretation. The objection is said to have come from the Platonists. Pointing out, *inter alia*, that the quantitatively different applicability of ethics, economics and politics is an insufficient reason for them to be distinct sciences, the Platonists put forth an alternative division of practical philosophy into legislative and judicial. The reasons and logic behind this bipartite division need not concern us here. Suffice it to refer to Dominic O'Meara's pioneering study, which successfully challenges the stereotype of the apolitical nature of Neoplatonism and has shown that the twofold division of practical philosophy reflects the Neoplatonic ideal of the divinization of human society through the extension of the internal constitution of the soul into the domestic order of the household and the political sphere.<sup>5</sup> The debates on the divisions of practical philosophy reported in the sixth-century *Prolegomena* may be seen as an echo of discussions on political virtue and the political sphere characteristic of late Neoplatonism. The *Prolegomena* of Elias and, in a more explicit fashion, David hint at an authorial preference for the Platonic bipartite division of practical philosophy.<sup>6</sup> In addition, it is notable that some of the *Prolegomena*—especially those of Elias and Pseudo-Elias (Stephanus)—attempt to play down the differences between Aristotelians and Platonists by adducing different and

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<sup>4</sup> Busse (1891: 15–16); Busse (1902: 7–8); Busse (1900a: 31–34); Busse (1900b: 74–76); Westerink (1967: 43–46).

<sup>5</sup> O'Meara (2003: 56–58).

<sup>6</sup> For Elias, see Busse (1900a: 32–34); David (Busse 1900b: 75–76) mentions that the Platonists raised their objections with 'a good reason' (ibid. 76.1: καὶ τοῦτο εὐλόγως).

somewhat forceful arguments.<sup>7</sup> The sixth-century Alexandrian philosophers thus both seek to reconcile Aristotelians and Platonists, and reveal their own Platonic partiality.

In the long run, the twofold division of practical philosophy mentioned by the Alexandrian Neoplatonists did not take hold in Byzantium. Byzantine philosophers were remarkably unanimous in their preference for the Aristotelian tripartite division. Examples broadly dispersed through time serve to illustrate this trend. In his *Dialectica*, John of Damascus (d. 749) chooses to mention the three parts constituting practical philosophy: ethics sets rules about the conduct of an individual; economics deals with a household; and politics with ‘cities and lands’ (πόλεις καὶ χώραις).<sup>8</sup> An anonymous Byzantine ‘school conversation’ (or rather, an educational questionnaire) traditionally dated to the eleventh century implies the same division. Here practical philosophy is exemplified by a reference to Aristotle’s *Politics*, *Economics* and *Ethics*.<sup>9</sup> The Aristotelian commentator Eustratios of Nicaea (fl. c. 1112), whose ideas will be discussed more closely below, reports matter-of-factly the tripartite division of practical philosophy.<sup>10</sup> Late Byzantine scholars continue to classify practical philosophy into its three branches. In his thirteenth-century *Epitome logica*, an influential and widely disseminated textbook on logic, the Nicaean scholar Nikephoros Blemmydes (1197–c. 1269) concurs with earlier opinions: the chapter of the *Epitome* devoted to the division of philosophy states that moral and economic philosophers are the ones concerned with the good of individuals and households, while ‘a statesman (πολιτικός) is the individual leading and governing a city or cities in the best fashion’.<sup>11</sup> The notion of political philosophy as the preserve of the statesman is one worth keeping in mind.

<sup>7</sup> Busse (1900a: 34); Westerink (1967: 44–46). See also Westerink (1990: 347). Ammonius, an earlier representative of the Alexandrian philosophical school, subdivides further each of the three Aristotelian parts of practical philosophy into legislative and judicial without reporting any conflict between Platonists and Aristotelians. See Busse (1891: 15).

<sup>8</sup> John of Damascus, *Dialectica* 3 and 66; *Fragmenta philosophica* 8, in Kotter (1969–85: vol. I, 56; 137; 160).

<sup>9</sup> Treu (1893: 99). The so-called school conversation is in fact a list of general questions about grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, and law, which are all conveniently supplied with correct answers. Treu’s dating is uncertain, because it rests solely on the importance of law in the curriculum. Börje Bydén cautiously prefers to date the work within the period c. 1050–c. 1300 and points to a text deriving from it in the fourteenth- or fifteenth-century Cod. Vat. gr. 1144.

See Bydén (2003: 223; 2004: 147).

<sup>10</sup> Heylbut (1892: 1.25–3.31).

<sup>11</sup> Nikephoros Blemmydes, *Epitome logica*, in Migne (*PG* 142: col. 733B–C): ὁ δὲ γὰρ πόλιν ἢ πόλεις διεξάγων καὶ διακυβερνῶν ἀρίστως πολιτικός.

Blemmydes follows up the above comment by noting that practical philosophy is implemented through legislation and justice.<sup>12</sup> Thus, he considers legislative and judicial activity to be modes of operation of practical philosophy rather than its constituent parts—an influence of the *Prolegomena* found also, as we will see, in Blemmydes' preface to the *Epitome*.<sup>13</sup> After Blemmydes, the early Palaiologan scholar and statesman Theodore Metochites (1270–1332), in a section on the division of philosophy in the preface to his astronomical treatise, refers to the three parts of practical philosophy, again pointing out that politics deals with human communities and social practices in the cities (πόλεις).<sup>14</sup>

To be sure, the tripartite division of practical philosophy into politics, economics and ethics was not the only interpretation in the Greek Middle Ages. In one of his minor philosophical works Michael Psellos suggests a hierarchical division of philosophy into self-contained tiers or levels without mentioning practical philosophy.<sup>15</sup> The 'sciences dealing with political matters', set at the lowermost end of the taxonomic hierarchy of philosophy, consist of judicial and legislative science as well as rhetoric.<sup>16</sup> The legislative and judicial segments of 'the sciences dealing with political matters' hark back to the taxonomic views of the Neoplatonists, in whose philosophy Psellos was interested. The Psellian interpretation, especially the inclusion of rhetoric among the political sciences, is highly idiosyncratic in the context of the Byzantine *divisiones philosophiae*. As we have seen, the standard view in the *divisiones* was that political philosophy was an integral, self-contained and autonomous discipline, one of the three branches of practical philosophy.

Why did the tripartite definition of practical philosophy establish itself as the preferred one? One reason is that it provided a convenient template for the individual works in the Aristotelian corpus—the Byzantine 'school dialogue' illustrates the tripartite divisions of practical philosophy by referring

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<sup>12</sup> Migne (*PG* 142: col. 733C): κατορθοῦται δὲ τὸ πᾶν πρακτικὸν διὰ τε τοῦ νομοθετικοῦ καὶ δικαστικοῦ.

<sup>13</sup> Uthemann (1984: 120 and 135 n. 93) has argued that Blemmydes borrowed most of the content of this chapter of the *Epitome* from David's *Prolegomena* and some of it from that of Ammonius. Blemmydes clearly does not follow David, who (see above n. 6) hints at his preference for the bipartite division of practical philosophy into legislative and judicial. It is possible that Blemmydes was influenced by Ammonius who subdivides each division of practical philosophy (ethics, economics, and politics) into legislative and judicial, even though it is noteworthy that Blemmydes refers to modes of operation, not divisions.

<sup>14</sup> Bydén (2003: 445.70–446.81).

<sup>15</sup> The work is analysed by O'Meara in this volume.

<sup>16</sup> Duffy (1992: 1–4, esp. 3.55–4.96).

to Aristotle's treatises.<sup>17</sup> Another reason is that the alternative bipartite division appears to have been viable only as long as Neoplatonic philosophy flourished in late antiquity. It lost its breeding ground once the philosophical schools which cultivated Neoplatonism declined or were closed by the first half of the seventh century.

*Does political philosophy matter?  
Classicism versus contemporary  
relevance*

The brief definitions of political philosophy in the *divisiones philosophiae* follow an antique tradition and are in a way antiquarian. By stating that the goal of political philosophy is the well-being of an urban community (πόλις), these definitions are at odds with the imperial politics and identity of Byzantium. Besides, cities in Byzantium after the seventh century were no longer self-governing communities like the antique πόλεις and could hardly be considered a realistic subject matter for political theory. Clearly Byzantine authors were reporting definitions of political philosophy carried over from the past and played on the derivation of the word 'politics' from 'πόλις'. An offshoot of this classicizing view of political philosophy was its understanding as the body of political writing by ancient philosophers. We may be reminded here of the Byzantine 'school dialogue' pointing to Aristotle's treatises.

Yet this academic approach turned back to the past did not fully suppress the urge of the authors of the classifications to apply empirical observation to the description of political philosophy. A certain effort for accommodation with historical reality may be seen in the admission on the part of John of Damascus, Eustratios of Nicaea, Nikephoros Blemmydes and Theodore Metochites that political philosophy could deal either with the well-being of a 'city' or of 'cities' in the plural. The word 'πόλις' itself was not irrelevant to Byzantium as an empire. Byzantium inherited from imperial Rome, to some degree at least, the tradition of seeing itself as a city-turned-empire and a city ruling over other cities. The term *politeia* (πολιτεία) of the *Rhomaioi* was used on a non-official level as a designation for the Byzantine state.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the word 'πόλις' could refer to any model political community, and so veiled or explicit parallels could be drawn with the Byzantine polity. In particular, the regulatory activity of the statesman

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<sup>17</sup> See above n. 9.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Mango (1990: 54.8–9; 68.19; 78.15). See also Beck (1970).

(πολιτικός) could reflect contemporary political preoccupations. As we shall see, Eustratios of Nicaea's comments accompanying his classification of political philosophy draw a parallel between the emperor and the statesman (πολιτικός) who governs the πόλις. Furthermore, the gulf separating ancient political philosophy and contemporary imperial politics did not remain unnoticed, and proved capable of leading to innovative reassessment. In the early fourteenth century Theodore Metochites asked himself what the focus of political philosophy should be. Eustratios and Metochites approached the traditional classifications in an original and critical way influenced by the contemporary historical environment, and I would like to discuss each case in detail.

*Eustratios of Nicaea's preface to the Nicomachean Ethics:  
distributive justice*

The twelfth-century Byzantine philosopher Eustratios of Nicaea wrote at some length on the division of practical philosophy and its three constituent parts in the preface to his commented edition of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>19</sup> As is well known, Eustratios took a leading part in a project of republishing the *Nicomachean Ethics* along with explanatory commentaries carried out under the patronage of the learned princess and historian Anna Komnene. The commentaries on some books were the work of earlier philosophers, while twelfth-century authors composed the remaining ones—Eustratios of Nicaea glossed Books I and VI, while Michael of Ephesus, Books V, IX and X. From among the three parts of practical philosophy, Eustratios chose in the preface to deal most extensively with politics: a circumstance explicable perhaps by the interest in this subject on the part of Eustratios or his patron.<sup>20</sup> It is possible, too, that the preface anticipates the commented edition of both Aristotle's *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. Michael of Ephesus glossed the former work, although in a less extensive fashion than his commentaries on Books V, IX and X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>21</sup> One may be reminded that Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* was itself a work of political theory. Aristotle considered his inquiry in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to be political and conceived of the work as an

<sup>19</sup> On Eustratios and his commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, see Tatakis (1959: 216–18); Giocarinis (1964); Lloyd (1987); Mercken (1990: 410–19); Ierodiakonou (2005).

<sup>20</sup> Eustratios explains that the preface serves to clarify 'in what ways the three kinds of practical philosophy differ, second, what each one of them constitutes, and third, what is the benefit each one of them brings to people.' See Heylbut (1892: 1.23–25).

<sup>21</sup> On Michael of Ephesus' commentary on the *Politics*, see most recently O'Meara (2008).

introduction to the *Politics*.<sup>22</sup> Eustratios' commentaries on Books I and VI inevitably touch upon issues of political interest.

Eustratios' excursus on political philosophy in the preface focuses on the role of the statesman (πολιτικός) in the establishment and maintenance of justice. After reporting the familiar view of the city-centred subject matter of politics, Eustratios turns his attention to the statesman. The statesman, he says, ought to be virtuous in every respect and 'capable of transmitting goodness to all members of the polity, caring in every way for the citizens and the city, or cities, if he rules over many'.<sup>23</sup> What follows is of particular interest: Eustratios envisaged justice in the city or cities as the allocation of appropriate shares among the citizens, which the statesman was to carry out. The statesman, according to Eustratios, would know well that

... each ruler over more individuals of the same kind is obliged to take equal care of his subjects and of himself, not so that all would be receiving shares which are equal to his or simply equal with each other's, but in accordance with proportion. For this is how cities are consolidated, namely, when everyone receives what is due to him. Depriving him [that is, everyone] of what is due reveals the governors of the cities as being unjust, predisposes the subjects to be lax about the good, and puts cities in a worse situation. This is the sense of Euripides' words, 'many cities suffer whenever a good and brave man receives no greater honour than his inferiors' (Euripides, *Hecuba* 306–8).<sup>24</sup>

Eustratios' notion of the statesman making just distributions in accordance with the principle of just proportion has important antecedents in ancient philosophy. The late antique Neoplatonists, inspired by Plato's *Gorgias* (508a) and *Laws* (756e–57c), exploited the idea of justice as allotment based on the geometrical proportionality of ratios.<sup>25</sup> Probably a closer and more

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1102a. The *Nicomachean Ethics* discusses political questions—for example, the supremacy of political science over other skills and sciences (1094a–b)—and devotes the entire Book V to the subject of justice. See Kraut (2002: 3–5; 98–177 [ch. 5: 'Justice in the *Nicomachean Ethics*']).

<sup>23</sup> Heylbut (1892: 2.30–3.3, esp. 3.1–3): [τὸν πολιτικὸν ἄνδρα ...] ἰκανὸν εἰσέτι καὶ τοῖς πολιτευομένοις μεταδιδόναι τῆς ἀγαθότητος, παντοίως κηδόμενον πολιτῶν τε ἅμα καὶ πόλεως ἢ καὶ πόλεων, εἰ πλειόνων τύχοι κρατῶν.

<sup>24</sup> Heylbut (1892: 3.3–12): ... εἰδότα καλῶς ὡς ἕκαστος ἄρχων πλειόνων ὁμοφυῶν ἐπίσης ἑαυτῷ φροντίζειν τῶν ὑπὸ χεῖρα ὀφειλέτης ἐστίν, οὐχ ἵνα τῶν ἴσων ἐκείνῳ ἢ ἀλλήλοις ἀπλῶς τυγχάνοιεν ἅπαντες ἀλλ' ἢ κατὰ τὸ ἀνάλογον. οὕτω γὰρ αἱ πόλεις συνίστανται, τοῦ αὐτῷ ἀνήκοντος ἑκάστου τυγχάνοντος. Αἱ γὰρ ἀποστερήσεις τῶν ἀνηκόντων ἀδίκους μὲν τῶν πόλεων <τούς> προεστῶτας ἐλέγχουσι, ῥαθύμους δὲ περὶ τὰ καλὰ <τούς> ὑποκειμένους διατιθέασι, τὰς δὲ πόλεις ἐχούσας κακῶς ἀπεργάζονται. τοιοῦτον γὰρ καὶ τὸ Εὐριπίδειον "ἐν τούτῳ γὰρ πάσχοι αἱ πολλαὶ πόλεις, ὅταν τις ἐσθλὸς καὶ πρόθυμος ὦν ἀνὴρ μηδὲν φέρηται τῶν κακίωνων πλέον". The quotation from *Hecuba* seems to have been proverbial and was excerpted in Stobaeus. See Wachsmuth & Hense (1884–1912: vol. IV, 6.1–3).

<sup>25</sup> O'Meara (2003: 102–3).



immediate source for Eustratios would have been the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the work on which he was just about to write a commentary. In Book V Aristotle divides justice into two kinds, distributive and corrective, and considers equality to be its most essential characteristic.<sup>26</sup> Equality in distributive justice was to be accomplished by means of allocating shares proportionate with the relative ‘worth’ (ἀξία) of the recipient: a proportionality that is geometrical in the sense of being based on the equality of quotients rather than arithmetical in the sense of being based on the equality of differences. Michael of Ephesos’ commentary on Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics* gives an instructive example of distributive justice: if Achilles was twice as worthy as Ajax, it would be just that Achilles should receive twice the amount of coins given to Ajax. For example, if Ajax would receive four coins, it would be just for Achilles to get eight.<sup>27</sup>

There are both clear and veiled allusions to twelfth-century Byzantium. Eustratios refers to the members of the political community (that is, ‘the city or cities’) as ‘subjects’ (οἱ ὑπὸ χεῖρα) to the statesman; the expression is a conventional Byzantine term designating the emperor’s subjects.<sup>28</sup> The focus on just distribution parallels one of the prime functions of the imperial office, namely, the granting of court titles with their attendant salaries and the award of tax privileges, a practice which became increasingly common from the second half of the eleventh century onward.<sup>29</sup> Just distribution had a particular resonance in the twelfth century. Critics attacked Emperor Alexios I (1081–1118) for confiscating church wealth at the beginning of his reign and especially for siphoning off public tax resources for the benefit of the extended and powerful Komnenian clan.<sup>30</sup> In his classification of political philosophy Eustratios adds his voice to the choir by agreeing with the assumption of twelfth-century critics, namely, that the good ruler is the one who distributes resources justly among the subjects. Eustratios considers this kind of discussion to be a central subject matter for political philosophy.

Further on in his preface, Eustratios continues to refer to the activity of the statesman in a way reminiscent of the Byzantine monarchical system. Famous leaders of the classical and biblical past—Moses, Joshua and Solon—are presented as paragons of political philosophy. It is interesting to

<sup>26</sup> Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1130b30–1132b20.

<sup>27</sup> Hayduck (1901: 19–23).

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, the twelfth-century historian John Zonaras, in Büttner-Wobst (1897: 562.11).

<sup>29</sup> Oikonomides (2002: 1039–48). See also Oikonomides (1996: 261–63).

<sup>30</sup> Magdalino (1983: 326–46).

find among them two legislators (Moses and Solon), a circumstance which seems to reflect the importance given to legislation as political philosophy in the Alexandrian *Prolegomena*.<sup>31</sup> Eustratios revisits the role of legislation in the body of his commentaries, where he notes that the task of political science or philosophy (ἡ πολιτική) is not only the establishment of laws in the city, but also the upkeep of walls, the maintenance of public hygiene and of the water supply, the provisioning of the city, the making of right decisions about war and foreign alliances, and the establishment of justice and proper religious worship.<sup>32</sup> From among these pressing concerns for any political community, water supply and the upkeep of the city walls were particularly relevant to the imperial capital Constantinople.

### *Metochites' dilemma on political philosophy*

In the late Byzantine period, Theodore Metochites attacked vigorously ancient works of political philosophy, which he nonetheless considered a high-ranking philosophical discipline. Metochites embarked on similar criticisms in two works: his early treatise *On Ethics or Education* and his subsequent collection of essays, *Sententious Remarks* (known commonly as the *Miscellanea*).<sup>33</sup> Metochites' life experience seems to have informed many of his views on political philosophy. A man of action as much as a philosopher, Metochites rose to the post of highest imperial minister and was the real power behind the throne of Emperor Andronikos II's government during the 1310s and 1320s until the emperor's downfall in 1328. In his treatise *On Ethics or Education* Metochites attacked Plato for exalting philosophy to the level of kingship (an allusion to the *Republic*) and for suggesting unrealistic political ideas.<sup>34</sup> Not only had Plato's political utopias never found their practical fulfilment in the past, Metochites notes, but they have no chance of ever doing so in the future. In a curious and important remark,

<sup>31</sup> Heylbut (1892: 4.5–7). Cf. *ibid.* 3.12–26, where Eustratios refers to the polity having four parts: legislative and judicial, taking care of one's soul; and gymnastic and medical, taking care of one's body.

<sup>32</sup> Heylbut (1892: 341.5–21). The context is a commentary on Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1142a2–6), where Aristotle illustrates the common understanding of prudence as an individual rather than a social virtue by citing Euripides. Eustratios digresses to show that an ethical virtue, such as prudence, differs qualitatively from economics and politics and then describes the preoccupation of each in detail.

<sup>33</sup> The treatise *On Ethics or Education* is usually considered to be one of the early works of Metochites, dated to 1297–98 (De Vries-Van der Velden 1987: 260) or around 1305 (Ševčenko 1962: 141 n. 2; Polemis 1995: 8–9). The *Sententious Remarks* has been dated to the period between 1321 and 1328. See Hult (2002: xiv).

<sup>34</sup> Polemis (1995: 169–77 [chs. 35–36]).

Metochites describes this situation as appearing to amount to ‘an abolition (κατάλυσις) of the greatest and best part of philosophy, political philosophy’.<sup>35</sup> The expression is interesting on two counts. Firstly, it places politics within philosophy and even assigns to it (enigmatically in this context) a supreme rank within philosophy—in complete contrast to Psellos in his minor philosophical work mentioned above, which relegates politics to the lowermost rank in the taxonomic hierarchy.<sup>36</sup>

Secondly and somewhat paradoxically, Metochites describes political philosophy as an abolished field of study. However, it is not that Metochites is sounding the death knell of the discipline, even though this may be the first impression. Metochites speaks not of the ruin of political philosophy in general, but of political philosophy *in antiquity* in particular. In the immediately following passage Metochites remarks that political philosophy or science (ἡ πολιτική) should deal with the possibilities and circumstances encountered in real life. He likens the versatile knowledge of politics to the skill of a sailor who knows how to keep his ship afloat in good and adverse weather (a standard simile of classical origin used often in Byzantine court literature). Politics, he continues, is not a discipline dealing with ideals and perfect situations, but one which has to address the natural imperfection of human life. To back this idea, Metochites mentions that no one in his times knows a perfect embodiment of either physical beauty or political virtues, the moral virtues of the soul according to Neoplatonism, which he says that he has often studied. The reason, he explains, is that virtue faces the material world which it could never fully control, a statement steeped in dualistic pessimism.<sup>37</sup> We may be reminded here of Metochites’ sympathies toward the philosophical school of scepticism and its agnostic tendencies.<sup>38</sup>

Metochites repeats and develops some of the above ideas in two of his essays in the *Sententious Remarks* (essays 80 and 81). Here he raises the question of why so few ancient philosophers concerned themselves with political philosophy and observes that those who did write on the subject shunned involvement in politics, preferring ethics to politics as an area of activity. Metochites explains this regrettable situation mainly through the preposterousness (κενολογία) of their political ideas. The ancient philoso-

<sup>35</sup> Polemis (1995: 172.13–16 [ch. 36]): ἡ διὰ τὴν τούτων ἀτυχίαν τῶν πραγμάτων καθάπαξ ἀποχώρησις, ἣν τις τοῦτ' ἀξιοῖ, κατάλυσις τις ἔοικε τῷ ὄντι εἶναι τοῦ μεγίστου τε καὶ καλλίστου μέρους φιλοσοφίας, τοῦ πολιτικοῦ.

<sup>36</sup> See above n. 16.

<sup>37</sup> Polemis (1995: 172.18–176.5 [ch. 36]). On the ‘political virtues’, see O’Meara (2003: 40–42).

<sup>38</sup> Bydén (2002).

phers should have acted, according to Metochites, like doctors practising their craft and helping their fellow citizens. Instead they preferred an apolitical conduct, which Metochites contrasts to how a statesman (πολιτικός) should act in reality, namely, by dealing with the current affairs to the best of his capacity.<sup>39</sup> Metochites' criticism of specific ancient political philosophers goes beyond Plato, who is mentioned both here and in his earlier treatise *On Ethics or Education*; now the criticism includes also Zeno, Chrysippus, Theophrastus, and mostly Aristotle whom Metochites chastises most severely.<sup>40</sup> Metochites contrasts the ineffectual thinkers of antiquity with ancient legislators who contributed to the greatness of their states: Zoroaster and Cyrus among the Persians, Hanno among the Carthaginians, and especially King Numa Pompilius among the Romans, whose legislation set the Roman monarchy on a firm course until Metochites' own times.<sup>41</sup> The emphasis on legislation, which harkens back to Neoplatonic views in the Alexandrian *Prolegomena*, is again worthy of note.

Metochites' conception that political philosophy should address real life and situations corresponds to his own interest in issues of political theory. More than twenty essays in the *Sententious Remarks* discuss political subjects of a varying degree of contemporary relevance, such as ancient constitutions, the three classic forms of government, and state finances. The last issue was a particularly pressing one: the reign of Andronikos II saw frequent fiscal crises and Metochites himself was the architect of the fiscal policies of the emperor during the later years of his reign. Therefore Metochites' view in his treatise *On Ethics or Education* of political philosophy as 'the greatest and best part of philosophy' addressing practical goals foreshadows the political essays based on his greater experience in government in his collection of *Sententious Remarks*.

### *The concept of royal science*

So far we have seen that the descriptions of politics in a series of Byzantine *divisiones philosophiae* composed in the course of many centuries were grounded in antique tradition, although they did occasionally go beyond what was expected from textbook definitions. I would like now to turn to a

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<sup>39</sup> *Sententious Remarks* 81, in Müller & Kiessling (1821: 532–37, esp. 533.24–27; 537.13–20).

<sup>40</sup> *Sententious Remarks* 80, in Müller & Kiessling (1821: 524–28).

<sup>41</sup> *Sententious Remarks* 107, in Müller & Kiessling (1821: 529–32). See also *Sententious Remarks* 107, in Müller & Kiessling (1821: 703–10), whose theme is the legislation of Numa Pompilius.

group of twelfth- and thirteenth-century taxonomic descriptions of philosophy composed outside the scholastic context of the *divisiones*. These descriptions link the Platonic concept of royal science (βασιλική ἐπιστήμη) to political philosophy. It becomes necessary here to examine at the Platonic pedigree of this interesting concept and the history of its use by the late antique Neoplatonists, the ‘immediate’ source for its reappearance in the eleventh century. The seminal Neoplatonic text to consider is the anonymous sixth-century dialogue *On Political Science*. The work has attracted much attention by scholars, although no attempt has been made to trace its influence on middle and late Byzantine political speculation.

The concept of royal science entered lastingly the ancient philosophical tradition through Plato’s dialogue the *Statesman*.<sup>42</sup> Here the skill of government is referred to interchangeably as ‘political’ (πολιτική) and ‘royal’ (βασιλική) knowledge or science.<sup>43</sup> The dialogue does not have the goal of addressing constitutional matters and leaves unexplained the distinction between ‘royal’ and ‘political’. In his critical response to Plato, Aristotle clarifies in the *Politics* (1252a8–17) that the king has a personal government; however, he is called a statesman (πολιτικός) when the citizens rule and are ruled in turn in accordance with political science. The *Statesman* describes royal or political science as an expert knowledge similar to weaving, navigation and medicine; it uses the related skills of generalship, rhetoric and justice, setting them in motion whenever the right occasion for action arises.<sup>44</sup> Aided by royal science, but not necessarily bound to the written law, the expert ruler is able to govern for the public benefit.

Ancient philosophical tradition after Plato maintained sometimes the synonymous usage of ‘royal’ and ‘political’. For example, the Roman Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus (d. c. AD 120) is said to have tried to convince, during his exile to Syria, a client king to the Romans of the benefits of philosophy, specifying that Socrates called ‘philosophy a political and royal science (πολιτική τε καὶ βασιλική ἐπιστήμη), because the one who receives it becomes a statesman straightaway’.<sup>45</sup> The context does not explain the intended meaning of ‘political and royal science’, although it is note-

<sup>42</sup> On this dialogue, see Lane (1997); Cooper (1999).

<sup>43</sup> On the identification of ‘royal’ and ‘political’, see Plato, *Statesman* 267c (‘kingship is another name for statesmanship’) and 276c. Cf. *ibid.* 266e; 274e; 289d; 291c; 305c–d; 309d. The concept of ‘royal science’ is explicitly used in 261c; 284b; 288e; 292e; 295b; for ‘political science’, see 303e.

<sup>44</sup> Plato, *Statesman* 303e–305e.

<sup>45</sup> The reference to the unity of philosophy and kingship goes back to Socrates’ words in the *Republic* (473d), although the vocabulary is also clearly that of the *Statesman*. See Lutz (1947: 66.24–26 [Discourse 8]).

worthy that the notion is tied to what was to become a commonplace in Byzantine court literature, namely, the Platonic idea of the philosopher-king. Another example of usage of this concept is the fourth-century Athenian rhetorician Sopater who worked in Neoplatonic circles. In the opening section of his *prolegomenon* to Aelius Aristides, Sopater states that ‘the science of the statesman is a royal care in governing.’<sup>46</sup> The statesman (πολιτικός) is said to give orders to others without himself acting, since he is the supreme legislator. The finality of all other skills (generalship, judicial rhetoric, the manual crafts, etc.) is subordinated to him, because the statesman contains and represents the good (καλόν) and happiness (εὐδαιμονία), while other arts and crafts act for the sake of happiness.<sup>47</sup>

The sixth-century dialogue *On Political Science* attempts to construct a philosophical *system* around the Platonic notion of royal science.<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, what survives today from the original six books of *On Political Science* is a fragment consisting of the end of Book 4 and a larger portion from the beginning of Book 5. The full scope of ideas discussed in the dialogue is thus unknown. Nevertheless, the surviving fragment is substantial enough to set the work into context. We know that the anonymous author, a contemporary of the emperor Justinian I (527–65), was schooled in Neoplatonic philosophy.<sup>49</sup> He was critically disposed to contemporary imperial politics. The programme of reforms outlined in Book 5 was markedly anti-authoritarian in its proposition of a mixed constitution and laws for the election and retirement of emperors.<sup>50</sup>

The table of contents of Book 5 notes that one of the discussed themes is the concept of βασιλική ἐπιστήμη and the link of royal science with, and its superiority over, other sciences and crafts.<sup>51</sup> In the initial section of the book, the main interlocutor, Menodorus, mentions that an earlier part of the dialogue, now lost, has demonstrated the differences between royal science and philosophy, and has shown that royal and political philosophy ‘are one

<sup>46</sup> Lenz (1959: 128.5–6): ἡ τοῦ πολιτικοῦ ἐπιστήμη βασιλική τυγχάνει κατὰ τὴν διοίκησιν πρόνοια. On Sopater and the Neoplatonic context, see O’Meara (2003: 209–11).

<sup>47</sup> The source is Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1094a–b, where the end of political science is described as the finality of all crafts and sciences.

<sup>48</sup> All references below are to the Mazzucchi’s revised 2002 edition. The dialogue has recently been commented on and translated by Bell (2009: 49–79 [commentary], 123–88 [translation]), who renders βασιλική ἐπιστήμη into English as ‘imperial science’.

<sup>49</sup> See the detailed analysis by O’Meara (2002) and O’Meara (2003: 171–84). See also Praechter (1900).

<sup>50</sup> On the political ideas in the dialogue, see Fotiou (1981); Cameron (1985: 248–52, esp. 249 n. 47); O’Meara (2003: 180–82); Angelov (2004: 506–11).

<sup>51</sup> Mazzucchi (2002: 18.2–4; 18.10–11).

and the same thing insofar as being divine imitation'.<sup>52</sup> The lost part of the dialogue thus discussed Plato's identification of kingly and political knowledge. The extant section of Book 5 continues to use the concepts of 'royal' and 'political science' synonymously and interchangeably.<sup>53</sup> It has been argued that the identification between royal and political science would have been explicated through the principle of Neoplatonic metaphysics, by which the first member in an ordered series both pre-contains and produces subsequent members. The surviving section of Book 5 presents kingship as the source and fountain of 'political illumination', which it communicates to the uppermost tier of a hierarchically arranged chain of offices and hence to the lower tiers of offices.<sup>54</sup>

The dialogue also paints a picture of the genesis, mode of operation and metaphysical agency of political science. The emergence of political science is set in a Platonic myth of the Creation. Menodorus tells a story of how, soon after the Creation, humankind had found itself lying in the middle between the rational and the irrational, between a life of pure intellect and nature. This state of affairs led to internal turmoil in the soul (tossed to and fro without a sense of direction) and warfare in the political sphere. To mend the unhappy situation and ensure human survival, the Demiurge and divine foresight granted humankind the two gifts of dialectic and political science.<sup>55</sup> The above description is heavily indebted to the Platonic tradition: the historical reconstruction of the polity hearkens to the *Republic* (369a ff.); the myth of the Creation is based on the *Timaeus*; the transcendental origin of political knowledge finds parallels and explanations in the writings of late Neoplatonists.<sup>56</sup> Political science secures human salvation (σωτηρία) through the actions of the statesman (πολιτικός). Having received the knowledge of political science as a divine revelation at the time of the emergence of the political community, the πολιτικός is said to approach different sections of the polity differently. He teaches political science to those who are 'by nature receptive (φύσει δεκτικοί)', while others he saves through correct belief (ὀρθὴ δόξα) and the tradition of faith. Among others he introduces the custom of living a just life and the fear of the laws (that is, he is a lawgiver), and he teaches them to imitate his own

<sup>52</sup> Mazzucchi (2002: 21.9–11, esp. ll. 10–11: ὅτι ταῦτόν βασιλεία τε καὶ πολιτικὴ φιλοσοφία οἷα θεοῦ μίμησις οὔσα).

<sup>53</sup> Mazzucchi (2002: 64–66).

<sup>54</sup> O'Meara (2003: 176–77).

<sup>55</sup> Mazzucchi (2002: 55.6–57.10).

<sup>56</sup> O'Meara (2003: 79; 94–97; 176).

good life.<sup>57</sup> The πολιτικός is not identified with the βασιλεύς whose election and ideal qualities are described elsewhere in the surviving fragment of Book 5; nonetheless, the activity of the πολιτικός is monarchical in so far as it represents top-down ordering of the polity and inasmuch as political science is also royal science.

The salvation of humankind brought about by political science and the πολιτικός is both physical and metaphysical. After the πολιτικός sets the polity in order, the human race is able to regain its pristine state: ‘the heavenly metropolis’ (ἡ ἄνω μητρόπολις) from where it has been exiled.<sup>58</sup> How this happens precisely is not explained in the extant fragment of the dialogue. The broad outline of the scheme of salvation finds close parallels in Neoplatonic philosophy: namely, the importance of political virtues as the first stage in the divinization of the soul, the return of the soul to the One, and the idea of a heavenly city.<sup>59</sup> However, as scholars have warned, one should be cautious not to use these parallels to draw a hasty conclusion about the non-Christian religious beliefs of the author. The discussion of matters of metaphysics in the surviving part of the dialogue is brief and non-polemical. As a counter-argument against the author’s paganism, one can point to the circumstance that the phrase ‘the heavenly metropolis’ used by the dialogue is attested solely among Christian authors and that the notion of return to the heavens corresponds to the Christian notion of salvation after the Fall of Man.<sup>60</sup>

The sixth-century dialogue not only marks a peak in Neoplatonic political philosophy, but is worlds apart in its sophisticated argumentation from the advisory ‘mirror of princes’ literature, the main genre of political theorizing in the centuries immediately following Justinian I. The concept of royal science is absent from this court literature and appears to have been reintroduced during the upsurge of philosophical study in the eleventh century. The eleventh-century *Historia Syntomos*, cogently attributed to Michael Psellos, mentions in the context of an excursus on ancient Roman

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<sup>57</sup> Mazzucchi (2002: 59.1–15).

<sup>58</sup> Mazzucchi (2002: 60.1–8).

<sup>59</sup> O’Meara (2003: 176).

<sup>60</sup> A *TLG* search for the phrase ἡ ἄνω μητρόπολις shows that, apart from the sixth-century dialogue, it was used solely by Christian authors. See, for example, Gregory of Nazianzus, *On the Holy Easter*, in Migne (*PG* 36: col. 656A). The question of whether the author of the sixth-century dialogue is a pagan or a Christian has no easy and obvious answer; it is evident that he lived in a mixed Christian and pagan milieu. On this question (left similarly open but with different arguments), see O’Meara (2003: 183). Bell (2009: 76–79) also considers this question difficult to answer.



history that a muse taught βασιλική ἐπιστήμη to King Numa Pompilius.<sup>61</sup> The idea of royal science being a divine gift to humankind is what we already saw in the sixth-century dialogue. Psellos' usage seems to have been intentional and premeditated. The source for this section of the *Historia Syntomos* is the *Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who reports a story according to which the ancient Roman king received divine instruction in 'royal wisdom' (βασιλική σοφία). It is noteworthy that Psellos modified the phrase 'royal wisdom' into 'royal science' (βασιλική ἐπιστήμη).<sup>62</sup> The substitution makes the passage from Dionysius of Halicarnassus fit the Neoplatonic idea of the divine origins of royal science and is explicable by Psellos' instrumental role in the eleventh-century revival of Neoplatonism.

After re-emerging in the eleventh century, the concept of royal science was linked with the classifications of practical philosophy. In the preface to his *Epitome logica* the thirteenth-century philosopher and monk Nikephoros Blemmydes remarks that 'to say it briefly, reigning scientifically (τὸ βασιλεύειν ἐπιστημονικῶς) is nothing else than the summit of practical philosophy'. The explanation stated in the immediately following sentence is that the emperor holds the reins of judicial and legislative power in his hands, and when acting with care and erudition he is seen 'as another God on earth'.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the exalted position of royal science (this is how I understand the expression 'reigning scientifically'), namely, at the apex of practical philosophy, is explained through the prerogatives of contemporary emperors as supreme legislators and supreme judges. The reference to legislation and justice is the same echo from the Neoplatonic bipartite division of practical philosophy which resonates, as we saw, also in Chapter 7 of the *Epitome logica* on the *divisiones philosophiae*.<sup>64</sup>

The connotations of royal science in the preface to the *Epitome logica* can become clearer through further examination of the context. In terms of

<sup>61</sup> Aerts (1990: 2.22–24). Duffy & Papaioannou (2003: 219–29) have adduced convincing philological arguments in favour of Psellos' authorship in spite of Aerts' earlier objections (1990: viii–xv). The use of the concept of βασιλική ἐπιστήμη itself lends support to Psellos' authorship of the *Historia Syntomos*.

<sup>62</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. Rom.* 2.60.5. I would like to thank Stratis Papaioannou for this reference. It is interesting also that the *Historia Syntomos* reports the instruction of Numa as a fact, while Dionysius of Halicarnassus presents it as a story reported by some people.

<sup>63</sup> Nikephoros Blemmydes, *Epitome logica*, in Migne (*PG* 142: col. 689A–C, esp. 689B): καὶ ἵν' εἴπω συντόμως τὸ πᾶν, οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἐστὶ τὸ βασιλεύειν ἐπιστημονικῶς ἢ τῆς πρακτικῆς φιλοσοφίας αὐτὸ τὸ ἀκρότατον.

<sup>64</sup> See above nn. 11–13.

genre the preface is a mixture of philosophical musings and laudation of the emperor John III Batatzes (1221–54), who had commissioned Blemmydes to compose the textbook on logic and sponsored his teaching activities.<sup>65</sup> At the outset of the preface, Blemmydes lays out the similarity between kingship and philosophy, which boils down to the circumstance that both preside over their respective spheres. Kingship is the highest political dignity, while philosophy is the ‘art of arts and science of sciences’—one of the six definitions of philosophy reported in the late antique *Prolegomena* to philosophy.<sup>66</sup> When kingship and philosophy converge, the ruling power reaches perfection by imitating God and secures good life for the ruled. For ‘as some great philosopher reckoned in the best fashion’ (Plato is not mentioned by name), the subjects would prosper when the emperor is a philosopher.<sup>67</sup> It is this statement that is followed by the remark that ‘reigning scientifically is the summit of practical philosophy’. In other words, royal science is the knowledge possessed by a philosopher-king. But what kind of knowledge is royal science specifically?

Blemmydes’ stellar and politically powerful student and philosopher, the crown prince and for a brief time emperor of Nicaea Theodore II Laskaris (b. 1221/22, ruled 1254–58), develops further the notion of royal science. In his *Satire of the Tutor* Laskaris dwells at length on the importance of philosophy in his education, emphasizing its special role for an imperial prince.<sup>68</sup> The satire is a lengthy mockery of the tutor to whom Laskaris was unwillingly assigned as a teenager. Among the tutor’s many shortcomings is the alleged attempt to turn the crown prince away from the study of philosophy. Laskaris enumerates the six classic definitions of philosophy and describes how each referred to the benefits to be derived from philosophy. The definition of philosophy as ‘the art of arts and the science of sciences’ is linked with the profit of obtaining knowledge of ‘the first science, that is,

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<sup>65</sup> The preface is the *prooimion* both to an early first edition and the final edition of the *Epitome logica*. Carelos (2006: 401–2) re-edited recently the *prooimion*, describing it as an ‘integrated mirror of princes’. However one finds here no traces of *parainesis* or didacticism characteristic of court advice literature. On Blemmydes’ preface to his *Epitome* and its connection with his teaching activities on logic, see Lackner (1981: 353); Constantinides (1982: 12); Macrides (2007: 194). See also Munitiz (1988: 71 and n. 91).

<sup>66</sup> Blemmydes was to repeat the same reasoning in ch. 6 of his mirror of princes, the *Imperial Statue*. See Hunger & Ševčenko (1986: 44–46). On philosophy as the art of arts and science of sciences, see the *Prolegomena* by Elias (Busse 1900a: 20.18–23) and David (Busse 1900b: 26.26–28).

<sup>67</sup> Nikephoros Blemmydes, *Epitome logica*, in Migne (*PG* 142: col. 689A–B). The inspiration is Plato’s *Republic* X 689a–b.

<sup>68</sup> This is an idea which Laskaris was to revisit during his more mature years when ruling as a sole emperor. See Angelov (2007: 238).

royal science (βασιλική ἐπιστήμη)'. Laskaris presents royal science in the following manner:

[I needed to be a philosopher] inasmuch as philosophy is 'the art of arts and science of sciences', so that, subject to the providence of God and to conformity with nature that serves God's command, I, who am the crown upon humankind, would have the entire scientific knowledge of the first science, that is, royal science. For from there [from royal science] gaze the wise man and the private individual, the common craftsman and the soldier, the wrong-doer and the just man, the one who is judged and the judge, the bravest and the vanquished, the diligent and the indolent, the rich and the poor, households, villages, cities, and the world, and to put it shortly, all the people. Compile a work regarding what kind of man the person whose lot it is to govern should be! This is the reason why I very much needed to be a philosopher. For I think it is necessary for the rulers to know science and to do nothing without it.<sup>69</sup>

Like his teacher Blemmydes, Laskaris considered royal science a philosophical discipline. He expected to study the subject during his philosophical education and ridiculed an unfortunate teacher who dared think otherwise. In fact, Laskaris expected to gain the knowledge of royal science by reading a mirror of princes, for the expression 'what kind of man the person whose lot it is to govern should be' was used during the late Byzantine period in reference to works of court advice literature.<sup>70</sup> This circumstance may clarify Laskaris' otherwise enigmatic comment that all kinds of people, both virtuous and not, 'gaze from' royal science: they stare from the pages of a mirror of princes like Blemmydes' *Imperial Statue*, which illustrates virtues and vices through numerous historical and mythological figures. Like Blemmydes, Laskaris considered royal science a high-ranking subject: what Blemmydes had called 'the summit of practical philosophy' was for Laskaris 'the first science'. Laskaris comes close to Blemmydes' *Epitome logica* also by using the definition of philosophy as 'the art of arts and the

<sup>69</sup> Tartaglia (2000: 180.632–181.646): διὰ δὲ τοῦ 'τέχνη τεχνῶν καὶ ἐπιστήμη ἐπιστημῶν', ἵνα ἐπὶ θεοῦ προνοίᾳ καὶ φύσεως ἀκολουθίᾳ ὑπηρετούσης τῷ θεῷ προστάγματι, τῆς πρώτης ἐπιστήμης, τῶν γε κατὰ τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον ὦν κορωνίς, τῆς βασιλικῆς ἐπιστήμης φημί, παντοίαν ἔχω τὴν ἐπιστήμην—ἐκεῖθεν γὰρ ἐνορᾷ καὶ σοφὸς καὶ ἰδιώτης, καὶ βάνασος καὶ στρατιώτης, καὶ ἀδικῶν καὶ δικαιοπραγῶν, καὶ κρινόμενος καὶ δικάζων, καὶ ἀριστεύων ὡς καὶ ἠττώμενος, καὶ σπουδαῖος καὶ ὀκνηρὸς, καὶ πένης καὶ πλούσιος, καὶ οἶκος καὶ κώμη, καὶ πόλεις καὶ κόσμος, καὶ συνελῶν εἴπω πᾶς ὁ λαός· ὅποιον γοῦν τὸν ἄρχειν λαχόντα δεῖ εἶναι σύναξον. διὰ τοῦτο οὖν ἔδει με ἄκρως φιλοσοφεῖν· ἀναγκαῖον γὰρ ἠγοῦμαι γινώσκειν τοὺς ἄρχοντας ἐπιστήμην καὶ ἄτερ ταύτης πράττειν μηδέν. The interpretation of this passage is not without difficulty. The preposition ἐπί in the phrase ἐπὶ θεοῦ προνοίᾳ is the editor's sensible emendation from ἐπεὶ found in the manuscripts. I have translated the word ἐκεῖθεν with its most common meaning of 'from there', 'thence'.

<sup>70</sup> The title of the fourteenth-century paraphrase of Blemmydes' mirror of princes *The Imperial Statue* is given in this way in some of the manuscripts. See Hunger & Ševčenko (1986: 45); Migne (*PG* 142: coll. 611–12).

science of sciences' in a similar context, although in this case he engages in a play of words appropriate for a satire and argues that the definition shows that royal science is a worthy philosophical subject.

A concept used by Laskaris in his descriptions of royal science reminds one of the dialogue *On Political Science*. His qualification of royal science as 'the first science' corresponds to the idea in the sixth-century dialogue about the early emergence of political science after the Creation and to Menodorus' words that political science is the 'first good' (πρῶτον ἀγαθόν), and the best and greatest skill.<sup>71</sup> Royal science was thus 'the first science' both temporally and in terms of value. The same idea is conveyed by the table of contents of Book 5 of the dialogue, which states that one of its subjects is the superiority of royal science over other arts and sciences. Unfortunately, this section of Book 5 has been lost.

Does the reappearance of the notion of royal science in Byzantium after the eleventh century indicate the influence of the sixth-century dialogue? Examining one last piece of evidence can help us to arrive at a plausible hypothesis. A twelfth-century imperial panegyric of the emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143–80) by Michael Italikos contains an interesting description of royal science, which, as far as I am aware, is unique in the middle Byzantine period.<sup>72</sup> A teacher of philosophy, rhetoric and medicine in Constantinople, Italikos included in the oration quotations from the *Republic* by which he strove to display his learning to the court audience.<sup>73</sup> The epideictic function of the imperial oration is neither unusual nor surprising, and it is important to realize that Italikos considered the rhetorical work to be a forum for the presentation of philosophical ideas. The oration lauds Manuel for having mastered at an early age, through the instruction given by his father, Emperor John II Komnenos, the art of war and royal science (βασιλική ἐπιστήμη).<sup>74</sup> Just as in the case of Laskaris, therefore, royal science is understood as a field of knowledge taught to princes. Further on in the oration, Italikos engages in a description of royal science as a master craft surpassing all political skills and sciences:

It was necessary that he [sc. the prince Manuel] learned royal science as a more masterly craft [than strategy], which subjugates all peoples to it and governs cities and all

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<sup>71</sup> Mazzucchi (2002: 63.4–8). See also *ibid.* 64.12–14 (citation from Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 4.2.11).

<sup>72</sup> On Italikos, see Treu (1895); Fuchs (1926: 38); Tatakis (1959: 218–19); Gautier (1972: 14–28); Kazhdan (1991). On Italikos as a teacher as well as on his oration in praise of Manuel, see Magdalino (1993: 333–35; 435–38).

<sup>73</sup> Gautier (1972: 282.1–2; 282.9–10).

<sup>74</sup> Gautier (1972: 282.23).

parts of the universe. For she [royal science] issues orders about actions to be carried out in the best possible manner, uses as her tools other powers, namely rhetoric and strategy, carries everything, so to speak, by attaching it to herself, and presides over all political [sciences and skills], just as the First Philosophy presides over all other sciences and skills and is called ‘the art of arts and the science of sciences’.<sup>75</sup>

It is interesting to find here a third example of a Byzantine author citing the definition ‘art of arts and science of sciences’ in order to place royal science within the divisions of knowledge. In this case, Italikos understands the ‘art of arts and science of sciences’ to be metaphysics, which Aristotle calls First Philosophy. The comparison here, therefore, is between metaphysics and royal science, the former presiding over the theoretical disciplines and the latter commanding as a master craft all other political sciences and crafts. Italikos’ description of royal science is richer in philosophical terminology than those of Blemmydes and Laskaris, and weaves together Platonic and Aristotelian notions. Thus, the Platonic concept of royal science is linked to the notion of an architectonic master craft, which Aristotle applies in the opening of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to political science.<sup>76</sup> Rhetoric and strategy appear as ancillary crafts to royal or political science both in Plato and Aristotle: the *Statesman* refers to rhetoric, strategy and justice as tools of royal science, while the *Nicomachean Ethics* speaks of rhetoric, strategy and economics as crafts subordinate to political science.<sup>77</sup>

The three descriptions of royal science by Michael Italikos, Nikephoros Blemmydes and Theodore II Laskaris share among themselves similarities with the sixth-century dialogue, which may be summarized as follows:

(1) The Byzantine authors view royal science as philosophical knowledge and a part of philosophy. Blemmydes comes closest to making a classificatory statement when naming royal science the apex of practical philosophy. All three authors assign royal science a supreme place in the hierarchy of knowledge: master craft, the apex of practical philosophy, the first science.

(2) All three authors explain the philosophical affinity of royal science through the definition of philosophy (or First Philosophy) as the art of arts

<sup>75</sup> Gautier (1972: 283.14–21): τὴν δέ γε βασιλικὴν ἐπιστήμην ὡς ἀρχιτεκτονικωτέραν ἐχρῆν ἐκμαθεῖν, πάντα ὑφ’ ἐαυτὴν ποιουμένην ἔθνη καὶ πόλεις καὶ μερίδας ὅλας τοῦ σύμπαντος διακυβερνῶσαν· αὕτη γὰρ περὶ τῶν πρακτικῶν ὡς ἄριστα διατάττεται καὶ χρᾶται ταῖς ἄλλαις δυνάμεσιν, ὡς ὄργανοις, ῥητορικῇ καὶ στρατηγικῇ, καὶ ὡσπερ εἰς ἐαυτὴν ἀναδησαμένη φέρει τὰ πάντα καὶ τῶν πολιτικῶν ἀπασῶν ὑπερκάθηται, καθάπερ ἡ πρώτη φιλοσοφία τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιστημῶν καὶ τεχνῶν, τέχνη λέγεται τεχνῶν καὶ ἐπιστήμη ἐπιστημῶν.

<sup>76</sup> *Eth. Nic.* 1094a26–28.

<sup>77</sup> Plato, *Statesman* 305c–d; Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1094a27–b6.

and science of sciences. The superiority of royal science over other sciences and arts is one of the subjects of the sixth-century dialogue.

(3) Two of the three authors (Michael Italikos and Theodore Laskaris) assume that an imperial prince can learn royal science through instruction, whether by an emperor-father versed in it or by a philosopher capable of composing a discourse on kingship. The sixth-century dialogue mentions in a similar fashion that the statesman (πολιτικός) teaches political science to people receptive to it by nature.

The three areas of convergence with the sixth-century dialogue are significant enough to indicate intellectual continuity, but by themselves do not constitute sufficient evidence for concluding that there was *direct* dependence on the late antique work. No quotations from the dialogue *On Political Science* are identifiable, and the Byzantine reception of the work is known to have been unenthusiastic: one single mention of it in Photios' *Bibliotheca* and a single palimpsest manuscript in which the dialogue survives. Furthermore, the descriptions of royal science by the three Byzantine authors are brief and synoptic, omitting important points made in the sixth-century dialogue, such as the identification of political and royal science or the metaphysical role of political science. One is perhaps justified to envisage an intermediate source in the form of a simplified epitome or a philosophical chapter dealing with royal science, which would have been derived from the dialogue. An epitome like this could have been produced in the eleventh century, a time of revival of philosophical studies, when summaries of philosophical subjects were produced in the Psellian milieu.<sup>78</sup> This hypothesis finds support in the circumstance that the earliest middle Byzantine texts in which the notion of royal science reappears are the writings of Michael Psellos, including the *Historia Syntomos* and, as we will shortly see, also one of his orations. The suggested explanation of how the dialogue could have exerted indirect influence is only a plausible hypothesis. Further work and the edition of new philosophical texts may help to shed fresh light on the issue.

No matter what the path of transmission of the concept of royal science may have been, it is important to note that it gained wider currency in various non-philosophical contexts after the eleventh century. In Byzantine historiography and rhetoric βασιλική ἐπιστήμη referred to the body of knowledge which emperors acquired through instruction in order to be able to govern wisely and effectively. The *Historia syntomos* attributed to

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<sup>78</sup> One immediately thinks of the *philosophica* of Psellos or the philosophical work from the Psellian milieu preserved in Cod. Barocci 131 and edited by Pontikos (1992).

Psellos refers to the wise Roman king Numa being taught royal science by a muse. In a context closer to his own times, Psellos refers to the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–55) acquiring ‘royal science’ through the enlightened influence of a philosopher-advisor.<sup>79</sup> Anna Komnene’s *Alexiad* speaks of how the emperor Alexios I regarded his mother Anna Dalassene as a ‘leader in royal science’ and therefore confided in her so strongly as to entrust her with extraordinary powers.<sup>80</sup> In his *History* George Pachymeres notes that Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282–1328) mastered ‘royal science’ at an early age; therefore, the emperor initially rejected the recommendation of his advisors to disband the Byzantine fleet as a money-saving measure, although in the end this unwise decision was made.<sup>81</sup> The Platonic concept thus became applied to the characterization of educated emperors in Byzantine literature and historiography.

### Conclusion

This investigation has traced the Byzantine understanding of the place and nature of politics in the classification of philosophy. Of special interest has been the question of whether and how political philosophy as described in the classifications corresponded to contemporary politics. It is beyond doubt that the *divisiones philosophiae* conceived of political philosophy as an autonomous discipline. The Aristotelian tripartite division of practical philosophy, with politics as one of its legitimately constituted fields, was the common view during the Greek Middle Ages. The alternative Neoplatonic division of practical philosophy into two branches was generally not followed, although awareness of it is evidenced in the writings of Byzantine philosophers (Psellos especially, and to a lesser extent Blemmydes and Metochites).

The description of political philosophy in the *divisiones philosophiae* is usually brief, based on school tradition leading back to late antiquity, and articulated through ancient politico-philosophical terminology. The resultant academic and classicizing perspective is sometimes accompanied by a rarer view which takes imperial politics into consideration. The latter view also availed itself of ancient philosophical concepts, both Platonic and Aristotelian. Some of the classifications describe political philosophy as a field concerned with the activity of the statesman who brings good order and jus-

<sup>79</sup> Dennis (1994: 434–35) (*Or.* 17). The context is Psellos’ panegyric of his teacher John Mauropous, Metropolitan of Euchaita, who is said to have been an advisor to the emperor.

<sup>80</sup> 3.7.5.5–8, esp. 7–8: ὡς ἐξάρχῳ βασιλικῆς ἐπιστήμης ταύτη προσεῖχε τὸν νοῦν.

<sup>81</sup> Failler (1984–99: vol. III, 83.9–12).

tice to the πόλις or πόλεις. This view reflects a common top-down model of social theorizing and political ordering in Byzantium. The association of royal science with political philosophy served to connect political theory and social reality. Originally discussed in Plato's dialogue the *Statesman* (from where the very notion of the statesman derives) as the expert craft of governing, and elaborated later by the Neoplatonists, the concept referred in Byzantium to the historically specific knowledge of imperial rule. The notion of royal science worked as a bridge linking different periods and spheres: a bridge from antiquity to Byzantium, from philosophy to politics, and from political philosophy as a discipline to the advisory works on the ideal emperor and imperial governance.

Traditionally, historians of philosophy have observed the relatively low level of interest in political philosophy in Byzantium in comparison with logic, ethics and the subjects of theoretical philosophy. From the point of view of commentaries on ancient philosophy and scholastic texts, this observation is justified. Yet when account is taken of the taxonomic ordering of political philosophy, the view of royal science advocated by some Byzantine philosophers after the eleventh century opens the door of philosophy to the large, diverse and rich body of kingship literature. The word 'literature' is used intentionally, because the bulk of the works in question is rhetorical by genre and discourse (mirrors of princes, orations, works critical of emperors, etc.). To what extent and which works of this literature may be deemed philosophical in the context of the history of Byzantine philosophy are questions in need of further study. What is apparent is that the authors who used the notion of royal science include some of the most original Byzantine political thinkers, such as Michael Psellos, Theodore II Laskaris and George Pachymeres, who were philosophers with wide-ranging interests. It is likely that they would have considered kingship literature to belong to the field of political philosophy.

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