THE DATE OF PSELLOS' DEATH, ONCE AGAIN: PSELLOS WAS NOT THE MICHAEL OF NIKOMEDEIA MENTIONED BY ATTALEIATES

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The date of the death of Michael Psellos has been debated by many scholars. He is a figure so often quoted in scholarship that it is annoying not to know what end date to cite for him, whether in the 1070s, 1080s, or even 1090s. The current state of the question was established recently, in 2003, by Apostolos Karpozilos, who showed that there is no evidence that Psellos lived past 1076 except for a reference in the historian Michael Attaleiates to a certain Michael of Nikomedeia who died in the early months of the reign of Nikephoros III Botaneiates, that is, in 1078. Previous scholars had attempted to identify the two men, but Karpozilos offers the strongest argument for their identity and he also convincingly lays to rest various alternative positions that would have Psellos live into the 1090s.[1] In sum, if Psellos was this Michael of Nikomedeia, then he died in 1078; if he was not, then all that we can say is that he drops out of the historical record in 1076. It is the first of these conclusions that I wish to challenge here. It is hardly a weakly argued conclusion, I hasten to add, and I held it as highly likely to be true until recently, when I joined an effort to translate Attaleiates into English. I realized then that the identification of the two men rests on a misunderstanding of a crucial part of the text, a problem that we will come to in due course.

The author is extremely grateful to Stratis Papaioannou for considering and reconsidering this question many times and for offering invaluable comments and alternatives at its every twist and turn. Needless to say, he bears no responsibility for the positions I take here.

1 A. Karpozilos, When did Michael Psellus die? The evidence of the Dioptra, *BZ* 96 (2003) 671–677, with references to previous bibliography, the most significant of which in support of his position was P. Gautier, Monodie inédite de Michel Psellos sur le basileus Andronic Doucas, *RÉB* 23 (1966) 153–170, here 159–164, and the most recent against it A. Schminck, Zum Todesjahr des Michael Psellos, *BZ* 94 (2001) 190–196. Karpozilos restates his position in his Βυζαντινοὶ ἱστορικοὶ καὶ χρονογράφοι, vol. 3, Athens 2009, 72–74. In the recent Greek translation and revision of J. N. Ljubarskij's book on Psellos, originally published in Russian in 1978, one can observe the gradual falling away of later dates, as the author himself, in added notes, retracts pieces of evidence as no longer tenable: Η προσωπικότητα και το έργο του Μιχαήλ Ψελλού, transl. A. Tzeles. Athens 2004, 57–63.

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What does Attaleiates say about the death of this Michael of Nikomedeia? Before quoting the relevant passage, some context is necessary. Attaleiates has just recounted a failed attack against the emperor Botaneiates by the Varangian guard itself within the palace, during the course of which one of the secretaries who was standing beside the emperor was killed.

> Not long after, the monk Michael, the *hypertimos*, who had been placed in charge of the administration and whose family origin was from Nikomedeia, ended his life. He was an arrogant and unpleasant man and was not wholy in agreement with the emperor's generous benefactions. The killing of the secretary, in fact, presaged his own death, for the man happened to be in his service [i.e., Michael's] and, because of this, the belief prevailed that God took him [i.e., Michael] away for holding up the imperial grants and benefactions.
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> Οὐ πολὺ τὸ ἐν μέσῳ καὶ Μιχαὴλ μοναχὸς ὁ ὑπέρτιμος, ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν πολιτικῶν πραγμάτων προστάς, τὸ γένος ἕλκων ἐκ Νικομηδείας, τὴν ζωὴν ἐξεμέτρησε, δυσάρεστος ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὑψαύχην καὶ μὴ πάνυ τι ξυντιθέμενος ταῖς τοῦ βασιλέως φιλοτίμοις εὐποιίαις, τὸν σφαγέντα ὑπογραφέα προοίμιον ἐσχηκὼς τῆς αὐτοῦ τελευτῆς. τῆς γὰρ ἐκείνου ὑπηρεσίας ἐτύγχανε, καὶ διὰτοῦτο δήπου λόγος ἐκράτησεν ὡς ἐκ μέσου τοῦτον πεποίηκεν ὁ Θεὸς, οἷα τὰς βασιλικὰς δωρεὰς καὶ εὐεργεσίας διακωλύοντα.[2]

Just how many monks named Michael who also held the title of *hypertimos* and had political power existed at that time?, Karpozilos rightly asked. By the time we finish our discussion, the answer must be, at least two, Psellos and Michael of Nikomedeia. Despite their obvious similarities, it is hard to see how Attaleiates could have referred to Psellos like this and expect to be understood; moreover, his description of Michael of Nikomedeia, when examined against the usage of certain key technical political terms in the rest of the *History*, points decisively away from Psellos. But first some preliminary considerations.

[2] Michael Attaleiates, *History* 296–297; ed. and transl. I. Pérez Martín, Miguel Ataliates: Historia. *Nueva Roma*, 15. Madrid 2002, 212. On the basis of prior scholarship, Pérez Martín accepts the view that Psellos was Michael of Nikomedeia: xxii–xxiv, 300–301, 335.

1. It is unlikely that Psellos had any connection with Nikomedeia.

Karpozilos rightly states that Attaleiates means not that this Michael was himself born in Nikomedeia but that his family background lay there.[3] But in his voluminous corpus, which, as is well known, contains many autobiographical digressions, Psellos never refers to any connection that his family had with Nikomedeia, even when, on a number of occasions, he refers to the city itself. A few such occasions are worth mentioning. In the *Chronographia*, he refers to the many places that no longer held any trace of wisdom before he revived it through his own efforts, mentioning Athens, Nikomedeia, Phoenicia, Elder Rome, and New Rome.[4] He also wrote a small treatise on a strange phenomenon caused by an echo-chamber in Nikomedeia. Psellos says that he went to see it for himself and gives a natural explanation for it.[5] In neither case does he even allude to any connection that he might have with the place. The same is true about a letter he wrote to Basileios, the metropolitan of the city,[6] and another to an unnamed *krites* of the theme of Optimatoi, in which Nikomedeia lay.[7] Nor does he allude to any such connection in his *Encomium for his Mother*, where he discusses his family background. It is clear from what he says that his mother's parents were native Constantinopolitans; as for his father's family, he says only that they could trace their descent from consuls and *patrikioi*.[8]

[3] Karpozilos, When did Michael Psellus die (as footnote 1 above) 673.

[4] Psellos, Chronographia 6.43.

[5] J.M. Duffy (ed.), Michaelis Pselli Philosophica Minora, vol. 1. Stuttgart and Leipzig 1992, 106–109.

[6] Psellos, ep. 104; ed. E. Kurtz and F. Drexl, Michaelis Psellis Scripta Minora, vol. 2. Milan 1941, 132–133.

[7] Psellos, ep. 60; ed. K. Sathas, Μεσαιωνικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη, V. Paris 1876, 291–292.

[8] Psellos, Encomium for his Mother 2a–b, 4b; ed. U. Criscuolo, Michele Psello: Autobiografia (Encomio per la madre). Naples 1989, 87–88, 190; transl. A. Kaldellis, Mothers and sons, fathers and daughters: The Byzantine family of Michael Psellos. Notre Dame 2006. 55, 57.

2. "Michael of Nikomedeia" was not how contemporaries referred to Psellos.

Not only did Psellos call himself Psellos, both in his letters and other works,[9] both before and after he became a monk in late 1054 and changed his name from Konstantinos to Michael, almost every other contemporary or near contemporary source also refers to him by the name Psellos and usually only by that name, not as Michael and certainly not as Michael of Nikomedeia. This is significant: it means that he was universally known as "Psellos," and Attaleiates would have known that by not calling him that he risked not being understood by his own readers. Specifically:

Hundreds of texts of all possible genres and length are ascribed to Psellos in his rich manuscript tradition and in all cases he is identified as Psellos, sometimes just as Psellos, sometimes as Konstantinos Psellos, sometimes as Michael Psellos, and often with accompanying titles.[10] This can only mean that it was Psellos himself who always identified himself as such on every work of his that went into circulation, and Attaleiates, who was immersed in the intellectual trends of the capital,[11] surely knew this well. It would have been perverse for him to refer to such a famous figure as Psellos by any other name and expect to be understood.

In his preface, Ioannes Skylitzes refers to Psellos as ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς ὕπατος τῶν φιλοσόφων καὶ ὑπέρτιμος ὁ Ψελλός,[12] and at the end of his narrative, in connection with the embassy to the rebel Isaakios Komnenos in 1057, he refers to him as Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ Ψελλὸς ὁ τῶν φιλοσόφων ὕπατος.[13] It is interesting that Skylitzes continues to call him Konstantinos even though he is referring to a date after Psellos had taken the name Michael. This means that the name Michael itself was not securely linked to Psellos in the minds of contemporaries and so to call him that without adding the name Psellos would have been doubly confusing (and in the acrostich of a poem that he wrote soon after he

9 For an amusing instance, see Psellos, ep. 72; ed. Sathas (as footnote 7 above) 307: Ψελλὸς γάρ σοι γεγένηται ἕτερος (on the birth of a grandson); transl. E. Papaioannou in Kaldellis, Mothers and sons, 172.

10 See P. Moore, Iter Psellianum. Toronto 2005.

11 See now D. Krallis, Michael Attaleiates and the politics of imperial decline in eleventh-century Byzantium. Arizona 2011, forthcoming.

12 I. Thurn (ed.), Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum. *CFHB*, 5. Berlin and New York 1973, 3.

13 ibid. 496.

became a monk Psellos named himself as Konstas, not Michael).[14] Skylitzes is traditionally believed to have been writing in the 1090s, but a recent study argues that there is no reason why he cannot be placed earlier, at any time after 1057 when his narrative ends.[15]

In his account of the reign of Romanos IV Diogenes (1068–1071), the continuer of Skylitzes (possibly to be identified with Skylitzes himself) also refers to him as "the consul of philosophers, Konstantinos Psellos." In reference to the accession of Michael VII, and again during his reign, he calls him "the consul of the philosophers, Psellos," with no first name.[16]

Psellos appears as a functionary in the underworld court in the satire *Timarion*, not directly by name but as the Βυζάντιος σοφιστὴς who spoke ὑποψελλίζων,[17] which alludes to his name. I argue elsewhere that a possible date for this work is not long after the trial of Italos in 1082, so only a few years after the completion of Attaleiates' *History*.[18]

The death of Psellos occasioned a letter of consolation sent to Psellos' brother by Theophylaktos, later archbishop of Bulgaria (assuming the addressee of the letter has been preserved correctly). There is no way to date the letter, but the event is described only as τοῦ Ψελλοῦ θανόντος. At a later date, Theophylaktos sent a letter recommending Psellos' grandson to Kamateros; here too he refers to "the thrice-blessed *hypertimos* Psellos."[19]

A large number of writers of the twelfth century, including Gregorios Pardos, Ioannes Tzetzes, Anna Komnene, Eustathios of Thessalonike,

14 L. G. Westerink, Michaelis Pselli Poemata. Stuttgart and Leipzig 1992, 270–276. Albrecht Berger kindly reminded me of this text.

15 Cf. C. Holmes, Basil II and the governance of empire (976–1025). Oxford 2005) with E.-S. Kiapidou, Ἡ Σύνοψη Ἱστοριῶν τοῦ Ἰωάννη Σκυλίτζη καὶ οἱ πηγές της (811–1057). Athens 2010, 125–136.

16 E. Tsolakes (ed.), Ἡ Συνέχεια τῆς Χρονογραφίας τοῦ Σκυλίτζη (Ioannes Skylitzes Continuatus). Thessalonike 1968, 141, 152, 156.

17 Timarion 41, 45; ed. R. Romano, Pseudo-Luciano: Timarione. Naples 1974. 87, 90; transl. B. Baldwin, Timarion. Detroit 1984, 71, 74.

18 A. Kaldellis, The Timarion: toward a literary interpretation, in P. Odorico (ed.), Le face cachée de la litterature byzantine: Le texte en tant que message immediati. *Dossiers byzantines*, 7. Paris 2012; in preparation.

19 Theophylaktos Hephaistos, epp. 132 and 27; ed. P. Gautier, Théophylacte d'Achrida, Lettres. *CFHB*, 16/2. Thessalonike 1986, 588–589 and 218–211; transl. E. Papaioannou in Kaldellis, Mothers and sons (as footnote 8 above) 176–178; see M. Mullett, Theophylact of Ochrid: reading the letters of a Byzantine archbishop. Birmingham 1997, 136, 138–139.

and others, all called him Psellos, not Michael, and they reveal no knowledge of a connection with Nikomedeia.[20]

In the miniature image of Psellos dating to the late twelfth century (in *Pantokrator 234*, fol. 254r), where he stands facing Michael VII, he is also named, to the right of his image, only as "Psellos."[21] What was written to the left of him is now illegible; it may have included the word *monachos* (Stratis Papaioannou, pers. comm.)

There is one minor exception to this pattern, in a legal document: in a Synodal document produced during the events that led to the schism of 1054, but before Psellos became a monk, he is listed as "Konstas [i.e., Konstantinos], *vestarches* and consul of the philosophers," among others who delivered a letter from the emperor to the patriarch Keroularios.[22] This is the only place where he is not called Psellos.

3. Attaleiates does refer to Psellos elsewhere in his *History*, but not as Michael of Nikomedeia

It is surprising that Karpozilos does not refer in his article to the fact that Attaleiates does elsewhere clearly refer to Psellos. In discussing the domestic policies of Konstantinos IX Monomachos, he notes the institution of the office of *nomophylax* and adds that the emperor also "appointed a man to be the President of Philosophers who surpassed all our contemporaries in knowledge (πρόεδρον τῶν φιλοσόφων προχειρισάμενος ἄνδρα τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς διαφέροντα γνώσει)."[23] This passage challenges the identification of Michael of Nikomedeia with Psellos. Attaleiates clearly disliked Michael of Nikomedeia but this passage shows that he respected and was even willing to praise Psellos. Now, it would not be impossible for him to detest the personality of a man while respecting his learning, but we would then be faced with two different ways of naming and evaluating one and the same person, which is inconsistent with Attaleiates' general practice throughout the *History:*

[20] For the references, see A. Kaldellis, Hellenism in Byzantium: the transformations of Greek identity and the reception of the classical tradition. Cambridge 2007, 226–228.

[21] J. Spatharakis, The portrait in Byzantine illuminated manuscripts. Leiden 1976, 232 (no. 174).

[22] In *PG* 120, 745; cf. A. Michel, Schisma und Kaiserhof in Jahre 1054: Michael Psellos, in: 1054–1954: L'Église et les églises: neuf siècles de douloureuse séparation entre l'Orient et l'Occident, vol. 1. Chévetogne 1954, 351–440.

[23] Attaleiates, History 21.

he sticks to the same nomenclature, frequently includes cross-references to prevent confusion, and maintains a consistent presentation of the personality of his subjects. It is again hard to see how Attaleiates could have expected his readers to identify "the most learned President of the Philosophers" with the "unpleasant" Michael of Nikomedeia.

4. Michael of Nikomedeia was Botaneiates' "chief-of-staff" and could not have been Psellos.

It has to be admitted that many aspects of Attaleiates' description of Michael of Nikomedeia fit Psellos well. Here is that description again: "Not long after, the monk Michael, the *hypertimos*, who had been placed in charge of the administration and whose family origin was from Nikomedeia, ended his life. He was an arrogant and unpleasant man and was not wholly in agreement with the emperor's generous benefactions... the belief prevailed that God took him away for holding up the imperial grants and benefactions." Psellos was also a monk, an *hypertimos*, and one can easily see how he might have been regarded as arrogant. The continuer of Skylitzes refers to his boasting in the *Chronographia* (μεγαλαυχεῖ).[24] Also, Karpozilos takes Psellos' position as *proedros* of the Senate to explain the phrase ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν πολιτικῶν πραγμάτων προστάς, which he paraphrases as "he was active in the political life of the Capital."[25]

On the other hand, Psellos had nothing to do with Nikomedeia, as far as we know, and it is hard to see how he could have been regarded as unpleasant (δυσάρεστος). By his own account, he was quite a charmer[26] and his vast network of friends, patrons, students, and contacts as well as his rise at the court, unaided by wealth or family, testify to his interpersonal skills. The characterization is also hard to square with Attaleiates' reference to him as the most learned man of the times (see above). But this, perhaps, was and is and matter of opinion. There are, however, greater problems facing this identification. It is especially hard to see Psellos resisting an emperor's desire to grant titles and benefactions. Everything about the man and his career at the court indicates that he was happy to go along with emperors' wishes and support even their most delusional beliefs, regardless of whether he

[24] Tsolakes, Ἡ Συνέχεια (as footnote 16 above) 152.

[25] Karpozilos, When did Michael Psellus die? (as footnote 1 above) 675.

[26] Psellos, Chronographia 6.44–46.

agreed with them or not.[27] He claims to have opposed Romanos IV Diogenes' military policies, but he says this while writing under the subsequent regime of the Doukai and in order to please them.[28] In reality, he seems to have mostly gone along with the regime of Romanos and acted as its propagandist, and only turned against him when it served the wishes of his Doukai patrons.[29] He certainly tried to manipulate emperors into supporting his pedagogical aims, philosophical projects, and personal career, but he was not a man to oppose an emperor in a way that made him unpopular like this. But acting in what capacity exactly did Michael of Nikomedeia flout the will of Botaneiates? I propose here that the identification of Psellos with him is based on a misunderstanding of the passage in question and the way that Attaleiates used certain technical terms.

ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν πολιτικῶν πραγμάτων προστάς does not merely mean "that he was active in the political life of the Capital." It means something quite more specific and powerful, namely that he was placed in charge of the civilian administration and acted as the emperor's chief executive, such as Ioannes the Orphanotrophos was under Michael IV, Leichoudes for a number of years under Monomachos, Leon Paraspondylos under Theodora, Ioannes the bishop of Side under Michael VII, and then Nikephoros (Nikephoritzes). We now have a focused study of this phenomenon in Byzantine politics and the language that Attaleiates used here is the same as was used throughout the centuries to refer to this function (it was not an office as such, though it could be).[30] Many of these men were monks or churchmen or eunuchs or all of those things, because they were less threatening that way to emperors. Attaleiates refers to the men who occupied this position in terms very similar to those that he uses for Michael of Nikomedeia. Specifically, Ioannes the Orphanotrophos τὴν τῶν πραγμάτων εἶχεν ὡς μεσοβασιλεὺς διοίκησιν (11); Theodora entrusted to Leon τὴν διοίκησιν τῶν πραγμάτων (52); Leichoudes was ἀνὴρ μέγιστον διαλάμψας τοῖς βασιλικοῖς καὶ πολιτικοῖς πράγμασιν... μεσάζων ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις τὴν τῶν ὅλων διοίκησιν (66); Michael VII appointed Ioannes of Side as τῶν κοινῶν πραγμάτων διοικητὴν (180); and Nikephoros sidelined that Ioannes from τοῦ τὰ κοινὰ διοικεῖν so that himself εἰς τὴν τῶν κοινῶν πραγμάτων διοίκησιν προστησάμενος (182) – the same participle that Attaleiates uses later for Michael of Nikomedeia. In short, both the terminology and the logic of the narrative at 296–297 require that this Michael, who was blocking the emperor's wishes, was not just some active politician but the single most powerful man in the empire after Nikephoros III Botaneiates himself. That is why he merited special attention by Attaleiates, who does not note the deaths of men of lesser importance than this.

[27] For a striking example from the reign of Monomachos, see a. Kaldellis, The Argument of Psellos' Chronographia. Leiden and Boston 1999, 95–97.

[28] Psellos, Chronographia 7B.16.

[29] E. De Vries-Van der Velden, Psellos, Romain Diogénès et Mantzikert. *Byzantinoslavica* 58 (1997) 274–310.

[30] See now the study of E. Christou, Αυτοκρατορική εξουσία και πολιτική πρακτική: Ο ρόλος του παραδυναστεύοντος στη βυζαντινή διοίκηση (τέλη 8ου – αρχές 11ου αιώνα). Athens 2008.

Could this have been Psellos? We are contemplating not merely a brief extension into the reign of Botaneiates of his court career (and also of his life), but considering now whether he reached the pinnacle of power, a higher position than he ever had. Was he in charge of Botaneiates' administration? He would have been sixty years old. If this is the case, we would then have not only a secure date for his death but also a fascinating new chapter of his biography at the very end of his life. Personally, though, I doubt this was the case. Scholars who are willing to take the leap and consider the possibility that Psellos was put in charge of Botaneiates' administration have many questions to answer, among them the following: Why have no works by Psellos addressed to Botaneiates survived?[31] Why did later historians, such as the continuer of Skylitzes and Anna Komnene both of whom took such an interest in Psellos himself and the reign of Botaneiates, not note that he had attained this position? Why was Attaleiates so untypically confusing in identifying the man? Every other person who attained such power in the eleventh century is clearly identified in all the relevant sources by his full or last name.

It is not surprising that this Michael is not mentioned in other sources. It seems that he died within a few months of Botaneiates taking power in 1078 and he does not seem to have had a great historical impact. Whatever his influence, it was soon to be eclipsed by the notoriety of Botaneiates' two servants, Borilas and Germanos, who became the targets of early Komnenian historiography.[32]

[31] In some manuscripts, his poem on the Song of Songs is dedicated to Botaneiates, while in others to Konstantinos IX or Michael VII: Westerink, Poemata (as footnote 14 above), 13–14 (apparatus). This is an unreliable basis for biographical reconstruction.

[32] Tsolakes, Ἡ Συνέχεια (as footnote 16 above) 185–186; Nikephoros Bryennios, Materials for a History pr. 6, 4.16–17; Anna Komnene, Alexiad 1.7.1, 1.16.2–4, 2.1.3, and passim.

5. Their careers under Konstantinos X Doukas were otherwise incompatible.

Michael of Nikomedeia appears one other time in Attaleiates' *History*, and it is worth looking at that earlier passage as well. Now that we know that he was a different person, we should examine what else we know about him, especially because this passage confirms the conclusion that he is not to be identified with Psellos. At the start of his account of Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078), Attaleiates introduces the figure of the eunuch Nikephoros (Nikephoritzes), and looks back to a disgrace he had suffered under the emperor's father, Konstantinos X Doukas (1059–1067).

> There was a certain eunuch by the name of Nikephoros, whose family was from the Boukellarioi theme and who was most capable at devising and tailoring affairs and bringing about commotion in any state of affairs. While serving Michael's father, Konstantinos Doukas, in the order of the imperial secretaries, he was a sinister plotter and ingenious author of evils. He even whispered an accusation of adultery against the empress into the emperor's ear out of sheer jealous hatred for his fellow secretary and collaborator, Michael of Nikomedeia. Dismissed from the imperial retinue, he was appointed *doux* of Antioch, the one by Koile Syria.
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> ἦν γάρ τις εὐνοῦχος ὀνόματι Νικηφόρος, ἐκ Βουκελλαρίων ἕλκων τὸ γένος, δεινὸς ἐπινοῆσαι καὶ ῥάψαι πράγματα καὶ πολλὴν τῇ καταστάσει τὴν τρικυμίαν ἐπενεγκεῖν, ὃς εἰς τάξιν τῶν σεκρετικῶν ὑποθέσεων τῷ πατρὶ τοῦ Μιχαὴλ ὑπηρετησάμενος Κωνσταντίνῳ τῷ Δούκᾳ, ἐπεὶ καὶ σκαιὸς ἐφάνη καὶ διαβολεὺς καὶ σοφιστὴς τῶν κακῶν ὡς καὶ κατὰ τῆς Αὐγούστης μοιχείας ἔγκλημα τῷ βασιλεῖ ὑποψιθυρίσαι φθόνῳ τοῦ συνεξυπηρετουμένου καὶ συνδιενεργοῦντος αὐτῷ Μιχαὴλ τοῦ Νικομήδου, τῆς μὲν βασιλικῆς παραστάσεως ἀπεπέμφθη, δοὺξ δὲ τῆς κατὰ κοίλην Συρίαν Ἀντιοχείας ἀποδειχθεὶς.[33]

[33] Attaleiates, History 180–181. While I agree with Pérez Martín, Miguel Ataliates (as footnote 2 above) 300–301, in rejecting Kazhdan's proposed translation of this passage (who would have Nikephoros and Michael collaborating to bring down the empress here), I do not think that the correct reading requires us to identify Michael with Psellos: Nikephoros had many enemies, and Psellos was not necessarily among them. See A. Kazhdan, with S. Franklin, Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries. Paris and Cambridge 1984, 51–52.

At that time, so around 1063, Michael of Nikomedeia served in the same service (συνεξυπηρετουμένου) as Nikephoros, who was serving (ὑπηρετησάμενος) the emperor as an imperial secretary (εἰς τάξιν τῶν σεκρετικῶν ὑποθέσεων).[34] It does not seem like either of them was in charge of the service (which would have made that one the *protoasekretis*). While it is *possible* to take συνεξυπηρετουμένου as referring generally to imperial service, so that Michael need not have been an *asekretis* at this time, the context here tends to support the conclusion that he was in fact just that: instead of citing a specific office for Michael, Attaleiates merely links him to Nikephoros through the *syn-* and calls him a (former?) collaborator. This provides further proof that Michael of Nikomedeia could not have been Psellos, for Psellos had already gone through the ranks of the *asekretis*, risen to their top, and then quit the post of *protoasekretis* during the reign of Monomachos (1042–1055).[35] Nothing indicates that he again served Konstantinos X as a lower-ranked imperial secretary. The *Chronographia* suggests that his relationship with the imperial family was more informal: he would talk with the emperor, eat at his table, and tutor his son, the heir to the throne.[36] He was the emperor's "friend," a term he uses repeatedly in his account of those years. To be sure, this was part of a subtle literary presentation and Psellos had done something like this in the first edition of the *Chronographia*, where he described his relation with Monomachos, though certainly he was less intimate with him than with the Doukai. But he also made no secret of the fact, either at the time or later, that he was essentially an imperial secretary under Monomachos. After the accession of Isaakios Komnenos (in 1057), Psellos was a

[34] It does not appear that συνεξυπηρετουμένου means anything different from what συνυπηρετουμένου would mean.

[35] For the work that he wrote when he resigned as protoasekretis, see A.R. Littlewood, Michaelis Pselli Oratoria Minora. Leipzig 1985, 29–37; lines 135 ff. clearly refer to the reign of Monomachos, especially when taken in conjunction with Chronographia 35–46, while at lines 214–215 he says that he had spent only a short time in political life before leaving it now. For two short works that he wrote about serving as an asekretis, see ibid. 43–48. At Chronographia 7 A.7 he says that he had been an hypogrammateus under Monomachos. For his career in general, see G. Weiss, Oströmische Beamte im Spiegel der Schriften des Michael Psellos. Munich 1973.

[36] Psellos, Chronographia 7 A.1, 7, 22, 25.

proedros of the Senate.[37] It is difficult to see how he could have, at the same time, returned to the lower ranks of the *asekretis*, and, in fact, there is no proof that anything like that happened.

Moreover, it is clear from the passage quoted above that Nikephoros and Michael were enemies, whatever the nature of their collaboration before (maybe that just meant that they worked together in the same branch of the *asekretis*, not necessarily that they had been allies). To bring some sex into the discussion, we will never know why Nikephoros felt this jealous hatred of Michael, what it was exactly that he whispered into the emperor's ear about the empress' adultery, or why he attacked the empress to get at Michael in the first place (the empress being Eudokia Makrembolitissa). The fact, moreover, that Michael was appointed to head the state by Botaneiates immediately after the downfall of the regime of Michael VII, a regime that had been governed by Nikephoros after his return to power and influence, suggests that their enmnity was permanent: the one could be counted on to reverse the influence of the other, and this went back to ca. 1063, when Nikephoros was removed from the court. However, Psellos and Nikephoros do not appear to have been enemies, and our evidence for this comes from the early 1070s. The continuer of Skylitzes, who used Attaleiates as one of his sources but misunderstood or poorly reproduced his account of the struggle between Nikephoros and Michael in 1063, obviously had independent sources for the rise of Nikephoros under Michael VII. Nikephoros displaced Ioannes of Side as head of the government and ensured that Michael VII remained an imbecile. The continuer then adds that Psellos, "the consul of philosophers," also contributed to this effort by making Michael VII useless for any kind of serious work: τοῦ Ψελλοῦ πρὸς ἅπαν ἔργον ἀδέξιον καὶ ἄπρακτον αὐτὸν ἀπεργασαμένου.[38] The continuer seems to have viewed Psellos and Nikephoros as allies.

Moreover, before he rose at the court of Michael VII, Nikephoros was the governor of the theme of Hellas and Peloponnesos; he was posted there in 1068, shortly after the accession of Romanos IV Diogenes.[39] As it happens, we have a friendly letter of intercession (on behalf of the bishop of Besaine) addressed by Psellos to Nikephoritzes

[37] Psellos, Chronographia 7.42; see also Karpozilos, When did Michael Psellus die? (as footnote 1 above) 674.

[38] Tsolakes, Ἡ Συνέχεια (as footnote 16 above) 156.

[39] Attaleiates, History 182.

the *praitor* of Hellas and Peloponnesos, so between 1068 and 1071.[40] We need not infer a personal friendship or broader political alliance between the two men to conclude at least that they could not have been enemies at that point. To believe that Psellos and Michael of Nikomedeia were the same person would, therefore, taking all this evidence together, require that they were bitter enemies in 1063, on excellent terms in the reign of Romanos IV, close allies under Michael VII, and were in opposing camps in 1078. Granted, the Byzantines have a reputation for (shall we say) political flexibility, but these gymnastics are not necessary. They are being considered only to avoid the simple coincidence of having two monks named Michael with the title of *hypertimos*, one of whom was from Nikomedeia and the other not. That coincidence is now the lesser of two evils, considering all the reasons that militate against the identity of the two men. The score is here 4–0: we have two pieces of evidence suggesting that Nikephoros and Michael of Nikomedeia were enemies (from 1063 and 1078) and two pieces (from the interveening period 1068–1072) indicating that Nikephoros and Psellos were not.

In sum, Psellos was not Attaleiates' Michael of Nikomedeia. We must remember how little has come down to us from this period and how few of the many men, women, and eunuchs we know of all who were active at the court at that time. It may seem too coincidental to be true that there were two politically active monks named Michael who were *hypertimoi*, but in reality we have no statistical database against which to measure the likelihood or unlikelihood of such a coincidence.

Psellos, then, could have died at any time after the year 1076, but the fact of his sudden silence after that year, given the steady and even expanding stream of his writings in the early 1070s, indicates that he may well have died in 1076.

Abstract

This article argues that Psellos was not the "Michael of Nikomedeia" who Attaleiates says died in 1078, and that Psellos likely died in 1076, when his literary output suddenly ceased. Michael of Nikomedeia was an imperial secretary after Psellos had resigned from the highest post of that service; he

[40] Psellos, ep. 103; ed. Sathas (as footnote 7 above) 5, 344–346. It cannot be known whether the letters that Psellos sent to the krites of that theme, epp. 32–34, in ibid. 267–269, were also addressed to Nikephoros. For Besaine, see J. Koder/F. Hild, Hellas und Thessalia. *TIB*, 1. Vienna 1976,134–135.

was a mortal enemy of the logothetes Nikephoritzes (whereas Psellos seems to have been his ally); and was placed in charge of the civilian administration by Nikephoros III, a position of power that Psellos never held.