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Panel: Turning Points in the Reception of Classical Antiquity

Title: The Byzantine reception of Plutarch: the case of Psellos
(1018-1081)

Length: 20 min

Michael Psellos (1018-1081) represents a turning point in the reception of classics. His historical narrative, the *Chronographia*, is modelled on Plutarch's Parallel Lives and centres on the biographies of the emperors for whom he worked. However such a use is adapted to a Byzantine environment. Now that the provincial and civil elites were clearly and simply under imperial aegis, each chapter is dedicated to an emperor and does not attempt to compare him to another historical figure. It is striking that the defining feature of the parallel lives is omitted. This can be explained also by Psellos' belief that the individual is a unique mixture of characteristics rather than a collection of recognizable virtues and vices. Therefore one can see that the same text is used in a different context. The safe paradigmatic value of virtues, typical of the second sophistic, have been replaced by unique and solitary peculiarities of the individual. Thus, while Plutarch was widely read, his message was altered in order to combine with the new byzantine age of imperial power.