THE MORPHING PORTRAIT OF 
A CHURCH FATHER: EVIDENCE FROM 
THE *DE MORTE* **(CPG 4886)** ATTRIBUTED 
TO JOHN CHRYSTOS TOM* 

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Texts from antiquity are relatively scarce resources, and they survive as the result of a great deal of effort. As much is obvious enough when we consider even just the work of modern scholars, whose energy is directed at the preservation and presentation of known texts for important late ancient writers, as well as the recovery of texts to add to their historical dossiers. Yet we can also consider the efforts of even more distant readers, in antiquity; their energy was less often directed at the preservation of texts as texts and more about the creation of a particular portrait of a writer. Ancient curators of texts in their work solidified the authority of a writer, through their dedication making him into an intellectual whose writing was worthy of collection. In the context of late ancient Christianity, curators were also aiming at presenting the author as a righteous and imitable person, whose works were worthy of reading and reverence.

Curation was not a process applied solely to texts from the distant past. We know of many ancient Christian authors who took on themselves the task of pruning and collating their writings, of which Augustine with his *Retractiones* is only the most salient example. Even in cases where we cannot discern deliberate acts of editing on the part of the author during his lifetime, we know that those loyal to a writer or a teacher frequently collected and circulated edited versions of his work. Indeed, we are indebted to such devotees for much of the literature that survives from late antiquity. Were it not for the students, secre-

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taries, and relatives of people like Plotinus, Ambrose, Augustine, Libanius, or Basil of Caesarea, we might not have much to peruse as historians as we tried to reconstruct their lives and their actions.

In the case of John Chrysostom (ca. 349–407 CE), our portrait of him as an author has been, in many ways, determined by the concerns of those loyal to him at the end of his life. Chrysostom served briefly, and controversially, as bishop of Constantinople. The controversy that took him from office and into exile – where he died – was personal. In short, the early story recounts, Chrysostom was too brusque, too prickly, and he fared badly in the rather political position of being bishop of an imperial city. A small group of his loyal followers opposed this story and instead campaigned to present him as principled, yes, but misunderstood, unappreciated, and unfairly accused. The residue of their efforts is literary: the funeral oration for Chrysostom that has been transmitted under the name of Martyrius and the Dialogue written by Palladius as a kind of vita for Chrysostom are the two most salient. Both portray him as a principled, righteous person who was fated to contend with politically-minded, sinful, and ultimately diseased people whose eventual mortal judgment by God made manifest their inherent evil. In addition to these more explicit appeals, supporters of Chrysostom began redacting and circulating texts in his name, at times using passages and phrases in imitation of things Chrysostom had written or said in his lifetime. Thus, as Sever J. Voicu has argued, a significant number of texts were produced, even very early – some in fact before his exile, and others in the first twenty-five years after Chrysostom’s death.

Such intensive textual work established a more positive view of Chrysostom, but it also reinforced the correctness of the position of his partisans, who in these texts reflected to themselves their views about what had happened to their friend and their bishop. The modern editor of the funerary oration about Chrysostom that has been attributed to Martyrius, Martin Wallraff, compares the appearance of these texts about and “by” Chrysostom to the appearance of

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1 Ps-Martyrius, Pan. For a recent interpretation of its portrait of Eudoxia, see Barry 2016. Additionally, Palladius, Dial. 17 (Sources chrétiennes, 341: 332–336) makes quite graphic reading, as it describes the deaths of those who opposed Chrysostom. For the influence of these works on the reception of Chrysostom, see Mayer 2008, but see also her extensively annotated conference paper, “The Biography of John Chrysostom and the Chronology of his Works”, from the conference Chrysostomika II (2007, in Rome) and now updated through March 2014 and available online: www.academia.edu/6448810/The_Biography_of_John_Chrysostom_and_the_Cho

2 For an example of a pre-exile text, see Voicu 2013. Voicu provides a basic typology of the works attributed to Chrysostom before the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE in Voicu 2005. See also his earlier thinking on the efforts of the pro-Chrysostom group in Voicu 2004.
pseudapostolic writings that purport to describe the events and views of first-century followers of Jesus. As Wallraff writes, “the transmission of Chrysostom’s writings and pseudo-Chrysostomic writings formed a part of the group’s unity”, such that their efforts at producing a body of work for their revered friend were also constitutive of their community. I read this to mean that we can gauge, in such literary efforts, not only the group’s view of Chrysostom, but also their views of their own past and that past’s relationship to their contemporary situation.

Wallraff was speaking of the immediate post-mortem work on Chrysostom’s literary corpus, but we can extend his observation to later curation efforts as well. Voicu, in a different essay, categorizes all the works by and attributed to Chrysostom according to their method of production and the later interventions made upon them. It is clear that many further reworkings and outright inventions occurred and that these often treated an apparent gap between what Chrysostom represented and what his readers needed him to represent. That is to say, there was in history an ongoing adjustment of the legacy of Chrysostom – a man created by curation to be an authoritative “father” of the church – to the realities of ever-new contemporary contexts.

It is in this frame of analysis that the text titled de morte in the Clavis Patrum Graecorum becomes a useful piece of evidence. Because it is not a text written by John Chrysostom, it is not immediately useful for the historian who attempts to construct a historical picture of the writer’s ideas or words. But, because it is an anthology that includes excerpts from texts accurately attributed to Chrysostom, as well as from texts that were pseudonymously attributed to him, it is useful for grasping how later readers imagined the writer. What is more, we can understand something of how later writers viewed the relationship between Chrysostom’s culture and their own.

The text titled de morte was first proposed as a separate identifiable treatise from Chrysostom on the basis of its proximity to other well-known works. At the end of the listings for Chrysostom in the Clavis are over two hundred entries, proposed by Voicu and G. Morize as works that could perhaps be considered as pieces on their own to stand alongside other, long-accepted works.

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5  See, for example, the categories in Voicu 2008: “4. Restructured Works”, “5. Ancient Revisions”, and “6. Recent Revisions”, alongside especially “7. False ‘intentions’ attributed to Chrysostom”, in which Voicu notes “the desire to modify an image of Chrysostom and/or of his time” (63–64, quotation on 64).
All but one of the topics treated in New College Manuscript 83 are recognized as *eclogae* by Aubineau in his report on the codex.⁶ The passages collected on death in that manuscript entered into Voicu and Morize’s additional materials list, and thus received *CPG* number 4886 and the title *de morte*. Like many of these additional titles, *de morte* survives in a sole copy.⁷ Manuscript 83 is one of thirteen codices of material attributed to John Chrysostom that the library holds; several of them were said to have used by Henry Savile in the making of his seminal edition of the author’s works.⁸ Some of them are exclusively collections of homilies or treatises on one or another biblical work. For example, New College Manuscripts 71 and 84 contain material on Genesis; New College Manuscript 74 contains homilies on Matthew; and New College Manuscripts 75 and 76 contain homilies on the Acts of the Apostles. Other manuscripts held by the New College Library that are related to John Chrysostom are collections from other works, often including topical treatises alongside the odd biblical sermon or fragmentary work.⁹

Among these manuscripts, the codex labeled Manuscript 83 is singular in organization. This fact had already been recognized by Savile, who in his early edition on Chrysostom remarked that the codex seemed, in comparison with the other Oxford codices, to have “no order or method”.¹⁰ There is a structure in the work, though: it is an anthology of passages excerpted from works attributed to Chrysostom, ordered by topic, which is to say, it is a collection of *eclogae*. These small compilations were just one type of the curative writing that characterized the intellectual world of the Byzantine era. Though they differ from *catenae* (selected excerpts from multiple writers, organized by the text on which they provide commentary) and *florilegia* (selected excerpts from multiple authors organized by topic), they reflect the same intellectual processes that drive the making of these other kinds of writings: digestion and representation.

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⁶ Aubineau 1968, 102–104.
⁷ The Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford, MS83, 207r–228v. The text is written in two columns of twenty-three lines each. The pagination includes two folios marked “210”, hence 210 and 210b.
⁹ Consider New College MS 81, which contains twenty-one homilies from Antioch, one catechetical treatise, the five homilies on the incomprehensibility of God’s nature, homily 11 against the Anomeans, a treatise on consubstantiality, one of the sermons *Adversus Iudaeos*, four sermons on *Job*, and the pseudonymous sermon *Contra theatra* (Aubineau 1968, 99–100).
¹⁰ As cited in Aubineau 1968, 102: *De oxoniensi codice observandum illum a reliquis quos uidimus omnibus plurimum discrepasse: in illo enim capita eadem, ceteraque particulae collectae, at nullo ordine, nulla metodo ... ut in hoc demum codice congesta materia, in reliquis digesta uideatur.*
of knowledge in more accessible forms. To that end, *eclogae* could be added, with these other genres, to the intellectual project of summary and compilation described by Markus Dubischar, or to the more general ancient project of the representation of knowledge in various smaller forms considered in the recent volume *Condensing Texts - Condensed Texts*.11

These short pieces in New College Manuscript 83 are true to their name in that they are guided “tours” through the corpus of works attributed to Chrysostom.12 Containing *eclogae* on thirty separate topics, this codex allows readers to quickly access a selection of what Chrysostom had written on subjects like “envy” or “hate”, “longsuffering” or “prayer”. Of course, because these are common topics for reflection in Christian writings and because *eclogae* are the result of a process of selection, rather than composition, there can exist more than one *ecloga* on a given topic. One of the topics treated in New College Manuscript 83 is “death”, yet at least one other collection of passages about death attributed to Chrysostom survives; it has been published in *Patrologia Graeca* 63,801–812. The two *eclogae* cover some common territory, but are not identical. Here is a list of their correspondences, by folio number and page/line:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New College Manuscript 8313</th>
<th>Patrologia Graeca 63</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>207r–208r</td>
<td>no correspondence</td>
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<tr>
<td>208r–208v</td>
<td>803,32–804,5</td>
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<tr>
<td>208v–209r</td>
<td>803,4–803,32</td>
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<td>209r–209v</td>
<td>809,26–809,43</td>
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<td>209v–210b r</td>
<td>801,1–802,18</td>
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<td>210b r</td>
<td>804,58–805,6</td>
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<td>210b r–210b v</td>
<td>809,59–810,12</td>
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<td>210b v–211v</td>
<td>807,61–808,21</td>
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<tr>
<td>211v–212r</td>
<td>804,27–804,58</td>
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<tr>
<td>212r–212v</td>
<td>804,17–804,26</td>
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<tr>
<td>212v–213r</td>
<td>810,52–811,3</td>
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<tr>
<td>213r–213v</td>
<td>810,23–810,46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>214r–216r</td>
<td>no correspondence</td>
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11  *DUBISCHAR 2016; HORSTER – REITZ 2010.*

12  *HAIDACHER 1902* is the foundational overview of *eclogae* created from works attributed to Chrysostom, and his description of the *ecloga* published in *PG* 63 is at pp. 64–65; he does not describe the *ecloga* in New College Manuscript 83. Studies more directly focused on the *eclogae* are rare, but *BARONE 2007* is an exception.

13  All citations in the left-hand column of this table are from The Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford, MS 83; the right-hand column are page and line numbers from *PG* 63.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folios</th>
<th>Page Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>216r–217r</td>
<td>807,32–807,60</td>
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<tr>
<td>217r–217v</td>
<td>805,6–805,34</td>
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<td>217v–220r</td>
<td>806,8–807,32</td>
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<td>220r–221r</td>
<td>no correspondence</td>
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<td>221r–221v</td>
<td>810,12–810,23</td>
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<tr>
<td>221v</td>
<td>810,46–810,50</td>
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<tr>
<td>221v–222v</td>
<td>811,3–812,14</td>
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<tr>
<td>222v–223r</td>
<td>809,43–809,59</td>
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<tr>
<td>223r–223v</td>
<td>808,21–808,49</td>
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<tr>
<td>224r–226r</td>
<td>no correspondence</td>
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<tr>
<td>226r–227r</td>
<td>805,34–806,8</td>
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<tr>
<td>227r–227v</td>
<td>804,6–804,16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>227v</td>
<td>803,32–803,49</td>
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<tr>
<td>228r</td>
<td>802,18–803,3</td>
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<tr>
<td>228v</td>
<td>no correspondence</td>
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As can be seen, the two collections visit many of the same passages, though in an order unrelated to one another. Each has material that the other does not; proportionally, the material unique to New College Manuscript 83 is much greater than that unique to the *ecloga* published in *Patrologia Graeca* 63.\(^{14}\)

More than simply being larger than its counterpart, the *ecloga* on death in New College Manuscript 83 is also more visibly organized. It comprises fourteen subunits, each labeled more or less accurately according to the treatise, homily, or other work from which its excerpts are taken. Of the fourteen, eight of the donor texts are specifically exegetical homilies: those on the Thessalonian correspondence, the Corinthian correspondence, the letter to the Romans, or the Gospel of John, among others. The remainder of the subunits are from works that are not explicitly indexed to biblical books, though they are often still biblical in their treatment: *De perfecta caritate*, *Ad Theodorum lapsum*, *Contra theatra*, *De beato Abraham*, *Ad Stagirium a daemone vexatum*, *In dictum Pauli: Nolo vos ignorare*, and *Expositiones in Psalmos* 12. What is more, each section of passages cited from these donor texts is introduced by a heading identifying the texts from which the material is drawn, which is written in a slightly more delicate hand and, in all cases but one, indicated by a manicle in the nearest margin.

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\(^{14}\) All citations of folios in the table are from The Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford, MS 83. The few words unique to the *ecloga* in *PG* 63 comprise three short sentences and three slightly longer passages: 804,5–6; 807,60–61; 808,49–809,26; 810,50–52; 811,20–812,3; and 812,14–20.
From such details we can begin to imagine the creation of the *ecloga* and its manner of use. This was made by a person not only interested in conveying Chrysostom’s thought, but in conveying that thought linked to the specific works from which it had been mined. That bespeaks an interest in Chrysostom as an author, as much as an authority; it also bespeaks an awareness of the sheer size of the corpus that survived under his name. A creator of this *ecloga* could think its creation worth the effort because of two assumptions he likely made: first, that it was absolutely necessary to grasp Chrysostom’s thought in reference to a topic, but second, and at the same time, that it was impossible for an average or even highly dedicated reader to grasp Chrysostom’s thought in reference to a topic. From this tension emerges a guide, a notebook for readers who would like to (or are thought to have the need to) locate Chrysostom’s biblically-infused ideas in a faster fashion than could be possible by means of unexcerpted reading. Locating and comprehending these ideas was important enough, but also important was the continuing familiarity with the individual works in which they appeared. Each excerpt is carefully marked with information about the text from which it was taken, so these readers can know and continue to reference individually the writings that such a notebook would allow them to “master.” Modern intellectuals frequently enact this kind of framework for authors whose words and ideas are seen as necessary, whose catalog of works is seen as canonical, yet whose collected writings are perceived as unwieldy for one reason or another. In this sense, New College Codex 83 is like nothing so much as the publication of a “reader”, a curated selection from the author’s output, created by a more knowledgeable reader for a less-knowledgeable one.15

Because of a small phrase included among the excerpts regarding the topic of death, we can be more specific about the kind of reading community for which this text was prepared. In the portion of the text that reproduces a selection from the work attributed to Chrysostom and titled *Contra theatra*, the collator has reproduced a speech that was created in the voice of Sarah, mother of Isaac, as Isaac was to be led away to his impending sacrifice. The collator includes, in addition to Sarah’s speech, several reactions rendered in the voice of surrounding Canaanites who were presumed to be there and who respond to the tragedy of the speech Sarah gives.16 That is regular enough, but what is remarkable is the framing sentence, peculiar only to the New College Codex and not present in other copies of the full work *Contra theatra*. This collator

15 Compare, for example, RABINOW 1984 or MOI 1986.

16 PG 56,549.16–24, 25–42 are almost entirely reproduced in this *ecloga*, though there are a few phrases in that passage that are omitted from it.
introduces the speech by Sarah with a simple question, asking, “What would Sarah say having learned that God ordered Abraham to kill Isaac?”

That question may be simple, but the implications of its presence in this text are not. It is not an occasional question, styled only as a transition for this particular instance. Rather, it follows the standard format for a prompt to the rhetorical preliminary exercise of *ethopoeia*, or speech-in-character. Speech-in-character was one of almost a dozen standard exercises that were used in the late ancient rhetorical classroom to develop a student’s proficiency and facility with language. Its aim was to cultivate the ability to speak easily in first person from the position of various characters. Usually, the character assigned for whom the student would create the speech was a personage from literature who would be familiar to the student, like Achilles or Medea. Alternately, but less frequently, a student would be assigned a stock personage to imitate in his speech, like a painter or a prostitute. The student’s purpose in the speech was to generate content that reflected the situation of the person accurately, as it could be known from prior literary description, but that also expanded the rendition of the character beyond simply repeating what could be known from prior literary description. The challenge of such an exercise was to generate words that were novel enough to sustain interest and at the same time to elucidate some aspect of the character; doing this and remaining faithful enough to the original character could be quite difficult. Its practice developed in a student both an attention to the existing stories and characters in the literary tradition as well as the ability to innovate within the bounds of that tradition.

These qualities were the highly prized boons that resulted from long practice in speech-in-character, alongside other composition assignments widely used in late antiquity. The abstract ideal toward which the use of such exercises was directed, becoming a man of *paideia*, was more ancient in origin; texts from the first century praise the *paideia* of cultured, elite men. Even general reflections on the skills of oratory and persuasion speak of these as important foundations of good culture, necessities for the person interested in advancement and participation in elite society. But, scholars increasingly recognize that the handbooks in which we find instructions for, reflections on, and models of these

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18 For a detailed historical account of such exercises, see Hunger 1978, 92–120: 3) Rhetorische praxis a) Progymnasmata und andere Übungsreden.

19 See, for example, the list of characters assigned for speeches in the catalog of prompts extant for speech-in-character compiled in Amato – Ventrella 2005.
preliminary exercises are either known to have been produced by fourth- and fifth-century authors like Libanius or Aphthonius, or, having been attributed to earlier teachers, have now been redated also to the fourth or fifth centuries. The systematization and theorization of a common set of exercises designed to develop such qualities are late ancient processes.

The emergence of such a widespread educational curriculum had a significant impact on late ancient intellectual and cultural phenomena, the development of Christian tradition included. All of the late ancient Christian writers we know of learned to read and compose according to this system; two pieces of evidence support this assertion. First is that we have no evidence of any other widespread educational regime by which early Christian authors might have learned to read and to write persuasively. Second is the frequently remarked upon and quite evident reality that Christian writings include much material patterned on the forms that were learned in rhetorical classrooms; such patterning is present in Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac, and Armenian writers.

Despite their formation according to the practice of the rhetorical exercises, late ancient Christian writers did not normally draw attention to these patterns in their work. That could be in part attributed to the fact that hardly any ancient writers drew attention to these patterns by naming them explicitly in their work. It simply was not elegant style to do so; better to blend in a pattern seamlessly, to give the impression that such set pieces were in fact one’s original thought. In the case of speech in character, late ancient Christians used it frequently in their writings, sometimes to lend narrative interest by giving a voice to a quieter character, and sometimes to accomplish much more. More
determinative, though, for whether late ancient Christian writers explicitly tagged the rhetorical forms that structured their compositions may have been the trope of rhetoric’s emptiness, which frequently appeared in Christian discussions of learning in late antiquity. Even though they clearly had training in rhetoric, or had been rhetorical teachers themselves, several influential Christian authors decried rhetoric’s basic curriculum as being void of truth or, worse, as a process that deliberately encouraged falsehood.24

So, then, what does the presence of such a clear marker of a rhetorical exercise in the *ecloga* on death show us? First and most obviously, the compiler understood the speech written for Sarah, recognized it as a model of speech-in-character, and explicitly marked it as such for his reader by placing the right kind of prompting question at the head of the passage. To name the pattern of the writing he saw was not an embarrassment or a slight. It took nothing away from the piece excerpted, *Contra theatra*, nor did it threaten the integrity of Chrysostom’s authority as a source of Christian ideas. Indeed, to recognize and to mark the pattern of rhetoric was to acknowledge its usefulness and centrality in Christian discourse. Thus we can see that the compiler of these *eclogae* valued the structuring influence of rhetoric. When presented with a text that did not manifest that value, he adjusted it to reflect his reality.

The additional phrase in the treatment of death gives us this view of the compiler’s culture, but it also gives us more. To say that Byzantine culture valued rhetorical training is no novelty.25 To say, though, that the Byzantine compiler or compilers of this text were willing to constitute their past – their view of the Christian traditions of late antiquity – as if there, too, rhetoric had had explicit and acknowledged value, is a novelty. This small adjustment suggests a kind of political confidence, for with no differences between the compiler and his idealized portrait of Chrysostom, it cannot be that Chrysostom was an authority because he belonged to a better, golden age, to which the compiler and his readers should aspire. Instead, this work positions John Chrysostom as a writer whose training was precisely the same as the compiler’s, whose culture was continuous with the eventual readers of this anthology of his works. When later students and readers created the tools by which they could introduce authoritative writers to new audiences, at least part of their portraits were

24 Tornau 2002 offers a discussion of this theme in Augustine’s writing and briefly in Jerome’s.
reflections of themselves, which reduced the differences between their intellectual and epistemological frameworks and those of the late ancient writers they revered.

Bibliography


Summary

This article investigates the *ecloga* of passages on death collected from works attributed to John Chrysostom and preserved in New College Manuscript 83, which is classified as *CPG* 4886. It describes New College Manuscript 83, the contents of its *ecloga* on death, and provides a direct comparison of this *ecloga* with another on death published in *Patrologia Graeca* 63; then the article reflects on what the New College Manuscript *ecloga* can reveal about the users who created it and their ideas about its use. Because this *ecloga* attempts to preserve the original location of each passage it cites, and because its author explicitly labeled the rhetorical form of speech-in-character when it appeared, we can speculate that its creators were invested in rhetoric and the preservation of Chrysostom’s authority as the composer of specific individual works. This allows us to see that the *ecloga* conflates its creator’s intellectual frameworks with those of late antiquity, in effect retrojecting the processes of knowledge creation and preservation so prevalent in the Byzantine era back into Chrysostom’s time.

Keywords: John Chrysostom; death; *ecloga/eclogae*; rhetoric; speech-in-character

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