In tenth century Byzantine sources a new term emerges in relation to performers: παιγνιῶται (paigniōtai) were performers of various disciplines or, indeed, multitasking performers. Deriving from the Greek word παίγνιον (paígnion) (which has the double meaning of ‘play’ and ‘game’), ‘paigniotai’ means literally "the ones who play:" whether they played music, played theater, played with words or all of these together, the Byzantine authors do not always care to precise. Much like the ‘joculatores’ who appeared around the same time in Western Europe, the ‘paigniotai’ are mainly distinguished by their capacity to offer τέρψιν (amusement) through play. I propose that the theories of J. Huizinga and R. Caillois on game (ludus) and play (jocus) are instrumental in comprehending the nature of these performers and of their art, but also how they were perceived in their respective societies. The clear inclination of medieval mentality towards ‘jocus’ accounts for the fact that performers were valued primarily as entertainers whose playfulness was more important than their exact artistic discipline. In this sense, the emergence of παιγνιῶται and of ‘joculatores’ marks, in terminology as well as in performative practice, the passage from ancient to medieval Europe.

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Friday, November 30, 2018
1:30 p.m.
Scheide Caldwell House, Room 103