

Mimesis and Intertextuality in Twelfth-Century Byzantine Literature: the Case of Theodore Prodromos



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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines mimesis and intertextuality in twelfth-century Byzantium through the close study of the writings of Theodore Prodromos. Chapter One focuses on Prodromos' sequel to Lucian's satire *Philosophies for Sale*. Analysing Prodromos' appropriation of ancient literary *personae* (from Homer to Euripides to Hippocrates), I argue that Prodromos highlights the positive impact of classical literature on his occasional writings. Chapter Two investigates Prodromos' philosophical writings. As well as investigating Prodromos' criticism of ancient philosophical authorities, I draw attention to literary strategies that Prodromos deploys to showcase his excellence as a teacher of philosophy. Chapter Three studies Prodromos in his capacity of a panegyrist. I discuss the rise of military ideology in the Comnenian period and argue that Prodromos achieved his success as a court poet through reviving the Homeric hexameter. Chapter Four investigates Prodromos' subversion of the Comnenian political system. I identify three major strategies of subversion (endorsement of disgraced aristocrats, allegory and classical imitation) and single out the recurrent themes of Prodromos' criticism. Chapter Five discusses how Prodromos reconciled his classical aspirations with his Christian faith. I focus on the poorly studied collection of epigrams on the Old and New Testament, and demonstrate how Prodromos rewrites Scripture according to the conventions of classical literature. Chapter Six showcases originality of the epigrams' poetics by highlighting carnivalesque elements, which were earlier identified in other writings by Prodromos. Having evaluated my evidence, I come to the conclusion that mimesis and intertextuality were essential for achieving success in classroom, court circles and literary salons.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	6
Mimesis: History of the Concept.....	6
Modern Scholarly Approaches to Byzantine Mimesis	11
Intertextuality and its Applications to Byzantine Literature	14
Twelfth-century Classicism.....	18
Theodore Prodromos: the State of Scholarship.....	19
Structure and Objectives of the Present Work	23
Chapter I	27
ADVERTISING VERSATILITY: POETS AND PUBLIC FIGURES FOR SALE.....	27
Introduction	27
Status Quaestionis: an Original Sequel.....	30
Performance of Literary Versatility.....	32
Homer: Helpless Sage	32
Aristophanes: Comedy out of Favour.....	35
Euripides: Tragic Writer as Mourner	36
Demosthenes: Rhetoric in the Interest of National Security	39
Literary Smorgasbord	40
Display of Polymathy.....	41
Hippocrates: Ionic Doctor.....	41
Pomponius: Hellenized Roman	48
Prodromos as Polymath	50
Reflection of the Court Poet's Situation.....	51
Self-referentiality	51
Freedom-loving Slaves.....	52
Propaganda of the Truth	54
Conclusions.....	55
Chapter II.....	56
PHILOSOPHICAL BELLETRIST	56
Introduction	56
Commentary on Aristotle's Posterior Analytics	59
On Big and Small	64
Xenedemos, or Voices	69
Philosophical <i>Persona</i> outside Philosophy.....	75
Conclusions.....	78
Chapter III	79
POET LAUREATE: CELEBRATING THE COMNENIAN EMPIRE	79
Introduction	79
Historical Background.....	80
Time of Troubles.....	80
Hellenic Identity	82
Cultural Change: Military and Aristocratic Values	82
Homer in Twelfth-Century Byzantine literature.....	83
Historiography	83

Rhetoric.....	85
Scholarship.....	86
Prodromos' Homer	87
Imperial Encomia.....	89
Demotic Homer	92
Epic Hagiography	93
Poetry as Distinction	95
Excelling through Cultural Capital	95
Farewell to Constantinople: Turning Rhetoric into Poetry	96
Competing for the Patron's Attention: Prodromos vs. Basilakes	98
Competition at School	102
Recognition	103
Conclusions.....	105
Chapter IV.....	106
SUBVERTING THE COMNENIAN SYSTEM	106
Introduction	106
Isaac Komnenos: the Darling of Intellectuals.....	109
Anna Komnene: Pleading with a Comrade in Misfortune	111
'Friendship in Exile' as a Political Allegory	114
The Amarantos: a Parody of Byzantine Theatron.....	121
Conclusions.....	126
Chapter V	128
HELLENIC BIBLE.....	128
Christian Hellenist.....	128
Exegetical Commentary.....	129
Hymns to Saints.....	130
Biblical Epigrams.....	134
Classical Genres in the Biblical Epigrams	137
Epic.....	137
Drama.....	144
Historiography	161
Philosophy.....	167
Novel.....	183
Rhetorical strategies	190
Conclusions.....	214
Chapter VI.....	217
THE POETICS OF THE CARNIVALESQUE IN THE BIBLICAL EPIGRAMS.....	217
Introduction	217
Humour	220
Wordplay	221
Παρά προσδοκίαν	224
Incongruity (Mock Heroic)	225
Degradation.....	231
Grotesque	231
Eroticism.....	233
Dancing.....	237
Inversion.....	239
Mutability of Power	239
Literary Inversions.....	242
Mésalliances: Juxtaposition between Christian and Pagan.....	245
The Author's Involvement in the Narrative	247
Carnival beyond the Biblical Epigrams.....	248
Conclusions.....	250

CONCLUSIONS	252
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	258
Dictionaries	258
Editions and translations.....	258
Secondary literature.....	268

INTRODUCTION

Mimesis: History of the Concept

Mimesis is one of the key concepts of literary criticism¹. Its central importance is underpinned by the fact that the notion of mimesis was developed already in classical Antiquity, when it generally described '*the relationship between artist or work on the one hand and the world of external objects on the other*'². The origins of the concept of mimesis as an artistic representation of reality can be traced back to Archaic poetry; in one of the Homeric hymns, a chorus of young maidens is praised for mimicking (*μιμεῖσθαι*) the voices of all men and the sounds of castanets³. However, the credit for developing a fully-fledged theory of mimesis belongs to Plato, who made imitation a cornerstone of his criticism of art⁴. Plato's doctrine of mimesis is based on his hierarchical conception of reality whereby physical objects appear only as a vague approximation of ideal forms. Consequently, any artistic representation of the sensory world, be it poetry, music or painting, is a further step away from actual reality. Plato's dismissive attitude towards mimesis has had far-reaching implications. Even those theorists, who do not share Plato's idealism, tend to subscribe to his view that mimetic activity produces a *copy*, which does not bring added value to an original⁵. However, this is not to say that all later theorists followed Plato in rejecting mimesis. In fact, it was Plato's student, Aristotle, who, in his *Poetics*, highlighted positive aspects of literary imitation⁶. Aristotle narrowed down his discussion of mimesis to the representation of human actions on stage⁷. Unlike a historiographer, a tragic writer does not relate ordinary facts but seeks to establish general patterns of human behaviour

¹ Auerbach (1953); Potolsky (2006); Girard (2008).

² Russell (1979) P. 99.

³ Allen, Halliday, and Sikes (1936) In *Apollinem* ln. 162-3; Halliwell (2002) Pp. 15-22.

⁴ Slings (2003) 595a-621d; Verdenius (1949); Melberg (1995) Pp. 10-50.

⁵ Kaldellis (2021) Pp. 171-2.

⁶ Kassel (1965); Woodruff (1992); Halliwell (2002) Pp. 151-259.

⁷ Kassel (1965) 1149b24-8.

while portraying the character's *ethos*⁸. The poetry's aspiration to illuminate universal truths endows mimesis with a didactic role, which chimes with Aristotle's theory that a man learns his first lessons through imitation⁹.

Indeed, it was within the educational context that the concept of mimesis underwent further development. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, a number of grammarians developed a theory that the best way to become a good orator was by imitating classical authors¹⁰. Far from representing mechanical copying of predecessors, mimesis developed into a highly sophisticated rhetorical practice, as is obvious from Dionysius of Halicarnassus' definition: '*mimesis is an activity reproducing the model by means of theoretical principles*'¹¹. Elaborating on the methods of mimesis, Dionysius singles out specific authors (Thucydides, Plato and Lysias) as well as features of their style (*καθαρότης*, *σαφήνεια* and *συντομία*) as being worthy of imitation¹². Although Dionysius' treatise was meant to be a practical guide on imitation, it does not seem to have become a principal textbook for aspiring orators, which is suggested by the fact that the treatise has come down to us only in fragments¹³. Instead, the rhetorical education was based on *Progymnasmata*, collections of preliminary exercises that gradually developed the skills of public speaking¹⁴. We have four surviving handbooks of *Progymnasmata* composed by grammarians who lived in the Roman and Late Antique periods: Aelius Theon, Hermogenes of Tarsus, Aphthonius of Antioch and Nicolaus the Sophist¹⁵. The range of exercises found in *Progymnasmata* was wide but they all encouraged students to follow in the footsteps of great predecessors. According to Theon, rhetorical education should start from the listening of

⁸ Kassel (1965) 1451a36-1451b7.

⁹ Tsitsiridis (2005) Pp. 435-46.

¹⁰ Russell (1979); Halliwell (2002) P. 293.

¹¹ Radermacher and Usener (1929). Περὶ μμήσεως. Fragment 28; Cichocka (2010).

¹² Schippers (2019).

¹³ Russell (1979) P. 6.

¹⁴ Webb (2001).

¹⁵ Kennedy (2003). These handbooks were supplemented by the treatises on rhetorical theory, many of them produced by (Pseudo)-Hermogenes: Papaioannou (2021) Pp. 78-83.

classical authors because ‘we will imitate (μιμησόμεθα) most beautifully when our mind has been stamped by beautiful examples’¹⁶. Reaching more advanced stages of rhetorical training, a student would be expected to paraphrase, elaborate on or rationalize the existing narratives: the exercise on myth (μῦθος) requires composing a rhetorically persuasive version of a traditional story¹⁷; common place (κοινὸς τόπος) involves amplification of an accepted truth¹⁸, while confirmation (κατασκευή) calls for arguments in support of a controversial opinion¹⁹. In the exercise guidelines, the compilers of *Progymnasmata* recommend authors who could be used as rhetorical models. They claim that Platonic dialogues provide the best examples of myths²⁰, that the history of Thucydides contains exemplary descriptions (ἐκφρασις)²¹, while the speeches of Lysias and Demosthenes are an invaluable source for those who practice proposing a law (εἰσφορὰ τοῦ νόμου)²². It is remarkable that the authors who form the canon of *Progymnasmata* almost without exception flourished in classical Athens. From the first century BC onwards, a similar preference for ancient authors was advocated by ideologists of Atticism, who sought to recover the stylistic features of Plato, Aristophanes and Lysias, suppressing the linguistic change that had led to the emergence of the *Koine*²³. This linguistic conservatism was not limited to the classroom but also gave rise to a literary and cultural movement labeled the Second Sophistic²⁴. Its representatives, most of whom flourished in the second and third centuries AD, embarked on a remarkable project of forging Hellenic identity within the framework of the Roman empire²⁵. The Second Sophistic saw Hellenism as a marker of cultural superiority, which was reflected in Greek authors’ active involvement in political affairs, rhetorical sophistication and creative

¹⁶ Kennedy (2003) Pp. 5-6.

¹⁷ Kennedy (2003) Pp. 74-5.

¹⁸ Kennedy (2003) Pp. 79-81.

¹⁹ Kennedy (2003) P. 79.

²⁰ Kennedy (2003) P. 9.

²¹ Kennedy (2003) P. 11.

²² Kennedy (2003) P. 12.

²³ Gelzer (1978); Browning (1983) Pp. 19-52; Horrocks (2010) Pp. 79-188.

²⁴ Whitmarsh (2005).

²⁵ Bompaigne, J. (1958); Swain (1996).

engagement with the classical tradition²⁶. Despite the enormous cultural impact of the Second Sophistic, its programme of reviving the rhetorical culture of classical Athens was utopian. Remarkably, the charges of cultural solipsism were brought from within the movement itself. In a satire entitled *Lexiphanes*, Lucian mocks a character, whose use of the outdated Attic dialect has no other purpose than to conceal the lack of original ideas:

Can't you hear how he talks? Abandoning us, who converse with him now, he talks to us from a thousand years ago, distorting his language, making these preposterous combinations, and taking himself very seriously in the matter, as if it were a great thing for him to use an alien idiom and debase the established currency of speech²⁷.

Continuing the traditions of Hellenistic and Roman literature, Byzantine authors appear to be even more backward-looking²⁸. Granted, the emergence of Christianity gave rise to new genres such as hagiography, hymnography and world chronicles²⁹. It is also true that the ideological gap between Christianity and Paganism, only partially reconciled by the works of the Church Fathers, prompted the Byzantines to adopt a highly selective approach to the classical *paideia*³⁰. As Basil the Great explains in his propaedeutic address to young men on the value of Greek literature, in reading pagan writers, one has to imitate bees, who carefully pick from flowers only what they need, neglecting all the rest³¹. In a similar way, an aspiring Christian author would benefit from reading examples of virtuous behaviour in ancient poets all the while ignoring descriptions of evil practices such as banquets, licentiousness and family squabbles³². Despite this aversion to the inherent paganism of ancient sources, classical authors had a great influence on the development of Byzantine literature. The Byzantines constantly turned to classical sources for the phraseology, imagery and ideas, while disregarding linguistic features of the contemporary spoken language. This artificiality of literary practice prompted Romilly Jenkins

²⁶ Whitmarsh (2001).

²⁷ Harmon, Kilburn, and Macleod (1961-79) Vol. 5 *Lexiphanes*. Pp. 318-9.

²⁸ Browning (1989).

²⁹ Efthymiadis (2011); Wellesz (1961); Mariev (2016).

³⁰ Elm (2012).

³¹ Wilson (1975) P. 23.

³² Wilson (1975) P. 22.

to conclude that most Byzantine authors composed ‘*in what was virtually a foreign language, a language learned from vocabularies, grammars, and phrase-books*’³³. In Jenkins’ view, the influence of Hellenism, most clearly reflected in rhetorical sophistication of Byzantine sources, was so harmful that it deprived the Byzantines of any poetic feeling and expression³⁴. Such aversion to the mimetic character of Byzantine literature, driven by the Romantic imperative of self-expression and originality, was a common place in the twentieth century scholarship. Elaborating on Jenkins’ argument, Cyril Mango famously compared Byzantine literature to a distorting mirror, which presents Byzantine realia through the lens of a spectator representing the bygone world of Antiquity³⁵.

Disparaging the archaic character of Byzantine literature, scholars tended to adopt the point of view of the historian, without giving much thought to the literary functions of mimesis. The first attempt to approach mimesis as a literary device was made by Herbert Hunger³⁶, who identified three main levels of literary imitation: 1) extended comparisons of contemporary figures with mythological characters³⁷; 2) classical allusions used as a shorthand for personal qualities, feelings or historical situations³⁸; 3) linguistic imitation, reflected mainly in Atticism and adherence to classical meters³⁹. Hunger’s discussion includes reflections on the function of mimesis in some well-known Byzantine texts. Thus, focusing on Prodhomos’ *Katomyomachia*, Hunger showed that Byzantine authors could achieve a comic effect through the adaptation of conventions of classical drama into a story of animal strife⁴⁰.

³³ Jenkins (1963) P. 46. In contrast, Martin Hinterberger prefers to speak about ‘artificial’ language of highbrow literature: Hinterberger (2014).

³⁴ Jenkins (1963) Pp. 41, 43.

³⁵ Mango (1975).

³⁶ Hunger (1969-70).

³⁷ Hunger (1969-70) Pp. 23-6.

³⁸ Hunger (1969-70) Pp. 26-30.

³⁹ Hunger (1969-70) Pp. 30-8.

⁴⁰ Hunger (1969-70) Pp. 36-7.

Modern Scholarly Approaches to Byzantine Mimesis

Hunger's articles marked a new era in approaching imitation. Instead of giving judgments on the aesthetic merits of Byzantine literature, scholars started to look into how mimesis actually works. This new flexible approach to mimesis prompted a complete re-evaluation of this literary practice. As Emmanuel Bourbouhakis has suggested, '*where it was once seen as a constraint or inhibiting factor in the development of original literature, mimesis is increasingly perceived by scholars as a highly adaptive cultural and intellectual framework, one that extended to literary criticism*'⁴¹. While Hunger provided a general overview of mimetic techniques, more recent scholarship tends to focus on case studies that highlight the function of imitation in specific cultural circumstances. Thanks to the wide chronological and methodological range of scholarly contributions, mimesis emerges as a truly multifaceted phenomenon that underpins literary production across different cultural contexts. In the following discussion, I will highlight the most significant aspects of mimesis that have been identified in recent scholarship.

First, mimesis was one of the cornerstones of the Byzantine educational system. While the Byzantines developed a few original educational practices such as schedography⁴², the school curriculum in essence remained unchanged since Late Antiquity⁴³. In rhetorical education, *Progymnasmata* retained its status as the principal handbook, which is reflected in numerous commentaries thereon as well as in the large number of rhetorical compositions (myth, ekphrasis, ethopoeia etc.) produced by Byzantine teachers⁴⁴. Although some Byzantine collections of *Progymnasmata* incorporate Christian topics, the majority of rhetorical compositions adhered to classical tradition. Thus, a Byzantine student would have been

⁴¹ Bourbouhakis (2017) P. 114.

⁴² Vassis (1993-4); Agapitos (2015); Nousia (2016); Agapitos (2017).

⁴³ Hunger (1978) Vol. I Pp. 75-120; Hunger (1981); Kennedy (1983); Riehle (2021) Pp. 300-1.

⁴⁴ Rabe (1928); Littlewood (1972); Schiffer (2010).

expected to relate the story of Daedalus⁴⁵, provide a commentary on a maxim from ancient tragedy⁴⁶ or impersonate Pasiphae desiring a bull⁴⁷. Naturally, the classical foundation of rhetorical education made a huge impact on the literary practice: to prove their linguistic and cultural competence, Byzantine authors were compelled to fill their texts with classical proverbs, mythological references and historical exempla⁴⁸. The display of classical learning was important because it increased the chances of securing an office in the ecclesiastical or imperial administration. Moreover, classical mimesis had a moral and didactic purpose. Niketas Choniates, for example, employed anecdotes from Plutarch's biography of Solon to edify his readers on how a responsible leader should act in a time of crisis⁴⁹. In a similar vein, the monk Iakovos turned to the works of the Church Fathers to make a literary patchwork that provided moral guidance to his aristocratic patroness⁵⁰.

Closely connected to the educational function of mimesis are the attempts to employ classical learning as a means of forging elitist social identity. The foundations for this approach to imitation were laid by Ihor Ševčenko's study of the levels of style, which defined the '*persistent tyranny of high style*' in Byzantine literature as a marker of belonging to the cultural and social elite⁵¹. Ševčenko's framework has been productively applied to elucidate the mechanics of social interaction between specific individuals and groups of people. In his biographical study of the fourteenth-century intellectual Thomas Magistros, Niels Gaul has highlighted classicising Greek as a sociolect of the *pepaideumenoι*. Due to excellent rhetorical training, the members of Magistros' circle wielded great power, even despite the fact that some of them did not hold a

⁴⁵ Pignani (1983) Pp. 93-4.

⁴⁶ Pignani (1983) Pp. 104-9.

⁴⁷ Pignani (1983) Pp. 221-4.

⁴⁸ Giannouli (2014).

⁴⁹ Simpson (2003).

⁵⁰ Jeffreys, E. (2010a).

⁵¹ Ševčenko (1981).

political office⁵². Beyond rhetoric, the cultural prestige of classical tradition can be illustrated through epistolary etiquette⁵³. Written to maintain social networks and often to solicit patronage, Byzantine letters were most compelling when they included classical allusions, which evoked the shared experience of studying at school⁵⁴.

Another important field of the application of classical imitation was political propaganda⁵⁵. An average Byzantine writer was hugely dependent on aristocratic patronage and as such was expected to promote the cause of those in power⁵⁶. Byzantine occasional literature abounds with mythological and historical references that draw comparisons between Byzantine figures and heroes of the classical past, often in favor of the former⁵⁷. However, flattery was not the only purpose of the classical tradition in the political discourse. For example, Thomas Magistros modeled some of his speeches on Demosthenes' defense of tax exemption in order to express his position on the controversial issue of *pronoia*⁵⁸. In impersonating Demosthenes, Magistros endowed his argument with greater authority. At the same time, Magistros softened his challenge to the imperial policy by framing his oration as a school exercise (*μελέτη*)⁵⁹.

Despite the prevalence of encomiastic tone in Byzantine literature⁶⁰, Byzantine authors did not always think favorably about their political and cultural milieu. Although the autocratic nature of the Byzantine state made it difficult to speak one's mind, Byzantine intellectuals developed a number of strategies of sharing their critical feelings in a safe way⁶¹. One of the most effective methods of veiled criticism involved the use of classical references, whereby one could nuance,

⁵² Gaul (2011).

⁵³ Bourbouhakis (2020); Preiser-Kapeller (2020).

⁵⁴ Mullett (1981).

⁵⁵ Whitby, Mary (1998); Croke (2008).

⁵⁶ Nilsson (2016b).

⁵⁷ Hunger (1969-70) P. 23.

⁵⁸ Lenz (1963).

⁵⁹ Martin (2006).

⁶⁰ Lauxtermann (2019) Pp. 19-56; Kubina (2020).

⁶¹ Mullett (2013).

qualify or even disavow an expressly stated opinion, in a way that would be comprehensible only to an exclusive circle of fellow intellectuals. Thus, by portraying Theodora as an intrepid and powerful empress, Procopius reveals her true despotic nature through making her repeat a saying associated with Dionysius of Syracuse, one of the most cruel tyrants of the ancient world⁶². In the Middle Byzantine period, a number of Lucianesque satires conceal criticism of contemporary realia by placing the action in the imaginary past⁶³.

This brief overview of scholarly approaches to classical imitation demonstrates the importance of mimesis as one of the key concepts in Byzantine Studies. While acknowledging the great heuristic potential of mimesis, modern scholars are also acutely aware of the insufficient progress in our ability to use mimesis as a marker of the aesthetic value of Byzantine literature:

...instead of condemning unoriginality, the field is now discovering the virtues of “creative imitation”. But this does not go far enough. Any mention of “imitation” is bound to doom Byzantine literature because the criterion of “originality” is too deeply embedded in our normative framework. We need a different framework, though that is a long-term project for the field⁶⁴.

Intertextuality and its Applications to Byzantine Literature

In a bid to highlight ingenuity of Byzantine literature, scholars have proposed new conceptual frameworks to interpret Byzantine authors' engagement with the past tradition. Willem Aerts demonstrated that their reliance on classical literature does not exclude an aspiration to surpass classical models (i.e. *aemulatio*), which could be improved, modernised or even challenged⁶⁵. In Aerts' view, this pursuit spans across multiple genres of Byzantine literature but is especially prominent in historiography. By identifying Herodotean influence in Laonikos Chalkokondyles' description of adultery, Aerts shows that the Byzantine author introduces an innovation, which

⁶² Kaldellis (2004) Pp. 17-61.

⁶³ Krallis (2013).

⁶⁴ Kaldellis (2021) P. 172.

⁶⁵ Aerts (2003) P. 90.

resonates with narratological peculiarities of Renaissance novellae⁶⁶. The dynamic interaction between imitation and emulation in Byzantine literature has more recently become a subject matter of a collective monograph, which includes case studies from different genres and time periods⁶⁷.

As emulation elucidates only one aspect of engaging with literary tradition, scholars recognised the need to create a more comprehensive tool for the analysis of Byzantine literature. The solution was found in the concept of intertextuality, which plays a crucial role in modern literary criticism and cultural studies⁶⁸. Unlike mimesis, intertextuality is a modern concept, first coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966, in her paper on Bakhtin's theory of dialogism⁶⁹. Soon thereafter the concept gained currency in the works of other theorists of structuralism and post-structuralism including Roland Barthes⁷⁰, Jacques Derrida⁷¹, and Michael Riffaterre⁷². All the theories of intertextuality share an assumption that '*a text cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole*'⁷³. However, the abstract nature of most critical approaches makes it hard to pinpoint exactly what is meant by the term of intertextuality⁷⁴. The vagueness surrounding the concept of intertextuality was partly alleviated by Gérard Genette, who produced a systematic and clearly defined study of the wide range of relations between texts⁷⁵. Genette departs from his predecessors in relegating intertextuality to a subclass of a more fundamental notion of

⁶⁶ Aerts (2003) Pp. 96-7.

⁶⁷ Rhoby and Schiffer (2010).

⁶⁸ Worton and Still (1990); Alfaro (1996); Mason (2019).

⁶⁹ Kristeva (1980).

⁷⁰ Barthes (1990).

⁷¹ Derrida (1997).

⁷² Riffaterre (1983).

⁷³ Worton and Still (1990) P. 1.

⁷⁴ Cf. G. Allen's verdict, Allen (2000) P. 2: 'Intertextuality, one of the central ideas in contemporary literary theory, is not a transparent term and so, despite its confident utilization by many theorists and critics, cannot be evoked in an uncomplicated manner'.

⁷⁵ Genette (1997).

transtextuality, defined as ‘*all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts*’⁷⁶. Genette points out five types of transtextuality:

1. **Intertextuality** involves presence of a text within another by means of quotation, plagiarism or allusion⁷⁷.
2. **Paratext** provides a text with a secondary setting. It can be a title, preface, marginal note etc⁷⁸.
3. **Metatextuality** represents a commentary, which often adopts critical attitude toward an original text⁷⁹.
4. **Hypertextuality** signifies derivation of a text B from an earlier text A, and often takes the form of imitation⁸⁰.
5. **Architextuality** denotes implicit belonging of a text to a generic type⁸¹.

Having developed this sophisticated classification of various forms of transtextuality, Genette illustrates his definitions with the analysis of specific texts. Although Genette’s primary focus is on modern European literature, his quest for sources often prompts him to consider classical literature as an origin (hypotext) of the texts under discussion. Thus, Genette compares different versions of the burlesque travesties of Virgil’s *Aeneid*⁸², outlines major approaches to extending the Homeric narrative (proleptic, analeptic and elliptic continuation)⁸³ and provides rich evidence of the development of the mock-heroic epic well beyond the *Batrachomyomachia*⁸⁴. Genette’s informed discussion of classical origins of modern literature makes his approach

⁷⁶ Genette (1997) P. 1.

⁷⁷ Genette (1997) Pp. 1-3.

⁷⁸ Genette (1997) Pp. 3-4.

⁷⁹ Genette (1997) P. 4.

⁸⁰ Genette (1997) Pp. 5-7.

⁸¹ Genette (1997) Pp. 4-5.

⁸² Genette (1997) Pp. 56-66.

⁸³ Genette (1997) Pp. 177-81.

⁸⁴ Genette (1997) Pp. 133-42.

relevant to Byzantine studies, and it is, therefore, not surprising that Ingela Nilsson proposed that Byzantine texts should be read with the aid of Genette's work⁸⁵. In her study of the *Life of St Theoktiste of Lesbos*, Nilsson has uncovered multiple levels of transtextuality, arriving at insightful conclusions about the text's engagement with the classical tradition and its place within the genre of hagiography⁸⁶.

Nilsson's fruitful engagement with Genette's theory marked a greater recognition of the importance of intertextuality, and the rising interest in its mechanics in Byzantine texts⁸⁷. In particular, scholars pay much attention to the study of rewriting (paraphrasis) across different genres including hagiography, history and epic⁸⁸. The Byzantine culture of anthologising is deemed to be equally important, not least because it gathered and organised texts of any content: sayings, short stories, encyclopedic entries etc.⁸⁹.

Adopting the concept of intertextuality has not led to the abandonment of mimesis. On the contrary, scholars often embrace both mimesis and intertextuality, using them as complementary terms. It is telling, for example, that in the above quoted article Ingela Nilsson put the concept of intertextuality within the wider context of imitation in Byzantine literature⁹⁰. The same approach has therefore been adopted in this thesis too. Without seeing the need to make a clear-cut distinction between these terms, I refer to mimesis to describe the adaptation of classical models simultaneously on several levels such as genre, plot, imagery, stock characters, style etc. The concept of intertextuality will be used to highlight a single aspect of the engagement with classical tradition. This could be a quotation, allusion or reference to a specific episode from an

⁸⁵ Nilsson (2010).

⁸⁶ Nilsson (2010) Pp. 205-8.

⁸⁷ Cf. Messis and Papaioannou (2021) P. 144: 'Modern editors, translators, and commentators may sometimes overburden Byzantine texts with such apparatuses of citations/ allusions, yet the fact remains that intertextuality is omnipresent in Byzantine literature.'

⁸⁸ Efthymiadis (2021).

⁸⁹ Messis and Papaioannou (2021) Pp. 137-44.

⁹⁰ Nilsson (2010) Pp. 201-2.

external source. In adopting such a narrow definition of intertextuality, I follow the conceptual framework proposed by Genette.

Twelfth-century Classicism

While the active engagement with the past was inherent to Byzantine literature at all stages of its development, a preoccupation with mimesis and intertextuality often coincided with a more general revival of classical traditions. This was certainly the case for the twelfth-century classical revival when imitation became an intrinsic part of a cultural movement that encouraged the authorial self-assertion, artistic innovation and emerging sense of national identity⁹¹. The Comnenian period saw the reemergence of classical genres that had been dormant since Late Antiquity. Platonic dialogues provided an effective form for expressing contested theological ideas⁹², Lucianesque satires effected mockery of powerful individuals⁹³, whereas romantic novels and their allegorical readings ennobled the ideal of erotic love⁹⁴.

The adaptation of classical models went hand in hand with creative experiments with both content and form of traditional genres. Comnenian historians, for example, despite their preoccupation with Herodotus and Thucydides, completely revolutionised the Greek historiographical writing: Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* opened the emotional world of a female intellectual⁹⁵; Constantine Manasses wrote his Chronicle in verse, and endowed it with novelistic and moralising features⁹⁶; Niketas Choniates enriched his account of the decline and fall of the Komnenian system with his complex psychological portraits and detailed descriptions of everyday life⁹⁷. Innovation flourished even in the most conservative field of Byzantine intellectual culture, education: under the auspices of Anna Komnene such philosophers as Eustratios of Nicaea and

⁹¹ Hunger (1968); Magdalino (1993) Pp. 382-412.

⁹² Cameron, Averil (2016); Cameron, Averil and Gaul (2017); Bucossi and Calia (2020).

⁹³ Alexiou (1983); Cullhed (2020).

⁹⁴ Beaton (1989); Nilsson (2001); Roilos (2006).

⁹⁵ Neville (2013).

⁹⁶ Nilsson (2006); Nilsson (2020b) Pp. 142-169. Cf. observations on novelisation of Comnenian literature in Mullett (2006) and Messis (2014).

⁹⁷ Simpson (2013) Pp. 145-213; Littlewood (2010).

Michael of Ephesus compiled commentaries to the neglected treatises of Aristotle⁹⁸; Nikephoros Basilakes expanded the standard range of rhetorical exercises to include new Christian topics for practicing impersonation (ethopoeia)⁹⁹; John Tzetzes extended the Homeric narrative to make the history of the Trojan war accessible even to the outsiders of Byzantine intellectual circles¹⁰⁰.

Twelfth-century authors not only actively practiced imitation but also shared their thoughts on its artistic value. For instance, Nicholas Kataphloron criticized his fellow rhetoricians for caring too much about displaying their knowledge of classical literature¹⁰¹. In particular, Kataphloron compared the practice of lexical borrowing with gravedigging. However, while mocking his colleagues' obsession with the archaic language, Kataphloron himself uses *recherché* words borrowed from erudite literature (e. g. *σοροδαίμονες*)¹⁰². In other words, Kataphloron replicates exactly the practice that he purports to condemn. This inconsistency suggests that Kataphloron's criticism was ironic, and that mimesis was firmly embedded in Byzantine literary practice.

Theodore Prodromos: the State of Scholarship

The rich variety of mimesis and intertextuality that defines Comnenian literature would have been completely unimaginable without Theodore Prodromos. Although Prodromos' biography is quite obscure, a significant amount of information about the circumstances of his life can be inferred from his own works. Scholars agree that Prodromos must have been born in Constantinople around 1100¹⁰³. After completing rigorous training in grammar, rhetoric and philosophy¹⁰⁴, Prodromos entered the circle of Irene Doukaina¹⁰⁵; his earliest poem addressed to

⁹⁸ Barber and Jenkins (2009).

⁹⁹ Beneker and Gibson (2016); Gibson (2021).

¹⁰⁰ Cardin (2018).

¹⁰¹ Loukaki (2001); Loukaki (2019); Polemis (2020).

¹⁰² Loukaki (2019) P. 92 ln. 11.

¹⁰³ Hörandner (1974) P. 23; Kazhdan (1984c) Pp. 93-98.

¹⁰⁴ Hörandner (1974) Poem XXXVIII ln. 47-59.

¹⁰⁵ Kazhdan (1984c) Pp. 96-97.

her is dated to 1123¹⁰⁶. After the death of Irene, Prodromos wrote occasional works for John II Komnenos. Prodromos celebrated John's military triumphs (most notably the capture of Kastamon and Gangra)¹⁰⁷, praised his rule in terms of eschatological salvation (within the framework of Christmas celebration)¹⁰⁸ and commemorated John's life in the epitaph for the emperor's tomb¹⁰⁹. In his panegyrics, Prodromos developed an image of an emperor as a warrior, giving special importance to the virtues of military prowess, nobility and wealth¹¹⁰. The same system of values applies to Prodromos' poems, speeches and letters to other members of aristocracy¹¹¹. Prodromos' focus on military and aristocratic virtues neatly encapsulated the social and cultural developments in the twelfth century,¹¹² and it is no surprise that Prodromos became one of the most successful literary figures of the Byzantine millennium¹¹³. Indeed, Prodromos' fame not only spread well beyond his native city of Constantinople but also outlived the poet by many centuries¹¹⁴.

Despite his popularity, Prodromos failed to secure an appointment within bureaucratic structures of the Empire. Prodromos thus lacked a stable source of income, and at times desperately needed financial support¹¹⁵. This prompted Prodromos to adopt a persona of an ill and poor poet, and to beg his patrons to ameliorate his miserable conditions¹¹⁶. Such experimental mode of addressing a patron proved to be a successful innovation, and Prodromos' 'begging poems' were followed by similar compositions by authors conventionally known as Ptochoprodromos¹¹⁷ and

¹⁰⁶ Hörandner (1974) P. 188.

¹⁰⁷ Hörandner (1974) Poems III-VIII.

¹⁰⁸ Hörandner (1974) Poems IX-X.

¹⁰⁹ Hörandner (1974) Poem XXV.

¹¹⁰ Hörandner (1974) Pp. 73-109; Kazhdan (1984c) Pp. 105-11.

¹¹¹ Hörandner (1974) Pp. 37-56; De Gregorio (2010).

¹¹² Kazhdan and Epstein (1985) Pp. 99-119.

¹¹³ Lauxtermann (1998) P. 13.

¹¹⁴ Hörandner (1974) Pp. 32-35; Hörandner (2009). See Chapter Three of this thesis.

¹¹⁵ Hörandner (1974) P. 26. Bazzani (2007a). See Chapter Four of this thesis.

¹¹⁶ Beaton (1987); Cullhed (2014).

¹¹⁷ Eideneier (1991); Eideneier (2012).

Manganeios Prodromos¹¹⁸. The question of authorship of these respective collections sparked a debate, which lay at the heart of scholarship on Prodromos for the better part of the twentieth century¹¹⁹. While contemporary scholars tend to agree that the group of poems attributed to Manganeios Prodromos cannot be identical with that by Theodore Prodromos (one of Manganeios' poems refers to Prodromos as being dead)¹²⁰, the authorship of the *Ptochoprodromika* is still an open question. Those who argue against a single authorship point out the contrast in the linguistic register (the vernacular language of *Ptochoprodromika* vs. the highbrow Greek of Prodromos), differences in metrical patterns and biographical inconsistencies¹²¹. On the other hand, the proponents of a single authorship argue that the author of the *Ptochoprodromika* creates a *persona*, which does not have to reflect his actual circumstances; they also draw attention to the consistency in manuscripts' attribution of the *Ptochoprodromika* to Prodromos, and to the remarkable thematic links between Theodore Prodromos' court poetry and the *Poems of Poor Prodromos*¹²². While I do not intend to take a side in this debate, I will highlight some similarities in the poetics of the *Ptochoprodromika* and Prodromos' biblical epigrams¹²³.

As well as clarifying the historical circumstances of Prodromos' life, modern scholarship has applied itself to the study of the literary aspects of his works. This collective effort has revealed Prodromos' creativity in engaging with a broad range of classical models. In his occasional poems, Prodromos often used the Homeric hexameter to convey a sense of gravitas¹²⁴. In his satires, Prodromos drew inspiration from Aristophanes, Lucian and the Hellenistic epigram. In

¹¹⁸ Magdalino (1993) 'The poems of 'Manganeios Prodromos'' Pp. 494-500. Jeffreys (2011); Jeffreys, E. and Jeffreys, M. (2015) provide some glimpses of their ongoing work on the corpus of Manganeios Prodromos.

¹¹⁹ Papadimitriu (1898); Papadopoulos-Kerameus (1898); Hörandner (1967); Alexiou (1986).

¹²⁰ Hörandner (1967); Magdalino (1993) Pp. 439-54; Jeffreys (2011).

¹²¹ Hesseling and Pernot (1910) Pp. 17-23; Hörandner (1974) Pp. 65-7; Kyriakis (1974).

¹²² Kazhdan (1984c) Pp. 90-91; Beaton (1987) Pp. 22-6.

¹²³ See Chapter Six, Pp. 219-20.

¹²⁴ Tziatzi-Papagianni (1994); Bazzani (2007b).

particular, these sources provided memorable stock characters as well as effective strategies of invective¹²⁵. Apart from satires, Prodromos composed his own version of mock-epic, *Katomyomachia*, which some scholars (controversially) have interpreted as a parody of the Byzantine state and society¹²⁶. In his capacity as scholar and philosopher, Prodromos employed the form of Platonic dialogue to debate the subtleties of Aristotelian philosophy¹²⁷. Above all, Prodromos was in all likelihood responsible for the revival of romantic novel¹²⁸. Basing his narrative on Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*, Prodromos transformed the classical genre through writing in verse and incorporating a wide range of rhetorical compositions into a romantic tale¹²⁹. Aside from being a champion of classical Antiquity, Prodromos was a prolific author of religious texts including a commentary on canons¹³⁰, epigrams on the Church Fathers¹³¹ and a saint's life¹³². In his religious writings, Prodromos adopts an approach similar to the one we find in his classisicing works: he shows great respect for the past tradition but adapts it for his own purposes¹³³.

Apart from examining Prodromos' method of working with classical sources, modern scholars have invested significant effort into deciphering the social and cultural function of Prodromos' works. Benefiting from the excellent edition of Prodromos' occasional poems by Hörandner, they have developed our understanding of Prodromos' contribution to political propaganda as well as his self-representation as a court poet¹³⁴. Additionally, close reading of Prodromos'

¹²⁵ Podesta (1945); Podesta (1947); Migliorini (2010); Zagklas (2020).

¹²⁶ Hunger (1968); Meunier (2016); Marciniak and Warcaba (2018); Lauxtermann (Forthcoming).

¹²⁷ Charalabopoulos (2005); Spyridonova, Kurbanov and Goncharko (2017).

¹²⁸ Jeffreys, E. (2012). However, there is no consensus on this issue, with some scholars advocating Makrembolites' precedence: Agapitos (2000).

¹²⁹ Agapitos (1998); Jeffreys, E. (1998).

¹³⁰ Stevenson (1888).

¹³¹ D'Ambrosi (2008).

¹³² Papadopoulos (1935); Messis (2004).

¹³³ Zagklas (2016).

¹³⁴ Magdalino (1993) Pp. 413-34; Simelidis (2006); Bazzani (2007a); Faulkner (2016); Magdalino and Macrides (2021).

satires has revealed his concerns about the need to make compromises with moral principles¹³⁵. Most recently, Theodore Prodromos has emerged as a teacher. Specifically, Przemyslaw Marciniak has suggested that Prodromos' Lucianesque satire *Sale of Poetical and Political lives* was intended to test students' knowledge of the classical authors¹³⁶. Furthermore, Nikos Zagklas has demonstrated that many of Prodromos' works originally intended for the court or theatron¹³⁷, could be reused in school contexts¹³⁸. This interest in Prodromos' didactic activities has coincided with the scholarly focus on the method used for the teaching of grammar known as schedography, which was developed to a large extent thanks to Prodromos' efforts¹³⁹.

Structure and Objectives of the Present Work

Although in recent years Prodromos has become one of the most popular authors among the historians of Byzantine literature, 'a comprehensive study of his work and his role in the literary and intellectual developments of the twelfth century', – according to Elizabeth Jeffreys, - 'remains a desideratum'¹⁴⁰. Without covering Prodromos' entire literary oeuvre, this thesis aims to provide a detailed study of the use of mimesis and intertextuality in Prodromos' writings, and to contribute to our understanding of the role of the two respective phenomena in the culture of Comnenian Byzantium. To develop a full picture, this thesis focuses on the works that were produced for different kinds of contexts: school (Chapters One and Five), *theatron* (Chapters

¹³⁵ Cullhed (2017); Marciniak (2020).

¹³⁶ Marciniak (2013).

¹³⁷ Marciniak (2007); Toth (2007); Gaul (2018).

¹³⁸ Zagklas (2014).

¹³⁹ Vassis (1993-4); Agapitos (2015); Agapitos (2017).

¹⁴⁰ Jeffreys, E. (2016) P. 117. Cf. Kaldellis' assessment, Kaldellis (2007) P. 251: 'At this stage, it is still difficult to talk about him as "an author," given that the extent of his corpus is uncertain along with the dates, circumstances, and audiences of his works. There have been few sustained literary analyses... He is a literary goldmine waiting to be tapped'. Nikos Zagklas has also called for a comprehensive study of Prodromos' corpus, Zagklas (2014) P. 55: 'Needless to say, a monograph dealing with the entire Prodromic output remains a desideratum. Although the secondary bibliography on Theodore Prodromos and his work is vast, no one has attempted so far to piece together the entire puzzle: Prodromos "the poet", "novelist", "grammarian", "philosopher", "theologian", "hagiographer", "satirist", "orator", "epistolographer"'.

One, Four, Five and Six) and court (Chapter Three). Similarly, this thesis examines different genres including Prodromos' commentaries on classical works, letters, philosophical dialogues (Chapter Two), satires (Chapters One and Four), poems (Chapter Three and Four), speeches (Chapters One and Four) and epigrams (Chapters Five and Six). Naturally, the consideration of multiple genres has prompted an in-depth examination of Prodromos' engagement with different models, the most important of which were Plato (Chapters Two and Five), Lucian (Chapters One and Four) and Homer (Chapters Three, Five and Six). While the chapters of my thesis tend to focus on a specific genre, the structure of my argument will be defined by the functions of mimesis and intertextuality.

In Chapter One, I offer my interpretation of Prodromos' *Poetical and Public Characters for Sale* (*Βίων πρᾶσις ποιητικῶν καὶ πολιτικῶν*), which is a sequel to Lucian's satire *Philosophies for Sale*¹⁴¹. Featuring impersonations of six authors of classical Antiquity, this piece testifies to the diversity of Prodromos' interests and as such can serve as a suitable starting point for a discussion of Prodromos' engagement with classical texts. Identifying references to Prodromos' occasional writings, I suggest that the *Βίων πρᾶσις* could have been intended to serve as a kind of a business card, advertising the diversity of Prodromos' writing talents to potential patrons.

Chapter Two develops further the idea of mimesis as a means of self-promotion. However, it deals with Prodromos' philosophical interests, which are conspicuously absent from his adaptation of Lucian's *Philosophies for Sale*. Using Prodromos' philosophical compositions written in three different genres as my primary evidence, I examine the author's strategies of legitimising and popularising philosophical inquiry in the age when ancient philosophy was

¹⁴¹ Migliorini (2010) Pp. 128-68.

under attack¹⁴². More specifically, I show how his creative appropriation of Platonic style and thought supported his ambition to excel as a distinguished teacher of philosophy.

Chapter Three explores Prodromos' contribution to political propaganda. Having outlined the Comnenian society's preoccupation with military prowess and aristocratic nobility, I discuss the twelfth century's rediscovery of Homer across different genres including historiography, rhetoric and classical scholarship. Focusing on Prodromos' panegyrics, I showcase Prodromos' revival of Homeric hexameter as a literary tour de force¹⁴³, and interpret his success in terms of Bourdieu's theory of social capital¹⁴⁴. Contextualising Prodromos' literary output within the occasional rhetorical production of his time, I attempt to identify Prodromos' strategies of distinguishing himself from his contemporaries.

Chapter Four moderates Prodromos' encomiastic rhetoric through identifying his clandestine criticism of the political authority. I discuss in detail Prodromos' strategies of political subversion, and suggest that classical mimesis and intertextuality were intended to function as a code communicating critical opinions to an exclusive circle of fellow intellectuals. Apart from describing his methods of subversion, I identify recurrent themes in Prodromos' criticism of the political establishment, and juxtapose them to the evidence of how other twelfth-century intellectuals perceived the politics and ideology of their own age.

In Chapter Five, I examine how Prodromos reconciled his classicism with his Christian faith. For this purpose, I study his collection of epigrams on the Old and New Testament, which has only recently been properly edited and has accordingly received only limited scholarly attention¹⁴⁵.

¹⁴² Kaldellis (2007) Pp. 225-33.

¹⁴³ Cf. Zagklas (2014) Pp. 90-99.

¹⁴⁴ Bourdieu (1986).

¹⁴⁵ Papagiannis (1997).

Developing the first study on the classical sources of the biblical epigrams¹⁴⁶, I demonstrate how Prodromos incorporates the structural features of classical genres (philosophy, epic, drama, history, novel and rhetoric), and how this method impacts on the original biblical narrative.

Chapter Six highlights the originality of Prodromos' approach to the biblical paraphrase by analysing his poetics in terms of Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, the elements of which have already been identified in Prodromos' other works¹⁴⁷. Specifically, I draw attention to humour and grotesque; emphasis on reversals of fortune; and Prodromos' dialogic interaction with biblical characters and his readers.

The thesis thus constitutes a diptych: the first four chapters explore classical imitation in Prodromos' secular works, whereas Chapters 5 and 6 examine intertextuality in Prodromos' rendering of Scripture.

The overall ambition of this thesis is to demonstrate that mimesis and intertextuality underpin almost any type of literature produced in the twelfth-century Byzantium. Far from representing an antiquarian obsession with the past, classical imitation, I shall argue, provides a framework that often drives literary innovation. Crucially, classical mimesis had a practical use too. This thesis demonstrates that mimesis can serve as an effective means of achieving success in attracting students, soliciting patronage and gaining popularity among intellectuals as well as wider society.

¹⁴⁶ Magnelli (2003).

¹⁴⁷ Alexiou (1999); Roilos (2006).

Chapter I

ADVERTISING VERSATILITY: POETS AND PUBLIC FIGURES FOR SALE

Introduction

Literary imitation implies the reliance on specific classical models. As my thesis will show, Prodromos was an extremely versatile author. He followed in the footsteps of such authors as the epic poet Homer, the philosopher Plato and the novelist Heliodorus. However, the greatest influence on Prodromos' writings was evidently left by Lucian, and this penchant for the 'sweet Syrian'¹⁴⁸ is by no means a coincidence. Flourishing in the second century AD, Lucian was one of the most prominent representatives of the Second Sophistic, the cultural movement built around rhetorical performances, pedagogy and, most importantly, creative engagement with the classical tradition¹⁴⁹. These features strongly resonate with the cultural practices and aspirations of Byzantine intellectuals, as did the Sophists' programme of forging elitist Hellenic identity within the larger framework of the Roman Empire¹⁵⁰. This commonality of cultural experience resulted in the great popularity of Lucian in Byzantium. Indeed, the extensive *oeuvre* of Lucian (eight volumes of the Loeb editions¹⁵¹) could not have come down to us, unless his works were closely read and studied throughout the Byzantine period¹⁵². This is not to say, however, that Lucian was an uncontroversial figure. On the contrary, the Byzantines were acutely aware that his religious scepticism targeted not only the mainstream paganism but the newly arisen Christianity too. The entry in the *Suda*, for example, presents Lucian as an atheist doomed to eternal damnation for mocking Christ in his *Life of Peregrinus*¹⁵³. As a result, the Byzantines developed a highly selective approach to Lucian's heritage. The majority of authors limited themselves to stylistic imitation, which is reflected in a great number of scholia, quotations and

¹⁴⁸ Migliorini (2010) P. 19 ln. 25.

¹⁴⁹ Whitmarsh (2005).

¹⁵⁰ Whitmarsh (2001).

¹⁵¹ Harmon, Kilburn, and Macleod (1961-79).

¹⁵² Zappala (1990); Marciniak (2016); Marciniak (2019); Messis (2020).

¹⁵³ Adler (1928-35) Lambda Entry 683 Λουκιανός.

dictionaries based on Lucian's works. This cautious approach to Lucian is best exemplified by the critical essay of patriarch Photios, who condemned Lucian's nihilism but recognised the literary merits of his works¹⁵⁴. Another aspect of Lucian's influence can be identified within the polemical discourse. Launching vitriolic attacks on each other, the Byzantines often adopted the strategies of invective developed in Lucian's satires. Finally, the interest in Lucian resulted in imitation of his compositional methods. These could be 'forgeries' (to use Genette's term¹⁵⁵) that purported to be written by Lucian himself; some of them came down to us as a part of Lucian's corpus¹⁵⁶. Alternatively, Lucianic imitations could be open about their Byzantine provenance, like the *Timarion*, which provided a glimpse into a Christian fair in Thessaloniki before moving the action to the underworld¹⁵⁷. Despite their fantastic setting, pieces inspired by Lucian often served as satires, targeting specific features of Byzantine everyday life. The satiric purpose is especially prominent in most of the Prodromos' Lucianesque compositions, which ridicule the incompetence of fake professionals¹⁵⁸. Yet, in producing Lucianic satires, Prodromos, I will argue, aspires for something more than simply lambasting his contemporaries. Specifically, using Lucian as his model, Prodromos forges a *persona*, which enables him to gain prominence in the literary market of twelfth-century Constantinople. To develop this argument, I will discuss Prodromos' composition entitled *Poets and Public figures for Sale*¹⁵⁹.

The piece is inspired by Lucian's satire *Philosophies for Sale*¹⁶⁰. This is a dramatic representation of quite an unusual auction: Zeus and Hermes descend to the Earth to put on sale

¹⁵⁴ Henry (1959-77) Codex 128 96a-b.

¹⁵⁵ Genette (1997) P. 28.

¹⁵⁶ Kucharski (2020).

¹⁵⁷ Baldwin (1984). The literature on the *Timarion* is quite extensive; among the most recent publications are: Kaldellis (2012); Krallis (2013); Nilsson (2016a).

¹⁵⁸ Marciniak (2020) Pp. 135-7.

¹⁵⁹ Migliorini (2010) Βίων πρᾶσις ποιητικῶν καὶ πολιτικῶν. Pp. 127-68. The traditional translation is 'Sale of poetical and political lives'. While offering a different rendering into English, I will use the Greek abbreviation Βίων πρᾶσις that became current in the recent scholarship.

¹⁶⁰ Harmon (1915) *Philosophies for Sale*. Pp. 449-511.

the most prominent representatives of various schools of Greek philosophy. Having set up their stalls, the gods advertise each of the philosophers available for sale. The piece comprises several independent scenes, which share a similar structure. Zeus and Hermes summon a philosopher and give a brief description of his personal features. Then the philosopher is interviewed by a customer, who asks about his background, lifestyle and expertise. If the customer realises that he will benefit from the philosopher's company, he buys him for the amount proposed by the gods. Once all the philosophers are sold, Zeus and Hermes return to Olympus.

In describing and portraying a wide variety of philosophers, Lucian offers a playful reflection on the Roman intellectual scene, where anyone could appropriate the legacies of classical philosophy for their own purposes. Naturally, Lucian's piece is a satire: the most independent men of Antiquity are forced to showcase their wisdom only to be sold into slavery. Furthermore, this satire is a parody as it actively reuses philosophical technical terminology for comic purposes¹⁶¹. Taking into account that the satire ends with the gods' promise to return the next day to sell common people (a promise that is never fulfilled), one can easily see why Prodrornos choose the *Βίων πρᾶσις* as a model for his own satire.

Prodrornos' version opens with Zeus saying that the necessary platform for auction was set up the day before. Zeus notices that the crowd gathered in the expectation of the sale of 'rustic' people. Yet, the characters that appear actually to be on sale are far more sophisticated: Homer, Hippocrates, Aristophanes, Euripides, Pomponius and Demosthenes. Of these six characters three are poets (Homer, Aristophanes and Euripides), one is an orator (Demosthenes), one is a lawyer (Pomponius) and one is a doctor (Hippocrates). Once we learn that the majority of characters are engaged in literary work, one part of the title (*βίοι ποιητικοί*) becomes self-explanatory. However, another part (*βίοι πολιτικοί*) requires clarification. Contrary to the modern

¹⁶¹ Bompaire (1958) Pp. 350-61, 489-91; Hall (1981) Pp. 151-93; Whitmarsh (2001) Pp. 258-60.

usage of the term ‘political’, in ancient Greek *πολιτικός* had several meanings that are not related to statecraft: in particular, this adjective could refer to the civil society¹⁶² or public life¹⁶³. In the Byzantine rhetorical argot, *πολιτικός* was used to describe the wholesome effect of the literary activity of the Christian authorities: John Sikeliotes, for example, calls the Church Fathers (especially Gregory of Nazianzos) political philosophers highlighting thus the greater edifying potential of their homilies, in comparison with orations of classical ‘rhetors’¹⁶⁴. Applying the notion ‘political’ to the classical authors, Prodromos seems to imply that their works have not only aesthetic but also practical value.

Status Quaestionis: an Original Sequel

Although none of the Prodromos’ characters is a philosopher, the parallels between Lucian’s and Prodromos’ works are striking. Indeed, Prodromos has even attracted criticism for the supposed lack of originality: Christopher Robinson, in particular, observes that Prodromos’ adaptation of Lucian’s storyline is accompanied by the employment of the same stock characters: unsalable sybarite, jargon-ridden expert, and charlatan. All these similarities prompted Robinson to conclude that Prodromos’ piece ‘*apes its model too closely to seem an independent work of art*’¹⁶⁵. In his severe judgment, Robinson goes even further by suggesting that Prodromos’ work lacks any references to Byzantine reality.

This chapter, by contrast, approaches Prodromos’ piece as an original work that is rooted in the circumstances of the author’s life. In adopting such an approach, I will build on some recent discussions by Byzantinists who are more prone to study Byzantine imitations on their own. The most thorough study undertaken so far was authored by Przemyslaw Marciniak, who argues that

¹⁶² Liddell and Scott (1940) *πολιτικός* II.2, 3.

¹⁶³ Liddell and Scott (1940) *πολιτικός* IV.

¹⁶⁴ Papaioannou (2013) P. 34; Papaioannou (2019)

¹⁶⁵ Robinson (1979) P. 72.

this piece was written mainly for educational purposes¹⁶⁶. Marciniak observes that Prodromos' characters tend to quote their own works, and suggests that these quotations were intended to be identified by Prodromos' students. This interpretation chimes with our knowledge of Prodromos' didactic pursuits. Prodromos was a prolific author of school exercises known as *schede*¹⁶⁷, and, as we will learn in Chapter Two, was at pains to represent himself as an effective teacher¹⁶⁸. However, Marciniak's interpretation leaves some questions open. If the *Βίων πρᾶσις* had been indeed meant to test the knowledge of classical literature, one could have expected all the quotations to be carefully disguised. It is true that some fragments from classical works are so neatly woven into the characters' speech that they hardly stand out as an external material. Yet, sometimes it is absolutely clear that what a character says represents a quotation; this is especially relevant for the episode in which a customer recites the *Iliad* to expose metrical faults of the Homeric verses¹⁶⁹. Here, as in other similar cases, the identification of a quotation does not seem as challenging as it would have been expected of an exercise. Had Prodromos wished to puzzle his students, he would have likely concealed the author's identity until the very end of each scene. However, in fact, sometimes the authors' names are revealed not long after their appearance so that the source of their sayings is no longer a question¹⁷⁰. Another outstanding question has to do with the obscurity of certain authors found in Prodromos' satire; this is especially the case for Pomponius, a second-century Roman lawyer. His treatises were originally written in Latin. Although Pomponius' legal contributions were subsequently incorporated into Justinian's *Digesta*, they did not form a part of the Byzantine school curriculum¹⁷¹. Naturally, this evidence does not exclude the possibility that - as Marciniak aptly proposes - the *Βίων πρᾶσις* could have been used for educational purposes. Rather, it suggests that the *Βίων πρᾶσις*

¹⁶⁶ Marciniak (2013).

¹⁶⁷ Agapitos (2015).

¹⁶⁸ See Pp. 70-76.

¹⁶⁹ Migliorini (2010) P.129 ln. 140 – P.130 ln. 150.

¹⁷⁰ Migliorini (2010) P. 129 ln. 126; P. 133 ln. 329; P.135 ln. 405.

¹⁷¹ Honoré (2012).

was a more ambitious piece than just a school exercise¹⁷². In what follows, I will try to demonstrate that the *Bίων πρᾶσις* is more complex than one could imagine. My discussion is arranged in three sections. Firstly, I argue that Prodromos' imitation of multiple authors advertises his ability to adopt different stylistic registers and thus to produce writings for every possible occasion. Secondly, I examine the role of paraliterary characters (Hippocrates and Pomponius) and discuss their role in Prodromos' self-fashioning as a polymath. Thirdly, I examine the *Bίων πρᾶσις* as a piece that - especially through the representations of literary slavery - reflects the situation of a Byzantine intellectual and court writer¹⁷³.

Performance of Literary Versatility

Homer: Helpless Sage

The first author offered for sale is Homer¹⁷⁴. At first sight, the purchase of this author does not look promising. He is blind. He is so worn out by the old age that he can barely walk. As such, he crucially needs a guide to even enter the stage. While Hermes is advertising Homer's knowledge of the past, present and future, a customer sarcastically observes that he is ignorant of what happens beneath his feet. This is followed by further abusive remarks until Hermes intervenes to prove that Homer is the wisest. The god represents the poet as a creator; it is Homer who has endowed Zeus with his aegis and thunderbolt, Hermes with his wings, wand and sandals, and Athena with her black eyes. As well as being a gods' benefactor, Homer is endowed with many useful skills. Essentially, he is proficient in everything that characters of his poems do. First of all, he is a military commander: narrating the *Iliad*, Homer becomes responsible for levying the army, presiding over the heroes, and eventually capturing Troy. In times of peace,

¹⁷² Cf. Nikos Zagklas' argument that some pieces by Prodromos could be used for several purposes in different contexts: Zagklas (2014) Pp. 73-87.

¹⁷³ Similar approach is adopted in Chryssoyelos (2021) who proposes to read *Bίων πρᾶσις* as 'a subtle satire against the nexus of patronage during the Komnenian era, during which literati struggled to make ends meet'.

¹⁷⁴ Migliorini (2010) P. 127 ln. 34 - P. 131 ln. 203.

Homer is also indispensable: he can serve as an advisor, a doctor and, obviously, a poet. There is literally nothing that is beyond Homer's power.

While the Byzantine civilization has been often considered as anonymous, the recent scholarship made significant progress in discovering self-referential dimension of Byzantine literature. In his study of the image of Homer in the twelfth-century literature, Eric Cullhed points out some remarkable correspondences between some features of Homer's biography and the self-representations of the Byzantine poets, including Prodromos¹⁷⁵. Cullhed argues that Prodromos exaggerates Homer's helplessness to conjure up his own miserable condition. This identification with Homer has a pragmatic purpose. As Cullhed aptly remarks, Homeric language, metre and imagery were used by twelfth-century authors, not least by Prodromos, to celebrate military achievements of the Comnenian aristocracy¹⁷⁶. The adaptation of the Homeric *persona* in the *Βίων πρᾶσις* enables Prodromos to strengthen his reputation of a panegyrist.

Although Homer's profile suggests that his favorite subject matter is war, Hermes indicates that the poet's repertoire is unlimited: sometimes Homer sings the glories of heroes, while at other times his songs are devoted to love affairs¹⁷⁷. In my opinion, Prodromos stresses Homeric versatility to conjure up his own prolific output. Indeed, the occasions that inspired Prodromos to write an epic poem are by no means limited to military campaigns but include illness¹⁷⁸, death¹⁷⁹, appointment to office¹⁸⁰, his intended departure from the city¹⁸¹ and even an edition of schedule composed by a friend¹⁸². Therefore, by highlighting the breadth of Homer's repertoire,

¹⁷⁵ Cullhed (2014).

¹⁷⁶ Cullhed (2014) P. 56. See Chapter Four for the discussion of appropriation of Homer in the twelfth-century political discourse.

¹⁷⁷ Migliorini (2010) P. 128 ln. 85-9

¹⁷⁸ Hörandner (1974) Poems LXXVII, LXXVIII.

¹⁷⁹ Hörandner (1974) Poem XXVIa.

¹⁸⁰ Hörandner (1974) Poem LVIb.

¹⁸¹ Hörandner (1974) Poem VXXIX.

¹⁸² Hörandner (1974) Poem LXI.

Prodromos reminds his audience that, as the reincarnation of the Poet, he is able to elevate any subject matter to an epic scale.

In the *Bίων πρᾶσις* Homer emerges not only as a poet but also a teacher. Approached by an uncouth customer, Homer refuses to talk to him as long as he speaks in prose. Undeterred by such a rejection, the customer asks Homer to teach him verse composition. Complying with this request, Homer transforms the customer's initial question into verse, and adheres to his commitment to his verse throughout the entire conversation¹⁸³. The interaction between the poet and the customer can be considered a master class in verse composition. Being well versed in composing epic poems, Prodromos could offer this kind of training too.

The discussion of poetic craft goes beyond the basics of verse composition. At some point a customer notices that Homer's utterance does not comply with metrical rules¹⁸⁴. Therefore, the customer decides to put Homer's competence in composing proper hexameters to the test. He employs a grammatical theory that developed classifications of metrical faults (*πάθη στίχων*). Each of the metrical faults has its own name. If a verse at the beginning contains a redundant syllable, for example, it is called *προκέφαλος*. In a similar way, other types of faults (which typically amount to six but in some sources exceed this number) are caused by a redundant or missing short/long syllable. These classifications were developed by Hellenistic grammarians¹⁸⁵ but it was the Byzantine scholars who most actively applied them in literary criticism¹⁸⁶. In particular, John Tzetzes in his commentary to the *Iliad* on different occasions outlines the theory of metrical faults before giving a verdict on the quality of the verse in question¹⁸⁷. The *Bίων πρᾶσις* seems to parody these grammatical discussions: the customer recites to Homer flawed verses from the *Iliad* and identifies the type of mistake made by the Poet. Homer, however,

¹⁸³ Migliorini (2010) P. 129 ln. 106-9.

¹⁸⁴ Migliorini (2010) P. 129 ln. 140-50

¹⁸⁵ Studemund (1867).

¹⁸⁶ Lauxtermann (2019) Pp. 280-2.

¹⁸⁷ Lolos (1981) Section 1, vv. 1, 193.

makes light of this criticism, claiming that if he had known of metrical faults, he would not have been so prolific¹⁸⁸. This whole episode reflects Prodromos' deep involvement in grammatical culture as is obvious, for example, from his grammatical treatise dedicated to *sebastokratorissa Eirene*¹⁸⁹.

Aristophanes: Comedy out of Favour

The next two poets put on sale are Aristophanes¹⁹⁰ and Euripides¹⁹¹. Just as Democritus and Heraclites embody the opposition between tears and laughter in Lucian's piece, these two playwrights represent the contrast between comedy and tragedy. Hermes summons Aristophanes first and asks him to abstain from jeering. Aristophanes, however, disregards this request. Upon entering the stage, he begins to insult his potential master. He quotes the opening monologue from his own comedy *Plutus*, in which a slave complains that he has to suffer the consequences of actions of his foolish master¹⁹². When the customer observes that Aristophanes has not yet suffered anything, Aristophanes intensifies his insult by reciting fragments from other comedies. This behaviour prompts the customer to reject Aristophanes.

The outcome of this interaction aptly reflects the incongruence of Aristophanes' works with commissioned writings in the Byzantine court. Indeed, the formal nature of occasions celebrated by Byzantine authors often makes references to comedy inappropriate. However, the appearance of Aristophanes in the *Βίων προῶσις* is not arbitrary. Prodromos makes use of Aristophanic *persona* in some of his satirical poems including *Against a Lecherous Old Woman*¹⁹³ and *Against*

¹⁸⁸ Migliorini (2010) P. 130 ln. 151-3.

¹⁸⁹ Zagklas (2011).

¹⁹⁰ Migliorini (2010) P.132 ln. 264-83.

¹⁹¹ Migliorini (2010) P. 132 ln. 284 - P. 133 ln. 318.

¹⁹² Wilson (2007) *Plutus*. vv. 1-5. See the final section of this chapter for the more detailed discussion of Prodromos' handling of this quotation: P. 53.

¹⁹³ Migliorini (2010) *Κατὰ φιλοπόρνου γράος*. Pp. 3-18.

*an Old Man who Considered Himself Wise because of his Long Beard*¹⁹⁴. Both of these compositions rely on ancient comedy. In particular, Prodromos' psogos of an old woman is inspired by the scene from the *Plutus*, in which a young man mocks his old wealthy mistress¹⁹⁵. Like Aristophanes, Prodromos exploits the old woman's promiscuity, edentulism and makeup misuse for comedic purposes¹⁹⁶. The intertextual connection is reflected in lexical overlaps too. Prodromos' interest in Aristophanes, therefore, must have been quite significant¹⁹⁷, and it is only rhetorical conventions that prevented Prodromos from making wider use of ancient comedy.

Euripides: Tragic Writer as Mourner

After rejecting Aristophanes, the customer turns to Euripides. The tragic poet turns out to be as miserable as Homer and as rude as Aristophanes. He presents himself quoting his character Polymestor who has just been blinded by Hecuba: '*Woe is me! Where can I go, where halt, or turn?*'¹⁹⁸. Further on, Euripides intensifies the feeling of misfortune by quoting the beginning of another tragedy, *Orestes*: '*there is nothing so terrible, whether suffering or misfortune, that human nature could not bear burden of it*'¹⁹⁹. As the customer inquires about the reason for Euripides' misfortune, he quotes *Hecuba*'s Polyxena who expresses distress at her impending captivity²⁰⁰. Having thus identified himself as a slave, Euripides teases the customer by saying that a slave is by nature hostile to his master (*φύσει γὰρ ἐχθρὸν τὸ δοῦλον τοῖς δεσπόταις*), an aphorism, which is remarkably borrowed not from Euripides' extant works but from a rhetorical treatise by Hermogenes²⁰¹. Given Prodromos' poetic credentials, the misattribution of an

¹⁹⁴ Migliorini (2010) Κατὰ μακρογενεΐου γέροντος δοκοῦντος εἶναι διὰ τοῦτο σοφοῦ. Pp. 19-27.

¹⁹⁵ Marciniak (2015).

¹⁹⁶ One has, however, to keep in mind that these motives are not limited to the ancient comedy but were also actively employed in the Hellenistic mock epigram: Zagklas (2020), Pp. 281-93.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. my observations on the references to ancient comedy in Prodromos' biblical epigrams. See P. 223.

¹⁹⁸ Migliorini (2010) P. 132 ln. 284; Diggle (1984) *Hecuba* v. 1056.

¹⁹⁹ Migliorini (2010) P. 132 ln. 286-8; Diggle (1994) *Orestes* vv. 1-3.

²⁰⁰ Migliorini (2010) P. 133 ln. 290-7; Diggle (1984) *Hecuba* vv. 357-60, 375-8. Interestingly, Prodromos merges two different excerpts from Polyxena's monologue into a single speech.

²⁰¹ Rabe (1913) Section 3 ln. 35-6. Although some collections of apothegms attributed this dictum to Euripides, his authorship is quite unlikely because *φύσει γὰρ ἐχθρὸν τὸ δοῦλον τοῖς*

unprosodic verse to Euripides is hardly accidental. Interestingly, the deliberate distortion of Euripides' works took place already in Classical Athens, and was undertaken for comic effect. For example, in the Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Dionysus tries to present himself as a connoisseur of the plays by Euripides but ends up misquoting one of the most famous verses from the *Hippolytus*: γλῶτταν δ' ἐπιορκήσασαν ἰδίᾳ τῆς φρενός²⁰² (instead of ἡ γλῶσσ' ὁμώμοχ', ἡ δὲ φρήν ἁνώμοτος²⁰³). It is hard to identify the Prodromos' reasons for manipulating Euripides' text but the mockery of the tragic poet's ill informed admirers is definitely one of the possibilities.

Euripides' insult of the customer has the same effect as the bullying of Aristophanes: the offended customer rejects the tragic poet. The scene with Euripides, however, does not end here as another customer, who has just lost his beloved daughter, appears on stage²⁰⁴. A tragic poet is exactly what the grieving father needs. In his eyes, Euripides seems even capable of bringing the girl back to life just as he revived dead heroes (e.g. Alcestis) in his plays. Consequently, the mourning father agrees to buy Euripides, although he – just as Zeus and Hermes - is annoyed with the poet's wailing. The representation of Euripides as a mourner does not do justice to the complexity of ancient tragedy but it makes perfect sense in the context of the genre's reception in Byzantine literature. While references to tragic plays feature in quite a few genres of Byzantine literature, the greatest imprint of Greek tragedy can be found in literature written on the occasion of death. This broad genre encompasses various sub-genres such as *epitaphios*, monody and consolation²⁰⁵. The twelfth century witnessed a rise of this type of literature, not least thanks to the efforts of Prodromos. His *oeuvre* includes at least 29 writings on the occasion

δεσπότης does not constitute a good iambic trimeter (in place of τὸ one would expect a long syllable). As I will show below, distortion of ancient tradition is not limited to this case. Specifically, my discussion will reveal that Prodromos sometimes misquotes ancient authors for strategic reasons: See P. 47. In this case, however, the wrong attribution of the spurious verse to Euripides seems to be informed simply by the fact that it thematically fits into the context.

²⁰² Wilson (2007) *Frogs* v. 102.

²⁰³ Diggle (1984) *Hippolytus* v. 612.

²⁰⁴ Migliorini (2010) P. 133 ln. 305-17.

²⁰⁵ Kazhdan and Jeffreys, E. (1991); Lauxtermann (2019) Pp. 89-100.

of death²⁰⁶. Granted, some of these writings (for example, funerary epigrams) have almost nothing to do with tragedy. Others bear only a vague resemblance, borrowing the tragedy's meter (iambic trimeter) as well as some elements of tragic imagery. However, in some pieces, intertextual connections with ancient tragedy are extremely important. This can be illustrated by Prodromos' monody on *sebastokrator* Andronikos, the second son of Alexios I, who died from illness during a campaign in Asia Minor in 1130/1131²⁰⁷.

From the very beginning the text conjures up tragic atmosphere:

*Σκηναὶ καὶ γραφαὶ πενθήρεις καὶ δραματικὰ διηγήματα εἰσὶ μὲν καὶ αὐτόθεν δακρύων
ἐγερτικὰ καὶ πένθους οὗτι μετρίου δημιουργὰ συμπαθεῖ ψυχῇ καὶ τὸ ὅλον εἶπεῖν
ἀνθρωπίνῃ.*

*Mournful scenes and writings and dramatical stories are such by nature that they bring
about tears and provoke abundant lamentation in gentle or, to put it simple, all human
souls²⁰⁸.*

Winning the goodwill of his audience, Prodromos claims that Andronikos' death left him completely speechless. Although apologetic about his silence, Prodromos takes comfort in the fact that his dumbness prevents him from conjuring up '*the Holy Queen of Ilion*' and evoking memories of the past misfortunes²⁰⁹. He soon makes it clear that 'the Queen of Ilion' is the protagonist of Euripides' tragedy *Hecuba*, one of the school texts in which the role of lamentation was indeed very important. Sharing his feelings, Prodromos observes that what has happened to Andronikos is, in fact, *δρᾶμα*²¹⁰. Consequently, he decides '*to take up the dramatic Muse for a dramatic story*', citing the words of Hecuba: '*Woe, woe is me! What words, or cries, or lamentations can I utter?*'²¹¹. This quotation is followed by an emotional eulogy of Andronikos. Generally speaking, Prodromos delivers a funerary speech but he assimilates it to the

²⁰⁶ These works are the following (numeration according to Hörandner (1974): 2, 7, 23, 25, 26a,b, 28-9, 39, 45, 48-51, 54, 58, 60a,b, 64a,b, 65-7, 75-6, 81, 83, 85-6.

²⁰⁷ Op de Coul (2007) H81 Pp. 224-237.

²⁰⁸ Op de Coul (2007) P. 224 ln. 1-3.

²⁰⁹ Op de Coul (2007) P. 224 ln. 21- P. 225 ln. 25.

²¹⁰ Op de Coul (2007) P. 225 ln. 27: οἷον γάρ, οἷον τὸ ἐπὶ σοὶ **δρᾶμα**

²¹¹ Op de Coul (2007) P. 225 ln. 31-2: Καὶ ἵνα τὴν δραματικὴν ἀναλήψωμαι μοῦσαν ἐπὶ δραματικῷ διηγήματι, οἱ ἐγὼ μέλεος, τί ποτ' ἀπύσω; ποίαν ἀχῶ, ποῖον ὀδυρμόν; Diggle (1984) *Hecuba* vv. 154-5.

tragic lamentation. In the *Βίων πράσις*, the connection between the two genres remains:

Prodromos adopts persona of a tragic poet to highlight his suitability for the job of a mourner of the Comnenian aristocracy.

Demosthenes: Rhetoric in the Interest of National Security

The last literary character offered for sale is Demosthenes²¹². Hermes recommends him as an orator, whose formidable rhetorical skills helped Athenians in the time of political crisis. In particular, Demosthenes is responsible for ousting Philip of Macedon from Euboia, for upholding the control over the Hellespont and even for helping the ancient city of Byzantium. Elaborating on Hermes' praise of his eloquence and patriotism, Demosthenes proudly quotes his friend Ctesiphon's proposal to crown him for his services to Athens. However, as more details emerge, the customer learns about Demosthenes' notoriety for cowardice and corruptibility. Nonetheless, he agrees to buy him.

Although Prodromos has barely produced any piece that could be defined as a deliberative speech and, indeed, was primarily a court *poet* rather than an *orator*²¹³, Demosthenes still has an important role in the self-fashioning of Prodromos' literary image. To start with, Hermes introduces Demosthenes as an Athenian who speaks proper Attic Greek as opposed to the half-breed (*μιζέλλην*) lawyer, Pomponius. For Prodromos (as basically for any Byzantine intellectual), Atticism was synonymous with the highbrow style²¹⁴. As well as being an eloquent speaker, Demosthenes emerges as a quarrelsome person constantly denouncing his enemies. This quality resonates with Prodromos' own inclination to vitriolic attacks. Indeed, some of Prodromos' pieces are entirely devoted to exposing incompetence of fake professionals. These

²¹² Migliorini (2010) P. 134 ln. 381- P. 136 ln. 444.

²¹³ Prodromos' literary output does of course include speeches but they are significantly outnumbered by his poems.

²¹⁴ Browning (1978).

include *The Lover of Plato, or the Currier*²¹⁵; *The Ignorant, or the Self-Proclaimed Grammarian*²¹⁶; *The Executioner, or the Physician*²¹⁷ – the titles eloquently attest to Prodromos' contentious spirit, to which he might have (ironically) referred through the characterisation of Demosthenes. Yet, even more important in Demosthenes' image is the sentiment that words can be as effective in defending the fatherland as a proper military action. This idea definitely applies to Prodromos' own situation since many of his poems broadcast to the people of Constantinople his pride in the contemporary military campaigns. While Prodromos tends to attribute Byzantine victories to the emperor's supernatural power, he thinks that he contributes to the emperor's success too. Towards the end of one poem, for example, Prodromos reminds the emperor that he can rely on God, Virgin and, of course, on his faithful servant Prodromos²¹⁸. This loyalty, along with the poet's much-iterated poverty, further legitimises Prodromos' request for the imperial support. To strengthen his case, Prodromos highlights the precedent of Demosthenes, whose literary activity helped the polity at war.

Literary Smorgasbord

It is now clear that most of the characters featuring in Prodromos' *Βίων πρᾶσις* are meant to reference some aspect of Prodromos' literary activity. By bringing them all together, Prodromos emerges as a versatile writer. Indeed, impersonating different classical authors simultaneously is not an easy task since it requires deep knowledge of literary tradition as well as fluency in many different poetic meters, idioms and dialects. By embarking on this task, Prodromos, I suggest, aimed to showcase variation in his own literary works. Prodromos' preoccupation with variation can be illustrated through his penchant to celebrate a single event with several works that share content but differ in form. A good example of this practice is Prodromos' series of celebratory

²¹⁵ Migliorini (2010) Φιλοπλάτων ἢ σκυτοδέψης. Pp. 69-81.

²¹⁶ Migliorini (2010) Ἀμαθὴς ἢ παρὰ ἑαυτῷ γραμματικός. Pp. 29-49.

²¹⁷ Migliorini (2010) Δήμιος ἢ ἱατρός. Pp. 51-68.

²¹⁸ Hörandner (1974) Poem XVI vv. 214-23.

writings on the occasion of Alexius Aristenos becoming *orphanotrophos* for the second time²¹⁹. At the beginning of his address, Prodromos reminds his readers that he has already celebrated Aristenos in prose and schedography²²⁰. This, however, does not seem enough for Prodromos; Prodromos argues that Aristenos deserves the celebration that would involve also the third element, poetry. Thus, Prodromos offers a poetic panegyric split into four poems written in different meters. With regards to the order of the meters, Prodromos gives the pride of place to the heroic meter (hexameter). The hexametrical poem is followed by elegiac couplets and anacreontics. As these meters were associated with different genres, their juxtaposition produces the same effect as the parade of authors in the *Βίων πρᾶσις*: Prodromos' literary abilities appear so skilled that they can cover a diverse range of literary talents²²¹. Simply put, the skills of this one author equal the combined skills of many others.

Display of Polymathy

One of the most noteworthy innovations on Prodromos' version of the *Βίων πρᾶσις* is the diversity of characters' occupations. So far, I have dealt with the writers *par excellence* whose activities are centered on (though in Prodromos' representation, not limited to) the realm of literature. In this section, I turn to the characters whose professions require expertise other than literary skills.

Hippocrates: Ionic Doctor

The first of the two paraliterary characters, Hippocrates²²², appears straight after Homer. When Hippocrates meets the customer, Hermes discloses his provenance: his motherland is Kos, while his dialect is Ionic. Hippocrates manages to pronounce only three words before being interrupted

²¹⁹ Hörandner (1974) Poem LVI.

²²⁰ Agapitos (2015) Pp. 19-21.

²²¹ Cf. the discussion of the cycle to Aristenos in Zagklas (2018) Pp. 49-52.

²²² Migliorini (2010) P. 131 ln. 204 - P. 132 ln. 263.

by the customer, who struggles to understand ‘*what on earth he seems to murmur under his teeth*’ (τί ποτε καὶ ψάλλειν ἔοικεν ὑπὸ τὸν ὀδόντα)²²³.

Once the customer has come to grips with Hippocrates’ idiolect, he asks about Hippocrates’ occupation. Hippocrates elusively responds that he reaps grief from the troubles of others. This appears to be a definition of medical science as derived from Hippocrates’ own writings²²⁴.

Hippocrates’ attempt to highlight his sympathy takes the customer by surprise. He admits that equipped with a cauterising apparatus and a knife, Hippocrates looks like a butcher. This ominous ambiguity of the doctor’s image increases when the customer enquires whether he himself has any chances of succeeding in medicine if he buys Hippocrates. At first, Hippocrates tries to dissuade his interlocutor, quoting the famous dictum that *life is short, art is long*. However, later he acknowledges that passing for a doctor in their world is actually not that difficult, and provides instructions on how to become a medical professional. This initiation appears to be nothing but a mockery of contemporary professional standards. It turns out that an aspiring medic should not care as much about accurate diagnosis as about showing off his knowledge. A ‘successful’ doctor does not have to be skillful in operating; all he needs to do is to use technical terminology, disgorge aphorisms and refer to Hippocrates’ works. Despite his flagrant unprofessionalism, the doctor enjoys a win-win outcome: if a patient manages to survive, he can claim credit for his healing; in the case of death, the patient is no longer around to expose the doctor’s incompetence.

The Rise of the Medical Profession

The auctioning of Hippocrates reflects the cultural tendencies of the twelfth century. As Alexander Kazhdan has shown, by this time the medical profession had regained the prominence

²²³ Migliorini (2010) P. 131 ln. 212-3.

²²⁴ Migliorini (2010) P. 131 ln. 217; Littré, É. (1849) De flatibus Section 1 ln. 5-6.

it had lost during the Middle Byzantine period²²⁵. Specifically, doctors acquired agency in historical accounts, held official posts and were considered as peers by leading intellectuals, whose letter collections often featured doctors as addressees. Furthermore, doctors become prominent even in hagiography that no longer ignored them as rivals of saints. The rise of interest in medical knowledge profoundly affected Prodromos too.

The most direct evidence of Prodromos' acquaintance with the medical subject matter comes from the story of his illness. Prodromos gives an account of his disease in several pieces: letters to Alexios Aristenos, Stephen Skylitzes and two poems in hexametric verse²²⁶. Prodromos' representation of his illness is highly rhetorical. While describing his condition, Prodromos employs numerous literary allusions to make his misery seem like an event of biblical proportions. Specifically, Prodromos makes use of the *Exodus* to describe his experience of suffering the contrasting symptoms²²⁷. Before the illness, he says, he was unable to understand how fire and hail sent on Egypt by Moses were raging at the same time without neutralising each other. This mystery has been solved for Prodromos after he had suffered simultaneously from fever and blisters, which, both in color and form, reminded him of hail²²⁸. In a similar way, Prodromos alludes to biblical figures to make fun of his baldness that became one of the consequences of his illness. In particular, Prodromos jokes that when it comes to his appearance, he is Elisha and Paul (who were both bald); at the same time, he acknowledges that in terms of spiritual power he is nothing like them²²⁹. Prodromos description of his symptoms is very metaphorical: *'for the three days I was completely overwhelmed by extraordinary flames and fiery thunderbolts were burning me to ashes'*²³⁰. Nevertheless, Prodromos' obsession with literary imagery did not prevent him from incorporating in his account elements of medical

²²⁵ Kazhdan (1984b).

²²⁶ Letters: Op de Coul (2007) H88 Pp. 84-8; H89 Pp. 89-93; H107 Pp. 94-100; H92 Pp. 101-3. Poems: Hörandner (1974) Poems LXXVII, LXXVIII. See the discussion of the Poem LXXVIII in Tziatzi-Papagianni (1994).

²²⁷ Ex. 9:23-4.

²²⁸ Op de Coul (2007) H88 P. 85 ln. 22-33.

²²⁹ Op de Coul (2007) H89 P. 89 ln. 6-9.

²³⁰ Op de Coul (2007) H107 P. 95 ln. 35-36.

discourse. Observing that people tend to use euphemistic language in descriptions of their afflictions, Prodromos gives several examples from the argot of doctors, who ‘*use sacred words to refer to the most poisonous drug, call cauterising iron cold* (i.e. when one speaks of cold cautery) *and designate sacrum the bone that is responsible for sitting*’²³¹. The detail and precision of Prodromos’ account, though not up to the modern standards, prompted a historian of medicine to argue that Prodromos has produced the first description of smallpox²³².

This illness was not the only instance of Prodromos discussing medical matters. Prodromos keenly describes the course of illness of his friends and patrons as he mourns their deaths. Thus, while lamenting Theodora, the daughter-in-law of Nikephoros Bryennios, Prodromos devotes around 40 out of 191 verses to the *army of diseases* besieging her²³³. Although giving a metaphorical description, Prodromos provides specific symptoms, for example, the alternation of fever and chills. In his monody for Stephen Skylitzes, the bishop of Trebizond, Prodromos’ preoccupation with medical aspects is even more striking²³⁴. To begin with, he indicates Skylitzes’ disease using terminology that belongs to the medical nomenclature: quartan fever (*τεταρταϊκή περίοδος*) and jaundice (*ἰκτερος*). He specifies that the former caused dropsy (*τυμπανίτης ὕδρω*) along with deterioration of internal organs²³⁵. In addition, Prodromos recounts in detail Skylitzes’ bodily changes that prevented Prodromos from recognising his close friend: hollow temples, sunken eyes, blotchy and blackened skin, stripped beard, swollen stomach and limbs²³⁶. Prodromos recalls that Skylitzes tried to mitigate his pain by taking baths - but in vain. When the doctors saw Prodromos’ friend, their diagnosis did not hint at any chance of survival. Soon afterwards, Stephen Skylitzes died. This focus on the physical aspect of dying

²³¹ Op de Coul (2007) H88 P. 84 ln. 17-21 ...λοιμῶξις, ἣν διὰ τὸ ἐπάρατον πάντως εὐλογωνυμεῖν εἰώθασιν ἄνθρωποι, ἵν’ εὐφωροτέρα κἂν γοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς σεμνωνυμίας τοῖς κάμνουσι γίνοιτο, ὥσπερ ἀμέλει καὶ τὸ δηλητηριώτατον τῶν φαρμάκων παῖδες ἰατρῶν ἱερωνυμοῦσιν καὶ τὸν σπινθηριῶντα σίδηρον κρυερηγοροῦσιν καὶ τὸ περὶ τὴν ἔδραν ὅστοῦν ἱερὸν ὀνομάζουσιν.

²³² Codellas (1946).

²³³ Hörandner (1974) Poem XXXIX vv. 73-113.

²³⁴ Op de Coul (2007) H86 Pp. 264-86.

²³⁵ Op de Coul (2007) P. 272 ln. 197-200.

²³⁶ Op de Coul (2007) P. 272 ln. 212-20.

appears quite remarkable, especially if we keep in mind that Prodromos mentions only in passing the spiritual arrangements undertaken by the dying cleric.

One of the possible explanations of the prominence of the medical perspective is Prodromos' desire to fashion himself as a careful reader of the medical works. Indeed, in another funeral oration - the monody for sebastokrator Andronikos – Prodromos himself reasons like a physician: exhaustion caused by the harsh conditions of military campaigns made Andronikos vulnerable to illnesses that eventually killed him²³⁷.

As Prodromos writes about medical matters, he develops an image of a doctor. Many features of this image resonate with the representation of Hippocrates in the *Βίων πράσις*. Most notably, Prodromos' doctor emerges as a torturer not unlike Hippocrates the Butcher. In a poem addressed to *sebastokratorissa* Eirene, Prodromos describes a certain medical intervention that involved cauterization²³⁸. To dramatise his experience, Prodromos once again finds a biblical image appropriate to his situation: Three Hebrews in a Fiery Furnace²³⁹. Yet, while the biblical characters are invulnerable to fire due to God's intercession, poor Prodromos is incinerated to the bone²⁴⁰. Although Prodromos represents medicine as a source of pain, he nevertheless acknowledges the goodwill of doctors, as well as their professionalism. However, in some other cases, Prodromos encounters a charlatan whose treatment ends in a complete disaster.

Byzantine Version of Surgery by Chekhov

Once Prodromos' (or rather his invented *persona*'s) visit to a dentist was so unfortunate that it prompted an essay entitled the *Executioner, or Doctor*²⁴¹. The piece opens with a discussion of Hippocrates' saying that '*If a human had been a single entity, he would not have been suffering*

²³⁷ Op de Coul (2007) H81 P. 225 ln. 45 – P. 226 ln. 55.

²³⁸ Hörandner (1974) Poem XLVI.

²³⁹ Daniel 3:8-28.

²⁴⁰ Hörandner (1974) Poem XLVI ln. 1-29.

²⁴¹ Migliorini (2010) Δήμιος ἢ ἰατρός. Pp. 51-68.

pain’ (εἰ ἐν ᾗν ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὐκ ἂν ἤλγεεν)²⁴². While the relevance of this philosophical speculation to the substance of Prodromos’ story is debatable, it demonstrates the author’s awareness of medical writings, and thus adds credibility to his account. Prodromos’ prologue continues with an assertion that while some illnesses are caused by a vicious lifestyle, the vulnerability of a body or misfortune, others are provoked by doctors. Similarly to Hippocrates in the *Βίων πράσις*, Prodromos’ *persona* exposes doctors as murderers, who easily get away with their unprofessionalism. To prove his allegations, the narrator shares his own experience. Having suffered from afflictions of all kinds, Prodromos’ *persona* develops a toothache. As he suffers excruciating pain, he visits all available doctors, who have conflicting opinions: some recommend treating blood vessels, some suggest cauterising an ear, others offer pellitory. However, the most senior doctor ends this debate by insisting on extracting the tooth. Prodromos’ *persona* accepts this advice counting on the doctor’s extensive experience attested by his grey hair. As the doctor prepares for the surgery, his appearance emerges as both formidable and ridiculous. Although the doctor himself is as small as ‘*an atom of Democritus*’ he carries a surgical instrument fit for an elephant. Having made such a mixed impression, the doctor dissects the patient’s mouth and gum. Having examined all his teeth, the doctor eventually, with great difficulty, reaches the one that aches. Instead of simply extracting the tooth, the doctor pulls it back and forth and breaks the tooth in two. As the narrator bleeds, the doctor crowns his patient’s pain with cauterization. Having shared the horrendous details of his treatment, Prodromos’ *persona* makes a case for a public disgrace of doctors. He argues that instead of being appointed to public offices they should be treated as robbers. This call, however, seems to be quite partisan as the narrator reveals that he has stakes in another professional domain: philosophy. Specifically, he calls on his ‘*philosophical hands to take the field against those butchers*’ (i.e., doctors) *while sharpening a reed against murderous iron* (i.e. surgical

²⁴² Migliorini (2010) P. 51 ln. 7-32.

instruments)²⁴³. To emphasise his adherence to philosophy, Prodromos introduces a Socratic conversation between his authorial *persona* and an imagined interlocutor – practically a straw man - who unsuccessfully attempts to defend doctors. In appropriating Plato’s authority, the narrator goes as far as to assert that Plato rightly expelled doctors from his ideal state²⁴⁴, whereas in fact Plato’s targets were poets – the likes of Prodromos himself²⁴⁵.

Despite the slanderous attack on the dentist, the *Executioner, or Doctor* contains some indications that Prodromos’ attitude to the medical profession was respectful. Although Prodromos’ toothache was apparently not the matter of life and death, his case assembled the consilium of doctors, each of whom proposed a course of treatment. This suggests a high standard of medical practice in twelfth-century Constantinople. Furthermore, Prodromos’ representation of the doctor as a clumsy sadist is full of irony. In fact, almost all of the dentist’s actions seem to make sense even despite the fact that they cause considerable pain. Similarly, although the arsenal of surgical instruments leaves a chilling impression, it suggests sophistication of the medical profession, rather than a doctor’s ill will. Finally, Prodromos himself reveals that his denunciation of doctors should not be taken at face value. In conclusion, he describes his essay as a *psogos* of ‘undoctors’ and a praise of doctors. The latter include his friends, ‘*the most noble and knowledgeable*’ Nikolaos Kallikles and ‘*the best*’ Michael Lizix. Prodromos appeals to them to take care about his feeble body and destroy the fake doctors that hurt him²⁴⁶.

To sum up, Prodromos attitude to medicine in the *Bίων πράσις* and other writings is extremely complex. On the one hand, Prodromos is keen to demonstrate his medical erudition, even where

²⁴³ Migliorini (2010) P. 52 ln. 67-70.

²⁴⁴ Migliorini (2010) P. 55 ln. 190-1: δικαίως γὰρ ὑμᾶς καὶ Πλάτων τῆς ἑαυτοῦ πολιτείας ἐξώρισεν.

²⁴⁵ Slings (2003) 398a-b.

²⁴⁶ Migliorini (2010) P. 55 ln. 191-6.

this is not entirely appropriate. On the other hand, he vigorously discredits contemporary doctors as charlatans. I suggest that the reason underlying this inconsistency is as follows. As an intellectual, Prodromos acknowledges the rise of doctors and considers medical knowledge as a means to increase his social capital. As a hard-working writer, Prodromos considers incompetent physicians unworthy of the patronage and thus discredits them.

Pomponius: Hellenized Roman

Another paraliterary character is the lawyer, Pomponius²⁴⁷. When a customer asks Pomponius about his area of expertise Pomponius responds: λέγε. The customer takes this as an imperative from the Greek verb λέγω (to say), and accordingly points out that he has already spoken. As the confusion arises, Hermes steps in to clarify that Pomponius was speaking not Greek but Latin, in which *lege* (a distorted accusative of *lex*) means law. Acting as a translator, Hermes effectively assumes the role of the *antecessores*, professors of jurisprudence, who rendered Justinian's *Corpus Juris Civilis* from Latin into Greek²⁴⁸. Although Pomponius eventually switches to Greek, he constantly weaves into his speech the legal terminology of Latin origin. The conversation between Pomponius and the customer soon turns to the usual topic: how will the customer benefit from buying the lawyer? Pomponius promises to make his master rich. When asked how he could achieve this, given that he himself is poor, Pomponius provides a step-by-step instruction. The customer should first master the obscure legal terminology: βέρβις (*verbis* - contracts), κονσένσο (*consensus* - agreement), κονδικτίκιος (*condicio* - compact), to name a few notions²⁴⁹. Then he should go to court and puzzle everyone with the technical vocabulary while behaving in an ill-mannered way. He should feel free to insult and even physically attack his opponent since it is aggression that is the most effective means of winning court cases. Having

²⁴⁷ Migliorini (2010) P. 133 ln. 318 - P. 134 ln. 380.

²⁴⁸ Stolte (2018) Pp. 233-5.

²⁴⁹ Migliorini (2010) P. 134 ln. 353-9.

expressed doubts about Pomponius' qualifications, the customer buys him for 1.5 minas, a hundredth of the price paid for Homer.

Roman Law in Constantinople

Prodromos' representation of Pomponius is similar to that of Hippocrates. On the one hand, Prodromos exposes successful lawyers as churlish individuals. On the other, he shows his awareness of the technicalities of jurisprudence through inundating his readers with legal terminology. Prodromos' attention to law is understandable. From the eleventh century onwards, law gained special prominence in the intellectual landscape of Constantinople. Constantine IX Monomachos reorganises the Law School into a quasi-university under the direction of the newly created office of *nomophylax*²⁵⁰. The first incumbent of this office was John Xiphilinos, a close friend of Michael Psellos, who later became the patriarch of Constantinople. The rise of the importance of law is reflected in the contemporary literary output. For example, the eleventh century saw the production of the *Peira*, a compendium compiled by an anonymous colleague of the senior judge Eustathios Rhomaïos that summarised verdicts and special treatises. It drew its evidence from real practice²⁵¹. The flourishing legal culture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries is also evidenced by the significant number of commentaries on the key works of legislation, such as the *Basilika* and the *Nomokanon*²⁵².

Although Prodromos himself did not pursue legal studies, his social network included professional lawyers. Praising them in letters and speeches, Prodromos pays significant attention to their legal credentials. In a speech celebrating Alexios Aristenos, in a section dedicated to the addressee's education, Prodromos supplements the traditional triad grammar-rhetoric-philosophy with jurisprudence²⁵³. Furthermore, Prodromos indicates that it is due to his excellent knowledge

²⁵⁰ Kazhdan and Epstein (1985) Pp. 121-2.

²⁵¹ Howard-Jonston (2017).

²⁵² Macrides (1999).

²⁵³ Op de Coul (2007) H91 P. 201 ln. 100- P. 202 ln.105.

of secular and ecclesiastical law that Aristenos secured an important office of the *nomophylax*²⁵⁴. The importance of legal achievements is stressed even further in Prodromos' monody on Constantine Hagiotheodorites²⁵⁵. Just as Atlas supports heaven and earth, Constantine is deemed by Prodromos to have been upholding justice²⁵⁶. While mourning Constantine's death, Prodromos opens a book of legislation that evokes memories of the deceased friend²⁵⁷. The fact that Prodromos enjoys easy access to legal literature highlights Prodromos' keen interest in law. The inclusion of Pomponius in the *Βίων πρᾶσις* seems to serve a similar purpose. Displaying the awareness of a lawyer's trade, Prodromos demonstrates that he is not a stranger to the profession that was pursued by many of his high-status friends. Despite Prodromos' ironic representation of Pomponius, law was clearly considered to be a branch of knowledge that an intellectual could no longer ignore.

Prodromos as Polymath

Conjuring up representatives of different professions, Prodromos uses each of them to highlight his skills in a given field. At the same time, the parade of different characters allows Prodromos to reveal himself as a polymath. The prestige associated with this quality can be inferred from the writings of Prodromos himself. In a speech to Alexios Aristenos, he praises his addressee's versatility whilst challenging some precepts of Plato's political philosophy²⁵⁸. In Plato's ideal state, claims Prodromos, each person is assigned a single occupation. Any versatile man undertaking different occupations will be admired but, nevertheless, will be sent into exile²⁵⁹. Alexios Aristenos, skilled in rhetoric, philosophy and law, is exactly the sort of person who, due to his versatility, would be liable to the honourable exile from Plato's state. In Constantinople, however, he is more than welcome. Aristenos simultaneously holds the offices of the *nomophylax*, the *protekdikos* and the *orphanotrophos*, and in many ways contributes to the

²⁵⁴ Op de Coul (2007) P.198 ln.17- P. 199 ln. 28.

²⁵⁵ Op de Coul (2007) H85 Pp. 252-63.

²⁵⁶ Op de Coul (2007) P. 252 ln. 19 – P. 253 ln. 29.

²⁵⁷ Op de Coul (2007) P. 256 ln. 118-20.

²⁵⁸ Op de Coul (2007) H87 Pp. 173-83.

²⁵⁹ Op de Coul (2007) P. 174 ln. 39 – P. 175 ln. 50; Slings (2003) 398a.

prosperity of the Empire²⁶⁰. Praising the multifaceted skills of this civil servant, Prodromos in all likelihood hopes to gain recognition for his own intellectual versatility.

Considering Prodromos' claim to be a polymath, the complete absence of philosophical characters, in contrast to Lucian's satire, is striking. Does this choice imply that Prodromos neglects philosophy while focusing on more practical professions? I would argue that it does not. As I will show in Chapter Two, Prodromos actively engaged with philosophical subjects, and successfully imitated ancient Greek philosophers. As for the absence of philosophical characters in this particular piece, one should take into account the fact that Lucian's original practically exhausted all noteworthy philosophers of Antiquity. Therefore, to achieve originality, Prodromos had to create completely different characters, which is exactly what he did.

Reflection of the Court Poet's Situation

Self-referentiality

While interpreting the *Bίων προᾶσις* as a promotion of Prodromos' versatility, I often stressed self-referentiality in Prodromos' representation of classical authors. Indeed, certain qualities, like Homer's misery or Euripides' focus on mourning, make far more sense if applied to Prodromos himself rather than their historical prototypes. In this section, I intend to mine the *Bίων προᾶσις* for the reflections of Prodromos' experience as a professional writer and intellectual.

At the very beginning of the piece, the characters share the concern that intellectuals are not easily understood by the general public. When Zeus and Hermes see the crowd gathered for the auction, they conclude from the people's uncouth appearance that the customers look for the common (*ἀγοραῖοι*) lives (which were advertised in the end of Lucian's prequel), not poetic and

²⁶⁰ Op de Coul (2007) H87 P. 175 ln. 50- P. 177 ln. 113.

political ones²⁶¹. Hermes observes that the crowd will struggle to make sense of poetic recitals, which he intended to incorporate into his announcements²⁶². Zeus advises Hermes to use sign language as he would do in the meetings with the barbarian gods like Anubis, and encourages his fellow Olympian by pointing out some ‘*Hellenes*’ in the crowd²⁶³. Although Zeus and Hermes manage to establish contact with the crowd, the customers from time to time need the gods’ assistance in communicating with the highly sophisticated authors on sale: Homer expects his interlocutors to address him in hexameters, Hippocrates uses the Ionic dialect and Pomponius speaks Latin. The inaccessibility of classical authors to their potential masters may satirically reflect the linguistic and cultural gap between attendees of Byzantine *theatra*, where professional writers could recite composition well beyond the comprehension of most of the recipients, including the members of aristocracy, who often had only superficial interest in learning. Ironically, however, it was the ignorant social elite who enjoyed the privileged access to classical learning. In the ‘*Verses of Complaint against Providence*’ Prodrimos’ persona expresses his frustration that ‘*the class of artisans [rule over] wise men of noble origins*’²⁶⁴ and, what’s worse, ‘*snatches the books away*’²⁶⁵. The similar sentiment about the unfair distribution of cultural goods is voiced in other Prodrimos’ works too²⁶⁶.

Freedom-loving Slaves

Despite their cultural superiority, Byzantine literati were dependent on the social and political elite. It is the latter who supported intellectuals by commissioning literary works to glorify military victories, celebrate weddings and mourn their dead. While producing texts on commission, Byzantine authors were expected to serve their patrons rather than express themselves. In following this pattern, Prodrimos went so far as to represent himself as a slave of his patrons. While addressing John II, for example, Prodrimos states that he presents his poem

²⁶¹ Migliorini (2010) P. 127 ln. 12-16.

²⁶² Migliorini (2010) P. 127 ln. 17-20.

²⁶³ Migliorini (2010) P. 127 ln. 21-27.

²⁶⁴ Zagklas (2014) P. 303 vv. 59-60.

²⁶⁵ Zagklas (2014) P. 304 v. 100.

²⁶⁶ Zagklas (2014) Pp. 312-3.

as a slave to his master²⁶⁷. In the *Βίων πρᾶσις*, serfdom is developed into a full-scale metaphor of an intellectual's relationship with his patron. However, the characters' perception of their lot as slaves is in direct contrast to Prodromos' servility found in his panegyrics. Although the classical authors are expected to gratify their potential masters, many of them instead openly complain about their humiliating position. As I have already mentioned, in the *Βίων πρᾶσις* Aristophanes even abuses his potential master by quoting the opening line of his own comedy *Plutus* where a slave tells how his misfortunes are aggravated by the insanity of his master:

*Ὡς ἀργαλέον πρᾶγμ' ἐστίν, ὦ Ζεῦ καὶ θεοί,
δοῦλον γενέσθαι [παραφρονοῦντος δεσπότου].
ἦν γὰρ τὰ βέλτισθ' ὁ θεράπων λέξας τύχη,
δόξῃ δὲ μὴ δρᾶν ταῦτα τῷ κεκτημένῳ,
μετέχειν ἀνάγκη τὸν θεράποντα τῶν κακῶν*²⁶⁸.

Gods in heaven, it's a tough job slaving [for a master who's out of his mind!] The servant might offer the best advice, but if his owner decides not to follow it, the servant will surely share the grief.

What is especially interesting about this quotation is that Prodromos omits the most colourful part of the original text: *παραφρονοῦντος δεσπότου* (of an insane master). With these two words removed, the slave's speech appears as an almost legitimate complaint about being held accountable for the mistakes of a different person. The insult contained in the original passage is recognised only by those who have intimate knowledge of the text by Aristophanes. This (mis)usage of Aristophanic text exemplifies the employment of classical tradition as a means of subversion, which is relevant to many other twelfth-century texts too²⁶⁹.

Conjuring up the defiant Aristophanes, Prodromos, one might suggest, calls for poets' emancipation. If this is the case, the feasibility of this demand is put into question in a subsequent scene with Euripides. The tragic poet, similarly to his comic counterpart, curses his slavish lot. At first, Euripides is rejected. However, immediately thereafter another customer

²⁶⁷ Hörandner (1974) Poem IV ln. 1-4.

²⁶⁸ Migliorini (2010) P. 132 ln. 269-73; Henderson (2002). Wealth vv. 1-5.

²⁶⁹ Chapter Four of this thesis will look into the subversive function of mimesis in more detail.

arrives looking for a mourner for his deceased daughter. As Euripides appears an ideal candidate, he is purchased immediately. The message of this scene might be that regardless of a poet's creative aspirations, he has to fit into the existing literary landscape. In Comnenian Constantinople, this would mean producing literary works on commission.

Propaganda of the Truth

The character of Demosthenes problematises yet another aspect of the activity of the Byzantine authors. At first Demosthenes appears as the most ardent champion of his fatherland, freedom, and democracy. The enslavement of such a decent man seems especially dramatic. However, soon thereafter Hermes exposes Demosthenes as a traitor who does not live up to the values he promotes in his speeches. Although Demosthenes says:

πέρας μὲν γὰρ ἅπασιν ἀνθρώποις ἐστὶ τοῦ βίου θάνατος, καὶ ἐν οἰκίσκῳ τις αὐτὸν καθεύδων τηρεῖ· δεῖ δὲ τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς ἄνδρας ἐγχειρεῖν μὲν ἅπασιν ἀεὶ τοῖς καλοῖς, τὴν ἀγαθὴν προβαλλομένους ἐλπίδα, φέρειν δ' ἂν ὁ θεὸς διδῶ γενναίως

Indeed, since all men find the limit of life in death—even one who has shut himself in a closet and watches—good men must always venture all noble acts with good hope as their shield and worthily endure whatever god gives them²⁷⁰

Hermes insists that Demosthenes would be the first to surrender²⁷¹. As a court propagandist, Prodromos was acutely aware of the discrepancy between words and reality. Exposing Demosthenes, Prodromos might have intended to express his frustration with his complicity in deceptiveness of Byzantine rhetoric.

Considering these subversive allusions, the *Βίων προῶσις* emerges as not only a humorous work but also as a satirical piece, provided that we accept the ODB definition of the satire: ‘critical treatment in verse or prose, often by way of exaggeration or caricature, of the foibles of

²⁷⁰ Migliorini (2010) P. 135 ln. 422-6; Yunis (2005) In Defense of Ctesiphon on the Crown. Section 97.

²⁷¹ Migliorini (2010) P. 135 ln. 416-8.

*individuals, institutions, or society as a whole*²⁷². The most prominent ‘foibles’ (not to say vices) satirised in this piece are the blatant lies of intellectuals’ propaganda and the false pretensions of quasi-professionals.

Conclusions

To sum up, although Prodromos’ *Bίων πρᾶσις* is modeled on Lucian, it is an original piece of the twelfth-century intellectual. By impersonating classical authors (Homer, Aristophanes, Euripides and Demosthenes) Prodromos advertises his ability to write in genres suitable for every possible occasion. This display of literary versatility is supplemented with the claims of polymathy as Prodromos conjures up the doctor Hippocrates and the lawyer Pomponius. However, whilst demonstrating his expertise in medicine and law, Prodromos expresses his concern about the poor professional standards in these areas. Meant to promote Prodromos’ talents, the *Bίων πρᾶσις* is not, however, limited to this purpose. It also reflects on a writer’s circumstances on a wider scale. Making classical authors bemoan themselves being sold into slavery, Prodromos expresses discontent with writers’ utter dependence on their patrons. Furthermore, Prodromos hints that bombastic rhetoric might be completely perfidious. As the *Bίων πρᾶσις* reveals some of the most intriguing aspects of the author’s experience, this ‘imitative’ piece appears crucial for our understanding of the cultural fabric of twelfth-century Constantinople.

²⁷² Jeffreys and Browning (1991). Pace Marciniak (2013) P. 221, who suggests that the *Bίων πρᾶσις* is not constructed as a satire. However, Chrysosgelos’ (2021) contextualisation of the *Bίων πρᾶσις* within the contemporary practices of patronage also reveals the satirical thrust of this piece. It is important, however, to keep in mind that the answer to the question ‘Is Prodromos’ *Bίων πρᾶσις* a satire?’ depends on how we understand the nature of satire. Cf. Nilsson (2020a).

Chapter II

PHILOSOPHICAL BELLETRIST

Introduction

No literary evidence better displays the prominence of classical tradition in Byzantium than philosophy²⁷³. Although perceived as external to religious truth, ancient philosophy was instrumental in expounding the Christian theology²⁷⁴. One of its branches, logic, provided a method of defending the Orthodoxy against heresies²⁷⁵. The usefulness of philosophy for Christian apologetics cemented its place at the core of educational curriculum, which is reflected in numerous surviving commentaries, paraphrases and scholia to the writings of Plato and Aristotle²⁷⁶.

Studies of ancient philosophy were often subject to controversy. This was especially true for the Comnenian period, when the defenders of the Orthodoxy became particularly intolerant towards any spiritual dissent, whether real or perceived. Many spiritual leaders, among them theologians and philosophers, were prosecuted for their views²⁷⁷. The most notorious case of such intellectual suppression is the condemnation of Psellos' student John Italos, whose trial took place in 1082, under the auspices of the emperor Alexios I²⁷⁸. In the wake of this trial, the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* was supplemented with the eleven *anathemata* that condemned specific tenets of ancient philosophy as well as the application of the philosophical method to the theological issues. While the *Synodikon* represents Italos as the chief heretic, recent studies have shown that the philosopher was unlikely to have subscribed to all of the views that his critics

²⁷³ Tatakis (2003); Ierodiakonou (2002).

²⁷⁴ Louth (2017); Bradshaw (2017).

²⁷⁵ Erismann (2017).

²⁷⁶ Trizio (2017a).

²⁷⁷ Browning (1975a); Kaldellis (2007); Trizio (2017b).

²⁷⁸ Clucas (1981).

ascribed to him ²⁷⁹. Italos' case was clearly a show trial that aimed to discourage any engagement with Hellenic wisdom beyond the classroom.

The looming threat of prosecution did not prevent twelfth-century intellectuals from pursuing philosophical endeavors. One of the most productive activities in this field took the form of commentaries on Aristotle's works²⁸⁰. This traditional (and relatively safe) scholarly pursuit allowed considerable scope for innovation. Many previously neglected Aristotelian works now received full attention. One might also highlight the collaborative nature of some projects, one of which was the commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* sponsored by Anna Komnene. While some of its contributors remain anonymous, two of them have been identified as Michael of Ephesus and Eustratios of Nicaea²⁸¹. The former is also known to have commented on various zoological works, the *Politics*, the *Sophistical refutations*²⁸², while the latter compiled a commentary on the Second Book of the *Posterior Analytics*²⁸³. Furthermore, philosophy was prominent in the numerous religious debates of the Comnenian period²⁸⁴. The aforementioned Eustratios, for example, consistently made use of Aristotelian elements in his polemics against Leo of Chalcedon (on the use of icons), the *Latins* (on the issues of *Filioque* and unleavened bread) and the *Armenians* (concerning the Monophysites)²⁸⁵. Remarkably, the refutation of Leo's ideas took the form of a dialogue between two fictional characters, which suggests the Platonic influence. In some other instances, the format of a Platonic dialogue was employed in the imperial ideology: an anonymous account of the deposition of patriarch Nicholas Muzalon

²⁷⁹ Trizio (2017b) P. 464.

²⁸⁰ Barber and Jenkins (2009).

²⁸¹ Trizio (2021).

²⁸² Arabatzis (2012).

²⁸³ Hayduck (1907).

²⁸⁴ Cameron, Averil (2016) Pp. 59-99; Bucossi and Calia (2020).

²⁸⁵ Lloyd (1987).

presents Manuel Komnenos as a philosopher who defeats his interlocutor by means of Socratic interrogation²⁸⁶.

As one of the leading classicists of the twelfth century, Theodore Prodromos did not stay away from philosophy. According to the catalogue of Wolfram Hörandner, Prodromos' corpus includes three philosophical writings, different in form and content²⁸⁷:

- a) A commentary on Book II of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*²⁸⁸,
- b) An epistolographic treatise on the notions of *Big* and *Small*, expounded in the *Categories* of Aristotle²⁸⁹
- c) A dialogue *Xenedemos, or Voices*²⁹⁰

Although these three pieces make up only a small portion of Prodromos' literary output, Prodromos clearly attached great importance to his philosophical endeavours. One of the most eloquent testimonies of this attitude is Prodromos' letter to his former classmate Lizix. Having expressed his affection for his addressee, Prodromos complains about the difference in their social status. While Lizix enjoys the privileges of a high-ranking official, Prodromos is penniless. However, Prodromos' occupation with philosophy easily makes up for his poverty:

ἔχομεν οἷς καὶ ἀνυπόχομεν καὶ ἡμεῖς, τὸν Περίπατον, τὴν Ἀκαδημίαν, τοὺς ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ
ἐνθεασμοὺς τῶν βιβλίων, ἃς τε ὠδινῇθεις τοῖς παλαιοῖς ἡγαγόμεθα καὶ ἃς ἐκεῖθεν
ὠδιναντες ἀπετέκομεν. ἔστιν ἡμῖν εἰς σεμνολογίαν καὶ Πλάτων θεολογῶν καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης
φυσικευόμενος καὶ Ἰταλικὸς διδάσκων καὶ γράφων.

²⁸⁶ Lukhovitskiy and Zharkaya (2020).

²⁸⁷ Hörandner (1974) P. 48. The boundaries of Prodromos' corpus of philosophical writings are not clear-cut. A significant number of Prodromos' satirical and rhetorical writings, like his treatise on the Green Colour (Cullhed 2022), employ contain philosophical elements too. This extensive use of philosophical method in Prodromos' writings will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

²⁸⁸ Cacouros (1992).

²⁸⁹ Tannery (1887).

²⁹⁰ Spyridonova, Kurbanov and Goncharko (2017).

I also have something to boast about: the Peripatos and the Academy as well as the divine books of philosophy, some of which, though conceived by the ancients, I introduced, while others, taking their inspiration from there, owe their conception and creation to me. I can boast of the company of Plato speaking on the divine, Aristotle theorizing on nature, and Italikos teaching and writing²⁹¹.

In this letter, Prodromos advertises his philosophical expertise merely by means of rhetoric, without showcasing his philosophical talents in action. In the following sections, I intend to demonstrate that even in his philosophical writings Prodromos is as much concerned with the literary form as with the logical rigor of his reasoning. Furthermore, my discussion will show that the opposite is also true: Prodromos is committed to fashioning philosophical *persona* in writings that by virtue of their genre do not belong to philosophy.

Commentary on Aristotle's Posterior Analytics

Among Prodromos' philosophical works, the most substantial is his commentary on Book II of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*²⁹². This is a treatise on logic that outlines Aristotle's views on scientific knowledge and the procedures of its acquisition. More specifically, the *Posterior Analytics* explores the notions of demonstration (ἀπόδειξις) and definition (ὅρος, ὀρισμός) as well as the relationship between the two. As part of the Organon, the *Posterior Analytics* was carefully studied throughout the Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Along the scholia accompanying dozens of copies of the *Posterior Analytics*, there are several extant exegetical works that predate Prodromos' commentary. These are the commentary of Alexander of Aphrodisias (2nd century; surviving only in fragments)²⁹³, the paraphrase of Themistios (4th century)²⁹⁴, and the commentaries of Philoponus (6th century)²⁹⁵ and Eustratios (12th century)²⁹⁶. The place of Prodromos in the exegetical tradition was studied by Michel Cacouros,

²⁹¹ Op de Coul (2007) H98. P. 112 ln. 15-18.

²⁹² Ross (1964); Cacouros (1992).

²⁹³ Wallies (1883).

²⁹⁴ Wallies (1900).

²⁹⁵ Wallies (1909).

²⁹⁶ Hayduck (1907).

who has produced the *editio princeps* of the text in question²⁹⁷. Cacouros has shown that Prodromos' main sources are Philoponus and, especially, Eustratios.

As compiling a commentary must have taken much time and effort, Prodromos' decision to produce a new version only several decades (or even years) after Eustratios requires an explanation. Firstly, the political context must be accounted for. In 1117, Eustratios was accused of heresy and forced to resign from his see²⁹⁸. The reason for Eustratios' fall was due to his pursuit of ancient philosophy. One of the points of Eustratios' trial ascribes to him a thesis that Christ made use of syllogisms in the manner of Aristotle²⁹⁹. The disgrace of Eustratios in all likelihood made his texts suspicious, at least until his subsequent rehabilitation. This must have created a gap in the studies of Aristotle that Prodromos could fill by compiling a new commentary. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that Prodromos does not mention Eustratios, while the latter in his work frequently acknowledges the influence of Alexander of Aphrodisias.

Regardless of the relevance of the political background, there is another, more substantial reason behind the production of Prodromos' commentary: a claim to innovation. Although Prodromos acknowledges the work of his predecessors in the very first sentence³⁰⁰, he later distances himself from the previous tradition. First of all, Prodromos indicates that his commentary is shorter than those of others: he points out that people are more favorably disposed towards more concise writings³⁰¹. Furthermore, Prodromos draws attention to the differences in interpretation. Commenting on the meaning of the title of Aristotle's works, Prodromos expresses disagreement with those exegetes who thought that it derived from the title of another work, *On Analysis of*

²⁹⁷ Cacouros (1992).

²⁹⁸ Joannou (1952).

²⁹⁹ Joannou (1952) P. 34.

³⁰⁰ Cacouros (1992) P. 168.

³⁰¹ Cacouros (1992) P. 168.

Syllogisms (Περὶ αναλύσεως συλλογισμῶν)³⁰². Instead, Prodromos suggests that the *Posterior Analytics* owes its title to the superiority of analytical method (ἀναλυτική) over the method of division (διαίρετική). Finally, in one place, Prodromos highlights his originality by pointing out the gap in the hermeneutical tradition that he aims to fill:

‘Δι’ ἣν δ’ αἰτίαν καθόλου παντὸς τοῦ Γ τὸ Β εἴρηκεν ὁ φιλόσοφος, συνάψας τὸ παντὸς τῷ καθόλου, οὐδεις μὲν ἐπέσκεπται τῶν ἀρχαίων ἐξηγητῶν, ἡμῖν δὲ κατὰ τὸ ἐγχωροῦν εἰρήσεται περὶ τούτου’
‘While none of the ancient commentators considered for what reason the philosopher has said “B is asserted universally of all C”, having attached “all” to “generally”, I will, as far as possible, talk about this.’³⁰³

Bearing in mind that commentary as a genre is rooted in the educational setting, it is not surprising that Prodromos’ work features some prominent pedagogical features. According to Cacouros, the didactic nature of Prodromos’ commentary is reflected in two innovative peculiarities³⁰⁴. First, Prodromos’ simplifies his discussion by focusing solely on logical aspects of a complex notion (ἀντιπερίστασις), whereas previous commentaries aimed to take into account every possible feature thereof. Second, in elucidating Aristotle’s reasoning, Prodromos often employs the form of syllogism; this applies even to those cases when Aristotle himself does not illustrate his argument with any formal logical schemes. In addition to these observations, I would like to point out more general patterns that testify to didactic purpose of Prodromos’ commentary. In particular, one can note that Prodromos adopts a systematic approach by making references to specific chapters of the *Posterior Analytics* as well as to other works by Aristotle³⁰⁵. Furthermore, the commentary has some encyclopedic features as Prodromos illustrates logical points with examples from mythology and ancient history. While some of these

³⁰² Cacouros (1992) P. 170.

³⁰³ Cacouros (1992) P. 214.

³⁰⁴ Cacouros (1992) Pp. 788-9.

³⁰⁵ Cacouros (1992) Pp. 186, 192, 364-5.

examples go back to Aristotle and earlier commentators, others seem to be drawn by Prodromos from non-philosophical sources, as, for instance, his ironic reference to Alexander the Great's descent from the Egyptian god Ammon, which Prodromos uses to illustrate the relation between cause and effect³⁰⁶. Finally, in some instances, Prodromos explicitly refers to instructiveness (*διδασκαλικώτερον ποιοῦντες*) as an organising principle of his discussion³⁰⁷.

The didactic appeal of Prodromos' commentary is strengthened by the presence of multiple literary features, and especially by references to classical literature. Prodromos displays, for example, one of Aristotle's arguments with hexameter verses by Empedocles that do not seem to appear in previous commentaries³⁰⁸. Even more intriguing are the cases in which features of epic language are neatly interwoven into the technical discourse of the commentary. There is an instance in which Prodromos expresses his approval of Aristotle's reasoning with a formula *οὐκ ἀπὸ σκοποῦ*:

Τοῦτο πρὸς τὰ μέλλοντα ῥηθήσεσθαι οἶμαι τὴν ἀναφορὰν ἔχειν καὶ οἶμαι ἴσως οὐκ ἀπὸ σκοποῦ

*This, I think, is connected with what is going to be said further, and, in my view, this is not wrong*³⁰⁹.

While this expression can be found in a number of Greek authors, the majority of them are inspired by Homer³¹⁰.

In other instance Prodromos employs Homeric language to express his disagreement with Aristotle:

Καὶ μὴν αἰδοῖός μὲν μοί ἐσσι, σοφέ Ἀριστότελες, τοῦτο δὲ τὸ μέρος οὐκ εὐκολος ἐγὼ σοι ζυγνέσθαι, ὥς...

³⁰⁶ Cacouros (1992) Pp. 291-2.

³⁰⁷ Cacouros (1992) P. 272 Ἀνωτέρω μὲν γὰρ *διδασκαλικώτερον ποιοῦντες*, ἐκ τῶν ἀποδείξει ὑποκειμένων ἀρχόμενοι ὀρισμῶν, εἰς τοὺς ἀναποδείκτους ἀνεφερόμεθα ὥς εἰς ἀσαφέστερους ἐκ σαφεστέρων...

³⁰⁸ Cacouros (1992) P. 282.

³⁰⁹ Cacouros (1992) P. 188.

³¹⁰ Od. 11.344.

*Although I have a deep respect for you, wise Aristotle, I cannot agree with you on the point that...*³¹¹

The expression *αἰδοῖός μὲν μοί ἐσσι* is a quotation from Helen's penitent speech to Priam³¹².

The passage quoted above is also remarkable for its dialogical tone. Moreover, it is not unique: there are, in fact, multiple occasions where Prodrornos calls on Aristotle to clarify or defend his theory. As a result, Aristotle becomes a character of Prodrornos' text. Moreover, the participants of the dialogical exchanges are not limited to Aristotle and Prodrornos. Some parts of the discussion appear as if they were initiated by an anonymous interlocutor³¹³. As Prodrornos uses second-person pronouns, he acknowledges the presence of a reader³¹⁴. Interestingly, some of the interactions between Aristotle and his interlocutor recreate a classroom situation:

Καὶ ποῦ σοι τοῦτο, ὦ Ἀριστότελες, νῦν ὁ λόγος ὑπέθετο; νῦν γὰρ πρώτως εἰς ταύτην εἰσβάλλεις τὴν ἀπορίαν καὶ οὐδὲν οὐδέπω περὶ ταύτης φθάνεις εἰπών. Ἦ, φησὶν, εἰ <μὴ> τετρημένοις ἤκουες τοῖς ὡσὶ τῶν ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ ἀπορίᾳ ῥηθέντων μοι, οὐκ ἂν ἀμφισβητήσιμός σοι ὁ παρὼν ἐγένετο λόγος · ἄρα γάρ, ὦ πρὸς φιλοσοφίας, ὅταν ἀρχὰς τῶν ἀποδείξεων ἐτίθεμιν τοὺς ὀρισμοὺς καὶ ὅταν ὑποτίθεσθαι αὐτοὺς καὶ ὡς ὁμολογουμένους λαμβάνεσθαι ἔλεγον, οὐ τοῦτο ἄντικρυς ἔλεγον, μὴ εἶναι τὸν συλλογισμόν τοῦ ὀρισμοῦ καὶ ἀπόδειξιν;

*But, how on earth, Aristotle, did the discussion take that turn just now? It is here, for the first time, that you introduce this problem and in no way did you earlier talk about it. If, he responds, what I said regarding the first problem had not fallen on deaf ears, you would not have any doubts about the present argument. For, by philosophy, when I took definitions for beginnings of demonstration and when I said that they are assumed as preliminaries and taken for granted, did I not directly mean that there was no syllogism or demonstration of definition*³¹⁵?

The colloquial language of this conversation does not resemble the style of Aristotle's writings at all. Rather, such ironic representation of Aristotle as a teacher rebuking a confused student evokes a Platonic dialogue as a model. Indeed, some of the expressions of Prodrornos' Aristotle,

³¹¹ Cacouros (1992) P. 187.

³¹² Il. 3.171.

³¹³ Cacouros (1992) Pp. 215-6.

³¹⁴ Cacouros (1992) P. 190 Μονονούχι τοῦτο σοι ἐνταῦθα ὁ φιλόσοφος λέγει...

³¹⁵ Cacouros (1992) Pp. 210-1.

like $\tilde{\omega}$ $\lambda\tilde{\omega}\sigma\tau\epsilon$ ³¹⁶, $\tilde{\omega}$ $\phi\iota\lambda'$ $\acute{\epsilon}\tau\alpha\tilde{\iota}\rho\epsilon$ ³¹⁷, $\tilde{\omega}$ $\gamma\alpha\theta\epsilon$ ³¹⁸ are highly reminiscent of the Platonic language.

Platonic influence, however, is not the only reason for introducing dialogical elements:

Prodromos also seems to follow the Byzantine exegetical tradition that aimed to make philosophical and theological problems accessible through creating a classroom setting³¹⁹.

There seem to be two reasons behind the abundance of rhetorical and, in particular, dialogical elements in Prodromos' commentary. Firstly, it allowed Prodromos to make his commentary more interactive and thereby more accessible to students. Secondly, through the literary imitation, Prodromos could highlight his interest in Plato, without expressing any views that might have attracted criticism as unorthodox.

On Big and Small

The second of Prodromos' philosophical writing also deals with Aristotle but takes the form of a letter to Prodromos' friend Michael Italikos³²⁰. Byzantine epistolography was traditionally perceived as a rhetorical genre, independent from philosophy. Recent research, however, revealed remarkable convergence of philosophy and rhetoric in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which resulted in emergence of philosophical letters³²¹. In the twelfth century, this genre was especially favored by Michael Italikos³²². Although Italikos does not seem to have produced any philosophical works, Prodromos put his philosophical talent on a par with that of Plato and Aristotle³²³. One of the philosophical letters by Italikos is addressed to Prodromos. To express his affection for the missing friend, Italikos employs both traditional rhetorical *topoi* (e.g. desire for the correspondent's reply) and classical philosophy: an example occurs when

³¹⁶ Cacouros (1992) P. 206.

³¹⁷ Cacouros (1992) P. 236.

³¹⁸ Cacouros (1992) P. 189.

³¹⁹ Efthymiadis (2017).

³²⁰ Tannery (1887).

³²¹ Papaioannou (2012); Manolova (2020).

³²² Papaioannou (2007).

³²³ Op de Coul (2007) H98 P. 112.

Italikos claims that Simplicius' and Porphyrius' notion of multitude of names (*πολυώνυμοι*) does not apply to them because they are completely identical in their words, actions and aspirations³²⁴.

Like Italikos' philosophical letters, Prodromos' piece reflects the author's interest in both rhetoric and philosophy: indeed, at the very beginning, Prodromos praises Italikos' expertise in both of these areas. After rhetorical *captatio benevolentiae*, Prodromos decides to share with his correspondent his own reading of Aristotle's *Categories*, a treatise that formed part of the *Organon*³²⁵. Prodromos draws attention to the passage, in which the notions of 'big' and 'small' and 'many' and 'little' are said to fall under the category of relative (*πρός τι*) rather than quantity (*ποσόν*)³²⁶. He disagrees with Aristotle on this matter and argues in six points that these notions should be classified as quantities³²⁷. A further series of arguments is then introduced to refute Aristotle's view that 'big' and 'small' are not contraries.

Although Byzantine scholars tended to be loyal to Aristotle, Prodromos' criticism is by no means exceptional³²⁸. Often relying on late antique philosophers, the Byzantines at times found fault with general tenets of Aristotle's philosophy as well as with some of his specific ideas. Generally, they criticized Aristotle's obscurity and inconsistency. More specific objections largely addressed Aristotle's views that were at odds with the Christian faith. These included the denial of a temporal beginning and end of the present world, and the assertion that external goods are necessary for happiness³²⁹. Aristotle's contested ideas normally belonged to the sphere of metaphysics or ethics. Although Aristotle's logic and the *Categories* in particular were ideologically neutral, they too occasionally fell under critical scrutiny. Photios, for example, criticised the notion of substance in the *Categories* in an attempt to integrate Aristotelian ideas

³²⁴ Gautier (1972) Ep. 1 P. 60.

³²⁵ Minio-Paluello (1949).

³²⁶ Minio-Paluello (1949) 5b11-6a18.

³²⁷ See the summary of these arguments in Ierodiakonou (2005) Pp. 28-29.

³²⁸ Bydén (2013); Trizio (2017a).

³²⁹ Bydén (2013) Pp. 154-7.

with the teachings of the Church Fathers³³⁰. At the same time, the *Categories* were appropriated by the defenders of the Orthodoxy. During the iconoclasm controversy, several iconophile philosophers argued their case by treating an image and its prototype as connected through the Aristotelian category of relation (*πρός τι*)³³¹. As long as relatives (*πρός τινα*), according to Aristotle, cannot exist without each other (a father cannot be a father without having a child and vice versa), icons were claimed to be co-existent with their prototypes and thereby worthy of veneration.

Prodromos differs in that his criticism of Aristotle is not motivated by religious objectives. However, this is not to say that Prodromos builds his argument with disregard for any authority. On the contrary, having found himself at variance with Aristotle, Prodromos represents his disagreement as undesirable. He engages in a soliloquy, trying to disavow his criticism. To this end, he recites different scenes from Homer in which one is called to moderation and restraint:

...οὐκ εὐκολος ἐγενόμην τοῦτο τὸ μέρος θέσθαι τῷ Φιλοσόφῳ · ἀλλὰ καίπερ πολλὰ τοῖς λογισμοῖς κατεπάδων – καὶ ἔστι μὲν οὐ τό · τέτλαθι... κραδίη... ἔστι δ' οὐ τό · ἀτρέμας ἦσο καὶ ἄλλων μῦθον ἄκουε καὶ ἄλλα ἄττα τῆς ποιητικῆς Καλλιόπης · φιλία γάρ μέ τις καὶ αἰδῶς ἐκ παιδὸς ἔχει περὶ Ὀμήρου...

*...I happened not to be willing to agree with the Philosopher on this matter. Although I persistently hypnotized my reasoning – now with this: **Heart, be still**, now with that: **Mad man, be still and heed the word of others** and other Calliope' sayings of this kind (for since childhood I am possessed with love and awe of Homer) ...³³²*

The first quotation refers to the scene when Odysseus becomes indignant at the sight of his lustful mistresses heading to the suitors³³³. Initially he wants to kill them immediately. Yet, he checks his desire, since the assault would have prematurely exposed his identity. The second exhortation Prodromos derives from the episode with Odysseus urging the discontented

³³⁰ Bydén (2013) P. 166.

³³¹ Erismann (2016).

³³² Tannery (1887) P. 112.

³³³ Od. 20.18.

Achaeans to submit to the will of Agamemnon³³⁴. While scolding an insurgent commoner, Odysseus gives a specific reason why he should obey the generals: '*they are better men than you*',³³⁵.

These points are crucial to Prodromos' objectives: firstly, as Prodromos describes his internal strife by means of Homeric allusions, he displays his refined knowledge of the classical tradition. Furthermore, the purported attempt to suppress critical thoughts positions Aristotle as the unsurpassed philosophical authority. By criticising him, Prodromos showcases his ingenuity and independence.

Although Prodromos' letter is meant to express disagreement, it also displays his comprehensive expertise in Aristotle's teachings. Firstly, before expressing his criticism, Prodromos almost verbatim reproduces the argument of Aristotle³³⁶. Furthermore, some points of criticism rely on assumptions made in the *Categories*³³⁷. In a similar manner, Prodromos brings into play some details of Aristotle's general worldview drawn from the other works by this philosopher. One such example to consider is thus: to introduce one of his objections to Aristotle's thesis that something can be called big or small only in comparison with something similar, Prodromos explains that some unique objects, like the sun, the moon, and the heavens, are correctly called big without any external reference³³⁸. The existence of big entities that do not have an object of comparison enables Prodromos to infer that the notion of 'big' does not belong to the category of 'relative'. Then, Prodromos hedges by suggesting that one might assume the existence of multiple worlds in which no object would any longer lack an object of comparison. Yet, immediately thereafter, he triumphantly declares that Aristotle himself denies such a possibility,

³³⁴ Il. 2.200.

³³⁵ Il. 2.201.

³³⁶ Tannery (1887) P. 113.

³³⁷ Tannery (1887) P. 115.

³³⁸ Tannery (1887) Pp. 113-4.

citing Aristotle's treatise *On the Heavens* as his source. This qualification, however, does not seem to be motivated solely by Prodromos' quest for accuracy; rather, it provides an opportunity for the author to flaunt his comprehensive knowledge of Aristotle.

While Prodromos' attitude to Aristotle remains ambiguous, it is perfectly clear that he treats Plato as the highest philosophical authority. Indeed, one of his objections to Aristotle rests upon the fact that Plato held a contrasting view on a given issue:

Ἔτι εἰ ἀρχὰς τῶν ὄντων τὰ ἐναντία πάντες ἔθεσαν σχεδὸν οἱ σοφοί, Πλάτων δὲ ἐκ μικροῦ καὶ μεγάλου τὰ ὄντα γεννᾷ, ἢ τῶν δύο θατέρῳ ἀπιστητέον - τοῦ κοινοῦ λέγω κανόνος καὶ τῆς Πλατωνικῆς θέσεως - ἢ ἐναργῶς ἐναντία θετέον τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρόν. ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδεὶς τοσοῦτο καὶ παραφέροιο, ὥς ἢ τοῖς κοινῇ συνδοκοῦσιν, ἢ αὐτῷ γε Πλάτωνι μάχεσθαι · τὸ δεύτερον ἄρα λείπεται.

Furthermore, if practically all the wise men considered the opposites to be first principles, while Plato conceives the existent things from the small and big, one has either to disbelieve one of the two things – I mean the general rule and the Platonic assertion – or to consider unequivocally the big and small opposites. Surely, no one is so misled that they contradict either general consensus or Plato himself. Thus the second option remains³³⁹.

This juxtaposition is noteworthy, especially because exegetes since Late Antiquity tended to harmonise the teachings of the two philosophers³⁴⁰. The preference of Plato over Aristotle is even more striking if one takes into account that the former was less acceptable to the contemporary intellectual mainstream. Manuel I's theologian-advisor Nicholas of Methone, for instance, attributed the views of his opponent Soterichus to Plato's theory of ideas, and claimed

³³⁹ Tannery (1887) P. 118.

³⁴⁰ Trizio (2017a) P. 397.

that Plato himself had been refuted by Aristotle³⁴¹. The same Nicholas wrote a separate treatise in order to refute Neoplatonist Proclus³⁴². In a similar vein, Michael of Anchialos, in his inaugural speech as a newly-appointed *Hypatos* of Philosophers, announced that he would limit philosophical education to the study of Aristotle³⁴³. In light of this evidence, Prodromos' preference of Plato against Aristotle may be interpreted as an attempt to subvert the hierarchy imposed by the intellectual authorities of his age.

Xenedemos, or Voices

Prodromos' fascination with Plato is even more obvious in his other discussion of Aristotelian philosophy, found in the text entitled the *Xenedemos, or the Voices*³⁴⁴. Composed as a dialogue between an Athenian named Mousaios and a young man, Xenedemos, it opens with Mousaios' expression of admiration for the great philosopher Theocles of Byzantium, and of his desires to find out more about this renowned intellectual. As Xenedemos previously studied under Theocles, he readily agrees to satisfy Mousaios' curiosity. Xenedemos describes Theocles' background and lists his numerous talents. While Xenedemos praises his teacher, Mousaios exclaims that '*he would really like to leave Athens for Byzantium to meet Theocles!*'³⁴⁵ Having learned more about Theocles' achievements, Mousaios concludes that Byzantium has brought up a man of such great merit that no offspring of Greece could match him³⁴⁶. Finally, Xenedemos describes one memorable encounter with Theocles that had a formative influence on him. The story is as follows:

One day, going to school, where he studied philosophy under Hermagoras, Xenedemos was engaged in a conversation by Theocles. When Theocles found out that Xenedemos was studying Aristototle's *Categories*, he decided to test his knowledge of Porphyry's *Introduction*, a seminal

³⁴¹ Browning (1961) P. 183.

³⁴² Angelou (1984).

³⁴³ Browning (1961) P. 182.

³⁴⁴ Spyridonova, Kurbanov and Goncharko (2017).

³⁴⁵ Spyridonova, Kurbanov and Goncharko (2017) P. 247 ln. 6-8.

³⁴⁶ Spyridonova, Kurbanov and Goncharko (2017) P. 247 ln. 22-3.

treatise on Aristotle's definition and distinction of the five predicables (genus, species, difference, property and accident)³⁴⁷. Since these categories formed the foundation of Aristotle's metaphysics and logic, Porphyry's *Introduction* was indeed a cornerstone of the Byzantine philosophical curriculum, used regularly to complement and interpret Aristotle's own ideas³⁴⁸. Initially, Xenedemos had no doubts that he would successfully pass Theocles' examination. For instance, when he was asked to explain the notion of *genus*, he exclaimed '*Let my race (γένος) perish in obscurity, if I do not provide an accurate explanation of everything pertaining to genus*'³⁴⁹. However, Xenedemos' confidence soon collapsed: every time he gave a perfectly accurate definition of one of the predicables, Theocles showed that it entailed some sort of logical inconsistency. As a result, Xenedemos had no choice but to accept the multiple fallacies in Porphyry's textbook on Aristotle that Theocles exposed to him.

Although the logical arguments constitute a large part of the whole piece, I would argue that Prodromos' dialogue is by no means only about philosophical subtleties. I will try to show that the 'refutation' of Porphyry aims to promote a teacher, who stands behind the character of Theocles. To this end, I will highlight the effects of Theocles' lesson on his young student Xenedemos.

Overall, in his encounter with Theocles, Xenedemos discovers that everything he has so diligently learned appears to be futile. One such example is evident when Xenedemos is made to accept Theocles' conclusion that the notion of species does not differ from that of genus, and exclaims in frustration:

ὥς εἴ τις με ἤρετό ποτε, ποῖον ὦ Ξενέδημε κρειπτόνως ἀμφοτέροις τούτοις ἐπίσταιο, τὴν σαυτοῦ κλῆσιν, ἢ τὴν Πορφυρίου εἰσαγωγὴν, τὸ δεύτερον ἂν, θαρρούντως ἀπεκρινάμην· νῦν δ' ἄλλ' οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως εἰς τὸ ἐναντίον τὸ πρᾶγμα περιετράπη μοι· καὶ τοῦτο γε ἡσθόμην τὸ εἰδέναι μηδὲν.

³⁴⁷ Busse (1887).

³⁴⁸ Erismann (2017) Pp. 363, 367.

³⁴⁹ Spyridonova, Kurbanov and Goncharko (2017) P. 249 ln. 18-19.

*If someone had asked me: Xenedemos, which do you know better, your own name or Porphyry's Introduction, I would have replied with confidence: Porphyry's Introduction. Now, I do not know how, the situation has been reversed. What I have experienced is that I know nothing*³⁵⁰.

Furthermore, throughout the dialogue, Prodromos implies that the person responsible for Xenedemos' misconceptions is his former teacher Hermagoras. At the beginning of his conversation with Xenedemos, Theocles mischievously states that Hermagoras is the wisest of teachers. This, however, appears to be nothing but a subversive strategy, as Theocles attributes Hermagoras' teaching prowess merely to his pale complexion and remarkably long beard. These traits form the stock image of false philosophers in Lucian's satire *Icaromenippus* as well as in Prodromos' own works. One of Prodromos' pieces is an invective of an old man, a character, whose wisdom is measured by the length of his beard³⁵¹. The same image is employed by Xenedemos and Theocles to expose Hermagoras as a charlatan. This is how, for example, Xenedemos bewails his own gullibility: '*What a mistake I made to trust in the bushy beard of Hermagoras!*'³⁵². By having Xenedemos and Theocles denounce Hermagoras, Prodromos does not seem to target a historical figure. The character of Hermagoras was, in my opinion, constructed to emphasise a comparative advantage of Theocles' prototype over any other teacher of philosophy.

A useful section to consider is the passage in which Xenedemos praises the effectiveness of Theocles' teaching against the backdrop of Hermagoras' own less impressive didactic achievements. Having made his argument, Theocles asks whether he has managed to persuade Xenedemos. To highlight his effectiveness as a teacher Theocles quotes the words of Socrates:

³⁵⁰ Spyridonova, Kurbanov and Goncharko (2017) P. 254 ln. 9-13.

³⁵¹ Migliorini (2010) Κατὰ μακρογενεΐου γέροντος δοκοῦντος εἶναι διὰ τοῦτο σοφοῦ. Pp. 19-27; Marciniak (2020).

³⁵² Spyridonova, Kurbanov and Goncharko (2017) Pp. 255 ln. 26 - P. 256 ln. 1.

‘What more can I do for you? Shall I take the argument and ram it into your head?’³⁵³ Then Theocles’ mischievously suggests that they should have shared his point with Hermagoras so that ‘his beard would, perhaps, say something wiser than the others’³⁵⁴. Xenedemos responds that he has already accepted Theocles’ argument and does not need Hermagoras anymore.

The self-referential aspect of Prodromos’ dialogue becomes more evident when Theocles expresses his concern that Xenedemos’ natural talents may be spoiled by a bad teacher. He elaborates on this idea by quoting Plato’s Republic: ‘the best endowed souls become worse than the others under a bad education’³⁵⁵. Having made this point, he sarcastically assures Xenedemos that this would never happen to him as long as he studies under Hermagoras. However, immediately thereafter he once again exposes flaws in Xenedemos understanding of Porphyry, which were instilled by Hermagoras’ teaching. Theocles leaves Xenedemos with a good wish: ‘If only, o Graces, someone would take care of Xenedemos’ education!’³⁵⁶. This wish reads as an exhortation to abandon Hermagoras for a new teacher. The identity of the new teacher is not expressly stated, but the text could be productively mined for the information about the real person, who may be hiding behind the character of Prodromos’ Theocles. I will return to this point at the end of this section.

Now, it is important to emphasise that Prodromos communicates his messages to his target audience through Platonic *mimesis*. Overall, the *Xenedemos* displays several features of a Platonic dialogue, such as:

- The main section represents a situation in the past drawn from the memory of one of the interlocutors;

³⁵³ Spyridonova, Kurbanov and Goncharko (2017) P. 252 ln. 10-1; Slings (2003) 345b.

³⁵⁴ Spyridonova, Kurbanov and Goncharko (2017) P. 252 ln. 11-4.

³⁵⁵ Spyridonova, Kurbanov and Goncharko (2017) P. 256 ln. 26 - P. 257 ln. 1; Slings (2003) 491e

³⁵⁶ Spyridonova, Kurbanov and Goncharko (2017) P. 259 ln. 6-7.

- The heroes are preoccupied with definitions;
- The leading figure uses the maieutic method to refute his opponent's fallacies³⁵⁷.

Within this Platonic framework, Theocles is suitably assigned the role of Socrates. Theocles' similarity to Socrates is reflected not only in the method of approaching philosophical issues. Socrates also emerges as Theocles' role model as the latter tries to lure a student away from a rival teacher. This aspect of Socratic imitation can be identified in the intertextual link with Plato's *Phaedrus*³⁵⁸. When Theocles greets Xenedemos, he uses the opening phrase uttered by Phaedrus: *ποῖ δὴ καὶ πόθεν* (whither and from where?)³⁵⁹. When Theocles sees Xenedemos holding a book and rehearsing his lesson, he concludes that the young man is going to his teacher Hermagoras. This scene clearly refers to Phaedrus, who is so fascinated with Lysias' speech on love that he rehearses it while carrying the book under his garment. As he engages in conversation with Socrates, Phaedrus bids to outdo Lysias by arguing the same point in a more persuasive way. In his own speech, Socrates argues the opposite and thereby makes Phaedrus abandon his former belief. Phaedrus loses his trust in Lysias, and becomes a loyal follower of Socrates. The outcome of Xenedemos' talk with Theocles is the same: he tempts the young man to leave his old teacher for the new one.

Furthermore, there is a case to be made that the criticism of Porphyry's *Introduction* in Prodromos' dialogue in no way intends to undermine the significance of this treatise as a core textbook. Scholars have already observed that despite the seemingly overwhelming effectiveness of Theocles' arguments, their accuracy is questionable at best³⁶⁰. While Theocles criticism is based mainly on blurring the predicables' definitions, he (deliberately?) ignores the part of the

³⁵⁷ The detailed study of Platonic intertextuality can be found in Charalabopoulos (2005).

³⁵⁸ Burnet (1901).

³⁵⁹ Spyridonova, Kurbanov and Goncharko (2017) P. 249 ln. 2; Burnet (1901) 227a. This phrase features in a number of other Prodromos' writings, including his poem 'Friendship in Exile', Zagklas (2014) P. 326 v. 2.

³⁶⁰ Goncharko, Slinin and Chernoglazov (2016).

Introduction that outlines the difference between each of them. This suggests that what Prodromos actually offers is a series of sophisms, which are meant to be identified by an attentive reader. If this is true, Prodromos appears to follow the pattern of early Socratic dialogues, where Plato deploys seemingly convincing but logically fallacious arguments that effectively expose incompetence of Socrates' interlocutors³⁶¹.

The present hypothesis that Prodromos does not really mean to debunk Porphyry is supported by the plot development in his dialogue. Prodromos creates a captivating dynamic between his characters: the more Theocles succeeds in identifying the pitfalls of the *Introduction*, the more he sparks Xenedemos' interest. Xenedemos repeatedly entreats Theocles to continue with his unorthodox interpretation of the well-known text. Comparing the *Introduction* to a ladder, Xenedemos desires that it had so many steps that he could ascend into heaven – of course, under the guidance of Theocles. Theocles responds that, although this ladder does not consist of many steps, it does reach the heavens. Thus, he implies that the *Introduction* may suffice an aspiring philosopher, if it is appropriately studied, preferably under the guidance of an effective teacher.

Having identified the dialogue as a promotional piece, the following discussion will now offer some ideas about the identity of the teacher who might have stood behind the character of Theocles. While introducing Theocles to Mousaios, Xenedemos provides the following summary of his curriculum vitae³⁶². Theocles hailed from Italy and felt somewhat foreign in Byzantium. His works were composed both in verse and prose. Some of them were dedicated to emperors and described wars, others were addressed to private individuals. A separate group of them dealt with illness. Given that Prodromos' close friend and correspondent Michael Italikos indeed was a doctor and an epistolographer, it is plausible that he was the model for the character of Theocles. As Xenedemos hints that Theocles is dead, one can also suggest that the dialogue

³⁶¹ Robinson (1942).

³⁶² Spyridonova, Kurbanov and Goncharko (2017) P. 246 ln. 13 - P. 248 ln. 5.

celebrating Theocles was composed as Prodromos' posthumous tribute to his teacher Italikos³⁶³.

By the same token, it is plausible that Prodromos, as a former disciple of Italikos, modeled Xenedemos on himself.

I would like to develop this hypothesis by suggesting that Prodromos exploits the image of his teacher to promote himself. By doing so, he essentially follows in the footsteps of Plato, who made his teacher Socrates a protagonist of his dialogues. Although Plato had endowed his character with some features of historic Socrates, he arguably made use of this *persona* to express his own ideas and promote his own cause. The same remains true in this case because some of the key features of Theocles' image resonate with Prodromos' self-representation in his own writings. Specifically, Xenedemos summarises Theocles' teaching method as follows: *'even something seemingly unchallengeable could be challenged, even what stands firm can be overturned'* (κἄν τι ἀναπόρητον δοκοίη ἀπορηθήσεται · κἄν ἐπ' ἀσφαλοῦς ἐστηκός τε ἀνατραπήσεται)³⁶⁴. Similarly, in one of his letters, Prodromos links his philosophical studies with raising and solving problems (ἀπορίαι): *'You will find me always sitting with an open book. Now I am reading Aristotle or Plato, now I am bringing something from our Christian wisdom (οἶκοθεν) to the stage of learning; now I am raising problems, now I am solving them'* (καὶ νῦν μὲν ἀποροῦντας, νῦν δὲ τὰ ἀπορούμενα λύοντας)³⁶⁵. As Prodromos proceeds to talk about teaching, it is possible to suggest that *'raising and solving problems'* stands for Prodromos' method of discussing philosophical text with students. Consequently, Theocles' success in implementing this method showcases Prodromos' effectiveness as a teacher of philosophy.

Philosophical Persona outside Philosophy

All three philosophical works by Prodromos are traditional in their subject matter. Yet, experimentations with literary form as well as pronounced didacticism suggest that Prodromos is

³⁶³ Charalabopoulos (2005) Pp. 196-7. Other scholars, however, tried to identify the features of other Byzantine intellectuals, including Michael Psellos: Ebbesen (1996) Pp. 81-2; Papaioannou (2013) P. 241.

³⁶⁴ Spyridonova, Kurbanov and Goncharko (2017) P. 258 ln. 1-2.

³⁶⁵ Op de Coul (2007) H108 P. 104 ln. 19-22.

more interested in creating a compelling image of a philosophical writer rather than in making original contribution to philosophical inquiry. To corroborate this hypothesis, I would like to demonstrate that Prodromos is still keen to adopt a philosophical *persona* in writings that in terms of their genre and subject matter can hardly be classified as philosophical. To illustrate Prodromos' penchant for philosophical *belles-lettres*, it is useful to examine his satire '*The Plato-lover, or Leather-worker*'³⁶⁶. The piece starts with an affectionate encomium of Plato. Prodromos' *persona* admires Plato's versatility: he is an expert in music, mathematics and astronomy; his dialogues are literary masterpieces, which inspire philosophers and rhetoricians alike. The emphasis on the breadth of Plato's interests tellingly resonates with Prodromos' own literary versatility that he advertises in the *Sale of Lives*³⁶⁷. Having thus made a point about his affinity with Plato, Prodromos refuses to share his passion for the Athenian philosopher with anyone, who, in his view, is not qualified enough to appreciate the subtleties of Platonic philosophy³⁶⁸. Therefore, the opening encomium of Plato is followed by a psogos of an anonymous 'fan of Plato' (*φιλοπλάτων*) who, as the title suggests, rather belongs to leather workers. Prodromos vividly describes how his antagonist tries to pass for an expert reader: resting on his knees, with his arm leaned against his cheek, he seems to devour Platonic wisdom. However, this profound engagement with Platonic thought appears to be entirely deceptive. When asked to share his reading experience, the self-proclaimed Platonist appears to be unable to point out even the subject matter. Worse than that, he is so confused that he holds the book upside down. Having exposed the fake Platonist's incompetence, the author engages with him in a dialogue in order to dissuade him from any further philosophical studies. Prodromos' *persona* argues that everyone needs to adhere to the status quo: if one is born (and trained) an artisan, he should not endeavor to grasp the lofty matters of philosophy and give a misleading impression of his intellectual worth. The amateur Platonist tried to challenge this argument by referring to the

³⁶⁶ Migliorini (2010). *Φιλοπλάτων ἢ σκυτοδέψης*. Pp. 69-81.

³⁶⁷ See Pp. 32-41.

³⁶⁸ Marciniak (2020).

career of Diogenes who came to philosophy after earning his living as a money-changer. This objection, however, did not convince Prodromos, who supplied additional reasons as to why his interlocutor should never engage with philosophy. This argument between the two has semblance of eristic dispute that lies at the heart of early Platonic dialogues. Plato is also evoked every time Prodromos weaves into his argument quotations from Platonic dialogues. Arguably, however, these mimetic features are hardly enough to make Prodromos' piece a philosophical work in the proper sense of the term. Even if the clearly sophistic nature of all the arguments is discounted, the fact that the whole point of Prodromos' piece is not discovery of universally valid truth but simply an exposure of a fake identity cannot be disregarded. If there is a generic model for Prodromos' piece, it is a Lucianic satire, specifically the one entitled '*The Ignorant Book Collector*', which also features a presumptuous book owner, whose ignorance renders his ownership of luxury books utterly meaningless³⁶⁹. Prodromos' piece therefore appears to be satirical but – and this is a major innovation – is concerned with forging a philosophical image of its author.

Philosophical elements can be identified in many other works by Prodromos. In the chapter in this work on the Hellenism of Prodromos' biblical epigrams, I will provide a detailed analysis of the employment of philosophical imagery and terminology in a Christian context³⁷⁰. While these philosophical allusions testify to Prodromos' profound expertise in Plato and Aristotle, they have a literary purpose. Weaving philosophical references into his poetry, Prodromos assumes an appearance of a philosopher, without deploying philosophical method of inquiry. In the circumstances when ancient philosophy was considered both prestigious and controversial activity, adopting a philosophical *persona* in a literary entertaining - albeit superficial - way proved to be the most appropriate strategy of engaging with philosophical tradition.

³⁶⁹ Harmon (1921) *The Ignorant Book Collector*. Pp. 173-211.

³⁷⁰ See Chapter Five, Pp. 168-84.

Conclusions

All three philosophical writings of Prodromos deal with Aristotelian logic. Although this approach is traditional for Byzantine philosophical studies, Prodromos' interpretation of Aristotle's material is highly original. Prodromos' philosophical writings are works of literature. He achieves this by embellishing his discussions with rhetorical elements or giving them the shape of letters or dialogues. While taking a critical stance towards the teachings of Aristotle, Prodromos expresses his interest in (and indeed his preference for) Plato, a far less acceptable figure in twelfth-century Byzantium. Choosing Plato as his role model allows Prodromos to create a distinct intellectual identity that makes him to stand out among contemporaries. Specifically, through his self-identification with Socrates, Prodromos highlights his competitive advantage over other teachers of philosophy, whom he might have perceived as his direct rivals. Prioritising entertaining didacticism over academic rigor, Prodromos ensures that his philosophical writings appeal to a wide variety of people. The same purpose of making philosophy accessible to non-specialists is achieved through inclusion of philosophical elements into literary works such as satires and epigrams.

Chapter III

POET LAUREATE: CELEBRATING THE COMNENIAN EMPIRE

Introduction

A significant amount of Byzantine literature was produced on commission. An average Byzantine author could hardly flourish unless he relied on aristocratic patronage. This is especially true for the twelfth century, when a large body of literature was produced to commemorate special occasions³⁷¹. These could be imperial triumphs, bureaucratic appointments, aristocratic deaths or whatever else one considered important enough. Beyond the commissions for special occasions, the Byzantine authors' dependence on their patrons is reflected in the circumstances of the circulation of Byzantine texts. A Byzantine text could be performed in a formal setting like a church or could be addressed to members of literary salons known as *theatra*³⁷². These *theatra* were run by aristocratic patrons, notably, at times, by widowed ladies, who had a taste for learning. The most notable *theatron* of the twelfth century, the one of *sebastokratorissa* Eirene, attracted the most prominent authors of her time including John Tzetzes, Constantine Manasses and Theodore Prodromos³⁷³.

Among the twelfth-century authors, Prodromos was arguably the most successful in developing a powerful network of aristocratic patrons. He attracted major benefactors such as the emperors John II and Manuel I Komnenoi along with other members of the imperial family including the *sebastokrator* Isaakios and Anna Komnene. Other recipients of Prodromos' works include such high-ranking officials as the keeper of the imperial inkstand Theodore Styppeiotes, the *orphanotrophos* and *nomophylax* Alexios Aristenos and the patriarch John IX Agapetos³⁷⁴. A

³⁷¹ Nilsson (2020b).

³⁷² Mullett (1984); Marciniak (2007); Toth (2007); Gaul (2018).

³⁷³ Jeffreys and Jeffreys (1994); Jeffreys, E. (2014).

³⁷⁴ For the whole list see Hörandner (1974) Pp. 37-43.

significant number of Prodromos' writings commemorate the occasions that bear great importance for the Empire: deaths, marriages and military campaigns.

This chapter aims to explain Prodromos' success as a court writer. My argument falls into two parts. First, I will demonstrate how Prodromos' occasional writings resonated with societal developments of his time, specifically with the rise of Hellenic identity, militarism and aristocratic ideal. I will argue that these three cultural trends are best exemplified in the Homeric revival. After providing an outline of Homeric influence throughout different genres of twelfth-century literature, I will highlight Prodromos' revival of the hexameter as a literary *tour de force* that earned him popularity among the patrons³⁷⁵. The second part of the chapter will examine how Prodromos distinguished himself from other court writers. I will argue that Prodromos achieved originality by transforming traditional rhetorical genres into poetry. My key argument will be based on a comparative analysis of Prodromos's poetic homage of Alexios Aristenos and the prose panegyrics of the same person by other authors. I will also draw attention to several prose works by Prodromos, in which he demonstrates that his rhetorical excellence surpasses similar achievements by any of his contemporaries.

Historical Background

Time of Troubles

Alexios Komnenos usurped the throne at a time when the Byzantine Empire had to cope with a significant number of both internal and external difficulties. Throughout the eleventh century, Byzantium suffered significant territorial losses: the Balkans were raided by the Pechenegs; the Seljuk Turks launched attacks in Asia Minor, which eventually resulted in a catastrophic defeat of a Byzantine army and the capture of the emperor Romanos Diogenes near Manzikert in 1071; in Southern Italy, the Normans were conquering Byzantine provinces of Apulia and Calabria³⁷⁶.

³⁷⁵ Cf. Cf. Zagklas (2014) Pp. 90-99.

³⁷⁶ Harris (2014) Pp. 39-41.

The military defeats were aggravated by considerable financial difficulties. Having to fund the navy and army, the Byzantine government found it difficult to balance its books, and had to resort to the debasement of the gold coinage³⁷⁷.

The greatest challenge for the Comnenian Empire were the Crusades³⁷⁸. Planned originally as a joint Christian expedition against the infidels, the Crusades turned out to be an arduous struggle for the domination over the Christian world, which led to the capture of Constantinople in 1204. From the outset, the passage of the Crusaders through the Byzantine territory was marked by mutual suspicion and hostility: the locals often sabotaged the campaign, whilst undisciplined Western soldiers resorted to occasional plundering³⁷⁹. Although Byzantine emperors were at pains to buy the loyalty of Western kings, the latter were reluctant to recognise the authority of their Byzantine counterparts and even refused to hand over the territories that were strategically important for the Byzantines³⁸⁰. The territorial controversies were aggravated by the quarrels over the imperial title: the Western leaders would often offend the Byzantine *basileus* by calling him an emperor of the Greeks, a title that denied the Byzantines' claim to be the legitimate continuators of the Roman Empire³⁸¹. The Byzantine claims on universal authority were also questioned within the religious domain as the Papacy felt confident enough to assert its primacy over any other episcopal sees³⁸². More generally, the tensions with the West furthered theological differences between Orthodox and Latin Christendom: the twelfth century saw the production of numerous treatises that highlight controversies over *filioque*, unleavened bread and other aspects of the Christian ritual³⁸³. Despite the conciliatory attempts of Manuel, the prominence of the Latins in Constantinople and economic success of the Venetians caused

³⁷⁷ Angold (1997) P. 81.

³⁷⁸ Treadgold (1997) Pp. 638-66; Laiou and Mottahedeh (2001); Magdalino (2009).

³⁷⁹ Harris (2014) P. 66.

³⁸⁰ Harris (2014) Pp. 69-76.

³⁸¹ Harris (2014) P. 27

³⁸² Harris (2014) Pp. 46-58.

³⁸³ Cameron, Averil (2016) Pp. 59-99; Bucossi and Calia (2020).

significant resentment among the local population, which eventually resulted in a massacre in the Latin Quarter of Constantinople shortly after the ascension of Andronikos in 1182³⁸⁴.

Hellenic Identity

The clashes with the West made an impact on the sense of the Byzantine identity. Without abandoning their Roman inheritance, Byzantine authors started to identify themselves as *Hellenes*, reclaiming the notion that was used in earlier period to denote pagans³⁸⁵. The ancient literary characters were now often viewed as paragons of virtue, featuring in historical *exempla* in rhetorical praises of Byzantine historical figures³⁸⁶. Ancient mythology reappeared as a cultural code capable of connecting Christian *realia* with the classical past. Beyond mythology, the Byzantine authors often evoked the topography of ancient Greece, especially Athens, which became an object of nostalgia³⁸⁷.

Cultural Change: Military and Aristocratic Values

Another important cultural development was brought about by the change in the social structure of the Empire. With the ascension of the Comnenian dynasty, all political influence was accumulated within the imperial family; to secure a prestigious office or a title one had to be related to the emperor³⁸⁸. The increased importance of nobility coincided with the emergence of the heroic ideal. The emperor was no longer praised for *φιλανθρωπία* but first and foremost as a valiant warrior bathing in the blood of his enemies³⁸⁹. The indirect evidence suggests that from the middle of the eleventh century the proclamation of the emperor incorporated the Roman ritual of raising the emperor on a shield³⁹⁰. Preparing themselves for a military career from a

³⁸⁴ Shawcross (2020).

³⁸⁵ Magdalino (1992); Kaldellis (2007) Pp. 283-95; Rapp (2009).

³⁸⁶ Kaldellis (2007) Pp. 283-6.

³⁸⁷ Kaldellis (2007) Pp. 324-5.

³⁸⁸ Kazhdan (1974); Neville (2004); Frankopan (2007); Stanković (2007).

³⁸⁹ Kazhdan (1984a) Pp. 46-47; Magdalino (1993) Pp. 419-20.

³⁹⁰ Kazhdan (1984a) P. 51.

young age Byzantine aristocracy took part in tournaments and hunting, the past times, which apparently gained popularity under the Western influence³⁹¹. Militarisation of the Empire left a footprint on Byzantine art: the palace at Blachernai, for example, was decorated with the representations of martial deeds of Manuel Komnenos³⁹². In literature, the military ideal was epitomised in the romance of Digenis Akrites, a hero who distinguished himself in defending the frontiers of the Byzantine Empire. Endowed for his service with an estate, Digenis would enjoy such aristocratic pleasures as feasting, bathing and hunting³⁹³.

These cultural changes set the scene for the revival of classical literary genres. More specifically, the twelfth century has been labeled a Homeric century, and for a good reason³⁹⁴. The physical build, military prowess and ethical code of Homeric heroes defined the ideal that met the demands of the historical situation. Due to richness of the Homeric poems, the Homeric material was employed in the wide range of genres that were current in the twelfth century Byzantine literature³⁹⁵.

Homer in Twelfth-Century Byzantine literature

Historiography

First and foremost, the Homeric ideal was promoted in historiography³⁹⁶. Regarding this subject, three authors are especially important: Nikephoros Bryennios, whose history covers the period

³⁹¹ Kazhdan and Epstein (1985) P. 109.

³⁹² Kazhdan (1984a) P. 51.

³⁹³ Jeffreys (1998); Kazhdan and Epstein (1985) Pp. 117-9.

³⁹⁴ Kaldellis (2007) P. 243; Browning (1975b); Browning (1992).

³⁹⁵ Pontani (2006); Cullhed (2014); van den Berg (2017).

³⁹⁶ Dyck (1985); Saxey (2009); Neville (2012); Kyriakidis (2016).

from 1070 to 1080, including the unsuccessful rebellion of his grandfather³⁹⁷; Anna Komnene who gives an account of the reign of her father (the title of Anna's work, the *Alexiad*, already reveals inspiration from the *Iliad*³⁹⁸); Nicetas Choniates who gives a comprehensive analysis of the period from the death of Alexios Komnenos to the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade³⁹⁹. All three authors weave Homeric quotations into their texts, and Anna Komnene is also inclined to make direct references to Homer: in her history the poet's name features 14 times (both Bryennios and Choniates call Homer by name only once). The strong presence of Homer can be illustrated by the fact that Anna evokes the poet even in her descriptions of the barbarians. Anna describes how Robert Guiscard's wife, Gaita, encouraged withdrawing soldiers not '*in famous Homeric words, but something very like them in her own dialect*'⁴⁰⁰.

The Homeric influence is reflected in the characterisation of the histories' protagonists. Nikephoros Bryennios, for example, often represents his heroes as noble (*γενναῖος*) and well-born (*εὐγενής*), and makes clear that the chief virtue for military men is bravery⁴⁰¹. Anna Komnene, in a similar fashion, describes Nikephoros Bryennios the Elder as mighty, noble, and handsome, and accordingly suggests that Nikephoros was a good candidate for the imperial throne⁴⁰². The moral qualities of the Byzantine aristocracy appear to be as evocative of the Homeric ideal as their outward appearance: when hard pressed by the Scyths, Alexios Komnenos was asked why he continues to hold out; he responded that '*it is better to die fighting bravely than to win safety by doing something unworthy*'⁴⁰³; such preference of a noble death over an ignoble survival was a cornerstone of the Homeric ethics. Hector's farewell to Andromache, for

³⁹⁷ Gautier (1975); Carile (1968); Carile (1969).

³⁹⁸ Sewter (2003); Neville (2016).

³⁹⁹ Magoulas H. J. (1984); Simpson (2013).

⁴⁰⁰ Sewter (2003) P. 147.

⁴⁰¹ Neville (2012) Pp. 211-15.

⁴⁰² Sewter (2003) P. 38.

⁴⁰³ Sewter (2003) P. 225.

instance, where the Trojan hero acknowledges his fear of death but still goes to the battlefield in pursuit of glory,⁴⁰⁴ aptly displays this.

Each history attaches great importance to military events, and the description of battle scenes is accordingly influenced by the Homeric conventions. One of the key structural elements of the *Iliad* is *aristeia*, a narrative unit that focuses on the exploits of a single hero⁴⁰⁵. In a similar way, the Byzantine historians use this device to highlight the heroism of their protagonists. For example, the *aristeia* of Alexios Komnenos constitutes a significant part of the Anna's account of the Byzantine defeat in the Battle of Dyrrhachium⁴⁰⁶. Modeling her storytelling on epic *aristeia*, Anna reframes the defeat of Byzantine army into an example of Alexios' individual heroism⁴⁰⁷.

Rhetoric

Since Antiquity, encomiastic literature made active use of the Homeric heroes whose qualities and deeds could represent an ideal for more recent rulers⁴⁰⁸. It is therefore hardly surprising that Homer proved extremely popular among the twelfth-century orators too. For example, Nikephoros Basilakes, in his two encomia for the emperor John Komnenos and the patriarch Nicholas Mouzalon, makes 47 references to Homer; by comparison, references to the New Testament in the same compositions feature only 39 times⁴⁰⁹. As one may expect, Homeric references in the imperial oration are mainly used to highlight John's military prowess: he

⁴⁰⁴ Il. 6. 441-6; Griffin (1983) Pp. 81-102.

⁴⁰⁵ Sammons (2017) Pp. 157-76.

⁴⁰⁶ Sewter (2003) Pp. 148-53.

⁴⁰⁷ In a similar way, Nikephoros Bryennios valorizes generals who engage in a straightforward fight but lose rather than those who win by resorting to stratagems. See Neville (2012) Pp. 89-95.

⁴⁰⁸ Klooster and van den Berg (2018).

⁴⁰⁹ Maisano (1977) P. 68.

brandishes a far-reaching spear (*δολιχόσκιον ἔγχος*)⁴¹⁰, bathes in blood and gore (*λύθρῳ καὶ αἵματι*)⁴¹¹, and erects a monument of victory with an invincible hand (*ἀάπτους χερσὶ*)⁴¹².

Beyond political oratory, Homeric themes were prominent in rhetorical exercises. Thus, the collection of *Progymnasmata* of Nikephoros Basilakes features several stories (*διηγήματα*) deriving from the Homeric epic: Aloadae's struggle against the Olympians (14), Achilles' disguise as a woman on Skyros (15) and the capture of Troy (21), to name a few.⁴¹³ Furthermore, Homeric themes even seeped into the narratives preoccupied with the biblical material. Homeric features can be found, for example, in Basilakes' *ethopoeia* on what David could have said upon his capture by foreigners during his flight from Saul (33). Anticipating his grim end, David looks back at his former feats, referring to them with such characteristically Homeric vocabulary as *ἀριστεύς* (the best) and *ἀριστεία* (heroic deeds)⁴¹⁴.

While the Byzantines admired Homer as a Poet, they also recognised him as an inspiration for the students of rhetoric. In the introduction to his commentary on Homer's *Iliad*, Eustathios of Thessalonica encourages aspiring orators to use Homer as a source of vocabulary, aphorisms and anecdotes⁴¹⁵. Furthermore, in the main body of his commentary, Eustathios repeatedly singles out Homeric expressions that can be used to achieve different rhetorical purposes, such as to persuade, to mock or to reprimand.⁴¹⁶

Scholarship

The employment of Homer in historiography and rhetoric was supported by the advanced study of the Homeric poems by the most prominent intellectuals of the time. The most notable

⁴¹⁰ Il.3.346, 355, 5.15. Maisano (1977) P. 91.

⁴¹¹ Il.6.268, Od. 22.402. Maisano (1977) P. 90.

⁴¹² Il.1.567, 7.309, 8.450. Maisano (1977) P. 93, 105.

⁴¹³ Pignani (1983).

⁴¹⁴ Pignani (1983) P. 148.

⁴¹⁵ van der Valk (1971). P. 3.

⁴¹⁶ Nünlist (2012).

achievement on this front was arguably the voluminous commentary on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* produced by Eustathios of Thessalonica, who praised Homer as the receptacle of the world's wisdom⁴¹⁷.

The most prolific classicist of the twelfth century, John Tzetzes, also made Homeric poems one of the main subjects of his philological pursuits. Like Eustathios, Tzetzes had a didactic purpose: his *Allegories on the Iliad* and *Allegories on the Odyssey* were, in fact, produced to facilitate the assimilation of Manuel's German wife, Bertha-Eirene, into the Byzantine court⁴¹⁸. Tzetzes' fascination with the epic, however, extended further than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: apart from producing a hexameter poem on the *Events in Homer* Tzetzes also penned its prequel (the *Events before Homer*) and sequel (the *Events after Homer*)⁴¹⁹. John Tzetzes was not the only author to offer his own interpretation of the Trojan war. Isaac Komnenos, often identified with the *porphyrogenitos* son of Alexios I, produced a treatise on the episodes of the Trojan narrative left out by Homer⁴²⁰. The treatise contains an appendix that provides succinct portrayals of the chief characters of the Homeric poems⁴²¹.

Prodromos' Homer

Prodromos' main contribution to the revival of Homer is relatively easy to define: he produced hexametrical poems that heavily drew on Homeric language and imagery. As I have already pointed out, these poems were written on a wide range of occasions⁴²². Homeric influence is most prominent, however, in the poems that celebrate military achievements of the emperor John II Komnenos (III, VI, VIII).

⁴¹⁷ Cullhed (2016) Pp. 9*-11*; van den Berg (2022).

⁴¹⁸ Goldwyn and Kokkini (2015); Goldwyn and Kokkini (2019); Haubold (2021).

⁴¹⁹ Leone (1995); Kaldellis (2009) Pp. 29-36; Mondini (2021).

⁴²⁰ Hinck (1873) Pp. 59-88; Pontani (2007); Lovato (2021).

⁴²¹ Hinck (1873) Pp. 80-7.

⁴²² See P. 33 of this thesis.

The employment of the epic meter and language is firmly rooted in the ancient encomiastic tradition: Theocritus modeled his encomium of Ptolemy Philadelphus on a Homeric hymn⁴²³, while in the West such poets as Claudian drew inspiration for their panegyrics from Virgil⁴²⁴. However, as the Greek ceased to distinguish long and short vowels, composition of epic poetry became inevitably harder⁴²⁵. It is therefore no surprise that the seventh century poet George of Pisidia chose the iambic meter to celebrate the campaigns of the emperor Heraclius against the Persians and the Avars. Pisides' departure from the ancient models of epic poetry is also reflected in the panegyrist's demeaning remarks about Homer, whereby the latter is criticised for '*mythological fabrications*'⁴²⁶. In the Middle Byzantine literature, the epic poetry gave way to new meters such as political verse.

While Prodromos was keen to experiment with new developments in Byzantine literature, for him Homer represented the very summit of the art of poetry. Making Homeric allusions in a philosophical treatise, Prodromos states that '*since childhood I had affection and awe for Homer*'⁴²⁷. This formative influence of Homer defined not only the high quality but also the character of Prodromos' hexameters. In particular, the study of prosodic and linguistic features of Prodromic hexameters revealed that Prodromos is much closer to the patterns of Homeric versification than to those of late antique poets such as Nonnus, even though the latter was more often used as a model for subsequent epic poets⁴²⁸. In some respects, Prodromos' work sounds more epic than even Homer's; this is reflected, for example, in Prodromos' proclivity to use an epic gen. sg. ending –οιο for the words that are normally declined with the standard –ου ending. These general tendencies have been confirmed by the case studies of Prodromos' epic poems on

⁴²³ Hunter (2003) Pp. 8, 53.

⁴²⁴ Scourfield (2012).

⁴²⁵ Lauxtermann (1999b).

⁴²⁶ Xenophontos (2020).

⁴²⁷ Tannery (1887) P. 112.

⁴²⁸ D'Ambrosi (2008) Pp. 60-96.

the topic of his illness, in which learned Homeric mimesis is combined with an innovative transformation of the epic tradition⁴²⁹.

Imperial Encomia

Building on the above-mentioned observations, I intend to discuss Prodromos' epic poems that are most relevant to the shaping of the imperial ideology. The compositions in question form part of the series of poems that celebrate John's campaigns in Asia Minor against the Danishmendids in 1130-5⁴³⁰. Most of these poems are written in political verse, which makes perfect sense because their target audience did not include his fellow intellectuals but the political elite and the people of Constantinople. Poems VI and VIII are exceptions: they are written in hexameter.

The Odyssey of John Komnenos

Poem VI celebrates the arrival of John to Constantinople after the capture of Kastamon. It opens with the invocation of Courage (*θυμός*): Prodromos invokes Courage to allow him to sing the 'battles and slaughters as well as incomparable feats of the emperor'⁴³¹. This invocation conjures up the opening lines of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, in which Homer calls upon the goddess or the muse to tell of the rage of Achilles⁴³² and the adventures of Odysseus⁴³³ respectively. The replacement of the goddess/muse with Courage is quite telling as it reflects the poet's appreciation of violence. The invocation of Courage is followed by celebration of Ares, the god of war, who is said to be instrumental in capturing the cities and fortresses in Asia Minor:

*Ἦδη μὲν τετέλεστο περικλυτὸς Αὔσοσιν Ἄρης,
Κασταμόνος τ' αἰπεινὸν ἐπὶ πολίεθρον ἑάλω
καὶ τ' Ἀλαμος καὶ Ἀλαζος ἐνκτίμενόν τ' ἐπὶ Βάλλζον*

⁴²⁹ Tziatzi-Papagianni (1994); Bazzani, M. (2007b).

⁴³⁰ Hörandner (1974) Poems III-X. For historical reconstruction of these events see Chalandon (1912) Pp. 77-91.

⁴³¹ Hörandner (1974) Poem VI vv. 1-9.

⁴³² Il. 1.1-7.

⁴³³ Od. 1.1-5.

By this time glorious Ares [military prowess] has come to perfection for the Ausones, and the lofty citadel of Castamon was captured, as were Alamos, Alazos and well-fortified Balzon⁴³⁴.

Prodromos uses an expression *τετέλεστο [...] Ἄρης*, which implies that the Byzantines owe their military achievements to the good will of Ares. The idea of an Olympian god overseeing human affairs calls to mind the Homeric premise that the events of the *Iliad* have been designed by Zeus: *Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή⁴³⁵*. Again, by replacing Zeus with Ares, Prodromos brings to the fore the military ideal embodied by John.

Despite Prodromos' intention to sing of battles and slaughters, the main body of his poem is concerned with John's triumphal arrival in Constantinople. Prodromos describes the cheerful anticipation of people preparing to welcome their lord: some cleaned the streets, some wreathed laurels, some decorated houses with linen and silk⁴³⁶. In an elaborate Homeric simile, Prodromos compares the city to a beautifully adorned bride who awaits her groom, while attracting attention of every other person⁴³⁷. Having sketched the city's excitement, Prodromos gives an elaborate description of a chariot prepared for the emperor: made of silver and precious stones, it was embellished with carvings featuring lions and griffins⁴³⁸. Prodromos' description of armament as a work of art is akin to the Homeric *ekphrasis*, most famously exemplified in the description of the shield of Achilles in Book 18 of the *Iliad*.

Later on, Prodromos describes the triumphal procession that entered the city through the eastern gate⁴³⁹. The procession consisted of the 'Persian' nobles and their wives, the mules loaded with

⁴³⁴ Hörandner (1974) Poem VI vv. 10-2.

⁴³⁵ Il. 1.5.

⁴³⁶ Hörandner (1974) Poem VI vv. 21-39.

⁴³⁷ Hörandner (1974) Poem VI vv. 40-9 The detailed analysis of this simile can be found in Simelidis (2010).

⁴³⁸ Hörandner (1974) Poem VI vv. 57-82.

⁴³⁹ Hörandner (1974) Poem VI vv. 105-53.

spoils, the Arabian horses of the emperor, the clergy, the representatives of the four demes, the senate and the relatives of the emperor. These groups were followed by the emperor himself who went on foot, even though the populace and the patriarch entreated him to mount the chariot⁴⁴⁰. This meekness notwithstanding, the emperor's appearance instilled awe: clad in armour and shining with gold, in one hand he carried a scepter topped with a cross, and in another a document, the contents of which was, however, unknown to Prodnomos⁴⁴¹. The emperor was joined by his four sons, who were hailed by the City's population along with their father⁴⁴². The last member of the procession was the patriarch who decided to pay homage to the emperor despite his illness and old age⁴⁴³. At the very end there was a chariot on which the emperor placed the icon of the Virgin, who was credited with the triumph of the Byzantines⁴⁴⁴. As the procession reached the Hagia Sophia, the emperor consecrated the chariot to God. He entered the Church with the patriarch and placed his crown on the altar⁴⁴⁵.

The poem is defined by the leitmotif of return: *νόστος* and cognate words feature in it five times⁴⁴⁶. The poem therefore can be seen as a new *Odyssey*, which tells the story of return to homeland after war. Unlike Odysseus, however, John does not have to resort to disguise and stratagem to reclaim the power over his homeland. The Byzantine emperor returns to the city in full glory, welcomed and celebrated by all members of the public.

John Komnenos – πολίπορθος

Poem VIII chronicles the capture of Gangra. Some elements are clearly borrowed from the Homeric texts. If Poem VI was modeled on the *Odyssey*, the major source of inspiration for

⁴⁴⁰ Hörandner (1974) Poem VI vv. 154-9.

⁴⁴¹ Hörandner (1974) Poem VI vv. 160-8.

⁴⁴² Hörandner (1974) Poem VI vv. 173-87.

⁴⁴³ Hörandner (1974) Poem VI vv. 188-98.

⁴⁴⁴ Hörandner (1974) Poem VI vv. 199-210.

⁴⁴⁵ Hörandner (1974) Poem VI vv. 211-20.

⁴⁴⁶ Hörandner (1974) Poem VI vv. 20, 21, 28, 111, 220.

Poem VIII was the *Iliad*. Like Homer, Prodromos focuses on battles, which often involve brutal violence: during the siege, the Byzantines had to endure the Persian arrows, which fell on them more intensely than leaves pulled off by the northern wind in autumn⁴⁴⁷. Despite the fact that war is a collective endeavour, Prodromos, like Homer, ascribes the success of the army to its leader rather than to average soldiers. The poem's protagonist is, of course, the emperor John Komnenos. At the beginning of the poem, John is invoked as *Κομνηνιάδης πολίπορθος*⁴⁴⁸; the first epithet is modeled on patronymics, such as *Λαερτιάδης*, extremely common in Homer, whereas the second is a direct borrowing from the Homeric poems⁴⁴⁹. The Byzantine emperor has a clear antagonist, the widow of Gangra's ruler, who took over command over the city under the Byzantine attack. The chief characters make long speeches introduced by Homeric formulae such as *φάτο μῦθον*⁴⁵⁰. In one of his speeches, John begs the Virgin to intervene, and the Virgin heeds his plea: the stones catapulted by the Byzantines hit a target in the very midst of Gangra, which becomes a turning point in the whole battle⁴⁵¹. The Virgin's intercession is reminiscent of the interventions of the Olympian gods in the Trojan war; Homeric gods would often direct the actions of their favorites and even take up the arms themselves to protect them. Another important Homeric feature are extended similes; they juxtapose two scenes, descriptions of which often run for several lines and start with *ὥς*: 'as (*ὥς*) Situation 1, so (*ὥς*) Situation 2'⁴⁵². In Prodromos, like in Homer, *comparandum* is usually a battle episode, whereas *comparatum* often describes wildlife or everyday life⁴⁵³.

Demotic Homer

The epic flair of Prodromos' compositions goes well beyond the poems written in hexameter.

When Prodromos employs the more accessible political verse, the image of the emperor and his

⁴⁴⁷ Hörandner (1974) Poem VIII vv. 121-40.

⁴⁴⁸ Hörandner (1974) Poem VIII v. 2.

⁴⁴⁹ Λαερτιάδης; Il. 2.173, Il. 3.200, Od. 5. 203; πολίπορθος Il. 2.278, Il. 5.333, Il. 8.372

⁴⁵⁰ Hörandner (1974) Poem VIII v. 35.

⁴⁵¹ Hörandner (1974) Poem VIII vv. 150-85.

⁴⁵² Ready (2011).

⁴⁵³ Scott (1974) Pp. 56-95; Hörandner (1974) Poem VIII vv. 87-94.

family remains pretty much the same. The Comnenian clan, on several occasions characteristically called *γένος ἡρωϊκόν*, are constantly presented as noble, ascetic and committed to defending the Christian cause against the infidels⁴⁵⁴. The diffusion of the Homeric ideal within Prodromos' non-hexameter poetry can be illustrated through the poem celebrating the birth of the *sebastokrator* Andronikos' son, Alexios. Having congratulated the parents on the birth of Alexios, Prodromos encourages them to provide ammunition for their son: corslet, helmet, shield, spear, sword – the list goes on and reaches the same level of detail which is only elsewhere found in Homeric arming scenes⁴⁵⁵. Later, Prodromos recommends that Alexios should be brought up as a new Achilles who would defend the Byzantines in the new 'Trojan war':

*παράδος τοῦτον Χείρωνι βελτίστῳ παιδοτρίβῃ,
τῆς ἵπικῆς καὶ τοξικῆς ἀρίστῳ διδασκάλῳ,
καὶ Φοίνικι παιδαγωγῷ σώφρονι καὶ κοσμίῳ.
τάχα γὰρ μάχη Τρωϊκὴ συγκροτηθῇ καὶ πάλιν,
καὶ πάλιν Ἑκτώρ καθ' ἡμῶν ἐπέλθοι ξιφηφόρος
ὅλας ῥηγνὺς τὰς φάλαγγας, κτιννὺς τοὺς ἀριστέας
καὶ πυρπολῶν τὸν ναύσταθμον καὶ βάλλων τοὺς συμμάχους,
καὶ δεηθῶμεν τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ πάλιν Ἀχιλλέως.*

*Entrust him to Chiron, the finest mentor, the best teacher of horsemanship and archery, and to Phoenix, prudent and sensible educator. For perhaps the Trojan war would break out once again, and again Hector would go against us bearing a sword, breaking entire phalanxes, slaying the best, and burning the harbor, and hurling our allies, and thus we would once again be in need of Achilles*⁴⁵⁶.

It is noteworthy that Alexios is presented not as a generic Homeric hero but specifically as Achilles who stands against Hector. This suggests that the Byzantines began to toy with the Hellenic identity (without, however, developing full identification with the Hellenes), whilst their perennial enemies, the Turks, appeared as the Trojans⁴⁵⁷.

Epic Hagiography

⁴⁵⁴ Hörandner (1974) Poems XXXIX v. 24, XLIV v. 145, LIV v. 35.

⁴⁵⁵ Hörandner (1974) Poem XLIV vv. 74-81; Cf. Hainsworth (1966).

⁴⁵⁶ Hörandner (1974) Poem XLIV vv. 84-92.

⁴⁵⁷ On the representation of foreign peoples in Prodromos' poetry see Stanković (2006).

While the heroic ideal is mostly applied to the emperor and his family, Prodromos also promotes military ideology through the valorisation of saints in his epigrams on the great martyrs Theodore, George and Demetrios⁴⁵⁸. The collection consists of seventeen pairs of epigrams, one in iambic trimeter, another in hexameter (plus an additional three epigrams in iambics). The richness of detail of these epigrams effectively make them hagiography in verse⁴⁵⁹. Hagiography in verse constitutes a distinct genre, which to a certain extent can be also exemplified by Prodromos' poetic life of Gregory of Nazianzus⁴⁶⁰. Most of the epigrams are concerned with St Theodore⁴⁶¹, which perhaps reflects Prodromos' desire to honour his patron saint. Prodromos' narrative on Theodore's life includes episodes on the saint's birth in Euchaita (1), slaying the dragon (3), destruction of the pagan idols (4), multiple tortures ordered by Licinius (6-13), taking down from the cross by the angel (14-5), and execution (16). Throughout these epigrams, Theodore is represented as a noble, steadfast and resilient warrior suffering for the true faith. Such representation is in keeping with the rise of military saints. While in the early Byzantine period many of them, like Demetrios, did not possess distinct military functions, during the Macedonian period they were formed into celestial *état-major* responsible for protecting the emperor and his army⁴⁶². In the Comnenian period, warrior saints often appear on coins, seals and objects of the minor arts⁴⁶³. Indeed, successful warfare for the Comnenians was unimaginable without reliance on divine protection: Anna Komnena, for example, gives an account of Alexios leading passionate prayers before the battle with the Scyths⁴⁶⁴. Like martyrs, the Comnenian heroes were ready to sacrifice themselves while defending the Christian cause. In the monody for Andronikos Komnenos, Prodromos states that during the military expedition the

⁴⁵⁸ Giannelli (1963a).

⁴⁵⁹ Efthymiadis (2014).

⁴⁶⁰ D'Ambrosi (2008).

⁴⁶¹ Giannelli (1963a) Epigrams 1-16.

⁴⁶² Walter (2003) P. 274-6; White (2013) Pp. 64-93.

⁴⁶³ Kazhdan and Constable (1982) Pp. 111-2.

⁴⁶⁴ Sewter (2003) Pp. 256-7.

sebastokrator forebore harsh conditions, which eventually led to his death; to a certain extent, Andronikos' death turns out to be a martyrdom⁴⁶⁵.

Poetry as Distinction

Excelling through Cultural Capital

So far, I have endeavoured to explain Prodromos' success by placing him within the ideological context of his time. The congeniality of Prodromos' poetry to the military and aristocratic values was, indeed, a major factor of his success, but not the only one. Equally important was that Prodromos *distinguished* himself from his fellow court writers. In the remaining part of this chapter, Prodromos' strategies of asserting his leading position among his contemporaries will be examined.

In his study of Byzantine Hellenism, Anthony Kaldellis describes Comnenian literature as the age of the Third Sophistic⁴⁶⁶. This label reflects increased refinement of rhetorical production as well as greater cultural and political influence of writers. Granted, intellectuals were not directly involved in the process of running the Empire as all important offices were reserved to members of aristocracy, who secured their posts through kinship with the emperor. Yet, even without having a formal role in the government, Byzantine men of letters were valued as ideologists and advisors. The high status of Byzantine writers was secured through what Pierre Bourdieu described as cultural capital, i.e., the set of skills, manners and preferences that mark individual's belonging to the upper class of society⁴⁶⁷. Although in correlation with social and economic capital, cultural capital cannot be reduced to one's material well-being and social standing: for an aspiring musician money and social connections are necessary but not sufficient unless they

⁴⁶⁵ Op de Coul (2007) H81 Pp. 225-6.

⁴⁶⁶ Kaldellis (2007) Pp. 225, 233-241.

⁴⁶⁷ Bourdieu (1986).

are supplemented by hard work. The manifestations of cultural capital are manifold but it is remarkable that Bourdieu singles out linguistic and literary competence (which often presupposes familiarity with ancient languages) among the most characteristic indices of cultural refinement⁴⁶⁸.

The latter consideration makes Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital an insightful instrument for approaching stratification of Byzantine society, where literacy was a necessary asset for anyone aspiring to a career in the imperial administration or the ecclesiastical system⁴⁶⁹. In his landmark study of the levels of style in Byzantine literature, Ihor Ševčenko provided rich evidence of deploying high style as '*a distinctive badge either of membership in the upper class or at least of association with it*'⁴⁷⁰. All the features of high style such as periodic structures, recondite vocabulary and reliance on classical tradition endowed highbrow literature with an air of obscurity and mystery, which set highbrow authors apart from average speakers of Byzantine Greek. In twelfth-century Constantinople, an ability to write in highbrow Greek was an entry requirement for rhetorical career but linguistic competency alone could not guarantee success in the competitive environment of rhetorical *theatra*. To catch the eye of an aristocratic patron, one had to offer something more creative than writing in pure Attic. Below I would like to argue that the chief innovative feature of Prodhomos' work was the transformation of the traditional rhetorical genres into poetry⁴⁷¹. Furthermore, the use of hexameter and the language charged with archaisms, *hapax legomena* and complicated syntax – the quintessential features of high style - made Prodhomos stand out amongst even the most sophisticated orators.

Farewell to Constantinople: Turning Rhetoric into Poetry

Prodhomos has multiple poems that follow the structural pattern of rhetorical declamations of different kinds: the aforementioned Poem VI, celebrating the campaigns of John II, is modeled

⁴⁶⁸ Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) Pp. 107-40.

⁴⁶⁹ Bernard (2011); Bernard (2014) Pp. 155-207.

⁴⁷⁰ Ševčenko (1981) P. 302. The importance of high style for cultural and political success is also highlighted in Gaul (2011).

⁴⁷¹ Cf. Zagklas (2017).

on the speech of arrival (*ἐπιβατήριος*); the verses on coronation of Alexios, the son of John II (Poem I) are modeled on the crown speech (*στεφανωτικός*); lamentation for the death of the son of Irene Doukaina (Poem II) is modeled on the monody (*μονωδία*)⁴⁷². The following discussion focuses on a farewell poem by Prodrornos as a case study for transforming a prose rhetorical composition into poetry.

The poem is written on the occasion of Prodrornos' intended departure from Constantinople with his friend Stephen Skylitzes, who was appointed a metropolitan of Trebizond⁴⁷³. Consisting of fifty verses, the poem is entitled *Συντακτήριοι Βυζαντίοις*, which recalls the rhetorical genre of *συντακτικός*, leave-taking speech. Indeed, Prodrornos in many respects closely follows rhetorical precepts for a farewell oration⁴⁷⁴. He praises the city's unique location, its cultural landscape (baths, streets, markets and, of course, churches), and inhabitants (in particular, philosophers)⁴⁷⁵. Yet, in certain key aspects, Prodrornos departs from accepted conventions. Despite Menander's template requiring the author to acknowledge his gratitude to the city he leaves⁴⁷⁶, Prodrornos is quite open about his disappointment with Constantinople. He complains that the city cares as much as a mother for foolish people but treats the men of learning like a negligent stepmother⁴⁷⁷. The frustration with devaluation of learning and desire to withdraw from public life are common *topoi* in Prodrornos' poetry but their appearance in his farewell poem also seems to be inspired by a specific literary work - Gregory of Nazianzus' farewell oration delivered at the Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 381⁴⁷⁸. Having failed to assert his leadership in the factious environment of the Council, Gregory resigned as archbishop of Constantinople. Before he left

⁴⁷² Russell and Wilson (1981) Pp. 95-115 (*ἐπιβατήριος*), Pp. 179-81 (*στεφανωτικός*), Pp. 201-7 (*μονωδία*).

⁴⁷³ Hörandner (1974) Poem LXXIX. See pp. 551-2 for historical commentary; Hörandner (2012b).

⁴⁷⁴ Russell and Wilson (1981) Pp. 195-201 (*συντακτικός*).

⁴⁷⁵ Hörandner (1974) Poem LXXIX vv. 1-13, 24-33.

⁴⁷⁶ Russell and Wilson (1981) P. 195.

⁴⁷⁷ Hörandner (1974) Poem LXXIX vv. 14-17.

⁴⁷⁸ Migne (1858) Oratio 42 *Συντακτήριοις, εἰς τὴν τῶν ῥν' ἐπισκόπων παρουσίαν*. Pp. 457-492; McGuckin (2001) Pp. 361-6.

the imperial city, he attended a celebratory event in his honour, where he delivered his valedictory speech. Gregory tries to be positive in evaluating his experience of the City and its Church but at some point he starts criticising the spirit of rivalry as well as luxury that got hold of his less devoted colleagues⁴⁷⁹. Thanks to the observations of Nikos Zagklas, we know that Gregory was an important source of inspiration for Prodromos⁴⁸⁰. In particular, Prodromos follows in the footsteps of Gregory by connecting his departure from Constantinople with the City's failure to recognize his achievements. At the same time, Prodromos departs from his model by elevating rhetoric to poetry.

Competing for the Patron's Attention: Prodromos vs. Basilakes

His use of poetic form allowed Prodromos to revitalise the existing tradition but, more importantly, it was also an effective tool of showcasing his literary superiority over his contemporaries. In twelfth-century Constantinople, learned members of aristocracy were often courted by a number of writers who had to compete with each other for support of their patrons. This competitive environment led to the development of an extremely dense literary landscape, whereby one subject matter (or occasion) was addressed by different writers in different ways. These could be complementary perspectives as is evident from Roman Shlyachtin's comparative study of Prodromos' and Nicholas Kallikles epitaphs on Empress Eirene: the former focuses on Eirene's public image, while the latter highlights her motherly virtues⁴⁸¹. Alternatively, contemporary authors could engage in literary and ideological polemics. Thus, Charis Messis and Pamela Armstrong show that in his *Life of Meletios*, Prodromos subverts certain episodes from the hagiographical work on the same saint by Nicholas of Methone⁴⁸².

⁴⁷⁹ Migne (1858) Oratio 42 Sections 20-22.

⁴⁸⁰ Zagklas (2016).

⁴⁸¹ Shlyakhtin (2019).

⁴⁸² Messis (2004); Armstrong (2010).

In a similar vein, I would like to highlight rhetorical competition behind the laudatory addresses to Alexios Aristenos, a high-ranking official involved in the affairs of both the State and the Church and renowned for his learning, as is evidenced by his commentary on the *Nomokanon*⁴⁸³. A significant amount of information about Aristenos has been made available to us through the writings of his contacts: Theodore Prodromos⁴⁸⁴, Nikephoros Basilakes⁴⁸⁵ and George Tornikes⁴⁸⁶. For Prodromos, Aristenos was an addressee of several letters, three speeches and a poem. Basilakes wrote for Aristenos a speech, while Tornikes addressed him with a letter. All three authors consider Aristenos as a potential benefactor and accordingly do not spare words of praise for him. All three panegyric addresses have remarkable overlaps: each author, for example, is amazed by Aristenos' versatility enabling him to pursue both ecclesiastical and political careers⁴⁸⁷. Prodromos and Basilakes are particularly close to each other in choosing their topics for praise. The overlaps between them include extended praise of Aristenos' language⁴⁸⁸, distress with Aristenos' temporal absence from Constantinople on a government mission to Hellas⁴⁸⁹, and representation of Aristenos' celebration as a theatrical performance⁴⁹⁰. Both Prodromos and Basilakes also draw special attention to Aristenos' justice⁴⁹¹ and the beneficial effect of his charity work⁴⁹². Despite all these similarities in content, the artistic strategies of Prodromos and Basilakes are quite different. Basilakes produced a prose panegyric

⁴⁸³ Papagianne, Troianos, Burgmann and Maksimovič (2019).

⁴⁸⁴ Op de Coul (2007) Letters: H88 Pp. 84-8, H89 Pp. 89-93, H93 Pp. 129-31, H94 Pp. 132-4, H95 Pp. 135-7, H96 Pp. 138-40; Speeches: H87 Pp. 173-83, H90 Pp. 184-97, H91 Pp. 198-208; Hörandner (1974) Poem LVI.

⁴⁸⁵ Garzya (1984) Pp. 10-25.

⁴⁸⁶ Darrouzès (1970) Pp. 175-77.

⁴⁸⁷ Prodromos: Op de Coul (2007) H91 P. 202 ln.106-17, Hörandner (1974) Poem LVIIb vv. 1-10; Basilakes: Garzya (1984) Pp. 23-24; Tornikes: Darrouzès (1970) P.176 ln. 9-13.

⁴⁸⁸ Prodromos: Op de Coul (2007) H90 Pp. 189 ln.151- P. 190 ln. 167; Basilakes: Garzya (1984) Pp. 16-17.

⁴⁸⁹ Prodromos: Op de Coul (2007) H87 Pp. 176 ln. 97- P. 177 ln. 113. Basilakes: Garzya (1984) P.19 ln. 3-24.

⁴⁹⁰ Prodromos: Op de Coul (2007) H87 P. 174 ln. 21-2, Hörandner (1974) Poem LVIIa vv. 39-43; Basilakes: Garzya (1984) P. 11 ln. 28, P. 16 ln. 27.

⁴⁹¹ Prodromos: Op de Coul (2007) H87 P. 175 ln. 61 – P. 176 ln. 80, Hörandner (1974) Poem LVIIc vv. 1-8; Basilakes: Garzya (1984) P. 19 ln. 25-35.

⁴⁹² Prodromos: Op de Coul (2007) H87 P. 177 ln. 108-13, Hörandner (1974) Poem LVIIb vv. 20-3; Basilakes: Garzya (1984) P.25 ln. 4-21.

that follows the traditional template of Menander Rhetor. He duly praises Aristenos' fatherland, extols the nobility of his ancestors (an exaggeration, whose credibility is undermined by Tornikes' remarks about the modest origins of Tornikes' family⁴⁹³), and dwells on the classical virtues (*φρόνησις, δικαιοσύνη, φιланθρωπία*) embodied by his addressee. Basilakes' conservative approach to celebrating a patron chimes with Elizabeth Jeffrey's general assessment of Basilakes as '*the most straightforward and least-trending*' author in her overview of literary developments during the rule of John II⁴⁹⁴.

Contrary to Basilakes, Prodromos is particularly innovative in courting Aristenos. Granted, Prodromos' letters and speeches in honour of Aristenos are quite conventional, but his poem celebrating the occasion of Aristenos' reappointments as *protekdikos, nomophylax* and *orphanotrophos* is a highly original literary experiment⁴⁹⁵. The poem is split into four parts, each of which is written in a different meter. In the first part, Prodromos indicates that he has already praised Aristenos in prose and schedography⁴⁹⁶ but feels that he also needs to perform a poetic homage⁴⁹⁷. Setting out the structure of his encomium, Prodromos emphasises the diversity of his poetic repertoire: iambics, hexameters, dactylic pentameters and anacreontics. Prodromos indicates that the order of appearance of these meters is determined by their merits. In '*the battle of meters*' (*στίχων καινή μάχη*) hexameter gains the upper hand: '*Homer's mouth*', - explains Prodromos, - '*will roar most greatly. Who could possibly bear his roaring without praying that the earth swallows him straightaway?*'⁴⁹⁸ Despite the implied hierarchy of meters, all poems complement each other: iambics serve as an introduction to the whole cycle, hexameters focus on Aristenos' charity work in his capacity of *orphanotrophos*, pentameters on his activity as a judge, whilst anacreontics round off the poetic cycle with wishes for Aristenos' wellbeing.

⁴⁹³ Darrouzès (1970) P. 177 ln. 1.

⁴⁹⁴ Jeffreys, E. (2016) P. 113.

⁴⁹⁵ Hörandner (1974) Poem LVI; Zagklas (2018).

⁴⁹⁶ Vassis (1993-4); Agapitos (2015); Agapitos (2017).

⁴⁹⁷ Hörandner (1974) Poem LVIa vv. 9-26.

⁴⁹⁸ Hörandner (1974) Poem LVIa vv. 55-8.

While the twelfth century encomia were produced both in prose and verse, poetry seems to have not been as widespread as prose⁴⁹⁹. Remarkably, Basilakes begins his encomium of Aristenos by dismissing poetry⁵⁰⁰. He acknowledges the magic effect of Orpheus' songs that safeguarded the Argonauts on their journey for the Golden Fleece but indicates that he will not invoke the renowned poet, Calliope, or other muses. He adds that the proverbial Homeric ten tongues are of no use to him as they are overshadowed by the excellence of the language of Aristenos⁵⁰¹. Considering that employment of different poetic tongues, not least Homeric, was one of one the signature principles of Prodromos' poetics⁵⁰², Basilakes' remarks could be seen as a polemical attack against Prodromos. Given that Basilakes had to compete with Prodromos not only for aristocratic patronage but also students, his remarks could reflect the bitter antagonism between the two leading intellectuals of the time.

Prodromos, in his turn, could be even more explicit about his competitive attitude. Prodromos' aspiration to dominate the rhetorical market is especially pronounced in his monody on Stephen Skylitzes⁵⁰³. At the end of the text, Prodromos uses a *synkrisis*: the Homeric hero Achilles lamenting the death of his friend Patroclus invited heroes to compete in different sports (boxing, racing, discus throw etc.) in memory of the deceased⁵⁰⁴. In contrast to Achilles, Prodromos does not intend to invite any of his learned colleagues as long as he alone is able to celebrate Stephen Skylitzes' life in different ways: through monody, schedography and poems in various meters. Celebrating Aristenos with exactly the same triad – prose, schedography and poetic ensemble –

⁴⁹⁹ This conclusion can be drawn from Paul Magdalino's analysis of Manuel's panegyrics in Magdalino (1993) Pp. 413-88. Among Magdalino's sources in the given chapter only two – Prodromos and Manganeios Prodromos – opted for poetry, while the rest tended to follow the tradition of prose panegyric established by Menander Rhetor.

⁵⁰⁰ Garzya (1984) Pp. 10-11.

⁵⁰¹ Il. 2.489

⁵⁰² Zagklas (2018).

⁵⁰³ Op de Coul (2007) H86 Pp. 264-86.

⁵⁰⁴ Op de Coul (2007) H86 P.274 ln. 274 - P. 275 ln. 281.

Prodromos showcases his literary universality, which creates an impression that all other writers are redundant.

Competition at School

As rhetorical performance in the *theatra* and at court were tightly connected to school practices⁵⁰⁵, it comes as no surprise that competition between aspiring authors as well as their teachers often took place within an educational setting. The evidence from the eleventh century suggests the prevalence of grammatical and rhetorical contests between the schools, where a successful performance could secure a brilliant career for a pupil and strengthen the reputation of his master⁵⁰⁶. In the twelfth-century, the spirit of competition between court writers involved in education was no less prominent: Nikephoros Basilakes boasted about his pedagogical skill (some methods of schedography were even named after him)⁵⁰⁷, while John Tzetzes famously accused his colleague of plagiarising his commentary on Lykophron's *Alexandra*⁵⁰⁸. Prodromos also follows this trend of promoting his teaching talents at the expense of others but does this in a very original way. Among Prodromos' satires that expose the incompetence of representatives of various professions, there is one that targets the 'ignorant or self-proclaimed grammarian'⁵⁰⁹. In this satire, Prodromos' *persona* challenges an anonymous teacher of grammar to prove his expertise. This 'examination' has the form of a platonic dialogue but the self-proclaimed grammarian appears to be nothing but a silent straw man. Meanwhile, Prodromos not only demonstrates his conversance with issues of ancient grammatical theories, etymology and literary criticism, but he also gives a master class of school rhetoric through deployment of proverbs, mythological examples and *synkrisis*⁵¹⁰. The primary concern of 'The *Ignorant or Self-*

⁵⁰⁵ Zagklas (2014) Pp. 73-87.

⁵⁰⁶ Bernard (2014) Pp. 253-90.

⁵⁰⁷ Garzya (1973).

⁵⁰⁸ Leone (1995) Ep. 42.

⁵⁰⁹ Migliorini (2010) Ἀμαθὴς ἢ παρὰ ἑαυτῷ γραμματικός. Pp. 29-49.

⁵¹⁰ Marciniak (2020) Pp. 135-7.

proclaimed Grammarian’ is an assertion of Prodromos’ superiority as a teacher of grammar.

However, Prodromos also seems to make a point that he could have become a star orator, had he not preferred poetry to prose.

Recognition

While almost every author in the eleventh and twelfth centuries appears to be arrogant and conceited, not every one of them achieved the recognition that matched their high ambitions. When it comes to Prodromos, it can be safely stated that his assertive self-promotion paid off. The sheer volume of Prodromos’ poems that have survived to the modern day is already indicative of his popularity as a court poet⁵¹¹. Granted, Prodromos did not seem to have an official title that acknowledged his teaching or literary achievements. Yet, there is intriguing evidence that suggests that Prodromos may have received an official recognition on a grand scale. In a letter to Manuel I, John Tzetzes discusses the emperor’s intention to honor with a triumphal procession and coronation a distinguished writer (*μέλλεις τιμᾶν τὸν τοῦς λόγους τιμήσαντα*), to whom Tzetzes refers as a philosopher from Panion⁵¹². Paul Magdalino draws attention to the fact that a lemma to one of the Prodromos’ poems identifies the author’s name as Paniotes and suggests that there is hardly a better candidate for Manuel’s award than Prodromos⁵¹³.

Remarkably, Prodromos’ fame spread beyond the court and even Constantinople. In a letter sent to Prodromos from Philippopolis, Michael Italikos says that in his leisure time he enjoys the recital of his friend’s works by a monk Michael, who knows every Prodromos’ poem and piece

⁵¹¹ For manuscript tradition of Prodromos’ works see: Hörandner (1974) Pp. 135-74; Papagiannis (1997) Vol. 1 Pp. 14-163; Zagklas (2014) Pp. 100-63.

⁵¹² Leone (1995) Ep. 97. P. 141.

⁵¹³ Magdalino (2012) P. 23. This identification was, however, challenged in Rhoby and Zagklas (2011) who suggest that Paniotes stood for Constantine Manasses.

of prose by heart⁵¹⁴. While we should not perhaps take this claim at face value, it is important to note that Italikos praises Michael for combining poetic and prose recitals (*ἐλάλει ἔμμετρά τε καὶ ἄμετρα καὶ ἀμέτρως ἀμφοτέρω*)⁵¹⁵, which replicates Prodromos' penchant for genre hybridity. Yet, Michael's recitals are not an exact copy of Prodromos' works. Italikos ironically remarks that due to his Boeotian, as opposed to Attic, origin, Michael is not completely reliable in reproducing Prodromos' text⁵¹⁶. Surprisingly, Italikos does not blame Michael for diverting from Prodromos' text, but teases Prodromos by stating that the monk's variations are more enjoyable than the original. Translating Prodromos' poetry into vernacular language, Michael effectively engages in a *paraphrasis*, an activity which aims to make highbrow literature accessible to a wider audience⁵¹⁷. Prodromos, therefore, emerges not only as a court poet but also as the people's poet.

Prodromos' fame outlived him. One of his students, Niketas Eugenianos, wrote a monody, in which he recognised Prodromos' excellence as a court poet (*[γλῶσσαν] σκηπτούχων νίκας ὕμνοῦσαν*), philosopher and teacher⁵¹⁸. Furthermore, the anonymous satire *Anacharsis*, attributed to Eugenianos, features allusions to Prodromos' works along with quotations from Scripture and classical sources⁵¹⁹. Furthermore, the satire's protagonist, a maltreated intellectual Aristagoras, addresses Lady Grammar in the same way as Niketas Eugenianos expresses his admiration for Prodromos⁵²⁰. Considering that Lady Grammar stood for the ideal of decency and learning in the cruel and vulgar world of the *Anacharsis*, this parallelism reflects the tremendous respect that Comnenian authors had for Prodromos. Prodromos' influence lasted beyond the Comnenian

⁵¹⁴ Gautier (1972) Ep. 1. Pp. 59-65.

⁵¹⁵ Gautier (1972) P. 64 ln. 6.

⁵¹⁶ Gautier (1972) P. 64 ln. 7-9 Προσετίθει γάρ τι καὶ ἄφ' ἑαυτοῦ ταῖς σαῖς χάρισι; Hörandner (1991).

⁵¹⁷ On the paraphrasis see Pp. 136-7.

⁵¹⁸ Petit (1902) P. 452.

⁵¹⁹ Christidis (1984).

⁵²⁰ Cullhed (2020) P. 219.

period: an anonymous rhetorical manual dated to the thirteenth century mentions Prodromos' name among the poets who can serve as models for the composition of iambics⁵²¹.

Conclusions

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Byzantine Empire faced multiple security threats from the neighboring polities that culminated in the Crusades. In response to this challenge, the Byzantine elite centered their aspirations around warfare, attaching special importance to military prowess along with nobility. The emergence of military ideology triggered a rise in the popularity of Homer, whose epic ideals perfectly suited the demands of the age. As a consequence, orators and historiographers were keen to weave into their narrative multiple allusions to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, while their fellow *pepaideumenoi* made the Homeric poems the object of scrupulous philological research. Prodromos experienced arguably the most profound influence of Homer. Going beyond allusions to Homer, Prodromos also adopted the form of Homeric poems (that is, the hexameter) as well as their structural elements such as invocations, speeches and extended simile. Given that epic poetry had been practically dormant since the end of Late Antiquity, the revival of the Homeric Muse was truly a literary *tour de force*, which made Prodromos a highly sought-after author at the imperial court. While the hexameter was traditionally associated with military achievements, Prodromos started to use it in celebration of other occasions including departures from the City, funerary lamentations and office appointments⁵²². In the literary environment dominated by rhetoric, the deployment of poetic form was an innovation that showcased Prodromos' command of the culturally prestigious highbrow Greek. Having asserted his superiority over other Comnenian writers, Prodromos acquired the status similar to that of a poet laureate, which he enjoyed during his lifetime as well as after his death.

⁵²¹ Hörandner (2012a); Rhoby (2019) P. 277.

⁵²² The same applies even to epistolary petitions: Zagklas (2021).

Chapter IV

SUBVERTING THE COMNENIAN SYSTEM

Introduction

It is a long standing consensus that Comnenian Byzantium did not encourage open criticism of authority⁵²³. In his famous article, Robert Browning highlights the rampant culture of oppression, documented in dozens of trials of philosophers, orators and spiritual leaders charged with unorthodox views, and concludes that *‘intellectual climate, the structure of the education of the elite, the prospects of a career, all conspired to turn the young away from a dangerously critical attitude, and towards an elegant, learned and sterile mandarinism’*⁵²⁴.

Granted, some intellectuals had the courage to stand up against the imperial authority. Leo of Chalcedon opposed the confiscation of church property carried out by the government of Alexios I, which resulted in his deposition and exile⁵²⁵. In addition, several twelfth-century historians resisted imperial despotism by developing new currents of Kaiserkritik, which increasingly relied on Roman traditions of constitutionalism⁵²⁶. It is telling, however, that the most vocal critic of the Comnenian abuse of power, Niketas Choniates, completed his work once the Comnenian system (and thus its apparatus of oppression) had already weakened in the wake of the Fourth Crusade. In any case, beyond providing glimpses into these rare instances of dissent, Comnenian literature creates an impression of being dominated by disinterested antiquarianism, tamed rhetoric and flattery of those in power⁵²⁷. Does this, however, mean that Byzantine

⁵²³ Magdalino (1991); Magdalino (1993) Pp. 382-412; Kaldellis (2007) Pp. 225-233; Trizio (2017b).

⁵²⁴ Browning (1975a) P. 17.

⁵²⁵ See, however, Ryder (2017), who challenges the conventional view of Leo as a brave champion of free speech and explains his behavior in terms of internal ecclesiastical struggle.

⁵²⁶ Tinnefeld (1971); Magdalino (1983).

⁵²⁷ In this respect, Browning’s assessment is extremely indicative of scholars’ perception of Byzantine conformism, Browning (1975a) P. 5: ‘It is an age of uncreative erudition, of sterile

authors actually favored the society, governance and authorities that they so effusively exalted? Due to the recent scholarly efforts in interpreting subliminal messages of Byzantine texts, there is a growing evidence suggesting that the answer to this question is ‘No’. In recent decades, scholars have been keen to mine ostensibly conventional and conformist pieces of art and literature for the signs of what is commonly referred to as subversion. According to Dimiter Angelov, ‘*subversion is a challenge from the inside; it differs with its subtle methods from invective or openly expressed critique*’⁵²⁸. Due to its subtlety, subversion could take various forms, many of which have been studied in a dedicated volume edited by Dimiter Angelov and Michael Saxby⁵²⁹. Rather than making an overview of all existing methods of approaching subversion, I would like to emphasise that mimesis and intertextuality are often recognised as the most common and effective subversive strategies. In his systematic study of Aesopian language, which, despite its focus on Russian literature, could provide methodological basis for the studies of subversion in Byzantium, Lev Loseff gives rich evidence for imitations camouflaging critical attitudes to contemporary reality.⁵³⁰ To appreciate the critical potential of mimesis in Byzantine literature, one may consider the twelfth-century Lucianesque satire *Timarion*, which was often examined specifically as a case study of subversion⁵³¹. Thus, Margaret Alexiou has detected intertextual irony in the exaggerated praise of the *dux* presiding over the Festival of Saint Demetrios⁵³². Dimitris Krallis has advanced this argument by showing how displacement of the action into the Hades allowed the author of the *Timarion* to express his dislike for the Comnenian establishment⁵³³.

good taste. Its typical products are the elegant but flat poetry of Theodore Prodromus... the strained antiquarianism of Anna Comnena's history of her father's reign, the endless series of panegyrics and funeral orations...’

⁵²⁸ Angelov (2013) P. 7.

⁵²⁹ Angelov and Saxby (2013).

⁵³⁰ Loseff (1984).

⁵³¹ Nilsson (2016a).

⁵³² Alexiou (1983).

⁵³³ Krallis (2013).

As a successful court poet, Prodromos does not seem to be the most likely candidate to challenge the order of the Comnenian Empire. However, despite his unprecedented popularity, Prodromos throughout his career experienced several setbacks, some of which even prompted him to openly voice his discontentment with the level of support he received from his patrons⁵³⁴. When celebrating the emperor's extraordinary military achievements, Prodromos often made digressions that revealed his own dire personal circumstances. In one of his poems, Prodromos praised the emperor for defeating the external enemies but emphasised that he still needed to tackle the most formidable internal enemy – Prodromos' poverty⁵³⁵. These requests were not always heeded, and at some point Prodromos even lost access to the emperor. As a result, Prodromos was no longer able to produce versified press-releases (to use the term coined by Michael Jeffreys), which might have been one of the major sources of his income⁵³⁶. Trying to restore his relationship with the emperor, Prodromos used his connection with his former student Theodore Stypeiotes, who rose to the office of *epi tou kanikleiou*⁵³⁷. However, the evidence of Prodromos' later poems suggests that during Manuel's reign he never retrieved the status of the poet laureate he had enjoyed under John II⁵³⁸.

Given the precariousness of Prodromos' position, this chapter aims to explore Prodromos' strategies for questioning the fairness of the social and political order. First, it seeks to identify signs of disaffection in Prodromos' writings addressed to those members of aristocracy, who were at odds with the emperor. For this purpose, this chapter explores Prodromos' works dedicated to Isaac and Anna Komnene, each of whom had accumulated enough social capital to challenge the ruling emperor. This section draws particular attention to Prodromos' use of classical intertextuality, which, as I will argue, serves two main purposes: 1) communicating

⁵³⁴ Hörandner (1974) P. 26.

⁵³⁵ Hörandner (1974) Poem XV vv. 81-90; Bazzani (2007a).

⁵³⁶ Jeffreys (2011).

⁵³⁷ Kresten (1978).

⁵³⁸ Hörandner (1974) Poem LXXI; Stanković (2007).

veiled criticism; 2) endorsing Anna's and Isaac's intellectualism as an alternative ideal to militarism promoted by the imperial ideology. The second strategy of subversion I will consider is the use of allegory. Specifically, I will offer a reading of the poem entitled *Friendship in Exile*, which identifies Friendship's 'disgrace' as strife within the imperial family. I will demonstrate that along with expressing his regret over *Friendship's* harassment by *Animosity*, Prodromos expresses his dislike for the prevalence of militarism and duplicity in the Byzantine court culture. Finally, I will explore the subversive potential of classical mimesis. In particular, I will demonstrate that the Lucianesque dialogue *Amarantos* satirizes the Byzantine *theatron* and its culture of hypocrisy.

Isaac Komnenos: the Darling of Intellectuals

As it has already been noted in the previous discussion, Prodromos' mishaps within the court prompted him to seek support from aristocrats, who were cross with the emperor. The most notorious example is John's II brother, Isaac⁵³⁹. Initially, after Alexios' death, Isaac helped his brother to win the imperial throne in the family strife. Although John II repaid Isaac's support by granting him the title of *sebastokrator*, the alliance between the two brothers subsequently broke. Around 1130, Isaac, together with his sons, fled to the Seljuk Sultan of Ikonion and reportedly even attempted to create a coalition against his brother⁵⁴⁰. Having failed, Isaac reconciled with John II, and in 1138 returned to Constantinople⁵⁴¹. The peace, however, did not last long. In 1139, Isaac's son defected to the Turks, and soon thereafter Isaac himself was exiled to Heraclea Pontica⁵⁴². After the accession of Manuel, Isaac remained under suspicion. In his final years, Isaac retired to Thrace, where he founded the monastery of Kosmosoteira at Bera (modern Feres). Isaac himself composed the monastery's *typikon*, which shows his deep interest in

⁵³⁹ Hörandner (1974) P. 390; Varzos (1984) Pp. 238-54.

⁵⁴⁰ Magoulas (1984) P. 19; Varzos (1984) Pp. 239-43.

⁵⁴¹ Varzos (1984) Pp. 243-4.

⁵⁴² Varzos (1984) P. 244.

learning and literature⁵⁴³. His patronage of Prodromos provides further evidence for his literary tastes. Prodromos composed at least four pieces for the *sebastokrator*: a poem about Isaac's building activities, one other epigram and two encomia, one in verse, another in prose⁵⁴⁴. The first poem, written in the person of Isaac himself, describes his wanderings, presumably in the early 1130s, and his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, during which he funded a water supply system for the monastery of John the Baptist on the Jordan river⁵⁴⁵. Having described the challenges and high cost of the aqueduct construction, Isaac asks John the Baptist for the spiritual reward for his benefaction. As Isaac refers to himself as returnee, this poem might have been written in the context of the reconciliation between two brothers⁵⁴⁶. This suggestion is supported by the expressions of repentance at the very end of the text⁵⁴⁷.

However, in spite of the compelling evidence to the contrary, the continuing rivalry between John II and Isaac cannot, in fact, be ruled out. Prodromos' panegyric to Isaac suggests that even immediately after the reconciliation, Isaac might have longed for more power. His speech to Isaac represents the addressee sitting on a throne surrounded by the personifications of the cardinal virtues (i.e., Fortitude, Prudence, Justice and Temperance) and the liberal arts (Grammar, Rhetoric and, most importantly, Philosophy)⁵⁴⁸. Prodromos entrusts the praise of Isaac to Philosophy⁵⁴⁹. Taking over, Lady Philosophy complains about the abuse that she has suffered from Ares, the God of War⁵⁵⁰. She then accuses Ares of stripping her of royal privileges and relegating her to the level of commoners⁵⁵¹. To challenge Ares' decision, she invokes the

⁵⁴³ Petit (1908); Varzos (1984) Pp. 238-54; Pontani (2007); Lovato (2021).

⁵⁴⁴ Hörandner (1974) Poems XL-XLII; Kurtz (1908); Zagklas (2017) Pp. 241-2.

⁵⁴⁵ Hörandner (1974) Poem XL.

⁵⁴⁶ Hörandner (1974) P. 391.

⁵⁴⁷ Hörandner (1974) Poem XL vv. 47-54.

⁵⁴⁸ Kurtz (1908) P. 114 ln. 94 – P. 115 ln. 127.

⁵⁴⁹ Kurtz (1908) ln. 128-38.

⁵⁵⁰ Kurtz (1908) P. 115 ln. 139-45.

⁵⁵¹ Kurtz (1908) P. 115-6 ln. 146-53.

emperors of classical antiquity, who supported philosophical endeavours⁵⁵². Yet, Ares dismisses them as marginal and obsolete. In Isaac's case, everything is different. Philosophy recounts how she nurtured him bringing him to the summit of learning⁵⁵³. Since Isaac has mastered the Queen of Sciences (an ambiguous expression: it seems to refer to Philosophy but can also hint at the control of the capital city – Constantinople), Lady Philosophy was empowered to flaunt her privileges in front of Ares, who bows his head in shame⁵⁵⁴. The meaning of this allegory is clear. In challenging the supremacy of Ares, Philosophy expresses her frustration over John II's preoccupation with military matters at the expense of learning. The imaginary enthronement of Isaac reflects Prodromos' support of the *sebastokrator*'s ambitions to become the emperor⁵⁵⁵. What is striking, however, is that around the same time, Prodromos praised John II for his war efforts⁵⁵⁶. Ironically, while celebrating John II's military achievements, Prodromos makes use of the image of Ares, who in this case symbolises not the narrow-mindedness of war, but the military prowess necessary for defending the empire⁵⁵⁷. The ease with which Prodromos customises his rhetoric verifies the claim that he was a freelancer, oscillating between different patrons, rather than a full-time court poet.

Anna Komnene: Pleading with a Comrade in Misfortune

Anna Komnene was another of Prodromos' addressees who was at odds with the ruling emperor⁵⁵⁸. The eldest daughter of Alexios and his empress Irene, she was married to Nikephoros Bryennios, who was the son of the general defeated by Alexios⁵⁵⁹. As Alexios approached the end of his life, Irene, who was actively involved in governing the Empire, incited

⁵⁵² Kurtz (1908) P. 116 ln. 153-8.

⁵⁵³ Kurtz (1908) P. 116 ln. 162-79.

⁵⁵⁴ Kurtz (1908) P. 116 ln. 179-85.

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. Magdalino (1993) Pp. 193-5.

⁵⁵⁶ Hörandner (1974) Poem VI.

⁵⁵⁷ Hörandner (1974) Poem VI vv. 1-6.

⁵⁵⁸ Hörandner (1974) Pp. 376-7.

⁵⁵⁹ Carile (1968); Carile (1969).

her son-in-law to seize the throne⁵⁶⁰. However, Irene's son John was more prompt to occupy the palace and claim the imperial office for himself⁵⁶¹. According to Niketas Choniates, John's ascension caused resentment among some members of aristocracy, which resulted in a plot against the emperor instigated by Anna⁵⁶². As the plot failed, Anna had to retire to a Kecharitomene nunnery, where she, however, enjoyed significant freedom as she resided in imperial chambers and did not become a nun until the very end of her life⁵⁶³. Considering Anna's privileged position, Leonora Neville aptly suggests that Anna's withdrawal to the nunnery was caused, not by her disgrace, but rather her desire to establish a reputation as a pious woman, which would allow Anna to regularly converse with learned men without incurring suspicions of sexual licentiousness⁵⁶⁴. In any case, later in her life, Anna composed the *Alexiad*, a panegyric of her father disguised as history, which negatively assessed some aspects of imperial policies pursued by John II and Manuel I⁵⁶⁵. Despite being known to posterity for the *Alexiad*, Anna was praised by her contemporaries not as a historian but as a scholar and philosopher, who was instrumental in reviving the traditions of classical learning⁵⁶⁶. Indeed, under Anna's patronage the circle of such philosophers as Eustratios of Nicae and Michael of Ephesus produced new commentaries to the neglected works of Aristotle⁵⁶⁷.

In the light of Anna's appreciation of learning, it is no wonder that Prodrornos dedicated one of his poems to her⁵⁶⁸. The poem, written in the hexameter, starts with an invocation: Prodrornos apostrophises the Trinity, angels, the firmament – the list continues - before finally mentioning Anna, who is praised as the royal nursling of learning (*θρέμμα λόγου βασιλεία*)⁵⁶⁹. The invocation conjures up the beginning of a typical classical hymn, in which a narrator summons a

⁵⁶⁰ Magoulias (1984) P. 5.

⁵⁶¹ Magoulias (1984) P. 6.

⁵⁶² Magoulias (1984) Pp. 8-9; Hill (2000).

⁵⁶³ Neville (2017) Pp. 81-2.

⁵⁶⁴ Neville (2016) Pp. 133-40.

⁵⁶⁵ Sewter (2003); Magdalino (2000).

⁵⁶⁶ Neville (2016) Pp. 113-131.

⁵⁶⁷ Barber and Jenkins (2009).

⁵⁶⁸ Hörandner (1974) Poem XXXVIII.

⁵⁶⁹ Hörandner (1974) Poem XXXVIII vv. 1-8.

god, whose invocation is concluded with a prayer⁵⁷⁰. The adaptation of this hymnic feature has a pragmatic function because Prodromos' poem is effectively a cry for help:

*σοὶ γὰρ ἐμῆς κραδίης ἀπερεύγομαι ἄλγεα πυκνά·
σοὶ γὰρ ἐμῶν παθέων πολυπληθέα κύκλα μυθεῖμαι.*

To you I pour out the intense pain of my heart, to you I recount my ever-recurring sufferings⁵⁷¹.

Prodromos' lament focuses on the severe financial difficulties he experiences. Following the advice of his father, who dissuaded young Theodore from a military career on the grounds of his physical weakness, Prodromos embarked on a toilsome academic journey, which included the study of grammar, rhetoric and philosophy⁵⁷². He successfully completed his studies only to discover that his abstract knowledge had no practical value resulting in him being paid less than a craftsman⁵⁷³. Prodromos reveals his dependence on aristocratic patrons. In an elaborate Homeric simile, Prodromos compares his initial happiness about being a servant of 'wise lords' with a joy of a charioteer, who has won a race and expects a great prize (ἀέθλιον) for his victory⁵⁷⁴. The metaphor of chariot races is suggestive of the reversal of Prodromos' fortunes and, indeed, very soon the poet complains that after receiving several prizes (ἀέθλια) he fell into disgrace. The latter message is not communicated directly but encoded in a proverbial comparison with Mandrabolos, whose story, according to ancient antiquarians, was the following:

Mandrabolos, having found treasure, first dedicated to the gods a golden sheep, then one of silver, and finally one of bronze⁵⁷⁵.

⁵⁷⁰ Russell and Wilson (1981) Pp. 25-9.

⁵⁷¹ Hörandner (1974) Poem XXXVIII vv. 9-10.

⁵⁷² Hörandner (1974) Poem XXXVIII vv. 45-62.

⁵⁷³ Hörandner (1974) Poem XXXVIII vv. 63-74.

⁵⁷⁴ Hörandner (1974) Poem XXXVIII vv. 88-96.

⁵⁷⁵ Hörandner (1974) Poem XXXVIII vv. 97-100; Schneidewin and von Leutsch (1839) Centuria 4 Section 62. Most paroemiographers quote the proverb related to Mandrabolos in the following form: Ἐπὶ τὰ Μανδραβόλου: ἐπὶ τῶν ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον προκοπτόντων (In the situation of Mandrabolos: on something which got worse).

While in Antiquity references to impoverished Mandrabolos are quite scarce, in twelfth-century Byzantium, numerous intellectuals including John Zonaras, George of Antioch and Michael Choniates, use Mandrabolos' story as an example illustrating the change of fortunes⁵⁷⁶. The monetary nature of Mandrabolos' misfortune allows Prodromos to signal that he suffers financial deprivation, while the proverbial form ensures that Prodromos' complaint does not sound blunt.

Another aspect of Prodromos' Aesopian language involves intertextuality. In the proemium of his poem, Prodromos addresses Anna as a beautiful shoot of a beautiful olive tree (*καλῆς καλὸν ἔρνος ἐλαίης*)⁵⁷⁷. The expression *ἔρνος ἐλαίης* is rare: it occurs only once in Homer, while the later appearances are restricted to Homer's imitators and commentators⁵⁷⁸. To fully appreciate what Prodromos means by calling Anna *ἔρνος ἐλαίης*, it may be helpful to consider the original context of this phrase. As it happens, Homer employs it in an extended simile that elucidates the killing of Trojan hero Euphorbus by Menelaus during the fight over Patroclus' body.

Dramatising the premature death of a young man, Homer conjures up an image of an olive tree's offshoot, which is carefully reared but later uprooted by a tempest⁵⁷⁹. Taking into consideration that Euphorbus was slain by the *king* Menelaus, Prodromos might have used Homeric intertext to represent Anna as a victim of the emperor's wrath and to express his sympathy for her downfall. The Homeric mimesis thus allows Prodromos to express his opinion about the subject which he could not discuss openly.

'Friendship in Exile' as a Political Allegory

If in the poem to Anna Prodromos resorts to his antiquarian knowledge and intertextuality to communicate hidden meaning, in another poem, entitled *Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ* (*On Friendship*

⁵⁷⁶ Büttner-Wobst (1897) P. 550; Sideras (2006) Section 5 ln 15, Section 6 ln 1; Kolovou (2001) Ep. 142 ln. 28.

⁵⁷⁷ Hörandner (1974) Poem XXXVIII v. 8.

⁵⁷⁸ Il. 17. 53.

⁵⁷⁹ Il. 17.53-60.

in *Exile*), he deploys subversion through allegory⁵⁸⁰. The poem in question represents a dramatic dialogue between the personification of Friendship (*Φιλία*) and a Stranger (*Ξένος*). The drama can be roughly divided into three parts. In the introduction, the Stranger encounters the Lady Friendship, who shocks him with her sorry sight: her eyes are full of tears, her hair is disheveled, and her purple robe turned into rags⁵⁸¹. The Stranger learns that Friendship's misery is caused by her unjust treatment by her husband, the World (*Κόσμος*), and Friendship is prepared to leave the World⁵⁸². Friendship invites the Stranger to sit under a pine tree, and relates her story. This monologue, which constitutes the main body of the text, is effectively an elaborate self-praise. Friendship argues that the world rests on her ability to bring the opposites into harmony⁵⁸³. In society, Friendship is also indispensable: she ensures harmonious interaction of fellow citizens and facilitates the division of labour⁵⁸⁴. Love, of course, is also a product of *Φιλία*: Prodomos provides here several examples of the all-embracing power of erotic desire, which are also known from romantic novels⁵⁸⁵. The World failed to appreciate his wife; encouraged by Folly (*Μωρία*), he brings into his house a mistress, Animosity (*Ἐχθρα*), and his legitimate consort, Friendship, is made homeless⁵⁸⁶. Friendship is completely baffled by her husband's actions: drawing from mythological *exempla*, she makes a *synkrisis*, which shows that Friendship is essential in any human affair, whereas Animosity only brings destruction⁵⁸⁷. Concluding her pre-departure monologue, Friendship foresees the devastation that the World faces with Animosity⁵⁸⁸. The Stranger feels sorry for the future state of the world and he invites her to share his modest home and table, which is effectively a proposal of a new marriage⁵⁸⁹. At first,

⁵⁸⁰ Zagklas (2014) Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ. Pp. 326-62.

⁵⁸¹ Zagklas (2014) Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ. vv. 1-14.

⁵⁸² Zagklas (2014) Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ. vv. 15-31.

⁵⁸³ Zagklas (2014) Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ. vv. 53-108.

⁵⁸⁴ Zagklas (2014) Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ. vv. 109-25.

⁵⁸⁵ Zagklas (2014) Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ. vv. 126-39. For analogy with romantic novels see Zagklas (2014) Pp. 347-8.

⁵⁸⁶ Zagklas (2014) Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ. vv. 158-65.

⁵⁸⁷ Zagklas (2014) Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ. vv. 169-247.

⁵⁸⁸ Zagklas (2014) Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ. vv. 248-61.

⁵⁸⁹ Zagklas (2014) Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ. vv. 262-73.

Friendship is reluctant to accept as she is overwhelmed by the negative memories of her married life⁵⁹⁰ but the Stranger convinces Friendship to change her mind⁵⁹¹. After making the Stranger take a vow to keep all his promises, Friendship agrees to start a new life with him⁵⁹².

The poem has received only limited scholarly attention, and some discussions of the text are out of date. Ernesto Passamonti denies the poem any literary value and, accordingly, limits his critical analysis to the manner in which Prodhromos christianizes ancient philosophical doctrines⁵⁹³. Pablo Cavallero in a more recent article attempts to judge Prodhromos' poem on its own merits but his method prioritises the formal analysis of language, meter and rhetorical tropes over discussion of the poem's place in literary culture of twelfth-century Constantinople⁵⁹⁴. Significant progress in our understanding of the poem has been made by Nikos Zagklas' commentary, in which he divides the poem into idioms, motives and *topoi* that were current in the Comnenian literature⁵⁹⁵. One of such devices, emphasised earlier by Panagiotis Roilos, is allegory. Conjuring up the personification of *Φιλία*, Prodhromos shares the conceptual framework of Makrembolites' novel, in which Eros, uniting the opposites, ensures smooth running of Cosmos⁵⁹⁶.

The poem can be studied from the multiple perspectives. It would be appropriate to start the analysis by pointing out that the *Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ* relies on the classical tradition. In particular, Prodhromos borrows the motive of a self-imposed exile from Lucian's piece entitled *The Runaways*⁵⁹⁷. In this satire, Zeus and Apollo encounter Lady Philosophy in the state of

⁵⁹⁰ Zagklas (2014) *Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ*. vv. 274-6.

⁵⁹¹ Zagklas (2014) *Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ*. vv. 277-94.

⁵⁹² Zagklas (2014) *Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ*. vv. 295-7.

⁵⁹³ Passamonti (1892).

⁵⁹⁴ Cavallero (2017).

⁵⁹⁵ Zagklas (2014) Pp. 326-62.

⁵⁹⁶ Roilos (2006) P. 187.

⁵⁹⁷ Harmon, Kilburn, and Macleod (1961-79) Vol. 5 *The Runaways*. Pp. 53-99; Praechter (1910) P. 315.

distress: ‘*woman coming up in haste, excited and tearful, like someone suffering great wrongs*⁵⁹⁸. They learn from Lady Philosophy that she was upset by the rise of parvenus who style themselves as philosophers but in truth are impudent ignoramuses. The gods restore justice by making the fake philosophers to return to their former trades, while Philosophy is encouraged to go back to Greece to live with her husband. The journey of Friendship in Prodrornos’ poem is very similar: she leaves the world to complain about the suffered abuse but is ultimately consoled with the grant of due privileges. The influence of *The Runaways* on Prodrornos can be identified even beyond the allegorical narrative and the motive of exile: in essence, *The Runaways* exposes the unfair social success of fake intellectuals, which is exactly what Prodrornos does in his numerous Lucianesque imitations.

Apart from being influenced by the classical tradition, Prodrornos’ piece responds to the developments within the Byzantine society and literature. One of such changes is the growing attention to the topic of friendship. Since the eleventh century, as Margaret Mullett put it, friendship ‘*is seen as absolutely at the core of society*’⁵⁹⁹. In the twelfth century, friendship matters a lot in practical terms but it is also the case that intellectuals start to theorise about the nature of friendship: one can think about Italikos’ letter to Prodrornos that communicates emotions by means of neoplatonic apparatus⁶⁰⁰. The frequent celebrations of friendly feelings does not mean that the question of friendship was completely unproblematic. Margarat Mullett aptly remarks that ‘*the sudden rash of discussion of friendship in the eleventh and twelfth centuries may be some indicator that friendships were seen as not working or, on the contrary, as vorking too well*’⁶⁰¹. For example, one of the Eustathios of Thessalonica’ speeches explores a delicate situation of maintaining friendship with the two people who are at odds with each other⁶⁰².

⁵⁹⁸ Harmon, Kilburn, and Macleod (1961-79) Vol. 5 *The Runaways*. P. 55.

⁵⁹⁹ Mullett (1988) P. 14.

⁶⁰⁰ Papaioannou (2007).

⁶⁰¹ Mullett (1988) P. 19.

⁶⁰² Wirth (2000) Pp. 46-54.

Examining pitfalls of friendship allows one to discuss the problems of the contemporary society. Without reducing Prodromos' poem to a political message, I would like to suggest that on one of its levels *Friendship in Exile* can be read as an allegory of disgrace. On examination, the text offers several indications that *Φιλία* stands for a member of the aristocracy who lost the support of the emperor. Describing Friendship's miserable look, the Stranger notices the disappearance of the purple clothes (*πορφύρα*) along with the lack of overall majesty (*σεμνότης*) befitting his interlocutor⁶⁰³. As the purple was tightly linked to the emperor and his family, Friendship's initial entitlement to this colour conjures up a member of Byzantine aristocracy⁶⁰⁴. It is well known that the Comnenian clan was all too familiar with family strife, and that most dramatic conflicts took place between siblings⁶⁰⁵. The suggestion that Prodromos may have in mind an emperor's disgraced sibling such as Isaac or Anna, is endorsed by the selection of mythological *exempla*, which Friendship uses to highlight her superiority over Animosity. Specifically, Friendship refers to the Theban princes Eteocles and Polynices who failed to share the rule and subsequently killed each other in a battle⁶⁰⁶. The representation of Friendship's antagonist, Animosity, is also reminiscent of the ideals that were a matter of controversy for Comnenian intellectuals and leadership. Endowed with such unpleasant features as a murderous look, hands stained with blood and a rough voice, Animosity bears atrocious offspring, among which are Murder (*Φόνος*) and Combat (*Μάχη*). Setting the accommodating Friendship against barbaric Animosity, Prodromos seems to replicate the contrast between Lady Philosophy and Ares from his address to Isaac. As with the case of the politically charged rehabilitation of Lady Philosophy, the sympathetic representation of suppressed Friendship may defy prioritisation of might and violence over intellectualism, embodied in such disgraced aristocrats as Anna and Isaac Komnenoi.

⁶⁰³ Zagklas (2014) Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ. vv. 8, 11.

⁶⁰⁴ James (1996) Pp. 77-8; James (2003)

⁶⁰⁵ Magdalino (1993) Pp. 180-201; Frankopan (2007).

⁶⁰⁶ Zagklas (2014) Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ. vv. 222-4.

Whatever person or values Friendship may have stood for, the poem offers – again, in an indirect manner – a critical reappraisal of literary and cultural practices that characterised the twelfth-century intellectual environment. In a bid to showcase her virtuous simplicity, Friendship prides herself on avoiding two vices: pretence (*ὑπόκρισις*) and vanity (*πέρπερος τρόπος*)⁶⁰⁷.

Friendship's appreciation of sincerity and honesty is further corroborated by the fact that her acceptance of the marriage proposal is predicated on the Stranger's pledge to honor several virtues, one of which requires avoiding 'ambiguous twists' (duplicity) and speaking bluntly⁶⁰⁸. If one were to follow this advice, one would find it extremely hard to fit in the twelfth century culture, which was obsessed with pretence and duplicity. This cultural tendency is best corroborated by Eustathios of Thessalonica's oration on hypocrisy, a text which only recently has attracted scholarly attention⁶⁰⁹. Eustathios draws a distinction between two types of hypocrisy, good and bad. The former, originating in Antiquity, was effectively a dramatic device, which helped tragic writers and actors to represent human virtues and vices; embodied in the greatest texts of classical literature, the 'old hypocrisy' is praised for its edifying potential, which, according to Eustathios, can be appreciated even by Byzantine readers, living many centuries after the live performances of ancient Greek plays⁶¹⁰. However, in Eustathios' time, the dramatic hypocrisy degenerated into pretence, which does not have any merit whatsoever⁶¹¹. This 'new hypocrisy' has many faces; it is embodied in adulterers, spies, and, most relevantly to Eustathios' own milieu, unscrupulous monks and sycophantic orators⁶¹². While Eustathios

⁶⁰⁷ Zagklas (2014) *Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ*. vv. 184-5.

⁶⁰⁸ Zagklas (2014) *Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ*. vv. 289-90 *Τὰς στρεβλὰς δὲ φεύγειν διπλόας; Λαλεῖν δὲ ταῦτα, καὶ φρονεῖν ἐν καρδίᾳ;*

⁶⁰⁹ Tafel (1832) Oratio 9; van den Berg, B. (2017); Marciniak (2020).

⁶¹⁰ Tafel (1832) Oratio 9 Sections 1-2.

⁶¹¹ Tafel (1832) Oratio 9 Section 8.

⁶¹² Tafel (1832) Oratio 9 Sections 16-17 (orators), 19 (adulterers), 22 (spies), 24-28 (monks).

naturally discourages his listeners from acting hypocritically, he nevertheless acknowledges that he himself in his everyday life is not completely immune to this evil⁶¹³.

Eustathios' criticism is attenuated by other twelfth-century texts that suggest a positive judgment of hypocrisy. In his description of the passing of the Crusaders through the Byzantine territory, Niketas Choniates praises Michael Italikos, the bishop of Philippopolis, for ensuring the smooth transit of the foreign army. Niketas ascribes Italikos' success to the dissembling power of rhetoric:

*[Italikos] lured the king into his power, enfeebling him with the charms of his words, bewitching him with the honey of his tongue. He said one thing but meant another and disguised his true feelings to benefit the Romans*⁶¹⁴.

Niketas' representation of Italikos' strategic use of his eloquence is in keeping with Italikos' own view of rhetoric as a tool for manipulation. Placing rhetoric above philosophy, Italikos admires rhetors' ability to deceive their audience when '*they expound small subjects with grandiosity and declare big things in minimal terms*'⁶¹⁵. Interestingly, this recognition of the deceptive nature of rhetoric was made in a letter to Theodore Prodromos, who, as a court poet, was all too aware of the fact that good oratory often involves deception. Given that the notion of hypocrisy was so embedded in twelfth-century rhetorical culture⁶¹⁶, one should take Friendship's plea to avoid dissimulation *cum grano salis*. Friendship's appeal for sincerity may, in fact, serve as an ironic marker that the whole text must be read as a political allegory that subverts the conventional ideals, which could never be criticised in a direct manner.

⁶¹³ Tafel (1832) Oratio 9 Section 9.

⁶¹⁴ Magoulias (1984) Pp. 36-7.

⁶¹⁵ Gautier (1972) P. 63.

⁶¹⁶ Cf. the Anthony Kaldellis' emphasis on 12th writers' penchant to speaking in riddles, Kaldellis (2007) P. 237: 'They made a game of writing in complex structures that require decoding: the inner meaning was often the opposite of the surface sense of the words. Indeed, they boasted of this skill and challenged readers (or listeners) to decipher the code. In part this was a game, but it also allowed the sophists to say things that were not safe to say openly. This was a *standard* skill, despite its absence from modern surveys'.

The Amarantos: a Parody of Byzantine Theatron

Finally, it is necessary to focus on the subversive potential of Prodromos' classicising works by using as a case study the Lucianesque satire entitled *The Amarantos, or the Erotic Desires of an Old Man*⁶¹⁷. The piece opens with a dialogue between two followers of Democritus, Diophantos and Philolaos, and an Epicurean, Hermocles, who renounces the crude materialism of his interlocutors but cherishes the pleasure that he derives from spending time in his garden⁶¹⁸. The heated philosophical debate is suddenly interrupted by an arrival of the dialogue's protagonist Amarantos. At first, the quarreling philosophers want Amarantos to act as an arbitrator in their controversy. Amarantos suggests instead sharing a story, which could reconcile both parties because it would induce both Epicurus's pleasure and Democritus' laughter⁶¹⁹. Amarantos' story concerns a curious incident that occurred to his teacher of philosophy Stratocles. Lecturing on ethics, Stratocles ardently defended the ideal of celibacy⁶²⁰ and disparaged marriage as a burden that aggravates the already miserable corporeal existence. He pointed out the notorious misdeeds of such female villains as Helen of Troy, Clytemnestra and Phaedra. Endowed with a rich life experience and truly philosophical appearance (most notably, a long beard), the old Stratocles made his listeners admire his theoretical reasoning as well as practical commitment to ascetic life⁶²¹. Soon afterwards, however, Stratocles' circle had to reconsider everything they had learned from their teacher. One day Amarantos spotted a notary, who headed to the home of Stratocles⁶²². Given the extremely old age of Stratocles, Amarantos assumed that his teacher was on his deathbed, and followed the notary to the house of Stratocles⁶²³. Having arrived, Amarantos discovered that Stratocles was not only alive but was preparing to get married. The unlikely bridegroom had an odd appearance: he looked much younger but the clumsy application

⁶¹⁷ Migliorini (2010) Ἀμάραντος ἢ γέροντος ἔρωτες. Pp. 83-127.

⁶¹⁸ Migliorini (2010) Pp. 83-4 ln. 1-60.

⁶¹⁹ Migliorini (2010) P. 84 ln. 66-76.

⁶²⁰ Migliorini (2010) P. 85 ln. 107-24.

⁶²¹ Migliorini (2010) P. 85 ln. 125-30.

⁶²² Migliorini (2010) P. 85 ln. 130-41.

⁶²³ Migliorini (2010) Pp. 85-6 ln. 143-58.

of cosmetics revealed that his rejuvenation was fake⁶²⁴. The grotesque nature of Stratocles' marriage is enhanced by the fact that the philosopher's bride was extremely young, and that she was forced to get married because of her father's poverty⁶²⁵. Stratocles gives an exquisite banquet to celebrate his marriage; the feasting is accompanied by poetic recitations in different meters⁶²⁶, culminating in Stratocles' delivery of an encomium of love and marriage⁶²⁷. Amarantos is perplexed by such a dramatic change of heart; he tries to remind Stratocles of his former views against women and matrimony but Stratocles finds new arguments in support of marriage⁶²⁸.

The dialogue purports to reflect the *mores* of classical Antiquity. Set in ancient Athens, it features characters who have characteristically classical Greek names. The protagonists invoke the pagan gods; they debate the philosophical teachings of Epicurus and Democritus (condemned and neglected in Byzantium); their language resembles the idiolect of Attic philosophers. Despite the antiquarian façade, an attentive reader is provided with some clues indicating that the dialogue is actually about Byzantine Constantinople. First, the marriage procession brings the newlyweds to the temple, which references the Byzantine practice (non-existent in Antiquity) of concluding marriages in the church⁶²⁹. Incidentally, this anachronism also featured in Prodromos' novel, prompting modern scholars to suggest that the romantic tale can be read as a satirical reflection of the Byzantine court culture⁶³⁰. Second, the dialogue gives prominent roles to the characters whose professions involve writing: a notary (*συμβολαιογράφος*, the earliest occurrence of this lemma characteristically dates to the fourth century AD) drafts a marriage

⁶²⁴ Migliorini (2010) P. 86 ln. 160-71.

⁶²⁵ Migliorini (2010) P. 87 ln. 205-12.

⁶²⁶ Migliorini (2010) P. 88 ln. 253-64, P. 89 ln. 307-22.

⁶²⁷ Migliorini (2010) P. 88 ln. 265-87.

⁶²⁸ Migliorini (2010) Pp. 88-9 ln. 288-303.

⁶²⁹ Migliorini (2010) P. 87 ln. 203-4.

⁶³⁰ Jeffreys, E. (2012) P. 155 (Book 9) ln. 474-81; Kaldellis (2007) P. 265; Roilos (2006).

contract, while a grammarian (*γραμματικός*) performs an epithalamium during the banquet⁶³¹.

The grammarian recites the poem from a book, which reflects the habits associated with Byzantine reading culture⁶³². While this kind of imagery is not completely absent from Prodromos' ancient literary models (such as Lucian's *The Ignorant Book-Collector*), the detailed attention given to the roles of the clerk and grammarian in the marriage story suggests the Constantinopolitan context, whose social, political, administrative and cultural life was unimaginable without learned bureaucrats⁶³³.

These references to Byzantine realia ought not to be taken as unintentional anachronisms but rather as indications of the author's perception of contemporary society. Thus, Eric Cullhed in his discussion of the *Amarantos* argues that the dialogue exposes the moral compromises that an intellectual needed to make in order to survive in the tough environment of twelfth-century Constantinople⁶³⁴. Specifically, Cullhed links the drama of a poverty-stricken girl marrying the old Stratocles with Prodromos' concern, voiced on several occasions in other literary works, that material deprivation made people compromise their ideals. Indeed, the characters of the *Amarantos* often behave hypocritically. The mechanics of dissimulation is illustrated primarily through the repulsive image of Stratocles who fakes youthful attractiveness and dramatically changes his view of marriage. Although Stratocles' entourage does not condone the old philosopher's metamorphosis, they nevertheless contribute to the illusion by celebrating Stratocles as a highly desired bridegroom.

⁶³¹ Συμβολαιογράφος: Migliorini (2010) P. 85 ln. 140 – P. 86 ln. 148; γραμματικός: Migliorini (2010) P. 88 ln. 249-64.

⁶³² Shawcross (2018).

⁶³³ In this respect, Choniates' description of Crusaders mocking the Byzantine customs is extremely indicative of Byzantine obsession with written culture, Magoulas (1984) P. 327: 'Others, holding reed pens and inkwells, pretended to be writing in books, mocking us as secretaries.'

⁶³⁴ Cullhed (2017).

As the celebration of Stratocles takes the form of poetic recitations, it conjures up the Byzantine *theatron*⁶³⁵. Commissioned works would often be used to commemorate formal occasions, with weddings being one of the most popular celebratory events. Indeed, among Prodrornos' occasional writings, we find a group of poems that celebrate the wedding of Alexios, the son of *panhypersebastos* Nikephoros Phorbenos⁶³⁶. The poetic celebration of the Byzantine aristocrat belongs to the genre of the epithalamium codified in the rhetorical manual by Menander Rhetor⁶³⁷. Following the precepts of Menander, Prodrornos praises the beauty of the couple as well as nobility of their families, conjuring up images of gorgeous bridal chambers and alcoves. More importantly, the epithalamium for Alexios shares some features with the *Amarantos*. First, both Stratocles and Alexios are celebrated in a series of separate poems rather than in a single piece. In the *Amarantos*, the marriage is first celebrated by the grammarian Dionysus, who performs elegiac couplets⁶³⁸. At the beginning of his poem, Dionysus praises Stratocles and his wife Myrillis as a couple, comparing their union to that of Ares and Aphrodite. The second part of the poem describes individual virtues of the bridegroom and his bride. The second poem also starts with a praise of marriage and then moves to encourage Stratocles to admire the beauty of his wife. Despite the similarity in content, the second poem is written in a different meter, anacreontics, and is performed by a different person, the comedian Chaerephon⁶³⁹. As for the marriage of Alexios, it is celebrated by the cycle of five poems which equally employ both repetition and variation. Thus, the first poem focuses on the newlyweds' aristocratic ancestry⁶⁴⁰; the second entreats the bridegroom to lay aside his armor for the time of the feast⁶⁴¹; the third compares the beautiful relationship of the lovers to the harmony of the natural world⁶⁴²; the fourth is an encomium of the bride; the fifth poem glorifies the concept of marriage in general. In

⁶³⁵ Mullett (1984); Marciniak (2007); Toth (2007); Gaul (2018).

⁶³⁶ Hörandner (1974) Poem XLIIIa-e.

⁶³⁷ Russel and Wilson (1981) Pp. 135-47.

⁶³⁸ Migliorini (2010) P. 88 ln. 253-64.

⁶³⁹ Migliorini (2010) P. 89 ln. 307-22.

⁶⁴⁰ Hörandner (1974) Poem XLIIIa vv. 5-10, 20-1.

⁶⁴¹ Hörandner (1974) Poem XLIIIb vv. 1, 24.

⁶⁴² Hörandner (1974) Poem XLIIIc vv. 1-20, 24.

both instances, the division of the marriage celebration into several poems has not only an aesthetic but also a pragmatic purpose⁶⁴³. In the *Amarantos* the poems are performed during the banquet, where the guests are busy with debating arguments for and against marriage. Each poem eases the tensions of the heated debate and marks the transition to a new argument. It is clear that here poetry represents a short interlude rather than a self-standing centerpiece. While we lack information about the circumstances of the performance of Prodromos' poems in honor of Alexios and his wife, we may surmise that these were meant to provide an entertaining backdrop to the various stages of the marriage ceremony⁶⁴⁴. While some of the pieces of Prodromos' occasional poetry are quite extensive (several hundred verses), each of the five marriage poems is short (between 22 and 24 verses) and, in contrast to Prodromos' military-themed hexametrical poems, easily comprehensible: in fact, the main body of these poems consists largely of nominal sentences.

The second similarity between poems in honour of Stratocles and Alexios relates to their imagery. In both instances, Prodromos conjures up a wonderful world of plants to celebrate the newlyweds. In the *Amarantos*, the anacreontic poem reaches its climax with a comparison of Stratocles' bride to a rose that surpasses all other flowers⁶⁴⁵. This comparison, of course, contributes to the symbolic idealisation of a garden as a locus amoenus, developed throughout the dialogue. In a similar way, one of the Prodromos' poems in honor of Alexios and his wife starts with an exclamation: *Τίς εἶδε κῆπον ἀρετῶν*; (Who has seen the garden of virtues?); further on, the poet describes lilies, cedar, cypress and other plants that, in Prodromos' view, represent multiple virtues of the aristocratic couple⁶⁴⁶.

⁶⁴³ Cf. Zagklas (2018) Pp. 62-63.

⁶⁴⁴ Cf. Zagklas (2017) Pp. 234 who argues that prosimetrum enhances satirical tone of *The Amarantos*.

⁶⁴⁵ Migliorini (2010) P. 89 ln. 317-20.

⁶⁴⁶ Hörandner (1974) Poem XLIIIc vv. 1-20, 24.

The aforementioned parallels allow us to suggest that the description of Stratocles' banquet in the *Amarantos* was meant to reference actual Byzantine *theatra* by conjuring up a literary performance during the formal occasion of a wedding celebration. This holds promising implications for the understanding of such events because the description of Stratocles' feast in the *Amarantos* features not only poetical recitations but also what happens behind the scenes. It is noteworthy that the informal conversations of Stratocles' guests stand in sharp contrast with the poems that exalt the bridegroom. In fact, Amarantos and his friends ridicule Stratocles for his inappropriate erotic desire. Crucially, the mockery of Stratocles is carried out in a clandestine fashion: when one of the guests jokes that made-up Stratocles looks like a blushing youngster, he has to whisper this into Amarantos' ear⁶⁴⁷. According to Dimiter Angelov, whisper (*ὕποψιθυρίζω*) in Byzantine sources often has the function of clandestine criticism and, after the eleventh century, it becomes one of the major forms for expressing dissent⁶⁴⁸. The majority of instances of using whisper as a means of criticism feature in political histories but one such instance is attested in the *Timarion*, which employs a Lucianesque dialogue to satirise the Byzantine aristocracy⁶⁴⁹. Prodromos' strategy in the *Amarantos* is very similar: using an ancient literary form, he narrates a story that purports to take place far away from Byzantium but, in fact, reflects the culture of twelfth century Constantinople. While the *Timarion* focuses on the communities of philosophers and orators, the *Amarantos* casts light on the Byzantine *theatron*. Like the *Timarion*, the *Amarantos* highlights the intellectual's need to resort to dissemblance and whisper, and thus it appears to criticise the Comnenian culture of repression.

Conclusions

Despite his outstanding success as a court poet, Prodromos did not consider the social and political order of the Comnenian Empire irreproachable. Placed in the stringent conditions of

⁶⁴⁷ Migliorini (2010) P. 87 ln. 242 – P. 88 ln. 247.

⁶⁴⁸ Angelov (2013) P. 4.

⁶⁴⁹ Krallis (2013) Pp. 233-4. Pace Nilsson (2016) Pp. 188-94 who reads The *Timarion* as a piece of literary criticism.

intellectual competition, Prodromos would often voice complains regarding the scarcity of financial support and at times even blame the emperor for his lack of generosity. However, as the hierarchical order of the Comnenian Empire did not leave much room for open criticism, Prodromos had to be very creative in communicating his discontent in a manner that would not compromise his loyalty. As this chapter has discussed, there are three main strategies of subversion. The first disguises the desire for change of the style of governance within the usual business of court panegyrist, specifically in the addresses to Isaac and Anna Komnene. Praising these individuals must have been perfectly legitimate given their high status, yet both Isaac and Anna were rivals of the ruling emperor. The eulogies of Isaac and Anna highlighted the dissenting siblings' learning as a desirable alternative to John's militarism and thus signaled Prodromos' endorsement of the potential enthronement of an individual such as Isaac or Anna. The second strategy employs allegory, whereby exiled Friendship represents discord within the imperial family. Expressing sympathy for the refined Friendship harassed by harsh Animosity, Prodromos expresses his regret over the disgrace of the most learned members of Comnenian family, who could become enlightened rulers. The third strategy relies on classical imitation. Placing the action of the *Amarantos* in classical Athens, Prodromos satirises the system of patronage implemented in Byzantine *theatron*, without incurring a risk of insulting his patrons. Using various means of subversion, Prodromos is quite consistent in targeting two trends of the Comnenian society: militarisation and duplicity. Criticising these practices, Prodromos assumes a completely different authorial *persona* than the one he uses in his capacity as court poet.

Chapter V

HELLENIC BIBLE

Christian Hellenist

Although Prodromos is mostly known as a champion of classical Antiquity, a significant part of his *oeuvre* is concerned with the religious matters. Among them are the poetic⁶⁵⁰ and prose Lives⁶⁵¹, the verse calendars of saints⁶⁵², the exegetical commentaries on the Canons of Cosmas of Jerusalem and John of Damascus⁶⁵³, the Tetrastichs on the Old and New Testaments⁶⁵⁴ as well as numerous dedicatory epigrams addressed to various saints, prophets and the Virgin⁶⁵⁵. As a Christian author, Prodromos received far less scholarly attention than as a classicist. Scholars who studied Prodromos' religious output tend to concentrate on his reliance on authoritative Christian writers, especially Gregory of Nazianzos. Thus, Christos Simelidis argues that an unattested verb in Prodromos' comparison of the emperor to God owes its appearance to an erroneous reading of Gregory's poetry⁶⁵⁶. In a more comprehensive study, Nikos Zagklas shows that, beyond lexical borrowing, Prodromos employs themes and genres favoured by Gregory⁶⁵⁷. As for Psellos a century earlier⁶⁵⁸, appropriation of Gregory's authority becomes a means for Prodromos to highlight the superiority of his literary talents as well as impeccability of his religious beliefs. As well as studying the literary qualities of Prodromos' religious works, scholars examined material aspects of their production. Mario D'Ambrosi (admittedly, controversially) suggested that Prodromos' epigrams on Basil the Great, John Chrysostom and

⁶⁵⁰ D'Ambrosi (2008).

⁶⁵¹ Papadopoulos (1935).

⁶⁵² Giannelli, C. (1963b); Acconcia Longo, A. (1983).

⁶⁵³ Stevenson (1888).

⁶⁵⁴ Papagiannis (1997).

⁶⁵⁵ Zagklas (2014).

⁶⁵⁶ Simelidis (2006).

⁶⁵⁷ Zagklas (2016).

⁶⁵⁸ Papaioannou (2013) Pp. 51-87.

Gregory of Nazianzos were inscribed on the icons of the Three Hierarchs in the Pantokrator Monastery⁶⁵⁹.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the classicism of Prodhomos' Christian writings and to explore the literary and ideological ramifications thereof. The relationship between classical and Christian elements is extremely complex and defies generalisations: even a single Christian author could – often strategically – alter his attitude to 'Classics' depending on changing personal and political circumstances⁶⁶⁰.

Prodhomos' literary activity, even in his capacity of a Christian author, is marked by a deep appreciation of classical texts. In the address to Alexios Aristenos, Prodhomos exclaims:

καὶ πότερον παρὰ τῆς ἡμετέρας καὶ ἀπλουστέρας γραφῆς δανείσομαι τὸ προοίμιον καὶ εἰρήνην τῷ οἴκῳ τούτῳ ἀνακράζομαι, ἢ παρὰ τῆς οὐχ ἡμετέρας καὶ κομψοτέρας καὶ, ὧ χαῖρε μέλαθρα, πρόπυλά θ' ἐστίας τῆς παροῦσης, ἀναβοήσομαι;

Should I borrow the introduction from our very own and more simple writing proclaiming Peace to this house [Luke 10.5] or from alien but more refined, shouting: 'Hail the house and the gates of this home' [Euripides, Heracles 523]?⁶⁶¹

Displaying his knowledge of both the Gospels and Euripides, Prodhomos does not establish a strict hierarchy between his sources but implies that both classical and Christian literature have comparative advantages of their own.

Exegetical Commentary

Another illustration of Prodhomos' inclusive poetics can be found in the commentary on the Canons of Cosmas the Melodist and John of Damascus⁶⁶². This theological exegesis was written at the behest of *orphanotrophos* Constantine the nephew of the bishop of Nicomedia to whom

⁶⁵⁹ D'Ambrosi (2013).

⁶⁶⁰ Kaldellis (2007) P. 138.

⁶⁶¹ Op de Coul (2007) H91 P. 198.

⁶⁶² Stevenson (1888).

Prodromos dedicates a rhetorical introduction to the main body of his text⁶⁶³. In this introduction, Prodromos expresses his thanks for Constantine's invitation to compile the commentary. Giving his reasons to accept Constantine's offer, Prodromos draws an extensive comparison between Constantine's act of patronage and the parable of the great banquet⁶⁶⁴. Prodromos' account of the biblical story features several allusions to classical literature⁶⁶⁵. First, contrasting himself with the ungrateful guests who turned down invitation to the banquet because of other earthly commitments, Prodromos says that it would be madness if a field, a yoke of oxen or a woman would have prevented him from tasting ambrosia (i.e., accepting Constantine's invitation to produce the commissioned text)⁶⁶⁶. Mentioning ambrosia, Prodromos makes the host of the biblical banquet, identified with the Christian god, feed his guests with the food of the Olympians. Secondly, if he were to reject the invitation, Prodromos states that Constantine would not need to look for the poor, crippled and lame (as the Gospel's master did⁶⁶⁷) to replace Prodromos in *ἐστιάτοριον* because it is already full of them⁶⁶⁸. Referring to *ἐστιάτοριον*, which in classical sources often designated a banqueting hall near a temple⁶⁶⁹, Prodromos uses the pagan code to describe the Byzantine practice of running charity organisations under the aegis of a church.

Hymns to Saints

Another example of combining Christian piety with classical learning can be found in Prodromos' dedicatory poems to six prominent saints: apostle Paul, Gregory of Nazianzos, Basil

⁶⁶³ Stevenson (1888) Pp. 1-3. Constantine's patronage must have been particularly important for Prodromos as he was attached to the orphaneiotropheion: Hörandner (1974) Pp. 27-8.

⁶⁶⁴ Matt. 22:1-14.

⁶⁶⁵ Stevenson (1888) P. 1 ln. 10 – P. 2 ln. 14.

⁶⁶⁶ Stevenson (1888) P. 1 ln. 15-9.

⁶⁶⁷ Luke 14:21.

⁶⁶⁸ Stevenson (1888) P. 1 ln. 19 – P. 2 ln. 3.

⁶⁶⁹ Strabo: Meineke (1877) Book 10 Chapter 5 Section 11; Plutarch: Babbitt (1928) 146D; Philostratus: Kayser (1871) P. 605.

the Great, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa and Nicholas of Myra⁶⁷⁰. As Nikos Zagklas suggested, this series was written to highlight Prodromos' association with the *Orphanotropheion*, which hosted a school and an almshouse⁶⁷¹. The mission of the *Orphanotropheion* informed the choice of dedicatees: St Paul was the institution's major patron; the works of the four Church Fathers must have formed a substantial part of the school's curriculum, whereas St Nicholas was a patron of those in need and especially orphans⁶⁷². The poems have symmetrical structure, with each consisting of twelve elegiac couplets. Apart from classical meter, Prodromos employs Homeric language, and Nikos Zagklas has identified multiple allusions to the Homeric poems. To these observations one can, however, add that the dedicatory poems are modeled on the Homeric hymns, which as part of the epic tradition must have been appreciated by Prodromos via the medium of Gregory of Nazianzos' poetry⁶⁷³.

Although the Homeric hymns were read and copied throughout the Byzantine period, the Byzantines, as Christos Simelidis has shown, were not particularly productive in imitating this genre⁶⁷⁴. In this respect, Prodromos is an exception. Andrew Faulkner demonstrated that, in some of his historical poems, Prodromos employs the elements of the Homeric hymns to celebrate the city, the emperor and other members of the Comnenian aristocracy⁶⁷⁵. The imitation of the Homeric hymns in historical poems is, however, limited mostly to imagery, whereas the dedicatory poems share the significant number of the Homeric hymns' structural elements too⁶⁷⁶. Firstly, as with the Homeric hymns, the poems begin with an invocation of the saints; the name of dedicatee is in the accusative and depends on the verb of singing (*ἀείδω*,

⁶⁷⁰ Zagklas (2014) Pp. 181-224.

⁶⁷¹ Zagklas (2014) Pp. 220-4.

⁶⁷² Mergiali-Falangas (1991).

⁶⁷³ Zagklas (2016).

⁶⁷⁴ Simelidis (2016).

⁶⁷⁵ Faulkner (2016).

⁶⁷⁶ Clay (2011); Parker (2012).

λιγαίνω, μέλλομαι)⁶⁷⁷. Secondly, the invocation is followed by an accumulation of the epithets that list the dedicatee's attributes⁶⁷⁸. Thirdly, the main body of the text is often introduced by a demonstrative pronoun ὅς (ὁ)⁶⁷⁹. Scholars of the Homeric Hymns have identified two types of the main sections: one ('attributive'), written in the present, describes divinity in terms of its attributes (appearance and spheres of activity), while another ('mythic') uses the past tense to narrate a myth associated with a god⁶⁸⁰. Most hymns comprise both attributive and mythic parts. The same holds true for Prodromos' dedicatory poems: verbless sections consisting of laudatory epithets alternate with narrative accounts of saints' lives and deeds written in the past tense. Finally, some dedicatory poems end with salutation or prayer⁶⁸¹, which is also the case for the Homeric hymns. The following chart outlines the similarities discussed above:

	Homeric hymns	Prodromos' dedicatory poems
Invocation	In Cererem 1 Δήμητρ' ἡῤκομον σεμνήν θεὰν ἄρχομ' αἰεῖδεν	Basil 1 Καπαδοκῶν Βασίλειον αἰείσομαι ἀρχιερεῖα
Accumulation of epithets	In Dianam 1 Ἄρτεμιν αἰίδω χρυσηλάκατον κελαδεινήν παρθένον αἰδοίην ἐλαφηβόλον ἰοχέαιραν αὐτοκασιγνήτην χρυσαόρου Ἀπόλλωνος,	John Chrysostom 1-4 Χρυσολόγον μετὰ τοῖσι λιγαίνομαι Ἰωάννην, Ῥώμης ὀψιτέρης ἀρχιερεῖα μέγαν, εὐκέλαδον μέγαλοιο χειλιδόνα πνεύματος ἀγνοῦ, δόγματος εὐαγόρου κίθαριν ἐμμελέα.
Use of demonstrative pronoun ὅς (ὁ)	In Herculem 4-6 ὅς πρὶν μὲν κατὰ γαῖαν ἀθέσφατον ἡδὲ θάλασσαν πλαζόμενος πομπῇσιν ὕπ' Εὐρυσθέως ἄνακτος πολλὰ μὲν αὐτὸς ἔρεξεν ἀτάσθαλα, πολλὰ δ' ἀνέτλη·	Nicholas 7-10 Ὅς πολὺν πενίης βαρυνούσου λύσας ἄνδρα, τρισσῶν θηλυτέρων δυστυχέων γενέτην νύκτα δι' ὀρφναίην χρυσοῦ βαλέων ἀποδέσμους τρισσοὺς λαθριδίη, κάμπαλιν ἵχνι' ἄγων.
Salutation	In Venerem 292-3 Χαῖρε θεὰ Κύπριοι εὐκτιμένης μεδέουσα· σεῦ δ' ἐγὼ ἀρξάμενος μεταβήσομαι ἄλλον ἐς ὕμνον.	Basil 23-24 χαῖρε βροτῶν βιότητος ἐπ' εὖπορον οἶμον ἰθύντορ, γήραος εὐκοσμία, χαλινὲ κουροσύνης
Prayer	In Cercerem 492-4 πότνια ἀγλαόδορ' ὠρηφόρε Διοῖ ἄνασσα αὐτὴ καὶ κούρη περικαλλὴς Περσεφόνεια πρόφρονες ἀντ' ὧδῃς βίοντον θυμήρε' ὀπάζειν.	Paul 22-24 μνώεο Θεωδώρου λάτριδος εὐσεβέος, ἡνίκα θεσπεσίῳ προπροήμενος ἀμφὶ θοώκῳ ἀνδρομέου βίοντου μέτρα δικασπολέεις

⁶⁷⁷ Zagklas (2014) P. 181 v. 1, P. 187 v. 1, P. 196 v.1, P. 201 v. 1, P. 207 vv. 1-3, P. 213 v. 1.

⁶⁷⁸ Zagklas (2014) P. 187 vv. 1-15, P. 196 vv. 1-6, P. 201 vv. 1-14, P. 207 vv. 1-6, P. 213 vv. 1-4.

⁶⁷⁹ Zagklas (2014) P. 181 vv. 7, 12, P. 187 v. 16, P. 196 v. 15, P. 207 vv. 13, 17, P. 213 vv. 7, 11, 14, 17.

⁶⁸⁰ Janko (1981).

⁶⁸¹ Zagklas (2014) P. 196 vv. 23-4, P. 213 vv. 21-4.

Choosing the form of the Homeric hymns to celebrate the saints, Prodnomos inscribes himself in the tradition of Christian Hellenism. Early Christian poetry often utilised elements of classical hymns to celebrate Christ and the saints; the most notable authors of such hymns include Synesius and Gregory of Nazianzos⁶⁸². As Christos Simelidis demonstrated, Gregory reworks the imagery of Hellenistic poetry, especially that of Callimachus, to express the new – superior – Christian truth⁶⁸³. It is, therefore, no surprise that Prodnomos’ hymn praises Gregory for his mastery of both Christian and Hellenic wisdoms⁶⁸⁴. In a similar way, in the *Poetic Life of Gregory of Nazianzos*, Prodnomos repeatedly highlights the Church Father’s classical credentials and on one occasion even calls Gregory and Basil a pair of *Hellenes*⁶⁸⁵. This Hellenism is accompanied by a stress on the impeccable Orthodoxy of the Church Fathers. In particular, Prodnomos repeatedly represents the Church Fathers as defenders of the doctrine of the Trinity⁶⁸⁶. This seems to be informed by Prodnomos’ personal circumstances, in particular his need to highlight his own Trinitarian beliefs. At one point of his career, Prodnomos had to defend himself against accusations of impiety leveled by a certain Barys. In his apology, Prodnomos tries to dispel any doubts about his commitment to the doctrine of Trinity, and even includes an acrostic that purports to highlight his reverence for it⁶⁸⁷. At the same time, Prodnomos makes a case for the use of ancient philosophy, and refers to philosophical qualifications of the Church Fathers⁶⁸⁸. Philosophy is deemed essential because it helps to avoid ‘*getting lost in the maze of syllogisms of heretics*’⁶⁸⁹. This imagery is echoed in one of the dedicatory poems: ‘*by means of non-tearable nets of his reason (λόγος) Basil destroyed labyrinths of rotten wisdom of*

⁶⁸² Frangeskou (1984); Lacombrade (1978).

⁶⁸³ Simelidis (2009) Pp. 30-46.

⁶⁸⁴ Zagklas (2014) P. 187 vv. 3-6.

⁶⁸⁵ D’Ambrosi (2008) Ep. 7a v. 2.

⁶⁸⁶ Zagklas (2014) P. 187 vv. 20-2, P. 207 v.12.

⁶⁸⁷ Hörandner (1974) Poem LIX vv. 144-67.

⁶⁸⁸ Hörandner (1974) Poem LIX vv. 27-37, vv. 104-20.

⁶⁸⁹ Hörandner (1974) Poem LIX vv. 197-8.

*vainglorious Eunomius*⁶⁹⁰. Merging the Church Fathers' experience and his own, Prodromos gains immunity from criticism from his conservative contemporaries.

Biblical Epigrams

The rest of this chapter is dedicated to the discussion of the classicism of the epigrams on the Old and New Testaments. The epigrams on biblical themes were written before Prodromos, in different meters and by different poets including George of Pisidia, John Geometres and Christopher of Mytilene⁶⁹¹. In his synaxarion verses, the latter seems to have come up with an interesting innovation that was picked up by Prodromos: addressing a single event with a pair of epigrams: one in dodecasyllable, another in hexameter⁶⁹². The same polyphonic structure is adopted in Prodromos' epigrams on the Three Hierarchs and on military saints Theodore, George and Demetrius⁶⁹³. Another innovative feature of Prodromos is that he produces a *collection* that covers multiple books of the Bible: Genesis (38 pairs of epigrams), Exodus (25), Leviticus (3), Numbers (11), Deuteronomy (3), Joshua (10), Judges (20), Ruth (2), 1 Kingdoms (26), 2 Kingdoms (18), 3 Kingdoms (17), 4 Kingdoms (9), Gospel of Matthew (48), Mark (3), Luke (6), John (12), and Acts of the Apostles (29). It is interesting that in the epigrams Prodromos addresses only historical books of the Septuagint. It is difficult to identify the reason for that⁶⁹⁴ but Prodromos' selective approach clearly cannot be attributed to his lack of interest towards the other parts of the Old Testament: one of Prodromos' poem in honour of John Komnenos is effectively a cento consisting of the verses borrowed from the Psalms and the prophetic books⁶⁹⁵. Nevertheless, the scope and the degree of detail provided by Prodromos' epigrams make his

⁶⁹⁰ Zagklas (2014) P. 196 vv. 13-4.

⁶⁹¹ Tartaglia (1998) Carmina 1-8 (On John the Baptist), 11 (Annunciation), 12-15 (Nativity); Opstall (2008) Carmina 73 (Christ calming the storm), 83 (Mary Magdalene anointing Christ), 283-4 (Baptism); De Groote (2012) Carmina 3 (Baptism), 14 (Resurrection), 25 (Transfiguration).

⁶⁹² Darrouzès (1958); Follieri (1980).

⁶⁹³ D'Ambrosi (2008); Giannelli (1963a).

⁶⁹⁴ Lauxtermann (1999) P. 368 connects Prodromos' choice with the editorial patterns of Byzantine manuscripts.

⁶⁹⁵ Hörandner (1974) Poem XVII.

collection similar to biblical paraphrases, which transform the Bible into a text of a different genre, style and narrative structure⁶⁹⁶.

Biblical paraphrases have different functions⁶⁹⁷. First, they serve as biblical exegesis. Second, many paraphrases have an aesthetic purpose, often rendering unpretentious biblical prose into language and meter of classical poetry. In Greek, there exists a hexameter paraphrase of the Gospel of John by Nonnus⁶⁹⁸ and a hexametric paraphrase of Psalms attributed to Apollinaris of Laodicea⁶⁹⁹. Latin paraphrases include the rendering of the Life of Christ in Virgilian hexameters by Juvencus⁷⁰⁰ and versified paraphrase of the Psalms by Paulinus of Nola⁷⁰¹. Aside from these surviving works, we also have the accounts of the Church historians, Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen, about the paraphrastic activity of the two Apollinarii, father and son⁷⁰². Affected by Julian's edict prohibiting Christians to teach Classics, the elder Apollinaris paraphrased the Pentateuch into hexameters, and put the historical books of the Old Testament into the form of dramatic tragedy, whereas his son expounded the Gospels in the manner of Platonic dialogues. Sozomen adds to this list of imitated models the comedies of Menander and the odes of Pindar, and praises unprecedented versatility of Apollinaris: *'he excelled in every branch of literature, whereas ancient writers were proficient only in one'*⁷⁰³. After the end of the Late Antiquity, the interest in biblical paraphrases has become relatively weak but this gap was compensated by the surge of paraphrases of other (including religious) texts⁷⁰⁴. One of most convincing testaments to the creative paraphrastic activity is the *Paradeisos*, a tenth-century collection of elegiac couplets

⁶⁹⁶ Whitby, Mary (2007); Lauxtermann (2019) Pp. 225-46; Ricceri (2020).

⁶⁹⁷ Faulkner (2019).

⁶⁹⁸ Scheindler (1881).

⁶⁹⁹ Ludwich (1912).

⁷⁰⁰ McGill (2016).

⁷⁰¹ Dolveck (2015).

⁷⁰² Maraval and Périchon (2004-7) 3.16; Bidez and Hansen (1960) 5.18. See the discussion in Cameron, Alan (2016) Pp. 72-5.

⁷⁰³ Bidez and Hansen (1960) 5.18.

⁷⁰⁴ Lauxtermann (2019) P. 237.

that render the sayings of the desert fathers⁷⁰⁵. Given that the *Paradeisos* consists of tetrastichs written in the Homeric language, it is certainly a possibility that this collection might have influenced Prodrornos' approach to writing his Biblical epigrams.

Although Prodrornos' epigrams have received far less attention than they deserve, the few studies that do exist address their classical tendencies. The editor of the text Gregorios Papagiannis included in his edition *corpus fontium* that testifies to the active use of classical sources by Prodrornos⁷⁰⁶. In his review of Papagiannis' edition Marc Lauxtermann provided additional details on the manuscripts tradition, highlighted metrical patterns of Prodrornos' hexameters and offered some reflections on the relationship between epigrammatic poetry and visual art⁷⁰⁷. Developing Papagiannis' rich *apparatus fontium*, Enrico Magnelli wrote an article in which he pointed out several dozens of allusions to various classical authors, some of which, like Aratus, Theocritus or Aratus, were not particularly popular among the Byzantines⁷⁰⁸. Although Magnelli tries to be representative in his coverage of Prodrornos' sources, the scope of his study did not allow him to consider Prodrornos' adaptation of such genres as philosophy, rhetoric and history.

My discussion builds upon the *Quellenforschung* carried out by Papagiannis and Magnelli but also takes into consideration the imitation of structural elements of classical genres. An essential part of my contribution will be an analysis of how classical allusions fit alongside the original biblical text paraphrased by Prodrornos. In particular, I will highlight discrepancies between the epigrams and the Bible in order to demonstrate that Prodrornos rewrites the Bible according to the conventions of classical genres. The genres, whose elements I identify, are as follows: epic, drama, philosophy, history, novel and rhetoric.

⁷⁰⁵ Lauxtermann (2019) Pp. 241-246.

⁷⁰⁶ Papagiannis (1997).

⁷⁰⁷ Lauxtermann (1999a).

⁷⁰⁸ Magnelli (2003).

Classical Genres in the Biblical Epigrams

Epic

Composing half of the epigrams in hexameters, Prodromos revived the tradition of the epic stylisation of the Bible which flourished in Late Antiquity⁷⁰⁹. This tradition consists of two strands: biblical paraphrase and biblical cento poetry⁷¹⁰. The paraphrase is represented by the Psalms attributed to the fourth-century bishop Apollinarius and by the Gospel of John by the fifth-century poet Nonnus. While the paraphrases are written in original hexameters, cento poems are ‘*made up of verses lifted verbatim, or with only slight modification*’⁷¹¹ from Homer or other classical poets. The most famous cento poem in Greek that has survived to modernity is the one by Empress Eudocia (401-460)⁷¹². Arranged in independent chapters, Eudocia’s centos recycle verses from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to recount selected episodes from the Old and New Testament. Eudocia’s poem was in all likelihood inspired by fourth-century Latin poetess Proba, who transformed Virgil’s *Aeneid* into a Christian poem centred around the life of Jesus⁷¹³.

Prodromos’ hexametrical epigrams are much closer to a paraphrase than to a cento. While Prodromos actively makes use of Homeric language, his poetic method is quite different from copying verbatim the selected segments of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. Firstly, Prodromos modifies the Homeric formulae. For example, Homeric *κακὰ (φρεσὶ) βυσσοδομεύων*⁷¹⁴ on several occasions appears in Eudocia’s poem without change⁷¹⁵, but in Prodromos’ epigram, it is transformed into *δεινὰ φρεσὶ βυσσοδομεύων*⁷¹⁶. Secondly, Prodromos uses words that seem to be

⁷⁰⁹ Agosti (2001).

⁷¹⁰ Whitby, Mary (2007).

⁷¹¹ Usher (1998) P. 2.

⁷¹² Schembra (2007).

⁷¹³ Green (1995).

⁷¹⁴ Od. 8.273, 9.316, 17.66, 465, 491, 20.184.

⁷¹⁵ Schembra (2007) 1.1340, 1.1618, 2.528, 2.1343, 3.486, 4.483, 5.497.

⁷¹⁶ Papagiannis (1997) Matt. 187b v.3.

borrowed from Homer but in fact come from other epic poets (Nicander, Oppian, Nonnus), or are coined by Prodromos himself (*κρατεράλλκης*)⁷¹⁷. Finally, Prodromos often departs from the epic tradition by incorporating into hexameters elements of other linguistic registers, such as dramatic stichomythia⁷¹⁸. That said, the collection contains numerous allusions to both Homeric poems, with the Old Testament epigrams mostly concerned with the *Iliad* and the New Testament mostly concerned with the *Odyssey*. The following discussion examines instances of Homeric intertextuality which involve departures from the biblical text.

Themes from the Iliad

1. Ex. 53 Εἰς τὴν ὁγδόην πληγὴν, τὴν ἀκρίδα

*Ἀκρίδα θεσπεσίην, δεινὸν νέφος, οὐρανόθεν πρὸ
ᾧσε Θεός· Φαραὼ δὲ περὶ φρένας ἄχνητο ἄναξ,
Μωυσέως γούνων δ' ἐπελάζετο ἀκρίδ' ὀλέσσαι·
αὐτὰρ ὃ οἱ κατάκουσε καὶ ἀκρίδι φύζιν ἐνῶρσεν*

On the eighth plague of Egypt, locusts

*God **showered** heavenly locusts, an awful cloud, from the sky. Lord Pharaoh was distressed in his heart. He embraced Moses' knees beseeching him to destroy the locusts. Moses then gave ear to him and turned the locusts to flight.*

The epigram summarises one of the plagues of Egypt which God inflicted in an attempt to persuade Pharaoh to allow the Jews to depart from slavery⁷¹⁹. In the Bible, locusts are sent to Egypt by wind from another part of the Earth: ‘*So Moses stretched out his staff over Egypt, and the Lord made an east wind blow across the land all that day and all that night. By morning the wind had brought the locusts*’⁷²⁰. When the destruction wrought by the locusts pressured Pharaoh to repent, Moses interfered and relieved Egypt; as in the beginning of this story, the locusts were carried by the wind⁷²¹.

⁷¹⁷ Papagiannis (1997) Num. 74b v. 3, Jud. 93b v. 4.

⁷¹⁸ See the section on drama in this chapter: Pp. 153-56.

⁷¹⁹ Ex. 10:1-20.

⁷²⁰ Ex. 10:13.

⁷²¹ Ex. 10:18-9.

Creating an image of God showering locusts from the sky, Prodromos is likely to have been influenced by Homer. The verb *ῥω* evokes a flashforward scene in the beginning of *Iliad* Book 12, which narrates how, after the capture of Troy, Zeus, together with other Olympians, destroys the wall that protected the ships of Achaeans:

*And Phoebus Apollo diverted the mouths of all the rivers to one place, and for nine days he hurled their rolling waters against the wall; and Zeus rained [ῥε] without respite, so as more rapidly to render the defenses seaborne flotsam;*⁷²²

The reference to this scene is particularly apt since both in the Bible and the *Iliad* a natural disaster inflicted by God results from the failure to carry out religious rites. While the Jews are prevented from worshipping their God by Pharaoh⁷²³, the Achaeans neglect the gods of their own accord⁷²⁴.

2. 4 Reg 181 Εἰς Ἰηοῦ τὸν ἀποκτείναντα τὸ πᾶν Ἀχαὰβ γένος καὶ αὐτὴν Ἰεζάβελ

*Ἥλιον ἦν ποτ' ἔδεισεν Ἰεζάβελ, ἦν ποτ' ἀπέδρα
θηλυτέρεην πικρόθυμον, ἀπηνέα, τέκνον ἐχίδνης,
ὕψοθεν ἐκκυλίσας χαμάδις βάλε, πέφνε δ' Ἰηοῦ,
σῶμα δέ οἱ κύνεσσι καὶ οἰωνοῖς πόρε δεῖπνον.*

On Jehu assassinating the whole house of Ahab including Jezebel herself

*Jezebel, a woman of a vicious heart, harsh, a viper's daughter, whom once Elijah feared and fled, is killed by Jehu, who cast her to the ground from on high. He let **dogs and birds** feast on her body.*

The grim death of the evil princess Jezebel follows the defeat of the male members of her family by Jehu, who was anointed as king to avenge the oppression of the true prophets by the house of Ahab⁷²⁵. Jehu kills Jezebel by ordering his eunuchs to throw her out of the window. When the servants come to bury Jezebel, they discover nothing but her skull, feet and legs. This fate, according to Jehu, fulfills Elijah's prophecy: 'On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs will devour

⁷²² Il. 12. 24-6. Tr. Alexander (2015).

⁷²³ Ex. 5:1-2.

⁷²⁴ Il. 12.6.

⁷²⁵ 2 Reg. 9.

*Jezebel's flesh. Jezebel's body will be like dung on the ground in the plot at Jezreel, so that no one will be able to say, 'This is Jezebel.'*⁷²⁶. Although resentful, Jehu orders Jezebel's burial out of respect for her royal status⁷²⁷. Yet, Prodromos' epigram implies that Jehu allowed Jezebel's unburied body to be eaten by animals. Making Jehu responsible for dishonouring the body of the slain enemy, Prodromos seems to be influenced by Homer. In particular, Prodromos' gruesome epigram summons to mind the scene of Achilles threatening fallen Hector with mutilation of his corpse:

*'He fell in the dust. And shining Achilles vaunted: "Hector, you surely thought when you stripped Patroclus that you were safe, and you thought nothing of me as I was absent—pitiable fool. For standing by, his far greater avenger, I remained behind by the hollow ships—I who have broken the strength of your knees. You the dogs and birds [κύνες ἡδ' οἰωνοὶ] will rip apart shamefully; Patroclus the Achaeans will honor with funeral rites.'*⁷²⁸

Although Hector promises untold riches in exchange for Achilles' permission to allow his family to bury him with dignity, Achilles ruthlessly reiterates that the dogs and birds will devour him⁷²⁹. Although extremely graphic, the mutilation of a corpse by dogs and birds constitutes a recurrent theme in Homeric epic right from the very beginning from the *Iliad* where the poet claims that Achilles' wrath turned many heroes into spoils for dogs and birds: *αὐτοὺς δὲ ἐλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν οἰωνοῖσι τε πᾶσι*.⁷³⁰ Given that the Bible states that Jezebel's body is mutilated by the dogs and horses⁷³¹ and not the birds, the employment of the formulaic *κύνεσσι καὶ οἰωνοῖς* constitutes a case of rewriting the biblical text according to the conventions of the Homeric epic.

Themes from the Odyssey

3. Gen.15.Εἰς τὴν οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ πύργου τῆς Χαλάνης

⁷²⁶ 2 Reg. 9:36-7.

⁷²⁷ 2 Reg. 9:34.

⁷²⁸ Il. 22.330-6. Tr. Alexander (2015).

⁷²⁹ Il. 22.354.

⁷³⁰ Il. 1.4-5.

⁷³¹ 2 Reg. 9:33.

*Ἄνδρες ὑπερφίαλοι κακὰ φρεσὶ μητιόωντο,
 πύργον ἀναστήσειν ἐπ' Ὀλύμπου πείρατα μακρά·
 τὴν δ' ἄρα μῆτιν ἔερξε κακὴν Θεός, ἀμφὶ δὲ γλῶσσαν
 σύγχεε τὴν δομέουσιν, ὃ δ' οὐ τέλος ἔλλαβε πύργος.*

On the Construction of Tower of Calneh

Overly arrogant men plotted evil deeds in their minds, to build a tower in the distant reaches of Olympus. Yet, God hindered this ill intention. He confused the language of builders and the tower was never completed.

Relating the story of the Tower of Babel⁷³², Prodromos directs the builders' aspirations towards Olympus, the mountain prominent in Homeric epic, but absent from the Bible. Furthermore, Prodromos departs from Scripture by interpreting the construction of the tower as an attempt at upheaval. To accuse the builders of ill intentions, Prodromos uses the Homeric formula *κακὰ μητιόωντο*. The interpretation of this biblical episode as hubris resulting in divine punishment has been articulated already in the ancient exegetical tradition⁷³³. It was advanced in European literature (in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for example) and remains subject to discussion in modern biblical scholarship⁷³⁴. However, Theodore Hiebert, interpreting the Tower of Babel as a story about origins of cultural diversity, persuasively shows that any judgments about the builders' pride, defiance or sin are inferential⁷³⁵. Regardless of the reasons that led to the ancient and modern scholars opting for a crime-and-punishment interpretation, Prodromos, arguably, ascribes hostility to the builders in order to assimilate the story of the Tower of Babel with the story of the Aloadae brothers, Ephialtes and Otus. These giants rebelled against the Olympian gods. In the *Iliad*, they are said to put Ares in chains and imprison him for thirteen months⁷³⁶. More pertinently, they attempted to overthrow the gods by piling mount Ossa upon Olympus and

⁷³² Gen. 11:1-9.

⁷³³ Hiebert (2007) P. 29.

⁷³⁴ Hiebert (2007) P. 29.

⁷³⁵ The only thing the Bible tells us about the builders' motives is the following (Gen. 11:4): 'so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth'.

⁷³⁶ Il. 5.385-7.

Pelion upon Ossa⁷³⁷. Crucially, Homer speaks about the Aloaetae's desire to reach the heavens⁷³⁸, which also happens to be the aim of the builders of the Tower of Babel: *'let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens'*⁷³⁹. The similarities between the tale of the Aloaetae and the biblical story are striking, and it is no wonder that folklorists unite them in one group along with other myths about attempts to scale the heavens⁷⁴⁰. Yet, the ill intention against the gods remains peculiar only to the Aloaetae story. Therefore, by mentioning it as a driving force of building the Tower, Prodromos transforms the biblical story into a Homeric-inspired myth.

4. Matt.195.Εἰς τὸν ἐν θαλάσῃ ὕπνον Χριστοῦ

- (a) Ὁ δεσποτικὸς ὕπνος ἀρρήτῳ λόγῳ
 ὑπνοῦσαν ἐξύπνισε τὴν ἅλμην τότε·
 ἡ δ' ἐξέγερσις ἔμπαλιν τοῦ δεσπότου
 τὸ τῆς θαλάσσης ἐξεκοίμισε πλάτος.
 (b) Χριστὸς μὲν παλάμῃφιν ἐέρξατο πάντας ἀήτας·
 τοῦ δέ τ' ἐνὶ βλεφάροισι γλυκὺς περιχεύμενος ὕπνος
 πείσσε λαθεῖν Βορέην· ὃ δ' ἀπέπτατο, καὶ δ' ἄλλα τύψε·
 Χριστοῦ δ' ἐγρομένου κεῖνος πάλιν ἔνδον ἐέρχθη.

On Christ's Sleep at Sea

- (a) *For an ineffable reason, the Lord's sleep at that time awoke the dormant sea. But the Lord's awakening put the whole of the sea back to sleep.*
 (b) *Christ held all winds in the palm of his hand. Yet, having embraced his eyelids, the sweet dream persuaded Boreas to escape. It flew away and struck the sea. However, when Christ woke up, Boreas was restrained again.*

Relating the miracle of the calming of the storm⁷⁴¹, Prodromos creates an image of a wind bound, released and then bound yet again by physical constraints. In the beginning of the epigram, Christ holds all the winds in his hands, whereas in the end Boreas is shut within an unnamed space (*ἐνδον ἐέρχθη*), possibly again in Christ's hands. The image of Jesus controlling

⁷³⁷ Od. 11.305-20.

⁷³⁸ Od. 11.316.

⁷³⁹ Gen. 11:4.

⁷⁴⁰ Crooke (1908) Pp. 162-4.

⁷⁴¹ Matt. 8:23-27.

the winds through physical force is not found in the Bible where he exerts control with words alone: *'Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm'*.⁷⁴² Furthermore, Prodomos departs from the Bible by reducing the danger of the winds *and* the waves/sea/storm to just the winds alone⁷⁴³.

The explanation for these departures from the Gospel's storyline can be found in the Homeric story of Aeolus, the keeper of winds⁷⁴⁴. Visited by Odysseus on his island, Aeolus listens to the account of the much-troubled journey of the Trojan hero and agrees to arrange a safe travel home for Odysseus. Aeolus gives Odysseus a bag which contains all the winds shut inside except the favourable west wind Zephyrus that would take Odysseus home. Odysseus nearly reaches Ithaca when, exhausted from steering the ship, he falls asleep. Tempted by greed, Odysseus' companions untie the sack and release the winds, which take the ship back to Aeolia. Significantly, in the Bible, the storm also takes place while Christ is asleep. Yet, in the *Odyssey*, sleep effectively *causes* the storm, whereas the Gospel represents Christ's sleep as only a *circumstance* in which the storm takes place: *'Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping'*⁷⁴⁵. As Prodomos writes that the escape of Boreas was prompted by γλυκὺς ὕπνος (an expression which features in the Homeric episode⁷⁴⁶) afflicting Christ, he follows the narrative of the *Odyssey*. The causal relationship between falling asleep and the storm is even more prominent in the iambic tetrastich. Although lacking features of Homeric language, it prepares a reader for the assimilation of Christ's miracle to the episode from the *Odyssey*, which is fully developed in the hexametric epigram analysed above.

⁷⁴² Matt. 8:26. In other Gospels Christ's influence on winds is also limited to words. Cf. Mark 4:39: *'He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!"'*

⁷⁴³ The prominence of sea as a separate force, along with the winds, is evident from Matt. 8:24: *'Suddenly a **furious storm** came up on the lake, so that the **waves** swept over the boat'* Cf. mentions of the winds and waves in Matt. 8:26-7.

⁷⁴⁴ Od. 10.1-76.

⁷⁴⁵ Matt. 8:23.

⁷⁴⁶ Od. 10.31.

Drama

Theatricality in Byzantine Literature

Ancient Greek drama did not make it to Byzantium. At major public entertainment venues, the performances of dramatic plays gave way to chariot races, mimes, jugglers and dancers⁷⁴⁷.

Condemned by the Church Fathers and eventually banned at the Trullan Synod in 692, most theatrical activities faded away in the Middle Byzantine period⁷⁴⁸.

Despite the Church authorities' disapproval of all kind of spectacles, Byzantine life was highly theatrically-centered, with the elements of performance being identified in public, literary and even religious domains⁷⁴⁹. Firstly, theatrical elements were prominent in the court ceremony. The *Book of Ceremonies*, compiled under the auspices of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, provides exhaustive instructions on how to stage various religious and secular ceremonies, such as feast day processions, coronations and promotions⁷⁵⁰. The minute attention to all aspects of the court ritual implies that the ceremonies were designed as spectacle. They were meant to cause excitement among the people of Constantinople as well as its overseas visitors.

Less documented, yet more intriguing, is the dramatic nature of the Byzantine liturgy. The first attempt to dramatise the sacred history took place within sermons, which often functioned as a commentary on the biblical events⁷⁵¹. Closely connected to dramatic homilies is Byzantine hymnography, in particular *kontakion*, which celebrates the major feasts, such as Nativity and Easter, through the dramatic reenactment of biblical episodes⁷⁵². Like dramatic homilies, *kontakion* contains a significant number of extra-scriptural elaborations such as imaginary

⁷⁴⁷ Webb (2008).

⁷⁴⁸ Magoulas (1971); Tinnefeld (1974); Puchner and White (2017) Pp. 52-111.

⁷⁴⁹ Odorico (2007); Marciniak (2007); Bourbouhakis (2010).

⁷⁵⁰ Moffatt and Tall (2012); Cameron, Averil (1987).

⁷⁵¹ La Piana (1936); Cunningham (2003).

⁷⁵² Carpenter (1936); Wellesz (1947); Schork (1966).

conversations or soliloquies. Although *kontakia* were chanted by a preacher and a choir, the majority of scholars agree that the dramatic parts of hymns were not intended for staging.

Despite the lack of theatrical representation in dramatic homilies and hymnography, we do have evidence of religious theatre in Byzantium⁷⁵³. A thirteenth-century manuscript contains a scenario of a mystery play, which details scenery, costumes and actors' roles⁷⁵⁴. Furthermore, several independent witnesses describe a dramatic reenactment of the biblical episode '*The Three Children in the Furnace*', whose staging involved designated space for the 'furnace', choir and complex choreography⁷⁵⁵. Importantly, however, these religious performances are generally believed to be influenced by Western religious plays.

With the evidence for the existence of religious theatre being compelling, it is also important to outline the literary tradition, which employs dramatic form to narrate biblical events. Firstly, according to Eustathios of Thessalonica, John of Damascus (c. 675-749) composed a 'Euripidean' drama on Susanna and the Elders⁷⁵⁶. In the first half of the ninth century, Ignatios the Deacon composed a play on the fall of man, with Adam, Eve, Serpent and God acting as *dramatis personae*⁷⁵⁷. As Ignatios' activity occurred during a period of rising interest in classical drama, it is not surprising that his text not only contains numerous allusions to Sophocles and Euripides but also shares structural elements of classical tragedy: it has a prologue, dialogues, dramatic entrances and exits. Most importantly, it features *peripeteia* as the heroes' circumstances change drastically towards the end of the play⁷⁵⁸.

⁷⁵³ Bréhier (1913); Baud-Bovy (1938).

⁷⁵⁴ Lampros (1916); Vogt (1931); Mahr (1947).

⁷⁵⁵ Velimirovič (1962); White (2015).

⁷⁵⁶ Lauxtermann (2003) Pp. 134-5.

⁷⁵⁷ Speck (1995); Lauxtermann (2019) Pp. 82-7.

⁷⁵⁸ Browning (1968).

The most notable specimen of biblical dramatisation is represented by the *Christos Paschon*, a poem which relates the story of Christ's passion, death and resurrection⁷⁵⁹. Although some manuscripts attribute it to Gregory of Nazianzos, most contemporary scholars believe that it was composed in the twelfth century; several attempts were made to identify the author with Theodore Prodromos, John Tzetzes, Constantine Manasses or Eustathios of Thessalonica, yet none of them are convincing⁷⁶⁰. Being partly an independent composition and partly a cento, the *Christos Paschon* borrows verses from different poets, most notably Euripides. The author is very conscious of his mimetic purpose; in the preface, he promises 'to recount the world-saving passion in Euripidean fashion (νῦν τε κατ' Εὐριπίδην τὸ κοσμοσωτήριον ἐξερῶ πάθος)⁷⁶¹. The scholars, who have studied the dramatic devices of the *Christos Paschon*, however, have different views on whether this Christian drama conforms with the genre conventions of ancient Greek tragedy. Sticca, aptly identifying the Resurrection scene as peripety, concludes that 'the Christian experience here is very close to that of the classic Greek audience when, at the end of tragic presentation, it found again its pristine soul unencumbered by sin and affliction'⁷⁶². Nikolaos Vakonakis, in his monographical study, expresses an opposing view: the *Christos Paschon* has little to do with classical tragedy⁷⁶³. The reasons informing Vakonakis' conclusion include the unsuitability of the *Christos Paschon* for staging. Specifically, Vakonakis points out the absence of such dramatic features as unity of place, time and action as well as stichomythia, choral songs and denouement (λύσις). At the same time, Vakonakis acknowledges the presence of Euripidean prologue, anagnorisis, and messenger speeches. Furthermore, Vakonakis highlights the aptness of endowing the Virgin with the words of Medea and Agave (Euripidean characters from *Medea* and the *Bacchae* respectively), which develop the motive of the grieving mother. The substantial amount of such similarities prompts a conclusion that even if the

⁷⁵⁹ Brambs (1885); Vakonakis (2011); Mullett (2020).

⁷⁶⁰ Mullett (2020) P. 204.

⁷⁶¹ Brambs (1885) vv. 3-4.

⁷⁶² Sticca (1974) Pp. 39-40.

⁷⁶³ Vakonakis (2011).

Christos Paschon was not an ancient Greek drama *stricto sensu*, it nevertheless may be considered as a successful imitation of one.

Dramatic Elements in the Epigrams

Although Prodromos' biblical epigrams in no way belong to the genre of classical drama, they contain numerous features that are peculiar to ancient Greek tragedy. In discussing these dramatic features, I will occasionally draw on the conceptual apparatus of Aristotle's *Poetics*⁷⁶⁴. Although this work was not among the most widely read Aristotelian treatises in Byzantium (it has survived only in two manuscripts, one dated to the tenth, another to the twelfth century)⁷⁶⁵, the theoretical discussions of tragedy were current in the twelfth-century. *Barocci 131*, a thirteenth-century miscellany of eleventh and twelfth-century rhetorical and philosophical texts, transmits a treatise on tragedy, possibly written by Psellos, which builds upon the Aristotelian and Hellenistic theories⁷⁶⁶. The same is true for the didactic poem *Περὶ τραγικῆς ποιήσεως* composed by John Tzetzes⁷⁶⁷.

Action

One of the key characteristics of tragedy is the representation of reality through *action*: this narrative feature distinguishes drama from epic, where the story is recounted by a detached narrator, and lyric, which reflects the inner world of poetic *persona*⁷⁶⁸. The emphasis on action in some of Prodromos' epigrams is reflected in opening questions addressed by the author to a protagonist of a given episode: 'X, what are you doing? (*Τί δρᾷς*)'⁷⁶⁹. In the example given

⁷⁶⁴ Tarán and Gutas (2012).

⁷⁶⁵ Tarán and Gutas (2012) P. 36.

⁷⁶⁶ Browning (1963); Oxon. MS. Barocci 131 fol. 415-415v. Wilson (1966).

⁷⁶⁷ Pace (2011).

⁷⁶⁸ Tarán and Gutas (2012) 1448a20-4.

⁷⁶⁹ One can find this question in Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 11, Gen. 32, Ex. 59, 2Reg. 154, Matt. 190, Matt. 225.

below, the prominence of ‘acting’ is highlighted by the fact that the verb *δράω* is applied not only to the protagonist (Joseph) but to the other characters (Joseph’s brothers) too, even though they do not appear on ‘stage’:

Gen.30.Εἰς τὸ ἐνύπνιον Ἰωσήφ

(a)—*Τί δράῃς Ἰωσήφ; τοὺς ὀνείρους σου λέγεις
οὐ τῶν ἀδελφῶν εὐλαβηθεὶς τὸν φθόνον,
μή που μανέντες οὐ καλῶς δράσωσί σε;
—Θεῶ πέποιθα καὶ πεποιθότως λέγω.*
(b) *Φάσμασιν ἐννυχίοισι προείδετο δῖος Ἰωσήφ
ἄσσα μετεσσομένοισιν ἐν ἡμασιν ἔλλαβε τέρμα·
ἐνδεκα δράγματ’ ἔην κυνέοντα δράγμα Ἰωσήφ·
μεῖνον, ὄφρ’ ἐνδεκ’ ἴδης κασιγνήτους εἶνα κυνεῶντας*

On the dream of Joseph

(a) *Joseph, what are you **doing**? Are you relating your dreams without concern for the jealousy of your brothers, without fearing that, enraged, they would **hurt** you? –I trust in God and speak with confidence.*
(b) *In the nightly vision divine Joseph foresaw what was going to happen in the days to come. There were eleven sheaves making obeisance to the sheaf of Joseph. Wait to see the eleven brothers making obeisance to the one.*

The first epigram represents a glimpse into the action: Joseph has already started to relate his dreams but is yet to experience their adverse consequences⁷⁷⁰. That the action takes place ‘in real time’ is indicated by the present tense (*δράῃς, λέγεις, λέγω*), which stands in contrast with the aorist used in the original⁷⁷¹.

Chorus

Greek tragedy is unimaginable without a chorus. Sometimes understood as a ‘middle voice’, the tragic chorus simultaneously played the role of participant and observer⁷⁷². Trying to grasp the complexity of the tragic chorus, Richard Rutherford suggests that a choral song can be described

⁷⁷⁰ Gen. 37:1-11.

⁷⁷¹ Gen. 37:5 ἀπήγγειλεν, 37:6 εἶπεν, 37:9 εἶδεν, διηγήσατο.

⁷⁷² Güthenke (2013).

though five recurring elements: a) hymn/prayer b) self-characterisation c) response to events d) narrative and e) reflection⁷⁷³.

The presence of Prodromos' *persona* is very prominent. He often engages in a dialogue with the biblical characters and his readers. Balancing between narrating the biblical events and sharing the characters' experience, Prodromos' *persona* assumes a role very similar to that of the tragic chorus. I shall demonstrate that Prodromos' interventions in his narrative share the features that, according to Rutherford, are inherent to a tragic choral song.

a) hymn/prayer

A choral song often opens with an invocation. Originating from fear, it seeks divine protection or salvation for an individual or community⁷⁷⁴. An example of such a prayer can be found in Prodromos' hexametrical epigram on Jesus' miraculous curing of a leper:

Matt.192.Εἰς τὸν ἰαθέντα ὑπὸ τῆς ἀφῆς Χριστοῦ λεπρόν

*(b) Νῦν μὲν ἓνα Χριστοῖο καθήρατο δάκτυλα λεπρόν·
ἀλλ', ὅτ' ἐπὶ σταυροῖο ταθήσεται, οὐχ' ἓνα μόνον,
φύσιν ὅλην δ' ἰήσεται ὅλην λεπρὴν περ ἐοῦσαν·
ᾄψαι κάμοῦ, Χριστέ, νοός δ' ἀπο λέπραν ἄειρον.*

On the leper cured by the Christ's touch

*(b) This time Christ's fingers cured just one leper. However, when he will be stretched out on the cross, he will cure not just one person but the entire mankind (creation), leprous as it is. **Touch me as well, Christ, and remove leprosy from my spirit.***

Having briefly summarised the given biblical episode⁷⁷⁵, Prodromos' *persona* conjures up a completely different scene - the crucifixion. He likens it to Christ's miraculous healings through an implicit comparison of a sin to leprosy. Having identified Christ as a Savior of the whole

⁷⁷³ Rutherford (2012) Pp. 224-5.

⁷⁷⁴ Rutherford (2012) P. 224.

⁷⁷⁵ Matt. 8:1-4.

mankind, Prodromos' *persona* expresses hope for his personal salvation. In this respect, Prodromos follows the conventions of epigrammatic poetry that often includes prayers on behalf of an author's voice⁷⁷⁶.

b) self-characterisation

The tragic chorus often expresses its collective identity and how it relates to the main events⁷⁷⁷.

While Prodromos normally shares his personal perspective on the biblical episodes, in some cases, he purports to represent a group of people. This is seen, for example, in the epigram on the punishment of Ananias and Sapphira:

Act Ap.269.Εἰς τὰ κατὰ Ἀνανίαν καὶ Σάπφειραν

*(b) Ἀννανίην ποτ' ἔπεφνε Πέτρου λόγος, οὖνεκα Πνεῦμα
ψεύσατο, παμμεδέοντα βασιλέα, τῆς δέ κεν ὦνῆς
κλέψεν ἑὼν κτεάνων, ἀπὸ δ' εἴλετο μοῖραν ἐκεῖθεν·
ψευδολόγοι, τρομέωμεν· ὁ γὰρ τύπος ἐγγύθι κεῖται.*

On what happened with Ananias and Sapphira

*(b) One time a word of Peter killed Ananias since he deceived Spirit, an all-ruling king. Ananias concealed a portion of proceeds from his possessions, and met his doom because of that. **Tremble, my fellow liars!** Here lies our archetype.*

Prodromos' *ψευδολόγοι* could represent simply those who lie in everyday life. However, the combination of lies (*ψευδής*) with speeches (*λόγοι*) suggests that Prodromos might have coined *ψευδολόγοι* to refer to orators (like himself), who distort the truth for the sake of propaganda⁷⁷⁸.

c) response to events and d) narrative

The chorus responds to the unfolding events with a narrative that may be either reactive, reacting to the past action, or prospective, anticipating or predicting, hoping or fearing⁷⁷⁹. In Prodromos,

⁷⁷⁶ Lauxtermann (2019) Pp. 169-75.

⁷⁷⁷ Rutherford (2012) Pp. 224-5.

⁷⁷⁸ Cf. my argument in Chapter One and Four, Pp. 53, 122-3 about references to intellectuals' inclination to distort the truth in rhetorical performances.

an example containing both regressive and progressive perspectives can be found in the epigram on Michal helping David to escape from their home when they are surrounded by the Saul's men:

1Reg.131.Εἰς Δαβὶδ φεύγοντα ἐκ προσώπου Σαοῦλ προπεμπούσης αὐτὸν τῆς Μελχόλ

(a) *Ναί, σῶζε σου τὸν ἄνδρα, Μελχόλ, ἐνδίκως,
βουλὰς δὲ πατρὸς ἀκύρου τὰς ἀδίκους·
ναί, φεῦγε, Δαβίδ, τοῦ Σαοῦλ τὴν μανίαν
καὶ πρὸς Σαμουὴλ σπεῦδε τὸν χρίσαντά σε.*

On David fleeing from the presence of Saul with Michal escorting him from the house

(a) *Come on, righteous Michal, save your husband, thwart the unrighteous plots of your father. Come on, David, escape the madness of Saul and rush to Samuel, who anointed you.*

As Prodromos conjures up a scene of David's escape⁷⁸⁰, he connects this episode with the preceding events, specifically Saul's madness and plotting⁷⁸¹. At the same time, Prodromos anticipates David's subsequent salvation with the help of Samuel⁷⁸². Using imperatives (σῶζε, ἀκύρου, φεῦγε, σπεῦδε) and the exhortation particle (ναί), Prodromos encourages David and Michal to take action, which is something that a tragic chorus also does.

e) reflection

It is not uncommon for a chorus to make digressions by offering reflections on something that is not related to the main action⁷⁸³. In a similar way, Prodromos sometimes shares some aspects of his general worldview instead of recounting the biblical story. In the epigram on Delilah's second attempt to find out the source of Samson's strength, this is developed into a rhetorical attack against women in general:

⁷⁷⁹ Rutherford (2012) P. 225.

⁷⁸⁰ 1 Reg. 19:11-2.

⁷⁸¹ 1 Reg. 19:9-11.

⁷⁸² 1 Reg. 19:18-24.

⁷⁸³ Rutherford (2012) P. 225.

Jud.107.Εἰς τὴν δευτέραν ἀπόπειραν Δαλιδᾶς, καθ' ἣν οὐ περιεγένετο τοῦ Σαμψών

(α) Ὡς κρεῖσσον ἄρκτοις συμβιοῦν ταῖς ἀγρίαις
καὶ συλλαλεῖν δράκουσι καὶ συζῆν λύκοις
καὶ συγκατοικεῖν σκορπίοις ἀνημέροις,
ἢ γοῦν γυναιξί· τὴν Δαλιδά μοι βλέπε.

On the second inquiry of Delilah during which she did not prevail over Samson

It is so much better to cohabit with wild bears and talk to serpents and live together with wolves and share the same roof with untamed scorpions than with women. Look at Delilah!

Although Delilah is clearly a negative character, her portrayal in the Bible does not contain any implications about women in general⁷⁸⁴. Using Delilah's wickedness as a pretext for condemning the whole of womankind, Prodromos adopts the misogynistic sentiment of Euripidean drama (admittedly, shared by many of his contemporaries), which links the viciousness of tragic heroines such as Phaedra or Medea to their gender. Prodromos' reliance on Euripides' perception of women is reinforced by another epigram on Delilah's treachery, in which he uses the epithet *μυσαρός* (abominable)⁷⁸⁵. This word occurs for the first time in Euripides, and is used repeatedly to describe Medea's evil character⁷⁸⁶.

Dialogical Interaction (stichomythia)

Aside from the chorus, drama is characterised by the dialogical interaction of its characters. While dramatic dialogues sometimes take the form of extended speeches, every Greek tragedy includes a dynamic dialogical exchange, called *stichomythia*, in which each utterance by each speaker consists of a single or even half line (hemistichomythia)⁷⁸⁷. Commonly, *stichomythia*

⁷⁸⁴ Jud. 16.

⁷⁸⁵ Papagiannis (1997) Jud 109a4: ὄντως, γυνή, σὺ χρήμα **μυσαρώτατον**.

⁷⁸⁶ Diggle (1984) Medea vv. 1393, 1406.

⁷⁸⁷ Brown (2012).

features question and answer, argument, persuasion or prayer⁷⁸⁸. All these elements can be found in Prodromos' epigram on the Annunciation:

Luc.237.Εἰς τὸν εὐαγγελισμὸν

(a) — ὦ χαῖρε, σεμνή. — Τῆς ξένης ὀπτασίας.
— Θεὸν κηῖσεις. — Τοῦ τεραστίου λόγον.
— Πίστευε τὴν κήσιν. — Ἄρρενος δίχα;
— Ναί, τοῦ Θεοῦ θέλοντος. — Ὡς γένοιτό μοι

On the Annunciation

(a) -Greetings, o revered. -What an amazing vision! -You will conceive God. -What extraordinary news is that! -Believe in conception. -Without a male? -Yes, since God desires so. -May this happen to me.

The original passage in the Gospel of Luke is highly dramatic: Mary encounters the angel Gabriel, and, after initial bewilderment, accepts that, contrary to the laws of nature, she will give birth to God⁷⁸⁹. The conversation between Mary and Gabriel features three speeches by Gabriel and only two by Mary. Initially, the Virgin is so confused that she remains silent, although the narrator vividly describes her emotional reaction⁷⁹⁰.

In Prodromos' epigram, the narrator completely disappears, giving way to Mary and Gabriel. Each character speaks not two or three (as in the Gospel) but four times; although this extension is due to the need to fit Mary and Gabriel's conversation into tetrastich, it also makes the conversation more dynamic, as one would expect from *stichomythia*. Other changes introduced by Prodromos reflect the following key features of *stichomythia*: balance, ellipsis and elaboration of the interlocutor's words⁷⁹¹.

a) balance

⁷⁸⁸ Collins (2004) P. 5.

⁷⁸⁹ Luke 1:26-38.

⁷⁹⁰ Luke 1:29.

⁷⁹¹ Hancock (1917) P. 9.

In Greek drama, *stichomythia* represents the ideal of symmetry, whereby both sides equally contribute to the unfolding discussion. In the Gospel, however, Gabriel has the leading role: not only does he speak one more time than Mary, but his speeches are significantly longer (118 vs. 17 words). While in Prodomos' epigram Gabriel speaks first and Mary responds, their words are split almost equally between them: 12 vs. 11.

b) ellipsis

The dynamism of *stichomythia* is often achieved through elliptical phrases. In our case ellipsis can be found in all of the Virgin's utterances. The first two of them (*Τῆς ξένης ὀπτασίας; Τοῦ τεραστίου λόγου*) are genitives of exclamation, which are extremely common in Greek tragedy. The fourth utterance (*Ὡς γένοιτό μοι*) omits adverbial construction, initially present in the original (*γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου*)⁷⁹². Apart from grammatical ellipsis, Prodomos omits some details of the original episode, most notably Gabriel's explanation of the 'technology' of Immaculate Conception⁷⁹³. Owing to its elliptical structures, Prodomos' epigram shares enigmatic nature of tragic *stichomythia* as the latter is often constructed as a riddle. In Byzantine religious context, the use of ellipsis endows the Annunciation scene with an inexplicability fitting one of the most sacred Christian mysteries.

c) elaboration of the interlocutor's words

This can be considered a special case of ellipsis. In our epigram, the third utterance of the Virgin (*Ἄρρενος δίχα;*) elaborates the words of Gabriel, pronounced back in the second line: *Θεὸν κυήσεις*. The subsequent response of Gabriel, with the genitive absolute (*τοῦ Θεοῦ θέλοντος*), also retains the same verb *κύω* as the implied grammatical predicate of the sentence.

⁷⁹² Luke 1:38.

⁷⁹³ Luke 1:35-7.

The deployment of dramatic device in rendering the Annunciation can be found in other genres of Byzantine literature too. Both dramatic homilies and hymnography feature the Annunciation as the most popular subject, so that Prodromos' dramatisation of this story appears to be perfectly in keeping with the existing tradition⁷⁹⁴.

Proairesis

Although tragedy, according to Aristotle, is mainly concerned with action, it also portrays the heroes' character (ἦθος) and thought (διάνοια)⁷⁹⁵. Prodromos' keen interest in these elements is exemplified by the epigram on the betrothal of Rebecca to Isaac:

Gen.25.Εἰς τὴν νύμφευσιν Ῥεβέκκας καὶ ὅπως ἐντυχὼν ταύτῃ ὑδρευομένη ὁ δοῦλος Ἀβραὰμ ἤτησε πιεῖν ὕδωρ καὶ λαβὼν ἐγνώρισεν αὐτῇ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἔλευσιν καὶ λαβὼν αὐτὴν ἀπήει πρὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ ὅπως ἰδοῦσα τὸν Ἰσαὰκ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἠδέσθη καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον ἐκάλυπεν

(b) —Ξεῖνε, τίς οὗτος ἀνὴρ ἀμφ' ἡμέας ἰθὺ βαδίζει,
ὄμμα δέ οἱ γοργόν, τάς δ' ὅσσεται ἄντα καμήλους;
 —Οὗτος ἐκεῖνος, ἄνασσα, τεὸς πόσις, οὗτος ἐκεῖνος.
 —**Εἴμι καλυψαμένη· αἰδώς μ' ἔχει εἰσορόωσαν.**

On the betrothal of Rebecca and how a slave of Abraham having encountered her fetching water asked for water and having received it explained the reason of his arrival, and after having taken her he went to Abraham and how after having seen Isaac on the road she was ashamed and covered her face.

(b) *Stranger, who is this man that walks straight towards us. **His look is terrifying**, he stares directly at the camels. – This, my lady, is your husband, indeed, this very one. – **I shall go with my head covered. I blush to look.***

According to Aristotle, to show one's character, a hero needs to make a choice (προαίρεσις) that reveals certain personal traits⁷⁹⁶. According to this definition, Rebecca, indeed, does have a character as she makes decisions that are indicative of her hospitality, faithfulness and modesty: she brings water to a stranger, waters his camels and offers a lodging for a night. When the stranger reveals his intention to bring her to the house of Abraham as Isaac's bride, Rebecca

⁷⁹⁴ Arentzen (2019).

⁷⁹⁵ Tarán and Gutas (2012) 1449b 36 -1450a3.

⁷⁹⁶ Tarán and Gutas (2012) 1454a 17-19.

immediately agrees to leave her home despite her family encouraging her to stay. These actions alone, however, do not tell us much about Rebecca's inner world as she does not speak. When Rebecca encounters Isaac, the biblical narrator implies that she covers her face in silence: '*She got down from her camel and asked the servant, "Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?" "He is my master," the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself*'⁷⁹⁷.

Prodromos, in his turn, supplies the description of this action with a small ethopoeia.

Endowing Rebecca with shame, Prodromos' epigram resonates with the ethics of Greek (most notably, *Euripidean*) drama where *αἰδώς* or the lack thereof is often seen to determine characters' moral choices⁷⁹⁸. Furthermore, Prodromos uses the linguistic construction '*αἰδώς X (personal pronoun) ἔχει*', which is extremely common in Euripides⁷⁹⁹. Finally, the link to drama in this epigram is reinforced by the description of Isaac's look (*ὄμμα δέ οἱ γοργόν*), which derives from the portrayal of young and beautiful warrior Parthenopaeus in the *Seven against Thebes* by Aeschylus⁸⁰⁰.

Peripeteia

The decisive moment in the unfolding of a Greek tragedy is the *peripeteia* ('turning point'), which is defined by Aristotle as a change of the situation into the opposite⁸⁰¹. This change may occur from the state of happiness to that of misery, or the other way around, from misery to happiness⁸⁰².

⁷⁹⁷ Gen. 24:64-5.

⁷⁹⁸ Segal (1970); Furley (1996).

⁷⁹⁹ Diggle (1984) *Hecuba* v. 970; Diggle (1994) *Orestes* vv. 101, 460.

⁸⁰⁰ Page (1972) v. 537.

⁸⁰¹ Tarán and Gutas (2012) 1452a 22-23.

⁸⁰² Tarán and Gutas (2012) 1451a 13-4.

Prodromos often highlights the reversal of the characters' circumstances, which is evidenced by the frequent usage of the epic adversative particle *αὐτάρ* (*ἀτάρ*)⁸⁰³. The examples of reversals from happiness to misery include a whole range of situations: 'divine' Joshua defeating the belligerent peoples but (*αὐτάρ*) eventually dying⁸⁰⁴; Samson, who once killed thousands of men with the jawbone of a donkey, ending up grinding grain like an ass⁸⁰⁵; Naomi arriving to Moab together with her husband and two sons but leaving only with her daughter-in-law Ruth⁸⁰⁶. This focus on death ending a heroic life, humiliating sufferings and the loss of family is perfectly in keeping with the tragedy's aim to depict *pathos*, defined by Aristotle as '*a destructive or painful action, such as death on the stage, bodily agony, wounds, and the like*'⁸⁰⁷.

In contrast to stories about downfall, Prodromos' epigrams also contain examples of positive *peripeteia*: Adam, after the fall, firmly believing in the return to paradise through the atonement of crucified Christ⁸⁰⁸; Bathsheba, having lost her first son, soon giving birth to Solomon, a future king of Israel⁸⁰⁹; finally, Christ's resurrection changing the myrrhbearers' grief into joy⁸¹⁰.

While *peripeteia* can take place within one epigram, its effect is more dramatic when Prodromos uses both tetrastichs to describe the transition from happiness to misery, or vice versa. An example of this narrative technique, whereby the first tetrastich focuses on an initial misfortune,

⁸⁰³ Although the frequency of this particle (with 56 occurrences its share in the whole corpus of biblical epigram is 0.003082) in Prodromos' epigrams falls short from Homer (0.004520), it is significantly higher than in the Palatine Anthology (0.000479), which is representative of the language of classical and Byzantine epigrams.

⁸⁰⁴ Papagiannis (1997) Jos. 90b.

⁸⁰⁵ Papagiannis (1997) Jud. 110b.

⁸⁰⁶ Papagiannis (1997) Ruth 112a.

⁸⁰⁷ Tarán and Gutas (2012) 1452b 11-3.

⁸⁰⁸ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 9a. The dramatic character of this reversal is emphasized by a parallel structure: ...ἐξ Ἑδὲμ πέμπουσί με ...εἰς Ἑδὲμ πέμπουσί με.

⁸⁰⁹ Papagiannis (1997) 2 Reg. 148b.

⁸¹⁰ Papagiannis (1997) Matt. 233b.

whilst the second describes a happy resolution, can be found in the pair of epigrams on the binding of Isaac⁸¹¹:

Gen.24.Εἰς τὸ πειρατήριον Ἀβραὰμ καὶ τό “Λάβε τὸν υἱόν σου τὸν ἀγαπητόν”

(a) Δνεῖν ἀγάπαιν Ἀβραὰμ σχεθεὶς μέσον,
τῆς μὲν φυσικῆς τῆς δ' ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν φύσιν,
τῆς φυσικῆς προὔθηκε τὴν ὑπὲρ φύσιν·
ὀρᾷς τὸν υἱόν, τὴν μάχαιραν, τὰ ξύλα.

(b) Ἀνστρεφε τήνδε μάχαιραν, Ἀβραμ γέρον· οὐ γὰρ ἔοικε
παιδοφόνῳ παλάμῃ Θεὸν ἰλάσκεσθαι ἄνακτα·
ἀμνὸς ὅδ' ἄγχι πάρεστι φυτῷ σαβέκ ἀμφιπεδήτης·
τόνδε λαβὼν κατάθυσον, ἀτὰρ φίλου υἱὸς ἀπόσχου.

On the trial of Abraham and ‘take your beloved son’

(a) Abraham was caught between two loves: the natural, and the one that is above all nature. He placed the supernatural love above the natural. Look at his son, the knife and the wood.

(b) Put away this knife, old Abraham. It is not fitting to appease God, your Lord, with a child-killing hand. There is a lamb nearby, caught in a thicket. Take and sacrifice it but keep away from your dear son.

The first epigram describes the tragic choice of Abraham, dramatising his intense inner struggle. Having set the scene for the impending sacrifice, the epigram ends abruptly, leaving the reader with grim anticipation of Isaac’s end. After the suspense, the second epigram relieves the reader by introducing an angel who commands Abraham to spare his son and to sacrifice a lamb in his stead. The epigram features deictic pronouns (*τήνδε μάχαιραν, ἀμνὸς ὅδ’*), which contribute to the *ἐνάργεια* of the action. The dramatic nature of the episode is enhanced by the use of adjective *παιδοφόνος*, which Euripides applies to the characters who killed their children: Medea and Heracles⁸¹². It is only the angel’s urgent intervention that prevents Abraham from joining the ranks of the child-murderers of ancient mythology.

Anagnorisis

⁸¹¹ Gen. 22:1-19.

⁸¹² Diggle (1984) Medea v.1407; Diggle (1981) Hercules v. 1201.

Closely connected to peripeteia is recognition (*ἀναγνώρισις*), which is defined by Aristotle as a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune⁸¹³. Prodromos on two occasions refers to the concept of recognition (*ἀναγνωρισμός*) in the titles of his epigrams on the story of Joseph⁸¹⁴. The story, as it is narrated in the Bible, can be considered a full-scale drama, which unfolds through a series of carefully staged recognitions: the father of Joseph comes to the (false) belief that his son is dead through recognition of Joseph's robe covered in blood⁸¹⁵. Unrecognised by his brothers in Egypt, Joseph accidentally learns about their sincere remorse and, deeply moved, puts their pouches of silver back in their sacks⁸¹⁶. Then, upon recognition of the silver, the brothers regret that they wronged Joseph⁸¹⁷. Finally, the recognition of Joseph's silver cup in Benjamin's sack⁸¹⁸ leads to Joseph's reunion with his beloved brother and the whole family.

The scene of recognition, according to Aristotle, is the most effective when it coincides with *peripeteia*⁸¹⁹. Prodromos achieves this in the description of Jacob's transition from misery to happiness as he reunites with Joseph:

Gen.36.Εἰς Ἰακώβ ἐρχόμενον ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ θρηνοῦντα ἐπὶ τῷ ἀναγνωρισμῷ Ἰωσήφ

(a) — Ἐδάκρυες χθές, Ἰακώβ, τὸν υἱέα
δοκῶν θανεῖν· ἔνδικον ἦν τὸ δακρύειν·
νῦν ζῇ· τί λοιπὸν δακρύεις γελᾶν δέον;
— Τὸ τῆς χαρᾶς δάκρυον ἄρτι δακρύω.

On Jacob coming to Egypt and crying at the **recognition** of Joseph

(a) *You cried yesterday, Jacob, believing that your son is dead. Your weeping was justified. But now he is alive. Why do you keep crying when it is fitting to laugh? I am now shedding the tears of joy.*

⁸¹³ Tarán and Gutas (2012) 1452a 29-32.

⁸¹⁴ (1997) Gen.35 Εἰς Ἰωσήφ δακρύνοντα ἐπὶ τῷ ἀναγνωρισμῷ τῶν ἀδελφῶν αὐτοῦ; Gen.36 Εἰς Ἰακώβ ἐρχόμενον ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ θρηνοῦντα ἐπὶ τῷ ἀναγνωρισμῷ Ἰωσήφ.

⁸¹⁵ Gen. 37:31-3.

⁸¹⁶ Gen. 42:21-5.

⁸¹⁷ Gen. 42:27-35.

⁸¹⁸ Gen. 44:1-12.

⁸¹⁹ Tarán and Gutas (2012) 1452a 32-3.

Prodromos' title identifies Jacob's meeting with Joseph as the moment of *ἀναγνωρισμός*⁸²⁰. Yet, in the Bible, the actual recognition happens earlier, when Jacob receives the favourable news from his sons returning from Egypt⁸²¹. Initially, Jacob is unable to believe that his son is alive and rules over Egypt but once he hears the full story and sees the carts sent by Joseph to bring him to Egypt, all doubts disappear⁸²². Merging Jacob's recognition of Joseph's survival with the reunion of the father and the son adds poignancy and drama to Prodromos' rendering of this biblical story. A dramatic touch is also added by a dialogical conversation between Jacob and Prodromos as well as grammatical constructions, specifically an accusative absolute (*γελᾶν δέον*), which is common in Greek tragedy.

Conclusions

It is clear that Prodromos' biblical epigrams contain a whole range of dramatic features. Prodromos represents biblical characters in action: instead of providing a summary of a completed episode, Prodromos gives a snapshot of a continuous action, which allows a reader to experience a sense of immediacy. This effect is enhanced by the active usage of deictic expressions, a phenomenon that suggests that the biblical epigrams may have been accompanied by a visual image.

Many of Prodromos' epigrams are arranged as dialogues. While the dialogical interaction of biblical characters features in other genres of Byzantine literature (specifically, dramatic homilies and *kontakia*), Prodromos' epigrams are especially effective in evoking classical drama through *stichomythia*, which is an integral part of every ancient Greek tragedy. While some dialogues take place between the characters, others occur between a character and Prodromos himself. In sharing his characters' experience, Prodromos' *persona* assumes a function similar to

⁸²⁰ Gen. 46:29.

⁸²¹ Gen. 45:26.

⁸²² Gen. 45:26-8.

that of a tragic chorus. Furthermore, while inventing speeches for his characters, Prodromos creates ethos, and in this way increases the vividness of the dramatic narrative.

Prodromos often highlights reversals of fortune, either from misery to happiness, or vice versa, which reflects the key structural element of Greek drama, *peripeteia*. In relating the *peripeteia* in the story of Joseph, Prodromos draws attention to the act of recognition, which, again, is crucial for the plot of Greek tragedy. It is remarkable that Prodromos' techniques of dramatisation of biblical history conform to the theory of Greek tragedy formulated in the *Poetics* of Aristotle. While there is no evidence that Prodromos read this treatise, the existence of a twelfth-century manuscript containing the *Poetics* as well as contemporary theoretical discussions of Greek tragedy make Prodromos' acquaintance with Aristotle's ideas on drama possible.

Historiography

Historiography is the most enduring genre of ancient Greek literature⁸²³. While some classical genres such as drama or lyric poetry virtually disappeared with the end of Antiquity, the Byzantines never ceased to write histories. Altogether, they cover practically the entire period of the existence of the Byzantine Empire⁸²⁴. When writing histories, the Byzantines often relied on the ancient founders of the genre, i.e., Herodotus and Thucydides. Similarly to their classical predecessors, Byzantine historians focused on military and political events, adopted a highly sophisticated rhetorical style, and incorporated into their narratives fictitious speeches as well as digressions on geography and ethnography⁸²⁵. Classicising historiography was not, however, the only type of historical writing practised in the Greek Middle Ages⁸²⁶. Christianization of the Empire gave rise to a new genre of ecclesiastical history. It gave an account of the triumph of

⁸²³ Angold and Whitby, Michael (2008); Kaldellis (2010).

⁸²⁴ Treadgold (2007); Treadgold (2013); Neville (2018).

⁸²⁵ Gador-Whyte (2007); Scott (1981).

⁸²⁶ Afinogenov (1992).

Christianity, achieved in the fierce struggle with pagan prosecutors and heretics⁸²⁷. Reflecting on ecclesiastical and classical historiography, Eusebius writes:

Other writers of historical works have confined themselves to the written tradition of victories in wars, of triumphs over enemies, of the exploits of generals and the valour of soldiers, men stained with blood and with countless murders for the sake of children and country and other possessions; but it is wars most peaceful, waged for the very peace of the soul, and men who therein have been valiant for truth rather than for country, and for piety rather than for their dear ones, that our record of those who order their lives according to God will inscribe on everlasting monuments⁸²⁸

The significance of Church history notwithstanding, it was another Christian historiographical genre, the World Chronicle, that developed into a lasting alternative to classicising history: almost every Byzantine century saw a production of at least one chronicle⁸²⁹. While classicising history tended to focus on the recent events, chronicles started their accounts from the Creation and discussed at length the biblical and the Roman past. Universal in their scope, chronicles presented history as predetermined by divine Providence.

While the contents of Prodromos' epigrams overlaps in subject matter with that of Church History (both focus on the Life of Jesus and the Acts of the Apostles) and World Chronicles (with their common interest in the Old Testament), it is striking that Prodromos' rendering of biblical events displays the influence of classical historiography. Like classical histories, Prodromos' epigrams give numerous accounts of military engagements. Partly this is due to the fact that the Old Testament is preoccupied with war. However, in addition to that Prodromos tends to use the vocabulary of ancient historians: *στρατηγός*⁸³⁰, *ὑποστράτηγος*⁸³¹, *όπλοφόρος*⁸³², *σπένδω* (make truce)⁸³³. What is even more striking is that Prodromos projects the juxtaposition between the Greeks and barbarians onto conflicts between the Jews and other tribes; in some of

⁸²⁷ Chesnut (1986).

⁸²⁸ Lake and Oulton (1926).

⁸²⁹ Mango (1988-9); Scott (2012); Howard-Johnston (2016).

⁸³⁰ Papagiannis (1997) 2 Reg. 141a.

⁸³¹ Papagiannis (1997) Jos. 84a.

⁸³² Papagiannis (1997) Jos. 84b.

⁸³³ Papagiannis (1997) 2 Reg. 141t.

his epigrams ‘barbarians’ are defeated by Jonathan⁸³⁴ and David⁸³⁵. David’s most notable opponent, Goliath, is called not only ‘barbarian’ but also ‘hoplite’⁸³⁶, most likely in reference to the elaborate description of his heavy armour in the Bible:

*He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. His spear shaft was like a weaver’s rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels.*⁸³⁷

Goliath’s description in the Bible, indeed, conjures up the image of a hoplite: bronze helmet, corselet, greaves, spear and shield all formed a part of hoplite’s equipment⁸³⁸. Yet, describing Goliath as both ‘barbarian’ and ‘hoplite’ is a contradiction since the status of a hoplite in Antiquity was reserved only to citizens of Greek city-states⁸³⁹.

‘Barbarians’ feature not only in Prodromos’ descriptions of military engagements. Prodromos also uses the notion of ‘barbarian’ to stress the wickedness of immoral characters. This can be illustrated by the epigram on the Christ’s betrayal by Judas:

Matt.223.Εἰς τὴν προδοσίαν

*(b) Τίπτε φιλεῖς, δολόμητι, διδάσκαλον ἐσθλόν, Ἰούδα;
τίπτε, φυλὴ κακοεργέ, **μαχαιοφόρος** ποτὶ ἄρνα
ἔρχεαι οὐκ ἐρίσοντα; ἐκὼν τοι ἔσπεται οἶος·
θῶσον, ὄφρ’ αἶμα λαβὼν ψυχῆς φλιὰν ἀμφιχρिसαίμην.*

On betrayal

*(b) Wily Judas, why are you kissing your noble master? Why, malevolent race, **you approach with swords** the lamb that does not fight back? He will follow you voluntarily as he is. Sacrifice him so that I can receive his blood and anoint the lintel of my soul’s door.*

⁸³⁴ Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 123a.

⁸³⁵ Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 129a.

⁸³⁶ Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 127.

⁸³⁷ 1 Reg. 17:4-7.

⁸³⁸ Lazenby (2015).

⁸³⁹ Lazenby (2015).

After reproaching Judas, Prodromos addresses the crowd sent by priests to arrest Jesus. He calls this group of people *μαχαιοφόρος*. Although this designation aptly reflects the fact that the crowd was armed with swords⁸⁴⁰, it also functions as an insult. In historical sources, the term *μαχαιοφόροι* refers to the soldiers of ‘barbaric’ origin, most notably the Thracians and the Egyptians⁸⁴¹. Furthermore, *μαχαιοφόροι* were often mercenaries⁸⁴², which resonates with the fact that Judas betrayed his master for thirty pieces of silver.

Histories often describe the process of decision-making, which usually takes place in a council (*βουλή*). Occasionally, ancient historians indicate that a council made a poor decision, branding it *άβουλία*⁸⁴³. Prodromos uses this notion too. Specifically, *άβουλία* appears in Prodromos’ criticism of the Jews worshipping the golden calf⁸⁴⁴:

Ex.61.Εἰς Μωσῆν, ὅπως ἐν τῷ χρονίζειν αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ ὄρει τοῦ λαοῦ εἰδωλολατρήσαντος κατελθὼν ἐθυμώθη καὶ τὰς πλάκας συνέτριπεν

(a) Πονηρὲ λαέ, δυσσεβέστατον γένος.
Θεὸν τὸν ἐχθρὸς ἀγνοεῖς σώσαντά σε,
τὸν χθρὸς τὸ θεῖον μάννα χορτάσαντά σε,
καὶ μοσχολατρεῖς; **τῆς άβουλίας**, ὅση.

On Moses, how he came down in anger and broke the Tablets since the people worshiped idols when he spent time on the mountain

(a) Wicked people, the most impious race, do you not know God who yesterday saved you, who yesterday fed you with divine manna? Are you worshipping a calf? Such **thoughtlessness!**

Prodromos’ usage of *άβουλία* mirrors its use by ancient historians. First, *άβουλία* relates to large communities of people, usually a city-state (e.g. Corcyraeans⁸⁴⁵) or a nation (e.g. Greece⁸⁴⁶). If

⁸⁴⁰ Matt 26:47 ὄχλος πολὺς μετὰ **μαχαιρῶν** καὶ ξύλων.

⁸⁴¹ Wilson (2015) 9.32; Jones and Powell (1942) 2.96.2.

⁸⁴² Jones and Powell (1942) 2.96.2; Marchant (1910) 6.2.10.

⁸⁴³ Jones and Powell (1942) 5.75.3, Wilson (2015) 8.57, 8.74.

⁸⁴⁴ Ex. 32:1-35.

⁸⁴⁵ Jones and Powell (1942) 1.32.4.

⁸⁴⁶ Wilson (2015) 7.9

ἀβουλία is ascribed to a single individual (like the Spartan commander Eurybiades in charge of Greek fleet in the battle of Salamis⁸⁴⁷), his course of action nevertheless affects the whole community. In a similar way, in the Bible, Aaron is asked to create the golden calf by all the Jewish people, who subsequently share collective responsibility for worshipping the idol⁸⁴⁸. Also, *ἀβουλία* represents not a misjudgment made in good faith but an act of irresponsible audacity which entails moral condemnation. One ancient example occurs when Xerxes accuses the Spartans at Thermopylae of being driven by *ἀβουλία* and *ἀναιδείη* (shamelessness)⁸⁴⁹. Similarly, Prodromos condemns the *ἀβουλία* of the Jews in a very intense way (*Πονηρὲ λαέ, δυσσεβέστατον γένος*). Finally, *ἀβουλία* may have adverse consequences. Herodotus relates that the Athenian, Mnesiphilus, implored Themistocles to persuade the generals to stay at Salamis to prevent destruction of Greece from *ἀβουλία*⁸⁵⁰. In a similar way, the decision of the Jews to worship the golden calf prompts God to contemplate the complete destruction of the chosen people⁸⁵¹.

Beyond preserving the memory of the events of the past, history has an edifying purpose⁸⁵². The moralising of ancient historians can take different forms, including digressions (anecdotes), speeches and evaluative phrasing⁸⁵³. In his epigrams, Prodromos often intervenes to provide moral guidance. Interestingly, some of Prodromos' admonitions seem to be inspired by historiographical tradition:

Matt.214.Εἰς τὸν νομικὸν πλούσιον

(b) Ὁφελεις, ὦ πλούσιε, πενέστερος ἔμμεν' ἀπάντων·
 ὄφελεις ἐνδεέεσσι συνιζέμεν ἀνθρώποισι,
 μὴ δὲ κομᾶν χρυσοῖο ταλάντεσιν, ὅς σε **κολούει**
 Χριστῷ ἅμ' ἐλθέμεναι, σταυρόν δ' ἀνὰ ὄμον ἀρέσθαι.

⁸⁴⁷ Wilson (2015) 8.74.

⁸⁴⁸ Ex. 32:1.

⁸⁴⁹ Wilson (2015). 7.210.

⁸⁵⁰ Wilson (2015) 8.57.

⁸⁵¹ Ex. 32:9-10.

⁸⁵² Jacobs (2017).

⁸⁵³ Hau (2016) Pp. 7-13.

On the rightful rich man

*(b) Rich man, you ought to have been poorer than the rest. You ought to have joined people in need. You ought not to have plumed yourself with talents of gold, which **prevent** you from walking with Christ, and [reaping the reward of] carrying the cross on your shoulder.*

The epigram deals with the parable of Christ's exhortation to a rich man to sell his possessions and distribute them among the poor⁸⁵⁴. Explaining the rationale for this course of action, Prodromos employs the verb *κολούω* in the unusual sense of 'to prevent'. While the phrase *ὅς σε κολούει* forms an enjambment continued by the last verse of the epigram, it can also be read on its own: 'the wealth degrades you'. Taken in this sense, *κολούω* conjures up a series of episodes from historical works, which identify abundance and excellence as the qualities that make their possessor most vulnerable to destruction. In Herodotus' account of the Persian wars, for example, Artabanus advises Xerxes against waging war on Greece, (prophetically) observing that *φιλέει γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τὰ ὑπερέχοντα πάντα κολούειν* - the god loves to bring low all things of surpassing greatness⁸⁵⁵. Such devaluation of ephemeral greatness appears to corroborate the ideal of Christian asceticism and humility.

To sum up, although Prodromos did not compose a history, his rendering of biblical events displays some features of classical historiography. Firstly, Prodromos' version of biblical history includes a considerable number of military conflicts, which resonates with ancient historiography's preoccupation with war. Secondly, describing biblical military episodes, Prodromos relies on the language and worldview of ancient historians. Specifically, he projects the dichotomy of the Greeks vs. barbarians onto the conflicts between the Jews and other peoples. Thirdly, Prodromos links Christian ethics with some of the moralising ideas of ancient historians.

⁸⁵⁴ Matt. 19:16-26.

⁸⁵⁵ Wilson (2015) 7.10.

Philosophy

The presence of classical philosophy in the biblical epigrams is especially intriguing given that this subject most vividly represents the tensions between the ‘outer’ and Christian wisdoms. Paul the Apostle denounced Hellenic wisdom because it is unable to grasp the mystery of the Christian salvation⁸⁵⁶. In Early Christian literature, pagan philosophy was often viewed as a breeding ground of heresiology, and it is telling that Epiphanius's *Panarion* condemns – among the contemporary Christian heresies – the teachings of Pythagoreans, Platonists, Stoics and Epicureans⁸⁵⁷. The hostility towards ancient philosophy culminated in Justinian's decision to close the Platonic Academy at Athens in 529, which aimed to cleanse the Christian empire of the remains of paganism⁸⁵⁸.

The suspicion towards pagan wisdom was, however, supplemented by adaptation of philosophy to the Christian cause. Many Christian thinkers, for example Clement of Alexandria, believed that philosophy, inasmuch as it encapsulates the ideal of virtue, prepares the soul for comprehension of supreme Christian truth⁸⁵⁹. In a similar way, philosophy, especially the dialectical method of Plato and the logic of Aristotle, was deemed effective in elucidating Christian teachings⁸⁶⁰. Finally, the philosophical method helped defend the Orthodoxy against heresies⁸⁶¹.

While being confined to the school curriculum for the larger part of the Middle Byzantine period, in the eleventh century, philosophy regained its status as a method of independent inquiry

⁸⁵⁶ 1 Cor. 1:18-25.

⁸⁵⁷ Grant (1988) Pp. 148-9; Holl (1915) Pp. 183-7.

⁸⁵⁸ Cameron, Alan (1969).

⁸⁵⁹ Camelot (1931).

⁸⁶⁰ Parry (2017); Bradshaw (2017).

⁸⁶¹ Erismann (2016).

into metaphysical questions⁸⁶². The rise of philosophy's prestige can be illustrated by the epigram of John Mauropous, in which the poet prays for the salvation of Plato and Plutarch⁸⁶³. Furthermore, Mauropous' student Michael Psellos took up a state-funded position of the Master of Philosophers, and made philosophy, along with rhetoric, his chief intellectual preoccupation⁸⁶⁴. Among the major innovations of Psellos' approach was the idea that philosophy could be applied to theological questions⁸⁶⁵. This provoked a backlash among the proponents of mystical currents, and Psellos had to justify his approach. In a letter to his friend John Xiphilinos, Psellos refers to the Church Fathers, who established a precedent (though one apparently forgotten by the eleventh century) of applying the philosophical method to theological matters⁸⁶⁶. Although Psellos' reputation was damaged, his lasting prominence as a high-placed bureaucrat helped him escape prosecution. The fate of Psellos' student John Italos was different. While Psellos' philosophical inquiries were eclectic, Italos made the application of reason to the questions of faith his major intellectual endeavor⁸⁶⁷. Although it is highly unlikely that Italos ever upheld any tenet of the pagan philosophy that contradicted the Christian teaching, he tended to examine Christian assumptions on their own merit, without relying directly on the authority of the Fathers. This, along with Italos' Norman origins and links to the conspiracy of overthrown Doukas family, made him an easy target for the new conservative emperor Alexios Komnenos, who wished to fashion himself as a defender of Orthodoxy⁸⁶⁸. In 1082, Italos was tried and condemned⁸⁶⁹. In the wake of the trial, the Synodikon of Orthodoxy was supplemented with eleven anathemas, which condemn not only specific tenets of pagan philosophy that were at

⁸⁶² Kaldellis (2007) Pp. 193-202.

⁸⁶³ de Lagarde (1882) Epigramma 43.

⁸⁶⁴ Duffy (2002); Papaioannou (2013) Pp. 29-50; Jenkins (2017).

⁸⁶⁵ Clucas (1981) Pp. 137-8.

⁸⁶⁶ Papaioannoun (2019) Pp. 527-44; Jeffreys and Lauxtermann (2016) Pp. 151-2.

⁸⁶⁷ Clucas (1981) P. 79.

⁸⁶⁸ Clucas (1981) Pp. 88-99.

⁸⁶⁹ Gouillard (1985).

variance with Christian dogma but also any attempts to apply philosophical method to theological issues⁸⁷⁰.

The twelfth century was a period of disgrace for philosophy⁸⁷¹. The chair of the Master of the Philosophers was occupied only twice: by Italos' pupil Theodore Smyrna and – after a long break, in 1166 – by Michael the nephew of the bishop of Anchialos, who, in his inaugural lecture, promised to subordinate philosophy to theology and limit his studies to Aristotle⁸⁷². Granted, Aristotelian studies flourished in the twelfth century, but it is striking that they focused on producing commentaries, especially on those works, which were at a safe distance from metaphysical questions: Michael of Ephesus commented on various zoological treatises, the *Politics*, the *Rhetoric*, the *Sophistical refutations*, while Eustratios of Nicaea produced a commentary on the Second Book of the *Posterior Analytics*⁸⁷³. Beyond the scholarly tradition, philosophy was discouraged, and the Comnenian period saw several dozens of trials of the philosophers who interfered with theology⁸⁷⁴. Thus, the aforementioned Eustratios of Nicaea, who, apart from commentaries, produced polemical theological works, some of which - in the form of philosophical dialogues⁸⁷⁵, was forced in 1117 to abdicate as a result of accusation of heresy. It is of interest that one of the points of Eustratios' trial ascribes to him a thesis that Christ made use of syllogisms in the manner of Aristotle⁸⁷⁶. Several decades later two professors of Patriarchal School, Michael of Thessalonica and Nikephorus Basilakes, were condemned for theorising about the Trinity⁸⁷⁷.

⁸⁷⁰ Clucas (1981) Pp. 139-62.

⁸⁷¹ Browning (1975a).

⁸⁷² Browning (1961); Polemis (2011).

⁸⁷³ Barber and Jenkins (2009).

⁸⁷⁴ Trizio (2017b).

⁸⁷⁵ Demetrakopoulos (1866) Pp. 127-51.

⁸⁷⁶ Joannou (1952) P. 34; Lloyd (1987).

⁸⁷⁷ Clucas (1981) Pp. 69-71.

More pertinently to this study, Theodore Prodromos was also accused of unorthodox views, possibly, as in the case of his fellow intellectuals, in relation to the Trinity. No evidence of any trial proceedings survive, but we have his poem directed against his accuser, Barys, where Prodromos, defends his faith and, like Psellos, justifies his use of philosophy by referring to the philosophical credentials of the Fathers⁸⁷⁸. In other circumstances, Prodromos even had to feign an aversion to philosophy. In his *Life of Saint Meletios*, Prodromos praises the saint for neglecting all the branches of *θυραία φιλοσοφία* (outer – or pagan - philosophy) for the sake of devoting himself to *the wise folly of fishermen*⁸⁷⁹. In the address to the patriarch John IX Agapetos, Prodromos himself rejects Proclus and other Neoplatonic philosophers in favour of the Christian wisdom⁸⁸⁰.

Considering such oppressed status of philosophy, it is not surprising that already in the second pair of epigrams (on Creation) Prodromos rebukes Aristotle for developing cosmology that is at odds with the Bible:

Gen.2.Εἰς τὴν πρώτην ἡμέραν, καθ' ἣν ἐγένετο ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ

(a) Ὡ καὶνὲ τέκτον οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς, Λόγε,
 πρῶτα στεγάζεις, εἶτα βάθρα πηγνύεις;
 καὶ δημιουργεῖς οὐρανοῦ γῆν δευτέραν;
 καὶ τοῦτο τῆς σῆς πανσόφου λεπτοργίας.
 (b) Εἴ κε θεοπροπίην Μωυσέος οὔρασι βάλλον
 σοῖσιν, Ἀριστότελες, τάχ' ἂν οὐρανὸν ἀμφενόησας
 κτίσμα Θεοῦ μέγαλοιο σάφ' ἔμμεναι, οὐ δέ τε πειθοῖ
 κλεψινόφῳ ἀγέννητον ἔφησθά μιν, ἀλλὰ γενητόν.

On the first day, in which the heaven and the earth came into being

(a) O amazing craftsman of the heavens and the earth, the Word, do you first build a roof and then foundations? And do you create the earth after the heavens? This is the way of your most wise subtle workmanship.
 (b) If, Aristotle, Moses' prophecy had not fallen on your deaf ears, you would perhaps have comprehended that the sky is clearly a creation of great God, and you would not

⁸⁷⁸ Hörandner (1974) Poem LIX.

⁸⁷⁹ Papadopoulos (1935) Section 2.

⁸⁸⁰ Manaphis (1974) Section 5.

have claimed, employing deceptive persuasion, that it is uncreated; instead you would have held it for created.

The theory of the eternity of the world, developed in the *Physics*, was indeed one of the major points of criticism of Aristotle's thought on the part of Christian apologists and philosophers⁸⁸¹. Prodromos' 'refutation' of ancient philosophers is, however, charged with irony. Conjuring up the scene of Aristotle listening to Moses (albeit without paying attention) Prodromos seems to parody an idea – advocated primarily by Philo – that Greek philosophy derives from the Torah⁸⁸². In a similar way, Christian apologists, who wished to downplay the achievements of Greek philosophers, suggested that the Greeks learned their philosophical wisdom from other – barbarian – peoples⁸⁸³. In most cases, these barbarian philosophers were thought to be in the possession of the truth achieved through revelation rather than rational inquiry. In particular, one of the major sources of barbarian philosophical knowledge was prophecy. While Prodromos' reference to the prophetic ability of Moses is grounded in the Bible, its designation as *θεοπροπίη* is not entirely appropriate. With 41 occurrences before Prodromos, this word is practically reserved to pagan epic poets: Homer (7)⁸⁸⁴, Apollonius of Rhodes (14)⁸⁸⁵, Quintus of Smyrna (7)⁸⁸⁶ and Tryphiodorus (2)⁸⁸⁷, who naturally apply *θεοπροπίη* to pagan deities. Apart from a few occurrences in dictionaries and commentaries, one encounters *θεοπροπίη* in the polemical treatise by Origen, who dismisses Greek oracles and asserts that even some pagans reject them⁸⁸⁸. Thereafter, Origen contrasts pagan oracles with the prophecies of Jewish prophets who

⁸⁸¹ Bydén (2013) P.156.

⁸⁸² Goodenough (1962) P. 95.

⁸⁸³ Früchtel, Stählin and Treu (1960-70) 1.15.69.

⁸⁸⁴ Il. 1.87, 1.385, 11.794, 16.36, 16.50, Od. 1.415, 2.201.

⁸⁸⁵ Fränkel (1961) 1.66, 144, 209, 301, 448, 487, 958, 1106, 2.213, 512, 769, 4.1357, 1747, 1756.

⁸⁸⁶ Vian (1963-9) 5.339, 6.60, 7.190, 220, 10.263, 14.365, 396.

⁸⁸⁷ Mair (1928) Alosis Iliou vv. 49, 132.

⁸⁸⁸ Borret (1967-9) 7.3.

are enlightened by the Spirit of God⁸⁸⁹. Describing Moses' speech as *θεοπροπίη*, Prodromos identifies the biblical prophet with the religious tradition that he is supposed to reject.

Another aspect of the irony in representing Aristotle as an inattentive listener can be identified if one takes into account that this image reverses the didactic scene from Prodromos' commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* in which Aristotle speaks from the position of authority⁸⁹⁰. To elucidate a complicated part of Aristotle's theory, Prodromos conjures up a student accusing Aristotle of inconsistency. In response to this, Aristotle demonstrates that his theory is coherent and criticises the student for failing to pay attention to what he had said earlier:

Ἦ, φησίν, εἰ <μὴ> τετρημένοις ἤκουες τοῖς ὥσι τῶν ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ ἀπορίᾳ ῥηθέντων μοι, οὐκ ἂν ἀμφισβητήσιμός σοι ὁ παρὼν ἐγένετο λόγος.

*If, he [Aristotle] responds, what I had said regarding the first problem **had not fallen on deaf ears**, you would not have any doubts about the present argument.*⁸⁹¹

In Prodromos' epigram, Aristotle transforms from a teacher into an inattentive student. This ironic reversal is accompanied with a subversion of anti-Aristotelian sentiment that Prodromos purports to propagate in his epigram. This is exemplified in the ambiguity of *ἀμφοινοέω*⁸⁹². Before Prodromos, *ἀμφοινοέω* occurs only once, in Sophocles' *Antigone*⁸⁹³. This means that Prodromos' reader could be unsure about how to construe this verb. To fit *ἀμφοινοέω* consistently into Prodromos' argument, one has to take it as 'to fully understand'. This ad hoc interpretation does not, however, find support in Sophocles' usage, who endows *ἀμφοινοέω* with a completely different meaning: *to be in doubt*⁸⁹⁴. Therefore, those members of Prodromos' audience who

⁸⁸⁹ Borret (1967-9) 7.4.

⁸⁹⁰ Cacouros (1992).

⁸⁹¹ Cacouros (1992) P. 210.

⁸⁹² Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 2b2.

⁸⁹³ Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990) *Antigone* ln. 376.

⁸⁹⁴ Liddell and Scott (1940) *ἀμφοινοέω*. Interestingly, the scholiast in Xenis (2021) ln. 376b claims that the prefix *ἀμφί* is redundant (*περισσὴ ἢ ἀμφί*), suggesting thus – incorrectly – that *ἀμφοινοέω* is identical to *νοέω* (apprehend). This confusion is likely to prompt the linguistic game that Prodromos plays in the epigram under discussion.

were acquainted with the *Antigone* could be tempted to read the beginning of Prodromos epigram not as:

*If, Aristotle, Moses' prophecy had not fallen on your deaf ears, you would perhaps have **understood** that the sky is clearly a creation of great God*

but as:

*If, Aristotle, you had listened to Moses, you would perhaps have **put into question** that the sky is clearly a creation of great God*

Granted, the remaining part of the epigram ('and you would not have claimed, employing deceptive persuasion, that it is uncreated; instead you would have held it for created') makes clear that only the first interpretation produces a coherent text. Yet, the hypothetical possibility of Aristotle challenging Moses suggests that Prodromos was not sincere in his criticism of the ancient philosopher.

This hypothesis can be supported by the fact that in his rendering of biblical events, Prodromos consistently appeals to philosophical images, terminology and theories. I will demonstrate that by discussing Prodromos' treatment of themes found in the works of Plato and Aristotle.

Platononic themes

A recurrent means of marrying philosophy with the Bible is the presentation of interactions between biblical characters in the form of a platonic dialogue. One biblical story that inspired Prodromos to draw analogies with philosophical dialogue can be found in the second chapter of Gospel of Luke⁸⁹⁵. After presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Luke says that Jesus' parents took their twelve-year-old son to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. When the festival was over, Mary and Joseph left without realising that Jesus stayed behind. When they came back, they found Jesus '*in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking*

⁸⁹⁵ Luke 2:41-52.

them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers'⁸⁹⁶.

Prodromos' epigram on this story reads as follows:

Luc.239. Εἰς τὴν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ ὑπομονὴν τοῦ δωδεκαετοῦς Ἰησοῦ

(a) Ἥ μὴ φθονοῦντες ἀκροᾶσθε γνησίως,
Φαρισαϊκὴ δύσθεος γερουσία,
ἢ τί φθονοῦντες ἀκροᾶσθε τῶν λόγων,
ὧν παῖς ὁ **παμπάλαιος** Ἰησοῦς λέγει;
(b) Τίς ποτε παῖς, ὃ κάθισσεν ἐφ' ὑψηλοῦ θρόνου,
ἐν δ' ἀγορὴν συνάγειρε γεραίην; οἷα δὲ βάζει;
δεῦρο περιστάντες μιν ἀκουσόμεθ' ὅτι κεν εἴπῃ·
ἢ ῥ' ὃ γε παῖς Θεός ἐστι, Θεοῦ δέ τε ῥήματα βάσκει

On leaving twelve-year-old Christ in Jerusalem

(a) Are you, godless council of pharisaic elders, genuinely listening without any resentment, or why do you, resentful as you are, listen to the words, which Jesus, a **very old** child, says?
(b) What child did ever sit on a high seat and gather the assembly of the elders? What does he talk about? Come, let us surround him and listen to what he says. Indeed, this boy is God, and he utters divine words.

The biblical story bears strong similarities to the setting of a platonic dialogue. As in Plato, the biblical dialogue takes place between a young man and more experienced 'teachers'.

Furthermore, the biblical passage features the theme of wisdom: 'And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man'⁸⁹⁷. Most importantly, Prodromos draws an analogy between the Bible and Plato by using *παμπάλαιος*. Coined by Plato in the *Theaetetus*⁸⁹⁸, this word is quite rare (31 occurrences before Prodromos) and mostly restricted to philosophical (and often Platonic) authors. Given that *παῖς ὁ παμπάλαιος* constitutes *contradictio in terminis*, it is almost certain that this idiosyncratic combination was meant to stand out as an allusion to the *Theaetetus*⁸⁹⁹. The reference to the *Theaetetus* is appropriate since the protagonist of this dialogue, like Christ, is a young boy who is praised for his outstanding abilities. The characters

⁸⁹⁶ Luke 2:46-7.

⁸⁹⁷ Luke 2:52.

⁸⁹⁸ Burnet (1900) *Theaetetus* 181b3.

⁸⁹⁹ One, however, also needs to keep in mind that *puer senex* was a popular topos in Medieval and Byzantine hagiography: Pratsch (2005) Pp. 88-90. One of the aspects of this tradition is the practice to call Christ Ancient of Days (*παλαιὸς τῶν ἡμερῶν*) after the Book of Daniel (Dan. 7:9, 7:13, 7:22).

of the dialogue highlight the precociousness of Theatetus even before he enters the discussion⁹⁰⁰. Eucleides, who recorded the conversation between Theatetus, Theodorus and Socrates, reports in the introduction that Socrates was so impressed by the boy's natural gifts that he prophetically ('μαντικῶς') predicted that he would become a notable man⁹⁰¹. As Socrates met the young prodigy Theaetetus shortly before his death⁹⁰², his role becomes similar to that of Simeon and Anna the Prophetess, who recognised newborn Christ as Messiah⁹⁰³. Another interesting similarity is the presumably tragic death of Theaetetus. When Eucleides meets his interlocutor Terpsion at the very beginning of the dialogue, he reports that he has just run into Theaetetus who was mortally wounded⁹⁰⁴. Theaetetus' heroism emerges as a self-sacrifice – just as in the case of Christ.

While the Bible does not specify the age of the 'teachers' (διδάσκαλοι) talking with Christ⁹⁰⁵, Prodicus represents them as elders (γερονσία)⁹⁰⁶. This seems to be inspired by the *Theaetetus* too. Indeed, Plato repeatedly stresses the contrast between Theaetetus' youth and Theodorus' old age; this recurrent theme often informs dramatic development of the conversation⁹⁰⁷.

Further evidence of Platonic stylisation comes from Prodicus' version of the story about Pharaoh commanding midwives to kill all the male offspring of the Jews⁹⁰⁸.

Ex. 40 Εἰς τὸ πρόσταγμα Φαραὼ τὸ κελεῦον ταῖς μαίαις τῶν Ἑβραίων φονεῦν μὲν τὰ ἄρρενα ζωογονεῖν δὲ τὰ θήλεα.

⁹⁰⁰ Burnet (1900) *Theaetetus* 143e-144b.

⁹⁰¹ Burnet (1900) *Theaetetus* 142c-d.

⁹⁰² Burnet (1900) *Theaetetus* 142c.

⁹⁰³ Luke 2:25-38.

⁹⁰⁴ Burnet (1900) *Theaetetus* 142a-b.

⁹⁰⁵ Luke 2:46.

⁹⁰⁶ Papagiannis (1997) 239a2.

⁹⁰⁷ Burnet (1900) *Theaetetus* 146b; Burnet (1900) *Theaetetus* 165a-b; Burnet (1900) *Theaetetus* 183c-d.

⁹⁰⁸ Ex. 1:22.

(a) Θεὸς τὸν Ἀβραμ εὐλογεῖ καὶ πληθύνει,
σύ δ', ὧ Φαραώ, κτιννύεις καὶ σμικρύνεις;
ταῖς ὀμφαλητόμοις δε τιθήναις λέγεις
πᾶν ἀρσενικὸν θανατοῦν; **κακῶς λέγεις**.

On Pharaoh's order to midwives of the Jews to kill boys but spare girls

(a) God blesses and multiplies [the people of] Abraham, whereas you, Pharaoh, kill and diminish it? Are you telling the nurses, who cut navel strings, to put to death every male child? You are talking nonsense!

The biblical account of this story has the rudimentary elements of a dialogue. Pharaoh's command is reported as a direct speech addressed to two midwives; each of them have personal names⁹⁰⁹. The midwives do not challenge Pharaoh's order but silently ignore it. However, the next interaction between the midwives and Pharaoh is presented as a dialogue:

*Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?" The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive"*⁹¹⁰.

Prodromos turns this conflict into an eristic refutation. What the Bible states simply as a matter of fact ('God was kind to the midwives and the people increased (*ἐπλήθυνεν ὁ λαὸς*) and became even more numerous'⁹¹¹), Prodromos presents as an argument against Pharaoh's intention (Θεὸς τὸν Ἀβραμ εὐλογεῖ καὶ **πληθύνει**, σύ δ'...)⁹¹².

A most notable feature of Platonic influence can be found in the expression *κακῶς λέγεις*. Being a reversal of a popular Socratic phrase, *εὖ λέγεις*, – meaning, 'you are making a good point' (36 occurrences in Plato's dialogues), it may seem to be a Platonic formula for expressing disagreement in a dialogical exchange. However, this is not the case. In Plato (as indeed in other authors), *κακῶς λέγω* in most cases takes a direct object and means to 'speak ill of

⁹⁰⁹ Ex. 1:15-16.

⁹¹⁰ Ex. 1:18-9.

⁹¹¹ Ex. 1:20.

⁹¹² Papagiannis (1997) Ex. 40a1-2.

somebody/something⁹¹³. Less often, *κακῶς λέγω* denotes a wrong opinion but in this case it would refer to a third party absent from a conversation⁹¹⁴. There are only two instances when Plato uses *κακῶς λέγω* in second person but in both cases 1) the tense of *λέγω* is other than present; 2) the phrase is negated and, most importantly, 3) forms part of a complex syntactical structure⁹¹⁵. As a self-standing formula, *κακῶς λέγεις* does not appear in Plato at all.

Although quasi-Platonic *κακῶς λέγεις* is certainly an innovation, Prodromos was not the only Byzantine author to use this formula. Aside from Prodromos, *κακῶς λέγεις* also features in Pseudo-Macarius' questions and answers⁹¹⁶ and Gennadius Scholarius' treatise on Filioque⁹¹⁷. As both of these works have a dialogical structure, their authors, like Prodromos, may have employed *κακῶς λέγεις* to reinvent Platonic language in the new rhetorical framework.

The final testimony to Plato's presence in biblical epigrams is provided by Prodromos' portrayal of king Saul:

1Reg.122.Εἰς τὸ εἶδος Σαοὺλ καὶ ὅπως τοὺς Ἀμμανίτας ὠλόθρευσεν.

(a) *Εἰ πρῶτον εἶδος ἄξιον τυραννίδος,
ὕπερ Σαοὺλ τίς ἄξιος τυραννίδος,
Σαοὺλ ἐκεῖνον τὸν μέγαν, τὸν ὠμίαν,
τὸν εὐπρόσωπον, τὸν καλὸν τὴν ιδέαν;*
b) —*Τίς φθ' ὅδ' ἀνὴρ ὑπερῆλιξ, εὐρύτατοι δέ οἱ ὦμοι,
Ἀμμανίτην δ' ἀπόλυσι πολὺν καὶ ἀπείρονα λαόν;
—Κοίρανος Ἑβραΐης ὅδ' ἐπλετο, λῶστέ, γενέθλης,
Κίς δέ μιν ἐξεφίτυσσε, φίλον δέ οἱ οὖνομα Σαοὺλ.*

On appearance of Saul and how he destroyed the Ammonites

(a) *If it is appropriate to bestow kingship basing on the first **impression**, who is more worthy of kingship than Saul, that Saul, who is tall, **broad-shouldered, attractive and good-looking**?*

⁹¹³ Burnet (1903) Euthydemus 284d; Burnet (1903) Meno 94e; Burnet (1907) Leges Vol.5 934d-e.

⁹¹⁴ Burnet (1903) Ion 531e-532a; Burnet (1907) Leges 916d-e; Slings (2003) 392a-b.

⁹¹⁵ Burnet (1900) Theaetetus 187d; Slings (2003) 492e-493a.

⁹¹⁶ Berthold (1973) 32 1 1.

⁹¹⁷ Jugie, Petit and Siderides (1930). 1 11.

(b) *Who is this mature man, with **extremely broad shoulders**, the one who destroyed great and innumerable army of the Ammonites? This, my dear friend, was the ruler of the Jewish race, he was begotten by Kish, and his name is Saul.*

Praising Saul's appearance, Prodromos follows the biblical text, which highlights Saul's good looks as an explanation for his election as a king:

as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others. Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people"⁹¹⁸.

Defining appearance as a criterion for kingship, Prodromos, however, appears to be ironic since Saul eventually proved to be a bad king. The ironic effect is created through multiple features of Platonic language (*εἶδος, καλόν, ἰδέα, λῶστέ*) that recall Plato's idea that appearance is deceptive. Furthermore, Prodromos quotes a famous line from Euripides *πρῶτον μὲν εἶδος ἄξιον τυραννίδος* (firstly, goods looks are worthy of kingship)⁹¹⁹ that in the Byzantine tradition acquired ironic potential. For example, in the chronography of Theophanes Continuatus, Michael III allegedly quotes this line to justify his decision to elevate an oarsman of the imperial dromon to the office of kaisar⁹²⁰.

The subversion of Saul's praise is, however, not the only function of platonising vocabulary. I suggest that, in this epigram, Prodromos uses Saul merely as a cover for expressing his admiration for Plato. The substitution of Saul with Plato as the true hero of this epigram is especially tempting since Prodromos on two occasions refers to the characteristic broad shoulders. While Saul did have exceptionally broad shoulders⁹²¹, this physical feature was also a characteristic of one Athenian philosopher to the extent that it gave him his name - Plato⁹²².

⁹¹⁸ 1 Reg. 10:23-4.

⁹¹⁹ Nauck (1889) Fragment 15 v. 2.

⁹²⁰ Featherstone and Signes-Codoñer (2015) P. 296.

⁹²¹ 1 Reg. 9:2.

⁹²² Dorandi (2013) 3 4.

Prodromos' decision to celebrate Plato in such a clandestine fashion (rather than, for example, through direct comparison with Saul) suggests that Prodromos was mindful that the application of philosophy to the Bible could fail to find approval among his contemporaries. This is why the better part of the Platonic allusions did not feature any technical terminology and thus could be recognized only by those who were sympathetic to Prodromos' philosophical pursuits.

Aristotelian themes

References to Aristotle in Prodromos' epigram cover different areas of Aristotle's interests including physics, logic and ethics. They often involve technical terminology, which stands in contrast with poetic language of epigrams. This contrast can be intended to highlight ideological tension between the biblical belief in the supernatural and Aristotle's profoundly scientific outlook. An example of Prodromos' juxtaposition of Christian revelation and Aristotelian science comes from the pair of epigrams on Saul tormented by an evil spirit:

1Reg.126. Εἰς τὸ πονηρὸν πνεῦμα τὸ πνίγον Σαούλ, ὃ τῇ Δαβὶδ κιθάρᾳ ἡσύχαζεν

(a) *Ἐναντίωσιν ὧδε πνευμάτων βλέπε·
τὸ μὲν προφήτην τὸν Κῖς υἱὸν δεικνύει,
τό δ' αὐτὸν ἄγχει καὶ πιέζει καὶ πνίγει·
μὴ τοῦ πνίγοντος, ὃ Τριάς, πεῖραν λάβω.*
(b) *Πνεῦμα θεηγορέοντος ἀπέπτατο ἐκ σέο, Σαούλ,
οὔνεκα παμμεδέοντος ἐλήσας συνθεσιάων·
πνεῦμα δέ τοι κακίης μεταέπτατο καὶ σε ἀπάγχει,
καὶ τάχα κέν σε τέλος Δαβὶδ ἀπέπνιζ' ἀπεόντος.*

On the evil spirit choking Saul, which calmed down thanks to David's lyre

(a) Look at this sort of **contrariety** between the two spirits. One makes son of Kish a prophet, while the other strangles, stifles and torments him. May I not, o Triad, experience the spirit of torment.
(b) The spirit of the diviner flew away from you, Saul, since you forgot the covenant with the Ruler of All. The spirit of evil has flown instead and it strangles you. It would have strangled you to death if David had not been present.

The biblical story behind this epigram goes as follows. God shares with Samuel his intention to appoint Saul, son of Kish, King of Israel to save the Jews from the Philistines⁹²³. Saul is anointed by Samuel. Being inspired by the Spirit (*πνεῦμα*) of God, Saul becomes a prophet and defeats his enemies⁹²⁴. During one of his military campaigns Saul, however, disregards the commands of God⁹²⁵. Saul loses his throne, and Samuel anoints David the new king⁹²⁶. Having fallen out of God's favour, Saul is repeatedly tormented by an evil spirit, which eventually incites him to attack David⁹²⁷. Yet, David escapes death and all the subsequent plots against his life end with Saul's humiliation by God⁹²⁸.

Describing the dynamics of Saul's influence by the two opposite spirits, Prodromos employs the Aristotelian notion of contrariety (*ἐναντίωσις*). Featuring in different works of Aristotle, this concept is a key instrument in Aristotle's analysis of process⁹²⁹. Every *ἐναντίωσις* implies the deprivation of an opposite quality⁹³⁰. Given that substitution of the benevolent spirit with an evil one marks a fundamental change in Saul's circumstances (specifically his loss of power), the concept of *ἐναντίωσις* acquires quasi-heuristic value in understanding the story of Saul. That said, Prodromos' employment of *ἐναντίωσις* produces comic discrepancy between biblical spirituality and Aristotle's empiricism. Though some contraries in Aristotle have metaphysical foundations, Aristotle tends to apply them only to entities that form the subject matter of physics. With growth and decay being among the major processes described by principles of contraries, the discussion of contraries often presupposes matter⁹³¹. The association of contraries with materiality is best illustrated by the fact that Aristotle, following pre-Socratic

⁹²³ 1 Reg. 9:15-16.

⁹²⁴ 1 Reg. 14:15-23.

⁹²⁵ 1 Reg. 15:1-35.

⁹²⁶ 1 Reg. 16:1-13.

⁹²⁷ 1 Reg. 19:9-10.

⁹²⁸ 1 Reg. 19:11-24.

⁹²⁹ Anton (1985).

⁹³⁰ Ross (1924) 1055b 18-20.

⁹³¹ Ross (1924) 1069b.

tradition, employs them to describe the interaction between elements: earth, air, fire and water⁹³². Prodromos, on the other hand, applies *ἐναντίωσις* to *πνεῦμα*. In classical Greek, *πνεῦμα* was used interchangeably with *ἀήρ* (air) and often referred to physical reality⁹³³. However, in Christianity, *πνεῦμα* came to mean spirit and as such stood in sharp contrast with the material world⁹³⁴. By disregarding this development, Prodromos reduces the divinely inspired action to natural process.

Occasionally Aristotle's scientific terminology acquires critical potential when applied to a miraculous event. This can be illustrated by Prodromos' epigram on Joshua commanding the Sun stand still.⁹³⁵

Jos.90. Εἰς τὸν θάνατον Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναυῆ

(a) Ὁ χθὲς τὸν ὀζὺν ἡλίου στήσας δρόμον
νῦν παντελῇ πέπονθεν **ἀκίνησίαν**,
ὥς μὴ θεὸς δόξειε τοῖς ἀπλουστέροις
πρὸς τὰς ξένας βλέψασι θαυματουργίας.

On the death of Joshua

(a) *The one who onetime stopped the swift movement of the Sun, now has come to a **complete stop**, so that he does not seem like God to overly simple-minded people, who looked at the wondrous marvels.*

The term derived from Aristotle's theory of motion (*ἀκίνησία*) prompts the reader to question: how does Joshua's miracle fit with Aristotle's scientific outlook? The answer is that it not only defies the basic principle of natural causality, but it also contradicts some specific tenets of Aristotle's cosmology. While the motion of terrestrial objects, according to Aristotle, is always

⁹³² Forster and Furley (1955) On Coming-to-be and Passing Away 331a. This theory must have been familiar to Prodromos as he alludes to it in his poem *Friendship in Exile*: Zagklas (2014) Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ. vv.73-87.

⁹³³ Diels and Kranz (1951) Anaximenes. Fragment 2; Burnet (1900) Phaedo 112b; Bekker (1831) Problemata 940b.

⁹³⁴ Lampe (1961) *πνεῦμα*.

⁹³⁵ Jos. 10:1-15.

finite, heavenly objects move in a continuous fashion⁹³⁶. Apart from providing theoretical explanation for eternal motion of heavenly bodies, Aristotle draws attention to the striking empirical evidence supporting his theory:

*throughout all past time, according to the records handed down from generation to generation, we find no trace of change either in the whole of the outermost heaven or in any one of its proper parts*⁹³⁷.

The incompatibility of Joshua's miracle with Aristotle's natural philosophy does not indicate much on its own. It is, however, striking how emphatically Prodnomos exposes Joshua's mortal nature while singling out 'simple-minded people' admiring miracles⁹³⁸. Given this critical charge, I suggest that the reference to Aristotle may have been used to cast doubt on the veracity of the story, which the Bible itself presents as extraordinary⁹³⁹.

This interpretation, however, does not constitute the only possible reading of the epigram in question. Although ἀκίνησία originates in the scientific treatises of Antiquity, this concept was adopted by the Christian authors who considered it one of the properties of God⁹⁴⁰. In this respect, Joshua achieving ἀκίνησία (eternal rest) after his death can be considered as an example for all the faithful practicing mortification of the flesh. The ability to lend itself to different interpretations is not an exclusive feature of this epigram but rather a general characteristic of the poetics of Prodnomos who had to balance between the self-expression and the orthodoxy.

To sum up, despite the tensions between philosophy and religion in the twelfth century, Prodnomos makes extensive usage of Platonic and Aristotelian stylistic features, concepts and theories. Elucidating the Bible as a philosophical text, Prodnomos makes a case for reconciling

⁹³⁶ Lloyd (1968) Pp. 135-9. Cf. reference to the ancient astronomy in Prodnomos' *Friendship in Exile*: Zagklas (2014) Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ. vv. 58-72.

⁹³⁷ Guthrie (1939) 270b.

⁹³⁸ Papagiannis (1997) Jos. 90a3-4.

⁹³⁹ Jos. 10:14.

⁹⁴⁰ Migne (1864) Cyrillus, De Sancta Trinitate P. 1125.

the Christian and pagan wisdoms. On the other hand, Prodromos' philosophical readings of the Bible highlight the difference between revelation and reason. Although Prodromos purports to favor the Christian dogma over philosophical theories, his actual sympathy to philosophy was greater than he could openly reveal.

Novel

Romantic novels were works of fiction that narrated the adventures of young lovers of aristocratic backgrounds. The heroes usually suffered shipwrecks, captivity, sexual assaults, separations but eventually reunited and married⁹⁴¹. The genre flourished between the second and fourth centuries AD, and its five specimens have been transmitted to the modern day: Chariton's *Callirhoe*⁹⁴², Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*⁹⁴³, Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*⁹⁴⁴, Xenophon of Ephesus' *Ephesian Tale*⁹⁴⁵, and Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*⁹⁴⁶. Although Christianity did not encourage the representation of sensual love, romantic novels enjoyed great popularity in Byzantium⁹⁴⁷. Among the five novelists, Heliodorus was held in particularly high esteem, and became the source for anthologies, didactic works, and poems⁹⁴⁸. The *Aethiopica* also prompted critical responses by Byzantine authors. Patriarch Photius dedicated to the *Aethiopica* a chapter in his collection of book reviews known as the *Bibliotheca*⁹⁴⁹. Defining the *Aethiopica* as *σύνταγμα δραματικόν*, Photius praises it both in terms of style and ethics. After this critical introduction, Photius relates the plot. It is striking that Photius' rendering ignores the fact that the story opens *in medias res*. Yet, the degree of detail suggests that Photius read Heliodorus with great interest. Interestingly, the *Aethiopica* is not the only novel reviewed by Photius. The

⁹⁴¹ Hägg (1983).

⁹⁴² Reardon (2004).

⁹⁴³ Vilborg (1955).

⁹⁴⁴ Dalmeyda (1934).

⁹⁴⁵ Dalmeyda (1926).

⁹⁴⁶ Lumb, Maillon, and Rattenbury (1960).

⁹⁴⁷ Beaton (1989).

⁹⁴⁸ Gärtner (1969); Agapitos (1998).

⁹⁴⁹ Henry (1959-77) Codex 73 50a6-51b41; Treadgold (1980).

Bibliotheca also contains discussion of the lost novels by Iamblicus (*A Babylonian story*)⁹⁵⁰ and Antonius Diogenes (*The wonders beyond Thule*)⁹⁵¹ as well as the celebrated romance by Achilles Tatius *Leucippe and Clitophon*⁹⁵². Photius likens the plot of the *Leucippe and Clitophon* to that of the *Aethiopica* but does not enjoy Achilles Tatius as much as Heliodorus. Although Photius enjoys the sweetness of Achilles Tatius' style, he condemns the erotic focus of his work.

A more balanced comparison between Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius can be found in the critical essay by Michael Psellos⁹⁵³. Overall, Psellos favors the *Aethiopica*, admiring its rhetorical charm, elevated morality as well as narrative sophistication. As for the *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Psellos considers it as imitation of the *Aethiopica* that achieves greater stylistic glamour but falls short in effective characterisation of heroes.

The interest in the romantic novel culminated in the Comnenian period⁹⁵⁴. Within a very short period of time, possibly a decade, this fascination with the genre yielded four Byzantine novels: *Hysmine and Hysminias* by Eustathios Makrembolites⁹⁵⁵, *Rhodanthe and Dosicles* by Theodore Prodromos⁹⁵⁶, *Drosilla and Charikles* by Niketas Eugenianos⁹⁵⁷, and *Aristandros and Kallithea* by Constantine Manasses⁹⁵⁸. While Makrembolites used prose, three other authors departed from the genre conventions by writing in verse. Among other innovations one can point out a shift in focus from action towards rhetorical descriptions, personifications and lamentations⁹⁵⁹. The twelfth-century novels enjoyed great popularity and made an impact on other contemporary

⁹⁵⁰ Henry (1959-77) Codex 94 73b24-78b3.

⁹⁵¹ Henry (1959-77) Codex 166 109a6-112a12.

⁹⁵² Henry (1959-77) Codex 87 66a14-28.

⁹⁵³ Barber and Papaioannou (2017) Pp. 186-92.

⁹⁵⁴ Beaton (1996); Burton (1998); Nilsson and Zagklas (2017).

⁹⁵⁵ Marcovich (2001); Nilsson (2001).

⁹⁵⁶ Marcovich (1992).

⁹⁵⁷ Conca (1990).

⁹⁵⁸ Mazal (1967); Jeffreys (2012).

⁹⁵⁹ Roilos (2006).

genres including epistolography, history, and hagiography⁹⁶⁰. Remarkably, Comnenian novels share some similarities with Old French courtly literature such as *Le Roman de la Rose*, although the exact direction of influence remains a matter for debate⁹⁶¹.

Given that Prodhomos played an important a role in reviving erotic fiction, it is not surprising that his accounts of some biblical stories contain allusions to ancient Greek novels. My first example comes from the pair of epigrams on the myrrhbearers learning about Christ's resurrection⁹⁶²:

Matt.232.Εἰς τὰς μυροφόρους

(a) Ἰωάννα· —Ποῦ τῇ Σαλώμῃ συντρέχεις,
 φίλῃ Μαριάμ; —Εἰς Ἰησοῦ τὸν τάφον.
 —Κἀγὼ σὸν ὑμῖν. —**Ποῦ δ' ὁ νεκρός; ἐκλάπη;**
 —Οὐκ ἐκλάπη, γυναῖκες, ἀλλὰ ζῶν μένει.
 (b) —Τίς λάαν μετάειρεν, ὑπέρμεγα πῶμα τάφοιο;
 τίς δέ τε νεκρὸν ἄνακτα **συλήσατο** τύμβον ὀρύζας;
 —Σῶμα νεκρὸν **συλάει τυμβωρύχος**, αὐτὰρ Ἰησοῦς
 ἔγρετ', ἐπεὶ Θεός ἐστι· Πέτρῳ φάτε ταῦτα, γυναῖκες.

On myrrhbearers

(a) Joanna: Where are you running, dear Maryam, together with Salome? - To the tomb of Jesus. - I will join you. – **Where is the corpse? Is he stolen?** – He is not stolen, women, but continues to live.
 (b) Who has removed the stone, the immensely great lid of the tomb? Who has **carried away** the dead lord, having dug the tomb? – **A gravedigger carries away** the dead body but Jesus has risen since he is God. Say this to Peter, women.

In both of the epigrams, the women suggest that Jesus' body has been stolen by gravediggers. However, this interpretation does not find support in the biblical text. According to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, the myrrhbearers do not make any guesses about the disappearance of the Jesus' body; they simply accept the angel's announcement that Christ has risen⁹⁶³. The

⁹⁶⁰ Mullett (2006); Messis (2014).

⁹⁶¹ Cupane (1974); Beaton (1989) Pp. 154-63.

⁹⁶² Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-13; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-10.

⁹⁶³ Matt. 28:2-7; Mark 16:5-7; Luke 24:4-8.

Gospel of Matthew contains an episode, in which the chief priests ask soldiers to testify that Jesus's body was stolen by his disciples⁹⁶⁴. However, the priests' wishful thinking is not the same as the actual reaction of myrrhbearers.

The Gospel of John relates the scenes with the myrrhbearers differently from the other Gospels. According to John, Mary Magdalene sees the empty tomb and rushes to the apostles to say the following: *'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'*⁹⁶⁵. When Mary returns to the tomb, she encounters two angels to whom she repeats what she has already said to the apostles⁹⁶⁶. Finally, she faces Christ but at first does not recognise him. Mistaking Christ for a gardener, Mary shares her trouble yet again: *'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him'*⁹⁶⁷. Significantly, throughout her short speeches, Mary refers to Christ's body as not stolen (*κλέπω, συλλάω*) but simply taken away (*αείρω, βαστάζω*). In a similar way, Mary does not make any reference to gravediggers (*τυμβωρύχοι*), which feature in Prodnomos' epigrams.

Prodnomos' departure from the Bible can be explained if we consider that his rendering of Christ's resurrection is informed by the motive of the mock death, which represents one of the most popular plot twists in ancient Greek novel⁹⁶⁸. Significantly, some of the mock deaths involve discovering an empty tomb. In particular, this is the case for Chariton's novel the *Chaereas and Callirhoe*. The novel starts with a luxurious funeral of the aristocratic woman Callirhoe who was accidentally killed by her jealous lover Chaereas⁹⁶⁹. Soon after the funeral, Callirhoe's tomb is plundered by pirates, who discover that the woman survived⁹⁷⁰. Fascinated

⁹⁶⁴ Matt 28:11-3.

⁹⁶⁵ John 20:2 Ἦραν τὸν κύριον ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου, καὶ οὐκ οἶδμεν ποῦ ἔθηκαν αὐτόν.

⁹⁶⁶ John 20:13 Ἦραν τὸν κύριόν μου, καὶ οὐκ οἶδα ποῦ ἔθηκαν αὐτόν.

⁹⁶⁷ John 20:15 Κύριε, εἰ σὺ ἐβάστασας αὐτόν, εἰπέ μοι ποῦ ἔθηκας αὐτόν, καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸν ἄρῶ.

⁹⁶⁸ Whitmarsh (2011) Pp. 208-9; Winkler (2014) Pp. 576-9.

⁹⁶⁹ Reardon (2004) 1.5.

⁹⁷⁰ Reardon (2004) 1.9.

with Callirhoe's beauty, the pirates abduct her and sell her to a rich Milesian⁹⁷¹. As Callirhoe suffers the misfortunes of serfdom, her family visits her grave to make offerings⁹⁷². Noticing that the tomb is open, Callirhoe's family suggests that her body has been stolen by gravediggers⁹⁷³. Soon however, Callirhoe's family is relieved to learn that after her abduction Callirhoe was still alive⁹⁷⁴. The story of Callirhoe's mock death seems to be a possible hypotext in Prodromos' representation of Christ's resurrection. Indeed, both narratives share several elements, represented in the chart below, some of which are absent from the Gospels:

	Chariton	Prodromos
Surprise at the disappearance of the body	νεκρὰ δὲ ποῦ; (3 3 4)	Ποῦ δ' ὁ νεκρός; (a3)
Inference that the body was stolen by gravediggers	τυμβωρύχοι διορύξαντες τὸν τάφον ἔκλεψαν αὐτήν (3 2 7)	ἐκλάπη; (a3), τίς δέ τε νεκρὸν ἄνακτα συλήσατο τύμβον ὀρύξας; (b2)
Announcement of survival/resurrection	ζῇ Καλλιρόη (3 2 7)	Οὐκ ἐκλάπη, γυναῖκες, ἀλλὰ ζῶν μένει (a4), αὐτὰρ Ἰησοῦς ἔγρετ' (b 3-4)

In addition to these parallels, one can point out that Callirhoe on several occasions is taken for a goddess. This happens, for example, when Chaereas and other Syracuseans discover an empty tomb⁹⁷⁵. This consideration makes assimilation of Callirhoe's and Christ's resurrections more appealing but also theologically problematic.

Another allusion to a novel can be found in the pair of epigrams on Saul summoning the spirit of Samuel with the help of the Witch of Endor⁹⁷⁶:

1Reg.138.Εἰς Σαοὺλ δεόμενον τῆς ἐγγαστριμύθου ἀνενεγκεῖν αὐτῷ τὸν Σαμουήλ

(a) Ὁ χθὲς προφήτης καὶ λαλῶν τῷ Κυρίῳ
ἐγγαστριμύθῳ νῦν λαλεῖς γραῖδίῳ;
ὁ τὸν Σαμουήλ ζῶντα μὴ ζήτῳ βλέπειν

⁹⁷¹ Reardon (2004) 1.10-4.

⁹⁷² Reardon (2004) 3.3.

⁹⁷³ Reardon (2004) 3 3 4.

⁹⁷⁴ Reardon (2004) 3 2 7.

⁹⁷⁵ Reardon (2004) 3 3 5 μὴ γὰρ οὐκ ἦδεν ὅτι θεὸν εἶχον γυναῖκα καὶ κρείττων ἦν ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς.

⁹⁷⁶ 1 Reg. 28:7-20.

ζητεῖς βλέπειν θανόντα; τῆς ἐμπληξίας.
(b) Ὁρθιος ἐξ Αἴδαο βλέπων ἀνάεισι Σαμουήλ
(θηλυτέρη γάρ μιν βιήσατο νερτερόμαντις),
λυγρὰ δε θέσφατ' ἔειπε Σαοὺλ ἀδίκῳ βασιλῇ·
τῶν δέ κεν ὡς κατάκουσε Σαοὺλ, φίλα γούνατα λῦτο.

On Saul asking ventriloquist bring Samuel to him

(a) *You who, the day before, were a prophet and talked to the lord, are you now talking to a ventriloquist crone? Not willing to see Samuel when he was alive you seek to see him when he is dead. What a stupidity.*
(b) *The seer Samuel came up straight from Hades (for a female necromancer forced him), and communicated baneful oracles to the unrighteous king. As Saul heard them, his knees became weak.*

While the Bible does not specify necromancer's age⁹⁷⁷, Prodromos represents her as an old woman (γραιδίον)⁹⁷⁸. This detail prompts a comparison with the scene of necromancy found in Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*. In Book 6, Chariclea and her foster father Calasiris go on a search for Chariclea's lost lover Theagenes⁹⁷⁹. They encounter a multitude of fallen men; near the dead they also meet an old woman who mourns her fallen son⁹⁸⁰. The old lady promises to take Chariclea and Calasiris to a safe place the following morning but asks them to leave her alone for a night so that she can make a sacrifice⁹⁸¹. As Chariclea and Calasiris retreat, the old woman performs magic rites and raises her dead son to interrogate him about the fate of his brother⁹⁸². As the fallen man appears to be reluctant to talk, his mother performs additional rites, trying to make him speak⁹⁸³. The fallen man succumbs but his responses fall short of the old woman's hopes⁹⁸⁴. Not only does he foretell the looming death of his brother, but he also accuses his mother of disturbing him in front of strangers; he adds that as a punishment for the sacrilege she

⁹⁷⁷ In 1 Reg. 28:7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 21, 23, 24 she is called simply γυνή – a woman.

⁹⁷⁸ Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 138a2.

⁹⁷⁹ Lumb, Maillon, and Rattenbury (1960) 6.11.

⁹⁸⁰ Throughout the episode she is called γύναιον πρεσβυτικόν 6.12.2; πρεσβῦτις 6.12.3, 16.13.6, 6.14.3, 16.14.7; γραιῦς 16.13.4, 16.14.5, 16.15.5.

⁹⁸¹ Lumb, Maillon, and Rattenbury (1960) 6.13.6.

⁹⁸² Lumb, Maillon, and Rattenbury (1960) 6.14.1-4.

⁹⁸³ Lumb, Maillon, and Rattenbury (1960) 6.14.5-6.

⁹⁸⁴ Lumb, Maillon, and Rattenbury (1960) 6.15.1-2.

will soon suffer a violent death⁹⁸⁵. Having understood that the act of necromancy was observed by Charicles and Calasiris, the old woman starts to run between the dead in search of strangers but accidentally stumbles upon a sword and dies⁹⁸⁶.

The description of necromancy in the Bible and Heliodorus' novel share a number of similarities. Firstly, summoning the dead is caused by war: the old woman wants to learn about the fate of her soldier son, while Saul looks for advice before an upcoming battle⁹⁸⁷. Secondly, the ghosts of the dead foretell the doom of those who summoned them⁹⁸⁸. Thirdly, the ghost's message upsets its recipient: Saul refuses to eat, whereas the old woman starts to chase Charicles and Calasiris before accidentally killing herself⁹⁸⁹.

Taking advantage of these parallels, Prodromos introduces further details to make Saul's story more similar to the episode from the novel. Most notably, Prodromos represents the (originally ageless) Witch of Endor as an old woman. Furthermore, Prodromos makes her responsible for 'forcing' (*βιήσατο*) Samuel to appear before Saul⁹⁹⁰. This seems to be informed by the *Aethiopica*, where the fallen man complains that his mother 'violently forced' him to speak⁹⁹¹.

While Prodromos' possible reliance on the *Aethiopica* is intriguing, he nevertheless does not appear to be unique in showing interest in Heliodorus' representation of necromancy. Rendering *Aethiopica* in his *Bibliotheca*, Photius devotes disproportionate attention to the episode in question⁹⁹². Interestingly, this interest to magic is reflected in Photius' reviews of other novels

⁹⁸⁵ Lumb, Maillon, and Rattenbury (1960) 6.15.3-4.

⁹⁸⁶ Lumb, Maillon, and Rattenbury (1960) 6.15.5.

⁹⁸⁷ Lumb, Maillon, and Rattenbury (1960) 6.12.2; 1 Reg. 28:4-5.

⁹⁸⁸ Lumb, Maillon, and Rattenbury (1960) 6.15.3; 1 Reg. 28:16-9; Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 138 b3.

⁹⁸⁹ Lumb, Maillon, and Rattenbury (1960) 6.15.5; 1 Reg. 28:20.

⁹⁹⁰ 1 Reg. 138b2 θηλυτέρη γάρ μιν **βιήσατο** νερτερόμαντις.

⁹⁹¹ Lumb, Maillon, and Rattenbury (1960) 6.15.2 σῶμα νεκρὸν **ἐκβιαζομένη**

⁹⁹² Henry (1959-77) Codex 73 50b 37 – 51a 7.

too: the summary of Iamblichus' *Babyloniaca* features another reference to necromancy⁹⁹³, while the exposition of the *Wonders beyond Thule* by Antonius Diogenes includes the description of a trip to the underworld⁹⁹⁴.

To conclude, the allusions to the ancient novel in Prodromos' epigrams reflect the genre's popularity in the twelfth century Byzantium. At the same time, Prodromos' adaptation of novelistic material is controversial: one epigram compares Christ's resurrection to the fake death of enamoured heroine, whereas another focuses on necromancy.

Rhetorical strategies

Given Prodromos' rhetorical credentials⁹⁹⁵, one is not surprised to find that the biblical epigrams are exceptional rhetorical compositions. Most importantly, the epigrams constitute a paraphrase – a rhetorical activity that lies at the very heart of the Byzantine literary culture⁹⁹⁶. Byzantine paraphrasis was used as an instrument of elucidating authoritative text through adaptation of a different form, language and style⁹⁹⁷. Any literary work could potentially become an object of paraphrase; thus, there are paraphrases of histories⁹⁹⁸, saints' lives⁹⁹⁹ and letters¹⁰⁰⁰. It was, however, Scripture, that was most often paraphrased in commentaries, homilies and poems¹⁰⁰¹. Prodromos' transformation of the Bible into collection of epigrams also falls under definition of Byzantine paraphrasis. In what follows, I shall demonstrate that Prodromos' strategies of rewriting were rooted in the school rhetorical practices.

⁹⁹³ Henry (1959-77) Codex 94 75b 24.

⁹⁹⁴ Henry (1959-77) Codex 166 109a 39 -109b 2.

⁹⁹⁵ See Chapters One and Three of this thesis: Pp. 39-41, 96-103.

⁹⁹⁶ Efthymiadis (2021).

⁹⁹⁷ Alwis, Hinterberger, and Schiffer (2021).

⁹⁹⁸ Wahlgren (2021).

⁹⁹⁹ Resh (2015).

¹⁰⁰⁰ Lovato (2021).

¹⁰⁰¹ Faulkner (2019).

Paraphrase

Defining paraphrase as a *change of form of expression that retains the same thought*, Theon points out four main types: variation in syntax, variation by addition, variation by subtraction, and variation by substitution¹⁰⁰². All of these types, as well as combinations thereof, are actively employed by Prodrornos.

1) Syntactical paraphrase, according to Theon, makes use of the same words but their order is rearranged¹⁰⁰³.

An example of this type can be found in Prodrornos' epigram on the offerings for the tabernacle:

καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀπαρχή, ἣν λήμψεσθε παρ' αὐτῶν· χρυσίον (1) καὶ ἀργύριον (2) καὶ χαλκὸν (3) καὶ ὑάκινθον (4) καὶ πορφύραν (5) καὶ κόκκινον διπλοῦν (6) καὶ βύσσον κεκλωσμένην (7) καὶ τρίχας αἰγείας (8) καὶ δέρματα κριῶν ἡρυθροδανωμένα (9) καὶ δέρματα ὑακίνθινα (10) καὶ ξύλα ἄσηπτα (11) καὶ λίθους σαρδίου (12) καὶ λίθους εἰς τὴν γλυφὴν εἰς τὴν ἐπωμίδα (13) καὶ τὸν ποδήρη (14).

*These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold (1), silver (2) and bronze (3); blue (4), purple (5) and scarlet yarn (6) and fine linen (7); goat hair (8); ram skins dyed red (9) and another type of blue leather (10); acacia wood (11); and onyx stones (12) and other gems to be mounted on the ephod (13) and breastpiece (14)*¹⁰⁰⁴.

Ex.62.Εἰς τὴν νομικὴν σκηνήν

(b) Χαλκός (3) τε χρυσός (1) τε καὶ ἄργυρος (2) ἐν δ' ὑάκινθος (4) πορφύρα (5) τ' ἡδὲ κριῶν καλὰ νάκεα (9) διὰ τε βύσσοις (7) ξύλα τ' ἄσηπτα (11) λίθοι τ' ἀπὸ Σαρδόφι (12) καὶ τρίχες αἰγῶν (8), σκηνὴν ταῦτ' ἐπόησε θεηδόχον, εὖ ἀραρυῖαν.

On the Tabernacle

(b) Bronze (3), gold (1), silver (2), and besides blue (4), purple (5), and fine ram fleece (9), divine flax (7), acacia wood (11), Sardian stones (12) and goat hair (8) made thus god-receiving tabernacle, well-furnished indeed.

¹⁰⁰² Kennedy (2003) P. 70.

¹⁰⁰³ Kennedy (2003).

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ex. 25: 3-7. Septuagint omits verse 6, which is present in the Hebrew original and modern translations: olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense.

Of the long lists of offerings Prodomos preserves almost everything, omitting only one type of dye (6), one type of leather (10)¹⁰⁰⁵ and both types of gems (13, 14). Disregarding minor changes in suffixes (*ἄργυρος* instead of *ἀργύριον*, *χρύσος* instead of *χρυσίον*), it would be possible to say that Prodomos keeps the nouns as they appear in the original: the only exception is the change of ram skins (*δέρματα κριῶν*) into fleece (*κριῶν νάκεα*). Prodomos's treatment of adjectives is more liberal: *κεκλωσμένην* and *ἡρυθροδανωμένα* are substituted with *δία* and *καλά*, whereas *αἰγείας* is transformed into a noun *αἰγῶν*. The word order underwent changes too: for example, precious metals are no longer arranged according to their value.

2, 3, 4) Paraphrase by addition elaborates the original words. In contrast, paraphrase by subtraction omits some elements of the original. Finally, paraphrase by substitution replaces the original words with their synonyms¹⁰⁰⁶. All these types of paraphrase can be illustrated by the epigram on Samson killing a lion:

καὶ κατέβη Σαμψων καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ εἰς Θαμναθα. καὶ ἐξέκλινεν εἰς ἀμπελῶνα Θαμναθα, καὶ ἰδοὺ σκύμνος λεόντων ὠρυόμενος εἰς ἀπάντησιν αὐτοῦ· καὶ κατηύθυνεν ἐπ' αὐτὸν πνεῦμα κυρίου, καὶ διέσπασεν αὐτόν, ὥσπερ διασπάσαι ἔριφον αἰγῶν, καὶ οὐδὲν ἦν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ. καὶ οὐκ ἀπήγγειλεν τῷ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ οὐδὲ τῇ μητρὶ ἃ ἐποίησεν.

*Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done.*¹⁰⁰⁷

Jud.102.Εἰς τὸν Σαμψὼν σκίζοντα τὸν λέοντα

*(b) Οὐρεὸς ἔσσυτ' ἄφαρ σκύμνος λιὸς ἐκ δασυφύλλου,
οὐρῇ παῖε δὲ πλευράν, ἀτὰρ λυγρὰ μῆδετο ἔργα·
τόν δ' ὥς οὖν ἐνόησεν ἐπάλμενον ἐγγύθι Σαμψών,
χερσὶ λαβὼν στιβαρῇσι κατέκτανε διχθὰ κεάσας*

¹⁰⁰⁵ The precise meaning of *δέρματα ὑακίνθινα* was unclear to scholars for a very long time: only recently it was persuasively argued that the original here refers to beaded skins. Propp (2006) Pp. 374-5.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Kennedy (2003) P. 70.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Jud. 14.5-6.

On Samson tearing a lion

(b) Suddenly a lion's cub leaped from the mountain's dense foliage, struck his side with a tail, and plotted baneful deeds. As Samson spotted the lion springing close to him, he took him with stout hands and killed by tearing him apart.

Prodromos' epigram accurately conveys the content of the biblical episode but its form is completely different. It is telling that only two (σκόμνος and χείρ) of twenty-nine words of this epigram derive from the original text. As Prodromos needs to fit the whole episode into just four verses, he resorts to subtraction. The subtraction is achieved through omission of a) geographical location (Timnah) b) Samson's parents c) Samson's inspiration by the spirit of God d) comparison of a lion with a goat. At the same time, Prodromos invents some new details that add vividness to his narrative. In particular, the lion a) springs from the densely wooded mountains b) strikes his side with a tail c) contrives evil deeds. The latter phrase (λυγρὰ μῆδετο ἔργα) represents a Homeric formula. Prodromos also imitates Homer by substituting the *Koine* words (λέων, διασπάω, αὐτόν) with their epic equivalents (λίς, διχθὰ κεάσας, τόν).

It is also possible to paraphrase one's own words; this is seen in Prodromos' works when he responds to a single event not with one but two epigrams. The relationship between the two epigrams cannot be described through a single formula. Yet, one can point out the following patterns:

1) Both epigrams form a continuous narrative¹⁰⁰⁸. For example, Gen. 13a describes God's rejection of the human race¹⁰⁰⁹, while Gen. 13b instructs Noah to build an ark to save himself from the Flood¹⁰¹⁰. Within this scheme, the first epigram can still anticipate what is about to happen later, while the second can summarise what has been already said before¹⁰¹¹.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Papagiannis (1997) Gen 13, Gen 17, 3 Reg. 173.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Gen. 6:5-7.

¹⁰¹⁰ Gen. 6:12-4.

¹⁰¹¹ Papagiannis (1997) Jud 99.

2) Epigrams present biblical events in the reverse order¹⁰¹². The first epigram in this case would normally describe the climax of an episode, while the second would provide its background. For example, Gen. 14a reports that Noah cursed Ham for not covering his shame¹⁰¹³, while Gen. 14b returns to the events that led Noah to lying naked¹⁰¹⁴

3) Alternatively, epigrams can mix up the original sequence of biblical events. In this case, each epigram gives an idea of the whole episode but only in fragmentary form. As a result, to reconstruct the original narrative, a reader needs to collate information from both epigrams¹⁰¹⁵. In this respect, one can observe that Prodrornos often uses flashbacks and flashforwards. For example, 2 Reg. 150a praises Joab's resourcefulness in reconciling Absalom with David, their father¹⁰¹⁶; 2 Reg. 150b starts with a flashback to Absalom's exile in the wake of his murder of his brother Amnon¹⁰¹⁷ but then returns to the account of Joab's plan to reinstate Absalom in David's favor.

4) Epigrams narrate biblical events almost in an identical manner but differ in tense¹⁰¹⁸. Iambic trimeter would normally use the present tense and describe the episode as if it is happening live. On the other hand, hexametric tetrastich, in accordance with Homeric imitation, would render the same episode into a story of an epic past.

5) While one epigram uses third-person narrative, another adopts dialogical form. Some dialogical interactions take place between characters; others involve the author who can address

¹⁰¹² Papagiannis (1997) 2 Reg. 150.

¹⁰¹³ Gen. 9: 22-7.

¹⁰¹⁴ Gen. 9:20-1.

¹⁰¹⁵ Papagiannis (1997) Jud. 111.

¹⁰¹⁶ 2Reg. 14:1-24.

¹⁰¹⁷ 2Reg. 13:23-39.

¹⁰¹⁸ Papagiannis (1997) Deut. 80, Jos. 84 Jud. 91, 1Reg. 127.

a character¹⁰¹⁹ or a reader¹⁰²⁰. The difference between these narrative forms is similar to that of 4): third-person narrative presents an event as an established fact, while dialogue describes it in action.

6) Epigrams narrate the same event but adopt the point of view of different characters. This can be illustrated by 1Reg. 124, which gives an account of killing of the Amalekites' king Agag. In 1Reg. 124a, Prodomos exposes Agag's vain hope for survival, whereas in 1Reg. 124b he reprimands Saul for sparing the defeated king.

7) One epigram gives an impartial account of the episode, while another offers an ethical interpretation. The latter can include a praise¹⁰²¹, a rebuke¹⁰²² or an exhortation¹⁰²³.

8) One epigram focuses exclusively on the given episode, while another draws a comparison with another biblical event or character. The latter often takes the form of biblical typology, which interprets some Old Testament characters or events as prefigurations of their New Testament 'antitypes'¹⁰²⁴. In this manner, Prodomos compares the budding of Aaron's staff with the birth of Christ¹⁰²⁵, and Joshua – by virtue of his name - with Jesus¹⁰²⁶.

9) Epigrams give contradictory interpretation of the episode. This can be illustrated through a pair of epigrams on Jesus in Gethsemane. In Matt. 22a, Prodomos urges Christ not to beg God to avert his destiny because humanity can achieve salvation only through Jesus' self-sacrifice.

¹⁰¹⁹ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 11, Ex. 46, Num. 76.

¹⁰²⁰ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 10, Ex. 45, Matt. 200.

¹⁰²¹ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 19, 4Reg. 179.

¹⁰²² Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 18, 3 Reg. 167.

¹⁰²³ Papagiannis (1997) Ex. 50, Num. 70.

¹⁰²⁴ Baker (1976); Jeffreys, E. (2010b).

¹⁰²⁵ Papagiannis (1997) Num. 71.

¹⁰²⁶ Papagiannis (1997) Jos. 88.

On the other hand, in Matt. 222b Prodromos wishes Judas had been idle in that fateful night, expressing thus (unfulfilled) desire for Christ's survival.

10) While no two epigrams are identical, some pairs practically repeat each other, only with slight variations in detail. For example, both 1Reg. 137a and b are arranged as dialogues, in both of which Prodromos wonders why David does not use the opportunity to kill Saul. Twice exhorted to take revenge, David twice refuses to do so. Reenacting the same scene again, Prodromos highlights David's exceptional loyalty.

Figures of Speech

The rhetorical nature of Prodromos' epigrams is also reflected in his extensive use of rhetorical figures. A figure, according to grammarian Alexander, is '*an amelioration of thought or diction*'¹⁰²⁷. Rhetorical figures were usually subdivided into the figures of thought (*διάνοια*) and the figures of speech (*λέξις*): the former was concerned with strategies of argumentation, whilst the latter deals with means of expression¹⁰²⁸. Below are examples of rhetorical figures most frequently used by Prodromos:

Alliteration (parechesis) is the repetition of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words: Ex. 47b3 **κ**λιβάνους τε **κ**λίνας τε¹⁰²⁹

Anadiplosis is the repetition of the same word or phrase from the preceding clause in the beginning of the new one: Gen33a3-4. ἡ προσδοκᾷς ἐντεῦθεν αὐτὸν **ἐλκύσαι**; οὐχ' **ἐλκύσεις**, γίνωσκε, καὶ χεῖρῳ δράσης¹⁰³⁰

¹⁰²⁷ Spengel (1856) P. 11; Kennedy (1983) P. 124.

¹⁰²⁸ Spengel (1856) P. 10; Porter (2001) P. 581.

¹⁰²⁹ For other examples see: Papagiannis (1997) Ex. 49b, Act. Ap. 271a, 280a.

¹⁰³⁰ Papagiannis (1997) Lev. 64a.

Anaphora is the repetition of a word or phrase in the beginning of successive clauses:

Gen. 35b Συγγενὲς αἴμ' ἀπέδοντο ὁμαίμονες ἄλλοδαποῖσι· συγγενὲς αἴμ' ἀπέδοντο, γένους σφίσι δ' οὗτι μεμήλει¹⁰³¹

Anthithesis is the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas: Gen. 26a Ὡς δυστυχῆς ἡ θήρα τῆς κυνηγίας· ὥς εὐτυχῆς ἡ θήρα τῆς ἀπλαστίας¹⁰³²

Asyndeton is the omission of the conjunction between parts of the sentence: Gen. 32b ὥς ἴδεν, ὧς ἐμάνη

Chiasmus is a figure in which words, constructions or concepts are repeated in reverse order:

Act. Ap. 284b πρόσιτ', ἔθνεα πάντα· ἔθνεα πάντα, πρόσιτε¹⁰³³

Diacope is the repetition of a word or phrase with one or several intervening words: Gen. 22a

Ἔκφευγε, Λώτ, ἔκφευγε τὴν γῆν Σοδόμων¹⁰³⁴

Ecphonesis is a sudden emotional exclamation used for emphasis or to capture attention: Act.

Ap. 290b Χριστὸν μὲν Σατανᾶς πειράζετο (ὦ μέγ' ἀναιδής).¹⁰³⁵

Epanalepsis is ending clause with its beginning: Gen. 25b Οὗτος ἐκεῖνος, ἄνασσα, τεὸς πόσις,

οὗτος ἐκεῖνος.¹⁰³⁶

¹⁰³¹ Papagiannis (1997) Ex. 59b, Act. Ap. 267a.

¹⁰³² Papagiannis (1997) Gen 67a, Act Ap. 271.

¹⁰³³ Papagiannis (1997) Act Ap. 268b, 1 Reg. 121a.

¹⁰³⁴ Papagiannis (1997) Jud 91b, Act. Ap. 267b.

¹⁰³⁵ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 5b, Act. Ap. 289a.

¹⁰³⁶ Papagiannis (1997) Act. Ap. 293b.

Epistrophe is the repetition of a word or phrase in the successive clauses: 2Reg. 145 Εἴ τις βροτοῖς ὄρχησις ἐστὶν ἀμύμων, ἢ τοῦ Δαβὶδ ὄρχησις ἐστὶν ἀμύμων.¹⁰³⁷

Epizeuxis is the immediate repetition of a word or phrase: Ex. 40 Παιδοφόνους Φαραὼ Μωσῆς χέρας ἔκφυγεν οἶος, οἶος ἀπὸ βρεφέων¹⁰³⁸

Paregmenon is the juxtaposition of words that have the same etymological derivation:

Gen. 14b καὶ πῖεν ἀρπαλέως ζωρὸν μέθυ, ἐκ δὲ μεθύσθη¹⁰³⁹

A special case of paregmenon is **figura etymologica**, in which an accusative is used with a cognate verb: Gen. 29a ἄλλην φθορὰν ἔφθειρεν, ἄλλην ἐφθάρη¹⁰⁴⁰

Polyptoton is the repetition of a word in different cases or inflections: Gen. 20a δρυὲς δρυῶν μακαρτάτη¹⁰⁴¹

Synonymia is the use of synonyms to amplify a given subject: Jos. 89a Ποῦ δραπετεύεις, ἀλλόφυλε; ποῦ τρέχεις; ... μάτην προφεύγεις¹⁰⁴²

In addition to the rhetorical figures listed above, Prodromos uses a type of repetition that does not seem to be defined in rhetorical handbooks. Specifically, in one tetrastich, Prodromos exploits dialectal variety to spell ‘three’ (τρισσός/ τρεῖς) in four different ways:

2Reg. 157

(b) **Τρισσοῖς** ἀμφὶ κακοῖσι μέσος περὶ Δαβὶδ ἐρχθεῖς,

¹⁰³⁷ Papagiannis (1997) Jud. 91a.

¹⁰³⁸ Papagiannis (1997) Jos. 81b, Act. Ap. 279b.

¹⁰³⁹ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 27b, 1 Reg. 124b.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 36a.

¹⁰⁴¹ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 29a, Act. Ap. 290b.

¹⁰⁴² Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 10b, Num. 77a.

ἥ ἐ τρισοῖς λυκάβασι βίη λιμοῖο παλαῖσαι,
ἥ μήνεσσ' τρισοῖσιν ἄλυσκάζειν ξίφος ἐχθρῶν,
ἥ τρισὶν ἡμασι λαὸν ὄλυσθαι, εὔλετο τοῦτο

Compositional Techniques: Use of Progymnasmata

Further evidence supporting the rhetorical nature of Prodrornos' epigrams is provided by active usage of elements of *Progymnasmata*¹⁰⁴³. *Progymnasmata* were rhetorical exercises that aimed to prepare a student for public performances. While these exercises were composed by teachers of rhetoric throughout Late Antique and Byzantine period¹⁰⁴⁴, only four handbooks of *Progymnasmata* survive in full: those by Theon (first century), Hermogenes (second century), Aphthonius (fourth century) and Nicolaus (fifth century). Aphthonius, whose handbook enjoyed the greatest popularity in the Byzantine period, divides *Progymnasmata* into fourteen categories: *mythos* (fable), *diegema* (narrative), *chreia* (anecdote), *gnome* (maxim), *anaskeue* (refutation), *kataskeue* (confirmation), *topos* (common place), *encomion*, *psogos* (invective), *synkrisis* (comparison), *ethopoeia* (characterisation), *ekphrasis*, *thesis* (proposition), and introduction of a law¹⁰⁴⁵. Although most of these elements were designed for public speaking, they had an impact on many literary compositions beyond rhetoric too. The biblical epigrams are not an exception, and below I will highlight the influence of *Progymnasmata* on Prodrornos' poetics.

Narrative

Aphthonius defines narrative (*διήγημα*) as an exposition of an action¹⁰⁴⁶. The majority of Prodrornos' epigrams fall under this category. However, while some epigrams contain ethical commentary, others focus solely on narrative¹⁰⁴⁷. The latter tend to employ past tense and

¹⁰⁴³ Kennedy (2003) P. 70.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Littlewood (1972); Kotzabassi (1993); Pignani (1983).

¹⁰⁴⁵ Kennedy (2003) Pp. 96-127.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Kennedy (2003) P. 96.

¹⁰⁴⁷ The list of such purely narrative epigrams is provided in Papagiannis (1997) P. 6.

contain a lot of verbs. Some of the epigrams feature *ποτε* (once upon a time) that sets the storytelling tone¹⁰⁴⁸.

Chreia

Theon defines *chreia* (*χρεία*) as a brief saying or action attributed to a famous person¹⁰⁴⁹. Some *chreiai* are verbal (*λογικαί*), some describe action (*πρακτικαί*), and some are mixed¹⁰⁵⁰. Verbal *chreiai* are further broken down into declarative (*ἀποφαντικόν*) and responsive (*ἀποκριτικόν*): the former contain statements made by a historical figure, while the latter feature someone responding to a particular situation or a question.

Some titles of Prodromos' epigrams identify a given biblical episode as *chreia* by quoting a saying. Examples of such titles include: Matt. 194 *Εἰς τό “αἱ ἀλώπεκες φωλεοὺς ἔχουσιν, ὁ δὲ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἔχει ποῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν κλῖναι”* (On 'Foxes have dens, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head'.)¹⁰⁵¹; Matt.210. *Εἰς τό “τίνα με λέγουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι” καὶ εἰς τὴν Πέτρου ἀπόκρισιν* (On 'Who do people say I am?' and Peter's response)¹⁰⁵².

As well as labelling biblical *chreiai* with a title, Prodromos includes *chreiai* in the main body of his epigrams too. This can be illustrated through an epigram on Peter rebuking Simon the Sorcerer,

Act Ap.275. *Εἰς τὴν ἐπὶ Σίμωνι τῷ μάγῳ ζητοῦντι ὀνήσασθαι τὸ Πνεῦμα ἀπόφασιν Πέτρου*

(a) *“Τὸ χρυσίον σου συναποικήσαιτό σοι,
ἄπιστε, πιστὲ δοῦλε χρημάτων, Σίμων·
τοῦ Πνεύματος γὰρ οὐ πιπράσκω τὴν χάριν”
Σίμων ὁ Πέτρος πρὸς Σίμονα τὸν μάγον.*

¹⁰⁴⁸ Papagiannis (1997) Jud. 103b, 2Reg. 147b, 2Reg. 150b.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Kennedy (2003) P. 15.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Kennedy (2003) P. 16.

¹⁰⁵¹ Matt. 8:20.

¹⁰⁵² Matt. 16:13-16.

On Peter's response to Simon the Sorcerer seeking to buy the Spirit

(a) "May your gold perish with you, faithless, a true slave of money, Simon. For I do not sell the Spirit's grace". Simon the Peter (said) to Simon the magician.

The title of this epigram briefly describes a situation, which prompted a saying of a notable person. The epigram thus falls within the definition of verbal responsive *chreia*. Although Prodromos purports to quote Peter, his epigram, in fact, represents a very liberal interpretation of the biblical text¹⁰⁵³.

Gnome (Maxim)

Maxim (*γνώμη*) is defined as a statement that urges or dissuades¹⁰⁵⁴. It differs from *chreiai* in that a maxim is always a saying, whereas *chreia* can report an action. Furthermore, a *chreia* is always attributed to a particular person, while maxim can be impersonal¹⁰⁵⁵.

Prodromos' exposition of biblical events is often accompanied by an ethical interpretation; sometimes it takes the form of practical advice. In a series of epigrams on Samson and Delilah, for example, Prodromos repeatedly urges his reader to stay away from women:

Jud.108.Εἰς τὴν τρίτην ἀπόπειραν Δαλιδᾶς, καθ' ἣν οὐ περιεγένετο τοῦ Σαμψών

(a) Τὸν Σατανᾶν σχοίῃ τις εἰς συνοικίαν,
τελχῖνι πικρῷ συνδιάξοι τὸν βίον,
μὴ γοῦν γυναικί, καὶ γυναικὶ μαχλάδι·
ἢ Δαλιδά μοι μάρτυς ἐστὶ τοῦ λόγου.

On the third attempt of Delilah, during which she failed to prevail over Samson

(a) Let anyone cohabit with Satan, let him spend his life with a spiteful Telchin, but not with a woman, especially not a wanton one. Delilah is a testimony to my argument.

¹⁰⁵³ Act. Ap. 8:20-3.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Kennedy (2003) P. 99.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Kennedy (2003) P. 100.

Although Prodromos' recommendation is inspired by Delilah, it claims to represent general truth, which makes it a maxim.

Anaskeue (Refutation)

Refutation (*ἀνασκευή*) is defined as overturning of some matter at hand¹⁰⁵⁶. In his epigram on the argument between Jesus and Pharisees, Prodromos presents Christ's speech as *anaskeue*¹⁰⁵⁷. In fact, the relevant biblical episode already features the elements of refutation. Having been accused by Pharisees of driving out demons through Beelzebub, Christ deploys several arguments to demonstrate that Pharisees are wrong. Christ's argumentation contains the elements, which, according to rhetoricians, define a good refutation¹⁰⁵⁸. In particular, Christ implies that what Pharisees say is a) impossible (*ἀδύνατον*) and incredible (*ἀπίθανος*) b) inappropriate (*ἀπρεπής*) c) inexpedient (*ἀσύμφορον*).

a) Impossible/incredible.

*Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?*¹⁰⁵⁹

b) Inappropriate

*And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people [sons] drive them out? So then, they will be your judges*¹⁰⁶⁰.

c) Inexpedient

*Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven*¹⁰⁶¹.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Kennedy (2003) P. 101.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Matt. 12:22-37.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Kennedy (2003) P. 101.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Matt. 12:25-7.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Matt. 12:27.

¹⁰⁶¹ Matt. 12:30-1.

Prodromos' pair of epigrams strengthens Christ's argument against Pharisees:

Matt.202.Εἰς τὸ ὅτι “ἐν Βεελζεβούλ ἐκβάλλει τὰ δαιμόνια”

(a) Ὁ φυγαδευτὴς δαιμόνων, γραμματέες,
ὕμῖν καλεῖται δαιμονῶν; φεῦ τοῦ λόγου·
καὶ τίς γ' ἂν ὑμῶν δαιμονίζοιτο πλέον
τὰ δαιμονώδη ταῦτα τολμώντων λέγειν;
(b) Δαιμονίων λεγεῶνας ἀπήλασε τηλόθι Χριστὸς
ἐν Γαδάραις ἐπιτάγδην, χοιρόφι δ' ὤρσε φυγόντας·
δαιμονιώντα δ' ἔφαν γραμματέες αὐτὸν ἐκεῖνον·
ἄρ' οὐχί σφιν ἐμήνισεν ἄγριος, ὃ ζένε, Δαίμων;

On “It is by Beelzebub that he drives out demons”

(a) *The expeller of demons, scribes, is claimed by you to be possessed by a demon? What the hell are you talking about? Indeed, who can be more possessed than you, who dare to assert such demonic things?*
(b) *Christ expelled legions of demons far away by command in Gadara, and incited them to run into pigs. And yet the scribes said that he himself is possessed by demons. A wild demon is wroth against them, o stranger, isn't he?*

Like Christ's speech, Prodromos' epigrams follow the rhetorical precepts found in the

Progymnasmata. Firstly, Prodromos clearly identifies the idea he wants to refute¹⁰⁶². Then,

Prodromos demonstrates that this idea is incredible. To achieve this, Prodromos employs

rhetorical exclamation (*φεῦ τοῦ λόγου*). More importantly, Prodromos refers to Christ's miracle

(delivering the maniac of Gadara) that proves his non-susceptibility to demons¹⁰⁶³. To expose

Pharisees's claims as inconsistent, Prodromos makes paradoxical statements: *Ὁ φυγαδευτὴς*

δαιμόνων ...καλεῖται δαιμονῶν ; Δαιμονίων λεγεῶνας ἀπήλασε ... δαιμονιώντα. Finally,

Prodromos discredits his opponents, suggesting that they themselves are possessed by a

demon¹⁰⁶⁴. The effectiveness of Prodromos' refutation is enhanced by the appeals to his

adversaries (*γραμματέες*) and the spectator (*ὃ ζένε*) and the rhetorical questions.

Kataskeue (Confirmation)

¹⁰⁶² Papagiannis (1997) Matt. 202a1-2, b3.

¹⁰⁶³ Papagiannis (1997) Matt. 202a1, b1-2.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Papagiannis (1997) Matt. 202a3, b4.

Confirmation (*κατασκευή*) is defined as the corroboration of some matter at hand¹⁰⁶⁵. In a similar way to refutation, it has to be applied to things that are neither very clear, nor wholly impossible. The biblical episode chosen by Prodromos to highlight elements of confirmation fully complies with this requirement¹⁰⁶⁶:

Matt.203.Εἰς τοὺς αἰτοῦντας σημεῖον

(a) *Σημεῖον αἰτεῖς, γραμματεῦ, τὸν δεσπότην;
ὁ τυφλὸς οὐ σημεῖον ἐμβλέψας πάλιν;
ὁ κωφὸς οὐ σημεῖον ἀκούσας πάλιν;
ὄντως φθόνος τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ φθόνου λόγος.*
(b) *Ἡελίοιο φόως καὶ αἰθέρα δέρκετο τυφλός,
ἐν δέ τε κωφὸς ἄκουσε, ῥόος δ' ἐπὶ αἵματος ἔστη,
καὶ λεγεὼν ἔπηξε, νεκρὸς δ' ἀναέκθορε τύμβου·
γραμματέες, τί πλέον σημήιον ὕμιν ἀρέσσει;*

On demanding a sign

(a) *Scribe, are you asking the Lord for a sign? Didn't the blind see yet another sign? Didn't the deaf hear yet another sign? This is nothing but envy and envy's thought.*
(b) *The blind saw the light of the sun and the sky, and the deaf heard, and the flow of blood stopped, and the legion cowered, and the dead rose from the grave. Scribes, what other sign will please you?*

When asked by Pharisees to provide a sign, Jesus tells the story of Jonah as an allegory of his resurrection¹⁰⁶⁷. Prodromos also makes a strong case for messianic role of Christ by recalling his miracles. One of them (exorcising the blind and the mute man) has just been reported to Pharisees¹⁰⁶⁸, whereas others took place earlier¹⁰⁶⁹. Furthermore, Prodromos calls Jesus 'master' (*δεσπότης*). This reflects the Progymnasmata's requirement to enhance the reputation of the author of the statement under discussion¹⁰⁷⁰. Finally, dismissing Pharisees' doubts as envy

¹⁰⁶⁵ Kennedy (2003) P. 103.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Matt. 16:1-4.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Matt. 16:2-4.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Matt. 12:22-4.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Bleeding woman: Matt. 9:18-22; Exorcism in Gadara: Matt. 8:28-34; Resurrection of Jairrus' daughter: Matt. 9:23-26.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Kennedy (2003) P. 104.

(φθόνος), Prodromos implies that the belief in Christ is indicative not only of a sound mind but also moral integrity.

Common Place

Common-place (κοινὸς τόπος) is an amplification and attack on an acknowledged evil¹⁰⁷¹. It is called common because it is directed against not a specific person but a given quality in general. Prodromos quite often targets abstract qualities, including φθόνος (envy)¹⁰⁷². Prodromos sees φθόνος as a driving force behind the Fall¹⁰⁷³, Joseph's misfortunes¹⁰⁷⁴, Saul's attacks on David¹⁰⁷⁵ etc. Two epigrams (on Miriam's punishment¹⁰⁷⁶ and the crowd's choice to spare Barabbas instead of Christ¹⁰⁷⁷) are entirely dedicated to an attack on φθόνος. Both epigrams start with an invocation of φθόνος, describing it with a significant number of negative epithets:

Num. 68 Εἰς τὴν κατὰ Μωσέως βλασφημίαν Μαριάμ καὶ ὅπως ἐλεπρώθη
(b) ὦ φθόνε, κακὸν ἄμαχον, ἀπείριτον ἄχθος ἀρούρης,
νοῦσε μέγ' ἀργαλέη...

On Miriam's blasphemy against Moses and how she became a leper
(b) O envy, invincible evil, immense burden upon the earth, incredibly painful affliction...

Matt. 228
(b) ὦ φθόνος, ἀνθρώποισι πάθος μέγα, νοῦσε κακίστη,
πῦρ ὀλοόν, πτολέμοιο φάγον στόμα, τέκνον ἐχίδνης...
O envy, severe suffering to the mankind, the worst illness, destructive fire, devouring
mouth of war, offspring of a viper...

Both epigrams represent φθόνος as an ailment, an image, which receives further development in Num. 68b, where φθόνος inflicts leprosy on Miriam. War imagery also forms a recurrent theme:

¹⁰⁷¹ Kennedy (2003) P. 148.

¹⁰⁷² Hinterberger (2013).

¹⁰⁷³ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 9a.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 30a.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 130t.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Num. 12:1-15.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Matt. 27:15-26.

Num. 68b calls *φθόνος* invincible evil (*κακὸν ἄμαχον*), whereas Matt. 22b describes it as devouring mouth of war (*πτολέμοιο φάγον στόμα*).

Encomium

Encomium is language expressive of inherent excellences¹⁰⁷⁸. It differs from praise in that praise is brief, whereas encomium is an artistically elaborated composition. Encomium typically starts with description of the person's origin and upbringing. The main part of encomium is concerned with fine actions. Encomium often includes a comparison that highlights superiority of the praised person.

The encomiastic mode is clearly discernible in Prodromos' epigrams¹⁰⁷⁹. On different occasions, Prodromos celebrates the person's ancestry (of Jesus)¹⁰⁸⁰, beauty (of Saul)¹⁰⁸¹, virtues (Abrahams' faith¹⁰⁸², Jonathan's courage¹⁰⁸³, Solomon's wisdom¹⁰⁸⁴) and deeds (building of Solomon's temple¹⁰⁸⁵). While a single epigram is too short to amount to a proper rhetorical encomium, some characters, especially Old Testament kings, nevertheless receive full encomiastic treatment due to the fact that Prodromos covers their lives with a series of epigrams. Prodromos creates a particularly favourable image of David, who, throughout the Byzantine period, was viewed as a role model for emperors¹⁰⁸⁶. Prodromos introduces David by describing his anointment by Samuel¹⁰⁸⁷; the epigram hints at David's background as a shepherd and emphasises that he was chosen by God not for his good looks but for his heart. Prodromos'

¹⁰⁷⁸ Kennedy (2003) P. 108.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Cf. Lauxtermann (2019) Pp. 19-21.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Papagiannis (1997) Matt. 186.

¹⁰⁸¹ Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 122.

¹⁰⁸² Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 16.

¹⁰⁸³ Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 123.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Papagiannis (1997) 3 Reg. 162.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Papagiannis (1997) 3 Reg. 164.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Rapp (2010).

¹⁰⁸⁷ Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 125.

then moves to celebrating David's deeds, the greatest of which is the defeat of Goliath¹⁰⁸⁸. The exposition of David's achievements is accompanied by a praise of his character, most notably his mildness (*πραότης*), which is paradoxically combined with David's boldness¹⁰⁸⁹. Prodromos' praise of David is very emotional. For example, the epigram on David sparing Saul in a cave ends with an exclamation: *τῆς χρηστότητος, τῆς ἀνεξικακίας*¹⁰⁹⁰; similar exclamations highlighting David's compassion (*συμπαθής*) and forgivingness (*ἀμνησικακία*) conclude other epigrams as well¹⁰⁹¹. As befits the encomiastic discourse, Prodromos' celebration of David is enhanced by comparisons; in particular, throughout his exposition of the First Book of Kings, Prodromos draws a sharp contrast between maniacal and disgraced Saul and David, rightfully chosen by God as a king of Israel. On the other hand, David is compared with Christ on the grounds that to become a proper king he has to wait until he turns thirty - the age when Christ, as Prodromos puts it, developed great vigour of strength¹⁰⁹². Prodromos also follows the conventions of the encomiastic mode in that he downplays the vices of David. Although Prodromos does report David's adultery with Bathsheba and killing of Uriah, he tries to mitigate David's fault through the strategic arrangement of the two epigrams addressing this episode: the epigram giving an account of David's misdeeds is preceded by a tetrastich that attacks the entire institution of marriage¹⁰⁹³; in light of this, David appears simply to have followed human nature.

Invective

Invective (*ψόγος*) is a language expressive of inherent evil¹⁰⁹⁴. The structure of an invective mirrors the structure of an encomium. Prodromos' epigrams encompass invectives against

¹⁰⁸⁸ Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 127.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 137a.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 134a.

¹⁰⁹¹ Papagiannis (1997) 1Reg. 137a, 2Reg. 140a.

¹⁰⁹² Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 143b.

¹⁰⁹³ Papagiannis (1997) 2 Reg. 147.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Kennedy (2003) P. 111.

individual villains (Dalida¹⁰⁹⁵, Saul¹⁰⁹⁶, Judas¹⁰⁹⁷), groups of people (sodomites¹⁰⁹⁸, Joseph's brothers¹⁰⁹⁹) and things (wealth¹¹⁰⁰). Nearly all Prodrornos' invectives include abuse¹¹⁰¹ and some also contain admonishments¹¹⁰², threats¹¹⁰³ and curses¹¹⁰⁴.

Synkrisis

Synkrisis (σύγκρισις) is defined as language setting the better or worse side by side¹¹⁰⁵. As previously noted¹¹⁰⁶, Prodrornos has an inclination to represent the events of the Old Testament as an anticipation of the life of Jesus, relying on a doctrine of biblical typology which has its roots in theology and exegesis. In addition, Prodrornos compares events which are more or less contemporary: the '*fierce and shivering*' song of Moses from the Book of Deuteronomy is juxtaposed with '*the song of joy*' from the Exodus¹¹⁰⁷. In a similar way, Prodrornos claims that, by touching Christ's body, Nicodemus acted as a forerunner of Thomas¹¹⁰⁸. As *synkrisis* often involves competition between those compared, Prodrornos gives precedence to Nicodemus: while Thomas touched only the wounds from the nails, Nikodemus saw the nails themselves and anointed Christ's body with myrrh (ἱερὴ ὕλη).

Ethopoeia

¹⁰⁹⁵ Papagiannis (1997) Jud. 109a.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 130.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Papagiannis (1997) Matt. 222b.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 21a.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 31a.

¹¹⁰⁰ Papagiannis (1997) Matt. 214a.

¹¹⁰¹ Papagiannis (1997) Jud. 109a: Τί γάρ, μιὰρὰ Δαλιδά.

¹¹⁰² Papagiannis (1997) Jud. 109a ἄρ' ἐραστὴν βελτίω δοκεῖς ἐφευρεῖν (Dalida).

¹¹⁰³ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 21a πρὶν ἢ γὰρ ἀγγελοφθόρον γένη, πυρὶ φθαρῆση καὶ κακὸν κακῶς θάνης (Sodomites).

¹¹⁰⁴ Papagiannis (1997) Matt. 221b ὡς ἀπόλοιτο (Judas).

¹¹⁰⁵ Kennedy (2003) P. 162.

¹¹⁰⁶ See P. 196.

¹¹⁰⁷ Papagiannis (1997) Deut. 79a; Deut. 32:1-43, Ex. 15:1-18.

¹¹⁰⁸ Papagiannis (1997) John 262b; John 19:38-40, 20:24-9.

Ethopoeia (*ἠθοποιία*) is defined as imitation of the character of a proposed speaker¹¹⁰⁹.

Ethopoeia normally answers the question: What words X would say in a given situation? While topics for ethopoeia were usually chosen from ancient mythology, in the twelfth century, it became more common to write personifications for biblical characters. In particular, several biblical ethopoeiai – for example, *What words would Joseph utter after being released from prison, interpreting dreams for the Pharaoh, and being appointed to govern Egypt?* – can be found in the collection of the *Progymnasmata* of Nikephoros Basilakes¹¹¹⁰.

In Prodromos' epigrams, biblical characters often speak. While some speeches just paraphrase what has actually been said in the Bible, others significantly elaborate the character's original words or are altogether invented. An example of an invented speech can be found in the epigram on the healing of the blind man¹¹¹¹:

Joh.258.Εἰς τὸν τυφλόν
(b) Ἄσμενος ἡελίου σε βλέπω σέλας ἡδὲ σελήνης,
οὐρανὸν ἀστερόεντα, πυρὸς φύσιν, ἡέρα δῖον
καὶ ποταμούς, ψάμμιον τε παράλιον ἡδέ τε γαῖαν·
ὄμματα γάρ μοι πλάσσε Θεοῦ Λόγος οὐ πρὶν ἔόντα.

On the blind man
(b) I am delighted to see you, the light of the sun and the moon, the starred sky, the nature of fire, the divine air, and the rivers, and the sand, and the seacoast, and the earth. For God's word shaped eyes for me, previously nonexistent.

In the Gospel of John this miracle is reported as follows:

*He [Jesus] spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing*¹¹¹².

¹¹⁰⁹ Kennedy (2003) P. 115.

¹¹¹⁰ Pignani (1983).

¹¹¹¹ John 9:1-12.

¹¹¹² John 9:6-7.

The Gospel does not say a word about the blind man's reaction on seeing the light for the first time in his life. When the blind man was challenged by neighbors to provide an explanation of his healing, he gives an account that is strikingly concise:

*"How then were your eyes opened?" they asked. He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."*¹¹¹³

When the blind man is subsequently interrogated by Pharisees, he gives a similarly laconic account. Asked to elaborate about the mechanics of his healing, the blind man gets so irritated with Pharisees' interest in the miracle that he refuses to speak any further:

*He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"*¹¹¹⁴

The biblical account of the healing of the blind man has a deep theological meaning but lacks the rhetorical sophistication. Inventing hypothetical speech, Prodomos adds to the biblical story plausibility and vividness.

Ekphrasis

Ekphrasis (ἐκφρασις) is defined as descriptive language.¹¹¹⁵ There are ekphrases of things, persons, places, and events. Some ekphrases found in Prodomos' epigrams, for example that of the Ark of the Covenant¹¹¹⁶, reflect the descriptive passages of the Bible. Sometimes, however, ekphrasis is a result of transformation of what originally has been presented as a story (διήγημα) into a static picture. This transformation is usually achieved through the use of the verb ὀρᾷς addressed to a spectator (ἑνέ). In this manner Prodomos represents Aaron's staff's

¹¹¹³ John 9:10-11.

¹¹¹⁴ John 9:25-7.

¹¹¹⁵ Kennedy (2003) P. 117.

¹¹¹⁶ Papagiannis (1997) Ex. 62b.

transformation into a snake¹¹¹⁷, visions of Samuel¹¹¹⁸, and the death of Herod¹¹¹⁹. Most interesting are the cases when Prodnomos' ekphrases are not based on the biblical text. One such example can be found in the epigram on the Resurrection:

Matt.231.Εἰς τὴν ἀνάστασιν
(a) *Ναί, λὰξ ἐνάλλου τῷ θανάτῳ, Χριστέ μου·
ναί, πληττε τὴν ἄπληστον Ἄδου γαστέρα,
ἕως ἂν οὖς πέπωκεν ἐξαναπτύσῃ,
καὶ λῶε τοὺς σχεθέντας αὐτῷ δεσμίους.*

On the Resurrection
(a) *Come on, leap on death with foot, my Christ. Come on, strike insatiate stomach of Hades until he spits out those he has swallowed. And release the captives bound by him.*

The scene of Christ attacking Hades and releasing the imprisoned mankind does not appear in any Gospel and is reserved to apocryphal literature. However, by the Middle Byzantine period, Christ's descent to Hell gained prominence in art¹¹²⁰. The iconography of the scene, known as the Harrowing of Hell, includes personification of Hades trodden down by Christ; Adam and Eve being dragged by Christ; and broken shackles representing the salvation of mankind. The popularity of the image testified by different types of media makes it highly likely that Prodnomos' epigram was inspired by visual art.

Thesis

Thesis (θέσις) is defined as a logical examination of any matter under inspection¹¹²¹. Just like speeches in modern debating practices, composition of a thesis involved arguing for or against a certain proposition, and a speaker was expected to appeal to considerations of justice, legality, possibility and advantageousness. One of the most popular subjects for a thesis was the question whether one should marry, and Prodnomos makes a case against this proposition:

¹¹¹⁷ Papagiannis (1997) Ex. 45a.

¹¹¹⁸ Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 117a.

¹¹¹⁹ Papagiannis (1997) Act. Ap. 283a.

¹¹²⁰ Kartsonis (1986).

¹¹²¹ Kennedy (2003) P. 120.

2Reg.147.Εἰς τὴν εἰς Βηρσαβεὲ μοιχείαν Δαβὶδ καὶ τὸν φόνον Οὐρίου

(a) Ὡς ἀπόλοιτο πᾶς γάμος καὶ πᾶν λέχος·
κακὴν γαμεῖς; ποῖνιμον εὐρήσεις βίον·
καλὴν γαμεῖς; θάνατον ἀντικερδάνης·
τὸν Οὐρίου θάνατον, εἰ βούλει, σκόπει.

On David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah

(a) *Let every marriage and engagement perish. Are you marrying a bad woman? You will find that your life has become a nightmare. Are you marrying a nice one? You will pay for that with death. Look, if you are keen, at Uriah's death.*

Biblical Characters as Ancient Orators

The final means of achieving rhetorical sophistication is representation of biblical characters as ancient orators. Moses on several occasions is called *δημαγωγός*¹¹²², whereby he is compared with such popular leaders and public speakers of Antiquity as Pericles and Cleon¹¹²³.

Furthermore, relating the case of blasphemy¹¹²⁴, Prodromos uses the language that in the classical period was used to describe defamation:

Lev.66.Εἰς τὴν κατάλευσιν τοῦ καταρασαμένου τὸν Ἰσραηλίτην

(a) Παῖς Ἰσραηλίτιδος ἐξ Αἰγυπτίου
ἀράς κατεσκέδαζεν Ἰσραηλίτου·
τὸν ἥμισυν δὲ τοῦτον Ἰσραηλίτην
ὁ δημαγωγὸς ἐκ λίθων θανεῖν κρίνει.

On the stoning of the person who had cursed an Israelite

(a) *The son of an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father **had poured curses** on an Israelite, and it was this half-breed Israelite whom the leader of the people condemns to death by stoning.*

In the Bible, the act of blasphemy is reported as follows: *καὶ ἐπονομάσας ὁ υἱὸς τῆς γυναικὸς τῆς Ἰσραηλίτιδος τὸ ὄνομα κατηράσατο* (The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name with a

¹¹²² Papagiannis (1997) Lev. 66a, Num. 68a, Deut. 78t.

¹¹²³ Pelling (1992) Pp. 10-40.

¹¹²⁴ Lev. 24:10-23.

curse)¹¹²⁵. Prodromos renders this clause into *ἀρὰς κατεσκέδαζεν*, where the verb forms the part of the idiom that describes spreading slanderous reports¹¹²⁶.

The rhetorical code is most conspicuous in Prodromos' account of Paul's activity as a preacher. Thus, a title of one pair of epigrams frames Paul's preaching in Pisidian Antioch as *δημηγορία*¹¹²⁷. In classical Greece *δημηγορία* was a piece of deliberative rhetoric spoken before the assembly¹¹²⁸. Any citizen in attendance was entitled to speak¹¹²⁹. The same democratic principle appears to be observed in the gathering attended by Paul:

*After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak." Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said...*¹¹³⁰

Praising Paul's rhetorical success, the epigram compares Paul's words to the honey from mount Hymettus¹¹³¹. As the latter is located in Attica, the comparison amounts to likening Paul's eloquence with that of Attic orators, which is the highest compliment a Byzantine author could pay or receive.

Introducing Paul's preaching to the Athenians¹¹³², Prodromos refers to another genre of ancient rhetoric - *διάλεξις*¹¹³³. Having emerged in the Second Sophistic, *dialexis* was, according to the definition of a modern scholar, 'an educational lecture, presented orally at a public convention, aimed at a more varied and possibly also larger audience than the mere specialists in the field of

¹¹²⁵ Lev. 24:11.

¹¹²⁶ Liddell and Scott (1940) κατασκεδάννυμι 2.

¹¹²⁷ Papagiannis (1997) Act. Ap. 284: Εἰς τὴν δημηγορίαν Παύλου (On Paul's public speaking).

¹¹²⁸ Liddell and Scott (1940) δημηγορία 2; Sciou (2011).

¹¹²⁹ Timmerman and Shiappa (2010) Pp. 68-9.

¹¹³⁰ Act. Ap. 13:15-6.

¹¹³¹ Papagiannis (1997) Act. Ap. 284a3-4.

¹¹³² Act. Ap. 17:16-32.

¹¹³³ Papagiannis (1997) Act Ap.288. Εἰς τὴν ἐν Ἀρείῳ Πάγῳ **διάλεξιν** Παύλου, ὅτε καὶ Διονύσιος καὶ Δάμαρις καὶ ἄλλοι ἐπίστευσαν (On Paul's Areopagus **sermon**, when Dionysius, Damaris and the others believed).

*philosophy, concerning a theme that has some wider societal and ethical relevance*¹¹³⁴.

Considering that Paul's sermon a) is delivered in a public place, the Areopagus, of a philosophical city *par excellence*, b) propagates Christian teaching among large groups of people and c) responds to the criticism of pagan philosophers and considers metaphysical questions such as the resurrection, one is entitled to conclude that it indeed falls within the definition of *dialexis* as a genre of Late Antique literature¹¹³⁵. Paul therefore emerges as a Christian sophist who, by means of persuasion, outwits his pagan counterparts.

To conclude, the collection of biblical epigrams is composed of an arrangement of highly sophisticated rhetorical compositions. The rhetorical nature of the collection is informed by the fact that it represents a paraphrasis of an authoritative text. As such, it employs the whole range of techniques listed in the rhetorical textbooks: syntactical paraphrase, paraphrase by addition, by subtraction, and by substitution. More importantly, by responding to biblical episodes with two epigrams, Prodomos effectively paraphrases himself. Such two-dimensional presentation enables Prodomos not only to showcase his command of different stylistic registers but also to experiment with narrative techniques, which include continuation, reversal, fragmentation, repetition and contradiction. Furthermore, Prodomos actively employs rhetorical figures which, through different kinds of repetition, emphasise the articulation of the biblical text. In a similar way, multiple elements of the *Progymnasmata* add vividness and persuasiveness, which biblical texts (or biblical protagonists) occasionally lack. Finally, the rhetorical sophistication of the epigrams is enhanced by linking biblical rhetorical practices, especially Paul's preaching, with the classical oratory.

Conclusions

¹¹³⁴ Lauwers (2015) P. 130.

¹¹³⁵ Many works of Byzantine literature were also entitled *διάλεξεις* but these were theological dialogues, not sermons: Berger (2006); Bucossi (2014); Migne (1865) *Panoplia dogmatica ad Alexium Comnenum*.

The preceding sections have demonstrated that by accommodating the Scripture to the conventions of drama, epic, historiography, novel, philosophy and rhetoric, Prodromos effectively produces a Hellenic Bible. It is now appropriate to offer some reflections on the possible purposes of such an enterprise.

Firstly, by assimilating biblical stories to the episodes of classical literature, Prodromos establishes common ground between Christianity and Hellenism. In this respect, he follows in the footsteps of the composers of the biblical epic of Late Antiquity, most notably Nonnus, who uses the Homeric language to highlight parallels in the lives of Dionysus and Christ¹¹³⁶. Despite the formal similarities between the biblical epic and Prodromos' epigrams, the cultural agendas of Late Antique poets and Prodromos were not identical. The former flourished in the period of religious syncretism, and often used Homeric language as a medium for propagation of the Christian truth among the pagan elites¹¹³⁷. By contrast, Prodromos' mission was to show that the alluring beauty of Classical literature is compatible with the teachings of Orthodoxy.

Secondly, by rewriting the Bible according to the conventions of different classical genres, Prodromos elevates the simple and unpretentious language of Scripture to the level of artistically sophisticated classical literature. Although this purpose is not stated directly in Prodromos' epigrams, it can be inferred from his other writings. In particular, in the speech celebrating the eloquence of Alexios Aristenos, Prodromos criticises Clement of Alexandria for dismissing form of expression:

Οὐκ ἐπαινῶ γὰρ ἐγὼ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος τὸν Στρωματέα, εὐγλωττίαν μήποτε ζηλοῦν λέγοντα μηδὲ ῥημάτων εὐγένειαν, ἀρκεῖσθαι δὲ μόνῳ τῷ αἰνίξασθαι τὸ νοούμενον. ἀδιάφορος γὰρ ἂν οὕτω καὶ ὁ βλατοπώλης εἶη καὶ ὁ σοφός. ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς μικροῦ ἂν ἢ οὐδὲ τοῦ τυχόντος λόγου τὴν γλῶτταν ἠξίωσα, εἰ γυμναῖς ταῖς ψυχαῖς διεζῶμεν, τὸν ὁμοζύγον τοῦτον ὑπερاناβάντες πηλόν. ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ ὁ τοῦ σώματος οὗτος ὄλκος, ὁ ὀργανικός, φημι, ἀνδριὰς τὰς ἡμετέρας ψυχὰς περιπέπλασται καὶ οὐκ ἔξδὸν ἀμέσως τὰ τοῦ νοὸς ἡμῖν ἐμφανισθῆναι κινήματα, οὐ δευτέρας οἶμαι δεῖν ἀξιοῦν τὴν γλῶτταν τιμῆς.

¹¹³⁶ de la Fuente (2013); Spanoudakis (2013); Whitby, Mary (2016).

¹¹³⁷ Agosti (2001).

I do not praise Clement where he claims in the Stromata never to strive for eloquence and nobility of diction but to be satisfied with merely touching upon the sense. For thus there would be no difference between the cloth seller and the wise man. I too would have counted language as of meager or no import if we transcended this clay that is yoked to us and could pass through life with naked souls. But since this burden of the body – I refer to this living statue- has been formed around our souls, and since it is not possible for mental processes to be intimated to us directly, I consider it imperative to rate language as of no secondary importance¹¹³⁸.

Further on in this speech, Prodromos compares Aristenos to the Apostles but adds that, in addition to God's grace, the language of Aristenos can boast of Atticism, which the apostles lack¹¹³⁹. Prodromos' Hellenization of the Bible rectifies this shortcoming.

Finally, the Hellenization of the Bible created an opportunity for acquiring classical *paideia* without an exposure to 'dangerous' ideas endemic in classical sources. Before the twelfth century, one could hardly receive rhetorical training without having to write an ethopoeia of Medea killing her children. Prodromos' epigrams, however, demonstrate that the biblical narrative can also serve rhetorical education.

¹¹³⁸ Op de Coul (2007) H90 P 188; Tr.: Alexiou (1999) P. 92.

¹¹³⁹ Op de Coul (2007) P. 189.

Chapter VI

THE POETICS OF THE CARNIVALESQUE IN THE BIBLICAL EPIGRAMS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that through the Hellenization of the Bible, Prodrornos reconciles Christianity with classical *paideia*. This chapter will focus on the poetics of the biblical epigrams through the study of elements of the carnivalesque. The understanding of the concept of carnival that shall be used here was developed by Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin in his monograph *Rabelais and his World*¹¹⁴⁰. Criticising previous scholarship's emphasis on Rabelais' connection to Renaissance humanism, Bakhtin traces the sources of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* to popular-festive forms, centred around carnival. The latter represents the inversion of the normal order of life through laughter and chaos: during carnival one sees ritual crownings and uncrownings, the fall of hierarchical structures, eccentric behavior, overfamiliar interactions and juxtaposition of praise and abuse, high and low, sacred and profane. The key feature of carnivalized life is degradation, which is often achieved through grotesque realism, a concept that emphasises material and corporeal substance. Indeed, a scholar of Bakhtin suggests that carnival ‘celebrates the body which eats, digests, copulates, and defecates, but who does so in a wild, exaggerated and grotesque way’¹¹⁴¹. For Bakhtin, the exaggerated description of bodily processes represents a cosmic renewal: each death in the grotesque realism is pregnant with a new life. Even more important for Bakhtin is the anti-authoritarian impulse of carnival: the gay relativity brings liberation from culture of fear, awe and monolithic seriousness imposed by the Catholic Church.

¹¹⁴⁰ Bakhtin (1984b). The work was initially submitted as doctoral thesis in 1940, published in Russian 1965. First English translation appeared in 1968.

¹¹⁴¹ Dentith (1994) P.65.

Although carnival is rooted in a particular historical reality, the applications of this concept extend far beyond the popular feasts of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and their reflection in Rabelais. In his book, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin asserts that carnival can take different shapes depending upon the epoch, the people, and the occasion¹¹⁴². Following the translation of Bakhtin's works into English, scholars attempted to apply the notion of carnival to diverse cultural phenomena ranging from Shakespeare's theatre to the novels of Milan Kundera, and to the Monty Python series¹¹⁴³. More pertinently to the present topic, the elements of the carnivalesque were identified in the writings of Theodore Prodromos. In her contribution on the Ptochoprodromic poems, Margaret Alexiou draws upon Bakhtin's framework to challenge the dismissal in previous scholarship of the poetics centered around excessive eating, scatological descriptions, resurrections, dressing up and the inversion of roles¹¹⁴⁴. Like Bakhtin, Alexiou highlights wordplay and linguistic ambiguity as a source of humour. One such example can be found in one of the scenes involving a pseudo-heroic battle between the Ptochoprodromic *persona* and his wife where they fight over a broomstick¹¹⁴⁵; in this scene, Alexiou aptly sees sexual innuendo. In another poem, Ptochoprodromos' humour borders on blasphemy. Adopting a persona of a poor and abused monk, Ptochoprodromos gives a description of a sumptuous repast of corrupted hierarchs in which religious imagery sits alongside expressions from Attic comedy which are heavily charged with sexual connotations¹¹⁴⁶.

Bakhtin's framework is even more prominent in Panagiotis Roilos' study of Medieval Greek novel¹¹⁴⁷. Roilos interprets the Medieval novel as intersectional discourse mediating different opposites (Pagan vs. Christian, Ancient vs. Modern, High vs. Low), and turns to comic scenes to highlight the genre's inherent liminality and inclusiveness. The comic scenes often unfold during

¹¹⁴² Bakhtin (1984a) P. 122.

¹¹⁴³ Bristol (1985); Kundu (2000); Bishop (1990).

¹¹⁴⁴ Alexiou (1999).

¹¹⁴⁵ Eideneier (1991) Poem I vv. 172-97.

¹¹⁴⁶ Eideneier (1991) Poem IV vv. 409-430.

¹¹⁴⁷ Roilos (2006).

the banquets whose festivity, frivolity and abundance reenact Bakhtin's idea of carnival. The banquet scenes are full of performances, rhetorical, culinary and theatrical, which reveal the regenerative character of grotesque. In Prodromos' novel *Rhodanthe and Dosicles*, for example, a Persian envoy named Artaxanes is served a roast lamb; when Artaxanes starts to cut it, a number of newly hatched sparrows emerge from its stomach and begin to fly above Artaxanes' head¹¹⁴⁸. Roilos demonstrates that this culinary marvel parodies the miracle of the Nativity through the appropriation of the imagery of hymnography. Such juxtaposition of sacred and profane is not an exception; the Medieval novels abound with spectacles which, as Roilos concludes, '*transgress everyday boundaries*' and, taking place in liminal occasions, include '*the use of carnivalesque and occasionally subversive metalanguages that reverse, criticize, or satirize the established norms of behavior and communication*'¹¹⁴⁹.

In the following section, I will demonstrate that the biblical epigrams are as much marked by the poetics of the carnivalesque as are the Ptochoprodromic poems and the twelfth century novels. I will start my exposition by uncovering humorous aspects of the epigrams. Including humour within the framework of the carnivalesque is informed by the fact that Christianity felt uneasy about laughter¹¹⁵⁰. It is telling that in the New Testament laughter is reserved to soldiers mocking '*the king of the Jews*', whereas the laughter of the faithful is deferred to the eternal life¹¹⁵¹. These antigelastical tendencies have been further developed in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, who linked laughter with aggression, unruliness and lasciviousness¹¹⁵². In the twelfth century, a contemporary of Prodromos, Nikephoros Basilakes, admits that he burnt the

¹¹⁴⁸ Marcovich (1992) Book 4 vv. 122-32.

¹¹⁴⁹ Roilos (2006) P. 288.

¹¹⁵⁰ Halliwell (2008) Pp. 471- 519.

¹¹⁵¹ Luke 6:21,25.

¹¹⁵² Halliwell (2008) Pp. 483-7.

satirical writings composed in his youth when, as a mature man, he realised that laughter does not befit a good christian, let alone a churchman¹¹⁵³.

Despite the normative disapproval of laughter, Byzantium was by no means a humourless society. In fact, as John Haldon demonstrated, laughter is tightly woven into the everyday life of Byzantine civilisation¹¹⁵⁴. Humour was prominent in numerous Byzantine satires but also in the lives of the saints and even in religious polemic.

The practical deployment of humour in Byzantium was supplemented by theoretical generalisations about the nature of the comic¹¹⁵⁵. Some Byzantine perceptions of the comic were inspired by a section from Pseudo-Hermogenian treatise *Περὶ δεινότητος* entitled *Περὶ κωμικῶς λέγειν*¹¹⁵⁶. According to Pseudo-Hermogenes, there are three sources of the comic: parody (*τὸ κατὰ παρωδίαν σχῆμα*), unfulfilled expectations (*τὸ παρὰ προσδοκίαν*) and images incongruous with the subject matter (*τὸ ἐναντίας ποιεῖσθαι τὰς εἰκόνας τῇ φύσει τῶν πραγμάτων*)¹¹⁵⁷. By ‘parody’ pseudo-Hermogenes means wordplay, giving as an example a lisping character mispronouncing *κόρακος* (crow) as *κόλακος* (flatterer). The rhetorical figure *παρὰ προσδοκίαν* involves an unexpected final twist that causes a reader to reinterpret the beginning of the phrase. The incongruity, according to pseudo-Hermogenes, arises when big is juxtaposed with small, as in the sentence: the quails fought like Ajax and Hector; this type of humour is best exemplified by mock-heroic texts, the most popular of which, the *Batrochomyomachia*, must have been known to the author of *Περὶ δεινότητος*.

Humour

¹¹⁵³ Magdalino (2020).

¹¹⁵⁴ Haldon (2002). See also Tougher (2010); Bernard (2015);

¹¹⁵⁵ Pizzone (2017).

¹¹⁵⁶ Rabe (1913).

¹¹⁵⁷ Rabe (1913) *Peri methodou deinotetos* Section 34.

Wordplay

Prodromos' biblical epigrams employ all the types of comic discourse discussed by pseudo-Hermogenes. Wordplay in most instances involves the juxtaposition of words that sound alike but have different meaning:

καὶ γίνεται σοι **δάμαρ** ἢ νύμφη **Θάμαρ**¹¹⁵⁸;

Ἀδωνιβεζέκ, βασιλεὺ Χανανίτα,
τῆς μὲν Βεζέκ θεόν σε τοῦνομα γράφει,
καθὼς κεναυχεῖς αὐτός· ὥς δ' ἐγὼ κρίνω,
σὸν ἐν Βεζέκ δείκνυσιν **Ἀιδωνέα**;¹¹⁵⁹

...τῷ **Σαλομῶν** ἀτένισον· ὁ γὰρ Θεῷ οὐρανὸν ἄλλον
πήγνυσιν ἐν **Σολύμοις**...¹¹⁶⁰.

Other puns, however, amount to a more complex linguistic game. For example, in the account of the discovery of the infant Moses by the daughter of Pharaoh¹¹⁶¹, Prodromos exploits the phonological changes of Greek:

Ex.41.Εἰς τὴν γέννησιν Μωσέως καὶ ὅπως ῥιφέντα αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ ποταμῷ μετὰ θίβης εἶδεν αὐτὸν ἢ θυγάτηρ Φαραὼ καὶ περιεποιήσατο

(b) —Δεῦρο φάτε, πρόπολοι, τί τόδ' ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ὀρῶμαι;
—Πλαζομένην ῥέέθροισι θίβην. —Λάξεσθέ οἱ, **αἶραι**.
—Λαζόμεθ'. —Οἶγέτ', ἀθρεῖτ' ἄφενος ῥά οἱ ἔλπομαι εἶναι.
—**Νηπίαχον** τόδ', ἄνασσα. —**Ἀτὰρ** γέ μοι **νῆις** ἐσεῖται.

¹¹⁵⁸ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 32a.

¹¹⁵⁹ Papagiannis (1997) Jud. 92a.

¹¹⁶⁰ Papagiannis (1997) 3 Reg. 164b.

¹¹⁶¹ Ex. 2:1-10.

On the birth of Moses and how Pharaoh's daughter saw and saved him after he was thrown into a river in a basket

(b) Come here, servants, and say what is this that I see with my eyes? –Basket roving on the streams. – Grasp it, attendants! – We take hold of it. –Open and inspect it. I hope it contains riches. – This is an infant, mistress. – All right, let him be my son.

In the Bible, the attendants of Pharaoh's daughter are called *ἄβραι*¹¹⁶². Taking advantage of the fact that in Byzantine Greek *ν* with a consonant and *β* became phonologically identical, Prodromos spells *ἄβραι* as *αῦραι*, which has a completely different meaning: *air*¹¹⁶³. Given that *αῦρα* often signifies breeze from water, our context opens up a possibility of the Pharaoh's daughter speaking to the winds. This comic ambiguity is supplemented by the use of two different verbs of almost identical spelling, *πλάζομαι* and *λάζομαι*. Furthermore, the comic effect of puns is enhanced by a fictional dialogue between the Pharaoh's daughter and her maids. Arranged as stichomythia, this dialogue evokes a comedic tone. Indeed, endowing Pharaoh's daughter with an abnormal interest in money resonates with the image of women in Aristophanic plays, where *'they are typically frivolous, spendthrift, naive, ignorant of realities outside of household, devious, impulsive and sex-obsessed'*¹¹⁶⁴. Although not each of these adjectives can be applied to Pharaoh's daughter in the given epigram, her representation by Prodromos follows the pattern of depicting women in ancient Greek comedy.

Beyond *paronomasia*, Prodromos often employs polysemantic vocabulary to achieve comic effect. One example can be drawn from his account of the assassination of king Ish-Bosheth by his generals¹¹⁶⁵:

2 Reg. 142 Εἰς Μεμφιβοσθὲ τὸν υἱὸν Σαούλ, ὅπως τῆς θυρωροῦ αὐτοῦ νυσταξάσης εἰσῆλθέ τις ἐχθρὸς καὶ ἀπέκτεινεν αὐτόν

¹¹⁶² Ex. 2:5.

¹¹⁶³ Liddell and Scott (1940) *αῦρα*. An interesting example of confusion between *αῦρα* and *ἄβρα* can be also found in Gaisford (1842) P. 174.

¹¹⁶⁴ Henderson (2002) P. 27.

¹¹⁶⁵ Papagiannis (1997) 2 Reg. 4:1-12.

(b) Μή ποτε νυσταλέην νοὸς ἐνδοτέρῃσι θύρῃσιν
ἐνστήσης πυλαωρόν· ἴα' γάρ, τάλαν, αὐτίκα δαίμων
τήνδε λαθὼν σὲ φίλου ἀπὸ καρήατος ἀμέρσει·
μάρτυς ὁ Μεμφιβοσθὲ φίλῃν κεφαλὴν ἀπολέσσας.

On Ish-Bosheth the son of Saul, how, when his (female) gatekeeper slumbered, an enemy of his entered and killed him

(b) *Never place a drowsy gatekeeper at the inner gates of your mind. For, miserable, a demon will escape her notice and deprive you of your own head. Ish-bosheth, who has thus lost his head, can testify.*

The epigram is written as a maxim encouraging a reader to ensure that his guards are vigilant at all times. Towards the end of the poem, Prodrornos introduces Ish-Bosheth, whose death was caused by the negligence of a drowsy gatekeeper. Referring to Ish-Bosheth as *μάρτυς* (witness), Prodrornos primarily implies that the king's case can serve as corroboration of his advice. However, given the violent character of Ish-Bosheth's death, *μάρτυς* also suggests a parodic comparison with Christian martyrs, many of whom were executed through beheading¹¹⁶⁶. The assimilation of Ish-Bosheth to the Christian victims of religious persecution is supported by the fact that Ish-Bosheth's killers were condemned by David and put to death as murderers of an innocent man¹¹⁶⁷. However, despite falling victim to unrighteous killers, Ish-Bosheth by no means can lay claim to sanctity. Association of Ish-Bosheth with Christian martyrs eventually appears to be a travesty of holiness.

Another type of wordplay involves endowing rare words, usually compounds, with the new meanings. Giving an account of Judgement of Solomon,¹¹⁶⁸ Prodrornos refers to the contested child as *ἀμφιμήτριον βρέφος*¹¹⁶⁹. In the given context this expression means 'a child of (claimed by) both mothers'. However, in other sources *ἀμφιμήτριος* refers either to a region around the

¹¹⁶⁶ Detoraki (2014).

¹¹⁶⁷ 2 Reg. 4:9-12.

¹¹⁶⁸ 3 Reg. 3:16-28.

¹¹⁶⁹ Papagiannis (1997) 3Reg. 163a1.

womb or – more often - half-siblings born to different mothers¹¹⁷⁰. Interestingly, in the latter sense *ἀμφιμήτριος* is used by Prodromos' friend Michael Italikos in his lexicological excursus in Aristophanes' of Byzantium discussion of kinship terminology¹¹⁷¹. Deviating from the idiomatic usage, Prodromos violates the expectations of his fellow antiquarians and thus achieves a comic effect.

Παρά προσδοκίαν

A number of Prodromos' jokes are based on breaking expectations. This method of *παρά προσδοκίαν* can be illustrated by the account of blinding of Samson¹¹⁷²:

Jud. 109 Εἰς τὴν τετάρτην ἀπόπειραν Δαλιδᾶς, ὅτε τὸν Σαμψὼν ἀνδραποδισαμένη ἀπεξύρησε τὰς τρίχας τῆς κεφαλῆς καὶ τυφλωθῆναι πεποίηκεν

(b) —*Τίς σε φίλων βλεφάρων ἀπαμέρσατο, ἄλκιμε Σαμψών;*
—*Ὅς με κόμην κεφαλῆς ἀποείλετο. —Τίς δ' ἄρ' ἐκεῖνος;*
—*Ἦδε γυνὴ δολόεσσα· Δαλιδὰ δέ μιν καλέουσιν.*
—*ὦ τάλαν, ὡς κραδίηφιν ὄφιν διεθέρμανας οὖλον.*

On the fourth attempt of Delilah, when having enslaved Samson she cut his hair and made him blind

Who has deprived you of your eyes, strong Samson? - The one who bereaved me from hair on my head. - Who is he? - She is wily woman (wife). - Her name is Delilah. - O wretched one, what a baneful snake have you nourished in your bosom!

Asked about his offender, Samson gives an enigmatic answer, which, however, implies that the person in question was male (ὅς). This assumption is upheld in the follow-up question about the identity of the culprit, who is referred to with the masculine demonstrative pronoun *ἐκεῖνος*. However, Samson's response - *Ἦδε γυνὴ δολόεσσα* – overturns the shared assumption about the gender of Samson's nemesis. The unfulfilled expectations contribute to the comic effect, which is rooted in the incongruousness of the whole situation: the invincible Samson, whose strength is

¹¹⁷⁰ Liddell and Scott (1940) ἀμφιμήτριος.

¹¹⁷¹ Gautier (1972) Epistle 35. P. 217 ln. 9.

¹¹⁷² Jud. 16:1-22.

highlighted by an adjective *ἄλκιμος* (stout), meets his doom at the hands of a woman. Making Delilah solely responsible for Samson's destruction, Prodromos departs from Scripture, where Delilah only deprived Samson of his strength by cutting his hair, whereas the Philistines gouged out his eyes¹¹⁷³.

Another method of making a *παρὰ προσδοκίαν* joke involves the unexpected alteration of a classical formula. Giving the account of the plague of flies¹¹⁷⁴, Prodromos mentions that the land of Goshen was left untouched:

Ex.49.Εἰς τὴν τετάρτην πληγὴν, τὴν κυνόμυϊαν, ἣς πληγῆς ἐπειράθη Αἴγυπτος ἐκτὸς τῆς γῆς Γεσέμ, ἣν κατέκουν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι
 ...τοῦνεκα γάρ σε σάωσε Θεὸς μέγας **ἄχθος ἀπούρας**,
 οὐνεκά σ' Ἑβραῖη κληῖρον λάχε πότνια φύτλη.

On the fourth plague, swarm of flies, which the whole Egypt experienced apart from the land of Goshen, which the Jews inhabited
 ...*The reason why great God spared you [the land of Goshen] by taking away the burden is that the august Jewish tribe obtained you as its lot.*

The expression *ἄχθος ἀπούρας* recalls Homeric formula *ἄχθος ἀρούρης* (burden upon the earth)¹¹⁷⁵, which occupied the same metrical sedes. The allusion to the '*burden upon the earth*' in this particular context is extremely apt since the epigram addresses the land of Goshen. However, given that in Homer *ἄχθος ἀρούρης* functions as a term of (self)-deprecation, Prodromos' pun subverts the reverence felt toward the land of Goshen as the home to the Jewish people.

Incongruity (Mock Heroic)

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that the use of hexameter allows Prodromos to highlight some parallels between the Bible and the Homeric poems. However, it is also true that Homeric

¹¹⁷³ Jud. 16:21.

¹¹⁷⁴ Ex. 8:20-30.

¹¹⁷⁵ Il. 18.104, Od. 20.379.

language in some instances becomes a source of comic incongruousness, when the nobility of heroic meter is applied to ordinary, if not base, things. An example of discrepancy between high and low can be found in the account of Abraham and Lot's conflict¹¹⁷⁶:

Gen.18.Εἰς τὴν μάχην τῶν ποιμένων Ἀβραὰμ καὶ τῶν ποιμένων Λὼτ καὶ τὴν τούτων διαίρεσιν

(b) Δοιῆς παρ ποιμένης δύο ποιμένες ἀντίοι ἔσταν·
Λὼτ μὲν ὅς, αὐτὰρ ὃ γ' Ἀβραμ· ὑπὸ προβάτοις δὲ μάχοντο·
ἐν δ' ἄρα δεσποσύνοισιν ἀεικέα ὤρσαν ὑπ' ὀργήν,
καὶ τ' **ἔριδι ξυνέηκαν**, ἀπ' ἀλλήλων δ' ἐμέρισσαν.

On the conflict of Abraham's and Lot's shepherds, and their separation

(b) *Two shepherds, with two flocks, stood against each other. One was Lot's, the other was Abraham's. They fought because of sheep. The question of ownership stirred an unseemly wrath, and brought them to contend, and they [Lot and Abraham] split from each other.*

While Scripture refers to this conflict as 'fight' (μάχη)¹¹⁷⁷, one should imagine not a full-fledged combat but rather a skirmish, which eventually was peacefully resolved by Abraham and Lot. In contrast, Prodomos' epigram implies that the conflict took the form of a duel worthy of Homeric heroes: the biblical characters are claimed to stand against each other (ἀντίοι ἔσταν) just like leaders of warring armies¹¹⁷⁸. What's more, the conflict between Abraham and Lot is compared to the most important strife of the Greek epic – the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles. Specifically, using the expression **ἔριδι ξυνέηκαν** Prodomos alludes to the opening verses of the Iliad: 'Τίς τάρ σφωε θεῶν **ἔριδι ξυνέηκε** μάχεσθαι;' ('Which of the gods, then, set these two together in conflict, to fight?')¹¹⁷⁹. According to the Iliad, the origin of the strife was the plague afflicted by Apollo on the Achaeans in punishment for abducting a priest's daughter Chryseis by Agamemnon. At the meeting of the Achaeans, Agamemnon agrees to return Chryseis to her father but demands Achilles' slave woman, Briseis, in compensation. Enraged

¹¹⁷⁶ Ex. 13:1-12.

¹¹⁷⁷ Ex. 13:7.

¹¹⁷⁸ Cf. Il. 11.215-7.

¹¹⁷⁹ Il. 1.8 Tr. Alexander (2015).

Achilles leaves the camp and asks his mother Thetis to coax Zeus into sabotaging the Achaeans' effort in capturing Troy: the ensuing battles between the Achaeans and the Trojans form the narrative substance of the *Iliad*. The conflict between Abraham and Lot emerges as a travesty of Agamemnon and Achilles' strife. Devoid of an epic scale, it is caused not by divinity but livestock, which is characteristic of mock-epic, where activities normally performed by gods and heroes are relegated to animals devoid of any virtue.

Apart from applying epic language to unheroic subject matter, Prodromos achieves comic effect through the parodic misuse of Homeric phraseology, like in the account of the assassination of Moabite king Eglon¹¹⁸⁰:

Jud.94.Εἰς Ἀώδ τὸν ἀποκτείναντα δόλῳ τὸν Μωαβίτην Ἐγλώμ

(b) Μωὰβ ἄνασεν Ἐγλώμ, κακά δ' ἔρδεν Ἰουδαίοισι·
τοῖς δὲ Θεὸς πονέουσ' ἐλεήμονα ἔμβαλε κούρην¹¹⁸¹
καὶ σφιν ἄνω προπέπομφεν ἀρηγόνα ἄλκιμον Ἀώδ,
ὃς τὸν Ἐγλώμ κατέπεφνε λόγῳ δολόεντι **συλήσας**.

On Ehud who killed Eglon king of Moab by deceit

(b) Eglon ruled over Moab, and did harm to the Jews. As they struggled, God mercifully took care of them, and sent brave Ehud as a helper. He killed Eglon after having **taken him off [despoiled]** with a deceitful word.

According to the Bible, the Jews sent Ehud to kill Eglon who oppressed Israel¹¹⁸². Ehud came with gifts but hid a sword under his clothing¹¹⁸³. After paying his tribute, Ehud asked Eglon to

¹¹⁸⁰ Jud. 3:12-30.

¹¹⁸¹ *Κούρη* in the usual sense of a 'girl' is impossible in this context. Some manuscripts have *κούρην* (cropping), which would metaphorically mean the 'end' to the troubles of Jews. The corruption of *κούρον* (young man) also needs to be considered, although it does not go well with the adjective *ελεήμων*, and, more importantly, appears to be superfluous in the light of the following line. Alternatively, Prodromos might have played with Latin *cura* (care), which is testified in Byzantine Greek. Cf. Trapp (1994-2017) *κούρα*.

¹¹⁸² Jud. 3:15.

¹¹⁸³ Jud. 3:16-7.

talk privately on the pretext that he had a secret message for him¹¹⁸⁴. When left alone with Eglon, Ehud put his sword into action:

*Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king's belly. Even the handle sank in after the blade, and his bowels discharged. Ehud did not pull the sword out, and the fat closed in over it*¹¹⁸⁵.

Rendering this episode, Prodnomos uses the verb *σνλάω*. In epic, this verb signifies stripping off the arms of a fallen foe¹¹⁸⁶ and represents an important symbolic act of sealing a victory over the slain enemy: the Book 16 of the *Iliad*, for example, narrates a ferocious fight over fallen Sarpedon, whose dying wish was that his comrades prevent the Achaeans from humiliating him through seizing his arms¹¹⁸⁷. In Prodnomos' epigram, *σνλάω* has a completely different meaning: to take away from the retinue¹¹⁸⁸. In contrast to the Homeric practice, Ehud not only does not seize the arms of Eglon (who is unarmed) but also leaves his own sword in Eglon's body as it is grotesquely covered by fat¹¹⁸⁹. Having accomplished his mission, Ehud escapes in a clandestine manner to avoid revenge from Eglon's bodyguards¹¹⁹⁰. Thus, the Homeric ideal of heroic triumph over a defeated enemy is changed by Prodnomos into the devious assassination of a pathetic king.

The epigram on prophet Elijah's escape from queen Jezebel¹¹⁹¹ goes as far as to reject the heroic values altogether:

3Reg.172.Εἰς τὴν ἀπὸ προσώπου Ἰεζάβελ φυγὴν Ἥλιου

(a) Ὁ τὰς ἀπάσας οὐρανοῦ κλείων θύρας
νεκρούς δ' ἀνιστῶν θαυματουργῶν δὲ ζένα
νῦν ἐκδιδράσκει τὴν Ἰεζάβελ τρέμων·
ζηλῶμεν αὐτοῦ τὴν φυγὴν καὶ τὸν φόβον.

¹¹⁸⁴ Jud. 3:19.

¹¹⁸⁵ Jud. 3:21-2.

¹¹⁸⁶ Liddell and Scott (1940) *σνλάω*.

¹¹⁸⁷ Il. 16.485-501; Segal (1971).

¹¹⁸⁸ The closest meaning in Liddell and Scott (1940) can be found under the headings 3 b,c.

¹¹⁸⁹ Jud. 3:22.

¹¹⁹⁰ Jud. 3:23-6.

¹¹⁹¹ 3 Reg. 19:1-8.

(b) *Θηλυτέρη βασίλεια Ἰεζάβελ Ἥλιον αὐτῷ
χώσατο, λυγροτάτην δὲ φόνου ἐνετεínaτ' ἀπειλήν·
ταρβήσας δ' ὁδ' εἶπε πρὸς ὃν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν
“φύζις ἀρειοτέρη” καὶ ἔκφυγεν ἡματα μακρά.*

On Elijah's flight from Jezebel

(a) The one who shut the gates of the sky, and resurrected the dead, and performed marvelous miracles now flees Jezebel in terror. Let us emulate his escape and fear.

(b) Female queen Jezebel pressured Elijah himself, and made terrible death threats. **Having been terrified, he spoke to his heroic heart:** “Escape is preferable” and was on the run for many days.

Having Elijah to call forth his ‘heroic’ spirit, Prodromos draws a comparison between him and Odysseus. Surrounded by the Trojans, Odysseus opts for fighting to the death over fleeing, considering the latter option unworthy of a warrior:

*ὀχθήσας δ' ἄρα εἶπε πρὸς ὃν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν·
ὦ μοι ἐγὼ τί πάθω; μέγα μὲν κακὸν αἶ κε φέβωμαι
πληθὺν ταρβήσας· τὸ δὲ ῥίγιον αἶ κεν ἁλώω
μοῦνος· τοὺς δ' ἄλλους Δαναοὺς ἐφόβησε Κρονίων.
ἀλλὰ τί ἦ μοι ταῦτα φίλος διελέξατο θυμός;
οἶδα γὰρ ὅττι κακοὶ μὲν ἀποίχονται πολέμοιο,
ὃς δὲ κ' ἀριστεύῃσι μάχῃ ἐνὶ τὸν δὲ μάλα χρεὼ
ἐστάμεναι κρατερῶς, ἢ τ' ἐβλητ' ἢ τ' ἐβαλ' ἄλλον.*

*Then troubled he spoke to his own great-spirited heart: “Ah me, what will become of me? Great is the evil if I should take flight in fear of this outnumbering; but more dreaded is this, if I should be caught on my own; the son of Cronus has put to flight the other Danaans. But why does my heart debate these things? For I know that cowards shrink from war, and he who would be best in battle, he must strongly stand his ground, whether he is killed, or kills another.”*¹¹⁹²

In contrast to Odysseus, Elijah prefers to flee. Describing the cowardly flight of Elijah

Prodromos relies on a long tradition of inverting the Homeric ideal of glorious death: one may consider Archilochus' poem, in which the poet's *persona* leaves his shield by a bush but saves his life¹¹⁹³. However, in Prodromos' epigram the logic of inversion achieves a far greater scale.

¹¹⁹² Il. 11.403-10 Tr. Alexander (2015).

¹¹⁹³ West (1971) Archilochus Fragment 5; Page (1964).

Firstly, Prodromos assigns a military role to a prophet, who by definition is not fit for war; this will have seemed particularly incongruous to the Byzantine audience, who, unlike their Western counterparts, were not accustomed to the sight of priests fighting in battle ¹¹⁹⁴. Secondly, Elijah's flight is contrasted with his previous exploits, some of which, like bringing draught, did cause trouble for king Ahab ¹¹⁹⁵. Thirdly, Prodromos stresses that Elijah's retreat was caused by a woman (*Θηλυτέρῃ βασιλείᾳ*); given that in the Homeric epic women were completely excluded from the military and state affairs, Jezebel's *tour de force* is especially striking.

Although Elijah's response to danger from the Homeric perspective appears nothing but ignominious, Prodromos, despite this, still recommends Elijah as a role model for his fellows: *ζηλωμεν αὐτοῦ τὴν φυγὴν καὶ τὸν φόβον*. Given that Elijah has suffered oppression from the queen, Jezebel, Prodromos may be promoting fear and circumspection as an attitude suitable for anyone who deals with Byzantine aristocracy. While in those poems which celebrate military campaigns Prodromos describes Byzantine aristocracy as Homeric heroes, his own *persona* embodies a completely anti-heroic ideal. A good illustration of such self-fashioning can be found in Prodromos' poem to Anna Komnene ¹¹⁹⁶. The poem represents a specimen of begging poetry and as such is centered around its author. Prodromos describes a scene from his childhood, with his father giving him career advice. Prodromos' father acknowledges that military career brings glory but advises Prodromos against it, fearing lest he become a disgrace (*αἴσχος*) due to his physical inaptitude:

*σοὶ δέ, τέκνον Θεόδωρε ἀνάλκιδες εἰσὶ μὲν ὦμοι,
ὥστε σάκος φορέειν, ἀνάλκιδες εἰσὶ δὲ χεῖρες,
ὥστε δόρυ κραδάειν, ἀνάλκιδες εἰσὶ δὲ κνήμαι,
ὥστε σε μαρναμένοις χαλκοκνήμιδα μετελθεῖν·
Your shoulders, my boy Theodore, are too feeble to carry a shield, and your arms too
feeble to brandish a spear and your legs too feeble to go into battle while wearing bronze
greaves ¹¹⁹⁷.*

¹¹⁹⁴ Haldon (1999) P. 262.

¹¹⁹⁵ 3 Reg. 17:1.

¹¹⁹⁶ Hörandner (1974) Poem XXXVIII.

¹¹⁹⁷ Hörandner (1974) Poem XXXVIII vv. 35-8.

Such discouragement of a military career overturns the upbringing of Homeric heroes, whose fathers established military glory as a priority for their sons. Glaucus, for example, challenged by Diomedes to talk about his ancestry, finishes his story with recollection of his father's admonition to excel in the battlefield:

*Ἰππόλοχος δέ μ' ἔτικτε, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ φημι γενέσθαι·
πέμπε δέ μ' ἐς Τροίην, καὶ μοι μάλα πόλλ' ἐπέτελλεν
αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων,
μηδὲ γένος πατέρων αἰσχυνέμεν, οἳ μέγ' ἄριστοι
ἐν τ' Ἐφύρῃ ἐγένοντο καὶ ἐν Λυκίῃ εὐρείῃ.*

*And Hippolochos begot me, and I say I am born of him; he sent me to Troy, and gave many directives to me, always to be best and to be better than all others, not to disgrace the line of my fathers, who were far the best in Ephyre and in broad Lycia.*¹¹⁹⁸

Unlike Homeric heroes, Prodromos was advised by his father not to fight but to pursue academic studies. Prodromos describes his acquisition of grammar, rhetoric and philosophy as a long and arduous voyage that evokes wanderings of Odysseus¹¹⁹⁹. Having completed his education, Prodromos, however, realises that his antiquarian learning does not bring any dividends¹²⁰⁰. Prodromos complains that even craftsmen are doing better than he, and regrets that he has not become one of them at an earlier stage in his life¹²⁰¹. The misery of a poor scholar recounted in Homeric hexameters emerges thus as another example of the subversion of epic conventions that Prodromos enacts in his epigrams by relating the ordinary and unworthy deeds of biblical characters against the heroic background of Homeric poems.

Degradation

Grotesque

¹¹⁹⁸ Il. 6.206-10.

¹¹⁹⁹ Hörandner (1974) Poem XXXVIII vv. 47-62.

¹²⁰⁰ Hörandner (1974) vv. 64-7.

¹²⁰¹ Hörandner (1974) vv. 68-74.

Closely connected to humour in Prodromos' rendering of biblical events is the degradation of Scripture that is achieved through grotesque emphasis on the material and the bodily. Before discussing the evidence from the biblical epigrams, it seems appropriate to note that the grotesque forms one of the cornerstones of Prodromos' satirical writings. In one of them, Prodromos attacks a crone who despite her old age has enormous appetite for sex¹²⁰². Relying on Aristophanes, Lucian and Hellenistic epigram¹²⁰³, Prodromos draws an extremely repulsive portrait of the old courtesan: she suffers from podagra, gibbosity and blindness but still uses make-up in a bid to seduce naïve youth.¹²⁰⁴ In accordance with the logic of grotesque realism, the old age in Prodromos' satire is pregnant with regeneration: while Prodromos wishes the old lady would go to hell (where, however, even Cerberus would struggle to digest her body), he compares her to an infant on the grounds that she hardly has any teeth¹²⁰⁵.

Despite the gravity of the Scripture's subject matter, the grotesque remains one of the key features of the biblical epigrams. To achieve the grotesque effect, Prodromos at times needs to simply substitute a single word from the biblical text. One case in point is Prodromos' account of the Judgement of Solomon¹²⁰⁶. According to the Bible, to find out who is the true mother of the contested child, Solomon decides to undertake a blood-chilling procedure:

*Then the king said, "Bring me a sword [μάχαιρα]." So they brought a sword for the king. He then gave an order: "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other."*¹²⁰⁷

In Prodromos' epigram the sword (μάχαιρα) is replaced with a saw (πίλον) so that a reader has to imagine a truly sadistic vivisection, which, however, was averted thanks to the wisdom of the biblical king.

¹²⁰² Migliorini (2010) Κατὰ φιλοπόρνου γραός Pp. 3-18.

¹²⁰³ Zagklas (2020).

¹²⁰⁴ Migliorini (2010) Κατὰ φιλοπόρνου γραός vv. 19-21, 30-4.

¹²⁰⁵ Migliorini (2010) Κατὰ φιλοπόρνου γραός vv. 22-5, 99-103.

¹²⁰⁶ 3 Reg. 163.

¹²⁰⁷ 3 Reg. 3:24-5.

In some instances, Prodromos goes further than replacing a single word and supplies additional details that intensify the repulsiveness of the original scene. Let us consider the horrendous episode from the Book of Judges¹²⁰⁸: after defeating the Canaanites, the Jews capture the king Adoni-Bezek and cut off his fingers and toes (*τὰ ἄκρα τῶν χειρῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ*)¹²⁰⁹. In Prodromos' epigram, the misery of Adoni-Bezek is described as follows:

Jud.92.Εἰς Ἀδωνιβεζέκ τὸν Χανανίτην, ὃς πάντας, οὓς ἐχειροῦτο, τῶν ποδῶν στερῶν καὶ τῶν χειρῶν ὕστερον καὶ αὐτὸς τὰ ὅμοια πέπονθεν

(b) *Τλᾶμον Ἀδωνιβεζέκ, ἄχειρ καὶ ἄπους ποτὶ γαίην
ἔρπε διὰ στέρνοιο κατ' αἰόλον ἐρπηστήρα...*

On Adoni-Bezek the Canaanite, who deprived everyone he subdued of their legs and hands but suffered the same fate

(b) Wretched Adoni-Bezek, crawl on the ground without hands and legs, just with your torso, like a slippery serpent...

In this description, Adoni-Bezek is deprived not just of fingers and toes but his arms (*ἄχειρ*) and legs (*ἄπους*) altogether. While in the Bible Adoni-Bezek was assisted on the journey to Jerusalem, Prodromos deprives him of any dignity by representing him crawling. The grotesque image becomes complete with the comparison of the mutilated Adoni-Bezek to a reptile. Interestingly, the comparison to an animal as a means of humiliation of a ruined biblical character is not limited to evil king Adoni-Bezek. Recounting Samson's tortures at the hands of the Philistines¹²¹⁰, Prodromos represents Samson grinding grain 'like an ass' (*δίκτην ὄνου*)¹²¹¹, a scoffing image that originates from Prodromos' imagination rather than the Bible.

Eroticism

¹²⁰⁸ Jud. 1:4-7.

¹²⁰⁹ Jud. 1:6.

¹²¹⁰ Jud. 16:21.

¹²¹¹ Papagiannis (1997) Jud. 110a.

A further aspect of carnivalesque degradation is erotization of the Bible. From the seventh century, erotic epigrams, which were a respectable genre of classical literature, began to disappear¹²¹². However, in twelfth-century Byzantine literature, Eros is rehabilitated, above all, in the re-emergent romantic novels. One such example is the allegorical story of Hysmine and Hysminias by Eustathios Makrembolites where ‘*Eros is portrayed as the lord of the taxis which makes the world go round*’¹²¹³. No less prominent is the figure of Eros in the ethopoeiai by Nikephoros Basilakes, who uses some of the most obscene classical myths (like Pasiphae’s affair with a bull) to highlight omnipotent but also ominous power of the sensual desire¹²¹⁴.

As in classical myths, the Bible contains numerous stories of erotic infatuation. Remarkably, Prodromos uses many of them, and acknowledges incest (Lot and his daughters¹²¹⁵), rape (Amnon and Tamar¹²¹⁶) and adultery (David and Bathsheba¹²¹⁷) as integral parts of the Sacred history. Prodromos’ description of passion is very naturalistic. Let us consider the episode from the Book of Numbers that relates an Israelite’s punishment for enjoying the company of a Midianite woman:

*Then an Israelite man brought into the camp a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting. When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear into both of them, right through the Israelite man and into the woman’s stomach*¹²¹⁸.

Prodromos’ response to this episode takes the form of ethopoeia:

Num.76.Εἰς τὸν Φινεὲς συνεκκεντοῦντα τὸν μῑγέντα τῇ Μαδιθηναίᾳ Ἰσραηλίτην

¹²¹² Lauxtermann (2003) P. 131.

¹²¹³ Magdalino (1992) P. 197.

¹²¹⁴ Kotłowska (2019).

¹²¹⁵ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 23.

¹²¹⁶ Papagiannis (1997) 2 Reg. 149.

¹²¹⁷ Papagiannis (1997) 2 Reg. 147.

¹²¹⁸ Num. 25.6-8.

(a) Τὸν σειρομάστην, Φινεές, λαβὼν πάλιν
τὸν Ἰσραηλίτην με τῇ πίστει μόνη
ἁμαρτία μιγέντα Μαδιανίτι
πλήξας ἀπόσπα τῆς κατ' αὐτὴν αἰσχύνης.

On Phinehas piercing through an Israelite together with a Midianite woman he had intercourse with.

(a) Phinehas, grab your spear once again and hit me with your faith, me an Israelite, who have sinned with a Midianite woman, and drag me away from my shameful acts with her.

The biblical episode contains some crude details but Prodromos' epigram intensifies the episode's grotesque materialism even further. While the Bible only suggests that the Israelite was involved in intercourse with his Midianite guest, Prodromos puts the 'shameful acts' (αἰσχύνη) in the culmination of his epigram. Furthermore, employing an ethopoeia Prodromos compares himself with the lustful Israelite.

Apart from creating the naturalistic descriptions of actual biblical love scenes, Prodromos makes sexual innuendos while rendering episodes that lack any inherent erotic aspect. Let us consider the story of David and Jonathan. The two biblical characters had great affection for each other and made a covenant that ensured David's protection from Jonathan's father Saul¹²¹⁹. There is no question that the relationship between David and Jonathan was filled with strong feelings: during their reunion '*they kissed each other and wept together*'¹²²⁰. However, nothing in the Bible indicates that the relationship between David and Jonathan was homoerotic. Granted, the Bible relates that Jonathan loved David as he loved himself¹²²¹. According to the scholars of the Hebrew Bible, the verb *love* in David-Jonathan narrative has political connotations: to *love* here means to facilitate David in making his way to the throne of Israel¹²²². In a similar vein, Greek

¹²¹⁹ 1 Reg. 20:16.

¹²²⁰ 1 Reg. 20:41.

¹²²¹ 1 Reg. 20:17 ἠγάπησεν ψυχὴν ἀγαπῶντος αὐτόν

¹²²² Thompson (1974); Ackroyd (1975).

ἀγαπάω that appears in Septuagint points at a friendly affection but not an erotic desire¹²²³.

Despite all that, Prodrornos implies that David and Jonathan's friendship culminated in sexual partnership:

1Reg.128.Εἰς τὴν ἀγάπην Δαβὶδ καὶ Ἰωνάθαν

(a) Τῆς ἀγαθῆς σου καρδίας, Ἰωνάθαν·
τὸν παῖδα Δαβὶδ εἶδες ἡριστευκότα
καὶ φίλον αὐτὸν ἔσχες αὐτῇ τῇ θεᾷ,
ἄνακτος υἱὸς τὸν ταπεινὸν ποιμένα.

(b) Οὐκ ἄρα ἐσθλὸς ἀνὴρ φλαύρῳ ἐπιμίσγεται ἀνδρί·
ἐσθλῷ δ' ἐσθλὸς ἔοικε, κακὸς δὲ κακῷ φίλος εἶναι·
ἢ βλέπε τόνδε φέριστον Ἰωνάθαν υἱέα Σαούλ
Δαβὶδ τῷδε φερίστῳ ὁμῶς φιλότῃτι μιγέντα.

On David's and Jonathan's affection

(a) *What a golden heart you have, Jonathan. You saw that the boy David had distinguished himself and at that sight you, a king's son, befriended him, a humble shepherd.*

(b) *A good man does not **consort** with a bad man. Good people ought to be friends with good people, and bad ones with bad ones. Just look at the most distinguished Jonathan, the son of Saul, who **mingled intimately** with the equally distinguished David over here.*

The title of the epigram identifies the David and Jonathan's relationship as ἀγάπη, a spiritual affection, which is suggested by the biblical account¹²²⁴. The iambic tetrastich also adheres to Scripture in representing David and Jonathan merely as friends. However, the hexametric tetrastich contains vocabulary that suggests the erotic nature of David and Jonathan's alliance. Specifically, the verb ἐπιμίσγω in Homer signifies hostile or peaceful relations but in later authors also develops a meaning of sexual intercourse¹²²⁵. When it comes to the expression φιλότῃτι μιγέντα, there is no any instance when it refers to anything different than sex¹²²⁶.

¹²²³ Liddell and Scott (1940) ἀγαπάω.

¹²²⁴ 1 Reg. 20:17.

¹²²⁵ Liddell and Scott (1940) ἐπιμίσγω.

¹²²⁶ Cf. Il. 2.232; Allen, Halliday, and Sikes (1936) In Bacchum vv. 56-7; West (1966) Hesiod. vv. 124-5.

Therefore, for any of Prodromos' readers familiar with the epic tradition David and Jonathan appear as lovers despite the fact that in the Bible their relationship is purely platonic.

Describing forbidden practices, like sex or wine consumption, Prodromos is reluctant to criticise them. On the contrary, Prodromos uses biblical material to demonstrate that what is considered immoral can in fact encapsulate virtue. When giving an account of the prostitute Rahab who helped the Jews to capture Jericho by hiding in her inn two of their spies¹²²⁷, Prodromos exclaims:

Jos.81.Εἰς Ῥαὰβ τὴν πόρνην, ἣ τοὺς κατασκόπους Ἰεριχὼ σῶσασα ὕστερον ἀλISCOμένης αὐτῆς μόνη τῶν ἄλλων ἐσώθη

(a) ...μιμεῖσθε, πόρναι, τῆς Ῥαὰβ τὴν καρδίαν,
ὥς ἂν τύχητε ψυχικῆς σωτηρίας.

On prostitute Rahab, who was the only to survive during capture of Jericho after she saved the spies, who came to Jericho

(a) *Prostitutes, emulate the heart of Rahab so that you attain spiritual salvation.*

Addressing contemporary prostitutes, Prodromos implies that despite their occupation they could be as virtuous as Rahab, the most virtuous woman in the entire Jericho.

Dancing

Another controversial activity rehabilitated by Prodromos by highlighting a positive biblical example is dancing. Although dance remained one of the most popular entertainments throughout Byzantine history, the Church disapproved of it. For example, the Council of Trullo banned '*public dances by women which are able to cause much impunity and harm*'¹²²⁸. However, the Second Book of Kings describes a dance that carries a great religious significance.

¹²²⁷ Jos. 2:1-24.

¹²²⁸ Webb (1997) P. 130.

Celebrating the return of the Ark to Jerusalem, David changed his imperial robes for a linen ephod and ‘*danced before the Lord with all his might*’¹²²⁹. As he came to bless his household, his wife Michal rebuked him for uncovering himself before the eyes of his servants’ maids but David assured her that he humiliated himself in the name of God¹²³⁰. Conversely, Prodrornos in his epigram supports David’s performance:

2Reg.145.Εἰς τὸν Δαβὶδ προορχούμενον τῆς κιβωτοῦ

(a) *Εἴ τις βροτοῖς ὄρχησις ἐστὶν ἀμύμων,
ἢ τοῦ Δαβὶδ ὄρχησις ἐστὶν ἀμύμων·
ὀρχούμενος γὰρ τῆς κιβωτοῦ προτρέχει
ἀνατρεχούσης εἰς τὸν ἀρχαῖον τόπον.*

(b) *Μελχὸλ ἀριστοπόσεια, τί μέμφει ὧ παρακοίτῃ,
οὐνεχ’ ὑπὲρ κίστης ἱερῆς περὶ **κόρδακα** παίζει;
οὔτι κακὸν τόδε ῥέζει οὐδ’ ἀπρεπὲς βασιλῆι,
χαρᾶς θειοτέρης δὲ τρανὲς σάφα δείκνυσι σῆμα.*

On David dancing in front of the Ark

(a) *If any of the humans’ dances is acceptable, it must be the dance of David. While dancing he leads the procession in honor of the Ark that is returning to the old place.*

(b) *Michal, wife of the noble husband, why do you rebuke your consort for dancing the kordax all around because of the sacred chest? He does nothing wrong or inappropriate for a king but clearly represents a distinct sign of divine joy.*

While the Bible does not provide any details about David’s dance, Prodrornos represents him performing the *kordax*. Having been first attested in comedy, the *kordax* bears strong associations with vulgarity and sexual lasciviousness¹²³¹. Byzantine authors tended to include episodes of the *kordax*, often in conjunction with wine drinking, to discredit their opponents¹²³². Niketas Choniates, for example, claims that dancing the *kordax* was one of the favorite pastimes of John Kamateros, a high official, who ‘*tasted of higher learning with only the tip of his*

¹²²⁹ 2 Reg. 6:14 ἀνεκρούετο ἐν ὀργάνοις ἡρμοσμένοις ἐνώπιον κυρίου.

¹²³⁰ 2 Reg. 6.20-22.

¹²³¹ Liddell and Scott (1940) κόρδαξ. Cf. entry in Hesychius’s Lexicon: Latte (1953-66) *κόρδαξ*: εἶδος ὀρχήσεως ἀσέμνως κινούσης <τὴν ὀσφύν> the kordax – type of dance that moves loins in a shameful manner.

¹²³² Koder (2013).

*finger*¹²³³. In representing David dancing the *kordax*, Prodromos undermines the authority of the biblical king but at the same time legitimises merrymaking by linking it to the sacred history.

Inversion

The world of carnival is a topsy-turvy world. Describing folk festivals reflected in Rabelais' work, Bakhtin observes that one of their essential elements was the reversal of the hierarchic order: '*the jester was proclaimed king, a clownish abbot, bishop, or archbishop was elected at the 'feast of fools*'¹²³⁴. At the end of the festival, the mock king would be uncrowned, beaten and even turned into slave. Such a reversal of fortune represents for Bakhtin the principle of regeneration that underpins the nature of carnival.

Mutability of Power

In the biblical epigrams, the principle of regeneration can be found in Prodromos' treatment of the succession of kings. Describing the enthronement of Judas¹²³⁵, Prodromos represents the new king as a substitute for Joshua, who earlier on replaced Moses after his death:

Jud.91.Εἰς Ἰούδαν τὸν μετὰ Ἰησοῦν ἄρξαντα τῶν Ἑβραίων

(a) Τοῦ Μωσέως θανόντος Ἰησοῦς μένει,
τοῦ δ' Ἰησοῦ θανόντος Ἰούδας μένει·
μὴ γὰρ στρατηγῶν ἐνδεὴς ὁ δεσπότης;
μὴ γὰρ Θεῷ λείπουσιν ἀκραιφνεῖς φίλοι;

On Judah ruled over the Jews after Joshua

(a) When Moses dies, Joshua remains. When Joshua dies, Judah remains. The Lord is not deficient in generals, is he? God does not lack true friends, does he?

The syntactical parallelism of the epigram highlights the idea that the individual features of the prophets are irrelevant as they are simply instruments of enacting the divine will.

¹²³³ Magoulas (1984) P. 64.

¹²³⁴ Bakhtin (1984b) P. 81.

¹²³⁵ Jud. 1:1-2.

If the above quoted epigram celebrates the biblical kings as God's servants, in the epigram on the death of Samuel¹²³⁶, Prodromos emphatically exposes the transient nature of the Jewish prophet:

1Reg.135.Εἰς τὸν θάνατον Σαμουήλ

(b) Καὶ σὲ βίη θανάτοιο βιήσατο, δῖε Σαμουήλ,
καὶ σὺ μετὰ χθονίοισιν ὁμὸν τέλος εὔραο πότμον·
αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ σ' ἀθάνατον ἐνὶ φρεσὶν ἦσιν ἐνώμων·
οὐ δ' ἄρ' ἔης ἀθάνατος, θάνες δέ τε καὶ σύ, Σαμουήλ

On the death of Samuel

(b) *The power of death has overcome you as well, divine Samuel, and you have reached the common final destiny of mortals. However, in my thoughts, I considered you immortal. But you are not; you died as well, Samuel.*

The epigram is structured around the binary oppositions that represent the vertical hierarchy: Divine (δῖος) – Earthly (χθόνιος), Immortality (ἀθάνατος) – Death (θάνες). In the course of his epigram, Prodromos literally brings Samuel down to earth: it is telling that in the beginning of the epigram the prophet is addressed as *divine* Samuel (δῖε Σαμουήλ), whereas in the end he is simply *Samuel*. The exposition of Samuel's mortal nature is tinged with irreverence: Prodromos addresses Samuel four times with the personal pronoun *σύ/σέ* and thus establishes a familiar relationship with the biblical prophet which may be considered inappropriate.

The most conspicuous evidence of Prodromos' increased attention to the mutability of power can be found in his rendering of the separation of the United Kingdom of Israel¹²³⁷. The Bible describes the separation of Israel as a complex process that develops in several stages: Jeroboam, one of the Solomon's officials is promised kingship by prophet Ahijah, who tears a cloak into twelve pieces and explains the meaning of this symbolic act¹²³⁸; as Solomon dies he is succeeded

¹²³⁶ 1 Reg. 25:1.

¹²³⁷ 3 Reg. 11:26-12:24.

¹²³⁸ 3 Reg. 11:27-40.

by his son Rehoboam¹²³⁹; Israelites complain to Rehoboam about the heavy yoke imposed by Solomon but the new king follows the advice of those who recommend oppressing his people¹²⁴⁰; the Israelites rebel and proclaim Jeroboam as their king who will receive power over the better part of Israel¹²⁴¹; Rehoboam, in turn, retains control over Judas and the tribe of Benjamin¹²⁴². Prodromos does not provide these details but simply draws attention to the dramatic reversal of fortunes:

3Reg.166.Εἰς τὴν διαίρεσιν τοῦ κράτους Σαλομών, ὅτε καὶ ὁ μὲν δοῦλος αὐτοῦ τῶν δέκα ἤρξε φυλῶν, ὁ δὲ υἱὸς τῶν δύο

(a) *Βλέψον, Σαλομών, εἴ τι καὶ θανὼν βλέπεις,
διαίρεσίν σου καὶ μερισμὸν τοῦ κράτους,
καὶ πῶς ὁ παῖς σου σκῆπτρα κληροῦται δύο,
ὁ δ' οἰκέτης κύριος ἐστὶ τῶν δέκα.*

(b) *Δοιοὶ ἐν Ἰσραὴλ μετέσαν Σαλομών βασιλῆες,
ὃς μὲν ἀνακτορέης ἐξ ὀσφύος εἰς βίον ἦκων,
ὃς δὲ δμῶδς ἀνακτος· ἀτὰρ πλεον ἄρξεν ὁ δοῦλος·
δώδεκα γὰρ φυλάων ἅπο εἴλετο τὰς δέκα πάσας.*

On the separation of Solomon's power, when a slave of his took over ten tribes, whereas his son – over two

(a) *Look, Solomon, if you can see even after death, at division and partition of your kingdom, and how your son inherits two scepters [tribes], while the slave becomes the master of ten.*

(b) *In Israel Solomon was succeeded by the two kings. One has come to life from the royal loin. Another was a lord's servant. However, the slave gained more power. Out of twelve tribes he seized complete control over ten.*

Without calling Jeroboam by name, Prodromos refers to him several times as a slave¹²⁴³. While the Bible does use *δοῦλος* in relation to Jeroboam¹²⁴⁴, it also mentions that he was put in charge

¹²³⁹ 3 Reg. 11:41-3.

¹²⁴⁰ 3 Reg. 12:1-15.

¹²⁴¹ 3 Reg. 12:16-9.

¹²⁴² 3 Reg. 12:20-4.

¹²⁴³ Papagiannis (1997) 3 Reg. 166a4 οἰκετής, b3 δμῶδς ἀνακτος, δοῦλος.

¹²⁴⁴ 3 Reg. 11:26.

of the whole labour force of the house of Joseph¹²⁴⁵. Omitting this detail about Jeroboam's relatively high standing, Prodromos sharpens the contrast between his old and new statuses, which is achieved through the juxtaposition of *οἰκέτης* and *κύριος*. It is also noteworthy that Prodromos is silent about the reasons for the separation of Israel. According to the Bible, the downfall of the house of Solomon was caused by the disloyalty of the king¹²⁴⁶. In Prodromos' epigram, the new balance of power is presented as a result of accidental reversal of fortune, which is consistent with the predominance of chaos in the carnivalised world.

Prodromos' emphasis on the permutation of power in the Bible resonates with the institutional vulnerability of the Byzantine emperor highlighted in a recent study by Anthony Kaldellis¹²⁴⁷. Although the Comnenian emperors managed to establish a quasi-dynastic system of succession, the emperor was nevertheless never immune from the danger of being toppled by ambitious members of his own clan¹²⁴⁸. The reversal of fortunes highlighted in the biblical epigrams might therefore function as a subtle reminder of the mortal nature of emperors and the inherent insecurity of their office.

Literary Inversions

The prominence of the reversal of fortune in the political domain is supplemented by the use of inversion as a literary technique. One such instance is the epigram that relates to one of the resurrections performed by Christ:

Matt.198.Εἰς Χριστὸν ἀνιστῶντα τὴν θυγατέρα τοῦ ἀρχισυναγώγου

(a) Σὺ καὶ θανατοῖς καὶ πάλιν ζωοῖς λόγῳ,
ζωοῖς δὲ μᾶλλον ἢ θανατοῖς, Χριστέ μου·
ὁ δ' **ἀρχισυνάγωγος** εἰς μαρτυρίαν
βιοῦν τὸ θυγάτριον ἔμπαλιν βλέπων.

¹²⁴⁵ 3 Reg. 11:28.

¹²⁴⁶ 3 Reg. 11:33.

¹²⁴⁷ Kaldellis (2015).

¹²⁴⁸ Magdalino (1993) Pp. 180-201.

On Christ raising a daughter of the chief rabbi

(a) You let die and you bring back to life with your word; but you rather let people live than let them die. This can be attested by the chief rabbi, who sees that his daughter is alive again.

Prodromos identifies the resurrected woman as a daughter of the chief rabbi (ἀρχισυνάγωγος). This title is borrowed from the account of this miracle in the Gospel of Mark¹²⁴⁹; in the Gospel of Luke this man is called ἄρχων τῆς συναγωγῆς¹²⁵⁰. However, in the version of this story presented in the Gospel of Matthew the mourning father is introduced simply as ἄρχων – governor/official¹²⁵¹. As the epigram in question renders the episodes from the Gospel of Matthew, one would expect Prodromos to adopt the terminology of this particular text. Instead, by utilising the parallel Gospel, Prodromos erodes the boundaries between the two canonical texts.

Another aspect of the logic of inversion is the reversal of genre conventions. As is already clear from the above discussion, Prodromos renders each biblical episode in two epigrams: one written in hexameters, another in dodecasyllables. Normally, the first epigram employs the imagery and language of epic poetry, whereas the second uses the imagery of drama. However, in some instances, Prodromos employs epic features in his iambic epigrams and vice versa. The epic elements in iambic tetrastichs include the absence of contraction¹²⁵² and the Homeric vocabulary¹²⁵³. The ‘foreign’ elements in hexametric epigrams are mainly lexical but also represent the structural features of other genres, like dramatic stichomythia:

Ex.54.Εἰς τὴν ἐννάτην πληγὴν, τὸ ψηλαφητὸν σκότος

*(b)—Τίς ποτ’ ἔης; —Ὅδ’ ἐγώ. —Ποῖ στείχομεν; —Οὔτι πω οἶδα.
—Ὡ μοι ἐγώ· κατέαγα τὸ κρανίον· ἐκ δὲ θυράων
τίς με λαβὼν ἀγάγησι; χέρες, προοδεύετ’ ἀταρπόν.
Μωσῆς τήνδε κέδασσε μακρὴν καὶ ἀπείρονα νύκτα.*

¹²⁴⁹ Mark 5:22.

¹²⁵⁰ Luke 8:41.

¹²⁵¹ Matt. 9:18.

¹²⁵² Papagiannis (1997) Matt. 202a1 γραμματέες.

¹²⁵³ Papagiannis (1997) Act. Ap. 268a4 ἀρτίπους.

On the ninth plague, comprehensive darkness

(b) *-Who in the world are you? -It's me. -Where do we go? -I have no idea. -Woe is me! I have hit my skull. Who will take me out of the gates? Hands, find out the way out. Moses, scatter this deep and boundless night.*

The epigram quoted above gives an account of the darkness spread by God over Egypt for the punishment of Pharaoh¹²⁵⁴, and it contains, as one would expect from hexametric tetrastich, multiple epic features. In particular, one can point out the Homeric exclamation ὦ μοι ἐγώ¹²⁵⁵, the epic form of the subjunctive ἀγάγησι¹²⁵⁶ and the epic metathesis in the noun ἀτραπος>ἀταρπών, which occupies the same sedes as in Homer¹²⁵⁷. However, the epigram begins with a dialogue, the dynamism of which (a speaker changes three times) is characteristic only of drama. Furthermore, the ludicrousness of the scene (which of course is invented by Prodnromos) perfectly suits comedy but does not fit epic at all. The epic conventions are also overturned through the use of inappropriate vocabulary: κρανίον, for example, is attested in Homer only once and is applied to the skull of a horse¹²⁵⁸; the usage of this word in relation to a human skull becomes current only in later authors such as Euripides, whose satyr play the *Cyclops* apparently functions as Prodnromos' source. Specifically, τὸ κρανίον παίσας κατέαγα are the words of the blinded Cyclops, who tries in vain to attack his nemesis, Odysseus¹²⁵⁹.

While it is agreed that '*genres flourished in Byzantium*'¹²⁶⁰, the experimentation with genre conventions became particularly popular in Comnenian literature. Several poets, including Prodnromos, began to create compositions, especially in celebratory contexts, which involved

¹²⁵⁴ Ex. 10:21-9.

¹²⁵⁵ Il. 11.404, 16.433, 17.91.

¹²⁵⁶ Il. 24.155, 24.184.

¹²⁵⁷ Il. 17.743, Od. 14.1.

¹²⁵⁸ Il. 8.84.

¹²⁵⁹ Diggle (1984) *Cyclops* vv. 683-4.

¹²⁶⁰ Mullett (1992) P. 235.

combinations of different meters¹²⁶¹. The employment of dramatic elements in epic meter and vice versa can be considered as the part of the same process of literary innovation.

Mésalliances: Juxtaposition between Christian and Pagan

Another key feature of the carnivalized world is ‘carnivalistic mésalliances’. The direct result of them is that ‘*all things that were once self-enclosed, disunified, distanced from one another by a noncarnivalistic hierarchical worldview are drawn into carnivalistic contacts and combinations*’¹²⁶². The most conspicuous mésalliance in biblical epigrams occurs between the Hellenic and the Christian. In the previous chapter, it has been demonstrated that, through the deployment of ancient literary models, Prodromos often highlights close parallelism between classical myths and biblical episodes. This harmonious relationship is supplemented by rapprochements of the Christian and the Pagan that border on profanity. In particular, this happens in the group of epigrams that share a similar structure: they open with an interrogative pronoun *τίς* (who is that?) and then proceed to describe the character in the manner of a riddle. Most of these epigrams provide an answer to the riddle, i.e., the personal name of the character in question. Although these epigrams purport to refer to a biblical character, they also contain details that conjure up a pagan counterpart, the comparison with whom is not always to the credit of the given biblical character. This ‘double vision’ technique can be illustrated with an epigram on baptism:

Matt.190.Εἰς τὴν βάπτισιν

(b) — *Τίς πόθεν εἶς, ἀύχμηεν, ὀρέσφερε, ἄγριε ἄνερ;
— Οὔρεος ἐξ ἀβάτοιο Ἰορδάνου ἀμφὶ ῥέεθρα
εἶμι Θεοῦ Λόγοιο διήκονος, οὗ ἐνὶ κάρη
δεξιτερὴν ἀνάειρα, φόβος δέ με γυῖα ὑπῆλθεν.*

On the Baptism

¹²⁶¹ Zagklas (2018).

¹²⁶² Bakhtin (1984a) P.123.

(b) *Who are you and where did you come from, squalid inhabitant of the mountains, wild man? - I come from the impassable mountains around the currents of Jordan, and I am a servant of the Divine Word, to whose head I raised my right hand; fear came upon my knees.*

At first sight the answer to the riddle seems easy: it is John the Forerunner, who came from the wilderness to baptize Jesus in the river Jordan. Prodrornos aptly calls John ἄγριε ἄνερ as his ‘clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey’¹²⁶³. However, some other features attributed by Prodrornos to John cannot be inferred from the Bible. The Gospels, for example, explain that John preached in the desert¹²⁶⁴ but nothing suggests that he has come from the mountains (ὀρέστερε; Οὐρεος ἐξ ἀβάτοιο... εἴμι). It is true that John can be imagined as ἀρχμήεις (with squalid hair) but this adjective is so rare that it is basically reserved for the faun Pan. In particular, it features in the Homeric hymn to Pan, which represents the divinity as inhabitant of mountains and embodiment of wilderness:

Ἀμφί μοι Ἑρμείαο φίλον γόνον ἔννεπε Μοῦσα,
αἰγιπόδην δικέρωτα φιλόκροτον ὅς τ’ ἀνὰ πίση
δενδρήεντ’ ἄμυδις φοιτᾷ χοροήθεσι νύμφαις
αἶ τε κατ’ αἰγίλιπος πέτρης στείβουσι κάρηνα
Πᾶν’ ἀνακεκλόμεναι νόμιον θεὸν ἀγλαέθειρον
ἀρχμήενθ’, ὅς πάντα λόφον νιφόεντα λέλογχε
καὶ κορυφὰς ὀρέων καὶ πετρήεντα κέλευθα.

*Tell me, Muse, about Hermes’ dear son, his goat-footed, two-horned, noise-loving son who roams wooded meadows with dancing nymphs. The goddesses scamper up cliffs of sheer rock invoking Pan, shepherd god with wild, shining hair, whose domain includes all snowy crests, mountain heights, and rocky paths*¹²⁶⁵.

Identification of John the Baptist with Pan is not the only aspect of poetic license deployed by Prodrornos in this epigram. Describing Christ’s baptism, Prodrornos employs the verb ἀναείρω¹²⁶⁶, which in Homer signifies primarily a wrestler’s attempt to hoist his adversary¹²⁶⁷. It

¹²⁶³ Matt. 3:4.

¹²⁶⁴ Matt. 3:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23.

¹²⁶⁵ Rayor (2004) To Pan vv. 1-7.

¹²⁶⁶ Papagiannis (1997) Matt. 190b4.

¹²⁶⁷ Cunliffe (1924) ἀναείρω. In later poetry, however, ἀναείρω simply means ‘to lift up’.

goes without saying that reimagining the baptism as wrestling is nothing but profanity; this is especially true, considering that the Christianity had great reservations concerning athletics in general and fighting in particular¹²⁶⁸.

The Author's Involvement in the Narrative

Closely connected to the carnivalistic *mésalliances* is the close and familiar contact between the people during the carnival. Throughout the collection of the biblical epigrams, Prodromos as an author is actively involved in the unfolding action: he encourages, gives advice and criticises the characters¹²⁶⁹. On the other hand, the biblical episodes appear to have an impact on Prodromos' *persona*'s worldview. The ridiculous death of Absalom, for example, who is caught in the tree because of his long hair, is presented as an argument for baldness¹²⁷⁰:

2Reg.156.Εἰς Ἀβεσσαλὼμ αἰωρηθέντα ἐκ τῶν τριχῶν ἐπὶ δένδρου καὶ φονευθέντα

(a) Θέλω φαλάκραν ἢ καλὰς ἔχειν τρίχας,
εἴ μοι θάνατον προζενοῦσιν αἱ τρίχες·
Ἀβεσσαλὼμ γὰρ μὴ καλὰς ἔχων τρίχας
οὐκ ἂν ἐάλω καὶ φονευθεὶς ἐφθάρη.

On Absalom hung by his hair from a tree and slaughtered

(a) *I would prefer to have baldhead rather than beautiful hair, if the hair promises death to me. For if Absalom had not had beautiful hair, he would not have been caught and killed.*

This comic expression of preference of safety over attractive hair can be read as a self-consolation. In the series of letters, Prodromos describes his experience of smallpox: it brought Prodromos many sufferings but the most heartbreaking consequence of his affliction was the loss of hair¹²⁷¹. Prodromos' *persona* admits that in his youth he made fun of the bald-headed; now, as

¹²⁶⁸ Marcovich (1995) Section 23.

¹²⁶⁹ Cf. my discussion of features of tragic choruses in the epigrams in Chapter Five: P. 147.

¹²⁷⁰ 2 Reg. 18:9-18.

¹²⁷¹ Op de Coul (2007) H89 Pp. 89-93.

the circumstances have changed, he has to ridicule himself in writing before others mock him in person.

Apart from projecting biblical stories onto himself, Prodromos brings Scripture closer to contemporaneity by interpreting the Bible by means of the conceptual apparatus that was current in Byzantium. Let us consider the concept of *φθόνος* (envy). Throughout Byzantine intellectual history, this notion had a huge significance; it was seen as a driving force for vice, intellectual rivalry and political rebellion among other things¹²⁷². In the Bible, however, *φθόνος* as a concept is all but absent: in the Septuagint, it is as attested only four times, twice in the Books of the Maccabees and twice in the Wisdom of Solomon¹²⁷³. The contexts in which Prodromos mentions *φθόνος* amount to nine instances: the concept features in the epigrams on Saul's resentment against David¹²⁷⁴, the envy of Joseph's brothers¹²⁷⁵ and the fall of Adam¹²⁷⁶.

Carnival beyond the Biblical Epigrams

The biblical epigrams are not the only religious writing by Prodromos that contain elements of the carnivalesque. The same is true about Prodormos' *Life of Meletios*, the saint who was active in Attica at the end of the eleventh century¹²⁷⁷. Meletios' activity was commemorated by the two Comnenian authors. The scholars agree that Prodromos' composition was an original and even subversive response to Meletios' life penned by the leading Comnenian theologian Nicholas of Methone¹²⁷⁸. The comparison between the two texts carried out by Charis Messis reveals that, while Nicholas was following the conventions of hagiography, Prodromos used hagiographical

¹²⁷² Hinterberger (2013).

¹²⁷³ Machabaeorum I 8:16. Machabaeorum III 6:7. Sapientia Salomonis 2:24, 6:23.

¹²⁷⁴ Papagiannis (1997) 1 Reg. 130.

¹²⁷⁵ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 30.

¹²⁷⁶ Papagiannis (1997) Gen. 9.

¹²⁷⁷ Papadopoulos (1935).

¹²⁷⁸ Armstrong (2010).

narrative to satirise corruption of his contemporaries¹²⁷⁹. This purpose informs the selection of miracles Prodromos focuses on. In Prodromos' narrative, the saint usually steps in to save the characters, who are endangered because of their own vices. In one episode, Meletios was hosting the proconsul of Hellas, Epiphanios Kamateros, who was so gluttonous that he choked with a fishbone. Epiphanios survived. However, before celebrating the saint's interference Prodromos indulges in giving a detailed description of the agonising official:

ἐπάλλετο μὲν ἡ καρδία τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ καὶ τὰ στέρνα μόνον οὐ διαρρήσσουσα προκύπτειν ἠπειλεί, ἡ δὲ ὅλη τῶν σπλάγχνων οἰκονομία τὴν διὰ τοῦ λαιμοῦ ἐτόλμα τεράστιον ἀναρροίβησιν, ἴσταντο δὲ οἱ πρὸ τῶν βλεφαρίδων οἱ ὀφθαλμοί, καὶ ἀστακτὶ κατέρρει τὸ δάκρυον, ἥ τε γλῶττα διὰ τῶν χειλέων ἄσχημον ὄντως θέαμα προτετάνυστο.

*The man's heart was beating fast, and his protruding chest was on the verge of breaking asunder. The whole constitution of his inward parts threatened to disgorge through his throat. His eyes rolled out of the eyelids, and tears streamed in floods. His tongue protruding from his lips made for a truly ugly spectacle*¹²⁸⁰.

In the gallery of the grotesque images, a prominent place is designated to the representation of erotic perversion¹²⁸¹. Again, the inclusion of such controversial material has a perfectly good explanation: to highlight the ascetic response of Meletios and his monks to the seductions of licentious women. However, Prodromos portrays lust in such great detail that it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the piquant episodes were included in the narrative for their own sake.

Apart from portraying historical characters, Prodromos actively engages in conversation with his reader. This interaction often has a polemical nature. Introducing the humble origins of Meletios, Prodromos anticipates the scorn of his fellow intellectuals and contends that the saint's piety fully compensates for the ignobility of his parents and homeland¹²⁸². Furthermore, Prodromos satirises the aristocratic weakness for gastronomic delicacies (so vividly described in many

¹²⁷⁹ Messis (2004).

¹²⁸⁰ Papadopoulos (1935) Section 11 ln. 9-14.

¹²⁸¹ Papadopoulos (1935) Section 14.

¹²⁸² Papadopoulos (1935) Section 2.

twelfth-century texts), which is contrasted with the austerity of Meletios' diet¹²⁸³. Aristocracy is not the only social group targeted by Prodromos. According to Messis, Prodromos also provokes conservative monasticism by drawing comparisons that suggest Meletios' superiority over major biblical figures¹²⁸⁴.

Relating the life of Meletios, Prodromos assimilates his authorial *persona* to the unpretentious and rustic personality of the saint. Abandoning his usual self-fashioning as a Hellenist, Prodromos praises the saint for his neglect of classical learning and dismisses ancient practices of divination, especially the *Pythiai*, who delivered prophecies 'by inhaling vapors through their genitals and exhaling them through their mouths'¹²⁸⁵. Such an anti-classical stance is, however, subverted through hidden allusions to classical literature scattered throughout the text. When describing the challenges of the endless wanderings of Meletios, Prodromos represents the saint as *ἄπολις, ἄοικος, ἀνομίλητος* (without a city, without a home, without a community)¹²⁸⁶. This series of adjectives formed by the alpha privative strongly evokes Euripides' use of bereaved women; for example, in the *Hecuba* a sympathetic handmaid addresses the miserable protagonist as *ἄπαις ἄνανδρος ἄπολις* (deprived of children, a husband and a city)¹²⁸⁷. Such unexpected identifications of the saint with characters of classical literature can be identified as yet another expression of Prodromos' irony that enlivens but also subverts the genre of hagiography.

Conclusions

The poetics of the carnivalesque deployed in the biblical epigrams reflects a radical new worldview that distinguishes the Comnenian century from the previous periods of the Byzantine

¹²⁸³ Messis (2004) Pp. 330-1.

¹²⁸⁴ Messis (2004) Pp. 332-3.

¹²⁸⁵ Papadopoulos (1935) Section 12 ln. 11-13.

¹²⁸⁶ Papadopoulos (1935) Section 5 ln. 22.

¹²⁸⁷ Diggle (1981) *Hecuba* v. 669; Cf. Diggle (1981) *Iphigenia Taurica* v. 220; Diggle (1994) *Helena* v. 689.

history. The humour of the epigrams encourages laughter, an emotion that, despite the censure of the Church Fathers, gained currency in the twelfth century¹²⁸⁸. Prodromos softens biblical *gravitas* through jocular concentration on the material and bodily. In contrast to the ideals of hierarchy and order embodied in the mechanics of the Church and the Empire, Prodromos promotes the logic of inversion, which is especially prominent in his treatment of the transition of power. In such a chaotic world, things that are normally isolated from each other emerge as practically identical; the most striking form of such carnivalistic *mésalliances* is the juxtaposition between the figures of sacred history and ancient mythology. Closely connected to that is the establishment of overfamiliar contacts between the biblical characters and the author's *persona*. Prodromos not only interferes in the unfolding biblical events but also projects them onto his personal experience as well as historical realia of Byzantium. The resulting fusion of frivolity, earthiness and self-referentiality encapsulates the new values that came into being during classical revival of the Comnenian period.

¹²⁸⁸ Marciniak and Nilsson (2020).

CONCLUSIONS

In Borges' story, *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*, the hero – a twelfth-century symbolist from Nîmes – embarks on an impossible task of rewriting the famous novel of Cervantes¹²⁸⁹. At first, Menard tries *to be* Miguel Cervantes - speaking fluent Spanish, recovering the Catholic faith, forgetting the history of Europe between the years 1602 and 1918, but eventually decides to remain Pierre Menard and recover the *Quixote* through his personal experience. Without copying Cervantes, Menard produces the text that echoes the original *Quixote* word for word but at the same time is not identical with it. In the narrator's view, Menard's *Quixote* is much more subtle than that of Cervantes. Writing about seventeenth-century Spain, Menard 'creates' a new concept of the historical novel that stands out from the contemporary fiction. Where Cervantes expresses views that were common for his class and occupation, Menard says something that nobody could expect to hear from him. Menard's text is even deemed to make allusions to authors who lived after Cervantes. Also, there is a difference in style: the archaising language of Menard '*suffers from a certain affectation*', whereas Cervantes simply writes in the Spanish of his time.

Mimesis and intertextuality make Byzantine literature similar to Pierre Menard's endeavour of rewriting the *Quixote*. Separated by centuries from classical Antiquity, Byzantine authors nevertheless purported to write like Homer, Plato or Lucian, and at times succeeded in the impossible task of producing a text that would pass for a work by a classical author¹²⁹⁰. Despite following in the footsteps of classical authors, Byzantine writers did not lack originality. Reviving Hellenism, they addressed concerns of their own age. This is especially true for the twelfth-century Byzantium when the revival of classical tradition coincided with the discovery of emotional world of an individual, the experimentation with new artistic forms and the emerging

¹²⁸⁹ Yates and Irby (2000) Pp. 62-71.

¹²⁹⁰ For example, a speech by Thomas Magistros for a long time was falsely attributed to Aelius Aristides. Hunger (1969-70) P. 20.

ethnic identity. These tendencies were especially prominent in the works of Theodoros Prodromos, who exemplifies the art of merging classical Antiquity with contemporary Byzantine culture.

This thesis has demonstrated how Prodromos embraced different classical models to bolster his reputation as a teacher, court poet and intellectual. The choice of the model was informed by Prodromos' agendas. Thus, as a teacher, Prodromos adopts Platonic features to support his argument against his rivals in the educational market. As a court poet, Prodromos revived the Homeric hexameter to enhance the political ideal of military prowess, and to highlight his superiority over other panegyrists. Addressing his fellow intellectuals, Prodromos chose the form of Lucianesque satire to conceal his critical attitude toward certain social and cultural developments of his time. The ability to switch between different models for imitation allowed Prodromos to fulfill multiple roles across the intellectual landscape of Comnenian Constantinople.

In terms of intertextuality, Prodromos displays a great variety too. When engaging with the literary tradition, Prodromos deploys all five types of transtextuality singled out by Genette. Prodromos makes active use of intertextuality by making references to classical authors. Occasionally Prodromos acknowledges his source directly; specifically, he mentions Plato¹²⁹¹, Homer¹²⁹², and the 'sweet Syrian' (Lucian)¹²⁹³. This suggests that Prodromos wanted to be perceived as a literary successor of these authors. Yet, the majority of Prodromos' allusions are hidden, which conforms with the Byzantine literary etiquette of reserving the full disclosure of one's sources. Prodromos' reluctance to give a full acknowledgement of his literary influences has nothing to do with plagiarism. In fact, Prodromos often intentionally misquotes his sources

¹²⁹¹ Migliorini (2010) Φιλοπλάτων ἢ σκυτοδέψης P. 71 ln. 128-30.

¹²⁹² Tannery (1887) P. 112.

¹²⁹³ Migliorini (2010) Κατὰ μακρογενείου γέροντος δοκοῦντος εἶναι διὰ τοῦτο σοφοῦ P. 19 ln. 25.

and thus subverts the meaning of his hypotext¹²⁹⁴. This suggests that literary tradition for Prodromos was nothing more than a starting point for expressing his own ideas.

Paratextuality can be easily identified in Prodromos' choice of titles for his works. Specifically, Prodromos inscribes himself in the satirical tradition through his penchant to reduplicate titles (*Δήμιος ἢ ἰατρός; Φιλοπλάτων ἢ σκυτοδέψης; Αμάραντος ἢ γέροντος ἔρωτες*), which echo the titles of, for example, Lucian's compositions (e. g. *Μένιππος ἢ Νεκρομαντεία*). Furthermore, Prodromos often uses a title as a commentary to the source that inspired his composition. This is especially true of Prodromos' biblical epigrams. While some titles provide just a conventional reference to a famous biblical scene (e.g. Matt. 187 *Εἰς τὴν Χριστοῦ γέννησιν*), some provide a comprehensive summary thereof, which at times exceeds the main text, as in the case of his account of Rebekah's marriage to Isaac¹²⁹⁵. The main body of Prodromos' text consists of two epigrams, which dramatically reenact Rebekah's hospitality to Abraham's servant and her encounter with Isaac. Read on their own, these epigrams are not easily identifiable as belonging to Rebekah's story. However, preceded by the title, they immediately emerge as a part of the biblical narrative.

Metatextuality (commentary) is at work in Prodromos' critical engagement with the Aristotelian philosophy. Firstly, Prodromos produces a running commentary on the second book of the *Posterior Analytics*. Secondly, Prodromos questions a specific tenet from the *Categories* in his letter to Michael Italikos. Thirdly, he identifies flaws in Porphyry's *Introduction*, and discusses

¹²⁹⁴ Cf. my discussion in Chapter One of Prodromos ascribing to Plato the order to expel the doctors, whereas in fact Plato's culprits were poets, the likes of Prodromos. See P. 47.

¹²⁹⁵ Papagiannis (1997) 'Gen. 25 *Εἰς τὴν νόμφευσιν Ῥεβέκκας καὶ ὅπως ἐντυχὼν ταύτῃ ὕδρευομένη ὁ δοῦλος Ἀβραὰμ ἤτησε πιεῖν ὕδωρ καὶ λαβὼν ἐγνώρισεν αὐτῇ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἔλευσιν καὶ λαβὼν αὐτὴν ἀπήει πρὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ ὅπως ἰδοῦσα τὸν Ἰσαὰκ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἠδέσθη καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον ἐκάλυψε*. On the betrothal of Rebekah; and how Abraham's slave have met her fetching water and asked for a drink and having received it revealed to her the reason of his arrival and brought her to Abraham; and how she having seen Isaac on the street felt ashamed and covered her face'. One of course has to keep in mind that the epigrams' titles could represent later additions by the scribes.

them in his polemical dialogue the *Xenedemos*. While in each of these cases Prodromos offers a sustained discussion of a classical philosophical text, he also extends the tradition of philosophical commentary. Providing a fresh interpretation of old philosophical problems, Prodromos appears to be equally concerned with highlighting his literary, rhetorical and didactic competence.

Hypertextuality is arguably the most important of Prodromos' methods of engaging with literary tradition. Several pieces by Prodromos are direct reworkings of classical works, and one of the chapters of this thesis has provided a detailed study of Prodromos sequel to Lucian's satire the *Philosophies for Sale*¹²⁹⁶. Although Prodromos' piece derives from Lucian's hypotext, by adopting part of the title, structure, and imagery, it constitutes an original work that is highly relevant to twelfth-century Constantinople. Modeling his work on Lucian, Prodromos, in fact, has an opportunity to highlight his creativity because, in some principal points (e.g., selecting the characters), he departs from the classical author.

Architextuality is evident in Prodromos' awareness of genre conventions. This is especially true of Prodromos' activity as a court poet. Celebrating the military achievements of Byzantine emperors, Prodromos conformed to the conventions of panegyric outlined by Menander Rhetor, and developed an imperial image that resonated with the rhetorical production of his contemporaries. Occasionally, Prodromos explicitly indicates that his composition belongs to a specific genre. Thus, entitling his farewell poem to Constantinople as *συντακτικοί [στίχοι]*, Prodromos acknowledges a rich rhetorical tradition of valedictory speeches. Remarkably, however, Prodromos transforms the conventions of this genre by opting for verse instead of prose.

¹²⁹⁶ See Pp. 27-56.

In concluding this study, it is appropriate to offer some reflections on the key features of Prodromos' poetics. First, Prodromos' compositions are highly rhetorical. Naturally, Prodromos deploys a large rhetorical arsenal in his occasional poems to ensure variation within traditional genres. In his philosophical compositions, Prodromos uses rhetorical devices to make his reasoning more entertaining and accessible. The most spectacular rhetorical *tour de force* is achieved in his collection of epigrams on the Old and New Testament, in which Prodromos redefines biblical paraphrasis through his experimental juxtapositions of two epigrams that narrate a single episode. Furthermore, Prodromos here incorporates the elements of *Progymnasmata*, which echo contemporary school practices. The strong presence of rhetoric in Prodromos' works suggests that they were composed in order to be reused in the classroom¹²⁹⁷.

Moreover, Prodromos' writings display great hybridity. The existent scholarship has shed light on the ease with which Prodromos alternates between different meters, poetry and prose, vernacular and highbrow language¹²⁹⁸. This thesis has also revealed that Prodromos makes the fusion of different genres one of the key principles of his poetics. Thus, his *Sale of Lives* features the characters of an epic poet, two playwrights, an orator, a doctor and a lawyer to advertise Prodromos' own skills to write for different audiences and occasions. In a similar way, his biblical epigrams create a spectacular mosaic featuring the elements of epic, philosophy, drama, history, rhetoric and novel thus marrying biblical wisdom with the elegance of classical literature. The hybridity of Prodromos' poetics strongly resonates with Prodromos' constant in-between state: with his seriousness and buffoonery, piety and irreverence, loyalty and subversion.

¹²⁹⁷ Cf. Nikos Zagklas' conclusion about the purpose of Prodromos' poems. Zagklas (2014) Pp. 55-87.

¹²⁹⁸ Zagklas (2018); Agapitos (2015).

Finally, Prodromos' work is highly self-referential. A significant number of his works seem to be autobiographical. In them, Prodromos expresses his frustration with the futility of classical learning¹²⁹⁹, shares the story of his illness¹³⁰⁰ and defends himself against the accusations of impiety¹³⁰¹. Furthermore, even in the compositions that are supposed to focus on a different person, Prodromos often makes digressions about his own circumstances¹³⁰². Most importantly, fictional works of Prodromos touch upon the issues of the author's life too. Thus, philosophical dialogue *Xenedemos* advertises Prodromos' teaching methods, the *Sale of Lives* highlights his versatility as an author, whereas the *Amarantos* problematizes the system of patronage.

In analysing Prodromos' poetics, I hope to have shown that mimesis and intertextuality were at the very core of the cultural mechanics of twelfth-century Byzantium. Furthermore, evidence provided throughout this work suggests that one should not attribute the enduring relevance of classical imitation to the inertia of tradition. Rather, scholars should aim to view mimesis and intertextuality as a deliberate strategy that helped intellectuals to succeed in school classrooms, intellectual salons and court circles.

¹²⁹⁹ Hörandner (1974) Poem XXXVIII.

¹³⁰⁰ Op de Coul (2007) H88 Pp. 84-8; H89 Pp. 89-93; H107 Pp. 94-100; H92 Pp. 101-3; Hörandner (1974) Poems LXXVII, LXXVIII.

¹³⁰¹ Hörandner (1974) Poem LIX.

¹³⁰² Hörandner (1974) Poem XV vv. 71-90.

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