Growing Old in Byzantium: The Construction of Ageing in Twelfth-Century Literary and Visual Culture

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Abstract

Byzantium in the twelfth century was a society in which diverse images of the elderly existed simultaneously. This thesis analyses the multiple meanings of growing old in this period of Byzantine history, painting a nuanced picture of the ideas and associations that underpinned the many conflicting representations of ageing. The results of this study shed some light on the cultural significance of growing old, and on the role of age in the construction of Byzantine identity more generally.

To this date there has been relatively little scholarship on age in Byzantium, and much of this scholarship has tended to focus on the earlier part of the life course.[1] This thesis focuses exclusively on representations of ageing and the elderly in the literary and visual culture of twelfth-century Byzantium. It utilises a range of Greek textual sources, including historiography, hagiography, fictional literature, occasional poems and verse epigrams, together with visual evidence in the form of religious icons, monumental art and manuscript illumination. The various age motifs are examined and situated within broader trends in contemporary discourse. The intended outcome of the thesis is thus the production of what might be termed a 'thick description' of old age in Byzantium.[2] By interpreting the images of old age 'thickly', the findings of the thesis contribute towards a deeper understanding of the cultural significance of ageing. From the evidence presented, it is suggested that in twelfth-century Byzantium growing old was a relative concept whose meaning was subject to the context in which it was depicted. Defined chiefly through contrast with youth, the imagery of old age represented a potent and emotive poetic tool, deployed in contemporary literature and art to convey a range of meanings.

[1] Alice-Mary Talbot, "Old age in Byzantium," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 77, no. 2 (1984); Chris Gilleard, "Old age in Byzantine society," *Ageing and Society* 27, no. 5 (2007); Ecaterina Lung, "No Country for Old Women? The Place of Older Women in Early Byzantium", *Chronica Mundi* 13.1 (2018); J Lascaratos and Effie Poulacou-Rebelacou, "The roots of geriatric medicine: care of the aged in Byzantine times (324–1453 AD)," *Gerontology* 46, no. 1 (2000); Eve Davies, "Age, Gender and Status: A Three–Dimensional Life Course Perspective of the Byzantine Family," in *Approaches to the Byzantine Family*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Shaun Tougher (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); Eve Davies, "From womb to the tomb: the Byzantine life course AD 518-1204" (University of Birmingham, 2013); Despoina Ariantzi, *Coming of Age in Byzantium: Adolescence and Society* (De Gruyter, 2017).

[2] Joseph Ponterotto, "Brief note on the origins, evolution, and meaning of the qualitative research concept thick description", *The qualitative report* 11.3 (2006): 539; Clifford Geertz, "Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture." *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief* 3 (1973): 6-9. See also Myrto Veikou, '"Telling spaces' in Byzantium: ekphraseis, place-making and 'thick description'," in *Storytelling in Byzantium. Narratological Approaches to Byzantine Texts and Images*, ed. Margaret Mullett, Ingela Nilsson and Charis Messis (2018), 16-7, 26-9.

Introduction

"'Let grey hair and old age importune you;

let a wrinkled brow and trembling gait

incline you from wrath to pity.'"[3]

(Theodore Prodromos, *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*)

"O abominable old woman, great evil among men!

O abominable old woman older than Thoukritos,

wrinkle in flux and decay of time!"[4]

(Theodore Prodromos, *Against a Lustful Old Woman*)

The two excerpts quoted above encapsulate the complexity involved in writing a history of old age in Byzantium. Both passages are from texts by the twelfth-century author Theodore Prodromos, yet each presents its aged figure in a completely different light. What these texts present is not their author's individual perspective *per se*, but rather two distinct kinds of rhetoric relying on disparate cultural images of ageing. Yet the efficacy of these rhetorical discourses betrays the potency of the assumptions about ageing that underlie them. The culture of twelfth-century Byzantium was thus one in which multiple diverse images of the elderly could exist simultaneously. This thesis aims to unpick the multiple meanings of old age in this period, painting a nuanced picture of the ideas and associations that underpinned the many conflicting representations of ageing. It is hoped that this study will shed some light on the cultural significance of growing old, and in turn on the formation of Byzantine identity more generally.

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[3] *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, VIII.23-5, trans. Elizabeth Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2012).

[4] Translations are my own unless otherwise specified. Theodore Prodromos, "Against a Lustful Old Woman," in *Manuelis Philae Carmina*, ed. E. Miller (Paris1855; reprint, 1967)., 4.90, vv.1-3:
Ὦ μιαρὰ γραῦς, κακὸν ἀνθρώποις μέγα!
Ὦ μιαρὰ γραῦς Θουκρίτου παλαιτέρα,
Ῥυτὶς ῥοϊκὴ καὶ χρονικὴ σαπρία!

The debate over Byzantium's cultural identity is as old as Byzantine studies itself and has shown no sign of reaching a definitive consensus in recent decades.[5] Scholars have argued that what might be called 'Byzantine culture' can be characterised predominantly by either Classical Hellenism, Judaeo-Christian tradition, the material culture of 'daily life' or else a melting pot of various peoples and cultures.[6] Certainly this picture does not become more straightforward by the Middle Byzantine period, with the revival of interest in Classical literary forms as well as consistent introspection and redefinition with regard to the status of religious iconography.[7] As with many products of this complex amalgam of cultural heritage, Middle Byzantine depictions of old age are by no means unique to Byzantium or even to the Middle Ages as a whole. Nevertheless, the way in which old age was constructed in this period can reveal a lot about the culture within which such images of ageing were reproduced.

Historiographical Survey

The growing interest in age as a factor in the formation of power structures and subjective experience in past societies owes much to the cultural turn of the 1980s. Rather than a fixed universal process, ageing came to be viewed increasingly as a culturally constructed aspect of

[5] The continued importance of this debate is indicated by recent works such as Averil Cameron, *Byzantine Matters* (Princeton University Press, 2019)., esp. 1-5; Anthony Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic* (Harvard University Press, 2015).; *Hellenism in Byzantium* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).; Christos Malatras, "The Making of an Ethnic Group: The Romaioi in the 12th-13th Centuries" (paper presented at the Identities in the Greek World (From 1204 to the Present Day), Proceedings of the 4th European Congress of Modern Greek Studies Granada, 2010).; Ilya Afanasyev and Nicholas Matheou, ed. *Revising Pre-Modern Ethnicity and Nationhood*, Medieval Worlds (2017). On periodisation within Byzantine scholarship, see Averil Cameron, "Late Antiquity and Byzantium: An Identity Problem," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 40, no. 1 (2016). On Byzantium's relationship to its classical past, see Elizabeth Jeffreys, "We Need to Talk About Byzantium: Or, Byzantium, Its Reception of the Classical World as Discussed in Current Scholarship, and Should Classicists Pay Attention?," *Classical Receptions Journal* 6, no. 1 (2014).

[6] Cameron, *Byzantine Matters*, 46. The increasing decentralisation in discussions of Byzantine cultural and ethnic identity may be linked to the influence of post-modernism and post-colonialism, calling into question the attribution of Constantinopolitan elite culture to Byzantium at large (Koray Sevki Durak et al., *Identity and the Other in Byzantium : Papers from the Fourth International Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium, İstanbul 23-25 June 2016*, Papers from the Fourth International Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium, İstanbul 23-25 June 2016 (İstanbul: GABAM., 2019)., 7-8). For this trend in scholarship, see for instance Yannis Stouraitis, "Reinventing Roman Ethnicity in High and Late Medieval Byzantium," (2017)., 70-94. C.f. Paul Magdalino, "Constantinople and the Outside World," in *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider: Papers from the Thirty-Second Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. D. C. Smythe (University of Sussex, Brighton: Aldershot, 2000).

[7] Aleksandr Petrovich Kazhdan, Ann Wharton Epstein, and Annabel Jane Wharton, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, vol. 7 (Univ of California Press, 1985)., 138-140; Paroma Chatterjee, *The Living Icon in Byzantium and Italy: The Vita Image, Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries* (Cambridge University Press, 2014)., 88.

selfhood shaped by the discourses of the society in question.[8] Bodies came to be viewed as 'aged' as well as 'gendered'.[9] These developments have given rise to a wealth of recent scholarship, with several monographs and volumes dedicated entirely to the topic of age in the Ancient and Medieval worlds.[10] The subject of old age in Late Antiquity and Byzantium has received less attention, but has nevertheless developed three identifiable strands of scholarship which deserve some commentary before the methodology of this thesis is laid out. Broadly, these can be defined as scholarship focusing on the status of old age and the elderly, the life course approach, and the treatment of old age as a literary discourse.

The status of the elderly in the Ancient and Medieval worlds has been a fruitful topic in recent decades, leading to discussion of participation and marginalisation as well as the components that made up aged identities.[11] Within Byzantine studies a number of articles have addressed these questions, the earliest being Alice-Mary Talbot's "Old Age in Byzantium".[12] In this work Talbot combines scholarship on mortality rates in the Byzantine world, calculated from skeletal analysis and funerary epigraphy, with literary evidence outlining the limits of old age and various attitudes towards the elderly.[13] This is an extremely useful overview of the unique place of old age in Byzantine society. However, the article demonstrates a significant flaw in this approach whereby the portrayal of old age in normative literature is correlated with the lived experience of the elderly in Byzantine society.[14] The close association of the literary portrayal of old age with its social status is a feature of all the scholarship in this category.

Chris Gilleard's two articles on old age in the Early Latinate Middle Ages and Byzantium respectively follow much the same structure as Talbot's "Old Age in Byzantium". "Old Age in

[8] On the cultural turn with regard to the cultural construction of selfhood, see Penny Summerfield, "Subjectivity, the Self and Historical Practice," in *New Directions in Social and Cultural History*, ed. Rohan Mcwilliam and Lucy Noakes Sasha Handly (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018)., 25.
[9] Since the 1990s in particular, age has come to be seen as one of the four dimensions of social experience, alongside gender, ethnicity and class, Ecaterina Lung, "No Country for Old Women? The Place of Older Women in Early Byzantium," *Chronica Mundi* 13, no. 1 (2018)., 192.
[10] Pat Thane, *The Long History of Old Age* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005).; Paul Johnson and Pat Thane, *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, Ebook Central (London ; New York: Routledge/LSE, 1998).; Christian Krötzl and Katariina Mustakallio, *On Old Age: Approaching Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Brepols, 2011).; Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages: Winter Clothes Us in Shadow and Pain* (Psychology Press, 2004).; Despoina Ariantzi, *Coming of Age in Byzantium: Adolescence and Society* (De Gruyter, 2017).
[11] See for instance Georges Minois, *History of Old Age* (John Wiley & Sons, 2012).; Tim G Parkin, "Ageing in Antiquity: Status and Participation," in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, ed. Paul Johnson and Pat Thane (London: Routledge, 1998).; Katalin Szende, *Coping with Old Age in Medieval Hungarian Towns* (Brepols, 2011).
[12] Alice-Mary Talbot, "Old Age in Byzantium," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 77, no. 2 (1984).
[13] Talbot, "Old Age."
[14] See for instance Talbot, "Old Age," 270.

the Dark Ages" is set out as a response to George Minois' *History of Old Age*, in which Gilleard argues against Minois' highly pessimistic portrayal of old age in the Early Middle Ages, citing the moral and religious authority granted to old age by the emerging Christian Church.[15] The article begins with a discussion of life expectancy based on material and literary evidence, then goes on to examine the writings of ecclesiastical figures as well as the implications of social and familial structures on the status of old age.[16] Gilleard's "Old Age in Byzantine Society" follows much the same structural pattern as "Old Age in the Dark Ages", with a survey of the available evidence for life expectancy in Byzantium followed by discussion of social structures, the influence of Christianity and the exceptionality of Byzantine philanthropic institutions and geriatric medicine.[17] The article's ultimate conclusion is that old age in Byzantium acquired a particular 'spiritual capital' and was accordingly a far less marginalised status than in Greco-Roman Antiquity.[18] Although they share the same tendency for positivist extrapolation from normative literature, these two articles synthesise a huge range of material in order to effectively lay the foundations for the emerging study of old age in Byzantium and the Early Latinate Middle Ages.

Other scholars have focused on the status of old age in Byzantium through a particular lens, bringing a narrower focus to the topic but ultimately making the same interpretative leap found in the studies of Talbot and Gilleard. For instance, Ecaterina Lung's "No Country for Old Women" explores the interaction of gender and age in the formation of social identities in Byzantium.[19] The article primarily focuses on Early Byzantine histories and chronicles but draws from the writings of the Church Fathers and secular and ecclesiastical legislation for contextualisation and to illustrate discrepancies.[20] The intersection of gender and age in the construction of individual and group experience is a fascinating topic which will undoubtedly yield a great many insights with further study. However, Lung herself acknowledges that the writers she examines were not merely reflecting an objective reality but rather were "using the images associated with old age for their own purposes".[21] This being the case, there is a danger in assuming that these writings reflected the lived experience of contemporary older women. Lastly in "The Roots of Geriatric Medicine", Lascaratos and Poulacou-Rebelacou discuss a

[15] Chris Gilleard, "Old Age in the Dark Ages: The Status of Old Age During the Early Middle Ages," *Ageing and Society* 29, no. 7 (2009)., 1066.
[16] Gilleard, "Dark Ages," 1067-70, 1070-78.
[17] Chris Gilleard, "Old Age in Byzantine Society," *Ageing and Society* 27, no. 5 (2007)., 628, 630-36.
[18] Gilleard, "Old Age in Byzantine Society," 632, 636.
[19] Lung, "No Country."
[20] Lung, "No Country," 191, 196-8.
[21] Lung, "No Country," 200.

range of texts from across the Byzantine period with a particular focus on the medical treatment of old age.[22] The findings of this study paint a relatively rose-tinted picture of old age in Byzantium in much the same fashion as Gilleard's two articles, as "The Roots of Geriatric Medicine" assumes an underlying social reality behind the geriatric care advocated in the normative literature discussed.[23]

The second major focus in the scholarship on old age in Byzantium has been on the life course. The life course approach has its roots in sociology and anthropology, but has since been applied effectively within various other disciplines.[24] For anthropologists working around the turn of the twentieth century, the life course was conceptualised as a series of rites of passage allowing individuals to pass between clearly defined and discrete statuses.[25] Within this model, ageing was seen as a fixed constant across generations.[26] More recent scholarship has debated the rigidity of this system, suggesting that social identity should be viewed rather as a continuous process pitting individual agency in dialogue with normative social structures.[27] As a historical approach life course analysis places an emphasis on the social rather than biological construction of ageing, framing individuals against the social expectations associated with particular phases in life.[28] This has proven a popular and successful angle from which to approach the topic in Byzantine studies, revealing much about the role of age in the construction of social identity.

Eve Davies' PhD thesis "From Womb to the Tomb" offers a wide-ranging exploration of the Byzantine life course between the sixth and thirteenth centuries.[29] The study makes use of a range of source material, including historical and hagiographical writings, images in manuscripts and churches and numismatic and epigraphical evidence.[30] As a natural consequence of the huge chronological scope and source base used, Davies' analysis is extensive rather than intensive. The result is a valuable portrayal of each distinct phase in the life course as it was socially constructed in Byzantium, revealing tensions and contradictions

[22] J Lascaratos and Effie Poulacou-Rebelacou, "The Roots of Geriatric Medicine: Care of the Aged in Byzantine Times (324–1453 Ad)," *Gerontology* 46, no. 1 (2000).
[23]Lascaratos, "The Roots," 2-3.
[24] Eve Miriam Davies, "From Womb to the Tomb: The Byzantine Life Course Ad 518-1204" (University of Birmingham, 2013)., 6.
[25] Jennifer Lorna Hockey and Allison James, *Social Identities across the Life Course* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)., 11.
[26] Hockey, *Social Identities*, 11.
[27] Hockey, *Social Identities*, 11-13; Chris Callow and Mary Harlow, "Left-over Romans: The Life Course in the Late Antique West," *Families in the Imperial and Late Antique West* (2012)., 221.
[28] Davies, "From Womb," 2.
[29] Davies, "From Womb."
[30] Davies, "From Womb," 11.

that invite further in-depth study.[31] In contrast to the broad scope of Davies' thesis, Chris Callow and Mary Harlow's chapter "Left-Over Romans" examines the life course in fifth-century Gaul through three micro-historical case studies.[32] The authors dissect contemporary accounts of the lives of three members of the Gallo-Roman aristocracy, highlighting points of similarity and departure from the normative life course trajectories of the period.[33] This illustrates the flawed nature of the ideal, fixed life course model, but also the value in its comparison with the diverse perspectives of contemporaries.[34] Lastly, Davies' chapter "Age, Gender and Status" explores the interaction between the three titular components in the presentation of family roles in hagiographies composed between the sixth and twelfth centuries.[35] As mentioned above, the combined impact of age and gender with regard to the formation of social roles and identities is a largely untapped and extremely lucrative field of inquiry, which in this case leads to several useful insights into the Byzantine family.[36]

Overall, life course approaches have been used effectively to highlight the creation of and deviation from normative age roles in Byzantium. More generally, they have demonstrated the value of looking at Byzantine society through the lens of age. Scholarship on the life course has been vital in informing the conceptual framework of this thesis, yet it is not an appropriate methodology for the purpose of the present work. For one thing, a life course approach would somewhat obscure the exceptionality and symbolic significance of old age, especially since reaching this stage in the life course was anything but normative. In focusing on the networks of meaning that were used to construct old age in Byzantium, this thesis borrows aspects of its methodology from scholarship that explores old age as a discourse.

The manipulation of conventional images of old age in literary sources has been a subject of interest for scholars working on several historical periods in recent decades. Rather than attempting to extrapolate information about the social reality of old age from the literature in question, this approach focuses entirely on the meaning of old age as a semiotic system.[37] In other words, its goal is to explore the ways in which literature employs the language and images

[31] See for example Davies, "From Womb," 176-9.
[32] Callow, "Left over Romans," 221.
[33] Callow, "Left over Romans," 229-232.
[34] Callow, "Left over Romans," 232.
[35] Eve Davies, "Age, Gender and Status: A Three–Dimensional Life Course Perspective of the Byzantine Family," in *Approaches to the Byzantine Family*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Shaun Tougher (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013)., 153.
[36] See above, pp.7-8.
[37] Thomas M Falkner, *The Poetics of Old Age in Greek Epic, Lyric, and Tragedy*, vol. 19 (University of Oklahoma Press, 1995)., xiv.

of old age for poetic or rhetorical effect.[38] This methodology has been used effectively to illustrate the importance of old age as a rhetorical tool and its symbolic associations in Byzantine thought, although it has so far been restricted to the writings of Late Antique Church figures.[39]

Chris De Wet's two articles on the rhetoric of John Chrysostom, "Old Age, Masculinity, and Martyrdom" and "Grumpy Old Men?", are an excellent example of the kind of insights that this method can offer.[40] In "Grumpy Old Men?", De Wet establishes old age as a discourse and discusses the connotations of old age in relation to gender in Ancient and early Christian literature before turning his attention to Chrysostom's rhetoric.[41] He argues convincingly that Chrysostom sets out to create a new masculine ideal centred on the youthful vigour of the soul acquired through gerotranscendence; transformation into an 'other' via the virtuous characteristics of old age.[42] Similarly in "Old Age, Masculinity, and Martyrdom" De Wet examines Chrysostom's use of old age *topoi* in conjunction with the language of youth and athletic contest.[43] Again, De Wet demonstrates how Chrysostom uses the discourse of old age to frame a radical reimagining of masculinity in conventional terms.[44] Karen King's "'In Your Midst As a Child'" explores the development of ideas about ageing more generally in early Christian thought.[45] In the process, she highlights the importance of images of the elderly and children, as well as agelessness, in the formation of early Christian ideologies.[46] Unlike the other two methodologies discussed above, a focus on the discourse of old age tends towards a narrow scope and even narrower implications. Nonetheless, scholarship making use of this approach has proven to be very effective in exploring the construction of arguments and ideology, and the role of age discourse in this process.

[38] Falkner, *The Poetics*, xiv.
[39] Chris de Wet, "Grumpy Old Men? Gender, Gerontology, and the Geriatrics of Soul in John Chrysostom," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 24, no. 4 (2016).; "Old Age, Masculinity, and Martyrdom in Late Antiquity: John Chrysostom and the Maccabean Martyrs," *Journal of Early Christian History* 8, no. 1 (2018).; Karen L King, "'In Your Midst as a Child'—'in the Form of an Old Man': Images of Aging and Immortality in Ancient Christianity," *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity* (2009).
[40] De Wet, "Grumpy"; De Wet, "Old Age."
[41] De Wet, "Grumpy," 492-3, 499-504, 517-19.
[42] De Wet, "Grumpy," 510, 519.
[43] De Wet, "Old Age," esp. 57-8.
[44] De Wet, "Old Age," 55-8.
[45] King, "'In Your Midst'".
[46] King, "'In Your Midst'," 61-3, 69-70.

Methodology

The present thesis aims to build on the growing body of scholarship on old age in Byzantium through the application of a new methodology. As outlined above, the purpose of this thesis is to explore what it meant to grow old in twelfth-century Byzantium.[47] In doing so the intention is to avoid painting a simplistic picture of old age in Byzantium that emerges out of an overly positivist interpretation of normative texts. Instead, old age will be examined as a discourse that was both reflected in and moulded by contemporary visual and literary culture. By deconstructing the various recurring images of old age in Middle Byzantine culture, this thesis aims to produce what might be termed a 'thick description' of old age in Byzantium.

The term 'thick description' was first coined by the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, for whom it meant applying intentionality to a particular behaviour.[48] It was later popularised by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who used it as an analogy for the work of a successful ethnographer.[49] For Geertz, ethnography entails providing a context through which a behaviour can be more fully understood.[50] For instance, the 'thinly' described act of someone contracting their eyelid can be 'thickly' described as a person winking to convey a particular meaning.[51] More recently, the concept of 'thick description' has gained recognition as a valuable tool for qualitative research in various disciplines.[52] For the purpose of this thesis, 'thick description' offers a useful framework with which to approach the portrayal of old age in Byzantine culture. This thesis aims to avoid producing a 'thin' survey of the available source material on old age in the twelfth century, simply highlighting the discrepancy between positive and negative portrayals of elderly figures.[53] Rather this thesis consists of a selection of case studies illustrating the diverse ways in which old age was conceived of and represented in literary and visual media. In the following chapters these ideas and images will be isolated and deconstructed with a view to unveiling the networks of meaning underlying them. It is hoped that the ultimate result will be a form of key with which cultural images of old age in Middle

[47] See above, pp.5-6.
[48] Joseph G Ponterotto, "Brief Note on the Origins, Evolution, and Meaning of the Qualitative Research Concept Thick Description," *The qualitative report* 11, no. 3 (2006)., 539.
[49] Ponterotto, "Brief Note," 539; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, vol. 5019 (Basic books, 1973)., 6.
[50] Geertz, *The Interpretation*, 6-7.
[51] Geertz, *The Interpretation*, 6-7.
[52] Ponterotto, "Brief Note," 538. C.f. Veikou, "'Telling Spaces'," 16-26, in which Constantine Manasses' *ekphrasis* of Constantinople is understood as a 'thick description' in its own right.
[53] On this tendency in traditional scholarship, see Parkin, "Ageing in Antiquity," 22-3.

Byzantium can be interpreted 'thickly', thereby contributing towards a deeper understanding of the complex cultural significance of ageing.

The methodology employed by this thesis brings with it several advantages but is not without its own set of challenges and caveats. The qualitative nature of the approach lends itself to a series of cases studies rather than an exhaustive survey of all available source material. As such, a range of literary and visual sources have been selected to cover several diverse aspects of Byzantine culture. These include histories and chronicles, hagiographical texts, court literature, religious iconography, and inscribed epigrams. The thesis aims to explore the images and assumptions associated with old age rather than the life course expectations and experiences of individuals, and therefore documentary sources such as letter collections are excluded from the analysis.[54] Since depth of analysis is preferable over breadth of scope in this instance, the thesis has also been limited chronologically to the long twelfth century (c.1081-1204). Current scholarship on old age has tended to focus on the early period of Byzantine history or else offers a broader overview of the entire period, leaving the Middle Byzantine period in need of further study. The twelfth century is particularly well suited to a project centred on Byzantine culture given the flourishing literary production and experimentation of the period, which has received a great deal of scholarly attention in recent decades.[55]

Since the core objective of this thesis is to untangle the web of meanings associated with old age, the chapters in the main body have been organised thematically according to distinct identifiable patterns in representations of ageing. These divisions are of course artificial and potentially risk obscuring the many cases in which depictions of the elderly draw upon multiple recognisable *topoi*. This issue is dealt with in the concluding chapter of the thesis, which aims to tie together different strands of contemporary thought concerning old age.[56] Another caveat associated with this structure is that sources from very different contexts are discussed in parallel in a manner that may run the risk of downplaying factors such as their production or authorship. This problem is mitigated in part by the following section of the present chapter, which aims to provide a broad overview of the socio-political context of the twelfth century,

[54] An excellent example of the latter kind of study is Callow, "Left over Romans," as discussed above, p.10.
[55] See for instance, Alexander Kazhdan and Simon Franklin, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1984).; Michael J Jeffreys, "The Nature and Origins of the Political Verse," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1974).; Aglae Pizzone, *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature: Modes, Functions, and Identities*, vol. 28 (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2014).
[56] See below, pp.191-4.

as well as a brief introduction to the source material most frequently used throughout the thesis. Additionally, due effort is made in the chapters that follow to avoid comparison between different types of source material without discussion of the specific context and motivation behind each. The final limitations worth mentioning are those of scope. The time constraints of a project of this scale limit the analysis to a chronological span of just over a single century, but a similar methodology could easily be applied to many other periods of Byzantine history. Likewise, the thesis is limited to an analysis of Greek textual material. One avenue for further study would be the expansion of this research to include textual material composed in the many other languages spoken within the Byzantine sphere of influence.

The Twelfth Century: Context and Sources

The decision to chronologically restrict this thesis to the twelfth century is advantageous in terms of the availability of source material. This period, approximately coinciding with the rule of the Komnenian dynasty (1081-1185), witnessed social and political upheaval as well as dynamic experimentation within the literary and visual arts. It is now well-established that the eleventh and twelfth centuries saw accelerated demographic growth that manifested in greater land cultivation and the development of urban centres.[57] At the same time, Alexios I's rise to power in 1081 brought with it the beginning of a new paradigm for the empire's governance centred on kinship ties within the ruling dynasty.[58] Members of the imperial family exhibited their wealth and influence during this period through literary and monastic patronage, leading to extensive monastic foundation activity in Constantinople.[59] The political situation during the reign of Alexios I precipitated events that led directly to the First Crusade in 1096, a phenomenon that brought Byzantium into close contact with the Latin West over the course of the twelfth century.[60]

[57] Angeliki E. Laiou and Cécile Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, Cambridge Medieval Textbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)., 92-3.
[58] Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143-1180* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)., 183-7; Michael Angold, "Belle Epoque or Crisis? (1025–1118)," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire C. 500-1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (2008)., 612-3.
[59] Angold, "Belle Epoque," 618; Margaret Mullett, "Refounding Monasteries in Constantinople," in *Founders and Refounders of Byzantine Monasteries*, ed. Margaret Mullett (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 2007)., 366-70; Elif Demirtiken, "Changing Profiles of Monastic Founders in Constantinople, from the Komnenoi to the Palaiologoi: The Case of the Theotokos Pammakaristos Monastery in Context," in *Trends and Turning Points*, ed. M. Kinloch and A. MacFarlane (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2019)., 267-70.
[60] Angold, "Belle Epoque," 620-3. On the broad political and cultural impact of the Crusades on Byzantium in the twelfth century, see for instance Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 295; Eleni Tounta, "Political and Cultural Encounters

These developments had a major impact on contemporary forms of cultural production and consequently on the body of available source material for the period. The activity of aristocratic *ktetors* ('founders') resulted in the construction and elaborate decoration of churches and monasteries, as well as the commissioning or restoration of many religious icons.[61] Monumental art and icons were often accompanied by dedicatory or commemorative epigrams, many of which have been preserved either in situ or in manuscripts.[62] Monastic foundations or re-foundations also entailed the creation of *typika* or foundation documents containing extensive details about the structure of monastic life and the systems put in place for the monastery's governance. *Typika* in this period were particularly thorough owing partly to the monastic reform movement of the late eleventh century as well as the importance of these foundations as commemorative institutions.[63] A confluence of factors led to a decline in the number of new hagiographical works produced in the twelfth century, though with some notable exceptions.[64]

The textual evidence of the twelfth century has stood at the forefront of a wave of scholarship that has firmly established the literary and historical merits of Byzantine literature over the

between Byzantium and the Normans, 11th-12th Centuries," in *A Companion to Byzantium and the West, 900-1204*, ed. Nicolas Drocourt and Sebastian Kolditz (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2022)., esp. 255, 264-5; Joan B Burton, "Byzantine Readers," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)., 272; Shaun Fitzroy Tougher, *Bearding Byzantium: Masculinity, Eunuchs and the Byzantine Life Course* (Ashgate, 2013)., 155.

[61] Robert G Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands* (Oxford University Press, 2019)., 302-317. The church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi, founded in 1164 by Alexios Angelos Komnenos, is a good example of the lavish building and decoration projects carried out during the period (Ida Sinkevic, *The Church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi: Architecture, Programme, Patronage*, vol. 6 (Reichert Verlag, 2000)., 1-4). As an example of the latter phenomenon, the *Sebastokratorissa* Eirene (see below, p.16) dedicated a number of liturgical objects to churches of the *Theotokos* in Constantinople (Elizabeth Jeffreys, "The Sebastokratorissa Irene as Patron," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 60, no. 1 (2012)., 178).

[62] Many inscriptions of both types have been published in Andreas Rhoby, Wolfram Hörandner, and Anneliese Paul, *Byzantinische Epigramme Auf Fresken Und Mosaiken* (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009).; Andreas Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme Auf Stein Nebst Addenda Zu Den Banden 1 Und 2 : Byzantinische Epigramme in Inschriftlicher Uberlieferung Band 3, Teil 1 Und 2*, Denkschriften Der Philosophisch-Historischen Klasse Ser. ; 474 (Vienna : Bristol: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2014). On icon epigrams, see Ivan Drpić, "The Restoration of Icons," (forthcoming)., 14-5; "Painter as Scribe: Artistic Identity and the Arts of Graphē in Late Byzantium," *Word & Image* 29, no. 3 (2013)., 334-6; see also Marc D Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres: Texts and Contexts*, vol. 1, Wiener Byzantinistische Studien (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2003)., esp. 76-88.

[63] On the monastic reform movement as viewed through foundation documents, see John Philip Thomas, Angela Constantinides Hero, and Giles Constable, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents : A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies ; 35 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2000)., 441-5. On the commemorative function of founded and re-founded monasteries, see Mullett, "Refounding Monasteries," 375-8; Carolyn L. Connor, *Art and Miracles in Medieval Byzantium : The Crypt at Hosios Loukas and Its Frescoes* (Princeton ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1991)., 90-1.

[64] On the decline in new hagiography, and the few works that were produced in the period, see below, pp.76-8.

course of recent decades.[65] Current scholarship is engaging with twelfth-century Byzantine literature on a much deeper level than its detractors once thought possible. Recent studies have demonstrated the creativity of contemporary authors in terms of form and genre, analysed the complex poetics of their literary works and explored their interaction with ancient philosophical ideas.[66] A considerable proportion of the literature produced in this period reflected the context of the court in Constantinople. Aristocratic patronage by members of the extended imperial family created an environment of intense competition, but also one of communication and exchange between rival members of the literati.[67] The prevalence of information regarding the identities and interests of certain aristocratic figures has facilitated the adoption of a patron-centred analytical lens with which to view contemporary literary culture.[68] Some of the most important patrons connected to the texts discussed in this thesis were the emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180), the *Sebastokratorissa* Eirene (c.1110/12-c.1152/53), wife of emperor John II's son Andronikos, and Bertha-Eirene (d.1159), first wife of Manuel I.[69] Many of the texts commissioned by these figures were composed for an assumed performance in a *theatron*, a term which by the eleventh century at the latest came to refer to a circle of educated figures gathered around a particular patron.[70]

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[65] See for instance Kazhdan, *Studies on Byzantine Literature*; Jeffreys, "The Nature," 141-195; Pizzone, *The Author*.

[66] Panagiotis Agapitos, "John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners: A Byzantine Teacher on Schedography, Everyday Language and Writerly Disposition," *Medioevo Greco* 17 (2017).**;** Nikos Zagklas, "Experimenting with Prose and Verse in Twelfth-Century Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 71 (2017)**.**; Panagiotis Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia: A Poetics of the Twelfth-Century Medieval Greek Novel* (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, Trustees for Harvard University, 2005).; Ingela Nilsson, *Writer and Occasion in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Authorial Voice of Constantine Manasses* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).; Adam J Goldwyn, *Byzantine Ecocriticism: Women, Nature, and Power in the Medieval Greek Romance* (Springer, 2017).

[66] Suzanne MacAlister, "Aristotle on the Dream: A Twelfth-Century Romance Revival," *Byzantion* 60 (1990): 196-7; Michele Trizio, "Reading and Commenting on Aristotle," in *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, ed. Anthony Kaldellis Niketas Siniossoglou (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)., 398-9, Eric Cullhed, "The Blind Bard and 'I': Homeric Biography and Authorial Personas in the Twelfth Century," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 38, no. 1 (2014).

[67] On competition, see Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 236; Nikos Zagklas, "Satire in the Komnenian Period: Poetry, Satirical Strands, and Intellectual Antagonism," in *Satire in the Middle Byzantine Period: The Golden Age of Laughter?*, ed. Przemysław Marciniak and Ingela Nilsson (Boston: Brill, 2021)., 279-80. Letters between literati and patrons played an important role in the literary discourse of the period, see Zagklas "Epistolarity in Twelfth-Century Byzantine Poetry: Singing Praises and Asking Favors in Absentia," in *Epistolary Poetry in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. Alexander Riehle Krystina Kubina (New York ; London: Routledge, 2021)., 67-71. Some of the literature produced in the period shows signs of borrowing or interaction with the works of contemporaries, see Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 162.

[68] Jeffreys, "The Sebastokratorissa"; for a summary of different approaches to the literature of the twelfth century, see Nilsson, *Writer and Occasion*, 58-9.

[69] Jeffreys, "The Sebastokratorissa," 175-8.

[70] On the *theatron* in Middle and Late Byzantium, see Niels Gaul, "Performative Reading in the Late Byzantine Theatron," in *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond*, ed. Teresa Shawcross and Ida Toth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)., 215-16; Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 239; E.C. Bourbouhakis, "The End of Ἐπίδειξις. Authorial Identity and Authorial Intention in Michael Choniates' Πρὸς Τοὺς Αἰτιωμένους Τὸ

The literary culture of the twelfth century gave rise to several men of letters who produced a range of texts on commission for members of the Komnenian court. Rather than introducing their texts individually as they are used throughout this thesis, it will be more beneficial to the reader to provide a brief introduction to some of the most important of these figures here. One of the most celebrated Byzantine authors of the twelfth century, particularly in the eyes of his near-contemporaries, was Theodore Prodromos (c.1100-1156-8).[71] Over the course of his career he composed texts for Eirene Doukaina until her death in c.1133, then for the emperor John II and lastly the emperor Manuel and the *Sebastokratorissa* Eirene among others.[72] His works span a wide range of genres from treatises and *enkomia*, to parodies and satirical texts.[73] Much of his literary output involved engagement with or the witty subversion of ancient literary models, including the Lucianic corpus, philosophical texts and the novels of the Second Sophistic.[74] Similarly, John Tzetzes is best known for his literary innovations as well as his commentaries and allegorical interpretations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.[75] Born most likely into a lesser aristocratic family in Constantinople in c.1110, Tzetzes initially gained a post as secretary to the governor of Verroia before being unexpectedly dismissed and sent back to Constantinople.[76] He went on to write pieces on commission for various aristocratic patrons, including Bertha-Eirene and the *Sebastokratorissa* Eirene, and finally retired with an *adelphaton*, a kind of stipend for lay inhabitants, to the Pantokrator monastery, teaching the monks rhetoric and grammar as payment.[77] Another member of this group of mid-twelfth-century intellectuals was the author known to modern scholars as 'Manganeios' Prodromos,

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Ἀφιλένδεικτον," in *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature: Modes, Functions, and Identities*, ed. Aglae Pizzone (Boston: Walter de Gruyter Inc., 2014)., 208-10; Jeffreys, "The Sebastokratorissa," 189-91.

[71] Kazhdan and Franklin, *Studies on Byzantine Literature*, 87, 101; Panagiotis Agapitos, "Grammar, Genre, and Patronage in the Twelfth Century: A Scientific Paradigm and its Implications," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 64 (2014), 14; Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 6. Texts copied after Prodromos' death were frequently erroneously attributed to him, illustrating his fame and popularity (Margaret Alexiou, "The Poverty of Écriture and the Craft of Writing: Towards a Reappraisal of the Prodromic Poems," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 10 (1986)., 2-3).

[72] Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 5-6.

[73] Kazhdan, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 136-9; Marina Bazzani, "Theodore Prodromos' Poem LXXVII," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 100, no.1 (2007), 1-3; Agapitos, "Grammar, Genre and Patronage," 14-22.

[74] Przemysław Marciniak, "Prodromos, Aristophanes and a Lustful Woman," *Byzantinoslavica-Revue internationale des Etudes Byzantines* 73, no. 1-2 (2015)., 23-5. On the revival of the ancient Greek novels, see below pp.19-20.

[75] Magdalino, *The Empire*, 350; Baukje van den Berg, "John Tzetzes as Didactic Poet and Learned Grammarian," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 74 (2020)., 285-6; John Tzetzes, "Allegories of the Iliad," (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015)., and "Allegories of the Odyssey," (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019).

[76] Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A Political History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Addison Wesley Longman Inc., 1997), 245.

[77] Jeffreys, "The Sebastokratorissa," 177-8; Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, 247; Robert Browning, *Church, State and Learning in Twelfth Century Byzantium* (London: Dr. Williams's Trust, 1981), 11.

hereafter referred to as Manganeios.[78] Again writing predominantly under the patronage of the emperor Manuel I and the *Sebastokratorissa* Eirene, Manganeios composed some hundred and forty-eight extant works ranging from *enkomia* to occasional pieces, to direct requests for his patron's aid.[79] The latter, sometimes termed 'begging' poems, are concerned with Manganeios' ongoing request for an *adelphaton* at the monastery of St. George in the Mangana district of Constantinople.[80] After successfully taking up this residence, Manganeios died c.1161.[81]

In addition to the professional men of letters based in Constantinople, several members of the educated elite pursued careers in the Church. Eustathios of Thessalonike and Michael Choniates were two such men who became Archbishop of Thessalonike and Metropolitan of Athens respectively in the latter part of the twelfth century.[82] Eustathios was the author of several important texts, including a lengthy *epitaphios* or funerary oration for the emperor Manuel I, commentaries on the Homeric epics, treatises on the monastic life and several secular orations.[83] One of the two monodies in honour of Eustathios following his death was composed by his pupil Michael Choniates, who together with his brother Niketas became wealthy and influential figures within Constantinopolitan society towards the end of the twelfth century. Michael Choniates paints a vivid impression of his time as Metropolitan of Athens through his surviving letter collections.[84] He also composed a rhetorical text responding to critics in defence of his modesty, which has been the focus of some discussion by modern scholars.[85]

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[78] Incorrectly associated in manuscripts with Theodore Prodromos, Manganeios' modern nickname is derived from the monastery in which he lived his final years.
[79] Jeffreys, "The Sebastokratorissa," 178-9; Elizabeth Jeffreys and Michael Jeffreys, "A Constantinopolitan Poet Views Frankish Antioch," *Crusades* 14 (2015), 50.
[80] Magdalino, *The Empire*, 352.
[81] Elizabeth Jeffreys, "A Twelfth-Century Perspective on Byzantium's Western Neighbours: The Witness of Manganeios Prodromos," in *Byzantium and the West : Perception and Reality (11th-15th C.)*, ed. Nikolaos Chrissis (London: Routledge, 2019)., 128; Kazhdan, *Studies on Byzantine Literature*, 103.
[82] On the lives and careers of these figures, see Michael Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni, 1081-1261* (Cambridge University Press, 2000)., 179-207; Kazhdan, *Studies on Byzantine Literature*, 140-95.
[83] On the *epitaphios*, see E.C. Bourbouhakis, *Not Composed in a Chance Manner : The Epitaphios for Manuel I Komnenos by Eustathios of Thessalonike* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2017). On the Homeric commentaries, see esp. Eustathios of Thessalonike, "Commentary on Homer's Odyssey, Volume 1, on Rhapsodies a-B," ed. E Cullhed (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2016)., Baukje van den Berg, "Eustathios on Homer's Narrative Art: The Homeric Gods and the Plot of the Iliad," in *Reading Eustathios of Thessalonike*, ed. Filippomaria Pontani, Vasiles Katsaros, and Vasileios Sarres (Berlin ; Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017).; Jacqueline Klooster and Baukje Van den Berg, *Homer and the Good Ruler in Antiquity and Beyond* (Brill, 2018). On his treatises and orations, see Paul Magdalino, "The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century," *The Byzantine Saint* (1981)., 55; Hannah Elizabeth Ewing, "A "Truly Unmonastic Way of Life": Byzantine Critiques of Monasticism in the Twelfth Century" (The Ohio State University, 2014)., 35; Andrew Stone, *Eustathios of Thessaloniki: Secular Orations 1167/8 to 1179* (Brill, 2013).
[84] Angold, *Church and Society*, 197-207.
[85] Bourbouhakis, "The End"; Magdalino, *The Empire*, 337-9; Paul Stephenson, *The Byzantine World*, Routledge Worlds (London ; New York: Routledge, 2010)., 179.

Revived interest in ancient literary forms in conjunction with the spirit of literary experimentation in the twelfth century gave rise to innovative or reimagined forms of fictional literature. The most obvious manifestation of this trend was the emergence of four Byzantine novels, modelled closely on the ancient Greek novels, especially Heliodoros' *Ethiopica*, Achilles Tatius' *Leukippe and Klitophon* and Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*.[86] Despite these works' clear connection to their ancient forebears, recent scholarship has demonstrated the ways in which their authors drew from various influences and reflected contemporary thought and sensibilities.[87] The author of *Hysmine and Hysminias* has been identified as Eumathios Makrembolites, the recipient of two letters from Theodore Balsamon and the subject of a funerary epigram by the same.[88] This epigram mentions that Eumathios was eparch of Constantinople twice, and held the rank of *sebastos*.[89] *Hysmine and Hysminias* is the only one of the twelfth-century novels composed in prose, and makes use of a simple linguistic style.[90] There is an argument to be made from its textual interaction with Theodore Prodromos' novel *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* that *Hysmine and Hysminias* was composed first, placing the dates of their authorship sometime in the 1130s.[91] Prodromos' novel is written entirely in twelve-syllable verse, apart from one passage of hexameter, and according to its dedicatory preface was commissioned by a Caesar plausibly identified as Nikephoros Bryennios, a patron of several other works by Prodromos.[92]

Niketas Eugenianos' *Drosilla and Charikles* was also composed in twelve-syllable verse and contains several passages of embedded hexameter, including two songs and a lament.[93] The three extant monodies composed by Eugenianos for Theodore Prodromos indicate that the two men were close, with Prodromos possibly acting as Niketas' teacher for a period. He is also attributed as the author of a funerary oration commemorating the *megas droungarios* Stephanos Komnenos, situating Niketas as one of the educated men in the employ of members of the

[86] Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 14, 348; Tomas Hägg, *The Novel in Antiquity* (Univ of California Press, 1991)., 74. For the direct influence of *Daphnis and Chloe*, see *Drosilla and Charikles*, 6.440-451.
[87] See for instance Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 15-16; Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 265-9; Lynda Garland, "'Be Amorous, but Be Chaste…': Sexual Morality in Byzantine Learned and Vernacular Romance," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 14 (1990)., 70-9; MacAlister, "Aristotle on the Dream: A Twelfth-Century Romance Revival.", 196-201.
[88] This identification is by no means secure, and despite Herbert Hunger's publication of seals supposedly proving the connection between the two figures, Elizabeth Jeffreys rejects this argument, concluding that he did at least belong to the influential Makrembolites family regardless of his first name. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 159-60.
[89] Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 159.
[90] Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine novels*, 167.
[91] Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine novels*, 9, 162.
[92] Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine novels*, 7-14.
[93] Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine novels*, 344.

Constantinopolitan elite.[94] Unlike the other verse novels, Constantine Manasses' (c.1115-1187) work *Aristandros and Kallithea* was composed in fifteen-syllable 'political' verse. The text was possibly commissioned by the *Sebastokratorissa* Eirene, who was also responsible for the production of Manasses' *Synopsis Chronike* or 'world chronicle' in the same metre.[95] Fifteen-syllable verse was highly popular among the uneducated elites of the twelfth century, being a stress-based metre with its origins in the rhythms of contemporary spoken Greek. Though it made texts far easier for their audience to comprehend, it was frequently scorned by the intellectuals of the day, exposing a tension between the interests of patrons and authors.[96] Manasses' novel itself apparently enjoyed far less popularity than its contemporary counterparts in subsequent centuries, surviving only in a fragmentary form in several collections of excerpts.[97] As such, what remains of the surviving body of material perhaps sheds more light on the priorities of the excerpters than on Manasses' own cultural milieu.

The twelfth century also saw the emergence of fictional literature modelled to some degree on Lucianic texts, including Theodore Prodromos' *Bion Prasis* ('Sale of Lives'), *Katomyomachia* ('The War of the Cat and Mice'), and *Amarantos*.[98] To these may be added the anonymous *Timarion*, which also drew on elements of Aristophanes.[99] The *Timarion* has been dated on the basis of internal textual evidence to the twelfth century, and almost certainly after 1112.[100] The text consists of a dialogue between the narrator *Timarion* and his friend Kydion, to whom he recounts the story of his unexpected descent into Hades, complete with satirical portraits of its deceased inhabitants.[101] Lastly, the twelfth century saw the crystallisation of the popular romance *Digenis Akritis* into a written form. The world as depicted in the Digenis story, together with the historical references contained within, point to its oral formation around the

[94] Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine novels*, 341-2.
[95] Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine novels*, 273-6. On Manasses' life and works, see also Ingela Nilsson and Eva Nyström, "To Compose, Read, and Use a Byzantine Text: Aspects of the Chronicle of Constantine Manasses," *Byzantine and modern Greek studies* 33, no. 1 (2009)., 44-5.
[96] Jeffreys, "A Constantinopolitan Poet," 53-4; Roderick Beaton, "The Rhetoric of Poverty: The Lives and Opinions of Theodore Prodromos," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 11 (1987)., 11; for a detailed discussion of fifteen-syllable verse and its origins, see Jeffreys, "The Nature," 141-195.
[97] Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 267-81.
[98] Barry Baldwin, "A Talent to Abuse: Some Aspects of Byzantine Satire," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 8 (1982)., 22-3; Marciniak, "Prodromos," 24-5; Zagklas, "Satire," 283-4.
[99] "Timarion," ed. Barry Baldwin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984)., introduction 1; Baldwin, "A Talent to Abuse," 20-2.
[100] *Timarion*, introduction 30.
[101] As Ingela Nilsson points out, a descent into Hades presents an author with an ideal location in which to depict writers and intellectuals of the near and distant past, and thus bring academic and literary matters into the spotlight (Ingela Nilsson, "Poets and Teachers in the Underworld: From the Lucianic Katabasis to the Timarion," *Symbolae Osloenses* 90, no. 1 (2016)., 181).

Euphrates frontier region in the ninth and tenth centuries.[102] In the vibrant and experimental literary scene of twelfth-century Constantinople these oral tales were coalesced into one single work of literature, from which the two primary surviving manuscripts derive.[103] The result is a text that depicts a mythical golden age by the banks of the Euphrates, perhaps reflecting a nostalgia for lands now lost after the defeat at Manzikert in 1071.[104]

Historiographical works were also affected by developments within the literary culture of the period. Although composed in the eleventh century, Michael Psellos' *Chronographia* represents a turning point in Byzantine historiography, with its inclusion of myriad personal anecdotes and its unusually overt efforts at self-aggrandisement.[105] Psellos' Neoplatonism and interest in ancient learning would also go on to drive much of the intellectual discourse of the twelfth century.[106] Psellos' historiographical and intellectual ethos was in many respects preserved and expanded upon by Anna Komnene, daughter of Alexios I and Eirene, and one of the most prominent figures within twelfth-century intellectual culture.[107] Anna's *Alexiad* represents an effort to synthesise a form of Greek historiography immersed in the classical and Homeric past with novelistic and contemporary elements.[108] Anna's self-representation has been the focus of much scholarship, owing to her unique position as a woman and the daughter of the figure she hoped to celebrate.[109] By contrast, Constantine Manasses' *Synopsis Chronike* marked a radical departure from the ancient historiographical tradition that Anna aimed to continue. Written in fifteen-syllable 'political' verse, Manasses' chronicle has been described

[102] Elizabeth Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis* (Cambridge University Press Cambridge, 1998)., introduction xli.
[103] Ibid., introduction lvi.
[104] *Digenis*, introduction xvii; Roderick Beaton, "Cappadocians at Court: Digenes and Timarion," in *Alexios Komnenos, Papers of the Second Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, 14-16 April 1989*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Dion Smythe (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1996)., 332, 337.
[105] Warren Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)., esp. 271-2, 289-90; Michael Jeffreys, "Psellos and 'His Emperors': Fact, Fiction and Genre," in *History as Literature in Byzantium : Papers from the Fortieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, April 2007*, ed. Ruth Macrides (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010)., 3-4.
[106] Angold, "Belle Epoque," 619. On the influence of Psellos on the culture at large, see Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 225-31.
[107] Trizio, "Reading," 398-9; J. Harris, "Institutional Settings: The Court, Schools, Church, and Monasteries," in *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, ed. Anthony Kaldellis and Niketas Siniossoglou (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)., 33; Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 227.
[108] Cullhed, "The Blind Bard," 56; Roger Scott, "Text and Context in Byzantine Historiography," in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Malden, Mass. ; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010)., 253-4; Margaret Mullett, "Novelisation in Byzantium: Narrative after the Revival of Fiction," in *Byzantine Narrative* (Brill, 2017)., 1-2, 9-12; Angeliki Laiou, "Introduction: Why Anna Komnene?," in *Anna Komnene and Her Times*, ed. Thalia Gouma-Peterson (New York ; London: Garland Publishing, 2000)., 5.
[109] See Leonora Neville, "Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian," (2016).; Laiou, "Introduction"; Diether R Reinsch and Thomas Dunlap, "Women's Literature in Byzantium?—the Case of Anna Komnene," in *Anna Komnene and Her Times*, ed. Thalia Gouma-Peterson (New York ; London: Garland Publishing, 2000).; Thalia Gouma-Peterson, "Gender and Power: Passages to the Maternal in Anna Komnene's Alexiad," ibid. (Garland).

as ‘novelistic’ by some scholars for its literary style and tendency towards *ekphrasis*.[110] From the perspective of a cultural historian of the twelfth century, Manasses’ construction of the past and the episodes he brings to light provide a great deal of insight into the literary taste and concerns of his contemporaries.

Other historians of the twelfth century included John Zonaras and Anna’s husband Nikephoros Bryennios.[111] Both Zonaras and later Niketas Choniates used their histories to criticise the Komnenian dynasty for treating public funds as private property, and for what they saw as the harm they had done to the state.[112] Choniates composed his history over a span of several decades before and after the sack of Constantinople in 1204, colouring his narrative with hindsight and a strong anti-Komnenian theme.[113] His work presents an unflattering portrait of a number of imperial figures, and contains an embedded lament for the city of Constantinople that has attracted scholarly attention.[114] The history of John Kinnamos constitutes a valuable counterbalance to the negative assessment of Choniates.[115] Representing the ‘official’ history of Manuel I’s reign, and based largely on the same reports from the Byzantine army as those used by Manganeios in the composition of his encomiastic poems, Kinnamos’ history offers a version of events as the ruling dynasty wanted them to appear.[116]

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[110] Ingela Nilsson, "The Past as Poetry: Two Byzantine World Chronicles in Verse," in *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry*, ed. Wolfram Horandner, Andreas Rhoby, and Nikos Zagklas (Brill, 2019)., 518; Constantine Manasses, "Breviarium Chronicum," in *Constantini Manassis Breviarium Chronicum*, ed. O. Lampsides, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 36.1 (Athens: Academy of Athens, 1996)., xl-xlv; Nilsson, *Writer and Occasion*, 26; Nilsson, “To Compose,” 43.

[111] Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 227. On what is known about Zonaras and the sources for his *Epitome of Histories*, see John Zonaras, "The History of Zonaras. From Alexander Severus to the Death of Theodosius the Great," ed. Thomas Banchich and Eugene Lane (London: Routledge, 2008)., 1-4. On the rhetorical argument of Bryennios’ history, see Leonora Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[112] Paul Magdalino, "Aspects of Twelfth-Century Byzantine Kaiserkritik," *Speculum* 58, no. 2 (1983)., 329-30; Dimiter Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204-1330* (Cambridge University Press, 2007)., 253.

[113] See Nicetas Choniates, "Nicetae Choniatae Historia," ed. Jan Louis van Dieten (Berolini: W. de Gruyter, 1975)., 529; Magdalino, *The Empire*, esp. 4-15; Magdalino, “Aspects,” esp.335-44. On Choniates’ rhetorical narrative, see Athanasios Angelou, "Rhetoric and History: The Case of Niketas Choniates," in *History as Literature in Byzantium : Papers from the Fortieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, April*, ed. Ruth Macrides (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007).

[114] For instance T. Kampianaki, "'O City, City': Rhetoric and Style in Niketas Choniates' and Doukas' Laments for Constantinople," in *Lament as Performance in Byzantium*, ed. N. Tsironis in collaboration with T. Kampianaki (Routledge, forthcoming).; Michael Angold, "Laments by Nicetas Choniates and Others for the Fall of Constantinople in 1204," in *Greek Laughter and Tears: Antiquity and After*, ed. Margaret Alexiou and Douglas Cairns (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017)., 338.

[115] See Magdalino, *The Empire*, Introduction.

[116] Michael Jeffreys, "Versified Press-Releases on the Role of the Komnenian Emperor: The Public Poems of Manganeios Prodromos," in *Basileia: Essays on Imperium and Culture in Honour of E.M. And M.J Jeffreys*, ed. Geoffrey Nathan and Lynda Garland (Brill, 2017)., 29-30.

Viewed as a whole, the source materials introduced in this section provide myriad representations of ageing and older people, both textual and visual. Decoding the nature and implications of these representations rests largely on an examination of the wider narrative they form a part of. Some of the sources introduced here made use of age *topoi* as a central part of their rhetorical argument, or else reflected a wider trend in contemporary discourse. In these instances the sources in question are treated as a case study, allowing for a more in-depth examination of their poetics and cultural influences. In other cases, sources are used for the sake of comparison or to corroborate the evidence for a broader trend. In yet others, sources beyond those detailed here are consulted, in which case they are given a proper introduction at the appropriate point in the chapter.

Toward a Byzantine Definition of Old Age

Before exploring the various cultural significances of old age in Middle Byzantine culture, some obvious but important questions will need to be tackled: how long did someone typically live before they were considered 'old' in Byzantium, and to what extent did the Byzantine concept of 'old age' equate to our own? These questions are difficult to answer with any concrete certainty, but exploring ways in which they might be addressed helps to establish some important theoretical considerations. The normative beginnings of old age in the contemporary global north are relatively easy to pinpoint, thanks to the establishment of state pensions and a legal retirement age by the 1970s.[117] In the case of pre-modern societies the boundaries are far less clear. The following section aims to deal with these questions through a brief survey of the demographic and literary evidence from the Ancient and Medieval worlds more generally, before turning to look at Byzantine writers themselves and the Greek terminology they used.

Contrary to popular perceptions, a significant minority of people living in the Latinate Middle Ages did survive into what is usually considered old age today.[118] Precise and reliable demographic data is difficult to come by in the source material available for much of the Middle

[117] Paul Johnson, "Historical Readings of Old Age and Ageing," in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, ed. Paul Johnson and Pat Thane (London: Routledge, 1998)., 3.
[118] There is a general assumption in the modern global north, reinforced by legal retirement ages, that old age begins at around 60 or 70, Johnson, "Historical Readings," 3.

Ages.[119] This has not however prevented scholars from putting forward tentative models of life expectancy. For instance, Patlagean has calculated from a sample of early Christian funerary epigraphy in the eastern Mediterranean that although 68% of women and 56% of men had died by the age of 44, 9% of men and 5% of women did in fact survive into their late 70s or early 80s.[120] Skeletal records from cemetery burials in the Early Latinate Middle Ages suggest that most people tended to die before the age of 60, while Late Antique skeletal material points to a higher life expectancy.[121] This general trend can be seen in the mortality rates calculated from skeletal remains throughout the Byzantine world, with an average age at death in the early to mid-30s, in contrast to the Classical period with its average age at death of 45 years for men and 36 for women.[122] As Laiou suggests, it is possible that the relative stability of the Byzantine empire between the tenth and twelfth centuries gave rise to a higher average life expectancy than that seen in subsequent centuries, with average life expectancy at birth falling to around 23 years around the beginning of the fourteenth century.[123]

The lower life expectancy of the Early Middle Ages has led Gilleard to suggest that since reaching the threshold of adulthood did not guarantee a long life, it is plausible that people were considered old at an earlier age than we would expect today.[124] This interpretation underlines a crucial distinction between an individual's absolute, numerical age, and their relative, socially constructed age. This is neatly illustrated by the status of elite women in Ancient Roman society who would frequently be described as 'old' alongside their husbands, even if they had not lived nearly as many years.[125] Evidently this socially relative construction of old age could vary substantially even within a single society, given the impact of factors such as gender, class and working environment.[126] This is not to say that absolute chronological

[119] Gilleard, "Dark Ages," 1068; Angeliki E Laiou, *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, vol. 39 (Dumbarton Oaks, 2002)., 51; in the case of Byzantium this is due in part to changes in epigraphic habits, see I Toth, "Reflections on a Period of Transformation in Early Byzantine Epigraphic Culture," in *Inscriptions in the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine History and History of Art*, ed. Christos Stavrakos (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag in Kommission, 2016)., 17-18.
[120] Talbot, "Old Age," 268; Evelyne Patlagean, "Pauvreté Économique Et Pauvreté Sociale Abyzance, 4–7 S," (Paris, 1977)., 95-100.
[121] Gilleard, "Dark Ages," 1068-69.
[122] Talbot, "Old Age," 267.
[123] Gilleard, "Old Age," 628; Laiou, *The Economic History*, 52; it is important to note in this case that these mortality rates do not account for the impact of high child mortality, whereas the mortality rates cited above remove cases of child mortality from the final calculation.
[124] Gilleard, "Dark Ages," 1066.
[125] Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence, "Viewing the Old: Recording and Respecting the Elderly at Rome and in the Empire," in *On Old Age: Approaching Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Christian Krötzl and Katariina Mustakallio (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011)., 4.
[126] Harlow, "Viewing the Old," 3; Katalin Szende, "Coping with Old Age in Medieval Hungarian Towns," ibid., 197; Shahar, *Growing Old*, 12-35.

age played no role at all in the formation of the concept of old age. Life expectancy was predictably far higher among certain groups in the Middle Ages, particularly the nobility and the clergy.[127] However, it is important to bear in mind that while a considerable minority of the population did consistently live into their 60s and 70s, old age as a social category may have encompassed a wider range of individuals.

While the relativity of old age is somewhat reflected in the literary material, Ancient and Medieval writers tended to impose clear numerical limits on old age, usually in the name of a mathematical or cosmological agenda.[128] For instance, Ptolemy of Alexandria writing in the second century CE proposed that each phase of the human life course was aligned with a particular planet, which determined its character and duration. According to this model, the age of retirement and deliberation or *presbuteros* began at age 56 and lasted until *gerontes* at age 68, which brought with it physical decline and general irritability.[129] Other writers divided the life course into discrete phases of equal duration, with the Pythagorean system positing four stages of 20 years, and Varro five stages of 15 years. Regardless of the chosen numerical model, most Ancient writers placed the onset of old age for men at around 60 years.[130] This pattern is echoed in Augustus' marriage legislation of the first century CE, which set out the expectation that men younger than 60 and women younger than 50 should be married.[131] The age of 60 appears to have been an important watershed in the male life course particularly, supported by the fact that Roman military service was no longer required of men over that age.[132]

Early Christian writers often interpreted the human life course symbolically as part of a wider cosmological argument.[133] Augustine of Hippo suggested that there were six ages in the life of an individual, corresponding to the six ages of the universe, with old age beginning around the sixtieth year and potentially lasting up to the age of 120.[134] The so-called 'limits of David' set a biblical precedent for the boundaries of old age, suggesting that any individual living into their 70s had exceeded their allotted life span and entered extreme old age.[135] Writers in the

[127] Byzantine emperors and scholars tended to live much longer than the life expectancy calculated from material evidence, Talbot, "Old Age," 269.
[128] Cicero in *De Senectute* frames old age as something looming on the horizon for himself and his addressee, aged respectively 62 and 65, in sharp contrast to much of the contemporary normative literature discussed in this section (Harlow, "Viewing the Old," 8; Parkin, "Ageing in Antiquity," 20).
[129] Harlow, "Viewing the Old," 4.
[130] Harlow, "Viewing the Old," 7.
[131] The discrepancy here between men and women can be explained with reference to contemporary ideas about female loss of fertility, Harlow, "Viewing the Old," 4-7.
[132] Harlow, "Viewing the Old," 9.
[133] Gilleard, "Dark Ages," 1070.
[134] Minois, *History of Old Age*, 115; Gilleard, Dark Ages, 1071.
[135] Talbot, Old Age, 268.

Middle Ages were influenced to a great extent by these earlier models of the life course. Isidore of Seville for instance proposed a system of six life stages, with the final phase beginning at the age of 70, comprising *senectus* characterised by physical decline, and *senium* in which mental capacity followed suit.[136] By contrast, Byzantine medical writers were influenced primarily by the Hippocratic tradition, according to which the life course was divided into four stages corresponding with the four humours and the seasons of the year. This model aligned old age with winter and characterised this phase as one of increasing cold and dryness.[137] The medical and Christian traditions were by no means discrete, with John Chrysostom preferring a tetradic system in line with Hippocratic tradition, in which each of the four phases were associated with their own distinct vices.[138]

The normative location of old age at around 60-70 years is attested in other kinds of source material from the Early Middle Ages, as in the case of Visigothic Weregeld prescribed as compensation for the murder of individuals from different age groups.[139] While men murdered between the ages of 50 and 65 were thought to be worth 200 *solidi*, those over 65 were valued at only 100 *solidi*.[140] On the other hand the murder of a woman aged over 40 years incurred compensation of 200 solidi, while those aged 60 and above were valued at next to nothing, implying a strong correlation between female fertility and the perceived social value of a woman's life.[141] A similar pattern can be seen in the case of the Early Byzantine Church, which offered financial protection to women to prevent them from remarrying, but only if they were aged 60 years or more.[142] There is also evidence to suggest that the age 50 held particular significance for the Byzantines, since hagiographical writings tend to cite the age of their subjects in their 50s more frequently than any other age range.[143]

In striving to understand what Byzantine writers meant when they mentioned old age, the first thing to consider is the words they used to express the concept, and how their meaning differs from our own. The most common way of expressing the abstract concept in English is with the noun-adjective compound 'old age'. This applies specifically to the long life of a person or

[136] Minois, *History of Old Age*, 115; Callow, "Left-Over Romans," 230.
[137] Lascaratos, "The Roots," 3.
[138] De Wet, "Old Age," 49.
[139] The majority of Byzantine writers placed the onset of old age at around 60 years, or occasionally 50 (Talbot, "Old Age," 268).
[140] Minois, *History of Old Age*, 114.
[141] Minois, *History of Old Age*, 114; the significance of the age of 60 for women here is an interesting departure from the Classical Roman age limits discussed above (pp.24-5), implying perhaps a development in thought about female fertility or women's roles in the later part of the life course.
[142] Lung, "No Country," 197.
[143] Davies, "From Womb," 182.

living being, although its component adjective 'old' is far more general and can be used to describe inanimate objects or abstract concepts, as in this case.[144] Thus the term 'old age' is related closely in terms of semantics to 'old' things, whether animate or inanimate. The most widely used Byzantine Greek equivalent to 'old age' is γῆρας, which differs in several important respects.[145] Much like 'old age', γῆρας primarily refers to the longevity of an individual rather than an inanimate object, but while 'old' is a qualifier that necessitates a length of time, γῆρας is a self-contained state of being.[146] In many respects, the Byzantine Greek πολυετής (literally 'many years') is far closer in meaning to 'old age' but γῆρας appears far more frequently in the surviving textual evidence.[147] This leaves open the possibility of a distinction between temporal age and socially constructed age in the Byzantine conception of γῆρας. Indeed, the recurrence of literary *topoi* such as the child-old man (παίς γέρων) would support this suggestion.[148] Similarly, some monastic *typika* encouraged monks to hasten the ageing process through fasting and bodily mortification.[149] This is not to say that γῆρας was completely divorced from longevity: the effectiveness of the literary *topoi* mentioned above depended on their conflict with normative age roles based on the length or brevity of the individual's life. However, the term γῆρας certainly supports the notion that contemporaries did not understand 'old age' in terms of a universally accepted span of years.

The term γῆρας could be qualified to convey an age more precisely or vividly. For instance, ἔσχατον γῆρας ('extreme old age') could be used to signify advanced old age, in somewhat similar fashion to the distinction between *presbuteros/senectus* and *gerontes/senium*.[150] The verb γηράσκω ('I grow old'), derived from the same stem as γῆρας, could also be used to describe the ageing process.[151] In some instances the concept of 'old age' might also be expressed with a noun formed from an adjective, as in the case of το ὑπέρακμον from ὑπέρακμος ('past prime').[152] Though less common, this term is explicitly negative, implying a perception of 'old age' as a fallen state of lost youth. Another related term was πρεσβεία, which carried far more positive connotations, associated as it was with the rights of seniority and

[144] Encyclopaedia Britannica (1993), 'Old Age'.
[145] For examples of its use, see Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme Auf Stein*, IT29; Choniates, *Historia*, 335, 413.
[146] Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon (LSJ), γῆρας. The word γῆρας was in fact used to apply to inanimate objects, though to the best of my knowledge always in the context of personification.
[147] LSJ, πολυετής; for its use in this context, see Choniates, *Historia*, 2.14.
[148] Talbot, "Old Age," 273; Davies, "Age, Gender and Status," 157.
[149] Talbot, "Old Age," 273.
[150] Manasses, *Synopsis Chronike*, 989.
[151] Manasses, *Synopsis Chronike*, 4494, 5224.
[152] Eustathios, *epitaphios*, 32.18.

intercession.[153] The meaning of πρεσβεία was quite flexible despite its age-related semantic connotations, often meaning 'primacy' or 'embassy'.[154]

When describing older people, Byzantine writers could draw from a substantial vocabulary, each word carrying a set of connotations appropriate for a particular context. Two Ancient Greek terms frequently employed by Byzantine writers to refer to old men were γέρων and πρεσβύτης.[155] The word γέρων conveyed a sense of authority and respect, being the term used to describe monastic elders and holy men.[156] Similarly πρεσβύτης, derived from the Ancient Greek πρέσβυς ('old man'), was related closely to πρεσβεία, and the comparative form πρεσβύτερος (in Ancient Greek, 'ambassador') came to mean 'presbyter' in a Christian context.[157] This connection is particularly interesting considering the association of old age with sanctity in Byzantine literature and art. A female equivalent emerged and became popular in Byzantine texts in the form of πρεσβῦτις.[158] Terms used specifically to describe old women were generally less flattering, with the most common being the Ancient Greek γραῦς, γραΐς or γραῖα.[159] The diminutive form of γραΐς, γραΐδιον ('old hag') might be used to denigrate an old woman.[160] Diminutives such as γερόντιον ('little old man') and γύναιον ('little woman') could also be used to portray old men and women in a derogatory fashion.[161] Adjectives like γηραιός ('old') from γῆρας might be used to distinguish individuals as elderly in a neutral manner.[162] Other words used to depict older men and women focus on the elderly body, with terms such as πολιά ('grey hair') emphasising white or grey hair as a primary characteristic of the elderly

[153] LSJ, πρεσβεία.
[154] 'Primacy' in Anna Komnene, "Alexiad," in *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, ed. A. Kambylis and D. Reinsch (Berlin ; New York: De Gruyter, 2001)., I.13.4; c.f. 'embassy' in *Alexiad*, VII.2.8.
[155] LSJ, γέρων; For πρεσβύτης see John Mauropous, "Epigrams," in *Joannis Euchaitorum Metropolitae quae in codice Vaticano Graeco 676 supersunt*, ed. P. de Lagarde (Göttingen1882 (repr. 1979))., 8, v.14; Eustathios Eustathios of Thessalonike, "Commentaries on Homer's Iliad," in *Eustathii archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes*, ed. M. van der Valk (Leiden: Brill, 1976)., 2.106.13, 2.108.22, 2.603.15, 4.805.29.
[156] See below, p.80.
[157] πρεσβύτερος could be used adjectivally to mean 'elder', as in Choniates, *Historia*, 97. C.f. for instance "Life of St. Christodoulos," in *Acta et diplomata monasteriorum et ecclesiarum orientis, tomus tertius*, ed. F. Miklosich and J. Müller (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006)., 1.85.4.
[158] For instance *Drosilla and Charikles*, 7.249, 9.172; Theodore Prodromos, "Against a Lustful Old Woman," in *Manuelis Philae Carmina*, ed. E. Miller (Paris1857 (repr. 1967))., vv.4, 8.
[159] As in Prodromos, "Against a Lustful Old Woman," vv.1-2, 26; *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, 6.145; Theodore Prodromos, "Carmina Historica," in *Theodoros Prodromos, Historische Gedichte*, ed. Wolfram Hörandner (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1974)., 17.94.
[160] LSJ, γραΐδιον. See for instance Michael Psellos, "Letters," in *Michael Psellus, Epistulae, vols. I-II*, ed. Stratis Papaioannou (Berlin ; Boston: De Gruyter, 2019)., 272.90; Eustathios, *Commentaries on the Odyssey*, vol.2, vers. 116.
[161] Choniates, *Historia*, 271, 273; John Kinnamos, "History," in *Joannis Cinnami epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum*, ed. A. Meineke (Bonn: Weber, 1836)., 246.
[162] LSJ, γηραιός. For instance John Mauropous, "Canon of Sts. Cosmas and Damian," in *Un canone di Giovanni Mauropode in onore dei ss. Cosma e Damiano*, ed. F. D'Aiuto (2000)., 3.31.

body whether male or female.[163] Grey hair or baldness frequently appear as indicators of old age in Byzantine literature and art, and might be celebrated or derided depending on the context and intent of the work.[164]

Clearly in Byzantium, as in any society, old age was not defined universally in accordance with a specific numerical age limit. The point at which old age was thought to commence, and the chance of attaining it, varied significantly between groups and individuals, depending on a range of social factors. At the same time, old age was closely tied to temporal age ranges in texts composed by writers adhering to religious, medical or philosophical conventions. The general consensus of these texts appears to have placed old age not long before or after the age of 60, which is particularly interesting given its similarity with the normative threshold of old age in the modern global north.[165] Byzantine Greek terminology used to represent old age differs from that of modern English in several important respects. This thesis uses terms such as 'old' and 'elderly' interchangeably for the sake of convenience, but it is important to bear in mind that they do not convey the full nuance of the Greek. It is clear that the concept of ageing could be articulated in a great many ways by twelfth-century Greek-speakers, and that the meaning of these words was rarely derived from distinctions between chronological age ranges. Rather, contemporaries had at their disposal a vast array of semantically dense terms and expressions for describing different types of old age and elderly people. The goal of this thesis is not to search for a definitive cultural meaning of any single term, but to explore the ways in which these words were used to depict the concepts and figures they signified.

Growing Old: From Reverence to Marginalisation

The chapters that follow are organised thematically, with each exploring an identifiable theme within contemporary representations of ageing. The first two chapters deal with the most idealised images of old age in twelfth-century Byzantium. Chapter one explores the relationship between advanced age and authority of various kinds within contemporary culture. It traces the precedent for this norm through the ancient Greek and Christian philosophical

[163] See *Drosilla and Charikles*, III.174. Also λευκόθριξ, as in Manganeios, "Poésies Inédites De Théodore Prodrome," in *Annuaire de l'Association pour l'encouragement des études grecques en France*, ed. Emmanuel Miller (1883)., 58-59 v.2.
[164] See below, pp.49-50, 168.
[165] Johnson, "Historical Readings," 3.

traditions before turning to a discussion of the evidence from the twelfth century. Three types of authority relating to age are identified and explored: intellectual prestige, spiritual authority and secular authority in connection with social or political power. Chapter two expands upon the notion of spiritual authority introduced in the first chapter, focusing on the role of age and gender in the formation of holiness. The chapter begins with an overview of the role of age in Byzantine monasticism and in the representation of holy figures. This provides a necessary foundation for the interpretation of the twelfth-century *Lives* of two saints, situated within the broader context of contemporary scepticism and the monastic reform movement.

The central chapters of the thesis explore the emotional and symbolic significance of ageing through case studies of contemporary literature, monumental art and epigrams. Chapter three examines the role of age rhetoric in the literary expression of suffering in twelfth-century Byzantium. It traces the juxtaposition of old age and youth in contemporary laments and depictions of lamentation, before turning to the rhetorical use of elderly figures as objects of pity. Chapter four focuses on the symbolic significance of ageing and its role in the articulation of contemporary responses to death. The first part of the chapter deals with visual representations of death and salvation, while the second part analyses literary treatments of the same themes.

The final two chapters deal with representations of older figures that either explicitly or implicitly reveal their alterity in the eyes of a contemporary audience.[166] Chapter five treats the role of age within the literary traditions of ridicule and invective. The age rhetoric used against elderly caricatures is placed within the context of the need for entertaining performance and the prevalence of intellectual rivalry at the Constantinopolitan court. Lastly the chapter examines the role of similar age *topoi* in contemporary invective through a case study of Niketas Choniates' depiction of Andronikos I. The sixth and final chapter of this thesis takes a more holistic view of the literary material discussed in earlier chapters, focusing on its presentation of older figures. Specifically, it explores the intersection of age, gender and

[166] On the concept of alterity or 'otherness' in relation to Byzantine studies, see for instance Durak, *Identity*; Dion C. Smythe, *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider : Papers from the Thirty-Second Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, March 1998*, Publications of the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies (Routledge, 2016)., esp. Margaret Mullett, "The 'Other' in Byzantium," in *Strangers to Themselves : The Byzantine Outsider : Papers from the Thirty-Second Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, March 1998*, ed. Dion Smythe (Aldershot: Variorum, 2000).; Katherine Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons: Between Reality and Spirituality in Byzantine Art* (Brepols, 2013)., 263-5; Corinne Jouanno, "Shared Spaces: 1 Digenis Akritis, the Two-Blood Border Lord," in *Fictional Storytelling in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean and Beyond*, ed. Carolina Cupane (Leiden: Brill, 2016).: 1, esp. 267-9.

ethnicity in the construction of the figures' social identity. This is achieved through two literary case studies, leading into a broader discussion based on material analysed in earlier chapters.

* * *

The topic of ageing is more relevant today than it has ever been. Longer life expectancies combined with declining birth rates in many parts of the world have resulted in older people making up a larger proportion of the population than in previous centuries.[167] Although modern conceptions about the threshold of old age have remained remarkably consistent, the State Pension age is due to increase in the coming decades, inviting discussion about how we think about age, work and the life course.[168] The elderly represent a powerful political force, showing a consistently higher voter turnout than younger demographics.[169] Despite this, older people are frequently ignored or taken for granted by those in power.[170] In March and April 2020 a policy by the UK government to free up hospital beds led to the unchecked spread of COVID-19 to care homes, resulting in soaring mortality rates among the mostly elderly inhabitants.[171] This incident shines a light on another issue, that there is little universal agreement on the best care solution for elderly people.[172] It is therefore crucial at this point in time to seriously consider what it means to grow old and how modern societies treat those who do. To explore how societies of the past responded to these questions is also to understand more deeply the world of the present.

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[167] Pat Thane, "Old Age in European Cultures: A Significant Presence from Antiquity to the Present," *The American Historical Review* 125, no. 2 (2020)., 393; Karen M Sowers and William S Rowe, "Global Aging," in *Handbook of Gerontology: Evidence-Based Approaches to Theory, Practice, and Policy*, ed. J. Blackburn and C. Dulmus (Hoboken: Wiley, 2007)., 3-4.

[168] In the UK, State Pension age is due to increase to 68 between 2044 and 2046: "Proposed new timetable for State Pension age increases", Gov.UK, accessed 3rd October 2022, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/proposed-new-timetable-for-state-pension-age-increases

[169] See for instance: "Demographic Change," Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, accessed 3rd October 2022, https://www.ageing.ox.ac.uk/blog/European-elections; "Age and Voting Behaviour," British Election Study, accessed 3rd October 2022, https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/bes-findings/age-and-voting-behaviour-at-the-2019-general-election/

[170] On the abuse of elderly people in modern societies, and especially the abuse of older women who statistically live longer than men, see Sowers, "Global Aging," 5-6.

[171] "Covid: What happened to care homes," BBC News, accessed 3rd October 2022, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/52674073

[172] Current systems include community-based care involving integrated health and social services, and filial support schemes in which families are incentivised to care for their elderly relatives (Sowers, "Global Aging," 8).

Chapter One: Age, Wisdom and Authority

> If you come to a matter and wish for counsel,
> seek the help of old and experienced men:[173]

The idea that old men and women are privy to a distinct form of wisdom accrued over a long life span is an almost universal truism perpetuated by a great many cultures throughout history.[174] The passage above is taken from one of the oldest versions of *Spaneas*, a Byzantine paraenetic text with probable origins in the twelfth century.[175] The text expresses a conception of elderly authority that is commonly found in advice literature regarding good governance.[176] This notion of elderly authority can be seen reflected in several areas of twelfth-century Byzantine culture.

Respect for advanced age in Byzantine literature must be understood in light of the canon of classical texts and the Christian philosophy of the Church Fathers. The normative authority of old men was epitomised in the figures of Nestor and Priam in the *Iliad*, one of the most foundational texts in the Byzantine education system.[177] These two characters were held in high esteem owing no doubt to a confluence of social status and perceived wisdom.[178] While younger men were evaluated primarily according to their prowess in battle, older men were

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[173] Spaneas, ed. Anagnostopoulos, *Ὁ Σπανέας* (2010): 427-8. This text is found in the MS Vat. Pal. gr. 367, edited by Lambros, Τὰ ὑπ᾽ ἀριθμὸν ΡΙΖ΄ καὶ ΡΓ΄ κατάλοιπα. NE 16 (1922) 30-59:
Ἂν ἔλθῃς εἰς ὑπόθεσιν καὶ συμβουλὴν θελήσῃς,
γερόντων ζήτησε βουλήν. ἀνθρώπων πειρασμένων·

[174] On modern concepts of wisdom in relation to old age, see Robert J Sternberg, "Older but Not Wiser? The Relationship between Age and Wisdom," *Ageing International* 30, no. 1 (2005)., esp. 9. See also Simone de Beauvoir's survey of cultural attitudes towards aging in the ancient world, *Simone De Beauvoir, Old Age (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977).*, esp. 90-115.

[175] On Spaneas, see Georg Danezis, *Spaneas: Vorlage, Quellen, Versionen* (Institut für Byzantinistik und neugriechische Philologie der Universität, 1987)., vii-ix; also Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, 245-6.

[176] Compare for instance Plutarch, *Old Men in Politics*, 783A-797F, Susan Jacobs, "Plutarch's Statesmen: Mirrors of Political Effectiveness," in *Concepts of Ideal Rulership from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Roskam Geert and Stefan Schorn (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018)., esp. 162 n.26.

[177] For an example of Nestor's status, see Homer, "Iliad, Loeb Classical Library 171, Translated by A.T. Murray, Revised by W.F. Wyatt," (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925). II.20-1, where Agamemnon is said to honour Nestor especially among the elders, implying a level of respect accorded to older men by default. On the wisdom and authority of Priam, see III.146-153 and XXIV.201-2; On the role of the Homeric poems in Byzantine education, see van den Berg, "John Tzetzes as Didactic Poet," 286; see also Tim Parkin, "The Ancient Greek and Roman Worlds," in *The Long History of Old Age*, ed. Pat Thane (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005)., 37.

[178] On the establishment of Nestor as a good counsellor owing to his age and experience, see Hanna M Roisman, "Nestor the Good Counsellor," *The Classical Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2005).

valued for their experience and capacity for offering sage advice. The Spartan *gerousia* is perhaps the clearest example of this ethos manifested in the political structures of the ancient Greek world.[179]

The idea that old age naturally lends itself to the pursuit of wisdom can be seen reflected in a great deal of classical philosophical literature. Plato's *Republic* discusses the benefits and downsides of growing old through the voice of the elderly Kephalos. While the narrative makes plain that advanced age does not necessarily produce a good philosopher, it is demonstrated to be conducive to tranquillity and philosophical contemplation, assuming that the old man in question is comfortably wealthy and possesses a good disposition.[180] In the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, Plato further asserts that the declining years of life are best suited to philosophy, while conceding that the forgetfulness of extreme old age can get in the way of this ideal.[181] The Aristotelian picture of growing old is much harsher than the Platonic. Using the example of Priam, Aristotle suggests that the happiness of a life (*eudaimonia*) can only be judged after the death of the figure in question, as a twist of fortune in old age might transform an otherwise successful and virtuous life.[182] The *Nicomachean Ethics* emphasise several negative traits associated with growing old, namely meanness, lack of interest in friendship except where profitable, moroseness, and the inability to please others.[183] Nonetheless the same text also upholds the conventional mores, that people should heed the opinions of the elderly and that every older person is due a degree of respect.[184]

The philosophical approach to old age was elaborated and expanded upon by various Latin authors. In *De Senectute*, Cicero offers a monologue in the voice of Cato the Elder in much the same vein as that of Kephalos in Plato's *Republic*.[185] Ultimately for Cicero, the negative aspects of the ageing process were outweighed by the authority and freedom to pursue philosophy enjoyed by the old.[186] These ideas were developed further by Plutarch in his pamphlet on whether old men should engage in public affairs.[187] Contrary to Cicero's argument that the old

[179] Ennio Bauer, "Old Age as a Principle of Social Organization: Gerousiai in the Poleis of Hellenistic and Roman Southern Asia Minor," in *On Old Age: Approaching Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (2011)., 127.
[180] Plato, *Republic*, 330a; Helen Small, *The Long Life* (Oxford University Press, 2007)., 27-8.
[181] See esp. *Phaedrus*, 276d; Small, *The Long Life*, 29-35.
[182] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100a2-8; Small, *The Long Life*, 54-6.
[183] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1121b14, 1156a25, 1157b14-15, 1158a3-7; Small, *The Long Life*, 57.
[184]Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1143b10, 1165a28; Small, *The Long Life*, 56.
[185] Parkin, "Ageing in Antiquity," 24.
[186] Parkin, "Ageing in Antiquity", 24-5.
[187] Plutarch was well-read in Byzantium in the twelfth century (see, Michael Grünbart, "Plutarch in Twelfth-Century Learned Culture," in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Plutarch*, ed. Sophia Xenophontos and

should retire to a life of contemplation in the country, Plutarch argued that the elderly were well-suited and even morally obliged to take an active part in the political sphere, due in part to their greater *logos* ('rationality'), *parrhesia* ('free-speaking') and pedagogical capacity.[188]

Ancient philosophical tradition, and in particular the works of Plato and Aristotle, had a considerable influence on Middle Byzantine intellectual culture. The eleventh-century polymath Michael Psellos did much to revive the earnest study of Plato, provoking accusations of heresy from his rivals in the process.[189] Aristotle's works witnessed a surge of interest from prominent Byzantine authors in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Anna Komnene, John Italos' pupil Eustratios and Michael of Ephesos spearheaded this process of intellectual revival, giving rise to a series of commentaries on major works of Aristotle.[190] Literature and art representing ageing in twelfth-century Byzantium was thus produced in an intellectual environment that was shaped considerably by the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions.

On the other hand, the association in Byzantine thought between extreme old age and spiritual authority can be traced back to the prophets of the Old Testament, many of whom were thought to have lived well over a hundred years.[191] It is perhaps no surprise then that the early Christian conceptualisation of the ascetic ideal was influenced considerably by Old Testament precedents.[192] Ascetic saints were frequently celebrated in Byzantine hagiography as having lived to an extreme old age, demonstrating their exceptionalism and separation from ordinary worldly affairs.[193] The authoritative aspect of this advanced age is illustrated by the late fifth-century anthology of *Apophthegmata Patrum* ('Sayings of the Desert Fathers').[194] Many of the

Katerina Oikonomopoulou (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2019)., 265-78), although not to my knowledge this particular text.

[188] Plutarch, "On Whether an Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs," 783-797, Harold North Fowler, "Plutarch's Moralia, Vol. 10," *Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA* (1936). (repr. 1969); Parkin, "Ageing in Antiquity," 26.

[189] On Psellos' relationship with Plato, see Graeme Miles, "Psellos and His Traditions," in *Byzantine Perspectives on Neoplatonism*, ed. Sergei Mariev (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017)., 79-80. On the challenges to Psellos' Orthodoxy, see Psellos' letter C 1 (= S 175), summarised in Michael Jeffreys, *The Letters of Psellos: Cultural Networks and Historical Realities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 151-2.

[190] MacAlister, "Aristotle," 196-7; Trizio, "Reading," 398-9. On Aristotelian undercurrents in the dreams in the Komnenian novels, and the authors' possible connection to the circle of Aristotle commentators, see MacAlister, "Aristotle," 201-212.

[191] Abraham is one of the prime examples of blessed longevity (see for instance Genesis 24:1).

[192] Derek Krueger, "The Old Testament and Monasticism," in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. Paul Magdalino and Robert S Nelson (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2010)., 199.

[193] See Davies, "Age, Gender and Status," 168.

[194] Krueger, "The Old Testament," 201.

Fathers' replies appealed to the authority of Old Testament figures, and the advanced age of the Fathers themselves is consistently emphasised throughout.

However, the emphasis placed on the extreme age of holy men and women was not simply the result of adherence to the aesthetics of Old Testament models. The imagery of ageing provided early Christian theologians with a means of expressing intricate concepts in a highly tangible way. Clement of Alexandria for instance distinguished between the age of the body and that of the soul, suggesting that the ideal soul should remain youthful through perpetual renewal and simple adherence to God.[195] Such a separation of physical and mental or spiritual age was a motif commonly employed by early Christian authors, and is epitomised by the *topos* of the παῖς γέρων.[196] This was used frequently in hagiographical accounts in particular to celebrate the extraordinary spiritual maturity of the saint even in childhood.[197] John Chrysostom similarly talks about 'inward greyness' in his homilies, attempting to transform old age from a socially constructed state tied to the chronology of the life course into a set of ideal character traits that could be developed at any age.[198] In much the same way as Plato and Cicero praised old age for its cooling of sexual and other worldly passions, Chrysostom argued that old age liberated the individual from bodily desires, allowing for the cultivation of self-control and wisdom.[199] He also defended the classical *topos* of the elderly being more authoritative in their speech.[200]

Both traditions outlined here contributed substantially to the reverential representations of elderly figures in twelfth-century Byzantium. Just as it would be problematic to disentangle the classical Hellenic and Orthodox Christian aspects of Byzantium's cultural heritage, it would be disingenuous to discuss secular and ecclesiastical manifestations of these traditions in the twelfth century discretely.[201] Instead the following two chapters are organised according to identifiable aspects of the contemporary construction of old age: the concept that old age should be respected owing to greater wisdom or seniority, and the celebration of ageing for its assumed ability to liberate individuals from worldly concerns. The former theme is discussed in chapter 1 through an analysis of secular literary and historical texts as well as hagiographical literature

[195] Clement, *Paedagogus* I.5-6; King, "'In Your Midst'," 69-70.
[196] On the παῖς γέρων *topos*, see Davies, "Age, Gender and Status," 157-8.
[197] Talbot, "Old Age," 273.
[198] See for instance Chrysostom, *Hom. 7 in Heb.* 3-4 (Field 7:96-97); De Wet, "Old Age," 51, 55-6.
[199] Chrysostom, *Hom. 7 in Heb.* 3 (Field 7:95); De Wet, "Old Age," 50-2.
[200] Chrysostom quotes from the book of Sirach (32:3 and 32:7-8) to support this argument (De Wet, "Old Age," 53).
[201] On the Hellenic and Orthodox aspects of Byzantine culture, see for instance Cameron, *Byzantine Matters*, esp. 1-5; Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*; Kaldellis, *Hellenism.*

and art. The second concept is rooted firmly in ascetic and monastic tradition and is thus explored in chapter 2 below through a focused analysis of monastic foundation documents and hagiographical literature.

"See The Golden Old Man": The Intellectual Prestige of the γέρων

Although the Homeric texts remained at the heart of the education system throughout the Byzantine millennium, the twelfth century witnessed an increasing level of engagement with the epic poems and with the figure of Homer as an author.[202] This is evidenced by Eustathios of Thessalonike's *Parekbolai* on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and Anna Komnene's aptly-named *Alexiad*.[203] For Theodore Prodromos and John Tzetzes, the figure of Homer represented the ideal author and played a vital role in the construction of their own authorial *personae*.[204] This section takes a closer look at Tzetzes' *Allegories of the Iliad*, with a particular focus on his appeals to the intellectual authority of Homer, and on the construction of old age within the narrative as a whole.

John Tzetzes' *Allegories of the Iliad* is one of several of the author's works that reinterprets and analyses classical texts.[205] In this text Tzetzes allegorises Homer's *Iliad* book-by-book, using a tripartite system of interpretation in keeping with ancient conventions: elementary, psychological and pragmatic.[206] In the process, Tzetzes also provides his own summaries of the key events and descriptions of the characters involved. Though for the most part he stays faithful to his source material, he also includes his own additions with reference to contemporary Byzantine society. For instance, the description of Paris-Alexander's upbringing incorporates details of a training program typical for a contemporary Byzantine prince, including riding, javelin-throwing and archery.[207] He also inserts himself into the text on

[202] Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 242-3.
[203] On Eustathios, see esp. van den Berg "Eustathios on Homer's Narrative," 129. On the use of Homer in the *Alexiad*, see for instance Neville, "Anna Komnene," 51.
[204] Cullhed, "The Blind Bard," 49-50, 60-7.
[205] As well as his commentary of the *Iliad*, Tzetzes wrote verse commentaries on the *Odyssey* and on Hesiod: Magdalino, *The Empire*, 350.
[206] An elementary interpretation explains the actions of the gods in relation to cosmological and meteorological forces; a psychological interpretation presents the gods as manifestations of the human psyche, with Zeus representing reason and so on; a pragmatic reading simply views the gods as men and women, functioning as characters in the text. Kazhdan, *Change*, 134.
[207] Kazhdan, *Change*, 134-5.

several occasions, including a lengthy physical description at one point in which he likens his appearance to that of Palamedes and Cato the Elder.[208]

One important feature of the *Allegories* is their change in patron midway through. The first fifteen books of the work were funded in instalments by empress Bertha-Eirene, and Tzetzes likely began their composition around the time of her arrival in Constantinople in 1142.[209] Whether due to a loss of interest or some other reason, the empress ceased to fund the work prior to its completion. In the introduction to book sixteen Tzetzes notes the change in patron to a certain Konstantinos Kotertzes, and from this point on the style of the work changes dramatically.[210] The first fifteen books were at least nominally composed with a view to introducing the Bavarian-born empress to a cornerstone of Greek literary culture, and therefore mostly consist of Tzetzes' summaries with some light allegorical readings.[211] The books that follow however are far more intellectually sophisticated, with a greater number of direct quotations from Homer, increasingly opaque allegorical interpretations and allusions to various ancient authors.[212]

The alignment of wisdom, poverty and old age forms a central part of Tzetzes' self-representation in his *Allegories of the Iliad*. In the *prolegomena*, Tzetzes begins with his account of the traditional *bios* information concerning Homer's final years:

> "He was impoverished and, having gone blind from old age,
>
> roamed through all the lands of Greece
>
> reciting his poems and being received with honor."[213]

Despite his supposedly honoured position, the Homer of this tradition dies blind, elderly and impoverished, by slipping in the mud and falling onto a rock.[214] Tzetzes' authorial relationship with Homer has been studied at length by Eric Cullhed, who suggests that such a presentation of Homer's *bios* narrative can be viewed in light of what Beaton termed the 'rhetoric of poverty'.[215] By drawing parallels between the tragically under-appreciated Homer, and the

[208] Tzetzes, "Allegories of the Iliad.", Prolegomena vv.724-39.
[209] Magdalino, *The Empire*, 350; Tzetzes, *Allegories*, introduction vii.
[210] Tzetzes, *Allegories*, introduction vii.
[211] Ibid., vii-viii.
[212] Ibid., *Allegories*, vii.
[213] Tzetzes, *Allegories*, Prolegomena vv.115-7, trans. Goldwyn, 11. On the literary traditions regarding Homer the poet, see Cullhed, "The Blind Bard," 53, 60.
[214] Tzetzes, *Allegories*, Prolegomena, vv.115-132; a similar tradition is alluded to in Theodore Prodromos' Lucianic parody, *Sale of Poetical and Political Lives*. Cullhed, "The Blind Bard," 53-4.
[215] Cullhed, "The Blind Bard," 56; Beaton, "The Rhetoric of Poverty," 3-4.

contemporary twelfth-century author searching fruitlessly for patronage, Tzetzes casts his authorial *persona* in the same mould as the blind poet of antiquity.[216] Such a self-representational strategy is especially significant given the context of oral performance and unregulated manuscript dissemination in which Tzetzes was writing.[217] Tzetzes' authorial identity is therefore largely formed through his representation of Homer, embracing as his own the latter's thankless literary genius and complete dependency on the generosity of others.

It is also revealing that Tzetzes' narrative style undergoes a noticeable transformation from Book XVI onwards, with the change in patron from Eirene to Kotertzes.[218] It is at this point that the figure of Homer starts to appear more regularly as the architect behind the meanings allegorised by Tzetzes. In Book XVI Tzetzes offers the following interpretation of Homer's use of words to convey hidden significance:

> "Now, you have learned exactly about my golden Homer,
>
> how using basic words in a rhetorical fashion
>
> he both tells the truth and laughs loudly.
>
> Foolish Patroklos, what are you saying? Speak as though to Tzetzes:
>
> if there were twenty Hektors somewhere without an army,
>
> they would not have killed all the Greeks by themselves."[219]

In this passage Tzetzes fully embraces a Homeric identity through the use of the possessive pronoun, and the implication that Homer was being playful and serious at the same time. In the following Books Tzetzes increasingly refers to Homer in his allegorical interpretations, lauding the poet's word play and his ability to infuse the text with double meanings. In Book XVIII for instance, Tzetzes comments:

> "A little later the old man, using most discreet wordplay,

[216] Cullhed, "The Blind Bard," 67. It is important to maintain a distinction between the historical author and their authorial *persona* as represented in the text. An uncritical conflation of the two may lead to an overly literal interpretation. Recent scholarship on the authorial *personae* of twelfth-century authors as well as their texts' articulation of patronage relationships has by contrast yielded many valuable insights. See for example, Alexiou, "The Poverty of Écriture," 2-5; Beaton, "The Rhetoric of Poverty", 3-7; Cullhed, "The Blind Bard," 56-60; Panagiotis A Agapitos, "New Genres in the Twelfth Century: The Schedourgia of Theodore Prodromos," *Medioevo greco* 15, no. 1 (2015)., 3; Nilsson, *Writer and Occasion*, 106-8.
[217] Cullhed, "The Blind Bard," 50.
[218] Tzetzes, *Allegories*, XVI vv.1-7.
[219] Tzetzes, *Allegories*, XVI vv.346-51, trans. Goldwyn, 313.

speaks of the twelvefold zodiac, ‘elders’ sitting

‘on hewn,’ that is solid, ‘stones in the sacred circle.’”[220]

In the same Book, Homer is again lauded for his literary play in similar terms:

“See the golden old man, how he here plays his way through the whole!”[221]

The continued emphasis on Homer’s capacity for playfulness carries a particular significance in the context of twelfth-century literary production. The idea that the old poet might demonstrate his literary erudition through witty play is reminiscent of an often-quoted line from the *proemion* of the first *Ptochoprodromic* poem:

“For old men too can play, albeit more wisely so.”[222]

The five *Ptochoprodromic* poems are one of the most controversial and illuminating bodies of literature that have survived from the twelfth century.[223] Although the precise authorship of each text remains a matter for debate, there is a broad consensus in more recent scholarship concerning the nature of the pieces. Rather than being seen as an example of Greek literary expression from below, many modern scholars agree that the *Ptochoprodromica* represent a playful exercise in role play or a kind of *ethopoiia*.[224] This emphasis on the playfulness of twelfth-century literary discourse has led also to an increasing interest in the *schedos,* a type of cryptic school-room exercise that demonstrably came to play a larger role in the literary

[220] Tzetzes, *Allegories,* XVIII vv.703-5, trans. Goldwyn, 383.
[221] Tzetzes, *Allegories,* XVIII v.775, trans. Goldwyn, 389.
[222] *Poèmes prodromiques en grec vulgaire* I.11, ed. Hesseling and Pernot: “παίζουσι γὰρ καὶ γέροντες, ἀλλὰ σωφρονεστέρως”, trans. Markéta Kulhánková, "“For Old Men Too Can Play, Albeit More Wisely So”: The Game of Discourses in the Ptochoprodromika," in *Satire in the Middle Byzantine Period: The Golden Age of Laughter?*, ed. Przemyslaw Marciniak and Ingela Nilsson (Boston: Brill, 2021)., 304. On the playfulness of the *Ptochoprodromic* poems, see also Margaret Alexiou, "Ploys of Performance: Games and Play in the Ptochoprodromic Poems," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999).; Beaton, “The Rhetoric of Poverty”.
[223] The debates over the authorship of the *Ptochoprodromica* have revolved around interpretations of textual evidence as well as questions of metre and the supposed disjunction between learned and vernacular Greek, see Alexiou, “The Poverty of Écriture,” 1-4; Marjolijne C Janssen and Marc D Lauxtermann, "Authorship Revisited: Language and Metre in the Ptochoprodromika," in *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond*, ed. Teresa Shawcross and Ida Toth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)., 558-561; Agapitos, “New Genres,” 4-5; Jeffreys, “A Twelfth-Century Perspective,” 128. On the inclusion of the so-called Maiuri poem as the fifth *Ptochoprodromic* poem, see Janssen, “Authorship Revisited,” 560-1; Agapitos, “New Genres,” 4-5; Nilsson, *Writer and Occasion,* 109; Kulhankova, “For Old Men Too Can Play”, 305-6.
[224] Janssen and Lauxtermann for instance have explored the significance of the prefix *ptocho-* in Byzantine literature prior to the twelfth century, suggesting that it in fact signifies a comedic reversal in authorial persona, Janssen, “Authorship Revisited,” 560-2. On *ethopoiia*, see for instance Ivan Drpić, *Epigram, Art, and Devotion in Later Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016)., esp. 89-92.

innovations of the period.[225] In light of this scholarship, this line from the *Ptochoprodromic* poem or the playfulness of Tzetzes' Homer can be understood as an indication that wits and guile were essential tools in the arsenal of the ideal author. In ancient and Byzantine Greek the verb παίζω ('I play' or 'I joke') was closely linked with childhood and children (παῖς) as well as education (παιδεία).[226] Thus the idea of an old man playing or joking was in some sense oxymoronic, imbuing the line from the *Ptochoprodromica* with a certain playful energy in its own right.[227] It also serves as a further indication of the influence of the witty intellectual games of παιδεία in broader twelfth-century literary discourse.[228]

Tzetzes' Homer is thus constructed in such a way as to exhibit the most desirable accolades of a contemporary rhetor, being an old man who is both wise and playful. This archetypal identity often subsumes the individual authorial identity of Homer. Although the poet is sometimes referred to by name, in the latter section of the work he is often identified by the title γέρων ὁ χρυσοῦς ('golden old man') or simply as the γέρων ('old man').[229] In all of these cases Homer is brought into the text on account of his supposed use of allegory and word play, for which Tzetzes frequently praises him, celebrating in the process his own literary and interpretative achievement. A good example of this is in Book XXIII, when Tzetzes allegorises Homer's reference to the food and drink of the gods:

> "For old oil, just like salt,
>
> heals wounds, and preserves them from decay.
>
> For that reason this all-wise old man calls
>
> oil ambrosial and salt divine."[230]

[225] Agapitos, "New Genres," 7-14; Agapitos, "Blemish Examiners," 2. On literary playfulness more broadly, see for instance Nilsson, "The Past as Poetry," esp. 524, 529-30.
[226] LSJ, παίζω.
[227] The association between old men (γέροντες) and children (παῖδες) is conceptually not far removed from the popular aphorism that old age is like a second childhood, attested in Plato, *Leges*, Steph. 646a, 4-5 ("ὁ γέρων δὶς παῖς γίγνοιτ' ἄν") and *Spuria*, Steph. 367b, 6-7 ("δὶς παῖδες οἱ γέροντες"). The latter saying became especially popular and resurfaced in the works of later authors. See Tim Parkin, "The Elderly Children of Greece and Rome," in *On Old Age: Approaching Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (2011)., 26-32.
[228] Compare for instance Theodore Prodromos' efforts to introduce the *schedos* to contexts of performance beyond the schoolroom, *Ioannis Vassis, "Graeca Sunt, Non Leguntur. Zu Den Schedographischen Spielereien Des Theodoros Prodromos," (1994).*, 13-14; Agapitos, "New Genres," 14.
[229] Tzetzes, *Allegories*, XVIII vv.703, 775, XX vv.64, 270, 369, XI vv.182, 237, 282, XXIII vv.43, 73.
[230] Tzetzes, *Allegories*, XXIII vv.41-44, trans. Goldwyn, 481.

At another point, in Book XXI, Tzetzes specifies that Homer is distinguished by his composition and use of words, describing him as:

> "[t]his old man, skilled at composition, he who surpasses every orator and philosopher and the others whose work is words...".[231]

Evidently the continuous emphasis on the poet's old age is not simply a reflection of the 'rhetoric of poverty', as exemplified in the *bios* information in the *prolegomena*. Rather the construction of Homer's identity as that of an ideal γέρων draws on ideas about the intellectual authority of the aged. This intellectual authority derives in part from the common conception of the elderly as repositories of knowledge and wisdom. A useful comparison may be made with the preface of Niketas Choniates' history, composed around the turn of the thirteenth century:

> "Let no one be so mad as to believe that there is anything more pleasurable than history. Decrepit old men, more ancient than Tithonos and thrice a crow's age, familiar with the record of the past, related these things to willing audiences, kindling the fires of their memories and ploughing the furrows of the past. He who loves learning, even though he be but an adolescent, proposes to do the same thing."[232]

According to Choniates the craft of the historian, much like Tzetzes' art of composition, was the domain of old men with extensive experience of life and deep memories from which to draw. Younger intellectuals aspiring to pursue learning to the same degree must then attempt to embody the wisdom and breadth of knowledge associated with advanced age. The infallibility of Tzetzes' Homer rests largely on his presentation as a wise old man, and his identification with this figure thus secures some of Homer's wisdom for Tzetzes himself.

Given the highly technical and intellectual content of the latter part of Tzetzes' work, the much closer engagement with the figure of Homer can perhaps be seen as part of a more concerted effort at literary self-aggrandisement. Tzetzes' authorial and interpretative legitimacy then rests largely on his interaction and association with the figure of Homer. This figure is presented as intellectually superior and wise, capable of effortless modulation in tone between sobriety and playfulness. To this end, the constructed persona of Homer is defined as a γέρων, attaching

[231] Tzetzes, *Allegories*, XXI vv.182-4, trans. Goldwyn, 449.
[232] Choniates, *History*, 2, trans. Harry J Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniatēs* (Wayne State University Press, 1984)., 3.

connotations of wisdom and intellectual authority to Tzetzes' authorial identity, as well as ensuring continuity with the depiction of the poor old poet in the *prolegomena*.

The impression of the normative intellectual superiority of old men that emerges from the construction of Tzetzes' Homer is corroborated by the literary output of Tzetzes' twelfth-century peers. Theodore Prodromos in particular composed a number of satirical texts directed against old men whose philosophical reputation rests more on surface-level appearances than on genuine wisdom.[233] As argued by Marciniak, the old men in these texts were unlikely based directly on real historical figures, but rather represent archetypal opponents in a context in which λογικοὶ ἀγῶνες, or contests between grammarians, had become standard since the eleventh century.[234] Prodromos' arguments against the assumed intellectual authority of ragged old men should therefore be read as general rather than specific. These texts reveal a frustration that was undoubtedly heightened for rhetorical effect, yet this effectiveness implies the general acceptance of a norm in which the trappings of wisdom were often equated with intellectual legitimacy. The aesthetics of old age were a central component of these signifiers of wisdom.

Visualising Holy Authority: Popular Religion and Ecclesiastical Hierarchy

The notion of spiritual authority on earth in Byzantium was closely tied to the ideals of old age, if not necessarily to a long life.[235] This section explores this connection through two types of spiritual authority: the idealised holiness of the saints, and the more mundane hierarchies of monastic life.

The extreme age of many saints according to hagiographical tradition and the use of the παῖς γέρων *topos* have already been noted above.[236] A further illustration of the link between old age and spiritual authority is the age at which holy men and women earned their saintly reputation in hagiographical literature.[237] The author of the ninth-century *Life* of Theodora of

[233] These texts are discussed in greater detail below, see p.152.
[234] Przemyslaw T Marciniak, "Of False Philosophers and Inept Teachers: Theodore Prodromos' Satirical Writings (with a Translation of the Poem against the Old Man with a Long Beard)," *Βυζαντινά Σύμμεικτα* (2020)., 136.
[235] For the sake of practicality, my definition of spiritual authority is more generalised than the one proposed by Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity (University of California Press, 2013)., 56-7. The term is used in this thesis to refer to religious authority of various hues that separated certain individuals from the ordinary laity, including both members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the saints.
[236] See above, p.34.
[237] See Davies, "Age, Gender and Status," 167-9.

Thessalonike mentions the saint's age of 68 years following the death of her extremely old superior Anna, and it is at this point in the narrative that Theodora is first presented as a paragon of sanctity in her own right.[238] In fact, as Eve Davies argues, the majority of saints performed their most important deeds in life after reaching the age of around 50, suggesting that acts performed in old age were imbued with a greater level of spiritual significance.[239]

Old age and asceticism were not the only means of attaining holiness of the highest order in Byzantine tradition however. The principal alternative route was through martyrdom, thereby denying the saint a natural death at the end of a long life. The number of new martyrs decreased significantly following the formal establishment of Christianity within the Roman Empire, though the Iconoclast period provided a number of martyrs and resulted in a revival of interest in the composition of hagiography in the ninth century.[240] In the same period hagiographies emerged celebrating female married saints, including the martyred Mary the Younger, whose *Life* can be dated to the tenth or eleventh century.[241] Despite the lack of new martyrs, the Middle Byzantine period saw a surge of interest in the early Christian military saints such as St. George, St. Merkourios, the two Theodores, St. Demetrios and St. Procopius, many of whom were also martyrs.[242] This manifested itself most evidently in monumental art from the tenth century, in which military saints were treated increasingly as a unified group, and many were adopted as patrons by aristocratic families.[243]

The spiritual authority of the holy martyrs was noticeably distinct from that belonging to other kinds of saint in hagiographical literature. In the *Passio* of St. Merkourios for instance, the saint is characterised chiefly by his military prowess, his *parrhesia* and his youthful beauty.[244] Similarly, St. George was celebrated for his beauty as a young man, while St. Perpetua earned the martyr's crown through a struggle that was expressed in martial and highly masculinised language.[245] This youthful virility stands in stark contrast to the bodily denial of the ascetics, or the aged severity of holy bishops and monastic founders. The form of holiness exhibited by

[238] Alice-Mary Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, vol. 1 (Dumbarton Oaks, 1996)., 162; *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike*, in Talbot, *Holy Women*, 39-41.
[239] Davies, "Age, Gender and Status," 167.
[240] Stephanos Efthymiadis, "Collections of Miracles (Fifth-Fifteenth Centuries)," *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography* 2 (2014)., 119.
[241] Talbot, *Holy Women*, 242-3.
[242] Christopher Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Routledge, 2016)., 2-4.
[243] Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 4.
[244] Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les Légendes Grecques Des Saints Militaires* (Cambridge University Press, 2017). Appendix IX.7; c.f. Appendix X.7.
[245] Paul Halsall, "Women's Bodies, Men's Souls: Sanctity and Gender in Byzantium" (Fordham University, 1999)., 124-7; Myrto Hatzaki, *Beauty and the Male Body in Byzantium: Perceptions and Representations in Art and Text* (Springer, 2009)., esp. 132.

the early Christian martyrs was also usually unlearned in nature, and was bestowed upon the saint by divine revelation and subsequent willingness to die for their belief rather than the performance of miracles or feats of asceticism.[246] Holiness in the broadest sense therefore did not require an aged body or mind. Nonetheless, advanced age was often used to grant sanctity or religious authority to figures depicted in hagiographical literature and art, as is demonstrated by the two following case studies.

The cult of St. Photeine flourished widely in the Byzantine empire and beyond between the tenth and twelfth centuries, and thus provides both textual and visual evidence for the depiction of this popular saint during the period under discussion.[247] Photeine was a legendary figure identified in Byzantine accounts with the Samaritan woman with whom Christ spoke at Jacob's well.[248] She was thought to have preached Christianity in Carthage or Palestine before facing martyrdom in Rome under the emperor Nero, although her cult seems to have developed primarily in Greece and especially Constantinople.[249] True to her name (lit. 'the shining one'), textual evidence indicates that Photeine specialised in curing eye diseases and blindness, which were carried out at her shrines in Constantinople.[250]

The multiple surviving versions of St. Photeine's *Life* attest to the continued popularity of her cult. These include a short *Passio* whose composition can be dated only approximately between the sixth or seventh centuries and the tenth century, and several shorter *menologia*, including two imperial *menologia* of the eleventh century.[251] The author of a longer *Passio* presents two alternative accounts of Photeine's death, positing that she either died in prison or that she was released and lived into an extreme old age.[252] The text that forms the basis of discussion here is the *Inventio et Miracula*, which can be dated on the basis of internal evidence to the eleventh or twelfth century.[253] This collection of miracles is preserved in a single fourteenth-century

[246] Merkourios for instance converts after a dream in which he is visited by an angel, Delehaye, *Légendes Grecques*, Appendix IX.5. On recurring patterns in traditions of the early Christian martyrs, see Jan Willem van Henten, "Early Jewish and Christian Martyrdom," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom*, ed. Paul Middleton (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2020)., esp. 73.
[247] Alice-Mary Talbot and A Kazhdan, "The Byzantine Cult of St. Photeine," in *Presence of Byzantium : Studies Presented to Milton V. Anastos in Honor of His Eighty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Andrew Roy Dyck and Takacs Sarolta (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1994)., esp. 109-10.
[248] Talbot, "The Byzantine Cult," 103; John 4:8-26.
[249] Talbot, "The Byzantine Cult," 103-5.
[250] For instance, Alice-Mary Talbot, "The Posthumous Miracles of St. Photeine," *Analecta Bollandiana* 112, no. 1-2 (1994)., 90, see also 85; Talbot, "The Byzantine Cult," 105.
[251] *BHG* 1541-1541g; Talbot, "The Byzantine Cult," 103-5, 112.
[252] Talbot, "The Byzantine Cult," 105-6.
[253] *BHG* 1541m.

manuscript and describes a series of posthumous miracles performed at Photeine's healing shrines in Constantiople.[254]

The narrative of the *Inventio et Miracula* incorporates several dream-visions experienced by those seeking the saint's help. One of these visions offers a tantalising glimpse into the portrait type of the saint as imagined by her Constantinopolitan cult, and provides a useful point of comparison with extant contemporary visual material.[255] Saints who lived to a ripe old age could theoretically be depicted at any stage of their life course and thus the age at which their portrait type became fixed illustrates the stage in the life course that epitomised the holy figure's spiritual agency.[256] The age that encapsulated that particular agency was usually determined by the class to which the saint belonged in the case of male saints, while most female saints were shown as young women.[257] Therefore it is significant that Photeine's venerable old age is emphasised on one of the few occasions in which her appearance is described. In one passage the saint's appearance is presented in the form of an *ekphrasis* when the saint appears in a dream before a certain citizen of Constantinople called Abraamios, who has lost his eyesight due to an epidemic:

> "…the vision was of a woman who was already elderly and aged and quite advanced in years, wearing a garment of linen, with a pleasant and charming face. She seemed to carry a large candle, and touched his eyes and said in a cheerful voice: 'Blind men, recover your sight, and those who are in darkness, receive the light; for behold, through me, the perfume-bearing martyr Photeine, Christ will grant light to your darkened eyes and will bring an end to your affliction and relieve your suffering....'"[258]

The main features of the saint's appearance here are her advanced age, which is expressed elaborately with three effectively synonymous expressions, her linen garment (στολή), and her

[254] MS Florence, Bibliotheca Nationalis Centralis gr. 50; Talbot, "The Byzantine Cult," 103, 110.
[255] On the theologically important belief that visions of saints should be recognisable from their visual portraits, since the latter were true likenesses of the holy figure, see Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton University Press Princeton, 1996)., 5-7.
[256] An interesting example of this in practice can be seen in the *Life* of Theodora of Thessalonike, in which the saint is miraculously painted posthumously in a perfect likeness of herself as a younger woman, despite living to an extreme old age (*Life of Theodora*, 54). This younger portrait type is supported by visual evidence, as the earliest surviving image of Theodora presents her as a young woman, in an eleventh-century fresco in Hagia Sophia in Thessalonike (Talbot, *Holy Women*, 210-11, and 211 n.253).
[257] Maguire, *The Icons*, 16.
[258] Trans. Talbot, "The Posthumous Miracles," 90. *Inventio et Miracula*, 3.67-75: ἡ δὲ ὄψις γύναιον ἦν γηραλέον ἤδη καὶ ἔξωρον καὶ ὅλον ὑπερηβηκός, στολὴν ἐκ μέσου ἠμφιεσμένον, προσηνὲς τὴν θέαν καὶ χαρίεν. Τοῦτο ἐδόκει λαμπάδα ὁρᾶν, τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν τε αὐτοῦ ἅψασθαι καὶ εἰπεῖν ἱλαρᾷ τῇ φωνῇ· «Οἱ τυφλοί, ἀναβλέψατε· καὶ οἱ ἐσκοτισμένοι, φωτίσθητε· ἰδοὺ γὰρ δι' ἐμοῦ τῆς μυροφόρου καὶ μάρτυρος Φωτεινῆς τὰς ὄψεις ὑμῶν ἀμαυρωθείσας φωτίζει Χριστὸς καὶ καταπαύει τὸν πόνον καὶ κουφίζει τὰς ὀδύνας.

generally kind (προσηνής) and beautiful (χαρίεις) appearance. This emphasis on the beauty of her elderly appearance is strikingly different from the dichotomy between youthful beauty and wrinkled old age that appears in much secular literature from the period. This holy beauty perhaps reflects a gendered dimension of Photeine's sanctity.[259]

The details included in this brief *ekphrasis* suggest an adherence to an existing portrait type, of an elderly woman perhaps holding a candle. Surviving later Byzantine examples from Crete do not align with the details of her *ekphrasis*. In cases where her portrait has survived in good condition, Photeine appears with grey-brown hair in contrast to the white hair and more pronounced wrinkles of other female saints, such as St. Marina. In the surviving Cretan examples, Photeine is instead distinguished by her white kerchief and a cross held in her hand.[260] This portrait type is consistent with post-Byzantine Orthodox icons of the saint.[261] This discrepancy is somewhat surprising given the considerable emphasis on Photeine's aged appearance in the *Inventio et Miracula*, and perhaps suggests a distinctly Middle Byzantine or Constantinopolitan trend in her representation.

Artistic trends of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries brought with them new ways of visualising saints in contrast to the established portrait types fixed at a specific point in the saint's life course. One of the most significant developments on this front was the emergence of the *vita* icon, a visual embodiment of a saint that incorporated the varying states adopted by

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Collins, Kristen and Robert Nelson. *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007, 174.

Fig.1- Eustratios Beam, Panel 1

[259] Many female saints were celebrated in hagiographical literature for possessing inner as well as worldly beauty, see for instance the *Life* of Mary the Younger, 2 in Talbot, *Holy Women*. Cf. especially the description of Theodora of Thessalonike's elderly face exhibiting a holy beauty in death, *Life* of Theodora, 43.
[260] Ioannis Spatharakis, "Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete: Rethymnon Province.," (London: Pindar Press, 1999)., *Byzantine Wall Paintings in Crete*, vol. 1, 342; vol. 2, 328; vol. 3, 274.
[261] See for example an icon of Photeine at http://full-of-grace-and-truth.blogspot.com/2009/08/relics-of-st-photini-in-constantinople.html (image taken from http://www.eikonografos.com/).

the holy figure during and after their lifetime.[262] This phenomenon helps to contextualise a particular anomalous work of hagiographical iconography preserved at mount Sinai, known as the Eustratios templon beam (Fig.1).[263] This beam depicts ten posthumous miracles carried out by St. Eustratios, one of the Five Martyrs of Sebasteia who were martyred under the reign of Diocletian.[264] The beam's decoration is dated to the twelfth century, although the evidence for the origins of the painter is inconclusive.[265]

In three of the scenes depicted on the beam, patients suffering from madness, brain fever and tetanus respectively are cured by means of St. Eustratios' reliquary. As noted by Ševčenko, in three other scenes depicting the curing of female patients from fever, uterine infection and paralysis, the reliquary is not involved in the process, implying a lesser degree of access to the saint's relics for women.[266] In the three scenes in which the reliquary is present, it is carried by an apparently recurring figure in the form

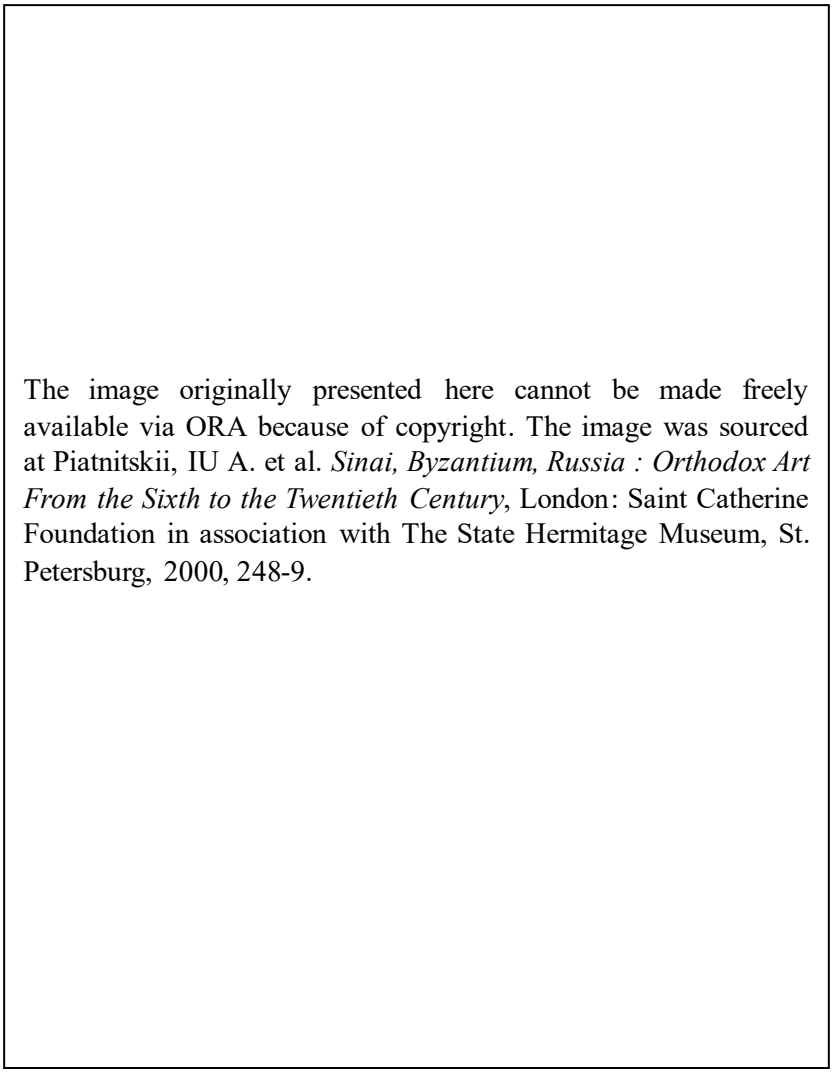

Fig. 2- Detail of Eustratios Beam, Scene 5

[262] Chatterjee, *The Living Icon in Byzantium and Italy: The Vita Image, Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries*., 86.
[263] Chatterjee, *The Living Icon*, 81; Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, "The Posthumous Miracles of St. Eustratios on a Sinai Templon Beam," in *Byzantine Religious Culture : Studies in Honor of Alice-Mary Talbot*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012)., 268.
[264] Ševčenko, "The Posthumous Miracles," 267.
[265] See Ševčenko, "The Posthumous Miracles," 278-82, who concludes from a discussion of the clothing depicted that the artist must have hailed from a context familiar with an Islamic weaving technique that was distinct from most contemporary Byzantine textiles.
[266] Ševčenko, "The Posthumous Miracles," 272-3.

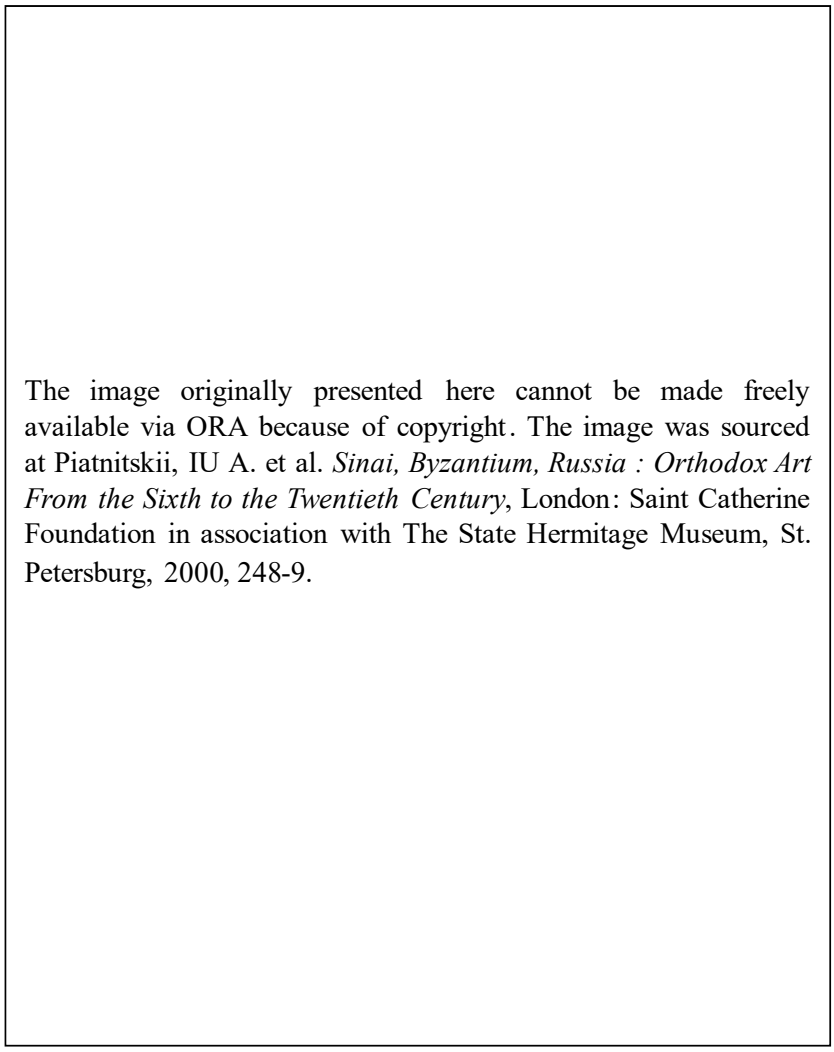

Fig. 3- Detail of Eustratios Beam, Scene 12

of an old man, wearing a white tunic with a brown *clavi* and a brown mantle. The figure's clothing suggests that he should be identified as a monk or priest.[267] In scene 3 the patient is led by a youth holding a rope while another young man watches the events unfold. In scene 5 the sleeping patient and the elderly man holding the reliquary are watched by four young men in the background (Fig.2). In scene 12 the man suffering from tetanus is treated by the old man holding the reliquary while another old man behind the young patient points to the miracle, with all figures aside from the bearer of the reliquary dressed in plain tunics (Fig.3). In all three images the place of honour is granted to the elderly ecclesiastical figure carrying the reliquary, through which the miracles are performed. His importance within the image, and by extension his right to hold the holy relics, are underlined by his clothing and his age, both of which serve to distinguish him from the surrounding figures. The close association between ecclesiastical rank and advanced age seems clear.

This association is further demonstrated by a brief but revealing passage from Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*, during her narration of the events leading up to the seizure of the throne by Alexios and Isaac Komnenos. On approaching the city, the brothers come across a figure with prophetic powers who is given the following description:

[267] Ševčenko, "The Posthumous Miracles," 269-272.

> "As he approached them bareheaded he had the appearance of a priest, white-haired, rough-bearded."[268]

This comment suggests that for Anna's audience, ecclesiastical office was associated with two primary physical characteristics: an unkempt beard, signifying masculinity and physical maturity, and white hair, indicating advanced age.[269]

Perhaps the most illuminating textual source for the interaction of age and seniority in the religious sphere may be found in the form of contemporary monastic *typika*. A brief survey of the surviving foundation documents composed in the twelfth century reveals that advanced age was expected to function as a preferential factor but that it was rarely structurally legitimised. For instance, intellect, virtue, wisdom and experience are consistently emphasised as the main criteria for the selection of a new superior, but age is not explicitly mentioned in this regard.[270] In fact, on several occasions the *typika* warn against taking excessive pride in seniority, which might cause a nun or monk to seek the seat of honour at table, or to attempt to usurp the office of superior.[271] These egalitarian norms form an integral part of the coenobitic ideals expressed by the monasteries' foundation documents.[272] The assumption that special deference should be owed to the oldest in the community perhaps had its origins in lay society, in which village elders played an important role in everyday life.[273] On other occasions the *typika* accept that a greater level of esteem might be granted to older monastics, as the superior could override the customary seating order if a monk was worthy of respect on account of either old age or social class in their life beyond the monastery.[274] Older nuns in particular were to be trusted with chaperoning wealthy younger nuns during excursions beyond the convent: a fact that likely had

[268] Alexiad, II.7, trans. ERA Sewter and P Frankopan, "Anna Komnene, Alexiad," (Penguin London, 2009)., 67.
[269] On the beard, masculinity and maturity in Byzantium, see Tougher, *Bearding Byzantium: Masculinity, Eunuchs and the Byzantine Life Course*., esp. 162-3.
[270] See for instance Thomas, Hero, and Constable, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents : A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments*., St. Mamas, trans. Anastasius Bandy, 1; Kecharitomene, trans. Robert Jordan, 11.
[271] Thomas, *Foundation Documents*, St. Mamas, 36; Kecharitomene, 12. C.f. *"Life of St. Athanasios of Athos," in Vitae duae antiquae sancti Athanasii Athonitae, ed. J. Noret (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982).*, 58.1, in which the author expresses concern over monastic superiors who place their own pursuit of rank and status above respect for the 'traditional elders'.
[272] See Thomas, *Foundation Documents*, 862-64; On the origins of coenobitic monasticism, see Alice-Mary Talbot, *Varieties of Monastic Experience in Byzantium, 800-1453* (University of Notre Dame Pess, 2019)., 2.
[273] Laiou, *The Byzantine Economy*, 101.
[274] Thomas, *Foundation Documents*, St. Mamas, 36.

as much to do with older men and women's assumed resilience to sexual temptations as with the respect garnered by advanced age.[275]

The evidence presented in this section suggests that the aesthetics of old age were one of the ways in which holiness or spiritual authority could be conveyed in twelfth-century Byzantium. This is not to say that ageing was necessarily a prerequisite for holiness, or even a condition for greater spiritual authority in the ecclesiastical sphere. Nevertheless, the image of the aged holy man or woman remained potent in popular religion, glimpsed through the contemporary evolution of the cult of saints. At the same time, the very real connection between age and experience inevitably resulted in a continued association between advanced age and authority within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The rank and dignity normatively assigned to elders was not limited to the ecclesiastical world however, as the warnings of the *typika* against taking pride in seniority indicate. The following section turns to a broader discussion of seniority, age and gender in relation to secular power and authority in the twelfth century.

Secular Authority: Age and Power in Elite Society

The preferential treatment of elders that was anticipated by monks and nuns of the period is indicative of broader tension surrounding age and authority in Middle Byzantium. One way in which this tension can be glimpsed is through the relationship between seniority and imperial succession. Although the process of succession was never legally formalised in Byzantium, the majority of rulers sought to pass on the sceptre to their eldest male child.[276] Failing this, the throne might pass without controversy to a member of the imperial family related by blood or marriage.[277] Under the Komnenian dynasty the assumed right of seniority in the succession of imperial children came under strain on more than one occasion. One of the most illuminating is the accession of Manuel I, who seized power upon the death of his father John II in 1143.

[275] Thomas, *Foundation Documents*, Kecharitomene, 4. On the assumed role of the ageing process in lessening sexual desire, see below, pp.86-7.
[276] On imperial succession in Byzantium, see G. *Gilbert Dagron, Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium (Cambridge University Press, 2003).*; on succession in the reign of the Komnenoi, see Alexander D Beihammer, "Comnenian Imperial Succession and the Ritual World of Niketas Choniates's Chronike Diegesis," in *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. Alexander D Beihammer, Stravroula Constantinou, and Maria Parani (Leiden: Brill, 2013).
[277] A good example of this informal system can be seen in the case of the Macedonian dynasty, with the elderly Constantine VIII succeeding his brother Basil II in 1025, and his daughter Zoe legitimising through marriage and adoption the reigns of Romanos III, Michael IV, Michael V and Constantine IX, as well as briefly enjoying her own reign alongside her sister Theodora in 1042.

The court historian John Kinnamos provides one account of the accession of Manuel, and at a key point in the narrative he places a speech in the mouth of the dying John II in an effort to justify Manuel's status as successor over his elder brother Isaac:

> "But good sense rejects the elder and pursues the better, and teaches that excellence corresponds to excellence. Of all things this struggle is difficult, to try to obtain the best. Since one must assign the better part to the best person (for what else would one esteem more honorable than empire?), I would wish, fellow soldiers, that perfection of excellence rather belonged to the elder. But the decision looks towards the youngest, and the empire's standard of excellence points rather to the latest-born."[278]

The purpose of this rhetoric is to present Manuel's accession as legitimate, thereby constructing a narrative that attempts to conceal his shaky grasp of power in the early years of his reign.[279] In order to achieve this, the assumed right of seniority must be challenged by the idea that the most suitable candidate for the throne is simply the best, not necessarily the eldest. Even in this instance however, Kinnamos' John II upholds the right of seniority as an ideal, expressing the wish that the eldest candidate would also be the best qualified for the role. Seniority is therefore presented as one factor to be taken into consideration rather than a custom with the force of a law, as in the case of primogeniture in the Latinate Middle Ages.

In Niketas Choniates' historical retelling of the event, the author offers a version of the same speech that grapples more directly with the problem at hand:

> "For God does not look at the outward appearance as man does, nor does he award public offices because of advanced years, as one devoted to grey hair and old age, but, rejoicing in the nobility of soul, he looks upon the meek and the gentle and upon him who keeps his commandments. Accordingly, therefore, conceding little to Nature, the arbiter, and shunning her ordinances like the counsels of a narrow-minded woman in matters of vital concern, I prefer instead to emulate God, who is above every respect of persons."[280]

[278] Kinnamos, *History*, I, trans. Charles Brand, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus* (Columbia University Press, 1976)., 29.
[279] The insecurity of Manuel's early reign is hinted at by his imprisonment of both his older brother and uncle in the Pantokrator monastery, as argued by Bourbouhakis, *Not Composed*, 30.
[280] Choniates, *Historia*, 44, trans. Magoulias.

Here the speaker John is made to conceptualise the decision to favour the younger of his sons as a contest between the will of God and Nature.[281] This accommodates the established norm that those with grey hair and advanced years are 'naturally' deserving of recognition in the public sphere, while arguing for the alternative in the name of the greater authority of God. Interestingly here preference for advanced years or the privilege afforded to seniors is expressed in terms of devotion to old age specifically. This devotion is shown to be surface-level in contrast to God's focus on the individual's character; a criticism that can be seen echoed in much satirical literature of the twelfth century.

Another interesting aspect of this passage is its use of gender to discredit Nature's "ordinances". The image of the dying emperor turning a deaf ear to the entreaties of a woman strongly echoes Choniates' narration of the succession struggle following the death of Alexios I. John II Komnenos was himself a younger claimant to the throne in competition with his older sister Anna. Choniates' narrative does much to implicitly justify Alexios' preference for John over his elder daughter and her husband Nikephoros Bryennios by depicting their advocate Empress Eirene through the misogynist stereotype of an irrational and nagging wife.[282] In the depiction of both generations then, the 'natural' order with its elevation of seniority is presented as feminine and irrational when compared to the selection of the most virtuous candidate, irrespective of or perhaps despite their age.

From the analysis so far, it is clear that seniority carried a certain normative weight in the context of succession, but this phenomenon must be viewed separately from the relationship between old age and political authority. The expectations surrounding seniority were based on the age of an individual relative to another, having little to no connection to the place of that individual within their life course. Whether the individuals in question were youths or extremely old had no bearing on their claim to the rights of seniority. Choniates' account of the succession of Manuel Komnenos is unusual in linking seniority with old age, and implies wider assumptions about the role of the elderly in positions of political authority. The remainder of this section explores three aspects of the relationship between the life course and social and political power. Firstly, contemporary family power dynamics are discussed through

[281] The concept of God and Nature as the driving forces behind normative practice is reminiscent of early Byzantine legal rhetoric as witnessed in the *corpus iuris civilis* and can be traced back to the works of Cicero, Gaius and Ulpian. See for instance Justinian, *Institutes*, 1.2.11; Cicero, *De Re Publica*, III.22; *Institutes of Gaius*, 1.1.1; see also Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, *The Making of a Christian Empire: Lactantius & Rome* (Cornell University Press, 2000)., 47; Jill Harries, *Imperial Rome Ad 284 to 363: The New Empire* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012)., 791.
[282] Choniates, *Historia*, 5-6.

analysis of the ideal elite family as presented in the Komnenian novels and *Digenis Akritis*. The second section deals with the role of old age and wisdom in the construction of idealised rulership as conveyed by advice literature and an imperial funerary oration by Eustathios of Thessaloniki. The final section considers the interaction of gender and age in the formation and legitimisation of power.

The importance of the nuclear family in Byzantine society from the sixth century onwards has long been noted by scholars.[283] Understanding the relationships between parents and children is therefore integral to understanding power relationships in Byzantium. This is particularly relevant for the Komnenian era given the role that family connections increasingly performed in the political life of the ruling elite.[284] The romance of *Digenis Akritis* and the Komnenian novels provide an opportunity to examine the ideals lying behind the filial relationships of the period. All four of the texts that have survived in full fundamentally tell stories about the departure of young aristocratic men and women from their parental households and ultimately the creation of their own nuclear family. The focus of the narratives on such a liminal moment in the life course of their protagonists reveals the extent as well as the limits of normative filial devotion and the authority exercised by parents.

The Komnenian novels make it clear that people belonging to different age groups could expect to interact with society in a different manner. The separate interests of the groups are expressed in a truism offered by a fragment from Manasses' novel *Aristandros and Kallithea*:

> "Contemporaries appeal to contemporaries, they say; so a girl responds to a girl,
> a crone three times older than a crow to a crone and an aged man to an old one."[285]

In contrast to the erotic adventures of the protagonists, their aged parents are consistently presented in contexts connected with legal practices, or the respectful articulation of religious and social customs.[286] Given the impeccably noble stock of the protagonists and their parents, these normative roles must be understood as an ideal for the elderly among the highest echelons

[283] A Kazhdan, "Small Social Groupings (Microstructures) in Byzantine Society," *XVI. Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress, Akten* 11 (1982)., 3-10; Laiou, *The Byzantine Economy*, 18. See also Christine Angelidi, "Family Ties, Bonds of Kinship (9th–11th Centuries)," in *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. Pamela Armstrong (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013)., esp. 158.
[284] Magdalino, *The Empire*, 180-1.
[285] *Aristandros and Kallithea*, Fragment 18: 1.55-56 Hr = 20-21 Ma, trans. Jeffreys; for the motif of the longevity of crows, see Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 10.14, cited in Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 287 n25.
[286] For the legal authority of the aged elite, see Kraton's instigation of his son's trial by fire in *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, I.358-383; for a religious role see the parents' excursions to the temple of Zeus in *Hysmine and Hysminias*, esp. VI.10.1.

of society. As such, these elderly figures are consistently integral to the performance of the ritualised mores of the novels.[287] The correlation between age and concerns of this nature is made explicit in a passage from Makrembolites' novel *Hysmine and Hysminias*, in which the protagonists' fathers compete to bestow on each other the formal honour of drinking first from the cup:

> "So the time for drinking sent out its summons and a slight struggle broke out between Sosthenes and Themisteus, our fathers, not a real fight but the sort of contest that serious old men get up to."[288]

As the narrator himself concedes, the self-referential manner in which this scene is framed as a conflict draws attention to the inadequacy of the analogy. The use of martial terminology and an accompanying aside from the narrator highlights the distance between the world of the youthful narrator and that of the older generation. While the concerns of the young aristocratic pair in this scene are centred on erotic sentiments and games, expressed through the literary convention of the shared drinking cup, those of their fathers are limited to the proper observance of social etiquette and custom.[289]

The honour shown by the novels' protagonists and their companions to their parents is shaped as much by their membership of the nobility as by their age. In Theodore Prodromos' novel *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, the scene in which the eponymous protagonists first cast eyes on each other places great emphasis on the noble status of their parents. The reputation of the parents serves both to define the identities of the protagonists and to justify their marriage as a suitable match.[290] Accordingly, Dosikles initially approaches Rhodanthe via the official channel, asking his mother to send a message to Rhodanthe's father to arrange the marriage.[291] Only after the failure of this approach does Dosikles turn to abduction, escaping from the social expectations of aristocratic life in a manner common to all the novels of the period.[292] The protagonists'

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[287] On the role of elderly figures within ritual lament in the novels, see below, pp.89-104.
[288] *Hysmine and Hysminias*, V.10.1.
[289] The description of the erotic games centred on the shared drinking cup has its origins in *Leukippe and Klitophon*. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 214 n160.
[290] See for instance *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* II.171-175 in which Dosikles introduces himself and Rhodanthe with considerable emphasis on their parents' identities and reputation. While recounting his first sight of Rhodanthe, Dosikles gives a lengthy exposition of his internal turmoil, within which he reassures himself that both their parents are wealthy and of good repute, *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, II.233-245.
[291] *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* II.369-380.
[292] *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* II.392-399. On the Komnenian novels and *Digenis* as escapist fantasies appealing to an aristocratic readership constrained by comparatively rigid social mores, see Roderick Beaton, "The World of Fiction and the World 'out There': The Case of the Byzantine Novel," in *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider*, ed. D. C. Smythe (Aldershot: Variorum, 2000)., 179, 181.

parents in the novels are treated with a great deal of respect and obedience by their children up to the point of abduction or elopement. In *Hysmine and Hysminias*, the formalities of the many banquets indicate the hierarchy of honour afforded to the attendees. Despite Hysminias' special status as a herald at the first occasion, he successfully persuades Hysmine's father Sosthenes that he and his wife Panthia should drink before he does; an order that is maintained through the following scene.[293] Makrembolites' novel is distinct for a number of reasons, in part for the rebellious erotic agency granted to Hysmine prior to the elopement.[294] When she is wordlessly rebuked by her parents for her flirtatious behaviour however, both protagonists express their shame through blushes and a lowered gaze.[295]

Such deference to the wishes of one's parents can also be seen in the romance of *Digenis Akritis*, in which Digenis' father the emir faces the displeasure of his mother after leaving her behind in his homeland:

> "Receiving a letter from his mother in Syria,
> he decided to leave, fearing her curse,
> for it is certainly right not to provoke one's parents."[296]

Just as in the novels, here the emir's amorous pursuits are shown to conflict with his filial duties, although his obedience in this instance and his ultimate decision to take her with him into Byzantine territory reaffirm his virtuous character. The young Digenis also exhibits a pious filial loyalty during the bloody description of his first hunt:

> "The boy said this in reply to him:
> 'If it is the wish of God who looks kindly on all things,
> and if I have the blessing of my father and my lovely mother,
> you will see it dead too, like the two bears."[297]

[293] *Hysmine and Hysminias*, I.8.3.
[294] On the exceptionality of this treatment of the heroine, see Corinne Jouanno, "Women in Byzantine Novels of the Twelfth Century: An Interplay between Norm and Fantasy," in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006)., 158-162.
[295] *Hysmine and Hysminias*, I.10.1-4.
[296] *Digenis*, G III.16-18, trans. Jeffreys.
[297] *Digenis*, G IV. 170-173, trans. Jeffreys.

Even Digenis only resorts to abduction as a means of marrying the girl after exhausting the possibility of a legitimately arranged marriage.[298]

In the above cases, filial duty serves to uphold conventional power structures: the continuation of the family name through marriage and inheritance. Accordingly, any upheaval in this social order caused by abduction or elopement is swiftly resolved through parental reconciliation before marriage.[299] The fulfilment of filial obligation can also be viewed as a reflection of normative social practices, with obedience in youth foreshadowing care for ageing parents.[300] The rejection of this duty of care is therefore frequently treated as monstrous and disreputable.[301]

Within the imperial family filial duty carried an additional weight, as evidenced by the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene. At several points in the text, the author explicitly mentions the challenge facing her in negotiating her role as both historian and loyal daughter while discussing events that might paint her father Alexios I in a questionable light.[302] As argued by Leonora Neville, Anna's protestations of filial devotion were likely driven in part by the expectations of her gender, placing a greater emphasis on care for family members.[303] Undoubtedly her self-representation as a loyal daughter also served to emphasise her rightful place at the centre of the Komnenian dynasty. The honour bestowed upon parents in elite families was therefore an ideal that reflected social norms and acted as a mark of virtue that could be manipulated for rhetorical effect.

Displays of filial respect did not necessarily translate to genuine power and authority for the parents, even in the idealised world of the novels: all the abductions that take place in the novels and the *Digenis* romance are carried out irrespective of the parents' consent. The following analysis returns to old age itself and its supposed advantages, exploring its role in the construction of normative imperial power.

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[298] *Digenis*, G IV.301-307.
[299] *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* IX.301-314; *Hysmine and Hysminias* X.13.3-5; *Drosilla and Charikles* IX.162-5; *Digenis*, G IV.685-733.
[300] On the continued prevalence of filial care for society's elderly as a cultural norm in the modern world, see Sowers, "Global Aging," 8.
[301] See for instance, Choniates' description of the mistreatment of the elderly Kilij Arslan by his two sons (*Historia*, 413).
[302] See for instance *Alexiad*, Prologue, 2; 1, 16. On this conflict and the author's response to it, see Leonora Neville, *Anna Komnene*, esp. 43-48.
[303] Neville, *Anna Komnene*, 47.

Advice literature provides an insight into the place of advanced age and its expected companions, experience and wisdom, within the sphere of imperial power. The paraenetic poem *Spaneas* likely originated in the twelfth century, although most of the advice contained within draws its inspiration from Scripture or a work attributed to Isocrates.[304] The text as witnessed in the fourteenth-century MS Vat. Pal. gr. 367 contains a passage in which the addressee is advised to heed the advice of the old rather than the young:

> "Do not disrespect the old man nor disregard him
> so that they praise you, so that they pray for you and so that you live long.
> If you come to a proposal and you wish for counsel,
> seek the help of old and experienced men:
> When you do not trust the advice of the young,
> since the mind of young men looks to the rasher [option].
> Listen to the example of ancient history."[305]

The text then offers as an example a retelling of the Biblical story of Rehoboam, son of Solomon from *1 Kings 12*.[306] The main lesson to be drawn from this narrative is that the rashness and impatience of young men leads to poor short-sighted decision-making regarding weighty issues. Old men by contrast are valued as advisers for their caution and years of experience. The potency of the advice of old men was recognised by Eustathios of Thessalonike, who designated "reconciling words of elderly men" as one of the five ways in which Homer resolved difficult situations in his plots.[307] Hence it is suggested by *Spaneas* that regardless of the age of the ruler themselves, the imperial office should benefit most from the decision-making capacity of the old.

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[304] Danezis, *Spaneas*, vii-ix.
[305] *Spaneas*, 427-33:
Μὴ καθυβρίσῃς γέροντα μηδὲ καταφρονήσῃς
νά σε ἐπαινοῦν, νά σου εὔχωνται καὶ νὰ μακροχρονίσῃς.
Ἂν ἔλθῃς εἰς ὑπόθεσιν καὶ συμβουλὴν θελήσῃς,
γερόντων ζήτησε βουλήν. ἀνθρώπων πειρασμένων·
τῶν νέων δὲ τὰς συμβουλὰς ποτὲ μηδὲν πιστεύσῃς,
ἐπεὶ πρὸς το θρασύτερον ὁ νοῦς τῶν νέων βλέπει.
Πρὸς δὲ παράδειγμ΄ ἄκουσον ἀρχαίας ἱστορίας."
[306] *Spaneas*, 434-71.
[307] Eustathios, *Commentary on the Iliad*, 1.247ff (Van der Valk 1971-87: i.149.9-19); Aglae Pizzone, "Toward a Byzantine Theory of the Comic," in *Greek Laughter and Tears: Antiquity and After*, ed. Margaret Alexiou and Douglas Cairns (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017)., 164.

In much the same vein, failure on the part of the ruler to heed the advice of elders could constitute a cause for invective, as in the case of Niketas Choniates' portrayal of Manuel I. In his narrative of the events leading up to the disastrous battle of Myriokephalon in 1176, Choniates' Manuel is presented with an opportunity to avoid battle:

> "All those who were experienced in warfare, especially in Turkish combat, and who were advanced in age, entreated Manuel to receive the embassy with open arms rather than to place all hopes on the die of battle.… Manuel paid no heed whatsoever to the words of the older men but instead gave ear to his blood relations, especially those who had never heard the sound of the war trumpet, who sported beautiful hair styles and displayed bright and cheerful faces and wore around their necks collars of gold and translucent necklaces of sparkling gems and precious pearls."[308]

The foolishness, recklessness and childish or feminine-coded concerns of young Komnenian aristocrats are a recurring motif in Choniates' historical narrative, which places the blame for the collapse of 1204 firmly on the heads of the Komnenian dynasty.[309] In this instance, Manuel's preference for his young relatives is set out in opposition to the alternative, trusting in the advice of the old and the more experienced, which is implied to be the correct course of action for a ruler.[310]

A conflicting impression is given by the text known as the *Muses of Alexios I Komnenos*, preserved within the thirteenth-century MS cod. Vallicell. 68 (E 22).[311] The text consists of advice by an emperor to his successor, and is supposedly attributed to Alexios I himself, though the work was in reality a legitimization of John II's accession.[312] On the matter of advisers, the text offers the following:

> "But ruling everything be ruled by the laws alone:
> do not heed everyone, nor by any means follow all,
> but heed those who speak for your safety

[308] Choniates, *Historia*, VI.179, trans. Magoulias.
[309] cf. Choniates, *Historia*, 435-6, 467, 509, 550-1. For the most explicit statement of blame directed against the Komnenoi, see Choniates, *Historia*, 529.
[310] A similar dynamic may be found in the *Alexiad*, in which Anna presents Alexios siding with his younger and more impatient officers over his older and more experienced advisers. The resulting battle with Robert Guiscard went very poorly for the Byzantines, and Anna recounts the names of many young nobles who died in the exchange (*Alexiad*, IV.5-6).
[311] Paul Maas, "Die Musen Des Kaisers Alexios I," *Byzantinische Zeitscrhift 22* (1913)., 348.
[312] For the attribution to Alexios himself, see Maas, "Die Musen," 366. On the date and circumstances of the work's composition, see Neville, "Anna Komnene," 146-7.

and that of your children and the army and the city.
Follow the old counsellors who have experience of many things,
whose teacher is time.
Though fortunate in your old men, consider the younger ones,
whose minds are grey, and their wits aged,
whose intellects are old but their bodies young,
equally valuable in the wielding of empire,
as they will help it at a great crisis
when many grey old men are foolish.
For to find strength in a young body seems an easy thing
for nature contributes to it,
but you should regard an old mind in a young body
as a wondrous thing and a great gift from God.
Gather advice from old and young,
consider what has been decided
as beneficial to you and the city
and something to be done, and remember it."[313]

As before, this passage upholds a preference for wisdom and experience among advisers, but unlike *Spaneas*, the *Muses* detaches the commendable attributes of the old from their age. Much like the hagiographical *topos* of the παίς γέρων, the ideal adviser should be young but with the

[313] Translation adapted from R.H. Jordan et al. (the Belfast agreed translation) 1:iv:1989, 68-86:
"ἄρχων δὲ παντὸς τοῖς νόμοις ἄρχου μόνοις.
μὴ πᾶσι πείθου μηδέ πως ὅλοις ἔπου,
πείθου δὲ τοῖς λέγουσιν εἰς σωτηρίαν
σοὶ καὶ τέκνοις σοῖς καὶ στρατῷ καὶ τῇ πόλει.
ἔπου δὲ τοῖς γέρουσι τοῖς βουληφόροις,
οἷς πεῖρα πολλῶν, ὧν διδάσκαλος χρόνος·
καὶ τῶν γερόντων εὐτυχῶν νεωτέρους,
οἷς νοῦς πολιός, οἷς φρένες γηραλέαι,
οἷς γραῦς μὲν ἡ φρήν, ἡ δὲ σὰρξ νάντη νέα,
ἀνταξίους νόμιζε τῇ σκηπτουχίᾳ
πολλῶν πολιῶν καὶ γερόντων ἀφρόνων
εἰς καιρὸν αὐτὴν ὠφελήσοντας μέγαν·
ῥώμην γὰρ εὑρεῖν ἐν νεαρῷ σαρκίῳ
ῥᾷον δοκεῖ τι· συντελεῖ γὰρ ἡ φύσις·
εὕρῃς δὲ νοῦν γέροντα σαρκίῳ νέῳ
τεράστιόν τι καὶ θεοῦ δῶρον μέγα.
ἄθροιζε βουλὴν ἐκ γερόντων καὶ νέων,
καὶ τὸ κριθὲν σοὶ συντελὲς καὶ τῇ πόλει
καὶ πρακτὸν ἡγοῦ καὶ διὰ μνήμης ἔχε·"

mind and wits of an old man, since the elderly themselves can be foolish.[314] Comparison of these two texts reveals that idealised rulership involved careful decision-making informed by the advice of wise and experienced counsellors. However, the advanced age of the advisers was very much treated as a means to an end: they were not celebrated for their age but for its normative benefits, and indeed the ideal adviser was one who possessed the positive attributes of old age while being young in body.

These conflicting attributes can be seen in the portrayal of the old man Philopappous in the narrative of *Digenis Akritis*, especially in the Grottaferrata version of the text.[315] After urging the amazon Maximou to adopt a cautious approach in her attack on Digenis, Maximou defers to his judgement, saying:

> "'You who are old and shrewd, I entrust the command to you; do what you want then and all of us will obey you.'"[316]

Shortly afterwards the old man's caution is vindicated when the brash warrior Melimitzis ignores his advice and rushes to attack Digenis head on.[317] However, despite the initial portrayal of Philopappous' trepidation as a form of prudence, his lack of bravery in battle is mocked by both Digenis and Maximou.[318] Once again prudence and wisdom are tied closely to the ageing process, although old age is viewed as a hindrance beyond the limited role of advising younger rulers and warrior elites.

A similar pattern emerges from idealised depictions of emperors. Eustathios of Thessaloniki's *epitaphios* for Manuel Komnenos is one of very few surviving Byzantine funerary orations.[319] The text is modelled structurally on the encomiastic tradition codified in Menander 'Rhetor', and thus provides ample evidence of the aspects of rulership deemed to be most

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[314] On the παίς γέρων, see above, p.27.
[315] On the discrepancy between the two versions of the text in their depiction of Philopappous, see below, pp.175-8.
[316] *Digenis*, G 6.470-1, trans. Jeffreys:
ὦ γέρον τε καὶ νουνεχές, σοὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν πιστεύω·
πράττε λοιπὸν ὡς βούλεσαι, πάντων σοι πειθομένων.
This particular passage is absent from the Escorial version of the text, and the depiction of Philopappous in the surrounding narrative is generally far more negative. For instance, Maximou's response to his persuasive story is one of frustration rather than respect, and she refers to the length of time he has known her only as a means of verifying her brave and impetuous character (*Digenis*, E 1384-98).
[317] *Digenis*, G 6.491-507.
[318] *Digenis*, G 6.513-16, 6.564-67. Maximou's ridicule is especially crude in *Digenis* E 1519-22, linking old age to emasculation and a loss of courage.
[319] Bourbouhakis, *Not Composed*, 27, 36.

praiseworthy.[320] Loosely summarised, the main aspects celebrated in the *epitaphios* are Manuel's martial strength, social capacity, wisdom and memory, religious authority, medical knowledge, humility, self-control, sleepless dedication, and eagerness for renovation.[321] Among these components of Manuel's character, his wisdom is the first to be celebrated in the oration, manifesting as the ability to deliberate carefully but to make quick decisions as required.[322] This form of wisdom however is never linked with Manuel's advanced age, despite his age featuring elsewhere for rhetorical effect. For instance, Eustathios praises the emperor for his impressive memory:

> "The majority of these memories had been preserved from childhood until well into old age: that location, that man, that occasion, or that gathering, the manner in which certain acts had been carried out, and various things of this sort, whose re-presentation renewed the oldest impression of the thing learned."[323]

Here the longevity of the emperor's life serves only to convey the impressive extent of Manuel's long-term memory, before going on in the text following to praise his short-term memory as well.[324] In fact, when Manuel's age is mentioned in the text in connection with his virtue as an emperor it is framed as an obstacle to overcome in later life:

> "And who would not consider it a marvel in such circumstances, that even as he was measuring out his last days, divided between his mortal nature -even if it was not yet the time for someone of his age- […] He therefore hunted young, vigorous beasts, a noble pursuit associated with Herakles, pretending this was a battle, as though he were exercising. As his stamina began to give way, he needed more frequent rests during these hunts. And while illness compelled him to rest, his hand would not cease from valiant works."[325]

As pointed out by Bourbouhakis, Manuel would have been sixty-two when he died; an age that would have been considered 'old' by most contemporaries even if Manuel's vigorous lifestyle gave the impression that he died well before his time.[326] Manuel is commended for defying the ageing process rather than displaying the virtues associated with the last stages of the life

[320] Bourbouhakis, *Not Composed*, 38-9. On the text as a kind of *paraenetic* work, see Bourbouhakis, *Not Composed*, esp. 67-9.
[321] Eustathios, *Epitaphios*, 13-68, trans. Bourbouhakis.
[322] Eustathios, *Epitaphios*, 13-4, trans. Bourbouhakis.
[323] Eustathios, *Epitaphios*, 32, trans. Bourbouhakis.
[324] Eustathios, *Epitaphios*, 33, trans. Bourbouhakis.
[325] Eustathios, *Epitaphios*, 76, trans. Bourbouhakis.
[326] Bourbouhakis, *Not Composed*, 76.

course. Such self-sufficiency in the face of bodily ageing is reminiscent of the hagiographical tradition of saintly figures carrying out actions despite their age.[327] The age dynamic of this feat is accentuated by the emphasis on the youthful vigour of the animals hunted by the emperor. The overall effect is a kind of inversion of the παίς γέρων *topos*, with the emperor able to display uncommonly youthful energy despite his ageing body.

From this brief discussion of paraenetic and encomiastic literature from the twelfth century it seems apparent that old age had little place in the image of the ideal ruler. A similar picture emerges from the depictions of elderly rulers in twelfth-century historical narratives. John Kinnamos for instance recounts the accession of Lothar II, "a very old man", to the throne of the Holy Roman Empire following the death of Henry V:[328]

> "When he perceived this [revolt by rival claimants], Lothar, who was really old and far gone in age, but who possessed a noble nature and did not know how to speak and act save with simplicity, agreed to pass on his office to them, when his fate overtook him."[329]

Although Lothar is here portrayed sympathetically, his advanced age is presented as an impediment to good rule rather than a possible advantage.[330] Another episode from Kinnamos' history worthy of consideration in this regard is the fall from grace of Theodore Stypeiotes, keeper of the inkstand at the court of Manuel I:

> "... but after he was detected and proven crooked and malicious toward him, the wretch was deprived of eyes and tongue. For he foretold to many, as if from a [prophet's] tripod, that the span of the emperor's life had already been measured out, and declared that the Romans' senate must bestow authority on someone not still a youth nor puffed with pride, but to a genuinely aged man, well beyond youth, so that when he, by way of argument, ruled he might rather direct the state's business as in a democracy."[331]

Viewed in isolation, this might appear to represent an argument in favour of granting imperial power to the older and more experienced. However, given Kinnamos' portrayal of Theodore Stypeiotes and Alexios Axouch as guilty of treason and therefore deserving of their punishment

[327] See for instance the *Life* of Theodora of Thessalonike, 41; *Life* of Mary of Egypt, 11.
[328] Kinnamos, *History*, II, p.73.
[329] Kinnamos, *History*, II, p.73, trans. Brand.
[330] Cf. a very similar situation in the case of the Byzantine Emperor Nikephoros III, who is portrayed in the *Alexiad* as unfit for rule due to his old age (*Alexiad*, II.12).
[331] Kinnamos, *History*, IV, p.141, trans. Brand.

at the hands of Manuel, this passage should be read as part of an effort to discredit Stypeiotes.[332] His preference for the rule of the old is set out in direct opposition to the younger emperor Manuel and is therefore implicitly misguided, even if the argument may have had some resonance in the contemporary political environment.[333]

Choniates' history is far more critical of the Komnenoi, not least Manuel I, and therefore offers another side to Kinnamos' use of age rhetoric.[334] Manuel's youth upon accession in Choniates' account is viewed as a potential weakness:

> "The clergy and of these the most astute doubted whether Manuel, a mere youth with the first growth of down on his cheeks, would really be able to govern the empire, which very much needed a man with shaggy beard, grown hoary in prudence, and, moreover, whether he could overthrow his brother Isaakios, who had a more lawful claim to the throne and was ensconced in the queen of cities."[335]

The emphasis here on the importance of experience is far more in line with the advice literature discussed above. The dire consequences of a young ruler more interested in hunting and other trivial pursuits are demonstrated in Choniates' narrative by the brief reign of Manuel's successor Alexios II.[336] On the other hand, old age is shown to be just as damaging a quality in a ruler by Choniates' history. Andronikos Komnenos' advanced age is a consistent part of his vilification to the extent that when John Doukas offers up his head to receive the crown, Choniates has the crowd reply that they now hate "every man on the edge of the grave and advanced in years."[337]

The didactic and normative literature discussed above, and the poignant age rhetoric of the historians especially suggest that there was a contemporary discourse surrounding the relationship between age and the imperial office. Another closely connected branch of this discourse was the question of the role of women in connection with imperial power. Just as Eustathios' funerary oration for Manuel Komnenos celebrated his ability to overcome the inconvenience of an ageing body, so too did women have to confront the supposed limitations

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[332] Magdalino, *The Empire*, 19
[333] By contrast, Anna Komnene uses the youth of Alexios I upon his accession to compare him favourably with his adversary Robert Guiscard, suggesting that Alexios would be able to grow into the role of emperor while Robert was already at the height of his power (*Alexiad*, V.1).
[334] On the difference between the two authors in terms of perspective, see Magdalino, *The Empire*, 1-26.
[335] Choniates, *Historia*, 219, trans. Magoulias.
[336] Choniates, *Historia*, 223.
[337] Choniates, *Historia*, 345, trans. Magoulias. For Andronikos' emphatic old age, see Choniates, *Historia*, 283, 286, 275-6.

of their gender to access power. A confluence of these two strands of thought can be found in Anna Komnene's portrayal of her grandmother Anna Dalassene. The *Alexiad* devotes a considerable amount of space to justifying the power granted to Anna Dalassene by her son Alexios, for which he was likely criticised by his detractors.[338] As set out in the *Alexiad*, the main obstacle to Anna Dalassene's legitimacy as governor of the empire's affairs was her gender:

> "At this point the reader may well censure my father for transferring the government of the empire to the women's quarters, but if one knew this woman's spirit, her surpassing virtue, intelligence and energy, one's reproaches would soon turn to admiration. For my grandmother had an exceptional grasp of public affairs, with a genius for organization and government."[339]

Anna Komnene's response to Alexios' critics is that her grandmother's intellectual qualities made her suitable for taking up such a responsibility by virtue of their sheer exceptionality. Indeed, in terms of her competence, intelligence and faith she is depicted as surpassing the supposed constraints of her gender much as male rulers might be expected to overcome the limits of ageing:

> "To return once more to my grandmother, I must add this: not only was she a very great credit to her own gender, but to men as well; indeed, she contributed to the glory of the whole human race."[340]

In demonstrating her suitability for the role, Anna brings her grandmother's age and experience to the forefront of her portrayal:

> "She was already a woman of mature years [αὐτὴν παρηκμακυῖαν = she was past her prime] when she was called upon to exercise imperial authority, at a time of life when one's mental powers are at their best, when one's judgement is fully developed and knowledge of affairs is widest- all qualities that lend force to good administration and government. It is natural that persons of this age should not merely speak with greater wisdom than the young, as the tragic playwright says, but also act in a more expedient

[338] *Alexiad*, III.6-8; see Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium Ad 527-1204* (Routledge, 2002)., 191.
[339] *Alexiad*, III.7, trans. Sewter.
[340] *Alexiad*, III.8, trans. Sewter. Overcoming the boundaries of gender and age were common *topoi* in hagiography, with saintly women overcoming their gender and saintly children and the elderly overcoming the limitations of their age (Alice-Mary Talbot et al., *Becoming Byzantine: Children and Childhood in Byzantium*, vol. 1 (Harvard University Press, 2009)., 7; see also Davies, "Age, Gender and Status," 158.

> way. In the past, when she was still looked upon as a younger woman, she had impressed everyone as having an old head [πολιὸν = grey (hair)] on young shoulders; to the observant her face alone revealed Anna's inherent virtue and gravity."[341]

Drawing attention to Anna Dalassene's age in such a way serves two interrelated causes. By focusing on the ideal mental attributes of rulership as expressed by contemporary paraenetic literature Anna was able to present Anna Dalassene's exercise of political power as legitimate without addressing the highly masculinised aspects of contemporary rulership such as martial prowess. At the same time, Anna Dalassene's maturity and exhibition of an 'old' way of thought from a young age serves to distance her from association with the earlier stages of an elite woman's life course, namely marriage and childbearing. In this sense, her advanced age grants her participation in a masculinised, or at least less overtly feminine identity.[342]

This rhetoric stands in stark contrast to depictions of other imperial women in their old age. The depiction of empress Zoe in Michael Psellos' *Chronographia* for instance includes several passages praising her for maintaining a youthful appearance despite her age.[343] This, as well as Psellos' repeated assertion that Zoe was past the age for sexual relations, can be interpreted as a central facet of Zoe's relationship with imperial power, as an empress consort whose authority rested primarily on marriage and her ability to produce potential heirs.[344] Although Psellos makes brief mention of her lack of mental stability and interest in public affairs in her old age, these are presented as secondary to the former.[345]

Conclusion

'Authority' is a nebulous concept and extremely difficult to quantify at the best of times. The intention of this chapter with its three distinct strands has not been to offer a definitive explanation of the relationship between age and authority in the twelfth century. Rather it has been to explore three areas in which age was fundamental to the construction of authority in literary and visual culture. Though distinct, the intellectual, spiritual and political

[341] *Alexiad*, III.7, trans. Sewter.
[342] On old age and the construction of masculinity, see below, pp.87-8.
[343] Michael Psellos, "Chronographia," in *Michel Psellos. Chronographie ou histoire d'un siècle de Byzance*, ed. É. Renauld (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1928 (repr. 1967))., VI.1.6, 158.
[344] Psellos, *Chronographia*, III.5, VI.53, 151.
[345] Psellos, *Chronographia*, VI.157.

manifestations of aged authority shared several common elements that contribute towards a more comprehensive picture of contemporary ideas about growing old.

Old age acted as a badge of intellectual credibility within the highly competitive literary culture of twelfth-century Constantinople. The association between advanced age and intellectual prowess was founded on the assumption that old age brought with it great wisdom and experience, allowing Tzetzes to tap into the prestige of a mythical aged Homer who was both wise and playful. Similarly, the famously well-educated and Homer-loving Anna Komnene appealed to these ideals in her portrayal of her grandmother Anna Dalassene, attempting to justify her role in power by eclipsing her status as a woman with her aged wisdom and piety. Caution and wisdom were widely praised as desirable qualities in a secular ruler in the paraenetic and encomiastic literature of the period. However, the same literature makes it clear that these attributes could and should be separated from the physicality of ageing, with old age more often presented as a challenge to be overcome than an indirect benefit. This is reflected in historical texts where old age was most frequently used to indicate a figure's lack of suitability for a position of power, and elderly rulers were more often presented as foolish or tyrannical.

In the sphere of popular religion, old age maintained its status as a signifier of holiness and could by itself indicate the religious authority of a figure, as indicated by the Eustratios templon beam and the Constantinopolitan cult of St. Photeine. The natural assumption of positions of authority by the older and more experienced is a phenomenon that can be glimpsed on the occasions when it was challenged. For instance, the many works by Theodore Prodromos criticising old rhetors and philosophers for concealing their incompetence or cynicism with the aesthetics of aged wisdom illustrate an entrenched cultural phenomenon at the root of his rhetorical frustration. Similarly, warnings in monastic *typika* against preference on account of seniority in age indicate a broader tendency for exactly that form of preferential treatment. By contrast, the right of seniority to imperial power was theoretically upheld by contemporaries but frequently ignored in practice without great controversy. Likewise, filial duty was presented in contemporary literature as a crucial virtue, though within the texts it functioned more as an indicator of the child's legitimacy and loyalty than as a manifestation of the authority of the older generation.

The relationship between authority and age in twelfth-century Byzantium was complex and layered. In the intellectual and popular religious spheres elderly figures earned respect and

influence, from both the ideal associations of old age and its aesthetics. Within secular elite society, advanced age was theoretically celebrated but in practice treated as an unpleasant obstacle to overcome by strength of character or the care of diligent children. When elderly figures came into possession of power and authority in the political sphere they were most frequently treated with intense mistrust. Finally, the evidence presented in this chapter makes it clear that the exact nature of the relationship between old age and authority was very much a topic of debate and discussion among contemporaries.

Chapter Two: The γέρων in the Twelfth Century: Age, Gender and Asceticism

> "Cyril is everything we had heard about him. He is white-haired, aged, venerable, a man of peace… for you can tell someone peaceful by his air of calm."[346]
>
> (Nikolaos Kataskepenos, *Life of St. Cyril Phileotes*)

The influence of holy men and women, both living and dead, was one of the most enduring characteristics of Byzantine society. The social role that such men and women played and their place in the broader culture underwent several seismic transformations between the promulgation of the cult of Antony the Great and the end of the twelfth century.[347] The twelfth century saw the engagement of living holy figures with those at the centre of power, while the cults of their predecessors shaped the lifestyles and expectations of both lay and monastic communities. Taking into consideration the importance of these figures in the intellectual and material world of the Byzantines, the present chapter examines the intersection of age and gender in the formation of holy identities. The twelfth century saw a number of broad social and intellectual developments that resulted in a reconfiguration of the acceptable limits of sainthood. The relationship between age and sanctity thus needs to be understood in this context.

The first part of this chapter provides a brief overview of the role of age in Byzantine monasticism and in the representation of holy figures. These two topics are treated in separate sections which primarily utilise evidence from monastic foundation documents and hagiographical literature from the centuries prior to and including the twelfth. This cursory analysis is intended to provide a contextual foundation for the discussion in the second part of the chapter, which aims to interpret the twelfth-century material within its broader cultural context. The latter sections focus on three twelfth-century hagiographical texts: the *Life* of Cyril

[346] Nikolaos Kataskepenos, "Life of St. Cyril Phileotes," in *La Vie de Saint Cyrille le Philéote moine byzantin*, ed. É. Sargologos (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1964)., 46.16: καθάπερ ἠκούσαμεν, οὕτως καὶ εἴδομεν. Ἔστι γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ τὴν μὲν τρίχα πολιός, γηραλέος, ἱεροπρεπής, εἰρηνικός - τὸν γὰρ εἰρηνικὸν ἄνδρα ἐν τῷ κατεστάλθαι τὰ ἤθη χαρακτηρίζομεν…". Trans. Mullett, "Novelisation," 18.

[347] *Life* of Antony, by Athanasios of Alexandria, *BHG* 140. On this text and its influence on later (mostly Latin) hagiography, see Tomas Hägg, "The Life of St. Anthony between Biography and Hagiography. Volume 1: Periods and Places," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, ed. S Efthymiadis (Burlington, London: Ashgate Publishing, 2011).

Phileotes by Nikolaos Kataskepenos, and the two *Lives* of Meletios the Younger by Nicholas of Methone and Theodore Prodromos. The third section situates the treatment of monasticism and sainthood by these works within some of the key social and intellectual developments of the twelfth century. The final section turns to a textual analysis of the saints' *Lives* with a view to the way their narrative frames the life course and spiritual authority of the saints themselves. The findings of this chapter suggest that ideas about ageing played a highly significant role in the construction of sanctity in the twelfth century.

Age and Monasticism

Byzantine monasticism was extremely diverse in terms of form and function, with numerous paradigms for monastic foundations emerging by the twelfth century. The oldest of these was the *lavra*, a type of monastic community that enabled solitaries to maintain a life of prayer and self-mortification while gathering once a week to take part in the liturgy and collect essential supplies.[348] A far more common arrangement was for monastics to live communally in accordance with coenobitic tradition.[349] This system was designed in principal so that monks and nuns could police their fellow brethren, ensuring adherence to a standard of ascetic stricture set out in the monastery's foundation document (*typikon*).[350] Finally, the Middle Byzantine period saw the appearance of idiorrhythmic monasticism, a model that became far more prevalent in the Palaiologan period, and which received significant backlash from contemporaries who criticised these foundations for their lenience regarding conventional ascetic practice.[351]

The nuns and monks who made up the population of these institutions also took the cloth for a variety of reasons. The normative pathway was open to people of all social classes and involved becoming a monk in early adulthood and remaining in that role until death.[352] By contrast, for

[348] Talbot, *Varieties*, 2-3. A good example of the continuity of this system is Mt. Athos, which became a site of extensive monastic foundation in the Middle Byzantine period aimed towards the eremitic inhabitants of the holy mountain (see Talbot, *Varieties*, 29; *Life* of Athanasios, 24, 43).
[349] Talbot, *Varieties*, 15, 53.
[350] For an example of an attempt to enforce a strict ascetic lifestyle, see Thomas, *Foundation Documents*, Evergetis, trans. Robert Jordan, 4, 9, 21-2.
[351] Talbot, *Varieties*, 39.
[352] On the normative age of admittance and the noviciate period for new monastics, see Alice-Mary Talbot, "The Adolescent Monastic in Middle and Late Byzantium," in *Coming of Age in Byzantium. Adolescence and Society*, ed. Despoina Ariantzi (De Gruyter, 2017)., esp. 84-8.

their imperial or aristocratic founders, monasteries represented a place for retirement in later life, or refuge from the political world.[353] Under the Komnenoi it became increasingly fashionable for elites to become monks or nuns towards the end of the life course, or alternatively on their deathbed.[354] For many of these elites, entering into a monastery did not necessarily indicate the end of their political career, and several in fact re-entered the secular world after a short term of monastic life.[355] The exile of educated members of the elite to monasteries ensured that many monastic institutions came to function as centres of intellectual activity.[356] Monasteries in twelfth-century Byzantium were thus far from monolithic in terms of their stated purpose and practical function. Despite this, many of the various facets of the monastic sphere contributed to a culture in which old age was consistently celebrated.

One of the most persistent features of Byzantine monastic life was the considerable spiritual and mundane authority granted to monastic elders.[357] On a practical level, many older monastics had spent the majority of a long life in the cloth, granting them experience that enabled them to act as role models or even teachers for the novices.[358] The pedagogic dynamic between elder and younger monastics is reflected in the *Lives* of many saints who apparently modelled themselves on their elders. For instance, the *Life* of Daniel the Stylite lays a heavy emphasis on the relationship between the eponymous ascetic and his mentor Symeon the Stylite, while the *Life* of Athanasios of Athos gives substantial weight to its subject's formative meeting with the holy γέρων Michael Maleinos.[359] A more complex relationship between age groups is presented in the *Life* of Theodora of Thessalonike, in which Theodora is tested and punished on multiple occasions by the elderly abbess Anna.[360] Rather than serving as an inspiration for the younger nun, Anna instead fulfils an antagonistic role in the narrative, presenting Theodora with trials through which to prove her dedication and ultimately with the

[353] See Demirtiken, "Changing Profiles," 267-8.
[354] Mullett, "Refounding," 378, esp. n.65; Alice-Mary Talbot and Stamatina McGrath, "Monastic Onomastics," *Monastères, images, pouvoirs et société à Byzance* (2001)., 89-118.
[355] A prime example of this phenomenon is Michael Psellos, whose brief period as a monk on Mount Olympus in 1054 did not prevent his return to court the following year.
[356] For instance, Anna Komnene spent a considerable period of time in exile at the monastery of Kecharitomene, founded by her mother Eirene (see Harris, "Institutional Settings," 33-5).
[357] Talbot, "Old Age," 273. Older monks and nuns were often placed in positions of authority or responsibility, due in part to their supposed resistance to passions and thus incorruptibility (Thomas, *Foundation Documents*, Evergetis, 34; Kecharitomene, 4, 17).
[358] See for instance the *Life* of Athanasios of Athos, in which elders ('*gerontes*') play several integral roles in coenobitic life, acting as assistants through which the Saint is able to edify and discipline his monks (45.5).
[359] *Life* of Daniel the Stylite, ed. Delehaye, 7-9; *Life* of Athanasios, 8-9.
[360] Anna punishes Theodora for her motherly inclinations by forcing her to live together with her daughter in a cell for fifteen years without speaking (*Life* of Theodora, 27-8), and later sends her to spend the night outside in the middle of a snowstorm (32-3).

gruelling task of caring for her in extreme old age.[361] This friction between the generations is a common feature of hagiographical texts portraying coenobitic life, though the hagiographers consistently used these episodes to demonstrate their saint's humility and respect for their elders.[362]

On a more conceptual level, advanced age was held in high esteem within monastic institutions for its association with bodily mortification and hence ascetic achievement. The link between bodily mortification and ageing has long been noted by scholars, with Alice-Mary Talbot pointing out that part of the intention of ascetic regimes was to hasten the body's ageing process.[363] The perceived mortifying effect of the physicality of ageing, combined with ancient notions about the cooling of passions and detachment from sexual temptation in old age, ensured that advanced age corresponded closely to the ascetic ideal.[364] Similarly, contemporary cultural norms concerning the superior intellectual authority of older people would have created a comparable implicit hierarchy in monasteries that functioned as vehicles for scholarly activity.

In addition to the esteem granted to figures of advanced age within the monastic sphere, the age and gender of holy figures was central to the construction and articulation of their sanctity. This can be seen most evidently in hagiographical literature and monumental religious art, as both represent depictions of holiness in its idealised form. Some models of sanctity remained relatively unchanged over the course of Byzantine history, while others came to prominence or receded in response to broader socio-political developments. The following section offers a brief overview of the role of age and gender in the formation of some of the most prevalent models of sanctity within Byzantine hagiographical tradition. This provides a necessary context within which the twelfth-century hagiographical texts must be situated and interpreted.

[361] *Life* of Theodora, 37.
[362] C.f. *Life* of Athanasios, 14-5.
[363] Talbot, "Old age," 273. On the association between ascetic practice and growing old in early Christian thought, see de Wet, "Old Age," 52.
[364] De Wet, "Grumpy Old Men," 499-500.

Age and Gender in the Construction of Sainthood

The way in which hagiographical texts represented holy men and women depended substantially on normative gender roles as well as life course expectations.[365] Female solitaries or even coenobitic nuns appear far less frequently as the subjects of surviving saints' *Lives* than holy foundresses.[366] The lack of *Lives* of female solitaries undoubtedly reflects a reality in which many young women and girls had limited personal agency while under the guardianship of male relatives, and lone women were considered at risk of assault.[367] Additionally, the *Lives* of female ascetics that have survived suggest that the identity of the hermit was highly masculinised in its contemporary cultural context.[368] A clear example of this is Saint Mary of Egypt, whose *Life* depicts her in such a condition of bodily mortification that she is mistaken for a male hermit.[369] As a reformed sex worker, Mary's bodily denial and adoption of a masculine mantle carries a particular significance, yet the holiness attained by various other saints equally attests to the gendered nature of saintly identities. For instance, it has been argued that the hagiographical accounts of early Christian female martyrs couched the achievements of their heroines in terms of masculinised contest (*agon*) with the Devil.[370]

The attainment of sainthood in the early hagiographical tradition through either martyrdom or prolonged adherence to an ascetic way of life was thus a process that was culturally coded as masculine.[371] There is however a striking difference in the age group most often associated

[365] The gendered dimension of the way saints are characterised in hagiographical literature has been discussed at length (Alexander P Kazhdan, "Women at Home," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998).; Stravroula Constantinou, "Subgenre and Gender in Saints' Lives," in *Les Vies Des Saints À Byzance : Genre Littéraire Ou Biographie Historique? : Actes Du Iie Colloque International Philologique "Epmhneia", Paris, 6-7-8 Juin 2002*, ed. Paolo Odorico and Panagiotis Agapitos (Paris: Centre d'études byzantines, 2004).; Roland Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality* (Princeton University Press, 2020)., Introduction; Halsall, "Women's Bodies,"). Meanwhile the age aspect has garnered less scholarly attention (see for instance Davies, "Age, Gender and Status"; Ariantzi, *Coming of Age*).

[366] Stavroula Constantinou, "Male Constructions of Female Identities: Authority and Power in the Byzantine Greek Lives of Monastic Foundresses," in *Female Founders in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. Lioba Theis, Margaret Mullett, and Michael Grunbart (Köln ; Weimar ; Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2014)., 48.

[367] Alexander Kazhdan, "Byzantine Hagiography and Sex in the Fifth to Twelfth Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990)., 132; Talbot, *Varieties*, 78-9, 130; C.f. Constantinou, "Male Constructions," 54-7.

[368] Doing battle with demons – an extremely common activity for holy men and even dedicated monks in hagiographical literature – was depicted in terms of a conflict that required masculine bravery, as when St. Athanasios chides a monk for fleeing from a demon in an unmanly (ἄνανδρον) fashion, *Life* of Athanasios, 54.

[369] *Life* of Mary of Egypt, 10-11; Mary's masculinisation is likewise emphasised by her portrait iconography, usually depicting her as half naked and wearing traditionally male clothing (Piotr L Grotowski, "Defining the Byzantine Saint–Creating a Message in Orthodox Art," *Series Byzantina Studies On Byzantine and Post–Byzantine Art* 8 (2010)., 144).

[370] Halsall, "Women's Bodies," 124-5.

[371] As argued by Halsall it would be reductive to see sainthood itself as masculinised, as male saints were often feminized in relation to traditional masculine roles (Halsall, "Women's Bodies," 106-7). Nonetheless, the

with each type of saint. Youth was by no means an essential characteristic for a martyr's cult to flourish in Byzantium.[372] Yet the hagiographical literature and portrait iconography that celebrated the many martyrs who died in early adulthood often emphasised their youth, and in particular their youthful beauty. Notably this applied equally to male martyrs such as George and Merkourios as it did to female martyrs, who were less exceptional in the context of an iconographic tradition that consistently presented female saints as young and beautiful.[373] The youthful beauty of martyred saints, in addition to the obvious aesthetic appeal within iconographic tradition, also functioned as a visual expression of the saint's power and thus the military might of their associated aristocratic patron.[374] The youth of this group of saints was thus significantly linked with their worldly presence and bodily strength, in direct contrast to the incorporeal and unworldly authority granted to ascetic saints.

In the case of the latter, both coenobitic and eremitic monastic saints were usually depicted in literature and art in advanced old age. The association of white hair and mortified flesh with holiness was such that in hagiographical literature, the sight of an elder alone was enough to provoke admiration and respect. Thus the monk Zosimas immediately pursues Mary of Egypt in her *Life*, as it is understood that Mary's blackened body and white hair marks her out as a worthy γέρων: the object of the narrator's search.[375] A similar phenomenon appears in the *Life* of Athanasios of Athos, a holy man and monastic founder in the latter part of the tenth century.[376] In one passage of his *Life*, preserved in a version that was composed approximately between 1050 and 1150, the saint poses as a mendicant and questions another γέρων about the alms given out at a particular monastery:[377]

> "The elder replied to him, 'There's lots of hospitality to strangers and generosity there, my father; for even I was considered worthy of many good things there. One monk gave

idealised behaviour depicted in saints' *Lives* often aligned with the corresponding norms expected of each saint's gender (see Constantinou, "Subgenre and Gender," 417).

[372] See for instance the older military martyr Polyeuktos, as depicted in a miniature in the Walters 'Imperial' Menologion dated to the eleventh century (Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, "The Walters" Imperial" Menologion," *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* (1993)., 49); C.f. the evolution of the iconography of the military Saint Menas of Egypt, who appeared from the fifth century onwards as a young beardless soldier, yet by the tenth century was normally depicted as a middle-aged man with a white beard (Grotowski, "Defining," 138-9).

[373] Hatzaki, *Beauty*, 121-3; C.f. Maguire, *The Icons*, 28-32.

[374] On the adoption of specific military saints as patrons by aristocratic families, particularly those with land in Anatolia, see Piotr Grotowski, *Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints: Tradition and Innovation in Byzantine Iconography (843–1261)*, vol. 87 (Brill, 2010)., 111.

[375] *Life* of Mary of Egypt, 10-11.

[376] Richard PH Greenfield and Alice-Mary Maffry Talbot, *Holy Men of Mount Athos*, vol. 40 (Harvard University Press, 2016)., "Life of Athanasios of Athos, Introduction"; Talbot, *Varieties*, 15-35.

[377] Greenfield, *Holy Men*, "Life of Athanasios of Athos, introduction".

me a cloak and another a cowl, and another one something else. But if you go there and they see such an elder as yourself, they will give you even more good things.'"[378]

The spiritual superiority of the saint, instantly recognised by those who meet him, is naturally a motif found throughout the *Life* in question and in many other works of hagiography.[379] Nonetheless, the status of γέρων can be seen within the same text to confer an immediate aura of authority on figures other than the saint.[380] The term γέρων within a hagiographical context conveys a dual meaning, signifying both an explicitly masculine figure of advanced years, and an elder with credentials as a spiritual leader. This composite significance is most clearly illustrated by another episode from the *Life* of Athanasios describing the saint's relationship with an elderly ascetic mentor:

"But the elder (γέρων), who was an old man (γέρων), was unable to perform physical labor; and the young man made up for the elder's need."[381]

Within hagiographical literature more broadly, γέρων ('elder') and πατήρ ('spiritual father') are used to refer to holy men and monastic leaders respectively, although in practice the term is often interchangeable.[382] That monastic authority figures were conceptualised as paternal figures is not surprising given the way that coenobitic monasteries were modelled on familial structures, and that monks would often act as spiritual fathers to laypeople who attended the liturgy at the monastery.[383]

Other hagiographical motifs and narrative *topoi* appear in the *Lives* of various types of holy men and women, indicating the intricate connections between sanctity and old age in Byzantium. For instance, hagiographers often made a point of mentioning monastic saints' age upon or shortly before their death. The ages they record are extreme, very frequently in the nineties, indicating the role of advanced old age in marking a figure out as exceptionally holy.[384] Regardless of the historicity of the age of these individuals, some monastics would indeed have lived much longer than their peers and would thus have been especially revered.[385]

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[378] *Life* of Athanasios, 49.2, trans. Greenfield.
[379] C.f. *Life* of Athanasios, 9.1-2; Theoktiste of Lesbos, 17, trans. Talbot, *Holy Women*.
[380] See for instance *Life* of Athanasios, 43.1.
[381] *Life* of Athanasios, 14.1, trans. Greenfield: "Ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν γέρων, οἷα γέρων, ἀδύνατος ἦν κοπιᾶν· ὁ δὲ νέος τὸ ὑστέρημα ἀνεπλήρου τοῦ γέροντος."
[382] *Life* of Athanasios, 9.2, 17.1, 44.1, 49.2.
[383] Ruth Macrides, "The Byzantine Godfather," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 11 (1987)., 140-4; Talbot, *Varieties*, 1.
[384] *Life* of Cyril, 54; C.f. *Life* of Theodora, 41-3.
[385] On the role of extreme old age in monastic communities, see Talbot, "Old Age," 270.

Holy figures are also frequently praised for overcoming the physical limitations placed on them by old age and infirmity.[386] The ability to transcend or ignore bodily weakness brought about by ageing is a literary *topos* that can also be found in secular encomiastic texts.[387] In addition to the obvious function of this *topos* in extolling the determination and virtue of the figure in question, it also serves to underline a holy figure's lack of concern for their body and the worldly sphere more broadly, allowing them to exhibit the spiritual benefits of advanced age without overtly suffering from the physical drawbacks. Lastly, the παῖς γέρων is a *topos* that appears widely in hagiographical texts.[388] The term refers to a child who exhibits signs of maturity or piety beyond their years, and in hagiographical literature this *topos* often appears in depictions of the early lives of saints. Aside from its rhetorical and narrative functions, the prevalence of this *topos* reveals the close conceptual association between advanced age and the wisdom and restraint that remained at the heart of the ascetic ideal.

Legitimising Sainthood in the Twelfth Century

The following hagiographical texts discussed in this chapter may be viewed as experimental works of literature, but their depiction of the holy figures themselves largely adheres to the gender and age expectations outlined above. The *Life* of Cyril Phileotes has been noted for its collation of *florilegium* material, spanning a narrative that depicts Cyril's somewhat unusual progression towards sainthood in the eleventh century.[389] The author, known as *hosios* Nicholas Kataskepenos took his name from the Kataskepe monastery located on the Bosphoros, founded by Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180).[390] The text's contents imply a monastic readership, although Nicholas may also have had an imperial or elite audience in mind.[391] The

[386] *Life* of Theodora, 41-3; *Life* of Mary of Egypt, 11.
[387] C.f. Bourbouhakis, *Not Composed*, 75-81.
[388] On this *topos*, see Davies, "Age, Gender and Status," 157-8; Talbot, "Old Age in Byzantium," 273. As argued by Galatariotou, signs of sanctity from early childhood were a mainstay of hagiography from the early centuries onwards, although the motif of child saints possessing the wisdom of old age in fact emerged in hagiography after the ninth century (Catia Galatariotou, *The Making of a Saint : The Life, Times and Sanctification of Neophytos the Recluse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)., 83).
[389] On the use of *florilegium* material within the text, see Margaret Mullett, "Literary Biography and Historical Genre in the Life of Cyril Phileotes by Nicholas Kataskepenos," in *Les Vies Des Saints À Byzance: Genre Littéraire Ou Biographie Historique? : Actes Du Iie Colloque International Philologique "Epmhneia", Paris, 6-7-8 Juin 2002*, ed. Paolo Odorico and Panagiotis Agapitos (Paris: Centre d'études byzantines, 2004)., 390-1; "Food for the Spirit and a Light for the Road: Reading the Bible in the Life of Cyril Phileotes by Nicholas Kataskepenos," *Literacy, Education, and Manuscript Transmission in Byzantium and Beyond* (2002)., 148.
[390] Mullett, "Food for the Spirit," 140-1.
[391] For discussion of the text's intended audience and purpose, see Mullett, "Food for the Spirit," 142-4.

Life of Meletios the Younger is particularly notable for having two distinct versions produced within the space of a few years by authors writing in the same Constantinopolitan milieu. The earlier of the two texts was composed by Nicholas, bishop of Methone, in 1041, who states in the preamble that the work was commissioned by an anonymous figure.[392] Nicholas' version of the *Life* serves to demonstrate the saint's holiness and at the same time commemorates the aristocratic family members who appear throughout the text.[393] Theodore Prodromos' *Life* of Meletios might initially appear to be following in the tradition of hagiographical *metaphrasis* (translation between linguistic registers), which had become increasingly common from the ninth century onwards, often associated with the *Menologion* of the tenth-century official Symeon Metaphrastes.[394] Composed shortly after Nicholas' text, Prodromos' work performs a wholly different function while still maintaining the same broad biographical narrative. Where Nicholas' text depicts the saint's pilgrimages and miracles as stages in the saint's spiritual development, Prodromos' aim seems to have been dramatic storytelling in service to a critique of his contemporaries and wider society.[395] Saint Meletios himself was the founder of a monastery on Mt. Myoupolis near Thebes which was funded with the support and patronage of Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118). He died at the same monastery in c.1110.[396] Both saints and their hagiographers had close ties to the Komnenian imperial family and much of the success of their cults was owed to the dynastic patronage that significantly influenced monasticism in the twelfth century.

Although the cult of saints remained an integral element of Byzantine culture in the Komnenian and Palaiologan periods, by the twelfth century comparatively few new hagiographical works

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[392] Nicholas of Methone, "The Life of Meletios the Younger," in *Συμβολαὶ εἰς τὴν ἱστορίαν τοῦ μοναχικοῦ βίου ἐν Ἑλλάδι, vol. II: Ὁ Ὅσιος Μελέτιος "Ὁ Νέος" (περ. 1035-1105)*, ed. C. Papadopoulos (Ἀθήνα: Τύποις Φοίνικος)., 1. For an overview of the differences between the two versions, see Charis Messis, "Deux Versions De La Même "Vérité": Les Deux Vies D'hosios Mélétios Au Xii Siècle," in *Les Vies Des Saints À Byzance. Genre Littéraire Ou Biographie Historique? Actes Du Iie Colloque International Sur La Littérature Byzantine.*, ed. S. Constantinou, P. Odorico, and P. Agapitos (Paris: Centre d'études byzantines, 2004).

[393] Messis, "Deux Versions," 326.

[394] Christian Høgel, "Symeon Metaphrastes and the Metaphrastic Movement," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography, V.2. Genres and Contexts*, ed. S Efthymiadis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2020)., 181-5. A good example of this tradition of lay hagiographers adapting earlier hagiographical models for the literary sensibilities of a contemporary secular elite can be found in Niketas Magistros' early tenth-century *Life* of Theoktiste of Lesbos, whose narrative was broadly derived from the *Life* of Mary of Egypt (Nathalie Delierneux, "The Literary Portrait of Byzantine Female Saints," ibid. (2011)., 372-3). On *metaphrasis* in Byzantine hagiography and literature more broadly, see Stavroula Constantinou and Christian Høgel, *Metaphrasis: A Byzantine Concept of Rewriting and Its Hagiographical Products* (Brill, 2020).; *Anne Alwis, Martin Hinterberger, and Elisabeth Schiffer, Metaphrasis in Byzantine Literature (Brepols, 2021).*

[395] Messis, "Deux Versions," 320, 322-4.

[396] Johannes Pahlitzsch, "Byzantine Monasticism and the Holy Land: Palestine in Byzantine Hagiography of the 11th and 12th Centuries," in *Heirs of the Apostles: Studies on Arabic Christianity in Honor of Sidney H. Griffith*, ed. D. Bertaina, Keating, S. T., Swanson, M. N., & Treiger, A. (Brill, 2018)., 243-4.

were being produced. This, combined with growing theological disputes concerning the validity of miracles attributed to saints, ensured that for many people living in this period miracle-working saints belonged to a semi-mythologised distant past.[397] Many of the hagiographical works that were composed at this time present scepticism concerning miracles as a problem to be combatted by the hagiographer. In the *Life* of Cyril, Kataskepenos urges his audience to reflect on the miracles of Saint Cyril as evidence against such scepticism:

> "Therefore let the common people not say that miracles are not for the believers, but for the faithless, and that today there are no perfect Christians and because of this the power to perform healing has been suspended. For the proof is here."[398]

Unlike other forms of doubt concerning the authenticity of certain types of holy men, this uncertainty of 'the common people' regarding the performance of miracles does not appear to have been based on a criticism of a type of eremitic lifestyle.[399] Rather, it seems to have been reflective of a wider discourse about the special status afforded to ancient miracle workers. This interpretation is supported by a passage from Version B of the *Life* of Athanasios of Athos, composed between c.1050 and 1150 and closely following a lost original composed shortly after the Saint's death at the turn of the eleventh century.[400] At one point in the *Life* an earnest discussion ensues between two monks at the Great Lavra about whether or not the feats of the ancient saints could be replicated in the present day:

> "Then Theodoritos asked him again, 'Most venerable father, more than anything I wonder how the most blessed Eupraxia, even though she was a young and tender girl, was considered worthy of the grace of such a long standing vigil and fasting for forty-five days. For I do not think that such a gift of grace has been given to anyone in the present day.'"[401]

In more elaborate fashion, Theodore Prodromos frames this same discourse in terms of a legal dispute in the opening of his version of the *Life* of Meletios the Younger:

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[397] On the decline in hagiographical production in the eleventh century and the corresponding controversy over the elevation of new saints, see Paschalidis, "The Hagiography," 148-9.
[398] *Life* of Cyril, 57: Μὴ τοίνυν λεγέτωσαν οἱ πολλοὶ ὅτι τὰ σημεῖα οὐ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἀπίστοις καὶ ὅτι τὰ νῦν οὔκ εἰσι τέλειοι χριστιανοὶ καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἡ χάρις τῶν ἰαμάτων ἤρθη· ὁ γὰρ ἔλεγχος ἐγγύς.
[399] C.f. below, pp.78-9.
[400] *Life* of Athanasios of Athos, introduction xi-xii; Dirk Krausmüller, "Take No Care for the Morrow! The Rejection of Landed Property in Eleventh-and Twelfth-Century Byzantine Monasticism," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 42, no. 1 (2018)., 48.
[401] *Life* of Athanasios, 44.1.

> "Wherever there are men who endeavour to tell of our own age, they limit goodness to the past, as if it were vigorous and young and naturally engendered it, while confirming the barrenness and sterility of goodness in present days. They weigh goodness with the older and measure evil with the more recent, tying distinction and its opposite to the age and not free choice. So that, unbeknown, the upright man remains unrewarded and the sinner goes unpunished! They wrongly understand or take no heed of the scripture that says that everything pertaining to antiquity is more venerable."[402]

Prodromos approaches the matter with a scathing critique, presenting those who would condemn the apparent lack of virtue in the present as self-righteous and narrow-minded. As argued by Messis, this passage reveals the unique quality of Prodromos' text, as a work that aims not to promote the cult of the saint and his benefactors, but to use the structure of hagiographic biography to subtly criticise those of the present day who "limit goodness to the past."[403] Nevertheless, this statement together with the one from the *Life* of Cyril suggest that defending present-day miracle-working had become a kind of hagiographical *topos* in its own right by the latter part of the twelfth century. Where in the *Life* of Athanasios the question is portrayed in the context of an open-ended discussion, in the later texts the authors take a clear stance in opposition to an apparently widespread scepticism.

Such scepticism concerning the performance of miracles emerged in an environment that was growing increasingly hostile to self-proclaimed holy men. As detailed by Magdalino, a number of Constantinopolitan intellectuals in the twelfth century composed works that were highly critical of what they saw as greedy charlatans posing as living saints in Byzantine cities.[404] For John Tzetzes, Constantinople was full of cynical pretenders who clothed themselves in the trappings of asceticism – a chain round their feet and an air of simplicity – in order to attract the attention of aristocrats hoping to outfit their private chapels with relics of the same holy men.[405] In his commentary on canon sixty of the Council in Trullo condemning those who simulate demonic frenzy for their own gain, Theodore Balsamon argued that the sheer volume

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[402] *Theodore Prodromos, "Life of Meletios the Younger," in Συμβολαὶ εἰς τὴν ἱστορίαν τοῦ μοναχικοῦ βίου ἐν Ἑλλάδι, vol. II: Ὁ ὅσιος Μελέτιος "ὁ νέος" (περ. 1035-1105), ed. C. Papadopoulos (Athens1935).*, 1, trans. Pamela Armstrong, "The Life of Meletios" (unpublished thesis).
[403] Messis, "Deux Versions," 322.
[404] Magdalino, "The Byzantine Holy Man," 54-65; on changing attitudes towards sanctity see also Aleksandr P Každan, "Hermitic, Cenobitic, and Secular Ideals in Byzantine Hagiography of the Ninth through the Twelfth Centuries," *The Greek orthodox theological review* 30, no. 4 (1985)., 'Hermitic, Cenobitic and Secular Ideals', and Ewing, "Unmonastic."
[405] No. 104, Tzetzes, ed. Leone, 150-2. C.f. Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Eustathii Opuscula*, 97.

of pretenders had made it impossible to identify genuine holy fools.[406] One of the central reasons for the declining number of new officially-endorsed holy fools in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was this difficulty in separating authentic fools from their cynical imitators.[407] The result was that several ascetics who considered engaging in holy foolery in this period were deeply conflicted about the efficacy of their actions should they be recognised as imitating that paradigm.[408] The overarching impression is of particular models of sanctity associated with a type of charismatic holy man who engaged continuously with the lay public. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries these models had become systematised to the extent that their adherents were instantly recognisable as such.

This alone would likely not have provoked a backlash from figures like Tzetzes if not for the second part of his complaint: a social context in which urban elites represented an eager audience for ostentatious displays of asceticism.[409] The resistance of certain intellectuals to what they perceived as insincere displays of ascetic practice was by no means reflective of a lack of interest in monasticism from laypeople. On the contrary, the Komnenian regime set a precedent for energetic monastic foundation projects and expressions of private devotion that were tied to the legacies of the most powerful families.[410] As Tzetzes alludes to, members of the ruling families, especially elite women, often formed relationships with ascetic figures acting as spiritual fathers; a phenomenon that is well attested in hagiography.[411] The problem as far as Tzetzes was concerned was not the elites' support of asceticism *per se*, but rather their indiscriminate patronage of both coenobitic monasticism and charismatic holy men. The latter presented a considerable challenge to the secular intellectuals of the twelfth century who were vying for the already limited attention of aristocratic patrons.[412] The new hagiographical works produced in the twelfth century therefore had to contend with rising scepticism about the

[406] Balsamon, commentary on Trullo, *PG* 137.716.
[407] On this topic, see Sergey A Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond* (OUP Oxford, 2006)., esp. 204.
[408] See for instance Irénée Doens, "Nicon De La Montagne Noire," *Byzantion* 24, no. 1 (1954).; Ivanov, *Holy Fools*, 209-10.
[409] On Komnenian patronage of ascetic holy men, particularly that of Alexios I Komnenos, see Armstrong, "Alexios Komnenos," 219-23.
[410] A significant number of the epigrams preserved in the Anthologia Marciana are related to dedications of monastic foundations or private icons by members of the extended Komnenian family or the great rival families of the time, Spyridon Lampros, "Ὁ Μαρκιανὸς Κῶδιξ 524," *Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων* 10 (1911)., 12, 50-2, 56, 58-9, 61, 63, 70, 91, 97, 99. On Komnenian monastic foundation as a political act, see Demirtiken, "Changing Profiles," esp. 269-71, 276-9; see also Angold, "Belle Epoque," 583, 592; Mullett, "Refounding Monasteries," 366-70.
[411] Athanasios for instance became the spiritual father of Nikephoros II Phokas, *Life* of Athanasios 22; Cyril held audience with members of the Komnenian family including the emperor Alexios, *Life* of Cyril 17.1, 47, 51 (Armstrong, "Alexios Komnenos," 226-7); C.f. the tenth-century *Life of Saint Basil the Younger*, 26-7.
[412] On this aspect, see below, pp.161-6.

veracity of miracles and an atmosphere in which the performance of radical asceticism was a contentious issue. It is therefore no surprise that the texts discussed in the following section placed greater emphasis on a quiet form of *askesis* restrained by the regulations of coenobitic monasticism.[413]

The γέρων and the Ascetic Ideal

The function of a conventional medieval saint's *Life* was on some level the establishment or propagation of a saint's cult, and thus needed to justify the figure's membership of that privileged group. Given the attitude of scepticism that pervaded twelfth-century intellectual culture, this aspect may have been more pivotal than in previous centuries. The way in which these texts portrayed their saints therefore reveals a great deal about the receptiveness of the implied audience to otherwise conventional elements of hagiographical narratives. In the *Lives* of both saints, the holy men achieve sainthood after attaining the status of a γέρων ('old man, elder') following sustained ascetic practices. As discussed above, the term γέρων had a dual significance in the context of monasticism, functioning as a mark of having gone through ascetic rites of passage as much as a descriptor of the individual's age.[414] Despite contemporary criticisms of those who ostentatiously displayed their ascetic achievements, genuine ascetic practice was nonetheless considered the core of idealised monastic life. In Eustathios of Thessalonike's *Visitation on the Monastic Life* for instance, the author begins by celebrating attributes that could apply equally to hermits as to coenobitic monks:

> "Oh strict monks, oh true Naziaraians, oh anchorites, oh those who have left behind the tumult and the struggle of life, those who are in seclusion for God and who have risen away from the world, those who have gone towards God and strive towards perfection with deeds pleasing to God alone in silence, and transcend the spectacle into closeness to God and thus equality to the angels and having rejected servitude below and as blessed runaway slaves having escaped the ruler of evil, so indeed having run towards the saving lord and having exchanged the earth for heaven."[415]

[413] See for instance the various places in the *Life* of Cyril in which the author downplays the extreme elements of Cyril's ascetic practices, *Life* of Cyril 16.3, 92-3, as pointed out by Mullett, "Food for the Spirit," 143.
[414] See above, p.74.
[415] Eustathios of Thessalonike, "Visitation on the Monastic Life," in *Eustathii Thessalonicensis De emendanda vita monachica*, ed. K. Metzler (Berlin ; New York: De Gruyter, 2006)., 1: Ὦ ἀκριβεῖς μοναχοί, ὦ ἀληθεῖς

For Eustathios, those who lived completely alone and in silence (ἡσυχίᾳ) were closest to God and were therefore the truest (ἀκριβεῖς) form of monk. The adoption of an eremitic way of life was not final however, and indeed hagiographical narrative conventions suggest that extreme ascetic practices and removal from the world were normally undertaken at a particular stage in the life course. According to their hagiographies, female solitaries tended to begin living in isolation at an earlier age than their male counterparts, usually around the age of eighteen. As Eve Davies points out, this disparity may well have been linked to contemporary ideas about the age of maturity, which fell earlier in the life course for females than for males, according to legal texts.[416] The adoption of a strict solitary lifestyle therefore functioned as a rite of passage that may have superseded or followed on from marriage, marking the transition to adulthood for young Byzantine women.[417] For male monastic saints the age of *anachoresis* ('departure from society') was later, usually around twenty-five, following a period of mentorship by an older monk or time spent in a monastic community.[418] The function of this transitional phase seems to have been to ensure that the monk was adequately mature and both physically and mentally prepared for the challenge of solitary ascetic life. In the *Life* of Athanasios, the older monk Maleinos allows the future saint to bypass the usual monastic trial period, realising his exceptional character, though he restrains Athanasios from the most extreme ascetic practices until he has gained adequate experience after four years of coenobitic living.[419] Rather than going directly into complete solitude, the saint then spends some time in servitude to a solitary γέρων, a phenomenon identified by Talbot as another possible stepping stone for male monastics on the road to a life of solitude.[420] Lastly, Athanasios founds the Great Lavra with the financial aid and close support of the emperor Nikephoros II Phokas.[421] The founding of the monastery also marks the final major threshold in Athanasios' life course as it

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Ναζιαραῖοι, ὦ ἀναχωρηταί, ὦ τὴν τύρβην μὲν λιπόντες καὶ τὸν κατὰ βίον ἀγῶνα, τῆς γωνίας δὲ διὰ τὸν θεὸν γενόμενοι καὶ κόσμου μὲν ἀπαναστάντες, θεῷ δὲ προσχωρήσαντες καὶ τῇ καταμόνας ἡσυχίᾳ πράξεσι θεαρέστοις ἐγγυμνασάμενοι πρὸς ἐντέλειαν καὶ τῇ θεωρίᾳ ἐπαναβάντες εἰς τὸ ἀγχίθεον καὶ οὑτως ἰσάγγελον καὶ τὴν μὲν κάτω δουλείαν ἀπειπάμενοι καὶ τὸν τῆς κακίας οὑτως ἄρχοντα διεκφυγόντες εὐλογητοὶ δραπέται, τῷ δὲ ὄντως ἐλευθερωτῇ δεσπότῃ προσδραμόντες καὶ τῶν γηΐνων ἀλλαξάμενοι τὰ οὐράνια·

[416] The *Ekloga* of Leo III indicates a continuity in the disparity, with a male age of legal marriage at fifteen and thirteen for females; Davies, "Age, Gender and Status," 160-1, esp. n.50.

[417] The legal age of marriage was thirteen for girls in Byzantium, although many were married from much younger ages by family members looking to secure their future (Ruth Macrides, "Families and Kinship," in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. E. Jeffreys, John Haldon, and Robin Cormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)., 654-5). The *Lives* of female saints thus often feature their central protagonist avoiding marriage or escaping a husband at the earliest possible opportunity (Constantinou, "Male Constructions," 53).

[418] Talbot, *Varieties*, 104; Davies, "Age, Gender and Status," 160-1; Pahlitzsch, "Byzantine Monasticism," 244-5.

[419] *Life* of Athanasios, 9.1-2.

[420] Talbot, *Varieties*, 105.

[421] *Life* of Athanasios, 22, C.f. 34, 36; Talbot, Monastic Experience, 32-4.

is swiftly followed by the performance of his first miracle, thereby proving his status as monastic leader and holy man.[422]

The life course outlined in the *Life* of Cyril Phileotes differs substantially in its details, but its rites of passage are comparable in many ways to those in the *Life* of Athanasios. After a childhood in which he demonstrates his exceptional wisdom and piety, being depicted as "θεοσόφιστος ὁ παῖς" ('the child with Godly wisdom'), Cyril declines an offer of becoming an ordained priest and instead marries at the age of twenty.[423] Cyril's role as husband and father of at least three children is treated very briefly by his hagiographer, who quickly moves on to Cyril's travels and ascetic pursuits. Within the same chapter that Cyril's marriage is introduced, the saint persuades his wife to continue their marriage in celibacy.[424] Much like in the *Life* of Athanasios however, Cyril does not embark on a fully ascetic lifestyle until later, in this case when he reaches the age of thirty.[425] In the intervening period Cyril practices the discipline of obedience by going to sea for three years.[426] The location of Cyril's solitary cell in his initial period of ascetic practice marks him out as distinct among other previous and contemporary saints. Rather than withdrawing into the wilderness by himself or seeking out a solitary elder to support, Cyril agrees with his wife that she will perform all the work necessary to allow him to retreat into a cell within their own home.[427] Despite this arrangement, the following period of Cyril's life is characterised by incessant movement. This includes traveling every Friday to Constantinople to witness the weekly miracle at the church of the Blachernai, and going on pilgrimage with his brother to Rome.[428] After moving between monasteries to avoid the dangers of a Pecheneg invasion, Cyril finally settles back at his brother's monastery of the Soter near his hometown of Philea, about thirty to forty miles from Constantinople, and lives within the monastery adhering to a strict *askesis*.[429] Cyril goes on to live to the impressive age of ninety-five, marking him out as exceptional among his fellow monastics.

As argued by Margaret Mullett, chapter twenty-nine, the point at which Cyril settles permanently at his brother's monastery, is a major turning point in the narrative of the text.

[422] *Life* of Athanasios, 24.
[423] *Life* of Cyril, 2.1.5-6; 2.4; 3.1.
[424] *Life* of Cyril, 3.1-4.
[425] Mullett, "Food for the Spirit," 41. On Cyril's particularly gradual transition towards *anachoresis*, see Galatariotou, *The Making of a Saint*, 76.
[426] *Life* of Cyril, 5.
[427] *Life* of Cyril, 6.1. On Cyril's unusual lack of coenobitic experience, see Mullett, "Novelisation," 15.
[428] *Life* of Cyril, 14.1, 20.1.
[429] *Life* of Cyril, 29**;** On the approximate location of Philea, see M Kaplan, "In Search of St. Cyril's Philea" (paper presented at the Work and Worship at the Theotokos Evergetis, Papers of the Fourth Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, Cd. M. Mullett et A. Kirby, BBTT, 1995)., esp. 214, 220-1.

This chapter features Cyril's rite of passage from monk to γέρων via ritual humiliation and tests, after which he himself becomes the locus for the events of the narrative: rather than travelling to sacred sites and monasteries, important figures come to him.[430] This neat division of Cyril's life course into two halves most likely reflects the needs of the narrative more than the historical events of his life, and thus caution must be exercised when drawing conclusions about the historicity of Cyril's actions in the latter half of his *Life*.[431] Nonetheless, the way in which the saint is depicted before and after this pivotal point in the narrative reveals a great deal about the contemporary archetype of the γέρων and the γέρων-in-training. Only one detailed physical description of the saint is given during the narrative, and it is situated close to the saint's death. Upon visiting the saint at his monastery, a representative of the emperor Alexios I offers the following description as confirmation of Cyril's status as a holy man:

> "Cyril is everything we had heard about him. He is white-haired, aged ('γηραλέος'), venerable, a man of peace... for you can tell someone peaceful by his air of calm. He is lacking no virtue, is full of love of God and is good."[432]

Given the narrative purpose of the description, the list of features is extremely sparse in this instance, with little to distinguish Cyril aside from his grey hair and elderly appearance. These features are nonetheless enough to convince Alexios and by extension the text's audience of Cyril's embodiment of the identity of a γέρων. At earlier points in the narrative, Cyril's appearance also plays a major role in the affirmation of his spiritual credentials, though in these cases Cyril's body serves as a manifestation of his ascetic achievements. In one such episode Anna Dalassene recognises Cyril principally from the signs of his ascetic lifestyle:

> "She having read aloud these things and recognising him from his garment and his gait and his countenance and the pallor and dryness of his face – for he was self-depriving in custom – rising up she prostrated herself before his feet entreating for his prayer and blessing."[433]

The major emphasis on Cyril's ascetic accomplishments at this point in his life course is not altogether surprising given that ascetic feats were considered a means of acquiring spiritual

[430] Mullett, "Literary Biography," 389-94.
[431] Mullett, "Literary Biography," 390.
[432] *Life* of Cyril, 46.16, trans. Mullett, "Novelisation," 18.
[433] *Life* of Cyril, 17.1: Ἡ δὲ ταῦτα ἀναγνοῦσα καὶ αὐτὸν ἐπιγνοῦσα ἔκ τε τοῦ στολίσματος καὶ βαδίσματος καὶ βλέμματος καὶ τῆς ὠχρότητος καὶ ξηρότητος τῆς ὄψεως - ἦν γὰρ συνεσταλμένος τῷ ἤθει -, ἀναστᾶσα προσέπεσεν αὐτοῦ τοῖς ποσὶ δεομένη τῆς παρ' αὐτοῦ εὐχῆς καὶ εὐλογίας.

authority within the ecclesiastical hierarchy.[434] However, the marks of asceticism that demonstrate Cyril's identity as a holy man in the first half of the text's narrative are largely supplanted by his embodiment of the role of γέρων, characterised by his elderly appearance and peaceful demeanour. The author of the *Life* reveals that Cyril's ascetic regimen became milder after settling at his brother's monastery, donning cords in place of the chains he wore when he was younger.[435] Thus it would appear that Cyril's status as a γέρων within the narrative is linked to his age in two respects. As a figure who has adhered to a rigorous ascetic regime for many years over his long life, Cyril accrues enough spiritual authority that his status no longer needs to be proven by further ascetic achievements. His status in the second half of the text rests in part on the many experiences recounted in the first half of the narrative, corresponding with the first half of the saint's life course. On the other hand, the description of Cyril to the emperor Alexios I implies that Cyril's advanced age could act as confirmation of his holy status by itself, given the association with self-restraint and control over passions. In other words, Cyril's old age in the later chapters of the *Life* both confirms his place in the life course and thus his accomplishment of the normative ascetic rites of passage, and demonstrates his suitability for the role of holy man given the cultural association between age and emotional control.

Theodore Prodromos' *Life* of Meletios the Younger is unsurprisingly a highly literary work, and contains dramatic narrative elements that would not have been out of place in the same author's novel *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*.[436] However, the life course of Meletios as presented by both Prodromos and Nicholas of Methone follows a general structure that is similar in many respects to that of other male monastic saints. After running away from home at the age of fifteen or sixteen to avoid marriage, Meletios travels to Constantinople to take up the monastic habit. The young monk remains there for three years in what might be thought of as an initiation period, then sets out on a pilgrimage to Rome and Jerusalem. Before his journey begins in earnest however he stays for a period of eight years according to Nicholas, or twenty-eight according to Prodromos, in an oratory (εὐκτήριον) near the city of Thebes.[437] The delay in Meletios' journey has been connected by Johannes Pahlitzsch to the legal age normally prescribed for appointment to the rank of deacon in Byzantium (around twenty-five).[438]

[434] C.f. C. Rapp, "Holy Bishops," 101.
[435] Mullett, "Food for the Spirit," 141.
[436] For instance, Prodromos links the saint's departure from his monastery in Thebes to an attempted seduction by a Theban noblewoman, *Life* of Meletios, 5.43-59. See Pahlitzsch, "Byzantine Monasticism," 244.
[437] Prodromos, *Life* of Meletios, 5; c.f. Messis, "Deux Versions," 320-1.
[438] Pahlitzsch, "Byzantine monasticism," 244-5.

Certainly it would seem from the *Lives* of the saints discussed here that by the eleventh and twelfth centuries male monastic saints were expected to have gained experience of *askesis* in a controlled environment, if not a coenobitic monastic community, before entering fully into the public sphere. After three years spent visiting the Holy sites of Palestine, Meletios returns to Thebes to minister to his flock, and it is soon after this point in the narrative that Prodromos refers to the saint as a γέρων, coinciding with the performance of his first miracles.[439]

Perhaps the most striking similarity between the twelfth-century texts in terms of narrative structure is the point at which the central figure is transformed from ascetic to γέρων. In the *Life* of Cyril the main turning point takes place in the twenty-ninth chapter out of a total of fifty-seven, while in Prodromos' *Life* of Meletios the saint becomes fully established as a miracle-working γέρων in the ninth chapter out of a total of twenty-two. In both cases, the most fundamental shift in the status of the saint occurs at the midpoint of the narrative, with roughly half the subject matter devoted to the saint's ascetic struggles on the road to becoming a holy man, and the remainder dealing with his miraculous deeds in later life and after his death.[440] Such a narrative convention clearly sets these *Lives* apart from the miracle collections that continued to be produced in Constantinople and other urban centres in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[441] The uneasy fusion of the two halves of these narratives illustrates one of the difficulties facing contemporary hagiographers. The two identities of the holy man, that of a monk struggling against human passions and of a living icon with access to miracle-working power, had to be reconciled. To some degree the παῖς γέρων *topos* helps to smooth the transition between the two identities by way of foreshadowing the saint's exceptional character in later life. Perhaps more significant is the fact that the transformation of the monastic saint's social and spiritual status takes place over the course of a long life. There is therefore no dissonance within the hagiographical narrative between Cyril the married man and a father of three children, and the grey-haired γέρων described to Alexios I. The old age of Cyril and Meletios distances the miracle-working holy figures from their secular lives, with their subsequent ascetic trials in youth and early adulthood acting as the catalyst for their metamorphosis.[442]

[439] Prodromos, *Life* of Meletios, 9.
[440] The structural organisation of saints' *Lives* to include in sequence 'acts' and 'virtues' of their central figure is a convention that can be traced back to the *Life of Antony* and beyond to many ancient biographies (Hägg, "The *Life of St Antony*," 25)
[441] Paschalidis, "The Hagiography," 147.
[442] This process was aided by the tendency of hagiographers to omit references to saints' ages between thirty and fifty, which Davies has interpreted as evidence that middle adulthood constituted the 'normative' stage of the life course for most adult authors (Davies, "Age, Gender and Status," 167). As a result, between young adulthood and old age the saint's age takes on an ambiguous quality, contributing to the impression of a radical

As discussed above, advanced age and masculinity both performed a central role in the construction of ascetic sainthood.[443] The term γέρων on a basic level signifies the combination of these two facets. It is therefore no surprise that both Cyril and Meletios are presented by their hagiographers in such a way that their character and actions align closely with a set of masculine ideals. In the *Lives* discussed here the saints are presented in a positive light for their engagement with the world beyond the confines of the monastery; one of the key features that distinguished male monastic saints from their female counterparts.[444] Moreover, the ascetic practices of the saints feature prominently and early on within the narrative, highlighting their self-control and independence.[445] Restraint from engaging in worldly pastimes and control over one's emotions were consistently encouraged by monastic *typika*, in which indulging in sensory pleasure is framed negatively as effeminate.[446] As Neville has argued, emotional self-control was one of the most fundamental expressions of masculinity in Byzantium, acting as a requirement for the exercise of control over others.[447] Accordingly, both Cyril and Meletios spend time in ascetic isolation in early adulthood, by the end of which they hold spiritual authority both within monastic institutions and the broader secular world. By the time of his old age Cyril has acquired the peacefulness that comes from complete mastery over emotions, thereby signifying his achievement of a masculinised ascetic ideal.

Sexual abstinence plays an emblematic role in the *Lives*, contributing to a comprehensive picture of the saints' *askesis* as well as further underlining their masculine moderation and self-control. Thus Prodromos' account of a Theban noblewoman attempting to seduce Meletios reinforces the depiction of the saint's restraint as well as adding dramatic flavour to the narrative.[448] Similarly, Kataskepenos emphasises the abstinence of both Cyril and his wife following their mutual agreement to live in celibacy, and the self-restraint of Cyril in refusing

transformation at the critical turning point and limiting the sense of continuity between the saint's disparate life course stages.

[443] See above, p.74.

[444] Constantinou, "Subgenre and Gender," 414.

[445] *Life* of Meletios, 3.5-10, 5.41-2; *Life* of Cyril, 3.

[446] See for instance Thomas, *Foundation Documents*, Evergetis, 28, which instructs monks to avoid bathing and taking care of their physical condition, as to do so would be to live in an effeminate way. This was despite a gradual relaxation in monastic regulation against bathing since the late eleventh century (Thomas, *Foundation Documents*, Kecharitomene, 58; Pantokrator, 10, 15; Pantokrator, Trans. Robert Jordan, introduction 729-30).

[447] Leonora Neville, "Byzantine Gender," in *Byzantine Gender* (ARC, Amsterdam University Press, 2019)., 43-4.

[448] This episode is entirely absent from Nicholas' version of the *Life* (Messis, "Deux Versions," 323), suggesting that this was not a core component of the saint's construction as a γέρων. Nonetheless, it is revealing that Prodromos added this episode to his portrayal of an idealised holy man against whom Prodromos' own contemporaries are compared unfavourably.

to allow his wife near the monastery after his settling there.[449] Cyril's marital cohabitation arrangement is certainly unusual when compared to other *Lives* of male and female saints in the hagiographical corpus.[450] For Mullett, this constituted a pitch for a radical new model of asceticism available to both men and women, married or otherwise, directed towards a mixed audience of Komnenian secular elites and monastics.[451] Whether this mode of *askesis* would have been available to a holy woman in similar circumstances if the roles were reversed remains uncertain.[452] What is clear is that these passages effectively counterbalance the brief treatment of Cyril's early married life, transforming a potentially uncomfortable blemish on his ascetic record into further evidence of his self-control and exceptionalism.

After the critical turning point in the twenty-ninth chapter, Cyril is established as a γέρων who exhibits both complete self-control and a peacefulness that signals his liberation from worldly passions. Both these masculinised traits are demonstrated by the saint in the earlier part of his *Life* as evidence of his commitment to an ascetic lifestyle, yet they are proven beyond question by his venerable aged appearance in the latter part of the text. Just as his peaceful exterior acts as evidence of his ascetic sufferings, so too does his old age demonstrate his dedication to this lifestyle over the course of a long life. When combined with contemporary assumptions about the freedom from sexual desire and worldly cares brought by the onset of old age, the figure of the elderly holy man fully embodied a subset of masculine ideals.

Conclusion

The larger topic within which this chapter is situated has been the focus of several extensive studies and no doubt merits a great many more. The goal of this present chapter is not to provide

[449] *Life* of Cyril, 3.1-4. The author makes it clear from the outset that Cyril's marriage was intended purely for the purpose of procreation rather than the love of pleasure, *Life* of Cyril, 3.1. *Life* of Cyril, ch.27; Mullett, "Novelisation," 20-1.
[450] Female monastic founders for instance are consistently depicted in their hagiographies as getting rid of their husbands as soon as the possibility emerges (Constantinou, "Male Constructions," 53).
[451] Mullett, "Food for the Spirit," 160.
[452] Female saints in Byzantine hagiography are consistently defined in terms of their sexuality and by extension their relationship to men, e.g. 'daughter', 'mother', 'wife', 'widow' (Constantinou, "Subgenre and Gender," 416; Catia S Galatariotou, "Holy Women and Witches: Aspects of Byzantine Conceptions of Gender," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 9 (1985)., 82). It is certainly true that from the Middle Byzantine period female forms of sanctity came increasingly to make an allowance for marriage, c.f. the *Life* of Mary the Younger in Talbot, *Holy Women*; Kazhdan, "Hagiography and Sex," 133. The specifically monastic form of holiness presented in the *Life* of Cyril however represents a further departure, and a hypothetical female equivalent would have to negotiate the conflicting identities of wife and holy woman to a far greater extent than her male counterpart.

definitive answers to all the questions it has raised, but rather to explore some of the ways in which age and gender interacted with conceptions of holiness in twelfth-century Byzantium. In particular, the chapter has focused on the place of asceticism within twelfth-century Byzantium and its broader reception by contemporaries. The aim of this approach has been to examine the impact of twelfth-century developments on the long-established association between sanctity gained through ascetic accomplishments and advanced age. The findings suggest that the twelfth century saw broad cultural and theological changes leading to a decline in the number of new saints, and an intellectual backlash against lower class self-styled holy men hoping to profit from the naïve largesse of the secular elite. Despite this, the ascetic way of life retained its high status, even among contemporary intellectuals, although the form of *askesis* that was celebrated was closely connected to coenobitic monasticism. This was a kind of asceticism that allowed for interaction with the secular world, and especially for the elaborate donations of members of the Komnenian extended family. Extreme feats of ascetic suffering were downplayed by contemporary hagiographers with a preference instead for the ascetic virtues of abstinence and quiet self-denial.

The celebration of ascetic ideals was one of the most prominent ways in which old age earned reverential treatment in Byzantine society, and this remained true for the twelfth century. Within the monastic sphere, asceticism consisted of the enactment of a set of ideals that aligned closely with contemporary concepts of masculinity. Within this context, the elderly γέρων represented the epitome of masculine virtue. This can be seen reflected in the *Lives* of new saints produced in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, in which the saint's status as a γέρων was tied to his mundane and spiritual authority. Despite the innovations of the hagiographical texts of the twelfth century in terms of content and style, they nonetheless continued to uphold a narrative that fundamentally aligned sanctity with an elderly masculine ideal achieved through ascetic self-control.

Chapter Three: Pity and Lamentation

Lamentation has a long history in Greek literary culture, and has rightfully been the subject of a considerable amount of scholarship.[453] Many ancient Greek traditions of mourning continued in Byzantium, often fused with popular Christian beliefs.[454] At the same time, authors composed literary laments and funerary orations adhering to a greater or lesser extent to a set of structures and *topoi* established by the rhetorical handbook of Menander 'Rhetor'.[455] Age consistently played a significant role in both liturgical and literary traditions**,** from the assignment of roles within the lamenting community, to the way in which deceased and mourner were treated in the rhetoric of lamentation. The first half of this chapter sets out to untangle the relationship between age and lamentation in the literary tradition of twelfth-century Byzantium. This analysis raises further questions about the representation of elderly suffering more broadly, and these are subsequently addressed in the second half of the chapter.

Age Rhetoric in Literary Lament

In the twelfth century, competing rhetors utilised the language and imagery of lament as a means of showcasing their compositional versatility, linguistic flair and a capacity to adapt their style to the requirements of the occasion. This practice may be defined as a form of *ethopoiia*, a rhetorical exercise and mainstay of the Byzantine education system in which the

[453] Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002). is still the most authoritative work on the topic. See also *Greek Laughter and Tears: Antiquity and After* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017).; Nilsson, *Writer and Occasion*, esp. 64-83; Panagiotis A Agapitos, "Public and Private Death in Psellos: Maria Skleraina and Styliane Psellaina," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 101, no. 2 (2009).; Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia*, esp. 79-99; Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (Cornell university press, 2001).; Henry Maguire, "Women Mourners in Byzantine Art, Literature, and Society," in *Crying in the Middle Ages*, ed. Elina Gertsman (New York ; London: Routledge, 2012).; Andromache Karanika, "Messengers, Angels, and Laments for the Fall of Constantinople," in *The Fall of Cities in the Mediterranean: Commemoration in Literature, Folk-Song, and Liturgy*, ed. Mary R. Bachvarova, Dorota Dutsch, and Ann Suter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). C.f. Loring M. Danforth and Alexander Tsiaras, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

[454] On the evolution of mourning practices in early Byzantium, see Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament*, 61-76.

[455] On the influence of Menander 'Rhetor', see van den Berg, "Homer," 219; Bourbouhakis, *Not Composed*, esp.38-9. Different forms of literary lamentation existed in ancient and medieval Greek tradition. The *threnos*, *goos*, or *kommos* were usually performed by female mourners and incorporated ritual acts of lamentation, while the *elegos*, *epitaphios logos* or *epikedeion* were reserved for men (Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament*, 200). Given the fluidity of modes exhibited by the texts discussed in this chapter, the term lamentation is not tied to any one form of composition or ritual practice but is used loosely to refer to expressions of mourning or grief over a death or a loss.

author would compose a speech that could be delivered by a historical or fictional character.[456] Accordingly, speeches borrowing elements from the style and format of traditional funerary orations appear embedded in a range of literary works from the period.[457] These texts reveal a great deal about the cultural expectations of the Byzantine elite with regard to death and bereavement. On many occasions the age of the deceased or the bereaved figures performs a pivotal role in the rhetoric, thus presenting an excellent opportunity to examine contemporary assumptions about the life course and its relationship with loss and suffering.

As in the present day, the normative life course in Byzantium entailed survival into full adulthood. The death of a child or young adult therefore carried a greater tragic weight than the death of an elder. Funerary laments from the period consistently draw attention to the youth of the deceased in cases where they were thought to die before their time.[458] The renowned eleventh-century intellectual Michael Psellos' funerary orations make consistent use of this motif.[459] In his lament for the aristocrat Maria Skleraina, who died unexpectedly of disease in c.1045, Psellos uses the metaphor of a tree unexpectedly uprooted:

> "like a tree blossoming from the valleys of the mind,
>
> alas, alas, she has been harvested, uprooted before her time."[460]

The use of harvest metaphor is a well-established *topos* in Greek lament tradition, and appears in a similar fashion in Psellos' funeral oration for his daughter Styliane, who died at the age of eight:

> "Who reaped the harvest of your youth before the summer? Who caused your sunny beauty to darken and made you no different from the dead in their tombs?"[461]

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[456] On *ethopoiia* and its influence on broader literary production, see for instance Martin Hinterberger, "The Language of Byzantine Poetry: New Words, Alternative Forms, and "Mixed Language"," in *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry*, ed. Wolfram Hörandner, Andreas Rhoby, and Nikos Zagklas (Leiden: Brill, 2019)., 57; Beaton, "Rhetoric of Poverty"; Drpić, *Epigram, Art, and Devotion*, 89-92.

[457] Many of these are discussed in detail below and include the twelfth-century novels, *Digenis Akritis* and the 'begging' poems of Manganeios Prodromos. The imagery commonly found in the lament tradition can be found in an even broader spectrum of textual contexts, often divorced from lamentation itself. See for instance Manasses, *Encomium of Michael Hagiotheodorites* 38–49, ed. K. Horna, 'Eine unedierte Rede des Konstantin Manasses', *Wiener Studien* 28 (1906) 171–204.

[458] The exceptional tragedy of dying young can be traced in Greek literature back to Homer (Iliad 24.725-6; see also Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament*, 322).

[459] The works of Michael Psellos have attracted much scholarly attention to this date, and this poem is no exception. See for instance Anthony Kaldellis, "Mothers and Sons, Fathers and Daughters: The Byzantine Family of Michael Psellos," (2006).; Agapitos, "Public and Private," esp. 579-604.

[460] Cantarella 166.2.20-1, trans. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament*, 354.

[461] Trans. Kaldellis, "Mothers and Sons," 133. Agapitos and Polemis, eds. (2002), *Or.* 19.38.

The continued popularity of this *topos* betrays an assumption that there is an age at which it is natural to die, much as the harvest should be reaped when the crop has come to full fruition. Death in youth is by contrast presented as unnatural or unjust, while the antithesis between life and death, light and dark emotively conveys the tragedy of the event. It is therefore an important element of the rhetoric that the youth of the deceased is brought to the forefront of the lament. In this way the lament is rhetorically effective at moving its audience to grief or pity.

A strikingly similar line of rhetoric can be found in the embedded laments of the Komnenian novels. In Theodore Prodromos' novel *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, the male protagonist is treated to an account by his fellow captive Kratandros, in which the latter details his pursuit of the young woman Chrysochroe and her unfortunate death that resulted from it.[462] Within this nested narrative, the girl's father Androkles is given a voice with which to lament his daughter's death:

> "Alas, my daughter, alas, my little one,
> so untimely taken from our midst.
> My child, offspring of a wretched parent,
> you have gone from here through the envy of accursed Fate,
> unwed, unescorted; you have not even glimpsed the bridal
> chamber, nor has your progenitor
> lit the bridal torch for you
> nor has he begun the eloquent bridal hymn,
> but the grace of your countenance has been harvested
> in the bloom of spring-time, and the mortal-devouring Fate
> did not wait for the harvest to come."[463]

[462] *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, I.178-97.
[463] *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, I.212-22, trans. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 26-7:
"ὤμοι" λέγων "θύγατερ, ὤμοι παιδίον,
οὕτος ἀώρως ἐκ μέσου μετηρμένον·
ὦ τέκνον, ὦ γέννημα πατρὸς ἀθλίου,
ἀπῆλθες ἔνθεν δυσμενοῦς φθόνῳ Τύχης
ἄνυμφος, ἀστόλιστος, οὐδὲ παστάδας
εἶδες γαμικάς, οὐδ' ὁ σὸς φυτοσπόρος
ἀνῆψεν ἐν σοὶ νυμφικὴν δᾳδουχίαν,
οὐδ' ἦρξεν ᾠδῆς εὐφυῶς γαμηλίου·
ἀλλ' ἐτρυγήθης τοῦ προσώπου τὴν χάριν
ἔαρος ἀκμάζοντος, οὐδὲ τὴν τρύγην
ἔμεινεν ἐλθεῖν ἡ βροτοφθόρος Τύχη."

Here the tragedy of Chrysochroe's death is framed in terms of the expectations of a female aristocratic life course. The emphasis on the marriage denied her and Androkles' prospective role within it focalises the narrative firmly from the father's perspective.[464] The tragedy of the event is presented in terms of Androkles' loss and thus appeals to Byzantine patriarchal sensibilities. Chrysochroe's youth is important here in the sense that it emphasises the denial of her participation in marriage, one of the most pivotal stages in the life course of an elite woman.[465]

A somewhat similar dynamic can be observed in the mother-son relationship presented in Eumathios Makrembolites' novel *Hysmine and Hysminias*, where Hysimias' mother Dianteia mourns the supposed loss of her son:

> "'Phoibos Apollo, I perish. I have been shorn of my family's locks. My son was a flowery meadow which I tended, but I have been pitiably robbed of him entirely with all the plants, with all the blooms. A spring dripping with honey was my handsome son for me, and I have been quite robbed of it…'"[466]

Although there is less emphasis here on the marriage rite, again the young man is presented as dying in the spring of his life before coming into the season of harvest or maturity. The gardening metaphor for the process of raising a child appears elsewhere in contemporary literature, and effectively complements the imagery of blooming youth cut down before its time.[467] Constantine Manasses' funerary oration for Nikephoros Komnenos for instance uses an elaborate extended metaphor to convey his upbringing and tragic death:

> "But the high-minded and noble Doukas, having cultivated a well-planted plant, I mean this good Komnenos, and tending him with the dews of education, gardening him with the moistures of wisdom and irrigating him sufficiently with prowess drawn from

[464] In narratology, focalisation is used to describe the perspective from which the events of the story are viewed (Thomas Schmitz, *Modern Literary Theory and Ancient Texts: An Introduction* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008)., 56-7). For the use of narratology in Byzantine studies, see esp. Ingela Nilsson, "Narrative: Theory and Practice," (2021).; Christa Gray, "'Holy and Pleasing to God': A Narratological Approach to Hagiography in Jerome's Lives of Paul and Malchus," *Ancient Narrative* (2017)., 6-7.

[465] Ariantzi, *Coming of Age*, 8-10.

[466] *Hysmine and Hysminias*, X.10.15-22, trans. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 256:
Ὠλώλειν, Φοῖβ' Ἄπολλον· τοῦ παντός μοι γένους ἀπεκειράμην τὸν βόστρυχον. Λειμών μοι παῖς εὐανθής, καὶ φυτηκόμος ἐγώ· ἀλλὰ ὅλον αὐτὸν σὺν αὐτοῖς φυτοῖς, σὺν αὐτοῖς ἄνθεσιν ἀπεσυλήθην ἐλεεινῶς. Πηγή μοι στάζουσα μέλιτος ὁ καλὸς ἐκεῖνός μοι παῖς, ἣν ὅλην ἀφῄρημαι·

[467] As noted by Goldwyn, the hero's courtship of the girl in *Digenis Akritis* is treated as the cultivation of a garden (Goldwyn, *Byzantine Ecocriticism*, 64-5; see *Digenis*, G. 4.5-8; on the similar treatment of heroines in the Byzantine romances, see Charles Barber, "Reading the Garden in Byzantium: Nature and Sexuality," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 16 (1992)., 16). The similarity of these two dynamics reveals something about the paternalistic conception of marriage in the period.

> books… [I saw a north-east wind] dash violently against the tree and it did not harm the tree in its leaves nor in its twigs, but root and branch it cast it down to the ground and made it dead and lifeless, and being heavy with fruits and not yet having brought these things to fruition."[468]

The oration thus depends on two rhetorical strands in provoking sympathetic pity from its audience. On the one hand the death of the young Nikephoros has tragically denied him an opportunity to fulfil his potential in life, with the imagery of the destroyed tree promoting sympathy for the young man himself. On the other, the emphasis on Nikephoros' education and upbringing places a spotlight on his parents' loss, given all they had invested in their child's future. Lament literature of the period thus often employed the young age of the deceased when conveying the harsh and unjust nature of their death, though it played only a circumstantial role in evoking pity for those left behind.

Just as the youth of the deceased was a common motif in twelfth-century laments, the age of their mourning parents and relations was often central to the effectiveness of this rhetoric. Echoing many of the themes employed in Hysminias' mother's lament, Makrembolites gives a speech to the female protagonist Hysmine's mother that draws attention to her emotional dependence on her daughter:

> "'You were my fountain of sweetness, sweetening the bitterness of my old age, but a channel from Eurykomis diverts you to a different bitter conduit, and my soul thirsts for you and my mouth searches for you like a fair-flowing spring.'"[469]

Both mothers' laments at this point in the novel are laced with dramatic irony given that the fate of the protagonists is well-known to the audience. This knowledge effectively focalises the narrative from the young protagonists' perspective. In other words, this portion of the novel presents a performance of lamentation that invites the audience to pity the bereaved elderly parents without sharing in their mourning directly.

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[468] ed. Kurtz (1910), 30-33, 41-45, first section trans. Nilsson, *Writer and Occasion*, 72-3; second section my translation:
Ἀλλ' ὅ γε μεγαλόφρων Δούκας καὶ εὐγενὴς καλλιφυὲς γεωργήσας φυτόν, τὸν καλὸν ἐκεῖνον φημὶ Κομνηνόν, καὶ δρόσοις μὲν παιδείας μοσχεύσας, σοφίας δὲ νοτίσι κηπεύσας καὶ τὴν ἐκ τῶν βίβλων ἀνδρείαν ἱκανῶς ἐπαντλῆσας αὐτῷ ... προσβαλόντα τῷ δένδρῳ σφοδρῶς καὶ εἰς φύλλα μὲν οὐδαμῶς ἀλλ' οὐδὲ εἰς κλῶνα τὸ φυτὸν ζημιώσαντα, αὐτόπρεμνον <δὲ> κατὰ γῆς αὐτὸ καταβεβληκότα καὶ νεκρὸν καὶ ἄζων ἀπεργασάμενον, καὶ ταῦτα βρῖθον καρποῖς, καὶ ταῦτα μήπω μηδ' εἰς τὸ ἀκμαῖον ἐληλακός...

[469] *Hysmine and Hysminias*, X.11.8, trans. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 258:
Πηγή μοι γλυκάζουσα σύ, τὸ πικρόν μοι τοῦ γήρως καταγλυκαίνουσα· ἀλλ' ὀχετηγός τις ἐξ Εὐρυκώμιδος εἰς ἑτέραν ἀμάραν μετάγει σε, καὶ ἡ ψυχή μου διψᾷ σε, καὶ ὡς καλλίρρουν πηγὴν ζητεῖ σε τὸ στόμα μου.

Pity for parents in their old age appears frequently in the novels as a motivating factor behind the protagonists' eventual adherence to their social and familial responsibilities. In *Hysmine and Hysminias*, the laments near the end of the work are foreshadowed by the words of Hysminias' friend Kratisthenes:

> "'But your father's hopes are based on you; you are the staff of his old age, the warmth for his chills, the breeze in his summer heat. Then, do you not pity your mother, who breathes and speaks for you and rejoices in you and for you forgets the miseries of her old age?'"[470]

The poetic use of antithesis in these passages, contrasting sweet and bitter, water and thirst, warmth and cold, is a mainstay of Greek lament literature.[471] The implication of these passages is that whether through death or negligence, an elderly parent who has been deprived of normative filial support in the later stages of their life deserves the sympathy and pity of the novel's audience.

Niketas Eugenianos' novel *Drosilla and Charikles* provides a subversion of its protagonists' happy resolution through the secondary characters Kleandros and Maryllis.[472] Throughout much of the novel Kleandros plays the role of friend and companion to Charikles while Maryllis appears in the later books of the work, acting as a guardian and surrogate mother figure to Drosilla during her separation from Charikles. Soon after the protagonists' reunion, Kleandros receives word that his own beloved has died, causing him to lament and ultimately die of grief.[473] While Kleandros's unhappy fate offers a new perspective on the fortunes of Drosilla and Charikles, Maryllis illustrates what could have befallen their parents if they had not survived and been reunited. In the midst of a celebratory meal, Maryllis tells the young protagonists:

> "-for I love you like Chramos
> who was my son, the only son whom I bore,
> whose graces I enjoyed but briefly

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[470] *Hysmine and Hysminias*, III.9.2-3, trans. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 198:
ἀλλ' ὁ πατὴρ ἐπὶ σοὶ τὰς ἐλπίδας σαλεύει· σὲ γήρως ἔχει βακτηρίαν καὶ ψύχους θέρμην καὶ καύματος ζέφυρον. Εἶτ' οὐκ ἐλεεῖς τὴν μητέρα, ἥτις σε πνεῖ καὶ λαλεῖ καί σοι γέγηθε καὶ τῶν τοῦ γήρως κακῶν ἐπιλήθεται;
As noted by Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 198, n.91, for the staff analogy c.f. Heliodoros, *Aethiopica*, 1.13.1: "ἀλλὰ τοῦ γήρως τοὐμοῦ βακτηρίαν ἔσεσθαι"

[471] Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament*, esp.150-160; on antithesis in Byzantine rhetoric in general, see Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia*, 95-6.

[472] On the unique emotional ambivalence at the end of the novel, see Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia*, 296.

[473] *Drosilla and Charikles*, VIII.311-14.

and for whom I grieve for so long-
the four of you must gladly consume my banquet,
the four of you must quaff my wine,
for my food is the sight of you.'"[474]

Here in this carnivalesque banquet the protagonists fulfil the role of Maryllis' lost son, a dynamic that foreshadows the reunion scene later in the following Book.[475] This theatrical roleplay can only last for so long however, and thus Maryllis' speech also functions as a glimpse into a possible alternate resolution from the perspective of the protagonists' parents. The figure of Maryllis offers the audience a very tangible example of social isolation in old age that adds substantial weight to the elaborate hyperbolic rhetoric of the parents' laments.

The motif of the sight of a child sustaining an elderly parent appears elsewhere in contemporary literature. In *Digenis Akritis* the eponymous hero's father is rebuked by his mother for abandoning her in their native land following his marriage and conversion to Christianity:

"'My sweetest child, light of my eyes
and comfort of my soul in my old age,
my charming delight, my consolation,
tell me why you have lingered, child, in Roman territory?
For when I did not see you, I no longer wished to see the light
or the gleaming sun or to live in the world.'"[476]

Evidently the bereaved or abandoned elderly parent was a popular *topos* in the fictional literature of the twelfth century, providing rhetors with an opportunity to demonstrate their

[474] *Drosilla and Charikles*, VIII.258-64, trans. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 448:
φιλῶ γὰρ ὑμᾶς, ὡς ἐκεῖνον τὸν Χράμον,
ὅν υἱὸν εἶχον, ὅς προήχθη μου μόνος,
οὗ μικρὸν ἀπήλαυσα τῶν χαρισμάτων,
καὶ μακρόν εἰμι δυσφορουμένη χρόνον--·
οἱ τέσσαρες χαίροντες ἐστιᾶσθέ μοι,
οἱ τέσσαρες τὸν οἶνον ἐκροφεῖτέ μοι·
τροφὴν ἐγὼ γὰρ τὴν ὑμῶν ἔχω θέαν.
[475] *Drosilla and Charikles*, IX.149-97.
[476] Digenis, III.132-7, trans. Jeffreys, *Digenis*, G 53:
Ὦ τέκνον μου γλυκύτατον, φῶς τῶν ἐμῶν ὀμμάτων,
καὶ παραμύθιον ψυχῆς τῆς ἐμῆς ἐν τῷ γήρει
καὶ τερπνὸν ἀγαλλίαμα, ἡ ἐμὴ θυμηδία,
εἰπέ μοι τί ἐβράδυνας, τέκνον, εἰς Ῥωμανίαν;
Ἐγὼ γὰρ μὴ ὁρῶσα σε οὐκ ἤθελον φῶς βλέπειν
οὔθ' ἥλιον τὸν λάμποντα οὔτε ζῆν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ.

compositional versatility and mastery of the conventions of lament. The advanced age of the lamenting figure functions in part as a signifier of their relationship to their children and especially their dependence upon them in later life. However, there is also evidence to suggest that the figure's advanced age was tied more directly to contemporary ideas about lamentation itself. In Eugenianos' novel, the reunion of Drosilla and Charikles with their fathers is described in the following manner:

> "First they wept, as is habitual in old age,
> then they kissed their heads delightedly,
> they rejoiced, they grieved, they were happy, they were despondent,
> they laughed, they cried, they burst into loud applause."[477]

The first line of this passage points to an assumption about the experience of old age that makes elderly characters particularly well-suited to lamentation. The parents' emotional volatility conveys the significance of the scene, inviting the audience to emulate this intensity in their response to the narrative.[478] At the same time the parents' weeping is justified as a natural consequence of their age, implying an assumed correlation between the two things. As pointed out by Jouanno, the Komnenian novels emphasise the gendered differences between men and women, defining weeping and sentimentality as the role of the latter.[479] The case of the elderly fathers' expression of emotion however presents an example of the intersection of normative gender roles and age-appropriate behaviour. Overt sentimentality may have seemed contradictory in the portrayal of a younger masculinised figure, but in this instance the fathers' age creates a distance between them and this masculine ideal.[480] The reassertion of their status as elderly figures therefore serves to justify their role in the scene, enabling a peak in the emotional intensity of the narrative without undermining the fathers' gendered identity.

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[477] *Drosilla and Charikles*, IX.162-5, trans. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 454:
οἳ πρῶτα δακρύσαντες, ὡς γήρᾳ νόμος,
τὰς σφῶν κεφαλὰς κατεφίλουν ἀσμένως,
ἔχαιρον, ἤλγουν, εὐθύμουν, ἐδυσφόρουν,
ἠγαλλίων, ἔκλαιον, ἐκρότουν μέγα·
C.f. *Digenis*, E, 228-9:
τέκνον μου ποθεινότατον, ψυχή μου, ἀναπλοκή μου,
τί ἐσκότασες τὰ ὀμμάτια μου, τί ἔχασες τὸν ἑαυτόν σου;

[478] The mixture of laughter and tears at a reunion scene is common to many ancient and Byzantine novels. Ingela Nilsson, "Comforting Tears and Suggestive Smiles: To Laugh and Cry in the Komnenian Novel," in *Greek Laughter and Tears*, ed. Margaret Alexiou and Douglas Cairns (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017)., 296.

[479] Jouanno, "Women in Byzantine Novels," 148-9.

[480] On the feminising effect of ageing on male figures in Byzantine literary tradition, see below, pp.147-8.

It is perhaps no accident that the portrayal of the protagonists' fathers taking up a conventionally feminine role coincides with their depiction as passive agents completely dependent on their children for support. Several of the Komnenian novels place direct emphasis on the old age of the protagonists' parents at a specific point in the narrative to emotively convey their pitiful circumstances. For instance, in *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* the narrative takes the perspective of the lovers' fathers shortly before their reunion with their children.[481] For the duration of this section, the two men are consistently defined by their age, with multiple references to their advanced years. This is in marked contrast to the depiction of the protagonists' fathers when they first appear in the narrative.[482] Dosikles' father Lysippos is initially introduced as the son of Euphrates, a great general, while Rhodanthe's father Straton is described as wealthy and significant.[483] At this earlier point in the narrative the fathers are defined by their social standing with no mention of their age. Thus, the old age of the parents is not an inherent aspect of their characterisation, but rather a specific *topos* that is emphasised for emotive and dramatic effect at a key turning point in the narrative.[484]

The significance of the parents' old age in the portrayal of their lamentation is illustrated towards the end of *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, when Kratandros' father Kraton comes before the pirate leader Bryaxes to plead for his son's life. The father's lengthy speech is preceded by a description that establishes the narrative within a mode of ritual lament:

> "...he immediately made for the temple, shouting loudly
> (clawing, scratching at his pleasant face,
> tearing his white and reverend locks),
> and clasping Bryaxes' feet
> he began this most pitiable lament."[485]

[481] *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, IX.184-240.
[482] *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, II.170 onwards.
[483] *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, II.172-3, II.213-14.
[484] This technique was also used in hagiography to similar effect, as in the case of the seventh-century *Life* of Symeon, where the saint's mother is given a hyperbolically old age to reinforce her role in the narrative (Leontios, *Life of Symeon the Holy Fool*, 125**;** Davies, "Age, Gender and Status," 161).
[485] *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, VIII.12-16, trans. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 127:
πρόσεισιν εὐθὺς τῷ νεῷ κράζων μέγα
(δρύψας, ἀμύξας τοῦ προσώπου τὴν χάριν,
λευκὴν σπαράξας καὶ γεραιτέραν τρίχα),
καὶ τοῦ Βρυάξου τοῖν ποδοῖν εἰλημμένος
οἴκτιστον οἷον ἐτραγῴδει τὸν λόγον ·

Ritual acts of lamentation such as wailing, clawing at the cheeks and tearing at the hair were frequently represented in ancient Greek literature and their continued practice after the advent of Christianity is attested by the writings of the Church Fathers.[486] In this context, the pleasantness of his face and his venerable white hair accentuate the emotive weight of Kraton's ritualised self-harm. His idealised aged body is transformed into a site of suffering, provoking sympathetic pity from the novel's audience. The lengthy speech that follows serves as a demonstration of effective rhetorical composition during which the motif of Kraton's pitiful old age repeatedly comes to the foreground. One passage is particularly revealing in this regard, and merits inclusion here despite its length:

> "'Let grey hair and old age importune you;
> let a wrinkled brow and trembling gait
> incline you from wrath to pity.
> In vain would I have accomplished so great a journey,
> if leaving Cyprus I hastened uselessly in this way
> and in vain clasped your sacred feet
> so that I, an aged father, might see my child alive;
> do not do this, divine emperor, by the gods, do not do this.
> You have me; if you wish, cut me down, consume me with fire,
> give to the gods the flesh of an old man
> (if indeed the gods take pleasure in human deaths).
> You have me; pull out my teeth
> (if any still remain in this aged creature).
> You have me; gouge out my eyes
> (if time has not already done so).
> Let a forlorn father pay the penalty in place of his son;
> sacrifice an old man, not a handsome young one.
> For an old man a sword is a matter for brief debate
> since in a short while he will die even without a sword;
> but for a young man the delights of life are still to come.
> It is terrible, when a comely youth dies,
> that a decaying old man still yearns for life...

[486] Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament*, 16-19, 65-8**;** such violent gestures of lamentation were frowned on by the Church as they demonstrated a lack of faith in the Resurrection (Maguire, "Women Mourners," 6-7).

…grant the son his father, the youth the old man,
allow me in my old age to be rejuvenated.'"[487]

This speech exhibits most clearly the irony that lies behind the elderly figures' laments discussed in this chapter. Through the voice of Kraton, Prodromos asserts repeatedly that the life of an old man is worth less than that of a youth, since death is just around the corner for the former while the latter still has much of the life course yet to experience. Popular adherence to this perspective is demonstrated by funerary laments mourning the tragic death of a child or a young adult.[488] Paradoxically however, the very same wretchedness of old age imbues the elderly supplicant with a right to be indulged and cared for. The self-deprecating asides describing the old man's toothless appearance and failing sight, while on the surface downplaying his own value, in practice centre the rhetoric on the father's aged body. Pity for an unfortunate old man becomes the emotive and persuasive core of the speech rather than sympathy for the hazardous circumstances of his young son. The final line of the passage appeals to a notion of restoring the elderly father to a more youthful state, again equating the release of Kratandros with the salvation of his aged father.[489] Perhaps most importantly, the persistent juxtaposition of the son's youth with his father's old age once more demonstrates

[487] *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, VIII.23-44, 83-4, trans. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 127-9:
πολιὰ καὶ γῆράς σε δυσωπησάτω·
ῥυτὶς προσώπου καὶ βάσις τρομαλέα
ἐκ τοῦ θυμοῦ πρὸς οἶκτον ἀντικαμψάτω.
μάτην γὰρ ἀνύσαιμι τὸν πλοῦν τὸν τόσον,
εἰ Κύπρον ἀφεὶς ἐν κενοῖς ὦδε δράμω,
μάτην δὲ τῶν σῶν ἱερῶν ποδῶν θίγω,
ὡς ζῶν τὸ τέκνον ὄψομαι πατὴρ γέρων·
μὴ τοῦτο, θεῖε βασιλεῦ, μὴ πρὸς θεῶν.
Ἔχεις με· κἂν βούλοιο, τέμνε, πυρπόλει,
δίδου θεοῖς γέροντος ἀνθρώπου κρέας
(εἴπερ θεοὶ χαίρουσιν ἀνθρώπων φόνοις).
ἔχεις με· τοὺς ὀδόντας ἐξόρυττέ μου
(εἴ τις παραλείποιτο τῷ γήρᾳ τέως).
ἔχεις με· παττάλευε τὰς ἐμὰς κόρας
(εἰ μὴ πεπαττάλευκεν αὐτὰς ὁ χρόνος).
δότω πατὴρ δείλαιος ἀνθ' υἱοῦ δίκας·
γέροντα θυσίαζε, μὴ καλὸν νέον.
γέροντι μὲν γὰρ τοῦ ξίφους μικρὸς λόγος,
ὅς μικρὸν ἤδη καὶ ξίφους χωρὶς θάνοι·
νέῳ δὲ τοῦ ζῆν ἡ χάρις πρὸς τοῖς πρόσω.
δεινόν, νέου θνῄσκοντος ὡραιωμένου,
γέροντα σαπρὸν ἀγαπᾶν ἔτι πνέειν...
...δὸς παῖδα πατρὶ πρεσβύτῃ νεανίαν,
ποίησον ἡβῆσαί με τὸν γηραλέον.
[488] C.f. above, pp.90-3.
[489] The rejuvenation of elderly figures through benefaction was a popular motif in twelfth-century rhetoric, and is discussed at length below, pp.126-30.

that both are nothing more than a construct: relative categories whose contrasting features are exacerbated for rhetorical effect.

An anecdote in Niketas Choniates' history offers an interesting example of age manipulation in practice, although in this instance old age is held to have the opposite effect on the audience. After having her murdered, the vilified emperor Andronikos orders the empress Xene's portrait repainted:

> "He had earlier ordered that the paintings of Empress Xene, Emperor Alexios's mother, whom he had ordered strangled, be done over so that she appeared as a shrivelled-up old woman because he was suspicious of the pity elicited by these radiant and very beautiful portrayals, worthy of the admiration of the passers-by and spectators."[490]

Here the narrative implies that an aged appearance might make an onlooker less inclined to pity the deceased. However, there is an important distinction to be made between this passage and Kraton's speech that illustrates the difference between two types of intersection of age and pity. In the case of the Empress Xene, the extent to which her death was viewed critically by the Constantinopolitan public is dependent on the type of figure she was remembered as. A depiction of Xene as a beautiful young woman would cast her death in a tragic light in line with the conventions of contemporary lament literature, while the death of a wizened old woman would be perceived as natural. The beauty of Xene's youthful appearance is particularly significant here as it signifies her intrinsic goodness and represents an important aspect of her characterisation as an idealised aristocratic woman.[491] Kraton's speech plays with a similar notion of aged proximity to death, and the decreased societal value of an older life. However, as a living elderly figure, Kraton inspires sympathy in the audience for his difficult and painful plight: it is not his advanced age by itself but rather his suffering that lies at the core of this rhetoric.

Self-deprecating rhetoric of the kind represented in Kraton's speech naturally lends itself to the construction of 'begging' poetry, and thus performed an important role in many of the encomiastic orations composed by Manganeios. As part of a petition to the emperor Manuel I

[490] Choniates, *Historia*, 332-3, trans. Magoulias:
...καὶπερ τὰς εἰκόνας τῆς βασιλίδος Ξένης τῆς τοῦ βασιλέως Ἀλεξίου μητρός, ἥν διὰ πνιγμονῆς τοῦ ζῆν ἀπεξένωσε, πρὸς γεραιτάτην καὶ ῥικνὴν μεταζωγραφῶν μορφὴν τὸν ἐκ τῶν παριόντων καὶ θεωμένων τὸ λαμπρὸν ἐκεῖνο καὶ περικαλλέστατον εἶδος καὶ τοῦ θαυμάζεσθαι ἀξιώτατον ὑποβλεπόμενος ἔλεον, τὰς δὲ πλείους καὶ ἀπαλείφειν ἐνδοὺς τοῖς θέλουσι….

[491] C.f. Psellos' funerary orations, above, p.90.; on Psellos' great emphasis on Styliane's physical beauty, see Kaldellis, "Mothers and Sons," 130-3; on outer beauty as a reflection of inner goodness, and exceptions to this paradigm, see Hatzaki, *Beauty*, esp. 39-42.

composed most likely in 1156, Manganeios elaborates on the sickness from which he had been suffering:

> "Previously I ran like the wind, I conversed with the wind,
> and I had winged feet, vying with the winds,
> but I fell into mud, I was thwarted,
> I was caught by struggles and nooses and traps,
> I was held back by firm bonds of affliction,
> The hail of old age freezes my sinews,
> it sets floods of phlegm flowing into them,
> and the wings of my feet were withered by the cold,
> and I drag myself across the ground more slowly than a tortoise,
> I who once leaped like Tydeus – though this is boasting."[492]

In this instance, the author's expression of suffering is far more literal and physical than those in the passages discussed above.[493] Nonetheless, the rhetorical formula is much the same: an idealised past is compared with a miserable present, the speaker's suffering is expressed in terms of cold, and in his old age he is entirely dependent on the benefaction of the addressee. One of the most noticeable differences here is the use of hunting metaphors, which are appropriate given the emphasis on the emperor's hunting prowess in this and other works, as well as the nature of the author's request.[494] In this and several other poems composed by Manganeios, old age and coldness function as a proxy for the poet's rhetorical poverty: if the

[492] Trans. Jeffreys and Jeffreys, forthcoming, 40, vv.13-22:
"Ἀνέμῳ πρὶν συνέτρεχον, ἀνέμῳ συνωμίλουν,
καὶ πόδας εἶχον πτερωτούς, ἐρίζοντας ἀνέμοις,
ἀλλ´ ἐπεπτώκειν εἰς ἰλύν, ἀλλὰ συνεποδίσθην,
ἀλλ´ εὗροσάν με συμπλοκαὶ καὶ βρόχοι καὶ παγίδες,
ἀλλὰ συνέσχον με δεσμοὶ στερροὶ ταλαιπωρίας,
ἀλλὰ τοῦ γήρους χάλαζα τὰ νεῦρα καταψύχει,
ἀλλὰ χειμάρρους φλέγματος εἰς ταῦτα καταρρέει,
καὶ τῶν ποδῶν μου τὸ πτερὸν ἐμάρανε τὸ ψῦχος,
καὶ περισύρομαι τῇ γῇ βραδύτερον χελώνης,
ὁ πρὶν πηδῶν ὡς ὁ Τυδεύς, κἂν κομπηρὸς ὁ λόγος."

[493] It seems probable that the continued references to illness in Manganeios' poems had a basis in the life of the historical author. For instance, there are three poems in the Manganeios corpus that address a request to the patron in question for the acquisition of a live fox to be used as a cure for the author's crippled legs. One of these is the poem under discussion presently, included in the Mioni catalogue as M 40, while the other two are found in the manuscript Milan, Ambr.gr.O.94 and are awaiting publication by Elizabeth and Michael Jeffreys, as poems 147 and 148 (Jeffreys, forthcoming).

[494] See especially 40, vv.62-69; cf. poems 147 and 148 (Jeffreys, forthcoming).

latter is relieved by the emperor's patronage his old age will cease to be a concern.[495] In a very real sense it may well be the case that the *adelphaton* at the Mangana monastery would have lessened the author's suffering. In terms of the symbolism of these verses however, the poet's cold and old age serve to create a contrast between the wretched condition of the speaker and the brilliance of the addressee, highlighting the dependence of the former on the latter. Just as the elderly parents in the contemporary romances are presented as entirely dependent on the light and warmth of their children, so too is the suffering aged rhetor dependent on the benefaction of his patron. This invites the possibility that the old age featured so prominently in Manganeios' verses was to some extent relative and context dependent: an expression of the relationship between poet and addressee rather than an absolute aspect of his identity.

The vivid depictions of physical and emotional suffering discussed in this section must be interpreted in the context of broader cultural developments in contemporary literature, art and liturgical practice. The twelfth century in Byzantium saw a renewed literary interest in many fields of Classical learning, including medical treatises.[496] This resulted in the insertion of medical terminology and concepts into various literary works of the period, and a general interest in the *ekphrasis* of illness can be seen in the rhetoric of Manganeios and Theodore Prodromos as well as Psellos' lament for Styliane.[497] The anonymous *Timarion* is a good example of this phenomenon, as a significant portion of the text is devoted to a detailed and medically authoritative account of the narrator's illness and near death.[498]

The image of an old parent grieving for their child had Biblical precedents that held a prominent place in Middle Byzantine art. The ritual mourning of Jacob when presented with the blood-stained coat of Joseph is depicted for instance in an eleventh-century Octateuch, MS Vatican gr.747.[499] Similarly, the emotionally-charged reunion of these two figures was conveyed through a tearful embrace, as depicted in ivories of the tenth and twelfth centuries, in reference

[495] Cf. M18, vv.177-180; M30, vv.46-8. On the 'rhetoric of poverty', see Beaton, "The Rhetoric of Poverty".
[496] Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 249; see Eustathios' funerary oration for Manuel I Komnenos, in which he praises the emperor for his medical knowledge, Bourbouhakis, *Not Composed*, 49.
[497] See esp. Manganeios, M.40, vv.18-9; on Theodore Prodromos' sickness, see Bazzani, "Theodore Prodromos' Poem LXXVII," 1-2, and Janek Kucharski and Przemysław Marciniak, "The Beard and Its Philosopher: Theodore Prodromos on the Philosopher's Beard in Byzantium," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 41, no. 1 (2017)., 45-6; on Psellos' lament, see Agapitos, "Public and Private," 596-7.
[498] *Timarion,* 12; see also the description of Theodore of Smyrna's medical conditions while he was alive (*Timarion*, 24), and a passage in which an old shade is diagnosed as one who died from 'wasting fever' (*Timarion,* 21). On the authorship, dating and influences of the text, see Baldwin, *Timarion,* introduction; also Baldwin, "A Talent to Abuse," 20-2.
[499] Henry Maguire, "The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art," *Dumbarton Oaks papers* 31 (1977)., 129.

to the biblical text of Genesis 46:30.[500] One notable iconographic development of the twelfth century was the emergence of the Man of Sorrows or *Akra Tapeinosis*, whose oldest surviving icon is from Kastoria, dated to the final quarter of the twelfth century.[501] This icon represents the dead body of Christ in the form of a nude bust on one side, and the Virgin holding the Christ-child with an expression of deep sorrow on the reverse.[502] When viewed together, the icon signifies the mixture of joy and grief at the death of Christ's human body.[503] It brings the human element of the Passion to the foreground, both in terms of Christ's physical suffering and the Virgin's emotional pain.[504] The close juxtaposition of birth and death, joy and grief formed an integral part of the rhetoric of liturgical lament.[505] The construction of emotion in contemporary lament literature was dependent on a language shared by the Greek lament tradition and liturgical practices as reflected in the art of the later twelfth century.[506] The misery of the bereft aged parents in the fictional literature of the twelfth century and their subsequent joyful salvation carries additional weight when viewed through the lens of contemporary art and liturgical practice.[507]

It is evident from the literature discussed so far that age performed an important role in various forms of lament as represented in the literary works of twelfth-century rhetors. A figure's youthfulness exacerbated the tragedy of their death, while by contrast the old age of those left behind served as a focal point for the grief of the survivors. The laments of archetypal elderly figures in this body of literature are almost exclusively self-pitying, rebuking the fates or their children for their lack of support, or else garnering the sympathy of the audience in adherence to a set of expectations about the misery of growing old. The second half of this chapter

[500] Maguire, "The Depiction," 161.
[501] Liz James and Antony Eastmond, "Teodora Burnand the Complexity of the Iconography of the Bilateral Icon with the Virgin Hodegetria and the Man of Sorrows, Kastoria," in *Wonderful Things: Byzantium through Its Art* (Routledge, 2016)., 129-132; Hans Belting, "An Image and Its Function in the Liturgy: The Man of Sorrows in Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 34 (1980)., 4.
[502] Burnand, "The Complexity," 129.
[503] Ibid., 137.
[504] Ibid. In a similar vein, the period also saw the development of the motif of the Virgin closely embracing Christ in depictions of the Deposition and the Entombment, which came into use by the tenth century but was fully and emotively deployed in the twelfth (Maguire, "The Depiction," 163).
[505] Belting, "An Image and Its Function," 4. On the emotional and theological significance of Middle Byzantine depictions of the Lamentation more broadly, see Maguire, "The Depiction," 162. On the function of the Kastoria Man of Sorrows icon in liturgical processions, and the use of smaller Man of Sorrows icons in funerals, see Burnand, "The Complexity," 132-3.
[506] This may be seen as a prelude to artistic developments of the thirteenth century, in which depictions of the death of Christ incorporated ritual acts of mourning such as the tearing of hair and clothes, and the Lamentation included increasing numbers of female mourners (Maguire, "Women Mourners", 10).
[507] On age imagery in representations of Christian salvation, see below, pp.124-5.

examines in greater detail the role of elderly figures as objects of pity in the literary production of twelfth-century Byzantium.

The Elderly as Objects of Pity

The novels of the Komnenian era were replete with depictions of old age as a miserable phase in the human life course. The normative suffering of old age is illustrated appropriately by a scene in *Hysmine and Hysminias* during which the male protagonist and his friend Kratisthenes admire and interpret a series of paintings. One of these contains representations of the months of the year personified, each of which is described in detail and its meaning explained by the helpful Kratisthenes. The *ekphrasis* offered for the final month February is as follows:

> "That greyhaired and wrinkled man who sits hard up to the fire reveals to you the harshness of winter no less than the chill of old age; for winter does not pierce a tender-skinned girl but makes the old man bent."[508]

The adage at the end of this passage subverts the audience's gendered expectations for rhetorical effect. In the face of cold weather, a young woman is found to be in possession of the usually masculinised trait of physical resilience, while an old man is haplessly vulnerable.[509] The old man is presented as suffering and powerless; an object of the audience's pity without any agency of his own. As has been made clear by the first half of this chapter, elderly figures were frequently framed in literary works of the twelfth century in such a way as to elicit a response of this kind from the audience. This pattern extended to historical works of the period, in which the mistreatment of an older authority figure could be used to condemn the parties responsible. In Niketas Choniates' history for instance, the emperor Isaac II Angelos is blamed for his unceremonious removal of the patriarch:

> "He [Isaac] promoted as patriarch Niketas Mountanes, the *sakellarios* of the Great Church, but he would not even tolerate this very old man to die on the throne. Charging

[508] *Hysmine and Hysminias*, IV.18.13, trans. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 207:
Ὁ πολιὸς οὗτος ἀνήρ, ὁ ῥυτίς, ὁ τῇ ἱστίῃ ἐμπελαδὸν παρακαθήμενος τὸ δριμὺ τοῦ χειμῶνος καθυμεμφαίνει σοι, οὐχ ἧττον δὲ καὶ τὸ τοῦ γήρως ψυχρόν· ὁ γάρ τοι χειμὼν διὰ κόρης ἁπαλόχροος οὐ διάησι, τροχαλὸν δὲ γέροντα τίθησιν.
[509] C.f. Halsall, "Women's Bodies," 123-5.

> the man as being simple-minded and condemning him for his blameless old age, he hurled him down against his will from the throne."[510]

Here Choniates implies that the old patriarch should rightfully have been allowed to continue his responsibilities even if his extreme age made him ill-suited for the role. Senility is acknowledged as a very real problem facing those advanced in age, yet respect is expected to supersede pragmatic considerations in this case. This text is not unique among contemporary works for acknowledging the possibility of senility in old age. Eustathios of Thessalonike's funerary oration for the emperor Manuel I praises the emperor's strength of memory towards the end of his life, and in the eleventh century Michael Psellos commented that the empress Zoe's old age made her unfit for responsibilities in her waning years.[511] Despite the possibility of the patriarch's senility, Isaac's actions stand in opposition to the assumed respect shown towards elders, and the emphasis on Niketas' extreme old age works to present the emperor as a ruthless persecutor. In addition to the superlative description of the patriarch as τριγέροντα ('extremely old'), and the sympathetic portrayal of his γῆρας…ἀνέγκλητον ('blameless old age'), the old man is again presented as a helpless victim, the object of abuse both narratively and syntactically.

Choniates' history gives similar treatment to the Seljuk Sultan of Rum to enhance the narrative with invective against the sultan's sons. Towards the beginning of his account of the reign of Isaac II, Choniates introduces the sultan as a shrewd strategist and notes his old age with relatively neutral language:

> "When the sultan of Ikonion (this was still Kilij Arslan, in green old age and over seventy years old) heard of Andronikos's death and Isaakios's accession, he conjectured rightly that with such changes of emperors, dislocations would most likely occur, especially if a major war was being fought in the West."[512]

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[510] Choniates, *Historia*, 405.15-19, trans. Magoulias:
προβαλόμενος δ' ἀντ' αὐτοῦ πατριάρχην τὸν Μουντάνην Νικήταν, τῆς Μεγίστης Ἐκκλησίας ὄντα σακελλάριον, οὐδὲ τὸν τριγέροντα τουτονὶ τῷ θρόνῳ παρῆκεν ἐναποψῦξαι, ἀλλ' ἀφέλειαν καταγνοὺς τοῦ ἀνδρὸς καὶ γῆρας ἐπεγκαλέσας ἀνέγκλητον καὶ ἄκοντα τοῦ θρόνου ἀπεσφενδόνησε.
[511] Bourbouhakis, *Not Composed*, 35; Psellos, *Chronographia*, VI.157; c.f. Choniates on the *Sebastokrator* John Doukas pointing out his rationality despite his age, Choniates, *Historia*, 385.
[512] Choniates, *Historia*, 367.18-23, trans. Magoulias:
Ὁ δέ γε τοῦ Ἰκονίου σουλτάν (ἦν δὲ εἰσέτι ὁ Κλιτζασθλάν, εὐγηρίαν ἄγων καὶ γεγονὼς ὑπὲρ ἔτη τὰ ἑβδομήκοντα) τὸν Ἀνδρονίκου ἐνωτισθεὶς θάνατον καὶ τὴν ἀνάρρησιν Ἰσαακίου πυθόμενος καταστοχάζεται ἀρίστως ὅσα εἰκὸς ἐπὶ ταῖς τῶν βασιλέων τοιαῖσδε μεταθέσεσί τε καὶ παραλύσεσι γίνεσθαι, καὶ μᾶλλον εἰ πόλεμος ἀνθέλκει ἐσπέριος καὶ πολέμων ὁ κράτιστος·

Later in the narrative the sultan's advanced age is reiterated, although this time in the context of his fall from power at the hands of his sons:

> "Around the fortress of Philomilion, the king [Barbarossa] engaged the sons of the sultan of Ikonion, whom they had removed from the throne and driven from Ikonion, transforming his former paternal good fortune into an ill-starred old age…"[513]

In this instance the elderly ruler's mistreatment is also framed as a reversal of normative filial care. This is achieved through the contrast between anticipated πατρικὴν εὐκληρίαν ('paternal good fortune') and the harsh reality, γῆρας…δύσδαιμον ('an ill-starred old age'). Such a reversal of fortune grants a tragic dimension to the narrative that accentuates the pitiful portrayal of the sultan and the cruelty of his sons. These disapproving remarks about the callousness of the Sultan's sons may perhaps be understood as part of Choniates' greater argument as to why the failings of the Komnenian dynasty led to the sack of 1204. Throughout his history, Choniates consistently decries a diminishing respect for the imperial office and demonstrates the foolishness of brash young aristocrats acting in the interest of personal glory rather than that of the Roman state.[514] This brief episode thus acts as a mirror for the self-serving Byzantine aristocracy and as a foreshadowing of Isaac II's own dethronement at the hands of his brother Alexios. The episodes may also be understood within the context of contemporary Byzantine notions of the 'other'.[515] The emphasis on the Turkish rulers of Ikonion's disregard for filial duty helps to establish a set of 'Roman' cultural norms with which to identify members of the ingroup. By extension, this bestows Choniates' portrayal of the treacherous young Byzantine elites with an added weight, aligning them with an 'un-Roman' other on account of their behaviour.

Another passage from Choniates' narrative that illustrates the author's overarching argument is his depiction of the ritual humiliation and execution of Andronikos I.[516] Despite his generally extremely hostile portrayal of Andronikos as emperor, within which his old age is consistently brought to the forefront, during his dethronement Andronikos is presented in a pitiful and sympathetic light:

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[513] Choniates, *Historia*, 413.1-5, trans. Magoulias:
τῷ τοι καὶ περὶ τὸ κάστρον τὸ Φιλομίλιον συγκεκροτηκὼς πόλεμον ὁ ῥὴξ μετὰ τῶν παίδων τοῦ Ἰκονιέως σουλτάν, οἵτινες αὐτὸν τοῦ ἄρχειν καὶ βασιλεύειν παρέλυσαν καὶ τοῦ Ἰκονίου ἀπεώσαντο τὴν προτέραν πατρικὴν εὐκληρίαν εἰς γῆρας μεταθέμενοι δύσδαιμον...
[514] See for instance Choniates, *Historia*, 179, 223, 421, 467, 503, 509, 539-40, 550-1 and esp. 435-6.
[515] C.f. Malatras, "The Making," 3-4.
[516] On Choniates' distaste for the power of the mob and their growing power, see Beihammer, "Comnenian Imperial Succession," 190-8.

> "...he was paraded through the agora looking like a leafless and withered old stump, his bare head, balder than an egg, shining before all, his body covered by meagre rags; a pitiful sight such as to evoke tears from gentle eyes."[517]

The choice of vegetal imagery in describing Andronikos as γεράνδρυον ἄφυλλον ('a leafless aged tree') signals a shift in tone and genre, tapping into an established vocabulary associated with the expression of grief and pity.[518] Such a forlorn and aged appearance might otherwise be found in a passage of invective or ridicule; yet here the image is used to invoke the audience's sympathy.[519] The framing of Andronikos' old age in this part of the narrative as pitiful rather than ridiculous or repulsive forms part of the author's vilification of the Constantinopolitan mob, whose merciless cruelty stands in stark contrast to the implied response of the text's audience. Noticeably, both modes of rhetoric achieve their ends through the objectification of the elderly figure in question. The passage describing Andronikos' torture and execution provides a detailed physical description of the emperor's body but no insight into his inner thoughts or experience; in narratological terms the episode is focalised through the onlooking crowd rather than the suffering Andronikos.[520] This perspective is constructed and supported throughout the narrative of the incident, with emphasis placed on those who witnessed Andronikos' bodily humiliation (παντάπασι) and their emotional response to the spectacle (πηγὰς ἐθέλον δακρύων ἡμέροις ὄμμασιν).

Turning this analytical lens to the other passages presented in this section, it is clear that the pitiful elderly figure is rarely the focus of the narrative (i.e. the perspective from which the events of the story are viewed).[521] Choniates' narration of the removal of the patriarch Niketas Mountanes forms part of a longer tirade against the overbearing power of Isaac II, and as such positions the latter as the internal focaliser of the account.[522] Indeed the only insight offered into the inner world of the patriarch is that he was unwilling (ἄκοντα) to be removed from the patriarchal throne, further complementing his lack of narrative agency. Similarly, although the passage detailing the overthrow of Kilij Arslan II dwells briefly on the ruler's experience of old age, the primary effect of this is to condemn the actions of his sons, while the narrative as

[517] My translation, Choniates, *Historia*, 349:
…διὰ τῆς ἀγορᾶς θριαμβεύεται, κατὰ γεράνδρυον ἄφυλλον ᾠοῦ ψιλότερον ἀκαλυφές τε παντάπασι κρανίον προφαίνων καὶ βραχεῖ ῥακίῳ τὸ σῶμα σκεπόμενος, θέαμα ἐλεεινὸν καὶ πηγὰς ἐθέλον δακρύων ἡμέροις ὄμμασιν.
[518] See above, pp.91-2.
[519] See below, pp.158, 162.
[520] On focalisation, see Nilsson, "Narrative," 275-7; c.f. Gray, "Holy and Pleasing," esp. 6-7.
[521] Nilsson, "Narrative," 276.
[522] Choniates, *Historia*, 405.

a whole is focalised through the figure of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa.[523] This is not to say that Choniates' historical narrative never focalises older political figures.[524] Yet it is revealing that the manipulation of suffering experienced by elderly figures for emotive rhetorical effect frequently coincides with a level of narrative separation between the audience and the aged figures themselves. The practical consequence of this is that the narrative invites the audience to pity the old as if from an onlooker's perspective, rather than to empathise with the figures directly.

A similar dynamic can be seen in the court rhetoric of Manganeios. In one poem, dated to c.1152-3, the author entreats the emperor Manuel Komnenos to take notice of his wretched condition and sign the document that will grant the poet an *adelphaton* at the Mangana monastery.[525] Much of the poem is devoted to an emotive portrayal of the narrator's suffering, with extensive use of lament *topoi* and a sustained emphasis on his advanced age.[526] However, although the only voice present in the poem is that of Manganeios' authorial *persona*, his narrative of suffering is crafted with an external focus in mind. As argued by Nilsson, encomiastic texts can be conceptualised as an articulation of the relationship between two culturally constructed identities: the rhetor and the patron.[527] In the case of Manganeios' poem, this relationship is conveyed through the insertion of the addressee at several crucial junctures:

> "Do you see, my sovereign, how I limp with difficulty
> do you see my sickness, do you see my debility,
> and my affliction that totally overwhelms me,
> the downward movement of my balance, its turning to the worse,
> the wasting of my flesh, the withering, the decay,
> and the deterioration and the slide towards emaciation,
> and the cold and turbid debris of old age?"[528]

[523] Choniates, *Historia*, 412-3.
[524] C.f. for instance the narrative in Choniates, *Historia*, 368, which is focalised through Kilij Arslan II in his seventies, or much of the narration of Andronikos I's reign, which often offers insights into the aged emperor's thoughts and suspicions, e.g. Choniates, *Historia*, 275-6, 286, 332-3.
[525] M18 (Jeffreys, forthcoming).
[526] For lament *topoi*, see esp. M18.10-20, 43-58, 65-72, 84-7, 132-9, 177-80.
[527] Nilsson, *Writer and Occasion*, 59-62.
[528] M18.43-9 (Jeffreys, forthcoming):
Ὁρᾷς, ὦ μονοκράτορ μου, πῶς ὑποσκάζω μόλις,
ὁρᾷς, μου τὴν ἀσθένειαν, ὁρᾷς τὴν ἀτονίαν,
καὶ τὴν ταλαιπωρίαν μου τὴν κατακάμπτουσάν με,
τὴν εἰς τὸ κάταντες ῥοπήν, τὴν εἰς τὸ χεῖρον χύσιν,
τὴν ἐκροήν μου τῶν σαρκῶν, τὸν μαρασμόν, τὴν τῆξιν,
καὶ τὴν φθορὰν καὶ τὴν φορὰν τὴν ἐπὶ τὸ τρυχοῦσθαι

The repetition of the second-person verb "ὁρᾷς" ('you see') gives a presence to the figure of the addressee, inviting him and by extension the entire audience to look at the rhetor's physical performance of suffering.[529] The patron appears as an addressee most prominently in the second half of the poem, where the rhetor blends his requests issued in the second-person imperative with encomiastic praise of the emperor and his young daughter.[530] The poem is thus self-consciously constructed as a direct form of address, a performance of the literary relationship between wretched poet and pitying patron. Although the emperor is not directly given a voice in the text, his consistent presence and imagined acts of future beneficence ensure that his *persona* is every bit as central to the rhetoric as that of the performer. In addition to these two figures, the rhetor gives voice to two imagined commentators; the first an anonymous onlooker offering a warning about the perils of the future, the other the rhetor's own white hair bemoaning his old age and fearing the proximity of death.[531] These voices bring to the work a degree of rhetorical variety, complete with exclamations and rhetorical questions, but they also create a distance between the narrator and the performer. While the narrator adopts the perspective of an external onlooker, the rhetor's *persona* becomes the object of the audience's scrutiny.

Both the agency of the primary addressee and the inclusion of voices extrinsic to the figure of the rhetor de-focalise the narrative from Manganeios' elderly impoverished *persona* by the end of the poem. Once the cold and suffering of the rhetor's old age have been established in the first-person, the introduction of external commentators transforms him from miserable subject to pitiful object. The emperor's imagined response, enacted through the poet's entreaties, thus presents itself as a merciful act with which the audience is encouraged to identify. In other words, the poet's performance of the suffering of old age facilitates his self-representation as an object of pity, to be viewed with sympathy by his audience. Thus, even in Manganeios' court rhetoric the image of a wretched old man was at its most potent when viewed through the eyes of another.

The effectiveness of this motif in eliciting the sympathy of an audience is supported by the many references to the age of suffering groups of people in literary and historical texts of the twelfth century. In Theodore Prodromos' novel *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, this literary *topos* is

καὶ τὴν ψυχρὰν καὶ θολερὰν τοῦ γήρως ὑποστάθμην;
[529] C.f. M.61, v.16.
[530] M18, vv.63-189, esp.63-82, 159-89.
[531] M18, vv.107-24, 128-39.

used in a vivid *ekphrasis* of the atrocities carried out by Bryaxes against the city of the defeated warlord Mistylos:

> "There were improvised couches, rapes of virgins,
> a bridal chamber on the ground and an earth-strewn marriage bed,
> the pregnant belly was torn open;
> the dead womb brought forth a dead infant.
> The old father lamented for his young son,
> the young son lamented for his old mother.
> There was no pity, not for the old, not for the infant,
> not for those in the flowering of their middle years;"[532]

This passage is both shocking in its content and acoustically effective, with a great deal of syllabic repetition and alliteration ("ἔρριπτεν ἐκτὸς νεκρὰ νεκρὸν"; "υἱὸν πρεσβύτης πατὴρ νέον"; "οὐκ οἶκτος οὐδείς, οὐ γέροντος"). In particular, the lines "ἔκλαυσεν υἱὸν πρεσβύτης πατὴρ νέον, / ἔκλαυσεν υἱὸς μητέρα γραῖαν νέος" echo each other structurally, resulting in aesthetically pleasing verses that also heighten the drama of the story. The contrast between the youth and old age of the tormented populace thus provides the author with an opportunity to convey the extent of the horror in poetic fashion. The two opposing extremes of the life course here serve to emphasise the pitiless brutality of the invaders, as no one is spared from the devastation. Significantly, the young and old are consistently grouped together in this passage, perhaps chiefly for poetic effect but also due to the privileged status of the young and the old as objects of pity.

A similar combination of the various age groups appears further on in the same *ekphrasis*, when the narrator extensively lists all those taken prisoner by the attackers:

> "One chain dragged on many necks;
> mother, father, son, children, bride, bridegroom,

[532] *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, 6.124-31, trans. Jeffreys:
Λέκτρα σχεδιασθέντα, παρθένων φθόροι,
θάλαμος ἐν γῇ καὶ χαμαίστρωτον λέχος.
διχῇ διερρήγνυτο γαστὴρ ἐγκύμων·
ἔρριπτεν ἐκτὸς νεκρὰ νεκρὸν τὸ βρέφος.
ἔκλαυσεν υἱὸν πρεσβύτης πατὴρ νέον,
ἔκλαυσεν υἱὸς μητέρα γραῖαν νέος.
οὐκ οἶκτος οὐδείς, οὐ γέροντος, οὐ βρέφους,
οὐ τῶν ἐν ἄνθει τῆς μέσης ἡλικίας·

adolescent, young man, a man in his maturity, an old man,
rich, needy, master, servant,
sick, healthy, fortunate, unfortunate,
slave-girl, mistress, virgin, old woman, young woman –
all were led by the one rope."[533]

The groups of people listed in this catalogue are for the most part divided into sets of opposing or complementary pairs, i.e. "rich, needy", "bride, bridegroom". The line detailing four stages in the male life course is a notable outlier from this pattern, with the progression of the line mirroring the chronological stages of the life course. By contrast the stages in the female life course are outlined in the final line of the catalogue. This relegation, or perhaps emphatic placement, of the explicitly female figures in the final line rather than in opposition to the male life course is likely indicative of the dominant contemporary conception of gender, in which male was seen as 'default' and female as lesser.[534] In the case of the latter only half of the line is devoted to life course stages, possibly as a result of metrical constraints, and the three stages are presented out of chronological order. The effect in both instances is to contribute to the sheer comprehensiveness of the catalogue, and to highlight the impact on the old and young in particular. In the line representing the male life course, youngest and oldest are acoustically more prominent in the initial and final position and indicate the extremity of the harm done to the citizens. In the case of the female life course a similar effect is achieved through the juxtaposition of old and young at the end of the line.

Similar rhetoric can be found in the historical literature of the twelfth century, whose authors borrowed from a shared set of images and *topoi* to construct an effective *ekphrasis* of destruction. As part of Niketas Choniates' emotive account of the sack of Constantinople in 1204, the author expresses the abuse of the city's inhabitants in a similar fashion to Prodromos' novel:

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[533] *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, 6.140-6, trans. Jeffreys:
πολλοὺς τραχήλους εἷκεν ἅλυσις μία·
μήτηρ, πατήρ, παῖς, τέκνα, νύμφη, νυμφίος,
νεανίας, ἔφηβος, ἀκμήτης, γέρων,
πλουτῶν, προσαιτῶν, δεσπότης, ὑπηρέτης,
νοςῶν, ὑγιής, εὐτυχῶν, οὐκ εὐτυχῶν,
δούλη, κυρία, παρθένος, γραῖς, νέα–
ἤγοντο πάντες ἐξ ἑνὸς καλωδίου.

[534] See for instance Damien Casey, "The Spiritual Valency of Gender in Byzantine Society," in *Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society*, ed. Neil Bronwen and Lynda Garland (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016)., 169-74; c.f. Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1974)., 24.

> "The enemy, now that there was no one to raise a hand against them, ran everywhere and drew the sword against every age and sex."[535]

Much like the list of atrocities carried out by Bryaxes, the implication here is that the cruelty and violence of the assailants was all the more extreme for their indiscriminate targeting of women, the old and the young.[536] This motif returns later in the same narrative:

> "They who were bashful of their sex were led about naked, they who were venerable in their old age uttered plaintive cries, and the wealthy were despoiled of their riches."[537]

Much like in the passages from Theodore Prodromos' novel, the horror of this scene is conveyed through elaborate and acoustically effective language.[538] The audience's shock is cultivated through a series of stark juxtapositions of the figures' normative dignity and their present mistreatment by the soldiers. Thus the modest are stripped naked, the wealthy are deprived of their wealth and the old are distressed and driven to mourning. Once again lamenting elderly figures are used to provoke pity and therefore outrage in the audience.

Choniates' history devotes special attention to the suffering of the old and the young at other points in his narrative, as in the description of the ravaging of cities by the Cumans following the sack of Constantinople:

> "What mortal could shed enough tears and adequately mourn the abductions, the pillaging, the casting of infants into the cross-roads, and the running through of the aged with the sword?"[539]

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[535] Choniates, *Historia*, 570, trans. Magoulias:
οἱ δὲ πολέμιοι μηδενὸς εἰς χεῖρας ἰόντος διαθέουσι πολλαχῇ καὶ τὰ ξίφη σπῶσι καθ' ἡλικίας πάσης καὶ γένους παντός…

[536] The norm (though not necessarily the reality) in Middle Byzantium was that women of all ages together with the young and the old should live under the protection, and in most cases the authority, of a mature male family member (see for instance Carolyn L. Connor, *Women of Byzantium* (London: Yale University Press, 2004)., "Part III: The Middle Byzantine Period"; Angeliki E Laiou, "Women in the History of Byzantium," in *Byzantine Women and Their World*, ed. Loli Kalavrezou and Angeliki Laiou (London: Yale University Press, 2003).; Judith Herrin, *Unrivalled Influence: Women and Empire in Byzantium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).19, 127.

[537] Choniates, *Historia*, 574.25-6, trans. Magoulias:
οἱ τῷ γένει σεμνοὶ γυμνοὶ περιήεσαν, οἱ τῷ γήρᾳ γεραροὶ γοεροί, οἱ πλούσιοι ἀνούσιοι.

[538] The brief passage is densely packed with alliteration and syllabic repetition, e.g. "γένει σεμνοὶ γυμνοὶ"; "γήρᾳ γεραροὶ γοεροί"; "πλούσιοι ἀνούσιοι".

[539] Choniates, *Historia* 637, trans. Magoulias:
τὰς δὲ προνομάς, τὴν δ' ἐναπερριμμένην ταῖς τριόδοις ἄωρον ἡλικίαν καὶ τοὺς διαξιφισμοὺς τῶν προηκόντων χρόνῳ σωμάτων τίς οὕτω πολύδακρυς καὶ πολύθρηνος ἐν ἀνθρώποις ὡς ἀξίως καὶ πενθῆσαι καὶ δεξιώσασθαι δάκρυσι;

Again, as the tone of the work modulates to resemble that of a lament, the suffering of the old and the young form the emotive core of the rhetoric. Both groups are equally framed as vulnerable and helpless victims, whose mistreatment is either cause for mourning, or for condemnation of the perpetrators. The latter is explicitly present in the author's voice during the depiction of mob looting following the departure of Conrad III's army from the vicinity of Constantinople:

> "They razed buildings, carried off the riches inside, searched through the holy monasteries, removed sacred furniture, desecrated holy vessels, showed no reverence for the venerable gray hair of the monks, disregarded virtue which even the enemy knew how to honor, and, to make a long story short, they ill-treated those they attacked in every way."[540]

In this instance the narrative is squarely focused on the disreputable behaviour of the looters, with the reference to mistreated elderly monks serving to highlight their lack of respect rather than necessarily to stir up pity or sympathy for their victims. Evidently more than one rhetorical effect was made accessible by the depiction of the suffering of anonymous elderly figures. As such, the elderly figures of these narratives are either framed as venerable individuals deserving of respect that is denied them, or are grouped together with women and children as defenceless victims. The mentality that lay behind the classification of the old and the young in one category is clearly illustrated by a section of the *Alexiad*, in which Anna describes Robert Guiscard's desperation to find new recruits for his army:

> "Not being satisfied with the men who had served in his army from the beginning and had experience in battle, he formed a new army, made up of recruits without any consideration of age. From all quarters of Lombardy and Apulia he gathered them, overage and underage, pitiable specimens who had never seen armour even in their dreams, but then clad in breastplates and carrying shields, awkwardly drawing bows to which they were completely unused and falling flat on the ground when they were allowed to march."[541]

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[540] Choniates, *Historia* 391, trans. Magoulias:
οἰκήματα κατήρειψαν, τὸν ἔνδον πλοῦτον περιεβάλοντο, ἱερὰ ἀνηρεύνησαν φροντιστήρια, ἔπιπλα ἀφείλοντο παναγῆ, σκεύη τίμια ἐβεβήλωσαν, σεμνὴν μοναζόντων πολιὰν οὐκ ᾔδέσθησαν, ἀρετῆς, ἣν καὶ πολέμιος οἶδε τιμᾶν, ἠλόγησαν, καὶ ἵνα τὰ πολλὰ συντέμω, πᾶσαν κἀκωσιν καθ' ὧν ἐπήεσαν ἐπεδίξαντο.

[541] *Alexiad* I.14.1, trans. Sewter:
μὴ γὰρ ἀρκούμενος τοῖς ἀνέκαθεν ἐστρατευμένοις ἐνδράσι καὶ πρὸς μάχην ἐπισταμένοις ὁπλίζεσθαι νεοσύλλεκτον ποιεῖται στράτευμα μηδεμιᾶς φειδόμενος ἡλικίας· ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἔξωρον καὶ τὴν ἄωρον πανταχόθεν συναγηοχὼς Λογγιβαρδίας τὲ καὶ Ἀπουληίας εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἐφειλκύσατο. καὶ ἦν ἰδεῖν καὶ παῖδας καὶ

The folly of Robert's decision is communicated in this passage through the ineffectiveness of the old and young recruits, but also through their placement in circumstances for which they are ill-suited. Anna makes it clear at a later point in the same narrative that these mistreated new recruits are to be interpreted as victims:

> "As I said, this idea of Robert's was just as crazed as the behaviour of Herod, or even worse, for Herod raved only against newborns, but Robert against boys and older men as well."[542]

Throughout this narrative the old and the young are treated as broadly equivalent in terms of their rhetorical significance; both represent a group deprived of agency whose only narrative purpose is to suffer with the goal of provoking the audience's pity. It is especially revealing that in this instance the group of old men and boys are collectively infantilised. The portrayal of the new recruits as completely inexperienced in all military matters is naturally hyperbolic for rhetorical effect. Nevertheless this indicates a construction of elderly caricatures that are completely detached from any notion of the individuals' passage through the life course. Boys and old men are not presented as actors passing through a specific phase of the male life course but rather as objects to be protected, venerated or pitied by the mature adult men that made up the narrative's main agents as well as its assumed audience.

Conclusion

The literary works of twelfth-century Byzantium consistently demonstrate a manipulation of age rhetoric in service to the effective expression of mourning and suffering. This relationship between age and lamentation reveals a great deal about contemporary assumptions regarding ageing and death, as well as the perceived value of a life relative to its place in the life course. The language of lamentation that Byzantine authors inherited or adapted from ancient precedents was well suited to an emotionally charged 'private' style of oration that was centred on the tragedy of youth cut short.[543] The death of an individual advanced in years rarely formed

μειρακίσκους καὶ γέροντας, ἀνθρώπους οἰκτρούς, οἵ μὴδ' ὅσον ἐν ὀνείροις ὅπλον ἐθεάσαντο, τότε δὴ ἐνδεδυμένους θώρακα καὶ ἀσπίδα κρατοῦντας καὶ τόξον ἀφυῶς πάντῃ καὶ πλημμελῶς τείνοντας καὶ κατὰ στόμα πίπτοντας, ἐπειδὰν βαδίζειν ἐξῆν.

[542] *Alexiad*, I.14.2, trans. Sewter:
ταῦτα μὲν ἄντικρυς, καθάπερ εἶπον, μανίας ἦσαν Ἡρώδου ἤ καὶ πλέον Ἡρώδου· ἐκεῖνος μὲν γὰρ κατὰ τῶν βρεφῶν ἐμεμήνει μόνων, οὗτος δὲ καὶ κατὰ παίδων καὶ πρεσβυτέρων.

[543] On the distinction between 'public' and 'private' funerary orations, see Agapitos, "Public and Private."

the subject of this type of literary lament. However, elderly figures were often given a pivotal role in the voicing of lamentation. Given contemporary assumptions about the misery of old age, older figures were presented in the literature of the period as more readily prone to mourning for themselves. This may be seen as a reflection of a social mechanism, whereby pity for the suffering of the old reinforced the duty of filial care; the neglection of which frequently appears in literature as a means of rhetorical condemnation. The *topos* of the elderly mourner enjoyed influence beyond the embedded laments of the Komnenian romances, as evidenced by the court rhetoric of Manganeios.

The emphasis on the extreme old age of the mourner in these texts is evidence of a rhetorical strategy that had become ingrained in contemporary literary discourse. The age of the lamenting figure was juxtaposed with the youth of a secondary figure, conveying the power dynamic but also the duty of care owed by one party towards the other. Both old age and youth must be understood in this context as literary constructs, defined relative to each other rather than by any universal metric.

The popularity of the elderly mourner *topos* in the literary works of the twelfth century is best interpreted in the context of evolving literary and artistic sensibilities concerning the depiction of physical and emotional suffering. By inviting the audience to pity a grieving parent and their lost child, contemporary authors were appealing to an emotional narrative and a set of imagery that had deep roots in the liturgical practices of the period. On another level, such a treatment of elderly suffering is indicative of the respect normatively shown to older men and women, and of their lack of agency as victims to be pitied. From the narratological approach taken in this chapter, it is apparent that the representation of pitiful elderly figures almost always involved their dissociation from the audience's perspective. The victimisation of those advanced in age represented a reliable means of eliciting the audience's pity or even outrage, but always from the point of view of an onlooker. The society portrayed by the literature discussed in this chapter was one in which boys, old men and women of all ages were almost exclusively dependent on the support and protection of adult men, and had little agency of their own. While the reality was far more nuanced in practice, such an idealised picture is indicative of one way in which gender and age were constructed and intersected in Byzantine thought.

Chapter Four: Ageing, Death and Rejuvenation

One of the most persistent ways in which old age is defined is by its proximity to death. It is often anticipated that fear of the inevitability of death should abate and become reconciliation at the end of a life. The old are consequently expected to be more philosophical in confronting their own mortality.[544] In twelfth-century Byzantium, the imagery of old age played a crucial role in the way in which death was articulated in the art and literature of the period. This chapter aims to demonstrate that old age was often used as a proxy for death or destruction, and yet neither was conceived of in terms of finality. Just as ageing and death marked the end of worldly life, resurrection and restoration offered the possibility of a second youth and new life.

Given the enormity of the topic, the analysis of this chapter is broadly divided into a series of thematic case studies dealing with visual and literary representations of death and rejuvenation. The first part of the chapter focuses on two visual compositions that became closely associated with funerary contexts by the twelfth century, namely the *Anastasis* and the *Deesis*. The second part of the chapter explores a range of textual material that dealt with the concept of ageing and death. Each source discussed in this chapter articulated these concepts in a way that was intricately tied to its greater narrative and context. By exploring this loosely connected series of case studies, this chapter does not presume to argue that the ideas they express concerning ageing formed part of a consciously constructed philosophy. However, the age imagery employed in these various contexts does provide an insight into the way in which ageing and death were perceived within twelfth-century Byzantine culture.

Representing Death and Salvation

Death and its aftermath were represented visually by several fully-developed iconographic types in the Middle Byzantine period, with some noteworthy pieces of religious art surviving from the twelfth century. These include an icon of the Last Judgment preserved on Mount Sinai, a manuscript containing homilies of James Kokkinobaphos illustrated with depictions of

[544] Small, *The Long Life*, 1.

the underworld and the *Anastasis*, and miniatures depicting the death of a monk found in a Horologion manuscript from Lesbos.[545] In addition to works that directly depicted the process of death and its aftermath, certain images came to be associated with funerary and commemorative contexts for their theological and emotional resonance with contemporary conceptualisations of death. The *Anastasis* and *Deesis* in particular came to perform a prominent role within commemorative spaces towards the latter part of the twelfth century. Analysis of these images within this context represents a unique opportunity to explore the ways in which contemporaries articulated the concepts of death and salvation.

Visual representations of the *Anastasis* are attested from the first decade of the eighth century.[546] Normally translated into English as the Resurrection, the *Anastasis* depicts the crucified Christ trampling a personified figure of Hades and leading the newly freed Adam and Eve to salvation (Fig. 4). Much like the Greek verb ἀνίστημι, which can be transitive ('to raise someone') or intransitive ('to resurrect'), the term *Anastasis* encompasses both Christ's raising of the dead and his own resurrection.[547] In the twelfth century, the *Anastasis* came to feature far more prominently in the decoration of tombs. A representation of the *Anastasis* found at an *arkosolium* tomb in the courtyard of the church of St. Nicholas in Myra is the earliest known instance of its appearance in this context, dated by inscription to 1118. The second firmly dated example can be found in the cave tomb of St. Neophytos in Cyprus, composed in the year 1183. This trend continued for over a century, as the *Anastasis* is found as a sepulchral decoration in the Canavar Kilise in Soganli in



Fig. 4- Miniature Anastasis from 11th century Gospel book

[545] Nancy Ševčenko, "Some Images of the Second Coming and the Fate of the Soul in Middle Byzantine Art," in *Apocalyptic Themes in Early Christianity*, ed. Robert Daly (Brookline, Mass.: 2009)., 1-2, 5, 12. Another example is attested by the poet Kallikles, who states that an image of the Second Coming was commissioned by Alexios I Komnenos to decorate the palace at Kastoria in the early twelfth century (*Nicola Callicle, Carmi*, ed. R. Romano (Naples 1980), 101-102, no. 24; Ševčenko, "Some Images," 7).
[546] Anna D. Kartsonis, *Anastasis : The Making of an Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986)., 69.
[547] Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 4.

Cappadocia, which has not been dated securely but was most likely composed in the thirteenth century or later.[548]



Fig. 5- 12th Century *Deesis* Icon, St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai

Deesis is the name commonly used to describe a composition featuring Christ flanked by the Virgin and John the Baptist who stand with hands extended towards him (Fig. 5). By the Middle Byzantine period this image became increasingly associated with intercession.[549] As such, the image was sometimes situated within the decorative scheme of the narthex, as in the case of the twelfth-century frescoes preserved at the church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi.[550] The narthex of the church often functioned as a funerary chapel in this period, and thus the intercessory meaning of the *Deesis* functioned as an expression of the deceased individual's hope for salvation.[551] By a similar token, the composition appeared frequently in the decoration of tomb spaces from the thirteenth century onwards in Byzantium, although a few cases have survived from the later twelfth century. [552] Thirteenth-century examples are reliably attested in Cappadocian cave churches, as well as at Iznik, Constantinople and possibly Vize.[553]

The function of the *Anastasis* and *Deesis* in commemorative contexts is perhaps best illustrated by the cell of St. Neophytos on Cyprus. In this tomb, decorated in preparation for his interment, Neophytos himself is incorporated into the composition of the *Deesis* (Fig. 6). He appears

[548] U. Weissbrod , "*Hier liegt der Knecht Gottes—" Gräber in byzantinischen Kirchen und ihr Dekor (11. bis 15. Jahrhundert): unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Höhlenkirchen Kappadokiens* (Wiesbaden 2003)., 75–6; On the tomb of St. Neophytos, see C. Mango and E. Hawkins, "The Hermitage of St. Neophytos and Its Wall Paintings," *DOP* 20 (1966) esp. 193.
[549] See A. Kazhdan (ed.), *ODB* (New York 1991) *Deesis*; Sinkević, The Church, 67; Cutler, Under the Sign, 145-50.
[550] On the church and the narthex in particular, see Sinkević, "The Church," 1, 67.
[551] Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture*, 373; Sinkević, "The Church," 67.
[552] Weissbrod, "*Hier liegt*," 49–53; Sarah Brooks, "Commemoration of the Dead: Late Byzantine tomb decoration (mid-thirteenth to mid -fifteenth centuries" (New York 2002) 118–9.
[553] Weissbrod, "*Hier liegt*," 49–53.

kneeling in the lower left corner and holding onto Christ with both hands in a performance of *proskynesis*.[554] As founder of the monastery and patron of its decoration, Neophytos is depicted in humble clothing, with grey-brown hair and eyes raised in supplication. Beside the saint is an open scroll inscribed with a prayer that Christ show mercy to his suppliants:

> "By the prayers of Thy Mother, Christ, and of Thy Baptist
>
> who stand in awe beside your blessed throne
>
> to him who lies as a suppliant before your divine foot
>
> be merciful, now and forever."[555]

The situation of the *Deesis* containing the suppliant Neophytos alongside the *Anastasis* in the tomb invites an exploration of the relationship between the two compositions. In conjunction with the epigram, the *Deesis* composition gives voice to Neophytos, who performs *proskynesis* in the hope of Christ's salvation with the aid of the intercessors John the Baptist and the Virgin. The *Anastasis* in the tomb carries a more abstract meaning, with Adam representing the sinful everyman and his salvation



Fig. 6- *Deesis* Wall Painting, Cell of St. Neophytos, c.1183. Byzantine Institute and Dumbarton Oaks fieldwork records and papers, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC.

[554] Mango, "The Hermitage," 181.
[555] Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme in Inschriftlicher Überlieferung Band 1*, Nr. 243.:
Μ(ητ)ρικαὶς, Χ(ριστ)έ, λιταῖς καὶ βαπτιστοῦ σου
θρόνῳ σου σεπτῷ σεφθῶς παρισταμέν(ων)
θείῳ σου ποδὶ ἱκετικῶς κειμένῳ
ἵλεως ἔσω νῦν καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.

promising hope of the same for all humanity.[556] Together, the images evoke the patron's hope or even expectation of salvation in reciprocation of his role in founding the monastic community. In this commemorative context, the figure of Adam should not simply be interpreted as a representation of the archetypal sinner, but rather as a direct model for Neophytos.

Evidence for the liturgical use of funerary spaces naturally sheds further light on the interpretation of their decoration. Commemorative rites formed a central part of monastic life in the twelfth century, with services taking place on a weekly basis and Saturday in particular devoted to the remembrance of the dead.[557] According to the foundation document of the Pantokrator monastery in Constantinople, founded in 1136, monks were expected to pray at the tombs of the deceased in chapels devoted to lay and monastic figures.[558] It would be reasonable to assume that the motifs of intercession and resurrection emphasised by the *Anastasis* and *Deesis* in this context functioned primarily as a guide for the monks praying for the salvation of the deceased.[559] This significance cannot be applied to the tomb of Neophytos however. According to the monastery's revised *typikon*, composed by Neophytos himself in 1214, the tomb was to be sealed and hidden from visitors upon his death.[560] The presence of a verse epitaph within the tomb addressed in the voice of Neophytos has raised some doubt over the credibility of the founder's request.[561] However, there is substantial evidence to suggest that inscriptions, particularly those with a devotional or apotropaic function, would often be situated in places hidden from external viewers. The practice of inscribing the inner lid of tombs is attested in Italy between the seventh and ninth centuries, and in Greece and the southern Balkans as far back as late antiquity.[562] At least in this instance, the decorative scheme of the tomb appears to have been envisioned as an articulation of Neophytos' personal devotion and hope for salvation.

The popularity of the *Anastasis* and *Deesis* as commemorative motifs in this period supports some broader observations about contemporary approaches to death. The first is the central

[556] On the significance of Adam in the *Anastasis*, see Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 6.
[557] E. Velkovska, "Funeral Rites According to the Byzantine Liturgical Sources," *DOP* 55 (2001) 41.
[558] P. Gautier, "Le Typicon du Christ Sauveur Pantocrator," *REB* 32.1 (1974), 33, 35.
[559] C.f. Connor, *Art and Miracles*, 109.
[560] Trans. C. Galatariotou in Thomas, *Foundation Documents*, 1369.
[561] Mango, "The Hermitage," 198. The epitaph can be found in Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken*, Nr. 244.
[562] A. Felle, "Non-Exposed Funerary Inscriptions and the Cult of the Cross Between Italy and Byzantium, 6th–9th Centuries," in M. Lauxtermann and I. Toth (eds.), *Inscribing Texts in Byzantium: continuities and transformations* (Abingdon 2020), 122–136.

role performed by Christ in determining the destination of the departed soul. The second is the assumed efficacy of prayers for the dead by those left behind. Both elements can also be seen in Byzantine liturgical tradition; a phenomenon that differentiates liturgical texts from non-liturgical literature.[563] As argued by Marinis, liturgical commemoration represented a communal ritual on behalf of the departed, and thus the emphasis on the influence of prayer and Christ's direct agency provided a justification and outlet for the community's prayers.[564] For those still alive, the death of an individual was an occasion that contained within it the hope of their salvation, though this possibility rested largely on prayers on behalf of the departed individual's soul and the benevolence of Christ.

The *Anastasis* and *Deesis* are in many ways emblematic of a contemporary Byzantine response to death. The imagery commonly employed in depictions of these two scenes therefore carried a great deal of symbolic weight. Representations of the *Anastasis* consistently emphasised the age disparity between its participants, imbuing the scene with an age dynamic that drew from and in turn informed a wider contemporary discourse. The following section examines the imagery of the *Anastasis* in closer detail, paying particular attention to the interrelationship between age and death.

"You see your renewal": Death and Rejuvenation in the *Anastasis*

By the end of the Middle Byzantine period, the *Anastasis* as an image had come to epitomise the celebration of Easter, and with good reason. Together with the Crucifixion, the iconography of the *Anastasis* demonstrates the death and resurrection of Christ and therefore the promise of salvation for mankind.[565] The significance of the *Anastasis* imagery for contemporaries is best illustrated by surviving verses or epigrams associated with the Feast Cycle. Although preserved in manuscripts, many of these epigrams were likely intended as an accompaniment to the monumental depiction of the scenes.[566] One of the best examples is a collection of epigrams

[563] Vasileios Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium: The Fate of the Soul in Theology, Liturgy, and Art* (Cambridge University Press, 2016)., 83-91.
[564] Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife*, 91-3.
[565] L. Milanović, "On the Threshold of Certainty: the Incredulity of Thomas in the narthex of the *katholikon* of the Hosios Loukas monastery," *Зборник радова Византолошког института* 50.1 (2013), 375.
[566] Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry vol.1*, 76-8.

found in the famous manuscript Marc. Gr. 524, dated to c.1050-1200.[567] The epigram *On the Anastasis* emphasises Christ's dual nature while exhorting the dead to rejoice in the overthrow of Hades:

> "The tomb holds the flesh, Hades the soul; Christ is one with both, a single hypostasis; rejoice ye dead, die O Realm of Death!"[568]

Additionally, several of the motifs of the *Anastasis* are reflected in epigrams for other scenes in the Feast Cycle. The piece titled *On the Descent from the Cross* includes the narrative of Christ's descent and raising of Adam:

> "You descended to earth, were raised from earth to the wooden cross, went down from the cross to Hades, my Christ, and drew up Adam from there to Heaven."[569]

These epigrams are especially valuable for this chapter's analysis since they focus on the theological implications of the accompanying scenes rather than offering a literal description. The emphasis on Adam in the description of the *Descent* can be linked to the common depiction of Adam's skull at the foot of the cross in that composition.[570] However, it is clear that this epigram was primarily evoking the imagery of the *Anastasis* to convey the soteriological message behind the image actually represented. The symbolic role of the forefathers (γενάρχαι), and among them Adam in particular, is illustrated by another poem *On the Anastasis* found in John Mauropous' eleventh-century poetry collection. The principle manuscript for the collection, Vat. gr. 676, was copied while Mauropous was alive or soon after his death, and constitutes a rare extant example of a collection of verses published as a cohesive whole by their author.[571] The epigram in question was almost certainly composed for an occasion or context in which a visual representation of the *Anastasis* was present, given the number of references to the viewer and to details of the image itself. The latter two thirds of the poem correspond most closely with the imagery of the *Anastasis* scene:

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[567] Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry vol.1*, 76-7; Foteini Spingou, "The Anonymous Poets of the Anthologia Marciana: Questions of Collection and Authorship," in *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature: Modes, Functions, and Identities*, ed. Aglae Pizzone (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014)., 139**.** The manuscript has more recently been re-examined in detail by Foteini Spingou ("Words and Artworks in the Twelfth Century and Beyond," *The thirteenth-century manuscript* (2012).), whose new readings are taken into consideration in the texts presented here.
[568] Trans. Wolfram Hörandner, "A Cycle of Epigrams on the Lord's Feasts in Cod. Marc. Gr. 524," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 48 (1994)., XVII.
[569] Trans. Hörandner, "A Cycle of Epigrams," XV.
[570] Hörandner, "A Cycle of Epigrams," 130.
[571] Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry vol. 1*, 62-3.

"Now his [Christ's] strong hands drag out of the ancient tombs
our first forefathers and stand them upright.
First he raises what fell long ago,
then raises this weighty, venerable man,
and thus he resurrects all humankind.
For their sake he came down to the flesh and the grave,
and now tramples Hades, the man-destroying tyrant.
Accept now as the first of your kindred
Adam, David, and Solomon the wise.
The image shows them to you alive,
as forefathers of the one who gives new life.
Now you have these men risen from the dead,
and women have their Eve, the mother of all.
And these - let them be blinded now with fear;
these useless guardians and wretched servants.
The Lord strikes them with lightning bolts,
so impious eyes will not see him again.
But you, deemed worthy of the sights you see,
clap your hands! You see your renewal.
Rejoice, rejoice, this is the Lord's Easter."[572]

The "first forefathers" in this passage are Adam and Eve, the culprits of Original Sin, now finally redeemed through Christ in an act that offers a promise of salvation for all of humankind.[573] The poem juxtaposes life and death, old and new, emphasising the antiquity of the dead figures who have now suddenly been bestowed with new life. It appeals to an implied onlooker, prompting them to rejoice as by witnessing Christ's salvation of the forefathers they are, in effect, witnessing their own renewal ('ἀνάπλασις').

The emotional and theological core of these verses can be seen reflected in twelfth-century visual representations of the *Anastasis*. Much like the verses of John Mauropous, these depictions tended to bring the salvation of Adam to the foreground and to subordinate the figure of Eve. While Christ interacts directly with Adam, pulling him up from Hades by the arm, Eve

[572] Mauropous, 8 vv.11-30, trans. Floris Bernard and Chris Livanos, *The Poems of Christopher of Mytilene and John Mauropous*, vol. 50 (Harvard University Press, 2018)., 337-9.
[573] Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 6.

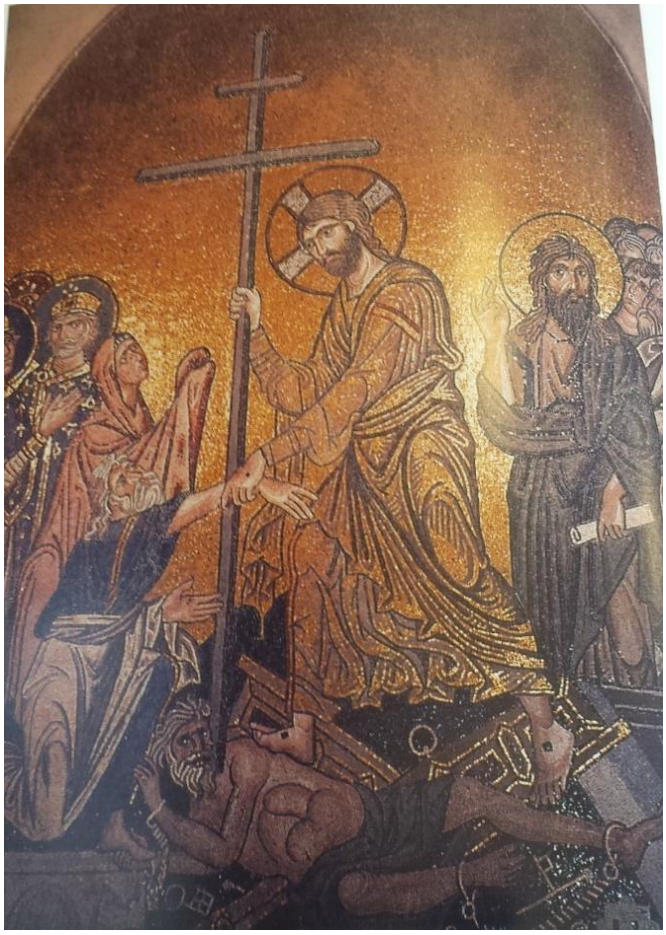

Fig. 7- *Anastasis* mosaic, Daphni Monastery, c.1100

is usually depicted further back in a supplicating pose with arms outstretched towards Christ (Fig. 7). Anna Kartsonis explains this phenomenon by reference to Theodore Studites' Easter Homily, in which he proclaimed that Eve deserved a lesser share of the blame for the Fall since she was deceived by the Devil.[574] It is also possible that Eve's more intense supplication and her subordination to Adam is indicative of the hostile treatment of Eve in much Byzantine theological writing. For the Church Fathers, Eve as the archetypal fallen woman presented a justification for the inferior position of women in contemporary society. The very same Cypriot monastic founder Neophytos reproduced these ideas in his own writings.[575] Regardless of their apparent difference in status within the image, Adam and Eve collectively represent humanity fallen on account of Original Sin, now redeemed through the Crucifixion.

One of the most consistent features of this established Middle Byzantine *Anastasis* scene was the visual contrast between saved and saviour. Christ appears as a young bearded man, radiating light and strength and exhibiting the most energy and movement within the composition.[576] The image of Christ trampling on the defeated Hades was borrowed from imperial iconography depicting the emperor as victorious over the enemies of Rome.[577] Adam

[574] Kartsonis, *Anastasis,* 212.
[575] Neophytos the Recluse, 'Περὶ τοῦ παραδείσου τὸ φυτόν', ed. I. Tsiknopoullos, 'Τρία ἀνώνυμα Βυζαντινά ποιήματα ἐπανευρίσκουν τόν ποιητήν των ἅγιον Νεόφυτον', *Κυπριασκαὶ Σπουδαί* 27 (1963) 88–89; see C. Galatariotou, "Holy Women," 60.
[576] Kartsonis, *Anastasis,* 71**;** Christ was depicted at various ages in different iconographic forms, depending on the theological context of the scene. See for instance the twelfth-century decoration of the cupolas at the Church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi, in which Christ is depicted as Emmanuel, Ancient of Days, Mature resembling the Pantokrator, and Priest (Sinkević, "The Church," 39).
[577] Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 72.

meanwhile appears stooped, humbled and explicitly elderly: an old man with long, dishevelled white hair and beard (Fig. 7). Eve's age is more difficult to determine given that one of the central identifiers of old age in Byzantine art is the figure's grey or white hair, and in most cases Eve's hair is either fully concealed or barely visible. When the colour of her hair is determinable however, it is also evidently white.[578]

This age disparity contributes to the theological and emotional meaning of the *Anastasis* in several significant ways. As suggested by Mauropous' verses, Christ's Old Testament forefathers were seen to exude a sense of gravitas, pulled as they were from their ancient tombs. The abstract antiquity of the Old Testament is in some sense conveyed by the venerable old age of its principal representatives. At the same time, the imagery of the *Anastasis* and contemporary responses to it emphasise the binary opposition of life and death in the scene; a necessary element for the miraculous nature of the resurrection to be driven home. The act of raising Adam in the *Anastasis* is emblematic of Christ's victory over death itself. Thus, the age of Adam and Eve signifies their place among the dead, contrasted with the new life bestowed on them by a youthful Christ.

The *Anastasis* and *Deesis* provide an insight into the conceptualisation of death in the twelfth century. The *Anastasis* offered visual proof of Christ's victory over death and the promise of salvation for all humankind, while the *Deesis* elaborated on the agency of Christ and the importance of prayer for intercession on behalf of the dead. Both imply a conceptualisation of death as a point of transformation and new life rather than simply the end of mortal existence. Visual representations of the *Anastasis* together with surviving ekphrastic verses suggest that Christ's symbolic act of resurrection was perceived as the renewal of the ancient and the dead. These abstract concepts were conveyed through the venerable gravitas of the Old Testament figures, chief among them being the old man Adam. The second part of this chapter explores the relationship between ageing and death in twelfth-century Byzantine culture more broadly through a range of literary material. When viewed in light of this wider cultural context, it becomes apparent that imagery of the *Anastasis* formed part of a larger contemporary discourse.

[578] For instance, Mango, "The Hermitage," 152.

Facing the End: Discourse on Ageing and Death

In one of his supplicatory verses, Manganeios entreats the emperor Manuel for financial support with an elaborate Biblical analogy.[579] The author begins with the story of the staff of Moses, which was transformed into a serpent and then back into a staff after Moses was instructed to grasp it by the tail. [580] This episode is shown to be analogous to the fall of Adam from Paradise, in that God's intervention through Christ restored Adam to his former condition.[581] The rhetor then asks the emperor to grant him a similar transformation:

> "But become my Moses, grasp the tail,
> appear as saviour, appear as Christ and take hold of me,
> and again reshape me into my former appearance,
> and reveal me as a blooming plant of Paradise,
> and give me in due time a crop of virtue.
> For the time of felling is already at hand and at the gates,
> and seeing the axe lying by the root
> I anticipate the felling of a tree that bears no fruit.
> If your serenity's right hand takes charge
> of my last years, those of my old age,
> again I shall become a shoot and again I shall burgeon
> and again I may in season bear flowers and fruit"[582]

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[579] On the 'begging' poems of the twelfth century, see R. Beaton, "The Rhetoric of Poverty," 1–28; Alexiou, "The Poverty of Écriture," 1–40; Cullhed, "The Blind Bard," 49–67. See also Jeffreys, "The Sebastokratorissa," 180–1; Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry vol. 1*, 34–6.

[580] E. Mioni (ed.), *Bibliothecae Divi Marci Venetiarum Codices Graeci Manuscripti* (Rome 1967) 19, vv.45–53. C.f. A. Rahlfs (ed.), *Septuaginta*, vol.1, 9th edn. (Stuttgart 1935, reprinted 1971) Exodus.4.4.

[581] Ibid., 54–66. In Byzantine exegesis passages from the Old Testament were often interpreted allegorically as precursors of events from the New Testament, see P. Magdalino and R. Nelson, "Introduction," in P. Magdalino and R. Nelson (eds.), *The Old Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, D.C. 2010), 3–4.

[582] Translation adapted from Jeffreys (Forthcoming). Mioni, *Codices*, 19, vv. 79–90:
Ἀλλὰ μοι φάνηθι Μωσῆς, ἀλλ' ἅψαι τῶν ἐσχάτων,
ἀλλὰ σωτήρ, ἀλλὰ Χριστὸς φανεὶς ἐπιλαβοῦ μου,
καὶ πάλιν ἀναμόρφωσον εἰς τὴν προτέραν θέαν,
καὶ παραδείσου δεῖξον με φυτὸν ἐξηνθημένον,
καὶ δός μοι τὸ γεώργιον τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐγκαίρως.
Καιρὸς γὰρ ἤδη τῆς τομῆς ἐγγὺς καὶ παρὰ θύραις,
καὶ τὴν ἀξίνην καθορῶν κειμένην πρὸς τὴν ῥίζαν
τὴν ἐκτομὴν καραδοκῶ τοῦ μὴ καρπίμου δένδρου.
Εἰ δὲ τῶν τελευταίων μου καὶ τῶν τοῦ γήρους χρόνων
ἡ δεξιὰ καθάψεται τῆς γαληνότητός σου,
πάλιν φυτὸν γενήσομαι καὶ πάλιν ἐκβλαστήσω,

This poem is particularly dense with symbolic meaning, even by the standards of Manganeios' often verbose style. In terms of the Biblical analogy, Manganeios is represented by Moses' staff or the fallen Adam; once planted in Paradise but now corrupted and awaiting his restoration at the hands of the emperor. At the same time, the author makes reference to *Matthew 3* in which John the Baptist urges his listeners to produce the fruit of repentance, before the coming of Christ heralds the cutting of the tree and its destruction by fire.[583] The emperor is thus presented as an imitator of Christ and a bringer of new life, both of which were encomiastic motifs employed widely in Manganeios' poems.[584] Not only will Manuel's support revert Manganeios to his former condition, but it will also grant him the possibility for repentance and salvation in his final years. The image of Christ taking hold of Adam and restoring him to his former glory is a clear allusion to visual depictions of the *Anastasis*, though in this instance the emperor and Manganeios are inserted into the central roles. The author's old age and his hope that he may once again flourish with the emperor's support are therefore analogous to death and salvation, viewed through the Christological analogies of the *Anastasis* and the plant of Paradise.

Manganeios' allusion to the sermon of John the Baptist draws his ageing and the prospect of the end of days into close alignment with each other. The resulting anthomorphic expression of the author's aged and corrupted condition bears some similarity to the vegetal metaphors commonly found in the lament tradition.[585] The image of the author as an aged tree soon to meet his end appears in another poem by Manganeios, yet comparable rhetoric can also be found in the works of his contemporaries.[586]

In an oration celebrating the patronage of an unnamed logothete, Constantine Manasses expressed his anticipation of a change in fortune owing to the addressee's support:

> "May it work out well for me and may I grow with the water of this source a blooming tree, rich in harvest, golden with noble fruits, because earlier attempts to plant trees bore no fruit, the tree tending was not successful, and all my laborious gardening had less effect than mere foraging would have had."[587]

καὶ πάλιν ἄνθος καὶ καρπὸν κατὰ καιρὸν ἐνέγκω·

[583] Matthew 3.7-10.

[584] Jeffreys, "A Constantinopolitan Poet," 56–7. C.f. Mioni, *Codices*, 18, vv.77–80, and 40, vv. 87–8.

[585] Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament*, 195–8. On anthomorphic imagery (the representation of humans as plants) in twelfth-century Byzantine literature, see Goldwyn, *Byzantine Ecocriticism*, 40.

[586] Mioni, *Codices*, 18, vv. 134–7.

[587] Manasses, *Encomium of Michael Hagiotheodorites* 38–49, ed. K. Horna, 'Eine unedierte Rede des Konstantin Manasses', *Wiener Studien* 28 (1906) 171–204:

Evidently the representation of literary patronage through vegetal imagery was not unique to the poetry of Manganeios and carried significance beyond the poem's specific Biblical allegory. The ancient *topos* of the garden as a place of learning and self-cultivation was retained in Byzantine literature.[588] What is distinct about Manganeios' poem is the use of anthomorphic imagery to convey the onset of old age and the approach of death.

Such an emphasis on the rhetor's old age recurs frequently within Manganeios' works. In several of his encomiastic or 'begging' poems, Manganeios depicts his authorial *persona* in terms of coldness, sickness and old age, contrasted with the vitality and warmth exhibited by the emperor. This motif is often strengthened by the comparison of the emperor to the sun, a common *topos* found in many encomiastic texts composed for Manuel.[589] For instance, in one poem Manganeios declares:

> "I love the warmth of this gleaming golden sun,
> let it cherish the old age which freezes me,
> sun of Rome, Manuel, ruler of light among the stars."[590]

Throughout these poems, the speaker's old age and coldness are curable only by the warmth representing the patronage of the emperor Manuel. In this way the rhetor frames the emperor's mundane financial support as a grand act of benevolence:

> "...stretch out your powerful fingers, grasp the pen at last,
> and dip it in fire-coloured, crimson ink,
> and bestow on me a covering that will keep out the cold,
> and permanent sustenance to support my old age..."[591]

εἴη δέ μοι τοῦτο γοῦν εἰς καλὸν καὶ κηπευθείη μοι τούτῳ τῷ νάματι δένδρον ἀνθεοφόρον, ὀπωροφόρον, χρυσίζον εὐγένεσι καρποῖς. τὰ γὰρ πρὸ τοῦ φυτηκομήματα γεγόνασιν ἄκαρπα καὶ ἡ δενδροκομία μοι ἄχρηστος καὶ ἡ πολύμοχθος λαχανεία βοτάνης χορτολογουμένης ἀχρειοτέρα.
For discussion of this passage, see Nilsson, *Writer and Occasion*, 94.

[588] *Veronica Della Dora, Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium (Cambridge University Press, 2016).*, 94.

[589] Jeffreys, "A Constantinopolitan Poet," 56. See for instance Eustathios' Funerary Oration for Manuel, which tacitly implies that the comparison to the sun had become an established *topos*: Bourbouhakis, *Not Composed*, 54–5.

[590] Trans. Jeffreys (Forthcoming). Mioni, *Codices*, 30, vv.46–48:
τούτου τὴν θέρμην ἀγαπῶ τοῦ χρυσαυγοῦς ἡλίου,
αὕτη περιθαλψάτω μου τὸ καταψῦχον γῆρας,
ἥλιε Ῥώμης, Μανουήλ, φωτάρχα τῶν ἀστέρων.

[591] Trans. Jeffreys (Forthcoming). Mioni, *Codices*, 18, vv.177–80:
...τεῖνον δακτύλους εὐσθενεῖς, ἆψαι ποτὲ γραφίδος,
καὶ βάψον ταύτην εἰς ὑγρὸν πυρόχρουν, ἐρυθραῖον,
καὶ δώρησαί μοι καὶ σκηνὴν κωλυτικὴν τοῦ ψύχους,

In these examples, old age and coldness function as a proxy for the poet's rhetorical poverty: if the latter is relieved by the emperor's patronage his old age will cease to be a concern. Additionally, through the alignment of temperature and age the poet implies that the coldness of old age itself could be reversed by the emperor's generosity. The act of patronage is thus presented as a source of rejuvenation rather than simply financial support.

Manganeios' lamentations about his own old age share some of their motifs with an eleventh-century poem by John Mauropous, framed by the author as a dialogue between the elements of his own psyche.[592] Suffering from illness and looking back on his earlier life, the personification of Mauropous' reason admits:

> "I had a lamp once, I know, I cannot deny that,
> but since it does not have enough oil to feed upon,
> it has a wick that has cooled down
> and the flame of its light has withered away
> and only shines faintly, not possessing any brilliance.
> For the word shares in the sickness of the body
> like a musical melody of a defective lyre.
> Hence, I have to keep the remnant of the light
> and securely lock it somewhere inside,
> far from the winds of the open air,
> so that it is not all suddenly extinguished by mistake."[593]

Like Manganeios, Mauropous describes the experience of growing old as a steady decline from the brilliance of youth, ending in fragility and withdrawal. Unlike the 'begging' poems of Manganeios however, these verses contribute to a larger theme of the poems *To Himself* compiled by Mauropous. The author frames his ailing body and hesitancy to engage with public life within an elaborate exposition of his modesty and humility.[594] Writing a century later, there is little chance that Manganeios was influenced directly by Mauropous' poem.[595] Rather, the commonality in these poems demonstrates the perseverance of a way of framing old age, yet

καὶ χρονικὴν διατροφὴν στηρικτικὴν τοῦ γήρως...
[592] Bernard, *The Poems*, commentary on 92.
[593] Mauropous, Poem 92, vv.61-71. Trans. Bernard, *The Poems*, 501.
[594] C.f. poems 89-93 in the collection.
[595] On the limited familiarity of Byzantine authors with the works of their Byzantine predecessors, see Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry vol.1*, 59.

one that could have entirely different implications depending on the author's wider narrative. The motif of ageing and rejuvenation present in many of Manganeios' poems cannot be disentangled from the contemporary construction of imperial ideology and patronage.

"I scrape off the wrinkly old age": Restoration and the Rhetoric of Ageing

The rhetorical use of age by Manganeios to celebrate imperial benefaction reflects a broader trend in the literature of the twelfth century. In a famous passage describing the sack of Constantinople in 1204 by the forces of the Fourth Crusade, the historian Niketas Choniates addresses the city directly:

> "O City, formerly enthroned on high, striding far and wide, magnificent in comeliness and more becoming in stature; now thy luxurious garments and elegant royal veils are rent and torn; thy flashing eye has grown dark, and thou art like unto an aged furnace woman all covered with soot, and thy formerly glistening and delightful countenance is now furrowed by loose wrinkles."[596]

In expressing the horror of the event, Choniates relies on elements of rhetorical technique traditionally found in laments for lost loved ones.[597] The city's glorious past is repeatedly contrasted with its wretched condition in the present.[598] Significantly, the city is personified as a once beautiful woman who has been prematurely aged by the harshness of her circumstances. The contrast between past and present, glory and destruction, is thus explicitly modelled on the human life course.

The use of female figures in the personification of cities is a Greek cultural tradition that can be traced back to the *tychai* of antiquity. In the Hellenistic period, queens and later women of

[596] Choniates, *Historia*, 577.4-9, trans. Magoulias:
ὦ ἡ πρώην ὑψίθρονος καὶ βιβῶσα μακρὰ καὶ μετέωρα, μεγαλοπρεπὴς τὸ εἶδος, ἀξιοπρεπεστέρα τὸ μέγεθος, νυνὶ δὲ κατερραγμένη καὶ διερρηγμένη τοὺς χλιδῶντας χιτῶνας καὶ τὰ κομψὰ καὶ ἀρχικὰ κρήδεμνα καὶ τὸ ὄμμα ἀπεσβεσμένη τὸ χαροπὸν καὶ γρηῒ καμινοῖ ἴση ἐκ τοῦ κατησβολῶσθαι πυρὶ καὶ ῥυτίσι χαλαραῖς ηὐλακισμένη τὴν στιλπνὴν καὶ τερπνὴν ὄψιν πρότερον.
For a recent example of scholarship discussing this passage in light of Byzantine lament tradition, see T. Kampianaki, "O City, City."
[597] Kampianaki, "O City, City."
[598] This is a very common rhetorical device in the Greek lament tradition (Kampianaki, "O City, City."), and can be traced from classical Greek laments through to Byzantine funeral orations and epigrams (Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament*, 165–6).

the Roman imperial family were increasingly divinised in the form of the goddess Tyche, who also retained her generic status as a guardian of individuals and protector of cities.[599] In the Byzantine period, Tyche was depicted in Constantinople in the form of a statue of a young girl, a fact used by Constantine Manasses in his *Synopsis Chronike* to celebrate Basil I's restoration of the empire:[600]

> "Thus he saved the Roman state.
> He transformed her, Tyche, who had grown old and wrinkled,
> into a beautiful tender-cheeked maiden."[601]

The fluid substitution of Tyche for the Roman state illustrates both the ease with which the condition of the polity could be understood in terms of female ageing, and the extent to which a Constantinopolitan intellectual like Manasses saw City and state as interchangeable. The City's epithet βασιλεύουσα πόλις ('Reigning City'), or βασιλὶς τῶν πόλεων ('Queen of Cities') can be viewed as a natural development of the City's alignment with powerful female figures.[602]

The continual rejuvenation of the Roman state is a motif with roots in the Latin literature of the Imperial period, during which time authors including Virgil and Livy engaged with the notion of *Roma Aeterna* ('eternal Rome'). Rhetoric surrounding Rome's ageing and decline was amplified towards the end of the fourth century and the first decades of the fifth, and the significance of Rome's old age would go on to be debated by Christian and Pagan polemicists.[603] By the twelfth century the eternal ageing and rejuvenation of the Roman state had acquired a very specific role in the formation of imperial ideology.

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[599] Amy Smith, "Queens and Empresses as Goddesses: the public role of the personal *tyche* in the Graeco-Roman world," in S. Matheson (ed.), *An Obsession with Fortune:* tyche *in Greek and Roman art* (New Haven 1994), 87–8.
[600] See also L. James, "Good Luck and Good Fortune to the Queen of Cities: empresses and *tyches* in Byzantium," in E. Stafford and J. Herrin (eds.), *Personification in the Greek World: from Antiquity to Byzantium* (Aldershot 2005).
[601] Manasses, *Synopsis Chronike*, trans. L. Yuretich, *The Chronicle of Constantine Manasses* (Liverpool 2018), 208. Constantine Manasses, *Breviarium Chronicum*, ed. O. Lampsides (Athens 1996) 5223–5225:
ἐντεῦθεν ἀνεσώσατο τὰ πράγματα Ῥωμαίοις
καὶ τύχην τὴν γηράσασαν, τὴν ἐκρυτιδωθεῖσαν,
καλὴν τρυφεροπάρειον εἰργάσατο κορίσκην·
[602] On the ideological significance of this epithet, and of New Rome in general, see P. Magdalino, "Constantinople and the Outside World," esp. 150–1.
[603] S. Marcos and M. del Mar, "Rome in Her Old Age: a topic in the polemic between Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity" (2019), esp. 30–8.

In one of Manganeios' panegyrics addressed to both the members of the Senate and the emperor Manuel I, the author praises the emperor for his rejuvenation of the Roman state in the following terms:

> "He who lights up our city, the giant emperor,
> who steers and preserves the ship of rule,
> and calms the seething waves that rise from the mass of water,
> from the assaults of foreign nations and the surge of enemies
> with attacks and burning flashes,
> who also decorates his crown with pearls of triumphs,
> who brought the wrinkled old woman back to her prime,
> and having proved New Rome by his deeds to be a true strength…"[604]

It is not certain whether the "wrinkled old woman" here refers to Constantinople or the state at large, though the fact that Manganeios mentions the City and the ship of rule in the same breath betrays the close association between the two.[605] The use of Constantinople's title 'New Rome' in close proximity to the imagery of youthful rejuvenation invites the audience to imagine the City, and by extension the Roman state, as intrinsically and eternally youthful.

In all these texts, age is consistently employed as a metaphor for the condition of the state. In the passage from Choniates' history, the city's old age and wrinkled face form part of a wider narrative of decline from beauty, affecting both the personified figure and her adornment. While once she was beautiful and clothed with splendid garments, now her appearance is blackened and wrinkled and her clothing torn. Similarly, in Manganeios' panegyric the wrinkled old age of the city is framed as a decline from past greatness. The verb used in this case is ἀνάγω, which conveys the meaning 'bring back', 'put back' or 'restore to its original

[604] Trans. Jeffreys, "A Constantinopolitan Poet," 109. Mioni, *Codices*, 8, vv.369–376:
Ὁ δᾳδουχῶν τὴν καθ' ἡμᾶς, ὁ γίγας αὐτοκράτορ,
ὁ τὴν ὁλκάδα τῆς ἀρχῆς καὶ κυβερνῶν καὶ σώζων,
καὶ τῶν κυμάτων τὸν βρασμὸν τὸν ἐκ πολλῶν ὑδάτων
τῆς τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐπιδρομῆς καὶ τῆς ἐχθρῶν συρροίας
ἐν προσβολαῖς καὶ καυστικαῖς βολίσι κατευνάζων,
ὁ καὶ τὸ στέφος ἐγκοσμῶν τροπαίων μαργαρίταις,
ὁ πρὸς ἀκμὴν ἀναγαγὼν τὴν ῥερυτιδωμένην
καὶ ῥώμην ἔργοις ἀληθῶς δείξας τὴν νέαν Ῥώμην...

[605] On the close association between Constantinople and the Roman state in contemporary thought, see Nicholas Matheou, "City and Sovereignty in East Roman Thought, C. 1000–1200: Ioannes Zonaras' Historical Vision of the Roman State," in *From Constantinople to the Frontier: The City and the Cities*, ed. Nicholas Matheou, Theofili Kampianaki, and Lorenzo Bondioli (Leiden: Brill, 2016)., 59.

shape'.[606] Thus both examples use the personified city's old age to indicate a fall in status from past glory, implying an analogy between decline and the human ageing process. It is notable that in both cases this process of decline or destruction is presented as reversible. In the passage from Manganeios' poem the restoration of the city through patronage is likened to the rejuvenation of an old woman. Similarly, Choniates' narrative goes on to urge the city to "stand up" and adorn herself once more in glory and strength, taking inspiration from Old Testament laments for the sack of Jerusalem, particularly the so-called second-Isaiah.[607] The imagery of ageing in these works does not indicate the finality of the transformation but rather emphasises its impermanence, inviting the audience to celebrate the rejuvenation of the city or to take heart in the possibility of its future actualisation.

The notion that God's chosen people, and Constantinople in particular, was experiencing a cycle of continual decline and renewal must be viewed in light of Byzantine eschatological tradition. Of the several Byzantine models of world history, one of the most prominent was the seven-age model. This posited that the period since the incarnation of Christ represented the sixth and final age of mortal existence, associated in the Augustinian tradition with the extreme old age of humankind.[608] Byzantine eschatological thought differed somewhat from the Latin tradition in the emphasis it placed on the fate of the Roman empire and especially Constantinople. In this paradigm, New Rome was identified as the embodiment of the fourth and final world empire whose destruction would herald the end of the world.[609] In a sense, the rejuvenation of the aged city of New Rome symbolised the regeneration of humankind itself. Like Manganeios' elderly *persona*, humanity was thought to be in the throes of old age and facing the prospect of worldly demise.

The ageing of the Queen of Cities carried additional weight in a twelfth-century literary context given the discourse surrounding the growing influence of the Latin west. Manasses' chronicle offers a valuable insight into the broader concerns of his contemporaries through his selective construction of narrative.[610] On several occasions, the author employs personification to

[606] LSJ, ἀνάγω.
[607] Kampianaki, "O City, City," 4–5.
[608] On the Augustinian model and its influence in the Latinate Middle Ages, see Elizabeth Sears, "The Ages of Man," in *The Ages of Man* (Princeton University Press, 2019)., 55-79. On Byzantine eschatological thought, see Magdalino, *The End of Time in Byzantium* (de Gruyter, 2008)., 119-22; Vasileios Marinis, "Joseph Bryennios and Eschatological Theology," 262-4.
[609] Paul Magdalino, *The End of Time in Byzantium* (de Gruyter, 2008)., 121.
[610] Nilsson, "To Compose," esp. 43–5.

emphasise the superiority of New Rome over Old Rome, as in a derisive portrayal of the emperor Constans II:

> "He sailed away to the very fertile Sicily,
> desiring to strip away the beauty of the imperial city
> and to give power to the senile Rome,
> as if someone were to take away the finery of a beautifully decorated bride
> and adorn an aged woman like a young girl."[611]

Similarly, on the coronation of Charlemagne the same chronicle declares:

> "Thus the former bond between the cities was broken.
> The sword fell between mother and daughter,
> severing and dividing with the sword of wrath
> a good-looking maiden, the New Rome,
> from the wrinkled, ancient, senile Rome."[612]

In contrast to the passages from Manganeios and Choniates, here the age of the two personified cities is used to distinguish between them and is thus intrinsic to their identity. The stripping away of decorations by Constans II is likened to taking beautiful finery from a young bride and giving it to an old woman, attempting to conceal her nature but with limited success.[613] Likewise in the second passage, Old and New Rome are compared to a mother and daughter; their age is integral to the way in which they are defined and relate to each other. By expressing their relationship in terms of time rather than space, Manasses asserts the clear superiority of New Rome owing to the assumed correlation between ageing and decline. The prevalence of

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[611] Manasses, *Synopsis Chronike*, 3776–80. Trans. Yuretich, *The Chronicle*, 154:
εἰς Σικελίαν ἀποπλεῖ τὴν πολυφορωτάτην,
τὴν πόλιν τὴν βασίλειον ἀποκοσμῆσαι θέλων
καὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν χαρίσασθαι τῇ τριπεμπέλῳ Ῥώμῃ,
ὡς εἴ τις ἁβροστόλιστον ἀποκοσμήσει νύμφην
καὶ γραῦν τινα τρικόρωνον ὡς κόρην ὡραΐσει.
[612] Manasses, *Synopsis Chronike*, 4448–52. Trans. Yuretich, *The Chronicle*, 180:
οὕτως ὁ πρώην σύνδεσμος τῶν πόλεων ἐρράγη,
οὕτω μητρὸς καὶ θυγατρὸς μέσον ἐπεπτη σπάθη,
διχάζουσα καὶ τέμνουσα μετὰ θυμοῦ ῥομφαίας
νεᾶνιν τὴν εὐπρόσωπον, τὴν νεωτέραν Ῥώμην,
ἐκ τῆς ῥυζῆς καὶ παλαιᾶς καὶ τριπεμπέλου Ῥώμης.
[613] C.f. a similar trope within twelfth-century satirical literature: Marciniak, "Prodromos, Aristophanes," esp. 30; *Drosilla and Charikles*, V.73–101.

such rhetoric would have added a poignant layer of significance to Choniates' portrayal of Constantinople as an elderly and neglected woman.

Age therefore played an integral role in the personification of Constantinople and the Roman state. The age of this personified figure carried several distinct and potent implications and thus provided rhetoricians with ample material on which to base their arguments. On some occasions age was used to distance the ever-youthful New Rome from the Old. On others the continual rejuvenation of Constantinople served to reinforce an imperial ideology centred around the life-giving magnificence of the emperor. The role of age rhetoric in the construction and affirmation of this ideology is further supported by epigraphic evidence. A now-lost epigram from the fortifications of Smyrna located at the north gate of the castle on Mount Pagos in modern Izmir, Turkey, praises Ioannes III Vatatzes and his wife Eirene. The piece was composed in c.1222/23, possibly by Nikephoros Blemmydes:[614]

> "This formerly very famous city
> (…) The hand of destructive time cut [it] in two like a fawn
> Is by a wild panther, threw it to the ground,
> Made it completely like an old woman with sunken cheeks,
> Wearing away the beauty and the lovely shine.
> But the ruler of the younger Rome, Ioannes,
> child of the very famous emperors who came from the Doukas family,
> feeling compassion and taking pity on the perishing suffering [city]
> scraped off her old age and made her limbs untired,
> and tightening her wrinkled cheeks and weak joints,
> he turned into a young bride the old woman, who looked like an ancient crow."[615]

[614] A. Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme in Inschriftlicher Überlieferung Band 3, Teil I: Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein*, TR93, 694.
[615] Ibid.:
Τήνδε πόλιν πάροιθεν ἀγακλειτήν περ ἐοῦσαν…
χεὶρ ὀλοοῖο χρόνοιο διέτμαγεν ἠΰτε νεβρὸν
πόρδαλις ἀγρία, βάλε δέ μιν κατὰ γαίης,
γρηῒ δέ μιν θήκατο πανίκελον ἰσχνοπαρείῳ,
κάλλος ἀμαλδύνασα καὶ ἀγλαΐην ἐρατεινήν·
ἀλλὰ Ῥώμης κοίρανος ὁπλοτέρης Ἰωάννης
πάϊς Δουκοφύτων ἐρικυδῶν βασιλήων,
οἰκτείρας μογέουσαν ἀποφθιμένην τ' ἐλεαίρων
γῆρας ἀπέξεσεν ἠδ᾽ ἀκμῆτα τεύξατο γυῖα
ῥικνά τε παρήϊα καὶ ἄψεα λυγρὰ τονώσας
θήκατο κουριδίην ἀπὸ γραὸς πεντακορώνου·

This passage is suffused throughout with the rhetoric of age. Through enjambement the words γρηῒ ('old woman'), πάϊς ('child') and γῆρας ('old age') are placed at the front of their respective lines, drawing attention to the contrast between the old age of the city and the youth of the patron. This association is enhanced by the variation on Constantinople's epithet, Ῥώμης…ὁπλοτέρης ('younger Rome'), again emphasising youth in connection with Vatatzes. The city is also anthropomorphised in a sustained way in this passage, with detailed description of her sunken and wrinkled cheeks, weak joints and crow-like appearance.[616] This deeply human old age is nonetheless reversible, as in the texts by Manganeios and Choniates discussed above. The old age of the personified city is metaphorically scraped off or smoothed out by the act of renovation, implied by the verb ἀποξέω.

There is evidence to suggest that the framing of acts of restoration as rejuvenation was not limited to expressions of imperial ideology however. Around a dozen extant dedicatory epigrams from the twelfth century attest to a similar rhetorical use of age imagery by private individuals commemorating restorative acts of patronage.[617] These texts are contained in the *Anthologia Marciana*, a collection of Komnenian poetry preserved in the manuscript Marcianus Graecus 524.

One epigram commemorates the patronage of Michael Tatikios who restored an icon of St. George:

> "The turning wheel of circle-running time,
> which corrupts everything by the force of its motion,
> succeeded in making your image completely obscure.
> (…)
> Removing your former withered appearance,
> I offer you the flower and prime of new beauty."[618]

[616] On the crow *topos*, c.f. for instance Choniates, *Historia* 2.14–15.
[617] These can be found in the *Anthologia Marciana*, a collection of Komnenian poetry preserved in the thirteenth-century manuscript Marcianus Graecus 524, ed. Lampros, "Ὁ Μαρκιανὸς Κῶδιξ 524," 3–59. See Spingou, "The Anonymous Poets," 139.
[618] Trans. Drpić, "The Restoration of Icons" (forthcoming). Anonymous, Epigram on an icon of St. George restored by Michael Tatikios, in Lampros, 'Κῶδιξ', 56 (no. 99), vv. 5–7, 14–15:
στροφὴ τροχοῦ χρόνου δὲ τοῦ κυκλοδρόμου
πᾶν εἰς φθορὰν ἄγουσα τῆς φορᾶς ῥύμῃ
ἴσχυσε τὸν σὸν ἐξαμαυρῶσαι τύπον.
(...)
τὸν πρὶν μαρασμὸν σῆς θέας ἀ[..]ξέων,
ἄνθος δὲ διδοὺς καὶ νέου κάλλους ἔαρ.

Much like the texts by Manganeios and Manasses, this epigram makes sustained use of anthomorphic imagery. Paradoxically, the use of this vegetal imagery ties the deterioration of the icon to the concept of human ageing as it was commonly expressed in contemporary literature.

This association is made more explicit by two other epigrams preserved in the same manuscript:

> "The flowing nature of time has almost
> succeeded in extinguishing the light of the depicted figures.
> I rekindle it with the flames of my ardent love
> (….)
> and scrape the wrinkly old age of their images,
> intent on rejuvenating the youths' portraits."[619]

> "Formerly, you spent a night and a day in the depth of the sea without
> any harm, O Paul. But now the weight of time
> has nearly buried your image in the depths of oblivion.
> Overcome by divine desire for you,
> I, Peter, abbot of the monastery of Moglena,
> scrape off the old age of the painting's colors."[620]

In both epigrams, the ageing of the image is defined as γῆρας ('old age'). The effect is especially pronounced in the first example, with the longevity of the painting contrasted with

[619] Anonymous, Epigram on an icon of the Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace restored by Andronikos Doukas Kamateros, in Lampros, 'Κῶδιξ', 54 (no. 97), vv. 10–12, 16–17. Trans. Drpić, "The Restoration of Icons," (forthcoming):
πλὴν ἀλλ΄ ἐπιρρέουσα τοῦ χρόνου φύσις
ἴσχυσε μικροῦ τῶν τύπων τὸ φῶς σβέσειν
φίλτρου φλοξὶ ζέοντος ἀνάπτω πάλιν
(...)
ξέω δὲ γῆρας ῥυτίδος τῶν εἰκόνων
παίδων νεάζειν τοὺς χαρακτῆρας θέλειν.

[620] Anonymous, Epigram on an icon of Saint Paul restored by Peter, abbot of the monastery of Moglena, in Lampros, 'Κῶδιξ', 18 (no. 44), vv. 1–6. Trans. Drpić, "The Restoration of Icons," (forthcoming):
νυχθημερεύσας ἐν βυθῷ πρώην, Παῦλε,
πέπονθας οὐδὲν ἀλλὰ νῦν φορὰ χρόνου
λήθης βυθοῖς ἔκρυψε μικροῦ σὸν τύπον.
Πέτρος δὲ σῷ δέσμιος ἐνθέῳ πόθῳ
ἡγουμενεύων τῆς μονῆς τῶν Μογλένων
ξέω τὸ γῆρας τῆς γραφῆς τῶν χρωμάτων.

the youth of the figures (the Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace).[621] This passage also uses ῥυτίς in an adjectival sense to further anthropomorphise the icon, expressing its longevity in vividly human terms. In both cases the verb of restoration is ξέω, meaning in this context to scrape smooth or polish (an uncertain derivative form is used in the St. George epigram).[622] Thus the old age of the icons is expressed in terms of the physicality of human ageing, but with the concession that the wrinkles of old age can be smoothed out through the act of renovation.[623]

An interesting comparison may be found in the form of a *basilikos logos* addressed to Constantine Doukas. The author, Theophylact Hephaistos, taught in Constantinople in the 1080s as *maistor ton rhetoron*, before being appointed to the bishopric of Ochrid after 6th January 1088.[624] In this text the author criticises those aristocratic monastic founders who allow their existing foundations to fall into disarray:

> "Ancient monasteries, decorated with age and crying out for salvation are abandoned while new foundations are inaugurated under the names of the founders, and each one desires to be at once innovator and master of the new foundation. It is as if someone were to leave without care a sick son, and seek out another wife to have children without any reason to accuse the sick one."[625]

Much like the epigrams, Theophylact celebrates the act of restoration as a form of salvation offered to particularly old monasteries. In this case however monastic foundations are likened to an aristocratic patron's children, whose antiquity and disrepair are represented by sickness rather than old age. Given the entirely different context of this piece, emphasis is placed on the aristocrats' obligation towards their foundations rather than the miraculous nature of the act of restoration. The framing of ageing monasteries as sick children dependent on the benefaction of a paternal patron presents a recognisable power dynamic, albeit without the imagery of human ageing found in the commemorative texts.

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[621] Drpić, "The Restoration of Icons," forthcoming.
[622] LSJ, ξέω. This is also the root of the verb chosen in the inscription from Mouth Pagos (see above, p.135), suggesting a close interaction between texts commemorating both kinds of restoration.
[623] The technique of icon restoration is attested by the foundation document of the Kosmosoteira Monastery at Pherai, dated to 1152, Trans. N. Ševčenko, '*Kosmosoteira: typikon* of the *Sebastokrator* Isaac Komnenos for the monastery of the Mother of God *Kosmosoteira* near Bera', in Thomas, *Foundation Documents*, 845 (109).
[624] Margaret Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid: Reading the Letters of a Byzantine Archbishop* (Routledge, 2016)., 8.
[625] Theophylact of Ochrid, *Paideia basilike*, ed. P. Gautier, Théophylacte d'Achrida: discours, traités, poésies (CFHB, 16.1, Thessalonike, 1980), 189. Trans. Mullett, "Refounding Monasteries," 370-1.

The evidence of the commemorative epigrams points to the existence of a broader cultural conception of ageing that can be seen in the 'begging' poems of Manganeios and the visual imagery of the *Anastasis*. In each case old age symbolises death and decay but also the possibility for renewal at the hands of a powerful benevolent figure. Restoration of this kind had the capacity to grant new life to holy icons and the polity of New Rome in much the same way as Christ granted the possibility of eternal life to humankind. This archetype of continual ageing and rejuvenation helps to contextualise contemporary abstract and cosmological interpretations of ageing and immortality.

Ageing and Immortality

In several of his encomiastic texts, Manganeios does not focus on the reversal of his own old age but instead on the emperor's mortality. One address to Manuel I treats his triumphal entry into Antioch soon after Easter, 1159:

> "So receive this little refrain as if it were a great hymn,
> not considering the greatness of your triumphs
> but my sluggishness and feebleness
> -caused by my old age and sickness from the cold-
> which has afflicted my arms and legs and affected everything,
> and filled my sinews with an unpleasant discharge,
> and every joint and linkage and my whole being.
> But may you remain untouched by the pressures of old age
> and high above every earthly weakness
> which our four-fold composition brings in time;
> and may you pass on your realm to purple-born offspring,
> as if in a kind of continuous golden chain,
> that preserves eternally succession to the sceptre
> and to your mighty throne and terrible majesty."[626]

[626] Poem 10, M fols. 21-22v; P pp.123-33, lines 334-347. Trans. Jeffreys, "A Constantinopolitan Poet," 126.

The poet first establishes his own physical weakness and affliction caused by old age and sickness. His hope that the emperor should remain free from the effects of old age and illness initially reinforces the contrast between the two figures, but is undercut by his admission that these maladies are inevitable for all mortals of "four-fold composition."[627] This tension between the hope for longevity and the recognition of mortality is resolved by the poet's final wish, that the emperor secure the sceptre eternally through his descendants like a "continuous golden chain". In this passage rejuvenation is not offered to either the poet or the emperor himself in defiance of the ageing process, but rather continued life and freedom from mortality are presented as attainable through the emperor's progeny.

In an earlier poem composed before Manuel's entry into Antioch, mortality and time itself are shown to be overcome by Manuel's deeds:

> "These acts dominate time, they even overcome forgetfulness;
> may the memory of these innovations never fade away,
> it will remain within the circuit of the world's celestial light,
> it will be catalogued with the stars, and time will not blot it out;
> it will be written down indelibly on the plaques of men's souls,
> and inscribed on tablets and held ready on men's tongues,
> for as long as the swift passing of time itself
> continues its circular motion every day;
> thus you also will remain free from death and old age,
> so long as the giant sun is above the earth, so long as Orion shines,
> you the Orion unsleeping at night and the gold-darting giant sun."[628]

Here the poet skilfully links the unending cycle of the days with his consistent portrayal of Manuel as the sun. Just like Orion and the sun itself, Manuel will remain immortal due to the impetus of his actions. By commemorating Manuel's deeds in words, Manganeios also tacitly implies his own immortalisation through his art. The emphasis on writing, inscription and oral recital in the poem no doubt alludes to Manganeios' well-disguised self-promotion and conveys

[627] The 'four-fold composition' is a reference to the Hippocratic theory of the four humours, given greater systematic structure by Galen, which was pervasive within Byzantine medical thought. Galen's theory established a link between the humours, the seasons and his model of the four stages of human life (Jacques Jouanna, "The Legacy of the Hippocratic Treatise the Nature of Man: The Theory of the Four Humours," in *Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen* (Brill, 2012)., 339, 358-9).
[628] Poem 8, M ff. 15v-19; P pp.89-112, lines 731-741. Trans. Jeffreys, "A Constantinopolitan Poet," 125.

the hope that his verses might be commended alongside Manuel's deeds by the generations to come.

These verses set out two distinct but altogether more worldly mechanisms for the attainment of immortality than the promise of salvation offered to all followers of Christ. It is important not to overstate the significance of these rhetorical *topoi*, whose primary function was to celebrate the magnificence of the emperor and his family rather than to establish a philosophy on the immortal soul to rival that of the Church. Nonetheless, these passages reveal a familiar dread concerning the end of the life course and a desire to transcend the suffering of old age and death through metaphysical means.

Just as Manganeios' poems explore immortality in a metaphysical sense that goes beyond the individual, contemporary literary and visual evidence attests to an understanding of the human life course as part of a larger natural cycle. The twelfth century saw an emerging interest in the personification of the months of the year with reference to seasonal human activity. The practice of representing the months of the year as twelve male figures was widespread in late antiquity, and resurfaced in Byzantium in the early twelfth century, either through contact with the Latin West or as a manifestation of twelfth-century antiquarianism. This personification is found in verses on the twelve months of the year composed by Theodore Prodromos.[629] The motif also appears in another antiquarian revival of the twelfth century, Eumathios Makrembolites' novel *Hysmine and Hysminias*.[630] There is also evidence to suggest that this literary trend was reflective of broader artistic practice, as four illuminated manuscripts from the first half of the twelfth century contain personifications of the months of the year (Fig. 8).[631]

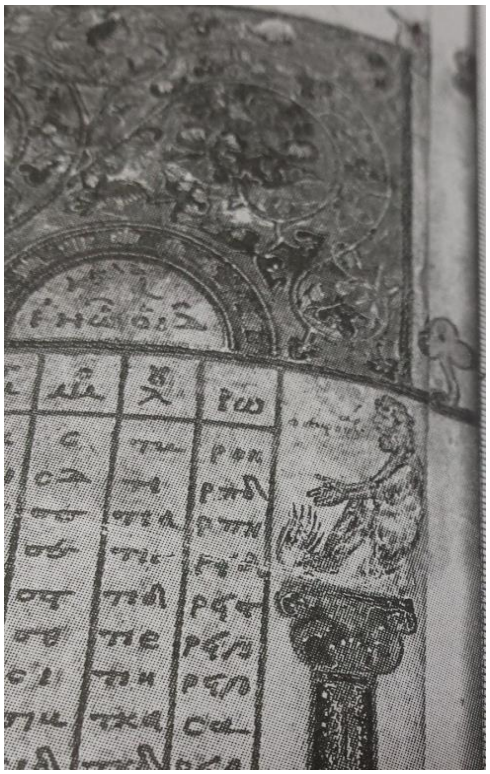

Fig. 8 – February personified in Canon Table, Melbourne Gospels, Twelfth Century

[629] Elizabeth Jeffreys, "The Labours of the Twelve Months in Twelfth-Century Byzantium," in *Personification in the Greek World: From Antiquity to Byzantium*, ed. Emma Stafford and Judith Herrin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005)., 309-10.
[630] On Makrembolites and his novel, see Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 159-60, 167.
[631] Jeffreys, "The Labours of the Twelve Months," 318.

Each personified figure was representative of his month through association with a particular civic or agricultural activity tied to that part of the year.[632] All of the men were conventionally youthful or middle aged with the exception of February, who was presented as an old man huddled over a fire.[633] In *Hysmine and Hysminias,* the protagonist describes a painting of this personification of February:

> "At the end were painted bowls of fire and a flame reaching up from the earth to the sky itself, so that it could not be understood whether the fire came pouring out of the aether to earth or whether it came up from earth to the sky. And an extraordinarily aged man was seated by the flame, completely wrinkled, with completely grey hair and beard, clad in leather from head to loins, the rest of him naked- his hands, his feet and most of his belly. His hands were stretched out and he seemed to draw the flame to him and to fan it and completely attract it to himself."[634]

The painting is shortly afterwards interpreted by the protagonist's friend Kratisthenes, in a passage discussed briefly in the previous chapter:

> "That greyhaired and wrinkled man who sits hard up to the fire reveals to you the harshness of winter no less than the chill of old age; for winter does not pierce a tender-skinned girl but makes the old man bent."[635]

This explanation as well as the variable ages of the other figures depicted indicates that the association between old age and winter is not simply a reference to the human life course, with senescence representing the winter of life. Rather the suffering of extreme cold is linked to ideas about the experience of old age.[636] The image of the freezing old man huddled over the flame and drawing it to himself is remarkably reminiscent of Manganeios' panegyrics and 'begging' poems, in which the poet is sustained by the warmth of the emperor's generosity.

Although the personified figures do not function as a representation of the progression of the human life course, the inclusion of the elderly February and the coldness of old age implies that this experience was considered part of an ongoing cycle. Rather than signifying the end of the year and of the life course, the experience of old age is presented as one of many aspects

[632] Jeffreys, "The Labours of the Twelve Months," 309.
[633] The introduction of the fire is an innovation of the twelfth century and can be found in both literary and visual depictions (Jeffreys, "The Labours of the Twelve Months," 319).
[634] *Hysmine and Hysminias,* IV.16.1-3. Trans. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels,* 205-6.
[635] *Hysmine and Hysminias*, IV.18.13. Trans. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels,* 207.
[636] On the *topos* of an old man suffering in the cold of February, see Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry vol.2,* 142-3.

of the life of the community over the course of a year. As in the case of Manganeios' *enkomia* for Manuel I, the life of the individual is recognised as mortal while also forming part of a wider chain or cycle.

Conclusion

The concept of growing old is fundamentally tied to the existential terror that comes from acknowledging the inevitability of mortality. Several literary and visual works of twelfth-century Byzantium represent contemporary responses to this existential aspect of ageing. Though any comparison between the disparate sources discussed in this chapter runs the risk of succumbing to reductive over-simplification, some clear patterns do emerge from their representation of ageing and death.

The image of the *Anastasis* articulated the conquering of death and the promise of resurrection through the raising up of the elderly Adam. In the twelfth century the use of the image within commemorative contexts transformed an articulation of fundamental Christian theology into an expression of personal devotion that symbolised the efficacy of prayer for the dead. The central imagery of the *Anastasis*, the salvation of an old man by the beneficence of a powerful younger figure, resonated with and informed contemporary discourse. Manganeios' 'begging' poems and *enkomia* employed an age rhetoric that positioned the emperor, sometimes even explicitly, in the role of Christ in the *Anastasis*. This restorative element of imperial ideology can be traced through contemporary *enkomia*, historiography and epigraphic material celebrating the rejuvenation of the Roman state. In this context, the ageing and restoration of New Rome carried an eschatological significance that represented a response to the end of earthly life on a cosmological scale. The conceptualisation of the destructive force of time as human ageing and the act of restoration as rejuvenation influenced contemporary expressions of private patronage, as illustrated by the preserved epigrams commemorating the restoration of icons. Finally, Manganeios' *enkomia* and the contemporary popular association of old age with Winter both point towards an effort to situate the ageing process within a broader cycle.

The case studies discussed in this chapter suggest that the contemporary articulation of death was centred around a desire for metaphysical transcension. Human ageing signified the destructive power of time and the inevitability of death, yet it also served as a reminder of life

beyond the mortal body. In this sense, ageing and death were not final, but rather held within them the possibility of new life. Like the elderly Adam in the *Anastasis*, a derelict city, deteriorated icon or sick poet could be brought back from the brink of death through another's beneficence.

Chapter Five: Ridicule and Invective

Although the ageing process was often treated with a certain gravity in Byzantine culture, older figures were sometimes portrayed in contemporary literature with very little reverence or respect. The humorous objectification of elderly figures had a long history in Greek literary culture dating back to Attic Comedy.[637] Images of ridiculous or disreputable old men and women resurfaced across a range of twelfth-century Byzantine texts. Their consistency makes it possible to identify several distinct trends in the contemporary discourse of humour and invective. This anti-age rhetoric reflected the literary sentiments of the period and functioned as a release valve for contemporary social tensions. This chapter explores the use of humorous and negative depictions of old age within twelfth-century literature. It aims to situate these images of ageing within the socio-cultural developments of the period.

Comedy in Byzantium, and in particular the Middle Byzantine period, has been the focus of a flurry of recent publications that have gone a long way towards proving that Byzantinists as well as the Byzantines themselves possess a sense of humour.[638] Despite a mistrust of wittiness (*eutrapelos*) and concern about internal relaxation (*diachusis*) that was linked to excessive laughter, Byzantine literature is replete with jokes and entertaining spectacles. Notable examples include joke books, historiographical anecdotes about court entertainment, and comic modulations in fictional literature.[639] The Byzantine sense of humour was often crude by our

[637] Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia*, 289-290. Older figures in Middle Comedy for instance would normally be depicted by actors wearing stomach padding, while short clothes and padding would also be used to mark the exceptionally low status of slave characters (John Richard Green, "Towards a Reconstruction of Performance Style," *Greek and Roman Actors: aspects of an ancient profession* (2002)., 104).

[638] The challenge that it was Byzantinists rather than the Byzantines themselves that lacked a sense of humour was raised by Alexiou in 1986 (Alexiou, "The Poverty of Écriture," 31). Some of these recent publications include Przemysław Marciniak and Ingela Nilsson, *Satire in the Middle Byzantine Period : The Golden Age of Laughter?* (Boston: Brill, 2021).; John Haldon, "Humour and the Everyday in Byzantium," in *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Guy Halsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).; Lynda Garland, "'And His Bald Head Shone Like a Full Moon...': An Appreciation of the Byzantine Sense of Humour as Recorded in Historical Sources of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," *Parergon* 8, no. 1 (1990).; "The Rhetoric of Gluttony and Hunger in Twelfth-Century Byzantium," in *Feast, Fast or Famine* (Brill, 2017).; Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, vol.2, Chapter 15; Pizzone, "Toward a Byzantine Theory," 146-165.

[639] There is evidence to suggest that a late antique joke book, *Philogelos*, was read by members of the Constantinopolitan literati in the twelfth century (Barry Baldwin, "John Tzetzes and the 'Philogelos'," *Byzantion* 56 (1986)., 339-41; see also Floris Bernard, "Humor in Byzantine Letters of the Tenth to Twelfth Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks papers* 69 (2015)., 182). On court entertainment, see a much-discussed passage from Choniates' history that demonstrates the presence of mimes (Choniates, *Historia*, 441-2)**;** On comic modulations in fictional literature, see Pizzone, "Toward a Theory," 149; Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia*, ch.4.

modern standards, and at its core revolved around laughter at the expense of others.[640] The alterity of the ageing body ensured that it functioned as a prime target for comedic abuse. The comedic *topoi* employed in the construction of elderly caricatures were readily transferred to invective against political figures and intellectual rivals. Literary and historiographical texts provide the best witness to this form of rhetoric, which is largely absent from hagiographical literature and religious art.[641] This chapter begins with an extended analysis of surviving ancient comic *topoi* and their use in the construction of elderly caricatures. In addition to these overt forms of ridicule, ideas about ageing bodies culminated in comic modulations in rhetorical works and even the satirical framing of the authorial *persona*. The relationship between elderly caricatures and the authorial *persona* forms the subject of the second part of this chapter. The final two parts are devoted to an analysis of invective against the elderly within both intellectual and political spheres.

Subverting the Norm: Ageing and Inappropriate Behaviour

Ridicule directed towards elderly caricatures can be traced back to Classical Greek and Latin literature, exemplified by Attic comedy and Juvenal's vitriolic tenth satire.[642] The revival of Lucianic literary forms in the twelfth century gave new life to this tradition: at least three of the seven 'Lucianic' works by Theodore Prodromos relied heavily on comic *topoi* concerning elderly figures.[643] In line with their ancient literary models, twelfth-century humorous depictions of older figures focused especially on aspects of the ageing body. In a series of poems attributed to Manganeios Prodromos, the author lambasts an old man for marrying a younger woman:

> "In vain you join yourself to a girl,
> when you are white-haired and pot-bellied to the extreme.
> For neither a priest's discourse nor one cup
> will unite you in one flesh.
> For your belly will drive away the girl,

[640] On Byzantine ridicule and invective, see Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry vol.2*, 119-144, esp. 124-8.
[641] C.f. above, pp.80-7, 116-25.
[642] Juvenal, *The Satires*, X.190-246. For similar *topoi* in Attic comedy, see Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia*, 289-290.
[643] For instance, *Amarantos, or the Passions of the Old Man*, *Against a Lustful Old Woman*, and *Against an Old Man, Who Thinks Himself Wise Because of his Long Beard*.

and the two bodies will be separated." [644]

The addressee's white-haired (λευκόθριξ) and pot-bellied (προγάστωρ) body forms part of an *ad hominem* attack; an object of ridicule in its own right and the cause of the man's assumed failure to consummate his marriage. The expectation that older men should not engage in sexual activity manifests in this poem as a literal physical impediment. Instead of criticising the old man for his inability to restrain his erotic desires the poem simply emasculates him, inviting the audience to mock the impotence of his aged fat body.

In a recent study Zagklas has demonstrated the interaction of twelfth-century authors such as Prodromos and Niketas Eugenianos with the satirical verses found in the eleventh book of the Greek Anthology.[645] Among the considerable number of mocking epigrams concerning old men or women, one piece attributed to Leonidas of Alexandria is comparable in subject matter to the poems *Against an Old Man*:

> "Philinus when he was young married an old woman, in his old age he married a girl of twelve, but he never knew Venus at the right season. Therefore sowing formerly in barren land he remained childless, and now has married a wife for others to enjoy and is deprived of both blessings."[646]

Both compositions feature playful criticisms of age disparities in marriage, although the Manganeios poem above places far greater emphasis on the body of the old man as the source of its coarse humour. In particular, the image of an impotent old man is a comedic *topos* that appears in other contemporary texts. In the Escorial manuscript version of *Digenis Akritis*, the bandit leader Maximou scoffs at the old soldier Philopappous for his presumed cowardice:

> "'Get out of here, mad old man, son of perdition;
> extreme old age has withered your cock.
> I reckoned he had armies and brave youngsters;

[644] M 130, Miller, "Poésies Inédites," 58-59, vv.1-6:
"Μάτην ἑαυτῷ παρθένον συνηρμόσω,
ὁ λευκόθριξ σὺ καὶ προγάστωρ εἰς ἄκρον.
οὐ γὰρ συνάψειέ... εἰς σάρκα μίαν
ἢ πρεσβύτου λόγιον ἢ πόσις μία.
ἡ κοιλία γὰρ ἀποπέμψει τὴν κόρην,
καὶ διττὰ διάστασιν ἔξει σαρκία."
[645] Zagklas, "Satire in the Komnenian Period," 289-292.
[646] *Anthologia Graeca*, Book 11, no. 70. Trans. W. R. Paton and Michael A. Tueller, *The Greek Anthology*, Rev. ed., Loeb Classical Library ; 67 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

so I brought my armies and I came to make war."[647]

In this passage, Philopappous' lack of bravery is expressed as a form of physical emasculation through the crude phrase "ὁ κῶλος σου ἐτσιγκρίασε." The loss of libido and of normative masculine qualities such as bravery were thought to be linked in Ancient medical thought, with old age initiating a cooling process that brought the male body closer in line with the supposed coolness of the female body.[648] The effect of this remark is particularly potent given Maximou's assumption of a traditional masculine role for much of her time in the narrative.[649] The association between masculinity and age is reinforced by the subsequent line which contrasts the old man Philopappous with the brave youngsters ("ἀγούρους ἀνδρειωμένους") that Digenis is thought to have with him.

The assumed emasculation of the ageing process shines some light on the rhetorical effect of Manganeios' poem against the old man. The poem's humour comes not from the notion of an old man marrying a younger woman *per se*, but rather from the reality of the man's ageing body. Ridicule directed against older women in similar circumstances took a substantially different line of approach, although again the ageing body functioned as the primary site of abuse. Scorn directed against older women's bodies was a well-established *topos* in Greek literary tradition, as attested by multiple instances in the Greek Anthology.[650] One particular *topos* that took root in the literary milieu of the twelfth century was that of the lustful old woman. The most famous manifestation of this caricature is Theodore Prodromos' *Against a Lustful Old Woman*, in which a woman of hyperbolic old age is mocked for attempting to pursue an erotic lifestyle:

"O old woman deprived of all your teeth,
chewing with only two molars,
which time thankfully has not yet taken away,
so that you may not look like a new-born baby!
O pallid old woman, though you try to conceal it with cosmetics!

[647] *Digenis*, E.1519-1522, trans. Jeffreys:
'Ἔβγα ἀπ' ἐδῶ, λυσσόγερε, υἱὲ τῆς ἀπωλείας·
ὡς καὶ ἀπ' τὰ γέρα τὰ πολλὰ ὁ κῶλος σου ἐτσιγκρίασε.
Ἐγὼ ἔλεγα φουσάτα ἔχει καὶ ἀγούρους ἀνδρειωμένους,
καὶ ἐπῆρα τὰ φουσάτα μου καὶ ἦλθα νὰ πολεμήσω.'
[648] De Wet, "Grumpy," 499-500.
[649] On the liberation of Maximou from the moral and sexual conventions of the poem, see Garland, "Be Amorous," 90.
[650] For instance, *Anthologia Graeca*, Book 11, nos.65-74, 256, 374, 408, 417.

O withered raisin, though you still look like an unripe grape!"[651]

Zagklas has demonstrated that this text is in many respects a more elaborate and abusive adaptation of the roughly fourteen poems treating this topic in the eleventh book of the Greek Anthology.[652] The stream of abuse exhibited by Prodromos' poem veers away from simple ridicule and towards moral criticism. Emphasis is placed on the old woman's failed attempts to disguise her age with cosmetics; a line of argument that elevates her behaviour to a calculating act of deception. Further variations on this model appear in the Komnenian novels. This is particularly apparent in Niketas Eugenianos' novel *Drosilla and Charikles*, in which the male protagonist expresses his disgust at being propositioned by the older woman Chrysilla:

"'But that the wrinkled Chrysilla
should nurse an anguished passion for Charikles,
does this not seem disgusting? No, by Themis,
no, no, by Eros' malicious coals,
you will not be united to me, miserable old woman, in my heart,
a savagely murky sea of anguish.
Your kiss is a punishment in itself, woman;
your lips are harsh and your mouth is dry.
Time has made your jaw protrude through your skin;
you are bleary-eyed already, even if you have mascara everywhere;
yes, you are sallow, even though you have larded on the cosmetics."[653]

The two texts clearly make use of a shared language, centred on a caricature of a disgusting old woman whose attempts to beautify herself are ultimately doomed to failure. Both women are thus simultaneously criticised for their behaviour and mocked for their aged body. In the case of Chrysilla, each aspect of her appearance signifies a decline from the ideal of youthful

[651] Prodromos, "Against a Lustful Old Woman." vv.22-7:
Ὦ γραῦς ὀδόντος παντὸς ἐστερημένη,
Μόνοις παρατρώγουσα γομφίοις δύο,
Οὓς εὖ γε ποιῶν οὐκ ἀφεῖλεν ὁ χρόνος,
Ὡς μὴ νομισθῇς ἀρτιγέννητον βρέφος!
Ὦ γραῖς ὠχρὰ κἂν πλανᾷς ψιμμιθίῳ!
Ὦ σταφὶς ἰσχνὴ κἂν δοκῇς ὄμφαξ ἔτι!
[652] These are *Anthologia Graeca*, Book 11, nos. 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 71, 72, 73, 74, 119, 256, 374, 408, 409. See Zagklas, "Satire in the Komnenian Period," 286-7.
[653] *Drosilla and Charikles*, V.73-83. Trans. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, 400-1. Similar rhetoric appears earlier in the same novel during a banquet scene (*Drosilla and Charikles*, III, especially III.173-195).

female beauty, from a time when she may have been "lovelier than Artemis".[654] In the present she is wrinkled, sallow, bleary-eyed, with a pronounced jaw, harsh lips and a dry mouth.[655] The emphasis on decline from youthful beauty is even more apparent in an epigram recited during the young men's symposium at an earlier point in the same novel:

> "Another youth let out a shrill cry in his turn,
> 'How I give a thousand thanks to the grey-haired hag.
> She judges well and always passes sound judgments;
> she is an advocate for the Kyprian, in my view,
> driving haughty girls to passion.
> She who exults in her elegant curls
> sees that the long plait has vanished,
> the once blonde locks have turned to white;
> she whose brows were lofty and arrogant
> has now lost all the grace of her beauty.
> The breast that formerly jutted out in front of the girl
> now droops: time has destroyed it.
> Alas, old lady, your voice is elderly;
> your lips which were previously moist have become dry;
> your brow has sunk, it brings disgust;
> all your beauty, woman, has gone.
> What is left for you? Come on, become a procuress.'"[656]

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[654] *Drosilla and Charikles*, V.85.

[655] C.f. the *ekphrasis* of Drosilla's beauty, *Drosilla and Charikles*, I.120-158. See also Byzantine female beauty standards as expressed in depictions of female saints, Maguire, "Icons," 28, 31-2.

[656] *Drosilla and Charikles*, III.173-89, trans. Jeffreys:
Τορὸν δὲ πάλιν ἄλλος ἀντεκεκράγει·
Ὡς εὐχαριστῶ τῇ πολιᾷ μυρία.
Καλῶς δικάζει καὶ καλῶς πάντα κρίνει·
ἀρωγός ἐστι τῆς Κύπριδος, ὡς βλέπω,
ποινηλατοῦσα τὰς σοβαρὰς πρὸς πόθον.
Ἡ γαυριῶσα βοστρύχων εὐκοσμίᾳ
ὁρᾷ τὸ μακρὸν πλέγμα νῦν διαρρέον,
εἰς λευκὸν ἐτράπη δὲ τὸ ξανθὸν πάλαι·
ἡ τὰς ὀφρῦς ὑψοῦσα καὶ διηρμένη
ἀφῆκε πᾶσαν ἄρτι τοῦ κάλλους χάριν.
Ὁ μαστὸς ἑστὼς ὄρθιος πρὶν τῆς κόρης
ὑπεκλίθη· καθεῖλεν αὐτὸν ὁ χρόνος.
Γηραλέον τὸ φθέγμα, φεῦ, σοί, πρεσβύτις·
τὸ πρὶν δροσῶδες χεῖλος, ὡς αὐαλέον·
πέπτωκεν ὀφρύς, ἦλθεν εἰς ἀηδίαν

This epigram reinforces the antithesis between youthful beauty and its loss through old age by means of the repeated emphasis on past and present. Unlike the physical attributes of the misguided old men which seem to have carried with them a slapstick quality that the audience was encouraged to find innately humorous, the scorn present in these verses stems chiefly from the sexualised context in which the women are presented. In the case of Charikles' outburst, the wrinkles and dry lips of Chrysilla are not presented as worthy of distain in their own right. Indeed, such characteristics are frequently emphasised in the context of lamentation.[657] Rather, the woman's aged appearance serves to highlight and mock her erotic pretentions. In a similar vein, the young men's epigram delights in pointing out the old woman's loss of idealised feminine features that granted her some sexual agency in youth, now eradicated with age.

These representations of older women are distinct from the passages discussed above in two further respects. While the old men are depicted as ridiculous and foolish, the women are presented as disgusting and unnatural. In the case of the epigram from the young men's symposium, the woman's sunken brow is described as bringing ἀηδία (literally 'nauseousness' or 'disgust').[658] All of this woman's attributes that have "lost all the grace of her beauty" appear innately disgusting to the poem's narrator, and by extension the intended audience. Charikles' rhetorical question in the above passage suggests that it is ἀπευκτός (literally 'deprecated' or 'abominable') for a woman as old as Chrysilla to be amorously inclined towards him.[659] The choice of word here implies that there is something unnatural as well as abhorrent about Chrysilla's behaviour.[660]

However, Chrysilla's affront to the natural is also emphasised by the old woman's attempts to artificially conceal her age with makeup; an element that also appears in Prodromos' *Against a Lustful Old Woman*. This *topos* is reminiscent of a passage attributed to Lucian found in the Greek Anthology:

> "You dye your hair, but you will never dye your old age, or smooth out the wrinkles of your cheeks. Then don't plaster all your face with white lead, so that you have not a

τὸ πᾶν δὲ σοὶ παρῆλθε τοῦ κάλλους, γύναι.
Τί λείπεταί σοι; Δεῦρο, μαστρόπευέ μοι.

[657] See above, pp.93, 98.
[658] LSJ, ἀηδία.
[659] LSJ, ἀπευκτός.
[660] For a similar tone of disgust used in the portrayal of an ancient novel's antagonist, albeit for different reasons, see the portrayal of the hedonistic pederast Gnathon in *Daphnis and Chloe*, IV.11-20.

face, but a mask; for it serves no purpose. Why are you out of your wits? Rouge and paste will never turn Hecuba into Helen."[661]

Here the fundamental criticism is the same as in the depiction of Chrysilla, that old age can never be effectively concealed with cosmetics and that their excessive use results in something unnatural, in this case a mask instead of a face.

Many of these motifs are brought to the fore in Theodore Prodromos' *Amarantos, or the Erotic Desires of an Old Man*, a text that explores the artificial nature of physical self-representation. In this case however, the deceiver is not a lustful old woman but once again an old man marrying a younger woman. The story revolves around a philosophical dialogue between four characters in ancient Athens before their interruption by the arrival of Amarantos, who tells them about a wedding he attended the previous night.[662] The wedding took place between a young girl named Myrilla and the elderly philosopher Stratocles, whose attempts to conceal his advanced age are described at length:

> "His cheeks were coloured with pale orchil in the projecting part and convexities of the wrinkles, but they conserved most of the former ochre in the hollows and concavities, since the colour could not fully penetrate into the recesses that were shut close by the swelling. This resulted in a ridiculous mixture of ochre and rouge. His hair was curly and reddish, whereas most of his beard had been removed with a razor, giving him a rounded form. His eyelashes were made dark with dye, which is certainly not befitting of a syllogismising philosopher. For the moisture of his sore eyes ran in dark streams, quickly revealing the deceit."[663]

This forms an integral part of the argument of the work, in which it is demonstrated that men and women are simply actors on the stage of life, that Stratocles was never truly a philosopher and has in fact merely swapped his ochre-coloured face for rouge.[664] Viewed alongside the other contemporary texts ridiculing amorous elderly figures, it is clear that Prodromos'

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[661] Greek Anthology XI.408, trans. Paton:
Τὴν κεφαλὴν βάπτεις, τὸ δὲ γῆρας οὔποτε βάψεις, οὐδὲ παρειάων ἐκτανύσεις ῥυτίδας. μὴ τοίνυν τὸ πρόσωπον ἅπαν ψιμύθῳ κατάπλαττε, ὥστε προσωπεῖον, κοὐχὶ πρόσωπον ἔχειν. 5οὐδὲν γὰρ πλέον ἐστί· τί μαίνεαι; οὔποτε φῦκος καὶ ψίμυθος τεύξει τὴν Ἑκάβην Ἑλένην.
[662] For plot summary and discussion, see Eric Cullhed, "Theodore Prodromos in the Garden of Epicurus," in *Dialogues and Debates from Late Antiquity to Late Byzantium*, ed. Averil Cameron and Niels Gaul (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).
[663] Theodore Prodromos, *Amarantos*, ed. Migliorini, "Teodoro Prodromo, *Amaranto*," *Medioevo Greco* 7 (2007), 10.5-14. Trans. Cullhed, "Garden of Epicurus," 156-7.
[664] Cullhed, "Garden of Epicurus," 157.

depiction of Stratocles was drawing from a popular set of literary *topoi* regarding the improper behaviour of the old. This recurring image must be understood in light of the text's performed context as well as its broader rhetorical meaning. Like all literature of its kind produced in the twelfth century, *Amarantos* was not merely a dry exposition of the author's thesis, but a piece intended to be entertaining for its listeners.[665] This is demonstrated most clearly by the inclusion of the orations delivered at Stratocles and Myrilla's wedding. The first is an *epithalamium* recited by the grammarian Dionysios:

> "Hail, beautifully colored bedstead of the
> youths who are best suited for marriage, both
> Stratocles and young Myrilla! Hail, wedding
> and bed of the newly married prosperous
> young people! Hail, Aphrodite, since you
> preside over weddings and take care of the
> bedchamber! The charming groom and the
> divine bride, with their beauty, pretty stat
> -ures and faces, did not fear even you, Ares,
> sacker of cities, and mighty Aphrodite!
> O groom, how gentle, how beautiful you
> are; blond, with reddish complexion, dark
> eyebrows, clustering hair! And you, hail, O
> noble bride! Hail, for you I sing this wedding hymn, a child of Laconic brevity."[666]

The second is delivered by the comedian Chaerephon, and focuses more on the youthful beauty of the bride, urging Stratocles to take notice:

> "Queen of Goddesses, o Cyprian; Desire, might of mortals; Marriage guardian of life. I sing for you with words, I glorify you with verses, o Desire, Marriage, Paphian goddess. Behold the young maiden, behold, o young lad; awake, do not let your partridge quarry escape!
>
> Stratocles, friend of the Cytherean one; Stratocles, husband of Myrilla, look at your dear wife; she flourishes, she blooms, she shines; the rose is the lord of flowers, Myrilla

[665] On the entertainment value of contemporary rhetoric, see for instance Magdalino, *The Empire*, 353-5; Agapitos, "New Genres," 7-9. See also above, pp.39-40.
[666] Theodore Prodromos, *Amarantos*, 193-4. Trans. Zagklas, "Experimenting," 233.

is the rose among the maidens. The sun illuminates your bedsteads; a cypress has grown in your garden."[667]

Both poems serve to emphasise the age disparity between the couple in an entertaining way, with the first giving a heavily ironic description of the youth simulated by Stratocles' cosmetics and the second drawing attention to the natural youth of the bride. As in many of the passages discussed in this chapter, the effectiveness of the humour in *Amarantos* stems from juxtapositions: the ugliness of old age against the beauty of youth, and philosophical pretentions against worldly inclinations. The elderly bodies of women and men are presented as monstrous or simply ridiculous when placed in an unnaturally youthful, worldly context.

The abuse directed at these older figures is implicitly justified by the non-normative behaviour they exhibit. The concept of an amorous old woman or man was in some sense oxymoronic for contemporaries. It is perhaps no surprise that the motif of older people refusing to act their age performed such a central role in contemporary comedic literature, given that deceived expectations represented one of the three elements of Hermogenean 'comic discourse'.[668] The humorous effect of old people behaving in an uncharacteristic manner is illustrated clearly by the character of Maryllis in Niketas Eugenianos' novel *Drosilla and Charikles*. Though her portrayal in the novel is generally positive and sympathetic, Maryllis unwittingly takes on the main role in a slapstick comedy scene shortly before the novel's resolution:

"So they busied themselves
and delightedly consumed food and drink,
and the old woman- for she was good-hearted -
gave herself over to the festivities and the drinking.
Then she got up from her seat
and, being already prepared for this,
took a napkin in both hands
and began a somewhat Bacchic dance,
producing a small snuffling sound,
which initiated festivity and instigated mirth.
However, the constant gyrations quickly

[667] Theodore Prodromos, Amarantos, 195. Trans. Zagklas, "Experimenting," 234.
[668] See Pizzone, "Toward a Byzantine Theory," 147. On the influence of the Hermogenean corpus within the Byzantine education system, see Stratis Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

tripped Maryllis up in her movements
and so the poor wretch fell over with her legs in a tangle;
she promptly lifted her feet over her head
and pushed her head into the ground.
The symposiasts let out a huge guffaw.
Old Maryllis lay where she fell
and farted three times,
because she could not bear the pressure on her head.
She did not get up- the poor wretch
said she could not, and lying there
she held out her hands to the young men."[669]

The comedy of this scene lies not only in the slapstick and general absurdity, but also in its carnivalesque quality.[670] As Roilos has commented, this scene shifts the entire tone of the narrative, transforming a respectable banquet into "a grotesque performative event", with Maryllis taking on the role of a jester at a raucous feast, as in the case of Satyrion and Nausikrates in *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*.[671] Caricatures depicted in Attic comedy and witnessed by ancient epigrams may be cited as an influence on such a portrayal of an old woman, especially given their revival in the twelfth century by intellectuals including Theodore Prodromos.[672] However, the particular use of slapstick and the nature of the performance within the context of a banquet suggests that this scene represents more than simply an adaptation of ancient literary conventions. For Roilos, Maryllis' dance and grotesque performance reflects the continued popularity of the carnival and pagan festivals in Byzantium, and can be understood within a growing literary interest in ordinary and naturalistic aspects of everyday life.[673] Despite the intense disapproval of the Church, pagan festivals remained a fixture in the

[669] *Drosilla and Charikles*, VII.270-292, trans. Jeffreys.
[670] The humour of the *Ptochoprodromic* poems is similarly centred on a temporary reversal of the author's fortunes via the adoption of an impoverished poetic persona. Janssen and Lauxtermann, "Authorship Revisited: Language and Metre in the Ptochoprodromika." 561-2. Evidently comic modulations in twelfth-century Byzantine literature could involve taking on what Bakhtin would call a 'carnival sense of the world.' Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 107.
[671] Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia*, 289.
[672] Comic caricatures of old women provided the basis for Prodromos' depiction of a lustful old woman. Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia*, 290. C.f. the Dionysiac depiction of the lecherous old virgin among the banquet jokes in *Drosilla and Charikles*, III.207-15; Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia*, 289-92.
[673] Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia*, 294-5. On the continued popularity of carnivals and festivals in the twelfth century, see Haldon, "Humour," 61-2. C.f. the carnivalesque elements in the *Ptochoprodromica*. Alexiou, "Ploys of Performance," 99-100.

lives of ordinary Byzantines.[674] At the heart of many such celebrations lay the inversion of normative social and gender roles, involving transvestism, the wearing of very expensive or very lowly garments and so on.[675] Likewise, a major source of humour in Byzantine texts is absurd or improper behaviour, whether in the case of an old man acting like a youth, a priest acting like a soldier, or a human behaving like an animal.[676] In the case of Maryllis, her Bacchic dance represents a stark contrast to her more serious role elsewhere in the novel, and should be interpreted as a carnivalesque inversion for comedic effect.[677]

The upset of social norms in this scene is given an explicitly age-related nuance at its conclusion. When Maryllis eventually stands back up she gives a short speech as a justification for the preceding events:

> "But she sat with the young people and said,
> 'By the gods, my children, just look at me.
> From the time that the good Chramos, Maryllis' son,
> was buried- and that was eight years ago-
> I have not laughed or danced;
> I have this to thank you for.
> They say that even an old man runs when fooling with lads.'"[678]

The adage given in the final line classifies her entertaining and ridiculous performance as a moment of youthful playfulness in the company of the other younger characters, contrary to the behaviour expected of a woman of her age. It can be inferred from this that the crude slapstick of the preceding scene gains much of its comic value from the portrayal of an old woman exhibiting behaviour normally expected of a youth, and its catastrophic consequences.

The absurdism and comedy in the carnivalesque rests primarily on two elements: the inversion or levelling of hierarchies and power relationships, and things not truly being as they appear on the surface. One passage from Prodromos' treatise *On Those who Condemn Providence*

[674] Canon 62 of Trullo forbade the celebration of the Kalends, the Vota and the Brumalia, and in the twelfth century Zonaras lamented the continuation of such festivities, particularly in rural areas. Maroula Perisanidi, "Entertainment in the Twelfth-Century Canonical Commentaries: Were Standards the Same for Byzantine Clerics and Laymen?" in *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 38, no. 2 (2014): 190-1.
[675] Haldon, "Humour," 62; Perisanidi, "Entertainment," 191.
[676] Haldon, "Humour," 60.
[677] For Maryllis' role in the broader narrative, and as an old woman in the ritual laments at the end of the novel, see above, pp.94-5, and below, pp.178-87.
[678] *Drosilla and Charikles*, VII.309-315.

because of Poverty indicates that twelfth-century Byzantine writers were fully aware of the latter concept:

> "Tell me, have you seen an old man, aged as if he were born in the days of Saturn, wrinkled in the mantle, displaying Pythagorean ochre in his face, leaning upon a crooked fennel stalk like Silenus? What would you say about him? That he is meet for God? That he is sacred? That nothing can be guided by Providence unless such men are wealthy? I know that you would say this and more. But I have seen that such a man is far from sacred. For as soon as you notice that he has stolen his pet birds - the ones I caught from his hand, or the ones I pulled out from under his cloak - you see that we human beings mostly live by playing a part. We are deceived about the ass in the lion's skin and the weasel in the wedding dress. Thus there is a deep theatric scene around us; we act ourselves and others act for us."[679]

Here the narrator explicitly calls attention to the intellectual and spiritual authority granted to old men before abruptly undermining it. As argued by Cullhed, an awareness of the theatricality of life may well be the key to understanding Stratocles' transformation during the narrative of *Amarantos*.[680] Both *Amarantos* and *Drosilla and Charikles* derived humour from the contrast between appearance and reality, drawing attention to the artificial nature of performed social roles. The gravity attributed to the roles normatively performed by older men and women facilitated their humorous subversion by twelfth-century authors. The humour inherent in the subverted image of respectable old age holds implications for the interpretation of another contemporary literary form. The following section explores the possibility of reading aged self-representation as a form of self-satire through a case study of the 'begging' poems of Manganeios.

Self-Satire: The Aged Authorial *Persona*

It is argued elsewhere in this thesis that the 'begging' poems of Manganeios Prodromos draw from established old age *topoi* to effectively convey the power dynamic between the author's

[679] Theodore Prodromos, *On Those Who Condemn Providence Because of Poverty*, 1295b-1296a, ed. and Trans. Cullhed, "Garden of Epicurus," 158, n.22.
[680] Cullhed, "Garden of Epicurus," 157-8.

persona and his addressee.[681] However, bolstering the poems' rhetorical argument is not the only effect of this self-deprecation. In one poem, the author declares:

> "I have willingly been your faithful servant,
> I have kept up my good will, I have completed the course;
> but now I have grown old and exhausted in your service,
> I am bowed down, as you see, and crippled in the knees,
> my feeble and livid body is in a bad way,
> I am lame in both my hips, with my thighs,
> my knees are diseased, my flanks are giving me pain,
> the part around the nipple on the breast suffers too,
> indeed most of my body is in decline,
> for the lamp of the body, which once shed light,
> no longer has the spark of sight;
> but still the document of freedom,
> the crown of faith, the prize of the race,
> is withheld, and the servant is grieved by his servitude."[682]

Despite the singular person ending of ὁρᾷς ('you see'), the poem was in reality most probably written for performance in front of a mixed audience of wealthy patrons and aspiring literati, within a *theatron* or other similar environment.[683] If the poem was intended to stand out from the crowd and attract the attention of existing and potential patrons, the entertainment value of

[681] See above, pp.127-9.

[682] Trans. Jeffreys (Forthcoming), M 61, vv.13-26:
Δεδούλευκά σοι καὶ πιστῶς καὶ μετὰ προθυμίας,
τὴν εὔνοιαν τετήρηκα, τετέλεκα τὸν δρόμον,
ἀλλ' ἤδη καὶ γεγήρακα καὶ κέκμηκα δουλεύων,
καὶ κατεκάμφθην, ὡς ὁρᾷς, καὶ σκάζω καὶ τὸ γόνυ,
πονηρῶς ἔχει τὸ σαθρὸν καὶ πελιδνόν μοι σῶμα,
ἐπίσχεταί μοι τὰ διττὰ σὺν τοῖς μηροῖς ἰσχία,
ἠσθένησαν τὰ γόνατα, νεφροὶ κατοδυνῶνται,
συμπάσχει περιμάζιον ἐπὶ τῷ στήθει μέρος,
ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ὁλότητος τὸ κρεῖττον ἠλαττώθη,
ὁ λύχνος γὰρ τοῦ σώματος, ὁ πάλαι φωτοβρύτης,
οὐκ ἔχει νῦν ὡς πρότερον τὸν ὀπτικὸν σπινθῆρα.
ἀλλ' ἔτι τὸ χειρόγραφον τὸ τῆς ἐλευθερίας,
τῆς πίστεως ὁ στέφανος, τοῦ δρόμου τὸ βραβεῖον,
παρακρατεῖται καὶ λυπεῖ τὸν δοῦλον ἡ δουλεία.

[683] Manganeios' works often used simple syntax and included explanations for any allusions, making them accessible to a large aristocratic audience (Jeffreys, "A Constantinopolitan Poet," 54-5).

the performance would have been paramount. This brief interjection, prompting the audience to focus on the speaker's own appearance, gives some indication of how this entertaining performance was to be achieved. There is evidence from the eleventh century that suggests that a good rhetorical performer was expected to embody the genre or characters of a text through modulations in their voice.[684] In addition to this, dressing up and impersonating stock characters played an integral role in twelfth-century mime spectacles.[685] It is therefore not a great stretch to imagine that this poem was intended for performance with both a verbal and visual dimension, possibly with the use of props or other visual aids.[686] The long list of ailments in connection to old age can perhaps be understood as part of an entertaining, multi-sensory performance, not just part of the poem's rhetorical argument.[687]

This self-satirical reading of Manganeios' poem is supported by the appearance of much the same device in the contemporary *Ptochoprodromic* poems. In each of the poems in the collection, the narrator adopts a different *persona*, ranging from a hen-pecked husband to an abused monk.[688] In most of these poems, the narrator himself is the primary object of ridicule, and is presented in a number of embarrassing and farcical situations.[689] Indeed, Lauxtermann and Janssen have reassessed the connotations of the prefix *ptocho-*, arguing that rather than simply meaning 'poor', it carries the suggestion of a temporary carnivalesque reversal of fortunes.[690] Following this interpretation, the author self-consciously adopts comically unfortunate *personae* in each of the five poems, all of which contrast sharply with the 'empirical' author's circumstances.[691] The portrayal of impoverished caricatures affirms the audience's superiority, allowing them to laugh openly at those more disadvantaged than

[684] Stratis Papaioannou, "Encomium for the Monk Ioannes Kroustoulas Who Read Aloud at the Holy Soros, Translated with Introduction and Notes by Stratis Papaioannou," in *Michael Psellos on Literature and Art. A Byzantine Perspective on Aesthetics*, ed. Charles Barber and Stratis Papaioannou (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017)., 176-83, 287-93.
[685] Perisanidi, "Entertainment," 194.
[686] As Magdalino has argued, the recitation of the text was only one aspect of the *theatron* performance, which would have incorporated architecture, clothing, music and choreography. Magdalino, *The Empire*, 353-4.
[687] The use of self-deprecating humour in this context can be understood within the dynamics of an asymmetrical patronage relationship, in which the patron has the freedom to mock those of lower social standing, thus affirming their social superiority (see Bernard, "Humor in Byzantine Letters," 189).
[688] Alexiou, "Ploys of Performance," 96-102.
[689] Alexiou, "Ploys of Performance," 97-102.
[690] Janssen, "Authorship Revisited," 560-2.
[691] The term 'empirical author' refers to the historical individual in contrast to the 'model author' witnessed in the voice they employed across several works (Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Harvard University Press, 1994)., 15). For discussion of the utility of this terminology in the study of twelfth-century Byzantine literature, see Nilsson, *Writer and Occasion*, 89-90.

them.[692] The depiction of the narrator's crippling old age in the 'begging' poems of Manganeios can perhaps be viewed through the same lens. The embodiment of a poor aged caricature transforms the poet into an object of ridicule, made all the more amusing by its juxtaposition with the author's genuine social standing.

The pecuniary concerns of Manganeios' *persona* would also have been interpreted in light of popular ideas about the different priorities of the elderly. The belief that old age brought with it a certain cynicism and an excessive concern for worldly affairs is present in the writings of Aristotle, which is perhaps significant given the revival of interest in his works among the literati of the twelfth century.[693] For Aristotle, the four main negative attributes of old age were meanness, a lack of interest in friendships unless profitable, moroseness, and an inability to please others.[694] Those who survived into old age were thus ruled over by their material needs and by fear, detached from life and yet clinging to it ever more desperately.[695] The *Timarion* presents several old men who demonstrate miserly behaviour and an obsession with the material world.[696] In one passage the protagonist is accosted by a nameless old man who comically bombards him with questions about the price of fish and various other kinds of food.[697] This scene is especially valuable since the unnamed old man is not given any significant identifiable features, in contrast to many of the historical figures present in the text. Thus, he is presented as a stereotypical caricature, unadulterated by specific reference to a contemporary figure. It is possible that the 'rhetoric of poverty' employed by Manganeios was appealing to these assumptions about self-interested and materially dependent old men. The humorous aspects of Manganeios' begging *persona* would certainly have only been strengthened by these connotations.

Across a range of encomiastic and 'begging' poetry addressed to Manganeios' patrons, the author consistently emphasised his own old age and afflictions. One of the consequences of this was the formation of an entertaining portrait of an elderly intellectual, closely aligned with

[692] On the effectiveness of the *Ptochoprodromica* in an oral performance context, see Janssen, "Authorship Revisited," 558-9. On the poems' satirical depiction of the man in the street to an elite Byzantine audience, see Garland, "The Rhetoric of Gluttony," 51-4.
[693] The eleventh and twelfth centuries saw a renewal of scholarly interest in Aristotle, spearheaded by Anna Komnene, John Italos' pupil Eustratios, and Michael of Ephesus, giving rise to a series of commentaries on several major works of Aristotle. MacAlister, "Aristotle on the Dream," 196-7. On Aristotelian undercurrents in the dreams in the Komnenian novels, and the authors' possible connection to the circle of Aristotle commentators, see MacAlister, "Aristotle on the Dream," esp. 201-212.
[694] Small, *The Long Life*, 57.
[695] Small, *The Long Life*, 62.
[696] For discussion of the most prominent of these figures, Theodore of Smyrna, see below, pp.163-4.
[697] *Timarion*, 20.

a caricature that drew inspiration from *topoi* found in Lucian or the eleventh book of the Greek Anthology. The adaptation of this caricature into an authorial *persona* both for the enhancement of the author's rhetoric of poverty, and the titillation of his audience can be interpreted as an aspect of literary playfulness and experimentation that flourished especially in the twelfth century. This is not to say that the 'empirical' author Manganeios did not experience old age or illness.[698] Yet the author's integration of old age into his works' rhetoric can be seen as symptomatic of a wider trend in twelfth-century literary discourse: manipulating long-established literary *topoi* into a form of innovative rhetorical play.

In addition to its role in Manganeios' self-representation, old age featured prominently in discourse among competing intellectuals at the Constantinopolitan court. Just as Manganeios' authorial *persona* owed its efficacy to a well-established catalogue of images associated with elderly intellectuals, so too did exchanges between intellectual peers display an awareness of these *topoi*. An exploration of the social environment in which these texts were produced is essential to properly contextualise their depiction of elderly figures.

Intellectual Rivalry

The portrayal of the old philosopher Stratocles in *Amarantos* is emblematic of a social tension that can be glimpsed through the writings of contemporary literati. Some of Theodore Prodromos' works are far more explicit in their criticism of would-be elderly philosophers. His poem *Against an Old Man, Who Thinks Himself Wise Because of his Long Beard* belonged most likely to a group of texts whose purpose was to defend Prodromos' teaching methods.[699] In it he ridiculed an old intellectual, named after the extremely old man Thoukritos from Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*:

> "Yow ow ow! That bushy beard,
> which that decrepit, putrid old man, Thoukritos,
> lets fall, all the way down to his breast.
> Yow ow ow! That smell, the stench of goat!
> (…)

[698] For instance, there are three poems in the Manganeios corpus that address a request to the patron in question for the acquisition of a live fox to be used as a cure for the author's crippled legs. See above, p.101 n.493.
[699] Marciniak, "Of False Philosophers," 131-2; See also Kucharski, "The Beard," 46-8.

> You're foolishly deluding yourself, old man,
> taking the exuberance of your beard
> to be a sign of philosophy."[700]

Prodromos later alluded to this text in a letter to the *orphanotrophos* Alexios Aristenos, composed around the time of his recovery from an illness that caused the loss of his hair and the uncontrollable growth of his beard:

> "…as long as I enjoyed bodily health, and my hair was thick and groomed, my beard grew symmetrically and not in the manner of the philosophers, I have poured a rude sneer upon those less fortunate in this respect… But now, that the die of ugliness has turned upside down for me, I did not await gossip and slander from others. I set myself as my own accuser. I allow those who are willing to take their fill of my own joke."[701]

In both passages the author establishes a connection between a long and unruly beard and the affectation of philosophical authority. The stereotype of the bearded philosopher in Greek literature can be traced back to the Hellenistic period, when philosophers tended to sport beards as a means of distancing themselves from their shaven contemporaries.[702] This trope was adopted by Lucian and several Byzantine writers despite the fact that beards had become commonplace outside of philosophical circles.[703] The particular association in Byzantine society between beards and adult masculinity in general may have led writers such as Theodore Prodromos to call attention to the overgrown nature of philosophers' beards.[704] By presenting the unwieldy growth of his beard as a consequence of severe illness, Prodromos only partially incites laughter at his own expense. The implication of the latter text is that only a near-death experience could cause the author to look as terrible as the pretentious old men he previously ridiculed.

Prodromos' portrayal of disreputable old philosophers in *Amarantos* and his poem *Against an Old Man* may be interpreted in light of another near-contemporary depiction of a

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[700] Theodore Prodromos, *Against an old man, who thinks himself wise because of his long beard*, vv.1-4, 30-2. Trans. Marciniak, "Of False Philosophers," 143-4. On the Lucianic model, see below, p.170.
[701] Translation of text from Migne, *PG* 133, 1251-53, based on unpublished edition of Prodromic letters by M. Op de Coul (2007 unpublished PhD dissertation), trans. Janek Kucharski and Przemyslaw Marciniak, "The Beard," 45-6.
[702] Kucharski, "The Beard," 51.
[703] Kucharski, "The Beard," 51-2.
[704] Kucharski, "The Beard," 52; Tougher, *Bearding Byzantium*, 162-3. C.f. *Timarion*, 19, in which a gluttonous aristocrat in Hades is described by possible allusion to Julian's *Misopogon* (see Timarion, n.126), referencing his poor beard hygiene but without implying philosophical pretentions.

Constantinopolitan intellectual. The deceased Consul of the Philosophers Theodore of Smyrna is presented in the anonymous *Timarion* as a philosopher and teacher who indulged excessively in a luxurious worldly lifestyle while he was alive. This is conveyed in the text primarily through a heavy emphasis on Theodore's gluttony:

> "'In the life above, I gave many discourses that pleased Their Majesties, in return for which I earned many gold pieces and enjoyed many unusual benefits. But I squandered everything on extravagant banquets and sybaritic dinners… The consequent agonies wore me out body and soul. My body became a useless burden to me."[705]

Given Byzantium's religious and moral culture, accusations of excessive gluttony were a mainstay of Byzantine *Kaiserkritik* and of *psogos* in general.[706] Thus the *Timarion* is full of characters who are obsessed with food, the most notable case being the gluttonous old man introduced soon after the narrator's entrance to Hades.[707] Although the figure is not given a full physical description, the emphasis on his old age and messy beard together with consistent wordplay centred on richness and fat creates a vibrant caricature.[708] Similar language linking fatness with wealth can be found in the *Ptochoprodromic* poems.[709]

Theodore is given several passages of dialogue in which he assures the protagonist of his reformed ways, that he now sustains himself on a diet of cress, marrow and asphodel in order to subdue his stomach.[710] However, these ascetic aspirations are comically undermined at several points when his more worldly concerns resurface. Indeed, Theodore's final request of Timarion near the end of the work is that he send down a selection of his favourite foods, described with lavish attention to detail:

> "'My boy, please send me a five-month-old lamb, two three-year-old hens that have been fattened and slaughtered, the kind the poulterers sell in the market, I mean the kind

[705] *Timarion*, 24, trans. Baldwin.
[706] Canon 55 of Laodicea forbade both clerics and laymen from attending large banquets funded by the participants, since such events could lead to gluttony, drunkenness and undesirable sexual behaviour. Perisanidi, "Entertainment," 187; Garland, "The Rhetoric of Gluttony," 43-5.
[707] *Timarion*, 17.
[708] For instance, the food eaten greedily by the man is described as πιμελῆς τὰ πάντα μεστά ('entirely full of fat'), *Timarion*, 17; Baldwin, *Timarion*, n.121.
[709] In the third poem for instance, an imagined wealthy scholar is depicted riding a fat mule, παχυμουλαρᾶτος (literally 'fat-muled'), Eideneier (1991), III, v.59, trans. Geoffrey Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and Its Speakers* (John Wiley & Sons, 2014)., 338-41.
[710] See for instance *Timarion* 24.

> that good butchers have removed the stomach fat from and laid it across their thighs on the outside, and a one-month-old sucking pig and a nice fat and fleshy sow's belly.'"[711]

This scenario, in which an influential man of letters is driven by greed or hunger rather than higher ideals, is a recurring motif in twelfth-century Byzantine comedic texts. The *Ptochoprodromic* poems encapsulate this theme especially, with the narrator in Poem IV complaining that as a writer he has less access to food than the local craftsmen.[712] Moreover, the food in this poem is presented in a heavily euphemistic manner, drawing on the Aristophanic association of sex with the excessive consumption of food.[713] Such sexual connotations only reinforce the impression of worldliness created by this *topos*.

In contrast to the Ptochoprodromic poem, the humour in the portrayal of Theodore lies not in an entertaining depiction of the character's deprival of food and sex, but rather in the contrast between his material desires and his ascetic pretentions. In this respect Theodore bears many similarities with the figure of Stratocles in *Amarantos*, who is likewise conspicuous in his display of philosophical self-control but submits to worldly desires without any sign of remorse.[714] As discussed above, the physical description of Stratocles decked out with rouge and dyed eyelashes conveys a sense of revulsion at the attempt to make the face of an elderly philosopher seem artificially youthful.[715] Ultimately his efforts are doomed to failure since the rouge mixes with the remnants of pale orchil in his wrinkles and the moisture of his eyes causes the dye to run.[716] This failure is emblematic of one of the central humorous dilemmas of the text, that an old man cannot successfully fulfil the role of a young husband, no matter how much makeup he uses. It is significant that his attempts to adopt this new role are foiled by his wrinkled brow and watery eyes, two conventional physical attributes of old age.[717] While it may be implied in the narrative that both of Stratocles' roles are superficial and constructed, evidently his age permits him to perform one far more convincingly than the other. This is clear from the way in which he is introduced as a philosopher of some repute:

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[711] *Timarion*, 46, trans. Baldwin.
[712] Alexiou, "The Poverty of Écriture," 14-16. On the recurring motifs of food and hunger in the Ptochoprodromic texts, see Garland, *Rhetoric of Gluttony*, 52-4.
[713] Alexiou, "The Poverty of Écriture," 16; Garland, *Rhetoric of Gluttony*, 48.
[714] Cullhed, "Garden of Epicurus," 156-7.
[715] See above, p.152.
[716] Cullhed, "Garden of Epicurus," 156-7.
[717] On the leakiness of the elderly body in general, see De Wet, "Grumpy," 498. On wrinkles, see De Wet, "Grumpy," 507; compare with Manasses, *Synopsis Chronike*, 104-5; or *Hysmine and Hysminias*, II.10.4.

> "…we admired him, praised him and called him fortunate indeed, and we were all ears when he taught, because the man is a terrific speaker, and we trusted in his appearance. For his beard fell down to his knees and his neck was bent, his eyebrows were drawn together, and ochre was all over his face and, generally speaking, his look indicated that he was a philosopher even to those who did not know him."[718]

The comedy of the wedding scene comes largely from its subversion of Stratocles' appearance as presented in this passage: a respected old man who maintains his intellectual authority by distancing himself from earthly concerns. Likewise, the old Consul of the Philosophers in the *Timarion* is ridiculed for his longing for the luxurious banquets of his former life, precisely because of their contrast with the ascetic lifestyle he purports to lead in Hades.

A common theme in many of these texts is the criticism, made with varying degrees of sincerity, of an older established literati, and the underlying principle that the aesthetics of advanced age equate to intellectual authority. This criticism must be interpreted in the context of the fierce competition for aristocratic patronage that took place in twelfth-century literary *theatra*.[719] Although such portrayals were most likely intended to be entertaining first and foremost, pieces such as Theodore Prodromos' poem *Against the Man with a Long Beard* indicate that contemporary writers were not above satirising rival intellectuals. It is also possible that the theme of old men with false pretences should be interpreted in the context of contemporary texts criticising charlatan doctors and false holy men. Critical treatments of medical professionals can be traced back to Classical Antiquity and their continued appeal in Middle Byzantium is indicated by the inclusion of numerous related passages in the Greek Anthology.[720] Literary criticisms of holy men by contrast developed significantly in the twelfth century, with particular emphasis placed on their ability to fool aristocrats and the Constantinopolitan mob by donning the trappings of ascetic holiness.[721] A passage in Choniates' history concerning the eccentric prophet Basilakios illustrates the growing suspicion of holy men by twelfth-century intellectuals:

> "This man, therefore, appeared to many, as I have said, to be a prophet and diviner of future events. There were those women who asked indecent questions and wore immodest frocks to make sport of him, but the sober-minded held him to be a curiosity,

[718] Migliorini, Teodoro Prodromo Amaranto, MEG 7 (2007), ch. 8, 85, trans. Marciniak, "Of False Philosophers," n.35.
[719] On this competitive context, see Magdalino, *The Empire*, 339-40.
[720] Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry v.2*, 142.
[721] Magdalino, "The Byzantine Holy Man," 54.

> a buffoon, and a prattling old man. And there were those, among whom I was included, who said that he possessed a spirit of divination."[722]

The fact that this motif occurred on multiple instances in contemporary texts indicates a growing awareness that the trappings of intellectual or spiritual authority may not be supported by an underlying reality. The physical attributes of old age are clearly presented as one of the means by which one could lay claim to this authority. Through satirical and entertaining literature, contemporary writers were able to question this façade and articulate the social tensions it created, without undermining it completely. The carnivalesque treatment of elderly figures such as Theodore of Smyrna and Stratocles can be understood in part as an outlet for the frustrations of the literati against the established norms of intellectual authority.

Political Invective: Niketas Choniates and Andronikos I Komnenos

Negative images associated with ageing were not limited to humorous literature and the articulation of intellectual and socio-economic tensions among the contemporary literati. These *topoi* played a significant role in Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*, as witnessed in the historiography of the period.[723] For instance, Niketas Choniates' criticism of the Komnenian dynasty in the decades leading up to the sack of Constantinople is predicated in part on elderly caricature. This is demonstrated most clearly by Choniates' depiction of the emperor Andronikos I Komnenos. Andronikos' advanced age is mentioned repeatedly by Choniates, starting from the point in the narrative that he begins to manoeuvre for accession to the throne.[724] However, Andronikos' old age is initially received favourably, earning him the respect of the troops and admiration from supporters who place their faith in his "hoary experience".[725] Choniates posits that Andronikos was raised to the height of power because of the assumption that old age is well suited to wise rulership:

> "The council contended that the seditionists would not be stilled in any other way except that Andronikos should become emperor, since he whose hair had turned silver

[722] Choniates, *Historia*, 449, trans. Magoulias.
[723] On the tradition of Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*, see Averil Cameron, "Early Byzantine Kaiserkritik: Two Case Histories," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 3 (1977)., 15-16; Magdalino, "Aspects of Kaiserkritik"; Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, 253-4.
[724] Choniates, *Historia*, 228-9, 246-8.
[725] Choniates, *Historia*, 229, trans. Magoulias, "O City," 130.

> gray by time was able to speak more wisely than the young… for he could perceive clearly what must be done and carry out the action to be undertaken more forcefully and authoritatively than the young Alexios."[726]

Much like Theodore Prodromos with the old philosopher Stratocles, Choniates soon demonstrates the folly of interpreting an aged appearance as an indicator of wisdom and moderation. Andronikos' venerable old age is undermined by much the same body-humour and negative *topoi* as those discussed in the earlier parts of this chapter. The first significant example of this is in Choniates' description of Andronikos' triumphal procession, in which the new emperor rides through the city at speed rather than the slow pace customary for the imperial ceremonial:

> "…some contended that it was fear that gave rise to the spectacle, while others maintained that because of the day-long strain and the fatigue caused by the encumbrance of the imperial trappings, the old man was unable to contain the excreta of his bowels over a long period of time and defecated in his breeches."[727]

By relating this episode and the popular theories surrounding it, Choniates calls into question Andronikos' suitability for the role of emperor given the physical limitations of his old age.[728] On a more basic level however, the use of body humour transforms this part of the narrative into a slapstick performance with an old man as the object of ridicule, much like the character of Maryllis in *Drosilla and Charikles*. Throughout the narrative that follows, Andronikos' age more often forms part of a general attack on his character than any elaborate argument regarding his theoretical capacity to rule.[729] One of the most striking attacks on the unpopular emperor is situated at the beginning of the narration of his reign, and concerns Andronikos' decision to marry the young Alexios II's widow Anna:

> "And he who stank of the dark ages was not ashamed to lie unlawfully with his nephew's red-cheeked and tender spouse who had not yet completed her eleventh year, the overripe suitor embracing the unripe maiden, the dotard the damsel with pointed breasts, the shrivelled and languid old man the rosy-fingered girl dripping with the dew of love."[730]

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[726] Choniates, *Historia*, 270, trans. Magoulias.
[727] Choniates, *Historia*, 272-3, trans. Magoulias.
[728] On ageing as a factor in the social and political marginalisation of individuals, see below, pp.170-90.
[729] See for instance, Choniates, *Historia*, 283, 312, 335.
[730] Choniates, *Historia*, 275-6, Trans. Magoulias, "O City," 153.

Here Andronikos' marriage is represented in line with the *topos* of the old man marrying a young woman. In this case however Choniates juxtaposes Andronikos' extreme old age with Anna's extreme youth, prompting a response of outrage or disgust from the implied audience. The scenario is cast in terms of shame and unnatural behaviour, in stark contrast to the ridicule directed at the hopeless pretences of the old men in *Amarantos* and the Manganeios poem *Against an Old Man*. The emphasis on Andronikos' "shrivelled and languid" appearance brings the alterity of his ageing body into sharp relief, tying his moral failings to his 'otherness' as an old man. The legitimacy of this association is demonstrated by a passage following the death of Andronikos, in which the Sebastokrator John Doukas is rejected as a potential successor:

> "The aforementioned Doukas, who was standing with Isaac, removed his hat, and baring his bald pate that shone brighter than a full moon, made earnest supplication that the diadem be set on his head. The mob refused, asserting that they never again wanted an old man to rule over them as emperor. They had had their fill of evils at the hands of the grizzled Andronikos; thanks to him, they abhorred every old man full of years and on the brink of the grave, especially if he had a beard parted in the middle and tapering at the end."[731]

Doukas' bald head is presented elsewhere in Choniates' history as cause for mockery, and functions here as an indicator of his age.[732] The significance of baldness as part of derogatory treatments of older men may derive partly from the positive connotations of grey hair.[733] Regardless, this passage represents the bitter resolution to Choniates' *psogos* of Andronikos as an old man. The crowd's abrupt change of heart over the course of Andronikos' reign is presented by Choniates as an indictment of rule by popularity.[734] The deceptive appearance of Andronikos' venerable old age thus acts as a warning against uncritical and gullible decision-making. The portrayal of Andronikos during his reign rests on negative and humorous images of the elderly that were actively circulating in contemporary literature. Andronikos' venerable appearance and supposed wisdom are demonstrated to be nothing but smoke and mirrors: an idealised role that Andronikos was unwilling to perform. Choniates' *psogos* goes one step further than the satirical literature of his contemporaries however, interlinking Andronikos'

[731] Choniates, *Historia*, 345, trans. Magoulias.
[732] Garland, "And his bald head," 16-17.
[733] C.f. Proverbs 20:29, "the beauty of old men is their grey hair". This passage was quoted by Byzantine authors including John of Damascus, Sacra Parallela, 3.4 (PG 95, 1305 D-1308 D); Talbot, "Old Age," 271.
[734] On the role of the Constantinopolitan mob in Choniates' history and his portrayal of their psychology, see Angelou, "Rhetoric and History," 299.

abhorrent behaviour with old age itself to the extent that the two cannot be separated in the minds of the Constantinopolitan mob.

Conclusion

Advanced age was one of the core characteristics that Byzantine authors routinely mocked in a tradition dating back to the Lucianic corpus and Attic comedy. In this context the aged bodies of men and women were presented as cause for humiliation; a deviation from the gendered ideals of normative adulthood. These negative images of old age should not be taken at face value however. As in other contexts, age and its associations provided contemporary authors with a set of rhetorical tools with which to impress a particular perspective upon their audience. The nuances of their portrayal of older figures nonetheless shed some light on the wider socio-cultural environment of twelfth-century Byzantium.

One of the most consistent motifs in the texts discussed in this chapter is the discrepancy between the audience's expectation and the reality presented by the text. *Amarantos* and the raucous banquet scene in *Drosilla and Charikles* present elderly figures who act in contradiction to the roles they are expected to perform. Theodore Prodromos' invectives and the anonymous *Timarion* present elderly intellectuals whose philosophical wisdom is little more than a surface-level affectation, disguising the worldly concerns beneath. Choniates' history, much like *Amarantos*, looks critically at the assumed gravity and self-restraint of old men, showing these assumptions to be comically misguided or outright dangerous. These latter examples illustrate the degree to which the idealised expectations of old age were entrenched in contemporary culture. Paradoxically, the secular literature produced in this period was full of old people behaving badly. Comedy and invective provided rare outlets for the articulation of this tension between the ideal and its inverse.

Chapter Six: Social Identity and Marginalisation

In the sixteenth of Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*, the thirty-year-old Terpsion complains that the old man Thoukritos is still living beyond the age of ninety, while he himself is bound for an untimely death.[735] In his frustration at being unable to inherit Thoukritos' wealth, Terpsion demands:

> "Well, oughtn't an old man like him, who can no longer make use of his wealth, to depart from life and make way for young men?"[736]

The narrative structure of the dialogue quickly shows Terpsion's greed to be misguided through the interjections of the second character Pluto.[737] The tone and content of Terpsion's arguments nevertheless reflected a literary discourse that would continue to influence Greek authors for many centuries. In the twelfth century Theodore Prodromos began his satirical work *Against a Lustful Old Woman* by claiming that the titular figure was older than even Thoukritos.[738] Much like his ancient exemplar, Prodromos depicts his old crone as obstinately refusing to give up on life or to make the changes to her lifestyle that would be expected of a woman of her age.[739] Both figures are presented as a dead weight: the social value they may have accrued in the eyes of contemporaries has either dissipated in their later years, or else been subverted into a monstrous parody of its former self.

The question of social participation has long been a valuable line of enquiry in the scholarship on old age.[740] These studies have argued that in many societies, growing old often heralded diminishing social responsibilities and a significant loss of independence. As older people came to be perceived as ineffective in their vocation or broader social roles, they were normally expected to reduce their active involvement and gracefully accept the associated loss of authority.[741] This process of alienation was normalised in many modern societies by the

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[735] Lucian, *Dialogues of the Dead* 16.1, 82-3.
[736] Trans. Lucian, "Dialogues of the Dead," in *Lucian*, ed. A. Harmon, K. Kilburn, and M. Macleod (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).
[737] Lucian, *Dialogues of the Dead*, 16.3.
[738] This text's reference to the Lucianic dialogue has been identified by Marciniak, "Prodromos, Aristophanes," 28.
[739] C.f. for instance vv.26-8, in which the old woman is lambasted for her efforts to conceal her ageing with cosmetics.
[740] Johnson, "Historical Readings," 5-6; Parkin, "Ageing in Antiquity."
[741] The question of whether old people were suited for political life and should withdraw into other roles was in fact a topic of debate among authors of the late Roman Republic and the early Imperial period, including Cicero and Plutarch (see Parkin, "Ageing in Antiquity," esp. 24-6).

introduction of state pensions and a legal retirement age, though this should chiefly be understood as codification upholding an already normative phenomenon.[742] Some sociologists in the twentieth century saw the retreat from active social participation as a natural process of social disengagement.[743] More recently this model has been criticised by scholars drawing attention to the socially constructed aspects of the ageing process. According to the latter interpretation, the social alienation of older people is a direct consequence of social norms and institutions that focus their attention on the younger adult population, pushing older people to the margins.[744] This marginalisation effect can be seen clearly in many pre-modern sources, in which older people frequently appear on the fringes of the socio-political sphere.[745]

The marginalisation of older people is facilitated by the transformative effect of ageing on an individual's social identity. As argued by Hockey and James, social identity is not constant but is rather formed and reformed by age in corroboration or conflict with factors such as gender, class and ethnicity.[746] Individuals could thus be represented in drastically different ways by bringing one aspect of their identity to the fore and eclipsing others.[747] This chapter examines the role of age in the transformation of social identities in twelfth-century Byzantium, and in particular the extent to which these specifically 'aged' identities were presented as marginal to broader society. The identities of the figures discussed are analysed from an intersectional perspective, since the marginalisation of elderly figures was always compounded or alleviated by other aspects of their socialised identities.[748] A poor elderly widow had access to forms of social participation that were very different from those of a Constantinopolitan elite man. The intention of this approach is not to formulate a hierarchy of intersectionally marginalised identities, but rather to explore some of the nuance behind the contemporary construction of social identity.

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[742] On the scholarly discourse about the place of older people in the twentieth century, and the tendency towards Modernisation theory, see Johnson, "Historical Readings," 5-6, and Debra A Street, "Sociological Approaches to Understanding Age and Aging," (2007)., 154-5; c.f. Shahar, *Growing Old*, 49-52.
[743] Street, "Sociological Approaches," 148.
[744] Street, "Sociological Approaches," 157-9.
[745] See for instance Shahar, *Growing Old*, 2; Parkin, "Ageing in Antiquity," 34.
[746] Hockey, *Social Identities*, 3-4.
[747] Durak, *Identity and the Other*, 17.
[748] The term 'intersectionality' was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw to refer to the integration and interaction of gender, sexuality, race etc. in the marginalisation of individuals (Kimberley Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics. The University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989 (1), 139-167," *Chicago, IL* (1989).). The framework of intersectionality has been employed in a number of diverse fields in the subsequent decades and has proved an invaluable tool for analysing overlapping systems of oppression and privilege. See for instance Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality*, esp. 14; Toni Calasanti and Neal King, "Intersectionality and Age," in *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology* (Routledge, 2015)., 193.

In keeping with the methodology of the rest of the thesis, this chapter is not concerned with the *realia* of social experience, either of historical individuals or groups. Instead, the analysis focuses on literary representations of older figures, drawing attention to the construction of their identity relative to social norms and literary conventions. The texts discussed here have all been introduced at an earlier point in the thesis. The intention is to reassess this same body of material with a broader focus to highlight some of the main trends in their construction of aged identities. The following sections consist of two case studies and an extended conclusion that draws together common trends in the literary material analysed throughout the thesis. The case studies allow for a closer examination of the intersection of age, gender and ethnicity in the representation of elderly men and women. The older figures in question are given a position of relative prominence within the narratives of two fictional texts that emerged out of the cultural milieu of the twelfth century: the romance *Digenis Akritis* and the novel *Drosilla and Charikles*.

No Country for Old Men

The romance of *Digenis Akritis* has been the object of a great deal of analysis in recent decades involving various critical lenses.[749] However, little attention has been given to the fact that the text is in many respects a celebration of youth.[750] Through a combination of shifting narrative focus and premature death, neither Digenis nor his parents are depicted in their later years.[751] Rather the narrative is concerned primarily with their militaristic youthful exploits, whether in the form of battle or hunting.[752] When older figures do appear in the text, their age consistently restricts their agency and independence. One older character who appears several times in the latter part of the narrative is the veteran bandit soldier Philopappous. Despite being, by his own

[749] See for instance the gender-historical approach in E. Jeffreys, "Akritis and Outsiders," in *Strangers to Themselves : The Byzantine Outsider : Papers from the Thirty-Second Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, March 1998*, ed. D. C. Smythe (Aldershot: Variorum, 2000)., 195-7; Neville, "Byzantine Gender," 49. The role of sexual morality in the work is explored in Garland, "Be Amorous," esp. 83-8. The text is analysed through the lenses of gender and ecocriticism by Goldwyn, *Byzantine Ecocriticism*, esp. 39-73.

[750] The fact that the main cast of characters in *Digenis* and the twelfth-century novels are adolescents has been pointed out by Catia Galatariotou, "The Byzantine Adolescent: Real or Imaginary?," in *Coming of Age in Byzantium*, ed. Despoina Ariantzi (Berlin ; Boston: De Gruyter, 2017)., 211-12.

[751] See for instance the description of the death of Digenis' parents, G 7. 109-204; c.f. Digenis and the girl's death in the following book, G 8.31-208.

[752] On the role of hunting as an expression of Digenis' masculine virtue and capacity to subdue the animals, women and environment around him, see Goldwyn, *Byzantine Ecocriticism*, 41, 57-60.

admission, fifty-two years old, Philopappous is repeatedly characterised as an old man.[753] He is in fact defined almost exclusively by his age, in contrast to his fellow bandits whose identities vary more substantially according to the narrative context.[754] The significance of his old age differs substantially between the Grottaferrata (G) and Escorial (E) versions of the text, illustrating a tension between the work as it was circulating in the literary circles of the twelfth century, and the sensibilities of later scribes.[755]

The depiction of Philopappous must first and foremost be understood in relation to the context in which he appears. This section of the romance, Book VI in G, concerns Digenis' defence of his wife and implicitly the land he has settled on by the banks of the Euphrates. The content of these passages is highly militaristic, with narrative weight given primarily to Digenis' prowess in battle and the schemes of the bandits who intend to take the girl from him. The fantastical conquests of Digenis no doubt reflect a Byzantine imagination of the eastern frontier prior to the losses of the late eleventh century, and would have appealed to an elite audience still coming to terms with their present situation.[756] The attention given to Digenis' heroism in battle, and particularly single combat, also perhaps reflects the renewed Homeric inspiration of many authors in the twelfth century as well as the influence of the Latin *Chanson de Geste*.[757] The frontier of Book VI is thus shown to be a dangerous place in which young men are more highly valued than any other group. At the conclusion of this section of the narrative, the E version of the text offers an explanation for Digenis' ambition and justifies his many (mis)adventures:

> "Since youthfulness always carries pleasure to excess
> and is excited by wealth and reputation,
> Digenis Akritis, the Frontiersman of Double Descent, accomplished everything."[758]

[753] *Digenis*, G 6.355; c.f. G 6.222, 332, 360, 395, 423, 449.
[754] The younger bandits are defined at times by their age but at others by their bravery, experience etc., c.f. *Digenis*, G 6.428; G 6.489-496.
[755] On the differences between the two main extant witnesses to the text and its manuscript transmission, see Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, 'Introduction', xiii-xvii; Jouanno, "Shared Spaces," 261-3.
[756] Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, 'Introduction', xvii; Beaton, "Cappadocians at Court," 332.
[757] On the Homeric elements in *Digenis* as well as the influence of the Latin *Chanson de Geste*, see Jouanno, "Shared Spaces," 272-3; Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, 'Introduction', xvii.
[758] Trans. E. Jeffreys, Digenis E 1606-8:
Ὡς ἔχει ἡ νεότης πάντοτε τὴν ἡδονὴν εἰς κόρον
Καὶ συνεπαίρνεται πολλὰ εἰς πλοῦτον καὶ εἰς δόξαν,
Πάντα ἐσυνετέλεσεν ὁ Διγενὴς Ἀκρίτης.

Youth is thus a central aspect of Digenis' identity: it is presented as the cause of his rashness but also his achievements in the name of fame and fortune. Yet young men are also celebrated in this portion of the narrative for their martial capabilities. In addition to the insurmountable strength of Digenis, the warrior woman and leader of the bandits Maximou insists that age be taken into account when picking out the best of her soldiers for battle:

> "'So go and collect a thousand guerrillas,
> and from the thousand select for me about a hundred youngsters;
> they should have fine weapons and armoured horses,
> and they should be well turned out, able to give good blows with sticks
> and splendid spear-thrusts and bloody cuts with the sword;'"[759]

Clearly in this romanticised facsimile of war young men are thought to be intrinsically more fearsome in battle. Their bravery is often commended especially, even if it does not necessarily lead to victory.[760] As Adam Goldwyn remarks, the events of the *Digenis* romance construct "a male-centric world dominated by violence", in which the protagonist exerts patriarchal control over women and the natural world.[761] Within this world of glorified brutality, youth and masculinity are equally held in high esteem.

By contrast the old man Philopappous is the only named character in this section of the narrative whose courage is shown to be lacking. After making an opportunistic attack on Digenis while the latter is fighting Maximou's lieutenant Milimitzis, Philopappous turns to run away, prompting the hero to taunt him:

> "'Wait for me, Philopappous; aren't you ashamed to be running away?
> Wait, let's fight; perhaps you should try again,
> because I thought that you were feeble and somewhat distressed
> but now I see that I had made a mistake, Philopappous, my old man,
> now I see that you have turned rabid and snapped at me unexpectedly.'"[762]

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[759] Trans. E. Jeffreys, Digenis E 1402-6:
καὶ ὑπάγετε, σωρεύσετε χιλίους ἀπελάτας
καὶ ἀπ' τοὺς χιλίους μοῦ χώρισε κἄν ἑκατὸν ἀγούρους
καὶ ἄς ἔχουν ἅρματα καλά, ππάρια ἀφιρωμένα,
καὶ ἄς εἶναι περιγυριστοί, νὰ κροῦν καλὰς ραβδέας
καὶ κονταρέας ἔμνοστας, σπαθέας αἱματωμένας

[760] E.g. *Digenis* E 1314, 1362, 1521; c.f. G VI.356-8, 490-5.

[761] Goldwyn, *Byzantine Ecocriticism*, 40.

[762] Trans. Jeffreys, *Digenis*, E 1456-60:
«Ἀνάμέ με, Φ'λοπαππού, οὐδ' ἐντρέπεσαι νὰ φεύγης;

The heavy sarcasm of this passage betrays an assumption that an old man like Philopappous should be too feeble and cowardly to attack Digenis head-on; an assumption that is somewhat contradicted by an earlier passage in the same text.[763] The equivalent speech in the G version is even more scathing of the old man's decision to attack from behind, calling into question Philopappous' right to be called a soldier.[764] The role of Philopappous' old age in his construction as a coward is made explicit by Maximou's response when he proposes a further ambush against Digenis:

> "'Get out of here, mad old man, son of perdition;
> extreme old age has withered your cock.
> I reckoned he had armies and brave youngsters;
> so I brought my armies and I came to make war.'"[765]

This speech is the clearest possible indicator of the text's association between age and masculinity. Bravery, as a masculine signifier, is attributed to the young men that make up the bulk of Maximou's force in contrast to the emasculated old man Philopappous. Advanced age is shown to be antithetical to bravery.[766] The result is a carnivalesque scene in which Maximou performs masculinity more effectively than the man she is mocking. From these passages, it would seem that an imagined world that upheld strength and bravery above all else had little space for an old man such as Philopappous.

However, Philopappous is given some limited agency both within this normative masculine role and beyond it. The G and E versions of the text differ significantly in their portrayal of these aspects of Philopappous' character. However, both versions align closely in their depiction of Philopappous' first attack against Digenis. In E, Philopappous is described as powerful (δυνατὸς) and his blow succeeds in shattering Digenis' shield.[767] Similarly, in G Philopappous is presented as a worthy opponent:

Ἀνάμενε καὶ ἄς δώσωμεν, χαρῆς καὶ ἄς δευτερώσης,
ὅτι ἔβλεπά σε ταπεινὸν καὶ ὡσὰν ὑποθλιμμένον·
καὶ ἐδὰ βλέπω ἐπλανέθηκα, Φιλοπαππού μου, γέρον,
καὶ ἐδὰ βλέπω ἐλυσσίασες καὶ ἐκρυφοδάκησές με.»

[763] See below, p.176.
[764] *Digenis* G VI.513-16.
[765] Trans. Jeffreys, *Digenis* E 1519-22.
[766] C.f. *Alexiad* II.8 in which the elderly emperor Botaneiates' youthful bravery is depicted as dwindling in old age. Images of cowardly old men were also commonplace in contemporary literature, c.f. *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* I.450-3.
[767] *Digenis* E 1248-50.

"And immediately Philopappous dismounted from his horse
taking his sword and shield as well,
and rushed at me vigorously, hoping to terrify me,
for truly he attacked extremely bravely."[768]

The motif of courage is taken up again shortly afterwards when Philopappous' young companions refer to him as "bravest of old men" (γέρον ἀνδρικώτατε).[769] While he may not be able to compete with younger men in terms of martial skill and reckless courage, it is suggested that Philopappous may be able to overcome the anticipated limits of his age, thereby continuing to participate in a military setting.

However, Philopappous is also presented as being able to perform roles uniquely tied to his age and experience. This is where the G version of the text diverges somewhat from the equivalent passages in E. Following their initial defeat at the hands of Digenis, Philopappous' two young companions who are described as "younger in age and sense" (νεωτέρας...ἡλικίας καὶ φρένας) offer supernatural explanations for their loss, to which the old man offers a rebuttal:

"…old Philopappous made an old man's comment:
'All that, my children, is mere consolation,
a story of bad luck, comfort for your souls.'"[770]

The greater "sense" that Philopappous displays here, though pessimistic, indicates his quality as an experienced soldier and potentially a wise adviser. This quality in fact earns him a degree of respect from Maximou, who initially agrees with his plan to send a small group ahead to sneak up on Digenis:

"Maximou said to the old man in reply to this,
'you who are old and shrewd, I entrust the command to you;

[768] Trans. Jeffreys, *Digenis*, G VI.215-18:
Καὶ εὐθὺς ὁ Φιλοπαπποῦς κατῆλθεν ἐκ τοῦ ἵππου
σπαθὶν ἀράμενος αὐτοῦ ἅμα καὶ τὴν ἀσπίδα,
τρανῶς εἰσῆλθε πρὸς ἐμὲ προῆσαι με ἐλπίζων·
εἶχε καὶ γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς ὁρμὴν ἀνδρειοτάτην
[769] *Digenis*, G VI.365.
[770] Trans. Jeffreys, *Digenis*, G VI.332-4:
ὁ γέρων ὁ Φιλοπαπποῦς γηραιὸν ἔφη λόγον:
'Ταῦτα πάντα, ὦ τέκνα μου, εἰσὶ παραμυθίαι,
περιγραφαὶ ἀτυχιῶν, ψυχῶν παρηγορίαι·

do what you want then and all of us will obey you.'"[771]

Philopappous' cunning enables him to land a blow on Digenis' horse while he is preoccupied fighting Melimitzis.[772] Although this underhanded action is presented in an extremely negative light in contrast to Digenis' strength and courage, his trickery is depicted as a manifestation of his shrewdness acquired through old age. In a similar vein, this savviness allows him to deceitfully persuade Maximou to march against Digenis.[773] Philopappous' old age is thus presented as a hindrance in the field of masculine-coded bravery resulting in his emasculation, particularly in the E version. However, age and experience also grant him a form of knowledge and cunning that allow for a different social and therefore narrative function, albeit one that is shown to be inferior to the normative masculinity of Digenis.

The G version of the text especially supports the notion of older men holding positions of authority in a martial context, as their sage advice is presented as more valuable than their personal ability to fight. The narrative voice even slips momentarily into a condemnation of the younger soldier Melimitzis for going against Philopappous' authority:

"Having said this, he [Melimitzis] rushed against me with all his might,
putting no weight at all on the old man's advice,
for all barbarians are disbelieving heathen [δύσπιστον ἅπαν]."[774]

In this version of the text it is therefore implied that heeding the advice of elders is a Byzantine cultural norm. The reckless disregard for caution that appears to be celebrated among the bandits is used here to effectively other them, drawing a line between Maximou's band and an implied Byzantine soldier who has faith in his elders. This contrasts dramatically with the portrayal of Philopappous and Melimitzis in the E version. In this text, Melimitzis greets

[771] Trans. Jeffreys, *Digenis*, G VI.469-71:
Πρὸς δὲ ταῦτα ἡ Μαξιμοὺ τῷ γέροντι ἀντέφη:
'Ὦ γέρον τε καὶ νουνεχές, σοὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν πιστεύω·
πράττε λοιπὸν ὡς βούλεσαι, πάντων σοι πειθομένων.'
[772] *Digenis*, G VI.508-10.
[773] *Digenis*, G VI.393-425.
[774] Trans. Jeffreys, *Digenis*, G VI.497-9:
Οὕτως εἰπόντος κατ' ἐμοῦ ὅλῳ θυμῷ ἐκινήθη
τὰς τοῦ γέροντος παρ΄ οὐδὲν θέμενος παραινέσεις·
ἔστι γὰρ καὶ τὸ βάρβαρον δύσπιστον ἔθνος ἅπαν.

Philopappous with a derogatory expression, calling him "my moulting hawk" ('γεράκιν μου μουτάτον'), and simply insults him when he proposes the use of subterfuge against Digenis.[775]

This chapter of the Digenis romance presents an imagined temporal and geographical space in which youthful courage and idealised masculine virtue overcome all challenges. Within this theatre, the old man Philopappous serves to highlight Digenis' youth and bravery much as Maximou acts as a distorting mirror for his masculinity. In both versions of the text the old man is set apart from his companions by his age, and shown to be less inclined to participate in the contests of martial strength that validate their masculine identity. The G version is comparatively sympathetic to Philopappous, implying that his marginalisation stems in part from the 'un-Roman' culture of the frontier bandits. This modification illustrates the sentiments of the scribe who adapted and transmitted the text, and stands in stark contrast to the underlying themes of the romance. The case of Philopappous represents a rather extreme example of an older figure whose social context causes his alienation. Nonetheless, the literary image of an old man floundering out of his depth was one that needed no explanation for a contemporary audience, and provided a vehicle for comedic elements within the text.

The Old Woman Outsider

The Digenis romance features one elderly female character in the form of the emir's mother, whose abandonment by her son provides the impetus for the narrative events following the marriage of Digenis' parents.[776] The character of the mother is fairly one-dimensional and exists primarily as a burden to be endured by her son the emir, demonstrating his dutiful nature.[777] A far more complex example appears in the twelfth-century novel *Drosilla and Charikles* by Niketas Eugenianos. This is the generous old woman and surrogate maternal figure Maryllis, whose role in the novel has been treated by several scholars of Middle Byzantine literary culture.[778]

[775] *Digenis*, E 1361, 1435.
[776] *Digenis*, G II.50-1, c.f. E 225-7.
[777] See above, p.95.
[778] See for instance, Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia*, 89, 288-92; Lynda Garland, "Street-Life in Constantinople: Women and the Carnivalesque," in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006)., 175.

In a work primarily concerned with the romantic adventures of its young protagonists, Maryllis is given a surprising amount of agency within the final books of the novel. First introduced towards the beginning of Book VI, Maryllis appears as a "good-hearted old woman" (τις γραῦς ἀγαθὴ) who takes the stranded Drosilla into her care.[779] She later performs the role of intermediary between Drosilla and her unwanted suitor Kallidemos, and is given several lines to voice her support for him.[780] Perhaps most strikingly, she remains a focal point of the narrative even after the young protagonists are reunited. At the reunion scene itself in Book VII Maryllis is given equal narrative weight to the other rejoicing characters:

> "…they immediately burst into that abode
> within which the kind-hearted old woman
> was conversing sympathetically with Drosilla.
> Then there was speech hovering between joy and tears…
> …kind words from Charikles to the old woman
> for her hospitality to Drosilla,
> many thanks to Kleandros
> from that best of maidens, Drosilla,
> for his having shared Charikles' hardships.
> Such was the hubbub among the four of them,
> truly a mixture of joy and tears."[781]

This passage establishes a parallel between Maryllis as a caregiver for Drosilla, and Kleandros as the companion of Charikles, maintaining a narrative symmetry that constituted a central motif of the twelfth-century novels.[782] It is noteworthy that Drosilla's companion is an older

[779] *Drosilla and Charikles* VI.236-41.
[780] *Drosilla and Charikles* VI.556-64.
[781] *Drosilla and Charikles* VII.36-9, 43-9, trans. Jeffreys:
ἄφνω παρεμβάλλουσιν αὐτῇ τῇ στέγῃ,
ἧς ἔνδον ἡ γραῦς, ἡ φίλοικτος καρδία,
μετὰ Δροσίλλας ἐμπαθῶς προσωμίλει.
Φωνὴ μεταξὺ χαρμονῆς καὶ δακρύων...
...καλοὶ μὲν εἰς γραῦν ἐκ Χαρικλέος λόγοι
ὑπὲρ Δροσίλλας τῶν φιλοξενημάτων,
πολλὴ δὲ προὸς Κλέανδρον εὐχαριστία
ἀπὸ Δροσίλλας τῆς ἀρίστης παρθένου
τῶν πρὸς Χαρικλῆν συγκακοπραγημάτων.
Τοιοῦτος ἦν θροῦς ἐν μέσῳ τῶν τεσσάρων
σύμμικτος ὄντως χαρμονῆς καὶ δακρύων.
[782] On the narrative and sexual symmetry in the twelfth-century novels, see Jouanno, 'Women in Byzantine Novels', 148; Garland, "Be Amorous," 79.

woman of lower social status while Charikles' equivalent is a young man of his own age and class, reflecting the rarity of representations of coequal female friendships in contemporary secular literature.[783] In any case it is clear that Maryllis' age does not impede her narrative importance as a secondary character roughly equal to the unfortunate young lover Kleandros. In fact this section of the narrative often gives preference to her perspective over that of Kleandros.[784]

Unlike Kleandros, Maryllis performs various distinct roles throughout her scenes in the novel. Each of these roles reflects a particular literary archetype, and should not be taken as indicative of contemporary social roles available to older women. Nonetheless they implicitly point towards pervasive assumptions about the social agency of older woman and their participation in society. The most obvious of these roles in the novel is that of the host, and is best exemplified by the celebratory banquet sequence towards the end of Book VII, and again at the meal on the following day in Book VIII.[785] The older host is a long-standing character in Greek literary tradition, and appeared in contemporary twelfth-century novels as well as their classical models.[786] The host's magnanimity in this context functions as an expression of their social status, and hence Maryllis' elevated position as host may be interpreted as part of the carnivalesque inversion present in the later chapters of the novel.[787] As a woman, Maryllis' role as a host is also framed in terms of surrogate motherhood, as the absence created by the death of her son is repeatedly mentioned.[788] In any case, Maryllis is able to perform this role to great success and is commended by the youths, albeit with a layer of comedic irony in reference to her Bacchic dancing:

> "'By your son,' responded the young men,

[783] On female friendship in the Byzantine novels, see Jouanno, "Women in Byzantine novels," 150. Female friendships in Byzantium are an underexplored area of study, see Margaret E Mullett, "Byzantium: A Friendly Society?," *Past & Present* 118, no. 1 (1988)., esp. n. 91. Female friendships between equals can however be glimpsed through hagiographical texts such as the *Life of Eupraxia* (see Stavroula Constantinou, "Same-Gender Friendships and Enmity in the Life of Eupraxia," in *After the Text : Byzantine Enquiries in Honour of Margaret Mullett*, ed. Liz James, Oliver Nicholson, and Roger Scott (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2022)., 218-27).
[784] See for instance, *Drosilla and Charikles* VII.231-4.
[785] *Drosilla and Charikles* VII.265-73, VIII.243-7.
[786] See the banquet scene in Prodromos' *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, in which Glaukon, a man of approximately the same generation as the protagonists' parents, performs a similar role as host (*Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, II.151-69); c.f. the banquet in Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*, hosted by the middle-aged father of Daphnis, Dionysophanes, IV.34-5.
[787] On this carnivalesque inversion**,** see above, p.156**.**
[788] *Drosilla and Charikles*, VII. 309-16, VIII.258-64. Female characters in Byzantine literature were most commonly defined through their relationship with male relatives or other male figures, see for instance Constantinou, "Subgenre and Gender," 417.

‘you have given us great pleasure, decorous Maryllis,
in many ways, including your food and drink.
And your dancing and skilful gyrations,
and the abundant movements of your feet,
and the speed of your subtle contrapuntal motions,
have delighted us more than food, more than drink,
more than the most luxurious banquet,
more than the most overflowing cup.
And you have done nothing strange, mother;
even if we were old men three times over,
we would not have been afraid of sharing your experience,
since the gods always grant what is agreeable.’’’ [789]

Maryllis’ slapstick dance performance at the feast spills over into an entirely different literary *topos*, that of the humorously indecorous old woman. Roilos has identified the roots of this *topos* in depictions of drunken old women in Attic comedy, and draws attention to the parallel between Maryllis as an overzealous entertainer and the rustic dance performed by Nausikrates at the banquet scene in Theodore Prodromos’ *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*.[790] The line between respectable host and object of ridicule is thus extremely fragile in the case of Maryllis, though importantly this comic modulation does not alienate her from the young characters surrounding her. As she herself is made to comment, “They say that even an old man runs when fooling with lads.”[791] Maryllis’ drunken performance represents an affront to normative standards of

[789] Drosilla and Charikles VII.316-28, trans. Jeffreys:
‘Μὰ τὸν σὸν υἱὸν’ ἀντέφησαν οἱ νέοι
‘ἥδυνας ἡμᾶς, ᾧ Βαρυλλὶς [check if you can use other MS] κοσμία,
ἄλλοις τε πολλοῖς καὶ τροφῇ σῇ καὶ πόσει·
ὄρχημα δ΄ οὖν σὸν καὶ τέχνη λυγισμάτων
καὶ σῶν ποδῶν κίνησις ἀφθονωτέρα
καὶ πυκνὸν ἀντίλοξον εὔστροφον τάχος
ὑπὲρ τροφὴν ἥδυνεν, ὑπὲρ τὴν πόσιν,
ὑπὲρ τράπεζαν τὴν πολυτελεστάτην,
ὑπὲρ φιάλην τὴν ὑπερχειλεστάτην.
Καὶ καινὸν οὐδέν, μῆτερ, ὧν κατειργάσω·
ἡμεῖς δὲ κἂν γέροντες ἦμεν τρισσάκις,
συμμετριάζειν οὐκ ἄν εἴχομεν φόβον,
πάντως τὰ λῷστα τῶν θεῶν δωρουμένων’.
[790] *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, II.109-118; Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia*, 289-90.
[791] *Drosilla and Charikles* VII.315:
…παισὶ πλανηθείς φασι καὶ γέρων τρέχει.

acceptable behaviour for older women, yet the youths' conclusion offers a degree of acceptance and a suggestion that these standards may be overly restrictive.

Another stereotypical and usually derogatory role that Maryllis falls into is that of the aged procuress. As part of his attempt to seduce Drosilla, the local youth Kallidemos turns to Maryllis asking her to intercede on his behalf:

> "'O good old woman, wise old woman, modest old woman,
> win over the unyielding maiden,
> and receive a great reward from Kallidemos.'
> Xenokrates' son took pleasure in his remarks,
> and the old woman made a brief intervention
> in Kallidemos' speech to the girl and said,
> 'Unless Drosilla errs in her vision,
> Kallidemos, son of Xenokrates,
> she will see no one else on earth more handsome than you.'"[792]

The *topos* of the elderly procuress is in fact foreshadowed within the same text by one of the banquet epigrams shared by Charikles' companions in the third book of the novel.[793] As in her role as a host, once again Maryllis is placed in a position of social power and influence. In this case however the influence is transitory, deriving from her relationship to Drosilla as her *de facto* guardian rather than her individual rank or capacity.

By contrast, Maryllis takes on an important social role in the final chapter which she earns entirely due to her own age and experience. At the funeral for the young Kleandros, Maryllis is depicted leading the funerary procession:

> "There gathered together every shepherd, every peasant,
> every compassionate man at the stranger's grave,

[792] *Drosilla and Charikles* VI.556-64, trans. Jeffreys:
…ὦ γραῦς ἀγαθή, γραῦς σοφή, γραῦς κοσμία;
Μέτελθε καὶ σὺ τὴν ἀκαμπῆ παρθένον,
καὶ Καλλιδήμου μισθὸν ἐκλάβῃ μέγαν.
Τούτοις ἐνησμένιζεν ὁ Ξενοκράτους·
ἡ γραῦς δὲ μικρὰν ἐγκοπὴν ποιουμένη
τῆς Καλλιδήμου λαλιᾶς πρὸς τὴν κόρην
εἰ καὶ Δροσίλλα μὴ πλανᾶται τῷ βλέπειν
ἔφασκε, Καλλίδημε, καὶ Ξενοκράτους,
οὐκ ἄλλον εἰς γῆν ὄψεταί σου καλλίω.
[793] *Drosilla and Charikles* III.173-95. See above for quotation and discussion of this epigram, p.150.

and every long-suffering woman,
among whom was Maryllis, leading the mourning."[794]

The implication here is that the mourning women, and Maryllis especially, are using the opportunity to mourn for their own lost loved ones; a phenomenon that has been recorded in rural Greek funerary practices of the past century.[795] Here Maryllis' identity as an old woman grants her a unique degree of authority within the context of funerary lamentation.

Maryllis' roles as a host and as the lead mourner illustrate the areas within which older women might be expected to display the most agency: as head of a household, and as a focal point for the community's expression of grief. Beyond this, the relatively sympathetic treatment of Maryllis even when she is made to embody ancient stereotypical caricatures suggests that older women could be envisioned at least theoretically as performing a variety of social roles. Even if her contribution is peripheral to the affairs of the youths, providing entertainment at the banquet and persuasive words as a procuress, her age does not restrict her from engaging with them with remarkable familiarity. On the other hand, the manner of her participation is shaped to a large extent by her status as a foreign old woman, which decisively sets her apart from the other characters. The final part of this section analyses Maryllis' tri-partite identity and the ways in which facets of age, gender and ethnicity ultimately contribute to her marginalisation.

Much like Philopappous in the Digenis romance, Maryllis' old age paves the way for new social roles such as lead mourner and procuress. Like Philopappous however, Maryllis attempts in vain to perform roles associated with younger women. The transformation of her Bacchic dance into a slapstick performance is made possible chiefly by her old age, providing both an explanation for her ineptitude and a justification for her comedic objectification. Yet whereas Philopappous' old age creates a conflict with the romance's version of ideal masculinity, Maryllis' age transforms her identity from one gendered role to another. Although Kallidemos praises Maryllis for her modesty, this quality is emphasised far less frequently than in the case of Drosilla.[796] Unlike Drosilla, whose beauty is consistently highlighted, Maryllis is never

[794] *Drosilla and Charikles* IX.7-10, trans. Jeffreys:
Ἐκεῖ συνῆλθε πᾶς νομεύς, πᾶς ἀγρότης,
πᾶς συμπαθὴς ἄνθρωπος εἰς ξένου τάφον,
καὶ τῶν γυναικῶν πᾶσα τληπαθεστέρα,
μεθ΄ ὧν Βαρυλλὶς καὶ προῆρχε τοῦ γόου.
[795] Danforth, *The Death Rituals*, 73.
[796] See Kallidemos' speech above, p.182; C.f. *Drosilla and Charikles*, VI.195-6, VI.555.

directly sexualised by her depiction in the narrative.[797] Instead she is constructed as a maternal figure in the eyes of the protagonists, around whom the narrative is focalised. Consistent emphasis is placed on her kindness and generosity, and she is referred to repeatedly by Drosilla as 'mother'.[798] As a woman, Maryllis' identity is thus understood in relation to her kinship bonds, to her deceased son Chramos and his temporary replacement, the young protagonists. Her interaction with the main characters of the novel is therefore shaped and directed by her performance of the role of mother.

This form of role play may be interpreted as part of a broader narrative device that contributed substantially to the entertainment value of this and other contemporary novels. Makrembolites' novel *Hysmine and Hysminias* especially features an extended sequence of this kind in the latter part of the narrative. With their true identities concealed, the two protagonists find themselves forced into service to wealthy nobles, and later pretend to be siblings upon reuniting.[799] While the mirroring of gender and social status is more pronounced in Makrembolites' novel, *Drosilla and Charikles* equally presents its high-born protagonists in a fallen state with those around them completely oblivious to their origins. This farcical situation is best illustrated by Maryllis' well-intentioned attempt to comfort Drosilla, through which she reveals her ignorance of the reality:

> "… 'Come, child, tell me;
> where do you come from and who is your father and what your city,
> and who is this Charikles on whom you call and for whom you lament?
> You mourn ignobly and weep senselessly,
> for you have not accepted marriage with Kallidemos
> who exceeds all the inhabitants here
> in beauty and burgeons with gold.
> You do not make a good choice, poverty-stricken stranger,
> if you now consider that Kallidemos, a noble youth,
> is not fit to be united with you.'"[800]

[797] Drosilla's beauty is mentioned on multiple occasions, *Drosilla and Charikles*, I.158, IV.188, 243, 349-359.
[798] *Drosilla and Charikles* VI.248, VII.25.
[799] *Hysmine and Hysminias* 9.14-15.
[800] *Drosilla and Charikles* VII.14-23, trans. Jeffreys:
Δεῦρο, τέκνον, ἐξάγγελλέ μοι·
πόθεν τίνος σὺ καὶ πατὴρ τίς καὶ πόλις,
τίς ὅν Χαρικλῆν ἐκκαλουμένη στένεις;
Πενθεῖς δ΄ ἀγεννῶς καὶ στενάζεις ἀφρόνως,
τὸν Καλλιδήμου γάμον οὐ δεδεγμένη,

The irony of this speech adds to the comedic effectiveness of the scenario, but the inversion of the characters' circumstances also functions as a kind of escapist fantasy for the novel's intended elite audience. For such listeners, a text like this offered an opportunity to imagine 'slumming it' with those at the opposite end of the social hierarchy, witnessing various indecorous antics in the process, and all with the promise of returning to the natural order at the end.[801] The deference shown to Maryllis as a mother may therefore be understood as part of this broader role play, in which a foreign old woman might become the host to young elites in the guise of foreigners themselves.

The ethnic identity of Maryllis and her community is difficult to label with any precision. The novel situates the village in a desert somewhere between the Arabian Peninsula and the protagonists' Thessalian homeland.[802] Maryllis' dedication to Dionysos and the 'Hellenic' style of the funerary rites might imply that the village's inhabitants share a culture very similar to that of the young heroes.[803] Seeking to associate the desert village with a historical geographical space may be misguided however. Like the other twelfth-century novels, the world of *Drosilla and Charikles* represents an abstract literary space that has more in common with the idealised worlds of the Second Sophistic novels than with any contemporary or historical reality.[804] What can be said is that Maryllis and the other inhabitants of the village are identified as foreigners ('ξένοι') in a distinctly rural landscape, the antithesis of the Constantinopolitan elite audience for whom the novel was composed.[805] Elements of Constantinopolitan snobbery can be seen in the novel's portrayal of the village community, as in Drosilla's response to Kallidemos' advances:

> "'When my fellow countrymen are handsome young men from the city
> how, Kallidemos, son of Xenokrates,

ὅς ὑπὲρ ἄλλους τοὺς κατοίκους ἐνθάδε
ὡραῖός ἐστι καὶ τέθηλε χρυσίῳ.
Οὐκ εὖ γε ποιεῖς, ὦ πένησσα καὶ ξένη,
εἰ Καλλίδημον εὐγενῆ νεανίαν
οὐκ ἄξιόν σοι συμμιγῆναι νῦν κρίνεις.

[801] A comparison may be made in this regard to the Ptochoprodromic poems, whose temporary reversal of their protagonists' fortunes has been discussed in Janssen, "Authorship revisited," 561-2.

[802] *Drosilla and Charikles*, VI.175-90.

[803] *Drosilla and Charikles*, VII.268, IX.7-10.

[804] On the abstract construction of space and time in the twelfth-century novels, see Roderick Beaton, "Transplanting Culture: From Greek Novel to Medieval Romance," in *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond*, ed. Teresa Shawcross and Ida Toth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)., 503-5.

[805] As argued by Roilos, Maryllis' lack of restraint and indecorous behaviour can be understood as a reflection of both her age and her status as a rural outsider (Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia*, 295).

can foreign villagers be superior?'"[806]

The term ξένος ('foreigner') is used to denigrate the villagers, but it also serves to highlight the topsy turvy social status of the youths as strangers in a foreign land. When Maryllis asks Charikles to share his story, he replies that he is obliged to do as she wishes since they are her ξένοι ('guests'), and are therefore entirely dependent on her hospitality:

"'but since it is your wish, old mother, that we should tell
of our huge periods of suffering
in exchange for your hospitality,
listen; for how can we spurn
the cause of so much happiness
for me, Drosilla, and Kleandros, your guests?'"[807]

When used in this context, the term ξένος implies the foreignness of the youths but also their privileged status as guests within the Greek tradition of hospitality.[808] The superficial power that Maryllis holds in this scene is therefore undercut by the attention drawn to the difference in her status as a ξένος. The implicit prejudice against foreigners expressed by the surrounding text should not be downplayed, even if her status is elevated to that of a host in this scene. As Roilos has pointed out, the indecorous Bacchic element in Maryllis' characterisation invites comparison with Prodromos' depiction of a lustful old woman as well as witch-like figures such as the exotic old woman in the *Aithiopika*.[809]

The depiction of Maryllis in *Drosilla and Charikles* suggests that there was space in the contemporary Byzantine imagination for an old woman to hold a very particular kind of social influence that emerged from the intersection of her age and gender. Her performance of several conventional roles found in Greek literary tradition imbue her with a sense of the familiar

[806] *Drosilla and Charikles* VI.297-9, trans. Jeffreys:
Συμπατριωτῶν ἀστικῶν καλῶν νέων
πῶς ἄρα, Καλλίδημε, παῖ Ξενοκράτους,
χωριτικοὶ γένοιντο κρείττονες ξένοι;
[807] *Drosilla and Charikles* VII.127-32:
ἐπεὶ δὲ σὸν θέλημα, γραῦ μῆτερ, λέγειν
ἡμῶν τοσαύτας τληπαθεῖς περιόδους
εἰς ἀνταμοιβὴν τῶν φιλοφρονημάτων,
ἄκουε· πῶς γὰρ καὶ παραγκωνιστέον
τὴν τῆς τοσαύτης αἰτίαν θυμηδίας
ἐμοί, Δροσίλλᾳ καὶ Κλεάνδρῳ τοῖς ξένοις;
[808] C.f. LSJ, ξενία.
[809] Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia*, 290-2.

despite her alien surroundings. Lurking on the fringes of this positive portrayal however is the caricature of the foreign old woman, the epitome of the outsider from an elite Constantinopolitan audience's perspective. As such, Maryllis' character is easily transformed into an object of ridicule when the narrative demands it, stripping her of any implied social agency and individuality.

Age and Marginalisation: Broader Trends

The case studies outlined so far offer two very different perspectives on the role of age in the construction of social identity. They provide a tantalising glimpse into the role of age in the formation and articulation of normative gender roles. Nuances in the portrayal of older men and women hint at the perceived advantages of ageing, facilitating the continuation of a modified form of social participation. Despite this, it is evident that ageing was broadly perceived by contemporaries as a marginalising force, separating individuals from their younger peers through social and physiological changes. The final section of this chapter presents a broader examination of the contexts, both public and private, in which older figures were presented as unable to adequately perform their roles, or else were criticised for attempting to do so.

In much of the source material discussed in this thesis, as also in some modern gerontological scholarship, old age tends to be pathologized and cast as an abnormality.[810] Early to middle-aged adulthood for both men and women is presented as the definitive stage in an individual's life course. The periods before and after this stretch of adulthood are viewed as liminal stages consisting of development and decline respectively. However, in twelfth-century Byzantium there was no consistent rite of passage to mark an individual's departure from normative adult life, unlike the heavily gendered rites that demarcated the critical moments of childhood and adolescence.[811] In contrast to modern pension schemes, there was also no universal form of provision for older people that demarcated a social space separated from the world of normative

[810] On this tendency in modern gerontology and medical science, see Calasanti, "Intersectionality," 195-6; Street, "Sociological Approaches," 144.
[811] On the rites of passage from childhood, through adolescence to adulthood, see Ariantzi, *Coming of Age*, esp. Ariantzi, 'Introduction', 3-6; Galatariotou, "The Byzantine Adolescent," 204-10.

adulthood. The final phase of the life course in twelfth-century Byzantium heralded withdrawal to a monastery for a limited few, and reliance on filial support for a great many more.[812]

Yet retreat from the public sphere and from the normative duties of adulthood was by no means a universal pattern. Many contemporary texts implicitly reveal the awkward tension that arose from older individuals outstaying their welcome in public life. Thus, Choniates' John Doukas is repeatedly made to justify his usefulness in the political sphere given his advanced age.[813] Anna Komnene's depiction of the old emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates places considerable emphasis on his advanced age and diminished spirit, making him apparently unfit to rule.[814] In a similar vein, the comedy in many of the humorous treatments of ageing in the twelfth century lay in the refusal of old men and women to 'act their age', particularly with regard to their erotic pursuits.[815] Despite the differences between these two paradigms, both reflect a general assumption that older people should adhere to a different pattern of behaviour than the rest of the adult population. Older individuals acting outside the limitations of these patterns were presented as monstrous or subversive, in much the same way as men and women who were seen to go against normative gender roles.

The new identities that old people were expected to inhabit often involved limiting self-assertion or socio-political agency. This is far more noticeable in the case of male figures in a political or military context, as demonstrated in contemporary historiography and in the case of Philopappous in *Digenis*.[816] Especially in a military context, ageing was often presented as an emasculating process that made old men less courageous than their younger peers, even if their cautious advice would prove to be vindicated.[817] The impact of ageing on the agency of female figures is less clear-cut. Within the patriarchal worldview upheld by the available sources, older women are shown to exert forms of social influence that are inaccessible to younger women owing to their sexual objectification. Both women in the imperial family, and poor widows like Maryllis in *Drosilla and Charikles*, were depicted performing social and

[812] Monastic retirement might involve an *adelphaton* if the price could be afforded, or alternatively staying in a *gerokomeion*, an institution for the elderly (Talbot, "Old Age," 278), e.g. Thomas, *Foundation Documents*, Pantokrator, 738. The prevalence of the filial support model is illustrated by the *topos* of parents dependent on their children, see above, pp.93-5.
[813] Choniates, *Historia*, Isaakios Angelos I.385; C.f. Andronikos II.345.
[814] *Alexiad* II.8-12.
[815] See above, pp.146-69.
[816] This pattern is reflected in the case of emperors who retired to a monastic life, e.g. Choniates, *Historia*, Manuel Komnenos VII.221-2; *Alexiad* II.12.
[817] See for instance *Alexiad* IV.5, in which Alexios' older and more experienced military advisers suggest caution while the younger nobles push him towards battle; C.f. *Alexiad* VI.7 as an example of the youthful ideal of masculinity celebrated throughout the work.

political acts that may not have been available to them as younger married women.[818] This is not to ignore the ways in which older women were doubly marginalised and caricatured, but simply to acknowledge that in some cases age was not as alienating a factor for female figures as for male figures.

As well as perpetuating the notion that older people should withdraw from the social and political activities of normative adulthood, representations of elderly people often stripped their subjects of agency entirely. Old people frequently appear in twelfth-century historiography and fictional literature as a discrete and uniform group, often alongside women and children, for the sake of provoking the audience's pity or horror at their mistreatment.[819] This form of rhetorical strategy effectively objectifies the older people in question, depriving them of their individuality and defining them entirely by a single shared characteristic. Similarly, depictions of older individuals often relied heavily on stereotypes or literary conventions for narrative purposes, reducing their identity to a caricature of their age group. This is exemplified by the emir's mother in *Digenis*, whose role in the narrative is defined entirely by her pitiful old age, thus illustrating the burden of care placed on her son. The use of old age to provoke a sympathetic or pitying response from the intended audience highlights the level of care expected to be shown towards elders in contemporary society, but it also reveals the ease with which old people could be homogenised to fit a narrative.

The material discussed in this thesis does however point to certain social spheres in which old age was a highly normalised and even idealised component of social identity. Chief among these were the monastic and intellectual spheres. Wisdom, experience and detachment from worldly desires were all closely associated with the social and physiological process of ageing and were celebrated as virtues among monastics and the literati.[820] The uniquely vitriolic criticisms of Theodore Prodromos aimed against old charlatan intellectuals serve to highlight the pervasiveness of the assumption that old age demonstrated virtue in this context. In each case, the physicality of ageing was presented as the cause of obstacles to overcome, yet it also acted as an outward manifestation of wisdom and restraint. The implied ideal was the attainment of the wisdom and temperance of old age while remaining unhindered by the

[818] The justification of Anna Dalassene's role in politics under the reign of Alexios I in the *Alexiad* rests in large part on her wisdom and intelligence gained from advanced age (*Alexiad* III.7). For comparison, Psellos' depiction of Empress Zoe offers a rare picture of an older woman voluntarily distancing herself from the trappings of a youthful feminine ideal (Psellos, *Chronographia* VI.64).
[819] See above, pp.104-14.
[820] See above, pp.36-42, 80-7.

physical consequences. As problematic as this may have been in practice, the lionisation of virtues associated with normative patterns of ageing resulted in a number of social spheres in which older women and men represented the ideal rather than an unwelcome fringe. Yet these groups, despite their over-representation in the available source material, in themselves existed on the margins of society. The vast majority of the population did not have access to higher education, while monasticism as an ideal was defined in many respects through its rejection of the structures and conventions of secular life.[821]

The overarching picture that emerges is one in which a limited number of normative social roles existed for older people, though all of them were in some way removed from 'default' adulthood. The figure of Philopappous in *Digenis Akritis* illustrates the tension between the perceived physiological and psychological effects of ageing, and the expectations tied to the performance of adult masculinity. The comparatively nuanced portrayal of Maryllis meanwhile helps to define some of the areas in which older women might be expected to exercise social agency owing to the intersection of age and gender. At the same time this intersection facilitates the reduction of her character to a caricature whose triply marginalised identity makes her an easy object of ridicule from the perspective of the novel's elite Constantinopolitan audience. The overrepresentation of monastic and intellectual voices in the extant literary source material led much of the initial scholarship on old age in Byzantium to focus on the respect for elders inherited from the Judaeo-Christian tradition.[822] Taking into consideration a wider body of secular literary material, it is evident that outside of these two specific contexts the process of growing old was associated with the loss of individual identity enjoyed during adulthood, as well as withdrawal from many social roles and activities.

[821] On the limited extent of education in twelfth-century Byzantium, see Harris, "Institutional Settings."
[822] Talbot, "Old Age," 270-1; Gilleard, "Old Age," 632-6.

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis has been to explore what it meant to grow old in the culture of twelfth-century Byzantium. Each chapter discusses a discrete set of motifs and images that might appear frequently in one type of source material but not another. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify several common themes among the different contexts in which ageing was represented. Viewed as a whole, the findings of this thesis go some way towards providing the interpretative tools needed to understand twelfth-century Byzantine representations of ageing in their wider cultural context. At the heart of the evidence discussed in this thesis there is a paradox. On the one hand, the concept of old age was idolised together with its associations of wisdom, experience and concern for the spirit. On the other, the ageing process itself was consistently viewed with dread, suspicion or dissociation. This perception often translated to the depiction of elderly figures themselves, whose 'otherness' is apparent whether in the expression of ridicule or admiration. The coexistence of these contradictory perspectives is best understood in terms of the rhetorical or poetic contexts in which they appeared.

Ageing was invested with immense symbolic weight within Byzantine culture. In keeping with the seven-age model of world history and popular eschatological thought, the Byzantines saw the material world as approaching the end of its life course. The era in which they lived was thus the old age of the world, the final stretch of mortal existence before its destruction and the prospect of Paradise beyond. Within the Christian cosmological framework of twelfth-century Byzantium, old age signified death or human mortality, typified by visual and textual depictions of Adam within the narrative of the *Anastasis*. The dynamic expressed by the image of Christ raising the elderly Adam from the grave was echoed in contemporary discourse surrounding imperial benefaction and the act of restoration more broadly. The symbolic association of old age with death also informed the construction of holiness and the literary expression of lamentation in this period. In the case of the former, the aged body functioned as a manifestation of bodily mortification and an ascetic lifestyle, demonstrating a detachment from worldly affairs and a commitment to the edification of the soul. Age and ascetic practices could effectively neutralise the gendered identity of female saints in hagiographical tradition. Yet in the case of surviving male saints' *Lives* from the twelfth century, old age formed a central element of the presentation of the saint as a γέρων, the epitome of masculine self-control. Just as old age came to signify ascetic bodily suffering, so too was it closely linked

with the expression of mourning and lamentation. The *topos* of elderly lamentation was employed in the fictional literature of the period as well as occasional and encomiastic rhetoric. The image of an elderly parent grieving for their lost child must be understood in the context of contemporary liturgical practices, particularly with regard to the way in which suffering and loss were articulated.

Given the symbolic importance of ageing within Byzantine cosmology and religious culture, much of the source material analysed throughout this thesis points to a normative veneration and respect for the elderly. The consistency of this norm is matched only by the frequency with which it was called into question. The experience gained over a long life converged with contemporary ideas about the philosophical and spiritual concerns of older people, supporting the assumption that old age was inseparable from wisdom. Whether or not it was accepted, this assumption can be seen reflected in a wide range of source material, from the *Alexiad* and Tzetzes' *Allegories of the Iliad* to monastic *typika* and the satirical texts of Theodore Prodromos. However, both paraenetic and ridiculing texts of the twelfth century distinguished between the idealised attributes associated with ageing, and the attainment of old age itself. The contrast between an idealised image of ageing and its subversion permeated the literary discourse of the twelfth century. Authors like Theodore Prodromos used this motif as a means of criticising intellectual rivals in an entertaining way, while Niketas Choniates' invective against Andronikos I rested on much the same critique of superficial aged venerability. Yet the *topos* of elderly figures behaving in a manner contrary to the normative expectations of their age was presented in other instances with far more ambivalence. The assertion of the *Ptochoprodromic* narrator that "old men too can play, albeit more wisely so" encapsulates the playful juxtaposition of aged and youthful behaviour by contemporary authors.[823] This trend can be seen reflected in Tzetzes' representation of Homer in his *Allegories of the Iliad,* as well as Maryllis' performance as a Bacchic dancer in *Drosilla and Charikles*. The prevalence of this motif in contemporary discourse perhaps points towards an interrogation of the social performativity of age within the wider culture.

The respect normatively granted to older individuals was not based solely on admiration of the supposed virtues of old age. The *topos* of the wretched elderly figure was regularly used to inspire pity in the text or image's recipient. This may be seen in the 'begging' poetry of Manganeios, the embedded laments of the Komnenian novels and the historiographical texts

[823] *Poèmes prodromiques en grec vulgaire* I.11, ed. Hesseling and Pernot, trans. Kulhankova, "For Old Men Too Can Play", 304.

of Niketas Choniates and Anna Komnene. In these instances the elderly figures in question are presented as helpless victims; a childlike 'other' to be protected or saved. This represents one facet of a greater trend in contemporary depictions of the elderly. Even in cases where advanced age was presented as an ideal, older figures themselves were frequently characterised by their alterity. For instance the figure of the γέρων in hagiographical literature was presented as distinct from both the secular world and younger or less experienced monastics. The effectiveness of rhetoric inciting its audience to ridicule or pity older figures depended on their age eclipsing other aspects of their identity as individuals. To designate someone as a γραῦς or a γέρων was to emphasise their difference from the adult male default. As a result, individuals characterised as old were often homogenised with others of the same specified age group. Crucially however, this process of reductive characterisation was always linked to a specific rhetorical context and was rarely consistent even within a single text.

This final point has important implications for the study of age in Byzantium. When analysing the various kinds of age rhetoric employed by twelfth-century authors, it becomes clear that the representation of figures as elderly was not based on a perceived intrinsic aspect of their identity but rather on their relationship to those around them and the requirements of the wider narrative. Thus, Manganeios' old age is brought to the foreground where the poem's narrative demands it, and is defined through comparison to the youthful vitality of the emperor. Similarly, the lamentations of the parents discussed in chapter three call attention to the mourners' advanced age specifically in contrast to the youth of their children. As mentioned in the chapter above, the parents' age is not brought into the narrative of the novels until it becomes an integral component in the poetics of their laments. As the novels shift from one literary mode to another so too does their manipulation of age *topoi*. The old woman Maryllis in *Drosilla and Charikles* is the clearest example of this, transforming almost instantaneously from ridiculous Bacchic dancer to lamenting parent. A similar pattern can be seen in historiographical literature, with Anna Komnene's portrayal of her grandmother's aged wisdom and administrative competence standing in stark contrast to her depiction of the childlike old men drafted into the army of Robert Guiscard. Manganeios' authorial *persona* represents an interesting exception to this model. The author's use of age imagery to convey his wretched old age is remarkably consistent across several poems. Instead, these images drew simultaneously from various elements of contemporary discourse regarding ageing, resulting in texts that may have carried a multi-layered meaning ranging from allegory to self-satire.

Old age may have carried a symbolic and emotional weight in the abstract, but individuals were presented as 'old' only in relation to a point of reference or contrast. Much like national 'imagined communities' founded on an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy, advanced age was defined through antithesis with youth.[824] As the state of lost youth, what old age 'meant' at any one time depended on the imagery employed and the context in which it appeared. Through a 'thick description' of the imagery of old age and its socio-cultural contexts, this thesis contributes to a movement away from a rose-tinted assessment of the place of old age in Byzantium. Although evidence of ridicule and invective against elderly figures must be interpreted in terms of its specific rhetorical function, it should not be dismissed as simply the imitation of ancient literary *topoi*. Manganeios and Theodore Prodromos' poems against old men and women reflected contemporary sensibilities and the nuances of their social environment as much as they did the literary traditions they were drawing from. Their manipulation of age *topoi* was first and foremost a means to a rhetorical end, yet the images they presented both reflected and informed the wider culture. Depictions of elders, both reverential and derogatory, articulated underlying and often contradictory currents in twelfth-century Byzantine thought.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis of this material demonstrate the value of a cultural historical approach to the study of age and ageing in past societies. Yet the findings of this thesis prompt just as many further questions as they provide answers to those raised in the introduction. For one thing, this study provides a synchronic snapshot of Byzantine culture during one specific period. A diachronic approach with a broader chronological scope would provide additional insight into the ways in which the cultural meanings attributed to ageing developed over time in response to larger cultural shifts. A study looking forward into the late and post-Byzantine periods would also benefit from additional kinds of source material including vernacular literature.[825] By the same token, a project based on non-Greek source material would make it possible to identify the cultural images of ageing that gained sway beyond the confines of the Greek-speaking Byzantine world. A comparative or global historical approach would similarly shed much light on the distinct nuances of Byzantine culture and the role of age within it.

[824] Benedict Anderson, "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism," in *The New Social Theory Reader* (Routledge, 2020).
[825] On vernacular literature, see Ulrich Moennig, "Intertextuality in the Late Byzantine Romance Tale of Troy," *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond* (2018)., 352-4; Carolina Cupane, "In the Realm of Eros: The Late Byzantine Vernacular Romance–Original Texts," in *Fictional Storytelling in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean and Beyond*, ed. Carolina Cupane and Bettina Krönung (Leiden: Brill, 2016)., 98-101.

The intersection of age and gender in the formation of identity is a subject that has already received some scholarly attention within the field of Byzantine studies.[826] The findings of this thesis contribute towards an understanding of the relationship between the two. In keeping with the argument of this concluding chapter, the nature of the interaction between age and gender depended substantially on the broader narrative surrounding it. For instance, ageing was presented as an emasculating process within the youthful and violent world of *Digenis Akritis*, while hagiographical accounts portrayed the elderly γέρων as the epitome of masculine self-restraint. In a similar vein, amorous old women were portrayed as monstrous in a literary tradition that can be traced back through the Greek Anthology. Yet the ageing process also allowed figures like Saint Mary of Egypt and Anna Dalassene to rise above the limits of their gender, according to their representation by authors seeking to celebrate their virtues. In each case the positive traits associated with either youth or old age were couched in terms of masculinity. These trends have been touched upon but not adequately explored by this thesis due to the constraints of time and scope. Studies on idealised and non-normative gender roles in Byzantium would gain much from further examination of their interaction with age.

[826] See above, pp.7-11.

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