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RESORTING TO RARE SOURCES OF ANTIQUITY:  
NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES AND THE POPULARITY  
OF PLUTARCH'S *PARALLEL LIVES*  
IN TWELFTH-CENTURY BYZANTIUM\*

SOPHIA XENOPHONTOS

The rare story of the Lydian king Pythes and his wife is first attested in Plutarch's *Mulierum virtutes* 262D–263A (ca. 115 AD) and exploited again a few decades later in Polyaeus' *Strategemata* 8.42 (ca. 163 AD) in a version that seems to follow closely the Plutarchan account.<sup>1</sup> After a huge gap of about ten centuries, the same story is revived in the Komnenian era by the Byzantine theologian and teacher, Nikephoros Basilakes (born ca. 1115 – died after 1182).<sup>2</sup> In this article, I wish to examine the Byzantine reception of Pythes' encounter with his wife by discussing the transformation of the story within the context of *Progymnasma* 11. This will additionally help us to reflect on Plutarch's popularity in twelfth-century Byzantium and especially on the status of transmission and circulation of his *Parallel Lives* and *Moralia* during that age.

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- <sup>1</sup> The earliest reference to Pythes is Herodotus 7.27-29 and 7.38-39, where the name is given as Pythius; see S. LEWIS, Who is Pythius the Lydian? *Histos* 2 (1998) 185-191. Pythes is mentioned also by Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 33.10 and Seneca, *De ira* 3.16, but not in relation to his wife. According to STADTER, the episode of Pythes' wife in Plutarch is unique and independent from Herodotus, P. STADTER, *Plutarch's historical methods. An analysis of the Mulierum virtutes*. Cambridge, Mass. 1965, 120-124. The issue of whether Polyaeus actually drew on Plutarch's narrative or whether he consulted a common source remains a contested one, but the chances are in favour of the former possibility. See STADTER, *Plutarch's historical methods* (cited just above), 18-29, who rightly brings out the close verbal resemblances of the two accounts and stresses that everything said in Polyaeus is already in Plutarch, while there are elements of the Plutarchan account omitted by Polyaeus.
- <sup>2</sup> Concisely on Basilakes, see the relevant lemma in the Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, *ODB* I, 263 s.v. "Basilakes, Nikephoros" (A. KAZHDAN); cf. A. GARZYA, *Precisazioni sul processo di Niceforo Basilace*. *Byz* 40 (1970) 309-316, A. GARZYA, *Fin quando visse Niceforo Basilace?* *BZ* 64 (1971) 301-302.

Before turning to the variations that Basilakes introduces to Pythes' anecdote, we need to identify his source material, which is in all likelihood Plutarch's rather than Polyaeus' text.<sup>3</sup> Two pieces of evidence lead us towards that conclusion: first, the reference in the narrative's heading, which explicitly acknowledges Plutarch as a source for the story; and second, Plutarch's enduring prominence from the early Byzantine centuries until the end of the Palaiologan period, in opposition to the relatively lower profile of Polyaeus in the Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup> Although his *Strategemata* played an important role in Byzantine military ethnography, as a number of Byzantine abridgments of the work attest,<sup>5</sup> the influence of this treatise after the tenth century should not be overestimated.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, that the *Strategemata* survive in a single manuscript (Laurentianus 56.1, ca. 1295) can hardly be explained as a result of mere chance, however optimistic scholars wish to be on that issue.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, if one considers that Plutarch's version of the story goes on to deal with Xerxes' wrath against Pythes, a topic absent from both Polyaeus and Basilakes, one would be inclined to establish Polyaeus as Basilakes' model instead. I do not believe that this need follow, because each of the elements involved in Pythes' anecdote was appealing at different periods in the history tradition of the narrative.<sup>8</sup> As opposed to Xerxes' wrath, which figured large in the classical age but fell into oblivion after Seneca (1st century AD), Pythes' wealth that had aroused his wife's concern attracted, in particular, the Byzantine authors of Basilakes' time, for instance Eustathios of Thessalonike and John Tzetzes. This justifies well why Basilakes worked on the currently fashionable topic of Pythes' wife and

<sup>3</sup> On how Basilakes redeploys antique myths, see A. GARZYA, Une rédaction byzantine du mythe de Pasiphaé. *Le parole e le idee* 9 (1967) 222-226. On the Byzantine notion of imitation of the classical past, see H. HUNGER, On the Imitation (ΜΙΜΗΣΙΣ) of Antiquity in Byzantine Literature. *DOP* 23/24 (1969/1970) 15-38.

<sup>4</sup> A. GARZYA, Plutarco a Bisanzio, in: I. Gallo (ed.), L'eredità culturale di Plutarco dall'antichità al Rinascimento: Atti del VII Convegno plutarco, Milano-Gargnano, 28-30 maggio 1997. Naples 1998, 15-27; N. HUMBLE, Plutarch in Byzantium, in: F. TITCHENER – A.V. ZADOROJNYI (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plutarch*. Cambridge (forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> A. DAIN, Les cinq adaptations byzantines des «Stratagèmes» de Polyen. *Revue des Études Anciennes* 33 (1931) 321-345.

<sup>6</sup> E.L. WHEELER, Polyaeus: Scriptor Militaris, in: K. BRODERSEN (ed.), *Polyainos. Neue Studien. Polyaeus. New Studies*. Berlin 2010, 7-54, at 52-54, who does not talk of Polyaeus' afterlife beyond Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos' *De administrando imperio*, ca. 950. Cf. E. BIANCO, *Gli stratagemmi di Polieno*. Torino 1997, 12 who does not treat the influence of Polyaeus after Leo VI's *Taktika* of 903/4.

<sup>7</sup> P. KRENTZ – E.L. WHEELER, *Polyaeus: Stratagems of war*. Chicago-Illinois 1994, 20-21.

<sup>8</sup> STADTER, *Plutarch's historical methods* (cited n. 1), 121.

was uninterested in reproducing the long-abandoned Xerxes' relation to Pythes.

In addition to the above, I was able to trace a number of textual divergences between Polyaeus and Basilakes at junctures in which Plutarch's and Basilakes' accounts appear to be in absolute agreement:

a) Polyaeus' treatment starts with Pythes' passion for gold, and omits the authorial praise for the female virtue, which introduces the narrative in both Plutarch and Basilakes, as we shall see.

b) By withholding the name of the queen, Basilakes keeps very close to Plutarch, where the queen is also anonymous. Had Basilakes' consulted Polyaeus' text, he would have mentioned the name of Pythes' wife, Pythopolis, which is overtly stated both in the title of the passage as well as once within it. This would have otherwise helped him to adhere to his tendency in the rest of his narratives of naming his heroes.

c) The element of *eros*/love as a metaphor for Pythes' passion is absent from Polyaeus, yet actively exposed in the other two accounts. We shall soon see how Basilakes reshapes in a very novel fashion Plutarch's own treatment of *eros*.

Before embarking upon the thematic analysis of Pythes' story in its ancient and Byzantine version comparatively, for reasons of convenience I provide the reader with an English translation of the *diegema*.

*Progymnasma* 11. 'Narrative (*diegema*), also mentioned by Plutarch  
in the *Parallel Lives*'

The inventiveness of women did not, of course, escape the notice of the men of old, but they quite properly admired those of the female race who possessed some sort of wisdom, though without generating envy of this phenomenon amongst the male race. Once upon a time there was a king whose name may have been different but who shared Midas' soul and whose temperament was guided by love for gold. Although he was the ruler of many cities, he did not know how to rule his own love of money. While he controlled the rest of his affairs by his immense luck, however he was enslaved to this one passion, his love of gold; he was moderate in all other respects but condemned to suffer insatiably from this one only. During his sleep he would dream nothing but gold, when he was awake he would see gold before him again, and even when he was awake during the night he would once more imagine gold. What pursuit did he not try in order to acquire money? What kind of means did he not contrive in order to accumulate wealth? His subjects were burdened with unbearable taxes and some of these they paid as best they could and others they supplemented from mining the earth. In the former case, the citizens squandered their fortune, in the latter case they

wore out their bodies, and they never ceased inventing all sorts of money making; nonetheless, their ruler's every effort was dedicated to satisfying his passion. For, in addition to his love for gold he also had a love for hunting. He once set out to the woods, dragging his hunting dogs with him. There the king ran after the deer and the hares on his horse and shouted to his dogs, while the queen had another preoccupation, namely how to diminish her husband's overwhelming impulse for money making. There occurred to her, as by a flash of divine inspiration, a rather clever idea: if the king were to understand that his beloved gold cannot support life, then he would abstain completely from his passion. The rest of the idea would then be as follows: given that after a surfeit of hunting the king would also want to satiate his belly, he would find a wholly golden dinner, and the moment he felt the slightest sense of hunger, he would understand the uselessness of gold. The queen considered all this and no sooner thought than done. The goldsmiths had vast quantities of gold at their disposal, which was divided up and distributed, and many hands crafted that novel and golden meal. Nearby there was also a table of beaten gold, mixing vessels, and wine-cups, all produced of gold. It was possible to see a completely golden dinner set out on gold. The table was gold and the bread-baskets decorated with gold. Placed next to all these gold things was also the golden food. Partridges out of gold, imitating the real partridges of the forest, hares, ostriches, and everything else were shining because of gold. The same happened with the food cooked on fire, to which the brightness of gold added a golden colour that seemed more fiery than burning coal. When it was time for the king to come for dinner, he was dripping with sweat from the hunt, the servants were present taking care of the golden table and of everything that this was supposed to contain. The king however despised all these and demanded other sorts of food instead. "What is all this, my queen and wife?". The queen replied: "Eat gold, my king, because gold is what you love, gold is entirely what you are seeking for. So satiate yourself with gold, in order to treasure up gold in your belly and so that your whole body becomes overlaid with gold. If gold, however, is totally useless to your body, and makes one die from starvation more quickly, then what is the point of pursuing it so energetically?". The king listened to all this and respecting his wife's mixture of wisdom and justice he relieved the cities of the greater part of the taxes and himself from his excessive lusting after gold.

Basilakes' *diegema* on Pythes is about the king's obsession with gold (element 2 in the table below) and it is shaped around a Midas-type fable, launched with the author's admiration for the female prudence (σοφία) that heals the male passion (element 1). The incident can be divided into discernible thematic units, treating

the motivation that alerts Pythes' wife (element 3), the description of her plan (element 4), the king's reaction together with a lively edifying speech delivered by his wife (element 5), and the story's resolution, signifying how Pythes has amended his old ways (element 6).

	Plutarch ΠΥΘΕΩ ΓΥΝΗ, <i>Mulierum virtutes</i> 262D–263A	Nikephoros Basilakes ‘Διήγημα, ὃ καὶ Πλούταρχος ἐν Παραλλήλοις διηγείται’ <i>Progymnasma</i> 11
1. Introductory theme: female prudence	Λέγεται δὲ καὶ τὴν Πύθεω τοῦ κατὰ Ξέρξην γυναῖκα σοφὴν γενέσθαι καὶ χρηστήν.	Ἄλλ’ οὐδὲ γυναικὸς ἐπίνοια τοὺς πάλαι διέλαθεν, ἀλλ’ οἷς εἶχέ τι σοφὸν καὶ τὸ θῆλυ τοῦ γένους, εἰκότως θαυμάζουσι, τοῦ δὲ λοιποῦ γένους φθόνον οὐ ποιοῦνται τοῦ θαύματος.
2. Pythes' obsession with gold	αὐτὸς μὲν γὰρ ὁ Πύθης ὡς ἔοικε χρυσείοις ἐντυχὼν μετάλλοις καὶ ἀγαπήσας τὸν ἐξ αὐτῶν πλοῦτον οὐ μετρίως ἀλλ’ ἀπλήστως καὶ περιττῶς, αὐτὸς τε περὶ ταῦτα διέτριβε καὶ τοὺς πολίτας καταβιβάζων ἅπαντας ὁμαλῶς ὀρύττειν ἢ φορεῖν ἢ καθαίρειν ἠνάγκαζε τὸ χρυσίον, ἄλλο μηδὲν ἐργαζομένους τὸ παράπαν μηδὲ πράττοντας.	ἦν γὰρ τίς ποτε βασιλεὺς τὴν κλησιν μὲν ἕτερος, τὴν ψυχὴν δὲ Μίδασ, καὶ τὴν γνώμην φιλόχρυσος. πολλῶν μὲν ἦρχε πόλεων, ἀλλ’ οὐχὶ καὶ φιλοχρηματίας ἄρχειν ἠπίστατο. ἀλλὰ τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ἐκράτει τῷ μεγέθει τῆς τύχης, μόνω δὲ τῷ πρὸς χρυσὸν ἐδούλευεν ἔρωτι καί, τᾶλλα σωφρονῶν, τοῦτο μόνον, ὡς οὐκ ἔδει, νοσῶν ἀπηλέγχετο. πάντα χρυσὸς ἦν αὐτῷ τὰ ἐνύπνια, χρυσοῦ, καὶ νήφων, ἦρα καὶ μὴ νήφων χρυσὸν νυκτὸς ἐφαντάζετο. ἐντεῦθεν τί μὲν οὐκ ἔδρα τῶν, ὅποσα τὸ χρῆμα τοῦτο πορίζουσι; ποῖος δὲ τρόπος εἰς πορισμὸν οὐκ ἐπεννοεῖτο τοῦ χρήματος; φόροι δύσφοροι τοῖς ὑπηκόοις ἐπεφορτίζοντο καὶ τὰ μὲν, ὡς εἶχον, ἐπέφερον, τὰ δὲ προσετίθουν, ἐκ γῆς μεταλλεύοντες. τὰ μὲν τὴν περιουσίαν ἐξήντλουν, τὰ δὲ τὸ σῶμα κατέτρυχον καὶ μυρίον εἶδος χρηματισμοῦ προσεπιννοῦντες οὐκ ἔληγον, ἀλλ’ ἦν ἡ πᾶσα σπουδὴ τοῦ κρατοῦντος ἀποπλῆσαι τὸν ἔρωτα. ὁ δὲ εἶχεν ἄρα μετὰ τοῦ φιλοχρύσου καὶ τὸ φιλόθηρον.

3. Why/How Pythes' wife decides to treat her husband's passion ἀπολλυμένων δὲ πολλῶν πάντων δ' ἀπαγορευόντων αἱ γυναῖκες ἰκετηρίαν ἔθεσαν ἐπὶ τὰς θύρας ἐλθοῦσαι τῆς τοῦ Πύθωω γυναικός. καί ποτε καὶ πρὸς τὴν ὕλην ἔξεισε, καὶ τοὺς κύνας ἐπισυρόμενος, ἐνταῦθα ὁ μὲν ἐλάφοις ἐπέτρεχε καὶ λαγωοῖς ἐφιπάζετο καὶ τὸ κυνηγετικὸν ἐπεθώυξεν, ἡ δὲ βασιλὶς ἐτέραν εἶχε σπουδὴν, ὅπως ὑφέλη τῆς ἐς τὸ χρηματίζεσθαι πανταχόθεν ὄρμῆς, καὶ πως ἐπιόν, οὕτω κατὰ δαίμονα, εἰς νοῦν λαμβάνει καὶ μάλα σοφόν τι ἐνθύμιον·
4. Description of the plan ἡ δ' ἐκεῖνας μὲν ἀπιέναι καὶ θαρρεῖν ἐκέλευσεν, αὐτὴ δὲ τῶν περὶ τὸ χρυσίον τεχνιτῶν οἷς ἐπίστευε μάλιστα καλέσασα καὶ καθείρξασα, ποιεῖν ἐκέλευεν ἄρτους τε χρυσοῦς καὶ πέμματα παντοδαπὰ καὶ ὀπώρας, καὶ ὅσοις δὴ μάλιστα τὸν Πύθην ἐγίνωσκεν ἠδόμενον ὄψοις καὶ βρώμασι. ποιηθέντων δὲ πάντων ὁ μὲν Πύθης ἦκεν ἀπὸ τῆς ξένης· ἐτύγχανε γὰρ ἀποδημῶν· ἡ δὲ γυνὴ δεῖπνον αἰτοῦντι παρέθηκε χρυσὴν τράπεζαν οὐδὲν ἐδώδιμον ἔχουσαν ἀλλὰ πάντα χρυσᾶ. τὸ μὲν οὖν πρῶτον ἔχαιρε Πύθης τοῖς μιμήμασιν, ἐμπλησθεὶς δὲ τῆς ὄψεως ἦται φαγεῖν· ἡ δὲ χρυσοῦν ὅ τι τύχοι ποθήσας προσέφερε. ὡς εἰ μηδὲν εἰς τὸ ζῆν ἐκεῖνος γνοίη τὸν φίλον χρυσὸν συμβαλλόμενον, τοῦ πάθους ἂν πάντως ἀπόσχοιτο. τὸ δὲ ἦν, ὡς ἔξει μὲν αὐτὸς μετὰ κόρον τῆς θήρας καὶ τὴν γαστέρα κορέσων, εὐρήσει δὲ τὸ δεῖπνον ἅπαν χρυσὸν καί, μικρόν τι λιμώξας, ἐντεῦθεν τὸ τοῦ χρυσοῦ περιττὸν καταγνώσεται. ἐδόκει δὴ ταῦτα καὶ τὸ δοκοῦν αὐτίκα ἐπράττετο. χρυσὸς μὲν ἦν μυρίος τοῖς χρυσοχοίοις, ἐπὶ μέρος ἀναμετρούμενος, χεῖρες δὲ πολλαὶ διετεχνῶντο τὸ καινὸν ἐκεῖνο καὶ χρυσοῦν ἄριστον. ἦν ἐκεῖσε καὶ χρυσήλατος τράπεζα καὶ κρατήρες καὶ οἶνοχοαὶ καὶ τὰ πάντα χρύσεια. καὶ ἦν ὄραν ὄλον τὸ δεῖπνον χρυσὸν ἐπὶ χρυσῷ κείμενον· χρυσὸς μὲν ἦν ἡ τράπεζα, χρυσῷ δὲ καὶ τὰ κανᾶ διεσκευάστο. ἐπὶ δὲ χρυσοῖς τούτοις χρυσᾶ καὶ τὰ ὄψα ἐτίθεντο· πέρδικες ἐκ χρυσοῦ, τοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς ὕλης μιμούμενοι, λαγωοί, ὄρνεις καὶ πάντα ὡς ἀπὸ χρυσοῦ διελάμπετο. εἶχέ τι καὶ τοῖς ἐκ πυρὸς ὀπτωμένοις παρόμοιον, οἷς τὸ τοῦ χρυσοῦ ἄνθος εἰς τὸ πυρὸς πότερον δίκην ἀνθράκων ἐπέχρωζεν. ἐπεὶ δὲ καιρὸς ἦν, ὡς εἰς ἄριστον ἦκεν ὁ βασιλεὺς, πολλοὺς τοὺς ἐκ τῆς θήρας ἀποστάζων ἰδρώτας, καὶ δὴ παρήσαν οἱ θεράποντες, χρυσὴν κομίζοντες τράπεζαν, καὶ ὅποσα ὡς ἐπὶ τῆς τοιαύτης τραπέζης ἤμελλον κείσεσθαι.

5. Pythes' response and his wife's edifying speech	<p>δυσχεραίνοντος δ' αὐτοῦ καὶ πεινῆν βοῶντος, 'ἀλλὰ σύ γε τούτων' εἶπεν ἄλλου δ' οὐδενὸς εὐπορίαν πεποίηκας ἡμῖν·   καὶ γὰρ ἐμπειρία καὶ τέχνη πᾶσα φροῦδος, γεωργεῖ δ' οὐδεὶς, ἀλλὰ τὰ σπειρόμενα καὶ φυτεύομενα καὶ τρέφοντα τῆς γῆς ὀπίσω καταλιπόντες ὀρύσσομεν ἄχρηστα καὶ ζητοῦμεν, ἀποκναίοντες αὐτοὺς καὶ τοὺς πολίτας.'</p>	<p>ὁ δὲ τῶν μὲν ὑπερεώρα, ἕτερα δὲ τὰ πρὸς τροφήν ἐζητεῖτο. «Τί οὖν ἦν, ἡ βασιλῆς ἅμα καὶ ξύνουκος;» «Ἔσθιέ» φησιν «ἀπὸ χρυσοῦ, βασιλεῦ, ἐπειδὴ σοὶ καὶ χρυσὸς τὸ φιλούμενον, χρυσὸς ἅπαν ἐστὶ σοὶ τὸ σπουδαζόμενον. ἀπὸ χρυσοῦ τοιγαροῦν καὶ κορέννυσο, ἵνα σοὶ καὶ ὑπὸ γαστέρα χρυσὸς θησαυρίζοντο καὶ σοὶ καὶ τὸ σῶμα εἴη ὅλον ἐπίχρυσον. εἰ δ' οὐδὲν ὁ χρυσὸς εἰς τὸ σῶμά σου χρήσιμος, ἀλλὰ θάττον ἀπὸ μόνου χρυσοῦ τις λιμώζεται, ἐς τί ἄρα σοὶ τὸ πολὺ τῆς σπουδῆς καταβάλλεται;».</p>
6. Conclusion: final outcome	<p>ἐκίνησε ταῦτα τὸν Πύθην, καὶ πᾶσαν μὲν οὐ κατέλυσε τὴν περὶ τὰ μέταλλα πραγματείαν, ἀνὰ μέρος δὲ τὸ πέμπτον ἐργάζεσθαι κελεύσας τῶν πολιτῶν τοὺς λοιποὺς ἐπὶ γεωργίαν καὶ τὰς τέχνας ἔτρεψε.</p>	<p>ἤκουσε ταῦτα ὁ βασιλεὺς καί, τὸ τῆς γυναικὸς σοφὸν μετὰ τοῦ δικαίου προσαιδεσθεῖς, ἀνῆκε ταῖς πόλεσι μὲν τὸ πολὺ τοῦ φόρου, ἑαυτῷ δὲ τὸ ἐσάγαν χρυσομανές.</p>

Table 1: Division of Pythes' narrative into thematic units in Plutarch and Nikephoros Basilakes comparatively

The differences noticed in the Byzantine adaptation of the story are the result of the rhetorical drive informing Basilakes' text. The *diegema* belongs to his *Progymnasmata*, rhetorical exercises concerned mainly with Greek myth and history (and less often with Christian themes as well). The *Progymnasmata* are an important genre, reflecting the tendency of Byzantine authors to reconstruct a creative illusion of the classical past, in an attempt to define themselves as successors to a brilliant legacy.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The *progymnasmata* were a significant part of the educational training in Late Antiquity and Byzantium, which initiated the student into the elements of rhetoric, equipping him for his own rhetorical performances. There were various kinds of *progymnasmata*, for instance, *mythos*, *diegema*, *gnome* or *chreia*, *ethopoia*, *encomium*. On *progymnasmata* in



Basilakes' composition is in general more extensive than the Plutarchan archetype, sophisticated rather than merely informative or descriptive, and it preserves the anonymity of the Lydian king as a way of generalizing the moral tone of the narrative. In connection with this, *diegema* 11 appears to be an exception to the series of Basilakes' other *diegemata*, in that it does not involve famous gods or heroes from Greek mythology, such as Zeus, Pasiphae, Odysseus, and Ariadne, and this might offer another possible explanation for the anonymity of its non-Greek king. In emphasizing the king's passion with gold, Basilakes calls it a conquering passion and an overwhelming sickness (ἐδούλευεν ἔρωτι, νοσῶν ἀπηλέγχετο, ἀλλ' ἦν ἡ πᾶσα σπουδὴ τοῦ κρατοῦντος ἀποπλῆσαι τὸν ἔρωτα), advancing at length the implications of Plutarch's ἀγαπήσας ... τὸν πλοῦτον (terms under texts in element 2). This must be the product of Basilakes' heightened interest in the element of *eros*, which constitutes the predominant theme of his *Progymnasmata*, as has been noticed.<sup>10</sup>

Next to Pythes' love for gold (τὸ φιλόχρυσον), Basilakes additionally invents the passion of love for hunting (τὸ φιλόθηρον),<sup>11</sup> not to be found in Plutarch. This prompts him to usher in a whole section, in which he presents a radically different framework for the involvement of Pythes' wife in the story. According to Plutarch, Pythes had compelled all citizens to work in the mines, performing no other activity. Many perished and became physically exhausted, so that a female embassy appeared at the door of the wife of Pythes and made supplication asking for her help (element 3). In Basilakes' discussion, the king sets out to the woods

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general, see R. WEBB, *The Progymnasmata as Practice*, in: Y.L. TOO (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*. Leiden–Boston 2001, 289–316; on Byzantine *progymnasmata*, see H. HUNGER, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (*Byzantinisches Handbuch*, 5/1). Munich 1978, 1, 92–120; A. LITTLEWOOD, *A Byzantine Oak and its classical acorn: the literary artistry of Geometres*, *Progymnasmata* 1. *JÖB* 29 (1980) 133–144; G. A. KENNEDY, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors*. Princeton 1983, 54–70; on Basilakes and *progymnasmata*, see A. PIGNANI, *Niceforo Basilace. Progimnasmata e monodie: testo critico, introduzione, traduzione* (*Byzantina et Neo-Hellenica Neapolitana*, 10). Naples 1983, 20–22, P. ROILOS, *Amphoteroglossia: A poetics of the twelfth-century medieval Greek Novel*. Washington DC 2005, 32–40, A. KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium: the transformations of Greek identity and the reception of the classical tradition*. Cambridge 2007, 258–260, and S. PAPAIOANNOU, *On the Stage of Eros: Two Rhetorical Exercises by Nikephoros Basilakes*, in: M. GRÜNBART (ed.), *Theatron. Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter* (*Millennium-Studien*, 13). Berlin–New York 2007, 357–376.

<sup>10</sup> H.-G. BECK, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend*. Munich 1982, 144–147; cf. PIGNANI, *Niceforo Basilace* (cited n. 9), 34 and PAPAIOANNOU, *On the Stage of Eros* (cited n. 9).

<sup>11</sup> On Byzantine hunts, see PH. ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΕΣ, *Κυνηγετικά ἐκ τῆς ἐποχῆς τῶν Κομνηνῶν καὶ τῶν Παλαιολόγων*. *EEBS* 9 (1932) 3–33, E. PATLAGEAN, *De la chasse et du souverain*. *DOP* 46 (1992) 257–263.

for hunting, dragging his dogs with him, and chasing with manic force deer and hares; he is accompanied by his queen, who observes his folly and contrives a wise means to help him (element 3). Contrary to Plutarch, Basilakes goes on to state bluntly the rationale lying behind the wife's plan: by offering golden food at a moment of combined tiredness and hunger, she could teach him that the accumulation of gold is a useless pursuit, if it cannot satisfy the basic human needs (element 4). The direct articulation of the moral message at this point leads us to classify the narrative under the category of Basilakes' hortatory *progymnasmata*, dealing with moralizing topics and concerns.<sup>12</sup> Its ethical impact is reinforced by the sustained focus on the concept of gold during the preparation of the dining table: whereas the corresponding scene in Plutarch merely mentions that the wife set before Pythes a golden table with golden edible, Basilakes imbues this part of the narrative with no less than eighteen cognates of χρυσός (in bold within element 4).

On the other hand, the detailed description of the forest scenery framing this episode implicates another conventional theme of Basilakes' *progymnasmata*, namely his favourite antithesis between love and nature. *Eros* transgresses the limits of *physis*, and eventually becomes a tyrant for the agent in question, just as Pythes' obsession with gold, itself a violation of human order and proper ethical behaviour, ultimately conquers him. Another opposing element to *eros* is that of *sophrosyne*, which is definitely in effect in the case of Pythes' wife, with her prudence being the powerful drive that diminishes the king's passion.<sup>13</sup>

Plutarch's Pythes returns home from one of the many journeys he used to make and after marveling at the sight of the mimic food, he shouts out that he is hungry, whereupon the wife castigates him for directing all his energy to plentiful supplies and neglecting agriculture in particular (element 5). In Basilakes however, the king comes back from a tiring hunting excursion and completely overlooks the golden meal, demanding immediately food.<sup>14</sup> That explains why the wife in this version is more judgmental, urging the king with a tone of sarcasm to satiate his hunger with gold, so that his belly and whole body become gold too (the dense usage of χρυσός is again into play, eight times in total, under element 5). She concludes her reproach with the didactic admonition that gold contributes nothing to one's body, leading faster to starvation. At the end of the

<sup>12</sup> KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium* (cited n. 9), 259.

<sup>13</sup> ROILOS, *Amphoteroglossia* (cited n. 9), 34 and 38.

<sup>14</sup> In Basilakes the demand for food is accompanied by the king's complaint towards his wife in direct speech: "What is all this, my queen and wife?", which ushers in an overtone of theatricality and makes their encounter more dramatic, another feature of Basilakes' *progymnasmata*.

story, Basilakes sharpens Plutarch's perspective that stays on the public consequences of Pythes' alteration (the citizens turn to agriculture and the trades); he instead affirms the wife's wisdom and justice, which had released her husband from his obsession with gold, stressing thus the ethical dynamics of his narrative (element 6).

I have demonstrated how Nikephoros Basilakes reshapes a rare myth of antiquity by appropriating it to the peculiarities of the literary genre he represents. I would like, by way of conclusion, to look at the heading of *diegema* 11. Although we cannot be certain whether the individual titles of each *Progymnasma* are the author's own or of some scribe, most probably student(s) belonging to Basilakes' scholastic circle, it is intriguing that the title accompanying Pythes' narrative erroneously acknowledges it as part of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*.<sup>15</sup> Contrary to Pignani, who takes the story to be non-Plutarchan (she sees it as a remake of the well known myth of the king Midas),<sup>16</sup> it is clear that it is to be identified with the section 262D–263A of Plutarch's *Mulierum virtutes*.<sup>17</sup>

How are we then to explain the misleading title? I suggest that this is a testimony to the popularity of the *Parallel Lives* in relation to the *Moralia* during the Komnenian period as well as in the centuries before that. The great difference in the history of transmission of the two corpora is that the *Parallel Lives* achieved standardization, becoming thus popular, much earlier than the treatises of the *Moralia*, which for many centuries lacked unity, circulated either as separate essays or as group of essays, still not as a self-contained project.<sup>18</sup> It was not until the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century that the miscellaneous treatises now forming Plutarch's corpus of the *Moralia* were brought together by the polymath Maximos Planoudes (c. 1255 – c. 1305). With the aid of various assistants, Planoudes launched a serious editorial operation by collating various pre-existing manuscripts, meticulous-

<sup>15</sup> The earliest manuscripts of Basilakes' *Progymnasmata* that we have belong to the 13th century, Vind. phil. gr. 254 and Vat. Barb. gr. 240 (olim II.61 et 392). Given that Basilakes died after 1182, it is not impossible that these manuscripts belong to Basilakes' immediate circle, in all likelihood to his students. This does not exclude the possibility that the surviving manuscripts reproduced the erroneous title of one of Basilakes' autographs.

<sup>16</sup> PIGNANI, Niceforo Basilace (cited n. 9), 16, n. 8.

<sup>17</sup> STADTER, Plutarch's historical methods (cited n. 1), 122, n. 312.

<sup>18</sup> N. WILSON, *Scholars of Byzantium*. London 1996, 235; cf. J. IRIGOIN, II. Histoire du texte des *Œuvres Morales* de Plutarque, in: Plutarque *Œuvres Morales*. Tome I. Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles-Lettres". Paris 1987, ccxxvii–ccc, J. IRIGOIN, Les manuscrits de Plutarque à 32 lignes et à 22 lignes, in: *Actes du XIVe Congrès International des Études Byzantines*, Bucarest, 6–12 Septembre 1971, vol. III. Bucharest 1976, 83–87. Cf. M. MANFREDINI, Codici plutarchei contenenti Vitae e Moralia, in: I. GALLO (ed.), *Sulla tradizione manoscritta dei Moralia di Plutarco*. Salerno 1988, 103–122.

ly transcribing them, and publishing for the first time *Moralia* 1–69 in two main codices, the Ambrosianus C 126 inf. (859) and Parisinus graecus 1671.<sup>19</sup> It is at this stage that we can claim that the *Moralia* enjoyed popularity as a collection and exerted impact on the intellectual activities of Byzantine scholars (for instance, Theodore Metochites models his *Semeioseis gnomikai* on Plutarch's *Moralia*).<sup>20</sup>

Apart from the premise that in Basilakes' times the *Moralia* were not yet provided with the authority they had in Palaiologan Byzantium, the *Mulierum virtutes* itself appears to have been a less renowned essay of the collection. This is manifested, for instance, in the fact that in the 9th century it was not included in Photios' catalogue of Plutarch's works as provided in his *Bibliotheca* (*bibl.* 161 = II 123-127 Henry), which in turn draws on Sopater's extracts from Plutarch dating back to the 4th century. Nor does this essay belong within the group of treatises 1-21 (in the Planoudean numeration) that according to Wilson became canonic from an early period.<sup>21</sup> Another piece of evidence makes also part of the point here; we know that John Zonaras, a roughly contemporary of Basilakes, in his *Epitome historiarum* included a considerable number of excerpts from the *Parallel Lives*, but only three from the *Moralia*, among which not the *Mulierum virtutes* (these are excerpts from the *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae*, *De Alexandri fortuna aut virtute*, *Regum et imperatorum apophthegmata*).<sup>22</sup> Finally, Plutarch's biographical writing (rather than the *Moralia*) seems to have influenced the historical outlook of the slightly later author, John Tzetzes (c. 1110–1180/5), who

<sup>19</sup> On the two codices, C. N. CONSTANTINIDIS, Higher education in Byzantium in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, 1204 – ca.1310. Nicosia 1982, 74-75, M. MANFREDINI, Il Plutarco di Planude. *Studi Classici e Orientali* 42 (1992) 123-125, I. PÉREZ MARTÍN, Nuevos códices planudeos de Plutarco, in: C. SCHRADER et al. (eds.), Plutarco y la historia: actas del V Simposio Español sobre Plutarco, Zaragoza, 20-22 de junio de 1996. Zaragoza 1997, 385-404, D. BIANCONI, Un altro Plutarco di Planude. *Segno e testo* 9 (2011) 113-130. The earliest manuscript of *Mulierum Virtutes* is Planoude's Ambrosianus C 126 inf. (859).

<sup>20</sup> I treat this issue in a forthcoming article, The Byzantine Plutarch: self-identity and model in Theodore Metochites' *Essay 71* of the *Semeioseis gnomikai*. *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*. One could relevantly notice that Michael Psellos in the 11th century modeled his collective project *De omnifaria doctrina* on the essay *De placitis philosophorum* (now considered spurious) or John Tzetzes in the 12th century his *Chiliads* only on part of the *Moralia*.

<sup>21</sup> WILSON, *Scholars of Byzantium* (cited n. 18), 235. The famous treatises appear to have been *De audiendis poetis*, *De cohibenda ira*, *De capienda ex inimicis utilitate*; A. GARZYA, La tradizione manoscritta dei *Moralia*: linee generali, in: I. GALLO (ed.), Sulla tradizione manoscritta dei *Moralia* di Plutarco. Salerno 1988, 9-38, esp. 16.

<sup>22</sup> M. MANFREDINI, Due codici di 'Excerpta' Plutarchei e l' 'Epitome' di Zonara. *Prometheus* 18 (1992) 193-215, M. MANFREDINI, Due codici di 'Excerpta' Plutarchei e l' 'Epitome' di Zonara II. *Prometheus* 19 (1993) 1-25.

famously refused to sell his copy of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* at a moment of financial constraint.<sup>23</sup> The same is the case with Niketas Choniates (1155/7–1217), whose *Chronike diegesis* depends on the *Parallel Lives*.

It is obvious that the misattributed ascription of *diegema* 11 squares with the intellectual preferences of the time. The scholars belonging to Basilakes' milieu were heirs to the long-lasting reputation of the *Parallel Lives* and to a tradition that had placed this corpus at the very heart of the Byzantine historical activity even centuries before.<sup>24</sup> The misattribution might be owed to a *lapsus memoriae* or confusion, in case the student/scribe reproduced the episode without consulting directly the manuscript that contained it; otherwise it might reflect a calculated decision on Basilakes' part or his circle designed to make the *diegema* appealing to its audience, given that it was supposed to stem from such an authoritative project of antiquity as the *Parallel Lives*. An alternative title assigning the *diegema* to Plutarch's *Mulierum virtutes* would have probably said nothing to Basilakes' readers, whereas any attempt at advertizing the project that included it would have been both pointless and impossible, as the *Moralia* (Ἠθικά) was a label attached by Planoudes much later and established only then. The assumptions around the ascription of the *diegema* may vary, but Basilakes' audience would have duly enjoyed the prestigious hint.

Département d'Histoire, Arts et Archéologie  
Université Libre de Bruxelles

#### ABSTRACT

This article examines the Byzantine adaptation of the anecdote of the Lydian king Pythes within Nikephoros Basilakes' *Progymnasma* 11 in relation to its earliest surviving source, Plutarch's *Mulierum virtutes* 262D–263A. By looking at the ascription accompanying Basilakes' *progymnasma*, it additionally argues for the popularity of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* in Komnenian Byzantium.

<sup>23</sup> WILSON, *Scholars of Byzantium* (cited n. 18), 190.

<sup>24</sup> N. HUMBLE, *Imitation as commentary? Plutarch and Byzantine historiography in the tenth century*, in: G. PACE – P. VOLPE CACCIATORE (eds.), *Gli scritti di Plutarco: tradizione, traduzione, ricezione, commento*. Naples 2013, 219–225.