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LOVE AND THEATRE IN THE WORKS OF NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES*

Introduction

In the preface (Πρόλογος) to the first collective edition of his texts, written at the end of his life as *à mi-chemin entre l'autobiographie et le 'manifeste' littéraire*¹, Nikephoros Basilakes (ca. 1115 – after 1182)² modifies the quote from *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius in a way that would prove essential for the understanding of the emotional dimension of his work:

δίψαν ἐκεῖνος καλῶν τὸν εἰς αὐτὰς βίβλους ἀπληστον ἔρωτα καὶ τὴν ἐντεῦθεν τῆς δοξομανίας μέθην, αἰεὶ μὲν ἐπιρρέουσαν οὐδέποτε δὲ κατανούουσαν, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ μᾶλλον ἐκκάουσαν καὶ τηροῦσαν τὸν πολυδίψιον κ.τ.λ.³

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¹ A. GARZYA, *Un lettré du milieu du XII^e siècle: Nicéphore Basilakès*, RESEE 8, 1970, p. 615; IDEM, *Intorno al Prologo di Niceforo Basilace*, JÖB 18, 1969, p. 57–71, but only with the amendment by I.D. POLEMIS, *A Note on the Praefatio of Nikephoros Basilakes*, BZ 94, 2001, p. 605–607.

² A. GARZYA, *Precisazioni sul processo di Niceforo Basilace*, B 40, 1970, p. 309–316; IDEM, *Un lettré...*; IDEM, *Fin quando visse Niceforo Basilace?*, BZ 64, 1971, p. 301–302; IDEM, *Literarische und rhetorische Polemiken der Komnenenzeit*, Bsl 34, 1973, p. 1–14; IDEM, *Il "Prologo" di Niceforo Basilace*, BCPENCGL n.s. 19, 1971, p. 55–71.

³ NIKEPHOROS, *Praef.*, I, [in:] *Nicephori Basilacae Orationes et Epistulae*, ed. A. GARZYA, Leipzig 1984 (cetera: ed. GARZYA), p. 1–2. Riccardo MAISANO wrote about this edition (in: *Antonio Garzya bizantinista*, [in:] *L'Antico e la sua eredità. Atti del Colloquio internazionale di studi in onore di Antonio Garzya (Napoli, 20–21 settembre 2002)*, ed. U. CRISCUOLO, Napoli 2004, p. 196): *Accanto agli interessi protobizantini, si colloca, per importanza e risonanza nella storia degli studi, una fitta serie di ricerche pionieristiche nel campo della grande retorica dell'età dei Comneni, e in particolare sull'opera del retore Niceforo Basilace, con edizioni commentate degli scritti, pubblicate e interpretate a più riprese e culminate con la editio dell'intero corpus delle orazioni nella Biblioteca Teubneriana (1984).*

τὴν δὲ τῶν βιβλίων δίψαν ῥῆσον, ἵνα μὴ γογγύζων ἀποθάνῃς, ἀλλὰ ἴλεως ἀληθῶς καὶ ἀπὸ καρδίας εὐχάριστος τοῖς θεοῖς⁴.

Let these reflections suffice thee, if thou hold them as principles. But away with thy thirst for books, that thou mayest die not murmuring but with a good grace, truly and from thy heart grateful to the Gods⁵.

Let this be enough for you, and your constant doctrine. And give up your thirst for books, so that you do not die a grouch, but in true grace and heartfelt gratitude to the gods⁶.

Writing about the excessive desire for book knowledge, Basilakes does not merely use the word ‘thirst’ (δίψαν) taken from *Tὰ εἰς ἑαυτὸν (Meditations)*, but expands it and at the same time reinforces with the phrase ἄπληστον ἔρωτα (‘insatiable desire’). This wording, emotionally charged and surprising in the light of Byzantine aesthetics, seems to reflect the author’s creative personality. The use of the word ‘eros’ outside strictly sexual semantics is in itself very interesting: it indicates the writer’s psychological interests, his emotional involvement, and, at the same time, the strength of his character, as he did not hesitate to write explicitly about matters that were only inferred through metaphors at the time. Therefore, even if we assume that the above phrases are a sophisticated *topos* of the ταπεινότης type⁷, its particular form of argument constitutes a unique, authorial *sphragis*⁸. We believe that by exploring this particular aspect of the language of emotion that Nikephoros uses we will overcome the limitations of the aesthetic norms of the time, come closer to the real discussion about the human condition that took place within the *literati* circles of the era, and demonstrate the links between Nikephoros Basilakes’ work and the recently reborn romance⁹.

⁴ *The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Antoninus*, II, 3, 1, 7–9, ed. et trans. A.S.L. FARQUHARSON, Oxford 1944 [repr. Oxford 1968].

⁵ *The Communings with Himself of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus*, ed. et trans. C.R. HAINES, London–New York 1916 [= LCL, 58], p. 29.

⁶ MARCUS AURELIUS, *Meditations*, trans. M. HAMMOND, London 2006 [= Pcl], p. 11.

⁷ *I am not able to acquire too much knowledge*, cf. GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *De mortuis non esse dolendum*, [in:] *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, vol. IX.1, ed. G. HEIL, Leiden 1967, p. 35, l. 18 (‘intellectual weakness’); XENOPHON, *Hellenica*, III, 5, 22, [in:] *Xenophontis opera omnia*, vol. I, ed. E.C. MARCHANT, Oxonii 1900 [repr. Oxonii 1968] (‘mental incapacity to fight’). Cf. C. WENDEL, *Die TAIBEINOTHE des griechischen Schreibermonches*, BZ 43, 1950, p. 259–266 (rich collection of adjectives).

⁸ Unlike the literature of Antiquity (example of a model study: O. THÉVENAZ, *Auctoris nomina Sapphus: noms et création d’une persona littéraire dans l’Héroïde XV ovidienne*, [in:] *Onomastique et intertextualité dans la littérature latine. Actes de la journée d’étude tenue à la Maison de l’Orient et de la Méditerranée – Jean Pouilloux, le 14 mars 2005*, Lyon 2009 [= CMOMA.SP, 41], p. 121–142), the above issues have not yet been systematically researched in the field of Byzantine studies.

⁹ Of the four works written in the Age of the Komnenoi (see below), one should exclude the novel by Constantine Manasses (ca. 1115–ca. 1187), preserved in fragments, titled *Aristandros and Kallithea*. It was written circa 1160, and thus long after Basilakes had finished his artistic career (see below, although Eros appears in a dozen or so fragments; the aspect of personal travel experiences that

“Insatiable Desire”

The phrase ἀπληστος ἔρωσ appears in a work¹⁰ entitled *A Story* [diegema]¹¹, also told by Plutarch in the *Parallel Lives*¹². It tells the story of the Lydian king Pythes,

influenced the narrative in his novel was presented by Catia GALATARIOU, *Travel and Perception in Byzantium*, DOP 47, 1993, p. 221–241), see *Der Roman des Konstantinos Manasses. Überlieferung, Rekonstruktion, Textausgabe der Fragmente*, ed. O. MAZAL, Wien 1967 [= WBS, 4]; H. HUNGER, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, vol. II, München 1978 [= HA.BH, 12.5], p. 126–128; P. MAGDALINO, *In Search of the Byzantine Courtier: Leo Choiosphaktes and Constantine Manasses*, [in:] *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. H. MAGUIRE, Washington 1997, p. 161–165.

¹⁰ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, XI, [in:] NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasmata e monodie*, ed. A. PIGNANI, Napoli 1983 [= BNN, 10] (cetera: ed. PIGNANI), p. 82–85, 270–272; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Narration*, IV, [in:] *The Rhetorical Exercises of Nikephoros Basilakes. Progymnasmata from Twelfth-Century Byzantium*, ed. et trans. J. BENEKER, C.A. GIBSON, London–Cambridge Mass. 2016 [= DOML, 43] (cetera: ed. BENEKER – GIBSON), p. 24–29. The author of the last publication had also included some corrections and emendations suggested in published reviews, some of them proposed themselves, but had not personally inspected the manuscripts.

¹¹ *Diegema* (Latin *narratio*) is the simplest form of rhetorical expression, understood as ‘an account, a story’. Depending on the environmental context, it may be ethically charged (e.g. in the hagiography analyzed by C. RAPP: *Storytelling as Spiritual Communication in Early Greek Hagiography: The Use of Diegesis*, JECS 6, 1998, p. 431–448), although it is not a requirement *ex definitione*. Such requirements are: a) σαφήνεια (let us add that it is also a prerequisite of *ekphrasis*, HERMOGENES, *Progymn. X*, 23–24, [in:] *Hermogenes opera*, ed. H. RABE, Leipzig 1913, p. 23; DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, VII, 59, vol. II, trans. R.D. HICKS, Cambridge Mass.–London 1925 [= LCL, 184], p. 168–169: σαφήνεια δὲ ἐστὶ λέξις γνωρίμως παριστάσα τὸ νοούμενον / *Lucidity is a style which presents the thought in a way easily understood*); b) συντομία, i.e. conciseness; c) πιθανότης, i.e. plausibility. There is no doubt that Basilakes’ *Diegemata* possesses all these qualities, but let us specify that *pithanotes* in this case means the internal cohesion of the world presented in the work, and not the objective probability of events. In other words, it also includes the narrative of the world of myth in full, if its heroes act according to the internal laws of this world (the definition above is universal and refers to the whole Greek Antique and Byzantine literature, and allows to avoid thinking with the simple contemporary true–false dichotomy, cf. J.R. MORGAN, *Make-Believe and Make Believe: the Fictionality of the Greek Novel*, [in:] *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World*, ed. C. GILL, T.P. WISEMAN, Exeter 1993, p. 175–229; *Greek Fiction*, ed. J.R. MORGAN, R. STONEMAN, London–New York 1994 (including the article by S. MACALISTER, *Byzantine Developments*, [in:] *Greek Fiction...*, p. 275–287). *Diegema* is usually synonymous with *diegesis*, although Nikolaos the Sophist and Aphthonios treated the latter as a broader-spectrum narrative concept, while the *diegema* is specific (see C. RAPP, *Storytelling as Spiritual...*, p. 433, footnote 2), in fact, however, it is a highly individual issue, e.g. GERONTIUS (saec. V), *Vita S. Melaniae Junioris*, I, 1, 16, [in:] *Vie de Sainte Mélanie*, trans. D. GORCE, Paris 1962 [= SC, 90], p. 124): εἰς τὸ ἄπειρον πέλαγος τοῦ διηγήματος ἐμαυτὸν καθεῖναι παρασκευάζομαι; definition of the romance genre: Andronikos II Palaiologos’ (saec. XIV): Τὸ κατὰ Καλλίμαχον καὶ Χρυσορρόην ἐρωτικὸν διήγημα (*Le roman de Callimaque et de Chrysorrhoe*, ed. et trans. M. RICHARD, Paris 1956), but Διήγησις Ἀλεξάνδρου μετὰ Σεμιράμης βασιλίσσης Συρίας περὶ τῶν ἔνδεκα ἐρωτημάτων (saec. XIV/XV; *Die Erzählung von Alexander und Semiramis*, ed. et trans. U. MOENNIG, Berlin–New York 2004 [= SB, 7]).

¹² NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, XI, ed. PIGNANI, p. 82–85. For the English version of the article, I used the translation by J. Beneker and C.A. Gibson, however the title proposed by Sophia Xenophontos sounds better: *Narrative (diegema), also mentioned by Plutarch in the Parallel Lives*, see below.

a good ruler, who, however, was overcome by a desire for gold so great that it slowly destroyed him. Several years ago, Sophia Xenophontos demonstrated that Basilakes' narrative is based on Plutarch's story¹³ and collected the classical tradition of myth¹⁴. The title is misleading because Plutarch recounts the story in *Mulierum virtutes* 262D–263A, but it is nevertheless easily explained: *Moralia*, of which *Mulierum virtutes* is a part, was not collected in a separate edition until the time of Maximus Planudes and was often treated as part of the much more popular *Vitae parallelae*¹⁵. At this point, however, let us return to the lexicon that defines Pythes' mental state in relation to gold.

Already at the outset we learn that Pythes as a king was beyond reproach, except that *he was a slave only to his desire for gold* (μόνω δὲ τῷ πρὸς χρυσὸν ἐδούλευεν ἔρωτι), but was otherwise a reasonable man (τᾶλλα σωφρονῶν). It is interesting that Basilakes considers the Lydian ruler's case from a psychiatric perspective, treating his condition as an illness (νοσῶν ἀπηλέγχετο) and not as an ethical flaw of character. The impression that it is not really about gold, that it is not a question of greed, but rather a pathological need to be satisfied, in which the precious metal plays the role of an artifact of secondary importance (nowhere in the text, despite the accumulation of several dozen derivatives of the term χρυσός, is there any allusion to its material value or Pythes' avarice), is made more likely when the characteristics of the figure in question concludes with the following line: [...] *as all their* [i.e. subjects] *efforts were directed toward fulfilling the desire of their ruler* (ἀλλ' ἦν ἡ πᾶσα σπουδὴ τοῦ κρατοῦντος ἀποπλήσαι τὸν ἔρωτα)¹⁶. That is why the cure, prepared by his wife, whose name is unfortunately never mentioned, proves successful: when Pythes, weary and hungry, returned from the hunt, he was only given golden food, served on golden plates on golden tables... A strong biological need managed to overcome his soul's illness.

¹³ As a result, we must reject the opinion of the Nikephoros' publisher, Adriana Pignani, who in *Pro-gymnasma*, XI (Narration, IV, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 24–29) noted only a variation of the Midas myth, p. 16, note 8: [...] *Il titolo ne riconosce la fonte in un supposto analogo dieghema, compreso nelle Vite parallele di Plutarco, ma con un falso evidente, ché il racconto plutarcheo non é. Trattasi invece d'un rifacimento abbastanza originale del diffusissimo mito del re Mida.*

¹⁴ S. XENOPHONTOS, *Resorting to Rare Sources of Antiquity: Nikephoros Basilakes and the Popularity of Plutarch's Parallel Lives of Twelfth-Century Byzantium*, Par 4, 2014, p. 1–12.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 10–12.

¹⁶ NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Narration*, IV, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 25. The Xenophontos translation: [...] *their ruler's every effort was dedicated to satisfying his passion* seems too delicate, whereas it is admissible to change the sentence subject.

In his ethopoeia¹⁷ *What Heracles would say while serving as a slave to Omphale*¹⁸, Basilakes depicts the son of Zeus and Alcmene defeated by a more powerful force. In the past, Heracles complains, I have tried to be wise (σωφρών) but I have always been caught by Eros, who overcame my senses and led me to misery. It is in this context that he utters several epithets that very unanimously emphasize the inevitability of god's actions: ακατάβλητος, άνίκητος ό πολέμιος, τοξότης, άτρεπτος. In his final prayer to Zeus and Athena, Heracles pleads with them to bring him back to his former condition¹⁹:

Άλλ' ώ Ζεϋ πάτερ και άδελφή πρόμαχος Άθηνά, έγώ μέν όλην έξεκάθηρα γήν, ύμεις δέ μοι τήν ψυχήν έκκαθαίροιτε και διδοίητε σωφρονείν, και τάχα και τούτον κρατήσω τόν άθλον και νικήσω τόν Έρωτα και πάλιν άκούσω καλλίνικως.

But O father Zeus and sister Athena, the protector, since I purged the entire earth, may you purge my soul and grant me to be soberminded: then perhaps I will also be victorious in this contest, will defeat Love, and will once again be called glorious champion.

Coincidentally, Nicetas Eugenianos referred to the same myth in a short text entitled Έπιστολή πρός γραμματικήν (*Letter to the Grammar*). The translation and commentary have been published elsewhere²⁰, therefore let us only emphasize that Niketas is a lover (πρός) of his creative Muse (this is why he is able to write at all) and expresses his desire to write as follows: *I have given myself to you [i.e. Grammar] into captivity like Heracles to Omphale*.

¹⁷ Ethopoeia is a rhetorical exercise in which one's own statement shows the personality of the speaker. "Imaginary Allocation" – as stated in the skillful but imprecise definition, as if on the margin of the main theme, by late R.J.H. JENKINS, *The Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Literature*, DOP 17, 1963, p. 45 and much better: R.J. PENELLA, *The "Progymnasmata" in Imperial Greek Education*, CW 105, 2011, p. 81 and note 20: "speech-in-character"; the article is a very good theoretical introduction. I know only one monograph devoted to it: H.-M. HAGEN, *Ηθοποιία. Zur Geschichte eines rhetorischen Begriffs* (Diss., Universität zu Erlangen-Nürnberg 1966). Recently a collection of studies has also been published: *Ethopoiia. La représentation de caractères entre fiction scolaire et réalité vivante à l'époque impériale et tardive*, ed. E. AMATO, J. SCHAMP, Salerno 2005. Unfortunately, all of them concern Late Antiquity literature, as does the accessible essay by R. WEBB, *The Progymnasmata in Practice*, [in:] *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, ed. Y. LEE TOO, Leiden-Boston 2001, p. 289–316. On the existence of early Christian ethopoeia, the existence of which was challenged not long ago even in textbooks, cf. J.-L. FOURNET, *Une éthopée de Caïn dans le Codex des Visions de la Fondation Bodmer*, ZPE 92, 1992, p. 253–266.

¹⁸ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, XLVIII, ed. PIGNANI, p. 197–199, 347–348; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoeia*, XIX, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 258–263.

¹⁹ NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoeia*, XIX, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 262–263.

²⁰ A. KOTŁOWSKA, *Herakles w bizantyńskiej refleksji poetyckiej. Studium przypadku*, VP 35, 2015, p. 293–296.

Interestingly, two writers of one generation (one of whom also the author of a romance) use the same, not particularly popular myth, to express their psychological sense of addiction. The most drastic approach, one whose realism appeals also to the contemporary audience, is the ethopoeia entitled *What the girl from Edessa would say after being deceived by the Goth?*²¹ The man would not have been successful if it had not been for Eros' help (what is significant, it was expressed in militaristic terminology, in order to emphasize brutality) in overcoming the girl's *areté*²²:

Τὰ μὲν δὴ πρῶτα, Ἔρωτι συμμάχῳ χρησάμενος καὶ τὴν γλῶτταν ἔχων ἐλέποιν, κατ' αὐτῆς δὴ σωφροσύνης κατεπεστράτευσε, πολιορκῆσαι θέλων τῆς παρθενίας μου τὴν ἀκρόπολιν καὶ καταστρατηγῆσαι τῆς σωφροσύνης αὐτῆς.

At first, then, employing Love as his ally and possessing a siege engine for a tongue, he led an assault against chastity itself, wishing to besiege the acropolis of my maidenhood and lead a campaign against my very chastity.

A similar vision of Eros as an external force that can lead to evil and certainly is suspicious had been suggested two hundred years earlier by John Geometres in an epitaph dedicated to John Tzimiskes²³. The emperor, as *persona loquens*, tells the story of his life, including the following justification of the assassination of Nikephoros II Phokas:

Ἐπεὶ δ' ἔρωσ με τῆς κακίστης ἐν βίῳ
τυραννίδος κατέσχε, φεῦ δυσβουλίας.

It is Eros, who has submitted my life to his tyrannical power,
that is the cause of this misery.

Even earlier, in the body of writings of Libanius of Antioch²⁴ contains a surviving ethopoeia entitled *What words would an eunuch utter to talk about his love?* now identified as a work of Severus of Antioch²⁵. In the context discussed

²¹ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, LVI, ed. PIGNANI, p. 228–232, 366–369; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoeia*, XXVII, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 322–329.

²² NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, LVI, 20–22, ed. PIGNANI, p. 229; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoeia*, XXVII, 2, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 324.

²³ IOANNES GEOMETRES, 267.22–269.19, [in:] *Anecdota graeca*, vol. IV, ed. J.A. CRAMER, Oxford 1841.

²⁴ LIBANIUS, *Progymnasma*, XI, [in:] *Libanii Opera*, vol. VIII, rec. R. FOERSTER, Lipsiae 1913 [= BSGR], p. 434–435.

²⁵ E. AMATO, *L'autore dell' Ἐὐνοῦχος ἐρῶν (Ps.-Lib. ethop. 26 Foerster) ed il più antico frammento in millet di etopea d'autore*, [in:] *Approches de la Troisième Sophistique. Hommages à Jacques Schamp*, vol. II, ed. E. AMATO, A. RODUIT, M. STEINRÜCK, Bruxelles 2005 [= ColL, 296], p. 3–17.

herein, the essential element is the phrase concluding the prayer to Eros: ἡ παῦσον τὸ πάθος ἢ τὴν φύσιν μετάβαλε. (*end this feeling or change my nature!*). It is a highly evocative expression of the They tellingly demonstrate the inability to cope with feelings on one's own and the inevitable conflict between human nature (φύσις) and desire (πάθος, ἔρωσ). The centerpiece of this conflict is present both in Basilakes' rhetorical writings as well as in his romances written for the purposes of *theatron*; the only difference is the way it is presented and interpreted.

Having laid groundwork, we can proceed to the myth which, like no other story, illustrates the ominous aspect of Eros, namely the myth of Pasiphaë. Basilakes wrote as many as two pieces on this subject, which so far have not been analysed separately²⁶. They are not synonymous either, but rather mutually complementing²⁷. Only in the first couple of sentences does the *Story of Pasiphaë* describe the nature of the Cretan ruler's feelings, without going into too many details²⁸. Later, however, the text changes, gains pace, and the reason for this is expressed in a number of concise but emotionally charged phrases: the girl was compelled by Eros, who broke her character and forced her to do what she did not really want²⁹. In the end, the narrative slows down again and speaks in a rather neutral – considering the circumstances – tone about Dedalus' invention and Minotaur's birth³⁰. Meanwhile, the ethopoeia *What Pasiphaë would say after falling in love with a bull* has to give the voice to the woman herself. This is conducive to a more nuanced content, including a broader argumentation. The main line of defense

²⁶ Only Antonio GARZYA (*Ovide, Nicéphore Basilakès et le mythe de Pasiphaé*, L 26, 1967, p. 477–479) devoted two short texts to them, however, they focused on mythological material issues (the question of the identification of the material used for making the artificial cow) and *Une rédaction byzantine du mythe de Pasiphaé*, PI 9, 1967, p. 222–226 (factual similarities and differences with the Ovid's version).

²⁷ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, XIX, ed. PIGNANI, p. 94–95, 277–278; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Narration*, XII, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 46–49; NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, LIV, ed. PIGNANI, p. 221–224, 362–364; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoeia*, XXV, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 306–313.

²⁸ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, XIX, 1–10, ed. PIGNANI, p. 94; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Narration*, XII, 1, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 47.

²⁹ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, XIX, 10–20, ed. PIGNANI, p. 94–95; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Narration*, XII, 1, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 46–47: "Ἔρωσ [...] συνηγωνίζετο καὶ φύσις αὐθις ἐκείθεν ἀντέκρουε [...]; ἃ μὴ φύσις ἐβούλετο..." Ἔρωσ παρεβιάζετο... / *Love contended [...], and nature struck back from the opposing side... what nature rejected... Love strove to supply*. J. BENEKER and C.A. GIBSON translation is more gentle than the original.

³⁰ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, XIX, 20–27, ed. PIGNANI, p. 94–95; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Narration*, XII, 2, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 46–49.

is to invoke several “difficult loves” and to remind the old truth that human norms do not apply to gods³¹. Hence Pasiphaë can manifestly say³²:

Οὐκ αἰσχύνομαι τὸν πόθον ὡς ἔκφυλον·

I'm not ashamed of this unnatural desire for another species.

It is only after this that she brings up the arguments that we already knew from the previous story: the violence of Eros, from whom there is no escape. That is why she is brave enough to cry out³³:

Αἰτιῶμαι τὸν Ἔρωτα. [...] Προσαιτιῶμαι τὴν Ἀφροδίτην.

I find fault with Love. [...] I find fault with Aphrodite too³⁴.

However, she does not ask for the spell to be reversed. It is an amazing scene: that is exactly how people should act in their dealings with gods. However, what impresses the audience the most is the conclusion: Pasiphaë controls herself and calmly asks Dedalus (what a suspense!) to speed up his work on the artificial heifer³⁵. Unlike any other story, this tale shows the ethical limits of discourse and the extreme evil to which a god can contribute. It is only when a controversial subject emerges in literature that it is proof of its “cultural life”. The antique and mythological setting, on the other hand, made it possible for the story, with its fundamentally amoral message³⁶, to be published in the Empire. Pasiphaë shows that the issue of Eros was not only a rhetorical exercise, and that the avant-garde manner of her presentation saves her from being pigeonholed as part of the state “cultural program”³⁷.

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³¹ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, LIV, 1–31, ed. PIGNANI, p. 221–222, 362; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoiea*, XXV, 1–2, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 306–309. Cf. the fantastic words uttered by Eros in NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, LI, 29–30, ed. PIGNANI, p. 209, 354; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoiea*, XXII, 2, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 282–283 (*Myrrha*): ἀλλ’ ἐτήρει τοὺς τῆς φύσεως θεσμούς καὶ τοὺς ἐμοὺς οὐ προσίετο / *but he obeyed the laws of nature and did not comply with mine*.

³² NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, LIV, 45, ed. PIGNANI, p. 223, 363; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoiea*, XXV, 4, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 310–311.

³³ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, LIV, 56–57, ed. PIGNANI, p. 223, 363; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoiea*, XXV, 4, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 310–311.

³⁴ I suggest here what seems to be a more accurate translation: *I find fault with Aphrodite even more*.

³⁵ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, LIV, 84–90, ed. PIGNANI, p. 224; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoiea*, XXV, 6, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 312–313.

³⁶ As it is not about Pasiphaë's immoral act, but about a deity giving up morality.

³⁷ See below: discourse on the genesis of Eros' image in romance, some have fallen into this trap, mistaking form for content.

Particularly noteworthy is the strong opposition of eros vs. σωφροσύνη (and its derivatives, and ultimately also φύσις), reflected in the above progymnasmata. The very fact of choosing such an opponent calls for a commentary. Σωφροσύνη as one of the most important of the ἀρηταιά of everyday life, was quickly Christianized and enjoyed great popularity in Byzantine literature of all ages, such as the Palaeologan era, even in works that were strongly influenced by the West³⁸. Aristotle's definition in *On Virtues and Vices* has not lost its relevance either:

Σωφροσύνης δέ ἐστι τὸ μὴ θαυμάζειν τὰς ἀπολαύσεις τῶν σωματικῶν ἡδονῶν, καὶ τὸ εἶναι πάσης ἀπολαυστικῆς [αἰσχρᾶς] ἡδονῆς ἀνόρεκτον, καὶ τὸ φοβεῖσθαι τὴν ἀταξίαν, καὶ τὸ τετάχθαι περὶ τὸν βίον ὁμοίως ἔν τε μικροῖς καὶ μεγάλοις. παρέπεται δὲ τῇ σωφροσύνῃ εὐταξία, κοσμιότης, αἰδώς, εὐλάβεια.

To sobriety of mind it belongs not to value highly bodily pleasures and enjoyments, not to be covetous of every enjoyable pleasure, to fear disorder, and to live an orderly life in small things and great alike. Sobriety of mind is accompanied by orderliness, regularity, modesty, caution³⁹.

This particular perception of Eros as a dark force or a sickness of the soul, which is extremely difficult for man to resist, turns our attention toward romances of its day, and consequently prompts us to ask about Basilakes' affiliation with the literary circle centered around the court (*theatron*, German: *literarische Zirkel*, French: *cour littéraire*)⁴⁰. The above issue has not been sufficiently

³⁸ Cf. the Meliteniotes' poem *Εἰς τὴν Σωφροσύνην* (PLP no. 17848, its attribution to the better known Theodore Meliteniotes [PLP no. 17851] is uncertain), edition: *Poème allégorique de Méliténiote*, ed. E. MILLER, NEMBIAB 19, 2, 1872, p. 1–138 (extrait), cf. C. CUPANE, *Una passeggiata nei boschi narrativi. Lo statuto della finzione nel 'Medioevo romanzo e Orientale'*. In *margini a un contributo recente*, JÖB 63, 2013, p. 84–90 (the author supports the authorship of Theodore).

³⁹ ARISTOTLE, *The Athenian Constitution. The Eudemean Ethics. On Virtues and Vices*, trans. H. RACKHAM, Cambridge Mass.–London 1952 [= LCL, 285], p. 492–493.

⁴⁰ A. RHOBY, *Verschiedene Bemerkungen zur Sebastokratorissa Eirene und zu Autoren in ihrem Umfeld*, NRh 6, 2009, p. 305–336; O. LAMPIDIS, *Zur Sebastokratorissa Eirene*, JÖB 34, 1984, p. 91–105; E. JEFFREYS, *The Sebastokratorissa Eirene as Literary Patroness: the Monk Iakovos*, JÖB 32, 1982, p. 63–71; R. DOSTÁLOVA, *Die byzantinische Theorie des Dramas und die Tragödie Christos Paschon*, JÖB 32, 1982, p. 73–83; M. MULLETT, *Aristocracy and Patronage in the Literary Circles of Comnenian Constantinople*, [in:] *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. M. ANGOLD, Oxford 1984 [= BAR. IS, 221], p. 173–197 (in particular p. 175: translation of a fragment of a letter from Michael Italikos to Nikephoros Bryennios [to whom Prodromos dedicated his romance], MICHAEL ITALICUS, *Epistulae*, XLIII, [in:] MICHEL ITALIKOS, *Lettres et discours*, ed. P. GAUTIER, Paris 1972 [= AOC, 14], with information on the great impression made by the sent and read text of the latter “into *logikon theatron*”); EADEM, *Rhetoric, Theory and the Imperative of Performance: Byzantium and Now*, [in:] *Rhetoric in Byzantium. 35th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. E. JEFFREYS, Farnham 2003 [= SPBSP, 11], p. 151–160; M. GRÜNBAIT, *Female Founders – Das Konzept: Zu Stiftungshandlungen in der Byzantinischen Welt*, WJK 60, 2012, p. 21–28; E.C. BOURBOUHAKIS, *Rhetoric and Performance*, [in:] *The Byzantine World*, ed. P. STEPHENSON, London–New York 2010, p. 175–187; P. MARCINIAK, *Byzantine*

examined⁴¹; biographical data indicate that his contacts with the literati associated with the circle may have taken place in 1140–1155⁴², although researchers usually confine themselves statements that, while beautiful, are only very general in nature⁴³.

Theatron – A Place of Performance?, [in:] *Theatron. Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter / Rhetorical Culture in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. M. GRÜNBART, Berlin–New York 2007 [= *Mil.S.*, 13], p. 277–285. It is therefore not surprising that *theatron* is not even mentioned in the critical bibliographic review devoted to the continuation of classical theatre (which began with a comprehensive fundamental volume by Konstantin SATHAS, *Ἱστορικὸν δοκίμιον περὶ τοῦ θεάτρου-καὶ τῆς μουσικῆς τῶν Βυζαντινῶν ἤτοι εἰσαγωγή εἰς τὸ Κρητικὸν θέατρον*, Βενετία 1878 [repr. Ἀθήνα 1979]), see: W. PUCHNER, *Zum “Theater” in Byzanz*, [in:] *Fest und Alltag in Byzanz*, ed. G. PRINZING, D. SIMON, München 1990, p. 11–16 and p. 169–179 (notes); P. MAGDALINO, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180*, New York 1993, p. 336–356, 429–434.

⁴¹ In one of the letters (No. XIX, in: ed. GAUTIER) Michael Italikos complains that the emperor favours one notary (νοτάριος) Basilakios (it is worth noting that research into the rhythm of Nikephoros' prose indicates that the clauses are very similar to those of Michael): R. MAISANO, *La clausola ritmica nella prosa di Niceforo Basilace*, *JÖB* 25, 1976, p. 87–104, the study was supplemented by W. HÖRANDNER, *Der Prosarhythmus in der rhetorischen Literatur der Byzantiner*, Wien 1981 [= *WBS*, 16], p. 84–91: This level of creativity was neither a field of competition nor a formal experiment for any of them. One of Tzetzes' letters is addressed to “the grammarist, Mr [κυρῶ] Nikephoros” (IOANNES TZETZES, *Epistulae*, C, ed. P.L. LEONE, Leipzig 1972 [= *BSGR*], p. 146–147). However, the content does not provide sufficient grounds for closer identification (forsitan Leone is simply inconclusive). Nikephoros went through all levels of his career at the school at the Hagia Sophia, up to and including διδάσκαλος τοῦ ἀποστόλου, see R. BROWNING, *The Patriarchal School at Constantinople in the Twelfth Century*, *B* 32, 1962, p. 181–184. Thanks to his position and rhetorical skills, he prepared official speeches (including panegyrics) for the court. His scholarly and ecclesiastical career was abruptly interrupted by his involvement in a theological controversy concerning the eucharistic sacrifice in the context of Trinitarian issue. In the end, at a second synod on this issue, on May 12, 1157, Nikephoros' views were deemed unorthodox, and he himself was forced into exile. He settled in the Bulgarian Filipopol. It was then that the monody in memory of brother Constantine was composed, the last of his texts to be preserved, cf. A. GARZA, *Un lettré...*, p. 613–615; NICEFORO BASILACE, *Monodia*, I, [in:] ed. PIGNANI, p. 235–252, 373–382. Several years ago Michael Grünbart called for a comprehensive and systematic study of the social relations and cultural ties of the representatives of the cultural elite in the 12th century, which would have been possible due to the extensive body of sources, including correspondence. In his diagrams, which show the links between John Tzetzes (in this case, there is a good article by Andreas RHOBY about the patronage strategy of this author: *Ioannes Tzetzes als Auftragsdichter*, *GLB* 15, 2010, p. 155–170) and Theodore Prodromos (the critical edition, to be published as the 81st volume of *CC.SG: Theodori Prodrumi Epistulae et Orationes*, Turnhout 2018, edited by Michiel D.J. OP DE COUL will certainly contribute to the research; however, in the short review by the author: *The Letters of Theodore Prodromus and Some Other 12th Century Letter Collections*, *MG* 9, 2009, p. 231–239, there is no information about Basilakes), but Nikephoros Basilakes does not appear, see M. GRÜNBART, ‘*Tis love that has warm’d us. Reconstructing Networks in 12th Century Byzantium*, *RBPB* 83, 2, 2005, p. 301–313.

⁴² Circa 1140: first senior positions in a rhetorical school, 26 January 1156: session of the first synod on the issue of orthodoxy.

⁴³ Such as Robert BROWNING in an otherwise inspiring text *Enlightenment and Repression in Byzantium in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, *PP* 69, 1975, p. 18: *Much admired by the young, Basilakes was a rhetorician of influence in the literary world.*

Greater precision would require direct data that are lacking⁴⁴, unlike, for example, the rather emotional confessions of Michael Choniates (1138–ca. 1222), their authenticity notwithstanding⁴⁵. Perhaps, as some researchers who have taken an interest in Basilakes have suggested, his character traits were not conducive to social life⁴⁶. In our opinion, the dilemma of the choice between the life of a real artist and a social celebrity (οὐκ ὡς ἀπειρόκαλος εἰς θεάτρα καταβαίνων...) ⁴⁷ did not originally exist, but is rather a rhetorical justification of the failed life of a bitter man. This is a slightly different interpretation from the one Aglae Pizzone proposes, which remains the only comprehensive analysis of the *Prologue*⁴⁸. We believe that it was in fact the theme of Eros that really formed the discussion – hidden from us – between Basilakes and the romance poets, who belonged to the cultural elite of the empire, “the upper-class intelligentsia”⁴⁹.

Of course, some of the works of Basilakes feature a more traditional approach. In an ethopoeia that is an *ekphrasis* of the garden tended by an incompetent gardener⁵⁰. Beauty of the apple tree is there expressed by *ekphrasis* of Eroses playing

⁴⁴ E.g. E. JEFFREYS, *The Sebastokratorissa Irene as Patron*, WJK 60, 2012, p. 177–194: meticulous collection of information on the figures related to the foundational activity of Irena – Basilakes was not mentioned; also M. GRÜNBAIT, *Tis love... passim*.

⁴⁵ E.C. BOURBOUHAKIS, *The End of ἐπίδειξις. Authorial Identity and Authoria Intention in Michael Chōniates' Πρὸς τοὺς αἰτιωμένους τὸ ἀφιλένδεικτον*, [in:] *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature. Modes, Functions, and Identities*, ed. A. PIZZONE, Boston–Berlin 2014 [= BArchiv, 28], p. 201–224.

⁴⁶ E.C. BOURBOUHAKIS, *The End of ἐπίδειξις...*, 214–115: “mental illness”; P. MAGDALINO, *The Empire...*, p. 336–337: *stern critic of his own literary creations*; M. ANGOLD, *Autobiography and Identity: The Case of the Later Byzantine Empire*, Bsl 60, 1999, p. 41–42: *a noble retreat so as not to waste time*.

⁴⁷ ΝΙΚΕΦΩΡΟΣ, *Praef.*, VIII, 26sq, ed. GARZYA, p. 5.

⁴⁸ A researcher from Odense explains Basilakes' withdrawal from public life with his sincere, personal fear of graphomania (πολυγραφία; what is interesting, is that this word, rarely used before, has begun to appear more often from the twelfth century, see e.g. the beginning of Michael Choniates letter to John of Naupaktos [*Epistulae*, CLXVII, [in:] *Μιχαήλ Ἀκομινάτου τοῦ χωνιάτου τὰ σωζόμενα*, vol. II, ed. S.P. LAMPROS, Ἀθήνα 1880, p. 332], where the author rhetorically stipulates that he will express himself concisely [τὸν λακωνισμὸν τιθέμεθα / *laconic*] precisely not to fall into πολυγραφίαν) and in consequence of compromising the artistic and ethical standard of his work. We should not forget that *Prologue* was written after the synods that broke Nikephoros' career, see A. PIZZONE, *Anonymity, Dispossession and Reappropriation in the Prolog of Nikephoros Basilakes*, [in:] *The Author in Middle...*, p. 225–243. There is no reason to dispute this well-argued line of reasoning. However, there was no follow-up as to why the exaggeration of reading was expressed by the words: ἀπληστος ἔρωσ (no attempt was made to track down this semantics in Basilakes' work). Here we can see internal tension, emotions that go beyond the – possibly too calculated – “program caution”, and which can be the result of both the contemporary intellectual debate and personal experiences (it is important not only how much we read, but above all, what). From this perspective, this article can be seen as a complement to Pizzone's study.

⁴⁹ A.R. LITTLEWOOD, *An 'Ikōn of the Soul': the Byzantine Letter*, VL 10, 1976, p. 197.

⁵⁰ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, LV, ed. PIGNANI, p. 225–228, 364–366; ΝΙΚΕΦΩΡΟΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΑΚΗΣ, *Ethopoeia*, XXVI, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 314–321.

with fruits of the tree⁵¹. The use of plural is not metaphorical or informative (there is only one Eros, after all), but modal – it is intensivum meant to emphasize the power of god's presence⁵². It is expressed in the visual beauty of the fruit and its primeval erotic symbolism, which survived until Byzantine times⁵³. This is evidenced, among other things, by the popularity of the story of Emperor Theodosius giving his wife Eudocia an apple, which then returned to him via Paulinus, the empress' friend...⁵⁴ In the monophysite version, the emperor gives it to his sister Pulcheria, who in turn gives it to her lover Marcian⁵⁵. But also in his use of pluralis does Basilakes challenge convention, when the description of the "villainous character" of the aforementioned Goth, apart from egoism and uncouth manners, also includes: καὶ τὰ πολλὰ τοῖς ἔρωσι χαριζόμενος⁵⁶; and Io, turned into a cow, is to be comforted by the fact that Σὲ δὲ τὴν ἐμὴν φίλην βοῦν στέψουσι μὲν Ἴρωτες...⁵⁷ It is an image of dark irony, but essentially identical to the depiction of Erotes circulating during a dream wedding⁵⁸.

Eros in the Romance of the age of the Komnenoi

Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721) was the author of a short work *Traité de l'Origine des Romans*, now somewhat forgotten but nevertheless highly interesting from the point of view of the history of Byzantine literature. It was published as an introduction to the edition of the novel *Zaïde* by Madame de La Fayette (Marie-Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne, comtesse de La Fayette, 1634–1693), the first volume

⁵¹ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, LV, 16–17, ed. PIGNANI, p. 225; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoiea*, XXVI, 1, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 314–315; cf. NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, LI, 13–14, ed. PIGNANI, p. 208; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoiea*, XXII, 2, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 280–281.

⁵² Cf. PLATO, *Philebus*, 50d, [in:] *Platonis opera*, vol. II, rec. J. BURNET, Oxonii 1967; PLUTARCHUS, *Philopoimen*, XVII, 1, [in:] *Plutarchi vitae parallelae*, vol. II.2, rec. K. ZIEGLER, Lipsiae 1968, p. 21.

⁵³ A.R. LITTLEWOOD, *The Symbolism of the Apple in Byzantine Literature*, JÖB 23, 1974, p. 33–59. Cf. I. NILSSON, E. NYSTRÖM, *To Compose, Read, and Use a Byzantine Text: Aspects of the Chronicle of Constantine Manasses*, BMGS 33, 2009, p. 49–51.

⁵⁴ A.D.E. CAMERON, *The Empress and the Poet: Paganism and the Politics at the Court of Theodosius II*, YCS 27, 1982, p. 217–289; R. SCOTT, *From Propaganda to History to Literature: The Byzantine Stories of Theodosius' Apple and Marcian's Eagles*, [in:] *Byzantine History as Literature*, ed. R. MACRIDES, London 2010, p. 115–133.

⁵⁵ R. BURGESS, *The Accession of Marcian in the Light of Chalcedonia Apologetic and Monophysite Polemic*, BZ 86/87, 1993/1994, p. 47–68; M. VON ESBRÖCK, *La pomme de Théodose II et sa réplique arménienne*, [in:] *Novum Millenium. Studies on Byzantine History and Culture Dedicated to Paul Speck*, ed. C. SODE, S. TAKÁCS, Aldershot 2001, p. 109–111.

⁵⁶ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, LVI, 14, ed. PIGNANI, p. 229; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoiea*, XXVII, 1, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 322–323: *given over almost entirely to sexual desires*.

⁵⁷ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, XLVII, 73, ed. PIGNANI, p. 196; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoiea*, XVIII, 6, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 256–257: *You, my dear cow, the Erotes will crown*.

⁵⁸ HH 5, 2 (abbreviation see below).

of which was published in 1669. The text of the *Treatise*, printed in 1670–1671, was soon translated into English and published separately in 1672⁵⁹. Having rightly recognized the innovative character of Madame de La Fayette's novel⁶⁰, Huet decided to add an outline of the history of the genre. Of course, the vast majority of information contained therein is already outdated, but its historical significance consisted in including works from the Byzantine culture into the synthetic history of the genre. Huet believed that in order to be called a romance, a literary piece had to meet two basic criteria, which in their essence have not changed to this day: a) "l'amour de l'homme"⁶¹ and b) "l'esprit fabuleux"⁶². In the 12th century, four pieces were written that met these requirements: *Rodanthe and Dosikles* (hereinafter: RD, ca. 1140) by Theodore Prodromos, *Drosilla and Charikles* (hereinafter: DCh, shortly after 1140) κατὰ μίμησιν τοῦ μακαρίτου⁶³ φιλοσόφου τοῦ Προδρόμου by Niketas Eugenianos⁶⁴, *Hysimine and Hysimines* (hereinafter: HH, mid-1140s) by Eumathios Makrembolites (1150s?)⁶⁵ and *Arístandros and Kallithéa* by Constantine Manasses (not included in the analysis, see above)⁶⁶.

⁵⁹ *Lettre-traité de Pierre-Daniel Huet sur l'origine des romans*, éd. F. GÉGOU, Paris 2005; the author of this article used the 1671 editio, p. 5–67.

⁶⁰ The first modern psychological novel, in addition written by a woman. What turned out to be an even bigger bestseller was *La Princesse de Clèves*, 1678.

⁶¹ Cf. P. ROILOS, *Amphoteroglossia. A Poetics of the Twelfth-Century Medieval Greek Novel*, Cambridge 2005, *passim*, in particular p. 32–40.

⁶² Note that in classical terminology it can be defined the aforementioned *diegesis*, *diegema*, *narratio*.

⁶³ Of blessed memory, i.e. dead, particularly, what is important here, the one that has died recently.

⁶⁴ A. KAZHDAN, *Bemerkungen zu Niketas Eugenianos*, JÖBG 16, 1967, p. 101–117; F. CONCA, *Il romanzo di Niceta Eugeniano: Modelli narrativi e stilistici*, SG 39, 1986, p. 115–126; C. JOUANNO, *Nicetas Eugénianos, un héritier du roman grec*, REG 102, 1989, p. 346–360.

⁶⁵ Another author disagrees, С.В. ПОЛЯКОВА, *О хронологической последовательности романов Евматия Макремволита и Феодора Продрома*, ВВ 32, 1971, p. 104–108; ЕАДЕМ, *К вопросу о датировке романа Евматия Макремволита*, ВВ 30, 1969, p. 113–123 (the author collected *loci similes* of Basilakes and Makrembolites which were later used by Adriana Pignani in her edition; e.g. the extremely detailed, three-page list of *similia* deserves a separate article and verification due to the extraordinary abundance of themes and symbols, many of which have their own history), moving Makrembolites to the turn of the 11th and 12th centuries and considering it to be a work that marked the start of renewal (also for the West as an inspiration for *Roman de la Rose*). For a long time, most of the studies ignored her suggestions and it was only Suzanne MACALISTER who resumed the interpretation of the Soviet scholar in the article *Byzantine Twelfth-century Romances: a Relative Chronology*, BMGS 15, 1991, p. 175–211. However, their arguments, which are based on the establishment of the direction of the borrowing of certain themes, cannot be considered conclusive, in particular in view of the statements made by Carolina CUPANE, *Metamorphosen des Eros. Liebesdarstellung und Liebesdiskurs in der byzantinischen Literatur der Komnenenzeit*, [in:] *Der Roman im Byzanz der Komnenenzeit*, ed. P.A. AGAPITOS, D.R. REINSCH, Frankfurt am Main 2000 [= Mel, 8], p. 52–54: reading of the intitulatio in Vat. gr. 114, f. 3r. as *νωβελίσσιμος*.

⁶⁶ Ingela NILSSON has written a number of treatises from a geneological point of view, including the monograph *Erotic Pathos, Rhetorical Pleasure: Narrative Technique and Mimesis in Eumathios Makrembolites' "Hysmine & Hysminias"*, Uppsala 2001 [= SBU, 7]; A. CATALDI PALAU, *La tradition*

As a narrative frame, the “illusion of antiquity”⁶⁷, apart from the reference to the convention of the genre, serves primarily to strengthen the universal dimension of the moral standard, liberating it from the limitations of a particular religion, or even from its distorted, overly zealous forms⁶⁸. For both the heroes and their enemies, love appears at first sight upon encountering unexpected beauty that captivates and enchants them⁶⁹. Hence, the *ekphrasis*⁷⁰ of Rhodante appears as early as the beginning of RD⁷¹. Gobryas, the pirate chief of arms, was stunned by the sight of the girl that he had kidnapped together with other residents of Rhodes. Prodrornos skillfully uses the contrast between the girl’s gentleness and the brutal roughness of the pirate⁷²:

manuscrite d’Eustathe Makrembolitès, RHT 10, 1980, p. 75–113. Also noteworthy is P. ROILLOS, *Amphoteroglossia...* with various detailed remarks. Italian translation: *Il Romanzo Bizantino del XII secolo*, ed. F. CONCA, Torino 1994 [= CG.ATAB]; English: *Four Byzantine Novels*, trans. E. JEFFREYS, Liverpool 2012 [= TTB, 1]; NIKETAS EUGENIANOS, *Drosilla and Charikles. A Byzantine Novel*, trans. et ed. J.B. BURTON, Wauconda 2004 (Greek text after the Italian edition); critical editions: *Theodori Prodrorni De Rhodanthes et Dosiclis Amoribus Libri IX*, ed. M. MARCOVICH, Stuttgartiae–Lipsiae 1992 [= BSGR]; EUSTATHIUS MACREMBOLITES, *De Hysmines et Hysminiae Amoribus Libri XI*, ed. M. MARCOVICH, München–Leipzig 2001. Unfortunately, it should be emphasized that this edition’s author is ignoring Herbert Hugner’s unmistakable findings (following K. HORNA, *Die Epigramme des Theodoros Balsamon*, WSt 25, 1903, p. 182–183, 206–209) regarding the form of the name: Eumathios instead of Eustathios: H. HUNGER, *Die Makremboliten auf byzantinischen Bleisiegeln und in sonstigen Belegen*, SBS 5, 1998, p. 4–8.

⁶⁷ A. KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium. The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*, Cambridge 2007, p. 258–259.

⁶⁸ The extreme views that existed in Byzantine society at the time are evidenced by the writings of Neophytos of Cyprus, see C. GALATARIOTOU, *Eros and Thanatos: A Byzantine Hermit’s Conception of Sexuality*, BMGS 13, 1989, p. 95–137. In the world of Neophytos (d. 1214) there was no room for the main figures of this article.

⁶⁹ Also in Nicephoros’ progymnasmata physical τὸ κάλλος is a cause of a nascent feeling.

⁷⁰ J. ELSNER, *Introduction: The Genres of Ekphrasis*, Ram 31, 2002, p. 1: *Ekphrasis is a descriptive speech which brings the thing shown vividly before the eyes*. This definition, with minor changes, appears in Greek tradition from Theon to Nikolaos. Cf. H. MAGUIRE, *Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions of Works of Art*, DOP 28, 1974, p. 111–114; R. WEBB, *Ekphrasis of Buildings in Byzantium: Theory and Practices*, Bsl 69, 2011, p. 20–32 (see also her previous works); R. MACRIDES, P. MAGDALINO, *The Architecture of Ekphrasis: Construction and Context of Paul the Silentiary’s Poem on Hagia Sophia*, BMGS 12, 1988, p. 47–82; E.M. VAN OPSTALL, *On the Threshold. Paul the Silentiary’s Ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia*, [in:] *Sacred Thresholds. The Door to the Sanctuary in Late Antiquity*, ed. IDEM, Leiden–Boston 2018 [= RGRW, 185], p. 31–65 (but from the perspective of religious studies); V. FOSKOLOU, *Decoding Byzantine ekphrasis on Works of Art. Constantine Manasses’s Description of Earth and Its Audience*, BZ 111, 2018, p. 71–102, which discusses the problem of an ability of reconstructing a work of art, based on literary *ekphrasis*, which must include “readership’s horizon of expectations”. For understandable reasons, none of the categories of *ekphrasis* is as popular as those on works of art (we may even ask, whether the *ekphrasis* of works of art were a separate subgenre), so we do not have studies as thorough as the above model examples, which would concern e.g. *ekphrasis* of emotions.

⁷¹ RD 1, 39–60.

⁷² RD 1, 68–70, trans. E. Jeffreys.

οὕτω τὰ θαυμάσια τῶν θεαμάτων
καὶ βαρβαρικὸν συγκαταστέλλει θράσος,
ψυχὴν δὲ ληστοῦ πρὸς κατάπληξιν στρέφει.

To such an extent did the wondrous spectacle
cast down even the barbarian's temerity,
and bring confusion to the robber's soul.

A similar pattern of enchantment is later found in the case of Kratander, Dosikles' companion in a dungeon⁷³, or the hero himself⁷⁴. When Dosikles unsuccessfully tries to fall asleep after a conversation with Kratander, he talks to himself about how the beauty of Rhodante made him feel⁷⁵. In all of this the lack of a god of love is striking, both at the level of the plot and the metaphor. It is only in the last verses of the second book that Dosikles, concluding his retrospection of the kidnapping of his beloved, praises Eros for his power⁷⁶, but one cannot help feeling that it is only a scholastic formality. Here we find all the topoi: Eros is deceptively charming, older than Kronos in spite of having the body of a child⁷⁷; he rages with a smile on his face; he blows fiery missiles in the hearts of others; no creature can resist him. At this point, Prodromos' narrative takes a surprising turn, as companions reprimand Dosikles, unable to bear the artificiality of his exalted speech⁷⁸:

Ἐπαύου, Δοσίκλεις, ὦν μάτην λέγεις λόγων
ἔφασαν οὗτοι· ἴμῃ γίνου δημηγόρος
(ἀπρόσφορος γὰρ ἄρτι φιλοσοφία)
ἀλλὰ σκωπῶμεν ἐμφρόνως τὸ πρακτέον.

'Stop your pointless speech, Dosikles,
they said, 'Don't be an orator
(for philosophizing is inappropriate now),
but let us consider sensibly what has to be done.

Is it the case that Prodromos uses the narrative frame to safely smuggle an allusion to some political-ideological struggles, as Suzanne MacAlister claims, linking these words to the condemnation of Eustratius of Nicaea (1117)⁷⁹? In fact, there

⁷³ RD 1, 164–169.

⁷⁴ RD 2, 188–220.

⁷⁵ RD 2, 210–211.

⁷⁶ RD 2, 421–431.

⁷⁷ S. MACALISTER, *Byzantine Twelfth-century Romances...*, p. 206: suggests that RD 2, 422 is the reply to HH 2, 9, hence it is important to shift the chronology of the romances; however, the direction of the relationship is not clear and the ambiguous nature of god had not been a secret for anyone for a long time, cf. PLATO, *Symposium*, 178c, [in:] *Platonis opera...*

⁷⁸ RD 2, 432–435, trans. E. Jeffreys.

⁷⁹ S. MACALISTER, *Byzantine Twelfth-century Romances...*, p. 206–207.

is no slightest evidence of this. It seems that this is rather one of those interesting formal solutions for which Theodor was famous. The phrase φιλοσοφία, used here in the pejorative sense ‘to pretend to be wise, to confabulate, to exaggerate’, appears only once in the entire work (both of these facts alone exclude the hypothesis involving Eustratius, whose possible defense would be much better prepared and based on emphasizing its orthodoxy, and not on increasing the effect of uniqueness). This reinforces the impression of a switch to a lower register, which serves to highlight the here’s naivety in the throes of his first love.

Later, Prodrornos emphasizes two negative examples of actions by Eros, who often leads people to self-destruction: the already mentioned pirate Gobryas, who pierced himself with his own sword⁸⁰, and an unknown woman from Rhodes. The latter, hit by two arrows of the god (adequately described in this context as δριμύς, τοξάριος), initially only looked persistently at Dosikles, until finally she ran up to him and partially tore off his robe⁸¹. This episode was unusually drastic from the perspective of the time. It should be remembered that all initiatives and reflections on Eros’ nature come from a man. With her act, the girl violated all the standards, including *aretai*, mentioned earlier in the Aristotelian definition. The worst thing is that her humiliation was nothing but a game for the god⁸²:

ἔπαιζεν, ὡς εἴωθεν, ὁ δριμύς Ἔρως

fierce Eros had his sport, as is his custom

All these romances, despite their many differences, agree that the couple in love are innocent⁸³ when the feeling develops and that they maintain the highest moral standards (not just in the sexual sphere) in spite of many misfortunes and psychologically difficult situations they face. Certainly, this situation leads to psychological contradictions⁸⁴. The above argument demonstrates how important for

⁸⁰ RD 6, 52–64, in particular 6, 57: οὕτω βιαιότατον ἐν καικοῖς Ἔρως / *Eros is a most violent force in men of evil disposition*, trans. E. Jeffreys.

⁸¹ RD 8, 191–209.

⁸² RD 8, 192, trans. E. Jeffreys. However, the word ‘sport’ seems inappropriate at this point and it should rather be “he was playing”.

⁸³ Confusing innocence with ‘passivity’, which in addition has an extremely pejorative sense in contemporary view: from simple ineptitude to passive submission of life, it is a grave misinterpretation committed by C. CHRISTOFORATOU, *The Iconography of Eros and the Politics of Desire in Komnenian Byzantium*, E.PMAM 12, 2005, p. 72; in the remaining parts of the article, the author follows Paul Magdalino’s interpretation of Eros as an element of imperial ideology (see below).

⁸⁴ C. JOUANNO, *Les Jeunes filles dans le roman byzantin du XI^e siècle*, [in:] *Les Personnages du roman grec. Actes du colloque de Tours, 18–20 novembre 1999*, ed. B. POUDERON, C. HUNZINGER, D. KASPRZYK, Lyon 2001, p. 341: “indéniable tension”. Cf. a broad study of sexual morality, showing the nuance present in various literary trends, not only in romance (despite the title): L. GARLAND,

the understanding of the meaning of Eros in Theodore Prodromos' romance are the words of Rhodante spoken to a kind old woman named Myryllis, who gave her shelter, where Dosikles ultimately found her⁸⁵:

Ἐκεῖνος οὗτος ἀγνοῶ ποίοις λόγοις
 ἀλοῦς ἐμοῦ, δέσποινα, τῆς τρισαθλίας
 Ἔρον μὲν οὐ κέκληκεν εἰς συνεργίαν
 (ἦρκει γὰρ ἀντ' Ἐρωτος ἐμβλέψας μόνον).

That young man for reasons of which I am ignorant
 was smitten by me, the thrice wretched;
 it was not Eros whom he summoned as his accomplice
 (for his mere appearance was a sufficient substitute for Eros).

God is therefore not so much the source of evil love, for such does not exist⁸⁶, as an unhappy one, such as the feeling that affected the aforementioned Kratan-der⁸⁷. Any involvement of the deity frees us from the responsibility for our deeds, sometimes not particularly worthy of remembering, which we commit under its influence. Rhodante, therefore, rejects Eros and paradoxically saves the genuineness and future happiness of her own love.

The romance by Niketas Eugeneianos is completely devoid of such ambiguity. *Eros tyrannos* manifests himself in all his power, controlling the fate of people as he sees fit. We get to know the protagonists *in medias res* according to the standard of ancient romance. Kratylos, Parthian ruler, plunders the city of Barzon, and Drosilla and Charikles are among the prisoners he takes⁸⁸. They had met and fell in love earlier, at the feast of Dionysus. During their sea voyage to Drosilla's family they unfortunately came across pirates. The storm allowed them to slip out, but they made the unfortunate decision to stay in Barzon for a while. According to the rules of the genre, their new owners, King Kratylos and Queen Chrysilla, fall in love with them, though their feelings are not reciprocated. The latter even poisons her husband to remove an obstacle to her relationship with Charikles, but soon commits suicide after losing the battle with the Arabs⁸⁹. In her last message to the young couple she stresses that her feelings are the responsibility of ἄφυκτος Ἔρωτος⁹⁰,

⁸⁵ *'Be Amorous, But Be Chaste...': Sexual Morality in Byzantine Learned and Vernacular Romance*, BMGS 14, 1990, p. 62–120; A. ΛΑΙΟΥ, *The Role of Women in Byzantine Society*, JÖB 31, 1981, p. 233–260.

⁸⁶ RD 7, 239–242, trans. E. Jeffreys.

⁸⁷ Cf. Basilakes' defense of Pasiphaë, described above.

⁸⁸ RD 1, 190–205.

⁸⁹ DCh 1, 1–74.

⁹⁰ DCh 5, 434–438.

⁹¹ DCh 5, 199: "inescapable love" trans. J.B. Burton; E. Jeffreys.

Ἔρωσ δὲ τυφλός⁹¹, i.e. one that cannot be rationalized. Interestingly, nobody disputes the truthfulness of these words. Unlike in any other romance, Niketas' Eros is a deterministic, pessimistic power (πόθος)⁹²:

οὕτως ἐρώων πᾶς – ὡς ἄφυκτον τι πόθος –
 ἀλίσκεται γὰρ τοῖς Ἔρωτος δικτύοις,
 ὡς μῦς πρὸς ὑγρᾶς ἐμπέσων πίσης χύτραν.

Thus every lover (how inescapable love is!)
 is caught by the nets of Eros,
 just like a mouse who's fallen into a pot of pitch⁹³.

Thus everyone who is in love – and what an ineluctable thing is passion –
 is entrapped in eros' snares,
 like a mouse that has fallen into a pot of sticky resin⁹⁴.

The luckless Kleandros (the equivalent of Kratander in RD) uses surprisingly brutal language in his correspondence with Kalligone, to which he never received an answer⁹⁵:

ἀλλ' ἔνδον αὐτῆς τῆς ταλαίνης⁹⁶ καρδίας
 Ἔρωσ ὁ πικρὸς, ὁ δρακοντώδης γόνος,
 ἐλισσεταί μοι λοξοειδῶς, ὡς ὄφις,
 καὶ στέρνα μοι καὶ σπλάγχνα, φεῦ, κατεσθίει.

but within my wretched heart,
 cruel Eros, the snake-child,
 rolls around obliquely, like a serpent,
 and devours my heart and inward parts, alas⁹⁷

⁹¹ DCh 5, 217: "Eros is blind" trans. J.B. Burton; E. Jeffreys.

⁹² DCh 4, 408–410.

⁹³ Trans. J.B. Burton.

⁹⁴ Trans. E. Jeffreys.

⁹⁵ DCh 2, 216–219. Another aspects of Kleandros' misfortune, including his death and funeral, see detailed analysis in J.B. BURTON, *A Reemergence of Theocritean Poetry in the Byzantine Novel*, CP 98, 2003, p. 262–267.

⁹⁶ This is one emotionally strong epithet, indicating a terrible emotional suffering; it is quite often used by Euripides, he uses *τάλαινα* to describe Medea (e.g. *Med.* 277, 996), Alcestis (*Alc.* 250), Hecuba (*Hec.* 514), *Euripidis fabulae*, vol. I, *Cyclops, Alcestis, Medea, Hereclidae, Hippolytus, Andromacha, Hecuba*, ed. J. DIGGLE, Oxford 1984 [= SCBO]. In Sophocles, it is Tecmessa (*Ajax* 340–341) unsuccessfully trying to stop Ajax for committing suicide; Electra (*El.* 304, 388), Eurydice (*Ant.* 1180), *Sophoclis fabulae*, rec. H. LLOYD-JONES, N.G. WILSON, Oxonii 1990 [= SCBO].

⁹⁷ Trans. J.B. Burton.

But within my unhappy heart itself
 bitter eros, that serpentine offspring,
 insinuates himself into me obliquely, like a snake,
 and – alas – devours my breast and my entrails⁹⁸.

Finally, Queen Chrysilla tries to explain the murder by forces that are more powerful than her. However, it is not the whim of the child god, as in Prodromos' work, but the non-personal power of nature, of which Eros is only a pale personification⁹⁹. Using contemporary language, it is an omnipresent life energy, amoral in the sense of lack of immanent ethical valuation.

The perspective of Eumathios Macrembolites is surprisingly different and at the same time the most mature of all three takes on the theme. HH is distinguished by its radical shift of emphasis from the plot to the allegoresis, to an extent unprecedented in the other romances. The first five of its eleven books are, to a large degree, *ekphraseis*, interrupted by a barely feigned dialogue: *ekphraseis* of works of art, of people, of feelings that “concentrate on emotion and fantasy”¹⁰⁰. All of them have one goal: to show Eros' power in all its ambiguity as a guarantor of the cosmic order (yes, I am aware that from the Greek perspective it is merely a tautology!). There is a fundamental difference between this vision and Niketas' vitality: the Eros of Makrembolites is transcendent, while that of the other author is immanent to the world. In such circumstances people have two ways of touching the god, both fully established in tradition – namely dream¹⁰¹ and art. They ensure the authenticity of the relationship and, at the same time, save us from the literalness in which Niketas was so immersed and which Prodromos did not trust. It is therefore only natural that when Hysminias first confesses to his friend Kratisthenes¹⁰²:

⁹⁸ Trans. E. Jeffreys.

⁹⁹ DCh 5, 218–220.

¹⁰⁰ M. ALEXIOU, *A Critical Reappraisal of Eustathios Makrembolites' Hysmine and Hysminias*, BMGS 3, 1977, p. 29.

¹⁰¹ Dream is a state in which a person can learn the truth without any falsification or mental limitations brought by the real world; paradoxically, therefore, what is incomprehensible consciously becomes realized in a subconscious dream: N. KALOGERAS, *Education Envisioned or The Miracle of Learning in Byzantium*, Bsl 64, 2006, p. 111–124 (= ZAC 13, 2009, p. 513–525). Cf. G. CALOFONOS, *Dream Interpretation: A Byzantinist Superstition?*, BMGS 9, 1984–1985, p. 215–220; P. COX MILLER, *Dreams in Late Antiquity. Studies in the Imagination of a Culture*, Princeton 1998. In both these works the reader will find bibliographic references to oneirocritical literature, but see also a new important publication: *Dreambooks in Byzantium. Six Oneirocritica*, trans. et comm. S.M. OBERHELMAN, Aldershot–Burlington 2008. This interpretation of Hysminias' dream is different from the one proposed by M. ALEXIOU (*A Critical Reappraisal...*), who – somewhat anachronistically – sees the dreams as the protagonist's own subconscious and not a gateway to another world. Suzanne MACALISTER (*Aristotle on the Dream: A Twelfth-Century Romance Revival*, B 60, 1990, p. 195–212) analyzes dreams present in romance as a subject of debate at *theatron*, which had to combine the traditions of Antiquity, contemporary sensitivity and subtle naturalistic elements (“wet dreams”).

¹⁰² HH 3, 1–2, trans. E. Jeffreys.

[1] Καὶ δὴ μοι περὶ μέσῃν νύκτα κατακοιμημένῳ ἐνύπνιον ἦλθεν ὄνειρος μάλα φοβερός· ὁρῶ γὰρ περὶ τὸ δωματίον εἰσὶν πλῆθος οὐκ εὐαριθμητόν, ὄχλον σύμμικτον ἀνδρῶν, γυναικῶν, νεανίσκων, παρθένων· λαμπαδηφόροι πάντες τὴν δεξιάν· τὴν γὰρ τοὶ λαῖαν περὶ τὸ στήθος εἶχον δουλοπρεπῶς. [2] Καὶ μέσον τὸ περὶ τὸ τοῦ κήπου θριγγίον μεράκιον, τὸν γεγραμμένον Ἔρωτα, τὸν βασιλέα, τὸν φοβερὸν ἐκείνον, ἐπὶ τοῦ χρυσοῦ καὶ ἄλιν δίφρου καθήμενον·

[1] And then about the middle of the night, while I was sleeping, a vision came to me, a rather terrifying dream; for I see a crowd of inestimable size entering the chamber, a mixed throng of men, women, youths, maidens. All held torches in their right hands while their left they placed on their breasts in a servile manner. [2] And in the middle was the lad who was painted on the wall around the garden, Eros, the emperor, that terrifying figure, seated on his golden throne once more.

And after a brief presentation of the situation, the god accepted his love for Hysmine¹⁰³:

[5] Καὶ πρὸς τὴν παρθένον ὁ βασιλεὺς· ‘Διὰ σέ καὶ ὠργίσθην, διὰ σέ καὶ διαλλάσσομαι.’ Ἡ δ’ εὐθὺς λαβομένη μου τῆς χειρὸς ἐξανέστησε, θαρρεῖν ἐπιτρέψασα. Καλεῖ με τοῖνον ὁ βασιλεὺς τῇ χειρὶ καὶ στεφανοῖ μου ῥόδῳ τὴν κεφαλὴν· τὸ δὲ παρεστῶς ἅπαν ἠλάλαξεν, ἐκροτάλιζεν, [6] ὠρχεῖτο, Ὁμόδουλος Ὑσμινίας’ λέγον ἡμῖν, ὁ θρασύς, ὁ παρθένος, ὁ τὴν καλὴν Ὑσμίνην αἰσχύνας· Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς Ἔρωσ πρὸς τὴν καλὴν Ὑσμίνην εἰπὼν· Ἔχεις τὸν ἐραστήν’ ἀπέπητῃ μου τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν, ὄλος περὶ μέσῃν μου τὴν καρδίαν πεσῶν.

[5] And the emperor said to the maiden, “It is for your sake that I was angry, so for your sake I receive him back in favour”. She immediately took my hand and made me stand up, telling me to be confident. The emperor summons me with a gesture and crowns my head with roses. All the bystanders cried out and applauded, [6] and danced around, saying, “Hysminias has become our fellow slave, the bold, the unwed, who spurned the lovely Hysmine”. Then saying to the lovely Hysmine, “You have your lover,” the emperor Eros flew away from my eyes and plunged deep into my heart.

Paradoxically, despite the ubiquitous *ekphrasis*, physicality goes to the background in Makrembolites’ work. The concrete quickly loses its realism because it is subject to a sublime metaphorical interpretation. What really is true, Eumathios seems to say, happens in our hearts and minds. Feelings are the only thing that is authentic, and this is partly expressed by the figure of *Eros basileus*. Let us remember this change of epithet: the more popular *tyrannos* had to give way¹⁰⁴. It cultivates love as an inner motion of the human heart, not an external whim or impulse. It is no coincidence that Hysminias is the first hero of the Greek romance to experience all his love in a dream. Its equivalent in this world is the garden of Sosthenes, whose long *ekphrasis* is absolutely vital for the understanding of the whole work. Hysminias walks around the garden with his friend Kratisthenes,

¹⁰³ HH 3, 5–6, trans. E. Jeffreys.

¹⁰⁴ DCh 4, 412.

admiring it and describing with such sensitivity and metaphor that the reader starts to realize that the Garden, which can now be spelled with a capital letter, is but an allegory of the universe¹⁰⁵. Its key element is an image dominated by the four forms of *aretai*: *Phronesis*, *Ischys*, *Sophrosyne* and *Themis*. The ladies are easy to identify because above each one's head there is a part of a single-verse iambic inscription. The whole depiction is described as a δράμα (action, performance)¹⁰⁶ and Hysminias' summary of the description indicates the need for allegorical interpretation (ἔφιλοσοφοῦμεν)¹⁰⁷:

Ἐντεῦθεν ἐφιλοσοφοῦμεν τὰ τῶν γυναικῶν σχήματα καὶ τὰ μέχρι τοῦ τόθ' ἡμῖν κατελαμβάνομεν ἀκατάλεπτα [...].

Then we discussed the women's appearance and we comprehended what till then had been incomprehensible to us [...].

The manner in which Eros is depicted is ambiguous, if not disturbing¹⁰⁸. He is painted as a naked boy with winged feet, sitting on a throne worthy of a "Mycenaean tyrant", holding a bow and fire in his hand. He is surrounded by a crowd of men and women of all ages and of different skin colors, in a position indicating submissiveness¹⁰⁹. And there are twelve scenes depicting activities specific to a given season¹¹⁰. Hysminias understands that the image carries a hidden message¹¹¹:

Ἔχω σου, τεχνίτα, τὸ αἰνίγμα¹¹², ἔχω σοῦ τὸ δράμα· εἰς αὐτόν σου βάπτω τὸν νοῦν· κἂν Σφιγγγένη, Οἰδίπους ἐγώ· κἂν ὡς ἐκ Πυθικῆς ἐσχάρας καὶ τρίποδος αἰνιγματωδῶς ἀποφοιβάζης λοξά, πρόσπολος ἐγώ σοι, καὶ διασαφῶ τὰ αἰνίγματα.

¹⁰⁵ Reference material, cf. C. CUPANE, *Orte der Liebe: Bäder, Brunnen und Pavillons zwischen Fiktion und Realität*, Bsl 69, 2011, p. 167–178; A.R. LITTLEWOOD, *Romantic Paradises: The Role of the Garden in the Byzantine Romance*, BMGS 5, 1979, p. 95–114.

¹⁰⁶ HH 2, 6, 1.

¹⁰⁷ HH 2, 6, 2, trans. E. Jeffreys.

¹⁰⁸ HH 2, 7.

¹⁰⁹ HH 2, 9; 4, 4.

¹¹⁰ HH. 4, 4–18, see E. JEFFREYS, *The Labours of the Twelve Months in Twelfth-century Byzantium*, [in:] *Personification in the Greek World. From Antiquity to Byzantium*, ed. E. STAFFORD, J. HERRIN, Aldershot 2005, p. 309–324; P. ROILOS, *Amphoteroglossia...*, p. 161–168. An extremely mysterious motif: it is an astronomical symbolism of the whole year, thus indicating the holistic aspect of time (*aiōn*, and not the divisible *chronos* [dated according to various human, culturally determined systems]), in which everything has its own time, its own season (hence the *kairos*), but at the same time the measurable passage of time (*chronos*) is unimportant. Placing this image in the context of Eros points to god's power over time. The garden, on the other hand, is a cosmos as an external reality but also an internal reality as a psyche of Hysminias. On both levels there is a constant and inevitable conflict between *Aretai* and Eros, who is inside and outside, in time and beyond it. He is simply a God.

¹¹¹ HH 2, 8, 2, trans. E. Jeffreys.

¹¹² A term that surprisingly rarely appears in the context of this myth (*TLG*: access on May 5, 2018), so it seems that its presence here may have attracted the attention of the recipient/auditor. The

I can grasp, craftsman, your riddle, I can grasp what you have done (δρᾶμα), I can immerse my mind in yours¹¹³; even if you are Sphinx, I am Oidipous; even if you utter riddling prophecies from the Pythia's hearth and tripod, I am your priestly attendant and I can interpret your riddles.

The ambivalence of Apollo's oracle is intended to show an interpretation of a work of art as a mystical experience. In this particular case, Hysminias needs to understand what love is. Although Kratisthenes tells him that this is the force that brought the universe into existence and still sustains all living beings, Hysminias must experience it himself. This, I think, is the torch in Eros' hand – an invitation to the mystery¹¹⁴.

It might be worth mentioning here a similar scene from the ancient romance by Achilles Tatios, entitled *Leucippe and Clitophon*, well-known, read and appreciated in Byzantium¹¹⁵. While visiting a temple of Astarte in Sydon, the narrator admires a painting depicting the abduction of Europe. His attention is focused on admiring the power of the god and the literal eroticism emanating from the image. Makrembolites, who knew the text very well, borrowed the setting but gave it a completely different meaning. The Byzantines saw the process of personification as a type of metaphor, within the broader framework of the problem of reality being expressed through words ('ἐνάργεια', i.e. 'visibility', 'vividness'), which

only noteworthy mention is Androtion (d. ca. 340 BCE), fr. 31: τῆς Σφίγγος αἴνιγμα and a detailed account of its content. However, the above opinion will remain only a hypothesis because we must remember that only a small fragment of Ancient and Byzantine literature has arrived to our times and we will never be able to make unanimous judgements regarding lexical statistics.

¹¹³ Cf. NICEFORO BASILACE, *Monodia*, I, 186, ed. PIGNANI, p. 243: εἰς νοῦν βᾶπτω, p. 377: [...] *l'intagevi nella mente*. The mutual references in this passage confirm and at the same time go beyond KALDELIS' statement, *Hellenism in Byzantium...*, p. 260: *There are, in fact, close textual and generic links between Basilakes' progymnasmata and the novel of Makrembolites; both, after all, were products of the same Hellenizing milieu and its rhetorical background.*

¹¹⁴ There is a fascinating discussion on the genesis of this image in particular, and Eros in romance in general. Paul MAGDALINO (*Eros the King and the King of "Amours": Some Observations on "Hysmine and Hysminias"*, DOP 46, 1992, p. 197–204), sees it as a reflection of the symbolism of the imperial age of the Komnenoi; Carolina CUPANE, on the other hand, whose dissertations continue to be a model of analysis (*Ερως βασιλεύς: La figura di Eros nel romanzo bizantino d'amore*, AASLAP 4 ser., 33, 1973–1974, p. 243–297 and *Metamorphosen des Eros...*, p. 40sq), prefers a synthesis of Antiquity traditions and Western models, although her perspective may be disturbed by the fact that she also discusses the so-called folk romance of the Paleologists' era (cf. its Italian translation: *Romanzi cavallereschi bizantini*, ed. C. CUPANE, Torino 1995), while Elisabeth JEFFREYS sees the opposite direction of inspiration: *The Comnenian Background to the Romans d'Antiquité*, B 50, 1980, p. 455–486). Undoubtedly, the social realities of the 12th century were favorable to the subject matter, after all, there is no question that the renewal of the romance took place at that time. However, the discussion on Eros has an extremely internal, psychological character, as evidenced by its unprecedented intensity and diversity of view: are the studies on the myth of Pasiphaë presented above not in contradiction with any 'political' arguments?

¹¹⁵ Cf. MICHAEL PSELLUS, *The Essays on Euripides and George of Pisidia and on Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius*, ed. A.R. DYCK, Wien 1986 [= BV, 16].

occupied them even more than their ancient predecessors¹¹⁶. These emotions can be seen in the way the friends talk about the painting: they treat it as a challenge, a puzzle that conceals a mystery; an embodiment of the truth that not everything can be said, that there are things for which there are no adequate words. How far removed it is from the scene in Sidon, where there is no secret, everything is revealed and comes down to the pleasure of contemplation of an emotionally charged, purely physical beauty.

This above outline highlights the very diverse representations of Eros in romance, too ambiguous to be reduced to rhetorical strategies; in my opinion, it reflects the emotions that had to be present in the 12th-century Byzantine society. For reflection on the essence, origin and value of feelings exceeds genological conditions and is almost modern, extremely psychological in nature. This is the thread of Ariadne that binds *theatron* poets to Basilakes.

Conclusion: Did Basilakes belong to the literary circle of the palace?

A very interesting relation between Eros and the theatrical terminology is demonstrated by an ethopoeia¹¹⁷ entitled *What Love would say when he sees a woodcutter attempting to chop down Myrrha while she was still pregnant with Adonis*¹¹⁸. The god informs man that he should be careful about what he is cutting because some trees and, more broadly, plants are, as we say today, “not from this world”, and as such they are inviolable. As examples he cites Narcissus, Daphne and Hyacinth; now he forbids to harm Myrrha, a girl turned into a tree as a punishment for an incestuous relationship with her father. He explains that in fact it was his own doing¹¹⁹, summarizing the warning in a lofty manner¹²⁰:

¹¹⁶ S. GOLDHILL, *What is Ékphrasis for?*, CP 102, 2007, p. 1–19; esp. p. 3–6 about the impact of the image on the psyche of the viewer.

¹¹⁷ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, LI, ed. PIGNANI, p. 207–210, 354–355; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoeia*, XXII, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 280–286. Parisinus gr. 2544 (saec. XVI) as his last work (ff. 125v.13–126v) contains an ethopoeia of the same title, attributed to the Severus of Antioch, while E. Amato rightly recognized in it the text of the above mentioned ethopoeia by Basilakes. Adriana Pignani, an excellent researcher, failed to notice this manuscript, see E. AMATO, *An Unpublished Ethopoeia of Severus of Alexandria*, GRBS 46, 2006, p. 67.

¹¹⁸ Recently, a translation of both of the progymnasmata on the subject (besides the *ethopoeia, diegema* must also be added: NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, XXIII, ed. PIGNANI; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Narration*, XVI, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 56–59) has been released along with a comprehensive study of the mythographical materials by Stratis PAPAIOANNOU, *On the Stage of Eros: Two Rhetorical Exercises by Nikephoros Basilakes*, [in:] *Theatron. Rhetorische Kultur...*, p. 357–376.

¹¹⁹ Cf. NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, XXIII, 2, ed. PIGNANI, p. 99, 281: *mentre Amore la constringeva ad andar contro la legge di natura*; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Narration*, XVI, 1, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 57: *Love compelled her to transgress against nature*. Eros' strict responsibility for incest is Basilakes' innovation, cf. S. PAPAIOANNOU, *On the Stage...*, esp. p. 364–366. It is another, besides Pasiphaë, example of god's amorality.

¹²⁰ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, LI, 5–21, ed. PIGNANI, p. 208; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoeia*, XXII, 1–2, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 280–283.

ἄλλ' Ἔρωτος δρᾶμα καὶ Ἀφροδίτης σκηνὴ καὶ κόρη καλὴ προσωπεῖον ὑποδύσα φωτοῦ [...] Ἔρωσ ὁ σοφὸς ἐγὼ καὶ δρᾶμα μελετῶ φιλοτήσιον, Ἔρωσ ὁ δεινὸς ἐγὼ καὶ καλός, ὁ νέος ἄμα καὶ παλαιός¹²¹, ὁ τοξεύων ἄμα καὶ μειδιῶν...

Ma è una rappresentazione d'Amore, è una scena di Afrodite, una bella fanciulla rivestita della maschera di albero. [...] Eros il poeta son io e preparo un dramma d'amore, Eros il terribile son io e bello, nuovo e antico ad un tempo, colui che lancia il dardo e insieme sorride...¹²²

But it is a drama of Love, a stage for Aphrodite, a beautiful girl, who put on the mask [*prosōpeion*] of a tree [...]. I, the wise Love, rehearse a drama of love, I, the clever and beautiful Love, who am both young and old, who both shoots the bow and smiles...¹²³

Rather, she is a drama of Eros and Aphrodite's stage. She is a beautiful girl than has put on the mask [*prosōpeion*] of a tree [...]. I am Eros, the wise one, and I stage a performance [*drama*] of love. I am Eros, the skillful one and the beautiful, the young one as well as old, sending forth my arrows while also smiling...¹²⁴

Basilakes ambivalently uses the dual meaning of the word drama as a love adventure, and at the same time as its literary development¹²⁵. It connects the level of almost modern metaphor with the level of stage realism (σκηνή [stage], mask), which undoubtedly creates an allusion to romance and its recitation as part of the *theatron* as the most adequate form for this type of subject. One can imagine Nikephoros reciting these words of Eros at a meeting of the literary circle: he would then perform in an excitingly double role. However, Basilakes uses the metaphor of theatre practice too often and too freely for that to be a coincidence¹²⁶.

¹²¹ Cf. depiction of Eros in Sosthenes' garden presented above.

¹²² Trans. A. Pignani.

¹²³ Trans. J. Beneker and C.A. Gibson.

¹²⁴ Trans. S. ΠΑΠΑΙΟΑΝΝΟΥ, *On the Stage*..., p. 362. Each translation has its own advantages.

¹²⁵ The emergence of the metaphorical meaning of the theatrical terminology, now common in Western culture, was not a trivial matter. On the contrary, the moment of the breakthrough is not known with certainty. Based on documentary sources and not on literary texts, we can only assume that it took place in the last decades of the 5th century. Two examples: (1) P.Oxy 16.1873 (dated: 475–499 CE): private letter concerning the disturbances in Lycopolis (τὴν Λυκοπολιτῶν στάσιν καὶ μανίαν φαντάζομαι) and the cause of (these?) misfortunes (αἰτίαν [τ]ῶν δεδραμετοϋρημάτων); (2) SB 1.5314 (currently linked to 1.5315; dated: 322–642): unspecified private problems, possibly financial if we consider 1.5315 (l. 15–16: ἐγενόμεθα εἰς τραγοδίαν). Early literary sources are troublesome and ambiguous because by using references that are “tragic” or “dramatic” in the sense of “misfortune”, they do so on the basis of comparison, proverb or references. Only private texts, such as correspondence, are generally free of literary culture references and can therefore help to capture the emergence of this phenomenon, cf. H. ZILLIACUS, *ΤΡΑΓΩΔΙΑ und ΔΡΑΜΑ in metaphorischen Bedeutung*, Arc n.s. 2, 1958, p. 217–220.

¹²⁶ ΝΙΚΕΦΟΡΟΣ, *In Alex. Arist.*, IV, 25–28, XVI, ed. GARZYA, p. 11, 16; *In Ioann. ep.*, XVI, 8–9, XIX, 18–19 (allusive τὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἀρχόντων τῆς σκηνῆς προσωπεῖον), ed. GARZYA, p. 37, 39; *In Ioann. ep.*, XXIII, 14–15 (paraphrasing the metaphor of Paul, *Ad Hebraeos*, IX, 11), ed. GARZYA, p. 44; *In Iann. imp.*, I, 5–9 (θέατρον συναγείρομεν, κατὰ γένη κατὰ φυλὰς κατὰ δήμους, ἀγαθοῦ βασιλέως ἀγαθὴν ἐπευφημοῦντες τὴν πρόδον – *adventus imperatoris* 1138, cf. F. Fusco, *Il panegirico di Niceforo*

The ethopoeia of Adrastos¹²⁷ features the saying, later so popular in many variants, about “city, a broad stage, rich in misfortunes”¹²⁸; in monody, death is leaving a “silent stage”¹²⁹. The verb ‘θέατριζω’ (seldom used in Basilakes’ times), applied to the delivery of monody¹³⁰, is a direct reference to acting (gestures, crying, trembling voice). The latter situation may be just as suitable to mean a performance at a meeting at *theatron*.

Basic convergence lines:

1. a varied images of Eros and a debate on his nature in the works of *theatron* poets, as well as a strong presence of often controversial erotic semantics (e.g. Pasiphaë’s or Myrrha’s casus, militaristic terminology, scenes of violence) in Nikephoros Basilakes’ *progymnasmata*;
- a) it has been proven that a similar debate was held on the nature of dreams at that time;
- b) both romance and Basilakes agree that *sophrosyne* is the fundamental *arete* for maintaining human dignity in the face of Eros’ often hostile and destructive actions;
2. Nikephoros Basilakes’ frequent and correct application of theatre-related lexicon, as regards both the stage practice (performance) and the metaphor.

On the basis of the above, I can conclude that Nikephoros Basilakes participated in the literary and social discourse of the cultural elites of Constantinople on an equal footing for about twenty years. This would be very difficult, if not impossible, if he was not member of *theatron*. In addition, his high social standing makes him fully eligible for such an affiliation, and only special circumstances could have prevented him from joining. This did not happen until the mid-1150s, and was most likely the “fault” of Basilakes himself. The autobiographical elements, full of bitterness and sweetened by the rhetoric of self-sufficiency, were written

Basilace per Giovanni Comneno, AFLFUM 1, 1968, p. 273–306; I. AUGÉ, *La reconquête des Commènes en Orient vue par les panégyristes byzantins*, Bi 3, 2001, p. 313–328), ed. GARZYA, p. 49; In *Nicolaum Muz.*, I, 13–16: ὡς πολυανθῆς λειμῶν τοῦτο τὸ θέατρον... / like a flowery meadow, it is theatron..., ed. GARZYA, p. 75, followed by a theme of bees akin to the image in HH 5, 10, 5. Unfortunately, recent contribution of P. ROILOS (*I grasp, oh, artist, your enigma, I grasp your drama’: Reconstructing the Implied Audience of the Twelfth-Century Byzantine Novel*, [in:] *Fictional Storytelling in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean and Beyond*, ed. C. CUPANE, B. KRÖNUNG, Leiden–Boston 2016 [= BCBW, 1], p. 463–478), is too general an outline, which only describes *l’esprit de siècle*.

¹²⁷ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Progymnasma*, LII, ed. PIGNANI, p. 210–216, 356–359; NIKEPHOROS BASILAKES, *Ethopoeia*, XXIII, ed. BENEKER – GIBSON, p. 286–297.

¹²⁸ Trans. J. Beneker and C.A. Gibson, p. 289.

¹²⁹ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Monodia*, II, 173–174, ed. PIGNANI, p. 259.

¹³⁰ NICEFORO BASILACE, *Monodia*, I, 120, ed. PIGNANI, p. 240.

after these events, so unfortunate for Basilakes; they therefore did not reflect the earlier situation from the time when he wrote his *orationes* and *progymnasmata*.

Translated by Katarzyna Gucio

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Abstract. The article analyzes the rhetorical output of Nikephoros Basilakes, focusing on his use of scenic terminology and the psychological interpretation of myths. The conclusions substantiate the theory that Nikephoros had been part of the imperial *theatron* before his downfall in the mid-1150s.

Keywords: Byzantine novel, ekphrasis, ethopoeia, Nikephoros Basilakes, Pasiphaë, theatre in Byzantium.

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