

# The Textual Sources for the Peloponnese, A.D. 582–959: Their Creative Engagement with Ancient Literature

*Ilias Anagnostakis and Anthony Kaldellis*

THIS ARTICLE problematizes a set of sources about the history of Greece, and specifically of the Peloponnese, between the sixth and tenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> These sources cover the period 582–959, from the reign of Maurikios to that of Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, but were written in the ninth and tenth centuries. As is well known, there is a gap in the production of written sources for the Peloponnese between the sixth and the tenth centuries that ends with texts that are difficult to evaluate and that tell rather incredible stories. In dealing with this evidence, most modern historians have jumped ahead to the stage of factual verification and utilization, but this article will pause at the prior stage of literary evaluation and show that some of these narratives are creative adaptations of ancient templates and archetypes. This is in fact a pervasive trait of tenth-century Byzantine narratives,<sup>2</sup> but we

<sup>1</sup> Most of the ideas and readings in this paper came from Anagnostakis, but it was conceived, written, and presented by Kaldellis. Some of these readings have been published before (cited where appropriate below), albeit in preliminary form, mixed in with other concerns, separate from each other, and in modern Greek, so they have not found an extensive readership. Their collective implication for the history of Greece emerges only from the presentation here.

<sup>2</sup> K. Jazdzewska, “Hagiographic Invention and Imitation: Niketas’ *Life of Theoktiste* and Its Literary Models,” *GRBS* 49 (2009) 257–279; A. Kaldellis, “The Original Source for Tzimiskes’ Balkan Campaign (971) and the Emperor’s Classicizing Propaganda,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 37 (2013) 1–18, and “The Byzantine Conquest of Crete (960–961 A.D.) and Pro-

will concentrate here on texts that relate to the Peloponnese, and not even all of those that can be analyzed in this light.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, we focus on the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, the story of the widow Danelis, the story of the admiral Adrianos, and some texts concerning the *magistros* Niketas.

These texts were meant to promote political objectives in the tenth-century present and not primarily to give reliable accounts of the past. We are not saying that the events in question did not happen, only that we have to be much more careful in assessing the degree of historical data that the texts provide. We need to understand their literary form first, and their literary politics. Common themes that run through our set include the creative use of classical paradigms in order to cast recent history in politically advantageous ways; the tension between Patras and Lakedaimon; and the effort of the Constantinopolitan center to ‘tame’ the often unruly reality of these far-flung and ethnically problematic provinces.

#### 1. Arethas, Pausanias, and the making of the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*

The three-page historical memorandum known by scholars as the *Chronicle of Monemvasia* actually bears the manuscript title *On the Foundation of Monemvasia*, and that only in one of the later manuscripts that contains an expansion of the work by a later scholar. That title does not appear in the main manuscript that is used to reconstruct the text and is almost certainly not original but added later by someone who was interested in the little that the text says about his fort-city.<sup>4</sup> This brief text has

---

kopios’ *Vandal War*: Classical *Imitatio* in the Continuer of the *Chronicle of Symeon*,” under review.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. D. Pettegrew, “Basil’s Thunderbolt: Niketas Ooryphas and the Portage of the Corinthian Isthmus,” *Thirty-Seventh Annual Byzantine Studies Conference: Abstracts of Papers* (Chicago 2011) 8–9.

<sup>4</sup> Text and commentary in P. Lemerle, “La chronique improprement dite de Monemvasie: Le contexte historique et légendaire,” *REByz* 21 (1963) 5–49, 5–7 for the different MSS., and 8–11 for the text; and I. Dujčev, *Cronaca di Monemvasia* (Palermo 1976). See also E. Kislinger, *Regionalgeschichte als*

acquired considerable notoriety because it constitutes the only surviving narrative survey of the entry and settlement of the Slavs in Greece, and it makes startling claims for the displacement (and later return) of the Greek populations from, to, and within the Peloponnese specifically. In recent times the furor has abated, in part because nationalist debates over ethnic purity are not in fashion, because the text itself seems to have yielded up most of its secrets (though see below), and because the history of this period is being investigated through the patient accumulation of archaeological data in a framework that does not accept the straightforward identification of material cultures (e.g. types of belt buckle or pots) with ethnic groups named in literary sources.<sup>5</sup>

Scholars have, nevertheless, treated the *Chronicle* as a documentary source whose historical claims constitute ‘evidence’ to be either confirmed or refuted by archaeology. If this is to be the game, we believe that its testimony is highly problematic, for it can be argued that archaeology reveals continuous habitation and even imperial presence in regions which the *Chronicle* says were abandoned for two centuries.<sup>6</sup> As the *Chronicle* has

---

*Quellenproblem: Die Chronik von Monembasia und das sizilianische Demenna. Eine historisch-topographische Studie* (Vienna 2002); and S. Turlej, *The Chronicle of Monembasia: The Migration of the Slavs and Church Conflicts in the Byzantine Source from the Beginning of the 9th Century* (Cracow 2001), for a review of the scholarship.

<sup>5</sup> See for example the recent discussion and detailed reconstruction by F. Curta, *The Edinburgh History of the Greeks, c. 500 to 1050: The Early Middle Ages* (Edinburgh 2011).

<sup>6</sup> I. Anagnostakis, “Η χειροποίητη κεραμική ανάμεσα στην Ιστορία και την Αρχαιολογία,” *Βυζαντικά* 17 (1997) 285–330, examines how the interpretation of the material and literary sources is mutually interdependent, with conclusions in one field often resting upon hypotheses in the other. For surveys, see A. Lampropoulou, I. Anagnostakis, V. Konti, and A. Panopoulou, “Συμβολή στην ερμηνεία των αρχαιολογικών τεκμηρίων της Πελοποννήσου κατά τους ‘σκοτεινούς αιώνες’,” in E. Kountoura-Galake (ed.), *Οι σκοτεινοί αιώνες του Βυζαντίου (7<sup>ς</sup>–9<sup>ο</sup> αι.)* (Athens 2001) 189–229; and Kislinger, *Regionalgeschichte* 72–101.

become a red flag in nationalist debates, let us clear the air at the outset and state for the record that Slavs did settle in the Peloponnese in great numbers and that the functioning of the imperial administration was disrupted (though what the *Chronicle* actually claims is that the *Avars* settled in Greece and the Peloponnese; the Slavs appear mysteriously in the second half of the text with no explanation as to how they got there).<sup>7</sup> However, we believe that these events happened in ways far more chaotic and messy than the neat schematic narrative of the *Chronicle*. We will argue that the text, written centuries after the events, borrowed its structural narrative logic from an ancient author (Pausanias) who was writing about the ethnic history of the Peloponnese in a previous ‘Dark Age’.

The *Chronicle* consists of two parts. The first recounts Roman-Avar warfare in the later sixth century and is based on the works of historians such as Euagrius (cited by name), Theophylaktos, and Theophanes.<sup>8</sup> The second recounts the migrations of the indigenous population of the Peloponnese during the invasions and installation of the Avars and the reestablishment of Byzantine imperial and ecclesiastical authority there under Nikephoros I (802–811, in his fourth year). This part, the more interesting and controversial of the two, is based on unknown sources; it is here, in its account of the measures of Nikephoros, that it abruptly and without explanation refers to Slavs rather than Avars. It has been suggested that this part is based on a *sigillion* issued by Nikephoros I in 805/6,<sup>9</sup> but we will point to a different type of source altogether.

<sup>7</sup> For Avars and Slavs in the sources relating to Greece in this period see F. Curta, “Barbarians in Dark-Age Greece: Slavs or Avars?” in T. Stepanov and V. Vachkova (eds.), *Civitas Divino-Humana in Honorem Annorum LX Georgii Bakalov* (Sofia 2004) 513–550 (though we do not accept his late dating of the *Chronicle* at 535–538, which he seems to have abandoned in *The Edinburgh History*, 253–255).

<sup>8</sup> For these sources see Kislinger, *Regionalgeschichte* 25–29.

<sup>9</sup> O. Kresten, “Zur Echtheit des Sigillion des Kaisers Nikephoros I. für Patras,” *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* 19 (1977) 17–78.

It is believed that the goal of the text is to bolster the claims of the see of Patras over that of Lakedaimon in the face of possibly competing claims by Corinth.<sup>10</sup> Its narrative has accordingly been reverse-engineered to lead up to and thereby ‘explain’ that configuration. Specifically, just as the Peloponnese was ecclesiastically divided between two metropolitan bishoprics, Patras and Corinth,<sup>11</sup> the *Chronicle* gives the two parts of the Peloponnese quite different histories (which is historically implausible in itself). We summarize its claims. The Avars expelled the “noble” (or rather “indigenous”) Greek peoples<sup>12</sup> of the Peloponnese and settled the land. The people of Patras fled to Reggio di Calabria, the Argives to the island Orobe,<sup>13</sup> and the Corinthians to Aigina. The Lakonians divided into groups, with some going to Sicily (becoming the Demenitai), others founding Monemvasia (in an inaccessible location by the coast), where they lived with their own bishop, while others still, the shepherds and peasants, moved to nearby rough terrain and became the Tzakones. Thus the Avars held the Peloponnese for 218 years (the exact dates are specified, between the reigns of Maurikios and Nikephoros). The Avars then mysteriously disappear from the narrative. We are told that the eastern part of the Peloponnese was kept “pure” (καθαρεῖον), free of Slavs from Corinth to Malea, that is, basically the territory that was under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Corinth. It should be noted that this is possibly the only

<sup>10</sup> Kislinger, *Regionalgeschichte* 106; Curta, *The Edinburgh History* 253–255.

<sup>11</sup> I. Anagnostakis, “Μονεμβασία – Λακεδαίμων: Για μια τυπολογία αντιπαλότητας και για την Κυριακή αργία στις πόλεις,” in T. Kioussoulou (ed.), *Οι βυζαντινές πόλεις, 8<sup>ος</sup>–15<sup>ος</sup> αιώνας: Προοπτικές της έρευνας και νέες ερμηνευτικές προσεγγίσεις* (Rethymno 2012) 101–137, here 104.

<sup>12</sup> J. Koder, “Arethas von Kaisareia und die sogenannte Chronik von Monembasia,” *JÖBG* 25 (1976) 75–80, here 75–76, proposed, on basis of the Arethas scholion (on which see below), to emend εὐγενῆ ἑλληνικὰ ἔθνη to ἐγγενῆ ἑλληνικὰ ἔθνη.

<sup>13</sup> For the debate over this see Anagnostakis, *Βυζαντιακά* 17 (1997) 319–320 n.94.

passage in Byzantine literature which refers to “purity” in this way, i.e., the absence of non-Romans. The text also says about that region that a Byzantine governor was regularly appointed there. One of those governors, a certain Skleros, then defeated the Slavs in the other part of the Peloponnese (the western one), which enabled Nikephoros I to restore the cities there. That emperor brought the people of Patras back and gave their bishop the rank of metropolitan. He restored the city of Lakedaimon, though this was settled not by the original inhabitants but by “a mixed group,” including Kapheroi (whoever they were),<sup>14</sup> Thrakesians (from the theme in Asia Minor), Armenians, and many others. Lakedaimon was given a bishop who was subordinate to Patras, as were Methone and Korone.<sup>15</sup> We are also twice told that Nikephoros converted the barbarians.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, we are presented with a picture according to which the see of Corinth governed those regions whose population was indigenous (including the Lakedaimonians who founded Monemvasia) while the see of Patras governed those regions that included defeated barbarians as well as the mixed settlers of Nikephoros—with the crucial provision that the people of Patras themselves were descended from indigenous refugees. Continuity is the paradigm for Patras, rupture for Lakedaimon. This division is, of course, too schematic to be realistic. But it made sense as a kind of etiology (or a *patria*) to the tenth-century author, who is now generally identified as Arethas,<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> For the proposed explanations see Kislinger, *Regionalgeschichte* 45 n.352.

<sup>15</sup> For the possible refoundation of Korone by Nikephoros see I. Anagnostakis, “Μετονομασίες – μετοικεσίες: Η περίπτωση της βυζαντινής Κορώνης,” in *Πρακτικά επιστημονικού συνεδρίου (5–7 Αυγούστου): Ομηρική Αίπεια – Αρχαία Κορώνη – Πεταλίδι* (Petalidi 2009) 45–69, here 62–64.

<sup>16</sup> The details of this process, which undoubtedly happened, elude us. For theories see J. Herrin, “Aspects of the Process of Hellenization in the Early Middle Ages,” *BSA* 68 (1973) 113–126; and M. Dunn, “Evangelisation or Repentance? The Re-Christianisation of the Peloponnese in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries,” *Studies in Church History* 14 (1977) 71–86.

<sup>17</sup> Ever since Koder, *JÖBG* 25 (1976) 75–80. A relationship was already

the bishop of Kaisareia in Kappadokia and himself a native of Patras (ca. 850–after 932). Our findings will strengthen that identification, without, however, making it conclusive. It is still possible that the *Chronicle* was written by someone else in Arethas' circle and so our references to Arethas as the author will include this possibility.<sup>18</sup>

Obviously, we are not in a position to appreciate all the nuances of this text's politics, though the latter certainly involved the emphatic subordination in the present of “mixed” (σύμμικτος), “impure” Lakedaïmon to “indigenous” (ἐγγενής), “pure” Patras, according to the words used in the *Chronicle* (καθαρεύειν) to describe regions inhabited by “Greeks” and not barbarians. We can, at least, identify the elements from which Arethas built up the narrative. One of the ancient authors whom he owned and commented on was Pausanias. He even put his name by Pausanias' discussion of Patras (in Achaia) in 7.21.10, in a scholion that he added to his own manuscript of Pausanias: περὶ Πατρῶν, τοῦ τῆς ἐμῆς γενέσεως Ἀρέθα ἀρχιεπισκόπου Καισαρείας τόπου χωρογραφία.<sup>19</sup> Arethas

---

postulated by S. Kyriakides, *Βυζαντινὰ Μελέται VI Οἱ Σλάβοι ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ* (Thessaloniki 1947) 80, 92–93; see also Kresten, *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* 19 (1977) 68, 71–72; Kislinger, *Regionalgeschichte* 40, 105–108; V. von Falkenhausen, “Arethas in Italien?” *Byzantinoslavica* 56 (1995) 359–366, here 360.

<sup>18</sup> A similar conclusion has been proposed for the editor of the Byzantine *Chrestomathy* and scholia on Strabo, which reveal a familiarity with the Peloponnese and the region of Patras in particular ca. 900: *Chrest. Strab.* 7.37, 47, 8.21 (*GGM* II 572, 574, 583); A. Diller, “The Scholia on Strabo,” *Traditio* 10 (1954) 29–50, here 48. Arethas may have been the editor of the scholia, or else someone in Photios' circle: Diller 32, 44–50.

<sup>19</sup> F. Spiro, “Ein Leser des Pausanias,” in W. von Hartel (ed.), *Festschrift Johannes Vahlen* (Berlin 1900) 129–138, here 136, and *Pausaniae Graeciae descriptio* III (Leipzig 1903) 222; S. Kougeas, *Ὁ Καισαρείας Ἀρέθας καὶ τὸ ἔργον αὐτοῦ* (Athens 1913). For the scholia on Pausanias and the role of Arethas in them see A. Diller, “Pausanias in the Middle Ages,” *TAPA* 87 (1956) 84–97, here 86; M. Casevitz, “Sur les scholies à Pausanias et les fragments de Pausanias,” in D. Knoepfler and M. Piérart (eds.), *Éditer, traduire, commenter Pausanias en l'an 2000* (Neuchâtel/Geneva 2001) 33–42. Many

knew Pausanias well enough to comment on his account of Patras and supplement it with epigraphical material from the ancient remains of the city. Now, if we turn to Pausanias' general account of the peoples of the Peloponnese, at the beginning of Book 5 (Eleia: 1–2) we find a narrative that presents all the basic structural elements of the tale of migrations in the *Chronicle*, which we are proposing that Arethas used as a model to tell the history of the same place in the centuries before his own time.

Specifically, Pausanias claims that the autochthonous peoples of the Peloponnese were two, the Arkadians and Achaians (remember that Arethas was an “Achaian”). But then the Dorians arrived from Oite in the north and expelled the Achaians (just as the Avars do in the *Chronicle*). The Achaians, however, did not leave the Peloponnese, according to Pausanias; instead, they expelled (ἐκβαλόντες) the Ionians and took the coast (Αἰγιαλόν) from them, which, he adds, is today called Achaia (just as some Lakedaimonians in the *Chronicle* take to the coast, αἰγιαλόν, when the Avars similarly expelled the “indigenous” Greeks: ἐκβαλόντες). Arkadia, then, is the only region that has kept its original population, for the rest of the Peloponnese is full of the newcomers (just as in the *Chronicle*, the Corinthia and the eastern coast of the Peloponnese down to Malea are free of Slavs, while the rest of the Peloponnese is taken over by the settlers). The Corinthians, Pausanias concludes, are the most recent, and “in my time” they have held their land for 217 years by command of the emperor (just as in the *Chronicle* 218 years had passed before the cities were resettled at the em-

---

scholia in MSS. of Pausanias have at times been attributed to Arethas, but we must be cautious, as many of them are probably later additions. There is no doubt about the one quoted above, or the one on Paus. 5.16.2, on an inscription that Arethas saw on a column in Patras: εἶδον ἐγὼ ἐν Πάτραις τῆς Πελοποννήσου ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐρειπίοις τῶν παλαιῶν οἰκοδομημάτων ἐπὶ κίονος κεφαλίδος ταύτην τὴν γραφὴν. See Spiro, in *Festschrift Johannes Vahlen* 137, and *Pausaniae Graeciae descriptio* III 221; Kougeas 3; A. Rizakis, *Achaie II La cité de Patras: épigraphie et histoire* (Athens 1998) 259–261; Casevitz 34.



peror's command).<sup>20</sup> As we see, the parallels between the *Chronicle* and Pausanias are not only structural: they are verbal and factual too.

Another important element in the relationship between the *Chronicle* and Pausanias, which has not been observed, is the emphasis given in both texts to the etymology of place-names and ethnonyms. In his account of Achaian prehistory (7.1–9), Pausanias uses terms related to naming over eleven times. This emphasis on genealogical history based on names, or rather name-changes, and etymology is observable also in the *Chronicle* (e.g. the Dementai, Monemvasia, and the Tzakones).<sup>21</sup>

To produce the backbone of the second half of the *Chronicle*, Arethas has broken up and recombined the narrative elements of Pausanias 5.1–2. Only the element of the return from exile is not there (a not insignificant part, as we will find below). It is not just that Pausanias offers the basic elements: he is talking about the exact same places. Moreover, there is one aspect of Arethas' narrative which points to an ancient source, but which scholars have overlooked because they (erroneously) take it for granted. The Byzantines did not consider themselves to be “a Hellenic people,” but Romans.<sup>22</sup> In talking about the “indigenous” Hellenic races of the Peloponnese, the author of the *Chronicle* (and Arethas in his marginal comment: see below) reveals an antiquarian cast of mind: autochthony in a Greek context is precisely the concern of Pausanias in Book 5.1–2. But there is more. Both narratives inaugurate periods that historians of Greece have come to call Dark Ages, one with the

<sup>20</sup> Pausanias' 217 years reach from 44 B.C. to 173 A.D.: A. Diller, “The Authors Named Pausanias,” *TAPA* 86 (1955) 268–279, here 268. For Arethas' use of Pausanias' number see I. Anagnostakis, “Περιούσιος λαός,” in Kountoura-Galake, *Οι σκοτεινοί αιώνες* 325–346, here 345–346.

<sup>21</sup> Y. Lafond, in Y. Lafond and M. Casevitz, *Pausanias: Description de la Grèce VII* (Paris 2000) xxiii–xxvi; Koder, *JÖBG* 25 (1976) 77.

<sup>22</sup> A. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge 2007), passim, and 117–118 for the *Chronicle*.

coming of the Dorians and another with the coming of the Avars-Slavs.<sup>23</sup> It is interesting that Arethas should use that precise parallel.

To identify Arethas as the author of the *Chronicle*, scholars rely in part on a marginal comment that he wrote next to the chronicle of Nikephoros in the MS. *Moscow Gr.* 231 (135<sup>v</sup>), dated to 931/2. This scholion is basically a long extract from the second part of the *Chronicle*, regarding the migration and return of the Hellenic people.<sup>24</sup> But there are some interesting additions. Arethas adds more antiquarian ethnonyms to the mix of invaded peoples: the Ainianes and the Lokrians, both Epiknemidian and Ozolian. It is as if Arethas was building upon an older text of his. He also refers to Patras in a way that has no exact parallel in the *Chronicle*, when he calls it τὸ ἀρχαῖον πόλισμα τῶν Πατρῶν (whereas in the *Chronicle* it is a πόλις and a μητρόπολις). As it happens, just a few lines above the passage of the *Description of Greece* that Arethas annotated with his name and rank (7.21.10) we find Pausanias' only reference to ἀρχαῖα πολίσματα (a rare expression in ancient literature anyway), here in connection with Patras (7.21.6). And if we read more of what Pausanias had to say about Patras, as Arethas had done, we find our source for the theme of "return by the emperor's command."

Specifically, Pausanias says that at the time of the Gallic invasion of Greece the people of Patras had to abandon their

<sup>23</sup> I. Anagnostakis, "Οἱ Πελοποννησιακοὶ σκοτεινοὶ χρόνοι: Το σλαβικό πρόβλημα. Μεταμορφώσεις της Πελοποννήσου ἢ της ἔρευνας;" in *Οἱ Μεταμορφώσεις της Πελοποννήσου (4<sup>ης</sup>–15<sup>ης</sup> αἰ.)* (Athens 2000) 19–34, here 20.

<sup>24</sup> S. Kougeas, "Ἐπὶ τοῦ καλουμένου Χρονικοῦ τῆς Μονεμβασίας," *Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων* 9 (1912) 473–480, here 474–475; P. Charanis, "The Chronicle of Monemvasia and the Question of the Slavonic Settlements in Greece," *DOP* 5 (1950) 141–166, here 152–153 (text and English transl.); L. G. Westerink, "Marginalia by Arethas in Moscow Greek Ms. 231," *Byzantion* 42 (1972) 196–244, here 241; also Dujčev, *Cronaca* 24–25 (text and Italian transl.); Kislinger, *Regionalgeschichte* 37–40 (text and German transl.); see also H. Kalligas, *Byzantine Monemvasia: The Sources* (Monemvasia 1990) 16–18.

city. But Augustus (like Nikephoros after him in the *Chronicle*) gathered them back to Patras from the other *πολίσιματα* where they had settled and (again like Nikephoros) granted them special privileges: only they would be “free” among the Achaians “and he gave them other rights, those which the Romans grant to their colonists” (7.18.6–7).<sup>25</sup>

Arethas found in Pausanias the tools with which to craft the narrative that he wanted. This does not mean that every claim in the *Chronicle* is invented, for real events can be represented in such antiquarian garb. The move of Patras to Reggio should not be lightly dismissed.<sup>26</sup> But, on the other hand, we still have no guarantee of historicity, and the present argument here shifts the balance toward literary invention, or at least toward the literary elaboration of the structural logic shaping the presentation of events. Arethas was effectively creating new civic identities out of ancient associations along the lines of origin, continuity vs. rupture, and ethnicity (pure vs. impure, mixed vs. autochthonous). Ultimately, these served the interests of the elites in the areas in question.<sup>27</sup> If only we knew exactly how.

## 2. The legend of Danelis in the *Vita Basilii*

Among the many extraordinary tales told in the biography of the emperor Basileios I (reigned 867–886) that was authorized (though not authored) by his grandson Konstantinos VII Porphyrogenetos is the story of his relationship with the widow Danelis (or Danielis) of Patras, named after her husband

<sup>25</sup> For Augustus’ refoundation of Patras and its significance see S. Alcock, *Graecia Capta: The Landscapes of Roman Greece* (Cambridge 1993). There are many problems in Pausanias’ account of the abandonment of Patras after the Gallic invasion, but a discussion would be too long.

<sup>26</sup> For possible confirmation in the signatures of the Council of Nikaia II see Herrin, *BSA* 68 (1973) 118 n.31; also Falkenhausen, *Byzantinoslavica* 56 (1995) 359–366. For the relocation of the Cypriots to Nea Ioustianopolis (by Kyzikos) in this period and their return see D. M. Metcalf, *Byzantine Cyprus, 491–1191* (Nicosia 2009) 450–455.

<sup>27</sup> Anagnostakis, in *Οι βυζαντινές πόλεις* 103–105.

Daniel.<sup>28</sup> It is a romance in three acts. Act I: Basileios when he is still an up-and-coming groom forms an association with her and her son in the Peloponnese (11); Act II: she then visits him with a magnificent retinue at the court when he is emperor (74–76); and Act III: after Basileios' death, she visits his son Leon VI, makes him heir to her vast estate, and he then sends an official who settles her affairs after her death (76–77).<sup>29</sup>

Neither Daniel (the husband), Danelis, nor their son Ioannes are attested independently of the *Vita Basilii*.<sup>30</sup> Historians, starved for information about the socioeconomic conditions and ethnic makeup of the ninth-century Peloponnese, have understandably reached out with both hands for the detailed information provided in the text about the widow's vast estates and her legions of slaves and dependents.<sup>31</sup> And, as if the fictions in the original text were not enough, even ethnic attributes have been invented and supplied, such as that she represented a “quasi-independent” Slavic lordship that was slowly coming under Byzantine authority.<sup>32</sup> One might as well

<sup>28</sup> For the variant spellings of her name see B. Koutava-Delivoria, “Qui était Daniélis?” *Byzantion* 71 (2001) 98–109, here 101–104.

<sup>29</sup> We are using the new edition by I. Ševčenko, *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur liber quo Vita Basilii imperatoris amplectitur* (Berlin 2011). For the present analysis see also I. Anagnostakis, “Το επεισόδιο της Δανηλίδας: Πληροφορίες καθημερινού βίου ή μυθοπλαστικά στοιχεία;” in C. Angelidi (ed.), *Η καθημερινή ζωή στο Βυζάντιο: Τομές και συνέχειες στην έλληνοβυζαντινή και ρωμαϊκή παράδοση* (Athens 1989) 375–390.

<sup>30</sup> R.-J. Lilie et al., *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit* (Berlin/New York 1999–) I 392 (Danielis #1215), 396 (Daniel #1229), and II 362–363 (Ioannes #3228).

<sup>31</sup> E.g. W. Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780–842* (Stanford 1988) 366; J. Lefort, “The Rural Economy, Seventh-Twelfth Centuries,” in A. E. Laiou (ed.), *The Economic History of Byzantium I* (Washington 2002) 231–310, here 241; and see below.

<sup>32</sup> M. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy* (Cambridge 1985) 206–207. Also as “an *archontissa* of a Peloponnesian Sklavinia”: I. Ševčenko, “Re-Reading Constantine Porphyrogenitus,” in J. Shepard and S. Franklin (eds.), *Byzantine Diplomacy* (Aldershot 1992) 167–195, here 192–193. Against such excessively precise identifications: I. Anagnostakis, “Οὐκ εἰσὶν ἐμὰ τὰ

identify her as a Jew, based on the names in her family (her grandson, in Act III, is named Daniel).<sup>33</sup>

It is, of course, well understood that the *Vita Basilii* is a work of dynastic propaganda that culls themes, motifs, and images from ancient literature in order to make the murderous upstart Basileios seem like the ‘Chosen One’. Not only is his genealogy traced back to the Parthian Arsakids, Alexander the Great, and Constantine the Great,<sup>34</sup> a number of passages, especially toward the beginning, replay episodes from the lives of Cyrus the Great, Alexander, and others. All this business about Basileios’ origins was dismissed in contemporary sources already as “fictions”—πλασματώδης ιστορία and πλάσμα τοιόνδε.<sup>35</sup> Gyula Moravcsik dedicated a long article to unraveling these fictions, but did not impeach the tale of Danelis, perhaps accepting its historicity.<sup>36</sup> Speaking as we are of raveling and unraveling, one aspect of the story that has captured the imagination of modern historians is the allusive reference to the “richly variegated Sidonian fabrics” that Danelis brought to Basileios (in Act II) and the “large woolen carpets” that she

---

γράμματα’. Ιστορία και ιστορίες στον Πορφυρογέννητο,” *Symmeikta* 13 (1999) 97–139, here 105–106 n.13.

<sup>33</sup> For this possibility see I. Anagnostakis, “Η Σολομώντεια αμφιθυμία των πρώτων Μακεδόνων αυτοκρατόρων και οι αποκαλυπτικές καταβολές της,” in A. Lampropoulou and K. Tsiknakis (eds.), *Η εβραϊκή παρουσία στον ελληνικό χώρο (4<sup>ος</sup>–19<sup>ος</sup> αιώνας)* (Athens 2008) 39–60, here 55–56.

<sup>34</sup> *Vita Basilii* 2–3.

<sup>35</sup> Respectively: Niketas David Paphlagon, *Life of Ignatios* in *PG* 105:487–574, here 565–568; new edition and transl. by A. Smithies, *Nicetas David: The Life of Patriarch Ignatius* (Washington 2013) 118–121; and pseudo-Symeon *Chronicle* in I. Bekker, *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus* (Bonn 1838) 689.

<sup>36</sup> G. Moravcsik, “Sagen und Legenden über Kaiser Basileios I,” *DOP* 15 (1961) 59–126, here 96–97; for the generic (mostly panegyric) aspects of this work see L. van Hoof, “Among Christian Emperors: The *Vita Basilii* by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus,” *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 54 (2002) 163–183, who, we believe, downplays the text’s inventiveness.

dedicated to the Nea Ekklesia built by Basileios.<sup>37</sup> On the sole basis of this passage, whole textile industries have been postulated for ninth-century Patras,<sup>38</sup> though the first phrase at least is a direct quotation of Homer, *Iliad* 6.289–290.

In a nutshell, Act I replays (with variations) Alexander’s visit to Kandake (in Ethiopia) in the *Alexander Romance*, while Act II replays the Queen of Sheba’s visit to Solomon. The stories match well even in their details. The Peloponnese is also the southernmost land that could be accommodated in the quasi-historical tableau of the *Vita Basilii*.

Act I: Basileios’ master Theophilos (Theophilites) is sent to Patras by the emperor Michael III and visits the church of St. Andreas; a certain monk there does not greet him, despite his status and retinue. Basileios visits the church later whereupon the monk rises and “addresses him with an acclamation usually offered to emperors” (11.16–17). Witnesses report this to Danelis, who summons the monk and interrogates him; she acts like a “ruler” in that land (ὡσπερ τις δέσποινα τῶν ἐκεῖ βασιλίσσα, 75.11). When Theophilos leaves, Basileios stays behind because of an illness, and when he recovers he is summoned by Danelis who gives him gifts (gold and thirty slaves, in the expectation of a future return), and asks only that he become a spiritual brother of her son Ioannes, thereby making her his mother.<sup>39</sup> She then reveals his destiny to him and asks that he remember her at that time, which he promises to do. With the money that she gives him he purchases lands in Macedonia (11.60–64).

The basic narrative elements are taken from the *Alexander*

<sup>37</sup> *Vita Basilii* 74.31 and 76.6. For the church see P. Magdalino, “Observations on the New Ekklesia of Basil I,” *JÖBG* 37 (1987) 51–64.

<sup>38</sup> S. Runciman, “The Widow Danielis,” *Études dédiées à la mémoire d’André M. Andreadès* (Athens 1940) 425–431; Curta, *The Edinburgh History* 153–157, who reads the gifts of Act II into the settlement of Act III, postulating “workshops” that are not in the text.

<sup>39</sup> For this aspect see C. Rapp, “Ritual Brotherhood in Byzantium,” *Traditio* 52 (1997) 285–326.

*Romance*. When Alexander visits the widow-queen Kandake (who lives in spectacular opulence), he does so in the guise of an adjunct of the king, who is played by his friend Ptolemaios, but Kandake knows that he is really the king. She keeps this a secret for a while, before announcing it to him.<sup>40</sup> Just as Basileios befriended Danelis' son Ioannes, Alexander befriends the son of Kandake, Kandaules, and helps him to rescue his wife. Kandake, moreover, wishes that Alexander were her own son (εἶθε ἦς μου καὶ σὺ υἱός). The passage describing the gifts that both she and her son Kandaules<sup>41</sup> give to Alexander (gold and thirty slaves) is the source of the *Vita Basilii* (11.45–47): compare the *Romance*

δῶρα πολύτιμα ἔν τε σκεύεσι καὶ ἱματίοις διαχρύσοις, καὶ λόγῳ  
τῶν ἐτησίων φόρων τάλαντα τριακόσια ... χρυσίον ... ἐπιδοὺς  
αὐτῷ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ... παιδῶν ἄνδρας τριάκοντα

to the *Vita Basilii*

δέδωκεν γὰρ αὐτῷ καὶ χρυσὸν ἱκανὸν καὶ ἀνδράποδα πρὸς  
ὑπηρεσίαν τριάκοντα καὶ ἐν ἱματισμῷ καὶ διαφόροις εἶδεσι  
πλοῦτον πολύν.

A textual, and thereby literary, relationship is an absolute certainty, which means that secondary elements of the story can also be attributed to the *Romance*. For example, the political acumen that Byzantine historians now ascribe to the Peloponnesian magnate is really just a feature of her literary prototype.

The *Chronicle* of Georgios the Monk, which the authors of the

<sup>40</sup> We use these variant versions of the tale, which occurs in the third book of the *Romance*: A = G. Kroll, *Historia Alexandri Magni* (Berlin 1926) 3.18–24 (pp.115–123); β = L. Bergson, *Der griechische Alexanderroman: Rezension β* (Stockholm 1965) 3.18–24 (pp.152–167); λ = H. van Thiel, *Die Rezension λ des Pseudo-Kallisthenes* (Bonn 1959) 3.18 (pp.39–51, 57–65); ε = J. Trunpf, *Anonymi Byzantini: Vita Alexandri regis Macedonum* (Stuttgart 1974) 40–43 (pp. 148–166). For an English translation of a compiled version see R. Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance* (London 1991).

<sup>41</sup> This supplementary element, namely that Kandaules also gives gifts, reinforces the literary connection between the two pairs; *pace* Ševčenko, in *Byzantine Diplomacy* 193 n.68.

*Vita Basilii* knew well and to which they may well have turned for stories rich in historical-symbolic significance, devotes the first part of its entry on Alexander to his visit to Jerusalem, where the high priest tells him the prophecy of Daniel, namely that the Macedonians would conquer the Persians. This is taken from Josephos, but it, in turn, may have been the source for the name of Danelis, who also prophesies the rise of Basileios, the ‘Macedonian’ emperor.<sup>42</sup> Not coincidentally, perhaps, the very next scene in Georgios’ entry is Alexander’s visit to Kandake, at the end of which he promises “to keep you and your sons safe and also to preserve your kingdom and take you as a wife.”<sup>43</sup> Likewise, in the *Vita*, Danelis asks that he love them thereafter and he promises that “if this [her prophecy] were to come to pass, he would proclaim her sovereign over all of that land, insofar as possible.”<sup>44</sup> Both heroes then depart, gold in hand. Fulfilling the wish of Kandake, Basileios later (in Act II) bestowed upon Danelis the title of “Mother of the Emperor” (75.3).

Act II: the story of the Queen of Sheba (Saba, in Arabia Felix, modern Yemen) was confused later with those of Semiramis and Kandake,<sup>45</sup> but the ghost-writers of Konstantinos VII relied mostly on the Old Testament and Josephos.<sup>46</sup> There is no reason to give here an exhaustive list of textual parallels. The *Vita* exaggerates her royal status, marked by the retinue of 300 young men to carry her litter from the Peloponnese to

<sup>42</sup> Georgios *Chronicle* pp.25–33 de Boor, based on Jos. *Aḡ* 11.8.

<sup>43</sup> Georgios *Chronicle* pp.33–34. In general, in the *Vetusta* and later versions of the *Romance*, Kandake is called “his mother” and Alexander “her son”: Version A 3.23 (p.122); and Version e 43 (p.166). See Anagnostakis, in *Ἡ καθημερινή ζωή* 384–385.

<sup>44</sup> *Vita Basilii* 11.54–58; likewise in *Romance* Version e 43 (p.166).

<sup>45</sup> J. Deramey, “La reine de Saba,” *RHR* 29 (1894) 296–328, here 326–327; S. Kraufs, “Die Königin von Saba in den byzantinischen Chroniken,” *BZ* 11 (1902) 120–131; J. Trumpf, “Alexander und die Königin von Saba,” *Athenaeum* 44 (1966) 307–308.

<sup>46</sup> 1 Kings 10:1–13; 2 Chronicles 9:1–12; Jos. *Aḡ* 8.6.5–6.



Constantinople (ten of them at a time), her magnificent gifts, and a reception in the Magnaura, which is done by the emperors “whenever they receive some great and famous leader of a foreign nation” (*Vita Basilii* 74.9–21). Danelis’ departure echoes that of the foreign queen: “she went back again to her own country as if she were the ruling queen of those dwelling there” (75.10–12). The details of her visit are also elaborated from previous sources. The 100 pretty eunuchs (embellished in the *Vita* with an allusion to *Il.* 2.469–471)<sup>47</sup> and the *skiastriai* women (weavers and embroiderers?) whom she brought to the court probably allude to the riddle posed by the Queen of Sheba to Solomon in Georgios the Monk: she brought many handsome, similarly dressed boys and girls and challenged him to identify their gender.<sup>48</sup> Then, the numbers and functions of her vast retinue (300 slaves to carry her litter, and the 100 eunuchs and 100 women) are the same as those of the slaves sent by Kandake to Alexander.<sup>49</sup> Her litter is based on that of Kandake too, a Wagnerian extravaganza the size of a house.<sup>50</sup> Danelis pays her respects to Basileios’ Nea Ekklesia just as the Queen does to the Temple of Solomon, which serves to reinforce the narrative parallel between Basileios and Solomon that the text is trying to build up.<sup>51</sup> In fact, pseudo-Symeon tells us that Basileios buried a statue of Solomon in the church’s

<sup>47</sup> Identified in I. Anagnostakis and T. Papamastorakis, “Ο μοναχός του αγίου Ανδρέα στην Πάτρα και η απεικόνισή του στο χειρόγραφο του Σκυλίτζη,” in V. Konti (ed.), *Ο μοναχισμός στην Πελοπόννησο, 4<sup>ος</sup>–15<sup>ος</sup> αι.* (Athens 2004) 63–85, here 75 for eunuchs surrounding lords like flies around an enclosure; see also C. Messis, *Les eunuques à Byzance: entre réalité et imaginaire* (Paris 2014), ch. 5 (forthcoming).

<sup>48</sup> Georgios *Chronicle* pp.200–201; Kraufs, *BZ* 11 (1902) 125.

<sup>49</sup> Version A 3.18 (p.116) and Version λ 3.18 (pp.41–42).

<sup>50</sup> Version A 3.22 (p.120) and Version λ 3.21 (p.46).

<sup>51</sup> This position was adopted and developed further by A. Markopoulos, “An Anonymous Laudatory Poem in Honor of Basil I,” *DOP* 46 (1992) 225–232; and S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912): Politics and People* (Leiden 1997) 129–132.

foundations.<sup>52</sup>

It has been shown that Byzantine apocalyptic texts of a possible Egyptian or Syriac origin interweave elements of Biblical mythology (especially regarding David and Solomon) with the pseudo-Kallisthenic tales about Alexander. From the seventh century on, these texts circulated widely in Byzantium and recount the tale of one Houseth, a widow-queen of the south who is regarded as the true mother of Alexander the Great and a new Queen of Sheba; she travels to New Jerusalem (Byzantium) with her riches and marries king Byzas. Therefore, the *Vita Basilii* was not without precedent in depicting a rich widow compiled from Biblical and pseudo-Kallisthenic references who visits Constantinople bringing rich gifts fit for a king and attended by a huge retinue (always thirty in number but here thirty thousand).<sup>53</sup>

In sum, the story of Danelis was woven out of ancient materials in order to reinforce the Alexandrian and Solomonic credentials of the dynasty's founder. Most of the detailed information that historians use to discuss Danelis' socio-economic importance is not 'information' at all. Does this mean that Danelis was a fictitious character through-and-through?<sup>54</sup> Not necessarily. There is still Act III: Danelis came to Constantinople again under Leon VI and made him her heir (her son had died), asking for an official to be sent to inventory her property. Section 77 describes how the *protospatharios* Zenobios carried this out on the basis of her will, though there is still considerable rhetorical exaggeration of her wealth here.<sup>55</sup> We

<sup>52</sup> Symeon *Chronicle* 132.14, ed. S. Wahlgren, *Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae Chronicon* (Berlin/New York 2006) 265; cf. pseudo-Symeon *Chronicle* p.692. See Magdalino, *JÖBG* 37 (1987) 58–60.

<sup>53</sup> Anagnostakis, in *Η εβραϊκή παρουσία* 46–52; A. Lolos, *Die Apokalypse des Ps.-Methodios* (Meisenheim am Glan 1976) 84–89. For the general diffusion of these tales see P. J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley 1985), esp. 34–36, 73–84.

<sup>54</sup> This is what Koutava-Delivoria, *Byzantion* 71 (2001) 98–109, takes Anagnostakis, in *Η καθημερινή ζωή* 375–390, to be arguing.

<sup>55</sup> For Act III see esp. Curta, *The Edinburgh History* 153–157.

are closer to ‘historical’ times here and a document is cited (the will). But it is entirely unclear what kind of personal history we may infer based on that little information. The story of Danelis that we have bears as much relation to the truth as a Hollywood film about ancient history. As one of us has written elsewhere, “the social and economic historian cannot respond that, even if the episode is invented, still it must have accorded with the realities of the period to have credibility with the readers of a historical text. For the point of this part of the *Vita* is to highlight the extraordinary career of a future emperor and project his story onto the plane of legend.”<sup>56</sup>

### 3. Interview with a demon: Admiral Adrianos at Monemvasia

The Nea Ekklesia was not only wrapped in Solomonic legend, it was dogged by scandal. In 877 Syracuse was besieged by the Arabs and it fell to them in May of the next year. The Logothete chronicle, which is not a partisan of the dynasty, claims that news of the siege was brought to the emperor but that the men of the fleet had been set to work digging the foundations for the church, and so the fleet was late and the city lost.<sup>57</sup> And a portentous occurrence: they placed in the church the statue of a bishop holding a rod with an entwined serpent. When the emperor went in he placed his finger in the serpent’s mouth only to be bitten by a real snake that lived there. Basileios was healed only with difficulty.<sup>58</sup> None of this is in *Vita Basilii*, which clearly engages in damage control: the sailors were set to work on the church to prevent them from becoming idle, and the fleet was sent out “immediately” (εὐθέως) when the news about Syracuse arrived.<sup>59</sup> The version in Symeon, then, was dominant. The *Vita Basilii* attributes the delay to the

<sup>56</sup> A. Kaldellis, “The Study of Women and Children: Methodological Challenges and New Directions,” in P. Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine World* (London 2010) 61–71, here 63.

<sup>57</sup> Symeon *Chronicle* 132.12 (p.264).

<sup>58</sup> Symeon *Chronicle* 132.14 (p.265).

<sup>59</sup> *Vita Basilii* 68.15–20 and 69.11–12 respectively.

admiral Adrianos, who was sent out with the relief fleet, and relocates the ‘supernatural’ occurrences to the untamed Peloponnese. Specifically, it tells the following tale.<sup>60</sup>

Adrianos set sail but lack of winds forced him to harbor at Hierax near Monemvasia and wait. He was an “indolent” man (ῥαθυμότερος) who did not want to advance by rowing. Meanwhile the Arabs took Syracuse. There was a place called Helos by Monemvasia where a force of demons lived, and the shepherds there would worship them. One day the shepherds heard them saying to each other that the city had been taken. The tale reached Adrianos, who summoned the shepherds, interrogated them, and asked to be taken to these demons. The demons told him that, indeed, the city was lost, but he did not believe them because demons do not have foreknowledge. At this point, the author corrects Adrianos: this was not a case of foreknowledge but only of knowing events that were already past and done with. “For the demons are able, on account of their delicate structure and swift movement, to arrive ahead of the messages sent by human carriers.” Ten days later some refugees confirmed the story, whereupon Adrianos returned to the capital to face the emperor’s wrath. This odd story effectively distracts us from the emperor’s responsibility.

Demons reside in places that resist the orders of the Christian empire, whether these are inhabited by indigenous pagans, rough peasants, unassimilated ethnic newcomers (such as the Slavs in this case), or ancient statues, even in Constantinople. Here we must think of the still partially untamed Slavs mentioned in the parallel Konstantinian text, *De administrando imperio*, “the Ezeritai and Melingoï who were left by Lakedaimonia and Helos ... on either side of the tall mountain called Pentadakylos.”<sup>61</sup> Helos on the coast of the Laconian Gulf is

<sup>60</sup> *Vita Basilii* 69–70. For the following analysis, see also I. Anagnostakis, “Το επεισόδιο του Αδριανού: ‘Πρόγνωσις’ και ‘τελεσθέντων δήλωσις,’” in N. G. Moschonas (ed.), *Ἡ ἐπικοινωνία στὸ Βυζάντιο* (Athens 1993) 195–226.

<sup>61</sup> *De admin. imp.* 50.15–18 (pp.232–233 Moravcsik/Jenkins). We do not

mentioned by ancient authors: Homer, Thucydides, and Strabo.<sup>62</sup> Let us not assume, however, that these untamed elements, namely the shepherds of the tale, must have been Slavic. The same chapter of *De administrando imperio* refers to the inhabitants of these regions, especially Maïne, “who are not of the race of the Slavs, but of the ancient Romans, who even today are called Hellenes on account of their former idolatry ... They were baptized and became Christians during the reign of the blessed Basileios.”<sup>63</sup> The ethnic and religious makeup of this region seems to have been complex.

Genesios, whose *Reigns of the Emperors* is based on the same sources as Theophanes Continuatus and on the *Vita Basilii* itself, gives a variant of the tale.<sup>64</sup> He calls Adrianos “noble” (ἄνδρα γενναῖον) and has the news brought to him by a notable. This man told him about the demons and his farm at Helos, eight miles from Hierax (surely incorrect). In this version, the demons claim to have been present at the fall of the city, and it is fifteen days until their claim is corroborated. Genesios says that “these sorts of predictions by local spirits—or rather their knowledge of events that have already transpired”—lasted until the reign of Leon VI (886–912). This is not a long time (at most 35 years), but it refers us at least to local oral traditions as the source for this story.

The story of Adrianos and the demons has a defensive

---

know exactly where Helos was. Pentadaktylos is the Byzantine name of (ancient and modern) Taygetos.

<sup>62</sup> Homer *Il.* 2.584; Thuc. 4.54.4; Strab. 8.3.12.

<sup>63</sup> *De admin. imp.* 50.71–75; on this passage see I. Anagnostakis, “Ἡ θέσις των ειδωλολατρών στο Βυζάντιο: Ἡ περίπτωση των ‘Ελλήνων’ του Πορφυρογέννητου,” in C. A. Maltezou (ed.), *Οἱ περιθωριακοὶ στὸ Βυζάντιο* (Athens 1993) 25–47, and in *Ἡ ἐπικοινωνία στὸ Βυζάντιο* 211–213; Kalligas, *Byzantine Monemvasia* 72–83; Anagnostakis, in *Οἱ βυζαντινὲς πόλεις* 107; Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium* 116.

<sup>64</sup> Genesios 4.33; ed. A. Lesmueller-Werner and I. Thurn, *Iosephi Genesii Regum libri quattuor* (Berlin/New York 1978); transl. A. Kaldellis, *Genesios: On the Reigns of the Emperors* (Canberra 1998).

quality, and is engaged in misdirection on behalf of Basileios. But it may also have a deeper narrative core. The story associates Lakedaimon and Sicily through demonic traffic and communication. We saw above that the *Chronicle of Monemvasia* says that the Avar invasions forced part of the inhabitants of Lakedaimon to flee to Monemvasia and part to flee to Sicily, specifically “to Demenna, where they became known as Demenitai instead of Lakedaimonitai.”<sup>65</sup> Demenna is Sicilian Valdemone, which in medieval sources is sometimes called Demonna, i.e. Daimonna, in Greek.<sup>66</sup> The implication of the *Chronicle* is that the name was a corruption of the *daimon* in *Lakedaimon*. The association of Sicily and the area around Aetna with the demon Typhon was very old.<sup>67</sup> In Greek mythology, Typhon was trapped under this mountain by Zeus.<sup>68</sup> Following ancient sources, the *Etymologikon Magnum* gives for Δεμενάι: χωρίον τῆς Σικελίας· ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ δέδετα ὁ Τυφῶν ὑπὸ τὴν Αἴτνην (“a place in Sicily; [named] after the fact that Typhon is bound there under Aitna”),<sup>69</sup> i.e. the place received its name from the fact that Typhon was “bound” there (*[de]demenos* in the Byzantine vernacular). The ‘demonic’ connection persisted, in part because *demenos* (and *desmos*, *katadesmos*) means tied down or enchanted by a demon or magician. Obviously, we are not looking for a possible historical ‘truth’ in all this, only to uncover the mythological associations of these places and

<sup>65</sup> *Chronicle of Monemvasia* 41–46 Lemerle = 95–120 Dujčev.

<sup>66</sup> Sources and studies cited in Anagnostakis, in *Ἡ ἐπικοινωνία* 215–216 n.45; and a thorough investigation now in Kislinger, *Regionalgeschichte*.

<sup>67</sup> Kislinger, *Regionalgeschichte* 110–114. This is based not only on late sources: already in Aischylos a personified Sicilian Aetna (or Thaleia), a daughter of Hephaistos, is the mother of the Palikoi demons of Sicily: Stephanos of Byzantion s.v. Παλική (*TrGF* III 7). So Valdemone may be later, but ancient tradition already postulated demonic associations.

<sup>68</sup> T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth* I (Baltimore 1993) 49–50, a tradition repeated in late sources, e.g. Strabo, Stephanos of Byzantion, Eustathios of Thessalonike, etc.

<sup>69</sup> T. Gaisford, *Etymologicum Magnum* (Oxford 1848) 255; see Kislinger, *Regionalgeschichte* 110–114.

names, even if this mythology concerns only the migrations of the late sixth century that had become legendary already by the ninth century and certainly by the tenth. We are in mythological space.

The reports of these Byzantine migrations to southern Italy, especially to Calabria, contain other ancient associations: Arethas, in his scholion on Nikephoros mentioned above (114), repeats the information in the *Chronicle* about the expulsion of the people of Patras by the invasion of the Slavs and their installation at Reggio di Calabria, and then he goes on to add that the Slavs also expelled the Ainianes and both Lokrian peoples, the Epiknemidian and the Ozolian.<sup>70</sup> These names, of course, are archaizing; for all that Arethas is ostensibly referring to the sixth century A.D., his words evoke the movements to southern Italy in the archaic age of Greece. As it happens, the story of Adrianos alludes to that same era too, or at least it is constructed by recycling ancient narrative motifs. Specifically, it seems to be modeled on the battle of the river Sagra (in Reggio di Calabria, not yet identified, but maybe the present-day river Torbido or Allaro),<sup>71</sup> a battle fought between Epizephyrian Lokri and Kroton in the sixth century B.C.

The story is told conveniently in the *Souda*, because the battle gave rise to a proverb that was used by many of the authors of this period, including Photios and Arethas. In the war with Kroton, Lokri asked for help from Lakedaimon, but none was

<sup>70</sup> Westerink, *Byzantion* 42 (1972) 241.

<sup>71</sup> When St. Elias returns to southern Italy he crosses the Sêkros river, which has been identified with the Sagra: *The Life of St. Elias the Younger* 92; G. R. Taibbi, *Vita di Sant'Elia il Giovane* (Palermo 1962) 92. See Anagnostakis, in *Ἡ ἐπικοινωνία* 223–224 and nn.58–59; S. Caruso, “La ‘χώρα Σαλινῶν’ nell’agiografia storica italo-greca,” in *Ad contemplandam sapientiam: studi di filologia letteratura storia in memoria di Sandro Leanza* (Catanzaro 2004) 55–96, here 67–68 n.71. It is also interesting that chronicle traditions unfriendly to the Macedonian dynasty attribute the fall of Taormina in 902 to the fact that Leon VI had detained the fleet in the capital in order to build churches, just as had happened with Basileios I and Syracuse according to Symeon *Chronicle* 133.34 (p.283).

forthcoming (just as the help from Adrianos never arrived). Instead the Spartans offered the Dioskouroi, whom the Lokrians invited to join them. When they won the battle of Sagra, the news was miraculously announced on the same day in Lakedaimon, but it was not believed until it was confirmed by survivors days later (the ensuing proverb was “truer than the events at Sagra,” i.e. true but not believed).<sup>72</sup> Not only is the narrative motif identical to the case of Adrianos, the two stories also link, through demonic communication, the same two regions, Lakedaimon and southern Italy. Daimons and Lakedaimons kept criss-crossing the routes between Sparta and southern Italy.

Unfortunately, what we cannot do is trace the evolution of the story of Adrianos and the demons from the local legends mentioned by Genesios to the scholarly elaborations that we have today. We should not rule out the possibility that provincial elites—the proximate informants of our written sources—were capable of classicizing elaborations on their own; we need not ascribe everything to scholars in the capital.<sup>73</sup> In any case, local traditions that hinted at religious and possibly ethnic deviance were processed by antiquarian interests that aimed to white-wash the emperor’s failure to protect Syracuse.

#### 4. Ethnicity and classicism: The case of Niketas *magistros*

From the standpoint of Porphyrogennetos’ court, there was something still ‘untamed’ about the Peloponnese. There were Slavs all about Lakedaimonia, who were restless and stirring rebellion into the reign of Romanos I (920–944);<sup>74</sup> demon-

<sup>72</sup> *Souda* s.v. ἀληθέστερα τῶν ἐπὶ Σάγρα (I 108–109 Adler). For other ancient and Byzantine writers who cite the proverb see Anagnostakis, in *Ἡ ἐπικοινωνία* 220–221.

<sup>73</sup> See A. Papalexandrou, “Memory Tattered and Torn: Spolia in the Heartland of Byzantine Hellenism,” in R. M. Van Dyke and S. E. Alcock (eds.), *Archaeologies of Memory* (Oxford 2003) 56–80, here 64, 67; A. Kaldellis, *The Christian Parthenon: Classicism and Pilgrimage in Byzantine Athens* (Cambridge 2009) 99–100, 184, 201–202.

<sup>74</sup> *De admin. imp.* 50.1–70.



worshippers at Helos; and “Hellenes” in the Mani who, while obedient, retained a separate identity and paid tribute rather than taxes to the empire.<sup>75</sup> Nor was the trouble limited to the south. Under Nikephoros I, the Slavs around Patras (whose religion is not specified) rose up and attacked the *Graikoi* and then the city itself with the aid of Saracens. When they were defeated, they sought sanctuary with St. Andreas and were made into dependents of the local church. Leon VI later protected them from financial abuse by the bishop.<sup>76</sup> We have seen how concerned Arethas was, in the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, to present Patras as an island of Hellenicity surrounded by subject Slavic lands, and how he depicts Lakedaimon as a “mixed” place, resettled by Nikephoros I with elements drawn from far and wide.

As it happens, we also have a voice from those untamed lands. One author asserts stronger claims to a classical heritage than any other Byzantine of the tenth century, and is simultaneously the target of the most vicious ethnic-slur we have from that era, designed to make him look most unclassical and foreign. These are opposite facets of the same reality and are therefore linked. The person in question is Niketas *magistros*, and with him we observe the close relationship between ethnicity and classicism in the tenth-century Peloponnese.

Niketas was born around 870 and claimed to be “a Spartan on my father’s side and Athenian on my mother’s side,”<sup>77</sup> and

<sup>75</sup> *De admin. imp.* 50.71–82.

<sup>76</sup> *De admin. imp.* 49. The main studies are I. Anagnostakis and A. Lamproroulou, “Μιά περίπτωση έφαρμογής του βυζαντινού θεσμού του άσύλου στην Πελοπόννησο: Η προσφυγή των Σλάβων στο ναό του Αγίου Ανδρέα Πατρών,” *Symmeikta* 14 (2001) 29–47, and “Καταστολή: Μια μορφή άνοχής στην Πελοπόννησο του 9<sup>ου</sup> και 10<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα,” in K. Nikolaou (ed.), *Ανοχή και καταστολή στους Μέσους Χρόνους: Μνήμη Λένου Μαυρομάτη* (Athens 2002) 47–61, here 49–52; and S. Turlej, “The Legendary Motif in the Tradition of Patras: St. Andrew and the Dedication of the Slavs to the Patras Church,” *Byzantinoslavica* 60 (1999) 374–399.

<sup>77</sup> Niketas *Ep.* 2; L. G. Westerink, *Nicetas Magistros: Lettres d’un exilé (928–946)* (Paris 1973). Westerink inferred from another letter that he was born

he regarded himself primarily as a Spartan. His letters are chock full of classical references, more so than any other collection of this period, and he speaks of classical matters as if they are his own ancestral patrimony, calling himself a Spartan and a Lakonian (*Ep.* 5). His letters, he says, are appropriately “laconic” (*Ep.* 4). In one letter he deems the Bithynian Olympos (a center of Christian monasticism) an unpleasant location compared to the more celebrated Olympos in Thessaly, home of the gods (*Ep.* 20). There is no parallel to this comparison in Byzantine literature. Toward the beginning of his career, Niketas had also written the *Life of Theoktiste*, the first hagiographic fiction of the middle period that gave free rein to the conventions of the ancient romance, basically embellishing the *Life of Maria of Egypt* with the language and themes of Achilles Tatios and Dion Chrysostomos’ *Euboic Oration*. The deserts of the south are in this text replaced with Greek islands.<sup>78</sup>

This eminently classical profile, however, was dismissed at the court of Konstantinos VII as so much arrogance and pretension. Niketas is one of the few Byzantines mentioned in that emperor’s compilation *De thematibus*, and he is not just mentioned but attacked, specifically in the section on the Peloponnese. The author says that the famous grammarian Euphemios put down a man from the Peloponnese who thought too highly of his own nobility (εὐγένεια), which in truth was only ignobility (δυσγένεια), with the following verse: “*garazdo*-face, a Slavicized visage.” He then specifies that this man was Niketas, who married his daughter Sophia to Christophoros, the son of emperor Romanos.<sup>79</sup> This is in fact a crucial

---

at Larissa, but see T. Pratsch, “Zur Herkunft des Niketas Magistros (\*um 870 – † frühestens 946/947) aus Lakonien,” *Byzantion* 75 (2005) 501–506; and I. Anagnostakis, “Byzantium and Hellas: Some Lesser Known Aspects of the Helladic Connection (8th–12th c.),” in J. Albani et al. (eds.), *Heaven and Earth II Cities and Countryside in Byzantine Greece* (Athens 2013) 15–29, here 21–25.

<sup>78</sup> Jazdzewska, *GRBS* 49 (2009) 257–279, citing previous studies.

<sup>79</sup> *De them.* 2.6 (p.91 Pertusi). The word may come from Slavic *gorazd*, ‘shrewd’: Curta, *The Edinburgh History* 280. Euphemios was the person to

passage of the text, one line of which has resonated in modern polemics on Greek ethnicity: it is precisely before this passage that Konstantinos says that “the entire land [of Hellas and the Peloponnese] was Slavicized and became barbarian.” We justly wonder, then, is the attack on Niketas merely an illustration of the general thesis of Slavicization (that Slavs settled in Greece), or is the Slavicization thesis actually meant to reinforce the *ad hominem* attack that follows? And what is the background of that attack? That is, what were its politics? Classical credentials and ethnic imputations were politics by other means at the court.<sup>80</sup> We have to take these rhetorical tropes with a grain of salt and consider their function.

Konstantinos VII had good reason to dislike Niketas, who had tied his fortunes to the house of Lekapenos and had taken part in the coup that brought Romanos to power in 919–920.<sup>81</sup> Romanos then sidelined Konstantinos for over twenty years. The scholar-emperor was bitter about that when he later assumed sole power (in 945). In the *De administrando imperio*, he advises his son not to give brides to foreign nations. But what if anyone asks, Why then did Romanos I give his granddaughter to Peter, the king of Bulgaria (in 927)? Konstantinos answers with a long tirade against Romanos I, whom he calls an illiterate low-born fellow (οὔτε ἀπὸ γένους εὐγενοῦς), unqualified for office (13.146–194). In both cases, Konstantinos comes across as a royal snob: he labels Niketas “arrogant” (μέγα φρονοῦντα, *De them.* 2.6) and Romanos “impudent” (αὐθαδέστερον, *De admin. imp.* 13.153), basically because they aspired to positions beyond their proper station.

As it happens, the two cases are linked by more than the

---

whom the *Sylloge Euphemiana* was dedicated; this was one of the components of the later *Greek Anthology*, and was probably completed in the first decade of the tenth century. See A. Cameron, *The Greek Anthology from Meleager to Planudes* (Oxford 1993) 254–256; M. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres: Texts and Contexts* (Vienna 2003) 114–115.

<sup>80</sup> Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium* 93–95.

<sup>81</sup> Theophanes Continuatus 6.12 (p.394 Bekker).

moral rhetoric of the emperor: the bride in question, Maria, was the daughter of Romanos' son Christophoros and therefore the granddaughter of Niketas himself! These two upstarts not only usurped power from Konstantinos himself, they joined their bloodlines to the Bulgarian royal house. Niketas was dispatched to personally escort the Bulgarian king to Constantinople.<sup>82</sup> The point of such an alliance might have been to solidify the Lekapenos hold on power by projecting it onto the stage of international relations and thus to further sideline Konstantinos himself.<sup>83</sup> (The latter inclined toward a Frankish alliance, which is why he made an exception for Franks in his bridal policy.<sup>84</sup>) It is no wonder that Konstantinos vented against the Bulgarians too, in the *Vita Basilii* as “vain boasters” (οἰηματῖαι καὶ καυχηματῖαι) and in the *De thematibus* as “God-hated” (θεομίσητον).<sup>85</sup> One begins to suspect that all these accusations of “arrogance” are linked: Slav-faced social upstarts from Greece and Bulgarian pretenders to the throne were all threats to Konstantinos' position, and so he linked them in his polemic. Therefore, the Slavicization of the Peloponnese—whatever the reality—was, in the texts we have, primarily a way to discredit *domestic* rivals. Conversely, Niketas' Hellenic rhetoric might well have been one way for social upstarts from the ‘untamed’ lands of the south to legitimate their position. He may have been of Slavic origin, which would only make him more interesting in this connection. But that logic cuts both

<sup>82</sup> Theophanes Continuatus, 6.22 (p.413). According to the chronicles, Niketas was later (927–928) implicated in a plot to dethrone Romanos in favor of Christophoros, Romanos' son, and was exiled to northwest Asia Minor: Westerink, *Niketas* 30–31.

<sup>83</sup> J. Shepard, “A Marriage too Far? Maria Lekapena and Peter of Bulgaria,” in A. Davids (ed.), *The Empress Theophano: Byzantium and the West at the Turn of the First Millennium* (Cambridge 1995) 121–149, here 132–133 (who does not discuss Niketas at all).

<sup>84</sup> Shepard, in *The Empress Theophano* 122 n.4.

<sup>85</sup> *Vita Basilii* 12.13 and *De them.* 2.1 (p.85). For Byzantine views of the Bulgarians in general see A. Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity: Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature* (Philadelphia 2013), ch. 4.

ways: as “‘Slavs’ could be used metonymically to refer to barbarians, all things Slavic came to represent the opposite of ‘civilization’ or cultural sophistication.”<sup>86</sup> Let us dig some more into Niketas’ background.

The continuer of the continuer of Theophanes notes the existence under Romanos I (around 921) of an uneducated Rentakios Helladikos, a relative of Niketas *patrikios* (i.e., our *magistros*). This man is said to have attacked his father and plundered his possessions (his father fled and was captured by the Saracens of Crete). Rentakios eventually sought asylum in Hagia Sophia. The emperor Romanos wanted to remove him from the church and punish him, but he sent forged letters to the Bulgarians promising to defect (we must remember that the Bulgarians under Symeon had recently been raiding as far south as the Gulf of Corinth). Rentakios was eventually arrested and blinded.<sup>87</sup>

The family and this incident must be localized in the Peloponnese.<sup>88</sup> This was, then, a relation on Niketas’ father’s side, the ‘Spartan’ side. We note again a ‘sinister’ connection to the Bulgarians. What about the most Hellenic name *Helladikos*? There is reason to think that its original form was *Eladikos*, referring, that is, to men connected with the olive-oil business—“oily” men and, if you will, not proper *Hellenes*...<sup>89</sup> *Helladikos* was probably an attempt to ennoble the name—more im-

<sup>86</sup> Anagnostakis, in *Οι βυζαντινές πόλεις* 111–113, cf. “Ελλαδικά παραμύθια και ελλαδική παραμυθία στο Βυζάντιο του 10<sup>ου</sup> αι.,” in *Ελιά και Λάδι, Δ΄ Τριήμερο Εργασίας* (Athens 1996) 121–150, here 125–128; and Curta, *The Edinburgh History* 288, also 236, 280.

<sup>87</sup> Theophanes Continuatus 6.4 (p.399). On the Rentakioi see H. Ditten, “Prominente Slawen und Bulgaren in byzantinischen Diensten (Ende des 7. bis Anfang des 10. Jahrhunderts),” in H. Köpstein and F. Winkelmann (eds.), *Studien zum 8. und 9. Jh. in Byzanz* (Berlin 1983) 95–119, here 104–108.

<sup>88</sup> Westerink, *Nicetas* 24.

<sup>89</sup> Westerink, *Nicetas* 24–25; in more detail, Anagnostakis, in *Ελιά και Λάδι* 121–122, 126, with a prosopography of the Eladikoi-Helladikoi at 129–132, and in *Heaven and Earth* II 15–29.

puddence, from Konstantinos' standpoint. An Eladas (Ioannes) had been a member of the regency during Konstantinos' minority,<sup>90</sup> possibly another reason for the later emperor to dislike the clan. In one of his letters from exile, Niketas asks the metropolitan of Kyzikos (possibly Theodoros) to send him some olive oil, "which this miserable place lacks" (*Ep.* 8). Taken altogether, it is quite likely, then, that our Niketas was the same as the Niketas Eladikos *protospatharios* who was sent by Zoe in 914 to negotiate with the Bulgarians over Adrianople.<sup>91</sup>

These associations, in the overall context of the court's prejudice against the upstart Helladikoi and their Hellenic impudence, might actually lie behind some remarkable epigrams by the later tenth-century poet Ioannes Geometres. While younger than everyone else in this story, Geometres began his career under Konstantinos VII and wrote his epitaphs, which means that he may have enjoyed his patronage. What has heretofore seemed inexplicable about a series of his poems is that they denigrate Greece and exalt Constantinople, echoing the language of late antiquity—but half a millennium too late.<sup>92</sup> The last verse of the epigram on the wise men of Athens, comparing Athens and Constantinople, orders the former to bow before its ruler and not to boast of its olives, whereas the latter holds the scepters of imperial power. Another epigram, on Nikaia, the nearest famous city to Constantinople, continues the same comparison and must be quoted in its entirety:

Three are the cities famous for the olive tree:  
Nikaia, Prainestos, and the city of Erechtheus.

<sup>90</sup> S. Runciman, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and his Reign* (Cambridge 1929) 47–48, 52; see Anagnostakis, in *Ελίά και Λάδι* 129–130.

<sup>91</sup> Theophanes Continuatus 6.8 (p.388).

<sup>92</sup> For Geometres' life and career see M. D. Lauxtermann, "John Geometres – Poet and Scholar," *Byzantion* 68 (1998) 356–380, here 360 for the start of his career. For his strange revival of the anti-Athenian rhetoric of late antiquity see Kaldellis, *The Christian Parthenon* 8–9. The poems in question are 109–111 in *PG* 106.950–951, found also in H. Hunger, "Athen in Byzanz: Traum und Realität," *JÖBG* 40 (1990) 43–61, here 51–52.

But Athens: don't think highly of your olives.  
Nikaia has them too, as well as vineyards, and  
meadows, gardens, trees, livestock, and a lake.  
It always wins, just as its name suggests.

Geometres' poems extended the life of the rivalry between Constantinople and Athens, between the nobility of the royal family and the provincial impudence and sinister Bulgarian connections of the men who tried and failed to displace it.

*November, 2013*

National Hellenic Research Foundation  
Institute of Historical Research  
Section of Byzantine Research  
48 Vassileos Constantinou Ave.  
11635 Athens, Greece  
eanagno@cie.gr

Dept. of Classics  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, OH 43210-1319  
kaldellis.1@osu.edu