

Michael Choniates at the Christian Parthenon and the *Bendideia* Festival of *Republic* 1

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IN HIS STUDY *The Christian Parthenon*, Anthony Kaldellis includes a collection of sources that refer to a mysterious eternal light associated with the Athenian cathedral.¹ These range from the Anglo-Saxon pilgrim Saewulf's prosaic description of "a lamp that burned eternally without need for fuel" to Eustathios of Thessaloniki's eulogy for the penultimate Byzantine bishop of Athens, Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites, which compares the departed prelate's luminous soul to the "divine light that could be found *there* [i.e. in the Parthenon]."² Taken together, the testimonies suggest that at some point in the medieval period there was in fact a lamp kept perpetually burning in the Parthenon, as described explicitly by Saewulf and as "presupposed in Byzantine accounts,"³ which use the

¹ *The Christian Parthenon: Classicism and Pilgrimage in Byzantine Athens* (Cambridge 2009: hereafter 'Kaldellis') 196: "Beyond the fact of its success, the greatest mystery that surrounds the Christian Parthenon is the 'divine' light that was said by so many different visitors and commentators to emanate in or from the building." See however R. Ousterhout's review (*JECs* 18 [2010] 157–158) and his reservations regarding Kaldellis' suggestion of possible connections between the lamp in the twelfth-century Parthenon and testimonies of another lamp in the ancient Erechtheion. For a historical and architectural survey of the Parthenon in the Byzantine and Ottoman periods see also Ousterhout's "Bestride the Very Peak of Heaven: The Parthenon after Antiquity," in Jenifer Neils (ed.), *The Parthenon: From Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge 2005) 292–329.

² Kaldellis 196.

³ Kaldellis 201.

lamp's light as a starting point in order to develop extended theological metaphors. As Kaldellis shows, the most sustained metaphorical treatment of the Parthenon's light is given by Michael Choniates in his inaugural oration as bishop of Athens, which he probably delivered in his episcopal cathedral soon after his installation in 1182.⁴

The aim of the present paper is to show why the Parthenon's lamp worked such a powerful effect upon Michael's learned imagination. As evoked by Kaldellis, the Church of the Atheniotissa represented on a monumental scale for Choniates the productive tension generated by his complex cultural inheritance as a Roman of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁵ I argue that he finds in the eternally burning lamp of the Parthenon a symbol for one of the most important components of that cultural inheritance: the Byzantine literary tradition itself.

In the peroration of his inaugural address, Choniates' rhetoric characterizes the Church of the Theotokos Atheniotissa as a portal communicating with heaven (104.27–105.7):

⁴ For Michael Choniates and his references to the Parthenon in various orations and letters see Kaldellis 145–165. For the text of Michael's *Inaugural Oration* (Εἰσβατήριος ὅτε πρῶτον ταῖς Ἀθήναις ἐπέστη) see S. Lampros, *Μιχαὴλ Ἀκομινάτου τοῦ Χωνιάτου τὰ Σωζόμενα* I (Athens 1879) 93–106. The complete oration has not yet been translated into English; for an introduction and summary of its contents see A. Rhoby, "Studien zur Antrittsrede des Michael Choniates in Athen," *Göttinger Beitr. zur byz. u. neugr. Philologie* 2 (2002) 83–111, at 83–86. Rhoby provides a philological commentary on the complete text at 89–111. For a recent literary study of the oration as well as its place in Choniates' career see S. Efthymiadis, "Michael Choniates' *Inaugural Address at Athens: Enkomion of a City and a Two-Fold Spiritual Ascent*," in P. Odorico and C. Mesis (eds.), *Villes de toute beauté, l'ekphrasis des cités dans les littératures byzantine et byzantino-slaves* (Paris 2012) 63–80. I am grateful to the anonymous reader for bringing this important study to my attention.

⁵ Kaldellis 206. Cf. Efthymiadis, in *Villes* 66–67, on Choniates' negotiation of the legacy of Hellenism with Christianity and on this oration as a product of the Comnenian age in its treatment of Hellenism "as a wholly respectable intellectual achievement" (67).

ὡς φοβερὸς ὁ τόπος οὗτος· οὐκ ἔστι τοῦτο ἀλλ' ἢ οἶκος θεοῦ καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ πύλη τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κἀντεύθεν τὸ ὑπερουράνιον τοῦτο φῶς ἀκάματον εἰσρεῖ δεῦρο, οὐκ ἀμαυρούμενον ἡμέρας, οὐ διακοπτόμενον νυκτί, ἄξυλον, ἄῦλον, ἀκραιφνέστατον, ἀειλαμπές, ἀειφανές ἀβεβήλοις καὶ πιστοῖς ὄμμασι. τοῦτο στῦλος θείου πυρός, τοῦτο τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς μυστικῆς καὶ φωτοδόχου νεφέλης ἀπόρροια δι' οὗ ὁδηγοῖμεθ' ἄν, εἰ δι' ἐρημίας παθῶν ὀδεύοιμεν, εἰς τὴν ἐπιθυμητὴν γῆν καὶ τῶν πρωτοτόκων μητρόπολιν, μᾶλλον δὲ πρὸ τούτων δοκῶ μονοῦ πρὸς τὸ Χωρήβ ἀνελθεῖν σὺν αὐτῷ τῷ ποιμνίῳ μου καὶ βᾶτον φλογωπὸν ἐνοπτρίζεσθαι οὐ συμβόλοις ἀμυδροῖς καὶ σκιώδεσιν, ἀλλ' ἀληθείας φανοτάταις ἐκβάσει ...

How awe-inspiring is this place! It is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven, and from there this heavenly light flows here unceasingly, neither dimming during the day, nor interrupted at night, a light shining without fuel, immaterial, most pure, ever-brilliant, ever-visible for uncorrupted eyes that have faith. This is the pillar of divine fire, this is the effluence of the mystical—for us Christians—and light-receiving cloud by which we would be led, if we were journeying through a desert of vices, to the promised land and mother city of the first-born, or rather before this it almost seems that I am ascending Mt. Horeb with this flock of mine and that I behold the Burning Bush, not through dim and shadowy symbols but through the brightest issues of truth...⁶

We will discuss below Choniates' time-honored assimilation of his own rhetorical persona to the figure of Moses on Mount Horeb, but for now his description of the church's lamp deserves closer attention. It burns "unceasingly, neither dimming during the day, nor interrupted at night, a light shining without fuel, immaterial"—and Kaldellis has shown that this ever-burning lamp of the Christian Parthenon has ancient antecedents on the Acropolis itself.⁷ He suggests that in the case of

⁶ For translations of this section of the oration I have consulted that provided by Kaldellis 158–160. Other translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

⁷ Kaldellis 200: according to Pausanias (1.26.6–7) the Temple of Athena

the ever-burning lamp we can find evidence for “antiquarian revival” at work.⁸ Leaving aside the question of whether or not Choniates was aware of ancient instances of perpetually lit lamps on the Acropolis, I argue that he finds in the Parthenon’s lamp a symbol for the preservation of a tradition of learning across time. I hope to demonstrate that it was in fact within precisely this metaphorical framework—the passing of the proverbial torch—that Choniates conceived of the relationship between the Athens of the past and the Athens of his Christian present. He uses the Parthenon’s physical lamp as one of a series of images developed through the oration to depict the passing on of learning and the literary tradition to which he himself is contributing.

We turn now to the opening of the address, where Choniates expounds upon a particular civic festival celebrated by his hearers’ ancestors (94.14–95.1):

Ἀθηναίους μὲν οὖν τοῖς πάλαι, φιλοθύται γὰρ οἱ τότε καὶ φιλεορτασταὶ κομιδῆ, πάγκοινος ἐτελείτο πανήγυρις καὶ ἡ πανήγυρις λαμπαδηδρόμος ἀγών, καθ’ ὃν ἐν ἀποστάσεσι συμμέτροις ἐστῶτες στοιχηδὸν ἔφιπποι διαδιδόντες λαμπάδιον ἀλλήλοις ὁ πρῶτος τῷ δευτέρῳ καὶ ὁ δεύτερος τῷ μετ’ αὐτὸν κάκεινος τῷ ἐφεξῆς, οὕτως ἡμιλλῶντο τοῖς ἵπποις καὶ τὸν λαμπαδικὸν ἀγῶνα τοῦτον διέθεον. τοῖς μὲν δὴ Ἀθηναίοις τοῖς τότε μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων τελετῶν καὶ τοιαύτη πανήγυρις πάλαι ποτὲ ἦγετο. ἡμεῖς δὲ τρόπον εὐαγέστερον ἕτερον τὴν καθ’ ἡμᾶς ταύτην πάμφωτον ἐκκλησίαν, ἣν καὶ λυχνίον ὀνομάζειν διὰ τῆς θεολογικῆς ἀποκαλύψεως διδασκόμεθα, οἷς κρίμασι θεὸς ἐδοκίμασεν ἐδεξάμεθα μετὰ τοὺς πρὸ ἡμῶν ἐγκεχειρισμένους ταύτην θειοτάτους ἄνδρας, καὶ τὸ ἐπιβάλλον αὐτοῖς τοῦ καλοῦ τῆς λαμπαδηδρομίας ταύτης ἀγῶνος ἄριστα διανύσαντας· καὶ δρα-

⁸ Polias housed a lamp that was kept perpetually lit in honor of the goddess: “they fill this lamp with oil and then wait until the same day of the following year, for the oil suffices for the interval, even though it burns both day and night.” Kaldellis (201) also cites Strabo 9.1.16 on how the lamp “is never extinguished.”

⁸ Kaldellis 202. Cf. however Ousterhout’s reservations, *J ECS* 18 (2010) 158.

μούμεθα κατέχοντες ἀνά χεῖρα ταυτηνὶ ἐφ' ὅσον τῷ ἀθλοθέτῃ
δόξει Χριστῷ· εἶτα τοῖς ἐξῆς καὶ μεθ' ἡμᾶς διαδώσομεν.

And so the Athenians of old, being then exceedingly fond of sacrifices and feasts, celebrated a public festival—a torch relay contest, in which the participants, arranged in a line at equal distances, would ride on horseback passing a torch to one another, the first to the second in line, and the second to the one after him, and he in turn to the one following, and in this way they contested with one another on horseback and ran this torch race. Such a festival then was celebrated, along with other rites, by the Athenians of that time. We, on the other hand, in a more holy fashion received, through the judgments rendered by God, this all-illuminated Church of ours, which we are even taught by the divine revelation of scripture to call a 'lamp'. We have received it in turn after those most divine men who were entrusted with it before us, and who performed most excellently the duty incumbent upon them of accomplishing the noble contest of this torch race. And we in turn shall run, holding it in our hands for as long as Christ the giver of the games deems fit. And then we shall pass it on to those who come after us.

For Choniates the torch relay of the ancient Athenians offers an elegant metaphor for the Church and the Orthodox tradition: its legacy and teachings are handed on from generation to generation to be safeguarded for posterity—a passing of the ecclesiastical torch.⁹ The metaphor is well chosen, but it was no tome of antiquarian lore that furnished Choniates with these details regarding the ancient festivals of his adopted city.

⁹ Rhoby, *Göttinger Beitr. zur byz. u. neogr. Philologie* 2 (2002) 95, notes that Michael's teacher, Eustathios of Thessaloniki, also used the motif of the torch relay in a text on the monastic life to describe how lay persons could "complete this torch race" with the help of the monk as a model: K. Metzler, *Eustathii Thessalonicensis De emendanda vita monachica* (Berlin 2006) 99, τοιοῦτῳ γοῦν λάμπε φωτί, καὶ δραμοῦνται πάντες ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ ἀνάψουσι καὶ αὐτοὶ μεταλήψει τῇ ἀπὸ σοῦ φῶτα ὅμοια. καὶ πῶς ἀμιλλώμενοι λαμπαδικὸν ἀγῶνα τοῦτον τελέσουσι διὰ σοῦ τῷ παντὶ σεμνότερον τοῦ ἐν τοῖς πάλαι ἱστορουμένου. Choniates may have known this passage of his teacher's, but I argue here for a closer connection with another textual model.

Rather, the festival that for him symbolizes the passing on of the orthodox tradition is that celebrated in the opening scene of Plato's *Republic*, when Socrates and his companion Glaucon have gone down to Peiraeus to attend a festival and are invited to stay for dinner. A selling point is the spectacle that will happen afterwards (328A1–B1):¹⁰

καὶ ὁ Ἀδείμαντος, ἀρά γε, ἦ δ' ὅς, οὐδ' ἴστε ὅτι λαμπὰς ἔσται πρὸς ἑσπέραν ἀφ' ἵππων τῇ θεῷ; ἀφ' ἵππων; ἦν δ' ἐγὼ καινόν γε τοῦτο. λαμπάδια ἔχοντες διαδώσουσιν ἀλλήλοις ἀμιλλώμενοι τοῖς ἵπποις; ἢ πῶς λέγεις; οὕτως, ἔφη ὁ Πολέμαρχος. καὶ πρὸς γε παννυχίδα ποιήσουσιν, ἦν ἄξιον θεάσασθαι· ἐξαναστησόμεθα γὰρ μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνον καὶ τὴν παννυχίδα θεασόμεθα. καὶ συνεσόμεθά τε πολλοῖς τῶν νέων αὐτόθι καὶ διαλεξόμεθα. ἀλλὰ μένετε καὶ μὴ ἄλλως ποιεῖτε.

And Adeimantus said, “Don’t you know that there’s going to be a torch relay on horseback in the evening in honor of the goddess?” “On horseback?” I said, “that’s certainly new. Will they hold torches and pass them to one another as they race with their horses? Or what do you mean?” I asked. “Just so,” said Polemarchus, “and in addition they will celebrate a night-festival, which is worth watching. For we will get up after dinner and watch the night-festival. And we will join many of the young men there and converse. Just stay and don’t do otherwise.”

Michael’s riders passing torches to one another while they race their horses in a relay (ἔφιπποι διαδιδόντες λαμπάδιον ἀλλήλοις ... ἡμιλλῶντο τοῖς ἵπποις) are taken point for point from the description put into Socrates’ mouth of the *Bendideia* festival at the Peiraeus (ἀφ' ἵππων ... λαμπάδια ἔχοντες διαδώσουσιν ἀλλήλοις ἀμιλλώμενοι τοῖς ἵπποις).¹¹

As seen above, Choniates first uses this image as a metaphor for the ‘passing of the torch’ in the Church’s tradition as its truth and teachings are handed down from one generation to

¹⁰ For the text of the *Republic* I use S. R. Slings (ed.), *Platonis Rempublicam* (Oxford 2003).

¹¹ For the *Bendideia* festival itself see R. Parker, *Athenian Religion: A History* (Oxford 1996) 170–173.

the next. In this he is following Plato's lead: the *Bendideia* torch relay prefigures several themes in the *Republic*, the first of which is the theme of the 'passing on' of culture and knowledge, which develops into a major leitmotif in Books 1 and 2. The note is first struck at 330B, when Socrates asks Cephalus if he inherited most of his wealth or acquired it on his own. In his reply Cephalus describes his family's chain of inheritance over three generations: his grandfather and namesake built significantly upon an inheritance that had at first equaled about what Cephalus has now; after inheriting this vast fortune his father Lysanias lost much of it and left to Cephalus less than what the latter currently possesses, but he hopes to preserve what he has made and leave a little bit more than what he received for the next generation, which is in fact represented in person by his son Polemarchus. Then, as he is about to exit the scene, Cephalus brings up the metaphor of succession again (331D6–D9):

καὶ μέντοι, ἔφη ὁ Κέφαλος, καὶ παραδίδωμι ὑμῖν τὸν λόγον· δεῖ γάρ με ἤδη τῶν ἱερῶν ἐπιμεληθῆναι. οὐκοῦν, ἔφη, ἐγώ, ὁ Πολέμαρχος, τῶν γε σῶν κληρονόμος;

"And now," said Cephalus, "I pass on to you all my speech. For now I have to attend to the rites." "Therefore," Polemarchus said, "am I the inheritor of your affairs?"

Cephalus "passes on" his speech, and his son Polemarchus claims it as his inheritance. Then in his description of what Glaucon will refer to as "a city of pigs" (372D5), Socrates notes how the inhabitants of this ideal simple city will pass on their simple lifestyle to their descendants, and in doing so he invokes the language of succession and inheritance from Book 1 (372C5–D4):

ἐπελαθόμεν ὅτι καὶ ὄψον ἔξουσιν, ἄλας τε δῆλον ὅτι καὶ ἐλάας καὶ τυρόν, καὶ βολβούς καὶ λάχανά γε, οἷα δὴ ἐν ἀγροῖς ἐψήματα, ἐψήσονται. καὶ τραγήματά που παραθήσομεν αὐτοῖς τῶν τε σύκων καὶ ἐρεβίνθων καὶ κυάμων, καὶ μύρτα καὶ φηγούς σποδιοῦσιν πρὸς τὸ πῦρ, μετρίως ὑποπίνοντες· καὶ οὕτω διάγοντες τὸν βίον ἐν εἰρήνῃ μετὰ ὑγιείας, ὡς εἰκός, γηραιοὶ τελευτῶντες ἄλλον τοιοῦτον βίον τοῖς ἐκγόνοις παραδώσουσιν.

I forgot that they will also have some relish, certainly salt and olives and cheese, and they will boil roots and vegetables like country folk. And we shall also give them things to munch for dessert—figs and chickpeas and beans, and they will roast myrtle berries and acorns by the fire and drink a little in moderation. And thus living their life in peace with health they will die as old men, as is fitting, and pass on such a life to their descendants.

With the phrase ἄλλον τοιοῦτον βίον τοῖς ἐγγόνις παραδώσουσιν, Socrates simultaneously recalls Cephalus' narrative of inheritance across four generations in his family at 330B, as well as his statement at 331D that he will “pass on” (παραδίδωμι) his speech to the assembled interlocutors, including his son Polemarchus.¹²

Much of the rest of the *Republic* will deal with the themes of succession and inheritance, in particular how the ideal city is to extend its own existence by passing on its culture to successive generations through education. These themes were first pre-figured at the *Bendideia* by the torch race, an image which must have appealed to Plato's imagination, as he used it again in *Leg.* 6 as a metaphor for the passing on of life and culture from one

¹² The connection between the two passages is made stronger by the fact that other details of the city of pigs recall our first glimpse of Cephalus at 328B–C: the inhabitants of the city of pigs recline on beds of leaves and feast together with their children while wearing crowns and singing hymns to the gods (372B5–7); when we met Cephalus he was sitting on a chair at a feast together with his sons Lysias, Euthydemus, and Polemarchus; he was wearing a crown and had just finished sacrificing to the gods (328C2–3). Finally, Socrates' words that the inhabitants of the city “will take care to avoid poverty and war” (372C2) would strike a poignant note for contemporary readers, many of whom would have seen Polemarchus and Lysias—both present in the dialogue—fall victim to poverty and war: as metics they were persecuted by the Thirty, stripped of the property which Cephalus had bequeathed to them and condemned to death by hemlock, a fate which Lysias barely escaped, though his brother did not. See Jacob Howland, “Plato's Reply to Lysias: *Republic* 1 and 2 and *Against Eratosthenes*,” *AJP* 125 (2004) 179–208, who reads the exchanges between Socrates and Polemarchus and Lysias as Plato's response to Lysias' speech against Eratosthenes for the murder of his brother.

generation to the next (776A7–B4):

ὧν δὴ χάριν μητρὶ καὶ πατρὶ καὶ τοῖς τῆς γυναικὸς οἰκείους παρέντας χρῆ τὰς αὐτῶν οἰκήσεις, οἷον εἰς ἀποικίαν ἀφικόμενους, αὐτοὺς ἐπισκοποῦντάς τε ἅμα καὶ ἐπισκοποῦμένους οἰκεῖν, γεννῶντάς τε καὶ ἐκτρέφοντας παῖδας, καθάπερ λαμπάδα τὸν βίον παραδιδόντας ἄλλοις ἐξ ἄλλων, θεραπεύοντας ἀεὶ θεοὺς κατὰ νόμους.

For this reason they must allow their parents to remain in their own homes while they themselves go off as if to a colony to live, returning to visit their parents and being visited by them in turn, and have children there and raise them, passing on life like a torch from one generation to another, while always worshipping the gods in keeping with the laws.

For Choniates as for Plato, the torch race is an apt metaphor for the passing on of culture and tradition from one generation to the next. He hopes that, as the Church received and preserved its teachings and traditions from earlier generations in unbroken succession, so too will the citizens of Athens have preserved the nobility of spirit that was bequeathed to them by their ancestors (101.23–102.2):

τοιούτους ἀκούω τοὺς ἀρχηγέτας ὑμῶν γενέσθαι· φιλολόγους, σοφοὺς, ἀμνησικάκους, φιλοξένους, φιλανθρώπους, ἀντιληπτικούς, φιλοτίμους, μεγαλοψύχους, πειθοῦς ὑποδρηστήρας, λόγου θεράποντας. εἰ τῆς χρυσῆς γοῦν ἐκείνης σειρᾶς ἐξῆπται τὸ γένος ὑμῶν, εἰ τῆς πηγῆς ἐκείνης καθέλκεται τὸ ρεῦμα τῆς διαδοχῆς ἀθόλωτον, εἰ οὐκ ἀνάξιοι πτόρθοι τοιαύτης ρίζης ἐξέφυτε, εἰ πολῖται ἰθαγενεῖς τῆς ἀρίστης πατρίδος εὐχεσθε εἶναι καὶ ὀνομάζεσθαι, ὁ ἐφεξῆς διακωδωνίσει μοι χρόνος σαφέστατα καὶ γνώσομαι θᾶπτον τὸ ἀττικίζον αἶμα καὶ ἀθηναίζον λῆμμα οὐχὶ τῷ κατὰ κεφαλῆς κρωβύλω καὶ τέττιγι.

Such I hear were your founders of old: fond of learning, wise, forgiving, hospitable, humane, understanding, lovers of honor, generous, assistants to persuasion, servants of the word. If your race has been fastened to this golden chain, if the stream of succession is drawn from that source unsullied, if you were born not unworthy shoots of that stock, if you boast to be and be called native citizens of the best country, the coming time shall make known to me most clearly, and I shall quickly know the Attic

blood and Athenian spirit,¹³ but not by the top-knots and cicada-brooches [of old].

Like the passing on of the traditions of the Church, the preservation of the ancient Athenian spirit represents another chain of succession (τὸ ῥεῦμα τῆς διαδοχῆς, “the stream of succession”) that is prefigured by Choniates’ use of the torch relay metaphor.

Moreover, I suggest that the Golden Chain mentioned by Choniates almost in passing alludes to another famous metaphor used to describe a particular type of cultural succession. This Homeric phrase (*Il.* 8.19), frequently strengthened by ὄντως or ὄντι, was a popular expression throughout Greek literature. It was particularly important among Neoplatonist circles thanks to a passage in the *Theaetetus* (153c), where Socrates explains that the phrase must refer to the sun and its place in the cosmic order. Proclus vigorously applied this Platonic exegesis of the Homeric Golden Chain to his own ontological system, which is characterized by interconnected chains of being.¹⁴ It is this Proclean interpretation of the Golden Chain that Michael Psellos, an important influence on Choniates, will advance in his essay on the phrase.¹⁵

However, in addition to its use as a metaphor for the Great Chain of Being, the image of the Golden Chain seems to have been used by Neoplatonists variously to characterize (a) a chain of ‘emanation’ extending from heavenly planes to divinely inspired Platonists; (b) the transmission of Platonism across time from one Platonist to another; or (c) the safekeeping of the Platonic tradition by worthy intellectual heirs (not necessarily immediate successors to one another).¹⁶ As John Glucker has

¹³ Reading λῆμα for the edition’s λῆμμα.

¹⁴ For example Procl. *In Ti.* I 314.12–18 Diehl, II 24.23–31, etc.

¹⁵ Περὶ τῆς χρυσοῦς ἀλύσεως τῆς παρ’ Ὀμήρω, in J. Duffy, *Michael Psellus. Philosophica minora I* (Stuttgart 1992) 164–168. My gratitude goes to Stratis Papaioannou for bringing this text to my attention.

¹⁶ I draw here from John Glucker’s study of the possible meanings of the Golden Chain as employed by ancient commentators on the Platonic

demonstrated in his study of the phrase's history, the most important source for applying the phrase to the tradition of Platonism or the succession of Platonists occurs in Photius' excerpts from Damascius' *Life of Isidorus*: δεδιώς δ' ὁ Πρόκλος περὶ τῆ Πλάτωνος χρυσῆ τῶ ὄντι σειρᾶ, μὴ ἡμῖν ἀπολίπη τὴν πόλιν τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς ("Proclus feared for the truly golden chain of Plato, lest it depart from the city of Athena").¹⁷

This passage, together with accounts of the history of Platonism by Proclus and his fellow fifth-century Neoplatonist Hierocles that mention respectively a "divine chorus"¹⁸ or "sacred race"¹⁹ of Platonists, seems to have led to the modern tendency to refer to the Golden Chain of the Platonic tradition.²⁰ Moreover, some scholars, perhaps by reading Damascius' use of the phrase into the accounts of Proclus and Hierocles, attribute to the latter two specifically (and without mentioning that Damascius via Photius is our source for Proclus' use) the use of the Golden Chain metaphor to refer to the continuity of the Platonic tradition, even though Proclus

tradition: *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (Göttingen 1978) 306–315. For the possible connection between the images of the Golden Chain and the Hesiodic Golden Race mentioned by the Delphic oracle which Porphyry includes in his life of Plotinus (*V.Plot.* 22.51–7: a group of the great philosophers which the soul of Plotinus is said to have joined) see Gucker 319–320.

¹⁷ *Bibl. cod.* 242, 346a17–19 (VI 37 Henry).

¹⁸ 1.1, τῶ θεῷ τούτῳ χορῶ: H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink, *Proclus. Théologie platonicienne I* (Paris 1968) 6.

¹⁹ τῆς ἱερᾶς ... γενεᾶς; as recorded by Photius in his summary of Hierocles' seventh book, which covers the history of Platonism from Ammonius to Plutarch of Athens: *Bibl. cod.* 214, 173a.36–37 (III 129–130 Henry). For the similarity of the accounts by Proclus and Hierocles see H. Schibli, *Hierocles of Alexandria* (Oxford 2002) 7–8.

²⁰ A tendency apparent in titles: Algis Uždavinys, *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy* (Bloomington 2004); John Dillon, *The Golden Chain: Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity* (Aldershot 1991); or the section "Lost Rings of the Platonist Golden Chain" in N. Siniosoglou, *Radical Platonism in Byzantium: Illumination and Utopia in Gemistos Plethon* (Cambridge 2011) 49–160.

never uses the phrase in this sense in any of his extant works.²¹ These reservations notwithstanding, it still seems plausible (and Glucker entertains the hypothesis) that the metaphor “can apply to a temporal series like that of the continuity of the true Platonic tradition.”²²

I suggest that such a meaning can be found in Choniatēs’ use of the phrase here. Granted, the phrase was certainly used by other authors—including Choniatēs’ teacher Eustathios of Thessaloniki—to refer to bloodlines of dynastic succession.²³ However, in this oration Choniatēs has already rewritten a Platonic festival scene in order to raise the issue of cultural continuity between past and present. Thus one suspects that, when he mentions here the Golden Chain, the use of the *topos* to characterize the continuity of the Platonic tradition cannot be far from his mind. In addition, when he asks “if the flow of *succession* has been drawn from that stream *unsullied*” (εἰ τῆς πηγῆς ἐκείνης καθέλκεται τὸ ρεῦμα τῆς διαδοχῆς ἀθόλωτον), we should compare this to how, according to Proclus’ account of the Platonic succession, his teacher Syrianus “immaculately (ἀχράντως) received from [his predecessors] the most genuine and clear light of truth in the bosom of his soul.”²⁴ Additionally, we might compare Proclus’ own student Marinus on how the gods brought Proclus to Athens “so that the succession (διαδοχή) of Plato might be preserved unadulterated (ἀνόθευτος) and pure.”²⁵ As with the *Republic*’s torch race, Choniatēs

²¹ See Siniosoglou, *Radical Platonism* 49: “Proclus, Damascius and Olympiodorus appear to have been the last rings in the Platonist ‘golden chain’ envisaged by Hierocles”; J. Finamore’s foreword to Uždavinys, *The Golden Chain*: “Whether or not Iamblichus ever used the phrase, it is certain that Proclus adapted the Homeric ‘Golden Chain’ to the Neoplatonic heritage of wisdom” (ix).

²² Glucker, *Antiochus* 313.

²³ P. Wirth, *Eustathii Thessalonicensis opera minora* (Berlin 2000) 15, p. 252.70–73.

²⁴ *Théologie platonicienne* 1.1 (I 7): παρ’ ὧν τὸ γνησιώτατον καὶ καθαρότατον τῆς ἀληθείας φῶς τοῖς τῆς ψυχῆς κόλποις ἀχράντως ὑποδεξάμενος.

²⁵ R. Masullo, *Marino di Neapoli. Vita di Proclo* (Naples 1985) 239–241: ἵνα

uses the image of the Golden Chain in two ways: both to suggest the connection between his own audience and their ancient forebears and also to symbolize the literary and philosophical tradition upon which he draws throughout the oration.

There is yet another aspect of succession in the oration that is governed by the motifs of the passing of the torch and the Golden Chain. Here I have in mind Choniates' re-use of earlier Byzantine homiletic literature. Since so much of the oration plays with themes and images of succession, we should recognize that extensive borrowings from the classics of Patristic literature are not examples of an unthinking rehearsal of fossilized *topoi*. Rather, the act of textual 'recycling', such as an adaptation of a passage from Gregory of Nazianzus' Oration on the Holy Lights, is a compositional technique that nicely demonstrates the dominant thematic preoccupations of Choniates' oration. In drawing on Gregory, he offers us an example of cultural succession at work.

In the chapter immediately following Choniates' assertion that he will know "the Attic blood and Athenian spirit" of his audience, he goes on to claim that he wants them to go even further and improve upon the example of their ancestors in matters of belief and virtue (102.5–12):

μᾶλλον μὲν οὖν καὶ τελεώτερον ἐκείνων καὶ ἀκριβέστερον ταῦτα κατορθοῦν ὑμᾶς βούλομαι, καθότι ἐκεῖνοι μὲν, φάυλαις προληφθέντες δόξαις καὶ διαλελωβημένων τῶν περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναπλησθέντες ὑπολήψεων, ὡς καὶ θεοὺς εὐρετὰς καὶ ἐπιστάτας παθῶν προστήσασθαι, ἀκαθέκτως καὶ ἀδεῶς ἐξημάρτανον οἷς οὐ κεκολασμένον, ὅτι μὴ καὶ θεῖον τὸ ἀμαρτάνειν ἐνόμιζον, εἰς τὸ θρησκευόμενον ἀναφέροντες τὴν ἐμπάθειαν.

Rather, with regard to this I intend to instruct you in a more complete and precise fashion, seeing that they, taken in by base beliefs and filled with outrageously mutilated conceptions regarding the divine, in such a way that they even put forward gods as inventors and defenders of the passions, unrestrainedly

γὰρ ἀνόθευτος ἔτι καὶ εἰλικρινῆς σώζεται ἡ Πλάτωνος διαδοχή.

and fearlessly sinned, in that they believed sinning was not punished, but even divine, ascribing their passions to that which they worshipped.

Here he reworks a famous passage on the mysteries and beliefs of pagans from Gregory's Oration on the Holy Lights (*Or.* 39.7), one of the sixteen so-called 'liturgical orations' which by the tenth century had been selected to be read aloud in church on appointed days in the liturgical calendar:²⁶

οὐ γὰρ τοῦτο μόνον δεινόν, τὸ πεποιημένους ἐπ' ἀγαθοῖς ἔργοις, εἰς δόξαν καὶ ἔπαινον τοῦ πεποιηκότος, καὶ Θεοῦ μίμησιν, ὅσον ἐφικτόν, ὀρμητήριον γενέσθαι παντοίων παθῶν, βοσκομένων κακῶς καὶ δαπανώντων τὸν ἐντὸς ἄνθρωπον· ἀλλὰ τὸ καὶ θεοὺς στήσασθαι συνηγόρους τοῖς πάθεσιν, ἵνα μὴ μόνον ἀνεύθυνον τὸ ἀμαρτάνειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ θεῖον νομίζεται, εἰς τοιαύτην καταφεύγον ἀπολογία, τὰ προσκυνούμενα.

For not only is this terrible, namely that they who had been made for good works, for the glory and praise of their maker, and for imitation of God as far as that is possible, became instead a lair for all sorts of vices, which wickedly eat away at and consume the inner man—not only that, but they even went so far as to set up the gods as advocates for the vices, so that sinning was not only irreproachable, but even considered divine, since they had recourse in the objects of their worship for such a defense.

Choniates reproduces Gregory's anti-pagan polemic clause by clause: the latter declares pagans "put forward gods as inventors and defenders of the vices" (ὡς καὶ θεοὺς εὐρετὰς καὶ ἐπιστάτας παθῶν προστήσασθαι), which Choniates renders "set up the gods as advocates for the vices" (καὶ θεοὺς στήσασθαι συνηγόρους τοῖς πάθεσιν). Gregory's pointed claim that "sinning was not only irreproachable, but even considered divine" seems to be carefully echoed in Choniates: "they be-

²⁶ For the Byzantine reception of Gregory see now S. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (Cambridge 2013) 56–63 with bibliography; for Gregory's 'liturgical orations' see 57.

lieved sinning was not punished, but even divine.”²⁷ Finally, both Gregory and Choniates have pagans locate the justification for their accommodation of the vices in the objects of their worship (cf. τὸ θρησκευόμενον with τὰ προσκυνούμενα).

There are likely many similar moments in Choniates’ oration where he draws at length upon other classics of homiletic literature. Indeed, Stephanos Efthymiadis has shown how Choniates draws some of the light imagery in his description of the Parthenon from another passage on the Parthenon in a funeral oration for a previous bishop of Athens, Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites, composed by Choniates’ teacher Eustathios.²⁸ In a different context this adaptation of earlier material might seem an otherwise unremarkable instance of standard Byzantine discursive practice. But in this oration Choniates has chosen for his main theme the passing on of culture and the links between past and present. Again and again he links his topics through imagery of chains and successions to the description of the *Bendideia* that he borrowed from Plato’s *Republic*. In composing his oration, which was meant to be delivered in the Parthenon itself, one might conjecture that he would have been all too acutely aware of how he wrote within the parameters of a long rhetorical tradition. To use his own metaphor, adapting at length from texts like Gregory’s or Eustathios’ orations is just another way in which Choniates ‘carries the torch’.

This however is only the first layer of literary work that Choniates has the torch relay perform, as the *Bendideia* festival offers a useful metaphor that can be connected to a number of

²⁷ However, I am not sure of the soundness of the text ἀκαθέκτως καὶ ἀδεῶς ἐξημέρτανον οἷς οὐ κεκολασμένον, ὅτι μὴ καὶ θεῖον τὸ ἀμαρτάνειν ἐνόμιζον. If we could read οἷ γ’ οὐ or ὡς οὐ instead of οἷς οὐ, then what seems to be an anacoluthon in the syntax would disappear, though I do not know if such a change can be defended on paleographic grounds.

²⁸ Efthymiadis, in *Villes* 77, citing Choniates 105.13–16 together with *Eustathii* 1 (p.12.21–23 Wirth): “Choniates picked up the points of Eustathios’ text concerning the light emanating from the Acropolis and further elaborated them.”

themes. At 94.15–16 he characterizes the ancient Athenian spectators of the torch relay as “lovers of sacrifices and festivals” (φιλοθύται γὰρ οἱ τότε καὶ φιλεορτασταί). Throughout the oration he implicitly contrasts the ancient Athenian festival spectators with his contemporary audience, who are to be spectators of the true light housed in and symbolized by the Virgin’s church.²⁹ This precisely recalls the comparison that Plato establishes in the *Republic* between festival spectators and spectators of the truth, i.e. philosophers: at 475D1–8 Glaucon describes avid festival-goers, characterized as φιλοθεάμονες and φιλήκοοι, who travel to different cities and villages to attend festivals of Dionysus and listen to the choruses.³⁰ At 475E4 Socrates suggests that these lovers of festival spectacle are similar to philosophers, whom he calls “lovers of the spectacle of truth” (τοὺς τῆς ἀληθείας ... φιλοθεάμονας). The comparison developed in this scene of course applies to their own situation: they had come to the Peiraeus to pray to the goddess and observe the festival (τὴν ἑορτὴν βουλόμενος θεάσασθαι, 327A2–3), but in addition they end up “contemplating a city coming to being in speech” (γιγνομένην πόλιν θεασαίμεθα λόγῳ, 369A6). Socrates and his companions are festival spectators who become spectators of the truth.

For Plato, the act of contemplating the *Bendideia* festival and its torch relay race prefigures the action of the Allegory of the Cave at 514A1–517C4, where the prisoners see shadows on the cave wall produced by a procession of objects moving between their backs and the light of a fire behind them and engage in contests (διαμιλλᾶσθαι at 516E9 and 517D9; cf. ἀμιλλώμενοι at 328A4 of the torch relay in the Peiraeus) about who can most accurately observe and predict the comings and goings of the

²⁹ See e.g. 105.23–25: τὸ τοῦ λάμπαντος ἐξ αὐτῆς ἀληθινοῦ φωτὸς ἅγιον σκήνωμα, οὗ τὴν τερπνότητα ἐπισκέπτεσθαι λαχόντες παρὰ θεοῦ (“the holy dwelling-place of the true light that shines from her, the delightful beauty of which God has granted us to behold”).

³⁰ My thanks go once again to the anonymous reviewer for suggesting this passage to me.

images (516C8–D4).³¹ This indirect encounter with reality through shadows is contrasted with the progressively more direct encounter with reality that the escaped prisoner experiences as he acquires the ability to look directly at the sun after accustoming his eyes by looking at reflections of the sun on various surfaces and then other heavenly objects (516A5–B7). Once the escaped prisoner (to be identified with the philosopher) returns to the cave, he will be able to discern all the more easily the reality behind the shadows on the wall—if he has time for his eyes to readjust to the darkness (520B5–D5). For Plato, then, the imagery of the *Bendideia* torch race is intimately connected to the description in Books 6 and 7 of the soul's ascent to *theoria* or contemplation of the Divine:

The philosophers who have been educated in the ideal city are to go down (καταβατέον; cf. 519d5, 539e2) in turn into the cave where the others live. There they are to become observers (θεόσασθαι—the same verb as at 327a3) and judges (as Socrates was at the festival) of what is fine and just and good in the world below—this being of course the sensible world where we all live now as dramatized in Plato's famous image of the Cave. Apply the Book 7 passage to the first words of the *Republic*: the Peiraeus at night lit by torches becomes an image of the prison-dwelling in the cave, which in turn is an image (εἰκὼν, 517a8) of the sensible world as such.³²

The contemplation by *theoroi* or spectators at the Peiraeus of the torch relay race is a shadow of the philosopher's contemplation or *theoria* of divine truth.

For Choniates as well, the torch race will lead eventually to

³¹ For Plato's construction of contemplative *theoria* in *Republic* 5–7 see Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in its Cultural Context* (Cambridge 2004) 94–138 (ch. 3, “The Fable of Philosophy in Plato's *Republic*”).

³² Myles Burnyeat, “First Words,” *PCPS* 43 (1997) 1–20, at 6. For more on how the opening scene at the *Bendideia* festival prefigures the description of *theoria* in Books 5–7 see Diskin Clay, “Plato's First Words,” *YCS* 29 (1992) 113–130, at 125–129.

the contemplation of the light of heaven, and here we return to his peroration (104.27–105.7):

How awe-inspiring is this place! It is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven, and from there this heavenly light flows here unceasingly, neither dimming during the day, nor interrupted at night, a light shining without fuel, immaterial, most pure, ever-brilliant, ever-visible for uncorrupted eyes that have faith. This is the pillar of divine fire, this is the effluence of the mystical—for us Christians—and light-receiving cloud by which we would be led, if we were journeying through a desert of vices, to the promised land and mother city of the first-born, or rather before this it almost seems like I am ascending Mt. Horeb with this flock of mine and that I behold the Burning Bush, not through dim and shadowy symbols but through the brightest issues of truth...

This is a complex passage. Here and in the immediately following section (see below) we are made to realize that the image of the Athenian torch relay earlier in the oration prefigured the depiction of the Mother of God as “both light-receptacle and light-giver” (τῆς φωτοδόχου παρθένου καὶ φωτοδότιδος, 105.23). The Virgin is presented as a link, both receiving and transmitting, in a relay of light that centers upon the Parthenon. As Athena the “pseudo-virgin” was a false shadow of the Theotokos,³³ so an ancient Greek festival is made to foreshadow a major complex of images associated with the Parthenon’s new namesake. This passage picks up the chain of light imagery from the description of the *Bendideia*’s torch race

³³ 104.17–23: καὶ ἡ ἀκρόπολις αὐτῆ τῆς τυραννίδος τῆς ψευδοπαρθένου Ἀθηνᾶς ἀπήλλακτο καὶ οὐκέτι τὸ ἐπιβώμιον αὐτῆς πῦρ ἀκοίμητον τρέφεται, τῆς δὲ δι’ αἰῶνος παρθένου καὶ μητρὸς τοῦ θεοῦ πυρσὸς ἀειφανῆς ὡς ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ τῆς ἄκρας ταύτης ἀνίσχει καὶ οὐχ ὅπως τὴν πόλιν καὶ τὰ τῆς Ἀττικῆς ὑπερόρια διαυγάζει, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅσην γῆν ἐπέρχεται ἥλιος, “And this Acropolis was delivered from the tyranny of the false virgin Athena, and no longer is the sleepless fire of her altar nourished, but the torch of flame of the eternally virgin Mother of God shines perpetually and rises from this peak as from heaven, illuminating not only the city and the territory bordering Attica, but as much of the earth as the sun traverses.”

as the Parthenon is turned into a portal for the unceasing stream of the light of heaven.

That stream of light then becomes the Pillar of Fire that guided the Israelites through the desert, a transformation which puts Choniates in mind of an earlier event in the Exodus narrative: Moses and the Burning Bush. Here Choniates assimilates himself to Moses in his role as the mystic *theoros* whose ascent of Mt. Horeb is read as the soul's ascent to the contemplation of the divine.³⁴ This Platonic Moses, a character first developed by Philo and later by Christian Platonists like Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, engages in the contemplation of divine truth, and the salient features of Moses' *theoria* pass from Books 6 and 7 of the *Republic* (the analogies of the Sun, Line, and Cave) through Philo to Origen to the Cappadocian Fathers and from them into the mainstream of the Byzantine homiletic tradition.³⁵

³⁴ Cf. the description of the soul's ascent to contemplation of the intelligible realm at *Resp.* 517B: τὴν δὲ ἀνάβασιν καὶ θέαν τῶν ἄνω τὴν εἰς τὸν νοητὸν τόπον τῆς ψυχῆς ἄνοδον τιθεὶς οὐχ ἀμαρτήση τῆς γ' ἐμῆς ἐλπίδος.

³⁵ For Philo's Platonic exegesis of Moses and the Burning Bush (Ex 3:14) see David Runia, "Platonism, Philonism, and the Beginnings of Christian Thought," in *Philo and the Church Fathers* (Leiden 1995) 1–24, who singles out this and three other passages from the books of Moses as the decisive texts in Philo's selection of the "Platonist paradigm" to show how "insights from the Greek philosophical tradition could be localized in the authoritative words of scripture" (15). Runia cites J. P. Martín, "Ontologia e creazione in Filone Alessandrino," *Rivista de filosofia neo-scolastica* 82 (1990) 146–165, at 153, on how exegesis of this very passage from Exodus "forms the nucleus of Philo's thought" (15 n.60). For the role of Moses in Gregory of Nazianzus' construction of contemplative *theoria* see Christopher Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God* (Oxford 2008) 65 n.6: "Gregory is largely responsible for creating the image of Moses as a primary model of Christian growth and the vision of God. There are brief statements in Origen that hint at such a use of Moses. In *Comm. Jn.* 32.338–343 Origen refers to the glory that shone in Moses' face 'when he was conversing with the divine nature' on Mount Sinai, to which he adds a summary comment on purification and contemplation ... Gregory, however, makes Moses' encounter with God on Mount Sinai paradigmatic for

In the century before Choniates the figure of the Platonic Moses will feature, for example, in Michael Psellos' letter to John Xiphilinos.³⁶ For Gregory of Nazianzus, we can point to a representative passage in his Second Theological Oration, titled *Περὶ Θεολογίας* (*Or.* 28.3):

τί τοῦτο ἔπαθον, ὦ φίλοι καὶ μύσται καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας συνεργασταί; ἔτρεχον μὲν ὡς θεὸν καταληψόμενος, καὶ οὕτως ἀνήλθον ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος, καὶ τὴν νεφέλην διέσχον, εἴσω γενόμενος ἀπὸ τῆς ὑλῆς καὶ τῶν ὑλικῶν, καὶ εἰς ἑμαυτὸν ὡς οἶόν τε συστραφεῖς. ἐπεὶ δὲ προσέβλεψα, μόλις εἶδον θεοῦ τὰ ὀπίσθια· καὶ τοῦτο τῇ πέτρα σκεπασθεῖς, τῷ σαρκωθέντι δι' ἡμᾶς θεῷ Λόγῳ· καὶ μικρὸν διακύψας, οὐ τὴν πρώτην τε καὶ ἀκήρατον φύσιν, καὶ ἑαυτῇ, λέγω δὴ τῇ τριάδι, γινωσκομένην, καὶ ὅση τοῦ πρώτου καταπετάσματος εἴσω μένει καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν χερουβὶμ συγκαλύπτεται, ἀλλ' ὅση τελευταία καὶ εἰς ἡμᾶς φθάνουσα ... ταῦτα γὰρ Θεοῦ τὰ ὀπίσθια, ὅσα μετ' ἐκεῖνον ἐκεῖνου γνωρίσματα, ὡς περ αἱ καθ' ὑδάτων ἡλίου σκιαὶ καὶ εἰκόνες ταῖς σαθραῖς ὄψεσι παραδεικνύσαι τὸν ἥλιον, ἐπεὶ μὴ αὐτὸν προσβλέπειν οἶόν τε, τῷ ἀκραιβνεί τοῦ φωτὸς νικῶντα τὴν αἴσθησιν. οὕτως οὖν θεολογήσεις, κἂν ἦς Μωυσῆς καὶ “Φαραὼ θεός,” κἂν “μέχρι τρίτου” κατὰ τὸν Παῦλον “οὐρανοῦ” φθάρσης, καὶ ἀκούσης “ἄρρητα ῥήματα.”

Christians. Through Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* and the Pseudo-Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* as well—both of which follow Gregory Nazianzen's work—the motif becomes standard in Eastern and Western spirituality.” Beeley 65 n.5 compiles a catalogue of passages in Gregory of Nazianzus referring to Moses. For Gregory of Nyssa's treatment of *theoria* see especially J. Daniélou's classic *Platonisme et théologie mystique* (Paris 1944), and especially the chapter “La nuée ou De la Contemplation” (127–171), which refers frequently to Moses' *theoria* in Gregory's *Life of Moses* (ed. Daniélou 1968). For the figure of Moses in the Patristic tradition in general see Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley 2005) 125–136, discussing how Moses was constructed as the episcopal exemplar *par excellence* in terms of spiritual, ascetic, and pragmatic authority.

³⁶ U. Criscuolo, *Michele Psello: Epistola a Giovanni Xifilino* (Naples 1973) 54.165–55.178. My gratitude goes once again to the anonymous reader for bringing this passage to my attention.

What is this that has happened to me, o friends and initiates and fellow lovers of the truth? I was running to comprehend God, and thus I came up the mountain, and passed through the cloud, entering into it away from matter and material things, and I turned inward to myself as much as I could. But when I looked, I saw with difficulty only the hindparts of God. And this even though I was protected by the rock—that is, God the *Logos* who became flesh for our sake. And peeking out a little, I saw not his first and unmixed nature, and that which is known to itself, the Trinity I mean, and which remains behind the first veil and is hidden by the Cherubim, but only that ultimate part of His nature which reaches us ... For this is what is meant by “the hindparts of God,” the tokens of recognition of God that come after God, like the shadows and images of the sun upon the waters that represent to weak eyes the sun, since it is not possible to gaze upon the sun itself, as it exceeds the capacity of vision thanks to the purity of its light. In this way then will you speak about God, even if you are a Moses and “as God to Pharaoh,” even if you have like Paul reached the Third Heaven, and heard ineffable words.

Gregory characterizes the incomprehensibility of the divine by likening God to the sun, whose light is so strong that the eye cannot look directly at it—and in so doing makes use of one of the most famous of all Platonic similes.³⁷ For Gregory, dis-

³⁷ For the text as well as Gregory’s allusion to the figure of the sun in the Allegory of the Cave (515E5–516A2) see Paul Gallay, *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 27–31* (Paris 1978) 106 n.1. Gallay also discusses (106–107 n.2) the parallels between this passage in Gregory of Nazianzus and the second part of Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Moses*, which offers an extended *θεωρία* in the sense of a “spiritual interpretation” of the events of Moses’ life narrated in the first half of the text, the *ιστορία*. See also Frederick Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* (Leiden 1991) 109, on how “the point about the inability of humans to see God in his essence had been made by Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 5.11) and Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catechetical Orations* 6.5).” Norris notes that Gregory’s recognition of his own inability to completely comprehend the divine “is based on his education within both Hellenic and Christian tradition,” since both Plato and Moses “knew only the pure could handle the pure” (108). For the Platonism of Gregory of Nazianzus see especially Claudio More-

course about the divine (θεολογία) is necessarily going to be cast in Platonic form. Moreover, thanks to Gregory's extraordinary importance as a model author for Byzantine literature, the Platonizing θεολογία or discourse about the divine that we find throughout Gregory's orations (and in texts, like the corpus of Ps.-Dionysius, that were profoundly influenced by Gregory) will become a definitive characteristic for much of the Byzantine homiletic tradition.³⁸

Thus though they are separated by well over a thousand years, we can still recognize the Platonic origins of Choniates' description of how he will "behold the Burning Bush, not through dim and shadowy symbols but through the brightest issues³⁹ of truth" (καὶ βᾶτον φλογωπὸν ἐνοπρὶζέσθαι οὐ συμβόλοις ἀμυδροῖς καὶ σκιώδεσιν, ἀλλ' ἀληθείας φανοτάταις ἐκβάσει, 105.5–7). Michael is contrasting on the one hand how the "dim and shadowy symbols" of the Old Testament

schini, *Filosofia e letteratura in Gregorio di Nazianzo* (Milan 1997) 22–69. For contemplative *theoria* in general in the Platonic and Patristic tradition see Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*² (Oxford 2007). For Choniates and the Christian Platonic tradition see also Efthymiadis, in *Villes* 77–78.

³⁸ For the Byzantine Gregory see Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos* 56–63; for Gregory as a favorite Byzantine author see J. Noret, "Grégoire de Nazianze, l'auteur le plus cité, après la Bible, dans la littérature ecclésiastique byzantine," in Justin Mossay (ed.), *II. Symposium Nazianzenum* (Paderborn 1983) 259–266.

³⁹ For ἐκβάσει we might read instead ἐκφάσει, an attractive and welcome emendation suggested to me by Stratis Papaioannou. Thus we would have "through the brightest *revelations* of truth"; cf. *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität* s.v. ἔκφασις. If ἐκβάσει is to be retained, it appears to have one of two meanings, and I offer the translation 'issues' in an attempt to cover both possibilities. A common meaning, especially in Patristic authors, is 'issue' in the sense of a 'fulfillment of divination or prophecy'; cf. LSJ s.v. ἔκβασις II. A less common meaning, but perhaps relevant here, is 'issue' in the sense of 'emanation' or 'procession'; cf. LSJ s.v. III. Ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite uses the word in this way of the 'overflowing' of being from the first cause: B. R. Suchla, *Corpus Dionysiacum I Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. De divinis nominibus* (Berlin 1990) 188.6. Cf. Lampe s.v. ἔκβασις 1.

prefigure indirectly the coming of Christ with the New Testament's direct revelation of Christ's divinity on the other.⁴⁰ This differentiation between the economy of revelation in the Old Testament and that of the New Testament—Truth depicted through symbols versus Truth glimpsed immediately—is characterized in Christian Platonizing discourse in such a way as to render it epistemologically parallel to the division of the 'intelligible' section of Plato's Divided Line at the end of *Republic* 6 (509D6–511E5). This section of the line corresponds to the 'intelligible' world, and it in turn is subdivided into that which is accessed through *διάνοια* and that which is accessed through *νόησις*. The former faculty accesses the truth of the Forms in the manner of students of geometry, as Socrates explains (510D5–511A1):

οὐκοῦν καὶ ὅτι τοῖς ὁρωμένοις εἶδεσι προσχρῶνται καὶ τοὺς λόγους περὶ αὐτῶν ποιοῦνται, οὐ περὶ τούτων διανοοῦμενοι, ἀλλ' ἐκείνων πέρι οἷς ταῦτα ἔοικε, τοῦ τετραγώνου αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα τοὺς λόγους ποιούμενοι καὶ διαμέτρου αὐτῆς, ἀλλ' οὐ ταύτης ἢν γράφουσιν, καὶ τᾶλλα οὕτως, αὐτὰ μὲν ταῦτα ἂ πλάττουσί τε καὶ γράφουσιν, ὧν καὶ σκιαὶ καὶ ἐν ὕδασι εἰκόνες εἰσίν, τούτοις μὲν ὡς εἰκόσιν ἀδ' χρώμενοι, ζητοῦντές τε αὐτὰ ἐκεῖνα ἰδεῖν ἂ οὐκ ἂν ἄλλως ἴδοι τις ἢ τῇ διανοίᾳ.

And do you not also know that they further make use of the visible forms and talk about them, though they are not thinking of them but of those things of which they are a likeness, pursuing their inquiry for the sake of the square as such and the diagonal as such, and not for the sake of the image of it which they draw? And so in all cases. The very things which they mould and draw, which have shadows and images of themselves in water, these things they treat in their turn as only images, but what they really seek is to get sight of those realities which can be seen only by the mind.⁴¹

The figures and symbols used by geometers function as

⁴⁰ So also Kaldellis 159 n.43.

⁴¹ For these passages on the Divided Line I use the Loeb translation of Paul Shorey (Cambridge [Mass.] 1935).

shadows and images of reality, analogous to the way “shadows and images ... in water” (σκιαὶ καὶ ἐν ὕδασιν εἰκόνες) are images of actual physical shapes in nature.

The cognitive faculty corresponding to this section of the line accesses the Forms in the same way that the Old Testament provides access to the truth of Christ’s divinity through, as Michael puts it, “dim and shadowy symbols” (συμβόλοις ἀμυδροῖς καὶ σκιώδεσιν). On the other hand, Choniates’ glimpse of the divine through the “brightest issues of truth” (ἀληθείας φανοτάταις ἐκβάσεσι) offers an unmediated experience of the divine analogous to the unmediated understanding of the Forms through νόησις. Such an understanding makes “no use whatever of any object of sense but only of pure ideas moving on through ideas to ideas and ending with ideas” (*Resp.* 511C1–2). In this way the soul ascends to the “principle of all” in the highest segment of the divided line—which Socrates later describes as the contemplation of being and the “brightest aspect of being”: ἕως ἂν εἰς τὸ ὄν καὶ τοῦ ὄντος τὸ φανότατον δυνατὴ γένηται ἀνασχέσθαι θεωμένη (518C9). Here we might compare the way Choniates characterizes his contemplation of the divine as being made possible through the ἀληθείας φανοτάταις ἐκβάσεσι to Plato’s τοῦ ὄντος τὸ φανότατον, which for him is the ultimate object of the soul’s contemplation. Plato had drawn upon the metaphor of bright, revelatory light to characterize *theoria* that is unmediated through symbols, and in doing so he established a precedent that Choniates in his turn, much later in that long succession, would follow.⁴²

⁴² Note also that in Christian Platonizing discourse the figure of Moses the *theoros* is associated not only with imagery of revelatory light, as in Choniates, but also commonly with the motif of the “darkness of unknowing” as it is used in connection with apophatic theology. Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa play a major role in the development of this tradition; see n.37 above. For another key passage see Ps.-Dion. Ar. *Myst.* (ed. Heil and Ritter) 143.16–144.15. Ps.-Dionysius’ “darkness of unknowing” (τὸν γνόφον τῆς ἀγνωσίας, 144.10) is the literary ancestor of the “darkness” (γνόφος) and “cessation of all thinking” (κατάπαυσις πάσης νοήσεως) that Psellos, in his letter to Xiphilinos (287 above), associates with Sinai in

Then, in the climactic image of the homily, he creates a final chain of divine light that transfigures the torch relay he had used at the beginning of the oration. The ancient Athenians had been spectators of a chain of light carried in the torch relay on horseback, but Choniates' contemporary Athenian audience are to engage in contemplation of a chain of *divine* light. The Virgin Mary, as both receptacle and giver of light (τῆς φωτοδόχου παρθένου καὶ φωτοδότιδος), stands at the center of this chain, and the light of Christ that shines from her and the lamp-light that shines from her dwelling-place, the Parthenon, are the objects of Choniates' gaze. The Virgin and her temple receive divine light "broken off from the Father of Lights" (ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων θεία φωτὸς ἀπορρώξ) which in turn Michael and his audience contemplate, while taking care to "keep the fire of love alive"⁴³ lest they extinguish the Spirit (105.22–28):

τοιόνδε τὸ τέμενος τοῦτο, περικαλλές, εὐφεγγές, ἀνάκτορον τῆς φωτοδόχου παρθένου καὶ φωτοδότιδος χάριεν, τὸ τοῦ λάμπαντος ἐξ αὐτῆς ἀληθινοῦ φωτὸς ἅγιον σκῆνωμα, οὗ τὴν τερπνότητα ἐπισκέπτεσθαι λαχόντες παρὰ θεοῦ, εὐλαβώμεθα, μήποτε νυκτὸς ἔργοις μελαινώμεθα, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ φωτὶ τὸ φῶς ὀπτανώμεθα, τῷ τῶν ἀρετῶν τὸ τῆς ἐντεῦθεν ἐλλάμψεως.

Such is this temple, most beautiful, luminous, graceful palace of the light-receiving and light-giving virgin, the holy dwelling-place of the true light that shines from her, the delightful beauty of which God has granted us to behold; let us take care lest we become black with deeds of night; rather in light let us behold the light, that is, in the light of our virtues let us behold the light that beams forth there.

The ancient forefathers of Choniates' Athenian audience, as lovers of sacrifices and feasts (94.15–16), had been spectators at a torch race on horseback, a festival of light. For Choniates,

his own explanation of Moses' contemplative ascent: for the passage see Criscuolo, *Michele Psello* 54.165–55.178 and 78 (commentary).

⁴³ 105.29–106.1: πῶς δ' οὐ σβέσομεν τὸ πνεῦμα; εἰ τὸ τῆς ἀγάπης πῦρ ἀναζωπυροῦμεν ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς ἐμπυρεύοντες.

however, that ancient light spectacle pales in comparison to that which his audience now contemplate. Their ancestors had a “pseudo-virgin” and the torch relay of the *Bendideia*; now they have the Virgin Mary and the stream of divine light which she receives and shines forth in turn. The Athenians, who were once like the wild olive but have since been cultivated into the domestic olive,⁴⁴ now have a festival spectacle worthy of the true religion. However, in the passing of the old religion to Christianity not all has been lost, and Plato’s *Bendideia* still has a place in the new dispensation. For Michael Choniates as bishop of Athens at the close of the twelfth century, the festival scene that opened the *Republic* proves a still-fertile metaphor, and he is able to exploit it just as Plato had in order to prefigure themes of cultural inheritance and succession, chains of divine light, and the contemplation of God.

The introductory scene at the *Bendideia* festival has been famous since antiquity; perennially cited is the anecdote of how after Plato’s death multiple drafts of just the first sentence of the *Republic* were found among his papers (Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 25). As we have seen (n.32), the opening at the Peiraeus carries special significance for the whole of the work. Moreover, Andrea Wilson Nightingale and Ian Rutherford have used this passage to demonstrate how Plato and other fourth-century philosophers invented contemplative metaphysical philosophy as we know it by using the well-known civic practice of festival pilgrimage to delineate a new realm of activity for a new type of philosopher: the contemplation of pure ideas.⁴⁵ In dialogues like the *Phae-*

⁴⁴ 103.21–22: ὡς ἐξ ἀγριελαίου εἰς καλλιέλαιον μετεκεντρίσθητε (alluding to Rom 11:24).

⁴⁵ Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth* 17: “How did the fourth-century philosophers conceptualize ‘theoretical’ wisdom and define it as an intellectual practice? The central metaphor used in the philosophic literature of this period was that of spectating at a religious festival.” Ian Rutherford, “*Theoria* and *Darśan*: Pilgrimage as Gaze in Greece and India,” *CQ* 50 (2000) 133–146, and *State Pilgrims and Sacred Observers in Ancient Greece: A Study of Theoria and Theoroi* (Cambridge 2014) 324–338.

drus, the *Symposium*, and especially the *Republic*, Plato uses the institution of traditional *theoria*—festival pilgrimage and spectatorship—as a metaphor to characterize the ideal philosopher’s contemplative activity: the philosopher is a *theoros* or pilgrim who engages in ritual spectatorship or *theoria* of Truth:

The fourth-century philosophers favored this paradigm [traditional *theoria*] for several reasons. First, they sought to conceptualize a mode of apprehension that took the form of ‘seeing’ divine essences or truths. *Theoria* at religious festivals—in which the pilgrim viewed icons, sacred images, and spectacles—offered a good model for this conception of philosophical ‘vision’. As we have seen, *theoria* at religious sanctuaries and festivals was characterized by a sacralized, ‘ritualized’ visuality.⁴⁶

It is beyond the scope of the present article to trace the development of contemplative *theoria* from how Plato conceived of it to how Choniates performed it on behalf of his audience at a Christian *panegyris* or festival in the Parthenon in the twelfth century. Suffice it to say that the ever-burning lamp of the Christian Parthenon was not the only light that could suggest to Choniates and his peers a connection between past and present. In “the noble contest” of the torch race which Choniates ran, the torch which he received from his predecessors and which he would in turn “pass on to those who come after” had been lit by Plato long before.⁴⁷

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⁴⁶ Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth* 69.

⁴⁷ My warm gratitude goes to the journal’s anonymous readers for their unstintingly generous advice, as well as to Stratis Papaioannou, Elsa Amanatidou, and Ray McConnell for their crucial comments on an earlier version. Finally, I owe more than I can say here to Margaret Mullett and the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, where a stay as a Junior Fellow in Byzantine Studies for 2014/5 made this paper possible.