

A Pious Mouse and a Deadly Cat: The *Schede tou Myos*, attributed to Theodore Prodromos

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BYZANTINE LITERATURE has no shortage of mice.¹ Anna Komnene describes a Turkish sultan's dream in which he is attacked by mice which turn into lions (15.6). Christophoros of Mytilene² and later Eustathios of Thessalonike³ complain about mice invading their houses; unusually big mice living in Hades appear in the twelfth-century satire *Timarion*.⁴ Finally, mice serve as the protagonists of Theodore Prodromos' *Katomyomachia*.⁵ Traditionally mice were regarded

¹ Mice are also a common topic in ancient Greek literature, see for instance the epigrams *Anth.Gr.* 6.302 and 303.

² M. de Groot, *Christophori Mitylenaii Versuum Variorum Collectio Cryptensis* (Turnhout 2012) no. 103, Εἰς τοὺς ἐν τῇ <οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ μῦς>: "The voracious mice of this home who (...) everything (...) giving themselves over to marriages and births (...) they <turn> my house into their colony" (unpublished transl. by F. Bernard).

³ *Ep.* 6, ed. F. Kolovou, *Die Briefe des Eustathios von Thessalonike* (Munich/Leipzig 2006). On this letter see M. Grünbart, "Store in a Cool and Dry Place: Perishable Goods and their Preservation in Byzantium," in L. Brubaker and K. Linardou (eds.), *Eat, Drink and Be Merry (Luke 12:19). Food and Wine in Byzantium. In honour of Professor A. A. M. Bryer* (Burlington 2007) 42–43.

⁴ *Timarion* 18–19; transl. B. Baldwin (Detroit 1984) 54–55.

⁵ H. Hunger, *Der byzantinische Katz-Mäuse-Krieg. Theodore Prodromus, Katomyomachia* (Graz 1968). Generally on mice in Byzantine literature see C. Carpinato, "Topi nella letteratura greca medievale," in E. Cingano et al. (eds.), *Animali tra zoologia, mito e letteratura nella cultura classica e orientale* (Padua 2005) 175–192.

as greedy creatures who drank the olive oil from lamps and ate people's food.⁶

Among the texts in which a mouse plays a prominent role is an interesting yet understudied work of the twelfth century, the *Schede tou Myos*. This work inscribes itself within the traditional depiction of mice as greedy, food-devouring pests. However, it is more than a simple recitation of a common topos but also reflects on the process of learning itself. The *Schede* has not received much attention from scholars. There are a number of editions, beginning with the *editio princeps* by Jean François Boissonade in 1829,⁷ but almost no work that offers a complete analysis of the text. A recent exception is a monograph by Florence Meunier, which offers a lengthy though not always reliable study of both *Katomyomachia* and *Schede tou Myos*.⁸ Meunier's book includes a French version of *Schede*, the only translation of this text. Against this backdrop, the present analysis attempts to shed light on aspects of *Schede* which remain either unstudied or debated, such as its didactic as well as satiric purposes.

The text, divided into two parts—hence *schede* not *schedos*—

⁶ See for instance N. Nicholas and G. Baloglou, *An Entertaining Tale of Quadrupeds. Translation and Commentary* (New York 2003), lines 127–149 (the description of a mouse).

⁷ J. Fr. Boissonade, *Anecdota graeca* I (Paris 1829) 429–435; K. Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη* VII (Venice 1894) 114–117; K. Horna, “Analecten zur byzantinischen Literatur,” *Jahresbericht des k. k. Sophiengymnasiums* (Vienna 1905) 12–16; J.-Th. Papademetriou, “Τὰ σχέδη τοῦ μύος: New Sources and Text,” in *Classical Studies presented to Ben Edwin Perry* (Urbana 1969) 210–222; most recently M. Papathomopoulos, “Τοῦ σοφωτάτου κυρου Θεοδώρου τοῦ Προδρόμου τὰ Σχέδη τοῦ μύος,” *Parnassos* 21 (1979) 376–399, who also discusses the previous editions.

⁸ F. Meunier, *Théodore Prodrome. Crime et châtement chez les souris* (Paris 2016). Meunier's analysis is at times questionable and her conclusions at least debatable; she rarely refers to previous studies even if they deal directly with the same topic. Some of her ideas are interesting but on the whole the book seems an unsuccessful attempt to find in the texts layers of meaning which are simply not there.

tells the story of how a mouse, tempted by banquet leftovers, is caught by a cat as he is about to eat a mullet. The mouse unsuccessfully tries to convince the cat that he is a monk and, at the end of the story, is devoured by his oppressor. This story is, more or less, a traditional Aesopic scenario in which one animal attempts to outfox another.⁹

The authorship of the text is not completely certain. Most often it has been ascribed to Theodore Prodromos,¹⁰ but this has been questioned. Following Boissonade, Karl Krumbacher attributed the work (“Maushumoreske”) to Prodromos.¹¹ Konstantinos Sathas went even further, calling the *Schede* “a key” to Prodromos’ *Katomyomachia*.¹² However, Konstantin Horna later questioned Prodromic authorship on two grounds. He argued that Prodromos’ name appears in only one manuscript, and, perhaps more importantly, certain stylistic and literary similarities suggest that the *Schede* was penned by Konstantinos Manasses, not Prodromos.¹³ Silvio Mercati pointed out that Horna’s arguments are not conclusive and that similar literary features can be found in the texts of other twelfth-century writers.¹⁴ John-Theophanes Papademetriou abstained from discussing

⁹ See for instance fable 79 Perry, where a cat pretends to be dead to catch mice. For a similar though much later scenario compare a Cretan story, C. Luciani, “L’apologo cretese ó Κάτης καὶ ó μποντικός,” *RSBN* N.S. 38 (2001) 195–230; N. Banescu, “Un poème grec vulgaire du moyen-âge: ‘Ο κάτης καὶ οἱ ποντικοί,’” in *Εἰς μνήμην Σπ. Λάμπρου* (Athens 1935) 393–397. Generally on cats in Byzantium see E. Kislinger, “Byzantine Cats,” in I. Anagnostakis et al. (eds.), *Animals and Environment in Byzantium* (Athens 2011) 165–178, with further bibliography.

¹⁰ H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* II (Munich 1978) 28: “Ein Pendant dazu sind die dem Theodoros Prodromos gehörigen Σχέδη τοῦ μύος.”

¹¹ *Geschichte der Byzantinischen Literatur*² (Munich 1897) 757.

¹² Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη* VII 114.

¹³ Horna, *Jahresbericht* 12–14.

¹⁴ S. Mercati, “Intorno agli Σχέδη μύος,” in *Collectanea Byzantina* I (Bari 1970) 380.

the authorship issue, merely pointing out that “in the three new manuscripts, however, no mention is made of Prodrimos or any other author.”¹⁵ In contrast, Meunier’s recent analysis is wholly based on the presumption that Prodrimos was the author of the *Schede*, so as to form a sort of a literary diptych with the *Katomyomachia*.

The arguments supporting Prodromic authorship are rather weak. The heading attributing this work to him appears in only one manuscript (*Paris.gr.* 2652, 15th cent.), written in faded red ink above the folio number (110).¹⁶ Horna has noted rightly that it was common practice to ascribe an anonymous work to a famous author from the past.¹⁷ Interestingly, the case of the *Katomyomachia* is similar—only one manuscript contains an ascription of Prodromic authorship, *Marc.gr.* 524.¹⁸ However, unlike *Paris.gr.* 2652, *Marc.gr.* 524 (ca. 1300) is the oldest and best codex available. The manuscript evidence, thus, is inconclusive, and students of the *Schede* have attempted to look elsewhere for possible proof of Prodromic authorship.

A passage in the *Description of the Earth* by Konstantinos Manasses (151–163)¹⁹ describing the dilemma of a mouse which wants to eat fish leftovers is almost identical, with slight changes, to a passage in the *Schede tou Myos*.²⁰ Horna took this

¹⁵ Papademetriou, in *Classical Studies* 213. The latest edition, Papathomopoulos, *Parnassos* 21 (1979) 376–399, seems to accept the Prodromic attribution. There is a short discussion (at 389–390) where he summarizes the earlier views.

¹⁶ Papademetriou, in *Classical Studies* 213 n.16. I have consulted the manuscript on line.

¹⁷ Horna, *Jahresbericht* 12. On titles of Byzantine texts generally see A. Rhoby, “Labeling Poetry in the Middle and Late Byzantine Period,” *Byzantion* 85 (2015) 259–283.

¹⁸ Hunger, *Der byzantinische Katz-Mäuse-Krieg* 25.

¹⁹ I. Nilsson, “Narrating Images in Byzantine Literature: The Ekphrasis of Konstantinos Manasses,” *JÖB* 55 (2005) 121–146, at 125–126, translates this passage.

²⁰ Papathomopoulos, *Parnassos* 21 (1979) 395–396.

as yet another proof that these two texts—*Schede* and *Description*—could have been penned by the same person,²¹ but Paul Maas accused Manasses of plagiarizing Prodromos' work.²² Indeed it was not unusual for one writer to appropriate lines or even longer passages from other authors' works. For instance, Niketas Eugenianos, Prodromos' student, uses lines from his teacher's satire *Against a Lustful Old Woman* in *Drosilla and Charikles*.²³ An even closer similarity can be found in the *Dramation* by Michael Haplucheir, who re-uses passages from various Prodromic texts.²⁴ Thus, it is possible that in the *Description*, Manasses uses a fragment from the work penned by his older and more famous colleague.

There are other literary traits shared by the *Schede* and works of Prodromos—the mixing of prose and verse, ancient proper names given in the plural (Prodromos did this, for instance, in the *Bion Praxis*), and finally of course the cat-mouse conflict scenario. All these features, however, could have been used by any other twelfth-century writer. I am inclined to think, on the basis of literary rather than codicological grounds, that Prodromos or somebody from his immediate milieu could well have been the author of this piece. The Prodromic authorship seems attractive and plausible even though there is not enough evidence to put it beyond doubt.

Two manuscripts (*Paris.gr.* 2652 and *Vat.gr.* 711) describe the

²¹ Horna, *Jahresbericht* 13.

²² P. Maas, "Rhythmisches zu der Kunstprosa des Manasses," *BZ* 11 (1902) 511 n.1.

²³ Compare for instance the description of the old woman at *Drosilla* 5.81–82 (λημῶς γὰρ ἦδη, κὰν ὁ κόχλος εἰς βάθος / κατωχριῶς ναί, κὰν τὸ φῦκος εἰς πάχος) and *Against* 30–31 (λημῶσα, κὰν ὁ κόχλος ἀμφὶ τὰς κόρας / ῥυσσῶσα, κὰν τὸ φῦκος ἀμφὶ τὰς γνάθους).

²⁴ W. Hörandner, "Prodromos-Reminiszenzen bei Dichtern der Nikänischen Zeit," *ByzF* 4 (1972) 98–104, and "Musterautoren und ihre Nachahmer: Indizien für Elemente einer byzantinischen Poetik," in P. Odorico et al. (eds.), *"Doux Remède": Poésie et poétique à Byzance* (Paris 2009) 201–217.

work as τὰ σχέδη τοῦ μύος (V) and σχέδη μύος (P), locating it thus in the tradition of schedography. Once ignored, *schede*, or didactic exercises, have attracted increased scholarly attention in recent years.²⁵ Hunger's preliminary definition is very general, describing them as school exercises presented in a form appropriate for children to learn important lessons, such as grammar.²⁶ Although students of Byzantine literature today know much more about schedography than in Hunger's time, an attempt to precisely define *schede* is a desideratum. Recently a definition of what a *schedos* is and what functions it performed was offered by Panagiotis Agapitos:²⁷

²⁵ Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche profane Literatur* II 25; cf. *ODB* III 1849 ("a system of educational exercises introduced probably ca. 1000"); R. Browning, "Il codice Marciano gr. XI.31 e la schedografia bizantina," in *Miscellanea Marciana di Studi Bessarionici* (Padua 1976) 21–34 (repr. *Studies on Byzantine History, Literature and Education* [London 1977] XVI); C. Gallavotti, "Nota sulla schedografia di Moscopulo e suoi precedenti fino a Teodoro Prodromo," *BollClass* SER. III 4 (1983) 3–35, esp. 12–35; I. Vassis, "Graeca sunt, non leguntur: Zu den schedographischen Spielereien des Theodoros Prodromos," *BZ* 86–87 (1993–1994) 1–19; D. Polemis, "Προβλήματα τῆς βυζαντινῆς σχεδογραφίας," *Hellenika* 45 (1995) 277–302, and "Philologische und historische Probleme in der schedographischen Sammlung des *Codex Marcianus Gr. XI, 31*," *Byzantion* 67 (1997) 252–263; T. S. Miller, "Two Teaching Texts from the Twelfth-Century Orphanotropheion," in J. W. Nesbitt (ed.), *Byzantine Authors: Literary Activities and Preoccupations. Texts and Translations dedicated to the Memory of Nicolas Oikonomides* (Leiden/Boston 2003) 9–20; P. Agapitos, "Grammar, Genre and Politics in Komnenian Constantinople: Redefining a Scientific Paradigm in the History of Byzantine Literature," *JÖB* 64 (2014) 1–22, and "Learning to Read and Write a *Schedos*: The Verse Dictionary of Par. gr. 400," in E. Efthymiadis, (eds.), *Pour une poétique de Byzance. Hommage à Vassilis Katsaros* (Paris 2015) 11–24.

²⁶ *Die Hochsprachliche profane Literatur* II 25: "Seit der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit, und zwar seit dem frühen 11. Jh., verstand man unter *σχέδος* im technischen Sinne offenbar ein umfangmässig begrenztes Lehrstück, das – in Prosa oder in Versen – in einer für kindliche Gemüter berechneten Methode verschiedenes Wissenwertes, vor allem aus der Grammatik, vermitteln sollte."

²⁷ *JÖB* 64 (2014) 5.

A *schedos* served a primary and a secondary aim. It drilled young pupils (ten to twelve years old) in the complexities of Greek grammar and syntax, while it also helped them in certain cases to understand the different types of progymnasmata. These two aims were achieved through the puzzling form in which the γραμματικός (“grammarian”) presented the *schedos*, since the text was filled with strange words and phrases giving no meaning, and punctuated in an erratic manner. The pupils had to decode such a puzzle and to rewrite it correctly. The puzzles were based on ἀντίστοιχα (“sound correspondences”); these could be similarly sounding verbal or nominal forms, or they could be wrongly written words or phrases. *Schede* were usually written in prose (approximately twenty to twenty-five lines in length), but they were also composed in iambic twelve-syllable verse. A high number of *schede* from the late eleventh to the late twelfth century survive in collections transmitted in approximately twenty manuscripts of the thirteenth and early fourteenth century; most of these *schede* are still unpublished and thus understudied.

However, the exact function of the *Schede tou Myos* remains disputed. Its first editor, Boissonade, labelled it “*tenuissimum opusculum*” (“a very weak little work”) meant to be performed as a speech in a school.²⁸ Krumbacher called it *Maushumoreske*, a parody of the Holy Scripture.²⁹ These two scholars opened two possible ways of understanding the *Schede*: as a parodical or satirical work (Sathas, Horna) or merely a school exercise with no humorous elements (Mercati, Festa).³⁰ Papademetriou asserted rightly that, in setting in opposition satirical vs. educational texts, these scholars created “an issue where none need exist.”³¹ Presented in different performative contexts—in school or *theatron*—the same text might have different purposes. What in school was a *schedos* might become a text with satirical in-

²⁸ *Anecdota graeca* I 429.

²⁹ *Geschichte* 757.

³⁰ N. Festa, “Note preliminari su Longibardos,” *BZ* 16 (1907) 452.

³¹ Papademetriou, in *Classical Studies* 214.

nuendo when presented in a *theatron*.³² The *Schede* stands out also in terms of its bipartite composition, with each prose *schedos* followed by a short poem in dodecasyllables. Silvio Giuseppe Mercati edited two other texts, which he also described as schedographical exercises.³³ They are interesting in that they are structurally quite similar to the *Schede tou Myos*: the narrative is divided into two parts, each ends with a short dodecasyllable poem (of two lines and five, respectively).³⁴ Moreover, like the *Schede* the texts lack any antistoichic elements (homonyms or incorrect words which students were supposed to correct).

Although not all manuscripts contain the description *schede/schede tou myos* there is no reason to doubt that one of the text's functions was to serve as a school exercise. One of the codices, *Vat.gr.* 711, transmits other works which were either part of the Byzantine *curriculum studiorum* or were used in teaching:³⁵

³² This was suggested already by Vassis in his work on two Prodromic *schede*, *BZ* 86–87 (1993–1994) 13: “Diese Stücke können zwar in der Schule verwendet, aber vielleicht auch an die in ihnen angesprochenen Personen geschickt werden: das erste an den hohen Beamten, um durch ihn in die Hände des Kaisers zu gelangen, das zweite direkt an die Kaiserin und ihre Familie.” Nikolaos Zagklas recently proposed to see imperial court, school, and *theatron* as “three communicating vessels,” i.e. different performative contexts: *Theodore Prodromos: The Neglected Poems and Epigrams* (diss. Vienna 2014) 93.

³³ Mercati, *Collectanea* 384.

³⁴ The content of these *schede* is different, however, as they describe the heavenly vision prompted by an illness. On this kind of vision see J. Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium. Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (Cambridge 2007).

³⁵ On Byzantine education see for instance S. Efthymiadis, “L’enseignement secondaire à Constantinople pendant les XI^e et XII^e siècles: Modèle éducatif pour la Terre d’Otrante au XIII^e siècle,” *Néa Póμη* 2 (2005) 259–275; A. Markopoulos, “De la structure de l’école byzantine. Le maître, les livres et le processus éducatif,” in B. Mondrain (ed.), *Lire et écrire à Byzance* (Paris 2006) 85–96, and “Teachers and Textbooks in Byzantium, Ninth to Eleventh Centuries,” in S. Steckel et al. (eds.), *Networks of Learning. Perspectives on Scholars in Byzantine East and Latin West, c. 1000–1200* (Zürich/Münster 2014) 3–15; A. Giannouli, “Education and Literary Language in Byzan-

tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; a speech of Demosthenes; a grammatical treatise on the alphabet; a parenetical treatise of Basil I. Similarly one of the MSS., *Leiden. Vulc.* 93, contains texts potentially useful for school: a selection from Sophocles, and *Ilias* by Konstantinos Hermoniakos. The didactic purpose of the *Schede* is also evident in its introductory sentences:

Schedos I. Εἰ βούλεσθε, ὦ παῖδες, τραφήναι τήμερον λογικῶς, ἰδοὺ ὁ μῦς ὑμῖν τὸ συσσίτιον δίδωσιν. οἶδατε δὲ ὡς τὸ ζῶον λίχνον ἐστὶ καὶ κατὰ τὸν Ποιητὴν ἐμβασίχυτρον.

If you would like, O children, to feed on learning today, the mouse offers you a communal meal. You know how gluttonous this animal is and, according to the Poet, is a pot-stalker.

Schedos II. Ἴδοὺ καὶ σήμερον ἄβρον ὑμῖν τὸ ἐστίαμα ἢ τοῦ μυδὸς εὐτρεπίσειε τράπεζα.

Look, may there be a nice meal prepared for you on the mouse's table today.

Both sentences compare the consumption of food and the consumption of literature. This alimentary metaphor is not unusual, especially in texts written by teachers or for didactic purposes. In one poem from the School of Forty Martyrs, the author (a teacher) mentions the meal (or table) of the words of mortals, βροτῶν λογικῶν (...) τράπεζαν (3.2–3).³⁶ The first *schedos* edited by Mercati ends with an invitation to “the second table” (πρὸς τράπεζαν δευτέραν).³⁷ Similarly, in a commentary on the *Halieutica* of Oppian, Tzetzes compares his texts to a banquet, πανδαίσια—the same word is used by the mouse in the *Schede*—prepared with condiments (ἄρτυμάτων).³⁸ Finally,

tium,” in M. Hinterberger (ed.), *The Language of Byzantine Learned Literature* (Turnhout 2014) 52–71.

³⁶ G. Schirò, “La schedografia a Bisanzio nei secoli XI–XII e la scuola dei SS XL Martiri,” *BBGG* 3 (1949) 29.

³⁷ Mercati, *Collectanea* 384.

³⁸ A. Colonna, “Il commento di Giovanni Tzetzes agli ‘Halieutica’ di Oppiano,” in *Lanx satura: Nicolao Terzaghi oblata* (Genoa 1963) 102.

in one of his letters Michael Italikos describes the educational feast he can offer.³⁹

With this imagery of literary consumption, the introductory lines of the *Schede tou Myos* define the text's purpose. However, in my view, these lines are intended to do more than confirm the didactic function of the text. The mouse is described as λιχνός, "greedy," and ἐμβασίχυτρος, a "pot-stalker." The latter is a clear allusion to the *Batrachomyomachia*, in which Ἐμβασίχυτρος is one of the protagonists.⁴⁰ The *Batrachomyomachia* was believed to be a school text for children written by Homer,⁴¹ so it had essentially the same aim as the *Schede tou Myos*. On the other hand, the mouse's greediness was not only his true motivation and the ultimate cause of his demise but also a warning against voracious, greedy reading. As Aglae Pizzone shows, λιχνεία was believed to be counterproductive in education. Although acceptable in the reading of fiction, it was questionable in learning, as examples from the writings of Michael Psellos and Eustathios of Thessalonike demonstrate.⁴²

³⁹ *Ep.* 18, ed. P. Gautier, *Michel Italikos. Lettres et discours* (Paris 1972). See also Eustathios of Thessalonike's remark: "So out of Homer flooded down to the sages most if not all of the greatest stream of literature. Of all the men who pondered the things above or studied nature, ethics, or profane literature generally, not one passed by Homer's banquet without a welcome. All lodged with him, some to spend the rest of their lives being fed from his table, others to fulfil a need and to borrow something useful from him for their own argument" (I 1 van der Valk; transl. after C. J. Herington, "Homer: A Byzantine Perspective," *Arion* 8 [1969] 433).

⁴⁰ On the *Batrachomyomachia* in Byzantium see C. Carpinato, "La fortuna della *Batrachomyomachia* dal IX al XVI secolo: da testo scolastico a testo 'politico,'" in M. Fusillo, *La battaglia delle rane e dei topi* (Milan 1988) 137–148; H. Wölke, *Untersuchungen zur Batrachomyomachie* (Meisenheim 1978).

⁴¹ This is suggested for example by an epigram attributed to Leo the Philosopher where the *Batrachomyomachia* is presented as a work written by Homer for young students to imitate: see Wölke, *Untersuchungen* 34–35

⁴² A. Pizzone, "Fiction, Emotions and Audiences in Eustathios of Thessalonike's Commentaries on Homer," *DOP* 70 (2016) 227–229. A similar image of students being greedy for *schede* appears in Psellos' work: *Ep.* 16 (E. Kurtz and F. Drexel, *Scripta minora* 20.4–16): φοιτᾶτον παρ' ἡμᾶς νέω περὶ

The two lead sentences in the text thus not only define its purpose but also caution against excessive eagerness. What makes the *Schede tou Myos* exceptional is that the entire text might be read as a warning against eagerness, λιχνεία, which ultimately has negative consequences.

The aim of a work like the *Schede* is to help students develop their power over words. The opening phrase τραφήναι τήμερον λογικῶς resembles lines from the “schedographical dictionary” edited by Boissonade,⁴³ whose function was most likely to help young Byzantines compose a *schedos* (8–9):

ἐπεὶ λόγος ἄρχει σε, ἄρχου καὶ σὺ τοῦ λόγου,
ὡς ζῶων λογικώτατον, καὶ βασιλεὺς τῶν ζῶων.

Since the word has power over you, you have power over the word as the most *intelligent*⁴⁴ animal and the king of animals.

These two verses encapsulate the very purpose of a *schedos*: to master and rule words in the same way human beings rule animals.

The use of the Psalms in the second *schedos* is also indicative of the educational purpose, as they were the basis of Byzantine

ὀρθογραφίας πονοῦντε καὶ περὶ τούτων ταῖν πάσαν καταβάλλοντε σπουδὴν. οὗτοι, φύσει τε ὄντες δεξιοὶ καὶ σπουδῇ τὰ πλεῖστα τῶν χρησίμων γεγραφοῦτες σχεδῶν, ὧν καὶ ποτε αὐτὸς σχεδογραφῶν ἔτυχον, βιάζουσιν ἡμᾶς καὶ κατεπεύγουσιν, ἐφ’ ᾧ καὶ ἐτέρους τοιαῦτα αἰτεῖν, βαρέως φέροντες, εἰ μὴ χανδὸν πάντων σχεδῶν σιτήσονται.

⁴³ *Anecdota graeca* IV (Paris 1832) 366–412. Antonio Tovar dated this lexicon to the twelfth century: “Nicetas of Heraclea and Byzantine Grammatical Doctrine,” in *Classical Studies Perry* 235. Niels Gaul opted for fourteenth-century Cyprus: “Ἀνασσα Ἄννα σκόπει – Fürstin Anna, bedenke! Beobachtungen zur Schedo- und Lexikographie in der spätbyzantinischen Provinz,” in L. M. Hoffmann and A. Monchizadeh (eds.), *Zwischen Polis, Provinz und Peripherie: Beiträge zur byzantinischen Geschichte und Kultur* (Wiesbaden 2005) 663–703, esp. 666–693. Most recently Panagiotis Agapitos proposed again the twelfth century: in *Pour une poétique* 11–24; Agapitos’ paper offers also the most exhaustive analysis of the text.

⁴⁴ I assume that λογικός here means “intelligent/endowed with reason” in the sense of someone with a perfect control of words/language, someone learned.

elementary education—“the psalter served as the main textbook.”⁴⁵ At the beginning of the exchange of quotations from the Psalms, the mouse dares to change a verse from Psalm 37:2, rendering Κύριε, μὴ τῷ θυμῷ σου ἐλέγξης με (“O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger”) as “Κυρία μου, μὴ τῷ θυμῷ σου ἐλέγξης με” (2.73–74, “O my Lady, rebuke me not in your anger”).⁴⁶ The change of gender is grammatically necessary because the cat is ἡ αἰλουρίς. However, this text has no religious context; it is neither subversive nor blasphemous. Contrary to what Krumbacher thought, the *Schede* is not a parody of the Psalms (“Parodie heiliger Schriften”).⁴⁷ Both mouse and cat manipulate the quotations from the psalter as these texts are treated as school materials, not sacred writings. If there are comic overtones in this passage, they lie rather in two animals using what was the basis of literary education than in the author of the *Schede* parodying the Psalms.

Given that the didactic purpose of this work is beyond doubt, what then were these two particular *schede* meant to teach?⁴⁸ As mentioned above, the *Schede tou Myos* is quite an exceptional work. The element closest to the antistoichic puzzles described above is the alteration of a verse from Hosea 6:7, ἔλεος θέλω καὶ οὐ θυσίαν (“I desire mercy, not sacrifice”), to ἔλαιον θέλω καὶ οὐ θυσίαν (*Schedos* II, “I desire olive oil, not sacrifice”). This phrase is hardly a riddle, however, but wordplay based on the

⁴⁵ Giannouli, in *The Language* 53. See also H. Hunger, *Schreiben und Lesen in Byzanz. Die byzantinische Buchkultur* (Munich 1989) 77–78; F. Ciccolella, *Donati Graeci. Learning Greek in the Renaissance* (Leiden 2008) 106; A. Markopoulos, “Education,” in E. Jeffreys et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford 2008) 787.

⁴⁶ For the Psalms I use the numeration of A. Rahlfs and the translation of L. C. L. Brenton.

⁴⁷ Krumbacher, *Geschichte* 757.

⁴⁸ The same question was asked by Papademetriou with no definite answer. His assumption that the lesson would be to warn young monks not to wear “civilian clothes outside the school compound” seems simplistic (*Classical Studies* 214–215 n.18).

homophonic similarity between ἔλαιον and ἔλεος. Hunger gives a long list of what could have been learned from the *Schede*: vocabulary (e.g. animal names, body parts), figures of speech (anaphora, chiasmus), and the names of mythological characters.⁴⁹ While it is highly likely that various rhetorical figures were placed in the text for students to find and identify, I am sceptical of Hunger's other propositions. A student at this level of education should already have been familiar with such mythological names as Aias, Achilles, Menelaos, and Nestor.⁵⁰ Also, the nouns used in the first *schedos* do not seem to be unusually complicated. If, once again, the "schedographical dictionary" gives any indication here, this lexicon does not include words used in the *Schede*, with two exceptions: γέρανος (94) and μῦς (522, explained as ὁ ποντικός). In the strictest sense then, the *Schede tou Myos* does not look like a *schedos*.

However, *schede* could teach not only how to recognize and use words or rhetorical figures but also how to write *progymnasmata*. I suggest that this was an important didactic purpose of the *Schede tou Myos*. The first *schedos* is mostly an independent ekphrasis⁵¹ which describes an object in motion, like Manasses' description of the crane hunt and Hagiotheodorites' depiction of a chariot race in a letter-poem to a friend.⁵² This impression is strengthened by the use of the phrase καὶ ἦν ἰδεῖν τὸν μῦν ("one could see the mouse"). The subject of the ekphrasis is a

⁴⁹ Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche profane Literatur* II 28–29; likewise Carpinato, in *Animali tra zoologia* 183. Rhetorical figures are thoroughly analysed in Meunier, *Théodore Prodrome* 296–302.

⁵⁰ See for instance N. M. Kalogeras, *Byzantine Childhood Education and its Social Role from the Sixth Century until the End of Iconoclasm* (diss. Univ. of Chicago 2000); A. Vasilikopoulou-Ioannidou, *Η αναγέννησις των γραμμάτων κατά τον 13' αιώνα εις το Βυζάντιον και ο Όμηρος* (Athens 1971); R. Browning, "Homer in Byzantium," *Viator* 8 (1975) 15–33.

⁵¹ See for instance Nilsson, *JÖB* 55 (2005) 121–146.

⁵² P. Marciniak and K. Warcaba, "Racing with Rhetoric. A Byzantine Ekphrasis of a Chariot Race," *BZ* 107 (2014) 97–112, with further bibliography.

mouse surrounded by food leftovers, who both fears the potential danger (i.e. a cat) and is overwhelmed by what is on the table. I assume that this piece was intended to be an ekphrasis and this is exactly the reason why Manasses used a fragment taken from it—or perhaps it was the other way around; who borrowed from whom is not of the highest importance—in his own ekphrasis.⁵³ Therefore, whereas the first part is mostly ekphrastic, I argue that the second can be seen as an exercise in *ethopoia*—what would a mouse caught by a cat say? Conventionally, *ethopoia* followed the form of an oration delivered by either an historical figure or a mythological character and preceded by the phrase *τίνας ἂν εἴποι λόγους*.⁵⁴ However, there are examples, albeit later, of the *dramatic ethopoia*, which takes the form of a dialogue. For instance, Alexios Makrembolites' *Dialogue between the Poor and the Rich* opens with such a sentence, signifying that the following text is an *ethopoia* in the form of a dialogue: *τίνας ἂν εἴποι λόγους πένητες πρὸς πλουσίους καὶ τίνας αὖ πρὸς πένητας οὗτοι*.⁵⁵ Moreover, given the twelfth-century writers' interest in the dramatic/dialogic form, such an alteration would be perfectly understandable.⁵⁶ *Ethopoiai*, like every *progymnasma*, could be adapted according to the needs of the writer.

As stated, a text might have multiple levels of meaning and

⁵³ Meunier calls this borrowing “une exercice de *mimesis*”: *Théodore Prodrome* 312. To some extent this is right but there is nothing unusual in such recycling of passages taken from earlier authorities or contemporary poets; see M. Grünbart, “Zusammenstellen vs. zussammenstehlen. Zum Traditionsverständnis in der byzantinischen Kultur,” in A. Rhoby and E. Schiffer (eds.), *Imitatio–Aemulatio–Variatio* (Vienna 2010) 129–136.

⁵⁴ So for instance *ethopoiai* written by Nikephoros Basilakes: *Niceforo Basilace, Progimnasmata e monodie*, ed. A. Pignani (Napoli 1983); transl. J. Beneker and C. A. Gibson, *The Rhetorical Exercises of Nikephoros Basilakes. Progymnasmata from Twelfth-Century Byzantium* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2016) 144–329.

⁵⁵ I. Ševčenko, “Alexios Makrembolites and his ‘Dialogue between the Rich and Poor,’” *Žbornik radova Vizantoloskog instituta* 6 (1960) 187–220.

⁵⁶ See for instance Theodore Prodromos' *Amarantos*, *Bion Prasis*, Michael Hapluchair's *Dramation*.

serve more than one purpose. The didactic purpose of the *Schede tou Myos* thus is only one possible reading of the text. The second *schedos* is at the same time an *ethopoia* and a satire of monks who are focused less on heavenly matters and more on earthly pleasures, such as food.⁵⁷ In this *schedos*, the mouse attempts to convince the cat that he is a monk, but the cat accuses the rodent of gluttony, a standard comic motif.⁵⁸ The gluttony and drunkenness of monks was a favourite target of Byzantine invective and satire.⁵⁹ As Northrop Frye explains, “Satire demands at least a token fantasy, a content which the reader recognizes as grotesque, and at least an implicit moral standard.”⁶⁰ The *Schede tou Myos*, especially the second part, offers both—two animals comment indirectly upon a prevalent problem (gluttony) in Byzantine society and perhaps even more precisely among monks, who were supposed to be free from the temptations of this world. The exchange between the pro-

⁵⁷ This has been noted by Meunier, *Théodore Prodrome* 346. Meunier, however, limits her discussion to one example, the satire against the *hegoumenos*. This is one of the so-called *Ptochoprodromica*, see H. Eideneier, *Ptochoprodromos* (Cologne 1991).

⁵⁸ S. E. Hill, *Eating to Excess: The Meaning of Gluttony and the Fat Body in the Ancient World* (Santa Barbara 2011). For gluttony in the twelfth-century context see T. Labuk, “Gluttony at the Table of the State: Niketas Choniates reading Aristophanes,” *JÖB* 66 (2016) 127–150. Moreover, the mouse is anthropomorphized (“And the previously haughty mouse grasped his beard with both hands and plucked it out completely and soaked the entire ground with his tears”). Perhaps this is yet another proof of Prodromic authorship—the imagery of mice in the *Katomyomachia* differs from that in the *Batrachomyomachia* or Aesopic fables in that Prodromic mice look much more like human beings; see L. R. Cresci, “Parodia e metafora nella *Catomyomachia* di Teodoro Prodromo,” *Eikasmos* 12 (2001) 197–204.

⁵⁹ See for instance M. Angold’s analysis of Prodromos’ monastic satire in relation to twelfth-century monastic realia: “Monastic Satire and the Evergetine Monastic Tradition in the Twelfth Century,” in M. Mullett and A. Kirby (eds.), *The Theotokos Evergetis and Eleventh-Century Monasticism* (Belfast 1994) 86–102, esp. 94.

⁶⁰ N. Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton 1957) 224.

tagonists ends with the cat saying “my mouth will become your tomb” (τὸ στόμα μου γενήσεται τάφος σου). This of course means that the cat will devour the poor rodent. However, the cat’s line might be also an allusion to Psalm 5:10, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν ἀλήθεια· ἡ καρδία αὐτῶν ματαία· τάφος ἀνεωγμένος ὁ λάρυγξ αὐτῶν· ταῖς γλώσσαις αὐτῶν ἐδολιοῦσαν (“for there is no truth in their mouth; their heart is vain; their throat is an open tomb; they were treacherous in their words”). This reinforces the fact that the mouse is nothing but a liar and shows the superiority of the cat, who thus defeats the rodent also in “words,” that is, rhetorically.

Therefore, Papademetriou was right in saying that there is no need to argue whether *Schede* is more didactic or more satirical—it is clearly both. Whether its satirical layer was understood by the students is a different question, one that cannot be answered satisfactorily. Although this is mere speculation, I can imagine that this text read in a *theatron* attended e.g. by the author’s peers was seen chiefly as satirical.

Agapitos argued that Prodromos consciously promoted “a novel schedographic project around the middle of the twelfth century.”⁶¹ Although the *Schede tou Myos* differs from the Prodromic *schede* discussed by Agapitos, and there is not absolute certainty that Prodromos penned these two short texts, the *Schede* looks like an experiment: it is an autonomous literary work which possesses both educational and ludic qualities. Nothing in the text suggests a performative nature, but perhaps its bipartite composition indicates that it was delivered by two students. This seems to be true of the two texts published by Mercati.⁶² Moreover, Psellos in his writing on greedy students also discusses the possibility of his pupils performing the text.⁶³

⁶¹ P. A. Agapitos, “New Genres in the Twelfth Century: The *Schedourgia* of Theodore Prodromos,” *Medioevo Greco* 15 (2015) 14. See also Vassis, *BZ* 86–87 (1993–1994) 13–14.

⁶² Mercati, *Collectanea* 384: λόγῳ δ’ ἀνάγοις δυάδα μοι τῶν νέων.

⁶³ See n.42 above.

The *Schede tou Myos* contributes to our understanding of Byzantine educational methods in manifold ways. This text teaches certain technical skills (rhetorical figures, the use of *progymnasmata*), and at the same time it is a self-commentary—it comments upon the process of learning itself. Schedography is what I would like to call an open genre, which can be modified and adapted according to the needs of its author. The *Schede* proves also that the boundary between a literary and a didactic text is not fixed. Our modern division between literary works and texts composed for didactic/school purposes is anachronistic. The *Schede* could serve didactic purposes but at the same time it is a funny text, which satirizes a concrete problem.

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

The text of a very wise kyr Theodore Prodromos:

The *Schede tou myos*⁶⁴

I.

If you would like, O children, to feed on learning today, the mouse offers you a communal meal. You know how gluttonous this animal is, and, according to the Poet, a pot-stalker.⁶⁵

Therefore, somewhere one of the ancients prepared a feast,⁶⁶ invited his friends, and reclined at the table. The smell of food, or, better yet, the smell of the meat-dish teased the mouse's nostrils. When this luxurious banquet, then, had come to an end, the mouse swiftly went for the leftovers.

So, having reached them, he ignored other things and neglected them as useless and dismissed them as inedible. He pretended not to

⁶⁴ The translation is based mostly on the critical edition of Papatomopoulos, although sometimes I adopt Papademetriou's readings. Even though it was my intention to render the Greek as faithfully as possible sometimes I translate more freely to bring out the comic effect.

⁶⁵ The Poet is of course Homer. Homer/the Poet had in Byzantium many functions, one of them educational. On the use of Homeric biographies in Byzantium see E. Cullhed, "The Blind Bard and 'I': Homeric Biography and Authorial Personae in the Twelfth Century," *BMGs* 38 (2014) 49–67.

⁶⁶ ἄριστον meant originally breakfast, but as the word came later to signify also a later meal, I translate here "feast/banquet."

see them and busied himself completely with a head of a mullet.⁶⁷ Indeed, there were many various leftovers there: leg of crane, backbone of rabbit, and leg of partridge; small pieces of meat were left on bones. There was also a head of a beautiful mullet, and the mouse hurriedly threw himself at it. Yet even as he desired [it], he was afraid: he opened his mouth and, shaking, stepped back. While his stomach pushed him towards the food, fear put him to flight. Desire stirred in him, but his cowardly heart held him back. Even as he was running toward it, he was running away from it. He desired food but fled as if from an enemy. He suspected that a cat might be hidden somewhere in the bones.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, after a long time he shook off the fear and threw himself at the head of the mullet. One could see the mouse exulting, dancing, almost gloating about it, saying: “Is there any king who rejoices in such luxury? And where would he find such a banquet with no trouble at all?” Such were the grandiose words the mouse spoke to himself. And he was dancing around the head of the mullet and biting it with a quick chomp chomp of his teeth, yelling: “Oh, happy days, not even the most splendid seafood can hide from me. Oh, such swiftness and power have I gained, such as never enjoyed by Ajax or Achilles, nor any Menelauses or Nestors, whom poetry wisely glorifies. I am jumping on top of the highest dwellings,⁶⁹ and when I come swiftly down again from there, I nearly rule both the earth and sea and I live luxuriously in great abundance.”⁷⁰ While that unfortunate mouse said these and other pompous words, suddenly the very thing he feared came to pass. Out of nowhere, a cat leapt out and caught him. Thus, the wretched mouse

⁶⁷ I translate “mullet” rather than “red mullet” following G. C. Maniatis, “The Organizational Setup and Functioning of the Fish Market in Tenth-Century Constantinople,” *DOP* 54 (2000) 29. As Maniatis points out, mullet belonged to the more luxurious and therefore pricier fishes.

⁶⁸ There is an interesting parallel with the Ptochoprodromic poem 3.264–273 (ed. Eideneier): one of the monks puts the cat on the dining table so his brethren will believe that it was the cat and not the monk himself who ate a piece of meat.

⁶⁹ This is taken probably from Hdt. 2.148.5: τὰ μὲν νυν μετέωρα τῶν οἰκημάτων αὐτοῖ τε ὠρῶμεν διεξιόντες καὶ αὐτοὶ θεησάμενοι λέγομεν.

⁷⁰ ἄλλαις τρυφαῖς κατάκομος, lit. “profusion of luxurious things”; cf. for instance Makrembolites *Hysmine and Hysminias* 4.7 κατάκομος ἄνθεσι.

lay before the cat as if he were a toy, defeated by this horrible disaster. And the previously haughty mouse grasped his beard with both hands and plucked it out completely and soaked the entire ground with his tears.

But let us finish the story here, if you will,
so, as the mouse continuously feeds on food,
you may feed on the power of learning, O children.

II.

Look, may there be a nice meal prepared for you on the mouse's table today.

When the cat had captured the mouse in his trap⁷¹ and toyed with him, she asked him about his mother and father, about his life and occupation and, to say it simply, she questioned him from top to bottom. The unfortunate mouse, still struggling to catch his breath, said, "My lady, seeing you so close, I can't speak about myself without my voice trembling. If you will, move back a little bit and I will tell you thus truthfully everything about me." She glared at him grimly and said: "O, worst of mice, why do you speak deceitful words, wanting to deceive me? You can either tell me about yourself or you can immediately become part of my meal." Then immediately the mouse replied tearfully: "I am called, my lady, Elaiopotes [Drinker of olive oil], my father is Lardophagos [Lard-eater], and my mother Pastoleichos [Salt-licker]." The cat interrupted the mouse then and asked: "Why are you crying so hard? Where have you learned to cry? Perhaps there are praying and crying ascetics among you and you are one of them? Where is the stole which they call a cloak [*paramandyon*], where is the headdress [*kidaris*], where is the mantle [*mandyas*], where are the sandals on your feet?" And the mouse, wanting to prove himself right and to seem as holy as possible in order to avoid danger, said: "I am, my lady, a superior of our monastery, I am clothed in a long habit, I have a headdress and a mantle and the rest. I have established strict rules for my monks to pray for you twice each Saturday,⁷² as to one blessed."⁷³ And the cat

⁷¹ Papathomopoulos has ἐντὸς τῶν σαρκίων, "among bits of meat," rather than ἀρκύων.

⁷² Σάββατον may mean both "Saturday" and a "week." However, Psalm 37 which the mouse uses begins "A Psalm of David for remembrance concerning the Sabbath-day." This seems to suggest that the mouse means

said: “And you have learned to sing the Psalms and say prayers and do exactly that which is prescribed for monks?” And at this moment the mouse started singing the Psalm:

“O my Lady, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath.⁷⁴

I have been afflicted and brought down until the end.”⁷⁵

And again:

“My heart was troubled within me; and the fear of death fell upon me.⁷⁶

For my transgressions have gone over mine head.⁷⁷

My throat has become hoarse from shouting.⁷⁸

I have lessened and I became silent and my pain is visible for all⁷⁹

And thy terrors have greatly disquieted me,⁸⁰ and so on.

The cat said in turn: “How come you don’t sing this – ‘I want olive oil and not sacrifice, butter from cows, milk from sheep with young lamb fat?’⁸¹ and this ‘These are more dear to me than honey’⁸² and this ‘I have anointed and rubbed my head with fatty olive oil,’⁸³ and the like.”

Seeing that rather than helping, it incriminated him, he said: “My lady, since my youth I kept myself away from such things. I ate

Saturday rather than a week.

⁷³ Similarly Meunier, *Théodore Prodrome* 295: “de prier deux fois le jour du sabbat pour toi qui es juste.” Hunger, however, seems to understand this differently: *Die Hochsprachliche profane Literatur* II 25, “zu der seine Mönche beten” (to whom his monks pray).

⁷⁴ Psalm 37:2.

⁷⁵ This is a combination of at least two verses from Psalms, 37:7 and 37:9.

⁷⁶ Psalm 54:5.

⁷⁷ Psalm 37:5.

⁷⁸ Psalm 68:3.

⁷⁹ Once again this is a combination, Psalm 106:39 and 37:18.

⁸⁰ Psalm 87:17.

⁸¹ Hosea 6:7 and Deut 32:14.

⁸² Psalm 18:11.

⁸³ Again a combination of fragments of various Psalms: 88:21, 91:11, 22:6.

neither honey nor milk nor butter,⁸⁴ but I am attached just a little bit only⁸⁵ to pure seafood in order to acquire the highest virtue.”

Then the cat said: “Who else, if not you, O Superior of mice, seeks out the monks’ baskets and devours whatever happens to be there. Who drains the olive-oil from the candles? If you had been clad in a monastic⁸⁶ garment, I would have changed my mind and would have been convinced by your appearance. Since you left your cell without your monastic garb, my mouth will become your tomb,⁸⁷

In order that you receive the fruits of your prayers
in a fitting manner, O Superior of mice.”⁸⁸

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⁸⁴ Meunier, *Théodore Prodrome* 346, thinks that this is an allusion to Canon 57 of the Council *in Trullo*: “It is not right to offer honey and milk on the altar.”

⁸⁵ μόνων Papathomopoulos, rather than μόνον.

⁸⁶ Papademetriou μοναχικήν: Papathomopoulos μοναδικήν.

⁸⁷ Cf. Psalm 5:10.

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