

New Testament Miracles in the *Ethopoeiae* of Nikephoros Basilakes

Craig A. Gibson

FOR MORE THAN A MILLENNIUM after its invention, the rhetorical exercise in *ethopoeia* was populated with mythological and (to a lesser extent) historical characters along with stereotyped comic figures such as lovestruck painters, cowardly misers, and repentant prostitutes. In the mid-twelfth century in Constantinople, Nikephoros Basilakes (ca. 1115–after 1182) composed a collection of progymnasmata that included thirteen *ethopoeiae* featuring characters from the Bible. The purpose and the audience of these exercises are unknown. He may have composed and performed them as models for the students in his rhetorical school, for the enjoyment of a circle of other literary elites including the Komnenian novelists, or for an unmentioned patron.¹ His teacher Nikolaos Mouzalon is

¹ For Byzantine education in general see the useful overview of Athanasios Markopoulos, “Education,” in Elizabeth Jeffreys et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford 2008) 785–795. On the teaching of progymnasmata in the eleventh century see Ronald F. Hock, “Observing a Teacher of Progymnasmata,” in Matthew R. Hauge et al. (eds.), *Ancient Education and Early Christianity* (London 2016) 39–70. For the reading of progymnasmata in *theatra* see Stratis Papaioannou, “On the Stage of *Eros*: Two Rhetorical Exercises by Nikephoros Basilakes,” in Michael Grünbart (ed.), *Theatron: Rhetorical Culture in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berlin 2007) 357–376, at 357. On their connection to Komnenian novelists see Panagiotis Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia: A Poetics of the Twelfth-Century Medieval Greek Novel* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2005) 32–40. For Basilakes, I use the text and translation of Jeffrey Beneker and Craig A. Gibson, *The Rhetorical Exercises of Nikephoros Basilakes: Progymnasmata from Twelfth-Century Byzantium* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2016).

known to have written at least one biblical *ethopoeia*,² and other writers in the late twelfth through the fourteenth centuries also wrote biblical *ethopoeiae*,³ but there is no evidence that students in Greek rhetorical schools were taught to compose biblical-themed *ethopoeiae* at any date. Significantly, biblical themes for *ethopoeia* are nowhere mentioned in the handbooks on progymnasmata. Basilakes, then, probably did not learn to write biblical *ethopoeiae* as part of his education, and if he introduced them to his own students, it may have been his own innovation.

Of Basilakes' thirteen biblical *ethopoeiae*, six feature figures from the Old Testament and seven from the New Testament. Of the New Testament-related themes, Mary's preparation of Jesus' body for burial (12) and the apostle Peter's crucifixion (13) are not found in the canonical New Testament, but the remaining five *ethopoeiae* (7–11) are speeches in response to miracles described in the Gospels. This article examines how Basilakes recast these five stories into speeches and modified them according to the common organization by the "three times" (present, past, and future) in order to create unique, first-person reactions to miracles in the New Testament. These tightly-focused monologues sometimes present the story through a secondary character or even a silent observer, and the translation from narrative to monologue, or from primary to secondary characters, means that some of the original context and details fade away and are replaced with a new emphasis and a new interpretation of the events. The astonishment that the speakers experience in the face of events that are both novel and paradoxical gives them special insight into their own emotional history (present, past, and future), the nature of

² I. Nesseris, *Η Παιδεία στην Κωνσταντινούπολη κατά τον 12^ο αιώνα* (diss. Ioannina 2014) I 108, 258.

³ See the catalogue of Eugenio Amato and Gianluca Ventrella, "L'éthopée dans la pratique scolaire et littéraire: répertoire complet," in Eugenio Amato et al. (eds.), *Ethopoïia. La représentation de caractères entre fiction scolaire et réalité vivante à l'époque impériale et tardive* (Salerno 2005) 213–231.

Jesus, and their place in Christian history. Basilakes' *ethopoeiae* thus represent an innovative literary experiment that united classical Greek rhetoric with biblical exegesis in the literary renaissance of the Komnenian period.

From biblical source to ethopoeia

After choosing his themes, Basilakes would have reread the biblical accounts, noting details that would be useful for understanding the speaker's *ethos* and the place of this event in his or her life. Writers of *ethopoeiae* sometimes found that a continuous model speech already existed in their literary sources, but more often it did not. Both the existence and the absence of a model would have been valuable, the former encouraging them to compare their own compositions to a model provided to them (as one ancient manual recommends),⁴ the latter giving them freer rein to invent within the boundaries of accepted practice. When Basilakes reread the relevant biblical accounts, he rarely found a continuous speech; instead, he found a narrative peppered with short bursts of direct or indirect speech, or a conversation between his focal character and other characters, or a narrative containing events that his speechless character would be called upon to explain. In his five *ethopoeiae* on New Testament miracles (7–11), Basilakes often imagines scenarios for which his gospel source text did not include a speech: Mary briefly speaks before but not after the miracle at Cana (8), the slave of the high priest does not speak at the arrest of Jesus (11), and Hades does not appear as a character in the biblical Lazarus story at all (10). In the story of the man blind from birth (9), the biblical account contains a piecemeal series of short speeches and dialogue, which Basilakes reduces to one speech that takes place just after the man is healed.

Basilakes had spent a lifetime reading, being read to, and worshiping; he had read biblical exegesis and heard it presented in sermons, sometimes in the persona of a biblical

⁴ Theon *Progymn.* 72.9–16.

character⁵; in his worship experience, he had been exposed to hymns connected with the themes of some of his *ethopoeiae*; he had taught rhetoric, using both pagan and Christian texts, and he had lectured on the letters of Paul. While I draw attention to some of his possible sources of inspiration, I have not attempted to trace all of them, identify which of the alterations to the biblical stories are his own invention, or speculate on why he chose these particular characters and moments, and not others.⁶ In particular, I do not discuss the relation between biblical *ethopoeiae*, homiletics, and hymnography in detail, although it seems likely that further study of this vast topic would repay the effort. Instead, I offer here an interpretation of Basilakes' *ethopoeiae* as unique moments of reception by a Christian *rhētor* who is expert both in the interpretation of Scripture and in the teaching and composition of progymnasmata, and who furthermore seems to be motivated by the pursuit of novelty in literary theme and execution. Drawing on his knowledge of ancient *ethopoeiae* and exercising the creative license of the homilists and hymnographers, he converts biblical narrative into dramatic monologue, creating moving speeches that aim to capture the immediacy and vividness of lived experience.

Organization by the "three times"

Basilakes' awareness that *ethopoeia* was under-theorized in ancient rhetoric may have given him more freedom to develop his themes. Beyond the basic requirements to illustrate the *ethos* and/or *pathos* of the speakers and to make their speech conform

⁵ For the use of dialogue in Byzantine sermons and the writers' interest in exploring the motivations and emotional reactions of biblical characters, see Mary B. Cunningham, "The Interpretation of the New Testament in Byzantine Preaching: Mediating an Encounter with the Word," in Derek Krueger et al. (eds.), *The New Testament in Byzantium* (Washington 2016) 191–203.

⁶ On this subject see Derek Krueger and Robert S. Nelson, "New Testaments of Byzantium: Seen, Heard, Written, Excerpted, Interpreted," in *The New Testament in Byzantium* 1–20; and Sarah Gador-Whyte, *Theology and Poetry in Early Byzantium: The Kontakia of Romanos the Melodist* (Cambridge 2017) 7.

to their character, the only other recommendation was to organize the speech around the “three times”: present, past, and future, in that order. Typically, *ethopoeiae* open with a lamentation over the present crisis, just as the character experiences and is beginning to process it. The speaker then contrasts the present unhappiness with his/her past happiness. Finally, the speaker imagines the even worse future to come.⁷ In his *ethopoeiae* on New Testament miracles, Basilakes uses the division by times and in the same order, but he alters the speaker’s emotional history. Instead of an unhappy present, contrasted with a happy past, and ending with predictions of an even unhappier future, as the ancient theorists presume, the present is happy, the past varies, and the future (whether near or distant) is happier.⁸

In *Ethopoeia* 7 (“What Zacharias, the father of the Forerunner, would say after the Forerunner is born and he is freed from his inability to speak”), the first sentence takes place in the present: “My voice has returned to me along with my child, and the proclamation has not proven false” (7.1). Zacharias

⁷ Aphthonius *Progymn.* 45 recommends the division by the three times. Ps.-Hermogenes *Progymn.* 21–22 presumes the sad–happy–sadder outline: “Begin with the present, because it is difficult; then run back to earlier times, because they have a large share of happiness; then change to the future, because what is going to happen is much more dreadful” (transl. George A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* [Atlanta 2003] 85). Nicolaus in his *Progymnasmata* likewise presumes the sad–happy–sadder scenario, outlining the example “what Peleus would say when hearing of the death of Achilles” (65–66), but he advises a brief stopover in the present as a transition between the past and future (65): “We shall, therefore, begin from the present and run back to past time, then from there again return to the present; for we shall not immediately come to the future, but shall make brief mention of present constraints and in this way we shall consider what is going to follow” (transl. Kennedy 165).

⁸ The variable emotional quality of the “past” section means that Basilakes’ Christian *ethopoeiae* do not always represent a complete inversion of the sad–happy–sadder arrangement, as implied in Beneker and Gibson, *Rhetorical Exercises* xiii.

immediately moves to the past, in which he narrates the angel's visit and blames himself for not believing him (7.1–2). He returns briefly to the present, when he celebrates the birth of the child and recovery of his voice (7.2–4), before going on to the future, in which he predicts the birth of Jesus and John's role as Forerunner (7.4). In *Ethopoeia* 9 (“What the man blind from birth would say upon gaining his sight”), the blind man celebrates his sight in the present. In the past section, he narrates that he was disabled at birth and led a difficult and depressing life of incomparable misery (9.2–3), until moments ago when Jesus healed him (9.4). Returning briefly to the present, he delights at seeing the sun and sky, and then he predicts in the future section that he will no longer stumble or need a walking stick, says that he is looking forward to seeing his parents (9.5) and the Temple for the first time (9.6), and promises that if he “must go into the synagogue,” he will tell everyone who asks the entire story (9.6).⁹ Thus in *Ethopoeiae* 7 and 9 the happy ending becomes possible because the speakers have no known history after their biblical story; they essentially become fictional characters unconstrained by dramatic irony. It is up to Basilakes to select a future happy point to which to direct their gaze: Zacharias has an almost mystical understanding of his newborn son's destiny as the Forerunner of Christ, and the blind man plans to tell everyone the story of his miserable life before his healing.

In *Ethopoeia* 11 (“What the slave of the high priest would say when his ear is cut off by Saint Peter and healed by Christ”), the slave of the high priest celebrates the instantaneous and pain-free healing of his severed ear in the present (11.1) and then goes to the past, which for him began only a few minutes earlier, when his ear was cut off during the initial conflict in the garden (11.2). He briefly returns to the present to marvel again

⁹ This is a bold promise, since he may be excommunicated from the synagogue for his confession of faith, as his parents feared would happen to them during their interrogation (John 9:22).

at Jesus (11.2) before combining narrative of immediate past events with present-time commentary, rebuking first Peter and then Judas (11.3–4), and urging (again in the present) the high priest and others in the group to recognize that Jesus is the Messiah for whom they have been waiting (11.4). As for the future, the slave predicts that they will lose and Jesus will win: “Our plot, I know well, will not succeed; we will be punished, even if for nothing else, for calling to account a man who is by no means answerable to us. But he, I suspect, will do something novel in his death (καινοτομήσει τὴν τελευταίην), just as he previously did in his birth” (11.4). The emotional tenor of this future is mixed: while the slave unhappily predicts punishment for himself and his group, the novelty that he predicts for Jesus’ death seems a positive counterbalance. Something special, something new will happen, but the slave has no idea what. At the end of the speech, are we to think that the slave is now a follower of Jesus? Augustine thought so,¹⁰ and Basilakes seems to imply as much—the slave has witnessed a personal miracle, seen Jesus comport himself with superhuman kindness, told the rest of the group that he is the Messiah, and predicted that further wonders will accompany Jesus’ death—however, perhaps feeling constrained by the silence of the gospel account, Basilakes does not have the man say it. External to the story, however, the reader knows that the novelty that the slave predicts is the Resurrection, and can thus himself fill in the emotional blank left by the slave with an informed happy ending.

In *Ethopoeia* 8 (“What the Theotokos would say when Christ changed the water into wine for the wedding”), Mary in the present experiences both awe and love at the miracle at Cana (8.1). Her past was not sad or even different; in fact, she begins the past section with the observation, “This is consistent with earlier events,” which she says included the miraculous conception, the annunciation, a painless delivery, perpetual virginity,

¹⁰ August. *In Evang. Iohan.* 112.5; transl. Joel C. Elowsky, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament IV b, John 11–21* (Downers Grove 2007) 270–271.

the appearance of the star, and the visit of the Magi (8.2). Next, she turns to the wedding and gradually brings her account back to the present moment, in which she encourages the guests to enjoy the wine (8.3–5). In the final section, she ends not with explicit predictions of an even happier future but with a “bold proclamation” that she is blessed as the mother of God and that God has blessed this wedding with his attendance and miraculous transformation of water into wine (8.6). Basilakes seems to omit the future from this speech, but I think for good reason. If he had ended the speech with Mary’s predictions of even greater miracles to come, it would have been difficult to maintain his key theme of mothers and sons and somehow keep the exercise focused on her emotional experience, because Mary does not accompany Jesus during his ministry. Moreover, extending Mary’s viewpoint too far into the future risks intimating her son’s death. Instead, Basilakes leaves her in an eternal happy present as the blessed Theotokos who has given birth to Jesus, raised him to adulthood, and now prompted him to begin his ministry.

By contrast, *Ethopoeia* 10 (“What Hades would say when Lazarus is raised from the dead on the fourth day”) conforms to the traditional scheme. In the present, Hades is bewildered and worried by his recent loss of Lazarus (10.1). In the past, he says he had ruled over Greeks, Assyrians, Persians, and Medes and found that, without exception, all Gentiles die and stay dead (10.2). The Jews, however, such as Elisha and Elijah, do not follow the rules (10.2), and “this new enemy of mine is their descendant” (10.3). Hades alludes to others whom Jesus (still unnamed) has raised from the dead, but says that this is the first time he has raised “a dead man who had already spent time in Hades” (10.4). As the days passed, Lazarus continued to maintain his confidence in being rescued, and while Hades continued to doubt, he was at the same time troubled (10.5). Finally, in a vivid narrative, Hades describes how Jesus (now named) attacked, and “Lazarus flew out of [Hades’] hands and put on his body” (10.6). The future section is an excellent specimen, combining Hades’ fear of his attacking enemy, some hope

that Jesus himself may be attacked (“I hear that the rest of the Jews are at arms, and perhaps thanks to this I will not be unlucky,” 10.7), the consolation to himself that everyone eventually dies, and finally a prescient fear of the Resurrection: “But, alas, I again have a suspicion about the future; I fear that Jesus may even be God, even if he is mortal in appearance. Thus I take confidence in his appearance, but tremble at what is proclaimed” (10.7). Basilakes’ Christian readers would hardly sympathize with the speaker: Hades’ loss is their gain, and the ending is an ironically happy one.

Analysis of Ethopoeiae 7–11

Ethopoeia 7: Zacharias

The *ethopoeia* is based on Luke 1:5–80. In Luke’s account, when the angel Gabriel appears to Zacharias/Zechariah as he performs priestly duties in the temple and reveals that his wife Elizabeth will bear him a son to be named John, Zacharias responds, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years” (1:18 *RSV*). The angel rebukes him, punishing him with the inability to speak until his son is born and named. On the eighth day after his son is born, at his circumcision, Zacharias writes on a tablet “his name is John” (1:63) and immediately recovers the ability to speak, and then he delivers the so-called *Benedictus* speech (1:68–79). In Basilakes, the priesthood of Zacharias is not mentioned, and the unnamed angel visits him at an unspecified location. Basilakes also transfers Zacharias’ recovery from the eighth day to the moment of his son’s birth: “But as soon as the infant came into the light, immediately speech shone upon me; his mother has been delivered from her birth pangs, and I from my speechlessness” (Ἄλλ’ ἅμα τε τὸ βρέφος ἀνήκεν εἰς φῶς ἐκείνη καὶ παρ’ ἐμοὶ αὐτίκα ὁ λόγος ἐπέλαμπε· λέλυται τῇ μητρὶ τὰ τῆς ὠδίνος κάμοι τὰ τῆς φωνίας λέλυται, 7.2). Basilakes’ Zacharias therefore does not give his son a name, much less by writing it on a tablet in the presence of onlookers.

In Luke 1:68–79, once Zacharias is cured of his speechlessness, he first calls for blessings on the Lord who has saved the Jews from their enemies, referring to the prophets and the

covenant (1:68–75), and then he addresses the child as prophet of the most high and Forerunner of Jesus, who will bring salvation and forgiveness of sins (1:76–79). Luke’s account concludes with one verse mentioning that John grew up and went to live in the wilderness (1:80). Basilakes takes a different direction. Zacharias attempts to interpret and elevate his former speechlessness as a metaphorical pregnancy that parallels the unexpected literal pregnancy of his wife Elizabeth (here unnamed). In Luke, Zacharias is not cured until eight days after Elizabeth delivers her child, but Basilakes synchronizes the two events to strengthen the thematic parallel. Thanks to divine inspiration (7.3), Basilakes’ Zacharias suddenly understands his role in the beginnings of Christian history, and he infuses his mystical and allusive description of that role with paradox (7.4):

Φωνῆς ἔμελλον κληθῆναι πατήρ, τοιγαροῦν ἔδει με τὴν φωνὴν ἐγκυμονῆσαι πρότερον καὶ σιγὰν μέχρι καὶ τόκου, ὡς ἔδει καὶ τοῦ Λόγου προδραμεῖν τὴν Φωνὴν καί, πρὶν ἢ παρθένον τεκεῖν, καὶ στεῖραν ἀκοῦσαι μητέρα. Τὸ δ’ ἀπὸ τοῦδε σὺ μὲν ὁ παῖς ἡ μεγάλη Φωνὴ τοῦ τῆς μητέρας νέφους περιτραγέτος ἐξέλαμπε, κάμοι δὲ ἡ φωνὴ συνεξέλαμπε καὶ τὰ τῆς φωνίας διέρρηκται.

I was about to be called father of the Voice, and so first I had to be pregnant with voice and remain silent right up until birth, just as the Voice also had to be the Forerunner of the Word, and just as a barren woman had to be called mother before a virgin could give birth. From that point on, you, my child, the great Voice, shone forth after the cloud of the womb was broken, and at the same time my voice shone forth too, and my speechlessness was broken.

Zacharias now realizes that he is the father of the prophet Isaiah’s “Voice” (Φωνή) crying in the wilderness (Isaiah 40:3), and that he first had to undergo pregnancy (his months of enforced silence) until “Voice” (his son John, the Forerunner) was born and he recovered his own voice; his son Voice has now come to serve and herald the Word (Jesus), who in turn will carry out the will of his Father (God), the Intellect. Moreover, he realizes that his barren wife Elizabeth had to give birth before her virgin cousin Mary (also unnamed) could. Zacharias interprets his months of silence as a pregnancy and his recovery

of speech as a birth, so as to align his figurative experiences of pregnancy and childbearing with the literal experiences of Elizabeth and Mary. While Basilakes' choice of theme highlights Zacharias' role in the story, it also portrays him as empathetic to women through their shared capacity to bear children, and it closely connects him to a story that in Luke is more focused on the two mothers and their children. Unlike in Luke, where the story of Zacharias' loss and recovery of speech frames the story of Elizabeth and Mary but is not mentioned within it, Basilakes' Zacharias is promoted to center stage and is thematically linked to the nameless archetypal figures—the barren old woman, the pregnant virgin, the child named Voice, another person named Word, the Father Intellect—whose stories orbit and illuminate his own.

In *Ethopoeia* 7, Basilakes also offers interpretations of his biblical source texts by having his characters draw parallels between their own experience and the experiences of characters in the Old Testament. Zacharias says that he should have recalled that barren women can become mothers, since he is a descendant of the formerly barren Sarah, wife of Abraham (7.2). He predicts that his son John “will surpass Samson in his struggle against luxury” (7.3) and “will not drink strong drink” (7.1); in Luke 1:15, the angel does not mention Samson by name but does allude to the command laid upon Samson's mother (Judges 13:4) by stating that John “shall drink no wine nor strong drink.” Basilakes thus makes Luke's allusion explicit. Zacharias also predicts that his son “will surpass Samuel in his leadership of the people” (7.3), whereas his biblical counterpart had compared him to Elijah, saying that he would “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared” (Luke 1:17). Basilakes substitutes Samuel for Elijah for the same reason that he makes Luke's apparent allusion to Samson explicit: both Samson and Samuel, like John, were born to previously barren mothers (Judges 13:2, I Samuel 1:5), whereas Elijah's parentage and the circumstances of his birth are unknown.

Ethopoeia 8: the Theotokos

The basis is John 2:1–11. In John’s account, Mary, Jesus, and the disciples were invited to a wedding at Cana. When the wine ran out, Mary asked Jesus to intercede, he responded somewhat brusquely, and she directed the servants to follow his instructions. Jesus performed “the first of his signs” (2:11) by transforming jars of water into wine of such quality that the steward of the feast praised the bridegroom for saving the best wine until last, contrary to the usual practice (2:6–10). Basilakes, by contrast, removes everyone from the scene except for Mary, Jesus, and the guests. There are no disciples, servants, steward of the feast, or bridegroom. Nor does his Mary describe how the miracle was performed. Instead, she directs her speech first to Jesus (8.1–4) and then to the guests (8.4–6), addressing the latter both as “you,” with commands to drink the wine, drink of the miracle, and drink of faith (8.4, 8.5), and as “we,” who share a collective history with Mary that includes the miracle-working of Moses in the wilderness.

In Basilakes’ hands, the wedding at Cana is the site of Jesus’ first miracle, but also an event that confirms Mary’s status as Theotokos and assigns her a greater role in Jesus’ early ministry. In the biblical story, Mary informs Jesus that the wedding has run out of wine and directs the servants to follow his instructions; Basilakes depicts her as not only informing Jesus of the situation but persuading him to reveal his power now and thereby honor her as his mother, the Theotokos. In John 2:3–5, Mary says to Jesus, “They have no wine.” Jesus replies, “O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” Mary does not reply to this, but turns to the servants and says, “Do whatever he tells you.” And that is the last we hear from her in this story. Basilakes, however, assigns Mary a much greater role. First, he credits her with bringing a reluctant Jesus to the wedding. The gospel account says “the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus was also invited, with his disciples” (2:1–2). Basilakes’ Mary says (8.3):

Γάμος ἦν καί, παρθένον ἔχων μητέρα, καὶ γυναῖκας μητέρας
 ἰδεῖν οὐκ ἀπόκησας, ἀλλ’ ἐφείπου τῆ μητρί, τοῦτο μὲν ὄς

παιδίων νόμους τηρῶν, τοῦτο δ' ὡς καὶ γάμον νομοθετῶν καὶ συγχωρῶν τὸν ὑμέναιον. Ἐτίμησας μὲν, ὦ παῖ, πολλοῖς τὴν παρθενίαν πρότερον θαύμασι, νῦν δὲ καὶ τὸν γάμον καὶ δι' αὐτὸν τὴν μητέρα ἐμέ.

There was a wedding, and although you have a virgin mother, you did not shy away from seeing married women as mothers; rather, you followed your mother, in part obeying the laws for children, in part sanctioning marriage and allowing the wedding. You honored virginity, my son, with many prior miracles, and now you honor both marriage and, through it, me your mother.

His mother Mary's unique status as a virgin mother, Basilakes suggests, could have made Jesus reluctant to associate with ordinary mothers at a wedding, but at her request he obediently attended the wedding and sanctioned it by his presence. The bridegroom, steward of the feast, and male servants of John's account fade into the background in this new imaginary world in which there are only three kinds of attendees: the virgin mother, ordinary mothers, and the sons whom Mary exhorts to obey their mothers in 8.4.

Basilakes' second major intervention amplifies and redistributes John 2:3–4: "When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine'. And Jesus said to her, 'O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come'." John's Mary does not explicitly ask Jesus to perform a miracle; Basilakes' Mary says that she was already aware of her son's power and "urged him to work a miracle" (παραθήγω θαυματουργίας ἄνασθαι, 8.4):

“Ἐπιδείξει,” λέγουσα, “πάντως, ὦ παῖ, μετ’ οὐ πολὺ τὴν ἰσχύν. Εὖ οἶδα ὡς τῆς ἡλικίας ἀναμένεις τὸ τελεώτερον, χρόνον ἀποταμιεύεις τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ, καιρὸν ὀρίζεις τοῖς θαύμασιν. Ἄλλ’ ἄρξαι νῦν. Ἐπιγόμαί σε τερατουργοῦντα θεάσασθαι, χάρισαι τὴν τῶν θαυμάτων ἀπαρχὴν τῇ μητρί.” Ὁ δέ—ὦ νόμοι πατέρων ἐπὶ τέκνοις κείμενοι!—οὐκ ἀνένευσεν, οὐκ ἀπεῖπεν, οὐκ ἀπεδοκίμασε μητρὸς αἴτησιν, ἀλλ’ ὕδωρ ἤγετο, καὶ ὁ μὲν ἐπέταττε, τὸ δ’ εἰς οἶνον παρήγετο.

“Certainly, my son, you will soon display your power. I know well that you are waiting until you are older; you are reserving

time for teaching and setting a definite occasion for miracles. But begin now. I am eager to see you working wonders; offer the first miracle to your mother.” And he—O laws of parents governing children!—did not decline, did not refuse, did not deny his mother’s request; rather, water was drawn, and he gave a command, and it was changed into wine.

Basilakes not only omits Jesus’ rebuke to his mother, but he uses Mary’s own speech to deny in three distinct ways that any such rebuke occurred: Jesus, she says, did not “decline” or “refuse” or “deny” her. Basilakes also turns Jesus’ justification for his response (“My hour has not yet come”) into an anticipated objection that Mary poses and resolves herself. Acknowledging that Jesus has carefully planned the start-date of his ministry and the division of his time into teaching and miracle-working, she nevertheless asks him to go ahead and begin now. Basilakes reassigns to Mary the substance of Jesus’ excuse, which she forestalls by saying, in effect, ‘I *know* your hour has not yet come, but...’

The tenor of Jesus’ response to his mother and his objection that his hour has not yet come were two problems that had exercised ancient biblical exegetes in both the western and the eastern Church. They do not deny that Jesus rebuked her but instead explain why it was proper and consistent for him to have done so. John Chrysostom says that Jesus elsewhere honored his parents, but says that this story shows that when our parents “demand anything at an unseasonable time or cut us off from spiritual things, we should not be deceived into compliance.” Ammonius explains that God does not need to be reminded, and Augustine likewise says that Jesus is reminding her of his divinity just before he performs the miracle. Maximus of Turin acknowledges that Jesus was displeased at his mother’s request, but only because he was more concerned with “the new chalice of eternal salvation” than with “earthly wine.” Similarly, Irenaeus says that Jesus was not ready to “partake of the cup, which would have so much emblematic

significance later on,” and Augustine says that the “hour” to which Jesus refers is the hour of his crucifixion.¹¹ Basilakes’ closest approach to a metaphorical interpretation of the wine is when his Mary asks the guests to “drink deeply of the wine; drink even more deeply of the miracle” (τοῦ θαύματος, 8.4) and “drink of this new wine, but before that, drink of faith” (τῆς πίστεως, 8.5). His Mary initially wavers between love of her human son and the fear of God (8.1), but this tension is quickly resolved, and her joy at the event is pure and untainted by any foreknowledge of her son’s death. For these biblical exegetes, Jesus’ rebuke of his mother can be explained; for Basilakes, it never happened.¹²

Unlike some ancient biblical exegetes, Basilakes does not thematically connect the miracle at Cana to Jesus’ baptism three days prior. He also omits allusions to the Eucharist and

¹¹ John Chrys. *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 21.2; Ammon. *Fragments on John* 57; Aug. *Harmony of the Gospels* 4.10.11, *On Faith and the Creed* 4.9; Maximus Tur. *Sermon* 23; Iren. *Against Heresies* 3.16.7. These sources are collected in English translation in Joel C. Elowsky, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament, IV-A: John 1–10* (Downers Grove 2006) 91–92.

¹² Romanos Melodos’ *kontakion* on the marriage at Cana (*Kontakion* 7) is strikingly similar in content to Basilakes’ *Ethopoeia* 8. Strophes 1 and 3 highlight the themes of virgin birth and perpetual virginity. Jesus is not disgusted by marriage even though he was born of a virgin (strophe 1), and he attends the wedding in order to show that the institution of marriage should be honored (2). When Romanos’ narrator asks Mary how she knew that Jesus could perform miracles when he had never done so before, she says that the annunciation, virgin birth, perpetual virginity, and the star that guided the Magi were also great miracles (8–9). In Romanos, Mary likewise tells Jesus that she knows he controls time (11), but instead of asking Jesus to alter his schedule, it is Jesus who says to her, “But now, contrary to the order, before the teaching, you have asked for miracles,” using the same division of his ministry into teaching and miracles as Basilakes, and he affirms that children must honor and obey their parents (16). Romanos also praises Christ the creator who brought forth water from a rock (4), but he does not develop this into a detailed comparison of Moses and Christ as miracle-workers, as Basilakes does.

the Passion, which Mary does not yet know about, and he makes no reference to the image of Christ as bridegroom, which would not make sense in the context of this speech. Instead, motherhood and the obligations of sons to their mothers become the focus of the speech. In Basilakes, Mary recalls her direct request of her son to perform his first miracle, which shows that she has given thought to the timetable of Jesus' future ministry but also demonstrates the universal ability of mothers to encourage their sons to achieve great things, and to do so for them. In John, it is left unstated why Jesus decides to help at the wedding. In Basilakes, his mother invites Jesus to reflect on the importance of this event for his ministry, and she uses the occasion of this first miracle to exhort him and other sons always to show kindness, consideration, and obedience to their mothers.

Like Zacharias in *Ethopoeia* 7, who cites the examples of Sarah, Samson, and Samuel in order to explain recent and future events to himself, Mary compares Jesus' first miracle at Cana to the miracle-working of Moses in the wilderness, an analogy not made in the biblical account. She argues that Jesus surpasses Moses in four ways: Moses produced water from a rock, but Jesus produced wine from water; Moses struck the rock with a rod, but Jesus merely spoke a word; Moses performed his miracle after many complaints from his people and a long delay, but Jesus needed only a request from his mother to spur him to perform the miracle immediately; Moses was a servant of God, but Jesus is God himself (8.5). Mary sums up by comparing this miracle to creation, as both were performed by the Word of God: "In the beginning he created the whole world by means of the Word—heaven and earth, the sea, rivers, and everything else—and now too with a word he changed the nature of water into wine" (8.5).

Ethopoeia 9: the man blind from birth

The basis is John 9:1–41. In John's account, Jesus and his disciples see a blind man, and the disciples ask Jesus who sinned, the man or his parents. Jesus replies that neither sinned: the man is in this state awaiting a miracle. Jesus mixes his saliva

with mud, applies it to the man's eyes, and tells him to go wash; the man obeys and returns healed. The community wonders if it is the same man. The man answers questions from his neighbors and the Pharisees. The Pharisees question his parents, interview the man a second time, reject him as a liar, and throw him out of the synagogue. Jesus reveals his identity to the man, who proclaims his belief and worships Jesus. The story ends with Jesus contrasting physical and spiritual blindness and condemning the Pharisees for the latter.

Basilakes' account differs from John's in two main ways. In John's gospel, Jesus approaches the man, and the man declares his faith after the miracle. In Basilakes, the man approaches Jesus, already convinced of his identity and "boiling with faith" even before he experienced his own miracle (9.4):

Ἐφοίτων ἐν τῷ ναῷ, προσήτουν τὰ πρὸς τροφήν, ἤκουον τοῦ Ἰησοῦ διδάσκοντος, ἐπηκολούθει τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ καὶ θαύματα. Ἐπὶ τούτοις ὑποφλέγομαι τὴν καρδίαν, ἀναζέω πρὸς πίστιν, ζηλῶ τοὺς ἰαθέντας τῆς δωρεᾶς. Ἑρμαιον ἠγοῦμαι τὸ πρᾶγμα, ἐντεῦθεν ἰκέτης πρόσειμι, Θεὸν ἐπιβοῶμαι, σωτήρα καλῶ, τὸ πάθος εἰς οἶκτον προβάλλομαι.

I was visiting the temple; I was begging for my sustenance; I heard Jesus teaching, and miracles followed the teaching. In response to this I was inflamed in my heart, I was boiling with faith, and I envied those he healed for their bounty. I considered the event a godsend, and so I approached him as a suppliant, I cried out to God, I called him savior, and I demonstrated my suffering for his mercy.

In order to get here, Basilakes has to modify the context of their first encounter. In John's account, Jesus has just escaped being stoned for his alleged blasphemy by some Jews in the Temple (8:59) when he passes by the man blind from birth (9:1), discusses him with the disciples (9:2–5), and heals him. Basilakes omits Jesus' conflict with the Jews in the Temple, imagining instead that he has been teaching and performing miracles in the Temple while the blind man is nearby. Basilakes also removes the disciples and their discussion of sin (John 9:1–5), which has the effect of smoothing out a staging problem. As soon as Jesus finishes speaking in 9:3–5, he spits on the

ground, mixes his saliva with mud, and anoints the man's eyes (9:6). So, either Jesus and his disciples must have been standing right by the man while they talked about him, or they walked toward the man as they talked, or the man approached them as they talked. Basilakes has the man approach Jesus, having already realized who Jesus is and convinced of his power. In John, the healing precedes the man's declaration of faith, and the encounter between Jesus and the man just happens. In Basilakes, the man's declaration of faith precedes his healing, and the man purposely approaches Jesus.

The change in staging also changes the thematic implications of John's account. In John, Jesus says, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (9:5), and then, "as he said this" (9:6), he heals the man. At the end of the story, after the man declares his faith, Jesus says, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind" (9:39), and condemns some nearby Pharisees for their spiritual blindness (9:40–41). In Basilakes, there is no analogy or contrast between physical blindness and spiritual blindness. The man experiences physical healing, and with the exception of Jesus, every character from John's account fades into the background: the disciples, the man's neighbors and parents, and the Pharisees. In fact, Basilakes' story takes place in dramatic time just after the healing in 9:6–7. The man's declaration of faith is moved from near the end of the story (9:35–39) to the new gap between Jesus's speech in 9:3–5 and the healing in 9:6–7, and so the man's account of his past life does not include the recent events of 9:8–41 at all.

The second main way in which Basilakes' story differs from John's lies in the mechanics and the new thematic significance of the healing. In the biblical account, Jesus heals the blind man by applying a salve to his eyes that he made from mud and his own saliva and asking the man to go wash at the pool of Siloam (9:6–7). Basilakes apparently follows some ancient Christian interpreters in portraying this miracle as an act of creation: Jesus did not simply anoint the man's eyes with a salve, but used the divine power of creation to create or re-

create them. Basilakes also omits the act of washing at the pool, because now there is nothing to wash away. The man says (9.4):

Γῆν συνέφυρεν ὕδατι καὶ φέρων τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἐπιτίθησι καὶ τὸ φῶς εὐθὺς ἀνεδίδοτο. Θεὸν ἐγὼ σε, θαρρῶν, ἀποφαίνομαι καὶ πρό γε ἐμοῦ τὰ τοῦ θαύματος. Ὅλον ἐκ πηλοῦ τὰ πρῶτα συνεστήσω τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ νῦν παρὰ μέρος οὐκ ὄντα πηλῶ μεταπλάττεις. Ταῦτά σε κηρύττει Θεόν, ταῦτα δημιουργὸν ἀνθρώπου, ταῦτα υἱὸν Θεοῦ ἐν θνητῷ τῷ προσχήματι.

He blended earth with water, and taking it he put it on my eyes, and the light was immediately imparted. I confidently declare that you are God, and the results of the miracle are right before me. In the beginning you made a whole man from clay, and now you refashion with clay a man who was not whole [lit. “partially non-existent,” παρὰ μέρος οὐκ ὄντα]. These actions proclaim you as God, Creator of humans, son of God in mortal guise.

Thus the man blind from birth effectively becomes a new Adam, and Jesus his Creator. The same idea is found in the works of many ancient biblical exegetes. Some compare this miracle to the creation of human beings (Irenaeus, Ammonius, and Ambrose) or the creation in general (Caesarius of Arles).¹³ John Chrysostom refers to Jesus “forming” (ἐπλασε) the man’s eyes, complete with “arteries and nerves and veins, and all things of which our body is composed.” Ephrem the Syrian says that Jesus “brought to fullness what was lacking in creation”; Caesarius says that he “reform[ed]” and “recreate[d]” (*reformet ... recreet*) his eyes; and Irenaeus refers to the “physical reformation and ... regeneration” (*plasmationem et ... regenerationem*) of the man’s eyes.¹⁴ In Basilakes, the man says that

¹³ Iren. *Against Heresies* 5.15.2; Ammon. *Fragments on John* 317; Ambrose *Letter* 67.4–6; Caesarius *Sermon* 172.3 (in Elowsky, *Ancient Christian Commentary: John 1–10*, 324–326).

¹⁴ John Chrys. *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 56.2; Ephrem *Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron* 16.28; Caesarius *Sermon* 172.3; Iren. *Against Heresies* 5.15.3 (in Elowsky, *Ancient Christian Commentary: John 1–10*, 322–323, 325).

“deep darkness was upon me both before and after my birth” (βαθὸν δέ μοι σκότος ἐπῆν καὶ πρὸ τοῦ τόκου καὶ μετὰ γένεσιν, 9.2), “everything was night and indissoluble gloom” (Νὺξ ἦν τὰ πάντα καὶ ζόφος ἄλυτος, 9.2), and “To me alone of everyone the whole world seemed without light, and again darkness seemed primordial. I imagined the world as it was before the light came and replaced night, and I marveled at the great Moses” (Ἐπ’ ἐμοὶ μόνῳ τῶν ἀπάντων ἀλαμπὲς ἐδόκει τὸ πᾶν καὶ σκότος αὐθις ἀρχέγονον. Ἔφερον εἰκόνα τοῦ παντός, πρὶν ἢ τὸ φῶς ἦκειν καὶ νύκτα μεταλαβεῖν, καὶ Μωσῆν ἐκεῖνον ἐθαύμαζον, 9.3). Basilakes has the man admire Moses as the author of the first creation story in Genesis 1, for his ability to describe so clearly what he had not personally experienced as a blind man. Similarly, Ephrem refers to the primordial darkness before creation in interpreting this miracle.¹⁵ The speaker in Basilakes is thus prompted to claim for himself the twin distinctions of most unfortunate blind man ever, because unlike other blind people, he was blind from birth (9.3), and most fortunate sighted man ever in “the novelty of my sight” (τῷ καινῷ τῆς ὄψεως, 9.2), because, unlike other sighted people, his eyes were personally created or repaired by Jesus.

The speaker in Basilakes gazes with amazement upon the sun and the daytime sky (9.5) and the “ineffable beauty of the Temple” (ναοῦ κάλλος ἄρρητον, 9.6), and he looks forward to seeing his parents for the first time and knowing that his affliction will no longer be blamed on their sin (9.5; cf. John 9:2–3). Similarly, in an *ethopoeia* in Cyril of Alexandria’s commentary, which he offers by way of explanation of John 9:15, the man also expresses his joy at the prospect of seeing all the things that he had only heard about: the light of the sun, the city of Jerusalem, the Temple and its altar, the countryside of Judea with its hills and trees, and the night sky with the moon

¹⁵ Ephrem *Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron* 16.28 (in Elowsky, *Ancient Christian Commentary: John 1–10*, 323).

and stars.¹⁶ Whether Basilakes had read Cyril's *ethopoeia* is unknown. Both speakers celebrate their new ability to see sunlight and the Temple, but while Cyril's man is eager to explore Jerusalem and the countryside, Basilakes' man quickly focuses on restoring his parents' reputation and beginning his new life of bearing witness to the miracle.

Ethopoeia 10: Hades

The *ethopoeia* takes as its inspiration John 11:1–44.¹⁷ In John's account, Jesus is informed by Mary and Martha that Lazarus is very sick, but he delays going to him. When Jesus senses that Lazarus has died (“fallen asleep”), he tells the disciples that they are going to him. Jesus tells Martha that Lazarus will rise again, and Mary accompanies them to the tomb. Jesus says, “Lazarus, come out,” and Lazarus emerges from the tomb alive.

Basilakes' version takes place on the same timetable, with Lazarus slowly decomposing until he suddenly rises on the fourth day, but it otherwise has little to do with the gospel account. Mary, Martha, and the disciples are not mentioned, and the speaker (Hades) is not a character in the gospel account at all. The speech reads between the lines to imagine Lazarus' time in the underworld as he patiently waits for Jesus to rescue him, but from the hostile point of view of Hades. This Hades is not the god of Greek mythology, but a keeper of the dead of all nations in a monotheistic Christian universe. After he loses Lazarus, he laments the loss of other Jews known from the Old and New Testaments: Elisha and Elijah (10.2), the daughter of Jairus (Matthew 9:18–26, Luke 8:41–55), and a widow's only son (Luke 7:11–15). He does not mention other Greek gods or lament the thematically relevant losses of, say, Theseus, Al-

¹⁶ Cyril. *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 6.1 (in Elowsky, *Ancient Christian Commentary: John 1–10*, 329).

¹⁷ For this speech in the context of contemporary works mentioning Hades (the place), see Ingela Nilsson, “Hades Meets Lazarus: The Literary *Katabasis* in Twelfth-Century Byzantium,” in Gunnel Ekroth et al. (eds.), *Round Trip to Hades in the Eastern Mediterranean Tradition: Visits to the Underworld from Antiquity to Byzantium* (Leiden 2018) 322–341, esp. 332–336.

cestis, and Semele; the loss of his wife Persephone for part of each year; or the heroic intrusion and escape of Heracles. And so it is incorrect to interpret this Hades as expressing his fear that Jesus may be “a god”: he is afraid that he is “God.”¹⁸

Basilakes’ inspiration for this exercise could have come from a sermon or hymn, as there was a tradition of depicting how the keepers of the underworld reacted to the resurrection of Lazarus. A homily of Basil of Seleucia contains an *ethopoeia* of Hades that also takes place just as Lazarus is taken from him. Hades laments his reversal of fortune as the tombs are emptied and the dead return to life, “undo[ing] the tragedy, leaving me an heir to grief.” There follows a series of four rhetorical questions in which he wonders who is responsible, and he closes with “Oh, in vain was I entrusted with a kingdom! Oh, in vain was I confident in an angry God!”¹⁹ In the western church, a sermon in Latin by Peter Chrysologus imagines that when Christ “began to strike the doors of the underworld ... the power of Tartarus with all its fury confronted him.” The angels accompanying him tell Tartarus his identity; he scoffs, saying

¹⁸ Pace Nilsson, in *Round Trip* 336 n.56. In Basilakes’ exercise, Hades says of Jesus, “I fear that he may even be God, even if he is mortal in appearance” (δέδοικα μὴ καὶ Θεὸς ᾷ, κἄν θνητὸς τὸ φαινόμενον, 10.7). Similarly, the slave of the high priest at Gethsemane refers to “all the other novel signs that testify that this man has come to us as God,” and affirms, “Even if he is mortal in appearance, he is to be understood as God” (Κἄν θνητὸς ᾷ τὸ φαινόμενον, ἀλλὰ γε Θεὸς τὸ νοούμενον, 11.4). Damaskinos (Olkinuora) of Xenophontos, “Personification in Byzantine Hymnography,” in Alexis Torrance et al. (eds.), *Personhood in the Byzantine Christian Tradition: Early, Medieval, and Modern Perspectives* (London 2018) 80–99, at 87, sees the Hades of Byzantine hymnography as a relic of the pagan past in a new Christian context: “both Hades and Death represent personified deities of the pagan past ... in a way, Hades and Death, apart from representing death and corruption, become through their personification concrete scapegoats of the pagan past. The destruction of these persons exposes the fundamental change in the fate of humanity through Christ’s salvific work.”

¹⁹ Basil. *Homily on Lazarus* 11–12 (in Elowsky, *Ancient Christian Commentary: John 11–21*, 31–32).

that although he knows God is in charge of heaven and the creation, “this one that I see is one of the earthlings, made out of mud, enclosed in a mortal body, and in his human condition viler than human beings, and, in short, soon to be handed over to the grave and very shortly destined to come under my jurisdiction.”²⁰ Similarly, Hades in Basilakes hopefully reminds himself that “at first many have been emboldened against me, but ultimately they have been defeated and have died” (10.7), and although he refers to Jesus as “mortal in appearance,” he still fears that he may actually be God. Chrysologus goes on to portray Hades appealing to God with Christ as the opposing litigant, and the decision being rendered in Christ’s favor. Basilakes would also have known of hymns about Lazarus in which Hades is assigned a speaking part.²¹

Ethopoeia 11: the slave of the high priest

This composition has a more complex relationship to the New Testament than *Ethopoeiae* 7–9 and 10, which all rely on a unique biblical account. This story is told in all four gospels (Matthew 26:36–56, Mark 14:32–52, Luke 22:39–53, John 18:1–11). When Jesus goes to Gethsemane to pray, he takes his disciples Peter, James, and John, whom he chides three times for their failure to stay awake. Judas arrives with “a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people” (Matthew 26:47). By prearranged sign, Judas kisses Jesus, and some people try to arrest him. In the scuffle, someone (perhaps Peter) draws his sword and cuts off the ear of the slave of the high priest. Jesus tells him to put away his sword, and goes away with the crowd while his

²⁰ Peter Chrysol. *Sermon* 65.6–8 (in Elowsky, *Ancient Christian Commentary: John 11–21*, 28–29).

²¹ For example, Romanos Melodos imagines a tense exchange between Hades and Thanatos (Death) as Jesus approaches Lazarus’ tomb. Both watch in terror as Lazarus’ body is reassembled; they review past resurrections and lament the loss of their power and empire (*Kontakion* 14, strophes 8–16); see Barbara Saylor Rodgers, “Romanos Melodos on the Raising of Lazarus,” *ByzZeit* 107 (2014) 811–830.

disciples flee. Jesus is then taken to “Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered” (Matthew 26:57). All four gospels recount the wounding of the high priest’s slave (Matthew 26:51, Mark 14:47, Luke 22:50, John 18:10), but only Luke 22:51 mentions his healing, and only John 18:10 gives him a name (Malchus) and identifies Peter as the disciple who struck him.²²

In Basilakes, the only disciples mentioned are Peter (“that rash old man,” 11.3) and Judas (“you false, gold-loving disciple,” 11.4), there is no angry mob, and the high priest and other learned men are present. The slave addresses “my master and all the rest who are acquainted with Scripture,” who “know the Law in detail” and “are not unaware of the Messiah,” and who therefore through careful research should be able to discern that “this man is the awaited one” (11.4). This change allows the slave to combine his personal experience of miraculous healing by an impressively non-violent and compassionate Jesus with his ironically superior knowledge of Scripture to conclude that Jesus is the Messiah, and to urge his companions to recognize the same and realize that their actions here today will not go unpunished (11.4).

Conclusion

Basilakes’ *ethopoeiae* concerning New Testament miracles revisit familiar stories through the experiences of characters who now have the opportunity to retell these events from their own point of view, and who offer readers new perspectives, themes, and interpretations through which to understand them: Zacharias as a metaphorical pregnant mother; Mary as a proud, loving mother who takes center stage one last time to launch her son’s career; a formerly blind man whose eyes were not simply healed but were formed or reformed by Christ the potter, creator of the universe which, like the man himself, was

²² In this respect it is similar to Basilakes’ *Ethopoiea* 5, which combines details from two different but broadly parallel stories in 1 Kings 24:1–23 and 26:1–25 to create a speech for David after he spares Saul’s life.

once covered in impenetrable darkness; an eternal jailkeeper who realizes that his absolute rule has come to an end and who ironically laments a resurrection that Christians understood to prefigure Christ's own; and a slave who sees more than his learned master, recognizing in Jesus the long-awaited Messiah, feeling guilt for his role in the arrest, and perhaps catching a glimpse, however faint, of the Resurrection to come. The ancient rhetorical exercise *ethopoeia*—originally designed to explore the *ethos* and *pathos* of figures from Greek mythology, as part of the training of an educated, pagan elite seeking to serve as advocates, governors, and bureaucrats—became the vehicle through which Basilakes extended the *dramatis personae* and storyworld of early Christian history by exploring the character and emotional experience of speakers who were there, and by constructing these five miracles (which occurred only moments before) as the turning points connecting the present, past, and future of their lives.²³

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Department of Classics
University of Iowa
craig-gibson@uiowa.edu

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