

Twelfth-Century Scholars on the Moral Exemplarity of Ancient Poetry

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MORAL EXEMPLARITY is a conspicuous element in Byzantine thought and literature across multiple genres and contexts. Hagiographical accounts typically present their holy protagonists as models of exemplary virtue to be emulated by monastics and laypeople alike;¹ imperial orations and panegyric poetry frequently compare contemporary emperors with exemplary rulers from the early Byzantine past or Old Testament kings, such as David and Solomon;² and the

¹ See for example Theodoret of Cyrus, *Religious History* 30.7 Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen: saints' lives offer "models of philosophy" (ἀρχέτυπα φιλοσοφίας); *Life of Mary of Egypt* 41 (PG 87.3 3725B): for generations monks passed on the story of the saint as a model (ὑπόδειγμα) that would benefit the listeners; Gregory the Cellarer, *Life of St. Lazaros of Mt. Galesion* 1 Delehaye: stories of saints are like living icons or mirrors for later generations. Cf. *Life of Basil* 1.17–18 Ševčenko: the portrait of Basil serves as "the standard of virtue, a statue, and a model for imitation" (ὁ πρὸς ἀρετὴν κανὼν τε καὶ ἀνδρίας καὶ τὸ ἀρχέτυπον τῆς μιμήσεως). Some Lives stress that the saint was already a model for others during his/her lifetime: e.g. Ignatios the Deacon, *Life of the Patriarch Tarasios* 20 Efthymiadis. On female saints as models for both men and women see C. Rapp, "Figures of Female Sanctity: Byzantine Edifying Manuscripts and their Audience," *DOP* 50 (1996) 313–344.

² See esp. C. Rapp, "Old Testament Models for Emperors in Early Byzantium," in P. Magdalino et al. (eds.), *The Old Testament in Byzantium* (Washington 2010) 175–197. On David in particular see V. Tsamakda, "König David als Typos des byzantinischen Kaisers," in F. Daim et al. (eds.) *Byzanz: Das Römerreich im Mittelalter* (Mainz 2010) 24–54; R. Ricceri, "David as Model for the Emperor and His Poet: Theodore Prodromos and

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prefaces to various historiographical works emphasize the moral value of history and the valuable lessons that historical examples may impart.³

As a mode of reading and evaluating the past, moral exemplarity also informed Byzantine interpretations of ancient Greek poetry: for Byzantine scholars the gods and heroes of the pagan past served as positive or negative role models for contemporary readers. The fourth-century Church Fathers justified the central position that Byzantine education afforded to ancient literature on the grounds of its literary and moral exemplarity. In his *Address to Young Men on Reading Greek Literature*, for instance, Basil of Caesarea famously likened the selective extraction of moral lessons from examples of virtuous behavior in ancient Greek literature to plucking roses while taking care to avoid the thorns (i.e., to ignore or discard any potentially harmful material).⁴ Throughout the essay Basil demonstrates this proposed approach by identifying the moral benefit to be derived from selected passages of ancient literature. For many centuries after Basil's lifetime, moral exemplarity remained a central tenet in attitudes toward the ancient literary legacy, assuming various forms that ranged

John II Komnenos," in B. van den Berg et al. (eds.), *Poetry in Byzantine Literature and Society (1081–1204): New Texts, New Approaches* (Cambridge forthcoming).

³ E.g. Niketas Choniates, *History* 1.5–2.11 Van Dieten; historiography brings back to life and places before the eyes of readers both virtuous and immoral figures of the past for the (moral) benefit of mankind. For Byzantine ideas on the moral value of history see also L. Neville, "Why Did the Byzantines Write History?" in *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies* (Belgrade 2016) 265–276, esp. 268–269.

⁴ Basil, *Address to Young Men* 4 Naldini; see N. G. Wilson, *Saint Basil on the Value of Greek Literature* (London 1975), for commentary and introduction. For ancient Greek literature in the early centuries of Christianity see e.g. P. Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantin* (Paris 1971) 43–73; A. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium* (Cambridge 2007) 120–172.

from moralizing allegorical interpretations of Greek poetry (predominantly Homer) to collections of edifying maxims drawn from the literature of the past.⁵

This article explores moral readings of ancient poetry in key twelfth-century scholarly texts that were intended to educate the empire's future political and cultural elite. I shall focus on the monumental commentaries on Homer produced by the rhetorician and court orator Eustathios of Thessalonike (ca. 1115–1185), whose sustained reading of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* devotes considerable attention to both their rhetorical and their moral qualities.⁶ Reflections on the moral value of ancient poetry may also be found in various didactic works by the grammarian John Tzetzes (ca. 1110–1170), in particular his verse treatises on ancient poetry,⁷ and the collection of

⁵ For examples of moralizing allegory in John Malalas and Tzetzes see A. J. Goldwyn, "John Malalas and the Origins of Allegorical and Novelistic Traditions of the Trojan War in Byzantium," *Troianalexandria* 15 (2015) 23–49. For the moral reading of the *Odyssey* by Manuel Gabalas in Late Byzantium see R. Browning, "A Fourteenth-Century Prose Version of the *Odyssey*," *DOP* 46 (1992) 27–36; L. Silvano, "Perché leggere Omero: il prologo all'Odisea di Manuele Gabala nelle due redazioni autografe," *ĴÖB* 67 (2017) 217–237. For maxims collected from ancient authors see e.g. the *Corpus Parisinum*, ed. D. M. Searby (Lewiston 2007).

⁶ M. van der Valk, *Eustathii Archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem* (Leiden 1971–1987); E. Cullhed, *Eustathios of Thessalonike: Commentary on Homer's Odyssey I* (Uppsala 2016, for Books 1–2); J. G. Stallbaum, *Eustathii Archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis Commentarii ad Homeri Odysseam* (Leipzig 1825–1826). The latter will soon be replaced by the new digital edition by E. Cullhed and S. Douglas Olson (<https://scholarlyeditions.brill.com/eooc>). On Eustathios' life and works see P. Cesaretti and S. Ronchey, *Eustathii Thessalonicensis Exegesis in canonem iambicum pentecostalem* (Berlin 2014) 7*–30*, with further bibliography.

⁷ For the treatises *On the Differences between Poets*, *On Comedy*, *On Tragedy*, along with two redactions of prose prolegomena on comedy, see W. J. W. Koster, *Scholia in Aristophanem* 1A (Groningen 1975). I am currently preparing a volume with English translations of, and commentary on, these texts (along with the introductory essay of Tzetzes' *Exegesis of the Iliad*). For

progymnasmata (rhetorical exercises) by the courtier and rhetorician Nikephoros Basilakes (ca. 1115–after 1182), a collection that likely originated from Basilakes’ activities as a teacher of rhetoric.⁸ The first part of this article will explore how these scholars make exemplarity a central element of ancient poetry’s moral value. The second part will adopt a close perspective on Eustathios’ reading of Homer and examine how his commentaries frame the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as vehicles for ethical reflection and moral education. The final part will explore Eustathios’ ideas on precisely how exemplary figures can influence the behavior of moral agents. Overall, this paper aims to elucidate the Byzantine practice of interpreting ancient literature through a moral lens while simultaneously exploring moral exemplarity as a mode of reading, writing, and thinking in Byzantium.

The moral value of ancient poetry

Byzantine discussions of ancient drama include several particularly elaborate reflections on the moral value of ancient poetry. Although ancient plays were no longer performed, ancient comedy and tragedy were still central elements in Byzantine education, and several commentaries and other didactic resources were produced accordingly to assist teachers and their students in understanding the texts.⁹ In addition to

an introduction on Tzetzes as a scholar see F. Pontani, “Scholarship in the Byzantine Empire (529–1453),” in F. Montanari (ed.), *History of Ancient Greek Scholarship: From the Beginnings to the End of the Byzantine Age* (Leiden 2020) 452–459.

⁸ Basilakes’ *progymnasmata*: A. Pignani, *Niceforo Basilace: Progimmasmi e monodie* (Naples 1983); revised version with English translation J. Beneker and C. A. Gibson, *The Rhetorical Exercises of Nikephoros Basilakes: Progymnasmata from Twelfth-Century Byzantium* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2016); see there vii–viii on his career and activities as teacher, with further bibliography.

⁹ On ancient drama in Byzantium see esp. P. Marciniak, *Greek Drama in Byzantine Times* (Katowice 2004), esp. 41–58 for the educational context.

commentaries on Aristophanes and (perhaps) scholia on various tragic plays, John Tzetzes composed several introductory treatises on ancient comedy and tragedy that explain their history, formal and performative features, and social functions.¹⁰ In his verse treatise *On the Differences among Poets*, for instance, Tzetzes argues that both tragedy and comedy were intended to shape the spectators' lives. In relating the vicissitudes of various heroes, tragedians cautioned their spectators against the dangers of arrogance; the comic poets' serious humor, by contrast, sought to deter their audiences from engaging in criminal conduct and other unsavory exploits.¹¹ Tzetzes thus appears to imply that spectators absorbed lessons about moral conduct through witnessing the downfall of tragedy's hubristic heroes and the ridicule suffered by the protagonists of comedy.

Eustathios expresses similar views in a sermon on hypocrisy (ὑπόκρισις) delivered in his capacity as archbishop of Thessalo-

¹⁰ For Tzetzes' scholarship on ancient drama see Pontani, in *History of Ancient Greek Scholarship* 456–459; for the commentaries on Aristophanes see also F. Benuzzi, "Erudizione, autorità e autorialità: l'esegesi antica alla commedia sulla cattedra di Giovanni Tzetze," *Incontri triestini di filologia classica* 17 (2017/8) 369–386, and A. Pizzone, "Cultural Appropriation and the Performance of Exegesis in Tzetzes' Scholia on Aristophanes," in B. van den Berg et al. (eds.), *Byzantine Commentaries on Ancient Greek Texts, 12th–15th Centuries* (Cambridge 2022) 100–129. For Tzetzes' possible work on the tragedians (esp. Euripides) see D. J. Mastronarde, *Preliminary Studies on the Scholia to Euripides* (Berkeley 2017) 77–89, with further references.

¹¹ Tzetzes, *On the Differences between Poets* 65–71, with translation and discussion in B. van den Berg, "Playwright, Satirist, Atticist: The Reception of Aristophanes in 12th-Century Byzantium," in P. Marciniak et al., *Satire in the Middle Byzantine Period* (Leiden 2021) 227–253, at 232–235. Tzetzes connects the moral function of ancient drama to its alleged origins: see P. Roilos, "Satirical Modulations in 12th-Century Greek Literature," in *Satire* 258–259, and van den Berg, "Playwright"; see also P. Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia: A Poetics of the Twelfth-Century Medieval Greek Novel* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2005) 232.

nike. The sermon opens with a discussion of ancient hypocrisy in the sense of “acting,” in which Eustathios argues that, unlike the morally reprehensible hypocrisy that pervaded the society in which he lived, ancient “hypocrisy” was a positive force that imparted lessons about moral values. For Eustathios the actors in ancient dramas—tragedy in particular—functioned as “living and speaking history books” (βιβλίον ιστορίας ζῶν καὶ λαλοῦν) in their ability to bring the past to life on stage.¹² In this way, they became teachers of every virtue, presenting audiences with models of both virtue and vice—the former to be emulated and the latter avoided. In the sermon’s opening paragraphs, Eustathios argues that the moral lessons of ancient drama remain relevant for his contemporary readers, thus underscoring the continuing value of ancient poetry in Byzantine society.¹³

Two maxims in Nikephoros Basilakes’ *progymnasmata* (maxims 2 and 3 Beneker/Gibson, *Prog.* 25 and 26 Pignani) discuss in greater detail the edifying effects of ancient tragedy. As a subcategory of *progymnasmata*, γῶμαι (maxims) consist of detailed examinations and elaborations of sayings that are impersonally expressed—that is, without the indication of a speaker or agent (the presence of which would make them *chreiai* rather than maxims).¹⁴ Like many of the *progymnasmata*, they were thus an

¹² *On Hypocrisy* 89.32; the text is *opusculum* 13 in T. L. F. Tafel, *Eustathii Metropolitanæ Thessalonicensis Opuscula* (Amsterdam 1832). On the moral value of bringing history to life cf. Niketas Choniates (n.3 above). On the opening paragraphs of Eustathios’ sermon see Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia* 233–234, 281–282, and in *Satire* 264–265; B. van den Berg, “‘The Excellent Man Lies Sometimes’: Eustathios of Thessalonike on Good Hypocrisy, Praiseworthy Falsehood, and Rhetorical Plausibility in Ancient Poetry,” *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 3 (2017) 15–35.

¹³ *On Hypocrisy* 88.30–31, 61–65 Tafel.

¹⁴ On the difference between *chreia* and maxim see e.g. Aphthonios, *Progymnasmata* 4.4 Patillon.

exercise in invention and prose composition.¹⁵ Basilakes provides his students with model exercises that develop the often terse instructions in handbooks such as that of Aphthonios—an incidental reminder that rhetorical education also revolved around the emulation of examples. While Basilakes' *progymnasmata* served primarily to instruct young students in different modes of rhetorical composition, they may have simultaneously fulfilled ethical-didactic functions: many *progymnasmata* were designed to inculcate in their young students social values and moral principles alongside rhetorical techniques.¹⁶

In each of the relevant maxims, Basilakes praises Sophocles as the most sagacious of poets on the grounds that his works include many wise sayings and are nonpareil in their realization of tragedy's didactic purposes.¹⁷ The second maxim contains his most elaborate reflections on the functions of tragedy

¹⁵ On *progymnasmata* in ancient education see R. Webb, "The *Progymnasmata* as Practice," in Y. L. Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Leiden 2001) 289–316. On *progymnasmata* in the twelfth century, M. Loukaki, "Training Students in the Art of Discourse in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: Forms of *Progymnasmata*," in P. Chiron et al. (eds.), *Les Progymnasmata en pratique, de l'antiquité à nos jours* (Paris 2020) 193–202.

¹⁶ See C. A. Gibson, "Libanius' *Progymnasmata*," in L. Van Hoof, *Libanius: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge 2014) 128–143, at 140; Webb, in *Education* 303–305. The same applies to declamations as an educational practice closely related to the *progymnasmata*: R. Penella, "Libanius' *Declamations*," in *Libanius: A Critical Introduction* 107–127, at 126–127, and "Introduction," in *Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations* (Cambridge 2009) 1–32, at 12–13. More broadly on rhetoric and rhetorical education as shaping the social and cultural identities of elite men, see M. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton 1995); Gleason's influential book concerns the Second Sophistic, yet much of her discussion also holds true for later periods.

¹⁷ *Maxims* 2.1, 2.4, 3.1 Beneker/Gibson / *Prog.* 25.1–2, 32–37; 26.1–5 Pignani. On these maxims and Basilakes' views on Sophocles see also P. Marciniak, "The Executioner and his Drugs: Nikephoros Basilakes on Sophocles," *Listy filologické* 144 (2021) 347–364.

(*Maxim* 3 Beneker/Gibson / *Prog.* 26 Pignani), in its discussion of the gnomic lines from Sophocles' *Electra* that serve as the title of the exercise: "This just penalty should come immediately to everyone, that whoever wishes to act outside of the laws should be killed, for then there would not be so much wrongdoing."¹⁸ Basilakes explains that tragic performances served to dispel any abomination that infested the state or grew in the minds of its citizens. In watching characters from ancient myths invariably and swiftly being punished for their wicked deeds, spectators would be deterred from criminal acts or immoral proclivities for fear of the potential consequences.¹⁹ Expounding the gnomic lines from the *Electra*, Basilakes likens tragedians to doctors whose tragedies serve as a medicine that has the power to restore a state afflicted by evil to a healthy condition of honor and virtue. Drugs serve either to protect our health and fend off future illness or to restore the body to health when it is already under attack from disease. The "cauterizing iron" of Sophocles' tragedies works in the same two ways: on the one hand, it prevents our souls from becoming corrupted to begin with; on the other hand, in cautioning that crimes will be punished immediately, tragedy instills in its spectators a fear of wrongdoing, thus restoring justice and order whenever they are threatened by crime and immorality.²⁰ Basilakes has Sophocles summarize the beneficial effects of his tragedies in the first person (*Maxim* 3.5 Beneker/Gibson / *Prog.* 26.34–39 Pignani):

¹⁸ Ἐχρῆν δ' εὐθὺς εἶναι τήνδε τοῖς πᾶσιν δίκην, ὅστις πέρα τι τῶν νόμων πᾶσσειν θέλει κτείνειν· τὸ γὰρ κακοῦργον οὐκ ἂν ἦν πολὺ (transl. Beneker/Gibson). Cf. Soph. *Electra* 1505–1507.

¹⁹ *Maxim* 3.3 / *Prog.* 26.20–24 and throughout the same text; Basilakes makes the same point in *Maxim* 2.1 / *Prog.* 25.7–13, with a reference to Orestes' murder of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra.

²⁰ The medical metaphor is found in *Maxim* 3.1, 3.5–6, 3.8–9 / *Prog.* 26.1–5, 34–42, 60–72.

Γέμουσι κακῶν αἱ πόλεις καὶ νοσοῦσιν ἀθεράπευτα καὶ κάμνουσι μὴ παυόμενα καὶ δεῖ τοῦ φαρμάκοις στήσοντος τὸ δεινόν. Ἄλλ' οἶδα τὴν θεραπείαν ἐγὼ πρὸς γὰρ τῆς σοφίας τοῦτο τὸ καλὸν ἀπωνάμην. Κἂν οἱ τῶν πόλεων ἐπιστατοῦντες ἐθέλοιτε μαθεῖν, οὐ φθονήσω τῆς θεραπείας, οὐ καθέξω τὸ φάρμακον, ἐγγὺς τὸ παράδειγμα.

The cities are full of evils, they suffer from untreated diseases, they are chronically ill and they lack someone to stop their suffering with drugs. But I know the treatment; for by my wisdom I acquired this fine thing. And if you overseers of the cities wish to learn it, I will not deny you the treatment; I will not withhold you the drug; the example is at hand. (transl. Beneker/Gibson)

This passage encapsulates the key notion that enables tragedy's edifying effect, exemplarity. Basilakes' Sophocles argues that tragedy aims to influence the behavior of moral agents in the present by offering the audience a *παράδειγμα*, an example of moral or immoral actions and their consequences.²¹

The example referred to here is the story of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra as recounted in the *Electra*, in which the former, according to Basilakes (*Maxim* 3.2 / *Prog.* 26.14–19), is punished for his adultery and the latter for her *hybris* when they are killed by the vengeful Orestes. Basilakes has Sophocles himself explain the lessons that this *paradeigma* imparts: “When Aegisthus is struck down and Clytemnestra falls, let this be your standard for a just penalty, and consider this the definition of health.”²² In other words, the story of the *Electra* offers instruct-

²¹ On *paradeigma* as a model for moral imitation see K. Demoen, *Pagan and Biblical Exempla in Gregory Nazianzen: A Study in Rhetoric and Hermeneutics* (Turnhout 1996) 38; see 77–82 for its application in the works of Gregory, and “A Paradigm for the Analysis of Paradigms: The Rhetorical *Exemplum* in Ancient and Imperial Greek Theory,” *Rhetorica* 15 (1997) 125–158, on *παράδειγμα* in ancient rhetorical theory.

²² *Maxim* 3.6 / *Prog.* 26.40–42: Βαλλόμενος Αἴγισθος καὶ πίπτουσα Κλυταιμνήστρα, οὗτος ὑμῖν τῆς δίκης ἔστω κανὼν καὶ τοῦτον τῆς ὑγείας ὄρον τίθεσθε.

tion as to how such criminal acts and wicked behaviors should be dealt with—that is, with immediate and severe punishment to safeguard the community’s moral wellbeing.²³ The gnomic lines cited as the title of Basilakes’ rhetorical exercise thus reflect the moral lessons that he presents as being at the heart of the *Electra*’s status as an exemplary story. At the end of his discussion (*Maxim* 3.16 / *Prog.* 26.139–144), Basilakes further supports his point by listing stories of other mythical figures who, in his view, have similar protreptic properties: Palamedes, Sisyphus, Ixion, Tantalus, and Tityus were all gravely punished for their crimes, and their examples should turn us away from wrongdoing.

Maxim 2 / *Prog.* 25 elaborates on another Sophoclean maxim, in this case a line on kindness from the *Ajax*.²⁴ Basilakes also begins this text with a discussion of the benefits that tragedy confers through moral exemplarity, although no mention is made here of παράδειγμα or similar terms. Again, he identifies the universal lessons that tragic exemplars impart: the story of Ajax’s madness brings those who are suffering from similar afflictions to their senses; the story of Electra demonstrates that grief is normal but temporary; and Oedipus’ suffering reveals that fortunes change and that we should thus refrain from taking too much pride in our current prosperity (*Maxim* 2.2–3 / *Prog.* 25.13–30). Like these brief examples, the tragic stories that Basilakes cites lose most of their complexity in his reading, being reduced to one-dimensional morality lessons. He does

²³ Despite Basilakes’ (rhetorical or actual) endorsement of capital punishment in this text, the Byzantines seem to have preferred mutilation or exile over the death penalty: G. T. Dennis, “Death in Byzantium,” *DOP* 71 (2001) 1–7, at 6–7. Dennis suggests that executions, when they happened, may have served as a cautionary example to those who might be thinking of crime or rebellion—not unlike the exemplarity Basilakes posits for the pseudohistorical punishments of ancient tragedy.

²⁴ *Ajax* 522: χάρις χάριν γάρ ἐστὶν ἢ τίκτουσ’ ἀεί, “for it is always kindness that begets kindness.”

not mention, for instance, that in most versions of the myth Palamedes was not in fact a traitor but was unjustly killed by the Greek army after being set up by his envious rival Odysseus.²⁵ Basilakes also ignores the fact that Oedipus achieved his fragile good fortune by (unwittingly) killing his father and entering into an incestuous marriage with his mother. Although Basilakes and his readers were undoubtedly aware of the moral ambiguity of his tragic exemplars, for the sake of the argument the stories are reduced to unproblematic ethical lessons.

While it is true that the rhetorical purpose of Basilakes' exercise may have influenced his reductive reading of tragedy, Byzantine book epigrams reveal that, in fact, such an approach was widespread.²⁶ Various epigrams in the fourteenth-century codex *Laur.Plut.* 31.08 similarly identify the moral lessons that may be drawn from Aeschylus' tragedies. The anonymous poet argues, for instance, that the *Prometheus* teaches us that robbery is bad, that Xerxes' defeat in the *Persians* should convince us not to wrong our neighbors, and that the tormented Orestes of the *Eumenides* admonishes us not to resort to murder.²⁷ Such simplistic interpretations belie the tension that Timothy Hamp-

²⁵ For Tzetzes this is a key aspect of the story and brings him to identify with Palamedes: S. Xenophonothos, "A Living Portrait of Cato': Self-Fashioning and the Classical Past in John Tzetzes' *Chiliades*," *Estudios Bizantinos* 2 (2014) 187–204, at 197–198; V. F. Lovato, "Portrait de héros, portrait d'érudit: Jean Tzetzés et la tradition des *eikonismoi*," *MEG* 17 (2017) 137–156, at 142–148.

²⁶ Similar moral readings were already part of the ancient and late antique reception of tragedy: R. Webb, "Attitudes toward Tragedy from the Second Sophistic to Late Antiquity," in V. Liapis et al., *Greek Tragedy after the Fifth Century: A Survey from ca. 400 BC to ca. AD 400* (Cambridge 2019) 297–323, at 304–311; N. Croally, "Tragedy's Teaching," in J. Gregory (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 2005) 55–70, with additional references.

²⁷ On these epigrams see M. Tomadaki and E. M. van Opstall, "The Tragedians from a Byzantine Perspective: Book Epigrams on Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides," *MEG* 19 (2019) 193–220, at 202–203.

ton identified in Renaissance readings of ancient texts through the lens of moral exemplarity: while the most ideologically correct and rhetorically powerful exemplar would be morally unambiguous, the veneration of antiquity and the study of ancient texts laid bare the entire narrative of the hero's life, with all its ambiguities.²⁸ Like their Renaissance counterparts, Byzantine teachers and scholars applied a degree of censorship or filtering to ancient narratives with the aim of countering their inherent ambiguity and moral heterogeneity.²⁹ Both Basilakes and the anonymous epigrammatist(s) offer an unequivocal interpretation that brings the *ὠφέλεια* or (moral) usefulness of the old stories into sharp relief for contemporary readers, a usefulness that served to justify the study of ancient literature in the first place.³⁰

Homer as a teacher of moral behavior

Byzantine scholars thus continued to subscribe to the age-old notion that drama and poetry in general—not least that of Homer, who was still considered the greatest of all poets—had an inherent moral value.³¹ In an encomium on the metro-

²⁸ T. Hampton, *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca 1990), esp. 27–29.

²⁹ Censorship and filtering: Hampton, *Writing from History* 27; ch. 2 examines how Budé, Erasmus, and Machiavelli attempted to resolve this tension in their advice treatises. Regarding exempla in ancient Rome, Rebecca Langlands has argued that it was precisely the ambiguities and tensions in the exemplary tales that made them so useful for moral education and reflection: *Exemplary Ethics in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge 2018) esp. ch. 7 and 12. A more elaborate study of exempla and exemplarity is required to generate more general conclusions about the Byzantine practice.

³⁰ Cf. Basil of Caesarea as discussed above. For *ὠφέλεια* as central to Byzantine literary culture see I. Toth, “Modern Encounters with Byzantine Texts and their Reading Publics,” in T. Shawcross et al. (eds.), *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond* (Cambridge 2018) 37–50, at 42–43.

³¹ On Homer in Byzantium see most recently M. Mavroudi, “Homer in Greece from the End of Antiquity 1: The Byzantine Reception of Homer

politian of Chonae, for instance, Eustathios' student Michael Choniates calls Homer "the marvelous and divine herald of virtue, in that he recounts heroic virtues of all kinds." In his *Allegories of the Odyssey* Tzetzes likewise emphasizes the moralizing nature of Homeric poetry: "To turn everyone away from unlawful deeds, what did Homer not do, what did he not say, to warn them?"³² Eustathios similarly underscores the edifying properties of Homeric poetry in the prefaces to his commentaries. He opens his *Commentary on the Iliad* by praising the extensive merit of Homeric poetry and lists "teaching on moral virtues" (διδασκαλίας τῆς περὶ ἠθικῶν ἀρετῶν) among the many benefits that the *Iliad* has to offer; moreover, he commends the poet for sharing with historians the ability to educate the souls of his audience and urge them toward virtue, again pointing to the moral value of the past.³³

and his Export to Other Cultures," in O. Pache et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge Guide to Homer* (Cambridge 2020) 444–472. For the twelfth century in particular see A. Basilikopoulou-Ioannidou, *Ἡ ἀναγέννησις τῶν γραμμάτων κατὰ τὸν IB' αἰῶνα εἰς τὸ Βυζάντιον καὶ ὁ Ὅμηρος* (Athens 1971); see also F. Pontani, *Sguardi su Ulisse: la tradizione esegetica greca all'Odisea* (Rome 2005) 136–340.

³² Michael Choniates, *Oration 2* (I 26.9–11 Lampros): τὸν Ὅμηρον ... τὸν δαιμόνιον καὶ θεῖον ἀρετῆς κήρυκα οἷς παντοδαπὰς ἡρώων ἀρετὰς καταλέγει; Tzetzes, *Allegories of the Odyssey* 12.94–95 Hunger: ἐκτρέπων πάντας Ὅμηρος πράξεων τῶν ἀθέσμων, / τί οὐ ποιεῖ, τί οὐ λαλεῖ κινούσιν εἰς νουθεσίαν (transl. after A. J. Goldwyn and D. Kokkini, *John Tzetzes, Allegories of the Odyssey* [Cambridge (Mass.) 2019] 177). I owe these examples to Basilikopoulou-Ioannidou, *Ἡ ἀναγέννησις τῶν γραμμάτων* 113–114. Tzetzes' *Allegories* and other commentaries on ancient poetry contain numerous moral readings, which deserve a study of their own.

³³ Eustathios, *Commentary on the Iliad* I 2.7, 10–13 van der Valk. On the moral value of history see n.3 above. According to Eustathios (and his contemporaries), Homeric poetry had a historical core: see B. van den Berg, *Homer the Rhetorician: Eustathios of Thessalonike on the Composition of the Iliad* (Oxford 2022) 45–46, 63–64; see there 21–34 on the encomiastic opening of the preface and 185–194 for an annotated translation. Cf. Basil of Caesarea,

In the preface to his *Commentary on the Odyssey* he introduces in more detail his view that reading Homer may confer moral benefit; he identifies the *Odyssey*'s key moral lessons (1380.2–5 Cullhed) as follows:

Σωφροσύνη δὲ τῆς ποιήσεως ταύτης ὁ κεφαλαιωδέστατος σκοπός, καὶ φιλανδρίαν δὲ παιδεύει ἔννομον τὸ βιβλίον τοῦτο, προθέμενον τὴν Πηνελόπην εἰς ἀμφοτέρων ἀρχέτυπον. ἤδη δὲ καὶ ἀδικίας ἀπέχεσθαι ὑποτίθησιν, οἷς τοὺς μνηστήρας οὐ δίκαια πλημμελοῦντας ἀπαλλάττεσθαι οὐκ εὖ ἰστορεῖ. ὅσα δὲ καὶ ἄλλα σποράδην ὁ ποιητὴς παιδεύει νόμῳ οἰκείῳ—βιωφελῆς γὰρ πᾶσα ποίησις—τὰ κατὰ μέρος τοῦ βιβλίου διδάξουσιν.

The principal aim of this poem is temperance, and the book teaches lawful love of one's husband, presenting Penelope as a model for both things. It also advises to avoid injustice, in that it narrates how the suitors after committing unjust deeds do not meet a good end. Everything else that the poet teaches here and there according to his own custom—since all poetry is useful for life—will be shown by the sections proceeding part by part through the work. (transl. Cullhed)

Eustathios here articulates the assumption that informs his reading of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* throughout his commentaries: in his view Homer intentionally wove moral lessons into his poetry through the exempla of his characters. As exegete, Eustathios' task is to identify and explicate the lessons that are inherent in Homer's poetry. In reality, Eustathios projects his own didactic program onto the poems and presents the lessons that he wishes to impart as being anticipated by the great poet.³⁴ Eustathios' reading of Penelope as a model of modera-

Address to Young Men 5.26–27 Naldini: Homeric poetry is a praise of every virtue.

³⁴ On this hermeneutic principle see Cullhed, *Eustathios of Thessalonike* 11*–13*, and van den Berg, *Homer the Rhetorician* 41–44. For the same principle in ancient commentaries cf. I. Sluiter, "Commentaries and the Didactic Tradition," in G. W. Most (ed.), *Commentaries = Kommentare* (Göttingen 1999) 173–205, at 173–179.

tion and spousal love and of the suitors' fate as intended to dissuade us from behaving unjustly has much in common with Basilakes' approach to tragedy, as discussed above.³⁵ In accordance with Eustathios' proclamation in the quoted passage, we find numerous examples of such moral lessons throughout the commentaries. He explains, for example, that the narrative of the Cyclops is Homer's way of cautioning against drunkenness.³⁶ With the example of Nestor urging Agamemnon in *Iliad* 14 to take a moment to reflect and make a plan while the battle is raging at the ships, Homer teaches us that one can overcome even the direst circumstances by means of prudence (φρόνησις).³⁷ Moreover, the example in *Iliad* 10 of Agamemnon going himself to wake Nestor rather than sending a servant offers rulers a lesson in simplicity and self-reliance.³⁸

³⁵ On moderation or σωφροσύνη as an important quality for women in Byzantium see e.g. Psellos, *Encomium on his Mother* 442–444 Criscuolo (his mother), 757–759 (his sister); Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 3.8.3 Kambylis/Reinsch (on her grandmother Anna Dalassena).

³⁶ *Commentary on the Odyssey* I 350.12–15 Stallbaum on *Od.* 9.371. On drunkenness in Byzantine satire and social criticism see T. Labuk, “Aristophanes in the Service of Niketas Choniates – Gluttony, Drunkenness and Politics in the Χρονική Διήγησις,” *JÖB* 66 (2016) 127–152, esp. 141–145, 151.

³⁷ *Commentary on the Iliad* III 577.10–11 on *Il.* 14.61–63; Eustathios here rephrases scholion bT on *Il.* 14.61–62 Erbse. For Eustathios' ideas on the importance of φρόνησις for a good ruler see E. C. Bourbouhakis, *Not Composed in a Chance Manner: The Epitaphios for Manuel I Komnenos by Eustathios of Thessalonike* (Uppsala 2017) 77*–81*. For *phronesis* in the imperial oratory of Manuel's reign more broadly see P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge 1993) 435, 488.

³⁸ *Commentary on the Iliad* III 14.14–19 on *Il.* 10.53–55. For the broader implications of this idea in Eustathios' work see E. Cullhed, “Achaeans on Crusade,” in F. Pontani et al. (eds.), *Reading Eustathios of Thessalonike* (Berlin 2017) 285–297. For further examples of moral lessons in the commentary on *Iliad* 1 see G. Lindberg, “Eustathios on Homer: Some of his Approaches to the Text, Exemplified from his Comments on the First Book of the *Iliad*,”

Eustathios does not offer a sustained moral interpretation of the conduct of Homer's heroes and heroines, but rather selectively points out moral lessons on an ad hoc basis, identifying models not only to imitate but also to avoid. He considers the gods' behavior equally instructive, as, for instance, when he presents Hera as a negative model in his comments on *Iliad* 8. When Poseidon vehemently rejects Hera's entreaty to assist the Greeks in contravention of Zeus' wishes (8.205), Eustathios explains (*Commentary on the Iliad* II 565.10–14):

Ὅτι ἀναιδῆς μὲν κἀνταῦθα συνήθως ἢ Ἥρα, εὐλαβῆς δὲ ὁ Ποσειδῶν, ὃς καὶ κωλύει αὐτὴν θρασύνεσθαι κατὰ Διός, παιδεύοντος τοῦ ποιητοῦ ἐν μὲν, μὴ χρῆναι ἀπλῶς κατὰ ἀρχόντων θρασύνεσθαι, ἕτερον δέ, μὴ κατεπαίρεσθαι γυναῖκα ἀνδρός, καὶ τρίτον, σωφρονίζεσθαι τοὺς ἀφελεστέρους ὑπὸ τῶν κρειπτόνων.

Here, too, Hera is shameless, as usual, whereas Poseidon, who prevents her from acting insolently against Zeus, is cautious. The poet teaches, first, that in general one should not act insolently against rulers; second, that a woman should not be arrogant toward a man; and, third, that more brazen people should be chastened by their [moral] superiors.

This passage aligns with Eustathios' general approach to myths in Homeric poetry: he first analyzes the stories as Homer relates them from a rhetorical and (as here) ethical perspective; next, he turns to the story's allegorical meaning, where applicable.³⁹ The example of the mythical figure of Hera demonstrates that the exemplarity of Homer's characters is not contingent on their actual existence in the past; fictional tales can serve the same edifying purposes as historical exempla, particularly if supported by a cultural authority as potent as

*Erano*s 83 (1985) 125–140, at 134–136.

³⁹ For Eustathios' two-stage approach to myth and allegory in Homeric poetry see van den Berg, *Homer the Rhetorician* 49–54, 142–143, and 175–178, and references therein.

Homer.⁴⁰

Aware that the Homeric epics predate Christianity, Eustathios does not read Homeric poetry in overtly Christian terms. Given that his overall aim is to reconstruct the poem's meaning *as intended by Homer*, he refrains from Christianizing allegorical readings, such as we find in Psellos or John Diakonos Galenos.⁴¹ More subtly, however, Eustathios' reading nonetheless brings the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in line with a Christian moral framework. For instance, when Achilles prays to Zeus after helping Patroclus prepare for battle in *Iliad* 16, Eustathios explains that the poet here reinforces the importance of prayer in critical circumstances; moreover, he continues, Homer here demonstrates that the prayer achieves its result through divine power.⁴² Without Christianizing Homer outright, Eustathios implies that the religious beliefs and practices of the Greeks at Troy share affinities with contemporary Christian praxis and impart behavioral lessons relevant to the Christian reader. In a

⁴⁰ In the same way, hagiographical tales (and edifying stories) with a large degree of fictionality provide moral lessons and offer their saintly protagonist as a model for imitation, whether or not they actually existed. On the moral value of hagiography see S. Papaioannou, *Christian Novels from the Menologion of Symeon Metaphrastes* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2017) xviii (cf. xii–xviii on the fictionality of Byzantine hagiography). See also C. Messis, "Fiction and/or Novelisation in Byzantine Hagiography," in S. Efthymiadis (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography II* (Farnham 2014) 313–341.

⁴¹ On Psellos' allegorical method see esp. P. Cesaretti, *Allegoristi di Omero a Bisanzio: Ricerche ermeneutiche* (Milan 1991) 29–59; on Galenos, P. Roilos, "Unshapely Bodies and Beautifying Embellishments': The Ancient Epics in Byzantium, Allegorical Hermeneutics, and the Case of Ioannes Diakonos Galenos," *JÖB* 64 (2014) 231–246. Psellos' Christian readings were strongly criticized by Tzetzes, who followed a contextualizing and historicizing approach similar to that of Eustathios: see Cesaretti 127–140; Cullhed, *Eustathios of Thessalonike* 29*–33*; M. Savio, *Screditare per valorizzare: Giovanni Tzetze, le sue fonti, i committenti e la concorrenza* (Rome 2020) 42–47.

⁴² *Commentary on the Iliad* III 837.30–838.1 on *Il.* 16.218–220.

similar vein, when Achilles boasts to Aeneas in *Iliad* 20 about the time he laid waste the city of Lyrnessus with the aid of Athena and Zeus (20.188–194), Eustathios again attributes didactic value to the fact that Achilles does not claim to have captured the city alone but acknowledges that he did so with the help of a god/God (σὺν θεῷ).⁴³ By removing the names of Athena and Zeus and subsuming them under a singular deity, Eustathios translates the Homeric passage into universal terms to highlight its widely applicable moral value.⁴⁴ These and similar interpretations in the commentaries are without precedent in the ancient scholia from which Eustathios draws much of his material; rather, they reflect Eustathios' ability to imbue the ancient poems with new meaning in the context of the twelfth-century Christian worldview.

The examples discussed hitherto demonstrate how Eustathios through inductive reasoning draws general moral principles from the behavior and actions of Homer's gods and heroes and outlines the profile of a virtuous person throughout his commentaries. He often points explicitly to the qualities of such a morally excellent (σπουδαῖος) individual: Achilles' tears at the loss of Briseïs, for instance, suggest that the excellent man should be moderate in his emotions (μετριοπαθής) rather than altogether emotionless (ἀπαθής);⁴⁵ the examples of Agamemnon

⁴³ *Commentary on the Iliad* IV 390.22–23.

⁴⁴ Out of similar practical concerns, Eustathios 'universalizes' Homeric verses so that they can be quoted by Byzantine authors: see R. Nünlist, "Homer as Blueprint for Speechwriters: Eustathius' Commentaries and Rhetoric," *GRBS* 52 (2012) 493–509, to be read with Cullhed, *Eustathios of Thessalonike* 18*–23*.

⁴⁵ *Commentary on the Iliad* I 179.29–180.1 on *Il.* 1.349. The distinction between μετριοπάθεια and ἀπάθεια is debated in late antique philosophical commentaries and emerges in the twelfth century in discussions on the contemplative life as we find them in the commentaries on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* by Eustratios of Nicaea: see M. Trizio, *Il neoplatonismo di Eustrazio di Nicea* (Bari 2016) 201–223. A detailed discussion of Eustathios'

in *Iliad* 2 and of Odysseus at various points throughout the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* reveal that the excellent man may occasionally tell falsehoods, if only for the right reasons.⁴⁶ Moreover, when Menelaus calls his archenemy Paris “noble” in *Iliad* 3.353, Homer demonstrates that the excellent man is generally full of praise and does not resort to derogatory remarks unless absolutely necessary.⁴⁷ Through the historical example of Agamemnon and the mythical example of Zeus Homer teaches that the excellent man—and particularly the good ruler—does not sleep all night but stays awake pondering the best course of action.⁴⁸ Eustathios’ reading is thus part of the long (transtem-

views lies beyond the scope of the present paper. For connections between Eustathios’ Homeric commentaries, the Aristotelian tradition, and twelfth-century debates on the contemplative life/monasticism see B. van den Berg, “Athena Disenchanted: Eustathios of Thessalonike on Ethical and Rhetorical Prudence in Homer and Beyond,” in T. Scheijnen et al. (eds.), *Enchanted Reception: Religion and the Supernatural in Medieval Troy Narratives* (Uppsala forthcoming).

⁴⁶ Agamemnon: *Commentary on the Iliad* I 285.22–24, on the Peira; Odysseus: e.g. *Commentary on the Iliad* III 95.2. See also van der Valk, *Eustathii Archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis* I praefatio §119; van den Berg, *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 3 (2017) 15–35. Eustathios expresses a similar idea in the preface to the *Commentary on the Odyssey* 1379.33–40 Cullhed, with commentary in F. Pontani, “Il proemio al Commento all’Odissea di Eustazio di Tessalonica,” *Bollettino dei Classici* 21 (2000) 5–58, at 26.

⁴⁷ *Commentary on the Iliad* I 666.1–3. See B. van den Berg, “Eustathios of Thessalonike on Comedy and Ridicule in Homeric Poetry,” in *Byzantine Commentaries on Ancient Greek Texts* 169–194, esp. 176–188.

⁴⁸ *Commentary on the Iliad* I 227.4–9 on *Il.* 1.545–550. On Zeus and Agamemnon as wakeful plotters in the *Iliad* see S. Montiglio, *The Spell of Hymnos: Sleep and Sleeplessness in Ancient Greek Literature* (London 2015) 12–15. In the Palaiologan period, Nikephoros Xanthopoulos Kallistos composed a *chreia* on Homer’s famous words that counsellors should not sleep all night (*Il.* 2.24–25), praising the ethical-didactic value of these lines: for the text see J. Glettner, “Die Progymnasmata des Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopulos,” *ByzZeit* 33 (1933) 9.65–10.113; for translation and discussion R. F. Hock

poral and transcultural) tradition of reading Homer's heroes as models for rulers and, indeed, for human behavior in general.⁴⁹

To achieve their didactic potential, the lessons that Eustathios recognizes in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* must have resonated with ideas that were already present in the society to which Eustathios' Homeric exegesis catered.⁵⁰ The practice of forgoing sleep, for instance, was idealized in various Byzantine contexts: vigils were a staple feature of monastic life, sleep abstinence was central to asceticism, and emperors were frequently praised for their vigilant wakefulness in the service of the community.⁵¹ Eustathios praises Emperor Manuel I Komnenos for his dutiful vigilance on various occasions, notably in the funerary oration for Manuel, in which he asserts that the late emperor used to toil on the battlefield during the day and stay awake at night to carefully plan the next morning's fray—not unlike the strategizing rulers of the *Iliad*, one might argue.⁵²

and E. N. O'Neil, *The Chreia and Ancient Rhetoric: Classroom Exercises II* (Atlanta 2002) 348–359.

⁴⁹ For the reception of Homer in (mostly ancient) reflections on good rule, see the papers in J. Klooster et al. (eds.), *Homer and the Good Ruler in Antiquity and Beyond* (Leiden 2018), with further bibliography. For the exemplarity of Homeric epic in the Early Modern and Modern world, see the papers in A. J. Goldwyn (ed.), *The Trojan Wars and the Making of the Modern World* (Uppsala 2018). For the idea that exemplary readings are a universal aspect of Homeric reception from antiquity to the present see Goldwyn's "Introduction: 'That men to come shall know of it': Theorizing Aesthetic Innovation, Heroic Ideology, and Political Legitimacy in Trojan War Reception," 1–13, at 5–7, 12.

⁵⁰ Cf. Langlands, *Exemplary Ethics* 32.

⁵¹ On sleep abstinence in different Byzantine contexts see N. Barkas, *Sleep and Sleeplessness in Byzantium* (Piscataway 2019).

⁵² Eustathios, *Funeral Oration for Manuel I Komnenos* 54, with commentary in Bourbouhakis, *Not Composed in a Chance Manner* 181. Bourbouhakis points to David as a biblical archetype for the sleepless ruler (Psalms 131:2–6). On the emperor's vigilance see also Eustathios, *Oration* 11, 184.82–89, 189.56–60 Wirth.

Another passage (57) in the same oration states that Sleep was powerless in the face of Manuel's indefatigable commitment to his imperial duties.⁵³ Notwithstanding its long pedigree, this laudatory portrayal of Manuel as a good ruler must surely reflect values held in contemporary Byzantine society. As Laurent Pernot has argued with respect to antiquity, "the principal vocation of epideictic oratory is the reinforcing of the public's adherence to accepted and recognized values."⁵⁴ Byzantine epideictic, too, served to reaffirm commonly held ideals of good rulership and moral behavior, itself offering models for imitation.⁵⁵ The connections between the excellent man of Eustathios' commentaries and the idealized portrait of Manuel as ruler illustrate the extent to which the commentaries are in dialogue with twelfth-century society at large. Eustathios' reading of Homer imbues the ancient stories with new significance by projecting contemporary values onto the heroes of antiquity—values that had a long history, perhaps, but whose relevance nonetheless persisted into the twelfth century.

Rivalry and ambition

To a certain extent, Eustathios' focus on exemplarity amplifies attitudes toward the past that were already present in the Homeric epics themselves, not least in the form of exemplary stories embedded in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.⁵⁶ Eustathios'

⁵³ Byzantine intellectuals often stress the waking nights they themselves spend in the service of learning, e.g. Tzetzes, *Commentary on Aristophanes' Wealth* ad 1098 (35–49 Massa Positano).

⁵⁴ L. Pernot, *Epideictic Rhetoric: Questioning the Stakes of Ancient Praise* (Austin 2015) 98.

⁵⁵ Cf. Pernot, *Epideictic Rhetoric* 95–98. On the parenetic value of epideictic oratory in Late Byzantium see D. Angelov, "Byzantine Imperial Panegyric as Advice Literature (1204–c. 1350)," in E. M. Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium* (Aldershot 2003) 55–72.

⁵⁶ On the exemplarity of the past in Homeric poetry see Goldwyn, in *The Trojan Wars* 3–5; M. Alden, *Homer beside Himself: Para-Narratives in the Iliad*

analysis of such stories therefore provides further clues as to precisely how exempla drawn from the past can guide the behavior of moral agents in the present. What psychological and emotional dynamics lead them to imitate or emulate the virtuous deeds of figures so distant as Agamemnon or Achilles?⁵⁷ Perhaps the best-known exemplary tale in Homer is the story about Meleager told by Phoenix to Achilles during the embassy scene in *Iliad* 9; to this we might add Nestor's tales about his earlier feats, tales about fathers addressed to their sons (e.g. tales told to Telemachus about Odysseus), and the tale of Orestes, twice told to Telemachus in the *Odyssey*.⁵⁸ In his comments on the story of Meleager Eustathios dwells particularly on the points of similarity between Meleager and Achilles:⁵⁹ both are noble and brave men who nurture wrath; while Meleager was the best of the Calydonians, Achilles is the best among the Greeks, and just as the Calydonians suffered defeat without Meleager, so too do the Greeks face destruction if Achilles cannot be persuaded to rejoin the fight. Both heroes are asked to return to battle by people close to them, but both turn a deaf ear to their entreaties. In presenting such a close

(Oxford 2000), especially ch. 4 on Nestor offering his own experiences as examples, and ch. 7 on the Meleager story.

⁵⁷ Similar questions have been central to modern debates on exemplarity and role models: e.g. L. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory* (Oxford 2017); K. Kristjánsson, "Emotions Targeting Moral Exemplarity: Making Sense of the Logical Geography of Admiration, Emulation and Elevation," *Theory and Research in Education* 15 (2017) 20–37. Langlands draws on modern views on the issue in her analysis of the experience of learning from exemplars in ancient Rome: *Exemplary Ethics* 86–111. A comprehensive analysis of exemplarity in Byzantium remains a desideratum.

⁵⁸ Many of these stories are discussed in I. J. F. de Jong, "The Birth of the Princes' Mirror in the Homeric Epics," in *Homer and the Good Ruler* 20–37; see also Alden, *Homer beside Himself* ch.4 and 7.

⁵⁹ Eustathios discusses the parallels in *Commentary on the Iliad* II 786.12–787.3.

parallel, Eustathios explains, Phoenix hopes to convince Achilles to prevent his own story from ending in the same way as Meleager's: Meleager eventually returned to battle but without the gifts that would have been his had he returned earlier. Achilles is urged not to let the situation deteriorate to such a degree: if he yields and rejoins the fray now, he will receive numerous gifts and be held in great honor. In this way, Meleager serves as a negative example or, in Eustathios' words, as an ἐπιχείρημα ἐκ τοῦ ἐναντίου, "a proof from the opposite."⁶⁰

Eustathios thus reads the Meleager story from the rhetorician's perspective, focusing on its structure and its persuasive purpose. In other instances, however, he identifies the emotions that the stories evoke or are intended to evoke in the hero to whom they are addressed. Nestor's story in *Iliad* 7 about a duel he once fought causes the Greek army to feel ashamed (καταιδέσας) for not rising to Hector's challenge.⁶¹ His Pyliaic epic in *Iliad* 11 (670–762) similarly serves to put Achilles *in absentia* to shame (καταιδέσει) for disregarding his father's wish that he strive to be the best: Nestor's tale recounts how he himself managed to excel even against his father's will.⁶² Agamemnon's words in *Iliad* 4 about Tydeus' past feats cause Diomedes to feel ashamed (καταιδέσει) that he is not more like his father.⁶³ When Athena similarly compares the hero unfavorably to his father in *Iliad* 5 (800–813), Eustathios explains the psychological effects of the exemplary tale as follows (II 205.13–16):

⁶⁰ *Commentary on the Iliad* II 783.14–15. Elsewhere Eustathios calls the story a παράδειγμα (II 781.18) and a ὑποδιήγησις (II 786.12–13; cf. schol. T on *Il.* 9.529a1 and schol. b on *Iliad* 9.529a3 Erbse). On παράδειγμα and theories of argument and proof see Demoen, *Pagan and Biblical Exempla* 37–42.

⁶¹ *Commentary on the Iliad* II 423.3–6 on *Il.* 7.132–157.

⁶² *Commentary on the Iliad* III 296.7–16; cf. schol. bT 11.670–764, which explains in different terms how Nestor's story aims to spur the listener to action.

⁶³ *Commentary on the Iliad* I 765.23–26 on *Il.* 4.370–400.

Σημείωσαι δὲ ὅτι καὶ ἐν τούτοις ἡ τῷ Διομήδει λαλοῦσα Ἀθηνᾶ ἡ φρόνησις ἐστὶν ἡ ἔμφυτος αὐτῷ καὶ ἀεὶ συμπαρομαρτοῦσα, δι' ἧς ἀναπολεῖ τὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ ἐκεῖθεν εἰς μάχην ἐρεθίζεται καὶ μέμφεται ἑαυτόν, ὅτι καὶ βραχὺ γοῦν τι ἀνεπαύσατο.

Notice that also here the Athena who speaks to Diomedes is the prudence that is innate to him and always accompanies him, which brings him to go over his father's deeds again and hence rouse himself to battle and blame himself that he rested even for a brief moment.

In Eustathios' reading, Athena is an allegory of Diomedes' own intelligence; that is, the hero *himself* repeatedly recalls the great deeds his father performed as a model of military valor and as a source of motivation to strive to live up to his father's example.⁶⁴ Shame and prudence, then, are assumed to accompany the widespread idea that children should follow the examples of their renowned ancestors. In the *Epiphany Oration of 1176*, for instance, Eustathios encourages the young Alexios Komnenos, heir to the throne, to imitate his excellent ancestors, his great-grandfather Alexios I Komnenos, his grandfather John II Komnenos, and his father Manuel I Komnenos. Why, Eustathios asks, should he hark back to ancient examples if recent models of virtue are right at hand?⁶⁵

Each of the above examples assumes a certain competitiveness, a desire to surpass others, with the exemplary tales providing incentive for emulation rather than imitation. This notion is crystallized in my final example—the tale of Orestes that Athena, in the guise of Mentès, recounts to Telemachus in the first book of the *Odyssey* (294–302), to which Eustathios attributes the term *παράδειγμα*. By telling him how Orestes avenged the death of his father, Athena-Mentès aims to encourage Telemachus to attend to the dire situation in his palace, overrun by the suitors. Eustathios explains that the

⁶⁴ On Athena as φρόνησις see van den Berg, in *Enchanted Reception*.

⁶⁵ *Epiphany Oration of 1176* (Or. 13) 215.42–216.53 Wirth.

example of Orestes is intended to stir the young man's sense of rivalry and ambition by virtue of the praise it lavishes on a figure that is his peer in age and royal status (*Commentary on the Odyssey* 1418.45–48 Cullhed):

εἶτα καὶ προπαροξύνει ῥητορικῶς ἐν ὁμοιότητι παραδείγματος καὶ τὸ τοῦ νέου ζηλότυπον καὶ φιλότιμον ἐρεθίζει τῷ ἐπαίνῳ τοῦ ἰσῆλικος καὶ βασιλικοῦ παιδὸς Ὀρέστου, λέγουσα· ἢ οὐκ αἰεὶς οἶον κλέος ἔλλαβε δῖος Ὀρέστης πάντας ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους ...

Thereafter she rhetorically sharpens the speech by adducing a comparison with an exemplum and rouses the young man's zeal and ambition by praising a young man who is his equal in age and a prince, Orestes, saying: "Or have you not heard of the fame that noble Orestes acquired among all men ..." (transl. Cullhed, slightly modified)

Eustathios' focus on ambition and rivalry among peers resonates with the twelfth-century world, a world rife with social and professional competition.⁶⁶ While the envy and jealousy that result from rivalry are often evaluated as negative emotions in Byzantine culture,⁶⁷ in the context of moral exemplarity they become positive forces that galvanize moral agents to better themselves.⁶⁸ Again, Eustathios' reading of the epi-

⁶⁶ E.g. A. Garzya, "Literarische und rhetorische Polemiken der Komnenenzeit," *Byzantinoslavica* 34 (1973) 1–14; Av. Cameron, *Arguing It Out: Discussion in Twelfth-Century Byzantium* (Budapest 2016) 6–9 and passim.

⁶⁷ See M. Hinterberger, "Zelotypia und Phthonos: Eifersucht in der byzantinischen Literatur," *Nea Rhome* 6 (2009) 11–36 (with a discussion of the term ζήλοτυπία and cognates at 14–16); for the twelfth century, "Phthonos als treibende Kraft in Prodromos, Manasses und Bryennios," *MEG* 11 (2011) 83–106; and his broader discussion of *phthonos* and related emotions in Byzantium, *Phthonos: Mißgunst, Neid und Eifersucht in der byzantinischen Literatur* (Wiesbaden 2012).

⁶⁸ On rivalry as driving *aemulatio* in Roman exemplarity see Langlands, *Exemplary Ethics* 87, 93–95. Eustathios attributes similar positive potential to *philotimia* or ambition as a driving force of authorship: B. van den Berg, "How to Write and Enjoy a Tale of Disaster: Eustathios of Thessalonike on Emotion and Style," in M. P. de Bakker et al. (eds.), *Emotions and Narrative in*

sode thus reveals the psychological dynamics that he perceives as accompanying exemplary stories and, in this way, contributes to our understanding of how ethical exemplarity worked in other contexts.

Conclusion

We know that ancient drama and Homeric poetry were read in Byzantine schools, and it seems only natural that teachers would use them to inculcate in young students—mostly boys from wealthy families—not only the rules of Greek grammar and the rhetorical principles of public speaking but also the moral values of the Byzantine civic elite. Scholarly and didactic works by teachers such as Tzetzes, Basilakes, and Eustathios therefore provide us with valuable insights into moral education in Byzantium and the continuing value of ancient literature in the medieval world. Such moral didacticism participated in broader ethical frameworks, as well as in broader cultural discourses regarding the exemplary value of the past. By focusing on the ethical usefulness of the ancient past and by reading ancient texts through the lens of moral exemplarity, our twelfth-century scholars transform ancient poetry into a site of moral reflection and redefine its cultural authority in terms relevant to their own time. In so doing, they position themselves within a centuries-long tradition and adopt attitudes toward the past that are encoded in the ancient texts themselves as their point of departure.

Scholarly works on ancient literature simultaneously flesh out the past's exemplary value in concrete terms. While references to ancient history and mythology in Byzantine literature are abundant, although often brief, works such as Eustathios' Homeric commentaries demonstrate the hermeneutic principles, psychological and emotional dynamics, and indeed the

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specific moral meanings attributed to stories of historical and mythological exemplars. Byzantine scholarship thus enables us to better understand the ethical dimension of these frequent allusions and appreciate them beyond their functions as literary devices, rhetorical ornaments, and displays of erudition.⁶⁹ More than this, they reflect Byzantine approaches to making sense of history and applying the past to contemporary objectives as a “reservoir of models for present action.”⁷⁰

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⁶⁹ For studies exploring the literary and rhetorical role of exempla, see Demoen, *Pagan and Biblical Exempla*, for Gregory of Nazianzos; G. Karla, “Die Macht des Exempels: Alexander der Grosse in den Reden des Libanios,” *Rhetorica* 35 (2017) 137–160, for Libanios; T. Antonopoulou, “‘What Agreement has the Temple of God with Idols?’ Christian Homilies, Ancient Myths, and the ‘Macedonian Renaissance,’” *ByzZeit* 106 (2013) 595–622, on mythical exempla in homilies from the late ninth and tenth centuries; for Niketas Choniates, S. Efthymiadis, “Greek and Biblical *Exempla* in the Service of an Artful Writer,” in A. Simpson et al. (eds.), *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer* (Geneva 2009) 101–120, who also refers to the edifying role of exempla (see esp. 119).

⁷⁰ Hampton, *Writing from History* 8. I thank Adam Goldwyn, the anonymous reviewers, and audiences at the Universities of Groningen and Oxford for their feedback on an earlier version of this article.