

# The Taming of Digenes: The Plan of *Digenes Akrites*, Grottaferrata Version, Book IV

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**D**IGENES AKRITES was known as early as the twelfth century, when the narrator of one of the ptochoprodromic poems wished that a second Akrites might appear, firmly plant his feet, take up his club, and smash a gluttonous abbot's feast to bits.<sup>1</sup> A long narrative poem on the hero's adventures survives in various versions, Greek and Russian. Its "episodic nature" and other peculiarities of its plot have long been recognized.<sup>2</sup> What has been less fully appreciated is that a comparison of versions and literary models, aided by Trapp's synoptic edition,<sup>3</sup> can help clarify problems in the surviving text.<sup>4</sup>

Both in terms of plot and poetic technique the poem falls into two distinct parts, the so-called "Lay of the Emir" (Books I–III of the Grottaferrata version=G) and the "Lay of Digenes" (G,

<sup>1</sup> Ptochoprodromos, *Kritische Ausgabe der vier Gedichte*, ed. and tr. H. Eidenier (Cologne 1991) IV 189–92: "Ὡς τις Ἀκρίτης ἕτερος ἐκεῖ νὰ εὐρέθη τότε, καὶ τὰς ποδέας του νὰ ἔμπεξεν, νὰ ἐπῆρεν τὸ ραβδὶν του καὶ μέσα νὰ ἐκατάβηκεν εὐθὺς ὡς ἀγουρίτσας καὶ νὰ τοὺς ἐσυνέτριπεν ὡς παλαμναῖος γίγας; cf. E. Jeffreys, "The Grottaferrata Version of *Digenes Akrites*: A Reassessment," in R. Beaton and D. Ricks, edd., *Digenes Akrites: New Approaches to Byzantine Heroic Poetry* (London 1993) 34.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e.g. R. Beaton, "'Digenes Akrites' and Modern Greek Folksong: a Reassessment," *Byzantion* 51 (1981) 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Digenes Akrites: synoptische Ausgabe der ältesten Versionen* (Vienna 1971).

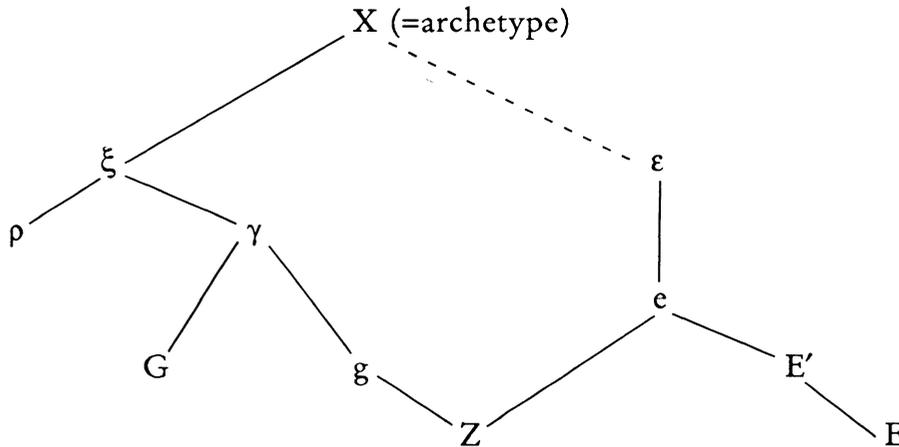
<sup>4</sup> See A. R. Dyck, "On *Digenes Akritas*, Grottaferrata Version, Book 5," *GRBS* 24 (1983) 185–92, and "On *Digenes Akrites*, Grottaferrata Version, Book 6," *GRBS* 28 (1987) 349–69; D. Ricks, "Is the Escorial *Akritas* a Unitary Poem?" *Byzantion* 59 (1989) 184–207, and *Byzantine Heroic Poetry* (Bristol 1990) *passim*.

Books IV–VIII).<sup>5</sup> Book IV of the Grottaferrata version occupies an important point in the plot—the beginning of Digenes’ own tale. At first glance this book appears to be highly episodic, comprising, as it does, the narrative of young Digenes’ first exploits in hunting, his winning of his bride, and his encounter with the Emperor. But in spite of its composition from disparate elements, G–iv does, I shall argue, have a kind of inner unity, for here we see the process by which young Digenes becomes integrated in society. Although this study will focus on the earliest extant version, preserved in the Grottaferrata monastery (*codex Cryptensis* Za 44=G, s. XIII ex./XIV in.),<sup>6</sup> features of the other versions also need to be considered, especially the extant representative of the other main branch of the tradition, the *codex Scorialensis* Ψ IV.22 (=E, s. XV), and the hybrid version Z, reconstructed from three extant Mss. of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the two eighteenth-century Russian versions (their [hyp]archetype=ρ) will also be mentioned. The main relations are as follows:<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> On the plot cf. H.-G. Beck, “Formprobleme des Akritas-Epos,” in *Ideen und Realitäten in Byzanz. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (London 1972) XVIII, 139ff (= *Beiträge zur Südosteuropa-Forschung* [Munich 1966]), and *Geschichte der byzantinischen Volksliteratur* (Munich 1971) 94 (though he should have characterized the “Lay of the Emir” as a romance, rather than a historical epic); on poetic technique cf. V. Tiftixoglu, “Digenes, das ‘Sophrosyne’-Gedicht des Meliteniotes und der byzantinische Fünfzehnsilber,” *BZ* 67 (1974) 44f; N. Oikonomidès, “L’ ‘épopée’ de Digénis et la frontière orientale de Byzance aux X<sup>e</sup> et XI<sup>e</sup> siècles,” *TravMém* 7 (1979) 380f, presents further arguments for the independence of the two parts.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Father M. Petta ap. L. Politis, “L’ épopée byzantine de Digénis Akritas. Problèmes de la tradition du texte et des rapports avec les chansons akritiques,” *La poesia epica e la sua trasformazione* (= *AttiLinc* 367, Quad. 139 [Rome 1970]) 554.

<sup>7</sup> This the earliest portion of Trapp’s stemma (*supra* n.3: 46), modified by omission of Y, by which he assumed Z to have gained direct access to the archetype. Trapp has isolated (29–33) elements in Z that lack correspondence in G or E; one wonders, however, whether, taken together, these divergences are so significant as to require positing for Z a more direct line to the archetype; some could have been included in g or e, though omitted from the extant G and E; others could represent borrowings by Z, which dates to the fifteenth century (Trapp 29), from folksongs (see the parallel to the song Τοῦ νεκροῦ ἀδελφοῦ: Trapp 30); cf. also M. Jeffreys, “Digenis Akritas Manuscript Z,” *Dodone* 4 (1975) 200 with n.3; L. Politis, “Digénis Akritas. À propos de la nouvelle édition de l’ épopée byzantine,” *Scriptorium* 27 (1973) 335f.



At the beginning of G-iv Digenes, aged twelve, is a young animal, or rather, is swifter and stronger than any animal, as he demonstrates by squeezing a she-bear to death, catching a deer and killing a lion (G 1053ff, E 664ff [omitting the incident with the deer], Z 1381ff).<sup>8</sup> Upon completion of these *rites de passage*, his father declares him henceforth independent (G 1160ff, Z 1494ff). The remainder of G-iv shows how this child of nature becomes a part of culture. One ancient analysis of the formation of human society found that *prima societas in ipso coniugio est* (Cic. *Off.* 1.54).<sup>9</sup> This phrase nearly fits Digenes, for the first step in his ‘taming’ is his willing enrollment as a ‘slave of love’ for the General’s daughter. Here Digenes displays his prowess once again: he steals his bride and defeats an entire army in order to keep her.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> A number of cultures present folktale traditions of a hero’s precocious exploits; cf. Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, I–VI (rev. edn. Bloomington 1955–58) F611.3.2, Z231.

<sup>9</sup> Arius Didymus *ap.* Stob. *Ecl.* 2.7=II 148.5 W.-H. offers a more politically oriented Greek counterpart: πολιτεία δὲ πρώτη σύνοδος ἀνδρῶς καὶ γυναικῶς κατὰ νόμον ἐπὶ τέκνων γεννήσει καὶ βίου κοινωνία.

<sup>10</sup> For the slave of love motif cf. G 1293f: δουλοὶ γὰρ τὰ φρονήματα ἔρωσ ὡς ὧν δεσπότης, ὑποτάσσει τὸν λογισμὸν ὡς ἡνίοχος ἵππον; and for its use elsewhere in the poem, cf. Dyck (*supra* n.4 [1983])189, and 185ff on bride-theft and its variations as an element in the plot of the poem; for bride-theft in E and related texts cf. P. Mackridge, “None but the Brave Deserve the Fair’: Abduction, Elopement, Seduction and Marriage in the Escorial *Digenes Akrites* and Modern Greek Heroic Songs,” in Beaton and Ricks (*supra* n.1) 150–60.

The question arises, as often in the study of this poem, whether this organization of the material was the conception of the G-redactor or goes further back in the poem's history. MacAlister sees G-iv as a combination of two books of its model  $\gamma$ , the reconstructed common source of G and g, the manuscript from which Z is assumed to have drawn for this branch of the tradition. Hence, for her, G-iv as we have it is the creation of the G-redactor.<sup>11</sup> She argues that the brief summary at the beginning of G-iv was "almost certainly [the G-redactor's] own contribution" (568). Comparing the first verse of G-vi (2334: ἔκτος λόγος ὁ παρῶν πλείστων ἀνδραγαθίων) with the corresponding verse in Z (2743: Ἐβδομος λόγος ὁ παρῶν πλείστας ἀνδραγαθίας), MacAlister concludes that "the only explanation" for the fourteen- rather than fifteen-syllable line in G "seems to be that [the G-redactor] substituted ἔκτος for ἔβδομος" (568f); but this state of affairs would imply that the G-redactor was, in fact, following a summary in his model,  $\gamma$ , from which, via g, Z presumably received the verse quoted (see stemma *supra* 297). Moreover, her hypothesis is hardly "the only explanation" for G's text: its first editor, Legrand, had already effected the easy and obvious correction by inserting ὁ before ἔκτος at G 2334. On the other hand, MacAlister argues that the summary at the beginning of G-vi was based on  $\gamma$ , which the G-redactor found "indispensable, as it contained the reason for the first-person narration" (568). The first-person narrative of G-vi, however, is a continuation of that to the Cappadocian begun at G 2062ff, not a narration to some unnamed friends, as the summary (perhaps after a version similar to Z 2425ff; *cf.* also Z 3655) suggests.

That the summaries prefaced to G-iv and G-vi are secondary is clear from the fact that, while each book of G begins with a decorated initial letter, in Books 4 and 6 this occurs only *after* the summaries (*sc.* G 952ff and 2334ff respectively: so Trapp, *per litt.*). The two summaries will surely have arisen at the same stage of redaction. The phenomena can be accounted for by either of two hypotheses: (1) the redactor/scribe of G composed the summaries; this would explain his having accorded them special status in the process of rubrication; (2) the scribe of G simply copied what he found in his exemplar ( $\gamma$ ), *i.e.*, both the summaries and the method of rubrication

<sup>11</sup> S. MacAlister, "Digenis Akritas: The First Scene with the Apelatai," *Byzantion* 54 (1984) 551–74 (hereafter cited in the text by page number).

originated at the previous stage of redaction. In either case the summaries are likely to have been motivated by the fact that their author, whether the scribe of G or  $\gamma$ , found in his exemplar two exceedingly long books corresponding in content to G-iv and G-vi.

Where the book-divisions of G and Z fail to coincide, the presumption is that G, rather than Z, stands closer to the original (*cf.* again the stemma *supra* 297). Thus, Trapp (*supra* n.3: 27f) has shown that Z has added its Book 1 and combined into one two books of its model corresponding to G's Books 2 and 3. MacAlister proposes that in G's model,  $\gamma$ , Book 4 concluded with Digenes' return from the hunt and Book 5 began with his first meeting with the General's daughter. But note that Z, although it joins E in inserting the first encounter with the ἀπελάται after the hunt, places the first meeting with the General's daughter, as in G (1205), immediately after and on the way back from the hunt: Ὑπῆρχε τοίνυν καθ' ὁδὸν τοῦ κυνηγιῶ Ἀκρίτου (1109). This, then, must also have been its position in  $\gamma$  as the common source of G and g. There is, then, no reason to posit for  $\gamma$  the return home that in Z forms part of the prelude to the first meeting with the ἀπελάται (1539f).<sup>12</sup> In light of these facts, as well as our observations about the summaries, it is likely that  $\gamma$  already had a separate book roughly corresponding to G-iv.

The scene in which Digenes abducts his lady is perhaps the finest in the poem. The action is carefully prepared by *ekphraseis* of both Digenes (G 1172ff [not in E]) and the girl who wins his heart (G 1300ff). Her magnificent home, too, receives its own *ekphrasis* (G 1218ff), even though the Borderer professes no interest in augmenting his property through the match (G 1489ff [without counterpart in E]). The psychology of budding love is delicately sketched on both sides: we are shown Digenes' symptoms—inability to eat or drink—and his vacillation between hope and despair (G 1331ff); the young woman, too, is powerfully smitten by love at first sight (G 1223ff): we see her wakefulness the entire night of the planned elopement (G 1360 [not in E]), her awareness that she

<sup>12</sup> *Cf.* R. Beaton, *The Medieval Greek Romance* (Cambridge 1989) 38, and "An Epic in the Making? The Early Versions of *Digenes Akrites*" in Beaton and Ricks (*supra* n.1) 60f, who argues convincingly that no lacuna need be posited since, in literary terms, the narrative in G is complete and satisfying in itself.

has, for the first time, cast aside modesty in meeting clandestinely with her lover (G 1451ff [not in E]), and her prudence in making Digenes swear an oath of fidelity (G 1521ff; cf. E 893ff).

The General's implacable opposition to the union transforms what was initially a straightforward suit into a bride-theft operation with military complications. The old folktale type that underlies this plot is also reflected in the saga in which Pelops wins the hand of Hippodamia in a chariot race in spite of the opposition of her father, Oenomaus; in several versions the father's incestuous attraction to his daughter leads him to raise the stakes for her hand (he spears any suitor he can catch).<sup>13</sup> In line with the general tenor of our poem, however, the hero prevails by prowess, rather than craft, as in the most famous version of the Pelops saga, where the groom Myrtilus (in some accounts, bribed by a promise of Hippodamia's favors) replaces the lynch-pin of his master's chariot-wheel with a dummy of wax.

Even this generally effective narrative is not, however, altogether free of anomalies. Digenes' first encounter with his future wife is, as we have seen, represented as taking place on the way home from his first hunting expedition, set when Digenes was aged twelve (G 1036 [not in E]). When Digenes and the rest of the hunting party (which includes his father and uncle) reach the General's house, he begins to serenade (G 1207ff), but only after the serenade does he ask whose house this is (G 1239 [not in E]). At this point Digenes' father proves a convenient source of information about the girl, her father, and his measures to dispose of her previous suitors (G 1242ff [not in E]). When Digenes asks his father to present his proposal of marriage to the General, his father replies that he has already done so and been rebuffed (G 1259f [not in E]). For the following scene, however, in which Digenes speaks to the girl at her window, his father, no longer wanted, simply disappears.

Surely the clumsiness in the handling of Digenes' father and the rest of the retinue during the tête-à-tête with the General's daughter points to the secondary character of this material (note that this first encounter with the General's daughter is

<sup>13</sup> Nic. Dam., *FGrHist* 90F10.19f; [Luc.] *Charid.* 19; Tzetz. *ad Lycoph. Alex.* 157=Σ *Eur. Or.* 990; only Hyginus (*Fab.* 253) states that the relationship was actually consummated.

altogether absent from E).<sup>14</sup> The motive for the addition is transparent: the  $\gamma$ -redactor wishes Digenes to make a formal offer of marriage in order to satisfy convention. By foreshortening, the offer has already been tendered—and rejected—at the paternal level before Digenes ever makes his request. Our redactor carries foreshortening beyond his powers of artistic integration, however, in combining Digenes' return from hunting accompanied by a retinue with the lovers' first rendezvous. Here, as elsewhere, the  $\gamma$ -redactor shows strain in his attempt to combine incidents, probably known to him from individual songs, into a large-scale plot.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to these problems with the plot, there are also some minor infelicities. The moralizing elements in G are the work either of the  $\gamma$ - or the G-redactor; that they have the character of an afterthought clumsily "pasted on" has long been recognized.<sup>16</sup> The  $\gamma\omega\mu\alpha\iota$  in the narrative provide a particularly blatant example. When Digenes proposes that they should shun the narrow roads before daylight, he reinforces the suggestion with an appropriate maxim about the dangers of being caught in such places,<sup>17</sup> but by adding line 1425 ( $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \delta\epsilon\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\ \kappa\acute{\alpha}\mu\pi\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\nu\delta\rho\omicron\iota\ \tau\omicron\lambda\mu\eta\rho\omicron\iota\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\pi\omicron\iota\omicron\upsilon\nu\tau\alpha\iota$ ; cf. Z 1888) he would seem to place himself among the  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\nu\delta\rho\omicron\iota$  who become bold in open fields. It is likewise odd when in G 1469 the girl tells Digenes that it is reason ( $\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ ), rather than love ( $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\acute{\alpha}\pi\eta$ ), twice subject in the previous line, that urges him to die for her (without counterpart in Z). So too the metaphor applied at the very moment of elopement (G 1538; not paralleled in Z) is inept: to equate Digenes with a hawk and the girl with a partridge is to ignore the feminine psychology so carefully developed in the preceding scene. None of these passages, it need hardly be said, has a counterpart in E.<sup>18</sup> Finally, for some tastes the narrator goes on at excessive length about the power

<sup>14</sup> Note also that the insertion in E of an encounter with the  $\acute{\alpha}\pi\epsilon\lambda\acute{\alpha}\tau\alpha\iota$  between hunt and romance is secondary, as MacAlister (*supra* n.11) has demonstrated; cf. Trapp (*supra* n.3) 56.

<sup>15</sup> See the studies cited *supra* nn.4, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Beck, "Formprobleme" (*supra* n.5) 96.

<sup>17</sup> G 1423f:  $\acute{\omega}\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\ \acute{\omicron}\delta\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\xi\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\theta\omega\mu\epsilon\nu\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\ \sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\omega\pi\omicron\upsilon\varsigma,\ \pi\rho\iota\nu\ \phi\acute{\epsilon}\xi\eta\cdot\ \rho\acute{\eta}\mu\alpha\iota\ \gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\acute{\omega}\mu\alpha\tau\alpha\ \acute{\alpha}\pi\omicron\kappa\tau\epsilon\iota\nu\omicron\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\delta\rho\epsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ ; cf., however, line 1361, which states that the girl stayed up all night waiting for Digenes but fell asleep at dawn.

<sup>18</sup> For the different principles on which G and E generally expand the "core" text cf. Beaton, "An Epic in the Making?" (n.12 above) 63.

of passion (to extenuate the girl's willing participation in the elopement: G 955ff and 1476ff, the latter without counterpart in E).

After the narrative of the battle, the dialogue of Digenes with his prospective father-in-law and the description of the wedding, the final episode of Book IV is his encounter with the Emperor (not in E).

In order to motivate the Emperor's desire to meet with Digenes, the  $\gamma$ -redactor has added some connective tissue that narrates, in summary form, the hero's decision to live on the border (G 1197) and his slaying of the ἀπελάται who had plotted to abduct his wife; in the aftermath his reputation is said to have been widespread (G 1916ff). (It is doubtful, however, whether the defeat of the ἀπελάται would have earned the hero so vast a reputation that the Emperor would want to meet and honor him [see below]). This is, in any case, ground that will be traversed later in the poem (resolve to move to the Euphrates at G 3137–38 [without counterpart in E or Z]; the abduction plot in Book VI of G and corresponding parts of E and Z). In placing the meeting with the Emperor at this point in the poem, at some cost in narrative consistency, the  $\gamma$ -redactor aimed, I suspect, to provide the final act in the process of Digenes' 'taming' and integration into Byzantine society.

The encounter with the Emperor is perhaps the oddest incident in this odd poem. The reader's difficulties begin with several unexplained references in the correspondence leading up to the meeting. In both G and Z the Emperor dispatches a letter inviting the Borderer to his presence. G, but not Z, adds to it a clause assuring the recipient that he need not expect foul play (G 1937: μή ὑποπεύων λυπηρὸν παρ' ἡμῶν ὑποστῆναι); but there is no indication why Digenes might be inclined to expect such. Again, despite its conventionally obsequious beginning, Digenes' answer to the Emperor concludes, in both G and Z, with a directive as to where they should meet and how many troops the Emperor may bring (*viz.*, few: μετ' ὀλίγων, G 1945; *cf.* Z 2324). The obvious interpretation is that Digenes is taking seriously the possibility of an ambush; yet he claims, oddly, that this reduction in the number of the Emperor's forces is to lessen the possibility of the Emperor's "inexperienced soldiers" saying something offensive and thus causing Digenes to engage them.

Moreover, this strange reversal of rôles of Emperor and subject continues at the meeting: the Emperor's arrival is

announced to Digenes; instead of remaining seated on his throne, the Emperor approaches, embraces, and kisses the Borderer, as he might a brother monarch, rather than a subject. The Emperor allows Digenes to name his gift, but the Borderer refuses (G 1979, E 2344ff). Then, with remarkable self-possession, the Borderer proceeds to read the Emperor a lecture on his imperial duties (G 1983ff).<sup>19</sup> Following this *Fürstenspiegel*, Digenes turns the tables by granting the Emperor double the tribute he formerly paid to Iconium (G 1993–97).<sup>20</sup>

Such, then, are the problems with Digenes' meeting with the Emperor—the unexplained references to the possibility of foul play or of the Emperor's troops committing some indiscretion and the reversal of rôles of Emperor and subject. Here, moreover, we cannot fill in the ellipses or explicate the oddities in G's narrative, as we can elsewhere, from E, which lacks this episode altogether.

Trapp has demonstrated that the episode with the Emperor presents striking parallels with the Lives of Sts Theodore Tiro and Theodore Stratelates, who, in spite of the difference in rank, were in origin one.<sup>21</sup> The defective integration of this incident in the overall plot and a number of its other peculiarities can, I think, be explained on the basis of this provenance. The  $\gamma$

<sup>19</sup> On the relation of this passage to other Byzantine *Fürstenspiegel*, cf. G. Prinzig, "Beobachtungen zu 'integrierten' Fürstenspiegeln der Byzantiner," *JÖBG* 38 (1988) 23: "Digenes bringt nicht ... spezielle Anliegen vor, sondern beschränkt sich auf Standard-Formulierungen: daher wirkt der ganze Passus allzu harmonisierend und blaß."

<sup>20</sup> We hear of Digenes' conquests in this sector only much later in the poem (G 3341f; cf. E 4153ff); the reference need not postdate the twelfth century: cf. P. Magdalino, "Digenes Akrites and Byzantine Literature: The Twelfth-Century Background to the Grottaferrata Version," in Beaton and Ricks (*supra* n.1) 7.

<sup>21</sup> E. Trapp, "Hagiographische Elemente im Digenes-Epos," *AnalBoll* 94 (1976) 275–87; the Lives in question were printed in H. Delehaye, *Les légendes grecques des saints militaires* (Paris 1909) 151–82 (Appendices III–IV); on the single origin of both cf. H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich 1959) 405; the plots are alike in essentials; I cite only III (by page and line in parentheses in the text) as the more vivid and circumstantial version. The discovery of these parallels renders the previous literature on this episode of *Digenes Akrites* largely obsolete; also, in light of Jeffreys (*supra* n.7), it is unlikely that anyone will revive the view that, on the whole, the manuscripts of the Z-tradition stand closer to the original in this sector than G.

redactor wanted Digenes to confront the Emperor and found in the Lives of the Theodores (referred to elsewhere in the poem<sup>22</sup> and involving the saint's meeting with the Emperor Licinius, in his phase of persecuting Christians), what he thought a suitable model; after all, Digenes shares several characteristics of Theodore, who is described as τὸ γένος ἐπιφανέστατος, τὴν ἡλικίαν νεώτατος, καὶ ταῖς χερσὶν ἀήττητος (p.152, 21f).

The Vitae model their depiction of Theodore and Licinius ultimately on Dionysus and Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae*. Theodore, the apparent subject, is, in fact, steering events toward his own goal, which, however, is not the dismemberment of his opponent but his own martyrdom (and ultimate victory). In the Vitae the incidents thus form a sequence with a clear inner logic leading to a climax. The saint's slaying of a dragon and other exploits reach the Emperor's ears, and he sends messengers asking Theodore to come to him at Nicomedia; the Emperor's intent is hostile from the outset (μέγα τούτῳ λοιπὸν ἐδόκει θήραμα τὸ τὸν ἄνδρα ἐλεῖν: p.156, 29f). Theodore replies by letter that public business requires his continued presence in Heraclea but invites the Emperor to meet him here instead so that he can offer Licinius a public display of his piety by sacrificing to the gods (p.157, 27ff). This latter is, of course, a piece of deception; we have already been told his real motive: he wishes to be martyred in his native place (p.157, 10ff); and the sequel likewise requires an environment friendly to Theodore. Licinius is characterized as lacking in self-control; he is pictured as so thrilled at the prospect raised by Theodore's letter that he hastens to Heraclea as if to a lovers' tryst (p.158, 8: read ὡς) ἐπὶ τὸν ἐρώμενον τρέχων εὐθὺ τῆς Ἡρακλείας ἤλαυνε); hence his willing abandonment of imperial prerogative.

Upon his arrival, Licinius and Theodore greet each other warmly; Licinius asks Theodore to sacrifice to the pagan divinities; Theodore asks for two days' grace in which to engage in a private devotional exercise; for this purpose Licinius

<sup>22</sup> Trapp (*supra* n.21 278) has collected the references—four in G, of which only one has a correspondence in E, in addition to an allusion in the prologue added later to G. One wonders whether the addition of this episode in G was suggested by that single allusion in the "core"; the reference at E 883 (μὰ τὸν ἅγιον μου Θεόδωρον, τὸν μέγα ἀπελάτην) already assimilates Theodore to the Borderer's milieu.

entrusts the saint with splendid divine statues in gold and silver. When Licinius summons him two days later and asks Theodore to join him in pouring libations, the saint replies ambiguously, and a centurion named Maxentius steps forward to accuse Theodore of having reduced the head of Artemis' statue to numerous tiny fragments, a charge that Theodore confirms. The saint is then subjected to the most grisly tortures and crucified. By night an angel removes the body from the cross. Hence on the following day, when Licinius asks for the corpse to be brought to him so that he can mutilate it and cast it into the sea, it cannot be recovered. Theodore appears to and converts those who go in search of the corpse. When rioting between pagans and Christians ensues at Heraclea, Theodore intervenes, admonishing the Christians to offer no resistance.

The  $\gamma$ -redactor's idea of adapting Digenes' encounter with the Emperor from Theodore's meeting with Licinius was problematical. Confronted with this overall scheme (arrangement of the meeting, encounter with the emperor, martyrdom, display of the martyr's posthumous powers), the  $\gamma$ -redactor had to part with the central element of the martyrdom; hence his plot comprises only the arrangement of the meeting, the encounter with the Emperor, and a display of the subject's (no longer posthumous) prowess. Though he could include such an accidental feature as the subject's insistence that the Emperor come to him, he could not use the motivation in his model for the subject to make such a request (Theodore's wish for martyrdom in his native city) or for the Emperor to give way (his desire to entrap Theodore and loss of self-control when a method for doing so appears).

Instead the  $\gamma$ -redactor had to supply a different motive for the subject's dictation of terms; hence in his letter Digenes alludes to the Emperor's "inexperienced soldiers" in explaining why he wishes the Emperor to appear escorted by only a few troops (G 1945ff; already in  $\gamma$  in view of Z 2326ff); in fact, Digenes here sketches an entire scenario in which he reacts to provocative words of these (hypothetical) *tirones* by killing them. Now, an incident that precisely follows this pattern does occur in G, namely Digenes' encounter with soldiers at Trosis (G 2448ff): Digenes responds to their taunts (G 2464f) by taking up his club and killing all forty-five of them (G 2462, 2477ff). Note, however, that in E and Z this encounter is not with soldiers but with the *ἀπελάται* (E 1142, Z 2889); doubtless this was also the case in G's source ( $\gamma$ ), for otherwise it is very difficult to explain the

allusion to the three ἀπελάται at G 2453ff (‘Υπῆρχον δέ, ὡς ὕστερον παρ’ αὐτῶν τοῦτο ἔγνω, Ἰωννάκης θαυμαστός καὶ νέος ἀπελάτης, Φιλοπαπποῦς ὁ γέρων τε καὶ ὁ Κίνναμος τρίτος). In this sector, then, G’s text confuses or conflates two incidents, one corresponding to the battle with the ἀπελάται as in E and Z, the other the encounter with imperial soldiers mooted as a possibility at G 1947ff. Moreover, as a *hypothetical possibility* motivating Digenes’ dictation of terms for meeting the Emperor, the encounter with arrogant *tirones* is nonsensical. What would make sense would be for Digenes to have killed a number of imperial troops prior to the scene with the Emperor. Such an incident would explain both the Emperor’s desire to meet the Borderer and the latter’s wariness. I suspect that the γ-redactor, squeamish about so direct a confrontation with imperial power, transposed the incident into a conditional clause.

In the Lives of the Theodores, as we have seen, the actual meetings of Emperor and subject, aside from social pleasantries, revolve around the religious issue; they provided, in other words, no usable model for the γ-redactor. The original version of the encounter with the Emperor, as I have reconstructed it, is nevertheless markedly similar to Digenes’ encounter with his prospective father-in-law, each preceded by a trial by arms between Digenes and the other’s soldiers. In either case the dialogue of Digenes with the principal is polite, with any criticism reserved for the other’s soldiers;<sup>23</sup> and in both encounters Digenes refuses gifts<sup>24</sup> and instead confers them (in line with Aristotle’s description of the behavior of the μεγαλόψυχος at *Eth.Nic.* 1124b9ff). Of the two scenes, the meeting with the General is older (found in E, G, and Z and therefore part of the archetype), that with the Emperor modeled (loosely) on it.

The episode concludes with a display of Digenes’ powers, just as the *Vitae* concluded with a demonstration of the power of

<sup>23</sup> Deflecting criticism to a third party is of course a common means of defusing tension; cf. R. W. Fogg, “Dealing with Conflict: A Repertoire of Creative, Peaceful Approaches,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 29 (1985) 337; at G 1628 Digenes criticizes his soldiers in dialogue with his prospective father-in-law, as he does the (potential) reckless behavior of the Emperor’s raw recruits.

<sup>24</sup> For refusal of the dowry offered by his prospective father-in-law, cf. G 1694–98; E 2098–2102.

the resurrected Theodore. Again the  $\gamma$ -redactor borrowed from elsewhere, this time the catching of a wild horse and killing of a wild animal from Theophanes Continuatus 230f (*Vita Basili*)<sup>25</sup> but with some interesting differences. In the *Vita Basili* the horse escapes when the emperor leaps off and leaves it unattended in the heat of the hunt, whereas the release of the horse in the poem has no other motive than to allow Digenes to display his prowess. The capture is effected by Digenes on the run, whereas Basil rode up to the runaway horse on his own mount and leaped from one to the other (but only after he had received permission to ride the imperial horse). The killing of the wild animal is handled less realistically and more heroically in the poem. For the animal is now a lion, rather than the wolf of the *Vita Basili*; and Digenes kills it with his bare hands, not with the imperial mace. In Theophanes Continuatus the two incidents lead directly to the foreshadowing comment of Caesar Bardas that Basil would be the destruction of the imperial family. But without a religious conflict at its center, as in the Lives of the Theodores, or a rise to the throne in prospect, as in the *Vita Basili*, the scene in *Digenes Akrites*, lacking dramatic unity, fails to build to a climax; the hero's display of prowess in apprehending the horse and slaying the lion seems like an afterthought, for the essential transactions between ruler and subject were already complete, including the return of the estates of Digenes' grandfather and the grant of patrician status, the right to rule the borders and to wear imperial raiment (G 1999f).

So far our concern has been exclusively with the Greek versions of *Digenes Akrites*. It is worth remembering that the hero's encounter with the Emperor occurs in one of the Russian versions as well (R I).<sup>26</sup> In fact, as Trapp has already noted (*supra* n.21: 284), R I contains some surprising similarities to the hagiographical source. Most striking is the anger of the Emperor when he hears of Devgenij's exploits and his resolve to capture him, so that his letter to Devgenij is, in fact, deceptive. Furthermore, in spite of Devgenij's precaution in warning the Emperor not to bring many troops, the meeting

<sup>25</sup> The incident was compared already by H. Grégoire, *Autour de l'épopée byzantine* (London 1975) II 491ff and XII 163f; see also Genesisius 127.

<sup>26</sup> Printed in B. D. Kuz'mina, *Devgenievo dejanie* (Moscow 1962) 154ff; English tr. in D. B. Hull, *Digenis Akritas: The Two-Blood Border Lord* (Athens [Ohio] 1972) 131-34.

proves to be an ambush. Another similarity is that the setting for the action is not the frontier, but a city (the Russian version simply calls it "the city of the Emperor"), just as in the Lives of the Theodores the setting is Heraclea. As Heraclea is rent by civil disturbance, so Devgenij forcibly subdues "the city of the Emperor." At least in regard to the setting and the Emperor's motives it seems clear that the Russian version is closer to the hagiographical source than G. This situation is at odds with the conventional characterization of the Russian versions as belonging to the same branch of the tradition as G and representing an elaboration of that tradition that eschewed specific names of people and places and added fantastic and folktale elements and was thus less helpful than G in reconstructing  $\xi$ , the posited common source of  $\gamma$  and  $\rho$  (the [hyp]archetype of the Russian versions).<sup>27</sup> Our episode gives further indication that, as Elizabeth Jeffreys recently remarked, "the place of the Russian versions in the line of descent still requires elucidation."<sup>28</sup>

The meeting with the Emperor may well pose problems for the modern reader, insofar as the  $\gamma$ -redactor was at pains to eliminate the tension between subject and Emperor found in his model (though he left behind such traces as the Emperor's assurance that Digenes need fear no harm or the Borderer's limitation on the number of the Emperor's troops). The medieval reader, however, may well have viewed the matter differently. Although the scene with the Emperor can no longer be viewed as the  $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$  of the poem as a whole,<sup>29</sup> it is the  $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$  of Book IV as the  $\gamma$ -redactor conceived it; indeed, he thought in terms of smaller, usually book-length units, rather than of the entire poem as an organic unity. The Lay of Digenes, comprising Books IV–VIII of the Grottaferrata version, is definitely its hero's poem. He is always at the center;

<sup>27</sup> E. Trapp, "Hatte das Digenisepos ursprünglich eine antikaiserliche Tendenz?" *Byzantina* 3 (1971) 203–11.

<sup>28</sup> Jeffreys (*supra* n.1) 33 n.9. In fact, the evidence linking G, or rather its source  $\gamma$ , with the Russian versions was never very strong, the existence of a common source,  $\xi$ , having been posited on the basis of a single element shared by G and the Russian versions against Z, *viz.*, the Emperor's name (Basil at G 1924 and p.154 Kuz'mina; Romanus at Z 2302). But this is, of course, not a conventional conjunctive error; the same name could have been introduced independently in several versions for different reasons (*cf.* Grégoire [*supra* n.25] VI 425, although his general preference for the Russian version [XVIII] cannot be upheld in light of Trapp [*supra* n.27]).

<sup>29</sup> *Cf.* Beck (*supra* n.5), "Formprobleme," 145, and *Volksliteratur* 94f.

all other characters, however fascinating or powerful, be they the General's daughter, the woman abandoned at the oasis, the ἀπελόται, or the Amazon Maximo, merely exist as a foil before which Digenes can fulfill his potential for heroism. The same applies to the Emperor himself, who is marginalized in the presence of the hero. Indeed, the only standard that the poem knows is heroism; and the Emperor fails this test dismally in G when he thinks to flee the lion (G 2020). Only Digenes stands up to the beast. One can well imagine the satisfaction that Byzantine readers took in this scene—in seeing the Emperor humanized in the presence of the hero.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, however, the encounter with the Emperor has another function, that of relativizing the hero and fixing him in his place in the hierarchy, at the head of which stands the Emperor. Underlying this episode is the problem of reconciling to their place in the hierarchy the local grandees, especially the military aristocracy of the Eastern provinces, who, in the Middle Byzantine period, concentrated great wealth and power in their hands and who could, and occasionally did, challenge the central authority.<sup>31</sup> Our episode broaches the issue but defuses it by confining Digenes' threat to a purely hypothetical epistolographic exercise. In the presence of the Emperor himself Digenes, though allowed to exhibit his remarkable power, does so purely as a display-exercise (the catching of the runaway horse) or for the common defense (the slaying of the lion). The displacement of the meeting with the Emperor to this point in the narrative establishes early on that this potentially subversive warrior has been safely coopted into the imperial sys-

<sup>30</sup> On the scene with the Emperor as an example of the point of view of the ordinary Byzantine, cf. H.-G. Beck, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend* (Munich 1978) 85.

<sup>31</sup> Cf., e.g., J.-C. Cheyinat, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)* (Paris 1990) 207ff, esp. 213ff (“Les familles des prétendants à l’Empire”).

tem; so placed, the incident can serve to round out the hero's difficult process of acculturation to Byzantine society.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The emphasis on the figure of Digenes as actually or potentially subversive of imperial authority was adumbrated by Grégoire (*supra* n.25, esp. II and XVIII), who posited that the earliest versions of the poem were likely to have been more anti-imperial in tendency than the extant ones (apart from the Russian). But where the surviving versions differ as greatly as do the Russian version and G in the handling of the transactions between Digenes and the Emperor, the reconstruction of an *Ur*-version becomes problematic. What can be said is that a certain tension was latent in the subject-matter, and the different redactors played up or played down this aspect as they saw fit (and according to their distance from or proximity to the capital?).

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