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Classicizing Visions of Constantinople after 1204

Niketas Choniates' De signis Reconsidered

FOTEINI SPINGOU

χάλκεια χωνευθέντα, Βυζαντίδος ἄσπετα Ρώμης
θαύματα, χρυσομανῶν χειρὶ φιλοκτεάνῳ,
ἄφθιτα Χωνιάτης χώνευσεν αὐῶ ἱστορί μύθῳ
καὶ γραφῇ. αἰσχύνου χεῖρ φιλοχρημοσύνας.

*Indescribable copper wonders of Byzantine Rome
were cast in the mold by the greedy hand of
gold-mad men,
yet Choniates cast them undecaying in his
history through plot
and narrative. Be ashamed, hand, at your love
for money!*

Franciscus Arcudius (ca. 1590–1641)

Franciscus Arcudius, librarian of the famous book collector Cardinal Francesco Barberini, was intrigued by a short chapter he found at the very end of Niketas Choniates' *Chronike Diegesis*, a curious account of the suffering of Constantinople at the hands of the crusaders.¹ The destruction of the ancient statues

features so vividly in the narrative that it has led readers to isolate this part of the *Diegesis* and title it *De signis* or *De statuis*.² Such an approach is justified by the text itself, as the *De signis* neither follows the chronological sequence of the events nor corresponds to the relatively detailed, historical approach to them exhibited in the preceding pages.

To provide a complete summary of the modern scholarship on this remarkable section of Choniates' historical account would require a separate article.³ However, a few recent contributions are relevant to the arguments presented here, as they focus on a metaphorical reading of the text (rather than an effort to

357–62. (Diktyon IDs are nonsignificant numeric identifiers for Greek manuscripts used in the database Pinakes. On Diktyon IDs, see <http://www.diktyon.org/en/identifiants-du-reseau/manuscrits/>; on Pinakes, see <https://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/>.)

2 The *De signis* began to be frequently singled out from the rest of the *Diegesis* first in the late thirteenth century (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, gr. 11.22 [coll. 1235], fols. 182r–v, 149r; Diktyon 70658) and subsequently by a number of fifteenth-, sixteenth-, and seventeenth-century scribes; see van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, liii–lix. The practice continued with later printed editions up until the year 1960 (*ibid.*, cvii–cix). The excerpted text in manuscripts and in print was accompanied by one of the variations of the Latin title.

3 The most recent discussion can be found in I. Taxis, *The Ekphrasis in the Byzantine Literature of the 12th Century*, Ελληνικά 90 (Rome, 2021), 62–63.

reconstruct monuments and events).⁴ The late Titos Papamastorakis was the first to study the political implications of the *De signis*. For Papamastorakis, the work clearly conveys “a skilfully loaded message” associated with the causes that led to the events of 1204.⁵ But his approach often turns into a hunt for realia rather than a mere interpretation of the text’s metaphorical meaning. In a passing comment, Ingela Nilsson also endorses the view that Choniates is concerned with statues not simply as objects but mainly as threatened cultural capital.⁶ Still more recent contributions have taken a more theoretical approach to the text. Stanislaw Kuttner-Homs finds echoes of Aristotelian rhetorical theory in the *De signis*.⁷ Paroma Chatterjee, in her 2011 article, highlights the rendering of concepts related to visibility (such as that of stillness) and associates them with Choniates’ literary expression, suggesting that the statues stand as “the very hallmark of human civilization and historical continuity.”⁸ Chatterjee continued her discussion of the *De signis* in an article published in 2018 in a collection on charisma. Following the definition of *charisma* as a sense of “authority granted by remarkable moral and spiritual gifts,” Chatterjee in her contribution expands on issues of visibility; she understands the *De signis* to be a representation of Constantinople as “a charismatic place undone by the marauding Latins” and a composition that is related to claims of a Hellenic historical continuity.⁹

4 A comprehensive literature review—similarly incomplete but nonetheless focused on different publications—can be found in the commentary attached to the recent Italian translation of the *Diegesis*: A. Pontani, *Grandezza e catastrofe di Bisanzio: Narrazione cronologica*, vol. 3 (Milan, 2014), 637–42.

5 T. Papamastorakis, “Interpreting the *De signis* of Niketas Choniates,” in *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer*, ed. A. Simpson and S. Efthymiadis (Geneva, 2009), 209–23.

6 I. Nilsson, “Constantine Manasses, Odysseus and the Cyclops: On Byzantine Appreciation of Pagan Art in the Twelfth Century,” *BSL* 69.3 (2011): 123–36.

7 S. Kuttner-Homs, “Interpréter le *De signis* de Nicétas Chôniatès, ou le double jeu des apparences,” *Porphyra = Confronti su Bisanzio* 1 (2013): 62–75.

8 P. Chatterjee, “Sculpted Eloquence and Nicetas Choniates’s *De Signis*,” *Word & Image* 27.4 (2011): 396–406, esp. 396.

9 P. Chatterjee, “Charisma and the Ideal Viewer in Nicetas Choniates’s *De Signis*,” in *Faces of Charisma: Image, Text, Object in Byzantium and the Medieval West*, ed. B. M. Bedos-Rezak and M. D. Rust (Leiden, 2018), 243–66; quotations, 244. The definition of *charisma* is from P. Binski, “Reflections on the ‘Wonderful Height

I view the *De signis* as a metaphorical *logos* that relates to the lost political and cultural beauty of Constantinople. The text gives little indication that it was intended to be read as a strictly factual account of events or to convey claims of continuity with a historical Hellenism. Instead, with this account Choniates addresses readers who valued classicizing learning and were open to its potential. Such readers could decode a symbolic expansion of the author’s sorrow over the loss of his accustomed existence and come closer to his authorial psyche. Simultaneously, they could read the *De signis* as a political manifesto against those Byzantines who disregarded the importance of education and culture in Constantinople, and as a cry for unity among those who were forced to leave behind the city of Byzantium and their shared way of life.

The argument here develops in three parts. The first section considers the original literary purpose of the *De signis*. It evaluates the transmission of the work’s manuscript, emphasizing paratextual features that are not evident in the modern critical edition of the *Diegesis*. Noting that the *De signis* was originally associated with only one of the three main versions of the *Diegesis*, this section raises questions regarding the reception of the text by Choniates’ intended audience. The analysis of the manuscript evidence is complemented by an effort to locate points of correspondence in content and structure between the *Lamentatio* (or *Threnos/Lament*) for the events of 1204, which is also included in the *Diegesis*, and the *De signis*. The second section explores the memory landscape of the Byzantine capital as created and interpreted by Choniates. There I argue that Choniates does not refer exclusively to the statues in the Hippodrome (or around the city): in fact, he refers mainly to those of Constantinople’s major monuments that were of political and religious significance. His interest is not in recording in detail the destruction caused by the crusaders but in creating a list of symbolic loci of memory. The third section of the article offers a new close reading of the high point of the *De signis*: the nearly delirious description of the statue of Helen of Troy, the figure of essential beauty. I argue that Helen’s statue stands for the cursed beauty of Constantinopolitan cultural life. The statue’s bitter

and Size’ of Gothic Great Churches and the Medieval Sublime,” in *Magnificence and the Sublime in Medieval Aesthetics*, ed. C. S. Jaeger (New York, 2010), 129–56, at 134.

fate mirrors Choniates' emotions and ideas: his passionate desire for his past life, his sorrow at the traumatic destruction of the urban lifestyle of a man of letters, and his interest in maintaining the unity of his peer group, those exiled literati nurtured on the beauties of classicizing learning.

The *De signis* in the LO Version of the *Diegesis*

The Manuscript Context

The admittedly complex manuscript tradition of the *Diegesis Chronike* has been uncovered thanks to the laborious efforts of Jan Louis van Dieten and Alicia Simpson.¹⁰ Niketas Choniates reworked the *Chronike Diegesis* at least three times, but, as Simpson has proved, he associated the *De signis* with only one of its three main versions, the so-called LO. A schematic summary of a much more complex textual tradition follows.¹¹

A first version of the *Diegesis* is the shortest of the three and the most popular one in manuscripts. This so-called *brevior* version, on which Choniates started working before 1204, covers the period between the ascension of John II to the throne and the events of February/March 1205, at which point it abruptly stops.¹²

By the time Choniates began working on a second version of the *Diegesis* he had been forced into a permanent exile in Nicaea. He subsequently revised parts of the *brevior* and expanded its content to cover events up to the autumn of 1207.¹³ The version that includes the events from 1203 (which partially made up the *brevior*) until 1207 is named LO. The peculiar appellation comes from the initials of the two principal manuscripts in which it survives: Florence, Biblioteca Medicea

Laurenziana, plut. 9.24 (= L), fols. 362v–384v,¹⁴ and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Roe 22 (= O), fols. 447–450.¹⁵ Choniates included the *De signis* only in this version of the *Diegesis*.

The final version, the so-called *auctior*, is the most extensive of the *Diegesis*'s main versions. Choniates composed it at a time when he was living in Nicaea but found himself excluded from public life.¹⁶ Though based on the *brevior*, this version embeds amended parts of the LO and further additions. Modern scholarship agrees that Choniates' editorial efforts in the *auctior* version are unfinished.¹⁷ The *De signis* became part of this version only *after* Choniates' death and in a form not directly extracted from the LO.¹⁸

Because the modern editor of the *Chronike Diegesis*, Jan Louis van Dieten, sought to offer a user-friendly text that combines all versions in a sensible manner, his edition reflects the text's convoluted manuscript tradition only in the critical apparatus.¹⁹ This 1975 edition is essentially based on the *auctior* version, with selected additions from the other versions, and in it the *De signis* is placed at the very end of the *auctior*. Should the modern reader wish to reconstruct the original order, he or she must place the *De signis* after the

10 van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, xix–ci; idem, “Die drei Fassungen der Historia des Niketas Choniates über die Eroberung von Konstantinopel und die Ereignisse danach,” in *Lesarten: Festschrift für Athanasios Kambylis zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. I. Vassis, G. S. Henrich, and D. R. Reinsch (Berlin, 1998), 137–60; A. Simpson, “Before and After 1204: The Versions of Niketas Choniates' *Historia*,” *DOP* 60 (2006): 189–221; and, most recently, eadem, *Niketas Choniates: A Historiographical Study*, Oxford Studies in Byzantium (Oxford, 2013), 68–127.

11 For a fuller discussion, see Simpson, “Before and After 1204,” with further references, and A. Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί και χρονολόγοι: Τόμος Γ' (1105–1205 αι.)* (Athens, 2009), 703–8.

12 Simpson, “Before and After 1204,” 196–205.

13 On the date of composition, see *ibid.*, 207–8; Simpson, *Historiographical Study*, 47–54, 73–74.

14 Diktyon 16112. The manuscript has been dated to the thirteenth century: see van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, xxvii. The manuscript has been digitized and it is accessible online: <http://mss.bmlonline.it/Catalogo.aspx?Shelfmark=Plut.9.24>.

15 Diktyon 48403. Roe 22 was copied by the monk Jonah on behalf of Constantine Mavrozoumis in the year 1286. See van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, xxv–xxvii; H. O. Coxe, *Greek Manuscripts*, Bodleian Library Quarto Catalogues 1 (Oxford, 1969), 480–82.

16 Simpson, *Historiographical Study*, 75; Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί και χρονολόγοι*, 707–8.

17 Simpson, “Before and After 1204,” 216.

18 See Simpson, *Historiographical Study*, 76, n. 24. Simpson's argument relies on two pieces of evidence. First, she notes the curious *μακαριώτατος* in the title of the work and important witness of *auctior* (a point that had similarly led Vasile Grecu to suggest that the *De signis* is a later addition; see “Autour du *De Signis* de Nicetas Choniates,” *REB* 6 [1948]: 58–66, esp. 62); and second, she notes the parallel references in the *De signis* and the *auctior* version that are often incompatible with each other. See also the discussion below.

19 Pontani, *Grandezza e catastrofe* (n. 4 above), 638, is more critical in her judgment of van Dieten's edition: “Il tentativo pionieristico di van Dieten di creare nel sec. XX un testo Greco quale Niceta mai aveva visto, va considerate come una tappa nella lunga storia della tradizione dell'opera più enigmatica e pregevole della storiografia bizantina.” For previous editions of the *De signis*, see van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, cvii–cix.

note in the apparatus criticus on v.D. 611 for lines 30–35 (and not after p. 646, as the printed edition has it).

The modern displacement of the *De signis* is not immediately evident to the reader. Because the *De signis* has little connection to the events preceding it—the events of 1206 and “the wickedness of the Italians”—moving it to its new position does not create a hiatus in the flow of Choniates’ historical work. To put it differently, the *De signis*, placed at the very end of the work, is indeed an appendix; but—as I will argue below—it is an appendix not to the entire LO version of Choniates’ history but only to its second and last chapter/book.

The paratextual features in the two manuscripts that have transmitted the LO version, the Oxford and the Florence manuscripts, suggest that Choniates divided the text of the LO into two chapters/books, each of which has its own appendix.

- Book A includes (i) a main part concerning the preliminaries of the Fourth Crusade, which ends with the capture of the city and Choniates’ condemnation of the crusaders, v.D. 535.3–576.95, and (ii) a rhetorical appendix—that is, the *Lamentatio* (*Threnos*) on Constantinople, v.D. 576.1–582.46.
- Book B consists again of (i) a main part that deals with the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade and the developments in Macedonia, Epirus, and the Peloponnese (in the order in which the passages appear in the manuscripts), v.D. 585.58–603.23;²⁰ 612.36–627.91; 631.17–636.65; 628.7/14–631.16; and 605.65–611.25, as well as v.D. 611 with text in the apparatus criticus for lines 30–35,²¹ and (ii) a literary appendix, the *De signis*, v.D. 647.1–655.65.

The scribe of the Oxford manuscript, Jonah, placed a capital letter alpha in the margin next to the beginning of the first book. Given that the same scribe wrote in red τόμος δεύτερος (second volume) next to the text corresponding to v.D. 585.58, the alpha at the beginning of the work should be understood as a reference to

20 O (fol. 440, line 17) omits the passage after v.D. 596.38 (αἶρειν τῶν σκύφων) and before v.D. 613.79 (κατὰ χάραν ἔμενον οὐ μικρὰ ἀπὸ τῶν βλάχων).

21 On the arrangement of the events in LO, see van Dieten, “Die drei Fassungen,” 144–47.

the first book or chapter.²² Toward the end of the first book, the title θρήνος τῆς Πόλεως (Lament on the City) separates this appendix from the main text of the first book/chapter.²³ Indeed, the *Lamentatio* finishes just before the second book begins. The scribe emphasizes the beginning of the appendix of the second book, the *De signis*, by employing red lettering at the start of the section but adds no separate subtitle.²⁴

Indications of LO’s structure and division into parts also exist in the Florentine manuscript. Although the first book is in no way labeled, as it coincides with the beginning of the work, the second book starts on fol. 372v in red letters. The label τόμος δεύτερος (second volume) is in a later hand that apparently traces the letters of the original scribe. The *Lamentatio* is separated from the main text of the first part with red initials and a marginal note that reads θρήνος τῆς Πόλεως (Lament on the City).²⁵ This marginal note is one of many in this part of the LO version in L.²⁶ Additional notes that were expected to accompany the text of the second

22 O, fols. 423 and 436v, respectively. Marginal notes in Roe 22: fol. 423: ἐνταῦθα τὸ πέρ(ας) τ(ῆς) δογματικ(ῆς) πανοπλί(ας) / A. fol. 429v: ἔκφρασις ὡς ἐν ἱστορία (r. ἱστορία) σύντομ(ος) τοῦ ἀγάλματος τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς ὃ ἴστατο ἐν τῷ (r. τῷ) φόρῳ (r. φόρῳ) fol. 434: περ(ι) τ(ῆς) ἀγί(ας) τραπέζ(ης) τῆς μεγάλ(ης) ἐκκλησι(ας) fol. 435: θρήνος τῆς πόλε(ως) fol. 436v: τόμος δεύτερος / β fol. 450: ἐνταῦθα τὸ τέλος τῆς βίβλου τ(ῶν) δ[ο]γματ(ων)

23 O, fol. 435.

24 O, fol. 447.

25 O, fol. 435.

26 All marginal notes are written in the hand of the main scribe. The notes are not available in Van Dieten’s edition (cf. van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historiae*, xxvii). Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, plut. 9.24 (= L):

fol. 362v: ἐνταῦθα ἡ ἀλωσις τῆς πόλεως και τινα τῶν μετὰ ταῦτα συμβάντων (beginning of the narrative)

fol. 364: πε(ρι) τ(οῦ) θ(εοδ)ώ(ρου) τοῦ λασκά(ερω)ς, next to the text in the apparatus criticus for v.D. 544.19. [passage omitted in the *brevior* and *auctior*]

fol. 364v: περ(ι) δ..τ τῆς πόλε(ως) ἔμπρυσμ... for v.D. 545.45

fol. 367: the beginning of the text for the second reign of Isaac Angelos and his son Alexios starts on a new line and with the initials words written in red, v.D. 549.4

fol. 367 (also): ση(μείωσαι) πε(ρι) τοῦ καλυδωνί(ου) συδός, for v.D. 558.42. and ἔκφρασις ὡς ἐν ἱστορία (r. ἱστορία) σύντομος τοῦ ἀγάλματος τῆς ἀθηνᾶς ὃ ἴστατο ἐν τῷ (r. τῷ) φόρῳ for v.D. 558.4

fol. 367v: σ...ω, for v.D. 559.74

book are missing, however. In fact, other paratextual features, such as red initials, are also absent from this part, and thus a mostly filled manuscript has blank spaces. The omissions may indicate that the anonymous scribe meant to return to the text to add the missing letters and perhaps comments. Nonetheless, the scribe divides the *De signis* from the second book of the LO with a note reading *περὶ τῶν θεατρικῶν* (about the issues of the Hippodrome; fol. 282).

The Lamentatio and the De signis

In contrast to the *De signis*, the *Lamentatio* is included in both the *brevior* and *auctior* versions.²⁷ However, the placement of the *Lamentatio*, together with its textual parallels to the *De signis*, underlines their connection in the LO.

The outline of the LO version given above has already highlighted that the *Lamentatio* and the *De signis* play corresponding structural roles, as the LO consists of two chapters—each one with a main part and an appendix. Vigorous action and a multitude of dynamic events characterize the main parts of both chapters, while in the appendixes (the *Lamentatio* and the *De signis*) time freezes—or at least slows down

significantly. The *Lamentatio* is Choniates' tearful *cri de coeur* for the fate of his beloved city, and it involves no physical movement or robust action. Similarly, lengthy creative descriptions (ekphrases) of the atrocious assaults against the built monuments of Constantinople dominate the *De signis*.

The highly rhetorical character of the *Lamentatio* and the *De signis* interrupts the relatively disciplined historical narrative of the *Diegesis*. The *Lamentatio* comes immediately after the account of the events leading up to the seizure of the city, but it is clearly distinguished from that narrative by its highly emotive style. Its salient features include references to sorrow and emotional pain, through metaphors relating to, and apostrophes to, the personified city; references to historical laments (from, for example, the Old Testament); and the strong presence of the author's "I"—as expected in a lament.²⁸ The carefully curated form leaves no doubt as to its rhetorical style. Consider, for instance, the opening lines of the prose text:

ὦ πόλις, /¹ πόλις πόλεων πασῶν ὀφθαλμέ, /²
ἄκουσμα παγκόσμιον, θέαμα ὑπερκόσμιον, /³
ἐκκλησιῶν γαλουχέ, πίστεως ἀρχηγέ, ὀρθοδο-
ξίας ποδηγέ, /⁴ λόγων μέλημα, καλοῦ παντὸς
ἐνδιαίτημα⁵ . . .²⁹

O City, /¹ City [of cities], eye of all cities /²
boast of the world, spectacle beyond this world,
/³ nursing mother of churches, leader of the
faith, head of the right faith /⁴ beloved subject
of speeches, abode of all blessings⁵ . . .³⁰

The style is an ostentatious display of Choniates' rhetorical dexterity. The sentence is made up of a series of exclamatory statements that create a poetic effect through an abundance of rhythmic patterns and sounds. It begins with the repetition of the word *πόλις* (city), an emphatic absolute evocation of the city that is repeated twice more immediately afterward—once in

fol. 368: *περὶ τοῦ θανάτου Ἀλεξίου τοῦ υἱοῦ Ἰσαακίου τοῦ ἀγγέλου*, for v.D. 563.78

fol. 368v: new line and first words in red for the beginning of the reign of Alexios Doukas Mourtzouphlos, separated from the previous narrative

fol. 369: *ἀρχὴ τῆς θρακ. τῆς πόλεως δευτέρ(ας) ἐπιχειρήσ(εως) τῶν Λατίν(ων)* for v.D. 567.58

fol. 369: *ἐνταῦθα πάλιν προ(σ)βολὴ κατὰ τῆς πόλε(ως)* for v.D. 568.77

fol. 369v: *ἄλωσις τῆς πόλεως* for v.D. 569.6f. and *ἕτερος τῆς πόλεως ἐμπρησμός* for v.D. 570.33

fol. 370: *ση(μείωσαι) ταῦτα τὰ παγ . . . θρήνων ἐπάξια* for v.D. 572.83

fol. 370v: *περὶ τῆς ἀγίας τραπέζης τῆς μεγάλ[ης] ἐκκλησί(ας)*, for v.D. 573.14

fol. 371: *θρήνος τῆς πόλ(εως)*—beginning of the *Lamentatio*

fol. 372v: *τόμος δεύτερος*—beginning of the second book

fol. 374v: *ση(μείωσαι) τὰ παρὰ τῶν λατίνων γινόμενα*, v.D. 594.81, and *τὰ λεγόμενα γυρίσματα σγοῦρα glossa* for v.D. 594.94–95

fol. 382: *περὶ τῶν θεατρικῶν*—beginning of the *De signis*

27 MSS Vatican City, BAV, gr. 169 (thirteenth century), Diktyon 66800; Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, gr. Z 403 [coll. 857] (fourteenth century), Diktyon 69874; Vatican City, BAV, gr. 168/1041 (thirteenth or fourteenth century), Diktyon 66799; Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Historicus gr. 53 (fourteenth century), Diktyon 70930, for the *brevior* version and Vatican City, BAV, gr. 163 (thirteenth century), Diktyon 66794, for the *auctior* version.

28 On poetic laments on cities, see M. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres: Texts and Contexts*, vol. 2 (Vienna, 2019), 98–100.

29 The division in cola is mine. On the phrase “eye of all cities,” see K. Chrystogelos, *Κωνσταντίνου Μανασσή: Ὀδοιπορικόν* (Athens, 2017), 186.

30 All the translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.

the nominative (with a vocative meaning) and once in the genitive. At its third occurrence, the word is syntactically associated with both “eye” and the preceding occurrence of the word “city,” enabling it to be read either as “eye of all cities”³¹ or as “city of cities”—both phrases that mean the most important of all cities. This part of the sentence is divided into two semi-cola (πόλις πόλεων / πασῶν ὀφθαλμέ); the first two words have their stress on the first syllable and the second pair includes oxytone words. The third colon, with distinctively homoioteleutic words, is divided into two halves, each of which evokes the two senses that appeal the most to performance: hearing and viewing. Polypoton is also employed here with the repetition of the root of κόσμος (world). The fourth part offers a series of attributes followed by a genitive. All three attributes are oxytone second declension nouns, with a vocative form finishing in /ε/. The final part of the opening statement of the *Lamentatio* is segmented into two halves thanks to the two neuter nouns that finish in -(η)μα and have accents on their antepenultimate syllables. The meaning of both nouns is specified by accompanying nouns in the genitive. This last part is self-referential: Choniates indeed writes a “speech” (*logos*) about the city, and what he misses is his “abode,” the “abode of all blessings/goods”—that is, Constantinople.³²

Following the elaborate *Lamentatio*, book 2 of the LO begins with a further, although briefer, lament on Constantinople, which similarly concludes with an extremely emotional twist.³³ A lengthy reference to Athens follows the *Lamentatio* in the *auctior* version, in some manuscripts of the *brevior* version, and in the

latest printed edition.³⁴ This reference to Athens is omitted from the LO; instead, Constantinople is the sole point of focus at the beginning of its second book. But herein lies the oddity of the LO: very little of what follows in book 2 of the LO is about the capital city and its vicissitudes. Constantinople as a topic is awkwardly reintroduced with the *De signis*—that is, at the end of the book—when the reader is redirected from 1206 back to 1204.

The *De signis* is advertised as a diversion from the principal content of the second book by the text of the LO itself:

“Ἴνα δὲ μὴ μακροτέρα τῇ ἱστορίᾳ χρώμενοι πολυπλοκωτέρας ἐντεῦθεν τὰς λύπας κτώμεθα, ταυτὶ μὲν παρήσομεν, ἐκεῖνα δ' ἐν ἐπιτομῇ τῷ λόγῳ δώσομεν.”³⁵

So that our sorrows may not become more acute by protracting the narrative we shall pass on from these [the events in the Peloponnese in 1206/7] and we shall speak about those [the events in Constantinople in 1204] in brief.

Stating that he is coming to the end of his work as he fears that the story may become tiresome for the reader, Choniates announces that he will turn his story to “those” (ἐκεῖνα). The vague reference to “those” leaves the reader momentarily at a loss. The sentence following the above statement indicates the historical period of the narrative: τῆς γὰρ ἡμετέρας βασιλείας ἄρτι διαπεττευθείσης ἐς τοὺς Φράγγους . . . ἴκετο ἐκ Βενετίας πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Θωμᾶς (Shortly after our Empire was won in dice by the Franks . . . arrived from Venice the patriarch of Constantinople, Thomas [Morosini]). This rather conventional manner of introducing the *De signis* alerts the reader to the scope of the lengthy ekphrasis that is about to follow.

Why Did Choniates Compose the LO?

Choniates left no indication as to his intentions and aims in revisiting and expanding the *brevior* version. Alicia Simpson, using van Dieten’s edition, has carefully compared linguistic discrepancies between the different versions of the *Diegesis* and has identified several

31 Cf. Libanius, *Oration 30: To Theodosius: For the Temples* 42.16. Choniates is imitated by John Eugenikos, *Monody for Lady Mary*, ed. S. P. Lambros, *Παλαιολογία καὶ Πελοποννησιακά Α'* (Athens, 1912), para. 29, and Cardinal Bessarion, *Monody for Manuel Palaeologos*, ed. S. P. Lambros, *Παλαιολογία καὶ Πελοποννησιακά Γ'* (Athens, 1926), 289. Cf. Πόλις πόλεων πασῶν κεφάλῃ in Doukas, *Turkobyzantina*, ed. V. Grecu, *Ducas: Istoria Turco-Bizantina (1341–1462)*, Scriptores Byzantini 1 (Bucharest, 1958), chap. 41, 1.1. See the quintessential discussion of the topos in E. Fenster, *Laudes Constantinopolitanae*, *MiscByzMonac* 9 (Munich, 1968), 196–210.

32 I am grateful to Olivier Delouis, who informed me that Stanislaw Kuttner-Homs is working on an extensive metrical analysis of the *Lamentatio*.

33 v.D. 585.58–592.36. The emotional turn is also discussed in M. Angold, “Laments by Nicetas Choniates and Others for the Fall of Constantinople in 1204,” in *Greek Laughter and Tears: Antiquity and After*, ed. M. Alexiou and D. Cairns (Edinburgh, 2017), 338–51.

34 v.D. 583.1–585.57.

35 v.D. 647.1–3.

patterns in Choniates' revisions.³⁶ However, the available manuscript evidence has not yet been considered. By evaluating patterns and particular features in the LO, I argue in this section that Choniates reworked his historical narrative in order to pair it with his theological treatise, the *Panoplia Dogmatike* (*Dogmatic Panoply*), with the ultimate aim of presenting it to the emperor and his entourage. But as it survives in the Oxford and Florence manuscripts, the LO represents only a draft of such a larger undertaking: it addresses Choniates' hypereducated peers, with their insatiable taste for classifying learning.

The LO version is therefore a private text: in sharp contrast to the relatively wide early transmission of the other versions of the *Diegesis*, the LO survives in just two manuscripts.³⁷ And also in contrast to the other versions of the *Diegesis*, which could be read independently, the LO makes sense only if read together with the *brevior*. Crucial parts about the period between the reign of John II (r. 1118–1143) and 1203 are missing, as the text of the LO begins abruptly and in medias res—that is, in the middle of the events of the year 1203:

Ἀλλὰ μέχρι μὲν δὴ τούτων εὐδρομος ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος
καὶ διὰ λείας φέρων ὁδοῦ, τὸ δ' ἐντεῦθεν οὐκ
οἶδ' ὅπως τῷ λόγῳ χρῆσομαι.³⁸

Up to now, the course of our logos has been smooth and easily traversed, but from this point on I fail to know how to use our words [*logos*].³⁹

The statement above sits uneasily at the very beginning of the LO. The opening sentence is unrelated to the *Dogmatic Panoply*, an account of fierce dogmatic disputes and debates that precedes the LO in both manuscripts. The divisive events mentioned in the *Panoply* can hardly be described as “smooth” (εὐδρομοί). Moreover, the awkward beginning of the LO matches the beginning of the third chapter of the *brevior*, and thus it is safe to assume that the readers of Choniates' work were in possession of at least the first two books of the history.⁴⁰

36 See Simpson, *Historiographical Study* (n. 10 above), 90–103.

37 See *ibid.*, 299, where after “D” read “Vaticanus graecus 168 (former 1041).” On the manuscript tradition of the *Diegesis*, see above.

38 v.D. 535.3–4.

39 Trans. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium* (n. 1 above), 294 (adapted).

40 See critical apparatus on v.D. 535.3.

Marginal notes that appear in both the Oxford and Florence manuscripts emphasize the version's rhetorical features. For instance, a note attracts the reader's attention to a particular rhetorical mode: “a brief ekphrasis of the statue of Athena at the forum as in the *historia*.”⁴¹ It is written next to a passage about the destruction of the statue of Athena by the Constantinopolitan mob that is indeed included in the *brevior*.⁴² A similar note in the margins of both manuscripts draws the reader's attention to an ekphrasis of the altar in the Hagia Sophia.⁴³ A rather elaborate parallel to this practice of flagging different rhetorical modes next to specific passages has been observed in manuscripts of *Drosilla and Charikles*, the novel by Niketas Eugenianos.⁴⁴ The notes in the LO are less systematic than those in Eugenianos's manuscripts, but they are indicative of the same practice, intended to attract the reader's attention to the rhetorical beauties of the text.

As already noted, the LO is paired in both manuscripts with the *Dogmatic Panoply*. Since the *Panoply* has not been published in full and its manuscript transmission has been partly studied, only limited conclusions about Choniates' aims and goals in writing it can be drawn.⁴⁵ We should start by noting that the consistent pairing of the *Panoply* and the LO version is not accidental, given that the two manuscripts are not direct

41 O, fol. 425, and L, fol. 367v. The reference to *historia* is understood as a reference to the *brevior* that is indeed titled *ιστορία* in manuscripts, while the title *Χρονική Διήγησις* is associated exclusively with the *auctior*.

42 v.D. 558.47–559.77. The passage is extensively discussed below.

43 O, fol. 434, and L, fol. 370v. v.D. 573.13–574.32.

44 Discussed, e.g., in *Εἰκῶν καὶ λόγος: Ἐξὶ Βυζαντινῆς περιγραφῆς ἔργων τέχνης*, ed. P. Agapitos, M. Hinterberger, and E. Mitsi (Athens, 2007), 115–17.

45 Excerpts of the Greek text of the *Panoply* have been published in A. Mai, *Spicilegium Romanorum*, vol. 4 (Rome, 1840), 399–497, and reprinted in PG 140:10–282. A Latin summary of the first five books of the *Panoply* is available in PG 139:1101–44. The *prooimion* has been published in J. L. van Dieten, *Zur Überlieferung und Veröffentlichung der Panoplia Dogmatike des Niketas Choniates*, *Zetemata Byzantina* 3 (Amsterdam, 1970), 60–64. For a brief discussion of the manuscript tradition with further references, see F. Spingou, “A Platonising Dialogue from the Twelfth Century: The Logos of Soterichos Panteugenos,” in *Dialogues and Debates from Late Antiquity to Late Byzantium*, ed. N. Gaul and A. Cameron (London, 2017), 125. See also van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia* (n. 1 above), xci–xciii, and *idem*, “Zur Überlieferung der Panoplia Dogmatike des Niketas Choniates: Codex Parisinus Graecus 1234,” in *Polychronion: Festschrift Franz Dölger zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. P. Wirth (Heidelberg, 1966), 166–80.

copies from a common source or even of each other. The two texts, the *Panoply* and the LO, succeed each other with a minimal visual separation:⁴⁶ a marginal note indicating the end of the *Panoply* (but not the beginning of the LO) appears in the Oxford manuscript, while in the Florence manuscript the LO starts on a new page.

Neither the Florentine nor the Oxford manuscript was Choniates' autograph or a copy written under his supervision. Yet in both, the two works are presented in a similar way. Thus, it is probable that the thirteenth-century scribes faithfully copied their prototypes.⁴⁷ This hypothesis is also supported by the kind of manuscripts in which the paired *Panoply* and *LO* are found: none of them is an anthology or a miscellaneous codex. The Florentine manuscript contains only the two works by Choniates. The Oxford manuscript begins with Choniates' two works and, after the scribe finished copying them, he filled the rest of the manuscript with works about the Orthodox dogma.⁴⁸

A possible further suggestion that the pairing of the *Panoply* and the LO was intentional appears in the title of the book epigram found in the Florence manuscript:⁴⁹

τινὸς διελθόντος τὴν βιβλίον, ἐξ ἑτοίμου στιχηρὸν
προσφώνημα ὡς ἐν εἶδει ἐπιγράμματος μεμνη-
μέν(ου) . . . χάς τοῦ φιλοπονήσαντος τὴν συνθήκην
τῆς βιβλίου προκειμ(ένης) διπλῆν πραγματείαν τὴν
τε προταχθεῖσαν ἐκκλησιαστικὴν ἱστορίαν καὶ τὴν
πρὸς τὸ τέλος . . . ὑπ. . . ὑστερόχρονον ἐπιτ(ομὴν).

By a reader of the book. A versified, offhand, encomiastic address in the form of a [book] epigram . . . commemorating . . . the one who worked laboriously on the composition of the book at hand [which contains] a double treatise, first the ecclesiastic history and secondly . . . a compendium <composed> at a later date.

46 The last paragraph of the *Panoply* in L (fol. 362) and O (fol. 447) marks the end of the last chapter, but not necessarily of the entire work: ἀλλ' ἱκανῶς ὡς οἶμαι καὶ τὰ περὶ τοῦ δόγματος τούτου τῷ λόγῳ διασεσάφηται, etc. (but as I believe, this chapter has adequately clarified the affairs of the particular doctrine, etc.).

47 Both copies were made less than eighty years after the composition of the original text of the LO.

48 Description in Coxe, *Greek Manuscripts* (n. 15 above), 480–82.

49 Text and translation in full can be found in the appendix of this article, pp. 219–20 below.

Despite its poor condition in the manuscript, the title of the epigram clearly speaks about a “double treatise” by a single author. The first part of this “double treatise” was a church history, a description that corresponds well with the *Panoply*. The identification of the first part of the book with the *Panoply* is also corroborated by the first verses of the poem, which mention a “treasury”—the alternative appellation for the orthodox “arsenals” (ὄπλοθήκαι).⁵⁰ The following verses of the book epigram concern the “combined” content, as they refer both to divine issues, in the *Panoply*, and to human events, presumably in the *LO*. According to the poet-reader, the book imitates the universe (*kosmos*), as its first part is about divine matters (τὰ θεῖα πρῶτον) and the second offers guidelines for human actions (ὑστερον τὰ πρακτέα).⁵¹ Indeed, the theoretical *Panoply* is about orthodox beliefs and heresies, while a historical narrative considers the deeds of the mortals.⁵² Thus, the reader of the book epigram was expected to have at hand the *Panoply* and the LO together, positioned to admire both the author's orthodoxy and his rhetorical dexterity; or, as the poet of the epigram puts it:

... ἀλλ' ἰδοὺ βλέπω,
τὰ ζωτικὰ ῥήματα γράμματα φέρει
καὶ θνητὰ μικτὰ τοῖς ἀθανάτοις λόγοις.

... Behold, I see
[the book] carries letters, the life-bringing words
even if mixing mortal [words] with immortal
logoi.

The *Panoply* is one of the three interconnected dogmatic arsenals that were composed during the long twelfth century following the example of Theodoret of

50 Vv. 1–4.

51 Vv. 9–10.

52 See the title of the *Panoply* in L, fol. 3 (= van Dieten, *Zur Überlieferung und Veröffentlichung der Panoplia Dogmatike*, 56.9–12): συλλογὴ τῶν ὄλων σχεδὸν δοξῶν καὶ αἵρέσεων καὶ ἱστορία τῶν ἀποτεκόντων αὐτὰς ἀνδρῶν, ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἀντιρρήσεις ἐπ' ἐνιαῖς τούτων καὶ μάλιστα ταῖς παλαιτέραις, καὶ ἕτερα τινὰ χρήσιμα τοῖς εὐσεβέσι, πονηθέντα τὰ παρὰ τοῦ σεβαστοῦ Νικήτα Χωνιάτου (A collection of nearly all doctrines and false teachings, and a historical narrative about the men who created them, as also refutations against some of them and primarily against the most antique ones, and others useful to the pious, written by *sebastos* Niketas Choniates [he became *sebastos* in 1190]).

Cyrrhus's *Eranistes*.⁵³ Choniates copied his Komnenian precursors (especially Zigabenos) word for word and added chapters about heretical disputes during the reign of Manuel I. It has been repeatedly noted that Choniates' *Panoply* is the only one of the three Komnenian arsenals that was composed without an imperial commission.⁵⁴ In the anonymized introductory letter at the beginning of the *Panoply*, Choniates contends that he composed the work in response to a friend's repeated plea.⁵⁵ That friend has been understood to be Constantine Mesopotamites, metropolitan of Thessaloniki, because of the ascription of the epigram in the Florentine manuscript.⁵⁶ But the name "Mesopotamites, metropolitan of Thessaloniki" was added in a later hand above the title of the epigram, as if the "reader of the book" was this Mesopotamites. Nevertheless, the attribution may indicate that this Mesopotamites was simply the owner of the book, or a reader of the book, but not necessarily the target reader of the two treatises. In addition, addressing an anonymous "friend" is a common rhetorical device employed by medieval authors (as well as authors from other periods).⁵⁷

The text of the book epigram relates the reading of the book to two kings who were considered exemplary in Byzantine imperial ideology: Alexander the Great and King Solomon.⁵⁸ The poet mentions the copy of the *Iliad* that, according to Plutarch, Alexander had as

his bedside reading and considered "a provision on the military virtue."⁵⁹ Yet the poet departs from Plutarch's narrative and the book finds its place next to the bed of Solomon, which, according to the Old Testament, was surrounded by sixty warriors.⁶⁰ In both cases, the book that combines human events and orthodox/divine dogmas was to serve an exemplary king or, better, the emperor. In writing the *Panoply* Choniates created a readily accessible arsenal with arguments against the heretics, an essential "weapon" for an orthodox reader. In the last verses of the epigram the author is parted from his book, which had been offered to a higher power—presumably the emperor—much as in the book of Exodus it is commanded that the firstborn cattle and sheep must stay with their mother for seven days but on the eighth be presented to God.⁶¹ Such an action, it was suggested, would lead to salvation.⁶² In other words, it is possible that Choniates aimed to present his book to a ruler (as earlier authors of dogmatic arsenals had done) after 1204. In a deviation from the previous tradition, Choniates apparently hoped to pair his *Panoply* with an account of historical events from his recent political history. Before arriving at his final draft, he circulated versions of the paired works among close friends who were appreciative of his learning and rhetorical skills. The LO is a partial reworking and expansion of the *brevior*, as the marginal notes clearly flag to Choniates' friends. To be sure, Choniates revised a chapter of the *Panoply* after 1213 and sent it to the

53 On Theodoret of Cyrrhus, see A. Rigolio, *Christians in Conversation: A Guide to Late Antique Dialogues in Greek and Syriac* (Oxford, 2019), 168–72. The other Komnenian dogmatic arsenals are by Euthymios Zigabenos (dedicated to Alexios I) and by Andronikos Kamateros (dedicated to Manuel I Komnenos and composed at some point between 1172 and 1177). For the text of Zigabenos's *Dogmatic Panoply*, see PG 130:20–1360. On the *Sacred Arsenal* by Kamateros, see A. Buccosi, *Andronici Camateri Sacrum Armamentarium: Pars Prima*, CCSG 75 (Turnhout, 2014), xxiv–xxvi.

54 See, e.g., Simpson, *Historiographical Study* (n. 10 above), 38.

55 van Dieten, *Zur Überlieferung und Veröffentlichung der Panoplia Dogmatike*, 56–59 (see ὦ φίλος [o friend; 57.7] and ὁ δέ με πολλάκις ἤτησας, τοῦτο καὶ δὴ ἀσπασίως παρέχω σοι, συλλογὴν ποιησάμενος πασῶν αἰρέσεων [You have asked me (for that) many times, so indeed I offer that you, for I have collected all the false teachings; 57.20–21]).

56 Ilias Nesseris has identified the Mesopotamites mentioned in the title with Constantine ("Ἡ παιδεία στην Κωνσταντινούπολη κατά τον 12ο αἰώνα," 2 vols. [PhD thesis, University of Ioannina, 2014], 2:209, n. 29) independently of Alicia Simpson (*Historiographical Study*, 37–38).

57 See, e.g., F. Spingou, "Thinking about Letters: The Epistolary of 'Leo the Wise' Reconsidered," *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 21 (2015): 182–84, 187–91.

58 Vv. 11–22.

59 Vv. 11–17. Plutarch, *Alexander* 8.1 (ed. K. Ziegler, *Plutarchi vitae parallelae*, vol. 2.2, Teubner, 2nd ed. [Leipzig, 1968]): ἦν δὲ καὶ φύσει φιλόλογος καὶ φιλομαθῆς καὶ φιλιαναγνώστης, καὶ τὴν μὲν Ἰλιάδα τῆς πολεμικῆς ἀρετῆς ἐφόδιον καὶ νομιζῶν καὶ ὀνομάζων, ἔλαβε μὲν Ἀριστοτέλους διορθώσαντος ἦν ἐκ τοῦ νάρθηκος καλοῦσιν, εἶχε δ' αἰεὶ μετὰ τοῦ ἐγχειριδίου καιμένην ὑπὸ τὸ προσκεφάλαιον, ὡς Ὀνησίκριτος ἰστορήκε (He was by nature lover of rhetoric and of learning and of every kind of reading, and as Onesicritus narrates, because he considered and named the *Iliad* a provision on the military virtue, he received a copy corrected by Aristotle—they call that "the casket [copy]"—and he had it always by his forehead next to his dagger). See T. S. Brown, "Alexander's Book Order (Plut. 'Alex' 8)," *Historia: Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte* 16.3 (July 1967): 359–69. On direct and indirect references to Plutarch in the oeuvre of Niketas Choniates, see A. Simpson, "Precepts, Paradigms and Evaluations: Niketas Choniates' Use of Plutarch," in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Plutarch*, ed. S. Xenophontos and K. Oikonomopoulou, Brill's Companions to Classical Reception 20 (Leiden, 2019), 279–94.

60 Song of Sg 3:7.

61 Vv. 26–27; Exod. 22:30.

62 Vv. 27–30.

emperor's uncle, the *logothetes* Basil Kamateros⁶³—an action that may provide further support for the thesis that the *Panoply*, along with the LO, was intended for an imperial audience (Theodore I Laskaris?) in the hope of receiving the rewards of royal benevolence.

*Declaring Independence:
The De signis as an Autonomous Text*

In addition to the Florence and the Oxford manuscripts, there are further two textual witnesses for the *De signis*: manuscript Vaticanus gr. 163, fols. 220v–221r (Diktyon 66794), of the late thirteenth century, and its roughly contemporary manuscript, Marc. gr. 11.22, fols. 182r–v and 149r (Diktyon 70658). The Vatican manuscript preserves the *auctior* version of the *Diegesis* with the (incomplete) text of the *De signis*, which Alicia Simpson has proved to be a later addition.⁶⁴ Unusually for the early phase of this work's transmission, the manuscript in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice preserves the *De signis* as a stand-alone, independent text. The lemma specifies only the author of the treatise, “Τῷ Χωνιάτου” (“Of Choniates”), without offering further information.⁶⁵ The main text itself includes numerous minor but important divergences from the text transmitted together with *LO*. For example, the first sentence of the text in the Venetian manuscript reads τῆς δ' ἡμετέρας βασιλείας ἄρτι διαπεττευθείσης [sic] ἐς τοὺς Φραγγίσκους instead of τῆς γὰρ ἡμετέρας βασιλείας ἄρτι διαπεττευθείσης ἐς τοὺς Φραγγίσκους. The use of the particle δὲ is equally inappropriate as the postpositive γὰρ to mark the beginning of a text. Even more, the use of δὲ in the first part of the sentence creates unnecessary repetition, as the particle

is again used later in the same sentence (ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τῆς ἀρχιερωσύνης). Most of the readings deriving from the manuscript in Venice—all noted in Van Dieten's edition—demonstrate that the text in Marc. gr. 11.22 presents minor variations from the LO, which are able to support its existence as a (sub-)version of the text. The variations in the Marcianus manuscript are also found in the incomplete text in Vat. gr. 163, suggesting that the scribe of the Vatican manuscript used a version of *De signis* closer to that transmitted in the Marcianus rather than the LO.⁶⁶

That said, the context of transmission of the *De signis* in Marc. gr. 11.22 is more important than the version of the text that the manuscript preserves. The manuscript is very familiar to anyone studying Byzantine court literature from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries thanks to the wealth of texts it preserves. Although scholars are still awaiting a new detailed codicological description of the codex, it is safe to note that the manuscript is in fact made of two separate books written on different paper and in different hands.⁶⁷ The first book contains twelfth-century court poetry (attributed mainly to the so-called anonymous Manganeios).⁶⁸ The second book is a compilation of rhetorical exempla and treatises.⁶⁹ It includes letters and orations by Constantine Manasses (ca. 1130–ca. 1187), Gregory Antiochos (ca. 1125–d. post 1196), Theodore Balsamon (d. post 1195), and George Akropolites (1217/20–1282) among excerpts of Aristotelian treatises and rhetorical

63 For the chapter and the related letter to Basil Kamateros, see Simpson, “Before and After 1204” (n. 10 above), 202, n. 40. The cover letter to the chapter from the *Panoply* has been published as letter no. 11 in J. A. van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae orationes et epistulae*, CFHB 3 (Berlin 1972), 216–17; see esp. 217.18–20. On the letter's date, see A. J. Simpson, “Studies on the Composition of Niketas Choniates' *Historia*” (PhD thesis, King's College London, 2004), 164. Cf. Simpson, *Historiographical Study*, 38; following Bossina, she notes that “it is reasonable to assume that in addition to satisfying the theological interests of his friends, the *Panoplia* was also addressed to a larger audience.”

64 See Simpson, “Before and After 1204.” The text breaks in v.D. 650.1 (τρίχα σὺλος).

65 MS Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, gr. 11.22 (coll. 1235) (Diktyon 70658), fol. 182r. The title is written in the hand of the main scribe.

66 The text in Vatican City, BAV, gr. 163 (Diktyon 66794), breaks after 650.1 (σὺλος). All readings are noted in van Dieten's edition. See, e.g., the omission of ἀλλήλοις in v.D. 648.52 and the changes in lines 649.62–63 and 649.75.

67 A description of the manuscript is available in E. Mioni, *Codices graeci manuscripti bibliothecae divi Marci Venetiarum*, vol. 3, *Indici e cataloghi, nuova serie* (Rome, 1972), 116–30. Mioni dates the manuscript to the end of the thirteenth century, while van Dieten (*Orationes et epistulae*, viii) proposes a more flexible dating between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In my view, the first part of the manuscript dates from the end of the thirteenth century and the second from the early fourteenth. For an up-to-date bibliography on the manuscript, see <https://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/notices/cote/70658/>. I have examined the manuscript *in situ* on two separate visits to Venice, in 2011 and 2015.

68 Fols. 1–87v, copied by a single hand (see Mioni, *Codices*, 116). An edition of these poems is currently being prepared by Elizabeth and Michael Jeffreys.

69 Fols. 88–189, copied by multiple but contemporary hands (see Mioni, *Codices*, 116).

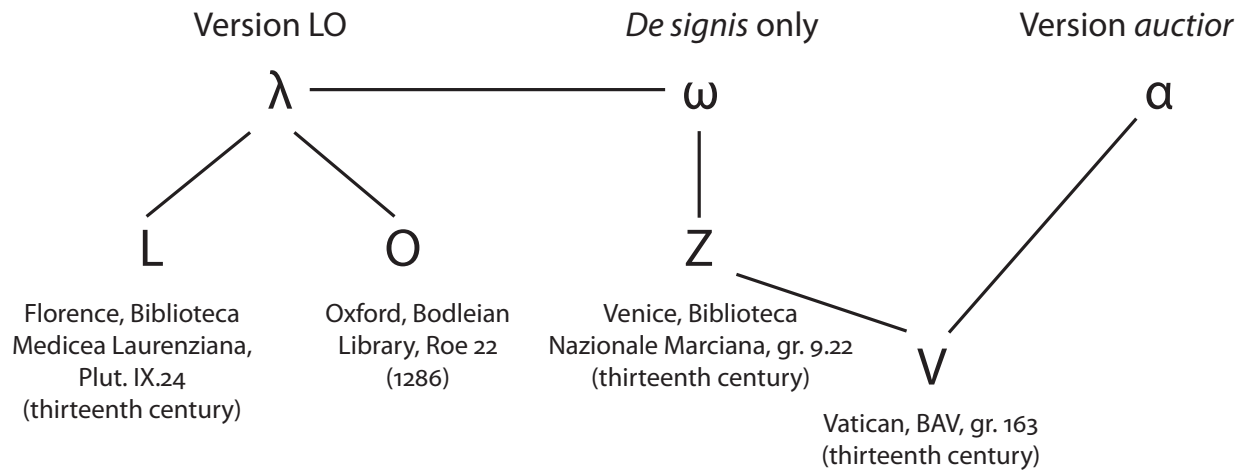


Fig. 1. Schematic representation of the *De signis*'s textual transmission.

compendia.⁷⁰ Most important, the manuscript (despite its lacunose state) is the main source for the orations and letters composed by the author of the *Diegesis*, Niketas Choniates.⁷¹ The *De signis* is not transmitted as part of his collection of rhetorical works, however. Rather, it is preceded by the letters of Theodore Balsamon and followed by rhetorical examples of letters attributed to Aristotle (385–348 BCE) and to sophists such as Dio Chrysostom (ca. 40–ca. 115 CE) and “Dionysius the sophist.”⁷² Such a context impels us to read the *De signis* not as a part of a historical account but as a rhetorical masterpiece preserved in order to be studied and imitated by later rhetors. The competence of Byzantine rhetoricians was judged by their skills and their familiarity with rhetorical texts rather than with guidebooks on rhetoric. The orations or letters by rhetoricians of the past, and especially of the Second Sophistic, were read along with those of contemporary or recent authors in

order to equip the younger generations with the necessary inspiration and examples so that they might enrich the line of the rhetorical tradition.

The *De signis* as a Description of the City of Constantine

In the previous section I have argued that the *De signis* is a rhetorical treatise appended to an account of events addressed originally to intellectuals in Choniates' social circle. The following pages interpret the *De signis* exactly as that: a rhetorical, semiautonomous, semifictional, lyrical appendix to a narrative of historical events. A great number of modern scholars have used the *De signis* to help reconstruct the monumental cityscape of the Byzantine capital before and after 1204.⁷³ This is certainly a welcome way to read it, but it is far from the only way. It has long been recognized

70 The manuscript's content has been described in full in Mioni, *Codices*, esp. 125 (no. III)–130 (no. XXIII). It should be noted that “no. XVIII Epistolae variae” (fols. 172v–173v), which appears unattributed in Mioni's description, includes Constantine Manasses' *Letters* published by K. Horna, “Eine unedierte Rede des Konstantin Manasses,” *WS* 28 (1906): 185–87 (letters I, III, IV).

71 Fols. 91–125v; the manuscript is discussed in van Dieten, *Orationes et epistulae*, ix–xiv.

72 The quires of the manuscript are currently out of place. The *De signis* begins on fol. 182r, and continues on fol. 182v and then fol. 149r. Fol. 182v is the end of the fourth quire of the original manuscript (noted with a δ in the middle of the bottom margin).

73 E.g., T. F. Madden, “The Fires of the Fourth Crusade in Constantinople, 1203–1204: A Damage Assessment,” *BZ* 84/85 (1992): 72–93. As a source for the statues of the Hippodrome in particular, see, e.g., J. Bardill, “The Monuments and Decoration of the Hippodrome in Constantinople,” in *Hippodrom/Atmeydanı: A Stage for Istanbul's History*, ed. B. Pitarakis, Pera Museum Publications 39 (Istanbul, 2010), 167–70, 179–82. On using the *De signis* as a reliable source for the reconstruction of the forum of Constantine, see A. Kaldellis, “The Forum of Constantine in Constantinople: What Do We Know about Its Original Architecture and Adornment?,” *GRBS* 56 (2016): 714–39. For the reconstruction of the Hippodrome and Constantinople in general, see S. Bassett, *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople* (Cambridge, 2004), 188–92, 208–11, 212–32.

that the Byzantines did not perceive rigid boundaries between “literature” and history writing.⁷⁴ History writing was a form of literature that also aimed to please the reader, not simply to give a strict account of events. The *De signis* falls into this category. Moreover, it essentially goes a step further, as it is an emotional response to the misfortunes of the author’s beloved city expressed through a highly stylized rhetorical narrative in which factual accuracy is of only secondary importance. In the *De signis*, Choniates writes what one could name in German as *Historie* (that is, the intellectual feat of narrated memories), but not *Geschichte* (that is, the representation of the past in prosaic terms and with alleged objectivity). In order to decode this semiautonomous appendix to the LO, we should read it in a way that emphasizes the internal structure of the account and the collection of symbols it presents, rather than its “truthfulness.” Describing objectively real events is only part of the purpose of the *De signis*, not its absolute goal.

This section of the article is divided into three parts. The first suggests that in the *De signis*, Constantinople is a landscape of memory constructed by Choniates. By spotlighting particulars rather than offering a general overview or a historically anchored account of the looting of Constantinople, Choniates creates a landscape for his readers and engages with all the little details that matter to him and the social group to which he belonged. Readers in turn are called to shape a memory of the city with Choniates as their guide. Choniates after all constructs a memory landscape through a selective collection of symbols related to the city and the Empire. The second part highlights the discourse of beauty in the *De signis*. It compares Choniates’ narrative with other descriptions. The *De signis* presents the destruction of Constantinople in aesthetic terms that Choniates’ friends—highly educated individuals—could easily interpret and understand. The final part focuses the discussion on the statues in the Hippodrome (perhaps the most famous part of the *De signis*). Choniates enlivens the statues as they act on the central stage of Constantinople’s civic life, the

Hippodrome. Placed on such a stage, I argue, the statues become symbols of what this city really was: the Empire.

The De signis and the City

The first words of the *ex abrupto* introduction of the *De signis* set the tone for the rest of the narrative: τῆς γὰρ ἡμετέρας βασιλείας ἄρτι διαπεττευθείσης ἐς τοὺς Φράγκους ὁμοίως καὶ τῆς ἀρχιερωσύνης κληρωθείσης τοῖς Βενετικοῖς . . . —“For when our rulership was just won by gamble by the Franks and our high priesthood was assigned by lot to the Venetians.” There is no dignity ascribed here to the crusaders. For Choniates, they are a bunch of gamblers (to put it plainly) who found their way to Byzantium and seized the most important parts of its civic and church administration, inaugurating a new era for the city.⁷⁵ The reference to a collective “we” versus a collective “they” and to the two forms of governorship makes us realize something fundamental to any reading of the *De signis*: the appendix provides not an account of the statues and their abusive destruction but a narrative of the assault against the capital that, by the twelfth century, was the Empire.⁷⁶

For Choniates, the newly appointed patriarch represents the crusaders’ recklessness. In the opening paragraph of the *De signis*, Thomas Morosini is described as an utterly inappropriate man with an appalling physique, mirroring his atrocious character: he is fat, and he does not have any hair on his face or chest.⁷⁷ Choniates describes him as “fatter than a well-fed pig.”⁷⁸ For the Byzantines, obesity was evidence of a lack of self-control.⁷⁹ A clean-shaven face and hairless

75 Cf. v.D. 595–596.

76 On Constantinople as the Empire, see, e.g., P. Magdalino, “Byzantium=Constantinople,” in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. L. James, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Chichester, 2010), 43–54.

77 v.D. 647.4–15. Cf. Pontani, *Grandezza e catastrofe* (n. 4 above), 643, n. 4. On Morosini, see M. Angold, “Thomas Morosini, First Latin Patriarch of Constantinople (1205–1211): A Re-appraisal,” in *Crusading and Trading between West and East: Studies in Honour of David Jacoby*, ed. S. Menache, B. Z. Kedar, and M. Balard (London, 2019), 17–34.

78 v.D. 647.8–9.

79 On obesity, see M. Hatzaki, *Beauty and the Male Body in Byzantium: Perceptions and Representation in Art and Text* (Houndmills, 2009), 36, with particular reference to Choniates. On the *ethos* of a person understood as mixture of exterior appearance and the interior self, see also the discussion in S. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2013), 140.

74 See, e.g., the contributions in *History as Literature: Papers from the Fortieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, April 2007*, ed. R. Macrides (Surrey, 2010); R.-J. Lillie, “Reality and Invention: Reflections on Byzantine Historiography,” *DOP* 68 (2018): 157–210.

chest demonstrate faulty faith, as both—especially the former—are often regarded among the “Judaizing” practices and ethnic characteristics of “the Latins.”⁸⁰ Ugliness is equated with evilness, and the detail about Morosini’s habit of playing with his golden ring (a sign either of luxury or, if it was a signet, of power) only adds to the impression of his recklessness and wickedness.⁸¹

The reader is subsequently transported to separate scenes of destruction. The plundering starts with the tombs in the imperial mausoleum by the church of the Holy Apostles, particularly that of Emperor Justinian. Then, the church’s silver ciborium over the Holy Altar of Hagia Sophia is destroyed. The destruction of bronze monuments follows: the complex of the three statues of Hera, Paris-Alexander, and Aphrodite in the Forum of Constantine and the *anemodoulion* (a mechanical weathervane) on a tetrapylon near that forum are shattered, as is the equestrian statue at the Forum Tauri (or Forum of Theodosius). The narrative reaches its highest point with the description of the statues in the spina of the Hippodrome (analyzed in the last part of this section).

The three sections of the narrative in the *De signis* are internally divided by a repeated statement about the crusaders’ insatiable appetite for money. The first statement about the greed of the crusaders follows the report on the Holy Apostles and Hagia Sophia. The second follows the narrative about the wretched fate of

monuments in the two major fora of the city, and precedes the description of the destruction of the statues at the Hippodrome. The division guides the development of the subject: Choniates is interested not in what the crusaders destroyed in general but rather in how οἱ τοῦ καλοῦ ἀνέραστοι οὗτοι βάρβαροι . . . ἀνταλλασσόμενοι μικρῶν τὰ μεγάλα καὶ δαπάναις πονηθέντα μεγίσταις οὐτιδανῶν ἀντιδιδόντες κερμάτων—“those emasculated-from-loving-beauty barbarians exchanged the important for unimportant and the things made at great expense for worthless coins.”⁸² The repeated statement reveals the subject of the *De signis*, an allegory about cashing in on Byzantium’s grandeur on the cheap.

In the first section, the crusaders destroy both the βασιλεία in Constantinople and the ἀρχιερωσύνη. They first target the historic imperial mausoleum of the Holy Apostles and then the historic seat of the patriarch of Constantinople, Hagia Sophia. But Choniates is concerned not about the monumental architecture or decoration of either but about specific objects, which he places on the monumental map of the city. The mausoleum of the Holy Apostles is named *heroon*, “the residence of the heroes.” Though that term was routinely used in the twelfth century, Choniates brings the word back to its original meaning: the Holy Apostles is the abode of the corpses of emperor-saints, such as Justinian.⁸³ Justinian’s sainthood was an uneasy subject in Byzantium (as discussed below). Nonetheless, Choniates includes Justinian among the servants of God assaulted by the crusaders; and his reference to the incorruptibility of the emperor’s body essentially includes him among the Christian saints.⁸⁴ At the same time, the crusaders who care only to pillage the tombs are presented as common gravediggers wishing to strip the deceased of their last belongings.⁸⁵ Their ruthlessness continues as they next target the ciborium above

80 See, e.g., Constantine Stilbes, *List of Errors*, ed. J. Darrouzès, “Le mémoire de Constantin Stilbès contre les Latins,” *REB* 21 (1963): 50–100, at 71, par. λθ’/39; further discussion in T. M. Kolbaba, *The Byzantine Lists: Errors of the Latins* (Urbana, IL, 2000), 56–57. The term “Latins” is used by Choniates for the crusaders. On the use of the term as an ethnonym after the middle of the eleventh century, see A. Kazhdan, “Latins and Franks in Byzantium: Perception and Reality from the Eleventh to the Twelfth Century,” in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, ed. A. E. Laiou and R. P. Mottahedeh (Washington, DC, 2001), 84–87, with an analysis of the term in the *Diegesis* at 86–89.

81 The Byzantines were aware that the ring symbolized the conscious marriage between priest and church (e.g., Constantine Stilbes, *List of Errors*, ζδ’/64, ed. Darrouzès, “Le mémoire de Constantin Stilbès,” 78), but they were uneasy with the custom as they considered it a sign of unnecessary luxury (see Kolbaba, *The Byzantine Lists*, 53). Pontani (*Grandezza e catastrofe*, 643, n. 4) identifies the ring with the *Annulus piscatoris* (*anello del piscatore*) worn by the pope. The first explicit mention of the papal ring is dated to 1265 (E. Waterton, “On the Annulus Piscatoris, or Ring of the Fisherman,” *Archaeologia* 40.1 [1886]: 138–42, esp. 138). In fact, Morosini’s ring could have been a signet ring and thus a symbol of his position of power.

82 v.D. 649.80–83.

83 v.D. 678.26–28.

84 Emperors often appeared to have incorruptible bodies; see H. Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit: Entstehung, Wandel und Wirkung einer tausendjährigen Weissagung* (Stuttgart, 2010), 88, n. 13.

85 On gravediggers, see, e.g., poem 82 of Christopher Mitylenaios: “On the Gravediggers, Who Robbed the Garments of the Dead When the Cemetery at Saint Luke’s Was Ablaze,” ed. M. De Groot, *Christophori Mitylenaii Versum Variorum Collectio Cryptensis*, CCSG 74 (Turnhout, 2012), 77–78; translation F. Bernard and C. Livanos, *The Poems of Christopher of Mytilene and John Mauropous*, DOML 50 (Cambridge, MA, 2018), 169.

the Holy Altar of Hagia Sophia. Choniates describes the ciborium with the word *καταπέτασμα* (literally, “veil”). The term *katapetasma* and the description of the Hagia Sophia as a great temple could evoke the Temple of Jerusalem.⁸⁶ This is of course not surprising, since all Byzantines viewed Constantinople as the New Jerusalem, and the destruction of the Holy Altar in Hagia Sophia is the destruction of the altar with the highest status in the Empire.

The symbolic character attributed to the two monuments is by now evident. The heroon of the Holy Apostles, a mausoleum that had last been used for new burials nearly two centuries before the time Choniates started composing the *De signis*, stands for the political power of the Romans of Byzantium (the *basileia*). Hagia Sophia, a great temple, is the center of the religious power of Byzantium (the *archieroynē*). Following scenes of the collapse of the imperial authorities, the destruction of the civic life is staged at the city’s fora and performed in the Hippodrome.

Like the first part, the next two parts of the *De signis* narrate details. The Forum of Constantine may have been heavily adorned since late antiquity, but Choniates is concerned about only two monuments: a complex of statues on the Judgment of Paris (with the Athena missing)⁸⁷ and the anemodoulion, which was located not in the forum but on a tetrapylon on the Mese, between the Forum of Constantine and the Forum Tauri.⁸⁸ Choniates emphasizes the monumental size of the statues in the Constantinian forum and the anemodoulion. Height is a key feature in the description. The destruction of the Judgment of Paris is described as the toppling of a series of large statues. The

statue of Hera, which stood (*ισταμένη*) in the Forum of Constantine, was melted down into coins, but its head was so large that it was taken to the Great Palace. The statue of Paris-Alexander, which stood together with that of Aphrodite holding the apple of discord, was literally capsized (*ἀνατέτραπται*) from its base.

Choniates engages with the anemodoulion differently than with the statues, as he emphasizes its height and extensive decoration but does not describe its destruction. He begins the passage by comparing it to the great columns that stood around the city.⁸⁹ This comparison is crucial to understanding the passage. The columns closest to the anemodoulion were the 36-meter-tall porphyry column of Constantine, which stood at the center of the Forum of Constantine,⁹⁰ and the highly decorated Theodosian column in the Forum Tauri.⁹¹ Greater height (*hypsos*) was a sign of greater authority (and beauty) in Byzantium as elsewhere. In this passage, that authority is overturned by the toppling of statues and a *mēchanēma* in and near a forum carrying the name of the capital’s founder. The humiliation of Byzantium’s authority is given additional symbolic emphasis at the beginning of the passage, as the crusaders do not simply destroy the colossal statue of the *polychalkos* Hera but drag her cut-off head to the Great Palace, the seat of imperial administration.

The mythology surrounding the equestrian statue in the Forum Tauri was well known among the city’s inhabitants and visitors. Choniates identifies the statue with either Joshua, son of Nun, or Bellerophon (although he shows a clear preference for the latter).⁹² He subsequently focuses on the small statue that was allegedly hidden under the horse’s hoof.⁹³ Choniates

86 Choniates refers to τὸ τοῦ Μεγίστου Νεῶ καταπέτασμα. On *καταπέτασμα*, see Exod. 26:37, 38:18; Num. 3:25. I am grateful to Paul Magdalino for this observation. Cf. Pontani, *Grandezza e catastrofe*, 644, n. 9. Note that Antony of Novgorod, writing in 1200, also uses the term *katapetasma* to describe the ciborium of the Hagia Sophia; for the reference and discussion, see J. Bogdanović, *The Framing of the Sacred: The Canopy and the Byzantine Church* (Oxford, 2017), 38, with a rich commentary on the term on 36–38. On the Μέγιστος Νεῶς or Ναός as the Temple of Jerusalem, see, e.g., Romanus the Melode, *On the Third Week of the Lent* (Hymn 54), 21.3–4, ed. J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode: Hymnes*, vol. 5 (Paris, 1981).

87 Kaldellis, “The Forum of Constantine” (n. 74 above), 736; Papamastorakis, “Interpreting the *De signis*” (n. 5 above), 219.

88 See B. Anderson, “Leo III and the Anemodoulion,” *BZ* 104 (2011): 41–54, and A. Berger, “Der Chalkun Tetrapylon and Parastaseis Kapitel 57,” *BZ* 90 (1997): 7–12.

89 v.D. 648.44–47. The wording here is important: Τὸ δὲ τετραπλευρον χαλκοῦν μηχανήμα μετέωρον ἀνεβαῖνον καὶ μικροῦ τοῖς τῶν κίωνων μείζοντι εἰς ὕψος ἀνθαμιλλώμενον.

90 The bronze statue that originally stood on the column had toppled during a storm in 1105/6. Manuel I Komnenos (r. 1143–1180) added a cross on the part of a Corinthian capital remaining on the top of the column. See R. Ousterhout, “The Life and Afterlife of Constantine’s Column,” *JRA* 27 (2014): 304–26, esp. 316–17.

91 G. Becatti, *La colonna coelide istoriata: Problemi storici, iconografici, stilistici* (Rome, 1960), 83–150. On the Forum of Taurus, see A. Berger, “Tauros e Sigma: Due piazza di Constantinopoli,” in *Bizanzio e l’Occidente: Arte, archeologia, storia: Studi in onore di Fernanda de’ Maffei*, ed. C. Barsanti (Rome, 1996), 17–24, esp. 20–22.

92 v.D. 649.58–65.

93 v.D. 649.68–76.

speaks of an “old rumor” connecting the statuette to an enemy of Byzantium (a Venetian, or some Roman, or a Bulgarian). Our author concludes that when it was found, the statuette was wearing a shepherd’s cloak. The double identification of the equestrian statue is repeated in the tenth-century *Patria*, where the figurine under the hoof of the statue is connected to the scenes on the statue’s pedestal depicting “the final days of the city, about the Rus’ who will conquer this city” (referring to ninth-century events).⁹⁴ In his *Guidebook to Places of Pilgrimage* (*Kitāb al-ishārāt ilā ma’rifat al-ziyārāt*), ‘Alī ibn Abī Bakr al-Harawī (d. 1215) notes the existence of the imposing equestrian statue in the Forum of Taurus and the “talisman that prevents the enemy from assailing the city” that could be found under its hoof.⁹⁵ All three sources agree that the figurine represents an adversary of Byzantium. The Byzantine sources identify it with existing enemies, while al-Harawī attributes apotropaic powers to it. Choniates offers the additional and unquestionably odd detail that the figurine wore a “thick coat [χλαῖναν], woven with sheep’s wool” (χλαῖναν, ὁποῖαν τῶν θρεμμάτων τὰ ἔρια πλέκουσιν).⁹⁶ That detail immediately generates practical (and rudimentary) questions: Could a perishable woolen textile survive in the humid climate of Constantinople? And even if it were instead a sculpted *chlaina*, why would a sculptor dress a figurine in such an unusual coat?

Given that the woolen coat is not mentioned in any other account, Choniates may have had supplemented his narrative with a fictional detail. It is highly unlikely that the perishable material would have survived for very long.⁹⁷ The climate of Constantinople, a port, is particularly humid. According to Choniates, the

statuette was inaccessible and thus the coat (if it existed) could not have been changed over time.⁹⁸ The key to understand that detail is that medieval accounts agree that the statuette is an enemy of Byzantium, an interpretation retained by Choniates. A thick woolen coat was a cheap article, most appropriate for “rough,” uneducated people, such as—for Choniates—the Latins.⁹⁹ The crusaders—again, according to Choniates—did not care to learn more about the statue but instead mindlessly surrendered it to fire.¹⁰⁰ The accusation about the invaders’ crudeness becomes a central theme in the remaining part of the *De signis*: Choniates names them repeatedly barbarians, “unable to love beauty” (ἀνέραστοι τοῦ καλοῦ),¹⁰¹ and illiterate (ἀγράμματοι).¹⁰² That would not be the only instance in Choniates’ oeuvre of members of an ethnic group appearing to wear a *chlaina*. In a letter to Basil Kamateros, Choniates presents the double-colored coat (χλαῖναν δίχρωμον) of Armenians as a sign of their being allegedly double-minded.¹⁰³ Thus, the statuette in the *De signis* becomes a symbol for the fate of the city: the barbarians (= the statuette in the shepherd’s coat) are freed as the military power of Byzantium (= the equestrian statue) collapses—a fate foretold by al-Harawī.

98 v.D. 649.72–74.

99 See, e.g., *Scholia on Aristophanes’ Frogs*: χλαῖνα [ἀπὸ ἐρίων]: εἶδος εὐτελές, ed. W. J. Koster, *Commentarium in ranas (scholia recentiora Tzetzae)* (Groningen, 1962), 1459a. The twelfth-century metropolitan of Thessaloniki, Eustathios, says that the Latins wore *chlainai*. But in his work *chlainai* are “garments reminiscent of the mandya that are easy to undress or rather to take off”; Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Commentary on Odyssey*, ed. and trans. E. Cullhed, *Eustathios of Thessaloniki: Commentary on Homer’s Odyssey*, vol. 1, Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia (Uppsala, 2016), 140–41, 1398.62–63. See also the discussion of the passage in E. Cullhed, “Achaens on Crusade,” in *Reading Eustathios of Thessaloniki*, ed. F. Pontani, V. Katsaros, and V. Sarris (Berlin, 2017), 292–95. On the connection between Eustathios and Niketas Choniates, see below, p. 206.

100 v.D. 649.77–78: ὀλίγα δὲ τῶν ἐπ’ αὐτῶν πεφασμένων οἱ Λατῖνοι φροντισαντες πυρι καὶ τοῦτο ἐνέβαλον.

101 v.D. 649.79–80.

102 v.D. 653.94–95. Again, the account of Eustathios of Thessaloniki complements that of Choniates. Eustathios explicitly names the Normans as ἀγροῖκοι; Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, ed. and trans. J. R. Melville Jones, Byzantine Australiensia (Canberra, 1987), 146.21.

103 Letter 11, p. 217, line 7, ed. I. A. van Dieten, *Orationes et epistulae* (n. 63 above), 216–17; see J. L. van Dieten, *Niketas Choniates: Erläuterungen zu den Reden und Briefen nebst einer Biographie*, Supplementa Byzantina 2 (Berlin, 1971), 182–86.

94 ἔχει ἐγγεγλυμμένας ἱστορίας τῶν ἐσχάτων τῆς πόλεως, τῶν Ῥῶς τῶν μελλόντων πορθεῖν ταύτην τὴν πόλιν. *Patria* 2.47, ed. T. Preger, *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum* (Leipzig, 1907), 176.11–13. Note also the variation in C: ἱστορίας τῶν ἐσχάτως μελλόντων Ῥῶς πορθεῖν τὴν αὐτὴν πόλιν. A. Berger, *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople: The Patria*, DOML 24 (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 82–83.

95 Text, translation, and commentary: C. Palombo, “‘Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Harawi: Description of Constantinople, from the Guidebook to Places of Pilgrimage (*Kitāb al-ishārāt ilā ma’rifat al-ziyarat*)” in *The Visual Culture of Later Byzantium (c. 1081 to c. 1350)*, ed. F. Spingou, Sources for Byzantine Art History 3, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2021), I.5.5, 1:539–52, esp. 545.

96 v.D. 649.76–77.

97 Choniates indicates that the figurine was covered while the Byzantines had repeatedly tried in the past to secure the statue on its base; v.D. 649.72–74.

A modern reader can cast doubt on the accuracy of further stories, events, and details provided in the *De signis*. It is unclear, for example, whether Choniates ever met Morosini. Having escaped Constantinople on 17 April 1204, Choniates was absent from the city during Morosini's arrival in late summer 1205.¹⁰⁴ Although the plundering of the Holy Apostles and the sacrilege of Hagia Sophia are generally known from other sources, their reported details of the pillage of the city do not exactly match. For example, the church of the Holy Apostles is admired by Robert de Clari (ca. 1170–ca. 1216), while Geoffrey de Villehardouin (ca. 1160–ca. 1213) gives the quite questionable detail that one of the leaders of the Fourth Crusade, Odo II of Champlitte, was buried there.¹⁰⁵ A Greek source written by a member of Choniates' social circle, Constantine Stilbes (fl. ca. 1200), mentions in his *Errors of the Latins* that the crusaders opened tombs of "saint and non-saint emperors and empresses" in the Holy Apostles, and that they uncovered the "mysteries of nature" (suggesting incorruptibility).¹⁰⁶ Stilbes also mentions that the "heretic" enemies of Byzantium carried out on their shoulders the tomb of Constantine the Great.¹⁰⁷ The description obviously in some ways

parallels Choniates' report, but the central point—the plundering of Justinian's tomb—is absent. A fully confident narrator, Choniates attributes to Justinian a saintly feature, an incorruptible body, thus rejecting the general skepticism about the emperor's piety.¹⁰⁸ It is hard to explain the reasons that led our author to emphasize that particular detail or even to name Justinian in his account (instead, e.g., of Constantine the Great, who was also buried there). There are no further references to Justinian in any version of the *Diegesis*. An account of the debates concerning the orthodox dogma that occurred during Justinian's reign does appear in the tenth book of the *Panoply*, but again no evidence or reason to credit the emperor's sanctification is offered.¹⁰⁹ The reference may be read as a bitter comment on the unfulfilled Reconquista, which, if it had been successful, could have altered the course of history. Alternatively (and more convincingly), the mention of Justinian's name may be intended to testify to his sanctity as a holy refounder of the church of the Holy Apostles. Indeed, Justinian's activity in founding the church of Hagia Sophia (not of the Holy Apostles) was the main argument for his sanctification, according to other Byzantine authors.¹¹⁰

104 Choniates returned to Constantinople only in June 1206. A second, briefer description of Morosini, related to events placed in the summer of 1205, is not included in the LO but rather only in *auctior* (v.D. 623,73–79). For Choniates' escape from Constantinople, see *Diegesis*, v.D. 587,1–594,77 (also in LO); cf. Simpson, *Historiographical Study* (n. 10 above), 21–22. Van Dieten, *Erläuterungen*, 46, and R. L. Wolff, "Politics in the Latin Patriarchate of Constantinople, 1204–1261," *DOP* 8 (1954): 230, rushed to suggest that Choniates was an eyewitness.

105 Robert de Clari, *La conquête de Constantinople: Édition bilingue*, ed. and trans. J. Dufournet, Champion classiques–Moyen âge 4 (Paris, 2004), para. lxxvii, 178–79; Villehardouin, *The Conquest of Constantinople*, para. 262, trans. C. Smith, *Joinville and Villehardouin: Chronicles of the Crusades* (London, 2008), 71.

106 "Le mémoire de Constantin Stilbès," para. ζβ' /92, ed. Darrouzès (n. 80 above), 84, 392–93: *τάφους ἀνώρουσαν ἀγίων καὶ μὴ τοιοῦτων βασιλέων τε βασιλισσῶν, καὶ μυστήρια φύσεως ἐξεκάλυψαν*.

107 On the pillage of the Holy Apostles, see *The Errors of the Latins*, ζβ' /92, ed. Darrouzès, "Le mémoire de Constantin Stilbès," 84, 392–96. Choniates refers to ὁ καλὸς τὰ πάντα Στιλβῆς in a letter sent to Michael Autorianos in April 1208 (Letter 10, 215,1–4, ed. van Dieten, *Orationes et epistulae*, 214–15; idem, *Erläuterungen*, 180–81). On the identification, see van Dieten, *Erläuterungen*, 180, n. 2, and Darrouzès, "Le mémoire de Constantin Stilbès," 56. On Stilbes' work, see Kolbaba, *The Byzantine Lists* (n. 80 above), 27, 178. Manuel Chrysoloras, writing in 1411, confirms that many imperial tombs preserved in and around the Church of the Holy Apostles were at his

time in a ruined state. See C. Billò, ed., "Manuele Crisolora: *Confronto tra Antica e la Nuova Roma*," *Medioevo Greco* 0 (2000), 20,31–33; for an English translation, based on the 1655 edition by P. Lambecii as reprinted in PG 156, see C. Smith, *Architecture in the Culture of Early Humanism: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Eloquence, 1400–1470* (New York, 1992), 210.

108 G. Prinzing, "Das Bild Justinians I. in der Überlieferung der Byzantiner vom 7.–15. Jhdt.," in *Fontes Minores* 7, *Forschungen zur byzantinischen Rechtsgeschichte* 14 (Frankfurt, 1986), 80. For an overview on the topic of Justinian's sainthood, see K. Kovalchuk, "The Founder as a Saint: The Image of Justinian I in the Great Church in St Sophia," *Byzantion* 77 (2007): 205–38. Kovalchuk (212–15) refers extensively to the sources questioning Justinian's piety because of his involvement in "aphthartodocetism" (that is, the belief that Christ's body remained incorruptible from the moment of his arrest). Although other twelfth-century authors show awareness of such questions regarding the emperor (e.g., Zonaras, Glykas, Manasses), Choniates does not refer to the issue. He includes instead a routine reference to the fifth ecumenical synod that took place during Justinian's reign (Niketas Choniates, *Dogmatic Panoply*, introduction edited in van Dieten, "Zur Überlieferung und Veröffentlichung der Panoplia Dogmatike" [n. 45 above], 54, 1–15).

109 At least in the excerpts published in PG 140:67–76.

110 Hélèn Ahrweiler (*L'idéologie politique de l'Empire byzantine* [Paris, 1975], 86; cited in Prinzing, "Das Bild Justinians I.," 75) reports that Niketas Choniates says in the *Diegesis* that Manuel I Komnenos tried to imitate Justinian in his policy toward the West.

Constantine Stilbes again provides an account of the crusaders' sacrilege against Hagia Sophia and the destruction of its Holy Altar in particular. But he does not make particular mention of the (famous for its luxury) ciborium of the church.¹¹¹ This again may be taken as a further symbolic action that Choniates attributed to crusaders in a semifictional account. As discussed above, the wording for the destruction of the ciborium transforms it to a symbol for the destruction of the New Jerusalem: that is, Constantinople.¹¹²

The group of sculptures representing the Judgment of Paris in the Forum of Constantine is different from that in all other sources. The statue of Athena, which is missing from the sculptural complex as described by Choniates, is included in numerous accounts, such as that by the tenth-century Constantine the Rhodian

(870/80–post 944),¹¹³ and it is mentioned in an earlier passage from Choniates' *Diegesis*. According to Choniates, the mob destroyed the artwork because doing so was viewed as symbolizing the destruction of the city.¹¹⁴ According to Papamastorakis's reconstruction, the Judgment of Paris in its complete form would have included Athena's statue.¹¹⁵ Drawing on the Byzantine accounts, numerous art historians (including Papamastorakis) have variously tried to identify the statue with a particular type of representation of Athena (e.g., the Promachos, the Parthenos, the Lemnian/Lindian Athena, or Minerva d'Arezzo).¹¹⁶ None of these types of statuary was destined to become part of a complex sculptural composition; instead, each was displayed on its own—exactly as other Byzantine authors describe Athena as standing before the Senate in the Forum of Constantine.¹¹⁷

The anemodoulion is well attested in medieval sources. Choniates' description finds a parallel in that of Constantine the Rhodian, who included the monumental weathervane among the miracles in the city of Constantine.¹¹⁸ Both authors described a cone-like

However, I have been unable to identify the passage in question in the editions of either E. Bekker (available to Ahrweiler) or van Dielen. Justinian rebuilt the fourth-century church of the Holy Apostles and added a new mausoleum. See Constantine the Rhodian, *Ekphrasis of the Holy Apostles* 494–505, ed. I. Vassis in *Constantine of Rhodes, On Constantinople and the Church of the Holy Apostles*, ed. L. James (Farnham, 2012), 53, with commentary at 116, n. 129. See also N. Karydis, "Justinian's Church of the Holy Apostles: A New Reconstruction Proposal," in *The Holy Apostles: A Lost Monument, a Forgotten Project, and the Presentness of the Past*, ed. M. Mullett and R. G. Ousterhout, *Dumbarton Oaks Symposia and Colloquia* (Washington, DC, 2020), 99–130.

111 Stilbes, *The Errors of the Latins*, πα', ed. Darrouzès, "Le mémoire de Constantin Stilbès," 82. In his account Stilbes also mentions the sacrilege against portable precious items from the Holy Altar (e.g., chalices and patens), a detail that is omitted from Choniates' *De signis* but included in the *Diegesis*, v.D. 573.13–574.27. The ciborium of Hagia Sophia is mentioned by others, e.g., in the account of Antony of Novgorod from the year 1200. In his *Pilgrim Book*, in Slavic, the bishop of Novgorod mentions that a number of crowns (including that of Constantine the Great) were hanging above and around the Holy Altar. He further describes the ciborium: "This ciborium is decorated with silver and gold, and the altar columns and ambo are [also decorated] in silver." For a new edition of the Slavic text and English translation, see G. P. Majeska (with a commentary by C. Barber), "Antony, Archbishop of Novgorod: The Pilgrim Book," in Spingou, *The Visual Culture of Later Byzantium* (n. 95 above), 1.5.3, 1:509.

112 Casting Constantinople as the New Jerusalem was a standard feature of imperial rhetoric, especially after the tenth century. See P. Magdalino, "From 'Encyclopaedism' to 'Humanism': The Turning Point of Basil II and the Millennium," in *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between*, ed. M. D. Lauxtermann and M. Whittow (London, 2017), 6.

113 For the passage from Constantine the Rhodian, see *Ekphrasis of the Holy Apostles*, 153–62, ed. Vassis, in James, *Constantine of Rhodes*, 28–31, with commentary at 106–8, nn. 60–63.

114 v.D. 558–59.

115 Papamastorakis, "Interpreting the *De signis*" (n. 5 above), 219.

116 For the different identifications, see R. Jenkins, "The Bronze Athena at Byzantium," *JHS* 67 (1947): 31–33; idem, "Further Evidence Regarding the Bronze Athena at Byzantium," *BAS Annual* 46 (1951): 72–74; A. Linfert, "Athenen des Phidias," *Athenische Mitteilungen* 97 (1982): 57–77; E. B. Harrison, "Lemnia and Lemnos: Sidelights on a Pheidian Athena," in *Kanon: Festschrift für Ernst Berger*, ed. M. Schmidt (Basel, 1988), 101–7; A. Linfert, "Keine Athena des Phidias in Konstantinopel," *Boreas* 12 (1989): 137–40; Papamastorakis, "Interpreting the *De signis*," 219. On the different types, see C. C. Davison with the collaboration of B. Lundgreen, *Pheidias, the Sculptures & Ancient Sources*, ed. G. B. Waywell, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, Supplement 105, 3 vols. (London, 2009), esp. 2:865–66 (on Choniates' passage, although the literature review is incomplete). See also James, *Constantine of Rhodes*, 106–7, n. 61.

117 The sources are summarized and also discussed in Bassett, *The Urban Image* (n. 73 above), 188–92.

118 *Ekphrasis of the Holy Apostles*, 178–201, ed. Vassis in James, *Constantine of Rhodes*, 30–33. On Constantine the Rhodian, see L. James, "The Poet and the Poem," in idem, *Constantine of Rhodes*, 131–57. Choniates: v.D. 648.44–57. Cf. Pontani, *Grandezza e catastrofe* (n. 4 above), 644–45, n. 14. The anemodoulion is also described by Choniates in the reign of Andronikos, but that account is much briefer: see v.D. 332.35–333.44 (this passage can be found only in the *brevior* and *auctior* versions, not in LO).

bronze device, embellished with paradisiacal imagery of nature-inspired depictions and naked Erotes, and crowned by a weathercock in the shape of a winged creature/woman.¹¹⁹ Discrepancies between the two descriptions, such as the different activities performed by the Erotes, the appearance (or not) of plants and cattle, or the exact form of the weathercock (a monstrous creature or a woman), relate more to the objectives of a rhetorical ekphrasis of bucolic scenery than to the object on which the authors (probably) gazed. An ekphrasis aims to place a subject before the audience's eyes. That subject is described by a narrator who can modify the impression of the object according to individual tastes or priorities. Constantine the Rhodian describes a beautiful but static object. Choniates goes a step further, using the image to evoke antique texts and demonstrate his skills. Far from focusing on the object, the description brings to life spring-like scenery: melodious birds are singing; pipes, milk pails, sheep, and lambs bring a bucolic element to the description; and the sea and freely running fish, as well as Erotes, are playfully rendered before the mundane component is arrived at—an object demonstrating the direction of the winds. *Enargeia* (the fundamental ingredient of ekphrasis) is equally essential in Choniates' text: the fast-paced description moves coherently along the different parts, enlivening the appearance of the object before the eyes of the text's beholder.¹²⁰ Rather than concealing the intended ekphrastic function of his text; Choniates underlines the use of the ekphrastic technique by using the technical rhetorical term *poikilia*.¹²¹ Educated members of the audience (such as those in Choniates' circle) could easily associate the passage with famous ekphrases of romantic landscapes (in *Daphnis and Chloe*) and summer gardens (by

119 On the possibly factual details included in the description and a comparison with other ancient monumental weathervanes, see D. Lowe, "Twisting in the Wind: Monumental Weathervanes in Classical Antiquity," *Cambridge Classical Journal* 62 (2016): 147–69. I have recently argued that Constantine's description stems from a now-lost post-ninth-century poem on statues; see F. Spingou, "The Written Evidence," in *The Brill Companion to Constantinople*, ed. P. Magdalino, N. Asutay-Effenberger, and A. Effenberger (Leiden, forthcoming).

120 The emotional response is achieved by referring, for example, to the actions of birds (v.D. 648.47–48), sheep/lambs (v.D. 648.48–49), fish (v.D. 648.51), and cupids (v.D. 648.52–53), as well as to the landscape (*topos*, v.D. 648.49–50). On *enargeia*, see R. Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Farnham, 2009), 87–107.

121 v.D. 648.47. On *poikilia*, see below n. 145.

Philostratus the Elder).¹²² Still, his use of the imperfect (instead of the more vivid historic present) in the *De signis* makes an unmistakable statement that the description can belong only to the past.

Choniates' account does not mention all the monuments in the urban or ceremonial landscape of Komnenian Constantinople. It is also riddled with eye-catching omissions. Choniates notes the destruction of the Holy Apostles, but neither the Great Palace, which had retained its ceremonial significance in Choniates' time, nor the Blachernai Palace, the Komnenian center of political power, figures in his text. Instead, the Holy Apostles, with its mausoleum that had not been used as a burial place for the Byzantine emperors since the year 1028, is given priority, while the existence of a heroon in the Pantokrator monastery is not even acknowledged.¹²³ But the Holy Apostles was the place where the division of the former empire was decided, a factor that would have informed Choniates' decision.¹²⁴ To emphasize the imperial tradition, he mentions that the corpse of Justinian was found incorrupt, although the same is said in other sources about a much more influential emperor, Constantine the Great.¹²⁵ The offense against the church is communicated through the description of the assault against the holiest place in Constantinople: the Holy Altar in Hagia Sophia. But the plundering of the treasury of the Great Church—famous for the numerous objects found in church treasuries in the Latin West and from other accounts—is absent from the narrative in the *De signis*. Choniates remains uninterested in the columns in the fora or the wealth in buildings such as

122 For parallels in romances, see Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* 4.39; for the phrase *αἰλοὶ καὶ γαυλοὶ* (v.D. 648.48) in particular, see Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* 1.4.3.5; on Cupids and apples (and a hare), see Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines* 1.6.5.

123 C. Mango, "Sépultures et épitaphes aristocratiques à Byzance," in *Epigrafia medievale grece e latina: Ideologia e funzione*, ed. G. Cavallo and C. Mango (Spoleto, 1995), 99–117, esp. 115–16. On the Pantokrator and the Holy Apostles, see R. Ousterhout, "The Church of the Holy Apostles and Its Place in Later Byzantine Architecture," in Mullett and Ousterhout, *The Holy Apostles*, 228–33. All these monuments had survived the fires of 1203/4; see Madden, "The Fires of the Fourth Crusade" (n. 73 above), 72–93.

124 v.D. 596.33–38. The detailed description of the proceedings is missing from the LO.

125 According to the *brevior* and the *auctior* alone, the imperial tombs, and especially the tomb of Constantine the Great, were plundered by Alexios III (v.D. 479.32–38).

the Great Palace or the Blachernai Palace.¹²⁶ The statues in the fora or in the Hippodrome (discussed later) were also part of the “ancient landscape” of the city. The production of monumental statues in stone (let alone in bronze) ceased after the seventh century, and thus their presence would have been as strange to a twelfth-century Byzantine as they are to us today.¹²⁷

Describing the “ancient” landmarks of the city, Choniates creates a memory landscape—a landscape that represents a form of antiquity, a certain “pastness” that is filled with sites of symbolic meaning.¹²⁸ Each stop in the narrative is a spatial marker that allows recollection of the lost Empire. The Holy Apostles—containing the corpse of a saintly Justinian—stands for the old roots of the Byzantine *basileia*. Hagia Sophia, a great temple, is the Byzantine *archierosynē*, and the ciborium above its Holy Altar can be read as symbolizing its ability to cover its people. The fora recall the old authority (and beauty) of Byzantium,¹²⁹ and the Hippodrome—as discussed below—becomes the stage of performance for the city’s and Empire’s tradition.

The succession of scenes in Choniates’ narrative reminds one of a slow sequence of still photographs, without human actors. Each place or object acts by itself; or as Nuala C. Johnson puts it, “The stage acts more than as the context for the performance—it is the

performance itself.”¹³⁰ The inhabitants of the city are absent. The presence of the generically described Latins fades away as priority is given to objects. Choniates’ only concern is to mention that the head of the colossal statue of Hera is transferred to the Great Palace with the help of four oxen.¹³¹ No other agents are involved in that scene: only a *spolium* and four oxen. Similarly, the anemodoulion and the equestrian statue in the Forum Tauri exist in a static condition, until they are surrendered to fire by the “Latins.”¹³² Even the interpretations of the statuette under the equestrian statue are presented as distant observations from a vaguely defined past. Choniates speaks about a φήμη παλαιφατος (an old rumor) known to “everyone,” as if commenting on an intelligible scene.¹³³

The memory landscape created in the *De signis* is not a stage of performance but the performance itself. Setting aside the actual performance of the text (which would have been read aloud in gatherings of literati), I focus here on the actual content of the *De signis*. Its function as a performance is demonstrated not only by the scenes themselves but even by the lack of transitions between them. Time is rarely considered, as all events seem to float without any sense of progression or any sign of a need to anchor them at a specific date.¹³⁴ This is hardly surprising, though, as Choniates speaks about a historical trauma, and past and present times are often blurred when such events are recalled.¹³⁵ Likewise, there is no linear physical sequence. The description starts with the Holy Apostles, then jumps to Hagia Sophia, and finally moves to monuments along the Mese, the main road of Constantinople. To follow the path that Choniates suggests, one would proceed from the Holy Apostles southeast to Hagia Sophia. But the monuments placed in the fora along the Mese, the route to Hagia Sophia, are mentioned only later in the narrative. And then, after reaching the monuments placed

126 The Great Palace was heavily plundered by the crusaders. A.-M. Talbot, “The Restoration of Constantinople under Michael VIII,” *DOP* 47 (1993): 250.

127 See, e.g., B. Ward-Perkins, “The End of the Statue Habit, AD 284–620,” in *The Last Statues of Antiquity*, ed. R. R. R. Smith and B. Ward-Perkins (Oxford, 2016), 295–308.

128 Here “memory landscape” refers to a well-composed group of places or sites. My use of the term is closer to the concept of the places of memory, as defined by David Lowenthal (“Past Time, Present Place, Landscape and Memory,” *Geographical Review* 65 [1975]: 1–36), than to Pierre Nora’s notion of *lieux de mémoire* (memory sites; see, e.g., Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de mémoire*,” trans. M. Roudebush, *Representations*, no. 26 [Spring 1989]: 7–24). Lowenthal emphasizes the importance of individual imagination in the creation of a pastness that defines a material or immaterial place of memory. For Nora, imagination is also important, but he presupposes a strong division between the “historical” and the “literary” that is hardly applicable to any form of material coming from Byzantium.

129 Alicia Simpson, who discusses various references to the agora in the *Diegesis*, notes that the fora are also locations related to political propaganda: see “Narrative Images of Constantinople,” in Simpson and Efthymiadis, *Niketas Choniates* (n. 5 above), 185–208, esp. 189–95.

130 N. C. Johnson, “Locating Memory: Tracing the Trajectories of Remembrance,” *Historical Geography* 33 (2005): 173.

131 v.D. 648.39–41.

132 v.D. 649.58–59.

133 v.D. 649.68–70.

134 Time as a sign of a sequential order is mentioned only twice: first in relation to the destruction of the ciborium of Hagia Sophia (v.D. 648.32: μετ’ οὐ πολὺ), and second in reference to the destruction of Paris-Alexander and Aphrodite (v.D. 648.42: καὶ ἐπ’ αὐτῆ).

135 See, e.g., Lowenthal, “Past Time, Present Place,” 28.

further west in the Mese, the narrative leaps back to the east, to the Hippodrome.

Choniates (and his audience) was aware of these discrepancies. He had lived in that city, and he unquestionably knew it well. In the *De signis*, he re-creates Constantinople as a place of geographical imagination in order to refer to an elusive pastness: geography is central only insofar as it establishes the city's identity. The places mentioned by Choniates were familiar to him and his audience, though since the LO was written about six years after 1204, they may feel distant. His firsthand experience of these spaces makes the added details seem plausible. More statues could have stood in the Forum of Constantine and the famous statuette could have worn an extra garment. The tripartite internal division that leads the reader through the text highlights the incremental destruction of a past reality; the end of the political power of Constantinople comes with the destruction of the symbols of the imperial and ecclesiastical power, the Holy Apostles and Hagia Sophia; the destruction of its social organization is reflected in the fora, which are empty and stripped of their signs of authority; and, finally the political and cultural significance of the capital and the essence of urban life, the beauty of the city, are extinguished as fire preys upon the statues in the Hippodrome.

The Lost Beauties of the City

The discourse of beauty figures prominently in the *De signis*, but in ways that differ from the traditional and rather vague topos of the city's *kallos*.¹³⁶ Choniates instead expatiates on the destruction of the urban beauty by emphasizing key monuments from a classicizing past, thereby transforming them into symbols of the lost decorum.

The placement of these symbols is carefully chosen: they are on the Mese, the center of the capital's commercial and social activity, and at the Hippodrome, the center of its ceremonial and cultural life. Before the extensive description of the statues in the Hippodrome,

136 On the topos of the city's *kallos*, see H. Saradi, "The *Kallos* of the Byzantine City: The Development of a Rhetorical Topos and Historical Reality," *Gesta* 34.1 (1995): 37–56. She notes that "two elements underlying the medieval character of the urban centers become central in such praises: the *kallos* of the churches and the *kallos* and strength of the fortifications" (47)—elements that seem far from Choniates' descriptions.

Choniates speaks about the destruction of a group of bronze statues representing the Judgment of Paris—that is, the myth of supreme beauty :

Ἡ τε οὖν ἐν τῇ Κωνσταντινείῳ ἀγορᾷ ἰσταμένη πολύχαλκος Ἥρα κέκοπται εἰς στατήρας καὶ χωνεῖα παραδίδοται, ἥς ἡ κεφαλὴ μόγις τέτρασι βοῶν ὑποτρόχοις ζεύγμασιν ἐς τὸ μέγα παλάτιον ἀποκεκόμισται. Καὶ ἐπ' αὐτῇ ὁ Πάρις Ἀλέξανδρος τῆς βάσεως ἀνατέτραπται, συνεστῶς Ἀφροδίτη καὶ χειρίζων αὐτῇ τὸ χρύσειον μῆλον τῆς Ἐριδος.¹³⁷

So, that Hera wrought of much bronze that used to stand in the forum of Constantine was cut into coins and surrendered into a smelting furnace. Her head was carted off with great effort to the Great Palace by four yokes of oxen. After that, Paris-Alexander, who used to stand by Aphrodite and offer to her the golden apple of Discord, was toppled down from his pedestal.

The Greek word for *statue* is absent from the text.¹³⁸ Instead, all the actions are directed against the gods themselves. First, Hera, the *polychalkos* (wrought of much bronze) was cut (κέκοπται)¹³⁹ and melted down, while her head was dragged to the Great Palace. Fragmentation is one of the utmost offenses against beauty. Though the topic of unity has been little explored in relation to Byzantine Greek literature, it figures prominently in recent discussions of ancient Greek aesthetics.¹⁴⁰ Still, Choniates clearly cast the offense in relation to that aesthetic term: the body of Hera was separated from her head and the body was "cut into coins." This is not the first time that Choniates described the offense against Constantinople as the destruction of its beauty's unity. In a monody written for his brothers-in-law (discussed below), Choniates

137 v.D. 648.38–43.

138 This is not a unique omission. For example, in the second book of the *Patria* or the *Parastaseis*, the anonymous authors make a similar choice. That Choniates' text includes no other human protagonists makes the omission more important than a customary reference.

139 The verb also means "assaulted."

140 For a summary, see M. Heath, "Unity, Wholeness, and Proportion," in *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics*, ed. P. Destrée and P. Murray (Chichester, 2015), 382–92.

laments that “the beautiful city of Constantine was ‘cut’” (οὕτω κόψασθαι τὴν Κωνσταντίνου καλλιπόλιν).¹⁴¹

Then, Paris-Alexander and Aphrodite were overturned from their very foundation (τῆς βάσεως ἀναπέτραπται).¹⁴² If we read the passage allegorically, we see that beauty, as judged by Paris-Alexander and embodied by Aphrodite, has been overthrown. Athena is missing from the description, because the destruction of her statue by the mob of Constantinople was discussed earlier in Choniates’ text, where Choniates himself interprets it as an allegorical image of the destruction of prudence and courage.¹⁴³ Thus the destruction of the group of statues in a previous part of the narrative was part of an assault against beauty: first prudence and courage were destroyed, then beauty (inevitably) vanished.

The discourse of beauty continues as Choniates calls on the reader to lament the loss of the proud anemodoulion, a device (μηχάνημα) that stood at a prominent height in the city’s monumental skyline. Choniates wonders: “Who could have laid his gaze upon it and not marvel at its *poikilia*?”¹⁴⁴ *Poikilia* is a term traditionally related to the Byzantine (and broadly Hellenic) idea of beauty.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, *thauma* (wonder) is a key response to absolute beauty.¹⁴⁶

141 Niketas Choniates, *Orations* 15, ed. van Dieten, *Orationes et epistulae* (n. 63 above), 149.29. The phrase alludes to Joshua 15:16: Καὶ εἶπε Χάλεβ· ὅς ἐάν λάβῃ καὶ ἐκκόψῃ τὴν Πόλιν τῶν γραμμῶν καὶ κυριεύσῃ αὐτῆς, δώσω αὐτῷ τὴν Ἀσχάν θυγατέρα μου εἰς γυναῖκα (And Chaleb said: Whosoever shall take and destroy the city of letters [= Kirjath Sepher], and master it, I will give to him my daughter Ascha to wife).

142 The simultaneous destruction of the two statues is suggested by the use of the word *συνεστώς* (from *συνίστημι*), as it indicates their strong connection.

143 The destruction of Athena is interpreted by Choniates himself as an allegorical image of the destruction of prudence and courage. See v.D. 558.47–559.73. This point is also discussed in Papamastorakis, “Interpreting the *De signis*” (n. 5 above), 211–12. Later in his article (217), Papamastorakis presents the destruction of all the statues in general as a counterweight to the destruction of the statue of Athena (on which see 218–19).

144 v.D. 648.46–47: τίς οὐκ ἂν ὀφθαλμὸν ἐκείνων ἐπιβαλὼν τῆς ποικιλίας ἐθαύμασεν;

145 On *poikilia*, see, e.g., H. Maguire, *Nectar and Illusion: Nature in Byzantine Art and Literature* (Oxford, 2012), 130, with further references. On *poikilia* and the beauty of the cities, see Saradi, “The *Kallos* of the Byzantine City,” 45–47.

146 See, e.g., C. Hunzinger, “Wonder,” in *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics*, ed. P. Destrée and P. Murray (Chichester, 2015), 422–37.

The crusaders are also held accountable for melting down another “most beautiful artwork” (περικαλέστατον ἔργον), an equestrian statue. As mentioned above, Choniates is interested in the beauty of the work rather than in its identification with a particular hero from the Old Testament or Greek mythology. Again, the rider and the horse are understood to be real, and Choniates does not speak of them as “statues.”

At the beginning of the description of the statues in the Hippodrome he uses the term *ἄγαλμα*, which, like *ἀνδριάς*, can signify a statue.¹⁴⁷ The word *agalma* is readily related to beauty,¹⁴⁸ and this association of the statues with the discourse of beauty in Choniates’ text is clear:

Ἄλλ’ οὐδὲ τῶν ἐν τῷ ἵππικῷ ἰσταμένων ἀγαλμάτων καὶ ἀλλοίων θαυμαστῶν ἔργων τὴν καταστροφὴν παρήκαν οἱ τοῦ καλοῦ ἀνέραστοι οὗτοι βάρβαροι, ἀλλὰ καὶ ταῦτα κεκόφασιν εἰς νόμισμα, ἀνταλλασσόμενοι μικρῶν τὰ μεγάλα καὶ τὰ δαπάναις πονηθέντα μεγίσταις οὐτιδανῶν ἀντιδιδόντες κερμάτων.¹⁴⁹

And those barbarians who are unable to feel any affection for beauty did not fail to destroy also the *agalmata* [statues] and other similar marvelous works that stood in the Hippodrome. Instead they cut these also into coins, exchanging the significant for the insignificant ones, and replacing things made at great expense with worthless pocket change.

From the very beginning, the *agalmata* are involved in a discourse of beauty, and an appreciation for

147 For *ἀνδριάς*, see v.D. 648.36. Cf. the discussion in Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos* (n. 76 above), 179–81.

148 E.g., Nikephoros Basilakes speaks about “the emperor similar to the sun, the *agalma* of beauty” (ὁ ἡλιοειδὴς βασιλεὺς τὸ τῆς ὀρειότητος ἄγαλμα); see J. Beneker and C. Gibson, *The Rhetorical Exercises of Nikephoros Basilakes: Progymnasmata from Twelfth-Century Byzantium*, DOML, Greek text with facing English translation (Cambridge, MA, 2016), *Orations*, E, 119. Cf. *ἄγαλμα τοῦ Θεοῦ περικαλλὲς ἑαυτὸν περὶ τὸν χθόνιον τοῦτον χώρον εἰργάσατο; Progymnasma* 24.42, ed. A. Pignani, *Niceforo Basilace: Progimnasmie monodie*, Byzantina et neo-hellenica neapolitana 10 (Naples, 1983). The association cannot be called Byzantine, as it was common from classical antiquity on; see, e.g., D. Konstan, *Beauty: The Fortunes of an Ancient Greek Idea* (Oxford, 2014), 21–22.

149 v.D. 649.79–81.

art.¹⁵⁰ Such an aesthetic reading of the statues (instead of a more literary interpretation) was not unheard of in a post-Psellian intellectual world. In a number of texts, including some from the eighth or ninth century, such as the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikoi* (*Brief Historical Notes*), statues are bewitched or can reveal the future;¹⁵¹ but in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the agalmata often provided an occasion for a learned discourse on Hellenic paideia.¹⁵² By avoiding descriptions of statues, Choniates may not be comparing himself to a statue (as did Psellos, according to the magisterial analysis of Stratis Papaioannou), but he creates via symbols an image of what he misses the most: the beauty of *his* Constantinople.

The Statues and the Empire

The symbolic discourse of the destruction of Constantinople continues in the last part of the *De signis*: the destruction of the statues in the Hippodrome. The Constantinopolitan Hippodrome, a place representing Byzantium's civic tradition as well as a place of public entertainment and official political display,¹⁵³ is indeed the most appropriate place to talk about

150 Cf. S. Papaioannou, "The Byzantine Late Antiquity," in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. P. Rousseau, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Chichester, 2009), 26.

151 The significance of the *Parastaseis* has recently been vigorously debated. For Averil Cameron and Judith Herrin (*Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai* [Leiden, 1984]), the *Parastaseis* records local "history." Alexander Kazhdan ("Constantin imaginaire": Byzantine Legends of the Ninth Century about Constantine the Great," *Byzantion* 57 [1987]: 196–250, esp. 250) understands the text as a parody. More recently, Benjamin Anderson ("Classified Knowledge: The Epistemology of Statuary in the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*," *BMGS* 35 [2011]: 1–19) sees the text as a symbol of elite knowledge available only to a privileged Constantinopolitan class. See also P. Odorico, "Du recueil à l'invention du texte: Le cas des *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*," *BZ* 107 (2014): 755–84, who underlines the importance of its manuscript context in understanding the work itself. On apocalyptic traditions related to statuary, see A. Berger, "Magical Constantinople: Statues, Legends, and the End of Time," *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2 (2016): 9–29 (with further bibliography).

152 On this point, see Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*, 179–91.

153 See P. Magdalino, "Medieval Constantinople," in his *Studies on the History and Topography of Byzantine Constantinople*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot, 2006), study I, 42–43, n. 151, and 103, for the continuous use of the Hippodrome (with reference to previous contributions). Manuel Chrysoloras, in his famous *Synkrisis* between Rome and Constantinople, notes that the statues' pedestals had remained in the Hippodrome (and elsewhere); see Billò,

the Empire. Twelfth-century emperors held games in the Hippodrome to impress diplomatic visitors or to celebrate events such as military victories and royal weddings.¹⁵⁴ It was traditionally the place where the "palace" met the people and the emperor was praised or condemned.¹⁵⁵ And indeed its appearance and liveliness so impressed foreign visitors that it featured prominently in their accounts of the city written in Arabic, Hebrew, Old Norse, and Slavic.¹⁵⁶

Choniates, well aware of the significance of the place, carefully chooses the statues he decides to mention. For him, these statues are not enchanted, but they

"Manuele Crisolora," 20.36–38; Smith, *Architecture in the Culture of Early Humanism*, 210.

154 P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge, 1993), 111, 239. On games in the Hippodrome to celebrate imperial victories, see *ibid.*, 241, 485. The Hippodrome was used on different occasions to celebrate events related to the imperial line of the Komnenoi, including the simultaneous betrothal of Alexios II and Agnes of France, and the wedding of Maria Komnene (daughter of Manuel I) and Renier de Montferrat in 1180: see Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Λόγος ἐπὶ τοῖς θαυρακοῖς δημοτελέσει τραπέζωμασιν, ὅτε τῶν βασιλικῶν παιδῶν ἐτελοῦντο οἱ γάμοι*, ed. P. Wirth, *Eustathii Thessalonicensis: Opera Minora*, CFHB 32 (Berlin, 2000), oration 10, 170–81, esp. 171–72, also described in William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done beyond the Sea*, trans. E. A. Babcock and A. C. Krey, 2 vols. (New York, 1943), 2:450–51. Cf. Magdalino, *Manuel*, 244–45.

155 On this aspect of the Hippodrome, see Simpson, "Narrative Images" (n. 129 above), 195–204.

156 See, e.g., for Arabic, the account of al-Harawī (as quoted above; see n. 95); for Hebrew, Benjamin of Tudela (second half of the twelfth century), translation and discussion by L. Mordechai, "Benjamin of Tudela's Travels," in Spingou, *The Visual Culture of Later Byzantium* (n. 95 above), I.5.6, 1:553–59; for Old Norse, see S. Ashley, "Seeing the Spaces of Byzantium in Icelandic Saga: Heimskringla and Morkinskinna," in *ibid.*, I.5.7, 1:562–73. Scenes from the Constantinopolitan Hippodrome were also depicted in Saint Sophia in Kiev: see R. Romanchuk et al., "Ekphrasis of Hippodrome Scenes: Cathedral of St. Sophia in Kiev," in *ibid.*, I.5.8, 1:574–94. On the impression made on the middle Byzantine spectators by the games in the Hippodrome, see, e.g., the excerpts quoted in A.-M. Talbot, "The Lure of the Hippodrome in the Middle Byzantine Era," in Pitarakis, *Hippodrome / Atmeydam* (n. 73 above), 65–68. The statues in the Hippodrome are mentioned as a group by Robert de Clari, who appreciates their beauty but perceives them to be enchanted objects. See Robert de Clari, *La conquête de Constantinople*, ed. Dufournet (n. 105 above), par. XC, 180–81, a passage discussed in Berger, "Magical Constantinople," 22, and P. Schreiner, "Robert de Clari und Konstantinopel," *Novum millennium: Studies in Byzantine History and Culture Dedicated to Paul Speck*, ed. C. Sode and S. A. Takács (Aldershot, 2001), 337–56, esp. 348. See also Magdalino, "Medieval Constantinople," 95, for an earlier effort of an Italian merchant to carry off a bronze statue from the Hippodrome.

have risen to the level of metaphor, reflecting the identity of the city and the Empire. The general framework in which Choniates composes his work is that of history (not letters or oratory), and so he registers interpretations of the monumental environment by quoting earlier texts, without necessarily concurring with them.¹⁵⁷ For the statues of the Hippodrome, however, Choniates offers supplementary interpretations, effectively emphasizing their function as symbols. Where his explanations are missing, modern scholars have provided educated and plausible guesses. As Titos Papamastorakis has discussed most of the symbolic references to statues,¹⁵⁸ my account here will be rather short.

Choniates interprets the seated statue of Heracles resting after having cleaned the Augean stables, a work of “Lysimachos” (i.e., Lysippus), as an emblem of courage.¹⁵⁹ The medieval author says that for that reason, Heracles could not have been removed by “these people who separate courage from its fellow virtues, appropriating it for themselves and using it in a superfluous manner.”¹⁶⁰ He subsequently explains that the statue of Nikon and the donkey is a monument memorializing the battle at Actium, and the beginning of the Pax Romana.¹⁶¹ According (as always) to Choniates, the Hyena (of Antioch)¹⁶² and the She-Wolf (of Rome) together fed Romulus and Remus, and so they represent the “ancient dignity [σεμνώματα] of the nation [γένος].”¹⁶³

157 A. Cutler, “The *De Signis* of Nicetas Choniates: A Reappraisal,” *AJA* 72.2 (April 1968): 117; H. Saradi, “Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries,” *DOP* 44 (1990): 47–61, esp. 57.

158 Papamastorakis, “Interpreting the *De signis*” (n. 5 above), 214–22.

159 v.D. 649.84–650.9. Papamastorakis, “Interpreting the *De signis*,” 214–15. See also H. Saradi, “Perceptions and Literary Interpretations of Statues and the Image of Constantinople,” *Βυζαντιακά* 20 (2000): 66–73, esp. 68; A. Cutler, “Herakles and the Hippodrome of Constantinople,” in Pitarakis, *Hippodrome / Atmeydanı*, 206–11.

160 v.D. 650.7–9: [τοιούτων ὄντα] τὸν Ἡρακλῆν οὐ παρήλθον ἀκαθαίρετον οἱ τὴν ἀνδρείαν τῶν συννόμων ἀρετῶν διστῶντες καὶ αὐτήν ἑαυτοῖς οἰκειοῦντες καὶ περὶ πλείστου τιθέμενοι. Cf. Papamastorakis, “Interpreting the *De signis*,” 215. Discussed in detail by Chatterjee, “Sculpted Eloquence” (n. 8 above), 397–99. Cf. Cameron and Herrin, *The Parastaseis*, 210–15.

161 v.D. 650.10–16. Cf. Cameron and Herrin, *The Parastaseis*, 258. See also G. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire: Études sur le recueil des “Patria,”* Bibliothèque Byzantine—Études 8 (Paris, 1984), 118, n. 73.

162 Choniates does not mention its provenance.

163 v.D. 650.20–651.13. Papamastorakis, “Interpreting the *De signis*,” 215; Saradi, “Perceptions and Literary Interpretations,” 68.

He then describes, but does not interpret, a Nilotic animal and an elephant, statues of sphinxes, and the statue of Scylla. Choniates calls them simply *καινά* (“weird,” not necessarily “novel”), but he does not use the word judgmentally. He does not charge them with being odd or demonic; he observes their uniqueness, which is also related to their different provenance.¹⁶⁴ Although Choniates does not directly interpret them, perhaps the presence of these statues was intended to demonstrate the glorious expansion of the Empire (even if those days were long gone in the twelfth century).

The next point in the description of the statues is the technical sophistication implied in a paragraph devoted to the sundial of Apollonius of Tyana. Choniates calls it *καὶνὸν μεθόδευμα*, this time using the adjective positively in the phrase “a wondrous craft.”¹⁶⁵ The sundial had the form of a sculptural complex depicting an eagle fighting against a snake. After admiring the beauty of the artwork, Choniates vividly renders in an ekphrasis the brutal battle between animals. It recalls a comparable scene rendered at the close of the description of the Hippodrome’s destruction. There it is the statue of Helen (discussed in detail in the following section of this article) to which the longest part of the description is dedicated.¹⁶⁶

Nike (the personification of victory), with an equestrian figure at her hand, is also described in half a paragraph.¹⁶⁷ The statue of Nike is praised for its approachability; that of the equestrian figure, for its appearance of strength and readiness for battle. In a modern metaphorical reading, this group of statues may evoke the military success of the Empire.¹⁶⁸ The statues of the charioteers are then fully described. Their

164 Cf. H. Maguire, “The Profane Aesthetics in Byzantine Art and Literature,” *DOP* 53 (1999): 189–205, esp. 196. On the various interpretations of the Scylla complex, see Berger, “Magical Constantinople,” 19–21, and P. Stephenson, “The Skylla Group in Constantinople’s Hippodrome,” *ZRVI* 50 (2013): 65–74.

165 v.D. 651.32–57. Papamastorakis, “Interpreting the *De signis*,” 215–16; Saradi, “Perceptions and Literary Interpretations,” 68–69. Also discussed in H. Maguire, “Profane Icons: The Significance of Animal Violence in Byzantine Art,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 38 (Autumn 2000): 18–33, esp. 27. John Malalas and the *Patria* refer to more works as creations of Apollonius of Tyana; see Berger, “Magical Constantinople,” 13.

166 v.D. 652.58–653.4.

167 v.D. 653.6–16.

168 Papamastorakis, “Interpreting the *De signis*,” 214–5.

presence is certainly expected in the place where they stand, the Hippodrome.¹⁶⁹ Finally, Choniates describes wild beasts fighting each other.¹⁷⁰ Titos Papamastorakis has connected the description to previous passages in the *Diegesis* that are related to animal fighting. He has ingeniously interpreted this complex of statues as “a metaphor that relates to the consequences of the fall of Constantinople, reflects the present conditions of the empire, and looks forward to the future with optimism.”¹⁷¹

The symbolic function of the statues in the Hippodrome fits in the broader picture of the *De signis* painted in this section. To understand the *De signis*, we should treat it as a narrative of a memory landscape meticulously created through the selection and collection of ancient symbols. These monuments and public spaces date from at least five hundred years before the composition of the *De signis*, while anything erected in the twelfth century (or even the tenth or eleventh century) has been simply left out. The careful assemblage of symbols results in a unified whole projecting the loss of political power, social cohesion, and cultural sophistication. Faced with these losses, Choniates finds refuge in an array of statues enforcing a discourse of an aesthetic classicism. He is not interested in claiming or arguing for historical continuity. Living in a pre-Winkelman world, Choniates mixes images derived from classical, Hellenistic, imperial, and late antique literature. What these texts have in common is that all were written in Greek (Choniates’ language) and all come from a distant past revered by Choniates’ peers. The malleability of this aesthetic classicism makes the *De signis* a unique masterpiece of world literature, which appropriately culminates in discourse about one of the most recognized symbols of sublime beauty: Helen of Troy.

The Beauty of Helen of Troy

The narrative of the destruction of the statues in the Hippodrome (as well as the narrative of the entire *De signis*) reaches a climax with the ekphrasis of the statue of Helen of Troy. The reference to the statue is the most extensive and emotive in this part of the LO. Choniates

expresses his longing for a highly eroticized heroine and his revulsion at the “illiterate barbarians,” whose ignorance results in the destruction of perfect beauty. The presence of Helen’s statue in the Hippodrome is not attested in any other source. For that reason, Tony Cutler (who was followed by Titos Papamastorakis) identified the statue with that of Aphrodite, Helen’s divine counterpart.¹⁷² However, the existence of Aphrodite’s statue likewise lacks documentation. Be that as it may, the exact identification of the statue is of little importance. As argued above, the degree to which the lines of the *De signis*, a literary appendix to the LO, capture reality is uncertain. Instead, the *De signis* is a series of ekphrases that create a metaphorical discourse and emotional narrative of the dire results of the sack of Constantinople.

In this article’s previous section, I discussed such metaphorical appreciations of most of the monuments featured in the landscape of memory created by Choniates. Here I focus on the culmination of the account—the destruction of the statue of Helen of Troy—arguing that the ekphrasis is the author’s personal expression of pain for the loss of Constantinople’s beauty and of anger against all those (whether the crusaders or Choniates’ fellow Byzantines) who are unable to appreciate that beauty in terms of an aesthetic classicism. This section is divided into three parts. The first points to the creative reuse of classical Roman and Greek texts in the description of Choniates’ Helen. I argue that rather than trying to imitate in his narrative a specific “version” of the legendary heroine, Choniates created his own Helen by mixing stories and words from the Byzantine classics. The second section argues that Choniates’ Helen stands for the beauty of Constantinople. The connection is established with the help of parallel passages from the *History*, Choniates’ orations, and his marginal notes on Diodorus’s *Library*.

172 Cutler (“The *De Signis* of Nicetas Choniates” [n. 157 above], 118) tentatively suggests the identification of the statue with that of Venus Genetrix; see also Papamastorakis, “Interpreting the *De signis*,” 222. For the statues standing in the Hippodrome in general, see, e.g., Bassett, *The Urban Image* (n. 73 above), 58–67, 212–32; cf. the brief catalogue in Bardill, “The Monuments and the Decoration of the Hippodrome” (n. 73 above), 179–82. The statue of Heracles is also mentioned elsewhere in the *auctior* and *brevior* versions (v.D. 519.35–520.55). Cf. Papamastorakis, “Interpreting the *De signis*,” 211, n. 4; Cutler, “Herakles,” 210, mentions a later attestation of a bronze statue of Heracles but assures the reader that this is not the same statue as the one recorded by Choniates.

169 v.D. 653.17–25.

170 v.D. 653.26–655.65.

171 Papamastorakis, “Interpreting the *De signis*,” 217. This interpretation was further developed by Chatterjee, “Sculpted Eloquence,” 400–401.

This part also explores the strong emotional response of our literatus to what he understands as a debasement of the cultural life of his city. The final part, after noting the close affinity between Choniates' *De signis* and Isocrates' *Encomion on Helen*, discusses the account's ideological aims.

Constructing Helen

Numerous authors since archaic times and classical antiquity have elaborated on the mythical character of Helen of Troy. Living and working in the twelfth century CE, Choniates joins that polyphonic choir praising (and fearing) the beauties of Helen. The fact that Choniates refers to a statue is of little importance. He molds the character (*ēthos*, in rhetorical terms) and beauty (*kallos*) of his heroine in a way with no exact parallel in any other sources, Byzantine or not.¹⁷³ Our author employs an amalgam of stories and words from the Byzantine classics to create his own vision of a Helen who may never have existed. The very first lines of the description set the tone for the rest of the narrative:

Τί δὲ ἡ λευκώλενος Ἑλένη καλλίσφυρός τε καὶ
δολιχόδαιρος, ἡ τὸ Πανελλήνιον ἐς Τροίαν ἀθροί-
σασα καὶ καθελούσα Τροίαν, ἐκ δὲ ταύτης προσο-
κειλασα Νεῖλω κάκειθεν αὖθις ἐς ἦθη τὰ Λακῶνων
ἐπανάλυσασα χρόνιος; ἄρ' ἐμείλιξε τοὺς δυσμελί-
κτους; ἄρ' ἐμάθαλξε τοὺς σιδηρόφρονας;¹⁷⁴

What about the white-armed Helen, with the beautiful ankles and the long neck, she who gathered the Panhellenion to Troy and she who destroyed Troy, from where she came ashore

173 To my knowledge, there is no systematic study of Helen of Troy in Byzantine literature. For a first review of some of the relevant references, see the standard article of E. Jeffreys, "The Judgment of Paris in Later Byzantine Literature," *Byzantion* 48.1 (1978): 112–30. On Helen of Troy in the Palaiologan romance *War of Troy*, see, in the volume *Reading the Late Byzantine Romance: A Handbook*, ed. A. J. Goldwyn and I. Nilsson (Cambridge, 2019), Goldwyn and Nilsson, "An Introduction to the Palaiologan Romance: Narrating the Vernacular" (1–18); Goldwyn and Nilsson, "Troy in Byzantine Romances: Homeric Reception in *Digenis Akritis*, the *Tale of Achilles* and the *Tale of Troy*" (188–210); and S. Constantinou, "Homosocial Desire in the *War of Troy*: Between (Wo)men" (254–71). On the reception of the figure of Helen of Troy in general, see L. Maguire, *Helen of Troy from Homer to Hollywood* (Maiden, MA, 2009), and M. Gumpert, *Grafting Helen: The Abduction of the Classical Past* (Madison, WI, 2001).

174 v.D. 652.58–62.

at the Nile and from there she returned to the accustomed lands of the Laconians after many years? Did she not placate the implacable? Did she not soften those with iron hearts?

Choniates mixes and matches his sources. The character (*ēthos*) of Choniates' Helen is nearly exclusively Homeric. She is the disarming beauty of the third and sixth books of the *Iliad*. She is the seductive reason on account of which the Hellenes were united and, subsequently, they attacked and destroyed Troy.¹⁷⁵ Choniates' Helen is also the faithful wife in the *Odyssey*'s fourth book. Our author re-creates the relatively obscure story of the adventurous return of Menelaus (and Helen from Troy) to Sparta and their unfortunate diversion to Egypt. For Stesichorus, Herodotus, and Euripides, Helen arrived in Egypt together with Paris-Alexander after the two left Sparta, causing the interference of Proteus and halting Helen's journey to Troy. In the *Odyssey*'s account, however, Helen appears in Egypt after the end of the Trojan War. The fourth book of the *Odyssey* concerns the visit of Telemachus, Odysseus's son, to the palace of the Spartan king—Helen's husband, Menelaus. On the second day of Telemachus's visit, Menelaus narrates his vicissitudes on his return home from Troy, including a tempest that caused his boats to come ashore on the island of Pharos, near Egypt. Upon capturing the mythical Proteus, the form-changing sea-god, Menelaus learned that he needed to offer sacrifices to the gods in order to return safely to Sparta. To complete the demanded offerings, Menelaus had to go to Egypt.¹⁷⁶ The reader of the *Odyssey* is aware that the Hellenes won the war, that Helen was at some point in Egypt (where she acquired enchanting drugs),¹⁷⁷ and that she resides in Sparta with Menelaus, but the poem nowhere explicitly mentions her presence in Egypt together with Menelaus.

175 The bibliography on Helen of Troy in the Homeric epics is vast. See L. L. Clader, *Helen: The Evolution from Divine to Heroic in the Greek Epic* (Leiden, 1976); M. Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference, and the Epic* (Ithaca, NY, 1989); N. Austin, *Helen of Troy and Her Shameless Phantom* (Ithaca, NY, 1994); and—the most recent and useful, especially to a general readership (although with analysis that includes a number of original observations and arguments)—R. Blondell, *Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation* (Oxford, 2013).

176 Homer, *Odyssey* 4.351–480.

177 Homer, *Odyssey* 4.227–232. Cf. Choniates, v.D. 652.77–78.

The commentary (*parekbolai*) on the *Odyssey* by Eustathios of Thessaloniki (ca. 1115–1195), however, clears up discrepancies between the summary of the story in Choniates' *De signis* and the text of the *Odyssey*. Choniates, for example, says that Helen came ashore at the mouth of the Nile, while according to the *Odyssey*, Menelaus's ships came ashore at the island of Pharos, which "was well off the Egyptian coast."¹⁷⁸ Eustathios explains that the story of Pharos is an additional enrichment to the narrative. In fact, he argues, the winds directed Menelaus "to the *Egypton*—that is, to the Nile" (εἰς τὸν Αἴγυπτον ὃ ἔστιν εἰς τὸν Νεῖλον).¹⁷⁹ The medieval scholiast also places unwavering trust in the Homeric version of Helen in Egypt—that is, that she arrived in Egypt after the Trojan War. Commenting on Helen's possession of Egyptian drugs, Eustathios marginalizes the Herodotian version of the story, according to which Helen did not go to Troy but remained in Egypt, by stating that "Herodotus is of the opinion that Helen was not at Troy, as it is said by other [authors]."¹⁸⁰ The phrase "[Herodotus] is of the opinion" (ἀρέσκειται) is derogatory, as it implies that Herodotus is expressing a personal view, backed by no authority or evidence.

The connection between this passage from the *De signis* and Eustathios's commentary is far from casual or accidental. Michael Choniates, the brother of Niketas Choniates, was a student and a close friend of Eustathios.¹⁸¹ Eustathios states that he composed his *Parekbolai* (a form of commentary) on classical

poetry at the request of his students.¹⁸² Although it is unclear whether Michael (together with his brother?) was included among the petitioners, it is certainly not impossible that he (or both?) had access to Eustathios's commentaries, which were circulated among Eustathios's students for at least twenty years.¹⁸³ The exact relationship between the *Diegesis* and Eustathios's Homeric *Parekbolai* can be established only with a detailed analysis of the textual parallels, which would exceed the scope and aims of this article. But the above discussion demonstrates the close affinities in how the *Odyssey* was received in the writings of authors belonging to the same social network.¹⁸⁴

The final sentence of the passage quoted above speaks of Helen's power to pacify even the most enraged soul. How Choniates came to this observation is unclear. Perhaps he drew this conclusion himself, as Helen in the *Odyssey* appears to have completely reconciled with her husband Menelaus. Perhaps he refers to the enchanting drug that she possesses in the *Odyssey*. But he could have drawn from other sources. According to Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, Menelaus was about to kill Helen, but upon seeing her naked breasts he dropped his sword.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, what follows in Choniates' text is a description of Helen's erotic beauty; thus, although it is hard to prove direct links between the two texts, their similarity cannot be ignored.

Helen's beauty (*kallos*) is introduced with three key Homeric words: λευκώλενος (with white arms), καλλισφυρος (with beautiful ankles), and δολιχόδειρος (with long neck). The epithet λευκώλενος is a standard Homeric characterization of a beautiful woman; it is applied at least once to Helen in the *Iliad*.¹⁸⁶ But

178 Homer, *Odyssey* 4.354–55, ed. T. W. Allen, *Homeri Ilias*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1931): νῆσος ἔπειτά τις ἔστι πολυκλύστῳ ἐνὶ πόντῳ / Αἴγυπτον προσπάρειθεν, Φάρον δὲ ἐκυκλήσκουσι.

179 Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Commentary on the Odyssey*, ed. J. G. Stallbaum, *Eustathii archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis commentarii ad Homerum Odysseam*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1825; repr. Hildesheim, 1970), 1:169. Eric Cullhed's new edition is not yet complete.

180 ἀρέσκειται γὰρ Ἡρόδοτος, μὴ εἶναι τὴν Ἑλένην ἐν τῇ Τροίᾳ, ὡς καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις εἴρηται. Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Commentary on the Odyssey*, ed. Stallbaum, 1:162.9–10. Compare to that the lukewarm reception of the Homeric version in Ioannes Tzetzes, *Chiliades*, chilia 6, history 76, 731–55, ed. P. L. M. Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzae historiae* (Naples, 1968).

181 On the relationship between the two men, see G. Stadtmüller, "Michael Choniates: Metropolit von Athen," *OC* 33.2 (1934): 140 [18]–143 [21], and F. Ch. Kolovou, *Μιχαὴλ Χωνιάτης: Συμβολὴ στὴ μελέτη τοῦ βίου καὶ τοῦ ἔργου του: Τὸ κορπὺς τῶν ἐπιστολῶν*, Πονήματα 2 (Athens, 1999), 107–11.

182 Different versions of the *Parekbolai* circulated between 1156 and 1175/6, and possibly until 1190. Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, ed. Cullhed (n. 98 above), 4*–9*.

183 Discussed in *ibid.*, 9*–11*.

184 The reader should also consult N. Gaul, "Andronikos Komnenos, Prinz Belthandros und der Zyklus: Zwei Glossen zu Niketas Choniates' *Χρονικὴ διήγησις*," *BZ* 96.2 (2003): 623–60, who finds parallels between Choniates' *Diegesis* and texts by Eustathios in the reception of the Homeric text and the judgments on Andronikos Komnenos. Apostolos Karpozilos (*Βυζαντινοὶ ἱστορικοὶ καὶ χρονολογῶν: Τόμος Γ'*, 683 [n. 11 above]) also notes that Niketas Choniates had direct access to Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Capture of Thessaloniki*.

185 Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 155–56; for a discussion of the passage, see, e.g., Maguire, *Helen*, 52–55.

186 Homer, *Iliad* 3.121.

though the other two epithets are Homeric, they are used to describe Helen only by Choniates. In the epic, *καλλίσφυρος* is reserved for Marpessa, Danae, Hebe, and Ino; *δουλιχόδειρος*, for swans and cranes. In fact, the excerpt of the *De signis* is the second place where our author uses the same epithets. Choniates names Helen *καλλίσφυρος* and *δουλιχόδειρος* in a passage from the *brevior* (also in the *auctior*), in which he compares the beauty of Mary of Antioch, the second wife of Manuel I Komnenos, to that of Homer's heroine.¹⁸⁷ If *καλλίσφυρος* can describe any beautiful woman, as Eustathios also suggests,¹⁸⁸ the rather rare *δουλιχόδειρος*/*δουλιχόδειρος* was used similarly.¹⁸⁹ Choniates employs the same epithet to describe the statue of Athena before the Constantinopolitan mob destroyed it in 1203.¹⁹⁰

In what follows, the beauty of Helen is further detailed in words drawn from other rhetorical elaborations. Choniates' description reads:

... οὐμενοῦν οὐδ' ἔλωσ τοιοῦτόν τι δεδύνηται ἢ πάντα θεατὴν τῷ κάλλει δουλαγωγήσασα, καίπερ ἔστολισμένη θεατρικῶς καὶ δροσώδης ὀρωμένη κἂν τῷ χαλκῷ καὶ ὑγραιομένη πρὸς ἔρωτα τῷ χιτῶνι, τῷ κρηδέμνω, τῇ στεφάνῃ καὶ τῷ πλοχμῷ τῶν τριχῶν· ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἀραχνίων λεπτότερος ἦν, τὸ δὲ δαιδάλεον¹⁹¹ ἐπανεκέιτο, ἢ δὲ διέδει τοῦ μέτωπον χρυσοῦ καὶ τιμαλφῶν λίθων ὑποκρινομένη διαύγειαν, ὁ δὲ τῆς κόμης κεχυμένον καὶ διασοβούμενον πνεύμασιν ὀπισθίω δεσμεύματι περιέσφιγγεν ἕως κνημῶν ἐκτεινόμενον. ἦν δὲ καὶ τὰ χειλῆ καλύκων¹⁹² δίκην ἡρέμα παρανοιγόμενα, ὡς καὶ

δοκεῖν ἀφιέναι φωνήν· τὸ δὲ χάριεν μειδιάμα¹⁹³ εὐθέως προσυπαντῶν καὶ χαρμονῆς πιμπλῶν τὸν θεώμενον καὶ τὸ τοῦ βλέμματος χαροπὸν καὶ τὰς ἀψίδας τῶν ὀφρύων¹⁹⁴ καὶ τὴν λοιπὴν εὐφυῖαν τοῦ σώματος οὐκ ἦν, ὅποια ἦν, διαγράψαι λόγῳ καὶ παραστήσαι τοῖς ἔπειτα.¹⁹⁵

... She was totally unable to do such a thing [soften those with iron hearts], she who had enslaved every spectator [*theatēn*] with her beauty, even though she appeared in a theatrical manner [*theatrikōs*], and she was seen fresh, even in bronze, and she appeared moist for love with her garment,¹⁹⁶ veil, crown, and the braid of hair. Her garment was finer than a spider web, and her veil was masterfully¹⁹⁷ moving; her crown adorned her forehead playing with the translucency of gold and precious stones, and her braid of hair that extended down to her knees, flowing down and blowing in the breeze, was bound tightly in the back with a hairband. The lips like rose cups, parted as though she were about to speak; the graceful smile, at once greeting the spectator and filling him with delight; it is not possible to put accurately in words and describe for the future generations the power of her gaze, the arches of her eyebrows, and the rest of the beautiful form of her body.¹⁹⁸

In Homer, the beauty of Helen remains elusive, as she is never described in detail. She is only briefly praised for her white arms, her beautiful hair, and her long gown.¹⁹⁹ Choniates elaborates on these aspects of the beauty of his Helen with words and metaphors borrowed from the Byzantine classics, including not only the words of Homer, Aeschylus, and the like but also those of authors of the Second Sophistic and later. As

187 v.D. 116.64. The epithet *λευκώλενος* is also used in the same passage (v.D. 116.63), but it is applied to Hera.

188 Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Commentary on the Iliad*, ed. M. van der Valk, *Eustathii archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1971–76), 2:809: *καλλίσφυρος, καθὰ καὶ ἀλλαχοῦ ἐρρέθη, γυναικός ἐστι κυρίως ἔπαινος, ὡς Ἀργυρόπεζα.*

189 Eustathios, *Commentary on the Iliad*, 1:387–88, simply explains the meaning of the word without suggesting alternative uses.

190 v.D. 559.57.

191 Oppianus, *Cynegyтика* 3.346–47.

192 Ps. Libanius, *Description 30: On Beauty*, text and translation in C. A. Gibson, *Libanius's Progyrnasmata: Model Exercises in Greek Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta, 2008), 503–7, esp. paras. 12, 14. Cf. Achilles Tatius, *Leukippe and Kleitophon* 1.4. The topos was frequently repeated in the twelfth century: see Nikephoros Basilakes, *Progyrnasmata* 47.7, or George Tornikes, *Orations* 14, in J. Darrouzès, *Georges et Démétrios Tornikès: Lettres et discours*, Le monde byzantine (Paris, 1970), 2.47, lines 19–20.

193 Cf. Ps. Libanius, ed. Gibson: *καλὸν ὄμμα προσμειδιῶν.*

194 Cf. Ps. Libanius, ed. Gibson: *ὀφρῶν ἐλικοειδῆ τὴν ἀψίδα περιτορνεύουσαν.*

195 v.D. 652.62–74.

196 Alternative translation: “and there was sexual fluidity in her gown.”

197 Or “in the manner of the crafts of Daedalus.”

198 Trans. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, 360 (n. 1 above; adapted).

199 For her arms, see, e.g., Homer, *Odyssey* 22.227; for her hair, Homer, *Odyssey* 15.58; and for her gown, *Odyssey* 7.280.

these parallels are not reflected in van Dieten's apparatus fontium (composed before the TLG provided convenient access to them), it is worth mentioning at least a few of them.²⁰⁰ The provocative description of the moist bronze and of an image on the verge of moving finds parallels in the description of statues by Callistratus (ca. third or fourth century CE).²⁰¹ The thin garment is similar to that worn by Andromeda in an image described in Achilles Tatius, *Leukippe and Kleitophon* (first or second century CE).²⁰² Helen's flower-like lips, carefully arranged hair, smile, and eyebrows are that of Tatius's heroine Leukippe as she was imagined in an anonymous ekphrasis on beauty from the school of Gaza (attributed to Libanius). In addition, the sexuality conveyed by a bronze statue of Helen and the sensual fluidity of an eroticized statue are praised in epigrams from the second book of the *Greek Anthology*.²⁰³ An expanded list of parallels would simply confirm the same conclusion: the beauty of Choniates' Helen is a carefully assembled mosaic made of words and images borrowed from a long rhetorical tradition.

The use of these sources is anything but surprising for an author living in what has been often described as "the century of Homer." As modern scholarship fails to systematically acknowledge the influence of Hellenistic and imperial Greek literature, such a designation might be an exaggeration. Nonetheless, it captures the

seriousness of the interest in Homer in the twelfth century.²⁰⁴ Moreover, the scholars of the twelfth century showed a renewed interest in the works of the Second Sophistic. Callistratus's *Descriptions* is known to have been read and used since the middle of the eleventh century. Ancient novels were not only read in the twelfth century but also imitated.²⁰⁵

Choniates' Helen may well be a collage of literary sources, yet her composition fits her surroundings, the Hippodrome.²⁰⁶ As discussed above, the Hippodrome remained in the twelfth century a lively place of public display, in effect Constantinople's public

200 Van Dieten's edition of Choniates' *Orations and Letters* (n. 63 above) has the same shortcoming. For additions to the apparatus fontium, see D. Chrestides, "Αναμνήσεις από αρχαία κείμενα στους λόγους και στις επιστολές του Νικήτα Χωνιάτη," *Ελληνικά* 49.1 (1999): 25–44. See also idem, "Ο Κώος ποιητής του Νικήτα Χωνιάτη," *Ελληνικά* 35 (1984): 70–73. The Italian translators of the *Diegesis* (Pontani, *Grandezza e catastrofe* [n. 4 above]) have furnished their publication with an additional apparatus locorum, and the parallels noted in this article should be added to that list. Further parallels are available in D. Chrestides, "Αναμνήσεις από αρχαία κείμενα στο έργο του Νικήτα Χωνιάτη Χρονική διήγησις," *Επιστημονική επετηρίδα Φιλοσοφικής σχολής πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης* 22 (1984): 687–709.

201 In particular Callistratus, *Descriptions*, nos. 3.3 (on a statue of Eros), 11.1 (on the statue of a youth), ed. A. Reisch and K. Schenkl, *Philostrati minoris Imagines et Callistrati Descriptiones* (Leipzig, 1902). Choniates' description probably echoes *Iliad* 3.385. Cf. *Iliad* 3.228, *Odyssey* 4.3, etc. For further references to Callistratus in twelfth-century ekphrases, see Taxis, *Ekphraseis* (n. 3 above), 58, 184, 194, 222.

202 Achilles Tatius, *Leukippe and Kleitophon* 3.75, ed. E. Vilborg, *Leucippe and Clitophon* (Stockholm, 1955): τὸ ὕφασμα λεπτόν, ἀραχνίωv ὁϊκὸς πλοκῆ.

203 *Anthologia Graeca* 2.168–70, 99–101.

204 The reception of the Homeric poems in twelfth-century Byzantium is currently an extremely vivid research field, including the recent work by Baukje Van der Berg and Georgia Kolovou on Eustathios, and Aglae Pizzone and the teams in Odense and Venice on Tzetzes' Homeric commentaries. Among the standard studies on the subject, see A. Vassilikopoulou-Ioannidou, *Ἡ ἀναγέννησις τῶν γραμμάτων κατὰ τὸν ἰβ' αἰῶνα εἰς τὸ Βυζάντιον καὶ ὁ Ὅμηρος*, Βιβλιοθήκη Σοφίας Ν. Σαριπῶλου 14 (Athens, 1971/2); R. Browning, "Homer in Byzantium," *Viator* 6 (1975): 15–33; idem, "The Byzantines and Homer," in *Homer's Ancient Readers: The Hermeneutics of Greek Epic's Earliest Exegetes*, ed. R. Lamberton and J. J. Keaney (Princeton, NJ, 1993), 134–48; C. Cupane, "Die Homer-Rezeption in Byzanz," in *Homer: Der Mythos von Troia in Dichtung and Kunst*, ed. J. Latacz, T. Greub, P. Blome, and A. Wiczorek (Munich, 2008), 251–58; M. Loukaki, "L'univers homérique dans les éloges impériaux du XII^e siècle à Byzance: Notes sur Théophylacte d'Achrida, Nicéphore Basilakès et Eustathe de Thessalonique," in *À l'école d'Homère: La culture des orateurs et des sophistes*, ed. S. Dubel, A.-M. Favreau-Linder, and E. Oudot (Paris, 2015), 247–57; Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, ed. Cullhed (n. 99 above), *17–*25. See also the most interesting case of the twelfth-century illustrations on a manuscript of the *Iliad*, Venetus A, discussed by I. Kalavrezou, "The Twelfth-Century Byzantine Illustrations in the Venetus A," in *Recapturing a Homeric Legacy: Images and Insights from the Venetus A Manuscript of the "Iliad"*, ed. C. Dué, *Hellenic Studies* 35 (Cambridge, MA, 2009), 117–32.

205 On the reception of the Greek novel in the twelfth century, see, e.g., I. Nilsson, *Erotic Pathos, Rhetorical Pleasure: Narrative Technique and Mimesis in Eumathios Makrembolites' "Hysmine & Hysminias"*, *Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia* 7 (Uppsala, 2001), 261–87. For the novelistic elements in the *De signis*, see Nilsson, "Constantine Manasses, Odysseus and the Cyclops" (n. 6 above), 134. See also I. Nilsson, *Raconter Byzance: La littérature au XIII^e siècle* (Paris, 2014), 172–76, for a discussion of elements related to novelistic discourse in other passages of the *Diegesis*.

206 Note that the scribe of manuscript L signals the beginning of the *De signis* with the title *Περὶ τῶν θεατρικῶν*, which should be understood as "about the issues concerning the Hippodrome." The word θέατρον was often used in post-tenth-century texts to indicate the Hippodrome. See Constantine of Rhodes, *On Constantinople*, 258 (ed. Vassis, 36; commentary by James, 111).

theater. Appearing “in a theatrical manner” (θεατρικῶς), Choniates’ Helen is able to “enslave every spectator [θεατῆν] with her beauty.” Resembling an automaton, she becomes the subject of the methods of Daedalus (τὸ δὲ δαιδάλεον ἐπανέκειτο), and she is given the ability to move through the enargeia of the ekphrasis.²⁰⁷ Even her crown is described as participating in her performance with the patterns of its gleam. The relevant sentence is hard to render in English. [Ἡ στεφάνη], Choniates says, ὑποκρινομένη διαύγειαν χρυσοῦ καὶ τιμαλφῶν λίθων. The word ὑποκρίνομαι applies to actors participating in a theatrical play. In this case the bronze crown “plays” or “acts,” creating the impression of poikilia with the translucent reflection of gold and precious stones and giving the statue the appearance of an elusive woman.

Passion for Beauty / Passion for Constantinople

It is impossible for the reader not to notice that the word *statue* (ἄγαλμα) is absent from the passage. Choniates’ Helen of Troy is an actor made of bronze, acting in the Constantinopolitan theater, the Hippodrome. And the author describes not the destruction of her statue but the destruction of her manners and her main attribute, her absolute beauty. If the *De signis* is a constellation of symbols—as argued above—what is the role reserved for Helen?

In fact, different scholars offer different interpretations. Paroma Chatterjee, taking into account modern interpretations of Helen, affirms that Choniates’ Helen presents “an image of herself designed to impress

and delight her listeners.”²⁰⁸ Certainly the delight (and despair for her loss) of the audience plays an important role in description, as for any ekphrasis. Modern research has shown, however, that Choniates uses references to Homer or Homeric heroes in the *Diegesis* to express an opinion or a judgment.²⁰⁹ Thus, such references cannot be taken as meant to simply please an intended audience. Helen Saradi suggests that “the statue of Helen became the symbol of the beauty of art, the visible story of the Homeric epic, a proof of the Greek superiority in the letters, the reminder of the victory of the Greeks over the Trojans, and, by extension, over their descendants, the Italians,”²¹⁰ but she offers no arguments to support her interpretation. Most recently, Theresa Urbainczyk notes that Helen is among the beautiful women in the *De signis* who “stood in for the city,”²¹¹ but again does not substantiate her position. In my view, Helen of Troy stands for the beauty of Constantinople. That beauty includes its culture and traditions, and it was expressed through classicizing learning, which was most dear to our erudite author.

Personifications of cities as female figures were common in Byzantine literature.²¹² Choniates refers to Constantinople as an abused woman in the *Lamentatio*.²¹³ He further elaborates on this topos in a different passage from the *Diegesis*, using a Homeric figure as a metaphor for the city of Constantine. In the passage, found in the

208 Chatterjee, “Charisma and the Ideal Viewer” (n. 9 above), 258–59, with reference to Anne T. Bergren, “Helen’s ‘Good Drug’: Odysseus IV 1–305,” in *Contemporary Literary Hermeneutics and Interpretations of Classical Texts*, ed. S. Kresic (Ottawa, 1981), 201–14. Cf. Chatterjee, “Sculpted Eloquence” (n. 8 above), 402–3.

209 See, e.g., Simpson, *Historiographical Study* (n. 10 above), 274–79, with further bibliography; more recently, T. Urbainczyk, *Writing about Byzantium: The History of Niketas Choniates* (London, 2017), 66–68.

210 H. Saradi, “The Antiquities in Constructing Byzantine Identity: Literary Tradition versus Aesthetic Appreciation,” *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 17 (January, 2011): 95–113; quotation at 105. See also eadem, “Perceptions and Literary Interpretations” (n. 159 above), esp. 69–70 and 72, where Saradi states that the statue of Helen “becomes a symbolic standard . . . of unsurpassed artistic values and literary tradition” (again without a further analysis).

211 Urbainczyk, *Writing about Byzantium*, 40.

212 Such personifications are common in Greek literature from the fifth century BCE onward. See, e.g., B. Poulsen, “City Personification in Late Antiquity,” in *Using Images in Late Antiquity*, ed. S. Birk, T. M. Kristensen, and B. Poulsen (Oxford, 2014), 209–26, with further bibliography.

213 v.D. 577.12–27. On the *Lamentatio*, see above.

207 There are no confirmed attestations of the existence of automata in the Byzantine Hippodrome. A bronze goose from the Hippodrome, now in the British Museum, might have been able to make sounds, but that would not be enough for it to be classified as an automaton. The account of Robert de Clari attests that the statues “used to play by enchantment, but they do no play anymore” (“et soloient cha en arriere par encantement, mais ne juoient mais nient,” *La conquête de Constantinople*, ed. Dufournet [n. 105 above], 180, para. XC). As Ruth Macrides has shown, that Robert de Clari is probably referring to the elusive but widely accepted *stoicheiosis* (bewitchment) of the statues, rather to actual automata; Macrides, “Constantinople: The Crusaders Gaze,” in *Travel in the Byzantine World: Papers from the Thirty-Fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, April 2000*, ed. Macrides (Aldershot, 2002), 193–212, at 206–7. That said, the existence of automata in the Great Palace is well attested. See R. Loverance, “The Bronze Goose from the Hippodrome,” in *Fountains and Water Culture in Byzantium*, ed. B. Shilling and P. Stephenson (Cambridge, 2016), 87–102, esp. 97–99.

brevior and *auctior* versions of the *Diegesis* (which do not include the *De signis*), the author explicitly compares Constantinople to Penelope, the alter ego of Helen:

Ὡς περίπυστον πράγμα Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴ καὶ πᾶσιν ἔθνεσι ζηλωτὸν καὶ προσκυνητὸν ἀξίωμα, οἷος σοὶ ἐπεμάνησαν ἔρασταί . . . θυμαλγέστερά εἰσιν ὄντως τὰ σὰ οἷς πέπονθε Πηνελόπη παραλληλιζόμενα, καὶ κατ' οὐδὲν ἀπέοικας βασιλείας γυναικὸς πανευδαίμονος, σεμνῆς τὸ κάλλος, εὐφυοῦς τὸ μέγεθος, εὐπρεποῦς τὴν ὄψιν, ἑαλωκυίας μέντοι χερσὶν ἔραστῶν ἀναιδῶν μηδὲ τιμωμένων ὀβλοῦ παρ' ἐχέφροσιν, οὔτε μὴν ἐχόντων τὸ μεγαλοπρεπὲς αὐτῆς συνιδεῖν μηδ' εὐλαβουμένων τὸ ὕψος μηδ' ὑποστελλομένων τὸ εὐγενές, ἐνίοτε δὲ καὶ πρὸς ὕβριν περιελκόντων καὶ εἰς κοίτην ἀπαγόντων ἀθέμιτον.²¹⁴

Such a celebrated thing, sovereignty of the Romans, and honor envied and adored by all nations, what violators have you endured! . . . What lovers that had gone mad over you! . . . Your vicissitudes are more heart-rending than those that Penelope suffered. In no way do you differ from a queen all-blessed, venerated for her beauty, proportionally shaped, orderly in her appearance, fallen to the hands of shameless lovers whom the prudent deem worthless. Unable to behold her majesty, disrespectful of her grandeur, and constraining her nobility, they drag her to assault and they kidnap her to an abusive bed.²¹⁵

In this passage, which is omitted from the LO, Penelope becomes a second Helen, although violated and raped: she is abducted and forced to join her suitors in bed. In fact, one may argue that the identities of the two Homeric heroines are similarly mingled in the *De signis*. Because Helen is never referred to as an adulteress, she maintains Penelope's main attribute: chastity. And certainly, both Helen and Penelope, two queens standing

214 v.D. 498.29–499.40.

215 Trans. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium* (n. 1 above), 274, adapted. The passage on the reign of Alexios Angelos is also discussed in S. Efthymiadis, "Greek and Biblical Exempla in the Service of an Artful Writer," in Simpson and Efthymiadis, *Niketás Choniates* (n. 5 above), 101–19, esp. 110.

for the queen of cities, remain passive before the abusive fate that unworthy men have imposed on them.

The involvement of inferior men unable to acknowledge beauty and nobility further connects the passage about Penelope (in the *brevior* and *auctior*) and that about Helen in the *De signis* (exclusively in the LO). The expression of an ultimate disappointment concludes the ekphrasis of Helen in the *De signis*:

ἄλλως τε ποῦ παρ' ἀγραμμάτοις βαρβάροις καὶ τέλεον ἀναλφαβήτοις ἀνάγνωσις καὶ γνώσις τῶν ἐπὶ σοὶ ῥαυωδηθέντων ἐκείνων ἐπῶν οὐ νέμεσις Τρῶας καὶ εὐκνήμιδας Ἀχαιοὺς τοιῆδ' ἀμφὶ γυναικὶ πολὺν χρόνον ἄλγεα πάσχειν· αἰνῶς ἀδανάτῃσι θεαῖς εἰς ὧπα ἔοικεν.²¹⁶

After all how could one expect to find among unlettered and entirely illiterate barbarians the ability to read and knowledge of those epic verses sung of you:

*Surely there is no blame [nemesis] on Trojans and strong-greaved Achaeans if for long time they suffer hardship for a woman like this one. Terrible is the likeness of her face to immortal goddesses.*²¹⁷

Choniates' description of the "barbarians" as illiterate is noteworthy, but not unique in the long twelfth century. Eustathios of Thessaloniki describes the Normans attacking Thessaloniki in 1185 as ἀπειρόκαλοι (inexperienced of beauty) and ἄνθρωποι ἀχαρίστεροι πάντων (the men most unable to appreciate grace).²¹⁸ As in Eustathios's description of the conquest of

216 v.D. 653.94–3.

217 Trans. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, 360–61 (adapted); translation of *Iliad* 3.156–58, R. Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago, 1951), 121. Stanislas Kuttner-Homs ("Nicetas Chôniatès lecteur de lui-même: Les mécanismes de l'emprunt interne dans l'oeuvre d'un haut lettré byzantin," *Kentron* 30 [2014]: 109–28) finds parallels between the description of the statue of Helen and various descriptions of princesses and empresses; the passage cited above is discussed on 115–16. On Homeric excerpts in the work of Choniates, see R. Maisano, "I poemi omerici nell'opera storica di Niceta Coniata," in *Posthomerica II: Tradizioni omeriche dell'Antichità al Rinascimento*, ed. F. Montanari and S. Pittaluga (Genoa, 2000), 41–53.

218 Eustathios refers to the Normans and the looting of Thessaloniki. Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, ed. Melville Jones (n. 102 above), 146.25–26.

Thessaloniki, Choniates' illiterate barbarians commit atrocities against the city's beauty. Eustathios condemns the Normans with these words because they destroyed the decorum of the city, but Choniates attacks his barbarians even more fiercely, saying that these people shattered the beauty of the city because they are illiterate and thus ignorant of the beautiful. The worst offense for Choniates, and his learned peers, is the lack of an educated understanding of beauty.

The Homeric lines concluding the passage just quoted from the *De signis* come from the third book of the *Iliad*, when the elderly Trojan men sat by the Skaian Gates and admired the beauty of Helen. Choniates, remaining still in a detached mood, becomes one of the distant observers who appreciate the beauty, take offense at its destruction, but do not try to save it (or save themselves from that destruction).

He increasingly falls into surrender in the text, following emotions of admiration, rage caused by erotic passion (*pothos*), and destructive despair (*pathos*):

Ἄλλ' ὦ Τύνδαρις Ἑλένη, κάλλος αὐτόθεν καλόν,
Ἐρώτων μόσχευμα, Ἀφροδίτης τημελούχημα,
πανάριστον φύσεως δώρημα, Τρώων καὶ Ἑλλήνων
βράβευμα . . . ποῦ δὲ τὰ ἄμαχα φίλτρα; πῶς οὐ
ἐχρήσω τούτοις ὡς πάλαι καὶ νῦν; ἀλλ' οἶμαι σοὶ
ταῖς Μοίραις πέπρωται τῇ τοῦ πυρὸς ὑποπεσεῖν
ἔρωϊ, μηδ' ἐν εἰκόνι παυσσαμένην ἀνακάειν τοὺς
ὀρώντας εἰς ἔρωτας· εἶπον δ' ἂν ὡς καὶ ἀντίποινα
τοῦ τὴν Τροίαν ἠθελῶσθαι πυρὶ ταῖς σαῖς σχετλίως
φρυκτευθέντι φιλότησιν οἱ Αἰνειάδαι οὔτοι πυρὶ
<σε> κατέκριναν[.]²¹⁹

O Tyndareus's daughter Helen, beauty good by itself,²²⁰ offshoot of the Eroses, ward of Aphrodite, nature's most perfect gift, prize for both the Trojans and the Hellenes . . . where are your irresistible love charms? How should I not declare these which are similar to the old stories also in the present? I suspect that the Fates had foreordained that you should succumb to the flame's fervor so that your image should no longer enflame the onlookers with desire. It was said

219 v.D. 652.75–83.

220 One can only wonder whether this is not just a defense of Helen but also a reference to the *καλὸν κακόν* (beautiful evil), the Hesiodic Pandora. Hesiod, *Theogony* 586, ed. M. L. West (Oxford, 1966).

that these Aeneads condemned you to the flames as retribution for Troy having been laid waste by the flames lit by your scandalous amours[.]²²¹

Choniates is the desperate lover who cannot have his object of passion and thus accepts her destruction. He addresses Helen directly and his words are strikingly emotional. Her ultimate beauty arouses passion, and thus destruction is the inescapable conclusion. The narrator, Choniates, remains physically separated from Helen, but his desire for her is very real. To the best of our knowledge, the condemnation of Helen to immolation is not attested in any other source. It is rather a new addition to the story befitting the fate of the statue and indicative of the author's emotional state. Choniates is incensed by the beauty he cannot have, and thus he is ready to accept its total ruin. It is, after all, Helen's beauty that creates desire, and desire brings only disaster for both the onlooker and the object of admiration.²²²

Choniates also describes his inability to join Helen's beauty in a very different context: the marginal notes in manuscript Vaticanus gr. 130 (Diktyon 66761), a copy of the first-century CE *Library* of Diodorus of Sicily. The scholia, which have been safely attributed to the hand of Niketas Choniates,²²³ often express the author's sorrow for the loss of his beloved city.²²⁴ The

221 Trans. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, 360 (adapted).

222 The desires caused by beauty are not felt by Choniates alone. Relevant discussions include Konstan, *Beauty* (n. 148 above), 68–70.

223 Published and discussed in C. M. Mazzucchi, "Leggere i classici durante la catastrofe (Constantinopoli, Maggio–Agosto 1203): Le note marginali al Diodoro Siculo Vaticano gr. 130," *Aevum* 69.1 (1995): 200–258. On this topic, see Simpson, *Historiographical Study*, 280–81, and now J. Bértola, "Using Poetry to Read the Past: Uncollected Byzantine Verse Scholia on Historians in the Margins of Medieval Manuscripts" (PhD diss., Ghent University, 2021), 39–42.

224 In a further marginal note, Choniates mentions he was drinking wine in his effort to find consolation for the loss of his much-missed city life. The episode is placed in the middle of the summer (the time of the "dog days," ca. 20/21 July). Choniates made his comment starting from an anecdote in Diodorus Siculus's *Library for History* 5.79, according to which Oenopion, the mythical king of Chios, was taught the art of winemaking by his father, the god Dionysus. To understand the poem, one must recognize that *Οἰνοπίων* /*inopíon*/ and the genitive plural of the Greek word for wine makers, *οἰνοποιῶν* /*inopíon*/, are nearly homonyms. Vatican City, BAV, gr. 130, fol. 306v, ed. Mazzucchi, "Leggere," 213: "εὖ Οἰνοπίων ἔσχεν ἀρχὴν τῆς Χίου / καὶ τίς γὰρ ἄλλη προσφυστέρᾳ πλέον; / ὁ δ' οὖν κύων τὴν λέξιν αἰχμαλωτῖσει / ὡς ἀστεῖστομοῖς χρησίμην τοῖς ἐλλόγοις / οἷς ἡμῖν ἢ τράπεζα φλεγμαίνειν φθάνει / οἷς ἐντροφήσαι καὶ

note about Helen in the Vaticanus manuscript should be read in this way, as an emotional response to the events of 1204. The scholion referring to Helen reads:

Γυμνησίων ἔθιμα τὰ πρὸς τοὺς γάμους
εἰ τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς συντετήρηγτο χρόνοις
κάγω πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἀσμένως ἐνηξάμην
καὶ ταῦτα δυσθάλαττος ὦν πάντων πλέον
καὶ τρίχα λευκὴν ὑπὸ τοῦ χρόνου φέρων.
τὰ νυμφίων δ' οὐκ ἂν πόθ' εἰλόμην γέρα
κἂν Τυναρίδος ἐπλέκοντο παστάδα.²²⁵

If the nuptial customs of the Gymnessi
were kept in our times
I would join them with great joy,
although I suffer from seasickness more than
any other man
and I have white hair because of the passing
time.
But I would never receive the nuptial gifts
even if they have prepared the bridal chamber
for the daughter of Tyndareus.

Choniates comments on Diodorus's account of the alleged nuptial custom of the inhabitants of the Balearic Islands, whereby the guests sleep with the bride (and the groom is the last person to enjoy conjugal relations). The daughter of Tyndareus is, of course, no other than Helen of Troy. In his scholion, Choniates expresses his despair at being cut off from Helen, a spectator incapable of fulfilling his desire to join her. Helen is once more desirable but elusive for the author—exactly like her statue in the *De signis*.

πάλιν γένοιτό μοι / μικρὸν παρηγόρημα τῶν μακρῶν πόνων / ὦν ἡ ξιφίρης
χεῖρ Ἰταλῶν αἰτία / τοὺς ἀστικούς μὲν ἔστω τοῖς ὄρεστέροις (Rightly
Oenopion had received the rule of Chios, / what other [island] would
have been more appropriate [for him to rule]? / So, the dog [of Orion
= Sirius] may capture the word [οἶνος (wine)] / as a handy one for the
entertainment for those endowed with reason; / thanks to this (entertainment)
my table is already unwholesome, / to this (entertainment) I
have resorted again, / a small consolation to great pains, / the cause for
which is the sword-bearing hand of the Italians / that mixed the people
of the cities with those of the mountains). Cf. a passage from the
Lamentatio in the *Diegesis* (v.D. 580.86–87; trans. Magoulias, *O City
of Byzantium*, 318): Τίς γὰρ ἀνάστοι' ἂν ἐπὶ γῆς ἀλλοτριωθεῖσης ἤδη τοῦ
λόγου καὶ βαρβαρωθείσης τέλειον τὰ Μουσῶν ἐπιδείκνυσθαι κρούματα;
(For in a land long alienated from letters and completely barbarized,
who dares to sing the song of the Muses?).

225 Ed. Mazzucchi, "Leggere," 211.

Taking anything that Choniates says at face value can only lead to misunderstandings.²²⁶ His very personal response to the statue in the *De signis* and the heroine in the scholion can be interpreted if one understands Helen to be a symbol for the beauty of Constantinople, the author's most beloved city. In a discourse on the destruction of his city, the city of an intellectual, the text's rhetorical construction and references to the classics would remind the readers of its lost grandeur. The visual images created in the ekphrasis would transmit the message of ancient beauty, such as that found in the streets of Constantinople (as discussed above). These images and words, separately and combined, create an emotive world in which Choniates loses himself, blaming those unable to understand it. Choniates laments that though the "crazed suitors neither fashioned a bridal chamber [for Constantinople], nor lit a nuptial torch, did they not however ignite the coals of destruction?"²²⁷

It is in any case no secret to the readers of the LO that Choniates was personally affected by the bitter events before and after the crusaders' sack of Constantinople. Choniates describes in detail his painful experience and he repeatedly mourns for the loss of his beloved city.²²⁸ He was an eyewitness of the disaster, which inflicted personal trauma, as he and his family were forced to abandon their livelihood and seek refuge more than once.²²⁹ "Emptying out the vexation overflowing from [his] soul in this fashion,"²³⁰ he may find a way to come in terms with that absolute disaster.

226 As Anthony Kaldellis ("Paradox, Reversal and the Meaning of History," in Simpson and S. Efthymiades, *Niketas Choniates* [n. 5 above], 77–101) has rightly pointed out.

227 v.D. 576.10–577.11: ἡ γοῦν . . . μανιώδεις ἐρασταὶ παστάδα σοὶ
μὲν οὐκ ἐπλέξαντο, οὐδ' ἀνήψαν σοὶ δᾶδα γαμήλιον, ἀφανιστηρίου
δ' ἀνέκαυσαν ἀνθρακες; (If these crazed suitors neither fashioned a
bridal chamber for you, nor lit a nuptial torch for you, did they not
ignite the coal of complete destruction?). From the *Lamentatio*; trans.
Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, 317.

228 Cf. the *Lamentatio* and v.D. 591.12–592.49 in the LO and the
Diegesis. See also Niketas Choniates, *Orations II'*, ed. van Dieten,
Orationes et epistulae (n. 63 above), 126.20–27.

229 E.g., v.D. 573–76, 585, 58–595, 98. On the condition of Choniates
and his family at the time he composed the LO (with reference to relevant
sources), see Simpson, "Before and After 1204" (n. 10 above),
205–6.

230 v.D. 593.50 (on the laments following the sack of the city):
Ταῦτ' ἐξ ὑπεράντλου ταῖς ἀχθῆδοσι ψυχῆς κενώσαντες . . .

Helen becomes Choniates' most personal heroine, a symbol for the beauty of Constantinople and a mirror of his own emotional state. The medieval author creates a custom-made Helen to fit the purpose of his narrative, using material provided to him by his training and standing: classicizing learning. But Choniates does not simply "write emotion,"²³¹ or even just evoke emotion. He creates emotion in his audience with an ekphrasis defined by *enargeia*, while seeking a remedy for his traumatic separation from his greatest love, Constantinople.

In addition, Choniates has practice in alluding to the Homeric texts to create his symbols of Constantinople. When his brothers-in-law and close comrades in internal politics and involuntarily exile, John and Michael Belissariotes, died in quick succession in 1207/8, Niketas composed a monody to celebrate their memory.²³² Choniates laments not only the loss of his relatives but also the loss of his beautiful city, Constantinople, which he compares to Troy.²³³ There is little to add to Michael Angold's excellent analysis

of the symbolic discourse and emotional undertones in the *Monody's* comparison of the two cities.²³⁴ As Angold puts it, Choniates, in reality, is deeply saddened by the "disrespect [of the crusaders] to the Byzantine way of life."²³⁵ The statement immediately underlines the common subject running through the passages in the *Monody* and the *De signis*. Both texts include direct quotes from Homer that Choniates uses to express his personal opinion. Whereas the description of Helen, for example, concludes with the words of Trojan elders, the passage in the *Monody* is essentially introduced with the words of Hector to Paris: "Now your own headlong destruction is certain; now sacred Ilion is entirely lost."²³⁶ Furthermore, both texts describe offenses against aesthetic unity and thus beauty. Just as the beautiful statues in the Hippodrome were attacked viciously (*κεκόφασσι*) in the *De signis*,²³⁷ so the *καλλιπόλις* of Constantine was cut (*κόψασθαι*).²³⁸ In the *Monody*, Choniates' grief over the intensity of the calamity was measured against the intensity of the beauty of the city's colonnaded streets and its golden houses, as well as against the accumulation of any kind of wealth.²³⁹ In the *De signis* he is frustrated because the barbarians measured and exchanged great works of art for pocket change.²⁴⁰ Also in the *Monody* he mourns the transfer of even the most sacred things (presumably monuments and objects) out of the city and the loss of the most fortunate of men. In the *De signis*, the monuments and objects are destroyed. Finally, he mourns in the *Monody* the loss of the most fortunate men and the excellent generals who defended Troy to preserve beauty,²⁴¹ as he mourns in

231 Cf. the title of one of the recent contributions to studies on affect: *Writing Emotions: Theoretical Concepts and Selected Case Studies in Literature*, ed. I. Jandl, S. Knaller, S. Schönfellner, and G. Tockner (Biefeld, 2017).

232 Niketas Choniates, *Monody on the Belissariotes Brothers*, in *Orations IE'*, ed. van Dieten, *Orationes et epistulae*, 147–69, relevant passage at 148.17–150.22. For a commentary, see van Dieten, *Erläuterungen* (n. 103 above), 158–61. The monody is dedicated primarily to John, but Choniates also laments the death of John's brother, Michael. On the relationship between Niketas Choniates and the Belissariotes brothers, see Simpson, *Historiographical Study*, 24–25. The Belissariotes brothers had also strong social ties with Niketas' brother, Michael Choniates; see Kolovou, *Συμβολή* (n. 181 above), 137–40.

233 Choniates, *Monody on John Belissariotes*. On the reception of Troy in Byzantine literature, see Cupane, "Homer-Rezeption" (n. 204 above), 256–58. It is somewhat ironic that in his account of the sack of Constantinople, the *Hystoria Constantinopolitana*, Gunther of Pairis also compares Constantinople to Troy. But he emphasizes fate, noting that just as the Argives took possession of the riches of conquered Troy so did the crusaders in Constantinople. A. J. Andrea, *The Capture of Constantinople: The "Hystoria Constantinopolitana" of Gunther of Pairis* (Philadelphia, 1997), 108–9. There is no evidence that Choniates was aware of Gunther's account or of other non-Greek justifications for the conquest of Constantinople as revenge for the fall of Troy. On this point, see T. Shawcross, "Re-inventing the Honteland in the Historiography of Frankish Greece: The Fourth Crusade and the Legend of the Trojan War," *BMGS* 27 (2003): 120–52. For the separate tradition, see M. Desmond, "Homer and the Latin West in the Middle Ages," in *The Cambridge Guide to Homer*, ed. C. O. Pache (Cambridge, 2020), 435–43, with further bibliography. See also A. J. Goldwyn, "That men to come shall know of it': Theorizing Aesthetic Innovation, Heroic Ideology, and Political Legitimacy in Trojan War

Receptions," in *The Trojan Wars and the Making of the Modern World*, ed. Goldwyn, *Studia Graeca Upsaliensia* 22 (Uppsala, 2015), 1–14.

234 Angold, "Laments" (n. 33 above), 341–44.

235 *Ibid.*, 342.

236 νῶς σῶς αἰπὺς ἄλεθρος, νῦν κατ' ἄκρας ἦλ'ω Ἴλιος ἱρή: *Monody on the Belissariotes Brothers*, ed. van Dieten, *Orationes et epistulae*, 149.27–28. Cf. *Iliad* 13.722–23, ed. T. W. Allen, *Homeric Iliad*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1931): νῦν ὄλετο πᾶσα κατ' ἄκρης Ἴλιος αἰπεινή· νῦν τοι σῶς αἰπὺς ἄλεθρος.

237 v.D. 649.81.

238 *Monody on the Belissariotes Brothers*, ed. van Dieten, *Orationes et epistulae*, 149.29.

239 κάλλη στοῶν καὶ δόμους χρυσοπάστους καὶ παντοδαπῶν χρημάτων σωρείας τὴν συμφορὰν ἐπεμέτρησε. *Ibid.*, 150.2–4.

240 v.D. 649.81–83.

241 *Monody on the Belissariotes Brothers*, ed. van Dieten, *Orationes et epistulae*, 150.8–12; cf. *Iliad* 13.765–72.

the *De signis* the lack of men with paideia who would be able to understand verses sung to a Helen (and thus comprehend her true beauty).²⁴²

The true beauty of Helen, the true beauty of Constantinople, according to Choniates, can be perceived only using paideia. In the twelfth century this is not a unique approach to the appreciation of ancient art. Consider for example Constantine Manasses (ca. 1130–ca. 1187), who invites his reader to comprehend a carving of Odysseus and the cyclops Polyphemus, combining images and his classical learning.²⁴³ Acknowledging and interpreting myth was in any event part of the cultural capital of the group within which Choniates and Manasses were raised and in which their identity as intellectuals was formed. Yet the two men took different approaches to the classics. Tellingly, in the *Synopsis Chronike* Manasses enriches his narrative about Helen of Troy with an elaborate ekphrasis of Helen.²⁴⁴ Manasses borrows the story from Herodotus and, like Choniates, he describes the beauty of Helen in ways drawn from Homer and the other Byzantine classics. The similarities in the attributes conferred on Helen are many—Helen has white hands, a long neck, beautiful brows, red lips²⁴⁵—and there are just as many differences. In line with customary ideals of beauty, Manasses emphasizes the color of Helen's skin, her big eyes, and many other features that are not included in Choniates' account.²⁴⁶ Such similarities and differences are, in my view, of minor importance, as they represent variations in the reception of the same tradition. Essentially, the major difference is that Manasses' Helen lacks the emotional depth of Choniates' Helen. Manasses gives an enjoyable account of the beauty of Helen; Choniates instead

transforms his Helen into an expression of his pothos and pathos for his beloved but lost Constantinople.

Searching for the Barbarians

The above paragraphs first analyzed Choniates' sources of inspiration for the rhetorical elaboration of his version of Helen of Troy, then discussed the employment of (the statue of) Helen of Troy as a symbol for the beauty of Constantinople. I have further argued that the emotional intensity of the description mirrors the emotional state of the author after his involuntary exile from the former Byzantine capital. In what follows, I suggest that no understanding of the ekphrasis of the statue of Helen in the *De signis* can be complete without taking into account another possible source of inspiration: the *Encomion of Helen* by the Athenian rhetor Isocrates (436–338 BCE). The *ēthos* of Choniates' *Helen* is formed not only by the Homeric stories (discussed above) but also by beauty values developed first by Isocrates.

The exact date, circumstances, and intended audience of Isocrates' composition remain a matter of dispute among modern scholars. According to the dominant view, the *Encomion of Helen* was composed around 370 BCE, but there is a scarcity of evidence casting light on its context.²⁴⁷ The text itself is presented as a reply to a speech in defense (*apologia*) of Helen composed by the sophist Gorgias (ca. 480–ca. 380 BCE). In brief, Isocrates first offers a critique of the philosophers (paras. 1–15), then praises Theseus as an Athenian hero (16–38) before he presents an elaborate praise of Helen of Troy (39–69).²⁴⁸ The masterful display of rhetoric in the *Encomion* secured it a continuous readership in Byzantium.²⁴⁹ There are at least thirty medieval manuscripts of the *Encomion*, with the earliest one dated from

242 v.D. 653.94–96.

243 Discussed in detail in Nilsson, "Constantine Manasses, Odysseus and the Cyclops" (n. 6 above), esp. 129–31.

244 Constantine Manasses, *Synopsis Chronike* 1155–67, ed. O. Lampsidis, *Constantini Manassi Breviarium Chronicum*, CFHB 36, 2 vols. (Athens, 1996), 1:66–67. On the ekphrasis, see Taxidis, *Ekphraseis* (n. 3 above), 134–35. On the importance of such descriptions in the *Synopsis Chronike*, see I. Nilsson and E. Nyström, "To Compose, Read, and Use a Byzantine Text: Aspects of the Chronicle of Constantine Manasses," *GRBS* 33 (2009): 42–60.

245 The similarity of the two accounts is also noted in Taxidis, *Ekphraseis*, 63.

246 For a detailed analysis of Helen's features, see *ibid.*, 134–35; for further parallels, see *ibid.*, 48.

247 For an overview with more details, see D. Mirhady and Y. L. Too, *Isocrates I*, *Oratory of Classical Greece* 4 (Austin, TX, 2000), 31–32, with further bibliography. For a more recent discussion, see Blondell, *Helen of Troy* (n. 175 above), 222–49. Edition: Isocrates, *Encomion of Helen*, ed. É. Brémond and G. Mathieu, *Discours*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1929), 163–79.

248 See G. Heilbrunn, "The Composition of Isocrates' *Helen*," *TAPA* 107 (1977): 147–59.

249 For a reading of the *Encomion* as a document prioritizing the importance of rhetoric in education, see J. Poulakos, "Argument, Practicality, and Eloquence in Isocrates' *Helen*," *Rhetorica* 4.1 (Winter 1986): 1–19.

the second half of the eleventh century.²⁵⁰ Moreover, the *Encomion* is known to have inspired authors in twelfth-century Constantinople. A case in point is the Pseudo-Lucianic dialogue *Charidemus, or On Beauty*.²⁵¹ Although the *Encomion* is not named in the dialogue, the anonymous Byzantine author of the dialogue reflects on Isocrates' arguments in parallel passages, and adopts and adapts supporting examples from the *Encomion*.

Choniates is similarly disinterested in the details of the *Encomion*, but he uses ideas and arguments developed within it. To begin with, both authors refer to a passive heroine. Helen does not speak or act on her own account, her movements are kept to a minimum, and she stands at a distance while the authors observe her existence and actions. Neither author makes an effort to justify her actions. For both, Helen's beauty is irresistible and the wars waged for her are justified by her beauty, which is beyond price.²⁵² They both accept the superiority of beauty and they consider its ownership as a sign of a higher form of living.²⁵³ Crucially, they both perceive the ownership of beauty as the attribute of noble men. As Isocrates puts it, "We should be justified in considering that it is owing to Helen that we are not the slaves of the barbarians."²⁵⁴ For Choniates,

however, Isocrates' words can be applied only to the past, as in his present the "barbarians"—who are unable to appreciate beauty—went beyond enslaving Helen to destroy her.

The statement just quoted from the *Encomion* reveals a further common theme in both accounts: the projection of a strong sense of group identity. The members of the group familiar to the authors ("us") fight for the possession of beauty (exemplified by Helen) and thus partake of the higher way of life, while their enemies (the "barbarians" or "them") are trying to steal that privilege. The approach to the opposite group, the barbarians, in the two texts differs. Isocrates' barbarians steal Helen, causing no damage to her, while for Choniates' barbarians, destruction follows the possession of beauty. Isocrates urges what could be called *Panhellenism*, given the united fight of the Hellenes against one common enemy.²⁵⁵ Choniates, however, does not call the Byzantines to unite against the Latins. Instead, with a rather reflective attitude, he proposes an ethical (as opposed to an "ethnic") distinction between "us" and "them."²⁵⁶ Unlike Isocrates, Choniates describes his barbarians in detail:

ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔα με τὸ χρυσομανές τῶν ἀνδρῶν διανοή-
σασθαι τι τοιοῦτον καὶ φθέγγασθαι, ὕφ' οὗ τὰ
σπάνια πανταχοῦ καὶ καλῶν κάλλιστα ἔργα
παντελεῖ ἀφανισμῶ παρεπέμφθησαν, εἰπεῖν δὲ
καὶ τὸ τὰς ἑαυτῶν γυναικάς ὀβολῶν μετρίων
πολλάκις ἀποδιδόναι καὶ ἀποπέμπεσθαι, καὶ
μᾶλλον εἰ προσανέχουσι τηλία καὶ προστετήκασι
πεττοῖς πανημέριοι ἢ καὶ πρὸς ὄρμην ἄλογον καὶ
μανιώδη, οὐ μὴν ἀνδρείαν ἔμφρονα, κατ' ἀλλήλων

250 The earliest dated manuscript is Vatican City, BAV, gr. 65, from 1063 (Diktyon 66696). The *Encomion* is found on fols. 59–70v, and it is accompanied by scholia on rhetorical/technical aspects of the text. Other early manuscripts include Vatican City, BAV, gr. 64, y. 1269/70 (Diktyon 66695); Vatican City, BAV, gr. 936, late thirteenth / early fourteenth century (Diktyon 67567); Vatican City, BAV, Palatinus gr. 135, first half of the fourteenth century (Diktyon 65867); and Modena, Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, a.P.6.12 (Puntoni 130/III.D.11), end of the fourteenth century (Diktyon 43364).

251 Anonymous, *Charidemus, or On Beauty*, ed. and Italian trans. R. Anastasi, *Incerti auctoris: Charidēmos ē peri Kallous*, Edizioni e saggi universitari di filologia classica 14 (Bologna, 1971). Further translations: M. D. Macleod, *Lucian*, vol. 8, Loeb (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 468–502 (English); trans. R. Romano, *La satira bizantina dei secoli XI–XV* (Torino, 1999), 72–97 (Italian). The parallels are clearly noted in Anastasi's apparatus fontium. The dialogue is also discussed in F. Spingou, "Beauty, Introduction," in eadem, *The Visual Culture of Later Byzantium* (n. 95 above), 2:902–4.

252 E.g., Isocrates, *Encomion of Helen* 17 (τῆς δὲ περιβλεπτον καὶ περιμάχητον τὴν φύσιν ἐποίησεν), 18 (ἡττήθη τοῦ κάλλους ὁ κρατεῖν τῶν ἄλλων εἰθισμένος), and 49; cf. v.D. 652.62–65 and v.D. 653.95–94 [sic]. E.g., Isocrates, *Encomion of Helen* 54; cf. v.D. 652.66–74.

253 E.g., Isocrates, *Encomion of Helen* 48; cf. v.D. 652.84–653.94 (see also the discussion below).

254 Isocrates, *Encomion of Helen* 67: δικαίως ἂν καὶ τοῦ μὴ δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τοῖς βαρβάροις Ἑλένην αἰτίαν εἶναι νομίζοιμεν.

255 The fundamental discussion of Panhellenism in Isocrates' *Encomion on Helen* is G. A. Kennedy, "Isocrates' *Encomium of Helen*: A Panhellenic Document," *TAPA* 89 (1958): 77–83. Kennedy's contribution has been hotly debated and discussed. Among the critics, see Heilbrunn, "Composition of Isocrates' *Helen*." For a detailed literature review, see C. Brunello, "Il potere della parola nell'elogio di Elena: La prospettiva retorica di Isocrate sul rapporto tra ontologia e linguaggio," *Seminari Romani di cultura greca* 7 (2018): 107–32, esp. 125–27 listing the relevant bibliography. For a recent discussion, see Blondell, *Helen of Troy*, 222–23.

256 Nikolaos Christis has noted, however, that Choniates "might have been a pioneer in expressing this vision of 'national' liberation" in his public orations; see "Ideological and Political Contestations in Post-1204 Byzantium: The Orations of Niketas Choniates and the Imperial Court of Nicaea," in *The Emperor in the Byzantine World*, ed. S. Tougher (London, 2019), 248–63; quotation, 256.

ἐνθουσιῶσι καὶ τὴν Ἄρεος σκευὴν περιτίθενται, τῆς νίκης προτιθέντες ἄθλον πάντα τὰ προσόντα σφίσιν, αὐτὰς τὰς κουριδίους ἀλόχους,²⁵⁷ ἐξ ὧν πατέρες ἠκηκόεισαν τέκνων, ἔτι δὲ τὸ μέγα χρῆμα καὶ τοῦς ἄλλοις δυσπαραίτητον τὴν ψυχὴν, καὶ ἦς ἕνεκα τὰ πάντα περισπουδάζουσιν ἄνθρωποι.²⁵⁸

But the madness for gold of these men does not allow me to conceive of and utter such a thing, for that madness was the reason why the absolutely rare and most beautiful of all works²⁵⁹ were given over to complete destruction. Nor can I speak of their frequent selling and sending away of their women for a few coins while they attended the gambling tables and were engrossed at checkers all day long, or, being eager to engage not in acts of prudent courage but in irrational and mad assaults against one another, they donned the arms of Ares and set up as the prize of victory all their belongings, even their wedded wives, because of whom they heard themselves called fathers of children, and even that great treasure which others find difficult to sacrifice—the soul, for whose salvation men are eager to do anything.

For Choniates, the “barbarians” should be kept as a separate group because of their moral shortcomings. In the line preceding the quoted passage, the barbarians are named Aeneads, an appellation collectively applied to the Latins,²⁶⁰ but Choniates proceeds to define the barbarians on the basis of their customs and manners. For him, it is almost natural for these barbarians to be unable to appreciate the most exclusive and most beautiful works of art, as they have no moral standards—in brief, they are unable to partake of the highest form of living. They are disrespectful toward their wives and

children, they are gamblers, they are impetuously violent, and they even disregard their own souls.

The description matches the image of the crusaders presented in other parts of the *Diegesis* and in other works by Choniates.²⁶¹ However, the same accusations were made against unlawful and disrespectful Byzantines. Alexios V Doukas (February–April 1204), for example, is accused of gambling along with the crusaders.²⁶² The same Alexios is said to be a “lecher in bed, having put away two wedded wives” (κουριδίου ἀλόχους),²⁶³ and he is described as trying to fight the Latins in an disorderly or ugly manner (ἀπειροκάλως ἔχων τῆς τῶν Λατίνων ἀντιμαχήσεως).²⁶⁴ In other versions of the *Diegesis*, Alexios III Angelos (1195–July 1203), who left Constantinople undefended during the first attack of the crusaders, is judged by Choniates to be a “wretched man” unable to care about his wife or children or the greatness of the city.²⁶⁵ After Choniates and his family were forced to seek refuge in Selymbria, he notes that vulgar men (ἀγοραῖοι) among his fellow Byzantines were trafficking in looted ecclesiastical objects that the Latins were passing to them.²⁶⁶

Such moral judgments result in a broader definition of “the unlettered and entirely illiterate barbarians.” Choniates unquestionably blames the crusaders, but the long description may be perceived as expressing his anger at his fellow Romans/Byzantines who are ultimately responsible for the destruction of his most beloved city. They had themselves plundered some of the most beautiful artworks,²⁶⁷ and the city had suffered from successive fires in 1203 to 1204.²⁶⁸ Surely, they are distinguished

257 Cf. *Iliad* 1.114, 7.392, 13.626, 19.298; *Odyssey* 14.245, 15.356. Cf. v.D. 571.52–53.

258 v.D. 652.84–653.94.

259 Note the Greek: τὰ σπάνια πανταχοῦ καὶ καλῶν κάλλιστα ἔργα.

260 See, e.g., John Zonaras, *Epitome*, ed. L. Dindorf, *Ioannis Zonarae epitome historiarum*, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1869), 86; Nicholas Mesarites, *Letter to Emperor Theodore Laskaris*, 1, ed. A. Heisenberg, *Neue Quellen zur Geschichte des lateinischen Kaisertums und der Kirchenunion*, vol. 2, *Die Unionsverhandlungen vom 30. August 1206: Patriarchenwahl und Kaiserkrönung in Nikaia 1208* (Munich, 1923) [repr. *Quellen und Studien zur spätbyzantinischen Geschichte* (London, 1973)], 27.13–14.

261 E.g., Choniates, *Orationes* II', ed. van Dieten, *Orationes et epistulae* (n. 63 above), 126.15–19. Though Choniates' description of the crusaders as illiterate is quite exceptional, he was not alone in accusing them of immorality. See Kazhdan, “Latins and Franks in Byzantium” (n. 80 above); A. Papayianni, “Memory and Ideology: The Image of the Crusaders in Byzantine Historiography, Eleventh–Thirteenth Centuries,” in *The Crusader World*, ed. A. Boas (Abingdon, 2015), 278–88.

262 v.D. 557.16–21.

263 v.D. 571.52–53.

264 v.D. 566.27.

265 v.D. 547.80–84.

266 v.D. 594.80–83.

267 v.D. 558.47–559.74. See the excellent commentary in Papamastorakis, “Interpreting the *De signis*” (n. 5 above), 211–12.

268 Discussed in Madden, “The Fires of the Fourth Crusade” (n. 73 above).

from Choniates' peers and those who participated in rhetorical studies with him.²⁶⁹ Thus, the unity that Choniates seeks is not among Byzantines (against the Latins) but among those who are able to understand the beauty of Helen/Constantinople against those who are unable to do so.

Choniates' Classicism and the *De signis*

The *De signis* is a significant text in the history of world literature. It is fascinating not only because of its carefully chosen vocabulary or vivid images or any other literary technique that Choniates confidently employs with total success but also because of his ability to create a nearly imaginary cityscape using allusions from a classicizing past to express his present. The narrative begins with the essential ingredients for what was the political formation of Byzantium: the βασιλεία and the αρχιερωςύνη. The core of the *De signis* is its description of the statues in the Hippodrome, a collection of symbolic art within the cityscape. Choniates collects metaphors as part of the pervasive discourse of an aesthetic classicism, and he expresses his despair caused by a nearly delirious longing for his beautiful city. Our author defines the city's identity through an expression of a classicizing past that befitted the cultural habits of his peers. That past included anything that was already in Choniates' time placed at the realm of "antiquity": the Homeric world, fifth- and fourth-century Athens, the Hellenistic kingdoms, the Roman past, and even late antiquity. The author describes the destruction of Constantinople in rhetorical elaborations, and his lament (blended in a series of ekphrases) naturally reaches its highest point with the description of the destruction of the archetype of classicizing beauty, Helen of Troy. The sack of the city is a disaster not merely for the buildings and monumental landscape of Constantinople but also for the very *ēthos* and *kallos* of its citizens' lives. And those who caused this catastrophe are those unable to understand the beauty of the city, the "illiterate barbarians," crusaders and Byzantines alike. A single ray of hope—expressed through the implicit parallel to Isocrates' *Encomion for Helen*—is the fellow feeling among literati, who could understand the true beauty of the city.

269 Cf. v.D. 594.79–80: Καὶ ταῦτα μὲν τὰ ἡμέτερα καὶ τῶν ὁ συνεικοινώνων ἡμῖν σχήματος καὶ τῶν λογικῶν ἐν μεθέξει παιδεύσεων.

The manuscript tradition of the text supports only that the *De signis* (a) is a symbolic-emotional discourse and (b) addresses Choniates' peers. The *De signis* has survived either independently, as an example of good rhetoric, or as part of a single version of the *Diegesis*, the LO. That LO version was intentionally paired by Choniates with his anti-heretical treatise, the *Dogmatic Panoply*. By circulating these two works among the literati of his circle, he was (possibly) hoping to receive feedback or just present a draft of a work that included the political and ecclesiastical history of their empire, which, after the events of 1204, was fatally wounded. The readers of the LO would have been given access to the previous version of Choniates' political history, and thus they would have been able to appreciate his reworking and expansion of the text. Most importantly, having been initiated into the learned codes of Byzantine education (including texts that were both Christian and non-Christian classics), they would have been able to admire the two appendixes that Choniates placed at end of the two chapters of the LO, the *Lamentatio* and the *De signis*. With these appendixes, our author abandons his effort to register events as a good historian and instead expresses his deepest sorrow for the loss of his adored city. In the *Lamentatio* he borrows the voice of the prophet Jeremiah and cries out in a manner that reflects his own age and hardships. In the *De signis* he embarks on a series of ekphrases of works that may or may have not been, creating a picture of total destruction and triggering his feelings of resentment and inability to react against the fate of the Empire, the city, and his past life.

Given the *De signis*'s nature and context, the statues are not the author's major concern and the text itself was never intended to be a factual source for modern historians. In fact, I have argued that by including the account of the statues in the LO, Choniates offers a vision of classicism that enabled him to channel his emotions and opinions. It was a way for an individual to come to terms with the trauma of loss and uprooting. Our author does not address all citizens of Constantinople, but only those who have been nurtured intellectually by classicizing learning. In contrast to transient visitors, the city's inhabitants were expected to live along with the statues. No longer part of a living cultural production, the statues were rather fossils of a vaguely defined antiquity. Education made it possible to understand them in ways not tinged with superstition and fear, but as aesthetically pleasing objects. Already by the middle of

the eleventh century, the educated elite appreciated the ancient statues in aesthetic terms. Choniates introduces flexibility into the discourse of classicizing objects and texts: he manipulates the function of the ancient artifacts and captures in words his personal dismay about contemporary events. Here classicism stands out as a particular community's cultural practice; in engaging with this practice, the community communicates with an adjustable and intangible ideal past that sits uncomfortably on the edge of that community's own tradition. This classicism is related not to cultural imperialism but to the individual's participation in a core power group, and through its exclusivity it secures the cohesion of the

Empire's administrative strata. In this context, classicism is an attempt not to systematically understand the past or one's surroundings but to express the present.²⁷⁰

270 Two new pertinent publications appeared at a late stage in this article's production: Adam Goldwyn's *Witness Literature in Byzantium: Narrating Slaves, Prisoners, and Refugees* (2021) examines aspects of trauma in Byzantine witness literature (including Choniates' work), and Paroma Chatterjee's *Between the Pagan Past and Christian Present in Byzantine Visual Culture: Statues in Constantinople, 4th–13th Centuries CE* (Cambridge, 2021) discusses various aspects of statues mentioned in Choniates' *Diegesis*.

Appendix

Book epigram in L manuscript of the LO version: Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 9.2.4, fol. 385²⁷¹

Ed. A. M. Bandini, *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum bibliothecae medicae Laurentianae* (Leipzig, 1761), vol. 1, 434 = PG 140:291 (cum translatione latina). Cf.

Ghent University, *Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams (DBBE)*, no. 19319 (formerly 2783), <http://www.dbbe.ugent.be/occ/2783>, sine titulum. Titulum edidit J. L. van Dieten, *Zur Überlieferung und Veröffentlichung der Panoplia Dogmatike des Niketas Choniates*, *Zetemata Byzantina* 3 (Amsterdam, 1970), 13.

Τοῦ Θεσσαλονίκης Μεσοποταμίτου

τινὸς διελθόντος τὴν βίβλον, ἐξ ἑτοίμου στιχηρὸν προσφώνημα ὡς ἐν εἶδει ἐπιγράμματος μεμνημέν(ου) . . . χάς τοῦ φιλοπονήσαντος τὴν συνθήκην τῆς βίβλου προκειμένης διπλὴν πραγματείαν τὴν τε προταχθεῖσαν ἐκκλησιαστικὴν ἱστορίαν καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὸ τέλος. ὑστερόχρονον ἐπιτομήν.

Εὐαγγελικὸς ἄλλος οἰκοδεσπότης,
θησαυροφυλάκιον ἠνοιχθη στόμα,
ἐξάγεται δὲ καὶ παλαιὰ καὶ νέα,
ἀρχαῖκὰ δόγματα καὶ καινοὶ λόγοι.
5 ἢ βιβλιακὴ σύνθετος διαρτία
ἀνθρωπικὸν σύγκριμα μικτὸν δεικνύει,
ψυχὴ δοκεῖ καὶ σῶμα, γνώσις καὶ φθίσις,
κἂν οὐρανὸς πρὸς ὕψος, ἂν δὲ γῆ κάτω,

κόσμου μίμημα δέλτος ἢ προκειμένη,
10 τὰ θεῖα πρῶτον, ὕστερον τὰ πρακτέα.

καὶ μετρικὸν μὲν γράμμα, τὴν Ἰλιάδα,
σμαραδογλυφῆς²⁷² ἐνθαλαμεύει θίβη
Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ τοῦτο τῆς εὐψυχίας,
βασιλικῆς γνώρισμα φιλοδωρίας,

Of Mesopotamites, [metropolitan] of Thessaloniki

By a reader of the book. A versified, offhand, encomiastic address in the form of a [book] epigram . . . commemorating . . . the one who worked laboriously on the composition of the book at hand [which contains] a double treatise, first the ecclesiastical history and secondly . . . a [historical] compendium <composed> at a later date.

As a new host of the Gospels
a mouth, a treasury was opened
and expounds [words about] old and recent [issues]:
the ancient dogmas and the new *logoi*.
5 The combined formation in the book
demonstrates the human mixed composition,
meaning of soul and body, knowledge and decay,
as if in the height of heavens, as if at the bottom of
the earth,
this book compares to the universe [*kosmos*],
10 referring first to divine things and secondly to
mortal doings.
So, a pearl-sculpted casket encloses
a poetic work, the *Iliad*,
and this demonstrates Alexander's virtuous courage,
a feature of imperial bounteousness

Tit. Τοῦ Θεσσαλονίκης Μεσοποταμίτου fortasse a diversis manibus ἐξ ἑτοίμου om. ἐξ Bandini/Migne προκειμένης προ L πρὸς τὸ τέλος.. ὕπ... ὑστερόχρονον μ.. δέ τ.. ὕπ.... δε om. Bandini/Migne | 7 φθᾶσις L corr. φθᾶσις Bandini/Migne, φθᾶσις DBBE | 11 ἰδιάδα DBBE

271 Open access via Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Digital Repository (mss.bmlonline.it), [http://mss.bmlonline.it/s.aspx?Id=AWODkMSII1A4r7GxL9pT&c=Nicetae%20collectio%20omnium%20fere%20opinionum%20et%20sectarum,%20et%20historiarum%20hominum%20qui%20illas%20instituerunt%20\[...\]/oro/779](http://mss.bmlonline.it/s.aspx?Id=AWODkMSII1A4r7GxL9pT&c=Nicetae%20collectio%20omnium%20fere%20opinionum%20et%20sectarum,%20et%20historiarum%20hominum%20qui%20illas%20instituerunt%20[...]/oro/779).


272 Hapax legomenon.

- 15 ἀνακτορικῆς δεῖγμα λαμπρᾶς καρδίας,
 χλωρὰ λίθος, βλάστημα λειμῶνος λόγου,
 σαφῆς διόπτρα τοῦ πρὸς Ὅμηρον πόθου.
 ὕλη δέ τις καλύπτρα ταύτης πυκτίδος
 τὰς καρδιακὰς πτυχαὺς ἐξανοικτέον
- 20 καὶ τὴν μεταξὺ χώραν ὑφαπλωτέον
 κλίνην Σολομώντειον εὐτυχησάτω.
- τοιοῦτος οἶκος ἄξιος ταύτης τόπος.
 ζωῆς ἔμαθον βίβλον. ἀλλ' ἰδοὺ βλέπω,
 τὰ ζωτικὰ ῥήματα γράμματα φέρει
- 25 κἂν θνητὰ μικτὰ τοῖς ἀθανάτοις λόγοις.
- προφητικῆς πλήρωμα θεσπιωδίας,
 τῆς ἐπτάδος μέρισμα καὶ τῆς οὐκτάδος
- εἰ μή τις ἄλλην ἄλλος ἐπτάδα λέγει
 τὴν ἐπτάκαυλον συνοδικὴν λυχνίαν,
- 30 ἥτις ἀνήψεν ὧδε σωστικὸν σέλας.
- 15 an expression of a royal illustrious heart,
 a green stone, an offshoot of a meadow of *logos*,
 a clear mirror of the love for Homer.
 But the content of the book is also its cover,
 so that the panels of the heart may be opened
- 20 and the space between them [the panels] to extend
 as the book may find a fitting place by Solomon's
 bed.
 Such a house is worthy of this [book].
 I learned the book of life; but behold, I see
 it carries letters, the life-bringing words
- 25 even if mixing mortal [matters] with immortal
 words.
 This is the fulfillment of the prophecy
 about the separation on the seventh and the eighth
 days
 so none would name seven
 other than the synodic seven-stemmed lamp,
- 30 which lit up here the life-saving light.

16 λειμῶκος Migne | 24 φέρει L Bandini/Migne | 26 θεσπιωδίας DBBE

11–17 Plutarch, *Alexander*, ed. K. Ziegler, vol. 2.2, 8.1 | 16 AHG June 22.14.6–8: Ὡς ἀνθη τοὺς θεοὺς λόγους / ἐκ τῶν λειμῶνων δρεψάμενος / τῆς γραφῆς, ἱεράρχα | 21 Cant. 3:7 | 22 οἶκος ἄξιος Eur. *Hel.* 69 | 23 ζωῆς βιβλίον Rev. 3:5 | 24 ζωτικὰ γράμματα cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, ed. K. Holl, vol. 3, 6 | 27 Cf. Ex. 22:30 | 29 ἐπτάκαυλος λυχνία Greg. Naz. *In Pentec.* (Or. 41) PG 36:433 C

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