Reviving the Pagan Greek Novel in a Christian World

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IN THE CHRISTIAN WORLD of Constantinople, in the twelfth century A.D., there was a revival of the ancient Greek novel, replete with pagan gods and pagan themes. The aim of this paper is to draw attention to the crucial role of Christian themes such as the eucharist and the resurrection in the shaping and recreation of the ancient pagan Greek world in the Byzantine Greek novels.

Traditionally scholars have focused on similarities to the ancient Greek novels in basic plot elements, narrative techniques, and the like. This has often resulted in a general dismissal of the twelfth-century Greek novels as imitative and unoriginal.[1] Yet a revision of this judgment has begun to take place.[2] Scholars have noted that there are themes and imagery in these novels that would sound contemporary to many of their Byzantine readers, for example, ceremonial throne scenes and

[1] Thus B. E. Perry, *The Ancient Romances: A Literary-Historical Account of Their Origins* (Berkeley 1967) 103: "the slavish imitations of Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus which were written in the twelfth century by such miserable pedants as Eustathius Macrembolites, Theodorus Prodromus, and Nicetas Eugenianus, trying to write romance in what they thought was the ancient manner. Of these no account need be taken."

[2] See R. Beaton's important book, *The Medieval Greek Romance*[2] (London 1996) 52–88, 210–214; M. Alexiou, "A Critical Reappraisal of Eustathios Makrembolites' *Hysmine and Hysminias*," *BMGS* 3 (1977) 23–43.

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Byzantine "frogmen."[3] Interest has extended also to the Christian context of the twelfth-century novels, particularly in regard to the topics of chastity and suicide.[4] But the extent to which Christian rituals, themes, and motifs colored the thought and presentation of these novels has not yet been discussed and is sometimes even denied; thus, "none of the Byzantine romances alludes (except in the sly asides already mentioned) to the coming of Christianity."[5] Yet in the process of reviving the ancient Greek novels, the Byzantine novelists also rewrote them, which included infusing them with Christian themes and motifs.

Four novels appear to have been written during the twelfth-century revival of the ancient Greek novel: Theodore Prodromos's *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, Niketas Eugenianos's *Drosilla and Charikles*, Eustathios Makrembolites' *Hysmine and Hysminias*, and Konstantinos Manasses' *Aristandros and Kallithea*. Three of these novels are extant in their entirety, the fourth, by Manasses, only in fragments. All seem to have been written in the context of the Komnenian court in Constantinople, and at least two may well have been written during the 1140s under the patronage of the *sebastokratorissa* Eirene Komnene.[6]

The reign of the Komnenian dynasty (1081–1185) was a period of relative stability and economic security for the Byzantine world. This was also the period when the crusaders came,

[3]*E.g.* R. Macrides and P. Magdalino, "The Fourth Kingdom and the Rhetoric of Hellenism," in P. Magdalino, ed., *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe* (London 1992) esp. 149–152; H. Hunger, "Byzantinische 'Froschmänner'?" in R. Hanslik, A. Lesky, and H. Schwabl, edd., *Antidosis: Festschrift für Walther Kraus zum 70. Geburtstag* (Vienna 1972) 183–187, and his *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (Munich 1978), esp. II 131–132.

[4]See S. MacAlister, *Dreams and Suicides: The Greek Novel from Antiquity to the Byzantine Empire* (London 1996) esp.133–135, 139, 162–164.

[5]Beaton (*supra* n.2) 56–57; see also *e.g.*, F. Meunier, "Théodore Prodrome: 'Rhodantè et Dosiklès'. Roman grec ou roman byzantin?" *Rivista di bizantinistica* 1 (1991) 215, who comments on the absence "de toute trace de christianisme."

[6]See E. M. Jeffreys, "The Comnenian Background to the *Romans d'Antiquité*," *Byzantion* 50 (1980) 455–486.

arousing Byzantine hostility. Despite the general flowering of intellectual life in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as shown by a revival of such Hellenic genres as the novel and satire, there were also heresy trials against Hellenizing philosphers,[7] which would have seemed threatening to Hellenizing writers at court. Further, in the eleventh century, Michael Psellus's essay on Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius implies that there was strong disapproval being voiced of the ancient novels, perhaps by church officials.[8] Although in the twelfth century there also seems to have been a strong readership of the ancient novels,[9] still in this context of heresy trials and ecclesiastical doubt about the value of the ancient novel, the revival of the novel, with its pagan gods and pagan themes, is noteworthy.

Perhaps the revival is in part due to the coming of the Crusaders and a desire among Byzantines to articulate their Greek identity against the West. Further, from the fourth century on, when the ancient novel seems to have ceased to be written, saints' lives had continued the themes and motifs of the novels, *e.g.*, travel, trials, miracle escapes, and in the end salvation or reunion. The fading of the genre of saints' lives by the twelfth century provided an opening for the revival of the ancient novel.[10] The continued popularity of the ancient novels, particularly those of Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius, but also Longus's, etc., in the Byzantine world would also have encouraged the revival of the genre. The continued readership of these novels in an increasingly orthodox Christian world was

[7] For example, the condemnation in 1082 of John Italos, head of the school of philosophy in Constantinople, for paganism and heresy, and that in 1117 of Eustratios of Nicaea, who wrote commentaries on Aristotle. See L. Clucas, *The Trial of John Italos and the Crisis of Intellectual Values in Byzantium in the Eleventh Century* (Munich 1981).

[8] See A. R. Dyck, ed., *Michael Psellus: The Essays on Euripides and George of Pisidia and on Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius* (Vienna 1986) 83.

[9] See MacAlister (*supra* n.4) 118, 111–112.

[10] See H.-G. Beck, "Marginalia on the Byzantine Novel," in *Erotica Antiqua*, Acta of the International Conference on the Ancient Novel, 1976, ed. B. P. Reardon (Bangor [Wales] 1977) 63.

perhaps eased by claims that Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius were Christian bishops.[11] Further factors may have included the emergence of women literary patrons among the Komnenian dynasty, who might have been receptive to stories that give equal focus to heroines and heroes, as well as the possible friendliness of the court of the amorous Manuel I Komnenos to a genre with amatory themes.[12]

This paper explores the underlying presence of Christian themes and motifs in the twelfth-century (pagan) Greek novels. It begins with themes of the eucharist, the resurrection, human sacrifice, and pagan gods in Theodore Prodromos's *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*. Next is a discussion of themes of consumption, the Song of Solomon, and pagan gods in Niketas Eugenianos's *Drosilla and Charikles*. The paper then focuses on footwashing and other Christian motifs in Eustathios Makrembolites' *Hysmine and Hysminias*, and brief mention is also made of the fragments of Konstantinos Manasses' *Aristandros and Kallithea*.[13] The conclusion will include the suggestion that the revival of the novel in the twelfth century may have been in part motivated by a desire for a safe (distanced) forum for broaching sensitive theological subjects.

Prodromos and the Eucharistic Theme

Theodore Prodromos, one of the new professional writers at the twelfth-century Byzantine court, has traditionally been credited with being the first to revive the ancient Greek novel. He was a prolific writer, producing eulogies, philosophy, theology, satires, and the novel. He was closely associated with a

[11] Heliodorus: Socr. *HE* 5.22 (fifth century), Phot. *Bibl.* cod. 73 (ninth century); Achilles Tatius: *Suda* α 4695 (tenth century). For discussion see Hunger, *Literatur* (*supra* n.3) II 121–122; MacAlister (*supra* n.4) 109–112.

[12] See P. Magdalino, "Eros the King and the King of *Amours*: Some Observations on *Hysmine and Hysminias*," *DOP* 46 (1992) 197–204.

[13] The texts used are M. Marcovich, ed., *Theodori Prodromi, de Rhodanthes et Dosiclis amoribus libri IX* (Stuttgart 1992); F. Conca, ed., *Nicetas Eugenianus, de Drosillae et Chariclis amoribus* (Amsterdam 1990); O. Mazal, *Der Roman des Konstantinos Manasses* (Vienna 1967); I. Hilberg, ed., *Eustathii Macrembolitae Protonobilissimi, de Hysmines et Hysminiae amoribus libri XI* (Vienna 1876).

number of important persons at court: Eirene Doukaina, wife of Alexios I Komnenos, the *sebastokratorissa* Eirene Komnene, and John I Komnenos. After the death of John, he appears to have retired to a monastery, although he continued to write occasionally for members of the court of Manuel I Komnenos.[14]

Prodromos's novel, nine books long and written in twelve-syllable verse, starts *in medias res*, with pirates capturing the young lovers, Dosikles and Rhodanthe, among others, at a religious ceremony at Rhodes. After a series of misadventures, including the usual shipwrecks and threats of being sacrificed to the gods, the lovers are reunited and return home to Abydos to be wed.

Prodromos's novel is unique among the twelfth-century Greek novels in its close attention to themes of the eucharist, by then long-established as a central sacrament of the Orthodox church. It is perhaps worth quoting here the eucharistic narrative of Jesus giving bread and wine to his disciples:[15]

> While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant."

In twelfth-century Constantinople, one might expect echoes of the eucharist and the resurrection to be orthodox and uncontroversial. Yet Prodromos's novel includes passages that bear overt resemblances to the Christian themes of the eucharist and the resurrection and are disturbing in tone.

[14]On Prodromos's life see A. P. Kazhdan, "Theodore Prodromus: A Reappraisal," in *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Cambridge 1984) 87–114. On Prodromos's "literary circle" see Jeffreys (*supra* n.6) esp. 474–481.

[15]Matt. 26.26–28; see also Mark 14.22–24; Luke 22.19–20. The scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission. All rights reserved. The edition consulted in this paper is B. M. Metzger and R. E. Murphy, edd., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (New York 1991).

The most prominent instance of the eucharistic theme occurs after Dosikles and his friend have been rescued from the pirates. Dosikles is attending a celebratory banquet with his friend's family and community, but he is unhappy for he thinks his beloved Rhodanthe is lost:[16]

> Dosikles alone of that company was despondent;
> Dosikles alone was pining away,
> as if he had eaten a meal of his own flesh,
> had drunk a cup of his own blood.
> Someone seeing him pallid and wasted
> would perhaps have conjectured,
> Can it be that he is shamefully preparing a bizarre meal?
> That he eats of his own flesh and drinks of his own blood?
> That being filled with food from within
> he has no need besides for food from outside?

The motif of not eating and drinking out of grief reflects real life and also a long literary tradition, *e.g.* Achilles at the start of *Iliad* 24. But in elaborating this motif of isolating grief, Prodromos chooses to use language and imagery that would vividly remind Christian readers of the eucharistic ritual. Insofar as eucharistic rituals are designed to draw people together not isolate them, by invoking the eucharist here Prodromos intensifies the reader's sense of Dosikles' alienation from his dining companions.[17]

Twice more eucharistic imagery appears in similarly striking and disturbing ways. Toward the end of the novel, during the reunion of fathers and children, Dosikles expresses willingness to suffer any punishment for stealing Rhodanthe away (9.294–295): "See, here I am: whip me, punish me, | glut yourself on my flesh, drink up my blood." Although themes of cannibalism do appear in the ancient Greek novels, the specific eucharistic

[16] 8.232–241. All translations from the Byzantine novels are my own. The line numbers correspond to the editions cited *supra* n.13.

[17] To console Dosikles, the father of the household tells him that he must eat, for to grieve at a celebratory meal shows ingratitude to the gods, and assures him that he has a new family in the community of the meal (8.269–273). This was a typical motif of Christian feasts, which celebrate splitting away from the biological family and finding a new family in the Christian community.

combination of eating the flesh and drinking the blood seems to be something new to the Greek novel with Prodromos.

Another instance occurs in the context of a military battle between two rival pirate bands. As the first pirate king's city is being captured, the following description is given of the carnage (6.122–123): "the sword was savagely devouring much raw flesh, and the dagger was drinking streams of blood." This disturbing use of eucharistic imagery occurs in a description of how the battle savagery delights pagan gods (6.114–123):

> It was possible to see the temples being plundered,
> the gods' statues cast forth,
> heroes' paintings erased,
> houses captured, the inhabitants slaughtered,
> women lamenting, and little children wailing.
> A throng of cruel Furies danced,
> the Titans sang a tragic song about the disaster,
> Pallas played, and Ares was pleased.
> The sword was savagely devouring much raw flesh,
> and the dagger was drinking streams of blood.

The eucharistic rite has been transferred into the context of savage pagan gods who delight in the consumption of raw flesh and blood. Further, the descriptions of temples plundered, gods' statues cast forth, and heroes' paintings erased also seem evocative of another aspect of Byzantine history: the destruction of pagan temples as well as the iconoclastic destruction of Christian imagery and statues.

The traditional novelistic theme of human sacrifice (and barbarian cannibalism) also seems to take on topical, Christian significance in the context of a novel with such obvious eucharistic motifs. A philosophical discussion on the morality of human sacrifice takes place between the second pirate king and his potential sacrifices and then between the king and the father of one of the intended sacrifices. The parallel to Heliodorus's novel, a strong influence on the shape and patterning of both Prodromos's and Eugenianos's novels, is evident here, for there too moral objections are offered to human sacrifice

(10.9.6, 10.39). But in the debates in Prodromos's novel, there is an unusually graphic and physical tone to the description of human sacrifice and the gods' consumption that seems to evoke the eucharistic ritual. Thus, for example, the father pleads with the pirate king for the lives of the two young men (8.50–57):

> Offer the gods pity rather than a sacrifice;
> benevolence is an excellent meal for gods,
> and a man's escape from slaughter, an excellent bowl of wine.
> Thus the gods dine on deliverance;
> thus shared joy makes a meal for gods,
> but not human flesh, great slaughter,
> blood gushing forth, an intoxicated sword,
> roasted flesh, and polluted air.

The advocacy here of a spiritual rather than a blood sacrifice could have had special resonance with Christian readers (see *e.g.* Matt. 9.13).[18]

Prodromos heightens the focus on the physicality of the offering of flesh and blood/wine to gods by having the father assert the need for human bodies if gods were to enjoy offerings of human flesh (8.58–68):

> If the immortals had a body
> and frame like ours,
> if they had tongue, teeth, mouth,
> belly, bowels,
> and all the rest,
> you could offer them food and drink
> and roasted flesh and cups of honey drink;
> but since the gods' divine form is fleshless,
> they can't eat flesh or drink wine.
> Surely then he would anger the immortals,
> whoever should roast human flesh.

[18]On the notion of spiritual sacrifice see E. Ferguson, "Spiritual Sacrifice in Early Christianity and Its Environment," *ANRW* II 23.2 (1980) 1152–1189; S. Bradbury, "Julian's Pagan Revival and the Decline of Blood Sacrifice," *Phoenix* 49 (1995) esp. 332–337. In Heliodorus's novel, Prodromos's model here, the strong advocacy for spiritual sacrifice may have helped promote the idea that Heliodorus was a Christian. The concept of spiritual sacrifice was also prominent among some pagans (Pythagoreans, Stoics, Neoplatonists, etc.).

The moral tone of these arguments may recall the Ethiopian priest's arguments against human sacrifice at the end of Heliodorus's *Ethiopian Story*, but there the arguments are briefer and do not spell out the details of what human sacrifice might mean in terms of the gods' literal consumption of human flesh and blood.[19] In a society heavily invested in the institution of the eucharist, with its sacrament of eating the flesh and drinking the blood, these arguments and images might have seemed troubling to readers.

The question then arises, why would a writer dependent on court patronage in Constantinople in the twelfth century choose to use such imagery in these provocative ways? The graphic nature of the father's arguments seems to draw on a history of discussion regarding the Christian ritual of the eucharist and cannibalism. Criticisms of the eucharist as cannibalism find voice already in the New Testament (*e.g.* John 6.52–61). In the twelfth century, controversies over the nature of the eucharist were building and would by the end of the century split the church. One side, represented by Soterichos Panteugenos, maintained that the eucharist was symbolic, the other, represented by Michael Glykas, that it was to be taken literally.[20] The terms of this controversy were long-standing. For example, the Iconoclasts regarded the eucharistic bread and wine as a symbol of Jesus, but the Second Council of Nicaea (A.D. 787) declared that the eucharistic bread and wine were not symbolic but the actual flesh and blood of Jesus.[21] Prodromos's graphic descriptions of

[19] In Prodromos's novel a more universal moral claim is forwarded by the hero's friend Kratandros, that gods hate human sacrifices and strange slaughters; "What city | guided by sacred principles of law | sacrifices humans and honors gods in this way?" he asks (7.490–492).

[20] For the two sides, see M. Jugie, *Theologia dogmatica Christianorum orientalium ab Ecclesia catholica dissidentium* (Paris 1930) III 317–325; R. Bornert, *Les Commentaires byzantins de la divine liturgie du VII^e au XV^e siècle* (Paris 1966) 229–233. On the eucharistic controversy in the twelfth century, see too M. Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni, 1081–1261* (Cambridge 1995) 128–131.

[21] Mansi XIII 264D–268A, *cf.* 261E–264C. For discussion see S. Gero, "The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Byzantine Iconoclasts and Its Sources," *BZ* 68 (1975) 4–22.

eating human flesh and drinking human blood seem to raise issues related to this discussion.[22]

Among the ancient (pagan) Greeks, the theme of cannibalism evoked horror rather than the sense of unity with the divine attained through eucharistic ritual. In mythology, the Greeks trace cannibalism back to the gods before the Olympians.[23] So too in the ancient novels, the theme of cannibalism occurs. Thus in Achilles Tatius's novel Egyptian bandits supposedly disembowel the heroine and eat her entrails before the hero's eyes (3.15). The theme of human sacrifice linked with cannibalism also occurs in the fragments remaining from Lollianus's novel *Phoinikika*.[24] Among the Roman novels the theme of cannibalism occurs in Petronius's *Satyrica*: Eumolpus's will stipulates that the condition of inheritance is to "slice up my body into little pieces and swallow them down in the presence of the entire city" (141, transl. Arrowsmith).

Anxieties about eating and consumption are voiced throughout Prodromos's novel, on small and large levels. When Dosikles fears Rhodanthe is dead at sea after her ship has capsized, he laments that her body now is a feast for fish, her flesh a meal for sea creatures (6.303–304; see also 487, 491), and he later elaborates with the paradox that she has become food for creatures who themselves are destined to be food

[22] On how "heretics homed in on the horror" of eucharistic eating and drinking, see M. Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge 1991) 360 with n.64.

[23] Thus the Titan Cronus, the stories of Tantalus, Atreus and Thyestes, Homer's Cyclops, Procne and Tereus. For the theme of self-cannibalism, see Ov. *Met.* 8.877–878 (in the *Metamorphoses* the consumption themes culminate in Pythagoras's discourse against eating flesh, 15.75–175). On Byzantine miniatures of Tantalus serving the gods his son Pelops see K. Weitzmann, *Greek Mythology in Byzantine Art* (Princeton 1951) 57–58, with figs. 68–69.

[24] For Greek text and English translation, see S. A. Stephens and J. J. Winkler, edd., *Ancient Greek Novels: The Fragments* (Princeton 1995) 337–341. For discussion see J. Winkler, "Lollianos and the Desperadoes," *JHS* 100 (1980) esp. 166–175; A. Henrichs, "Pagan Ritual and the Alleged Crimes of the Early Christians: A Reconsideration," in P. Granfield and J. A. Jungmann, edd., *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten* (Münster 1970) I 29–35.

(6.377–378).[25] The fear of becoming food for fish is an old one.[26] In the ancient Greek novels this fear is also expressed. Thus in Achilles Tatius's *Leukippe and Kleitophon*, Kleitophon prays (3.5.4), "If we are doomed to feed the fish, let a single monster engorge us together, a single stomach accommodate us as one, so that even among the fish we may share a sepulcher."[27] Also in Longus's *Daphnis and Chloe*, Pan threatens the general in charge of the kidnapping of Chloe (2.27): "I shall sink your ship and make you food for the fish unless, immediately, you hand back Chloe" (transl. Gill, *CAGN*). (These are the only two instances of this theme in the ancient novels of Chariton, Xenophon of Ephesus, Achilles Tatius, Longus, and Heliodorus.)

In Prodromos's novel, however, the additional detail that the fish might themselves be eaten with Rhodanthe's body within adds a new twist and seems to echo theological arguments regarding the resurrection of bodies that had been consumed by other creatures. Thus, for example, a test case proposed by Porphyry:[28]

> A certain man was shipwrecked. The hungry fish had his body for a feast. But the fish were caught and cooked and eaten by some fishermen, who had the misfortune to run afoul of some ravenous dogs, who killed and ate them. When the dogs died, the vultures came and made a feast of them. How will the body of the shipwrecked man be reassembled, considering it has been absorbed by other bodies of various kinds?

In Prodromos's novel, the additional detail in the expression of

[25] The fear that the beloved has been swallowed by fish is voiced once in Eugenianos's novel (6.86–88), but without the added twist that the fish in turn become food for other creatures.

[26] *E.g.* Hom. *Il.* 21.122–127.

[27] Transl. Winkler in B. P. Reardon, ed., *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (Berkeley 1989: hereafter *CAGN*).

[28] Transl. R. J. Hoffmann, *Porphyry's Against the Christians: The Literary Remains* (Amherst [N.Y.] 1994) 91. For the Greek text see A. von Harnack, ed., *Porphyrius: 'Gegen die Christen'* (*Abh.Berlin* 1916.1) fr.94. See also Athenag. *The Resurrection of the Dead* 4.

the eaten-by-fish motif, that the fish in turn would themselves be consumed, seems strongly reminiscent of such "chain consumption" arguments regarding the resurrection of the body.[29]

Prodromos and the Resurrection Theme

The *Scheintod* (seeming death) scene has long been recognized as a staple of the ancient novel;[30] repeatedly a person is believed to be dead and then rises from the dead.[31] The wish for victory over death is ancient and compelling: the desire that death is not the end, that the dead can return, or that there is life beyond death. In Prodromos's novel, as in the ancient ones, lovers repeatedly wish for victory over death.

But in a novel written in the deeply Christian world of Byzantium, issues raised about the resurrection would have had a special Christian resonance for most readers. In Prodromos's novel, when Dosikles tries to kill himself in the belief that his beloved Rhodanthe is dead, his friend Kratandros tries to prevent him by denying the possibility of resurrection (6.423–435):

> If, while Rhodanthe is preserved in life,
> you cast yourself recklessly into the sea,
> is it possible to rise again from the dead
> and live together and be united with the girl,
> to escape from so great a chasm—oh gods, how great!—
> and to flee from the darkness of death,
> with the laws of the dead set aside?
> Once humans have left life,
> fallen into dust, mingled with the dead,
> sailed across the marshy waters of Acheron,
> gulped down the single cup of forgetfulness,
> and drunk a cup of Cocytus or Styx,
> they cannot see the light of day again.

[29] On these see C. W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York 1995) 32–43; R. M. Grant, "The Resurrection of the Body," *JRelig* 28 (1948) 195–198.

[30] E. Rohde, *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer*[3] (Leipzig 1914) 287 n.1.

[31] Thus Chariton 1.5–6, 1.8; Xen. Eph. 3.6–8; Ach. Tat. 3.15–18, 5.7.4–9, 5.18–19. For discussion see also G. W. Bowersock, *Fiction as History: Nero to Julian* (Berkeley 1994) 104–108; Winkler (*supra* n.24) 167 (on Ach. Tat. 3.15).

In a similar suicide scene in Achilles Tatius's novel, written during the second century, while Christianity was still struggling for acceptance in the Roman empire, the author has the hero's friend make the suggestive remark, "Who can know but that she will come to life again?"[32] Prodromos, on the other hand, writing in a world in which most of his contemporary readers would be heavily invested in the Christian idea of the resurrection, moves in the less expected direction of having a sympathetic character deny at length the possibility of a resurrection.

In the ancient novels of Chariton, Xenophon of Ephesus, Achilles Tatius, Longus, and Heliodorus, and in the twelfth-century novels of Eugenianos and Makrembolites, the seeming death and resurrection scenes all involve lovers. In Prodromos's novel, however, the theme of seeming death and resurrection is explored on all levels, from pirates to animals to the main protagonists. For example, the hero Dosikles while hunting observes a female bear in a state of paralysis on one side, who "brought all her dead flesh back to life" by using an herb (8.478). Dosikles picks the herb, and when he discovers his beloved Rhodanthe paralyzed (through a poisonous drink), he uses the herb to bring her body "back to life—oh divine grace!" (8.506). This unusual variation on the theme of a return from seeming death includes a salvation directly attributable to the lover's foresight and activity.

A central resurrection scene occurs during the three books that focus on the pirates, in the absence of the hero and heroine. At the pirates' banquet an entertainer seems to kill himself and then rises from the dead at the host's command, in the pirate king's name (4.235–238):

> Gobryas stood up from his seat,
> approached the man who seemed dead,
> and said, "You, sir, arise and live.
> This is the command of the great Mistylos."

[32] 7.6.1; transl. S. Gaselee, *Achilles Tatius* (Loeb).

This false display is designed to awe the other pirate king's ambassador (much as the elaborate displays at the Byzantine court impressed barbarians).

The display includes other tricks as well, designed to deceive and impress the guest satrap Artaxanes. For example, the featured dish at Gobryas's banquet is a roast lamb from which live baby sparrows burst forth, a dish highly reminiscent of the boar from which thrushes flew forth at Trimalchio's banquet in Petronius's *Satyrica*.[33] Prodromos's Gobryas uses the roast lamb dish as an example of the power of his pirate king Mistylos to change the substances of things (4.134–143). The spectacle of the occasion is the important thing here—to overwhelm the visitor with the power of the host, as in the Byzantine court.[34] But in Prodromos's novel, in the context of repeated imagery of the eucharist and the resurrection, food illusions featuring life emerging from death (unburnt sparrows emerging from a burnt womb, 4.161–163) may have a Christian resonance as well. Gobryas uses this display as a demonstration of Mistylos's powers "to make substances change" (4.136).[35]

Gobryas claims a further power for Mistylos, that in battle he could even make male soldiers conceive and bring forth puppies (4.166–171). Prodromos has Artaxanes repeatedly express intense anxiety about the possibility of a male's giving birth and lactating (4.180–188; see also 5.56–61):

> Do not let him [King Mistylos] give the accursed fortune of women
> and the distressing pains of childbirth
> to an army general, as an unlucky gift,
> for where in us [males] are there outlets for milk
> if the babies need, in accordance with Nature's law,
> to be nourished by draughts of milk?

[33] *Sat.* 40.3–5. None of the ancient Greek novels (of Chariton, Xenophon of Ephesus, Achilles Tatius, Longus, and Heliodorus) include food illusions.

[34] See Hunger, *Literatur* (*supra* n.3) II 131–132; Macrides and Magdalino (*supra* n.3) 150, 151–152.

[35] On linkages between eucharistic devotion and food illusions, see further C. W. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley 1987) 60–61.

Besides, how will an army general
be able to endure such great shame
if he—wretched man—conceives wretched babies?"

Stories of males giving birth were not unknown, of course, among the ancient Greeks and Romans. Prodromos's Gobryas reminds Artaxanes that the theme of males giving birth traces back to Zeus, who gave birth to Dionysus and to Athena, so Artaxanes need not be ashamed of giving birth as a male (4.190–206): "how can we call shameful for men of earth | things that are honorable for gods of heaven?" (4.205–206).[36]

But for Christians, the specific anxiety about nurturing through breasts might also recall discussions of God as mother, the eucharist, and the lactating Jesus.[37] Thus, for example, Clement of Alexandria's elaborate discussion of the breasts and milk of God in *Paed.* 1.6, *e.g.*, "Hence seeking is called sucking; for to those babes that seek the Word, the Father's breasts of love supply milk," and "He who has regenerated us nourishes us with His own milk, the Word; for it is proper that what has procreated should forthwith supply nourishment to that which has been procreated."[38] Similarly, the anxiety expressed by Prodromos's Artaxanes that he might be made to give birth extends to the consequent need to nourish the offspring. Prodromos clearly links Artaxanes' anxiety with gender anxiety, a

[36] For Byzantine visual representations of the births of Dionysus and Athena from Zeus, with classical models, see Weitzmann (*supra* n.23) figs. 52–60. On the Christian story of the "pregnancy" of the emperor Nero (and his giving birth to a frog), see R. Zapperi, *The Pregnant Man*, transl. B. Williams (Chur 1991) 112–121, and 3–41 on such Christian stories as the birth of Eve from Adam, the birth of the church from Christ on the cross, etc.

[37] On "God's motherhood" and "Christ's breast," see Bynum (*supra* n.35) esp.270–274, and her "Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing," in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley 1982) 110–169. On "God the Mother," see also E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York 1979) 48–69.

[38] *Paed.* 1.6.46.1, 49.3 (I 117, 119 Stählin); the English translations are taken from A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, edd., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* II 221. Prodromos's criticisms of Clement indicate familiarity with Clement's writings (Migne, *PG* 133.1265AB).

strong theme in Prodromos's novel,[39] but the issues Artaxanes raises also have striking parallels in Christian discussions of the eucharist and the milk and breasts of God.[40]

Prodromos's juggler's feat with the sword may recall the juggler described at the start of Apuleius's *Golden Ass*, who swallowed a sword and then a hunting spear (1.4). Through Lucius's description of the juggler, Apuleius reminds his readers to suspend disbelief, to remain open-minded to the possibilities of magic (and literature).[41] In Prodromos's novel, however, credulity to magic and to juggler's tricks is mocked in the person of Artaxanes, as shown, for example, by King Bryaxes' response to Artaxanes' warnings regarding the powers of the rival pirate king (5.74–80):

> "I wasn't aware, Chief Satrap,
> that Artaxanes trembles thus
> before mere images and shadows of bogey monsters,
> is afraid of the deceitful forms of children's games,
> which don't even frighten infants,
> lets himself be robbed of his senses and his whole mind
> by the tricks of jesters and cooks.

Yet King Bryaxes' response to Artaxanes' warnings about Mistylos's powers also seems to emphasize their resemblance to powers traditionally ascribed to Jesus (5.84–88):

> I'll believe that this omnipotent one, transformer of substances,
> and wonder-worker (to Artaxanes' thinking)
> raises the dead and transforms substances
> if he should fall, a pitiable corpse, under my sword,
> and then raise himself back up again.

[39] *E.g.*, Kratandros's admonition to Dosikles to stop weeping ("it's womanish to weep," 1.150) and Bryaxes' admonition to his men before battle ("to cast off arms and run away is the mark of an unmanly, even womanish spirit," 5.376–377); see also *e.g.* 6.444–445, 8.282–283.

[40] *E.g.* Clem. Al. *Paed.* 1.6.42.2–3 (I 115 Stählin).

[41] See J. J. Winkler, *Auctor and Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's The Golden Ass* (Berkeley 1985) 30–33.

The description of Mistylos here seems to parallel powers ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels and also suspicions raised against him.[42] When Bryaxes mockingly asserts that he will believe in the powers of Mistylos if he should be killed and then resurrect himself, this seems to echo the mockery of Jesus on the cross (Matt. 27.39–43), *e.g.* "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him" (42; see also Mark 15.31–32, Luke 23.35–39).

Prodromos and the Human Sacrifice Theme

The theme of human sacrifice has a long history among the Greeks, including Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia, Achilles' sacrifice of twelve Trojan boys on Patroclus's pyre (*Il.* 23.175–183), and the Greeks' sacrifice of Polyxena on Achilles' tomb (Eur. *Tro.*).[43] Human sacrifice is also one of the charges used to denigrate persons of different beliefs or ethnicities in the ancient world. So for example pagans accused Christians of human sacrifice (and cannibalism), and Christians brought the same charges against pagans.[44]

[42]On Jesus as possessed by evil powers see *e.g.* Mark 3.22, 6.14–16; Justin *Apol.* 1.30. On Jesus as wonder-worker, see M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco 1978), 81–93 etc.; H. Remus, "'Magic or Miracle?' Some Second Century Instances," *The Second Century* 2 (1982) 127–156 (esp. 134–139). On magic in the Byzantine world, see H. Maguire, ed., *Byzantine Magic* (Washington 1995). As Meeks points out, "While there is a strong tradition both in Judaism and in Christianity that tries to distinguish sharply between 'magic' and 'religion,' in practice the distinction is often unclear at best" (W. A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* [New Haven 1993] 114).

[43]On the history of the human sacrifice theme among the ancient Greeks, see D. D. Hughes, *Human Sacrifice in Ancient Greece* (London 1991); on human sacrifice scenes in the ancient Greek novel, see *e.g.* Winkler (*supra* n.24) 167–171.

[44]J. Rives, "Human Sacrifice among Pagans and Christians," *JRS* 85 (1995) 65–85; M. J. Edwards, "Some Early Christian Immoralities," *AncSoc* 23 (1992) 72–82; Henrichs (*supra* n.24) 18–35. On the charge of cannibalism, see *e.g.* Bynum (*supra* n.29) 55.

In Prodromos's novel, the theme of human sacrifice, like that of resurrection, seems to have a special Christian slant to it. In book one, the first pirate king orders the sacrifice of four men as a thanks-offering to the gods of the sea, for it pleases the gods to drink human blood (1.454–461). Here, in contrast to anonymous persons in the ancient Greek novels, Prodromos explores what this sacrifice means from the victims' points of view (what they lose).[45] But Prodromos's elaboration of the sacrifice of one of the sailors, Nausikrates, also seems to highlight aspects paralleled in Christian tales: a cheerful and willing self-sacrifice, admiration from those viewing his death, and the anticipation of banquets in the afterlife (1.485–501):

> Nausikrates, however, bravely, without tears,
> hastened to his slaughter as if to a drinking party,
> with this address to his merry heart:
> "Farewell, dinners and drinking parties of the living!
> Farewell, lavish tables!
> Having had his fill of you, Nausikrates
> will gladly go down to the house of Hades
> and inspect the drinking parties of the dead
> and visit their feasts."
> He spoke thus and bent his neck,
> saying, "Come on, Gobryas, strike me with the blade!
> Look, Nausikrates is ready for slaughter."
> And so Gobryas stretched forth the broad blade
> and killed the noble Nausikrates, pitiably.
> And all those present at these events
> were struck with amazement at the dead man
> and his undaunted heart.

Nausikrates' attitude of happy self-sacrifice recalls the attitudes of Christian martyrs.[46] His declaration that he shall visit the drinking parties of the dead also seems to echo biblical themes. Thus Jesus proclaims, "I tell you, many will ... eat with

[45] This narrative strategy traces back to Homer's numerous sympathetic vignettes of slain warriors in the *Iliad*.

[46] See too MacAlister (*supra* n.4) 135.

Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."[47] Prodromos repeats this motif later, in the description of Dosikles' calm and cheerful willingness to be sacrificed (7.347–349): "The other stood in the middle, | with cheerful appearance and joyous face, | going to his death as if to a feast."[48]

Prodromos's Rhodanthe talks of her decision to follow Dosikles in terms that parallel renunciations made by Christian martyrs and saints (7.76–84):

> Ah, Dosikles, don't worry on my account,
> for why did I give up my dear land, my parent's earth,
> my father, mother, dear brothers,
> the circle of maiden friends my own age,
> gold in abundance, pearls, silver, stones,
> and, more important, my freedom,
> and become a mockery for the world,
> and exchange for all that, wandering with Dosikles,
> and prefer chains to living well?

These motives were not unknown in the ancient novel,[49] but in a deeply Christian context, such words would surely have evoked images of Christian asceticism (self-denial) and piety.[50]

Prodromos and the Pagan Gods

The second time the motif of human sacrifice arises in Prodromos's novel, the pirate king Bryaxes initiates a lengthy Socratic dialogue with his two intended victims, Dosikles and Kratandros, on the question of proper worship of divinity. The

[47] Matt. 8.11, so too Luke 13.29; *cf.* Isa. 25.6's description of the banquet of heaven for all peoples, "a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines."

[48] The explanation of Dosikles' cheerfulness as due to a mistaken notion regarding the possibility of love after death not only undermines Dosikles' heroism but also raises the question of the nature of the afterlife (7.350–354): "he thought it a good thing and surpassing good, | if he should die, together with Rhodanthe, | for the unlucky hope deluded him, | that even in tombs there are loves and nuptials | —so blind and stupid is love!"

[49] *E.g.* Ach. Tat. 5.18.4.

[50] Rhodanthe's words could also apply, for example, to Thecla and what she gave up to follow Paul, in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla.*

predominance of religion in society is a given in Bryaxes' assumptions about the young men, as indicated in his prefatory remarks (7.394–397):

> I could ask about religion and family,
> but I won't, since I have your dress and language
> to teach me all these things,
> nor whether you worship gods and which these are.

In this passage Prodromos seems to be playing with the vast distance between the pagan and Byzantine Greek worlds. The concept of "a religion" was alien to the ancient Greeks.[51] A barbarian pirate in the ancient Mediterranean world (with its potpourri of gods and ritual practices) would hardly have been able to discern from a Greek person's dress and language a particular "religion." But in the twelfth-century Byzantine Greek world, it would have been a relatively safe assumption that Greek dress and language meant Christian religion.

While in the ancient Greek novels female divinities generally serve as the patrons and guarantors of weddings—heroes and heroines fall in love at festivals of goddesses, see them in dreams, invoke them as guarantors of marriage, and are finally reunited at their temples or offer thanks there for being reunited[52]—in the twelfth-century novels male gods take all these roles. In Prodromos's novel, Hermes is the patron and

[51] Thus, on the "alien conceptual world of classical Greek paganism," Cartledge observes, "The classical Greeks did not, for example, 'have a word for' religion" (in L. B. Zaidman and P. S. Pantel, *Religion in the Ancient Greek City*, transl. P. Cartledge [Cambridge 1992] xvii). θρησκεία, translated as "religion" in this passage from Prodromos, takes on the meaning "religion" after the classical period and particularly in Christian and Jewish contexts (*e.g.*, LXX Wis. 14.18; Acts 26.5; Ep.Jac. 1.26; Clem. Al. *Strom.* 6.15).

[52] In Chariton, Aphrodite plays this role; in Xenophon of Ephesus, Artemis (1.2–3, 5.15.2; *cf.* Isis's similar role, 4.3.3–4, 5.4.6–7, 5.13.2–4); in Achilles Tatius, Artemis (4.1.4, 7.13–16, 8.9.13); and in Longus, the Nymphs, with Eros (1.7, 2.23, 3.27, 4.34, 4.37–38; marriage consecrated at the Nymphs' cave). In Heliodorus, however, Apollo, Isis, and the Ethiopian deities Helios and Selene divide these roles as the lovers move from Delphi to Ethiopia (marriage consecrated at the altars of Helios and Selene, 10.40–41).

guarantor of the wedding.[53] Hermes appeared in a dream to Rhodanthe and said that the marriage must take place in Abydos by the providence of the gods there. Hermes' guarantee is repeatedly invoked in the novel (3.69–75, 432–434; 6.394–403, 471–472; 8.529–530), which ends with Rhodanthe and Dosikles' wedding performed in Hermes' temple by Hermes' priest (9.474–481). In Eugenianos's novel, Dionysus is the patron and guarantor of the wedding. Charikles falls in love with Drosilla at a festival of Dionysus (3.61ff., esp.336ff.; 7.136–143), Dionysus guarantees their wedding (1.247–255; 3.409–411, 343–344; 8.151–160), and he provides help throughout the novel (3.408, 351–365; 6.664–668; 7.225–228), which ends with Drosilla and Charikles' wedding performed in Dionysus's temple by Dionysus's priest (9.286–296). In Makrembolites' novel, three male gods are the patrons and guarantors of the love affair: Zeus, Eros, and Apollo. Hysminias meets Hysmine when he comes for a celebration of Zeus's festival, Eros gives Hysmine to him (5.19.3; 6.18.3–7.1; 7.19; 11.5; *cf.* 3.1), and Eros and Zeus are regarded as co-guarantors of the wedding (*e.g.*, 7.1, 4, 6; 7.9.3; 9.18.2). Then at Daphnepolis Apollo's help is invoked (8.10; 10.10–12), the couple reunite with their parents at Apollo's altar, and Apollo's oracle guarantees their wedding (10.13.3–5; 10.16.4–10.17.2; 11.12.1).

I suggest that this striking shift from female deities as the patrons and guarantors of weddings in the ancient novels to male deities in the twelfth-century novels may have something to do with the shift from pagan beliefs, encompassing a wide range of male and female deities, to Christianity, with its focus on male divinity (Father and Son). Further, while weddings never take place inside temples in the extant ancient novels, the weddings in both Prodromos's and Eugenianos's novels take place inside temples, with priest presiding and the community in attendance. This seems to reflect another aspect of Christian

[53] In the extant ancient novels, Hermes is mentioned only in very traditional functions (*e.g.*, as patron of merchants, god of profit, god of eloquence).

practice in the Byzantine world, for while pagan Greeks did not celebrate weddings in temples, among the Byzantines it was common practice to hold weddings in church, and the marriage legislation of Leo VI (886–912) enforced this practice by decreeing that only marriages consecrated in church were valid. As Angold observes in a discussion of slave marriages under Alexius I, "It is almost as though it [the church's blessing of a marriage] represented some kind of enfranchisement; in the sense that through it the newly wedded couple took their full place in society."[54] At the end of both Prodromos's and Eugenianos's novels, the priest urges the whole community into the temple to witness the wedding ceremony.

Eugenianos, Themes of Erotic Consumption, and the Song of Solomon

The novel of Eugenianos, a younger contemporary of Prodromos, imitates Prodromos's in many respects (the first page of the Paris MS., in fact, proclaims that Eugenianos's novel is an imitation of Prodromos's). Like Prodromos's novel, Eugenianos's is nine books long, written in twelve-syllable verse, and also starts *in medias res*, with an attack on a town. Unlike Prodromos's novel, however, Eugenianos's does not raise the eucharist theme in overt ways and does not include philosophical discussion of such topics as the resurrection. Still, themes of cannibalism and resurrection occur, as in the ancient novels, particularly in the context of the discourse of love.

There is a long history of cannibalistic imagery used in the context of lovers erotically consuming one another. Among the ancient novels, Achilles Tatius's offered the twelfth-century novelists a strong model of images of cannibalistic consumption between lovers, *e.g.*, "She was my entire meal" (1.5.3), "my banquet had been in my eyes: a surfeit of her face, a champagne vision drunk down till I could drink no more" (1.6.1), "To a

[54] Angold (*supra* n.20) 411, with 404–405 on Leo VI's marriage legislation.

lover nothing is savory save only the beloved" (5.13.3).[55] In Eugenianos's novel the images of cannibalistic consumption have become more graphic and even grotesque. Thus, a lover complains in a letter to his beloved that Eros, like a serpent, is devouring his heart and innards (2.216–219).[56] The hero Charikles, gazing on his beloved Drosilla sleeping in a garden, describes Eros as "clinging closely like a marsh leech, drink[ing] up every drop of blood" (4.400–401). Drosilla's rustic suitor says to her that he takes her smile as payment for his lover's speech, as a raven takes his nourishment from stinking entrails (6.540–543).

Eugenianos also seems to draw inspiration for erotic consumption imagery from the Song of Solomon, which features similarly sustained passages of alimentary imagery for the beloved. Thus a fictive story told by Charikles features a girl offering to feed her lover with her body (4.277–288):

> If there is no ripe apple in the garden,
> accept my breast in place of the apple;
> if it pleases you, unhappy man, bend forward and eat.
> If a bunch of grapes from a vine is not ripe,
> squeeze the tips of my tart breast;
> take a delightful kiss in place of a honeycomb.
> Instead of embracing tree and branches,
> which one knows to do when wishing to gather fruit,
> I am the tree; come, cling to me,
> for you have my arms in place of branches.
> I am the tree; climb up me
> and pluck my fruit, which is sweeter than honey.

Both the length and the details of this description—the girl as a tree for her lover to climb, combined with erotic apple and grape

[55]Transl. Winkler in *CAGN*; *cf.* the usual "[your lips] taste sweet as honey," 2.7.6. Chariton and Heliodorus, on the other hand, include no food or consumption imagery used of the beloved; Longus's novel contains only the usual pastoral food images *e.g.* 1.17, 1.18, 2.18 (but note the Sapphic apple at the top of the tree, 3.33–34); and Xenophon of Ephesus has only two slight references to drinking the beloved's tears (1.9.3, 1.9.5).

[56]In a third letter, he asks his beloved to take hold of his heart with her fingers and clear away the worms devouring him (2.260, 268–272).

imagery—seem to recall a famous description of a beloved girl in the Song of Solomon (7.7–9):

> You are stately as a palm tree,
> and your breasts are like its clusters.
> I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its branches.
> Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
> and the scent of your breath like apples,
> and your kisses like the best wine that goes down smoothly
> gliding over lips and teeth.

Again in Eugenianos's novel, a rustic suitor expresses similar alimentary desires regarding the heroine Drosilla (6. 570–573):

> Now I desire to gather you
> like ripe fruit at the top of a tree;
> open, then, the doors of your garden to me,
> and allow me to eat and be sated at last.

This passage in which a lover requests admission into his beloved's closed garden seems to recall the Song of Solomon's famous equation of the beloved with a locked (virginal) garden: "A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed"; to which she replies: "Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits."[57]

There is a long tradition in Greek literature (and elsewhere) of the use of food imagery to describe the beloved—lips that drip honey, breasts like apples, the grape that becomes ripe, the gathering of the vintage of love.[58] There is also a long tradition of the use of garden imagery to describe the beloved—the beloved in bloom, mouth opening like a rose, cheeks blooming with flowers.[59] The imagery of the lover as a gardener and the

[57] 4.12, 16. The closest parallel in the ancient novel to imagery of an enclosed garden for virginity may be in Longus's novel: a herdsman rejected by Chloe ruins an enclosed garden by destroying its flowers (4.7–8). On gardens in Byzantine novels see A. R. Littlewood, "Romantic Paradises: The Role of the Garden in the Byzantine Romance," *BMGS* 5 (1979) 95–114.

[58] For ripe and unripe grape imagery used of persons, see *e.g.* *Anth.Pal.* 5.20, 5.124, 5.304, 9.261; *cf.* Alcaeus 119 L.-P.

[59] Among the ancient novels, see Ach. Tat. 1.4.3, 1.19.1–2, 2.1.3, 3.7.3–4, 6.7.2; Heliodorus 3.4.5, *cf.* 2.33.3; Longus 1.16, 1.18, 1.24, 4.17. Chariton and

gathering of the fruit of the beloved is also found earlier in Greek literature.[60] But in Eugenianos's novel, the concentration of erotic alimentary and vegetative imagery (*e.g.*, the girl as a tree for her lover to climb), in addition to the length of the descriptions, seems especially reminiscent of Song of Solomon.[61]

In the Christian world, there was a history of disagreement over the interpretation of the Song of Solomon, one side looking for allegories of divine love and the other presenting secular, literal readings of the sexual love between Solomon and a woman. Most of the church fathers, following Origen (his *Commentaries* and *Homilies*), preferred mystical, allegorical readings; so, for example, Gregory of Nyssa (*Comm. on the Song of Songs*). Theodore of Mopsuestia, on the other hand, presented a literal, sexual interpretation of the Song of Solomon, but his views were not influential in the Church. The passages of Eugenianos's novel discussed here, however, seem to suggest that he was also reading the Song of Solomon sexually and literally, in the tradition of Theodore of Mopsuestia and against orthodox opinion. The revival of the ancient novel—safely distanced in a defunct pagan world—seems to have offered him the freedom to do so.

Other Christian Themes in Eugenianos's Novel

In Eugenianos's novel, Christian imagery occurs almost exclusively in the context of human love. Thus the old woman Maryllis sees the lovers embracing as if merging into one flesh (7.231–234):

Xenophon of Ephesus use no vegetative imagery for the beloved. Such imagery applied to persons is of course traditional and common in ancient literature (*e.g.* Hom. *Il.* 18.56–57, 437–438; 22.87; *Od.* 6.157, 162–163; Psalms 144.12).

[60] Among the novels, Ach. Tat. 1.8.9. See also *e.g.* Sappho fr.105a L.-P.; *cf.* Longus 3.33 (discussed by R. L. Hunter, *A Study of Daphnis and Chloe* [Cambridge 1983] 74–76).

[61] In Greek lyric poetry, erotic vegetative and alimentary imagery is prevalent but not so extended. In the ancient novels, imagery of consumption of the beloved is rare (save in Achilles Tatius's novel) and never found in the extended concentration of the passages in Eugenianos and Makrembolites (see discussion below).

> They looked so hard to separate
> that they gave Maryllis the impression
> that the two of them had become one body,
> who in conversation had become one soul.

She concludes regarding their reunion (7.262– 264):

> You say that all this is a god's work, and you are right,
> wise Drosilla. Let Kallidemos be damned!
> Who could separate those whom a god has joined?

Eugenianos is having Maryllis respond to the lovers' embrace and reunion in Christian terms, with Christian imagery. The imagery and language she uses recall Jesus's response to the Pharisees' query regarding the lawfulness of divorce:[62]

> "A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.

Eugenianos briefly brings up the human sacrifice theme when the Parthian king kills some of his captives as sacrifices to the gods for safe homecoming (4.93–95). But Eugenianos does not dwell on the moral and theological implications of such sacrifices as Prodromos does.

The theme of resurrection briefly emerges when Charikles, on hearing that his beloved has fallen into the sea and thinking her dead, says that if he had died first, he would have returned to life to be with her (6.75–76). It is not the spiritual love of God but the earthly love of a woman that would resurrect him. So later Drosilla thanks Dionysus for giving her back Charikles: "another greater gift: | to see one I expected among the dead, among the living" (7.227–228). But these brief occurrences of the "seeming death" and resurrection theme were probably too

[62] Mark 10.7–9, from Gen. 2.24; see also Matt. 19.5–6. For another use of the image of man and wife becoming one flesh, see Eph. 5.31. On Eugenianos's echo (7.264) of the biblical "what God has joined together, let no one separate," see A. P. Kazhdan, "Bemerkungen zu Niketas Eugenianos," *JöBG* 16 (1967) 116.

slight to take on much Christian coloration for Eugenianos's contemporary readers.

Also, Eugenianos's description of captive mothers unable to nurse their babies "since the nourishing flow from their breasts had become a shower of blood" (1.34–35) may also seem to recall (and reverse) Christian imagery of the flow of blood from Christ's breast as a nurturing fluid. For readers reminded of such Christian imagery, the horror of the destruction caused by war might be heightened by the contrast.[63]

Eugenianos and the Pagan Gods

Gods are more omnipresent in Eugenianos's novel than in Prodromos's; Eros appears throughout, and Dionysus is the patron and guarantor of the wedding. With all his mythological references, Eugenianos is obviously looking back to the pagan world and pagan gods. But his insistence on describing Dionysus as the son of Zeus may have also had the effect of seeming to diminish their distance from the Christian Father and the Son for his contemporary readers. The relation of the Father to the Son was a crucial issue in twelfth-century theology, as earlier. Throughout Eugenianos's novel, Dionysus is repeatedly referred to simply as the son of Zeus[64] as though there were no other claimants to that title. To Christians in twelfth-century Byzantium, for whom there was just one Son of God, such a reference might have seemed natural. Drosilla at one point seems to express a doubt about Dionysus's identity as a god and son of god (6.317–318): "If you are a god and son of Zeus, tell me (whether Charikles still lives)." Might such a query have seemed analogous to doubts voiced in the New Testament and elsewhere regarding the status of Jesus (*e.g.* Matt. 26.63; John 10.24)? In response to such doubts, Jesus sometimes explicitly

[63] On the linkage between blood and milk see Clem. Al. *Paed.* 1.6 (I 104–121 Stählin).

[64] 5.93; 6.307, 317; 8.30, 74. He is also referred to as "Dionysus, son of Zeus" (1.247; *cf.* 3.356), the "son of Zeus and Semele" (7.195), and "Semele's son" (7.42).

equates himself with the Father (*e.g.* John 10.30, 14.9–10). In Eugenianos's novel also, Zeus and Dionysus, father and son, seem to become one, for the festival of Dionysus at the start of the novel (1.113; *cf.* 1.107, 151) becomes, in Charikles' retelling, a festival of Zeus (4.63, 7.157).[65]

Linkages between Jesus and Dionysus would have been relatively easy for Eugenianos (and his educated readers) to make. Writers in late antiquity had often done this. For example, Clement of Alexandria lifts lines from a dialogue between Dionysus and Pentheus (Eur. *Bacch.* 465ff.) to show how "the Savior Himself, then, plainly initiates us into the mysteries."[66] The *Christos Patiens*, a Byzantine Passion of Christ often dated to the twelfth century, also draws frequently from Euripides' *Bacchae*. For example, here is the Virgin Mary speaking of Jesus (1545–1550):[67]

ἐγὼ δ' ἔτικτόν σ' αὖθις ἀγνεύουσ' ἔτι,
μορφὴν λαβόντα πρὸς θεοῦ βροτησίαν.
ἀλλ' ἐγγενεῖς σῆς μητρός, οὓς ἥκιστ' ἐχρῆν, . . .
σωτῆρά σ' οὐκ ἔφασκον ἐκφῦναι θεοῦ.

I bore you . . .
who took your mortal form from god.
But your mother's people, who least should have done so . . .
denied that you, the savior, were the son of God.

[65] At 4.63 the festival is described as a celebration of Zeus's birthday, which may help account for the conflation of Zeus and Dionysus here. On the link between "the Zeus born on Crete and the Cretan Dionysus," see C. Kerényi, *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, transl. R. Manheim (Princeton 1976) 119. On the "Zeus-Dionysus" figure associated with Crete, see also Farnell, *Cults* I 36–38, II 612. For evidence that stories linking Dionysus and the Cretan Zeus were known in the third century A.D., see the fragment of Euripides' Cretans preserved by Porphyry: J. Diggle, ed., *Tragicorum Graecorum: Fragmenta Selecta* (Oxford 1998) 115–116, I parodus = 472 N.

[66] *Strom.* 4.25.162.2–4 (II 320 Stählin); transl. *Ante-Nicene Fathers* II 439.

[67] The Greek text used is A. Tuilier, ed., *Grégoire de Nazianze, La Passion du Christ* (Paris 1969), which I translate.

These lines are clearly drawn from Dionysus's self-description in the prologue to Euripides' *Bacchae*:[68]

> Διόνυσος, ὃν τίκτει ποθ' ἡ Κάδμου κόρη (2) ...
> μορφὴν δ' ἀμείψας ἐκ θεοῦ βροτησίαν (4) ...
> ἐπεί μ' ἀδελφαὶ μητρός, ἃς ἥκιστ' ἐχρῆν,
> Διόνυσον οὐκ ἔφασκον ἐκφῦναι Διός (26–27).
>
> Dionysus, whom once the daughter of Kadmos bore ...
> who took a mortal form in exchange for a god's ...
> since my mother's sisters, who least should have done so,
> denied that Dionysus was the son of Zeus.

Again, the Virgin Mary says of Jesus (1563–1564),

> ἐν οἷς χορεύσεις καὶ καταστήσεις τὰ σὰ
> μυστήρι' ἵν' ᾖς ἐμφανῶς θεὸς βροτοῖς.
>
> among whom you will set your dances and establish your
> mysteries that you may be manifest as a god to mortals.

This clearly echoes Dionysus's declaration (21–22),

> τἀκεῖ χορεύσας καὶ καταστήσας ἐμὰς
> τελετάς, ἵν' εἴην ἐμφανὴς δαίμων βροτοῖς.
>
> and there having set my dances and established my
> mysteries that I might be manifest as a god to mortals.

Like Jesus, Dionysus was seen as a god who descends from heaven to walk among humans. Traveling with his followers, Dionysus established his worship wherever he went, and his worship was inclusive and appealed to all classes. Also, both Jesus and Dionysus performed miracles of wine and were closely associated with the vine (*e.g.* John 2.1–11, 15.1). Like Jesus, Dionysus too could represent salvation and redemption for mortals. Thus, in Nonnos's fifth-century *Dionysiaca*, one of the Fates comforts Dionysus as he grieves for his son's death: "Lord Bacchos has wept tears, that he may wipe away man's tears" (12.171).[69]

[68] The Greek text used is J. Diggle, ed., *Euripidis Fabulae* III (Oxford 1994); the English translation is my own.

[69] Transl. Rouse (Loeb). Similarities also might have been drawn between Jesus's eucharistic story and the Orphic stories of the eating of Dionysus (by

Perhaps Eugenianos felt comfortable using Dionysus so centrally in part because of the ready linkages between Jesus and Dionysus. Dionysus's prominence as the guarantor and patron of the marriage in Eugenianos's novel might also have owed something to the ease with which writers moved between Dionysus and Christ from late antiquity on. Eugenianos's insistence on describing Dionysus as the son of Zeus might also have encouraged readers to see parallels between these pagan deities and the Christian Father and Son.

The Theme of Footwashing in Makrembolites' Novel

The novel of Eustathios (or Eumathios) Makrembolites has traditionally been dated to the second half of the twelfth century, but some scholars argue for an earlier dating.[70] Makrembolites is unique among the four twelfth-century novelists in writing his novel in prose and in presenting the whole story from the limited first-person perspective of the hero.[71] His predominant model among the ancient novels is Achilles Tatius's *Leukippe and Kleitophon*, but Heliodorus's *Ethiopian Story* also is an important influence. Detailed ekphraseis of art objects, including numerous allegorical paintings, and the fourteen symposia, sites for much loveplay between hero and heroine (both as masters and as captive slaves), also set Makrembolites' novel apart from the other twelfth-century Greek novels.

There are moments in Makrembolites' novel when Christian

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the Titans) and Dionysus's resurrection (through Zeus's intervention). For important cautions regarding the association of the Dionysiac "eating of raw flesh" with the eucharist, see W. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1987) 111; M. Detienne, *Dionysos Slain*, trans. M. Muellner and L. Muellner (Baltimore 1979) esp. 68–69. *Cf.* E. R. Dodds, ed., *Euripides, Bacchae*[2] (Oxford 1960) xvi–xix.

[70]See S. MacAlister, "Byzantine Twelfth-Century Romances: A Relative Chronology," *BMGS* 15 (1991) 175–210. For a judicious summary of the dating issues, with references, see Beaton (*supra* n.2) 79–81, 211–212, who "still adhere[s] to the traditional sequence of writing (Prodromos, Eugenianos, Makrembolites)" (212).

[71]On Makrembolites' "consistent use of first-person viewpoint," see Alexiou (*supra* n.2) esp. 30–32.

themes seem to color strongly the presentation and thought. The first occurs in book one when Hysminias, the religious herald, describes how Hysmine washed his feet (1.12.3):

> The maiden, Hysmine, kneels down, takes my feet in her hands, washes them with water (for this is a religious duty towards heralds). She holds them, holds them again, embraces them, squeezes them, kisses them noiselessly, discretely.

In the ancient Greek and Roman world, bathing was conventional before meals (*e.g.*, Plat. *Symp.* 174A). The task of bathing guests before the meal might be given to female attendants,[72] or to the daughter or mistress of the house.[73] It was also an ancient custom for attendants to help guests wash just hands and/or feet before dining. In the ancient Greek novels, however, mentions of such bathings or washings are rare, despite the frequency of banquets and symposia. In Heliodorus's novel (2.22.2) a maidservant washed the feet and cleaned the dust from the lower legs of the household guest on his arrival (before the meal; such a measure would help keep the dining couches clean).[74] There was also a tradition of bathing guests or washing their feet at other times than before meals (*e.g.*, *Od.* 5.263–264, 19.317–319).

In Makrembolites' novel, the religious context given for the activity (footwashing "is a religious duty towards heralds"), the timing and setting (after the symposium, in the guest's room), and the erotic nature of the activity (a woman washing and kissing a male guest's feet) distinguish this incident of footwashing from earlier descriptions of footwashing. There is, however, in the New Testament, a memorable instance of a

[72] *E.g.* Hom. *Od.* 4.48–54; 8.426–457; 10.358–373; 17.87–93; 19.320–322.

[73] *E.g.* Hom. *Od.* 3.464–469; 10.449–452. For a father washing a guest's feet, see *Joseph and Aseneth* 7.1 (ancient romance based on Gen. 41.45, 50–52; 46.20; shorter Greek version reconstructed by M. Philnenko [Leiden 1968]); *cf. Digenes Akrites* Gro. 4.209.

[74] On washing mud from the feet before a symposium, see Plut. *Mor.* 616D; *cf.* Plut. *Phocion* 20; Petron. *Sat.* 31, 70.

woman washing and kissing a male guest's feet, at Luke 7.36–50. When Jesus is a guest of Simon, a woman comes and tends his feet (7.38):

> She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.

Jesus uses her example to rebuke Simon for not providing the traditional footwashing welcome for his guest (7.44–45). The combination of washing and kissing in the woman's attention to Jesus's feet offers a strong parallel for Hysmine's action.[75]

Makrembolites' erotic description of footwashing thus may recall this memorable passage in the New Testament. Might the reminiscence of the passage from Luke have encouraged some Christian readers to read Hysmine's forward behavior here as that of a "sinner," like the woman who washes and anoints Jesus's feet? Certainly, Hysmine functions as a temptress for Hysminias, and she succeeds in distracting him from his religious duty as herald, as shown by his friend Kratisthenes' reproaches (3.9.1): "Have you no respect for the herald's wand? No respect for the Diasia [festival of Zeus]?"

Another memorable footwashing passage from the New Testament, John 13.3–20, in which Jesus washes his disciples' feet, seems to offer other thematic parallels for Makrembolites' novel. Jesus tells his disciples to follow his example and go forth and wash one another's feet. In the novel, Hysminias reports that when Hysmine was a guest at his home, he wanted to follow her example and wash her feet as she had washed his (5.14.2–3):

> I wondered at the hospitality of Aulikomis, which even extended to washing guests' feet. At our house, we didn't even wash their hands; yet we have an altar of Zeus Xenios and we celebrate the Diasia. Why don't I also wash the feet of Hys-

[75] *Cf. Joseph and Aseneth* 20.1–5.

> mine, as she so eagerly washed mine, that I may also kiss her feet, press them, and soothe her amorously as she soothed me?

The footwashing episode may have further resonance in the shaping of Makrembolites' novel, for part of the meaning of the footwashing episode in John is that Jesus humbles himself and takes a servant's role (John 13.4–5):[76]

> [He] got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.[77]

In Makrembolites' novel, starting at 8.11.1, Hysminias has taken the role of servant to Greek masters, and he later shows that Hysmine too became a serving girl to Greek masters (9.5.3ff.).[78]

Other Christian Themes in Makrembolites' Novel

Another passage in Makrembolites' novel that seems strongly colored by Christian motifs occurs when Hysminias tries to fall asleep (3.4.1):

> I thought, by the gods, that I was pierced through my sides, and by Eros, I was on a bed of thorns. As if I was roasting on a pyre, I was turning constantly, like a new kind of victim, burned in honor of Eros.

Makrembolites has Hysminias use language appropriate to Christian martyrs to describe his difficulties sleeping. The use of the martyr imagery here also underscores the conflict for Hysminias between his duties as a herald and his love for Hysmine. But whereas a Christian martyr generally renounced

[76] *Cf.* Luke 12.37; 1 Tim. 5.10. For discussion see R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John, XIII–XXI* (Garden City 1970), esp. 564–572.

[77] The detail of the towel may help provide a linkage to Hysmine's washing of Hysminias's feet in Makrembolites' novel (1.12), for Hysmine too finishes by wiping Hysminias's feet with a towel.

[78] Plepelits, who proposes an allegorical interpretation that reads Hysmine as the Church, Christian teaching, and the hypostasis of Christ, argues that the association Makrembolites intended here was only with John 13.2ff. (K. Plepelits, *Eustathios Makrembolites: Hysmine und Hysminias* [Stuttgart 1989] 59).

family and society for the love of God, for the pagan Hysminias —a religious herald—religion, family, and society are all entwined, and he renounces them all for the love of a girl.[79]

The motif of human sacrifice is also included in Makrembolites' novel. Late in the novel, when the two lovers finally run away from their parents by ship, during a storm the Syrian captain calls for a human sacrifice to Poseidon to placate the sea, the victim to be chosen by lot. The lot falls upon Hysmine, and she is thrown naked into the sea. The kind of Christian coloration associated with such an episode in Prodromos's novel is missing in Makrembolites' rendition of the human sacrifice theme. Unlike Dosikles, Hysminias does not lament that Hysmine will be consumed by fish, themselves to be consumed in turn (a lament that recalls the "chain consumption" theme in discussions of the resurrection of the body). No theological discussions about the proper worship of divinity take place, and no imagery of cheerful martyrdom appears (as in Prodromos's novel, in the persons of Nausikrates in book one and Dosikles later).

Makrembolites also includes (briefly) the theme of food illusions. A host serves a lavish meal that includes complicated, artful dishes: "fish presented like game, peacock like fish" (2.13.1). But in contrast to Prodromos, where food illusions (a roast lamb that gives birth to baby sparrows) play an important part in a discussion of powers to transform substances and resurrect the dead, Makrembolites does not elaborate this theme at all.

Makrembolites' novel also includes speeches that parallel the sacrifices holy persons (including martyrs) made to follow a life of God. Hysmine and Hysminias repeatedly declare how they have given up fatherland, parents, estate, and all the comforts of home for each other (*e.g.* 5.18, 6.9.1–2). Makrembolites'

[79] Heroes and heroines of the ancient novels also suffer threats of torture (*e.g.* Ach. Tat. 7.12) and utter defiant speeches (*e.g.* Ach. Tat. 6.21–22; Xen. Eph. 2.4).

contemporary Christian readers might have been especially sensitive to possible parallels with Christian renunciation of worldly goods and biological family for God.

The desire to be one flesh with the beloved is again a motif, though comically elaborated and conflated with the consumption motif at 4.21.3–4:

> I pressed her in my arms, I gobbled her up, I devoured her all with my lips, and we were united like ivy on cypress. I embraced the girl, like a plant taking root, I tried to form one being with her, and I wanted to eat her all up.

The desire to consume the beloved, to eat and drink her, is prominent in imagery throughout the novel (*e.g.* 3.5.4, "the food and drink of my eyes, of my soul, were the maiden Hysmine"; see also 5.12.3). There is much imagery of the beloved as a grape to be gathered or as grain to be harvested (*e.g.* 5.16.3, 7.4.1, 9.19.3, 10.11.4), and Hysminias describes himself as an insatiable grape-gatherer (5.16.3). In turn there is also the imagery of the beloved as a garden (5.17.1–3, 6.8.3). In these two passages the motif of the enclosed (virginal) garden is strong. Thus Hysmine claims to Hysminias (6.8.3), "You have put a fence around my garden that the hand of a passerby not gather me in." It is worth recalling here the similar image of the girl as enclosed (virginal) garden in the Song of Solomon (4.12, quoted above).

Possible Christian Motifs in Manasses' Novel

Although we have only fragments of Manasses' novel, for the sake of completeness I include some remarks on motifs with possible Christian coloration. The themes of cannibalism and human sacrifice, which in the other novels were associated with a constellation of imagery and themes related to the eucharist, are again evident. The hero Aristandros complains that Bousiris, the leader of robbers, tried to eat his innards, "using me like an animal, a wild beast" (IV fr.68.11–13). So too there is a graphic image of Eros as cannibalistic (VI fr.104.3–4):

> if someone dishonors him, he violently attacks him,
> tears apart the offender, and gulps down his flesh.[80]

Suffering, too, is said to cut the soul in pieces and shake down the innards (IV fr.82). The provocative description of wine as the "milk of Aphrodite" (II fr.24.2) may also resonate with the eucharistic conflation of blood, wine, and nourishing fluid.

Conclusion

The ancient Greek novel, which traditionally included themes of cannibalism and resurrection, offered a forum for broaching questions not easily raised in other genres. The twelfth-century novelists seem to be exploring continuities and compatabilities between the Christian and pagan worlds. But they also sometimes seem to use the forum for exploring such Christian issues as the eucharist and the resurrection. Prodromos, in particular, sometimes uses grotesque eucharistic imagery and thus seems to raise questions about these practices. Rather than simply justifying the prevailing ideology—celebrating the distance of the Byzantine from the pagan world—the novelists seem to be raising questions about their contemporary world by highlighting possible parallels between the Christian and pagan practices. Thus, just as Prodromos describes activities in the pirates' world in terms compatible with Byzantine court ritual, battle maneuvers, and battle exhortations, so too he raises issues regarding such topics as the eucharist and the resurrection in his elaboration of traditional novelistic themes, such as sacrifice and love. His novel might have been unsettling for some readers. Certainly it would not have simply reconfirmed existing prejudices.

Since Prodromos may very well have been first among the

[80] In the ancient Greek novels of Chariton, Xenophon of Ephesus, Achilles Tatius, Longus, and Heliodorus, Love generally inflames, makes ill, poisons and wounds, but it does not graphically devour the flesh, as in the twelfth-century novels of Eugenianos and Mannases.

Byzantine novelists, I should like to suggest that he might have chosen to revive the ancient novel not only because of its popularity among readers, but also because it offered a "safe" medium, during a time of heresy trials, for raising questions about the resurrection and the eucharist. The themes of resurrection, human sacrifice, and cannibalism were already a major part of the ancient novels' themes, so Prodromos could exploit them and elaborate upon them (as he did) to emphasize parallels with Christian themes and to raise issues.[81] The twelfth-century novelists following him do not seem as interested in the Christian aspects of these themes as Prodromos. Perhaps they simply saw the readership Prodromos (already a well-connected writer at court) had attracted and wanted to take advantage of that same readership (probably mostly moneyed and elite). Or perhaps also, the disturbing imagery of Prodromos's novel (*e.g.*, his use of the eucharistic imagery) was upsetting to some readers, and the novelists who followed him chose to exploit other aspects of the genre (*e.g.*, the erotic side). In any case, Prodromos's lead in using Christian imagery and themes to disturb and startle his readers does not seem to have been followed to the same degree in the other twelfth-century Greek novels.

The revival of the ancient Greek novel—with its themes of seeming death and resurrection, cannibalism, and human sacrifice—offered the Byzantine novelists a powerful forum for exploring Christian rituals and beliefs regarding the eucharist, the resurrection, and the like. This paper has shown that twelfth-century Greek novels allude in striking ways to Christianity. For Byzantine novelists, experience of the pagan Greek world was heavily mediated through the discourse of Christianity. The Christian themes and imagery that underlie

[81] For an evocative discussion of "parallels in form and substance between the writings of the New Testament and the fictional production of the imperial age," see Bowersock (*supra* n.31) 99–160 (quotation at 124).

and help shape the twelfth-century novels also create a complex play of transcultural (pagan and Christian) discourses that animate these works.

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