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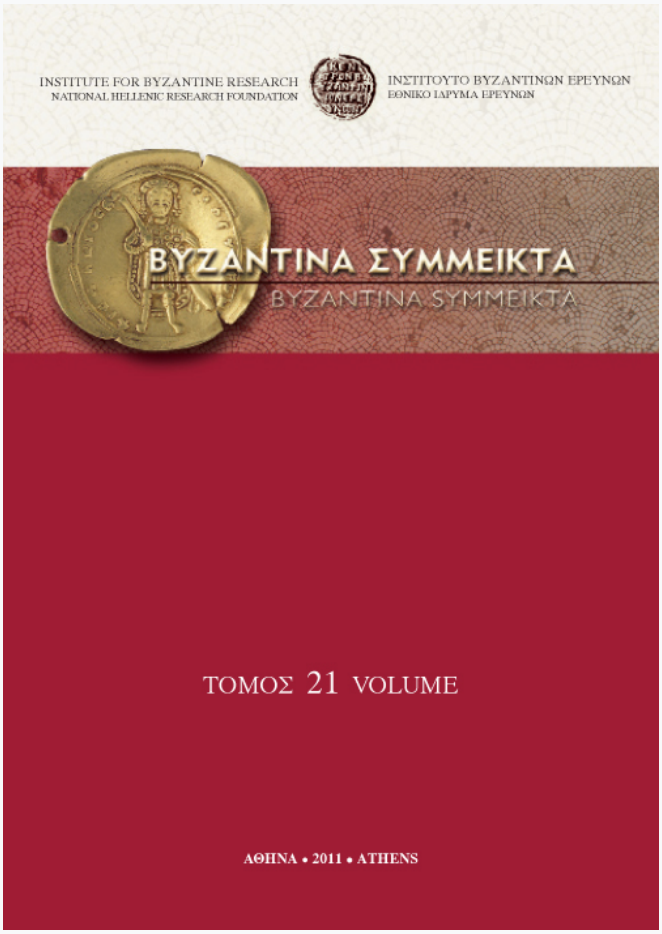

Andronikos I Komnenos: A Greek Tragedy

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Andronikos I Komnenos: A Greek Tragedy

The annals of Niketas Choniates[1] chronicle the period of Byzantine history beginning with the death of Alexios I Komnenos on 15/16 August 1118, and ending with the events of the historian's flight to Nikaia in the autumn of 1207 following the fall of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusade. While translating the text I became intrigued by the fate of Emperor Andronikos I Komnenos (1183-1185)[2] who, in certain aspects of his life-style, is depicted as a mirror image of his first cousin, Emperor Manuel I Komnenos

1. *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates*, English translation by H. J. Magoulias, Detroit 1984. The pagination cited from the annals is placed between parenthesis together with NH. See *Introduction* XI-XVI. For Niketas Choniates (ca.1155/56-1215/16) see A. Simpson – S. Efthymiadis (eds.), *Niketas Choniates. A Historian and a Writer*, Geneva 2009, especially A. Simpson, Niketas Choniates: the Historian (13-34), and S. Efthymiades, Niketas Choniates: The Writer (35-58). On his theological treatise *Treasury of Orthodoxy*, also known as *Δογματικὴ Πανοπλία*, see H. J. Magoulias, Doctrinal Disputes in the History of Niketas Choniates, *The Patristic and Byzantine Review*, 6/3 (1987), 199-226, as well as L. Bossina, Niketas Choniates as theologian, in: *Niketas Choniates. A Historian and a Writer*, 165-184.

2. Andronikos I Komnenos was born ca. 1118/20 and was put to death in Constantinople after 14 September 1185. At his death he was 65/67 years old; considered aged by Niketas Choniates, the historian refers to him at his end as "he who stank of the dark ages", a "dotard", "a shriveled and languid old man", and "more aged than Tithonos or Kronos" (NH 153, 157). On Andronikos I see C. M. Brand, *Byzantium confronts the West, 1180-1204*, Cambridge, MA 1968; O. Jurewicz, *Andronikos I. Komnenos*, Amsterdam 1970, and the detailed entry (with full bibliographical references) in: K. Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, vols. I-II, Thessaloniki 1984, I, 493-638, n. 87 (hereafter: Varzos, I or II).

Επιμέλεια έκδοσης: Στυλιανος Λαμπακης, IBE/EIE

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(1143-1180)[3]. I was particularly struck by the revelation that the tragedy of Andronikos I seemed to conform to Aristotle's principles of classical drama, but, in the final analysis, as the final curtain drops on the tragedy of Andronikos, we come to realize that there is, after all, a fundamental disagreement between the author of the *Poetics* and Niketas Choniates, the historian, as to what constitutes tragedy.

The great tragedians of classical Greece were largely concerned with dramatic situations that largely take place within the bounds of family ties. The protagonists are closely connected by blood or marriage. Blood guilt, even matricide in the case of Manuel I's juvenile son, Alexios II (1180-1183), as well as blatant incest, are singled out as the fatal legacy of the family. Incest and murder were at the center of ancient Greek drama and were looked upon with the utmost of horror. The Athenians of the fifth century B.C. were well aware of the dreadful consequences of the curse as a family inheritance. Moreover, divine punishment might fall not directly on the unrighteous man, as in the case of Emperor Manuel I Komnenos, but on his wife and offspring. This entails the infliction of suffering on blameless family members who are guilty by association.

But tragedy, asserts Aristotle[4], must not show the wicked person falling from prosperity to adversity which, as we shall see, was the case with Emperor Andronikos I at his death, the protagonist of this study. The reason for this, Aristotle argues, is that the misfortunes of such a depraved figure cannot arouse the necessary emotions of pity and fear (ἔλεος, φόβος), the essential components of tragedy. Pity or compassion can only be reserved for the undeserving victim of a relentless fate, guilty only of ἁμαρτία, that is, an error or human fallibility, but not of calculated malice. The tragic figure, therefore, cannot be held wholly responsible for the consequences of his actions, as is the case with the Christian sinner. The tragedian, moreover, resorts to dramatic spectacle by making the fearful and the pitiable visible on stage. Oidipous shocks our senses as he stumbles onto the stage with blood gushing down from his empty eye sockets whose orbs he himself has gouged out with the golden pins of his mother's raiment. This was the consequence

3. On Manuel I's reign see P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143-1180*, Cambridge 1993, as well as Varzos I, 422-477, n. 81.

4. Aristotle, *The Poetics*, ed. and transl. by St. Halliwell (Loeb Classical Library, [hereafter cited as LCL], Cambridge, MA 1954), 423.

of his horrifying discovery that his wife, the mother of his children, in fact, was his own mother; moreover, he was shown to be unknowingly the murderer of his own father[5].

As we have remarked above, tragedy revolves around the protagonist's ἁμαρτία. His destiny is determined by factual ignorance, and, therefore, his culpability is limited. He is, nonetheless, responsible for his deeds of passion. Oidipous mistakenly killed his father, but he was, at the same time, guilty of killing his father's attendants because he had succumbed to his violent temper[6]. The consequence is that in the end he will suffer a terrible reversal of fortune. The cost of his error or ἁμαρτία is terrible suffering, beginning with his mother's suicide. Deeds perpetrated out of ignorance do not exonerate the perpetrator; in fact, they will only abet his personal downfall.

Aristotle distinguishes between the poet, whom he favors, and the historian. The real events recorded by the historian Aristotle calls "the particulars" while the tragedian invents possible scenarios, "the universals"[7]. Aristotle elevates poetry over history because, he claims, it belongs to the realm of philosophy. The historian, however, will ask: Is not what actually happened in the past more important than what might have happened? Again, do not the tragedians select particular mythological figures to be their protagonists such as Agamemnon, Antigone, Aias etc.?

Aristotle further requires that the emotions of fear and pity be critical components of the tragic performance on stage. However, these same two emotions are evoked when the tragedies are recited offstage. Written histories were likewise read aloud before an attentive audience[8]. Here the historian and the tragedian converge as they both are recording tragic events. Aristotle follows Homer when he says that the experience of both fear and pity create simultaneously a sense of tension-relieving pleasure. Gorgias of Leontini (ca. 483-376) elaborated on this phenomenon in his

5. Sophokles, *Oidipous Tyrannos*, ed. and transl. by H. L. Jones (LCL, 1994), vs. 1249-1250: "[Iokaste] wept over the bed where in double misery she had brought forth a husband by her husband and children by her child."

6. Sophokles, *Oidipous Tyrannos*, vs. 801-813.

7. Aristotle, *The Poetics*, Introduction, 13.

8. When Herodotos visited Athens ca. 445 B.C. he recited aloud a portion of his history: Herodotos, transl. by A. D. Godley (LCL, reprinted 1990), vol. 1, "General Introduction", VIII.

Enkomion of Helen 9. While Aristotle uses the term ἡδονὴ for pleasure, Gorgias substitutes πόθος φιλοπενθής, i.e. a doleful yearning[9].

Of the several types of tragedy recorded by Aristotle he numbers "the kind rich in suffering" (παθητική)[10]. The suffering endured must occur within family relationships. This, we shall see, is the case with both Manuel I and Andronikos I. The subject matter of classical Greek tragedy was based almost entirely on mythology derived from the heroic Mycenaean age, but there were two exceptions where contemporary historical events were depicted on the Greek stage. Shortly after the fall of Ionian Miletos in 494 B.C. to the Persian king Darius, Herodotos records that the city was enslaved and its surviving population was deported and settled in the Persian empire bringing to an end its revolutionary scientific achievements[11].

But the one historical tragedy that does survive is Aischylos' *The Persians* produced in 472 B.C. This play deals with the events of the Greek naval victory at Salamis in 480 B.C. The protagonists are Xerxes, his mother Atossa, and the ghost of his father Darius. The enactment of this play, however, would not have elicited pity and fear from the Athenian audience. What is of interest for this study is that the Athenian audience recognized both the similarities and the differences between myth and history, the imaginative and invented world of gods, supernatural beings, heroes and legendary ancestors, on the one hand, and the unfolding events of recent history, documented by eye-witness accounts as well as oral and written sources.

The staged play, after all, is not the same as the stage of History. The tears shed by the spectators of ancient Greek tragedy, whose subject matter was based on mythology, were not of the same emotional depth as those shed for contemporary historical calamities such as Phrynichos' *The Fall of*

9. *Iliad* 23.14: "Thetis roused a desire of wailing". *Odyssey* 22.500-501: When Odysseus is welcomed home "a sweet longing seized him/To weep and wail". *Odyssey* 15.399: Eumaios, Odysseus' trusty swineherd, welcomes him home with the words: "We will take delight in each other's woes". These quotes are from the translations of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by A. T. Murray (LCL reprinted in 1954 and 1974).

10. Aristotle, *The Poetics*, 118-119.

11. Herodotos, 6.20-22. "Phrynichos, having written a play [492 B.C.] only two years after the event titled *The Fall of Miletos* and set it on stage, the whole theatre broke into weeping; and [the Athenians] fined Phrynichos a thousand drachmai for bringing to mind a calamity that touched them so nearly, and forbade forever the enacting of that play".

Miletos. Real blood was shed by the inhabitants of Ionian Miletos; moreover, the decimated Milesians and the Athenians were related by blood, dialect and intellectual achievement[12].

For our purposes the Aristotelian concept of reversal (περιπέτεια) or tragic change of fortune is played out in the meteoric rise and fall of Andronikos I Komnenos. The περιπέτεια of the protagonist, according to Aristotle, must affect us mightily; it must be a wrenching experience that effects a great change in the spectators. Tragedy's function is to arouse the emotions of pity or compassion as well as a frightful fear to use Gorgias' terminology (φρίκη περίφοβος). We are horrified at the murder of blood relatives, the senseless infliction of indescribable tortures, mutilations, blindings, and wholesale executions on subjects of the empire. But to feel pity or empathy for those who suffer the extremities of cruelty is fundamental to our humanity. Andronikos was abused and maltreated as a young man without pity, and the result was that he himself became hardened and pitiless in his dealings with his adversaries. We must not remain indifferent to suffering, even to the suffering of our enemies. But this sensibility was lacking in the politically powerful of twelfth century Byzantium. But Niketas Choniates was an exception; his engagement with suffering moves us dramatically.

Aristotle contends that pity is experienced only for the victim, loathing for the oppressor as was the case with Andronikos I in his fateful day of reckoning when he himself, in a tragic reversal of fortune, became the victim. Niketas Choniates, however, disagrees with Aristotle for he is convinced that we must pity suffering offenders, even for someone as heartless as Andronikos I. Sentenced to die for his crimes, he was forced to suffer beyond human endurance. Even the Olympian gods are often depicted as pitiless in their dealings with mere mortals, and against this divine indifference, human pity stands out in ironical insight. The Christian God, on the other hand is φιλάνθρωπος, a God who loves mankind. Moreover, he is ἐλεήμων, a God of mercy and compassion who pities his human creation. Andronikos' last words, as we shall see, are *Κύριε ἐλέησον*, "Lord, have mercy". But we

12. Rationalism emerged first in Miletos with the *φυσικοί*, the founders of natural philosophy, i.e. physical science. These were Thales, Anaximandros, and Anaximenes. The slaughter and deportation that take place in warfare result often in the extermination of the brightest minds of a flourishing civilization.

must not be surprised that, like the Olympian gods, the Christian God, can also withhold his pity. The unforgiving rupture of human relationships leads to tragic consequences. Tragedy brings in its wake terrible waste.

The ancient Greeks understood that there is an unbridgeable chasm between human beings who must inevitably grow old and die, and the gods who are deathless and ageless. Unlike their divinities, mortals must accept the fragility of their evanescent lives, and reconcile themselves to the reality that the workings of Fortune (Τύχη) and Fate (Μοῖρα) are inescapable.

Hellenism Confronts Christianity. The Historical Context

A momentous event in the history of the Roman empire was the conversion of the pagan Roman emperor, Constantine I the Great, to Christianity in the year 312. In 324 Constantine became sole emperor, and on 11 May 330 he dedicated the Greek city of Byzantion, to be renamed Constantinople in his honor[13]. The importance of his decision may be summarized as follows: the capital of the Roman empire was soon thereafter to be transferred from Old Rome on the Tiber to New Rome on the Bosporos; the lingua franca of the eastern Roman empire was destined to be Greek; and an exclusionist monotheistic Christianity was determined to blot out an all-inclusive polytheism. Unfortunately, fanaticism accompanies monotheism. God despises the infidel whether he be pagan, Jew, Christian or Muslim.

A question of paramount interest is to what extent did Hellenism survive in the Christian world of the "Byzantine" empire (330-1453)[14]. For the twelfth century, the period under discussion in this paper, the historian Niketas Choniates is a critical witness in this regard. The Byzantine man of letters was educated in both Holy Scripture and ancient Greek learning[15]. By making ancient Greek literature acceptable through

13. Niketas Choniates calls Constantinople *Byzantion*, *Byzantis*, *queen of cities*, *the imperial city*, *the fair city of Constantine*, and the *megalopolis*.

14. As it is known, it was Hieronymus Wolff (1516-1558) who first used the term "Byzantine" to denote the Roman Empire in the Greek East. The inhabitants, however, called themselves "Romaioi" or Romans.

15. Niketas Choniates cites the Old Testament and, in particular, the Psalms, over 500 times, and the New Testament over 300 times. His references to ancient Greek literary sources add up to over 400 while those of Holy Scriptures number over 800 plus thus favoring the latter two to one. See S. Efthymiadis, Greek and Biblical *Exempla* in the Service of an Artful Writer, in: *Niketas Choniates. A historian and a writer*, 101-119.

allegorical interpretation, Western civilization owes the Byzantine scribes, both secular and religious, unlimited gratitude for preserving much of the ancient Greek classics which, if left to early Christian animosity, would have been destroyed forever. In truth, Byzantine culture was constituted of a dualism of sources[16]. Education, in other words, was based on two seemingly contradictory sources: Greco-Roman institutions, traditions, and learning, on the one hand, and Christian faith and the Holy Scriptures on the other. Ancient Greek culture and reason, in particular, continued to inform Christian values while, at the same time, both could be in radical conflict. The life and times of the Komnenoi emperors, Manuel I and Andronikos I, are revelatory for our purposes.

The Body Beautiful and the Body Shameful

First, let us discuss the radically different perceptions of the human body as viewed by Hellenic culture and Christian morality. Is the body good or evil? Before discussing the classical Greek view of the body as both beautiful and good, reference must also be made to the archaic religious movement known as Orphism in which the body is denigrated. Citing Orphism Plato

16. By 172 B.C. the translation of the Hebrew Bible into *koine* or common Greek was completed in Alexandria for the use of the Jews who no longer knew Hebrew but only spoke Greek. Monotheistic Judaism now drastically altered the meaning of Hellene to designate gentile, heathen, and idolater. This disparagement of the designation Hellene was adopted by the church fathers as a term of opprobrium. Emperor Theodosios I (379-395) terminated the Olympic Games with their offensive nude contestants and pagan festivals and sacrifices; he was also responsible for the destruction of Greek temples and statues of Greek divinities and heroes, now viewed as pagan idols. The Church replaced the Greek gods and heroes with Christian saints. Emperor Justinian I (527-565), the builder of Hagia Sophia, denounced "the fallacy of impious and foul Hellenes (*CJ* XV 18.10)".

Niketas Choniates is exceptional in that he rehabilitates the name *Ἕλλην* and equates it with the designation Romaioi or Romans of the Byzantine empire (NH 82, 167, 244). The cities of the empire he now calls "Hellenic poleis" (NH 273); moreover, he speaks of the "Hellenic tongue" (NH 14, 177). During the last four centuries of their dwindling empire, the inhabitants boasted, as do the Greeks of today, of a strong identity with the ancient Hellenes and their legacy as heirs to Hellenic culture and civilization. As Romaioi, now identified as Hellenes, they began to realize that they were not just one people of a multi-ethnic empire, but that they now constituted a *γένος*, a nation. Subsequently, there was a return to the ideals of ancient Athens, and the name Hellene was rescued by emperors, churchmen, and savants alike.

remarks "in fact I once heard one of our sages say that we are now dead, and the body is our tomb"[17]. The body is also called a prison (δεσμωτήριον). The words used for body (σῶμα) and tomb (σῆμα) suggest a mystical similarity between the two. But in classical Hellenic culture the beauty of the naked human body was glorified, admired and highly valued. In the Old Testament, however, whose moral constraints were adopted by Christianity, nakedness is a cause for shame. When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and eat of the forbidden fruit in the garden, they saw that they were naked and sewed fig leaves together to cover their nakedness; their efforts, evidently, were not adequate and so God himself turned tailor and made coats of skin to clothe them (Genesis 3.21). The shame of nakedness is further emphasized in the story of the drunken Noah who fell asleep naked in his tent (Genesis 9.23). His sons Shem and Japheth, in order to cover their father, were compelled to walk backwards to avoid seeing Noah's nakedness[18]. But on the other side of the Mediterranean, the Greeks were devoted to gymnastics, so-called because they exercised in the nude. The Spartans were the first to strip openly and bare their bodies. The Spartan festival called *Γυμνοπαιδεῖαι* was celebrated with naked boys both dancing and engaging in gymnastic exercises. Again, Lykourgos, the legendary Spartan lawgiver, encouraged modest Spartan maidens to appear nude in public celebrations in pursuit of health and the body beautiful[19]. In art they are not, in fact, depicted naked but wearing short chitons, and are applauded as "thigh-showers". Thucydides notes that it was only recently that the naked athlete was a requirement in the Olympic Games[20].

Let us not forget that it was the prize given to the most beautiful goddess, the golden apple, awarded to Aphrodite by the Trojan prince, Paris Alexander, that initiated the Trojan War. He favored Aphrodite because she promised to reward him with the most beautiful woman in the Greek

17. Plato, *Gorgias* 493a.

18. Especially on the Byzantine perception of nudity, exemplified by Noah's naked body, see I. Anagnostakis – T. Papamastorakis, Ἐκμανὴς νέος Βάκχος. The Drunkenness of Noah in Medieval Art, in: Ch. Angelidi (ed.), *Το Βυζάντιο ώριμο για αλλαγές: Επιλογές, ευαισθησίες και τρόποι έκφρασης από τον ενδέκατο στον δέκατο πέμπτο αιώνα*, Athens 2004, 209-256.

19. Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, transl. by B. Perrin (LCL, reprinted 1993), 246-247.

20. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, transl. by Ch. F. Smith (LCL, reprinted 1991), 12-13.

world, Helen, queen of Sparta[21]. The lovely bronze statue of Helen that was melted down with other ancient bronze masterpieces for the purpose of minting copper coins by the leaders of the Fourth Crusade in 1204 enflamed "spectators with sexual passion"[22]. If, by the middle of the fourth century B.C. the statue of the naked Aphrodite of Knidos was notorious for evoking sexual arousal, certain goddesses in Greek mythology, however, when espied in the nude by mortals, even inadvertently, visited their displeasure on the transgressors in extreme measure[23].

It is worth noting that in the New Testament Christ is never described physically nor is he or his mother or any of the women surrounding him ever called beautiful[24]. In the iconography of the Crucifixion Christ may be shown naked in his upper torso and wearing a loin cloth. The reason for so doing is to show that from his side blood and water flowed as proof of his humanity[25]. In the poignant *Lamentations* of Holy Week in the Greek Orthodox Church, Christ's mother addresses her dead son: "O my sweet springtime, my most beloved child, whither hast thy beauty sunk down?" The early church fathers, however, depicted Jesus as a short unattractive

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21. Apollodoros, *The Library*, transl. by Sir J. G. Frazer (LCL, reprinted 1989), II, 172-173.

22. NH 360-361. *Iliad* 3.155-159, "wondrously like is [Helen] to the immortal goddesses to look upon". Praxiteles' notorious statue of the nude Aphrodite of Knidos (ca. 340 B.C.) so aroused the sexual passion of one smitten admirer that he secretly embraced it and deposited upon it the stain of his semen. See Pliny, *Natural History*, 36.21. Again when Protesilaos left behind his bride of one day, Laodameia, to join the expedition to Troy, he was the first Greek to set foot on Trojan soil and was forthwith slain by Hektor. The distraught bride had a statue of her beloved husband sculpted which she took to bed with her and engaged in love-making with his image. Apollodoros, *The Library* II, 198.

23. When the hunter Aktaion, by chance, happened upon Artemis as she was bathing, the offended goddess punished the violator by changing him into a stag, and straightway his own hunting dogs tore him apart. Again, when the Theban prophet Teiresias viewed the goddess Athena at her bath in a stream on Mount Helikon, Athena blinded the guiltless Teiresias, but in compensation, the goddess gave her victim the power of prophecy and the ability to speak with birds. Apollodoros, *The Library*, I, 323; 361-363.

24. St. Mary of Egypt is depicted in her icon as "gaunt and bony ... with no clothing at all". Her hairy body was covered with sores and as such could never have aroused sexual passion. For the Church depiction of the naked female body was acceptable but only if it aroused revulsion see ODB, vol. 2, 1310.

25. ODB, vol. 1, 555a.

man while others described him as "the most beautiful of the sons of men". By the ninth century Christ is represented as being tall and having beautiful eyes, a long nose and long fingers, curly hair and a black beard[26]. But it was the image of Christ in the type of Zeus that won out. The pull of Hellenism was strong indeed.

The second most important person in Byzantine theology, next to Christ, is his mother, the Virgin Mary. In fact, the sexuality of the Theotokos, the Mother of God, was denied by the doctrine that she remained a virgin even after conceiving and giving birth to the God-man. Orthodox Christians insist that she be exalted as the "ἀειπάρθενος", the Ever-virgin Mary. This is so because she conceived through the Holy Spirit and no human male had intercourse with her.

Niketas Choniates, time and again, betraying the influence of Hellenic aesthetics on his Christian values, delights in the beauty of human beings. When describing the physical attributes of Maria of Antioch, the second wife of Manuel I, he gushes that she was "exceedingly beautiful; her beauty was incomparable". He compares her, moreover, to the goddesses of Olympos, Aphrodite and Hera "whom the ancients deified for their beauty (NH 66)". As for Andronikos I "he was endowed with a wondrous comeliness (NH 79)", and "his perfect physique was worthy of empire (NH 59)". An emperor should look the role. But here we must strike an ominous note. At his death it was Andronikos' comeliness that was assaulted with his iniquities. Externalities do count.

The Dead

The living know that death is inevitable. Human beings also kill their fellow human beings; visited by death themselves they also visit death on others. The ancient Greeks believed that the bodies of the dead have a certain claim on the living. For Sophokles' Antigone, the ritual burial of her slain brother Polyneikes is a necessity and a sacred familial obligation required by the gods themselves[27]. Christians, on the other hand, were content on

26. ODB, vol. 1, 436b.

27. Sophokles, *Antigone*, ed. and transl. by H. L. Jones (LCL, 1994), vs. 429-431. Antigone covered Polyneikes' corpse with dust and poured over it a three-fold libation. Ritual burial, claims Antigone, is sanctioned by the "unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods". The human corpse is to be revered. See Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, transl. by W. H. S. Jones

consigning the sinner's body and soul to eternal damnation in Hades or, in translation, Hell. Christians, moreover, found a way for the saintly dead to live on in this world. The physical remains of the Christian saints now called relics needed to be preserved as they were believed to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, miracle-working. The bones and even strands of hair of blessed saints and martyrs had proven to work miraculous cures where all other means might fail. In addition, relics defended against inclement weather, crop destroying locusts as well as the bubonic plague[28].

For the ancient Greeks ritual burial was crucial for the ultimate fate of a shade or spirit of the deceased, otherwise it could not be ferried across the river Styx by Charon and reach a peaceful rest in Hades, the underworld; the dead did not enter a celestial paradise[29]. The shades of humans, denied proper burial, were doomed to an eternity of restless wandering on the wrong side of the Styx, never to rest in peace. Christians, moreover, despite their vehement denunciation of polytheism, borrowed certain pagan beliefs and trumpeted these as their own. The martyred saints in heaven are called upon to escort the innocent souls of the newly deceased Christians to their

(LCL, reprinted 1992), 85-86. Kimon, son of Miltiades, the hero of Marathon, brought back to Athens in triumph from the island of Skyros the bones of the Athenian hero Theseus. This action was a precursor of the collection of relics of the saints by the Church.

28. When Emperor Justinian I was suffering excruciating pain from a dangerous knee infection, the clergy laid the newly recovered reliquary of the Forty Martyrs of Melitene in Kappadokia on the emperor's ailing limb. "The ailment disappeared instantly, driven out by the bodies of men who had been dedicated to the service of God". Prokopios, *Buildings*, transl. by H. B. Dewing with the collaboration of Gl. Downey, 64-69. See also H. J. Magoulias, The Lives of Byzantine Saints as Sources of Data for the History of Magic in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries A.D.: Sorcery, Relics and Icons, *Byz* 37 (1967), 252-253.

29. In Greek mythology Hades was Zeus' brother, the Lord of the Underworld. But Hades is also the place where the dead reside. In the Resurrection hymns of Romanos the Melode Christ, in his descent to Hades following his crucifixion, does physical combat with Hades; he tramples upon this personification of death (Thanatos), and breaks asunder the gates of Hades (Hell), thus rescuing the first parents, Adam and Eve. Hades is depicted as a dark-skinned pagan god. P. A. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami* (*Church of Chora*) [Bollingen Series LXX/Pantheon Books, 1966], vol. 3, p. 343. The Anastasis Detail [201]. Charon, the ancient ferryman of mythology, in modern Greek folklore has become *Charos*, the personification of Death or Thanatos. Charos is ever on the hunt for human souls. See M. Alexiou, Modern Greek Folklore and its Relation to the Past: The Evolution of Charos in Greek Tradition, in: S. Vryonis (ed.), *The "Past" in Medieval and Modern Greek Culture*, Malibu, CA 1978, 221-236.

final resting place[30]. In addition, Archangel Michael assumed the role of the Olympian Hermes the Ψυχοπομπός, the Conductor of Souls to Hades[31].

The seemingly insoluble conflict between two alien cultures was resolved by the seamless interpenetration of Hellenism and Christianity. One of the best examples of this dynamic is the comparable roles played by the pagan goddess Athena and the Christian Virgin Mary. The warrior Athena, armed with helmet, spear and shield, begotten of Zeus, king of the gods, without a mother, was worshipped as the Champion and Defender of Athens, the center of classical Greek civilization. But the virgin goddess Athena was now supplanted by the "militant" Virgin Mary who gave birth to the son of God without a human father. Assuming Athena's military attributes, the Virgin Mary was now made to serve side by side with the Byzantine emperor in battle as his fellow-general! By proclaiming the Theotokos, the Mother of God, as the divine protector of Constantinople, the ascendancy of the capital of Byzantine civilization over pagan Athens was heralded. The giant bronze statue of Athena Promachos on the Acropolis even though transferred to Constantinople, was replaced by the miraculous icon of the Mother of God.

After the defeat of the Danishmendid Turks in 1133, Emperor John II Komnenos, father of Manuel I, celebrating a triumphal procession in the capital, gave up his place on the magnificent silver-plaited imperial chariot, adorned with precious jewels and pulled by four horses whiter than snow, mounted in his stead, the icon of the Mother of God, attributing his military victories to her as his "unconquerable fellow-general (NH 12)". In the year 1167 Manuel I celebrated his own triumph after his victory over the Hungarians. Following his father's example, he gave up his place to the icon of the Theotokos, acclaiming her as "the invincible ally and unconquerable fellow-general of the emperor. The axle did not creak loudly, for it did not carry the dreadful goddess, the pseudo-virgin Athena, but the true Virgin, who, beyond understanding, bore the Word through the word" (NH 90)[32].

30. See Magoulias, The Lives of Byzantine Saints ... Sorcery, Relics and Icons, 261.

31. *Odyssey* 24.1-10. Aischylos, *Choephoroi*, transl. H. W. Smyth (LCL, reprinted 1992), v. 622.

32. Ca. 500 A.D. the Parthenon, the Temple of the Virgin Athena, was converted into a Christian church and renamed in honor of Athena's supplanter, the "ἀειπάρθενος", the Ever-virgin Mary, Our Lady of Athens. Thus the militant Mother of God now reigned victorious over both Constantinople and Athens. When the capital was under attack, the emperor Isaakios II Angelos "carried up to the top of the walls, as an impregnable fortress and unassailable

Incest

For the ancient Greeks incest, like murder, resulted in dreadful pollution and required purification[33]. Niketas Choniates, addressing the reigns of Manuel I and Andronikos I, deplores "the brazen incestuous relations of both emperors" which, he adds, were conducted openly in defiance of public sensibility and the Church's canonical prohibitions. Although claiming to be devout Christians, marital fidelity meant nothing to them, and their consciences remained untrammeled. Both Homer and the classical tragedians attribute such reprehensible conduct to ἄτη, i.e. infatuate folly or moral failure. This concept is still front and center in human relationships although the ancient term never appears in a Christian context. For both Manuel I and Andronikos I lust trumps chastity and wedding vows[34]. Engaging in playful repartee with his first cousin, Emperor Manuel I, Andronikos dismissed protocol and quipped "the subject should emulate his ruler and

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palisade, the icon of the Mother of God taken from the monastery of the Hodegoi ... and therefore called Ὁδηγήτρια, i.e. "She who leads or shows the way." This was the most famous portable icon in Constantinople, supposedly painted by St. Luke the Evangelist. Recording the events preceding the fall of Constantinople to Mehmed II the Conquerer, the historian Doukas writes the following. "The common low-born populace ... going into taverns ... while holding bottles of unwatered wine in their hands and drinking to the intercession of the icon of the Mother of God, they beseeched her to protect and defend the City [Constantinople] against Mehmed as she had done in the past against Chosroes and Chagan and the Arabs": H. J. Magoulias, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks by Doukas, An Annotated Translation of Historia Turco-Byzantina*, Detroit 1975, 204.

33. Diocletian, who established the tetrarchy and proclaimed himself Augustus of the East in 295, published a law proclaiming incestuous marriages "barbarian monstrosities" and threatened execution as punishment. Canon 54 of the Council in Trullo (691-692) supports Diocletian's attitude. Emperor Herakleios (610-641) married his niece Martina. The marriage was viewed as scandalous but valid. See *ODB* 2.992.

34. The ancient Greeks warned of the peril presented by Ἄτη, the personification of infatuate folly caused by blindness or delusion sent by the gods. In the *Iliad* (16.805) Agamemnon blames not himself but Ἄτη as the cause of his offensive behavior toward Achilles whereby he ignited the latter's wrath. Both the king and Achilles were infatuated with their war prizes, Chryseis and Briseis. Agamemnon confesses, "Howbeit seeing I was blinded, and Zeus robbed me of my wits, eager am I to make amends and to give [Achilles] requital past counting". Zeus now joins Ἄτη as an external force affecting Agamemnon's behavior.

that he, Andronikos, came out of the same mould as Manuel" (NH 59)[35]. He made it a point, moreover, to emphasize that the emperor was the more reprehensible of the two since Manuel took to bed his own niece while his mistress was the daughter of his first cousin[36].

Andronikos I reveled in his lechery, a man "madly ravenous for sexual intercourse." He was disdainfully called "πρίαπος" (NH 157)[37]. He resorted, moreover, to ointments and preparations to revitalize his genitals. His god was Eros who instigated sexual passion, and, consequently, no one woman could satisfy his lust for long (NH 177). Like a bee, he flitted from one beautiful conquest to another collecting the nectar of arousal to sustain his addiction. Portraying himself all the while as a devout Christian, following the example of his cousin Emperor Manuel I, he embellished churches and adorned icons with precious metals and gems. All the while, Andronikos was a diligent student of the Pauline epistles, but, at the same time, he blithely ignored St. Paul's admonitions pertaining to marital fidelity (*Ephesians* 22-33).

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35. They were approximately the same age; Manuel I was born in 1118 and Andronikos between 1118 and 1120.

36. The mistress of Manuel I, was his niece Theodora [It is not certain whether this Theodora was daughter of his brother Andronikos- (see VARZOS, I, 357-379,n.76) or rather child of Manuel's I sister Eudokia, [see VARZOS I, 412-421 n. 80 (Eudokia) and II, 417-434, n. 150 (Theodora)]. Andronikos I, Manuel's first cousin, was the son of Isaakios Komnenos (VARZOS, I, 238-254, n. 36), brother of John II Komnenos (VARZOS, I, 203-228, n. 34). He bedded his niece Evdokia (VARZOS, II, 161-254, n. 130), Theodora's cousin. The widowed Evdokia had been later married to Michael Gabras (see VARZOS, II, 164, and note 13). John II Komnenos had four sons, Alexios (VARZOS, I, 339-348, n. 74), Andronikos, (VARZOS, I, 357-379, n. 76), Isaakios (VARZOS, I, 391- 398, n. 78) and Manuel who succeeded his father. Alexios, the eldest, was crowned John II's co-emperor in 1122 but died in 1142. Andronikos, the second son, died while escorting his brother Alexios' corpse to Constantinople. The deceased Andronikos had two sons, John (VARZOS, II,142-155, n. 128) and Alexios (VARZOS, II,189-218, n.132), and three daughters, Maria (VARZOS, II,155-161, n.129) and her two notorious sisters, Theodora [who married Henry II Jasomirgott in 1148; in 1156 Henry became Duke of Austria. See VARZOS, II,171-189, n. 131], and Evdokia (VARZOS, II,161-171, n. 130). Maria married twice, Theodore Dasiotes and John Cantacuzenus. John was incensed by Andronikos I's affair with his sister Evdokia. Alexios became the lover of Manuel's I widow, Maria of Antioch.

37. Priapos was the Greek god of procreation, depicted as an erect phallus.

Envy and Revenge

Andronikos' relationship with Manuel was poisoned early on. Andronikos never forgave his cousin for refusing to pay his ransom when he was taken captive by the Turks while hunting game in 1143. In 1155 he was relieved of his command as Duke of Branicevo and Belgrade, accused of conspiring with the Hungarians to depose Manuel I (NH 58). In the same year, Andronikos' reckless adulterous behavior further infuriated the emperor. His incestuous relations with the widowed Evdokia scandalized both her brother John and brother-in-law. Setting a trap to catch him in *flagrante delicto*, they surrounded Evdokia's pavilion where the lovers' tryst had been arranged, intent on killing the sinner on the spot, but forewarned by his mistress Evdokia, Andronikos made a spectacular escape by slashing his way out with his sword.

Unhappily for the flamboyant Andronikos, he was quickly captured and thrown into prison on charges of conspiracy and incest in the year 1155. Three years later (1158) while in the very act of breaking out of captivity, he unexpectedly came upon his wife on her way to be incarcerated in the very same prison, possibly because she was incriminated in planning his escape. Never one to lose an opportunity, Andronikos managed to engage in sexual intercourse with her leaving her pregnant with their son John (NH 59-61). Andronikos was soon recaptured and incarcerated for another six long years. Thus the emperor robbed his cousin, in total, nine years of the prime of his life. Contriving an escape in 1164 Andronikos made his way to Galitza at the mouth of the Morava river. Apprehended here by the Vlachs he made an Odyssean escape by using his ready wits. In the dark of night, Andronikos, feigning to be suffering from an extreme attack of loose bowels, requested of his captors to be allowed to withdraw to relieve himself. He took along his staff, wrapped his cloak around it, placed his hat on top, and making it appear that he was bent over in the act of evacuation, he took flight. Damned now to live the life of a vagabond in exile, Andronikos chose to distance himself "far from Zeus and his thunderbolt" (NH 74-75).

Manuel I, to his credit, provided Andronikos in the year 1166 with the opportunity to redeem himself by appointing him Governor over Kilikia whose metropolis was Tarsos[38]. Andronikos attacked Thoros II who

38. This was the native city of St. Paul who was esteemed by Andronikos I.

controlled Armenian Kilikia, but he suffered a shameful defeat, and, to make matters worse, he disgraced himself by fleeing the battlefield and his governorship to rush into the eager arms of Philippa, daughter of Raymond of Poitiers, Prince of Antioch, and sister of Maria, Emperor Manuel's second wife. Bewitching his French inamorata with his irresistible charms, the Byzantine Adonis paraded about Antioch with his bodyguards, his erotes bearing silver bows. A fop in his attire, "the king of dandies" lost sobriety and faculty of reason, a victim of ἄτη (NH 79).

Disgusted by Andronikos' "indecent love affairs and unlawful marriage", Manuel ordered his incorrigibly libertine cousin taken into custody, one more time, and punished. Once again, on the run, Andronikos was compelled to abandon Philippa's embraces, and winged his way to the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem; the year was 1167. In the Holy City he comported himself "with unbridled lewdness" in his relations with a second Theodora[39], the daughter of the emperor's brother Isaakios[40]. Theodora, at this time, was the widow of Baldwin III, king of Jerusalem who died in 1163. Upon learning of this second incestuous transgression, and the mischief Andronikos was creating in the Crusader kingdom, Manuel I sent sealed orders to the authorities to seize the unrepentant rebel and to end his misdeeds by blinding him. Theodora, however, intercepted the dispatch and handed it over to her seducer. Andronikos, realizing his days were numbered, proceeded to trick Theodora as Zeus had done in his abduction of Europa. Pleading with her to accompany him but a short distance before they separated, he proceeded to drag her by force to join him in exile (NH 80-81).

Wandering from province to province, the fugitives found asylum in the realm of the Turk, Saltuq ibn Ali, ruler of Erzerum, following the example of his father and brother before him. Niketas Choniates sees Andronikos as another Sisyphos who time and again managed to outwit Θάνατος, i.e. Death[41]. The Christian historian walked hand in hand with Greek mythology. Saltuq magnanimously appointed Andronikos governor of one of his provinces. After spending fourteen years in exile, in 1180, the

39. Varzos, II, 327-346, n. 142.

40. See note 36 above.

41. Aischylos wrote two plays about Sisyphos: *Σίσυφος Δραπέτης*, "The Runaway" with whom Niketas Choniates compares Andronikos and *Σίσυφος Πετροκυλιστής*, "The Stone-Roller".

year of Manuel I's death, Andronikos, following the example of his father, pleaded with the emperor to grant him amnesty and safe conduct to return to the capital[42]. A penitent, he asked forgiveness for his wayward ways. The emperor, perhaps feeling some regret for inflicting such harsh treatment through the years on his cousin, agreed to be reconciled with Andronikos. Escorted under guard into the emperor's presence in July 1180, the penitent resorted to hyperbole, grand gestures and public weeping as though he were performing some great tragedy on stage for the spectators to admire his hypocritical talents (NH 128)[43]. Andronikos theatrically threw off his cloak, revealing a heavy chain hanging down from his neck. Dropping to the floor, he stretched himself out in submissive prostration, refusing to stand upright until he was dragged by his chain of shame and dashed against the emperor's throne[44].

Manuel I was forgiving, but he had no intention of allowing the chameleon to remain in Constantinople free to work his mischief. He sent Andronikos to Oinaion in Asia Minor to take up residence. Within two months the emperor was dead; the date was 24 September 1180[45]. There is a Greek adage that says ὁ θάνατός σου ἡ ζωή μου, "Your death is my life". It was not grief but elation that Andronikos experienced at the welcome news. The opportunity was now given him to return from his lengthy exile to the capital. He even declared himself to be the protector of the heir apparent, the emperor's thirteen year old son, Alexios II whose mother was the beautiful foreigner, Maria of Antioch.

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42. As noted, Andronikos' father was Isaakios, brother of Emperor John II. In disagreement with his brother the emperor, Isaakios, accompanied by his eldest son John, took refuge with Masud I, satrap of Ikonion. Unhappy with his lot in exile, Isaakios reconciled his differences with his brother, Emperor John II. Later, when John II was in the midst of battle against the Turks at Neokaisareia, a distinguished Italian knight was unhorsed; the emperor commanded his nephew John to surrender his own Arabian stallion to the knight. Taking offence, John defected to the Turkish enemy, and married a daughter of Masud.

43. The name for actor in Greek is *ὑποκριτής*.

44. Aischylos, *Agamemnon* (LCL, reprinted 1992), vs. 919-920. Speaking to Klytaimnestra Agamemnon says, "Do not like some barbarian, grovel to me with wide-mouthed acclaim".

45. Astrologers prophesied wrongly that Manuel I's lifespan would be extended another fourteen years and proceeded to urge him to spend his leisure time in sexual dalliance - such happy therapy! (NH 124).

When Andronikos arrived at the straits opposite Constantinople on a site above Chalcedon, the Patriarch Theodosios crossed over to take the measure of the man. Prone to overblown dramatic gestures, as we have seen, Andronikos proceeded to throw himself down in front of the Patriarch's horse and "lay outstretched mighty in his mightiness ... he rose up and licked the soles of the Patriarch's feet". Theodosios upbraided Andronikos for his theatrical antic while "fawning like a dog" (NH 141-142). The Patriarch, moreover, was wary of Andronikos' "insidious effrontery, his self-serving and affected manner ... his strutting and supercilious sneer" (NH 142). His scowl and Titanic indignation frightened his onlookers.

While biding his time across the straits, Andronikos convinced the Byzantine fleet and imperial troops to attack the hated Italian merchants housed in the capital's Latin quarter (NH 140-141). The Pisans and Genoese were caught unawares. The city populace ran amok looting their victims' houses filled with riches and treasures of all kind. Many were even put to death, and those who managed to escape on their ships took their vengeance on the islanders as they made their way back to Italy.

Once Andronikos' supporters inside Constantinople had secured the palace, he visited the young emperor, and again making a profound public obeisance, he embraced the successor's feet while beating his breast and shedding tears. His hypocrisy knew no bounds. Once ensconced in the capital, Andronikos made a public visit to the tomb of his detested cousin, Manuel I. To mislead the eager bystanders, Andronikos, the consummate actor, "wept bitterly and wailed piteously". The dissembler convinced his audience that he truly loved his cousin, his persecutor. Once out of earshot, Andronikos ominously muttered: "I shall fall upon your family like a lion pouncing on a large prey, and I shall exact fitting revenge for the injuries I have sustained at your hands" (NH 143).

At last, his own master, Andronikos unleashed his reign of terror with an unmitigated and insatiable vengeance. He began by punishing Manuel's loyal dignitaries and officials by expelling them from house and home, thus separating them from their loved ones. Without making any formal charges, he bound all those suspect in iron manacles, gouged out their eyes and dispatched them with poison. "Adept at concocting deadly potions", Andronikos rid himself of the strong-willed and politically ambitious daughter of Manuel I and Bertha of Sulzbach, Maria, who, like Aischylos'

Klytaimnestra, was more man than woman. Both she and her Italian husband, Renier of Montferrat, were removed by poison (NH 145).

There were other less fatal means of removing enemies of the throne such as forcible tonsure and relegation to a monastery, a measure certainly preferable to execution. There were times when Byzantine emperors voluntarily embraced the monastic life as they approached the end of their lives to prove their piety and to secure salvation. As his death approached, Manuel I insisted that he be tonsured a monk. He was convinced that donning the coarse black monastic habit, emblematic of the life in Christ, would miraculously enroll him in the eternal army of the Heavenly Emperor. Even in God's Kingdom there is need for the Archangel Michael as Ἀρχιστράτηγος, Commander-in-Chief of the Angelic Hosts, to engage in holy warfare against Satan and his demonic forces[46].

Manuel I also provided that the empress Maria be tonsured a nun, taking the name Xene, in the hope of removing her as a temptation to those who would use her as a way to seize the throne. But neither she nor her "effeminate" wooers respected an action she had not sought voluntarily as required by monastic regulations. These pompous suitors fluttered around the empress whose radiant and pearly countenance, candor and charm of speech, enthralled all those who approached her. They arranged their hair in charming curls and like babes in arms anointed themselves with sweet oils. They pranced about the pseudo-nun showing off their necklaces sparkling with precious gems. It was Alexios, Manuel I's nephew, son of his brother Andronikos, who won Maria-Xene's heart and access to her bed.

In the year 1183 Andronikos convinced the naive young emperor, Alexios II, to crown him his co-emperor. Addicted, as we have seen, to the grand gesture and public spectacle to gain his perfidious goals, Andronikos "shedding hot tears ... lifted (Alexios) on to his shoulders and carried him up to the pulpit of the Great Church (Hagia Sophia) ... (and) carrying him back in the same manner, he appeared to be more affectionate than a father, one who accepted the charge to protect the youthful scion of his empire" (NH 147).

To remove the dowager empress from public affairs, Andronikos insisted that Maria be tonsured once and for all and confined to a convent. But even

46. A mosaic of "Michael, the Prince of the Heavenly and Sacred Hosts with sword drawn" stood in the narthex of Hagia Sophia (NH 135).

this resolution did not allay Andronikos' fears. He now had her charged with treason, and then coerced the justices to sentence her to death. She who was "the sweet light and vision of beauty unto men", was condemned to die by strangulation. Incredibly, her death warrant was signed by her own child "written as though with a drop of his mother's blood" (NH 149). Alexios II had unwittingly committed the execrable crime of matricide.

Having murdered his way to the imperial throne, Andronikos, in need of recreation, reveled in his outings from the palace, followed by his courtesans and concubines "like a cock by barnyard hens". He indulged himself, moreover, in the pleasures of copulation with the female pipers who provided voluptuous entertainment at the court turned brothel. His sexual escapades again were imprudently carried out in the open, scandalizing his courtiers and kinsmen alike (NH 177). In addition, he proceeded to marry Agnes, Alexios II's child widow, the eleven year old daughter of Louis VII of France, renamed Anna. Παιδοφιλία was now added to Andronikos' debaucheries. "And he who stank of the dark ages was not ashamed to lie unlawfully with his nephew's red-cheeked and tender spouse who had not yet completed her eleventh year"[47].

But this devotee of Eros proved pitiless when dealing with the love life of his own daughter Irene[48], the illegitimate offspring of Andronikos and his mistress Theodora, daughter of Manuel I's brother Isaakios. Irene was married to Alexios[49], the bastard son of Manuel I and his niece Theodora, daughter of Manuel's brother Andronikos. The incestuous union of Alexios and Irene, both offspring of first cousins, was proscribed by the church canons on pain of excommunication. Thus incest bred incest. Their mothers, moreover, gave birth out of holy wedlock. Reasons of state are not excuse enough to violate the sacred canons. The Holy Synod, however, bribed and manipulated by Andronikos I, fabricated the excuse that since Irene and Alexios were both born illegitimate, they were, in effect, not related at all! The Archbishop of Bulgaria was suborned to solemnize the marriage (NH 145-146).

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47. The groom Andronikos was in his mid-sixties. Agnes-Anna arrived in Constantinople in 1180 when she was only eight years old; her prospective groom, Alexios II Komnenos, was eleven. See *ODB*, vol. 2.1305.

48. Varzos, II,537-539, n. 165.

49. Varzos, II,481-496, n. 156.

Andronikos was so fond of his son-in-law that he favored him to be his successor, but when Alexios was accused of plotting against his throne, the emperor had him blinded and exiled to a coastal fortress where a special tower was built to hold him. He was buried alive in the sky so to speak. But Andronikos was not yet appeased. He commanded his daughter Irene to convert her love for her rebel husband to hatred and to cease forthwith to grieve and mourn for him. But her true love for her husband would not permit her to do so. Andronikos retaliated by expressing his loathing for her and then banished her from his sight. Her filial devotion, owed her father who had begotten her, he insisted, superseded her love for her husband[50]. The utterly distraught Irene, unable to betray her love for her husband, appeared before her unforgiving father as though stepping out of a Greek tragedy, in tatters with her hair shorn and keening a doleful dirge (NH 171)[51].

To counterbalance the sexual infidelities of Manuel I and Andronikos I, both mirror images of one another, it must be noted that the wives of the Byzantine nobility were exemplary for their loving and undying devotion to their husbands. Niketas Choniates also highlights the example of the wife of Alexios Axouch, the chief master of the horse, Maria[52]. She was, in fact, the daughter of Alexios, deceased brother of Manuel I, and is described as "a prize of peerless beauty". When allegations of treason were lodged against her husband, the emperor had him seized, forcibly tonsured a monk, and banished to a monastery. At first, the distraught wife attempted to kill herself. Frustrated in the undertaking, she groveled at her uncle's feet "beating her breast in grief", and pleaded with Manuel I to forgive her blameless husband. Although he was moved to tears, Manuel I refused to rescind the decree condemning Alexios Axouch. Niketas Choniates poignantly describes her collapse in truly tragic terms. "Her life was given over to weeping like a mourning dove, and she walked in circles through

50. Sophokles, *Antigone*, vs. 665ff. Kreon, addressing the defiant Antigone who was betrothed to Kreon's son Haimon, demands total obedience to the ruler. "One must obey the man whom the city sets up in power/ In small things and in justice and its opposite .../ But there is no worse evil/ Than insubordination".

51. Andronikos completely ignored Christ's injunction. "For this cause shall man leave father and mother, and cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh. Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder". (*Matt.* 19.5-6; *Mark* 10.7-8).

52. Varzos, II,117-135, n. 123.

the house, moaning and wailing and lamenting her loneliness; consumed by excessive grief, and having exhausted her possessions caring for her two sons, she became deranged and in the end she withered" (NH 82)[53].

In September 1183 Andronikos was crowned co-emperor with Alexios II. During the solemn procession that followed the coronation ceremonies, Andronikos, as a result of the day-long activities and the heavy encumbrance of the imperial vestments and weighty crown, in unrelieved physical discomfort, defecated in his breeches, an ominous and malodorous portent of his short reign (NH 151). In the following year (1184) Andronikos, ensconced as emperor besieged the city of Nikaia in revolt. Resorting to an unbelievably bizarre contrivance, he placed Euphrosyne, the mother of Isaakios Angelos, the man destined to depose him, on top of a battering ram, and moved the weapon up to the city's walls. It was a marvel that the threatened woman did not die of fright! Thankfully, the Nikaians sallied forth at night and rescued the lady by pulling her up over the wall with a rope (NH 156-157).

It was, however, the failure of Andronikos to defend the empire, in particular, the island of Cyprus and the Greek mainland, that made the emperor an easy target for rebellion. In his first year as sole emperor (1183), Theodora's nephew, named for his grandfather, Isaakios, sailed to Cyprus and took control of the island by forging imperial decrees with Andronikos' signature. As Governor General of Cyprus, again a case of mirroring the actions of the emperor himself, Isaakios instituted a reign of terror of his own, committing murder by the hour and maiming the island's inhabitants at random. He took excessive delight in defiling the marriage beds of the illustrious nobility and boasted of the large number of virgins he had deflowered.

In 1185, the last year of Andronikos I's brief reign, the Norman King of Sicily, William II, invaded Greece and meeting no resistance, easily seized all the Greek lands on his way including Thessalonike, the second most important city in the empire next to Constantinople. The General Governor of the city, David Komnenos[54], capitulated like a frightened woman. Thessa-

53. Describing the ideal marriage, Niketas insists that the oneness of man and wife should "remain unsullied until their last breath, which prudent couples deem to be the fulness of human happiness" (NH 291-292).

54. Varzos, II,67-82, n. 112.

lonike lay prostrate, ready to be raped. The enemy poured into the churches, packed with the faithful seeking asylum, and slaughtered whoever was in the way; they cut down the clergy as they prayed reverently in their sacred vestments before the holy altar. While the cantors chanted hymns in praise of God, the Norman desecraters ran throughout the church nave and even intruded into the sanctuary, forbidden to laymen, barking like dogs and singing obscene ditties. In vain did the faithful place their trust in the miracle-working icons of Christ and his saints. The blasphemers threw them to the floor, ripped off their precious ornaments, trampled on the sacred portraits of Christ, his blessed mother, the saints and martyrs, and then burned them as firewood to cook their food.

The city's intimidated inhabitants were robbed of their clothing and possessions, evicted from their dwellings and brutally lashed until they revealed where they had concealed their money. The Norman knights galloped through the streets grasping the beards and long hair of the male population and forcibly clipped their hair in the round according to their own fashion. Whenever they came upon the Thessalonians partaking of what little food was available, the enemy would bare their buttocks breaking wind like thunder and then urinating not only upon their food but also in their faces. The irony is that it was none other than Alexios Komnenos, grandson of Manuel I's brother Andronikos[55], who led William II and his pillagers to Greece, hoping to take Constantinople as well, and then to be raised to the throne by deposing the impotent Andronikos in this hour of crisis.

Evaluation

For three years, two of them as sole emperor, Andronikos I ruled the empire despotically until his death in 1185. Yet, despite his brief reign he proved to be one of the most fascinating emperors in all of Byzantine history. To adequately assess his reign, a portrayal of his physical, emotional, psychological and moral attributes must be essayed.

In his physical appearance Andronikos "was well-proportioned and of wondrous comeliness, erect in posture and of heroic stature" (NH 193-194). His face remained youthful until his death, yet his hair turned white as snow revealing a receding hairline. When frustrated, he would "twist his

55. Varzos, I, 601, and note 480.

flowing, curly beard with his fingers" (NH 142). In his attire he favored a violet colored garment of Iberian weave, and on his head he wore a grayish black headdress shaped like a pyramid (NH 141). In his favored role as seducer of beautiful women, he donned elegant attire. Andronikos, in addition, was physically robust, the healthiest of men, avoiding neat wine. Following the example of Homeric heroes[56], he preferred fire-roasted meats. His contemporaries were impressed by the fact that he was never observed to belch. To treat a stomach ache, he partook of a "morsel of bread and a sip of wine"[57]. Andronikos took a physic but only once, and he was so confident in the excellence of his health that he anticipated a soft and peaceful end, the realization of which he was so tragically denied.

Niketas Choniates makes it a point to recognize Andronikos' rhetorical skills, proof of his classical learning. He was, in addition, especially devoted to St. Paul; his study of the Pauline epistles enabled him to compose incontrovertible arguments with which he embellished his own letters; unfortunately, however, none of these survive. His speech was honeyed yet grandiloquent (NH 183). Although he esteemed "divine philosophy", i.e. church doctrine, he chose not to follow the example of Manuel I, and, in fact, forbade discussions of "newfangled ideas" about God. Manuel I went so far as to deliver catechetical sermons giving his own exegesis of difficult biblical passages. He even compelled the bishops to expunge the anathematization of Allah listed in the Book of Catechism so that Muslim converts would not be required to blaspheme God (NH 183).

Although Andronikos' terrifying image as a man of violence, cruelty, mutilation and murder blackened his reign irreparably, Niketas Choniates does not ignore his "many virtuous actions" (NH 179). He credits Andronikos as emperor for providing state funds for the relief of the indigent, instructing his officials to attend to their needs with compassion and judgment. No

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56. On the use of Homer by Niketas Choniates see A. Vassilikopoulou, Ἀνδρόνικος ὁ Κομνηνὸς καὶ Ὀδυσσεύς, *EEBΣ* 37 (1969-1970), 251-259; Eadem, *Ἡ ἀναγέννησις τῶν γραμμάτων κατὰ τὸν ΙΒ΄ αἰῶνα εἰς τὸ Βυζάντιον καὶ ὁ Ὅμηρος*, Athens 1971-1972; R. Saxey, The Homeric Metamorphoses of Andronikos I Komnenos, in: *Niketas Choniates. A historian and writer*, 121-143; N. Gaul, Andronikos Komnenos, Prinz Belthandros und der Zyklop. Zwei Glossen zu Niketas Choniates' Chronikē diēgēsis, *BZ* 96 (2003), 623-660.

57. *1 Timothy* 15.23. "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for the stomach's sake and thine own infirmities".

respecter of persons, Andronikos singled out those who resorted to the right of might freely striking their victims with their fists. When an official, on a tour of inspection, lodged with certain rustics procuring from them his personal needs as well as provisions for his attendants and carriages, he arrogantly went on his way without making any payment for these services. Andronikos I sentenced the guilty official to twelve lashes and directed the imperial fisc to pay the expenses many times over (NH 182). By reining in the land-hungry magnates together with the money-hungry tax collectors, who were adept at fabricating novel tax increases to enrich their own private coffers, the populations of both the provinces and cities increased substantially (NH 179)[58]. In addition, he chose to pay public officials handsome salaries, and thus bringing to an end the sale of public offices, a practice that hobbled efficient governance. The emperor also decreed that ships driven to harbor by storms could no longer be broken up and their cargoes confiscated (NH 181). Concerned with the capital's water supply whose rain waters had turned stagnant and pestilential as they were brought up from the ancient underground aqueduct and funneled to the agora, Andronikos I rebuilt the conduit which now provided a flow "sweeter than running water".

The Double Nature of Andronikos

By enumerating Andronikos' beneficial civic projects and humanitarian provisions on behalf of his subjects, Niketas Choniates, who had a profound understanding of human character and motivation, wanted to balance out his characterization of the emperor by acknowledging both his good and evil deeds. "He was not inhuman in all things, but like those creatures fashioned of double natures, he was brutal and human in form" (NH 195). Greek mythology had imagined all kinds of monsters embodying both bestial and human forms such as the Minotaur, the centaurs, Medusa, the Sirens, Triton etc. As we have noted above, human beings are morally dichotomized.

Andronikos himself, a student of St. Paul, was well aware of the moral dilemma of the human condition. St. Paul himself admits that he too is

58. Evidently, many of the Byzantine population of countryside and cities chose to move to Turkish jurisdictions to escape oppressive taxes. Niketas Choniates writes "because iniquities abounded ... they preferred to settle among the barbarians rather than in the Hellenic cities and gladly quit their homelands" (NH 273).

trapped by the reality that "the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do ... since my enemies (bring) ... me to act contrary to my will. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members" (*Romans* 7.19 and 7.23). For St. Paul it is the law of the mind that opts for the good while it is the law of one's members, i.e. the flesh, the body, that succumbs to evil. In the case of Andronikos, however, his crimes and moral transgressions prevailed by far over his civic good works. He denied himself moral restraints altogether. There was, it seems, a decadent strain in twelfth century Byzantine culture which Niketas Choniates identifies as a "refined effeminacy". The empire became impotent, unable to defend itself in the hour of its greatest threat.

Andronikos I's murderous ascendancy to the Byzantine throne provided him the license to commit one atrocity after the other. When, as emperor, he besieged and captured the rebel city Prousa, he proceeded to hang the inhabitants on trees, now heavy-laden with human fruit; he cut off hands and clipped fingers while chopping off the legs of others. Some lost both hands and eyes, and others lost right eye and left leg or left eye and right leg. Finally, he deprived the bishop of Prousa of one of his eyes, and then he denied burial to all the impaled. Andronikos was evidently a sadist, taking sheer delight in inflicting random suffering on his victims.

Back in the capital, the preamble of Andronikos' decree sentencing his enemies to death reads as follows:

If it is for the common good and especially for the benefit of Andronikos, the savior of the Romans, that all those who have been apprehended and incarcerated for being obdurate and seditious or who have been banished, must be utterly destroyed; furthermore, their kinsmen and blood relations shall be seized and put to death[59]. Henceforth, for all such as these who, having been seized and their eyes gouged out, there shall be no other way left to bring them to their senses except to deprive them of life (NH 186).

Their motivation, claimed the promulgators of this decree, was divinely inspired!

Andronikos was bald-faced enough to contend that it was the judges and the senate who had determined the individual punishments of the accused, therefore, it was his solemn imperial duty to execute the sentences

59. The classic conviction of guilt by association.

they imposed. But to the emperor's chagrin, his own son Manuel refused to carry out the executions, contending that the decree was not an imperial constitution. To refuse to obey his tyrannical father must have been an act of great courage[60]. Thankfully, the executions were suspended.

Was Andronikos, despite his need to copulate with as many women possible, a misogynist? It seems that the only women Andronikos loved were his sexual partners of the moment. As emperor, however, all females suspect of belonging to the opposition, were not spared his vengeance. He subjected them as well to blinding, starvation, imprisonment and torture. Ever the hypocrite, Andronikos defamed wives for their incontinence. He took pleasure in publicly mocking their husbands by suspending the horns of deer that he himself had bagged in the hunt over the arches of the agora. The taunt was clear: the husband who wears horns has been cuckolded; it was common knowledge that the female deer is promiscuous[61].

To be rid of enemies, Andronikos, like Manuel I before him, tonsured not only nobles but high-born ladies as well, banishing them to monasteries and convents, thus subverting these religious institutions. Patriarch Basil Kamateros, however, allowed those women tonsured against their will, to remove their black habits and return to secular life.

60. Manuel (Varzos, II,511-528, n. 161) and John (Varzos, II,528-532, n. 162) were the sons of Andronikos' first marriage. There was also a daughter Maria (Varzos, II,532-535, n. 163) who kept her father informed of developments in the imperial palace (NH 137). Manuel, Andronikos' first born son, refused to carry out the execution of Empress Maria-Xene; he refused, moreover, to sanction the death sentence of all those officials who were condemned on grounds of sedition. John, his second son, whom Andronikos, at his overthrow, promoted in his stead, was seized in Philippoupolis and died miserably after being blinded (NH 197). Manuel's two able sons, David and Alexios, succeeded in extending their rule over Herakleia, Paphlagonia, Oinaion, Sinope and Trebizond. Alexios, to his credit, founded the Greek Empire of Trebizond (1204-1222). David Komnenos, the last Greek emperor of Trebizond, capitulated to Mehmed II on 15 August 1461 (see A. G. C. Savvides, *Ιστορία της αυτοκρατορίας των Μεγάλων Κομνηνών της Τραπεζούντας [1204-1461]*, Thessalonica 2009, 157-168). In 1463 David was executed with several of his children in Constantinople. His wife, the Empress Helena, proved to be another Antigone, risking her own life by digging the graves of her slaughtered family with her bare hands! She died of heartbreak a few days later in her hovel of straw, clad in sackcloth. Helena deserved another Sophokles to render her crushing tragedy: Magoulias, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks by Doukas...*, p. 259, ft. 321.

61. The modern Greek term for the cuckolded husband is *κερατάς*, i.e. "he who wears horns".

Andronikos' paranoia went to far as to consign two of his victims to the flames. Mamalos, secretary to Alexios, Andronikos' son-in-law, was accused of owning certain books predicting the reigns of future emperors. He convinced Alexios that it was foretold that he was destined to ascend the imperial throne. Earlier, as we have seen, Andronikos had, in fact, favored his son-in-law to succeed him. But now, Mamalos was to pay the fatal price for forecasting Andronikos' overthrow. Spectators filled the Hippodrome to witness this gruesome event. Their curiosity turned into shock and they were observed to weep as the stokers prodded with long poles the bound and naked Mamalos back into the flames each time the scorched sorcerer leaped out in agony as he vainly attempted to escape the blazing inferno. The torturers took delight in playing the cat-and-mouse game with their victim. In the end, the young secretary was offered up as a burnt offering. In disgust Niketas Choniates characterizes Andronikos I as the most ruthless tyrant who ever lived (NH 172). Again, when a homeless squint-eyed wretch was caught roaming about Andronikos' pavilion, he too was accused of practising sorcery and, like Mamalos before him, was burnt at the stake without trial (NH 143).

Andronikos might react violently to all those who resorted to prophecy in their pursuit of the throne, but he felt that he had the right to do so on his own. If the pagan oracles of Delphi and Dodona had been mocked and abandoned by Christians together with the ancient modes of divination, the emperor trusted only in hydromancy which provided portents of the future by the use of tubs and basins filled with water. The sorcerer recited an incantation which charged the water with a magical potency; images were reflected "like the shining rays of the sun" revealing thereby the hitherto unknown future (NH 187). Choosing not to attend such loathsome rites in person, as these were strongly denounced by the Church, Andronikos secured for his purposes the ministrations of a notorious wizard named Skleros Seth, who earlier had been blinded by Manuel I for performing such outlawed rituals. Andronikos I was anxious to learn the name of his successor as well as the exact time of his overthrow. Skleros Seth succeeded in conjuring up the multiform demon who forthwith plunged into the water with a loud splash and proceeded to provide answers to the questions posed. The date that was given correctly predicted that Andronikos would be

deposed on 14 September, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The name of the successor was not fully spelled out but "only a sigma in the shape of a half-moon behind which was formed an iota"[62]. The emperor was convinced that these two letter designated Isaakios Doukas Komnenos, the grandson of Isaakios Komnenos, son of Emperor John II Komnenos. He had sailed from Isauria in Anatolia to Cyprus where, by presenting forged imperial decrees, he became a murderous and lecherous tyrant over the island (NH 187-188). Oracles, by their very nature, are often deceptive and highly ambiguous. Again, the demon's prediction proved correct, but it was not Isaakios Doukas Komnenos but Isaakios Angelos who deposed the emperor. Andronikos I now promoted his son John as co-emperor convinced that God Himself had disclosed that the empire would not pass from alpha to alpha, i.e. from Andronikos to his son-in-law Alexios, but from alpha to iota, that is, from Andronikos I to his son John[63].

If the Church denounced demonic divination, it fervently embraced the miracle-working icon as providing portents of the future. For example, Andronikos was especially devoted to the miraculous icon of St. Paul which he had adorned and dedicated as a votive offering in his favorite Church of the Holy Forty Martyrs[64]; it was in its precincts that he planned to be interred after his death. As Andronikos' frightful end approached, lo and behold!, teardrops were seen to trickle down from the eyes of St. Paul's icon. When these were wiped away the tearful flow continued unabated. Informed of this ominous phenomenon, Andronikos I himself interpreted its meaning. "Paul was weeping for him, a portent that the worst calamity was to befall him. He loved Paul ardently ... and presumed that he was loved by him in

62. The Greek letter *sigma*, the letter S, was sometimes replaced by the Byzantine scripted C. The Greek *iota* is transliterated as the English letter I or J.

63. Emperor John II Komnenos, to justify his promotion to the throne of his youngest son Manuel while by-passing the oldest Isaakios against custom and precedent, cites "the many predictions and prophecies of men beloved of God, all of which foretold that Manuel should be emperor" (NH 24). An ancient prophecy as well as certain iambic verses foretold that Andronikos I would reign as emperor (NH 130, 195).

64. During the reign of the pagan Roman emperor Likinios (308-324 A.D.), the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia were condemned as Christian soldiers; forced to stand naked all night on a frozen lake, they froze to death.

return" (NH 194)[65]. Andronikos also embellished the icon of Christ Savior through which Christ directly addressed Emperor Maurice (582-602)[66].

The Tragic Death of Andronikos I. Pity, Fear and Suffering

To repeat, the most loathsome crimes in classical Greek tragedy were incest, the shedding of kindred blood, and especially the murder of a parent. Andronikos I revoltingly compelled the young Alexios II to commit matricide. Thus, he was guilty of all three crimes and much more. In the end, however, he suffered a horrendous reversal of fortune (περιπέτεια). The ancients would have been convinced that it was because of his unbounded cruelty that he was pursued by *νέμεσις*, i.e. divine retribution or righteous anger aroused by injustice. Because of his unending atrocities, the tragedians would have shown that their perpetrator could not escape being both polluted and a polluter of everything he touched. Niketas Choniates, the historian, recording events that took place some 1500 years later, does not use the same terms but certainly implies them.

A man's life, believed the Greeks through the ages, can be evaluated only at his death. What we can say with some confidence is that the tragic death of Andronikos I Komnenos is one of the most pitiful and terrifying in recorded history. The issue is not whether the emperor deserved to die but how his death sentence was inflicted. Easily deposed by Isaakios II Angelos, Andronikos planned his escape by boarding a ship prepared for this purpose. But the angry sea which Andronikos had defiled by casting the headless corpse of the murdered Alexios II into its billowing waves, now vomited

65. St. John of Damascus (b. ca. 625 A.D.) writes: "The saints in their lifetime were filled with the Holy Ghost, and when they are no more, His grace abides with their spirits, and with their bodies in their tombs, but also with their likenesses and holy images, not by nature, but by grace and divine power". H. J. Magoulias, *Byzantine Christianity: Emperor, Church and the West* (Detroit 1982), p. 49.

66. Magoulias, The Lives of the Byzantine Saints ... Sorcery, Relics and Icons, *Byz* 37 (1967), 262. The emperor Maurice (582-602) dreamt of Christ ordering him to approach his icon on the capital's Chalke Gate. When Maurice appeared, the Savior asked: "Where, O, Maurice, do you desire that I punish you, here or in the future age?" The emperor asked to be allowed to expiate his sins in this world. In response, Christ delivered over Maurice and his entire family to the usurper Phokas. Maurice and all his relatives were summarily executed. As Andronikos I suffered his horrendous death did he, like Maurice, hope that by suffering hell on earth, the gates of Heaven would open to welcome him into eternal bliss?

the ship ashore. Falling into the waiting hands of his captors, he was bound and thrown into a boat together with his child bride Agnes-Anna[67] and his current mistress Maraptike with whom, as was to be expected, he was passionately in love. At this point a remarkable scene took place as if taken out of the playbook of an ancient Greek tragedy. While awaiting landfall and his imminent doom, Andronikos "enacted a tragedy. Deftly modulating the plaintive tones of his voice, he sang a pathetic lament that paraded the forcible confinements in the past, and like a dexterous musician plucking the strings of a melodious instrument, he recounted in poetic strains how highborn was his family, distinguished for bravery; ... and how pitiable was the present calamity .... The ingenious women responded to Andronikos in song and improvised an even more mournful tune. He began the lamentation, and they, following his lead, and singing together, answered him" (NH 192). The culture that could produce such a scene was truly remarkable[68]!

Niketas Choniates adds that Andronikos' captors were not moved by this dramatic performance. The Sirens' songs rendered in the manner of women in mourning, went unheeded. It is to be noted that in this instance a dirge was keened not for a deceased beloved, but for a living but doomed individual. The eulogy here precedes death. We are struck by the ability of the cast or chorus to improvise funereal chants antiphonally in the face of certain disaster. Bound in chains, a condition with which Andronikos was familiar, he was led to face the judgment seat of Isaakios II Angelos, the man who had deposed him[69]. The injuries now inflicted on the hated

67. From 1185 to 1203 Agnes-Anna remained in Constantinople. Following the sack of the capital in 1204, the widowed empress married Theodore Branas whose family was related to both the Komnenoi and the Angeloi.Theodore Branas became a vassal of the Latin Empire. See *ODB*, vol. 1.37b and Varzos II, 458-460.

68. The ability of Andronikos I to improvise verses lamenting his own fate, and the ease with which Agnes-Anna and Maraptike were able to respond antiphonally, can be explained by the ancient Greek tradition of keening dirges (*θρῆνοι*) that recounted the life and fate of the beloved dead. See Sophokles, *Elektra*, 86 ff. The keeners of dirges, at times, paid performers, resorted to a stored memory bank of past threnodies, enabling them to choose and improvise suitable laments fitting the individual life of the deceased. Andronikos I and his lady loves were familiar with such funereal customs. See M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, Second edition revised by D. Yatromanolakis – P. Roilos, Lanham, MD 2002, 11-14. Alexiou differentiates the *θρῆνος*, the set dirge from *γόος*, the improvised lament.

69. This was the same courtier who earlier had dragged Andronikos by his self-imposed chains to the foot of Manuel I's throne (NH 128-129).

Andronikos provide one of the most fearful and pitiable spectacles in all of Byzantine history[70].

The Pharmakos

In ancient Greece, the citizenry expelled the cause of defilement and pollution from the polis in the person of a φαρμακός, a scapegoat[71]. Like Oidipous, Andronikos became a living defilement, a curse incarnate. Like the rebel of Heaven, Andronikos was hurled from God's glory to Hell's abyss. Exalted earlier as savior, he was, in fact, the destroyer and then the destroyed. He who reigned from his terrestrial throne as co-emperor with Christ, was paraded before his former subjects as an ἄγος, to use tha ancient designation, a defilement and abomination, the very dregs of humanity. Hymned as "The Faithful Emperor in Christ of the Romans", he was reduced to a base and despised outcast. The wondrously handsome Adonis was pummelled mercilessly, and from εὔμορφος, that is, comely among men, he was made ἄμορφος, disfigured beyond human recognition. Our historian urges us to "reflect on human frailty at the end of life and the wretchedness of the body cast around us like an oyster shell" (NH 125). The Greeks believed in the body beautiful and eternalized its beauty in marble but especially bronze sculpture. But in our world every beautiful living thing in nature must wither and die.

The horrors to which Andronikos was subjected before the vengeful eyes of the newly-crowned Isaakios II Angelos are truly heart-wrenching

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70. Niketas Choniates has demonstrated time and again that he had the tragedian's talent to dramatize the visual impact.

71. *Greek Iambic Poetry*, ed. and transl. by D. E. Gerber Cambridge, MA, 1999, p. 359. Tzetzes (*Ioannis Tzetzae Historiae*, ed. P. A. M. Leone, Galatina 2007, V.23, vs.728-763) quotes Hipponax (fl. 540-537 B.C.): "The pharmakos was an ancient form of purification as follows. If a disaster such as famine or pestilence or some other blight struck a city because of divine wrath they led the ugliest man of all as if to a sacrifice in order to purify and cure the city's ills. They set the victim in an appropriate place ... flogged him seven times on his penis with squills, (and) wild fig branches ... and finally burned him on wood from wild trees and scattered his ashes into the sea and winds in order to purify the city of its ills". See also Hesiod, *Works and Days*, transl. by H. G. Evelyn-White (LCL, reprinted 1982), 21. Hesiod warns his readers that a single evil man will bring suffering to a whole city, and the people will perish from famine and plague, and the women will not bear children.

and demoralizing[72]. He was slapped in the face, kicked on the buttocks, his beard was torn out, his teeth pulled out, his head shorn of hair ... he was even battered by women who struck him in the mouth with their fists, especially all those whose husbands were put to death or blinded by Andronikos. Afterwards his right hand was cut off by an axe, he was cast again into the same prison without food or drink, tended by no one. Several days later, one of his eyes was gouged out, and seated upon a mangy camel, he was paraded through the agora looking like a leafless and withered old stump, his bare head balder than an egg ... his body covered by meager rags; *a pitiful sight that evoked tears from sympathetic eyes*[73]. Some struck him on the head with clubs, others befouled his nostrils with cow-dung, and still others, using sponges, poured excretions from the bellies of oxen and men over his eyes ... There were those who pierced his ribs with spits...pelted him with stones .... A certain incontinent prostitute, grabbed an earthen pot filled with hot water and emptied it over his face ... Andronikos was led into the theatre[74] in mock triumph sitting on the hump of a camel. When he dismounted, he was straightway suspended by his feet ... to the two small columns on which rested a block of stone ... Suffering all these evils and countless others ... he held up bravely under the horrors inflicted upon him and in possession of his senses. To those who poured forth one after another and struck him, he turned and said no more than Κύριε ἐλέησον, "Lord have mercy", and "Why do you further bruise the broken reed?" ... the foolish masses ... removing his short tunic, assaulted his genitals. A certain ungodly man dipped his long sword into his entrails ... After so much suffering, Andronikos broke the thread of his life, his right arm extended in agony and brought around to his mouth so that it seemed to many that he was sucking out the still warm blood dripping from the recent amputation" (NH 192-193).

Andronikos' torn and battered corpse was denied burial and thrown like a butchered animal carcass into one of the Hippodrome vaults.

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72. See L. Garland, Political Power and the Populace in Byzantium Prior to the Fourth Crusade, *Bsl* 53 (1992), 17-52.

73. My italics. For Aristotle this would not have been acceptable as a component in Greek tragedy since Andronikos I is not the victim of ineluctable Fate, but his own malevolent actions, his calculated malice, led to the downfall of his own making.

74. Niketas Choniates uses the term "θέατρον" for the Hippodrome designating the latter as a place for tragic performances.

Epilogue

The life and death of Andronikos I Komnenos provides us with a window into the aesthetic, moral, intellectual, religious, economic and emotional world of Byzantine society in the twelfth century. The fact that we have no direct personal relationships with long dead historical figures affords us the necessary distance to arrive at an objective evaluation. As we have seen, Phrynichos was fined and his play banned forever because he rubbed raw the exposed nerves of his Athenian audience who were still grieving over the contemporary calamity of their stricken fellow Ionians in Miletos[75].

At the heart of Niketas Choniates' historical record is the essence of human suffering. He is at pains to show us that the greatest threat to civilization are the perversities of human malevolence as well as the reckless and irrational acts undertaken not only by those in political power, but also by average human beings in their daily lives. Besides man-made calamities, however, humans are made to suffer natural disasters beyond their control, and so we invent pitiless and vengeful gods to blame for them. Suffering as well as learning are at the heart of both tragic drama and tragic history (*πάθει μάθος*).

A careful reading of the *Annals* of Niketas Choniates enriches our understanding of the human condition in the drama of history while, providing at the same time, a greater appreciation of the profound complexity and mystery of human emotions; as we empathize and suffer with the protagonists, we learn that the passions are as important, and sometimes, even more so, than the intellectual attainments in the ongoing life of every individual. The passions often prevail over reason[76].

The message of the ancient tragedians is that humans learn through suffering, but this certainly is not always the historical case. Niketas Choniates is addressing his times, and yet, he is aware that he is speaking to us as well by transcending the boundaries of time; the past intrudes into

75. O. Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action*, Berkeley 1979, pp. 167-181.

76. In ancient Greek philosophy the divine nature of the Godhead is impassible, that is, not subject to the passions which distinguish humanity, and this conviction influenced early Christianity. But Christ as God made flesh has both a human and a divine nature. Christ as God the Son incarnate suffers in his Passion on the cross. Outside his humanity, however, Christ as the second person of the Holy Trinity, together with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, is impassible. All this, however, is beyond human comprehensibility.

the future. The tragedy of Andronikos I Komnenos occurred in the distant twelfth century, and yet it engages us intellectually and, at the same time, arouses our emotions and engages our intellect in the twenty-first century.

Again, it is instructive that the Greek Orthodox Church celebrates the horrific deaths of martyrs as feast days. The suffering and death of the God-man is also followed by the resurrection and the gladness of Easter. It is also true that classical tragedy often ends with a happy resolution. As for Andronikos, however, there is no *deus ex machina*, an external contrivance to save him from his fate. The question we must now ask is: Does Andronikos' horrific death evoke in us the tragic emotions of pity and fear? I believe, pace Aristotle, that the answer is a resounding yes. Niketas Choniates agrees by pointing out that Andronikos' *death evoked sympathetic tears from the Hippodrome spectators* (NH 193). In his last excruciating moments, the dying emperor cries out "Lord have mercy", but his God will not deign to answer.

On the other hand, we almost despair of humanity as we are required to look upon the unspeakable tortures which both Emperor Isaakios II Angelos and the Byzantine populace rained down upon the pitiful Andronikos with such infectious frenzy. There is, alas, no redeeming *κάθαρσις* for the reader/spectator, only a sickening horror and disgust remain. Not only is there no purging of the emotions of fear and pity but, in fact, these are intensified[77].

It is human emotions, indeed, that distinguish mortals from the pitiless gods as well as from the blind, insensate and ineluctable forces of nature which take no heed of human suffering. What Andronikos needed was not for the Lord to show him mercy, but for his torturers to do so; this contradiction in terms, however, made this an impossibility.

How does the tragedy of Andronikos I Komnenos end? The final curtain drops as we view his decomposing and putrefying mangled corpse lying exposed, "naked, soundless, having neither form nor beauty"[78].

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77. It is perplexing that Aristotle speaks of *κάθαρσις* but only once in the *Poetics* (VI 26-27, pp. 46-47). "Through pity and fear accomplishing the catharsis of such emotions". Aristotle asserts that the effect of tragic drama on its audience is a healing κάθαρσις, i.e. the purging or cleansing of the negative emotions of pity and fear. Pity and fear, moreover, create a sense of tension-healing pleasure.

78. MAGOULIAS, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks ... by Doukas*, 235.

Andronikos I Komnenos: A Greek Tragedy

The Annals of Niketas Choniates depict Emperor Andronikos I Komnenos (1183-1185) in certain aspects of his lifestyle as a mirror image of his first cousin, Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180). The life and death of Andronikos I Komnenos provide us with a window into the aesthetic, moral, intellectual, religious, economic and emotional world of Byzantine society in the 12th century. It was thanks to the Byzantine empire that the ancient texts were preserved and transmitted. Ancient Greek culture and reason, in particular, continued to inform Christian values while, at the same time, both could be in radical conflict. The tragic reign of Andronikos as presented by Niketas Choniates conforms to Aristotle's principles of classical drama, but there is a fundamental disagreement between the author of the Poetics and the historian as to what constitutes tragedy, which underlines this conflict.