Will Zion Fall Again ? The Deuteronomistic Epic in Twelfth Century Byzantium

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Résumé

Bien que ce soit un truisme de longue date que d'affirmer que la culture byzantine est le produit à la fois des traditions classiques et chrétiennes, le rôle joué par la Bible dans la production de la culture byzantine n'est devenu que récemment un objet d'étude critique soutenue parmi les byzantinistes. Seule une fraction de ces études se concentre sur l'Ancien Testament. Cet article se concentrera sur un poème de l'écrivain du XII^{e} siècle Théodore Prodrome comme exemple de l'influence de la tradition épique deutéronomistique sur la littérature byzantine. En nous concentrant sur ce poème, nous pouvons voir comment les livres du Deutéronome sont utilisés pour faire de la dynastie des empereurs comnéniens la dernière itération des héros de l'Ancien Testament. Ce faisant, Prodrome a dépeint les actes de ces empereurs du XII^{e} siècle comme l'accomplissement des prophéties de l'Ancien Testament, bien qu'il ait réécrit et réinterprété les Écritures afin de s'adapter à la situation politique contemporaine. De plus, nous pouvons voir comment les objectifs militaires et diplomatiques de l'empereur Jean II Comnène ont été particulièrement façonnés par cette tradition épique, alors qu'il cherchait à réifier les traditions épiques de l'Ancien Testament au XII^{e} siècle.

Abstract

Though it is a longstanding truism that Byzantine culture was the product of both Classical and Christian traditions, the role played by the Bible in the production of Byzantine culture has only recently become an object of sustained critical study among Byzantinists. Only a fraction of that study focuses on the Old Testament. This paper will focus on one poem by the twelfth century writer Theodore Prodromos as an exemplar of the influence of the Deuteronomistic epic tradition on Byzantine literature. By focusing on this poem, we can see how the Deuteronomistic books of the Old Testament are used to cast the Komnenian dynasty of emperors as the latest iteration of Old Testament heroes. By doing so, Prodromos portrayed the deeds of these twelfth century emperors as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies, though he rewrote and reinterpreted scripture in order to fit the contemporary political situation. Further, we can see how the Emperor John II Komnenos' military and diplomatic goals were especially shaped by this epic tradition, as he sought to reify the epic traditions of the Old Testaments in his twelfth century present.

Texte intégral

The study of epic literature in Byzantium has received a new lease of life in recent years[1]. It has become increasingly recognised that epic literature permeated Byzantine literary culture far more than suggested by the sole surviving complete epic poem, *Digenis Akritas*, and the other so-called Akritic ballads of the eleventh century.[2] The oft quoted lines of the twelfth century Archbishop Eustathios of Thessalonike from his commentary on the *Iliad* epitomises this when he opines that : "From Homer comes if not all at any rate much of the material of later writers… All have stopped at Homer's hostelry".[3] The 2020 three volume study on the structures of epic poetry neatly outlines this surviving tradition in an excellent piece by Kristoffel Demoen and Berinice Verhelst.[4] This study goes further, however, in another piece by Verhelst analysing how 5th century texts such as Nonnus of Panapolis' *Paraphrases* and the Empress and later Saint Eudocia's *Homerocentones* actively used features and direct quotations of Homeric epic to retell or elaborate on Christian themes.[5] For example using Homerically phrased and ordered divine counsel scenes to describe why Jesus should go to earth, followed by an equally Homeric messenger scene for the Annunciation, and then *ekphraseis* for miracles such as the wedding of Cana.

I would like to further these advances in scholarship by refocusing on the other great influence upon Byzantine literature : the Old Testament. In this paper, I will first introduce the relationships between Old Testament and Byzantine literature, before focusing on the highlights of one particular text, and from this I will suggest some preliminary interpretations about both that text, and the influence of the Old Testament upon the epic tradition in Byzantium.

The terms 'Israelite' or 'Hebrew' epic have themselves been challenged terms since the idea of the Hebrew Bible as Epic was first mused in the 19th century. Indeed, Fr Sauvage's paper in this volume takes on this very question using the example of *Exodus* 14, and he uses an innovative metalinguistic reading to establish that it is indeed an epic, though one operating on a very different plane and with a very different purpose to that of the ancient Greek epic.[6] Without wishing to retread his excellent scholarship on this question, for my paper I especially point my readers towards Susan Niditch's chapter on "The Challenge of Israelite Epic" in the 2005 *Companion to the Ancient Epic*.[7] After outlining the debate, her paper concludes by drawing on the typology established in Felix Oinas' 1978 anthology of epics from around the world.[8] Niditch notes that these Hebrew texts certainly included elements of perilous adventure,

daring and manhood that could be sung, chanted, recited, acted out or danced, but that as with other cultures, the role of oral composition remains an open question.[9] Further, that the relationship of these works to history varies, as the historic hero is embellished with legend, and the hero of fiction assumes a realistic dimension, so they tend to converge in epics. She finishes with a set of questions, asking whether the Israelites themselves considered the heroic tales from Judges to 2 Samuel, or of God as Yhwh the divine warrior, to be epic ? This she answers by saying this literature was certainly comparable with other epics from around the world, and that "they appealed within ancient Israel and elsewhere", where "they were employed in culturally specific ways as a deeply expressive means of asserting and declaring national and ethnic identity".[10]

This brings us back to Byzantium, as one of those 'elsewheres'. Though it is a longstanding truism that Byzantine culture was the product of both classical and Christian traditions, the role played by the Bible in the production of Byzantine culture has only recently become an object of sustained critical study among Byzantinists, and only a fraction of that study focuses on the Old Testament. Magdalino and Nelson opened the introduction of their, thus far unique, volume of collected essays on *The Old Testament in Byzantium* by noting that no major study on the Bible in Byzantium has yet been produced. This is despite the fact that references to Scripture are omnipresent in "every conceivable milieu, in word and in image".[11] To take history writing as an example, scripture served as the foundational normative historiographical narrative into which other histories and legends could be folded.[12] I previously published a paper on history writing in twelfth-century Byzantium under the Komnenos dynasty, where I argued that history was depicted as a continuum.[13] Events in the biblical, mythological, classical, and more recent past are juxtaposed in these texts as part of the same divinely inspired order of the world, and the Komnenoi were the latest iteration of rulers that would restore and maintain the divinely ordained world order.

As such, the Komnenoi are presented as the heroes of a great variety of court texts that Byzantinists often refer to as 'rhetorical', covering a broad variety of poems, speeches, letters, short novels and songs that are in various registers of Greek, but whose intended audiences were both the court and the people of Constantinople as part of either a public or more private ceremonial reading.[14] Some are in simpler Greek and would likely have been sung out by choirs before races in the Hippodrome or at important church or civic events, whilst others would be intended for *Theatra*, essentially literary salons that could be a high level one run by an aristocrat, or a lower level one for a teacher and his students.[15] They are packed with allusions to classical history and mythology, in addition to more recent historical events – but, far from being mere window dressing, these allusions articulate the policies and ideology of Komnenian Byzantium in ways that fit these texts into Oinas' classification of epic, used by Niditch for Israelite epics. It is noteworthy that Komnenian Byzantium in particular draws heavily on the Deuteronomistic books of the Bible, which are the same books that Niditch focuses on as those that should be seen as an especial part of an Israelite epic tradition.

It is here that two points must be clarified : those being, the medium through which the Old Testament was received in Byzantium, and some further explanation of these so-called Deuteronomistic books, and why they might have especially appealed to twelfth century Byzantium.

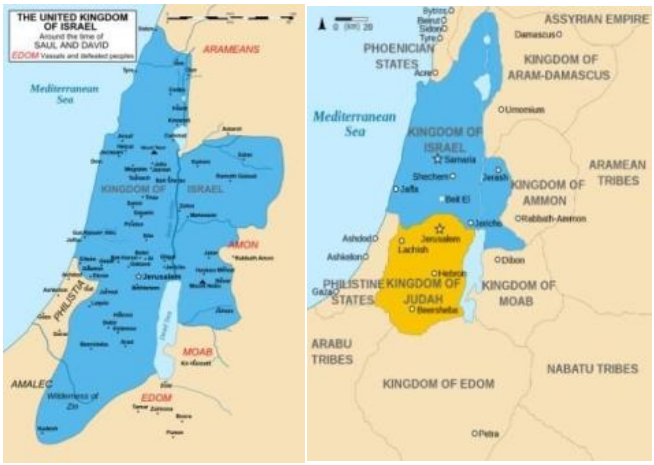
To add some additional context, when I first composed this paper, I used the provisional title of the 'Israelite' epic. I did this because the Old Testament was experienced by the overwhelming majority of audiences in Byzantium entirely through Greek language, and therefore using the term 'Hebrew' epic was a misnomer, whilst they were certainly associated with the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah, which I will return to below. The vast majority of these audiences would have encountered the Old Testament through the *Prophetologion*—a lectionary of Biblical excerpts to be read during the specified parts of the liturgical year, which was produced between the ninth and sixteenth centuries.[16] Educated clergy and laymen would also have been familiar with the Psalter, which was used for both public and private prayer.[17] The Old Testament as a corpus was also not the one familiar to most modern audiences, as it was the Greek translation of the original Hebrew that after St. Augustine has been called the Septuagint.[18] So-named due its storied origin as a translation made by seventy Jewish scholars for Ptolemy II Philadelphus in the 3rd century BC for the Hellenistic Jews of the Eastern Mediterranean, the text contains expanded and revised versions of the texts preserved in the Hebrew tradition, from which most modern Protestant Christians derive their Bible. It also contains several sections not in the Catholic tradition either, such as the Prayer of Manasseh and Psalm 151.

A Byzantine audience would therefore have been very familiar with the annual readings of the *Prophetologion* and the Psalms, but any deeper knowledge would have come through a textual corpus distinct from that familiar to most modern Jews and Christians. The term 'Hebrew' epic

would therefore be misleading, but to be even more precise than 'Israelite', the term 'Deuteronomistic' should also be clarified.

This term derives from Martin Noth's classic work of Biblical scholarship where he proposed that the biblical books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings were largely the work of a single author, writing during the Babylonian exile. Noth argued that this historian's narrative goal was to explain the fall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah on account of their failure to enact the will of God/YHWH, but he also held out hope for a restoration of Judah.[19] More recently, Römer has argued that the books were written in three stages.[20] He identifies the first stage as being under Josiah, 16th king of Judah, the second as during the Babylonian exile, and the third in this Persian period after the rebuilding of the temple ; all this material was composed between the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria in 721 BC and the return from the Babylonian exile in 539 BC.

According to the biblical account, the United Monarchy of Israel had split after the northern tribes under Jeroboam refused to accept Solomon's son Rehoboam as their king sometime around 1000–900 BC. A major theme is the faithfulness of the southern kingdom of Judah, based in Jerusalem, to God, illustrated when the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Neo-Assyrians. In this period, one of the main tropes that developed was that God had chosen a righteous remnant to remain, while God's enemies defeated his wayward children, and that remnant would eventually be restored to their full inheritance.[21] Scholars since Noth and Römer have found further positions based on these themes, with some key ideas being a renewed focus on how King Josiah was the true successor to David through redeeming his people of "the sin of Jeroboam", or on how these books hold out hope to the people of Judah, or how God's promises are always kept.[22]



The United Kingdom of Israel and the divided kingdom after Rehoboam. See :
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Israel_ %28united_monarchy %29#/media/File :Kingdom_of_Israel_1020_map.sv
and
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Israel_ %28Samaria %29#/media/File :Kingdoms_of_Israel_and_Judah_map_830.s
From this context, it becomes increasingly clear why these Deuteronomistic books would have resonated strongly in twelfth-century Byzantium. Literati had claimed for many centuries that the Christian Empire of New Rome/Byzantium was in succession to the kingdom of Israel.[23] But their successors in the twelfth century lived in an empire that had lost much of its territory during the crises that followed the battle of Manzikert in 1071, the civil wars that followed, and the passage of the First Crusade.[24] The Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) had brought the empire back from the brink of extinction, and now his heirs had the task of restoring the old empire, as you can see they had some success with in the 100 years following. With this political project at the heart of the Constantinopolitan court, it is no surprise that in these contemporary court texts we see this Israelite epic tradition come through strongest, as they saw written in these Deuteronomistic books a comparable theo-geopolitical situation.

Byzantium c.1025

Byzantium c.1090

Byzantium c.1180
The changing borders of Byzantium between the eleventh and twelfth centuries.
See :https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File :Byzantine_Empire_animated.gif

The text chosen as an exemplar in this paper is one by Theodore Prodromos, whom recent scholarship has named as the twelfth century Constantinopolitan 'poet laureate' : a master of his craft who wrote more than 17,000 verses across multiple genres, from hagiography to classical romance, Aristotelian philosophy to satire.[25] Though Prodromos' work has often been viewed through the lens of the classical tradition, it is this poem in particular that demands that we view it through the lens of Deuteronomistic tradition as well.

The poem, entitled : "A *Dekastiche* for Autokrator Lord John Komnenos taking the field again against the Persians : prayers taken from all of the prophets", is 410 lines long, with a few lacunae in the surviving manuscripts that would have added a few more lines ; even as it is, this text is double the length of Prodromos' similar works for the emperor, making it at least a mini epic in this regard.[26] It is also entitled and structured as a *dekastichoi* : often translated into the German '*Dekastische*', this refers to the structure of the poem being that of ten-line verses that use various metres, but crucially means that this poem would be sung at a public occasion, such as the ceremonial departure or return of the emperor on a campaign.[27] Therefore, though written by Prodromos, this text was intended for public performance, and so earns its epic genre credentials in that regard as well. Its title refers explicitly to the fact that the poem will use "prayers taken from all the prophets" for the Emperor John II Komnenos 1118-43.[28] The content of the text, however, goes further than simply using prayers in support of the emperor's campaign, but makes an epic of the emperor's deeds that had been long foretold by these biblical prophets.

To give you a highlights tour of this poem, it opens with : Ὁρῶν παραταττόμενον κατὰ Περσῶν σε πάλιν | καὶ κατὰ τῶν ἐξ Ἰσμαὴλ ἐκτείνοντα τὸ δόρυ ('Seeing you ready for battle against the Persians again and stretching your spears against the get of Ishmael')[29] The 'get of Ishmael' and the 'Persians' are enemies of the Israelites from opposite ends of the Old Testament, and thus the Emperor drawing up in battle against them 'again' is not only a reference to his latest campaign, but a call to arms for God's anointed to once more face God's enemies, and this is literally referenced in the fourth verse in a paraphrase of Psalm 88 (LXX). 21–22.[30] Indeed, in a twelfth-century context, using the idea of the children of Ishmael confronting the children of Isaac is particularly apt, as it reflects the religious and political closeness of Christianity and Islam, and the Basileus and the Caliph, and their competing claims to universal authority.

That John is the Lord's favoured is made clear with judicious paraphrasing of Psalm 90 in the next verse, and though much of it merely emphasizes how John is favoured by God, there is a deft reworking of the psalm towards the end :

Χώρει, γεννάδα βασιλεῦ, θαρρῶν κατὰ τοῦ Πέρσου,ὁ γὰρ θεός σε ῥύσεται, καθ᾽ἃ Δαυὶδ προλέγει,
ἀπὸ παγίδος θηρευτῶν καὶ λόγου ταραχώδους,
σκιάσει δέ σε θαυμαστῶς τοῖς τούτου μεταφρένοις

καὶ τοῖς ἀγγέλοις ἑαυτοῦ δεσποτικῶς κελεύσει
διαφυλάσσειν σε καλῶς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς σου.
ἐπὶ χειρῶν ἀροῦσι σε, μήποτε καὶ προσκόψῃς.
ἐᾠου βασιλίσκου δὲ καὶ δυτικῆς ἀσπίδος
καὶ λέοντος μεσημβρινοῦ καὶ δράκοντος ἀρκτῴου
τὸ κράτος ἄκρῳ τῷ ταρσῷ βασιλικῶς πατήσεις.

Go, noble Emperor, be courageous against the Persians,for God shall protect you, as David foretells,
from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence ;
with his feathers he shall cover you marvellously
and like a master he shall order his angels
to guard you well in all your ways.
They will lift you up in their hands, so that you won't stumble.
Cobra of the east and serpent of the west
and lion of the south and dragon of the north
you shall royally trample on power with the ends of your feet.[31]

Compare that with the original text of Psalm 90 in n.31 and we can see that the emperor is here described as fulfilling the prophecy of Psalm 90 in spreading his empire out over its enemies.

Thus far, the poem has articulated a general programme of expansion, rather than specifics, but then it turns to the obscure prophet Habakkuk :

Καλῶ καὶ σὲ τὸν Ἀββακοὺμ τὸν βλέποντα τὸν μέγανσυνάρασθαί μοι τῆς εὐχῆς τῆς εἰς τὸν βασιλέα
καὶ προφοιβάσαι τρόπαια καὶ προχρηστηριάσαι
καὶ προειπεῖν τὸν ὄλεθρον τοῖς ἀλαζόσι Πέρσαις.
ἰδοὺ κινήσω καθ᾽ ὑμῶν τοὺς μαχητὰς Ῥωμαίους,
τοῖς ἵπποις τούτων ἀλτικὰς ἐνθήσομαι δυνάμεις
ὑπὲρ ὁρμὴν παρδάλεων καὶ λύκων Ἀρραβίας,
καὶ γαῦρον ἐξιππάσονται καὶ δράμονται μακρόθεν
καὶ πετασθῶσι κατὰ γῆς τῆς σοβαρᾶς Περσίδος
ὡς ἀετὸς ὀξύρροπος καὶ πρόθυμος εἰς βρῶσιν.

I also summon you, Abbakum the great seer,to join me in praying for the Emperor
and predict the defeat [of the enemies], give oracles
and foretell the ruin of the arrogant Persians.
Now I arouse the Roman warriors against you :
I shall imbue the jumping powers of their horses,
[which are] swifter than the leopards and wolves of Arabia
and they shall ride forth [in exultation] and run far off
and fly over the violent Persian land,
like an eagle quickly turning and swooping for meat.[32]

The prophet Habakkuk/Abbakkum is only twice mentioned by name in the Bible, and that is only in the Hebrew bible that passed into the Greek Old Testament known as the Septuagint (Habakkuk 1. 1 and 3. 1). The book attributed to him consists of five oracles concerned with the rise of Chaldean Babylon, though he is also mentioned in the Greek additions to the Book of Daniel.[33] In these oracles, Habakkuk compares the coming Chaldean horsemen to various animals, so that the parallelism with the Turks becomes obvious in Prodromos's passage reflecting Habakkuk 1. 5–11, as shown above.

Though the parallel is mixed by Prodromos adding in the terms Persians and Arabs, ahistorical to Habakkuk, his updating of the verse to fit John's contemporary situation is made clear in the next stanza : 'Μάνθανε, γῆ Χαλδαϊκὴ καὶ γῆ Βαβυλωνία | καὶ χῶρος Αἰθιοπικὸς καὶ γῆ Μαδιηναία' ('Learn your fate, land of Chaldea and land of Babylonia | and the country of Ethiopia and the land of Madiina').[34] This references the borders of the biblical world, with the often interchangeable Chaldea and Babylon meaning the north and east, while the Islamic heartland of Medina is added to Ethiopia for the south. This phrase may therefore be equivocating the conquest of Babylon by Chaldean horsemen with the conquest of Baghdad as the new Babylon by Seljuk Turkish horsemen, with Baghdad's location *c*. 50 miles north of ancient Babylon (outside modern Hillah) making the parallelism apposite. Though one might assume that the reference to Ethiopia was merely one and the same with the Ethiopia mentioned by the classical Greek geographers, Ethiopia is also the usual Septuagint translation of the Hebrew *Kush*.[35] *Kush* is prominent in the Prophets and 2 Kings as a generic term for countries south of Israel, and it is also used more specifically in some sections to refer to southern Egypt. This may have been due to Egypt being ruled in the eighth and seventh centuries BC by the twenty-fifth dynasty, who were of Kushite/Nubian origin – and it is

mentioned that King Hezekiah fought the king of Ethiopia/Kush in 2 Kings 19 :9. By the twelfth century, this region was predominantly under Islamic rule and so the parallelism continues, with the new enemies of the new chosen people equated together, and so this reference should be understood as one whose Biblical meaning comes through as strongly, if not more strongly than its classical Greek one in this context.[36] Mixed in this section on Habbakuk, we also have the mention that God opens up the eyes of the great, which may actually be a semi-quotation from Elisha, but this is itself combined with God preparing his equipment – the saviour of the people is marching out carrying his shining weapons and missiles, in what could be seen as the epic arming scene of the poem.[37]

The daughter of Zion, younger Rome, is then called upon to arise and restore all the land and sea to the Lord in lines 121-130, paraphrasing the prophecies of restoration from the prophet Micah (Micah 4 :8-13 and 7 :11-12). This is likely a deliberate misreading of what the Old Testament says, as the daughter of Mt Zion is used in the Old Testament to describe Jerusalem itself, whereas it is now New Rome, Constantinople, who is the daughter of Zion.[38] Though the many foot soldiers marching out are mentioned briefly, the focus is on the *Despotes*, the emperor, described as the purple bloom of the Komnenian branch in reference to John's birth in the Porphyra chamber of the imperial palace.[39] He is the child who is "your saviour and avenger" : the hero who will restore all the land and sea to the lord, in a clear reference to the Deuteronomistic promise of the eventual restoration of the united monarchy of God's chosen people.

The next paraphrase is from the Book of Amos, another minor prophet who was from the southern kingdom of Judah but preached in the northern kingdom of Israel, a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea in the eighth century BC. As a side note, Amos following Habakkuk and Micah is not the chronological order of the Septuagint, suggesting, perhaps, that political allusions had a primacy over biblical precedent.

Ἀμὼς ἀκρέμον προφητῶν, καὶ σὺ συμπάρεσό μοικαὶ « τάδε λέγει κύριος ὁ παντοκράτωρ »
λέγε·
πῦρ ἄσβεστον ἀποστελῶ περὶ τὰ τείχη Γάζης,
καὶ καταφλέζει σύμπαντας αὐτῆς τοὺς θεμελίους,
ἐξολοθρεύσει παντας δὲ κατοίκους τῆς Ἀζώτου·
σὺν τούτοις ἄρδην ἀπολεῖ καὶ τοὺς Ἀσκαλωνίτας·
ἀπάξω δὲ τὴν χεῖρα μου πρὸς τέρματα Περσίδος,
καὶ πάντες οἱ κατάλοιποι βαρβάρων ἀπολοῦνται,

Amos, branch of the prophets, you too shall join meand 'thus says the Pantokrator'[40] tell :
I shall send unquenchable fire around the walls of Gaza,
and it shall burn all of her foundations,
and destroy all the inhabitants of Azotus :
and together with them annihilate the Ascalonians :
I will bring my hand upon the boundaries of Persia,
and all the remaining barbarians shall be destroyed[41]

This passage contains the same mixing of the biblical and classical past with the twelfth-century present, starting the use of the ethnonym "Persians," who, to repeat, did not exist when Amos wrote, but most of the rest of the passage is pure quotation from Amos 1–2, though there are also some similarities with Zachariah 9 :1-9, which intriguingly includes Damascus as well. I will return to Damascus momentarily, but I want to highlight that this passage is a perfect example of this continuum between Biblical past and twelfth century present, as Prodromos intentionally blurs the distinction between these different parts of history. Such an effect makes it easy for John to appear as the latest in a series of Biblical heroes. Building upon this, it is significant that among this general exhortation for the emperor to conquer his enemies, Prodromos has chosen to use specific references to the Palestinian littoral. These include references not only to "fire around the walls of Gaza", but also "Azotus", which is the Greek Bible's name for biblical and modern Ashdod, just north of Gaza, and "the Ascalonians" in reference to Ashkelon, which is between Ashdod and Gaza. The likely dating of the poem is especially relevant here, as from this context it appears likely that Prodromos wrote it on the occasion of Emperor John's great campaign to the east in 1136-39. During this time, John conquered Cilicia and some towns in northern Syria, and he almost incorporated the crusader principality of Antioch into the empire (see maps above).[42] His aims may also have stretched beyond this.

We know through a letter found in the Genizah archive, which a Jewish doctor of Seleukeia wrote to his relatives in Egypt, that some of John's generals had been asked to bring this doctor medical textbooks from cities they captured, mentioning Damascus in particular, which is intriguing for the possible intertextuality between Amos and Zachariah in this section.[43]

Further, John sent his cousin Adrian to visit Jerusalem and the Holy Land while he was in Syria to visit Orthodox Christians there and distribute the emperors largesse, and he is specifically described as the Aaron to John's Moses, and thus this trip appears as a foretaste of a planned imperial visit.[44] Though John was recalled back to Constantinople in 1139 before his designs were fulfilled, he returned in 1142 and planned to visit Jerusalem before he died in a hunting accident in Cilicia. A monody from that year, written by Prodromos's colleague, Michael Italikos, states that John had intended to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and that the holy city and Golgotha itself would have had honours reserved for him had he arrived.[45] Thus, John's aims for his eastern expedition appear to have been ambitious, to say the least, as this poem hints that some level of reincorporation of Damascus and the Holy Land itself was part of that agenda, which would have literally had John walking in the footsteps of his Old Testament predecessors. By doing so, he would earn the status of a reified epic hero himself, demonstrating how his military and diplomatic policies were shaped by this epic tradition.

This shall be returned to below, but in the poem the next of these predecessors was Joel, which brings us to some battle scenes in lines 151-170 : the Roman army is described as a tribe, φῦλον, making them of a kind with the tribes of Israel referenced in this way throughout the Greek Old Testament, biting like lions, appearing as many men like the daybreak to cover Persian hills, killing in a furious fire, until all the barbarians become subjects and the hills will drip with sweetness and milk in all Roman lands.[46] This directly paraphrases the especially warlike section of Joel 3, which opens with "In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem", and ends with the prophecy Prodromos quotes.

Zephaniah is then called on, interestingly to inspire the men of Aries in a clear classical-Biblical hybrid phrase of which there will be further examples. We have his words used to rouse the warriors, go to war and pour out the blood of a list of Biblical enemies in another paraphrase linked with the prophesies of Zephaniah whereby the entire world will be submitted to God's judgement, though the famous Biblical line about turning ploughs into swords is also quoted in lines 171-180, which is also from Joel 3.

The prophets Malachi and Nahum are called on next, as the emperor enters Persian lands with the feet of his army raising a great cloud of dust above the clouds, and we get a specific quotation from another classic and much used line of the Israelite epic tradition in line 211. "The *Despotes* Komnenos, stout lion, arises" is an explicit reference to the Lion of Judah, based on a blessing that Jacob gave to his fourth son Judah in Genesis 49 :9. John therefore comes across as the hero of the righteous remnant in the Deuteronomistic tradition, though it should not be forgotten that the Lion of Judah is also mentioned in Book of Revelations 5 :5 in connection with Jesus, and so it should not be forgotten that the poem portrays John as embodying this New Testament meaning as well.

The prophet Obadiah who is mentioned next does, however, reassert the opposition between the "the house of the bitter Esau, and of your deceitful Persian" and the house of Jacob, "my servant and child" in lines 221-240. The prophet Jonah who was swallowed by the whale is briefly namechecked in lines 241-250 as he is told not to run away to sea this time, before we get to Jeremiah.

In lines 253-254 we come across the title of my paper, as Prodromos asks whether Zion will fall again as it did long ago, surrounded on all sides and destined to be burned by the Babylonians. We hear no, but then frustratingly we have a lacuna in the text and so we don't hear the details. The text picks up with the lines "but having finished the lament with merriment send forth my Autokrator to fight for us again against the Persians", and we then have a quote from Jeremiah how the lord will take the field with the emperor, and will deliver him and shelter him, save him and protect him all the days of his life, in a possible paraphrase of Psalm 23, known to many for its opening lines "The Lord is my Shepherd".[47]

Zachariah follows, and we hear how all the Persian horses and chariots will be destroyed with the bows and missiles of New Zion in lines 271-280 (Cf. Zachariah 9 :9-17). More pertinently, Isaiah is then described as "συμμουσηγετούσης" – that is "prophet and leader of the Muses", in another blending of Old Testament and classical epic tradition, as the title 'Musagetes' is one ascribed to Apollo.[48] Isaiah 7 :20 is then quoted in lines 291-310, in the context of Assyria being shaved and humbled, which runs straight into a recitation of the first vision of the prophet Ezekiel.

This chapter describes how the land of Chaldea will be overtaken by four marvelous animals pulling the chariot of the Holy Spirit of God.[49] It is a prophecy that is reflected in Revelations 4 :2 6-8, one which early Christian commentators such as St Jerome and St Augustine believed was allegorically fulfilled by the four evangelists, leading to their usual portrayals in art as a winged man (Matthew), winged lion (Mark), winged bull (Luke) and eagle (John).[50]

However, Prodromos throws out this usual interpretation in his 310th verse to make his meanings regarding Old Testament prophecy being fulfilled in a new way crystal clear :

Δοκῶ μοι, θεῖε προφητῶν, τὴν ὅρασίν σου ταύτηντὸν Κομνηνὸν αἰνίττεσθαι δεσπότην
Ἰωάννην
καὶ τὴν ἐκ τούτου τετρακτὺν τῶν πορφυρογεννήτων.
κινεῖται γὰρ κατὰ Περσῶν ὡς λαίλαψ τεραστία
καὶ πῦρ καὶ φῶς περὶ αὐτόν

It seems to me, divine prophets, this vision of yours speaks in riddles of the Despotes John
Komnenos
and the four [creatures] are those porphyrogenites from him [his offspring]
He urges us on against the Persians as a monstrous hurricane
with fire and light around him

His political commentary and linkage could not truly be made clearer than that. From this point we still have another hundred lines, though the key sections come as once again David is namechecked and it is made clear that God destroys his enemies in a likely paraphrase of Psalm 83.

The Edomites, the whelps of Hagar and the Ismaelites, Gebal, the Ammonites and Amelekites, impious Sidon and Tyre, the Midianites under Sisera their general who was killed by Jael with a tent peg : all are cast down, though Prodromos adds that it is the Komnenoi that are doing so in line 367.[51] With that done, ordure is created in line 369, and from that ordure arises a Godly grape vine that will cover the new lands of New Rome, in a clearer paraphrase of Psalm 80. Christ is then mentioned for the only time in the poem, as the one who created, made, crowned and anointed John as emperor, and by doing so we get something that is at once another classical arming scene, though it is unclear whether it is Christ arming the emperor or indeed whether Christ is himself arming himself in order to slay and enslave those who do not perceive him, with phrasing that mirrors Psalm 18.

This psalm also ends with the line that God grants great salvation to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever, in what is again a clear indication that this Psalm is being deployed to refer to the Emperor John as much as to David.[52]

The emperor is then dispatched like an arrow and stretched like a spear in order to conquer, unless Babylon humbles herself by bending the neck, and Persians are encouraged to serve as guards and servants, and proffer tribute to New Rome.[53] This is an interesting way to end, as unlike the fire and death that characterises much of the Old Testament, and the treatment of the Amelekites and others, the Persians in this poem can become fellow servants and even guards of the emperor if they surrender. This matches with the many Turks and other foreigners who served in the imperial armies, including John's childhood friend and general John Axouch who was of Turkish origin.[54] The threat of Old Testament extinction is certainly there, but the political reality whereby willing subjects would be preferable intrudes into the poem. Considering John's conduct on his campaign, whereby any who surrendered were well treated, both Christians and Muslims, this mention is not tokenistic by any means, though it is certainly tacked on as a contemporary intrusion upon Old Testament mores.[55] Just as with the order of the prophets in this poem, or the reinterpretation of the wondrous animals as John's sons rather than the evangelists, the contemporary political situation always takes priority. Prodromos is not constrained by his source material, but he uses it liberally – rewriting and reinterpreting scripture if necessary to suit his purpose : that is portraying John as the latest epic hero in this Old Testament tradition.

Having gone through the highlights of the text, I hope it is plain to all that Prodromos is explicitly casting the contemporary Byzantine emperor as the latest hero of a twelfth century Israelite or Biblical epic. Just as the Deuteronomistic books of the Old Testament prophecy that the righteous remnant of Judah would one day reunite the entire the kingdom of Israel, so now will the righteous Roman remnant one day reunite the Roman Empire, and, specifically, it will restore the actual Holy Land of the Levant to the empire in addition to their 'Persian' occupied eastern territories they held in the eleventh century. This poem was performed as John left for his great eastern campaign, perhaps literally as the emperor, his sons and their retinue rode through the city on their way to join the army in Anatolia. This poem articulates the identity of these New Romans as the heirs of God's chosen people in the Old Testament, and indeed that these prophets were literally producing oracles about them, as it is through the Komnenoi that these prophecies were finally being fulfilled. Further, it is notable that Prodromos draw his material not only from the *Prophetologion* and the Psalter, but from material only in the Septuagint, and so this poem is yet more evidence of the depth and breadth of his scholarship.

This poem represents a Deuteronomistic epic according to Niditch's model, but I would like to

finish this paper by saying that this especially obvious example should be our starting point to read other Byzantine epics, and indeed more middle eastern epics and texts in general with this Old Testament paradigm in mind. Though all Byzantine writers may have stopped at Homer's hostelry as Eustathios said, so too did they stop at a Deuteronomistic one.

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29 Prodromos, Poem XVII, lines 1–2.

30 C.f. lines 44-50. For Ishmael as the son of Abraham and Hagar see Genesis 16–17, 21. His supposed descendants, the Ishmaelites, are identified with the Midianites who sell Joseph to Egypt: they are listed as enemies of Israel in Psalm 83. See: Knauf, Ernst Axel, *Ismael: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Palästinas und Nordarabiens im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr,* 2nd Edition, Wiesbaden, O. Harrassowitz, 1989. Under Cyrus the Great, Persia replaced Babylon as the Mesopotamian hegemon, and part of the old kingdom of Judah was reconstituted as the Persian province of Yehud. On this period, see the essays in: Lipschits, Oded, and Oeming, Manfred (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, Winona Lake IN, Penn State University Press, 2006.

31 Prodromos, Poem XVII, lines 61–70; Psalm 90. 12: 'ἐπ᾽ ἀσπίδα καὶ βασιλίσκον ἐπιβήσῃ | καὶ καταπατήσεις λέοντα καὶ δράκοντα' ('You shall walk over the asp and basilisk [cobra] | and tread [on] the lion and the dragon'. This passage as used by Prodromos also has an extra play on words as *basiliskos* means both 'princelet' and 'basilisk' (serpent), while *aspis* means both 'shield' and 'cobra'. Author's own translation with Giulia Paoletti.

32 Prodromos, Poem XVII, lines 71–80.

33 This is found both in the original *Codex Chisianus* Septuagint text, and the standard Theodotion version, and relates the story of 'Bel and the Dragon', where Habakkuk is transported by God from Judea to the lion's den in Babylon to bring food to Daniel: Daniel 14. 23–28. This story associated Daniel and Habakkuk with the warrior saints George and Demetrios in Byzantium, adding another dimension to the appropriateness of this parallel for a 'warrior emperor' such as John: Pitarakis, Brigitte, *Les croix reliquaires pectorales byzantines en bronze*, Paris, Picard, 2006, p. 178-179.

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38 In addition to Micah, see: 2 Kings 19:21; Isaiah 1:8 and 62:11; Jeremiah 4:31; Zechariah 9:9. Regarding Constantinople/New Rome as the New Jerusalem, Miller gives the example of the *Prophetologion* reading for Vespers on the anniversary of the foundation of Constantinople (11th May) being from Isaiah 54. This verse prophecies the future vindication of Zion, but the Prophetologion uses the additional incipit: "Thus says the LORD to the Holy City", which creates an ambiguity that encourages the listener to believe that the reading is addressed to Constantinople as "the Holy City". See: Miller, "*Prophetologion*", p. 68, n. 39. The so-called *Patria of Constantinople* is also informative. This text, whose major edition dates from the late tenth century, describes the sacred and legendary geography of Constantinople, and it is full of Old Testament associations. Book 2.40 recalls a statue of Solomon erected by Justinian that gazed at the Great Church of Hagia Sophia, while 2.87 mentions statues of Adam and Eve in the Hippodrome. 2.102 also recalls that a cross in the forum was flanked by statues of Constantine and Helena and two angels; given the cross was said to be inscribed with the Trisagion (ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος, cf. Isaiah 6:3), these angels may represent the seraphim of Isaiah's vision. The prophets Isaiah and Daniel were said to be buried in two Constantinopolitan churches (3.71 and 3.81), while Old Testament relics such as the rod of Moses and the horn of oil used by Samuel to anoint the kings of Israel were kept at others. In particular, the relationship between the great Church of Hagia Sophia and Solomon's Temple is emphasised. In Book 4's discussion of Justinian's rebuilding of Hagia Sophia, the account echoes the rebuilding of the Temple described in Ezra 4-5, with 4.14 specifically claiming that the bricks on the arches of the dome were stamped with Psalm 45:6 ("God is in the midst of her, God will help her at break of day"). This would apply the Old Testament theology of Zion's inviolability to both the church and the city as whole. 4.14 also calls the church's presbytery (Το [δὲ] ἅγιον θυσιαστήριον) the ἅγια ἁγίων: "the Holy of Holies", as in Solomon's Temple, making the claim to succession absolutely clear, as it was in Hagia Sophia that God now dwelled. See: Berger, Albrecht (tr. and ed.), *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople: The Patria*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2013.

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Quelques mots à propos de : Maximilian Lau

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