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THE *TIMARION* :
TOWARD A LITERARY INTERPRETATION

The *Timarion* is a unique work of Byzantine literature. A forty-page philosophical satire from around 1100, it is not easily classifiable in terms of genre. Descents to Hades are featured in some ancient works (e.g. the *Odyssey*) but they do not have the same literary character as the *Timarion* nor is the traveler judged in them. It survives in Cod. Vat. gr. 87 along with the works of Lucian, which it imitates in many ways, but Lucian was not so commonly imitated in Byzantium as to constitute a genre¹. The work is basically an experiment, and so is this essay, which will offer a new reading of some of the most problematical aspects of this anonymous text in an effort to jump-start our literary engagement with it. To place those specific aspects into context, I will first offer a synopsis of the work's contents².

The *Timarion* has a «frame-dialogue» in the format of a Lucianic exchange between two acquaintances, Timarion and Kydion, though most of the text after the first few pages consists of Timarion's first-person narrative of his experiences in Hades (after the introductory sections, Kydion interrupts or interjects rarely). The two are speaking in Constantinople, where Timarion has just returned. The work begins with Kydion greeting Timarion and asking about his trip. The story that Timarion eventually relates is, in summary, the following (I will explain why I say «eventually» below) : he traveled to Thessalonike to attend the festival of St Demetrios. He offers an *ekphrasis* of the festival and a satirical *encomium* of the city's governor, some Palaiologos Doukas or other who is not named. This part of his narration (the *ekphrasis* and the *encomium*)

1. Moreover, Lucian does not have a descent narrative. The *Philopatris* is an imitation that belongs probably to the tenth century and Theodoros Prodromos in the twelfth century made Lucian into an imitable genre: cf. *La satire byzantine des siècles XI-XV*, R. ROMANO (ed. by), Turin 1999, p. 284-335.

2. The standard edition (with Italian tr. and commentary) is : *Pseudo-Luciano : Timarione*, ed. R. ROMANO, Naples 1974 ; English tr. (with notes), B. BALDWIN, *Timarion*, Detroit 1984 ; Greek tr. (with text and notes), P. BLACHAKOS, *Τιμαρίων*, Thessalonike 2001. For scholarship on the *Timarion*, see below.

takes up only ten pages, yet it has attracted the bulk of scholarly attention, probably because it relates to *this* world.

Timarion recounts how he fell sick during his return and made it as far as the river Hebros in Thrace, where he was visited by two devils of the kind who escort the souls of the dead to Hades (*nekrophoroi* or *nekragogoi*, whom classisicts would call *psychopompoi*). In this pagan version of the afterworld, Timarion meets many people, both contemporaries such as the blinded emperor Romanos IV Diogenes and Michael Psellos as well as ancient philosophers and orators. He also meets his teacher, Theodoros of Smyrna (who had succeeded Ioannes Italos as Consul of the Philosophers). Theodoros explains what is going on: it turns out that the pagans rule in Hades after all, but don't worry, he tells Timarion, for they are just and treat Christians fairly. Theodoros acts as Timarion's guide and advocate and persuades a court consisting of pagan gods, ancient doctors, and, oddly enough, the Iconoclast emperor Theophilos (who, despite his heresy, had a reputation for justice), that Timarion was not fully dead when the devils took him so that his soul should accordingly be returned to his body. The legal argument hinges on the medical theory of the humors, though we must always remember that all is satire. There are numerous subtle blasphemies in Timarion's narrative, and some are not so subtle. Toward the end, Theodoros tells Timarion, «Get up (ἀνάστηθι). It's been long since one of the dead arose!» (46) No wonder Konstantinos Akropolites (in the fourteenth century) expressed outrage at this work, which, in his view, treated Christianity with disrespect and established pagan notions under a thin veneer of piety, and he threatened to burn his copy³.

There has been almost no discussion of the *Timarion* as an imaginative work of fiction and no discussion of it as a philosophical satire. A handful of articles and the introductions to the various editions focus on the *ekphrasis* of the festival at Thessalonike and the *encomium* of the governor. The major problem that they have attempted to solve is that of the author and date of the text, with no success so far. The only exception to this pattern is M. Alexiou's article on the subversive aspects of the *encomium*, which is astute and largely convincing but focuses on a small part of the text. Along with H. Hunger, she wrongly calls Thessalonike the «center of the discourse» in part because she assumed that rhetoric was what any Byzantine work was about. But the

3. M. TREU, «Ein Kritiker des Timarion», *BZ* 1 (1892) 361-365; *Pseudo-Luciano: Timarione*, ed. ROMANO *cit.*, p. 42-45; BALDWIN, *Timarion*, *op. cit.*, p. 24-28.

ekphrasis and *encomium* take up only the first few pages and, as we will see, reflect Kydion's interests, not Timarion's⁴.

It is strange that this work has not attracted more attention. It is perhaps the first work of Byzantine fiction that discusses verifiable historical figures as well as contemporary events and intellectual circles. Granted, we have fictitious hagiographies that are set in specific historical circumstances, such as Niketas Magistros' *Life of Theoktiste*⁵, but they would not necessarily have been read as fiction. In the *Timarion*, moreover, we face an embarrassment of riches. The work combines Lucianic dialogue and social satire with travel narrative and *ekphrasis*; an idiosyncratic vision of Hades; religious history and relations among different religions; recent imperial history; medical-judicial controversy; courts and justice; classical allusions; and contemporary intellectual history. It is not easy to decide where to begin to unravel the levels of meaning that must be encoded in all this. It is likely that if we begin to pull on any one of those threads, all the others will come apart as well. We must also consider its immediate contemporary context. Whoever the author was – and perhaps we will never know – the *Timarion* was designed to make full sense to a fairly narrow circle, namely the students of Theodoros of Smyrna. Some of the jokes we can appreciate, such as Theodoros' gluttony. But some people are described rather than named and their identity might have clarified the immediate politics of the text, for example the bearded old man eating pork whose name it is forbidden to speak Hades (17-18) and the slavish eunuch student of Ioannes Italos whose pretensions and deficiencies are noted at some length (43). Even Psellos is identified allusively as «the Byzantine sophist» whose precise identity is revealed through an obvious pun on his name: *hypopsellizon* (41-45)⁶.

4. M. ALEXIOU, «Literary Subversion and the Aristocracy in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: A Stylistic Analysis of the *Timarion* (ch. 6-10)», *BMGS* 8 (1983) 29-45, p. 36-37 for «center», citing H. HUNGER, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, II, Munich 1978, p. 152; cf. EAD., *After Antiquity: Greek Language, Myth, and Metaphor*, Ithaca-London 2002, p. 100-111 (unsystematic but insightful). Other studies are not literary, e.g., E. TH. TSOLAKIS, «Τιμαρίων, μία νέα ανάγνωση» in *Μνήμη Σταμάτη Καρατζά: Ερευνητικά προβλήματα νεοελληνικής φιλολογίας και γλωσσολογίας*, Thessalonike 1990, 109-117; R. BEATON, «Cappadocians at Court: Digenes and Timarion», in M. MULLETT-D. SMYTHE (ed. by), *Alexios I Komnenos, I, Papers*, Belfast 1996 [Texts and Translations 4.1], 329-338. A. KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*, Cambridge 2007, offers a literary reading complementary to the one developed here. Historians have made good use of the *ekphrasis*: S. VRYONIS, «The *Panēgyris* of the Byzantine Saint: A Study in the Nature of a Medieval Institution, its Origins and Fate», in ID., *Byzantine Institutions, Society and Culture, I: The Imperial Institution and Society*, New Rochelle, NY 1997, p. 251-292.

5. Cf. A. KAZHDAN, «Hagiographical Notes 9: The Hunter or the Harlot?», *BZ* 78 (1985) 49-50.

6. Cf. Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Exercise on the «Kyrie eleëson»*; *Eustathii Thessalonicensis opera minora, magnam partem inedita*, ed. P. WIRTH, Berlin-New York 2000 [CFHB 32], p. 76-77.

Certainly, this satire was written to perform some kind of «work» among a circle of early twelfth-century philosophers, orators, and medical students. I refer to Paolo Odorico's recent study of the *Captures of Thessalonike*, accounts that fused personal narratives with the concrete pragmatic aims of their authors that can only be grasped against the background of their immediate circumstances⁷. Timarion, who journeys initially to Thessalonike, likewise goes on to recount a dreadful personal experience – the subtitle contains another subtle irreverence: *Περὶ τῶν κατ' αὐτὸν παθημάτων* – but it also refers at all points to the intellectual and social context of Theodoros' school. Unfortunately, we lack the detailed information about that school that would enable us to read the work against its immediate context. What we can attempt to do, however, is to reconstruct that context from the text itself, in part by identifying its chief thematic concerns and literary strategies. This is a tricky undertaking that can only partially be fulfilled here. Before we come to terms with the work as a whole we must carefully study all the details, in other words read it closely, something that has not been done in the rush to find its author. I will focus on the introductory frame-dialogue of Timarion and Kydion, which is usually deemed the least satisfactory part of the work. The rehabilitation of Byzantine literature that is currently underway must, in my opinion, not avoid or concede alleged weak points but tackle them head-on and show how they have been misunderstood.

For example, in his commentary on the *Timarion* Barry Baldwin calls these introductory passages «boring». «The opening sections of the dialogue are the most spun out and least entertaining». He refers to the «idiotic interruptions by Kydion» and the «not very successful mutual banter». As for the writing itself, «the author is crippled by his very Byzantine need to show his readers how well he knows classical models ... the format allows him to show off his wide reading with a flurry of quotations from Homer and Euripides. Whether he had actually read the originals or merely got them from Lucian, who has some of the same ones, or from rhetorical handbooks is a moot point». These allusions are so unimportant that, Baldwin concludes, «I have not cluttered up the notes with references to them»⁸. Certainly there is bias in these dismissive characterizations, but how can we respond? I will here address two issues: first, the subtle dialogic interplay between Timarion and Kydion and its relation to the broader

themes of the work; and, second, the nature and role of these classical allusions, and their relation to those broader themes.

Kydion is typically regarded as a mere dialogic device, a speaker who exists merely to ask questions that advance the narration and who seems to have no interests or personality of his own. He is there because the Lucianic format requires him. His contributions are even regarded as annoying by Baldwin. But if we look more closely we see that his contributions are not neutral and that they affect the work in a major way. He is in fact part of the satire, and if he represents one type of student in Theodoros' school, as I suspect he does, then his presence is part of the text's political intentions, its «hidden face». Kydion greets Timarion and expresses a desire to learn about his journey (we will examine these opening exchanges in closer detail presently). In section 2, all that Timarion says is that he traveled to an unspecified place with a pious intention. He gives only a summary (*συλλήβδην*) and concludes by indicating his desire to discuss the tragic events (*τραγῳδία*) of his return. But Kydion interrupts him (3) asking for a more detailed account. In response, Timarion accuses Kydion of being *aplestos* (greedy) for stories and *akorestos* (insatiable). But he does backtrack in his narrative. Only now does he tell us that his destination was Thessalonike and his pious purpose to attend the festival of St Demetrios. He had not revealed this in his earlier summary and there is no indication that he would have done so had he then moved on to recount his experiences in Hades. He offers a brief *ekphrasis* of the Axios river and a brief reference to the festival. All this information Timarion would, in all likelihood, not have given had it not been for Kydion's insistence.

But Kydion interrupts Timarion again and asks for a detailed *ekphrasis* of the festival (4). It is this demand that prompts the long description of the festival and the governor. When Timarion is finished with that, at the end of section 10, Kydion now gives him permission to narrate his own experiences, drawing a distinction between the *ἀλλότρια* that Timarion has been recounting at Kydion's own insistence and the *καθ' αὐτὸν* that he wanted to discuss initially (and after which the work is subtitled). In section 11, then, Timarion picks up where he left off at the end of 2. The entire rhetorical digression in between is due to nothing else than Kydion's insatiability for *logoi*, upon which Timarion has commented twice explicitly. Kydion is interested in the rather silly rhetorical descriptions, Timarion in the more philosophically and religiously challenging afterworld of Hades.

So contrary to what Alexiou and Hunger supposed, the *ekphrasis* and *encomium* are not «the center of the discourse» but rather irrelevant to the tale that Timarion wanted to tell initially. One of the problems that readers face in trying to understand this text is the relation between the rhetorical introduction (the account of Thessalonike) and the

7. P. ODORICO, «Les trois visages de la même violence : Les trois prises de Thessalonique», in P. ODORICO – P.A. AGAPITOS – M. HINTERBERGER (éd.), *L'écriture de la mémoire : La littérature de l'historiographie*. Actes du III^e colloque international philologique «ΕΡΜΗΝΕΙΑ», Nicosie-Chypre, 6-8 mai 2004, Paris 2006 [Dossiers Byzantins 6], 147-179.

8. BALDWIN, *Timarion*, op. cit., p. 13-15, 80, 82.

journey to Hades, or rather the apparent lack of such a relation. We now realize that the *ekphrasis* exists because of Kydion, and what we know about Kydion is that he is insatiable and greedy for *logoi*. This is interesting because one of the main satirical elements of the work turns out to be the Byzantines' insatiability for food, i.e., their gluttony. Kydion is a glutton for rhetoric while Timarion, as we will see, turns out to be more interested in philosophy. In the introductory sections of this work, then, a philosopher more interested in the cosmic and religious questions raised by his experience of the afterworld is being pestered by a fellow Byzantine sophist who is typically more interested in rhetorical display. In this sense, Kydion is himself a target of the satire insofar as the *ekphraseis* that he is served up by Timarion are subtly satirical versions of what he was probably expecting.

Gluttony for food and for speeches are related aspects of Byzantine society that Timarion satirizes. But there is another dynamic at work here that reveals what must have been a tension in Theodoros' school or circle. Timarion – unlike Theodoros and Kydion – is quite sensitive to the difference between rhetoric and philosophy and has definite opinions as to who should be placed in one category and who in the other. He represents himself as more of a student of philosophy and satirically presents Theodoros' rhetorical performance at his own trial as pompous (just as he harps on his past gluttony, a vice that Theodoros has mostly overcome in Hades, though not entirely, for he asks Timarion to send him down a lamb, two hens, and a suckling pig : 46). After the trial, Timarion meets a group of the ancient philosophers and orators. Ioannes Italos, he says, wanted to join the philosophers but was scorned by them because he would not renounce his baptism – an interesting verdict on their part, especially as they seemed willing to accept Psellos, even if not entirely as an equal (43–45). I take this narrative to be an indirect statement by the author that Psellos was not a true Christian. He had apparently «renounced his baptism» or the ancient philosophers would not have accepted him⁹. The orators too would not accept Italos, and even threw stones at him to drive him away. We note here Anna Komnene's condemnation of Italos' lack of eloquence¹⁰. Psellos, on the other hand, is acclaimed highly by these orators, far more so than he is by the philosophers. This too is part of the author's commentary on recent intellectual history, from Psellos to Theodoros, which history he emplots on the axes of rhetoric

9. Supporting A. KALDELLIS, *The Argument of Psellos' Chronographia*, Leiden 1999 ; ID., *Hellenism in Byzantium...*, *op. cit.*, ch. 4.

10. P. MAGDALINO, «A History of Byzantine Literature for Historians», in P. ODORICO–P.A. AGAPITOS (éd.), *Pour une «nouvelle» histoire de la littérature byzantine : Problèmes, méthodes, approches, propositions*. Actes du colloque international philologique, Nicosie-Chypre, 25–28 mai 2000, Paris 2002 [Dossiers Byzantins 1], 167–184.

and philosophy. Psellos, he is saying indirectly, was acceptable as a philosopher but excelled as an orator¹¹.

At this point (45) Kydion interrupts again and asks about Theodoros : how was he honored by the «sophists» ? Kydion's question reveals that he does not grasp the difference between philosophers and orators. Timarion's answer subtly draws a distinction between the leaders of the philosophical sects (*hairesiarchai*) and the rhetor-sophists (*rhetorosophistai*). Theodoros, he says, had *some* contact with the philosophers but would mostly hang out with the orators of what we call the Second Sophistic (Polemon, Herodes Attikos, and Aristeides). In other words, Timarion considers the Consul of Philosophers under whom he studied to have been more of a rhetor than a philosopher. Kydion himself, we suppose (based on the interests he represents in the introductory frame-dialogue and the fact that he expresses no anxiety to separate rhetoric and philosophy), probably belonged entirely to the orators. The *Timarion*, in other words, presents a satirical but nevertheless serious history of education in Byzantium. It is fully engaged in the intellectual debates that must have been raging in and around the school of Theodoros about the relative merits of philosophy and rhetoric, as we know they had been since Psellos. Kydion and Timarion are two invented characters that exemplify this subtle contemporary dynamic.

I turn now to the classical allusions embedded in the work's introductory frame-dialogue, which Baldwin and others have characterized as mere affectation, that is, as unimportant flourishes probably lifted from an intermediary source. This view is found in many discussions of Byzantine texts. It is, however, not merely prejudiced, it is wrong, and when we realize that it is wrong we can then see that it is not based on any kind of argumentation or evidence. It is among the axioms that has held our field back from close literary engagement with Byzantine texts. It assumes, for example, without even bothering to look, that the classical texts being quoted are irrelevant to the subject matter of the *Timarion*. But if we bother to discover where these quotations are coming from we find that the opposite is almost always the case. (I have argued a similar thesis regarding the allusions in the sixth-century historians Prokopios and Agathias.¹²) As a methodological principle, I have concluded that it is necessary to consider the original context of allusions in Byzantine texts before we decide how and why

11. For Psellos' thoughts on the matter, see KALDELLIS, *The Argument...*, *op. cit.*, chs. 19–22.

12. A. KALDELLIS, «The Historical and Religious Views of Agathias : A Reinterpretation», *Byz* 69 (1999) 206–252 ; ID., *Procopius of Caesarea : Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*, Philadelphia 2004, ch. 1. Many examples from other texts and periods could be cited.

they are deployed. So let us look more closely in this case (I restrict myself to the Homeric and tragic quotations, leaving out the extensive borrowings from Lucian).

The second sentence in Kydion's opening greeting to Timarion at the very beginning of the work is based on *Odyssey* 16.23, where the swineherd Eumaios tells Telemachos, «Light of my days, you made it back!» Now *Odyssey* 16.21, the immediately previous verse in the poem but one (16.22 is a verse of address), has the narrator explain, «For he knew the lad had got away from death». And in the verse immediately after it Eumaios says, «When you took ship for Pylos, I never thought to see you here again»¹³. So Kydion's opening statement *implicitly* creates a context of anxiety and fear of death for the traveler. This context of death and foreboding is not contained in the verse that he quotes, but the verses on either side of it perfectly fit the setting of the *Timarion* dialogue. But to see this one has either to go look at the *Odyssey* (or know it by heart, which would not have been unthinkable for the students in Theodoros' circle). In this case, the Byzantine reader (unlike the modern one) would begin to suspect what this work was all about from the very first line; he would suspect more about Timarion's journey than does Kydion himself. This would constitute a form of textual irony.

The second quotation in Kydion's greeting is from *Iliad* 16.19, «Tell me, do not hide it in your mind, and so we shall both know»¹⁴. Well, in the *Iliad* this line concludes Achilles' questions to Patroklos – a friend speaking to a friend – about who of the Achaeans has died and who not; who are they mourning for, and so on? In case we miss these allusions, because we lack the Byzantines' intimate knowledge of the classical texts, Timarion reveals the game in his first response. You are playing the Homer game, he tells Kydion, and he promises to respond through tragedy to tell his story (in antiquity Homer was widely regarded as the first tragedian)¹⁵. Indeed, Timarion's first response-quotation is from Euripides' *Medea* 1317, with an added tragic *Ai Ai*, «Why are you stirring these things up?» Nothing is special about this verse in itself, but if we look up the passage from where it comes in the *Medea*, we find that it comes from the most gruesome moment of that most gruesome play. Iason has just seen the bodies of his murdered children, and says, «Let me see this twofold horror, the dead, and her»¹⁶. This, of course, matches the underworld horrors that Timarion intends

13. *Homer: The Odyssey*, tr. R. FITZGERALD, New York 1961.

14. *The Iliad of Homer*, tr. R. LATTIMORE, Chicago 1961.

15. Aischylos in Athenaios, *Dinner-Sophists* 8.347a; Plato, *Republic* 598d, 607a; Aristotle, *Poetics* esp. 24.

16. *Euripides: With an English Translation*, A.S. Way, New York-Putnam 1912. BALDWIN, *Timarion*, op. cit., p. 81-82 does not explain what he means when he says that this quotation is a «parody» of Euripides (everything in the text is a parody in some way). The words from the *Medea* are conjoined

to relate to Kydion (he explicitly says that he is about to relate «similar» things : ἐκεῖθεν ἐν τοῖς ὁμοίοις); it does not, however, prepare the ground for the satirical *encomium* of the governor that Kydion forces him to tell first, which is more proof of the digressive nature of Kydion's requests.

Timarion goes on to quote the opening lines of Euripides' *Orestes*, «There is no misfortune that human beings cannot endure». The verses that immediately follow these in the *Orestes* itself discuss Tantalos' punishment in Hades, another appropriate context for the narrative that Timarion wants to tell. Timarion's next quotation is to the related verses *Iliad* 17.446, «There is not anywhere a thing more dismal than man is», and *Odyssey* 18.130. In the *Iliad*, Zeus is lamenting human mortality, discoursing on death. Obviously, not *all* of the classical allusions in the introductory sections of the *Timarion* carry this esoteric resonance – some are just rhetorical flourishes, befitting the kinds of speeches that Kydion wants to hear – but it is nevertheless noteworthy that the vast majority of them do. Even in the otherwise banal *ekphrasis* of the Axios river (3), Timarion quotes *Iliad* 4.453, «As when rivers in winter spate run down from the mountains». The verses before this in the *Iliad* are, «Then the screaming and the shouts of triumph rose up of men killing and being killed, and the ground ran blood»¹⁷. When Kydion wants a more detailed account of the festival (4), Timarion replies by alluding to *Odyssey* 11.328 : «We may need to take all night doing so». In the original context, Odysseus is talking about the gathering of the shades in the underworld, and says that night will fall before he can list all the dead. So *Timarion's* Homeric and tragic quotations, while innocuous on the surface, are taken from contexts about death and Hades.

As a biographical aside, when I realized how necessary it is to examine the precise textual provenance of classical allusions in Byzantine works, I was told by the skeptical that such thematic correspondences were coincidental because it was known that the Byzantines had their classics from anthologies – apparently despite the much better

here with a partial quotation of *Odyssey* 9.39 (see below). Baldwin uses the fact that both verses are quoted in Heliodoros' *Aithiopika* (albeit in separate passages : 1.8, 2.21) to imply that the author of the *Timarion* knew these quotations indirectly (from Heliodoros, whom other passages indicate he had read), rather than from the originals. But this is pushing literary contempt too far. Like most educated Byzantines, the author of the *Timarion* certainly knew his Homer and Euripides. Even were the two verses conjoined directly in Heliodoros' text (as they are not), this would prove only that even borrowing quotations from intermediary texts was not incompatible with using them in the pointed allusive sense I am arguing for here. The allusive effect performed by the classical verses is quite different in the two texts, so the author of the *Timarion* had to know their original, classical contexts. Note the narrative appropriateness of quoting *Odyssey* 9.39 at this point: this is exactly when Odysseus begins to tell his fantastic adventures in first-person.

17. The allusion at the end of the *ekphrasis* to Phaidra in Euripides' *Hippolytos* is even more interesting.

known fact that Homer and the tragedians formed the basis of their education. The «gap» between these two facts was bridged by the supposition (sometimes explicitly stated, though often not) that they may have learned these poems in school but never paid much attention to their contents because the Byzantine «worldview» or «mentality» was alien to that of classics, an assumption that now seems increasingly unlikely, especially in cases of texts like the *Timarion*. Besides, where are these books of quotations that furnished the Byzantines with these handy verses? And why could they not both have learned classical texts in the original and consulted anthologies when writing their own works, a more charitable assumption? In retrospect, it seems that some of the instincts of literary interpretation that formerly held sway in our field – such as those exemplified in Baldwin's commentary – were virtually designed to make Byzantine authors look ignorant and shallow, even in the face of what may now be called common sense. Consider, for example, the two quotations embedded in Timarion's description of the emperor Romanos IV Diogenes (20). The first is to *Iliad* 16.775-776, which refers to the dead Trojan Kebriones, appropriate enough if not especially imaginative. The second, however, is from Odysseus' first glimpse of the Cyclops Polyphemos (9.190-191), which should bring the beast's blinding to mind, a fate that Romanos himself infamously suffered. This, it seems, is the one instance that rocked Baldwin's contempt, and here is his defensive response: «it may be doubted if the author was fully alive to its suitability here. For Homer is describing the Cyclops, to which gross, one-eyed monster Romanos could only be compared in tasteless mockery»¹⁸. Note that Baldwin implicitly grants that the verse is in fact suitable, but then invokes a doubtful article of taste (his taste, not Timarion's) to deny that the author *knew* it was obvious. Baldwin temporarily forgets that this is a satirical work abounding in such «gross mockeries».

It is more consistent with the facts of the text to assume that the author of the *Timarion* was always «fully alive» to the suitability of his classical «tags» and that they are merely rhetorical flourishes only in a minority of cases. What, then, does this textual strategy signify in the *Timarion*, where most of the quotations are clustered in the introductory frame-dialogue between Kydion and Timarion?

First, we witness a gradual shift during the course of the narrative. At first, the quotations (including their resonances) are used to illustrate, to give depth but still in a rhetorical way that carries no important philosophical or religious commitments. They compare what is happening or being said in the present to a parallel case from a classical text, even if indirectly and esoterically. This was a standard mode of

18. BALDWIN, *Timarion*, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

Komnenian rhetoric¹⁹, which I suspect «Timarion» despised. But as the story progresses and we actually find ourselves in the very Hades of Homer and the tragedians, the quotations cease to be comparative and become literally descriptive. For example, in recounting his story to Theodoros (26), Timarion quotes «the poet» (i.e., Homer) on his soul leaving his body and traveling to Hades (*Iliad* 16.856, 22.362). Here the classical comparison is *not* merely figurative (in the way in which a Christian Byzantine could apply a verse in Homer about Zeus to the Christian God). Timarion's soul actually did leave his body and go down to the Greek Hades. This literal reading, we now realize, may apply retroactively to many of the quotations used in the introductory dialogue (e.g., about Tantalos in Hades, etc.). It turns out, contrary to what the more rhetorically-minded Kydion may have thought, that they were not poetic affectations after all. This, I believe, is part of the broader subversion of rhetoric that the *Timarion* performs. Komnenian rhetoric breathed the language of ancient Greece and thrived on such make-believe comparisons. But was it not superficial from the standpoint of a student of philosophy who wanted to take the Greeks more seriously and on their own terms? What if all that Greek stuff were *real*? Timarion's underworld journey plays that logic out to its conclusion. While the authorities in Constantinople were attacking Italos because he seemed to take certain Greek notions too seriously²⁰, the Greek philosophers in this Hades get the chance to turn Italos away because he would not renounce his baptism. This is a nice reversal: Why should the ancient philosophers want *you*?, Timarion asks contemporary philosophers (note, again, that they do not turn Psellos away).

Second, the strategic use of classical allusions requires us to read the text in a different way. A few seemingly casual words might point to some curious revelations in an ancient text. Consider, for example, how Timarion introduces the festival of St Demetrios: «The Demetria [τὰ Δημήτρια] is a festival just like the Panathenaia among the Athenians and the Panionia among the Milesians» (5). This is part of the text's broader strategy of explaining Christian things in terms of pagan things, which is mere classicism at this point (as in so much Komnenian rhetoric to come) but will soon become existentially crucial for Timarion's soul. It is possible that the festival of St Demetrios is not called τὰ Δημήτρια in other Byzantine sources²¹, and that

19. Cf. KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium...*, *op. cit.*, ch. 5.

20. For Italos' trial and the warnings in the *Synodikon* against taking Greek doctrines too literally, see L. CLUCAS, *The Trial of John Italos and the Crisis of Intellectual Values in Byzantium in the Eleventh Century*, Munich 1981; A. KALDELLIS, «Byzantine Philosophy Inside and Out: Orthodoxy and Dissidence in Counterpoint», in K. IERODIAKONOU (ed. by), *Studies in Byzantine Philosophy* (volume in preparation).

21. For the cult in general, see J.C. SKEDROS, *Saint Demetrios of Thessaloniki: Civic Patron and Divine Protector, 4th-7th Centuries CE*, Cambridge, MA 1999.

Timarion has invented the name by formatting it on the names of its pagan antecedents. But it just so happens that the Athenians *did* have a Demetria, a festival instituted in honor of Demetrios Poliorketes, the city's Macedonian overlord. We know about it from Plutarch, who gives a thoroughly hostile account because such honors were appropriate for the gods and not for a mere mortal²². This could just as easily apply to St Demetrios himself. We note in this connection another curiosity, namely that the one request that Timarion makes of St Demetrios at the festival after praying to him is to have a safe return to Constantinople (10).

There was in fact another Demetria in ancient Athens, the pagan point of reference in Timarion's comparison, allowing us to expand the field of resonance of his curious term. «Demetria» was another name for the Eleusinian mysteries, the initiation into the rites of Demeter that prepared one ... for the afterworld. Plutarch, in a philosophical work, also informs us that the Athenians called the dead Demetreioi²³! It is possible, then, that Timarion has chosen his words and his destination (Thessalonike) carefully after all in relation to his otherworldly journey, so that the two parts of the work may be related via these classical and subversive under-currents. If this extension of the argument is valid we may conclude that, as in Prokopios, semantic resonances are not established only in relation to school-texts such as epic and tragedy but recruit authors such as Plutarch as well, whom it is hardly unthinkable that a student of philosophy at the end of the eleventh century would read.

In this sense, the festival of St Demetrios at Thessalonike turns out to be an appropriate (albeit coded) prefiguration for a journey into a pagan Hades. Along this vein, the variety and large number of people who attend these Demetria also presage the gathering of all souls in Hades. Note that Timarion lists «the Greeks» first here (5), who will have pride of place and rule in Hades as well. And when he says in prefacing the *ekphrasis* (5) that previously he had only heard of the saint's festival, he alludes to Herodotos 2.148, where the historian says that he saw the upper levels of the labyrinth in Egypt but only heard about the lower levels underground, which the priests said were for the tombs of their kings. This nicely ties in with the main theme of Timarion's narration, but it also symbolizes its double-layered nature, hinting that we may take the «Demetria» on two levels as well, one above and another below ground, one on the surface of the text and another beneath it, one for Kydion and another for more

22. Plutarch, *Demetrios* 12.

23. Plutarch, *On the Face in the Moon* 28 (= *Moralia* 943a-b); cf. R. PARKER, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, Oxford 2005, p. 361.

philosophical readers. The text's «hidden face» here requires a form of «archaeological» interpretation.

What might all this have meant to the immediate audience, the philosophers and orators at the school of Theodoros? Certainly, before we can answer this question more work will have to be done on the details and sub-currents of the text and in a more patient and generous spirit of inquiry than it has received so far. At this stage, I suggest that the philosophical reception of pagan culture in Byzantium is being posed as a problem, satirically of course, but in a way that impinges on a point of Christian belief, the salvation of the soul. How literally and seriously to take ancient beliefs was a topic that would have preoccupied these men whose intellectual genealogy, as the *Timarion* itself makes clear, included the turbulent career of Psellos, the trial of Ioannes Italos, and the condemnations placed after his trial in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* regarding how literally one ought to take ancient doctrines. The *Timarion* takes them seriously, yet within an ambiguating format of satire that defuses and protects, yet only up to a point. Within those parameters, the text basically offers a politicized commentary on the history of higher education in late eleventh- and early twelfth-century Constantinople, one that I believe should be taken seriously today. It is possibly our best guide to what was going on intellectually under Alexios I, but it will not yield up its secrets unless we engage with the *Timarion* as a literary, satirical, and philosophical narrative.