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Aristophanes in the Service of Niketas Choniates – Gluttony, Drunkenness and Politics in the Χρονικὴ διήγησις*

Abstract: This article discusses Aristophanic influence present in two important passages from Niketas Choniates' Χρονικὴ διήγησις, which are related to gluttonous tax officials from the retinue of Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (John of Poutza and John Kamateros). The first part of the article examines the place of Aristophanes' comedies within Byzantine learned culture in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and investigates possible reasons for the sudden boom in their popularity within the period. The second part analyses in details the passages in question, situating them within the comic tradition, demonstrating numerous intertextual allusions to Old Comedy (as represented by Aristophanes), and showing how consious appropriation of Aristophanic material added additional, chiefly political, meanings to Choniates' narrative.

Perhaps it would be a platitude to state that Choniates' History is a unique literary work – unique not only by virtue of the circumstances in which it originated, but also by reason of the literary talent of its author. To be sure, the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Byzantium witnessed many literary experiments in the field of historiography and beyond.[1] This development, initiated by Michael Psellos, was continued by Anna Komnene as well as Eustathios of Thessalonike. In his Capture of Thessalonike Eustathios explicitly acknowledges the difficulties of traumatic events being narrated by the one who is "wound up in its net".[2] Likewise, Choniates must have realised that a modified historical discourse was required to present readers with a satisfactory account of the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1204. He must have been deeply aware that generic boundaries had to be stretched in order to do justice to the tragic collapse of the Queen of Cities.[3] This authorial struggle can be gleaned from the numerous substantial revisions of the text undertaken by Choniates and witnessed by the manuscript transmission of the Χρονικὴ διήγησις.[4] Moreover, both the political and

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1 Margaret Mullett has analysed Psellos' and Anna Komnene's experiments with genre and generic inclusions within historiography and hagiography: M. Mullett, Novelisation in Byzantium in: Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honour of Roger Scott, ed. J. Burke (*Byzantina Australiensia* 16). Brisbane 2006, 14–21. Eadem, Literary Biography and Historical Genre in the Life of Cyril Phileotes by Nicholas Kataskepenos, in: Les vies des saints à Byzance: Genre litteraire ou biographie historique? Ed. P. Odorico – P. Agapitos. Paris 2004, 287–409. Also discussed by I. Nilsson, Archaists and Innovators: Byzantine 'Classicism' and Experimentation with Genre in the Twelfth Century, in: Genrer och genreproblem: Teoretiska och historiska perspektiv / Genres and their Problems: Theoretical and Historical Perspectives, ed. B. Agrell – I. Nilsson. Göteborg 2003, 413–424.

2 Eustathios, De capta Thessalonica 4.26–27 (ed. S. Kyriakidis, Eustazio di Tessalonica. La espugnazione di Tessalonica [*Testi e Monumenti* 5]. Palermo 1961): ὁ δὲ δικτύῳ … ἐνειληφθεὶς τῷ πράγματι.

3 For other instances of "generic stretching" see especially M. Mullett, Literary Biography. As Mullet, following H.-R. Jauss, notices: "… every text changes the genre in which it is written" (*ibidem* 5).

4 For the discussion of the composition and transmission of the History and a thorough analysis of two main versions of the text, earlier, prior to 1204, *b(revior)* and later, composed after 1204, *a(ucta)* see A. Simpson, Niketas Choniates. A Historiographical Study. Oxford 2012, 68–124. Also Eadem, Before and After 1204: The Versions of Niketas Choniates' 'Historia.' *DOP* 60 (2006) 189–221. The process of recomposing the History which resulted from the altered historical circumstances (after 1204) has also been analysed by J. Niehoff-Panagiotidis, Narrative Bewältigungsstrategien von Katastrophen-

deeply personal context must have led Choniates, who revised and amended the text during his exile in Nicaea, to see historical discourse as intertwined with the genres of comedy and tragedy.[5] Their presence within historical narrative is implicitly acknowledged by the historian at the very beginning of the final version of his work. The purpose of the history, according to Choniates, is to extol the noble deeds and to ridicule the wicked: καὶ κακία δὲ παρ' αὐταῖς (scil. ἱστορίαις) κωμῳδουμένη καὶ ἀγαθοπραξία ἐξαιρομένη …[6]

The use of the verb κωμῳδέω might seem unusual, but it becomes more intelligible if we take a look at the entry in the Suda on Prokopios of Caesarea. The author(s) of the lexicon left the following comment on the Secret History: "He also wrote another book, the so-called Anekdota … because it is entitled Anekdota, it contains invective and mockery (ψόγους καὶ κωμῳδίαν) of emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora."[7] The chief and basic meaning of the verb κωμῳδέω carries the connotations of ridiculing someone,[8] yet in the Byzantine period, the noun κωμῳδία denoted both lampooning/satire and the genre of comedy itself.[9] As Anthony Kaldellis has remarked, Aristophanes is the most frequently quoted ancient author in the Anekdota – citations from and allusions to the Athenian playwright are used to deride Justinian, his retinue, his wife and the vulgar Constantinopolitan mob.[10] Choniates, it seems, decided to use a similar technique of incorporating comic material into historical discourse.

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erfahrungen: Das Geschichtswerk des Nikitas Honiatis. *Klio* 92 (2010) 170–210. For a compelling discussion of Choniates' work on his own material, see S. Kuttner-Homs, Nicétas Chôniatès lecteur de lui-même: les mécanismes de l'emprunt interne dans l'oeuvre d'un haut lettré byzantine. *Kentron* 30 (2015) 109–128. An excellent study of the origins of Niketas' History as well as its dialogic relationship with Michael Psellos, Anna Komnene and John Kinnamos has been put forward by S. Efthymiadis, Quand Nicétas Choniatès a pris la plume: la genèse d'une œuvre historiographique, in: La face cachée de la littérature byzantine. Le texte en tant que message immediate. Actes du colloque international, Paris 5–6–7 juin 2008, organisé par Paolo Odorico en mémoire de Constantin Leventis, ed. P. Odorico (*Dossiers Byzantins* 11). Paris 2012, 221–236. For a general introduction to Choniates, see H. Hunger, Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner, I-II (*HdA* XII 5/1–2). München 1978, I 429–441.

[5] The presence of comedy and tragedy in the Χρονικὴ διήγησις has been discussed by Kaldellis, Katsaros and Garland: A. Kaldellis, Paradox, Reversal and the Meaning of History, in: Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer, ed. S. Efthymiadis – A. Simpson. Geneva 2009, 75–100, at 84. V. Katsaros, Το δραματικό στοιχείο στα ιστοριογραφικά έργα του 11ου και του 12ου αιώνα (Μιχαήλ Ατταλειάτης, Μιχαήλ Ψελλός, Ευστάθιος Θεσσαλονίκης, Νικήτας Χωνιάτης), in: L'Écriture de la mémoire: la littérature de l'historiographie, Actes du IIIe colloque international «ERMHNEIA», Nicosie, 6–7–8 mai 2004, ed. P. Odorico – P. Agapitos – M. Hinterberger (*Dossiers Byzantins* 6). Paris 2006, 281–316. L. Garland, 'And His Bald Head Shone Like a Full Moon …': An Appreciation of the Byzantine Sense of Humour as Recorded in Historical Sources of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries. *Parergon. Bulletin of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 8 (1990) 1–31.

[6] Niketas Choniates 1.9–10 (ed. J.-L. van Dieten, Nicetae Choniatae Historia [*CFHB* 11]. Berlin 1975). For a short discussion of these words from the perspective of the tradition of Byzantine psogos see P. Magdalino, Tourner en dérision à Byzance, in: La dérision au Moyen Âge, ed. E. Crouzet-Pavan – J. Verger. Paris 2007, 55–72, at 66.

[7] Suda π 2479.7–9 (ed. A. Adler, Suidae lexicon [*Lexicographi Graeci* I]. München – Leipzig 1928–1935, 2001, IV 209). All English translations from Greek are mine, unless otherwise noted.

[8] *LSJ* 1018.

[9] W. Puchner, Zur Geschichte der antiken Theaterterminologie im nachantiken Griechisch. *WSt* 119 (2006) 77–113, at 86. Such a meaning is exemplified well by the Comedy of Katablattas written by John Argyropoulos (ed. P. Canivet – N. Oikonomidès, La Comédie de Katablattas. *Diptycha* 3 [1982–1983] 27–79); also P. Marciniak, Byzantine Sense of Humour, in: Humor in der arabischen Kultur, ed. G. Tamer. Berlin 2009, 127–135. P. Roilos, Amphoteroglossia: A Poetics of the Twelfth-Century Medieval Greek Novel, Cambridge 2005, 265 has commented: "The usage of the word kōmōidia and of relevant terms in the ancient and medieval Greek novels places an emphasis on the genre connections with ancient Greek comedy or the satirical potential of certain episodes and discourses." A general overview of satirical writing in Byzantium has also been presented by B. Baldwin, A Talent to Abuse: Some Aspects of Byzantine Satire. *BF* 8 (1982) 19–28.

[10] A. Kaldellis, Prokopios: The Secret History with Related Texts. Cambridge 2010, xxxvii. To my knowledge, Kaldellis is the only scholar who compared Prokopios' Anekdota to Choniates' History, pointing to a similar mode of political criticism presented by both historians. See A. Kaldellis, Ethnography After Antiquity. Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature. Philadelphia 2013, 53. Cf. F. H. Tinnefeld, Kategorien der Kaiserkritik in der Historiographie von Prokop bis Niketas Choniates. München 1991.

On its own, however, comedy was not enough. Alexander Kazhdan has pointed out that the leitmotif of Choniates' History is a terminal social disease which ultimately led to the destruction of the state.[11] The record of this disease and its gloomy consequences required solemnity (τὸ σεμνόν) and venerability (τὸ αἰδέσιμον), and only the genre of tragedy could furnish it with these qualities.[12] A strikingly similar motif can be found in Aristophanes' Wasps, where Bdelycleon asserts that "it is a difficult task and requiring greater intellect beyond the scope of the comedians to cure the old sickness innate to the city"[13] As a result, the two modes of literary discourse form the essence of Choniates' methodology. Nowhere is the reciprocal play of the genres more explicit than in the passage addressed to Constantinople itself, which illustrates the Queen of Cities as a beaten old crone:

> I shall not mention those who put into verse with accompaniment of the lyre and sing your misfortunes, altering your tragedy into comedy in their wine stupor, and those who make ludicrous narration of your miseries the craft of their lifetime …[14]

Yet, one question remains to be answered: what purpose does comedy serve within historical narrative? Essentially, Choniates' vision of historical discourse implies the exhibition and contrast of noble and base characters for the aim of moral persuasion.[15] The contrast of the vulgar and the depraved with the dignified explains the need to use comedy and tragedy as literary genres subordinate to historiography. At the same time, such a discursive inclusiveness was not the sole experiment of Choniates – Roilos has convincingly argued that comic modulations, complex allusions to the Attic comedy as well as exploration of topoi characteristic of Old Comedy[16] "constitute one of the most distinctive features of the Komnenian novels that strongly differentiates them from their ancient Greek models."[17]

My aim in the present article will be to analyze two episodes from the Χρονικὴ διήγησις and to show how Choniates used Aristophanic material in his work. I argue that in his literary portraits of John of Poutza and John Kamateros Choniates employs numerous learned allusions which refer the reader directly to the plays of the Attic comedian. Through the use of themes specific to Old Comedy, these episodes can be seen as comic interpolations into the discourse of history. I also contend that Choniates' allusions and the use of such comic motifs are not a matter of following some vague literary tradition, but, on the contrary, show conscious intertextual dependence.[18]

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[11] A. P. Kazhdan – A. W. Epstein, Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries. Los Angeles 1985, 229.

[12] Niketas Choniates 3.52 (van Dieten).

[13] Aristophanes, Vespae 650–651 (Wilson): … χαλεπὸν μὲν καὶ δεινῆς γνώμης καὶ μείζονος ἢ 'πὶτρυγῳδοῖς ἰάσασθαι νόσον ἀρχαίαν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἐντετακυῖαν. I use the following editions of Aristophanic comedies: Acharnians, Knights, Clouds, Wasps, Peace, Birds (ed. N. G. Wilson, Aristophanis fabulae, tomus 1: Acharnenses, Equites, Nubes, Vespae, Pax, Aves. Oxford 2007). Lysistrata, Thesmophoriazusae, Frogs, Ecclesiazusae, Plutus (ed. N. G. Wilson, Aristophanis Fabulae, tomus 2: Lysistrata, Thesmophoriazusae, Ranae, Ecclesiazusae, Plutus. Oxford 2007).

[14] Niketas Choniates 577.19–23 (van Dieten) ἐῶ γὰρ λέγειν τοὺς πρὸς λύραν ἐντείνοντάς τε καὶ ψάλλοντας τὰ σὰ δυσπαργήματα καὶ κωμῳδίαν τιθεμένους τὴν σὴν τραγῳδίαν ἐν τῷ τὸν οἶνον προσίεσθαι καὶ βίου τέχνην ποιουμένους τὴν γελοιώδη τῶν κακῶν σου ἀφήγνσιν … .

[15] Niketas Choniates 1.1–23 (Van Dieten). See A. Simpson, From the Workshop of Niketas Choniates: The Authority of Tradition and literary Mimesis, in: Authority in Byzantium, ed. P. Armstrong. London 2013, 259–268.

[16] That is, Old Comedy as represented by Aristophanes.

[17] Roilos, Amphoteroglossia 225 ff.

[18] I use the term "intertextuality" as defined by Genette as "the actual presence of one text within the other" ("… la présence effective d'un texte dans un autre …"): G. Genette, Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degree. Paris 1992, 8. Nilsson and Marciniak applied Genette's framework to Byzantine literary works, showing how five categories of transtextuality, enhance our understanding of the technicalities of Byzantine mimesis: I. Nilsson, The Story but Another: A Reappraisal of

ARISTOPHANIC BOOM?

The place of Aristophanes' comedies in the Byzantine *curriculum studiorum* and their popularity cannot be exaggerated – Aristophanes was referred to by the Byzantines simply as the Comic Poet (ὁ Κωμικός).[19] Out of eleven texts composed by him which are currently known to us, the Byzantines regularly studied the following triad: Plutus*,* Clouds*,* Frogs (and occasionally Knights).[20] These plays were read and analysed time and time again in Byzantine schools. They also served as perfect models of Attic diction as well as the sources of learned, atticized words, which the pupils were expected to use instead of common-speech alternatives.[21]

The best evidence for the influence exerted by Aristophanic comedies can be found in the lexica used on a daily basis by Byzantine authors. In the most popular of them, the Suda, Aristophanic plays as well as references to Aristophanic scholia appear in 5,000 out of 30,000 entries, making the Attic comedian the most frequently referenced author in the lexicon.[22] A smaller, but still important ninth-century lexicon by Photius, incorporates a significant number of references to Old Comedy, most probably via Phrynichus, who was "an abundant source of quotations from Old Comedy,"[23] and one of the traceable sources of Photius.

In the twelfth century, literary interest in Aristophanic plays was booming. A brief survey of literary works of the period testifies well to the scope of this phenomenon. Gregory Pardos, who was active in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, in his treatise on the dialects of the Greek language, not only mentions Aristophanes as one of the typical authors of the Attic dialect, but also includes numerous direct quotations from Peace, Lysistrata, Clouds, Acharnians, Birds, Frogs and Thesmophoriazusae.[24]

It was under the Komnenoi dynasty, probably when Choniates was a young boy, that John Tzetzes composed his scholia on Aristophanes' Clouds, Frogs (which he notoriously criticises) and Birds, along with an introductory essay to Knights and notes on Plutus. Perhaps unsurprisingly, his Letters and Chiliades contain a plethora of quotes derived Aristophanes.[25] Tzetzes' contemporary, Eustathios of Thessalonike, also wrote a commentary on Aristophanes, which is now sadly lost and preserved only in small fragments.[26] Apart from that, Eustathios' extant works yield more tangible evidence of his

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Literary Imitation in Byzantium, in: Imitatio – Aemulatio – Variatio: Akten des internationalen wissenschaftlichen Symposiums zur byzantinischen Sprache und Literatur, ed. A. Rhoby – E. Schiffer (*Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung* 21). Wien 2010, 195–208; P. Marciniak, Theodore Prodromos' Bion Prasis: A Reappraisal. *GRBS* 53 (2013) 219–239. Intertextuality in Choniates' oeuvre is discussed, *inter alii*, by Simpson, From the Workshop and Kuttner-Homs, Nicétas Chôniatès.

[19] N. G. Wilson, Scholars of Byzantium. London 1996, 24.

[20] A. Markopoulos, De la structure de l'école byzantine. Le maître, les livre et la processus éducatif, in: Lire et écrire à Byzance, ed. B. Mondrain. Paris 2006, 85–96.

[21] R. Webb, A Slavish Art? Language and Grammar in Late Byzantine Education and Society. *Dialogos* 1 (1994) 81–103.

[22] Wilson, Scholars 146: "The modern reader cannot fail to be struck by the predominance of quotations from the text of Aristophanes and the scholia on his plays … For the present purpose, however, it is to be noted that of 30,000 entries over 5,000 derive from Aristophanic text and scholia, a proportion which can scarcely be justified even by an enthusiastic assessment of the undoubted value of Aristophanes as a source of Attic diction of the classical period." Also E. Dickey, Ancient Greek Scholarship: A Guide to Finding, Reading, and Understanding Scholia, Commentaries, Lexica, and Grammatical Treatises From Their Beginnings to the Byzantine Period. New York 2007, 90.

[23] Wilson, Scholars 91.

[24] The edition of the text is available in ed. G. H. Schäfer, Gregorii Corinthii et aliorum grammaticis libri de dialectis de linguae graecae. Lipsiae 1811, 1–623. Quotations from Pax (I indicate firstly the book and verse number in Pardos' treatise, then the line in Aristophanes' play): 2.67: 180, 2.52: 232, 2.100: 646; 2.375: 71; Lysistrata: 2.73: 13; Nubes: 2.96: 1176, 2.391: 153, 2.485: 327; Acharnenses: 2.397: 435, 3.205: 608, 3.217: 795, 2.390: 338, 3.162: 773, 3.179: 783, 3.223: 766; Aves: 2.406: 445, 2.414: 1268/9; Ranae: 2.426: 1, 2.439: 365, 2.470: 1437; and Thesmophoriazusae 2.10: 870.

[25] For the editions of the texts see Tzetzes, Epistulae (ed. P.L.M. Leone, Ioannis Tzetzae epistulae. Leipzig 1972); Tzetzes, Chiliades (ed. P.L.M. Leone, Ioannis Tzetzae historiae. Napoli 1968).

[26] Dickey, Ancient Greek Scholarship 30. Wilson, Scholars 202.

direct knowledge of Aristophanic comedies. In his renowned commentaries on Homer's works, references to Aristophanes and scholia on his plays appear frequently. Eustathios seems to have a particular fondness for a verse which appears both in Peace and Frogs (καὶ μιαρὲ καὶ παμμίαρε καὶ μιαρώτατε)[27] which he quotes in The Capture of Thessalonike, in a passage which mocks the infamous Stephanos Hagiochristophorites.[28] Eustathios used the very same line from Aristophanes' play in De emendanda vita monachica.[29] Another interesting use of Aristophanic material can be found once again in the Capture of Thessalonike; deriding David the commander-in-chief of the city, Eustathios quotes Knights:

> And after opening his mouth to this extent he sat gaping thereafter (χασμημάμενος), like a statue rather than a man "as if he was thwarting the dried figs" (ἐμποδίζων οἷον ἰσχάδας), in the words of the Comic Poet.[30]

The line Eustathios quotes derives from Knights and appears in the entry on ἴσχας in the Suda. The words had clear political implications and pointed to foolishness and rapaciousness, the author of the lexicon states: "And Aristophanes: 'as if he was thwarting the figs.' Just as, he says, those who eat dried figs do so without being hindered and greedily, in the same way the people, when they are seated in the Pnyx, they condemn and confiscate without any without any hindrance and greedily."[31] Within the comic tradition χάσκω-derivatives (lit. to gape) could point to stupidity and idleness – for instance in Knights 1261 Aristophanes calls Athens ἡ Κεχηναίων πόλις (The City of Gapers), as the Athenians spoke (and acted) like fools.[32]

Choniates similarly refers to the comedies of the Attic playwright a number of times. He was without a doubt thoroughly acquainted with the aforementioned school triad of Aristophanic comedies and, given that he belonged to the close circle of Eustathios, his knowledge of Aristophanic plays must have gone beyond the scope of the curriculum. Choniates refers to them not only in the Χρονικὴ διήγησις, but also in his secular orations. In the *index locorum* to his edition of the History, van Dieten lists quotations from Acharnians, Clouds, Plutus and Frogs, although the list is far from comprehensive and many references have yet to be identified.[33] One important citation, heretofore overlooked by scholars, is found in the preface to the Χρονικὴ διήγησις. Elaborating on the usefulness of historical discourse (τὸ ἱστορεῖν), Choniates remarks that it has the power to bring back to life those who "emptied the quivers of their existence" (ἐξτοξεύσαντες) long time ago.[34] The participle ἐξτοξεύσαντες derives from Aristophanes' Plutus.[35] The same line from the play is also mentioned in an entry in the Suda, which comments that the term is derived from a

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[27] Aristophanes, Pax 183 (Wilson); Aristophanes, Ranae 466 (Wilson).

[28] Eustathios, De capta 46.13 (Kyriakidis).

[29] Eustathios, De emendanda vita monachica 188.25–26 (ed. K. Metzler, Eustathii Thessalonicensis De Emendanda Vita Monachica [*CFHB* 45]. Berlin – New York 2006).

[30] Translated by J. Melville-Jones, Eustathios of Thessaloniki, The Capture of Thessaloniki (*Byzantina Australiensia* 8). Sydney 1987, 97. Aristophanes, Equites 755 (Wilson): κέχηνεν ὥσπερ ἐμποδίζων ἰσχάδας.

[31] Suda ι 711 (II 674 Adler): καὶ Ἀριστοφάνης· κέχηνεν ὥσπερ ἐμποδίζων ἰσχάδας. ὥσπερ, φησίν, οἱ τὰς ἰσχάδας ἐσθίοντες ἀνεμποδίστως καὶ λάβρως αὐτὰς ἐσθίουσι, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον καὶ ὁ δῆμος, ἐπειδὰν ἐν τῇ Πνυκὶ καθεσθῇ, κατακρίνει καὶ δημεύει.

[32] Aristophanes, Equites 1261 (Wilson). Suda κ 1463.6–9 (III 106 Adler): ἡ τῶν Ἀθηναίων, ὡς ληρούντων αὐτῶν. ἀπὸ τοῦ κεχηνέναι ἔλαβε τὸ ὄνομα, ὡς μετέωρα τῶν Ἀθηναίων.

[33] The quotation from Clouds 145–149 is briefly discussed by S. Efthymiadis, Niketas Choniates: The Writer, in: Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer 35–58, at 48. An interesting quote of a rare word (θυννοσκόπος) from Knights 313 can be found in Niketas Choniates Oratio 8.76.5 (ed. J. L. van Dieten, Nicetae Choniatae Orationes et Epistulae [*CFHB* 3]. Berlin – New York 1973).

[34] Niketas Choniates 2.14–15 (van Dieten): ἐπεὶ καὶ ἀθανάτοις ἐοίκασι δήπουθεν θνητοὶ καὶ ἐπίκηροι γεγονότες καὶ πάλαι τὸ ζῆν ἐκτοξεύσαντες ὅσους παρειλήφει τὸ ἱστορεῖν.

[35] Aristophanes, Plutus 34 (Wilson): ἤδη νομίζων ἐκτετοξεῦσθαι βίον.

metaphor of using up the arrows in one's quiver.[36] But it is rather unlikely that Choniates used this rare word merely for the sake of rhetorical embellishment.[37] The quotation gains meaning if we return to both the immediate and broader context of Plutus and set it against Choniates' preface. The main theme of the play, namely "the absence of any correlation between justice and prosperity"[38] is clear from its beginning. Chremylos, one of the central figures of the comedy, complains to his slave that although he was a pious and just man, he suffered from poverty and did not do well in his life, whereas others, the sacrilegious speakers and sycophants, were living in the lap of luxury.[39] Hoping to secure a prosperous future for his son, Chremylos resolves to consult the oracle about whether his offspring should renounce justice and become a fraud, since he has come to believe that only such an action could benefit his life.[40] The subsequent plot of the comedy is an extended answer to this moral dilemma. By the same token, according to Choniates' programmatic statement in the preface, the discourse of history provides a moral lesson to its recipients: it sets the examples of the unjust and the virtuous vividly before the readers' eyes so that they might choose what kind of behaviour is preferable.[41] The explicit intertextual reference to Plutus not only reinforces the ethical importance of history, but also, like the Aristophanic play, seems to encourage the readers to be righteous.

Other quotations taken by Choniates from the Aristophanic plays could also add comic overtones to the text. Emperor Alexios III Angelos is depicted as "roaring like an oak on fire,"[42] a quotation of Dionysos' words in Frogs, with which the god mocks Aeschylos, endows the entire passage with a laughable air and ridicules the Byzantine ruler. As Lynda Garland has noticed, moreover, the round cakes (πόπανα) which Constantine Mesopotamites ravenously eats in the History derive from Aristophanic tradition and satirize the foul eating habits of this corrupt court official.[43] Furthermore, Choniates calls the inept emperor Alexios II Komnenos (who is unable to put a stop to the machinations of the tyrant-to-be Andronikos Komnenos) by the name of Melitides, a proverbial blockhead known to us from Frogs.[44] As the Suda glosses:

> … and another proverb: "more laughable than Melitides," referring to those who are calumniated because of stupidity. For Melitides was ridiculed by the (comic) poets for foolishness … they say that the man could barely count up to five and not further, and that once he had married his bride, he did not sleep with her because he feared she would slander him before her mother.[45]

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[36] Suda ε 642 (II 232 Adler): Ἐκτετοξεῦσθαι: ἐκκεκενῶσθαι, ἀνηλῶσθαι. ἀπὸ μεταφορᾶς τῶν ἐν τῇ τοξείᾳ ἀναλισκόντων τὰ βέλη. Ἀριστοφάνης Πλούτῳ· τὸν ἐμὸν ἤδη νομίζων ἐκτετοξεῦσθαι βίον. Also see A. Pontani, Niceta Choniata, Grandezza e Catastrofe di Bisanzio Libri I–VIII. Verona 1994, 509, n. 2.

[37] As Efthymiadis, Niketas Choniates: The Writer 55 has aptly noticed: "… Choniates is not just another Byzantine writer who indulged in flourishes for the sake of mere pageantry and verbal obscurity. First and foremost he is a wordsmith in every sense: he would invent new words, delve out rare ones and re-use old ones in an inspiring poetic fashion. Whether single or grouped, his words encapsulate a particular message, image or emotion. By their sheer force, they can create 'verbal icons'. Words in the History do not only carry a deep meaning but acquire connotative strength, rhythmic and aural possibilities, associations with other words and a metaphorical dimension."

[38] A. M. Bowie, Aristophanes. Myth, Ritual and Comedy. Cambridge 1993, 274.

[39] Aristophanes, Plutus 28–31 (Wilson): Χρ. … ἐγὼ θεοσεβὴς καὶ δίκαιος ὢν ἀνὴρ κακῶς ἔπραττον καὶ πένης ἦν· Κα. οἶδά τοι. Χρ. ἕτεροι δ' ἐπλούτουν, ἱερόσυλοι ῥήτορες καὶ συκοφάνται καὶ πονηροί·

[40] Aristophanes, Plutus (Wilson) 32–38.

[41] Niketas Choniates 1.5–2.16 (van Dieten).

[42] Niketas Choniates 493.80 (van Dieten): ὡς πρῖνος ... καιόμενος; Aristophanes, Ranae 859 (Wilson): σὺ δ' εὐθὺς ὥσπερ πρῖνος ἐμπρησθεὶς βοᾷς.

[43] L. Garland, The Rhetoric of Gluttony and Hunger in Twelfth-Century Byzantium, in: Feast, Fast or Famine. Food and Drink in Byzantium, ed. W. Mayer – S. Trzcionka (*Byzantina Australiensia* 15). Brisbane 2005, 43–55, at 43–46.

[44] Niketas Choniates 319.65 (van Dieten), Aristophanes, Ranae (Wilson): τέως δ' ἀβελτερώτατοι κεχηνότες, μαμμάκυθοι, Μελητίδαι καθῆντο.

[45] Suda γ 118.4–9 (II 513 Adler): καὶ ἑτέρα παροιμία· Γελοιότερον Μελιτίδου, ἐπὶ τῶν ἐπὶ μωρίᾳ διαβεβλημένων. Μελιτίδης γὰρ ἀνὴρ κωμῳδούμενος ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν ἐπὶ μωρίᾳ … τοῦτον δέ φασιν ἀριθμῆσαι μὲν πολλὰ παθόντα μέχρι τῶν ε΄ καὶ πέρα μηκέτι δύνασθαι, γήμαντα δὲ τῆς νύμφης μὴ ἅψασθαι· φοβεῖσθαι γὰρ μὴ αὐτὸν ἡ παῖς τῇ μητρὶ διαβάλλῃ.

Later, Choniates portrays Constantine Mesopotamites, a prominent official in the Angeloi dynasty's court as "leaping on the heads of those men [scil. whom he irritated], as the comedy says."[46] The image, taken from a famous scene in Clouds,[47] amplifies the comic tone of the already playful passage.

ARISTOPHANIC TRADITION AND NEW SOCIAL MORES

Leaving Choniates aside for a moment, two more striking examples from the twelfth century show how deeply this Aristophanic "boom" infiltrated various genres of literature. John Apokaukos, the bishop of Naupaktos, quotes Clouds 1170 in his judgement of a divorce case, thus giving a comic flavour to the entire situation.[48] In a more arresting passage from the commentary on St. Basil's canon 70, Theodore Balsamon, Orthodox canonist and Patriarch of Antioch, shows how clergymen defile their lips through cunnilingus; "using women's privy parts as cups (ὡς κύλικι) … [they] drink the detestable liquid (κατάπτυστον πόμα) and desecrate their lips."[49] Two expressions which are used here are of Aristophanic provenance: Patrick Viscuoso[50] has remarked that κατάπτυστον πόμα bears a striking resemblance to similar words in Aristophanes' Knights 1285 (ἀπόπτυστον δρόσον) which refer to licking women's vaginal secretions, while δρόσος, just as various other liquids, is used by Aristophanes as a metonym for cunnilingus.[51]

Anthony Kaldellis has noticed that this sudden outburst of interest in Aristophanes coincided with a change of morality under the Komnenoi.[52] The authors of the period are deeply interested in more worldly sensual pleasures. The body, once scorned and seen as a source of sin, becomes a subject of lively interest – the change of attitude can be seen in various texts of the eleventh-century polymath Psellos and is continued by Anna Komnene, Choniates himself and the so-called Ptochoprodromos, to name but a few.[53]

Another marker of these changes towards sensuality can be gleaned from the striking extravagance of cooking practices attested to in the sources from the eleventh century onwards. The sumptuousness of the eleventh and twelfth-century aristocratic tables is well reflected in a number of letters written, *inter alii*, by Michael Psellos, Michael Italikos and Eustathios of Thessalonike, which contain extremely vivid descriptions of luxuriously prepared dishes.[54] Probably in order to meet the increased interest in haute cuisine, Eustathios decided to produce an Epitome of Athenaeus' Deipno-

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[46] Niketas Choniates 491.12–13 (van Dieten): αὐτὸς ταῖς κεφαλαῖς κατὰ τὴν τῆς κωμῳδίας ψύλλαν ἐφήλατο.

[47] In Clouds we learn that Socrates enquired how many of its own feet the flea jumped when it leaped from Chaerophon to his own forehead, so Socrates takes it, makes an impression of its feet in wax and measures the distance: Aristophanes, Nubes 143–152 (Wilson).

[48] Text and commentary in M.T. Fögen, Rechtssprechung mit Aristophanes. *Rechtshistorisches Journal* 1 (1982) 74–82.

[49] Basil the Great, Cannonical Letter 70 (ed. G. A. Ralles – M. Potles, Σύνταγμα των θείων και ιερών κανόνων των τε αγίων και πανευφήμων Αποστόλων, και των ιερών και οικουμενικών και τοπικών Συνόδων, και των κατά μέρος αγίων Πατέρων, IV. Athena 1854, 229): ὡς κύλικι χρῶνται τῷ γυναικείῳ αἰδοίῳ … κατάπτυστον πόμα πίνουσι, καὶ τὰ χείλη καταμιαίνουσι.

[50] P. Viscuoso, Theodore Balsamon's Canonical Images of Women. *GRBS* 3 (2005) 317–326.

[51] J. Henderson, The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy. New York 1991, 76, 145.

[52] A. Kaldellis, Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition. Cambridge 2007, 225–316, at 247 ff.

[53] For Psellos in this context see e.g. A. Kaldellis, The Argument of Psellos' Chronographia. Boston 1999, 154–166.

[54] M. Leontsini, Hens, Cockerels, and other Choice Fowl. Everyday Food and Gastronomic Pretensions in Byzantium, in: Flavours and Delights. Tastes and Pleasures of Ancient and Byzantine Cuisine, ed. I. Anagnostakis. Athens 2013, 113–132, at 122–129. The changing of attitude towards drinking wine from eleventh century onwards has been analysed by E. Kislinger, Dall'ubricacione al krasopateras. Il consumo del vino a Bisanzio, in: La civiltà del vino. Fonti, temi e produzione vitivinicole dal Medioevo al Novecento, a cura di G. Archetti (*Atti delle Biennali di Franciacorta* 7). Brescia 2003, 139–163, esp. 143–153.

sophists – the most comprehensive and voluminous Greek literary work on cooking, banqueting and consumption. These new social mores are also mirrored in the tendency of some authors to forge fake etymologies of Greek terms employed to denote various foodstuffs.[55] Last, but not least, a wide variety of other literary works use food consumption and bodily overindulgence as their subject matters. The starving poet of the four Ptochoprodromika obsessively mocks the extravagant consumption of others. Similarly, the thoughts of the characters whom the protagonist of the anonymous twelfth-century satirical dialogue Timarion meets in Hades are preoccupied with consumption. All they want to know about the upper world is what kinds of meats, wine and olive oils are consumed there, or the current prices of their favourite species of fish.[56] In line with these trends, ridiculing the improper eating habits of others also became a standard comic/satirical topos within the literature of the period.

Aristophanic comedies fit in well with these novel trends – after all, as John Wilkins points out, "comedy is a particularly materialist form of drama" – it makes use of material objects, chiefly bodies and food, as a conveyor of multiple metonymical meanings.[57] Indeed, his comedies are full of lists of foodstuffs and numerous other material objects or physical bodily reactions.[58] What is more, the Byzantines seem to have enjoyed the overt sexuality of Aristophanes' plays – as Margaret Alexiou has indicated, Ptochoprodromos with his obsessive use of food as a metonym for sexual intercourse is a "conscious exploitation" of Aristophanic material, not a coincidental enterprise.[59] That said, it is my contention that the very same can be said of the passages from Choniates' History which will be the subject of analysis in the present article. With that in mind, let us turn our attention to the relevant episodes from the text.

SLURPING THE SOUP OF THE STATE

The first comic passage I would like to discuss occurs in the narrative of a greedy tax collector, John of Poutza (ὁ ἐκ Πούτζης Ἰωάννης).[60] John, appointed by emperor Manuel I Komnenos as the supervisor of taxes, is heavily condemned and derided by the historian. He is described as the most

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[55] Leontsini, Hens 126.

[56] I. Anagnostakis, Timarion, in: Tastes and Pleasures of Ancient and Byzantine Cuisine, ed. Idem. Thessaloniki 2013, 109–111. As Kaldellis discerns "… one of the main satirical elements of the work turns out to be Byzantines' insatiability for food, i.e. their gluttony." (A. Kaldellis, The Timarion: Toward a Literary Interpretation, in: La face cachée de la littérature byzantine, 280). On luxury and extravagance in the sphere of drinking within the 12th century see E. Kislinger, Being and Well-Being in Byzantium. The Case of Beverages, in: Material Culture and Well-Being in Byzantium (400–1453). Proceedings of the International Conference, Cambridge, 8–10 September 2001, ed. M Grünbart – E. Kislinger – A. Muthesius – D. Stathakopoulos (*Österr. Akad. Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse, Denkschriften* 356 = *Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung* 11). Wien 2007, 152–154.

[57] J. Wilkins, The Boastful Chef: The Discourse of Food in Ancient Greek Comedy. New York 2000, 1. See also J. N. Davidson, Courtesans and Fishcakes. The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens. London 1997; Henderson, The Maculate Muse; J. Wilkins, Eating in Athenian Comedy, in: Food in European Literature, ed. Idem. Exeter 1996, 46–56.

[58] Such lists are present e.g. in Acharnenses 873–876; 878–880; Plutus 189–193; physical reactions such as vomiting: e.g. Equites 1150–1151; soiling pants Ranae 479–480, eating excrement Plutus 706, Pax 42. Numerous other aspects of physicality in Old Comedy are discussed by Wilkins, The Boastful Chef 1–51.

[59] M. Alexiou, The Poverty of Ecriture and the Craft of Writing: Towards a Reappraisal of the Prodromic Poems. *BMGS* 1 (1986) 1–40. Various other aspects of Byzantine literary humour in 11th and 12th centuries are exposed by Garland, And His Bald Head. Also see the discussion by J. Haldon, Humour and the Everyday in Byzantium, in: Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, ed. G. Halsall. Cambridge 2002, 48–71. Aristophanic threads within Byzantine satire are also mentioned by Baldwin, A Talent to Abuse, *passim*.

[60] Niketas Choniates 57.53–66 (van Dieten). For a short discussion of the individual himself see Simpson, Niketas Choniates. A Historiographical Study 205–206 and 271; H. Magoulias, O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates. Detroit 1994, xix and xxv; Efthymiadis, Niketas Choniates: The Writer 49–50.

onerous tax collector and a man who, because of his most inhumane disposition of character, was unmoved by either tears or gold. Being vested with unlimited authority, moreover, he devised a pernicious policy to divert the money which was supposed to be spent on the imperial navy directly to the state's treasury, thereby condemning the imperial fleet to utter destruction.[61] Exercising his absolute power, he eventually succumbed to the lure of wealth and devoted himself to the unjust collection of riches. It is precisely in this place that food comes into play as a potent metonymy:

> Suffering from meanness and stinginess, he often sent back to the market those foodstuffs which were dispatched to him. For example: the fish such as the suax and the labrax, the biggest and the fattest ones, which were sent to him by some people; he sold them thrice and he brought in for himself the fish bought alternately just as many times by others according to the need.[62] And straight on the fish became fishers: they did what they had suffered, and, as if by releasing a huge fish-hook and placing fat on it as though it was tiny bait, they drew into their home those people who were passing by.[63]

Thus far, John of Poutza has been labelled as a heartless niggard, not a voracious eater. The products of the sea serve as complex metonyms for his boundless greed.

Both species of fish, namely the σύαξ and the λάβραξ, appear intentionally in the passage above.[64] For one thing, most of the aquatic animals are regularly considered in medical literature as possessing relatively high nutritional value.[65] At the same time, the σύαξ (σύακιον) must have been a highly prized species – it was considered to be as nutritious as chicken meat, which the Byzantines considered a delicacy.[66] Moreover, Athenaeus attests that λάβρακες were praised chiefly for their

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[61] Niketas Choniates 55.5– 56.24 (van Dieten).

[62] The Greek text is difficult here and the meaning of the sentence is rather obscure. Choniates tries to poke fun at John's greediness. The act of selling and buying the same amount of fish at the very same price is simply foolish. Special thanks are owed to Nikolaos Zagklas who assisted me in making sense of this passage.

[63] Niketas Choniates 56.44–57.52 (van Dieten): καὶ σμικρολογίαν νοσῶν καὶ γλισχρότητα καὶ τὰ πεμπόμενα πολλάκις τῶν ἐδωδίμων ἀνέπεμπεν εἰς τὸ πωλητήριον· καὶ δεῖγμα, ὡς ἰχθύας σύακα καὶ λάβρακα, ὡς μὲν μεγίστους ὡς δὲ πίονας, παρά τινων αὐτῷ πεμφθέντας, τρισσάκις ἀπέδοτο καὶ τοσαυτάκις ἐναλλὰξ ἐωνημένους κατὰ χρείαν παρ' ἑτέρων εἰσηνέγκατο. καὶ ἦσαν ἄντικρυς ἁλιεῖς οἱ ἰχθύες, ὃ πεπόνθασι δρῶντες, ὡς μὲν ἄγκιστρον χαλῶντες τὸ μέγεθος, περιτιθέντες δὲ τὴν πιμελὴν ὡς δελήτιον, καὶ οὕτω κατασπῶντες τοὺς παριόντας εἰς τὴν ἐκείνων εἰσοίκησιν.

[64] Both species of fish are discussed by N. Zorzi, La Storia di Niceta Coniata, Libri I–VIII. Giovanni II e Manuele I Comneno. Materiali per un Commento. Venezia 2012, 104. Zorzi provides a bibliography on the subject and follows D'Arcy W. Thompson, A Glossary of Greek Fishes. London 1947, 140–142 in assuming that the σύαξ cannot be identified with confidence. However, M. Chrone-Vakalopoulos – A. Vakalopoulos, Fishes and Other Aquatic Species in the Byzantine Literature. Classification, Terminology and Scientific Names. *Byzantina Symmeikta* 18 (2008) 123–157, at 136 have recently identified σύαξ as *Psetta Maxima*, i.e. a species of the family of flatfish. They moreover identify λάβραξ as *Dicentrarchus Labrax*, a European Seabass: *ibidem* 142, while the entry in *LSJ* 1021 notes the English meaning "bass," *Labrax Lupus*. *LBG* II 905 notes the meaning "Steinbutt" which equates to the English "turbot". On the taste qualities of the λάβραξ and further discussion of the σύαξ see F. Tinnefeld, Zur kulinarischen Qualität byzantinischer Speisefische, in: Studies in the Mediterranean World (*Past and Present* XI). Tokyo 1988, 155–176: λάβραξ 159–160, n.6; σύαξ 166–167, n. 34. For both species in Byzantine hagiography and historiography see E. Kislinger, Gastgewerbe und Beherbergung in frühbyzantinischer Zeit (Diss.). Wien 1982, 80–81, 85. On fishes in (early) Byzantium see also M. Kokoszko, Ryby i ich znaczenie w życiu codziennym ludzi późnego antyku i wczesnego Bizancjum III-VII w. (*Byzantina Lodziensia* IX). / Fish and Their Importance in the Daily Life of Late Antique and Early Byzantine Societies from the Third to the Seventh Centuries. Łódź 2005. For the reconstruction of Byzantine diet (including the consumption of fish) on the basis of carbon-isotope analysis see Ch. Bourbou – B. T. Fuller – S. J. Garvie-Lok – M. P. Richards, Reconstructing the Diets of Greek Byzantine Populations (6th–15th Centuries AD) Using Carbon and Nitrogen Stable Isotope Ratios. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 146 (2011), 569–581, esp. 571.

[65] Chrone-Vakalopoulos – Vakalopoulos, Fishes 125. D'Arcy W. Thompson, A Glossary of Greek Fishes 141.

[66] Leontsini, Hens 129.

sweet taste.[67] In the passage itself Choniates jokingly adds that the fish were the biggest and the fattest ones which serves to increase the impression of John's greediness.

However, it is with the mention of the λάβραξ that Aristophanic language is introduced into the episode. As the entry in the Suda shows, the λάβραξ is both a kind of fish and a proverb, used as a pun for a stingy person:

> Labrax (sea bass): a species of fish and a proverb: "Milesian sea bass." And this name was given because they gaped their mouths wide open and greedily and hastily gulped down their bait. For this reason they are caught with ease … Miletus is a city in Asia where many sea bass live, since the marsh pours forth into the sea here. Because these fish like fresh water, they run up from the sea to the marsh and in this way their population is numerous near Miletus.[68]

The entry is taken from the scholia on Knights 361, where the λάβραξ is used exactly in this way, as an insult voiced by a protagonist of the play, the Paphlagon (whom I will briefly discuss below), towards his enemy, the Sausage Seller: "Even though you devoured sea bass, you would not disturb the Milesians!"[69] Interestingly enough, the λάβραξ appears in a similar function in the already mentioned satirical dialogue Timarion. There it reinforces the voracious appetite of another glutton, Theodore of Smyrna, who liked sardines (ἀφύη) even more than the delicious sea bass.[70]

Nonetheless, John's greed is only an introduction to his gluttony. In the next section we see him:

> At some other time, after he had spent his day in the Blachernae palace and was returning thence for a meal, when he spotted the food which was put forward on his way by the female tavern-keepers (ταῖς καπηλίσι), which in the *koine* 'dialect' is called *almaia*, he was overpowered with craving (ἠράσθη) to gulp down the soup (ζωμοῦ) and nibble at the stem of the vegetable (τῆς τοῦ λαχάνου σχίδακος ἀποτραγεῖν). Then, when one of his servants, who was called Anzas, told that he should now check and curb his appetite … John, looking at him ferociously and fiercely, insisted very hard to satisfy his desire (ἀποπλῆσαι τὸν ἔρωτα). And indeed, having greedily ripped the bowl, which contained his beloved meal, from the hands of the female vendor (ταῖς χερσὶ τῆς πωλητρίας) he stooped down (ἐγκύψας) and, with his mouth wide open, he eagerly slurped his little soupie (ἀμυστὶ καὶ χανδὸν ἐνεφορεῖτο τοῦ ζωμιδίου) and stuffed himself with the vegetable to the full (τῷ λαχάνῳ πολλάκις ἐνέχανε).[71]

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[67] Athenaeus, Deipnosophistai VII 86.17–19 (ed. G. Kaibel, Athenaei Naucratitae deipnosophistarum libri XV. Leipzig 1887–1890, II 184): Ἱκέσιος δέ φησιν ὅτι οἱ λάβρακες εὔχυλοί εἰσι καὶ οὐ πολύτροφοι, πρὸς δὲ τὴν ἔκκρισιν ἥσσονες, εὐστομίᾳ δὲ πρῶτοι κρίνονται.

[68] Suda λ 8 (III 225 Adler): Λάβραξ: εἶδος ἰχθύος. καὶ παροιμία· λάβρακας Μιλησίους. τὴν δὲ προσηγορίαν πεποίηται, διότι κέχηνεν αὐτοῦ τὸ στόμα, καὶ ἀθρόως καὶ λάβρως τὸ δέλεαρ καταπίνει· ὅθεν καὶ εὐχερῶς ἁλίσκεται … Μίλητος δὲ πόλις Ἀσίας, ἔνθα πολλοὶ γίνονται λάβρακες, διὰ τὴν ἐκδιδοῦσαν λίμνην εἰς θάλασσαν. χαίροντες γὰρ οἱ ἰχθύες τῷ γλυκεῖ ὕδατι εἰς τὴν λίμνην ἀνατρέχουσιν ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ οὕτω πληθύνουσι παρὰ Μιλησίοις.

[69] Aristophanes, Equites 361 (Wilson): ἀλλ᾽ οὐ λάβρακας καταφαγὼν Μιλησίους κλονήσεις.

[70] Timarion, 21.540–542 (ed. A. Romano, Pseudo-Luciano Timarione [*Byzantina et Neo-hellenica neapolitana* 2]. Napoli 1974, 69): ἀλλ᾽ ὅ με διέλαθε πάντων ἀναγκαιότατον, ἀφύων γέγονεν ἄγρα πολλή; ἔζων γὰρ ἡδέως ἐξ αὐτῶν ὀψονίζων ἐν βίῳ καὶ ἦσαν ἐμοὶ λάβρακος τιμιώτερα.

[71] Niketas Choniates 57.53–63 (van Dieten): Ἄλλοτε δὲ διημερεύσας ἐς τὰ ἐν Βλαχέρναις ἀνάκτορα κἀκεῖθεν πρὸς ὀψίαν ἐπαναλύων, ἐπεὶ θεάσαιτο παρὰ ταῖς καπηλίσι προβεβλημένην ἐνόδιον ἐδωδήν, ἣν ἡ κοινὴ διάλεκτος ἅλμαίαν ὠνόμασεν, ἠράσθη ζωμοῦ ἐμφορηθῆναι καὶ τῆς τοῦ λαχάνου σχίδακος ἀποτραγεῖν. εἰπόντος δέ τινος τῶν ὑπηρετουμένων, ὃς Ἀνζᾶς ὠνομάζετο, ὡς νῦν μὲν χρεὼν ἀνασχέσθαι καὶ κολάσαι τὴν ἔφεσιν, εὑρήσει δὲ καὶ κατ᾽ οἶκον γενόμενος ὃ ζητεῖ ὄψον παρατεθειμένον αὐτῷ εὐτρεπές, δριμὺ καὶ τιτανῶδες ἐμβλέψας πολὺς ἐνέκειτο σχέδην ἀποπλῆσαι τὸν ἔρωτα. ἀμέλει καὶ τὸ τρύβλιον ἁρπαλέως περιχυθεὶς ταῖς χερσὶ τῆς πωλητρίας ὀχούμενον, ὅπερ ἔστεγεν ἔνδον τὸ ἐκείνῳ ἐράσμιον ἔδεσμα, ἐγκύψας ἀμυστὶ καὶ χανδὸν ἐνεφορεῖτο τοῦ ζωμιδίου καὶ τῷ λαχάνῳ πολλάκις ἐνέχανε.

Choniates plays here with overt and covert references to Aristophanic comedies, chiefly Knights. The λάβραξ appears in the play just after the Chorus mentions how the Sausage Seller "swallowed the broth" of the state, not having given any share of the soup (ζωμός) to anyone.[72] It is by no means an accident that the depiction of John's gluttony revolves around this particular dish. He is a die-hard glutton, whose portrait is carefully constructed around well-established patterns of voracious eating. Just like other hefty eaters, he is unable to curb his appetite: seeing his beloved ἁλμαία,[73] he stops and gluttonously fullfills his uncontrolled desire.

From this we can glean what John Wilkins has captured as a complex relationship of "life as lived and food as eaten."[74] A few verses earlier in Knights, Paphlagon boasts how he gorged a sizzling-hot tuna: θύννεια θερμὰ καταφαγών[75] – the very acuteness of his passion bids him eat here and now, even at the risk of burning his palate. A glutton is defined, as James Davidson notes, by the fierceness as well as immediacy of his desire.[76] The aforementioned passage in Choniates' History carries a similar meaning: we have seen that in the passage when John's servant attempts to persuade him to restrain his craving, the glutton gives him a fierce gaze[77] and greedily takes the bowl (τρύβλιον) and gulps down the soup.

Nonetheless, the intertextual connection between the History and Aristophanes' plays seems to be much deeper. I have noted that the twelfth century witnessed a sudden rise in interest in bodily matters and that the Ptochoprodromic poems almost obsessively link the spheres of food and eating with sex.[78] After all, the noun γαστήρ has denoted a womb as well as a stomach since time immemorial, thereby closely linking one's appetite for food and one's appetite for sex. Henderson remarks how this interplay is widely exploited in comic discourse:

> The connection between eating and sex … is related to the early pleasure of taking in food which constitutes a child's first strong feelings of gratification and enjoyment. The female genitalia are often compared to meats that are cooked … and eaten … and sauces, soups, and juices are used to indicate vaginal secretions.[79]

It is this interconnection that Choniates might allude to in the episodes in question. The commentary by Balsamon mentioned above shows that the Byzantine authors were fully aware of how such comic imagery worked. Also, as Lynda Garland has remarked on the use of specific foodstuffs by Niketas: "… a number of these foods … have sexual connotations in Aristophanes, as indeed does the gluttonous enjoyment of food in general, of which Choniates could hardly have been unaware."[80]

The context of this episode might also lend credence to the erotically charged reading of the passage. First of all, it is immediately preceded by an expressive depiction of Manuel I Komnenos' lewd

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[72] Aristophanes, Equites 360 (Wilson).

[73] Ἁλμαία is also attested in the extant fragment of Aristophanes' Merchant Ships: Lexica Segueriana α 82.23 (ed. I. Bekker, Anecdota Graeca, vol. 1. Berlin 1814): Ἀριστοφάνης Ὀλκάσιν· Ἁλμαίαν πιών. Otherwise, it was a standard meal of the Byzantines, made of sour (i.e. salted or pickled) cabbage, frequently eaten in the monasteries, as is attested in various Τυπικά. On non-feast days it was eaten with the addition of olive oil, pulses, fish, nuts or cooked seeds. For a discussion and relevant bibliography on ἁλμαία and ζωμός (although, Zorzi does not discern any Aristophanic inspiration) see Zorzi, La Storia di Niceta Coniata 105. For ἁλμαία see also I. Anagnostakis, Byzantine Delicacies, in: Flavours and Delights 81–103, at 96.

[74] Wilkins, Food 5.

[75] Aristophanes, Equites 354 (Wilson).

[76] Davidson, Courtesans 146.

[77] Niketas Choniates 57.59 (van Dieten): δριμὺ καὶ τιτανῶδες ἔμβλεψας.

[78] Alexiou, Poverty 16–20.

[79] Henderson, The Maculate Muse 47.

[80] Garland, The Rhetoric of Gluttony 48.

behaviour: ignoring his newly-wedded and virtuous wife and inflamed by the "common erotic passions" (οἱ πάνδημοι ἔρωτες), he engaged in unlawful relationships with other women and "fastened the holes" of his relatives (δι' ὁμογνίου τρυμαλιᾶς … ἐμπερονών).[81] The episode of John's gluttony takes place by a roadside tavern, in front of which some female tavern-keepers (καπηλίδες) present food for sale and John snatches a bowl of his beloved soup from a female vendor (τῆς πωλητρίας). Zorzi sees the episode simply as a reflection of women's involvement in trade within the environment of the Constantinopolitan market, which cannot be doubted. Yet, at the same time, other contextual readings might be possible. Within the tradition of ancient Greek satire/comedy and invective, the term "female tavern-keepers" (αἱ καπηλίδες) was a cheerful euphemism for prostitutes. This tradition was indeed lively in Byzantine literature, as can be gleaned from, for instance, a playful letter by Michael Psellos, or an anonymous pamphlet written in the fourteenth century.[82] One more linguistic detail present in the episode might suggest a deeper literary allusion at work – the word which Choniates chose for a female vendor (ἡ πωλητρία) is attested only in Pollux' Onomasticon, where we learn that the form was used by Hermippus, another playwright of Old Comedy.[83]

Hence, food imagery in the passage related to John of Poutza might simply reinforce the link between sexual pleasure and consumption through multiple references to comic material.[84] The greedy tax official is an addicted lover (ἠράσθη ζωμοῦ; ἀποπλῆσαι τὸν ἔρωτα) of his "little soupie" – τοῦ ζωμιδίου, which is another rare word of Aristophanic provenance, found in Clouds.[85] In addition, it must be noted that Choniates seems to play here on the ambiguity of the verb ἐράω, which carries strong connotations of sexual lust on top of its usual meaning "to desire passionately." Certainly, as we have seen, John has been overcome by his passion for (ἠράσθη) the soup, and insists on "satisfying his desire" (ἀποπλῆσαι τὸν ἔρωτα) – another phrase with an obvious sexual meaning.[86] This seems to be at least in line with Choniates' own literary interest in obscene gags and buffoonery.

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[81] Niketas Choniates 53.58–54.74 (van Dieten). The passage and its densely erotic imagery have been analysed by Bourbouhakis, who discerns that ἔρωτες (a motif taken from the tradition of Greek novels) constitutes one of the leitmotifs of Choniates' portrayal of Andronikos' I Komnenos: E. Bourbouhakis, Exchanging the Devices of Ares for the Delights of Erotes. Erotic Misadventures and the History of Niketas Choniates, in: Plotting with Eros: Essays on the Poetics of Love and the Erotics of Reading, ed. I. Nilsson. Copenhagen 2009, 213–234, at 220. For matters of sexuality in Byzantium in general see E. Kislinger, Sexualität / Byzanz. *LexMa* VII 1813–1816.

[82] H. Herter, Die Soziologie der antiken Prostitution im Lichte des heidnischen und christlichen Schrifttums. *JbAC* 3 (1960) 70–111, at 73–74. Psellos, Epistula 97.17–24 (ed. E. Kurtz – F. Drexl, Michaelis Pselli scripta minora magnam partem adhuc inedita. Milano 1941, 125–126). Pamphlet 9–17 (ed. H. Hunger, Anonymes Pamphlet gegen eine byzantinische Mafia. *RESEE* 7 [1969] 95–107; cf. H.-V. Beyer, Personale Ermittlungen zu einem spätbyzantinischen Pamphlet, in: Byzantios. Festschrift für Herbert Hunger. Wien 1984, 13–26, at 18–19). The connection of taverns with sexual business and gluttony was famously explored in the Life of St. Theodore of Syceon (ed. A.-J. Festugière, Vie de Théodore de Sykeôn [*Subsidia hagiographica* 48]. Bruxelles 1970, I 288–301). For a short discussion of this see St. Leontsine, Die Prostitution im frühen Byzanz. Wien 1989, 133–137 and I. Anagnostakis, Byzantine Diet and Cuisine. In Between Ancient and Modern Gastronomy, in: Flavours and Delights 43–69, at 44–49. Certainly, Byzantine taverns were places in which the criminal underworld flourished, see Kislinger, Gastgewerbe und Beherbergung 154–156; S. N. Troianos, Καπηλεία και εγκληματικότητα στον κόσμο του Βυζαντίου, in: Essays in Honor of C. D. Spinellis, ed. M. Galanou. Athena – Komotene 2010, 1285–1300.

[83] Pollux, Onomasticon III 125.10–11 (ed. E. Bethe, Pollucis Onomasticon [*Lexicographici Graeci* IX]. Leipzig 1900, 194): Ὑπερείδης δε καὶ πράττην εἴρηκεν ἐν τῷ Συνηγορικῷ, πολήτριαν δ' Ἕρμιππος ὁ Κωμικός.

[84] To the best of my knowledge, the only scholar who has noticed such comic food symbolism in Choniates is Garland, The Rhetoric of Gluttony 48–55.

[85] Aristophanes, Nubes 388–391 (Wilson): νὴ τὸν Ἀπόλλω, καὶ δεινὰ ποιεῖ γ' εὐθύς μοι καὶ τετάρακται, χὥσπερ βροντὴ τὸ ζωμίδιον παταγεῖ καὶ δεινὰ κέκραγεν· ἀτρέμας πρῶτον "παππὰξ παππάξ", κἄπειτ' ἐπάγει "παπαπαππάξ", χὥταν χέζω, κομιδῇ βροντᾷ "παπαπαππάξ", ὥσπερ ἐκεῖναι. "By Apollo! At once the little soupie (τὸ ζωμίδιον) does terrible things to me and it has been stirred up, it roars like a thunder and it croaks fearfully: at first, without disturbance "pappax, pappax", then it continues "papappax", and when I ease myself, it wholly thunders "papapappax," just as it normally happens."

[86] Henderson, The Maculate Muse 37.

After all, he regards it as worthwhile to record a lewd verbal joke, a pun on emperor Isaac Angelos uttered by a jocose mime.[87] The historian finds it equally humorous to narrate an episode which occurred during the remarriages of Alexios' III daughters, in which some eunuch who gave the signal to start races in a bent-over position was slapped on the buttocks so forcefully that the noise could be heard everywhere.[88] Similarly, in an episode from the reign of Andronikos I, Choniates reports how people made fun of the tyrant by changing the meanings of the verbs πεδάω, δάκνω, κεντέω, which he used in his letter, into obscene ones.[89]

I have also remarked that in his plays Aristophanes uses dishes and dish-licking as metonyms for licking female genitalia. Aristophanes' Peace, where the Council (Βουλή) is to "slurp the soup" (ῥοφήσει ζωμὸν) of the play's heroine Theoria, and later on, when a man from the audience is to drink off Theoria's soup, are only two telling examples of such imagery.[90] The τρύβλιον, out of which John gulps his soup, does appear in the Ecclesiazusae[91] to denote female sexual organs. In the passage packed with obvious and concealed references to food as sexual indulgence, Smoios "cleans out the bowls of the women":

> … tell all the citizens that you shall feast, that it is spun in their lot. The tables have been prepared with all the goods … the fish are fried, the hare is fixed on a spit, the cakes (πόπανα) are baked, the youngest women will boil huge bowls of pea-soup. And Smoios, in his knightly clothes, cleans up in their midst the bowls of the females (τὰ τῶν γυναικῶν διακαθαίρει τρύβλια).[92]

I could not convincingly argue that Choniates was acquainted with the play. Nonetheless, I am strongly tempted to see a parallel between the two texts.[93] Both excerpts refer to soup: while Aristophanic text refers to ἔτνος (bean-stew), Choniates, uses the term ζωμός. Essentially, both are liquid and both can be guzzled. In the Ecclesiazusae Smoios, as has been quoted above, is licking women's vaginal secretions. The Byzantine historian is not as straightforward as Aristophanes, yet he describes John of Poutza as swallowing the soup directly from the τρύβλιον, which he snatched from the hands of the tavern-mistress. Both texts, therefore, mention the soup, the bowl, and put females in the passive roles upon which the gluttons act. As mentioned above, a "female tavern-keeper" could have a double meaning, especially within satirical/comic contexts. A τρύβλιον, moreover, does appear in Knights, to which Choniates may refer through the use of intertextual allusions. In Knights, the bowl appears in the Sausage Seller's speech, where it serves as a metonym for stealing fish from merchants, thus pointing to his parasitic greediness and living at the expense of others:

> With a couple of words I will reveal to you how you can have quantities of anchovies for an obol; all you have to do is to seize all the dishes (τρύβλια) the merchants have.[94]

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[87] Niketas Choniates 441.18–442.32 (van Dieten).

[88] Niketas Choniates 509.6–17 (van Dieten). These and numerous other instances of robust sexual sense of humour in Choniates' History have been analysed by Garland, And His Bald Head, *passim*.

[89] Niketas Choniates 317.9–318.21 (van Dieten).

[90] Aristophanes, Pax 715–717 (Wilson); Aristophanes, Pax 885 (Wilson): τὸν ζωμὸν αὐτῆς … ἐκλάψεται. See Henderson, The Maculate Muse 47, 145, 186.

[91] Henderson, The Maculate Muse 143.

[92] Aristophanes, Ecclesiazusae 838–847 (Wilson).

[93] Garland, The Rhetoric of Gluttony 48 notes that the round-cakes (πόπανα) which Constantine Mesopotamites allegedly ate in Niketas Choniates 441.4 (van Dieten), may have sexual connotations as well. The possibility that Choniates knew Ecclesiazusae cannot be ruled out. Otherwise they appear in more widely-read Plutus 660, 680 and through a scholion to Plutus in Suda π 2051 (IV 173 Adler).

[94] Aristophanes, Equites 648–650 (Wilson): αὐτοῖς ἀπόρρητον ποιησάμενος ταχύ /ἵνα τὰς ἀφύας ὠνοῖντο πολλὰς τοὐβολοῦ, τῶν δημιουργῶν ξυλλαβεῖν τὰ τρύβλια.

The obols are also mentioned by Choniates to reinforce John's stinginess – we see him instructing his servant to exchange a bronze coin for four obols – to pay two coins to the tavern-keeper and bring back the remaining two.[95]

This brings us back to the deeper political overtones of Aristophanic comedies. Knights, a biting political satire, might have served Choniates' purpose particularly well for a number of reasons. The Paphlagon mentioned above is, in fact, a pseudonym of the fifth-century BC Athenian politician Cleon, who was at the height of his power when Aristophanes composed and delivered the play. Cleon was a sly demagogue, a leather-seller, a cunning orator and a corrupt extortionist, and it was only due to a stroke of luck that he became one of the most important political figures of the day. Quite similarly, John of Poutza, acting as the imperial tax inspector,[96] abused his immense power and did whatever was to his liking: he bestowed lavish gifts upon his family and took money even from the most needy.[97] Being a social parasite, he lived off others' fortunes.

At the same time, the rise of corrupt state officials is one of the main themes of Knights: both Cleon (Paphlagon) and his rustic, uneducated opponent in the run for the leadership of the city, the Sausage Seller, feed themselves off the common good. The dense food imagery is constantly employed by Aristophanes as a metonym for political exploitation: the demagogues "devour the public funds before they are allotted to them" and "squeeze people like figs,"[98] the Sausage Seller accuses Paphlagon of making his name only through "reaping other's harvest,"[99] while he himself boasts that he stole a bowl with a meal from some shop.[100] In one of the scenes in the play Paphlagon is sleeping on the ground and snoring loudly after having stuffed himself with cakes stolen from the people.[101] The "political cuisine," a leitmotif of Knights, becomes a metonym for demagoguery exercised by foolish and unprincipled leaders of the rabble, impersonated by both Paphlagon and the Sausage Seller. When the latter asks his opponent whether he considers the people his own property, the Paphlagon boldly admits it, stating that it is due to the fact that "he knows with what tit-bits the demos is fed."[102] The acts of devouring the common good expressed in such vivid culinary terms are often equated by Aristophanes with sexual abuse. Immediately after he boasts that he knows how to feed people with "crumbs", Paphlagon declares that he "knows how to make Demos both wide and narrow (εὐρὺν καὶ στενόν)".[103] The Chorus of the play, which embodies the common citizens, further admits that "to steal, perjure yourself and make your butt receptive are three essentials for climbing high."[104]

Therefore, by grounding the passage in Aristophanic tradition by means of using specific foodstuffs and phrases, Choniates peppers his passage with political and possibly obscene overtones which serve not only as additional means of poking fun at John, but also endows it with deeper, de-

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[95] Niketas Choniates 57.63–66 (van Dieten): καὶ οὕτως στατῆρα χάλκεον τοῦ κόλπου ἐξενεγκών τινι τῶν ὑπὸ χεῖρα παρέσχετο, ἐπισκήψας ἀναλῦσαι τοῦτον ἐς τέτταρας ὀβολούς, καὶ δύο μὲν καταθέσθαι τῇ ὀψοπώλιδι, τοὺς δὲ λοιποὺς ταχέως εἰσκομίσαι αὐτῷ.

[96] Niketas Choniates 54.76 (van Dieten): είσφορών φροντιστήν και λογιστήν μέγιστον. See Zorzi, La Storia di Niceta Coniata 101.

[97] Niketas Choniates 56.25 (van Dieten).

[98] Aristophanes, Equites 258–259 (Wilson): ἐν δίκῃ γ', ἐπεὶ τὰ κοινὰ πρὶν λαχεῖν κατεσθίεις, κἀποσυκάζεις πιέζων τοὺς ὑπευθύνους σκοπῶν.

[99] Aristophanes, Equites 391–392 (Wilson): ἀλλ' ὅμως οὗτος τοιοῦτος ὢν ἅπαντα τὸν βίον, κᾆτ' ἀνὴρ ἔδοξεν εἶναι, τἀλλότριον ἀμῶν θέρος.

[100] Aristophanes, Equites 744–745 (Wilson): ἐγὼ δὲ περιπατῶν γ' ἀπ' ἐργαστηρίου ἕψοντος ἑτέρου τὴν χύτραν ὑφειλόμην.

[101] Aristophanes, Equites 103–104 (Wilson).

[102] Aristophanes, Equites 714–715 (Wilson): Αλ. ὡς σφόδρα σὺ τὸν δῆμον σεαυτοῦ νενόμικας. Πα. ἐπίσταμαι γὰρ αὐτὸν οἷς ψωμίζεται.

[103] Aristophanes, Equites 720 (Wilson).

[104] Aristophanes, Equites 427–428 (Wilson): … ἀτὰρ δῆλόν γ' ἀφ' οὗ ξυνέγνω· ὁτιὴ 'πιώρκεις θ' ἡρπακὼς καὶ κρέας ὁ πρωκτὸς εἶχεν.

cidedly more serious meanings. Such a reading of the episode joins together the sexual promiscuity of the greedy official and the rich comic symbolism of the soup as the fare of politics and snack imbued with obscene meanings. Seen from this perspective, the episode is a perfect example of a standard Byzantine literary play within which the educated readers or listeners were supposed to identify the original source of an allusion which was deliberately obscured by the author.[105]

DRINKING LIKE A FISH, EATING LIKE A HORSE: JOHN KAMATEROS

While the entire story of John Kamateros is amusing in itself,[106] I would like to focus on the anecdotal digression which contains three interconnected episodes and whose main aim is to present John as a somewhat dim-witted drunkard of prodigious appetites.[107] Indeed, Choniates heaps one invective upon another in the passage, but at the same time, the text is filled with intertextual hints. John is introduced as a boorish simpleton. Water- and sea-related metaphors constitute the core of the entire passage – they fasten together the excerpt, while simultaneously appropriating some of the themes specific to Attic Comedy:

> This Kamateros … although he had tasted the highest learning only by the tip of his tongue (μαθημάτων μὲν ὑψηλοτέρων ἄκρῳ λιχανῷ γεγευμένος) and although he was not a strict lover of divine philosophy, nor was he a quick-learner, his speech flew, his words were streaming like beautifully flowing spring water which is running down the hill (ῥέων τε τῷ λόγῳ κατὰ πηγάδα καλλίρειθρον διεκδιδοῦσαν τῶν πρανῶν), thanks to which he secured a great fame for himself. Being the worst glutton (ὀψοφαγώτατος) and the mightiest drunkard, he sang to the accompaniment of a small lyre. He moved himself rhythmically to the sound of the cithara and danced kordax (καὶ κόρδακα ὠρχεῖτο), swinging his legs to and fro. With his mouth wide open, he was filling himself (χανδόν ἐμφορουμένος) with wine, he poured into himself seas of it and, like sponges, he frequently soaked it in (κατὰ τοὺς θαλαττίους χόας καὶ τὰς σπογγιὰς συχνάκις τὸ ποτὸν ἀνιμώμενος). He did not plunge his mind into the sea of drunkenness with such irrigation, nor did his mind fail him, just as happens with drunkards, nor did he throw his head from one side to the other while being flooded with drunkenness. Instead, he would say something wise, and through drinking, he excited and watered his reasoning (ἀλλ᾽ ἔλεγέ τι σοφόν, ἀναφλέγων τε καὶ ἄρδων ἐν τῷ πίνειν τὸ λογιζόμενον), and he rather strengthened himself to audacious speaking. Pursuing drinking parties, not only did he please emperor, but also greatly endeared himself to the rulers of these nations who were devoted to carousing. When he was sent as an envoy to them, he outdid

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[105] I am referring here to a widely quoted passage from the thirteenth-century scholar, Nikephoros Choumnos: "So, although it is not necessary, it seems to me that the change and transformation [of a word] is more beautiful, in part to indicate where it comes from, in part to conceal it [from direct notice] and establish the relation (γνησίον ποιεῖν) through a link between the word and its source … . This beautifies and adorns the speech, and brings a great pleasure (ἡδονὴν πλείστην) to the audience when they find [the quotation]. And therefore, the listeners genuinely and affectionately follow the speech." Ed. J. F. Boissonade, Anecdota graeca. Paris 1831, III 363–364: οὖν οἷς δὲ μὴ τοῦτ᾽ ἀνάγκη, ἔμοιγεδοκεῖ βέλτιον αὖθις τὸ μεταποιεῖν καὶ ἐξαλλάττειν, καὶ ὧς ὑπεμφαίνειν ὅθεν ἐκπορίζῃ, ὧς δ᾽ὑποκλέπτειν καὶ γνησίον ποιεῖν τῆς συναφείας τοῦ λόγου καὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ τόκου … ὡραΐζει γὰρ δὴ καὶ τοῦτο καὶ καλλύνει τὸν λόγον, καὶ τοῖς ἀκροαταῖς εὐθὺς ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἡδονὴν ὅτι πλείστην ἐμποιεῖ καὶ τοίνυν ἀκούοντες γνησίως ἅμα καὶ ἀγαπιτηκῶς προσφύονται τῷ λόγῳ.

[106] Niketas Choniates 110.20–115.46 (van Dieten).

[107] Niketas Choniates 113.87 (van Dieten). For a discussion of the person of John see primarily R. Guilland, Les Logothètes: Etudes sur l'histoire administrative de l'Empire byzantin. *REB* 29 (1971) 5–115, at 59–61. Also Simpson, Niketas Choniates. A Historiographical Study 221–222 and 268–269. Kamateros' ignorance and his ability to improvise is also discussed briefly in an insightful study by C. Cupane, Στήλη τῆς ἀστειότητος. Byzantinische Vorstellungen weltlicher Vollkommenheit in Realität und Fiktion. *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 45 (2011) 193–211, at 201–205. Probably, Kamateros is also a protagonist of the anonymous twelfth-century satire Anacharsis, as has been argued by D. Christidis, Μαρκιανὰ ἀνέκδοτα. 1. Ἀνάχαρσις ἢ Ανανίας, 2. Ἐπιστολές – Σιγίλλιο. Thessaloniki 1984, 103–110. However, in *Hell 36* (1985) 184–189, A. Kazhdan rejected Christidis' arguments as unconvincing. Roilos, Amphoteroglossia 250–252, on the other hand, finds them plausible and briefly discusses some convergences between the two depictions.

in drinking those, whom it took a long time to be brought back from their drunken stupor and be revived to their senses. He also kept pace with others: these were the men who emptied the entire casks (πιθάκνας ὅλας) into their stomach, held the amphorae as if they were wine glasses (ὡς κύλικας) and their after-dinner vessel was as huge as the one used by Herakles (τὸν σκύφον εἶχον ἀεὶ ἐπιδείπνιον τὸν Ἡράκλειον).[108]

A number of allusions in the passage refer us back directly to the ancient comic material. First and foremost, the earliest attested mention of the term ὀψοφαγία, along with the verb ὀψοφαγέω, is in Aristophanes' comedies.[109] Although this is a common word attested in many works throughout the centuries, it is not at all improbable that Choniates, having numerous lexica at his disposal, and having comprehensive knowledge of the comic plays, was aware of this. In the second place, the mention of both gluttony and drunkenness opens up the rich array of the discourse of luxury traditionally signalled by it. Voracious eating, just like unrestrained consumption of alcohol, was believed to lead to inevitable financial ruin.[110]

A second point linking the excerpt to Aristophanic poetry is to be found in the perspicuous reference to the κόρδαξ – a lascivious dance of Athenian comedy. In essence, mention of this signals an intertextual relationship and introduces the topic of indecency. Κόρδαξ along with ὀψοφαγία seem to staple together the reciprocally linked worlds of food and sexual pleasure – John's conduct is aberrant in the areas of proper food consumption and wine drinking, his appetites are simply insatiable. Excess and incontinence are pronounced features of Kamateros' deviant behaviour. It must also be remembered that in the Byzantine tradition, the κόρδαξ was the dance of drunkards and was widely used as invective, satire or polemic, as is attested to in twelfth-century satire by Prodromos.[111]

Kamateros' abnormal drunkenness constitutes another intertextual link that ties this comic passage by Choniates to the Aristophanic plays.[112] Exploring Kamateros' inebriation, Choniates evokes water

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[108] Niketas Choniates 113.87–114.10 (van Dieten): Ἦν δὲ ὁ Καματηρὸς οὗτος … μαθημάτων μὲν ὑψηλοτέρων ἄκρῳ λιχανῷ γεγευμένος καὶ τῆς ὑπερσέμνου φιλοσοφίας οὐκ ἀκριβὴς ἐραστής, οὐδ' εὐμαθὴς ὁπαδός, κράτιστος δὲ τῇ φυᾷ καὶ τῷ ἀμελετήτῳ χαίρων τῆς φράσεως, ῥέων τε τῷ λόγῳ κατὰ πηγάδα καλλίρειθρον διεκδιδοῦσαν τῶν πρανῶν, ἐκ τοῦδε κλέος ἀπηνέγκατο μέγιστον. ἀνθρώπων δὲ ὀψοφαγώτατος ὢν καὶ οἰνοφλύγων ὁ κράτιστος πρὸς λύριον ἔψαλλε καὶ πρὸς κιθάραν μετερρυθμίζετο καὶ κόρδακα ὠρχεῖτο καὶ τὼ πόδε πολλάκις παρενεσάλευε. χανδὸν δὲ τῶν οἴνων ἐμφορούμενος καὶ κατὰ τοὺς θαλαττίους χόας καὶ τὰς σπογγιὰς συχνάκις τὸ ποτὸν ἀνιμώμενος οὐ κατεπόντου τὸν νοῦν τῇ ἀρδείᾳ, μήτε παρασφαλλόμενος ὡς οἱ ἔξοινοι, μήτε τὸ κάρη βάλλων ἑτέρωσε ὡς ὑπὸ μέθης ἐπικλυζόμενος, ἀλλ' ἔλεγέ τι σοφόν, ἀναφλέγων τε καὶ ἄρδων ἐν τῷ πίνειν τὸ λογιζόμενον, καὶ πρὸς βλάστην λόγων μᾶλλον ἐπερρωννύετο. διώκων δὲ τὰ συμπόσια οὐ βασιλεῖ μόνον πλεῖστα κεχάριστο, ἀλλὰ καὶ δυνάσταις μάλα πεφίλητο τῶν ἐθνῶν, ὁπόσοι τοὺς κώμους περιεσπούδαζον. κατὰ γὰρ πρεσβείαν αὐτοῖς παραβάλλων τοὺς μὲν ὑπερέβαλεν ἐν τοῖς πότοις καὶ πρὸς τὴν ὀψὲ κατήνεγκε τῆς μέθης ἀνάνηψιν καὶ τοῦ κάρου ἀνάνευσιν, τοῖς δὲ καὶ ἰσοφάρισεν· οὗτοι δὲ ἦσαν, οἳ πιθάκνας ὅλας ἐς τὴν γαστέρα μετήγγιζον καὶ ἀμφορέας ὤχουν τοῖς δακτύλοις ὡς κύλικας καὶ τὸν σκύφον εἶχον ἀεὶ ἐπιδείπνιον τὸν Ἡράκλειον. The passage has been comprehensively commented along with complementary bibliography by Zorzi, La Storia di Niceta Coniata 179–180.

[109] Davidson, Courtesans 20.

[110] "In fact it was considered quite impossible for a drinker to achieve anything worthy of note". Davidson, Courtesans 155.

[111] Kordax was traditionally linked with drunkenness, and, as Koder observes, it was used as invective, polemic and satire: J. Koder, Kordax und Methe: Lasterhaftes Treiben in byzantinischer Zeit. *ZRVI* 50/2 (2013) 947–958. Similar, abusive use of kordax, not mentioned by Koder, appears in Theodore Prodromos' The Ignorant Man: P. Marciniak, How to entertain the Byzantines: Some Remarks on Mimes and Jesters in Byzantium, in: Medieval and Early Modern Performance in the Eastern Mediterranean, ed. A. Öztürkmen – E. B. Vitz. Turnhout 2014, 125–148, at 135. On Kamateros' dancing see also Roilos, Amphoteroglossia 252.

[112] At the same time, it must be pointed out that the destructive habits of drunkenness, gluttony and sexual promiscuity were standard themes of Byzantine literary psogoi and Kaiserkritik. One of the most conspicuous examples is the image of emperor Michael III (the Drunkard) constructed in the Vita Basilii: Theophanes Continuatus, Vita Basilii 20–27 (ed. I. Ševčenko, Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur Liber V quo Vita Basilii Imperatoris amplectitur [*CFHB* 42]. Berlin – Boston 2011, 80–108). For the seminal study of Byzantine Kaiserkritik see Tinnefeld, Kategorien der Kaiserkritik. An in-depth literary analysis of portrayals of drunken Noah and how they change throughout the centuries is present in I. Anagnostakis – T. Papamastorakis, 'Εκμανής νέος Βάκχος', The Drunkenness of Noah in Medieval Art, in: Byzantium Matures. Choices, Sensitivities and Modes of Expression in Byzantium (Eleventh to Fifteenth Century). Athens 2004, 209–256.

metaphors, not only as a means of exhibiting his rhetorical *inventio*, but also as a way to engage the reader once more in a literary riddle. Comedic poetry quite frequently uses the image of copiously running water as a metonym for poetic production.[113] This topos appears in the Chorus' parabasis in Knights, where it illustrates the prolific artistic output of Cratinus during his younger years.[114] The poet was praised for as long as he flowed with his words like a river, snatching his opponents like huge trees through his mighty torrent:

> When young, you applauded him; in his old age you hooted and mocked him because his genius for raillery had gone. Cratinus again was like a torrent of glory rushing across the plain, up-rooting oak, plane tree and rivals and bearing them pell-mell in his wake.[115]

Similarly, we see that Kamateros managed to acquire great fame for himself thanks to the streams of his words (ῥέων τε τῷ λόγῳ). But while real literary talent stands behind Cratinus' poetic downpour, Kamateros is derided as an uncultivated babbler. As Carolina Cupane has aptly noted, such a "bombastic loquacity" practiced by Kamateros was regarded as a paragon of rusticity (ἀγροικία) and the polar opposite of the much-desired urbanity (ἀστειότης) of the educated aristocracy, which manifested itself in the "mildness of speech"[116] It is no coincidence that the ascent of vulgar rustics in Athenian politics forms the essential motifs of Knights and Clouds. The central figure of Clouds, Strepsiades, is an unschooled rustic (ἄγροικος)[117] whose financial resources are drained by his son, Pheidippides, who is addicted to gambling. As a consequence, Strepsiades decides to send the youngster to Socrates' Thinkery (φροντιστήριον) in order to learn how to win every case in court and help his father dispose of all the creditors who wish to recover their money. However, it quickly turns out that the Thinkery is filled with uneducated simpletons who enquire into the most bizarre and trivial matters. Correspondingly, we learn in Knights that the only reason why the Sausage Seller can rule the city is that he is the worst knave, a scoundrel and impertinent.[118] Also, he hardly knows how to read,[119] and, as one character admits in the play: "A demagogue must be neither an educated nor an honest man; he has to be a fool and a rogue."[120]

Without a doubt, the convergence of themes between the excerpt from the Χρονικὴ διήγησις and Aristophanes' play goes even further. The two slaves in Knights, Demosthenes and Nikias, consider in their comic dialogue how to deal with their greedy and cruel master Paphlagon.[121] For want of a better solution Demosthenes proposes drinking unmixed wine. They have to choose between death by suicide or devising a plan that will help the servants avoid this 'terminal' solution[122] and, at the end of the day, it is wine which activates one's mind:

> Demosthenes: … but bring me quickly a measure of wine (οἴνου χοᾶ) so that I may water my mind and say something fine (τὸν νοῦν ἵν' ἄρδω καὶ λέγω τι δεξιόν).
> Nikias: Ah me! How in the world would your drinking aid us?

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[113] The topos might have originated from the sympotic context from which Old Comedy originated. Wilkins, The Boastful Chef 249–256.

[114] Aristophanes, Equites 506–546 (Wilson).

[115] Aristophanes, Equites 526–528 (Wilson). English translation by E. O'Neill, The Complete Greek Drama Volume 2, 501.

[116] Cupane, Στήλη τῆς ἀστειότητος 203–204.

[117] Aristophanes, Nubes (Wilson) 43: ἐμοὶ γὰρ ἦν ἄγροικος ἥδιστος βίος and *ibidem* 47: ἄγροικος ὢν ἐξ ἄστεως.

[118] Aristophanes, Equites 180–181 (Wilson).

[119] Aristophanes, Equites 188–189 (Wilson).

[120] Aristophanes, Equites 191–192 (Wilson): ἡ δημαγωγία γὰρ οὐ πρὸς μουσικοῦ ἔτ' ἐστὶν ἀνδρὸς οὐδὲ χρηστοῦ τοὺς τρόπους, ἀλλ' εἰς ἀμαθῆ καὶ βδελυρόν.

[121] Aristophanes, Equites 73–102 (Wilson).

[122] Aristophanes, Equites 80–85 (Wilson).

Demosthenes: Very much indeed! Give it to me, and I shall recline. For when I'm drunk, I shall pour out everywhere tiny counsels, thoughts and arguments (βουλευματίων καὶ γνωμιδίων καὶ νοιδίων).[123]

Creativity and wine-drinking were, of course, the leitmotifs of ancient sympotic poetry – lyric genius was believed to be born through the consumption of wine.[124] Nonetheless, for Demosthenes, the traditional theme is a mere excuse for inebriating himself. By no means does he intend to create any poetic verse: in his alcoholic stupor he will pour out (or even vomit) only little counsels, thoughts and ideas – products of far worse quality than ingenious poetic output.

Sailing through the comic seas of drunkenness

Choniates portrays Kamateros in the passage as a mighty drunkard, who soaked in seas of wine like a sponge. Yet, litres of alcohol did not debilitate John's reasoning. Conversely, by means of such incontinent drinking, Choniates writes, he uttered something wise and he excited and watered his reasoning: ἀλλ' ἔλεγέ τι σοφόν, ἀναφλέγων τε καὶ ἄρδων ἐν τῷ πίνειν τὸ λογιζόμενον[125] – a phrase similar to the already quoted utterance of Demosthenes: τὸν νοῦν ἵν' ἄρδω καὶ λέγω τι δεξιόν. The verb ἄρδω used here by Choniates cannot be explained as simply a learned alternative to the common-speech ποτίζω. It was a well-known and widely-cited line and its source was clearly known to Byzantine authors. In his Commentary on the Iliad, Eustathios of Thessalonike quotes it at least three times and twice he identifies Aristophanes as its original author.[126]

Choniates' artistry reveals itself chiefly in his skillful linking of comic invective directed against John's poor intellectual capacities with his subversive drunkenness. Both motives are connected through the rich symbolism of water images: Kamateros "flows with his speech", almost vomiting the words like the Aristophanic slave (ῥέων τε τῷ λόγῳ), absorbs seas of wine (κατὰ τοὺς θαλαττίους χόας), without flooding his mind with it (οὐ κατεπόντου τὸν νοῦν). The water imagery in the passage is emphasised by constant repetitions of water-related terms, while the image of words pouring out of one's mouth is a play on the well-known comic theme of release of bodily fluids[127] – the impropriety of corporeal physical reaction is neatly balanced by rhetorical adornment captured in the almost idyllic picture of fresh spring water. The historian, in addition, exhibits in-depth knowledge of a standard ancient comic and sympotic nautical topos which equated the infinity of the sea with the obfuscation of the drunkard.[128] Here, Choniates alters the motif – his protagonist is in command of the boundless seas of drunkenness, the more he drinks, the more sober he is.

John's drinking abilities became a game enjoyed by the emperor himself – and are further explored in one more entertaining anecdote:

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[123] Aristophanes, Equites 95–100 (Wilson).

[124] On the contrary, as Davidson remarks, in the social sphere "in opposition to wine, water-drinking was a sign of extreme care and industriousness." Davidson, Courtesans 155. Cf. Athenaeus, Deipnosophistai X 31.6 (II 431 Kaibel): οἶνος καὶ φρονέοντας ἐς ἀφροσύνας ἀναβάλλει.

[125] Niketas Choniates 114.4–5 (van Dieten).

[126] Eustathios, Commentarii ad Homeri Illiadem (ed. M. van der Valk, Eustathii archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes. Leiden 1976) 2.508.3: ὅ ἐστι διαβρέχειν τὸ σῶμα, κατὰ τὸ «τέγγε πνεύμονας οἴνῳ», καὶ κατὰ τὸ «κίρνα, τὸν νοῦν ἵν' ἄρδω»; 2.663.10: ὃ καὶ ὁ Κωμικὸς ὑποκρουόμενός φησι «τὸν νοῦν ἵν' ἄρδω καὶ λέγω τι δεξιόν»; III 904.18 Ἀριστοφάνης δὲ ἄλλως ὡς κομίζοντα νοῦν. τοῦτο γὰρ ἐμφαίνει ἐν τῷ «τὸν νοῦν ἵν' ἄρδω καὶ λέγω τί δεξιό».

[127] Wilkins, The Boastful Chef 245.

[128] *Ibidem* 238 ff., Davidson, Courtesans 44–45. A famous story, quoted by Athenaeus in the Deipnosophists, tells of a house in Acragas which was called a "trireme", because young men drank so much there, they believed they had been crossing the sea in their vessel and started to throw the furniture out of the room in order to lighten the ship: Athenaeus, Deipnosophistai II 5 (I 86 Kaibel).

> … he was bet once by Emperor Manuel that he could gulp down to the bottom a porphyry wine-vessel (λεκανίδα) filled with water … well-pleased, Kamateros gave ear to the gamble. The bowl was filled to the brim (ὑπερχειλὴς) and contained two *choes* (κεχαδυῖα περὶ χόας δύο); after he had stooped down like an ox (ὁ δὲ κύψας ὡς βοῦς), he emptied the vessel, having paused his continuous drinking only once in order to take some air, and he immediately received from the emperor the prizes which had been accepted in the wager.[129]

The passage once more plays with well-known literary topoi. For one, a drunkard (φιλοπότης)[130] is, as James Davidson points out, a common comic character – but in Old Comedy the accusation of drunkenness was not a grave offence and it might have been far more embarrassing to accuse someone of excessive inebriation than to be a drunkard.[131]

By contrast, drunkenness forms an essential part of Choniates' social criticism.[132] Kamateros' intoxication stands as metonym for the wasteful and mindless self-indulgence of the ruling classes – even the emperor seems to be more concerned with the drunken feats of his useless tax official than with the affairs of the state. Although the vessel which John empties seems to be filled with water, the episode very clearly points to the enormous drinking abilities of the tax official. The passage is full of words and phrases taken directly from comic and sympotic traditions, where they are used in wine-drinking contexts.[133] Furthermore, the mention of a λεκανίς overflowing with wine and the act of almost uninterrupted drinking refers us back to comic material. Large, bottomless ladles and "deep-drinking" forms another cliché of luxurious drinking in comic tradition[134] and some of the biggest vessels were even called "breathless cups" owing to the fact that the wine was supposed to be drunk without taking a breath.[135] Pausing to take in some air serves to emphasize the enormous size of the λεκανίς which even the mighty drunkard is unable to cope with in one go. Furthermore, as we have seen, just before the wager episode Kamateros himself is portrayed as being perfectly able to keep up with the foreign monarchs who were used to drinking wine from big amphorae as well as from vessels as large as the one used by Herakles.[136] Drinking directly from the ladles is another standard motif of comic inebriation.[137]

In addition, the physicality of the two excerpts is more than pronounced – such a vivid imagery makes the reader almost feel the gulps go through John's throat (χανδὸν ἐμφορούμενος, διεκροφῆσαι τὴν πορφύρεον λεκανίδα, τὸ ἄγγος ἐκένωσεν).[138] John Wilkins comments that the human body as material

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[129] Niketas Choniates 114.15–28 (van Dieten): συνέθετό ποτε τῷ βασιλεῖ Μανουὴλ ὕδατος πλησθεῖσαν διεκροφῆσαι τὴν πορφύρεον λεκανίδα … ὡς δὲ τὸν λόγον ἀσμένως ὁ Καματηρὸς ἠνωτίσατο, ἡ μὲν λεκανὶς ἦν ὑπερχειλὴς ὕδατος, κεχαδυῖα περὶ χόας δύο, ὁ δὲ κύψας ὡς βοῦς τὸ ἄγγος ἐκένωσεν, ἅπαξ ἀνακόψας τὸ συνεχὲς τῆς πόσεως καὶ τότε ὡς τὸ πνεῦμα πλεῖον συλλέξειε, καὶ εἶχεν εὐθὺς τὰ ἐκ συμφώνου πρὸς βασιλέως ἀποδιδόμενα.

[130] Athenaeus, Deipnosophistai X 42.10–11 (II 442 Kaibel): φίλοινος δ' ἐστὶν ὁ πρὸς οἶνον ἕτοιμος, φιλοπότης δὲ ὁ πρὸς πότους, κωθωνιστὴς δὲ ὁ μέχρι μέθης.

[131] Davidson, Courtesans 155.

[132] Which renders his ideological vantage point closer to Theopompus' critique of drunken tyrants, as attested to by Athenaeus: Athenaeus, Deipnosophistai X 47 (II 447–449 Kaibel).

[133] Certainly, the episode is fictitious, given the sheer impossibility of containing seven litres (two *choes*) of water within the human stomach; cf. Kislinger, Being and Well-Being in Byzantium 153. It is hence a very good example of comic πλάσμα which I discuss briefly in the conclusion. Also see Athenaeus' discussion of literary uses of the vessel, ἄγγος, from which Kamateros drinks: Athenaeus, Deipnosophistai XI 99.1–17 (III 100 Kaibel).

[134] Cf. Athenaeus, Deipnosophistai X 47–53 (II 447–455 Kaibel).

[135] Davidson, Courtesans 64–65.

[136] Niketas Choniates 114.10–13 (van Dieten).

[137] Davidson, Courtesans 48.

[138] The use of the body and bodily imagery has been listed and briefly discussed by A. Kazhdan, Der Körper im Geschichtswerk des Niketas Choniates, in: Fest und Alltag in Byzanz, ed. G. Prinzing – D. Simon. München 1990, 91–106.

objects is of particular interest in comic literature. The jaws and the throat play the most important role in the depictions of gluttons and drunkards. Aristophanic characters persistently guzzle, swallow, bite off, bruise with the teeth, grind with the jaws.[139] Surely, the corporeality of Choniates' text reaches a similar level.

Thus, having accepted the wager, Kamateros is pictured as taking a huge overflowing vessel, bending forward like an ox and guzzling down two *choes* of beverage.[140] The phrase ὁ δὲ κύψας ὡς βοῦς immediately evokes a vivid image. On one level of interpretation the aim of the jest is simple enough, as it illustrates the act of covetous drinking, while the comparison ὡς βοῦς adds a humorous overtone to the image. At the same time, the participle κύψας is yet another term which was endowed with a special meaning in Aristophanic plays and it has already appeared in the "soup" episode related to John of Poutza. The entry in the Suda provides an explanation of the term which indicates that it carries a similar meaning to the English expression "having stooped down." Moreover, it directly quotes Aristophanes' Peace, commenting that κεκυφότες and κύψας denote feature characteristic of the gluttons:

> Having stooped forward/bent forward (κεκυφότες καὶ κύψας): Aristophanes says about the Beetle: "how the accursed creature, having bent forward, eats" – and by this pose he suggests gluttony. And it is clear that he expressed gluttony because chiefly those of men and animals who are bent forward towards their food and cling to it seem to eat greedily and over-eagerly.[141]

Both participles clearly point to the savagery of the incontinent eating of gluttons, who greedily devour their fare in a beast-like position. Certainly, both Johns rapaciously drink off their bowls. John of Poutza, having bent forward (ἐγκύψας), greedily guzzles his soup with his mouth wide open (i.e. in one draught – ἀμυστί), while Kamateros bends forward and empties his huge vessel. Yet again, if we look at the term in its original context in the Peace, it gains additional comedic force. The play opens with the complaints of two slaves who are ordered by their master, Trygaeus, to knead cakes of dung (ἐξ ὀνίδων πεπλασμένη) for his beetle. The second slave suddenly addresses the audience, asking whether anyone knows where to buy an airtight nose, for there is no work more abominable than to knead the food for the choosy beetle, who refuses to eat the cake unless moulded for the entire day. Peeping through a chink made by the slightly open door, he looks at the creature consuming its favourite fare in the other room of the house where the play is staged:

> The cursed creature! It wallows in its food (οἷον δὲ κύψας ὁ κατάρατος ἐσθίει)! It grips it between its claws like a wrestler clutching his opponent, and with head and feet together rolls up its paste like a rope-maker twisting a hawser. What an indecent, stinking, gluttonous beast! I don't know what angry god let this monster loose upon us, but of a certainty it was neither Aphrodite nor the Graces.[142]

Surely, Choniates' allusion might have evoked a very clear picture in the minds of those acquainted with the Peace. The beetle is, moreover, a guise of the aforementioned corrupt Athenian politician

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[139] Guzzling, ῥοφεῖν see Aristophanes, Equites 51, 905; Pax 716, Vespae 814, 906 (Wilson); bruise with teeth, φλάω Pax 1306, Plutus 784 (Wilson); bite off, τρώγω: Pax 1328, Ach. 801, 803, 806; Eq. 1077, Lys. 537 (Wilson); swallow, καταβροχθίζει: Equites 826, 357 (Wilson); grinding with the jaws (σμώχω γνάθοις): Pax 1308–1309 (Wilson). For the discussion of these and other terms see Wilkins, The Boastful Chef 25.

[140] Niketas Choniates 114.25–27 (van Dieten).

[141] Suda κ 1276 (III 90 Adler): Κεκυφότες· καὶ Κύψας· Ἀριστοφάνης περὶ κανθάρου φησίν· οἷον δὲ κύψας ὁ κατάρατος ἐσθίει. διὰ τοῦ σχήματος τὴν ἀδδηφαγίαν αὐτοῦ δηλοῖ. καὶ γὰρ τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῶν θρεμμάτων οἱ μάλιστα τοῖς ἐδέσμασιν ἐγκεκυφότες καὶ προσκείμενοι δοκοῦσιν ἀπλήστως καὶ περισπουδάστως ἐσθίειν.

[142] Aristophanes, Pax 31–37 (Wilson). English translation by E. O'Neill, Aristophanes. Peace. The Complete Greek Drama, Volume 2. New York 1938, 675.

Cleon, the very Paphlagon of Knights, as one of the slaves reveals at the outset of Peace: "Slave A: … What is this? What does the beetle mean? Slave B: … I think it refers to Cleon, who now eats dung in Hades."[143] Again, we should not exclude the possibility that Choniates was playing with another political allusion to Aristophanes' comedy through his use of the participle κύψας.

KAMATEROS: ARISTOPHANIC KYAMOTPΩΞ

The final episode in the series pictures John Kamateros as an ardent eater of green beans:[144]

> Because he was unable to resist feasting (ἑστιάσεως) on green beans (χλωροὶ κύαμοι), he … devoured their entire fields and attacked them more fiercely than a jackal … And while he was encamped by the river (ἐνσκηνησάμενος), when he spotted a small field of beans on its other bank … he crossed the river (διέβη τε τὸν ποταμὸν) and he bit off (ἀποτραγὼν) the major part of the field. Yet, he did not hold himself in this way – he packed that which he had not managed to gobble up in bundles and by lifting them on his back, he crossed the river at once. Then, when he had sat on the floor of his tent, he started counting the beans so eagerly (ἀνελέγετο τοὺς κυάμους ἡδέως), as if he had been fasting and had not eaten anything for a long time.[145]

Like a comic glutton, who eats alone, John is ruled by his voracious appetite and is unable to contain himself. The image created by Choniates operates within the standard literary patterns of the aberrant behaviour of voracious eaters. Powerless, having no will and being at the mercy of his own prodigious appetite, he is focused only on satiating his insatiable lust.

At the same time, John breaches the accepted codes of commensality – he is a μονοφάγος, a character well-known to Old Comedy, who quenches his gluttonous thirst without giving anyone a share of the meal.[146] At the same time, the passage fits well within the discourse of luxury – a mode of social critique employed by both Choniates and Aristophanes. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Byzantine and Athenian notions of luxury were parallel – in many instances it was a matter of how one eats not what one eats that labels a person a gourmand.[147] Athenaeus, quoting Alcman, once again lends a helpful remark which illustrates this point:

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[143] By the time Peace was staged, Cleon was already dead, thence the reference to Hades. Aristophanes, Pax 43–49 (Wilson).

[144] Kazhdan has analysed vegetal imagery in Choniates and traced its classical roots in many instances, without however any contextual interpretation: A. Kazhdan, El mundo vegetal en la 'Historia' de Nicetas Coniates. *Erytheia: Revista de estudios bizantinos y neogriegos* 16 (1995) 63–72. Similarly: A. R. Littlewood, Vegetal and Animal Imagery in the History of Niketas Choniates, in: Theatron. Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter, ed. M. Grünbart (*Millennium Studies* 13). Berlin – New York 2007, 223–258. On Byzantine diet in general see E. Kislinger, I cristiani d'Oriente: Regole e realtà alimentari nel mondo bizantino, in: Storia dell' alimentazione, ed. J.-L. Flandrin – M. Montanari. Roma – Bari 1997, 250–265; J. Koder, Gemüse in Byzanz. Die Versorgung Konstantinopels mit Frischgemüse im Lichte der Geoponika (*Byzantinische Geschichtsschreiber. Ergänzungsband* 3). Wien 1993; Dietetyka i sztuka kulinarna antyku i wczesnego Bizancjum (II-VII w.). Część II: pokarm dla ciała i ducha / Dietetics and Culinary Art of Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium (2nd–7th century AD). Part II: Nourishment for the Body and the Soul, ed. K. Jagusiak – M. Kokoszko – Z. Rzeźnicka (*Byzantina Lodziensia* XIX). Łódź 2015.

[145] Niketas Choniates 114.29–115.37 van Dieten): Ἥττων δὲ ὢν τῆς τῶν χλωρῶν κυάμων ἑστιάσεως … ὅλας οὖν ἀρούρας κατεδαπάνα καὶ θωὸς ἀκριβέστερον ἐπεξήρχετο. καὶ τότε παρὰ τὸν ποταμὸν ἐνσκηνησάμενος, ἐπειδήπερ εἰς τὴν περαίαν κυάμων θεάσαιτο γήδιον … τὸ πλεῖον ἀποτραγὼν οὐδ' οὕτως ἀπέσχετο, ἀλλ' ἐς δεσμὰς τὸ μὴ κατεδηδομένον ξυνενεγκὼν ἐπὶ νώτου τε ἀράμενος διέβη τε τὸν ποταμὸν αὐτίκα δὴ μάλα καὶ ἐπὶ δαπέδου τῆς σκηνῆς καθιζήσας ἀνελέγετο τοὺς κυάμους ἡδέως, ὡς εἰ νῆστις ἦν ἐπὶ μακρὸν καὶ ἀπόσιτος. Magoulias, O City of Byzantium 65 incorrectly translates the verb ἀναλέγω as "devour"; while Pontani, Grandezza e Catastrofe 259–261 translates it as "peels off" – but I have not been able to find any use of this verb in this particular meaning.

[146] Wilkins, The Boastful Chef 67–69.

[147] *Ibidem* 257. After all, pulses were, together with grain products, the staple food of the Byzantines. See J. Koder, Stew and Salted Meat – Opulent Normality in the Diet of Every Day? In: Eat, Drink and Be Merry (Luke 12:19): Food and Wine in Byzantium, ed. L. Brubaker – K. Linardou (*Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies. Publications* 13). Aldershot –

… full of pulse-broth (ἔτνεος), which e'en the glutton
Alcman would like to feast on warm
After the wintry solstice sets in
For the dainties does not care,
But loves the common people's dishes
As long as they are full enough.[148]

Discussing the episode related to John of Poutza, I have attempted to show that in literary use foodstuffs can be endowed with multiple meanings and that Choniates is consciously exploring this literary function. To be sure, Kamateros' ardent passion for the beans is another case in point. The very mention of beans serves as another multi-layered metonymy.[149] After all, in ancient Greek culture bean eating was already problematised and endowed with moral significance by Pythagoras and his followers who famously advocated abstaining from their consumption.[150]

In addition, beans in Aristophanic comedies might have sexual connotations, just as was the case with John of Poutza's soup: the firmness of the raw κύαμοι served Aristophanes as a metonym for young female breasts.[151] This interpretation might become even more plausible if we consider the fact that pulses, including κύαμοι, were regarded as aphrodisiacs by medical writers such as Oribasios, Paul of Aegina, Aetios of Amida.[152] Similar testimony can be found in the work of an

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Burlington 2007, 67–70. Idem, Gemüse in Byzanz 22–25 *et passim*; Kislinger, Cristiani d'Oriente 254, 260. A. Dalby, Tastes of Byzantium. The Cuisine of a Legendary Empire. New York 2010, 53, 80.

148 Athenaeus, Deipnosophistai X 10.26–7 (II 405–6 Kaibel): ἀλλ᾽ ἔτι νῦν γ᾽ ἄπυρος, τάχα δὲ πλέος / ἔτνεος, οἷον ὁ παμφάγος Ἀλκμὰν / ἠράσθη χλιερὸν πεδὰ τὰς τροπάς. / οὔ τι γὰρ ἠὺ τετυγμένον ἔσθει … /ἀλλὰ τὰ κοινὰ γάρ, ὥσπερ ὁ δᾶμος, / ζατεύει. English translation from: The Deipnosophists or the Banquet of the Learned of Athenaeus, vol. II, ed. C.D. Yonge. London 1854, 656.

149 I cannot agree with Ilias Anagnostakis who reads the episode literally as a factual occurrence, which, in his opinion, reflects the Byzantines' taste for this particular pulse. While the Byzantines consumed vast quantities of beans, I harbour serious doubts that Choniates' intention was simply to reflect any fashion for the consumption of raw beans – such a reading does not do justice to the comic/satirical overtones of the episode (I. Anagnostakis, Byzantine Delicacies, in: Flavours and Delights 99). Similarly, W. Treadgold, The Unwritten Rules for Writing Byzantine History, in: Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade 22–27 August 2016. Belgrade 2016, 277–292 at 286 has unconvincingly argued that the anecdotes about John of Poutze and John Kamateros are "trivial exaggerations" which Choniates "must have heard from someone". However, such a claim is not only unsubstantiated by the internal evidence from the History, but also (again) it depreciates Choniates' literary talent and tradition within which he operated. Discussing the passage, Garland, The Rhetoric of Gluttony 48, has commented that χλωροὶ κύαμοι might be a direct reference to Batrachomyomachia 124–125, where they serve as shin-pads for the mice (ed. T.W. Allen, Homeri opera, vol. 5. Oxford 1912): … κνημῖδας μὲν πρῶτον ἐφήρμοσαν εἰς δύο μηρούς, ῥήξαντες κυάμους χλωρούς, εὖ δ᾽ ἀσκήσαντες. The parallel is not very clear, yet the words are similar. Such a reading furnishes the passage with a comic overtone, turning it into a travesty of a military campaign: Kamateros' crossing the river to attack the beans and bring back the booty stolen from the "enemy" to his own tent (ἐνσκηνησάμενος, διαβαίνειν τὸ ποταμόν) has obvious military connotations. Certainly, pulses, were a staple food of heroes, dragon-slayers, military saints and athletes in the Greek literary tradition. The beans, because they caused flatulence, were associated with bodily strength and a warlike character (for this see I. Anagnostakis, Pallikaria of Lentils. The "Brave Boys" Beans, in: Flavours and Delights 133–137). In this reading, Kamateros simply fails as a "warrior" – the only "heroic" feat he is capable of is attacking … the field of plants.

150 P. Garnsey, Food and Society in Classical Antiquity. Cambridge 1999, 87–89. F. Simoons, Plants of Life, Plants of Death. Madison 1998, 192 ff. offers a discerning analysis of the Pythagorean ban, linking it with favism, a genetic condition triggered by the consumption of pulses. Eating raw beans directly from the field might have been another way of making fun of Kamateros. As Stathakopoulos has remarked, the Byzantines were fully aware that raw food, in opposition to cooked foodstuffs, was fitting for animals and savages, not civilized men (D. Stathakopoulos, Between the Field and the Plate: How Agricultural Products Were Processed Into Food, in: Eat, Drink and Be Merry 27). For the raw/cooked as a cultural marker see C. Lévi -Strauss, The Raw and the Cooked: Mythologiques, Volume 1. Chicago 1983.

151 Wilkins, The Boastful Chef 149. Green beans, as attested for instance in Lucian's Vitarum Auctio, also had another sexual connotation: the Pythagoreans purportedly believed that it was "a seed of men" and resembled the penis: Lucian, Vitarum Auctio 6 (ed. A. M. Harmon, Lucian. Cambridge 1915, reprint 1960, II 459): πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ τὸ πᾶν γονή εἰσι, καὶ ἦν ἀποδύσῃς κύαμον ἔτι χλωρὸν ἐόντα, ὄψεαι τοῖσιν ἀνδρείοισι μορίοισιν ἐμφερέα τὴν φυήν.

152 Paul of Aegina, Epitome iatrike I 35.26–28 (ed. J. L. Heiberg, Paulus Aegineta libri I-IV [*CMG* IX 1]. Leipzig – Berlin 1921, 24): ὀσπρίων δὲ κύαμοί τε ἐρέβινθοι καὶ ὦχροι καὶ δολιχοὶ καὶ πίσοι πνεύματος ὑποπιμπλάντες καὶ τῷ ἀφόνῳ τῆς τροφῆς,

eleventh-century medical writer, Symeon Seth, who acknowledges that chickpeas have the greatest aphrodisiac power of all pulses.[153] In medical literature the χλωροὶ κύαμοι were moreover thought to be worse for one's belly than regular beans and, again, to produce more gases than the standard *Vicia Faba* – hence their excessive consumption might have lent additional comic force to the passage.[154]

More importantly, however, a bean eater is a character not at all alien to Aristophanic plays. The most famous of them is possibly Herakles, whose colossal appetite for this particular kind of pulse is explored in Frogs. In this play, Dionysos, who wishes to set off to Hades in order to recover Euripides from the dead, illustrates to the foolish Herakles his longing for the deceased tragic poet by referring to bean-stew (ἔτνος).[155] Indeed, longing for ἔτνος seems to be the mythical hero's only strong desire; his role as a popular glutton and drunkard whose insatiable hunger and fondness for drinking is explored further in Frogs, Birds and in various other pieces of ancient literature.[156]

To be sure, there is an inherent interrelationship between the χλορὸς κύαμος mentioned by Choniates and Heraklean ἔτνος from Frogs. LSJ notes that the latter denotes "thick soup made with peas or beans," being an amalgam term for either ἔτνος πίσινον (pea stew), ἔτνος φάκινον (lentil stew) and ἔτνος κύαμιον (*Vicia Faba* stew).[157] Further intertextual correspondences between the excerpts in question and Aristophanes' Frogs might be enumerated – the sponge (σπογγιά) used by Choniates to reinforce the image of soaking in gallons of wine by Kamateros is present in the comic play to absorb a liquid of a somewhat different nature. In Frogs 482–488 Dionysos asks his slave Xanthias for a σφογγιά after the god has soiled his pants from fear. The use of quite a rare word may indeed be another allusion directing the reader to the comedy which was one of the cornerstones of Byzantine education. What is more, the entry in the Suda on σπογγιά quotes this very line.[158] Moreover, Herakles, a central character in the first part of the play, is, as I have shown, named in Choniates' passage and is thus yet another intertextual allusion in the passage.

Within the tradition of Aristophanic/Old Comedy, eating beans also had very strong political connotations. LSJ notes that a bean (κύαμος) also refers to "a lot by which public officers were elected at Athens." Hence, κυαμοτρώξ, another politically flavoured term, was used to denote a gluttonous bean eater in Aristophanes' comedies as well as the one who "eats up" the votes through which he is elected.[159] The noun could also carry the meanings of uncontrollable greediness, deviant eating habits

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similarly Aetios of Amida, Libri medicinales III 8.15–17 (ed. A. Olivieri, Aetii Amideni Libri medicinales I–IV [*CMG* VIII 1]. Leipzig – Berlin 1935, 267).

153 Symeon Seth, Syntagma 37.9–11 (ed. B. Langkavel, Simeonis Sethi Syntagma de alimentorum facultatibus. Leipzig 1868): Οἱ ἐρέβινθοι … δύσπεπτοί τε καὶ περιττωματικοὶ καὶ ἀφροδισιαστικοὶ καὶ τῶν κυάμων τροφιμώτεροι.

154 See e.g. Dioskorides, De Materia Medica II 105.1–7 (ed. M. Wellman, Pedanii Dioscuridi Anazarbei De Materia Medica Libri Quinque. Berlin 1907, I 179): κύαμος Ἑλληνικὸς πνευματώτικος … ὁ δὲ χλορὸς κακοστομαχώτερος καὶ φυσωδέτερος. Similarly, Aetios of Amida, Libri Medicinales I 227.26–9 (99–100 Olivieri): [κύαμος] ἐστὶ δὲ ὡς ἔδεσμα μὲν εἴπερ δύσπεπτόν τε καὶ φυσῶδης … καὶ ὁ μὲν χλωρὸς ἐσθιόμενος, μᾶλλον μὲν ὑπέρχεται τὴν γαστέρα. Similarly in one of his poems, Michael Psellos advises taking only small quantities of vegetables and pulses: πάντων λαχάνων, ὀσπρίων μίκρον λάβε, because they cause indigestion and gases. Michael Psellos, Poema 15.3 (ed. L. G. Westerink, Michaelis Pselli Poemata. Leipzig – Stuttgart 1992, 238).

155 Aristophanes, Equites, 60–67 (Wilson).

156 E.g. Athenaeus, Deipnosophistai X 1–2 (II 396–7 Kaibel), Aristophanes, Aves 1333 ff. (Wilson); Aristophanes, Ranae (Wilson) 503 ff.

157 Similarly, an eleventh-century medical writer Symeon Seth observes: Περὶ κυάμων: Πολλὴ καὶ τούτων ἐστὶ ἡ χρῆσις, ἔτνους ἐξ αὐτῶν κατασκευαζομένου. Symeon Seth, Appendix 131.10–11 (Langkavel). Tzetzes in his scholium on Frogs 62 comments: ἐπεθύμησας ἐξαίφνης ἔτνους: δι' αἰνίγματος δῆθεν ἐμφαίνει τὸ περιττὸν τοῦ πόθου. 'ἔτνος' δὲ αὐτός … τοὺς ἐρεικτοὺς κυάμους εἶναι ἐδόκουν. Tzetzes, Commentarium in Ranas 62 (ed. W.J.W. Koster, Tzetzae commentarii in Aristophanem [*Scholia in Aristophanem* 4.3]. Groningen 1962).

158 Suda σ 952 (IV 952 Adler). Cf. Psellos' poem against the drunken monk Jacob: Psellos, Poema 22.95–96 (Westerink): ὡς γὰρ σπόγγος ἄνικμος ἀνιμᾷς τὸν οἶνον πᾶσι μέρεσι τοῦ σώματος.

159 Scholia in Equites 41g (ed. D.M. Jones – N.G. Wilson, Prolegomena de comoedia. Scholia in Acharnenses, Equites, Nubes [*Scholia in Aristophanem* 1.2]. Groningen 1969): κυαμοτρώξ: δικαστικός, κυάμους ἐσθίων. κυάμοις δὲ ἐχρῶντο οἱ δικασταὶ διὰ τὸ μὴ καθεύδειν ἢ ἀντὶ ψήφων. ἄλλοι δὲ διὰ τοῦ σ, κυαμοτρώς, ἄλλως: τρεφόμενος ἀπὸ τῶν κυάμων. ἐπεὶ ἀντὶ ψήφων κυάμοις ἐχρῶντο ἐν ταῖς χειροτονίαις τῶν ἀρχόντων καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

and rusticity and it appears in Knights 41 as an epithet of Demos, who has recently purchased the Paphlagon who is mentioned earlier as his slave. Κυαμτρώξ had also additional humorous potential in the comic tradition: bean-chewing seems to be a distant predecessor of gum-chewing – the Athenians chewed beans while performing boring tasks. A bean eater was then a useless, old state official whose job was so pointless that he struggled not to fall asleep. As the Suda comments:

> Eating beans (Κυάμους τρώγων): [i.e.] serving as a judge. Or otherwise: in order not to fall asleep, for you are a dotard.[160]

The scholium to Knights further adds that a bean eater is irascible, quick to anger[161] or litigious and austere.[162]

Incidentally, envy and anger permeate the entire presentation of Kamateros. Choniates begins the digression of John's machinations against Theodore Styppeiotes in order to show how irrational vice is and how hard it is to defend oneself against it (ὡς κἂν ἀσυλλόγιστόν τι πρᾶγμα καὶ δυσφύλακτον ἡ πονηρία).[163] Irascibility and litigiousness are, without a doubt, pronounced features of Kamateros' behaviour: he is skilful in hatching plots (καί δεινός ὢν καττῦσαι δόλους).[164] He accuses (ἐνδιαβάλλει) his rival of being a fraud and a liar and prosecutes him for state treason (γράφεται προδοσίας) and constantly devises new ways of slandering Styppeiotes in front of the emperor.[165] Finally Theodore, as a result of Kamateros' machinations, is blinded and his followers are eliminated. Hence, the episode of bean eating, seen through the lens of comic tradition, is a complex literary allusion that does not merely point to Kamateros' uncontrolled craving but also stands for his parasitic and strictly antisocial nature. Indeed, Kamateros' gluttonous appetite for the beans runs very close to the theme of subversive eating at the expense of the common people which forms the core literary motif of Knights.[166] Hence John's feasting on the beans points to eating at the expense of society, alluded to by the aforementioned terms ἀναλέγω and ἑστίασις.[167] After all, the protagonist of the episode held the office of logothete of the dromos and was responsible for the state's fiscal administration – a fact which lends additional credence to the political reading of the entire episode.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the beginning of this article I argued that Choniates uses tragedy and comedy as genres subordinate to historical discourse. Historical narrative, in his eyes, furnishes the reader with examples of noble and shameful behaviour and the reader is to choose which of them to follow. The portraits of the two Johns undoubtedly show base and destructive characters who are presented to the reader through the lens of Aristophanic comedy. The interplay of comedy and tragedy within historical discourse can, moreover, be explained as conscious authorial emplotment. Hayden White argues that historical narratives, which aim to explain factual events, are always cast in the form of a story of a specific kind (i.e. epic, tragedy, comedy, legend, farce or a mixture thereof). The author chooses which types to follow from the ones available to him/her within his/her own specific cultural context. As a result of this, the ideological overtone of a particular historical narration depends largely on the story-type,

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[160] Suda κ 2577 (III 203 Adler): Κυάμους τρώγων: δικάζων· ἢ ἵνα μὴ κοιμηθῇς·γέρων γὰρ εἶ.
[161] Scholia in Equites 41g (Jones – Wilson): κυαμοτρώξ … ἀκράχολος δέ, εἰς ὀργὴν εὔκολος.
[162] Scholia in Equites 41i (Jones – Wilson): ἔστι δὲ τὸ κυαμοτρὼξ ἀντὶ τοῦ φιλόδικος καὶ σκληρός.
[163] Niketas Choniates 111.27 (van Dieten).
[164] Niketas Choniates 111.43 (van Dieten).
[165] Niketas Choniates 112.47–48 (van Dieten).
[166] Wilkins, The Boastful Chef 179–201.
[167] *LSJ* 110–111, 698.

or types, which are consciously chosen as a means of representing real events. This representation, in turn, enriches the narrated events with figurative meaning.[168] Therefore, the tragic downfall of the Byzantine Empire in 1204 was, from Choniates' perspective, a bitter farce of its decadent, idle and incompetent ruling classes. At the same time, however, the historian is also careful not to reduce his tragic account to a comic mockery: "for now we are risking to change the weeping into laughter" (νῦν γε καὶ τὸν οἶκτον εἰς γέλων μετενεγκεῖν κινδυνεύομεν).[169]

Hence, by means of following the literary tradition of Aristophanic comedies, Choniates adds multiple meanings to his literary narrative. This is achieved both through skilful and intricate allusions and through conscious exploration of motifs and techniques which originated in the comedies of the Attic playwright. The interconnected spheres of gluttony, food, sex and politics permeate the History as well as the comedies of Aristophanes. In the Χρονικὴ διήγησις the human body is used as the vehicle of social critique – the gluttonous, drunken and sexually lewd bodies of the emperors and the representatives of their retinues serve as metonymical representations of the decomposing state. This obsession with physicality, as I have pointed out, is also characteristic of Aristophanes' poetry.

Last, but not least, according to literary criticism, πλάσμα, fiction, is a fundamental feature of the comic genre.[170] The essence of comedy lies in violating the existing status quo with the clear aim of subverting its order and exhibiting the fallacies which underlie it. Πλάσμα is also a literary tool employed by Choniates in the episodes relating the gluttonous and drunken enterprises of the two Johns which have been analysed in this article. They are narratives which neither imitate nor record actual occurrences. John of Poutza, after all, pays for his "little soupie" in obols, hence in Ancient Athenian, not Byzantine currency, while Kamateros, in his gobbling up of the entire field of beans and unlimited drinking, is endowed with the unnatural strengths of the mythical Herakles – a pot-bellied glutton from Frogs. Hence, Choniates, just like Aristophanes, constructs in these portraits what John Wilkins captured in the idea of a "comic polis" – an alternative reality which plays the role of a critical commentary on the fallacious political system.[171] In this comic polis of the Χρονικὴ διήγησις the wicked are derided and their insatiable behaviour is pushed to the extreme in order to demonstrate their threat to the real polis and, therefore, to the empire.

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[168] H. White, Storytelling: Historical and Ideological, in: Centuries Ends, Narrative Means, ed. R. Newman. Stanford 1996, 58–78, at 71–74.

[169] Niketas Choniates 499.51–52 (van Dieten).

[170] As Mullett, Novelisation, *passim* argues, the broader use of fiction (πλάσμα) in the twelfth century is one of the many facets of novelisation in the Byzantine literature of the period.

[171] Wilkins, The Boastful Chef 46–47. Davidson, Courtesan xx offers the following remark: "Historians of the ancient world would prefer to work with honest-seeming, authoritative sources, such as Thucydides or Polybius who seem to have done their homework properly. Greek comedy, on the other hand, though it was clearly dealing with the real world, was far from straightforwardly realistic … This means we have to approach comic fragments with caution to see whether they are referring to an everyday situation or some fantastic scenario."