Vegetal and Animal Imagery in the History of Niketas Choniates

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In recent years various scholars have applied modern literary criticism to Byzantine literature,¹ but, unlike for Classical Greek literature, the long line of traditional literary criticism is almost entirely non-existent: indeed almost without exception editions of Byzantine authors lack literary (and even grammatical) comment of any kind. To help fill this yawning chasm I wrote an article on Michael Psellos' imagery that is little more than a detailed catalogue of similes and metaphors in the *Chronographia*.² The present work is a similar attempt for Niketas Choniates.³

In their influential literary study⁴ Alexander Kazhdan and Simon Franklin devoted the last chapter (256–286) to aspects of especially Choniates and Nikephoros Gregoras. Their most valuable comments, I believe, consider effective use of colour to communicate judgements, but a few pages (263–269) treat of imagery. Nonetheless, despite, for instance, the statement that “Choniates makes figurative use of a large menagerie of wild animals”, we find in this category that, through constraint of space, they merely name nine mammals and three reptiles, with a small selection of references, and summarize two similes concerning them. They thus fail to indicate both the huge variety of images used and the historian's typically Byzantine obsession for variety of wording for the same image. It is my primary purpose now to illustrate these two types of variety, for the second of which the relevant passages are quoted nearly always in full in Greek (as well as

1 For a brief summary of approaches see A. R. Littlewood, *Literature*, in: J. Harris (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in Byzantine History*, London 2005, 133–146.

2 Imagery in the *Chronographia* of Michael Psellos, in: C. Barber/D. Jenkins (eds.), *Reading Michael Psellos (The Medieval Mediterranean 61)*, Leiden/Boston 2006, 13–56. I have not yet seen the contemporaneously published article by E. McCartney, *The Use of Metaphor in Michael Psellos' Chronographia*, in: J. Burke (ed.), *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in honour of Roger Scott (Byzantina Australiensia 16)*, Melbourne 2006, 84–91.

3 As with Psellos there seems to be no important distinction between metaphors and the far more common similes, which latter are usually introduced by ὡς, ὥσει, καθάπερ, κατά, δίκην, οἷα, ὃν τρόπον, ὅσα or some such word or expression or, far less commonly, by a comparative adjective or adverb or a verb of comparison.

4 *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Cambridge 1984.

in translation),⁵ thus also giving some idea of Choniates' vast vocabulary. Since I too, however, suffer from constraint of space, I have chosen to treat of only two areas of imagery – vegetal and animal. This is unfortunate since some of his most memorable images involve quotidian actions or objects.⁶

Vegetal imagery has a long lineage in Greek literature from the time of the Homeric poems, where stalwart warriors were compared to vigorous trees in the *Iliad* and where the erotic element is introduced in the *Odyssey* (6.163) in a comparison of Nausikaa with a palm.

Thus in Choniates the youthful Conrad, son of William of Montferrat, is, in a military context, described as being “comely in his bloom” (201.94: τὴν ὥραν εὐπρεπῆ), while a statue of the warrior maiden Athene has a body that “though without life partook of a full bloom as if living” (559.62: ζωῆς ἀπέχον μετεῖχεν ὡς ζῶν ἀνθηρότητος). The emphasis is, however, always more on beauteous or vigorous (or both) youth, rather than on stalwart prowess. Thus, perhaps inspired by *Iliad* 18.56 and *Odyssey* 6.163, Choniates has Alexios II Komnenos as a child shooting up “in growth like a thriving and sturdy young plant” (169.5–6: κατὰ εὐθαλὲς καὶ πῖον νεόφυτον εἰς αὕξην ἀνέτρεχεν). An interesting variation on this theme is the example of Constantine Doukas who, as a youth with his first beard, “promised, like plants of good stock, to bear fruit prematurely” (193.63–64: κατὰ τῶν φύτων τὰ εὐγενῆ καρπογονεῖν πρὸ ὥρας ἐπαγγελλόμενον).

Simply to describe the beauty on which he depended as his matchmaker (95.28: προμνήστρια) to gain the hand of an imperial bride, Constantine Angelos is said to have been “cultivating a meadow of beauty on his face” (95.26: καπὶ τοῦ προσώπου λειμῶνα κάλλους κηπεύων). Similar imagery, but more extended, makes Manuel I Komnenos compare the young Istvan succeeding his father Geza II on the Hungarian throne as “some most beautiful growth from a dissimilar root” (127.68–69: ἐκ ῥίζης ἀνομοίου φυέν τι κάλλι-στον). Choniates gets even farther from Homeric imagery with the youthful Andronikos I Komnenos who is like a “climbing shoot of fir” (139.50: ἔρνος ἀναβαίνων ἐλάτινον), for here the context of his foppishness suggests in part a bad sense, something brought out more fully in “the flower of youth” (54.69: τὸ

5 All quotations are from the text of I. A. van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia* (CFHB XI/I – Series Berolinensis), Berlin/New York 1975 (I have retained van Dieten's punctuation even when I find it illogical). All translations, deliberately literal rather than literary, are my own (I have modernized names of peoples, e.g. Byzantines for Ῥωμαῖοι).

6 One of the most memorable involves Constantine Mesopotamites' policy in the reign of Alexios III Angelos: he held the church in his left hand, the palace in his right “tying [them] closely together like a corner-stone binding the separate [walls]” (490.82–83: περισφίγγων ὅσα καὶ λίθος τῶν διεστώτων συνδέτης ἀκρόγωνος), to accomplish which “he inserted into the government his own brothers like wedges or hoops, or he hung them like earrings in both the emperor's ears” (ibid. 85–86: ὡς σφῆνὰς τινὰς καὶ βλήτρα τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ κασιγνήτους ἐνέβυσσε τῇ ἀρχῇ, ἢ ὡς ἐνώτια ταῖς τοῦ βασιλέως ἐκατέρας ἀπηώρησεν ἀκοαῖς).

νεοτήσιον ἄνθος) that prompts the young Manuel I to choose a promiscuous way of life. On the other hand the imagery may still be of vigorous manhood, but with an ominous twist: Manuel observed that pacifists forget that “thereby more enemies grow forth as from fertile farm-land” (89.56–57: πλείονες ἐντεῦθεν ὡς ἐκ πολύχοος γηδίου φύονται οἱ διάφοροι).

Application of vegetal imagery to a female occurs first in Greek literature with Homer’s Nausikaa, and thereafter it becomes far commoner than the application to males. Choniates, however, despite his numerous references to marriages of beautiful ladies, largely eschews it. With the exception of the rather masculine Athene he has only two instances. The daughter of Manuel I is “tall like a damp⁷ white poplar” (170.35–171.36: κατ’ ἀχερωΐδα ὑδρηλὴν ὑψηλή) and Anna, the daughter of Alexios III Angelos, enjoyed a veritable “rose-bed of beauty” (473.56: τῇ τοῦ κάλλους ῥοδωνία). Possibly there could be added to these examples Choniates’ report that Manuel for her prudence called his niece, the wife of Alexios Branas, the “nosegay of the family” (389.73: τῶν ἐκ γένους ὀσφράδιον) on account of the likely contents of such an item. There is one passage that applies the imagery to both male and female: when Andronikos married Anna “the ripe had no shame to lie with and embrace the unripe grape, the over-ripe the lass with upstanding breasts, the shrivelled and languid the rosy-fingered maiden trickling the dew of love” (275.15–276.19: οὐκ ἡσχύνετο ... συγκατακλίνεσθαι καὶ παραγκαλίζεσθαι ὁ πέπων τὴν ὀμφακίζουσαν, ὁ ὑπέρωρος τὴν ἡλικίαν τὴν ὀρθοτίτθιον νεάνιδα, ὁ ῥικνὸς καὶ χαλαρὸς τὴν ῥοδοδάκτυλον καὶ δρόσον ἔρωτος στάζουσαν).

Comparison of a part of the human body with vegetation is a regular theme of Greek literature (as of other literatures and, most influentially for the Byzantines in especially Marian imagery, of the Old Testament’s *Song of Solomon*). It has little interest for Choniates, perhaps because he associates it with popular, and especially erotic, poetry. Nonetheless we find the commonplace imagery of lips, in this case those of Athene’s statue (652.69–70), as flower-buds (κάλυκες), while monks “grow their field of beard long like a deep crop of corn” (558.32: βαθεὶ ληΐῳ κομῶντες τὴν τοῦ πάγωνος ἄρουραν).⁸

Far away from the imagery of youthful vigour and beauty we find the Byzantine army during an anxious night in camp “turning pale through fear just as the leaves of trees change (in colour) during the leaf-shedding season” (187.90–92: βαπτόμενοι πρὸς ὥχρον ὑπὸ δέους, εἰς οἷον τὰ πέταλα τῶν δένδρων κατὰ καιρὸν τὸν φυλλοχόον μεταμορφάζεται). It must be admitted that this image is not very effective and its author must have been thinking simply of change of

7 From a refreshing spring shower or from dew or being full of sap?

8 For a beardless face compared to a field stripped of corn see below, 229.

colour rather than the specific hues,⁹ for the vernal rather than the autumnal are closer to the pallor of fear in men's faces. Far better is the brutal comparison of the mutilated Andronikos, lacking a hand and an eye, with a "leafless old stump" (349.11–12: γεράνδρον ἄφυλλον). Botanically beyond reproach Choniates has Alexios III "clinging" to Constantine Mesopotamites, who in another passage is to the emperor as "all the herbage of the field",¹⁰ "as firmly as ivy" (490.64–65: ὅσα καὶ κιττός ἐξεχόμενος); and taking his cue from Aristophanes (Ran. 289) he makes Alexios III "thunder back with fury like a holm-oak suddenly bursting into fire" (493.80–81: ὡς πρίνος αὐτίκα καίόμενος τῷ θυμῷ ἐπεβρόντα).

Common imagery appears in his metaphor of the traitor John Spyridonakis as a thorn (534.71: σκόλοψ)¹¹ to Alexios III. Similarly "a baneful evil shot up like hemlock" (463.79–80: ἀνέβλαστε κατὰ κώνειον φθοροποιόν [κακόν]). Here the evil is the person of Isaac Doukas, but elsewhere one generation of men "engendered hemlock that ripened for no other reason than death" (292.56–57: ἐξέφυσε κώνεια πρὸς οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἀδρουθέντα ἢ θάνατον), where the poisonous plant is the following generation. More elaborate is the porphyrogenita Maria's insistence that the protosebastos Alexios "be cast utterly out of the palace with curses, be torn away like some tare that had grown alongside the noble planting and be punished with ruin for climbing and choking the emperor as if he were wheat" (232.47–233.49: τῶν βασιλείων ἀπροσκορακισθῆναι ... καὶ οἷά τι παρεκφυὲν ζιζάνιον τῆς εὐγενοῦς ἀποσπασθῆναι φυταλιάς καὶ ζημιωθῆναι ὀλέθρῳ συναναβαῖνον καὶ συμπνίγον ὡς σῖτον τὸν αὐτοκράτορα).

Homer (Il. 23.597–599) is his model when Choniates says that Andronikos' "niggardly soul¹² was gladdened like dew on ears of corn" (280.31: ἰάνθη τὸ ψυχίδιον ὥσεί τε περὶ σταχύεσσιν ἔέρση); whereas he makes considerable changes with another vegetal Homeric simile in claiming that Manuel I "sprouted forth in new vigour like the prolific crop of a rich man that demands reapers in the prime of their strength" (151.60–62: ὁ δὲ κατὰ πολύχουν ἀνεθήλησε λήϊον μάκαρος ἀνδρὸς ἀκμαιοτέρους ἀμητῆρας ἐθέλον).¹³ In contrast another, and remarkable, image appears to be at least largely his own: "the mighty of the earth

9 Homer (Il. 3.35) uses the noun ὄχρος in a context of fear, but without any vegetal comparison.

10 484.92–485.93, quoting Job 5.25.

11 Although the word can mean simply "stake", "thorn" would fit Choniates' customary imagery better and his association of the word with Satan suggests that he had in mind II Ep. Cor. 12.7, where the addition of the words τῇ σαρκί makes "stake" unlikely.

12 H. J. Magoulias' translation (O city of Byzantium, *Annals of Niketas Choniates*, Detroit 1984) of Choniates' ψυχίδιον.

13 Homer has Greeks and Trojans sweeping like reapers through a rich man's fields of wheat or barley with thick handfuls falling (Il. 11.67–69) as they slay each other. Choniates keeps the military context because Manuel is invigorated by imminent war.

are really like high-reaching and leafy-crowned pine-trees; for, as these rustle when the needles of their branches are violently shaken by short blasts of wind, so these men do indeed both look askance at the man abounding¹⁴ in wealth and cower before the man who is superior to the majority in manliness” (143.47–51: εοίκασιν ἀτεχνῶς οἱ τῆς γῆς δυναστεύοντες ὑψιτενέσι καὶ ἀκροκόμοις πίτυσιν· ὥς γὰρ αὐταὶ καὶ βραχείαις ἀνέμων πνοαῖς τὰς τῶν κλάδων βελόνας διατινασσόμεναι ψιθυρίζουσιν, οὕτω δὲ καὶ οὗτοι καὶ τὸν πλούτῳ κομῶντα ὑποβλέπονται καὶ τὸν ἐπ’ ἀνδρεία τῶν πολλῶν διαφέροντα κατεπτήχασιν). Another instance of vegetal imagery applied to humans¹⁵ occurs in Andronikos returning to former ways like a branch springing back after being forcibly bent (276.34–35: καθὰ καὶ ξύλον ἐπικλινὲς βία πρὸς τὴν ἐτέραν ἔξιν μετενεχθέν).¹⁶

Inanimate things both concrete and abstract enjoy similar imagery. Two of the former are Biblical. In his lament for the sack of the capital in 1204 he compares the inhabitants’ scanty rags with the fig-leaves of Gen. 3.7¹⁷ (592.33: φύλλα συκῆς), while in saying that the wooded mountains preserved for Alexios III’s hunting were like “God-planted gardens” (540.39: θεοφυτεύτων παραδείσων) he probably had in mind Gen. 2.8. Further imagery in this category is non-Biblical. Thus Manuel had his military and other achievements depicted in his palaces in mosaics modelled “with flowers of variegated hue” (206.50–51: ἄνθεσι βαφῆς πολυχρόου). The simple and unimaginative metaphor of gold- and jewel-encrusted robes imitating the flowers of a meadow is extended by Choniates in his description of the reception by Alexios III of German envoys at Christmas 1196: the Byzantines encouraged them “to gaze at the full bloom of the stones, with which the emperor was adorned like a meadow, and pluck vernal delights in the middle of winter” (477.79–81: ἐς τὴν τῶν λίθων ἄνθην ἀφορᾶν, οἷς ὁ βασιλεὺς ὡς λειμῶν ἐνηγλάιστο, καὶ χειμῶνος μέσου χάριτας ἐαρινὰς δρέπεσθαι), but the Germans sternly bade them put off such finery for, if negotiations failed, the Byzantines would have to array themselves in battle against men “who are not blooming with stones like meadows with flowers” (477.90: οἷτινες οὐ λίθοις ὡς λειμῶνες περιανθίζονται).

For abstract subjects Choniates again has recourse to the Bible. In criticizing Isaac II for believing that his rule was secure “like the stem of a palm growing afresh at the smell of water and that it would last lengthy cycles of years like a

14 The verb (κομάω), literally meaning “grow long hair”, is, true to the author’s imagery, applied also, from the time of the Homeric Hymns (h. Cer. 454), to luxuriant vegetation.

15 For instances involving specific agricultural or horticultural practices see below, 227–231.

16 It may be noted also that Choniates uses part of the Homeric tag (“not from oak [or rock]”: Od. 19.163) at 338.82–83.

17 And the garments made from skins of Gen. 3.21.

cedar of Lebanon with lofty foliage” (446.51–53: ὡς στέλεχος φοίνικος ὑπὸ ὀσμῆς ἀναθλούμενον ὕδατος καὶ κέδρος Λιβανίτης ὑψίκομος ἐς κύκλους διατηρηθῆναι μακραιώνων ἐνιαυτῶν), he first combines Job 29.18 and 14.9 before adding from Ps. 91.13. In calling the military successes of Romanos, prince of Volynia and Galicia, kind deeds performed for the glory of Christian faith, he observes that the most minute part of the latter can, with adaptation of Saint Matthew’s words (17.20), “remove and transport mountains like a mustard-seed” (523.38–39: ὅσον κόκκος σινάπεως μεθίστησιν ὄρη καὶ μετατίθῃσι). With inspiration from Job (21.18) money squandered by Alexios III “was dispersed like a heap of chaff and swiftly scattered in the summer’s dust” (460.74–75: διαφορηθέντων δίκην ἀχυρμιάς καὶ κατὰ θερινὴν κόνιν ἐσκεδασμένων ταχέως). In an interesting adaptation of Judg. 9.14–15 Choniates has some of the squabbling Latins after the conquest of 1204 choosing like birds “thorny brambles to rule” (625.44: ῥάμνους ἀκανθώδεις ἐς ἀρχήν). In his image of the world that would result from a reconciliation between East and West he adds to the Biblical beating of spears into ploughshares and companionable feeding of lambs with lions (Mich. 4.3; Is. 11.6, 65.25) “a lasting increase and unexpected growth of crops so that the thorn-bush would produce pears and the fig-tree bristle with ears of corn” (310.45–47: τῶν ἐκφορίων τῆς γῆς ἐπίδοσις διαρκῆς καὶ παραλόγος ἔκφυσις, ὡς ὄχνας μὲν προενεγκεῖν τὴν ῥάμνον, τὴν δὲ συκὴν ἀσταχύων φρίσσειν ἀνθέρικας) before continuing with the spontaneously appearing lotus, crocus and hyacinth of Zeus’ impromptu bed for love-making with his wife (Il. 14.348).¹⁸ There is probably no Biblical content in the use of “a young shoot of empire” (227.25–228.26: τοῦ τῆς βασιλείας ... θαλλοῦ) for a new reign.¹⁹

An imaginative simile is found for the tax-collectors who, after the contrivance of new taxes under Isaac II, “knead monies collected neither fitly nor legally with those collected justly like millet in a cultivated orchard²⁰ or the poppy anemone with the rose” (445.43–45: ὡς γεωργίῳ ἡμέρῳ μελίνην ἢ ῥόδῳ ἀνεμώνην τὰ μὴ καλῶς μὴδ’ ὁσίως συλλεγόμενα συμφύρουσι χρήματα τοῖς δικαίοις). This may be compared with the second of a bizarre series of similes Choniates parades for the miracle of finding an act of kindness amid Andronikos’ evil deeds, which “was like hunting for a highly prized panacea from the flesh of that serpent [viz. of Eden] and finding a preservatory antidote, and like plucking a fragrant

18 For quite different imagery consequent upon the meeting of East and West see below, 233.

19 It is just possible that Choniates was thinking of 2Macc. 14.4, but his (metaphorical) use of goats as the subject of the clause makes this unlikely. A certain further instance of Biblical imagery in this category is, however, the use of “sour grapes” from Ier. 38(31).29 and Ezek. 18.2 at 427.31–32.

20 The word more commonly means “field”, but “orchard” fits the context better.

rose from thorns or at least setting before oneself a tasty banquet of starlings and quails from hellebore and hemlock” (324.7–11: ἦν ὡς ἀπὸ ὀφείας σαρκῶν ἐκείνου πανάκειαν θηράσασθαι περιμάχητον καὶ σώζουσιν εὐρέσθαι ἀντίδοτον καὶ ὥσπερ ἐξ ἀκανθῶν τρυγῆσαι ῥόδον ἡδύπνοον ἢ γοῦν ἐξ ἐλλεβόρου καὶ κωνείου ψαροὶ παραθέσθαι καὶ ὀρυζὶν ἡδεῖαν ἐστίασιν). The metaphor of “the cutting down of the trees of the imperial garden” (269.94–95: δένδροτομουμένου κήπου τοῦ βασιλείου) for “the extermination of Manuel’s family” is a nice reminder of the symbolism of power associated with an emperor’s garden,²¹ although by the historian’s time that has come to represent also the concept of renewal.²² Apart from a little unimportant, and perhaps even unconscious, imagery achieved by verbs,²³ the only remaining passage in this category offers something quite different in describing Philippa’s transference of affections from Constantine Kalamanos to Andronikos as her “Erotes fluttering their wings towards another, pelting Andronikos with apples and bearing torches” (140.77–78: Ἐρωτας ... πρὸς ἄλλον λύνοντας τὸ πτερόν μηλοβολοῦντάς τε καὶ δαδουχοῦντας Ἀνδρόνικον). This goes back to the customs of hurling apples at a wedding-chariot to promote fertility (Stesichoros, fr. 10 Page) and of a girl thus advertising her affections (first found with Athenian prostitutes trying to attract clients in Aristophanes [Nub. 997]).²⁴ Choniates will have been familiar with Erotes so playing from a bronze plaque of the fourth century A.D. which, though originally in a pagan temple in Dyrrhachium, had been built into the Ἀνεμοδούλιον (between the Artropoleia and the Forum Tauri in Constantinople) and whose destruction by the Fourth Crusade he laments at 648.52–54. The game may even have been a joke in the family, for the historian’s brother Michael uses

21 This has a long history. Actual destruction of royal trees had been carried out by invaders to assert their supremacy as early as c. 1458 B.C. in Egypt by Thutmose III and in the mid-ninth century B.C. in Assyria by Shalmaneser III (J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton, N. J. 1969, 240, 280). For the tradition of the symbolism from the Near East to the Byzantine period see A. R. Littlewood, *Gardens of the Palaces*, in: H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, Washington, D.C. 1997, 13–38 (esp. 18–21).

22 See H. Maguire, *Imperial Gardens and the Rhetoric of Renewal*, in: P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: the Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries*, Aldershot 1994, 181–197. For a further instance of an abstract see the “young shoot” (θαλλός) of empire, below, 240.

23 Evils are “shooting up alongside” (447.94: παραβλαστανούσας) virtues, which Choniates follows up in his next sentence by saying that Nature “has implanted” (ibid. 97: ἐνεφύτευσε) in us a passion for our own. Tyranny could be seen “growing forth” (224.39: φυομένην); but it is hard to decide whether καρπίζομαι and καρποῦμαι are used literally or figuratively at 142.28 and 613.62 respectively in the sense of “enjoying fruits of”.

24 See A. R. Littlewood, *The Symbolism of the Apple in Greek and Roman Literature*, in: HSCP 72 (1968) 147–181 (esp. 154–155); id., *The Symbolism of the Apple in Byzantine Literature*, in: JÖB 23 (1974) 33–59 (esp. 38–39); id., *The Erotic Symbolism of the Apple in Late Byzantine and Meta-Byzantine Literature*, in: BMGS 17 (1993) 83–103.

the same extremely rare verb to describe his own exchange of affectionate letters with a friend.²⁵

Although similes taken from agriculture begin in Greek with Hesiod,²⁶ that and the allied science of horticulture did not become truly respectable for gentlemen, and consequently literary writers, until the Roman period. The Byzantines, being heirs of both the Roman tradition and the Biblical, elevated both sciences even further.²⁷ It is, therefore, not surprising to find such imagery in Choniates. Many are naturally taken from the growing of man's basic food, cereals.

The preparatory ploughing furnishes but a single instance: the River Melas is small in summer when it passes "through earth ... cut to a deep furrow by ploughing oxen" (64.61–63: *διὰ ... γῆς ... εἰς βαθεῖαν σχιζομένης ἀρόταις βουσὶν αὐλακα*). Despite his fondness for the imagery of water, Choniates makes no imaginative use of irrigation²⁸ except perhaps when in his preamble he claims that he is continuing the work of earlier historians and that his work is "interwoven [with theirs] to resemble in a fashion a channel of water issuing from a single source" (4.70–71: *διαπλεκόμενος τρόπον τινὰ ὀλκῶ εἰκάζοιτο ῥεύματος ἐκ πηγῆς μιᾶς ἐκδίδοντι*). There are several uses for sowing: "an idea of making a personal attempt at autocracy was sown in him [the rebel Ivanko]" (510.41–42: *τις αὐτῷ ἐνέσπαρτο τοῦ τυραννίδι ἐπιβαλεῖν ἔννοια*); the profligate nature of sowing is used to make it stand for squandering in Michael Palaiologos "lavishly scattering seed rather than distributing the money" (91.22: *σπεύρων φιλοτίμως οὐ διαδιδούς τὰ χρήματα*); and, inspired by Ps. 125.5–6, Choniates has citizens, himself included, after the capital's sack in 1204 "casting lamentations like seeds" (593.51: *βάλλοντες τοὺς θρήνους ὡς σπέρματα*), but through trust in God looking forward to "taking up with joy the sheaves of a more fortunate change" (593.52–53: *αἴροντες ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει τὰ τῆς δεξιτέρας ἀλλοιώσεως δράγματα*). The same combination of operations is found twice more. Alexios V Doukas Mourtzouphlos, finding the treasury empty, nonetheless spent money in the very words of Matt. 25.26, "reaping where he had not sown and gathering what he had not scattered" (566.21–22: *θερίζων ... ἔνθα οὐκ ἔσπειρε, καὶ συνάγων ὅσα οὐ διεσκόρπισεν*). The other is more interesting: the historian's comment on the blame for John of Poutze's policy in persuading Manuel I to cut down expenses on the navy with the resultant growth of piracy is "even if we know the ear of corn of the sower, yet we blame also the reaper" (55.21–22: *εἰ δὲ*

25 Nicetae Choniatae orationes et epistulae, recensuit I. A. van Dieten (CFHB III – Series Berolinensis), Berlin/New York 1972, ep. 13.4.

26 Fr. 286 Merkelbach/West.

27 See Littlewood, *Gardens of the Palaces* (see n. 21), 16–18.

28 His watery images are mainly drawn from flooding rivers and the sea.

καὶ τὸν στάχυν ἴσμεν τοῦ σπείραντος, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἀμήσαντα προσεπαιτιώμεθα).²⁹

Reaping alone occurs on a number of occasions. Thus, to illustrate that during the reign of Andronikos civic strife was more deleterious to Asiatic cities than foreign invasion, Choniates writes “what a foreign-speaking hand did not reach, that the local right hand reaped” (263.24–25: ὧ χειρ οὐκ ἐπεξῆλθεν ἀλλόγλωττος, τοῦτο ἢ ἐγχώριος ἐθέριζε δεξιὰ). The same verb is used for Andronikos’ cutting down of high-minded and ingenious generals (143.46) directly after ἀκροτομέω (“cut off ear of corn”) is metaphorically employed to rid him of aristocrats. Even simpler is his description of Turks cut to pieces in battle who “fell upon one another like ears of corn” (71.55–56: ἐπ’ ἄλλω ἄλλος ἐπιπτον ὡς ἀστάχυες). More inventively tax-collectors are depicted as “reaping and binding the coins like sheaves and taking them together to the threshing-floor” (205.32–33: θερίζοντες καὶ δεσμεύοντες ὡς δράγματα τὰ κέρματα καὶ ὡς εἰς ἄλωνα συμφοροῦντες), imagery which is nicely extended to a later process with each man, having delivered a little to the emperor, “kneading loaves from the threshed wheat, that is the gold coins, for himself” (205.37–38: ἐαυτῷ φύροντος ἐγκρυφίας ἐκ τῶν ἀλοωμένων πυρῶν εἰτ’ οὖν χρυσίνων). The beard of the Latin patriarch Thomas Morosini was shaved “more closely than with pitch-plaster [a depilatory] so that the surface of his cheeks gave no indication at all of the initial growth of hair but was like a field completely plundered of corn”³⁰ (623.77–79: δρώπακος ἀκριβέστερον, ὡς εἶναι τὸ τῶν παρειῶν ἐδάφιον μὴδ’ ὑποφαιούμενον ὅλως ταῖς πρώταις ἀνατολαῖς τῶν τριχῶν, ἀλλ’ ὡς ληϊστὸν παντάπασιν ἄχλοον). This last probably refers to a crop not only reaped but also gleaned, an image, through the simple use of the verb καλαμάομαι (literally “gather corn-stalks”), used to describe the despoiling of the citizens of Thebes (74.45). Choniates employs this verb with ἐπιφυλλίζω (“glean grapes”) to describe excessive taxation (537.56) and puts them into the mouth of a man boldly criticizing Manuel for his treatment of his subjects (186.63), while their cognate abstract nouns appear (636.64–65) in a passage rejected by van Dielen which describes the respite of cities governed during her regency by the Hungarian Margaret-Maria. The Herodotean tale (5.92) of Thrasyboulos’ infamous advice to Periander of Corinth is not strictly an agricultural operation, but yet pertains to this imagery. Choniates employs it in unusual fash-

29 He continues with a metaphor of fire – καὶ εἰ ὁ ἐμπρησμός τοῦ ἀνάψαντος, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ κατασβέσαι δυναμένου, δρᾶσαι δέ τι τοιοῦτον ὅλως μὴ βουλευθέντος.

30 I have tried to bring out what I believe is deliberate paranomasia here: Choniates’ ληϊστὸν is an adjective signifying “to be carried off as booty”, whereas the unrelated noun λήϊον is a “standing crop” or “corn-field”. A noun, or neuter adjective standing as a noun, is needed grammatically, to be described by the adjective ἄχλοον (“without greenery”).

ion: “if it be a big and difficult thing for kings not to cut out the tallest ears of corn ... one would see that Alexios [III] was rich in this quality too” (548.3–5: εἰ δὲ μέγα καὶ βασιλεῦσιν ἐργῶδες τὸ μὴ τῶν ἀσταχύων ἐκτέμνειν τοὺς ὑπεραίροντας ... καὶ τοῦτο προσπλουτοῦντα ἴδῃ τις τὸν Ἀλέξιον).

It is hardly surprising that in so military an history as that of Choniates more images of cutting are used than merely that of harvesting corn. Haymaking is only to be expected. A huge German “smote [his opponent’s] horse across the legs and cut off both front ones with greater ease than a man could the grass of a field” (415.4–5: πλήττει τὸν ἵππον ἐπιδοχμίως περὶ τοὺς πόδας καὶ ἄμφω τοὺς ἔμπροσθεν ὡς οὐδ’ ἀγροῦ τις χόρτον ἀποδιείλεν).³¹ Despite their size other Germans, when the river Melas overflowed, “fell like grass and were swept away like sun-warmed rubbish of the farmyard or a light tuft of wool” (65.80–81: ἐπιπτον ὥσεί χόρτος καὶ ὥσεί φορυτὸς εἰληθερῆς καὶ πόκος ἐρίου κοῦφος παρεσύροντο). In the town of Athyras “children at the breast ... were harvested like grass and swiftly withering flowers” (630.79–81: τὰ ὑπομαστίδια τῶν παίδων ... ἀπεθερίσθη ... κατὰ χλόην καὶ ἄνθος εὐμάραντον) by the merciless Cumans. Destruction of sturdier plants also inspired the historian. He has Hungarians, opposed to Manuel’s choice of the future Bela III as his son-in-law, “uprooting and cutting down the first shoots of his hopes” (128.6–7: τὰς πρώτας τῶν ἐλπίδων ἐκριζοῦντες βλάστας καὶ ἀποτέμνοντες), while the doctrine of the heresiarch Sikidites that the body of Christ in the Eucharist was incorruptible the patriarch John Kamateros deemed necessary “to cut out root and branch” (514.44: πρὸρριζον ἐκτεμεῖν). With greater horticultural interest Choniates claims that Manuel, to stave off imminent rebellions, “counteracted the beginning of troubles by imitating the best gardeners who pull up young brambles, which damage the beds, and destroy the newly sprouted trees, which do not belong in a garden” (203.71–74: τὴν τῶν λυπούντων ἀρχὴν ἀπεμάχετο, τοὺς ἀρίστους τῶν γηπόνων μιμούμενος, οἱ τὰς τὴν πρασιὰν λυμαινομένας ἀκάνθας νεαράς ἔτι ἐκσπῶσι καὶ καταστρέφουσιν ἀρτιθαλῇ τῶν δένδρων τὰ μὴ κηπεύσιμα). Pruning too is brought into service: Alexios III’s virtues extended to him not chopping off opponents’ fingers and toes, which is expressed in the words “he did not prune bodily extremities like vines” (548.6–7: οὐδὲ κλαδῶν ἦν ὡς ἀμπέλους τὰ τοῦ σώματος ἀκρωτήρια).³² This bizarre imagery clearly appealed to Choniates, for he had already used it with even more grotesque additions to describe the actions of Andronikos at Prousa: “he hanged many others on the branches of trees ... cut off the hands of some, pruned the fingers of others like vine-shoots and removed the feet of some more ... [and] returned to the pal-

31 The last part of the imagery is from Jer. 12.4, but there the grasses wither rather than being cut down.

32 The simile follows the reference to the cutting of the tallest ears of corn (above, 231).

ace exulting in such trophies that he had gained [and] leaving behind the Prousaïans' cultivated vines, which ran up and closely entwined the trees, weighed down with the corpses of those hanged like more clusters of grapes, and not allowing any of those impaled to be put into mounds for coffins, but these the sun baked and let be whirled around by the winds like apparitions [i.e. scarecrows] hung up in cucumber-beds by those who watch over fruit" (289.71–72, 74–75, 84–89: συχνοὺς ἄλλους τοῖς ... δένδρων ἀκρέμοσιν ἀπεκρέμασε ... ὧν μὲν ... χεῖρας ἀπέτεμεν, ὧν δὲ δακτύλους ὡς ἀμπέλων περιέκειρε κλάδους, τινῶν δὲ πόδας ἀφήρηκε ... ἐπάνεισιν εἰς τὰ βασιλεία τοιούτοις γεγανωμένος τροπαιουχήμασι, τὰς τῶν Προυσαέων ἡμερίδας καταλιπὼν, αἱ περιπλέγδην τὰ δένδρα ἀνέτρεχον, βαρυνομένας τοῖς τῶν κρεμασθέντων σώμασιν ὡς ἄλλοις βότρυσι καὶ μηδὲνα τῶν ἀνασκολοπισθέντων ἀφείς ὡς ληνοῖς δοθῆναι τοῖς σήμασιν, οὓς καὶ τερσήνας ἥλιος ἀνέμοις περιφέρεσθαι ἀνῆκε κατὰ τὰ ἐν σικυηλάτοις ὑπὸ τῶν ὀπωροφυλάκων αἰωρούμενα φάσματα).

For grafting Choniates depends upon the famous Biblical passage at Rom. 12.24; yet he uses it in two completely different contexts. In the first he has courtiers disapprove of Manuel's plan to marry his daughter Maria to a Hungarian with the metaphor of "grafting the branch from an alien orchard onto a very fruitful domestic olive" (137.86–87: τὸν ἐκ φυταλιᾶς ἑτεροφύλου ῥάδαμνον εἰς καλλιέλαιον μετεγκεντρίζειν πιότατον).³³ In the second he avers that the Byzantines should not deem the atrocities consequent upon the sack of 1204 "a grafting of barbarian wild olives onto our domestic olive" (581.29–30: τῶν ἀγριελαίων βαρβάρων ἐγκέντρισιν εἰς τὴν καθ' ἡμᾶς καλλιέλαιον).

The last agricultural operation used by Choniates³⁴ is the process of turning grapes into wine. While his Turks "fell like ears of corn",³⁵ they also "had their life-blood squeezed out of them as if they were bunches of grapes being trodden in a wine-vat" (71.56–57: ὡς ῥᾶγες αἶμα τὸ ζώτικον ἀπεθλίβοντο ... ληνοβατούμενοι); but, in complete contrast, the venturesome and vigorous Theodore Kantakuzenos was like "fermenting wine newly trodden in the vat" (284.29: οἶνος ζέων νεωστὶ ληνοβατηθεῖς).

Whereas both Psellos and Choniates show great, and typically Byzantine, interest in vegetation for imagery, there is a huge disparity in their enthusiasm for the animal world. Psellos specifies only the lion, the monkey, snakes and the

33 Psellos had already used the passage for an imperial marriage of which he approved (Chron. 6.15.10–13).

34 Unless one can count the again Biblical imagery (Ps. 7.16, Prov. 26.27, though Choniates uses different vocabulary) when the Turks "slipped into the pit that they had dug with their own hands" (67.47–48: εἰς βόθυνον κατώλισθον, ὃν ταῖς οἰκείαις χερσὶν ἐβάθυναν) by their attack on the Franks (I ignore the exact quotation from Jer. 12.1–2 at 291.53–55).

35 Above, 231.

mythological griffin;³⁶ Choniates names no fewer than sixty-eight species comprising twenty-two mammals, twenty-one birds, twelve insects, six reptiles, two molluscs, two fish, one amphibian, one arachnid and the mythical composite Chimaira.

The generic “beast of prey” (θήρ or θηρίον) occurs repeatedly. Thus the Sicilians in Thessaloniki in 1185 are “fiercer than beasts” (304.88: ἀγριωτέροις ... θηρῶν), while the Latins in 1204 are “raw flesh-eating beasts” (589.62–63: ὠμηστὰς ... θήρας); Manuel informed his troops that the Byzantines should have driven out the Turks “like wild beasts from flocks” (70.29: ὡς θήρας ἐκ ποιμνίων); Isaac rescued captives “as out of the mouth of wild beasts” (398.15–16: ὡς ἐκ στόματος θηρῶν), but if he had immediately executed prisoners “he would have quite irrationally changed his nature for that of beasts” (364.31–32: εἰς θηρίου φύσιν ἐκ πολλοῦ τοῦ παραλόγου μεταμειφθέντα); and beaten Venetians are likely to be “jumping up and leaping forth like wild beasts that are hard to kill” (86.68–69: κατὰ τὰ δυσθάνατα τῶν θηρίων ἐφαλλόμενοι τε καὶ προσαλλόμενοι), a theme that Choniates varies with “for who has pursued a bloodthirsty beast without seeing it shortly after leaping up and seizing [its prey]?” (464.9–10: τίς γὰρ ἂν θηρίῳ κατηκολούθησεν αἰμοβόρῳ, μετ’ οὐ πολὺ ταῖς ὄψεσιν ἐμπηδήσοντί τε καὶ ἀναιρήσονται;).

Choniates calls his *bête noire* Andronikos a beast no few than seven times, but with sufficient literary artistry to make each instance different. Infatuated by Philippa “the beast put aside his severity” (139.55: τὸ ἐπισκύνιον ὁ θήρ ἀπεβάλετο); when he entered the palace for his coronation “the beast, changing his grim³⁷ gaze” (272.65: τὸ τοῦ βλέμματος ὁ θήρ μεταθέμενος βλοσυρόν), made promises of a change for the better; even without his imperial regalia the inhabitants of Chele “feared the beast even though he was naked” (348.65–66: τὸν ... θήρα καὶ γυμνόν ... ἐδεδίσαν); the patriarch Theodosios Boradiotes was “unwilling to enrage the beast and have him roaring against him” (254.15: τὸν θήρα μὴ ἐκμαίνειν ἐθέλων καὶ ἄλλως κατ’ αὐτοῦ ὠρυόμενον); the rebel Andronikos Lapardas, although he “thought to escape destruction and not be served up as a prepared feast and ready dessert for the jaws of Andronikos”, ... yet became “an *hors d’oeuvre* for the beast” (278.77–80: ἐκφυγεῖν τὸ διολέσθαι ὤφeto καὶ τὸ προβεβλῆσθαι θοίνῃ τις ἐτοίμη ἢ ἐπιτοράγημα πρόχειρον ταῖς γνάθοις τοῦ Ἀνδρονίκου ... βορὰ τῷ θηρὶ προδαιταλευθείς); upon the fail-

36 The lion is used seven times, the others once each (the monkey only for his pelt). He has recourse also to the non-descript θήρ and indulges in lengthy imagery of a ζῶον for the body politic (see Littlewood, *Imagery* [see n. 2], 22 and 35–38). Kazhdan and Franklin point out (*Studies in Byzantine Literature* [see n. 4], 268) Nikephoros Gregoras’ similar lack of enthusiasm for specific animals.

37 The adjective, originally meaning “hairy” or “bristling”, is used of lions by Hesiod (Sc. 175).

ure of the emperor's trick of mounting Euphrosyne Kastamonitissa upon a siege engine as a human shield he was, when the Nikaïans rescued her, left "to beat himself like another Phineus since he had nothing which he could place before the hungry beast of his anger" (283.9–10: ὡς Φινέα ἄλλον ... κόπτεσθαι μὴ ἔχοντα ὁ πεινῶντι τῷ τοῦ θυμοῦ θηρὶ παραθήσεται); and, in complete contrast, in search of sexual dissipation he would leave the city with a group of courtesans and "carefully pick out quite deserted spots ... pushing his way, like wild beasts, into meetings of hilly glens and verdant groves" (321.21–23: ἐφιλοκρίνει τὰ τῶν τόπων ἐρημικώτερα ... θηρίων δίκην συναγκείαις ὀρῶν καὶ χλοεροῖς παραβυόμενος ἄλσεσιν).³⁸

The hunger of beasts appears in two further instances: Stephanos Kon-tostephanos encouraged his troops to fight bravely against "barbarians with the minds of beasts" (154.64: θηριογνώμωνων βαρβάρων), since "mountain-ranging beasts" (154.60: θῆρες ὀρεινόμοι) run from those who attack bravely but men who fear to stand their ground "are set before them for an already prepared feast to be devoured raw" (154.62–63: ἐς ἐτοίμην θοίνην ὠμοβορούμενοι πρόκεινται); and on another occasion the Turks hoped to encircle the Byzantines and "like wild beasts gulp down an as it were well prepared dish or carry off abandoned eggs and a deserted nest" (188.36–38: ὥσπερ ὄψον εὐτρεπές ... οἷα θῆρες, λαφύζοντες, ἢ ὡς ἐγκαταλελειμμένα ῥὰ καὶ νοσσιὰν ἐρήμην ἀπάξοντες).³⁹

Apart from the use of θηριογνώμων the rare word θηροκομέω appears for Euphrosyne's taming of her wild husband (489.41–42) and Manuel's failure to do the same to Kilij Arslan (123.76), although later the same emperor dealing with the same sultan, "as though goading a slumbering flesh-eating beast, enraged him and roused him from his lair (175.31–32: ὅσα καὶ θῆρα ὠμηστὴν ἐφυπνώττοντα ἐξηγρίαιεν ὑπονύσσων καὶ τοῦ κοίτου ἀνίστη).

The more neutral word ζῷον ("animal") is used figuratively twice, the first time quite briefly: Andronikos "deployed his army" against Thoros "as if it were an animal into head, rear part and limbs proportionate to the whole" (138.9–10: ὅσα καὶ ζῷον τὴν στρατιὰν εἰς κεφαλὴν καὶ μέρος τὸ κατόπιν καὶ μέλη ἀνάλογα τῷ παντὶ συνδιαθέμενος εἶχεν). The second occasion is quite remarkable as Choniates compares the Byzantines' anguish for their captured city with that of animals longing for a captured companion put on display: "in addition we simply suffer as do some animals for those of their number trapped by hunters and enclosed in transparent glass cages; and, although by means of the clarity and brightness of the vessel they see as through a mirror the sight of their

38 For the continuation of this imagery see below, 238.

39 The second half of this imagery is taken from Is. 10.14.

fellow animal, they are yet wholly unable to join it or come into bodily contact with it, and consequently in distress they move round the vessel stupefied by the alteration in its appearance which is so at variance with its former state” (579.59–65: καὶ προσπάσχομεν ἀτεχνῶς ὁ καὶ ἓνια τῶν ζώων πρὸς τὰ παγι-
δευόμενα ἐκ σφῶν ὑπὸ θηρευτῶν καὶ ἐγκλειόμενα διαφανέσιν ὑελίνοις
ἄγγεσιν. ἐκεῖνά τε γὰρ τῷ τοῦ σκεύους εἰλικρινεῖ καὶ στιλπνῷ τὴν τοῦ
συννόμου ζώου θέαν ἐνοπτριζόμενα συμμῖξαι καὶ ἐν χρῶ γενέσθαι ὅλως
ἀδυνατεῖ καὶ διὰ τοῦτο μάτην περὶ τὸ ἄγγος ἀδημονοῦντα στρέφεται, τῷ
ἐξηλλαγμένῳ τῆς ὀψεως ὡς ἀπεναντίῳ τῆς πρώην ἕξεως ἐκβαθούμενα).⁴⁰

Choniates’ favourite mammal is the lion, for which four of his comparisons come, with considerable verbal changes, from Homer. Thus wits proclaimed that Andronikos, rather than praying at the tomb of his cousin Manuel, was promising the deceased emperor that he would attack his family “like a lion having encountered a great prey” (257.69: οἷα καὶ λέων μεγάλῳ ἐπεγκύρσας θηράματι); when Andronikos had taken Prousa, “like the ravenous king of beasts, falling upon animals without shelter and shepherds, he broke the neck of one, gorged himself on the entrails of another and in other wise treated a third extremely badly” (288.55–57: ὡς ἀρχικὸς θῆρ ἀπόσιτος ἱκανῶς ἀσηκάστοις ἐμπεσὼν καὶ ἀποιομάντοις θρέμμασι τοῦ μὲν αὐχένα κατέαξεν, ἄλλου δ’ ἐλάφυσεν ἔγκατα καὶ ἄλλως ἔθετο χειρίστως ἕτερον); a huge Frank warrior was “as confident in his own strength as a lion” (415.13–14: ὡς λέων τῇ οἰκείᾳ πεποιθὼς ῥώμῃ); and Manuel cut down the ranks of the barbarians “like a lion, trusting in its strength, herds of cattle or flocks of goats” (90.94: ὡς λέων ἀλκῇ πίσυνος βουκόλια βοῶν ἢ αἰγῶν αἰπόλια).⁴¹ Three are Biblical: mourning for his wife Manuel “roared forth a lamentation like a lion” (115.48–49: ὡς λέων θρηνηῶδες ἡρεύξατο), while the Cumans fell upon the Byzantines “like a lion among cattle” (468.13: ὡς ἐν κτήνεσι λέοντα).⁴² In the third, to show Manuel’s distrust for the Franks in 1146, Choniates has combined Matt. 7.15 with both Aesop (*Fab.* 199) and the paroemiographer Zenobios (1.93) – the emperor was

40 This is one of the rare passages in Choniates where the figurative imagery is then restated in terms of the subject to which it is applied, introduced here by “and we equally ...” (579.65–69: καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐπ’ ἴσης ...). The subject matter appears to refer to a hunters’ trick involving the enclosing of a tiger-cub in a glass cage which is described (with remarkable similarities of emotional effect) in a tenth-century letter of Symeon Magistros and Logothete of the Dromos (J. Darrouzès [ed.], *Épistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle*, Paris 1960, ep. 89.23–32). I am grateful to Michael Grünbart for reminding me of this passage and drawing my attention to a discussion of it by Stratis Papaioannou (*Der Glasort des Textes: Selbstheit und Ontotypologie im byzantinischen Briefschreiben* [10. und 11. Jh.], in: W. Hörandner/J. Koder/M. A. Stassinopoulou (edd.), *Wiener Byzantinistik und Neogräzistik* [Byzantina Vindobonensia et Neograeca XXIV], Vienna 2004, 330–333.)

41 After Il. 3.23, 11.173–176, 5.299, Od. 6.130–132 respectively.

42 From Hos. 11.10, Mich. 5.7 respectively.

suspicious “lest in some way they were coming as wolf cubs in the pelts of sheep or were lions disguised as asses, to reverse the fable, or were combining the lions’ skin with the fox’s” (61.81–83: μή πως ἐν δέρματι προβάτων λυκιδεῖς ἔρχονται ἢ ὄνω ὑποκρύπτονται λέοντες ἀπεναντίας τῷ μυθικῷ διηγήματι ἢ τὴν λεοντὴν ξυνέχῳσι τῇ ἀλωπεκῇ). The same proverb is used a second time for Andronikos’ pretence towards the Nikaïans when “having no lion’s skin ... he dons the fox’s” (286.88: τὴν λεοντὴν οὐκ ἔχων ... τὴν ἀλωπεκὴν ὑποδύεται).

Choniates’ other uses for the lion are more original, even though they still depend upon its ferocity and ravenous hunger. Three are quite brief and simple: Alexios Branas’ troops were like “an army of lions” (358.87: λεόντων στρατόπεδον); other Byzantine troops “were leonine and irresistible in their charge” (77.24: τὴν ὀρμὴν λεοντῶδες καὶ ἀνυπόστατον); and, surrendering to the opportunity of punning, Choniates compares Leon Monasteriotes, for his loud voice, to “a lion frightening wild animals” (312.20–313.1: λέων κνώδαλα ἐκφοβῶν). Two similes concern avoidance of trouble. The first is the general comment “as soon as a hunter espies or hears a tawny snake or shaggy-maned lion in the mountains he immediately turns aside” (113.82–83: ἤδη μὲν οὖν τις θηροτῆρ ὄφιν δαφοινὸν ἢ λέοντα λασιαύχενα εἰσορῶν καὶ ἄων ἐν ὄρεσιν εὐθέως ἐξέκλινεν). The second is in reference to some members of the imperial family in 1203 who shun battle with the Latins “more readily than an army of deer [does] a roaring lion” (561.22: ὡς οὐδὲ λέοντα βρυχητίαν ἐλάφων στρατόπεδον). The zeal of the Frankish soldiery for the taking of live captives at Thessaloniki is explained by the not entirely satisfactory rhetorical question “what death-bringing viper or deadly heel-menacing snake or bull-slaying lion passing over yesterday’s food and taking its fill of prey still warm ... ?” (301.4–6: ποία ... θανατηφόρος ἐχίδνα ἢ περνοφύλαξ ὄφιν ὀλέθριος ἢ ταυροφόντης λέων τὰ τῶν βρωμάτων ἔωλα παρορῶν, θερμῆς δ’ ἔτι τῆς θήρας ἐμπορούμενος ... ;). A simile to indicate reversal of military fortune runs “leaping like a lion from a thicket, dealing destruction like wolf cubs and pouncing like a leopard, the captors became captives and the victorious were vanquished” (362.81–84: ὡς ἐκ δρυμοῦ λέων ἐμπίπτοντες καὶ ὡς λυκιδεῖς ὀλοθρεύοντες καὶ ὡς πάρδαλις ἐφαλλόμενοι, γεγένηται αἰχμάλωτοι οἱ αἰχμαλωτεύσαντες καὶ κατεκυριεύθησαν οἱ κυριεύσαντες). In two further instances the lion is named by a periphrasis: Conrad III is described as “the king of beasts, stung in the tail and rushing to leap forward although he has feasted less than a day before” (63.33–35: ὅσα καὶ θῆρα βασιλικόν, ᾧ οὐχ ἔωλον τὸ ἐστίαμα, τῇ ἀλκαίᾳ ὑπονυσσόμενον καὶ πρὸς ἄλματα ἐξαπτόμενον); while Nemanja feared Manuel “more than wild creatures [do] the most kingly beast” (159.13–14: ὡς οὐδὲ τὸν βασιλικώτατον θῆρα τὰ κνώδαλα). A further complimentary instance involves

this animal – Constantine Angelos Doukas trained his troops to obey and fear him despite his youth “revealing his spirit like lion cubs immediately at birth [do] their proud expressions, the shagginess of their manes and the sharp points of their claws” (435.39–42: τὸ ... θυμοειδὲς παραδεικνύων, ὡς οἱ τῶν λεόντων σκύμνοι τὴν ὀφρὺν εὐθὺς ἐκ γενέσεως καὶ τῆς ἐπαυχενίου κόμης τὸ λάσιον καὶ τὰς τῶν ὀνύχων ἀκωκάς).⁴³

The other feline beast of prey mentioned, the leopard, appears once more, but only by means of a proverb to point the perjury of Desa. Rather inartistically Choniates makes the Serbian župan, who has just been compared with a chameleon,⁴⁴ don “his customary leopard’s skin” (136.62–63: τὴν συνήθη παρδαλήν)⁴⁵ to quote Euripides’ infamous line “My tongue has sworn, but my mind is unsworn” (Hippol. 612).

The commonest Byzantine predator, the wolf, makes eight appearances. Only two do not mention sheep or shepherd, one (98.95) consisting of the single word λυκοφιλία (wolf’s, i.e. false, friendship) for a treaty.⁴⁶ In the simplest of the others the historian saw, after the fall of the capital, a Latin seize a young girl “like a wolf a lamb” (590.66: ὡς ἀμνάδα λύκος). Saint Matthew’s famous image of “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (7.15) is used twice (61.81–82; 248.73–74). Two further Biblical passages⁴⁷ help to describe Eustathios, the good archbishop of Thessaloniki, as “having chosen to suffer evils with his own flock rather than imitate hired hands who flee, abandoning their animals, upon the arrival of the wolves” (307.79–81: συγκακουχεῖσθαι τῷ οἰκεῖῳ ποιμνίῳ ἐλόμενος μᾶλλον ἢ τοὺς μισθωτοὺς ἐξηλωκέναι, οἱ τῶν λύκων ἐρχομένων ἐὼντες τὰ θρόεμματα ἐκδιδράσκουσιν). Choniates makes Conrad III of Germany develop a hint from Theokritos (5.38) in claiming to his troops before the battle of Maeander in 1148 that the Byzantines “rear wolf-cubs [the Turks] for themselves as sacrificial beasts and fatten them ingloriously on their own blood, although they should ... drive them from their own lands and cities like beasts from their flocks” (70.27–30: ὡς ἐπισφάγια ἑαυτοῖς ἐκτρέφουσι λυκιδεῖς καὶ τοῖς οἰκεῖοις ἀγεννῶς πιαίνουσιν αἵμασι, δέον ... , ὡς θῆρας ἐκ ποιμνίων, τῶν οἰκείων ἀπελάσαι χώρων καὶ πολέων). A clever series of linked similes is deployed when the citizens heard of the arrest of Kalomodios and persuaded John Kamateros to write a letter to the emperor as if it were a shepherd’s pipe (524.76: σὺριγξ) in order to summon back to them the money-changer “like a lost and

43 There is also a pun, the “one bearing the name of a beast” (607.22: τὸν θηριώνυμον) meaning Leon Sgouros.

44 See below, 249.

45 Eustathios tells us (ad Il. 3.17, 374) that a leopard’s may be substituted for the commoner fox’s skin (cf. Macar. 8.17) to denote deceit.

46 The other is at 362.82 quoted above, 237.

47 Hebrews 11.25 and John 10.12.

strayed sheep” (524.76–77: ὡς πρόβατον ἀπολωλὸς καὶ ἀπόνομον).⁴⁸ This the patriarch managed successfully, restoring Kalamodios “like the sought-after lamb without him being fleeced of his gold by his wolfish gaolers” (524.79–81: ὡς ἀμνὸν τὸν ζητούμενον, μὴ τὸν χρυσὸν ὡς δορὰν ἀποσυρέντα παρὰ τῶν συσχόντων αὐτὸν λυκιδῶν). The most graphic picture, however, is presented by Manuel refraining from demanding the surrender of Armenian fortresses from Thoros II since that would have been “tantamount to a shepherd trying to extract a lobe of liver via a wolf’s throat” (103.2–3: ὡς ἐκ φάρυγγος λύκου ποιμὴν λοβὸν ἥπατος προσαπαιτῶν καὶ λαμβάνων).

Predators’ victims appear again.⁴⁹ Uroš II “abandoned his own people to invaders to be scattered and killed like herds of domestic animals browsing on the greenery of the woodland” (90.88–90: τὰς δὲ τῶν οἰκείων πληθῆς, ὅσα καὶ θρεμμάτων ἀγέλας τὰ χλωρὰ δρεπομένων τῆς ὕλης, ἀφῆκε τοῖς ἐπιούσιν εἰς διασκόρπισιν καὶ ἀναίρεσιν), Manuel consequently “cutting down the barbarian bands like herds of cattle or flocks of goats” (90.94–95: ὡς ... βουκόλια βοῶν ἢ αἰγῶν αἰπόλια τὰ τῶν βαρβάρων κείρας συστήματα); and Henry of Flanders slaughtered the inhabitants of Apros “as if they were a flock of sheep or herd of cattle” (621.8–9: ὡς εἰ ποιμνιον ἦν καὶ βουκόλιον) rather than Christians; Byzantine soldiers trapped in a gorge “were destroyed like herds of domestic animals in their sheds” (182.33–34: ὅσα καὶ θρεμμάτων ἀγέλαι ... περὶ σταθμούς ... ἐφθείροντο); and in a similar situation others were cut down “like domestic animals shut up in a pen” (430.14: ὡς θρέμματα κατακλεισθέντα σηκῷ).

These animals occur also other than as prey. Thus for cattle Cumans returned home driving “their captives like herds of kine and yoked animals” (631.14–16: κατὰ μὲν ἀγέλας κτηνῶν τὸ αἰχμάλωτον ... τὰ ὑπὸ ζυγὸν καὶ δίαιταν ζῶα); while citizens turned aside from a rebuke from Alexios V as if it were “a draught of bull’s blood” (566.42: ταυρείου αἵματος κέρασμα). Before his accession Isaac II knew that “the flesh-eating Andronikos would sacrifice him like an ox” (343.40: τὸν κρεωβόρον Ἀνδρόνικον ὡς βοῦν αὐτὸν ἱερεύσαντα); a certain Vatatzes accused of adultery with Euphrosyne was “dismembered like a fatted beast” (486.50: ὡς βόσκημα διαμελιζόμενος); Stephanos Hagio-

48 Noun and first adjective are taken from Luke 15.4.

49 Unadorned metaphorical use of the non-descript word for “prey” (θήραμα) occurs at 96.54; 105.71; 191.11; 195.35; 296.86; 511.70. See also 70.29; 288.55–57 quoted above, 234, 236 respectively. Nets for hunting (or sometimes perhaps fishing) occur in further similes or metaphors: ἀμφίβληστρον (264.58; 513.10); ἄρκυς (106.83; 430.16; 468.11); θήρατρον (142.40); πάγη (264.58); σαγήνη (267.34; 341.79; 513.11). The verbs δολορραφέω (“lay snares”) and ἐνσκολιεύομαι (“catch in snares”) are used figuratively at, respectively, 489.40 and 627.78–79; and the verbs ἐπικλώω and ἐπιθωύσω for hunters’ calls are similarly employed at 392.67. The word δέλεαρ (“bait”) may pertain to hunting at 14.56.

christophorites was cut down by Isaac II “like a fatted beast in convulsions and besmeared by its own blood” (342.2: ὡς βόσκημα σφαλίζοντα καὶ τῷ ἰδίῳ παλυνόμενον αἵματι) and those loyal to the emperor killed the rebel John Komnenos “striking blows all over his body as if he were a fatted beast” (527.67–68: ὡς βόσκημα πανσώμους ἐπενεγκόντες πληγὰς), whose “carcase” was later “swollen more than a huge ox” (528.74–75: τῷ πτώματι ὑπὲρ βοῦν διωδηκότι μεγάλοπλευρον). A quite different picture is conjured by John Kamateros “bending forward like an ox” (114.25: κύψας ὡς βοῦς) in emptying a huge wine-bowl to win a wager.

The Psalmist’s tag “as sheep for the slaughter” (43.23: ὡς πρόβατα σφαγῆς) occurs unadorned at 187.16, 338.86 and 432.64.⁵⁰ Goats have more varied uses in Choniates. Both besiegers and defenders of cities, remarkably for once without variety of vocabulary, “bounded over precipices like wild goats” (87.9: δίκην αἰγάγων ἐκρημνοβάτου. Cf. 429.71). Elsewhere we find the domestic kind. The lascivious Andronikos was like a billy-goat leading she-goats” (321.24: αἶγας τράγος ἡγούμενος), and Alexios Ivanko, preferring Anna as bride to her daughter, asked “What have I to do with a suckling kid⁵¹ for covering when I need a grown she-goat?” (473.58–59: Τί μοι καὶ τῷ ἐν γάλαξιν ... ἀρνειῷ ἀμνάδος πρὸς ὀχείαν καὶ αἰγὸς τελείας ἐπιδεομένῳ;). A further instance appears in a series of comparisons: “some [guardians of the young Alexios II] often wing their way in the manner of bees to the provinces and store up money like honey, and others like goats love the young shoots of empire ... and some imitating pigs grow fat on more sordid revenues ... rolling around in filthy deeds and rooting in the manner of pigs for everything that is most evil” (227.23–228.30: οἱ μὲν κατὰ τὰς μελίσσας συχνὰ πρὸς τὰς ἐπαρχίας λύουσι τὸ πτερόν καὶ ὡς μέλι τὰ χρήματα τιθαιβώσσουσιν,⁵² οἱ δὲ κατὰ τὰς αἶγας τοῦ τῆς βασιλείας ἐρώσι θαλλοῦ ... ἔνιοι δὲ τὰς ὕς μιμούμενοι ἐκ τῶν ῥυπαρωτέρων προσόδων λιπαίνονται ... ταῖς δὲ μυσαραῖς ἐγκυλινδούμενοι πράξεσι καὶ συωδῶς πρὸς ἅπαν ἐγκυπτάζοντες χεῖριστον).

Pigs occur alone in the simple “swinish onrush and reckless crowd” (558.44–45: τὴν ὀρμὴν συνώδη καὶ ἀτάσθαλον δῆμον), where the phrase artistically follows the removal of the statue of the Kalydonian boar in the Hippodrome. Vlach rebels also “rushed to the Danube like the herd of swine in the Gospels rushed to the sea” (372.57–373.58: κατὰ τὴν τῶν εὐαγγελικῶν χοίρων ἀγέλην ὡς εἰς θάλασσαν τὸν Ἰστρον ὥρμησαν), but this is less apposite for they crossed the river safely while Saint Matthew’s animals (8.32) perished. The Latin

50 The image of a shepherd of his flock is used for a patriarch (ἀρχιεπίσκοπον) at 456.80; 522.30 and 593.56, and for a bishop or secular ruler (ποιμήν) at 606.5 and 159.12–13 respectively.

51 ἀρνειός and ἀμνάς properly refer to a sheep, while αἶξ is a goat.

52 This verb is Homeric (Od. 13.106).

patriarch Thomas Morosini was “in his bodily conformation fatter than a hog reared in a pit” (647.8–9: τὴν δὲ σωματικὴν πλάσιν λακκευτοῦ σὺς εὐτραφέστερος); Frederick Barbarossa contemptuously forced Byzantine envoys to sit together with servants “as swineherds drive the swine all together into a sty, without separating the fat ones” (410.69–70: ὡς ἐς συφεὸν οἱ συφορβοὶ τὰς ὕς ἀπαξαπάσας εἰσελῶσιν μὴ διυστῶντες τὰς πίονας); and courtiers were beguiled by the empress Euphrosyne, “their ears tickled like pigs who lie supine having their bellies stroked” (457.93–94: ὡς ὕες, αἱ τὰς γαστέρας καταψώμεναι ὑπτιάζουσιν, ὑποκνῶμενοι τὰ ὦτα). Their wild cousins are employed four times: Armenians are described “unexpectedly urging themselves on just like, so to speak, a charging pack of boars” (26.73–74: εἰς παράλογον ὡς εἰπεῖν καὶ σὺδὴ ὀρμὴν ὑποθήξαντες ἑαυτούς); Andronikos, who in, unusually, a condensed version of Psalm 79.14, “wreaks destruction like a ferocious solitary boar” (266.24: ὡς μονιὸς διαλυμαίνεται ἄγριος), claimed that he would destroy the enemy “in the manner of hunters [killing] boars that live solitary lives” (321.1–2: ὃν τρόπον οἱ θηραταὶ τοὺς μοναστικούς τῶν σῶν); and imperial soldiers in pursuing Alexios Ivanko were reluctant “to grope for tracks of an eagle flying over crags and mountains, or search for the creeping of a snake on a rock or enrage to close combat a tusked wild boar repeatedly exposing its breast to spear-thrusts” (511.73–512.75: ἀετοῦ ἵχνη ἀναδιφᾶν ἐπιποτωμένου πάγοις καὶ ὄρεσιν, ἢ μεταλλᾶν ἐρπυσμὸν ὄφεως ἐπὶ πέτραις, ἢ ἐκμαίνειν εἰς συμπλοκὴν χαυλιόδοντα μονιὸν πολλάκις τὸ στήθος εἰς διακόντισιν προτεινόμενον).

Equine similes usually concern eagerness and may involve chariot-racing. To encourage his rebellion in 1181 Maria, Byzantine wife of Renier of Montferrat, “by means of her letters spurred Andronikos on like a horse standing at the starting-gate and panting with eagerness for the race” (231.5–6: τὸν Ἀνδρόνικον τοῖς γράμμασιν ἐμυώπιζεν ὡς ἵππον ἐφ’ ὕσπληγος ἐστῶτα καὶ δρόμον πνέοντα), although this was insufficient for later we learn of him “having been spurred on like a horse running in the hippodrome” (243.37: μυωπισθεὶς ὡς ἵππος σταδιευτῆς) by words from his daughter Maria; and Byzantine and foreign tax-gatherers were sent out in the provinces in pairs by Manuel “like outrunners and trace-horses of the imperial chariot” (205.30–31: ὡς παρήγοροι καὶ παράσειροι τοῦ τῆς ἀρχῆς ... ἄρματος).⁵³ Away from the race-track Andronikos quenched his anger “like a mettlesome horse hard to restrain” (269.83–84: ὡσεὶ καὶ ἵππος θερμὸς καὶ δυσκᾶθεκτος), imagery varied for Alexios

53 A further passage (437.16–23) compares Isaac to (a runner and) a charioteer, but, despite reference to bridle and reins, horses are not mentioned. Metaphorical use of bridle or reins is not uncommon (e.g. 17.33, 36.63–64, 103.5, 146.39–40, 343.35, 377.54, 437.20–21 [a small part of a noteworthy series of equestrian similes], 569.8–10).

Branas “forcibly restraining and throttling his innate lust for power as if it were an unbridled horse” (377.53–54: κατέχων βία καὶ ἄγχων ὡς ἵππον ἐξήνιον τὸ ἐνδόμυχον φίλαρχον). The trapped future Isaac II, “like Homer’s⁵⁴ well-fed horse unable to stamp his hooves on untilled ground and rush over the plains with free foot ... imitates the war-horse pricking up his ears to the trumpet that sounds the battle-signal, tossing his mane, snorting and leaping” (342.82–86: μὴ ἔχων ἄνετα κροαίνειν ὡς ὁ ἀκοστήσας ἵππος Ὀμήρειος καὶ ποδὶ κατὰ πεδίων ἐλευθέρῳ φέρεσθαι ... μιμεῖται τὸν πολεμιστήριον καὶ τὸ οὖς ἀναστήσας ὡς πρὸς σάλπιγγα ἠχοῦσαν τὸ ἐνυάλιον καὶ φρίζας κόμην τὴν ἐπαυχένιον καὶ φοιμάσας) as he closes with his enemy. The disrespect towards the emperor of the charlatan Basilakios is shown by his “racing hither and thither with the bounding of a colt” (449.44–45: ὧδε κἀκεῖσε μετὰ πωλικῶν φερόμενος σκιρτημάτων). In explaining the fall of Constantinople to the Latins the historian avers that “God thought fit to pull tight on our jaws with muzzle and bridle because we had all turned away [from him] ... like a stiff-necked horse champing against the bit” (569.8–10: ἐν κηῶ τε καὶ χαλινῷ τὰς σιαγόνας ἡμῶν ἄγξαι θεὸς ἐδικαίωσεν, ὅτι καὶ πάντες ἐξέστημεν ... ὡς ἵππος θρασ-αύχην τε καὶ δυσχάλινος). Of a quite different nature is the promiscuous Andronikos “like a horse in heat indulging in innumerable acts of copulation” (141.88–89: ὡς ἵππος θηλυμανῆς ταῖς παραλόγοις ἐπιθορνύμενος μίξε-σιν).

The donkey, surprisingly, appears only once – for a lecherous Latin “braying like a donkey at unmarried girls” (590.87–88: ταῖς παρθενικαῖς ... ὀνηδὸν ἐπιβρωμώμενος). The dog, on the other hand, is given varied uses. Theological disputations are called “howlings of dogs” (150.34: κυνῶν ὠρυγαί), and Latins interrupted the liturgy by “barking like dogs” (306.56–57: κυνηδὸν ὕλακ-τοῦντες). David Komnenos, the strategos at the siege of Thessaloniki, is criticized because “he checked the fervour of the citizens like a totally useless hunter [checking] the courageous rush of [his] whelps” (298.25–27: ἤγχε τὸ τῶν πολιτῶν πρόθυμον οἷα καὶ σκυλάκων γενναῖον ὄρμημα θηρατῆς ἀχρεϊό-τατος). Andronikos was called “a bloodthirsty dog” (283.15: κύων φιλαίματος) by the Nikaïans, and later, in the absence of his real enemy, he turned his anger on those near by, “doing the same things as dogs are wont to do, for they, retreating from the one hurling [stones], ward him off with barking, but snap with their teeth against the stone which has been thrown” (292.69–71: ταῦτόν τι δοῶν, ὃ καὶ κύνες πολλάκις ποιεῖν εἰώθασι· τοῦ γὰρ βάλλοντος ἀφιστάμενοι τοῦτον μὲν ἀμύνουσιν ὕλακαῖς, τῷ δ’ ἀφεθέντι λίθῳ τοὺς ὀδόντας ἐγχιρίπτουσιν). Slightly different canine behaviour is attributed to the inhabitants

54 Il. 6.506–507 (= 15.263–264). Van Dieten (see n. 5) adds Soph. El. 25, but the resemblance is slight.

at the Latin sack of Thessaloniki for, “in the manner of dogs they retreated from those who overtook them and did not molest them with their teeth, but as they were being hard pressed gave up barking at those before whom they crouched down and willingly but in vain closed their gaping jaws” (304.89–92: κύνες μὲν ἔστιν ὅπη τῶν ἐπικαταλαμβανομένων ἀπέσχοντο, οὐδ’ ὁδοῦσιν αὐτοὺς παρελύπησαν, ἀλλ’ οἷς τὸ γόνυ ὠκλασαν οἱ καταδιωκόμενοι παρήκαν τὸ ὑλακτεῖν καὶ εἰς μάτην αὐτοῖς ἐκοῦσιν ὥσπερ ἀπετελεύτησε τὸ χανεῖν). Andronikos possesses another canine quality when Choniates accuses him of “whining in a fawning manner like a dog” (253.91: κυνηδὸν προσκνυζόμενος) in front of the patriarch Theodosios Boradiotes. Another aspect of fawning appears twice: two disaffected Byzantines came close to “licking with their own tongues in the manner of dogs” (296.84: κυνηδὸν ταῖς ἑαυτῶν γλώτταις περιλιχμάζειν) the feet of William II of Sicily; and courtiers prostrate before Euphrosyne “thrust their noses against her slipper like fawning puppies” (456.87–88: τὴν ῥίνα τῇ ἐμβάδι δίκην προσκνυζομένων κυνιδίων ἐνήρειδον).⁵⁵ Finally Choniates borrows from Psalms (58.15) for Andronikos who, “famishing like a dog, to quote David, would wander around the city for want of someone to feast upon” (283.23–24: λιμώττων δὲ ὡς κύων, Δαυιτκῶς εἶπεῖν, ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ἔχειν τὸν καταθοινηθισόμενον περιεκύκλου τὴν πόλιν); and, possibly, very briefly from Sophokles (Aj. 8) for the rebel Andronikos Lapardas’ decision to pursue “like a Laconian hound” (277.53: κατὰ κύνα Λάκαιναν) rather than flee.⁵⁶

Deer are used not unsurprisingly as examples of both pusillanimity, the strategos David Komnenos being castigated as “more cowardly than deer” (298.17: τῶν ἐλάφων δειλότερος),⁵⁷ and sureness of foot, defenders of fortresses being, in a phrase drawn from Psalms (17.34), “like deer setting their feet on high places” (429.70–71: ὥσεῖ καὶ ἐλάφους ἐπὶ τὰ ὑψηλὰ τοὺς πόδας ἱστῶντας). A further quite different passage probably refers to this animal – upon the alleged adultery of his wife some counsellors advised Alexios III what to do to avoid becoming subject of common gossip and “being compared with those animals that have defences breaking forth from their heads but are never provoked and who do indeed not use their horns against those who cover their females in their very sight” (488.91–94: κακείνοις τῶν ζώων παραβαλλόμενος τοῖς ἐκκρούουσι μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν κροτάφων τὰ ἀμυντήρια, παροξυνομέ-

55 This is just before they are transmogrified into pigs at 457.93 (above, 240).

56 Though it is not strictly a simile or a metaphor, note may be taken of Dositheos suffering “exactly the fate of Aesop’s dog” (Fab. 136) in losing the patriarchates of both Jerusalem and Constantinople (407.82–85).

57 Cf. their avoidance of lions at 561.21, quoted above, 237.

νοις δὲ οὐδαμῶς, οὔτε μὴν τὸ κέρας ὀπλίζουσι κατὰ τῶν ἐπιθορνυμένων ἐν ὄψεσι ταῖς θηλείαις αὐτῶν).

Other wild mammals appear only fleetingly. Constantine the Armenian charged at Eustratios the Macedonian like “a mountain-bred gazelle bounding over the thickets” (23.4–5 δορκὰς ὀρεσίτροφος θάμνων διαλλομένη).⁵⁸ Andronikos went round “like a she-bear bereft [of her young]” (283.24: ὡς ἡπορημένη ἄρκτος). A tax-collector of Kerkyra, who has just been graphically described as “smoother in cunning than a pestle”, is called a “fox” (73.7: ἁλώπηξ).⁵⁹ Paronomasia aided John Lagos to disappear “surpassing a hare in racing away” (525.8–9: ὑπὲρ δασύποδα συντονία δρόμου χρησάμενος); while in anticipation of Andronikos the Nikaïans “cowered like leverets” (285.59–60: κατέπτυσσον ὡς λαγῶδια). Latins “broke wind more pungently than a weasel” (305.28–29: ἀπέπερδον δριμύτερον γαλῆς); and Boniface could not keep his intentions secret for he was “comparable to the weasel”⁶⁰ which was exposed by the suet it had come across” (600.54: τῇ δὲ γαλῇ παρομοιωθεῖς, ἦν διήλεγξε τὸ στέαρ παρεισπεσόν), where the unusual word to introduce the comparison was presumably chosen as a pun on the proverb (παροιμία)⁶¹ that is its source. The emperor Isaac becomes a whale,⁶² an elephant and a camel⁶³ in the metaphors of Mesopotamites as a “so-called pilot[-fish]” guiding “the whale” (439.72–73: τὸ κῆτος ὁ λεγόμενος προπομπός) and as a “black-skinned ant-man”⁶⁴ steering an elephant, the greatest burden on the earth, or a slender rope dragging along a camel by the nose” (440.82–83: μυρμηκάνθρωπος μελάγχροος τὸ τῆς γῆς μέγιστον ἄχθος διακυβερῶν ἐλέφαντα ἢ μῆρινθος λεπτὴ ἀπὸ ῥινὸς ἐφέλκουσα κάμηλον). The camel appears twice more. In the first instance, following Matt. 23.24, flatterers and evil judges “strained off the

58 Proverbs 6.5 is quoted virtually verbatim for Andronikos fleeing from the Vlachs “like a gazelle from the noose and a bird from the snare” (131.5–6).

59 For the skins of the lion and the fox see above, 237.

60 The Greek word γαλῆ (γαλέη) embraces a variety of mustelidae. Perhaps the marten or, more likely, the polecat is intended here. There are also two similes (183.66; 425.64) involving a trap for a weasel (γαλεάγρα).

61 A combination of Zen. 2.93 and 2.79.

62 The word used need not mean specifically a whale, but that is most likely in this context. David Komnenos was forever hiding from Andronikos, even inside a “sea-monster” (297.14: κῆτος θαλάττιον) “like the fugitive prophet [Jonah]”, while Roger II of Sicily is described as a “sea-monster” (62.90: θῆρ ἐνάλιος). For the symbolism of the whale see J. Signes Codoñer, *Der Historiker und der Walfisch. Tiersymbolik und Milleniarismus in der Kriegsgeschichte Prokops*, in: L. M. Hoffmann/A. Monchizadeh (eds.), *Zwischen Polis, Provinz und Peripherie. Beiträge zur byzantinischen Geschichte und Kultur* (Mainzer Veröffentlichungen zur Byzantinistik 7), Wiesbaden 2005, 37–58 (I am indebted for this reference to Michael Grünbart).

63 For him in the same context but as a lion bothered by a bee and a mosquito see below, 254.

64 Choniates probably knew this from Athenaeus (229a) who mentions the play *Μυρμηκάνθρωποι* by Pherekrates.

gnat while swallowing the camel” (309.38–39: τὴν κάμηλον καταπίνοντες δούλιζον τὸν κώνωπα). The second exhibits an unendearing habit: the patriarch Theodosios Boradiotes concealed the truth from Andronikos since he was unwilling “to open the camel’s mouth for it to spit as is its wont” (254.15–16: τὴν κάμηλον ἀναστομοῦν εἰς ἐξέραμα, πρὸς ὅπερ εἶθιστο). The final mammal is the dolphin like which the deep-drinking rebel John Komnenos is pictured “spouting” (527.50: κατὰ δελφῖνας ἀναφυσῶν).

Generic birds are put to various uses. Cumans and Vlachs, wheeling in battle after a feined retreat, “surpassed birds cleaving the air” (397.95: ὡς οὐδὲ πτηνὰ τὸν ἀέρα τέμνοντα); Latins “lighted upon Epidamnos like birds and rapidly stretching astride their feet from above scaled the battlements of the encircling walls with no difficulty” (317.11–13: Ἐπιδάμνου ἐπέβησαν ὥσει πτηνοὶ καὶ ἀέριοι μικροῦ τε θάτερον τῶν ποδῶν περιβάδην ἐκτείναντες ἀπραγμόνως τὰ τῶν περιβόλων ὑπερέβησαν κρήδεμνα); less successfully a would-be Mohammedan aviator, standing on a tower and raising his arms as wings, “shakes himself like a bird, thinking that he is walking on air” (120.77–78: διατινάσσεται πτηνοῦ δίκην, ἀεροβατεῖν οἰηθεῖς) as he plunges to the ground; Isaac Komnenos, when incarcerated on orders of his younger brother Manuel, “purposelessly fluttered his wings like a little snared bird” (49.31–32: εἰκαίως ἦν περυνγίζων κατὰ σαγηνευθὲν πτηνάριον);⁶⁵ “the [Constantinopolitan] mobs dispersed at sundown like flocks of birds” (527.53–54: οἱ ... ὄχλοι δύνατος ἡλίου κατ’ ἀγέλας ὀρνίθων διέστησαν); after the sack of 1204 in looking to elect an emperor “some [Byzantines] like birds among living creatures fly away and depart together in a flock to this man, but others select prickly shrubs for rulership”⁶⁶ (625.42–44: οἱ μὲν κατὰ τὰ ποτώμενα τῶν ζώων συμφορηδὸν συνανίπτανται τῷδε καὶ συναπαίρουσιν, οἱ δὲ καὶ ῥάμνους ἀκανθώδεις ἐς ἀρχὴν προχειρίζονται); and the emperor Isaac, rallying his troops, urged his men not to change sides during the battle “as we see happen with birds flying in flocks, for when one flies away the remainder also fly off together with a whirring sound, and upon one coming to rest the others fold their wings” (385.57–59: ὁ καπὶ τοῖς ἀγεληδὸν πετομένοις πτηνοῖς ὁρῶμεν γινόμενον· ἑνὸς γὰρ ἀναπτάντος καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ῥοιζηδὸν συνανίπτανται καὶ τῷ τοῦ ἐτέρου καταπαύσει συστέλλουσιν ἅπαντα τὸ πτερόν). One very effective passage does not even use a regular word for “bird”: the Latin host “outstrips my narrative and rushes on with faster flight than the quill of my history ... and like ... a winged and aerial creature flying beyond the history it advances towards the Isthmus” (610.1–5: προφθάνει μου τὸν λόγον ... καὶ τοῦ πτεροῦ τῆς

65 See also n. 58.

66 This last part comes from Iud. 9.14.

ιστορίας ταχυπετέστερον φέρεται ... τὸ δέ, ὡς ... πτηνὸν καὶ ἀέριον, ὑπερπτὰν τὴν ἱστορίαν χωρεῖ πρὸς Ἰσθμόν).

The generic word ὄρνις occurs in a repeated Biblical image,⁶⁷ first and at its simplest when men of rank pitched their tents around Andronikos “in the same manner as mother-birds draw their wings over their chicks” (255.36–37: ὃν τρόπον αἱ ὄρνεις ὑπὸ τὰς ἑαυτῶν ἐπισυνάγουσι πτέρυγας τὰ νεόττια). On two subsequent occasions it occurs in more extensive avian imagery. On one, although the Latin conquerors were “birds with crooked talons flying almost in the clouds and hovered oppressively over the Byzantines at that time in their power” (308.8–10: ἀγχινεφεῖς μικροῦ αἰρόμενοι γαμψώνυχες ὄρνιθες καὶ βαρεῖς ἐπεποτῶντο τοῖς ὑπὸ χεῖρα τηνικαῦτα Ῥωμαίοις), Eustathios protected them “as a mother-bird spreads her wings around her chicks” (ibid. 12–13: καθὰ καὶ ὄρνις ὑπὸ τὰς ἑαυτῆς περισυτέλλει πτέρυγας τὰ νεόττια). On the second Choniates laments the sack of 1204 and plaintively asks when Constantinople will once more be able to gather her children together “as mother-birds which love their offspring gather their own chicks beneath their wings” (578.47–48: ὃν τρόπον αἱ φιλότεκνοι ὄρνιθες ὑπὸ τὰς ἑαυτῶν ἀθροίζουσι πτέρυγας τὰ οἰκεῖα νεόττια), but, “flying around thee warily like sparrows whose nurturer has been captured and whose nest has been scattered we utter piteous and mournful cries” (ibid. 51–53: εὐλαβῶς ὡς στρουθοί σε περιιπτάμενοι, ὧν συνείληπται ἡ τροφός, ἡ δὲ καλὴ διεσκέδασται, ἐλεεινόν τι καὶ γοῶδες ἀναβαλλόμεθα), and are “borne along roving far and wide like homeless⁶⁸ birds” (ibid. 56–57: πολύπλαγκτοι φερόμενοι ὡς ὄρνιθες οἱ ἀβέβαιοι).⁶⁹ Similar imagery connected with this event had occurred earlier in Choniates’ version of Isaiah 10.14 with Sicilians boasting that they would seize the Empire “as a deserted nest” and “abandoned eggs” (304.1–2: ὡς ἔρημον νοσσιάν ... ἐγκαταλελειμένα ῥά), and the Latins boasting that “they would seize [Constantinople] like an abandoned nest” (356.27–28: ὡς ἐρήμην καταλήψεσθαι νοσσιάν). ὄρνις is used also specifically for the farmyard fowl in a comparison for Andronikos with his wenches “leading his domestic hens like a cock” (321.23–24: ὡς ὄρνιθας κατοικιδίους ἀλεκτροῦν ... ἡγούμενος).

The most common avian imagery in Choniates depends upon the birds’ cries, especially those of corvidae. Supporters of Andronikos on one occasion “cried ineffectually like jackdaws to a cloud-dwelling eagle with crooked talons” (229.61–62: ὅσα καὶ πρὸς αἰτὸν ὑψινεφῇ καὶ γαμψώνυχᾳ κολοιοὶ ἐγάρουν ἄκραντα), while on another they “enthusiastically winged their way to the queen

67 Matt. 23.37.

68 “Homeless” (i.e. “of no fixed abode”), rather than “unfirm” or “fickle”, is probably the significance of Choniates’ epithet. Magoulias translates as “migratory”.

69 The avian imagery is interspersed with that of planets and probably that of cattle.

of cities and ... croaked like cawing crows at the eagle [Alexios Komnenos] Vatatzes and his chicks" (264.50–52: τὸ τῆς προθυμίας πτερόν ἔλυον καὶ ... κατὰ τοῦ ἀετιδοῦς ὄρνιθος τοῦ Βατάτζη καὶ τῶν ἐκείνου νεοττῶν ἔκρωζον ὡς κορῶναι λακέρυζαι). The Latin conquerors of Thessaloniki were not moved by tears, even a pleasant word being considered as "screaming of kites or cawing of crow" (301.8–9: κλαγγή ... ἱκτίνων ἢ κρωγμὸς κορῶνης), and, even if momentarily successful, it rapidly became "a swan's dying and honour-loving song" (301.12: κύκνειον ἄσμα τελευταῖόν τε καὶ φιλότιμον) as the victors returned to slaughter. As artisans from Constantinople fell upon the Latins "their unintelligible cries filled the air just as if flocks of jackdaws, cranes or starlings were spreading their wings for flight with a din" (392.65–66: αἶ τε οὖν ἄσημοι φωναὶ τὸν ἀέρα ἐγέμιζον, ὥς οὐδ' εἰ κολοιῶν ἢ γεράνων ἢ ψάρων ἔθνεα κλαγγηδὸν ἐπτερούσσοντο).⁷⁰ The wife of Alexios Axuch pled for her husband's life "more piteously than a lammergeyer (?), more grievously than serpents, more mournfully than a kingfisher (?)" (145.2–3: φήνης ἐλεεινότερον, δρακόντων ὀδυνηρότερον, ἀλκυόνος πολυπενθέστερον), and thereafter led a "life devoted to weeping like discreet doves" (145.9–10: βίον φιλόδακρυν ... κατὰ τὰς φιλοσώφρονας τρυγόνας). Every emperor is apprehensive of any man who "has been furnished with a mouth and tongue like a nightingale" (143.51–52: τὴν γλῶτταν ὡς ὄρνις μουσηγέτης ἐστόμωται). Finally one interpretation mentioned by the historian for the prophecy "Oh, thou wilt become the food of dread ravens" (41.12–13: ὦ πῶς γενήσῃ βρώμα δεινῶν κοράκων) is that it refers to "the black and hissing iron" (ibid. 13: τὰ μέλανα καὶ σίζοντα σιδήρια) of cauterization.

For other images the eagle is most often used: John II, dying after his accident hunting, bewailed the fact that he could not now "fly like the kings of birds" (42.25: διαπτέσθαι ... ὡς οἱ βασιλεῖς τῶν ὀρνίθων) to Palestine; the proverbial saying "old age of eagle, youth of lark" (Zen. 2.38: ἀετοῦ γῆρας, κορύδου νεότης) the historian claims (273.1) was adduced by those advocating the dethronement of Alexios II; and the comparison of tracking Ivanko and a high-flying eagle has already been seen.⁷¹ In a metaphor for Stephanos Hagiochristophorites "the hawk (?) was already poised and the seizing [of its prey, Isaac] was not difficult" (342.83–84: ἡ ... ἄρπη ἤδη ἐτέτατο καὶ ἡ σύλληψις οὐκ ἦν δυσχερής). Venal judges are described as "looking round the imperial table like vultures round carrion" (334.91–92: τὴν βασιλικὴν περιπατταίνοντες τράπεζαν καθάπερ οἱ γῦπες τὰ θνησιμαῖα). The gourmand John Kamateros

70 This is a combination of Hom. Il. 2.459–463 and 16.583 or 17.755–756.

71 511.73, above, 241.

“consumed fields whole or, more accurately, attacked them like a *thoos*”⁷² (114.30–115.31: ὅλας ... ἀρούρας κατεδαπάνα καὶ θωὸς ἀκριβέστερον ἐπεξήρχετο). The comparison of finding an act of kindness amid Andronikos’ evil deeds and “setting before oneself a tasty banquet of starlings and quails” has already been noted.⁷³ The archetypal avian beauty, the peacock, appears twice: Franks prided themselves because “they are [not] gilded with purple and gold like the braggart Median bird” (477.92–93: ὡς ἀλαζῶν ὄρνις ὁ Μηδικὸς πορφύρα καὶ χρυσῷ περιχρῶζονται); and Isaac in Constantinople “was a dandy like a peacock which loves adornment” (441.15: ἐπιδευκτικὸς ... ἦν ὡς ταῶς ὁ φιλόκοσμος); although “like the phoenix he was seen [there] only at intervals” (442.32: κατὰ περιόδους ὡς ὄρνις ὁ φοῖνιξ ἐπωπτάνετο).⁷⁴

Choniates evinces little ichthyic interest or knowledge.⁷⁵ Conspirators, deprived of the right to answer charges, were led off to prison “like speechless fishes” (232.29: ὡς ἄφωνοι ἰχθύες). Only two are specifically named: Andronikos “escaped the hand of all [his foes] like a slippery eel” (138.23–24: ὡς ... ὀλισθηρά τις ἐγχέλυς τὰς τῶν ἀπάντων χεῖρας ἐξήλυξεν); and Mesopotamites, as we have seen, guided the imperial whale like a so-called pilot-fish.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, two marine mollusks make an appearance, the first a cephalopod (in the first two passages certainly the octopus). Uncertain of his hold on the throne, John II did not attend his father’s obsequies, but “clung to the palace like octopodes to their rocks” (8.90–91: ὡς οἱ πολύποδες τῶν πετρῶν ἐξείχετο τῶν ἀρχείων); and, with greater detail, the protosebastos Alexios Komnenos kept to the imperial apartments “like an octopus clinging tightly to the rocks with its suckers in a circle” (233.51–52: ὡς πολύπους ταῖς πέτραις καθάπαξ ἐμφὺς καὶ τὰς κοτυληδόνας κύκλῳ διαφείς). In a completely different context blood-relations turned away from Alexios V Mourtzouphlos’ harsh words “as if from a taste of raw octopus” (566. 41: ὅσα καὶ γεῦσιν πολύποδος ὤμου).⁷⁷ The other mollusk appears when witnesses of the death of Manuel, who was clad in but a tattered garment, reflected on “the wretchedness at the end of life of the body,

72 Hesychios’ entry for this bird is simply ὄρνις ποιός. Choniates’ context suggests that it fed on grain.

73 324.10–11, above, 228–229.

74 The context of Choniates’ quotation of Ps. 146.9 at 593.66–67 makes his use of nestling ravens arguably metaphorical.

75 There are a few images of fishermen (56.49–57.52; 341.79–80 and possibly 244.64) and a fisherman’s bait (δελήτιον at 57.51; 226.80), while some of the passages involving metaphorical nets listed in n. 49 above may pertain to fishing rather than hunting.

76 439.72–73, above, 244. Although there is no word for “fish”, ὁ λεγόμενος indicates that *προπομπός* signifies something more specific than simply an escort, and is presumably the type of fish mentioned by Aelian (de Anim. 2.13).

77 Andronikos’ wish for the sexual appetite of an octopus (322.33) is not so much a metaphor as a piece of zoological lore.

which is moulded around us like an oyster and grown together with the soul” (222.63–64: τὴν ἐν τῷ τελευτᾷ τὸν βίον τοῦ σώματος ἀχρειότητα, ὅπερ ἡμῖν ὡς ὄστρεον περιπλάττεται καὶ συμφύεται τῇ ψυχῇ).

Two reptiles receive one mention each. In a metaphor for Desa, the deceitful Serbian župan, “the chameleon, although it easily changed to every other colour, could not turn into the white of truth” (136.56–58: οὐκ ἦν τὸν χαμαιλέοντα πρὸς τὴν τῆς ἀληθείας μεταβαλέσθαι λευκότητα ἐφ’ ἑτέραν πᾶσαν χροιάν ῥαδίως μετατιθέμενον). Sicilian sailors when under fire “ran beneath the decks of their ships like tortoises under their carapace” (362.1: ὡς κέλυφος χελῶναι τὰ τῶν νηῶν ὑπέτρεχε καταστρώματα).

Snakes, on the other hand, figure no fewer than 33 times. Although normally the generic ὄφις or δράκων is used, the asp (ἄσπις, the Egyptian cobra), viper (ἐχιδνα) and “javelin-snake” (ἀκοντίας) are also found.

The Bible inspires many references. Without attempt at quotation Choniates refers to the serpent in Genesis for three passages: finding good in Andronikos was “like hunting for and finding a highly prized panacea and salutiferous antidote against the flesh of that serpent” (324.7–9: ὡς ἀπὸ ὄφεως σαρκῶν ἐκείνου πανάκειαν θηράσασθαι περιμάχητον καὶ σώζουσιν εὐρέσθαι ἀντίδοτον); “foreigners [Latins] as treacherous as the serpent” (592.35: ἐπίβουλοι ὡς ὄφις ἀλλόφυλοι) made the conquered Byzantines wear fig-leaves and rags; Skleros Seth, having seduced a girl with a peach,⁷⁸ was regarded by her kin as one who “like the serpent, the author of evil, despoils maidens by means of fruits and drives them away from a chaste life as if from Eden” (148.92–94: δίκην ὄφεως ἀρχεκάκου δι’ ὁπίωρας τὰς παρθένους συλαγωγούντος καὶ τῆς σώφρονος βιοτῆς ὡς ἐξ Ἑδέμ ἀπελαύνοντος).

The same serpent cloaked in the language of other Biblical passages occurs elsewhere: with a nod to Eccl. 10.11 John Kamateros was “possessed of a forked tongue like the slanderous serpent the author of evil” (111.43–112.44: δικρόαν εὐτυχῶν γλωτταν, ὅποιαν ὄφις ὁ ψίθυρος καὶ ἀρχεκάκος); Andronikos’ widespread executions would have been carried out “had not God, in the words of the prophet,⁷⁹ brought down his own sword on the apostate serpent, the crooked one, the one that flees beneath the waters, his wet abode” (338.89–91: εἰ μὴ κατὰ τὸν προφήτην εἰπεῖν τὴν οἰκείαν μάχαιραν ἐπέβαλεν ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ τὸν ἀποστάτην δράκοντα, τὸν σκολιόν, τὸν ἐν τοῖς ὕδασι νυμφεύοντα τῇ καθύργῳ ταύτῃ βιοτῇ); the protosebastos Alexios’ recall of the patriarch Boradiotes to Constantinople is graphically described in a long extension of its prece-

78 This was presumably a simple gift of affection, but fruits with seeds were considered to promote fertility (see above 229 and n. 24).

79 Is. 27.1.

dent.⁸⁰ “so against its will the crooked serpent uncoiling itself and swallowing down again its venom, which it had prepared to vomit over the holy man, gives its approval for this man’s return to his former throne” (242.16–19: ἄκων οὖν ὁ σκολιὸς ὄφης τῶν ἐλίξεων ἀποστὰς καὶ τὸν ἰὸν αὐθις κατεσπακῶς, ὃν ἐμμηκεῖναι κατὰ τοῦ ἁγίου προητοιμάκει, ἐπευδοκεῖ καὶ αὐτὸς τῇ ἐς τὸν πρότερον θρόνον αὐθις τούτου ἐπανελεύσει); and “even the serpent, the ancient⁸¹ plotter against the human race did not of old conceive and give birth to” (301.19–20: οὐδ’ ὄφης αὐτὸς ὁ ἀρχαῖος τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους ἐπίβουλος συνειληφῶς πάλαι ἀπέτεκεν) as much hatred as the Latins had for the Byzantines.

The famous deaf asp⁸² of Psalms 57.5 is given employment, with far less variety of vocabulary than is Choniates’ wont, on four occasions for refusals to harken: John II “was incanting these things to asps [inhabitants of a besieged fortress in Cilicia] deliberately making themselves deaf to the beguiling melodies from a wise sorcerer” (22.73–74: ἦν δ’ ἀσπίσι ταῦτα ἐπάδων ἔκοντι κωφεύουσας πρὸς τὰ ὑποψαλλόμενα παρὰ σοφοῦ φαρμακοῦ); the Latins in their refusal to listen to proposals for peace “ignored every wise sorcerer like asps plugging their ears” (392.69–70: ὡς ἀσπίδες τὰ ὦτα βύοντες πάντα παρέτρεχον σοφὸν φαρμακόν); rejecting pleas for support from the pretender Isaac Doukas Komnenos the Turks “all like asps blocked up their auditory organs to his incantations” (464.8: πάντες ὡς ἀσπίδες οἷς ἐπῆδε τὰς ἀκοὰς ἐπέφραττον); and the historian’s brother Michael failed to dissuade from attacking Athens Leon Sgouros whom “he saw deliberately plugging his ears like an asp making itself deaf” (607.22–23: κατ’ ἀσπίδα κωφεύουσας ἔκοντι τὰ ὦτα ... ἐώρα βύοντα).

Choniates uses four further Biblical serpents: men rejoiced at the fall of Mesopotamites as if “the serpent that was not caught by Job⁸³ had been seized” (492.46: ὁ παρὰ τῷ Ἰὼβ ἀνάλωτος δράκων συνείληπτο); Alexios Komnenos, son of the protovestiarios John, escaped from the Cumans “one would say like a flying serpent” (296.74–75: εἴποι ἄν τις ὄφης πετόμενος);⁸⁴ Prov. 24.54 (30.19) lies behind the pursuit of Ivanko being paralleled to the “tracking of the creeping of the serpent on the rock”;⁸⁵ and one passage from Psalms surrounds a tag from

80 Noun and adjective alone come from Soph. 16.5 or Is. 27.1.

81 This may be a fleeting remembrance of Apoc. 12.9.

82 Although the translation adder is hallowed by the King James’ Bible (Ps. 58.4), the word, as its primary significance of a round shield suggests, indicates the species as the (Egyptian) cobra or asp (*Coluber haië*).

83 See Job 40.25.

84 This is probably a reminiscence of Is. 14.29.

85 For the Greek of the whole series of comparisons see above 241.

Homer⁸⁶ when at the siege of Zeugminon the Hungarians “whetted their tongues like a snake’s ... letting fly from the barrier of their teeth obscenities smeared with the venom of asps that is under their lips” (133.67–69: τὰς γλώσσας ἔθηνον ὥσεί ὄφεως ... κακ τοῦ τῶν ὀδόντων ἔρκους αἰσχρορρημοσύνας τοξεύοντες ἰῶ ἀσπίδων τῷ ὑπὸ τὰ χεῖλη χρυστάς).

The myth of the Hydra inspires similes. The first is very simple: Manuel’s thoughts, undeterred by disasters, were forever “growing again like the Hydra” (160.25: παλιμφυῇ κατὰ τὴν Ὑδραν). The second, not strictly a simile or metaphor, is put into the mouth of Andronikos who, in justification of his execution of prisoners, asked “What benefit is there, when one head is cut off, that more will grow, and that there is no man to apply the sizzling iron? Herein the demigod and hero Herakles is especially to be praised because he had Iolaos to burn and destroy the Hydra’s ability to sprout anew” (334.86–89: Τί ... ὄνειαρ, εἰ κόρσης τεμνομένης μιᾶς, πλείονα φυήσονται κάρηνα, τοῖς δὲ οὐκ ἐπάγει τις τὸν σίδηρον σίζοντα; ἐπαινέτεός ἐν τούτῳ μάλιστα ὁ ἡμίθεος καὶ ἦρως Ἡρακλῆς, ὅτι τὸν Ἰόλεων ἐπικάοντα εἶχε καὶ τὸ τῆς Ὑδρας παλιμφυῆς ἀφανίζοντα).⁸⁷ A second myth is obscure: the state of the Empire is likened to “that of the mythical snake which wreaked havoc as it dragged itself along with maimed and damaged [literally deaf and blind] hindmost part” (225.48–50: τὸ τοῦ μυθικοῦ δράκοντος ... ὃς κακῶς διετίθετο κωφῷ καὶ τυφλῷ μέρει τῷ οὐραίῳ διεξαγόμενος).

A fable of Aesop (Fab. 62) is used twice to illustrate treachery: Andronikos is compared to “the snake that will attack barely after being warmed and will do ill to those who carry it in their bosom” (248.74–75: τὸν ... οὐπω μετὰ θάλπιν ἐπιθησόμενον ὄφιν καὶ κακῶς τοὺς ὑπὸ κόλπον φέροντας δράσοντα); and in respect to Isaac Doukas Komnenos the historian asks “who ... has befriended a venomous snake without it soon after,⁸⁸ even if he has become attached to it, disgorging its venom and, even if he has warmed it in his bosom, giving him a fatal bite?” (464.9–12: τίς ... μετ’ ὄφεως ἰοβόλου φιλίαν συνέθετο, κἂν προσπλέκοιτό τις αὐτῷ, τὸν ἰὸν ἐξεμοῦντος, κἂν ἐν κόλπῳ διαθάλπη, θανάσιμα δάκνοντος;).

More independently Choniates rather awkwardly combines two images in claiming that Kilij Arslan, “like a torrent in full flood or a snake that had de-

86 Ps. 139.4 and Il. 4.350 etc.

87 A third mention of the Hydra does not, at least overtly, involve serpentine imagery but rather a comparison with Herakles, whose sexual powers were greater than those of Andronikos, although a parallelism between deflowered maidens and severed heads is probably intended (322.35–37: οὐκ ἔχων δὲ τὴν ἰσὴν πρὸς τὸ ἀκολασταίνειν ἰσχύν, ὡς Ἰόλεων ἐκεῖνος κατὰ τῆς παλιμφυοῦς Ὑδρας συνέριθον).

88 A few words have been supplied here from the Greek of an earlier part of a composite comparison (464.9–10) already quoted above, 234.

voured many herbs,⁸⁹ deluged and swept away whatever happened to be in his way and swallowed up many of our forts, spitting out the venom of its evil; but [Manuel] ... with the lure of seductive gold lulled it to close its eye-lids in peaceful sleep, and as it angrily reared up to plunder he soothed and calmed its coils with which it was crushing his army” (123.80–87: κατὰ χειμάρρουν πληθύνοντα ἢ κατὰ πολλὰ ἐδηδοκότα φάρμακα δράκοντα κατέκλυζέ τε καὶ παρέσυρε τὸ προστυχὸν καὶ συχνὰ τῶν ἡμετέρων πολιχνίων κατέχασκε τὸν τῆς κακίας ἀποπτύων ἰόν· ὁ δὲ ... ὀλκῇ χρυσίου ἐφολκοῦ κατεκοίμιζε πρὸς εἰρήνην τὸ τούτου βλέφαρον καὶ ἦν τέως εἰς ληστείαν ἐπηγροίαινε λοφίαν καὶ τὸν ὀλκόν, ὃν ὑπεσύρετο τοῦ στρατεύματος, κατασιγάζων ἐπράυνεν).⁹⁰

Choniates has greater artistic success with other comparisons that are dependent upon anguine behaviour and appearance. Hungarian and Byzantine “armies seethed like an undulating⁹¹ snake with bristling scales” (156.21–22: κατὰ κινούμενον δράκοντα καὶ φρίσσοντα τὰς φολίδας ἐκύμαινον οἱ στρατοί). The Byzantines saw the Crusaders as, “like a flaming serpent, bending back with the coils of their troops, bristling with the scales of their weapons and opening out both their wings as if into a gaping mouth” (604.37–40: κατὰ δράκοντα φλογωπὸν ὀλκοῖς λορδούμενοι στρατευμάτων καὶ φολίσιν ἐπιφρίσσοντες ὅπλων καὶ ὥς εἰς χάσμα διανοιγόμενοι στόματος ταῖς ἐκατέρων τῶν κεράτων ἀναπτύξεσι). The Turks thought that if they could overcome the main body of Manuel’s army they could easily disable the rest “as we see happen with a snake, for when the head has been crushed the remaining coil of its body is necrosed also with it” (182.54–56: καθὰ καὶ ἐπὶ δράκοντος ὀρῶμεν γινόμενον, τῆς γὰρ κεφαλῆς συντριβείσης καὶ ὁ λοιπὸς συννεκροῦται ὀλκὸς τοῦ σώματος). A comet may resemble the reptile, “for the sight of the visible fiery mass portrayed the shape and curling of a snake as it was now stretched into a straight line and now was twisted round into coils, and at another time opening into a chasm of a mouth it created fear in those that gazed at it as if it were gaping from above on those below and desiring human blood” (251.47–50: ὁφews γὰρ σχῆμα καὶ ἔλιγμα ἢ τοῦ φανέντος ἀνάμματος ὄψις διατυπούσα νῦν μὲν διετέτατο, νῦν δ’ ἀμφιπεριελίσσετο εἰς ὀλκοῦς, ἄλλοτε εἰς χάσμα ἀνοιγμένη στόματος φόβον ἐνποιεῖ τοῖς θεωμένοις οἷονεὶ καταχάσκουσα ἐξ ὕψους τῶν κάτωθεν καὶ ἀνδρομέου γλιχομένη αἵματος). Sgouros took refuge on Akro-Korinth “as a creeping snake squeezes into a hole” (611.28: ὥς ὄφις ἐρπυστῆς ἐς χειὰν συσπειρᾶται). Mamalos tried to escape execution in

89 This part of the description is based on Il. 22.93–94.

90 This is necessarily a very loose translation. The omitted portion continues the image of the torrent.

91 An English translation is happier with the transference of marine imagery from armies to reptile.

the Hippodrome by darting out of the flames “like javelin-snakes” (311.83: κατὰ τοὺς τῶν ὄφεων ἀκοντίας). Isaac thought that he could “slough off his gout like a snake-skin and be completely transformed into a god-like man” (558.30: ὡς λεβηρίδα τὴν νόσον ἀποξύσασθαι τὴν ἀρθρίτιδα καὶ τὸ ὄλον εἰς ἄνδρα θεοείκελον ἀμειφθήσεσθαι). And Byzantine soldiers themselves rightly had the reputation among all nations, the historian asseverates, of being “matricidal vipers” (642.83: μητρολέθροισι ἔχιδναι) for the speed at which they deposed emperors.⁹²

The single amphibian is the frog, which is chosen solely for its colour, the protosebastos Alexios using “frog-coloured ink” (230.79: βατράχειον βάμμα), while the protovestiarios John wore “frog-coloured boots” (507.48: τὰ βατράχεια τὸ χρώμα πέδιλα), the cause of considerable mockery. The pejorative connotation of this colour, already noted by Kazhdan and Franklin,⁹³ is made even clearer by a third passage in which the entire body of a poisoned bull “turned paler than the colour of a frog” (654.43: ὑπὲρ τὸ βατράχειον χρώμα ἐχλώριζε).

In the class *Insecta* Choniates favours the two archetypal gatherers and workers, the ant and the bee.

Ants are used in two ways: as an image of swarming masses and as diggers. For the first the historian emphasizes the huge crowd of citizens that escorted him and his family from his home at the fall of Constantinople in 1204 by asseverating that they were all “like an assembly of ants as they passed through the streets” (589.46–47: ἐπ’ ἰσῆς ἀγορᾶ μυρμηκῶν διόντες τὰς τριόδους); “great crowds streamed” to listen to the buffoonish prophet Basilakios “more than worker-ants going to and from an ant-hill” (448.19–21: τὰ πλήθη συνέρρεον, ὡς οὐδ’ ἐς μυρμηκιὰν οἱ ἐπανιόντες τε καὶ ἐξιόντες φιλόπονοι μύρμηκες); and, with a recollection of Homer,⁹⁴ Cuman troops were “more numerous than armies of ants busied about the holy threshing-floors” (628.15–16: ὡς οὐδὲ μυρμηκῶν στρατεύματα τὰς ἱερὰς ἄλως ἀμφιπονούμενα). For digging there is a single reference to men burrowing in the earth like ants (221.41: γεωρυχεῖν κατὰ μύρμηκας) to make shelters from the winds.

92 For the repentant evil-doer compared with potential prey avoiding a snake (113.82–84), Latin inhumanity compared with “death-bringing viper or deadly heel-menacing snake” (301.4) and the wife of Alexios Axuch pleading more grievously than serpents (145.2) see above, 238 (bis) and 247 respectively. A final passage probably refers to a snake’s venom: Rukn al-Din’s aggressive and arrogant missives were “like deadly venom poured and scattered indiscriminately” (521.94–95: ὡς ἰὸς πολύφθορος κατὰ πλεῖστον διαχεόμενός τε καὶ διασκοιδνάμενος).

93 Studies on Byzantine Literature (see n. 4), 262–263. In Choniates’ source (Aristoph. Eq. 523) it has already been used in mockery.

94 Il. 5.499.

The most original image of bees has already been seen.⁹⁵ The insect appears first in another Homeric reminiscence⁹⁶ when courtiers early in Manuel's reign "were like a swarm of bees buzzing as they flew out of a hollow rock" (59.18–19: *σμήνι ἐώκεσαν μελισσῶν ἐκ πέτρης γλαφυρῆς βομβηδὸν ἵπταμένων*) to receive imperial largesse (and Choniates uses the very next line of the same quotation⁹⁷ to make Cumans "rival bees among vernal flowers" [628.13: *μελισσῶνας τοῖς ἐαρινοῖς ἀνθαμίλλοις ἀνθεσι*]). To indicate simply a great crowd "the people gathered together like swarms of bees leaving their hives" (270.25–26: *ὡς μελισσῶν σμήνη σίμβλων ἀπαναστάντα τὰ πλήθη συνείλεκτο*); and the collective noun implies bees in the expression "another swarm of the common herd" (451.73–74: *σμήνος ἄλλο ἀγελαῖον*).⁹⁸ More aggressively the Psalmist's⁹⁹ "they encompassed me about like bees a honeycomb" (*ἐκύκλωσάν με ὥσει μέλισσαι κηρίον*) is quoted at 367.18 and, only very slightly altered, at 434.19, while Cumans, again, are compared to bees when "it was like seeing swarms of bees issuing forth from their hives and wasps flying out of wayside holes" (620.78–80: *ὡς ἔστι καὶ τὰ σμήνη θεάσασθαι τῶν σίμβλων προϊόντα τῶν μελισσῶν καὶ τοὺς σφήκας ἐξιπταμένους τῶν ἐνοδίων χηραμῶν*). Drones are specified for the Philadelphians paying court to Andronikos, since "they buzzed like drones around the streets and the palace" (264.52–53: *ὡς κηφῆνες περιεμβόμβουν ἀγυῖας καὶ ἀνάκτορα*).¹⁰⁰ For the pestering by a single individual Aesop (Fab. 267) is employed for Constantine Mesopotamites who "was simply a bumble-bee or a mosquito buzzing around the ear of a lion [the emperor]" (440.81–82: *ἦν βομβυλιὸς ἀτεχνῶς εἴτε κώνωψ ὠτίον περιβομβῶν λέοντος*), but later, in his pursuit of advancement and glory, the courtier "escaped detection like the mosquito in the fable when it was battling with a lion but was caught by a fine spider's web" (491.7–8: *ἔλαθεν ὡς ὁ μυθικὸς κώνωψ ὁ λέοντι συμπλακεῖς ἀραχνίῳ λεπτῷ συλληφείς*).¹⁰¹

Mesopotamites is compared also with the famous flea in Socrates' "thinkery",¹⁰² when "all those onto whose head he had leapt like the flea in the comedy and whose jaw he had all but struck as if they were slaves" (491.12–14:

95 227.23–25, above, 240.

96 Il. 2.87–88.

97 Ibid. 2.89. This directly precedes the comparison with ants just quoted (above, 253).

98 The adjective had long since become a dead metaphor.

99 Ps. 117.12.

100 Having in the same sentence just compared them to crows and eaglets, Choniates immediately continues with a zoologically most inapt addition: "just as is the custom of the lazy and those who grow a forked tongue in their mouths".

101 Bees-wax (*κηρός*) is used metaphorically at 348.88–349.89, and honey (*μέλι* or a cognate word) for sweetness of tongue or words at 63.16–17; 248.68; 352.9 and 606.6–7, and in other metaphorical contexts at 112.46 and 585.45.

102 Aristoph., Nub. 144–147.

όπόσων αὐτὸς ταῖς κεφαλαῖς κατὰ τὴν τῆς κωμωδίας ψύλλαν ἐφήλατο καὶ οὐς μικροῦ κατὰ κόρησιν ἐρράπιζεν ὡς ἀνδράποδα) rose against him. For muscid imagery he has Andronikos “brooding over the words [of an oath] just as flies over weals” (228.40: τοῖς ῥήμασι ... ἐπικαθίσας ὡς αἱ μυῖαι τοῖς μώλωψι); and elsewhere he expands on Homer¹⁰³ when the common citizens ignore Andronikos’ pitiable death and concern themselves with their own doings “gathering together like tribes of flies that fly around springtime’s milk-pails and take gulps from the brimming drinking-cups of ivy-wood” (349.18–19: κατ’ ἔθνεα συναθροισθέντες μυῖων, αἱ τοὺς γαυλοὺς ἀμφιπεριπίπτανται ἕαρος καὶ περιχαίνουσι τὰ πιαλέα κισσύβια). Whereas Choniates uses a simple image of locusts for the Patzinaks plundering Thrace and “obliterating everything underfoot more thoroughly than a swarm of locusts” (13.40–41: τὰ ἐν ποσὶν ἀφανίζόντων τοῦ τῶν ἀκρίδων ἀκριβέστερον ἔθνους), he extends this, in part inappositely, by adapting Iliad 21.12–14 for Andronikos’ opponents who “brought in an alien and foreign army and acted exactly like a swarm of locusts that escape the fire but drown in the water” (335.4–6: ἀλλοτρίαν καὶ ὑπερόριον εἰσενεγκεῖν στρατιὰν καὶ ταῦτὸν ἄντικρυς δρᾶν τῷ τῶν ἀκρίδων ἔθνει, αἱ τὸ πῦρ ἐκδιδράσκουσαι τοῖς ὕδασιν ἀποπνίγονται). Courtesy of Saint Matthew (6.19–20) any donation given to Andronikos was rejected “being under suspicion like a moth ... or some other corrupting agency that destroys what comes near” (325.30–31: ὥσπερ σῆς ὑφορώμενον ... ἢ ἑτέρα τις φθαρτικὴ δύναμις τὸ προσεγγίζον ἀπολλοῦσα); and the patriarch Dositheos, as tutor of Isaac II, is described as “entering unobserved like a moth and corroding his nature” (433.79–81: ὡς σῆτα ... τὴν ἐκείνου φύσιν ... ὑπεισιόντα καὶ κατεσθίοντα).

Three other insects make only brief appearances. The historian criticizes Alexios III for clinging to his palace “like a larva stuffing itself into its chrysalis” (471.2–3: κατὰ τὸν εἰς τὸ κέλυφος βυόμενον σκώληκα). Choniates, most unusually, acknowledges his debt to Job (4.11) for an image of the neuropterous predator of the family Myrmeleontidae known as an ant-lion when men celebrated the fall of Mesopotamites as if “the gluttonous ant-lion had perished” (492.47: ὁ βόρος μυρμηκολέων ἀπώλετο).¹⁰⁴ Finally some courtiers who had fallen from power with the rise of Mesopotamites “were dimmed like glow-worms when the day breaks into a smile” (485.5–6: κατὰ πυγολαμπίδας ἡμαύρωντο μειδιασάσης ἡμέρας).

The single arachnid is the generic spider, brought in by Choniates only for its web, for which he finds three different words: Andronikos swept away plots “like

¹⁰³ Il. 2.469–471.

¹⁰⁴ Choniates neatly takes his adjective from one of Job’s nouns (μυρμηκολέων ὤλετο παρὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν βράν).

a spider's web" (104.44: ὡς ἰστὸν ἀράχνης); engines of war were demolished "like threads of a spider" (282.80: ὥσπερ καὶ ἀράχνης ... νήματα); and the garment of a statue of Helen was "more delicate than spiders' webs" (652.66: ἀραχνίων λεπτότερος).¹⁰⁵

Finally, one of Choniates' most effective similes employs a hybrid animal, the mythical Chimaira, which consisted of a lion, a goat and a snake. "Upon the fall of famed Thessaloniki there occurred ... a separation of the Sicilian army; one could say that like the mythical Chimaira a well-balanced force previously united was divided, and its forepart, the most powerful, like a lion immediately hastened towards the queen of cities, its middle grazed the areas around Amphipolis and Serrai and the remainder, the fleet, trailing along in the waters like a snake, kept watch over the metropolis of the Thessalians" (319.45–51: ἐπεὶ δὲ ἔαλω ἡ λογίμη Θεσσαλονίκη καὶ ὁ διαμερισμὸς ... ξυνέβη τοῦ Σικελικοῦ στρατεύματος, ἄλλος δ' ἂν εἶπέ τις ὡς κατὰ τὴν μυθικὴν Χίμαιραν συναπτόμενον πρότερον τὸ ἀντίπαλον, τότε διαιρεθέν, τὸ μὲν κράτιστον αὐτοῦ ὅσα καὶ λέων προηγούμενον εὐθὺ τῆς βασιλίδος ἴετο πόλεως, τὸ δὲ μέσον τὰ κατ' Ἀμφίπολιν καὶ Σέρρας ἐνέμετο, τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν, ὅσον δηλονότι ναυτικὸν καὶ ὡς ὄφιν συρόμενον ἐν τοῖς ὕδασιν, ἐτήρει τὴν προκαθεζομένην πόλιν τῶν Θεσσαλῶν).

This survey has demonstrated both Choniates' huge range of subjects for imagery in the two spheres of plants and animals and also his quest for *Selbstvariation* in meticulously avoiding the use of the same vocabulary when repeating an image. This trait is one rarely favoured today, but it was beloved by Byzantine writers who often excelled at it. How deliberate it was is evident from Choniates' success in so long a work as his *History*, for which checking earlier wording was necessarily rendered hard by both a hand-written text and the lack of page-numbering.¹⁰⁶

Kazhdan and Franklin emphasize¹⁰⁷ that, in contrast to that of Nikephoros Gregoras, Choniates' imagery is almost invariably gloomy.¹⁰⁸ This is of course true, but hardly surprising since his history treats of events from late summer 1118 to autumn 1207, a period of worsening problems in the Empire culminating in the sacks of Thessaloniki and Constantinople by "the sanctified bandits", a period of whose principal events and actors modern historians find little good to say, a period in which Choniates witnessed the sack and pillage of the capital with the destruction of so many works of ancient art and in which he himself lost both

105 For the mosquito of fable escaping the lion but caught in the spider's web see above, 254.

106 On the other hand we must remember that technological dependence (and increasing literacy) militates against memory.

107 Studies on Byzantine Literature (see n. 4), 257–271.

108 Ibid., 271.

home and high rank. But Choniates can use imagery to praise when the subject justifies it. The outstanding example is Eustathios, archbishop of Thessaloniki, whose image as a mother-bird gathering her chicks beneath her wings has already been seen,¹⁰⁹ and at whose words Latins would become gentler “like an inflamed wound soothed by water from a light hand” (308.7–8: οἷα τραῦμα φλεγμαῖνον χειρὶ κούγη καταλεινόμενον ὕδατι).

One thing not evident from this survey of the vegetal and animal worlds alone is that despite numerous images drawn from the Bible (especially the Old Testament), Choniates is in fact more dependent upon Classical literature. Here his comparisons are drawn almost exclusively from the Iliad and, in huge numbers, from mythology without any specific source; while there are also many comparisons made with historical persons and events. Imagery from quotidian life has a much greater percentage of examples of his own devising than that from the vegetal and animal worlds.

Another thing that the survey obscures is the historian’s inordinate love for piling on images. Style is, of course, subjective, and, although this particular aspect of Choniates’ composition is found in many other Byzantine authors, unlike the desire for *Selbstvariation*, there are considerable differences between writers. Psellos, for instance, prefers to expand an image, and if he does use different images he attempts to make them compatible.¹¹⁰ Typical of Choniates, on the other hand, are his description of Mesopotamites once looked down on but now regarded as “the horn of Amaltheia, ... multifarious mixing-bowl of virtues, all the herbage of Job’s field, ... the genuine pearl of Peroz always hanging from the emperor’s ears, ... Artemon the notorious, Argos the many-eyed, Briareus the hundred-handed” (484.91–485.3: κέρας τε Ἀμαλθείας ... πολυμιγῆς κρατὴρ ἀγαθῶν ἢ τὸ παρὰ τῷ Ἰὼβ παμβότανον τοῦ ἀγροῦ ... τὸ τοῦ Περόζου ἄντικρυς μάργαρον αἰεὶ πρὸς τοῖς ὠσὶ τοῦ βασιλέως ἀπαιωρούμενον ... Ἀρτέμων ὁ περιφόρητος καὶ Ἄργος ὁ πολυόμματος καὶ ὁ ἐκατόγχειρ Βριάρεως); or of those who exulted at his toppling “as though the fall of hostile nations had been successfully accomplished or a wild beast which is hard to capture and had desolated cities and destroyed their inhabitants, changing its colours like they say Libyan beasts do, had been taken, or the serpent that Iob could not catch had been seized or the gluttonous ant-lion destroyed or the many-tassled and fearsome aegis had been hurled into the nether abyss and torn asunder” (492.43–48: ὥς εἴπερ πολεμίων ἔθνων ὑπόπτωσις ἐντεῦθεν κατῶρθωτο ἢ θηρίον δυσάλωτον ἐκεχειρώτο πόλεις ἐξερημοῦν καὶ τοὺς κατοίκους διαφθεῖρον καὶ πρὸς χροᾶς ἀνομοίους μεταλλαττόμενον, ὅποια τὰ Λιβυκὰ φασιν, ἢ ὁ παρὰ τῷ Ἰὼβ ἀνάλωτος δράκων συνείληπτο καὶ ὁ βορὸς μυρμηκολέων

109 Above, 246.

110 Many examples are given in Littlewood, Imagery (see n. 2).

ἀπώλετο, εἴτε μὴν ἡ πολυθύσανος αἰγὶς καὶ δειματώδης ἐκείνοις ἐς χάος ἐλήλαται καὶ διέσπασται).

Not evident either is the quantity of similes and comparisons, which is far greater per page than in Psellos' *Chronographia*. Of this Choniates gives readers due warning in the disclaimer of his preface when in asseverating that History eschews both "rhetorical cleverness and poetic story-telling" (3.49–50: ἡ τε ῥητορικὴ δεινότης καὶ ἡ ποιητικὴ λογοποιΐα), he cannot refrain from adding that even when treated with dignity she is "desirous of being put before diggers and smiths covered in much soot and of being familiar to those who gaze at ... Ares" (ibid. 52–54: ἐρῶσα ... προκεῖσθαι σκαπανεῦσί τε καὶ σιδηρεῦσι καὶ πολλῆς γέμουσι τῆς ἀσβόλης καὶ συνήθης εἶναι τοῖς πρὸς ... Ἄρεα βλέπουσι), and that while she rejoices in very graceful phraseology "she yearns to be adorned with the pure and simple mantle of words" (ibid. 56–57: τὸ φάρος τῶν ὀνομάτων εὐλικρινές καὶ ἀπέριττον περικεῖσθαι φιλεῖ).