



Summary :

All existing information about the Byzantine poet "Ptochoprodromos" or "poor Prodromos" comes exclusively from four of his poems that survived in 12th-C. literary tradition. The ptochoprodromic poems, as they are called, are the first samples of Byzantine folk satire, a typical literary genre of the cosmopolitan society of komnenian Constantinople. The poet, who calls himself Ptochoprodromos, makes creative use of the tradition of satire and of the rhetorical technique of ethopoeia, contributing to the development of allegorical satire in the 13th century and later. As far as the author's identity is concerned, the poems are traditionally attributed to Theodore Prodromos.

Other Names

Date and Place of Birth

Unknown; 12th century

Main Role

Scholar, poet

1. Introduction

All existing information about the Byzantine poet Ptochoprodromos comes exclusively from his work, which constitutes a unique case in Byzantine literature. The literary tradition of the Byzantine times has left us four begging poems that appear to have many common aspects and are attributed in the manuscripts to a poet with the pseudonym "Ptochoprodromos". They are the so-called ptochoprodromic poems; examples of 12th-C. of secular poetry, written in the vernacular in order to win the favor and generosity of eminent people, but with an obviously mocking, satirical and even self-sarcastic style. Married life, the poverty of scholars and [monastic life](#) are satirized in the four poems. Both the identity of the author and the analysis of the poems in the context of the study of secular poetry, pose questions that have not been definitively answered yet.¹

2. The poet's portrait

Reading Ptochoprodromos' poems, we get the following idea about his life. He was a common man, coming from a poor family, a fact that posed many obstacles in his life. He did not learn an art or a trade, but encouraged by his father, he devoted himself to studying from a young age, a thing that he regretted when he was older, as he was not able to make a leaving by writing verses. He was married, with children and had family problems because of his humble descent, his economic state in general and his wife's character. He lived during the middle and the second half of the 12th century in [Constantinople](#) and had the ability and the courage to address his poems directly to the emperor. We also learn that at a young age he was a monk and asked for the help of the emperor himself because of the priors' unjust behavior toward him.

Such information appears in fragments in the four poems, which can in no way be considered as some kind of biographic entries. Therefore, and even though the author probably does draw from his personal experience when writing the poems, the figure of Ptochoprodromos is rather a literary disguise than a real person.²

3. The manuscript tradition and the research

The text of the poems has survived in different order and in some cases with interventions, alterations and abridgements in seven manuscripts of the Byzantine times (14th-15th c.) and two subsequent ones (late 15th and 16th c.). The *ptochoprodromic* poems have been the subject of studies by various researchers. A number of different editions and translations –in French (Hesseling and Pernot, 1910)³, Italian (Gazya, 1972)⁴, Spanish (Egea, 1984)⁵, and partly in English (Alexiou, 1986)⁶ and German (Eideneir, 1991)⁷ – shows that these poems attracted the interest of the researchers, who have particularly insisted on the two poems that mock monastic life and the life of a scholar and poet.



4. The issue of the ptochoprodromic poems

The issue of the authorship of the ptochoprodromic poems stimulated a discussion that has not yet concluded.⁸ In the beginning, the publishers, taking into account the title of the first poem and some sporadic mentions in the manuscript tradition, associated the authorship of the poems to the famous scholar and prolific author of the first half of the 12th century, [Theodore Prodromos](#), who has left us many essays and works in the scholarly language of the komnenian court, but works in the vernacular too. However, after G. Hatzidakis⁹ claimed, in 1892, that there were two different authors under the name Prodromos, various theories began to be suggested about the four poems. Decline of the attribution of the ptochoprodromic poems to Theodore Prodromos was generally based upon their lack of homogeneity, and mostly on linguistic arguments. But such arguments were considered insufficient.¹⁰ They were opposed with the assumption that Prodromos could have written the ptochoprodromic poems, following a prominent in the komnenian court trend.¹¹ The passages in scholarly language in the poems were considered evidence of Theodore Prodromos being their author, even though they don't present the same writing abilities. Another opinion that has been phrased is that the four poems were the work of a subsequent poet that imitated Theodore Prodromos.¹²

Lately, the discussion over the identifying Ptochoprodromos with an eponymous and specific known author has slackened among researchers. The examination of the issue turns to vernacular literature and its tradition, that was established by a series of anonymous works and collections, such as *Spaneas*, *Poulologos*,¹³ *Asma tou Armouri* etc. This approach was supported by Eideneier, in the context of his publication, study and commentation of the poems.¹⁴ On the other hand, modern research focuses on the receiver of the work and on the fact that this poetry was probably addressed to the people of the Court, maybe even the emperor himself. Thus, the ptochoprodromic poems constitute yet another indication of the trends in secular poetry of the komnenian times.

5. Dating

The dating of the poems is based on the factual examination of various pieces of evidence in the poems and the literary analysis of the language. [Manuel I Komnenos](#) (1143-1180) is mentioned as the recipient of the third and fourth poem; on the other hand, there are mentions of coins commonly known as *manoelata* (mean. "coins of Manuel"), *stamena*, *tartera*, which numismatic research places between 1163-1204. Accordingly, the writing of the poems is dated in the second half of the 12th century, or the late 12th century, which also explains the use of Turkish words, such as *tsaroukia*, because of the increased interaction between the Turkish and the Greek element in the Byzantine territory and even in [Constantinople](#) during that period.¹⁵

6. The poems

6.1. The first poem (the poor husband): “ .to the Emperor Mavroiannes [John II]”

The **first poem** survives only in one manuscript (cod. Paris.gr.396), dating back to the late 13th or early 14th century.¹⁶ The poem is titled “From Prodromos, kyros-Theodoros, to the Emperor Mavroiannes” and, according to Beck, is dedicated to John II Komnenos (1118-1143). It consists of 274 verses, “political” according to the poet, and it is a rather lively and amusing narration of his “sore tribulations caused by a warring wife” because of his poverty. The poet declares how much he fears her with the words: “I fear her mouth, I fear her rage,/I fear her threats and her distaste”. “Kyros Prodromos’ ”intention is to thank the emperor for his great benefactions to him, and also to recount the grievous condition he is in and ask for economic support in order to be spared the nagging of his shrewish wife and the humiliations to which she subjects him, so that the one who wishes the best for the emperor won't be lost prematurely.

6.2. The second poem (the poor father): “ .to the Sebastokrator”

The **second poem** is the shortest of the four. It is written in the same codex, under the inscription “From the same to the Sebastokrator”. In another codex of the 14th c., preserved in Jerusalem (Hieros. Sabait. 415), the poem survives under the title “From the same”, and is written after the fourth poem, which is about monastic life and is titled “Verses of grammatikos kyros



Theodoros Ptochoprodromos". In the second poem, the "poor" author attempts to please his "despot", the sebastokrator in 117 verses, using "political *metriasmata* and *politographias*" (=political metres/jests and political writings/citizen affairs), aspiring to his benefaction, in order to be rescued from the extreme poverty he is in. The poet notes that his name "Ptochoprodromos", should not deceive his despot. Because, even though his name is Prodromos, he does not eat greens and grasshoppers, but he likes tasty meals, like "greasy lamb meat". But the poet only has his poverty to offer to his starving intimates, so they end up eating their clothes and then hallucinate stars and green wheels "and the worst of it all, they look like they are drunk, and bewitched and crazy."

6.3. The third poem (the scholar): " .to the emperor lord Manuel Komnenos" –the poverty of a scholar

The **third poem** is the famous satire of a scholar's poverty. The text consists of 291 verses and has survived in a number of manuscripts of the 14th century (Paris.gr. Suppl. 1034, Paris.gr. 396, Monac.gr. 525), the 15th century (Paris.Coislin 382, Paris.gr. 1310, Constantionop. Serail 35) and the 16th century (Adrianop.1237 = Athen. Museum Benaki 44). In the oldest surviving manuscript, Paris.gr. Suppl.1034, of the 1364, the poem is titled: "Ptochoprodromos to the emperor lord Manuel Komnenos, the Purple-born" meaning it is a poem dedicated to Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180). The poet-narrator appears as a poor scholar, who remembers his youth, when his father used to advise him to study in order to prosper, "Ever since I was a lad, my father used to tell me, / 'Get an education, boy, and there'll be no-one like you.'" But now that he compares his poverty and hunger to the life of his neighbors who are manual workers, craftsmen and other wage-earners, he curses letters with the statement "I spit on grammar and I say with tears, / 'Christ, down with letters, and with whoever wants them!'" The situation described is painful, wherever the poet looks for some "bread to eat", in the four corners of his cell, he only finds "many texts many papers." He even wonders in everyday language how many poems he has to write "how many verses should I weave, / how much should I write and say, how much should I spout forth," in order to find a cure for his hunger. Toward the end he concludes that he is already in the three hells of starvation, cold and darkness. In his conclusion, the last 18 verses, the poet addresses a plea for help to the emperor, the "komnenoblaston apo porphyras rodon" (=rose of purple, "born in the purple" and "of the Komnenos lineage"), in a scholarly archaic language.

6.4. The fourth poem (the unfortunate monk): " .to Manuel the Purple-born, the Komnenos"- satire of a Byzantine monastery

The **fourth poem** is a satire of the life in a Byzantine monastery. The text survives in eight manuscripts, in full with alterations and in fragments, which shows the sensation it created. This poem is also dedicated to Manuel I Komnenos. In Paris.gr. Suppl.1034 of 1364, the title is: "Other verses of Hilarion, the monk Ptochoprodromos, to the most revered emperor lord Manuel the Purple-born and Komnenos." The mention of the name Hilarion in this codex is probably a result of misinterpretation, as it is not mentioned in other manuscripts where, on the contrary, Theodore Prodromos, or just Prodromos is mentioned. In 665 verses of fifteen syllables, the narrator, a young monk, "illiterate" and "dressed in rags", describes to the emperor how things are inside the monastery, his suffering and the greed of his priors, a father and son that illegally and excessively rule over the entire surrounding area. The many kinds of punishments imposed to the unfortunate monk without substantial reason are described in a satirical way. He emphasizes on the difference of living standards between priors and monks, describes how the former eat fish and let the latter eat a horrible slop, and generally how "they greedily collect coins/ and catechize us on avarice." He describes very lively the luxury and privileges enjoyed by "them", while he points out that for "us" there is suffering, mistreatment and hunger. As he has no one else to turn to, the monk turns to the emperor, asking him only a small piece of bread.

6.5. Other poems

At one time, some other smaller poems were also attributed to Ptochoprodromos. They are seven love poems from a codex of the 14th century, which, as subsequent research proved, are not related to the author of the ptochoprodromic poems.¹⁷ Five poems in a codex of the National Library of St Mark's in Venice (ar. XI 22), in which the poet addresses to Manuel I Komnenos and asks of him to be offered hospitality by "brotherhood" of the monastery of [St. George of Mangana](#) in Constantinople,¹⁸ were also attributed to Ptochoprodromos for some time. As it was later proven, these last ones were part of a collection of 12 poems that also dated from the 12th century and its author, who is also referred to as Prodromos, is conventionally called "Manganeios".¹⁹



6.6. Special characteristics of the poems (verse, style and language)

Ptochoprodromos' poems are written in the so-called political verse, meaning an iambic meter in fifteen syllables, based on the metric tone. With Ptochoprodromos and since the 12th century, the expression of satirical poetry in rhythmic meters (fifteen syllables) becomes more widespread. Other begging or pleading poems, in which known and unknown beggar poets ask favors from emperors or other influential personalities of their time (Michael Glykas, John Tzetis), are written in political verse.

Another basic characteristic of the ptochoprodromic poems is their mixed language. The scholarly language used in the prologue, the epilogue and wherever the poet turns to the receiver to submit his plea for benefaction. The vernacular, which is not affected by a particular dialect, but is used as a common literary language, is used in the parts where the narrator describes his misfortunes due to his poverty. The poet consciously associates and compares the issue of material poverty to the simplicity of the vernacular. On the other hand, the satirical style is more highlighted by the dark tones and the exaggerations of the description, while lyrical elements are also being used.²⁰

7. Evaluation

The ptochoprodromic poems are the first poems representing Byzantine vernacular satire. As Beck felicitously notes, this literary form is a typical product of the cosmopolitan society that begins expressing itself. And also, judging and criticizing, we would say. Behind his inclination to make fun of the shortcomings and improve his living standards, the anonymous poet proceeds to offer criticism. On the other hand, he addresses his receiver with ceremonial formality: "to the most revered emperor lord Manuel the Purple-born". The fact that the third and especially the fourth poem, in which the satire is even harsher, have survived in most of the manuscripts cannot be considered random. Ptochoprodromos' daring to complain about clergy misconduct directly to the emperor, in a sophisticated, poetic and bold way, does not convince us that we deal with the writing of a poor monk. It is possible that the author was not one "of the glorious", but it appears that he was raised in an environment that gave him the opportunity to get a good education, while he kept in touch with the scholars of Constantinople and was at ease with criticizing the clergy.²¹

These poems should also be evaluated as very important material in the study of the Byzantines' everyday life –diet, habits, clothing etc. P. Koukoule's study on the monastic life (1955), in which Prodromos or Ptochoprodromos was served as the main source,²² remains worthy of mention. Lately, M. Alexiou studied the information about games that are mentioned in the first three poems.²³

Ultimately, the ptochoprodromic poems should also be examined as a landmark in the evolution of secular literature. This small group presented a creative use of the tradition of satire and the rhetorical form of acting, but also set the foundations for the development of allegorical satire in the 13th century and later, where social and political satire is attempted through narrations about animals (*Διήγησις Παιδιόφραστος των Τετραπόδων Ζώων*,²⁴ *Συναξάριον του Τιμημένου Γαδάρου* etc.).²⁵

1. The most recent publication of *ptochoprodromika* includes translation in German with critical annotation and detailed commentary on the "ptochoprodromic" issue (Prodromische Frage), see Eideneier, H. *Ptochoprodromos: Einführung, kritische Ausgabe, deutsche Übersetzung, Glossar* (Köln: Romiosini 1991).

2. About the literary pseudonym (Die Literarsche Person) see Eideneier, Hans, *Ptochoprodromos : Einführung, kritische Ausgabe, deutsche Übersetzung, Glossar* (Köln: Romiosini 1991), pp 33-34.

3. *Poèmes prodromiques en grec vulgaire*, ed. D.-C. Hesseling, H. Pernot (Amsterdam: Müller 1910).

4. Garzya, A. *Teodoro Prodromo. Tre carmi satirici, traduzione et texte* (Neapel 1972).

5. Egea, José M., "El griego de los Poemas Prodrómicos", *Veleia* N.S. 1 (1984), pp. 177-191.

6. Alexiou M., "The Poverty of Ecriture and the Craft of Writing: Towards a Reappraisal of the Prodromic Poems", *Byzantine and Modern Greek*



Studies 10 (1986), pp. 1-40; translated excerpts of the poems in Appendix II: The Four Poems, pp. 36-40.

7. Eideneier, H. *Ptochoprodromos: Einführung, kritische Ausgabe, deutsche Übersetzung, Glossar* (Köln: Romiosini, 1991).
8. Review of the various opinions on the subject of the author's identity see Alexiou M., "The Poverty of Ecriure and the Craft of Writing: Towards a Reappraisal of the Prodrmic Poems," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 10 (1986), pp. 1-40, esp. Appendix I: On the Question of Autorship, pp. 32-35.
9. Hatzidakis, G.N., "Kritische Bemerkungen zu einigen mitteligriechischen Autoren", *Byzantinisches Zeitschrift* 1 (1892), pp. 98-106.
10. For the arguments in favour of identifying Ptochoprodromos as Theothore Prodromos see "Πρόδρομος Θεόδωρος", Φούρλας, Α. (ed.), *Tusculum. Λεξικόν Ελλήνων και Λατίνων συγγραφέων της Αρχαιότητας και του Μεσαίωνα* (Αθήνα 1993), pp. 421-22. Also, for older opinions see Κρουμπάχερ Κ., *Ιστορία της Βυζαντινής λογοτεχνίας*, intr. Νικ. Β. Τομαδάκη, transl. Γ. Σωτηριάδου (Πάπυρος 1964), pp. 757-768. J. Karayannopoulos also follows the presumptive attribution of the ptochoprodromika poems to Theodore Prodromos, see Καραγιαννόπουλος Ι., *Πηγαί της Βυζαντινής Ιστορίας* (Θεσσαλονίκη⁵ 1987), pp. 327-8.
11. Kazhdan A., "Ptochoprodromos", *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 3 (London-New York 1991), p. 1756.
12. On recent estimations about the dating and the authorship of the poems, see Alexiou M. "Ploys of Performance: Games and Play in the Ptochoprodromic Poems", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999), pp. 91-109.
13. Τσαβαρή, Ι. (ed.), *Ο Πουολόλογος* (Αθήνα 1987).
14. Eideneier, H. *Ptochoprodromos : Einführung, kritische Ausgabe, deutsche Übersetzung, Glossar* (Köln: Romiosini, 1991), p. 31.
15. Eideneier, H. *Ptochoprodromos : Einführung, kritische Ausgabe, deutsche Übersetzung, Glossar* (Köln: Romiosini, 1991), pp. 38-39.
16. The presentation of the poems is generally in accordance to Eideneier's latter publication, and Beck's classic description and analysis, Beck, H.-G., *Ιστορία της βυζαντινής δημόδους λογοτεχνίας* (Αθήνα: MIET 1988), pp. 171-177.
17. "Πρόδρομος Θεόδωρος", in Buchwald W., Hohlweg A., Prinz O. (μτφρ. Φούρλας, Α.), *Tusculum. Λεξικόν Ελλήνων και Λατίνων συγγραφέων της Αρχαιότητας και του Μεσαίωνα* (Αθήνα 1993), p. 423.
18. About "Manganean poems" and their relation to Theodore Prodromos and the ptochoprodromica poems, see Kyriakis M.J., "Poor Poets and Starving Literati in Twelfth Century Byzantium", *Byzantion* 44 (1974), pp. 290-309.
19. Kazhdan A., "Prodromos Mangneios", *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (London-New York, 1991), p. 1726.
20. On the ptochoprodromic poems as early examples of Byzantine vernacular literature see http://www2.fhw.gr/projects/cooperations/byzantine_literature/gr/700/704ap1.html (in Greek).
21. Alexiou M., "The Poverty of Ecriure and the Craft of Writing: Towards a Reappraisal of the Prodrmic Poems", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 10 (1986).
22. Κουκουλές, Φ., "Ο μοναχικός βίος" στο: *Βυζαντινών βίος και πολιτισμός* [= Vie et civilisation byzantines], (Αθήνα: Editions de l'Institut Français d'Athènes 1955), pp. 71-109.
23. Alexiou M. "Ploys of Performance: Games and Play in the Ptochoprodromic Poems", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999), pp. 91-109.
24. Διήγησις Παιδιόφραστος των Τετραπόδων Ζώων, ed. W. Wagner, *Carmina Graeca Medii Aevi* (Λιψία 1874).



25. Διήγησις Παιδιόφραστος των Τετραπόδων Ζώων, W. Wagner (ed.), *Carmina Graeca Medii Aevi*, Λιψία 1874. For the relation between prochoprodromica and allegorical and satirical works of their times, see http://www2.fhw.gr/projects/cooperations/byzantine_literature/gr/700/706b.html

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	Krumbacher K. , <i>Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur</i> , München 1897
	<i>Ptochoprodromos: Einführung, kritische Ausgabe, deutsche Übersetzung, Glossar</i> , Eideneier, Hans, Köln: Romiosini, 1991
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	Alexiou M. , "The Poverty of Ecriture and the Craft of Writing: Towards a Reappraisal of the Prodromic Poems", <i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i> , 10, 1986, 1-40
	Hatzidakis G.N. , "Kritische Bemerkungen zu einigen mittelgriechischen Autoren", <i>Byzantinisches Zeitschrift</i> , 1, 1892, 98-106
	Alexiou M. , "Ploys of Performance: Games and Play in the Ptochoprodromic Poems", <i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i> , 53, 1999, 91-109
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	Kyriakis M.J. , "Poor Poets and Starving Literati in Twelfth Century Byzantium", <i>Byzantion</i> , 44, 1974, 290-309

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Glossary :

histamenon or stamenon

Mean. "the standard coin", also known as trachy. A concave coin of silver-and-copper mixture (billon) and later on of copper. It was introduced by Alexios I Komnenos in 1092. Its initial value was 1/48 of the hyperpyron.

tetareron

Initially a slightly lighter coin of gold, introduced by Nikephoros II (963-969). From 1092 onwards it was a flat, copper coin of little value (also known as tarteron).

Quotations

Ptochoprodromos complains about the abbot's luxurious banquets, as opposed to the poor food provided to simple monks like himself. From poem IV (poem III in the Hesseling-Pernot edition):



Τετράδα καὶ παρασκευὴν ξηροφαγοῦσιν ὅλως·
ἰχθὺν γὰρ οὐκ ἐσθίουσιν, ἄναξ, ποσῶς ἐν τούτοις,
εἰμὴ ψωμίτιν, ἀστακοὺς καὶ ἀληθινὰ παγούρια, [275]
καὶ καρabiδας εκζεστάς, τηγάνου καριδίτσας
καὶ λαχανίτιν καὶ φακὴν μετὰ ὄστρειδομυδίτσια,
καὶ μετὰ . . . δέσποτα, καὶ κτένια καὶ σωλῆνας,
καὶ φαβατίτιν ἀλεστόν καὶ ὀρύζιν μετὰ τὸ μέλιν,
φασόλια ἐξοφθάλμιστα, ἐλαίτσας καὶ χαβιάριν, [280]
καὶ πωρινὰ ἀυγοτάραχα διὰ τὴν ἀνορεξίαν,
μηλίτσια τε καὶ φοίνικας, ἰσχάδας, καρυδίτσια,
καὶ σταφιδίτσας χιώτικας, καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ διὰ κίτρου.
. . . , νὰ χωνεύουσιν ἐκ τῆς ξηροφαγίας,
κρασίν γλυκὺν γανίτικον, καὶ κρητικὸν καὶ σάμιον, [285]
ἵνα χυμοὺς ἐκβάλωσιν ἐκ τῆς γλυκοποσίας,
ἡμᾶς δὲ προτιθέασιν κυάμους βεβρεγμένους,
Ἡμεῖς δὲ νῦν ἐσθίομεν καθόλου τὸ ἀγιοζούμιν,
καὶ σκόπει τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ τὴν ποικιλίαν·
κακκάβιν ἐνὶ δίωτον, ὡσεὶ μετρῶν τεσσάρων,
καὶ ἕως ἄνω οἱ μάγειροι γεμίζουσι το ὕδωρ,
καὶ πῦρ ἐξάπτουσι πολὺ κατὰ τοῦ κακκαβίου,
καὶ βάλλουσι κρομμύδια κὰν εἴκοσι κολέντας, [295]
καὶ τότε βλέπε, δέσποτα, καλὴν φιλοτιμίαν·
εἰς κλήσιν γὰρ βαπτίζονται τριάδος τῆς ἀγίας,
στάζει γὰρ τρεῖς τὸ ἔλαιον ὁ μάγειρος ἀπέσω,
καὶ βάλλει καὶ θρνμβόξυλα τινὰ πρὸς μυρωδίαν
καὶ τὸν ζωμὸν ἐκχέει τὸν ἐπάνω τῶν ψωμίων, [300]
καὶ δίδουν μας καὶ τρώγομεν καὶ λέγεται ἀγιοζούμιν.

Eideneier, Hans, *Ptochoprodromos: Einführung, kritische Ausgabe, deutsche Übersetzung, Glossar* (Köln: Romiosini 1991).

[Translation:

On Wednesdays and Fridays they keep a strict fast: they don't even eat any fish on those days, my lord, but only a bit of bread, and lobsters and nice crabs and stewed crayfish, pan-fried prawns and a few greens and lentils with their oysters and mussels, and clams and razor-shells, your worship, along with the rest: nice broad beans, rice with honey, sprouted black-eyed peas, olives and caviar, and botargo in season to keep them from starvation, sweet little apples and dates, dried figs and green walnuts, and Chios raisins, and some lemon conserve. Of course, they complete their fast-day meal with sweet Ganitic wine, and Cretan, and Samian, to throw off the evil humours with a drink of sweet wine. Meanwhile they put before us well-soaked dry beans, and quench our thirst with cumin-water, obedient to the Rule and the precepts of the Fathers. What we eat is nothing but 'holy soup'; notice the clever name. The cooks take a two-handled cauldron, about four gallons, and fill it up with water, and light a good fire underneath, and toss in about twenty onions ... The chef gives it three splashes of oil and tosses in some twigs of savory for flavouring, and pours this soup over our pieces of bread, and gives it to us to eat, and it's called 'holy soup'.

Transl. by A. Dalby, *Tastes of Byzantium* (New York 2003), p. 94.]

An evaluation of the ptochoprodromic poems in the context of Byzantine vernacular literature and its place in the Komnenian court

What conclusions can be drawn? Byzantinists have been all too ready to treat our poems as "non-sens in disenable," simply because they are in "mixed-up Greek." They have also been reluctant to accept that vernacular texts, from the twelfth century on, can and should be created with the same degree of seriousness as texts in the style. Textual emendations and conflation of different manuscripts have been arbitrary. Yet, if Theodore Prodromos was the author of our four poems, as a mounting body of evidence suggests, the twelfth century provides the literary, cultural, and linguistic starting point for "modern" Greek, at the same time as "ancient" texts were rediscovered, edited, and performed. The twelfth century, as Michael Hendy, Alan Harvey, and Magdalino have



shown from socioeconomic and cultural perspectives, was not one of decline, rather one of bewildering yet productive social diversification. Prodromos in the four vernacular poems spells out a timely if complex message for imperial rulers: they must pay serious attention to games and play in low-style language or else they will fall, as did indeed Constantinople to the Latins in 1204. Such is the wealth and specificity of detail afforded by the four poems here that we may be certain that they were not composed after that date, although they may have been revised by later scribes.

Alexiou M. "Ploys of Performance: Games and Play in the Ptochoprodromic Poems", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999), p. 109.

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