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NARRATING IMAGES IN BYZANTINE LITERATURE:
THE EKPHRASEIS OF KONSTANTINOS MANASSES*

... *the Word alone He worked* (*Synopsis Chronike*, v. 185)

The intimate relationship between word and image, narrative and description, poetry and art, is an old and by now thoroughly discussed idea. The ekphrasis – the rhetorical exercise in which word and image literally meet – holds a key position: it incorporates *ut pictura poesis* (but also, as it were, *ut poesis pictura*) and provides a starting-point for the long tradition of description in Western literature. Byzantine literature has furnished us with a treasure chest filled with material for studies of the relation between image and word. The many long and elaborate ekphrasis do not only describe objects in vivid detail, but in most cases they also offer interpretations of the images described, which helps us understand how images and descriptions were perceived. The Byzantine material also invites fruitful interdisciplinary investigations, since, in a few cases, both the works of art and their literary descriptions have come down to us. Furthermore, Byzantine authors wrote both independent ekphrasis and employed ekphrastic discourse within other genres, which opens up the opportunity for a new kind of investigation of ekphrasis, one with a point of departure in the author and the literary and cultural context in which he worked.

Konstantinos Manasses has been called “ein Spezialist für Ekphrasis”,¹ even though his use of the ekphrasis has not been subject to any thorough

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¹ H. HUNGER, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (*Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft* 12.5.1–2). Munich 1978, 1, 183.

examination. Manasses belonged to the group of intellectuals and rhetoricians associated with imperial circles in Constantinople in the mid twelfth century. His main work, the verse chronicle *Synopsis Chronike*, was dedicated to his patroness, Sebastokratorissa Eirene, to whose circle belonged also Theodore Prodromos and John Tzetzes.² Manasses was accordingly part of the highly intellectual milieu of the imperial capital at a time which was marked by both a broad literary production and an apparently experimental approach to ancient texts and genres, resulting in a series of works ranging from Aristotelian commentaries and ‘ancient novels’ to vernacular poems and satire. Manasses is known primarily as the author of the *Synopsis Chronike*³ and the novel *Aristandros and Kallithea*, the latter preserved only in fragments.⁴ The *Synopsis Chronike* includes a number of ekphraseis, and we may presume, in light of the fragments and the use of the device in the other Komnenian novels, that *Aristandros and Kallithea* featured ekphrastic passages. Manasses also wrote independent ekphraseis, five of which, to my knowledge, have survived: Ἔκφρασις γῆς (“Description of the Earth”),⁵ Ἔκφρασις κύκλωπος (“Description of a cyclops”),⁶ Ἔκφρασις ἀλώσεως σπίνων καὶ ἀκανθίδων (“Description of the catching of siskins and goldfinches”),⁷ Ἔκφρασις κννηγεσίου γεράνων (“Description of a crane hunt”),⁸ and Ἔκφρασις ἀνθρώπου μικροῦ (“Description of a small man”).⁹

² On Sebastokratorissa Eirene and her circle, see e.g. E. M. JEFFREYS, The Sebastokratorissa Eirene as Literary Patroness: the monk Iakovos. *JÖB* 32:3 (1982) 63–71, O. LAMPSIDIS, Zur Sebastokratorissa Eirene. *JÖB* 34 (1984) 91–105, and M. MULLETT, Aristocracy and Patronage in the literary circles of Comnenian Constantinople, in: *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries* (ed. M. ANGOLD) (*BAR International Series* 221). Oxford 1984, 173–197.

³ Ed. O. LAMPSIDIS, Constantini Manassis Breviarium Chronicum (*CFHB* 36, 1–2). Athens 1996.

⁴ Ed. O. MAZAL, Der Roman des Konstantinos Manasses. Überlieferung, Rekonstruktion, Textausgabe der Fragmente (*WBS* 4). Vienna 1967.

⁵ Ed. O. LAMPSIDIS, Der vollständige Text der Ἔκφρασις γῆς des Konstantinos Manasses. *JÖB* 41 (1991) 189–205. See also L. STERNBACH, Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte. *Jahreshefte des Österr. Arch. Instituts* 5 (1902), Sp. 74–83.

⁶ Ed. L. STERNBACH, Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte. *Jahreshefte des Österr. Arch. Instituts* 5 (1902), Sp. 83–85.

⁷ Ed. K. HORNA, Analekten zur byzantinischen Literatur. Vienna 1905, 6–12. See also L. STERNBACH, Analecta Manassea. *Eos* 7 (1902) 181–194.

⁸ Ed. E. KURTZ, Ešče dva nieizdannyh proizvedenija Konstantina Manassi. *VV* 12 (1906) 69–98, 79–88.

⁹ Ed. L. STERNBACH, Constantini Manassae ecphrasis inedita, in: *Symbolae in honorem ... Ludovici Cwiklinski quinque lustris magisterii in universitate litterarum Leopolitana peractis collectae ab amicis*. Leopoli 1902, 1–10. I have not managed to find

The aim of the present article is to introduce Manasses as an “expert on ekphrasis”: to present some of his ekphrastic material and to examine the techniques he employs when incorporating ekphraseis in a larger work, namely the *Synopsis Chronike*. I shall also discuss narrative aspects related both to the ekphrasis itself and to the insertion of ekphraseis within narratives. The history, formal rules, and rhetorical status of the ekphrasis have been thoroughly studied and discussed elsewhere and will not be brought up here.¹⁰ My primary concern is instead to consider the narrative and literary aspects of the ekphrasis. On the whole, there are few studies of the Byzantine ekphrasis from a literary perspective,¹¹ since the descriptions have been used mainly as a source of information for historians or art historians. In many cases, their rhetorical and/or literary characteristics have been neglected and they have consequently often been considered deceptive.¹² Now that we have a better understanding of the relations between image and word, description and narrative, it is time, I think, to pay the Byzantine ekphrasis some serious attention and see what it has to teach us about its own artistry.

this publication and have accordingly not read this ekphrasis myself. These are the five texts I have found references to, but there may be more; I would be most grateful to anyone who could refer me to other ekphraseis written by Manasses.

¹⁰ On the Byzantine ekphrasis and its development, see e.g. A. HOHLWEG, Ekphrasis. *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst* 2 (1971) 33–75, H. HUNGER, Hochsprachliche Literatur I, 170–188, and H. MAGUIRE, The Classical Tradition in the Byzantine Ekphrasis, in: *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*. University of Birmingham Thirteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies 1979 (ed. M. MULLETT – R. SCOTT). Birmingham 1981, 94–102.

¹¹ A conspicuous exception is E. MITSIS – P. A. AGAPITOS, Εἰκῶν καὶ λόγος. Ἡ περιγραφὴ ἔργων τέχνης στὴ βυζαντινὴ γραμματεία. *Annales d'Esthétique* 29–30 (1990/91) 109–126, giving a general outline of the development of the ekphrasis as an independent literary form in Byzantine literature and discussing the relation between image and word as expressed in some Byzantine ekphraseis. See also L. JAMES – R. WEBB, ‘To understand ultimate things and enter secret places’: Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium. *Art History* 14 (1991) 1–17, which considers the ekphrasis within the context of rhetoric, viewing it as a perceptual rather than descriptive response to art. On the relationship between text and image in Byzantine art, see H. MAGUIRE, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*. Princeton, N.J. 1981, R. CORMACK, *Writing in Gold*. London 1985, and L. BRUBAKER, Perception and Conception: Art, Theory and Culture in Ninth-Century Byzantium. *Word & Image* 5:1 (January 1989) 19–32.

¹² See e.g. H. MAGUIRE, Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions of Works of Art. *DOP* 28 (1974) 113–140. In the few cases when both object and description have survived, the ekphraseis have been criticised for not describing the object realistically enough. An example is Photios’ homily delivered on the occasion of the dedication of a mosaic of the Virgin and Child in Hagia Sophia, describing the image in a seemingly misleading manner. Photios, Homily 17 (ed. B. LAOURDAS, *Homilies of Photios*. Thes-

THE DILEMMA OF THE MOUSE

We shall first take a look at one of the independent ekphraseis of Manasses, examine its structure and consider its literary and narrative characteristics. We shall use as our example the best known ekphrasis, the so-called Ἐκφρασις γῆς,¹³ since it is the only one of the five ekphraseis which has appeared in a recent edition, and also the only one to have been studied from a literary perspective.¹⁴

The Ἐκφρασις γῆς is carefully structured, containing a theoretical proem, a detailed description with elaborate spatial organisation, and a concluding comment on the artist's and writer's skills. It thus provides a perfect example of the ekphrasis as an independent work of literature, displaying all the traditional characteristics of the rhetorical exercise and similarly, through its theoretical and explanatory considerations, exploring and explaining the genre itself. In the proem, the author-narrator undertakes a theoretical comparison between sculpture and painting, concluding that painting is the art form most apt to render realistically an object (5–22). He then states his urge to describe a specific object which he has seen with his own eyes, employing ekphrastic *topoi* going back to antiquity:

... τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἀφιλοκάλου ψυχῆς ἠγησάμην σιωπῇ τηλικούτου ἔργου κατακαλύψαι ...
καὶ τοίνυν χαρίζομαι τούτω τὴν γλώσσαν καὶ ὡς ἐφικτὸν ὑπ' ὄψιν τοῖς οὐκ ἰδοῦσαι
παρίστημι.

... so I thought that only an enemy of beauty could cover with silence such a work of art ... therefore, I offer this speech as a gift to the painting and present it, as far as it is possible, before the eyes of those who have not seen it. (26–28)

salonike 1959, 164–172), Engl. trans. by C. MANGO, *The Homilies of Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople*. Harvard 1958, 286–296. The description is discussed from a different perspective in JAMES – WEBB, *Ekphrasis and Art*, esp. 4, 12–13.

¹³ The full title is Τοῦ φιλοσόφου καὶ ῥήτορος κυροῦ Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ Μανασσῆ ἐκφρασις εἰκονισμάτων ἐν μαρμάρῳ κυκλωτερεῖ, κατὰ μέσον μὲν τυπούντων τὴν γῆν ἐν μορφῇ γυναικός, κύκλῳ δὲ παρόντων ὀπωρῶν καὶ τιῶν ζώων θαλασσίων καὶ ἄλλων διαφόρων (“Description of pictures set in a circular marble, having at their centre Earth in the form of a woman, and all around fruit, sea animals and various other creatures”).

¹⁴ For the edition, see LAMPSIDIS, *Der vollständige Text* 194–204. All references here are made to this text. On the problematic manuscript situation, see *op.cit.* 190–192. For a literary discussion of the text, see MITSIS – AGAPITOS, *Εἰκὼν καὶ λόγος* 116–118. For a comparison of the Ἐκφρασις γῆς with an epigram of Manuel Philes, see TH. BASEOU-BARABAS, *Το ἐντοίχιο ψηφιδωτό της Γῆς στο Ἱερό Παλάτιο καὶ οἱ “ἐκφράσεις” του Κωνσταντίνου Μανασσῆ καὶ Μανουήλ Φιλῆ: ρεαλισμὸς καὶ ρητορεία*. Σύμμεικτα 9/2 (1994) 95–115.

A narrative setting is then presented. The author-narrator wanders about the palace and the chambers of some “old emperors” (βασιλέων παλαιτέρων, 31),¹⁵ admires its general beauty, and then notices the adorned walls and what he thinks is a remarkable painting before which he stands dazzled: the realism of the image rivals nature itself. As he expresses his amazement, someone who is familiar with and understands matters of art (δεινός πολυπραγμονεῖν τὰ τοιαῦτα καὶ τὰ μυστηριωδέστερα κατανοεῖν τῶν τεχνῶν, 45–46) appears and further amazes him by explaining that the image is, in fact, a mosaic (λεπτῶν ψηφίδων εὐφύης ἀρμογή, 49). This, too, adheres to ancient forms of the ekphrasis: the *Imagines* of Philostratos the Elder are presented with a framing narrative situation in which the author-narrator describes and explains the paintings in the presence of some young men.¹⁶ The device is also extensively used and further developed in the ancient and Byzantine novels, where the beholding, describing, and explaining of images often play a decisive role in the plot.¹⁷

Then follows the description proper: Earth is represented in the centre of the mosaic and around this image are placed nine smaller tableaux (apples, peaches, pears, pomegranates, the leftovers of a meal, shell-fish, a cock, fish, dried fruit). The element of ‘action’ and movements is strong, achieved by means of a mixture of description with narrative, which is not a feature foreign to the ekphrasis, but here quite remarkably explored by Manasses. The best example is the description of the mouse in the fifth tableau (144–163). After the pomegranates, the leftovers of a meal are depicted, a heap of bones carelessly left behind, tempting a little mouse:

ἦσθετό ποθεν ἐκείνης τῆς ὀστώσεως μῦς· λίχνον δὲ ἄρα τὸ ζῶον καὶ ταχέως τῆς τῶν γευστῶν ὀσμῆς ἀντιλαμβανόμενον· ἦσθετο δὲ τῆς ὀστώσεως καὶ αἰσθόμενος ὀξέως ἐπέδραμε καὶ ἐπίδραμῶν τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ὑπερεφρόνησε καὶ παρήλθεν ὡς ἄχρηστα καὶ ἀφῆκεν ὡς ἄβρωστα καὶ οὐδὲ βλέπειν προσεποιήσατο, ὄλος δὲ τοῦ κρανίου τῆς τριγλῆς ἐγένετο καὶ τούτῳ φέρων ἐπέρουψεν ἑαυτόν. Ἄλλ’ ὃ τῆς σοφίας· ἔγραψεν αὐτόν ὁ τεχνίτης καὶ λιχνευόμενον καὶ

¹⁵ On these chambers in the Great Palace, Manuel I Komnenos and his relation to Manasses, see TH. BASEOU-BARABAS, Το ψηφιδωτό 97–99.

¹⁶ Philostratos, *Imag.* 1, prooem. 4–5. Philostratos the Younger employs no frame-story, but one may note his ‘assumed listener’ mentioned in *Imag.* prooem. 7. In Kallistratos’ descriptions there is no listener, but the author still underlines the act of beholding and reacting, see e.g. Kallistratos, *Imag.* 1.5; 2.4; 3.5. Engl. trans. by A. FAIRBANKS in Philostratos the Elder, *Imagines*. Philostratos the Younger, *Imagines*. Callistratos, *Descriptions* (*The Loeb Classical Library*), London 1931 (repr. 1960).

¹⁷ On the use of this device in the contemporary novel *Hysmine and Hysminias*, see I. NILSSON, *Erotic Pathos, Rhetorical Pleasure. Narrative Technique and Mimesis in Eumathios Makrembolites’ Hysmine & Hysminias*. Uppsala 2001, esp. 85–87.

φοβούμενον· ἅμα τὸ στόμα ὑπήνοιγε καὶ ἅμα ὑπότρομος ἀνεπόδιζεν· ἡ μὲν γαστήρ ἤπειγε πρὸς τροφήν, τὸ δὲ δέος ὑπέτρεπεν εἰς φυγὴν· τὸ μὲν ὄρεατικὸν ἀνηρέθειζεν, ἀλλ' ἀντεπεῖχε τὸ δειλοκάρδιον· ἅμα ἐπέτρεχε καὶ ἀπέτρεχε· καὶ ὡς ἐδώδιμον ἤθελε καὶ ὡς πολέμιον ἔφευγε δειλαῖος καὶ τὴν σωρείαν αὐτῶν τῶν ὀστέων ὑπόπτεινε, μὴ πού τις ἐν αὐτοῖς κατοικίδιος αἰλουρος παρακρούπτοιτο. Μετὰ τοιαύτης σοφίας ὁ μῦς ἐκεῖνος δεῖν εἰκόνιστο.

A mouse had smelled the heap, for the animal is indeed greedy and quickly grasps the smell of food. It had thus smelled the heap and attacked. In its rush it ignored everything that was there, passed it by without even looking at it, considering it to be useless and tasteless. It had desired the head of the red mullet and attacked it with frenzy. What clever invention, though! The artist had painted it as both greedy and frightened. It opened its mouth and, at the same time, moved back scared. Its belly pressed it upon the food, but fear put it to flight. Its appetites urged it forward, but cowardice held it back. It advanced and retreated. It wanted the red mullet as a titbit, but avoided it as an enemy, looking at the heap distrustfully, should the cat of the house have hidden inside it. With such an expertise had the painter represented the mouse in its dilemma. (151–163)

The use of narrative to describe the mouse's 'dilemma', the movement which does not in fact take place but is implied in the playful and paradoxical representation of the animal, renders the ekphrasis the vivid character which is its main aim; it brings the object described to life.¹⁸

After the description of the last tableau, the author-narrator closes by again praising the artist, but also highlighting his own role as a writer: γέγραπται δέ μοι τὸ πᾶν περὶ τὴν μάρμαρον τέχνασμα καὶ εἰς ἀντιγραφήν τῆς γραφῆς καὶ εἰς τέχνης ἀπόπειραν, "Here, then, have I described the whole artifice of the marble mosaic; I did it to render the painting, but also to confirm my own skill" (227–228). On the whole, Manasses' Ἐκφρασὶς γῆς includes all that belongs to the traditional form of the ekphrasis and embodies the complex relationship between image and word, their inherent rivalry *and* compatibility. It thus opens up for some comments on the narrative character of the ekphrasis, which should be made before we move on to the use of ekphrasis in the *Synopsis Chronike*.

¹⁸ This is the main aim of the exercise according to all the handbooks, see e.g. Aphthonios, ἔκφρασις ἐστὶ λόγος περιηγηματικὸς ὑπ' ὄψιν ἄγων ἐναργῶς τὸ δηλούμενον, "a descriptive speech bringing the object described vividly before the eyes", (ed. L. SPENGLER, *Rhetores Graeci*, Leipzig 1854 [repr. Frankfurt am Main 1966], 2, 46). On further implications of the adjective περιηγηματικὸς, see below. The description of the mouse and the leftovers has been interpreted in terms of the vanity of greed and luxury, see TH. BASEOU-BARABAS, *To ψηφιδωτό* 105–106, 114–115.

TO WRITE WITH IMAGES, TO PAINT WITH WORDS

The status of description has changed dramatically over the last decades. In general, description is no longer seen as an unnecessary digression without a certain function or worth of its own.¹⁹ The ekphraseis inserted in ancient, late antique, and Byzantine literature, starting with the Shield of Achilles in book 18 of the *Iliad*, are accordingly no longer considered problematic; on the contrary, they have been shown to serve a clear thematic and narrative purpose, which means that they cannot be removed without overthrowing the text's overall literary structure.²⁰ Originally a standard exercise of late antique rhetoric, the ekphrasis could be used within different kinds of genres, and the form and use of ekphrastic discourse is fluid: included in epic, history, speeches, or novels it could be presented as either prose or poetry, in different levels of style. In this respect, however indispensable to a comprehensive whole, the ekphrasis appears to have functioned as a sort of compliant building block. But the independent ekphraseis, as we just saw in the case of Manasses' Ἐκφρασις γῆς, are presented either with a framing, narrative situation or with inserted pieces of narrative, which in both cases means that narrative, in fact, comes in to serve description, and not the other way around. The Byzantine ekphrasis thus overthrows the concept of description as narrative's obedient servant and establishes itself not only as an independent discourse or text-type, but even as a literary genre.

Not only does description in a fully-fledged ekphrasis coexist with narrative in a reciprocal manner, but it may also be seen to form a story of its own; indeed a narrative. The fundamental difference between narrative and description is that the first is mainly temporal and the latter mainly spatial; when a description is inserted into a narrative, the temporal flow slows down and the text is 'spatialised' by means of the descriptive detail.²¹ The

¹⁹ See e.g. the various contributions in J. KITTAY (ed.), *Towards a Theory of Description* (*Yale French Studies* 61). New Haven 1980. For description as a text-type in its own right, see S. CHATMAN, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, N.Y. 1990, discussed in relation to *Hysmine and Hysminias* in NILSSON, *Erotic Pathos* 84–87.

²⁰ On the Homeric ekphrasis, see e.g. A. S. BECKER, *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis*. Lanham – London 1995.

²¹ The idea of spatial form was introduced by J. Frank in 1945. His initial article is reprinted along with later work in J. FRANK, *The Idea of Spatial Form*. New Brunswick 1991. A pertinent description of spatial form is made by I. VIDAN, *Time Sequence in Spatial Fiction*, in: *Spatial Form in Narrative* (ed. J. R. SMITEN – A. DAGHISTANY). Ithaca, N.Y. 1981, 131–157, 133 ("spatial form is often associated with the novel as a

boundaries between the different text-types are, however, not clear-cut, and an ekphrasis often contains not only spatial, but also temporal movement.²² The movement is hinted at already in the instructions of the handbooks, when they say that an ekphrasis is a λόγος περιηγηματικός, a “descriptive speech”, where “descriptive” entails the notion of “leading someone around”, take the reader-listener on a tour. The reader-listener is thus guided by the author-narrator who describes and explains the object, person, or scene by literally escorting his audience through the image with his words.

The temporal aspect is, of course, most apparent in a description of an event, such as a battle scene (or, in the case of Manasses, a hunting scene), and for such ekphraseis a chronological progression is even prescribed. Thus Libanios asserts that a description of a battle should begin with a representation of the occurrences leading up to the event and end with its ensuing consequences.²³ The ekphrasis is in this way from the very beginning closely linked to narrative, something which is indicated also by its suitable subjects, which are, basically, persons, places, times, and events. In a narrative (*diegesis*), the same subjects are employed to make up a story, as time and place are used to set the scene, and persons and events are described as the protagonists and their actions.²⁴ The affinity of the two text-types, and the ambivalence in their perception, is indicated also by the rhetoricians themselves, for example by Doxapatres’ classification of ekphrasis as a type of elaborate narrative.²⁵ The

poem, or as a composition dominated by the recurrence and juxtaposition of verbal motifs, operative words, and key themes”). Frank was incited by Lessing’s *Laocoon* (1766), cf. below. On the concept of spatiality as applied to *Hysmine and Hysminias*, see NILSSON, *Erotic Pathos* esp. 40–43, 73–74, 141–145. Cf. also below on repetition with variation.

²² Thus it was argued by Lessing in his *Laocoon* (chapter 17) that the Shield of Achilles did not form a description but a narrative, a continuous sequence of events. With these assertions, Lessing established the tradition of separation between temporal and spatial arts (poetry and painting), condemning description.

²³ Libanios, *Ekphrasis I* (ed. R. FÖRSTER, *Libanii Opera*. Leipzig 1915 [repr. Hildesheim 1963], 8, 460–464).

²⁴ JAMES – WEBB, *Ekphrasis and Art* 6–7.

²⁵ Doxapatres, ed. C. WALZ, *Rhetores Graeci*. Stuttgart 1832, 2, 509. JAMES – WEBB, *Ekphrasis and Art* 7. On description as narration from a modern perspective, see M. BAL, *On Story-Telling. Essays in Narratology*. Sonoma, CA 1991, 109–145. On the problematic relation between narration and description, see e.g. D. P. FOWLER, *Narrate and Describe: The Problem of the Ekphrasis*. *Journal of Roman Studies* 81 (1991) 25–35.

spatial and temporal movement is often conspicuous also in descriptions of works of art, where the objects depicted come to life by the ekphrasis' *topos* of praising the artist for painting so skilfully that the objects seem to move and change. In the case of Manasses' Ἐκφρασις γῆς, we have noted both the elaborate spatial movement, as the author-narrator describes the central image, and its surrounding tableaux and the implied temporality in the description of the mouse.

In depicting and displaying its object and thereby its story, the ekphrasis highlights and represents the inherent relationship between word and image, and thus between narrative and description. The affiliation is basically linguistic, since the Greek verb γράφειν means both "to paint" and "to write". An εἰκὼν γραπτή thus implies not only a "painted representation" but also a "written picture". It may also be further enhanced by the use of different prefixes, such as ἀντιγράφειν, which means both "to copy from something", "to write against something" or "to write in response to something".²⁶ It is with this *double entendre* that Manasses plays in the closure of his Ἐκφρασις γῆς, as he says that he has "described in order to render the painting" (γέγραπται ... εἰς ἀντιγραφὴν τῆς γραφῆς).²⁷ The relationship between the arts is thus one of amicable but explicit rivalry.

CREATING THE CREATION

By opting to write a chronicle – or, as he puts it himself, by accepting Sebastokratorissa Eirene's urgent request that one should be written (7–9) – Manasses entered a long and well established Byzantine literary tradition with its roots in ancient history-writing. He did not, however, follow the traditional form of the genre, but experimented with different types of discourse in an episodic structure and thus transposed carefully chosen material into a versified narrative. In this way, Manasses' general literary technique does not differ radically from that of other Komnenian authors; he follows the exploratory vein that on the whole characterises the literary production of the Komnenian period.

The selective use of sources, the careful blending of subject matter with structure, and the authorial intrusion reveals an author very much aware

²⁶ The close relation between visual and narrative representation is fully explored by, for example, Longos in his pastoral *Daphnis & Chloe* in the second century AD. ΜΙΤΣΙ – ΑΓΑΡΙΤΟΣ, *Εἰκὼν καὶ λόγος* 110.

²⁷ Note also Manasses' elaborate use of the same device in the closure of the Ἐκφρασις ἀλώσεως σπίνων καὶ ἀκανθίδων (ed. K. HÖRNER, *Analekten zur byzantinischen Literatur*. Wien 1905, 12).

of himself and his skill, an author daring to subvert an established genre and include ekphrastic strategies or novelistic plots. It is from this view-point, I suggest, that the use of ekphrasis in the *Synopsis* should be considered; that is, from that of generic inclusion and self-conscious literariness. The ekphrasis was certainly not a foreign element to ancient or Byzantine history-writing, but it was not fully developed on literary levels by the Byzantine chroniclers. Manasses not only puts the device to exhaustive use, but also exploits its implied figurative and aesthetic meanings in a manner which is similar to, but probably even exceeds, the use of ekphrasis in the contemporary Komnenian novels. This is most apparent in the opening section of the chronicle, the story of the Creation. I shall here consider the series of ekphraseis included in this part of the *Synopsis*: their structure, framing, and function in the episode.²⁸

In order to facilitate the reader's understanding and appreciation of Manasses' Creation episode as a narrative whole and avoid quotations out of context, I decided to offer an English translation of the passage in question (*Synopsis* 27–285; see the appendix).²⁹ My translation is aimed at preserving and conveying the literary spirit of the *Synopsis*. I have adopted the English seven-foot iambic metre as being the closest in length and spirit to the fifteen-syllable Greek political verse. Although I have tried to ensure that the force of every Greek word is reflected in the translation, I have made no attempt to provide a literal translation but rather one that emphasises that Manasses was more interested in literature, in telling a good story, than in our notion of history.³⁰

²⁸ Briefly on literary and generic strategies in the *Synopsis*, see I. NILSSON, Archaists and Innovators: Byzantine 'classicism' and experimentation with genre in the twelfth century, in: *Genrer och Genreproblem: teoretiska och historiska perspektiv / Genres and Their Problems: Theoretical and Historical Perspectives* (ed. A. AGRELL – I. NILSSON). Göteborg 2003, 413–424, 419–420. A shorter discussion of Manasses' story of the Creation along with an English translation of some passages was included in my paper at the symposium *L'écriture de la mémoire: la littérature de l'historiographie in Nicosia (Cyprus) 2004*, forthcoming as I. NILSSON, Discovering Literariness in the Past: Literature vs. History in the *Synopsis Chronike* of Konstantinos Manasses, in: *L'écriture de la mémoire: la littérature de l'historiographie. Actes du colloque international sur la Littérature Byzantine, Nicosie 6-8 Mai 2004 (Dossiers Byzantins 5)*, Paris 2006.

²⁹ The Greek text is easily accessible in Lampsidis' modern edition (as above, n. 3). A prose translation of the entire chronicle by Linda Yuretich is in preparation (University of Birmingham Press).

³⁰ I have tried as far as possible to make each English line correspond with a line in Manasses, though differences in the sentence structure and word order of the two languages have not always permitted this. In attempting to keep the translation run-

The Creation is, of course, an essential section of any Byzantine world chronicle, but Manasses' version is, in comparison to other Byzantine chronicles, highly literary and poetic. The episode covers about 250 verses and describes, in an extended series of longer and shorter ekphraseis, the creation of Heaven and Earth, flora and fauna, Adam and Eve. The creation *per se* offers a structural device that cannot be disregarded – the division into days with God's respective works – and this structure is the core also of Manasses' version. It has, however, been developed on structural, temporal, and thematic levels, all of which contribute to the poetic effect of the work. It should be noted that this poetic effect is not some 'natural' consequence of the author's versification of the historical material, but a result of his creative use of language (such as neologisms, or the contrast between vernacular and Homeric words) and elaborate narrative techniques (such as intricate patterns of repetition with variation).³¹ In the story of the Creation it is, above all, the central position of the ekphrasis along with the amplified exploitation of its literary potential that provide the poetic quality of the episode.

On a structural level, the Genesis formula, "and there was evening and there was morning, the first day", has been modified and expanded. Initially, it seems merely to have been furnished with some poetic ornamentation and variation (see e.g. 37–38: ἐν τούτοις οὖν παρῆδραμε τῶν ἡμερῶν ἡ πρώτη / τοῦ δὲ βλεφάρου λάμπαντος ἡμέρας τῆς δευτέρας, cf. 48–49: κόρη μὲν οὖν ἐπέμυεν ἡμέρας τῆς δευτέρας / καὶ τρίτη πάλιν ἠῦγαζε, καὶ πάλιν ὁ τεχνίτης). The variations of the formula with their metaphorical eyes, pupils, eyelids and faces, recall Homeric imagery of the rising and setting sun and form a distinct pattern of repetition with variation. But after the end of day four in v. 138, the explicit day and night structure is

ning *pari passu* with the original, I have occasionally been forced to add synonyms in the translation to fill in the line. Sometimes this could be exploited to convey the range of meaning of a Greek word, such as in v. 28, "most perfect and most absolute" to translate παντέλειος, but now and then words are there just to complete the line and so keep translation in step with the original, such as at v. 215, where "fragile" and "frail" both depend on ἀπαλούς.

³¹ That is to say, verse does not amount to poetry: verse is a formal feature, whereas poetry is an aesthetic judgement, so we can have poetic prose just as we can have prosaic verse. On the versification of the *Synopsis*, see NILSSON, *Discovering Literariness*. Repetition with variation is a 'spatialising' device, see D. LODGE, *The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy*, in: *Modernism. A Guide to European Literature 1890–1930* (ed. M. BRADBURY – J. McFARLANE) London 1976, 481–496; cf. also above. For the use of this device in *Hysmine and Hysminias*, see NILSSON, *Erotic Pathos* esp. 64–74, 106–108.

gradually dropped. Day five assumedly begins at v. 142 (after an inserted comment on the sun and the moon, created on the fourth day) and ends at v. 180, where the simple formula has been expanded and intertwined with an intricate framing of the previous ekphrasis in vv. 151–173. The sixth day follows at v. 181, never to be explicitly ended; it presumably closes at the point where Adam falls asleep in v. 277, hinted at in the implied analogue between the previous days closing their eyes and Adam falling asleep.

The day and night structure is significant because it functions not only as framing of and transition between the shorter passages, but also between ekphraseis. The abandoning of the strict day and night structure also coincides with the gradually extended use of ekphrasis and its framing. The transition between day two and three is, as we saw, represented by vv. 48–49, whereas the next transition in vv. 100–103 opens not only day four, but also the ekphrasis of the stars (ἐν τούτοις ἔδν καὶ τὸ φῶς ἡμέρας τῆς τριτάτης / ἔλαμπε δὲ τὸ πρόσωπον τῆς μετ' αὐτὴν ἡμέρας / καὶ πάλιν ἔργων καταρχὴ καὶ κέλευσις τοῦ κτίστου / τὸν οὐρανὸν εὐστέφανον τοῖς ἀστρασι γενέσθαι). That ekphrasis is concluded in vv. 135–138 with a rather elaborate closing frame, expanding the original simple formula (τότε τὸ πρῶτον ἥλιος, φαύσας καὶ φωταυγήσας / φανείς τε κόσμος οὐρανοῦ καὶ κάλλος τῆς ἡμέρας / ἔδούλευσε κελύσματι τῷ τοῦ πεποιηκότος / καὶ μύσας συνετέλεσεν ἡμέραν τὴν τετάρτην). If we then look at vv. 174–180, which close day five, immediately followed by the opening of the following day and ekphrasis in vv. 181–186, we discern a definite augmentation of the device: the day and night formulas have moved from simple transitional frames to poetic framework integrated both within the narrative and the ekphraseis (174–182: τοσῶνδε ζῳῶν τὴν ὑγρὰν πληρώσας καὶ τὴν χέρσον / ὁ πάνσοφος ὀροφωτῆς τῆς παγκοσμίου στέγης / ναὶ μὴν τὸν ἀχειρόκλωστον χιτῶνα, τὸν ἀέρα / ὃν θεῖον ἐμηρῶσαντο δακτύλων λεπτοργαία / ὡς πόλιν ὀχυρόπυργον πλατεῖαν ὑφαπλώσας / τοῖς σαρκοβόροις πετεινοῖς καὶ τοῖς βοτανηφάγοις / ἡμέρας συνετέλεσε τὸ δρόμημα τῆς πέμπτης. / ἕκτη δὲ πάλιν ἠῦγαξεν ἡμέρα, ὀδοέχρους / καὶ κήπευμα καλλιῖδενδρον θεὸς ἐφυτηκόμει).

If we consider the tempo of the episode, we find that already on the third day there is an abrupt change in the temporal flow, as God divides sea and land and then creates the flora of the earth, which is described by Manasses in a traditional garden ekphrasis (69–99). Also the following three days contain longer ekphraseis: day four has an elaborate ekphrasis of the sun, moon and the stars (104–134); day five contains the creation of the fishes, birds and animals (144–173); day six is covered by the creation of Eden, which is described in colourful detail (187–215), again in the manner of a garden ekphrasis, and a short description of the ani-

mals to which Adam gives names (252–271). Manasses thus sets out his discourse rather traditionally (from a biblical and chronological point of view) and then step by step ‘spatialises’ it in a series of ekphraseis, slowing down the narrative flow until the scene is completely set by v. 230: the Creation, culminating in the beauty of Eden, has been completed and Man may be placed in his proper surrounding. At this point, the author partly resumes a narrative discourse: the creation of Adam (231–247) is followed by his naming of the animals, where a short ekphrasis and a relatively long moral passage are included (248–276), together with the creation of Eve (277–282). The story of the Creation is closed with three concluding verses (283–285: ἔνδοθεν οὖν τοῦ τῆς τρυφῆς χώρου διέζων ἄμφω / ὡς ἄσαρκοι, μὴ φέροντες φροντίδας φιλοῦλους / ὡς μηδὲ περικείμενοι σώματος ὄλως βάρους) which, like the transitional passages we have seen earlier, have a twofold function: they close the frame of the creation, but also open and stand in sharp contrast to the following episode, describing Satan’s *phthonos* and the ensuing Fall (298–341).³² The author abandons description in favour of narrative, speeds up the tempo and thus underlines the drama of the events leading up to the Fall and the expulsion from Paradise.

The structure of the Creation episode and its internal temporal and spatial movement is sustained by its recurring theme: nature’s art-like beauty and perfection. This theme is introduced by an emphasis on the very opposite of adornment or completion: the first day’s starless sky, the vast plains of the earth; the empty canvas, so to speak, for God the Artist to fill. Nature’s artistry is then explicitly introduced on the third day with the ekphrasis of the flora (69–99), immediately to be followed by the ekphrasis of the stars, where the stars are described as adorning heaven “as flowers [adorn] the meadow” (115), as having the colours of individual flowers (123–128: Saturn shines like a hyacinth, Jupiter like a lily, Mars like a violet, etc) and finally as a mere garden (134: καὶ κῆπον ἀστροφύτευτον τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐποίει).³³ The climax is, of course, Eden with its lush, aromatic trees and flowers (187–215). A ‘garden within the garden’ is also mirrored in the peacock’s feathers, as he swaggers about showing off his beauty (264: καὶ κῆπον περοφύτευτον εἰργάζετο τὸ ζῶον).

³² One could also argue that the episode closes at v. 297 with God’s admonitions about the tree (as Lampsidis’ edition implies), but I choose to see v. 285 as part of a closing frame from a textual perspective.

³³ It is not within the scope of this study, but it would be interesting to take a closer look at the use of colours in this part of the *Synopsis*. On this issue in Byzantine art, see L. JAMES, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art*. Oxford 1996. On colours in the Ἐκφρασις γῆς, see TH. BASEOU-BARABAS, *To ψηφιδωτό* 102.

In line with the emphasis on art and nature, God is described not only as a creator, but also as an artist and a gardener. Although this is an image of God established already in Biblical and other religious texts, it is here underlined and intertwined with the surrounding vegetal imagery: at the beginning, he is an artist, a creator, a wise and skilful worker (41: καλλιτέχνης; 50: παντοτέκτων, σοφός; 63: τεχνίτης, παντεργάτης) and even a gardener of the heavenly garden of stars (133: φυτοσκάφος). But later on, as more things are created and the artistic imagery on the whole increases, God's artistry is stressed in elaborate passages such as vv. 174–180, the closing frame of the ekphrasis of the animals (quoted above). And in the following vv. 181–186, God's artistic skills are explained: he is indeed a gardener, but “He did not dig with his own hands, He struggled not with earth, / He did not place his palms on plants, the Word alone He worked (183–184: οὐ σκαφευτρίας ἐν χερσίν, οὐδὲ γαιομαχούσας, / οὐδὲ παλάμαις φυτουργοῖς, ἀλλὰ τῷ λόγῳ μόνῳ).³⁴

These verses, I think, should be considered in light of the ekphrasis' inherent functions and meanings: the writer's traditional praising of the painter's skill, his ability to bring things to life, is here turned into praise of *the* Creator for his mastery of material, his tool being the Word. Indeed, the whole concept of the perfection of nature competing with art (and also the other way around, of art competing with nature) is, as we have seen, the key notion of the ekphrasis itself. Without the implicit affiliation of nature with art and of painting with writing, there would be no basis for artists in their respective fields to rival one another. Manasses takes this concept one step further: he, the author-narrator, who also creates with the Word – steps into the Creation and marvels at God's art, which is, in fact, nature.

The theme is sustained by criss-crossing references and images: not only are the stars like flowers and Heaven like a garden, but the flowers of the real garden are also like stars (204: ὡς ἄστρον ἀκτινοβολοῦν ἀνέτελλε χαμόθεν) and the peacock carries in his feather an entire garden of his own (264). Both meadow and heaven are also likened to beautiful robes or dresses: as Earth “for the first time ever” is covered with plants, she is described as a young girl dressed as bride (69–70: στολισμοῖς ἡ γῆ καταγλαῖσθη / ὑπὲρ κορίσκην τρυφεράν ἄρτι νυμφευομένην / χρυσιοφόρον, σίλβουσας πέπλους καταμαργάροις). As the stars begin to shine, Heaven is depicted in

³⁴ The Greek original's instrumental dative τῷ λόγῳ, literally “with the word”, has been rendered by the expression “work the word” (as in, e.g., “work the clay”). Cf. also vv. 232 (παντοεργοῖς παλάμαις) and 244 (ὁ τῆς πηλίνης κερραμεύς).

similar terms (104–106: τότε τῶν ἄστρον οὐρανὸς τῷ κάλλει διηρθίσθη / ὡς πέπλος μαργαρόστροφος, χρυσόπαστον ὡς φᾶρος / ὡς ὕφασμα κοσμούμενον ἐκ πυρραζόντων λίθων; see also 122: οὕτως ὁ πέπλος οὐρανοῦ παντόχρους ἐωρᾶτο). The air, too, is described as a fine cloak woven by God and laid upon earth and animals as a protective cover (see 174–180, quoted above).

The use of such imagery brings about consideration of two central features of Manasses' story of the Creation. First, the use of contrasts in this latter passage – a cloak “of exquisite finery” (the air) as a strong protection – is a recurring figure throughout the passage. The inherent oppositions of the biblical discourse – “the earth was dark and God said, ‘Let there be light’, and there was light”, etc. – has been augmented by Manasses both on linguistic and narrative levels. To the linguistic aspect belong not only the word-plays of the type “the unseen was now to be seen” (e.g. 35: ὠφθη τά παρὶν ἀθέατα) but also Manasses' particular mixture of learned and vernacular Greek: he deliberately combines high and low and puts Homeric words next to popular similes and sayings.³⁵ On a narrative level, the contrast can be seen in the passage on Adam's naming of the animals in vv. 252–276. Adam is depicted surrounded by the animals: they are all fawning upon him, like servants around their master. Even if some of them are terrible beasts, Adam is not afraid; he has not yet learned about cowardice (270–271). This is illustrated by a moral simile describing how you may conquer anything, as long as you master your emotions (272–276). The placing of Adam in the centre and the rather elaborate description of his moral strength at the stage of his innocence contrast and thus underline the ensuing catastrophe as he falls asleep and Eve is created from his rib (277–282); it is a bitter sleep (277: ἀλλὰ πικρίας ὕπνον) which will effectively lead to their expulsion from the Garden. The oppositional pair Innocence – Sin is, of course, a central theme of the Bible, but Manasses has explored it also on a textual level in his composition of this episode.³⁶

Second, the imagery of beautiful robes inevitably evokes also the image of a maiden, especially in v. 70, where Earth's robe is said to surpass that of a young bride.³⁷ It has already been mentioned that Manasses' two ekphrasis of Earth and Eden are composed as traditional garden ekphra-

³⁵ Creating linguistic contrasts by the mixing of different levels of style and/or playing around with political verse seems to have been an appreciated literary device in the intellectual circles of the Komnenian court, for example also in the Prodromic and Ptochoprodromic poems.

³⁶ Cf. also above on the temporal contrast between this and the following passage.

³⁷ Cf. also the Ἐκφρασις γῆς with its personification of Earth as a maiden and bride, esp. 67–83.

seis. Such ekphraseis have a Greek tradition going back to the Homeric garden of Alcinous and have been thoroughly used and developed by the novelists both in late antiquity and in Byzantium. In the novels, the garden is almost always endowed with certain erotic traits, and is often used as a symbol of the heroine: the beauty and awakening sexuality of the young maiden resemble the lush garden, enclosed and protected by a wall and with a clear spring in its centre, refreshing both the plants and the young hero.³⁸ Manasses employs the traditional structure of the ekphrasis and also inserts the same sexual connotations that are traditionally used in a garden ekphrasis in his Eden: the branches of the trees intertwine and embrace, described in words usually describing sexual intercourse (194–197: τὰ πέταλα συνέπιπτον ἀλλήλοις τῶν δενδρέων / οἱ κλώνες προσεπέλαζον, συνήεσαν οἱ πρόθοι / ἐφύκεσαν αὐτόχρομα τῶν δένδρων αἱ φυλλάδες / ἀλλήλας ἀγκαλιζέσθαι περιπλοκαῖς φιλτέραις). Also the plants are suggestive of eroticism: the rose is a traditional plant in a garden description, but also a symbol of love and sex. Here, however, the rose has not yet received its thorns (202: ἄκεντρα δ' ἦν ἀνάκανθα τὰ ῥόδα τηνικαῦτα) – an apparent hint, despite the surrounding embracing trees, that innocence still prevails. It is Eve who will bring out the innate sexuality of the garden; the roses pose as yet no threat (cf. the emphasis on Adam's innocence in vv. 270–271, discussed above). There is thus a certain sexual tension in the description of Eden, latent in the biblical discourse, and further enhanced by Manasses' implicit references to the novelistic garden.³⁹

The garden is, above all, the place where nature meets and merges with art. A parallel may be seen in the peacock's feathers, which are too perfect to be natural, so to speak, and thus have become a symbol of nature's artful beauty (260–264). The concept can be traced back to antiquity and, for instance, Longos' garden descriptions in *Daphnis & Chloe*, and is fully exploited by the Byzantines. In the twelfth century, one may note the bringing in of *automata* in Makrembolites' garden in *Hysmine & Hysminias*, which highlights the artificiality of the 'natural' beauty of Sosthenes' garden. This brings us back to the ekphrasis' inherent rivalry between art and nature, painting and writing, and we ask ourselves what

³⁸ See A. R. LITTLEWOOD, Romantic Paradises: The Rôle of the Garden in the Byzantine Romance. *BMGs* 5 (1979) 95–114, C. BARBER, Reading the Garden in Byzantium: Nature and Sexuality. *BMGs* 16 (1992) 1–19, and NILSSON, Erotic Pathos 97–103, 209–213.

³⁹ One may note especially the direct reuse of Achilles Tatios' novel in vv. 198–200, cf. *Leukippe and Kleitophon* 1.15.2, 1.15.4 (ed. E. VILBORG, Achilles Tatius. *Leukippe and Clitophon*. Göteborg 1955, 16–17). On Makrembolites' use of the same passage in *Hysmine and Hysminias*, see NILSSON, Erotic Pathos 209–210.

it is that Manasses wishes to achieve when he presents parts of his chronicle in the form of ekphraseis.

EMBRACING THE CITY

I set out by discussing the narrative functions of description, arguing that ekphraseis are inherently narrative and not static parentheses serving as mere ornament of the story. In an independent ekphrasis, this narrative character can be seen both in the spatial movement of the description itself (which corresponds, basically, to the movement of the spectator's eyes) and in the implied movement of the objects depicted (such as the hesitant mouse in the Ἐκφρασις γῆς). This feature is retained also when ekphraseis are inserted into a longer discourse, but it is then combined and interacts with narrative, so that some parts of the texts cannot be defined as either text type. Explanatory or other authorial comments, for example, can move freely between description and narrative. The inclusion of ekphraseis in a longer narrative thus opens up for a full exploitation of the narrative potential of the device: ekphraseis describe, narrate, and explain, so that within a longer narrative they can 'spatialise', express themes, and similarly move the story along.

These multiple functions may be illustrated also by another ekphrasis in the *Synopsis*, the description of Constantinople (2319–2326). The description of Nea Roma is placed in the episode narrating the reign of Constantine the Great. As Constantine begins to build his city in Chalcedon, large birds appear to take the stones away and bring them to the site of ancient Byzantium. Realising that this means something important (this is not the work of Tyche, nor a coincidence, he reasons), Constantine transfers his building project to this place:

καὶ πόλιν ὀλβιόπολιν αὐτῇ προσανεγείρει
 πόλιν τὴν μεγαλόπολιν, πόλιν τὴν νέαν Ῥώμην
 Ῥώμην τὴν ἀρρυντίδωτον, τὴν μήποτε γηρῶσαν
 Ῥώμην αἰεὶ νεάζουσαν, αἰεὶ καινιζομένην
 Ῥώμην ἀφ' ἧς προχέονται χαρίτων αἱ συρμάδες
 ἦν ἡπειρος προοπτῷσεται, θάλασσα δεξιούται
 ἠπίως ἀγκαλίζονται παλάμαι τῆς Εὐρώπης
 ἀντιφλεῖ δ' ἑτέρωθεν τὸ τῆς Ἀσίας στόμα.

He builds upon this ancient town a city highly blessed,
 the greatest city of them all, the city of new Rome,
 a Rome untouched by wrinkles still, a city never ageing,
 a Rome that is forever young, forever in renewal,
 a Rome from which are flowing forth abundant streams of Graces,
 she rests enfolded by the land, the sea is reaching for her,

she lies there tenderly embraced within the arms of Europe,
while from behind she's being kissed by gentle lips of Asia. (2319–2326)

The ekphrasis opens and introduces the history of the Byzantine empire (as in contrast to the 'old history' of the Roman emperors), in which Constantinople plays a decisive role. As a transition it thus moves the story along while at the same time highlighting a crucial theme: the splendour of both the imperial city and Byzantium in general. The description of the city as a beautiful woman with its erotic connotations is part of an erotic tone introduced, as we have seen, already in the Creation episode and sustained in a number of episodes narrating amatory adventures of famous Byzantines.⁴⁰ After having made his point (introducing a new part of his chronicle and reminding the reader of his central themes), the author closes the description and returns to the main narrative with a comment on his own narration:

Ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν ἀρχήματα ταύτης τῆς βασιλίδος
ἑτέρου λόγου καὶ καιροῦ καταριθμεῖν καὶ γράφειν
ἐπὶ δὲ τὴν διήγησιν πάλιν ἔπαντιέον.

The glorious magnificence of this imperial city
should be described and written down in quite another context,
we must, however, now return to narrate our story. (2327–2329)⁴¹

The city reappears in the narrative after less than two hundred verses, not as an ekphrasis but in comparison with ancient Rome as a praise of Emperor Manuel I Komnenos:

Καὶ ταῦτα μὲν συμβέβηκε τῇ προεσβυτέρῳ Ῥώμῃ
ἢ δ' ἡμετέρα τέθληεν, αὔξει, κρατεῖ νεάζει
καὶ μέχρι τέλους αὔξειτο, ναί, βασιλεῦ παντάναξ
τοιούτον σχοῦσα τηλαυγῆ, φασφόρον, βασιλέα
μέγιστον Ἀῦσονάνακτα, μυριονικηφόρον
Κομνηριάδην Μανουήλ, πορφύρας χρυσοῦν ῥόδον
οὔπερ τὸ κράτος ἦλοι μετρούσαιεν μυριοί.

⁴⁰ On Manasses' predilection for erotic stories and juicy detail, see D. R. REINSCH, *Historia ancilla litterarum?* Zum literarischen Geschmack in der Komnenenzeit: Das Beispiel der *Σύνοψις Χρονική* des Konstantinos Manasses, in: Pour une «nouvelle» histoire de la littérature byzantine. Actes du colloque international philologique, Nicosie, 25–28 mai 2000 (ed. P. ODORICO – P. A. AGAPITOS) (*Dossiers Byzantins* 1), Paris 2002, 81–94, 86–88.

⁴¹ The author-narrator occasionally makes this sort of comment on his narration, see e.g. 1513–2514. L. STERNBACH, Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte 67–69, argued that this remark refers to the subsequent writing of Manasses' so-called Ὀδοιπορικόν (ed. K. HORNA, Das Hodoiporikon des Konstantin Manasses. *BZ* 13 (1904) 313–355).

And this is then what fell upon the lot of ancient Roma,
 but our city flourishes, grows, rules, forever youthful,
 and may she grow until the end, oh Emperor almighty,
 having for her ruler now the far-shining light-bringer,
 the greatest of Ausonian lords, who brings a thousand triumphs,
 Manuel the Komnenian sprout, the golden rose of purple,
 and may a thousand days still come to see him reign the city. (2506–2512)

The focus is here on Manuel, with the city only as a proper setting – a young, beautiful city for a young, beautiful emperor – but it refers back to the ekphrasis and thus to a thematic and structural pattern established by the first description of Constantinople as a woman resting in the arms of two continents.

I think we need to accept, then, that the ekphrasis is not just a rhetorical figure brought in as a textual building block, especially not when so centrally placed and accentuated as in the *Synopsis*. In light of the both close and tense relation between the arts that the ekphrasis expresses, and also the character of the Byzantine ekphrasis as an independent literary form, the ‘emplotment’ of parts of the *Synopsis* as ekphraseis have implications for the narrative itself. Ekphraseis describe, narrate, and explain: they entail literary, poetic, and figurative meanings which are hard to achieve with a ‘plain’ linear narrative.⁴² In addition, the ekphrasis in a Byzantine context takes on particular emotional and spiritual aspects, most conspicuous in the description of church frescoes or icons, and perhaps of relevance to us in our consideration of the Creation ekphrasis: along with the notion of an orthodox icon as a direct representation of the holy person depicted, the ekphrasis expresses a threshold not only between image and word, but also between worldly and spiritual, man and God.⁴³

Let me remind you of Manasses’ image of God as an Artist and Creator: “the Word alone He worked”. The use of the ekphrasis to reflect the ‘spatialised timelessness’ of the Creation, inevitably brings along the figurative

⁴² The term ‘emplotment’ was coined by H. WHITE, *Storytelling: Historical and Ideological*, in: *Centuries’ Ends, Narrative Means* (ed. R. NEWMAN), Stanford CA, 1996, 58–78, esp. 71–74. For emplotment in the *Synopsis*, see NILSSON, *Discovering Literariness*. I would like to add that the emplotment of the Creation as an ekphrasis brings in novelistic implications through the garden’s presence and status in the ancient and Komnenian novels. This should be considered in relation to contemporary novel writing (especially in light of the emplotment of the Troy story as a romance), but there is still no reason, in my view, to call the *Synopsis* ‘novelistic’, except in the superficial descriptive sense of the word. The *Synopsis* is not a novel; the author employs novelistic devices to narrate his story, but it is still history, *literary* history.

⁴³ JAMES – WEBB, *Ekphrasis and Art* 11–14.

meanings of the ekphrasis: art and nature, painting and writing, and so on. But the ekphrasis also takes on unique implications in this context, since the notion of bringing material reality to life occurs both in the story and in the text, as both poet-creators – the author and God – bring Creation to life. By implicitly comparing the Creation of God to the creation of ekphrasis, Manasses draws attention to *himself* as creator and underlines his own creating of a new kind of history. By drawing an image of Constantinople splendid enough to bring out the magnificence of the young Emperor Manuel, he shows off both his loyalty and his talent. By painting the Creation in ekphrastic colours, he highlights the poetic quality of the episode and also sets the tone for the chronicle as a whole. Manasses *works the word* and creates a literary history filled with the beauty of love, art, and poetry.

KONSTANTINOS MANASSES, *SYNOPSIS CHRONIKE* 27–286

Most perfect and most absolute, God's world-inventing Word
 when time had just begun created heaven without stars
 in endless beauty glimmering with God-inspired sparks
 30 and earth who nurtures everything and then also the light;
 and earth was still all unadorned, invisible was she
 and heavy lay the darkness still upon deserted plains.
 But as the light began to shine, was shed all over earth,
 and dressed in white a day was born, bright, shining like a lamp,
 35 the unseen was now to be seen, the darkness that we hate
 was banished by the flaming fire sent forth by rays of light;
 with these events that day went by, the very first of days.
 The bright eye of the second day, as she began to shine,
 a second, rounded sky was made, devised with wise design
 40 to function as a covering roof for those who live on earth,
 a firmament He called it, God, the Artist of such grace,
 there being now a second sky next to the first, the dark.
 Then did He also separate water that always flows
 from that of greatest, darkest deep, of which the first He brought
 45 upwards lightly in the sky, to inconceivable heights,
 the latter did He leave on earth, between the two He put
 the heaven as a palisade, a strong and steady wall.
 The bright eye of the second day, her pupil was then shut,
 a third day's eye began to shine, the Artist then again,
 50 the world's Creator and the Wise, He put himself to work;
 since all the water had been shed all over earthly plains,

the water which He'd left behind beneath the heaven's roof,
which covered now entirely just like a lake earth's face,
He gathered this entire flow together to one place,
55 like when with sweetest fig tree juice you curdle snow-white milk,
and turn that honeyed fluid into nicely rounded cheese.
When earth's vast cover thus was broken, scattered as it was,
her face was once more to be seen, visible the shape
of both her rocks and mountains, also of her steepest cliffs.
60 Then did He give a name to this, all water's ample mass,
the name He used for it was sea, but all that still was dry
and all that piled up high with stone, all the fertile land,
did God, the Workman of it all, the Artist, call the earth;
and manifesting then His force, His overwhelming might,
65 although the giant sun did not yet shine with nursing rays
He ordered every plant to grow, that all of them should sprout,
for pleasure merely some of them, enchantment to our eyes,
and others feed for animals, for those on earth a grace.
Then for the first time ever was the earth adorned in clothes,
70 surpassing thus a tender girl just now dressed as a bride,
in gold clad and all glimmering in pearl-encrusted robes.
The fragrant violet glistened clear, the rose in rivalry shone:
the violets with their colours from all over seemed to smile,
the deepest blue and purple bright and some of yellow hue;
75 one of the roses could be seen in deepest purple red,
another, dyed in shades of white, there beamed in contrast sweet.
You saw the snow-white lily and you saw the pimpernels,
the hyacinth rose from the earth, narcissus' charms were there
and the entire ornament that first Spring's graces wear.
80 There stoutly stood the ears of corn, weighed down by heavy grain,
while ivy's creeping swarthy leaves shook clusters of their fruit;
and all was good, all moist with dew, with rays of beauty filled,
and making earth ambrosial with medleys of their scents.
The softest grass, so fresh with dew, for cattle was laid out,
85 to feed the horses, tend the cows, a dewy meadow fresh.
Yes, such a garment wore the earth, of colours so diverse,
a robe like that had she received, well-woven did it bloom.
Long rows of plants were also there and trees grew up as well
with lovely leaves and branches fair, carrying loads of fruit:
90 there was a blooming apple tree, young with shimmering fruit,
and olive trees, luxuriant, and fig trees filled with sweets,
a pine tree with its shining trunk, oak, silver fir, and elm.

A wind came blowing, lightly stroked the needles of the pine,
 inspired thus the sweetest song and whispered in the leaves.
 95 A lovely cherry tree was there, the date-palm honeysweet,
 and vine, of course, who nurtures grapes, a row of crawling twigs,
 heavy clusters filled with juice, like ringlets from their branch.
 And all were filled with perfect fruit, so perfect were they all;
 for none was fashioned without grace, none was imperfect made.
 100 With these creations carried out, the third day's light did set,
 the face of her successor, the next day, began to shine,
 and once again He went to work, the Maker orders gave
 that heaven should be comely crowned with garlands of fair stars.
 The heaven then began to bloom with fair and starry beams
 105 just like a garment set with pearls, just like a golden cloak,
 just like a woven robe adorned with flaming precious stones.
 Then for the first time ever did day's eye begin to shine,
 the giant and enormous sun, the lamp that nurtures life,
 that ever-shining source of light, eternal fire's home.
 110 Then for the first time ever did the night receive its torch,
 the moon, that sphere which whitely shines with phosphorescent light,
 a perfect round, all glimmering and shimmering, without flaws.
 Then for the first time ever could the heaven see the stars,
 the great ones, lovely spherical, in rivalry they shone,
 115 adorning heaven's countenance like flowers meadows do.
 And Saturn had the darkest tint, a shade of swarthy lead,
 while Jupiter like silver shone and Mars was all ablaze;
 the Sun was gleaming radiantly just like the purest gold,
 in rivalry like tin then shone Venus' lovely sphere;
 120 then Mercury like flaming copper, red like fire beamed,
 transparent like the finest glass the Moon however gleamed;
 with all these colours was the robe of heaven to be seen.
 Just like a dark blue hyacinth did Saturn dimly gleam,
 and Jupiter like lilies shone, like violets Mars beamed forth;
 125 the Sun like pure gold glimmering was purple like a rose,
 the Morning star with blossoms white like pimpernels she shone;
 just like a flower purple-dyed fair Mercury cast his flames,
 the Moon looked like a narcissus with lovely petals trimmed.
 With such a mass of flowers' tints was heaven then adorned,
 130 with such a blooming motley crew was covered heaven's face,
 with graces filled and multicoloured, shimmering delight,
 into a garden was it turned, its flowers were the stars,
 its gardener, of course, was God, and just like plants and sprouts,

like flowers of a thousand hues did starry rays beam forth.
 135 Then for the first time ever, when the sun had shone and beamed
 and thus been seen as heaven's pride, as day's embellishment,
 did he obey the great command, our own Creator's charge,
 and having closed his eyes he brought the fourth day to an end.
 In such a way was everything concerning stars fulfilled;
 140 the sun was put in charge of days, day-ruling star was he,
 whereas the moon with tender eyes would burn all through the night.
 And yet there were no animals to wander earth's vast plains,
 in water nothing, nor on land, none travelled through the air.
 But God, He who is absolute, right into water's depths
 145 a power bringing fruit and life infused and then He said
 a living soul should there spring forth, just like when from a womb
 with heavy load, in birth pain's pangs is pushed into the world
 a perfect baby, newly born, yet physically complete;
 for like a seed did God's command dive right into the wet,
 150 the streams of whirling water turned He into fertile flow.
 And thereupon the wide-winged birds who travel through the air
 were free to spread their wings and fly so eagerly and swift,
 they floated lightly in the sky as had it been the sea,
 they dashed and dived across the sky, its softly flowing streams.
 155 There were the birds with larger wings, with large and hooked beaks,
 with crooked talons on their feet, like arrows were their claws,
 with cutting beaks, their jagged edge much sharper than a knife,
 for whom raw meat would serve as food, the nourishment they knew,
 to them it would be natural to live always on flesh;
 160 the eagle who is king of birds, the falcon, bird of prey,
 and all the other birds who spurn the meat that fire cooked.
 Chattering sparrows were there too, who seek in plants their food,
 with tiny wings and succinct lives, their changeful strains they sang
 and twittered in the bushes thick, in trees the echo rang;
 165 goldfinches singing, skylarks too, finches, starlings fair
 and every other bird that flies about the country's greens
 and makes an easy catch and ends up as a tasty meal.
 Then were there also to be seen wild, frightening beasts on earth,
 the lion with his shaggy neck, the leopard, tiger, bear,
 170 the wild boar carrying fearful tusks, broad-breasted elephant
 and dogs with pointed teeth were there, and hares on winged feet;
 yes, every bird and four-foot, every creature in the swamp,
 all those who dwell in the great sea, and in the mountains too.
 When He had filled both sea and land with creatures manifold

175 the all-wise Builder of the roof protecting all the world
 spread out the cloak – the air, I mean – which was not made by hand
 but whose exquisite finery His godly fingers wove,
 unfurled it like a city with strong towers on its walls
 upon the birds of prey and all the beasts which feed on plants;
 180 then did he bring it to an end, the course of that fifth day.
 A sixth day once again lit up, rose-coloured was she too,
 and then a garden filled with trees of beauty did God plant,
 He did not dig with His own hands, He struggled not with earth,
 He did not place His palms on plants, the Word alone He worked,
 185 and every tree from there sprang forth, of saplings graceful rows,
 their leaves were offering fragrant shade, an aromatic charm.
 And who could bring before our eyes the beauty Eden showed?
 There were long rows of green lush plants that bore their loads of fruit,
 there were arrays of fragrant trees, their leaves were ever-green;
 190 the fruits the first kind carried were with sweetest nectar filled,
 the second kind of sky-high trees thrived giving pure delight:
 the plane that close to water grows, the long-haired silver fir,
 the pine that reaches to the sky, the cypress and the elm.
 The trees approached each other and with eager leaves they touched,
 195 the branches reached across and met, the twigs each other clasped;
 it was indeed as if the trees converged in love's embrace,
 were clasping one another tight and shared a fond caress.
 The sun cast down her glittering rays and fell upon the plants
 and reached the ground beneath the trees, gently flowing through
 200 the intertwining, loving twigs, as much as they allowed.
 The beauty of the roses shone, challenged by lilies' tint;
 but no thorns carried roses then, they did not hurt or sting.
 The deepest red of roses and their glimmering shades of white
 like stars diffusing rays of light thus glimmered from the ground.
 205 The face of earth was covered then by lush and verdant grass,
 in places bleak, in others smiling lighter shades of green.
 Upon the flowers fresh with dew, this motley crew of hues,
 the wind of sweet Zephyrus blew, his tender breath embraced
 the flowers and the air thus filled with overwhelming scents.
 210 And right there in the midst of this, the tree of life shot forth,
 long falling hair with graces filled, fair leaves, so beautiful.
 From underneath a spring broke forth, to water clear gave birth,
 and watered thus the land of Eden filled with lovely trees
 and carried freshness to the roots and stems of all the plants
 215 and propagated rows and rows of fragile flowers frail.

Divided right there into four, four sources there were made,
 the spring becoming mother of great rivers of the world:
 these rivers in the language used by those who live in Syria
 go by the name of Pheison, Geon, Phorad is the third,
 220 the fourth of them is Eddekel; now if we speak in Greek
 they're Ganges and the mighty Nile, Euphrates and Tigris.
 Ganges traverses the borders of the land of Euilat
 (in this land you discover gold and also prized green jewels,
 the gold is really pure and sheen, glowing like the fire),
 225 whereas the Nile with her white flow Aethiopian land surrounds
 and waters the Egyptians' grounds, their fields of rich black soil,
 with fertile floods entices them to yield a harvest full.
 The Tigris running in swift pace, whizzing like an arrow,
 is champing foam, is splashing forth with distant-reaching roars
 230 and to the roped-off border of Assyria it speeds.
 So trees and plants now growing in this lovely dwelling place,
 with these two wonder-working hands created He then man,
 for this work using only soil, a piece of simple mud;
 infusing then His breath of life into this flesh of earth
 235 and thus creating there a man complete with breath, alive,
 he brought to life this synthesis, a body joined with soul
 and granted him the knowledge of a free and prudent thought,
 created him to look like God, an image of Himself.
 He settled man in Eden with its tender lovely plants,
 240 like in its chamber dwells the pearl, a world within the world;
 it may seem small when looking at the object's actual size
 but is in fact in value so much greater than the world.
 This man who had been modelled from the fire-tinted earth
 the Ceramist named Adam, He who worked the clay with hands,
 245 and put him in His Eden fair, as resident the first.
 He asked him then to cull the fruits of every lavish tree
 but on the tree of knowledge was he not to lay a hand.
 Then every kind of animal, each tame obedient thing
 and every beast that roamed about among the fertile groves
 250 before this Adam did He bring, the four-footed, the winged,
 that they would all be named by him according to their kind.
 The lion cruel was there brought forth, long-haired slayer of bulls,
 and bears with fiercely shining eyes, leopards with speckled hides,
 the deer, too, with its spotted skin, the fox with bushy tail,
 255 the elephant with large broad front, shaking a lengthy trunk,
 swift-footed hares with shortened tails along with goring bulls;

the partridge with his crimson feet and beak was too brought forth
as were the starlings with black wings, shaking feathers dark
and showing off a tint of white just like a trace of hail.

260 The golden peacock swaggered about, boasting of his feathers:
shining with a thousand tints, his wings like pure gold were,
but in his plumage glimmered also deepest purple red;
each feather held a shining bloom, a golden glittering eye,
a garden whole was thus displayed, the peacock's own design.

265 They all encircled Adam like the servants masters do,
they cringed and trampled, fawned upon the very first of men,
and he touched lightly with his hands these undefeated beasts
as if he touched small suckling lambs, tender newly born,
without the slightest shake before the danger that they posed;

270 for agitated cowardice, that simple, reckless thing
had not as yet begun to rise in this man's youthful heart.
In this way fear cannot be raised within a balanced soul,
by beast or fire nor by river with its frightening roar;
if you can master what you feel, if you control your faults,

275 both scorpions and basilisks you crush under your feet,
you make the wildest lion tame, the tiger is your pet.
This finished, Adam fell asleep, a bitter sleep it was,
initiating catastrophe, an all-destroying fall.
For the Creator touched his side as he was full asleep,

280 He took a rib and modelled it, woman then was made,
and Adam who'd been made of earth, the first of all mankind,
became rib-father of his Eve, as mother first on earth.
Within that pleasant dainty space were then the two to lead
their lives without material cares and carnal appetites,

285 not even naked bodies did they bother to disguise.