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Quotidian Imagery in the *History* of Niketas Choniates

Some forty-five years ago, when I first became interested in Byzantine literature, the dominant attitude that I encountered was contempt, contempt both for Byzantine literature and for me for being interested in it. Amongst scholars the good fight has now undoubtedly been won, and the few who stubbornly adhere to their inbred opinion that Byzantine literature is excruciatingly dull and incogitantly slavish are usually treated like modern dinosaurs, a race doomed to die out, although, as the dinosaurs did, some are taking an unconscionably long time in doing that – whereas to the general public, or rather the happily increasing, but still few, members of it who have ever heard of Byzantium, new attitudes have as yet percolated but little. Such a process, of course, always takes time.¹

Over the last fifteen years in particular much progress has been made in the study and appreciation of Byzantine literature: so much so indeed that the application to it of modern literary criticism in its various forms is now almost de rigueur, as a perusal of this volume makes manifest. Nonetheless, since I believe that some more elementary work still remains to be done, I wish simply in this contribution to offer a little further evidence for the highly individualistic nature of this literature, easy as such documentation is. My paper on imagery is, then, more elementary than all others delivered at this symposium, but I believe that it is still worth doing for, to my knowledge, there has never been any really thorough study of Byzantine imagery; not that one would be possible within the limitations of a symposium even if I were capable of producing it.

Before detailing the notable quotidian imagery of Niketas Choniates, I wish, since I have recently been working on imagery from some century and a half earlier, that of Michael Psellos,² as well as of Choniates,³ to make some general comparisons between the two authors. There is, unfortunately, not the time to enquire to what extent these comparisons reflect the literary trends of their respective periods, but a comparison of the latter with, say, Eustathios of Thessaloniki would suggest that this is true at least of Choniates.

Both Psellos and Choniates were well educated men and serious historians, and their imagery expresses and exemplifies in each case the personalities of its author, although the appalling circumstances of his times necessarily generated a greater sense of gloom and despair in the latter.⁴ Psellos is extraordinarily careful in his use of imagery: he takes great pains to ensure that his simile or metaphor is completely apposite (even when applied to different objects or acts), and never allows himself to be carried away into tasteless comparisons; he almost never mixes metaphors (he is well aware of his one egregious example of this for which he gives a sort of apology⁵); he must have had an amazingly retentive memory, or read over his work many times, since he without fail succeeds in avoiding the use of the same wording on the occasions when he does

¹ It must, nonetheless, be admitted that Byzantine literature, being in the main highly élitist, remains often very difficult to penetrate, a fact which, of course, exacerbates the concern about the modern trend, led by North America, of beginning Greek only at university level, with the consequent result that the younger generation of Byzantinists, except for those of outstanding linguistic ability, encounters great problems in tackling this literature (many young classicists already turn first to the right-hand page of a Loeb edition; and, as is well known, there are now plans at Dumbarton Oaks to produce a Byzantine equivalent of that famous library).

² Imagery in the *Chronographia* of Michael Psellos, in: *Reading Michael Psellos* (ed. C. BARBER – D. JENKINS). Leiden 2006, 13–56.

³ Vegetal and Animal Imagery in the History of Niketas Choniates, in: *Theatron. Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter* (ed. M. GRÜNBART). Berlin 2007, 223–258.

⁴ This had been noticed earlier by KAZHDAN – FRANKLIN, *Studies* 271, where comparison is made between Choniates and Nikephoros Gregoras.

⁵ *Chronographia* 7.57.5–9 (2.250 IMPELLIZZERI), when his image changes from imperial surgeon to imperial charioteer. See LITTLEWOOD, *Imagery* 38.

employ the same image;⁶ and he calls upon Classical literature far more than on Biblical. Choniates, on the other hand, is so exuberant in his piling on of images that exact application is sometimes lost, and in his enthusiasm he makes bizarre comparisons such as between the cutting off of fingers and the pruning of vines and between hanging corpses and scarecrows in cucumber beds;⁷ he creates jumbles of different images which appear higgeldy-piggeldy one after another to describe the same point; his repetition of imagery not infrequently uses exactly the same words; and, though making great use of Classical literature, he is also much indebted to the Bible for inspiration. The difference that I wish to emphasize today, however, is that Psellos, the consummate rhetorician, spins endless variations on traditional imagery, extending application and adding detail to time-honoured *topoi*; his imagery is almost entirely bookish: he was a polymath, but a polymath of book-learning. He gives the impression of having read and imbibed the corpus of ancient literature surviving in his day in its entirety (as he probably had), but almost never noticing anything in the world about him with his own eyes. Choniates, on the other hand, though extremely conversant with and indeed revelling in ancient literature, makes enormous use of personal observation. Take the animal world, for instance.⁸ Psellos, apart from the generic word for wild beast (θήρ) employs only the lion (Homer makes it difficult for him not to), the monkey (once and then only its pelt), the vague word “snakes” (ὄφεις, once) and the mythological griffin (once, for the shape of Constantine X Doukas’ nose); whereas Choniates gives us images of twenty-two different mammals, twenty-one birds, twelve insects, six reptiles, two mollusks, two fish, one amphibian, one arachnid and the mythical composite Chimaira – that is sixty-eight different species in all.

Now, however, we shall turn to Choniates’ humdrum imagery, that of the every-day objects almost entirely ignored, except when previously exalted by being a traditional classical image, by the grand, philosophically minded Psellos, who probably felt that such imagery would demean his work (it is significant, I think, that such imagery is common in especially Psalms and the synoptic Gospels, both used more by Choniates than by Psellos). Let us, then, begin in Choniates’ kitchen before proceeding into his dining-room.

In a kitchen the commonest objects were probably the amphorae and other casks, but Choniates’ use of the former is far from common and, like so many of his images, is surely the result of his own observation and imagination: because of a crippling disease, probably rheumatism, Theodore Kastamonites was barely able to walk, and so used to be carried into the emperor on a small couch “carried by two bearers like (the handles) of wine-amphorae” (438.30–31: ὑπὸ δυοῖν φορέων αἰρόμενος διὰ σκίμποδος ὡς οἱ τῶν οἴνων ἀμφορεῖς). Most likely common talk, however, is the origin of the rebel John the Fat’s nickname from the fact that the shape of his body was “barrel-like” (526.36: πιθώδης τὴν πλάσιν); but the image of men pouring floods of words into a “perforated barrel” (448.5: τοῖς ἐπαντλοῦσιν ὡς εἰς τετρημένον πίθον) is not. A drunken mob is “heavier with wine than even wine-casks” (393.10: καὶ Ταπύρων οἰνοβαρέστεροι)⁹; success makes the arrogant Latin Baldwin “swell like a wine-skin” (365.66: ὡς ἀσκὸς ἐξοιδούμενος) while one unfortunate member of the imperial court died of dropsy, “having swelled like wine-skins” (479.43: κατὰ τοὺς ἀσκούς οἰδηθεῖς). When urination is done “as through the siphon of the fundament” (305.30: ὡς διὰ σίφωνος τῆς ἔδρας) the historian may have been thinking of the instrument for drawing wine from a cask, but his use of “the bodily well-head” (305.35: ὁ σωματικὸς κρουνός) a few lines later makes it more likely that a water-pipe was in his mind.

On three occasions Choniates uses a kettle (λέβης), once for describing the ruler of Cyprus Isaac Komnenos “bubbling [with anger] like a kettle” (370.6: κατὰ λέβητα καχλάζων), once for the populace “blow[ing] off steam against the insolence of the rulers like a kettle on the fire” (561.35: ὡς λέβης ἐκ πυρὸς κατὰ τῶν κρατούντων ἀτμοὺς ἀνιέναι ὕβρεων), and once, with Biblical imagery but different application,¹⁰ for the Byz-

⁶ LITTLEWOOD, *Imagery*, *passim*, but note 48–49.

⁷ *History* 548.6–7; 289.71–89. For further agricultural and horticultural images see LITTLEWOOD, *Vegetal* 230–233.

⁸ Compare LITTLEWOOD, *Imagery* 21–22 and LITTLEWOOD, *Vegetal* 233–256.

⁹ The propensity to drink heavily of the Tapyri (an Indian people, although van Dieten uses a lower-case tau) is taken from Atheneus (442b) or Aelian (*Var. Hist.* 3.13), but the imagery is Choniates’.

¹⁰ On the choice of friends at *Sirach* 13.2.

antine armies falling against the Latins like “earthen-ware pots against kettles” (199.47–48: ἀντικρυς χύτρας πρὸς λέβητας). With a play on his name a tax-collector on Corcyra called Gymnos was “smoother than a pestle in cunning” (72.1: ὑπέρου φιλότερος); and certain merchants were stripped of their clothes to leave them “more naked than a pestle” (528.92–93: ὑπέρου γυμνοτέρους), as were the citizens of Thessaloniki after being robbed of their possessions by Boniface of Montferrat (620.65). Manuel I gave up his design to abandon his soldiers after the disaster of Myriokephalon when he heard one of them lament that the emperor had “ground” them between cliffs and mountains “as though with a mortar” (187.10: οἰοεῖ τινι ὄλμῳ), which is a more likely meaning here of ὄλμος than a “kneading-trough”. With recourse to a different implement the interpreter Aaron Isaakios claimed that he could “cut throats with his tongue as though it were a sharp knife” (147.74: διὰ γλώττης αὐτῆς ὡσεὶ καὶ μαχαίρας ὀξείας ἀποδειροτομεῖν). In a more elaborately worked-up simile Choniates compares “memory”, which awakens one to guard against [committing the same] error in similar circumstances, with a “fan that kindles the surviving and buried embers of the good fire in the soul into a living flame” (585.39–40: ῥίπις τὸ παραμένον ἐν ψυχῇ καὶ ἐνθαπτόμενον ἐμπύρευμα τοῦ καλοῦ κατὰ ζῶσαν ἔτι φλόγα πυρὸς ἀναθάλλουσα). And finally for this section he claims that Thessalonians whose protests of poverty were disbelieved by the Latins were tortured and then thrown into the streets “like some household waste” (303.81: ὡσπερ τι τῆς οἰκίας ... ἀποσάρωμα).

At table we find that the “broad-mouthed soup-ladle” (260.61: εὐρυχανδῆς ζωμήρυσις), which did, of course, find employment also in the kitchen, occurs (typically in Choniates’ enthusiasm coupled with Poseidon’s trident and the apple of discord) to describe the petition of the ambitious future Andronikos I to marry his daughter to the youthful Alexios II. For the imagery of cups the historian twice relies on a passage in Psalms¹¹: every citizen of Thessaloniki captured by the Latins was maltreated “as though detested by God, condemned to drink the wine-cup of the Lord’s wrath unmixed and compelled [to drink] the drinking-cup unmingled” (300.2–301.4: εἶη ἂν οὗτος ἐστυγημένος θεῷ καὶ τῆς ὀργῆς Κυρίου ἀμιγῆ κατακριθεὶς πλεῖν τὴν κύλικα καὶ τὸ ποτήριον ἀκέραστον προσενέγκασθαι); while to detail the disasters that befell the citizens of Constantinople in 1204 “as an unmixed drinking-cup and a wine-cup full of lees” (645.85–86: ὡς ἀκράτου ποτηρίου καὶ τρυγοφόρου κύλικος) were supererogatory. In a section rejected by van Dieten these same unfortunates have “a cup of afflictions unmixed with any joy” (635.13: τὸν σκύφον τῶν θλίψεων ἀκέραστον χαρμονῆ), in which we may notice that the writer has now added the σκύφος to the previous κύλιξ and ποτήριον as drinking vessels suitable for imagery, while that necessary adjunct the mixing bowl, here metaphorically one “of virtues”, (484.92: πολυμιγῆς κρατήρ ἀγαθῶν) is among the many images to which the infavour Constantine Mesopotamites is compared.

As for food, Andronikos I’s head was “balder than an egg”¹² (349.12: ὤου φιλότερον) when he was maltreated after his dethronement; Isaak II promised to fulfil Isaiah’s prophecy¹³ in “suck[ing] the milk of the Gentiles” 432.70: θηλάσει γάλα ἐθνῶν); the Thessalonians were not allowed to approach the time’s “bread of grief” (305.22–23: τὸν τῆς ὀδύνης ἄρτον) in the metaphor of the Psalmist;¹⁴ and the words of Andronikos were “smoother than olive-oil” (286.93: ὑπὲρ ἔλαιον λεία) while those of the Latins, in an extension of the simile, “were made softer than olive-oil flowing without sound” (301.25–26: ὑπὲρ ἔλαιον ῥέων ἀφοφητὶ ἀπαλύνηται).

Furniture does not play a large part in Choniates’ imagery. We do, however, find the footstool as a simile for how Manuel Komnenos intended to use the neck of Kilij Arslan in trampling upon him in submission (178.11), when the historian, in again calling the Bible to memory, substitutes θρανίς (= θράνος) for the Psalmist’s ὑποπόδιον.¹⁵ Curtains appear twice: Alexios III concealed his hatred for his brother behind “a curtain of affection” (448.8–9: παραπέτασμα φιλίας); while when similarly Andronikos told his troops that Amalric, the king of Jerusalem, “no longer hid[es] his secrets behind a curtain” (165.76–77: μήτε μὴν

¹¹ 74.9 (cf. Is. 51.17).

¹² Was this personal observation or a remembrance of a poem by Nicarchus at Anth. Pal. 11.398?

¹³ Is. 60.16.

¹⁴ Ps. 126.2.

¹⁵ Ps. 109.1.

παραπετάσματι συσκιάζοντος τὰ ἐνδόμυχα), the imagery is made more vivid by the choice of the word ἐνδόμυχα, literally “innermost parts of the house” for “secrets”. Lights necessarily played an important rôle in Byzantine houses and churches, and so, with an almost bewildering variation of vocabulary,¹⁶ Isaac II Angelos told Theodore Balsamon, Patriarch of Antioch, that since in his present position Balsamon was no longer able to serve as “the daily and ever-moving lantern” to the church “he had long desired to move him from the lampstand of the Antiochians to the oecumenical summit (the patriarchate of Constantinople) as a glorious lamp for the clarity of the laws” (406.48–54: μὴ ... εἶναι τὸν ἡμέριον ... λαμπτήρα τὸν ἀεικίνητον ... πάλαι ... βούλεσθαι μετενεγκεῖν αὐτὸν ἐκ τῆς τῶν Ἀντιοχείων λυχνίας πρὸς τὴν οἰκουμενικὴν περιωπὴν ὡς λύχνον ταῖς τῶν νόμων τηλαυγείαις πάμφωτον). “Lantern” is used again, coupled with “star” (230.87: λαμπτήρ καὶ ἀστήρ), for how Andronikos was originally viewed by the citizens of Constantinople, although soon enough the imagery changes to the sinister as the emperor’s letters are described as “like a smooth and shining mirror” (245.76–77: οἶα κατόπτρω ... λείψω καὶ ἀποστίλβοντι) and prove him a veritable Proteus.

Let us now look at clothing and adornments. Andronikos cast off “his soft words like rags” (286.93: ὡς ῥάκια τὰ ἀπαλά ... ῥήματα); and whereas he had been destined to reign for nine years God had subtracted six, which “were thrown like a ragged garment over the purple robe of his rule” (433.92–93: ὡς ῥάκος πορφύρα ἐπιβέβληνται). Many would-be rulers used murder to further their aims, thus, in a metaphor partly inspired by the Psalmist,¹⁷ “donning the double cloak of shame in place of the purple robe” (424.31: ἀντὶ πορφυρίδος διπλοῖδα αἰσχύνης ἐνδιδυσκόμενοι). The historian makes Louis VII, exhorting his troops before battle with the Turks, say, in imitation of Theodora’s famous words on the occasion of the Nika Revolt, that “to die for Christ is a fine burial shroud” (69.15–16: καλὸν ἐντάφιον τὸ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ τελευτᾶν).¹⁸ Euphrosyne, the masculine and strong-willed consort of Alexios III, dishonoured “the veil of modesty” (460.86: τὸ κάλυμμα τῆς αἰδοῦς) in what was a conscious metaphor, whereas the removal by the defenders of Didymoteichion of “the masks of fawning [suppliants]” (633.47–48: τὰ τῶν ὑποπιπτόντων ... προσωπεῖα) is, on the other hand, at best an antiquarian survival. A “watery belt (or girdle)” (37.95: ὑγρὸς ζωστήρ) brings another garment into play as metaphor for a quite different object, a protective, encircling Lake Pousgouse (Beyşehir Gölü). A final item of attire is the crown, and here Choniates, I believe, has Christ’s crown of thorns in mind when, in the events leading up to the disgrace and blinding of Andronikos’ zealous adherent Constantine Tripsykos he says that for him “a crown of ruthlessness was being plaited” (314.49–50: τῆς ἀπηνείας ἐπλέκετο στέφανος).

For personal adornments we find the ecumenical patriarch Kosmas II Attikos “especially adorned with great charity which, as if embedded with multifarious virtues in a costly necklace, shone like a radiant gemstone” (79.90–92: μάλιστα δὲ τῷ πολλῷ τῆς ἐλεημοσύνης ἐκέκαστο, ἥτις ὡς ἐν περιδερραίῳ κόσμῳ πολυτελεῖ προσπεπηγυῖα τῇ ποικιλίᾳ τῶν ἀρετῶν δίκην ἀκτινώδους λίθου ἐπάμφαινε). Again the envoys of Henry Hohenstaufen, confronted by the glittering dress of Byzantine courtiers, declared that they themselves “do not swell in arrogant manner like beads of pearls shimmering in the light of the moon or intoxicated amethysts” (477. 90–92: οὐδ’ οἰδαίνονται πρὸς ἠθος ἀγέρωχον μαργάρων σφαιρώμασι πρὸς φῶς διαγελόντων σελήνης ἢ ταῖς ἀμεθύσοις μεθύουσι λίθαξι), but they have “eyes red with the fire of their wrath like the rays of gemstones” (477.93–478.95: θυμοῦ ... πυρὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐρυθραίνονται τοῖς τῶν λίθων ἐπίσης ἀκτινώδεσιν). From literature rather than observation Choniates says, to emphasize Constantine Mesopotamites’ uniquely powerful position, that, amid a host of other extravagant metaphors, he was “the veritable pearl of Perozes” (485.95: τὸ τοῦ Περόζου ἄντικρυς μάργαρον), as he remembers Prokopios’ account of the Persian throwing away his exceptional adornment so that nobody else could ever wear it.¹⁹ Less specifically

¹⁶ Cf. the variety of words for drinking vessels above, p. 183.

¹⁷ Ps. 108.29.

¹⁸ Prokopios has Theodora say that kingship (βασιλεία) is a suitable shroud, itself a variation, and a very significant variation, on the “tyranny” (τυραννίς) of the original quotation made in reference to Dionysius I, the infamous and obloquial autarch of Syracuse (see J.A.S. EVANS, *The “Nika” Rebellion and the Empress Theodora*. Byz 54 [1984] 380–382; A. KALDELLIS, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*. Philadelphia 2004, 36–37).

¹⁹ Bell. Pers. 1.4.14 (I, p. 16,20–17,2 HAURY – WIRTH).

our historian avers that the wife of Alexios Axuch was a “radiant adornment” (145.94: λαμπρὸν ἐπικόσμημα).

The outstanding example, however, and surely one invented by the author, of an adornment being used as an image comes in a mixed metaphor describing the policy of Mesopotamites in the reign of Alexios III: he held the church in his left hand, the palace in his right, “tying [them] closely together like a corner-stone binding the separate [walls]” (490.82–83: περισφίγγων ὅσα καὶ λίθος τῶν διεστώτων συνδέτης ἀκρόγωνος²⁰), to accomplish which “he inserted into the government his own brothers, like wedges or hoops, or he hung them like earrings in both the emperor’s ears” (490.85–86: ὡς σφηνάς τινας καὶ βλήτρα τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ κασιγνήτους ἐνέβυσσε τῇ ἀρχῇ. ἢ ὡς ἐνώτια ταῖς τοῦ βασιλέως ἐκατέραις ἀπηώρησεν ἀκοαίς), so that he should know everything said or done in a church synod and that nobody should insinuate himself into the palace without his knowledge.

This leads us naturally into metaphors of buildings, where we can begin with the simple wall or fence. Various words are used by Choniates: Maria Komnene, the sister of Manuel I, used as refuge a church as if it were “a defensive wall” (235.27: ἔρυμα); John II Komnenos advanced against the Pechenegs “like an unbreakable wall” (15.95: τεῖχος ἄρρηκτον); and Denes was “immovable like a wall” (156.22: ὡς τεῖχος ἀτίνακτος) in the face of Andronikos Kontostephanos; Homer’s “palisade of teeth” (ἔρκος ὀδόντων)²¹ is used in a completely different context for a statue of a basilisk (or crocodile or asp – Choniates does not know which) attempting “to escape from [a bull’s] jaws” (654.51: τοῦ τῶν ὀδόντων ἔρκου διεκδῦναι); and the verb φράσσω (“fence” or “hedge in”) is used both for the Genoese Gafforio being protected by ships (482.4) and Branias’ infantry being armed with divers weapons (379.96). For variety we find that the grand zupan of Serbia Desa was “distressed by the fences of his oaths whereby he had blocked off for himself his contrary intentions” (136.60–61: ἐπαθαίνετο οἷς τὰς τῆς γνώμης παρεκτροπὰς θριγγίσις ὄρκων ἑαυτῷ ἀπετείχισε). Perhaps we may include here also the Biblical expression of falling into the pit that you yourself have dug for being the author of your own calamity,²² which Choniates uses for Turkish folly against the Germans (67.47–48: εἰς βόθυνον κατώλισθον, ὃν ταῖς οἰκείαις χερσὶν ἐβάθυναν).

With true buildings we find a preference for the tower or fortress (πύργος) in military contexts. The Hungarian comes palatinus Denes, in facing Andronikos Kontostephanos, “compact[ed] and form[ed] his army into a sort of tower” (155.1–156.2: πυκνώσας οἷον αὐτὸ καὶ πυργώσας); and the shields of the soldiers besieging Damietta (which according to the heartening words of Kontostephanos were larger even than that of Homer’s Ajax the Greater), “were brandished in defence like towers” (166.13–14: ὡς πύργοι ἀντιπροβέβληνται), an image continued with the use of a rare word from Psalms²³ for the soldiers standing up against the enemy’s missiles like “battlemented houses” (166.15–16: πυργοβάρεις). For other structures in other contexts we find that Alexios, the eldest son of John II Komnenos, died when his virulent fever “was attacking his head as though it were an acropolis” (38.16: ὡς ἀκροπόλει τῇ κεφαλῇ ἐπιθέμενος); and that Niketas, bishop of Chonai, was “an habitation of every virtue” (219.73: πάσης ἀρετῆς καταγωγίον). In claiming that Constantine Mesopotamites was such a dandy that “he surpassed the likeness of a church” (441.14: ὁμοίωμα ... ναοῦ ... ἐκέκαστο) Choniates uses the verb καίνυμι for “surpass”, a clever choice because of its secondary meaning of “being adorned”, and one not in his source, Ps. 142.12.

Gates and doors appear less frequently than one would perhaps expect: “speaking” becomes “express[ing] thoughts through the gates of the lips” (510.42–43: ἐννοήματα ... διὰ πυλῶν τῶν χειλέων ἐκφέρεσθαι); and, in a reminiscence of the language of Matthew,²⁴ Mesopotamites becomes the “small side-door, narrow gate and straightened road” (440.86: τεθλιμμένη παράθυρος καὶ στενὴ πυλὶς καὶ συνεπτυγμένη ὁδός) to the palace; while the Homeric phrase “the threshold of old age” (369.80: οὐδὸς γῆραος) is used for the elderly general

²⁰ For this part cf. his ep. 11 (p. 217.3–4 VAN DIETEN).

²¹ First at Il. 4.350.

²² Ps. 7.16; Prov. 26.27.

²³ Ps. 121.7.

²⁴ Matt. 7.13–14.

John Kontostephanos, and one from Proverbs²⁵ for Alexios IV passing through “the trap-door to Hell” (564.18: τοῦ ἄδου ... τὸ πέταυρον). There is little left in this section, merely that Isaac II ignored the threat of rebellion from his brother Alexios, leaping over “the stumbling-block on his hearth” (447.92–93: τὸ ἀφ’ ἐστίας σκῶλον), i.e. a person closely related to him, and that Euphrosyne was elevated by relations of the emperor “putting their shoulders like wooden beams beneath her glittering and lofty throne” (461.11–12: τοὺς ὤμους ὡς θρανίδας ὑποβάλλοντες ἐπὶ τῶν λαμπρῶν καὶ μετεώρων θώκων).

Of the implements employed in industry Choniates uses metaphorically most often the scales or balance. Kiliç Arslan abandoned his humility and was uplifted more easily than a feather whenever “Fortune gave a downward momentum to the other pan of the balance” (123.73: τῆ ἑτέρῃ πλάστιγγι ῥοπὴν ἢ τύχη παρείχετο). Similar language but including the words for “counterbalancing” (144.67–68: ἀντίρροπα δράσας) and “balance” (144.68: ζυγόν) describes Manuel’s attitude towards Alexios Axuch; while his thoughts over whether or not to marry his daughter to William of Sicily were at first “evenly balanced” (170.29: ἀμφιτάλαντον) before they suffered many alterations; and a few lines later but in a different context the same emperor angrily turned the “momentum” (171.56: in plural, ῥοπαί) against the Veneti upon recalling their behaviour. In the battle of Maria Komnene mentioned above Victory was at first undecided, “balancing the pans of both armies equally” (237.61–62: ἐπ’ ἴσης τὰς τῶν ἀμφοτέρων στρατευμάτων ταλαντεύουσα); Alexios IV placed his relationship with Manuel Kamytzes “in one pan of the scales of his mind” (533.53–54: ἐν πλάστιγγι μιᾷ τοῦ τῆς φρενὸς ζυγοῦ) and the latter’s wealth in the other, and “balancing both” (533.54–55: ταλαντεύων ἀμφοτέρα) found that the second was “much heavier in weight” (533.55: πολὺ τῆ ῥοπῆ βαρύτερα; and Constantine Doukas and Constantine Laskaris, competing for leadership of the state (“a tempest-tossed ship”), were deemed “of equal weight” (571.63: τῆς ἴσης ῥοπῆς). Very different in application is the image of ships carrying scaling ladders like scales with their pans (568.79–80: ὡς ἐπὶ ζυγοῦ κατατείναντος ἐπὶ τὴν πρὸς τὰ τεῖχη μεταβαίνουσι πλάστιγγα), but we must note the *Selbstvariation* in the wording of the other examples.

Anvils occur thrice. Two are based on the “unstruck anvil” (ἄκμων ἀνήλατος) of Job 41.16, which exact words are quoted for the implacable Latins (301.14), while the variation of “with heart forged on the iron anvil” (243.42–43: καρδίαν σιδηρέῳ χαλκευθεὶς ἄκμωνι) occurs for the only men able to withstand the dissembling tears of Andronikos. Quite distinct, and probably the author’s own image, is the attackers at the siege of Corcyra being struck with missiles “like anvils by hammers” (84.19: ὅσα καὶ ἄκμονες ῥαῖσθησι). Another image is of Manuel wishing to act “while the iron was still at its peak” [i.e. in the English idiom “still hot”] (121.23–24: ἕως ἔτι ὁ σίδηρος ἐν ἄκμῃ).²⁶

A whetstone, a touchstone and a magnet appear once each. Conrad of Montferrat, by encouraging Isaac, became “for the emperor like a whetstone for the razor of war” (383.84: ὡς περ ἀκόνη τῷ βασιλεῖ πρὸς τὸν τοῦ πολέμου ξυρόν). The same emperor then ignored accusations against his brother instead of applying “the Herakleian stone” (448.10: λίθος Ἡράκλεια). Choniates seems, excusably, a little confused here. “A Lydian stone” was the name applied to a silicious stone first found in Lydia and employed in the assaying of gold, that is as a touchstone, whereas “an Herakleian stone” was the name applied to a magnet; but Hesychios claims that the latter was so called after Herakleia in Lydia. Choniates is, nonetheless, aware of the other name for a magnet (λίθος Μάγνησσα, “Magnesian stone”), when he calls Michael Italikos a magnet for his enchanting conversation (62.14–15: κὰν ταῖς ὁμιλίαις τὸ ἦθος ἐπαγωγότατος καὶ λίθος ἀντικρυς Μάγνησσα) and again in averring that “the actions of men both slandered and praised are drawn by rumour as by a magnet” (465.41–466.42: ἐπάγειν δ’ ὡς λίθον Μάγνησσαν τὰς πράξεις τῶν ἐνδιαβαλλομένων εἴτε μὴν κροτουμένων παρ’ αὐτῆς ἀνδρῶν). Choniates’ use of “the Herakleian stone” is immediately followed by further in-

²⁵ Hom. II. 22.60 etc. and Prov. 9.18 respectively.

²⁶ Iron appears in only one other simile, and that taken straight from Homer (Od. 19.211) – the protosebastos Alexios when imprisoned was not allowed to keep his eyes open “as if they were of horn or iron” (249.92–93: ὡς περ κέρασ ἢ σίδηρον). Choniates metaphorically uses another metal when describing as “filings of gold” (462.48: χρυσοῦ ... ἀπορρινήματα) the colour of the hair of Alexios of Cilicia, who in 1195 proclaimed himself the son of Manuel I; while for a finished object in a third metal he claims that the Germans both collectively and in the person of one individual were regarded by opponents as “bronze statues” (412.16: ἀνδριάντες χαλκήρεις, singular at 415.2).

dustrial imagery in his assertion of Isaac's "love for his brother being as it were branded deep into his soul" (448.12–13: οἶον εἰς βάθος ἐγκεκαυμένην τῇ ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῇ πρὸς τὸν κασίγνητον στοργήν).

Weaving drew the historian's attention, for he has Andronikos twisting his beard "as though weaving on a loom" (283.20: ὡς ἐν ἰστῷ ὑφαινούσης), an image which he continues with the emperor "weaving plots" (283.22: δόλους ὑφαίνων) against the Nikaians; while Euphrosyne "unravell[ed] the twisted strands woven by a certain Kontostephanos like the thread of Penelope" (519.38–39: ὡς μίτον Πηνελόπειον ἀναλύσασαν τὰ παρά τινος Κοντοστεφάνου ἐξυφανθέντα συστρέμματα).²⁷ In a related image Alexios V "cuts the thread of [Alexios IV's] life" (564.16: τὸν τῆς ζωῆς ... μίτον ἐκτέμνει), and this same image of a thread is implied by the use of the verbs in "broke off his life" (351.52–53: ἀπέρρηξε τὴν ζωὴν) for the death of Andronikos and, literally, "having broken off the soul" (481.88: ἐναπορρήξας ... τὴν ψυχὴν) for the death of the leader of a conspiracy against Henry VI Hohenstaufen. Similarly the use of an Homeric verb in the expression "he [Kilij Arslan II] cautiously wound up the battles" (175.41–42: ἐτολύπευε τὰς μάχας πεφυλαγμένως) again implies a thread or skein.²⁸ Choniates has also noticed the plumbline, for Andronikos let down his cruelty "to the foundation of his soul like a single-dimensional line lengthened to be delicate and without any breadth" (323.66–67: ὡσεὶ καὶ γραμμὴν μονοδιάστατον καὶ μηκίζομένην εἰς τὸ λεπταλέον καὶ ἀπλατὲς ἐν τῷ ἑδαφίῳ τῆς ψυχῆς); and from needlework or cobbling he takes the expression "stitchers of falsehood" (488.86: συρραφεῖς ψεύδους) for liars.

Other images in this section can be mentioned summarily: leaving school is "putting down pen and ink" (439.71–72: ἀφειμένον δονακίσκου καὶ μέλανος); the barbarians moved "faster than the quill of his history" (610.1–2: τοῦ πτεροῦ τῆς ἱστορίας ταχυπετέστερον); wedges (σφήναι) and hoops or bands (βλήτρα) we have already noticed;²⁹ and a seal is used simply to mean the last man in the historian's comment that Andronikos Komnenos' son "was a seal and conclusion of the conspirators" (428.60–61: ἐπισφράγισμά τι καὶ τελευτὴ γέγονε τῶν ἀποστατῶν).

Finally sports and games do not pass unnoticed by Choniates. In saying that Coele Syria was won by the Frankish youth "having exercised themselves in such games [i.e. battles]" (72.79: τοιοῦτοις ... ἀγῶσιν ἐγγυμνασάμενοι) he may not perhaps have been conscious of using a metaphor; but, although it is not strictly a metaphor or simile, he deliberately makes reference to sport in having Andronikos Kontostephanos attempt to rouse his troops by remembering that encouragement from a trainer often "benefited an athlete for the contest at hand" (154.56–57: μέγα τι πολλάκις ὤνησε τὸν ἀθλοῦντα καὶ βραχεῖά τις ὑποφώνησις τοῦ ἀλείφοντος πρὸς τὸν ἐν χερσὶν ἀγῶνα). Words for prizes in games are commonly used in other contexts. So Choniates has Manuel I elevated to the throne by his father as "a prize of virtue" (45.36: ἄθλον ἀρετῆς),³⁰ "the prize" (314.49: τὸ βραβεῖον) for loyalty to Andronikos divided between Tripsychos and Stephanos Hagiochristophorites, and the Latins thinking that the seizure of the city of Orestias would be a "contest, prize and consummation of their toils" (622.20: ἀγώνισμα καὶ ἄθλον καὶ συμπέρασμα τῶν πόνων); while the wife of Alexios Axuch is described as "a beauty-prize" (144.93–145.94: καλλιστεῖον) in perhaps a reminiscence of the competition on Mount Ida. Byzantine fascination with dicing and board-games encourages Choniates to make the platitude for Isaac II's downfall that fortunes can change at a throw of the dice, for which he uses the rare word μετακύβευσις (452.8), and then later its cognate verb μετακυβεύω (565.4) for Alexios V

²⁷ Both Soranus (Soranus d'Éphèse, *Maladies des femmes*, IV. Texte établi, traduit et commenté par P. BURGUIÈRE [et al.]. Paris 2000, 27, 123.125) and Oribasius (Oribasii synopsis ad Eustathium ed. I. RAEDER [*Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* VI/3]. Leipzig – Berlin 1926 [Reprint Amsterdam 1964], 309, 14) had used the word σύστρεμμα for a clew or ball (of wool). Magoulias misses the word-play by translating "machinations" (H.J. MAGOULIAS, *O City of Byzantium. Annals of Niketas Choniates*. Detroit 1984, 285).

²⁸ The noun τολύπη is a clew either of carded wool to be spun or of spun yarn. Homer once uses the cognate verb τολυπεύω almost literally for the spinning of guile in the making by Penelope of a shroud for Laertes (Od. 19.137), but Choniates was surely thinking here of the metaphorical use of the word at Od. 24.95 when Agamemnon told Achilles that he had, in Butcher's and Lang's nice translation, "wound up the clew of war" (cf. also the use in Iliad 24.7 for the conclusion of Achilles' toils together with Patroklos).

²⁹ Above, p. 185.

³⁰ The use of βραβεύειν in the previous line suggests that the noun here was a conscious metaphor.

winning the imperial throne; while to show how the protosebastos Alexios took control in every sphere he says that “he moved all the draught pieces” (230.80: πάντα ... μετεπέττευε). Taking his clue from Homer³¹ he also has Andronikos scattering plots “like children’s sand-toys” (104.44–45: ὡς παιδίων ἐπὶ ψάμμου ἀθύρματα). The only grim sporting image, and indeed a very grim one, is reserved for Alexios Branas, for Isaac II so revelled in the rebel’s overthrow that while he ate he had Branas’ head brought into the palace where “it was thrown here and there back and forth like a ball” (389.66–67: ὠδέ τε κάκεισε δίκην σφαίρας διαγομένη τε καὶ μεταγομένη διηκοντίζετο).

Choniates’ imagery is amazingly rich. Elsewhere I have treated his vegetal, agricultural and animal imagery.³² The main areas therefore still untouched are the traditional literary sources of imagery, of which he makes much use, viz. fire, wind and other meteorological elements, water, the ship of state, equestrianism, and military affairs and equipment. In his variations on all these themes there is frequently a personal touch dependent upon observation and not just reading. His enthusiasm for comparing people and events of his own time with mythological and real figures and events that he knew from classical literature is remarkably far-ranging and a topic that I hope to treat at a later date. But for now a fitting conclusion to his quotidian imagery may be found in a very domestic picture: to blunt the emperor’s faculties as he listened to his fabulous tales the patriarch Dositheus induced Isaac II Angelos to lie down “as wet-nurses [are wont] to place their tiny babes on their stomachs to relax them” (433.81–82: ὡς αἱ τίτθαι τὰ βρεφύλλια ἐπικλινῆ τιθέναι πρὸς ῥαστώνην).

³¹ Il. 15.362–364.

³² LITTLEWOOD, *Vegetal* (above, n. 3), to which I should like to add the just recently noticed “cumin-cutter” (523.54: πρίζων τὸ κύμινον) for a “skinflint”.