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# Transferring and transforming ancient greek ritual practices in Byzantine twelfth century novels and theatre

Florence Meunier

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TRANSFERRING AND TRANSFORMING  
ANCIENT GREEK RITUAL PRACTICES  
IN BYZANTINE TWELFTH CENTURY NOVELS AND THEATRE

The sixty-second canon decreed by the Constantinopolitan council in Trullo (years 691-692)<sup>1</sup> displays a strong survival in the Byzantine empire of popular festive rites from the ancient Greece. Such a situation is attesting a spontaneous syncretism between antique polytheism and Christianity. The council in Trullo intends not to prohibit these popular festivities but to get rid of the ritual expressions going with the *Kalandai* (the first of January), *Bota* (the sixth of January, in honour of the god Pan, so that he would protect the livestock), *Broumalia* (end of November and December, twenty-four days in total, in honour of Dionysus, « *Broumalia* » from the epithet of Dionysus, *Bromios*, « the god shuddering when he is in a delirium » ), and on March the first, with the large popular gathering aimed to obtain from divinity a mild weather. These ritual expressions, for example women dancing in the streets or men dressed up as women and vice-versa, are regarded as uncontrolled behaviour harmful to public order, and even as sacrilege when concern wine-making process among invocations to Dionysus and comic figures. Actually, festivities of *Kalandai*, *Bota*, *Broumalia* and coming spring celebration were destined to become extinct following their ritual expressions since these expressions were constituting their substance. But Theodoros Balsamon, an ecclesiastic (patriarch of Antioch), in commenting on the council in Trullo sixty-second canon<sup>2</sup>, deplores the fact that even in the time he lives (the second half of the Byzantine twelfth century), during the Christian festivities of Nativity at the beginning of January and Lights on the day of Resurrection, the very clerks (in Greek *klèrikoi*) inside a church give themselves up to these pagan ritual expressions by clowning and dressing up in an inappropriate and sometimes blasphemous way (in a monk or an ascetic). So contrary to the canon sixty-two objectives, even if the pagan festivities themselves are no more extant, their substance, it means a number of traditional forms of

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<sup>1</sup> Ed. Mansi, T. XI, col. 972 A-C.

<sup>2</sup> *P.G.*, 137, col. 725 D – 731 A.

ritual expression, have survived. They have thus been diverted from their initial use and have blended into Christian practices. That's why referring to the canon sixty-two Theodoros Balsamon is inciting to legislate again against such practices.

Do works of fiction in Byzantine twelfth century attest too this kind of mixed religious practices which their authors would have inserted in course of plot ? In fact the story of three novels focused on love and adventure and of a little play / fable based on a fatal fight between cat and mice is set in the polytheistic context of Ancient Greece. But each of the three authors of these four works, Eustathios Makrembolites, Theodoros Prodromos and Niketas Eugenianos, scholars regulars in emperor's Manuel One Komnenos court, has modified in his own way the data of this antique polytheism<sup>3</sup>. Concerning the three novels<sup>4</sup>, modifications are obvious compared with the content of the five ancient Greek novels from the roman imperial period<sup>5</sup> whose themes Byzantine authors have partially taken up. Moreover, regarding the *Katomyomachia*, second work of Theodoros Prodromos in my corpus<sup>6</sup>, as Zeus is showing himself in the play the only god who is acting, polytheism is there in concrete terms resolved into a monotheism. Does it mean that at the same time polytheism is altered in its nature in the four Byzantine texts, gods' worship, ritual practices referring to this ancient polytheism are altered too ?

By and large components nature of ritual practices are the same : festivities, sacrifices, oracles, ordeals. But process and intentions are several times modified, some rituals, especially marriage celebration and sacrifices, are mocked, and even sometimes connected with a Christian content itself parodied.

The field of ritual practices in Greek and Byzantine novels includes the calendar festivities celebrated collectively in honour of some god. Outside this calendar, the marriage ritual celebration, an event of both societal and private order, occupies of course a fundamental place in the three love and adventure novels by recognizing officially the heroes as a true couple. But the religious ritual of the marriage celebration is not described in the Greek novels. Ritual practices include too public and private current ceremonies

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<sup>3</sup> F. Meunier, « Polythéisme et christianisme dans le roman byzantin du XIIe siècle », *Les hommes et les dieux dans l'ancien roman*, Actes du colloque de Tours, CESR, 22-24 Octobre 2009, B. Poudéron ed., Lyon, 2012, p. 305-326.

<sup>4</sup> Eustathios Makrembolites : M. Marcovich ed., *Eustathius Makrembolites, de Hysmines et Hysminiae amoribus libri XI*, München-Leipzig, 2001 ; Theodoros Prodromos, M. Marcovich ed., *Theodori Prodromi, de Rhodantes et Dosiclis amoribus libri IX*, Leipzig-Stuttgart, 1992 ; Niketas Eugenianos, *Drosilla and Charikles* in F. Conca ed., *Il romanzo bizantino del XII secolo*, Turin, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> For these five novels : Chariton from Aphrodisia, *Chaereas and Callirhoe* ; Heliodoros, *Aethiopics or Theagenes and Charikleia* ; Xenophon from Ephesus, *Ephesiakoï or Habrokomes and Anthia* ; Longos, *Pastorales or Daphnis and Chloe* ; Achilles Tatios, *Leukippe and Clitophon*, Belles-Lettres ed., Paris.

<sup>6</sup> Text and translation of *Katomyomachia* in F. Meunier, *Théodore Prodrome. Crime et châtement chez les souris*, L'Harmattan ed., Paris, 2016, p. 117-159.

propitiatory or as thanks offering in the form of sacrifices, and exceptional adjuvant practices in consulting an oracle or organizing an ordeal.

Calendar festivities in the Greek texts, in honour of Apollo (Heliodoros' novel), Artemis (Xenophon from Ephesus' novel), Dionysus (Achilles Tatios and Longos), Zeus (Achilles Tatios), are overall not very detailed, with as a minimum the same components, a procession, sometimes a sacrifice going with. Heliodoros is alone to detail festivities in honour of a god, Apollo : procession and sacrifice<sup>7</sup>, festivities in the course of which the heroes have met the first time. In contrast in the Byzantine Makrembolites' novel, the ritual procedure for the Apollo's festivities in the course of which heroes have been reunited with their parents is entirely absent<sup>8</sup>. And already in the previous scene of this work of Makrembolites about Artemis festivities the narrator had emphasized sensory and artistic features of the scene but didn't say anything regarding the religious data<sup>9</sup>, while in the Greek novel of Xenophon from Ephesus in the course of Artemis festivities religious features of the procession, worship objects and concrete representation of Artemis, embodied in the heroine, are specified<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, in the Byzantine Eugenianos' novel, whose in the plot Dionysus' festivities are twice inserted, not only the first time (book one of the work)<sup>11</sup> narrator substitutes polytheistic ritual data for a description of Dionysus grassland in sensory and aesthetic terms, but also the second time (book three)<sup>12</sup> he transforms this grassland into a kind of Byzantine Christian paradise by introducing there especially a plane whose leaves are golden<sup>13</sup>. A golden plane had been actually placed in the throne room of imperial palace in Byzantium since the first half of the ninth century under the reign of Theophilus (829-842). So for the third Byzantine novelist in my corpus, Theodoros Prodromos, doesn't insert any calendar festivities in the plot course, we can infer that Makrembolites and Eugenianos don't illustrate in fiction works the Byzantine reality condemned by the council in Trullo at the end of the seventh century and denounced by Theodoros Balsamon in the twelfth century. Furthermore, not only Makrembolites doesn't transfer in a twelfth century text the ancient rituals of the pagan festivities, but may be to play with the polytheistic context, from the beginning of the novel, he is inventing a ritual of a worship of Zeus *Meilichios*, « benevolent », an understatement to refer to Zeus as an avenging deity, may be Chthonian, celebrated during the *Diasia*, the most famous festivities in honour of Zeus in the ancient Athens. The *Diasia* ritual is unknown for it hasn't be described by ancient authors. One can only suppose it was performed in two phases, first public mourning festivities, cathartic, then private rejoicings, and may be sacrifices were

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<sup>7</sup> *Aethiopics*, II, 34, 1 to III, 6, 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Hysmine and Hysminias*, X, 6, 1 and 9, 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Hysmine and Hysminias*, IX, 1, 1 to 2, 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ephesiakoi*, I, 2, 2-6.

<sup>11</sup> *Drosilla and Charikles*, I, 105-115.

<sup>12</sup> *Drosilla and Charikles*, III, 65-100.

<sup>13</sup> *Drosilla and Charikles*, III, 83-84.

offered nights<sup>14</sup>. In Makrembolites' novel public festivities are full of joy, songs and dances, to celebrate the election of Zeus herald, the hero, Hysminias, sent to another city to represent his own town during the *Diasia*<sup>15</sup>. So nothing identical with the few informations historically known. What's more, *Diasia* are in this novel context specifically celebrated in honour of at the same time Zeus *Sôter*, «Saviour»<sup>16</sup>, *Phlios*, «Friendship Protector»<sup>17</sup> and *Xenios*, «Hospitable»<sup>18</sup>, three distinct sides and functions of Zeus, and never in honour of Zeus *Meilichios*. The author is mixing here differing polytheistic data and so comes to create obviously a ritual of fiction, devoid of any connection with the historical reality. At the very beginning of his work, he is announcing this fictional feature in localizing the *Diasia* in a town with an imaginary name<sup>19</sup> at the same time he is inserting them in the plot. The group of mixed rituals for the *Diasia* is with an exception not described but only mentioned as sacrifices to Zeus *Sôter* and *Xenios*<sup>20</sup>. Under the aegis of Zeus *Xenios*, alone feet washing of the guest, the hero / herald Hysminias, is detailed, and actually belongs to the historical reality. But the context of this traditional ritual is transformed by the author into a ludic object. For the heroine doesn't respect the holy nature of Zeus herald and instead of washing his feet she tickles them until he bursts out laughing<sup>21</sup>. In view of the novel features taken as a whole, this kind of play about a ritual is not only to interpret as a play about a polytheistic ritual but also about a Christian one. It may well be in a parodied way an alteration of a *New Testament* episode in the *Gospels, Luke*<sup>22</sup>, the scene showing the reformed sinner washing with her tears Jesus' feet and wiping them with her hair. In the scene of the novel *Hysmine and Hysminias* data are reversed so : in a religious context a virgin girl dares to make a profane gesture, which means here inviting to be seduced, inviting to temptation, while in *Luke's* episode a reformed prostitute making spontaneously a gesture of sacred adoration is repenting through her own tears on Jesus' feet of sins in her seductress' past. In this way profane turns to sacred in *Bible* and sacred to profane with a Byzantine author<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Charles Picard, « Sur les *Diasia* d'Athènes », *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 87, 1943, p. 158-175, and Sylvain Lebreton, *Surnommer Zeus : contribution à l'étude des structures et des dynamiques du polythéisme attique à travers ses épiclèses, de l'époque archaïque au Haut-Empire*, Thèse, Université de Rennes 2, 2013, p. 93-112.

<sup>15</sup> *Hysmine and Hysminias*, I, 1, 1 to 3,1.

<sup>16</sup> *Hysmine and Hysminias*, IV, 2, 2 and V, 15, 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Hysmine and Hysminias*, III, 9, 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Hysmine and Hysminias*, V, 8, 2 ; V, 9, 1; V, 14, 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Hysmine and Hysminias*, I, 1, 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Hysmine and Hysminias*, IV, 2, 2 ; V, 14, 2 ; V, 15, 1 and 15, 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Hysmine and Hysminias*, I, 12, 3-4.

<sup>22</sup> *Luke*, 7, 37-38, Nestle-Aland ed., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> F. Meunier, « Polythéisme et christianisme dans le roman byzantin du XIIe siècle », *Les hommes et les dieux dans l'ancien roman*, Actes du colloque de Tours, CESR, 22-24 Octobre 2009, B. Pouderon ed., Lyon, 2012, p. 305-326.

Transforming sacred in profane is characterizing too the work of the same Byzantine author, Makrembolites, about the celebration of heroes' marriage. In the Greek novels there is no description or even no mention but in Xenophon's<sup>24</sup> of religious ritual for the marriage festivities. Narrator shows interest in public expression of joy, through the whole town, and in following private banquet. It's apparently the same in Makrembolites' work. But the hero during the banquet doesn't pray to thank Zeus or Apollo, his protectors, for his sumptuous marriage. He diverts his attention from the festivities in diverting too from its religious meaning in this context the Greek verb *euchomai*, « to pray ». So he « prays » with a very profane, a very carnal intention, it means that the banquet could end as quickly as possible so that he can finally together with the heroine give themselves up to love delights<sup>25</sup>.

As for Theodoros Prodromos and Niketas Eugenianos, they emphasize too expression of public joy<sup>26</sup> but both replace Greek novels description of marriage banquet with a short presentation of the religious ritual regarding marriage ceremonial<sup>27</sup>. Hermes' and Dionysus' priests who marry heroes before they enter the temple put in Rhodanthe's and Dosikles' hands a little branch of ivy, or in Drosilla's and Charikles' hands a vine shoot. This component of a marriage ceremonial is not mentioned to my knowledge in any other ancient Greek or even Byzantine text. So Prodromos seems to have created it. Prodromos, and not Eugenianos, for in writing *Drosilla and Charikles* Eugenianos draws many times his inspiration from Prodromos. But the most noteworthy isn't this modification. The last line of Prodromos' novel (book nine, line 486), which follows immediately heroes' marriage presentation, is direct taken from the *Bible*. It's the restrained wording in *Genesis*, 4, 1 : « Adam knew his wife Eve », used by Prodromos in a polytheistic context to sum up soberly the heroes wedding night. Moreover Prodromos has modified biblical text by inverting subject and object of the quotation : « Rhodanthe knew her husband Dosikles ». This quotation twisted in this way represents a double rupture of religious context. Not only, of course, polytheistic context of the rest of the novel but also Christian *Bible* context. So indeed is called into question at the end of the novel the couple pattern set by God all-mighty Creator. The model relationship issued and set up in *Genesis* from the responsibility for the original sin imputed to the woman is questioned, for inside the novel the heroes' roles, it means man's and woman's roles, have been reversed, and the last line of the novel illustrates that. At no time indeed in the work the heroine plays the role of a tempter. On the contrary the hero himself plays this tempter role. One can see here as much as in other passages of the work where Christian data are inserted, that the author distances himself from Christianity.

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<sup>24</sup> *Habrokomes and Anthia*, I, 8,1 (religious gatherings and sacrifices).

<sup>25</sup> *Hysmine and Hysminias*, XI, 19, 3-4.

<sup>26</sup> *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, IX, 483-484 ; *Drosilla and Charikles*, IX, 297-298.

<sup>27</sup> *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, IX, 479-481 ; *Drosilla and Charikles*, IX, 292-294.

Marriage celebration may be connected in Greek novels and only in one Byzantine novel with a private or public propitiatory sacrifice, offered explicitly in a god's temple in Makrembolites' novel. This sacrifice is just mentioned and not described in Greek texts<sup>28</sup>, except in one episode of Tatius' Greek work whose framework Byzantine author Makrembolites has exactly borrowed but whose content he has ridiculed. The sacrifice is offered to Zeus upon a marriage which is not heroes' one. Components of this episode are limited : an eagle suddenly snatches from the altar with his claws sacrificial victim. In the Greek text, account is brief, the only facts are described. Marriage is immediately postponed and soothsayers are called to give an interpretation of this omen<sup>29</sup>. On the contrary in Byzantine novel narrator describes in detail reactions of crowd present, and the scene is treated as a parody of a tragedy scene, although the situation isn't tragic. It's a real hubbub, yells, lamentations, threnodies groundless, gesticulations, which are substituted for intervention of religious intermediaries of Tatius Greek novel. For the omen is interpreted by the crowd, each in his own way, some people even claim that it's not an omen but a pure coincidence<sup>30</sup>. So not only there's here transformation of a sacrifice ritual in a parody of a tragedy, but too parody of divine omen religious interpretation. From Tatius to Makrembolites, the content of the same episode has passed from sacred to profane. Is it to be concluded that especially divination process is ridiculed because it is performed by profane people or ridiculed in itself ? In these two cases the author, Makrembolites, may well call into question divination practice, frequent in Byzantium in the various strata of society, for considering it as a ridiculous survival from the Antiquity.

As for this propitiatory sacrifice in the course of which an eagle barged in, it is also depreciated through its evolution towards a pseudo-tragedy. Does it mean that in Byzantine novels emerges a reject from this pagan practice in general ? Sacrifices are an integral part of religious practices in Greek novels, and only two of them are described. In Byzantine novels of Prodrornos and Eugenianos, apart from one example in Prodrornos' text, which is not significant regarding the matter I am treating of, for it's a human's sacrifice performed by Barbarians instead of ancient Greek practices presented according to historical reality, there's neither any description nor even any mention of sacrifice. Indeed, it may express a reject of animals sacrifices from these two authors who don't wish to insert in the story this bloody practice, cruel in a Christian view. So Makrembolites is alone to choose to present sacrifices, especially mentioned in the first part of the work, not described but the sacrifice with eagle. Another sacrifice – so just mentioned – is an object of derision. In the book five of the novel<sup>31</sup>, a ritual sacrifice to Zeus during the *Diasia* which are attending heroes' parents, is neglected by the hero who suggests to the heroine that both they substitute for it

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<sup>28</sup> Tatios, VIII, 19, 3 ; Heliodoros, X, 40, 2 à 41, 3 ; Xenophon, I, 8, 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Leukippe and Clitophon*, II, 12, 1-3.

<sup>30</sup> *Hysmine and Hysminias*, VI, 10, 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Hysmine and Hysminias*, V, 15, 1-4.

a sacrifice to ... Eros. A sacrifice to Eros by offering him themselves together as victims in sacrificing both to each other their ... virginity. What else here but flesh celebration instead of Zeus ? As inside the episode of washing herald's feet, sacred has turned to profane.

Another kind of propitiatory sacrifice, in another context, political instead of familial and societal, is performed in the second work of Prodrornos in my corpus, a fable at the same time play entitled *Katomyomachia*, «*The battle of cat and mice* », which parodies several episodes of the *Iliad* presenting gods in action. Just before the battle, the mice king offers a number of gods a sacrifice intended to acquire their safeguarding under such perilous circumstances. But this brave war leader gets rid of this sacrifice by performing it hastily, enumerating in double quick time gods' names (twelve names), and closing the list with the offhand expression « and all others »<sup>32</sup>. So he shows how little he respects gods of the polytheism. Gods of the polytheism ? Not only. The question is larger. Indeed in this fable / play polytheism is transformed in fact into a monotheism, for Zeus is the only god to act. Now Zeus, the first god to be named on the king's list during sacrifice, is several times in the play ridiculed by the hero, the mice king who denies his omnipotence. Moreover, Christian data, which are also inserted in the play, are parodied too. So the parody of the ritual sacrifice<sup>33</sup> may show that the author, Prodrornos, distances himself from gods of polytheism, and from Christianity, since Zeus seems well incarnate Christians' God, and other gods are mentioned only once by the hero in the whole play, on the list recited. They are not in existence but through their name.

Such a negative presentation of ritual sacrifices doesn't define them as a whole, for one alone sacrifice is presented positively, in Makrembolites novel. It's no more a propitiatory sacrifice, but a thank offering one to Apollo. It's not described but set at a turning point in heroes' adventures, performed at a moment of public jubilation for the heroes' parents have just been reunited with their children and heroes themselves liberated from slavery with the aid of Apollo's oracle<sup>34</sup>. This sacrifice is unprompted, consequently separated from any pre-established ritual destined to be performed in a compulsory manner as have been sacrifices just mentioned by the narrator in the course of *Diasia* (first part of the work) or during Apollo's festivities (second part of the work). The thank offering sacrifice is expressing, in a close connection with the divinity, joy of the « happy end ». But this sacrifice is not enhanced in itself, but in the crowd's capacity to be grateful towards divinity.

If Apollo's oracle is of so capital importance here, in Makrembolites novel, as much for that matter as in Prodrornos', indeed it's because this ritual practice finds an echo in the very Byzantine reality. Performing or appealing for help oracular divination is as current in

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<sup>32</sup> *Katomyomachia*, l. 203-209 in Fl. Meunier, *Théodore Prodrome. Crime et châtimeut chez les souris*, L'Harmattan ed., Paris, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. for example *Iliad*, XVI, 233-248.

<sup>34</sup> *Hysmine and Hysminias*, X, 13-15.



Byzantium as in Greek Antiquity. But oracular divination in Byzantium has lost religious characteristics it had in Greek Antiquity : specific sacred place and ritual process, sacred intermediary of oracle transmission. In Byzantium for Apollo's oracle has been substituted any profane man or woman, respectable or not, predicting future to Byzantine people belonging to any social class and even to the emperor himself, especially in the twelfth century, writing period of the novels. Yet the authors Makrembolites and Prodromos imitate the episode of oracle pronouncing in Apollo's temple showed in the Greek novels of Heliodoros<sup>35</sup> and Xenophon<sup>36</sup>. Besides oracles text, Heliodoros, unlike Xenophon and Prodromos, mentions sacrifice and prayers of Apollo's priest before Pythia pronounces oracle. But the Byzantine Makrembolites goes beyond Heliodoros presentation by detailing the different phases of oracle consulting : first prayers of the heroes' parents to Apollo, then material expression of divine presence, then priests going into a trance, finally Apollo pronouncing oracle<sup>37</sup>. What is meaning such an episod in this Christian author who otherwise in the same novel distances himself both from polytheism and Christianity ? Positiv presentation of the ancient ritual attests here from the author faith in a transcendent power, certainly benevolent, but who is not named God. Would it be expression by the author of a kind of agnosticism ?

Regarding the ordeals in Prodromos' and Makrembolites' novels, the same conclusion as about oracles can be drawn, but in a different historical context. Ordeals practice, indeed, out of an ecclesiastical context, doesn't exist in Byzantine empire. This practice has been introduced there, under occidental influence, only from the thirteenth century, after creation of Constantinopolitan Latin empire<sup>38</sup>. Now in Prodromos' work a case of ordeal by fire is both borrowed from Heliodoros and altered, for it has no more religious purpose. Heliodoros has showed at his novel end heroes subjected to an ordeal by fire aimed to verify whether they are virgin. If they are, they will be sacrificed to gods as magnificent offering<sup>39</sup>. But the occidental practice of ordeal by fire may be was already known by Prodromos since the ordeal by fire in his novel has the same judicial purpose as the occidental ordeal. Divine justice is deciding, but in aid of human justice. For this purpose, ordeal process is it too the same as occidental one in Prodromos' ordeal episod ? No, in *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* hero's friend must go to a stake in order to be proven innocent from a crime<sup>40</sup>. This kind of process is specific, different from ordeals occidental and in Heliodoros' novel<sup>41</sup>. Specific too is in *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* divinity under the aegis of whose the ordeal takes place.

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<sup>35</sup> *Aethiopics*, II, 35, 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Habrokomes and Anthia*, I, 6, 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> *Hysmine and Hysminias*, X, 13, 2-3.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. G. Katsenis, « Le jugement divin, variations byzantines. Duel judiciaire et épreuve du fer rouge dans la pratique judiciaire à Byzance (XIIIe – XIVe s.), *Droit et cultures*, 53, 2007-1, p. 163-180.

<sup>39</sup> *Aethiopics*, X, 9, 1 and 3-4.

<sup>40</sup> *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, I, 375-376 and 393.

<sup>41</sup> In Heliodoros' novel heroes have to walk on burning bars ; occidental ordeal imposes on the accused to put hands on a burning bar.

Instead of Helios and Selene in Heliodoros' work, and God regarding occidental ordeal, *theoi*, «gods», are presented as entity without individualization, as one alone decision power transcending human.

On the contrary an ordeal by water narrated in detail<sup>42</sup> in the novel of Makrembolites is openly imitated from two distinct episodes of Tatios Greek novel<sup>43</sup>, which the author has mixed so : regarding the two heroines, Leukippe and Hysmine, ordeal objects, purpose of this ordeal – a virginity test – and divinity invoked – Artemis – indeed are the same. But Makrembolites has chosen as a place for the test the source of the second ordeal in Tatios' work, and has modified the very process of this ordeal. Instead of source water going up in a case of no-virginity, it's the Artemis statue herself who bends her bow towards the girl no more virgin and aims at her head. So described, this ordeal by water is closely integrated into polytheistic frame of the novel. Virginity celebrated here through the role played by Artemis during the ordeal of course assumes a fundamental religious dimension. But much more for a Christian author than for a polytheistic author from the Antiquity. That's why Makrembolites has emphasized this dimension, connected with christology. Apparently he strengthens the polytheistic feature of the ordeal episode, in reality he increases the gap between Tatios' work and his own, which he makes fuller of Christian requirements, what's not incompatible with a distance kept from Christian dogma. Virginity until marriage is a recurrent topic in the Byzantine novels of the twelfth century. Even if Prodomos and Eugenianos don't show any virginity test, their heroes remain so virgin until their marriage as Makrembolites' heroes<sup>44</sup>, but all the Greek heroes don't.

So, transferring and transforming ancient Greek ritual practices is an illustration of the choice of three authors during the Comnenian period : distancing themselves from components of polytheism and use a number of these components to question some Christian attitudes and dogma.

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<sup>42</sup> *Hysmine and Hysminias*, XI, 17, 3-4. This ordeal is also mentioned twice : XI, 16, 1 et X, 2, 1 (*sic*).

<sup>43</sup> *Leukippe and Clitophon*, VIII, 12, 7 to 14, 2 in one part, in another part VIII, 14, 3-4.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Fl. Meunier, *Roman et société à Byzance au XIIIe siècle*, Lille, 1998, p. 114-117.