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The beard and its philosopher: Theodore Prodromos on the philosopher's beard in Byzantium*

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The following paper analyses Theodore Prodromos' satire, Against the old man with a long beard. *It argues that the text which is heavily based on the ancient tradition of ridiculing philosophers is in fact directed against the twelfth-century fellow teachers of Prodromos.*

Keywords: Theodore Prodromos; satire; Lucian

'Ἕως μὲν ἀγαθῶς εἶχε μοι τὰ περὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ ἁβρῶς μὲν ἡ θριὶξ ἔσταλτο καὶ κομψῶς, συμμέτρως δὲ καὶ οὐ κατὰ φιλοσόφους καθεῖτο τὸ γένειον, πλατὺν μυκτῆρα τῶν ἐν τούτοις δυστυχούντων κατέχεον· οὐκ ἔστι γὰρ ὅς με φαλακρὸς οὐκ εὐθὺς ἰδὼν ἰλιγγίασεν· οὐκ ἔστι δὲ ὅς μοι βαθυπώγων περιτυχὼν οὐκ ηὔξατο οἱ χανεῖσθαι τὴν γῆν· νῦν δέ, εἰς ἐμὲ τοῦ τῆς ἀσχημοσύνης κύβου μεταρριφθέντος, οὐ περιμείνας τοὺς ἐξ ἄλλων λεσχασμοὺς καὶ τὰς βλασφημίας, ἑαυτὸν αὐτὸς καθ'αὑτοῦ κατήγορον ἵστημι καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς ἐμφορεῖσθαι χλεύης τοῖς ἐθέλουσι δίδωμι. καίτοι καὶ Συνέσιον οἶδα τὴν φαλάκραν καλλωπισάμενον καὶ Ἰουλιανόν γε οὐκ ἀγνοῶ τὸν οἰκεῖον, ὡς ἐν προσχήματι ψόγου, σεμνύμαντα πώγωνα.'[1]

[...] as long as I enjoyed bodily health, and my hair was thick and groomed, my beard grew symmetrically and not in the manner of the philosophers (*ou kata philosophous*), I have poured a rude sneer[2] upon those less fortunate in this respect. There was not one

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1 Migne, *PG* 133, 1251–53. Our translation is based on the unpublished edition of Prodromic letters by M. Op de Coul, 'Théodore Prodrome. Lettres et discours: édition, traduction, commentaire' (Paris 2007, unpublished PhD dissertation) 89–91 (letter no. 4). We would like to extend our thanks to Dr. Op de Coul for sending us his PhD thesis.

2 'Sneer' – μυκτήρ (LSJ s.v. I.2); rude (perhaps 'broad') – πλατύς (s.v. I.5); Op. de Coul takes it as a 'bitter smack on the nose' (*je donnais d'âcres nasardes*); perhaps the phrase may suggest the outpouring (κατέχεον) of nasal mucous.

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baldy who would not become dizzy, when he saw me. There was not one beardy who would not pray for the earth to swallow him, when he met me. But now, that the die of ugliness has turned upside down for me, I did not await gossip and slander from others. I set myself as my own accuser. I allow those who are willing to take their fill of my own joke.[3] Furthermore I do know that Synesios boasted of baldness and it is not unknown to me that Julian, under the pretence of *psogos*,[4] praised his own beard [...].

This fragment comes from the letter written by Theodore Prodromos to the *orphanotrophos* Alexios Aristenos at the end of his illness or immediately after it.[5] Prodromos who at some time in the 1140s suffered from smallpox, in both letters and poems, described minutely the symptoms and the course of the illness.[6] The poet repeatedly complains that while he lost his hair, his beard grew uncontrollably.[7] As he said in the letter, he was ready to be mocked the same way he mocked others ('I allow those who are willing to take their fill of my own joke'). We would like to argue that the 'joke' refers, most likely, to Prodromos' earlier little piece, a vicious attack on an old man:

Ἰαταταιὰξ τῆς ἁδρᾶς γενειάδος
ὅση καθεῖται μέχρι τοῦ προκολπίου
τῷ πεμπέλῳ γέροντι σαπρῷ Θουκρίτῳ.
Ἰαταταιὰξ τῆς κινάβρας, τοῦ γράσου.
Φεῦ τοῦ τοσούτου τῆς ὑπήνης φορτίου.
Ὅση μὲν εἰς ἔκτασιν, εἰς εὖρος δ'ὅση,

3 'To give me a taste of my own medicine'; to joke about me the way I used to joke before.

4 Prodromos refers to *Misopogon* by Julian Apostate. It is unclear if he means by *psogos* the entire text or only this specific fragment where Julian describes his unkempt (philosophical) beard. The former is not impossible, (modern interpretations also tend to classify the entire text as the example of *psogos*), and Julian creatively uses *psogos* for his own purpose (that is ridiculing the people of Antioch). What is more, Julian's satire is somewhat similar to Prodromos' letter in that he is both the author and the subject of abuse. On *Misopogon* as *psogos* see A. Quiroga, 'Julian's *Misopogon* and the subversion of rhetoric', *Antiquité Tardive* 17 (2009) 128–129.

5 Prodromos gives the following description of his own appearance: Letter no. 4 : '[...] Seen branded and tattooed all over the face, just like the labourers we see and the blacksmiths, their countenances marked with soot. Or, if you will, like serpents, shedding their skins and clad in scales, without the venom though. Or, like the flocks of Jacob, speckled and ashen. Stripped bare on the skull, with no hair whatsoever, and instead of that divine and golden-haired head, carrying a feeble little noggin above the neck; being both Elias and Paul on the head, without their prophetic and apostolic skills though. When will I reveal to you the injustice of the illness with my very lips?'

6 See *Theodoros Prodromos. Historische Gedichte*, ed. W. Hörandner, (Vienna 1974) 30–31; P.S. Codellas, 'The case of smallpox of Theodore Prodromus', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 20 (1946) 207–215. For some new evidence concerning Prodromos' life, see N. Zagklas, 'Theodore Prodromos: the neglected poems and epigrams (Edition, Translation and Commentary)', (Vienna 2014, unpublished PhD. dissertation) 52–72.

7 Letter no. 4: '[...] For amid the evils caused by that pestilence (both those already present and those expected) and having almost lost my soul to the illness, only in this one thing have I kindled my hopes that the calamity will also take hold of my huge and thick beard. And indeed this I kept telling myself: "O Wretched one, you suffer the shame of your appearance, the shedding of the blessed hair, that no one comes near you, that you are rejected, that even your relatives turn away from your sight like from the ill-omened days. But for all this you will have sufficient compensation in that the disease has also reached the accursed beard. From now on you are shedding the burden, getting rid of the goat smell, and have the appearance of a man rather than Pan [...]."'

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ἁπλῶς δὲ πάσας τὰς διαστάσεις ὅση
Ἐντεῦθεν, οἶμαι, κατακυπτάζεις, γέρον,
φέρεις δὲ καὶ κύρτωμα καὶ σφαιροῖς ῥάχιν·
ἡ γὰρ γενειὰς τὸν τράχηλόν σου κλίνει
πολλή τις οὖσα καὶ βάρους οὐ μετρίου. [...]

Πλανᾷς σεαυτὸν καὶ ματαιάζεις, γέρον,
τὴν ἀδρότητα τῆς μακρᾶς γενειάδος
εἶναι νομίζων δεῖγμα φιλοσοφίας.
Ἦ γὰρ τὸν Ἀθήνηθεν ἄνδρα τὸν μέγαν
τὸ τῶν λόγων αὔχημα, τὸν θεολόγον,
τὸν ἄντικρυς νοῦν, τὴν ὑπέρ φύσιν φύσιν,
τὸν υἱὸν Ἀρίστωνος, ᾧ κλῆσις Πλάτων,
καὶ τὸν φυσικώτατον Ἀριστοτέλην,
καὶ τὸν πυρὸς πάρεργον Ἐμπεδοκλέα,
τὴν τῶν Σταγείρων ἄκραν εὐετηρίαν,
καὶ τὸν Σάμιον τῷ γένει Πυθαγόραν,
καὶ τὸν σπαρέντα Σωγφονίσκῳ Σωκράτην,
εἰ μὴ μακρὰς καθεῖντο καὶ γενειάδας
καὶ μέχρις αὐτῶν ἀστραγάλων ἱγμένας,
καὶ τῆς κινάβρας ἔπνεον καὶ τοῦ γράσου,
ἄστροις δ'ἀπεικάζοντο τοῖς πωγωνίας,
ὅσον τὸ τοῦ πώγωνος, οὐ τὸ τοῦ φάους,
οὐκ ἂν σοφοὺς ἔφαμεν, οὐ φιλοσόφους
οὐκ ἂν δικαίους καὶ καλοὺς καὶ κοσμίους;[8]

Yow ow ow![9] That bushy beard,
which that decrepit, putrid old man, Thoukritos,
lets fall all the way down to his breast[10]
Yow ow ow! That smell, that stench of goat!
Oh, the enormous burden of that beard!
How long it is, how wide,
quite simply, how huge in all its dimensions.

8 For the newest edition see T. Migliorini, *Gli scritti satirici in greco letterario di Teodoro Prodromo: introduzione, edizione, traduzione e commenti* (Pisa 2010, unpublished PhD dissertation) 19–28. The Italian translation with commentary: R. Anastasii, 'Prodromea', *Siculorum Gymnasium* 18 (1965) 164–172. See also E. Magnelli, 'Prodromea (con una nota su Gregorio di Nazianzo)', *Medioevo Greco* 10 (2010) 110–144.

9 'Yow ow ow' (ἰαταταιάξ); an interjection defined by the ancient and Byzantine lexica as expressive of sorrow (θρηνητικὸν ἐπίρρημα; Sudas, s.v.); used in Old Attic Comedy (Aristophanes, *Knights* 1); the translation 'Yow ow ow' is Henderson's (Aristophanes, *Acharnians, Knights*, ed. and trans. J. Henderson, Cambridge, Mass. 1998).

10 'breast', lit. the part of clothing which covers the breast (προκόλπιον).

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That's why you're stooping down, old man.
And you wear this bulge and you bend your back:
For that beard is pulling your neck,
As it is quite big, and of immoderate weight. [...]

You're foolishly deluding yourself, old man,
taking the exuberance of your beard
to be a mark of wisdom.
Indeed, the man from Athens, the great one,
the glory of reason, the theologian,
the purest intellect, nature above nature,
the son of Ariston, whom they called Plato,
and the greatest student of nature, Aristotle,
the ultimate fruit of Stageira,[11]
and Empedocles, the victim of fire,[12]
and Pythagoras, the Samian by descent,
and Socrates, sown by Sophroniscus,
if they did not let their beards grow down
all the way to their ankles,
and did not reek with the stench of goat,
if they were not like comets [bearded stars]
(concerning the beard and not the light)
would we not call them philosophers, or wise
or just, or noble and decent?

The butt of Prodromos' ridicule is a certain Thoukritos,[13] the rare name, attested only in a handful of instances,[14] pointing undoubtedly to Lucian's satire as the source.[15] This old man pretends to be a philosopher and his main claim to this appellation is his long,

11 'Ultimate fruit' (ἄκρα εὐετηρία) – probably not only in the sense 'greatest' but also 'last' since Stageira was destroyed in Aristotle's lifetime (346 BC); cf. Migliorini, *Gli scritti satirici*, 25.

12 For the translation and explanation of this verse see Anastasi, 'Prodromea', 168, and Migliorini, *Gli scritti satirici*, 25.

13 Boissonade argued that Thoukritos was actually the real name of the targeted person, see G. Boissonade, *Anecdota Graeca* (Hildesheim 1962, repr. Paris 1832) IV, 430.

14 The *Lexicon of the Greek Personal Names* (Oxford 1994-) gives only 12 historical instances down to Roman times, all limited to Attica, and drawn mostly from epigraphic sources (vol. II, s.v. Θουκρίτος). This name as a symbol of old age appears also in yet another twelfth-century work, *Anacharsis*, see D. A. Christidis, *Μαρκιανὰ ἀνέκδοτα (1. Ἀναχάρσις ἢ Ἀνανίας; 2. Ἐπιστολές-Σιγίλλιο)* (Thessalonike 1984) 395–96: ἀλλὰ κρονόληρόν με Θούκριτον ἤγηται.

15 *Dial. mort.* 16. The Lucianic dialogue tells the story of a young legacy hunter, Terpsion, who squandered his own means and health striving to inherit the wealth of the nonagenarian Thoukritos, and ultimately died before him. The name Thoukritos is never before associated with such a figure in extant literature; Prodromos' Thoukritos is also very old, and elsewhere he uses the name as a byword for old age, see *Against an old lustful woman* 3 in Migliorini, *Gli scritti satirici*, 3.

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goatish and unkempt beard.[16] In his poem Prodromos also introduces yet another Lucianic figure, the Cynic Menippos, whose axe might help to get rid of the beard and which might symbolically mean the satirical purpose of the text which itself acts as a tool for unveiling the old man's lack of wisdom (*Against an old man* 23–29):

Μένιππος ἐγγὺς καὶ γινώσκεις τὸν κύνα
ναυπηγικὴν εὔθηκτον ἀξίνην φέρει·
χρήσει γὰρ ἡμῖν τοῦτον ὁ γλυκὺς Σύρος,
ἐκτῶν ἑαυτοῦ δελτίων ἀποσπάσας.
Καὶ, τοῦ κυνὸς φθάσαντος, οὐαί σοι, τάλαν·
οὐ γὰρ μόνην σου τὴν ὑπήνην ἐκτέμῃ,
ἀλλὰ ξὺν αὐτῇ καὶ μέρος τῶν ὀφρύων.

Menippus is close, and you know the dog,
He carries a well-sharpened shipwright's axe.
For the sweet Syrian will provide us with it,
Having drawn it from his writing tablets.
And should the dog come first, woe to you, wretch.
For he will not only cut off your beard,
but also with it a part of your eyebrows.

These references leave no doubt as to whose steps the Byzantine author follows while composing his own text. It is indeed in Lucian's satire that the tradition of ridiculing bearded philosophers reached its peak, even if his relationship with philosophy as such was not so one-sided.[17] He had no clear preference for any particular school, though some are clearly treated with less sympathy (or more antipathy) than others, the dubious pride of place no doubt given to the Stoics.[18] For all their differences, Lucianic satire

16 The invective against old age seems to have been a popular topos in twelfth-century literature; see E. Papadopoulou, 'Περί της ηλικίας και του γήρατος από τη γραμματεία του ενδέκατου και δωδέκατου αιώνα', *Byzantina Symmeikta* 17 (2005) 131–198 and more recently M. Kulhánková, 'Το άμυαλο γήρας στη βυζαντινή και πρώιμη νεοελληνική λογοτεχνία', *Neograeca Bohemica* 14 (2014) 41–49. For a similar description of an old man, though not a philosopher, see *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*: *Four Byzantine Novels*, trans. with introduction and notes by E. Jeffreys (Liverpool 2012) 7.432–434: ποδαγριῶντα καὶ φαλακρὸν τὴν κάραν, | πολύτριχον γένειον ἐξηρτημένον, | καὶ τοῦτο λευκὸν καὶ κινάβρας ἐκπνέον; or with gout and a bald head, | and a beard hanging from his chin, | long and white and stinking of goats? The mockery of long beards is also a topic of correspondence between Andrew Lopadiotes and George Oinaiotes (14th c.). Edition in G. Karlsson, G. Fatouros, 'Aus der Briefsammlung des Anonymus Florentinus (Georgios ? Oinaiotes)', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 22 (1973) 214–216. We owe this reference to Charis Messis.

17 The principal work here is M. Caster, *Lucien et la pensée religieuse de son temps* (Paris 1937) 9–122; see also G. Anderson, *Lucian. Theme and Variation in the Second Sophistic* (Leiden 1976) 113–135; C. P. Jones, *Culture and Society in Lucian* (Cambridge, Mass. 1986) 24–32.

18 Cf. Caster, *Lucien*, 16; Jones, *Culture and Society*, 28–9; among the positive specimens of Lucian's philosophers one might mention the Cynics: Demonax (*Dem.*) and Menippus (*Vit. Auct.*), the Academic Nigrinus (*Nigr.*) and the Epicurean Damis (*JTr*); on the historicity of some of these figures cf. Caster, *Lucien* 34, 73–81; Jones, *Culture and Society*, 90–95; D. Clay, 'Lucian of Samosata. Four Philosophical Lives (Nigrinus, Demonax, Peregrinus, Alexander Pseudomantis)', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, II 36.5, 1992.

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frequently lumps the philosophers together into one homogenous albeit quarrelsome group,[19] distinguished by a common set of features, the most notable being the beard.[20]

In Lucian the philosopher's beard is no ordinary beard, and one 'not to be treated lightly'.[21] It is, in the first place, distinguished by its size, literally 'depth' (*bathytes*); it resembles that of a goat (*kinabra*) or the goatish Pan; even Zeus, though himself sporting a considerable beard, must stretch it when he wants to casually merge into the company of philosophers.[22] It is also 'bushy' and perhaps unkempt (*lasios*), and therefore 'heavy' (*barys*), jokingly said to weigh more than five pounds.[23] It is sometimes grey, though not all Lucianic philosophers are men advanced in age.[24]

Prodromos builds upon Lucianic tradition and his 'philosopher' shares many features with Lucianic types, the unkempt and goatish beard being only one of them – the most prominent and obvious. Prodromic Menippus will cut not only the philosopher's beard, but also a part of his eyebrows (vv. 28–29: οὐ γὰρ μόνην σου τὴν ὑπήνην ἐκτέμῃ/ ἀλλὰ ξὺν αὐτῇ καὶ μέρος τῶν ὀφρύων). This is perhaps an allusion to the wrinkled forehead with lifted eyebrows, a clear sign of strained intellectual activity displayed by some of the philosophers in Lucian's texts.[25] The Lucianic philosopher is also characterised by the short cloak (*tribon*) over his shoulders, the satchel (*pera*) on his arm, and the walking stick (*xylon*) in his hand.[26] Prodromos on the other hand highlights that it is not the clothes that make the philosopher:

ὡς γὰρ φρονοῦσιν οὐ σοφὸς λέγοιτό τις
ποδῆρες ἱμάτιον ἐνδεδυμένος,
ἢ γοῦν ἐπ᾽αὐτῆς ἰγνύης ἐζωσμένος.
Οἷον Πλάτων ἄζωστος ἐν τῷ χθὲς χρόνῳ
μέσην ἐπ᾽αὐτὴν ἦλθεν Ἀκαδημίαν
καὶ τοῖς μαθηταῖς τούσδε τούς λόγους ἔφη·
εἰ σήμερον ζώσαιτο καὶ ζωσθεὶς λέγοι,

19 Cf. eg. *Icar* 5, 29; *JTr*. 16.

20 It is sometimes assumed that philosophers belonging to different schools had distinctly different manners of tending (or not tending) to their beards, the chief source being Alciphr. 3.19.2–5; Lucian, however, seems to be indifferent to such details, as evident from his *Vit. Auct*. where no distinction in this respect is made among the representatives of various schools.

21 'οὐ κεὐ καταφρονήτος πώγων' (Merc. Cond. 40).

22 Depth: *Icar*. 5 (γενείου βαθύτητι); 21, 29 (πώγωνας ἐπισπασάμενοι); *Tim*. 54 (ἐκπετάσας τὸν πώγωνα); cf. *Icar*. 10 (ἠυγενείοις ἀνδράσιν); *Pisc*. 11, 41–42; *BisAcc*.6; *Eun*.8; *Herm*.18, 86; *Paras*.50; *Philops*. 5; goat: *Gall*. 10 (τραγικὸς ἦν ἐς ὑπερβολὴν κουριῶν), *Eun*. 9; *kinabra*: *Dial. Mort*. 20.9; Pan: *Bis Acc*. 11; Zeus: *JTr* 16 (cf. *Sacr*. 11. *Dial. Deor*. 2.1); Zeus' beard: *Dial. Deor*. 8.2 (πώγωνα τηλικοῦτον).

23 Bushy (λάσιος): *Herm*. 86; *Dial. Mort* 20.9; five pounds: πέντε μναῖ τριχῶν εἰσι τοὐλάχιστον (*Dial. Mort* 20.9).

24 *Hist. conscr* 17; cf. *Peregr* 40; *Merc. Cond*. 33; for the old age and grey hair of philosophers see also *Icar*. 21; *Philops*. 23.

25 See for instance *Icar*. 29; *Tim*. 54.

26 The τρίβων, the satchel (πήρα) and the staff (ξύλον): *Tim*. 56–7; *Pisc*. 11; *Bis Acc*. 6; sometimes presented more specifically as attributes of the Cynic (*Vit. Auct*. 7; *Peregr*. 15).

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οὐ τοῦ χθὲς ἂν Πλάτωνος ἔσται βελτίων·
οὐ γὰρ στολαὶ κρίνουσι τοὺς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις,
οὐδ'ἐξαμοιβὴ ζώσματος καὶ βλαυτίου,

Just like among reasonable men no one will be called wise
dressed in a himation reaching to his feet
or wearing his belt around his thighs
As Plato for instance in yesterday's times
came to the heart of the Academy wearing no belt
and spoke these words to his students:
'if Plato today were to put on a belt, and wear it whilst speaking,
he will be no better than Plato of yesterday';[27]
for it is not garments that distinguish men of knowledge,
nor the changing fashions of belts and sandals [...]

However, in Lucian's time (the latter part of the second century) beards had been in fashion for over two generations—their length growing steadily decade by decade—not only among philosophers or philosopher/philhellene emperors, but also 'ordinary people' (*idiotai*), as attested by the numerous *kosmetai* busts with ample, not infrequently lengthy and quite 'philosophical' beards.[28] The world of Lucian's satire therefore, where the philosopher is conspicuous and recognizable by his beard, does not seem to correspond in this particular respect to the world in which Lucian himself lived and wrote. Or, to be more precise, it is the bearded philosopher himself that seems incompatible in his peculiarity: not so much a historical, contemporary model, but a stock character with a long history, moulded in a different, beardless age.[29] An age – ushered in by the advent of Alexander the Great and concluded at the end of the 1st century CE – in which philosophers sought to distinguish themselves from their clean-shaven contemporaries by adhering to the customs of their bearded ancestors.[30]

27 Following the meaning suggested by Magnelli, 'Prodromea', 122; the source of the anecdote is unknown (ibid.).

28 Cf. P. Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates. The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*, trans. A. Shapiro, (Berkeley 1995) 217–33; with the remarks of B. Borg, 'Glamorous intellectuals. Portraits of Pepaideumenoi in the second and third centuries AD', in B. Borg (ed.), *Paideia: The World of the Second Sophistic* (Berlin 2014) 158–61; on *kosmetai* (Athenian magistrates responsible for the training of ephebes) see recently R. Krumeich, '"Klassiker" im Gymnasion. Bildnisse attischer Kosmeten der mittleren und späten Kaiserzeit zwischen Rom und griechischer Vergangenheit', in Borg, *Paideia,* 131–55.

29 M. Caster, *Lucien*, 112–14; J. Bompaire, *Lucien écrivain. Imitation et création* (Paris 1958) 485–6; a different opinion was presented by Jones, *Culture and Society*, 31.

30 For the beard as 'a claim to a higher (because older) form of wisdom' cf. Zanker, *Mask*, 109; the first literary appearance of the bearded philosopher comes from an unknown fragmentary comedy by Phoinikides of Megara (early 3rd century BC): τρίτωι συνέζευξ' ἡ τύχη με φιλοσόφωι, | πώγων' ἔχοντι καὶ τρίβωνα καὶ λόγον (F 4.16 K-A = Stob. 3.6.13); it is usually assumed, however, that the figure of the bearded philosopher was invented in the Roman cultural milieu (as in Hor. Sat. 1.3.133; 2.3.35; Mart. 1.24; 1.96; 2.36; 6.56; 7.58; 7.9; 12.42; Gell. 9.2); cf. Zanker, *Mask*, 76; J. Sellars, *The Art of Living. The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy* (London 2003) 16.

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Prodromos' times are similar in this respect, for Byzantine reality was ostensibly bearded.[31] From the seventh century onwards beard became a social necessity, and each emperor after Phokas (602–610) sported one. It was not only a matter of fashion, but also a symbol of manliness, as it contrasted men with eunuchs who could not grow facial hair.[32] Beards may have even had political implications; they differentiated the Byzantines from the clean-shaven Latins.[33] Such a weighty issue may have perhaps led to excess, thus inviting ridicule. The authors of the entry 'beard' in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium,* for example, argue, referring to Prodromos' satirical work, that 'the cult of beard was ridiculed by satirists such as Theodore Prodromos'.

However, there is reason to believe that the object of Prodromos' ridicule is not the beard as such, but precisely the 'philosopher's beard'. Prodromos himself in his letter says that before he was struck by the illness his beard 'grew symmetrically and not in the manner of the philosophers *(ou kata philosophous)*'. Both texts, the letter and the satire, evoke the same image of a smelly, goatish overgrown beard, [34] that is the 'philosopher's beard'. This is exactly the beard sported by the character from the text *Against an old man*.

We would like to propose that the figure of the old man, 'Thoukritos', is not an allusion to some identifiable person but rather to Prodromos' contemporaries whose beards are described as 'philosophical'. Philosophy and grammar/rhetoric were in fact hard to separate in twelfth-century Byzantium.[35] Prodromos in the *Philoplaton* speaks of 'philosophical rhetoric and rhetorical philosophy' ('ἡ φιλόσοφος συνημμένως ῥητορικὴ καὶ ἡ ῥήτωρ φιλοσοφία').[36] At that time the word *philosophos* denoted not necessarily people dealing with philosophy as such but rather educated men, rhetors, including also teachers.[37] It

31 On Byzantine beards see S. Tougher, 'Bearding Byzantium: masculinity, eunuchs and the Byzantine life course', in B. Neil and L. Garland (eds), *Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society* (Farnham, 2013) 153–166; M. Rautman, *Daily Life in the Byzantine Empire* (Westport, Conn. 2006) 47; L. Bréhier, *La civilisation byzantine* (Paris 1950) 46–47.

32 See A. P. Kazhdan, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* I, 274, s.v. beard; M. Hatzaki, *Beauty and the Male Body. Perceptions and Representations in Art and Text*, (New York 2009) passim.

33 *ODB,* s.v. beard. See also Ch. Messis, 'Lectures Sexuées de l'altérité. Les Latìns et identité romaine menacée pendant les derniers siècles de Byzance', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 61 (2011) 164–170.

34 Prodromos uses the same words in his descriptions. See for instance: *Against an old man* v. 44: καὶ τῆς κινάβρας ἔπνεον καὶ τοῦ γράσου *Letter no. 4*, s. 90 Op de Coul: καὶ ἐπὶ κινάβρᾳ κινάβραν ἀνθηφορῶν.

35 See P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, (Cambridge 1993) 332 where he discusses this issue.

36 Migliorini, *Gli scritti satirici,* 69. Migliorini translates: 'la retorica filosofica unitamente e la filosofia retorica'.

37 F. Dölger, 'Zur Bedeutung von φιλόσοφος und φιλοσοφία in byzantinischer Zeit,' in Dölger, *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt: Ausgewählte Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Ettal 1953) 197–208, especially at 202 where he discusses middle Byzantine examples and also Prodromos. In his satire, Prodromos himself gives the definition of the learned men (οἱ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις):

οὐ γὰρ στολαὶ κρίνουσι τοὺς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις, | οὐδ'ἐξαμοιβὴ ζώσματος καὶ βλαυτίου, | φύσις δὲ γοργὴ καὶ μάθησις βιβλίων, | ἀπόκρισις καὶ πεῦσις εὐλογωτάτη.

For it is not garments that distinguish learned men | nor the changing fashions of belts and sandals, | but spirited nature and learning from books, | and great eloquence in argument and inquiry (83–86). On the rhetors and philosophers in Byzantium see also S. Papaioannou, 'Rhetoric and the philosopher in Byzantium', in K. Ierodiakonou and B. Bydén (eds), *Essays in Byzantine Philosophy* (Athens 2012) 171–197.

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would be, therefore, tempting to assume that Prodromos targets in his satire his fellow *grammatikoi* whom he finds to be impostors. This interpretation is perhaps reinforced by the lines from the poem where the narrator says: 'Thus long beards have nothing to do with judging/the intellect of both student and teacher' (οὕτω βαθεῖς πώγωνες οὐδὲν εἰς κρίσιν/λόγου μαθητῶν καὶ διδασκάλων λόγου, vv. 87–88).

Perhaps this entire text is yet another witness to one of the topoi of twelfth-century Byzantine literature, that of the 'false *grammatikos*', the same which is also apparent in another Prodromic piece *Amathes*. This issue has yet to be researched more thoroughly. However, an abundance of teachers in Constantinople must have resulted in strong competition among teachers-rhetors.[38] Small wonder therefore that good teachers, like Prodromos might have feared the competition of older and not necessarily better colleagues.

The aim of this text might be to defend Prodromos' peculiar way of teaching which he presented as a blend of grammar, rhetoric and philosophy as opposed to 'pure' philosophers who attempted to focus only on philosophy.[39] If this is the case, this text might be not only a satire but also a form of apology for Prodromos' own didactic method.[40]

Prodromos, as in his other texts[41] subsumes the ancient tradition and builds upon it, making it relevant to his own times and situation. The narrator on the one hand tells a timeless story which is rooted in Lucianic satires but on the other hand voices

38 See Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I*, 336, on Nikolaos Kataphloron's testimony. Kataphloron speaks of 'thousand and myriad sophists' as fertile as rabbits. This text is now available in a new edition, M. Loukaki, 'Τυμβωρῦχοι καὶ σκυλευτὲς νεκρῶν: Οι απόψεις του Νικολαόυ Καταφλώρονγια τη ρητορικὴ και τους ρήτορες στην Κωνσταντινούπολητου 12ου αιώνα', *Symmeikta* 14 (2001) 143–166. That Constantinople was infested with a great number of *grammatikoi* might also be inferred from the works of John Tzestes, see M. Bazzani, 'The historical poems of Theodore Prodromos, the epic-Homeric revival and the crisis of intellectuals in the twelfth century', *Byzantinoslavica* 65 (2007) 226. For earlier, eleventh century, examples of the rivalry between the schoolteachers see F. Bernard, *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry, 1025–1081* (Oxford 2014) 269–272.

39 Zagklas in his recent PhD proposes to interpret a fragment of the poem no. XXXVIII (to Anna Komnene) as an attempt at coupling grammar, rhetoric and philosophy:

[50] καὶ δὴ γραμματικῆς μὲν ἀπείριτον οἶδμα θαλάσσης | εὔπλοος ἐξεπέρησα, φορὸν δέ με πνεῦμα κατέπνει, | ῥητροσύνης μετέπειτα τὸν εὔριπον ἐξεπλοήθην, | εὔριπον ἀτρεκέως, τῇ γὰρ καὶ τῇ μεταπίπτει | ἀστατέων καὶ ἄνδιχ' ἀείστροφον οἶμον ἐλαύνει· | ὠκεανὸς δέ μ' ἐδεκτο μετήλυδα φιλοσοφίας, | [55] μείζων ὠκεανοῖο μέρος μέγα τοῦ περὶ γαίην· | κεῖνος μὲν γὰρ ἅπασαν ἐπέλλαβε τὴν χθόνα μούνην, | αὐτὰρ ὁ καὶ γαίην καὶ οὐρανόν, ἄλλα τε πάντα | ἐντὸς ἔχει διέπων περιδέξια, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι· | τοῦτον ἐγὼ περίειμι καὶ ὃν μὲν ἐπήλυθα κόλπον

[50] Having a good journey I passed through, while a favourable wind blew upon me, | thereupon, I sailed away for the narrow ditch of rhetoric, | truly a narrow sea, for the rhetoric is variable | an ever-changing path drives me unceasingly and far away | the ocean of philosophy received me as foreign settler, | [55] the great part of the ocean, larger in comparison with the land; | for that one got hold not only of the land, | but both land and heaven, and everything else | which it occupies inside and ambidextrously conducts, a wonder to be beheld; [60] that one I surpassed and traversed such a gulf (trans. N. Zagklas), see Zagklas, *Theodore Prodromos*, 64–65.

40 Prodromos is praised as both an excellent rhetor and philosopher in a *schedos* by the 'rather obscure figure of the monk Ioannikios'. See Zagklas, *Theodore Prodromos*, 60.

41 See, for instance. P. Marciniak, 'Prodromos, Aristophanes and a lustful woman', *Byzantinoslavica* 73 (2015) 23–34.

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authorial, i.e. Prodromic, concerns. The tradition of ridiculing philosophers, though ostensibly Lucianic, is much more deeply rooted in classical antiquity, going back at least to the threshold of the Hellenistic age. Prodromic Thoukritos, the bearded philosopher, is thus both old and ancient.

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