

NOTES ON ESCHATOLOGICAL PATTERNS IN A 12TH CENTURY
ANONYMOUS SATIRICAL DIALOGUE THE *TIMARION*¹

by

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Katabasis, namely descending to the underworld, is one of the most meaningful mythological and literary motives of all times, widespread in Antiquity in numerous well-known stories² – to mention here at least Sumerian Inanna’s visiting her sister Ereshkigal, the epic of Gilgamesh, the twelfth labour of Heracles, Orpheus’ journey to bring back his Eurydice or Aeneas’ descent in the sixth book of Vergil’s *Aeneid*. In medieval Western Europe it was reinterpreted in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and was also popular in Byzantium³, although in a completely different context. An anonymous satirical work that was composed in the 12th century⁴, the *Timarion* (Τιμαρίων ἢ περὶ τῶν κατ’ αὐτὸν παθημάτων), belongs to

¹ Some parts of the text have been delivered under the title: *Beware of Mice in Hades! Ancient Greek Eschatological Beliefs in a Satirical 12th Century Anonymous Dialogue “Timarion”* during the conference: “Μίμησις in Byzantine Art: Classical, Realistic or Imitative? The Second Cracow Symposium on Byzantine Art and Archaeology” organized by the Institute of History of Art and Culture of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, 5–7.9.2012.

² Contrary to popular convictions, Homer’s Odysseus does not descend to the Underworld but invokes the souls out of Hades in a sort of a necromancy ritual and thus the passage from the eleventh book of the *Odyssey* cannot be regarded as a *katabasis* motif.

³ The most comprehensive studies regarding the *katabasis* motives in Byzantine medieval literature are still: an unpublished doctoral dissertation by LAMBAKIS 1982 and Jane BAUN’s extensive monograph (BAUN 2007). Most recently see also CUPANE 2014.

⁴ VLACHAKOS (2001: 20 f.) gives a valuable survey of the hypotheses concerning the conjectural date of the composition as well as the authorship of the *Timarion*. See also TOZER 1881: 235; LAMBAKIS 1982: 82; ALEXIOU 2002: 100; MACRIDES 2005: 139; KALDELLIS 2012: 275. In 19th century scholarship it was attributed to Theodore Prodromos, an acclaimed Byzantine 12th century writer and scholar. Because of the thorough knowledge of medical art, it was also later ascribed to the famous court physician of the emperor Manuel I Komnenos, Nicolaos Callicles. KAZHDAN, EPSTEIN 1990: 139; KAZHDAN 1991: 2085; VLACHAKOS 2001: 21. KRALLIS 2013: 242. On 12th century and earlier Byzantine medicine see especially KAZHDAN 1984, who formulates a hypothesis that by the end of the 12th century physicians regained their status in Byzantine society which had been lost earlier due to the healing powers of the saints. He remarks (p. 50) that the person of Theodore of Smyrna (born mid-11th c., died after 1112), whom Timarion meets in Hades and who handles his defence, is an