

IS THE ESCORIAL AKRITES A UNITARY POEM?

This paper covers ground that has been much trodden by others, and in attempting only the broadest sort of answer to the above question its aims are modest⁽¹⁾. But it will be evident, I hope, that there is room for the question to be asked, if only as a small contribution to an important debate⁽²⁾.

The figure of Digenes Akrites has undergone many changes through the centuries, but in the view of this writer, the most momentous transformation took place at the point at which five poems relating to the hero were gathered (perhaps in the twelfth century) into a manuscript which is the ancestor of the Escorial MS known as E. It was at this point, and not before, that Akrites acquired a biography. In stressing this version to the exclusion of the Grottaferrata version (G), despite the lateness of the MS, it will be evident that I am following the arguments of Professor Stylianos Alexiou that E, not G, is closer to the archetypal *Akrites*; the most persuasive being those based on the presence in E, and E alone, of proper names from the Eastern borders, military terms and other *lectiones difficiliores* which are passed over or smoothed over in G⁽³⁾. An aspect of Alexiou's

(1) This paper is based on a lecture delivered to the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages at Oxford in October 1987; much of the material was presented piecemeal to the Byzantine Text Seminar at Birmingham University in 1987-88; I am very grateful to colleagues for their questions and comments. I owe a particular debt to those who took the trouble to read a draft of this article: Prof. S. Alexiou, Dr. R. M. Beaton, Dr. D. W. Holton, Prof. M. J. Jeffreys and S. MacAlister. Naturally I am responsible for any errors of fact or emphasis that remain.

(2) This article takes as the basis of discussion the edition of S. ALEXIOU, *Βασίλειος Διγενής Ἀκρίτης* (Athens, 1985), to the extent that it may almost be considered a review-article. My references to the huge secondary bibliography are sparing: I restrict myself largely to newer or supplementary material. On the fortunes of Akrites in later literature we now have a lucid treatment by G. ΚΕΧΑΓΙΟΓΛΟΥ, "Τύχες της βυζαντινῆς ακριτικῆς ποίησης στη νεοελληνική λογοτεχνία: σταθμοί και χρήσεις. Αποτιμήσεις, Ἑλληνικά, 37.1 (1987), 83-109.

(3) S. ALEXIOU, *Ἀκριτικά* (Herakleion, 1979). It should be noted, of course, that Alexiou's view has not found universal acceptance: for a sophisticated alter-

treatment in his monograph *Ἀκριτικά* which is particularly thought-provoking, and potentially revolutionary for the study of the subject, is his hint at the possibility that what we have in E may not be a single poem at all⁽⁴⁾.

In 1985 Alexiou published his edition of E, the first which actually makes the work readable⁽⁵⁾. The student of Byzantine vernacular poetry is tempted to breathe a sigh of relief and take the view of Jowett: "Don't dispute about texts. Buy a good text."⁽⁶⁾ With great ingenuity and good sense Alexiou has largely restored the text metrically and explicated numerous difficulties. And yet the very readability of this new E, and the fact that the reader now has a starting-point for reflection, brings some new problems to the fore. My reservations concern, not so much the surface of the text — on this one might sometimes be more conservative — as its structure⁽⁷⁾. It is perhaps the case that, in arguing for E's authenticity, Alexiou has gone

native account developing Alexiou's findings in another direction see R. BEATON, *The Medieval Greek Romance* (Cambridge, forthcoming; I am grateful to the author for showing me a typescript in advance of publication). In general, I would by no means to exclude the possibility that G contains authentic material from the archetype (see esp. N. ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΗΣ, "L' 'épopée' de Digénis et la frontière orientale de Byzance aux X^e et XI^e siècles", *Travaux et Mémoires*, 7 (1979), 335-397) — but here I draw solely on E for such evidence.

(4) ALEXIOU, *Ἀκριτικά*, p. 87: "The text does not appear organically unitary, and perhaps we shall be able to show that it consists of more than two (*Emir-Lied* and *Digenes-Roman*) parts". See also his article, "Ὁ Διγενής Ἀκρίτης τοῦ Ἑσχοριάδ", *Πρακτικά τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν*, 58 (1983), 68-83, esp. p. 80.

(5) The first published edition, by D. C. HESSELING ("Le Roman de Digénis Akritas d'après le manuscrit de Madrid", *Λαογραφία*, 3 (1911-12), 537-604) looked chaotic and deterred further study; that of P. KALONAROS, *Βασίλειος Διγενής Ἀκρίτης, τὰ ἔμμετρα κείμενα* (Athens, 1941), made the text look uninviting by placing it among the more readable versions.

(6) In G. MADAN, *Notebooks* (ed. J. A. GERE and J. SARROW, Oxford, 1980), p. 61.

(7) On questions of the Alexiou text see the review by BEATON in *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 106 (1986) 271-273 and the same author's article, "Ἀκρίτης καὶ οἱ κριτικοί: φιλολογικὰ καὶ ἐκδοτικὰ προβλήματα", in H. EINDENEIER (ed.), *Neograeca Medii Aevi* (Cologne, 1987), pp. 75-84. It may be that on a very few occasions Alexiou has wrongly deleted from his text: line 763, *μὲ τὰ καλίτζιά του*, may be worth keeping in order to stress that the hero goes out just on foot against the beasts; compare the phrase in "Armoures" 96a, *πεζὸς μὲ τὰ γονάτια*. (Perhaps E 763 originally read *πεζὸς μὲ τὸ καλίκιον*, cf. E 1323).

rather further than he ought in special pleading for its unity. (Although remarks made since tend to modify this.)⁽⁸⁾ Authenticity and unity are not the same thing, and in arguing that E is not just the *disjecta membra* of G or a precursor of G we must be careful to avoid the elision to the claim that E, though lacunose, is essentially a whole. It is indeed my view that, now that we can see E the more clearly, it is the clearer that it is not a poem at all but a collection – and that the attempt to bind the poems together is perfunctory and superficial. If I am right, the consequences will stretch far indeed – as much forward, to the after-life of the work, as backward, to its genesis.

Locally, then – to the constituent parts of E – Alexiou has done an inestimable service: he has enabled a fairer judgement of their poetic quality, and no scholar will be able to ignore the work from now on or dismiss its virtues as the product of chance⁽⁹⁾. The text has been largely liberated from an inadequate scribe and over-cautious editors without the imposition of a spurious uniformity: thanks to Alexiou our knowledge of medieval Greek continues to expand⁽¹⁰⁾. But the view that E, with its glaring incompatibilities of plot and ethos, is a single work implies a readership whose taste for quite sophisticated verse is accompanied by a blindness to contradictions which can only

(8) On the question of structure Alexiou's remarks are rather brief. Only once is the question of pre-existing material raised (p. ρβ' n. 91) and the arguments on pp. λβ'-λγ' are not compelling: that each part of E begins with a name and a gnome and ends with a significant outcome does not entail any organic relationship between the parts. Alexiou in fact concedes that especially the first three sections "have a certain self-sufficiency and could ... be read or recited singly"; and by way of conclusion (p. ρλθ') concedes with understatement that E is "not entirely unitary" – leaving the door open for the point of view argued here. Since completing this article I have been able to note a development in Alexiou's views in the direction I follow here: in his valuable article on his editorial policy ("Για την έκδοση του Ακρίτη και του Αρμούρη", *Μαντατοφόρος*, 25-26 (1987), 57-62) he now admits the possibility of more than one poet.

(9) Like J. ΜΑΥΡΟΓΟΡΔΑΤΟ (ed.), *Digenes Akrites* (Oxford, 1956), p. xix: the reaction against nationalist scholarship was needed, but one is entitled to be suspicious about the view that poetic beauties come by chance.

(10) ALEXIOU, pp. οζ'-πβ'. There are occasions when a little more consistency in the text may be required, or the lack of it observed, e.g. 859 and 865:

δὲν ἤξεύρεις, ὀμμάτια μου, τὸ φῶς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν μου
κι ἐγὼ ἤξεύρω, ὀμμάτια μου, τὸ φῶς τῶν ὀμματίων μου

(the genitive of *ὀμμάτια* occurs only here in E).

be described as imbecilic. I list the major incompatibilities (some noted by other scholars):

(i) Between parts (in Alexiou's divisions):

a. Akrites meets Philopappous and the other *apelatai* (622-701); but later Philopappous, Kinnamos and Giannakes do not know him (1215-1217).

b. Akrites plays at "village staves" (692) but derides villagers' pursuits (745); see also 231.

c. 610-621 (relegated by Alexiou to an appendix) duplicate 739-791, a rite of passage fully described in the latter place.

d. The exploits enumerated at 1612-1623 (conquering the whole world, including Emirs and Arabians) are never referred to elsewhere. Likewise, the deeds mentioned at 1709-1734 either duplicate or do not connect at all with what has preceded.

e. The narrative of the abduction told in part Γ' conflicts with what Akrites relates at 1735-1739 (the natural sense of this is that the *apelatai* attempted to carry off the bride when Akrites had just carried her off from the general's house) and 1740-1747 (it was at this point that the ogre attacked the couple); see further 1786-1787 in confirmation. Further important evidence that sections Γ' and Δ' are in fact *alternative tellings* of the same part of the Akrites-story (with ΣΤ' constituting an allusion to Δ') is to be found at 1373-1374, where again the natural interpretation is that this is a recent event:

τὴν κόρην τὴν ἐφύλαγα λόγου τοῦ Γιαννακίου,
ὁ Ακρίτης τὴν ἀφήρπαξεν καὶ χαίρεται μετ' αὐτήν.

(ii) Within parts:

(a) The first half of section Α' ends with the clearly proverbial lines 213-216. There then follows the conception, birth and childhood of Digenes Akrites in a short passage. The second part would originally have begun (with the emendation Alexiou prints in his note but not in his text): *καὶ μετὰ χρόνον οὐ πολὺν* (225) *ἔπεψε ἡ μάνα του χαρτίν* (226). Here the pronoun evidently refers to the Emir, not to his son. Alexiou proposes that we have lost lines after 224 in which the Emir was again mentioned; but more pointed and elegant would be a shortened linking passage about the birth of a son "of double birth" (with *διγενής* as an epithet rather than a name and, instead of "Akrites", *των παιῖδα*, on the lines of 452) which excluded the

attributes of akritehood, which have nothing to do with the "Lay of the Emir". It is in fact in this very passage that we can see the meeting of the hitherto unrelated things *digenes* and *akrites* to which Beaton has drawn our attention⁽¹¹⁾. At any event it is a narrative improbability that the Emir's mother would write to him only after several years; and although the poet's understanding of the historical background to his work remains obscure, his way of approaching the story is not one which has anything in common with fairy tale.

b. Akrites offers the general the opportunity to celebrate his daughter's wedding at Akrites' home or not at all — a breach of normal procedure, coming as it does with the refusal of a dowry (1000-1008); but then the general sends a dowry anyway (1072); and finally it is said that the general leaves the wedding, although his arrival has never been mentioned (1085).

c. Between 1001 and 1102 we have an abrupt and unexplained shift from first to third person narration. The closing lines of section Δ' (from 1599, which follows the figure-of-three proverbial statement by the hero, to 1605) are best understood as being a third-person coda to the first-person narration (note the verbs in 1605; although 1538 may make one cautious): this suggests that there was a similar prologue to the poem. If we had here the use of ring-form as in section Γ', then the prologue would perhaps have mentioned Maximou. (The existing introduction is hopelessly unmetrical and corrupt, and the corresponding proem to G Book Six unconvincing — to the extent that we may hypothesize that there was in circulation only an akephalic MS of the story of section Δ'.)

Comparing the parts of E as laid out by Alexiou with the Ptocho-prodromic poems and the poem of Michael Glykas — works, comparable in style, scale and sophistication — I prefer to adopt a position which assumes that the late Byzantine audience was conscious not just of local felicities of diction but of clarity and happiness of plot⁽¹²⁾.

(11) R. BEATON, "Was *Digenes Akrites* an Oral Poem?", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 7 (1981), 7-27.

(12) On the complexities of twelfth-century poetry see M. ALEXIOU, "The poverty of écriture and the craft of writing: towards a reappraisal of the Prodromic poems", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 10 (1986) 1-40 and BEATON, "The Rhetoric of Poverty: the Lives and Opinions of Theodore Prodromos", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 11 (1987), 1-28. On the question of scale, it is worth noting

The attentions of scholars have been focussed on the narrative structure or lack of structure of G, which is undisputedly a single work; but the question of the articulation of E requires further discussion⁽¹³⁾. What E needs, however unfashionable the procedure, is to undergo the Analysis to which Homer was subjected and, following Homer, works of medieval heroic poetry such as *Beowulf* and the *Song of Roland*⁽¹⁴⁾. The present article makes no secret of pursuing a particular direction, but the outcome cannot be predetermined: broadly speaking, there are two possibilities. Either the detailed study of cross-references, doublets and other narrative features will convince us that E is after all a unitary poem, albeit an imperfectly edited one; or, alternatively, a work with radical internal contradictions will be seen to fall apart into smaller works, which may well be well formed in themselves⁽¹⁵⁾. (At any rate, it will not "take away from any dignity

that if E were from the twelfth century and a single poem its scale would far outstrip other works in the vernacular.

(13) Alexiou's comments are rather brief, as indicated above (though note the remarks in *Ἀκριτικά*, p. 69); but food for thought is provided by two recent articles: S. MACALISTER, "Digenis Akritas: the First Scene with the Apelatai", *Byzantion*, 54 (1984), 51-74 (the conclusions differ from my own) and A. R. DYCK, "On *Digenis Akritas* Grottaferrata Version Book 5", *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 24 (1983), 185-192, with the important conclusion: "In any case, it is clear that in *Digenis Akritas* the individual song is primary, the combination of songs into a connected narrative secondary and superficial." Prior to these two articles similar observations had been made by M. J. Jeffreys and C. A. Trypanis. The former writes in "Digenis Akritas and Commagene" (repr. in E. M. and M. J. JEFFREYS, *Popular Literature in Late Byzantium* [London, 1983]) that "There are two distinct elements in the poem as it stands, and they may require different literary and historical interpretations" (p. 16) and that "Even an act of compilation would surely have produced a more integrated work" (p. 19). The latter comments (*Greek Poetry from Homer to Seferis*, London, 1981, p. 454) that the poem is "not even a single unit" and that it is "mechanically joined together". In fact at the turn of the century P. Karolidis had spoken of the poem as a *σειρά ἐπιλλίων* (quoted in ALEXIOU, p. ριβ').

(14) It is with reference to *Roland* that the controversy between "traditionalists" and "individualists" has burned most fiercely; see e.g. P. AEBISCHER, *Préhistoire et protohistoire du Roland d'Oxford* (Berne, 1972).

(15) For a comparative approach indebted to Homeric scholarship see B. FENIK, *Homer and the Nibelungenlied* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986); for important remarks on Homer's editing see M. MUELLER, *The Iliad* (London, 1984). An exception to the unity of the *Iliad* acknowledged even today is Book Ten (the Doloneia), precisely because it does not contain crossreferences to other parts of the poem (see R.

the book possesses ... that it has been subjected to the same kind of examination as the *Iliad*" (16).) Believing that the latter conclusion will ultimately become the consensus on the basis of the evidence, I shall set out here the parts of which I believe E to consist. So much of the Acritic bibliography is concerned with the supposed relation of the poetic material to historical persons, places and events that one must be grateful to Alexiou for providing to the student of E the first real chance to apply to the work the principle "Ὁμηρον ἐξ Ὁμήρου σαφηνίζειν. First of all, however, it will be useful to recapitulate — with some difference in emphasis from most existing treatments — on the question *who* Akrites is. Perhaps this robust hero will turn out to be as elusive as the "real" Ptochoprodromos (17).

The question of the background of the hero Akrites, even if we reject the notion that the poems faithfully preserve a historical setting, remains an important one that cannot be dismissed out of hand: although my argument that E, seen as a whole, is internally incoherent will derive its origin from the text itself, any changes made in a text which is, after all, "a single book, considered as such by its transcribers, and making a claim to be so considered" must rest in some degree on external evidence or inference (18). The incompatibilities which may be detected between different manifestations of Akrites in E can of course find a parallel in the different treatments of Achilles to be found in the *Iliad*, a work now acknowledged to be unitary: from A to I to T to Ω we are presented with a hero in very different guises. And yet there are important differences: the *Iliad* exceeds eight-fold

RUTHERFORD, "At Home and Abroad: Aspects of the Structure of the *Odyssey*", *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 211 (1985), 133-150). But this of course does not prevent us from seeing the Doloneia as an independent lay of merit; in this we would endorse the views of eminent poets, Holderlin (see R. B. HARRISON, *Holderlin and Greek Literature*, Oxford, 1975, pp. 31-32) and Solomos ("Ἀπαντα, ed. L. POLITIS, vol. 1, Athens, 1968, p. 31).

(16) Here, for the first of several times in this article, I quote W. P. KER (on *Beowulf*, in *Epic and Romance*, London, 1922, p. 159). Before specializations and their bibliographies had developed to the present stage a scholar of exceptional abilities was able to obtain an overview and produce formulations which have yet to be superseded; and in the case of *Akrites* a return to first principles is what is required.

(17) See e.g. BEATON, "The Rhetoric of Poverty".

(18) KER, *Epic and Romance*, p. 158.

the likely scale of E with its lacunae restored; and there are signs that Homer is consciously exploiting tensions between different aspects of Achilles in the tradition, working them into a complex whole (19). With Akrites, by contrast, we are talking, not so much about different aspects of Akrites as about different Akritai. Homer, in drawing on a rich tradition about Achilles, can at once allude to and suppress traditional myths about the hero's supernatural powers: while the incompatibilities in E result from the very thinness of traditional material concerning Akrites (20).

In considering this point we may remind ourselves of the *terminus post quem*: 1071, after which Akrites becomes a mere name (The *terminus ante quem* will be the fourteenth century, when we find the dominance of a genre of narrative poetry of clear Western provenance.) (21). The existence of the akritai or *limitanei* of course goes back further; and so, as Bishop Arethas of Caesar confirms, does a tradition of heroic song; but we must avoid speculation here and turn to the twelfth century, that in which Akrites for the first time enters written poetry. Here the famous references to Akrites in the *Ptochoprodromika* are significant: *τίς Ἀκρίτης ἕτερος*; and *τὸν νέον τὸν*

(19) See C. W. MACLEOD, *A Commentary on Iliad xxiv* (Cambridge, 1982).

(20) J. GRIFFIN, "The Epic Cycle and the Uniqueness of Homer", *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 98 (1978), 39-53. On the thinness of the traditional material relating to Akrites see MAVROGORDATO, *Digenes Akrites*, p. xlv (against Grégoire). It is worthy of note that in the poems of E very few references are made to events which occur outside the text: 1709-1720 on the Arabians is the only one, perhaps, and if this lay had been available the compiler would no doubt have included it in order to fill out Akrites' rather few exploits. (Alexiou's comparison (p. p. 171) with the incompatibilities in the Edda is off the mark: they are the result of too much material, not too little.) The fact that statements by the hero form the core of three of the poems (those closest to the original material) is significant: 700-701 end section B', 1596-1598 end section Δ' and 1759-1764 are the vestige of an older Death of Akrites lay. In this we have an indication that the tradition about Akrites may originate in what New Testament scholars call *pericopae*.

(21) On the Battle of Manzikert see BEATON, *The Medieval Greek Romance*. A *terminus ante quem* is harder to establish: although Alexiou places the work in the twelfth century, a continuing process of accretion cannot be ruled out, and it has been observed that 1204 does not in fact appear to mark so clear a cultural break as might be expected: see M. MULLETT, "Aristocracy and Patronage in the literary circles of Comnenian Constantinople" in M. ANGOLD (ed.), *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries* (Oxford, 1984).

Ἀκρίτην (of Manuel I Comnenus) ⁽²²⁾. The name of Akrites is remembered here, and as in E it requires no explanation as it appears to in all other versions; it is therefore understood ⁽²³⁾. But the institution has disappeared, so the name Akrites lives on anachronistically rather as if, after the destruction of the Royal Navy people still spoke of a mythical hero called Jack Tar. As the Comnenes once again cast their gaze back across the Eastern borders (c. 1150), a new vogue for Akrites is easily understood; and with the phrase “second Akrites” the poet is consciously recalling the hero’s own statement to his men *ὅτι Ἀκρίτην ἕτερον εἰς κόσμον οὐ θωρεῖτε* ⁽²⁴⁾. (The name Digenes is more puzzling. Beaton is surely right to emphasize its learned provenance; and it may be that Digenes is in fact a name used in the tradition only after the meaning of Akrites has been forgotten: a learned writer finds the epithet in the Lay of the Emir (452: *τὸν διγενή σου παῖδα*), and it subsequently becomes wedded to Akrites with the symbolism that the one of the borders is of double birth. Might it be more than coincidence that the original name Akrites has survived – to the exclusion of Digenes – in the Pontic songs? ⁽²⁵⁾

Let me now summarize the elements of E. The MS places the poems in biographical order, but this is quite distinct from an ordering

(22) Ptochoprodromos Poem 3.164-166 and 400y, quoted in ALEXIOU, p. ρκγ'. Especially as the poet's identity and dates are still uncertain, the above references still do not allow us to infer whether they pre- or post-date the entry of Akrites into the written tradition. But the vogue for Akrites is evidently attested, and it may be that we shall be able to find further clues in Manuel I Comnenus himself. For the moment, we have a possible correspondence in (Manganeios) Prodromos' poem *De Manganis* (ed. S. BERNARDINELLO, Padua, 1972), 3, line 51: *Ἐφράτης ἔφρυς ποταμός* cf. E 1620.

(23) This argument inverts that of BEATON, “*Ἀκρίτης καὶ οἱ κριτικοί*”, p. 78.

(24) E 1764; note that this is an emendation by Alexiou, however probable. The note of finality fits 1071; the rejection of it by Ptochoprodromos the confidence of Manuel.

(25) On the names see BEATON, “Was *Digenes Akrites* an Oral Poem?”. I contend that, just as the hero's akritehood has been superimposed on the “Lay of the Emir”, so has his double birth been superimposed on the remaining poems. The very lack of prominence of Akrites in later tradition is shown by the way in which Dapontes calls him Basil; see E. TRAPP, *Digenes Akrites. Synoptische Ausgabe der ältesten Versionen* (Vienna, 1971), p. 15. Pace Beaton, the fact that the hero is called Akrites in Pontus only (*i.e.* in the only place where the tradition of the hero's castle is preserved in song) may be more than coincidence.

in terms of literary sophistication. In fact the poems differ not just in style – this could be accounted for by their varying subject matter – but in substance, to the extent that it is hard to imagine a public having felt them to form an organized whole.

1. The separateness of the Lay of the Emir, is, I think, generally acknowledged; and this consensus can form the basis for a more searching look at the rest of E ⁽²⁶⁾. (What we have here, as Beaton points out, is the familiar principle of “bipartite structure”; though *Beowulf* is not the best comparison, as it is composed of two lays about the hero himself in a way that cannot be maintained of the Lay of Emir and the “Digenes Romance” ⁽²⁷⁾.) What we have here is a self-contained poem of some sophistication consisting originally of some 670 lines (with about the first 70 missing in E) – a scale larger than that of any of the other component parts of E. In this poem Akrites is virtually absent: he will originally have played no role in the story except in cementing the marriage between the Emir and the Roman general's daughter, and in forming a further bone of contention between the Emir and his mother. His akritehood is only mentioned in a short linking passage which does not impair the original structure of the lay only because it is so clearly an addition made by the first compiler of the proto-E collection ⁽²⁸⁾. Evidently the new vogue for Akrites brought in an interest to gather related material, and the Lay of the Emir was saved for poetry by its inclusion in the collection. (There is no trace of it in folk song; conversely, there is no trace in E of some other heroes, such as Andronicus, who appear in the modern folk tradition ⁽²⁹⁾.)

2. In the second poem, which we may call “Akrites among the Raiders”, we are at the opposite end of the spectrum of literary sophistication. Here we have an undigested *cantilène* incompatible in plot with the rest of E (not just with Alexiou's section Δ' but also with

(26) See the works of Alexiou, Beaton and Jeffreys above, whatever their other disagreements.

(27) BEATON, *Medieval Greek Romance*.

(28) E 222 is the only mention of the *apelatai* in the “Lay of the Emir”, unmetrical and best deleted; for 219 we may hypothesize *τὸν διγενή τους παῖδα*.

(29) In the Greek Academy edition (*Ἑλληνικά δημοτικά τραγούδια*, vol. 1, Athens, 1962) we find Andronicus and other heroes (pp. 3-118).

his section Γ' (30). G tackles the problem by removing the episode altogether: that the compiler of proto-E did not see himself as compiling a unitary work but as gathering a collection of related poems or lays, which he put in biographical order (31). The tone here is one of rugged humour as the hero defeats the proverbial old trickster Philopappous and his men and concludes with a punch-line. This Akrites is socially backgroundless — just an incarnation of the collective *akritai* — and for example plays at village staves where the Akrites of the third poem derides villagers' pursuits. Only a late and perfunctory linking passage, relegated by Alexiou to an appendix, makes any effort to embed the story in a biography of the hero (32).

3. The third poem tells the story of how Akrites carried off his bride, and it is the first surviving romance in vernacular Greek (33). It consciously alludes to the Lay of the Emir in a way which develops traditional tales about the power of love in a particular direction which one may see as influenced by Western developments of the time. The *apelatai* who are the traditional enemies of Akrites are deliberately excluded from this poem; and the poet even teases the reader with a

(30) So MACALISTER, "Digenis Akrites"; BEATON, "Ακρίτης".

(31) It is this principle that has caused confusion; but it is unclear how a compiler could have chosen another with the materials at his disposal.

(32) Section B' is in fact the only one representative of a *heroic age*, one in which "There is not the extreme division of labour that produces the contempt of the lord for the villein" (KER, *Epic and Romance*, p. 7). The linking passage is confused and unmetrical.

(33) By seeing Γ' in this way we may not only arrive at a juster estimate of its worth as a revision by a self-conscious poet of the "Lay of the Emir"; we may understand the influence of the E poems on the later literary tradition. In this way we may refine the remarks of Alexiou and Kechagioglou, "Τύχες" on the influence of E: it emerges that of the sections A' has no direct influence; B' probably none except insofar as it forms part of a heroic formulaic idiom; Δ' has none (save for relics in songs about a *drakos*: 'Ελληνικά δημοτικά τραγούδια, pp. 18-19); E'-ΣΤ' bifurcates into two types of folk song; but Γ', as belonging to the favoured genre of romance, exerts an influence far into the vernacular tradition. See here D. HOLTON, "Erotokritos and Greek tradition" in R. BEATON (ed.), *The Greek Novel A.D. 1-1985* (London, 1988); for an example of a borrowing or parallel see E 912 *και εὐθὺς ἐκατεπήδησεν τὴν χαμηλὴν θυρίδα* and *Erotokritos* 3.1462: *στή σιδερὴ θυρίδα* (in the same metrical position). If Leo Allaci could be acquainted with the *Ptochoprodromika* (G. ZORAS, ed., *Βυζαντινὴ ποίησις*, Athens, 1956, p. 28) then it is not unreasonable to suppose that Kornaros knew a Cretan MS of Akrites like E.

hint at an earlier version in which they tried to carry on further after her abduction by him (34). Bride-snatching (*ἀρπαγή*), which in "Digenes among the Raiders" is understood to be the stealing of someone else's bride, has here been brought to fit the model of the Lay of the Emir in which the hero carries off his own bride for love — though here the bride is allowed to display more independence (35). That the poem is self-sufficient is shown by its initial summary of the Lay of the Emir — which is not in the formulaic recapitulatory style of "Armoures" — and by its ring-form based on the current notion of Eros (36). (Here the suggestion of Elizabeth Jeffreys that the inspiration derives from the circle of Eleanor of Aquitaine is a fascinating one (37).) The poem is begun by a formal proem, of a type seemingly not to be found in the other parts of E, in which the poet declares his intention to write, not about the Hellenes and the Trojan War — his response indicates a contemporary vogue for the romances of antiquity — but of a hero of the Christian era (38). Although the Akrites here

(34) E 1035-38 and section (i) e of the list of inconsistencies above.

(35) Original bride-snatching: E 665-668; the Emir and the brothers in law: 197. See KER, *Epic and Romance*, p. 8: "An heroic age may be full of all sorts of nonsense and superstition, but its motives and action are mainly positive and sensible — cattle, sheep, piracy, abduction, recovery of stolen goods, revenge"; and contrast the needless risk-taking of Akrites over his bride for love.

(36) See the list of inconsistencies above (ii.b); if we remove the coda (added to an earlier MS in an edifying spirit like "Armoures", 197-201) we have a clear ring-form from the first line 702, *ὁ ἔρωσ τίττει τὸ φιλὶν καὶ τὸ φιλὶν τὸν πόθον* to the last three (1066-1069):

*καὶ ὁ ἔρωσ ἐξεπλήρωσε πάσας τῶν τὰς ἐλπίδας
καὶ πάντα τὰ θελήματα καὶ τὰ ἐξαρέσκιά του,
τοῦ ἔρωτος τοῦ ἡδονικοῦ, χαρμονικῶς τελοῦσιν.*

(*ἔρωσ*—*ἔρωσ* is a mild inconsistency of Alexiou's editorial policy.)

(37) E. M. JEFFREYS, "The Comnenian Background to the *Romans d'Antiquité*", in E. M. and M. J. JEFFREYS, *Popular Literature*.

(38) The proem strongly resembles that of the *Achilleis*. Although that poem in its present form appears to date from the fifteenth century, there is no reason why an earlier form (probably in a more learned form of the language) did not predate E (*pace* ALEXIOU, pp. ρχδ'-ρχε'). The author of E section Γ' appears teasingly to mention the *ὀνομαστοὺς στρατιώτας* of the Hellenes without actually naming any: perhaps he is deliberately withholding the name of Achilles. The prominence of Homer in twelfth century letters is well attested; see A. VASILIKOPOULOU-IOANNIDOU, *Ἡ ἀναγέννησις τῶν γραμμάτων κατὰ τὸν IB' αἰῶνα εἰς τὸ Βυζάντιον καὶ ὁ Ὀμηρος* (Athens, 1971) and E. M. JEFFREYS, "The Judgement of Paris in Later

is clearly a stage of development on from that of the fourth poem, he is still a stage behind the heroes of the later romances. In the first place, we have an symmetry : although Akrites is modern in carrying off a willing bride (his mother, when carried off by the Emir, was never consulted as to her wishes) the romance does not show the equipollence between hero and heroine which is palpable in the titles of e.g. *Libistros kai Rhodamne* (which is influenced by *Akrites* in a number of respects) (39). Furthermore, the new romantic guise of Akrites does not exclude from his behaviour a sort of roughness which was uncongenial to a transcriber of this lay : the original ending, in which the bride's father is simply snubbed, has been supplemented by a typical added coda to the lay in which the general is seen as happily conveying gifts to the wedding. Here we find at work the biographizing tendency which wishes to subdue Akrites to the norms of the ideal family (40).

4. The next poem may tentatively be entitled "Exploits of Akrites", as, at first sight, it appears to be a slightly rambling assemblage of traditional exploits. In fact, however, the narrative that we possess seems to be one of some ingenuity, and its main flaw is its corrupt beginning, which we should probably be ready to reject if it fits so poorly with the bulk of the narrative, which in general has been left largely unharmed by monkish revisions (41). The poet makes a witty

Byzantine Literature" in *Popular Literature*. In particular note the following passage of Prodrornos (*De Manganis* 5.17-22, to Manuel) :

μάτην τὴν Τυνδαρίδα μου προσήγαγον εἰς μέσον,
δι' ἣν στρατοῦ συγκίνησις, παλαιῖστραι μονομάχων
καὶ συμπλοκαὶ καὶ προσβολὴ καὶ μάχη καὶ συρρήξεις
καὶ συνεχεῖς ἐπιδρομαὶ καὶ λόχοι τε καὶ στάσεις
ὁ κατ' αὐτὴν γὰρ πόλεμος οὐκ οἶδεν ἡρεμίαν,
κἄν Ἐκτωρ ἔφθασε πεσεῖν ὁ πρῶτος μονομάχος.

(39) I. KARAGIANNE, 'Ο Διγενὴς Ἀκρίτης τοῦ Ἑσχοριάλ, συμβολὴ στὴ μελέτη τοῦ κειμένου (Ioannina, 1976), pp. 225-263.

(40) See the list, section (ii) b, above ; for the original lay as a possible reflection of social tensions between *akritai* and landowners see G. L. HUXLEY, "Antecedents and Context of Digenes Akrites", *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 15 (1974), 317-338.

(41) The beginning is hopelessly muddled and unmetrical, so much so that it may just have been cobbled together by an earlier scribe faced with an akephalic MS of section Δ' and made worse still by the semi-literate scribe of E. (The presence of the dragon could be deduced from the next bit, but the earlier part of the story was lost

attempt at weaving a number of exploits — perhaps the bulk of the exploits known to traditional lays — round an Akrites who is modern enough to love his girl : the girl forms the narrative backbone as she provokes the successive attacks of ogre, lion, *apelatai* and Maximou (42). The narration is in the first person, suggesting origins in a distinct *genre* ; but the beginning has been lost (43). Nonetheless, we may speculate with some confidence that the beginning in E represents an attempt to cobble together a beginning for the story which was already lost by the time of G, and that the original story, in harmony with the fifth poem, relates the events that occurred on the young couple's journey home from the abduction. In other words, this fourth poem is rather *an alternative version* of the third (and this does something to explain why the third poem, the work of a sophisticated poet seeking emancipation as much from earlier acritic poetry as from the current vogue for Troy, excludes the *apelatai* altogether) (44). With the first person narration comes a quite different ethos from that of the third poem : after having his way with the defeated Maximou, Akrites reports back to his wife with a no doubt proverbial punch-line (1596-1598) ; husband and wife enjoy the joke together (45). We are some way from the pledges of troth in the third poem.

5. The fifth part of what has been arranged as a sort of biography of Akrites in a way which I cannot believe to have taken in any audience but which has gripped scholarly opinions, concerns the retirement and death of Akrites. Alexiou treats the two as separate, but

for ever, and the idea of an unmotivated excursion of the hero and his loved one looks desperate ; nor is G any the wiser.)

(42) E 1106, 1122, 1149, 1397.

(43) Trapp's view, endorsed by Beaton, "Ακριτής", p. 79, that this is in imitation of the *Odyssey* holds for G, no doubt, but not for E : we do not have to suppose a classical origin for an embedded first-person narrative of this sort. As Ker remarks (*Epic and Romance*, pp. 110-111) "In English poetry there are instances of stories dramatically introduced long before the pilgrimage to Canterbury. In *Beowulf* there are various episodes where a story is introduced by one of the persons engaged."

(44) Except for one hint — teasing and appeasing the audience — when the hero prays to St Theodore τὸν μέγαν ἀπελάτην (891). We could not have a clearer indication, incidentally, that the notion of Akrites' being the implacable foe of the *apelatai* is utterly mistaken : he is a figure which is poacher turned gamekeeper.

(45) With Alexiou's note, but not his text, I include 1599 in the final third-person statement.

I doubt if this can be correct; although the corresponding sections even of G are somewhat perfunctory, the *ekphrasis* of the castle there has some point, while in the E version it stands alone (and disproportionately brief); furthermore, the mention of the hero's tomb cannot but be placed here in order to lead on to the hero's death⁽⁴⁶⁾. (Here a rare and cautious recourse to the evidence of modern Greek folk song may confirm this view⁽⁴⁷⁾. The Pontic versions of the death of Akritas have the hero building his castle and garden; the birds in the garden warn him of impending death; and then Charos comes to take him⁽⁴⁸⁾. This song, with Charos apparently an innovation, is to be seen, it is to be stressed, not as a prototype of the written poem, but as a reflection, however abbreviated and distorted, of a manuscript tradition⁽⁴⁹⁾.)

No poem of the Akrites collection is so easy to analyse into the parts of which it has been made; but for this very reason our

(46) It takes up a good deal of space (1160-1177), and any weakness of positioning may be the fault of scribes in what is a particularly confused section.

(47) In this I mean, not the use of existing songs as supplying evidence for the materials out of which the written poems were long ago produced (a tempting line of enquiry followed by GRÉGOIRE, "Notes on the Byzantine Epic. The Greek Folk-Songs and their importance for the classification of the Russian versions and of the Greek manuscripts" in *Autour de l'épopée byzantine*, London, 1975; see the remarks of BEATON, "Digenes Akrites and Modern Greek Folk Song: a Reassessment", *Byzantion*, 51 (1981), 22-43) but the use of existing songs as supplying evidence about lost MSS. The study of Greek folk song has been hampered by the traditional search for "pure" oral material, while it is evident that a good many songs derive from MSS or printed books. (On the general issue see M. ALEXIOU, "Folklore: an Obituary?", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 9 (1984-85), 1-28; for a familiar example see G. MORGAN, "Cretan Poetry, Sources and Inspiration", *Κρητικά χρονικά*, 14 (1960), 405-415. It is worth noting that in this respect much work on folk song represents a regression from the work of Fauriel, who was more open-minded on the issue: note his inclusion, with justification, of a passage from *Erotokritos* (Greek edition, *Δημοτικά τραγούδια της συγχρόνου Ελλάδος*, 1956, pp. 264-265). The Cypriot song of Armoures is sufficiently close in one of its versions ('*Ελληνικά δημοτικά τραγούδια*, pp. 46-51) to allow the inference that songs can quite faithfully preserve the contents of a MS, at least so far as concerns its broad lines (this does not, of course, include the preservation of proper names).

(48) See G. SAUNIER, "Le Combat avec Charos dans les chansons populaires grecques. Formes originelles et formes dérivées", *Ελληνικά*, 25 (1972), 119-152, 335-370.

(49) Charos as an innovation: G. SAUNIER, *Adikia: le mal et l'injustice dans les chansons populaires grecques* (Paris, 1979).

conclusions about the version originally included in the collection must be tentative⁽⁵⁰⁾. The strongly Christian element may have entered with the very idea of writing a poem about the hero's death, and the part relegated by Alexiou to an appendix is perhaps no more inauthentic than much of the rest⁽⁵¹⁾. But it is clear enough that, whenever they came together, we are dealing with three layers. First we have the archetypal Akrites in retirement telling of his deeds and declaring to his men that there will never be another Akrites⁽⁵²⁾. (This version is preserved in a Euboean folk song collected before the

(50) There are common features with the *Spaneas*; see G. DANEZIS, *Spaneas: Vorlage, Quellen, Versionen* (Munich, 1987), p. 134; plus e.g. *Spaneas* 516-517 (ed. ZORAS, *Βυζαντινή ποίηση*):

Ὁ κόσμος ἐν προσωρινός, ἡμέρες ὑπαγαίνων,
ὁ πλοῦτος, τὸ λογάριον ὡς ἄνεμος διαβαίνει.

Although it contains traditional material it appears to be a set piece on *vanitas vanitatum*. (If the Akrites vogue really was closely tied to the figure of Manuel, we might hazard that this poem would not have been written before 1180.)

(51) E 1794-1867 and ALEXIOU, p. λ'. Metrical variations, however, seem to occur in more or less any Christianizing passage in E, and just appear to be part of this idiom (e.g. 1753). And the expatiation in a Christian vein is not necessarily alien to heroic poetry (KER, *Epic and Romance*, p. 50) and, moreover, shows close affinities with the Alexander Romance, as G. VELOUDIS has shown, *Der Neugriechische Alexander* (Munich, 1968), pp. 265-269: Alexander says farewell to his warriors and his wife, and his wife dies shortly after. There are verbal correspondences between e.g. the 1521 prose version (V. L. KONSTANTINOPOULOS, ed., *Ps.-Kallisthenes: Zwei mittellgriechische Prosa-Forschungen des Alexanderromans*, vol. 2, Königstein, 1983) e.g. 198, 18-20:

Καὶ νὰ ἤξεύρης ὅτι τὴν σήμερον ἡμέραν ἡ ἀγάπη μας, ὅπου εἶχαμεν οἱ δύο μας, χωρίζεται· ἐγὼ ὑπαγαίνω εἰς τὸν Ἄδη καὶ ἐσένα ἀφήνω μὲ τὸν Θεόν, ὃ ἡγαπημένη ἀγάπη.

Compare E 1772, 1774-1775:

καλὴ ὡς εἶδες ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ὅτε εἶχαμεν τὸν πόθον ...
Σήμερον χωρίζομεθα καὶ ἀπέρχομαι εἰς τὸν κόσμον
τὸν μαῦρον, σκοτεινότετον, καὶ πάγω κάτω εἰς Ἄδην.

We cannot assume that what we have here in E is allusion rather than simply a traditional language; but the death of Alexander may well be the inspiration of this part of E with its ecumenism quite alien to the archetypal Akrites e.g. 1790-91.

(52) E 1709-1764. Much of this section is of course extraneous to the original lay, in which the point will not have been Christian faith but a defiant piece of heroic boasting in the vein of the Emir's words at 500-512. Krumbacher (quoted in ALEXIOU, p. ρλ') was surely right to see this as a traditional element.

written versions were discovered, and therefore to be considered immune from the attentions of nationalist men of letters⁽⁵³⁾.) Secondly we have the romantic Akrites as husband addressing his wife. (This has been preserved in some other folk songs⁽⁵⁴⁾.) Finally we have an overlay of Christian reflection on the vanity of things. The thing may have been done with scissors and paste, but it still presents sufficient incompatibilities and traditional elements that we may rule out its having been composed *ab initio* for the collection⁽⁵⁵⁾.

(As to the question of authorship, only speculation is possible. With the second poem it is probably out of place to speak of an author at all; the emulation by the third poem of the first suggests, perhaps, a different author; so too does the possibility that the third poem is an alternative telling of the fourth; and the language and priorities of the fifth poem clearly stand apart.)

To summarize the view of E that I have put forward. It is true that the very idea of collecting existing heroic poetry either about Akrites or relatable to Akrites and laying it end to end had in it the seeds of a biography of Akrites. Indeed, a biographical tendency has crept into the interstices between poems by the time of G (e.g. on the death of the hero's parents)⁽⁵⁶⁾. *But E is not the biography of Akrites*. Reluctance to admit this has its origins in the initial (and persistent) characterization of the Akrites versions as they were discovered as *epics*⁽⁵⁷⁾. The question is: if E had been discovered before T, G and

(53) N. G. Politis famously claimed 1350 songs of the Akritic genre, and was criticized for this by PSICHARI, "À propos de Digénis Akritas", *Quelques travaux de linguistique, de philologie et de littérature helléniques* (Paris, 1930), pp. 41-45. There are plenty of songs into which we may suppose that the name of Digenes has been foisted (see e.g. the song collected by the notorious Lelekos in N. G. POLITIS, "Ακρῖτικὰ ἄσματα. Ὁ θάνατος τοῦ Διγενῆ", *Λαογραφία*, 1 (1909), 168-275, p. 243). The Euboean song was first published in 1853-54, before the rediscovery of the Trebizond MS.

(54) E.g. *Ἑλληνικὰ δημοτικὰ τραγούδια*, pp. 37-38.

(55) Note especially the relic of oral poetry, *ἄρχοντες* (1673), significantly associated with a local *παράδοση* about the tomb.

(56) Most glaringly E 1095, which in G (7.109 ff.) at least becomes part of the story.

(57) See synoptically ALEXIOU, pp. ξη'-ξθ'. The wish to find an epic (recall the famous forgery by the Czech man of letters Vaclav Hanka) dominates nineteenth-century Greek views of *Erotokritos* also: see the important material (Sathas, N. G. Politis, Xerouchakes) in the introduction by S. XANTHOUIDES (Herakleion, 1915).

A had got us into the habit of thinking of *Digenes Akrites* as a unitary work, would we ever have thought of E as itself a unitary work? Now that Alexiou has given us a readable E, this writer suggests that a complete change of perspective may be in order.

An alternative model is to hand: it is the *Codex Regius* of the *Elder Edda*. In that MS 29 poems of mythological and heroic cycles of much older origin have been assembled with care in the thirteenth century by a scribe who is aware that they are related but separate⁽⁵⁸⁾. As Ker remarked, "It is possible for the human mind to imagine an editor, a literary man, capable of blending the poems in order to make a larger book". But

The poems ... assert themselves as individual and separate works. They are not the mere makings of an epic, the mere materials ready to the hand of an editor. It still remains true that they are the work of artists, and of a number of artists with different aims and ideals⁽⁵⁹⁾.

The use of the model is most valuable when we return to the question of the relation between the third and fourth poems of the Akrites collection; for here we have two poems which were originally not so much supplementary to the "biography" of Akrites as alternative, presenting alternative treatments of the hero. We may aptly compare the adjacent poems in the *Codex Regius*, the *Atlamá*l and the *Atlakviða*: "the poet of *Atlamá*l, for whom *Atlakviða* was a classic, strenuously sought for originality by exploring a contrasting poetic mode"⁽⁶⁰⁾. It is only that the careful scribe of the *Codex Regius*,

(58) U. DRONKE (ed.), *The Poetic Edda. Vol. I Heroic Poems* (Oxford 1969), pp. xi-xiii. It is to be noted that my proposals for E follow this model, and are not a revival of elaborate systems such as those of the nineteenth-century Homeric Analysts: indeed it is a central point that such complexity is out of place, generated as it is by the assumption that a poem is made out of a large fund of pre-existing material. In the case of the E poems the earlier material appears to have been rather scanty, and the MS falls into sections without large-scale athetizing or transpositions.

(59) KER, *Epic and Romance*, p. 156.

(60) DRONKE, *Poetic Edda*, p. 99. I have suggested the same about the relation of sections Γ' and Δ' of E. KER observes (*Epic and Romance*, p. 51) that "The relation of the French epics to French romance is on the one side a relation of antagonism, in which the older form gives way to the newer, because "the newer song is sweeter in the ears of men" ... But from another point of view there may be detected in the *Chansons de Geste* no small amount of the very qualities that were fatal to them, when the elements were compounded in the poems of *Erec* and *Lancelot*". The fortunes of the various parts of E (see Note 33 above) bear out the

copying from an exemplar or exemplars not more than about forty years older, gives us some help with the joining-passage, "The story is told still more clearly in the Greenland 'Lay of Atli'." (61).

The poems that make up E have suffered at the hands of time and the scribes; and yet that they have many beauties has been acknowledged (62). In the view of this writer, what has impeded a juster estimate of E is not just the chaotic state of the text prior to Alexiou's sterling work but the lowly estimate we must have of the poet's powers of synthesis if we hold E to be a single work. And we must not forget that it is not only Norse works that are gathered into MSS together: the very MS E from which we have our earliest akritic poems contains together the three poems, the *Porikologos*, the *Psarologos* and the *Poulologos* (63). It is possible to imagine these poems being put together, perhaps with others, into a large-scale work — but it did not happen, it seems. The question for Akrites is whether there would ever be found a great writer, a Tuoldus or a Per Abbat or even a Homer, who would blend its parts into a whole in order to produce a definitive *Akrites* (64).

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* * *

The answer was no. In this second and shorter part of this paper I attempt synoptically to trace the consequences of the disunity of the Akritic poems that I have identified. The fortunes of Akrites have

view of Ker (p. 323) that the twelfth century marks a more far-reaching change of fashion than the later "Renaissance".

(61) DRONKE, *Poetic Edda*, p. 12.

(62) ALEXIOU, pp. ρλε'-ρλζ' (Krumbacher, Hesselung, Kyriakides, Grégoire).

(63) ALEXIOU, p. ιε'. The E MS, it is to be noted, is also the best source of *Libistros* (M. CHATZIGIAKOUDES, *Tà μεσαιωνικά δημώδη κείμενα Α'* (Athens, 1977), pp. 69-79.

(64) On the issue of the "monumental composer" (I take the term of G. S. KIRK in *The Songs of Homer*, Cambridge, 1962) there is a helpful discussion in C. SMITH, *The Making of the Poema de mio Cid* (Cambridge, 1983); on the lack of one in the case of *Akrites* see ALEXIOU, pp. ρλη'-ρλθ'. The view of W. J. ENTWISLE in *European Balladry* (Oxford, 1939, p. 304 — with G in mind) that "the poet continues to outline dramatic situations, which he continues to fizzle through sheer lack of gift for narrative" bears out for E what Ker maintains of the *Edda* (*Epic and Romance*, p. 146): "it would be impossible, by any fusion or aggregation of the Eddic lays, to get rid of their essential brevity".

recently been given an admirable survey by G. Kechagioglou, and I restrict myself here to outlining a general argument and providing sundry details which are supplementary to his material (65).

It is true that, in seeking to turn the Akritic materials into a rounded poem the author of G showed some ambition; it is another matter whether the ambition was fulfilled. Embarrassed by the lack of material, he includes whole episodes (the Emperor Romanos, the daughter of Haplorrhades) and linking passages designed to make it clear that the separate stories are part of a whole. But there is a lack of proportion not just in the parts (the continual ekphrases and prurient Christian digressions) but in the whole: Book Four (the romance proper) has 1093 lines, while Book Eight (the Death) has only 313. This is episodic stuff, and the author of G is to be put with those epic poets who, in Aristotle's scathing phrase, "imagined that because Heracles was one person the story of his life could not fail to have unity" (66). G's value-system may be coherent — and Ker's comment about its "gloating Byzantine respectability" must stand — but his work is episodic, filled out with untraditional material (67).

The later versions, though they certainly deserve more attention from scholars *in themselves*, need not detain us long here. For Trapp and Jeffreys have demonstrated that all these versions derive from a lost MS Z, a conflation of E and G (68). The variations in style between the versions are most interesting, even if none is of high literary quality, but it is only in the Oxford version (O, 1670) that we find large-scale revision of the hero and his story. The harshness of G is toned down in order to produce a hero who is more like the hero of later romances such as *Imperios kai Margarona*, a couplet version

(65) Kechagioglou's article is confined to *λογοτεχνία*; much remains to be said about extra — or para — literary uses of Digenes/Akrites. I hope, furthermore, to have accounted here in some measure for the rather disappointing results that a search for the significance of Akrites in the culture produces.

(66) ARISTOTLE, *Poetics* 1451a. I make no attempt to supply bibliography for G, which will continue to have its defenders: this article aims only to refute the claim that E is the *dissecta membra* of a version such as G.

(67) KER, *The Dark Ages* (London, 1904), pp. 343-344; more recently C. GALATARIOU, "Structural Oppositions in the Grottaferrata *Digenes Akrites*", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 10 (1986), 29-68. MAVROGORDATO (*Digenes Akrites*, n. on 2271) significantly describes the poem as "a collection of episodes rather than a connected narrative".

(68) M. J. JEFFREYS, "Digenis Akritas Manuscript Z" in *Popular Literature*.



of which was printed in 1543 : Akrites is now a generous ruler who protects his subjects from *apelatai* who are now indistinguishable from the familiar early modern *ληστές* ⁽⁶⁹⁾. And yet, despite the ambition of O's author, Ignatios Petritzes, to have his work printed, the work never was. Why ?

Perhaps the main reason why Akrites never figured in print until 1875 – a reason, then, why he is so much less important for Greek popular culture than Erotokritos – was that there were verse and prose versions of the Alexander Romance. Alexander was clearly an ecumenical figure as Akrites was not, and the shared and therefore rival motifs of the two stories were a further obstacle to the diffusion of Akrites. An even greater obstacle was that presented by the printing of *Erotokritos* in 1713, for in this work the public found a work unitary, accessible and well crafted. The figure of Akrites, or as he is now normally known, Digenes, figures briefly in Cretan drama as a term (popular slang, perhaps) for a *miles gloriosus* ; but even the polymath Kaisarios Dapontes knows little about the hero ⁽⁷⁰⁾. Akrites disappears from the vernacular literary tradition as mysteriously as he appeared in it.

What, though, of Akrites' place in popular tradition ? For it is true that one could see Akrites as an authentic popular hero spurned by the scholastic or Frankish leanings of men of letters but living on healthily among the Folk. On this subject Michael Herzfeld has offered us an iconoclastic and largely convincing account of the connection between the study of the Akritic songs on the one hand and the Greek irredentist movement on the other ; and he has rightly poured cold water on the term "Akritic" itself ⁽⁷¹⁾. Even more damning evidence was provided earlier by Guy Saunier's survey of the folk songs on the subject of the struggle with Charos ; for from it emerges the unwel-

(69) *Διήγησις Διγενῆ* 1403 ff. (ed. S. P. LAMBROS, *Collection de Romans Grecs*, Paris, 1880).

(70) See here KECHAGIOGLOU, "Τύχες" and BEATON, "Was Digenes Akrites an Oral Poem ?" ; an echo of the Cretan use of "Digenes" was the KKE leader Zachariades' description of EOKA as *πεντοδιγενῆδες* – attacking Col. Grivas' name (P. SERVAS, *Κυπριακό : Ευθύνης*, Athens, 1980, p. 207).

(71) M. HERZFELD, *Ours Once More* (Austin 1982), esp. pp. 118-121 ; to be supplemented by the same author's article, "Social Borderers : Themes of Conflict and Ambiguity in Greek Folk Song", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 6 (1980), 61-80.

come fact that those songs which mention Digenes or Akrites are confined to certain areas of the Greek-speaking world ; Pontus and Cappadocia ; Cyprus ; and some of the Aegean, especially Crete ⁽⁷²⁾. In central and northern Greece, certainly, the names of the hero are utterly unknown – until disseminated by schoolmasters ⁽⁷³⁾. Furthermore the hero is absent from that authentic manifestation of tradition not much liked by schoolmasters, the Karagiozis. Akrites, in short, is anything but the Panhellenic hero prized by N. G. Politis, and the nature of his presence in the Greek popular mind today only bears out Ernest Gellner's thesis on nationalism :

The basic deception and self-deception practised by nationalism is this : nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society ... But this is the very opposite of what nationalism affirms and what nationalists fervently believe. Nationalism usually conquers in the name of a putative folk culture ⁽⁷⁴⁾.

(72) SAUNIER, "Le Combat avec Charos".

(73) This undermines the influential view of N. G. Politis about Digenes as a Panhellenic hero : see the passage of his lecture on the subject reprinted emblematically in *Εκλογαί από τὰ τραγούδια τοῦ ἑλληνικοῦ λαοῦ* (1914), p. 79. We may suggest therefore that the villages named Akritis in the Kilikis and Florina districts (*Ἐπίτομον Ἐγκυκλοπαιδικὸν καὶ Γλωσσικὸν Λεξικὸν Πάπυρος*, Athens, 1961) have been renamed in accordance with the remaining policy of this century : see M. TRIANTAPHYLLOIDES, *Ἄπαντα*, vol. 3 (1981), pp. 141, 595-596.

(74) E. GELLNER, *Nations and Nationalism* (London, 1980), pp. 68-69. The most striking example, one not fully investigated, is Cyprus : I offer one or two points. Helladic scholars posted to schools in Greece were intent to mine the folk tradition for the presence of the hero : S. ΜΑΝΑΡΔΟΣ, "Ὁ Διγενῆς τῆς Κύπρου" (originally in the first number of the magazine *Ἀκρίτας*), *Τοπωνυμικαὶ καὶ λαογραφικαὶ μελέται* (Nicosia, 1976), pp. 282-287 ; S. ΚΥΡΙΑΚΙΔΗΣ, "Διγενῆς καὶ κάβουρας", *Λαογραφία*, 6 (1917), 368-424 ; I. A. G. ΣΥΚΟΥΤΡΗΣ, "Διγενῆς καὶ κάβουρας", *Κυπριακὰ χρονικά*, 1 (1923), 154-163. For the further role of the Digenes figure in nationalism note the groups of resisting school-children known as *ἀκριτόπουλα* (N. CRAWSHAW, *The Cyprus Revolt*, London, 1978, p. 280), the Greek Cypriots' 'Akritis Plan' and the nickname of its author, the assassinated leader Polykarpos Georkatzes (e.g. S. MAYES, *Cyprus and Makarios*, London, 1981, pp. 160-162, 168). A further irony : the village Petra tou Digene is now in the Turkish-controlled area (*Blue Guide*, London, 1987, p. 180 ; on the place-names see N. ΚΛΕΡΙΔΗΣ, *Ὁ καινούριος μυθικός ἥρωας τῶν Ἑλλήνων. Ἱστορία καὶ θρύλοι στὸ Βυζάντιο καὶ στὴν Κύπρο*, Nicosia, 1961, pp. 81-87). But for Digenes as part of a persistent, but now lost, common folk culture (Akritic songs sung by Turks too) see M. ΚΙΤΡΟΜΕΛΙΔΟΥ, "Ἀκριτικά τραγούδια καὶ παραλογές ἀπὸ τὴν Κύπρο", *Λαογραφία*, 33 (1982-84) 179-237, esp. pp. 180, 184.

The discomfiture felt by the nationalist scholar who felt that the folk did not sufficiently appreciate the glories of its past was expressed in 1905 by N. A. Bees, who wrote of a monk from whom he had been collecting some Akritic material: "The ignorant, God-bothering, greedy monk had never even heard the name of Digenes Akrites and wasn't even interested to learn it!"⁽⁷⁵⁾.

But Akrites' lack of prominence in the folk tradition did not of course entail that the new literary Akrites, however much he revealed of his own time and the Great Idea, was destined to be a failure; and yet, as Kechagioglou acknowledges, our conclusions here must be a little disappointing⁽⁷⁶⁾. Akrites was still in the province of the philologist when Palamas inaugurated the modern literary vogue with his famous lines from *"Ίαμβοι καὶ ἀνάπαιστοι*. Greece certainly needed some sort of resurrection after 1897, hence Palamas' concluding lines,

στὴ ζωὴ ξαναφαίνομαι
καὶ λαοὺς ἀνασταίνω.

Palamas appears to be making the same pun here as a folk etymology of "Digenes"⁽⁷⁷⁾. And yet the hero had no invigorating effect on Greek poetry: in retrospect the presence of Akrites in the poetry of the modern Greek state seems to flicker as briefly as the flame of irredentist sentiment which produced it: although the hero is spoken of as the "unfailing spring" of poetry, this is far from being the case⁽⁷⁸⁾. In the absence of a unitary and standard *Akritēs* the possibili-

(75) N. A. BEES, "Μοραίτικα τραγούδια τοῦ ἀκριτικου κύκλου", *Παναθηναϊα*, 11 (1905), 33-37.

(76) On the distinction between the old and the new Akrites see BEATON, *Folk Poetry of Modern Greece* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 78-82.

(77) N. G. POLITIS, *Παραδόσεις* (Athens, 1904), vol. 1, p. 69: *γιατὶ ἔζησε δυνὸ γενεαίς*. Compare SIKELIANOS, *Ὁ θάνατος τοῦ Διγενῆ* (Athens, 1948), p. 11:

κ' ἐσὺ ποὺ πάτησες τὴν ἄτιμην ἀρρώστια,
γυιὰ Σου – χαρὰ Σου, Διγενή! ...Χριστὸς ἀνέστης!...

(78) G. ZORAS, "Ὁ Διγενῆς ἐν τῇ νεοελληνικῇ ποιήσει", *Ἑλληνικὴ Δημοουργία* 6 (1950 – hence the Cold War emphasis) 839-843. On the original connection with Greek irredentism see A. BRYER, "Hans Turrali rides again", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 11 (1987) 193-206; for a poem which puns on the name Digenes in a debunking of nationalism see N. CALAS, "Διγενῆ", *Ὁδὸς Νικήτα Πάντου* (Athens, 1977), p. 92.

ties for lyric presented for the modern Greek poets were but limited. The contrast with modern Greek poetry's exploitation of the Homeric inheritance is stark⁽⁷⁹⁾.

And yet, even if the modern Akritic myth is a dated and largely failed one, that does not deny us the opportunity – indeed it may encourage us – to look again at the poems of the E collection. For in it we may see various poets at work with varying but far from contemptible results.

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(79) The connection of *Akritēs* with Homer is favoured but highly inapposite, especially if we take the view of E which I have outlined; for an example see G. PAPACHARALAMPOUS, "Akritic and Homeric Poetry", *Κυπριακαὶ Σπουδαί*, 26 (1963), 25-65. For a contrast with modern Greek poetry's drawing on Homer see D. B. RICKS, "Homer and Greek Poetry 1888-1940", (Ph.D. London, 1986) and "A Greek Poet's Tribute to Keats", *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 37 (1988), 35-42.