

## ***Absolutely Evil: the Illiterate Crusader***

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### **1. Life and career timeline of Niketas Choniates**

Ca. 1155	<u>Birth</u>
Ca. 1164 to Ante 1182	<u>Studies</u>
Ca. 1164/65	<u>Studies in Constantinople</u>
Ante 1183	<u>Basilikos hypogrammateus</u>
1185	<u>Lost his job as basilikos hypogrammateus and devoted himself to the study of law</u>
1185/86	<u>Basilikos grammatikos</u>
1188/89	<u>Proestos tou epi ton koinon chrematon koitonos (head of the public treasury)</u>
Ante 1189	<u>Harmostes of the cities of Thrace</u>
Ante 1189	<u>Governor of the theme of Philippopolis</u>
1189	<u>Summoned to Constantinople</u>
Ca. 1190	<u>Sebastos</u>
1190	<u>Ephoros</u>
1190	<u>Logothetikos grammatikos</u>
1190	<u>Delivery of the annual panegyric on the Feast of Epiphany</u>
1190/91	<u>krites tou velou (judge of the velum)</u>
1194/95	<u>Epi ton kriseon</u>
Ante 1195s	<u>Logothetes tou genikou</u>
1195s	<u>Logothetes ton sekreton</u>
1203	<u>Destruction of his palace by the great fire of 1203</u>
1204	<u>Lost his position</u>
1204	<u>Destruction of his livelihood</u>
1206	<u>Return to Constantinople</u>
1206	<u>Refuge in Nicaea</u>
Ca. 1210	<u>In the service of an anonymous protovestiaris</u>
Ca. 1217	<u>Death</u>

### **2. Versions of Choniates' History**

**Phase A – Brevior:** reign of John II Komnenos (r.1118–43) to the uprising of the Romans (Byzantines) in Thrace against the Latins 1205. This is the shortest version of the story and thus named: Brevior. Choniates started writing this version at 1203 and most probably he finished in 1206.

**Phase B – LO:** named thus after mss. Laurentianus Plut. 9.24 (Florence) and Oxoniensis (Bodleian) Roe 22 (Oxford). This version starts in 1204: it is a reworking of the Brevior with the further addition of the events between November 1206 and autumn 1207. It was

probably composed when Choniates was in Nicaea, written and finished between 1210 or 1211. In both cases, the text is paired with the Panoplia dogmatica (a work with arguments against heretics). The De Signis only in this version.

**Phase C – Auctior:** revised and extended version of the brevior and LO. The composition of this version is dated to between 1213 and 1217, that is when Choniates was living in Nicaea but he was excluded from the public life. The latest critical edition is based on this version. The De Signis became part of this version only after Niketas' death.

### 3. Book epigram in Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plutei IX.24, f. 385

<p>τινὸς διελθόντος τὴν βίβλον, ἐξ ἐτοίμου στιχηρὸν προσφώνημα ὡς ἐν εἶδει ἐπιγράμματος με... τοῦ φιλοπονήσαντος τὴν συνθήκην τῆς βίβλου προκειμένης διπλῆν πραγματείαν τὴν τε προταχθεῖσαν ἐκκλησιαστικὴν ἱστορίαν καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὸ τέλος.. ὕπ... ὕστερόχρονον μ.. δέ τ..</p>	<p><i>By a reader of the book. A versified, offhand, encomiastic address in the form of a [book] epigram ... of the one who worked laboriously on the composition of the book at hand [which contains] a double treatise, firstly the ecclesiastic history and the end of ... at a later date...</i></p>
<p>Εὐαγγελικὸς ἄλλος οἰκοδεσπότης θησαυροφυλάκιον ἠνοίχθη στόμα, ἐξάγεται δὲ καὶ παλαιὰ καὶ νέα, ἀρχαῖκὰ δόγματα καὶ καινοὶ λόγοι. 5 ἡ βιβλιακὴ σύνθετος διαρτία ἀνθρωπικὸν σύγκριμα μικτὸν δεικνύει, ψυχὴ δοκεῖ καὶ σῶμα, γνώσις καὶ φθίσις. κἂν οὐρανὸς πρὸς ὕψος, ἂν δὲ γῆ κάτω, κόσμου μίμημα δέλτος ἢ προκειμένη, 10 τὰ θεῖα πρῶτον, ὕστερον τὰ πρακτέα. καὶ μετρικὸν μὲν γράμμα, τὴν Ἰλιάδα, σμεραδογλυφῆς<sup>1</sup> ἐνθαλαμεύει θίβη Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ τοῦτο τῆς εὐψυχίας, βασιλικῆς γνώρισμα φιλοδωρίας, 15 ἀνακτορικῆς δεῖγμα λαμπρᾶς καρδίας, χλωρὰ λίθος, βλάστημα λειμῶνος λόγου, σαφῆς διόπτρα τοῦ πρὸς Ὅμηρον πόθου. ὕλη δὲ τις καλύπτρα ταύτης πυκτίδος τὰς καρδιακὰς πτυχὰς ἐξανοικτέον 20 καὶ τὴν μεταξύ χώραν ὑφαπλωτέον κλίνην Σολομώντειον εὐτυχησάτω τοιούτου οἴκος ἄξιος ταύτης τόπος. ζωῆς ἔμαθον βίβλον. ἀλλ' ἰδοὺ βλέπω, τὰ ζωτικὰ ῥήματα γράμματα φέρει 25 κἂν θνητὰ μικτὰ τοῖς ἀθανάτοις λόγοις. προφητικῆς πλήρωμα θεσπιωδίας, τῆς ἐπτάδος μέρισμα καὶ τῆς οὐκτάδος εἰ μὴ τις ἄλλην ἄλλος ἐπτάδα λέγει τὴν ἐπτάκαυλον συνοδικὴν λυχνίαν, 30 ἥτις ἀνήψεν ὧδε σωστικὸν σέλας.</p> <p><small>16 AHG Jun. 22.14.11: Ὡς ἄνθη τοὺς θεῖους λόγου/ ἐκ τῶν λειμῶνων δρεψάμενος/ τῆς γραφῆς, ἱεράρχα,   21 Cant. 3:7   22 οἴκος ἄξιος Eur. Hel. 69   23 ζωῆς βιβλίον Rev. 3:5   24 ζωτικὰ γράμματα cf. Eriphanius, Panarion, ed. K Holl, vol. 3, p. 6   27 Cf. Ex. 22:30   29 ἐπτάκαυλος λυχνία Greg. Naz. In Pentec. (Orat. 41) PG 36: 433 C</small></p>	<p>As a new host of the Gospels a mouth, a treasury was opened and expounds old and new [issues]: the ancient dogmas and the new logoi. 5] The combined formation in the book demonstrates the human composition meaning of soul and body, knowledge and decay, as if in the height of heavens, as if at the bottom of the earth this book compares to the universe/<i>kosmos</i>, 10] referring first to divine things and secondly to human deeds. So, a pearl-sculpted casket encloses a poetic work, the Iliad, and this demonstrates Alexander's virtuous courage, a feature of imperial bounteousness 15] an expression of a royal illustrious heart, a green stone, an offshoot of a meadow of logos, a clear mirror of the love for Homer. But the content of the book is also its cover, so that the panels of the heart may be opened 20] and the space between them [the panels] to open up as the book may find a fitting place by Solomon's bed. Such a house is worthy of this [book]. I learned the book of life; but behold, I see it carries letters, the life-bringing words 25] even if mixing mortal [matters] with immortal words. This is the fulfilment of the prophecy about the separation on the seventh and the eighth days so none would name seven other than the synodical seven-stemmed lamp, 30] which lit up here the life-saving light.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Hapax legomenon.

**4. Outline of the *De Signis*** (to be found only in the version LO of the *Diēgēsis*)

(a) Arrival of Frankish political dignitaries and Venetian ecclesiastical dignitaries to C/ple

(b) Destruction of the city

- Church of the Holy Apostles – Justinian
- Hagia Sophia – Altar
- Forum of Constantine [Hera, Paris-Alexander, and Aphrodite]
- “Anemodoulion” (the “Wind servant”).
- Forum of Taurus: equestrian statue (Joshua, son of Nave or Bellerophon).
- The Hippodrome:
  - Herakles,
  - Nikon and the donkey
  - the statues of the Hyena (of Antioch) and the She-Wolf (of Rome)
  - statues of a Nilotic animal and an elephant, statues of Sphinxes, the statue of Scylla
  - the sundial of Apollonius of Tyana
  - Helen
  - a winged Nike
  - statues of the charioteers
  - a complex of wild beasts fighting

**5. From the *History: Constantinople as Penelope*** (!not in LO, Van Dieten, 498–99. tr. Magoulias, p. 274, adapted)

Ὡς περίπυστον πρᾶγμα Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴ καὶ πᾶσιν ἔθνεσι ζηλωτὸν καὶ προσκυνητὸν ἀξίωμα, οἷους ὑπήνεγκας βιαστάς [...] οἷοί σοι ἐπεμάνησαν ἐρασταί [...] θυμαλγέστερά εἰσιν ὄντως τὰ σὰ οἷς πέπονθε Πηνελόπη παραλληλιζόμενα, καὶ κατ’ οὐδὲν ἀπέοικας βασιλείας γυναικὸς πανευδαίμονος, σεμνῆς τὸ κάλλος, εὐφυοῦς τὸ μέγεθος, εὐπρεποῦς τὴν ὄψιν, ἐάλωκυίας μέντοι χερσὶν ἐραστῶν ἀναιδῶν μηδὲ τιμωμένων ὀβολοῦ παρ’ ἐχέφροσιν, οὔτε μὴν ἐχόντων τὸ μεγαλοπρεπὲς αὐτῆς συνιδεῖν μηδ’ εὐλαβουμένων τὸ ὕψος μηδ’ ὑποστελλομένων τὸ εὐγενές, ἐνίοτε δὲ καὶ πρὸς ὕβριν περιελκόντων καὶ εἰς κοίτην ἀπαγόντων ἀθέμιτον.

“O celebrated sovereignty of the Romans, and honour envied and adored by all nations, what violators have you endured! [...] The lovers that had gone mad over you! [...] Your sufferings are more heartrending than those of Penelope. In no way do you differ from a queen all-blessed, nobly beautiful, shapely, and comely who is seized by the hands of shameless lovers whom the prudent deem worthless. Unaware of her majesty and disrespectful of her grandeur, they ignore her nobility and drag her away in lust, carrying her off to be ravished in an unlawful bed.”

**6. Choniates, *De Signis*, Description of Helen** (excerpts)

a. Τί δὲ ἡ λευκώλενος Ἑλένη καλλίσφυρος τε καὶ δολιχόδειρος, ἡ τὸ Πανελλήνιον ἐς Τροίαν ἀθροίσασα καὶ καθελοῦσα Τροίαν, ἐκ δὲ ταύτης προσοκέλασα Νεῖλῳ κάκεῖθεν αὐθις ἐς ἠθὴ τὰ Λακόνων ἐπαναλύσασα χρόνιος; (Van Dieten, 652, 58–61)

What of the white-armed Helen, with the beautiful ankles and the long neck [*leukolenos, kallisphyros, dolichodeiros-Homeric vocabulary*], she who gathered all the Hellenes to Troy and she who destroyed Troy, from where she set ashore to the Nile and from there she returned to the customary abodes of the Laconians after many years? (my translation)

b. ἄρ' ἐμείλιξε τοὺς δυσμελίκτους; ἄρ' ἐμάλθαξε τοὺς σιδηρόφρονας; οὐμενοῦν οὐδ' ὄλως τοιοῦτόν τι δεδύνηται ἢ πάντα θεατὴν τῷ κάλλει δουλαγωγήσασα, καίπερ ἐστολισμένη θεατρικῶς καὶ δροσώδης ὀρωμένη κὰν τῷ χαλκῷ καὶ ὑγραινομένη πρὸς ἔρωτα τῷ χιτῶνι, τῷ κρηδέμῳ, τῇ στεφάνῃ καὶ τῷ πλοχμῷ τῶν τριχῶν (Van Dieten 652, 61–65)

“Didn’t she placate the implacable? Didn’t she soften those with iron hearts? She was not at all able to do this she who had enslaved every spectator (*theatēn*) with her beauty was wholly unable to achieve this, even though she was appeared in a theatrical manner (*theatrikōs*) and she was seen fresh, even in bronze, and she was moistured for love with her garment,<sup>2</sup> veil, crown, and the braid of hair.”

c. [...] ἀλλ’ οἶμαί σοι ταῖς Μοίραις πέπρωται τῇ τοῦ πυρὸς ὑποπεσεῖν ἐρωῆ, μηδ’ ἐν εἰκόνι παυσαμένην ἀνακάειν τοὺς ὀρῶντας εἰς ἔρωτας· εἶπον δ’ ἂν ὡς καὶ ἀντίποινα τοῦ τὴν Τροίαν ἠθαλῶσθαι πυρὶ ταῖς σαῖς σχετλίως φρυκτευθέντι φιλότησιν οἱ Αἰνειάδαι οὗτοι πυρὶ <σε> κατέκριναν. ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἔᾶ με τὸ χρυσομανὲς τῶν ἀνδρῶν διανοήσασθαί τι τοιοῦτον καὶ φθέγγασθαι, ὑφ’ οὗ τὰ σπάνια πανταχοῦ καὶ καλῶν κάλλιστα ἔργα παντελεῖ ἀφανισμῷ παρεπέμφθησαν [...]

(Van Dieten 652, 79–86)

“I suspect that the Fates had foreordained that you should succumb to the flame’s fervor so that your image should no longer enflame the onlookers with love. It was said that these Aeneadae condemned you to the flames as retribution for Troy’s having been laid waste by the firebrand because of your scandalous amours. But the gold-madness of these men does not allow me to conceive and utter such a thing, for that madness was the reason why rare and excellent works everywhere were given over to total destruction.” (Magoulias, p. 360, adapted)

d. [...] ἄλλως τε ποῦ παρ’ ἀγραμμάτοις βαρβάροις καὶ τέλεον ἀναλαφρήτοις ἀνάγνωσις καὶ γνῶσις τῶν ἐπὶ σοὶ ῥαψωδηθέντων ἐκείνων ἐπῶν  
οὐ νέμεσις Τρῶας καὶ εὐκνήμιδας Ἀχαιοὺς  
τοιγῆδ’ ἀμφὶ γυναικὶ πολὺν χρόνον ἄλγεα πάσχειν·  
αἰνῶς ἀθανάτησι θεαῖς εἰς ὧπα ἔοικεν;<sup>3</sup> (van Dieten 653, 94–3)

“After all how one could expect to find among these unlettered barbarians who are wholly illiterate, the ability to read and knowledge of those epic verses sung of you:

Small blame that Trojans and well-greaved Achaeans  
should for such a woman long time suffer woes;  
wondrously like is she to the immortal goddesses to look upon”

## 7. Marginal note in Vat. gr. 130, f. 265 (Mazzuchi 1995: 211)

5 Γυμνησίων ἔθιμα τὰ πρὸς τοὺς γάμους  
εἰ τοῖς καθ’ ἡμᾶς συντετήρητο χρόνοις  
κάγω πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἀσμένως ἐνηξάμην  
καὶ ταῦτα δυσθάλαττος ὦν πάντων πλέον  
καὶ τρίχα λευκὴν ὑπὸ τοῦ χρόνου φέρων.  
τὰ νυμφίων δ’ οὐκ ἂν πόθ’ εἰλόμην γέρα  
κὰν Τυναρίδος ἐπλέκοντο παστάδα.

If the nuptial customs of the *Gymnensi*  
was kept to our times

<sup>2</sup> The reference is probably to *Iliad*, 3.385. Cf. *Iliad*, 3.228 or *Odyssey*, 4.3. etc. Cf. Callistratus, *Descriptions*, no. 11: On the Statue of a Youth.

<sup>3</sup> *Iliad*, 3.156–58.

I would gladly join then  
even if I suffer from seasickness more than any other man  
and I have white hair by [the passing] time.  
But I would never receive the nuptial gifts  
even if they have prepared the bridal chamber for daughter of Tindaris (=Helen of Troy)

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