John Rutherford Kee

NARRATING THE BYZANTINE BORDER: WILDERNESS LANDSCAPE IN KEKAUMENOS AND *DIGENES AKRITES*

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization
in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies.

Central European University

Budapest

May 2019

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by

John Rutherford Kee

(United States of America)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,

Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements

of the Master of Arts degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Late Antique,

Medieval, and Renaissance Studies.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Chair, Examination Committee

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Thesis Supervisor

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Examiner

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External Reader

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External Supervisor

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I, the undersigned, **John Rutherford Kee**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 15 May 2019

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Abstract

Using conceptual tools from cultural geography and narratology, this thesis argues that Byzantine literature contains much more complex and substantive engagement with the spaces of the empire's periphery than has been recognized. It focuses on two texts which have always been acknowledged to display considerable interest in provincial life: the *Advice and Anecdotes* of Kekaumenos and the Grottaferrata version of *Digenes Akrites*. By adapting the rich cultural-geographic concept of "landscape" to the study of premodern narrative, however, this thesis demonstrates that their interest in the space of the borderlands is still deeper and richer than has been understood.

The argument proceeds in three stages. The first addresses the most "stereotyped" environment of all, the idyllic locale of the classical *locus amoenus*. It shows how *Digenes* plays on this space's associations with practical advice about the correct site for a military camp—relayed also by Kekaumenos—to integrate this motif into the wilderness of the frontier. The second explores how that wilderness is presented by Kekaumenos. It suggests that he combines narrative techniques from historiography with advice inherited from earlier military treatises to teach the unique perspective of an experienced general, the way such a commander "reads" the land. The final chapter treats *Digenes*'s wilderness in detail. It demonstrates how landscape there works in multiple ways—often in ones directly antithetical to Kekaumenos's—in order to define its protagonist as a heroic lone warrior, not a general.

In all these cases, this thesis suggests that landscape implicates more than simply terrain. It serves also as a means by which these texts to present larger, otherwise purely notional spaces, such as the imagined worlds of literary traditions or the imperial-political geography of the border. The thesis concludes by suggesting how this insight might be extended to the study of Byzantine literature more generally.

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On a more practical note, Zsuzsanna Reed patiently corrected several drafts—including patiently informing me of the sad demise of possessive singular *s'*.

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Table of contents

1 Introduction....1

1.1 Historical context....3

1.2 The two texts....6

1.3 Literature review....9

1.4 Methodology....11

1.5 The structure of the thesis....14

2 Landscape as a Form of Representation: Pleasant Places between *locus amoenus* and Military Camps....16

2.1 The "classical" *locus amoenus* in Achilles Tatius and the Grottaferrata *Digenes*....19

2.2 Pleasant places in practice in Kekaumenos....23

2.3 The Grottaferrata *Digenes*: Desire and warfare in the wilderness....27

2.4 Conclusion: To the border....33

3 Teaching a "Way of Seeing": Wilderness Landscape in Kekaumenos's Advice to a Border-Commander....35

3.1 The general's gaze as a "way of seeing"....37

3.2 Mountain passes and cognitive maps....43

3.3 Fortresses as landscapes of (potential) safety....47

3.4 Conclusion: Landscape as a way of thinking about the border....55

4 A Hero Named for the Frontier: Landscape in the service of Theme and Character in *Digenes Akrites*....60

4.1 Passes as theme in the "Lay of the Emir"....61

4.2 Digenes, dominance, and the characterizing function of space....68

4.3 Forested terrain and heroic narratives of combat....73

4.4 Competing visions of space in the fight for Digenes' camp....78

4.5 Conclusion: Remembering the lost landscape of the Anatolian frontier....81

5 Conclusion 88

6 Bibliography 94

6.1 Primary sources 94

6.2 Secondary sources 94

1 Introduction

This only I seek to learn from your lips

whether you are very eager to follow me,

so that we might come out of the mountain passes before daybreak.

For alley paths and narrow places are death to brave men

while on the plains cowards become bold.[1]

With these words the eponymous protagonist of the Byzantine poem *Digenes Akrites* attempts to persuade his beloved to jump from her father's window and elope. Digenes's strategy may well strike twenty-first century readers as strange: modern romantic heroes do not generally press their case by talking about topography. And few of us today readily associate passes with death and plains with bravery, at least at first glance. These verses thus point to the culturally- and historically-specific meaning of such places. Although the geological formations Digenes mentions indeed persist, their significance was very different for a Medieval Greek audience than it is for us. But this passage is no casual aside. It stands instead at a pivotal moment in this narrative of thousands of lines—right when the young lovers unite. The role of mountain passes at such a crucial point alerts us also to the literary importance of space. The particular cultural meaning of these places for the Byzantines shaped how Byzantine texts communicate.

This thesis explores how topography functions in two works of Medieval Greek literature: *Digenes Akrites*, composed probably in the twelfth or thirteenth century, and the slightly earlier *Advice and Anecdotes* of Kekaumenos. The kinds of terrain it will principally discuss are conveniently summarized in an earlier military treatise, in advice on where to set

[1] *Digenis Akritis*, 4.470-74. (Translation by Elizabeth Jeffreys, here and throughout, with occasional modifications.)

an ambush: "dense woods, valleys, steep hills, ravines, mountains extending almost up to the enemy battle line."[2] But though it analyzes topography that is tactically relevant and elucidates a peculiarly martial way of observing the environment, this thesis is not a work of military history. It is rather a literary and cultural historical investigation of two texts written about and for—and, at least in one case, by—members of Byzantium's military elite.

Though both well-known among Byzantinists, these texts have remained hard to interpret or classify; each is often treated as something of a hodgepodge. A central contention of this thesis is that attending to their presentations of space can help us understand how they operate as works of literature. But the particular spaces they represent matter too. Both these works are deeply concerned with the lands of the empire's provinces, and especially its borders. A second core argument of this thesis is that those literary depictions of terrain act as a means by which these texts think through what Byzantium meant as a political and cultural community at a time of profound imperial crisis. In both these ways, these representations are working as *landscape* in the rich sense intended by contemporary cultural geography. This way of approaching the physical environment, one that sees it as an interconnected whole inflected by power, has often been taken to be a unique development of the Western Renaissance. Against that old platitude, this thesis will identify lines of continuity, as well as points of divergence, between its Byzantine vision(s) of landscape and those previously claimed as distinctively modern. It thus contributes to the emerging research paradigm which seeks to understand premodern engagements with natural space.

The following introduction situates this argument by providing background on the following areas: the historical context of Byzantium in the eleventh century, the literary character of my two texts, the status of the "spatial turn" in Byzantine studies and related

[2] Maurice, *Strategikon*, bk. 4.1. (Translation by George T. Dennis.)

disciplines, and my particular approach to landscape. It finishes by offering a summary of subsequent chapters.

1.1 Historical context

By the middle of the seventh century, the greater part of the economic and political structures of the ancient Roman Empire had collapsed under the pressure of invasion in both Europe and Asia. Yet the imperial government in Constantinople never toppled, and by means of far-reaching administrative and military reorganization managed to retain its ties at least a functioning core of its former territory.[3] Essential to this restructured political geography were the new borderlands of central and western Anatolia, most prominently Cappadocia, which served as both the first line of defense for the empire's capital and as the nurturing ground for the emerging military aristocracy who staffed its armies. The heyday of the Caliphate saw almost yearly raids which devastated the formerly stable agricultural life of these regions and reduced settlement to scattered fortifications.[4] But as central power in Muslim lands faltered, this same region served as a staging ground for a remarkable change in fortunes. Led largely by that border elite which had spent generations fighting for and in its native region, from the ninth century Byzantine forces moved onto the offensive, initiating a reconquest that eventually extended across the Armenian highlands and upper Mesopotamia.[5] This renewed confidence in Asia bred new assertion in Europe, in which emperors, very often trained on warfare in the east, dismantled the First Bulgarian Empire and brought all the Balkans under Constantinople's control. By the middle of the eleventh century, the Byzantine imperial system stretched without interruption from the Adriatic to the Euphrates.[6]

This system was very far from a return to the Rome of old. The capital and the

[3] Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium*, 69–89; Haldon, *The Empire That Would Not Die*, 15–23.
[4] Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium*, 176–81; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 62–65.
[5] Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium*, 310–35; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 31–32, 78–85.
[6] Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium*, 374–90.

maintenance of a fiscal and military administration (now often combined)[7] loyal to the emperor were points of continuity. The last-surviving great city of the Greco-Roman world, Constantinople remained the indispensable center of both government and culture, an unavoidable destination for any provincial seeking a civilian career, whether secular or ecclesiastic. And unlike in the medieval West, there did survive state structures independent of the aristocracy, an apparatus capable of extracting wealth from the provinces to fund armies capable of swatting down any local challenges to the emperor's sovereignty. But even this system was nothing like the bureaucracy, with parallel chains of civil and military command and highly articulated ranks, of late antiquity.[8] Indeed, as long as they paid their taxes and lip service to the *basileus*, the major landowners even of the inner provinces could often run local affairs as they liked, checked more by each other than by distant, and disinterested, Constantinople.[9]

Further afield, in the newly conquered regions of eastern Anatolia and the northern and western Balkans, Byzantium's footprint was lighter still. The incorporation of these areas tended to proceed by straightforward cooptation of local elites, in which minor independent lords, often of Armenian, Georgian, or Slavic linguistic background, traded their claims to sovereignty for the security and guaranteed income of a place in the imperial hierarchy.[10] There, the impact of the central state was often limited to the installation of a general and his troop contingent to fortified points scattered strategically across the countryside. The number and presence of such figures increased in wartime and decreased in peace, but all further Byzantine control, such as it was, flowed from their activities. The regular cycling in and out of such commanders prevented them from developing any deep local ties that might tempt them to break away, but, by the same token, kept them continual strangers to the territory

[7] Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 84.
[8] Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium*, 98–125.
[9] Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950-1100*, 1–4.
[10] Holmes, "Byzantium's Eastern Frontier in the Tenth and the Eleventh Century," 96; Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of Muslim-Turkish Anatolia*, 53–56.

under their command. In these lands, the "empire" was a very uncertain entity even in the best of times.[11]

The final stage of Byzantium's eastward expansion was the absorption of the Armenian client kingdoms of Ani and Kars in 1045 and 1065, respectively.[12] Yet by the time of the latter, a process had already begun which would end with the utter collapse of the imperial state in Asia Minor. From the middle of the eleventh century, Turkic-speaking nomads from Central Asia, of greater or lesser loyalty to the Seljuk Sultanate, embarked on a series of raids deep into Constantinople's Anatolian dominions. Matched by renewed steppe-nomadic incursions in the Balkans, this crisis—or rather, perhaps, the Byzantine elite's disunity in the face of it—brought these raiders to the shores of the Bosporus by the reign of Alexios I Komnenos in the early 1080s. At the initiative of both invading warriors and newly entrepreneurial former officials, numerous independent lordships sprang up to fill the ensuing vacuum; by the twelfth century these had coalesced into a handful of major principalities, the most important based in Konya/Iconium.[13] And although Alexios and his successors launched a project of reform that stabilized the empire in Europe and regained at least the westernmost Asian dominions, the old inner Anatolian heartlands of Middle Byzantium's military aristocracy were never regained. Cappadocia became a memory; the Cilician Gates and the Euphrates, points Byzantine armies ventured only in alliance with Western crusaders.[14] The processes that would turn one of the longest holdouts of the Roman Empire into Turkey had already begun.

[11] Holmes, "Byzantium's Eastern Frontier in the Tenth and the Eleventh Century," 97–98.
[12] Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of Muslim-Turkish Anatolia*, 35.
[13] Beihammer, 209–23.
[14] Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 94–96.

1.2 The two texts

This history of imperial success followed by sudden collapse is implicated in both my texts, but in very particular—and particularly interesting—ways. The *Advice and Anecdotes* of Kekaumenos was written, as it were, in the midst of the crisis. As Charlotte Roueché has shown, this document draws its form from the transcultural admonitory tradition and its content from the author's surprisingly wide reading, personal experience, and family lore.[15] Phrased as a father's advice to his sons, the resulting work offers guidance on all aspects of life as a provincial aristocrat in eleventh-century Byzantium. This idiosyncratic mix of rules for conduct and exemplary tales is notable for its simple, lively style, which seems to capture something like a spoken Byzantine *koine*.[16] Even more, however, it seems to offer insight onto the world and opinions of a non-metropolitan social group rarely represented in Byzantine literature. Though the text of the sole manuscript is incomplete and certainly confused, the main body of the work falls into a series of discrete sections, offering advice to a civil official, a general, a private landowner, an emperor, an independent local ruler, and an aristocratic caught up in a coup.

In these sections, the chronological settings of its anecdotes range across the first three-quarters of the eleventh century, with a strong concentration toward the later part of the period. One dates the work to the later 1070s, and another laments the defections of populations in the border regions to the Seljuk sultan.[17] At least in part, then, this text is a direct contemporary witness to the emergency engulfing Byzantium in the late eleventh century. But, like contemporary witnesses of all eras, the author does not seem entirely aware of the extent of the changes through which he was living. The absence of the original preface makes any definitive statements about how Kekaumenos conceived of his project impossible.

[15] For detailed background on this author, see the Introduction in Roueché, *Kekaumenos,* Consilia et Narrationes. I have used Roueché's text and translation throughout, the latter with modifications.
[16] Horrocks, *Greek*, 262–64.
[17] Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 72.13, 18.18-24. See Roueché's commentary especially.

But in his advice to a general, Kekaumenos repeatedly references, as an ongoing concern, tenth- and eleventh-century institutions—most notably, that of the border commander, or *akrites*—rendered obsolete by the collapse of the 1070s and abandoned in subsequent Komnenian reforms. In its attempt to provide rules for life to a provincial military commander, this work offers a unique account of conditions on the borderlands in its immediately preceding period. But those *realia* may not have survived even the author's lifetime.[18]

In Kekaumenos, the loss of Byzantine Anatolia is mentioned but perhaps too present to fully register. For the considerably later *Digenes Akrites*, however, that loss is never directly acknowledged and yet pervades the text. Variously classified as epic or romance or some inchoate combination of both forms, this poem narrates the origins and adventures of its titular character, a folk-hero of those eastern borderlands.[19] The surviving manuscripts of the text range in language from a *koine* slightly less formal than Kekaumenos's to true late-medieval vernacular, and in date from ca. 1300 into the Ottoman period. The relationship between the different versions—and especially the relative priority between the two oldest, conventionally named for the libraries of Grottaferrata (G) and the Escorial (E)—remains contested. Yet all undoubtedly derive from an endeavor to compile and record originally oral material that had developed and circulated over the centuries' of the empire's eastward advance.[20] It tells the story of a "Frontiersman of Double-Descent," as translated by Elizabeth Jeffreys, the preternaturally strong and daring offspring of a converted Arab emir and his Byzantine aristocratic wife. The first three books of the poem recount the (initially rocky) union of these two, while the remaining five relate the exploits of their son as he builds and defends a life for himself in the wilds of the Euphrates border.

The question of *Digenes*'s origins is conditioned by two contradictory facts. The first

[18] Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 65–66.
[19] Angold, "The Poem of Digenes Akrites," 71.
[20] Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, 1998, xviii–xxx.

is that the poem, in all its versions, unquestionably records memories of the life and history of Middle Byzantine communities of the Anatolian frontiers. The second is that, in all the versions, these memories are so overlaid and intermixed as to reliably reflect no specific events, or even specific century, at all.[21] The text we have is thus best approached not as a historical document but as a Byzantine case of the much larger medieval phenomenon of "romancing the past," a tendency also observed in both the Latin West and Muslim lands. Across western Eurasia, the eleventh and twelfth centuries seem to have witnessed a drive to set into writing heroic tales of the early Middle Ages, including, on both sides, deeds of early battles between the armies of Christianity and Islam.[22]

Although nothing is certain, a plausible case can been made that, for *Digenes*, this process occurred at some point in the mid-1100s, possibly under the sponsorship of the imperial court. If it did exist, among the surviving texts this twelfth-century poem may well have mostly closely resembled that of the Grottaferrata recension, the earliest attested, which shows clear affinities to "high" Byzantine literature.[23] Due to constraints of time and space, this thesis will focus on that version. But though a twelfth-century dating and the precedence of the G text for *Digenes* overall are certainly convenient for my argument, the latter does not depend on the former. If necessary, all my analyses can apply equally to the narrow late-thirteenth or early fourteenth-century context for the production of this particular manuscript. One way or another, the story of this hero of Byzantium's eastern Anatolian frontier was inspiring literary production among the wider Greek-speaking community long after that frontier had ceased to exist.

[21] Jeffreys, xxx–xli; Jouanno, "Digenis Akritis, the Two-Blood Border Lord," 262–67.
[22] Agapitos, "From Persia to the Provence," 155. The term is from Spiegel, *Romancing the Past*.
[23] For concise overviews of these issues, see Jeffreys, "The Afterlife of 'Digenes Akrites,'" 145–49; Angold, "The Poem of Digenes Akrites," 72–74.

1.3 Literature review

Together, my texts are virtually unique in the Byzantine literature of the central Middle Ages for presenting the perspective from the empire's periphery—especially, one that is largely unconcerned with doings in Constantinople. Each has thus long been used, separately or in conjunction with other sources, by historians of all stripes; of these studies, those of military and administrative history are most relevant for this thesis.[24] More relevantly, the particular cultural connection between Kekaumenos and *Digenes Akrites* was noticed decades ago in a short but distinguished series of publications which compared the two for evidence of the *mentalité* of provincial society.[25] The last of these articles, by Catia Galatariotou, prefigures my own investigation in interpreting the two from the point of view of "space." But while Galatariotou understands this term as a psychological or structuralist category informing every element of each work, my own argument concerns something much more concrete: how the two texts present the physical environment of their settings, the lands of the empire's borders.

In addressing landscape in this quite literal way, this thesis participates in the new scholarly movement that seeks to investigate Medieval Greek conceptions of space and nature. Byzantinists are increasingly recognizing that the latter are not straightforward objective givens but have culturally-specific histories worthy of research in their own right. In joining this broader "spatial turn" in the humanities, their efforts are paralleled and preceded by work on texts from classical antiquity and the Western and Islamic Middle Ages.[26] Within the last decade numerous monographs and collections of essays have appeared interpreting ancient means of constructing and representing space, including three

[24] For a good synthesis of this research: Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*.
[25] Ševčenko, "Constantinople Viewed from the Eastern Provinces"; Magdalino, "Honour among Romaioi"; Galatariotou, "Open Space / Closed Space," 1996.
[26] Though by now incredibly diverse, the unifying aim of all such work is to employ spatially-inflected concepts developed in sociology and human geography to open up new questions for humanists. For a good introduction to the research agenda beyond premodern western Eurasia, see Warf and Arias, *The Spatial Turn*.

volumes dedicated to Greek literature in particular.[27] Western medievalists made a somewhat earlier start, with a groundbreaking 1973 study of landscape in text and image followed up by research employing a wide range of spatial methodologies since the turn of the millennium.[28] Their work is now joined by studies of the medieval spatial imagination from across the Islamic world—literally, from the Sahel to Central Asia—even further afield, into Sanskrit Kashmir, opening up particularly interesting comparative perspectives.[29]

Within Byzantine studies, this spatially-minded research program has manifested itself in several ways. As frequent objects of the intense, formalized mode of description known as *ekphrasis*, the narrow topic of gardens has long been a subject of interest, often from a directly literary point of view.[30] Studies of rural life and settlement structure, grounded in archeology, have become more and more common, often with a focus on individual regions.[31] Particularly important for me is A. Asa Eger's work on the Byzantine-Islamic frontier.[32] Further, this settlement-centric perspective, originally focused on material culture, is now being integrated into the reading of texts via Myrto Veikou's ongoing project on the "lived spaces" of Middle Byzantine hagiography.[33] Equally importantly, expanding on previous work in art history—most notably that of Henry Maguire—the cultural geographer Veronica della Dora has identified a consistent Orthodox Christian view of landscape

[27] Examples include Purves, *Space and Time in Ancient Greek Narrative*; de Jong, *Space in Ancient Greek Literature*; Geus and Thiering, *Common Sense Geography and Mental Modelling*; Gilhuly and Worman, *Space, Place, and Landscape in Ancient Greek Literature and Culture*; Kosmin, *The Land of the Elephant Kings*; McInerney and Sluiter, *Valuing Landscape in Classical Antiquity*.

[28] E.g. Pearsall and Salter, *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World*; Howes, *Place, Space, and Landscape in Medieval Narrative*; Kelly, *The Hero's Place*; Cassidy-Welch, "Space and Place in Medieval Contexts"; Stock and Vöhringer, *Spatial Practices*.

[29] de Moraes Farias, "Local Landscapes and Constructions of World Space"; Cooper, *The Medieval Nile*; Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam*; Azad, *Sacred Landscape in Medieval Afghanistan*; Kaul, *The Making of Early Kashmir*.

[30] Littlewood, "Romantic Paradises"; Maguire, "A Description of the Aretai Palace and Its Garden"; Barber, "Reading the Garden in Byzantium"; Littlewood, Maguire, and Wolschke-Bulmahn, *Byzantine Garden Culture*; Bodin and Hedlung, *Byzantine Gardens and Beyond*.

[31] Gregory, "Narrative of the Byzantine Landscape"; Decker, "Frontier Settlement and Economy in the Byzantine East"; Veikou, *Byzantine Epirus*; Cooper and Decker, *Life and Society in Byzantine Cappadocia*; Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*; Sarris, "Beyond the Great Plains and the Barren Hills"; Niewohner, *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia*.

[32] Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*.

[33] Veikou, "Space in Texts and Space as Text."

stretching from late antiquity across medieval Byzantium.[34] Her methodological reflections have been especially valuable for my own.[35] Finally, in the domain of secular literature, a new environmental consciousness has entered the study of Byzantine vernacular romance with the introduction of "ecocriticism."[36] The most extensive of these interventions is Adam Goldwyn's monograph, which indeed devotes a chapter to *Digenes*.[37]

1.4 Methodology

Though it takes inspiration in one way or another from all of these predecessors, my own reading of Kekaumenos and *Digenes Akrites* stands out for its literary analysis of a secular, specifically military approach to landscape. My argument employs that latter term in a technical sense. One of the most productive geographic concepts of the twentieth century, by 2008 the umbrella category of "landscape" encompassed so many, often contradictory formulations that critics were tempted to question whether the term any longer meant anything at all.[38] Taking a step back, however, we can see that the vast majority of conceptualizations share two crucial features. First, landscape concerns how human beings shape and give meaning to land. That is, landscape is never nature independent of culture, but always the physical environment as it is used, perceived, or represented—most often, all three together—by human agents and observers. It connects both sides of any culture/ nature or subject/ object divide. Second, landscape is always extensive and manifold, containing multiple, connected constituent parts. While certainly necessary for it, discrete entities—whether trees, forests, rocks, fields, or mountains, regardless of their size—never make a landscape, so long as they are taken separately. Rather, their interrelationship does, whether

[34] Maguire, *Earth and Ocean*; Maguire, *Nectar and Illusion*; della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*.
[35] Most importantly in della Dora, "Topia."
[36] Goldwyn, "Towards a Byzantine Ecocriticism"; Stewart, "Literary Landscapes in the Palaiologan Romances."
[37] Goldwyn, *Byzantine Ecocriticism*.
[38] DeLue, "Elusive Landscape and Shifting Grounds," 9–10. For a concise introduction to the history of the topic, see Wylie, *Landscape*.

that interrelationship depends on a painter's gaze, an inhabitant's routine, or a gardener's design.

Landscape's most sophisticated apologists have all put this propensity to serve as an intermediary, often in oblique and surprising ways, at the center of their defense of the concept. As David Matless has put it, the term "carries a relational hybridity, always already natural and cultural, deep and superficial" and thus can act as "delicate shuttle, weaving through matters often held apart."[39] More pointedly, John Wylie has claimed that landscape's very wealth of potential contradictions makes it useful, argue that overall the category might "best be thought of as a series of tensions: tensions between distance and proximity, observing and inhabiting, eye and land, culture and nature; these tensions animate the landscape concept, make it cogent and productive."[40] An important goal of this thesis is to explicate a "landscape concept" particular to the Byzantine military aristocracy, this community's characteristic way of interpreting natural topography while on campaign. In the spirit of Wylie's remark, it will contend that this version of landscape hangs midway between the tensions of several prominent analytic strands. Like the Marxian art-historical approach of Denis Cosgrove, this is landscape as a "way of seeing," a historically-specific mode of perception—but the perception of an involved participant, not an isolated observer.[41] Like the Darwinian, phenomenological method of Tim Ingold, it involves space as the encompassing surrounds of an "agent-in-its-environment"—but an agent facing strange and hostile environments, rather than harmoniously "dwelling."[42] Like the archeological surveys of W. G. Hoskins, it seeks an unequivocally pre-modern engagement with land—but one that has left its marks in texts rather than on the earth itself.

[39] Matless, "Section 4 Introduction: The Properties of Landscape," 231.
[40] Wylie, *Landscape*, 216.
[41] Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, 1; Cosgrove, "Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea," 46. Cosgrove adapted the term from Berger, *Ways of Seeing*.
[42] Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 173.

The previous formulation of the concept most relevant to my own is that W. J. T. Mitchell outlined in his volume *Landscape and Power*.[43] It is useful both for its forthright acknowledgement that landscape in varying forms existed at all historical periods, and for its concept of landscape as representation encapsulating much broader structures of political and cultural authority. But Mitchell's most important sources are visual, and my argument intends to take seriously that it is analyzing texts, narrative texts especially. In contrast to many investigations of literary landscape, it thus does not confine itself to, or even deal primarily with, dedicated descriptions—the textual equivalent of landscape painting.[44] Leaving aesthetics largely aside, it focuses instead on how coherent topographies emerge in the course of forward-moving narration.[45] Using ideas from narratology, especially as developed Marie-Laure Ryan's work on "immersion", it argues that such subordinate spatial markers, though easily dismissed as mere backdrops for action, are just as meaningful as the most lushly lingering descriptions.[46]

Equally important, but at a much broader level, my approach aims to take on-board the substantial advances made in understanding how texts interact with their contexts since *Landscape and Power*'s first publication in 1994. Scholars of all cultural disciplines, geography medieval, and Byzantine studies included, have increasingly recognized that representations are not inert reflections of their worlds but active interventions into them.[47] By representing space in a certain way within its narrative, a work of literature is also reshaping or seeking to reshape the culture—and therefore the space—beyond it. Rather than reading them as straight transcriptions of a static worldview or ideology, then, my analysis thus always asks what my texts are *doing* with landscape. It examines how their literary

[43] Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*.
[44] The connection is sometimes drawn explicitly, e.g., Siddall, *Landscape and Literature*, 9.
[45] In this my approach differs from the chronologically broad but avowedly aesthetic one of Fitter, *Poetry, Space, Landscape*.
[46] Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*.
[47] Dewsbury et al., "Enacting Geographies," 438; Stock and Vöhringer, *Spatial Practices*, 9; Veikou, "'Telling spaces' in Byzantium," 16.

landscape takes part in a dynamic communication between author, audience, and (at least their ideas about) the lands of the Byzantine frontier.

1.5 The structure of the thesis

Picking up on a suggestion of Mitchell's, the consistent argument of this thesis is that landscape in Kekaumenos and *Digenes* is always doing something more simply introducing space into the text—though it is certainly also doing that. Landscape is, instead, a core means, and the perhaps *the* core means, by which these texts engage the larger, otherwise purely notional spaces that are essential to their literary purposes: the Byzantine frontier and, for *Digenes*, the urbane world of the Hellenistic (and Komnenian) novel. The first main chapter serves as an extended introduction to this argument, outlining first Mitchell's theoretical stance and then the ways in which the Grottaferrata *Digenes* uses restful, pleasant waterside environments to link the wilds of the frontier to the erotically-charged *locus amoenus* of the ancient novels.

The remaining chapters investigate that wilderness in depth. The second body chapter investigates a tightly-interlinked series of passages in Kekaumenos's advice to a general (his "*strategikon*" in the narrow sense) which provide guidance to a border-commander. It demonstrates how Kekaumenos fuses substantive instructions drawn both from military treatise (or *taktika*) tradition with narrative techniques taken from historiography in order to focus on *how* a competent general perceives terrain—in particular, forests and mountain passes. This "way of seeing" landscape serves as the most concrete level of a broader way of thinking about the border as a geographic entity whose communication is, I suggest, a central goal of these passages.

Presenting that frontier is even more important to the literary endeavor of *Digenes.* My final main chapter thus discusses how wilderness landscape gives shape to the broader

space of the borderlands in this text. It demonstrates how passes and forests act as thematically important markers in the two major sections of the poem, centered on Digenes's father and Digenes himself respectively. In the latter especially, the precise means by which topography is introduced in scenes of combat (enemies jumping "out of bushes") serves to construct Digenes as a martial hero in a very particular way: as a supernaturally gifted but solitary warrior who triumphs not because of careful planning but despite the complete lack of it. This vision of landscape, almost antithetical to Kekaumenos's, underlines the romantic, nostalgic way in which *Digenes* imagines the frontier.

The thesis concludes, finally, by considering how the Byzantine visions of landscape it has outlined might be brought into deeper conversation with the cultural-geographic approaches from which it took inspiration. It ends by suggesting avenues for further research.

2 Landscape as a Form of Representation: Pleasant Places between *locus amoenus* and Military Camps

Taking the Grottaferrata *Digenes Akrites* and Kekaumenos as case studies, this chapter shows how the approach outlined in my Introduction can provide new insights into the best-researched Byzantine landscapes of all: gardens. The latter are indeed among the most extensively studied spaces in Byzantine culture overall, having inspired a series of articles and two collected volumes over the last several decades.[48] Gardens in literature have been a particular focus of this work, which took off from the romance tradition but has now branched out to include an impressive range of texts and genres, both secular and religious.[49] In this, modern interest partly follows medieval. Gardens served as the only environment to become a standard subject of ekphrasis; the very breadth of their dispersal in Byzantine literature is something of a testament to the unity of the latter's constituent traditions, underwritten by an educational system that made the handling of such motifs a central aim.[50]

The very productivity of garden ekphraseis as research subjects may, however, have led to a certain myopia regarding the appearance of other forms of landscape in Byzantine texts.[51] Furthermore, the chronological extent of that ekphrasistic tradition, combined with the imitative nature of much Byzantine literary production, has at times created the impression that such garden descriptions were mere topoi, "derived almost complete from

[48] See section 1.3 for more; an important additional recent contribution is della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*, chap. 3.

[49] Littlewood, "Romantic Paradises"; Barber, "Reading the Garden in Byzantium"; Dolezal and Mavroudi, "Theodore Hyrtakenos' Description of the Garden of St. Anna and the Ekphrasis of Gardens"; Bodin, "Paradise in a Cave"; Demoen, "A Homeric Garden in Tenth-Century Constantinople"; Nilsson, "Nature Controlled by Artistry."

[50] On the use of ekphrasis and other *progymnasmata* in education from antiquity, see Webb, "The Progymnasmata as Practice."

[51] A consequence of this may be seen in the fact that the introduction of "ecocriticism" into Byzantine studies has chosen to focus on these spaces: Goldwyn, *Byzantine Ecocriticism*, 23–25, 30–32; Stewart, "Literary Landscapes in the Palaiologan Romances," 273.

antiquity"—a suggestion that has been made for *Digenes* directly.[52] This chapter, in contrast, will leave the (fascinating but well-studied) literary functions of ekphrasis aside, and instead seek to understand how such places operate as landscape, as the representation of a specific type of environment.[53] By doing so, it will show that at least in *Digenes* even the most apparently conservative descriptions of garden-like environments implicate specifically medieval views of the frontier wilderness. These two kinds of environments are, moreover, much more intimately linked than has been recognized. Examined with due attention to their function as landscape, those idyllic, garden-like environments emerge as only the most prominent example of a broader environmental type. Defined by trees, grass, and water and associated with rest, this type included both the classical topos of the *locus amoenus* and the most practical frontier watering holes—a connection which is intelligently exploited in the Grottaferrata *Digenes*.

To make this argument, this chapter makes use of two aspects of the concept of landscape as presented by W. J. T. Mitchell. First is that landscape can serve as something like "a medium of cultural expression" in its own right. That is, even before they are transmitted onward by further representation in image or text, for any given observer, physical environments (concrete or imagined) *themselves* act similarly to representations. They are locations "in which cultural meanings are encoded, whether they are *put* there by the physical transformation of place … or *found* in a place formed, as we say, 'by nature.'"[54] Second is that, as such a mediating term, landscape always articulates the joints not only between nature and culture but between multiple cultural claims as well: "landscape *circulates* as a medium of exchange, a site of visual appropriation, a focus for the formation

[52] Gregory, "Narrative of the Byzantine Landscape," 483–84. The quoted remark concerns the garden-like camp at the beginning of Book 6.
[53] For a recent introduction to the scholarship on ekphrasis, with intriguing suggestions on how they create space in particular, see Veikou, "'Telling spaces' in Byzantium."
[54] Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," 14.

of identity."[55] As we will see, though our appropriations are textual rather than visual, all three of these functions are very much present in *Digenes Akrites* and Kekaumenos.

Landscape, I will argue, serves as a mechanism by which texts are held together, both across traditions and within individual works. I demonstrate both aspects in my first section, which reexamines the two most prominent passages of landscape description of *Digenes*—both dealing with gardens or garden-like spaces—in light of the longstanding topos of the *locus amoenus* and these descriptions' specific ancient model. Though these passages have been cited as instances of Byzantine literature's heavy-handed use of the classics, they in fact demonstrate interesting adaptation of their material, repurposing inherited topographical features to integrate these places into the poem's larger, violent world. Next I use Kekaumenos to explore the practical, military value of the kinds of waterside environments that underlie the *locus amoenus*. In this work, landscape has a different textual function, serving as part of the assumed store of shared common knowledge that draws author and audience together. In the third section, I return to *Digenes* with this military landscape tradition in mind. Wilderness sites that unite *locus amoenus* and practical resting points recur throughout the Grottaferrata poem's central books, and prove essential for joining this version's principal themes of warfare and love. In the end, the examination of these places not only proves the potential liveliness and flexibility of even apparently staid landscape motifs, but also makes an excellent introduction to the literary presentation of frontier wilderness which is this thesis's principal theme.

[55] Mitchell, "Introduction," 2.

2.1 The "classical" *locus amoenus* in Achilles Tatius and the Grottaferrata *Digenes*

Perhaps the twentieth century's definitive treatment of ancient and medieval literary landscape appeared in Ernst Robert Curtius's *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*.[56] Curtius devoted the tenth chapter of his monumental study to the *locus amoenus*—a verdant landscape of flowing water, blooming vegetation, sheltering trees, tranquility and ease.[57] From Homeric origins Curtius followed the fortunes of this idyllic *topos* through Hellenistic and late antique literature, by which later period, it had, in his view, come to serve as "the principal motif of all nature description."[58] Though in its developed form the *locus amoenus* became the canvas for elaborate rhetorical display, the basic recipe remained simple: "It is … a beautiful, shaded natural site. Its minimum ingredients comprise a tree (or several trees), a meadow, and a spring or brook. Birdsong and flowers may be added."[59]

Curtius did not follow this tradition's Greek legacy much after the division of the Empire.[60] But as Elizabeth Jeffreys has noted, two fine examples in Byzantine literature occur in the Grottaferrata *Digenes*, whose sixth and seventh books each begin with sumptuous descriptions of the gardens in which the protagonist resides.[61] Each is formed by the conjunction of a lush meadow and a sheltering grove, fed by cool flowing water—and well supplied with the optional birds and flowers. The description in Book 7, describing Digenes' permanent home, is longer and more developed. The passage is introduced by allusion to the water's source in the Euphrates, whose purity and freshness are assured by its own source in Paradise; here, the emphasis is on the grove (ἄλσος), which is—crucially, as we will see, walled in. That in Book 6 begins rather with the meadow (λειμών), in which

[56] Ganim, "Landscape and Late Medieval Literature: A Critical Geography," xvi–ii.
[57] Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 186.
[58] Curtius, 195.
[59] Curtius, 195.
[60] Curtius said farewell to the East with a brief nod to Nonnus: Curtius, 195.
[61] Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, n.d., 153.

Digenes and his wife pitch their tent in one luxurious May. But all three of Curtius's essential ingredients—ἄλσος, λειμών, and ὕδωρ, in those words—are equally present in each.[62]

Jeffreys has identified classical antecedents for these sections in two passages of Achilles Tatius' *Leukippe and Kleitophon*. The influence is extensive and undeniable: phrases are adopted word for word, or only minimally refitted to make prose into meter. Those eye-catching details—the birds and flowers—are in particular taken over virtually whole cloth.[63] But viewed as a whole, the use of Achilles Tatius by the Grottaferrata recension—or by the reception tradition in which the latter's composer/compiler was working—is a rather more sophisticated act of appropriation.[64] As Jeffrey notes, there are two passages in *Leukippe and Kleitophon* which the two *Digenes* passages draw from. The first, in the opening pages, describes a meadow (λειμών) in an ekphrasis of a painted *Europa and the Bull*.[65] The second, toward the end of the first book, recounts a meeting of the lovers in a garden, which is called a grove (ἄλσος).[66] Although the λειμών is interspersed with stands of trees and the ἄλσος thickly flowered, neither word appears in the passage of the other.[67] In blending these descriptions, then, the Grottaferrata version (perhaps drawing on earlier compilations) make free use of the ancient material. In the selection of details, some thought even seems to have been given to maintaining consistency in the imagined realia of the two new gardens.[68]

[62] Jeffreys, 6.15-27, 7.11-31. All citations to *DA* are given with book and line number and, unless otherwise noted, refer to the Grottaferrata text. I have used Jeffreys's translation with occasional modifications.

[63] For an example of the former, Περὶ τὸ ἄλσος τεῖχος ἦν αὔταρκες μὲν εἰς ὕψος (*DA* 7.15) / περὶ τὸ ἄλσος τειχίον ἦν αὔταρκες εἰς ὕψος (*L&C*, 1.15.1). For one of the latter, see the birds, e.g. οἱ κύκνοι ἐν τοῖς ὕδασι τὴν νομὴν ἐποιοῦντο (*DA* 6.24) / ὁ κύκνος περὶ τὰς τῶν ὑδάτων πίδακας νεμόμενος (*L&C* 1.15.8). I have used the text in Achilles Tatius, *Leukippe and Kleitophon*, ed. Vilborg, accessed via the TLG.

[64] Jeffreys notes that the material from *Leukippe and Kleitophon* may well have come via at least one intermediary: Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, n.d., xlv–vi. I use "Grottaferrata poet" as a shorthand for whoever (singular or plural) is responsible for giving this recension its markedly "higher" and more classicizing form as compared to the Escorial.

[65] Achilles Tatius, *Leukippe and Kleitophon*, bks. 1.1.3-6.

[66] Achilles Tatius, bk. 1.15.

[67] When the lovers start conversing shortly after the later passage, a peacock's tail is compared to a λειμών: Achilles Tatius, bk. 1.16.3.

[68] Without knowing how much of *L&K* was available to the G. poet, strong claims are impossible. But it is interesting that while most of the details in both *DA* passages stem from *L&K* 1.15, the water in each case flows through the meadow as in *L&K* 1.1. In the later passage, the water bubbles up directly into an artificial basin—appropriate neither for a wilderness campsite nor a canal off the Euphrates: *Digenis Akritis*, 6.19, 7.30; Achilles

But the appropriation goes considerably farther. In Achilles Tatius, ἄλσος always has its classical meaning of "grove," a usage that can extend to any sacred precinct, and highlights enclosure and separation from the outside world.[69] Both of the novel's gardens are walled. Yet the first of *Digenes*'s is not—it is a temporary campsite in the wilderness; the lines describing the hero's arrival to this location are virtually the only in the passage *not* derived from the novel.[70] Moreover, it is precisely its ἄλσος that links this space to the dangers of the wild. As they are trying to enjoy their idyllic campground, Digenes and his wife are disturbed when "Look! A fearsome lion came out of the grove."[71] Both the situation and its description immediately recall another episode, at the end of Book 4, when a lion comes "out from the grove"—again, ἐκ τοῦ ἄλσους—to terrify the attendants of the visiting emperor.[72] Digenes, naturally, quickly disposes of both—indeed, these are only two in a series of scenes in which opponents emerge "out of" surrounding vegetation to initiate scenes of chase or combat, with predictable results.[73]

Digenes' mastery of the hunt and the related ambush tactics of much Byzantine warfare is essential to his character and status—he is, in part, the superhuman embodiment of a frontier aristocratic ethos.[74] Chapter 4 will study how landscape helps articulate this portrayal in greater detail. What matters now is that this rough and rural code of martial prowess is vastly distant from the urbane, antique world of *Leukippe and Kleitophon*. It is landscape that serves as the linking term. Viewed from its antecedents, the ἄλσος in *Digenes* shifts with little warning between the secluded grove of romance and the hunting thicket of

Tatius, *Leukippe and Kleitophon*, bks. 1.1.4, 1.15.6. For a less charitable view of G.'s abilities, cf. Dyck, "On Digenes Akrites , Grottaferrata Version, Book 6," 368.

[69] Liddell et al., *The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. ἄλσος. The word occurs twice elsewhere, as the quiet setting for C.'s own narration (1.2) and at a shrine (8.6).

[70] Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, 6.15-17. Lines 6.19-20 stem from *L&K.* 1.1.5, *DA* 6.21-27 (with order slightly rearranged) from *L&K* 1.15.7-8.

[71] ἰδού, λέων φοβερὸς ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ τοῦ ἄλσους: *Digenis Akritis*, 6.91. The lion is the second interloper (after a δράκων), but the first to come explicitly from the woods, attacking as D.'s wife moves toward the trees (6.89-90).

[72] λέων τις ἐκ τοῦ ἄλσους / ἐξελθὼν διεπτόησε τοὺς μετ' αὐτοῦ παρόντας: *Digenis Akritis*, 4.1066-7.

[73] Such scenes are discussed in detail in my chapter 4, section 3.

[74] Goldwyn, *Byzantine Ecocriticism*, 57.

frontier-heroic wilderness. But considered on its own, as a single feature in its own narrative, the ἄλσος unites both functions, to new effects—the abrupt transition from languorous pleasure to mortal danger becomes a source of thrill.

Paul Magdalino has noted the wide popularity of Achilles Tatius in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: his novel was widespread enough to appear even in such peripheral provincial libraries as that of Eustathios Boilas.[75] What that ἄλσος did, I suggest, was to give the composer of the Grottaferrata recension a means to write the refined prestige of that master stylist and the Hellenistic tradition he represented into (what must have been) the oral-epic material of the original akritic songs.[76] To use the contemporary narratological term, they serve as the joint by which the "storyworlds" of the ancient novel and frontier folktale were combined.[77] The mere fact that a medieval poet would want to accomplish such a interweaving, and all it entailed—making the *locus amoenus* also a place of threat, evoking the gardens of the ancient Mediterranean in the wilds of medieval Anatolia—proves by itself that this topos had more creative potential than Curtius gave it credit.[78] But it also shows that the poet/compiler of *Digenes*, at least in its Grottaferrata version, had in interest in exploring the poetic potential of landscape outside strict fidelity to his models. That interest, I will argue, involved more than simply the interweaving of divergent registers of fictional narrative—it encompassed ongoing traditions of practice, specifically military practice, as well. It is to those traditions, and the literary modes that accompanied them, that I now turn.

[75] Magdalino, "Digenes Akrites and Byzantine Literature: The Twelfth-Century Background to the Grottaferrata Version," 5.
[76] On this as the overarching project of *Digenes*, especially G., see Beaton, *The Medieval Greek Romance*, 44–45; Magdalino, "Honour among Romaioi," 190; Angold, "The Poem of Digenes Akrites," 72.
[77] On "storyworlds," see Ryan, "Space," 2.1(d).
[78] The "tension" is noted by Jouanno, "Digenis Akritis, the Two-Blood Border Lord," 269.

2.2 Pleasant places in practice in Kekaumenos

Why the peoples of the Mediterranean basin might particularly favor shade, soft grass, and fresh water has never seemed to require much explanation: a walk on a hot day conclusively demonstrates the appeal.[79] That very self-evidence—a self-evidence which ultimately marks a continuity between the ancients' landscape sensibility and our own—may indeed have seemed to obviate the need to interpret such places when they appear in nonfiction texts. Yet not doing so risks ignoring the fundamentally similar value and function of these environments across different types of narrative. A fertile, shady river riverbank is always a place of at least potential ease and comfort; the landscape itself bears this association, even outside the specifically literary tradition of the *locus amoenus*. To see how the cultural meaning of such locations could operate in texts when not employed as a self-conscious motif, we turn now to the *Advice and Anecdotes* of Kekaumenos.

Charlotte Roueché has warned against imagining this author to have been naïve. The text contains evidence of both formal education and varied reading—and, as we saw with Boilas, provincial origins and outlook in no way rule out familiarity even with Achilles Tatius.[80] But especially when it comes to landscape, Kekaumenos is writing in a very different tradition. The books he most promotes, aside from Scripture, deal with military matters. Whether in history or *taktika*, the purpose of reading is eminently practical: to prepare oneself to out-strategize one's enemies.[81] For that latter goal securing adequate resting places is more than a luxury. Kekaumenos repeatedly emphasizes the importance of

[79] Curtius noted the *locus amoenus*' practical origins for "the man of the South": Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 186.

[80] For the author's sources—including florilegia and military, religious, and historical, texts—as well as engagement in the intellectual currents of the eleventh century, Charlotte Roueché, "The Literary Background of Kekaumenos," in *Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. Catherine Holmes and Judith Waring (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 114–27, 128–35. For a suggestion on the work's origin that places it close to Boilas, Charlotte Roueché, "The Place of Kekaumenos in the Admonitory Tradition," in *L'éducation Au Gouvernement et à La Vie: La Tradition Des "Règles de Vie" de l'Antiquité Au Moyen-Âge*, ed. Paolo Odorico (Paris: De Boccard, 2009), 143.

[81] Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 19.12-23.

allowing an army to regain its strength after a march, encapsulating the point in a maxim—"for the fatigue of traveling succeeds in weakening and making hesitant even men who excel in strength."[82] The converse comes a few lines later: "comfort and rest tend to make even the most wretched men more daring."[83] As is often the case with this author, both of these pithy formulations are embedded in apposite stories, retailing how the Bulgarian rebel Alousianos lost his army and how the Pechenegs triumphed over a larger Byzantine force by resting and not resting, respectively.

The solution is to make a camp first. Indeed, these vignettes with their internal precepts are headed by several sentences of direct instruction on precisely that point.[84] Together, these instructions and their two illustrative anecdotes form a discrete unit in the work, one paired with a related section on exploiting enemy logistical difficulties.[85] In highlighting the importance of encampment, this passage recalls one several pages earlier, in which the proper procedures for choosing and securing a site are laid out.[86] Here, we learn that not just any location will do. A general should "avoid marshy places and those which have an odour, because of diseases"—and staying in one place too long, for the same reason.[87] We are already approaching the landscape of the garden—that caution against soft and fetid ground mirrors rules from the tenth-century *Geoponika* cited by Littlewood.[88] And Kekaumenos' positive advice drives the comparison home. He urges "that one should encamp in the kind of terrain where there will be rest for the men and animals, such as beside

[82] ὁ γὰρ ἀπὸ τῆς ὁδοιπορίας κάματος ἐκλύειν οἶδε καὶ ὀκνηροὺς ποιεῖν καὶ τοὺς ῥώμῃ καὶ ἀλκῇ σώματος ὑπερέχοντας (Kekaumenos, 22.14-16). Citations to K. are given with WJ page and line numbers, selectable on the SAWS edition. The translation is Roueche's with modifications.
[83] γὰρ ἡ τρυφὴ καὶ ἀνάπαυσις θαρσαλεωτέρους ποιεῖν καὶ τοὺς ἄγαν ἀτυχεῖς (Kekaumenos, 23.04).
[84] Kekaumenos, 23.03-09.
[85] Kekaumenos, 23.12-24.20. The section ends with a summary: "For when men are suffering from weariness, fatigue and want, if the prospect of fighting is also landed on them, it puts grief and confusion into their spirits, and brings about defeat without a battle" (24.18-20).
[86] Kekaumenos, 11.12-31.
[87] τοὺς δὲ γλινοειδεῖς τόπους καὶ ἔχοντας ὀσμὴν ἀπόφυγε διὰ τὰς ἀρρωστίας (Kekaumenos, 11.17-20).
[88] Littlewood, "Gardens of the Byzantine World," 66.

the banks of rivers, beside streams and springs."[89] With these lines, we are back to precisely the kind of environment that underlay the *locus amoenus*—described in absolutely skeletal form. Such a landscape's governing quality is the tendency to facilitate rest: specific examples, whose ability to meet that criterion requires no explanation, are the banks of rivers, streams, and springs. The danger of swampy or contaminated sites implicitly points to the importance of fresh water, as the need for pasturage (rest for the animals) does for growing vegetation. Yet perhaps more significant is that these associations can remain—almost—completely unstated. A simple οἷον ("such as") followed by examples, double-checking that writer and reader are on the same page, is enough.

Such telegraphic references can communicate at all only because they make use of background knowledge and assumptions shared by author and audience. Put another way, the landscape itself—the cultural meaning of riverbanks, streams, and springs—brings those associations of comfort along with it, relieving the author of the need to spell it out himself. We are now at a second way in which landscape "circulates" within and across texts, serving as a common place not only for different literary traditions but for specific communities of writers and readers. The context of this advice on camps makes that particularly clear: as Roueché has noted, it is one of the points where Kekaumenos most directly discusses his relationship to previous military authors.[90] We can see this process in action again in the second of those passages on encampment. Kekaumenos notes how in his surprise attack on Thessaloniki the rebel Alousianos "did not set up his tent first in a suitable place, or encamp his army" but attacked directly with all his baggage, to the predictable result.[91] In the

[89] ἐν χωρίοις δὲ τοιούτοις αὐλίζεσθαι, ἔνθα καὶ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ τοῖς ζώοις ἔσται ἀνάπαυσις, οἷον παρὰ τὰς ὄχθας τῶν ποταμῶν, παρὰ πηγὰς καὶ κρήνας: Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 11.21-3. K. claims this advice descends from οἱ ἀρχαῖοι—previous military writers. Intriguingly, none of the forerunners Roueché gives (Onasander, Maurice, Leo) offer a similar list of restful spots (commentary to 11.17).

[90] Roueché, "The Literary Background of Kekaumenos," 122. The language of "suitable places" is a particular trope of this tradition, as discussed in the following chapter.

[91] οὐκ ἔπηξε πρῶτον τὴν σκηνὴν αὐτοῦ ἐν τόπῳ ἐπιτηδείῳ κατουνεύσας τὸν στρατὸν αὐτοῦ: (Kekaumenos, 22.10-11).

immediately following section, on logistical difficulties, he warns a commander with limited supplies against delaying, except to "rest your army in suitable country for two or three days, if you are free to."[92] What matters to us are those two nearly identical phrases—ἐν τόπῳ ἐπιτηδείῳ and ἐν χώρᾳ ἐπιτηδείᾳ. The qualities that make a site suitable for a camp are taken as given; the reader requires no more than a reminder to take them into account. Otherwise, landscape can speak for itself.

Roueché has analyzed how Kekaumenos's compositional methods play on his readers' familiarity with the preexisting admonitory tradition. As an author Kekaumenos alludes and reworks, leaving connections implicit. The result is a text arranged as "a *catena* of ideas, not a structured argument, with results that may seem inconsistent."[93] Direct contradiction is not at issue in our passages. But structure—in particular, how a reader may be expected to follow the movement of a text that circles back to a topic some ten pages, in a modern edition, after first introducing it—certainly is. Part of what keeps such a work together, we can now see, is its reliance on shared cultural knowledge like that embodied in landscape. All literature, of course—all communication—makes use of a common ground between audience and speaker. But the *Advice and Anecdotes* implicates that common ground in a different way than many "higher" literary texts. This work points outward, in virtually every sentence, to situations of practice in which the moment of reading itself will be (at most) a memory.

For Kekaumenos's addressee to become a competent general, what matters is finally not how perceptively he traced the connections between one word or thought and the next. What matters is how his reading (re)shaped the understanding of the world that he brought to the text, and will now carry out with him into situations of real command.[94] What the landscape means for such a person draws on much broader cultural understandings, but ends

[92] ἐν χώρᾳ ἐπιτηδείᾳ διανάπαυσον τὸν λαόν σου δύο ἢ τρεῖς ἡμέρας, <εἰ> ἔχεις ἄδειαν (Kekaumenos, 23.29-30).
[93] Roueché, "The Literary Background of Kekaumenos," 116.
[94] Note that this could result from impromptu composition as much as from a conscious plan.

up markedly specific, acting much like any technical vocabulary or jargon. Kekaumenos and his attentive readers, or those with the same competence, will recognize instantly what a "suitable place" for a camp is. The uninitiated may take longer to work it out—or miss that the phrase has any point at all. Still rooted in practice, the associations contained in the landscape thus do more than make the text cohere. They bring author and audience together, by highlighting the way they specifically, as a military elite, know to act in the environment.[95]

2.3 The Grottaferrata *Digenes*: Desire and warfare in the wilderness

As we saw in the Introduction, this warrior aristocracy is far from alien to *Digenes*. Many scholars have noted how the *Advice and Anecdotes* and the epic-romance share a proudly provincial outlook, a relatively rare survival in our Constantinople-centric literature.[96] This common background includes, at least for the Grottaferrata version, a strong interest in aphorisms and advice.[97] Some of *Digenes*'s maxims indeed deal directly with landscape, at times in more dramatic fashion than Kekaumenos's glancing references—a subject to be investigated in depth in the fourth chapter. In this section, however, we will return to *Digenes* with Kekaumenos's more limited lesson in mind—that the best environment for rest is beside a stream. As a setting in the Grottaferrata version, then, such landscapes do more than provide opportunity for classical allusion; they also facilitate the

[95] For a similar effect in relation K.'s advice on private life, Galatariotou, "Open Space / Closed Space," 1996, 304.
[96] See the literature review at 1.3 for more.
[97] Odorico, "La Sapienza Del Digenis"; Roueché, "The Literary Background of Kekaumenos," 116; Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, n.d., xliii–iv.

transition between the poem's two great themes, love and fighting. It is no accident that streams, springs, or riverbanks are found in every book of which Digenes is the hero.[98]

We have already seen how the ἄλσος in Book 6 served as a point of transfer between *Leukippe and Kleitophon*'s idyllic grove and the lion-rich wilds of heroic Anatolia. In Book 7, the new garden gets a wall—and after he has settled down in a permanent residence, there is apparently little else for Digenes to do but die.[99] More interesting are the protagonist's adventures in the wilderness. As we saw, his successful defense of his paradisiacal campsite (and wife) in Book 6 made use of a wooded landscape to bring the narrative from scenes of love to those of combat. A shady spring tends to act in the opposite direction, introducing the opportunity for repose after martial exertion. In *Digenes*, that repose rarely if ever occurs without erotic implications. Book 5 provides an excellent starting point.

As in Book 6, here the protagonist takes over the duty of narration. Digenes thus tells how, crossing "the waterless plains of Arabia" and becoming "completely thirsty," he espied a tree far off by a wooded swamp.[100] At the foot of the palm, he finds "a marvelous spring" just as expected,[101] and very much not as expected, an Arab girl, lamenting abandonment by her Christian lover.[102] Having learned in the book's introduction that it will contain a story of adultery, we in the audience are perhaps less surprised.[103] Yet the relationship between this figure and the landscape in which she appears articulates the entire narrative, for Digenes and us both. His initial fear is aroused by the incongruity of a beautiful young woman in such a

[98] I.e., in the "Romance of Digenes" as opposed to the "Lay of the Emir": Dyck, "On *Digenes Akrites*, Grottaferrata Version, Book 6," 367–68; Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, n.d., xxvii.
[99] Jeffreys suggests that we are running up against the limits of the original material: Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, n.d., 203. Digenes in fact catches his death in the garden, from a bath drawn just after a reminder of his continued hunting prowess (8.31-6).
[100] *Digenis Akritis*, 5.25-30. The plains are ἀνύδρους ... κάμπους (5.25); D. becomes ἔνδιψος ὅλος; the tree is πρὸς τὴν δασέαν βάλτον.
[101] καὶ τὴν φάραν ἐπιλαλῶ νομίσας ὕδωρ ἔχειν / καὶ οὐδαμῶς ἀπέτυχον· φοῖνιξ δὲ ἦν τὸ δένδρον / καὶ ἐκ τῆς ῥίζης θαυμαστὴ ἀνεπέμπετο βρύσις (*Digenis Akritis*, 5.31-3).
[102] He indeed suspects an apparition: Κἀγὼ νομίσας φάντασμα τὸ ὁρώμενον εἶναι / ἔκδειλος ὅλος γέγονα: (*Digenis Akritis*, 5.34-40).
[103] *Digenis Akritis*, l. 5.14.

wild setting: "for the place was deserted, trackless, and wooded."[104] He realizes from her entreaty that he stop to rest and hear her story that she is real.[105] Pleasure in her beauty then takes over—and the scene shrinks to the bare-bones *locus amoenus* of the spring: "I tied my charger to the branch of the tree / and stood my spear between its roots; / taking some water, I said to her these things."[106] From their conversation we learn how she came to be stranded in the wilderness. There, as it turns out, Digenes was not mistaken to be on his guard; some hundred Arabs leap out (just like those lions) from the surrounding swamp, to which the protagonist must chase them back.[107] But the young woman remains safe at the spring, where Digenes returns[108]—and where he conceives the "passion" (ἔρως) that will cause him to rape her in the process of fulfilling his promise to reunite the young woman with her lover.[109]

Scholars have long noted how this episode works as a nasty companion to both Digenes's parents' and his and his wife's own love stories, which equally begin as tales of forbidden passion in the anarchic frontier.[110] Going further, Adam Goldwyn has remarked on how the contrast between this girl and Digenes's wife is underscored by the environments in which they are set.[111] Landscape thus works as a common term for the comparison these episodes are exploring, between licit and illicit passion—though one that allows for more continuity than Goldwyn is willing to credit. If the gardens of Digenes's wife far outshine the site associated with the abandoned girl, the latter's "marvelous spring" remains a corollary to

[104] ἦν γὰρ ὁ τόπος ἔρημος, ἄβατος καὶ ἀλσώδης (*Digenis Akritis*, l. 5.40).
[105] πρὸς μικρὸν ἀναπαύθητι, κύριέ μου, ἐνταῦθα, / ἵν' ὅπως ἀκριβέστερον τὰ κατ' ἐμοῦ ἀκούσῃς (*Digenis Akritis*, 5.49-50).
[106] καὶ τὴν μὲν φάραν ἔδησα εἰς τοῦ δένδρου τὸν κλῶνα, / τὸ δὲ κοντάριν ἔστησα μέσον αὐτοῦ τῆς ῥίζης· / καὶ ὕδατος μεταλαβὼν πρὸς αὐτὴν τάδε ἔφην (*Digenis Akritis*, 5.58-60).
[107] *Digenis Akritis*, 5.177-90.
[108] πρὸς τὴν πηγὴν ὑπέστρεφον ἔνθα ἦτον ἡ κόρη (*Digenis Akritis*, 5.192).
[109] *Digenis Akritis*, 5.233. As Jeffreys remarks, citing the work of A. E. Laiou, the mere fact that the woman had eloped from home into the wilderness means that, legally speaking, there could be no question of rape—a final, brutal way this episode is determined by the meaning of its setting (Jeffreys 149n256).
[110] Dyck, "On *Digenis Akritas* Grottaferrata Version Book 5," 185–86; Galatariotou, "Structural Oppositions," 57–58; Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, n.d., 139n65.
[111] "The starkness of the natural environment, a lifeless desert with no water, represents the situation of the young girl abandoned by her husband: without a man, she cannot flourish like Digenis' wife in her garden." Goldwyn is here applying a suggestion a first made by Littlewood in relation to the other romances, see Goldwyn, *Byzantine Ecocriticism*, 79; Littlewood, "Romantic Paradises," 100.

her continuing attractiveness. And while that girl is intensely vulnerable in the wilderness, so is Digenes's wife: it is entirely their relationship to the superhuman protagonist that makes the difference. Each exists in an oasis of comfort, which is, without male protection, intrinsically threatened by encroaching wilds outside.

It is impossible to leave Book 5 without a feeling of unease. However we assign the blame—whether to the sin of adultery, as in the text itself, or to the moral hideousness of rape—something in the way Digenes relates to women has gone very wrong. As such, the denouement of this story corresponds to that of Maximou, the Amazonian ally of the bandits in Book 6. It will come as little surprise that underlying the erotic turn of this episode we find a landscape of water and shade. Having been defeated in single combat—the place of combat is already a grassy riverbank[112]—the female warrior is instantly sexualized, and offers herself in marriage.[113] Digenes refuses, but offers to get to know her after they have retreated "under the shade of the tree."[114] There, as he bandages her wounds "at the trees that bordered the river," the scene quickly turns to seduction.[115] If the Z manuscript contains anything like a faithful indication of the folios missing from the Grottaferrata version, Maximou is, unlike the abandoned girl, a willing partner in the act—but with consequences all the worse. After unceremoniously leaving her at the riverbank, Digenes driven by guilt returns, and cuts down the now defenseless woman in a bare two lines.[116]

[112] The pair fight twice, at the same location across the river from Digenes's camp. It is a grassy, fertile site: ἦν δὲ πολὺς ὁ ποταμὸς καὶ ἔπλευσεν ὁ ἵππος· / ὕδατος τούτου ἔκχυσις ἄποθεν δὲ ὑπῆρχεν / βραχυτάτην ἐμφαίνουσα λίμνην συχνήν τε πόαν: (*Digenis Akritis*, *Digenis Akritis*, 6.574-6). When D. returns after besting her comrades, we are reminded that M. ἀπελείφθη ἐν τῇ ποᾷ, ὡς ἄνωθεν ἐρρέθη (6.610). This, the only other occurrence of πόα, occurs just after a statement of their eventual adultery. M. requests that the single combat take place ἐν τῷ παρόντι τόπῳ (6.675).
[113] Jeffreys, 197, n769-70.
[114] Λοιπὸν δεῦρο ὑπὸ σκιὰν ἀπέλθωμεν τοῦ δένδρου: *Digenis Akritis*, 775.
[115] πρὸς ποταμοῦ τὰ γειτνιῶντα δένδρα: *Digenis Akritis*, 6.777.
[116] *Digenis Akritis*, 6.840-1.

The shift from comradely conversation between former combatants to sex occurs when Maximou takes off her padded military coat to escape the heat.[117] The situation thus recalls others of waterside refreshment after exertion—not only Digenes's seeking that wilderness spring in Book 5, but his bathing in another spring after Book 4's initiatory hunt. In each case, the preceding heat is described in virtually exact repetitions. Beside the river, Maximou "ῥίπτει τὸ ἐπιλώρικον· πολὺς γὰρ ἦν ὁ καύσων" (6.781). Behind the caesura that line is identical to Digenes' "ἔνδιψος ὅλος γέγονα (πολὺς γὰρ ἦν ὁ καύσων)" (5.28), and the whole line even more closely resembles that describing when, preparing for the hunt, Digenes "ἐκδύει τὸ ὑπολούρικον (ἦτον πολὺς ὁ καύσων)" (4.115). The bath that follows the latter marks more than the first appearance of the "marvelous, cold" water that will serve as the constitutive element of all the poem's subsequent *loci amoeni*.[118] It also marks the transition between two of this book's rites of passage—it is just after he arises, cleaned of gore and clothed in finery, that Digenes first encounters his future wife.[119] Fittingly, then, the bath is bookended by detailed descriptions of Digenes's own physical attractiveness.[120]

With Maximou present, a similar scene quickly becomes a seduction—which may count as more a change from latent to active sexuality than as an introduction of sexuality per se. A bathing pond is a place to turn from stress and exertion to repose and pleasure. In *Digenes*, those latter two terms tend to lead toward love; Maximou cuts out the intermediate step of getting all dressed up. She can do so because she is a unique—and uniquely confusing—figure: a beautiful virgin who is also an accomplished soldier.[121] It is intrinsic to this character's narrative potential that she gets wires crossed, transforming a situation of

[117] ῥίπτει τὸ ἐπιλώρικον· πολὺς γὰρ ἦν ὁ καύσων. / Καὶ ὁ χιτὼν τῆς Μαξιμοῦς ὑπῆρχεν ἀραχνώδης· / πάντα καθάπερ ἔσοπτρον ἐνέφαινε τὰ μέλη: *Digenis Akritis*, 6.781-4.
[118] Καὶ παρευθὺς ἀμφότεροι εἰς τὴν πηγὴν ἀπῆλθον / (ἦν δὲ τὸ ὕδωρ θαυμαστόν, ψυχρὸν ὡς τὸ χιόνιν) *Digenis Akritis*, 4.213-4. The passage as a whole extends from 4.202-18, and begins with Digenes's father's reminder that Τὸ καῦμα ἔστι πολύ (4.202).
[119] Dyck, "The Taming of Digenes: The Plan of 'Digenes Akrites', Grottaferrata Version, Book IV," 295; Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, n.d., 83n253.
[120] *Digenis Akritis*, 4.193-99, 4.219-28.
[121] Galatariotou, "Structural Oppositions," 58–61.

legitimate homosocial bonding into one of illicit heterosexual sex. Her gender wreaks havoc with the combatants' code of honor to which her valor seems to entitle her; in consequence of which, a related code of honor demands she be murdered. But this whole machinery works only by playing on the possibilities inherent in the landscape itself.

Across the central narrative of the Grottaferrata *Digenes*, springs, riverbanks, and gardens are sites of eroticism, concealed or open, good or bad. As such, these scenes take up a position in the long tradition of the *locus amoenus*, that "place of heart's desire"—a tradition that, direct quotation of the classics aside, was surely alive and well in Byzantium.[122] But they are also firmly integrated into a tale, or tales, of life and campaigning on the empire's quasi-mythical eastern frontier, where danger is omnipresent and that aristocratic code is more flouted than honored. Despite their wide affinities in world literature, both Book 5's abandoned girl and Maximou are fantasies specific to this borderland—most glaringly, in the brutality of their ends. Their stories are about what happens to unaccompanied women in the wilderness, the place where men fight. For the protagonist and the original audience, their very vulnerability here is a crucial to their attraction: defenseless, these are women available for the taking, with no consequences but moral ones. The Grottaferrata poem is interested in exploring the temptation such women represent for men—temptation which it celebrates in its lyricism and in its moralism disavows.

But this poem is interested in exploring that temptation *as desire*. A comparison to Maximou's fate in the Escorial is instructive. There the sex is a matter-of-fact act of dominance, one that lasts a single line and which Digenes proudly reports to his wife—who laughs![123] No shady trees or gossamer tunics, or guilty consciences, are to be found. In contrast, it is in fitting together violence and desire, in shifting from one of the poem's main

[122] Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 186–87; Littlewood, "Romantic Paradises," 97–98.
[123] Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, n.d., E. ll 1575-99. That one line is καὶ ἀπείτις τῆς τὸ ἔκαμα τῆς Μαξιμοῦς τῆς κούρβας—but at least, humiliated, she lives.

keys to its other, that those waterside landscapes in the Grottaferrata prove so useful. They do so because they are features native to both the poem's imaginative worlds: scenes of erotic idyll and good places for a military man to relax, introduced *as* places for a military man to relax. The result in each case is a setting that, while still recognizably meeting Curtius's definition of the *locus amoenus*, serves very different—and for an attentive modern audience, rather more unsettling—ends.

2.4 Conclusion: To the border

The undeniable repetition of core situations and themes in *Digenes*, especially the Grottaferrata version, has tempted interpreters to look for a single unified message in the work—at times with diametrically opposed results.[124] My arguments do not require such singular coherence. Whether in the high-literary tradition of the *locus amoenus* or the more practical one of military writers and campaigners, landscape was simply part of the culturally available material, like the aphorisms, out of which the poet (or poets) constructed the text we now read. It provided particularly amenable to the Grottaferrata purpose—composing a prestige version of what started as loose cycle of heroic folksongs—because that, as Mitchell argued, is what landscape as a form of representation does. It stands as a mediating term, alternately of exchange or appropriation, between human beings and the physical environment, between traditions, communities, and individuals. We have seen abundant evidence of this point in both our primary texts. In Kekaumenos, the mention of "suitable places" for setting up camp worked to draw together author and audience as a community—and to create internal links within an otherwise very diffuse the text. In *Digenes*, representations of shady, watered sites acted as a common term between the military culture

[124] For an early attempt, Galatariotou, "Structural Oppositions in the Grottaferrata Digenes Akrites"; for two recent and antithetical readings, Elizbarashvili, "The Formation of a Hero in Digenes Akrites"; Trilling, "Re-Introducing *Digenis Akritis*."

of that same—at least a very similar—frontier aristocratic community and the erotic preoccupations of both ancient and medieval romance. In both cases, landscape accomplished the merger so subtly that its work has passed with little to no comment from modern scholars.

In part, the representation of the pleasant environments in these texts must have seemed not to require interpretation because it remains similar, at least swiftly translatable, to our own common sense. Yet neither the *locus amoenus* nor the frontier wilderness is quite a modern way of understanding the physical world. Each is, instead, deeply involved in specifically ancient and medieval ways of representing nature. While the former is by now so well-known as to seem at times the *entirety* of premodern views of landscape, the latter has hardly been analyzed at all. It is to that task that the remainder of this thesis turns.

3 Teaching a "Way of Seeing": Wilderness Landscape in Kekaumenos's Advice to a Border-Commander

Kekaumenos is the author of some the better known remarks about reading in all of Byzantine literature.[125] Thanks to Charlotte Roueché, the old impression that this was a naïve author entirely disconnected from the intellectual currents of his time has fallen permanently by the wayside.[126] It is now generally accepted that Kekaumenos was an intellectually sophisticated writer whose lively prose depends as much on his possession of (some) rhetorical education as on his lack of Atticizing flourish.[127] Moreover, by identifying the literary traditions on which Kekaumenos draws, Roueché provided an invaluable basis for concretely analyzing how the text of this *sui generis* work was composed. But Roueché's groundbreaking work has not been followed by further, detailed studies on Kekaumenos made use of his materials. Picking up on the previous chapter's suggestion that landscape is a particularly useful lens for spotting the joints in this text, this chapter aims to do just that.

My analysis takes off from another of the *Advice and Anecdotes*'s remarks on reading—that, when at leisure, a general should read military handbooks and histories.[128] This statement is shortly followed by a claim that Kekaumenos's own advice is entirely original, born of personal experience, and not to be found in any other book.[129] This chapter will suggest that this claim may be more true than has yet been recognized. Using tools from

[125] These are advice to ask for help when you get stuck and to read a book all the way through, respectively: Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 47.14-8, 60.21-5.
[126] Roueché, "The Literary Background of Kekaumenos."
[127] Roueché, *Kekaumenos*, Consilia et Narrationes, Introduction, III; Cecaumenus and Odorico, *Conseils et récits d'un gentilhomme byzantin*, 30.
[128] "When you are at leisure, and not busy with military duties, read military handbooks, and histories, and the books of the church": Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 19.12-4. Scripture is then justified on the grounds that it is beneficial to one's soul, contains practical maxims, and, in the Old Testament, treats military affairs. For the sake of space, I here leave aside K.'s literary debt to the Bible.
[129] "I drew these things up (συνέταξα) for you - which are not in any other military manual nor in any other book - I drew them up from my own reflections, and from real experience (ἐξ οἰκείου γάρ μου συλλογισμοῦ καὶ ἐξ ἀληθινῆς πείρας); for they will benefit you a great deal": Kekaumenos, 19.23-5.

narratology, it analyzes in detail how he presents the space of the border in an extended sequence of advice to a border-commander, or "akrites."[130] In this section, Kekaumenos does much more than simply add a few good stories or tweak the occasional precept. Instead, he is combining literary techniques from historiography with substantive rules from the military treatises to do something distinctly different from either—in particular, to inculcate a "way of seeing" landscape, to teach how a competent commander surveys the environment.

The first section introduces this general's gaze as a way of seeing by comparing how Kekaumenos constructs space in his direct advice on ambushes (another instance of those "suitable spots") to how he does so in a story of an ambush. The second section then examines how one of Kekaumenos's longest passages of advice, on managing the danger of mountain passes, adapts similar, profoundly narrative methods for presenting space in order to build a cogent but generally applicable mental model of these threatening sites. The third section moves from landscapes of ineradicable danger, in the forests and passes of the wilderness, to ones of relative safety—the descriptions of prominent, naturally defensible forts. Drawing these elements together, the fourth section concludes by arguing that in this advice to an akrites landscape also acts as part of much larger model of what the frontier is and how it works. This sequence of advice and stories thus constitutes important evidence for landscape as geographical thinking in eleventh-century Byzantium.

[130] As the organization of the *Advice and Anecdotes* overall is not narrative, a word needs to be said about methodology. In my analysis, I always distinguish narrative proper from advice and, later, description. The distinction between advice and narrative can be especially blurry, as evidenced by the fact modern experimental literary narratives written in the second-person play on "how to" manuals and guidebooks (as well as other forms, like letter-writing, with relevance for K.): Fludernik, "Second Person Fiction," 230–39. Moreover, some of K.'s extended passages of advice almost meet the qualifications of narrativity as defined by prominent contemporary theorist, David Herman: they are situated in a context, introduce events in sequence, present a world, and give a sense of experience. Only an additional criterion of "particularity," appended to event-sequencing, is missing: Koopman, "Ancient Greek Ekphrasis," 19-23. In any case, such an approach to narrativity happily admits of degrees; in constructing space via text, even the most isolated and fleeting advice is presenting a world, and can be analyzed according to narratological concepts of how space is created in discourse.

3.1 The general's gaze as a "way of seeing"

Both the general precepts and the exemplary stories of Kekaumenos's military section demonstrate a consistent set of strategies for representing landscape via text. And although the passages where space figures prominently are relatively few, a spatially-minded close reading of these episodes can tell us much both about military landscape as a Byzantine "way of seeing" and about this work's literary purposes overall. In all cases, of course, the tactical value of terrain is paramount. Central to this are the cat-and-mouse games which Kekaumenos, following a long tradition,[131] describes as essential to warfare: "You must realize that the ambush is the basis of the barbarians' every stratagem. You must be on your guard against these; for many people have been caught in them. But also lay ambushes yourself in places that are suitable and not open to view."[132] That final prepositional phrase—εἰς τόπους ἐπιτηδείους καὶ ἀπροόπτους—introduces a "spatial frame," the simplest and most fleeting means of presenting space in discourse.[133] As individual units, such frames never constitute a proper setting in the sense of an extended, coherently interconnected space. Moreover, this one is, at least on reflection, remarkably vague. On the one hand, it would seem to be nearly useless to anyone in actual need of instruction. On the other hand, the statement narrowly considered is so self-evident as to be superfluous. Who, after all, would plan ambushes in inappropriate, highly visible spots?

The comparison to the previous *taktika* tradition is instructive. Kekaumenos's advice here is almost a synopsis of (ps.-)Maurice's rather pedantic statements on ambushes quoted at

[131] E.g. "It is of course an ancient maxim that teaches us to try to assault the enemy without ourselves suffering any injury, and intelligent generals (οἱ συνετοὶ τῶν στρατηγῶν) will keep this in mind and always give it high priority," Maurice, *Strategikon,* 9.1. For a discussion of this very widespread "Vegetian" practice of warfare, see Morillo, "Battle Seeking: The Contexts and Limits of Vegetian Strategy."

[132] "Ιστέον δὲ ὅτι πᾶσα μηχανὴ τῶν ἐθνῶν τὸ ἔνεδρόν ἐστι. καὶ χρή σε ταῦτα παραφυλάττεσθαι· πολλοὶ γὰρ δι' αὐτῶν ἑάλωσαν. ἀλλὰ καὶ σὺ ποίει ἔνεδρα εἰς τόπους ἐπιτηδείους καὶ ἀπροόπτους." Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes,* 10.29-31. This advice is reiterated at 13.07-9.

[133] de Jong, *Narratology and Classics*, 107; Ryan, "Space," paras. 5–8. These authors offer different definitions, depending on whether individual "frames" act as individual building blocks of "story space" (Ryan) or are limited to spatial indications outside a coherent setting (de Jong, for whom "setting" = Ryan's "story space"). I use the terms such that discrete frames can cohere into a fuller setting/story space but need not.

the beginning of my Introduction. The full quotation of that reveals the similarities—right down to talk of τόποι ἐπιτήδειοι: "Some commanders have availed themselves of suitable terrain, such as dense woods, valleys, steep hills, ravines, mountains extending almost up to the enemy battle line. They have used these to conceal troops and to keep them from being detected at a distance and attacked."[134] Kekaumenos drops the final sentence with its definition of ambushes—one that would be nearly redundant considering the etymology of the term he uses.[135] More importantly, that enumeration of "suitable places" has been entirely reduced to one adjective: ἀπροόπτους. What kind of spots are "not open to view" is left, as it were, as an exercise for the reader.[136]

This first piece of counsel thus leaves us with the sense that space is important—important enough to be worth mentioning, even when a bit obvious. But it is where Kekaumenos formally most differs from the earlier military treatises, in the way in which he relies on narrative to make his point, that the differences in his method become most apparent.[137] As often, the anecdotes render definite what Kekaumenos's advice has left vague. One of his most intricate tales of ambush hinges on the canny use of topography. He recounts how one Demetrios Polemarchios, a "prominent leader" of the Bulgarian borderlands (also one of K.'s maternal ancestors)[138] had besieged a Byzantine stronghold for a year to no avail. However,

> at the cliff below the fortress was the bathing-place, and there the general used to go, and the taxiarchs [unit commanders], when they wanted to, and bathed.

[134] Maurice, *Strategikon*, 4.1.
[135] The word ἔνεδρον, "sitting *in*," literally implies the opposite: Liddell et al., *The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. ἐνέδρα.
[136] For how such exercises play on common knowledge between author and audience, see my chapter 2.2 above.
[137]. Roueché, "The Literary Background of Kekaumenos," 120. An important exception is the anonymous tenth-century manual on siege defense known by the Latin title *De obsidione toleranda*, which makes significant use of exemplary stories taken from ancient sources. Roueché does not discuss this source in either her article or commentary on K.: the relationship between the two would be a valuable topic of further research, especially for the antecedents of K.'s nearly-unique approach.
[138] ὁ δὲ πρὸς μητρὸς πάππος μου Δημήτριος ὁ Πολεμάρχιος οὕτω καλούμενος ἦν ὑπερέχουσα κεφαλὴ εἰς τὸ μέρος ἐκεῖνο εἰς τὴν ἄκραν (Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 29.02-4).

> So he [Demetrios] devises this device: he went by night, and took up position opposite the fortress, with his men - the place was wooded, with bushes - and ordered the men with him to take large bushes and hold them in front of them, and overshadow and hide the horses and their riders, so as to look not like men, but like some wood growing on the spot. He had two chonsarii [scouts] on the ridge near the fortress, who, directly the general and the taxiarchs went down and began to wash, made a signal which they had been ordered to make. The others spurred down and surrounded the bathing-place, and captured the people in it.[139]

The word μηχανή—stratagem, device, here highlighted by *figura etymologica*—links this episode, near the end of the *strategikon*, to the general counsel at its beginning (nearly 20 pages in the modern edition). We are dealing with a consistent set of terms. But here those "suitable, hard-to-detect spots" have been placed into a concretely realized setting. There is the fortress on the cliff,[140] the bathing hole, the wooded place, and the opposing ridge. These are, moreover, dynamically related to each other—drawn into a whole—by the action of the story. The bath is introduced in relation to the castle and cliff (ἦν δὲ ὁ λοετρὸς κάτωθεν τοῦ κάστρου εἰς τὸν κρημνὸν). In the notice of the general's habit of descent—the imperfect acting as a sign of regular action (ἔνθα καὶ ἀπήρχετο)—it then immediately becomes a point that links those inaccessible sites to the outside.

Demetrios's recognition of this fact is the precondition for both his stratagem and his eventual triumph. That success in fact turns entirely on his superior mastery of the space of

[139] "ἦν δὲ ὁ λοετρὸς κάτωθεν τοῦ κάστρου εἰς τὸν κρημνὸν, ἔνθα καὶ ἀπήρχετο ὁ στρατηγὸς καὶ οἱ ταξιάρχαι ὅτε ἠβούλοντο καὶ ἐλούοντο. μηχανᾶται οὖν μηχανὴν τοιαύτην· ἐλθὼν νυκτὸς καὶ ἔστη ἄντικρυς τοῦ κάστρου μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ (ὁ δὲ τόπος ἐστὶν ὑλώδης ἔχων θάμνους) καὶ προσέταξε τοῖς σὺν αὐτῷ πᾶσι βαστάζειν θάμνους μεγάλους, κρατεῖν δὲ αὐτὰς ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν καὶ σκιάζειν καὶ ἀποκρύβειν τοὺς ἵππους καὶ τοὺς ἀναβάτας αὐτῶν, ὥστε φαίνεσθαι οὐκ ἀνθρώπους ἀλλὰ τοπικήν τινα ὕλην. εἶχε δὲ χονσαρίους δύο πλησίον τοῦ κάστρου εἰς τὴν ἀκρωρείαν, οἳ ἅμα τῷ κατελθεῖν τὸν στρατηγὸν καὶ τοὺς ταξιάρχας καὶ ἄρξασθαι τοῦ λούεσθαι ἐποίησαν σημεῖον ὃ προσετάγησαν. οἱ δὲ καταπτερνίσαντες ἐκύκλωσαν τὸ λοετρὸν κρατήσαντες τοὺς ἐν αὐτῳ": Kekaumenos, 29.10-21.

[140] See section 3.3 below.

the castle's environs. He knows how to exploit the brush opposite the cliff to conceal his soldiers, so that they seem to merge with the surrounding woods (ὥστε φαίνεσθαι οὐκ ἀνθρώπους ἀλλὰ τοπικήν τινα ὕλην). This move provides proximity and cover, but at the cost of vision. The attack can thus be launched only in combination with the scouts on the opposing heights, which though distant offer the overlooking view that allows these men to alert the lurking ambushers of the general's approach.

At all stages, the narrative progression underscores Kekaumenos's ancestor's control of both situation and space. We in the audience are constantly one step behind, learning about the topography only as the protagonist is putting it into action. Thus he has already arrived at the site near the pool when we learn, at a break in syntax, that this is wooded—right as he orders his men to cover themselves (Roueché renders it with brackets: ἔστη ἄντικρυς τοῦ κάστρου μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ [ὁ δὲ τόπος ἐστὶν ὑλώδης ἔχων θάμνους] καὶ προσέταξε τοῖς σὺν αὐτῷ πᾶσι...). "He had" the two lookouts on the neighboring ridge (εἶχε δὲ χονσαρίους δύο πλησίον τοῦ κάστρου εἰς τὴν ἀκρωρείαν), even though he himself is in hiding near the bath; these scouts make the signal—thereby joining the knowledge available from their position to the potential for action at the ambushers'—as "they had been ordered" (ἐποίησαν σημεῖον ὃ προσετάγησαν). More strikingly, this sentence marks the first hint we've had of that other ridge in any form. Yet, like the brush near the bath, this place is absolutely crucial for the plot. The story thus offers an extreme example of space actively "shown" and not "told," indicated on-the-go of narrative rather than in synoptic, descriptive pause.[141] But it is more than that: Kekaumenos's narrative devices mirror his ancestor's tactical ones. By the time the setting coheres, the trap is sprung—a canny authorial exploitation of space to highlight a character's acumen with parallels in ancient historiography.[142]

[141] de Jong, *Narratology and Classics*, 110; Ryan, "Space," para. 21.
[142] Rood, "Space and Landscape in Xenophon's *Anabasis*," 78–89. For K.'s engagement with ancient historiography, see Roueché, "The Literary Background of Kekaumenos," 124-7.

This is, in an important way, a story about landscape: a story about how to *see* and *use* space. This is not the landscape of the detached or reflective observer, familiar from Romantic poetry and Renaissance painting. But neither is it a way of "look[ing] at nature as an assemblage of isolated objects, without connecting trees, rivers, mountains, roads, rocks, and forest into a unified scene."[143] This is the landscape of an engaged participant: a markedly military way of reading nature, in which the scene is unified by action, and must be navigated in competition with enemies and coordination with allies and subordinates. This normative ideal of generalship as active cognitive engagement with space has a distinguished pedigree in ancient writing.[144] As Tim Rood and Maria Gerolemou have demonstrated in the cases of Xenophon and Polybius, this normative ideal brings with it—or rather, is instantiated in—particular styles of literary representation.[145]

Like those earlier writers, Kekaumenos uses narrative to foreground the subjective activity of perception, rather than its objective contents. And in this, although his substantive advice is essentially identical to theirs, Kekaumenos is adding something new to the military treatises. The latter do occasionally employ exemplary stories. Even where they are not mere citations of instances when the advised tactics proved successful, however, these anecdotes never focalize so closely on the protagonist-commander and his perceptions.[146] Their concern is the fact of success. Kekaumenos, on the other hand, not only *tells* but *shows* how a competent general engages with space—his stories provide role models of how a commander

[143] "Landscape Painting," *The Oxford Companion to Art* (Oxford: 1970), quoted in Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," 13–14.
[144] Gerolemou, "Educating Kings through Travel," 130–35.
[145] Rood and Gerolemou cited in preceding notes. For more on the development of narrative space in ancient Greek historiography, see Rood, "Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius." There is evidence of related effects in Byzantine historiography: Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline*, 98–99.
[146] For the former, e.g.: "This is what happened three times in the past to Ali, the son of Hamdan, twice in the reign of the revered and thrice-blessed emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus and once in that of the good emperor Romanos, his blessed son. Virtually everyone knows all about the complete destruction of the adversaries of Christ at that time. In various sections of the defile the men of Tarsus and the land of Cilicia were put to headlong flight by the commanders of the time who planned everything so well" (*On Skirmishing*, §3.50-8). The latter narratives tend to be high-level, summary reports of the campaign, e.g. *On Skirmishing*, §20.

should (or should not) perceive and act.[147] These are as much representations of the perceptual activity that interprets surrounding topography as of the topography itself. Just as much as any eighteenth-century watercolor, they evince a coherent "way of seeing" the physical world.[148]

An essential characteristic of this way of seeing is how different topographical features—such as forests, rivers, mountains—combine to produce situations of reciprocal danger and opportunity, insofar as they hinder or facilitate both vision and mobility for a would-be attacker and his target.[149] Even beyond ambushes, sight and movement remain essential terms. The equation changes depending on the circumstances: thus a large army should camp "in open places outside of the woods" while a small one should stick to "hidden and secure places" to avoid being surrounded.[150] Later, a commander in the latter situation is told to fool any emissaries sent as spies into misjudging his force's size—a tactic that will not work "unless you are encamped in rather wooded places; for in this way they can't get clear on how large an army you have, with your men coming up each from a different direction."[151] In all cases, advice is accompanied by a lone spatial frame introduced in a phrase after εἰς, the increasingly all-purpose preposition of lower register Greek (εἰς ἐμφανεῖς τόπους καὶ ἔξω τῆς ὕλης, εἰς ἀφανεῖς καὶ ὀχυροὺς τόπους, εἰς ὑλωδεστέρους τόπους).[152] As in that first precept about ambushes, such phrases reiterate the importance of topography, keeping space present in the text—and that general's landscape gaze sharp. But there is one type of terrain whose

[147] This fact itself should give us a greater appreciation of K.'s literary dimension: the immediacy of such "showing," as opposed to "telling" relies on sophisticated techniques not generally found in unpracticed narrative: Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 158–59.

[148] This term is discussed in my 1.4; within the cultural geography it was developed most importantly by Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, 1; Cosgrove, "Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea," 46. For a cogent application to Byzantine religious modes of perception, see della Dora, "Topia," 688. To be clear, my position is that that K.'s "way of seeing" is very much present in the *taktika*. However, the different means of presenting it there, which does not focus to the same degree on the role of the observer, might cause a determined landscape-modernist to squint.

[149] Perhaps as part of his decision not to discuss day-of-battle advice (10.23-4), K. does not discuss the tactical advantages of terrain for different kinds of troops as found in e.g., Maurice, Strategikon, bks. 7.2a, 12.8,20.

[150] Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 11.17, 11.13.

[151] "ἄλλως δὲ τοῦτο οὐ δύνασαι ποιῆσαι εἰ μὴ ἐὰν εἶ ἁπλικευμένος εἰς ὑλωδεστέρους τόπους. οὕτως γὰρ οὐ δύνανταί σε ἀποκαθαρίσαι πόσον λαὸν ἔχεις, τῶν σῶν ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος ἐπερχομένων." Kekaumenos, 13.18-20.

[152] For Kekaumenos's language, including the merger of εἰς and ἐν, see Horrocks, *Greek*, 264.

complexity merits more extended discussion even in the abstract—one of the most thematically loaded Byzantine landscapes of all: the κλησοῦρα, or mountain pass.

3.2 Mountain passes and cognitive maps

Kekaumenos devotes an extended section of advice to dealing with mountain passes. Especially in light of its major differences from how similar topics are handed in the true *taktika*, this passage yields important insights on how Kekaumenos's educational agenda differs from theirs. It occurs amid his recommendations to a frontier-commander (ἀκρίτης) on how best to chastise an unruly quasi-independent local lord (τοπάρχης). The key, we learn, is to lull him into overconfidence and then launch a surprise attack—this is already one of the text's most discursively developed blocks of advice, containing a future-tense narration of the akrites's success complete with dialogue among the cowed toparchs.[153] But our author has a caveat: "Only, when you enter his territory and raid it, if there are mountain-passes by which you entered, don't return by the same way; for the enemy, knowing the difficulty of the passes, will occupy them in advance, and when you return back will cut you to pieces."[154] Even in this opening stage of the advice, the introductory spatial frame is already more substantial than usual—given its own clause rather than limited to a prepositional phrase (εἰ μὲν εἰσι κλησοῦραι ὅθεν εἰσῆλθες). Terrain here is a topic in itself rather than a secondary, if necessary, qualifier. While it remains vague, even the generic type of spatial feature takes on qualitative color: "the difficulty of the passes" (τὴν δυσκολίαν τῶν κλησουρῶν) is indicated to be a matter of general knowledge. The specific topographical aspects that underpin this danger will have to wait. Already, however, the presence and potential activity of the enemy

[153] Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 25.11-20.
[154] "Πλὴν ὁπόταν εἰσέλθῃς καὶ κουρσεύσῃς τὴν χώραν αὐτοῦ, εἰ μὲν εἰσι κλησοῦραι ὅθεν εἰσῆλθες, μὴ ὑποστρέψῃς τὴν αὐτὴν ὁδόν. ἐκεῖνοι γὰρ γινώσκοντες τὴν δυσκολίαν τῶν κλησουρῶν προκαταλάβωσιν αὐτὰς καὶ ὑποστρέφοντός σου κλασματίσουσι σε." Kekaumenos, 25.21-4.

within it are crucial; the first prefix of προκαταλάβωσιν succinctly sums up the threat of being out-maneuvered.[155]

Kekaumenos drives home the consequences of such carelessness with the cautionary tale of a certain Michael, katepan of Dyrrachium, who brought an army of 40,000 to grief when, returning from a raid, "he found the passes where he'd entered occupied" (εὗρε κατεχομένας τὰς κλησούρας ὅθεν εἰσῆλθε).[156] Discussion of the moral of this story segues directly into advice on how to avoid making the same mistakes yourself: "Even if, perhaps, he had another route by which he could get out in good order, yet, from bad planning, or rather from inexperience, he was caught. But you, have skilful spies and communications-men, and before you enter, let them reconnoitre the routes; and once you go in and make your raid, leave by another route, and you will have no worries."[157] This Michael is almost the photographic negative of the author's ancestor Demetrios—the victim rather than the master of the landscape. His failing is ultimately a cognitive one: he doesn't know how to read and respond to the challenges the terrain sets. This fault is a combination of poor planning and inexperience, with the latter dominant (ἀπὸ κακοβουλίας, μᾶλλον δὲ ἀπειρίας). The latter especially is crucial. As Gerolemou has demonstrated for Polybius, experience, ἐμπειρία, in the specific sense of practical cognitive capability was a central term in ancient thinking about command.[158] Kekaumenos's use of the term, or in this particular case its antithesis, shows a fundamentally similar conception.[159] Michael lacks the knowledge of the terrain he needs—but worse, he lacks the *experience* to recognize he needs it.

[155] This verb, first recorded in Thucydides, has specifically military connotations. Liddell et al., *The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. προκαταλαμβάνω.
[156] Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 25.25-9.
[157] "καὶ εἰ τάχα εἶχεν ἄλλην ὁδὸν εἰς τὸ ἐξελθεῖν ἀσκύλτως, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ κακοβουλίας, μᾶλλον δὲ ἀπειρίας ἑάλω. σὺ δὲ ἔχε κατασκόπους καὶ τοποθέτας ἐντρεχεῖς καὶ πρὸ τοῦ εἰσελθεῖν σε κατασκοπευσάτωσαν τὰς ὁδούς· καὶ ἀφ'οὗ εἰσέλθῃς καί κουρσεύσεις ἔξελθε δι' ἄλλης ὁδοῦ καὶ ἔξεις τὸ ἀφρόντιστον." Kekaumenos, 25.29-26.03.
[158] Gerolemou, "Educating Kings through Travel," 132.
[159] The term is also very much alive in the *taktika*, with cognates occurring, according to the *TLG*, 22 times in Leo's *Taktika* and 30 times in *On Skirmishing*, though—interestingly—only 6 in Maurice.

For an attentive reader, Kekaumenos provides the remedy for both deficiencies. The specific advice corrects the bad planning. *Before* you enter, scouts should reconnoiter the routes (πρὸ τοῦ εἰσελθεῖν σε κατασκοπευσάτωσαν τὰς ὁδούς). A competent general acts in coordination with his subordinates to exploit the possibilities inherent in the terrain. As in the ambush at the bath, the skillful deployment of personnel reflects the commander's own control.[160] It also offers the means for managing the problem of passes where no alternate routes exist. In this case, one should "go in suddenly, without warning, and when you have raided, return quickly by the way you came in. But, if so, when you go in to raid, leave a force to hold the passes and the peaks of the mountains, and brave, skilful men in charge of them; and when you have raided, you will return, with God's help, without worries, rejoicing and happy."[161]

Those final joyous phrases complete the section on passes—and by now, the "difficulty" of the latter has become clear. It depends on the interrelationship of two of their topographical features. First is the way they channel an army's movements, making it predictable to an enemy's anticipation. Second is the dominant position they give to whoever holds the heights, offering a decisive advantage to the combatant who occupies the terrain first. Kekaumenos's two lines of counsel play on each of these aspects successively—introducing them into the text as they do so. There is no mention of a possible "other route" (ἄλλης ὁδοῦ) until the instructions to scout for it, nor of "the peaks of the mountains" (τὰς κορυφὰς τῶν ὀρέων) until those to hold them. As in the ambush, an integrated space is built up by the accumulation of individual indications as they become relevant "on the go"— here presented not in story-telling indicative but in the subjunctive, imperative, and future of

[160] Again ἔχω is used for his relationship to scouts acting on his instructions at a distance, emphasizing the commander's control over his agents. Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 26.01.

[161] "εἴσελθε ἐξαίφνης ἀμήνυτος καὶ κουρσεύσας ὑπόστρεψον τάχιον ὅθεν εἰσῆλθες. εἰ δ'οὖν, ὁπόταν εἰσέλθῃς κουρσεῦσαι, ἔασον λαὸν ἵνα κρατήσωσι τὰς κλησούρας καὶ τὰς κορυφὰς τῶν ὀρέων καὶ ἄνδρας γενναίους καὶ ἐντρεχεῖς τοὺς ἐξάρχοντας αὐτῶν, καὶ κουρσεύσας ὑποστρέψεις μετὰ τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ βοηθείας ἔχων τὸ ἀφρόντιστον, χαίρων καὶ εὐφραινόμενος." Kekaumenos, 26.04-9.

advice. By the end of this section, Kekaumenos has constructed a simple mental model not of one particular pass but of mountain passes in general. [162] This "cognitive map" picks out the most militarily salient features of *any* pass (alternative routes and high points)—and can thus be applied to any specific situation by reconnaissance and on-the-ground observation, just as Kekaumenos recommends.[163] In doing so, it acts as a complex heuristic in precisely the way Yi-Fu Tuan, one of the principal early theorists of the "mental map," envisioned.[164]

A reader who has properly absorbed Kekaumenos's *strategikon*, then, will be in no danger of repeating Michael the katepan's mistakes. The text itself will have corrected that figure's second, larger fault: his inexperience. Compared to the exhaustive directions for securing a pass found in the *taktika* proper, Kekaumenos gives hardly any instruction at all.[165] But this may be part of the point. By his own statement this author envisions his work as a complement to that tradition, and gives sophisticated (and much quoted) advice on how and what a general ought to read. [166] Considered as an educational tool, the very wealth of information to be found in the *taktika* can become a problem, overloading the reader with detail. While such overabundance pushes attention out, Kekaumenos's dynamic

[162] Such "cognitive maps" are mental models built up of "landmarks, route-segments, and regions" in that order, not extended two- or three-dimensional representations; in these terms, K. is giving his readers "landmarks" to look out for. For an introduction to the topic, a thorough theoretical overview in the context of ancient "common sense geography", and its application to narrative theory, see respectively Montello, "Spatial Cognition," 113; Thiering, "Spatial Mental Models in Common Sense Geography," esp. 16-36; Ryan, "Cognitive Maps and the Construction of Narrative Space," esp. 237-8. "Mental model," "cognitive map," and "mental map" are equivalent terms—however the last especially has fallen out of favor for its tendency to suggest that "image in the head."

[163] In the terms of Herman's narratological terms, this general applicability is accomplished by the absence—or perhaps, odd nature—of the "particularity" definitive for narrative proper: Koopman, "Ancient Greek Ekphrasis," 23.

[164] Tuan identifies five functions: mental maps (1.) "prepare us to communicate spatial information effectively" and (2.) "make it possible to rehearse spatial behavior so that when we are actually on the road we can act with a degree of assurance we would not otherwise have had;" they serve as (3.) "a mnemonic device;" (4.) "a means to structure and store knowledge;" and (5.) "imaginary worlds [which] depict attractive goals that tempt people out of their habitual rounds." Tuan, "Images and Mental Maps," 210–11. The first four functions are all present in the advice in this advice on passes. For the fifth, *mutatis mutandis*, see my 3.4 below.

[165] E.g., Maurice, *Strategikon*, 9.4; Nikephoros Phokas, "On Skirmishing," 3.

[166] Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 10.23-4, 19.23-7; Roueché, "The Literary Background of Kekaumenos," 117–23.

representations of space, concentrating on key points and their interrelationship, draw it in.[167] As a means of inculcating that military "way of seeing" landscape, his stories and simple advice may be much more likely to make a lasting impression, creating and exercising simple schemata that will stick in the memory to be applied in practice. As will we see in the next chapter, the danger of passes was a Byzantine cliché—yet that Michael the katepan was hardly the only Byzantine general to fall victim to them. The issue is not concrete, first-order content. It is experience (ἐμπειρεῖα), and what comes with it: being able to apply that knowledge, remembering how and when it's important amid the stress and countervailing pressures of a real-life campaign.[168] In comparison to the *taktika* tradition, then, Kekaumenos's peculiar blend of simple precept and pointed story can be seen as a tool for developing that kind of higher-order capacity, to the degree that any text can.[169]

3.3 Fortresses as landscapes of (potential) safety

Most of Kekaumenos's representations of terrain are strictly "active," indicated in the forward flow of narrative (or very detailed advice) rather than in offset description. But when the discussion turns to the spaces which surround fortresses, Kekaumenos does on occasion resort to a more descriptive method. This tendency leads us to the final means in which landscape operates in his *strategikon*: as a source of value for specific kinds of sites, naturally defensible strongpoints. The relevant passages here occur in a succession of stories

[167] "[T]he immersive quality of the representation of space depends not on the pure intensity of the information—which translates in this case as length and detail of the descriptions—but rather on the salience of the highlighted features and on the ability of descriptive passages to project a map of the landscape": Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 124. For more on Ryan's concept of "immersion," see my chapter 4.

[168] A related and vital term is σύνεσις—intelligence or understanding. But in K., as in the *taktika* tradition, this term seems to take on a more specific meaning: context-dependent judgment. Evidence of the latter is K.'s advice on whether to engage in open battle. Here the considerations for and against are precisely balanced, only σύνεσις, judgment in the moment, makes the decision: "Do everything with understanding, and caution and zeal (μετὰ συνέσεως καὶ προσοχῆς καὶ σπουδῆς), so that you will not be open to blame either because of your daring or because of your apparent defensiveness." Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 10.17-9.

[169] As Roueché has demonstrated, this complementary use of exemplary stories and direct advice derives from the cross-cultural admonitory tradition: Roueché, "The Place of Kekaumenos in the Admonitory Tradition," 139–44. This tradition is discussed further at the end of my 3.4.

concerning further advice to the akrites, immediately after the section on passes. The most extensive of these is the first:

> There is a fortress in the region of Greater Armenia; it is in a high place, with, above it, a good-sized plain, sufficient and even abundant for the people who live in the fortress as arable land and as pasture for their livestock, and for all their needs; it is made secure on every side by cliffs and deep ravines, and does not admit of being attacked by anyone from any side. For it's not even possible for anyone to get up there unless by one narrow road, and then to enter first through the gate of the fortress - and that with considerable difficulty. So there was nothing safer than this stronghold.[170]

Those opening words (κάστρον ἐστὶν) alert us that we are in a different discursive mode than either we have seen before: the verb is present indicative rather than the past of the stories or the modals of advice. Indeed, the phrase "there is a place *X*…" was "a staple of ancient storytelling" from Homer on.[171] As we move forward, the first predicate introduces a frame with εἰς providing a broader geographic orientation (εἰς τὰ μέρη τῆς Μεγάλης Ἀρμενίας). It is immediately followed by another (ἔστι δὲ)—the verb highlighted by taking the standalone, rather than enclitic, form at the head of the clause—relating the spatial disposition of the place itself. That proceeds periphrastically in a string of primary tense participles (ἔχον … κατησφαλισμένον … μὴ δεχόμενόν). This is description rather than narration, "omnitemporal" present matched with non-finite forms that emphasize ongoing fact: exceptionally in Kekaumenos, we are here entirely removed from any flow of events.[172]

[170] Κάστρον ἐστὶν εἰς τὰ μέρη τῆς Μεγάλης Ἀρμενίας· ἔστι δὲ εἰς ὑψηλὸν τόπον ἔχον ἐπάνω πεδίον ἱκανόν, ἀρκοῦν καὶ περισσεῦον τοῖς οἰκοῦσιν εἰς τὸ κάστρον εἰς τὴν σπόριμον γῆν καὶ εἰς τὴν νομὴν τῶν κτηνῶν αὐτῶν καὶ εἰς πᾶσαν αὐτῶν χρείαν, πάντοθεν κρημνοῖς καὶ φάραγξι βαθείαις κατησφαλισμένον, μὴ δεχόμενόν ποθεν παρά τινος πολεμηθῆναι. οὐδὲ γάρ ἐστί τινι δυνατὸν ἀνελθεῖν ἐκεῖσε εἰ μὴ διὰ στενῆς ὁδοῦ μιᾶς καὶ τότε εἰσελθεῖν πρῶτον διὰ τῆς πύλης τοῦ κάστρου καὶ τοῦτο μετὰ δυσκολίας πολλῆς. τούτου οὖν τοῦ ὀχυρώματος οὐδὲν ἦν ἀσφαλέστερον. Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 26.13-20.

[171] de Jong, *Narratology and Classics*, 112.

[172] For the syntactical underpinnings of this "descriptive mode" in Ancient Greek, including that "omnitemporal present," see Koopman, "Ancient Greek Ekphrasis," 60.

Following the lead of twentieth-century linguistics, contemporary narratology distinguishes between the "map" and the "tour" as means of conveying spatial information.[173] Kekaumenos uses both strategies here. That first long sentence with the stacked participles offers a bird's-eye view of the fortress delineating its most important features as a defensive site: its altitude, internal resources, and outward defenses. The syntax introduced by πεδίον ... ἀρκοῦν καὶ περισσεῦον even mirrors the topography, in which the fertile plateau, surrounded by cliffs, is described by an inset participial phrase. Having declared the fort's invulnerability at the start of this short "map," Kekaumenos then underscores it via the "tour" of an imagined assailant who must advance first along a narrow road and then through a gate, all with great difficulty (εἰ μὴ διὰ στενῆς ὁδοῦ μιᾶς καὶ τότε εἰσελθεῖν πρῶτον διὰ τῆς πύλης τοῦ κάστρου καὶ τοῦτο μετὰ δυσκολίας πολλῆς). By the end, then, the place has more than earned the author's designation as the safest that could be.

The passage makes space the object of sustained descriptive attention in a way without parallel in Kekaumenos's text. In a work where qualitative adjectives for particular objects[174] are scarce, here there is a series: *ὑψηλὸν* τόπον, πεδίον *ἱκανόν,* τὴν *σπόριμον* γῆν, κρημνοῖς καὶ φάραγξι *βαθείαις, στενῆς* ὁδοῦ μιᾶς.[175] But the vision of landscape thus described is very much continuous with that we have encountered before. Those adjectives are, after all, relating and reiterating the militarily salient features of the site. In doing so, moreover, the passage unites the two different ways in which we have seen, in this chapter and the previous, that the environment can matter for a general: its ability to provide rest and resources and to direct and channel movement. This fortress, in other words, is the whole package—a fertile place that can only be attacked by a single pass-like route, able to

[173] Ryan, "Space," para. 20; Linde and Labov, "Spatial Networks as a Site for the Study of Language and Thought," 930.
[174] As opposed to those qualifying general categories, as in εἰς τόπους ἐπιτηδείους καὶ ἀπροόπτους.
[175] There does seem to be a difference between those phrases where the adjective comes before or after the noun: in the former cases the adjective and noun together seem to make a tighter unit, regardless of the presence of the article. The fact that K. employs such phrases shows that he's attempting a (for him) unusual level descriptive specificity.

indefinitely sustain its defenders even as it frustrates any would-be attacker. These qualities, moreover, are presented as overwhelming the products of the terrain itself. These are natural features, inherent to the topography itself. This preexistent potential has only been lightly augmented by human agency, in a kind of finishing touch, by the addition of that gate at the top of the path.[176]

For the general's gaze, then, this fortress-plateau represents a landscape perhaps as ideal as the *locus amoenus* is for romance. That fact in itself goes some way to explaining the extensiveness of the description here. Far from expressing any personal idiosyncrasy, Kekaumenos is in large summarizing a way of thinking about settlement and terrain, in which the former is profoundly defensively integrated into the latter, that had been developing in Byzantium since late antiquity.[177] As John Teall noticed four decades ago, this change of emphasis, which instead of civilian amenities set military defensibility as the normative ideal for settlements, is legible in the military treatises too.[178] But the change there mostly concerns *taktika*'s instructions about how to defend against a siege (and whom within the settlement it is most essential to protect) rather than in descriptions of the places themselves. Indeed, such passages are surprisingly rare—in many cases, nonexistent.[179] The parallels for such descriptions are instead to be found in historiography. A work almost exactly contemporary

[176] In the "tour," once again, physical structure is related on-the-go, so that that gate first appears, simultaneously for reader and attacker, after traversing the road.

[177] For a recent, theoretically sophisticated summary, see Veikou, "Byzantine Histories, Settlement Stories," 165–76. A difference is that this fortress seems to dominate the landscape rather than conceal itself within it—on which see the end of this chapter.

[178] Teall, "Byzantine Urbanism in the Military Handbooks," 202.

[179] Despite all having at least one chapter on sieges, Maurice's *Strategikon*, Leo VI's *Taktika*, and *On Skirmishing* seem to contain no even approximate equivalents. The anonymous *On Withstanding Sieges* has more, but because it also cites historiographic narrative. Thus this example taken from Arrian—italics indicate direct quotation: "You may see <another example> in the so-called rock of Chorienes, an exceedingly strong position. *It was sheer on all sides (ἀπότομος πάντοθεν)*; the way up to it was single and what is more, narrow and barely *passable, since it had been constructed with no concern for the nature of the terrain (τοῦ χωρίου), so that it was difficult, even with no opposing, to ascend even in single file. A deep ravine (φάραγξ) also completely surrounded the rock…*" (100.16-21). The best evidence of the exceptionality of these two works in the *taktika* tradition is the anonymous *On Strategy*, which contains similar information and even vocabulary, but in form that recalls instead the instructions on ambushes: "Suitable sites (χώρια ... ἐπιτήδειά) for building a city, especially if it is going to be fairly close to the border, are those situated on ridges (κατὰ λόφων), and surrounding cliffs (κρημνοὶ δὲ κύκλῳ) make approach difficult" (§11). Translations (modified) from Sullivan, "A Byzantine Instructional Manual on Siege Defense"; Dennis, "The Anonymous Treatise on Strategy."

to the *Advice and Anecdotes*, Michael Attaleiates's *History*, contains at least one strikingly reminiscent passage.[180] Just as in his presentation of ambushes and the general's acumen, then, Kekaumenos is here blending elements of two traditions—advice from the *taktika* and literary techniques from historiography—to create a text which communicates in a way different from either.

Within Kekaumenos's text, this description of space is unique. Nevertheless, here again, the most important element of military landscape is human: the general and his opponent. This long descriptive passage is in fact only a set up; the past tense in that final summary sentence (οὐδὲν ἦν ἀσφαλέστερον) is also a transition to narrative. The story reinforces the military value of the site even as it underlines that the value of *any* site finally depends on the relative competence of the commanders who contest it. It begins, immediately after ἀσφαλέστερον, by noting that—presumably at least in part as a consequence—a nearby toparch "desired" (ἐπεθύμει) to take control of the fort. He then tricked the Byzantine general into allowing armed soldiers onto the plateau under the pretext of a delivery of grain.[181] Here again, the message is the same. Landscape fundamentally structures combat, but the experience that knows how to use that landscape is the ultimate criterion of success.

It is characteristic that Kekaumenos stresses the negative side of this equation—avoiding mistakes rather than seeking opportunities.[182] While the story on its own might seem to highlight the toparch's cleverness, the moral explicitly drawn points out instead how that cleverness depends entirely on his counterpart's foolishness: "If the general had not trusted those he thought were his friends but had ordered them to unload the corn outside the gate, he

[180] "The city of Ani is large, populous, and surrounded on all sides not by a man-made moat but by natural gullies that impassable and full of steep rocks, and on the side where sheer cliffs and ravines (ἀπορρῶγες καὶ φάραγγες) are lacking it is enclosed by a deep-eddying river that cannot be forded. The area that allows entry into the city is narrow and fortified by high and strong walls" (Bekker pg. 79). Translation from Kaldellis and Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates: The History*.

[181] Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 26.21-27.04.

[182] A marker of this tendency is the relative occurrence of cognates of ἐμπειρία and ἀπειρία in the text, according to the *TLG*: 3 to 17.

would have benefited from them, and their cunning would have come to nothing, and the general would have had no worries."[183] A competent general would have made the toparch a fool. In drawing our attention to that other outcome, this counterfactual brings home the open-ended, game-like aspect of these contests. The consequences of a move depend on the absence of a countermove; one commander's success is really another's failure. And again, as often, the hinge on which the result turns is space—the use or non-use of the defensive advantage of that gate.

But it is equally significant that that moral brings our perspective firmly, even if hypothetically, back on the side of the Roman general. Like that Demetrios Polemarchios at the opposite end of the empire, this toparch is introduced as an ancestor of the author.[184] Indeed, the lead-in to the account of that ambush at the bath contains definite echoes of this Armenian episode. Some prosopographical detail on Kekaumenos's ancestor aside, it reads: "Servia is a strong city in Bulgaria. A Roman general was guarding it, named Magerinos, and two taxiarchs with their thousands. … After laboring indefatigably for a whole year in order to take this invincible city, [Demetrios] wasn't able to capture it; so all that labor was in vain. For it obtained its security from cliffs and terrifying ravines."[185]

The resonances begin in the present-tense geographical orientation of that opening sentence (Σέρβεια πόλις ἐστὶν ὀχυρὰ ἐν Βουλγαρίᾳ). From there, this episode shifts immediately into narrative with the naming of the primary players, but ends up circling back around to a very similar point. Although the "invincible" (ἀπολέμητον) quality of this place is developed through the recounting of Demetrios's efforts to take it, that very quality ensures

[183] εἰ γὰρ οὐκ ἐπίστευσεν ὁ στρατηγὸς τοῖς νομιζομένοις αὐτοῦ φίλοις, ἀλλ' ἔξω τῆς πύλης προσέταξεν ἀποφορτῶσαι τὸν σῖτον, ἐκέρδανεν ἂν αὐτῶν καὶ εἰς κενὸν ἡ πανουργία αὐτῶν κατέληγεν καὶ ὁ στρατηγὸς εἶχεν τὸ ἀφρόντιστον. Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 27.05-9.

[184] ὁ τοῦ Τιβίου τοπάρχης καὶ πάππος μου: Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 26.21. On these two figures and K.'s other *pappoi*, see Roueché, "Defining the Foreign in Kekaumenos.," 205–9.

[185] Σέρβεια πόλις ἐστὶν ὀχυρὰ ἐν Βουλγαρίᾳ. ἐφύλαττε δὲ αὐτὴν στρατηγὸς Ῥωμαῖος ὀνόματι Μαγηρῖνος καὶ ταξιάρχαι δύο μετὰ τῶν χιλιαδῶν αὐτῶν. … πολλὰ οὖν οὗτος κοπιάσας καὶ ἀγρυπνήσας ἐνιαυτὸν ὅλον εἰς τὸ ἑλεῖν αὐτὴν ἀπολέμητον οὖσαν κρατῆσαι οὐκ ἴσχυσεν. ὅθεν καὶ εἰς κενὸν αὐτῷ γέγονεν ὁ τοσοῦτος κόπος. κρημνοῖς τε γὰρ καὶ φάραγξι φοβερωτάταις τὴν ἀσφαλείαν ἐκέκτητο. Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 28.32-29.10.

those efforts are stalled. Text and intradiegetic time may both move forward, but events are stopped (εἰς κενὸν αὐτῷ γέγονεν ὁ τοσοῦτος κόπος) by topographic barriers that plainly recall other fortress's description. Distinguished only by a more expressive adjective and the splitting of the compound verb, κρημνοῖς τε γὰρ καὶ φάραγξι φοβερωτάταις τὴν ἀσφαλείαν ἐκέκτητο (29.10) could be paraphrase of πάντοθεν κρημνοῖς καὶ φάραγξι βαθείαις κατησφαλισμένον (26.16). In both cases, the connection between encompassing cliffs and security is immediately apparent—and in both, will be overcome by the cunning of a crafty assailant. Yet here again, Kekaumenos's ultimate conclusion emphasizes the general's carelessness rather than his ancestor's brilliance.[186]

Separated by only two modern pages, these stories are in fact part of a series of cautionary tales, in each of which a general (usually Byzantine) loses his fortress. Those present-tense geographic introductions proceed by a set formula: "The city/fort *X* is…." They act as an important link between these episodes, especially in the sequence's opening stages.[187] One tale which occurs between the two we have seen shows that not only high, mountainous areas but low, marshy ones can provide topographical safety: "Demetrias is a city in Hellas, by the sea, made secure both by the sea and by the surrounding marshes."[188] In later cases, other kinds of information about the place are offered, or the geographical orientation stands alone.[189] Regardless of the precise introduction or the precise events, however, the lesson of all these stories is the same: a prudent and alert commander will never lose a well-situated fort. For every stratagem of the besiegers there is an answer; a general

[186] "For the man who doesn't take care, but walks unguardedly, often falls, even into misfortunes. So when they had been captured [Demetrios] took the fortress without bloodshed. So take care over these things" Kekaumenos, 29.21-4.

[187] The phrase introduces stories elsewhere as well, e.g. "Thessaloniki is a city (Θεσσαλονίκη πόλις ἐστὶν)…" before the tale of Alousianos discussed in my chapter 2.2: Kekaumenos, 22.09.

[188] Δημητριὰς πόλις ἐστὶ τῆς Ἑλλάδος παρὰ θάλασσαν, ἀπό τε τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ τῶν κύκλωθεν βαλτῶν ἐξησφαλισμένη. Kekaumenos, 28.9-10.

[189] E.g. "Otranto is a city in Italy, by the sea, populous and wealthy (Ἡ Ἰδροῦντα πόλις ἐστὶ τῆς Ἰταλίας παρὰ θάλασσαν, πολυάνθρωπος καὶ πλουσία)" and "Boianos is a strong Bulgarian fortress (ὁ Βοϊάνος κάστρον ἐστὶ Βουλγαρικὸν ὀχυρόν)." Later iterations start add variation, e.g. "There is a fortress called Moreia between Philippopolis and Triaditza (ἔστι κάστρον ὀνομαζόμενον Μόρεια, μέσον Φιλιππουπόλεως(a1) καὶ Τριαδίτζης)." Kekaumenos, 30.03, 32.02, 32.13-4.

who pays attention and has absorbed Kekaumenos's message will be able to withstand any attack.[190]

Here again, the content of Kekaumenos's instructions differs little from the previous military handbooks.[191] The difference is rather in how he presents that information. One thing Kekaumenos's descriptions make clear, in contrast to the *taktika*, is that the safety of these places depends on the site. It is embedded in their physical settings. The point is especially clear in that long passage right at the beginning of the sequence, on the fort in Armenia, and in its echoes in the story of Demetrios at Servia. There, the function of the dedicated descriptions, as neither time-bound narrative nor hypothetical advice, is to underscore that these are *permanent* features: not events, whether actual or possible, but facts. In establishing this point, the descriptive passages and phrases support their associated stories by supplying critical information. Yet, at least in the case of the tales about Kekaumenos's ancestors, the relationship between depiction and narrative works in the other direction too. Both those anecdotes act also to validate the information contained in the descriptive sections, proving by example that such well-sited fortifications can only be taken by subterfuge.[192]

Perhaps more important for Kekaumenos's purpose, however, these stories show that such places' very security introduces a new kind of threat. If something is valuable, someone will want to steal it. It is the toparch's simple desire for the Armenian fort that sets that story in motion, not any broader conflict. The lesson with which Kekaumenos introduces that story—that even apparently friendly independent rulers are not to be trusted—brings home that fact.[193] Kekaumenos's presentation of these places is thus a particularly intricate one: they are points where safety and danger intertwine, in danger because they are safe, yet capable, in the right hands, of withstanding any danger. At the center of that knot is the *value*

[190] A parallel text makes this point explicitly: Anonymous, "On Withstanding Sieges," 98.4-16
[191] Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 185–86.
[192] This mutual reinforcement of general truth and specific narrative was identified by Odorico, "La Sapienza Del Digenis," 11. It is discussed further in my 4.1.
[193]. Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 26.11-2.

of such spaces. It is, perhaps more than any other, the aspect of these places which Kekaumenos's stories and descriptions work together to build. That value is inextricably tied to landscape: introduced into the text via the depiction of terrain and established in the narrative as the reason that terrain matters. It is both written out of and written into the environment itself.

3.4 Conclusion: Landscape as a way of thinking about the border

This chapter has argued that in his *strategikon* Kekaumenos brings together the resources of different traditions of writing to teach a particular way of seeing and exploiting space. As outlined in the first section, narrative devices taken from historiography allow Kekaumenos to demonstrate the perceptual perspective of a competent commander, filling out the *taktika*'s instructions on ambushes. In the second section, we observed how Kekaumenos incorporates such techniques even into his general advice, allowing him to create a cognitive model to aid his readers in the navigation of a particularly treacherous type of terrain, the mountain pass. In the third, we saw how a means of describing the topography of fortifications, discursively separate from narrative or advice and again drawn from historiography, distinguishes such places within Kekaumenos's text, highlighting their unique value as points of possible security. This final section will show attempt to show how all these different elements of landscape work together to define the larger space of the borderlands.

First is the link, suggested in the previous section, between that "way of seeing" and the value of forts. The tale of Kekaumenos's ancestor Demetrios makes the connection very directly—the wilderness outside is a zone of much greater uncertainty, where only the constant vigilance of the commander can preserve both him and his men. Inside, as the story

of the Armenian fort shows, the uncertainty remains, but it is considerably more manageable. The opponents' options are limited, and sufficient precaution and vigilance can make the place virtually invulnerable, even to a heavily disadvantaged commander. Kekaumenos makes this point explicit in his instructions concerning rebellions, when he advises a loyal but outnumbered commander to secure such a place as swiftly as possible after the outbreak of revolt.[194] That advantage is why so much depends on these sites—not just a single imposing fortress, but the space of the empire itself. The command with which Kekaumenos begins that sequence of siege anecdotes makes this point explicit: "Akrites, guard your fortresses and the land entrusted to you."[195] The two terms, fortress and land, go together. Whoever holds the former has a decisive advantage in claiming the latter.

That phrase "the land entrusted to you"—τὴν ἐμπιστευθεῖσαν χώραν—is important. Kekaumenos has repeatedly made it clear that, in war and peace, defending the land (always expressed as τὴν χώραν σου) is one of the primary tasks of a Byzantine general.[196] Indeed, he presents the surrender of land as the cause of the greatest disasters for the Roman people—including the seventh-century loss of Egypt and the Levant.[197] This use of χώρα, moreoever, connects these moments to an even larger series of passages in which Kekaumenos employs this word, almost always with a genitive, to discuss political space: the land of the Romans, the land of the emperor—or, indeed, the land of an independent toparch.[198] Kekaumenos, that

[194] Roueché, *Kekaumenos,* Consilia et Narrationes, 64.15-65.08.
[195] Φύλαττε, ἀκρίτα, τὰ κάστρα καὶ τὴν ἐμπιστευθεῖσαν χώραν. Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 26.10.
[196] E.g. "If you act like this, you keep both your land and your army in safety (καὶ οὕτως ποιῶν φυλάττεις καὶ τὴν χώραν σου καὶ τὸν στρατόν σου σῶον); "guard your land well" (τὴν δὲ χώραν σου φύλαττε καλῶς); "guard your land, and make friends, if you can, from his land (δὲ τὴν χώραν σου καὶ ποίησον φίλους, εἰ δύνασαι, ἐκ τῆς χώρας αὐτοῦ)" (Kekaumenos, 21.28-9, 24.24, 25.03-5).
[197] "But if your adversary also seeks for land to be given him from your land (ἀπὸ τῆς χώρας σου), do not consent, unless he shall agree to be subject and tributary to you; and only do this in the case of great necessity. For from this cause many problems and disturbances have come upon the Romans - <such as> the Ishmaelites in Egypt and Palestine in the time of Heraclius" (Kekaumenos, 17.11-15).
[198] Two more such phrases occur in the *strategikon*: σχεδὸν πᾶσα ἡ τῶν Ῥωμαίων χώρα ἐπλήσθη θρήνων; εἰ δ'οὐ δυνηθῶσιν, ἀλλ'οὖν βλάψουσι καὶ σὲ καὶ τὴν χώραν τοῦ βασιλέως τὰ μέγιστα, Roueché, 23.10-11, 24.29-30. The freestanding section on "advice to the emperor" contains substantially more. Most interesting, however, are those in the "advice to a toparch," which draw the connection between fortresses, land, and political power even more explicitly: "If you own fortresses, or perhaps villages, on your own land (εἰς ἰδίαν χώραν κάστρα τυχὸν ἢ χωρία ἔχῃς), and are a toparch, and hold power in them, don't let wealth or titles or big promises from

is, is interested in thinking about space beyond landscape in the narrow sense we have defined here: in a way outside any unification by an agent's perceptual field.

We ourselves are now entering contested territory. Kekaumenos nowhere offers a definition of what he means by χώρα. The question of how premodern actors conceived of larger, demarcated geopolitical units is a fraught one, which quickly enters into difficult and longstanding debates about both the concept of territory and frontiers.[199] I certainly do not intend to enter such debates here. But that command "Akrites, guard your fortresses and the land entrusted to you," with all its associated passages, does stand as independent evidence that Kekaumenos has some idea of political control over space, which can be won or lost in war, gained or ceded by agreement. The frequency of these admonitions in the advice to the akrites—and their precise mirror image in the advice to the toparch—shows that it is particularly in the interaction between these two figures that such questions of political space become relevant. Kekaumenos has an idea of the border and how it works. Read in quick succession—as, in context, they must be—the passages addressed to the akrites thus have the additional function of building a coherent view of this zone: a much larger cognitive map. Landscape is a basic means by which they do so.

The smallest component—the connection between forts and their surroundings, grounded in the way the former contour the landscape—has been established. But what needs further emphasis is the sheer *repetition* of those stories about sieges, each with its formulaic introduction "City X is…," each with its fundamentally similar account of how the commander let down his guard and paid for it. Even the dullest reader will quickly abstract

the Emperors lead you astray, and give your land to an emperor, and get money and possessions in exchange for it, even if you are going to get four times as much, but own your land, even if it is small and insignificant (ἔχε τὴν χώραν σου κἂν μικρὰ καὶ οὐδαμινή ἐστι)" (Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 76.16-21).

[199] For a good introduction to these debates in regard to the Byzantine-Islamic case especially, see Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*, 10–12. The issue of how Byzantine views may have changed in the eleventh century has also been specifically contested, on which see the (partly) contrasting views of Dagron, "Byzance et La Frontière: Idéologie et Réalité"; Krallis, "The Army That Crossed Two Frontiers"; for a broader recent introduction to (contemporary) geography in Byzantium, Bazzaz, Batsaki, and Angelov, *Imperial Geographies in Byzantine and Ottoman Space*.

out the core message of these places' importance, and how to care for it. But those geographic introductions do something more. They provide a virtual survey of Byzantium's eleventh-century borders, hopscotching between Armenia and Dalmatia, the Aegean coast and the uplands of Bulgaria, Italy and Antioch.[200] Though the precision of that coverage is striking, it may well be unintentional. It is enough for my argument that Kekaumenos's horizons spanned the empire, that he found such broad-scale "geographical thought and imagination" worth repeating—and, most importantly, worth sharing with his readers.[201]

Indeed, we should not be too quick to dismiss the importance of that that dense yet geographically diverse succession of stories. In the traditions within which Kekaumenos is working, nothing quite like it exists.[202] As elsewhere, the *taktika* are for the most part exclusively general in their instructions about cities and sieges, and even the more anecdotal *On Withstanding Sieges* takes its stories from ancient sources.[203] Kekaumenos's use of the formula "City *X* is…" likely derives most immediately from historiography—again, Attaleiates offers several parallels.[204] There, such phrases act as an instrument by which the author maintains the ancient link between geography- and history-writing, both informing his audience and showing off his own (often firsthand) spatial knowledge.[205] But there, these formulae introduce scattered descriptive breaks into a vastly larger, encompassing narrative. In Kekaumenos, they act as something like the discursive backbone of this section itself,

[200] The first five places on this list are the first five stories. The next several return to the Balkans and Greece; Antioch, in a late antique story, is at Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 33.18-32.
[201] For such "geographical thought and imagination," see Angelov, "Asia and Europe Commonly Called East and West." (As with Magdalino's in the following note, I cite this un-paginated/-paragraphed online chapter by providing a searchable direct quote.)
[202] Magdalino's pessimism suggests that little may be found beyond them, either: "Byzantine literature as a whole not only reveals a deafening lack of curiosity about the empire's provincial territories, let alone the lands beyond its borders" (Magdalino, "Constantine VII and the Historical Geography of Empire").
[203] The former "deal in general, transferable geographical features" (Magdalino); for the latter, see Sullivan, "A Byzantine Instructional Manual on Siege Defense," 143.
[204] E.g. "The city of Ani is… (Τὸ Ἀνίον πόλις ἐστὶ…);" "we arrived directly at Artach. This fort is… (εὐθὺ τοῦ Ἀρτὰχ ἐβαδίζομεν. Τὸ δὲ τοιοῦτον κάστρον ἐστὶ…);" and "when he entered Melissopetrion, which is a fort on a certain hill… (ἐπὰν δὲ γένοιτο ἐντὸς τοῦ Μελισσοπετρίου, κάστρον δὲ τοῦτο ἐπί τινος λόφου κείμενον…). Michael Attaleiates, *History*, Bekker pp. 79, 118, 168. Attaleiates's text is filled with such geographical asides.
[205] The bibliography on the connection between ancient geography and historiography is vast. A cogent summary can be found at Clarke, *Between Geography and History*, esp. 82-97.

providing the most important structuring element it contains.[206] This passage is thus important evidence of practical geographical thinking—all the more so in a society which has left a famous dearth of evidence for any kind of working terrestrial map.[207]

That series of places, in other words, is performing one of the crucial functions of mental models as analyzed by Tuan. It is expanding, or at least exercising, Kekaumenos's readers' concept of the extent of the world, putting them into conceptual contact with places they have (likely) never been.[208] That is, it provides an overarching schema of what and where the border is—an overview which the landscape of the stories fills out in agent-focalized detail. Taken together, then, these few pages in the *strategikon* of the *Advice and Anecdotes* convey to the reader an integrated, functional idea of how the Byzantine frontier operates. From top to bottom, it prepares a potential commander for how to engage in this space, from how to orient himself at the broadest, empire-wide scale to how to observe a particular forested hillside. Even that advice on mountain passes plays a role: occurring right before the series of stories, it tells him what to look out for on the edge of his territory. The way of seeing terrain we spent most of this chapter analyzing is thus only one component—albeit the most immediately, practically important—in a much larger way of approaching space.

[206] Another structuring device—"Let me tell you a story of this sort"—occurs less frequently, and in conjunction with the "City *X* is…" formula: e.g. Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 30.02-3, 32.02, 32.13.
[207] On the absence, see Dilke, "Cartography in the Byzantine Empire," 258. What does exist are religiously-inspired depictions of the earth (e.g. Cosmas Indicopleustes) or derive directly from ancient geographers; astrological maps are more common. Even a very optimistic view of Byzantine cartography, such that of Papadopoulos, "Exploring Byzantine Cartographies," relies on hypothesizing from ancient evidence and treating as "maps" images such those examined by Hilsdale, "Constructing a Byzantine "Augusta." The closest equivalents to a working map seem to be the *periploi*, but even these apparently stopped being produced long before K.'s time (though an important example was copied in the tenth century): Savage-Smith, "Maps and Trade," 17.
[208] Tuan, "Images and Mental Maps," 211.

4 A Hero Named for the Frontier: Landscape in the service of Theme and Character in *Digenes Akrites*

The frontier is essential to *Digenes Akrites*: it is right there in the protagonist's title—ἀκρίτης, derived from ἄκρα, border. This is a poem named for a hero, and a hero named for a place. All modern interpretations of *Digenes* start off from these facts, and yet the interpretation of how the poem creates space in concrete terms—how it builds that frontier verse by verse—remains largely unexplored.[209] This chapter undertakes that task, arguing that, as we saw in Kekaumenos, wilderness landscape acts as the means by which the space of the border is defined. Indeed, the kinds of terrain that matter most for *Digenes* are exactly those which exercised Kekaumenos: mountain passes and forests. That correlation itself stands as an interesting indication of the consistency of Byzantium's spatial imagination. Nevertheless, *Digenes* is a very different literary work, and in it these spaces operate in a very different way.

This chapter will argue that the poem builds its landscapes in the service of two closely related functions. The first function is thematic—the evocation of the world of the Middle Byzantine Anatolian borderlands which constitutes both the narrative's setting and the source of its original oral-heroic material. The second is characterizing—the depiction of the protagonist as a figure uniquely suited to, and dominant over, these lands.[210] In fleshing out how each of these functions works in practice, I make use of Marie-Laure Ryan's analysis of "immersion," the way narratives can seem to transport or absorb readers.[211] In particular, Ryan distinguishes between "spatial" and "emotional/ temporal" immersion—the sense that

[209] That is, scholars have focused on the social and cultural history of (displaced) frontier society, hardly addressing the space of the frontier itself: e.g. Angold, "The Poem of Digenes Akrites," 74–75.
[210] For this typology from which these functions are taken, see de Jong, *Narratology and Classics*, 122–28.
[211] For definition, see Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 4–5, 10–12. Ryan's concept has recently been applied to the study of Homer: Allan, de Jong, and de Jonge, "From Enargeia to Immersion."

the setting is a real place through which the narrative moves, and the suspense of investment in characters' fates—which I argue are implicated in the thematic and characterizing functions respectively.

Starting from a maxim about landscape at the beginning of Book 4, the first section examines how mountain passes shape the story of the emir, Digenes's convert father, by acting as border-markers between the domains of Byzantium and Islam. The second section investigates how Digenes himself, in the speech excerpted in the Introduction, uses these same places to define his particular style of martial heroism at the moment of his coming of age. The third shows how that characterization is borne out in actual narratives of combat involving Digenes, the majority of which turn on a very specific means of presenting forested environments. The fourth section then demonstrates how Digenes's solo, highly physical style of engaging landscape is opposed to the much more cerebral, strategic approach of his primary opponent in the poem's biggest battle of all, the fight for the camp in Book 6. The fifth section concludes the chapter by tying all these threads together—in particular, by arguing that wilderness landscape, in all its forms, acts as the means of making the larger, otherwise abstract space of the frontier representable in narrative.

4.1 Passes as theme in the "Lay of the Emir"

Of the dozens of maxims which stud the text of *Digenes*, two deal directly with landscape. These provide direct evidence of the special place of mountain passes in the Byzantine cultural imagination. Interpreted in context, however, they also prove pivotal to the poem's structure. This section will argue that the correlation of those two features is not an accident—that the landscape of the border is one of the poem's recurrent themes, one of a small but continually repeated set of motifs that join this somewhat creakily-assembled epic-

romance into a surprisingly consistent whole.[212] The first of these landscape maxims arrives at the beginning of Book 4, in a passage that acts as a keystone to the work. The latter expounds on the power of love:

> For youth in its prime breaks hearts,
> then braves every deed that has never been ventured,
> to reach the sea and have no fear of fire;
> dragons and lions and other wild beasts
> desire, once established, considers as nothing whatsoever,
> and it regards bold brigands as worth nothing:
> it reckons night as day and passes as plains
> sleeplessness as rest and what is far off as near.[213]

As Jeffreys notes, these lines weave together categorical opposites of greater or lesser direct relevance to *Digenes* to create a universal picture of desire's effects.[214] Among the less relevant are sea and fire. While the former of these elemental opposites may have a special resonance with the novelistic tradition, *Digenes* never comes near it—nor is there any particular threat from fire. The threat of lions, on the other hand, is virtually omnipresent in the poem's wilderness.[215] By Book 4 Digenes's father has already bagged one—but the conquest of dragons, other beasts, and brigands will have to wait for his son. Night/day and sleeplessness/rest introduce other recurrent motifs, to be picked up explicitly during Digenes's courtship of his future wife.[216] Far/near finds a place there too, but has already

[212] This effect is further explored, if perhaps overstated, at Galatariotou, "Open Space / Closed Space," 1996, 303–4; Galatariotou, "Structural Oppositions."
[213] Νεότης γὰρ ἀκμάζουσα καρδίας ἀνασπάει, / εἶτα πάντα κατατολμᾷ τῶν ἀνεπιχειρήτων, / θαλάττης μὲν ἐφίκεσθαι, πῦρ μηδόλως πτοεῖσθαι· / δράκοντας δὲ καὶ λέοντας καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ θηρία / οὐδοτιοῦν λογίζεται στερεωθεὶς ὁ πόθος / καὶ τοὺς λῃστὰς τοὺς τολμηροὺς ἀντ' οὐδενὸς ἡγεῖται, / νύκτας ἡμέρας προσδοκᾷ καὶ τὰς κλεισούρας κάμπους, / ἀγρυπνίαν ἀνάπαυσιν καὶ τὰ μακρὰν πλησίον (*Digenis Akritis*, 4.10-17).
[214] Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, 1998, 67.
[215] A point made explicit a few lines later: "For Samson excelled by rending a lion with bare hands, / but the emir killed a boundless host of lions" (*Digenis Akritis*, 4.25-6).
[216] E.g. *Digenis Akritis*, 4.401-4.

figured prominently in his parents' love story.[217] The same is true of passes/plains (κλεισούρας/κάμπους).[218]

This reverie's placement at the beginning of Book 4 renders its specifically pro- and analeptic qualities all the more significant. This moment is the hinge between the poem's two major parts, where the role of protagonist shifts from Digenes's father ("the emir") to Digenes himself. In looking simultaneously backward and forward, these contrasting terms united by desire help bind together two narrative sequences that otherwise might seem only tangentially related.[219] Standing outside either story but linked to both, the passage becomes programmatic for the work as a whole, paralleling similar (but more developed) extra-narrative demonstrations of the power of Love in the Komnenian novels and later romances.[220] It thus demonstrates at a very abstract level the "double action" which Odorico has identified as characteristic for the poem's use of gnomes overall. This process, in which maxims explain and generalize the surrounding action even while being supported, because illustrated, by it, is an important means by which *Digenes* draws together its narrative even on a smaller scale.[221]

Landscape, embodied in the pass/plain distinction, might thus seem to be as thematically significant for the epic as the archetypal categories announced by any of those other opposites. In the poem's first major part, the so-called "Lay of the Emir," that is indeed the case. The opening three books build an imagined geography in which the passes, κλεισοῦραι—always associated with negative affect—mark the boundary between the lands

[217] E.g. *Digenis Akritis,* 3.34-6, 3.46-7.
[218] It is worth noting that that pair stands exactly parallel to the others. The force of this maxim depends on the immediate, self-evident connotation of each side of the opposition. These are pairs that mean bad and good, hard and easy: here the value distinction between passes and plains is as clear as night and day.
[219] The original heterogeneity of the "Lay of Emir" was a persistent theme of 20th-century scholarship on the poem, on which see Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, 1998, xxxii.
[220] Nilsson, *Erotic Pathos, Rhetorical Pleasure*, 202–8; Agapitos, "Dreams and the Spatial Aesthetics of Narrative Presentation in 'Livistros and Rhodamne,'" 124–26.
[221] Odorico, "La Sapienza Del Digenis," 139.

of the Byzantines and those of their Muslim enemies.[222] The story begins with the emir's abduction of Digenes's mother, after which at their own mother's order, her brothers set off in pursuit:

> Neglecting nothing and not taking their fill of sleep,
>
> within a few days they came upon the army,
>
> in the pass, the dreadful one they call Difficult.[223]

Together these lines create their own mini-narrative of space, one that resonates with multiple elements of Book 4's programmatic ode to love. The first establishes the brothers' simultaneous diligence and speed—*how* they conduct the journey.[224] Via a formula announcing simultaneous passage of time and space, the second covers distance, culminating in their arrival—*how long*.[225] The third introduces the *where* of the remainder of their encounter with the emir. As a spatial frame, this one is unusually prominent in *Digenes* in taking up a whole verse.[226] Here, the spatial indication proper (εἰς τὴν κλεισοῦραν) takes pride of place at the beginning of the verse, while the remainder fills it out with qualifiers: "dreadful" (τὴν δεινὴν), almost a standard epithet of passes in *Digenes*, and the name "Difficult" (ἣν Δύσκολον καλοῦσι). The latter is possibly the Cilician Gates,[227] but might well also be considered something like a "reality effect," populating the imagined world of the poem with specific (if spurious) places in order to lend it credibility as an existing

[222] That is, in the cognitive terms developed at in the previous chapter, passes function as salient "landmarks" in the poem's "common sense geography."
[223] καὶ μηδὲν ἀμελήσαντες, ὕπνου μὴ κορεσθέντες, / διὰ βραχέων ἡμερῶν ἔφθασαν τὰ φουσσᾶτα / εἰς τὴν κλεισοῦραν τὴν δεινὴν ἣν Δύσκολον καλοῦσι· (*Digenis Akritis*, 1.88-90).
[224] As often in post-classical Greek, sleeplessness is a stand-in for alert care in general: Bauer and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, s.v. ἀγρυπνία 2.
[225] For such interrelated "passage of time" and "passage of space" formulae in later romance, see Agapitos, *Narrative Structure in the Byzantine Vernacular Romances*, 233–38, 275–76.
[226] Such elements usually occupy a set position at the end of the line, for which see section 4.3 below.
[227] Identified as such by Kalonaros in 1941: cited in Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, 1998, 390. The online version of the *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* records no such name.

space.[228] In either case, the choice to use as a name here the precise quality Kekaumenos associated with passes (δυσκολία) says much about the latter's connotation.

The specific topographical characteristics of mountainous terrain play, perhaps, a continuing role in the larger setting of the emir's camp.[229] But when the brothers' sister recalls this episode as a whole in Book 2, it is by that pass (εἰς κλεισοῦραν—now at the end of the verse) that she locates it: "you dared to go alone against thousands / and join battle for my sake in the pass."[230] There, also for her sake, the emir turned back—this is the place where his conversion, inspired by love, began. And so, as the emir prepares to head home for his mother in Book 3, it is natural that his thoughts return to this place. This speech marks one of *Digenes*'s most sustained presentations of space:

> For my soul is on fire, my heart is burning,
> as I contemplate the boundless length of my journey.
> When shall we cross the fearful plains, my retainers,
> and the fearful hills and the dreadful passes,
> and when shall I gaze on Rachab and see my mother?[231]

This list of topographical features has both spatial and narrative functions. The former is, most immediately, to add verbal substance to that "boundless length" (ἄπειρον διάστημα), giving the distance a register in the text.[232] But the specifics fulfill thematic purposes too. Plains, hills, and passes are very much a feature of lands that separate Cappadocia from Syria—to the degree that an early twentieth-century's English traveler's impressions almost

[228] Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 130.
[229] If so, it is a secondary but particularly gruesome one: the bodies of the murdered women are found a ῥύαξ/ ῥυάκιον (a stream or ditch) which *On Skirmishing* associates with passes: *Digenis Akritis*, 1.223-6; *On Skirmishing*, 3.3.
[230] "μόνοι κατετολμήσατε ἐλθεῖν εἰς χιλιάδας / καὶ πόλεμον συνάψασθαι δι' ἐμοῦ εἰς κλεισοῦραν" (*Digenis Akritis*, 2.232-3). These lines occur in the middle of a rhetorical question about the power of mothers' curses.
[231] φλέγεται γάρ μου ἡ ψυχή, καίεται ἡ καρδία, / κατανοῶν τὸ ἄπειρον διάστημα τοῦ δρόμου. / Πότε κάμπους τοὺς φοβεροὺς διέλθωμεν, ἀγοῦροι, / καὶ τοὺς βουνοὺς τοὺς φοβεροὺς καὶ τὰς δεινὰς κλεισούρας, / καὶ τὴν Ῥαχὰβ θεάσωμαι, ἴδω μου τὴν μητέρα;
(*Digenis Akritis*, 3.46-50) .
[232] Ryan, "Space," para. 11.

paraphrase these lines.[233] In this passage, then, the poem is developing a "sense of place," one designed to transport the poem's 12th- or 13th-century audience (likely originally to be found in Constantinople)[234] to the long-lost borderlands of inner Anatolia.[235]

Those adjectives—the *fearful* plains and hills (κάμπους τοὺς φοβεροὺς / τοὺς βουνοὺς τοὺς φοβεροὺς), the *dreadful* passes (τὰς δεινὰς κλεισούρας)—contribute to this process. Though it is not clear whether these are generic attributes or specific to the Emir in this circumstance, the two options ultimately come to the same thing. The emir will be venturing into a centuries-old warzone, far removed from state structures or settled life.[236] In this succession of topographical terms, the poem is picturing wilderness as no-man's-land. This is indeed landscape—space viewed—of kind, but not the coherently interrelated domain such as we found in Kekaumenos. Distance, not connection, matters in these verses. Far-off "Rachab," perhaps vague but obviously non-Greek, drives home the point: here terrain is (very broad-brush) regional geography, rather than unified scene.[237]

As a narrative device this speech of the emir's foreshadows the journey itself, building tension by raising the possibility of danger. Via those adjectives, this expectation is presented as inherent in the spaces themselves. Nor is it disappointed:

> When [the emir] reached the uninhabited passes,
>
> as he journeyed he guarded his retainers on all sides.
>
> One day as they were traveling in a very dreadful pass

[233] The passage is cited in the title (and first page) of Sarris, "Beyond the Great Plains and the Barren Hills," 77.
[234] Jeffreys, "The Afterlife of 'Digenes Akrites,'" 147–49.
[235] For such narrative transport in modern literature, see Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 124–27.
[236] Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 78–79; Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*, 293–99; Sarris, "Beyond the Great Plains and the Barren Hills," 82–83. But neither should the "melancholy … monotonous, colourless, lifeless, unsubdued" quality that impressed Gertrude Bell, that traveler, be entirely discounted (quoted at Sarris, 77).
[237] Possibilities for "Rachab" include Raqqa and Edessa/Urfa (Arabic Ruhā): Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, 1998, 396; Odorico, *Digenis Akritas*, xlvii–iii.

they found a fearsome lion carrying a hind.[238]

The emir's caution upon entering the pass reactivates the threat opened up by his speech some forty lines before. But now the apprehension of danger is present, decisively focalized on the main character. As soon as it is reintroduced, that fear is realized in the lion—which sends those retainers scrambling up the mountain.[239] The emir promptly kills it, in a move that has been interpreted as either reestablishing his heroic excellence (in doubt since defeat by his future brother-in-law) or finally laying to rest his inner conflict about his former allegiance to Islam (by slaying a bestial symbol of the border).[240] More prosaically, as a matter of storytelling mechanics, the episode provides some content to fill out the distance between the emir's old and new homes, so that that "boundless" journey isn't over in a verse. Nevertheless, the emir's emphasis, after the kill, on collecting the lion's trophies for his son, the infant Digenes, suggests something important is going on here: and that, in some way, the eponymous hero's heritage is in play.[241]

None of these readings contradicts the other: what's important for us is that it's *at a pass* where these suggestive events unfold. This point is reiterated at each of the pivotal moments, in line-ending prepositional phrases that highlight the setting's wildness (εἰς *ἀοίκους* κλεισούρας) and general awfulness (εἰς *πάνδεινον* κλεισοῦραν) respectively. Considered in light of the whole series of mentions of passes—both the prolepsis in the emir's speech and the analepsis at the start of Book 4—another reading opens up. The episode reinforces the thematic importance of mountain passes as virtually archetypal sites of

[238] Ὅτε δὲ κατελάμβανεν εἰς ἀοίκους κλεισούρας, / διήρχετο γὰρ γύρωθεν φυλάττων τοὺς ἀγούρους. / Ἐν μιᾷ οὖν ὁδεύοντες εἰς πάνδεινον κλεισοῦραν, / λέοντα εὗρον φοβερὸν κρατοῦντα ἐλαφῖναν· (*Digenis Akritis* 3.89-92).
[239] ὡς δὲ τοῦτον ἐσκέψαντο οἱ ἄγουροι, εὐθέως / θροηθέντες ἀνέδραμον πάντες ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος (*Digenis Akritis*, 3.93-4).
[240] Ricks, "*Digenes Akrites* as Literature," 169–70; Elizbarashvili, "The Formation of a Hero in *Digenes Akrites*," 441–42.
[241] Goldwyn, *Byzantine Ecocriticism*, 55–56.

the Anatolian frontier.[242] This lion, whose skin and teeth Digenes Akrites will wear, provides an object lesson of the dangers inherent in the spaces that give him his second name—and of the corresponding rewards for those brave enough to face these dangers.

4.2 Digenes, dominance, and the characterizing function of space

The "thematic" function of passes tends to blend into a "characterizing" one. The process becomes even clearer in passes' next appearance, also in Book 4—significantly, that opening praise of love looks forward as well, to Digenes's courtship of his own wife. The scene in which he does contains the second maxim to spotlight passes: a place which is also, perhaps surprisingly given their previous prominence, that topographical feature's second-to-last appearance in the epic. This passage is the one with which this thesis's Introduction began; it occurs right at the moment when Digenes is trying to convince his future wife to defy her father and elope. The hero starts by assuring the girl he's not afraid of any reprisal:

> But let this be understood and certain to you, my soul,
> that I expect to crush armies on my own
> and to defeat divisions and subdue states.
> Your father and his retainers
> and likewise your brothers with your kinsmen
> I reckon as complete babes-in-arms and as nothing at all.
> This only I seek to learn from your lips
> whether you are very eager to follow me,
> so that we might come out of the roads of the passes before daybreak.
> For alleyways and narrows are death to brave men

[242] By the eleventh century κλεισοῦρα had been long established as the name of a type of military district originating in the mountains of the Anatolian frontier. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565-1204*, 79.

while on the plains cowards are made bold.[243]

Here space's characterizing function takes on a further dimension. This speech marks an important moment in the protagonist's transition to manhood. Having performed his first hunt shortly before, Digenes has already proven himself against beasts. But these verses constitute far and away the most extensive evidence yet of his aspirations to military dominance. And it is fitting, considering the poem's central themes, that Digenes makes this announcement in the service of love. His speech develops persuasively. Overall claims to more-than-ordinary martial prowess (which we readers have known to be justified since the 12-syllable preface) quickly slide into confidence in the face of the imminent threat. This dismissal of the challenge posed by the girl's family definitely echoes, if it does not precisely quote, love's disregard of dragons, wild beasts, and brigands in the book's programmatic opening (οὐδοτιοῦν λογίζεται … ἀντ' οὐδενὸς ἡγεῖται, 4.14-5; πάντως βρέφη λογίζομαι καὶ μηδὲν ὅλως ὄντα, 4.469). In the relationship between the two passages, Odorico's double mechanism is once again in action, as adage and incident lend each other mutual support.[244]

Then comes the crucial question: is the girl herself willing? It is little exaggeration to say that the entirety of the subsequent plot hinges on the answer. Digenes's *next* words are about terrain. Again a journey is at stake: landscape as a marker of distance. The Greek—hard to get precisely into English—emphasizes transit, starting with "roads" and specifying passes only after they've been exited (on the other side of the caesura: ὡς ἂν ὁδοὺς ἐξέλθωμεν | τοὺς στενωποὺς πρὶν φέξῃ). That line ends by imposing a time limit, which is in turn justified by the following gnome—one that gives perhaps the poem's clearest statement

[243] Ἀλλ' ἔστω σοι τοῦτο γνωστὸν καὶ βέβαιον, ψυχή μου, / ὅτι φοσσᾶτα προσδοκῶ μόνος καταπονέσαι / νικῆσαι τε παραταγὰς καὶ κράτη ὑποτάξαι· / τὸν δὲ πατέρα τε τὸν σὸν καὶ τοὺς αὐτοῦ ἀγούρους / ὡσαύτως καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς μετὰ τῶν συγγενῶν σου / πάντως βρέφη λογίζομαι καὶ μηδὲν ὅλως ὄντα. / Τοῦτο μόνον ζητῶ μαθεῖν παρὰ τῶν σῶν χειλέων, / εἰ προθυμεῖς κατὰ πολὺ ἐμοὶ ἀκολουθῆσαι, / ὡς ἂν ὁδοὺς ἐξέλθωμεν τοὺς στενωποὺς πρὶν φέξῃ· / ῥύμαι γὰρ καὶ στενώματα ἀποκτείνουν ἀνδρείους, / εἰς δὲ τοὺς κάμπους ἄνανδροι τολμηροὶ ἐκποιοῦνται (*Digenis Akritis*, 4.464-74).

[244] In this case the mechanism is internally doubled, as the maxim could be read in two ways depending on whether love merely *thinks* nothing of obstacles or can actually *make* nothing of them. The very fact of Digenes's confidence testifies to the former, while its proof by events does to the latter.

on the entangled cultural meaning of plains and passes. But before turning to that, we should note a terminological difference. Κλεισοῦρα nowhere appears in this passage; instead, the word to designate "pass" is στενωπός. The distinction between these two is mostly (and untranslatably) about register—when used of topography, their denotation is identical.[245] Also relevant here may be the strong association of στενο- compounds with metaphorical as well as literal confinement.[246] In particular, the etymological connection to στενώματα in the maxim may be particularly effective—rendering the saying instantly apposite without risking tautology.

The gnome returns once again to the special menace of passes which has haunted their mention throughout the poem. As in Kekaumenos, landscape is an index of excellence, but in almost inverse way. Here the challenge of passes is transposed onto a very different framework of values. While in Kekaumenos the terms of praise or blame concerned cognition—planning and experience—here they are about strength and daring: literally, manliness or its lack (ἀνδρείους / ἄνανδροι). The former is a quality Digenes possesses in superabundance, precociously announced in his claims to martial supremacy a few verses before.[247] But in this, Digenes is a warrior, not a general: he will smash armies "alone" (μόνος, 4.465). The sole opponent that concerns him, apparently, is topographical—the narrow routes that kill, actively, even the brave (ῥύμαι γὰρ καὶ στενώματα *ἀποκτείνουν* ἀνδρείους). The agency is with the terrain, which negates the natural ranking between combatants. The sources of this lethality are not explained, but it's tempting to find them in that "difficulty" elucidated by Kekaumenos: the way the peculiar physical attributes of passes make them a problem to be solved by craftiness and preparation rather than a neutral ground

[245] A remark by Michael Attaleiates says so outright: "[this place] has many στενωποὺς, which popular speech has taken to calling κλεισούρας (στενωποὺς ἔχει πολλούς, οὓς ὁ δημώδης λόγος κλεισούρας καλεῖν παρέλαβε)": text and translation, Pérez Martín, *Miguel Ataliates:* Historia, 29 (=Bekker 37); Kaldellis and Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates: The* History, 65. Κλεισοῦρα's lower register stems from its origin as a Latin loan: Browning, *Medieval and Modern Greek*, 41.
[246] E.g. Liddell et al., *The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. στενός II, στενοχωρία II.
[247] A point noted by Magdalino, "Honour among Romaioi," 190.

for contests of valor.[248] Whatever the reason, it's the passes Digenes wants to escape. On a level playing field, even cowards may become bold (εἰς δὲ τοὺς κάμπους ἄνανδροι τολμηροὶ ἐκποιοῦνται)—but he has made very clear he's not afraid of any open fight.[249]

In the moment, at least, landscape offers a solution to the age-old epic problem of building suspense with an invincible protagonist. By making concrete a scenario in which Digenes might be defeated, the maxim works to create a sense of urgency: to explain why Digenes needs the girl's answer *now*. In Marie-Laure Ryan's terms, landscape is thus being used to create not spatial but "temporal and emotional immersion" by generating a narrow range of possibilities on which the hero's fate depends.[250] And it is doing so at a crucial point. For a poem whose discourse returns over and over to the power of love—and whose plots revolve around the abduction of women—this scene is a, perhaps *the*, pivotal moment. If the plot so far has all been leading up to the emergence of Digenes, the preternatural border hero, the stories of his deeds will all turn, usually more directly than indirectly, on the girl. From the first battle with her father's men—which goes just as Digenes predicts—his military conquests as actually narrated, rather summarily reported, are performed almost with exception in defense of her; his dying speech suggests that *all* his deeds were.[251] His other romantic interludes, with Haplorrabdes's daughter and Maximou, end in guilt because they constitute adultery against her. His final house and garden are built for and enjoyed with her. This moment at the window, when all that is still in doubt, demands urgency, not just from

[248] Natural pitfalls—falling off cliffs, etc.—are certainly not at issue here, or Digenes wouldn't want to get out of the passes before day.
[249] For a quite different interpretation of this gnome as well as its literary function (or lack thereof), cf. Dyck, "The Taming of Digenes: The Plan of 'Digenes Akrites', Grottaferrata Version, Book IV," 299. The equivalent in E version runs from ll. 876-95. Interestingly, it contains the same idea that D. will face anyone on an open battlefield but would prefer not to be trapped *without* any talk of passes: he just wants to leave the vicinity of the girl's home.
[250] Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, esp. 142. The citation is from the title of the chapter.
[251] That speech is at *Digenis Akritis*, 8.121-2. For a scholarly accounting of the balance in the E recension, on this point comparable, see Mackridge, "'None But the Brave Deserve the Fair,'" 151–52.

Digenes but also from the audience. The need to cross the passes before daylight, to get moving, is one way the poem draws this out.[252]

But *Digenes* is not unified in the way we expect of modern literature, high or low. Its consistency is often more a product of continual drawing on a common pool of themes and motifs than of careful attention to mechanisms of plot.[253] In a modern text we might expect that gnome to act as a "Chekhov's gun," drawing attention to a possibility to be realized later in the work. But the gun doesn't fire. Instead, the danger of passes is raised, operates in this moment, and disappears, never to return. The contest against the girl's father's men does indeed take place on dawn-lit plains, a stage-setting briefly but effectively evoked.[254] The setting is still that landscape which *Digenes* has been building since its inception.[255] But in their preceding flight the lovers meet no passes, nor do these feature in any of Digenes's further adventures. This chapter's next section will argue that, in those subsequent books, their thematic function as geographic markers of wilderness is taken up by other kinds of landscape, most notably forest. And indeed, a close examination of how terrain functions in the depictions of combat there offers some insight on how to understand the non-realization of the threat of narrow places. Unlike most modern—or indeed, many Western medieval—tales of derring-do, *Digenes* shows no interest in presenting its protagonist at genuine risk of defeat: instead, its battles dramatize his constant composure and mastery in increasingly adverse scenarios.[256]

[252] For other aspects of the construction of this scene, see Dyck, "The Taming of Digenes: The Plan of 'Digenes Akrites', Grottaferrata Version, Book IV," 297–98.
[253] For a different view on the "the internal structure, coherence, and continuity of the story," cf. Galatariotou, "Open Space / Closed Space," 1996, 303.
[254] The verses are particularly memorable for the way the time-indication (daybreak) and space-indications (shadowy plains) fuse in an "active" narrative presentation: "And just as the light of day was dawning, / [the retainers] caught them there on the shadowy plains (Καὶ τοῦ φωτὸς αὐγάζοντος ἀπάρτι τῆς ἡμέρας, / ἐκεῖ τοὺς ἐκατέλαβον εἰς τοὺς ἀδήλους κάμπους)" (*Digenis Akritis*, 4.620-1).
[255] As in modern literature, this effect may be effective precisely for relying on the repetition of a few specially charged "mooring points" rather than inundations of detail: Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 127.
[256] For a close reading of a very different means of presenting both space and combat in a Western romance, see Lechtermann, "Topography, Tide and the (Re-)Turn of the Hero," 115–20.

4.3 Forested terrain and heroic narratives of combat

Fittingly, the poem's primary mode of presenting the space of combat—and the wilderness landscapes that go with it—make its appearance in the hero's very first rite of passage: his initiatory hunt. There, the young hero has just dispatched some bears when "a deer leaped from the midst of the thicket."[257] He swiftly catches it, but at the next moment "a very large lion stepped out of the reed-bed."[258] These formulae, in which an opponent emerges from heavy vegetation to begin an episode of chase or combat, recur throughout the poem. Thus late in Book 4, after Digenes's marriage and move to the wild, the emperor is visiting when "a lion, coming out of the grove / terrified those who were present with him."[259] In Book 5, the protagonist (now narrator) has stopped at a Syrian oasis "and Arabs came suddenly out of the marsh."[260]And toward the beginning of Book 6, finally, his wife goes to rest beside a tree "and, look, a fearsome lion came out of the grove."[261] In all of these, a clear pattern is evident, and for Digenes, the results are always the same. The enemy is quickly taken, in an exhibition of the protagonist's supernatural strength and speed: qualities explicitly praised at the very first round of the first hunt.[262] Indeed, the parallelism between these moments is even clearer in Greek: the opponent's verb of movement always carries the prefix ἐκ; the item of cover, in the genitive behind a preposition, takes a fixed position at the end of the line.

Such formulae thus constitute a standard way in which the poem presents space. As a means of doing so, these tags are definitely "active" in the sense discussed in the previous chapter: they indicate the surroundings via narrations of combat, action in the very narrowest

[257] ἔλαφος ἐξεπήδησε μέσον τῆς παγαναίας (*Digenis Akritis*, 4.140).
[258] λέων ἐξέβη μέγιστος ἀπὸ τοῦ καλαμιῶνος (*Digenis Akritis* 4.162).
[259] λέων τις ἐκ τοῦ ἄλσους / ἐξελθὼν διεπτόησε τοὺς μετ' αὐτοῦ παρόντας (*Digenis Akritis*, 4.1066-7).
[260] καὶ Ἄραβοι ἐξήεσαν ἄφνω ἀπὸ τῆς ἕλης / ὑπέρτεροι τῶν ἑκατόν, πάντες δὲ κονταρᾶτοι, / οὕτως δέ μοι ὑπέπεσαν ὡς γῦπες εἰς τὸ βρῶμα (*Digenis Akritis*, 5.178-80).
[261] Καὶ ἰδού, λέων φοβερὸς ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ τοῦ ἄλσους (*Digenis Akritis* 6.91). The serpent and the band of apelatai who attack in this same book approach openly: the former disguised as a seductive youth, the latter because they outnumber D. 45 to 1. After the battle some apelatai do, however, escape into a marsh (*Digenis Akritis*, 6.152).
[262] *Digenis Akritis* 4.119-20, 4.148-54.

sense. In part, of course, they function as handy techniques of beginning a hunt or battle without a lot of lead-in. Here, simple narrative convenience probably plays a role in their recurrence, and in any case the surprise of the sudden emergence underlines the poem's thematically important alternation of safety and danger.[263] And yet there is reason to believe something fundamental is going on here too. These narratives work to highlight the hero's extraordinary sangfroid and physical prowess, but in a quite particular way: by giving all the initiative to the opponent. This is an important part of what those formulae do. Digenes, who remarks early on that he has no fear of ambushes,[264] demonstrates his superiority by prevailing even though he makes the second move. The process begins as early as that scene with the deer:

> After the roars from the bears and the drumming of feet,
> a deer sprang up from the middle of the covert.
> The emir cried: "Take it, child, in front of you!"
> As soon as he heard his father, he rushed out like a leopard
> and with a few strides reached the deer
> and, grasping it by its rear legs,
> shook it and tore it in two.[265]

Digenes, still concerned with his previous quarry, starts a step behind us; he has to be warned by his father to start moving. The suspense is all about the gap between perception and reaction—at first, it seems that there must be one, and that the hero has already lost his opportunity. But Digenes, like a panther, can move in ways that defy ordinary human

[263] Dyck, "On *Digenes Akrites*, Grottaferrata Version, Book 6," 355.
[264] *Digenis Akritis*, 4.302.
[265] Ἐκ δὲ τῶν ἄρκτων τοὺς βρυγμοὺς καὶ τῶν ποδῶν τοὺς κτύπους, / ἔλαφος ἐξεπήδησε μέσον τῆς παγαναίας· / ὁ ἀμιρᾶς ἐλάλησε: «Δέχου, τέκνον, ἐμπρός σου.» / Καὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ὡς ἤκουσεν, ὥσπερ πάρδος ἐξέβη, / καὶ εἰς ὀλίγα πηδήματα φθάνει τὴν ἐλαφῖναν / καὶ τῶν ποδῶν δραξάμενος αὐτῆς τῶν ὀπισθίων, / ἀποτινάξας ἔσχισε ταύτην εἰς δύο μέρη (*Digenis Akritis*, 4.139-45).

capabilities.[266] Thus a scenario which, for most humans, would end with the sight of the deer's legs disappearing into the brush ends instead with him literally ripping the animal in two.

A similar effect occurs at the Arabs' ambush in Book 5—only here the situation starts out even more out of hand. Digenes has dismounted and tied up his horse in order to rest by the water:

> And Arabs burst suddenly out of the marsh,
> more than a hundred, all of them lancers.
> They fell on me like vultures on a carcass,
> and my charger in great panic broke the branch,
> but I, catching him as he started down the road,
> hastily mounted, grasping my lance;
> I made an onslaught on them and killed many.[267]

Digenes has already defeated thousands of his future father-in-law's retainers in open combat in Book 4: at this point a fair fight wouldn't yield much tension. And so, instead, the odds are outrageously stacked against him. Digenes is taken by surprise, outnumbered a hundred to one, and dismounted: in the simile his opponents have wings and he's already dead.[268] Worse, in the scene's second event his horse breaks free and makes a run for it: the animal's panic gives a register of how bad the prospects are. But again, while Digenes may be inconvenienced, he's not in danger—as soon as the first-person pronoun is in the nominative

[266] On such "zoomorphic metaphors," see Goldwyn, *Byzantine Ecocriticism*, 58.

[267] καὶ Ἄραβοι ἐξήεσαν ἄφνω ἀπὸ τῆς ἕλης / ὑπέρτεροι τῶν ἑκατόν, πάντες δὲ κονταρᾶτοι, / οὕτως δέ μοι ὑπέπεσαν ὡς γῦπες εἰς τὸ βρῶμα· / καὶ ὁ φάρας πολλὰ φθαρεὶς ἀπέσπασε τὸν κλῶνον, / ἐγὼ δὲ τοῦτον κατασχὼν ἐχόμενον τοῦ δρόμου / μετὰ σπουδῆς ἐπέβαινον κατέχων τὸ κοντάριν / καὶ πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἐπιδραμὼν πολλοὺς τούτων ἀνεῖλον (*Digenis Akritis*, 5.178-84).

[268] This simile both registers the lancers' actual attack (in fact provides the *only* register of the attack itself) and has us momentarily visualize an alternative scene where D.'s equivalent is literally dead meat—thus setting up the turn-around all the more effectively. The vividness of such (double-)visualization via similes in Homer is analyzed at Allan, de Jong, and de Jonge, "From Enargeia to Immersion," 39.

at the front of line 152 (ἐγὼ δὲ τοῦτον κατασχὼν…), first the horse, then the situation are soon under control.

These passages construct space as a domain of coherently interrelated movement. Both present the protagonist together with a second human agent (or set of agents) and an animal, each of whose independent actions we must follow for the story to make any sense at all. As in Kekaumenos, vision and mobility are key terms. But here, after the initial surprise, everything happens in the movement, and Digenes's gifts are such that no obstacle can stand in his way. Any imagined physical disposition of the setting thus immediately becomes irrelevant. Considered as landscape, then, even those opening formulae (μέσον τῆς παγαναίας, ἀπὸ τῆς ἕλης) are decidedly flat. They provide a context (occasionally, a pretext) for the opponent's entrance and then their work is done. The contrast with Kekaumenos is stark. There, the terrain was the story, the pivot on which success or failure turned. Here it is little more than a starting gun.

This is not to say that the poem has no interest whatsoever in building consistent settings, but that that immersion works in a different way. Terrain is always an (initial) obstacle to overcome, never an opportunity to exploit—and certainly never one to exploit in combat. That broken branch at the oasis, for instance, picks up a detail seemingly dropped as an aside, a bit of narrative housekeeping (what to do with the horse?), nearly a hundred lines before.[269] Moreover, the danger posed by the marsh has been foreshadowed even earlier, in lines that demonstrate the threat inherent in *any* of these environments:

> and I was absolutely terrified: my hair stood on end
>
> and I drew the weapon that always protects me,
>
> for the place was deserted, pathless and marshy.[270]

[269] The same place also mentions that the lance has been set against a tree: Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, 1998, ll. 5.58-9. The intervening verses are taken up by the backstory of a girl Digenes meets at the oasis.

[270] ἔκδειλος ὅλος γέγονα, τριχῶν μου ὀξυνθέντων, / καὶ τὸ φρουροῦν με δὴ ἀεὶ διεχάραττον ὅπλον· / ἦν γὰρ ὁ τόπος ἔρημος, ἄβατος καὶ ἀλσώδης (*Digenis Akritis*, 5.38-40).

The fear in the first line is particular to its context: Digenes thinks the girl he is seeing a ghost. But, as the next shows, even against the supernatural his instinct is to fight. The third explains the previous two by reference to the character of the place itself: its wildness (ἦν γὰρ ὁ τόπος ἔρημος, ἄβατος καὶ ἀλσώδης). That γὰρ, so often encountered in the introduction of the gnomes, is suggestive. Indeed, this explanation has a very similar double relationship to the surrounding action: on the one hand laying groundwork for the surprise attack, which on the other will retrospectively justify its general truth. But the line does something more too. It underlines that such forested wilderness is thematically significant in these middle books of *Digenes* in much the same way that mountain passes are for the first three. These spaces carry a similar charge; it is important that the protagonist's deeds occur there, in the lonely and threatening spaces of the frontier.[271]

The terrain in those bursting-from-vegetation formulae plays its part in maintaining this overarching thematically immersive setting. But in none of these episodes does the land play a central role in the resolution of the action; as such, it never itself coheres into a clearly delineated local topography. Like Kekaumenos, *Digenes* tells stories about the dominance of space, but that mastery works in a very different way. It is the result of the exquisite physical gifts and mental composure that allow a controlled response to any degree of chaos, rather than the experienced perception that never loses control. The difference is not one of technical deficiency but of narrative choice—about the kind of hero Digenes is, and the kind of text *Digenes* is. This is a poem about a warrior, not a general.

[271] Thus his desire to live alone in the wild, first announced at *Digenis Akritis*, 4.951-64.

4.4 Competing visions of space in the fight for Digenes' camp

The battle for Digenes's camp in Book 6 is the best evidence for the intendedness . The defense of the *locus amoenus*-like site we encountered in Chapter 1 above is both the poem's most extended narrative of combat and one of the most exceptional. In this scene there is indeed something approaching a fully realized topography, in which riverbank, wood, and mountain peak are coherently interrelated. As in Kekaumenos's stories, that coherence is focalized from the perspective of a single veteran commander—but this character is not Digenes himself but Philopappous, his antagonist, the senior and experienced leader of the apelatai. The latter's expedition against the former—with the intention of abducting Digenes's wife—is presented as an organized campaign, in which troops are assembled from several points and then led toward Digenes's encampment.[272] This army features more than a hundred experienced warriors against one. Even so, Philopappous's plan turns on stealth and the recognition that the terrain provides advantages to attacker and attacked:

> When they had already drawn near the banks of the river,
> Philopappous began to harangue them thus:
> "The place, my lady and you soldiers,
> in which I found the girl is very difficult,
> and we must not all go forward, since we will make a noise
> and give the man who is guarding her warning,
> so that they can slip off into the wood before we get near
> and we shall have no hope of catching our prey."[273]

[272] *Digenis Akritis,* 6.438-54. This process already relies on landscape, via the lighting of beacons on hilltops (6.440, 6.450).

[273] Πρὸς δὲ ὄχθας τοῦ ποταμοῦ πλησιάσαντες ἤδη, / ἄρχεται τοῦ δημηγορεῖν Φιλοπαπποῦς τοιάδε: / 'Ὁ μὲν τόπος, κυρία μου καὶ ὑμεῖς στρατιῶται, / ὑπάρχει δυσκολώτατος ἐν ᾧ τὴν κόρην εὗρον· / καὶ μὴ πάντες ἀπέλθωμεν ὡς κρότον ἐμποιοῦντες, / διάγνωσιν παρέχοντες τῷ φυλάττοντι ταύτην, / καὶ πρὶν ἢ πλησιάσωμεν, δύνωσιν ἐν τῷ ἄλσει / καὶ οὐδ' ὅλως ἰσχύσωμεν τὸ θήραμα κρατῆσαι (*Digenis Akritis*, 6.455-61).

This passage is foundational for establishing the topography of the rest of the battle. And as such, it looks both backward and forward in the text to present a consistent, actively realized space. The riverbank, some distance from Digenes's camp, has already been the site of the heroes first encounter with Digenes and his lieutenants; meanwhile, that river will play a crucial structuring role in the ensuing fight.[274] That wood, ἄλσος, meanwhile, has furnished the pretext for surprise attacks on Digenes's camp already—most notably, by that lion—and will conceal a few more.[275] And what connects them here is the forethought of Philopappous—who, in his talk of the place's difficulty (Ὁ μὲν τόπος … ὑπάρχει δυσκολώτατος), even sounds a bit like Kekaumenos.

This commander has recognized how the different features of the terrain combine to create a problem for his goals: that to approach from the riverbank with a large force will warn his opponent to escape. And like a good general, he has planned a solution: to first spy out where the girl is, and then to bring in the rest of the force. But he has misjudged his opponent, as we learn when the focus of narration shifts abruptly back to Digenes himself:

> I happened then to be on guard,
> holding my horse by the rein and sitting on a rock,
> and all the time I was watching their coming.[276]

This jump from Philopappous back to Digenes is jarring—all the more so in that, for a modern reader, it immediately inspires questions about how Digenes as narrator could know so much about the words and actions of the apelatai before they approach. As we have seen, that kind of narrative consistency is not something that *Digenes* is concerned to provide. Read on its own terms, however, this jump—almost a kind of metalepsis—is singularly effective at demonstrating Digenes's control of the space of his campsite. Having previously

[274] *Digenis Akritis*, 6.519-23, 566–580.
[275] *Digenis Akritis*, 6.509-11, 580.
[276] Ἐμοὶ δὲ τότε ἔτυχε διάγειν ἐν τῇ βίγλᾳ, / ἵππον κρατῶν τοῦ χαλινοῦ καθέζεσθαι ἐν πέτρᾳ / καὶ τούτων <τε> διὰ παντὸς τὴν ἔλευσιν ἐτήρουν (*Digenis Akritis*, 6.476-8).

recounted a series of combats initiated by the surprising appearance of the enemy—all handily defeated—the poem in this episode presents the point of the stalking enemy. The extended narration of the latter's preparation and planning forces us to envision the possibility that *this* time, the outcome may be different: like the antagonists who undertake it, we see so clearly how this attack could succeed. In Ryan's terms, it is thus virtually a prototypical means of evoking suspense.[277] But just as this enemy approaches, all that stealth and preparation turns out to be for naught. Digenes has been aware of it the whole time.

When it counts, Digenes is far from incompetent at perceiving landscape: he is a master of vision as well as movement. As a military figure, Digenes is always presented as an ideal. The moment suggests—if such reassurance is necessary—that the poem does not intend any criticism of its protagonist for his being almost constantly ambushed before. The point is rather that he does not *need* to fear, that his exceptional strength and courage put him entirely above such underhanded tactics. Indeed, the continuation of this scene bears out this sense that Digenes's mastery consists in almost reactive composure. Even once we have learned that this time the hero is in no danger of being surprised, Digenes does not use his advantage to begin the battle on his own terms. Instead, he waits, and the joining of the space of his guard-post to that of the advancing scouts is left, once again, to Philopappous:

> Catching sight of me, Philopappous said to Melimitzis [a lieutenant]:
> "Do you see him" (pointing at me with his hand),
> "That man sitting on the rock on the ridge?
> That's the one, you must understand, who has the girl.
> Let us not advance to meet him face to face,
> but let us find out where he keeps the girl,

[277] Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 142.

and then we shall pass the information to the troops, as was agreed."[278]

Philopappous's speech is the first indication that Digenes's rock is on a ridge—or, in fact, that there is any ridge near the campsite at all. That piece of topography will become important in the battle in a particularly interesting way; again, it is through the vision—and communication—of Philopappous, a planner and a commander who tries to use all the forces at his disposal, that we in the audience first become aware of it. That plan will never be put into action; Melimitzis considers it beneath his honor to sneak past a lone opponent, refusing his superior's wise advice and initiating, once again, another head-to-head duel.[279] We in the audience, of course, know that it never stood a chance. But Philopappous's plan is, nevertheless, certainly the best plan that any character in the entire poem develops for dealing with an invincible opponent: avoiding him. It thus may be no accident that Philopappous is the one opponent in all of *Digenes* who manages to create a military setback for the hero, by wounding his horse—after a well-timed ambush from out of dense brush.[280] The landscape of the general's gaze is not absent from *Digenes*. It is just not, or not primarily, the protagonist's own.

4.5 Conclusion: Remembering the lost landscape of the Anatolian frontier

This chapter has analyzed how landscape establishes both a rich thematic setting for the narrative and the specific heroic qualities of its protagonist(s) throughout the Grottaferrata version of *Digenes Akrites*. Examining mountain passes in the "Lay of the Emir," the first

[278] Ἰδών με ὁ Φιλοπαπποῦς λέγει τὸν Μελιμίτζην: / 'Ὁρᾷς ἐκεῖνον' (τῇ χειρὶ ἐμὲ ὑποδεικνύων) / 'τὸν ἐν πέτρᾳ καθήμενον ἐπὶ τὴν ἀκρωρείαν; / Αὐτὸς ὑπάρχει, γίνωσκε, ὁ τὴν κόρην κατέχων· / μὴ τοίνυν ἐλευσώμεθα κατὰ πρόσωπον τούτου, / ἀλλὰ ἃς ἐρευνήσωμεν ὅπου τὴν κόρην ἔχει / καὶ εἶθ' οὕτως γνωρίσομεν τῷ λαῷ, ὡς ἐρρέθη (*Digenis Akritis*, 6.479-85).

[279] *Digenis Akritis*, 6.490-9.

[280] Καὶ ὡς ἐν τούτῳ μου τὸν νοῦν εἰς ὥραν ἠσχολούμην, / λαθών με ὁ Φιλοπαπποῦς καὶ ἐλθὼν ἐκ πλαγίου / κονταρέαν ἐν τῷ μηρῷ τιτρώσκει μου τὸν ἵππον / (ὑπῆρχον δὲ συνηρεφῆ καὶ θαμινὰ τὰ δένδρα), *Digenis Akritis*, 6.508-11.

section showed how these topographical features act as landmarks both symbolically and literally, standing in for danger in general while serving as the concrete dividing point between the lands of Byzantium and Islam. The second examined how a particularly striking statement about passes from the mouth of Digenes—the quote with which this thesis began—works to define the young hero as a lone warrior, capable of besting any opponent in open battle but uninterested in the command of others. The third section showed how that this characteristic of Digenes plays out in narrative, where forested topography provides a means for introducing progressively more dire combat situations in which the protagonist nevertheless triumphs thanks to preternatural speed, strength, and composure. In the fourth section, finally, we saw how in the most extensive combat of all, Book 6's battle for the camp, Digenes's improvisatory, athletic approach to terrain is contrasted to the careful planning and perception of one of his antagonists, the general Philopappous.

We will return to the difference between those two opposing military modes of engaging space in this thesis's Conclusion. For now, however, I would like to reach back to the point where this chapter began—to the way those different inflections of landscape discussed in the first three sections work together to construct the Anatolian border as a coherent setting, indeed a coherent world. As we saw in this thesis's Introduction, that world ceased to exist some two centuries before the Grottaferrata manuscript was copied, and in all probability decades before anything like *Digenes Akrites* in any of its variants was composed. As Margaret Mullett and many others have remarked, this is a "deeply nostalgic" text.[281] Nowhere is that more true than in Book 8. Almost a third of this book consists of retrospective, first in the dying Digenes's own recounting of his earlier adventures to his wife—a summary of the plot—and then in his mourners' lament.[282] And so it is not surprising

[281] Mullett, "The Madness of Genre," 239.
[282] *Digenis Akritis*, 8.69-123, 8.249-293. The lament focuses on the horror of D.'s death, but repeatedly recalls the young warrior he was.

that this book incorporates landscape in a particularly memorializing way, one unlike any we have seen before.

The passage concerns the setting of Digenes's tomb. And perhaps appropriately—in that it brings the landscape full circle—that burial takes place at a mountain pass. Despite their disappearance through Books 5 to 7, the poem has not dropped these places entirely. The site is described in considerable detail:

> they buried the remains fittingly in a monument
> and built a tomb for them up on the pass
> near a certain place called Trosis.
> The Akrites's tomb was set on an arch, (MS 240)
> it was constructed wondrously from purple marble,
> it could be seen from afar on the mountain ridge, (MS 243)
> so that strangers who saw it uttered blessings on the young people: (MS 242)
> for what is on high can be seen far and wide.[283]

Thus in death Digenes contributes a literal landmark to the geography of the border which he dominated in life.[284] As in the general's vision of Kekaumenos—or Digenes's own encounter with Philopappous—height and vision are important terms here, but now their charge is reversed. This is landscape of a completely different kind than any we have analyzed so far. The advantage of the peak is not about *seeing* but *being seen*. The tomb is not an agent but an object; once it becomes the grammatical subject, passive verbs abound, even into the maxim (ἱστάμενος, συντεθειμένος, δυνάμενος ὀφθῆναι, θεωροῦνται). Nevertheless, as an object it still draws its surroundings together into an interrelated whole in a way no less coherent, if

[283] τὰ λείψανα ἐν μνήματι κηδεύσαντες πρεπόντως / τούτων τὸν τάφον ἔστησαν ἐπάνω εἰς κλεισοῦραν / παρέκει Τρώσεως τινὸς τόπου τοῦ καλουμένου. / Ἐπ' ἀψίδος ἱστάμενος ὁ τάφος τοῦ Ἀκρίτου, (240) / συντεθειμένος θαυμαστῶς ἐκ μαρμάρου πορφύρας, / τῆς ἀκρωρείας πόρρωθεν δυνάμενος ὀφθῆναι, (243) / ἵν' οἱ βλέποντες ἔξωθεν τοὺς νέους μακαρίζουν· (242) / τὰ γὰρ εἰς ὕψος ὄντα τε μήκοθεν θεωροῦνται (*Digenis Akritis*, 8.237-44).

[284] For real tombs that may have helped inspire this aspect of the original Digenes legends, see Jeffreys, xxxiii–iv.

very different, from Kekaumenos's general's gaze. This process is enacted in the verses themselves. Thus the perspective progresses gradually outward from a description of the tomb's physical lay-out (ἐπ' ἀψίδος ἱστάμενος) to its most striking visual component (θαυμαστῶς ἐκ μαρμάρου πορφύρας) to its visibility within the larger topography (τῆς ἀκρωρείας πόρρωθεν…), concluding with the response all of the preceding calls forth from passersby (ἵν' οἱ βλέποντες ἔξωθεν…)—it is from their focalization that the whole is ultimately observed.[285] As so often before, the entire effect is then encapsulated in a gnome.

As the admired object of an outsider's gaze, this scene ventures remarkably close to conventional Western, post-Renaissance notions of landscape—though here the context is commemorative rather purely aesthetic.[286] Nostalgia may be the linking thread—a recurrent strand of modern thinking about landscape sees it as essentially melancholy and backward-looking, reading the land for evidence of what has been lost.[287] The context of these verses suggests that similar is going on here: immediately afterward, the mourners—all magnates of the region—ascend to the tomb, lay their wreaths, and begin the lament that calls forth the vanished hero in speech but not in fact.[288] That lament ends with mourners' homeward departure: all that is left is the narrator's own closing invocation of the mercy of God.[289]

It is relevant that the funeral party must return home. The line emphasizes that they had gathered at the site for the occasion, implying that by heading homewards they are separating—οἴκαδε ἀνεχώρησαν οἱ ἐκεῖ ἀθροισθέντες. The very last spatial information in the poem as a whole, then, underlines the tomb's status, already so memorably constructed in the description of the site, as a landmark in the technical sense. This is a place that organizes surrounding space, where people congregate. That they all must return home reminds us that

[285] Though the slight emendation in the line order (the version printed by Jeffreys) certainly helps bring out this effect, the pattern is present regardless.
[286] On the trope of distance as definitive of landscape, see Wylie, *Landscape*, 3.
[287] Wylie, 30–31.
[288] *Digenis Akritis*, 8.245-8.
[289] "Lamenting deeply these and similar things, / they returned homewards, those who had gathered together there / for the burial of the high-born and holy bodies" (*Digenis Akritis*, 8.298-300).

that place is in the wilderness—that Digenes is *not* buried at the palace he constructed in such detail in Book 7, in the church beside his father.[290]

Instead, he is buried at a pass (ἐπάνω εἰς κλεισοῦραν). And not just any pass—one near a place called Trosis. Though this passage in Book 8 does not directly remark on it, we have met Trosis before: it is very near to Digenes's camp in Book 6.[291] Specifically, it is the place from which the first apelatai are returning when they encounter Digenes and the girl, noted in a set of verses that makes much of the etymology from "wounding."[292] That geographic orientation in the description of the tomb—more substantial in the original than in Jeffrey's translation (παρέκαι Τρώσεως τινὸς τόπου τοῦ καλουμένου vs. "near a place called Trosis")—is thus doing a rather surprising amount of work. It calls back to that long battle in Book 6, making the hero's tomb a geographically precise memorial to his greatest (narrated) deed. It also, it is hard not to suspect, suggests that Digenes's death has left a wound on the land of the border or its people.

Regardless, that return to this place-name after some 800 intervening lines of verse shows that the poem is working with a consistent geography. Whether the audience is intended to catch each connection or the poet is simply drawing from a limited set of terms is not really the question—what matters is the return, again and again, to the same kinds of sites. Those mountain passes, that dangerous vegetation, now this place called Wounding: such items all recur at widely separated points, often multiple times, and in the process define the poem's imagined geography. We might add other such places, too: the plains, the river that flows past Digenes's camp and house (at least the second case, the Euphrates). But also Syria (Συρία), Romania (Ῥωμανία)—and, most importantly, the borders (ἄκραι) themselves.

[290] *Digenis Akritis*, 7.102-8.
[291] Jeffreys, 231.
[292] *Digenis Akritis*, 6.117-9. The name is simply the word for wounding: Liddell et al., *The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. τρῶσις. A connection to a certain place Turus, near Samosata, has been suggested, but 4.118-9 demonstrates the common Greek word is paramount. The name is mentioned again in Philopappous's account of his first meeting with Digenes: *Digenis Akritis*, 6.406.

These terms are not on the same level. Presented within the narrative, from the characters' perspective, those topographical features constitute landscape proper, the environment viewed and unified as the space through which they move. But those last, (mostly) proper-named spaces are something else: too large, or perhaps simply too intangible, to be represented directly. Yet they are essential to the story, far more so, in the end, than the terrain. Discussion of Syria and Romania, the contrast between them, fills the "Lay of the Emir": the two occur 19 and 21 times respectively.[293] They are, indeed, very literally what make Digenes Digenes—a man of two peoples, two γένη. The borders, ἄκραι, as we noted, provide the title which is the other part of his name. He is almost invariably introduced by these two together, as Digenes Akrites, even in infancy.[294] The borders are, moreover, also the home of his most serious opponents, Philopappous and the apelatai.[295] On their own, however, these places are in a way too important, too big and encompassing, too much the context for everything, to ever appear in narrative by themselves.

It is through landscape that they become concrete. We have seen this already in what I have called the "thematic" function of space—in the way that passes act as the divide between Byzantium and Islam, that forests conceal the dangers of the borderlands. In making the issue solely about the text, internal to the representation, however, that framing risks undermining our understanding even of the text itself. Though it is undoubtedly, in modern terms, fiction—and as such provides only extremely questionable evidence for the historical Byzantine-Arab border—it is essentially fiction *about* a historical world.[296] Though it contains many folk elements, *Digenes* is not set, like *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe*, in a

[293] Numbers according to the *TLG*. Both terms recur in Book 5—thus matching a pattern for Arabic titulature and loan words identified by Dietrich, "Style-Switching in the Grottaferrata Text of Digenes Akrites."
[294] *Digenis Akritis*, 4.48-53
[295] *Digenis Akritis*, 6.396-9, 431. For historical background, see Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis*, 1998, xxxiii.
[296] Important parallels for this function can be found across the medieval world in precisely the eleventh to thirteenth centuries: e.g. Azad, *Sacred Landscape in Medieval Afghanistan*, 1–2, 12–16, 169; Kaul, *The Making of Early Kashmir*, 59–98; Kelly, *The Hero's Place*, 29. The last goes so far as to suggest that in the premodern world, "a primary function of poetic language seemed to be to heighten awareness of place-belonging."

fairy-tale land. It is instead, as Agapitos suggested, a Byzantine example of "romancing the past."[297] It tells its later Byzantine audience of a place, from Cappadocia to the Euphrates, which they have lost. Though clearest in Book 8, the nostalgia is present throughout. From the passes to forests, through landscape it finds something on which to catch hold.

[297] Agapitos, "From Persia to the Provence," 155.

5 Conclusion

The preceding two chapters have provided a detailed analysis of how wild landscape appears in Kekaumenos's advice to a border commander and *Digenes Akrites*. In neither case is representation of the environment regularly foregrounded; in both, however, it plays a pivotal role in articulating the text. The kinds of environments that figure in each are remarkably similar—mountain passes and forests. The military relevance of such terrain—in particular, how it facilitates surprise attacks—is in many ways obvious. This fact was as plain to the Byzantines as it to us, as the quote from Maurice's *Strategikon* cited in my Introduction attests. But neither the *Advice and Anecdotes* nor the Grottaferrata *Digenes* are doing obvious things with landscape. The former uses narrative techniques gathered from historiography, most importantly but not only focalization from the perspective of a commander, to emphasize the cognitive act of perception rather than the terrain itself. The latter, meanwhile, shows its protagonist flouting the whole tactical tradition—not to mention common sense—by repeatedly falling prey to ambushes, which he fends off in displays of superhuman presence of mind and physical prowess.

In both works, moreover, it emerged that these presentations of landscape perform another function too. They serve as concrete means for presenting the larger space of the border, an otherwise abstract spatial unit that cannot otherwise be directly represented or perceived on its own. In these texts, wilderness landscape is acting also as geographical "thought and imagination," to again borrow Angelov's term.[298] In this, landscape is operating in a way importantly related to what it was doing in my first chapter, on representations of restful, waterside environments. There, we saw that the same topography can be presented as both an entirely practical "suitable place" for a military camp or via the conventions of the

[298] Angelov, "Asia and Europe Commonly Called East and West."

classical *locus amoenus*—and preserves its inherent, restful qualities in each case. The Grottaferrata recension of *Digenes* regularly exploits the way this environment straddles literary traditions in order to join its two imagined worlds: the civilized, erotic sphere of the ancient novel/romance and the threatening wilds of the frontier. There again, landscape serves as the concrete point at which overarching, conceptual spaces become visible in the text. As cultural geography promised in the Introduction, landscape always brings with it more than it seems to at first glance.

A recurrent theme of cultural-geographic analyses of modern landscape is how the latter implicates, in an often hidden or even deceptive way, structures of power. The argument often runs by connecting the fixity and stability of space presented as extending outward under the gaze of a distanced observer and that observer's mastery—whether economic, intellectual, or political—over that environment. Denis Cosgrove put the point most succinctly: "In painting and garden design, landscape achieved visually and ideologically what survey, map making and ordinance charting achieves practically: the control and domination over space as an absolute, objective entity, its transformation into the property of individual or state."[299] W. J. T. Mitchell has extended this argument to self-presentations of empire in general, arguing that landscape as a mode of representation is "tailor-made for the discourse of imperialism, which conceives itself precisely (and simultaneously) as an expansion of landscape understood as an inevitable, progressive development in history, an expansion of 'culture' and 'civilization' into a 'natural' space in a progress that is itself narrated as 'natural.'"[300]

It is tempting to read the Byzantine frontier landscapes I have analyzed as working in a precisely inverse way: registering not imperial confidence but anxiety. In place of the detached observer before whom topography is laid out with scientific exactitude,

[299] Cosgrove, "Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea," 46.
[300] Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," 17.

Kekaumenos and *Digenes* posit a soldier under omnipresent but uncertain threat, surrounded on all sides by terrain alive with danger. In place of inevitably, "naturally" advancing horizons, they present a frontier beset both from outside and within, in danger of a collapse which only the vigilance and activity of specific individuals can forestall. While Kekaumenos, in the midst of a crisis, identifies such individuals as competent generals, the fact that *Digenes*, written long after, centers on a supernaturally gifted hero—now dead—might be taken as taken as acknowledgement that the collapse in fact occurred. Landscape in the *Advice and Anecdotes* and the Grottaferrata *Digenes* would then become neat case studies for Byzantine cultural responses to the empire's disastrous eleventh century.

Such an interpretation is particularly attractive in that it allows us to read the connection between Byzantine literature and the geography of the empire in more tightly interlinked ways. Drawing in part on the ancient geographic tradition, for instance, Theodore Prodromos's *Historical Poems* celebrating the campaigns of John II Komnenos present a very different vision of imperial space, one reminiscent of Mitchell's horizon-expanding destiny.[301] When we start looking at landscape, that is, Byzantine texts turn out to have substantially more to say about the lands beyond Constantinople than scholars have generally acknowledged. As a result—and perhaps more importantly—among premodern cultures Byzantium begins to look less isolated and exclusively inward-looking, more susceptible to productive comparisons with its predecessors, successors, and neighbors. While there may have been "no" *precise* "Byzantine equivalent of Strabo, Ptolemy, Pausanias, Ibn Hawqal, al-Idrisi, Gerald of Wales, William of Rubruck, Marco Polo, or Evliya Çelebi," the Byzantines had other means of doing fundamentally similar work.[302]

[301] Shliakhtin, "John Komnenos as Border-Maker and Border-Breaker," 427–28. Shliakhtin's analysis is especially interesting for noting how rivers define the boundaries of both empire and world, integrating the two—something only very questionably hinted at by *Digenes*'s Euphrates.
[302] Magdalino, "Constantine VII and the Historical Geography of Empire."

But such a project must be very careful to approach its texts with due respect for their status as literature. We should particularly rule out any mechanically historicist reading—one that would, for instance, see Kekaumenos's distrustfulness about the border as a straightforward response to the eleventh-century crisis, or Prodromos's imperial assertiveness as a direct result of the early Komnenian successes. As I have tried to show for both Kekaumenos and *Digenes*, these authors are working within complex and often interweaving textual traditions. Even at their most innovative or unusual, the spaces they create are inescapably literary, looking backward to their antecedents in previous texts even as they also point outward, towards the lands of the empire themselves. Such outward pointing is unquestionably among these texts' central goals: both concern places that they take as having really existed, whether in the present or (not too distant) past. The way they gesture outwards, however, is equally literary: equally shaped by the techniques they gained from their models, and the contexts and purposes in and for which they were composed and read.

Further investigation of landscape in Byzantine literature must proceed by examining more closely those wider traditions and contexts. For Kekaumenos, that means a much closer look at this author's relationship to the historiographical tradition as it existed in the eleventh century—both in new medieval compositions and in copies or compendia of ancient texts—than I have been able to provide. Phrases like that "City *X* is…" (*x* πόλις ἔστι...) give very precise objects of future research. Those "suitable places" (τόποι ἐπιτήδειοι) offer another avenue for exploring not only Kekaumenos's relationship to the *taktika*, where the phrase is ubiquitous, but of that tradition to others, in both practical and narrative literature.[303] Here, detailed study of the anonymous *On Withstanding Sieges* would be especially useful: it offers an important, and largely unrecognized, parallel case of mixing historical narratives into

[303] A quick search of the *TLG* reveals analogues in both the *Geoponika* as well as historiography and vernacular romance.

treatise-derived military advice.[304] Such work would greatly sharpen our understanding of how Kekaumenos is using the different modes of presenting military and imperial space—and thus help substantiate, or qualify, my arguments about the cognitive nature of his didactic project. In either case, it would help us understand how this text, which stands as very nearly the last of the military handbooks, situates itself between the resources of that tradition and the rapidly changing circumstances of the eleventh century.

For *Digenes*, the largest open question is the contrast, highlighted in Book 6, between Digenes's lone-heroic approach to landscape and the strategic one represented by Philopappous—the latter of which strongly recalls Kekaumenos's. The poem's emphasis, especially in the Grottaferrata version, on the protagonist a solitary warrior supported by Christian faith has been connected to the Western knightly ideals developing at the same time.[305] It is thus noteworthy that the later vernacular romances—the Medieval Greek texts which most directly recall those chivalric values and their associated literature—contain strikingly few, if any, equivalent passages.[306] Instead, as with Kekaumenos, stronger parallels might be sought in historiography, where episodes of single combat start to appear with Leo the Deacon and take on an even greater prominence in the Komnenian period. Nikephoros Bryennios's and Anna Komnene's heroes, for example, repeatedly best multiple opponents at once, with the twists and turns of combat described in vivid detail.[307] As Kyriakidis notes, this "clash between Byzantine theoretical concepts of generalship and aristocratic notions of heroism" was well established before *Digenes* can have been composed, and indeed existed in the ancient tradition too.[308] Many different factors must be combining here, but one point

[304] Sullivan, "A Byzantine Instructional Manual on Siege Defense." Roueché nowhere discusses this work.
[305] Angold, "The Poem of Digenes Akrites," 75–76.
[306] The one exception is found in *Belthandros and Chryszantza*, 220-32, when the wandering hero is attacked by bandits in a pass. The connection is important, and may depend in part on *Belthandros* status as the romance most concerned with presenting a "realistic" contemporary geography. But in this scene the presentation is very different: focalized from the bandits as a group, rather than Belthandros or a single opposing commander, with the attack neither extensively planned nor causing the hero even momentary inconvenience.
[307] Kyriakidis, "Accounts of Single Combat in Byzantine Historiography," 115–22.
[308] Kyriakidis, 128.

these analogues seem to make certain is that in this period romancing of the past coincided with substantial romancing of the (near-)present as well. Compared to Kekaumenos's hypercautious and underhanded model of generalship, the ideological advantages of such heroic models are readily apparent, especially for a military culture regularly undertaking large-scale, often aggressive campaigns rather than managing a stable frontier.[309] Combined with that overriding "nostalgic" concern for the lost borderlands, *Digenes*'s vision of military terrain might be especially well-suited to promoting an agenda of reconquest—a possibility that several scholars have entertained, but none proved.[310]

Regardless of the ultimate viability of such claims, deeper investigation into how other kinds of Byzantine texts narrate the spaces of the empire's borders provides a clear next step for extending the arguments I have presented here. That investigation would, however, do well to keep in mind another claim of Cosgrove's and Mitchell's—that the view landscape gives us is never reality simply, but always conditioned by ideologies inherent in landscape as a way of seeing, as a medium. In his study of the (landscape) archeology of the Byzantine-Islamic border, A. Asa Eger makes that point directly: the wilderness of this place was "mythic;" it "did not exist save in the perceptions of contemporaries."[311] In the zones my texts present as uninhabited wilds, local communities were making their livelihoods throughout the medieval period. The study of the landscape of the frontier in Byzantine literature can, that is, tell us a great deal about how the Byzantines conceived of their empire, from the most concretely practical to the most grandly abstract terms. But it can tell us little or nothing about the life of those lands itself.

[309] A particularly important case not discussed by Kyriakidis is that of Michael Attaleiates, who combines the emphasis on aggression without such prominent accounts of single-combat. Dimitris Krallis has analyzed a "debate" between Attaleiates and Psellos concerning Romanos IV Diogenes, which turns precisely on these issues of aggressiveness versus caution: Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline*, 81–94.
[310] E.g. Magdalino, "Digenes Akrites and Byzantine Literature: The Twelfth-Century Background to the Grottaferrata Version," 10–11; Angold, "The Poem of Digenes Akrites," 78. The coiner of the term "romancing the past" suggested an identical function for her vernacular French histories: Spiegel, *Romancing the Past*, 3.
[311] Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*, 9.

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