CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE “COURT OF AMOROUS DOMINION” AND THE “GATE OF LOVE”: RITUALS OF EMPIRE IN A BYZANTINE ROMANCE OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY*

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Two important studies, published in the early Seventies, discussed the image of rulership in Byzantine erotic fiction. Peter Pieler examined the appearance of kingship and the state in the Palaiologan romances from the perspective of Byzantine legal and institutional practice,1 while Carolina Cupane undertook an analysis of the image of Eros basileus (“Eros the king”) in the Comnenian novels and the Palaiologan romances, focusing on a comparison with the figure of the Dieux d’Amour and his chateaux in Old French romance and fabliau.2 Pieler’s study aimed at measuring the closeness or distance of fictive kingship in the romances to the “reality” of the Palaiologan era, while Cupane intended to demonstrate the strong motivic influence of Old French fiction on Byzantine romance. Since then, no

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2 C. Cupane, “Ἐρως βασιλεύς. La figura di Eros nel romanzo bizantino d’amore,” Atti dell’Academia di Scienze, Lettere e Arti di Palermo, ser. IV, 33.2.2 (1974), 243–97. One point of clarification is necessary concerning the terms “novel” and “romance”: they are used here in order to distinguish the twelfth-century Comnenian texts, feigning a “bourgeois antique” setting and using a classicizing stylistic idiom (conventionally referred to as “learned”), from the later Palaiologan texts which are placed in an “aristocratic medieval” environment and using a so-called “vernacular” stylistic idiom; see P. A. Agapitos, “From Persia to the Provence: Tales of Love in Byzantium and Beyond,” Acme. Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell’Università degli Studi di Milano 63 (2010), 153–69, at pp. 154–55 and 158–60.
detailed analysis of court ceremonies and hegemonic rituals in Byzantine fiction was undertaken.\(^3\)

One possible explanation for the absence of such studies is that these formalized expressions of fictive hegemony were considered to be mere stage contraptions in what was supposedly an undifferentiated core of fairytale material presented in a formulaic narrative form.\(^4\) However, more recent studies have shown that the Palaiologan “tales of love” present highly complex, quite differentiated, and not in the least stereotypical narrative forms. The eight surviving texts belong to quite specific and distinct cultural and socio-political contexts that range from the middle of the thirteenth to the late fifteenth century.\(^5\) The “tales of love” should be read as autonomous literary entities that operate as carriers of specific and intentioned ideological and cultural meanings, and not just as assortments of literary motifs, removed from their historical context.

Therefore, instead of examining ceremonies and rituals of power as a literary motif in all of the Byzantine vernacular romances, I have chosen in the present paper to study ceremonies and rituals in only one text, the anonymous *Tale of Livistros and Rodamne* (*L&R*). The romance was

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