In a pivotal scene of the 12th-century novelist Niketas Eugenianos’ *Drosilla and Charikles*, the female protagonist Drosilla is subject to unwelcome but rather pressing attentions from a certain Kallidemos, the brutish son of a local innkeeper. Drosilla’s beloved Charikles is in fact sleeping inside the house, but Kallidemos has fallen in love with Drosilla at first sight and has his mind set on winning her heart. The strategy he chooses in order to achieve this is storytelling: “I beseech you to call to your mind”, he says, “those who in the past were united by love into one soul”.\(^1\) Then follows a long list of literary lovers, presumably in order to inspire and convince the girl: we meet, among others, Theagenes and Charikleia (of Heliodorus’ *Aethiopica*), Daphnis and Chloe (of the novel by Longus), and Hero and Leander (of the hexameter poem by Musaeus).

This is not an exceptional passage per se – storytelling is a central part of courtship in many traditions, from antiquity onwards, – but the narrative context of the episode is one that deserves our attention. The event takes place in one of the so-called Komnenian novels, works that were modelled on and often alluded to the ancient Greek novel. While all four extent novels follow such a pattern, Eugenianos is unique in explicitly mentioning the literary models of late antiquity. We shall therefore take the passage cited above as our point of departure for a consideration of an interesting phase in the long history of Greek novelistic writing: the Byzantine revival of the 12th century.

We know of four novels written in the 12th century – the century of the Komnenian dynasty: *Hysmine and Hysminias* by Eumathios Makrembolites, *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* by Theodore Prodromos, *Drosilla and Charikles* by Niketas Eugenianos, and *Aristandros and Kallithea* by Constantine Manasses (preserved only in fragments).\(^2\) In spite of numerous similarities as to basic

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2 For Greek text (with Italian trans.) of all four novels (including the fragments), see Conca, *Il romanzo bizantino del xii secolo*. English translation in Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, with
plot and motifs, the four texts are different in form: Makrembolites wrote in prose while Prodromos and Eugenianos composed their novels in twelve-syllable verse and Manasses in the fifteen-syllable (‘political’) verse. Significant differences appear also in focus and overall theme: Makrembolites focuses on the power of erotic love by describing the sexual awakening of a young man, Prodromos seems to inscribe reflections of Byzantine diplomacy and court ceremonial, and Eugenianos lays a particular stress on marriage and marital ties. The fragmentary condition of Manasses’ novel does not allow us to define any such focus, since the fragments probably reflect the excerptors’ preferences rather than the structure and theme of the original text. Questions of authorship and dating remain partly unresolved, but the novels may with reasonable certainty be placed in the period between c. 1135 and 1155. Their internal sequence is, however, still a matter of debate, especially as regards the relation between the novels by Makrembolites and Prodromos. Since, in the following, I shall focus mainly on the relation of the Komnenian novels to the ancient novels and to their contemporary sociocultural and literary setting, the exact dating will not be discussed in any detail here.

1 The Composition of the Komnenian Novel: Themes and Motifs

As already mentioned, the Komnenian novels are modelled on the Greek novels of the Second Sophistic, especially *Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius and the *Aethiopica* by Heliodorus, but also the pastoral *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus and the non-sophistic *Chaereas and Kallirhoe* by Chariton.5

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3 Cf. Mazal, *Der Roman des Konstantinos Manasses*, with its reconstruction of the plot, and Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels*, pp. 280–82; cf. Nilsson and Nyström, “To Compose, Read and Use”. Due to its fragmentary condition, the novel by Manasses will be partly excluded from the present discussion on themes and motifs; on its transmission, see further below, pp. 58–59.


5 For the two phases of the ancient Greek novel, see the contribution by M. Fusillo in this volume pp. 21–38.