As with most other elements of the Greek tradition, Hades remained part of Byzantine artistic practices and underwent numerous transformations throughout the centuries. While the previous chapters of this volume have focused primarily on Hades in a Christian setting, I shall here turn to rhetorical and literary elaborations of the katabasis motif, belonging rather to the secular sphere—though any such distinction, as we shall see, remains arbitrary and perhaps even misleading. My primary focus is the twelfth century, the so-called Komnenian period of literary experimentation and intense interest in the ancient Greek tradition, not least in the authors and works of the Second Sophistic, such as Lucian. It is not very surprising that such a period produced not one, but several sophisticated reworkings of Lucianic descents to the Underworld, often combined and intertwined with both Homeric and Biblical material. My aim here is to present that material and discuss its function(s) in the socio-cultural context of twelfth-century Constantinople, with a special focus on two ethopoeiae by Nikephoros Basilakes. With the help of these two rhetorical exercises we can study both Hades as a setting and Hades impersonated, while also considering the educational and intellectual settings in which such elaborations could be seen as relevant and entertaining.

The Hades of Rhetoricians in the Twelfth Century

The most well-known Byzantine round trip to Hades is the anonymous Timarion, a Lucianic dialogue in which the protagonist Timarion describes his experience...
of Hades to his friend Kydion.\textsuperscript{3} At the time of the narration, Timarion is safely back in Constantinople, but his near-death experience appeared as he was travelling back from Thessalonike, where he had taken part in the Demetria – the celebrations of St Demetrios, patron saint of Thessalonike. Timarion fell seriously ill and was taken to Hades by two “shadowy and dusty-looking creatures,” but as it turns out they had made a mistake. A forensic inspection of his soul, undertaken by Asklepios and Hippokrates, showed that there were still pieces of flesh clinging to it, so Timarion was not quite dead and the soul was taken back to his body. The court procedures and the investigation in Hades took some time, during which Timarion could explore the Underworld in the company of his former teacher, Theodore of Smyrna. These at times rather detailed experiences take up most of the narrative and the Hades of Timarion turns out to host a mixture of ancient and Byzantine characters, living together in apparent harmony in this surprisingly nice realm of the dead.

The Timarion has received a fair amount of scholarly attention in the last few years, partly because of the increasing interest in twelfth-century literature and culture, partly because of an increasing understanding of mimetic and educational practices. The dialogue is usually understood as a satire of contemporary society, its political and religious arrangements, and/or as a parody or cento of ancient Greek literature, especially Lucian.\textsuperscript{4} There is no apparent conflict between these two readings; a text that is composed as a parody (building on, but not necessarily making fun of the previous tradition) can at the same time function as a satire (expressing criticism of and ridiculing contemporary society). However, a recent study by Byron MacDougall sheds new light on both the text itself and previous interpretations of it by convincingly showing how the Demetria in the Timarion are modelled on Heliodoros’ description of the festival at Delphi in the Athiopika.\textsuperscript{5} This particular scene – Timarion’s description of Thessalonike and, not least, the local governor – has been seen as particularly ‘real’ or even ‘documentary’, serving as evidence


\textsuperscript{4} The first serious reading of the Timarion was Alexiou 1982, a fundamental study on which all subsequent analysis necessarily depends; as regards both satirical and parodical aspects, see also Alexiou 2002, 100–11. For a focus on religion, philosophy and politics, see Kaldellis 2012 and Krallis 2013. For more attention to education and literary imitation, see MacDougall 2016 and Nilsson 2016.

\textsuperscript{5} MacDougall 2016.