

HANA COUFALOVÁ  
(MASARYK UNIVERSITY, BRNO)

## THE NOBLE ILLUSTRIOUS WARRIOR: YOUTHS IN KOMNENIAN LITERATURE

*Due to social changes in the eleventh-century Byzantine Empire, extended family bonds strengthened, the importance of the military aristocracy increased, and the Komnenodoukai clan acquired an unassailable position. Contemporary literature also reflected these changes by presenting the motif of a well-trained noble juvenile owning luxurious hunting and military equipment. Its two main elements are noble birth and a manly appearance.*

*The presentation of noble birth varies in Komnenian literature and three different aspects of this theme are identifiable. Historians strive to create imaginary blood lines between young men and mythological, biblical or historical rulers; orators extol youth's affiliation with the Komnenodoukai clan in an increased number of speeches and poems related to family events; and, finally, the same orators cease praising a humble origin in advisory literature. These aspects thereby indicate the increased importance of family bonds.*

*The depiction of a young man's manly appearance occurs in the same context in all genres with closely related elements. A good physical condition results from a commitment to military training and hunting – the latter considered a complementary relaxing activity to engaging in warfare –, which, in turn, assist in perfecting a youth's character by making him a brave and determined commander. Luxurious equipment complements this image, which embodies the enhanced self-esteem of the military aristocracy and the desire to present a respectable family status.*

*The contribution aims to outline the increased interest of writers in the appearance and physical activities of their heroes, to discuss each element of this motif in detail, and, finally, to associate this motif with changes in the organization of Byzantine nobility.*

**Key words:** Byzantine literature, Komnenian dynasty, Rhetoric

### Introduction

Eulogizing depictions of admirable young men, their deeds in time of peace and training for time of war, as well as counsels forming both their character and physical condition were rooted in the ancient Greek literary

tradition.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the corpus of advice given and characteristics glorified slightly changed over the centuries. Authors of the earlier Byzantine period focused more intensively on the perfection of the soul, praising the young man for his piousness, philanthropy, obedience, or prudence, whereas the exercising of a young man's body was quite often neglected. In the literature of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, the physical aspects of education are emphasized and the theme of a vigorous noble juvenile occurs more frequently than in the preceding centuries.<sup>2</sup>

The present contribution aims to examine the approach of Komnenian writers to this theme in detail according to its three main elements, i.e. a noble origin and affiliation with respectable families, the command of excellent hunting or military skills as well as the willingness to train them, and, finally, a manly look complemented by luxurious clothes and equipment. The examples mentioned in this contribution are chosen primarily from historiographical, advisory, and panegyric literature; nevertheless, increased interest in manly activities can be detected in a broader spectrum of genres – correspondence, poems illustrating the family life of the nobility, and fiction, i.e. the reintroduced romance novel, and satire or heroic poetry represented by the poem titled *Digenes Akrites*.

This concept of a young noble warrior emerges under the first Komnenian emperors, Alexios I and John II, whereas during the reign of the third Komnenian emperor, Manuel I Komnenos, the social climate as well as literary motifs slightly changed; interest in tourneys and courtly culture was on the increase, as has been satisfactorily demonstrated by scholars.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, the sources presented in my paper are related primarily to the reign of Alexios I Komnenos and his son John II Komnenos.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Isocrates' speeches *To Nicocles* and *To Demonicus* and Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*.

<sup>2</sup> In advisory literature of the early and middle Byzantine period, see the speech to Emperor Arkadios by Synesios of Cyrene *Peri basileias*; *Ekthesis*, advisory chapters by the deacon Agapetos; *Kefalaia parainetika*, two advisory chapters traditionally – though, according to recent scholarship, incorrectly – ascribed to Emperor Basil I; *The Letter of Patriarch Photios* to Khan Boris of Bulgaria; *Strategikon*, a book of advice also containing counsels for an emperor by Kekaumenos. Paidas (2005).

<sup>3</sup> Magdalino (1993: 180–228, 413–489); Magdalino & Nelson (1982); Schreiner (1996).

<sup>4</sup> For a summary of the well-elaborated literature of the period, see Hunger (1978); Mullett (1996).

### Noble birth

An increase in the importance of a hero's noble birth occurs in all genres; however, three different aspects of this theme can be found depending on the specific genre. The first aspect is an attempt by historians to justify the claim of their hero to rule by incorporating his lineage into blood lines of mythological or biblical kings, noble Roman families, or the first rulers of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>5</sup> Skylitzes Continuatus relates Emperor Nikephoros Botaneiates to *the Phokas clan and family Flavii, of the glorious elder Rome*,<sup>6</sup> while Michael Attaleiates creates for this Emperor an impressive fictitious lineage full of excellent military commanders that reaches even General Scipio the African and Consul Lucius Aemilius Paullus.<sup>7</sup> Nikephoros Bryennios puts the origins of the Doukas family in the times of Constantine the Great and explains their family name as *former occupation of founder of the dynasty*; he was indeed a military commander (*doux*).<sup>8</sup>

The attempt to raise the importance of a hero's family is quite apparent also in fictional heroic literature; Digenes Akrites together with his family members are repeatedly called noble and highborn (*eugenes, paneugenes*) and their lineage is well described.<sup>9</sup>

The second aspect is connected with panegyric literature, represented by imperial orations and poems that are both related to the official representation of the aristocracy as well as to their private family lives. Imperial panegyric literature is based on the scheme given by Menander Rhetor,<sup>10</sup> which emphasizes four cardinal virtues, the noble birth of the ruler, and his deeds in times of peace and war. Since this structure fulfils the intentions of the orators of the period, no specific features can be observed in their writings.

More attention must therefore be focused on a broad spectrum of speeches and poems concerning special occasions of family life – namely, births, weddings, and funerals.<sup>11</sup> The existence of these speeches and poems itself

<sup>5</sup> Kazhdan & Epstein (1985: 104–110).

<sup>6</sup> *Skylitzes Continuatus*, 172.10–14. The translation is taken from PBW, *Nikephoros 3*.

<sup>7</sup> *Michael Attaleiates*, 394–401. Attaleiates here conflates Scipio Africanus and Scipio Aemilianus. *Michael Attaleiates*, 605.

<sup>8</sup> *Nikephoros Bryennios*, 67.21–69.4.

<sup>9</sup> *Digenes Akrites*, I.264–269; I.284–285; IV.37.

<sup>10</sup> Russell & Wilson (1981).

<sup>11</sup> See e. g. Theodore Prodromos, *XLIV Στίχοι πολιτικοί εἰς τὴν γέννησιν τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ σεβαστοκράτορος Ἀνδρονίκου, κυροῦ Ἀλεξίου*; *Eustathios of Thessalonike, Λόγος ἐπὶ τοῖς θεωρικοῖς δημοτελέσει τραπεζώμασιν, ὅτε οἱ τῶν βασιλικῶν παιδῶν ἐτελοῦ-*

illustrates increased interest in the representation of family; furthermore, their writers repeatedly emphasize the hero's noble birth (*porphyra*)<sup>12</sup> and origin from the eminent clans of Komnenoi and Doukai.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike historians, writers of representative poems and speeches do not stipulate a biblical or mythological origin for the family of their hero, because an origin traced back to the Komnenodoukai clan is considered of equal value. In his speech, Nikephoros Basilakes regards the origin of John Komnenos, Archbishop of Bulgaria, from the dynasty of emperors as a guarantee of his qualities and predicts him *to have a heroic and royal fate just as three generations of his ancestors*.<sup>14</sup>

The court poet and physician Nicholas Kallikles compares young Andronikos Doukas, son of George Palaiologos and Anna Doukaina, in his epitaph, not to mythical heroes, but to his own ancestors, his grandfather of the same name and emperor Constantine X Doukas.

*What was his character like? – Iron. What were his skills like? – Old Doukas, another Andronikos or Constantine. [...] Lions bear lions.*<sup>15</sup>

And, finally, Theodore Prodromos, in his birthday poem, prods the baby Alexios into behaving like his great-grandfather Alexios I and grandfather John II and begs the infant's mother *to give to her child, as an example to follow, the attainments of his ancestors, because seeing them, he will guide aright his own possessions*.<sup>16</sup> This aspect of Komnenodoukai family pride becomes even more evident during the reign of Manuel I, as demonstrated in epigrams and dedicative poems by Codex Marcianus 524.<sup>17</sup>

The third aspect of the increased importance of noble birth is the absence of a humble origin as a criterion of being an ideal ruler in the parainetic

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ντο γάμοι; Manuel Straboromanos, *Λόγος πρὸς τὴν δέσποιναν Εἰρήνην τὴν Δούκαιναν παραμυθητικὸς ἐπὶ τῷ θανάτῳ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτῆς*; Michael Italikos, *Μονωδία εἰς τὸν Ἀνδρόνικον Κομνηνόν, Μονωδία εἰς τὸν σεβαστοκράτορα κῆρ Ἀνδρόνικον*. For rituals related to children and family life, see Ariantzi (2012).

<sup>12</sup> For different usage of the title “porfyrogenetos” during the reigns of Alexios, John, and Manuel Komnenoi, see Stankovic (2008).

<sup>13</sup> For members of the Komnenodoukai clan, two fundamental prosopographical works exist, Polemis (1968) and Varzos (1984). Useful biographical notes for all the noble juveniles mentioned in my paper can be found there.

<sup>14</sup> *Nikephoros Basilakes*, 29.21–34.

<sup>15</sup> *Nicholas Kallikles*, 9.22–28.

<sup>16</sup> *Theodore Prodromos*, XLIV, 408.92–99.

<sup>17</sup> Lampros (1911: 123–192); Odorico & Messis (2003); Rhoby (2010); Tserevelakis (2009–2010).

literature of the period. Unlike panegyric literature, parainetic literature is based on the concept of the piousness of the ruler – his ability to control human desires, which enables him to govern the whole empire together with its subjects. The noble origin of the emperor has no importance, because it was not achieved by restraining one's more primitive impulses, as, for example, the beauty of the soul, and it has no relation to the human character.<sup>18</sup> Considering the essentially different interpretations of the importance of noble birth in parainetic and panegyric writings, the specific genre of each form of writing must be carefully examined, as suggested by Margaret Mullett in the case of *Paideia basilike* by Theophylact of Ohrid, an imperial speech that contains both parainetic and panegyric elements. The panegyric part contains praise of one's noble origin, whereas the parainetic part does not deal with this subject at all.<sup>19</sup> For this reason, the claim often made by scholars that the noble birth motif is a feature of Komnenian parainetic literature might be untrue.

We come to the conclusion that the examples mentioned above demonstrate the importance of both family bonds and a respectable family status in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in three different respects. First, historians attempted to connect their hero's bloodline with celebrated ancient families; second: orators increased the number of speeches and poems related to family events; finally, the motif of a humble origin was absent in advisory literature.

### Warcraft

The three following motifs – a manly appearance, military prowess, and hunting dexterity – are related, because they jointly create an image of a young well-trained and well-equipped warrior. For this reason they will be presented together in the light of their common features.

The ability of an emperor to confront enemy hordes was a commonplace of Byzantine literature. Unlike former rulers usually praised as peacemakers and leaders of the Byzantine army, Komnenian emperors are eulogized for their personal participation in battle and the bravery they show.<sup>20</sup> For

<sup>18</sup> *Kekaumenos*, chap. 83; *Kefalaia parainetika*, chaps. 8 and 58.

<sup>19</sup> Mullett (1996); Mullett (2007: 381–383); Mullett (2013); *Theophylact of Ohrid*, 185.21–193.4.

<sup>20</sup> Kazhdan (1984: 43–58); Maniati-Kokkini (1997); Munitiz (1995); Neville (2012: 159–170); For example, *Kefalaia parainetika*, chaps. 13, 49; *Photios*, chap. 56; For Kekaumenos on this subject see Kazhdan's analysis in Kazhdan & Franklin (1984: 39); *Niketas Choniates*, 14.63–15.80; *John Kinnamos*, 7.16–8.1–5.

this reason, the inexperience of a young man in warcraft is considered a serious weakness and noble juveniles are encouraged to practice their military skills.<sup>21</sup> Some of them are trained by their closest relatives. For example, John II is said to have taught his heir, Manuel I, both theoretical knowledge and practical military skills;<sup>22</sup> others are entrusted to teachers, as described in Nikephoros Bryennios' depiction of the education of Isaac and John Komnenos. Bryennios also enumerates the constituents of such an education: *to arm oneself skillfully, to protect oneself with an oblong shield against enemies' arrows, to brandish a spear, to ride a horse dexterously, to hit the target with a bow, and to know how to line up a battle-array, place an ambush, take up a position in fit time, or to build a palisaded camp.*<sup>23</sup>

Experienced relatives and tutors could not always provide complete training for a young nobleman. For example, Theophylact of Ohrid advises his pupil, Prince Constantine, also *while making peace, to practice for war, to exercise yourself constantly in preparation for every type of warfare, to participate in military training with all your troops, and pay attention to the counsel of old and experienced soldiers.*<sup>24</sup>

The education of young noblemen described in sources from the Komnenian period consisted of moral philosophy, rhetoric, and military tactics and the preparation for active participation in military campaigns. For this reason, proper physical training and the exhibition of excellent physical skills became a frequent motif of Byzantine orators, as is noticeable in several speeches addressing young noblemen. These passages are standardized and frequently based on Homer's epos or Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*; nevertheless, some minor differences can be observed. Michael Psellos eulogizes the deceased Andronikos Doukas for his skills not only as a commander, but also as a great athlete: *because of proper training he excelled in all gymnastic and military exercises, he hurled the javelin forth and dexterously used sufficient force when throwing javelin and spear.*<sup>25</sup> Nikephoros Basilakes praises both the young emperor John II Komnenos and his com-

<sup>21</sup> The successor to Isaac Komnenos on the Byzantine throne, young Constantine Doukas, is disadvantaged as a future ruler, because he is not well versed in warcraft. *Skylitzes Continuatus*, 112.4–5. For methods of military training see Haldon (2003: 63–65).

<sup>22</sup> Angelov (2009: 109); *Michael Italikos*, 282–284; *Eustathios of Thessalonike*, 285.

<sup>23</sup> *Nikephoros Bryennios*, 75.15–22. The translation is partially taken from PBW, *Isaakios I*.

<sup>24</sup> *Theophylact of Ohrid*, 207.17–21. The translation is partially taken from Munitiz (1995: 53).

<sup>25</sup> *Michael Psellos*, 189.56–190.69.

panion John Axuch for their exceptional willingness to train as well as for their athletic and riding skills.<sup>26</sup>

The examples given clearly demonstrate the main attributes required of a young man: a close acquaintance with military tactics, a willingness to practice, exceptional horsemanship, and the ability to fight skillfully with spear and lance.

## Hunting

Hunting always played an important role in Byzantine life. In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, this sport became even more popular, as demonstrated by frequent references in the literature of the period, e.g. essays on the chase by Constantine Manasses and Constantine Pantechnes<sup>27</sup> or Theodore Prodromos' and John Kinnamos' depictions of the young emperor John II as a perfect hunter.<sup>28</sup> Hunting had belonged to the traditional education of noble juveniles from antiquity and was seen not only as an entertainment but also as an alternative form of training for battle.<sup>29</sup> For this reason, a young hunter is depicted as a young warrior and less manly types of hunting, e.g. hunting birds, are neglected.

The hunting motif is elaborated on two levels: first, in the impressive dexterity of the noble juvenile and, second, in the sumptuous equipment he is using. This second motif is closely connected to the writers' fascination with a life of luxury, an aspect which will be discussed later. According to Byzantine rhetoricians, the main hunting skills of a young man were hunting on horseback with a bow or spear, as can be observed in orations by Nikephoros Basilakes<sup>30</sup> and Theophylact of Ohrid.

*But to ride a horse ahead of your hunting suite and overtake your men, and kill a wild animal that scared juveniles of the same age even if it was dead, and draw*

<sup>26</sup> Nikephoros Basilakes, 87.16–21. For quotations see Xenophon, IV.1.3; Homer, *Iliad*, II.674, XI.709.

<sup>27</sup> Kazhdan & Epstein (1985: 110). Manasses deals in his ekphrasis with an old man hunting cranes. Kurtz (1906); Metropolitan of Philippolis Constantine Pantechnes depicts hunting with hounds, falcons and tame leopards. Miller (1872).

<sup>28</sup> Theodore Prodromos, XXV, 336.15–20; John Kinnamos, 24.10–24.

<sup>29</sup> Hennesy (2010: 89). Nevertheless, the requirement to be a capable warrior and hunter does not appear in Byzantine educational literature until the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Angelov (2009: 107); On hunting in Byzantium see Patlagean (1992), Kukules (1932) and Kukules (1952).

<sup>30</sup> Nikephoros Basilakes, 33.24–33.

*a bow riding a horse that runs like a wind and shoot successfully, these are all proofs of your agility.*<sup>31</sup>

In light of the fact that both writings mentioned above are panegyric speeches, the juvenile's dexterity is obviously exaggerated; however, this tendency is even evident in long hunting descriptions in *Digenes Akrites*. Although the usual schedule of hunting and military training is preserved, Digenes achieves each skill at a notably younger age than other young men.<sup>32</sup>

The military and hunting achievements of young men described above undoubtedly indicate one of the cardinal virtues – courage. Although this virtue is usually not mentioned, it pervades all the texts and is one of the most important character traits of a young man. As can be observed in the case of Digenes Akrites, courage is partially inborn, a part of a hero's soul, but it must be strengthened from an early age by astonishing deeds in military training and hunting.<sup>33</sup>

First-class hunting equipment is well described in Theodore Prodromos's poem for the infant Alexios: *purebred Arabian and Thessalian horses of the same age as the baby, bridles and cheek-pieces of a horse's head-stall, falcons and dogs good in hunting, tracking and running, iron corslet, helmet, leggings, spear of ash, bow, excellent points of arrows, two-edged sword, glittering broad sword, quiver and bowcase.*<sup>34</sup> This equipment clearly corresponds to the hunting techniques depicted above. Numerous descriptions of similar items are also preserved as records of fees paid by monasteries and in inventories of private possessions.<sup>35</sup>

### Physical descriptions

Physical appearance was mostly subordinate in the appreciation of a young man, whereas spiritual beauty was considered incomparably more

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<sup>31</sup> *Theophylact of Ohrid*, 183.7–11.

<sup>32</sup> *Digenes Akrites*, 4.70–189.

<sup>33</sup> In recognition of his courage, the emperor gives to Digenes dignities and tax relief. Mullett (1996: 377).

<sup>34</sup> *Theodore Prodromos*, XLIV, 408.69–80. As Hörandner (2009) points out, the whole poem deals mainly with martial activities of the baby and other education is almost omitted.

<sup>35</sup> Patlagean (1992: 260).



significant.<sup>36</sup> This scheme changed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when historians and orators never hesitated to describe physical appearance to complete the depiction of a young noble warrior. No doubt, these depictions are, in most cases, topoi and give no information concerning the real appearance of the person described, but their content indicates the look of an ideal noble juvenile, i.e. a young well-proportioned warrior wearing armor and weapons.

The relation between physical beauty and a strong body well trained in handling weapons can easily be observed in the advisory poems *Mousai*, usually ascribed to Alexios Komnenos.<sup>37</sup> The emperor praises his heir, John, for his musculature gained through exercise.

*You have a large grasp in strong fingers and how strong are the tendons of your ankles! A powerful arm lifts your shield. You have good chest and nice shoulders. What a nice span between them! It holds firmly and helpfully the weight of corslet wrought of fine brass.*<sup>38</sup>

Alexios' daughter Anna Komnene describes with obvious admiration one of the enemy commanders, Bohemund, as a wonder for the eyes to behold: *he was so tall in stature that he overtopped the tallest by nearly one cubit, narrow in the waist and loins, with broad shoulders and a deep chest and powerful arms.*<sup>39</sup> Despite the fact that she does not omit his personal characteristics, i.e. a tall figure and blond hair, the depiction altogether corresponds to the Byzantine ideal of a perfectly proportioned and symmetrical body.

Not only the physical appearance of the nobility was examined in detail by writers of the Komnenian period, but also their luxurious clothing, grooming, accessories, and equipment (e.g. saddlery, carriages, and hunting animals). Despite the fact that ostentatious displays of wealth were criticized by rhetorians, some writers of the 12<sup>th</sup> century were full of praise for their hero's property.<sup>40</sup> Theodore Prodromos let himself be carried away

<sup>36</sup> *Kefalaia parainetika*, chaps. 9 and 53; *Photios*, chap. 30.

<sup>37</sup> The authorship of these two poems, the second of which is even incomplete, is still open to debate. I follow the general consensus, taking them both as works from Alexios's later years. Shepard (1996: 71); Magdalino (1993: 27–29). For the opposite opinion (that *Mousai* are Alexios's last words to his son John on his deathbed, later revised in verse by an anonymous writer) see Reinsch (2009). For detailed analysis of current research, see Mullett (2012).

<sup>38</sup> *Mousa II*, 361.53–55, 362.56–57. The translation is partly taken from Mullett (2007: 266).

<sup>39</sup> *Anna Komnene*, 13.10.4. The translation is taken from Dawes (1928).

<sup>40</sup> Kazhdan & Epstein (1985: 75–80). However, wealth was not seen as an obstacle to

by the treasures, houses, and multitude of servants owned by the recipient of his poem.<sup>41</sup> Detailed descriptions of a hero's manly-looking, luxurious clothes, e.g. upper robes with golden hems embroidered with pearls and other large pearls in place of buttons, with buttonholes twisted from pure gold, and first-class riding equipment comprising a bold horse as white as a dove, forelock plaited with precious stones and golden bells, or saddle plaited with golden points and pearls, occur also in the epos *Digenes Akrites*.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, fascination with luxury was not common to all writers of the Komnenian period, e. g. Theophylact of Ohrid encourages Constantine *not to wear fine clothes, but to prefer copper armor that will ensure him the favor of his troops*.<sup>43</sup>

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that depictions of noble juveniles who strengthened their bodies by hunting and by means of military training occur across different genres of the Komnenian period. Orators in panegyric speeches and poems praise their physical skills or, in advisory writings, encourage them to continue in doing exercise. Historians never hesitate to emphasize hunting and military achievements in an emperor's youth. These motifs are also well preserved in the heroic poem titled *Digenes Akrites*, a living image of a handsome noble warrior.

## Conclusion

One of the most significant characteristics of Byzantine society was its considerable vertical mobility.<sup>44</sup> Although several diversified groups existed across the social spectrum, including the two main groups of the powerful military and civil nobility, they were not hermetically closed.<sup>45</sup> However, this open structure changed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when several long-lasting

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virtue; avarice (*philargyria*) and greed (*pleonexia*) undoubtedly were. Laiou (2002: 1125).

41 *Theodore Prodromos*, XLIV, 410.150–155.

42 For the depiction of Digenes' appearance, clothes, horse, and saddlery see *Digenes Akrites*, 4.193–203; 4.220–228; 4.232–245.

43 *Theophylact of Ohrid*, 193.21–23. Kazhdan (1984: 46).

44 The system of economic and social changes that affected the Byzantine countryside along with Constantinople from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries was much more complex. I present here only a brief outline of elements closely related to my topic. For a comprehensive review, see Laiou (2002: 225–370).

45 For the stratification of Byzantine nobility see Magdalino (1984).

social changes culminated with the feudalization of Byzantine society and the establishment of a strong merchant and artisan class.<sup>46</sup> The diversification of Byzantine nobility was completed under Komnenoi, when a new alliance of the powerful military aristocracy and landowners was established and other mighty families either incorporated themselves into this clan or vanished.<sup>47</sup>

The constitution of a prestigious ruling family clan based on military aristocracy meant an increase in the importance of the extended family as well as demands on the military proficiency of its members.<sup>48</sup> The influence of this change can easily be observed in the altered image of an ideal ruler and his closest male relatives in well-elaborated literature of the period. Former writers focused on six main Byzantine virtues, i.e. prudence (*phronesis*), justice (*dikaiosyne*), temperance (*sophrosyne*) and courage (*andreia*), combined with Christian piety (*eusebeia*) and clemency (*philantropia*). They eulogized the emperor as a peacemaker and based his nobility exclusively on his own achievements,<sup>49</sup> whereas in the Komnenian period the concept of the emperor-noble warrior appears.

This concept is reflected also in the depiction of an ideal young man. This motif of a well-trained and fully-equipped noble juvenile consists of two main elements – noble birth and a manly appearance associated with military and hunting skills. The theme of a noble origin varies in different genres. Historians try to connect a juvenile's bloodline to mythological, biblical, or ancient rulers, whereas orators in many panegyric speeches and poems glorify young men for their affiliation with the Komnenoi and Doukai clans and encourage them to follow the great achievements of the first Komnenian emperors; in their parainetic works, the praise of a humble origin is avoided. All these features affirm the increased importance of family bonds.

All elements of the second motif, i.e. a manly appearance, are closely related and occur in the same context in all genres. Regular physical training leads to the gaining of military skills and proficiency in hunting, since hunting is seen as a parallel activity to fighting in times of peace. These activities form not only the body of young man, but also his soul and make

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<sup>46</sup> Laiou (2002: 20).

<sup>47</sup> Kazhdan & Epstein (1985: 69–71).

<sup>48</sup> Patlagean (1984); Nicol (1984).

<sup>49</sup> In earlier Byzantine literature, a humble origin was not seen as a disgrace for an emperor, quite the contrary, e.g. Basil I, who came from poor conditions, is praised for his advancement and compared to the biblical David. Agapitos (1989); Hörandner (2009: 105–108).

him a brave, decisive and admirable warrior. This impressive image is completed by the juvenile's luxurious hunting and military equipment. To summarize, the increased emphasis on a juvenile's physical skills as well as the representation of family power and wealth demonstrate the enhanced self-esteem of the military aristocracy of the Komnenian period.

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- h.coufalova@seznam.cz

