

Introduction



This guide aims to make the riches of medieval histories written in Greek easily accessible to anyone who may be interested. It is a gesture of welcome to classicists, to western medievalists, as well as to students beginning their intellectual exploration of the world. While it contains no information that a diligent Byzantinist could not track down with time, gathering the information into one place may help them as well. The purpose is to provide a reliable starting point for research by explaining the basics of what we know about a text and how we know it, while avoiding the repetition of scholarly speculation. Calculated guesswork is part of doing medieval history, and I am all in favor of a good supposition from time to time. Yet often one scholar's reasonable guess is soon cited as fact, so that later readers do not know the relative stability of the ground they are building on. The goal here is to set a firm foundation and let you do the speculating.

Where this guide may innovate is in putting the emphasis on exploration of the surviving texts, rather than on medieval authors. Since the early modern period, scholars have been keenly interested in recovering the biographies of the individuals who wrote the histories, and reconstructing texts that no longer survive on the basis of hints in the manuscripts that do survive. The search for the lives and careers of creative agents was a natural expression of the Renaissance interest in individuals. This basic project animated the field well into the twentieth century, and much of the scholarship cited in the following pages is committed to recovering the lives of medieval authors. Developments in late-twentieth-century thought, commonly discussed under the rubric of the "linguistic turn," have shifted the focus of much scholarship from reconstructing individuals to analyzing texts.¹ Quite apart from the changing fashions

¹ Gabrielle Spiegel, "The Future of the Past: History, Memory and the Ethical Imperatives of Writing History," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 8 (2014): 149–79. Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

of theory, the only things available for us to study are texts in surviving manuscripts (throughout this book “manuscript” refers to a physical artifact written by hand). It would seem simply safer to lay the groundwork for further scholarship by focusing on these things in their own right, rather than looking ever past them toward how we imagine their creators. We are indeed able to say a good deal about the lives of many of the medieval men (and the woman) who wrote these histories, but since this guide aims to provide a fundamental starting point, we have tried to err consistently on the side of skeptical caution.

For some of the histories in this guide, we have plenty of information about the author, and can describe his career and work with great confidence. In other cases, our texts are entirely anonymous. Yet most of the time what we know about an author comes from the text he ostensibly wrote. Things get interesting in these cases because it is difficult to know how much we should trust what the texts seem to say about their authors. Consider the authorial information carried in the title *Brief Chronicle Collected, Combined, and Interpreted from various Chroniclers by George the Monk and Sinner*. The text that follows is highly moralizing, and packed full of stories about virtue rewarded and sin punished – not at all the sort of thing that would be written by someone who squandered life on booze and floozies. We therefore should distrust the claim that George was particularly sinful, although the monk part is easy to believe. The reasoning behind this fib is clear: if George had said he was a virtuous man, he would be guilty of the sin of pride, so he accused himself of sinfulness to make himself look humble, and therefore virtuous. Yet the fact that half of what this virtuous man tells us about himself is a lie, strictly speaking, should give us pause about trusting other statements in texts too readily. If this text were actually written by a Gregory who decided to take the truly humble step of attributing it to George, we would never know it. This history is discussed under the entry “George the Monk,” because that is the name associated with it in scholarship, but bear in mind that all we have are manuscripts with the name George in the title. Discussions about George himself are necessarily speculative. This case is clear enough that no one has been taken in and thought that George was *really* a sinner. But are we more justified in taking at face value the statements of those trained in artful rhetoric? The highly-educated and powerful imperial jurist John Zonaras says that he wrote his history in lonely retirement. Such a statement makes his history seem more reliable because, far away from the halls of power, he was less likely to favor old friends. Is it true? Scholars trying to account for all the phases of his life and career work hard

to put him in retirement when writing history, but what if he were retired the way George was sinful?

The skeptical approach of this guide is in contrast to that taken in the most thorough English-language treatment of Byzantine historiography, Warren Treadgold's *Early Byzantine Historians*, and *Middle Byzantine Historians* (a volume on *Late Byzantine Historians* is forthcoming).² Treadgold is a maximalist in terms of reconstructing medieval authors. He strives to erase anonymity by coming up with something to say about the author of every text and associating the names of medieval writers with anonymous surviving histories. Many of his suppositions might be correct, but they are expressed with a confidence that may encourage undue trust. He also is committed to reconstructing lost texts that seem to lie behind the ones we do have, including lengthy discussions of texts that exist only in his mind. It seems clear that some of our surviving texts weave together portions of earlier works we no longer possess, and again he might be right. Treadgold's books appear to contain a great deal more data about the past than this one. Students are likely to prefer his books because they provide a comfortable confidence in our depth of knowledge about the Middle Ages, whereas this guide can be frustrating in its lack of certainty. The bracing ignorance displayed in the following pages, however, can reassure you that you have not been misled. We try to let you know what is known and let you do the guessing. Think of this book as a dry martini to Treadgold's cream sherry.

This is not a guide to all the sources from which we derive information about the Byzantine Empire, but only those that ostensibly participate in traditions of Greek history writing. Many kinds of source material – such as seals, taxation records, letters, pollen counts, etc. – provide data from which we can explore the history of the Byzantine Empire and the Eastern Mediterranean more broadly.³ Many kinds of document contain narratives

² Warren T. Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* (New York: Palgrave, 2007); idem., *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (New York: Palgrave, 2013).

³ An extremely fine brief introduction to the field is the "General Introduction" to Jonathan Shepard, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500–1492* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2–98. There are other good places to start: Jonathan Harris, *Palgrave Advances in Byzantine History* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Elizabeth Jeffreys, John Haldon, and Robin Cormack, *Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Karagiannopoulos's detailed list of sources is available in Greek or German: Iōannēs E. Karagiannopoulos, *Pegai Tēs Vyzantinēs Historias*, 5th ed. (Thessaloniki: Ekdoseis P. Pournara, 1987); Iōannēs E. Karagiannopoulos, *Quellenkunde zur Geschichte von Byzanz (324–1453)*, trans. Günter Weiss, *Schriften zur Geistesgeschichte des östlichen Europa* 14 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1982). The new digital version of a major classical encyclopedia *Brill's New Pauly* has expanded coverage of medieval Greek authors. If you know what you are looking for, it is a great place to start. Manfred

about the past that are quite close to historical writing. An orator praising the emperor's victories will explain the course of recent events.⁴ A funeral oration may include narratives about events in the deceased's life that can be quite extensive.⁵ When writing their wills or foundation charters people sometimes included a sketch of their life's story.⁶ Although such texts do contain recognizably historical narrative, this guide only includes texts that call themselves "histories," or "chronicles," or that clearly look like such.⁷

We have included histories written between 600 and 1490 CE. These temporal boundaries leave out all of what has traditionally been called "Early Byzantine" history. "Early Byzantine" history is now commonly seen as a part of the history of "Late Antiquity." The earlier period has been studied in far greater depth than the later centuries. Several good introductions, and a host of detailed individual studies, exist for the historians of Late Antiquity.⁸ Studies of classical and late antique historiography typically end with Theophylact Simokattes. We have started with him. The end point for our project extends beyond the end of the empire in 1453, because the fall of Constantinople was one of many changes that gradually altered

Landfester, Hubert Cancik, Helmuth Schneider et al., eds., *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World: Classical Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

⁴ Magdalino makes extensive use of court oratory to construct the biography of Manuel Komnenos: Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁵ An example of an extensive historical narrative within a funeral oration is in Manuel II Palaiologos's oration for his brother Theodore: Julian Chrysostomides, ed., *Manuel II Palaeologus: Funeral Oration on His Brother Theodore* (Thessaloniki: Association for Byzantine Research, 1985).

⁶ For example, Gregory Pakourianos and Michael Attaleiates both told the highlights of their life adventures in the beginning of the foundation documents for their monasteries. Robert Jordan, trans., "Typikon of Gregory Pakourianos for the Monastery of the Mother of God *Petriztonitissa* in Bačkovno," in *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, ed. John Thomas and Angela Constantinides Hero, vol. 2 (Dumbarton Oaks, 2000), 507–63. Alice-Mary Talbot, "Attaleiates: Rule of Michael Attaleiates for His Almshouse in Rhaidestos and for the Monastery of Christ Panoiktirmon in Constantinople," in *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, ed. John Thomas and Angela Constantinides Hero, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2000), 326–76.

⁷ We have made exceptions to include some texts, such as Kaminiates's letter on the capture of Thessaloniki, because they are so often discussed in the modern scholarly literature as histories that it would be a disservice to leave them out. We have not included the brief notices of dates and events that appear in numerous manuscripts. Although these are sometimes called "short chronicles" in scholarship, these notes on dates are not examples of historical writing of the sorts that are considered on this book. On these notices see Peter Schreiner, *Die Byzantinischen Kleinchroniken* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1975); Apostolos D. Karpozilos, *Vyzantinoi historikoi kai chronographoi*, vol. 2 (Athens: Kanakē, 2002), 529–611.

⁸ David Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2002); Arietta Papaconstantinou, Muriel Debié, and Hugh Kennedy, eds., *Writing "True Stories": Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010); Gabriele Marasco, ed., *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity: Fourth to Sixth Century A.D.* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

the intellectual and cultural landscape of the Eastern Mediterranean. We included the generation of people who lived through the final defeat of the empire and wrote about the dissolution of the Roman Empire and the growth of Ottoman power. The latest historian we included, Laonikos Chalkokondyles, wrote a history that imitates Herodotus in many respects. Chalkokondyles's choice to imitate the first Greek historian makes his history a particularly fitting place to end our survey.

The discussions of individual texts are not uniform in style because of the great variety among the texts discussed. Some texts are a few pages long, and others fill multiple volumes. Some have been studied continuously for hundreds of years, and others hardly at all. Some have authors who were well-known public figures, and some are anonymous. We have tried to provide at least one English-language item for further reading. We have spent more time summarizing the contents of texts that have not been translated into a modern language.

Byzantine History is the history of the Roman Empire in the Middle Ages. Western European historical traditions have seen the advent of Christianity as a major turning point in human history. Regardless of whether the Christianization of the Roman Empire is seen positively, as the triumph of Christianity, or negatively, as the onset of the Dark Ages, considering Christianization as the crucial pivot point in human history leads to the supposition that the eastern Roman Empire stopped being the *real* Roman Empire once it had become Christian. Christianization was a deeply significant change within the culture of the Eastern Mediterranean. It cannot be trivialized or dismissed. It did not, however, sever the political entity of the Roman Empire into two segments in the minds of its inhabitants. To gain any traction in understanding Byzantine history, modern scholars need to take seriously the self-understanding of the inhabitants of the medieval Roman Empire as Romans.⁹ Too often even Byzantinists have considered them to be Greeks who thought they were Romans, or Byzantines who thought they were Romans, thereby attributing a false consciousness to the subjects of their study. In no other fields do historians routinely treat the subjects of their inquiry as having an inaccurate understanding of who they were. The Renaissance and Enlightenment narratives that posited a stark break between Antiquity and the Dark Ages have long been rejected by modern historians. Yet the aftertaste of these narratives continues to give many scholars a rough working

⁹ Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

understanding of the Byzantine Empire as separate and distinct from the *real* Roman Empire. Resisting the aftereffects of these paradigms allows scholars to take seriously the understanding and self-presentation of the citizens of the Medieval Roman Empire.¹⁰

In the sixth and seventh centuries, continuity in political identity with the classical Roman Empire coexisted with radical disruption of economic activity brought on by plague, war, and the collapse of long-distance trade networks. While the quality of life for many people may have improved when the owners of vast estates no longer violently exploited their labor, the amount of money spent on products of high culture diminished, and therefore the seventh century seems far poorer, from the standpoint of literary production.¹¹ The historical texts composed in the seventh through ninth centuries can seem, frankly, underfunded. The authors were just as astute and perceptive, but the products do not reflect particularly high standards of education.

Few histories survive from the seventh to ninth centuries. We have two historical texts from the seventh century, none from the eighth, and five from the ninth. It is likely that fewer people were writing histories in the seventh and eighth centuries, but also later generations did not prize, and recopy, historical texts from that era. In particular, histories that favored emperors who supported the theology of iconoclasm (726–787 and 814–842) were not valued, and perhaps even deliberately destroyed, by people who later favored icon veneration.¹² The study of the eighth century largely relies on texts written later.¹³

Roughly speaking, the economy of the Eastern Mediterranean improved in intensity and expanded in monetization throughout the medieval period.¹⁴ The rhetorical quality of classicizing histories improves

¹⁰ In the field of Late Antiquity, formed in conscious reaction to discourses of Dark Age rupture, it is normal for scholars to call the citizens of the fourth–sixth century eastern Roman Empire Romans, following the usage of the late ancient texts.

¹¹ Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹² This controversy over whether the veneration of images of saints and Jesus was idolatry looms large in the ninth-century writings of those who favored icon veneration. They showed the earlier emperors who had opposed icon veneration in the worst possible light, and likely inflated the significance of the whole controversy. On Iconoclasm, see Leslie Brubaker and John F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, C. 680–850: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Leslie Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2012).

¹³ Some of the later texts may have quoted or drawn on histories written in the eighth century. Theophanes, in particular, is often treated as a potential mine for earlier histories.

¹⁴ The fortunes of the Empire did not track consistently with economic expansion because the state was not always able to collect revenue effectively (particularly in the eleventh century). The political and fiscal troubles of the Empire, however, did not affect the ability of its elites to write compelling

approximately in step with economic expansion in the empire. Increasing prosperity in the late tenth and eleventh centuries was concurrent with the flourishing of rhetorical training and expansion of classical education.¹⁵ This trend is reflected in the production of increasingly sophisticated histories. Although the empire in the 1070s–1080s experienced significant military losses, and a fiscal crisis, intellectual culture blossomed.¹⁶ From the eleventh century on, it was possible for elite writers to have a knowledge of classical literature, philosophy, and history as profound as that we are taught to expect from Renaissance humanists.

The twelfth century marks a high point for Byzantine literary culture, with a confluence of political stability and patronage, extraordinary educational opportunities, and playful innovations in genres and styles.¹⁷ The sack of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade, in 1204, had a devastating impact on the sheer number of books available, the survival of ancient texts, and the networks of literary patronage. Individual authors could still acquire fine rhetorical and classical educations, but the increasing

history. Angeliki Laiou, “The Byzantine Economy: An Overview,” in *The Economic History of Byzantium from the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 1145–64.

¹⁵ Stratis Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Athanasios Markopoulos, “Roman Antiquarianism: Aspects of the Roman Past in the Middle Byzantine Period (9th–11th Centuries),” in *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys, vol. 1 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 277–97.

¹⁶ Alexios Komnenos’s (1081–1118) coin reform of 1092 marked the establishment of a new fiscal footing, as well as a new monetary system, replacing the debased coinage of the eleventh century. Cécile Morisson, “Byzantine Money: Its Production and Circulation,” in *The Economic History of Byzantium from the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Angeliki Laiou, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 909–66; Gilbert Dagron, “The Urban Economy, Seventh–Twelfth Centuries,” in *The Economic History of Byzantium From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Angeliki Laiou, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 393–462; Michael Angold, “Belle Époque or Crisis? (1025–1118),” in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500–1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 583–626; Paul Magdalino, “The Empire of the Komnenoi (1118–1204),” in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500–1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 627–63.

¹⁷ Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 225–317. Some examples of innovative texts: Elizabeth Jeffreys, trans., *Four Byzantine Novels*, Translated Texts for Byzantinists 1 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012); Barry Baldwin, trans., *Timarion*, Byzantine Texts in Translation (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984); Theodore Prodromus, *Der Byzantinische Katz-Mäuse-Krieg*, ed. Herbert Hunger (Graz: Böhlau in Kommission, 1968). Some recent studies: Dimitris Krallis, “Harmless Satire, Stinging Critique: Notes and Suggestions for Reading the Timarion,” in *Power and Subversion in Byzantium*, ed. Dimitar Angelov (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 221–45; Margaret Mullett, “Novelisation in Byzantium: Narrative after the Revival of Fiction,” in *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honour of Roger Scott*, ed. John Burke (Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2006), 1–28; Ingela Nilsson and Eva Nystrom, “To Compose, Read, and Use a Byzantine Text: Aspects of the Chronicle of Constantine Manasses,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 33, no. 1 (2009): 42–60; Panagiotis Roilos, *Aphoteroglossia: A Poetics of the Twelfth-Century Medieval Greek Novel* (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2005).

precariousness of patronage seems to have led to a diminishment of literary output in the thirteenth century. The desire to continue the traditions of empire, first in exile in Nicaea, and after 1261 in a recovered Constantinople, stoked interest in sustaining the writing of history. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the importance of the imperial government diminished as the Eastern Mediterranean became an increasingly polyglot mixture of competing Italian, Turkish, Serbian, and Greek political entities.¹⁸ In this Renaissance milieu, the skills of the classically trained rhetoricians were highly prized. Some of the authors at the end of our spectrum worked for the Genoese lords of Lesbos, and the Ottoman sultans, as well as for the last Roman emperors.

The cultural continuities evident in the Byzantine historiographical tradition can mask the changes in society, economy, and international politics that took place over the nine centuries covered in this book. A lot changed in the Mediterranean between the seventh and fifteenth centuries. That ideas about how history ought to be recorded remained so constant is a testament to the adaptive flexibility of Byzantine classicism, and the compelling nature of the Greek historiographic tradition.

Medieval Historical Texts: Histories, Chronicles, and Terminology

Saying that this guide only deals with texts that look like histories or chronicles begs the question of what a Byzantine history would look like. The conception shared by ancient and medieval writers in Greek, that “history” was a distinct kind of writing, gives us some confidence that we can pick the “histories” out of the rest of medieval Greek texts with some success. For a long time Byzantinists divided historical texts into two separate kinds: histories, which were good; and chronicles, which were not. In part, this categorization was prompted by the nature of the texts, but it also drew on and cultivated a set of unhelpful prejudices about medieval writing that have obscured the study of Byzantine history writing. The biases that underpinned the distinction between chronicle and history have been exposed, and some scholars advocate vigorously that the distinction should be abandoned entirely.¹⁹ Byzantine vocabulary for historical

¹⁸ Judith Herrin and Guillaume Saint-Guillain, eds., *Identities and Allegiances in the Eastern Mediterranean after 1204* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). Angeliki Laiou, “The Palaiologoi and the World around Them,” in *Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 803–33.

¹⁹ Ruth Macrides, “How the Byzantines Wrote History,” in *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić (Belgrade: Serbian National Committee of AIEB, 2016), 257–63.

texts does not reflect the distinction between histories and chronicles. Yet the distinction was not based on prejudice alone, and most historical texts do have characteristics that make it look like one or the other of two styles of historical writing.²⁰ We will try to describe the differences without perpetuating the unhelpful assumptions.

In the traditional categorization, chronicles were viewed disparagingly as the unoriginal compositions of poorly-educated and superstitious monks. Karl Krumbacher, a highly influential late-nineteenth century Byzantinist, associated the chronicle tradition with monks, and attributed to it a deeply Christian mindset that de-emphasized human endeavors in favor of cosmic divine action.²¹ Chronicles were characterized as using a low-style Greek, as concerned with salvation history, portents and natural disasters, and chronological listing of major events over a broad swath of time. By contrast, histories were attempts to follow in the tradition of classical historians such as Thucydides and Xenophon. They used more classicizing Greek, focused on the choices and actions of individuals, and covered a shorter time span.

The histories were thought to be continuations of a classical tradition, while the chronicles were inventions of the Christian Middle Ages. For the scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the medieval was seen as naturally worse than the ancient, and so the chronicles were seen as unworthy of study as works of historical craft. The chronicles could be used for gathering data on events, but not much was expected by way of authorial subtlety, as the authors were assumed to be uniformly and piously disinterested in human affairs.

In 1965 Hans-Georg Beck dealt a fatal blow to the theory of the “monkish chronicle” by showing that most of the authors of the chronicles were not monks, and that many Byzantine monks were not monkish.²² He demonstrated that several chroniclers who were monks at the end of their lives, were not lifelong devotees of the cloistered life. It was not unusual for Byzantine people to take monastic vows as they were dying. The adoption of the “angelic habit” was considered a proper preparation for the next world, especially for emperors or other politicians who inevitably needed to atone for their sins. Generals, courtiers, and prominent church officials

²⁰ Paul Magdalino, “Byzantine Historical Writing, 900–1400,” in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, ed. Sarah Foot, Chase F. Robinson, and Daniel R. Woolf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2:222–3.

²¹ Karl Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur von Justinian bis zum Ende des oströmischen Reiches (527–1453)*, 2nd ed., Handbuch der klassischen Altertums-Wissenschaft, IX, Pt. 1 (Munich, 1897), 319–23.

²² Hans-Georg Beck, “Die byzantinische ‘Mönchschronik,’” in *Ideen und Realitäten in Byzanz* (London: Variorum, 1972), 188–97.

would become monks as a means of safely ending a career that had become dangerous. Late-life monasticism could as easily be a sign that the individual had been particularly engaged in the world, rather than particularly pious. If these men wrote histories in their monastic retirement, we are not justified in thinking their writing would reflect a pious lack of interest in world affairs.²³ As well as debunking the idea that Byzantine chronicles were written by monks who reflected a uniform cloistered piety, Beck effectively exposed the prejudice that underlay the link between supposed monastic authorship and simple-mindedness.

More recently, scholars have emphasized that writing year-by-year accounts of events – chronicle writing – was not a medieval invention. Rather it was a development of an ancient form of historical writing just as much as the genre called “history.”²⁴ A more thorough understanding of the variety of historical writing in the ancient world makes it impossible to see chronicle writing as a distinctively Christian response to history and time.²⁵ Traditions of year-by-year chronicle writing developed into the most common form of historical writing in the Latin west.

So what did the Byzantine forms of historical writing look like? Some look a great deal like classical Greek histories that covered a relatively short stretch of time, such as those by Thucydides or Xenophon. The conventions of this genre were fairly well defined, and the authors expressed awareness of writing in this specific tradition. These are the texts that scholars have called classicizing histories. The texts that scholars have called chronicles are chiefly characterized by taking on a vast stretch of time, usually going from the Creation of the world up to the author’s present. There is more variety within this group and less consensus about the boundaries of the genre. We will describe the characteristics of the classicizing histories first, and then discuss the main features of the various other kinds of historical writing.

Classicizing histories conform to the stylistic rules of the classical Greek tradition of history writing. Herodotus, Xenophon, Thucydides, and their successors established history writing as its own kind of writing, different from oratory, drama, or other kinds of composition. There is a lot of

²³ Since Beck wrote his essay, studies of Byzantine monasticism have emphasized how deeply integrated monks were into the fabric of lay society. Even those men who joined monasteries out of pure devotion often did not experience severe separation from society. Rosemary Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843–1118* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²⁴ Richard W. Burgess and Michael Kulikowski, *Mosaics of Time: The Latin Chronicle Traditions from the First Century BC to the Sixth Century AD*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 33 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

variety in form, scope, and aesthetic sensibility among subsequent histories in Greek throughout the medieval era, but there is also much agreement on the style of language and exposition appropriate for a history. There were stable norms about what topics ought to be included in a history (mostly politics and war), how narrative should be written, what should be mentioned in the introduction, when the author should comment on the action, and so on. One of the chief characteristics was the use of classical Attic Greek. Authors tried to write in the language of ancient Athens to the best of their ability, even though this differed considerably from their everyday spoken language. Classicizing history is a good name for this genre because it is fundamentally about trying to describe recent events in the same way that ancient events had been. For all the variety of the medieval histories, they were part of a tradition that was remarkably stable in terms of language, style, and content.

Classicizing histories generally opened with an introduction, (*proemion*), in which the ostensible author proclaims his truthfulness.²⁶ Many introductions invoke Herodotus's claim that the purpose of writing history is to prevent the memory of the past from being obliterated by time.²⁷ It was commonplace for historians to say that they were going to write only what was true without favoritism. Often historians criticized their predecessors for being biased flatterers who distorted the truth because of hope for gain or personal grudges.²⁸ They claimed the deeds they were about to record were particularly worthy of commemoration. Often the authors explained that their skills were inadequate for the task of writing history, but they were compelled by some outside force, either the entreaties of other people or the danger that the deeds would be forgotten. The rhetorical skills of the author worked to persuade the audience that the history was true.²⁹ Authors of classicizing history often claimed that they wrote based on personal autopsy, about matters that they had seen and information that they

²⁶ Where texts do not have a *proemion*, we have reason to think the opening was lost.

²⁷ Leonora Neville, "Why Did Byzantines Write History?," in *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Smilja Marjanović-Dužanić (Belgrade: The Serbian National Committee of AIEB, 2016), 265–76.

²⁸ Iordanis Grigoriadis, "A Study of the Prooimion of Zonaras' Chronicle in Relation to Other 12th-Century Prooimia," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 91 (1998): 327–44. Robert Browning, *Notes on Byzantine Prooimia* (Vienna: In Kommission bei H. Böhlau Nachf., 1966).

²⁹ Anthony J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography: Four Studies* (Portland: Areopagitica Press, 1988); M. J. Wheeldon, "True Stories: the Reception of Historiography in Antiquity," in *History as Text: The Writing of Ancient History*, ed. Avril Cameron (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 33–63; Mullett, "Novelisation in Byzantium: Narrative after the Revival of Fiction," 7–8.

gathered through their own witness.³⁰ In all these respects, Byzantine histories followed classical traditions of historiography.³¹

Classicizing histories take on a discrete segment of time. Histories were detailed explorations of the causes and deeds involved in a particular reign or other more chronologically narrow series of events. Some scholars see classicizing Byzantine histories as almost by definition contemporary history, in which the author describes events of his own lifetime.³² Histories would often pick up the narrative thread where a previous history had stopped, so that together they created a continuous narrative.³³ The introductions to histories can include statements in which the author justifies his decision to write history by appealing to the need to continue the story from the point at which another text had ended. From the ninth century on, classicizing histories tended to be organized around the reigns of emperors with the accension and death of a particular emperor framing the discussion of the events. Most histories covered several reigns, but Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* is an extreme case of an entire history devoted to the reign of one emperor.

Histories were concerned with commemoration of great events. Histories were not particularly concerned with setting out the big chronological picture or a single moral viewpoint. Histories described and evaluated the deeds of individual actors, often emperors. The deeds recorded in histories were those of men engaged in politics and war. Histories are political and military narratives. Ecclesiastical politics sometimes joined the story as an aspect of imperial politics. Yet many topics that are of interest to us – our whole fields of economic, social, or cultural history – were not covered in histories. Medieval people were likely interested in money, familial and social relationships, and changes in cultural fashion, but they did not think of history books as the place to discuss any of that.

The authors of classicizing histories could maintain an open authorial presence throughout their texts. In some classicizing histories the author's personality is readily apparent and the author plays a significant role as guide and narrator to events.³⁴ The increase in rhetorical training and

³⁰ Martin Hinterberger, *Autobiographische Traditionen in Byzanz*, Wiener byzantinistische Studien 22 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999), 295–343.

³¹ One of the most helpful books for understanding Byzantine historiography therefore is John Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

³² Hinterberger, *Autobiographische Traditionen in Byzanz*, 296.

³³ Anthony Kaldellis, "The Corpus of Byzantine Historiography: An Interpretive Essay," in *The Byzantine World*, ed. Paul Stephenson (London: Routledge, 2010), 211–22.

³⁴ Ruth Macrides, "The Historian in the History," in *Philellēn: Studies in Honour of Robert Browning*, ed. Costas N. Constantinides, Nikolaos Panagiotakes, and Elizabeth Jeffreys (Venice: Istituto ellenico di studi bizantini e postbizantini di Venezia, 1996), 205–24.

re-engagement with late-classical rhetorical culture that took place in the late 10th and 11th centuries appears to have coincided with growing numbers of classicizing histories. Intensification of an author-centered book culture, as opposed to traditions of anonymous writing, was an aspect of this larger intellectual trend.³⁵

The texts Byzantinists call chronicles contrast with the classicizing histories in a number of significant ways. One is the use of a simpler style of Greek. They are not vernacular texts, written in anything like the spoken language of the day, but the grammar is more like the *koine* Greek of the New Testament and the vocabulary is less complex. The simple Greek of chronicles was long taken as a marker of lack of education. Yet the use of a less-classicizing Greek could be a deliberate choice. Sophisticated and rhetorically well-trained writers could choose to write in a lower register for the sake of clarity, as an expression of humility (and hence virtue), or to fit with the style appropriate to the chronicle genre.³⁶ Just as the authors of classicizing histories worked hard to write in an ancient language with a diverse vocabulary, so the authors of these historical texts tried to write accessibly.

The other major distinction from the classicizing histories is that “chronicles” take on a much larger span of time. Chronicles usually start with the Creation of the world and run up to the time of the author. Only two Byzantine historical texts, the *Paschal Chronicle* and Theophanes, qualify under the strict definition of a chronicle as an historical text that provides brief lists of events that happened in each year.³⁷ Yet when Byzantinists talk about chronicles, they are referring to historical texts that cover a large period of time with great brevity.³⁸

Some texts, such as Joel, Peter of Alexandria, or Patriarch Nikephoros’s *Chronographikon Syntomon*, string together a list of rulers in succession from Adam to the most recent emperor or some other point, with little commentary.³⁹ These extremely brief texts, which are more like lists than

³⁵ Stratis Papaioannou, “Voice, Signature, Mask: The Byzantine Author,” in *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature: Modes, Functions, and Identities*, ed. Aglae Pizzone (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 21–40.

³⁶ On authorial humility see: Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

³⁷ Burgess and Kulikowski, *Mosaics of Time*, 30–31.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 30–31, 61. Burgess and Kulikowski term this genre of writing *breviaria*, meaning a brief treatment of many thousands of years of history. Their distinction between chronicles and *breviaria* is convincing and useful. I have not adopted it because so much scholarship on Byzantium uses the vocabulary of chronicles that it would be confusing to introduce a new terminology. It also does not seem to make sense to use a Latin term for talking about Greek historical writing.

³⁹ The *Chronicon Bruxellense* does the same thing, but starts with Christ.

fleshed out prose, may have helped make sense of the whole world by setting major events in relation to each other. Slightly more expansive texts, such as Symeon the Logothete, Theodore Skoutariotes, or Ephraim, will have the lists of rulers be the primary structure, but note other events that happened in the reigns of those rulers. The rulers could be biblical patriarchs and kings, or Babylonian, Persian, or Roman emperors. These often increase in detail as they move closer to the time of composition, but their root purpose seems to have more to do with connecting the here and now with Adam, Christ, and the emperors. These texts can include the deeds of apostles and bishops. Often, unusual natural phenomena or portents are included.

Other texts use the reigns of rulers as headings under which various events are listed but do more storytelling about things that happened in each age. The chronicle of George the Monk begins with Creation and wanders quickly through history to the ninth century, pausing to discuss a wide variety of topics. He includes long digressions on theological matters, which often take the form of lengthy strings of quotations, and numerous entertaining anecdotes of little historical importance that are best understood as short stories. Kedrenos similarly told moralizing stories, and explained theological truth, while running through history from Creation to the present.

Besides the broad sweep of time, these texts seem to speak to humanity's role in cosmic history and offer a program of Christian world history. Charting the chronology of the whole of human history made the unfolding of the divine drama of Creation, Incarnation, and empire clear. Major events in the reigns of recent emperors get added into the record, but chronicles rarely reflect the experiences that were of personal importance to local communities at the time of composition.

Whereas the authors are often present in classicizing histories, the authors of chronicles stay in the background. These texts were often anonymous, and if they were associated with a named author, the author's voice was not generally heard in the text. An interesting case in point is provided by Michael Psellos. In his classicizing history of the eleventh century, Psellos appears as a character in the drama and has a strong authorial presence as narrator and guide to history throughout the work. When he took his turn to write something more like a chronicle however, Psellos kept such a low profile that scholars have doubted that he wrote it.⁴⁰ It now

⁴⁰ Stratis Papaioannou and John Duffy, "Michael Psellos and the Authorship of the *Historia Syntomos*: Final Considerations," in *Vyzantio, kratos kai koinōnia: Mnēmē Nikou Oikonomidē*

seems secure that he wrote both texts; he just adjusted his presentation to fit the different purposes. The complex manuscript histories of some chronicles – in which it can be difficult to figure out if a text is a modified “copy” of another chronicle or an “independent” text – owes much to the relative anonymity of the chronicle tradition.

A number of Byzantine historical texts do not look like either of the two styles discussed. John Zonaras wrote a history that started with Creation, like a chronicle, but was written in high style Greek and primarily concerned with secular history. John Skylitzes said he was continuing the work of Theophanes the Confessor, but whereas Theophanes’s work was a true year-by-year chronicle, Skylitzes’s work, in its scope and methods, was more like a classicizing history. Constantine Manasses wrote a fairly brief text that began with Creation, but it was in verse and focused far more on sex, jealousy, and fate than theology. Michael Glykas wrote a text that spent more time on the first seven days of the world than anything else, but it looks just like a chronicle from Jesus on, listing emperors briefly in succession.

These anomalies point out that the distinction between classicizing histories and chronicles is a construct that we have made to help us talk about Byzantine historical writing. The differences between chronicles and the classicizing histories are significant enough that some scholars continue to use the distinction. Yet the norms of the genres were always more guidelines than rules, and no one policed the boundaries. To the contrary, our texts display many variations and frequently play with the rules of the game.⁴¹

For all kinds of Byzantine historical writing, it was acceptable for an author to reuse material that had been written by another. In a society that grades kindergarteners for creativity, (and flunks people who plagiarize), Byzantine attitudes toward the reuse of older writing can seem perplexing. But if material was well-written and appeared to be true, it could be incorporated into a latter work without risking opprobrium. The authors of Byzantine chronicles have been denigrated as hacks who simply

Byzantium, State and Society: In Memory of Nikos Oikonomides, ed. A. Avramea, Angeliki Laiou, and Evangelos Chrysos (Athens: Hellenic National Research Foundation, 2003), 219–29. Even in the *Historia Syntomos*, Psellos’s personal agenda can be discerned: Raimondo Tocci, “Questions of Authorship and Genre in Chronicles of the Middle Byzantine Period: The Case of Michael Psellos’ *Historia Syntomos*,” in *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature: Modes, Functions, and Identities*, ed. Aglae M. V. Pizzone, *Byzantinisches Archiv* 28 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 61–76.

⁴¹ Dmitry E. Afinogenov, “Some Observations on Genres of Byzantine Historiography,” *Byzantion* 62 (1992): 13–33. Jakov Ljubarskij, “George the Monk as a Short-Story Writer,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 44 (1994): 255–64; Nilsson and Nystrom, “To Compose.”

cut-and-pasted bits of others' work. Yet when studied in detail, the chronicles seem to have been written, or compiled, with an aim of emphasizing particular points. Even the authors most easily seen as compilers have been shown to engage in intentional authorial acts with regard to the editing and presentation of their source material.⁴² The chronicles vary too much to see them as simply copied one from another.

Authors, Audiences, and Purposes

Writing was an elite activity of the highly-educated classes. If we can generalize, historians were people with public careers. As far as we can tell, none of the authors we can identify, of either histories or chronicles, had history writing as their primary occupation. It is not unusual for authors to have an imperial title associated with their name, indicating that they had some role in the imperial administration. Imperial titles did not always correspond to the actual tasks administrators were asked to undertake, so a title does not often tell us what the individual spent his time doing. In many cases, we do not really know what people with a particular title were supposed to be doing.⁴³ We have not always provided an English equivalent for titles because they can give a false sense of certainty about the author's regular job. There does seem to be a strong connection between history writing and legal work in the ninth to twelfth centuries. In this era, many historians were trained as lawyers and had careers as judges before turning to history.⁴⁴ The titles are generally congruous with high-level positions.

Some authors were monks, but for the reasons explained above, this may not have had much impact on their worldview. Some authors had titles that were associated with the patriarchal clergy. Up through the twelfth century however, the patriarchate was a branch of the imperial government and I would not assume that clerical title holders would have had a different ideology from their lay counterparts. The absence of prohibitions

⁴² Roger Scott, "Narrating Justinian: From Malalas to Manasses," in *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honour of Roger Scott*, ed. John Burke, et al. (Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2006), 29–46; Tocci, "Questions of Authorship and Genre in Chronicles of the Middle Byzantine Period: The Case of Michael Psellos' *Historia Syntomos*."

⁴³ Imperial titles were important in political culture of the empire in the eighth to eleventh centuries, but did not necessarily have much connection to the actual doing of administrative work. Leonora Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950–1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5–65.

⁴⁴ Angeliki Laiou, "Law, Justice, and the Byzantine Historians: Ninth to Twelfth Centuries," in *Law and Society in Byzantium: Ninth–Twelfth Centuries*, ed. Angeliki Laiou and Dieter Simon (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1994), 151–86.

on clerical marriage below the rank of bishop led to thorough integration of clerics into lay society. The lay imperial secretary Michael Glykas wrote one of our most pious texts, while the monk John Zonaras wrote one of the most secular.

We know less than we would like about the audiences for history in Byzantium.⁴⁵ The audience for the texts we call chronicles seems to have been significantly larger than that for classicizing histories. Histories survive in fewer manuscripts, and seem to have had a smaller circulation. Chronicles tend to have multiple copies, with plenty of variations among manuscripts.⁴⁶

The normal way of apprehending a text in the ancient and medieval worlds was to hear it read aloud. For many kinds of Byzantine literature, the oral sound produced when they were performed by a rhetorician was a vital aspect of their artistry that is difficult for modern readers to appreciate.⁴⁷ As we read silently we lose all sense of the euphony, alliteration, and rhythm of medieval Greek texts. Especially for scholars trained to read Greek with an early modern Western European pronunciation (“Erasmian” pronunciation is commonly taught in the US), it can be hard to appreciate anything of the sound of medieval Greek.⁴⁸ We also are not attuned to dramatic presentation and the emotional impact of the storytelling. Our silent and solitary reading habits do not form a good guide to the medieval experience of listening to histories.

The differences in scope, aims, and language between chronicles and histories seem to indicate different intended audiences, or at least different reasons for engaging in a historical text. For classicizing histories, the true audience was posterity. The introductions to many histories insist that their purpose is to preserve the memory of great deeds from oblivion. Histories fought against the destructive effects of time by recording deeds worthy of eternal memory. They served a commemorative purpose. A second commonly held purpose of histories was to educate audiences about how they ought to behave. The actions of past figures were taken as models for people to either emulate or shun. As Attaleiates explains, the victories and

⁴⁵ The fundamental study is Brian Croke, “Uncovering Byzantium’s Historiographical Audience,” in *History as Literature in Byzantium*, ed. Ruth Macrides (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), 25–54.

⁴⁶ Magdalino, “Byzantine Historical Writing, 900–1400,” 223.

⁴⁷ Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 237. Andrew F. Stone, “Aurality in the Panegyrics of Eustathios of Thessaloniki,” in *Theatron: Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter / Rhetorical Culture in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Michael Grünbart (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 419–28.

⁴⁸ Early modern pronunciation systems are easier for learners because they use a different sound for each written vowel, whereas in medieval and modern Greek many vowels sound the same.

defeats recorded in histories, “convey clear instruction and set patterns for the future. They simply lead us to imitate what was discerned well and to avoid ill-advised and shameful deeds ...”⁴⁹ History was a teacher of character.⁵⁰

That history taught one how to act in war and politics suggests an audience of men who could have political or military careers. The preface to the history of Basil I (867–886), ostensibly written by his grandson Constantine VII (945–959), clearly states that it is the future emperors who are called to learn from their progenitor’s example.⁵¹ The examples of deeds of emperors could also be useful and appealing models for individuals acting on a far smaller local stage. Many people could engage with histories as means of learning powerful lessons for action and morality without thinking that they would ever become emperors or generals themselves.

History was also a genre of entertainment. Key elements of the Greek historiographical tradition go back to the epics of Homer. The ideas that history should record great deeds and great words, and celebrate them, are part of the legacy of Homeric epic for historiography. Homer also lent history writing the third person narrative, and concern with the sequence of events, their causes, and effects.⁵² These remained essential elements of history through the medieval period. Byzantines classified history with entertaining display oratory rather than utilitarian civic oratory.⁵³ Commonalities in the sequential narrative in the third person and the purpose of preserving the memory of great deeds ensured that history and epic were considered kindred types of writing.

That histories were considered a genre of entertainment akin to epic did not make them unimportant. Histories could teach strong moral lessons. Whereas chronicles teach the proper relationship between the audience and the cosmos, histories teach the audience how to respond to the challenges of their immediate situation. Ancient histories were also studied to learn

⁴⁹ Anthony Kaldellis and Dimitris Krallis, trans., *Michael Attaleiates: The History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 9.

⁵⁰ Neville, “Why Did Byzantines Write History?”

⁵¹ Ihor Ševčenko, *Chronographiae Quae Theophanis Continuati Nomine Fertur Liber Quo Vita Basilii Imperatoris Amplectitur* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 10–11.

⁵² John Marincola, “Odysseus and the Historians,” *Histos* 1 (1997); Hermann Strasburger, *Homer und die Geschichtsschreibung* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1972); Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, 6; Frank W. Walbank, “History and Tragedy,” *Historia* 9 (1960): 216–34. Charles Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 31, 61–90.

⁵³ This categorization was developed by Hermogenes. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*, 103. On the connection between history and entertainment: Stratis Papaioannou, “The Aesthetics of History: From Theophanes to Eustathios,” in *History as Literature in Byzantium*, ed. Ruth Macrides (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 3–21; Magdalino, “Byzantine Historical Writing, 900–1400,” 2012, 221.

how to write and develop a good prose style.⁵⁴ The events covered in the history of Thucydides are virtually invisible in Byzantine chronicles. Fifth-century Athens was utterly unimportant from the Byzantine perspective. Yet Thucydides was studied carefully as a teacher of expression and fine writing.

The entertaining and commemorative function of history suggests that its audience would overlap somewhat with the audience for epic. History could be enjoyed by the educated elite who liked recalling stories of great deeds told in exemplary rhetorical fashion. We can imagine a performance context for classicizing histories that were conceived as examples of fine rhetoric. There is more evidence for live performance of literary texts from the twelfth century on.⁵⁵ Byzantines used the classical Greek word for theater for any place where texts were performed.⁵⁶ We do not have archaeological evidence for actual theaters that brought together large segments of the population. Rather it seems aristocratic households would have audience halls or other gathering spaces where texts could be performed by rhetoricians. It seems medieval Romans were dealing with a system of aristocratic patronage of orally performed literature that was remarkably similar to that for classical Roman oratory.⁵⁷ Scholars of the medieval west have also learned to appreciate the impact that performance of texts had on their medieval reception.⁵⁸

While we envision many rhetorical texts such as letters and orations being performed before audiences, scholars have not yet thought much about whether histories were performed in this way.⁵⁹ Most of our histories simply seem too long to read aloud in a sitting. This is true, but I think that they would be highly entertaining and emotionally engaging if performed episodically for a few hours an evening over a stretch of time. In my culture one of the most popular forms of entertainment

⁵⁴ Anthony Kaldellis, "The Byzantine Role in the Making of the Corpus of Classical Greek Historiography: A Preliminary Investigation," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 132 (2012): 71–85.

⁵⁵ Magdalino, *Manuel*, 339–53; Margaret Mullett, "Aristocracy and Patronage in the Literary Circles of Comnenian Constantinople," in *The Byzantine Aristocracy: IX–XIII Centuries*, ed. Michael Angold (Oxford: British Archeological Reports, 1984), 173–201; Roderick Beaton, *The Medieval Greek Romance* (London: Routledge, 1996), 16–17, 225.

⁵⁶ Przemysław Marciniak, "Byzantine Theatron – a Place of Performance?," in *Theatron: Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter / Rhetorical Culture in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Michael Grünbart (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 277–85.

⁵⁷ John P. Sullivan, *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nero* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

⁵⁸ Evelyn Birge Vitz, Nancy Freeman Regalado, and Marilyn Lawrence, eds., *Performing Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005).

⁵⁹ I suggest as much for Nikephoros Bryennios: Leonora Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The "Material for History" of Nikephoros Bryennios* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 29–32.

are television series that unspool complex narratives at the rate of ten episodes a year for a half decade or so. No one seems to have particular trouble following the plot. As we study Byzantine histories more closely, and translate more of them, we are coming to greater appreciation of their dramatic power. The history of John Skylitzes was long seen as a pastiche of earlier texts that ran dryly through events without concern for style or storytelling. Yet Catherine Holmes has convincingly demonstrated that Skylitzes in fact reworked his sources to highlight appealing episodes of “cinematic” action. Moments of heroic confrontation are foregrounded, yet presented in a stylized manner that minimizes the distractions of peculiar old titles and odd place names. While frustrating for modern historians who want to recover the particularities, these changes streamlined events to heighten their dramatic impact.⁶⁰ Other histories are vivid, exciting, and spark strong emotional reactions even when read silently.⁶¹ I have no trouble imagining at least some people gathering in aristocratic households to hear them performed. The numbers of people interested in doing this sort of thing were probably not too great, and this reflects our small number of manuscripts for most classicizing histories. This was a genre for a limited elite audience, perhaps in some cases not extending much beyond the imperial palace.

The texts we call chronicles survive in many more copies than classicizing histories, indicating that they enjoyed a wider audience. The language is simpler, so more people would be able to understand them, but that is not a reason to think they were shunned by the educated elite. Chronicles have a strong utilitarian function in helping people understand biblical history, and how biblical history and contemporary history fit together. Chronicles told you how we got from Adam to now, and where the Pharaoh, David, Nebuchanezzar, Cyrus, and Caesar stood in relation to each other. While, to my knowledge, we have no medieval texts saying as much, I think it likely that the main audience for chronicles was people trying to understand biblical stories and the relationships between the kings and emperors mentioned in the Bible and their own era. Chronicles could also teach strong moral lessons about which historical characters should be revered or

⁶⁰ Catherine Holmes, “The Rhetorical Structures of Skylitzes’ Synopsis Historion,” in *Rhetoric in Byzantium*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 187–200; Catherine Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976–1025)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 16–119.

⁶¹ Such personal responses are always subjective and I probably have a particular taste for Byzantine historiography, but I cried when reading Attaleiates and Chalkokondyles in translation. I think any of the classicizing histories would pack a punch in the course of a long, spread-out, episodic performance.

reveled. This certainly could indicate a monastic context for reading chronicles, but also lay households and communities.

It is difficult to imagine some chronicles being read as after-dinner entertainment, even to an ascetic audience. The *Paschal Chronicle* was designed to help properly calculate the date of Easter and otherwise establish the liturgical year. It lists every year, dated by a variety of chronological systems, even if no events are then listed as having happened in that year. This utilitarian purpose suggests that that it might have been consulted silently rather than read to a crowd. We only have one fragmentary copy. On the other hand, the chronicle of George the Monk is full of entertaining and morally edifying stories that are similar to hagiographies and stories that were read aloud in monasteries. The manuscript record indicates that George's chronicle was extremely popular. I have no doubt it was a form of entertainment in monasteries, and probably in many secular households as well. The chronicle of Constantine Manasses, written in fairly simple but rhetorically elegant verse, combines an easy guide to how all the parts of history fit together with delightful stories of adventure and romance. Needless to say, it is among the most widely copied Byzantine histories.

Classicism, Emphasis, and Meaning

Citizens of the medieval Roman Empire conceived of their culture as having deeply ancient roots, which had not been torn off when that empire became Christian. Whether oriented toward Christian sacred history or Aegean classicizing history, Byzantines engaged and contended with ancient historical traditions. Byzantine culture has been denigrated as merely imitative of the classical past. Yet classicism can lead to profound and subtle creativity. Is Virgil an uncreative hack because he imitated Homer? Did Willy Nelson use a nineteenth-century hymn tune in his "Red-headed Stranger" song cycle because he couldn't think of another melody? On the contrary, his use of the tune completes the meaning of his songs as the audience recalls the theological message of the hymn's lyrics. Those with the cultural knowledge of American Protestantism interpret the song cycle differently because for them the tune recalls themes of redemption that are nowhere stated in Nelson's lyrics. Without the cultural background, you miss the point. In this, Nelson's cycle is similar to much of Byzantine literature where the quotation or allusion to a classical source adds to the meaning of the text by drawing on the cultural knowledge of the audience. The more intimately familiar you are with classical

Greek, biblical, and patristic texts, the more echoes of them you will see in Byzantine historiography.

This sort of allusive figured speech – speech that prods an audience to draw a particular conclusion without spelling it out for them – was considered more powerful than plain speech by Byzantine authors. In repressive or absolutist regimes figured speech or covert expression can be safer than blunt or open speech. Yet ancient authors understood that figured speech is more effective, even among friends, than blunt speech. As a matter of both tact and safety, figured speech has been a part of Greek writing since antiquity. Some Byzantine writers continued traditions of writing that understood oblique suggestion as a strong form of statement. The English word “emphasis” is the etymological heir of the Greek *emphasis*, and both mean stress and prominence, but the way emphasis was achieved in ancient writing is directly contrary to modern methods.

The basic idea behind *emphasis* in Greek rhetoric was that an audience would trust conclusions they drew themselves more than an author’s bald accusation.⁶² One famous example of this is when Procopios, in narrating the history of the Nika riots that nearly overthrew Justinian (527–565), has Justinian’s wife Theodora make a speech arguing that he should fight the rioters rather than fleeing to safety. Theodora says that Justinian could flee, but “for my part, I like that old saying, that kingship is a good burial shroud.”⁶³ This shames the men into fighting and Justinian has 30,000 rioters in the hippodrome killed. Well-read members of Procopios’s audience would have recognized Theodora’s phrase as coming from a story about Dionysios the tyrant of Syracuse (405–367 BCE), who was notorious for his cruelty. When Dionysios was about to flee from a violent rebellion against him, one of his courtiers told him that “tyranny makes a good burial shroud.” The statement prodded Dionysios to stay, fight, and retain his crown by dint of killing the rioters. Those who knew the origin of Theodora’s famous phrase would recognize that her words were not brave and heroic, but bloodthirsty and tyrannical. When the surface meaning of the text is combined with knowledge about classical history, the audience is prodded to condemn Theodora and Justinian for tyranny and compare him to one of history’s most ruthless rulers. While the surface of the text can be read as depicting Justinian positively, the allusion

⁶² Fredrick Ahl, “The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome,” *American Journal of Philology* 105 (1984): 174–208.

⁶³ Anthony Kaldellis and Henry Bronson Dewing, trans., *Wars of Justinian*, Hackett Classics (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2014), 64.

prompts a scathing assessment for thoughtful readers.⁶⁴ This is what Byzantines called *emphasis*: giving enough information for the audience to complete a text's meaning. Modern western writers emphasize something by stating it clearly, loudly, and in boldface type. Well-trained medieval Greek writers practiced emphasis by engaging in figured speech that often drew on allusions to classical texts and ideas. By supplying the right bits of information and the right oblique suggestions, authors were able to elicit the judgments they desired from an audience, knowing that the audiences were more likely to trust the judgments they reached themselves.

The implication of Greek emphatic writing is that if you only pay attention to the meaning on the surface of the text you can miss a lot of what is going on. Often medieval texts rely on allusions or quotations of earlier texts to add layers of meaning to their writing. The context and meaning of the quoted source can add an extra dimension of meaning. For instance, Anna Komnene lifts a phrase from Sophocles's *Ajax* that fits nicely into her opening sentence of her history, where a surface reading would have her merely borrowing elegant words. Yet those who know the play will recognize that the phrase opens a memorable sentence in which the hero Ajax goes on to say that nothing strange should be unexpected since even he has become female.⁶⁵ As she steps into the male role of historian, Anna's allusion signals that her crossing of gender boundaries has a precedent. Byzantine rhetoricians studied classical and biblical texts extensively, and often used vocabulary found in those texts. Not every word or phrase shared between two texts was an intentional allusion. Yet it is worth exploring what could be meant by an allusion, and tracking down where unexpected phrases come from.

Authors could also add meaning to their texts by playing with the multiple meanings of words. Many Greek words have multiple meanings and context determines which is intended. Rhetoricians played with audience's sense of context and constructed polyvalent texts in which multiple meanings are all intended.⁶⁶ Nearly every other line of Choniates's history could mean at least two things.⁶⁷ Medieval Greek pronunciation, in which

⁶⁴ James Allan Stewart Evans, "The 'Nika' Rebellion and the Empress Theodora," *Byzantion* 54 (1984): 381–83; Leslie Brubaker, "Sex, Lies and Textuality: The Secret History of Prokopios and the Rhetoric of Gender in Sixth-Century Byzantium," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 83–101.

⁶⁵ Leonora Neville, *Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 32–35.

⁶⁶ Roilos, *Aphoteroglossia*.

⁶⁷ Stephanos Efthymiades, "Niketas Choniates: The Writer," in *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer*, ed. Stephanos Efthymiades and Alicia Simpson (Geneva: La Pomme d'Or, 2009), 35–58.

several different written vowels all have the same sound, allowed for extensive punning. When we consider how texts would have sounded when read aloud, it becomes clear that authors used puns to put even more layers of meaning into their texts.⁶⁸ Needless to say, such texts provide challenges to accurate translation.

Byzantine classicizing histories shared ideas about truth, accuracy, and impartiality with ancient histories that differ from modern historical practices. Texts following the norms of ancient Greek history writing sometimes would include speeches purporting to be what was actually said at a given moment. Classicists have been debating how to interpret the speeches in ancient histories for a long time. The trick is that the ancient historians were vigorous in asserting their devotion to the truth, yet the speeches must have been invented, at least in part. Many classicists now would agree that ancient historians would have considered it truthful to invent a speech that accurately reflected the reality of the situation.⁶⁹ The particular words may have been composed by the historian, but if they helped create a narrative that was plausible, and that fairly reflected the ethics, character, and decision-making habits of the speaker, the speech was truthful. Procopios probably considered the speech he wrote for Theodora to be entirely truthful. Since, in his view, she was ruthless and tyrannical, a speech that suggested those things to the audience was a true reflection of her character. His account of the Nika riots expressed *more* truth about the events than if he had not made up the speech.

By ancient standards, Procopios also displayed the characteristics of an impartial or unbiased historian in this passage because he had not succumbed to the temptation of flattering the ruler. By speaking truth to power, Procopios displayed his freedom and lack of partiality. In our society, students are taught that historians should be “objective,” meaning “not taking sides.” They are taught to be alert for any sign that an historian is “biased” in favor of one party or the other, and so they would see Procopios as a bad historian because he was “biased against” Theodora. For ancient and medieval historians in the Greek tradition, impartiality meant not taking sides unfairly, or for personal reasons. Ancient historians would see Procopios as a bad historian if he flattered Theodora because

⁶⁸ Dirk Krausmüller, “Strategies of Equivocation and the Construction of Multiple Meanings in Middle Byzantine Texts,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 56 (2006): 1–11.

⁶⁹ As a starting point see: John Marincola, “Speeches in Classical Historiography,” in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, ed. John Marincola (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 118–32; Matthew Fox and Niall Livingstone, “Rhetoric and Historiography,” in *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, ed. Ian Worthington (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 542–61.

he wanted to get some benefit from the ruler. Revealing the truth about Theodora's bloodthirsty ambition would probably not count as "biased" writing by ancient or medieval standards. The study of how Byzantine historians thought about truth, accuracy, and impartiality in history is still in its infancy.⁷⁰ Given that they learned how to write histories by studying classical histories, I think we can lean on the insights gained from the extensive scholarship on classical histories.⁷¹

There are no set rules for determining when an author is using figured speech and Byzantinists argue frequently about how much to read into a given text. It is a matter of personal judgment guided by understanding of literary and historical contexts and traditions. Readings that help a text make more "sense" generally meet with approval and those that leave an author disconnected from his society and culture are more distrusted. Of course, our understanding of Byzantine culture and society is changing constantly, so what one scholar finds far-fetched can seem spot on to another. Keep in mind that Byzantine studies is a slow-moving field, compared with western medieval studies or classical studies, so there can be gaps of decades between detailed studies of some texts. The last book or article written on a text may not reflect any current scholarly consensus. While it can be frustrating, the allusive nature of some Byzantine writing makes it a grand intellectual game. It is a game the medieval authors are inviting you to play and that many Byzantinists will testify is deeply rewarding.

Practicalities of Byzantine Histories

Systems of Dating

In the medieval Roman Empire, years were dated by relation to the imperial taxation cycle and by counting from Creation. The "Indiction Cycle" began in the fourth century as an ambitious plan for systematic taxation. The idea was that every fifteen years the imperial government would take a census and survey the empire to assess how much tax people could pay, which would set the taxation rates for that fifteen-year period. It is difficult

⁷⁰ Ralph-Johannes Lilie, "Reality and Invention: Reflections on Byzantine Historiography," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 68 (2014): 157–210.

⁷¹ A few starting points in a vast field: John Marincola, ed., *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007); John Marincola, ed., *Greek and Roman Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*; Christopher Gill and Timothy P. Wiseman, *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993); Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography: Four Studies*.

for us to appreciate just how staggeringly difficult it would be for a pre-modern state to collect this sort of data for an area as vast and diverse as the Late Antique empire. That anyone ever thought they could even try spoke to the tremendous power of the fourth-century government. It is unclear if taxation ever worked this way, and it certainly did not in the medieval empire, although the idea that taxation was assessed based on a census – and that the emperor knew where everyone was – was maintained through the eleventh century.⁷² Dating by the indiction cycle related events to the life of the empire and affirmed the sovereignty of the imperial state.

In indiction dating, years were numbered continuously from one to fifteen, each time making the sixteenth year “year one of the indiction.” Years were usually dated by giving both the indiction year and the reign of the emperor. Since most emperors did not reign more than fifteen years, this was often enough to create a precise definition of the year. Indiction dating is emblematic of the unusual nature of the Roman polity: the political structure of the empire was so stable that it lasted for 15 centuries, but the office of emperor could change hands relatively frequently. If a document names an indiction without an emperor, or if the emperor had a particularly long reign, we cannot know precisely which indiction cycle was meant. In modern studies if you see that an event is listed as happening in either of two years that are fifteen years apart, it probably derives from a source that lists an indiction, but no other means of distinguishing which indiction was meant.

Dating from the Incarnation never became common in the Byzantine Empire. Rather, people counted years from the Creation of the world. The abbreviation A.M., for the Latin *anno mundi*, is often used in translations to indicate the Byzantine reckoning of year of the world. Several different calculations of the age of the world were in competition until the early ninth century when the chronicle of Theophanes pegged Creation to what we call September 1, 5509 BCE. Theophanes’s dating became standard in subsequent Greek texts.⁷³

⁷² Arnold H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), 452–62. On taxation and imperial ideology in the medieval period see: Leonora Neville, “Information, Ceremony and Power in Byzantine Fiscal Registers: Varieties of Function in the Cadaster of Thebes,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 25 (2001): 20–43.

⁷³ Pavel Kuzenkov, “‘How Old Is the World?’ The Byzantine Era and Its Rivals,” in *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 23–24. Anthony Bryer, “Chronology and Dating,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys, John F. Haldon, and Robin Cormack (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 31–37.

The New Year started on September 1. When in modern scholarship an event is given as having occurred in, for example 815/16, it means that it happened between September 1 of 815 and August 31 of 816. Generally scholars only bother to list years this way when they have reason to think the event happened in the winter of that year, but it is unclear whether it happened in 815 or 816. Day and night each had twelve hours which varied in length with the amount of sunlight. So a summer daytime hour was longer than a winter daytime hour.

If you need to calculate the CE date where a text dates from Creation, and you are dealing with a text written after the middle of the ninth century, subtracting 5508 will get you close. Keep in mind that the Byzantine year started in September. If the event of interest happened between September and January, you will need to count back one more year. If you know a CE year and want to calculate which year it was in the Byzantine indiction cycle, add 3 to the year and divide the total by 15. If the remainder is 0, the indiction is 15, otherwise the remainder is the indiction. Grumel analyzed all of the competing calendars and drew charts of correspondences that will let you look up the CE equivalent of different Byzantine dating systems.⁷⁴ Don't try chronological work without checking Grumel.

Classicizing Terminology

Byzantine authors of classicizing histories often used ancient geographic names rather than contemporary equivalents. When writing in ancient Greek it would naturally look odd to include a new form of a city's name rather than its ancient name. In part because of this habit, in some cases we are better informed about classical than medieval geographic names. The new *Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire* has an invaluable list of classical, medieval, and modern place names.⁷⁵

The preference for classicizing names extended from geographic names to ethnic designations of various groups of people. In this case, the association of medieval reality with ancient ideals carried more ideological weight as medieval people were assimilated to ancient categories. Byzantine usage commonly assimilates a medieval group to an ancient group that seems to play the same political role or act in a similar way. The term "Scythian" was used for anyone riding horses who attacked the empire from beyond the Black Sea. When the ancient terminology cast medieval groups into

⁷⁴ Venance Grumel, *La Chronologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958).

⁷⁵ Shepard, *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500–1492*, 930–35.

subordinate roles of peoples that had been previously subjugated by the Romans, the classicizing terminology asserted a conceptual Roman dominance that may not have corresponded to medieval political realities.⁷⁶

One of the most important things to check when using a translation is whether the translator has preserved the medieval terminology for various groups. The medieval Romans' disinterest in contemporary names has frustrated some modern historians trying to recover the "reality" behind the Byzantine rhetoric. In some older translations, the translators tried to "correct" the Byzantine authors by substituting the "real" medieval names for the terminology of the source text. If the translator felt sure that the medieval author had meant Bulgarians when he said Mysians, the translation would read Bulgarians wherever the text said Mysians. Few now would see this as an appropriate step, but it was common practice for mid-twentieth century translations.

Language

When Byzantinists describe their texts, they often talk about "registers" or "levels" of Greek. These designations refer to how far the Greek of the text conformed to classical Attic Greek. Scholars commonly use metaphors of height to describe these differences; using "high style" for texts that closely mimic fifth-century BCE Attic Greek, "middling" or "mid-level" for texts closer to first-century *koine*, and "low" for texts that are further from classical norms.⁷⁷

Some medieval authors could choose to write deliberately in a higher or lower register for particular reasons. Yet to some extent the register an author chose was keyed to his level of education. The better educated the medieval author, the closer he or she was able to come to classical Attic. Authors of good, but not great, education would try to write in the *koine* Greek of the New Testament, which was still probably quite far from their street language. An author who is capable of writing high style could choose to write in a lower style, but an author who wrote in a simple *koine* may not have been capable of writing in an ornate high style.

Spoken medieval Greek seems to have sounded much like modern Greek. We know this because documents that have phonetic spelling mistakes

⁷⁶ Paul Stephenson, "Conceptions of Otherness After 1018," in *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider*, ed. Dion Smythe (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 245–57.

⁷⁷ Ihor Ševčenko, "Levels of Style in Byzantine Prose," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 31 (1982): 289–312.

give us a glimpse of how the writers would have heard the words. We don't know all that much about the grammar of commonly spoken Greek in the medieval period because we have to base our judgments on written texts, and everyone who was educated enough to write was trying to use classical Greek, or at least *koine*. The gradual evolution toward modern Greek can be traced through the medieval period, although these changes find hardly any reflection in the histories and chronicles.⁷⁸

Koine Greek was the somewhat simplified, standardized Greek used throughout the Eastern Mediterranean beginning in the Hellenistic era. After the conquests of Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE), Greek became an international language throughout the eastern Mediterranean, often functioning as a means of formal communication between communities alongside an entirely different local vernacular. This international language dropped some of the finer points of classical Greek as part of a natural simplification as it came to be used by non-native speakers. If you have singular and plural verb forms, do you really need a dual? The dual is lovely, but you can get your point across without it. The optative mood, used in classical Greek for verbs expressing possible, but as of yet unreal, states of being that you wish were real, was similarly dropped. *Koine* was not as refined and subtle a language as classical Greek, but it served well as an international language of commerce, communication, and cultural exchange. When the Aramaic-speaking disciples of Jesus put their hands to spreading the word about their new religion, the choice to write the Gospels in *koine* Greek was obvious.

At the same time that the Gospels were spreading stories about Jesus through the Eastern Mediterranean in *koine* Greek, well-educated rhetors were refining the study of classical Greek. In the second century CE the high-level of prosperity throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and the high prestige of classical Greek learning in Roman culture led to an expansion and refinement in teaching methodologies for high-quality Greek rhetoric. This flourishing of Greek training and rhetoric is called the Second Sophistic.⁷⁹ In this era teachers of rhetoric wrote textbooks and guides that helped students quickly learn how to participate in politics that required formal Greek rhetorical skills. The expansion of education with a common practical purpose led to a standardization and codification of proper Greek

⁷⁸ We can track some changes: Geoffrey C. Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and Its Speakers*, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Robert Browning, *Medieval and Modern Greek*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁷⁹ Tim Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

style and form. Once there was a clear-cut “right way” to express a certain kind of argument, many more practitioners did it that way. The textbook phenomenon was part of an expansion of education and the entry of a great many more people into a common rhetorical culture. Good rhetorical training was no longer reserved for the native Greek aristocracy and a handful of their imperial Roman captors, but was common among elites throughout the Roman Empire. Not everyone writing high-style Greek in the second and third centuries was a literary genius, but some were and many more people were writing.

The development of the Second Sophistic culture of learning and rhetoric overlapped somewhat with the growth of Christianity. In the course of the fourth and fifth centuries, Christian intellectual leaders in the Eastern Mediterranean worked to create ways of practicing their religion while participating in the rhetorical culture that increasingly prized classical texts. However contentious the process was in late antiquity, they succeeded in creating a corpus of classicizing Christian texts, and a Christian means of appreciating ancient culture, that allowed for the deeply classicizing and Christian culture of the Medieval Roman Empire. Byzantine authors approached ancient Greek texts through the lens of Late Antique Christian classicism.

Transliteration

The spelling of Byzantine names in modern texts can be a nightmare of confusion. Please accept my apologies on behalf of Byzantinists everywhere. No one is trying to be deliberately obscure (okay, well, very few of us are), but ideas about how to best handle medieval Greek names in modern languages have changed over time, and we’re having trouble coming to a consensus now. In the eighteenth century, scholars writing in English began translating Greek names into Latin, and using the Latin names in English texts. So the scholar would look at a Greek name like *Kommenos* and create a Latin version “Comnenus,” or translate Nikephoros into “Nicephorus.” The step of translating the Greek name into Latin is something that comes naturally to people who have had a very expensive English education. For those of us outside of the Harrow, Eton, Hogwarts set, this seems cumbersome and unwarranted. What makes Comnenus more English than Komnenos? What exactly is wrong with “K?”⁸⁰

⁸⁰ If we’re going to take out a letter, why shouldn’t we dump C, which always sounds like either K or S?

I have no idea, but this was the standard usage up through the 1980s. Some scholars continue to use Latinized transliterations. Scholars working in French similarly made French versions of Greek names by passing them through Latin but then accenting them as if they were French, hence Comnène. Expect different versions in each different language of scholarship.

The other central difficulty is the custom of translating some Greek names into their English equivalents, when the latter are “common.” So Ioannes becomes John, and Konstantinos becomes Constantine. This leads to inconsistencies in judging which names are common enough to get an English version. Should Eirene become Irene? This practice becomes especially problematic in such an international field because Ioannes becomes not only John, but also Jean, Johannes, Giovanni, Juan, and Ivan. I think this usage arose out of reading of the Greek New Testament (easily the most widely read Greek text) where longstanding cultural knowledge that the Gospel was written by John (or Jean, etc.) made it seem natural to use that name rather than Ioannes. When dealing with names that are common in English because the Greek saints were important in English culture (Theodore, George, Gregory, Mary, Luke, Matthew, etc.), there is a natural impulse to use the English version. Sometimes Anglicized names are used because a strictly transliterated version may be confusing. If you start talking about Konstantinos, are all of your readers going to know you mean Constantine? Is everyone going to know that Sokrates is the same person as Socrates? Some scholars vigorously resist the practice of using English names to translate Greek ones, arguing that it denies the identity of medieval people and that it is part of the larger erasure of the medieval Roman Empire from history. This is an excellent point and many scholars are beginning to use strict transliterations of Greek even in the case of common English names. I have hesitated to follow suit in my own work only because the field needs to fight its tendencies toward obscurantism vigorously, and changing the names of half the characters seems likely to make things more confusing rather than less.

In this book we have tried to use the conventions followed in the *Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, which are sensible and consistent enough to have a chance at becoming standard.⁸¹ The editor opted for strict transliteration of Greek with exceptions for a fairly short list of names with common English equivalents.

⁸¹ Shepard, *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, c. 500–1492.

Major Publications and Series

Systematic study of Byzantine histories was bankrolled in the sixteenth century by merchants in Europe who had very practical concerns in fighting off the Ottoman Turks. The German merchant and banker Anton Fugger figured that since the eastern empire had resisted the advance of the Turks for centuries, he could learn how to do it by studying Byzantine history. He paid Hieronomus Wolf (1516–1580) to edit and translate histories of Zonaras, Choniates, and Pachymeres.⁸² Other humanists continued to publish editions Byzantine histories, sometimes with Latin translations, throughout the sixteenth century.⁸³

In the seventeenth century, French supporters of the regime of Louis XIV thought that the eastern empire could offer a good role model for how to run a government properly. Under royal sponsorship they produced 28 volumes of the *Corpus Historiae Byzantinae* between 1645 and 1688, with ten further supplements published by 1819.⁸⁴ This series of publications is known as the **Paris Corpus**. These volumes were reprinted in Venice between 1729 and 1733. These reprints are sometimes called the **Venice Corpus**.

Nineteenth-century interests in widespread access to texts spurred the publication of two major series of Byzantine texts. The most important for Byzantine historiography is the *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, often called the **Bonn Corpus**, published in Bonn between 1828 and 1897. The series was initially edited by Berthold Niebuhr and continued after his death by Immanuel Bekker. It included 50 volumes containing editions of most Byzantine histories and chronicles. Many of the volumes were actually reprints of editions made for the Paris Corpus or earlier publications. Each text was accompanied by a Latin translation, also often reprinted from sixteenth or seventeenth century publications. It was printed in great numbers and many university libraries acquired a set. It has now been digitized as part of the Hathi Trust.

⁸² Wolf, who would have much preferred working on classical texts, coined the term ‘Byzantine’ to distinguish between the classical Greek history he enjoyed and the Christian Greek history he did not. Hans-Georg Beck, “Hieronomus Wolf,” in *Ideen und Realitäten in Byzanz* (London: Variorum, 1972), 169–93.

⁸³ For a more thorough discussion of the history of the field see: Diether Reinsch, “The History of Editing Byzantine Historiographical Texts,” in *The Byzantine World*, ed. Paul Stephenson (London: Routledge, 2010). George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. Joan Hussey, revised (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 1–21.

⁸⁴ Reinsch, “The History of Editing Byzantine Historiographical Texts,” 440.

Byzantine histories were also published as a small part of the massive enterprises of the French priest Jacques Paul Migne (1800–1875). Migne aspired to make all of theological literature easily available to a wide public. Although not particularly well-educated, Migne presided over the publication of many hundreds of books. His most famous series are the *Patrologia Latina* in 218 volumes, and the *Patrologia Graeca* in 166 volumes, published between 1857 and 1866. These series were advertised as containing the whole of Greek and Latin theological writing. The *Patrologia Graeca* is commonly abbreviated **PG**. These two series are less than half of Migne's publications. By selling relatively inexpensive subscriptions to a vast audience, he turned a tidy profit. This business model incentivized making the series as long as possible. The Byzantine histories that were included in the PG are not theological texts, but got swept up in Migne's search for more texts to publish. The editions are usually reprints of earlier work.⁸⁵ The PG is available online: www.patristica.net/graeca/.

The publication of critical editions of Byzantine texts entered the modern era with the establishment of the **Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae**, under the direction of the Association internationale des études byzantines. The first volume was published in 1967 and work is ongoing. All the volumes are numbered sequentially within the CFHB series, but they are published by different publishers, and given different sub-series names, depending on where they are produced. The *Series Washingtonensis* is published by Dumbarton Oaks, the *Series Berolinensis* by De Gruyter, and *Series Vindobonensis* by the Austrian Academy, etc.

Manuscripts, Texts, and Editions

Throughout this study, the term “manuscript” refers to an extant physical book written by hand. A “text” may have been composed and written down at a moment centuries before our earliest surviving manuscript. In these cases, the text was written down in a manuscript that was copied later, and we have the copy, but not the original. Sometimes we have a copy of a copy of a copy. An “edition” refers to modern scholars' attempt to reconstruct the original text. Often we will have several surviving manuscripts from different centuries that contain copies of a text. These usually have slight variations that creep in through the natural process of copying by hand. To create a critical edition, the modern editor will look at all the differences

⁸⁵ R. Howard Bloch, *God's Plagiarist: Being an Account of the Fabulous Industry and Irregular Commerce of the Abbé Migne* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

and try to figure out what was most likely to have been the author's original wording.⁸⁶ For some of our later texts, it is possible that the manuscript we still have was the one that the author actually wrote, which is called the "autograph." We rarely have any basis on which to decide if a manuscript is an autograph.

Key Starting Points for Further Study

For a discussion of how the habits and traditions of Byzantine historical writing complicate our apprehension of the reality of past events:

Lilie, Ralph-Johannes. "Reality and Invention: Reflections on Byzantine Historiography." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 68 (2014): 157–210.

A reflective overview of middle and late Byzantine histories commenting on all the texts:

Magdalino, Paul. "Byzantine Historical Writing, 900–1400." In *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 2, edited by Sarah Foot, Chase F. Robinson, and Daniel R. Woolf, 218–37. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

An essay on the coherence of Byzantine historical writing as an intellectual project:

Kaldellis, Anthony. "The Corpus of Byzantine Historiography: An Interpretive Essay." In *The Byzantine World*, edited by Paul Stephenson, 211–22. London: Routledge, 2010.

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⁸⁶ This methodology does not always make sense for Byzantine texts in the chronicle tradition because each person who made a copy of the chronicle was free to add, delete, or rearrange material. In these cases what would the 'original' version look like? Is that the version we should study? Additionally one of the main principles of classical text editing is that the Greek should be corrected to get back to the authentic ancient Greek vocabulary and syntax – getting rid of the influence of Byzantine copyists. For Byzantine authors, who tried to write in classical Greek to a greater or lesser extent, should editors 'fix' their 'errors' or see them as aspects of the medieval language?

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