BYZANTINE ADAPTATIONS OF THUCYDIDES

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Byzantine historiography, justifiably regarded as the apogee of Byzantine literature, combines different concepts and tendencies: the description of the creation of the world and the salvation of mankind, the development of the Christian faith and the organization of the church, and contemporary history. The chronicles produced from the fourth century onwards describe the creation of the world and the salvation of mankind, while the development of Christianity is dealt with by church historians between the fourth and the end of the sixth century (with echoes in the fourteenth century). Contemporary history is concerned with periods of imperial history, in each case up to the time of the author, or deals with outstanding events such as the siege and capture of the capital or of Thessalonica. From the middle Byzantine period (i.e., from about the tenth century) onward we come across different combinations of chronicle and contemporary history, with either one or the other concept prevailing.¹ Each concept had its own corresponding readership and its own form of linguistic or stylistic representation; chronicle and church history was intended more for a general readership with an average literary education, whereas contemporary history as a rule required familiarity with a form of language and style which we have come to refer to as “atticistic”; to master this demanded a special form of education. The authors of such “atticistic” works were continuing the historiographic tradition of Greek antiquity—sometimes imparted through Byzantine intermediaries—and were quite aware of this tradition. Nicetas Choniates expressed it very well at the beginning of the thirteenth century: “the best thing, historiography, the finest invention of the Greeks” (τὸ βέλτιστον χρὴμα, τὴν ἱστορίαν, καὶ κάλλιστον εὐρήμα τῶν Ἑλλήνων).²

² Niketas Choniates, Historia 580, 94–95 van Dieten.
Thucydides, together with Herodotus, Diodorus, Polybius, and Plutarch (to name but the most prominent), was the linguistic and conceptual model for Byzantine historical writers from the beginning to the end of the Byzantine empire, albeit with varying intensity. The prerequisite knowledge of his work is reflected both in manuscript records and in the literary opinions of Byzantine authors.

In the Byzantine era (330–1453 AD), Thucydides’ text was documented for us in individual papyri up to the sixth century, and from the end of the ninth century onwards in a continuous stream of codices, with one lull in the twelfth century and pronounced peaks in the fourteenth, and above all, fifteenth century. There are no testimonies for the “dark centuries” between the seventh and ninth centuries, a time when the empire was facing a severe crisis in both foreign and internal policy. It is only after the majuscule manuscript tradition was transliterated into the newly developed minuscule that documentation recommenced, with, among others, the cod. Heidelberg, Palat. gr. 252 (E) and the cod. Laur. LXIX 2 (C). The latter codex from the tenth century is the still-recognizable link back to the sixth century, to the former tradition, since it contains a Latin subscription which has been identified as a quotation of a subscription to a codex which can be dated to the fifth-sixth century.

Further evidence of Thucydides’ presence in the literature of Byzantium can be found in Byzantine literary criticism, even when opinions about him are negative. The high esteem in which Thucydides is held in the early Byzantine period concurs with the view that prevailed in Late Antiquity; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, for instance, despite all of his specific criticisms, and in accordance with general

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3 See the list of manuscripts and papyri in Alberti (1972–2000) I.X–XXXIX; Pérez Martín (2002).
4 On the redating of this manuscript from the previously generally-accepted tenth-eleventh century to the end of the ninth century, see Irigoin (1977) 242–44, esp. 243 n. 2.
5 See Alberti (1972–2000) I.II–XII.
6 See J.E. Powell (1938) 79. Cavallo (1992) 95–98 gives a graphic analysis of the subscription Deo gratias Petrus scripsit and convincingly argues that C was transcribed without intermediaries directly from a sixth century majuscule codex, in all probability in Constantinople. For further implications of these findings, see Luzzatto (1993) and Pernigotti (2001).
7 On the following, see Basilikopoulou (1992); Taragna (2000) 54; Pérez Martín (2002) 133–47.
8 On the development of the historiographical canon, see Nicolai (1992).