

**Ancient Histories and History Writing in New Rome:  
Traditions, Innovations, and Uses  
Byzantine Studies Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks  
May 5-6, 2023**

Leonora Neville and Jeffrey Beneker, Symposiarchs

History writing is a key site for the construction of ethical and political consciousness as well as historical memory. It allows individuals and communities to create and articulate their identity and positionality within the sweep of human history. In ancient Greece and the classical and medieval phases of the Roman empire, histories not only recorded past events, but either implicitly or explicitly told audiences how the past defined current communities and set moral and political agendas for future action. Different conceptualizations of the past amount to debates about who the authors thought they were, what was moral, and who their contemporaries ought to be. The study of traditions of historical writing is therefore an archaeology of civic identity, ethics, and politics.

This interdisciplinary symposium brings together scholars of ancient and medieval historical writing to explore connections and interactions between ancient Greek, biblical, classical Roman, and medieval Roman histories. Authors writing histories in eastern Roman society interacted variously with earlier Roman and Greek histories, as well as biblical histories, to construct conceptions of their community's identities and relationships with the past. Rhetorical alignments signaled conformity with or breaking from previous strands with these complex cultural traditions. Our explorations of the various ways medieval writers used, adapted, distorted, or ignored earlier texts will help us understand the complexities and nuances of medieval eastern Roman culture, community identity, and politics. In turn, the study of medieval uses of the classical historiographical tradition will yield fresh insights into the ways medieval attitudes and decisions shaped the preservation and creation of the classical canon.

### Friday, May 5

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| 8:30 a.m.      | Morning Registration and Coffee in the Music Room                      |
| 9:00-9:10 a.m. | Welcome: Thomas B.F. Cummins and Nikos D. Kontogiannis, Dumbarton Oaks |
| 9:10-9:20 a.m. | Introduction: Leonora Neville  |

#### **Frameworks**

Chair: John Duffy, Harvard University

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| 9:20-10:05 a.m.  | Changing Continuities: Eighth and Ninth Century Reckonings with the Eusebian Revolution<br>Jesse Torgerson (Wesleyan University) |
| 10:05-10:50 a.m. | Getting from Adam to Alexios: Roman History Looks Back<br>Leonora Neville (University of Wisconsin-Madison)                      |
| 10:50-11:05 a.m. | Coffee and Tea   |

## **Herodotus & Thucydides in Byzantine Histories**

Chair: Ioli Kalavrezou, Harvard University

- 11:05-11:50 a.m.      Mirroring Herodotus: Sources, Truth, and Truth Effects in Laonikos Chalkokondyles  
Emily Baragwanath (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)
- 11:50 a.m.-12:35 p.m.      The Clash of East and West: the Subversive Classicism of Kritoboulos, the Biographer of the Turkish Sultan Mehmet II (1451-1481)  
Scott Kennedy (Bilkent University)
- 12:35-2:30 p.m.      Lunch

## **Politics of Roman Antiquity in Byzantine Histories**

Chair: Dimiter Angelov, Harvard University

- 2:30-3:15 p.m.      Rewriting the Republic in Byzantium: Republican History and Political Memory in 10th Century Byzantium  
Christopher Mallan (University of Western Australia)
- 3:15-4:00 p.m.      John Zonaras and the Fall of the Roman Republic  
Jeffrey Beneker (University of Wisconsin-Madison)
- 4:00-5:00 p.m.      Discussion with Speakers moderated by Leonora Neville
- 6:00-8:00 p.m.      Reception in the Orangery/Memorial for John Nesbitt

## **Saturday, May 6**

- 8:30 a.m.      Morning Registration and Coffee in the Music Room

## **Lives and Histories**

Chair: George Demacopoulos, Fordham University

- 9:00-9:45 a.m.      The Synaxarion of Constantinople as Historiography  
Stratis Papaioannou (National Hellenic Research Foundation, Athens)
- 9:45-10:30 a.m.      Symeon Metaphrastes and Plutarch's *Lives*  
Noreen Humble (University of Calgary)
- 10:30-10:45 a.m.      Coffee break
- 10:45-11:30 a.m.      Historiography, Novel, Schedography: The Many Lives of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century  
Aglæ Pizzone (University of Southern Denmark)
- 12:15-1:45 p.m.      Lunch

## **Hellenism in the Roman Empire**

Chair: Elizabeth Bolman, Case Western Reserve University

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| 1:45-2:30 p.m. | The Romanitas of "Hellenism" in Byzantine Art<br>Sarah Bassett (Indiana University)  |
| 2:30-3:15 p.m. | A Preoccupation with Decline and Other Roman Aspects of Byzantine<br>Historiography<br>Anthony Kaldellis (University of Chicago) |
| 3:15-3:45 p.m. | Coffee and Tea   |
| 3:45-4:45 p.m. | Final Discussion, moderated by Jeffrey Beneker   |
| 5:00-6:00 p.m. | Reception in the Music Room Terrace  |

## Abstracts

### **Mirroring Herodotus: Sources, Truth, and Truth Effects in Laonikos Chalkokondyles**

*Emily Baragwanath (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)*

My paper addresses the following questions: In what ways do Laonikos' invocations of sources and approach to truth and truth effects hark back to Herodotus? What is the rhetorical effect of this, and what does it contribute to the character of Laonikos' history as a whole? Are the affinities merely superficial, or do they point to more profound connections between Laonikos' philosophy of and practice of history and Herodotus'?

### **The Romanitas of "Hellenism" in Byzantine Art**

*Sarah Bassett (Indiana University)*

As with other aspects of medieval Roman society, the visual traditions of the Byzantine world have long been described as "Hellenistic," a term that acknowledges not only a taste for classicizing subject matter in art, but also a stylistic proclivity for classicizing formal solutions. This paper explores the relationship between this visual Hellenism and the idea of history by pursuing three intertwined strands of inquiry. It begins with a definition of Hellenism in visual terms and a brief discussion of the historiography of Hellenism as a class of visual analysis, paying specific attention to its application to things Byzantine. It then turns to a two-part discussion of the visual record. In the first, it considers Byzantine interactions with the physical record of the classical past, noting how, at various phases in their long history, the artifacts of Greece and Rome were used to shape ideas of history or to prompt rumination on the past. Following on these observations, it then turns to the specific question of visual style to consider the Hellenistic aspects of works of medieval manufacture and with them the implications of classicizing form. The paper concludes by suggesting that in common with the Romans with whom they identified, the Byzantines absorbed the lessons of Greek Hellenism with specific historical ends in mind.

### **John Zonaras and the Fall of the Roman Republic**

*Jeffrey Beneker (University of Wisconsin-Madison)*

This paper seeks to characterize and analyze Zonaras's account of the fall of the Roman Republic and the rise of Augustus. I will focus on book 10 in the edition of Dindorf (1869; reprinted 2021), which is the start of Zonaras' second book and contains the accounts of Pompey, Caesar, and Augustus. The analysis has both historical and literary aims. On the historical side, I aim to show how Zonaras has modified, selected, and otherwise interpreted his sources to create a version of history that reflects his twelfth-century Byzantine understanding of the Roman past. On the literary side, I aim to show how Zonaras has woven themes into his historical narrative that highlight the personalities of the protagonists and reflect a contemporary view of human affairs. I argue, for example, that Zonaras was tuned into the contemporary belief that fortune or luck affected the course of human events (cf. Beaton 1996:61-65). He found in Plutarch an author who was sympathetic to this point of view and exploited those aspects of Plutarch's biographies that made fortune an active player in his subjects' careers and thus in the fall of the Republic.

### **Symeon Metaphrastes and Plutarch's *Lives***

*Noreen Humble (University of Calgary)*

This paper seeks to examine how knowledge of Plutarch's *Lives* may have influenced the way in which Symeon Metaphrastes (c. 900-989) approached the redaction of the *Menologion*. Two observations in particular beg this enquiry: the fact that there was a proliferation of

copies of Plutarch's *Lives* during the 10th century and that around this time we begin to see a dramatic shift in the way history is being written, from an annalistic mode to narratives centering around individuals. Knowledge of Plutarch's *Lives* has been posited as one of the reasons for the latter change. Clearly saints' lives were already centered around individuals, and it has long been noted that Metaphrastes made considerable changes to earlier versions of these stories (with Papaioannou arguing that he was strongly influenced by the rhetorical mode of ancient novelistic writing). It is on the prologues to the *Lives* that I will focus, not least because prologues of various different kinds are a feature of Plutarch's *Lives* but also because Psellus, in his encomium for Metaphrastes, comments particularly on the rewritten prologues in the *Menologion*. I will argue that it is here in particular where there seems incontrovertible evidence of Plutarchan influence.

### **A Preoccupation with Decline and Other Roman Aspects of Byzantine Historiography** *Anthony Kaldellis (University of Chicago)*

Byzantine historiography is usually classified as Greek because of the language in which it is written and seen as a continuation of the ancient Greek tradition of history-writing. But many ancient Roman historians wrote in Greek too. It has not yet been asked whether the Byzantine tradition is more Roman rather than Greek. Considering the differences between the ancient Greek and Roman traditions that modern classicists have postulated, this paper will explore the Roman aspects of Byzantine historiography. Like their Roman predecessors, the Byzantine historians focused their work on the history of the Roman state; they identified personally with it, to the point of being its partisans; they were preoccupied, in any period, with anxiety about its decline; and their writing was characterized by the use of exemplarity, a distinctively Roman literary trait. The paper will focus in particular on the pervasiveness of the fear of decline in the Byzantine historians and the models for its explanation that they deployed. In line with ancient Roman tradition, these were moralistic, focusing on greed, luxury, loss of public spirit, and (in a Christian context) sin and heresy. Only a few east Roman historians developed more sophisticated ideas by which to explain the decline that they believed had taken place.

### **The Clash of East and West: the Subversive Classicism of Kritoboulos, the Biographer of the Turkish Sultan Mehmet II (1451-1481)** *Scott Kennedy (Bilkent University)*

In this paper, I will discuss how Kritoboulos uses Thucydides and Herodotus to undermine Ottoman rule. Deploying the ancient rhetorical technique of similitude often employed against tyrants (Quint. 9.2.65-9), where the speaker draws comparisons between the praised and other leaders in order to make unfavorable comparisons, Kritoboulos often evokes famous narratives in both historians to question the sultan's justness. Throughout his history, Kritoboulos similarly keeps alive Herodotus's tyrannical image of Xerxes, drawing comparisons between the sultan's deeds and those of Xerxes such as the canal at Athos and the pontoon bridge across the Hellespont. Ultimately, this culminates in Mehmet's visit to Troy like Xerxes where the sultan sees his conquests as revenge for all that Westerners did to Easterners. Alluding to Herodotus's assertion in his preface that the Persian Wars was part of a fundamental conflict of East and West for revenge, Kritoboulos programmatically reveals that the wars of his own time are simply part of a larger clash of civilizations in which the new Xerxes triumphed over the descendants of the Greeks.

### **Rewriting the Republic in Byzantium: Republican History and Political Memory in 10th Century Byzantium** *Christopher Mallan (University of Western Australia)*

The scholarly Byzantine understanding of its pre-Imperial history was derived, in the main, from Appian, Dio, Diodorus, Dionysius, Plutarch, and Polybius. Thus, the reception of these

authors during this period is of considerable importance for ancient historians and Byzantinists alike. Moreover, the textual fortunes of these authors were shaped in the middle Byzantine centuries, as the works of these authors were copied, or transformed into new works through the process of abridgement. The most significant of these abridgements was the so-called *Excerpta Constantiniana* (hereafter *EC*) of the 10th century. Building on the recent work on the *EC* and other collections of excerpta by Németh (2018) and Manafis (2020), this paper examines the presentation of pre-Imperial Roman history in the surviving parts of the *EC*, focusing on those derived from three of the aforementioned authors, Dionysius, Dio, and Polybius. This paper asks two questions: 1) What patterns are discernible in the selection of pre-Imperial material in the *EC*? And, 2) what can this material tell us about the compilers' political-historical vision of the pre-Imperial Roman past?

### **Getting from Adam to Alexios: Roman History Looks Back**

*Leonora Neville (University of Wisconsin-Madison)*

Eastern Roman histories that connect the creation of the world to the authors' present often construct the sweep of human history in far more unified narratives than modern academic divisions would suggest. Our categories of biblical, classical, medieval, east and west are woven together in surprising ways to ground and center later Roman society within its complex cultural heritage. This paper traces various ways that medieval Roman authors connected themselves to the distant past and suggests some reasons why their ideas of what was important in the past differ from our own. Appreciating the later Roman conceptualizations of deep history provides a more stable context for understanding of their intellectual engagement with classical material.

### **The Synaxarion of Constantinople as Historiography**

*Stratis Papaioannou (National Hellenic Research Foundation, Athens)*

The premise could be put forward that the *Synaxarion of Constantinople*, though rarely acknowledged as such by its modern students, was among the seminal *historiographical* works produced in Byzantium. The present paper will test the validity and consequences of accepting such a premise, especially in regard to the ways in which "historiographical" texts formed (as well as challenged) communal identities in premodern societies like that of Byzantium. At that, the following lines of questioning will be pursued: What was the view of the historical past that it created? What kinds of identity did it promote? What were the effects of including "historical" data into a liturgical book such as the *Synaxarion*? And, conversely, what kinds of legends and literary fiction were reinvented as authorized past for Byzantine readers and listeners of *synaxaria*?

### **Historiography, Novel, Schedography: The Many Lives of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* in the 12<sup>th</sup> century**

*Aglæ Pizzone (University of Southern Denmark)*

Besides being the first surviving example of novelized biography or biographical romance in classical Greek literature, the *Cyropaedia* also stands out for the presence of several engaging subplots or "novellas". The most popular of them was perhaps the tragic story of Pantheia and Abradatas. It is a narrative of love, intrigue, travels, and war that spans across four books and is intertwined with the accounts of Cyrus' military campaigns. Recent scholarship has singled it out as the archetype anticipating or even paving the way to the later genre of the novel, showing its generative power for the *Ephesian Tale* by Xenophon of Ephesus. The novella was undoubtedly popular in Graeco-Roman times, and yet when it comes to its reception, even a cursory look shows that most quotations come from Middle Byzantine authors: not only John Zonaras, but also Nikephoros Basilakes, Konstantinos Manasses and, above all, John Tzetzes who gives the whole narrative arc of Cyrus' campaigns against Croesus

a place of pride both in the *Chiliades* and in the commentary on Hermogenes. In my paper I will explore these engagements with the story of Pantheia and Abradatas. Building on the treatment of the narrative offered by imperial rhetorical treatises (Hermogenes and Apsines), Byzantine authors seem particularly attracted to its grotesque and morbid aspects – i.e. the Frankensteinian outlook of Abradatas’ reconstituted corpse. From the characters’ point of view, these retellings show a varying focus within the triangle of Pantheia, Abradatas and Cyrus. The over-the-top emotional tone of the novella’s finale is modulated differently depending on whether authors want to emphasize male friendship or marital love. A close examination of the uses of Pantheia’s narrative, moreover, also leads to look at the practice of schedography, as Tzetzes explicitly associates her to schedographic exercises in his commentary on Hermogenes’ *On types of styles*.

### **Changing Continuities: Eighth and Ninth Century Reckonings with the Eusebian Revolution**

*Jesse Torgerson (Wesleyan University)*

In this paper, I start with the idea that Eusebius changed Roman (historical) time and (historical) subject matter. This is not necessarily self-evident to all scholars. I therefore spend a bit of time laying out in what specific ways the “Eusebian Revolution” changed the possibilities of Roman history for medieval authors—specifically what is presumed about historical time, and about the historical community. I then apply this point to examples from the middle Byzantine period. The idea of the paper is to identify ways in which some of the changes we see in (for instance) eighth and ninth-century histories are in fact efforts to work out how to deal with the impact of Eusebius’ thought on the nature of Roman time and the Roman polity within what remain in other important ways very ancient generic and conceptual frameworks.

Notes