INTRODUCTION

Plethon and the notion of paganism

Plato's escape from Athos

In November 1382 the maverick Manuel Palaiologos (1350–1425), future emperor of the Byzantine Empire, defied the policy of his father, Emperor John V, and devoted all his energy to the cause of defending Thessaloniki against the Turks. The young Manuel waged war and defended the city for no less than four and a half years. His mentor at the time was Demetrios Kydones (*c.* 1323–1397/8), translator of Aquinas, statesman and diplomat, Platonising philosopher and critic of the Orthodox establishment, a key man in late Byzantine intellectual history and among the first to sound the alarm when the Ottoman forces occupied Gallipoli (Kallipolis), their first city in Europe. In the middle of these dramatic circumstances Manuel and Kydones exchanged letters, one of which concerned an intriguing topic: the need to bring Plato back to life.

Kydones persistently asked Manuel to send him a manuscript held in Mount Athos. In Manuel's witty letter from Thessaloniki a *Plato redivivus* appears grateful finally to flee from Athos to Constantinople. Among the monks Plato was like a corpse, says Manuel. Kydones is the man who will redeem the philosopher from the hands of these monks to whom he does not belong (ἀνάρμοστος):

> What you were so fondly requesting you have, your Plato. But we like to think that there is nothing strange in presenting the man as a gift to you. Actually, he has just as much reason to express his gratitude to us as you do on receiving him, that is, if one subscribes to his teaching that a living thing is better than a non-living thing. Now, something which does not move or act or speak could never be properly called alive in any sense at all. This, in fact, has been his condition for many years, since he did not fit in with the monks, who have long ago renounced worldly wisdom. But you now bring him to life and make him

active again, and it is I who am the cause of this. (Manuel Pal. *Ep.* 3.1–9; trans. Dennis)

Oddly then, amidst military turmoil and eschatological scenarios regarding the collapse of an empire, the future emperor is concerned with the revival of Plato. But Kydones' reply is even more intriguing. That letter, he writes, was like a dream in which he met a Plato brought back to life, moving and talking, in fact resurrected through Manuel's words.[1] Kydones has no trust in the monks either. Here they are compared to the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse, the man who sold off Plato, and Manuel is urged to redeem the son of Ariston. Kydones concludes with a significant sentence: apparently there *are* people ready to welcome a revived Plato and to listen attentively to what he would have to say:

By god, translate words into deeds and hasten to liberate the son of Ariston [Plato] from many Dionysiuses. *For Athos is certainly not treating him more gently now than did Sicily, and perhaps they intend to sell him twice as the tyrant did* . . . Now, if you approach them [the monks] in a mild manner, they will call the transaction a sacrilege and will feign indignation. But if it is the emperor who demands it, and they realize there is no refusing, then you will see these men, who are now intransigent, giving in and thanking you for having asked. Only be insistent with these men, and you will soon have us see this old man [Plato] crossing not only Charybdis, but also the Aegean, and easily return to Athens, *among men who are his friends and are in a position to understand what he is saying*. (Dem. Kyd. *Ep.* 276.19–31)[2]

Kydones is precise. The time is ripe for Plato's voice to be heard again. To this end, political authority should be used in order to liberate Plato from certain men who are unfit to understand philosophy, unfriendly towards imperial sovereignty and who obviously do not think much of ancient philosophy. Kydones finally received his Plato. Regretfully the manuscript was in a horrible state.[3] This truly shocked him and brought tears to his eyes. And

[1] Dem. Kyd. *Ep.* 276.5–15 Loenertz: καὶ σὺ τὸν πάλαι κείμενον τοῖς λόγοις ἀνέστησας.
[2] Trans. Dennis in n. 2 to Manuel Pal. *Ep.* 3, with modifications. For the background to these letters see also Tinnefeld (2005)182–3.
[3] The book arrived 'all soaked through, all torn, the outside in disarray, the inside shrunk, dark stains all over, and in such a state that you would never have recognised it' (Dem. Kyd. *Ep.* 259.1–8).

yet Kydones was deeply appreciative of the efforts of his student. Apparently Manuel 'promised his friendship if they [the monks] gave it to him and threatened with his enmity if they refused; finally, just to do me a favour, he endured dangers'.[4] It is thus how the son of Ariston was saved 'for us' and escaped 'prison and fetters and tyrants (εἱρκτὴν καὶ δεσμὰ καὶ τυράννους)', albeit bearing clear marks of his misadventures.

One wonders: how could some monks be so powerful as to cause such trouble to a future emperor and to a star of the Byzantine intellectual firmament? Chapter 2 deals with the intellectual and religious identity of these people. Here it is sufficient to recall Sathas. Writing of Psellos' unhappy sojourn in a monastery in Bithynia, Sathas observes that the son of Ariston was occasionally seen as the 'Greek Satan', whose name was enough to make monks spit on the ground and recite averting prayers.[5] Significantly, Kydones' epistle to Manuel affirms that not only in Psellos' time, but in late Byzantium too, there were *others*, eager to listen attentively to Plato's voice.

At the same time as Manuel agreed with Kydones that Plato deserved better than being left in the company of the monks of Mount Athos, Georgios Gemistos, the man who would soon achieve notoriety under the cognomen Plethon, was in his late twenties. Perhaps Kydones had already made the acquaintance of the young philosopher, or he was just about to. Either way, he could hardly imagine how far that young man would go in the direction of bringing Plato back to life. Plethon is the man who actually took the endeavour of resurrecting Platonic philosophy to its extreme consequences.

It appears that Demetrios Kydones was one of Plethon's early instructors in the study of Platonism. In an epistle to Bessarion, Plethon mentions the 'wise Kydones' as the man who showed him sometime in the past the complexity of Plato's mathematics in Book 8 of the *Republic*.[6] Plethon's knowledge of Aquinas

[4] Dem. Kyd. *Ep*. 293.58–60. [5] *MB* vol. IV, lxviii.
[6] Cf. Pleth *Ep. Bess*. 2, Mohler III 467.15–22; *Resp*. 546b–c; Woodhouse (1986) 22; Baloglou (1998: 25) suggests that around 1390 Plethon was a student of Kydones.

strengthens the assumption of an early association with Kydones and his circle.[7] Further, we shall see that Demetrios' political views anticipate Plethon's model of sovereignty. One may reasonably infer that the young Plethon studied by the side of the established famous teacher of philosophy, though we do not know for how long and under what circumstances.

Plethon's relation to Manuel is clearer. Plethon was one of the chief intellectuals and advisors appointed to Manuel's court in Mistra from early on and enjoyed the full support of the future Roman Orthodox emperor.[8] Plethon was aware of Manuel's philosophical and political merits. He might have been aware too that Kydones had already discerned in that charismatic young man the personification of Plato's philosopher-king.[9]

A few decades after the incident involving the manuscript of Plato, Plethon repeated Kydones' advice and asked Manuel to impose his authority upon 'these men'. This time there was more at stake than a nice Plato manuscript to be enjoyed by elitist circles: the salvation of the Peloponnese from Ottoman occupation. Still, here too Plato is at the centre. In two *Memoranda* addressed respectively to Despot Theodore (*Consilium ad despotam Theodorum, c.* 1416) and Manuel (*Oratio ad Manuelem Palaeologum, c.* 1418) Plethon conveyed a radical socio-political reformist plan, one that was largely inspired by Plato and is suggestive of modern utopianism.

Manuel does not appear to have considered implementing his advisor's ideas. Plethon was not disillusioned. He continued to experiment with the spirit of Platonism, though in other ways. Since the publication of the seminal book on Plethon, François Masai's *Pléthon et le Platonisme de Mistra*, the predominant opinion is that Plethon was the founder of a pagan cell or

[7] On Demetrios Kydones see Ryder (2010) 5–128; Tinnefeld (1981) 4–74. On Plethon and Thomism see Demetracopoulos (2004); (2006) 276–341.

[8] In this book the term 'Roman Orthodox' is used interchangeably with the established yet misleading term 'Byzantine'. The terms 'Byzantium' and 'Byzantine' would be meaningless to 'Byzantines'. The latter were the Romans of the Eastern Empire and they defined themselves as such. The modern coinage 'Byzantium' retrospectively designates *Romania*. See here Kaldellis (2007a) 47. Current scholarship is slowly moving towards a terminological revision. See, for example, Bryer (2009) on the 'Roman Orthodox world (1393–1492)'.

[9] On the personality and life of Manuel see the classic study by Barker (1969).

brotherhood (φρατρία) operating in Mistra.[10] Plethon's magnum opus, the *Nomoi*, inspired by Plato's *Laws*, contains the constitution for a utopian pagan city-state.[11] The surviving fragments do not contain any appeal to imperial authorities, as do the two *Memoranda*. Nor do civil structures assume any role in the realisation of this new reformist programme. Instead, Plethon appears to have gone underground, turning to sectarianism as the proper vehicle for the spiritual and political regeneration of mankind. The *Nomoi* suggests that metaphysical as well as social-political truths are the business of an enlightened pagan cell or brotherhood rather than of established institutions. The *Nomoi* was cast into the fire and partially destroyed by Plethon's dogged adversary, Georgios Gennadios Scholarios, the first Roman Orthodox patriarch under Ottoman rule. It has been argued that one version of another key work by Plethon, the idiosyncratic recension of and commentary on the Platonising *Chaldean Oracles*, was also part of the notorious manuscript, and that so was the short treatise *Recapitulation of Zoroastrian and Platonic Doctrines*.[12]

Explaining his decision to destroy the *Nomoi* Scholarios observes that Plethon is an *apostate* who departed 'from all Christians' in extending his study of Hellenism beyond the level of *lexis* and *phone*, in effect seeking in Hellenism much more than the

[10] The term *phratria* was used by Plethon's opponent Scholarios. However, in *Nomoi* Plethon refers to his 'brothers' (*phratores*). See below, p. 390. Masai (1956: 300–14) considers John Argyropoulos, Bessarion, Michael Apostoles, Raoul Kabakes and other *literati* who later took up important roles in Italy as members of Plethon's sect. A pioneer scholar of Plethon, Fritz Schultze, was one of the first to have made a strong case for a pagan 'Sekt' and 'Bund' led by Plethon. See here Schultze (1874) 53–5.

[11] The *Nomoi* originally comprised three books and 101 chapters. According to the table of contents Book 1 contained 31 chapters, Book 2 had 27 chapters and Book 3 had 43 chapters. The last chapter is entitled 'Epinomis' after the work attributed to Plato. Chapter 6 from Book 2 on the notion of *heimarmene* was circulated independently during Plethon's lifetime (*De fato*). Of the original 101 chapters only 21 survive. They extend to 130 pages in the edition of Charles Alexandre. Scholarios wrote that it took him four hours to go through the whole book (Schol. *Ad exarchum Josephum, OC* 4.160.4–5: ἐν ὥραις τέτταρσιν ὅλαις, ἐλαχίστῳ μιᾶς ἡμέρας μορίῳ, τὸ βιβλίον ἅπαν ἐπήλθομεν). On what this information might mean with regard to the original extent of the book and some speculations regarding the relation between the surviving Greek text and the original, see Monfasani (1992) 49–51.

[12] See the introduction by Tambrun to her edition of the *Oracles chaldaïques*, xiii; Tardieu (1980) 54. On the destruction of the *Nomoi* see below, Ch. 3.

aesthetic beauty of words: that is to say, spiritual guidance.[13] Other powerful Orthodox rhetors and intellectuals also wrote invectives against Plethon. But Scholarios remains his first and philosophically as well as theologically better-equipped enemy.[14]

The *Nomoi* affair was not the first clash between Scholarios and Plethon; rather, that took place following Plethon's seminal lectures *On the Differences between Plato and Aristotle* delivered in Florence in 1439. The call for a new reading of Plato and the attack on Aristotle in the *Differences* initiated a lively and long-standing debate regarding the relation between Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy that has been seen as announcing the end of the medieval theologico-philosophical epoch and the rise of a new way to do philosophy.[15] This has numerous phases. The first involves Plethon's work of 1439, Scholarios' reply *Against Plethon* compiled in or before 1444/5 and Plethon's counter-attack *Against Scholarios* of around 1449.[16] Italian Renaissance philosophers and Greeks in exile took up the task of continuing the debate on the merits and shortcomings of Platonism and Aristotelianism. The stars of this second phase are Plethon's most illustrious student, Cardinal Bessarion, arguing against the 'calumniators' of Plato, and George of Trebizond arguing for Aristotle, against Plethon, and generally against all φιλοζοφοῦντες or *philotenebrae*

[13] Cf. Schol. *Ad principessam Pelop.*, *OC* 4.152.30–2; *Ad exarchum Josephum, OC* 4.160.25–35, 162.30. Matthew Kamariotes, *Contra Pleth.* 2 Reimarus also considers Plethon as an *apostate*. For the meaning of this accusation and the 'Plethon affair' in general see below, pp. 141, 146.

[14] The most detailed and nuanced study on Scholarios is by Blanchet (2008). Good recent scholarly work on his life and times include Tinnefeld (2002) 477–541 (with extensive bibliography on pages 536–41) and Livanos (2006) 9–69; Zeses (1988) provides a zealotic and enthusiastic portrait of Scholarios from the viewpoint of Eastern Orthodoxy.

[15] Couloubaritsis (2006) 143. In the epilogue to this book I argue that this interpretation is only partly correct: the Renaissance philosophers did not really follow up Plethon's call to liberate Plato and Aristotle from the clerical hegemony of discourse. This move took place only during the early modern reaction to Renaissance theology. The *Differences* attracted from early on the interest of scholars; cf. Gass (1844) and J. W. Taylor (1921). Important studies on this text include Lagarde (1976) and Bargeliotes (1980).

[16] Scholarios wrote his reply after Constantine Palaiologos, at the time despot of Mistra, urged him to respond to the *Differences*. But Scholarios did not address the work to Plethon but rather to the latter's student, the major Orthodox theologian and fervent anti-unionist Mark Eugenikos. In his turn, Plethon addressed his reply to Constantine and not to Scholarios. For the dating see Tinnefeld (2002) 482 n. 37, 484, 488. Woodhouse (1986: 283–307) provides a good summary of Plethon's *Against Scholarios* in English.

Platonists.[17] One of Plethon's later adversaries, Theodore of Gaza, Plethon's student Michael Apostoles and Andronikos Kallistos participated in another heated debate stirred by the criticism of Aristotle's notion of substance in the *Differences* and Bessarion's inflammatory remarks.[18]

Apparently Plethon's version of Platonism earned him fervent enemies. But Plethon was also fortunate to have dear friends. Inspired by the epitaph Speusippus devoted to Plato ('the earth holds in its bosom this, the body of Plato, but his soul is equal in rank to the blessed gods'),[19] the following *distichon* written by Cardinal Bessarion to honour his teacher encapsulates the admiration and respect that Plethon stirred among many of his contemporaries and students:

> Γαῖαν σώματι, ψυχῇ δ' ἄστρα Γεώργιος ἴσχει
> Παντοίης σοφίης σεμνότατον τέμενος.
>
> Georgios holds fast the earth with his body, the stars with his soul,
> Most venerable temple of all kinds of wisdom.[20]

Bessarion's verses intend to convey a sense of stability, firmness and steadiness. This sharply contrasts with the hazy image of Plethon in modern bibliography. According to the latter, almost everything about Plethon is either arbitrary or elusive: the exact date and place of Georgios Gemistos' birth;[21] his formative years and especially the purported sojourn in the Ottoman court, for some a peculiar place to study, for others an excellent choice for cutting-edge studies in the occult, interfaith discourse, medicine and philosophy; the role of a mysterious instructor, Elissaios, described by Scholarios as an Aristotelian Jew of Zoroastrian

[17] See here Hankins (1990) 193–263; Monfasani (1976) 201–29; Todt (2006) 149–68; Schulz (1999) 22–32. But see Mohler's note ad loc. on Bessarion's eclectic tendencies in the short treatise *Adversus Plethonem de Substantia* (Mohler III 148–50). See also Monfasani (2002) on the background of the Plato–Aristotle controversy and the role of Ficino.

[18] Mohler III 148–203.

[19] Speus. fr. 87b Tarán; *Anth. Pal.* 16.31 (trans. Paton); see Irmscher (1994) 188.

[20] Mohler III 469; Fabricius, *BG* 102; Schultze (1874) 108.

[21] Plethon was born between 1355 and 1360; on Plethon's life and times see the good recent account by Neri (2010) 15–196; Woodhouse (1986); W. Blum (1988) 1–6; Tambrun (2006a) 35–51. For Plethon's works see Neri (2010) 196–225.

background and polytheist inclinations;[22] the possibility that Plethon echoes the philosophy of the Persian mystic Suhrawardi[23] and that he was acquainted with Ottoman mystics and reformers such as al-Bistami and Sheikh Bedreddin; the real meaning of the cognomen 'Plethon';[24] the evidence that Gemistos served as a judge;[25] the nature of his notorious paganism; the date and the circumstances under which Gennadios Scholarios committed Plethon's manuscript to the flames.[26]

Mystery also surrounds Plethon's reasons for opposing the union of the Churches in the Ferrara/Florence Council of 1438/9; his influence upon Greek and Italian contemporaries and his role as mentor of Greek émigré intellectuals such as Demetrios Raoul Kabakes and Cardinal Bessarion; the transmission of his Platonism among Renaissance intellectuals such as Ficino and Pico della Mirandola;[27] the likely 'cultural translation' of his paganism into

[22] On Plethon's sojourn in Ottoman territory, the identity of Elissaios, and the analogies between his reformism and the radical Islamic mystical and revolutionary movement of Sheikh Bedreddin, cf. Siniossoglou (2012); Gardette (2007c).

[23] For a concise statement of the alleged link between the *Oracles*, Zoroaster, Suhrawardi and the Persian Magi see Tambrun (2006b). The thesis has been criticised by Hladký (2009) and (forthcoming). See also Siniossoglou (2012).

[24] Scholarios (*Ad exarchum Josephum, OC* 4.160.25–32) notes the shift from 'Gemistos' to 'Plethon'. According to Matthew Kamariotes (*Contra Pleth.* 2 Reimarus), Plethon's intention to purify Hellenism is already evident in this metonymy: 'Plethon' is the purist version of the demotic 'Gemistos' (ἑλληνικώτερον δῆθεν). See also Ellissen (1860) 2–3. On the other hand, Plethon's follower Michael Apostoles hints at the resemblance between 'Plethon' and 'Plato' (see here Masai 1956: 384): αὐτὸς . . . ἑταῖρος Πλάτωνι καὶ ὁμώνυμος. Manuel Corinthios, Bessarion, George of Trebizond and Marsilio Ficino popularised the idea that 'Plethon' is a symbolic reference to Plato. See Fabricius, *BG* 85–6 for an early treatment of this issue, and Zakythinos (1975) 322 n. 2.

[25] The evidence comes from the monody composed by the monk Gregory (*Μονῳδία τῷ σοφῷ διδασκάλῳ Γεμιστῷ, PG* 160.817), where Plethon is called 'protector of the laws of our fathers' and 'protector of the court of the Hellenes' (*PG* 160.817). See also Hieronymos Charitonymos, *Encomium Plethonis, PG* 160.807c.

[26] On the latter issue see Monfasani (2005).

[27] The recurring story (for others just a Ficinean legend) has it that the 1439 Plethonean lectures on the differences between Plato and Aristotle at the house of Cardinal Cesarini inspired Cosimo de Medici to create the Florentine Academy and focus on a long-term Hermetico-Platonic project. The evidence is contained in Ficino's preface complementing his 1492 translation of Plotinus (Neri 2010: 255–61; P. R. Blum 2010: 96, 106–7; Monfasani 2002: 197). Its interpretation has caused fierce debates among scholars. For the traditional view that Plethon might have inspired Cosimo de Medici's foundation of the Academy of Florence see e.g. *ODB* III s.v. 'Plethon'; Masai (1956) 327ff.; Irmscher (1994) 190. But see also the criticism of Maillard (2008: 68–85) and Monfasani (2002: 184–5), who notes that 'Ficino was harshly critical of Plethon.' See also Pagani (2008) 4 n. 1, 11 n. 15. On Plethon and the Italian humanists see P. R. Blum (2010) 107–8 and

the anti-feudal and anti-papal outlook of Sigismondo Malatesta, the pagan tendencies of Cyriaco d'Ancona and the pagan hymns of Marullus Tarcaniota; the influence exercised upon the *Utopia* of Thomas More.[28] One cannot even be absolutely certain whether or not we have a portrait of Plethon, though scholars believe they have identified him in different paintings.[29] Even his tomb is full of ambiguity. As Johannes Irmscher noted, the intellectual 'bipolarity' of Plethon's life is symbolically represented in the peculiar pagan-Christian icons and ornaments of the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini, where Sigismundo Malatesta, another man accused of paganism, transferred Plethon's remains from Sparta in 1465. As for these remains, it seems that they were wrapped in a piece of red barathea that immediately dissolved when, in 1756, the sarcophagus was opened.[30]

To all appearances it is difficult to grasp Plethon, either as a subject for biography, or from the viewpoint of intellectual history. As time goes by more questions than answers are added to an already long list. Contrary to ordinary expectations, the rise in scholarly interest has proved unable conclusively to dissolve the

(2004) 162–72; Gentile (1994) 813–32. Recently, Tambrun (2010: 642–7) connected Plethon's attribution of the *Chaldean Oracles* to the Magi with the *Compagnia de' Magi*, the fraternity maintained by the Medicis, and Cosimo's decision to have Plato translated. According to this view, Cosimo saw the translation of Plato as the vehicle to get to the most ancient wisdom of the Magi. On Plethon and Renaissance philosophy cf. Tambrun (2006a); P. R. Blum (2004); Couloubaritsis (2006) 143. Perhaps the first to comment on Plethon's impact on the Latins is Hieronymos Charitonymos in his *Encomium Plethonis*, *PG* 160.807C–D: τούτου τὴν σοφίαν Ἕλληνες ὁμοῦ τε καὶ βάρβαροι διὰ θαύματος ἦγον. Another view is that Plethon influenced the occult interests of Ficino – a theory taken up by G. R. S. Mead and Ezra Pound (see here Tryphonopoulos 1992: 138–42). It has been argued that Plethon is the man who essentially introduced Strabo to the West. See Hunger (1978) 511 and Anastos (1952) 1–18.

[28] On the links between Cyriaco, Malatesta and Plethon see Neri (2010) 126–8, 226–41 and Ronchey (2003). Raoul Kabakes ended up in Italy and his son, Manilius Cabacius Rhallis, might well have influenced the paganism of Marullus Tarcaniota. See Zakythinos (1975) 376: 'Michel Marulle Tarchaniote est en effet le dernier et le plus brillant représentant du mouvement païen qui rattache à Mistra, non par Pléthon, mais par Démétrius Raoul Kavakès.' On the question of neopaganism in the hymns of Marullus see Kidwell (1989) 199–200. On Plethon and Thomas More see Ch. 7, pp. 335–8, 386. On various aspects of the reception of Plethon's ideas and work cf. W. Blum (2005); Baloglou (1998) 78, 89–114; Knös (1950); Argyropoulos (1982); Neri (2010) 226–91.

[29] See here Neri (2010) 256; Seitter (2005) 131–42; Berger (2006) 85; Ronchey (2006) and the introduction by Moreno Neri to his edition of the *Differences*, 10–12.

[30] See Berger (2006: 89), who refers to Ricci (1924) 291–2. Berger notes that according to one account the skull was unusually big – indeed a strange parallel to the names 'Plethon' and 'Gemistos'.

smokescreen covering the life and times of Plethon and establish the *Sitz im Leben* of his work.[31] Plethon seems to become more and more elusive.

For example, recently doubts were expressed whether Plethon really died in 1452, that is to say, whether he was fortunate enough to have been spared witnessing the fall of Constantinople in 1453, as the 'apocryphal' tradition has it and as is commonly held.[32] What is more, the apparent conflict between Plethon's self-professed Orthodoxy, openly propagated in the Synod of Ferrara/Florence, and the explicit paganism of the *Nomoi*, which appears to be corroborated by what his enemies reported about him, presents us with a riddle. Recently, this led to renewed doubts

[31] The revival of international scholarly interest in Plethon is in itself an interesting phenomenon. It is reflected in a series of recently completed and ongoing research projects and in publications in diverse languages: Smarnakis (forthcoming); Hladký (forthcoming); Raszewsky (forthcoming); Neri (2010); Garnsey (2009); Hanegraaff (2009); Pagani (2006); (2008); (2009); Tambrun (2006a); Matula (2008); W. Blum and Seitter (2005). New editions and translations of Plethon's works are in preparation.

[32] Some problems with the 'apocryphal' tradition regarding Plethon's death were first noted by Ellissen (1860: 3 and 16). As Dain (1942: 8) observes, the main evidence seems to come from a note by an anonymous hand on the last folio of a fifteenth-century manuscript of Thucydides, according to which ἐτελεύτησεν ὁ ἀγαθός διδάσκαλος ὁ Γέμιστος (*sic*) on the first hour of Monday, 26 June in the fifteenth Indiction. This corresponds to the year 1452. Dain (1942: 10) did not rule out Bessarion or Kabakes as possible authors of this note. A second note written in the margin below the epitaph of Gregory of Nazianzus (some might see the irony in this) in *Monacensis gr*. 495, fol. 50v appears to have been modelled on the first note (Dain 1942: 11), thus reproducing the same 'apocryphal' version regarding the death of ὁ διδάσκαλος Γόμοστος (*sic*) (Hardt 1812: 155; Alexandre 1858: xliii n. 2). Monfasani attributed this second note to Raoul Kabakes and certainly the orthography speaks for Raoul's eccentricities (Monfasani 2005: 459 n. 3). Drawing on George of Trebizond, who in his *Comparatio* (1457) considers Plethon to have been dead for three years, Niccolo Perotti's preface to his *De generibus metrorum* and a change of tenses in Matthew Kamariotes' refutation of Plethon's *De fato*, Monfasani (2005: 461) argues that Plethon died in mid-1454 and that the tantalising note might have been partly wrong: it is possible that Plethon died on Wednesday, 26 June 1454. Still, as Blanchet (2008: 178 n. 44) points out, 'ces divers arguments peuvent difficilement aller contre une datation aussi précise et cohérente que celle de la note du *Monacensis gr*. 495'. The reservations of Blanchet are corroborated in so far as Monfasani too attributes the second note to Kabakes: how plausible is it to assume that such a devoted and enthusiast follower of Plethon as Kabakes (and also the man who probably saved for posterity what was left of the *Nomoi*) committed himself to an error as grave as that of placing the death of his beloved mentor *before* the fall of Constantinople? The year 1453 was long associated with all sorts of apocalyptic and eschatological scenarios and effectively marked the end of a world and the birth of another. It is unlikely that Kabakes completely lost touch with the *Zeitgeist* – and it is even less plausible to assume that he was unaware whether his mentor died before or after the event that changed the fate of Hellenism and, as Kabakes and his contemporaries believed, the world.