

Introduction

This volume explores how the imperial court in Constantinople in the tenth century remodelled the Byzantine approach to writing history by imposing its own vision of the past on a remarkable number of historical works. Under the supervision of Emperor Constantine VII (b. 905, sole reign 945–59), a team of scholars began to restructure historical works written in Greek by dividing them into short sections, conventionally called ‘excerpts’ and by distributing these sections into a system of fifty-three thematically distinct collections. Each of these collections corresponded to a topic suiting the tastes and interests of the Byzantine court, such as careers of former rulers, court politics, various aspects of warfare, diplomatic relations and ethnography of foreigners, as well as pieces of a more rhetorical or poetic nature included in historical narratives. In this study, I present the method behind the production of the *Excerpta* as one of ‘appropriation’. The limited remains of the fifty-three collections are known today as the *Excerpta Constantiniana* (hereafter the *Excerpta*) because of the emblematic figure behind this project, Constantine VII. The project continued under Constantine’s successors, probably under the guidance of Basil Lecapenus who enjoyed prominent political and financial prosperity until 985. The process of ‘appropriation’ drew inspiration from initiatives inherited from late antique emperors as well as Constantine VII’s own father, Leo VI. In the interval from the 940s to the 980s, the *Excerpta* project evolved together with the shift of taste in Byzantine historical writing. The chronicle-based approach gave way to one centred on biography, which presented a set of historical figures, including a range of Roman emperors, as models for imitation at court.

Most of the restructured materials survive only in part and in the new framework of the *Excerpta*, making them at once indispensable yet frustratingly complex resources for students of Hellenistic, Roman, late antique and early Byzantine history. However, despite

its importance, the *Excerpta* project has never been the object of a sustained analysis that situates it within its own cultural coordinates.¹ To fill this gap, this book revisits the *Excerpta* project within its Byzantine context in order to recover its origins and manner of production, with particular focus on the *Excerpta*'s relationship to tenth-century textual practices and scholarship. In addition, I will explore the impact of the *Excerpta* project on the courtly culture in Constantinople, especially with respect to the treatises ascribed to Constantine VII, namely *On Provinces*, *On the Administration of the Empire* and the *Book of Ceremonies*, as well as on the historiography composed at Constantine VII's order. This approach will clarify many aspects of Byzantine intellectual life in the tenth century, including ideology, practices of reading, the composition of new texts and the processes involved in the retrieval of knowledge from historical works – all aspects that would otherwise be difficult to access and assess.

Since the financial costs of the *Excerpta* project could hardly have allowed for multiple copies (Section 3.2), all pieces of evidence that survive today must depend on unique manuscripts that were manufactured for the imperial court. It is also possible that the entire process of 'appropriation' was interrupted in the draft phase (Section 3.3) and that only an incomplete set of deluxe copies of the fifty-three collections ever arrived at completion. The number of actual readers of the *Excerpta* would not have exceeded a small circle of intellectuals and functionaries at the imperial court. In addition, no surviving evidence suggests that the *Excerpta* were actually used after the 980s. At the end of the tenth century, when the imperial copies were still in the process of production (Section 3.4), the compilers of the *Suda* lexicon borrowed thousands of sentences and phrases from a number of collections and integrated them in a great variety of its biographical and lexicographical entries (Chapter 9).

Only in the late sixteenth century – after a half-millennium of oblivion – did the *Excerpta* begin to attract the attention of textual scholars in Western Europe because of the priceless fragments of otherwise lost texts that they contained. Thanks to the ravages of this long intermediate period, the fifty-three collections of the original set

¹ There are only a few comprehensive studies of the five extant collections of the project (EI, ELg, ELr, ES, EVV); Büttner-Wobst 1906a; Lemerle 1971: 287–8; Flusin 2002; Pittia 2002a; Roberto 2009; Treadgold 2013: 153–65; Kaldellis 2015a: 35–46; Németh 2010, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

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were reduced to five, all of them fragmentary. Two of the five survive in their original tenth-century form and represent the deluxe imperial manuscripts themselves: *On Virtues and Vices* (E_{VV}) and *On Gnostic Statements* (E_S). However, the original text of the latter manuscript was erased and what survives comprises about half of its parchment leaves that were rewritten with new texts in the fourteenth century.² The three other collections survive only in sixteenth-century transcripts, the tenth-century originals having been lost: *On Ambushes* (E_I), *On Embassies of Romans* (E_{Lr}) and *On Embassies of Foreigners* (E_{Lg}); the latter two enjoyed a wider circulation.³ Finally, several additional traces of the *Excerpta* survive indirectly, though these have not been studied alongside the former body of evidence.⁴

Despite the relatively small surviving portion of the entire *Excerpta* corpus, it nevertheless yields a surprisingly useful reconstruction of its constituent historical works, primarily for two reasons. To begin with, the excerpts have fossilised thousands of short passages of historical works in a form relatively unchanged from the original texts. Later authors drawing on historical works normally rewrote or paraphrased the original texts.⁵ Unlike these texts, which usually depart to a certain extent from the original phrasing, the *Excerpta* tend to preserve the precise words of the works they pass on.⁶

Secondly, the systematically structured body of excerpts offers a more detailed picture even of the lost works than their small proportion would suggest. We can perhaps use the analogy of a jigsaw puzzle to better explain this. Regrouping and distributing a high number of puzzle pieces from multiple puzzle sets, the excerptors preserved all the pieces in a systematic way without omissions. As a result of this process, the passages they copied from a given historical work in one of the collections appear in sequence, albeit with missing sections that were allocated to different collections, most of which are now lost. This method has produced within each collection a high number of shorter and longer *lacunae* that

² See *Turonensis* 980 and *Vaticanus gr.* 73, both described in Appendix B.1–B.2.

³ See the descriptions of the principal manuscripts of these collections (E_I, E_{Lr} and E_{Lg}) in Appendix B.3–4.

⁴ E.g. *Parisinus suppl. gr.* 607, ff. 16r–17v, 88r–103v (Section 3.5), *Ambrosianus* 119 sup., ff. 141r–53r (Sections 1.1 and 7.6) and the indirect evidence of the *Suda* (Chapter 9).

⁵ On the concept of cover texts, see Schepens 1997: 166–7.

⁶ Brunt 1980: 483–5.

are often difficult to trace. Nevertheless, one can reduce the number of *lacunae* and get a more complete picture of each work by combining the incomplete but structured chains of excerpts from all surviving collections. In theory, the sum total of all sections classified in fifty-three topics, if carefully relocated in the chain of the original work, would make up the complete original narratives (Section 3.4). Based on this principle, scholarly efforts since the sixteenth century have concentrated on attempting to reconstitute the original works, otherwise lost forever, on the basis of the *Excerpta*. Since then, the *Excerpta* have been seen as little more than a massive body of fragments of lost ancient works.

The scheme of the surviving collections covered the complete works of at least twenty-six historians ranging in date from the fifth century BC to the ninth century AD. In terms of time and geography, the corpus extended far beyond what constituted general historical knowledge available to the Byzantines, at least as reflected in their works of world history, regardless of whether we consider the middle of the tenth century, when the project was launched, or subsequent centuries in Byzantium, by which time Constantine VII's project had been forgotten.⁷

The *Excerpta* included noteworthy representatives from the oldest period of the Greek historiographical canon: the histories of Herodotus (c. 485–c. 425 BC)⁸ and Thucydides⁹ (c. 454–c. 399 BC) and, in the case of Xenophon¹⁰ (c. 430–354), his *Anabasis* and *Cyropaedia*. These historians offered nothing directly related to Roman history, the main concern of the Byzantine court and the *Excerpta* project. It seems, however, that the esteem placed on their rhetorical qualities and style led to their inclusion alongside the other selected authors. In the case of these and all the other historical works, the texts used for the *Excerpta* project derive from manuscripts

⁷ Jeffreys 1979: 215–28, 230; Mendels 1986; Magdalino 1999a: esp. 117–18, 129, 137.

⁸ Two manuscripts of Herodotus survive before the end of the tenth century: *Laurentianus Plut.* 70.3 (Florence) (siglum A) and *Vaticanus gr.* 2369 (siglum D). See more on Herodotus as included in the *Excerpta* in Wilson 2015: xx, 185, 201; Rosen 1987: xlvi–xlvii, lv–lvi; Wollenberg 1882.

⁹ On Thucydides and the *Excerpta*, see Kleinlogel: 1965: 158, 168 and Irigoien 1977: 242–4. The *Excerpta* relies on a copy with *scholia*, which included the *Life of Thucydides* by Marcellinus at the front.

¹⁰ On Xenophon's reception in Byzantium, see Pérez Martín 2013: esp. (on Constantine VII's circle) 832–43 and Persson 1915: 156–8. The text of the *Excerpta* is close to *Vaticanus gr.* 1335, the oldest copy of Xenophon who was otherwise widely read in Byzantium.

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contemporary with the earliest extant copies of the authors in question and represent an independent channel of textual transmission for each text.

Polybius (200–118 BC) was perhaps the most important historian for the Byzantine project and has clearly been judged accordingly since the earliest editions of the *Excerpta*.¹¹ In forty books, his *Histories* retold how Roman power rapidly expanded throughout the Mediterranean between 220 and 168 BC. For students of Rome, the *Excerpta* is especially important for complementing the small portion of Polybius' precious work which otherwise survives. Of Polybius' original work, only B. 1–5 have come down to us in the direct tradition, while B. 1–18 have been abridged in epitomes, and B. 19–40 survive only in fragments, mostly in the *Excerpta* or in the *Suda* that borrowed its citations from the *Excerpta*.

Diodorus of Sicily¹² (90–30 BC) compiled a universal history in forty books. He entitled his work *Bibliotheca* ('Library') to emphasise that he unified a rich variety of sources under a single framework. His immense work covers mythical history presented according to geographical region (B. 1–6), world history from the fall of Troy until Alexander the Great (B. 7–17), and finally reaches as far as c. 60 BC. Diodorus' B. 1–5 and 11–20 survive complete. The rest (B. 6–10 and 21–40) remain only in the form of epitomes or fragments, with a high proportion from the *Excerpta*; it is to the *Excerpta*, for example, that we owe nine-tenths of the second pentad (B. 5–10).¹³

Dionysius of Halicarnassus¹⁴ (first c. BC–AD), a professional rhetor and reputed literary critic as well, compiled his *Roman Antiquities*, a history of Rome from the earliest times to 264 BC, the beginning of the first Punic war, in twenty books. Only B. 1–9 of the *Roman Antiquities* have come down to us intact in the direct tradition, while B. 10–11 are almost complete. The scarce evidence of

¹¹ On the textual transmission of Polybius' *Histories*, especially on the text of the *Excerpta*, see Moore 1965:166–7. The earliest and most important manuscript of B. 1–5 is *Vaticanus gr.* 124, copied by Ephraim in 962 in Constantinople. The only complete copy of the epitomes of B. 1–18 is *Urb. gr.* 102 (Vatican), which dates to the turn of the eleventh century. The first edition of the *Excerpta* by Fulvio Orsini (Antwerp 1582) was principally an edition of Polybius' fragments. Németh 2016: 267–9.

¹² On the relationship between the complete portion of Diodorus and the *Excerpta*, see Goukowsky 2006: x–xii; Bertrac 1993: cxxxiv–cxxxvii and Irigoien 1977: 241–2.

¹³ Cohen-Skalli 2012: lxxv.

¹⁴ Sautel 2000: 90–1; Parmentier-Morin 2002; Pittia 2002a; Fromentin 2010.

B. 12–20 remains only in epitomes and in fragments, mostly in the *Excerpta* or dependent works.

Nicolaus of Damascus¹⁵ (first c. BC–AD) witnessed a fascinating period of history in direct contact with leaders who shaped its course. Nicolaus was a confidante of Herod the Great (73/74–4 BC), a tutor of the twins of Antony and Cleopatra, and later established close contacts with Octavian Augustus. He composed a very large historical work, of which fragments exist only from B. 1–7, mostly surviving in the *Excerpta*. This section is especially interesting for the history of the Near East and the Bible, as it includes sections on the Assyrians, Medes, Persians and Lydians, which Nicolaus took from earlier sources. His work offered rich material for Flavius Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*. Finally, a few fragments survive in the *Excerpta* from his autobiography and *Life of Augustus*.

The extensive historical corpus of Flavius Josephus (37–100 AD),¹⁶ which has survived complete in the direct tradition, was important for the Byzantine project for its many details relating to the history of the Near East. In his *Jewish War*, Josephus gives an account on the Jewish revolt against the Romans (66–70 AD) in seven books. In his *Jewish Antiquities*, he offers to a Roman audience a world history from the Jewish perspective in twenty books. The *Excerpta* also include his apology for Judaism in two books (*Against Apion*), as well as 4 *Maccabees*, which had been ascribed to Josephus. He cites many earlier sources on Jewish history, making his work itself a rich repository of fragments. It seems that the excerptors used manuscripts representing a textual tradition different from that which has survived otherwise.

Arrian of Nicomedia¹⁷ (c. 95–c. 175 AD) composed a vivid account of the campaigns of Alexander the Great (*Alexandri Anabasis*), which became very popular reading in later centuries, and is accordingly well-represented in the direct tradition, too. In addition to this work, the *Excerpta* probably included Arrian's account of the events after the death of Alexander (Τὰ μετ' Ἀλέξανδρον), and the Indian and Parthian histories. These works survive only in the indirect tradition,

¹⁵ Parmentier-Morin and Barone 2011.

¹⁶ Niese, the editor of the standard text of Flavius Josephus, has not valued the remains of *Excerpta* as highly as they deserve. See Schreckenberg 1972: 124–7 (on the *Suda*) 130–3 and Wollenberg 1871.

¹⁷ See the preface to his edition by Roos, Hammond 1999. On Arrian in the *Suda*, see Visconti 2010.

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and it is mostly in the *Suda* that we can find fragments borrowed directly from the *Excerpta*, which preserve most closely the original version. As a former military commander, Arrian could boast sharp insight on the practicalities of warfare. The only transcription of his *Tactics* and *Array against the Alans* remains in Constantine VII's military manuscript,¹⁸ which was copied in the same workshop as the imperial copy of *On Virtues and Vices*, one of the surviving collections of the *Excerpta*.

The *Excerpta* include a fragment from Iamblichus' (second century AD)¹⁹ novel, *A Babylonian Tale*, a romance relating the adventures of Sinonis and her beloved Rhodanes. The text survives only in Photius' *Bibliotheca* in the form of a summary (*cod.* 94), as well as in fragments included in the *Excerpta* and the *Suda*. This is the only work of fiction that Constantine VII's team included among the historical works proper.

Appian of Alexandria²⁰ (second century AD) wrote a *Roman History* in twenty-four books, of which only a portion survives in direct transmission. The section extending from Sulla until the end of war against Sextus Pompey, the younger son of the triumvir Pompey (B. 13–17), the most important source for the history of the late Roman Republic, was not included in the surviving portion of the *Excerpta*. The remaining parts of his work were organised by sections devoted to various peoples with whom the Romans came into contact. From this otherwise lost portion, the *Excerpta* includes fragments on Spain, North Africa, the Carthaginians, the Illyrians, the Syrians and on the war against Mithridates, king of Pontus.

Cassius Dio²¹ (c. 155–c. 235) composed a Roman history covering Aeneas' arrival in Italy up to AD 229 in eighty books, approximately only a third of which have survived intact: B. 34–60 and 78–9. In addition to the *Excerpta*, the rest survive only in various *florilegia* and epitomes, including those of John Zonaras and John Xiphilinus

¹⁸ See Arrian's *Tactica* and *Acies contra Alanos*, in *Laurentianus plut.* 55.4, ff. 182r–95v, both edited by Roos. On this manuscript, see Breccia 2011: 139–40.

¹⁹ He is not to be confused with his namesake the Syrian philosopher.

²⁰ Viereck–Roos 1939: esp. xvii–xx.

²¹ On the complex transmission of Cassius Dio, including the *Excerpta*, see Molin 2004, Mazzucchi 1979; for the most thorough account, especially with respect to the *Excerpta*, see Boissevain 1895: vi–xxi. B. 78–9 survive only in *Vaticanus gr.* 1288.

(at the turn of the twelfth century).²² By including a large number of fragments very close to the original versions, the *Excerpta* are indispensable for the recovery of Cassius Dio's highly important work for the period after the first century BC, and especially for his own lifetime.

Publius Herennius Dexippus²³ (c. 210–75) hailed from Athens and wrote three works, one on the invasion of Greece and Athens by the *Heruli* and the wars against the Goths in the third century (Σκυθικά), a second on the events after the death of Alexander the Great (Τὰ μετ' Ἀλέξανδρον) from 323 to 320 BC after the manner of Arrian, and finally a universal chronicle from mythical times up to 270 AD. The *Excerpta* and the *Suda* preserve almost all known fragments of these works,²⁴ as well as the second edition (fourteen books) of the *Histories* of the sophist Eunapius of Sardis²⁵ (346–414), who continued Dexippus' work from 270 to 404 and whose history was reworked, perhaps by a later redactor, in order to lessen its anti-Christian tone.

A few Church historians were also included in the *Excerpta*. The *Ecclesiastical History* of Socrates of Constantinople (379–440), which recounts the history of the period 305–439, is represented in only one fragment.²⁶ The *Suda* includes citations from the *Ecclesiastical Histories* of Theodoret of Cyrrihus (393–466), Sozomenus (380–440) and Philostorgius (368–433). These citations in the *Suda* were possibly derived from the lost portion of the *Excerpta*.

Priscus of Panium²⁷ (fifth century) wrote a *Byzantine History* in eight books in a classicising style, mostly centring on the rule of Attila and covering the period from c. 430 to 476. As a diplomat of Emperor Theodosius the Younger (r. 408–50), Priscus visited Attila's court

²² On Zonaras, see Banchich 2009: 8–11. On Xiphilinus' epitome of Cassius Dio, see Mallan 2013. On the impact of Roman history in Greek on twelfth-century Byzantine historiography with up-to-date bibliography, see Neville 2012: 29–38.

²³ See the introductions by Dexippus' editors Mecella 2013 and Martin 2006: 1–73.

²⁴ The excerpts on sieges include a fragment from Dexippus (*Parisinus suppl. gr.* 607, ff. 91r–2r). On a recently discovered palimpsest fragment (*Vindobonensis hist. gr.* 73, ff. 192r–5v), possibly of Dexippus, see the most recent accounts in Martin and Grusková 2014: esp. 731–6, (on the original manuscript) 748–50 and in Grusková and Martin 2013 and 2014.

²⁵ See its edition by Paschoud 2006: 499–553. Treadgold 2007: 81–7; Smirnova 2005; Buck 1977, esp. 164–5, 173, (on the *Suda*) 211–35.

²⁶ ELg 387–90.

²⁷ See Carolla 2008b; Treadgold 2007: 96–103; Bornmann 1979: xi–xxxv.

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and was able to give a first-hand, reliable account of the history and ethnography of the Huns. Only the *Excerpta* and other works depending on them preserve fragments of this important work.

Zosimus²⁸ (fifth century) composed his *New History* covering the period from Augustus up to 410 in six books. His work strongly relies on Dexippus, Eunapius and Olympiodorus (fifth century). The last two books of Zosimus give an especially important account on the period 395–410. As a non-Christian polytheist, Zosimus was biased against Christian emperors and, as such, was not held in esteem by later Christian authors. This may be the reason that only one manuscript of his work survives in the direct tradition.

From Procopius' (500–62)²⁹ corpus, the surviving sections of the *Excerpta* include his account of the wars of Justinian (527–65), which represents the most important and reliable source for this period: the *Persian War* (B.1–2) on the conflict with the Sasanian Empire, the *Vandalic War* (B.3–4) on Belisarius' campaign against the Vandalic Kingdom in North Africa, and the *Gothic Wars* (B.5–8) on the campaigns in Italy until 552/3. The *Secret History* is not cited in the *Excerpta* but is, however, in the *Suda*. For the textual history of Procopius' *Wars*, the *Excerpta* are important as their text antedates by almost four centuries the earliest textual witness of the *Wars*, which dates to the fourteenth century.

The *Excerpta* included three historians who continued Procopius' *Wars* in a classicising style. Agathias of Myrina (532–80),³⁰ otherwise known as the author of epigrams, covered the period between 552–3 and 558 in five books, all of which survive complete. Next, Menander Protector³¹ (sixth century), a military officer at the court of Emperor Maurice (r. 582–602), gave an accurate account on the period 558–82. All but one of the extant fragments are preserved in the *Excerpta* and in the *Suda*.³² The third continuator was Theophylactus Simocatta

²⁸ Forcina 1987: 99–102 and Ochoa 1990a, 1990b. Zosimus' only manuscript is *Vaticanus gr.* 156. Its standard edition is by Paschoud I–III (Paris, 1971–89).

²⁹ Greatrex 2014 offers a critical judgment on the mushrooming recent literature on Procopius. On Procopius and the *Excerpta*, see Haury 1905a: xxxiii; Wirth 1964: 163–7, 210; and Wirth 1965: 435. The earliest manuscript of the *Wars* is *Vaticanus gr.* 152.

³⁰ Treadgold 2007: 279–90; Av. Cameron 1970. See its edition by Keydell (1967) and English transl. by Fredno (1975).

³¹ Treadgold 2007: 293–9. See the edition and translation by Blockley (1985).

³² Halkin 1973.

(580s–641),³³ who retold the history of the reign of Maurice in eight books; his work survives in one manuscript and is the oldest and most reliable source on this period.

As master of offices under Justinian, diplomat and historian, Peter the Patrician³⁴ (500–65) wrote a history of the Roman Empire until the death of Constantius II (d. 361). Peter's work closely relies on Cassius Dio, Dexippus and Eunapius. He also wrote a treatise *On Administrative Organisation*, which is extensively cited in Constantine VII's *Book of Ceremonies*.³⁵ In addition, he reported on his diplomatic mission to Persia in 561/2.

John Malalas³⁶ (490–570) wrote a world chronicle of which seventeen books survive in a single corrupt Greek manuscript. Malalas' Greek is close to the spoken language and is an important source for the study of late-antique vernacular Greek. Because of his style and language he did not enjoy wide popularity among the educated elite of later centuries. The fragments of the *Excerpta* as well as a translation in Church Slavonic are important critical witnesses for establishing the text.

Malchus of Philadelphia³⁷ (fifth–sixth century) wrote a Roman history covering the period from Constantine I to Anastasius I (r. 491–518) in classicising style. He is especially well informed on the period 473–80. Fragments survive only in the collection *On Embassies*. Photius read seven books, which represent only a portion of the entire work.

John of Antioch (sixth–seventh century)³⁸ wrote a universal chronicle from Adam to Justin I (r. 518–27). It is debated whether

³³ Theophylactus is widely studied; see Treadgold 2007: 329–40 with bibliography. On the *Excerpta*, Theophylactus Simocatta and his earliest manuscript (*Vaticanus gr.* 977), see Schreiner 1987.

³⁴ Treadgold 2007: 264–70. On the attribution of the excerpts of the anonymous continuator of Dio to Peter, see Martolini 2009: 1–56 and Banchich 2015: 4–6. See also the forthcoming digital edition of the excerpts attributed to Peter in *Vaticanus gr.* 73 by Dariya Rafiyenko.

³⁵ On the fragments that survive in *De cer.*, see Sode 2004 and 2011. On Peter, see *Suda* π 1406.

³⁶ Treadgold 2007: 235–55. See the edition of Malalas by Thurn, based on the single copy, *Baroccianus* 182 (Oxford), and its English translation by Elisabeth Jeffreys, who marks passages that differ from the Church Slavonic translation. On Malalas in the *Excerpta*, see Flusin 2004 and Carolla 2016: 245–50.

³⁷ See Baldwin 1977 and the edition of his fragments by Cresci (1982).

³⁸ See Treadgold 2007: 311–29 with bibliography. The fragments of John of Antioch were recently edited according to two different approaches. Roberto 2005a edited all evidence which survives, including the epitomes that mostly survive in *Parisinus gr.* 1763 (*Excerpta Salmasiana*). Mariev 2008 does not attribute this reworked section to John and thus omits it from his edition.