

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

Introduction

3

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: Ioánnēs E. Karagiannopoulos, *Pēgai Tēs Vyzantinēs Historias*, 5th ed. (Thessaloniki: Ekdoseis P. Pournara, 1987); Ioánnēs 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 Petritzonitissa in Bačkov," 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).

Introduction

5

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 Morrisson, “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. Dimiter 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, *Aphotero glossia: 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.

Medieval Historical Texts: Histories, Chronicles, and Terminology 9

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.