

A Classic Dethroned: The Decline and Fall of Thucydides in Middle Byzantium

Scott Kennedy

TO THE MODERN CLASSICIST, it probably seems self-evident that Thucydides' *Histories* are, in his own words, a κτῆμα ἐς αἰεί, a "possession for eternity" (1.22). Recent years have witnessed an explosion of books, edited volumes, and articles on his reception.¹ Wiley-Blackwell has even published a *Handbook to the Reception of Thucydides*, which traces the influence of Thucydides from antiquity to the present day. This immense scholarly output affirms the enduring power of Thucydides to engage generation after generation of readers in the Western world. As for the Byzantine phase of this story, it is often assumed that his *Histories* were prized more or less continuously from late antiquity until they were rediscovered by Western intellectuals in the Renaissance.² But the story of Thucydides during Byzantium is more nuanced. A seminal and popular text in the ancient world, Thucydides became an esoteric concern in Byzantium between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries. Moreover, classicizing histories modeled on Thucydides, such as Prokopios, stop in the Middle Byzantine period, yielding to other historical forms such as the chronicle and the imperial biogra-

¹ For a sample, see N. Morley, *Thucydides and the Idea of History* (London 2014); C. M. Lee and N. Morley (eds.), *A Handbook to the Reception of Thucydides* (Chichester 2014); K. Meister, *Thukydides als Vorbild der Historiker: Von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Paderborn 2013); J. C. Iglesias-Zoido, *El legado de Tucídides en la cultura occidental discursos e historia* (Coimbra 2011); V. Fromentin et al. (eds.), *Ombres de Thucydide: la réception de l'historien depuis l'antiquité jusqu'au début du XX^e siècle* (Pessac 2010).

² E.g., M. Pade, "Thucydides," in R. Kaster et al. (eds.), *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum VIII* (Washington 2003) 110–111.

phy. As Diether Reinsch has stressed in a chapter on Byzantine historical adaptations of Thucydides, Byzantine historians made practically no use of Thucydides during this period.³

Why did Thucydides become esoteric and lose ground? Studies of Thucydides in the modern era have often pointed to his use in schools as an important impetus for his study.⁴ As Thucydides was primarily studied as a rhetorical text, I will argue that the root of his decline in Byzantium lay in the changing priorities of rhetorical schools. Through a comparison of what came before in rhetorical schools with what came after, I will demonstrate how Byzantines reprioritized Thucydides, as he became rhetorically, politically, and culturally problematic. Studies of reception often explore why a society read a text. They demonstrate the enduring power of texts as each generation of readers reinvents and reshapes the text for itself. This paper will demonstrate the opposite, namely how and why the Byzantines devalued Thucydides as a stylistic and historical model.

1. *The rhetorical tradition and Thucydides*

Before exploring this thesis, it is necessary to briefly sketch Thucydides' reception in antiquity, so that the reader has a sense of how Byzantine intellectuals departed from it. In antiquity, Thucydides was a staple of the educated elite. Figuring prominently on ancient reading lists, such as those of Quintilian or Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Thucydides enjoyed a wide cultural currency.⁵ He was imitated by authors such as Lucretius,

³ D. R. Reinsch, "Byzantine Adaptations of Thucydides," in A. Tsakmakis and A. Rengakos (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Thucydides* (Leiden 2006) 758.

⁴ N. Morley, "The Idea of Thucydides in the Western Tradition," in *A Handbook* 601.

⁵ J. Bompaire, "Les historiens classiques dans les exercices préparatoires de rhétorique (progymnasmata)," in *Recueil Plassart: Études sur l'antiquité grecque offertes à André Plassart* (Paris 1976) 1–7; C. A. Gibson, "Learning Greek History in the Ancient Classroom: The Evidence of the Treatises on Progymnasmata," *CP* 99 (2004) 103–129.

Caesar, Sallust, Josephus, Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Prokopios.⁶ He was also the subject of a booming scholarly industry devoted to his life and works. Dionysius of Halicarnassus' essay *On Thucydides* and Markellinos' *Life of Thucydides* are perhaps the best-known ancient monographs on Thucydides.⁷ But he was the subject of a relatively constant stream of scholarship from the first century B.C. to the fifth A.D. His text was read and commented on by now-obscure rhetors such as Hermippos (fl. 117–138), Sabinos (fl. 117–138), and Heron (?).⁸ But even better-known authors such as Porphyry and Galen devoted now lost monographs to Thucydides.⁹

Rhetorical schools played a pivotal role in the dissemination of Thucydides. Grandiosely credited by some with inventing

⁶ On Caesar see C. Krebs, "Thucydides in Gaul: The Siege of Plataea as Caesar's Model for his Siege of Avaricum," *Histos* 10 (2016) 1–14. For Sallust see T. F. Scanlon, *The Influence of Thucydides on Sallust* (Heidelberg 1980). On Josephus see J. Price, "Josephus' Reading of Thucydides: A Test Case in the BJ," in Georg Rechenauer and Vassiliki Pothou (eds.), *Thucydides, a Violent Teacher? History and Its Representations* (Göttingen 2011) 79–98; G. Mader, *Josephus and the Politics of Historiography: Apologetic and Impression Management in the Bellum Judaicum* (Leiden 2000); H. Drüner, *Untersuchungen über Josephus* (Marrburg 1896). For Tacitus see H. Bardon, "Tacite Hist. 3.21–24 et Thucydide 7.43–44," in *Hommages à Max Niedermann* (Brussels 1956) 34–37. For Cassius Dio see E. Litsch, *De Cassio Dione imitatore Thucydidis* (Freiburg 1893). For Prokopios there are many studies, such as H. Braun, *Procopius Caesariensis quatenus imitatus sit Thucydidem* (Erlangen 1885); F. Bornmann, "Motivi Tucididei in Procopio," *AeR* 19 (1974) 138–150; A. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (Berkeley 1985) ch. 3; C. F. Pazdernik, "Procopius and Thucydides on the Labors of War: Belisarius and Brasidas in the Field," *TAPA* 130 (2000) 149–187. Many useful studies of Thucydidean imitations by these authors and others are examined in *Ombres de Thucydide*.

⁷ On Dionysius see N. Wiater, *The Ideology of Classicism: Language, History, and Identity in Dionysius of Halicarnassus* (Berlin 2011). On Markellinos see L. Piccirilli, *Storie dello storico Tucidide* (Genova 1985).

⁸ On Hermippos see *Suda* ε 3024 and v 375; on Sabinos and Heron, *Suda* σ 11 and η 552.

⁹ *Suda* π 2098. On Galen and Thucydides see F. Kudlien, "Galens Urteil über die Thukydideische Pestbeschreibung," *Episteme* 5 (1971) 132–133.

rhetoric itself,¹⁰ Thucydides featured prominently throughout the rhetorical curriculum from beginning exercises to advanced composition such as declamation, in which students would impersonate a figure from antiquity on a real or imagined historical occasion. He could be studied as a model. For example, the second-century rhetorician Theon imagines reading passages such as the Athenian plague and the siege of Plataea with students in order to teach them how to write an *ekphrasis*.¹¹ Or Thucydides could be the subject of students' exercises. Aphthonios, the author of an important treatise on how to write beginning exercises, devoted an encomium to Thucydides as a sample exercise, while the Neoplatonic philosopher and rhetor Syrianos mentions a declamation theme in which a student would defend Thucydides when he was accused of crimes against the state after the publication of his *Histories*.¹²

One would expect Thucydides' influence to continue in Byzantium much as it did in antiquity. Along with several treatises by or attributed to Hermogenes of Tarsos, Aphthonios' preliminary exercises became the standard textbook for rhetoric in Byzantium.¹³ In theory, instructors would have been unable to avoid reading Thucydides with their students, given Aphthonios' heavy use of him in the encomium, which includes a lengthy and allusive summary of events in the *Histories*. But quite the opposite seems to have happened. Thucydides became problematic, and so people removed him from Aphthonios. A popular abridgement of Aphthonios, dating to the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, removed all of Aphthonios' sample exercises from the text including the encomium of Thucydides. In their place, the abridger, dubbed the *rhetor Marcianus*, substituted new exercises that demonstrate which texts students were ex-

¹⁰ Aphth. *Prog.* 22. Cf. Markellinos 38, who credits Thucydides as the first historian to write assembly speeches subject to rhetorical theory.

¹¹ Theon *Prog.* 12 (ed. Patillon).

¹² Aphth. *Prog.* 22–24; H. Rabe, *Syriani in Hermogenem commentaria* (Leipzig 1892) 135.

¹³ G. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric* (Thessalonike 1973) 5–26.

pected to know.¹⁴ Themes drawn from classical mythology, Homer, and Christianity figure prominently, such as a comparison of Saint Basil and Gregory Nazianzos and an *ekphrasis* on a baptistry.¹⁵ The rhetor Marcianus thus created an important update to Aphthonios. Authors who were canonical for Aphthonios, such as Thucydides, were replaced with texts more culturally relevant to some Byzantine intellectuals.

Not all Byzantine instructors adopted such a radical approach to the Thucydidean sections of Aphthonios as the rhetor Marcianus, but other instructors seem to have skirted over the Thucydidean material. Take for example how the popular P-scholia to Aphthonios, which were composed in the tenth to eleventh centuries,¹⁶ handle his précis of events in Thucydides:¹⁷

Thucydides recorded everything accurately and *he made his art the accomplishments of those who came before him, surrendering nothing to the*

¹⁴ Walz, *RG I* 127–135 (abridgement), 597–648 (progymnasmata). On the rhetor Marcianus see R. Hock and E. O’Neil, *The Chreia and Ancient Rhetoric: Classroom Exercises II* (Atlanta 2002) 258–268. At 261, they suggest that Marcianus flourished ca. the twelfth and thirteenth century, but this is unconvincing. As their *terminus post quem* they suggest that the influx of Christian material means that the work must date after Nikephoros Basilakes, but this is unconvincing because John Doxapatres a century before was already suggesting that students write encomia of Basil of Kaisareia and invectives on Julian the Apostate (Walz, *RG II* 465). One suspects that Christian material had percolated into the rhetorical curriculum long before Doxapatres, first entering it during the late antique period. For example, see J.-L. Fournet, “Un éthopée de Cain dans le codex des visions de la Fondation Bodmer,” *ŽPE* 92 (1992) 253–266. Their *terminus ante quem*, based on the thirteenth-century date of one of the manuscripts (*Marc.gr. Z. 599* (coll. 0807)), is also unsatisfying. The manuscript actually dates to the fourteenth century: E. Mioni, *Bibliothecae Divi Marci Venetiarum codices graeci manuscripti II* (Rome 1985) 524–526. Thus, the rhetor Marcianus probably flourished at a date from Middle Byzantium to the fourteenth century.

¹⁵ Walz *RG I* 630–638, 639–644.

¹⁶ On the P-scholia see R. Hock, *The Chreia and Ancient Rhetoric: Commentaries on Aphthonius’s Progymnasmata* (Atlanta 2012) 85–88. For the date see H. Rabe, “Rhetoren-Corpora,” *RhM* 67 (1912) 329–333.

¹⁷ Walz, *RG II* 264–265. Translations are my own unless noted otherwise.

depths of oblivion, for his writings have preserved those accomplishments. Someone who wants to be industrious can read in his books about Plataea, the ravaging of Attica, Naupactus, Lesbos, ... Ambracia, the trial held by the Spartans, and the rest. Thucydides recounts everything accurately.

In the italicized text, the scholiast summarizes Aphthonios, occasionally interjecting remarks on Thucydides, such as about his accuracy. The scholiast has apparently read Thucydides, but he does not assume that his students would also be reading Thucydides, leaving the task to the more industrious among them. To borrow an anachronistic term, Thucydides was treated as extra credit. Consider also John Doxapatres' popular commentary to Aphthonios.¹⁸ Writing during the second half of the eleventh century, Doxapatres is unique for spelling out in his introduction how he expected instructors and students to use his commentary (*RG* II 142–144):

The exegete [of the present book] needs to be an expert in all these things (i.e., the rhetorical rules of Aphthonios and Hermogenes), so that he can clarify them for the reader and prevent him being disturbed by ignorance of what is said. Furthermore, the exegete needs to have a precise knowledge of rhetorical texts, namely those laboriously crafted by Aristides, Thucydides, and Demosthenes, as well as poetic texts, so that he knows the *Histories* and the rest. For there is need of all these texts here, as in the encomium of Thucydides. In it, the sophist drew heavily upon the *Histories* by the historian ... As for the reader, he should not just know the contents of this book, but produce exercises in accordance with the methods of the treatise writer during every practice.

From Doxapatres' candidness, we can glean precious information about how he expected an ideal course on Aphthonios to be taught. Instructors like the P-scholiast might have read texts such as Thucydides, but their fundamental teaching centered on ex-

¹⁸ On Doxapatres see Hock, *The Chreia* 127–142; C. Gibson, "The Anonymous Progymnasmata in John Doxapatres' *Homiliae* in Aphthonium," *BZ* 102 (2009) 83–94. Doxapatres' popularity is evident from the survival of eleven Byzantine copies of the text. For a list of the surviving MSS. see <http://pinakes.iroht.cnrs.fr/> under recherche-generale, Doxapatres.

plicating Aphthonios for their students. Students had no obligation to read Thucydides.

If we press the negative implications of Doxapatres' expectations, we can also reconstruct how less than ideal classrooms might have operated. Because Doxapatres tells us that instructors needed to know their ancient rhetors, there must have inevitably been some instructors whose knowledge of ancient texts like Thucydides was quite tenuous. Indeed, we can even find examples of instructors whose knowledge of Thucydides was quite shallow. A fourteenth-century scholion to Aphthonios' encomium of Thucydides explains that the Spartans besieged Plataea because they "condemned the Athenians for their impiety, delivering judgment in favor of Potidaea and Corinth on account of the fact that the people of Potidaea were forced to consume each other for food."¹⁹ Although the Athenians' siege of Potidaea had resulted in the Potidaeans committing cannibalism (Thuc. 2.70), they had never been formally tried by the Spartans. This instructor relied on a declamation by Libanios for his knowledge of events in Thucydides. Libanios imagines the Athenians being put on trial by a Panhellenic assembly for impiety after forcing the Potidaeans to eat each other.²⁰ The fiction of the rhetor's classroom had thus become history for this commentator. Most Byzantine rhetorical commentators read their Thucydides. Texts meant for the practicing instructor of rhetoric, such as John of Sardis and John Doxapatres, cite Thucydides for examples on numerous occasions.²¹ Thus, it is easy

¹⁹ In H. Rabe, *Ioannis Sardiiani Commentarium in Aphthonii Progymnasmata* (Leipzig 1928) ix n. 1: ἡ Πλάταια συμμαχίς ἦν Ἀθηναίων. ταῦτα γάρ εἰσιν, ἃ συγγράφει ὁ συγγραφεύς. κατέκριναν γὰρ Λακεδαιμόνιοι Ἀθηναίους ἀσεβείας κρίνοντες ἐπὶ Ποτιδαϊάτας αὐτοὺς καὶ Κορινθίους, ὅτι βιασθέντες Ποτιδαϊᾶται ἀπὸ τῆς παρ' Ἀθηναίων πολιορκίας ἤψαντο ἀλλήλων τὰ ἐς τροφήν.

²⁰ Lib. *Decl.* 13, title: οἱ Ποτιδαϊᾶται ἀλλήλων ἐγείσαντο πολιορκούμενοι ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀθηναίων. καὶ κρίνονται Ἀθηναῖοι ὑπὸ τῶν Κορινθίων ἀσεβείας.

²¹ E.g. Walz *RG* II 199–203. K. Alpers, *Untersuchungen zu Johannes Sardiianos und seinem Kommentar zu den Progymnasmata des Aphthonios* (Braunschweig 2013) 87–99.

assume that all educated Byzantines shared their familiarity with the text. But it is important to remember that these were reference works and thus do not necessarily represent the real experience of a Byzantine classroom.

The surviving preliminary exercises, our best evidence of what material teachers covered with their students, also attest to a lack of interest in Thucydides. In the 145 preliminary exercises, produced between the tenth and fourteenth centuries,²² Christian material figures prominently alongside material drawn from Homer and Demosthenes. For all the attention that Thucydides received in late antiquity when he was the subject of these exercises, later Byzantines paid him scant attention. An anonymous scholiast of the late eleventh or early twelfth century suggests a synkrisis of Xenophon and Thucydides as authors as an example of the types of synkrisis.²³ However, there is no evidence that anyone attempted to make that suggestion a reality. A number

²² The progymnasmata included in this count are: John Geometres (6): A. R. Littlewood, *The Progymnasmata of Ioannes Geometres* (Amsterdam 1972); John Doxapatres (9): Walz, *RG* II 282–286, 349–353, 366–369, 451–460, 476–478, 491–492, 508–509; Nikephoros Basilakes (56): A. Pignani, *Niceforo Basilace. Progimnasmata e monodie* (Naples 1983); Nikephoros Chrysoberges (9): F. Widmann, “Die Progymnasmata des Nikephoros Chrysoberges,” *Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher* 12 (1935/6) 12–41, 241–299; Theodore Hexapterygus (6): W. Hörandner, “Die Progymnasmata des Theodoros Hexapterygus,” in W. Hörandner et al. (eds.), *Byzantios. Festschrift für Herbert Hunger* (Vienna 1984) 147–162; Gregory of Cyprus (19): S. Kotzabassi, “Die Progymnasmata von Gregor von Zypern: Fabeln, Erzählung, Ethopoie,” *Ελληνικά* 43 (1993) 45–63; George Pachymeres (14): Walz, *RG* I 551–596; Marcianus Rhetor (14): Walz, *RG* I 597–648; Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos (3): J. Glettnier, “Die Progymnasmata des Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopulos,” *BZ* 33 (1933) 1–12; Constantine Akropolites (9): A. Papadopoulos Kerameus, “Κωνσταντίνου Ἀκροπόλιτου μῦθοι ἀνέκδοτοι,” *Δελτίον τῆς ἱστορικῆς καὶ ἐθνολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας τῆς Ἑλλάδος* 3 (1891) 445–451; R. Romano, “Etopee inedite di Constantino Akropolita,” in M. Capone Ciollaro (ed.), *Talariskos: Studia Graeca Antonio Garzya sexagenario a discipulis oblata* (Naples 1987) 311–338.

²³ A. Sabatucci, “Scholii antichi ad Aftonio nel Cod. Laur. Gr. LX, 15,” *StIt* 16 (1980) 80.

of Byzantines wrote preliminary exercises in response to Aphthonios' other sample exercises. For example, the thirteenth-century scholar George Pachymeres wrote a refutation and a confirmation of Aphthonios' narrative of how the rose became red.²⁴ But Byzantines never seem to have done this with his Thucydidean material. There probably were some schools in which students were expected to engage with Thucydides. For example, Michael Choniates reports that the imperial chancellor Demetrios Tornikes in the twelfth century knew Thucydides by heart.²⁵ However, by and large, Byzantine instructors seem to have preferred other material.

2. *Thucydides as a stylistic model*

Thucydides' declining presence in schools was matched by a contraction in his use as a model. In his *Library*, the patriarch of Constantinople and polymath Photios testifies that Demosthenes and Plato were essential for anyone who wanted to master political and panegyric oratory.²⁶ Thucydides is missing from this list, which is especially significant, as ancient rhetors such as Hermogenes and Markellinos had frequently affirmed his value for these branches of rhetoric.²⁷ From other reviews, it is clear that Photios had read Thucydides and respected him. For example, Photios does not believe that Theopompos' claim to have surpassed previous writers could possibly refer to Thucydides or Herodotus, to whom Theopompos is inferior.²⁸ However, he frequently condemns Thucydides' style for its obscurity, unfavorably comparing it to that of his imitators Cassius Dio, Agatharchides, and Dexippos.²⁹ Photios prefers the style of other

²⁴ Walz, *RG* I 557–561, cf. Aphth. *Prog.* 3.

²⁵ F. Kolovou, *Michaelis Choniatae epistulae* (Berlin 2001) 45.

²⁶ Cod. 141, II 109 Henry.

²⁷ E.g., Markellinos 1; Hermog. *Id.* 409.

²⁸ Cod. 176, II 175 Henry.

²⁹ J. Schamp, "La réception de l'histoire chez Photios sous bénéfice d'inventaire," in I. Lewandowski and L. Mrozewics (eds.), *L'image de l'Antiquité chez les auteurs postérieurs* (Poznań 1996) 20–21.

historians such as Arrian, “who is second to none of those who have composed historical works best” or the patriarch Nikephoros, “who eclipsed many of his predecessors” with his *Brevarium*.³⁰ This may explain why Photios omitted Thucydides from his short list of oratorical models. Some Byzantines went even further. After reading Thucydides, the grumpy schoolmaster John Tzetzes scribbled a dodecasyllabic ‘farewell to Thucydides’ in *Heidelb.gr.* 252.³¹ Condemning Thucydides for his obscurity and “wooden” style, Tzetzes wished the Athenians had tossed him and his *Histories* in a dark pit!³²

Dark and obscure, Thucydides was slotted for replacement, as the Byzantines modernized their curriculum. The middle period is characterized by such efforts to redefine the ‘classics’. For example, Photios’ comments on Demosthenes and Plato appear in an entry about Basil of Kaisareia’s orations. Photios believed that Basil would make a suitable replacement for both. In the early eleventh century, John Sikeliotēs, a teacher of rhetoric who authored a commentary to Hermogenes’ *On the Types of Style*, would even try to oust Demosthenes from the curriculum in favor of Gregory of Nazianzos. In several passages of his commentary, Sikeliotēs argued that Gregory was stylistically superior, more virtuous, a Christian, and politically correct. Gregory had after all written under a monarchy rather than a democracy and was hence a more appropriate model for Byzantine students.³³

³⁰ Cod. 92, II 32 Henry, and Cod. 66, I 99. On Photios’ appreciation of historians as stylists see B. Croke, “Tradition and Originality in Photius’ Historical Reading,” in John Burke (ed.), *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honour of Roger Scott* (Melbourne 2006) 59–70; S. Efthymiadis, *Φώτιος Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως: Όσα της ιστορίας: Ανθολογία* (Athens 2000) 29–39.

³¹ W. B. Stanford, “Tzetzes’ Farewell to Thucydides,” *G&R* 11 (1941) 41.

³² M. J. Luzzatto, *Tzetzes lettore di Tucidide: note autografe sul Codice Heidelberg palatino greco 252* (Bari 1999) 133–134.

³³ T. Conley, “Demosthenes Dethroned: Gregory Nazianzus in Sikeliotēs’ Scholia on Hermogenes’ Περὶ Ἰδεῶν,” *ICS* 27–28 (2002) 145–152. On Sikeliotēs see also S. Papaioannou, “Sicily, Constantinople, Miletos: The Life of a

Thucydides did have defenders in the Byzantine period. In the early tenth century, the polymath Arethas defended Thucydides' difficult and obscure style in a tract addressed to his critics. Maligned for his baroque style, Arethas charged his critics with lacking the secular learning necessary to understand his oratory. His opponents suggested that he imitate the level and easily approachable style of the Church Fathers. But as he points out, even Gregory of Nazianzos, whom his contemporaries loved to emulate, had a difficult and baroque style just like Arethas' own. Knowing his contemporaries' love for Gregory, he then demonstrates the importance of secular learning for their model:³⁴

But if I must speak out of a love for truth, what these men [viz. Arethas' opponents] really long for is to appropriate the tongue of Thucydides and the relaxed manner of Herodotus for their own words, as it is possible to hear that holy man [viz. Gregory] say. Those men were among the most clever Greek orators and used a style that is terse and dense in terms of words and ideas. They have provided numerous difficulties to those more diligent readers who have read them until this day. You will not reap any handy benefit from them, unless you have followed the innumerable twists and turns of their style and complained extensively about how difficult they are.

In Arethas' view, Thucydides' difficult style was an important influence on Gregory. He uses Gregory's wish in his fourth oration against Julian that he had the tongue of Thucydides and the relaxed manner of Herodotus as proof of the importance for good oratory of knowing ancient orators.³⁵ Thus, if Arethas' detractors do not understand him, it is because they need to read more widely like Gregory and Arethas.

Arethas' justification of his style reflects his time's literary

Eunuch and the History of Byzantine Humanism," in Theodora Antonopoulou et al. (eds.), *Myriobiblos: Essays on Byzantine Literature and Culture* (Berlin 2015) 262–284.

³⁴ L. Westerink, *Arethae Archiepiscopi Caesariensis Scripta Minora* II (Leipzig 1968) 187–188.

³⁵ Greg. Naz. *Or.* 4.92 (PG 35.624B).

tastes. Late antique intellectuals had proclaimed their affection for Thucydides' style. For example, Thomas Scholastikos (5th–6th cent.?) wrote, "I love the three stars of rhetoric because they are the best of all rhetoricians. I love your labors, Demosthenes, but I am a huge fan of Aristides and Thucydides."³⁶ But for Middle Byzantines, reading Thucydides became an act of φιλοπονία, reserved for the most educated of the educated. His text continued to be nominally esteemed in some quarters. Grammarians such as George Choiroboskos occasionally cite "the historian,"³⁷ and the *Histories* were incorporated into Byzantine lexicography like the *Suda* by lexicographers drawing either directly or indirectly on Thucydides.³⁸ Thucydides retained his canonicity as a model of Attic style, but that does not mean that many people studied his work, or if they did, that they thought he was worth actively engaging with in rhetorical exercises, oratory, or historical writing. Even though Arethas talks up reading Thucydides, he himself did not imitate or quote Thucydides in his own oratory. As the *index fontium* to his rhetorical oeuvre indicates, his model of choice was Gregory of Nazianzos.³⁹ Byzantines accorded Thucydides some importance because of his widespread use in ancient and late antique literature, but they preferred other, often more recent or patristic models when they actually wrote.

3. Middle Byzantine imitations of Thucydides

As a final illustration of Thucydides' declining use in Middle Byzantium, let us consider the fate of Thucydides in historiography by looking at how his use as a model shifted between

³⁶ *Anth.Gr.* 16.315: ῥητορικῆς φιλέω τρεῖς ἀστέρας, οὐνεκα μόνον πάντων ῥητῆρων εἰσὶν ἀριεῖστεροι· σέιο πόνους φιλέω, Δημόσθενες· εἰμὶ δὲ λίην καὶ φιλαριστείδης καὶ φιλοθουκυδίδης.

³⁷ A. Hilgard, *Theodosii Alexandrini Canones; Georgii Choeroboschi Scholia; Sophronii Patriarchae Alexandrini Excerpta* (Leipzig 1889) 115.

³⁸ M. Giangiulio, "Storici greci di età arcaica e classica," in Giuseppe Zecchini (ed.), *Il lessico Suda e la memoria del passato a Bizantio* (Bari 1999) 89–99.

³⁹ See the *index auctorum* in L. Westerink, *Arethae Archiepiscopi Caesariensis Scripta Minora* II (Leipzig 1968) 188–189.

the ancient world and Byzantium. A survey of the surviving Middle Byzantine historians reveals that they largely favored different and more recent models. In the tenth century, the author(s) of Theophanes Continuatus wrote biographies of emperors influenced by Plutarch and Polybios.⁴⁰ The influence of Plutarch's biographical techniques has also been noted in one of the greatest Byzantine historians, Niketas Choniates.⁴¹ Michael Psellos, perhaps the best-known Byzantine historian, explicitly rejects employing Thucydides' summer-and-winter chronological scheme for his biographically organized *Chronography*.⁴² Michael Attaleiates' history of Byzantium's swift descent into military defeat and chaos during the eleventh century reverses Polybios' model of Rome's swift rise to world dominance.⁴³ Besides a shift toward writing imperial biography, for which Thucydides was not an ideal model, another trend in Middle Byzantine historiography was the increasing preeminence of Prokopios and Agathias, whose works later historians such as Joseph Genesios, Leo the Deacon, Pseudo-Symeon, Michael Attaleiates, Nikephoros Bryennios, and John Kinnamos often imitated in lieu of Thucydides.⁴⁴ It was Thucydides' successors

⁴⁰ R. J. H. Jenkins, "The Classical Background of the Scriptores Post Theophanem," *DOP* 8 (1954) 11–30.

⁴¹ A. Simpson, *Niketas Choniates: A Historiographical Study* (Oxford 2013) 252–253.

⁴² D. R. Reinsch, *Michaelis Pselli Chronographia* (Berlin 2014) 137.

⁴³ D. Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Tempe 2012) ch. 2.

⁴⁴ For Genesios and Bryennios, see L. A. Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios* (Cambridge 2012) 141–147. For Pseudo-Symeon, A. Kaldellis, "The Byzantine Conquest of Crete (961 AD), Prokopios' Vandal War, and the Continuator of the Chronicle of Symeon," *BGMS* 39 (2015) 302–311. For Kinnamos, C. Brand, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus* (New York 1976) 7; C. Neumann, *Griechische Geschichtschreiber und Geschichtsquellen im 12. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig 1888) 85–88; W. Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (Houndmills 2013) 415. Prokopios' influence on John Kinnamos has not been fully studied, but raw material for future study has been noted by P. Grotowski, *Arms and Armour of*

who inspired later Byzantine historiography rather than Thucydides himself.

As an illustration of Thucydides' decline, let us consider the plague (2.48–53) and the siege of Plataea (2.75–78), which were far and away the two most imitated portions of his *Histories*. In antiquity, the plague was perhaps the mostly widely appreciated part of his historical oeuvre. From Lucretius in the first century B.C. to the *Miracles of Saint Demetrios* in the seventh century, I count eleven surviving imitations of the plague.⁴⁵ But the plague was also popular and surfaces in discussions of later plagues, such as the Antonine, Cyprianic, and Justinianic. Lucian even complained that an imitator of Thucydides describing the Antonine plague had lifted all but the walls of Athens from Thucydides.⁴⁶ No doubt, an important factor in the plague's widespread currency was its use in ancient schools as a model *ekphrasis* of what a plague should look like. In the second century A.D., a rhetor would even grumble that his students had read too much history because they included gratuitous descriptions of plague in their practice speeches intended for a courtroom.⁴⁷

However, the overall decline of Thucydides in the Middle Byzantine rhetorical curriculum brought about a corresponding change in his use by historians. Plagues continued to beset the Romans just as they always had. Multiple plague scenes survive from the eighth to the fourteenth century by authors of great literary merit such as Michael Attaleiates and George Pachymeres, but none of them are very detailed or imitate

the Warrior Saints: Tradition and Innovation in Byzantine Iconography (843–1261) (Leiden 2010) 48 n.125; C. Whately, *Battles and Generals: Combat, Culture, and Didacticism in Procopius' Wars* (Leiden 2015) 163 n.3.

⁴⁵ Lucr. 6.1138–1286; Diod. 14.70–71; Livy 41.21; Dion. Hal. *Ant.Rom.* 9.42.1–2, 10.53; Joseph. *AJ* 7.324–326; Cass. Dio 53.29; Greg. Nys. *V.Greg. Thaum.*, PG 46.956–957; Prokopios *Wars* 2.22–23; Agath. 5.10; Paul Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de Saint Démétrius I* (Paris 1979) 76–77 (Miracle 3.36).

⁴⁶ Luc. *Hist.conscr.* 15.

⁴⁷ Ps.-Dion. Hal. *Rhet.* 10.372.

Thucydides.⁴⁸ In antiquity, a Thucydidean emulator such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Diodorus, or Cassius Dio frequently transformed minor epidemics mentioned in their sources into full-blown Thucydidean plagues.⁴⁹ However, Byzantines who wrote histories of earlier periods such as the twelfth-century historian John Zonaras did not follow in their footsteps and elaborate the superstructure of history with Thucydidean ornament.

The lengthiest surviving plague scene is illustrative of this shift away from Thucydides. It describes an outbreak of bubonic plague that devastated Byzantium in 747–748 under the emperor Constantine V (741–775).⁵⁰ The original, eighth-century historical work does not survive, but five texts written by three authors preserve a version of the original: Theophanes' *Chronography*; the patriarch Nikephoros' *Short History*, the same's third *Antirrhētikos* addressed to his iconoclast opponents, and the same's refutation of the Iconoclast council of 815; and a brief excerpt from the lost so-called *Great Chronography*, of which only excerpts survive in an eleventh-century manuscript.⁵¹ Warren Treadgold has recently argued that this lost source was a continuation of the history of Trajan the Patrician. He has identified the patriarch Tarasios as the author of the source, which he contends was a classicizing history, complete with a plague scene

⁴⁸ I. Pérez Martín, *Miguel Attaliata. Historia* (Madrid 2002) 211–212; Hans Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis historiarum* (Berlin 1973) 477–478; Albert Failler, *Georges Pachymérès, Relations historiques* (Paris 1999) I 467, II 412–413.

⁴⁹ E.g., Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 9.42.1–2, 10.53; Cass. Dio 53.29; Diod. 14.71.

⁵⁰ On the plague see D. Turner, "The Politics of Despair: The Plague of 746–747 and Iconoclasm in the Byzantine Empire," *BSA* 85 (1990) 419–434.

⁵¹ C. de Boor, *Theophanis Chronographia* (Leipzig 1883) 423; C. Mango, *Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople. Short History* (Washington 1990) 138–141; *3 Antirrh.*, PG 100.496C–D; J. Featherstone, *Nicephori patriarchae constantinopolitani Refutatio et eversio definitionis synodalis anni 815* (Turnhout 1997) 23; P. Schreiner, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken I* (Vienna 1975) 45. On the *Great Chronography* (not Great Chronographer) see Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* 31–35.

and a Thucydidean reflection on stasis.⁵² For my part, I suspect that it is impossible to conclusively know who the author of this lost source was unless new evidence comes to light. The work appears to have been a classicizing history, but its Thucydidean qualities should be questioned. Let us examine the alleged Thucydidean stasis scene before turning to the plague. During the Byzantine civil war of 742–743 between Constantine V and his brother-in-law Artabasdos, the author made some kind of comment on the evils of civil war that set father against son. Both Theophanes and Nikephoros present similar versions of this reflection:

Theophanes 418	Nikephoros 134–136
<p>ὁ δὲ ἀρχέκακος διάβολος τοιαύτην κατὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἐν τοῖς χρόνοις τούτοις ἤγειρε μανίαν καὶ ἀλληλοσφαγίαν, ὥστε τέκνα κατὰ γονέων καὶ ἀδελφοὺς κατὰ ἀδελφῶν συγκινεῖσθαι ἀφειδῶς εἰς σφαγὴν, καὶ ἀνηλεῶς ἐμπυρίζειν τὰς ἀλλήλοις ὑπαρχούσας στασεις τε καὶ οἰκίας.</p>	<p>ἐντεῦθεν ἐν μεγίσταις συμφοραῖς τὰ Ῥωμαίων διέκειτο, ὅπηνίκα ἡ παρ' ἐκείνοις περὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἀμίλλα τὸν ἐμφύλιον Χριστιανοῖς ἀνερρίπισε πόλεμον. οἷα γὰρ καὶ ὅσα συμβαίνειν τοῖς τοιούτοις εἶωθε τὰ δεινότατα, ὡς καὶ τὴν φύσιν ἐαυτὴν ἐπιλανθανεσθαι καὶ καθ' ἐαυτῆς ἵστασθαι (καὶ τί γὰρ δεῖ τὰλλα λέγειν;), πολλοὺς ἂν ἐν πείρᾳ καθεστηκέναι.</p>
<p>The Devil, instigator of evil, stirred up such fury and mutual slaughter among Christians that children mercilessly killed their fathers and brothers mercilessly killed their brothers, pitilessly setting fire to their quarrels with one another and to each other's homes.</p>	<p>From this point on, the Roman empire was in extreme distress when their struggle for rule aroused a civil war among Christians. The most dreadful things, which usually happen under such circumstances, when nature forgets itself and opposes itself (what more need be said?), are known to many from experience.</p>

Treadgold has suggested that both Nikephoros and Theophanes have reworked Thucydides 3.84.2, where the historian discusses how human nature is wont to commit acts of injustice

⁵² Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* 21.

and show intemperance. Nikephoros does not visibly echo Thucydides, but the spirit of both passages is similar as well as the technique of personifying nature. However, the absence of such reflections in Theophanes, and the overtly Christian sheen of the passage, points to the fact that they might not have appeared in the original source. They may instead reflect separate interpretations of the same event by Theophanes and Nikephoros. In any case, personifications of nature and discussions of how it is wont to act are not limited to Thucydides. They appear throughout Greek literature in authors who were popular in Byzantium such as Aristotle and John Chrysostom.⁵³ Thus, as a Thucydidean parallel, this is inconclusive.

The lost source's plague narrative similarly does not offer any conclusive Thucydidean parallels. There are no ideas or vocabulary lifted from Thucydides in any of the extant adaptations. The closest parallel with Thucydides concerns the inability of the beasts of burden to carry away cartloads of dead bodies (*Brev.* 138: τῶν ὑποζυγίων αὐτοῖς μὴ ἐπαρκεῖν ἔτι δυναμένων; *3 Antirh.* 496B: καὶ ὅσους ἂν οἱ ἀχθοφοροῦντες ἐκκομίζειν ἠδύναντο). This may resemble Thucydides' statement about how doctors did not suffice to deal with the plague (47.4: οὔτε γὰρ ἰατροὶ ἦρχουν τὸ πρῶτον), but it is hard to say because plagues by their very nature force humanity to come to terms with its inability to cope with massive and sudden change. Similarly, a statement on the inability of the pack animals to carry away the dead is missing in Theophanes and the *Great Chronography*.⁵⁴ Both texts focus on the innovative construction of the carts used to remove

⁵³ Arist. *De motu an.* 744b, *Part. an.* 659a, 683a, [*Pr.*] 896b; Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 635D; John Chrysostom *Ad Theod.* 1.16 (p.176 Dumortier). This is by no means a complete listing. A TLG search for the terms φυσ- and ειωθ- will turn up further results.

⁵⁴ Theoph. 423: ἐπενοήθη διὰ ζώων σαγματουμένων ὑποτετρακανθήλους σανίδας ἐπιτίθειν, καὶ οὕτως ἐκφέρειν τοὺς νεκρούς; Schreiner, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken* I 38: καὶ τοσοῦτον πλῆθος ἐκ τοῦ τοιοῦτου νοσήματος γέγονεν ὑπὸ θάνατον ὥς τοῖς ἀλόγοις ζώοις σανίδας ἐπιστρωννυμένους ἐπιφορτίζεσθαι τοὺς νεκρούς, κοπιώντων δὲ τῶν ἡμιόνων καὶ ἀμάξας ἐπιφορτίζεσθαι καὶ οὕτω ἀπάγεσθαι.

the dead. While Nikephoros highlights the inability of Constantinopolitans to cope with the crisis, other readers of the lost source display the city's ability and craftiness. Thus, it is hard to tell what Nikephoros has supplied and what was present in the original.

In contrast, the author whose influence is patent on these three separate plague scenes is Prokopios. Nikephoros' account of the plague in his *Short History* begins with a statement that the plague nearly destroyed all of humanity (138: τὸ φθοροποιὸν ἐπεφύετο πάθος, ἅπαν ἀνθρώπων γένος ἐπινεμόμενον διώλλυέ τε καὶ ἄρδην ἐξηφάνιζε), which almost exactly paraphrases Prokopios on the outbreak of the Justinianic plague (*Wars* 2.22.1: λοιμὸς γέγονεν, ἐξ οὗ δὴ ἅπαντα ὀλίγου ἐδέησε τὰ ἀνθρώπεια ἐξίτηλα εἶναι). Similarly, Theophanes' and Nikephoros' descriptions of the plague victims' demonic visions closely follow Prokopios 2.22.10–13, where demons converse with victims and appear to strike at individuals.⁵⁵ Judging from Nikephoros' *Antirrhetikos*, the lost source may have even further dramatized Prokopios' demons in emulation with his model. In Prokopios, demons predict to plague victims that they will number among the dead (2.22.13: ἢ λόγου ἀκούειν προλέγοντος σφίσιν ὅτι δὴ ἐς τῶν τεθνηξομένων τὸν ἀριθμὸν ἀνάγραπτοι εἶεν), whereas Nikephoros' demons have chillingly been transformed into seers of death. They foretell to plague victims the number of those who will die (3 *Antirrh.* 416D: ἀριθμὸς τῶν ὅσον οὕτω τεθνηξομένων ἐξηκούετο). Broadly speaking, the lost source's description of overflowing corpses and the difficulties that people faced in finding places to bury them is very much Prokopian. Prokopios describes at length how people dug mass graves in fields near the city and even filled up towers on the city walls with corpses, since the existing cemeteries lacked space for the dead (2.23.6–11). The lost source has changed the specifics of what overflow burial-sites were used (empty cisterns, gardens, and groves), but his Prokopian model is evident, as information on burial sites is not found in Thucydides. Even though he describes the roads of

⁵⁵ Theoph. 423; Nikeph. 138.

Athens choked with bodies of the dead and haphazard burials, Thucydides says nothing specific about how Athens disposed of the bodies.

It is hard to know how much Nikephoros, Theophanes, and the *Great Chronography* distort the original lost source. Was more Prokopian material in the original? Was Nikephoros' reworking of Prokopios 2.22.13 on the number of those who would die, in his third *Antirrhetikos*, present in the original, inasmuch as it is absent in both his history and Theophanes?⁵⁶ We can never know for certain unless the original source is rediscovered. But if Nikephoros did elaborate upon the lost source, as he most certainly did, then this choice is telling of the times. When Nikephoros read the lost source, his mind went to Prokopios, rather than to Thucydides, to embellish his narrative. Up until the seventh century, Thucydides was the gold standard for plague, but Nikephoros and the lost source turned to Prokopios instead. Thus, whether one believes that all the parallels I have cited between Prokopios and the original source were present in the original, or not, by the latter half of the eighth century Prokopios had clearly replaced Thucydides as a model for the most commonly imitated Thucydidean scene in the Greek historical tradition.

Another popular Thucydidean scene was the siege of Plataea (2.75–78), which was studied as a model *ekphrasis* in rhetorical schools.⁵⁷ Historians from Caesar and Appian to Prokopios and Agathias had imitated it.⁵⁸ Like the plague, it was a go-to text for a historian looking for a clear template of how to effectively describe a siege.⁵⁹ But in Middle Byzantium, it fell into disuse in

⁵⁶ Similarly, Nikephoros uses Prokopios' expression for the onset of buboes in his *Refutation* 23: βουβῶν ἐπῆρτο, καὶ θάνατος αὐτίκα παρήκτο. Cf. Prokopios 2.22.17: ἑτέροις δὲ οὐ πολλὰ ὕστερον βουβῶν ἐπῆρτο.

⁵⁷ Theon *Prog.* 12 (ed. Patillon); Aphth. *Prog.* 23.

⁵⁸ Caes. *BGall.* 7.22; App. *Hann.* 66–67; Arr. *Anab.* 2.18–21; Dexippos *Gothic Wars* fr.27 (ed. Martin); Priskos *History* fr.1b (Blockley 6.2); Prokopios *Wars* 2.26.9, 5.21.7–8; Agath. 3.5.10.

⁵⁹ On this siege in imitations see T. Mészáros, “Variations on a Theme:

favor of other models. Leo the Deacon's *History* is particularly illustrative. It covers the years 959 to 976, describing the victorious wars of the emperors Nikephoros Phokas (963–969) and John Tzimiskes (969–976). Writing in the tradition of Byzantine classicizing historians, Leo recounts the reconquest of Crete, Cilicia, Syria, and the Balkans. His work lacks a full scholarly study, but the translators of his *History* note that his chief models included Prokopios and Agathias; he may also have used Thucydides.⁶⁰ But on close examination, his use of Thucydides is probably illusory. The only Thucydidean citation suggested in the text's *index locorum* is the phrase *συμφοραῖς ἀνηκέστοις*.⁶¹ A TLG search reveals that the phrase was relatively common in Greek prose, appearing in Attic orators, ancient historians, the Septuagint, the Church Fathers, and even Agathias himself (2.1.11). Thus, it seems more likely that Leo picked the phrase up from either Agathias or his general reading. On an imitative level, Leo's history also demonstrates the shift away from the Thucydidean model. For example, his preface, an area where late antique imitators frequently drew upon Thucydides, is largely modeled on Agathias and in part on Prokopios.⁶²

Leo also stays away from the Thucydidean model of a siege. In Book 2 he describes the Byzantine siege of Chandax (Heraklion) in 960–961, the capital of the Arab emirate of Crete. This momentous siege, which ended in the reconquest of Crete, was understandably chosen for rhetorical elaboration and *ekphrasis* by Leo. But the model to which he turned was again Agathias and not Thucydides, even though the siege of Chandax could have provided a Thucydidean imitator with ample opportunities for elaboration. For example, Leo briefly pauses to describe a battering ram employed by the Byzantines to strike the walls of the city (2.7, p.25):

From Thucydides to Procopius," *AAntHung* 52 (2012) 225–234.

⁶⁰ A.-M. Talbot and D. Sullivan, *The History of Leo the Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century* (Washington 2005) 23.

⁶¹ Leo the Deacon *History* 10.3 (p.164), cf. Thuc. 5.111.3.

⁶² Talbot and Sullivan, *Leo the Deacon* 10. For Prokopios see Leo 1.1 (p.5), cf. Prokopios *Wars* 1.1.14.

κριὸν Ῥωμαῖοι τὸ τεχνούργημα ὀνομάζουσι, τῷ δίκην κριοῦ προτομῆς τὸν σίδηρον ἀπεικάζεσθαι, ὃς ἐνηρμοσμένος ὦν τῇ δοκῷ παῖει τὸν δόμον τοῦ ἄστεος

The Romans call this device a ram because the iron that is attached to the beam and strikes the walls of city resembles the head of a ram.

As battering rams were often covered with animal hides to prevent defenders from raining flaming arrows down upon the men driving the siege engine, a Thucydidean historian could easily have incorporated Thucydides (2.75.5) on the furs and hides that covered the Plataeans' extended wall. The fifth-century historian Priskos did just this when describing the Huns' battering ram at the siege of Naissos in A.D. 443.⁶³ But Plataea also could have offered other parallels to Leo. A part of the siege of Chandax included efforts to undermine the fortifications of the city by digging tunnels beneath them and then setting them on fire to destabilize the city's towers. If Leo had thought Thucydides worthy of imitation, he might have modeled the undermining of the city on the Plataeans' removal of earth from the Spartan embankment and even the Spartans' attempts to set fire to Plataea. Instead, Leo turned to Agathias' description of mining operations at Cumae in Italy during 552–553, adapting whole lines of it.⁶⁴

4. *Why did Thucydides fall out of favor?*

The answer to this questions points to long-term trends beginning in antiquity, which reached fruition in Byzantium. The first and foremost reason was his style. Long known for being obscure and deliberately *recherché*, Thucydides had since antiquity been caught in the crossfires of a debate among rhetoricians over the place of obscurity in rhetoric. Many ancient rhetoricians thought obscurity should be avoided at all costs. Rhetors such as Aphthonios taught their students from the very beginning of their rhetorical training that any narrative should

⁶³ Priskos *History* fr.1b (Blockley 6.2).

⁶⁴ Leo 2.7 (pp.25–26), cf. Agath. 1.10.

be clear, brief, and probable.⁶⁵ However, there were some who saw the value of a studiously recondite style, which only the learned reader could understand. For example, Hermogenes, who became the ultimate arbiter of style for Byzantines, allowed for some deliberate obscurity within his stylistic system (*Id.* 240–241). Thus, the stakes were set for a longstanding clash in Byzantium between Aphthonios and Hermogenes, as Byzantines tried to reconcile the two approaches to narrative style. Authors such as Photios and John Tzetzes lambasted Thucydides for his lack of clarity. For example, Tzetzes reprimanded Thucydides, stating that history should be “clear with dignity, persuasive, sweet as well as vigorous.”⁶⁶ His conception of the proper historical style is clearly inspired by the precepts of Aphthonios. However, others believed that deliberate obscurity had a place, such as the fourteenth-century scholar Theodore Metochites, who defended his own deliberately obscure style with reference to Thucydides.⁶⁷

Just as in antiquity, Thucydides’ style remained controversial in Byzantium. But what changed in Byzantium was the entrenchment of Hermogenes’ *On Types of Style* as the ultimate arbiter of matters of style. Late antique commentators on this treatise had been happy to abandon Hermogenes’ system when it suited them, but the Byzantines generally stuck close.⁶⁸ Thus, Hermogenes’ views on Thucydides’ style would have been taken far more seriously in Byzantium than they were in antiquity.

⁶⁵ R. Nicolai, *La storiografia nell’educazione antica* (Pisa 1992) 124–138; R. Meijering, *Literary and Rhetorical Theories in Greek Scholia* (Groningen 1987) 75; K. Barwick, “Die Gliederung der Narratio in der rhetorischen Theorie und ihre Bedeutung für die Geschichte des antiken Romans,” *Hermes* 63 (1928) 261–287.

⁶⁶ Luzzatto, *Tzetzes lettore* 35, 138.

⁶⁷ I. Ševčenko, *Études sur la polémique entre Théodore Métrochite et Nicéphore Choumnos* (Brussels 1962) 207–211.

⁶⁸ For example, the fifth-century rhetorician Syrianos abandoned Hermogenes’ system midway through his commentary on the text: Rabe, *Syriani* 175.

And in his opinion, Thucydides was a failed stylist. Even though Hermogenes recognized deliberate obscurity as an important tool for the master stylist, he did not think Thucydides exhibited such a style. In his review of Thucydides' style, he notes:⁶⁹

Thucydides aims especially at Grandeur and he achieves it. But in my view he does not attain the Grandeur he aimed at. In my opinion, he wants his style to be solemn, which is typical of the kind of the Grandeur one finds in panegyric. However, he goes too far, especially in his diction and word order, and tends toward a rough and austere style, which is consequently unclear. He is very careful with his artistic adornment and wants his style to be elevated and very weighty. But again here he goes beyond all bounds in his use of hyperbole and novel kinds of word order, and this too tends to make his style rough and, consequently, unclear.

From his review, it is clear that Hermogenes believed that Thucydides had tried to achieve certain stylistic effects such as solemnity, but ultimately fell short, producing a rough and obscure style. In a word, Thucydides was an ineffective stylist who unintentionally rendered his text obscure. One suspects that after reading their expert's opinion of Thucydides, many Byzantines, including those who might otherwise have valued obscurity, steered clear of him. Who would have wanted to read and imitate the obscure historian when other, more successful stylists existed?

And who were these models? Roman-era models, in most cases. As Christian Romans, the people whom we call the Byzantines took an interest primarily in what they considered their own national past, and not that of the ancient Greeks. Byzantine historians of the world since creation, such as John Malalas, George Synkellos, George the Monk, John Zonaras, and Constantine Manasses focus primarily on the Roman and biblical past. As Roger Scott and Elizabeth Jeffreys have indicated, Hellenic history was of little interest to these writers, who

⁶⁹ Hermog. *Id.* 409–410. My translation is heavily indebted to C. Wooten, *Hermogenes. On Types of Style* (Chapel Hill 1987) 128.

usually omit all mention of what we would call classical history.⁷⁰ Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos did include Thucydides in his collection of historical excerpts of historians from Herodotus to John of Antioch, but this project which organized excerpts from historians around set themes such as embassies was primarily interested in discovering general themes across history rather than exploring one particular period of history for its own sake.⁷¹ Byzantine interest in classical Greece rebounded in the late Byzantine era. For example, George Gemistos Plethon (d. ca. 1450) compiled a history of Hellenic affairs from Mantinea to the death of Philip II in 336 B.C. We also have evidence of an aborted attempt to write a Herodotean history of Persia in the fourteenth century.⁷² Thucydides would also reenter rhetorical schools and by extension Byzantine literary culture. George Pachymeres and Nikephoros Gregoras would devote declamations to themes from the Peloponnesian War, and Gregoras would even attempt to rewrite Thucydides on the Plataean debate (3.52–68).⁷³ Additionally, Thucydides became fundamental to historical writing once more and was a principal model for John Kantakouzenos, Laonikos Chalkokondyles, and Kritoboulos.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ E. Jeffreys, “The Attitudes of Byzantine Chroniclers toward Ancient History,” *Byzantion* 49 (1979) 199–238; Roger Scott, “Malalas and his Contemporaries,” in E. Jeffreys et al. (eds.), *Studies in John Malalas* (Sydney 1990) 67–86.

⁷¹ A. Nemeth, “The Imperial Systematisation of the Past in Constantinople: Constantine VII and his Historical Excerpts,” in Jason König and Greg Woolf (eds.), *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Cambridge 2013) 232–258.

⁷² E. Valdo Maltese, *Georgii Gemisti Plethonis, Opuscula de historia Graeca* (Trento 1987); G. Fatouros, *Die Briefe des Michael Gabras II* (Vienna 1973) 38.

⁷³ J. F. Boissonade, *G. Pachymerae Declamationes XIII quarum XII ineditae; Hieroclis et Philagrii grammaticorum Philogelōs* (Paris 1848) 1–19; P. L. Leone, “Nicephori Gregorae opuscula nunc primum edita,” *AFLM* 3–4 (1970) 751–766.

⁷⁴ H. Hunger, “Thukydides bei Johannes Kantakuzenos: Beobachtungen zur Mimesis,” *JÖB* 25 (1976) 181–193; T. S. Miller, “The Plague in John VI Cantacuzenus and Thucydides,” *GRBS* 17 (1976) 385–395; A. Kaldellis, *A*

However, in Middle Byzantium, Thucydides fell out of favor. His story was not a Roman or a Christian story, and thus his value was primarily stylistic. But even then, Byzantines were happy to replace him with clearer, Roman-period authors. For instance, the twelfth/thirteenth-century treatise *On the Four Parts of the Perfect Speech* recommends reading the historians Plutarch, Josephus, Philostratus, Psellos, and Prokopios.⁷⁵ Whereas in late antiquity Thucydides was often cited as the go-to model of the elevated and solemn style of rhetoric,⁷⁶ this treatise recommends Philo as an example of the solemn style and awards first prize for the ‘historical’ style (συγγραφικὸς χαρακτήρ) to Josephus and Heliodorus.⁷⁷ Thucydides, once so prominent on ancient reading lists, is nowhere to be found.

Finally, Thucydides may have been considered politically inappropriate. John Sikeliotēs’ comments on replacing Demosthenes with Gregory of Nazianzos may offer some insight into Thucydides’ decline. If Gregory was a better model because he was a Christian and wrote under a monarchy, perhaps some Byzantines concluded that Thucydides, whose text is thoroughly shaped by Athenian democracy, was not an appropriate model. After all, they had Roman models that aligned with the modes of monarchical rule. One could learn how to address the emperor, the Roman senate, or the army from Roman authors without needing to learn about bygone Hellenic institutions.

Thus, Thucydides, through some combination of these factors, lost his place in the Atticizing culture of Byzantium. While authors popular in late antiquity like Demosthenes and Aelius

New Herodotos: Laonikos Chalkokondyles on the Ottoman Empire, the Fall of Byzantium, and the Emergence of the West (Washington 2014) ch. 2; Reinsch, in *Brill’s Companion* 755–778.

⁷⁵ W. Hörandner, “Pseudo-Gregorios Korinthios, ‘Über die Vier Teile der perfekten Rede’,” *MEG* 12 (2012) 105–106.

⁷⁶ [Aristid.] *Rhet.* 1.1.3.5; Isid. *Pel. Ep.* 1697; [Bas.] *V.Thecl.* 2.proem.

⁷⁷ Hörandner, *MEG* 12 (2012) 105.

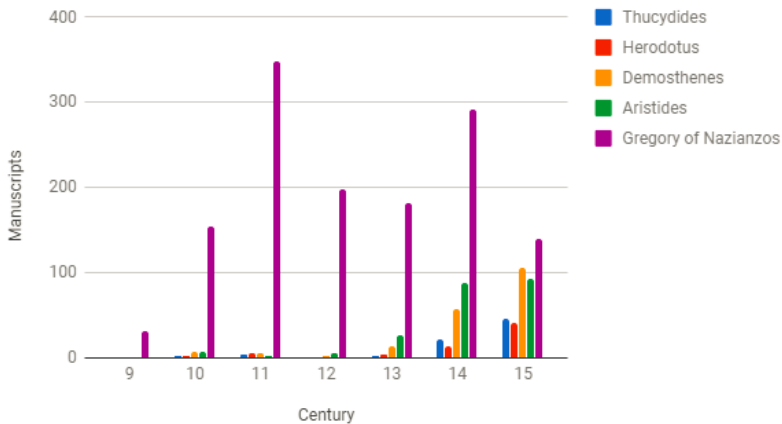
Aristides remained just as popular as ever, Thucydides' readership dwindled.⁷⁸ Manuscripts of Thucydides bear out this change. Taken on their own, manuscripts are difficult to use as evidence for the popularity of an author. Time and the accidents of survival play an important role in what we can know. But when taken together with the evidence of Thucydides' decline in the culture at large, they can offer yet another window on his changing reception. From the ninth to thirteenth centuries, there are a total of 10 surviving manuscripts or fragments of now lost manuscripts of Thucydides.⁷⁹ While this number might seem respectable, it is helpful to put it in context. By contrast, there are 13 manuscripts of Herodotus, 29 of Demosthenes, 40 of Aelius Aristides, and 912 of Gregory of Nazianzos' *Orationes* from this period. Thus, Herodotus was about as popular as Thucydides, while Demosthenes was three times as popular, Aristides four, and Gregory of Nazianzos ninety-one times. In the final two centuries of Byzantium, however, Thucydides closed the gap somewhat. From the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there are 68 manuscripts of Thucydides, 55 of Herodotus, 162 of Demosthenes, 181 of Aristides, and 431 of Gregory of Nazianzos. Thus, Herodotus was about 20% less popular than Thucydides, while Demosthenes was 2.4 times more popular than Thucydides, Aristides 2.7, and Gregory of Nazianzos 6.3.⁸⁰ The numbers of manuscripts per century are summarized in *Figure 1*:

⁷⁸ On Demosthenes in Byzantium see L. Pernot, *L'ombre du tigre: recherches sur la réception de Démosthène* (Naples 2006) 97–108. For Aristides see L. Quatrocioni, "Aelius Aristides' Reception at Byzantium: The Case of Arethas," in W. Harris and B. Holmes (eds.), *Aelius Aristides between Greece, Rome, and the Gods* (Leiden 2008) 279–294. Both authors' reception in Byzantium has yet to be fully examined.

⁷⁹ See G. B. Alberti, *Thucydidis Historiae* I (Rome 1972) ix–xxxix.

⁸⁰ The data for these calculations derives from the Pinakes website (<http://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/>). While not a perfect database of manuscripts, it usually indicates most of the surviving manuscripts of an author.

Figure 1: Manuscripts of an Author per Century



It is perhaps significant that during the Middle Byzantine phase of Thucydides' reception, some Byzantines began adding the following poem to their manuscripts of Thucydides (*Anth. Gr.* 9.853):

Friend, if you are wise, take me in hand. But if you are completely ignorant of the Muses, throw away what you do not understand.
I am not accessible to everyone, though a few have admired
Thucydides, the son of Oloros, a Kekropid by birth.

With this invitation to esotericism, Byzantines warned potential readers what kind of text lay ahead and who its proper audience was.

5. Conclusion

Thucydides' decline in Byzantium deserves consideration among Byzantinists, as his name often looms large in modern discussions of Byzantine historical writing and rightly so for the early and later periods. In Late Byzantium, as we saw, Thucydides would make a comeback. But our view needs to be more nuanced for the middle period. Thucydides' decline as an educational text and historiographical model suggests that we need to stop assuming that he was very important during this period. For example, some scholars have said that John Kinnamos'

history of the Komnenian emperors John II and Manuel I was Thucydidean. It is a military history complete with set speeches and letters just like the Athenian historian. But close study of Kinnamos' models reveals that Prokopios, who heavily modeled his history after Thucydides, was Kinnamos' principal model, rather than Thucydides himself.⁸¹ Thus, Kinnamos may look Thucydidean, but he is in fact Prokopian. It was the children of Thucydides whom Middle Byzantine historians emulated rather than their father.

More broadly speaking, the decline of Thucydides in Byzantium is an important chapter in the history of classical reception. Characterized by two peaks in the early and late periods that were separated by a five-century-long trough in the middle period, his reception in Byzantium illustrates how each generation of readers reshapes and reinvents the classics for itself. As Byzantium was the bottleneck through which most classical Greek literature had to pass to reach us, it also gives us a new appreciation for why we have what we have.⁸² How different the classical Greek canon might be today, had the Byzantines made different choices and decided to completely eradicate Thucydides from the rhetorical curriculum, as they did the comic poet Menander after the sixth century.⁸³ Perhaps, modern scholars would not be writing monographs on the reception of Thucydides and his seminal influence on Western thought, but reconstructing his thought from fragments in Brill's *Neue Jacoby*. This is counterfactual speculation, but nevertheless the reception

⁸¹ Brand, *Deeds* 7; Neumann, *Griechische Geschichtschreiber* 85–88; Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* 415. Kinnamos' debt to Prokopian battle scenes is signaled by Grotowski, *Arms and Armour* 48 n.125; Whately, *Battles and Generals* 163 n.3. However, the full influence of Prokopios on Kinnamos has not yet been fully studied.

⁸² A. Kaldellis, "The Byzantine Role in the Making of the Corpus of Classical Greek Historiography: A Preliminary Investigation," *JHS* 132 (2012) 71–85.

⁸³ S. Nervegna, *Menander in Antiquity: The Contexts of Reception* (Cambridge 2013) 252–260.

of Thucydides in Middle Byzantium should give us a healthy appreciation for those Byzantine scholars who read and preserved him until his late Byzantine revival reinfused him into the fabric of Western education.⁸⁴

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Bilkent University
Ankara, Turkey
scottkennedy@bilkent.edu.tr

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