

EXPLAINING THE END OF AN EMPIRE:
THE USE OF ANCIENT GREEK
RELIGIOUS VIEWS IN LATE
BYZANTINE HISTORIOGRAPHY*

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Abstract. This article studies the reception of the religious views of Herodotus and Thucydides in the works of the late-Byzantine historiographers Kritoboulos and Laonikos Chalkokondyles. Both reflect upon the great changes that took place during their lives, most notably the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans under their Sultan Mehmed II in 1453. In their evaluations of these events, they—unlike their contemporaries—avoided Christian doctrine and preferred explanatory models that found their origins in Herodotus and Thucydides and that favoured ‘fortune’ (τύχη) as the primary force in historical causation. In their narratives, they adopted caution (Herodotus) and discretion (Thucydides) on matters of religious doctrine and chose to ascribe more explicit views, for instance about divine retribution, to their characters. Their use of classical models can be considered to result from attempts to ‘anchor’ an innovative approach towards the past within contemporary intellectual debate.

Keywords: Herodotus, Thucydides, Kritoboulos, Laonikos Chalkokondyles, Religion, Fall of Constantinople, Anchoring Innovation

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1. Introduction

The Byzantines possessed a strong tradition of historiography whose representatives used classical Greek historians like Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, and their Hellenistic successors like Polybius and Arrian as templates.¹ In this article I will focus upon the last pair of these classicising historians, Kritoboulos (ca. 1410–1470) and Laonikos Chalkokondyles (ca. 1423–1465?), and attempt to assess their explanatory models against the backdrop of the historiographical tradition as it was shaped by Herodotus and Thucydides some nineteen centuries earlier.²

Kritoboulos and Laonikos were active when Constantinople fell into Ottoman hands in 1453. Kritoboulos was a local ruler on the island of Imbros, and was responsible for its peaceful transition to Ottoman rule after the fall of Constantinople. He structured his *Histories* around this watershed in history and dedicated his work to Sultan Mehmed II (Mehmed henceforth), whom he made his protagonist, and whose political and military intuition he praises. In portraying the Sultan, Kritoboulos alludes to Thucydides, for instance by ascribing a harangue to Mehmed (Krit. 1.14–16) that echoes his predecessor's version of Pericles' funeral oration (Thuc. 2.35–46).³ The

¹ For the length and strength of the historiographical tradition see Bury et al. (1966–7) 4–5: 'The continuity which links the fifteenth century AD with the fifth BC is notably expressed in the long series of Greek historians, who maintained, it may be said, a continuous tradition of historiography. From Critobulus, the imitator of Thucydides, and Chalcocondyles, who told the story of the last days of the Empire, we can go back, in a line broken only by a dark interval in the seventh and eighth centuries, to the first great masters, Thucydides and Herodotus'. Important studies on the reception of ancient Greek historiography in the Byzantine era are Moravcsik (1966), Scott (1981), and Reinsch (2006).

² The *terminus ante quem* for Laonikos' *Demonstrations* used to be placed around 1490, but is now believed to be earlier, ca. 1463. For discussion and arguments, see Wurm and Gamillscheg (1992) and Kaldellis (2012a), Akışık (2013) 4, Kaldellis (2014) 1–22.

³ Reinsch (2003) 303, (2006) 765.

autograph and only copy of the *Histories* was gifted to the Sultan and remained in Istanbul's Topkapı palace, only to be rediscovered by Tischendorf in 1859.⁴ Laonikos Chalkokondyles (Laonikos henceforth) was born in Athens but had to leave when his father fell out with its local Florentine rulers, the Acciaiuoli. His family moved to the Byzantine Despotate of the Morea and lived on in Mistras, where Laonikos became a student of the neo-Platonist philosopher Gemistos Plethon.⁵ Laonikos' work, the *Demonstrations of Histories* (*Apodeixeis Historiōn*), has a much broader scope than Kritoboulos' *Histories*, which focuses mainly upon the fall of Constantinople and its immediate aftermath. The *Demonstrations* are structured around the rise of Ottoman power in Asia and Europe, but they are presented as a universal history. The work includes digressions upon states and tribes that became involved in, or were affected by, the developments in Eastern Europe and Asia Minor. Laonikos owes this structure to Herodotus' *Histories*, which takes the rise of Persian power as its overarching narrative strand and digresses upon peoples and tribes that live in the areas that fall under or are threatened by the Achaemenid Empire. His indebtedness is also reflected in the title of his *Demonstrations*, *Apodeixeis Historiōn*, the plural of Herodotus' definition of his project as *historiēs apodexis* ('a demonstration of a quest for knowledge',

⁴ For Kritoboulos' biography see Raby (1938), Emrich (1975) and Reinsch (2003). His work has been edited by Greco (1963) and Reinsch (1983). The latter is used in this article. Reinsch has also translated the *Histories* within the *Byzantinische Geschichtsschreiber* series (1986). Less satisfying is the English translation of Riggs (1954), which contains omissions (of, e.g., subtitles) and errors in translation. A striking example is the translation of Kritoboulos' plundering 'Jews' (Ἰουδαῖοι, Krit. 1.62.2) with 'the most wicked men'. Why not lay bare Kritoboulos' antisemitism, typical of this era?

⁵ It was in Mistras that Laonikos was met by Cyriacus of Ancona, who visited the place in 1447. Direct evidence about his further life is lacking. For more extensive discussions of his biography see Miller (1922), Darkó (1923–4), (1927a), Wifstrand (1972), Hunger (1978), Wurm and Gamillscheg (1992), Nicoloudis (1996), Kaldellis (2012a), Akışık (2013) 4–21, and Kaldellis (2014) 1–22.

Hdt., *proem*). Laonikos indicates contemporary peoples by their classical Greek names and speaks of the Byzantines as Ἕλληνες instead of Ῥωμαῖοι.⁶ Like Herodotus he stages stories within the courts of monarchs, and occasionally uses autopsy claims to create an impression of historiographical authority (see below, n. 18). In contrast to Kritoboulos' *Histories* Laonikos' *Demonstrations* became widely known in Europe. It survives in dozens of manuscripts and was translated in Latin and French already in the sixteenth century.⁷

Both Kritoboulos and Laonikos reflected—like so many others—upon the great changes that took place during their lives. The end of the Byzantine Empire is nowadays analysed as the inevitable result of the relatively unchecked growth of Ottoman power in the East, and the fragmentation of the Byzantine Empire into smaller principalities and despotates in the course of the 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries.⁸ Contemporaries, however, struggled to give the events a place within their worldview. How could it be that a devoutly Christian city like Constantinople had fallen into the hands of the infidel? How could this be made compatible with the presupposed benevolence of the god of the Christians?

Some framed their responses in typically Christian terms and saw Ottoman victory as punishment for the sins of the

⁶ See Ditten (1963–4), Kaldellis (2012b) and (2014) 63–5 for his use of classical Greek names for contemporary peoples and (2014) 177–88 for the question of whom exactly Laonikos indicates as 'Romans'.

⁷ Darkó is responsible for the standard edition of Laonikos' *Demonstrations* (1927b). In this article I follow the section division in the new translation of Kaldellis (2014). Parts of his work have earlier been translated by von Ivánka (1954) and Nicoloudis (1996). Obscurities in Laonikos' Greek suggest a problematic manuscript tradition (Wurm (1995)) or the lack of a final round of revision by the author (Kaldellis (2014) 18–22). For aspects of Herodotus' reception by Laonikos see Aerts (2003) and Kaldellis (2014) 38–45, and for the reception of the *Demonstrations* in the Renaissance see Kaldellis (2014) 237–42.

⁸ For the fragmentation see a.o. Reinert (2002). For recent historical studies of the fall of Constantinople see Harris (2010) and Philippides and Hanak (2011).

Byzantines. Such is the view of the chronicler Doukas (1400–1462), who blames the Byzantines for their reluctance to support the unification of the western and eastern churches when threatened by growing Ottoman power. He reasons from an explanatory framework based on Christian belief in divine retribution, considering for instance the fall of Thessalonike to the Ottomans (1430) a punishment for Byzantine sins (Doukas, *Hist.* 29.5):

καὶ τὰ πάντα κακά, τί καὶ πῶς καὶ διὰ τί; διὰ τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν. Ἐν μιᾷ οὖν ἡμέρᾳ κενωθεῖσα ἡ τοσαύτη πόλις ἔμεινεν ἔρημος.

And all this evil, what, how and why? Because of our sins. In one single day such a great city was emptied and left stripped of its possessions.⁹

Gennadios Scholarios (1400–1472), appointed as patriarch in Constantinople after the fall, reasoned along similar lines, but added an eschatological viewpoint in considering the demise of the Byzantine Empire an indication of the approaching end of time and Day of Judgement.¹⁰

Others couched their responses in terms that were derived from classical antiquity. Soon after the fall of Constantinople anecdotes emerged in Italy in which the brutality of the Ottoman invaders was highlighted. Their crimes echoed those ascribed to the Greeks upon the capture of Troy. The Sultan, for instance, was said to have raped the defenceless children of the late emperor Constantine Palaeologus on the altar in the Hagia Sophia, a story inspired by the heinous crimes of the Greeks in Troy,

⁹ For other contemporary sources that hold similar views or express their agony by referring to god, see Papayianni (2010). For the idea of divine retribution in the case of the fall of Constantinople to the crusaders in 1204 see Zali's discussion of Choniates' *History* in this volume, above, pp. 111–17.

¹⁰ For more thorough discussions and overviews of Christian responses to the fall see Turner (1964) 356–72, Harris (2003) 153–4, and Moustakas (2011) 215–6, with references to further scholarship.

such as the rape of Cassandra by the lesser Ajax, the sacrifice of Polyxena at the request of Achilles, and the killing of Priam at the altar in his palace by Neoptolemus. Such rumours were invented and propagated by Greeks in the Latin West with an eye to encouraging the political and ecclesiastical elite to launch a crusade against the Ottomans.¹¹ Mehmed himself, meanwhile, may unwittingly have contributed to such traditions by framing the Ottomans (Turci) as avengers of their almost-namesake Trojans (Teucrici), for instance by his visit to the historical site of Troy, at that time already a *lieu de mémoire*.¹²

Kritoboulos and Laonikos, however, stand out among their contemporaries in evaluating Ottoman victory in neutral terms. They are exceptional, too, in their degree of engagement with models from the ancient Greek historiographical tradition, and in particular with Herodotus and Thucydides, whose stylistic traits and thematic concerns they imitate, and, as I will argue below, whose authorial methods and explanatory schemes they appear to have studied closely in reflecting upon contemporary events.¹³ Typically, Laonikos refuses to

¹¹ See Philippides and Hanak (2011) 193–214 for an overview of the sources and a discussion of the tales that flared up after the fall of Constantinople (and their ancient models).

¹² The visit is mentioned by Kritoboulos (4.11.5–6), according to whom Mehmed said, ‘God appointed me as avenger of this city and its inhabitants after so many cycles of years’ (ἐμὲ τῆς πόλεως ταύτης καὶ τῶν αὐτῆς οἰκητόρων ἐν τοσοῦτοις περιόδου ἐτῶν ἐκδικητὴν ἐταμειύετο ὁ θεός). Within Kritoboulos’ work the anecdote fits into a pattern in which Mehmed copies the behaviour of other conquerors like Xerxes, of whom Herodotus tells that he visited Troy when he campaigned against Greece (7.43), and Alexander the Great, whose visit to Troy is mentioned by Arrian in his *Anabasis* (1.12). That Troy was actually visited as a historical site in the 15th century is confirmed by Cyriacus of Ancona, the tutor of young Mehmed, who claims in his *Commentarii* to have visited the site on 28th October 1448 and to have seen numerous monuments and inscriptions.

¹³ On Thucydides as main model for Kritoboulos, see Reinsch (2003) 303 and Harris (2003) 154. For Laonikos, see Kaldellis (2014) x: ‘His *Histories* is ... modeled structurally and in its digressions on Herodotus, but stylistically on Thucydides’.

commit himself to the view that Constantinople fell as retribution for Troy (Laon. 8.30; see below), but his own ideas remain difficult to gauge and have led to controversy in scholarship. In Kritoboulos' case, the debate is further complicated by his presumed Ottoman bias. Below, I will discuss the religious views that can be discerned in both authors' evaluations of the end of the Byzantine Empire against the backdrop of the earliest representatives of the ancient Greek historiographical tradition. I will argue that, in terms of religious outlook, Kritoboulos and Laonikos each in his own way followed these ancient models more closely than often assumed. Finally, I will assess their use of ancient metanarrative concepts in explaining the course of history as attempts at 'anchoring innovation', and argue that in their attempt to shed a novel—and possibly dissident—light upon the events of their time, they deliberately used presentational methods that had throughout the ages proven to be popular and powerful tools to resist religious doctrine.

2. Definitions, Methods, and Caveats

Before attempting to compare Kritoboulos and Laonikos with their illustrious predecessors, some observations need to be made on definitions and methods. To begin with the latter, it is worth asking how best to make a comparison between two pairs of historians that stand almost two millennia apart and what to do with the intervening historiographical tradition. Though it is not my intention to ignore the developments in this tradition, my focus will be on its beginning and the end, which necessitates explaining why I believe this approach will yield valuable results.

First, the direct influence of Herodotus and Thucydides upon the works of Kritoboulos and Laonikos by far exceeds that of other authors. This is evidenced not only by numerous verbal and thematic parallels,¹⁴ but also by such

¹⁴ For Laonikos and Herodotus and Thucydides, see the valuable discussion in Kaldellis (2014) 23–48, and the appendix, 253–8. For

subtleties as their use of the Ionic inflexion of Ottoman proper names or the Atticising use of ξυν(-) instead of συν(-),¹⁵ the structure of their proems,¹⁶ and the voicing of similar methodological statements. Both historians take an empirical approach towards their material, which they phrase in terms derived from their distant predecessors, for instance by juxtaposing autopsy (ὄψις) and the use of informants (ἀκοή)¹⁷ or stressing their ambition to report the

verbal parallels between Kritoboulos, Laonikos and Thucydides, see Rödel (1905) 12–34.

¹⁵ Observe the use of the genitive ending in -εω in the case of proper names of the first declension., e.g. Krit. 1.4.3: Μωράτεω; Laon. 1.58: Ἀμουράτεω. Cf. Reinsch (2003) 305. I thank Anthony Ellis for pointing out to me the Atticising use of ξυν(-).

¹⁶ They describe their historiographical activities in Thucydidean terms as ξυγγράφειν ('compose') and paraphrase Herodotus' programmatic statement that 'great and marvellous events' (ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θαυμαστά) should remain known to later generations. Kritoboulos replaces Herodotus' ἐξίτηλα ('extinct') with the synonymous word ἀνήκουστα ('unheard of'), and Laonikos recycles Herodotus' litotes (μηδὲν ... ἀκλεῶς ≈ μήτε ... ἀκλεᾶ, 'not(hing) ... without fame').

¹⁷ In Laonikos' proem (Laon. 1.1) τῶν ... ἐς ἐπὶ θεῶν τε καὶ ἀκοὴν ἀφιγμένων echoes Hdt. 2.29.1 and 2.99.1, where the historian juxtaposes autopsy and the testimonies of others as the sources upon which his account relies. The precedence of autopsy above informants is implied in the typically Herodotean *formulae* that modify superlative expressions, such as Ἀσσυρίους μὲν τὸ παλαιότατον ἐπυθόμεθα ἀκοὴ ἐπὶ τὸ μνήμης μακρότατον ἀφικόμενοι ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς Ἀσίας ἀρχὴν προεληλυθέναι (Laon. 1.4 'From inquiries that went back as far into the past as memory goes I have gathered that the Assyrians were the oldest people that rose to power in Asia') and στρατόπεδον κάλλιστα πάντων δὴ στρατοπέδων, ὧν ἡμεῖς ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ ἀκοὴ ἐπυθόμεθα (Laon. 7.22: 'a camp most beautiful of all camps that we have witnessed and been informed about'). Meanwhile Laonikos' οἷς τε αὐτὸς παρεγενόμεν at the end of his proem (Laon. 1.2) echoes Thucydides' formulation of the same principle in his methodological chapter (οἷς τε αὐτὸς παρήν, 1.22.2). In Kritoboulos' case observe his comment upon Mehmed's lifting of ships from the Sea of Marmara into the Golden Horn as an event 'rather incredible for one to see and to hear about' (Krit. 1.42.7, παραδοξότερον καὶ ἰδεῖν καὶ ἀκοῦσαι).

events with accuracy (*ἀκρίβεια*).¹⁸ The quantity of similar formulations is such that it proves that Kritoboulos and Laonikos were deeply engaged with Herodotus and Thucydides, and although there are various later historians whose influence has been assumed, none of them has made such an impact upon the style and phrasing of Kritoboulos and Laonikos as Herodotus and Thucydides did.¹⁹

A second argument is that Herodotus and Thucydides decisively shaped the Greek historiographical tradition in antiquity, and thereby not only directly but also *indirectly* influenced their late-Byzantine successors. This argument is relevant when we look at indebtedness in explanatory models and other metanarrative aspects that go beyond the level of style and phrasing. In terms of religion, for instance, Herodotus' and Thucydides' Hellenistic successors like Polybius in many ways built their world-views upon their models, as elegantly argued by Hau in relation to Polybius' concept of 'fortune' (*τύχη*):

If quizzed about his thoughts on the motives of this superhuman power, Polybios might well have replied that they are unfathomable for mere mortals. And this, like his belief in double determination, brings him in line with traditional Greek religious thought, as represented by Herodotos.²⁰

The empirical stance that Herodotus and Thucydides display towards their material in many ways determined the

¹⁸ See for Kritoboulos *γράψω δὴ κατέκαστα ὡς ἐγένετο ἀκριβῶς* (Krit. 1.4: 'I will write down everything then exactly as it happened') and for Laonikos *ἐφ' ὅσον δὴ ἐς ἀκριβέστερον ἐπιθόμμεθα* (Laon. 1.8: 'as far as I was able to inquire as accurately as possible'). Compare Thucydides' methodological chapter: *ἀκριβείᾳ περὶ ἐκάστου ἐπεξελθῶν* (1.22.2, 'dealing with every single event with accuracy').

¹⁹ In the case of Kritoboulos, scholars mention Polybius' *Histories* (Harris (2003) 154) and Arrian's *Anabasis* (Reinsch (2003) 304 and Moustakas (2011) 219), whilst the historian himself refers to Flavius Josephus as a source of inspiration (Krit. 1.3.8).

²⁰ Hau (2011) 204.

absence of theological debate in the Byzantine historiographical tradition. This generic argument has been offered by Kaldellis in his discussion of Procopius' account of the plague that struck Constantinople under Justinian in 542. Kaldellis points to the tendency in early Byzantine historiography to avoid explicit statements on divine interference. He argues that the inherent goodness of the divine in Christian belief would have forced historians to explain why god brought havoc upon humans in the form of earthquakes and plagues. Instead, Procopius chose to describe the course of the disease and its impact on society according to the model that was offered by Thucydides in his second book (Thuc. 2.47.3–54.5), naming 'fortune' (τύχη, Procop. 2.23.16) as a potential motivating factor. Posing as a classical Greek historian, he preferred an essay rich in medical terminology to a homily that explained the plague in biblical fashion as the result of divine retribution.²¹ Thus, Kaldellis argues, whereas the Byzantines of this era were deeply engaged in theological debate about the substance of the divine, they produced 'little or nothing that explained the god's historical agency in their own post-apostolic times, in living history'.²² Instead, Herodotus and Thucydides continued to determine the way in which the historiographical tradition developed, with classicising historians throughout the Christian era grafting their works upon their *Histories*.²³

A third argument is that comparing the works of Kritoboulos and Laonikos to their classical templates may help us in evaluating the terminology chosen to describe the events of their time. For instance, in choosing the word βασιλεύς ('king') to indicate the Sultan, both Kritoboulos and Laonikos are believed to have implicitly supported Mehmed's claim to the Byzantine throne and to have

²¹ Kaldellis (2007) mentions the chronographer Malalas as an exception in explaining the plague under Justinian as a result of god's benevolence towards mankind, as it purged Constantinople of its worst residents.

²² Kaldellis (2007); quotation from p. 2.

²³ See Cameron and Cameron (1964).

legitimated his succession as king of the formerly Roman Empire.²⁴ The choice of title, however, also reflects Herodotus' way of referring to the Persian king, who is usually indicated as '(the) king' without further specification.²⁵ Although we should not ignore the potentially ideological implications of the adoption of the title βασιλεύς ('king') for Mehmed, it cannot be excluded that it was the Herodotean tradition that primed the historians in the first place, rather than contemporary political circumstances. In the same vein, one should be careful with terminology designating the divine. Turner, for instance, in his study of the late-Byzantine philosophy of history, argues that Laonikos distinguishes between a more personal and more abstract concept of the divine in the alternation between masculine ὁ θεός ('the god') and neuter τὸ θεῖον ('the divine').²⁶ In fact, classical historiographers tend to use these terms indiscriminately, as has been argued by Harrison for Herodotus and Hau for Polybius,²⁷ and there is no reason to assume that Laonikos did otherwise. Like his predecessors, he reserved a specific use of θεός for his ethnographic passages and the speeches of his characters to refer to a specific god belonging to a particular religion.²⁸ Similarly, not too much should be read into Laonikos' use of the names of ancient Greek deities, like Apollo and Artemis, to indicate gods that were worshipped by contemporary peoples like the Samogitians, Bohemians,

²⁴ Moustakas (2011) 218–20, 224–5; Akışık (2013) 55–6.

²⁵ See for instance Laon. 8.44 and Krit. 2.9.1. Both Laonikos and Kritoboulos occasionally (but not frequently) refer to the Sultan without article, just as Herodotus normally indicates the Persian king as βασιλεύς without article. See e.g. Laon. 8.31 and Krit. 2.3.5.

²⁶ Turner (1964) 360–1.

²⁷ Harrison (2000) 158–81, Hau (2011) 187. The *locus classicus* remains François (1957), who shows that this is a tendency of Greek literature from Homer onwards, prose from the earliest period to the latest included.

²⁸ E.g. Laon. 2.5 (Andronikos referring to the god of the Christians), 3.8 (Timur referring to the god of the Muslims).

and Massagetae (Laon. 3.29).²⁹ In this Laonikos follows the practice of Herodotus, who prefers the use of Greek names to indicate non-Greek deities (even when he also knows their local names),³⁰ as illustrated in his treatment of the Egyptian gods, who are usually referred to by Greek names, although Herodotus is aware of their difference, as his argument against equating the Egyptian with the Greek Hercules shows (Hdt. 2.43–45).³¹

Given the above arguments I believe that even in so complex a subject as the response to classical Greek religious views in the late-Byzantine era it is instructive to focus upon the beginning of the historiographical tradition, as it was so decisive in shaping the genre's themes and commonalities. In terms of definitions, then, I take these religious views in a broad sense, and include every utterance that ascribes an event to an entity beyond the sphere of human agency, whether this entity is indicated as a specific god, or referred to as a more abstract force like 'fortune' (*τύχη*). With this in mind I will now discuss those aspects of the divine in Herodotus and Thucydides that I consider to have been most relevant for Kritoboulos and Laonikos in composing their works of history.

²⁹ Akışık (2013) 59–60 considers this evidence of the continuation of the practice of ancient Greek cult among these peoples, at least in Laonikos' eyes: 'As we have seen, Laonikos wrote that the ancient religion of the Hellenes was still being followed in certain regions of the world in the fifteenth century, namely, among the Samogitians, Bohemians, an Indian race beyond the Caspian Sea, the Massagetae, and the inhabitants of the land of Khatai. Thus, Hellenism, with its worship of ancient Hellenic deities and nature, was a living reality according to Laonikos'.

³⁰ See for instance Hdt. 1.131.3, where he lists Mylitta, Alilat, and Mitra as names under which Aphrodite is known to respectively the Assyrians, Arabians, and Persians.

³¹ Again, Harrison is important here: (2000) 208–22.

3. A Summary of the Role of the Divine in Herodotus and Thucydides: Polyphony, Discretion, and Portents

When considering the role of the divine in the course of history more can be said about Herodotus, who explicitly awards it a role in human affairs, and less about Thucydides, who remains discreet in his narrative but makes his characters reflect on this topic and also hints at some form of coherence between the forces of nature and the violent events of his time.

In Herodotus' case, the role of the divine has led to much controversy in scholarship. Some consider the historian a traditional believer whilst others take him for a religious sceptic.³² *A priori* however one should observe that Herodotus' ideas about divine influence upon human affairs defy rational analysis and therefore cannot be brought together in a coherent explanatory model. Although this may disappoint those who look for consistency in historical explanation, a general lack of coherence is in fact a common characteristic of any religion.³³ In this regard it is worth quoting Harrison's observations that Herodotus' religious beliefs, as, indeed, religions in general, 'cannot simply be broken down step by step, distinction by distinction, into a single consistent plan', but that, in fact, '[i]nconsistencies in belief are not just an inevitable flaw of all religions, but actually a *means* whereby belief is maintained'.³⁴

³² Within recent scholarship Gould (1994), Harrison (2000), and Mikalson (2002) consider Herodotus more a traditional believer, whereas Lateiner (1989) 189–210 downplays the role of the divine within Herodotus' explanatory model and sees him more as a rationalist. Scullion (2006) holds a middle course in this debate, witnessing in Herodotus traces of scepticism as well as pious belief.

³³ For an extended discussion of this aspect of ancient Greek religion, and the consequences for its students, see Gould (2001) and Versnel (2011) 181–201 and appendix III.

³⁴ Harrison (2000) 16.

Thus a preferable approach is not to search for consistency in the role of the divine in Herodotus' *Histories*, but to analyse each reference to divine influence within its narrative context. In doing so, we should acknowledge that Herodotus was not writing theology, but, probably like any believer, struggled with the question of the (extent of) divine influence upon human life, especially in light of the vast and diverse amount of material that he collected for his project. As a consequence we find in the *Histories*, on the one hand, instances of a more fatalistic divine agent that causes great evils to fall upon people without any apparent reason. This divine force is the subject of Solon's lesson to Croesus (Hdt. 1.32), an envious divine that strikes human beings randomly (by 'fortune', *τύχη*), and whose only constant characteristic can be described as maintaining a balance so that aspirations of continuous growth are checked and counterbalanced.³⁵ On the other hand, we find in the *Histories* references to a divine force that operates as a moralistic agent and punishes wrongdoers. This force is responsible for the fall and destruction of Troy, a punishment for the crimes against the sacred laws of guest-friendship committed by Paris. Herodotus explains this in the following words (2.120.5):

... ὡς μὲν ἐγὼ γνώμην ἀποφαίνομαι, τοῦ δαιμονίου παρασκευάζοντος ὅκως πανωλεθρίη ἀπολόμενοι καταφανὲς τοῦτο τοῖσι ἀνθρώποισι ποιήσωσι, ὡς τῶν μεγάλων ἀδικημάτων μεγάλαι εἰσὶ καὶ αἱ τιμωρίαι παρὰ τῶν θεῶν. καὶ ταῦτα μὲν τῇ ἐμοὶ δοκέει εἶρηται.

... at least according to my opinion, because the divine provided that by complete and utter destruction they should become an example for mankind of how great crimes lead also to a divine retribution that is great.

³⁵ For Herodotus' presentation of Solon's ideas on human fortune and their elaboration in the remainder of the *Histories* see Harrison (2000) 31–63. Parallels of this 'Solonic' thought are found in the stories of Amasis and Polycrates (Hdt. 3.40–43) and Xerxes and Artabanus (Hdt. 7.8–18), on which see below, pp. 151–2, 158–9.

And this has been stated according to my personal view.

Herodotus usually frames statements about the retributive divine as personal views, thereby implicitly allowing for different viewpoints. The twofold use of *μέν* ‘solitarium’ in the above passage implies that others are welcome to disagree and have different opinions on this subject.³⁶ His framing hints at contemporary controversy about the course of events during the Trojan War, the role of the divine, and that of particular individuals like Helen, Paris and Menelaus.³⁷

Apart from referring to a divine that influences human life in different and apparently inconsistent ways, Herodotus also juxtaposes divine and earthly factors when he explains events. An example is his account of the madness of the Persian king Cambyses, which made him commit great crimes against the Egyptians and against members of his family and retinue (Hdt. 3.33):

ταῦτα ... ὁ Καμβύσης ἐξεμάνη, εἴτε δὴ διὰ τὸν Ἄπιν εἴτε καὶ ἄλλως, οἷα πολλὰ ἔωθε ἀνθρώπους κακὰ καταλαμβάνειν· καὶ γὰρ τινα καὶ ἐκ γενεῆς νοῦσον μεγάλην λέγεται ἔχειν ὁ Καμβύσης, τὴν ἱρὴν ὀνομάζουσί τινες.

Cambyses committed these mad acts, either because of Apis or it just happened because much evil tends to strike humans. It is said after all that Cambyses suffered from his birth onwards from a serious illness which some people call the ‘sacred disease’.

Herodotus explains Cambyses’ madness as either resulting from (divine) punishment for the slaying of Apis, a calf that

³⁶ On *μέν* ‘solitarium’ see van Emde Boas et al. (2016) 59.24. For the role of the retributive divine in Herodotus see Harrison (2000) 102–21.

³⁷ This controversy is attested in other sources. For an overview, see de Bakker (2012) 109 with references to further literature in n. 6.

was held sacred by the Egyptians, or from the natural cause of a mental disease that had plagued him all his life. He does not argue in favour of either, but offers two possible explanations to his readers, leaving them to choose for themselves.

A subtler example of such juxtaposing is found later in the *Histories* when Xerxes plans to revoke his decision to invade Greece and is threatened by a dream that orders him to maintain his original plan (Hdt. 7.12–18). Here the narrative suggests that the divine acts as a retributive force, as it urges Xerxes to attack the Greeks and suffer the consequences. Xerxes would, on this reading, be punished for his hubristic ambition to ‘equate the Persian realm with the sky of Zeus’, as he expresses it in his meeting with the other Persian grandees (Hdt. 7.87.1). Herodotus, however, complicates the explanation by making Xerxes’ uncle and mentor Artabanus argue that the dream is not divine, but the natural result of something that is in the front of Xerxes’ mind (Hdt. 7.16). As in the case of Cambyses’ madness a natural explanation is offered alongside a supernatural one, though the narrative in this case—with the same dream visiting Artabanus too (Hdt. 7.17.2, cf. 7.47.1)—suggests that Herodotus favoured the latter.

This juxtaposing of alternative explanations is typical of Herodotus’ way of presenting his material. The historian likes to confront his readers with different versions and viewpoints so as to engage them into his research and encourage them to active reflection.³⁸ This Herodotean ‘polyphony’ is nowadays understood as an indication that he worked in a circle of intellectuals that stimulated debate and discussion and had an audience in mind that held conflicting opinions on issues such as divine influence upon human affairs.³⁹ By allowing for different models of explanation he avoided the alienation of readers who would

³⁸ For this aspect of the *Histories* see the valuable analysis of Baragwanath (2008).

³⁹ For a detailed reconstruction of this context, based on comparison of Herodotus’ *Histories* with the texts of the early Hippocratic writers, see Thomas (2000).

otherwise not settle for the choices that he made in explaining the course of historical events.

A generation later Thucydides worked in a different way and presented his research in a smoother version to his readers, though in his work too there are ample traces of differing viewpoints and of his personal activity as an interpreter.⁴⁰ In contrast to Herodotus, however, Thucydides does not explicitly refer in his narrative to divine forces that influence the outcome of historical events. These references are exclusively found in speeches and thoughts ascribed to his characters, the classic example of which is found in Nicias' address to the Athenians after their final defeat in the Great Harbour of Syracuse, in which he refers to the divine as a retributive force (Thuc. 7.77.3–4):

ἱκανὰ γὰρ τοῖς τε πολεμίοις ἠτύχηται, καὶ εἴ τῳ θεῶν ἐπίφθονοι ἐστρατεύσαμεν, ἀποχρόντως ἤδη τετιμωρήμεθα. ... καὶ ἡμᾶς εἰκὸς νῦν τὰ τε ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐλπίζειν ἡπιώτερα ἔξειν (οἴκτου γὰρ ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἀξιώτεροι ἤδη ἐσμέν ἢ φθόνου) ...

For our enemies have enjoyed enough success, and if we in marching out incurred the wrath of one of the gods, we have now been punished sufficiently. ... Also in our case it makes sense now to expect the divine to be milder (for we are more worthy of its pity than envy) ...

Nicias is, in fact, portrayed as a deeply religious man when he decides that the Athenians—in spite of an increasingly hopeless military situation—should stay for another month in their camp on the shores of the Great Harbour near Syracuse after an eclipse of the moon, which prompts Thucydides to judge him as 'too much inclined towards superstition and the like' (*ἄγαν θειασμῶ τε καὶ τῷ τοιούτῳ προσκείμενος*, Thuc. 7.50.4). The subsequent narrative proves Nicias' appeals to the gods to be futile, as the delay

⁴⁰ For these aspects of Thucydides' history, see Rood (2006).

of the Athenians only fortifies the Syracusan position. The Athenians ultimately fail in their attempt to escape from their Sicilian enemies, and meet an even harsher fate than Nicias had envisaged. In a similar way Thucydides makes the Melians, when besieged by the Athenians, twice express their faith in a divine force that acts as an agent of justice and will protect them (Thuc. 5.104.1; 5.112.2), but they are ultimately conquered and killed by the Athenians.

Instances like these as well as references to religious institutions like the oracle of Delphi or the Games of Olympia show that Thucydides acknowledges the importance of religion for those who participated in the war, but refuses to speculate explicitly about divine influence upon human affairs in his own voice.⁴¹ Although the over-all narrative structure of the *Histories* may suggest that the Athenian defeat at Syracuse could be seen as some form of retribution for imperial overstretch, Thucydides himself remains silent about the potentially sensitive religious aspect of this interpretation.⁴² Instead, one of the factors that often influences the outcome of events in his narrative is the unforeseen chance (sometimes indicated by *τύχη* or its related verb *τυγχάνω*) that throws premeditated plans into disarray. This is exemplified in his account of the second sea-battle of Naupaktos, where the Peloponnesian fleet throws away certain victory against a much smaller number of Athenian ships which use a merchant vessel that coincidentally lies in their path to outwit their pursuers (Thuc. 2.91.3 ‘a merchant vessel happened to lie at anchor at sea’, *ἔτυχε δὲ ὀκτὰς ὁρμοῦσα μετέωρος*). In highlighting unforeseen fortune, Thucydides initiated a theme in historiographical war narrative that would be further developed by Polybius and, via Procopius among others,

⁴¹ For a discussion of Thucydides’ attitude towards religion with references to further scholarship see Furley (2006).

⁴² For more on this and the parallels with Herodotus’ narrative of the Persian Wars see Rood (1999).

find its way into the later Byzantine historiographical tradition.⁴³

Finally, it cannot be denied that also in Thucydides there is a certain ambiguity in relation to supernatural explanations of events. Although he usually prefers a rational, empirical explanation (for instance in ascribing the cause of a tsunami to an earthquake and not to a divine force, 3.89.5), Thucydides also claims, at the end of his introduction, that the magnitude of his war coincided with unparalleled portents and natural calamities, as Greece was struck by more (violent) earthquakes, solar eclipses, droughts, and famines than ever before. Although the historian does not claim a causal relationship, he implies that the exceptional events of the war should be seen in coherence with its accompanying natural phenomena. His claim hints at an underlying explanatory model in which all events in the cosmos are interdependent, which causes extreme human suffering to be paralleled by natural calamities. Although he never voices this principle explicitly, it turns out that he weaves references to the forces of nature into his narrative, suggesting that they act in some form of ‘concomitance’ with human events.⁴⁴

In sum, then, the following aspects of Herodotus’ and Thucydides’ attitude to religion in motivating events are relevant for the late Byzantine tradition:

(1) a tendency to juxtapose different explanatory schemas, whether divine or human, and to countenance a range of different forms of divine action (fatalistic, providential, and retributive). Herodotus openly juxtaposes these forms, whereas Thucydides tacitly allows for the possibility of coherence between human and natural phenomena;

⁴³ See Hau (2011) and my observations on Kritoboulos below, pp. 150–2.

⁴⁴ For a more elaborate discussion, also in relation to other parts of Thucydides’ *Histories*, see de Bakker (forthcoming). For the concept of ‘concomitance’ see Munson (2015).

(2) a tendency to ascribe explicit comments upon the role of the divine to characters by embedding them in the representation of their speeches and thoughts;

(3) a belief that great events are accompanied by spectacular natural portents.

It is now time to look at the ways in which Kritoboulos and Laonikos present the role of the divine in the great events of their time, and compare their use of classical models with other schemes of causation, both Christian and non-Christian, that may have informed their views. Turner singles out Kritoboulos and Laonikos as holding ‘fundamentally divergent views of the role of fate and divine providence in history’ when compared to their contemporaries. In his view both historians show themselves indifferent towards dogmatic Christianity.⁴⁵ But what do they offer instead?

4. The Divine in Kritoboulos’ History

In making Mehmed the protagonist of his work and evaluating his words and actions in generally positive terms Kritoboulos clearly did not base his explanation of Ottoman conquest primarily upon divine forces. Moustakas’ view, however, that ‘the metaphysical or theological aspect’ occupied ‘only a marginal position in his reasoning’ seems to be too strong when we consider the way in which Kritoboulos accounts for the end of the Palaeologan Empire.⁴⁶

In the opening of his *Histories*, Kritoboulos inserts an ‘apology’ (*παράκλησις*, 1.3) in which he addresses his readers and asks forgiveness for laying bare the ‘evils at home’ (*οἴκειλα κακά*, 1.3.1) that have afflicted the Byzantines.⁴⁷ He

⁴⁵ Turner (1964) 361–5; quotation at 364.

⁴⁶ Moustakas (2011) 222.

⁴⁷ As Anthony Ellis points out to me the phrase itself might be read as an echo of Hdt. 1.45.2, where Croesus is told to be in ‘such great evil at home’ (*ἐν κακῷ οἴκῳ τσοούτῳ*) after the death of his son Atys.

exonerates them from blame for the fall of the city, pointing instead to the cyclical nature of empire and arguing that history has taught that nothing remains the same forever (1.3.4–5):

τίς γὰρ οὐκ οἶδεν, ὡς, ἐξότου γεγόνασιν ἄνθρωποι, τὰ τῆς βασιλείας καὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς οὐδ' ὅλως ἔμεινεν ἐπὶ τῶν αὐτῶν οὐδ' ἐνὶ γένει τε καὶ ἔθνει περιεκλείσθη, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ πλανώμενά τε αἰεὶ καὶ ἐξ ἔθνῶν ἔθνη καὶ τόπους ἐκ τόπων ἀμείβοντα πανταχοῦ μεταβέβηκέ τε καὶ περιέστη, νῦν μὲν ἐς Ἀσσυρίους καὶ Μήδους καὶ Πέρσας, νῦν δὲ ἐς Ἕλληνας καὶ Ῥωμαίους κατὰ καιρούς τε καὶ περιόδους ἐνιαυτῶν ἐπιχωριάσαντά τε καὶ οὐδέποτε ἐπὶ τῶν αὐτῶν βεβηκότα; οὐδὲν τοίνυν θαυμαστὸν καὶ νῦν τὰ ἑαυτῶν δρᾶσαί τε καὶ παθεῖν καὶ Ῥωμαίους μὲν τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τὴν τύχην ἀπολιπεῖν, πρὸς ἑτέρους δὲ διαβῆναί τε καὶ μεταχωρῆσαι, ὥσπερ ἐξ ἄλλων ἐς τούτους, πανταχοῦ τὴν ἰδίαν φύσιν τε καὶ τάξιν τηροῦντα.

For who does not know that ever since mankind has been in existence, kingship and empire did not stay intact in the same hands and were not limited to one race or nation, but as if they were always wandering and changing from nation to nation and from place to place have everywhere moved away and circled around, and the one moment visited Assyrians, Medes and Persians, the other moment Greeks and Romans according to circumstances and cycles of years, and never ended in the same hands? Thus it is no surprise that also now kingdoms and empires do and suffer what is characteristic of them, and that power and fortune have left the Romans and shifted and moved across into the hands of others, just as they came from others to them, always and everywhere remaining faithful to their own nature and disposition.

In his apology Kritoboulos points at the principle of eternal change, which was first formulated by Heraclitus (6th–5th c. BCE) and guarantees that rule, kingship, and empire never

remain in the same hands forever. In his view, world-history should be seen as a continuous succession of empires, with the Ottoman Empire being ‘the next in line after the collapse of the Roman’.⁴⁸ The observation is made at the end of his introduction, just before the beginning of the narrative of the events. This placement is reminiscent of Herodotus, who rounds off his introduction to the *Histories* with a similar statement (1.5.3–4):

... προβήσομαι ἐς τὸ πρόσω τοῦ λόγου, ὁμοίως σμικρὰ καὶ μεγάλα ἄστυα ἀνθρώπων ἐπεξιών. τὰ γὰρ τὸ πάλαι μεγάλα ἦν, τὰ πολλὰ αὐτῶν σμικρὰ γέγονε, τὰ δὲ ἐπ’ ἐμεῦ ἦν μεγάλα, πρότερον ἦν σμικρὰ. τὴν ἀνθρωπηίην ὦν ἐπιστάμενος εὐδαιμονίην οὐδαμὰ ἐν ταύτῳ μένουσαν ἐπιμνήσομαι ἀμφοτέρων ὁμοίως.

... I will continue with my story touching upon mankind’s small and big cities in like manner. For those cities which were great in earlier times, have mostly become small, and those that were great in my time, were small in earlier times. Understanding, therefore, that human prosperity in no way remains in the same place I will mention both in like manner.

That Kritoboulos looked closely at Herodotus’ introduction is proven by the resemblance in the formulation of the principle of change (οὐδ’ ὅλως ἔμεινεν ἐπὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ≈ οὐδαμὰ ἐν ταύτῳ μένουσαν). Though a literal copy is avoided, Kritoboulos couches the principle in language that is largely synonymous.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Moustakas (2011) 222. See also Reinsch (2003) 306.

⁴⁹ Observe that Laonikos refers to the same Herodotean passage at the end of his introduction, though without reference to the principle of change: ὡς οὖν ἕκαστα τούτων ξυνέβη γενέσθαι, ὡς τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων πράγματα κατὰ βραχὺ ἀπώλετο, φθειρόμενα ὑπὸ Τούρκων, καὶ ὡς τὰ ἐκείνων μεγάλα ἐγένετο, ἐς μέγα αἰὲ ἐς τόνδε τὸν χρόνον ἴοντα εὐδαιμονίας, ἐπιμνησόμεθα ἐπεξιόντες, ἐφ’ ὅσον δὴ ἐς τὸ ἀκριβέστερον ἐπιθόμεθα (1.8: ‘how each of these events happened, how Greek power ended in a short time, being destroyed by the Turks, and how the

In Herodotus' *Histories* the instability of fortune and the fleeting nature of properties like wealth, happiness, and empire are repeatedly thematised. Ample reflection on the subject is found in the story of the Lydian king Croesus, who believes himself to be most blessed of all men until he is faced with the loss of his son and his empire. Having learnt from this experience he issues a warning to king Cyrus of Persia (1.207.2):

μάθε ὡς κύκλος τῶν ἀνθρωπείων ἐστὶ πρηγμάτων,
περιφερόμενος δὲ οὐκ ἔα αἰεὶ τοὺς αὐτοὺς εὐτυχέειν.

Learn that there is a cycle of human affairs, which turns round and does not allow the same people to be successful forever.

This cyclical view of an ever-changing course of history is also found in Kritoboulos' work, as witnessed by his observations about the cyclical nature of empire in his *παραίτησις* (1.3). Elsewhere too he uses it in his narrative for the purpose of consoling the Byzantines for the loss of their empire (1.69.3):

οὕτως οὐδὲν τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πιστὸν οὐδὲ βέβαιον, ἀλλὰ
πάντα δίκην Εὐρίπου ἄνω καὶ κάτω στροβεῖται καὶ
περιφέρεται ταῖς ἀγχιστροφίαις τοῦ βίου μεταβολαῖς
παίζοντα καὶ παιζόμενα παρὰ μέρος ...

Thus nothing human remains fixed and stable, but everything like the river Euripos⁵⁰ whirls around up

latter's power became great, and is still growing to great prosperity until now, we will relate in our overview of history, in so far as we gathered information in a more accurate manner'). Compare *ἐπιμνησόμεθα ἐπεξιόντες* with *ἐπεξιῶν* and *ἐπιμνήσομαι* (Hdt. 1.5.4).

⁵⁰ The use of the Euripos (the narrow strait that separates Euboea from mainland Greece) as an image of whirling instability dates back to antiquity, e.g. Aeschin. 3.90; Aristot. *Met.* 366a23. Kritoboulos may owe this particular phrase to Aelius Aristides (24.10 Keil): ἀλλ' ὡσπερ Εὐριπος ἄνω καὶ κάτω φέρεται.

and down and is tossed around by the quick changes of life, playing and being played with in turn ...

We could, with Moustakas,⁵¹ consider this cyclical view primarily secular, as Kritoboulos makes the successes of the Ottomans dependent on the qualities of Mehmed. However, in adopting this ancient explanatory model, Kritoboulos also makes a religious choice. He does not use linear models of historical explanation that were based upon Christian-eschatological doctrine and used by contemporaries like Gennadios Scholarios who also cooperated with the Ottoman leadership. Instead, he opts for an impersonal force that operates neutrally in guaranteeing the continuous change and succession of empire. The fall of Constantinople then being fated, it should just be seen as a spectacular piece of bad luck for its contemporary inhabitants, but not as the result of their sins.

Kritoboulos combines this cyclical view of empire with the idea of a capricious, impersonal ‘fortune’ (*τύχη*), which strikes at random and must always be borne in mind.⁵² It is this fortune, in personified form, that Kritoboulos holds responsible for the fall of the city, for instance when he refers to the staunch fighting mentality of its defenders (1.56.4):

ἀλλ’ ἐτήρησαν γενναίως τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἔνστασιν διὰ πάντων, ἕως ἣ πονηρὰ καὶ ἀγνώμων τύχη προὔδωκε τούτους.

But they nobly guarded their initial mentality throughout all events until wicked and inconsiderate fortune betrayed them.

⁵¹ Moustakas (2011) 222–3.

⁵² On ‘fortune’ (*τύχη*) in Kritoboulos, see Turner (1964) 361–3, who defines it as an impersonal concept without purpose, reason, and providence.

The fortune theme recurs in particular in character-speech. Kritoboulos ascribes the following words to Mehmed when he encourages his troops to remain vigilant during the final stage of the siege of Constantinople, thus marking him out as a wise leader (1.15):

*οὐκ οἶδαμεν ὡς τὰ τῶν πολέμων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν ἔργα οὐ
μενετὰ καὶ τῷ χρόνῳ οὐδὲν ἀνέλπιστον καὶ τὰ τῆς τύχης
ἄδηλα πανταχοῦ καὶ τὸ τῶν πραγμάτων τέλος
ἀστάθμητον καὶ ἀτέκμαρτον;*

Do we not know that war and crisis should not be waited for, that in time nothing remains out of reach, that fortune is everywhere unclear and that the end of things cannot be determined or fathomed?

Whereas Harris points to Thucydides and Polybius as templates for Kritoboulos' concept of fortune,⁵³ this example shows that the historian, in making Mehmed stress fortune's unpredictability, copied a narrative strategy that is also found in Herodotus. The latter, too, did not reflect upon fortune's capriciousness and divine envy in his own voice, but instead ascribed these views to his wise advisors Solon (1), Amasis (2), and Artabanus (3), whose speeches contain statements such as the following (Hdt. 1.32.4; 3.40.2 and 7.51.3, respectively):

(1) *πᾶν ἐστὶ ἀνθρώπος συμφορή.*
'man is in all respects accident'.

(2) *ἐμοὶ δὲ αἱ σαὶ μεγάλαι εὐτυχίαι οὐκ ἀρέσκουσι,
ἐπισταμένῳ τὸ θεῖον ὡς ἔστι φθονερόν.*
'To me your great successes are not pleasing, as I know that the divine is envious.'

(3) *ἐς θυμὸν ὦν βαλεῦ καὶ τὸ παλαιὸν ἔπος ὡς εὖ εἴρηται,
τὸ μὴ ἅμα ἀρχῇ πᾶν τέλος καταφαίνεσθαι.*

⁵³ Harris (2003) 154–5.

‘Bear in mind also the ancient saying, how well it has been said, “it is not at all at the beginning that the end becomes clear.”’

Kritoboulos also makes his characters reflect upon the divine in different terms. In his second book, which deals with the aftermath of the fall of Constantinople, the advisors of Dorieus, a local Aegean chief, warn him against disinheriting his older brother’s wife and children by appealing to (2.11.4):

θείαν νέμεσιν ... ἣ πανταχοῦ περιερχομένη τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων δικάζει καὶ τοὺς ἀδικουμένους καὶ ἀδικοῦντας ὀρᾷ.

divine vengeance, ... which comes around everywhere to give judgement on human affairs and observes those who are wronged and their wrongdoers.

Again the phrasing is loosely based upon a concept familiar from Herodotus, who, as discussed above, at times saw the effects of a retributive ‘vengeful divine’ at work, for instance in the case of Croesus, who was punished after his failure to understand the lessons that Solon tried to teach him (Hdt. 1.34.1):

ἔλαβε ἐκ θεοῦ νέμεσις μεγάλη Κροῖσον, ὡς εἰκάσαι, ὅτι ἐνόμισε ἑωυτὸν εἶναι ἀνθρώπων ἀπάντων ὀλβιώτατον.

a great vengeance from the god fell on Croesus, as one may guess, because he considered himself to be most blessed of all men.⁵⁴

Finally, Kritoboulos follows his ancient masters in paying attention to portents, such as the fog that covered

⁵⁴ Observe though that the *nemesis* concept is widespread in Byzantine literature. See Hinterberger (2010).

Constantinople and evaporated on the final day of the siege (1.46). Similarly, when the Byzantines prepare for the defence of the city, he mentions unfavourable omens, exceedingly strong earthquakes, thunderstorms, unusual signs and constellations of the heavenly bodies (1.18.6). These omens are offered by ‘the divine’ (*τὸ θεῖον*, 1.18.7) and appear to foreshadow the fall of the city. This passage subtly alludes to the observation made by ancient historians that great events coincide with unusual natural phenomena such as plagues, disasters, earthquakes, solar eclipses, droughts, and famines. Above, I referred to Thucydides’ claim that the Peloponnesian War coincided with natural disasters of unparalleled quality and quantity (Thuc. 1.23.3). Herodotus voices the same principle when he mentions the plague and collapse of a school on Chios, two events that foreshadow the island’s conquest by Histiaeus (Hdt. 6.27).⁵⁵

Thus Kritoboulos’ approach to the role of the divine in human affairs is couched in terms familiar from the classical historiographical tradition. Particularly striking are his allusions to Herodotus, who appears to have inspired him in formulating the principle of everlasting change. It may be from him that he copied the metanarrative strategy of remaining reluctant to express explicit statements upon the nature of the divine in his own voice. Instead, he makes his characters refer to the capriciousness of fortune, and at least once hint at a more retributive form of divine justice. The narrative passages, meanwhile, mainly focus upon the empirically verifiable human affairs and thereby reflect Kritoboulos’ aspirations towards historiographical authority in the eyes of his readers.

⁵⁵ Hdt. 6.27.1: *φιλέει δέ κως προσημαίνειν, εὖτ’ ἂν μέλλη μεγάλα κακὰ ἢ πόλι ἢ ἔθνει ἕσεσθαι*. (‘There are invariably warning signs given when disaster is going to overwhelm a community or race’, trans. Waterfield). I thank Anthony Ellis for drawing my attention to this passage.

5. The Divine in Laonikos' *Demonstrations*

Compared to Kritoboulos' *Histories*, Laonikos took on a more ambitious project, in which he did not exclusively focus upon the fall of Constantinople and its immediate aftermath, but attempted to write a contemporary world history structured around the rise of the Ottomans. His approach was innovative as he included lengthy geographical and ethnographical digressions, for which he used Herodotus' *Histories* as a template and ignored the preceding Byzantine historiographical tradition. This aspect has been discussed recently by Kaldellis, who points out that the indebtedness is particularly revealed in the 'conceptual framework of Laonikos's ethnography',⁵⁶ which lacks a Christian or pro-Hellenic bias, as exemplified by his discussion of Islam (3.15–20). To quote Kaldellis:

Laonikos was the first author from a Christian society to present Islam not as a theological error or religious abomination, but as a valid religious culture, presenting the facts dispassionately and finding it overall to be just. His approach was ethnographic, not religious.⁵⁷

In narratological terms, Laonikos' narratorial attitude can be described as impartial. In this respect he follows the historiographical tradition all the way back to the Herodotean narrator, who himself owes this impartiality to Homer.⁵⁸ This aspect of Herodotus' narrative was already acknowledged in antiquity by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who described his older compatriot as 'fair' (ἐπιεικής),⁵⁹ but

⁵⁶ Kaldellis (2014) 49–100; quotation at p. 65.

⁵⁷ Kaldellis (2014) 101.

⁵⁸ See Moustakas (2011) 224: 'In treating the history of the Ottomans, he tries to be impartial, which could be reflecting an influence from classical models of historical writing. In any event his narration is respectful towards the Ottomans, which in itself could be attributed to the imitation of his principal archetype, Herodotos, in the way the latter had treated the Achaemenid Persians'. For Herodotus' indebtedness to Homer in creating his narrator's voice, see de Jong (2004).

⁵⁹ D. Hal., *Pomp. Gem.* 3.15.

it was faulted by others, most notably Plutarch, who accused Herodotus of being a ‘lover of barbarians’ (*φιλοβάρβαρος*).⁶⁰ Just as Herodotus awards positive evaluations to foreign kings like the Persian Cyrus, Laonikos characterises some sultans in positive terms. Mehmed himself, however, as Harris points out, is ‘cast in the mould of the Persian king, Xerxes, as an arbitrary and selfish tyrant, as careless of the lives of his subjects as of those of his enemies’.⁶¹

In religious matters, however, Laonikos remains more discreet than Herodotus, and seems to follow Thucydides’ approach. He avoids typically Herodotean themes like miracles and dreams and reflects rationally upon the human inclination to turn to superstition in case of crisis (2.37), a passage that resembles Thucydides’ observations about the use of oracles by the Athenians at the time of the great plague (Thuc. 2.54) as well as Polybius’ criticism of Nicias’ superstition during the siege of Syracuse (Pol. 9.19, cf. Thuc. 7.50.4, quoted above). For Laonikos only ‘fortune’, (*τύχη*) counts as a force that brings about historical events, but in contrast to Kritoboulos, he does not qualify fortune as fleeting, but presents it as interrelated with human action and as concomitant with virtue.⁶² Laonikos highlights this interrelationship in his introduction, where he refers to the Greeks and argues that (1.3):

τύχην ἀρετῆς ἐνδεᾶ σχόντες ἀπανταχοῦ, ξύμμετρον δὲ οὐδαμοῦ.

their virtue was everywhere lacking in comparison to the fortune they enjoyed, and nowhere commensurate with it. (tr. Kaldellis)

⁶⁰ Plut., *DHM* 857A.

⁶¹ Harris (2003) 162.

⁶² Turner (1964) 359–61 denies this connection between fortune and virtue. He describes Laonikos’ concept of fortune as an impersonal supernatural force, acting as a ‘colourless numen’ (361).

The Romans are credited as conquerors of the greatest empire as (1.5):

ἰσοτάλαντον ἔχοντας τύχην τῇ ἀρετῇ.

their fortune was equal in weight to their virtue.

This combination of virtue and fortune recurs a few times in the *Demonstrations* to explain political and military success.⁶³

Those specialists who study Laonikos' concept of fortune have tried to account for its intellectual origins. In general they point to Laonikos' tutor Plethon, who wrote a treatise 'on fate' (*περὶ εἰμαρμένης*) in neo-Platonic fashion.⁶⁴ Harris argues that Laonikos owes his concept of fortune to the Latin historiography of Livy, to which he could have gained access through Italian connections, possibly via Plethon. He considers Laonikos' treatment of fortune a sign of emerging Renaissance thought, as it suggested a more emancipated role for human beings, more able than previously thought to influence their own destiny, provided that they lived a virtuous life.⁶⁵ Kaldellis, however, points out that Laonikos may have derived these ideas also from ancient sources, where they were found in the works of Plutarch.⁶⁶ In fact, ideas that connect one's fortune with one's personal qualities are already found in Herodotus, who, typically, frames them by embedding them in the speeches of his characters. Thus Themistocles is credited with the following sweeping statement at the end of his speech to his fellow-admirals at Salamis (Hdt. 8.60γ):

⁶³ Compare Laon. 1.47; 1.58; 7.63.

⁶⁴ Turner (1964) 359–60; Harris (2003) 160; Akışık (2013) 88, 123.

⁶⁵ Harris (2003) 163–70. Compare Moustakas (2011) 229.

⁶⁶ Kaldellis (2014) 172–3. Plethon, incidentally, studied the ancient historiographical tradition carefully, as is witnessed by his short historiographical treatise in flawless Attic Greek, fashioned after Xenophon and based upon Plutarch and Diodorus.

οἰκότα μὲν νυν βουλευομένοισι ἀνθρώποισι ὡς τὸ ἐπίπαν
ἐθέλει γίνεσθαι· μὴ δὲ οἰκότα βουλευομένοισι οὐκ ἐθέλει
οὐδὲ ὁ θεὸς προσχωρέειν πρὸς τὰς ἀνθρωπῆϊας γνώμας.

When humans discuss a plausible course of action this will mostly happen. But if they do not discuss a plausible course of action, not even the divine will agree with human plans.

These words conclude a speech in which Themistocles warns the Greek allies not to give up their position at Salamis. His *peroratio* reflects an optimistic perspective upon the role of the divine as supportive provided that humans are willing to carefully consider, discuss and plan their actions (*βουλεύεσθαι*). Themistocles' formulation thereby also befits the broader Herodotean theme of how to use one's cognitive capacities in the planning of an action. Many rulers in his work, most notably Xerxes, fail either to plan properly or respond adequately to wise advice offered by their subjects, often with disastrous effects for themselves and their subjects. Their attitude makes a negative outcome almost inevitable, as exemplified already early in the *Histories* by the behaviour of the Lydian king Candaules, who believes his wife to be the most beautiful woman on earth and keeps bragging about her to his trusted servant Gyges (Hdt. 1.8.1). Candaules, Herodotus thereupon admits, 'was destined to end his life badly' (*χρῆν ... Κανδαύλη γενέσθαι κακῶς*, 1.8.2), and in the narrative that follows he relates how Gyges ultimately usurped his throne.

In the one passage where Laonikos explicitly awards a role to fortune in his narrative, we find a similar situation. Here, Laonikos deals with the Palaeologoi Thomas and Demetrios, incompetent despots of the Morea, who according to Laonikos mismanaged their territories, were continually at odds with one another, and ignored Ottoman advice on how to improve their demeanour (8.43):

ἀλλ' ἐχρήν μὲν ταῦτα, τύχη οὐκ ἀγαθῇ φερόμενα, ταῦτ' ἄρα ἴσχειν σφίσι τὴν τελευτήν, καὶ οὕτω ἀποβήσεσθαι ἐς τὸ μηδὲν εἶναι γενόμενα.

But these things had to end in this way, propelled as they were by an evil fortune, and it brought about the end for them, their final outcome being extinction (tr. Kaldellis).⁶⁷

As often in Herodotus, an evil destiny is concomitant with or results from some form of human transgression. In this way, Laonikos characterises the Peloponnesian despots as the exact opposites of the Romans mentioned in his introduction. Whereas the latter found fortune on their side thanks to their virtue, the former were brought down by fortune as a result of their incompetence.

Elsewhere, Laonikos only embeds explicit statements about divine interference in human affairs in his character's speeches and thoughts, a narrative method familiar from Herodotus and Thucydides as we saw above. It is exemplified by the conversation between Timur and his defeated and captured opponent Bayazit, whom he accuses of blindness (3.60):

ἀλλ' ἦν μὴ ἐτετύφωσο, ἔφη Τεμήρης, οὕτω μέγα πάνυ φρονῶν, οὐκ ἂν δὴ ἐς τοῦτο συμφορᾶς, οἶμαι, ἀφίκου· οὕτω γὰρ εἴωθε τὸ θεῖον τὰ πάνυ μέγα φρονοῦντα καὶ πεφυσμημένα μειοῦν ὡς τὰ πολλὰ καὶ σμικρύνειν.

But if you had not been blinded, Timur said, and been so very high-minded, you would not have arrived, in my opinion, at such misfortune. For in this way the divine usually tends to lessen and make small everything that is swollen up and very high-minded.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ For a discussion of this passage see Kaldellis (2014) 42; cf. 192–3.

⁶⁸ For a similar example see Laon. 9.72.

Timur's statement echoes a passage in Herodotus' *Histories* in which Artabanus gives advice to his nephew Xerxes and warns him against his plan to invade Greece (Hdt. 7.10ε):

ὄρῳς τὰ ὑπερέχοντα ζῶα ὡς κεραυνοὶ ὁ θεὸς οὐδὲ ἐὰν
φαντάζεσθαι, τὰ δὲ σμικρὰ οὐδέν μιν κνίζει· ὄρῳς δὲ ὡς ἐς
οἰκήματα τὰ μέγιστα αἰεὶ καὶ δένδρεα τὰ τοιαῦτα
ἀποσκήπτει τὰ βέλεα. φιλέει γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τὰ ὑπερέχοντα
πάντα κολούειν. ... οὐ γὰρ ἐὰν φρονέειν μέγα ὁ θεὸς ἄλλον
ἢ ἑωυτόν.

You see how the god strikes with his thunderbolts those creatures that stand out, and does not allow them to make a show, whereas small creatures do not provoke him. You see how he hurls his bolts always into the largest palaces and trees of such size. For the god likes to curtail everything that stands out ... the god does not allow anyone else to be high-minded apart from himself.

Both statements (Timur's given from hindsight, Artabanus' as preliminary warning) hint at the divine as a force that punishes those who grow too big and become high-minded (observe the expression *μέγα φρονεῖν* in both passages).⁶⁹ Elsewhere too Laonikos makes his characters refer to this punishing role of the divine, for instance in his concluding reflection upon the fall of Constantinople, where he mentions the opinion held in the Latin west that it was a revenge for the capture of Troy—an opinion that, as discussed above, was widely held (8.30):

δοκεῖ δὲ ἡ ξυμφορὰ αὕτη μεγίστη τῶν κατὰ τὴν
οἰκουμένην γενομένων ὑπερβαλέσθαι τῷ πάθει, καὶ τῇ
τῶν Ἰλίου παραπλησίαν γεγονέναι, δίκην γενέσθαι τοῦ
Ἰλίου ὑπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων τοῖς Ἑλλησι πασσοῦδι
ἀπολουμένοις, καὶ οὕτω τοὺς Ῥωμαίους οἴεσθαι

⁶⁹ For more references to this widespread topos in classical literature, see Cairns (1996).

ξυμβῆναι, τὴν τίσιν ἀφίχθαι τοῖς Ἑλλησι τῆς πάλαι ποτὲ γενομένης Ἰλίου ξυμφορᾶς.

This enormous disaster seems to have surpassed those that have happened across the inhabited world in degree of suffering, and to have resembled the evil that struck the Trojans. The barbarians seem to have avenged themselves upon the Greeks as they were entirely brought down, and it seems that the Latins were of the opinion that it happened for this reason, that revenge fell upon the Greeks for the disaster that once struck Troy.

In this passage Laonikos carefully distinguishes his own opinion, namely that the fall of Constantinople resembled that of Troy in its magnitude, from the opinion of the Latins, who considered the events evidence of divine retribution for Greek crimes against the Trojans long ago. Unlike his predecessor Herodotus, Laonikos seems reluctant to endorse the idea of the divine as a punishing force within his narrative, and instead embeds it exclusively in the speeches and thoughts of his characters.

6. The Function of Ancient Explanatory Models in the Historiography of Kritoboulos and Laonikos: Anchoring Innovation?

The question remains, then, how to evaluate Kritoboulos' and Laonikos' use of the explanatory models of their distant predecessors. Why did they avoid a Christian orientation, such as found in Doukas' contemporary chronicle, which fashionably starts with Adam and a list of saints from the Old Testament before arriving at the Byzantine Emperors, and which expresses the more conventional opinion that the Byzantines owed their demise to themselves and were punished by god?

The answers to these questions cannot be given with certainty in light of our limited knowledge of the (religious) context in which Kritoboulos and Laonikos operated. Of

Kritoboulos, we can be reasonably certain that he was an Orthodox Christian, which becomes apparent in a prayer and a poem handed down under his name. Reinsch believes that he belonged to the circle of Gennadios Scholarios, the first patriarch of Ottoman Constantinople.⁷⁰ The autograph of the *Histories* opens with a dedicatory letter to Mehmed, which together with the positive evaluation of the Sultan's actions in the narrative itself, suggests that Kritoboulos sought to ingratiate himself at the Ottoman court in the same manner as many of his predecessors did under the Byzantine emperors.⁷¹ All this suggests that he may have had personal reasons to avoid explaining the Ottoman capture of the city—in Christian terms—as a divine punishment for the sins of the Byzantines. Moustakas hints in this direction by alleging that a view of Muslim rule as divine punishment was better avoided as it 'could only compromise the position of the conquered Christian peoples into the new state of affairs'.⁷² However, Kritoboulos envisages not only the Sultan as his reader, but also the defeated Byzantines themselves, to whom he offers comfort in his 'apology' (*παράιτησις*, 1.3). Here as well, an appeal to Christian thought is conspicuously absent and the historian resorts to the classical Greek tradition. In sum, Kritoboulos deliberately chose to frame contemporary

⁷⁰ Reinsch (2003) 298.

⁷¹ Unlike their ancient Greek predecessors, almost all historians of the Byzantine Empire were closely affiliated with the court and vying for prestige, often at the expense of others. Scott (1981) has defined this as a crucial distinction between classical and Byzantine historiography. This explains the focus on the character of the emperor and on his virtues. See also Croke (2010) on the audience for which the Byzantine historians wrote their works. The typical attitude of a Byzantine historiographer towards his royal patron can be illustrated by the work of the contemporary chronicler Sphrantzes, who repeatedly praises the last emperor, Constantine Palaeologus, and laments him when he dies in the final hours of the siege (*Chronicon Minus* 35.9). Sphrantzes was the last emperor's *Protovestiarius*, one of the highest officials at the court, and he describes various encounters with Constantine, whom he seeks to exonerate from blame for the city's fall.

⁷² Moustakas (2011) 229.

events within a perspective derived from a pre-Christian past, but no conclusive evidence of the factors that encouraged him to make this choice can be found.

In the case of Laonikos, the situation is even more obscure, as we cannot say anything with certainty about his personal religious views and are in the dark about his whereabouts after 1447.⁷³ It has been suggested that he was influenced by neo-Platonic views of his master Plethon, who is believed to have propagated the pagan religion of the ancient Greek past.⁷⁴ The one passage where neo-Platonic views surface is Laonikos' discussion of the tides of the Thames (2.41–42), in which he refers on the one hand to a 'great king' god who created order in nature and the celestial bodies and on the other hand to a 'world-soul' (*τῆ τοῦ παντὸς τοῦδε ψυχῆς*, 2.42), which arranges conflicting motions in nature into one harmonious whole.⁷⁵ Such views, however, are not expounded elsewhere, as Laonikos hides his personal religious views behind the voice of his impartial narrator, who takes an exterior perspective upon the religious habits of the peoples that are described in the *Demonstrations*, Christians, Muslims, and pagans alike.

Given the scant historical evidence, a possible way forward in evaluating Kritoboulos' and Laonikos' use of explanatory models from the classical past is the framing of this problem in terms of 'anchoring innovation'. This refers to the idea that for an innovation to become successful, it should be 'anchored' in a context that is familiar to the target-group for which it is intended. This holds for innovation in the technical realm as much as in conceptual

⁷³ Kaldellis (2014) 106: 'his own religious views are difficult, if not impossible to discern'.

⁷⁴ For this see in particular Akışık (2013) 58–75, who has studied the Herodotus manuscript Laur. 70.6 which Laonikos used in Mistras and identified an epigram in his hand in honour of Herodotus. I am not convinced however by Akışık's argument, based upon her interpretation of the epigram, that Hellenism was an alternative religion that offered itself to Laonikos. Problematic is that Hellenism refers to an ethnic/cultural identity and not to a religious/theological system.

⁷⁵ Akışık (2013) 76–80; Kaldellis (2014) 106–8.

areas. Energy efficient light bulbs, for instance, are more attractive to buy if designed in the guise of traditional light bulbs. And to take a conceptual example from close-by, one could argue that the modern theory of narratology developed by Genette–Bal owes its remarkable success in the field of classics to its transparent terminology largely derived from the ancient Greek and Latin rhetorical toolbox and thus easily understandable for classicists.⁷⁶

Both Kritoboulos and Laonikos took innovative steps in their works by which they deviated from the existing historiographical tradition. Kritoboulos' main innovation compared to his contemporaries was his attempt to legitimise Ottoman rule. As Moustakas points out, such an attempt precluded the use of explanatory models based on Christian principles as these were incompatible with the ideas on empire that were popular among the Ottomans and determined the way in which Mehmed acted as Sultan.⁷⁷ Given that he wrote his work not only for the Sultan but also with an eye to a Greek-speaking audience, Kritoboulos may have attempted to 'anchor' his 'innovative' approach to Ottoman rule by a strong reliance upon the classical Greek historiographical heritage. In Laonikos' case, the innovation lies, first, in the unusually broad focus of the *Demonstrations*, in which he attempted to write a universal history of contemporary Asia and Europe, and, second, in his neutral attitude towards the Ottomans and Islam, the latter of which he describes in empirical terms without judging it as a religious aberration. In this respect Akışık suggests that Laonikos must have been engaged with 'contemporary Italian humanist theories concerning historical processes' and that in this exchange of

⁷⁶ The concept of 'anchoring innovation' has been introduced in the field of ancient studies by Ineke Sluiter (cf. e.g., <http://www.ac2015.eu/ineke-sluiter-phd>). It currently features as a central theme of the OIKOS national research school of ancient studies in the Netherlands (<http://www.ru.nl/oikos/anchoring-innovation/anchoring-innovation/>).

⁷⁷ Moustakas (2011) 218.

ideas acted as an ‘innovator rather than a follower’.⁷⁸ I take, then, his extensive use of Herodotus in the creation of his work to be a well-considered strategy to ‘anchor’ his innovative approach to contemporary history within a framework that was familiar to his intended readers, in particular his fellow Greek-speaking intellectuals who had benefited from an education under Palaeologan patronage and were thoroughly schooled in the tradition of classical Greek historiography.

From our modern perspective it is ironic that Kritoboulos, who was by far the better of the two in stylistic respects and whose text is a delight to read compared to the obscurity of Laonikos’ Greek, ultimately failed in his attempt to ‘anchor’ his innovative approach. The autograph of his *Histories* remained in the library of the Sultans, only to be rediscovered in the 19th century, and no other copies appear to have been in circulation, which suggests that his text remained unknown to a wider audience. The reason for this may be that Kritoboulos, although innovative in his attempt to legitimise Ottoman rule, followed a selling strategy for the promoting of his work that was traditional to Byzantine historiography, whose representatives were usually affiliated with the emperors and their retinues, and wrote in support of their actions. Kritoboulos may have sought a position for himself at Mehmed’s court and therefore have followed his predecessors’ panegyric writing manner. The Sultan, however, broke with existing Byzantine traditions, and, in setting up his court in Constantinople, preferred to rely upon his trusted Ottoman officers as well as Ottoman

⁷⁸ Akışık (2013) 100. She relates this intellectual development to the decline of the Byzantine states in the fifteenth century: ‘In the fifteenth century, as the administrative structures of the Byzantine State crumbled around them, intellectuals, among them Laonikos Chalkokondyles, Bessarion, Plethon, Mark Eugenikos, Doukas, Kritoboulos, Sphrantzes, Gennadios Scholarios, Theodore of Gaza, George Amiroutzes, and George of Trebizond, heirs to a tradition that synthesised Mosaic and Christian teaching, classical Greek thought, and imperial Roman rule, were hard pressed to redefine their allegiances or even their identities’ (55).

nomenclature. We do not know how he received Kritoboulos' manuscript, but it appears that no attempts were undertaken to fund the production of copies.

Laonikos, on the other hand, appears to have been successful in 'anchoring' his innovative view upon history. Given that his *Demonstrations* were considered a unique source for the rise of Ottoman power and on the nature of its institutions, the work was copied and spread across Europe, and, as mentioned above, translated into Latin and French in the sixteenth century. In contrast to Kritoboulos, Laonikos' work does not show traces of attempts to ingratiate himself with any contemporary ruler. It probably owed its popularity to its broad scope of interest and its impartial narrative viewpoint, which made it a palatable text to consult for any contemporary member of the elite regardless of his political affiliation.

7. Conclusion

Kritoboulos and Laonikos, the last two representatives of a historiographical tradition that spanned almost two millennia, not only allude to their earliest predecessors Herodotus and Thucydides on a verbal level, but also show a deep understanding of their schemes of causation, reuse their themes and motifs, and use similar narrative mannerisms to communicate their views. From a religious viewpoint, they avoid Christian doctrine and prefer explanatory models that originate in Herodotus and Thucydides and favour 'fortune' (*τύχη*) as the overriding factor of influence upon the events. Furthermore, they adopt the caution (Herodotus) or discretion (Thucydides) of their ancient predecessors on matters of religious doctrine in their narratives and choose to ascribe more explicit views, for instance about divine retribution, to their characters. It may have been contemporary events that moved the two historians to use a framework that allowed them to sidestep theological intricacies. As such, it is attractive to evaluate their use of classical models as an attempt to 'anchor' an innovative approach in writing about the past. In

Kritoboulos' case this amounts to the legitimation of Ottoman rule, whereas Laonikos advertises a broader scope of interest than his predecessors in the Byzantine tradition, and, posing as an empirical observer, favours an impartial way of looking at different cultures and their religion.

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