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FATE, DIVINE *PHTHONOS*, AND THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE: THE RECEPTION OF HERODOTEAN THEOLOGY IN EARLY AND MIDDLE BYZANTINE HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Abstract: Herodotus enjoyed wide popularity among Byzantine historians. Within a Christian society, his complicated religious outlook and his moral viewpoint were of interest to the historians while at the same time presenting difficulties for their perception of historical causation. This article traces the responses of three early and middle Byzantine historians to Herodotus' religious views. I focus in particular on the significance which three concepts central to Herodotus' religious and historical thought—fate, divine *phthonos*, and the wheel of fortune—hold in selected passages from Procopius' *Wars*, Michael Psellus' *Chronographia* and Nicetas Choniates' *History*. I argue that these three concepts are not merely employed as literary devices but can help elucidate the theological and historical views of the Byzantine historians.

Keywords: Choniates, Christian, Greek religion, Herodotus, pagan, Procopius, Psellus.

Byzantine historians engaged systematically with and responded to their classical predecessors.[1] This process involved creativity and innovation and

[1] This is a revised, and much improved, version of a paper delivered at the Classical Association Conference 2013 panel 'Reading Herodotus' Gods, from Antiquity to the Present', organised by Anthony Ellis. First and foremost, I would like to sincerely thank Anthony Ellis for his sharp and instructive comments, and the excellent job he did as the editor of this volume. I would also like to thank Mathieu de Bakker and the anonymous reviewer for reading earlier drafts and offering helpful feedback. Finally, I am grateful to the *Histos* team, and John Marincola in particular, for offering a most suitable home for all four papers.

served the authors' literary, cultural, and political purposes. A landmark work such as Herodotus' *Histories*, which inaugurated the genre of history writing, was a seminal text to grapple and compete with. On account of its varied nature, the *Histories* was received in different ways, ranging from imitation to forthright criticism.[2] In a Christian context and in a society so deeply preoccupied with religion, Herodotus' complex religious standpoint and moral outlook made him an appealing model, but also posed challenges to the historians' perceptions of historical causation. This article tackles a selection of responses of early and middle Byzantine historians to Herodotus' religious outlook.

A comprehensive discussion of such a rich topic would require more space. I will therefore limit myself to a few indicative cases that can give us insight into the engagement of three Byzantine historians with Herodotus. I shall examine the role that three concepts central to Herodotean theological and historical thinking—divine *phthonos* (envy),[3] fate, and the wheel of fortune—play in passages selected from the following historiographical works: Procopius' *Wars* (6th century), Michael Psellus' *Chronographia* (11th century) and Nicetas Choniates' *History* (12th to early 13th century).

All three works have survived in complete form. Each carries particular significance for the history of the periods it narrates (in particular because the three historians claim to have participated in and/or witnessed the events they describe). The three works between them, moreover, demonstrate Herodotean influence in the following aspects: subject matter, vocabulary, style, ethnography, geography, dramatic presentation, and digressions.

I should like to start with some caveats. First, given that Byzantine historians often follow more than one classical

[2] See the brief overviews of the Byzantines' preoccupation with Herodotus' text by Bichler and Rollinger (2006) 181–3 and Rapp (2008) 129–34. Cf. also, more generally, Greatrex (1996) on the engagement of 5th- and 6th-century historians with the classical past, and Kaldellis (2012) on the Byzantine interest in ancient Greek historians.

[3] On envy in ancient Greece, see Konstan (2006) 111–28; Sanders (2013).

model[4] and their reception is in addition mediated through other pagan or Christian authors, it is not an easy task to detect direct influence and we must therefore proceed with care. Second, we must bear in mind that not only for Herodotus but also for other historians after him, such as Thucydides and especially Polybius, chance played a significant role in the explanation of historical events. However, the ideas of the reversal of fortune and of divine *phthonos*, at least in the field of historiography, appear for the first time in Herodotus and remain strongly associated with his work (reversal: Hdt. 1.5.4; 1.207.2; divine *phthonos*: Hdt. 1.32; 3.40; 4.205 (*epiphthonos*); 7.10ε; 7.46; 8.109.2 (*epiphthonos*)). Furthermore, in Herodotus there is a distinctive ambiguity in terms of the interference of the divine in human affairs. A degree of scepticism as to whether the divine is responsible for the turn of events in human life and also the openness to a range of historical explanations (fortune, human will, god) that we find in Herodotus' *Histories*[5] may be detected with variations in the works of the Byzantine historians. I suggest here that, among other things, it is in particular this openness to different explanations that brings these two intellectual cultures closer together.

But were these two worlds in essence so different after all? It is not the aim of this article to elaborate on the relationship between ancient Greek and Christian religion, but some brief comments will help build the background to my analysis. Viewing ancient Greek religion as the exact opposite of Christianity is a simple but unhelpful reflex. Christian thought incorporated numerous ideas from the complex and dynamic set of elements that comprised ancient Greek religion. Yet despite ample examples of overlap, the attempt to merge elements of these two

[4] E.g. Procopius is demonstrably influenced by Thucydides in his speeches and digressions. For an example of Thucydidean *aemulatio* in Procopius' *Wars*, see Aerts (2003) 93–6.

[5] On the diversified character of Herodotus' religious stance and handling of religious material, see Harrison (2000); Mikalson (2003). Cf. also Baragwanath (2008) for Herodotus' depiction of complex human motivation which further enriches the levels of historical interpretation.

religions was not always uncomplicated. When it came to historiography, Greek historians presented their Christian successors with a whole range of difficulties, especially in terms of historical causation. The major role of fortune in historical events, the jealous and vengeful deity, the importance of human decisions in the unfolding of events, and the centrality of fate in particular (all dominant in various pagan historiographical texts) would not seem easily compatible with the good and just nature of the Christian God who directed the course of events and all human affairs. Nevertheless, not everyone found this problematic. While some openly rejected and attacked certain ideas, others tried to adapt and assimilate them to Christian viewpoints. Most importantly, several Greek concepts, such as the role of fortune in human life or the supernatural force of envy, continued to be an integral part of Christian popular beliefs which facilitated their inclusion in the works of Byzantine historians.[6]

For this reason we must guard against the easy assumption that Byzantine historians who incorporated what we would label 'pagan ideas' into their works were necessarily going against Christian theology. Equally, that these historians are Christian and write in a Christian context and for a Christian audience, does not mean that they cannot flirt intellectually with ancient authors, or that their literary interactions with ancient authors are somehow not serious. Unless they openly attack the theology of classical historiography (most common in the case of ecclesiastical historians or hagiographers),[7] Byzantine historians do not seem to be heavily exercised about these matters. Acknowledging this fact can help us better understand the use of Greek theological concepts by Byzantine historians, and to break free of the preconception that the use of Greek texts consisted only of literary

[6] On how the first Christian historians coped with prominent religious notions of classical historiography, see Chesnut (1986).

[7] E.g. Eusebius of Caesarea, on whose work see e.g. Chesnut (1986) ch. 3. Note, however, that these authors often use the same means they are criticising to attack pagan concepts.

imitation aiming at superficial rhetorical effect. Reading the Byzantine engagement with classical authors as an aesthetic device is a handy but overly simplistic way to do away with such complexities (and with the complexities of Christian thought itself). Tempting though it is, we must resist the urge to develop smooth, consistent narratives of the theological discourse of Byzantine historiography.

My aim in this article is to examine how the Herodotean concepts of chance, the cycle of human affairs, and the envy of the gods shed light on the theology and, subsequently, the historical perspective of the three Byzantine historians under scrutiny. I will explore how these concepts interact with Christian beliefs; whether and how the use of these religious notions enables the historians to better realise their narrative purposes; and how the use of such concepts reflects the historians' personal conception of historical reality. Tracing the relationship between Herodotus and these Byzantine historians will help to disclose some of the intricacies of their theological thinking and the construction of their narratives. Scholars are becoming progressively more aware of, and interested in, the preoccupation of Byzantine historians with narrative and literary techniques,[8] and this paper attempts to contribute to this tendency by demonstrating that, in Byzantine historiography, religious concepts associated with Herodotus can be more than mere rhetorical devices.[9]

Procopius' *Wars*[10]

Procopius witnesses the challenging and difficult times of Justinian's reign. Justinian limited freedom of expression, did not tolerate religious diversity, prohibited pagans and heretics from holding public offices, and persecuted

[8] See e.g. Macrides (2010); Nilsson and Scott (2012) 328–32.

[9] For such concepts as mere literary devices in e.g. Procopius, see Cameron (1966); Brodka (2004).

[10] Translations of Procopius (occasionally slightly adapted) are from Dewing (1914–40).

religious dissidents. All these could have influenced Procopius' religious beliefs and the way these are expressed in his works, especially since Procopius writes contemporary history. Fear for his life could have dictated a certain distancing and ambiguity when it came to religious (and political) topics, in an effort not to give offence to the emperor and endanger himself. Whether this was the case or not, the contemporary context is important in understanding why Procopius' religious views have stirred up so much controversy. Things become even more complex because Procopius, as a profoundly classicising historian,[11] freely combines pagan with Christian elements. He has been called a Christian, a pagan, a Platonist, a sceptic, a fatalist, and an agnostic. He was, however, raised an orthodox Christian, he respected monks, and believed in miracles, demons, omens, and prodigies (e.g. *Wars* 1.4.9; 1.7.5–11; 7.35.4–8).[12]

The *Wars* of Procopius tells the story of Justinian's military engagements in Persia, Africa, and Italy (527–553/4 AD). Fortune (τύχη) dominates Procopius' historical explanation. It features either as 'circumstances', 'accident', 'chance' or 'situation', or as a key and unforeseeable factor in the unfolding of events, and is often linked or even identified with God. However, fortune is most frequently subordinate to God.[13] In addition, there is one example where an unfortunate fate is considered to be God's vengeance for a harmful or unjust action: the speech of

[11] On Herodotean, Thucydidean and other classical influence in Procopius' works, see e.g. Braun (1885) and (1894); Cameron (1985) 33–46, 217–19; Kaldellis (2004) 17–61; Karpozelos (1997) 380–1, 384; Treadgold (2007) 213–18 (*passim*); Gilmer (2013); Pazdernik (2006); Bornmann (1974); Adshead (1990); Cresci (1986).

[12] On Procopius' religious beliefs, see Kaldellis (2004) 165–221 and Treadgold's brief remarks (2007) 222–6.

[13] Fortune as 'circumstances', 'accident', 'chance' or 'situation': e.g. 2.11.33; 3.11.6; 3.25.25; 5.5.19; 5.18.15; 7.31.13; 7.13.19. Fortune as a key factor in the unfolding of events: e.g. 6.28.2; 8.33.24–5. Fortune linked with God: e.g. 2.9.13. Fortune subordinate to God: e.g. 3.18.2; 3.25.11–18; 7.8.21–4. Fortune identified with God: e.g. 8.12.33–5. On fortune as identified with divine providence in the *Wars*, see Downey (1949).

Totila, leader of the Goths, to his soldiers (7.8.15–24). Here Totila says that under the leadership of the unjust Theodatus, former king of the Goths, they behaved unfairly (7.8.21–2). They therefore caused God (*θεός*) not to be favourable towards them and as a result they are experiencing bad fortune (*τύχη*). Now that they have suffered enough for their sins (*νῦν δὲ τὴν δίκην παρ' ἡμῶν ὁ θεὸς ὧν ἐξημάρτομεν ἱκανῶς ἔχων*), God is giving them good fortune by making them victorious (*οἷς γε ὑπὲρ τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν δύναμιν νενικηκέναι τοὺς πολεμίους τετύχηκε*).[14] A Christian theological scheme of sin and punishment is outlined here, while fortune features as part of a divine plan. The same scheme of sin and punishment (God punishes injustice and rewards justice), but without a specific reference to fortune, is not only embedded in the speeches ascribed to characters (3.19.6; 2.4.17; 7.16.32) but also found in the narrative (e.g. 1.25.36, 41; 2.11.25).

In other passages Procopius cannot tell whether a certain event happened because of God or fortune, for example, in the Gothic Wars, when he relates Belisarius' plan against Totila and the defeat of the Romans (7.13.15–19).[15] Given

[14] Cf. also Nicias' speech of encouragement to his troops in Thuc. 7.77.2–3 (note esp. 7.77.3: *ἱκανὰ γὰρ τοῖς τε πολεμίοις ηὐτύχηται, καὶ εἴ τῳ θεῶν ἐπίφθονοι ἐστρατεύσαμεν, ἀποχρώντως ἤδη τετιμωρήμεθα* 'the enemy have had their full share of success, and if the gods resented our launching this expedition, we have already been punished enough'). Translations of Thucydides (occasionally slightly adapted) are from Hammond (2009).

[15] 'And to me it seemed either that Belisarius had chosen the worse course because it was fated (*χρῆν*) at that time that the Romans should fare ill, or that he had indeed determined upon the better course, but God, having in mind to assist Totila and the Goths, had stood as an obstacle in his way, so that the best of the plans of Belisarius had turned out utterly contrary to his expectations … However, whether this is so or otherwise, I am unable to say'. Cf. 2.23.16 (on the Byzantine plague): 'this disease, whether by chance or by some providence (*εἴτε τύχῃ τινὶ εἴτε προνοίᾳ*), chose out with exactitude the worst men and let them go free'. The latter example is very close to the Herodotean *εἴτε … εἴτε* formula which is frequently used in depiction of double motivation (e.g. Hdt. 3.121.2: *εἴτ' ἐκ προνοίης … εἴτε καὶ συντυχίη τις τοιαύτη ἐπεγένετο*

Procopius' classical take on historical writing and his strong interest in causation, putting fortune and God side by side could be seen to reveal a tendency to broaden the web of historical causation. This strategy is especially favoured by Herodotus, who often allows for both divine and natural or human explanations of events without taking sides or engaging in any kind of argument. For example, at 7.129.4 the historian's remark as to how the Tempe valley was formed leaves room for interpretation on the divine and the natural level and does not provide a single answer: 'The Thessalians say that Poseidon himself made the ravine through which the Peneius flows, and the story is plausible; for if one believes that Poseidon is responsible for earthquakes, and therefore that rifts formed by earthquakes are caused by him, then the sight of this place would make one say it was the work of Poseidon. For it seems to me that this rift in the mountains was caused by an earthquake'.[16] Likewise, the Athenian defeat at the hands of the Aeginetans and the Argives is attributed by the Athenians to divine intervention but for the Aeginetans and Argives it comes down to human agency (Hdt. 5.85–87.2). If Procopius is indeed appropriating here a distinctly Herodotean technique, he might be aiming at detaching himself from any one interpretation, thus both giving the impression of a more objective viewpoint and leaving it up to his readers to decide for themselves which interpretation they agree with or find more convincing. One important difference is, of course, that both of Procopius' explanations, fortune and God, are supernatural.

Procopius states that God is altogether good (e.g. 5.3.7–9) and, unlike Herodotus, cannot ascribe envy to God. Throughout the *Wars* φθόνος ('envy', 'jealousy') mostly appears as a human emotion, but it is also attributed to evil spirits (δαίμονες, identified in Christian belief most frequently with the Devil) and to fortune. This supernatural

'whether deliberately or whether some chance occurrence happened') (see Baragwanath (2008) 97–8 and esp. 122–59).

[16] Translations of Herodotus (occasionally slightly adapted) are from de Sélincourt (2003) and Waterfield (1998).

envy occurs when someone enjoys too much good fortune (4.8.1). We also find the closely related notion of *βασκανία*, malice, on the part of humans—a word also associated with the Devil in Christian thought.[17]

Procopius' preoccupation with the theme of reversal in human life represents a marked affinity with Herodotus. Change of fortune is recurrently emphasised in the *Wars* and related to the will of God.[18] Herodotus does not always attribute a change of fortune to the divinity, but when he does the change is often linked with divine *phthonos*. Procopius' slightly modified stance seems to be a consequence of his Christian beliefs. In an interesting piece of narrative Procopius reworks the Persian council scene in Herodotus' Book 7.[19] There Herodotus narrates the discussion about whether the Persians should undertake an expedition against Greece. Xerxes announces his decision

[17] Envy as human emotion: e.g. 2.2.12; 2.2.15; 5.1.33; 7.8.23; 7.25.23; 8.11.9; 8.24.28. Envy attributed to evil spirits: e.g. 7.19.22 (*φθονερῶν δαιμόνων*). Envy attributed to fortune: e.g. 6.8.1 (*τῆς δὲ τύχης ὁ φθόνος*). Envy as *βασκανία*: e.g. 6.30.1. It is worth bearing in mind that the notions of 'envious fate' and 'envious demon' appear first in Hellenistic writers and are picked up by imperial period writers (e.g. Pol. 39.8.2: *τὴν τύχην ὡς ἔστιν ἀγαθὴ φθονῆσαι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις*; Plut. *Alc.* 33.2: *τινι τύχῃ πονηρᾷ καὶ φθονερῷ δαίμονι*), and that the words *βασκανία* and *βάσκανος* are used frequently in Hellenistic literature as synonyms for *φθόνος* and *φθονερός* (e.g. Paus. 2.33.3: δαιμόνιον … *βάσκανον*). On the envy of fate in Hellenistic literature, see Aalders (1979). On the usage and meaning of *baskanos tukhê* and *phthonos* in Byzantine historiography (esp. in the 10th century) and the association of *phthonos* with the devil, see Hinterberger (2010b); cf. Hinterberger (2010a) on emotions, including envy, in Byzantine literature; (2004) (on envy). On the huge overlap between *phthonos* and *baskania*, established by the time of the Cappadocian Fathers, see Hinterberger (2010b) 197.

[18] Reversal of fortune: e.g. 3.5.10 (*τύχαις … ξυμμεταβάλλεσθαι*); 1.17.30 (*οὐ πάντα … χρεών ἐστι πιστεύειν τῇ τύχῃ οὐδὲ τοὺς πολέμους οἴεσθαι δεῖν κατορθοῦν ἅπαντας. οὐδὲ γὰρ εἰκὸς τοῦτό γε οὐδὲ ἄλλως ἀνθρώπειον*); 4.6.24 (*ἢ οὐχ ὁμοίως τοῖς φλαύροις ἀναγκαῖά γε ἡμῖν καὶ τὰ παρὰ τῆς τύχης ἀγαθὰ λογιστέον*;); 7.25.5 (*τὰ γὰρ ἀνθρώπεια καὶ σφάλλεσθαί ποτε πέφυκεν*). Reversal of fortune related to the will of God: e.g. 5.24.1–17; 3.4.13 (*τὰ ἀνθρώπεια τοῖς τε θείοις σφάλλεσθαι*).

[19] The correspondence has been noted by e.g. Evans (1971) 85–6; Kaldellis (2004) 180–1; Scott (2012a) 73–4.

to attack Greece but Artabanus, his uncle, tries to change his mind by talking about the dangers of such an enterprise and divine *phthonos* that brings down those who entertain grand designs and think big. In the follow-up to the Persian council scene, Herodotus narrates the dream that appeared to both Xerxes and Artabanus and eventually convinced them to carry out the campaign (Hdt. 7.8–18).

The relevant piece in Procopius (3.10.1–17) opens with a speech by John the Cappadocian who, like Artabanus, asks the emperor Justinian to reconsider an expedition against the Vandals and Gelimer in North Africa. The contexts are very similar: in both cases everyone is silent, although they disagree with the king's decision, and only the wise advisors dare to speak (cf. 3.10.7–8 with Hdt. 7.10.1).[20] What is more, the advisors talk about obstacles posed by sea and land,[21] recommend that the king proceed only after careful consideration and prudent planning, and urge the king to learn from past failures.[22] The events following the

[20] John's casting as a wise advisor at this point strikes us as strange because elsewhere in the *Wars* he is portrayed in dark colours (he had no regard for God and was punished for his crimes: e.g. 1.24–5). But perhaps given his close relationship with Justinian (e.g. 1.25.33) Procopius deems him the right person to admonish the emperor. Scott ((2012a) 73–4) suggests that Procopius' desire to adhere to the classical model in order to delicately stress his opposition to the expedition overpowered his negative view of John.

[21] Cf. 3.10.14 to Hdt. 7.10α.3–β.2 and also to Hdt. 7.49 (Artabanus' words in his discussion with Xerxes at the Hellespont).

[22] See e.g. 3.10.13–16: 'But if in reality these things lie on the knees of God, and if it behoves us, taking example from what has happened in the past, to fear the outcome of war, on what grounds is it not better to love a state of quiet rather than the dangers of mortal strife? … it will not be possible for you to reap the fruits of victory, and at the same time any reversal of fortune will bring harm to what is well established'. Cf. Hdt. 7.10β.1–δ.2: '… the men are said to be valiant, and indeed one might well judge as much from the fact that the Athenians alone destroyed so great an army that came to Attica with Datis and Artaphrenes … I conjecture thus not of any wisdom of my own, but just such a disaster did, in fact, almost overtake us when your father built a bridge across the Thracian Bosporus and bridged the Danube to attack the Scythians … You should not choose to run that kind of risk when there is no necessity to do so … In my experience nothing is more

discussion further recall the Herodotean narrative sequence: a priest comes and says that God appeared to him in a dream and asked him to tell the emperor that he must go to war (3.10.18–20).

John's speech is important in reflecting Procopius' theological framework as are the differences between this speech and its Herodotean foil. Herodotus' Artabanus attributes a reversal of good fortune to the jealous divinity (ὁ θεὸς φθονήσας) blasting anything preeminent (Hdt. 7.10ε). The reversal of fortune is emphasised in Procopius, as is the responsibility of God for all that happens in human life, but there is no sign of divine *phthonos*. Procopius also alludes to the Byzantine belief that the emperor is God's representative on earth and is therefore at least partly able to control the fortunes of his subjects (3.10.8). The Herodotean parallel, moreover, reinforces the comparison—which persists in the *Wars*—of Justinian to barbarian despots.

Procopius evokes Herodotus again when relating the fate of the city of Antioch (2.10.4–5):

> But I become dizzy as I write of such a great calamity and transmit it to future times, and I am unable to understand why indeed it should be the will of God to exalt on high the fortunes of a man or of a place, and then to cast them down and destroy them for no cause which we can perceive (τί ποτε ἄρα βουλομένῳ τῷ θεῷ εἴη πράγματα μὲν ἀνδρὸς ἢ χωρίου του ἐπαίρειν εἰς ὕψος, αὖθις δὲ ῥιπτεῖν τε αὐτὰ καὶ ἀφανίζειν ἐξ οὐδεμιᾶς ἡμῖν φαινομένης αἰτίας). For it is wrong to say that with Him all things are not always done with reason (αὐτῷ γὰρ οὐ θέμις εἰπεῖν μὴ οὐχὶ ἅπαντα κατὰ λόγον ἀεὶ γίγνεσθαι), though he then endured to see Antioch brought down to the ground at the hands of a most unholy man, a city

advantageous than good planning. For, even if a set-back happens, that does not alter the fact that the plan was sound; it is just that the plan was defeated by chance. However, if someone who has not laid his plans properly is attended by fortune, he may have had a stroke of luck, but that does not alter the fact that his plan was unsound'.

> whose beauty and grandeur in every respect could not even so be utterly concealed.

Procopius' language and imagery are equally reminiscent of Artabanus' speech to Xerxes about the envy of the divine that cuts off anything excessive (ὁ θεὸς τὰ ὑπερέχοντα πάντα κολούειν), like great living creatures, tall trees, and buildings (Hdt. 7.10ε). Similar is the picture Solon paints in his conversation with Croesus: the divine is entirely jealous and tends to confound humans (1.32.1: τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐὸν φθονερόν τε καὶ ταραχῶδες); hence, having given many men a glimpse of happiness, it then utterly ruins them (1.32.9: πολλοῖσι γὰρ δὴ ὑποδέξας ὄλβον ὁ θεὸς προρρίζους ἀνέτρεψε).[23]

Rather than employing the notion of divine *phthonos*, Procopius cannot explain the reversal in Antioch's fortune but professes to be certain that God had his reasons. Fortune's role in reversing human affairs is especially stressed in the life of Totila, whose wretched end is completely incongruous with his former glory. Procopius finds the capriciousness of fortune incomprehensible (8.32.28–30) but the start of the next chapter clearly shows that he considers this part of God's plan. In 8.33.1 the narrator enters his text to comment that Justinian's general Narses was right to believe that the Byzantine victory and Totila's death, as well as everything else, was the work of God. Nevertheless, divine intervention—highlighted in the case of Antioch by a portent (2.10.1–3)—does not exclude human will, which the historian mentions as a factor operating alongside God's will (5.24.1–17).

[23] Cf. Amasis' advice to Polycrates (Hdt. 3.40): 'the divinity is jealous (τὸ θεῖον … ἔστι φθονερόν) … I have never yet heard of someone doing well in everything who did not end up utterly destroyed (ὅστις ἐς τέλος οὐ κακῶς ἐτελεύτησε πρόρριζος)'. Cf. also the similar sentiments expressed in Pindar (*Pyth.* 10.20–1: φθονεραῖς ἐκ θεῶν μετατροπίαις; 8.76–8: δαίμων δὲ παρίσχει ἄλλοτ' ἄλλον ὕπερθε βάλλων, ἄλλον δ' ὑπὸ χειρῶν μέτρῳ καταβαίνει) and Simonides (fr. 527 *PMG*: ὀλίγῳ δὲ χρόνῳ πάντα μεταρρίπτει θεός). On Herodotus' rhetoric of advice, see Pelling (2006a); (2006b) 104–6.

Another motif which might well be borrowed from Herodotus is the use of a letter to express one's thoughts on human affairs. Amasis' letter to Polycrates about divine jealousy and the instability of fortune (Hdt. 3.40) could have provided the background of Pharas' letter to Gelimer (4.6.15–26) about the changeability of fortune being part of the human condition. Both letters advise the recipient to embrace or cause a change of fortune because some kind of balance is needed to avoid total misfortune and utter disaster. A comparably prudent attitude is advocated in Belisarius' letter to Justinian, where the general states that 'achievements which transcend the nature of things may not properly and fittingly be ascribed to man's valour, but to a stronger power' (5.24.5). This stronger power is described as 'some chance' which is soon identified with the will of God.

As Averil Cameron has argued, Procopius' use of classical vocabulary, tendency to avoid Christian terms, and adoption of an external perspective when commenting on Christian matters are closely linked to the fact that the *Wars* are written in the tradition of classical historiography.[24] This language creates a forceful rhetorical effect, corroborates Procopius' authority and objectivity, and would be easily recognised by the audience as a valid technique for a classicising Christian author.[25] Kaldellis, on the other hand, explains Procopius' inconsistencies and detachment by proposing that he is not a Christian; he further argues, reasoning from the historical context, that Procopius employs classical models to veil his criticism of the emperor and express his non-Christian outlook while avoiding

[24] E.g. 3.10.18: *τῶν δέ τις ἱερέων οὓς δὴ ἐπισκόπους καλοῦσιν* 'but one of the priests whom they call bishops'; 4.21.21: *αὐτὸν ὀμεῖσθαι τὰ Χριστιανῶν λόγια ἔφασαν, ἅπερ καλεῖν εὐαγγέλια νενομίκασιν* 'they said that he would swear by the sacred writings of the Christians, which they are accustomed to call Gospels'. Cf. Herodotus' assuming an external stance when discussing Greek religion, e.g. Hdt. 1.131.1; 2.53.

[25] See Cameron (1966); (1985). On Procopius purely aiming at *mimesis* of a superior writing style, see also Cameron and Cameron (1964); Brodka (2004).

exposing himself.[26] Neither Cameron's nor Kaldellis' views are unproblematic. Both scholars seem to start from the false premise that paganism and Christianity constitute entirely separable belief systems. *Mimesis* and facilitation of the audience's understanding based on familiar language and thematic patterns are only two aspects of Procopius' employment and remoulding of classical models. But to admit that Procopius' engagement with classical models is more than surface interaction does not indicate that Procopius rejected Christianity. The same can be said of his occasional ambiguity in religious matters and the central and complex role given to *tukhê* in the *Wars*. For all his occasional scepticism, shunning of Christian diction, and emphasis on chance, Procopius' historical causation bears strong Christian colours;[27] we notice that when he is unable to explain things in any other way he attributes them to a higher power, God. And when human responsibility (usually the emperor's) is at play, it mingles with the will of God.[28]

Pagan and distinctly Herodotean notions are adapted to current beliefs, and chance is made part of a Christian

[26] See Kaldellis (2004) 165–221, who argues that *tukhê* is a dominant feature of Procopius' non-Christian world-view. Cf. also Elferink (1967) who proposes that Procopius believed in both a rational God and an irrational fate.

[27] On Procopius' Christianity, see Evans (1971) (cf. esp. 100: 'he [i.e. Procopius] did not assign a large portion of historical causation to a purely pagan *τύχη*. Rather, he kept a place for contingency in historical causation, because he refused to see any real incompatibility between an omnipotent God and Divine foreknowledge on the one hand, and free will and contingency on the other … [A]t least we may say that Procopius' concept of *τύχη* was a product of his own time and education. It was not reused lumber from the pagan past, ill-digested and imperfectly comprehended by him'); Cameron and Cameron (1964) 317–22; Cameron (1966); (1985) 113–33; Treadgold (2007) 222–6; Downey (1949), who argues that Procopius was a sceptical Christian.

[28] Cf. Cameron (1986), who also thinks that the significance of the emperor's (i.e. Justinian's) personality in historical causation links together Procopius' *Wars*, *Secret History*, and *Buildings*, three works that may serve different purposes but are not contradictory as is commonly held.

interpretative framework. Procopius' very ambiguity may, in fact, be a conscious literary choice that furthers his goal of reporting historical events accurately following the example of his classical predecessors.[29] In taking into account a range of factors that affect historical events (God, chance, envious demons, human will), Procopius seems to adhere to his Herodotean model, especially at those points where he is reluctant to pass a judgement as to the accuracy of omens and signs, or to the actual nature of God even if he accepts unconditionally God's goodness. He thus says about God (5.3.6–9):

> As for the points in dispute [i.e. points of disagreement and controversy among the Christians], although I know them well, I shall by no means make mention of them; for I consider it a sort of insane folly to investigate the nature of God, enquiring of what sort it is. For man cannot, I think, apprehend even human affairs with accuracy, much less those things which pertain to the nature of God. As for me, therefore, I shall maintain a discreet silence concerning these matters, with the sole object that old and venerable beliefs may not be discredited. For I, for my part, will say nothing whatever about God save that He is altogether good and has all things in His power. But let each one say whatever he thinks he knows about these matters, both priest and layman.[30]

[29] Cf. Karpozelos (1997) 381–5.

[30] Some of Procopius' ideas about God, for example that God is free from envy and is the cause of good things only, are perfectly Platonic (e.g. *Tim.* 29e: *ἀγαθὸς ἦν, ἀγαθῷ δὲ οὐδεὶς περὶ οὐδενὸς οὐδέποτε ἐγγίγνεται φθόνος* 'God was good and the good can never have any envy of anything'; *Rep.* 379b–380c); for further discussion of this broader topic, see the Introduction to the volume. This line of interpretation has been taken, especially by Kaldellis (2004), to argue for Procopius' non-Christian outlook. But Platonic ideas are not necessarily inconsistent with Christian beliefs and Platonism had a strong impact on Christian theology (see e.g. Ferguson (2003)).

We may compare this with Herodotus' reluctance to speak about the gods (2.3):

> Besides this story of the rearing of the children, I also heard other things at Memphis in conversation with the priests of Hephaestus; and I visited Thebes and Heliopolis, too, for this very purpose, because I wished to know if the people of those places would tell me the same story as the priests at Memphis; for the people of Heliopolis are said to be the most learned of the Egyptians. Now, such stories as I heard about the gods I am not ready to relate, except their names, for I believe that all men are equally knowledgeable about them; and I shall say about them what I am constrained to say by the course of my history.

or with Herodotus' hesitancy to reveal the content of the ἱροὶ λόγοι that he gathered in Egypt (2.45.3):

> Besides this, if Heracles was a mere man (as they say he was) and single-handed, how is it conceivable that he should have killed tens of thousands of people? And now I hope that both gods and heroes will forgive me for saying what I have said on these matters.[31]

Psellus' *Chronographia*[32]

With Psellus and Choniates we are well into the Middle Ages, when the role of irrational powers, notably envy, has been significantly enriched. These powers have been transformed into independent passions, very often

[31] Cf. Hdt. 2.48.3: 'The Egyptians have a sacred story as to why these figures have oversized genitals, and why this is the only part of the body that can move'.

[32] Translations (occasionally slightly adapted) are from Sewter (1966). In quoting passages from the *Chronographia*, when accounts of the reign of different emperors are given in the same book, I give the name of the emperor first, e.g. Michael VII, 7.8.

associated with the Devil,[33] that conquer and misguide individuals and set historical events in motion.

Psellus' style is highly complex and he enjoys the interaction with ancient Greek literature.[34] He was fond of pagan philosophers and held philosophical and theological views that have been considered contradictory;[35] so much so that it has been argued he was only superficially Christian.[36] He received a broad education, was interested in horoscopes, became a high-ranking political advisor, and also served as a monk. His *Chronographia*, a work distinguished for its rich character portraits, is a history of the Byzantine emperors from Basil II to Michael VII (976–1077) and Psellus features in it as a historical actor.

In Psellus' theological framework fortune (*τύχη*) is most often subordinate to divine providence, or closely linked with it. But fortune also features by itself, with certain nuances of meaning depending on the context. Sewter[37] translates the term variably in different passages as 'fate', 'calamity', 'status', 'importance', 'origin', 'condition', 'circumstances'. The power of fortune is evident when Psellus says that a man can become a plaything of fortune (4.27: *τῆς τύχης γινόμενον παίγνιον*) or may be blessed with good fortune (Constantine IX, 6.96: *τύχης τινὸς δεξιᾶς*). Bad luck is often ascribed to a demon.[38]

[33] On the close connection between *phthonos* and the Devil, see Hinterberger (2010b); (2013).

[34] On Psellus and classical literature and thought, see Wilson (1983) 156–72.

[35] See e.g. Karpozelos (2009) 98–9.

[36] See Kaldellis (1999).

[37] See Sewter (1966).

[38] Fortune as subordinate to divine providence: e.g. Michael VII, 7.20. Fortune as closely linked with divine providence: e.g. Constantine IX, 6.195. Fortune as 'fate': e.g. 1.3; 1.15; Constantine IX, 6.15; 6.100. Fortune as 'calamity': e.g. Contantine IX, 6.18. Fortune as 'status': e.g. 4.28; 4.45. Fortune as 'importance': e.g. 3.10. Fortune as 'origin': e.g. Zoe and Theodora, 6.11. Fortune as 'condition' or 'circumstances': e.g. 3.8. Fortune as a higher power: e.g. 4.27; Constantine IX, 6.96. Bad luck linked with a demonic power: e.g. 1.28 (*δαιμονίαν τύχην*).

Φθόνος, as well as βασκανία, is a human emotion[39] but also a supernatural power. The personification of the jealousy that divided the two sisters, Zoe and Theodora, seems to have a metaphysical dimension (Michael V, 5.34: φθόνος τὰς ἀδελφὰς διελών). And when Psellus wishes that the darts of βασκανία (malice) and νέμεσις (retribution)[40] may never harm his friendship with Michael VII (Michael VII, 7.8), these two emotions turn into independent malicious powers that rise above the secular world.

But can God be envious? Comparing the passage Constantine IX, 6.74 with its Herodotean parallels might provide an answer to this. In 6.74 Psellus intrudes into his text to comment on the nature of envy and the emperors. Quoting a proverb ascribed to Solon ('Goodness is scarce') the historian talks about the 'creeping paralysis of envy' from which even the few (i.e. the emperors) are not immune. The envious man cuts off with his knife every part of a plant that might produce a fine bloom of natural fertility, courage, or any other good quality, while he is not bothered with the shoots that run to wood and produce no flowers at all.[41] Anything good inspires envy (φθόνος), an emotion which the emperors also feel since they want to excel above everyone else.[42]

[39] Φθόνος as human emotion: e.g. Constantine IX, 6.62; 6.191. Βασκανία as human emotion: e.g. Theodora, 6.6.

[40] On the meaning of *nemesis* and its close affiliation with *phthonos* and *baskania* in near-contemporary Byzantine historiography, see Hinterberger (2010b).

[41] 6.74: ἀλλὰ καὶ οὕτως ἐχόντων ἔρπει καὶ κατὰ τῶν ὀλίγων ὁ φθόνος, καὶ εἴ πού τις ἄνθη, λέγω δὴ ἐν πᾶσι τὸ πλεῖστον καιροῖς, ἢ γονίμου ἀναβλαστήσειε φύσεως, ἢ φρονήσεως ἀκριβοῦς, ἢ μεγαλοφυΐας, ἢ ψυχῆς καρτερᾶς καὶ ἀνδρείας, ἢ ἀγαθοῦ τινος ἄλλου, εὐθὺς ἐφέστηκεν ὁ τομεύς, καὶ τοῦτο μὲν τὸ μέρος τῆς βλάστης ἐκκέκοπται, παραβλαστάνουσι δὲ τὰ ὑλώδη καὶ ἄκαρπα, καὶ ὑλομανεῖ ἐπὶ πλέον ἡ ἄκανθα.

[42] οὐ γὰρ ἀρκεῖ τούτοις ἡ ταινία καὶ ἁλουργίς, ἀλλ' ἦν μὴ τῶν σοφῶν σοφώτεροι εἶεν καὶ τῶν ἀκριβούντων δεινότεροι, καὶ ἁπλῶς εἰπεῖν ὑπερτελεῖς κορυφαὶ τῶν ἁπασῶν ἀρετῶν, ἐν δεινῷ ποιοῦνται τὸ πρᾶγμα ('it is not enough that they should have their diadems and their purple, for unless they are wiser than the wise, cleverer than the experts—in

Psellus' diction and imagery[43] here recall the advice of the Herodotean Thrasybulus to Periander as to how a tyrant should secure his power, and Periander's consequent conduct (Hdt. 5.92ζ.2–η.1):

> Thrasybulus led the man who had come from Periander outside the town, and entered into a sown field. As he walked through the corn, continually asking why the messenger had come to him from Corinth, he kept cutting off all the tallest ears of wheat which he could see, and throwing them away, until he had destroyed the best and richest part of the crop (ἐκόλουε αἰεὶ ὅκως τινὰ ἴδοι τῶν ἀσταχύων ὑπερέχοντα, κολούων δὲ ἔρριπτε, ἐς ὃ τοῦ ληίου τὸ κάλλιστόν τε καὶ βαθύτατον διέφθειρε τρόπῳ τοιούτῳ) … Periander perceived that Thrasybulus had counselled him to slay those of his townsmen who were outstanding in influence or ability; with that he began to deal with his citizens in an evil manner.

The diction and imagery also recall the Herodotean Artabanus' words that the envious god puts down everything that is exalted (ὁ θεὸς τὰ ὑπερέχοντα πάντα κολούειν) and does not allow anyone but himself to feel pride (οὐ γὰρ ἐᾷ φρονέειν μέγα ὁ θεὸς ἄλλον ἢ ἑωυτόν) (Hdt. 7.10ε). The envy in Psellus' passage (6.74) seems not to be divine by contrast to Herodotus' passage 7.10ε. Moreover, passage 5.92ζ.2–η.1 of the *Histories* makes no reference to envy but we do find a link between tyrants and envy in the speech of Otanes in the Constitutional Debate: φθόνος is said to be an essential characteristic of all tyrants who feel jealous of 'the best who thrive and live' and are thus led to reckless actions (Hdt. 3.80.3–4). The verbal and visual resonances between the two Herodotean passages, 5.92ζ.2–

short, if they are not placed on the highest summit of all the virtues—they consider themselves grievously maltreated').

[43] For an overview of Psellus' use of imagery in the *Chronographia* and his debt to classical literature, see Littlewood (2006).

η.1 and 7.10ϵ, supported by Otanes' comments, in my view, reinforce the link between rulers/emperors and God, popular in Christian Byzantine thought and to which Psellus also refers indirectly in the same passage when he says: 'Either they must rule over us like gods or they refuse to govern at all'. But Psellus is careful to distinguish between the good nature of God and the bad nature of emperors as he points out that 'just when they should have rejoiced that God had raised up for them a helping hand, they chose rather to cut it off, simply because of the quarter from which that help was coming'. As with Procopius, envy may be attributed to fortune but not to God (e.g. 1.31: *ὑπερηφάνου καὶ βασκάνου τύχης*).

A most interesting passage redolent of Herodotus is the conversation between Isaac Komnenos and Psellus in the reign of Michael VI. Here Isaac, after his victory over Michael VI and his triumphant entry into the capital, is worried about the future, ponders the unpredictability of fortune, and doubts he will have a happy ending. Psellus—whom Isaac calls a 'philosopher'—replies that this view is truly philosophical and good beginnings are not necessarily followed by bad endings, and he continues (Michael VI, 7.41):

> If Fate has set a limit, it is not for us to probe. In fact, my acquaintance with learned books and propitiatory prayers tells me that if a man betters his condition, he is merely following his destiny. When I say that, I am, of course, expressing the doctrine of the Hellenes, for according to our Christian Faith, nothing is predetermined, nothing foreordained in our lives. Nevertheless, there is a logical connection between effects and their immediate causes. Once you change that philosophic outlook, however, or become elated with pride (*τὴν σὴν ψυχὴν ἐπαρθείς*) because of these glories, justice (*δίκη*) will assuredly oppose your plans, and very quickly at that. So long as your heart is not filled with pride, you can take courage. For God is not jealous where He gives us blessings; on the contrary,

> He has often set men on an uninterrupted path of glory (ὡς οὐ βασκαίνει τὸ θεῖον ἐν οἷς δίδωσιν, ἀλλὰ πολλοῖς καὶ πολλάκις κατ' εὐθεῖαν ἤνεγκε τὴν γραμμὴν τῆς λαμπρότητος).

Here Psellus brings Hellenic/pagan and Christian views quite close together: leading a good life secures long-lasting prosperity, while leading a bad life and being arrogant results in the opposite. The schema of arrogance and punishment outlined here is common in classical Greek (e.g. drama) and Byzantine (e.g. Procopius above) literature.[44] But the use of the wise advisor motif in particular as well as the philosophical touch unmistakably calls to mind the Herodotean dialogue between Solon and Croesus on human happiness, the mutability of fortune, divine *phthonos*, and the need to wait till the end before one deems anyone happy (Hdt. 1.30–2).[45] They also evoke Artabanus' comments on divine *phthonos* in the Persian council scene (Hdt. 7.10ε), and the conversation between Xerxes and Artabanus on the inevitability of human misfortune on account of divine jealousy (Hdt. 7.45–6).

The basic idea underlying both the Psellan and Herodotean contexts seem to be the same: 'thinking big' causes divine punishment. In Herodotus, however, there is one more stage which precedes divine punishment, and that is divine *phthonos*. Psellus elides divine *phthonos* altogether because, as we have seen, God cannot be envious. Psellus moreover replaces the notion of the punishment of the malicious divine with that of divine justice. And in what seems to be perhaps the most fascinating aspect of a masterly reworking of Herodotus, Psellus goes on to expressly say not only that God is not jealous of the blessings he gives us but also that God does not always bring about a reversal of fortune: if man avoids arrogance

[44] On arrogance in archaic and classical Greek literature, see Fisher (1992); Cairns (1996). On tragic patterns in Psellus' *Chronographia*, see e.g. Dyck (1994).

[45] Cf. Kaldellis (1999) 194–5.

then God will reward him with constant prosperity. In other words, man is responsible for his own misfortunes. This turns Herodotus' theological schema on its head: in the *Histories* the envy of the divinity makes unbroken happiness impossible and reversal of fortune inescapable. The vulnerability of humans to divine envy and the brief taste of the sweetness of life described in Herodotus (7.46.4: *ὁ δὲ θεὸς γλυκὺν γεύσας τὸν αἰῶνα φθονερὸς ἐν αὐτῷ εὑρίσκεται ἐών*) are displaced in Psellus by human accountability and a benevolent God.

This sort of reworking of the Herodotean precedents represents Psellus' creative Christian response to Herodotus' pagan historiography. It further underlines not only Psellus' wisdom and foresight as an advisor in the text but also the wisdom of Isaac in his reflecting on the fickleness of fortune—we notice that Psellus calls Isaac's thought 'philosophical' (*φιλόσοφον … τὸ ἐνθύμημα*). At the same time Psellus' reworking of Herodotus points to Isaac's ignorance as he is placed in a line of rulers who cannot really understand the meaning of the counsels of their advisors correctly and eventually fail: Isaac does not succeed in his attempt to reform the finances of Byzantium and suffers an untimely death.

The reversal of fortune appears as an overarching theme in the biographies of most Byzantine emperors where rise (accompanied by excessive pride) is followed by a precipitous fall. We have seen that Isaac Komnenos is well aware of this, as is empress Zoe, who tries to protect herself from any sudden change of fortune (Zoe and Theodora, 6.18: *τὴν τοῦ καιροῦ εὐλαβουμένη ὀξύτητα οὐ πόρρωθεν*). The motif is best exemplified in the story of Michael V when Psellus comments: 'the emperor would be punished for his tyrannical arrogance not in the distant future but immediately and suddenly'.[46] Psellus also muses on the incomprehensible ways in which divine providence (*ὅ τε νοῦς οὐ χωρεῖ τῆς Προνοίας τὸ μέτρον*) engineered Michael's

[46] Michael V, 5.23: *ἔμελλε δὲ ἄρα οὐκ εἰς μακρόν τινα χρόνον, ἀλλ' εὐθὺς καὶ ἐξ ὑπογυίου δίκας τοῦ τυραννικοῦ δώσειν φρονήματος*.

fall from power, pride, and luxury (Michael V, 5.24). As he builds his narrative around the succession, rise, and fall of emperors tracing the gradual decadence of the empire, Psellus vividly evokes Herodotus' narrative of the rise and fall of the Persian empire which conforms to the arrogance-punishment theme.[47]

Interestingly, the *Chronographia* finishes with a narrative device familiar from Herodotus and which we have also come across in Procopius: a letter from Michael VII to Phocas. Among other things, the letter warns about the omnipotence and overseeing role of divine providence that pays everyone what he deserves (Michael VII, 7.20).

Psellus often denounces pagan practices, horoscopes, and divination. He finds fault with some of the privileges of the monks and the feigned piety of the emperors (e.g. 3.13–16). Even if he leaves room for the workings of fortune, he believes that God rules over everything and he attributes positive turns of events in difficult circumstances or unexpected victories to God (e.g. 3.9; Constantine IX, 6.84; Isaac Comnenus, 7.88). Psellus moreover acknowledges the power of passions such as envy, which help him to describe the virtues and vices of the emperors. Besides, he had experienced first-hand the dire consequences of envy as he himself fell victim to the *βασκανία* ('jealousy', Constantine IX, 6.191) of the emperor Constantine Monomachus and joined the monastic life because his position was insecure (Constantine IX, 6.191–200). The influence of the contemporary historico-political, social, and cultural climate

[47] Two things are worth noting here. First, the concept of divine providence (*πρόνοια*) appears in Herodotus also (3.108: divine providence is wise and maintains a certain balance and order in the world) but by the 6th century it has become thoroughly Christianised. Psellus' ideas of divine providence, therefore, are not to be viewed as a Herodotean borrowing but, given Herodotus' pervasive influence on Psellus, it would be meaningful to explore Psellus' use of a theological concept that is both Herodotean and Christian—a topic which I hope to treat in detail elsewhere. Second, the rise and fall of empires could also be linked to examples from the Bible, but this is not the place to pursue this further; for brief comments on this topic, see the Introduction to this volume, above, pp. 24–5 and n. 20.

on Psellus is clearly significant. In a context of rapid social mobility and political as well as military decline, envy was openly promoted,[48] while there was an increasing interest in the individuals and their emotions in Byzantine art and literature especially from the 11th century onwards.[49] *Phthonos* is a forceful emotion and a power which operates outside God's will and is often closely joined with the Devil. Herodotean strands of thought—notably the envious divinity—are not just adapted to Christian ways of thought but wholly reinterpreted. Despite his openness to Greek litetature and philosophy as well as his occasional scepticism, Psellus has a fundamentally Christian outlook.[50] Defending himself and his Christian outlook, Psellus says (Theodora, 6.12):

> Nobody with any sense would find fault with a man who knew these theories [i.e. astrology and horoscopy], but gave them no credence. On the other hand, where a man rejects Christian Doctrine, and turns to such hypotheses, his studies are useless and may well be regretted. For my own part—and this is the truth—it was no scientific reason that made me give up these ideas, but rather was I restrained by some divine force. It is not a matter of logical argument—and I certainly pay no attention to other methods of proof. But the same cause, which, in the case of greater and more learned intellects than mine, has brought them down to a level where they accept Hellenic culture, in my case

[48] See e.g. Hinterberger (2010a) 131.

[49] See e.g. Kazhdan and Wharton-Epstein (1985) 197–230.

[50] On Psellus' religious beliefs, see Karpozelos (2009) 102–4 (rationality that does not undermine the religious feeling); Harris (2000) 25: 'That is not to say that Psellus and other Byzantine historians had a secular outlook, which sought only human causes for events. In criticising the actions of God's appointed emperor, they were providing a deeply religious explanation'. *Pace* Kaldellis (1999), who interprets the *Chronographia* as an ironic, subversive philosophical and political work, which is essentially Platonic and questions Christian theology. As with Procopius, there is a Platonic aspect to Psellus' thought but in my view this does not compromise his Christian beliefs.

> exercises a compulsion upwards, to a sure faith in the truth of our Christian Theology. If then my deeds have not always harmonised with what I profess, may I find mercy with the Mother of the Word, and with the Son born of no earthly father, with the sufferings He endured with the crown of thorns about His Head, the reed and the hyssop, the Cross on which He stretched out his Hands, my pride and my glory!

Drawing on Herodotean wise advisor scenes aids Psellus' somewhat apologetic goal of exaggerating his own involvement in contemporary political developments. Psellus associates himself with wise advisors at the same time as he distances himself from incompetent advisors (e.g. Constantine IX, 6.177–88). He does this to such an extent that he emerges as one of the most capable advisors—if not *the most* capable advisor—in his *Chronographia* (e.g. Constantine IX, 6.47–8; Michael VI, 7.18), even if he proved unable to influence the impetuous emperor Constantine Monomachus positively.[51] As the author of his work, Psellus points out the merits and disadvantages of the Byzantine rulers. And he presents himself, Psellus the historical actor, as being often responsible—at least partly—for the rise and fall of rulers. In that sense, he might be aiming to show that he operates under some kind of divine guidance, or that he is capable of understanding the workings of divine providence better than anyone else.

The way in which Psellus portrays himself as wise advisor and plays upon theological notions may be taken to associate him with Herodotus and his fundamental motif of ascent and decline. And as Psellus' focus on the individual and human responsibility—via his delineation of weak and flawed emperors—becomes intertwined with divine interference,[52] his world resembles that of Herodotus with its interplay between divine forces and human

[51] On the literary merits of the autobiographical nature of the *Chronographia*, see Pietsch (2005); (2006).

[52] Cf. Hussey (1935) 87–8.

accountability. The interlacing of human and divine responsibility is most certainly a recurring theme in Greek historiography and Psellus may be harking back to this tradition rather than to individual authors. Hence this similarity by itself cannot support a strong connection between Psellus and Herodotus. But viewed in the context of Psellus' creative recasting of Herodotean religious concepts and scenes, it is not implausible that Herodotus might have been one of Psellus' most influential models when it came to joining together divine and human liability.

Psellus' thought and the patterns of historical causation found in his work are complex. His *Chronographia* is suffused with literary innovations and a distinctly personal narrative style, also evident in elaborate descriptions of imperial psychology. Possible links with Herodotus are encouraged by the narrative of the *Chronographia* and can enhance the scope of interpretation and contextualise Psellus' contribution to Byzantine politics more effectively. Of course Herodotus was but one of the sources Psellus seems to have drawn on or to have had in mind when composing his work, along with, for example, Thucydides, Xenophon (as far as the defensive character of the *Chronographia* is concerned), or Plutarch (in terms of structuring his biographies). Psellus clearly revered Herodotus and in his writings he displays an appreciation of Herodotus' style, his sweetness (*Orationes pan.* 1.154: *τῆς Ἡροδότου γλυκύτητος*) as well as his charm and pleasantness (*Orationes pan.* 8.41–2: *τὴν Ἡροδότειον χάριν καὶ ἡδονήν*). He even compares the narrative and rhetorical style of the Byzantine hagiographer Symeon Metaphrastes to that of Herodotus and other Greek historians and orators (*Or. hag.* 7.207–29, 350–7). And he puts patristic and classical authors side by side as he draws parallels between John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzus and, among others, Herodotus in terms of digressions and simplicity of style that produces a captivating result.[53] Psellus even juxtaposes himself with

[53] See *Michaelis Pselli Characteres Gregorii Theologi, Basilii Magni, S. Ioannis Chrysostomi et Gregorii Nysseni* in Boissonade (1838) 124–31. For brief

Herodotus and, although he castigates him for reporting the worst deeds of the Greeks (*Chronographia* Constantine IX, 6.24),[54] it is significant that it is Herodotus whom he tries to improve upon and whose methods he attempts to better.

Choniates' *History*[55]

Choniates' *History* is the most important source for 12th- and early 13th-century Byzantine history and the capture of Constantinople by the armies of the Fourth Crusade in 1204. The work, rich in biblical and mythological *exempla*,[56] is permeated by criticism of emperors and interspersed with forceful character portraits and imagery in classical language. Choniates often employs a dramatic and epic tone, digressions and fictitious speeches, and composes quotations combining secular and theological discourse.[57] Many of these features, together with a balanced handling of Byzantines and barbarians,[58] the theme of the changeability of fortune, and the didactic role of history (praise or censure of leading personalities) bring Choniates close to ancient historical works[59] and Herodotus' *Histories* in particular.

comments on Psellus' literary criticism of Christian authors, see Wilson (1983) 166–72.

[54] Very likely echoing Plutarch's accusations in his treatise *On the Malice of Herodotus*.

[55] Translations (occasionally slightly adapted) are from Magoulias (1984).

[56] On Choniates' employment of paradigms from Greek mythology and the Bible, see Efthymiadis (2009b).

[57] On Choniates' historical methods, see Simpson (2009). On his literary qualities, see e.g. Fatouros (1980); Kazhdan (1983); Kazhdan and Franklin (1984) 256–86; Efthymiadis (2009a); Angelou (2010). On his reliance on earlier tradition, both Greek and Christian, see e.g. the passages listed by Christides (1984).

[58] See e.g. Lilie (1993) 282–4; Harris (2000) 27–8.

[59] Similarly Simpson (2009) 27: 'The praise and censure of leading individuals, the dominant role assigned to divine providence, the instability of fortune and the sudden reversals in the lives of men, the examples of virtue and vice cited for ethical instruction and the

In Choniates the reversal of fortune (202: *τὸ συμπῖπτον τῆς τύχης*)[60] is central in the fate of both emperors and nations and most often occurs due to the will of God. Choniates laments for the protosebastos Alexios who was blinded by Andronikos: 'O, how the course of events is reversed and sometimes is altered quicker than thought…' (249: *ὦ πραγμάτων παλινστρόφου φορᾶς καὶ θᾶττον ἢ λόγος μετακλινομένης ἐνίοτε*). When relating the story of Isaac Angelos, Choniates is at a loss whether what happened to him (the plotting against him, his blinding, and incarceration) was retribution (*δίκη*) instigated by divine *nemesis* but he still concedes that divine providence does everything for the best (452):

> As to whether divine nemesis (*θείαν νέμεσιν*) exacted retribution from him at this place, I leave for others to ponder. Providence (*πρόνοια*), which administers everything for the best, desires that avengers treat their most despicable enemies with humaneness, since they must suspect that power is never permanent, that one political action which ungirds sovereignty often is reversed with a new throw of the dice (*προσφέρεσθαι ὑφορωμένους τὸ μὴ ἀειπαγὲς τῆς ἰσχύος καὶ τὴν τοῦ κράτους ἀπόζωσιν καὶ τὴν ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ κινήματος εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ κατάντημα πολλάκις μετακύβευσιν ἢ παλιν-δρόμησιν*).

Two points in this passage deserve special attention as they seem to closely interact with Herodotus' text among others. The reference to divine *nemesis* possibly exacting punishment for Isaac Angelos' conduct calls to mind a Herodotean parallel in the story of Croesus and Solon, which revolves around similar matters: the instability of

continual moralising of the historian, all point the ancient principles of public utility, moral instruction and didactic function of historical narratives'.

[60] On reversals, including reversals of fate, in Choniates' *History*, see Kaldellis (2009).

human prosperity and divine castigation. Herodotus writes that, following Solon's departure, 'great divine *nemesis* fell upon Croesus' (1.34: ἔλαβε ἐκ θεοῦ νέμεσις μεγάλη Κροῖσον). The second point of interest is Choniates' next sentence on the workings of divine providence. Choniates' reflections on the kindness of avengers towards their enemies in view of the fickleness of fortune strongly recall the reflections of the Herodotean Cyrus when Croesus is on the pyre. It is the realisation of their shared humanity, the unpredictability of human affairs, and the fear of retribution that make Cyrus change his mind and spare his opponent (cf. δείσαντα τὴν τίσιν, 1.86.6). There is no direct reference to the divine in the Herodotean context but it is certainly implied that Cyrus is thinking of divine retribution. Such Herodotean parallels may have been noted by educated readers and could have provided a point of comparison which helpfully illustrated Choniates' thoughts. But the links also work the other way round, that is, promoting affinities between Greek and Christian ideas.

The greatest reversal of fortune, and the overarching theme of Choniates' *History*, is the rise and fall of Constantinople. There were no advance signs of the fate that befell the City. This was justice (δίκη) that manifested itself without warning (586). This was not 'an event without meaning, a fortuitous circumstance, or a coincidence, but the will of God'.[61] The fall of the City was the result of the sins of the emperors that provoked divine punishment. Like Psellus, Choniates removes the Herodotean *phthonos* of the divine from the pattern of sin and punishment. It is worth noting at this point that, while Choniates generally acknowledges a range of historical explanations, when it comes to such a momentous event as the fall of Constantinople, the historian rejects any other kind of explanation in favour of the will of God. It is very tempting to read this as a reflection on the most forceful factor that sets history in motion. This makes an interesting contrast to

[61] 589: κατὰ θεῖον οἶμαι καὶ μὴ περίπτωσιν τυχηρὰν ἢ συγκυρίαν οὑτωσί πως συμβὰν ἄλογον.

the Procopian model of sketching alternative motives and explanations, a model resonating with Herodotean narrative habits.

Fortune is powerful[62] and tips its scales in favour of whomever it wishes. It is also an unstable power[63] and, despite the fact that sometimes divine providence and fortune are disconnected (e.g. 426), Choniates often reminds us that everything happens according to the will of God (e.g. 154: stars and omens do not really matter).

But God cannot be envious. Envy (*φθόνος*) is a human emotion triggered by someone else's good fortune, and constantly causes intrigues and plotting within the court (227, 330, 333). Envy is also labeled as the 'evil eye' (10: *ὄμμα βάσκανον*). In the English translation of Magoulias the word 'envy' is often written with a capital 'E' to indicate the supernatural element. Envy occupies a key position in the fate of Theodore Styppeiotes who suffered at the hands of John Kamateros and was unjustly blinded. Choniates personifies *phthonos* as a supernatural power which brings about a change of fortune (111):

> Envy, which looks askance (*ἀεὶ ἐνορῶν φθόνος*), not only at the great rulers of nations and cities, but also at those of more modest rank, and which is forever near at hand nurturing traitors, did not deign to allow Theodore Styppeiotes to remain in his position of trust with the emperor; this elusive enemy inflicted many blows and removed him from his stable post and, in the end, overthrew (*ἀνέτρεψε*) him and caused him to suffer a most piteous fall (*πτῶμα … οἴκτιστον*).

[62] See e.g. 59, 123, 302, 433.

[63] See e.g. 611: *ἀλλοπρόσαλλος ἡ μάχη, πεττευτὰ τὰ ἀνθρώπινα, καὶ νίκη ἐπαμείβεται ἄνδρας. οὐδ' Ἀλεξάνδρῳ φασὶ τὰ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἀπρόσκοπα, οὐδ' ἀδιάπτωτος ἡ τύχη παράπαν τοῦ* Καίσαρος 'the battle is undecided, human affairs are determined by the throw of the dice, and victory shifts from man to man. Neither were Alexander's successes without obstacles, nor Caesar's fortune absolutely infallible'.

Significantly, two words in this passage recall vocabulary and themes employed by Herodotus in the context of divine *phthonos*, the force that disturbs human happiness. The verb ἀνέτρεψε ('overthrew') echoes the use of the same word by the Herodotean Solon: πολλοῖσι γὰρ δὴ ὑποδέξας ὄλβον ὁ θεὸς προρρίζους ἀνέτρεψε (Hdt. 1.32.9). The second Herodotean resonance is Choniates' reference to pity (πτῶμα… οἴκτιστον) in Styppeiotes' reversal of fortune. In Herodotus, Artabanus speaks of the pitiable suffering that characterises all human life (7.46.2: ἕτερα τούτου παρὰ τὴν ζόην πεπόνθαμεν οἰκτρότερα) as a consequence of divine jealousy.[64] The Herodotean intertext bolsters the metaphysical dimension of *phthonos* as well as highlighting the greatness of its power.

Choniates wonders how the justice of God allows these wicked deeds to happen, but then concedes that God is wise and that, although men should refrain from devising evil plans, God can forgive them if they show genuine repentance (113). The supernatural aspect of envy as well as its attribution to malevolent powers, demons (576: ἀλάστορες φθονεροί), who are occasionally named as 'Telchines' or 'Furies' (310: Ἐριννύων καὶ Τελχίνων φθονερῶν), indicates the merging of pagan and Christian ideas.[65] What is particularly thought-provoking is that in Choniates we come across a link between envy, as a supernatural power, and reversal of fortune that we have not seen in Procopius or Psellus. This causal relationship between envy and instability of fortune resonates clearly, I

[64] Ellis ((2013) 255–61) argues that pity is a typical key theme in Herodotean reversals of fortune.

[65] These malevolent supernatural powers, the 'Telchines' and the 'Furies', do not occur in Herodotus. They do occur, however, in one of the more classicising of the Ecclesiastical historians, namely Socrates Scholasticus (*HE* 3.21; 4.19); so although they might still have sounded rather classicising, it is likely that they had already been embedded to some degree within the Christian literary tradition.

believe, with the Herodotean concept of the envious divinity that causes a change of fortune.[66]

Choniates assumes a quasi-Herodotean outlook in that he admits many factors in his historical causation (envy, fortune, divine providence, human responsibility) and constructs his history on the basis of a causal relationship between abuse of power and punishment. His attitude towards prophecy and divination shows interest in the classical tradition and respect towards the Christian tradition. He opposes astrology but mentions portents, prophecies, and other types of divination and he trusts in the prophecies of holy men (e.g. 219–20). That he pinpoints wrongs in emperors and false prophets does not make him less of a Christian. Choniates believes that people make their own choices but everything is down to the will of God.[67] We have seen that the intertwining of human and divine responsibility reappears to varying degrees in all three historians explored here. This becomes a recurrent motif in Choniates' *History*, where time and again emperors make errors of judgement as they misinterpret or ignore prophecies. For example, Isaac Angelos consults the seer Basilakios, who correctly prophesies his blinding and deposition, but does not heed the warning (448–50). In so far as they act in this way, Choniates' characters seem to hark back to Herodotus' kings who fail to understand divine signs and recognise sensible guidance at their own expense—a pattern introduced by Croesus and his misinterpretation of Apollo's oracles (Hdt. 1.53–5).

Choniates' history is even more dramatic[68] and personal than Psellus', and his criticism of the emperors is much

[66] It is hard to say if Choniates is borrowing directly from Herodotus. Given that the same connection between *phthonos* and instability of fortune is already traced in Eusebius of Caesarea (see briefly the Introduction to the volume, above, pp. 32–3), the foregrounding of metaphysical *phthonos* in Choniates could also be mediated through Christian historiography.

[67] On Choniates' beliefs and interest in religious affairs, see Magoulias (1987); Magdalino (2009).

[68] See e.g. Magoulias (2011) on modelling the story of Andronikos on Greek tragic patterns.

more powerful.[69] Saxey observes that '[i]n blending dramatic and oratorical elements into his history, Choniates follows the most dramatic of historians, Herodotus'.[70] Consider, for example, the narrative of the fall of Constantinople: Choniates describes the monks feasting and dining while the Crusaders are camped outside the City (558). Here the dramatic character of the composition is clear, as is the responsibility of these supposedly 'holy' men, which is inextricably connected with God's punishment soon after.

Choniates' prolific use of *exempla* both from Greek mythology and the Bible more often than not blurs the boundaries between the pagan and Christian traditions, and between these and contemporary historical individuals and events. Drawing on the past to throw light on contemporary society is a favourite practice of Herodotus,[71] who often seeks to show how messy reality is.[72] Choniates' examples and equally his deployment of Greek and Christian theological concepts operate along similar lines: they demonstrate what a messy business modern history really is.

Conclusion

Chance and the cycle of human affairs play an important role in all three historical works. In Procopius both are equally important while Choniates builds his narration around a pattern of rise and fall. *Phthonos* ('envy', 'jealousy'), both as a human emotion and, primarily, as a supernatural power, is especially prominent in Psellus and Choniates. But none of the three historians considers God capable of envy, and in place of Herodotus' envious and vengeful deity we find divine providence that punishes injustice. Procopius' incorporation of pagan and especially Herodotean religious ideas, rather than being simply a literary convention, shows

[69] See e.g. Magdalino (1983).

[70] See Saxey (2009) 126.

[71] See most recently Bowie (2012); Baragwanath (2012).

[72] See e.g. Pelling (2006a); Baragwananth (2008).

that affinities with the classical world were still very much in evidence, and elements appropriated from pre-Christian thought remained an important part of contemporary Christian thought in the 6th century as at all periods. As we move on to the 11th century, human emotions and personal motivation take centre stage in the search for causes, and the interplay between human responsibility and divine interference, one of Herodotus' favourite themes, becomes a shaping factor in the construction of historical narratives. In the 12th and 13th centuries the writing of history becomes increasingly rhetorical and dramatic and systematically exploits the language of classical historiography.[73] This tendency towards tragic/dramatic history in the face of the Fourth Crusade is most evident in Choniates' Herodotean-like reversals.

Pagan terms associated with Herodotus are interestingly charged with double significance which not only points to imitation and the need for literary effect but also to the occasional scepticism, or open-mindedness, of the Byzantine historians. Historical thought had certainly changed considerably from the time of Herodotus as the Byzantines subscribe to a linear world-view (i.e. a history developing from Creation to the Day of Judgement) which directly opposes the cyclical world-view of historians of classical antiquity. Despite their belief in the goodness and superior will of God, these Byzantine historians do not limit their view by considering divine providence as the only causal factor in history. The diversity of factors influencing historical events (even if these are in most cases ultimately presided over by the will of God) helps to convey the complexities of their thought and their contemporary world. By allowing a plurality of historical explanations Procopius, Psellus, and Choniates show a striking resemblance to the 'father of history', who is often at a loss whether to ascribe an event to chance, human will or the deity.

[73] See e.g. Kazhdan and Wharton-Epstein (1985) 197–230 (11th century onwards). On dramatic elements in historiographical works of this period, see Katsaros (2006).

This approach moreover facilitates historians such as Choniates in describing their contemporary history as chaotic and futile, dominated by disorder and corruption. Others, like Procopius, also aspire to higher standards of reliability in expanding their net of historical causation. For Psellus, passions such as envy help to paint detailed portraits and praise and blame individual emperors. At the same time, the advice on envy and the nature of God that Psellus himself gives (as a character in his work) casts him in a better light because it links him to the figure of the 'wise advisor', the character who gives prudent counsel in Herodotus' *Histories*. Interaction with classical models in manifold and innovative ways[74] also enhances the status and impartiality of the Byzantine historians.

How would have audiences reacted to this interaction with classical and Herodotean models? The Byzantines had a predilection and an eye for narrative and storytelling strategies[75] and, with Herodotus enjoying wide reputation, learned audiences would very likely expect and be able to recognise engagement with the *Histories*. The employment of well-known motifs would help readers better comprehend modern historical events, hence it would assist the chief goal of history writing, the instruction of the audience.[76] The links with Herodotus, the initiator of the Greek

[74] On the combination of tradition and innovation/improvement upon classical models, see Hunger (1969/1970); Aerts (2003); Hinterberger (2010b) 195–203; Scott (2012b) 252–4.

[75] See e.g. Choniates *History* 1–3.

[76] See e.g. Procopius *Wars* 1.1.1: 'Procopius of Caesarea has written the history of the wars which Justinian, Emperor of the Romans, waged against the barbarians of the East and of the West … The memory of these events he deemed would be a great thing and most helpful to men of the present time, and to future generations as well, in case time should ever again place men under a similar stress'; Choniates *History* 1: 'Historical narratives indeed have been invented for the common benefit of mankind, since those who wish are able to gather from many of these the most advantageous insights'.

historiographical tradition, would also augment the importance of these events and the works recording them.[77]

The merging of Christian and classical strands of thought does not hamper the historians' explanation of events nor need it necessarily undermine their Christian identity. Classical Greek, and in particular Herodotean, theological concepts are recast in an inventive manner that reveals elaborate historical thinking, reinforces the seriousness of these historical narratives, enriches their explanatory framework, and is indicative of the authors' tolerance and also confusion in the face of a hectic reality, full of intrigues and corruption.

[77] On Byzantine audiences, see Croke (2010); Scott (2012b); Nilsson and Scott (2012) 324–32.

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