

BYZANZ
UND DAS ABENDLAND VII.
Studia
Byzantino-Occidentalia



BYZANZ UND DAS ABENDLAND VII.
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Inhaltsverzeichnis

Vorwort.....	11
Peter Schreiner	
Liaisons dangereuses. Die Ehe zwischen Anna von Ungarn und Andronikos Palaiologos (1272) im Spannungsfeld der Mittelmeermächte	13
Stanoje Bojanin	
The Byzantine Penitential Nomocanon in the Serbian and South Slavic Early Modern Printed and Manuscript Book	31
Salvatore Costanza	
Ungarn, Byzantinische Welt und Türkenkrieg in Filefos <i>Episteln</i>	51
Péter Ekler	
Georgius Trapezuntius, Johannes Regiomontanus and the <i>Defensio Theonis</i> . Second part	87
Isabel Grimm-Stadelmann	
Byzanz und das Abendland – Heilkunde im Dialog Byzantinische Medizin im Spannungsfeld zwischen Ost und West	97
László Horváth	
Die neu entdeckten Hypereides-Fragmente aus Herkulaneum. Reflexionen	163
László Horváth	
Dionysius of Halicarnassus' Essay on Hyperides	187
Predrag Komatina	
The Kangar of <i>De administrando imperio</i> and the Hungarian-Bashkir Controversy	205
Tamás Mészáros	
France and the French from the Perspective of a 15 th -century Byzantine Historiographer.....	225
Bojana Pavlović	
Prophezeiungen und Träume im Geschichtswerk von Nikephoros Gregoras – Vorbemerkungen	237

Srđan Pirivatrić	
The <i>translatio</i> of the Relics of St John of Rila from Sofia to Esztergom and back.....	261
Márton Rózsa	
A Long Dispute about a Little Orchard. The Social Aspects of a Case from the Chartulary of the Monastery of Saint Paul on Mount Latros.....	279
Boris Stojkovski	
Remarks on the Serbian Foreign Policy in the Age of Despot Stefan Lazarević.....	293
Pál Szabó	
ὁ χρηρ πλέον τοῦ εἰκότος φιλανθρωπεύεσθαι – Edict of Manuel Komnenos Concerning the Right of Asylum (1166)	313
Iván Tóth	
Some Observations on Kritoboulos' Characterisation in the <i>Syngraphē Historiōn</i>	323
Vratislav Zervan	
Die Begegnung des heiligen Königs Ladislaus mit dem heiligen Sava. Rätselhaftes aus der russischen und moldauischen Chronistik des 15./16. Jahrhundert	339
Ábel Csigó – Viktor Rinkács – Keve Szász – Ábel Török	
<i>P.Vindob. G 40159</i> : A Cut out of a List of Payments from the Papyrus Collection of Vienna	355
Natasja Čičić	
Transcending Borders – Initiation of the Hero in the Epic Romance <i>Digenis Akrites</i>	365
Ábel Török	
A Byzantine Epic in the Chronicle of Morea The Heroic Deeds of sir Geoffroy de Briel.....	375

Iván Tóth

Some Observations on Kritoboulos' Characterisation in the *Syngraphē Historiōn**

Let me begin, at the very start of my paper, with the conclusion – or to be precise, with the conclusion drawn by Luke Pitcher, who after having examined certain passages from the works of Greek and Roman historians writes the following:

...characterization in ancient historiography is a matter that goes well beyond labels of virtue or vice attached to particular people by the narrator. Characterization can also be a matter of style, of inflection, or of structure. As so often in the study of ancient narrative, it transpires that the twists and turns of narration – why a particular matter is handled at this point, and in this particular way – are almost as important as the author's overt commentary. For an adequate appreciation of how characterization works in the classical historians, it is necessary to trust the singer *and* the song.¹

Although, I must confess, I do not fully understand why it is necessary to trust the *historian* and his work for an adequate appreciation of how characterisation operates, Pitcher's otherwise correct statement can perfectly serve as a starting point for our investigation, even if the "singer" whose "song" will be analysed is a Byzantine one. In what follows, I will attempt to give some sense of how Kritoboulos of Imbros² deployed the toolkit of characterisation, and

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¹ PITCHER, L. V., Characterization in Ancient Historiography. In: MARINCOLA, J. (ed.), *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*. Vol. I. Malden, Mass. – Oxford 2007, 102–117, cit. 117.

² On Kritoboulos and his work, see the concise and very informative study of REINSCH, D. R., Kritobulos of Imbros – Learned Historian, Ottoman *Raya* and Byzantine Patriot. *ZRVI* 40 (2003) 297–311.

of how subtle his means for *ēthopoia* were. My position tallies with Pitcher's: I think myself that historians' characterisation means much more than putting positive or negative labels on historical personae. Still in this paper I will analyse Kritoboulos' overt narratorial comments on the protagonists of his work. In my defence, I will do this mainly in accordance with the considerations proposed by Pitcher. I will examine the interplays between characterisation, style and structure, and detect, where it is detectable, the historiographical traditions which Kritoboulos' methods for forming characters stem from. Since our historian orientated his work around the dominant figure of Mehmed II, my evidence for this endeavour will primarily come from excerpts that portray the Turkish ruler. Nonetheless, toward the end of my paper, I will touch upon the 'coprotagonists' of Mehmed's *res gestae* as well. I will study only the tiny tesserae of Kritoboulos' mosaics,³ hoping that they will prove to be shiny enough to throw some light on the bigger picture too.

We must begin our investigation right at the beginning of Kritoboulos' individual-centred work, and that happens to be an epistle not a proem – as one would expect –, given that the *Syngraphē historiōn* (hereinafter: *SH*) commences with a letter of dedication to the sultan.⁴ In the letter, which is virtually a lengthy laudation lavished on the Turkish ruler,⁵ the Byzantine historian already reveals some distinctive traits of his main protagonist. From this plethora of flattering words, I should like to highlight only one phrase which occurs in the following sentence:

Indeed (γε δὴ), you are the only one of kings, or at any rate one of a very few, who have united deeds with words (ἔργα συνήψας καὶ λόγους) and wisdom with majesty; for you are both a good king and a mighty warrior.⁶

³ I do not examine here, for instance, those larger units (e.g. *SH* I 4,1–5,2 [15,16–17,15]) which constitute the frame of Mehmed's portrayal, and I deal only incidentally with those narratorial technics with which Kritoboulos highlighted his main protagonist's character traits.

⁴ On the letter of dedication, see: REINSCH, D. R. (rec.), *Critobuli Imbriotae Historiae*. CFHB, 22. Berlin – New York 1983, 18*–27*.

⁵ In all likelihood, the encomiastic tone of the letter had a considerable role in Byzantinists' disdain for Kritoboulos and his work. See e.g. DARKÓ, J., Die letzten Geschichtsschreiber von Byzanz. *Ungarische Rundschau für historische und soziale Wissenschaften* 2 (1913) 384–396, esp. 390–391.

⁶ *ep.* 1 (4,28–32). I cite the Greek text from the critical edition of REINSCH (n. 4); I give the page and line number of this edition as well. I employ throughout the translation of RIGGS, Ch. T. (transl.), *History of Mehmed the Conqueror by Kritovoulos*. Princeton 1954 (rep. Westport, CT 1970) with some slight alterations.

I have cited the whole sentence not only to put ἔργα συνήψας λόγους, the phrase in question in context, making sense of it, but also to draw attention, on the one hand, to certain characteristics which lay the foundation for the sultan's positive image, and which will be brought into play later in the narrative itself, on the other hand, to accentuate certain allusive techniques by which the author highlights this character traits and makes them more visible for the reader. The phrasing of the quality of being *both a good king and a mighty warrior* (βασιλεύς τ' ἀγαθός κρατερός τε μαχητής) is a graphic example. The line is almost a verbatim quotation from the *Iliad*;⁷ Helen describes Agamemnon with these words. Apart from the piquancy of the comparison (*nota bene* Agamemnon was the conqueror of Troy, and Mehmed, according to his own claim, was the avenger of the Trojans),⁸ Kritoboulos' intention with the citation is crystal clear: he ranks the conqueror Sultan (and his deeds) alongside the epic heroes (and their achievements) at the start. Along with the borrowed aura of epic, wisdom (φιλοσοφία) and majesty (βασιλεία) also turn up as key characteristics, and are strung together within one sentence, as they will be in the narrative, providing the basic elements for the sultan's portrait. I will return to this fine woven tapestry later, but now let us focus on the particular expression of ἔργα συνήψας λόγους.

That a statesman unites his deeds with his words, or to put it bluntly, that he is constantly true to his word is, indeed, an admirable and very rare quality. And it seems to have been exceptional in the fifteenth century too, as Kritoboulos' special attention to it suggests. Mehmed, according to our historian, was one of the few exceptions. Kritoboulos gives no indication who are (or were) exactly, to his mind, the "very few" sharing this notable quality. But if we take into account his readings,⁹ we can trace the archetypal embodiment of this distinguished capacity.

The unity between words and deeds means integrity, and this kind of integrity calls to the reader's mind Pericles. The Athenian statesman's eloquence is well known and superbly illustrated by Thucydides, who lays stress not only on Pericles' exceptional oratory, but he also implies that Pericles always acted in line with his public utterances. Consider, by way of illustration, Pericles' last speech.¹⁰ Advocating his own policy, articulated in his first oration, Pericles

⁷ *Il.* 3,179. Kritoboulos made a minor alteration: he changed the word spearman (αἰχμητής) to warrior (μαχητής).

⁸ *SH* IV 11,5–6 (170,3–17).

⁹ Kritoboulos copied and owned the manuscripts of Herodotus, Thucydides, Arrian and Aelius Aristides; see REINSCH (n. 4) 68*–71*.

¹⁰ *Thuc.* II 60,1–64,6.

blames his fellow citizens for changing their minds haphazardly, and proudly declares: “For my own part, I remain the same and my position does not shift. It is you who are changing.”¹¹ On this self-definition a perceptive comment was made by Francis Cairns, who argues that Thucydides “is assuming as the background to his character portrayals a standard ancient type of moral assessment, in which actions and words take their worth from that of the actor or speaker.”¹² Maybe I am not on the wrong track assuming that the Thucydidean Pericles was a source of inspiration for Kritoboulos, who was thoroughly familiar with the Athenian historian’s writing.¹³ In fact, Mehmed himself turns out to be a notable orator whose words take their worth from actions. Let us see how.

First of all, Kritoboulos puts into the sultan’s mouth two speeches;¹⁴ both are polished and eloquent and none of them is answered or contradicted by another speech; they stand alone in the text, just like Pericles’ orations. As a matter of fact, in Kritoboulos’ work, the sultan is the only person, who delivers speeches. As it has been often remarked in relation to Pericles’ orations, this kind of formal uniqueness within the text has a special purpose: it underlines the speaker’s capability and stature.¹⁵

In both addresses, along with the comparable structural consideration, one can find several allusions to Pericles’ funeral oration and so-called apology which implicitly spotlight the similarity between the two statesmen. The *apparatus fontium* of the critical edition of the text catalogues meticulously these literary allusions.¹⁶ And though it would be important to examine them one by one so as to see how they work exactly, I set aside this question, and I should rather like to give a fairly representative sample of how Kritoboulos harmonises the sultan’s words and deeds.

¹¹ Thuc. II 61,2: “καὶ ἐγὼ μὲν ὁ αὐτός εἰμι καὶ οὐκ ἐξίσταμαι: ὑμεῖς δὲ μεταβάλλετε...” For the translation of Thucydides I use HAMMOND, M. (trans.), *Thucydides: The Peloponnesian War*. Oxford 2009 with slight modifications.

¹² Cited by HORNBLOWER, S., *A Commentary on Thucydides*. Vol. I.: Books I–III. Oxford 1991, 334.

¹³ See REINSCH (n. 4) 48*–54*, 68*–69*.

¹⁴ *SH I* 14,1–16,19 (25,20–34,33); 48,1–51,5 (60,4–65,8). Mehmed’s pungent answer to the complaints of the Byzantine delegation is also noteworthy. In this short *oratio recta* Kritoboulos demonstrates, for the first time in the narrative, Mehmed’s sharp wit and rhetorical abilities; see *SH I* 8,1–6 (20,13–36).

¹⁵ PITCHER (n. 1) 115.

¹⁶ REINSCH (n. 4) 25, 26, 28, 29, 60, *app. font.*

In both of his harangues Mehmed promises his subjects that he will be fighting with them in the front line. In the palace of Adrianople in the war council he declares: "I myself will be with you in the battlefield (ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς πρῶτος παρέσομαι ὑμῖν) and gladly share your travails, and will direct everything in the best way."¹⁷ And some months later in the Turkish camp before the last and decisive attack against the wall of Constantinople, he repeats his promise with almost the same words: "And I myself will be amongst you in the battlefield (κἀγὼ δὲ αὐτὸς πρῶτος παρέσομαι τῷ ἔργῳ μεθ' ὑμῶν), and will fighting by your side and will watch to see what each one of you does."¹⁸ With the picture of the commander battling side by side with his soldiers, Kritoboulos evokes the Iliadic heroes (and maybe Alexander).¹⁹ And he does so in the narrative as well: after the real fight had begun – we read –, "[Mehmed] led the [army] against the wall, himself at the head (ἡγεῖτο τὴν [στρατίαν] ἐπὶ τὸ τεῖχος πρῶτος αὐτός)."²⁰ Thereafter, he repeats this phrase word for word in the accounts of the main battles and sieges.²¹

By using this repetitive type-scene, Kritoboulos kills two birds with one stone: on the one hand, he invests the sultan with a certain air of epic, as he has already done it in the letter of dedication, and, on the other hand, creating interaction and cohesion between the narration of Mehmed's deeds (that is to say *erga*) and his orations (that is to say *logous*), or in other words, fulfilling the sultan's promise, he demonstrates that Mehmed, as it has been indicated in the epistle, is *indeed* (γε δὴ) a ruler who unites deeds and words. By employing and intertwining these motifs throughout the work consistently (and rather cleverly), he is able to form a coherent picture of the sultan, characterising him as an upright and valiant leader.

As for the style, the fixed phraseology that Kritoboulos applies leaps to the eye immediately. In his prolegomena to the text edition, Diether Reinsch claims that these linguistic stereotypes and type-scenes prevalent in Kritoboulos' writing

¹⁷ SH I 16,19 (34,29–31).

¹⁸ SH I 50,3 (63,21–64,1).

¹⁹ On this *topos*, see ALBERTUS, J., *Die ΠΑΡΑΚΛΗΤΙΚΟΙ in der griechischen und römischen Literatur*. Diss. Strassburg 1908, 72–73. REINSCH (n. 4) 64, *app. font. ad* p. 63,21–1 suggests that Kritoboulos imitated Arrian's account on Alexander battling at the walls of Tyros (Arr. *An.* II 23,4). If his suggestion is correct, we have one more representative example of Kritoboulos' mastery of literary imitation; the Byzantine historian managed to work in, ingeniously, the motifs of a *narrative* section which relates the Macedonian king's commanding qualities in an *oration* in order to depict the Turkish sultan as an inspiring leader.

²⁰ Though he led his soldiers only to the moat: μέχρι τῆς τάφρου: SH I 57,1 (68,19–20).

²¹ SH I 60,2 (70,13); II 18,6 (109,33–34); V 5,7 (187,12). Cf. REINSCH (n. 4) 34*.

have the same function as in oral poetry:²² they are mnemonic helps of the prose author.²³ Though, I think, Reinsch is right finding the roots of these stereotypes and type-scenes in the epic poetry, his comment on the purpose of these literary means should be taken with a pinch of salt, since it is hard to see how these formulas could help the prose author – who worked with recorded and finalised text and, thus, he did not need to improvise before his audience as the bards did – in remembering. The linguistic stereotypes, in my view, helped the prose author in reminding rather than in remembering. In fact, if we look these repetitions from the recipient's point of view, we find that they could be very effective in hammering home the author's message to the reader: in our case, for instance, the repeated and uniform description of the fighting sultan reminded the audience, if not convinced, that the Turkish ruler always acted in a way proper to a good general. So, these stereotypes assisted the reader rather than the author in recalling. But these formulas had another role to play. By applying the tool of repetition and type-scenes to historical narrative, our historian was able to dress up in epic clothes not only the historical figures of the related events, but the whole story too, and to match the fall of Constantinople to the fall of Troy, which he actually did in a *synchrisis*, after having narrated the downfall of the imperial city.²⁴

Now, let us step forward to our next example. For a general to be courageous on the battlefield is essential, but not enough. He must be clever and prescient as well – like Alexander the Great was, for instance. In the last chapters of the *Anabasis Alexandrou*, Arrian provides a detailed description of the Macedonian king's character. Reminiscing on Themistocles,²⁵ the Nicomedian historian writes that “[Alexander] had the most wonderful power to discern the right course, when it was still unclear, and was most successful in inferring

²² See with examples REINSCH (n. 4) 40*–42*.

²³ REINSCH (n. 4) 42*: “Der Vergleich mit Formeln und typischen Szenen der oral poetry scheint vielleicht auf den ersten Blick befremdlich, doch erfüllen die Stereotype in beiden Bereichen eine ähnliche Funktion: Sie sind mnemotechnische Hilfen einerseits des in einer Kunstsprache improvisierenden Sängers und andererseits des in einer künstlichen Gelehrtensprache schreibenden Prosaautors.”

²⁴ Cf. *SH I* 68,4 (77,3–10).

²⁵ Arrian borrowed this description from Thucydides' portray of Themistocles; see SINTENIS, C. (ed.), *Arrians Anabasis*. II. Baendchen: IV–VII Buch. Leipzig 1849, 216–217, *app. ad VII* 28,2; BRUNT, P. A. (transl.), *Arrian, II: Anabasis of Alexander, Books V–VII, Indica*. (LCL 269) Cambridge MA – London 1983, 297, n. 4.; BOSWORTH, A. B., *From Arrian to Alexander: Studies in Historical Interpretation*. Oxford 1988, 138; SISTI, F. – ZAMBRINI, A. (edd.), *Arriano: Anabasi di Alessandro*. Vol. II.: Libri IV–VII. Milano 2004, 660. As we will see, this Thucydidean reminiscence reappears in Kritoboulos' work as well.

from observed facts what was likely to follow”.²⁶ It was perceived by Hugo Montgomery that Arrian accentuates this special quality of Alexander in the narrative as well with the phrase of *and things turned out just as he guessed* (καὶ ξυνέβη τε οὕτως ὅπως εἶκασε) and its variations.²⁷

I have brought up Alexander the Great, the *Anabasis* and this well-turned phrase not by chance, of course. Owing to Reinsch's detailed research, it is well known now that Kritoboulos was closely familiar with Arrian's work: he copied it, studied it and utilised it, as several allusions, borrowings and parallels prove that.²⁸ Since the sultan himself, according to many sources, regarded the Macedonian king as a role model,²⁹ Kritoboulos choice of the *Anabasis* as literary model was not at all unreasonable. He equates Mehmed with Alexander in his writing many times explicitly and implicitly as well.³⁰ By doing so, he gives emphasis, in a very subtle way, upon the dispositions that are common to both rulers.

One of their shared qualities as generals was the above-mentioned ability of foreseeing the right strategy. In order to demonstrate that the sultan does not fall short of this capacity in the slightest, Kritoboulos deploys literary means very similar to Arrian's. Consider, for instance, the following passage which gives an insight into the young sultan's planning; Kritoboulos, writing about the preparation for the siege of Constantinople, mentions that “[Mehmed] judged it (ἔγνωστο γὰρ αὐτῷ) best to attack the wall at many points, so that, after he had begun the battle in several places, the capture of the city would prove easier and more facile for him, as indeed it turned out to be (ὡσπερ δῆτα καὶ γέγονε)”.³¹ Likewise, in the third book, relating the campaign against Corinth and the Peloponnese, he lets us into the sultan's thinking by recording that “[Mehmed] thought (ἐνόμιζε) that as soon as he had captured this place, he could gain the whole Peloponnese without a battle, as indeed it turned out to be (ὡσπερ δῆτα καὶ γέγονε)”.³²

²⁶ Arr. An. VII 28,2: ... ξυνιδεῖν δὲ τὸ δέον ἔτι ἐν τῷ ἀφανείῳ δυνάστεος, καὶ ἐκ τῶν φαινομένων τὸ εἶκος ξυμβαλεῖν ἐπιτυχέστατος... The translation is from BRUNT (n. 25).

²⁷ Arr. An. IV 2,5. MONTGOMERY, H., *Gedanke und Tat: Zur Erzählungstechnik bei Herodot, Thukydides, Xenophon und Arrian*. Stockholm 1965, 165 and 165, n. 9. (with further examples).

²⁸ REINSCH (n. 4) 58*–67*, 70*–71*.

²⁹ REINSCH (n. 4) 59*.

³⁰ See ep. 1 (4,19–20); SH I 5,1 (17,4); IV 4,3 (157,23); see also REINSCH (n. 4) 59*–63*.

³¹ SH I 31,1 (46,27–30).

³² SH III 6,8 (125,32–33).

It is clear from the repetitive formula of ὥσπερ δῆτα καὶ γέγονε that Kritoboulos wanted to represent the Turkish ruler as someone whose estimations always proved to be correct in the course of time. And to dispel any doubt about Mehmed's strategic foresight, he zealously rearticulates it in a slightly different way. Narrating the war council, our historian externalises, once again, Mehmed's idea: "He thought, as was true (ἐνόμιζε γὰρ ὅπερ καὶ ἦν), that if (ὡς, εἰ) he could succeed in capturing Constantinople and becoming master of it, there was nothing to hinder him from sallying forth from it in a short time, as from a stronghold for all the environs, and overrunning all and subduing the remnants of the Empire to himself."³³

And a few chapters later, reasoning why the sultan was so adamant in getting the Horn under his control by all means, Kritoboulos pens that "[Mehmed] thought, as was true (ἐνόμιζε γὰρ ὅπερ καὶ ἦν), that if (ὡς, εἰ) he could make an opening in the sea-wall as well, the capture of the City would be easier for him."³⁴

In both cases, Kritoboulos uses anew fixed phrases and constructions in order to depict one of the key traits of the sultan. Nonetheless, these linguistic patterns are not restricted to Mehmed's characterisation only, they turn up in other portrayals as well. Let me give some examples.

In his first oration, Mehmed, eulogising his ancestors, provides a vivid description of the Turkish national character.³⁵ Kritoboulos composed this section in the manner of Thucydides. He emulated the Corinthian envoys' speech before the Assembly of the Peloponnesian League,³⁶ in which they had characterised the Athenians as daring, unswerving and also very sharp antagonists. This sharpness³⁷ was expressed by the emissaries with the following words: "They are revolutionaries, quick with new ideas and quick to put their thoughts into execution..."³⁸ The quality of being penetratingly intelligent and quick to react to certain circumstances is a distinctiveness which, according to Kritoboulos, Mehmed's forefathers were also in full possession of. As the Byzantine historian, following in Thucydides' footsteps, phrases: "They were quick to recognise what

³³ SH I 13,2 (25,2–6).

³⁴ SH I 37,2 (50,28–29).

³⁵ SH I 14,10–12 (28,10–29,11).

³⁶ See MÜLLER, C. (ed.), *Critobuli Imbriotae libri quinque de rebus gestis Mechemetis*. FHG V/1. Paris 1870, 64, *app. ad I* 14,11–12; MASTRODEMETRES, P. D., 'Εσωτερικαὶ ἐπιδράσεις τοῦ Θεοκυδίδου ἐπὶ τὸν Κριτόβουλον. *Αθηνᾶ* 65 (1961) 158–168, esp.164–165; REINSCH (n. 4) 50*, 28–29, *app. font.*

³⁷ For the meaning of ὀξύς in this context, see HORNBLLOWER (n. 12) 115.

³⁸ Th. I 70,2: „οἱ μὲν γε νεωτεροποιοὶ καὶ ἐπινοῆσαι ὀξείας καὶ ἐπιτελεῖσαι ἔργω ἃ ἂν γνῶσιν...”

needed to be done (ὄξεις μὲν ἐπινοῆσαι τὸ δέον), and swift to put it into execution what they conceived as such (ταχεῖς δὲ τὸ νοηθὲν ἔργω τελέσαι).³⁹

Later, Kritoboulos employs this collective idiosyncrasy to characterise individuals as well. Apropos of Mahmud pasha's appointment as the head of the affairs of the great sultan, he puts down a brief character sketch of the newly nominated minister, who had – Kritoboulos hastens to add – Byzantine ancestors on both his father's and mother's side. Among the many virtues attributed to him such as sagacity, gallantry, oratory and cleverness, we find promptness too. His impressive list of qualities runs as follows:

“This man had so fine a nature that he outshone not only all his contemporaries but also his predecessors in wisdom, bravery, virtue, and other good qualities. He was very quick to perceive spontaneously what needed to be done, (ὄξυν μὲν οἴκοθεν συνιδεῖν τὸ δέον), even when another told him of it, and still quicker in doing and carrying it out (ὄξύτερον δ' ἐλέσθαι καὶ καταπράξαι).”⁴⁰

Needless to say, Mehmed himself was not short of sharpness either. In the fifth chapter of the first book, Kritoboulos presents a miniature character-portrait of the sultan, informing readers that Mehmed, by nature, had a burning desire to act (τὸ δραστήριον), and he did not postpone anything or put off any action, but immediately carried everything through (οὐδεμίαν ἀναβολὴν δίδωσι τῷ τε καιρῷ καὶ τοῖς πράγμασιν, ἀλλ' εὐθὺς ὅλος γίνεθαι τούτων).⁴¹ These abilities of his will be shown in practice as well, of course.⁴²

However, not only the Turks can pride themselves on being sharp and prompt. Interestingly, we come across this quality in Constantine's obituary. After the graphic description of the sack of the City by the Turks, Kritoboulos, echoing Thucydides' famous necrology of Pericles, briefly summarises the most important character traits of the late emperor. He writes that Constantine was “brilliant at speaking” (δεινὸς εἰπεῖν), “clever in thought” (δεινὸς νοῆσαι) and he adds that the emperor – akin to the Turks and Mahmud⁴³ – was “quick to perceive what needed to be done (ὄξυς μὲν συνιδεῖν τὸ δέον)”, and “still quicker in doing it (ὄξύτερος

³⁹ SH I 14,11 (28,22–23).

⁴⁰ SH I 77,2 (88,12–16).

⁴¹ SH I 5,2 (17,8–9); I 5,3 (17,18–19). Cf. Thucydides' description of Brasidas:... ἄνδρα ἔν τε τῇ Σπάρτῃ δοκοῦντα δραστήριον εἶναι... (Thuc. IV 81,1).

⁴² E.g. SH I 5,3 (17,18–20); 6,1 (18,27); 13,1 (24,29–31); 47,1 (59,14–26).

⁴³ Cf. REINSCH (n. 4) 88, *app. font. ad* 14–16, GRECU, V., Kritobulos aus Imbros. Sein wahrer Name. Die Widmungsbriefe. Die Ausgabe. Das Geschichtswerk. *Bsl* 18 (1957) 1–17, esp. 15; HUNGER, H., *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*. I. Bd. München 1978, 501.

δ' ἐλέσθαι).⁴⁴ Alluding to Thucydides, he also mentions that Constantine “was exact in his judgments of the present, as someone has said of Pericles, and supreme in conjecturing the future, even its most distant possibilities (τῶν δὲ μελλόντων ὡς ἐπὶ πλείστον τοῦ εἰκότος ἄριστος εἰκαστής).⁴⁵ Even though Kritoboulos owned a manuscript of Thucydides,⁴⁶ it is very likely that this time he recalled the work from memory without checking the relevant passage – for the citation refers not to Pericles but to Themistocles, whom the Athenian historian prizes for being “a consummate judge of the needs of the moment at very short notice, and supreme in conjecturing the future, even its most distant possibilities (τῶν μελλόντων ἐπὶ πλείστον τοῦ γενησομένου ἄριστος εἰκαστής).⁴⁷

Kritoboulos’ confusion between the two Athenian leaders, however, seems to be only an inaccuracy not a serious mistake, considering that, as a renowned scholar of Thucydides noted, “the account of Themistocles’ qualities prepares us for those of Pericles”⁴⁸ – and for those of Alexander, and of Mehmed, and of Constantine, we could continue the list.⁴⁹ There is no need, I think, of further inspections to notice that Kritoboulos’ *dramatis personae* are in general characterised by quite conventional criteria in a rather uniform language. The question is: why? Approaching my own conclusion, lastly, I should like to give an answer to this question, reflecting upon the idiosyncrasy of Kritoboulos’ characterisation technique and style.

More than a century ago Karl Krumbacher formulated his togated judgement on Kritoboulos, and condemned him simultaneously for his loquaciousness and limited vocabulary.⁵⁰ His one-sided verdict was reiterated by many scholars

⁴⁴ SH I 72,1 (81,12–14).

⁴⁵ SH I 72,1 (81,14–16).

⁴⁶ See REINSCH (n. 4) 68*–69*.

⁴⁷ Thuc. I 138,3. See MÜLLER (n. 36) 100 *app. ad* LXXII. § 1; GRECU (n. 43) 15; REINSCH (n. 4) 52*, 81 *app. font. ad* 14–16.

⁴⁸ HORNBLOWER (n. 12) 203; 223: „The praise of Themistokles forms a natural bridge to Pericles...”

⁴⁹ Cf. REINSCH (n. 4) 52*, 81 *app. font. ad* 14–16.

⁵⁰ KRUMBACHER, K., *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur von Justinian bis zum Ende des Oströmischen Reiches (527–1453)*. München 1897², 309: “Allein trotz aller Mühe erhascht Kritobulos auch nicht einen Schatten von der gedankenschweren Straffheit und Fülle des grossen Vorbildes; seine Darstellung leidet an breiter Geschwätzigkeit und bewegt sich einem ersichtlich engen Gehege angelernter Ausdrücke.” Presumably, Krumbacher (too) judged Kritoboulos’ writing style poor as a result of the above-mentioned formulas and type-scenes; cf. REINSCH (n. 4) 40*: “Im gesamten Werk jedoch hat Kritobulos dort, wo er von Geschehnissen berichtet, die so oder ähnlich auch an anderer Stelle vorkommen, zu sprachlichen Stereotypen

after him,⁵¹ until a more nuanced evaluation, propagated primarily by Nikolaos Andriotes, Nikolaos Tomadakes and Reinsch, came to the fore.⁵² According to this recent estimation, Kritoboulos mastered the ancient language and the fine art of literary imitation with panache and did use them with great inner emotion and mental strength. Although the latter assessment, in my view, is closer to the truth, Krumbacher also has a point. Kritoboulos' writing style does oscillate between flowery and plain language. However, he adopts these registers – and there is, I think, where the flaw of Krumbacher's argument lies in – not without reason, quite the contrary he adopts them deliberately.⁵³ One can say that he used the language functionally.⁵⁴ With these phrases he wanted depict familiar features for his seasoned Byzantine audience. These repetitious and, not least, easily recognisable phrases function like coloured and premanufactured tesserae in mosaics: our historian could place them in his portrayals interchangeably; they perfectly fitted in the portrait of the Turkish sultan or of the Turkish pasha or of the Byzantine emperor, or even of the Turks. For modern readers these portraits can be schematic and also boring with their worn-out clichés. For Byzantines, however, they offered reference points for understanding and judging historical actors (and events).⁵⁵

Not surprisingly, we can find a similar compendium of characteristics, for instance, in a twelfth-century Byzantine epitome of Philip's life preserved in

Zuflucht genommen, die ihm teilweise herbe Kritik eingetragen haben."

⁵¹ See e.g. COLONNA, M. E., *Gli storici bizantini dal IV al XV secolo. Vol. I.: Storici profani*. Napoli 1956, 36: "Come altri cronografi bizantini egli prende a modello Tucidide, imitandolo nella disposizione cronologica della materia, nella tecnica dei discorsi, nella ricchezza della narrazione. Ma il racconto risulta verboso, pur muovendosi in una manifesta angustia di vocaboli, e poco chiaro."

⁵² ANDRIOTES and TOMADAKES are cited by REINSCH (n. 4) 43*, n. 11.; 49* and REINSCH (n. 2) 303, 305. On Kritoboulos' style, see the detailed analyses of REINSCH (n. 4) 39*–43*.

⁵³ Kritoboulos employed intentionally, for instance, a more rhetorical and embellished style for the climaxes of his narrative; see with examples REINSCH (n. 4) 39*–40*.

⁵⁴ I do not agree with REINSCH (n. 4) 40*, according to whom Kritoboulos used these linguistic stereotypes as a refuge (*Zuflucht*). His assertion is only partly true.

⁵⁵ NEVILLE, L., Why Did the Byzantines Write History? In: *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade, 22–27 August 2016. Plenary Papers*. Beograd 2016, 265–276, cit. 273 rightly says the following: "Acknowledging the role of ancient models in the formation of character and culture in Byzantine society requires that we see the *topoi* and literary *mimesis*, not as inconsequential rhetorical dressing to be scraped off and disregarded, but as the touchstones for self-expression. Because identity was expressed by saying who one was like, the *topoi* speak to the truth of one's character. The *topoi* are not what should be ignored, but what were considered most important."

the *Vaticanus graecus* 96.⁵⁶ The scholarly set piece informs us, as simple and concise as does Kritoboulos, that the Macedonian king was brilliant at speaking (δεινὸς εἰπεῖν), he could foresee the future (τὰ μέλλοντα προιδεῖν ἰκανός), and he was quick in his actions (πρὸς τὰς πράξεις ὀξύς).

These scholastic and distilled portraitures, as we have seen, were mostly based on the character descriptions of the ancient authors.⁵⁷ So Kritoboulos, inserting these, so to speak, classical tesserae in his protagonists' portrayals, was able to evoke for his audience exemplary historical figures from the past,⁵⁸ who, as our historian's little slip has demonstrated, were interchangeable too. And this interchangeability, I suppose, was very important in chronicling the transition of power⁵⁹ from the Byzantines to the Ottomans in a way in which

⁵⁶ On the epitome of Philipp's life, see COOK, B. L., The Essential Philip of Macedon: A Byzantine Epitome of His Life. *GRBS* 45 (2005) 189–211.

⁵⁷ As it is well-known, the Byzantine (and ancient) historians and their audience became acquainted with the major historical works and the criteria of good historiography through the rhetorical trainings and preliminary exercises (*progymnasmata*); see CROKE, B., Uncovering Byzantium's Historiographical Audience. In: MACRIDES, R. (ed.), *History as Literature in Byzantium. Papers from the Fortieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, April 2007*. (Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies Publications 15) Farnham – Burlington VT. 2010, 25–53, esp. 28, 30, 42. It is very likely that these character descriptions were greatly influenced by the rhetorical exercises. The mutual relation between *progymnasmata* and historiography is still an uncharted territory in Byzantinology (as well as in Classics); see KALDELLIS, A., The Manufacture of History in the Later Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Rhetorical Templates and Narrative Ontologies. In: *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade, 22–27 August 2016. Plenary Papers*. Beograd 2016, 293–306, esp. 300 f. For an introduction to the problem, see: NICOLAI, R., *La storiografia nell'educazione antica*. Pisa 1992; GIBSON, C. A., Learning Greek History in the Ancient Classroom: The Evidence of the Treatises on *Progymnasmata*. *CPh* 99 (2004) 103–129.

⁵⁸ In the proem of the *SH*, Kritoboulos declares that one of his main aims of his writing was to give historical lessons to the next generations; see *SH* I 1,1 (12,7–8). The historical character-types had crucial role in the process of 'teaching'. As NEVILLE (n. 55) 273 f. put it relating to Skylitzes and Bryennios: "...histories provided multiple examples of great or horrible behavior they gave their readers powerful, memorable lessons in how to be virtuous and effective. When Skylitzes and Bryennios homogenized individuals into examples of particular types of characters, they were making their histories *more* useful, by making the important patterns clearer." This is true for Kritoboulos, too.

⁵⁹ Kritoboulos explained the fall of Byzantium with the idea of *translatio imperii*; cf. *SH* I, 4–5 (14,18–29); see ŠEVČENKO, I., The Decline of Byzantium Seen Through the Eyes of Its Intellectuals. *DOP* 15 (1961) 167–186, esp. 184; REINSCH, D. R., Il Conquistatore di Costantinopoli nel 1453: erede legittimo dell'imperatore di Bisanzio o temporaneo usurpatore? Alle origini della questione: appartiene la Turchia all'Europa? *Medioevo greco. Rivista di storia e filologia bizantina* 3 (2003) 213–223, esp. 219; REINSCH, D. R., Mehmed der Eroberer in der Darstellung der zeitgenössischen byzantinischen Geschichtsschreiber. In: ASUTAY-

Kritoboulos wanted to chronicle it – seeing that for him, as Reinsch put it, “the Sultan was the natural successor to the Byzantine Emperor, natural according to the laws of history as had been worked out by the theoreticians of the Hellenistic time”.⁶⁰ That is why Kritoboulos, instead of using the Arabic-Turkish title Emir or Sultan, called consistently Mehmed emperor (βασιλεύς),⁶¹ and that is why, I think, he portrayed the Turkish ruler and, occasionally, his subjects too in Greek ‘regalia’. Whether these homogenised and Hellenised⁶² portraits were historically accurate by our standards, it is, of course, question-begging. But every now and then we may appreciate the song without trusting the singer.

EFFENBERGER, N. – REHM, U. (eds.), *Sultan Mehmet II.: Eroberer Konstantinopels, Patron der Künste*. Köln – Weimar – Wien 2009, 15–30, esp. 17–18.

⁶⁰ REINSCH (n. 2) 306.

⁶¹ See REINSCH (n. 2) 306; MOUSTAKAS, K., Byzantine ‘Visions’ of the Ottoman Empire: Theories of Ottoman Legitimacy by Byzantine Scholars after the Fall of Constantinople. In: LYMBEROPOULOU, A. (ed.), *Images of Byzantine World: Visions, Messages, Meanings: Studies Presented to Leslie Brubaker*. Farnham 2011, 215–229, esp. 218 ff.

⁶² It is pertinent to recall here that Kritoboulos also created a Greek ancestry for the Ottoman rulers by tracing their origin back to Perseus and Achaemenes: *SH I* 4,2 (15,25–16,7); on this, see MOUSTAKAS (n. 61) 223. Consequently, he describes Mehmed as a philhellene ruler; see e.g. *SH III* 9,4–6 (128,13–31).

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