Reinventing the ancient Greeks : the self-representation of Byzantine scholars in Renaissance Italy

Lamers, H.

Chapter 1

Hellenism and Greekness in Late Byzantium

Who were the Byzantines? The answer to the question obviously depends on how we intend to read it. But if we look at how the Byzantines positioned themselves in their narratives of the past, and if we examine the names they used for themselves, we can only conclude that they saw themselves as the inheritors of the Roman empire, referring to themselves as 'Ρωμαῖοι' ('Romans') and to their country as Rhomaïs.[108]

This answer is not uncontroversial. The word 'Byzantines' itself obscures more than it reveals. It is an invention of sixteenth-century scholarship,[109] and the Byzantines themselves normally only used it to refer to the inhabitants of Constantinople.[110] While they called themselves 'Ρωμαῖοι', there is a notable resistance to call them Romans both in national Greek and in western scholarship. Recently, it has been argued that the denial of a Roman identity to Byzantium must be seen as the result either of western claims to the Roman legacy, or of Greek national claims to Hellenic continuity in Byzantium.[111] Western scholarship has generally refused to call the Byzantines 'Romans' because it saw the Roman legacy as primarily Latin and often also Roman Catholic, preferring labels such as 'Greeks', 'medieval Greeks', 'Byzantines', or 'orthodox' to refer

[108] Bibliography on this topic is huge. For an extensive bibliography on the subject I refer to Kaldellis (2007a) 411-452 and Kaldellis (2012a) in the notes. A very short and accessible overview on the Roman label throughout Byzantine history see Chrysos (2010b). On the complex history of the ethnonym 'Hellene' see especially Christou (1991), Hunger (1987), and Jüthner (1923). Very short overviews of the matter are Hall (2000), Chrysos (2010a), and also Carras (2000). For the emergence of the Hellenic label in antiquity see most notably Hall (2002) 125-171.

[109] Diverging from common opinion (ascribing the invention of the word to Hieronymus Wolf) Ben Tov (2000) 106-109 argued that it was Johannes Oporinus who derived the word 'Byzantine' from Chalkokondyles' definition of the word as a 'broader political term'.

[110] The coterminous words of 'Byzantinism' and 'Medieval Hellenism', understood as the millenary culture of the eastern Roman empire, was not adopted in Greek historiography until the nineteenth century as it was considered a foreign invention of European intellectuals. It was only from the 1880s, with classicism giving way to romanticism, that a really Byzantinocentric historiography could develop in Greece, and the term 'Byzantine' was commonly used. On this see in more detail Argyropoulos (2001) 30-32, Huxley (1998), Politis (1998).

[111] This is argued most extensively in Anthony Kaldellis' forthcoming monograph on Laonikos Chalkokondyles (Kaldellis forthcoming b), but see in the meantime Kaldellis (2012a).

to the eastern Romans of Byzantium.[112] Greek national historians, on the other hand, preferred to call the Byzantines Greeks rather than Romans, as this enabled them to emphasise continuity from ancient Greece via Byzantium to the nation-state Hellas. This 'mystic marriage of Pericles and Theodora', of ancient Greece and Byzantium, was consummated in the nineteenth century, when the father of Greek national historiography Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos introduced the idea of Hellenic Byzantinism.[113]

In this context, it is good to realise that to name the Byzantines Romans is not to say that they were not Greeks or *vice versa*. The Byzantines' relation to the Greek and Roman pasts – both pagan and Christian – varied over time and even among contemporaries.[114] Still, it is safe to say that during most of their history the people we now call Byzantines most intensively identified with the Romans, not with the Hellenes. If they did, it was mainly because they shared a language with them.[115] The identification with the Hellenes in an ethnic rather than cultural or linguistic sense is very much restricted to several moments in Byzantine history as well as to small groups or even eccentric individuals in Byzantine society. In different philosophical and literary constellations cultural Hellenism emerged especially in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries,[116] but identifications with the Hellenes as ancestors of the Byzantines collectively were mainly restricted to the latest period. Hellenism finally gained special momentum in the fifteenth century, and eventually 'survived' mainly in the post-Byzantine diaspora. For this reason, it is useful to briefly introduce the Byzantines' traditional views on their relation with the Greek past and outline how it changed over time, especially in the fifteenth century. Of course, it cannot be my purpose here to cover the fifteenth century extensively, nor to fill the virtual two-century gap between circa 1300 and 1500 in the secondary literature regarding Hellenism in the Byzantine world.[117] For that reason alone, I confine myself to sketching those evolutions in late-Byzantine views on Greekness in the fifteenth century that help us to see diasporic Hellenism both against the background of traditional Hellenism in Byzantium,

[112] Kaldellis (2007a) 3, 43, 83, 112-114, 338, 376.
[113] Mango (1965) 40-42. A detailed study on the ways in which late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Greek intellectuals construed Byzantium see Argyropoulos (2001).
[114] Kaldellis (2007a) 317, 391-392.
[115] See the pioneering an important studies of Page (2008) and Kaldellis (2007a) that have been of fundamental importance to my understanding of Byzantine self-understanding.
[116] The fascinating history of Hellenism in Byzantium is traced in Kaldellis (2007a).
[117] The most recent studies are Page (2008) and Kaldellis (2007a).

and as part of a wider cultural movement of an increasingly radical Hellenism originating in Byzantium.

Hellenes among the Romans

For the Romans of the East, the Hellenes had traditionally been a foreign people whose language they imitated, whose rhetorical theory they studied and applied, and whose philosophy they scrutinised through the lens of scriptural truth.[118] But they were a *foreign* people, and the study of their language and culture was 'outward learning' ('θύραθεν παιδεία') in contradistinction to 'our learning' ('ἡμέτερα παιδεία') or Christian theology. In the Byzantine sources, the Hellenes represented (a) geographically, the inhabitants of the area of mainland Greece or, more specifically, the Byzantine province of Hellas;[119] (b) historically, the ancient Greeks perceived as a remote and foreign people in the past; (c) linguistically, those who had received education in the Greek classics ('παιδεία') and, through imitation, spoke and wrote in the language of the ancient Greeks; and (d) religiously, those who adhered either to the religious beliefs of the Hellenes or to any other religion considered non-orthodox, so that the word became a shortcut-term for pagan without reference to language, origin or religion.

If the Byzantines referred to themselves as Hellenes, they did so in order to emphasise their competence in ancient Greek and their knowledge of ancient Greek literature, both secular and Christian. In this sense, the word 'Hellene' served to distinguish the intellectual elite from the majority of the population, not trained in classical oratory, poetry, and philosophy. So, for example, in some contexts, it served the elite of Constantinople to dissociate themselves from the provincials, despising them for their lack of Attic Greek and their less sophisticated knowledge of ancient Greek language and literature.[120] At another level, it served those same elites to create a sense of cultural superiority vis-à-vis a threatening and barbarian other, either the Turks, or the Latins.[121]

It was not until the thirteenth century that Byzantine intellectuals began to present themselves increasingly as Hellenes. Intensifying opposition to the Latin West probably

[118] Cf. De Vries-Van der Velden (2011) 110.

[119] Until the fourteenth century, Hellas generally signified the parts of the Greek peninsula north of the Peloponnesus (Attica, Boeotia, Aetolia, and Acarnania), but in subsequent authors it might include the Peloponnesus as well. Cf. Runciman (1952) 25. On the issue of imagining Greece before Greece see also chapter 6 below.

[120] Page (2008) 49-51.

[121] Kaldellis (2007a) 295-301, 334-388.

played a major role here. Relations between Byzantines and Latins reached a critical moment during the Fourth Crusade (1202–1204). Latin troops trampled Constantinople and established a Latin empire that lasted until 1261, when Michael VIII Palaeologus recovered Constantinople and Baldwin II went into exile. As the Latins had their own claims to the Roman tradition – both culturally and politically – the Byzantines had to readdress their own Romanity. Moreover, they had to accommodate the fact that the Latin Romans denied to the Byzantines their Romanity and called them 'Greeks' ('Graeci') (on which see also below, chapter 2, pp. 57-65). Initially, the Byzantines did not accept the Greek rubric and used the Greek equivalent ('Γραικός') mainly ironically or when put in the mouth of a westerner.[122]

Even so, they designed an alternative Hellenic image for themselves. Especially in the empire of Nicaea (one of the successor states after the Latin conquest of Byzantium in 1204) Byzantine intellectuals emphasised their privileged access to Hellenic learning. Their Hellenism could distinguish them from the Latins, who could not lay claim to this cultural legacy even if they now claimed Roman power in the East. It must be noted, however, that this Hellenism did not replace the Byzantines' Romanity, but rather redefined it; it explained what kind of Romans the Byzantines were.[123] In addition, Byzantines identified with the Hellenes as ethnic ancestors only very incidentally and especially to bolster their claims to cultural supremacy. So did, for instance, Theodore II Lascaris (1254–1258), who can be regarded as the first Byzantine using Hellenism not to define a Roman elite against other Romans, but as the substance of collective pride.[124] In the following centuries, many Byzantine intellectuals continued this tendency to refer to themselves as Hellenes, even though they did not stop calling themselves Romans. Sometimes they represented themselves not only as the intellectual but also as the ethnic heirs to the ancient Hellenes. However, they did so without too much consistency and, as it seems, predominantly as a means of foregrounding cultural distinctiveness. They did not work out a theory of how they could be Romans and Greeks at the same time, nor did they explain exactly how they saw their collective

[122] Page (2008) 87. Byzantine authors used the label 'Γραικοί' as a less derogatory alternative to '"Ελληνες' until the ninth century, after which it fell into disuse due to its negative association with the rubric 'Graeci' that westerners employed to undermine the Roman claims of the Byzantines. See Page (2008) 66-67. Later, some used it to refer to the orthodox (see chapter 2, pp. 57-65).

[123] This evolution is most elaborately discussed in Kaldellis (2007a) 317-388.

[124] For analysis and discussion of Theodore Lascaris' case see Kaldellis (2007a) 372-379.

descent from the ancient Hellenes, and what this implied, for example in their relation to the West and the Latins in particular.

Exceptions to this are scarce. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, Manuel Chrysoloras – the first Byzantine professor to hold a western chair of Greek from 1397 until 1400 and mainly renowned for producing the first Greek grammar in the West – rationalised his identification of the Byzantines collectively with both the ancient Greeks and the Romans.[125] He explained his views on exactly who the Byzantines were in a letter he wrote in about 1414 to emperor Manuel Palaeologus:

> Μεμνώμεθα οἵων ἀνδρῶν ἔκγονοι γεγόναμεν· Εἰ μὲν βούλοιτό τις, λέγοι <ἂν> τῶν προτέρων καὶ ἀρχαιοτέρων, λέγω δὴ τῶν πρεσβυτάτων καὶ παλαιῶν Ἑλλήνων, ὧν τῆς δυνάμεώς τε καὶ σοφίας οὐδεὶς ἀνήκοος μεμένηκεν. Εἰ δὲ βούλει, τῶν μετ᾽ ἐκείνους γενομένων ἡμῖν προγόνων, τῶν παλαιῶν Ῥωμαίων, ἀφ᾽ὧν νῦν ὀνομαζόμεθα καὶ οἵ δήπου ἀξιοῦμεν εἶναι, ὥστε καὶ τὴν ἀρχαίαν ὀνομασίαν σχεδὸν ἀποβαλεῖν. Μᾶλλον δὲ ἄμφω τούτω τὼ γένει ἐφ᾽ἡμῖν δήπου συνελήλυθε καὶ εἴτε Ἕλληνας βούλοιτό τις λέγειν εἴτε Ῥωμαίους, ἡμεῖς ἐσμὲν ἐκεῖνοι καὶ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου δὲ καὶ τῶν μετ᾽ ἐκεῖνον ἡμεῖς σώζομεν διαδοχήν.[126]
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> *Let us remember from what men we are descended. If someone would like, he could say that we descended from the first and age-old, I mean from the most venerable and ancient Hellenes (no one has remained ignorant of their power and wisdom). If you please, you could also say that we descended from those who came after them, the ancient Romans, after whom we are now named and who we, I suppose, claim to be, so that we even almost erased our ancient name [i.e. of the Hellenes]. Rather both of these races came together in our times, I think, and whether someone calls us Hellenes or Romans, that is what we are, and we safeguard the succession of Alexander and that of those after him.*[127]

Although Chrysoloras here used the word 'πρόγονοι' (forefathers, ancestors), he primarily defined the continuity between Byzantine present and the Romans as well as

[125] The classical study on Chrysoloras is Cammelli (1941). The most recent comprehensive studies on Chrysoloras are Thorn-Wickert (2006) and the contributions in Maisano & Rollo (2002), which appeared after they could be included in the very short introduction with a concise bibliography of Harris (2000e).

[126] Chrysoloras, ed. Patrinelis (2001) 117 ll. 4-13 (with adapted punctuation; <ἂν> is my conjecture).

[127] 'Those after him' ('τῶν μετ᾽ ἐκεῖνον') may refer either to the Romans or to the Hellenistic monarchs. As Chrysoloras here makes the point that the Byzantines are both Hellenes and Romans, it seems most likely that he refers to the Romans, who eventually succeeded Alexander as leaders of a world empire.

the Greeks in political rather than ethnic terms (note the use of 'διαδοχή' here).[128] For him, Constantinople best exemplified the Greco-Roman synergy with which he as a Byzantine identified. 'The two most powerful and intelligent peoples', Chrysoloras explained in his more famous *Comparison between Old and New Rome*, '(the one ruling at the time, the other having ruled immediately before, both adorned with every art, ambition, and splendour: Romans and Greeks), constructed this city after joining forces, and used all other peoples and their own resources to serve it.'[129] His primary reference point was, however, Rome. During one of his many diplomatic missions to Italy, he felt so much at home in the city, that he started looking for his beloved house before realising that he was in Old and not in New Rome.[130]

The idea that the Byzantines were a mixture of Greeks and Romans echoes in the curious hybrid rubric 'Ρωμέλληνες' (Romellenes), used by Isidore of Kiev in a eulogy for Manuel and John VIII Palaeologus.[131] Isidore asserted that Constantine the Great had united the best Romans and the best Hellenes in Constantinople in order to produce the best *genos* on earth. This was the people of Romellenes whom we would now call Byzantines.[132] However, most Byzantines preferred to identify either with the Romans or with the Hellenes. Sometimes they also used 'Ρωμαῖοι' and 'Ἕλληνες' side by side without further comment. There might well be something in the idea that the Greco-

[128] On the dating of the letter see Patrinelis (1972) 499; Chrysoloras, ed. Patrinelis (2001) 41-44. The text was recognised as an original composition of Chrysoloras by Christos Patrinelis in 1972 in the Monastery of Metamorphosis at Meteora (codex 154) and published in a critical edition 2001. On the title and function of the text see Chrysoloras, ed. Patrinelis (2001) 38-39, 50. On the identification of the text as Chrysoloras' see Patrinelis (1972) 498-499 and for the text see Chrysoloras, ed. Patrinelis (2001) (with an introduction on 9-34 followed by an English translation on 35-57). See also Dagron (2001) 786 and Rollo (2002) 64 who were not able to consult the edition of Patrinelis (but cf. Maltezou 2006: 100).

[129] Chrysoloras, ed. Billò (2000) 17 ll. 20-24 (§38): 'Δύο γὰρ τὰ δυνατώτατα καὶ φρονιμώτατα ἔθνη, τὸ μὲν τότε ἄρχον, τὸ δὲ εὐθὺς ἄρξαν πρὸ ἐκείνου, καὶ πάσῃ τέχνῃ καὶ φιλοτιμίᾳ καὶ ἁβρότητι κομῶντα, Ῥωμαῖοι τὲ καὶ Ἕλληνες, συνελθόντα ταύτην πεποιήκασι καὶ πᾶσι δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἔθνεσι καὶ τοῖς ἐκείνων εἰς αὐτὴν ἐχρήσαντο πρὸς ὑπηρεσίαν'.

[130] See his letter to Johannes Chrysoloras (the father-in-law of Franciscus Philelfus) in Cortassa (2000) 102.

[131] Isidore, ed. Lambros (1926) 152 l. 17. The author of the eulogy was unknown Lambros, but was revealed by Mercati (1926) 6-7 whose thesis was adopted by Philippides (2007) 370 n. 75. The term 'Romellenes' prefigures the attempts of nineteenth-century Greek historians to come to terms with the Byzantine past of the Greek nation. See on his subject Argyropoulos (2001) esp. 30-32.

[132] Isidore, ed. Lambros (1926) 151-152 (esp. 152 ll. 8-12) .

Roman dualism which Chrysoloras and Isidore voice so self-consciously may explain the wavering of Demetrios Kydones and some of his contemporaries between the Roman and Hellenic labels. Instead of uncertainty and instability, this wavering would then reflect their firm but implicit conviction of the Byzantines' double Greco-Roman background.[133]

On the whole, however, it seems that identifications with the ancient Hellenes remained fluid and undifferentiated before the fifteenth century. Questions such as where the Hellenes had been during the previous two millennia or how a people could be Hellenes and Romans at the same time remained unanswered.[134] This changed, however, in the fifteenth century. In that period, we find a move from 'Hellenism' towards 'grécité', to recall a useful distinction made by Gilbert Dagron.[135] In this thesis, the distinction between Hellenism and Greekness is used to differentiate between self-referential allusions to the ancient Greeks (not uncommon in the Byzantine tradition) and a more (not fully) theorised ethno-cultural identification with them (less frequent and even rare as Anthony Kaldellis has shown). With ethno-cultural identification I mean the construction of continuity between past and present groups by claiming both common ethnic roots and the preservation of significant original features (via cultural transmission or biological transferral). The former anchors the sameness of both groups in the remote past; the latter underpins the perceived sameness over time.[136] The first to theorise the Byzantines' relation with the ancient Hellenes along these lines in some detail was the eccentric late-Byzantine philosopher George Gemistos Plethon. In sharp contrast to Manuel Chrysoloras and Isidor of Kiev, Plethon considered Hellenism to be a full alternative to the traditional Romanity of the Byzantines.

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[133] Patrinelis (1972) 501-502 (together with note 15). Cf. the observation of Petrinelis in Chrysoloras, ed. Petrinelis (2001) 51 n. 53.

[134] Cf. Kaldellis (2007a) 378-379 and Vryonis (1991) 9.

[135] Cf. Dagron (2001) 784-791. It must be noted that this distinction is void of the evaluative overtones of George Seferis' famous distinction between "Ελληνικότητα' (usually translated as Greekness) and "Ελληνισμός' (Hellenism), which are in turn distinct from "Ρωμιοσύνη' ('Romiosyni'). These words represent different aspects of the psycho-cultural experience of being Greek. See on Seferis' complex distinction Brewer (2012) 273-274.

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The Hellenic alternative to Rome in the works of Gemistos Plethon

With the first attempts to formulate a real Hellenic alternative to the Roman-Christian complex of Byzantine self-identification in the second half of the fifteenth century, Hellenism for the first time really challenged the Roman self-representation of the Byzantines. The link between the Byzantines and the ancient Hellenes became more (but not fully) theorised in the works of George Gemistos Plethon. Plethon is important here because he anticipated many features of the Hellenism of the post-Byzantine intelligentsia in Italy. At his school in Mistra he educated some prominent members of the last generation of Byzantine scholars who would settle in Italy, not only the famous Bessarion, but also lesser known members of the cardinal's Roman court such as Demetrios Rhaoul Kavakis. In Mistra, Gemistos Plethon transformed the Hellenes from the object of watchful study into ancestors whose precepts must be revived in order to carry out a programme of social and political reform.

In what is left of Plethon's works three features stand out as particularly important since they sharply contrast with dominant Byzantine views on the Hellenes. As such, they foreshadow some important features of what we shall find in the Italian diaspora. First of all, Plethon's use of ancient Greek culture went far beyond a stylistic or literary ideal. For him, ancient Greek literature and philosophy are more than 'learning from outside' to be studied through the lens of Christian doctrines. From a traditional Byzantine point of view, his Hellenism was radical. Plethon took ancient Greek philosophy together with the history of the ancient Greeks as the primary source for his socio-political views that form an alternative to the Roman-imperial and, it seems, even the Christian order of the eastern Roman empire. His political ideal is the organisation of the ancient city state Sparta, philosophically underpinned by Plato.[137]

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[137] Garnsey (2009) 332-333. Plethon's political thought mainly survives in two memoranda addressed to Theodore and Manuel Palaeologus on which see Signes Codoñer (1998) 48-54. An edition of the treatises with a German translation and notes can be found in Plethon, ed. Elissen (1860). The most recent modern Greek translation is available in Baloglou (2002) 129-254 (with introductions on 23-127 and extensive bibliographies). Passages are translated into English in Barker (1957): 198-219 (with introduction on 196-198) and into Spanish in Signes Codoñer (1998) 82-90. On the various political aspects of Plethon's writings see now Capodiferro (2010) 55-83. On Plethon's political thought see especially Nikolaou (1974) 4-102 together with Blum (1987) and Peritore (1977). On the role of monasticism in Plethon's political treatises see Konstantelos (2003). On the role of Sparta in Plethon's political thought see Baloglou (2003) 319-326. The only recent monograph-length study of Plethon with particular attention to his radical Platonism is Siniossoglou (2011). For a very short introduction to his life with a concise bibliography see Harris (2000h).

In his *Book of Laws*, which he composed at the end of his life, Plethon designed a whole new and utopian order based, as he himself explained, on a theology inspired by a combination of Hellenic pantheism, Zoroaster and Plato, a Platonic and Stoic ethics, and a less rigorous form of Spartan political organisation.[138] He designed prayers in honour of the gods of the ancient Greek pantheon and gave very precise instructions on the celebration of the liturgy he described.[139] Plethon's political thought typically resisted traditional pillars of Byzantine society and parameters of identification. He not only designed a new pantheon, but also explicitly criticised the clergy.[140] Plethon's radical Hellenism and his critique of the position of the Church led Gennadios Scholarios – the first patriarch under Ottoman rule – to burn the *Book of Laws*, so that it is transmitted to us only fragmentarily. Scholarios was in many ways Plethon's antipode and represented a more traditional strand of Byzantine thought. Although he admitted that he was a Hellene by virtue of his language ('τῇ φωνῇ'), he rejected the Hellenic rubric because he did not think as the Hellenes had done and wanted to be called a Christian ('χριστιανός') after his true belief.[141] In more conservative circles, Plethon's Hellenism was thus interpreted as an act of intolerable resistance.

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[138] Woodhouse (1986) 322. English summaries of the parts of the text that survive are available in Woodhouse (1986) 325-356. Judging on the surviving Preface, the work treated theology, ethics, poetics, ceremonies, natural science, logic, Hellenic antiquities, and matters of health. A German translation of part of the text is in Blum (2005) 7-23; a modern Greek translation is Plethon, trans. Chatzimichail (2005) (with an introduction to his life and works on 15-53); a Spanish translation is in Plethon, trans. Lisi & Signes (1995) (with an introduction on XI-LXXV); a French translation by A. Pellissier is in Plethon, ed. Alexandre (1966) (with an introduction on I-C). An overview of editions and translations of Plethon's work up to 2005 can be found in the very useful contribution of Blum (2005) 49-50. Note that Blum does not mention the Spanish translation of the *Laws* by Lisi & Signes Codoñer (1995).

[139] Woodhouse (1986) 345; 351-353. For a good summary of the debate over Plethon's paganism and a nuanced position-taking see Hankins (1990) 197-205.

[140] Woodhouse (1986) 331. It must be noted that Plethon also retained orthodox views and Platonic elements that were in accord with orthodoxy. See on this complex and still underexposed matter esp. Signes Codoñer (1998) 27-38 and Woodhouse (1986) 361-362.

[141] Scholarios, ed. Jugie, Petit & Siderides (1930) 253 ll. 4-6: 'Καὶ αὖθις, Ἕλλην ὢν τῇ φωνῇ, οὐκ ἄν ποτε φαίην Ἕλλην εἶναι, διὰ τὸ μὴ φρονεῖν ὡς ἐφρόνουν ποτὲ Ἕλληνες· ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τῆς ἰδίας μάλιστα θέλω ὀνομάζεσθαι δόξης. Καὶ εἴ τις ἔροιτό με τίς εἰμί, ἀποκρινοῦμαι χριστιανὸς εἶναι' *[Although I am a Hellene by virtue of my language, I would always deny that I am a Hellene because of the fact that I do not think like the Hellenes. I want to be named after my own belief. And if someone would ask me who I am, I will answer that I am a Christian.]*. See on Scholarios' views on Hellenism, Romanity and Greekness Livanos (2006, 2003), Angelou (1996), and Vryonis (1991) 9-13.

Some decades before Plethon composed his magnum opus, he had already articulated his views on the role of Hellenism in the political affairs of the empire. About the time Chrysoloras reconciled the Greek and Roman traditions in his view on the Byzantines, Plethon addressed two memoranda regarding the state of affairs in the Peloponnesus both to the emperor and to the despot of the Morea.[142] These two memoranda exemplify a second feature of Plethon's Hellenism that marks the transition from radical Hellenism towards Greekness, i.e. from the study of Greek literature to identifying with the ancient Greeks. In the tracts, he advanced an argument in support of the Peloponnesus that was, importantly, not only based on practical and strategic reasoning, but also on notions of historical ties and ethnic belonging. When Plethon wrote his memoranda in the 1410s, the peninsula of the Morea was a semi-independent province of the Byzantine empire, ruled by a relative of the emperor, usually his brother.[143] His plans for the socio-economic rearrangement of the province in fact amount to the establishment of an economically and militarily self-sustaining polity that is territorially circumscribed and ethnically homogeneous, and in several respects comes close to our idea of the nation-state with a decidedly communal organisation.[144]

The memoranda show that Plethon's political project was as much a structural socio-economical enterprise as it was an instance of shrewd identity politics.[145] In the treatises, he identified the Hellenes as a coherent group in the present, connected through language and tradition, and with a historical territory of its own. 'We are Hellenes by race whom you lead and rule', he emphatically claimed in his letter to emperor Manuel II, 'as both our language and ancestral learning evidence'. Plethon also claimed territorial and ethnic continuity for the Hellenes. He continued by saying that there was no country that was more appropriate to the Hellenes than the Peloponnesus together with 'the areas of Europe bordering upon it as well as the islands off its coast'.[146] In this

[142] See on the disputed dates of the treatises Woodhouse (1986) 92. The address to emperor Manuel is normally dated not later than 1418; the address to despot Theodore is most probably earlier.

[143] Classic studies on the cultural and political history of the Byzantine Morea are Runciman (1980 = 2009), Löhnheysen (1977) and Zakythinos (1975). See also the controversial study of Fallmerayer (1830) together with the discussions in Wenturis (2000), Auernheimer (1998), Leeb (1996), Thurnher (1995, 1993), Veloudis (1970).

[144] Dagron (2001) 789.

[145] Cf. Hersant (1999) 128-130.

[146] Plethon, ed. Lambros (1926a) 247 l. 14 – 248 l. 3: Ἔσμὲν γὰρ οὖν ὧν ἡγεῖσθέ τε καὶ βασιλεύετε Ἕλληνες τὸ γένος, ὡς ἥ τε φωνὴ καὶ ἡ πάτριος παιδεία μαρτυρεῖ· Ἕλλησι δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν εὑρεῖν ἥτις ἄλλη οἰκειοτέρα χώρα οὐδὲν μᾶλλον προσήκουσα ἢ Πελοπόννησός τε καὶ ὅση δὴ ταύτῃ τῆς

corner of Europe, according to Plethon, the Hellenes had always lived without foreign intermingling from times immemorial to his day.[147] In this way, he not only claimed a common ethnic root for the Hellenes, but even suggested ethnic stability over centuries.[148] Moreover, he claimed that the Peloponnesus had produced the stocks of the Hellenes ('τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων γένη'), and that it was from there that they had undertaken their most famous deeds.[149] This shows that for Plethon, the Hellenes were not only a cultural, but also an ethnic group that extended from a specific home territory to which they were naturally attached.

Plethon's famous phrase 'we are Hellenes whom you rule' has often been taken to mean that in his view Manuel II did not rule over Romans at all.[150] In the immediate context of the phrase, however, Plethon himself emphasised that he spoke about the

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Εὐρώπης προσεχὴς τῶν τε αὖ νήσων αἱ ἐπικείμεναι'. For an English paraphrase of the letter see Woodhouse (1986) 102-106 with discussion on 106-118.

[147] Plethon, ed. Lambros (1926a) 248 ll. 3-10: 'Ταύτην γὰρ δὴ φαίνονται τὴν χώραν Ἕλληνες ἀεὶ οἰκοῦντες οἱ αὐτοὶ ἐξ ὅτου περ ἄνθρωποι διαμνημονεύουσιν οὐδένων ἄλλων προενῳκηκότων οὐδὲ ἐπήλυδες κατασχόντες, ὥσπερ ἄλλοι συχνοὶ ἐξ ἑτέρας μὲν ὡρμημένοι, ἑτέραν δὲ οἰκοῦσι κατασχόντες ἄλλους τε ἐκβαλόντες καὶ αὐτοὶ ὑφ' ἑτέρων τὸ αὐτὸ ἔστιν ὅτε πεπονθότες, ἀλλ' Ἕλληνες τήνδε τὴν χώραν τοὐναντίον αὐτοί τε ἀεὶ φαίνονται κατέχοντες καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης ὁρμώμενοι, περιουσίᾳ οἰκητόρων ἑτέρας τε οὐκ ὀλίγας κατασχόντες, οὔτε ταύτην ἐκλιπόντες' *[It is manifest that the Hellenes have always inhabited this area from times immemorial (no other people had inhabited the area before them) and that foreigners did not occupy it, as many others (after having been expelled from one area) occupy and inhabit another region after throwing out others and sometimes experiencing the same themselves by the hand of others. But it is manifest that the Greeks, on the other hand, have always inhabited this area and sailed out from there due to the great number of colonists, dwelling in not a few places, without however leaving this region.]*

[148] Although Plethon never mentions autochthony literally, he in fact comes close to transferring the ancient claim of autochthony from the ancient Athenians to the Peloponnesians. On the ancient Athenian concept see Rosivach (1987).

[149] Plethon, ed. Lambros (1926a) 248 ll. 10-13: 'Συμπάσης δὲ ταύτης τῆς χώρας αὐτὴ Πελοπόννησος ὁμολογεῖται τὰ πρῶτά τε καὶ γνωριμώτατα ἐνεγκοῦσα τῶν Ἑλλήνων γένη, καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης ὁρμώμενοι τὰ μέγιστά τε καὶ ἐνδοξότατα Ἕλληνες ἔργα ἀπεδείξαντο…' *[It is commonly agreed that of this entire territory the Peloponnesus brought forth the most prominent and most distinguished races of the Hellenes, and setting out from this region the Hellenes showed their greatest and most famous deeds…].* The idea that the Peloponnesus was the heartland of the Hellenes was also expressed by Plethon's contemporary Manuel Kalekas. In a letter to Manuel Chrysoloras, he explicitly called the Peloponnesus the 'ancient fatherland of the Hellenes'. See Kalekas, ed. Loenertz (1950) 307 (nr. 89 ll. 23-24: 'τὴν ἀρχαίαν τῶν Ἑλλήνων πατρίδα'). But compare the views of Constantine Lascaris in chapter 5, pp. 194-198.

[150] Rapp (2008) 142-143; Page (2007) 244-255; Harris (2006) 93; Vryonis (1996) 35 and (1991) 8, 13.

Peloponnesus ('ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς τῆς χώρας') and its inhabitants, but not about the empire in its entirety.[151] In other contexts, therefore, we find Plethon referring to the Byzantines as Romans ("Ρωμαῖοι') instead of Hellenes.[152] His real innovation is not in this phrase, but in the way he attempts to direct the emperor's attention towards the Peloponnesus, namely via an ethnological detour to prove that the eastern Romans were really Hellenes. This is the third important feature of his use of the ancient Greek past in addition to his usage of ancient Greek culture as a source for sociopolitical reform (radical Hellenism) and his claims to the ethnic and cultural continuity of the Hellenes with the ancient past (Greekness).

Shifting attention away from practical considerations towards loyalties of belonging, Plethon articulated a theory to account for the Hellenism of the Byzantines in his treatise to emperor Manuel II. Apart from claiming that Constantinople originally was a Dorian colony, he also maintained that the Romans who had settled in Byzantion under emperor Constantine were at least partly Greek. In order to substantiate this claim, he argued that Rome's population consisted of Sabines, who were Spartans just as the Dorians.[153] In this way, the philosopher stressed the close historical and ethnic

[151] He opens the paragraph by saying that 'first of all I will state briefly about this area that it must be much valued by you, not because I see that you have not been seriously concerned about giving proper attention to it, but for the sake of the argument so that it will advance through the necessary stages' (Plethon, ed. Lambros 1926a: 247 ll. 10-13: 'πρῶτον μὲν δὴ ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς τῆς χώρας, ὡς περὶ πλείστου ποιητέα ὑμῖν ἐστι, βραχέ' ἄττα μοι εἰρήσεται, οὐχ ὅτι μὴ καὶ αὐτοὺς ὑμᾶς περὶ τὴν ταύτης ἐπιμέλειαν ἐσπουδακότας ὁρῶ, αλλ'αὐτοῦ γέ τοι τοῦ λόγου ἕνεκα ὡς διὰ τῶν δεόντων δὴ χωροίη'). Cf. Plethon, ed. Lambros (1926a) 249 ll. 5-7. In the same vein, Beck (1961) argued that Plethon's Hellenism was not an attack on the Roman polity ruled from Constantinople, but an attempt to direct the emperor's attention towards the Peloponnesus (see esp. 90-92).

[152] In his *Monodia in Helenam Palaeologinam*, for example, he referred to the fact that the emperor reigned over the race of the Romans. See Plethon, ed. Lambros (1926b) 271: 'ἡ τῶν ἡμετέρων βασιλέων τε καὶ ἡγεμόνων αὕτη μήτηρ τῷ τούτων πατρὶ ἐγήματο (…) οὐκ ὀλίγων τοιούτων βασιλέων ἀπογόνῳ βασιλεύοντί τε τοῦ ἡμετέρου τούτου τῶν Ῥωμαίων γένους…' *[the mother of our kings and despots married their father (…) the offspring of not a few of such kings who reigned our race of the Romans]*.

[153] In his commentary to Plethon's letters, Elissen mentions Dionysius of Halicarnassus as Plethon's source for the idea that the Sabines were originally Spartans (see Plethon, ed. & trans. Elissen 1860: 135 n. 5; cf. Barker 1957: 199 n. 3). Dionysius indeed mentioned the theory that a colony of Lacedaemonians settled among the Sabines at the time of Lycurgus, but he did on the other hand not mention racial intermingling; he rather used the story as an explanation for the Spartan manners of the Sabines, esp. their fondness of war, frugality, and severity (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.49). The Sabines were widely believed to share Spartan customs due to Spartan colonists (cf. Plut. *Romulus* 16.1, *Numa* 1.3; Sil. 2.8, 8.412; Iust. 20.1.13; Zon. 7.3).

relationship or 'οἰκειότης' ('intimacy', in his own words) of the Byzantine Romans and the ancient Greeks.[154] In this key-passage he rationalised the Byzantines' relationship with the Hellenes in a decidedly ethnic sense:

> 'Καὶ μὲν δὴ καὶ τῆς μεγάλης ταυτησὶ πόλεως τῆς πρὸς Βοσπόρῳ, ἥπερ νῦν ὑμῖν βασίλειόν ἐστι, τήνδε τὴν χώραν εἴη ἂν λογιζομένοις οἷον μητέρα τε οὖσαν καὶ ἀφορμήν τινα ἰδεῖν, τοῦτο μὲν ἐπειδὴ Βυζάντιον οἱ προενῳκηκότες Ἕλληνές τε καὶ Δωριεῖς, Δωριεῖς δὲ Πελοποννήσιοι περιφανῶς, τοῦτο δ' ἐπειδὴ καὶ οἱ μετὰ ταῦτα, τὴν λαμπρὰν ταύτην ἀπὸ τῆς ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ Ῥώμης ἀποικίαν στειλάμενοι καὶ Βυζάντιον οὕτω καλῇ καὶ μεγάλῃ ἐπηυξηκότες τῇ προσθήκῃ, Πελοποννησίων οὐκ ἀλλότριοι, εἴ γε Αἰνιᾶσι μὲν Σαβῖνοι ἐπὶ τοῖς ἴσοις καὶ ὁμοίοις συνῳκισμένοι Ῥώμην εὐτυχεστάτην πόλεων κατῴκισαν, Σαβῖνοι δὲ ἐκ Πελοποννήσου τε καὶ Λακεδαιμόνιοι'.[155]
>
> *For those who give it a thought, it may well be possible to understand that this land [the Peloponnesus] is the mother and the origin of that big city at the Bosporus which is now the seat of your empire; first, because of the fact that the original inhabitants of Byzantion were Hellenes and Dorians (and the Dorians are obviously Peloponnesians); and secondly, because of the fact that those who thereafter set sail from Rome in Italy to this illustrious settlement, and thus made a splendid and great addition to Byzantion, were in no way foreigners to the Peloponnesians, since the Sabines were joined as settlers, on terms of equality and parity, with the Aenianes,*[156] *when they founded Rome, the happiest of cities, and the Sabines came from the Peloponnesus and were Lacedaemonians.*

The Hellenes could boast to have established two Romes, while the so-called Romans could pride themselves on a distinguished Hellenic pedigree.[157] Plethon highlighted the relevance of ancient Greece, and particularly the Peloponnesus, not only for the pre-Roman history of the imperial capital as a Greek colony (Byzantion), but also for the later Roman strata of its past. While for Chrysoloras Rome remained the main point of

[154] Plethon, ed. Lambros (1926a) 249 l. 19.
[155] Plethon, ed. Lambros (1926a) 248 l. 13 – 249 l. 5.
[156] Lambros' text reads 'Αἰνιᾶσι' (see above), while Elissen gives 'Αἰνειᾶσι' (Plethon, ed. Elissen 1860: 43 ll. 9-10). Both Barker (1957) 199 (following Lambros' text) and Elissen (1860) 89 understood the 'Aenianes' as referring to the descendants of Aeneas. The *Suda Lexicon* records 'Αἰνιεῖς' and 'Αἰνειᾶνες' as two different words to refer to the same small tribe from upper Greece. However, it also warns that the 'Αἰνιεῖς' and 'Αἰνειᾶνες' must not be confounded with the 'Ἀινειάδεις', or the descendants of Aeneas (see *Suda s.v.* 'Αἰνειάδης'; cf. Steph. Byz. *s.v.* 'Αἰνία'). As there seems to be no connection between Rome, the Sabines and the Aenianes of upper Greece, we might perhaps emend 'Αἰνειάδαις' in order to justify Barker's and Elissen's sensible interpretations. The emendation would be consistent with what Plethon himself says elsewhere (see Plethon, ed. Lambros 1930: 115, ll. 23–116, l. 1, where it is claimed that the Trojans settled in Italy under Aeneas and later founded Rome together with the Sabines of Lacedaemonian origin).
[157] Cf. Beck (1960) 91.

reference, for Plethon the Peloponnesus was the centre of revival. Unlike the thirteenth-century 'Hellenic Romans', Plethon nor Chrysoloras wrote in response to rivalling claims of the Latin West to the Roman legacy of Byzantium. Their Hellenism was not anti-Latin in this way. Chrysoloras' emphasis on the shared Greco-Roman tradition of Old and New Rome rather bridged the gap with the Latins.

Plethon, on the other hand, was not really interested in claiming a Roman heritage for the Byzantines nor in uncovering cultural common ground with the Latin West via a long forgotten Greco-Roman past. He primarily turned to Greek antiquity for the reinvigoration of Byzantium.[158] Therefore, he thoroughly reviewed the Romanity of the "Ρωμαῖοι', making them Hellenes via an ethnographical detour. While he did not consistently reject the Roman label for the Byzantines, he did dissociate himself from the Roman past of Byzantium.[159] Plethon's innovation was his ethnographical background theory in his memorandum, not the fact that he styled the Peloponnesians 'Hellenes'. More than eighty years later, Janus Lascaris (the most distinguished protégé of Plethon's student Bessarion) would apply a similar strategy in a different context and with different emphases, when he addressed his 'Roman' audience in Florence (see chapter 5). This shows that by the time Lascaris wrote, the dissociation from the Romans was complete.

Greekness without a theory

Plethon was exceptional because he was the first to provide an explicit ethnic underpinning for his identification of the Byzantine Romans with the Hellenes. Most Byzantines who identified the Byzantines exclusively as Greeks were not so explicit. This is for instance the case in some speeches by Johannes Argyropulus, who would later come to Florence to teach Greek on the chair of Chrysoloras after the fall of Constantinople. In the very last years of the Byzantine empire, Argyropulus addressed

[158] Cf. Siniossoglou (2011) 347-359.

[159] See, e.g., Plethon, ed. Lambros (1930) 129, ll. 13-17: 'ὁρῶμεν γὰρ οἳ ἡμῖν ἐκ τῆς μεγίστης Ῥωμαίων ἡγεμονίας κεχώρηκε τὰ πράγματα, οἷς ἁπάντων οἰχομένων δύο πόλεε μόνον ἐπὶ Θρᾴκης περιλέλειπται καὶ Πελοπόννησος, οὐδὲ ξύμπασα αὕτη γε, καὶ εἰ δή τι ἔτι νησίδιον σῶν ἐστι…' *[We see how the most mighty empire of the Romans turned out for us for whom only two small cities in Thrace [Selymbria and Mesembria] are left while all other cities have perished, and the Peloponnesus also remains (and not even that in its entirety) and whatever little island is still safe…].*

the emperor in a series of speeches as the philosopher-king of the Hellenes.[160] In about 1448, he called emperor John VIII the 'Sun King of Hellas' ('ὦ τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἥλιε βασιλεῦ') and a 'common delight for the Hellenes' ('κοινὸν τοῖς Ἕλλησιν ὀφθαλμόν').[161] In his monody for the deceased emperor, he further lamented that after the king's death 'not one single city or one people, but all cities of the Greeks and all our races have suddenly entered into nothing but danger'.[162] Argyropulus emphasised with admiration what the king had done for the Hellenes to promote their liberty,[163] and he saw it as the king's duty to safeguard 'the lands, the cities, the language of the Hellenes, and the entire tradition and law of our forefathers'.[164] When a year later the despot of the Morea returned to Constantinople to claim the imperial crown after his brother's death, Argyropulus again addressed the gathered Byzantines in the centre of imperial Romanity as Hellenes.[165] Both in his speeches to Constantine XI and in his monody for

[160] Cf. Cammelli (1941b) 29-30 who uses the texts as historical evidence for a problem of dating, but does not go into detail about their contents. For a short introduction to the life and works of Argyropulus with a concise bibliography see Harris (2000c).

[161] Argyropulus, ed. Lambros (1910) 7 ll. 4-8.

[162] Argyropulus, ed. Lambros (1910) 3 ll. 7-12: 'Σοῦ δέ, μέγιστε βασιλέων, ἐξ ἀνθρώπων οἰχομένου καὶ μηκέτ' ὄντος, οὐ μία πόλις οὐδ' ἔθνος ἕν, ἀλλ' Ἑλλήνων ἅπασαι πόλεις καὶ γένη πάντα τὰ τῶν ἡμετέρων ἐπ' οὐδενὸς αὐτίκα μάλα βεβήκασιν ἀσφαλοῦς, σείεταί τε πάντα πόλεων τείχη καὶ πεσεῖν ἤδη δοκεῖ καὶ δουλεύειν βαρβάροις' *[Now that you, greatest of kings, have departed from mankind and do not live anymore, not one single city or one people, but all cities of the Greeks and all of our races have suddenly entered into nothing but danger, and all city walls seem already to shake and fall, and seem enslaved by the barbarians].*

[163] See, e.g., Argyropulus, ed. Lambros (1910) 4 ll. 2-3: 'Λέγω δὲ ὅσα περ ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς καὶ γένος ἅπαν Ἑλλήνων εὖ αἰεὶ διετέλει ποιῶν ὁ μέγιστος βασιλεύς…' *[I mean all those things the greatest king constantly did for the benefit of ourselves and for the entire race of the Hellenes…]*; Argyropulus, ed. Lambros (1910) 5 ll. 3-9: 'Χωρὶς δὲ ἐκείνων, ὅσας ὑπηρεσίας τὰς μὲν διὰ γῆς, τὰς δὲ διὰ θαλάττης ὑπέστη, πονῶν μὲν αἰεί, μηδενὸς δὲ ἀφιστάμενος τῶν ὅσα πρὸς τὴν τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐλευθερίαν τείνει…' *[Apart from these things, how many services both on land and on sea did he set up, always working hard, and shrinking from none of the tasks pertaining to the freedom of the Hellenes…].*

[164] See, e.g., Argyropulus, ed. Lambros (1910) 6 ll. 16-20: 'Οὐκοῦν φιλοσοφεῖν ὁ πάντα ἄριστος ἐκεῖνος ἔκρινε δεῖν καὶ δυοῖν ἐκείνοιν, φιλοσοφίᾳ καὶ βασιλείᾳ, ἣν ἑωρῶμεν ἀρχὴν σὺν ἁρμονίᾳ ξυνέθηκε μουσικῇ, δι' ἧς ἐσώζετο μὲν ἡ κοινὴ τοῦ γένους ἑστία, ἐσώζοντο δὲ καὶ ὅσαι νῦν ὑφ' αὑτὴν καὶ χῶραι καὶ πόλεις καὶ ἡ τῶν Ἑλλήνων φωνὴ καὶ ἅπαν ἔθος καὶ νόμος πάτριος' *[The best king in all things decided that he should be a philosopher and through those two things, philosophy and kingship, he held together the empire that we see with musical harmony, through which the common hearth of our people was saved and all the things now under its sway: the lands, the cities, the language of the Hellenes, and the entire tradition and law of our forefathers].*

[165] See Argyropulus, ed. Lambros (1910) 10 ll. 6-11. Also in his *Basilica*, Argyropulus addressed his audience in this manner. See *id.*, ed. Lambros (1910) 37 ll. 13-14: 'Ὁρᾶτε δὲ ὑμεῖς, ὦ ἄνδρες

the emperor's brother, he consistently referred to the subjects of the emperor as 'Hellenes' instead of Romans, but without providing us with a background theory.[166] Such consistent usage of the Hellenic rubric *without* an explicit reflection as we find it in Plethon obviously prompts the question how far we can go with providing the absent background theory ourselves on the basis of inductive reasoning. For our present purpose, however, it suffices to note the unmotivated idiosyncratic usage and to signal such gaps in the sources.

Without explicit reflection on their self-representation as Hellenes it is difficult to determine *why* this sudden redefinition occurred at all. It has, for example, been argued that the use of the Hellenic rubric can be explained from the fact that Roman ecumenism did no longer live up to socio-economic and political realities of the fifteenth century.[167] From this perspective, the Byzantines exchanged their imperial Romanity for national Hellenism because the latter matched the smaller and almost homogenously Greek state in which they found themselves. This is a powerful historical argument, yet it is not entirely without its problems. To name the most important one, it starts from the idea that the Romans of the East were a transcendent religious-imperial community. All the same, the idea that the Byzantine Romans in their own view represented such a ecumenical community has recently been challenged and is therefore in need of thorough revision.[168] If it is true that the Byzantine Romans saw their own community more in terms of a modern nation state than in terms of a universal empire, we must reconsider the idea that their Romanity was by definition out of line with historical 'national' realities. On the other hand, it has been shown that the Hellenic rubric was used especially if not exclusively by Byzantine converts to Roman Catholicism, who had to accept among other things that the true Romans were in Italy and not in

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῞Ελληνες, οὐκ ἄνευ ἀγαθῆς ἡμετέρας τύχης ἐπὶ τοῦ βασιλείου θρόνου τοῦδε καθήμενον' *[You behold him, Hellenes, sitting, not without good fortune for us, on the imperial throne.]*

[166] See Argyropulus, ed. Lambros (1910). It seems that in Florence Argyropulus impacted upon the way Cosimo de'Medici was eulogised. In the wake of his lectures on Aristotle, there emerged a new philosophic tradition which praised Cosimo in terms of learning and wisdom (besides the old tradition of republicanism). See on this aspect of Argyropulus' impact Brown (1961) esp. 195-198. Although not mentioned by Brown, the speeches Argyropulus delivered in Constantinople before his move to Italy in many ways prefigure this new kind of eulogistic rhetoric he applied to Cosimo. I prepare a separate contribution on this. The standard work on Argyropulus are still Lambros (1910a) for his texts and Cammelli (1941b) for his biography (but see also Geanakoplos 1984b, Garin 1950 and Zippel 1896).

[167] Runciman (1970) 17-23.

[168] Kaldellis (2012a).

Constantinople. This suggests another explanation for the sudden emphasis on Hellenism in Byzantine circles.

With the Roman rubric deferred to the Romans of the West – as we find it in Laonikos Chalkokondyles – the Byzantine converts could refer to themselves either as Hellenes or as Greeks. Since '"Ελληνες' had the cultural prestige which the western rubric 'Γραικοί' obviously lacked, some Catholic or pro-western Byzantines would then have dropped the Roman rubric and embraced the Hellenic label instead.[169] More research far beyond our present scope needs to be done to settle the issue, but it is good to realise that very probably the usage of the Hellenic rubric was variously motivated. So, for instance, Plethon's notion of Greekness was not necessarily a means to distinguish the eastern Romans from the Latin Romans (as it had been in the thirteenth century), while it had even less to do with the adoption of Catholic or western points of view (as in the case of the Byzantine converts). This once again shows that generalisations are very problematic and prompts us to carefully review individual sources.

Nevertheless, we can safely say that the transformation of Byzantine self-identification, moving away from political and religious towards ethnic and cultural parameters, enabled Byzantines to imagine a community of Hellenes that transcended dynastic, political and religious borders. This is particularly important when such borders were in flux or even broke down, as they eventually did after 1453. As we shall see in chapter 3, the works of cardinal Bessarion illustrate this. In his *Encomium to Trebizond*, he traced the ethnic roots of the Trapezuntines back to the Athenians, and stressed that they had preserved some distinctive aspects of ancient Athenian culture. But they were not unique in this. In another treatise, Bessarion emphasised that the Peloponnesians equally partook of Hellenic roots and preserved typical Hellenic features. For Bessarion, the Hellenes were not confined to Trebizond, the Peloponnesus or any other place, but were a community that existed independently of dynastic or regional boundaries. In this sense, Bessarion anticipated the views on Greekness of one of Plethon's other pupils, Laonikos Chalkokondyles, who studied with him in Mistra. Writing after the fall of Constantinople for a Greek audience, this Athenian historian transformed his teacher's reform plan into a cogent history for the Byzantines – and so produced the first history in which the Byzantines are collectively positioned in Greek rather than Roman history.

[169] Kaldellis (forthcoming b).

The Hellenes re-enter history: Laonikos Chalkokondyles' Histories

In the history of Laonikos Chalkokondyles we find the Byzantines enter the stage of world history as Hellenes for the first time.[170] Chalkokondyles was the first non-western, Byzantine author who not only transformed the Romans of the East into Hellenes, but equally cast them in a coherent narrative of Hellenic instead of Roman history. He also explained *why* the Romans of the East were *really* Hellenes. In so doing, he introduced into Greek historiography Plethon's alternative to the traditional Romanity voiced by most contemporary historiographers, and to Greco-Roman compromises such as the one proposed by Chrysoloras. Much in the manner of Herodotus, Chalkokondyles paid a good deal of attention to other peoples beyond the immediate neighbours of the Byzantine empire.[171] Among these peoples, he used the label 'Romans' ('Ρωμαῖοι') normally to refer to the flock of the pope and the subjects of the Holy Roman emperor.[172] For him, the Hellenes ('Ἕλληνες') were clearly distinct from them.

Chalkokondyles is the only Byzantine historiographer who is consistent in calling the Romans of the East 'Hellenes'. The other three late-Byzantine historians adhere to traditional labels or are less consistent in their usage.[173] While Chalkokondyles was silent about the defining features of the Hellenes, it seems that lineage, language and shared culture were the basic ingredients. When he discussed the empire of Trebizond, for example, he claimed that the Trapezuntines were 'Hellenes by race, and their customs and language are equally Hellenic'.[174] Moreover, his conception of the Hellenic

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[170] Chalkokondyles' work in fact constitutes a history of the rise of the Ottoman Turks, culminating with the fall of Constantinople and its aftermath. On Chalkokondyles and his generally understudied historiographical work see now esp. Kaldellis (forthcoming a, forthcoming b, 2012b, 2012c), Harris (2003a, 2003b), Deisser (1986) 109-112, Vryonis (1976), Wifstrand (1972), Darkó (1927, 1924), Miller (1922).

[171] This marks him off from other Byzantine historians. Even if they imitated Herodotus in points of idiom and style, they did generally not share his curiosity in other peoples. Cf. Wifstrand (1972) 7.

[172] In addition, Kaldellis (forthcoming b) shows that in Chalkokondyles' ethnographical discourse the category of the Romans represents a 'disembodied notional Roman construct' that is used as a benchmark for the western peoples he describes.

[173] For a succinct overview see Vryonis (1991) or, with more substantial references, Ditten (1964), neglected by Vryonis. In his *Chronicon*, for example, George Sphrantzes only uses 'Ρωμαϊκόν' to refer to Byzantine matters. The other two late-Byzantine historians Doukas and Kritovoulos are inconsistent in their denominations of the eastern Romans, but they mostly refer to them conventionally as Romans.

[174] Chalkokondyles, ed. Darkó (1923) 219 ll. 4-5: '… Ἕλληνάς τε ὄντας τὸ γένος, καὶ τὰ ἤθη τε ἅμα καὶ τὴν φωνὴν προϊεμένους Ἑλληνικήν'. Cf. Chalkokondyles, ed. Darkó (1922) 248 ll. 17-23.

community principally transcended political borders. After his account of the fall of Trebizond in 1461, he concluded that 'in a small amount of time all the Greeks and the rulers of the Greeks had been overturned by this sultan [Mehmet II], starting with the city of Byzantion, after that the Peloponnesus, and finally the king and land of Trebizond'.[175] In this way, he subsumed the peoples and rulers of Constantinople, the Morea, and Trebizond under the collective Hellenic rubric probably on the basis of shared lineage, customs, and language. His ideal was to see all Hellenes united under one Hellenic king, and he had good hopes. So, he explained his choice to write in Greek because he believed that it would regain its position as a world language 'as soon as a king who is Greek himself, along with the kings that follow upon him, constitutes a not inconsiderable kingdom and gathers into it the children of the Greeks. They will govern themselves according to their own customs, in a manner most pleasing to themselves and from a position of strength with regard to other peoples'.[176]

The most important historiographical innovation of the Athenian historian was the fact that he dissociated Byzantium from Roman history and integrated it into the Hellenic past, a strategy also used by his teacher Plethon. Already at the beginning of his work, he observed that 'many others have, at various times, made records and written the history of each of the deeds of the Hellenes as they happened', thus framing what he

[175] Chalkokondyles, ed. Darkó (1923) 248 ll. 17-23: 'Τραπεζοῦς μὲν οὖν οὕτως ἑάλω, καὶ ἡ τῆς Κόλχων χώρα σύμπασα ὑπὸ βασιλεῖ ἐγένετο, ἡγεμονία καὶ αὕτη Ἑλλήνων οὖσα καὶ ἐς τὰ ἤθη τε καὶ δίαιταν τετραμμένη Ἑλλήνων, ὥστε ἀναστάτους γενέσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦδε τοῦ βασιλέως οὐ πολλῷ χρόνῳ τοὺς Ἕλληνάς τε καὶ Ἑλλήνων ἡγεμόνας, πρῶτα μὲν τὴν Βυζαντίου πόλιν, μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα Πελοπόννησόν τε καὶ Τραπεζοῦντος βασιλέα καὶ χώραν αὐτήν' *[That was how Trebizond fell and how the entire land of Kolchis came under the king's authority. This too had been a principality of the Greeks and its customs and lifestyle were also Greek, so that in a small amount of time all the Greeks and the rulers of the Greeks had been overturned by this king [Mehmet II], starting with the city of Byzantion, after that the Peloponnesus, and finally the king and land of Trebizond].*

[176] Chalkokondyles, ed. Darkó (1922) 2 ll. 12-19: 'μὴ δὲ ἐκεῖνό γε πάνυ ἐκφαύλως ἔχον ἡμῖν, ὡς Ἑλληνικῇ φωνῇ ταῦτα διέξιμεν, ἐπεὶ ἥ γε τῶν Ἑλλήνων φωνὴ πολλαχῇ ἀνὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην διέσπαρται καὶ συχναῖς ἐγκαταμέμικται. καὶ κλέος μὲν αὐτῇ μέγα τὸ παραυτίκα, μεῖζον δὲ καὶ ἐς αὖθις, ὁπότε δὴ ἀνὰ βασιλείαν οὐ φαύλην Ἕλλην τε αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἐσόμενοι βασιλεῖς, οἵ δὴ καὶ οἱ τῶν Ἑλλήνων παῖδες ξυλλεγόμενοι κατὰ σφῶν αὐτῶν ἔθιμα ὡς ἥδιστα μὲν σφίσιν αὐτοῖς, τοῖς δὲ ἄλλοις ὡς κράτιστα πολιτεύοιντο' *[Let no one deride us because we relate these things in Greek, for the language of the Hellenes has spread to many places throughout the world and has mixed with many other languages. It is very prestigious already and will be even more so in the near future, when a king who is himself a Hellene, along with the kings that will succeed him, constitute a not inconsiderable kingdom and gather into it the children of the Hellenes. They will govern themselves according to their own customs, in a manner most pleasing to themselves and from a position of strength with regard to others]*. The translation is after Kaldellis (forthcoming).

has to say about the decline of the Byzantine empire as part of Greek history and Greek historiography. The first pages of his work particularly read as a summary of his view on the Greek past of the eastern Roman empire.[177] In this summary, 'Byzantine history' predated the founding of Constantinople by Constantine the Great, which had been a traditional starting point for Byzantine historiography. With considerable leaps in time Chalkokondyles evoked the Greek colonisation of Asia and Africa, the expansion of the Greeks towards India and the Caucasus, the affairs of the Spartans and the Athenians, the king of the Macedonians and his successors.[178] After briefly mentioning the achievements of Alexander the Great, the Athenian historian turned to the rising power of the Romans, skipping the history of the Hellenistic age. 'At that point', he recounted, 'the Romans attained the greatest empire in the world, having their fortune in proportion to their virtue. They entrusted Rome to the highest of their priests and crossed over into Thrace under the command of their emperor'.[179] In his account of how the Greek city of Byzantion became a Roman capital, Chalkokondyles again made a significant leap in time from Alexander the Great and his successors (roughly the period between 336 and 30 BC) to the time of pope Sylvester (who was pope in the period between 314 and 335) and Constantine the Great (who reigned from 306 until 337). This summary of Greek history is an effective way of mnemonic pasting; it suggests contiguity with the ancient Greek past by sequencing events to form a continuous flow of history from the past into the present.

In his history, Chalkokondyles removed Constantinople from Roman history and placed it firmly within the Greek tradition. He refrained from using the eastern Roman, or Byzantine, names for the new capital, and employed the name of the ancient Greek colony 'Byzantion' instead of 'Constantinople' or 'New Rome'. In his conception, Byzantion was the place where Hellenes and Romans had mixed from the time of the Roman influx in the fourth century onwards.[180] In this, he insisted on the demographic

[177] Chalkokondyles, ed. Darkó (1922) 1-8.
[178] Chalkokondyles, ed. Darkó (1922) 2 l. 20-3 l. 8.
[179] Chalkokondyles, ed. Darkó (1922) 4 ll. 3-16 (for the Greek text see n. 181).
[180] Chalkokondyles contrasts this early phase of peaceful mingling with more recent conflicts between Byzantines and westerners. He mentions the most important issues. First, Chalkokondyles mentions the fact that the Romans (westerners or Latins) appointed for themselves a 'king of the Romans' ('βασιλέα Ῥωμαίων'), sometimes of German, sometimes of French extraction. Also, he mentions the problem of the religious schism, resulting in the Fourth Crusade (1202–1204), and the attempts to achieve a Union during the council of Ferrara-

and linguistic predominance of the Hellenes in the city. According to the historian, this Greek dominance explained the fact that the Hellenes had preserved their language and retained their customs ('γλῶτταν μὲν καὶ ἤθη … φυλάξαι') during the period of Roman rule. While Chrysoloras had maintained that the Byzantines had 'almost' lost their Hellenic name, Chalkokondyles on the contrary claimed that they had not maintained their ancestral name, but changed it into Romans ("Ρωμαῖοι"). Therefore, their kings called themselves kings and emperors of the Romans, and never kings of the Greeks.[181]

Through this programmatic passage Chalkokondyles proposed a compromise between Greeks and Romans presenting Greek culture (language and customs) within the context of a Roman political order (the eastern Roman empire).[182] Unlike Chrysoloras, however, he insisted on the fact that the Byzantines were Hellenes rather than Romans; that they were *really* Hellenes in charge of a Roman empire. As we have already seen, what Chalkokondyles desired to see restored was a polity of Greeks ruled

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Florence (1438–1439). See Chalkokondyles, ed. Darkó (1922) 4-5. On Chalkokondyles' fairly complex ideation of the Romans see also Kaldellis (forthcoming b).

[181] Chalkokondyles, ed. Darkó (1922) 4 ll. 3-16: '… ἐς ὃ δὴ Ῥωμαίους ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς οἰκουμένης μεγίστην ἀρχὴν ἀφικουμένους, ἰσοτάλαντον ἔχοντας τύχην τῇ ἀρετῇ, ἐπιτρέψαντας Ῥώμην τῷ μεγίστῳ αὐτῶν ἀρχιερεῖ καὶ διαβάντας ἐς Θρᾴκην, ὑφηγουμένου ἐπὶ τάδε τοῦ βασιλέως, καὶ Θρᾴκης ἐπὶ χώραν, ἥτις ἐς τὴν Ἀσίαν ἐγγυτάτω ᾤκηται, Βυζάντιον Ἑλληνίδα πόλιν μητρόπολιν σφῶν ἀποδεικνύντας, πρὸς Πέρσας, ὑφ'ὧν ἀνήκεστα ἐπεπόνθεισαν, τὸν ἀγῶνα ποιεῖσθαι, Ἕλληνάς τε τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦδε Ῥωμαίοις αὐτοῦ ἐπιμιγνύτας, γλῶτταν μὲν καὶ ἤθη διὰ τὸ πολλῷ πλέονας Ῥωμαίων Ἕλληνας αὐτοῦ ἐπικρατεῖν διὰ τέλους φυλάξαι, τοὔνομα μέντοι μηκέτι κατὰ τὸ πάτριον καλουμένους ἀλλάξασθαι, καὶ τούς γε βασιλεῖς Βυζαντίου ἐπὶ τὸ σφᾶς αὐτοὺς Ῥωμαίων βασιλεῖς τε καὶ αὐτοκράτορας σεμνύνεσθαι ἀποκαλεῖν, Ἑλλήνων δὲ βασιλεῖς οὐκέτι οὐδαμῇ ἀξιοῦν'. *[At that point the Romans had attained the greatest empire in the world, having their fortune in proportion to their virtue. They entrusted Rome to the highest of their priests and crossed over into Thrace under the command of their emperor, and within Thrace to the area which is the closest to Asia. Having made the Greek city of Byzantion their capital, they carried on the struggle against the Persians, at whose hands they had suffered such terrible things. From this point on, Greeks mixed with Romans in this place, and because there were far more Greeks established there than Romans, their language and customs ultimately prevailed. However, they did change their name and no longer called themselves after their ancestors. So, the kings of Byzantion prided themselves upon the title 'king and emperor of the Romans' and no longer 'king of the Greeks'.]* The translation is after Anthony Kaldellis' forthcoming translation of Chalkokondyles with slight adaptations.

[182] Also later in his history Chalkokondyles rationalised the interrelationship between Byzantines and ancient Hellenes. So, for example, he ended his account of the fall of Constantinople by saying that the fall and destruction of the city was a penalty the Byzantine Greeks suffered for what they had done in Troy. See Chalkokondyles, ed. Darkó (1923) 166-167, but note that Chalkokondyles qualified this explanation of the fall of Constantinople by saying that it is the way the Romans see what happened.

by a Greek. In this way, his retrospective Hellenisation of Byzantium anticipated the schools of Greek national history that effectively denied the Roman identity of the Byzantine empire in order to claim it for the newly invented Greeks of the nineteenth century.[183]

In the works of the Byzantine intelligentsia in Italy, we will find many of the features we have encountered in the works of Gemistos Plethon and Chalkokondyles: their emphasis on the ethnic link with the Hellenes, the stress on and anxiety about cultural preservation, the dissociation from the Romans, the territorialisation of the cultural space of Hellenism, and the idea that the Hellenes as a group transcended contemporary dynastic and political boundaries. Even so, we must be aware that the import of their Hellenism was very different. In the diaspora they had to negotiate between their commitments to their host societies and their loyalty to the homeland. While Plethon's Greekness was an act of intellectual resistance against traditional structures of eastern Roman power and the failure of traditional Byzantine humanism to respond to contemporary challenges,[184] the Hellenism of the Byzantine diaspora responded to different impulses and problems. Especially after the fall of the empire, emphasis shifted away from reform towards preservation and maintenance, and the centre of Hellenism moved way from Constantinople or the Peloponnesus to the diaspora. After the fall of Constantinople, the question was not how to reform Byzantine society, but how to preserve the Greek legacy and how to move the West towards a crusade against the Ottoman Turks to deliver Greece. Also, the Byzantine intelligentsia in Italy did not face a Greek audience; they on the contrary addressed an almost exclusively Latin audience, with which they perhaps shared more than with their countrymen who remained 'at home'. Most if not all of them supported the union with the Church of Rome or even converted to the Roman Church and participated in humanist culture, while in the East strong anti-western sentiment continued to exist, classical education was largely absent, and the Patriarchate became the focus of the Greek community under Ottoman rule. The Byzantine intelligentsia in Italy therefore reflected not so much an internal Greek or Byzantine point of view as they reflected a western vantage point on Byzantium and the Byzantines. As we shall see in the next chapter, the way they presented themselves as Greeks in the West was largely mediated by Latin discourses and therefore to a certain extent an imposed kind of Greekness. Unlike Plethon's Greekness, their Greek alterity was a *negotiated* and not a *radical* form of Greekness. Even so, the selection of case

[183] See on this esp. Kaldellis (forthcoming b).
[184] Cf. Siniossoglou (2011) 24-25.

studies in the second part of this study will show that the Byzantine intelligentsia in Italy not simply mimicked Latin points of view, but also manipulated them.

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It has not been my intention in this chapter to chart the still understudied patterns of mutual impact of the authors discussed, or their impact on a wider Byzantine or western audience. Even so, a few observations will suffice to countervail the idea that the influence of intellectuals such as Plethon and Chalkokondyles has been minimal.[185] It is a truism that their impact was restricted to their audience (which was a limited number of scholars), yet it must not be underestimated. Plethon was the teacher not only of Laonikos Chalkokondyles, but also of Bessarion and many others.[186] Chalkokondyles worked some of Plethon's ideas into his historical interpretations,[187] and also Bessarion followed in Plethon's footsteps with his policy note to the despot of the Morea.[188] In addition, it seems that the works of both Plethon and Chalkokondyles were fairly well known in the West at least among those who could read Greek.[189] So, for instance, Chalkokondyles' history was used by Janus Lascaris, who added marginal notes to his copy of the Athenian's history.[190] Apart from Lascaris' manuscript, twenty-four further

[185] See the introduction in Chalkokondyles, ed. Nikoloudis (1996) 58-59, but see also Livanos (2008) 244 for a more nuanced view.

[186] The only comprehensive study on Plethon's thought, and in particular his Platonism, is Siniossoglou (2011). On Plethon's impact see Blum (2005b). The systematic inventorying, editing, and translating of his works is still a serious desideratum (Signes Codoñer 1998: 56). Clues for further research and a well-informed status quaestionis with valuable bibliographical references can be found in Blum (2005b) 49-58 (see also Skoutelas 1999: 78-92). On Plethon's *Nachleben* see esp. Woodhouse (1986) 357-379, Bertozzi (2003), Skoutelas (1999) 45-48, Plethon, trans. Lisi & Signes (1995) XLI-XLVIII.

[187] On the influence of Plethon's idea of fate on Chalkokondyles' views see Harris (2003b) and esp. Kaldellis (forthcoming a).

[188] On the influence of Plethon's views on Bessarion in particular see Pertusi (1968).

[189] This was different for the other historians I mentioned, Kritovoulos and Doukas. They were largely if not entirely unknown to the West. The one manuscript of the former's work was stored in the sultan's private library and remained unknown until the nineteenth century.

[190] It concerns BNP, Cod. gr. 1781. For the presence of the codex in Lascaris' book collection see Jackson (2003b) 114 (the provenance of the manuscript is not recorded by Darkó in Chalkokondyles, ed. Darkó 1922: XXII). Also other manuscripts of Chalkokondyles' history can be

manuscripts survive, all from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,[191] in addition to Latin, French, and Tuscan translations of (parts of) his work.[192] Manuel Chrysoloras' comparison of old and new Rome (though addressed to the Byzantine emperor) circulated among Italian humanists from almost immediately after its completion and was rendered into Latin almost immediately after the fall of Byzantium.[193] Indications of dissemination and impact such as these can be multiplied and would merit a separate evaluation in a more comprehensive study on the subject. What is most important here is that, even if the circumstances in which they worked changed dramatically, the Byzantine scholars of the Italian diaspora did use the Greek rather than the Roman tradition to confront the challenges of their situation. In the next chapters we shall see, for example, cardinal Bessarion defending Greek freedom, Janus Lascaris Hellenising the Romans of the West, and Johannes Gemistus territorialising the cultural space of Hellenism. Before we delve into the case studies in the second part of this study, we will in the next chapter first explore the self-representation of the Byzantine intelligentsia in Italy against the backdrop of western 'Latin' views on Byzantium and the Byzantines.

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connected to Byzantine scholars. So, for instance, the present Parisinus gr. 1780 (the oldest of them all) was produced by Dimitrios Angelos (see Mondrain 2000: 240).

[191] For an overview of the manuscripts see the *codicum catalogus* in Chalkokondyles, ed. Darkó (1922) xvi-xxv with Wurm (1995, 1994). It is unlikely that the work was often read in the original Greek. This is evidenced by the fact that the first (Latin) translation (1566) preceded the *editio princeps* of the Greek text (1615) by more than forty years. On the text history of the printed editions of Chalkokondyles' text see the preface in the edition of Darkó (1922-1927), which is the last critical edition of the Athenian's history.

[192] Latin: Chalkokondyles, trans. Clauser (1556); French: Chalkokondyles, trans. Vigenère (1577, 1662). The 1662-edition of Vigenère's translation was enlarged with a continuation up to 1661. See on Vigenère's rendering Balsamo (2004). A selective, but interesting translation in Tuscan was prepared by Donato di Ruberto Acciaiuoli in 1542. I found it in 2009 in Rome (BA, Ms. 2247). A further Italian translation of Chalkokondyles' fourth book (owned by Donato Acciaiuoli) is in Modena (BE, Fondo Campori, Ms. 300).

[193] Guarinus Veronensis for instance, got the Greek work as early as 1411 (see Guarinus, ed. Sabbadini 1916: 20-21). In 1454, the Veronese humanist Franciscus Aleardus produced a Latin translation of the *Comparison*. See Enrico Maltese's introduction in Chrysoloras, trans. Cortassa (2000) 53-54 and see, for Aleardus' translation, Niutta (2002, 2001). I am currently preparing a translation of Chrysoloras' text with an introduction and notes.