

The Plague in John VI Cantacuzenus and Thucydides

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BYZANTINE literary works are often misleading sources of historical information. Byzantinists have long known that Byzantine authors frequently incorporated passages from ancient literature in their works, making it difficult at times to tell what is Athens or Alexandria and what is mediaeval Byzantium. Recently Cyril Mango has properly stressed the tendency among Byzantine writers of the highbrow literature to pattern their compositions on those of ancient authors, especially writers of the second sophistic, by imitating the structure and form of classical works, by using ancient terminology for peoples, places and things, and even by borrowing verbatim whole passages from classical literature.¹ In the case of the *De thematibus* of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, which purports to describe the themes of the tenth century, this antiquarianism has greatly distorted the picture of provincial administration in the author's own era by appropriating details from Strabo and especially from Hierocles, an author of the sixth century.² This predilection of Byzantine authors for imitating classical models, however, did not in every instance distort their account of their own age. A good example of incorporating passages from a classical model into an accurate description of a Byzantine reality is found in the emperor John Cantacuzenus' *History*, in his chapter on the plague.³

Plague descriptions in Greek literature have a long history beginning with Homer, but the most famous and influential example was Thucydides' account of the epidemic outbreak in Athens during the second year of the Peloponnesian War. It was used as a model to some degree by Procopius but especially by Ovid, Lucretius and

¹ Cyril Mango, *Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror* (Inaugural Lecture as the Bywater and Sotheby Professor of Medieval and Modern Greek in the University of Oxford, Oxford 1965) 3–18.

² *Ibid.* 14–15.

³ *Ioannis Cantacuzeni eximperatoris Historiarum Libri IV*, 3 vols., ed. L. Schopen (Bonn 1828, 1831, 1832) [hereafter, CANT. with book and chapter, then volume, page and line]. Plague description Cant. 4.8 (III p.49,15–p.53,1 Sch.).

Virgil.⁴ It was to Thucydides that Cantacuzenus turned in preparing his account of the plague which struck Constantinople in the fall of 1347.

There is no doubt that Cantacuzenus is describing an epidemic of bubonic plague. His account makes it clear that the disease came to Byzantium from southern Russia in 1347 and from there spread to Western Europe. His narrative agrees with what is known from Western sources about the geographical origins of the great bubonic pestilence of 1347/48, and it is chronologically consistent with the corpus of Western records from those years. Thus, without examining any symptoms described by the emperor, we know he is dealing with bubonic plague.⁵

The identity of Thucydides' plague is much more difficult to determine. Neither classicists nor medical historians have reached agreement concerning the nature of the Athenian disease, but modern research has definitely eliminated bubonic plague as a possible agent in the destruction of 430 B.C.⁶ Rather the Thucydidean epidemic seems to have been a viral infection such as smallpox, measles or typhus.⁷ For our argument the critical point is that the Athenian

⁴ Johannes Dräseke, "Thukydides' Pestbericht und dessen Fortleben," *Sokrates* 68 (1914) 182.

⁵ For the emperor's account of the origin of the pestilence see Cant. 4.8 (III p.49,17–22 Sch.). For a Western account see Gabriele de' Mussi, "Ystoria de morbo seu mortalitate qui fuit a 1348," ed. H. Haeser, *Archiv für die gesamte Medizin* 2 (1841) 26–59. See also J. F. D. Shrewsbury, *A History of Bubonic Plague in the British Isles* (Cambridge 1970) 37 [hereafter, SHREWSBURY, *History*].

⁶ Bubonic plague must be ruled out as a possible explanation of the Athenian epidemic for two reasons. First, the details of Thucydides' description do not match those of bubonic plague. Thucydides mentions no buboes. Even if *ἐλκη* (Thuc. 2.49.5) is taken to mean buboes (some sort of swelling), Thucydides' account implies that these *ἐλκη* appear everywhere on the body of the victim as do the blisters (*φλύκταιναι*), whereas bubonic swellings are in specific locations, around the jaws, in the groin or under the arm. Also, and perhaps most significantly, Thucydides does not mention the bloody sputum of pneumonic bubonic plague victims, the most frightening of symptoms. See J. F. D. Shrewsbury, "The Plague of Athens," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 24 (1950) 15–16, and R. J. and M. L. Littman, "The Athenian Plague: Smallpox," *TAPA* 100 (1969) 266–67 n.3. Second, the black rat, the only urban carrier of bubonic plague, did not immigrate to the Mediterranean world until the Hellenistic kings opened up heavy trade with India. See Shrewsbury, *History* 7–16; William H. McNeil, *Plagues and Peoples* (New York 1976) 112–26.

⁷ D. L. Page, "Thucydides' Description of the Plague," *CQ* 3 (1953) 97–119, and Shrewsbury, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 1–25, postulate measles attacking a virgin population as the Athenian epidemic. W. P. Arthur, "The Athenian Plague: A Medical Note," *CQ* 4 (1954) 171–74, and A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides II* (Oxford 1955) 150–53, argue for typhus. Finally Littman, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 261–73, make a case for smallpox.

mortality was not bubonic plague. Cantacuzenus' reliance on Thucydides therefore poses a problem. How accurate can his description of bubonic plague be when he has borrowed no fewer than nine passages almost verbatim from Thucydides' account of the disease at Athens?⁸

To answer this question one must approach Cantacuzenus' description of the plague and its symptoms from two directions: from a comparison of his account with the data amassed by modern scientific observation and from a close examination of the specific passages of Thucydides which he chose to incorporate into his text. It will also be useful in this inquiry to scrutinize the particular words with which Cantacuzenus described specific symptoms of the pestilence and to compare them with Thucydides' vocabulary. Cantacuzenus' account of the plague can thus provide a test case of his use of classical models, for the reality the emperor wants to depict is known to us from an outside source with impeccable credentials, the description of bubonic plague established by modern clinical observation. His classical model gives an account of a different disease. If the use of classical models were likely to produce distortion, one ought to find such distortion here.

Modern research has distinguished two forms of the plague, the bubonic and the pneumonic. Of the bubonic form there are two prominent symptoms, the swelling of the lymphatic glands in the groin, armpits or neck and the appearance of purple spots on the skin. In the pneumonic form the plague bacteria attack the lungs and cause severe coughing and spitting of blood. The bubonic form is not directly communicable from man to man but is spread by the rat-flea, *Xenopsylla cheopis*, from rat to man. The pneumonic form, on the other hand, can be passed directly by human beings, but its epidemic life is dependent on the bubonic form; *i.e.*, it is a complication of bubonic plague which attacks the respiratory system. Once a bubonic-plague victim has developed pneumonic complications, he can pass the bacteria directly to others without the help of the rat-flea.⁹ Granted these

Gomme (p.150) and Littman (266-67, no.3) have summarized the arguments eliminating ergotism from consideration.

⁸ Dräseke, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) 189, touches on this problem but does not explore it fully.

⁹ For a complete description of plague symptoms and the epidemiology of the disease see Tinsley R. Harrison, *Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine* (New York 1974) 823-25 [hereafter, HARRISON]. See also Shrewsbury, *History* 1-6. Older medical works provide even more detail on the clinical manifestations of bubonic plague since plague was then still a present danger and methods of diagnosis were dependent on the doctors' exact knowledge

major characteristics of bubonic plague, how accurate is Cantacuzenus' description?

Cantacuzenus does distinguish the two forms of the disease, pneumonic and bubonic, stating clearly that one form of the affliction attacks the lungs (pneumonic) and the other the head (bubonic).¹⁰ The bubonic form in fact attacks the lymphatic glands nearest the flea bite through which the plague bacteria have entered the body. These would most often be the glands located in the groin, but the lymphatic glands around the neck were in many cases affected, and these swellings must have caught Cantacuzenus' attention and caused him to associate the bubonic form of the plague with an affliction falling on the head.¹¹

Having distinguished the pneumonic and bubonic forms of the disease, the emperor correctly identifies the symptoms of each form. When the disease attacks the lungs, it produces pains in the chest and expulsions of blood from the mouth—two dramatic signs of pneumonic bubonic plague. When the disease attacks the lymph glands, large swellings appear which Cantacuzenus identifies as ἀποστάσεις. In locating the usual places of these buboes the emperor is vague, saying only that they are on the arms or legs of victims, or around their jaws. Finally Cantacuzenus mentions the purplish spots, one of the most striking signs of the bubonic form of the plague.¹² He calls them in some cases φλυκτίδες and in others μέλανα στίγματα (Cant. 4.8 [III p.51,4–6 Sch.]). The word φλυκτίδες implies that the marks were blister-like, and indeed, modern physicians describe the petichiae of the plague as carbuncles in some cases.¹³

of symptoms. Thus W. E. Jennings, *A Manual of Plague* (London 1903) [hereafter, JENNINGS], offers a more detailed account of plague spots, the buboes, progressive pulse-rate and fever than do modern works.

¹⁰ ὅσοι δὲ ἐπὶ δυὸν ἀντείχον ἢ τριῶν ἡμέραις . . . καὶ ἐς τὴν κεφαλὴν τοῦ νοσήματος ἐμπίπτοντος, ἀφωνία κατείχοντο . . . , τῶν περὶ τὸ ἰνίον νεύρων νεκρωθέντων, καὶ τάχιστα ἀπέθνησκον. ἑτέροις δὲ οὐκ εἰς τὴν κεφαλὴν, ἀλλ' εἰς τὸν πνεύμονα ἐμπίπτον τὸ κακόν, φλόγῳσις τε ἦν αὐτίκα πρὸς τὰ ἔνδον, . . . (Cant. 4.8 [III] p.50,10–18 Sch.). It seems that this damage to nerves around the ἰνίον (the occipital bone) was caused by the bubonic swelling. Cantacuzenus later mentions specifically the swellings about the jaw. That cervical buboes can lead to serious infections of the throat and result in speechlessness and suffocation has been observed by modern physicians. See R. Pollitzer, *Plague* (Geneva 1954) 434.

¹¹ Harrison 824.

¹² For the emperor's description of plague symptoms see Cant. 4.8 (III p.50,1–p.51,23 Sch.).

¹³ Shrewsbury, *History* 5.

Let us now turn to those symptoms, determined by clinical observation, which are not exclusive to bubonic plague but which necessarily attend the disease. Bubonic plague strikes suddenly with chills and a high fever (102°–105° F.), accompanied by rapid heartbeat, headache, vomiting, uncertain gait and finally delirium.¹⁴ Cantacuzenus' account is in almost complete agreement with modern clinical reports. The emperor says: "They [the victims] . . . first were seized by a very violent fever. When the sickness reached the head, they were gripped by speechlessness and fell unconscious to all reality as though they had dropped into a deep sleep. If they revived, they wanted to speak, but the tongue was hard to move and . . . they said a great many confused things."¹⁵ The emperor's account mentions the high fever, the headache—if we understand sickness in the head to mean headache—unconsciousness and delirium. In summary, the emperor's description accurately identifies the two forms of the plague, bubonic and pneumatic, describes the major symptoms of each form, and provides a good account of the patients' progressive deterioration.

In his plague description Cantacuzenus borrows nine passages from Thucydides. Of these, five deal with non-biological observations and are therefore not important for this investigation. To summarize these passages briefly, Thucydides first observed that the plague year (430 B.C.) was completely free from other normal illnesses.¹⁶ Second, he stated that the fearful epidemic was abnormal, outside the usual course of human nature.¹⁷ Third, he was impressed by the impotence of any specific remedy.¹⁸ Fourth, he continued in the same vein by pointing out the ineffectiveness of any nursing care.¹⁹ Finally, he observed the mental depression which accompanied the disease,

¹⁴ Harrison 824.

¹⁵ Compare this passage of Cantacuzenus (4,8 [III p.50,10–15 Sch.]) with Jennings 70. Jennings, like Cantacuzenus, stresses the speechlessness of plague victims.

¹⁶ Thuc. 2.49.1, cf. Cant. 4.8 (III p.50,4–7 Sch.). This is a rather strange observation, and perhaps it was entered only for dramatic effect (?).

¹⁷ Thuc. 2.50.1, cf. Cant. 4.8 (III p.52,4–7 Sch.). This borrowing calls for special comment. In Thucydides' account his observation that the disease was more harsh than anything usual among humans is an introduction to a brief study of its effects on the animal world. Most normal human diseases do not have any noticeable effect on animals. This one did and thus was *χαλεπωτέρως ἢ κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπείαν φύσιν*. Cantacuzenus, however, uses Thucydides' passage about the non-human nature of the disease as an introduction to a Christian theme, viz., the divine origin of the disease and its rôle in moving the wicked to repentance.

¹⁸ Thuc. 2.51.2, cf. Cant. 4.8 (III p.51,17–19 Sch.).

¹⁹ Thuc. 2.51.2, cf. Cant. 4.8 (III p.50,3–4 Sch.).

since the ill considered their cases hopeless.²⁰ All of these observations Cantacuzenus adapted to his description of the Constantinopolitan epidemic without damaging the accuracy of the symptoms he represented, since these passages are general statements which could be true of any serious epidemic in ancient or mediaeval times.

The remaining four passages borrowed by Cantacuzenus do deal with biological effects of the disease and thus must be carefully examined. The first of these says, "The throat and tongue were immediately bloody and emitted a strange and foul-smelling breath" (Thuc. 2.49.2). The emperor incorporated the last section of this passage concerning the invalid's breath—the first section he uses a few lines further on—with an original statement noting the presence of bloody saliva in patients whose lungs were infected with the disease (Cant. 4.8 [III p.50,20 Sch.]). It is interesting to notice that the observation about saliva identifies the most striking symptom attending pneumonic bubonic plague, while the observation borrowed from Thucydides concerning the patient's breath is a more general statement true of many diseases affecting the respiratory system. It could accompany smallpox, typhus or measles as well as pneumonic bubonic plague.²¹

The second passage deals with severe thirst. Thucydides (2.49.5) says that patients suffered from an extreme fever and that "many . . . were driven by unquenchable thirst, and anything to drink, in greater or lesser amount, left them in a similar state." Cantacuzenus, combining this observation with Thucydides' earlier remark about the throat and tongue, states, "The throat and tongue, parched by the burning heat, were black and bloody, while anything to drink, whether in a larger or a smaller amount, left the patient in a similar state" (Cant. 4.8 [III p.50,21–23 Sch.]). Here the emperor has not made an inaccurate observation, though he is using two statements concerning the Athenian pestilence, since plague too is accompanied by high fever and extreme thirst.²²

The third passage in Thucydides (2.51.6) reads, "Those who escaped . . . were confident since the disease never struck the same person a second time, at least with killing effect." Cantacuzenus copies this

²⁰ Thuc. 2.51.4, *cf.* Cant. 4.8 (III p.51,23–p.52,4 Sch.).

²¹ In the fourteenth century pneumonic bubonic plague was accompanied in some cases by gangrenous inflammation of the lungs. See Jennings 83.

²² Harrison 824. See also Jennings 69 and 82, who observed extreme thirst in plague victims.

observation almost verbatim (4.8 [III p.51, 10–13]), and here he has been misled by his archetype since recovery from infection with plague bacilli does not build up resistance to a subsequent attack as does recovery from viral infections such as smallpox and measles.²³

The final passage concerns the contagious nature of the infection. Thucydides (2.51.4) maintains that the epidemic produced great apathy among the Athenians, “since men were infected while treating one another and died like sheep.” Cantacuzenus, again quoting directly from his model, has not given us a distorted picture of the plague in Constantinople since, as we have seen above, the pneumonic form of plague is extremely contagious. Moreover, the emperor adds a perceptive detail about the spreading of bubonic plague which he did not find in Thucydides, namely that houses were emptied of men and horses by the scourge (Cant. 4.8 [III p.51,19–22 Sch.]). Such household mortality was a striking feature of bubonic plague, even in its non-contagious bubonic form, since the rats living in one house would all contract the disease and, as they died, their infected fleas would attack humans, horses and any other domestic animals.²⁴ Thus, Cantacuzenus’ own observation, combined with the quotation from Thucydides, provides an accurate description in complete agreement with what is known today about the epidemiology of bubonic plague. To summarize, of the four Thucydidean passages which Cantacuzenus incorporated into his text to describe real symptoms or biological effects of the Constantinopolitan plague, only one is not appropriate.

Having examined the quotations taken from Thucydides we may now analyze the specific words and phrases Cantacuzenus has used in describing symptoms to determine their accuracy and their relation to the model. The key words are *ἀποστάσεις*, *μέλαινοι φλυκτίδες* and *στίγματα μέλαινα*. Cantacuzenus employs *ἀποστάσεις* to describe the large lymphatic swellings of bubonic plague (Cant. 4.8 [III p.51,13 Sch.]). Such swellings were not found among the victims of the Athenian epidemic. A recent article has argued that *ἔλκη* in Thucydides means the buboes of bubonic plague, but it is significant that Procopius, who described the bubonic pestilence of Justinian’s

²³ Recovery from bubonic plague did in many cases establish immunity, what scientists refer to as acquired immunity. But recurrences were common. See Jennings 163, who mentions recurrences as quite normal. See also Shrewsbury, *History* 6. Nevertheless, without statistical records it may have appeared to Cantacuzenus that acquired immunity was universal among those who had recovered from plague.

²⁴ Shrewsbury, *History* 34–35.

reign and was strongly influenced by Thucydides' vocabulary, chose another word, *βουβών*, to designate the swellings.²⁵ Cantacuzenus must also have considered *ἔλκη* inappropriate, for from the Greek medical writers he took *ἀπόστασις*, a term used by ancient physicians for a swelling which eventually suppurated.²⁶ The bubonic swellings also suppurate, usually a week after the patient contracts the disease.²⁷ *ἀπόστασις* would then seem an accurate term for the lymphatic swelling attending the plague.

The emperor chose the term *φλυκτίδες* to describe one class of petichiae, purpurine marks on plague victims. Thucydides used a similar word, *φλύκταιναι*, for the Athenians' rash (2.49.5). As Robert and M. L. Littman have noted in a recent study of Thucydides' plague, *φλύκταινα* appears in ancient Greek sources to mean a blister caused when the skin is burned.²⁸ Many diseases known to modern science, including bubonic plague, produce blister-like pustules. Some bubonic-plague spots are raised carbuncles and could be described as *φλύκταιναι* or *φλυκτίδες*.²⁹ Thus Cantacuzenus, although doubtless influenced by Thucydides in his choice of *φλυκτίδες*, has not selected an incorrect word.

The emperor describes the petichiae on some patients as *στίγματα μέλανα*, contrasting these marks to the raised carbuncles (*φλυκτίδες*) on others.³⁰ The term *στίγματα* is not found in Thucydides, but Cantacuzenus perceived that not all plague spots were swollen pustules but were in most cases only dark, irregular marks.³¹ Aware

²⁵ See E. M. Hooker, "Buboes in Thucydides?" *JHS* 78 (1958) 78–83, who argues that the Athenian plague was bubonic and that *ἔλκη* refers to the symptomatic swellings. For Procopius' account see *De bellis* 2.22, esp. §§ 17, 29, 37 and 38, which refer to the bubonic swellings as *βουβῶνες*. Procopius has borrowed *φλόγωσις*, *φλύκταιναι* and *θερμόν* from Thucydides' medical vocabulary but substituted *βουβών* for *ἔλκος*.

²⁶ Hippoc. *Epidem.* 3, katast. 4. See also Galen's definition of *ἀπόστημα*, *Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia*, ed. C. G. Kühn, VII (Leipzig 1824, repr. Hildesheim 1965) 715. Only here do the Hippocratic texts seem to have influenced Cantacuzenus' plague description. In another section of Book IV, however, the emperor displays some knowledge of Hippocrates' *De natura hominis* 15 (cf. Cant. 4.10 [III p.67,9–14 Sch.]).

²⁷ Harrison 824; Shrewsbury, *History* 5.

²⁸ Littman, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 261–69.

²⁹ English writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries referred to plague spots as 'blains', 'tokens', 'pushes' and 'whelks' (Shrewsbury, *History* 5). The terms 'blain' and 'push' indicate a blister while a whelk is a pustule. These words all indicate raised, blister-like marks which could be described as *φλυκτίδες* in Greek (cf. *OED s.vv.*).

³⁰ *καὶ μέλαινα φλυκτίδες ἀνεφύοντο. ἑτέροις δὲ ὡσπερ στίγματα μέλανα κατὰ παντός τοῦ σώματος ἐξήνθει.* (Cant. 4.8 [III p.51,4–6 Sch.]).

³¹ Harrison 824–25 describes the plague petichiae as ecchymoses or discolorations pro-

that *φλυκτίδες* was not the right word to describe petichiae of this sort, he used *στύγματα* to indicate this kind of mark.

Cantacuzenus' plague description is remarkably careful in physical observations. His use of Thucydides has produced only one inaccuracy, the assertion that recovery from plague conferred immunity on the fortunate one. When contrasted with the plague description of Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) in the introduction of the *Decameron*, Cantacuzenus' accuracy is impressive. In preparing his account, Boccaccio, like Cantacuzenus, was influenced by Thucydides, but he most probably used a Latin paraphrase, not the Greek original. He also borrowed passages from a work of the Latin mediaeval tradition, the *Historia Langobardorum* of Paul the Deacon, which described the bubonic epidemic of Justinian's reign (A.D. 542).³² Thus Boccaccio, unlike Cantacuzenus, had before him one archetype which dealt with the same disease that ravaged Florence in 1348. Moreover, most of his account seems to be independent and thus ought to reflect accurately bubonic plague. But there are some inaccuracies in the *Decameron*. First, Boccaccio fails to distinguish clearly the pneumonic form of the disease. Second, two of his observations are contradictory. Claiming that no victims in Florence emitted blood from their mouths—the distinguishing sign of pneumonic bubonic plague—he states that the malady spread from man to man, an impossibility unless cases of pneumonic bubonic plague were present. Finally, he writes that men were struck by the malady without any attendant fever or other symptoms.³³ As was shown above, nausea, fever, headache and delirium all are common among plague victims.

We may return now to Professor Mango's assertion that Byzantine literature is a distorting mirror because of its close dependence upon ancient models. Cantacuzenus' plague description clearly has escaped duced by the hemorrhaging of small blood vessels under the skin, i.e. blotches, not raised carbuncles.

³² V. Branca, *Boccaccio Medievale* (Florence 1956) 210–12, stresses Boccaccio's use of Paul the Deacon in writing the introduction of the *Decameron*. I have found several discrepancies between Boccaccio's description of plague symptoms and those of Paul the Deacon. In the paragraphs dealing with the breakdown of customs and morals in Florence there are some parallels between the two works, but not so striking as Branca suggests. For the plague description of Paul the Deacon see *Historia Langobardorum*, *MGH Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. vi–ix* (Hanover 1878) 74.

³³ The plague description is found in the first pages of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, *Prima Giornata*. Boccaccio's error concerning fever is his own. Paul the Deacon states that plague victims ran high fevers. The *Historia Langobardorum* says nothing about pneumonic bubonic symptoms, nor does Boccaccio.

distortion despite heavy borrowing from Thucydides. One must ask whether Cantacuzenus' account is an exception, a singular example of accuracy despite its indebtedness to a classical model. The emperor himself was indeed an exception, an outsider to scholarly circles; contemporary *literati* did not recognize him as one of them, nor do his writings reveal any great classical learning.³⁴ He was a man of action, a political personality, trying in his retirement to justify his rôle in Byzantine politics in a manner appealing to learned men in Byzantium.

Though Cantacuzenus was an exceptional character among Byzantine men of letters, his section on the plague was doubtless a deliberate effort on his part to imitate highbrow Byzantine literature. If Professor Mango is right about Byzantine writers in general, then the emperor's careful tailoring of ancient model to contemporary reality was a useless bit of naïveté on his part. But there is good evidence that at least some Byzantine men of letters knew how to use ancient sources properly; *viz.*, not slavishly to copy them, but to mold them to describe their own world, to defend their own ideas, or to attack their intellectual opponents.³⁵ Such a humanist was Theodore Metochites (1260–1327).³⁶ Cantacuzenus was not a thinker on the level of Metochites, but his practical life seems to have given him an inherent respect for accurate description which saved him from the vices of the lesser Byzantine men of letters. Just as his plague description demonstrates an attention to the realities of his world, so too do other descriptive passages show an accuracy in describing the workings of the fourteenth-century Byzantine state—an exactness which is lacking in the work of Cantacuzenus' contemporary, the historian Nikephoros Gregoras (1296–1359).³⁷ Professor Mango's suspicion of Byzantine

³⁴ G. Weiss, *Johannes Kantakuzenos—Aristokrat, Staatsmann, Kaiser und Mönch—in der Gesellschaftsentwicklung von Byzanz im 14. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden 1969) 18.

³⁵ Concerning another example of such tailoring by Cantacuzenus see *supra* n.17.

³⁶ Though Theodoros Metochites described Byzantine life as *βιοὺν ἐκ διαδοχῆς* he was an original thinker and a creative user of ancient works. See Hans-Georg Beck, *Theodoros Metochites, Die Krise des byzantinischen Weltbildes im 14. Jahrhundert* (Munich 1952) 26–75. See also I. Ševčenko, "Theodore Metochites, the Chora, and the Intellectual Trends of His Time," in *The Kariye Djami*, ed. P. A. Underwood, IV (Princeton 1975) 19–91, esp. 43–51.

³⁷ Cantacuzenus is accurate in his use of terms concerning the Byzantine financial offices. He calls the imperial *bestiarion* the *basilikon tameion*, a word far more in accord with Byzantine official language than Gregoras' *prytaneion* (cf. *Nicephori Gregorae Byzantina historia*, ed. L. Schopen, I [Bonn 1829–30] 205.10–14). Cantacuzenus identifies the second major financial office as the *demosion*, a term found in hundreds of fourteenth-century documents. Gregoras, so far as I know, does not once use this expression. Moreover, Cantacuzenus often gives more detailed information on the workings of the financial officials. See his account of Patrikiotes' activities as *exisotes* (Cant. 3.8 [II p.62,7–9 Sch.]).

literature as an historical source is well-founded, but it must not be taken as universal. Each author's work must be considered carefully against all the criteria at our command before the image he presents is judged, to use Mango's phrase, "a distorting mirror."³⁸

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

October, 1976

³⁸ I thank Ms Leslie MacCoull of Catholic University and Ms Bonnie Moss of the University of Maryland for help in preparing this essay and Mr John Duffy of Dumbarton Oaks for his advice on Greek medical terms.