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DESTRUCTIVE BLACK BIRDS FROM THE WEST – NOTES ON AN UNUSUAL VERNACULAR 17TH-CENTURY LAMENT OVER THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE

ABSTRACT. Michał Bzinkowski, *Destructive black birds from the West – notes on an unusual vernacular 17th-century lament over the fall of Constantinople*

The vernacular lament known as *Thrinós Konstantinoupoleos* (*Threnody on Constantinople*) comes from the Codex Barberini Graecus 15, which is dated to the 17th century. It was written in the form of a letter by an unknown author to a recipient who also remains unknown. The author of the work imitates, albeit sometimes freely, the composition *Peri arpagis kai adikias. Kai thrinos kai klauthmos peri tis Konstantinoupoleos* by Matthew of Myra, a work that can be dated to before 1618. Surprisingly, the *Thrinós Konstantinoupoleos* has little in common with the lamentations over the fall of cities to which the threnodies for the fall of Constantinople belong. Its content is primarily a criticism of the Byzantines and an attempt to see the capture of the City as an inevitable event brought about by the Romaioi themselves. The composition bears no relation to the typical features of an elegy or an elogium. In this article, I focus on the features of this composition that distinguish it in character from other lamentations. Furthermore, by comparing relevant passages from the original text by Matthew of Myra, I attempt to show the profound originality of the author of *Thrinós*' vision.

Keywords: lament on Constantinople; vernacular post-byzantine poetry; fall of Constantinople

Among the many texts produced in vernacular Greek between the 15th and 17th centuries, the Lamentations on the Fall of Constantinople occupy a special place. Prose monodies written in classicizing Greek are quite highly rhetorized and adhere to the lamentations for the fall of cities that originated in antiquity (also alluding to Jeremiah's biblical lamentations).¹ In contrast, vernacular poetic works are more individualized compositions.² Among the numerous laments of

¹The continuity of lamentations from antiquity to the present day in the Greek world, their genre affiliation and specific poetics have been thoroughly examined by Alexiou in her influential monograph. See Alexiou 2002. See especially the chapter 'The historical lament for the fall or destruction of cities', Alexiou 2002: 83–101.

²The most important vernacular lamentations are discussed by Knös 1962: 158–168 and Beck 2009: 256–264 (In this article, I use the Greek version of Beck's monograph). For an overview of the most important lamentations, see also Kechagioglou's afterword to the new edition of the most

this type, few of which were published, with most still resting in manuscripts awaiting editing, are texts of varying lengths, ranging from a few dozen to over a thousand lines. Although the subject matter of the majority concerns the fall of the City in 1453, some of the compositions are not lamentative, but focus on such aspects as the relationship between East and West, the search for a scapegoat for the fall, and the relationship of the Byzantines with other nations or the stereotypical portrayal of the Turks. While some laments prominently feature prophecies, apocalyptic visions and legends related to the fall of the City,³ in majority of them, despite significant differences in expression or emphasis on slightly different aspects of the loss of Constantinople, the mood of solemnity characteristic of the genre prevails. What is palpable in most of the laments is a certain tragedy of the situation, a violent rupture in the continuity of Hellenism, deeply rooted in the collective memory of the Greeks.⁴

However, there are vernacular texts which, while engaging with the existing lamentation tradition, have a completely different tone, deviating markedly from the traditional one. These include the lament known as *Thrinōs Konstantinoupoleos* (*Θρήνος Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* – *Threnody on Constantinople*), rarely commented upon and referenced.⁵

The vernacular lament comes from the Codex Barberini Graecus 15, dated to the 17th century and belonging to the Vatican Library.⁶ The text was unknown to Lambros, a professor at the University of Athens and founder of the well-known journal ‘*Neon Ellinomnimon*’ known for publishing post-Byzantine texts.⁷ It is not included in the first comprehensive published list of texts that can be categorized as laments for the fall of Constantinople, including both texts written in prose (monodies) and poetic texts written in vernacular Greek, which

famous of the lamentation texts, *Anakalima tis Konstantinopolis*. See Kechagioglou 2012: 79–93. On the tradition of lamenting the fall of Constantinople, see especially Karanika 2016: 228–230. See also Papayianni 2010. Papayianni’s article provides interesting information on both monody and selected vernacular texts. For an analysis of the oldest lament, *Anakalima tis Konstantinoupolis*, in the context of cultural trauma, see Kefala 2020: 27–70. An interesting attempt to compare vernacular and monodic texts is presented in Goldwyn’s article. See Goldwyn 2014.

³The most up-to-date study on the prophecies related to the fall of Constantinople remains Pertusi’s monograph. In it, he analyses folk legends in the Christian tradition, Islamic prophecies, above all focusing on the *Visiones Danielis* circulating in the east of the Byzantine Empire from the 10th to the 15th century. See Pertusi 1988. An important study on apocalyptic visions and prophecies related to the fall of the City, see also Congourdeau 1999: 55–97.

⁴Kefala 2020: 70.

⁵Goldwyn comments briefly on this text, limiting himself essentially to summarising it and quoting a few excerpts. See Goldwyn 2014: 12–103.

⁶More on the collection of Maffeo Barberini (Pope Urban VIII) see: <https://www.wiglaf.org/vatican/fonds/Barb.gr.html> [access: 03.06.2025], where one can view the entire digitized Cod. Barb. gr. 15. For more on the contents and appearance of the manuscript, see Zoras 1939: 151.

⁷Zoras claims that Lambros researched the codex in question, but completely ignored the lament. See Zoras 1939: 151.

Lambros published in 1908.⁸ The text was first published in 1939 by Georgios Th. Zoras, a medievalist and professor at the Institute of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies at the University of Rome.⁹

The text of the lament, located on pages 15β-16β of the manuscript in question, was preceded by a brief annotation: Ἀπὸ ἑνα χειρόγραφον βιβλίον ἱστορικὸν κοινῇ γλώσσῃ [From a handwritten historical book in common language]. The work itself, written in 15-syllable, a common practice for works belonging to this genre, consists of 58 rhyming lines, which is rather unusual. It was written in the form of a letter from an anonymous author to an unknown recipient. In the first lines of the composition we can also find confirmation that the anonymous author used some ‘historical book’:

Πάτερ μου ποθεινότατε, ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου
 ὅπου μέ ἀναδέχθηκες βαπτίσματος ἐκ θείου,
 καί τάς ὁμολογίας μου διὰ τοῦ στόματός σου·
 Θεῷ καθωμολόγησας καί μ' ἔκαμες υἱό σου
 καί διὰ τοῦτο χρεωστῶ ἐγὼ νᾶ σέ δουλεύω
 εἰς πᾶν ὅπου δύνομαι, καί νᾶ μηδέν ὀκνεύω.
 Λοιπὸν τὸ βιβλιάριον, πού εἶχες παραγγέλει
 τό ἔγραψα, καθὼς ὀρᾷς, ἐξωριστρογγύλι. (v. 1–8)¹⁰
 My most beloved father, by the Holy Spirit
 you accepted me through divine baptism,
 and my confessions through your mouth;
 You testified to God and made me your son
 and for this reason I am obliged to serve you
 in whatever way I can, and to not be lazy.
 So, the booklet you ordered
 I wrote it, as you can see, in a roundabout way.¹¹

As Zoras suggests, the pious tone of the first lines suggests that we are dealing with a clerical person toward whom the sender expresses deep gratitude.¹² It is also clear that the speaker is reporting on a certain commitment he made to write ‘this little book’ (τὸ βιβλιάριον). As he points out, he fulfilled this task and wrote this book, albeit in a ‘roughly abbreviated’ or ‘roundabout’ (ἐξωριστρογγύλι) form. In this introduction to the composition, I believe a significant characteristic can already be observed: the author writes in a humorous manner, far from the seriousness characteristic of lamentations. It is precisely this characteristic, as

⁸ Lambros 1908: 190–202.

⁹ Zoras 1939: 152–154.

¹⁰ *Thrinós Konstantinoupoleos* 1959: 219. In the article, I quote the text of the lament according to a later version by Zoras, who published a revised and supplemented version of the original 1939 article. See Zoras 1959. Characteristically, Pertusi, who cites the lament in his well-known anthology, omits the first six verses of the work. See Pertusi 2003: 388.

¹¹ All translations are by the author of the present paper.

¹² Zoras 1959: 218.

I will try to show, that will dominate the entire work, which, contrary to its title, has little in common with a typical lamentation over the fall of cities.

It is widely believed that this work is an imitation or free adaptation of the so-called *History of Valachia* by Mattheus, Metropolitan of Myreon (known also as Matthew of Myra), a work that can be dated to before 1618.¹³ The voluminous composition of 2,860 lines includes a summary that succinctly outlines its contents: ‘The heroic deeds of the most pious and valiant voivode Michael¹⁴; also what happened in Wallachia from the reign of voivode Serban to voivode Gabriel Movila; also contains certain spiritual teachings addressed to voivode Alexander Ilias and all his successors on the throne; and a lament for Constantinople.’¹⁵

Part of the whole (v. 2305–2764), entitled *Peri arpagis kai adikias. Kai thrinos kai klauthmos peri tis Konstantinoupoleos*, was later emulated by an anonymous author of the lament discussed here.¹⁶ My intention is not to conduct a full comparative analysis of the two versions, but rather to highlight the significant differences between them and attempt to interpret the most puzzling passages.

In the first part of the lament *Thrinis Konstantinoupoleos*, after the introductory verses, the narrator informs the unknown recipient of the reason for writing the lament. According to him, the recipient should learn about the ‘upheavals of the Romans, who are headless’ (Ρωμαίων ἀκεφάλων τε τάς ἀκαταστασίας, v. 10). The adjective ἀκέφαλος used here suggests the author’s ironic treatment of the subject of the City’s decline, for it can be understood in two ways: as ‘deprived of leadership’ or ‘without a head’, in other words, ‘stupid’.

It should be asked at this point whether the author found the relevant expression in the work of Matthew of Myra, whom he imitates? Well, one can unequivocally answer that no, we will not find a similar adjective there. What is more, the tone with regard to the Romaiοi in that work is decidedly more elegiac, sounding dignified and solemn. If analogous passages can be found there, perhaps they would be the following:

ὥσ' ἂν τὸ πάθ' αὖτε ἡμεῖς οἱ ταπεινοὶ Ῥωμαῖοι,
ὅπου ἐσκλαβώθηκαμεν καὶ γέροντες καὶ νέοι·
ἀπὸ ταῖς ἀδικίαις μας καὶ τὴν κενοδοξίαν
ἐχάσαμεν τὴν δόξαν μας σκῆπτρα καὶ βασιλείαν (v. 2317–2320)¹⁷

¹³ Zoras 1959: 221; Pertusi 2003: 487–488.

¹⁴ Vincent 1998: 323–324. Vincent’s study is the most comprehensive and thorough discussion of the work of Matthew of Myra to date. On Matthew’s works see also Dinu 2012, who characteristically summarizes his work: ‘he seeks to emphasise the contrast between the former glory of Hellenism and its decline under Ottoman rule’. See Dinu 2012: 383.

¹⁵ I quote this passage from Vincent 1998: 276.

¹⁶ Among other imitations that are well known there is a version by Papa Synadinos (born c. 1600), a clergyman from the Macedonian town of Serres. See Knös 1962: 418. For a critical edition of Papa Synadinos, see Odorico: 1996.

¹⁷ *Peri agapis kai adikias* 1881: 313.

As we, the humble Romans, have suffered,
 we were enslaved, both old and young;
 because of our injustices and our vanity
 we lost our glory, our sceptre and our kingdom.

As we can see, instead of the blaming of the Romaioi of being ‘headless’, the author sees the collapse of the City as a result of their ‘wrongdoings’ (ἁδικίαι) and ‘vanity’ (κενοδοξία). The reasons for the City’s decline are variously presented in vernacular laments. In the most popular ones, the blame is not always on the side of the Romans. For example, in the *Anakalima*, the most frequently cited lament due to its literary value, the issue of guilt does not appear at all. In contrast, in another well-known and often-quoted work, *Thrinosis tis Konstantinoupoleos*, Constantinople, who speaks to Venice, directly blames the Virgin Mary for ascending to heaven instead of guarding the City. However, in the background of her words echoes the conviction that they have lost divine protection through their own sins and guilelessness.¹⁸

In the introduction to his paraphrase of the lament attributed to Matthew of Myra, the anonymous author, one gets the impression, clearly distances himself from the existing tradition. Distant from the events he describes, he places the blame on the Byzantines in a rather blunt and original way, describing them as “headless”. Such a beginning necessarily compels the reader to approach the rest of the text with suspicion regarding its content.

In subsequent verses, the author describes the immorality that led to the destruction of Constantinople. According to the narrator, all but three or four Romaioi possessed only the worst attributes. In the following verses, he bluntly characterises them as evil, prone to murders that took place at least once a year, as heretics, *pneumatomachoi*, persecutors of Christians, etc. (v. 13–22). Such verses, or any similar ones, cannot be found in the original work used by the author of this composition. The obvious mockery of his compatriots, who lost the city through their own fault, becomes a sharp satire.

The narrator is undoubtedly a Greek from some diaspora and writes for his compatriots, who, like him, are deprived of their homeland and spiritual capital. Yet he does not lament the loss of the City; rather, based on the existing lament, he creates an ‘anti-lament’. In doing so, he mocks everyone and everything that is a constant component of other works belonging to this genre. As he himself emphasises, the Greeks have become poor people who must wander through foreign kingdoms:

Κ' ἔχασαν τὸ βασίλειον ἐκ τῆς ἀπροσεξίας
 καὶ περπατοῦμεν οἱ πτωχοὶ εἰς ἄλλας βασιλείας (v. 23–24)
 And they lost their kingdom through carelessness
 and we, the poor, walk to other kingdoms.

¹⁸ *Thrinosis tis Konstantinoupoleos* 2003: 382.

The following verses are the most interesting part of the entire composition. The author once again distances himself from the original, hinting at the futility of the Greeks' dreams of regaining the city. He is aware that collective memory is filled with myths, prophecies and vain hopes.¹⁹ Considering that the author is writing in the 17th century, this fact seems interesting. It is an intriguing voice of reason, relatively uncommon among Greek authors. The tragedy of Constantinople is usually presented in a sombre, elegiac tone, whereas this deals with a kind of demythologisation, carried out by a Greek.

The mysterious bird that appears in both the original version attributed to Bishop Matthew and in the paraphrase seems to be significant. As before, there are considerable differences between the two passages. Let us quote both:

Matthew of Myra, v. 2345–2348	<i>Thrinos</i> , v. 27–30
<p>Ἀπέταξε μας το πουλί ὁποῦχαμεν ᾽ς τὸ χέρι ἔφυγε καὶ ξωρίστηκε κ' ὑπάγει ᾽ς ἄλλα μέρη, καὶ ἄλλοι τὸν ἐπίασαν καὶ δυνατὰ κρατοῦσιν καὶ μᾶς ποὺ τὸν ἐχάσαμεν θρηνοῦσι καὶ γελοῦσιν</p>	<p>Ἀπέταξε μας το πουλλί, ὑπάγει εἰς ἄλλα μέρη καὶ δὲν ἤξεύρομεν ποτὲ ἂν μᾶς ἐλθῇ εἰς τὸ χέρι, διότι τὸ ἐπίασαν ἄλλοι καὶ τὸ κρατοῦσι καὶ τὸ βαστοῦν ᾽ς τὸ χέριν τους ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ γροικοῦσι.</p>
<p>The bird that we had in our hands flew away and flew away and was exiled and fled and went to other places, and others caught it and hold it tightly and they mourn and laugh at us who lost it</p>	<p>The bird flew away, heading for other places and we don't know if it will ever come back to our hands, because others have caught it and are holding it and those who listen to it are holding it in their hands.</p>

Commenting on this passage, Pertusi somewhat laconically notes that this 'bird' can be understood as the two-headed imperial eagle of the Palaiologos dynasty, which has been in Russia for some time now.²⁰ Following this line of reasoning, the metaphor seems clear. According to the author of the paraphrase, the Byzantine eagle is currently held by those who are worthy of it. He uses the verb γροικῶ, which is mostly used in Crete and in Cyprus and its meaning is 'to hear' and 'to understand'. In other words, the values that Byzantium stood for, and which were embodied in Constantinople, were passed on to those who could appreciate them, according to the author. The narrator also expresses the belief that it is by no means certain that this 'bird' will ever return to the Greeks. The aforementioned content is not present in Matthew's original work, where we

¹⁹ Pertusi argues that the prophecies belonging to the so-called *Visiones Danielis*, written in Greek, were extremely popular in the 15th century, as evidenced, among other things, by references in the last Byzantine historians, Doukas, Chalkokondyles, the anonymous authors of laments (f.e. *Anakalima*) and, in particular, Nestor Iskander. See Pertusi 1988: 36–40; 126.

²⁰ Pertusi 2003: 488.

have a slightly different point of view. The emphasis there is on the perspective of viewing the Greeks as both worthy of compassion and subject to ridicule.

The author in subsequent verses opposes the fatalistic notion that foreign powers (Venetians, Hungarians, the Voivode of Wallachia, Michail, vv. 31–44) will liberate the city. He adds a humorous comment, which confirms our belief that we are dealing with a work with a satirical bent:

Ὡσάν ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἔτρωγεν ἀντίκρυ τὸ χαβιάρι,
καὶ ἔφαγε ξερὸν ψωμί, δὲν εἶχε τί να πάρῃ. (v. 45–46)
Like the one who used to eat caviar in front of him,
and ate dry bread, he had nothing to take.

He also points out that they place too much trust in oracles (v. 32). It is here that a certain enigmatic four-line passage appears, which, as far as I know, has not yet been satisfactorily explained:

Μαῦρα πουλιὰ ἐφάνησαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐσπερίαν
καὶ χάλασαν τὴν ἄμπελον ἕως τὴν μεσημβρίαν,
Ἐμπῆκε καὶ ἡ ἄλεπού καὶ χάλασε τ' ἄμπέλι
μὲ τὸ ἄρκουδι μάχεται καὶ νὰ παλέψει θέλει. (v. 35–38)
Black birds appeared from the west
and destroyed the vineyard until noon.
The fox also came and destroyed the vineyard
and fights with the bear and wants to fight.

Firstly, it should be emphasised that this is an entirely autonomous image, which cannot be found in Matthew's original text. Secondly, so far, the only explanation of what these animals might symbolise has been proposed by Pertusi. As he writes in his commentary on the work, the three animals mentioned can be associated with particular powers that could come to the aid of Constantinople. In his view, the bear corresponds to Russia, the fox to Venice, and the 'black birds' to Hungary or Spain.²¹ Although his explanation seems plausible, the question arises as to whether there is another possible interpretation of the above passage.

Significantly, the publisher of this lament, Zoras, completely ignores this passage and focuses his analysis on linguistic and metrical issues.²² Comparing this lament with its original, he merely states that it is of much poorer literary quality.²³ Although these animals evoke familiar associations—the fox with cunning, the bear with strength, and black birds (ravens or rooks gathering over carrion)—perhaps the meaning of this passage should be broadened.

²¹ Pertusi 2003: 488.

²² Zoras 1959: 218–219.

²³ Zoras 1959: 230–231.

Considering the context of the whole and the criticism of the Greeks' illusory hope of regaining the city, as well as the humorous tone of the lament, in which the author mocks the oracles, one might see the above passage in a different light. In fact, Pertusi himself states that one of the verses of this lament (v. 34) echoes the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* of Patara.²⁴ However, he does not pursue this line of thought further in his analysis. It seems to me that Pertusi suggests here that this passage can be interpreted in terms of an oracle or apocalyptic visions, which the author of the composition mocks. Following this line of thought, it is possible to get the impression that the author—perhaps with some specific prophecies in mind²⁵—is using hyperbole here. All this serves to reinforce his criticism of his compatriots.

The reference to the fox in the context of the vineyard is fairly easy to identify. It is, after all, an allusion to the Song of Solomon (2.15): 'Catch us the foxes, / the little foxes, / that spoil the vineyards, / for our vineyards are in blossom.'²⁶ If we take into account that the foxes here symbolise small but destructive forces that can destroy what is beautiful and valuable, the fragment in our lament becomes completely incomprehensible. In fact, Constantinople has already been destroyed; there is nothing more to destroy. The symbol was therefore used by the author of the lament for a different purpose. Perhaps, rather than a passage from the Bible, he had in mind an unknown prophecy of some kind concerning the fall of the City, a prophecy as yet not associated by anyone?

Although it is certainly possible to find analogies in existing prophecies,²⁷ albeit with difficulty, I argue that the essence of the statement lies elsewhere, rendering a search for a possible source misguided. The animals chosen may

²⁴ Pertusi 2003: 488. More on *Pseudo-Methodius' Apocalypse* and its reception, see Pertusi 1988: 20–24. See also Congourdeau 1999: 56–57.

²⁵ Apocalyptic visions related to the destruction of the City had appeared earlier. Congourdeau mentions a reference by Makrembolites, who, writing about the destruction of the dome of Hagia Sophia in 1346, mentions Daniel's characteristic vision of four beasts symbolising four empires (Daniel 7). See Congourdeau 1999: 57. Suffice it to say that Daniel's vision features a lion, a bear, a leopard and a beast with many horns, which is not specified in detail.

²⁶ I quote the fragment from Revised Standard Version – Catholic Edition (RSV-CE): <https://mycatholic.life/bible/rsvce/> [access: 20.06.2025].

²⁷ Allusions to the animals mentioned in the lament analysed here can be found in the texts of the prophecies cited by Pertusi, but - firstly - they are extremely rare, and secondly, they never occur in such a combination as in the work quoted. Let me give a handful of examples for illustration, noting that the question of the interdependence between the text of the lament and these passages remains open. It is possible that the anonymous author drew on entirely different testimonies, which are elusive to us. In the *Oracula* attributed to Leo the Wise in 15th/16th-century texts, we find both a bear (accompanied by two lion cubs and two dogs that the bear feeds) and a fox: Χαλκούπολις δὲ βαρβάρους πάλιν δέχου: / ὅταν γὰρ κυνῶν ἄρκτον λήγη μητέρα, / οἰκτίστατε, θρήνησον εἰς πόλου πλάτος, / ὅπως Θεοῦ σου τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀπολάβῃς. [...] ἄρκτος χαλκή [...] καὶ δύο σκύμνοι ὑποκάτωθεν αὐτῆς δεξιᾷ καὶ δύο κύνες λυεῖς θηλαζούσαι αὐτῇ [...]. Ἀλώπηξ ἐν ξένῳ ἄρξεις τῷ κράτει [...]. See Pertusi 1988: 173. See also: Ἄρκτος δ' ὀλετὴρ ὃν ὀφίς τάλας μόνος, Pertusi 1988: 175.

be completely random, since they are intended to provoke laughter rather than a solemn mood of lamentation. Even the vineyard mentioned by the author, which, as I have mentioned, has obvious religious connotations, seems out of place here, and the images of its destruction by black birds and a fox fighting with a bear are rather perplexing. The light tone of the quoted passage is confirmed by the author's commentary in the following lines:

Καὶ μεῖς τὰ ἐξηγούμεσθην ταῦτα στὸ θέλημά μας
καὶ ὅτι τὸ βασιλεῖον τὸ ἔχομεν κοντά μας.
Καὶ μετ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς λογισμοὺς περνοῦμεν τὸν καιρὸν μας
καὶ ὅλον ἓνα γίνεται μεγάλος ὁ ἐχθρὸς μας. (v. 39–42)
And we explain these things to our will
and that the kingdom is near us.
And with these thoughts we spend our time
and everything becomes one big enemy for us.

In light of the above, it is evident that we are dealing not so much with lamenting Constantinople as with lamenting the wretched Romaioi, who have been attributed the worst possible characteristics. One might also have the impression of this being a lamentation over the stupidity, gullibility and naivety of the Greeks, who, trusting in prophecies and blindly believing in foreign help, are unable to see the true state of affairs. This bitter satire on both the Byzantines and their descendants scattered across foreign lands ends ironically. In subsequent verses (v. 43–52), the narrator implores God for forgiveness for their sins, which are presented as having caused the unfortunate Greeks to 'fall into the hands of the Turks':

Ἀλλοίμονον 'ς τὸ γένος μας, τὸ πῶς ἐκαταστήθη,
κ' ἐπέσαμεν οἱ ἄθλιοι εἰς τῶν Τουρκῶν τὰ πλῆθη! (v. 43–44)
Alas, our race, how it happened,
that we, the unfortunate ones, fell into the hands of the Turks!

By way of summary, it must be stated with certainty that in this lament we are dealing with a work of an entirely separate character from other compositions belonging to this genre.²⁸ From the very first lines, the tone of the narrator's voice betrays a distance from the existing tradition to which he refers, as well as a distance from the 'national' collective trauma of the loss of Constantinople for the Greeks. More than reflecting on the fall of the City, the anonymous author focuses on the condition of his Greek contemporaries, mocking their credulity in prophecies and their futile hopes of regaining their spiritual capital. The author seems to have deliberately employed vague symbolism, most likely drawn

²⁸ Goldwyn, for example, does not see the difference between this text and other lamentations and does not take into account its satirical tone. See Goldwyn 2014: 102–103.

from familiar prophecies popular in the Greek world, in order to emphasise the barrenness of thinking about Constantinople by his contemporaries. This stance might explain the text's neglect among the Greeks, while its scant presence in scholarly discourse may confirm a lack of historical popularity. After all, it presents a very different point of view, one that is not very popular and which, in a way, destroys the sense of pious sanctity that has surrounded the city of Constantine for centuries. While few aspects of the lament in question have been referred to here, the examples cited clearly show that laments on the decline of the City are not an ossified genre; rather, their anonymous authors engage with the existing tradition, at times doing so in surprising ways. Certainly, the subject is still marginal as far as the reception of Constantinople in the Greek world is concerned and awaits a more comprehensive treatment. What is certain, however, is that whatever the nature of these destructive black birds from the west, they seem to have effectively obscured the real image of the City for the Greeks and Western culture for a good few centuries.

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