

*Global Histories before Globalisation*

# **BYZANTINE IDEAS OF PERSIA, 650–1461**

Rustam Shukurov



# Byzantine Ideas of Persia, 650–1461

This book offers a comprehensive study of the perceptions of ancient and medieval Iran in the Byzantine empire, exploring the effects of Persian culture upon Byzantine intellectualism, society and culture.

*Byzantine Ideas of Persia, 650–1461* focusses on the enduring position of ancient Persia in Byzantine cultural memory, encompassing both in the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’ significance. By analysing a wide range of historical sources – from church literature to *belles-lettres* – this book examines the intricate relationship between ancient Persia and Byzantine cultural memory, as well as the integration and function of Persian motifs in the Byzantine mentality. Additionally, the author uses these sources to analyse thoroughly the knowledge Byzantines had about contemporary Iranian culture, the presence of ethnic Iranians, and the circulation and usage of the Persian language in Byzantium. Finally, this book concludes with an insightful exploration of the importance and influence of Iranian science on Byzantine scholars.

This book will appeal to scholars and students in the fields of Byzantine and Iranian history, particularly to those studying the cross-cultural and social influence between the two societies during the Middle Ages.

**Rustam Shukurov**, PhD, D.Sc. in History (2012), is a Visiting Scholar at the University of St Andrews. He graduated from Moscow State University in 1984 and worked there for more than 30 years as a lecturer in Byzantine and Medieval studies. He has published several monographs, translations and articles on Byzantium, Iranian and Turkic History, including *The Grand Komnenoi and the Orient, 1204–1461* (Moscow, 2001) and *The Byzantine Turks, 1204–1461* (Leiden; Boston, 2016).

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*Rustam Shukurov*

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Rustam Shukurov

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Συνέβη δὲ τοῖς Πέρσαις ἐνδοξοτάτοις γενέσθαι τῶν  
βαρβάρων παρὰ τοῖς Ἕλλησιν  
‘Of the barbarians the Persians became the most  
famous among the Greeks’  
Strabo, XV, 3, 23

Ἐκ Περσίδος ἐγνώσθη Χριστὸς ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς  
‘From Persia Christ became first known’  
*De gestis in Perside, XX*

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When the first draft was sent to the publisher for peer review in October 2021, I could not have anticipated that the external circumstances during the book's completion would turn even more unfortunate and dreadful. The revision of this book coincided with the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The traumatic experience of this humanitarian tragedy, which unfolded in real time before our eyes through the media, hindered proper concentration on the planned text revision. This was exacerbated by a sharp deterioration in the domestic political atmosphere in Moscow. I left Moscow, first for my hometown Dushanbe (Tajikistan), and from there, I travelled again to Vienna before finally arriving in St Andrews a few months later.

There is another side to this story, one that is much more joyous and productive. From January 2020 to January 2021, I had the honour of being a team member of the *Mobility, Microstructures and Personal Agency in Byzantium* project, initiated and led by Professor Claudia Rapp, who received the 2015 Wittgenstein Award of the Austrian National Research Foundation (FWF) to fund the project.<sup>1</sup> During this period, I worked in the Department of Byzantine Studies at the Institute for Medieval Research (Austrian Academy of Sciences) for over a year. Claudia Rapp graciously supported the idea of this study being a significant part of my contribution to the project. Thus, this book was compiled within the framework of the project, which also made possible its Open Access publication.



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Moscow–Dushanbe–Vienna–St Andrews. February–December 2022

## Notes

- 1 FWF Wittgenstein-Award Project Z288-G25; <https://rapp.univie.ac.at/>; for a conceptual description of the project, see: Rapp, Claudia. 'Mobility and migration in Byzantium: in search of the sources', in *Ciutats mediterrànies: la mobilitat i el desplaçament de persones/Mediterranean towns: mobility and displacement of people*, ed. Flocel Sabaté (Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2021), 109–116.
- 2 <http://www.hist.msu.ru/departments/8823/solinvictus/>; <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-NJGpdSfCFt-N4a0MpbakA/featured>.



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# Introduction

For a modern scholar exploring the research topic ‘Byzantium and Iran’, the initial focus would be on the relations between Byzantium and Sasanian Iran, from the third century until the reign of Emperor Herakleios in 610–641. At the same time, in modern scholarship, the period following the Muslim invasion and the establishment of the caliphate in the Sasanian territories is described as the interrelations of Byzantium with the Arabs and later with various Turkic nations. Iran has, therefore, completely disappeared from Byzantine history. This point presents a certain paradox: Iranian culture continued to thrive and underwent further development in the ninth century, raising questions about the apparent neglect of Iran and Neo-Persian civilisation under Islam in the middle and late Byzantine culture.

Meanwhile, Byzantine sources, both ecclesiastical and secular, contain abundant references to Persia and the Persians. Persia finds frequent mention in both religious and secular textual productions, encompassing various literary genres and specialised narratives. Despite this huge wealth of information, the topic of Persia in the middle and late Byzantine tradition has never been the focus of research interest, and it remains invisible to modern analytical optics. The elusive nature of the subject stems from the challenge of comprehending the Byzantine understanding of Persia so far, which was formed by multiple perspectives on Persia. This includes a Christian-based interpretation, a perception shaped by Hellenic knowledge inherited from antiquity, and finally an image of Persia shaped by Byzantine contemporary experience. Each perspective comprises a distinct theme requiring specific research tools and approaches. Nonetheless, as we shall see, all the three aspects of the Byzantine vision of Persia have to be addressed in their inseparable connection with each other, since they co-existed within the Byzantine mindset simultaneously.

In this study, my aim is to develop a holistic description of the Byzantine perceptions of Persia from the seventh century down to the late Byzantine period in all their complexity and diversity. Indeed, the images of Persia in the Byzantine cultural milieu were distinctly heterogeneous, being formed in different times and under the influence of typologically differing factors. Therefore, this book aims to achieve two objectives. First, it seeks to

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reconstruct the image of ancient Persia in a religious and secular context. Second, it represents an effort to analyse and organise information about the contemporary Persian world, which the Byzantines accumulated from the seventh to fifteenth centuries. In other words, the focus will not be so much on the real Iran but on Byzantine's perception of Iran. Therefore, to differentiate between the real and imaginary aspects, I distinguish *Persian* from *Iranian*, using *Persian* mostly to refer to the Byzantine imaginary Persia and using *Iranian* when addressing ancient and mediaeval Iranian phenomena. However, there will be exceptions to this terminology, particularly in cases where widely accepted terms such as the old Persian language or New Persian culture are used.

### I.1 Clearing Up the Field

To develop my own research approaches, it is essential to establish a clear conceptual framework of the study. One of the objectives of this study, as noted earlier, is to provide a systematic description of the impact of mediaeval Iran on the life and culture of middle and late Byzantium. Although modern scholarship has studied certain aspects of the New Persian influences (which will be discussed later), the topic has not been problematised as an essential standalone subject and, therefore, not been comprehensively investigated. However, analysing Byzantine knowledge of contemporary Persian culture does not cause methodological difficulties. As we will discover, the use of traditional, well-tested analytical methods of the historical sciences is quite sufficient in most cases.

However, it is important to note that the majority of references to Persian motifs in the Byzantine sources are not related to contemporary events, but they are references to the characters and events of ancient history – Median, Achaemenid, Sasanian and occasionally Parthian periods. Explaining the extensive amount of data concerning ancient Persia requires the adoption of special approaches that are not yet widely used in Byzantine studies. Modern Byzantine scholarship has developed a certain tradition of interpreting such information, which revolves around two most influential approaches: the concept of *archaising* trends and the concept of *orientalising* tendencies in Byzantine textual and visual culture.

The concept of *archaising* or *classicising*, originally introduced by scholars of Byzantine literature, refers to the use of *artificial* forms of the Greek language, and the incorporation of literary, historical, geographical, scientific and other elements that are based on the 'imitation' (*mimesis*) of the ancient Greek textual culture. The 'imitation', according to modern scholarship, serves many purposes. It may aim to confer an ancient stylistic flavour to a text, to perform an intrinsically valuable imitative play with the language and imagery of the text, or to differentiate the intellectualism and sophistication of a particular author from the less educated individuals.<sup>1</sup> Ancient Persian themes in Byzantine literature, along with other antique

references and allusions, are commonly classified as an effect of archaising, which was a characteristic of Byzantine way of self-expression in texts and visual arts.

The other prevalent approach, *orientalism* or *exoticism*, interprets Asian motifs, and in particular Persian ones, as a literary, artistic and cultural trend that emerged during the Hellenistic era. This interpretation was most frequent after the publication of the seminal book by Edward Said.<sup>2</sup> The anti-colonial discourse of Edward Said, properly speaking, cannot be applied to premodern intellectualism. However, the influential ideas presented in Said's *Orientalism* have had a persuasive impact, and as a result, they have been used to explain certain aspects of premodern studies, without requiring any special proof. With regard to Byzantine material, modern scholarship sometimes combines the concepts of *orientalism* and *archaisation*, resulting in the interpretation of Asian motifs in Byzantine culture as 'an archaising reference to ancient Greco-Roman craving for exoticism'.

While these interpretational strategies served well for conceptual categorisation in the past and are sometimes still instrumental in literary and art criticism, they seem to be insufficient for the purpose of this present study. They do not adequately explain the frequent and persistent references to ancient Persia in the Byzantine tradition, nor do they fully understand their function in the thought models of the Byzantines. In most cases, as I argue, 'archaising' and 'orientalising' attitudes were not independent and self-sufficient principles, but rather a reflection of actual consciousness that dealt with explicit (or sometimes implicit) cultural memory.

## 1.2 Cultural Memory

As Plato captured in *Timaeus* (23b-c), in deep antiquity, the Greeks lived without remembering the past, as if silent and devoid of the power to express themselves in writing. Having no knowledge of what happened in old times, they had to begin all over again like children. However, as history reveals, the Greeks later learned to memorise and, through this, created a great culture, capable of remembering and creative imitation of the past. The concept of cultural memory is central to human culture in general, and Hellenic civilisation in particular. Cultural memory is key to the survival of a civilisation and to its success in the future. It is memory that mitigates cultural entropy and allows to accumulate and then systematise the outcomes of the past and present experience.

The concept of cultural memory is focal for the subsequent discussion of the image of Persia in the Byzantine mind. Since the 1990s, the subject of cultural memory has become increasingly popular in all branches of humanities, generating a vast bibliography. Especially relevant for this book are the conceptual studies of Pierre Nora and Jan Assmann, who have provided a firm theoretical basis for applying the concept of cultural memory to the study of historical mentality.<sup>3</sup>

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In this book, cultural memory is understood as an ever-living past or a system of ideas (or ‘stories’) about the past, which forms semantic contexts for actual consciousness and endows cultural meaning to new objects gained in experience. Cultural memory predefines contextual consciousness and, therefore, the self-identity and axiological patterns and hierarchy of cultural values. In this sense, my understanding of cultural memory parallels Michel Foucault’s concept of epistemic networks, which impart the principles of the description of the world and preconfigure the accommodation and systematisation of a new, previously unknown phenomenon.

Cultural memory is institutionalised through language, education, rituals, customs and other collectively shared ideas and practices. Written and oral traditions, visual art, monuments and artefacts are media preserving culturally significant memories and stories about the past, transmitting them from generation to generation. Information gleaned from ancient texts (written, oral, visual and performative), in the actual consciousness of a living person, turns into a kind of ‘stories’ about the timeless past. Remembered stories about notable personalities, notions and precedents of old perform as commonly known paradigmatic references to moral ideals and common-sense wisdom. In this sense, cultural memory is ‘irrational’ or rather intuitive inasmuch as it is opposed to the ‘rational’ professional systematisation of the past by a learned historian.

Specific mnemonic mechanisms for transmitting memory were embedded in the education system and in a wide range of textual and practical activities. These mechanisms played a vital role in shaping individual memory, primarily through the collective memory of a group that shares a common culture. Therefore, I understand collective and individual memories as facets of the broader concept of cultural memory, which is multilayered: one layer comprises basic memorial information shared by all members of society, while the other layers represent multiple variations that exist among different groups within the society.

However, the presence of a particular element in cultural memory does not necessarily imply that it will be reproduced at every opportunity by all members of the group who share this cultural memory. Despite the fact that certain elements of cultural memory may be comprehensible to everyone or the majority, this does not mean that it guarantees an obligatory explanatory model for each individual within the group. Each individual has his own specific experience, taste and preferences that give him freedom of choice in the application of explanatory models.

In order to underscore the specificity of memory’s dimension in its interrelation with actual consciousness, I quote Pierre Nora’s comprehensive, accurate and, what is equally important, artistically beautiful definition: ‘Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived <...> Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present’.<sup>4</sup>

The concept of cultural memory is currently gaining popularity in Byzantine studies, although it is still relatively uncommon to consciously employ it as a specific analytical device. However, it would be unfair to assume that the study relating to memory has not attracted modern analysis and assessment. Mark Bartusis took a comprehensive step towards memory studies as early as 1995. Bartusis, discussing the meaning and concept of *archaising*, has comprehensively expanded the understanding of the term and brought it beyond the narrow framework of philology. Showing the effect of archaisation in almost all spheres of Byzantine reality—‘in imperial ceremony, administration, coinage, seals and ideology, on the one hand, and in saints’ lives, liturgy, church administration, religious art and architecture, and theology, on the other’—he in fact has described major parameters of Byzantine cultural memory without referring explicitly to it.<sup>5</sup>

Previous scholarship has provided some direct references to Byzantine memory. Gilbert Dagron describes Byzantine court ceremonies as a manifestation of historical memory.<sup>6</sup> Anthony Cutler investigates the roles of late antique literary and visual exemplars in ninth- and tenth-century Byzantium and offers his original typology of memory ‘modes’.<sup>7</sup> Nathan Leidholm has published a study directly related to the topic of this book: he discusses Byzantine memory of the Achaemenids and its role in the formation of the ‘Macedonian dynastical legend’.<sup>8</sup> In the same vein, many modern scholars of Byzantium have de facto made a considerable contribution to memory studies, albeit not mentioning the concept itself. I will refer to a few scholars only, whose conceptual and innovative works deal with Byzantine cultural memory: Gilbert Dagron, Paul Magdalino, Henry Maguire, Albrecht Berger, Anthony Kaldellis, Ruth Macrides, Claudia Rapp, Dimiter Angelov, Corinne Jouanno and others, in many cases, have been reconstructing memory dimensions of the Byzantine mentality.<sup>9</sup> New generation scholarship increasingly addresses the concept of memory to analyse various aspects of Byzantine culture.<sup>10</sup>

### 1.3 Byzantine Cultural Memory

The specific feature of Byzantine cultural memory consisted in its unprecedentedly remote temporal horizon, which differentiated the Byzantines from most neighbouring nations in the mediaeval Mediterranean, with the exception of Jewish culture. The boundaries of Byzantine memory extended to the utmost limits of Homer’s epic timelessness and the biblical quasi-historical past, while the historical past starts from the time of Greco-Persian wars and *ab urbe condita*. Byzantine cultural memory included a vast range of diverse information coming from the past and was embodied in language, written texts, liturgy, civic rituals, visual tradition, practical techniques, oral tradition, habits and customs.

Byzantine cultural memory preserved only a part of information on what had been produced by previous generations, and considerably reworked and



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revisited it. It was a dynamic and, therefore, ever-changing phenomenon. The set of elements pertaining to Byzantine cultural memory was by no means static. On the one hand, there existed an invariant core of cultural memory that persisted unaltered throughout Byzantine history. On the other hand, the content of cultural memory changed in the course of time, which, in turn, altered the contextual meaning of its constituent elements. It would be worthwhile analysing the reasons for and impact of including and excluding specific elements over time, and their inherent meaning and function in the wider context of the *imaginary* self. Such a deconstruction of cultural memory would allow us to deepen our knowledge of the basic pattern of Byzantine identity: which elements of memory were invariable and which were prone to change?

Another set of problems pertains to the regularities and mechanisms inherent in reproducing cultural memory. In this context, the Byzantine education system, rituals (in religion and magic, social and political life, etc.) and a number of textual activities (encyclopaedic compilation, lexicography, etc.) may be studied as *mnemonic* devices to uphold and sustain cultural memory. At the same time, it would be pertinent to understand the motivations of an individual to *activate* memory, as well as the mechanisms of the activation: when and why did a Byzantine draw upon his cultural memory and how might this have influenced a person's decision-making?

Every direct reference or indirect allusion to an element of cultural memory in Byzantine textual and visual culture, in every single case, reveals a specific type of interaction between individual consciousness and cultural memory. Different elements of memory catered to different needs of and demands on the living culture. This is why the modern *archaising* and *orientalising* interpretational strategies are often a result of mere misinterpretation of the interaction between an individual's actual consciousness and cultural memory. Regarding *archaising*, if a twelfth-century Byzantine author employs some ancient allusion or association, it was not a simple and arbitrary transfer of an 'antique' and alien linguistic, textual or thematic element into a 'new' twelfth-century discourse. The author of the twelfth century could employ only those 'antique' objects that were at hand in his cultural memory, and only in those cases when ancient allusions helped to better understand the present reality. In this sense, Cyrus, Xerxes, Moses, Solomon, Aristotle, Jesus, Constantine the Great and the like belonged not so much to the historical past but rather, as elements of memory, to the time of a twelfth-century author, to the memorial reality of the author's time. To explain such instances of activating cultural memory as *archaising* without trying to understand the reasons and functions of a particular *antique* reference in the context of actual consciousness is next to saying nothing.

In particular, one should clearly differentiate between the *mimesis* of ancient literary and language models, which could be practised by Byzantine intellectuals, and the operation of their cultural memory. Sometimes, these two may have appeared very close to each other, interwoven and even almost

indistinguishable. However, the deep motivation of each of these two differs: in the case of *mimesis*, we are dealing with a manipulation of the *outer form* of a written or oral discourse, while the activity of cultural memory relates rather to *epistemic* layers of culture, being a means used by an individual to comprehend and systematise the present reality. It goes without saying that the problem of cultural memory should not be confused with the Byzantine ‘attitudes towards ancient history’: cultural memory, albeit drawing its strength from the past, deals with the everlasting present.

In the same vein, modern researchers are free to define Persian motifs in Byzantine culture as a manifestation of the ancient and mediaeval ‘orientalism’. However, in most cases it was not a matter of superficial, situational and temporary attractiveness of Asian exoticism, but rather lay in deeper layers of the Greco-Roman civilisation, which retained a sense of its affinity with the ancient cultures of the Mediterranean. If *orientalism* is definitely characteristic of modern Europe, Asian motifs for Byzantium seem to have been a more complex and deeper phenomenon, a structure-forming element that participated in the shaping of the Hellenic self.<sup>11</sup> Most of the cases, addressed in this study, can hardly be explained by *exoticism* or *orientalising* taste. At the same time, however, it would be unreasonable to wave away the presence of *orientalism* in Byzantine culture. There exist enough references to exotic orientalism in Byzantine art, such as Theophilos’s Bryas palace in the Baghdad style in the ninth century or the famous Mouchroutas pavilion in the Persian style in the twelfth century.<sup>12</sup> In each case of Byzantine referring to the Oriental, one should consider the contextual motives and function of the reference.

#### I.4 Memory in Byzantium

Cultural memory is a modern socio-anthropological concept that brings about methodological consequences. However, it would be a mistake to assume that applying the concept of cultural memory and the accompanying analytical procedures to Byzantine material implies posing foreign questions against Byzantine culture to which it cannot answer. The Byzantines were quite attentive to the issue of memory. They demonstrated a remarkable concern for the preservation and constant re-actualisation of memory, and not only in practical terms such as maintaining knowledge of the classical language and rewriting and commenting on ancient manuscripts. Byzantine intellectual reflection is quite rich in thoughts on the topic of memory. Here are just a few examples. The first instance characterises the meaning of the tenth-century revision and re-systematisation of classical textual tradition under Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (913–959). It was clearly perceived as an act of manipulating memory as expressed in the proem to the *Geoponika*: ‘you have skilfully and wisely brought back to life philosophy and rhetoric, which had heretofore fallen into neglect and immersed in the mute depths of Lethe (ἀχανῆ βυθὸν τῆς λήθης)...’ – writes the author addressing

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to the emperor.<sup>13</sup> András Németh, in his conceptual and ground-breaking study, has duly defined the large-scale activity at Constantine VII's court as an 'appropriation' of past experience and re-systematising it for the sake of contemporary needs,<sup>14</sup> or, in other words, as refreshing and re-actualising cultural memory.

The second example represents an intriguing theoretical exploration of the role of memory in individual experience and social life. Theodore Metochites (1270–1332) took a keen interest in the concept of memory, engaging in its discussion more than once.<sup>15</sup> In a number of his essays, Metochites addresses both individual memory and what we call now cultural memory, which is embedded in the ancient writings. [Individual] memory and memorising are crucial for a person's education.<sup>16</sup> [Cultural] memory, considered as past experience recorded in ancient books and now preserved in the mind's treasuries (τοῦ νοῦ ταμεῖα), is indispensable for both personal success and effective political and social practice.<sup>17</sup> The Byzantines extensively studied 'Everything done by the Greeks and said about the Greeks', or as one may reformulate, non-material cultural traces of antiquity. They modelled their intellectual and practical activities according to these 'examples and recollections' (ἐξ ὑποδειγμάτων τινῶν καὶ μνήμης).<sup>18</sup> Significant examples from the ancient experience of Greeks and Romans are available to the Byzantines due to their 'common tongue' (φωνὴ συνήθης) with the ancients; the Byzantines, accordingly, show gratitude to them for this 'noble and graceful language'.<sup>19</sup> Finally, Metochites emphasises the importance of memory in shaping future creative endeavours, both on a personal and social level, as he states: 'the beginning of all wisdom and knowledge is ... memory which confirms, establishes and prepares the discoveries'.<sup>20</sup> Metochites's theory of memory is not limited to the outlined aspects and deserves special attention and study.<sup>21</sup> In the present context, Metochites regarded the ancient textual tradition and, especially, historiography as an extension of individual memory, common for all Byzantines, providing paradigmatic models for any kind of social activity and behaviour in the present. In other words, ancient texts here play the role of a specific medium of cultural memory. This perspective aligns closely with the modern understanding of the sources and functioning of cultural memory. Further, examples of the Byzantine perception of memory as cultural memory can be found in Chapter 4.1 (Photios) and Chapter 6.4 (Plethon).

As we can observe, the topics related to cultural memory, its content, sources, functioning, effects, preservation and re-actualisation, were not alien to Byzantine thought. Although they were approached and expressed differently, these matters were indeed a subject of concern and exploration in Byzantine discourse.

### 1.5 The Function of Language

The 'classicised' form of language was of crucial importance to Byzantine culture, which served as a binding agent ensuring continuity and integrity of

memory. This language, although no longer spoken and being to an extent ‘artificial’, provided access to ancient depositories of knowledge. Byzantines realised that abandoning the ‘classicised’ language would result in the loss of cultural memory. As demonstrated by Metochites’s reasoning mentioned earlier, the Byzantines realised the link between their literary language and their memory of the past. In addition, their practical dedication to preserving the ancient language, which was persistently reinforced through education and practising high culture, asserts their awareness of the risks of losing the accumulated experience in antiquity and reverting to the state of ‘silence’ and ignorance. In this sense, ‘archaic’ grammar and vocabulary were not considered by the Byzantines as such, but rather as a kind of *meta-language* that was indispensable for comprehending and systematising the chaotic particles of the present reality (species) through abstract models of the past (genera).

The Byzantines used the ancient language not because of a lack of originality and incapability to say a new word (as some scholars may be prone to believe), but because they endeavoured, consciously and with intent, not to forget anything.

The described phenomenon is quite common for cultures striving to preserve cultural memory. For instance, in the mediaeval West, such a function of sustaining cultural continuity and integrity was performed by the Latin language, first, solely in the ecclesiastical sphere and later absorbing other, newly appeared forms of ‘lay’ intellectualism. The same can be said about the role of the Quranic Arabic language in the mediaeval Muslim world and of the New Persian language in the mediaeval and early modern Turkic and Indian cultural milieus.

## 1.6 An Outline of Research Logic

The first approach to problematising the topic of Persian motifs was undertaken in my article published in 2019.<sup>22</sup> However, subsequent research revealed that the problem involves much more extensive and varied source materials than anticipated. As a result, in this book I have chosen to pose research questions in certain instances, acknowledging that exhaustive answers to these queries will require future investigations.

This study is structured in seven chapters, which differ not only thematically, but also in the way the material is presented. The first six chapters address the issue of Persia and Persian motifs as elements of cultural memory in the ‘religious’ (Chapters 1–3) and ‘secular’ (Chapters 4–6) traditions. It was a challenge to decide which of these two major themes should be put first, since both traditions are equivalent in significance and deeply interwoven from a Byzantine perspective. Finally, I decided to begin this book with a discussion of religious culture for the following reason: some deformations in the ‘lay’ Hellenic image of Persia can only be understood when taking into account the religious thematic and semantic background of the Byzantine mind.

I would like to, however, make an important reservation concerning the typological division of the material into ‘religious’ and ‘secular’. The term ‘secular’ or ‘lay’ tradition is used rather figuratively in my study, exclusively for facilitating analytical systematisation, in order to distinguish two generically diverse lines in Byzantine culture: the new ‘religious’ one, originally mostly Semitic (Christian), and the old ‘lay’ one, originally mostly Indo-European (Greek and Roman). It must be kept in mind that the Byzantine mentality hardly drew such a distinction. Indeed, what one may imply under ‘lay tradition’ sometimes coincides with what the Byzantines called ‘Hellenic’ (Ἑλλην, Ἑλληνικός), in the sense ‘pagan’ (εἰδωλολάτρης, ἔθνικός). However, the Byzantine perception of ‘pagan’ or ‘Hellenic’ was much narrower concerning specifically religion-centred phenomena and discourses. The Byzantines considered most phenomena, which we now call ‘lay’ and ‘secular’, as religiously neutral constituents of culture in a broader sense, as natural outcomes of technical wisdom and common-sense practices (such as laws and political system, sciences, *belles-lettres*, customs, habits and the like). At the same time, however, a Byzantine considered these common-sense phenomena as tightly connected with the divine wisdom and divine cosmic order (i.e., ultimately with ‘religious’ aspect), thus merging together two dimensions of human culture, which we conditionally separate for analytical purposes.

Since Persian elements in the Greek Orthodox religious thought have not been problematised and systematically studied in modern scholarship, Chapters 1–3 devote much attention to empirical matters, identifying and systematising data related to the Christian Old and New Testament heritage, Christianisation of Iran and the Sasanian persecutions of Christians. In this exploration, my focus lies in not only how Persia was perceived by church intellectuals, but also in the adaptation of this knowledge in the everyday activity of an average believer. I will delve into the incorporation of Persian motifs in liturgical practices and private piety. It is also important to find mnemonic devices, intrinsic to ecclesiastical tradition, that transmitted religiously significant knowledge about Persia from generation to generation.

Chapters 4–6 discuss the manifestation of the Persian elements of cultural memory in the secular tradition, which is greatly aided by numerous studies in Greco-Roman antiquity that have thoroughly investigated the knowledge about Persia. My focus is on the thematic content of Persian motifs in the middle and late Byzantine tradition and the devices of accumulating and transmitting this knowledge. The chapters specifically analyse numerous instances of re-activating cultural memory in thought and practice. I present the argument that it was cultural memory, including its Persian constituents, that modelled intellectual, social and personal activity in many cases. The Byzantine lay tradition gives ample material for understanding micro-level interactions between cultural memory and individual consciousness.

Finally, Chapter 7 concerns not so much Byzantine memory of ancient events, but rather explores the Persian actualities in the middle and late

Byzantine social life and thought, including New Persians settled in the empire, geographical knowledge about contemporaneous Persia, the use of the New Persian language and, finally, the appropriation of Persian science. In modern Byzantine scholarship, the Persian has hardly been differentiated from the Arabic, Turkic or generalised Muslim. Meanwhile, the Byzantines themselves made this kind of distinction. I will present the argument that the Persian presence in the Byzantine intellectual milieu grew significantly in the last centuries of the empire's existence.

Regarding the spelling of Greek historical names, I primarily follow the conventions adopted by the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (ODB), which reflect the consensus among leading specialists in Byzantine studies of the time. The Old and Middle Persian names and terms are transliterated with scholarly diacritics only when absolutely necessary. For the Roman transliteration of Arabic and New Persian words, I generally follow the rules of *EP<sup>2</sup>*, with the following exceptions: the letter چ is transmitted as 'j' and not 'dj', and the letter ق is transmitted as 'q' and not 'k'. In most cases, for originally Turkic words I follow the conventions of Republican Turkish.

## Notes

- 1 For more on the Byzantinist concept of archaizing and *mimesis* with relevant bibliographical references, see: Bartusis, 'Function of *Archaizing*'.
- 2 Said, *Orientalism*.
- 3 *Lieux de mémoire*; Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 15–141 (Part I); Nora, 'Between Memory and History'; Assmann, *Kulturelle Gedächtnis* (German original version); Assmann, 'Collective Memory'. For more on the application of the concept of cultural memory to historical studies, see, for instance: Barash, 'Collective Memory'. A seminal work for mediaeval studies: Geary, *Phantoms of remembrance*; for an overview of mediaeval memory studies with further bibliography, see the important volume: *Memory and Commemoration*. For current methodological and thematic trends in memory studies, see the academic journal *Memory Studies* (since 2008).
- 4 Nora, 'Between Memory and History', 8.
- 5 Bartusis, 'Function of *Archaizing*'.
- 6 Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre*, Chapter 3 'Cérémonial et lieux de mémoire' (English translation: Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 84–124).
- 7 Cutler, 'Memory Palace'.
- 8 Leidholm, 'Artaxerxes'.
- 9 See, for instance: Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire; Testament*; Magdalino, 'Encyclopaedism'; Macrides and Magdalino, 'Fourth Kingdom'; Maguire, *Art and Eloquence*; Maguire, *Nectar and Illusion*; Berger, *Untersuchungen*; Rapp, *Holy bishops*; Rapp, *Brother-making*; Kaldellis, *Hellenism*; Kaldellis, *Byzantine Republic*; Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*; Angelov, *Byzantine Hellene*; Jouanno, 'Barbares'; Jouanno, 'Alexander the Great'; *Imitatio–Aemulatio–Variatio*.
- 10 See, for instance: Parry, 'Egypt in the Byzantine Imagination' (discussion of Byzantine memories of Egypt and Egyptian objects); Neville, 'Why Did the Byzantines Write History?' (references to biblical and classical figures and events in Byzantine historiography). Falcasantos, *Constantinople* (memory as a tool for creating a social group identity); Papalexandrou, 'Memory Culture' ('collecting'

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of textual objects of the ancient past). However, sometimes authors apply the term ‘cultural memory’ to the subjects relating to it indirectly only. For instance, the collective study *Memory and Oblivion in Byzantium* describes numerous individual cases in Byzantine textual and visual sources, which, however, relate rather to the perception of the past, but not cultural memory proper.

- 11 Shukurov, ‘Byzantium and Asia’.
- 12 Walker, *Exotic Elements*; 41–44, 144–164.
- 13 *Geoponika*, 1.20–2.3 (Proem, 4).
- 14 Németh, *Excerpta Constantiniana*.
- 15 For preliminary remarks on the issue of memory, see: Featherstone, ‘Seimeioseis Gnomikai’, 333, 335, 338.
- 16 Metochites, *Semeioseis gnomikai I*, 26–29 (II, 1).
- 17 Metochites, *Semeioseis gnomikai I*, 28–33 (II, 2–3).
- 18 Metochites, *Semeioseis gnomikai IV*, 34–39 (XCIII, 1–3); see also: Metochites, *Ἠθικός*, XII–XXIII.
- 19 Metochites, *Semeioseis gnomikai III*, 92–93 (LXVII, 16, 5) and also: Metochites, *Ἠθικός*, XXIII.36–40.
- 20 Metochites, *Semeioseis gnomikai I*, 26.17–20 (II, 1) and 32.5–13 (II, 3, 7); see also on the use of history as a repository of memory: Metochites, *Miscellanea*, 738–739, 748–749.
- 21 For instance, see: Metochites, *Semeioseis gnomikai II*, XLI and Metochites, *Poems*, 240–241 (Poem 11), 261–264 (Poem 13) — on longing for the past; Metochites, *Poems*, 99–100 (Poem 2), 253 (Poem 12)— on written texts and good deeds as a cause for person’s immortality; Bydén, *Metochites*, 302–303 — memory as a mind function.
- 22 Shukurov, ‘The Byzantine Concepts of Iran’.

# 1 Sacred Persia

The image of Persia in Byzantine Christianity was formed under the influence of biblical and pagan Greco-Roman traditions. Both traditions exhibited a significant interest in Persian civilisation, including its statesmanship, and intellectual and religious achievements. At the same time, a distinct religious perspective can be identified with motifs, concepts and ideas elaborated in the Jewish and Christian sacred scriptures, which influenced the formation of the Byzantine religion-oriented image of Persia. In this chapter, I will explore the role of Persia in the sacred history, or rather *metahistory*, of the relationship between God and humanity, as it was articulated by patristics and as it was adopted and, in some cases, reinterpreted later by Byzantine intellectuals. The religious concept of Persia, which emerged at the early stages of Christian theology, turned into a core element later in the Byzantine intellectual milieu, due to the paradigmatic status of patristics. The conservative nature of the church tradition ensured that the ‘Persian’ element remained unchanged in its fundamental essence throughout the ages.

Three reservations should be made in this connection. First, I will focus on exclusively Byzantine Greek-language Christianity, and minimise my delving into Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Coptic and other church traditions. My aim is to phenomenologically reconstruct the religious intellectual experience within the Byzantine Greek context, rather than undertaking any comparative or genetic study of specific theological themes or motifs. Second, I will approach theological, liturgical, ecclesiastical, hagiological and other related topics from exclusively sociological and anthropological standpoints, considering religious discourse as a specific kind of cultural expression. Third, due to the broad nature of the problem and the early stage of its inquiry, I will limit myself here to more or less sketchy outlines of particular aspects of the problem.

## 1.1 The Concept of the Old Testament

The Old Testament laid the foundation for key concepts that shaped the Christian perception of Persia and its role in the cosmic narrative of the relationship between the Creator and mankind.<sup>1</sup> Byzantine Christianity, in particular,



relied on and further developed the model ideas of the Jewish Bible to interpret the significance of Persia and the Persians in the sacred history of the world.<sup>2</sup>

The Old Testament provides ample evidence on the historical context of Media and Persia, which can be summarised as follows. The Persian empire succeeded the Babylonian empire and its founder, Cyrus II the Great (539–530 BCE), issued the famous decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild their Temple. However, the restoration of the Temple and the construction of Jerusalem dragged on for a few decades. Under Darius I the Great (521–486 BCE), the second Temple of Zorobabel was finally erected.<sup>3</sup> The Persian treasury and administration were ordered to return sacred vessels from the Temple seized by Nebuchadnezzar, pay the cost of the construction and supply the Temple with sacrificial animals.<sup>4</sup> Under Artaxerxes I (465–424 BCE), the construction works in the Temple were completed, Ezra reformed the Jewish state and Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> In the reign of Xerxes I (486–465 BCE), the well-known story of Esther unfolded, which is commemorated by the Jewish feast of Purim. The plot of the *Book of Tobit* portrays events occurring in the Median cities such as Ecbatana, Elam and Rhagae in the times of the Neo-Assyrian empire.<sup>6</sup> Apart from these, the Bible recounts more or less lengthy accounts of the Persian kings' deeds. Occasionally, it may have also referred to Persia in a purely geographical sense with no connection with the Persian state and people or may just have dated the events according to the years of a Persian king's reign.

The anthroponymic and toponymic references to Persia in the Septuagint are listed in Table 1.1. For brevity, I have omitted the names of the secondary characters, such as courtiers, officers and other individuals related to the Persian empire. Additionally, some biblical terms borrowed from Persian (especially in Esth.) have also been excluded.<sup>7</sup>

The evidence found in the Bible regarding Persia and the Persians played a significant role in forming the worldview of Byzantine Christianity in at least two senses. First, the 'Persian' themes found in the Old Testament played an important part in establishing connections between the biblical and Greco-Roman knowledge of the past and, therefore, in mapping and mutually justifying both heterogeneous traditions. As a result, there formed a sort of stereoscopic vision of the past in which differing lines in cultural memory complemented each other. Table 1.1 shows numerous intersections between the biblical and Greek versions of Persian history. Characters and geographical locations found in the Septuagint and Greco-Roman historiography and geography are marked with an asterisk (\*). The merging of the biblical and Greco-Roman historical memory started before Christianity and reached its zenith in the writings of Christian authors. These authors, in the course of establishing a general chronology of the world, endeavoured to identify and synchronise the events and characters of the Jewish sacred history in Greco-Roman contexts. The most significant contribution in this regard was made

Table 1.1 Media and Persia in the Bible

4 Rgns.	Αλαέ, Αβώρ, Γωζῶν (rivers or cities) of Medes: 17.6, 18.11
2 Suppl.	Κῦρος*: 36.22–23; Medes*: 36.20
I Esd.	Ἀραξέρξης*: 2.15–25, 7.4, 8; Δαρεῖος*: 2.25, 3–7; Ἐκβάτανα* (Ecbatana, city): 6.22; Κῦρος*: 2.1–14, 4.44, 4.57, 5.53, 5.68–70, 6.16–25, 7.4; Media*: 3.1, 3.14, 6.22; Persia/-ians*: 1.54, 3.1, 3.14, 5.53, 5.68, 7.4
II Esd.	Ἀμαθᾶ (Ecbatana, city): 6.2; Ἀρθασασθᾶ: 4.7–24, 6.14, 7, 8, 12.1, 15.14, 23.6; Ἀσουήρος: 4.6; Ἀφρασαῖοι (Persians): 4.9; Κῦρος*: 1, 3, 4.1–5, 5.13–17, 6.2–5, 6.14; Δαρεῖος*: 4.5, 4.24, 5.5–17, 6, 22.22; King of the Persians*: 1, 3.7, 4, 9.9; Medes*: 6.2
Esth.	Ἀραξέρξης*/Ἄσσυήρος: <i>passim</i> ; Medes*: <i>passim</i> ; Persia/-ians*: <i>passim</i> ; Σοῦσα* (Susa, city): <i>passim</i>
Idt.	Ἀραξῆαδ: 1.1–16; Ἐκβάτανα* (city): 1.1–16; Ἐλυμαῖοι*: 1.6; Medes*: 1.1, 16.10; Πεδίον Μέγα: 1.5; Persia/-ians*: 1.7, 16.10; Ῥαγαῦ* (Rhagae, city, region): 1.1–16
Tob.	Ἐκβάτανα* (city): 3.7 [GII, GI], 5.6 [GII], 6.6 [GI], 6.10 [GII], 7.1 [GII, GI], 14.12–14 [GII, GI]; Ἐλυμαῖς* (Elam, city): 2.10 [GII, GI]; Media*: <i>passim</i> ; Ῥαγαί/Ῥάγα* (Rhagae, city): 1.14 [GI], 4.1 [GII, GI], 4.20 [GII, GI], 5.5 [GI], 5.6 [GII], 6.10 [GI], 6.13 [GII, GI], 9 [GII, GI]
1 Makk.	Ἀρσάκης*: 14.2–3, 15.22; Δαρεῖος*: 1.1; Ἐλυμαῖς* (Elam, city): 6.1; Media/-es*: 1.1, 6.56, 8.8, 14.1–2; Persia/-ians*: 3.31, 6.1, 6.5, 6.56
2 Makk.	Ἐκβάτανα* (city): 9.3; King of the Persians*: 1.19–20, 1.33–35; Περσέπολις* (city): 9.2; Persia/-ians*: 1.13, 9.1–3*
4 Makk.	Persia/-ians*: 18.5
Hag.	Δαρεῖος*: 1.1, 2.1, 2.10
Zach.	Δαρεῖος*: 1.1, 1.7, 7.1
Esa.	Αἰλαμίται (Elamites): 11.11, 21.2, 22.6; Κῦρος*: 44.28, 45; Medes*: 13.17; Persia/-ians*: 21.2, 49.12
Ier.	Kings of Αἰλάμ (Elam): 32.11(25); King of the Medes*: 28.11, 28.28; King of the Persians*: 32.11(25)
Iezek.	Persia/-ians*: 27.10, 30.5, 38.5
Dan.	Ἀσουήρος: 9.1 [TH]; Δαρεῖος (the Mede): 5.31(6.1) [TH], 6.1–28, 9.1; King of the Medes and Persians*: 8.20; Κῦρος*: 1.21, 6.28, 10.1, 11.1; Ξέρξης*: 5.31(6.1) [OG], 9.1 [OG]; Media/-es*: 5.28–31, 6.8 [TH], 6.12, 6.15 [TH], 9.1; Persia/-ians*: 5.28–30, 6.8 [TH], 6.12, 6.15 [TH], 10.13, 10.20, 11.2–4; Σοῦσα* (city): 8.2
Bel.	Ἀστυάγης*: 1.1 [TH]; Κῦρος*: 1.1 [TH]

by Julius Africanus (d. ca 240), Eusebios of Caesarea (d. 339) and George Synkellos (d. after 810).<sup>8</sup> Evidently, these scholars established a chronological framework based on the biblical practice of dating by the reign of the Persian kings. This approach influenced George Synkellos's and Theophanes the Confessor's (d. 818) chronological references, who kept track of time, in particular, according to the years of the Persian kings' reign.<sup>9</sup> Christian universal chronography accumulated and systematised all the textual information about ancient Persia known to the Jews and Greeks, merging it into a single historical discourse. This laid a firm foundation for the modern scholarly history of the Achaemenids and Parthians.

Second, a crucial aspect in forming specific features of Byzantine cultural memory was the Old Testament depiction of an utterly complimentary image of the Persian empire. Remarkably, it emphasised the piety inherent in many deeds of the Persian kings who acted according to God's will. The *Book of Isaiah* expressed the favourable stance of the Bible towards the Persians in the most manifest form: [God] 'tells Cyrus to be wise (φρονεῖν) and says, "He shall carry out all my wishes"' (Esa. 44, 28–29) and

Thus says the Lord God to my anointed (χριστός), Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped so that nations will obey before him, and I will break through the strength of kings; I will open doors before him and cities shall not be closed: 2. I will go before you and level mountains; I will break in pieces doors of bronze and break off bars of iron, 3. and I will give you dark treasures; hidden, unseen ones I will open for you so that you may know that I am the Lord God, the God of Israel, who calls your name.

(Esa. 45.1–3)

These passages from the Old Testament were not overlooked by the church fathers and the later Byzantine tradition. King Cyrus, having known these prophecies of Isaiah, rejoiced much and acknowledged the God of the Jews as the True God and glorified Him; Cyrus was called χριστός here because he was anointed to kingship by God. As a very pious man, he diligently heeded God's commandments: overthrowing the Babylonian empire, ending the Babylonian captivity of the Jews and erecting the Temple.<sup>10</sup> In the later Byzantine historiography, starting with John Malalas (d. 570s), it was believed that Prophet Daniel revealed the prophecy of Isaiah to Cyrus; having heard the oracle, the Persian king fell at the feet of Daniel and promised to liberate the nation of Israel.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike the Greco-Roman tradition, which quite often noted negative 'barbarian' traits in Persian national character, the Old Testament exhibited exclusively sympathetic and even obsequious portrayals of the kings of Persia. At the same time, the positive image of Persia in the Bible matched well, supported and justified Greco-Roman admiration for the Persian statesmanship, wealth and wisdom.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the Bible strengthened the positive features within the Greco-Roman perception of Persia.<sup>13</sup> The resulting hybrid *topoi* contributed to the formation of basic structural elements for the subsequent interpretations of the metaphysical role of Persia in cosmic drama, which were and still are relevant (in a somewhat latent form) in Orthodox Christianity.<sup>14</sup> Such hybrid Byzantine discourses will be further discussed in this and the next chapters.

The biblical and Greco-Roman fusion had some indirect and less immediate consequences. The Byzantine ethnogeography, enriched by the Bible (Gen. 10–11; 1 Suppl. 1–27), obtained new knowledge about the roots of the Medes and Persians. The Tower of Babel story (Gen. 11) serves as the

starting point, producing several basic concepts in later Christian tradition.<sup>15</sup> Mankind were assumed to be descendants of Noah, and they attempted to build the Tower. In the subsequent event, God intervened by creating confusion in their language, resulting in a split up of people into diverse nations. The lists of nations and languages, which appeared after the Tower of Babel's time, comprised 70 or 72 or more languages; such lists first appeared in Christian writings from the third century, including the works by Hippolytus of Rome and amply circulated in the Byzantine tradition.<sup>16</sup> The number 70 or 72, representing the count of Noah's sons and grandsons, was apparently taken from Haggadic or Talmudic literature, while the ethno-linguistic content of the lists was formed under the profound influence of Greek and Roman culture. Within the Byzantine tradition, such lists were called *διαμερισμός* (meaning 'partition').<sup>17</sup> John of Damascus (d. before 754), as it seems, believed that the formation of multiple nations followed the linguistic division.<sup>18</sup> However, Patriarch Nikephoros I (ca 758–828) insisted that the languages appeared according to the emergence of the number of peoples after the Babel cataclysm, rather than the other way around. According to him, nations did not appear according to the number of languages.<sup>19</sup>

According to these lists, it was Shem, one of Noah's sons, who served as the ancestor of all the 'Eastern' peoples, including Persians, Bactrians, Indians and more. However, there are varying opinions among exegetes on some genealogical connections. For instance, Hippolytus of Rome believed that Madai, the son of Japheth (Gen. 10.2), was the progenitor of the Medes, while he identified the Persians as descendants of Put, whom he considered the fifth son of Shem.<sup>20</sup> Prokopios of Gaza (d. ca 528), George Hamartolos (mid-ninth century) and others shared Hippolytus's conviction concerning Madai and Medes, therefore suggesting that the latter originated from Japheth.<sup>21</sup> However, for *Chronicon paschale* (seventh century), Madai was the ancestor of the Britons, while the Medes and Persians descended from Shem's son Lud.<sup>22</sup> The belief that Medes' descended from Shem was supported by other historians such as John Malalas and George Synkellos.<sup>23</sup>

Another genealogical link was inferred by Eustathios of Antioch (fourth century). He accepted the derivation of the Medes from Madai/Adai, but pointed out that Elam, the eldest son of Shem, was the ancestor of the Elamites who 'are now the Persians',<sup>24</sup> thus equating the Elamites and Persians (which is quite understandable because of the prevalence of locative criterion in ethnic classifications of the time).<sup>25</sup>

In later tradition, unlike Hippolytus, Put was regarded as the son of Ham and the ancestor of the Libyans and Troglodytes, therefore having no connections with Persians. A Pseudo-Clementine account suggested the Hamitic origin of the Persians from Ham's son Mizraim, along with the Egyptians and Babylonians. However, this tradition lacked support from later authors.<sup>26</sup> Commonly, the Persians were believed to have been 'Semitic' people along with the Jews, Chaldeans and Syrians (Arameans). The classification of the

Medes fluctuated between ‘Semitic’ and ‘Japhetic’ identities, as sometimes they are typologically divorced from the Persians.

As another far-reaching consequence, Christian thinkers, drawing on apocalyptic references in Dan. 2 and 7 and other related biblical passages, put forward a division of history into periods corresponding to the Four terrestrial kingdoms. These kingdoms were identified as the Assyrians, Medes and Persians (or the Persians alone), Greeks (or Macedonians) and Romans, and they successively followed each other until the establishment of the fifth and the last eschatological kingdom of Christ. The destiny of this historiosophic model serves as an example demonstrating the interrelation between the biblical and Greco-Roman legacies in Christian contexts. Christian authors adopted the concept of the Four Kingdoms from the Greco-Roman pagan tradition, which had its roots in Near Eastern historiosophy and likely had an Iranian origin. The idea was developed during late Hellenistic and early Roman times. Daniel’s reference to successive universal kingdoms (Dan. 2) provided credibility to this concept for Christian thinkers.<sup>27</sup> According to the Four-kingdom schema, the imperial Achaemenid Persia was endowed with an important role in sacred history. It was seen as a significant step for mankind on the path to knowing and accepting Christ.

God was patient towards and guided the Persian kings, whom He views as His elects, despite their being considered ‘infidels’. A curious insight was put forward by John Chrysostom (d. 407) explaining, so to speak, a mechanism of interaction between God and the Persians. Chrysostom, interpreting Dan. 10:12–13, formulates a scheme that sheds light on this relationship. According to his interpretation, every nation has its guiding angel because God has distributed the countries of the universe among His angels. These angels are deeply affected by impiety, idolatry, ignorance and crimes of the nations they oversee. This point has become evident in the case of Daniel who was informed by the archangel Gabriel that the unnamed angel of the Persians confronted Gabriel for 21 days. It was with the help of the archangel Michael only he succeeded in persuading the angel of Persia to let the Jews go back to their homeland. The angel of Persia rejoiced seeing how the Jews made God known in Persia and grieved that, on the departure of the Jews, impiety would prevail in Persia.<sup>28</sup> In the ninth century, Photios, who was preoccupied with the Four-kingdom schema and the role of ancient Persia in it, showed interest in Chrysostom’s exegesis and reproduced it in his works *Myriobiblos* and *Amphilochia*.<sup>29</sup> In the eleventh century, Michael Psellos (or rather probably Pseudo-Psellos) believed that every nation had patron angels, implying that the angels spoke their respective people’s language.<sup>30</sup>

## 1.2 The Identity of the Magi

The metahistorical significance of Persia was further substantiated in the exegetics of the New Testament. The Persians were the first among mankind who learned about the Messiah’s nativity in Judaea and among the first who

adored him. According to Matthew (2:1–12), during the reign of Herod the Great (37–4 BC), the king of Judaea, some Magi (μάγοι) from the east (ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν) came to Jerusalem to worship the newborn king of the Jews. They saw His star on the rise (or ‘in the east’, ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ). King Herod, having heard this, was disturbed; he was told by chief priests and teachers of the law that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem in Judaea. Herod, first having learned from the Magi about the time the star had appeared, sent them to Bethlehem and asked them to let him know when they found the Child. The Magi went to Bethlehem and found the house due to the star that stopped over the place where Jesus was born. The Magi, having seen the Child and His mother Mary, threw themselves down and prostrated before Him (πεσόντες προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ). Then they presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, the Magi returned to their lands by another route.<sup>31</sup>

Since Johannes Kepler at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Matthew’s pericope has sparked an immense scholarly literature, with secular and religion-oriented historians and astronomers contributing hundreds of books and articles to the discussion.<sup>32</sup> The longstanding debate over the historicity of this passage has not subsided to this day. In brief, there are two interconnected aspects: (a) the problem of astronomical interpretation, that is, the type and chronology of the celestial phenomenon, described by Matthew, such as a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, a comet, a nova and so on, and (b) the problem of contextualising the account in the political, cultural and religious landscape of the Near East, as well as the pericope’s possible intertextual links and dependencies.<sup>33</sup> On the one hand, Matthew’s story is quite complicated by its plot, the number and nature of events and actors; however, on the other hand, the information is formulated succinctly, ambivalently and vaguely. This provides grounds for mutually exclusive interpretations of the supporters and opponents of the pericope’s historicity. For the current state of research, the historicity of Matt. 2:1–12 cannot be proved and cannot be disproved. Its enigma can only be solved if some new evidence is discovered supplementing and clarifying the pericope’s data.

I evade questions of historical credibility of Matthew’s pericope and its theological significance – the subjects are beyond the thematic scope of my study – and focus exclusively on its ‘Persian’ component as it was represented and interpreted by the Byzantine tradition. Matthew does not indicate explicitly the ethnic and cultural provenance of the Magi limiting himself to the reference to their origin from the East (ἀνατολαί). However, evidently, Matthew himself and his contemporary audience understood under μάγοι the Persian or, more precisely, Parthian priests.<sup>34</sup>

The term μάγος was commonly used in Greco-Roman writings since at least the sixth century BCE. Μάγος is derived from the Old Persian word *magu[š]* that survives in Middle Persian as *mog/mag* and in New Persian as *مغ mugh/magh*, meaning ‘Zoroastrian, Zoroastrian priest or teacher’.<sup>35</sup> In Greek literature of Classical and Hellenistic times starting with the fifth

century BCE, *μάγοι* were described as a college of priests that emerged during the Achaemenid empire and was established by Cyrus the Great. They were referred to as an esoteric community who observed the rites, performed sacrifices, conducted burial rituals, practised divination, interpreted dreams, provided healing and possessed a special kind of wisdom. Later on, *μάγοι* were known as king-makers at the Persian royal courts and were considered expert astrologers being closely associated with the Chaldeans.<sup>36</sup> Greek intellectuals during Classical times, and especially in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, had first-hand information on the Persian *magi* maintaining varied contacts with them. During Seleucid and Parthian times, these contacts were intensified due to the Hellenisation of the Middle East and especially Mesopotamia, where Greeks were assimilated to varying degrees with the local Syrians and Iranians.<sup>37</sup>

There existed also a 'non-terminological' rather vernacular usage of *μάγος*. In a derogatory sense, it could be used to refer to a 'wizard, enchanter, witch, quack, impostor'. The usage was first attested in the sixth century BCE. While the pejorative sense antedates its 'terminological' meaning of Persian priest in the written sources, this difference in meaning can barely be interpreted as the result of some evolution of the word's semantics, but rather as evidence of the lacunose survival of Greek literary heritage that has come down to us. As it seems, both meanings appeared approximately at the same time and coexisted throughout centuries circulating in differing discursive and thematic layers.<sup>38</sup> In its non-terminological sense, *μάγος* is used in the Septuagint *Book of Daniel* (1:20, 2:2, etc.) as a translation for the Hebrew *אֲשַׁפָּן* 'aššāp 'wizard, sorcerer'; in a similar sense, the word is found also in Acts 8:9, 11, and 13:6, 8.<sup>39</sup>

The problem of the ethnic identity of Matthew's Magi was raised by Christian exegetes quite early.<sup>40</sup> Major theological schools of the Greek-speaking Orthodox East, such as Alexandria, Cappadocia, Antioch, Nisibis and Edessa, agreed that the Magi were Persians. The earliest known interpretation of the evangelic Magi as Persian wise men can be attributed to Clement of Alexandria (d. ca 215). In his *Stromata*, Clement discusses the contribution of the barbarians to Greco-Roman spirituality and culture and, in particular, refers to 'the Magi of the Persians who by [their] magical science announced the Saviour's birth before all others and, guided by a star, arrived in the land of Judaea'.<sup>41</sup> Origen (d. ca 254), who succeeded Clement in the Catechetical School of Alexandria, refers to 'the scholars among the Magi of the Persians' and ridicules Celsus for not distinguishing the Persian Magi from the Chaldeans in his commentaries on Matt. 2:1–12.<sup>42</sup> Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) also supports the Persian identity of the Magi.<sup>43</sup> He appears to be aware of their variant identity as coming from Arabia that circulated among some scholars, but did not share this opinion. The earliest references to Arabia in this context can be found in the writings of the Western theologians Justin Martyr in Rome (d. ca 165) and Tertullian in Carthage (d. ca 220); similarly in the East, Epiphanius of Salamis (d. 403)

believed that the Magi were Arabians, for they were descendants of Keturah, Abraham's concubine and wife.<sup>44</sup> Cyril of Alexandria remarks that the gifts of the Magi were the fulfilment of the Psalms' reference (71.15) to 'the gold of Arabia' to be presented to the Messiah. Cyril explains that the Psalmist 'calls "Arabia" here the country of the Persians', resolving thus the contradiction between the Old Testament's topographical reference and the assumed Persian identity of the Magi.<sup>45</sup> Cyril's interpretation passed to the later exegetical tradition and, for instance, was repeated by Prokopios of Gaza (d. ca 528), who remarked that 'Now "Arabia" signifies the land of the Persians'.<sup>46</sup>

In Cappadocia, Basil of Caesarea (d. 379) details that 'the Magi are a Persian people devoting themselves to divinations, incantations and some natural antidotes, and being engaged in observing celestial phenomena'.<sup>47</sup> Eusebios of Caesarea, very likely, also supported the idea of the Persian provenance: at least a Syriac text ascribed to him maintains that the Magi were equipped and sent by the Persian king.<sup>48</sup>

In Antioch, John Chrysostom more than once highlights that Jesus Christ, having been born in Bethlehem, first was made manifest in Persia (ἐν Περσίδι ἐφάνη) where the star appeared. The Persian Magi learnt about the Nativity before all other people including Jews;<sup>49</sup> the Jews 'learn first from the Persian speech what they have refused to learn from the prophets'.<sup>50</sup> In Nisibis and Edessa, Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373) shared the belief in the Persian origin of the Magi indicating that it was God who 'drew the Magi from Persia for obeisance' to the Infant.<sup>51</sup>

The early Christian East was unanimous as to the Persian provenance of the Magi and this conviction, therefore, was inherited by the later Byzantine tradition. The association of the Magi with Persia and Persians was not limited to 'professional' theological literature, but was prevalent across all genres. John Malalas, who believed that the Magi possessed some mystic knowledge about the Nativity, however, somewhat 'politicised' the account suggesting that they came to Judaea as Persian spies.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, in the mid-sixth century, Kosmas Indikopleustes argued that the Persian empire of his time gained distinction due to the Magi, because of their prostrating before Jesus Christ.<sup>53</sup> Constantine of Rhodes, a tenth-century poet, described the decoration of the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, mentioning that the depicted Magi were hastening from Persia.<sup>54</sup> Manuel Philes, a popular poet in Constantinople in the first half of the fourteenth century, also recognised that the Magi were Persians coming from Persia and Babylon.<sup>55</sup>

The mainstream Byzantine tradition did not problematise specifically the questions of the Magi's number and names. However, following the influence of Origen, John of Damascus believed that they were three Magi,<sup>56</sup> which is also reflected in the Byzantine iconography of the Adoration depicting the Magi as three wise men.<sup>57</sup> The names associated with the Magi in the West, such as Balthasar, Melchior and Caspar, or those known to the Syriac, Armenian and Coptic traditions were not commonly recognised in Byzantium, although occasionally some authors referred to these names.<sup>58</sup>



The identification of the Magi as kings, common in the Western tradition, was not commonly accepted in Byzantium. Usually, Byzantines described the Magi as Persian astrologers and philosophers, or righteous men, or priests.<sup>59</sup> John of Damascus referred to them as the Persian ‘astronomer-kings’ and ‘magi-kings’ in the sense of ‘chief’ astronomers and magi under the sway of the Persian king.<sup>60</sup>

### 1.3 The Star and Chaldean Wisdom

Curiously, however, the established and commonly acknowledged Persian provenance did not exclude the Magi’s Chaldean identity despite Origen’s harsh contradistinction of these two, as noted earlier. For instance, Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 390) described the Magi as Chaldean astrologers, who were familiar with the Jewish prophetic tradition.<sup>61</sup> This highlights the overlap between Persian and Chaldean identities in the understanding of the Magi.

A notable example that further demonstrates this is found in the acts of the Ephesus Ecumenical Council (431). One of its documents refers to ‘μάγοι ἐκ Περσίδος’, while Theodotos of Ankyra (d. 446) in his homilies delivered during the Council, speaks of their coming from Chaldea and being Chaldean astrologers.<sup>62</sup> Evidently, the difference between Persian and Chaldean provenance of the Magi did not seem particularly important for church authors in the Orthodox East who followed the late Hellenistic and Roman tradition that associated Persian wisdom with Chaldean science.<sup>63</sup>

There was one more important exegetical aspect, which supported the notional link of the Magi with Chaldea. Early church authors developed the idea that the incarnation was a phenomenon beyond the laws of physical nature and, therefore, could not be predicted by genethliological means that dealt with natural objects only. Therefore, the Bethlehem star was considered a supernatural object, a divine miracle, and by itself could not give grounds for any genethliac prognosis.<sup>64</sup> The idea of the star’s being an unnatural object was especially explicitly expounded by John Chrysostom; his arguments were accepted as standard in the later Byzantine tradition and, in particular, were closely reproduced by Euthymios Zigabenos in the twelfth century. There were four aspects of the Bethlehem star that made it unlike physical stars: (1) the star moved from the north to the south (from Persia to Palestine); (2) it was too bright being seen even in daytime; (3) the star appeared and disappeared unnaturally as if having reason and will; and (4) the star was too close to the earth’s surface (otherwise it would not indicate an exact place in Bethlehem).<sup>65</sup>

From this basic premise that the star was a supernatural phenomenon, the church fathers criticised astrology and magic practices, highlighting the inability of physical science to deal with God’s omnipotence. They argued that the laws of nature are unable to predetermine God’s absolute freedom. On the other hand, as Origen noted (*Contra Celsum*, LX), God’s incarnation challenged the power of demons, which were the focus of pagan ritualistic

and magical manipulations. Another strong argument was that astrology falsely deprived the human soul of its innate free will. Although the noted criticism did not always imply the denial of astrology and magic's ability to resolve physical matters, most authors, including Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, Eusebios of Caesarea and others, joined the conceptual denouncement of astrology as a pseudo-science.<sup>66</sup> As we will explore in Section 1.6, the doubts about the epistemological foundations of astrology were strengthened by empirical evidence derived, in particular, through the rapid Christianisation of Sasanian Iran.

The Bethlehem star, rather than being interpreted astrologically, signalled to the Magi the birth of the Infant through their awareness about prophecies that associated the appearance of such a kind of luminary with the advent of the King and Messiah. It was believed, starting with Origen (*Contra Celsum*, LIX), that the Magi knew the Star Oracle of Balaam the Chaldean (Num. 24:15–17) and, having correctly interpreted that extraordinary celestial phenomenon, went to Judaea looking for the newborn King. It became possible because the Magi were the descendants of Balaam whether physically or by traditional instruction. John of Damascus referred to them as 'Balaam's descendants (ἀπόγονοί)' who, having seen the star, 'recalled the prophecy of Balaam'.<sup>67</sup> The idea of the Magi's Persian origin and, at the same time, their intellectual and spiritual succession from Balaam were also adopted in liturgical hymnography, being included in the series of *canons* chanted in December in connection with the Nativity.<sup>68</sup> The semantic link between Matt. 2:1–12 and Num. 24:15–17 is twofold: both cases speak of a star indicating the Messiah; in both cases, the main prophesying actors are pagan barbarians.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the pagan prophet Balaam instructed the pagan Magi about the future nativity of the Lord.<sup>70</sup>

#### 1.4 A Historiosophy of the Magi

The Byzantines recognised the Magi as Persians and this understanding remained with them throughout their history. Byzantine religious thought fully adopted the interpretations of Matthew's pericope by Orthodox Greek patrology. Of course, the dogmatic concept of the Magi did not principally change in later theology. However, Byzantine authors may have elaborated the canonical interpretations by exploring new aspects or placing the topic into new contexts. In the following sections, I will discuss two examples of how the later Byzantine tradition revisited the theme of the Magi.

The first example involves further elaboration of the historiosophical significance of the Magi's precedent. The early exegetes interpreted the identity of the Magi as barbarian and pagan in two ways, which supplemented the metahistorical exegesis of the Old Testament (see Section 1.1). First, the Magi's barbarian provenance was understood in a universal sense as an indication that Jesus came as a saviour to all mankind. From then on, the entire universe became part of Israel and the Persian Magi personified all the

gentiles. As Cyril of Alexandria put it, ‘those who are called [to God] have become more in number and have been gathered from all lands beneath the heavens’.<sup>71</sup> Second, the pagan faith of the Persian Magi was invested with an anti-Judaic and anti-Jewish significance. This was because the Jews became unworthy in the eyes of the Creator as they failed to recognise the Messiah. In the words of Chrysostom, ‘the Magi followed just the leading star, while the Jews did not believe [even] the instructing prophets’.<sup>72</sup>

Patriarch Photios (ca. 810 – after 893) introduced a new, more detailed historiosophic reading regarding the origin of the Magi. In his short treatise titled ‘Why did the Magi come first to the Lord’s birth from the East and from the Persians and not from any other land or nation?’<sup>73</sup> Photios supplemented the existing exegetical tradition by shifting the focus to factual historical aspects. He examined the ethnic and political affiliation of the Magi and showed that the only possible identity for them could have been Persian. His interpretations clearly manifest his fascination for historical analytics and systematisation. His first argument, in terms of traditional exegetics, can be qualified as a kind of ‘historical’ exegesis (ιστορία), or – in our terms – as a politological argument. Photios employed the historiosophic schema of the Four universal kingdoms (Assyrian, Persian, Greek and Roman). He argued that the Psalm’s prophecy ‘the kings of the Arabians and Saba shall offer gifts’ (Ps. 71.10) was fulfilled by the Persians because they conquered these lands. The imperial power (βασίλεια) first passed from the Egyptians to the Assyrians and from the latter to the Persians. During that period, the Persian kings held supremacy on earth. Hence, it was reasonable for those having leadership at that time to prostrate before and to present gifts to the only and eternal King, Jesus, the True God. As rulers of nearly the entire world, the Persians acknowledged the newborn king as a Master and Lord of all leaders (lines 3–15).

Exegetically, Photios’s second argument is ‘typological’;<sup>74</sup> in our terms, it may be described as ‘comparative historical’. Abraham, the first who preached θεογνωσίαν, meaning the knowledge of the True God, began his activity after coming out from the land of the Chaldeans. Similarly, the Persians, achieving θεογνωσίαν before all others, hurried from the very same land to bow to the Saviour, when it became evident that the True God then and now was in action and, nowadays, He had come to this world (lines 16–21).

Photios’s final argument is also ‘typological’ in traditional terms as it connects the Magi story with 1 Esd. 1–8 and 2 Esd.1. What Photios formulated here can be described as a ‘historical justice’ conception. According to Photios, the Persians, as heirs of the Assyrian empire, were paying reparation to Israel for all the destructions and plunders the Assyrians had made. All seized wealth, including spoils and collected taxes from the subjects, were in the Persian possession. God led the Persians to prostrate before the King of Israel, Jesus, to bring gold as a restitution for material losses, frankincense for compensating stopped sacrifices and myrrh for healing former destructions, as myrrh was used as a glue to bind the broken and for rebuilding the

Temple (i.e., the Church of God).<sup>75</sup> The Persians were the first among the gentiles who acknowledged Israel (i.e., Christian New Israel) as their lord politically and spiritually (lines 22–52).

To sum up, Photios did not contradict the traditional canonical exegesis of Matthew's pericope, but rather placed it into a much broader historical context by linking it with the idea of a special metahistorical status of the Persian empire. Photios remarkably shifted the focus from the Persian kingship to the Persians as a nation who heeded God's commandments to assist and exalt both Old and New Israel. In his elaboration of the Four-kingdom concept, he added some important factual historical precisions such as indicating Egypt as a predecessor of Assyria. All in all, the originality of Photios's reading of the story of the Magi lies in the special interpretive focus of a professional historian, attentive to factual details and prone to historical generalisations.

### 1.5 A Polemical Device

The second example explores an interesting expansion of the theological use of the Magi motif. Quite curiously, in the fourteenth century, the Persian identity of the Magi became instrumental in Christian polemics against contemporary Muslim Persians.<sup>76</sup> Before 1370, John Kantakouzenos focussed on the Magi account and related themes in his anti-Muslim work *Apologiae*, which was an answer to the anti-Christian letter of the Muslim theologian Shams al-Dīn, a Persian from Isfahān who dwelled at the time in the court of a certain Anatolian emir (possibly an Ottoman). The polemical letter of Isfahānī was addressed to the monk Meletios the Achaemenid, a Christian convert who was close to John Kantakouzenos. Kantakouzenos, in response, with a view to proving the godhead of Christ, discussed in great detail a number of dogmatic issues associated with the arrival of the Magi in Palestine, their veneration of Christ and their acknowledging the divine and human natures of Jesus. He emphasised the Persian origin of the Magi and their coming from Persia, describing them as 'being not commoners but leaders and governors' (ἀυθένται καὶ τοπάρχαι). Theologically, Kantakouzenos's interpretation remained within the framework of traditional Byzantine exegesis, relying mostly on John Chrysostom. However, his extensive use of the Magi motif specifically as a device in developing an anti-Islamic discourse was quite original and novel.<sup>77</sup>

Taking into account Kantakouzenos's keen interest in Anatolian Persian culture (see Chapter 7) and the Persian origins of his Muslim antagonist Shams al-Dīn and his Christian client Meletios, it is plausible that Kantakouzenos's focus on the Persian Magi was not coincidental. It is possible that he intended to effectively refute the misconceptions held by one Persian and to provide spiritual support to the other one by invoking the past religious experience of their own nation.<sup>78</sup> Kantakouzenos may have been aware of the Persian occupation of Bethlehem in 614, where the mosaic image of the

Persian Magi on the façade of the Nativity church prevented the Persian soldiers from doing any harm to the house of prayer ‘out of reverence and love for their forefathers’.<sup>79</sup>

The use of the Magi’s story in anti-Islamic polemics shows how new circumstances may have prompted a Byzantine thinker to seek new applications for traditional concepts, thereby, leading to further elaboration and re-emphasis of these ideas.

### 1.6 Early Evangelisation of Parthia

The Persian Magi were the first to learn about the Nativity, and they were the first to bring the news about the Messiah and incarnated God and His mother Mary from Bethlehem to the gentiles, thus anticipating the subsequent Christianisation of Parthia.<sup>80</sup> Andrew of Crete (d. 740), in his famous Great Canon (the first week of Great Lent, Monday), proclaims ‘Χριστὸς Μάγουσ ἔσωσε’, meaning ‘Christ saved the Magi’.<sup>81</sup> Akakios Sabaites (d. after 1204) understands the Great Canon in the sense that the Persians, through the Magi, became believers in Christ.<sup>82</sup> Also, in the tenth century, Symeon Logothete argues that the Magi, prostrating themselves before Christ, were the first among pagans who ‘glorified the name of gentiles’, implying, as it seems, their embracing Christianity.<sup>83</sup> John Chrysostom defines the Magi as ‘teachers’ sent by God with a mission to the Persian land.<sup>84</sup> The idea of the Magi’s missionary function was included in the catena commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew, in particular, in the section ‘Περὶ τῶν μάγων’ found in an eleventh-century manuscript (cod. Paris, Coislin 23).<sup>85</sup> The Byzantine tradition adopted some apocryphal details of the Magi’s activity on their return home, which were borrowed, in particular, from the *Story of Aphroditianos* (see Chapter 2): the Magi heralded the coming of the Messiah and God’s incarnation, and they also brought the first icon of Jesus and Mary to Persia. As Photios later summarised, Christ ‘sanctified Babylon through the Magi who had come to prostrate before Him’.<sup>86</sup> In the Syriac tradition, the apostolising function of the Magi on their return to Persia was conceptualised and elaborated even more emphatically.<sup>87</sup>

Further on, according to Acts 2:7–13, during the Pentecost glossolalia, the apostles spoke the languages of the Parthians, Medes and Elamites, which were understood by their native speakers present there. Many of those who witnessed the glossolalia finally adopted Christianity (Acts 2:41). The languages of the Parthians, Medes and Elamites may all have implied just the Parthian language or, along with Parthian, some other local languages of the Arsakid empire. This Iranian-speaking audience most likely were Parthian Jews who stayed in Jerusalem at the time of the Pentecost (Acts 2:5–6). In fact, according to contemporary scholarship, one of the driving forces behind evangelising Iran was probably the local Judaic communities that adopted Christianity.<sup>88</sup> However, John Chrysostom assumes that the apostles spoke the Parthian language (Παρθιστί) and interprets the pericope in Acts as

an allusion to all mankind that was represented here by pagan and hostile gentiles, such as Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Indians and others, who heeded the Christian message.<sup>89</sup> At the turn of the twelfth century, Theophylaktos of Ohrid argues that the apostles spoke Persian (γλώσση Περσῶν) among other languages, thus generalising the individual languages of the Parthians, Medes and Elamites into one definition.<sup>90</sup>

Further dissemination of the Christian truth was due to the missionary activity of the apostles. According to the early church tradition, five apostles were credited with the evangelisation of Parthia (Persia): Bartholomew, Matthew, Simon the Zealot, Judas Thaddaeus and Thomas Didymus. Christelle and Florence Jullien recently clarified the complex and intricate tradition concerning the apostolic missions in Persia.<sup>91</sup> As the Julliens show, differing lingua-cultural traditions, such as Greek, Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Coptic and Arabic, represented various versions of the apostles' activity in Parthia, who may have acted independently or in combination with each other. The Syriac tradition, in addition, refers to three other names from the Apostles of the Seventy being active in Persia: Addai, Aggai and Māri.<sup>92</sup>

In later Byzantine times, the prevailing conviction was that the apostle Thomas played a significant role in evangelising Persia (Parthia, Media, Karamania). It was probably mostly due to Origen's and Eusebios's indication that the land of the Parthians was assigned to Thomas through casting lots by the apostles.<sup>93</sup> The Greek tradition relating to St Thomas is extensive and still awaits systematic study. It consists of the earliest canonical and extracanonical texts, including the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*; rich hagiographical tradition consisting of actae, martyria, vitae, homilies, laudations and orations; and liturgical texts circulated throughout the Byzantine time. In addition, references to St Thomas can be found scattered in the diverse church and lay genres of late Antique patristic and Byzantine literature, reflecting different ecclesiastical and cultural perspectives.<sup>94</sup> Paradoxically enough, despite Thomas's repeated association with Persia in diverse genres including liturgical texts, the factual circumstances of his activity in the Iranian lands were never specified.<sup>95</sup> It stands in contrast to the detailed and colourful narrations of his mission in India.<sup>96</sup>

At the same time, occasional traces of intricate early traditions regarding the apostolic missionary destinations, which never were systematised by the Byzantine intellectuals, survived throughout the Byzantine era. These remnants were kept alive through the ongoing circulation of popular antique texts. There are occasional mentions of Apostle Matthew preaching in Persia, with his place of death indicated as 'Hierapolis of Parthia'.<sup>97</sup> According to the apostles' list from the Chronicle of Pseudo-Symeon Logothete (tenth century), St Bartholomew was crucified in Parthia.<sup>98</sup> Nikolaos Mesarites, at the turn of the thirteenth century, describing the Constantinopolitan Church of the Apostles, noted the mosaic representation of St Simon as the apostle to the 'Saracens and Persians', which probably was produced sometime

between the ninth and the mid-twelfth century.<sup>99</sup> A certain ambiguity in the apostles' missionary destinations and the apostolic missions in Parthia was inherited from the Byzantines by the modern Orthodox tradition.<sup>100</sup>

In any case, the early Christianisation of Persia offered a strong argument against the credibility of astrology as an epistemological tool and supported the anti-astrological discourse (see Section 1.3). In the ninth century CE, Photios favourably reproduces the elaborated argumentation of Diodoros of Tarsus (d. ca 394) in his work *Against Astronomers and Astrologers and Fate*. Diodoros, also taking into account the spread of Christianity in the early Sasanian empire (see Chapter 3), argues that the claims of astrologers that the stars predetermine the way of life, laws and customs of nations, for instance those of the Persians, the Iberians, the Lazes and the Romans, are false. This is evident because all these peoples have adopted the same Christian truth, despite their diverse geographical location and their diverse dependences on celestial bodies.<sup>101</sup> Thus, theologically, the ongoing spread of Christianity in Persia provided an important 'empirical' justification of the omnipotence of God's will and power over the world and humankind.

### 1.7 The Adverse Persians

The image of biblical and evangelical Persia in the Greek patristic and the later Byzantine tradition was chiefly positive. However, it is important to acknowledge that this image also had some significant negative connotations, which were associated with Persian religiosity and 'national character'. In Chapter 2, I shall discuss in more detail some scanty signs of controversy between Christianity and Mithraism. However, Mithraism, being par excellence a religion of mysteries, produced no dogmatic theology in the proper sense and, in particular for that reason, could hardly have become the target of systematic criticism by Christian polemicists.

Zoroastrianism, the national religion of pre-Islamic Iran, received little attention from church thinkers due to its geographical remoteness and minor impact on religious controversy in the Greek and Latin-speaking parts of the empire. However, some polemical refutations of Zoroastrianism were available, such as an anti-Zoroastrian tract by the bishop of Mopsuestia Theodore of Antioch (c. 350–428). Especially, Theodore's work is remarkable for referring to the primordial creator deity Zurvan (Ζουρουάμ).<sup>102</sup> Some attention was paid also to the Zoroastrian or related Iranian cult in contemporary Cappadocia by St Basil in 377. In his epistle to Epiphanius of Salamis, Basil informed about the local *Magousaeen* people (τῶν Μαγουσαίων ἔθνος), who were fire-worshippers, slaughtered animals through the hands of others, practised 'lawless marriages' (i.e., incestuous ones) and originated from a certain Ζαρνοῦας (Zurvan?).<sup>103</sup>

Unlike Mithraism and Zoroastrianism, the religion of Mani elaborated a detailed theology and ecclesiology. After its emergence into the Roman empire in the late third century, it was rebuffed by

many influential authors of the Roman empire.<sup>104</sup> The refutation of the doctrine of Mani was initiated in the late third century by both pagans, such as Alexander of Lykopolis, and Christians, as seen in *Epistle against the Manichees*. Subsequently, a comprehensive anti-Manichaean tradition was formed by early Christian authors including *Acta Archelai*, refutations of Eusebios of Caesarea, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius of Salamis, Theodoretos of Cyrrihus and many others. The Christians considered Manichaeism as a heresy (ἄρεσις), that is, as either a false Christian doctrine or an independent pagan religious teaching (as later was the case with the ‘religion of Muḥammad’).<sup>105</sup>

In pagan imperial legislative discourses, Manichaeism was often linked to the Persian empire as a political foe and it was also associated with abominable features of the barbaric ‘national character’ of the Persians. This connection to Persia was often referred to in Christian polemics as well.<sup>106</sup> However, in the early Christian tradition, there was an attempt to dissociate and even exculpate the Persians, including their kings and even their priesthood, from the grave sins of this doctrine. *Acta Archelai* and its followers, such as Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius of Salamis, Socrates Scholastikos, Theodore Anagnostes and George Hamartolos, believed that Manichaeism had its roots in Egypt. They asserted that it was first shaped by a certain Skythianos, a ‘Saracen’ (meaning ‘Arab’) who acquired wisdom and magic in Egypt. It was only later that his teachings reached Babylon, which was then under the Persian rule. In Persia, Skythianos’s successors were confronted and denounced by a local [Persian] ‘prophet’ and also a certain priest of Mithras; the Persian king persecuted and finally executed Mani for his falsehood.<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, only a few commentators directly connected the origins of Manichaeism with Persia. Eusebios of Caesarea mentioned that Mani brought his teaching from Persia, while Theodoretos of Cyrrihus believed that Mani was Persian, but was forced to leave Persia. Upon his return, he was seized by the Persian king and was cruelly executed by ‘the Persian punishment’. Timothy of Constantinople also shared the notion of Mani’s Persian roots and his being cruelly put to death on the Persian king’s orders.<sup>108</sup>

In summary, the prevailing church tradition depicted Manichaeism as an originally Egyptian teaching that later made its way to Persia. Most polemicists admitted more or less clearly that the Persians rejected Mani’s teaching and persecuted him and his followers. Interestingly, this link between Egypt and Manichaeism matches the early patristic idea of the Egyptian (Hamitic) origin of magic, as well as other evil teachings, and, ultimately, of the magician Zoroaster himself. According to this tradition, Cush and Mizraim, Ham’s sons, were ancestors of the Egyptians and Ethiopians, respectively (Gen. 10.6–13; 1 Suppl. 1.8–10). Nimrod, the son of Cush or Mizraim, was credited as the inventor of magic and other evil doctrines. He eventually moved to the East and Persia, and finally colonised Bactria, thus spreading evil knowledge there. The pagan Greeks, according to exegetes, knew Nimrod under the name of Zoroaster.<sup>109</sup> As a result, the



Persians here were excused from the sin of inventing occult teachings and techniques associated with Zoroaster.

The Christian anti-Manichaean tradition never lost its relevance and was perpetuated for centuries due to the constant enthusiasm for gnostic and dualistic spirituality among believers throughout the Christian world and, therefore, the repeated revival of such trends in the church. However, the Persian roots of Manichaeism remained in the shadows. In the eighth century, for instance, John of Damascus more than once touched upon the Manichaean issue. In his brief and scarcely informative entry in *De haeresibus*, he refers to Mani as a Persian; however, in *Contra Manichaeos*, comprising a lengthy and detailed critical dialogue discussing Mani's theology, he avoids explicitly associating Manichaeism with the Persians and their dualistic religion.<sup>110</sup> The Paulician crises in Byzantium provided strong impetus for a surge of interest in anti-Manichaean polemics. In the ninth and tenth centuries, the anti-Paulician polemics identified Paulicianism as a kind of Manichaeism and, when speaking about the origins of the latter, the accounts closely resembled the narratives found in *Acts of Archelai*, which contained vague references to Persian motifs.<sup>111</sup> In the eleventh century, Euthymios Zigabenos and Anna Komnene linked the doctrine of the Bogomils with Manichaeism of old.<sup>112</sup>

Belief in the Hamitic origin of the Persians, coupled with their association with magic, likely contributed to another point of negative connotations, which, however, did not originate in the Greek-speaking Christian East. In one interpretation, the Persian Magi in Matthew's pericope came to Judaea initially with malevolent intentions but were liberated from the demonic temptations upon their meeting with Christ (as in particular in Didymus the Blind). This interpretation, which was analogised to Esa 8.4, was popular almost exclusively among Western fathers of the church.<sup>113</sup>

Undoubtedly, adverse feelings for the Persians were fuelled by the long and gory history of anti-Christian persecutions in Sasanian Iran, especially the notoriety of Shapur II and Khusrav II (for more details, see Chapter 3). Along with the real kings, Christians may have recalled the tales of the evil deeds of the legendary Persian king Dadianos, who tortured and martyred St George.<sup>114</sup>

Accusations of the Persians practising paganism and their cruelty to Christians persisted beyond the era of the great Sasanian persecution and from time to time resurfaced in the minds of the Byzantines. The Golden Horde Mongols were often described as followers of the Persian sun-worshipping religion. At the turn of the fourteenth century, Pachymeres referred to the notorious Kocabahşı (Κουτζιμπαξής) as professing a Persian cult, although he was in fact probably a Mongol shaman.<sup>115</sup> The new martyr St John the New of Suceava was a Greek merchant from Trebizond, born around 1300. St John the New travelled to Moncastro (now Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi, Ukraine) for trading purposes. There he was detained by the local 'Persian' governor of the city, who was a sun-worshipper. The governor demanded that St John abjure Christianity and bow to the sun. As St John refused, he was tortured and executed for his faith in 1330.<sup>116</sup> The governor of Moncastro was most likely a Golden Horde officer.

Negative contexts of cultural xenophobia and a generally contemptuous attitude to Asians and specifically Persians, of course, influenced everyday religious mentality as well. Quite a telling example is provided in the popular hagiography of St Anastasios the Persian. During the transfer of St Anastasios's relics to Caesarea Palaestinae, a woman named Arete expressed doubt and said: 'I will not adore the relics brought from Persia'. Several days later, St Anastasios appeared to Arete in a dream and asked: 'Do you suffer from a pain in your loin?' Arete answered that she was healthy, however, when she woke up, she felt acute pain in that area. The pain persisted until the day when she ordered her servants to carry her to revere St Anastasios's relics. Finally, Arete summarised the incident that it was necessary to revere a relic even if it had come from Persia.<sup>117</sup>

### 1.8 Materiality of Memory

The memory of the holy Persian characters was embodied in material objects that served as, simultaneously, depositories and transmitters of memory. The most vivid and widely available objects of this kind were *lieux de mémoire* and standard Christian iconography that was reproduced in church decoration, miniatures in diverse genres of religious texts and decorative crafts.

Some biblical *lieux de mémoire* were associated with Persia. For instance, St Makarios the Roman (in the fifth or sixth century) visited the site of the Three Holy Youths – Ananias, Azarias and Misael who emerged from the furnace unharmed – in Ctesiphon of Persia.<sup>118</sup> According to the *Vita Eliae*, purporting to be about ninth-century events, a Byzantine man of piety tried to reach the graves of the Three Holy Youths and the shrine of the prophet Daniel in Persia.<sup>119</sup> Byzantine pilgrims were aware of several 'places of memory' in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood associated with the Magi.<sup>120</sup>

The iconography of the Persian holy men represented another form of material embodiment for memory. The early Byzantine iconography portrayed the prophet Daniel, the Three Holy Youths and the Magi in similar typical 'Persian' dresses (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2).

Up to the sixth century, the 'Persian' costume consisted of the so-called 'Phrygian cap', Persian trousers, sleeved tunic tied with a belt around the waist and the mantle (often floating). The similar typical 'Persian' or more precisely 'Parthian' appearance was exemplified by the iconography of Mithras in the scenes of Tauroctony, the depictions of other Mithraic figures (see Chapter 2.8), as well as the representation of Parthian tribute-bearers in Roman triumphal art and the like.<sup>121</sup>

In later iconography, formed by the tenth century and remaining in its essential characteristics unchanged until the end of Byzantium, the appearance of the biblical and New Testament Persian figures took on a more emblematic style. While retaining some basic features of the ancient 'Persian' attire like mantles and trousers, there were certain modifications. Trousers, for example, may have changed into leggings and high boots; the Phrygian cap was replaced by a small cap, most often rectangular in shape placed



Figure 1.1 Ananias, Azarias and Misael, sixth century (fragment). From Wadi Sarga, Egypt. British Museum, London (Photo: © Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin FRCP (Glasg). Wikimedia Commons, CC-BY-SA-4.0 licence)



Figure 1.2 The Magi, mid-sixth century. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna (Photo: © Nina Aldin Thune. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.5 license)



Figure 1.3 The Adoration of the Magi. *Il Menologio di Basilio* (Vat. gr. 1613), p. 272, ca. 1000 (Wikimedia Commons, CC-PD-Mark, PD-Art (PD-old default), PD-Art (PD-old-70))

on the crown of the head (see Figure 1.3). The mantle and ‘Persian’ headgear conferred foreign appearance and, most likely, were regarded as the most distinctive elements of the Persian dress.<sup>122</sup> During middle and late Byzantine times, the ‘Persian’ costume was characteristic of the Magi and also of the Old Testament figures such as Daniel, Ananias, Azarias and Misael and sometimes some other holy persons like Aaron, Moses, Solomon and Zacharias.

It is interesting to note that small caps of various shapes placed on the crown of the head came to be understood at a point in a broader sense as a distinctive ‘Asian’ headgear. In the fourteenth-century miniatures of the *Alexander Romance*, small caps decorated the heads of the Jewish (fol. 92v) and Indian priests (fol. 139–140) and, being wrapped by a turban, featured as an element of the ‘Persian’ costume (fol. 76).<sup>123</sup>

### 1.9 Conclusion: God’s Persia

Persian motifs were a part of the oldest church tradition, drawing upon testimonies from the Holy Scriptures that spoke of the deeds of the pious Persian men and women and the perspicacious Magi. The concept of ancient Persian piety was elaborated in the ample exegetic tradition by such pillars

of patrology as Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, Clement of Alexandria, John of Damascus and others.

The ecclesiastical perception of Persia absorbed a specifically Hellenic and Roman religio-political universalistic component. The exegetics of the Old Testament attributed to Persia the important role of safeguarding and disseminating monotheism and formulated the influential concept of the Four Kingdoms, which became one of the basic elements of Byzantine religious historiography. The precedents of the Persian Magi and the subsequent Christianisation of Parthia confirmed the eminent status of Persia in divine dispensation.

The memory of Sacred Persia from scriptural and patristic sources was reproduced in religious knowledge in the subsequent centuries through numerous mnemonic mechanisms, including exegetical, liturgical, hagiological and homiletic traditions, as well as through iconography and other material media. The conservatism of the church tradition contributed to the faithful reproduction of the entire bulk of established dogmatic notions over the centuries and allowed little opportunity for significant innovations in them. While Persian motifs remained mostly unchanged through centuries, nonetheless, there are instances of further development and elaboration in the middle and late Byzantine periods.

The Byzantine perception of Persian motifs in Christianity significantly differed from those of the Western Christians and Slavs. The Western and Slavic believers perceived the discussed Persian presence in the Christian tradition in a somewhat detached manner. The Persians are seen as outsiders or even aliens who appeared in the Scriptures and early church writings as a subsidiary proof of the omnipotence of God. In the eyes of the modern Christians of the West and Slavic East, the Persians of the Old and New Testaments resemble some fabulous creatures from the distant margins of the universe, similar to those described in hagiographical tradition. In contrast, the Byzantines remembered Persia and Persians as an indispensable, operative and instructive element of their religious tradition that would be incomplete without Holy Persia, the land where Christ had become first known.

## Notes

- 1 For the place of the Old Testament in the Byzantine tradition, for instance, see: Dagron, *Emperor and Priest; Old Testament in Byzantium; Bible in Byzantium; Christian Moses; Receptions of the Bible*.
- 2 The abbreviations for and versification of the Septuagint books are given according to *NETS*.
- 3 Yamauchi, *Persia*, 155–159. For a helpful expert contextualisation of the biblical data concerning the Persians, see also: Widengren, ‘Persians’.
- 4 See especially: I Esd. 6.16–25; II Esd. 1, 6.2–5; 2 Suppl. 36.22–23; Yamauchi, *Persia*, 89–92.
- 5 Yamauchi, *Persia*, 242, 253–278.
- 6 Yamauchi, *Persia*, 267–268, 307.
- 7 For the Persian names and loanwords, see now: Hutter, *Iranische Personennamen* and Yamauchi, *Persia*, 237–239 with further bibliography.

- 8 Vastcheva, Евсевий; Kuzenkov, Хронологические системы; Krüger, *Die Universalchroniken*.
- 9 Synkellos, *Ecloga*; Theophanes, *Chronographia*. For the biblical history in Byzantine chronicles, see: Fishman-Duker, 'Second Temple'.
- 10 Eusebios, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 225–226; Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarius in Isaiam*, 949.45–952.2; Theodoretos of Cyrhrus, *Commentaria in Isaiam*, 3:16.58–20.121 (XIV).
- 11 Malalas, 121 (VIII, 9); Kedrenos, 241.8–242.7; Hamartolos (de Boor), 19.18–20.6.
- 12 For more details, see Chapter 5 of this book.
- 13 For the fusion patterns of biblical and Greco-Roman images of the past, see, for instance: Jeffreys, 'Old Testament History'; Rapp, 'Old Testament Models' with further bibliography.
- 14 Modern Russian religious philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which, in a sense, continued Byzantine historiosophic models, showed considerable attention to the Persian/Iranian element in sacred history; see, for instance: Khomiakoff, Семирамида; Berdiaeff, Смысл истории, especially Chapter 2.
- 15 The seminal study on the idea of the Tower of Babel in European culture, which still retains its importance, is by Arno Borst: Borst, *Turmbau*, vol. 1.
- 16 Hippolytus, *Die Chronik*, 200.1–72; Borst, *Turmbau*, 1:297–298, 2:932–936 (text of Hippolytus's list). See also: Major, 'Number Seventy-Two'.
- 17 Scott, *Geography*, 135–158.
- 18 John of Damascus, *De haeresibus*, 3.24: '...when the languages of all were confounded, because of this reason all were called Meropes owing to the divided tongue' ('ὅτε αἱ γλῶσσαι διηρέθησαν τῶν πάντων, δι' ἣν αἰτίαν καὶ Μέρορες πάντες κέκληνται διὰ τὴν μεμερισμένην φωνήν'). Here Merops, literally implying a 'man of divided (or articulated) voice', personifies language multiplicity.
- 19 Patriarch Nikephoros, *Opuscula historica*, 84.7–10 (on Peleg): 'κατὰ τοῦτον ἡ πυργοποιΐα συνέστη καὶ ἀπὸ μιᾶς τῆς πάλαι διαλέκτου πολυφωνία γέγονε καὶ καθ' ἕκαστον ἔθνος τῶν γλωσσῶν διαφορά'. For more details, see: Borst, *Turmbau*, 1:301.
- 20 Hippolytus, *Die Chronik*, 59, 164. The identification Madai/Medes was suggested by Joseph Flavius: Joseph Flavius, *Antiquitates Judaicae*, 1.124.3.
- 21 Prokopios of Gaza, *Der Genesiskommentar*, 10.1.12; Hamartolos (PG), 97.12–14; Hamartolos (de Boor), 1:4.2.5 (p. 176.5).
- 22 *Chronicon Paschale*, 1:56.12–57.17.
- 23 Malalas, 1.6 (p. 8.25); Synkellos, *Ecloga*, 49.18 (Dera as the Medes' progenitor), 50.1–10 (the Medes, along with the Persians and Parthians, are considered descendants of Shem). For more details contextualising Malalas's version, see also: Caire, 'Diamérismos'.
- 24 Eustathios of Antioch, *Commentarius in hexaameron*, 753.53 and 757.9.
- 25 Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 17–26.
- 26 *Clementine Homilies*, 9.3–4.
- 27 Swain, 'The Theory of the Four Monarchies'; Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 286–294; Collins, *Seers, Sibyls, and Sages* (especially, Chapters 4, 8–11); Momigliano, 'Origins'; now see: *Four Kingdom Motifs*, especially, Lorenzo DiTommaso's chapter 'The Four Kingdoms of Daniel in the Early Mediaeval Apocalyptic Tradition'.
- 28 This idea was developed in the following two works: John Chrysostom, *In incarnationem*, 691–693; John Chrysostom, *In Danielelem*, 241–243. Instead, Theodoretos of Cyrhrus suggested that the angel of Persia, upon witnessing God's great favour towards Israel, was upset because the Israelites behaved worse than his Persian flock and barely deserved such divine benefits (*In Danielelem* 1496–1501).
- 29 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 8:517a–518b (cod. 277); Photios, *Epistulae et amphilochia*, 5:210–212 (no. 161). For some thirteenth-century references to the Four

- Kingdom concept, see, for instance: Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, 103 (Holobolos, *Synopsis Chronike*). See also below Section 1.4 and Chapter 4.
- 30 Gautier, 'De daemonibus', 171.555–566 (*De operatione daemonum*; Moore, *Iter Psellianum*, [711] THE.168). Psellos analogises angels with demons who speak the language of the nation they live in (Gautier, 'De daemonibus', 165.460–472). For the demons speaking human languages, see: Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1:1.24 and esp. lines 30–37; Greenfield, *Demonology*, 207 n. 634.
  - 31 For general surveys of the pericope's dogmatic interpretations and their evolution in the Christian East and West, see: Leclercq, 'Mages', 980–1067; Nekliudov, 'Волхвы', 278–282; Paciorek, 'L'adoration'.
  - 32 Freitag, *The Star of Bethlehem*. See also bibliographical sections for individual articles in: Barthel, van Kooten, *The Star of Bethlehem*.
  - 33 Molnar, *The Star of Bethlehem*; Adair, *The Star of Bethlehem*. For an expert selection of the most important approaches and judgments, see: Barthel, van Kooten, *The Star of Bethlehem*.
  - 34 The origins of the 'Star and King' and 'Magi and Star' motifs, which underlie Matthew's pericope, were most likely Iranian: Widengren, *Iranisch-semitische Kulturbegegnung*, chapters VII and VIII; for a revisiting of Widengren's ideas and their development, see a helpful survey with further bibliography: Hultgård, 'The Magi and the Star'. For Parthian contexts, see: van Kooten, 'Matthew, the Parthians, and the Magi', 496–646.
  - 35 Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:10–11, 2:19–21; Dandamayev, 'Magi'. The Old Iranian *magu-* derives from Indo-European *māgh-* and *māhgh-* 'to be able, to help, power, sorcerer'; see: Pokorny, *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2:695 and its revision by George Starostin and Alexander Lubotsky. See also: Edel'man, *Этимологический словарь*, 121–122.
  - 36 Lincoln, 'From Ritual Practice'; de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 387–403; de Jong, 'Matthew's Magi', 271–285; van Kooten, 'Matthew, the Parthians, and the Magi', 501–508. For collections of Greek and Latin sources on the Persian *magi*, see: Vasunia, *Zarathushtra*, Chapter 3 (p. 98–133); Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, Section 11.H (d) and also Index.
  - 37 van Kooten, 'Matthew, the Parthians, and the Magi', 514–517, 593–596.
  - 38 For the negative meaning of μάγος in Aesop, Heraclitus, Euripides and Sophocles, see: de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 387–388; Bremmer, 'Persian Magoi', 235–248. Dio Chrysostom's note is remarkable in this regard: '[those who] are best endowed with regard to truth, and are best able to understand the god, men whom the Persians have named Magi, that is to say, people who know how to cultivate the divine power, not like the Greeks, who in their ignorance use the term to denote wizards (γόητας)' (Dio Chrysostom, 3:456–457).
  - 39 Panaino, *I Magi evangelici*, 12–14; Panaino, 'Pre-Islamic Iranian Astral Mythology', 231–268. However, starting with Pliny in the first century, a negative interpretation of the Persian priesthood prevailed. Nevertheless, this did not eliminate the initial semantic dichotomy of μάγος; see: van Kooten, 'Matthew, the Parthians, and the Magi', 581–584.
  - 40 For a general analysis of the early patristic exegesis of Matthew's pericope, see: Kehrer, *Heiligen drei Könige*, 1:22; Paciorek, 'L'adoration'.
  - 41 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 1.15.71.4: 'Περσῶν οἱ Μάγοι (οἱ μαγεία καὶ τοῦ σωτήρος προεμίγησαν τὴν γένεσιν, ἀστέρος αὐτοῖς καθηγουμένου εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν ἀφικνούμενοι γῆν)'. Trans. (modified): Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* (Ferguson), 76. Evidently, 'μαγεία' in Clement's text should be understood in the sense of a special kind of natural science, which is described, in particular, in the famous definition of Philo: 'the true magical [art], being a keen-sighted science, for it discerns the deeds of nature with a more distinct perception ...' (Philo,

- De specialibus legibus*, 178.9–14 (III, 100)). See also: van Kooten, ‘Matthew, the Parthians, and the Magi’, 583.
- 42 Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1:1.24.19 (τῶν παρὰ Πέρσαις μάγων οἱ λόγοι), 1:1.58.8–14.
- 43 Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarius in Isaiam*, 1061.21–29.
- 44 It is worth noting that Justin and Epiphanius were likely born in Palestine. For more details on the Arabian identity of the Magi, see: Maalouf, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel*, 197–200; Hannah, ‘The Star of the Magi’, 434–435.
- 45 Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarius in Isaiam*, 1061.26–29: ‘Ἀραβίαν γὰρ ἐν τούτοις τὴν τῶν Περσῶν ὀνομάζει χώραν’. In modern standard English translations of Ps. 72 (71), Sheba stands for the Septuagint and Vulgate’s Arabia.
- 46 Prokopios of Gaza, *In Isaiam Prophetam*, 2473.49–50.
- 47 Basil of Caesarea, *In sanctam Christi generationem*, 1469A6–9: ‘Ἔθνος Περσικὸν οἱ μάγοι, μαντείας καὶ ἐπαοιδίας καὶ φυσικαῖς τισιν ἀντιπαθείαις προσέχοντες, καὶ περὶ τὴν τήρησιν τῶν μεταρσιῶν ἐσχολακότες’, and also col. 1469B11–15.
- 48 Hannah, ‘The Star of the Magi’, 448–449.
- 49 John Chrysostom, *In Christi natalem diem*, 738.49; Idem, *Homiliae XC in Matthaëum*, 73.17–19, 78.16–25.
- 50 John Chrysostom, *Homiliae XC in Matthaëum*, 65.24–25: ‘παρὰ Περσικῆς πρώτης φωνῆς μανθάνουσιν, ἃ παρὰ τῶν προφητῶν μαθεῖν οὐκ ἠνέσχοντο’.
- 51 Ephrem the Syrian, *Sermo unde magi*, 437.4: ‘ἐκ Περσίδος εἰς προσκύνησιν εἴλκυσε μάγους’.
- 52 Malalas, 10.4.
- 53 Indikopleustes, 393.11–14 (II, 76). Kosmas believed that the Magi, although not ethnically Persians, because they bowed to Jesus, became the kings of Persia after the Parthians and still ruled in his time (that is, the Sasanian dynasty). Kosmas’s expression of this idea is somewhat convoluted, but it can be discerned from the overall logic of the passage. For the origin of this motif, see: Frenschkowski, ‘Christianity’, 458. See more on this statement also in Chapter 5.2.
- 54 James, *Constantine of Rhodes*, 71.771.
- 55 Philes, *Carmina* (Miller), 2:31.80 (3.13), 2:57.573 (3.14), 323.122–123 (5.1). On Manuel Philes now see: Kubina, *Die enkomiasische Dichtung*.
- 56 John of Damascus, *Homilia in nativitatem Domini*, 5:342.25–28 (11); Kehrer, *Heiligen drei Könige*, 1:22.
- 57 Cumont, ‘L’adoration des mages’, 99–105; Kehrer, *Heiligen drei Könige*, 2:81–102.
- 58 See, for instance: Panaino, ‘Considerazioni’; Heyden, *Die Erzählung*, 29, 37, 319. The manuscript Vatopedi 10 (thirteenth or fourteenth century) identifies the Magi as Elimelech, Elisour and Eliav and offers explanations for these names; these names are derived from the Old Testament (see also: Heyden, ‘Legend’, 15 note d).
- 59 For instance, for priests, see: *Oracula Sibyllina*, 22 (1.334–35): ‘τούτω προσκομίσουσ’ ἱερεῖς χρυσὸν προφέροντες, σμύρναν ἀτὰρ λίβανον’; for wise men, see: *Souda*, μ28: ‘Μάγοι: παρὰ Πέρσαις οἱ φιλόσοφοι καὶ φιλόθεοι ὧν ἦρχε Ζωροάστρης καὶ μετὰ τοῦτον κατὰ διαδοχὴν Ὀστάναι καὶ Ἀστράμψυχοι’. For translation and commentary, see: *Suda On Line*.
- 60 John of Damascus, *Homilia in nativitatem Domini*, 5:332.10–11 (VI): ‘Περσῶν βασιλεῖς ἀστρονόμοι’ and 5:338.4 (X): ‘βασιλεῖς μάγους’.
- 61 Gregory of Nazianzus, *On Providence*, 24–27.
- 62 ACO, 1.1.7:34.17–19 and 1.1.2:83.26, 87.27–33 (Theodotos of Ankyra).
- 63 See above in this section and also: Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, 3:368, 374 n. 49, 453; von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie*, 575–79.



- 64 For a detailed discussion of Origen and St Basil's interpretations of the star's nature, see: DelCogliano, 'Tradition and Polemic in Basil', 48–54.
- 65 Chrysostom, *Homiliae XC in Matthaeum*, 61–66 (VI.1–3); Zigabenos, *In Matthaeum*, 137C–140A. A quite detailed discussion of the issue of astrology with reference to the worship of the Magi was developed in the *Against Astronomers* by Diodoros of Tarsus (d. in the 390s), which was summarised in: Photios, *Myriobiblos*, cod. 233 (4:47); Schäublin, 'Zu Diodors von Tarsos Schrift'. There was a disaccord among the church fathers regarding the time of the star's appearance (and therefore the beginning of the Magi's journey to Palestine) in relation to the birth of Christ; in the twelfth century, Michael Glykas examined different opinions and adopted the view of John Chrysostom that the star appeared before the Nativity and, within a year after it, the Magi reached Bethlehem; the same opinion was taken up by Zigabenos (Chrysostom, *Homiliae XC in Matthaeum*, VII.3; Glykas, *Annales*, 387–388).
- 66 Riedinger, *Astrologie*, 130–146. The exposure of astrology as a pseudoscience was initiated by pagan thinkers of late Antiquity based on philosophical conceptual grounds: Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie*, 570–627. For Byzantine disputes over the credibility of astrology, see: Magdalino, *Orthodoxie*; Tihon, 'Astrological Promenade'.
- 67 John of Damascus, *Homilia in nativitatem Domini*, 5:332.10–12 (6).
- 68 See, for instance: AHG, vol. 4, December 19:38.1 line 23, 23.48/2.1 line 21, 27.53.8 line 15, 28.55.5 line 10, 28.55.9 line 16, 30.60/2.1 line 11. See also an eleventh-twelfth century monastic synaxarion: Jordan, *Synaxarion*, Dec.30.9.
- 69 Hannah, 'The Star of the Magi'; Nicklas, 'Balaam', 233–246. See also in addition, for instance: Basil of Caesarea, *In sanctam Christi generationem*, 1469.19–25.
- 70 It is not impossible that Matthew's pericope implied an intertextual connection not so much with Balaam's oracle but rather with the prophecies of Isaiah; however, it was not explicitly formulated in early exegetics; cf.: van Kooten, 'Matthew, the Parthians, and the Magi', 609–617. For the links between Balaam and the Magi, also see: Paciorek, 'L'adoration', 101–115.
- 71 Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarius in Isaiam*, 1061.13–15: 'ἀριθμοῦ κρείττονες οἱ κεκλημένοι γεγόνασι, καὶ ἐκ παντὸς μέρους τῆς ὑπ' οὐρανὸν συναγερμένοι'. See also: Paciorek, 'L'adoration', 88–100; Panaino, *I Magi evangelici*, 31–32; Panaino, 'Pre-Islamic Iranian Astral Mythology', 259–261.
- 72 John Chrysostom, *Homiliae XC in Matthaeum*, 66.54–56: 'Μάγοι μὲν ἀστέρος κατάρχοντος ἠκολούθησαν· οὗτοι δὲ οὐδὲ προφητῶν ἐνηχούντων ἐπίστευσαν'. For more details on anti-Judaic and anti-Jewish ideas of early church authors, see, for instance: Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism*; Paciorek, 'L'adoration', 109–115.
- 73 Photios, *Epistulae et amphiloquia*, 6/1:104–105 (no. 306).
- 74 For 'typology' in theological exegesis, see now: Magdalino, 'Religious rhetoric'.
- 75 For possible interpretations of the three gifts, see: Paciorek, 'L'adoration', 115–137.
- 76 For more on the late Byzantine conception of the Persians, see Chapter 7.
- 77 Kantakouzenos, *Apologiae*, 1.18 (p. 56–65); Todt, *Kantakuzenos und der Islam*, 366, 373; PLP, nos 17738, 24783.
- 78 Kantakouzenos may have borrowed this idea from Psellos who, in the eleventh century, addressed the 'Persian' sultan with a long discourse on Christ's incarnation, and in passing referred to the 'coming of the Persians' to the newborn Jesus (Psellos, *Theologica II*, 20.113–114).
- 79 *Letter of the Three Patriarchs*, 43.8–18 (7, 8b) and Ch. Walter's commentaries on LVII–LVIII.
- 80 Kehrer, *Heiligen drei Könige*, 1:22.
- 81 Andrew of Crete, *Μέγας Κανὼν*, 9.7.

- 82 Akakios Sabaites, *Commentarius in Andreae Cretensis canonem*, 9.233.103–104: ‘Εγένοντο δὲ οἱ Πέρσαι διὰ τῆς διδασκαλίας τῶν μάγων πιστεύσαντες εἰς Χριστόν’.
- 83 Symeon Logothete, *Chronicon*, 83.9–11\* (§ 51) ‘ἀλλὰ καὶ μάγοι Χριστόν προσκυνήσαντες πρότερον τὴν τῶν ἔθνῶν κλῆσιν ἠνίξαντο’; Symeon means here that the Magi embraced Christianity before the first gentile converts: Kandake (by Apostle Philip) and Cornelius (by Apostle Peter).
- 84 John Chrysostom, *Homiliae XC in Matthaëum*, 83.56–84.2: ‘[Θεός] τοὺς δὲ μάγους ἐκπέμπει ταχέως... διδασκάλους ἀποστέλλων τῇ Περσῶν χώρα’. One may understand ἀποστέλλων here (especially in combination with διδασκάλους) also in a technical sense as ‘sending forth with a divine mission’.
- 85 Cramer, *Catena Graecorum partum*, 13–17, here p. 16.30–33.
- 86 Photios, *Commentarii in Matthaëum*, 6.1–2 (Mt 2.13): ‘Εἰς Αἴγυπτον φεύγει ὁ Χριστός, ἵνα καὶ ταύτην ἀγίασῃ ὥσπερ τὴν Βαβυλῶνα διὰ τῶν μάγων ἡγίασεν ἑλθόντων εἰς προσκύνῃσιν αὐτοῦ’.
- 87 Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confines*, 111–117.
- 88 Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confines*, 137–151; on the Judaic and early Christian communities in Parthia, see also useful discussion in: Pines, ‘Iranian Name for Christians’, however, some of his results have been revised by the Julliens (see, for instance, Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confines*, 184 and n. 306).
- 89 John Chrysostom, *Homiliae LV in Acta apostolorum*, 45.45–50 (IV.2) and 47.29–33 (IV.3).
- 90 Theophylaktos of Ohrid, *Expositiones in Acta apostolorum*, 533.34–36.
- 91 Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confines*, 43–110 (chapters 1–6).
- 92 Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confines*, 61–78.
- 93 Origen wrote about it in Book 3 of his nonextant *Commentaries on Genesis* which was quoted by Eusebios of Caesarea: Eusebios, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 1:97.3–4 (I.1.1).
- 94 BHG 1800–1844b, 779p and 779pb in Appendix II. The early church tradition in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Armenian and Arabic have been systematically analysed in: Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confines*, 79–110; for numerical estimations of St Thomas’s place in the Byzantine church tradition, see: Halsall, *Women’s Bodies*, Tables 2.1 and 2.2.
- 95 See, for instance: Socrates Scholastikos, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 1:190.5–6 (I.19): Thomas got Parthia by lot; Niketas Chartophylax, *Contra Latinos*, 140.35 (11th cen.); Prodromos (Hörandner), 517.47–518.1 (12th cen.); See also George Ameroutzes’s reference made between 1448 and 1453 in: Jugie, ‘La lettre de Georges Amiroutzès’, 90.29–30. For Byzantine liturgical texts, see, for instance: AHG, vol. 2, October 6.6 Synax. lines 1–2; vol. 10, June 30.20 Synax. line 29; SEC, June 30.1 (col. 781.8–10). See also: Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confines*, 81.
- 96 For the Indian mission of Thomas, see: Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confines*, 80–110; Thomaskutty, *Saint Thomas*; Kurikilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas*.
- 97 See, for instance, some early texts prevalent throughout the Byzantine era: Gelasios, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 148.9 (III.9.2); *Martyrium prius Andreae in Acta Andreae* (Prieur), 2:685.3–4; Schermann, *Prophetarum vitae*, 111.10–11, 165.11–12, 172.9–10, 178.3–4. For the problem of localising Hierapolis, see: Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confines*, 57–58.
- 98 Schermann, *Prophetarum vitae*, 178.12–13 (fourteenth-century manuscript Paris. gr. 1712). According to prevalent traditions, Bartholomew was crucified in Greater Armenia.

- 99 Downey, 'Nikolaos Mesarites', XX.1 and XX.5–6 (p. 875–876 for translation and p. 905 for Greek text). For the problem of dating of the church's mosaic decoration, along with further bibliography, see: James, *Constantine of Rhodes*, 204–216. For Simon's association with Persia in the early church tradition, see: Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confins*, 61–67.
- 100 For instance, regarding the apostolic Persian missions, see the authoritative hagiographical compendium by Metropolitan Dimitriy of Rostov (1651–1709): Dimitriy of Rostov, *Книга житий*, 1:407b (Matthew, 16 November); 4:137b (Judas Thaddaeus, 19 June).
- 101 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 4:32–38 (cod. 223).
- 102 The tract was titled 'On magic in Persia and what distinguishes it from the true religion'; it is known to us only from Photios' summary: *Bibliotheca*, 1:187 (cod. 81).
- 103 Basil of Caesarea, *Epistulae*, no. 258.4; West, 'The Classical World', 449; Frenschkowski, 'Christianity', 467.
- 104 For a general orientation in the extensive scholarly tradition concerning Manichaeism, see some recent studies, for instance: Sundermann, 'Manicheism'; Lieu, *Manichaeism*; Khosroev, *История манихейства*; Gardner, *The Founder of Manichaeism*.
- 105 Alexander of Lykopolis, *Disputatio; Epistle against the Manichees; Acta Archelai* (Vermes); *Acta Archelai* (Beeson); Eusebios, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 7.31; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*, 1:184–206 (VI, 21–35); Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, 66; Theodoretos of Cyrhus, *Compendium*, 1.26.
- 106 Coyle, 'Foreign and insane', especially 218–221 ('Manichaean' = 'Persian').
- 107 *Acta Archelai* (Beeson), 62–66; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*, 1:184–186 (VI, 22–23); Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, 3:66.4–12; Socrates Scholastikos, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 1.22; Theodore Anagnostes, 1.33; George Hamartolos, however, deemed Skythianos / Mani to be of Brahman origin (ed. de Boor, 467–468).
- 108 Eusebios, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 2:VII. 31. 2 (ἐκ τῆς Περσῶν ἐπὶ τὴν καθ' ἡμᾶς οἰκουμένην); Theodoretos of Cyrhus, *Compendium*, 377, 381; Timothy of Constantinople, *De iis qui ad Ecclesiam accedunt*, 20–24. 'Persian punishment' in Theodoretos' account is an old Greek idiomatic expression (see Chapter 5.4, proverb no. 7).
- 109 *Clementine Homilies*, 9.3–4; Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, 1:3; *Chronicon Paschale*, 1:49.11–19; Hamartolos (de Boor), 1:1.2.1–15 (p. 11). For more on the identification of Zoroaster with biblical figures, see: Bidez and Cumont, *Mages hellénisés*, 1:41–45. See now also: Kiel, 'Abraham and Nimrod'. For Malalas' version of the genealogy and role of Nimrod, see: Berthelot, 'Malalas'. See also Section 1.1.
- 110 John of Damascus, *De haeresibus*, 66.1; John of Damascus, *Contra Manichaeos*.
- 111 For the critical edition and detailed analysis of the relevant texts of Peter of Sicily and Photios, and the rite of abjuration from Manichaeism and Paulicianism, see: Astruc et al., 'Les sources grecques'; Lemerle, 'L'histoire des Pauliciens'. See also similar versions of the origins of Mani's religion in: Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De virtutibus*, 1:141–142; Kedrenos, 1:455.
- 112 Zigabenos, *Panoplia*, col. 1304.55–1305.2; Anna Komnene, XIV, 8, 3–9 (p. 454–458).
- 113 Heyden, *Erzählung*, 287–289 with analysis and further bibliography. Cf.: Paciorek, 'L'adoration', 93.
- 114 Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 2, 9–15; Theodoretos of Cyrhus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 5, 41; Delehaye, *Légendes grecques*, 51; Auzépy, *Vie d'Étienne le Jeune*, 260 note 385.
- 115 Pachymeres, X.30, XII.1.32, XIII.4.14; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 232–233.

- 116 Turilov, 'Иоанн Новый'.
- 117 Flusin, *Saint Anastase*, 1:130–133.
- 118 *Vita sancti Macarii Romani*, 165.14–16: 'εἰς τὴν χώραν τῶν Περσῶν εἰσήλθομεν εἰς τὴν πόλιν τὴν καλουμένην Κνησιφῶν καὶ προσεκνήσαμεν τοὺς ἁγίους τρεῖς παῖδας'.
- 119 See, for instance: *Vita Eliae*, 17.400–413 (XXII): 'θεάσασθαι τῶν ἁγίων τριῶν παίδων καὶ τοῦ προφήτου Δανιὴλ τὸ ἀγωνιστήριον'; *CMR*, 2:247; see also: Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 71 (Theodosius, 30); Yamauchi, *Persia*, 303.
- 120 Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 39 note 111, 49, 117 (Epiphanius the Monk, IV, 1, 10), 123 (Jacinthus the Presbyter, 323, 3), 152b, 155a; Külzer, *Peregrinatio*, 148 (Bethlehem), 276 (Cistern of Abraham) and also 303–304 (John Phokas), 323–324 (Anonymous of St Sabas).
- 121 Kehrer, *Heiligen drei Könige*, 2:81–102; Cumont, 'Adoration des mages'; Hultgård, 'The Magi and the Star'; Favaro, 'Sull'iconografia bizantina'; Cotsonis, 'Narrative scenes', 249.
- 122 Parani, *Reality of Images*, 232–234, 241–242.
- 123 *Alexander Romance*, Venice Hellenic Institute, Cod. gr. 5; cf. a small turban covering Nektenabo's crown of the head (fol. 3, 8, 10).

## 2 The pre-history of the Magi

This chapter, for the most part, goes beyond the chronological limits of this book. At the same time, the evidence discussed here is crucial for understanding the true significance of Persian motifs in later Byzantine religiosity. These motifs were prevalent not only in intellectual theologising, but also in the vernacular religious imagination. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Persian identity of the Magi was adopted in learned exegetical tradition and also incorporated into liturgical practices, which were made available to all. Thus, it became a basic element of religious memory throughout Byzantine history. The story of the Magi, with its important dogmatical meanings and, at the same time, its brief and fragmentary nature, quite understandably generates a desire to elaborate and to put it in a broader interpretative context. It is not surprising, therefore, that this narrative has inspired (and continues to inspire) commentators to expand on it by introducing new information and contexts.

A series of texts in Syriac, Latin and Greek emerged detailing the accounts of the events preceding the journey of the Magi to Palestine. These texts aimed to provide the ‘missing links’ left in Matthew’s terse account. The Persian motif played a central role in subsequent attempts to reconstruct factual contexts of the Magi’s journeys. One version is reproduced in the fourth-century Syriac *Revelation of the Magi* (a part of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*) and epitomised in the fifth-century Latin work *Liber apocryphus nomine Seth* (from *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum*).<sup>1</sup> In brief, the version relates that some magi customarily prayed in a cave, situated on the Mountain of Victory, and saw a miraculous star that stopped over the cave. The star guided them to Palestine and Bethlehem and led them to a cave where they met the infant Jesus. It is highly probable that the plot of this story went back to Iranian roots.<sup>2</sup>

However, in the Byzantine Greek-speaking tradition, the most influential version of the pre-history of the Magi was represented by the so-called *Story of Aphroditianos*, which was a part of the extensive treatise the *De gestis in Perside*. In the following sections, I will delve into the details of the *Story of Aphroditianos* as it has had a significant and long-lasting impact on the Byzantine concept of the Magi. In the last decades, the *De gestis* has been

comprehensively researched in a series of studies, first of all, by Katharina Heyden and Pauline Bringel, whose conceptual approaches are quite close.<sup>3</sup> Building upon Heyden and Bringel's findings, my subsequent discussion will partly develop and partly revisit their work.

## 2.1 The Plot

Structurally, the *De gestis in Perside* is an extremely complex narration combining a series of episodes that were created in diverse times and under diverse circumstances. These episodes are framed and united by introducing, at the beginning of the narration, an unnamed Roman, likely a prominent clergyman of the Roman empire, who happened to be in Persia and later recounted this story (§ 2).<sup>4</sup>

According to the account of the presumably fictitious Roman eyewitness and author, during the rule of the Persian king Arrhinatos, a dispute broke out in Persia between 'Hellenes' (i.e., pagans) and Christians, concerning the works of two historians, Dionysaros and Philip. The Hellenes advocated Dionysaros, while the Christians supported Philip. The rising tumult prompted the concerned Persian king to summon many Christian bishops and archimandrites to the imperial court, including the Roman author of the account. The dispute apparently concerned pagan Greek prophecies about Christ, which Philip had communicated in his book. One may think that, in the antigraph version of the account, the disagreement about predictions arose among Christians themselves, since the gathering included exclusively Christian ecclesiastics. There were no named pagans in the assembly, apart from the pagan Persian king (as I will further discuss in the next section). However, Jews were brought to the court by the king's order to arbitrate the dispute. Since the Jews refused, the king appointed Aphroditianos, who was 'Hellene' (pagan) and chief priest,<sup>5</sup> to determine the outcome (§ 1–5).

The subsequent narration consists of four major episodes, in which some smaller incidents are interspersed. The first episode deals with the dispute regarding whether the pagans prophesied about Christ. The assembly talked about three instances of the pagan oracles (§ 6–19). Further on, the first episode includes the *Story of Aphroditianos* about the astounding events that took place in the Persian temple of Hera, built by King Cyrus [the Great] in the royal palace. The marvel was brought about by the nativity of Jesus. These events were written down on gold tablets and kept in the Persian state archive. By retelling the story, Aphroditianos confirmed that the pagans did receive oracles about Jesus; moreover, he argued that Jesus Christ had first become known to the world through Persia (*De gestis*, 20).

According to Aphroditianos, one night, the idols of the temple began speaking, singing and dancing, because Hera had become pregnant by Zeus and was going to give birth to a child (§ 21–23). Further on, a star appeared over the head of Hera and, when a voice announced the birth, all other idols prostrated before Hera (§ 24). The Persian sages interpreted the

miracle as an indication of the birth of the King, the Son of the Pantokrator in Judaea. The god Dionysos confirmed this interpretation and proclaimed the end of idolatry (§ 25–26). It was also stated that now salvation had come to the gentiles and foreigners (§ 27: τοῖς ἔθνικοῖς καὶ ἄλλογενέσι). The Persian king sent his Magi to Judaea with gifts, and the star showed them the way (§ 28).

The Magi's first-person narration about their journey then follows. They went to Jerusalem and talked with the Jewish religious leaders (οἱ πρῶτοι τῶν Ἰουδαίων); in particular, they stated that Christ put an end to the Jewish law and religion (καταλύων τὸν νόμον ὑμῶν καὶ τὰς συναγωγάς); they also met the king of Judaea. Finally, they visited Mary and two-year-old Jesus in Bethlehem. The Magi returned to Persia with the image of the Mother and Child, which was placed in the temple of Hera with the inscription – 'In the God-sent temple, the Imperial authority of Persia has dedicated [this] to God Zeus-Helios, the Great King Jesus'.<sup>6</sup> The Magi concluded their report relating the appearance of an angel who warned them of a conspiracy against them (§ 29–32). The appearance of the star and the statues' speaking in the temple repeated on the same day yearly until the Ascension of the Lord (§ 83).

The second episode speaks about Orikatos, the Persian chief enchanter (ὁ πρῶτος τῶν ἐπαιδῶν), who attempted to perform miracles to humiliate the Christian ecclesiastics at the court. However, he eventually failed in this due to the omnipotence of God (§ 40–48). The third and fourth episodes comprise long and complex disputes between the Jews and the Christians, which were arbitrated by Aphroditianos (§ 49–66).<sup>7</sup>

In the end, the story unfavourably referred to the assumption of Doros the Jew, who tried to expose the marvel in the Persian temple. Doros argued that the statues in the temple looked like speaking and singing due to the mechanical tricks of craftsmen. The story leaves it to the reader to decide whether this explanation is true or not (§ 84).

## 2.2 Date, Place and Typology

The present form of the *De gestis* is believed to have been shaped between the 530s and 630s, possibly compiled by a Greek author from the western Syrian regions.<sup>8</sup> The plot and some motifs of the *De gestis* appear to have been inspired by the *Book of Daniel*.<sup>9</sup> A number of episodes within the text were likely borrowed from the lost historical work of Philip of Side.<sup>10</sup> The account of Aphroditianos regarding the temple miracle probably contains more ancient elements dating back to the pre-Constantine era.<sup>11</sup> Although the plot of the story develops in Persia, at the court of a Persian king, its specific Iranian origins are vague and unclear. It is possible that the miracles in the 'Persian' temple of Hera were modelled on the marvels of the Syrian temple of Ataratheh (Atargatis) in Hierapolis as described by Loukian of Samosata.<sup>12</sup> However, it is important to note that the locomotion and speaking of gods'

statutes is not a phenomenon exclusive to Loukian's story. Such incidents were well-known from theurgic practices as well.<sup>13</sup>

There is little doubt that the story is mostly or entirely fictitious, including the existence of the Roman witness and author. Among a dozen actors referred to in the *De gestis* (including King Arrhinatos, Aphroditianos, and other Persian, Christian and Jewish individuals), the only character identifiable is the historian Philip of Side (d. after 431).<sup>14</sup> Curiously enough, the anonymous author attempted in many ways to impart believability to the described events and to emulate 'real' factual contexts. This included introducing incomprehensible phrases imitating presumably Persian or Aramaic speech, as well as fictitious quotations from the royal Persian documents and the like.<sup>15</sup> Such details, though adding little to the credibility of the story in the eyes of a modern scholar, surely strengthen its 'Persian' flavour for the mediaeval reader.

The problem of the genre typology of the *De gestis in Perside* is quite complex. Katharina Heyden, who has comprehensively analysed the *De gestis* in a series of studies, defines its genre as 'Disputationsroman', which of course is a fitting categorisation.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, one may also remark that the entire text and each of its four episodes (partially or fully), by their subject matter, structure and objective, belong to the genre of Christian polemics against pagans and Jews.<sup>17</sup> However, the account of the temple miracle, occupying a part of episode one, remarkably differs because of its exegetic address to the evangelical Magi pericope. It may be defined as an explanatory and supplementary interpretation of the Holy Scripture,<sup>18</sup> resembling an 'Haggadic' discourse.

The temple miracle appears to have been an independent and self-sufficient text, as Heyden suggested, being compiled by the first third of the fourth century. It was later incorporated into the *De gestis*. The distinctiveness and self-sufficiency of the *Story of Aphroditianos* was also clearly perceived by the later Byzantine tradition. By the twelfth century at the latest, it may have circulated independently.<sup>19</sup>

### 2.3 Aphroditianos and the Magi

Aphroditianos's account of the temple miracle is an elaborate interpretation of Matthew's pericope, focussing on some key points of the patristic interpretation of the evangelical Magi. The story accentuates the Persian identity of the Magi (μάγοι), describing them as Persian wise men (Περσῶν σοφοί) and evidently implying Persian religious leaders or priests. The Magi were depicted as pagans, referred to as 'Hellenes'. The appearance of the star, indicating the birth of the Messiah, is described as first occurring in Persia and a miraculous, rather than a natural phenomenon. The revelation of the star to the pagan Persians is interpreted in universalistic and anti-Judaic senses. The religious wisdom and piety of the Persians were contrasted sharply with



the Jewish bigotry; consequently, the Persians were the only appropriate candidates for such a mission.<sup>20</sup>

Aphroditianos's account goes further, expanding some details that were either absent from the gospel's pericope or less evidently expressed in patristic interpretations. The main idea of the account is formulated in its very beginning: 'From Persia Christ became first known [in the world]' (ἐκ Περσίδος ἐγνώσθη Χριστὸς ἀπ' ἀρχῆς).<sup>21</sup> Further on, the Persians were the first who created an icon of Jesus and Mary. The account gives additional grounds for comprehending why Persians have been chosen for the revelation among all the pagans: the temple, where the miracle happened, was erected by Cyrus the Great himself who was highly regarded for his piety and wisdom by both the Old Testament and Greek pagan authors. The circumstances of the star's appearance are described minutely, highlighting a long and exuberant jubilation of major cosmic powers, involving their personification in the temple's statues, signifying the advent of the Son of God and Messiah. The star was bestowed to inform the Persians about the Nativity so that they could bring this news to all people and to find, greet and gift the Mother and the Child.

Further on, the account of Aphroditianos changes some accents of the tradition and amends it. The anti-Judaic stance was enhanced in comparison with Matthew and depicted the Jewish leaders as ignorable and crafty persons who tried to bribe the Magi so that they did not disseminate the news. It was not Herod (his name is omitted from the account) who sent the Magi to Bethlehem but the Magi knew themselves the destination point. These additional features attempt to decouple the Christian message from the Jewish tradition; not the Jews but pagans are true harbingers of the Christian truth.<sup>22</sup> Most details of the Magi's meeting with Mary and the Child, as well as their physical descriptions, are not found in the New Testament tradition and the later common consensus. For instance, according to Aphroditianos, Jesus sat on the ground and laughed when the Magi praised him, a notion at odds with the widespread belief that Christ never laughed.<sup>23</sup> While Aphroditianos attributed the first icon of the Mother and Child to the Magi, later tradition more commonly credited St Luke as the first painter of icons (at least since the fifth or sixth century).<sup>24</sup>

## 2.4 Early Contextualising Attempts

There have been a number of noteworthy attempts to situate the *De gestis* in a broader intellectual and spiritual context within the late antique Greco-Roman world. Eduard Bratke drew thematic and terminological commonality of the temple miracle with Julian's oration 'To the Mother of Gods'; Hermann Usener associated it with Gnostic imagery and rituals; Adolf Harnack grouped the *De gestis* with the so-called Aberkios inscription as a textual product of some 'syncretistic cult associations'; Franz Kampers

paralleled the *De gestis*' oracles and its image of the Persian court to the imagery of the *Alexander Romance*.<sup>25</sup> However, after minutely analysing these views, Katharina Heyden argues that it is barely possible to establish justifiable intertextual links; there may be a certain measure of affinity, but not a direct interdependence.<sup>26</sup> Defining the doctrinal or ideological typology of the *De gestis* in general and of the *Story of Aphroditianos* specifically, Heyden has elaborated numerous arguments describing its core idea as being an apologetic portrayal of paganism aiming to achieve a sort of a Hellenic-Christian synthesis. The Christian truth is a fulfilment of pagan prophecies and not only biblical ones, and the Greco-Roman pagan religious traditions are compatible with Christianity.<sup>27</sup> Heyden's argumentation is well elaborated and convincing; however, it is worth noting that the specific form of paganism addressed in the *De gestis* is not explicitly specified. It would be more practicable to look for associations not in a specific text, plot, legend or ritual, but rather in the general state of mind underlying the *De gestis* and especially the story of Aphroditianos on the temple miracle and its consequences.

Heyden refers in passing to the Greco-Roman image of Persia as a contextual element of the *De gestis* and I would like to further develop her reasoning.<sup>28</sup> My hypothesis is that the *De gestis* developed as a sort of a Christian quasi-Mithraic discourse aiming to place the origins of Christianity in the milieu of indigenous solar cults and their corresponding ethical traditions.<sup>29</sup> There still remain some oddities in the text, unexplained (or unnoticed) by modern commentators, that may indicate a certain quasi-Mithraic tendency.

## 2.5 A Christian 'Quasi-Mithraic' Apologia?

First of all, it is quite remarkable how the *De gestis* persistently labels the Persian king, dignitaries and priests as 'Hellenes' and their religion as Hellenic. Moreover, the Persian chief priest is not only qualified as 'Hellene' (§ 4) but also bears the glaringly Greek name of Aphroditianos.<sup>30</sup> The use of 'Hellenic' by early Christian authors in a general sense as 'polytheistic' and 'pagan' is well-known. However, 'Hellenes' as a general term for polytheists and pagans, as far as I know, was applied predominantly (or exclusively?) to the 'heathen' individuals and groups *inside* the borders of the Roman empire, to wit, to those being a part of the Greco-Roman Self. Therefore, attributing the term 'Hellenes' to the 'heathens' outside the Greco-Roman world, including Persian foreigners, was hardly legitimate.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, the anonymous authors of the *De gestis* considered Persia, Persians and Persian pagan cults as an element of their own identity. The most plausible religious and cultural context wherein such associations would be acceptable was Mithraism, commonly acknowledged as cultic Persianism on the Greco-Roman soil. Adherents of the Mithraic mysteries called their cult the mysteries of the Persians and claimed Zoroaster as their founder.<sup>32</sup>

Second, Mithras is directly referred to once by his Persian name and more than once by its Greek Mithraic counterparts. King Arrhinatos swears by the name of Mithras proper (§ 49).<sup>33</sup> The same supreme deity is referred to in Greek as ἥλιος ‘the Sun’ and μέγας ἥλιος ‘the Great Sun’ (§§ 21, 24, 33); the same deity is called θεὸς θεῶν ‘God of gods’, παντοκράτωρ ‘the omnipotent’ and ὑψιστος ‘the most high’ (§§ 23, 25 [p. 152.14], 29 [p. 156.16]). The caption for the image of Mary and Jesus refers to the latter as Ζεὺς ἥλιος θεὸς μέγας βασιλεὺς Ἰησοῦς ‘God Zeus-Helios, the great king Jesus’ (§ 31 [p. 160.2]), thus identifying Jesus with a sequence of the synonymic designations God–Zeus–Helios.<sup>34</sup> By examining the votive Mithraic inscriptions, it is evident that such a usage of the sacred names θεός, Ζεὺς, ἥλιος, μέγας ἥλιος, the attribute ὑψιστος and their combinations can easily be read as Mithraic.<sup>35</sup> God-Helios’s epithet παντοκράτωρ was quite well-known in Greek helio-centric paganism.<sup>36</sup> Another parallel can be found in the so-called *Mithras Liturgy* (whatever its relation to Mithraism was), which refers to μέγας θεὸς ἥλιος Μίθρας as one and the same deity.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that, in the *De gestis*, the supreme Sun deity of the Persians/Hellenes is the same as Mithras and the Persians/Hellenes of the *De gestis* identify Mithras with Christ.<sup>38</sup>

Third, Aphroditianos’s confession of faith may be read as a Mithraic creed. He maintains that he adores Helios (i.e., Mithras, as one can assume), the four elements and the One who is the Cause of everything (§ 33). Although Aphroditianos’s succinct confession may not be solely relevant to Mithraism, it can be easily interpreted in that context.<sup>39</sup>

Fourth, Aphroditianos’s title ἀρχιμάγειρος, though also found in the Septuagint with a meaning inappropriate to the *De gestis*’ general context, may have had a pseudo-Mithraistic significance. An inscription from Thessalonike dating from the second or third century CE refers to ἀρχιμαγειρεὺς καὶ ἀρχινεωκόρος implying, evidently, a high-standing minister of a mystery cult (probably, Mysteries of Cybele).<sup>40</sup> The analogical reading of the ἀρχιμάγειρος as a ‘high-standing priest’ of a fictitious ‘Persian’ pseudo-Mithraic cult ideally complies with the *De gestis*’ contexts.

Fifth, the presence of the imitated foreign language words throughout the *De gestis*<sup>41</sup> may have alluded to Mithraistic verbal practices in incantations and prayers. These practices included both Hellenised Middle Persian words (*nama* ‘hail’, *nabarze* ‘triumphant?’) and incomprehensible Pseudo-Persian elements.<sup>42</sup> However, of course, it is important to note that the usage of such incomprehensible words was not specifically Mithraistic, as it was also common, in particular, in magic spells (*glossolalia*, ἄσημα ὀνόματα, *voces magicae*).<sup>43</sup>

Each individual argument that has been offered may not indicate specifically Mithraism, but all of them together create a notable impression of a certain Mithraic influence or bias. The Christian significance attributed to Perso-Hellenic ‘Mithraism’, as demonstrated in this text, is further supported by the authority of the evangelical Magi who were commonly understood

as Persians.<sup>44</sup> By and large, Mithraic sentiments found in a Christian text are not surprising. Christian polemicists, such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian and others, denied with fervour any affinity between Mithraic and Christian customs, rites and symbolism. Regardless of their motives for the denial, it inadvertently evidenced the attempts of a ‘pro-Mithraic’ interpretation of Christianity (or a Christian reconstruing of Mithraism) that circulated among Christians themselves.<sup>45</sup>

However, the plot and substantive elements of the temple miracle hardly reveal any link with the Mysteries of Mithras proper. As it seems, the authors of the original version of the *De gestis*, especially of Aphroditianos’s account, employed quasi-Mithraic allusions to form a generalised image of pre-Christian native wisdom and piety. This depiction centred on the contemporary solar cult of imperial Rome, which was portrayed as religious ‘Persianism’.<sup>46</sup> In this sense, the motifs of pagan oracles in the *De gestis*, as was aptly noted by Pauline Brindel, resonate with the general idea of the so-called *Theosophy of Tübingen* – the collection of the pagan Greek and Egyptian prophecies concerning the Christian faith.<sup>47</sup> Such attempts to find predecessors of Christianity in old pagan traditions continued for many centuries, as exemplified, in particular, by a voluminous treatise on ‘Christian ideas’ in Greek, Persian, Egyptian, Chaldean and other writings, which was composed as late as after the 640 by an anonymous Constantinopolitan author and was later summarised by Photios.<sup>48</sup>

The presence of quasi-Mithraic elements made legitimate the semantic equalisation of ‘Persian’ with ‘Hellene’ and constructed a fictional *mise-en-scène* wherein imaginary quasi-Mithraic ‘Persia’ served as an *ἀλληγορία*/allegory in the technical literary sense.<sup>49</sup> This analogy implied that the ‘Persian’ king and the ‘Persian’ sage Aphroditianos symbolised an ideal ‘heathen’ Roman and Hellenic emperor and a chief priest-philosopher. It may also be suggested that the noted equalisation between ‘Persian’ and ‘Hellenic’ was most likely possible in quite early dates only, in Parthian times or some decades later, but before the commencement of the Sasanian persecutions of Christians in the 330s. This observation supports Heyden’s hypothesis about early and, probably, pre-Constantine origin of some parts of the *De gestis*, particularly the sections concerning pagan prophecies, including the temple miracle.

## 2.6 Reconciling Inconsistencies

My interpretation of the *De gestis* as a Christian ‘quasi-Mithraic’ apologia also provides solutions to several apparent inconsistencies in the plot:

- 1 Why did only Christian clerics take part in the disputation about Hellenic predictions (§§ 1–2)?
- 2 Why were the Jews first ordered by the king to act as arbitrators in the disputation (§ 3)?

- 3 Finally, it may recover the original logic of the obscure episode when some Christians complained of Aphroditianos's supporting Christianity to the king (§ 39): if the dispute occurred between the pagans and Christians, why then were the latter unhappy with the pagan arbitrator who defended them?

The original plot of the entire discourse can be reconstructed in the following way. First, one can posit that the general *mise-en-scène* originally suggested a discord among different groups of Christians – between ‘Hellenising’ (or ‘quasi-Mithraistic’ in my terms) and ‘Judaising’ Christians – concerning the origins of Christianity. Therefore, Dionysaros was the one who denied continuity between indigenous Greco-Roman paganism and Christianity, while Philip attempted to prove it (§§ 1, 7). King Arrhinatos wished to appease the resulting tumult between the two Christian parties and summoned them to the court.

Second, since the question concerned the ‘Hellenic’ prophecies about the events related ultimately to Israel and to the Jewish religion and community, it would be logical on the part of the king to choose Jewish teachers as an arbitrator in the dispute.

Third, in this suggested interpretational perspective, the episode of accusing Aphroditianos by some ‘archimandrites’ of ‘not saying a word about the true religion of the Hellenes, but instead acting against the Hellenes’,<sup>50</sup> becomes clearer: Aphroditianos, as a true ‘Mithraic’ priest, contrary to expectations, confirmed the affinity of his indigenous beliefs to Christianity, while the ‘Judaising’ archimandrites expected him to expose differences and contradictions between polytheistic ‘Hellenism’ and monotheistic Christianity. Aphroditianos, in the archimandrites’ eyes, misinterpreted the essence of paganism making it witness to the religion that was alien to it. It is worth noting also that earlier, the Christians feared Aphroditianos’s appointment as an arbitrator expecting that he would take a rabid anti-Christian stance thus making any dispute about Christianity’s pagan legacy senseless (§§ 4–5).

In the sections concerning pagan prophecies about Christ and Christianity (§§ 1–39), scholars have noted a certain tendency to push into the shadows the Jewish legacy in Christianity.<sup>51</sup> In particular, the temple miracle completely neglects the biblical contexts of the Nativity, passing over in silence even its link with Balaam’s oracle commonly accepted in mainstream exegetics. In some sense, as it seems, the standard Christian anti-Judaic message became entangled here with a Greco-Roman cultural and religious ‘antisemitism’.<sup>52</sup>

To conclude, Aphroditianos’s version of the pre-history of the Magi, unlike the one in *Liber apocryphus nomine Seth*, had nothing to do with genuine Iranian religiosity. Instead, it was a product of the Greco-Roman religious and literary tradition with its ‘Persianate’ propensities. The hypothetically reconstructed logic of Aphroditianos’s account as a Christian apologia of the indigenous solar tradition is reproduced in its extant versions but somewhat blurred and indistinct. This is quite natural and can be explained by

subsequent editing and emendations, which probably started quite early. The early transmitters and editors of the antigraph original may have found its 'quasi-Mithraic' stance undesirable, while later, it may have appeared even unintelligible to them.

## 2.7 Later Tradition

The story of the Star miracle and circumstances of the Magi's journey to Bethlehem entered the later Byzantine tradition and circulated in diverse forms, such as independent opera, parts of other works or brief references to some of its individual motifs. There are 44 Greek manuscripts of the *De gestis* known today, with the earliest one from the ninth century, of which 27 comprise the entire text, 13 contain the *Story of Aphroditianos* only and 4 manuscripts have other more or less extensive excerpts.<sup>53</sup>

The *Story of Aphroditianos*'s popularity in Byzantium is probably largely due to the fact that it was, as it were, legitimised by the theological authority of John of Damascus in the eighth century. John of Damascus included two sections of the *De gestis* in his Homily on the Nativity (BHG 1912): the oracle of Kasandros (*De gestis*, § 11–19) and Aphroditianos's story on the temple miracle (*De gestis*, § 20–32).<sup>54</sup> He amended Aphroditianos's story introducing new details that made it more compatible with the canonical version of the Magi story. In particular, he added a reference to the oracle of Balaam who was portrayed as the ancestor of Persian chief astronomers, a paraphrase of Ps. 72.10 and 15, a paraphrase of Matt 2:2–7 with a direct reference to the name of Herod and some minor changes in wording. His complete omissions are of little significance: the excised passage regarding Dionysos's announcement about the Nativity is the only extensive reduction (*De gestis*, § 25–26). For John of Damascus's expert judgement, the temple miracle and the descriptions of Mary and Jesus are dogmatically acceptable. His purpose of amending the text was to restore the Old Testament contexts and remove the most glaring deviations from the Orthodox readings of the evangelical Magi pericope. Moreover, St John's version includes one more uncommon detail that is absent from the *Story of Aphroditianos*, concerning the polymorphism of Christ: each of the Magi saw Him in a different age (infant, young man of 30 years and old man).<sup>55</sup>

Although the *Story of Aphroditianos* hardly became a part of mainstream religious thought developed by highly educated Byzantine intellectuals, its diverse versions were referred to in more or less detail by many theologians whose orthodoxy was above suspicion.<sup>56</sup> The most uncommon version was reproduced by Neophytos of Cyprus (1134–1214) who employed the *Story* extensively as an explanatory device on diverse occasions. In particular, according to Neophytos, the Magi learned about the Immaculate Conception in the month of March simultaneously with the Annunciation to Mary (§ 23); in March, the star was noticed by the Persians and the Magi set off for Palestine to be on the road for nine months (§ 23); the Magi entered

Judaea on the day when Jesus was born (§ 23); the appearance of the star was predicted by Balaam (§ 29); the Persian temple was dedicated to Zeus (§ 24, 38); and when the Magi returned home and placed the icon in the temple, the Persian sanctuary was rededicated to Jesus (§ 38).<sup>57</sup>

Importantly, the *De gestis* became known far beyond the Byzantine Greek-speaking milieu: it had a long and complicated history in other Orthodox traditions, having been translated into Slavonic (first, around the tenth century and later again in the thirteenth century), into Romanian (seventeenth century), and becoming especially popular in mediaeval Rus' and early modern Russia.<sup>58</sup>

## 2.8 Conclusion: Persianising Christianity

In the context of the present study, the *De gestis* and the *Story of Aphroditianos* as its part occupy a special place. First and foremost, the *De gestis* and its reception in the later tradition profoundly contributed to reinforcing the idea of the Magi's Persian identity within Orthodox and especially Byzantine religiosity and forcefully underscoring the belief that Christ became first known from Persia. As discussed in Chapter 1, these ideas were explicitly formulated by early patrology; however, the *Story of Aphroditianos*, presented in an accessible, captivating and truly novelistic form, introduced this belief to wider circles of 'popular' Christianity. In this sense, the *Story of Aphroditianos* significantly contributed to the embedding of the Persian element into the religious memory of the Byzantines.

The case of the *De gestis* testifies that, in the early stages of the development of Christianity, Greco-Roman Persianism could have been construed as one of the roots of Christianity as opposed to the biblical Jewish tradition. Early Christian religious Persianism was centred on the native solar cult and, naturally, on Mithraism (or rather quasi-Mithraism) as its popular and influential variety, which was reinterpreted in Christian terms. Christian quasi-Mithraic Persianism represented the other line in the search for the roots of the Christian truth. It postulated the predominance of the indigenous Greco-Roman origins of Christianity, distancing thus from the alien and 'abominable' Jews. The early iconography of some biblical characters and the Magi, described in Section 1.9 of Chapter 1, explicitly alludes to indigenous Greco-Roman Mithraic imagery. Another indication of an indigenous Persianising trend in the early Church is, in particular, the rethinking of *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti* on 25 December. This date most likely was regarded as Mithras's birthday but later came to be celebrated as the nativity of Jesus.<sup>59</sup>

The *Story of Aphroditianos* serves as a paradigmatic example of how imaginary Persia was completely assimilated with the Christian Hellenic and Roman Self. This assimilation effectively reduced the cultural distance between 'Persian' and 'Hellenic' to the point of complete disappearance under certain conditions. The subsequent popularity of the story secured the image of the Persians as an integral element of the Hellenic-Christian past in

the Byzantine religious memory. In the illustrative tradition of the *Story of Aphroditianos*, all the Persian characters are represented in ‘Roman’ attire, with the exception of the Magi wearing distinctive ‘Persian’ rectangular caps and mantles.<sup>60</sup> However, at the same time, paradoxically enough, the Persian was not deprived of its ‘ethnic’ and even ‘linguistic’ otherness at least in the text of the *Story*. Similar phenomena of the complete appropriating of the Persian Other and its merging with the Hellenic Self can be evidenced by many other instances, both ‘religious’ and ‘secular’, which will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

## Notes

- 1 See, for instance: Toepel, ‘The Apocryphon of Seth’; Landau, ‘The Revelation of the Magi’ (2016); for a basic up-to-date bibliography, see: Landau, ‘Revelation of the Magi’ (e-Clavis).
- 2 Hultgård, ‘The Magi and the Star’, 222–225; Toepel, ‘The Apocryphon of Seth’, 36–37.
- 3 BHG 802–806; *De gestis* (Heyden); Heyden, *Erzählung*; Heyden, ‘Legend’ (English translation of the *Story of Aphroditianos*); Bringel, *Polémique religieuse*; Bringel, ‘Polémique à la cour Perse’; Eastbourne, *Religious Discussion* (English translation of the *De gestis*). For a useful overview of the *De gestis* and its contexts with an up-to-date bibliography, see: Cameron, ‘Flights of Fancy’, 391–394.
- 4 The references to the *De gestis* are given hereafter according to section numbers in: *De gestis* (Heyden).
- 5 His title is given as ἀρχιμάγειρος in which μάγειρος means ‘cook’ or ‘butcher’ in Classical Greek authors and also can be understood as ‘bodyguard’ and ‘great officer in Oriental courts’ as in the Septuagint. Evidently, it would be reasonable to expect that the author of Aphroditianos’s story, in his word usage, followed the Septuagint. However, the connotation ‘priest’ is also recognizable in μάγειρος: Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique*, 656: ‘c’est proprement celui qui abat les bêtes et prépare la viande, souvent “sacrificateur”’. Therefore, I adopt here Pavel Shchyogolev’s translation ‘верховный жрец’, which looks more logical in the context of the *De gestis*: Aphroditianos was depicted as a chief expert in religious matters and his description as being ‘aged and eighty years old’ (§ 6.5) hardly matches the functions of ‘cook’ or ‘bodyguard’. See: Shchyogolev, *Очерки*, 7; cf.: *De gestis* (Heyden), 128 note 5. See also the next section below.
- 6 *De gestis* (Heyden), § 31 (160.1–3): ‘Ἐν τῷ διοπετεῖ ἱερῷ Διὶ Ἡλίῳ, θεῷ μεγάλῳ βασιλεῖ Ἰησοῦ, τὸ Περσικὸν κράτος ἀνέθηκεν’.
- 7 On the function and meaning of these polemical sections, see: *De gestis* (Heyden), 89–95 with further bibliography.
- 8 *De gestis* (Heyden), 66–88 (on dating and the anonymous author of the text); 103–109 (manuscript tradition; the oldest extant manuscript is probably Codex Mosquensis Graecus 265 of the ninth century); Bringel, *Une polémique à la cour Perse*, Introduction, Section ‘I.3. 3. Datation’. Cf.: Uthemann, *Anastasios Sinaites*, 617–685.
- 9 *De gestis* (Heyden), 60–61.
- 10 Heyden, ‘Philippus von Side’, 215–23 (Fragm. 3.1–5); Eadem, *Erzählung*, 171–225.
- 11 *De gestis* (Heyden), 44–49; Heyden, *Erzählung*, 226–294; Heyden, ‘Legend’, 7.
- 12 *De gestis* (Heyden), 45–47; Heyden, *Erzählung*, 261–270. For the temple of Atargatis and its rituals, see: Loukian (Lightfoot), 266–275.



- 13 For instance, on the laughing Hecate's statue and the kindling torches in her hands, see: Eunapios (Wright), 434–435. Bringel analogises the moving statues to some descriptions of mechanical devices (Bringel, *Une polémique à la cour Perse*, Traduction, n. 54).
- 14 For more information about Philip of Side and the role of his work, see: *De gestis* (Heyden), 37–50.
- 15 Bratke, *Religionsgesprach*, 177–178; Heyden, *Erzählung*, 261–270, 294; *De gestis* (Heyden), 10 and note 7.
- 16 *De gestis* (Heyden), 11–16; Heyden, *Erzählung*, 118–143.
- 17 Külzer, *Disputationes*, 112–117 (authorship ascribed to Ps.-Anastasios of Antioch); Uthemann, *Anastasios Sinaites*, 617–690; Déroche, 'La polémique anti-judaïque', 277–278. See also: Andrist, 'Literary Distance', 51–54.
- 18 Heyden, *Erzählung*, 226–294; Heyden, 'Legend', 6–7.
- 19 *De gestis* (Heyden), 112–113.
- 20 Chapter 1.2–3 above; cf.: *De gestis* (Heyden), 63.
- 21 *De gestis* (Heyden), 20.1 (p. 146.1).
- 22 Heyden, *Erzählung*, 17–18.
- 23 Cf. John Chrysostom's explanations in *Homiliae XC in Matthaem*, 69.46–48 (6.6): It often happened that He was seen crying, 'but never laughing nor [even] slightly smiling' (γελῶντα δὲ οὐδαμοῦ· ἀλλ' οὐδὲ μειδιῶντα ἤρεμα).
- 24 Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 49–53, 57–59. Theodore Anagnostes, I, 353, 5–7: after the death of Theodosios II in 450, St Luke's icon of the Virgin was received by Empress Poulcheria from her sister-in-law Empress Eudokia. However, Aphroditianos's notion of the Persian origin of the first icon might relate to the term 'the Persian picture' used in imperial court ceremonies, possibly implying the Mandyllion recovered from Edessa in 945 (Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De ceremoniis/Commentaire* (Vogt), 1:39–40 and note 1; Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, 8). It appears that the most ancient iconic representations may have been associated with Persia.
- 25 Bratke, *Religionsgesprach*, 129–193; Usener, *Weihnachtsfest*, 32–38; Usener's interpretation was supported in: Schwartz, 'Aphroditianos', 2791; Harnack, *Abercius-Inschrift*; Kampers, *Alexander der Große*, 111–135, esp. 116–135.
- 26 Heyden, *Erzählung*, 228–275.
- 27 Heyden, *Erzählung*, 17–18, 166–167, 203–205, 282–287, 623; *De gestis* (Heyden), 48, 95–98, 120–121.
- 28 Heyden, *Erzählung*, 290–293.
- 29 For the theory, practice and evolution of the Mysteries of Mithras, see now: Mastrocinque, *Mysteries of Mithras*.
- 30 For potential 'Persian' associations of this name to a Greek ear, see: Panaino, 'Iranica nella Disputatio', 246–247.
- 31 See, however, the *Life of Mamelchtha* which describes an Artemis's temple in Persia and the 'Hellenes' worshipping the cult of Artemis. Nonetheless, the vita does not equate 'Persians' with 'Hellenes', as it details that 'the king of the Persians' punished the 'Hellenes' for killing Mamelchtha and subsequently destroyed the temple of Artemis (Lequeux, 'La passion de Mamelchta', 273).
- 32 Beck, 'Greco-Roman Astrologers', 288–289.
- 33 In addition, 'Mithras' is present as an element in the theophoric name Mithrobades, the son of Arrhinatos (§ 27, 66, 83). See also: *De gestis* (Heyden), 24–27, 69, 154 note 73.
- 34 The association between Jesus and Mithras was a commonplace idea in late antiquity.
- 35 There are some examples: ἥλιος Μίθρας (*CIMRM*, 1: nos. 23, 24, 72, 171, 178, 568, 578); θεὸς Μίθρας (*CIMRM*, 1: nos. 18, 41, 54, 72); Ζεὺς ἥλιος Μίθρας...

- ὑψιστος (CIMRM, 1: no. 70); θεὸς ὑψιστος (CIMRM, 1: no. 72; cf.: CIMRM, 2: no. 72); Ζεὺς ἥλιος Μίθρας (CIMRM, 1: no. 463, 473, 474, 475); Ζεὺς ἥλιος μέγας (CIMRM, 1: no. 463, 473). However, for θεὸς ὑψιστος and παντοκράτωρ as termini technici outside Mithraic contexts, particularly in the Hypsistarian cult, see: Mitchell, 'Theos Hypsistos'.
- 36 Versnel, *Coping with the Gods*, 435–436; Fauth, *Helios Megistos*, 80, 93–97, 105–118, 159.
- 37 Betz, 'Mithras Liturgy', 39.482 and commentary 98–99; obvious Mithraic motifs in the *Mithras Liturgy* do not necessarily make the text 'Mithraic': Mastrocinque, *Mysteries of Mithras*, 308–312.
- 38 Cf.: Heyden, *Erzählung*, 230 discusses the identification of Zeus and Helios in late Roman times referring to Mithraic practices.
- 39 Cf.: Heyden, *Erzählung*, 29, 96 describes Aphroditianos's confession of faith in the following way: 'Hierin könnte man so etwas wie den kleinsten gemeinsamen Nenner aus platonischer Naturphilosophie, christlichem Schöpfungsglauben und zoroastrischer Verehrung der Elemente sehen'. However, interpretations of Mithraism through a 'Platonic' lens were not uncommon within Greek thought: Turcan, *Mithras Platonicus*.
- 40 CIMRM, 2: no. 2345. The first publishers of the inscription – Picard and Avezou – identified it as Mithraic: 'Inscriptions de Macédoine', 97–100 (no. 7). Cf.: Bringel, *Une polémique à la cour Perse*, Traduction, n. 4.
- 41 *De gestis* (Heyden), §§ 1 (p. 128.7), 10 (p. 136.3), 39 (p. 166.28), 41 (p. 170.2–3), 50 (p. 182.22–23), 66 (p. 200.16), 68 (p. 202.24–25), 82 (p. 212.17–18), 82 (p. 214.2–3). For these pseudo-Persian passages, see: Bringel, *Une polémique à la cour Perse*, Introduction, Section '2. Les Persica'.
- 42 See, for instance: CIMRM, 1: nos. 168, 568; TMMM, 2:56–57; Betz, 'Mithras Liturgy', Indices: II. Voces Magicae. For the use of incomprehensible words in Mithraic practices, see: Clauss, *Roman Cult of Mithras*, 105–108.
- 43 Poirier, *Tongues of Angels*, 48–53. For examples of 'meaningless' magical spells addressed to demons to harness their power, see: *Papyri Graecae Magicae; Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*; for some later Byzantine examples of this kind, see: Delatte, *Anecdota*, 1:4 (no. 17), 12.4–5, 40.17–21, 98.12, etc.
- 44 See also: Heyden, *Erzählung*, 287–288.
- 45 For early Christian criticism of the Mysteries of Mithras, which produced a huge historiographical tradition in scholarship, as well as for further bibliography, see: Colpe, 'Die Mithrasmysterien', 29–43; Alvar, *Romanising Oriental Gods*, 383–421; Walsh, *The Cult of Mithras*, 78–85. For useful conceptual overviews of the topic, see: Gordon, 'Miθra'; Clauss, 'Mithras und Christus', 265–285. For an analysis of Christian accounts and interesting additional considerations, see also: Mastrocinque, *Mysteries of Mithras*, passim and especially 20–22, 30–34, 135–137, 313–331. For the final destiny of the Mithraic mysteries in the Roman empire, see also: Turcan, *Mithra et le mithriacisme*, 115–121; Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 2:26–27.
- 46 For attempts to contextualise the *De gestis* in Sasanian religious life and politics, see now: Schilling, *Die Anbetung der Magier*; Panaino, 'Iranica nella Disputatio'.
- 47 *Theosophia* (Beatrice); Beatrice, 'Traditions apocryphes'; Alpi and Le Boulluec, 'La reconstruction de la Théosophie'; Bringel, *Une polémique à la cour Perse*, Introduction (Section II.1: 1. La question de l'ancrage géographique de l'ouvrage).
- 48 Photios, *Myriobiblos*, cod. 170 (2:162–165).
- 49 The use of the allegory device here is quite logical and appropriate: it is a figurative expression in which there is no necessary semantic connection between what is said (ἀγορεύειν) and what is meant by the said (ἄλλο), while the connection between the two is established by the allegorist, in our case, by the author of the *De gestis*.

- 50 *De gestis* (Heyden), § 39.11–16: ‘... τῆς ἀληθοῦς τῶν Ἑλλήνων θρησκείας μηδαμῶς λόγον ποιησάμενον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦναντίον καταπράξαντα Ἑλλήνων’.
- 51 Heyden, *Erzählung*, 167–168 (‘Enteignung des Judentums’).
- 52 The discussion of antisemitism in antiquity has spawned an abundant literature; see for instance: Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*; Daniel, ‘Anti-Semitism’; Stroumsa, ‘From Anti-Judaism to Antisemitism’; Collins, ‘Anti-Semitism in Antiquity?’; Gruen, ‘Was There Judeophobia?’; de Lange, ‘Origins of Anti-Semitism’; for an attempt at cultural typological analysis of the problem, see: Arkel, *Drawing of the Mark of Cain*, especially Chapter 2.
- 53 *De gestis* (Heyden), 103–109.
- 54 John of Damascus, *Homilia in nativitatem Domini*, 332.7–342.35 (6–11). For a detailed analysis of the homily and its contextualisation in St John’s thought, see: Heyden, *Erzählung*, 57–62, 94–115, 300, 323–328 (text and translation of John of Damascus’s excerpt); *De gestis* (Heyden), 110–111; see also Uthemann, *Anastasios Sinaites*, 687–590.
- 55 John of Damascus, *Homilia in nativitatem Domini*, 342.25–28 (11); Heyden, *Erzählung*, 112–115; Eadem, ‘Legend’, 17–18 note j.
- 56 For the versions of and more or less detailed references to the *Story* in middle and late Byzantine literature, see: BHG 802–806; Bratke, *Religionsgesprach*, 229–240; *De gestis* (Heyden), 105 note 241, 112 (Section 4). One should add to the lists of Bratke and Heyden also: Akakios Sabaites, *Commentarius in Andree Cretensis canonem*, 9.233.15–94. See also a later recension (fifteenth century?) in: Delatte, *Anecdota*, 1:324–328.
- 57 Neophytos, *Ἐρμηνεία Κανόνων τῶν Δεσποτικῶν Ἐορτῶν*, 7.23–38; Neophytos referred to the *Story of Aphroditianos* briefly also in *Ἐρμηνεία τοῦ ψαλτῆρος*, 5.67.106–110. For the biography and works of Neophytos, see: Galatariotou, *Neophytos the Recluse*. Neophytos here echoes the commonly accepted in the Orthodox Church dating of the Annunciation to Mary and the Nativity; however, for an alternative dating, see: Photios, *Myriobiblos*, 5:68 (cod. 232, Stephen Gobar).
- 58 Bobrov, *Апокрифическое ‘Сказание Афродитиана’*; Bobrov, *Сказание Афродитиана*; Gaster, ‘Die rumänische Version’. See also: Veder, ‘Slavonic Tale of Aphroditian’; Stradomski, ‘Апокрыфичне Пророцтво’; Trifonova, ‘Сказание на Афродитиан’; Trifonova, ‘Slavonic Translation’; Trifonova, ‘Третият славянски превод’; Kovalenko, ‘Сказание Афродитиана’; Simonescu, *Legenda lui Afroditian*.
- 59 The question of the origins of 25 December as the Nativity Day remains a topic of debate; see, for instance: Clauss, ‘Mithras und Christus’, 275–279.
- 60 Heyden, *Erzählung*, 329–352 and for the representation of the Magi, see, especially, Abb. 22–28, 28–29, 41–44, 46–49.

## 3 The holy Persians

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the Persian motifs from the Christian Sacred Scriptures were firmly established by exegetics and other genres of church literature, making them an indispensable element of the theological tradition and, accordingly, entering into Orthodox religious memory. The use of these motifs and *topoi* persisted in middle and late Byzantine textual and visual culture. As the later destiny of the *Story of Aphroditianos* suggests, the Persian component also circulated in popular religiosity. In this chapter, I will touch upon another theme – the Byzantine memory of the Sasanian Persian saints and martyrs. This theme not only expands the set of the Persian motifs in the church tradition, but also provides insights into the diverse mnemonic mechanisms of religious culture.

### 3.1 Christianisation and Persecution

The earliest traces of identifiable Christian communities in the Parthian empire came to light by the mid-third century at the latest. This emergence is believed to be the result of the missionary activity carried out by the churches of Edessa and Antioch. The massive deportation of the captive Roman subjects to Iran in 252–260 by the Sasanian shah Shapur I (240–271) in the course of the Persian-Roman wars increased the Christian population. As a result, two parallel Christian networks were formed in Iran: one consisted of the ‘old’ Christians who were indigenous Syriac- and Persian-speakers, and the other comprised the ‘new’ Greek-speaking communities consisting mostly of deportees. First, the attitude of the Sasanian authorities to the Christians was neutral or even favourable. From the Byzantine standpoint at that time, Persia was considered an integral part of the Christian world, to the extent that the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325) was defined by a fifth-century historian as a universal synod of bishops, assembled ‘from all the provinces of the Roman empire and Persia’.<sup>1</sup>

However, the situation changed when Constantine the Great (306–337) legalised Christianity and began systematically supporting it as one of the major confessions of the empire. By the first half of the fourth century,

the number of Christians in Sasanian Iran was considerable enough to cause concern among the Sasanian authorities about the security of Iran's western borders. These suspicions appeared to be justifiable, as Christians living under Sasanian rule could have harboured disloyalty towards the authorities viewing the Christian Roman emperor as their true universal lord. Doubts about the political loyalty of the local Christians prompted a series of mass persecutions, mostly occurring during times of war, under the reigns of Shapur II (309–379), Yazdegerd I (399–420), Bahram V (420–438), Yazdegerd II (438–457) and finally Khusrav II (590–628). According to Byzantine and Syriac hagiography, a significant proportion of native Iranians, including both lay and priestly members of Sasanian nobility, converted to Christianity, playing an important role in the Iranian political system. These noble individuals, often denounced by the Zoroastrian priests or high officials, may have faced death sentence. By and large, as it seems, many thousands of Christians suffered from persecution between the mid-fourth and the beginning of the seventh century.<sup>2</sup>

The dramatic destiny of Sasanian Christianity abounded with the sublime examples of individual and group feats of religious piety and fidelity, as well as with the highly traumatic experiences of oppression and massacres. The Byzantines perceived the Christian persecutions in Persia through the prism of the Magi's experience, which they remembered well. In the tenth century, Symeon the Metaphrast remarks on Shapur II's persecutions, stating that the Persians, who had once prostrated before Jesus, later inhumanly punished the followers of Christ because of Him.<sup>3</sup> By the term 'Persians', the Metaphrast is referring to the Persian kings. For the present study, the reflections of the double-edged history of Sasanian Christianity in the religious memory of the subsequent generations of the Byzantines hold primary importance. The cults of the Persian saints in the Greek-speaking Orthodox world require a special extensive study. In this chapter, I will outline some major aspects of the problem.

### 3.2 Liturgical Memory

The most significant information for appraising the importance of the Sasanian Christian experience can be found in liturgical practice. In this context, I will examine the references to the Persian saints in the *Synaxarion of the Great Church of Constantinople*. This collection of liturgical texts of diverse genres and dates appeared in the post-Iconoclastic period and modelled the order of services in the middle and late Byzantine Church.<sup>4</sup> Generally speaking, *synaxaria*, regulating the distribution of holidays according to the days of the liturgical year and the remembrance of saints and religiously significant events, imparts the clearest evidence of the significance of this or that holy figure or event for the Byzantine religious mentality. The mnemonic function of the liturgical tradition is much more efficient than that of expert

theology, because the former is addressed to a wider public and constitutes the basic knowledge mandatory for all Christians.

At Matins (ὄρθρος), brief notices of the saints of the day were read after the sixth ode of the canon. Among the saints referred to in the Byzantine Church service, there were a considerable number of holy Persians (by blood or by political allegiance) and other nationals martyred by the Sasanians. Table 3.1 summarises these commemorations as recorded in the editions of the *synaxaria* by Hippolyte Delehaye and Juan Mateos.<sup>5</sup> The table comprises only those names of saints directly associated with Persia in commemoration notices.

Table 3.1 Persian saints in the *Synaxarion of Constantinople*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Saint's day</i>	<i>Primary source</i>	<i>BHG, BHG NA</i>
1000 martyrs under Shapur II	IV.14	SEC, IV.14; TGÉ, IV.14	
120 martyrs in Persia	IV.5; IV.6	SEC, IV.5.4; TGÉ, IV.5, IV.6	
44 Sabaite martyrs in Persia	V.16	TGÉ, V.16	1215
Abdas, Abdiesous	V.16	SEC, V.16.2; TGÉ, V.16	
Abdas, Beniamin	IX.5; III.31	SEC, IX.5.3, III.31.3; TGÉ, IX.5, III.31	2000e, 2061m
Abramios the Persian	II.5	SEC, II.5.2; TGÉ, II.5	10–11
Achemenides the Confessor	XI.3	SEC, XI.3 ( <i>Mv</i> , 48)	
Aeithalas, Apsees (Akepsees)	XII.11	SEC, XII.11.2; TGÉ, XII.11	2015
Akepsimas, Joseph, Aeithalas	XI.3	SEC, XI.3.1; TGÉ, XI.3	15–20
Akindynos, Pegasios, Anempodistos, Aphthonios, Elpidiphoros	XI.2	SEC, XI.2.2; TGÉ, XI.2.	21–23
Ananias of Persia	XII.1	SEC, XII.1.2; TGÉ, XII.1	
Anastasios of Persia and his relics	I.22	SEC, I.22.2; TGÉ, I.22	84–90
Aphraates (Euphraates) the Persian Sage	I.29; I.28	SEC, I.29.3; TGÉ, I.28, I.29	
Azat the Eunuch and 1000 martyrs	IV.17	SEC, IV.17.2	
Bachthisoes (Rhachthisoes), Symeon, Isaac	V.15	SEC, V.15.5; TGÉ, V.15	2054h
Badimos	IV.9	SEC, IV.9.2; TGÉ, IV.9	210
Barsabas	XII.11	SEC, XII.11 ( <i>Mv</i> . 39)	

(Continued)

Table 3.1 (Continued)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Saint's day</i>	<i>Primary source</i>	<i>BHG, BHG NA</i>
Batas	V.1	<i>SEC</i> , V.1.2; <i>TGÉ</i> , V.1	
Boethazat, Sasanés, Thekla, Anna et al.	XI.20	<i>SEC</i> , XI.20.8	
Christina of Persia	III.14	<i>SEC</i> , III.14.5; <i>TGÉ</i> , III.14	
Dadas, Gobdelaas, Kasdoe	IX.29	<i>SEC</i> , IX.29.2; <i>TGÉ</i> , IX.29	480–480f
Dometios of Persia	X.4; VIII.7	<i>SEC</i> , X.4.3, VIII.7.1; <i>TGÉ</i> , X.4, VIII.7	560–561a
Eleutherios the Persian, Zoilos the Roman	IV.14; IV.13	<i>SEC</i> , IV.4.2; <i>TGÉ</i> , IV.13, IV.14	
Golindouch (Maria of Persia)	VII.12; VII.3	<i>SEC</i> , VII.12.2; <i>TGÉ</i> , VII.3; VII.12	700–702e
Heliodoros, Dosas, Mariab	IV.9	<i>SEC</i> , IV.9; <i>TGÉ</i> , IV.9	
Ia of Persia	IX.11; IX.25; VIII.4; VIII.5	<i>SEC</i> , IX.11.2, VIII.4.7; <i>TGÉ</i> , IX.11; IX.25, VIII.4; VIII.5	761–762
Ionas, Barachesios (Barouchesios) et al.	III.29	<i>SEC</i> , III.29.1; <i>TGÉ</i> , III.29	942–43
James and Azas	IV.17; IV.14	<i>SEC</i> , IV.17.3; <i>TGÉ</i> , IV.14	
James the Persian (Intercisus)	XI.27	<i>SEC</i> , XI.27.1; <i>TGÉ</i> , XI.27	772–773e
John of Persia	XI.29	<i>SEC</i> , XI.29.4; <i>TGÉ</i> , XI.29	
John, James the Zealot	XI.1	<i>SEC</i> , XI.1.3; <i>TGÉ</i> , XI.1	
John, Saborios, Isaac, Papias, Onam	XI.20	<i>SEC</i> , XI.20.7	
Mamelchtha	X.5	<i>SEC</i> , X.5.2; <i>TGÉ</i> , X.5	2245
Manuel, Sabel, Ismael	VI.17	<i>SEC</i> , VI.17.1; <i>TGÉ</i> , VI.17	1023–1024e
Martyrs of Persia	IV.9	<i>SEC</i> , IV.9.3; <i>TGÉ</i> , IV.9	
Maruthas and martyrs of Martyropolis	II.16	<i>SEC</i> , II.16.3; <i>TGÉ</i> , II.16	2265–2266
Miles, Eubores (Ebores), Papas, Senoie	XI.13	<i>SEC</i> , XI.13.2; <i>TGÉ</i> , XI.13	2276
Nersas, Joseph	XI.20	<i>SEC</i> , XI.20.5; <i>TGÉ</i> , XI.20	
Relics of Anastasios	I.24	<i>SEC</i> , I.24 ( <i>M</i> , 40)	
Persissa/Perses	IX.23; IX.24	<i>SEC</i> , IX.23.6; <i>TGÉ</i> , IX.24	
Pherphouthé	IV.5	<i>SEC</i> , IV.5.3; <i>TGÉ</i> , IV.5	1511
Prokopios of Skythopolis	XI.23	<i>SEC</i> , H, 40; <i>SEC</i> , P, 41	
Sadoch and 128 saints	II.20	<i>SEC</i> , II.20.2; <i>TGÉ</i> , II.20	1613

(Continued)

Table 3.1 (Continued)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Saint's day</i>	<i>Primary source</i>	<i>BHG, BHG NA</i>
Sadoth and 120 others	X.19	<i>SEC</i> , X.19.3; <i>TGÉ</i> , X.19	
Salamanes	II.17	<i>SEC</i> , II.17.6; <i>TGÉ</i> , II.17	1614
Sositheos, Narses, Isaac	XII.9	<i>SEC</i> , XII.9; <i>TGÉ</i> , XII.9	
Symeon of Persia, Abdelas, Gousthazat, Phousik	IV.17; IV.14	<i>SEC</i> , IV.17.1; <i>TGÉ</i> , IV.14	
Thekla, Mariamne, Martha, Mary, Enneeim	VI.9; VI.6	<i>SEC</i> , VI.9; <i>TGÉ</i> , VI.6	2417

It is necessary to notice that in modern hagiology, Sadoth and Sadok in Table 3.1 are recognised as variants of the same name, of which Sadoth (Σαδῶθ) is more correct, being a rendition of the Persian *shāh-dūst*, that is, 'king's friend' (φιλοβασιλεύς in the Greek text); his feast day is 20 February.<sup>6</sup> However, in Byzantine times, at least formally, Sadoth and Sadoch were recognized as distinct individuals with separate commemoration days.<sup>7</sup> The female martyr St Persissa (Πέρσισσα in *SEC* and Πέρσης in *TGÉ*) seems to be unidentifiable, being referred to in *synaxaria* without any additional indication of her circumstances. Paul Devos has suggested that Persissa/Perses is an 'ethnic' name. On the other hand, the female name 'Persis' is not unique and can also be found in hagiography.<sup>8</sup> St Persissa can be included in the list of the Persian saints with reservations. Sometimes St Prokopios of Skythopolis (feast 23 November) could have been associated with Persia.<sup>9</sup> In addition, some biblical characters associated with Persia were commemorated in Byzantine liturgy, such as the prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Youths on their feast day 17 December and also on several other occasions, such as the Sunday before the Nativity.<sup>10</sup>

In the *Synaxarion of Constantinople*, 51 commemoration entries for the Persian saints (with some saints having multiple days of commemoration) constitute 3.5 per cent of the total of approximately 1450 entries.<sup>11</sup> While the percentage might seem low, this is understandable since the vast majority of saints were subjects of the Roman Empire, where Christianity originated and developed as a religion. In addition, the church tradition was mostly indifferent to the ethnic origin of a holy man.<sup>12</sup> Indications of Persian, Ethiopian, Syrian and Armenian identity or one's dwelling in these lands are an exception to the rule. Remarkably, the group of Persian saints is larger than any other non-Roman affiliation: approximately twice as many as Ethiopians, Syrians or Armenians.



It is also important that the commemoration of the Persian saints and martyrs continued to be a part of the Byzantine Church service centuries after the disappearance of the Sasanian empire and the almost complete evaporation of Persian-speaking Christianity. While not all the saints listed in Table 3.1 were necessarily celebrated on their feast days in all Byzantine churches throughout the centuries, the normative character of the *Synaxarion* played an important role in preserving the memory of notable Christian Persians and transmitting it through generations of believers, including both well-educated and commoners, clerics and laypersons.

The routine commemoration of the Persian saints in liturgy gave rise to a rich hymnographic tradition. As Enrica Follieri has shown, starting with the sixth or seventh century, the most prolific and renowned hymnographers paid tribute to the Persian martyrs: George of Pisidia (d. ca 634), Patriarch German I (d. after 730), John of Damascus (d. before 754), Clement the Hymnographer (d. after 824), Theophanes Graptos (778–845), Ephraim of Caria (eighth or tenth centuries), Joseph the Hymnographer (816–886), Patriarch Photios (d. 893), George of Nicomedia (latter half of the ninth century) and Bartholomew of Grottaferrata (d. 1055). It is interesting to note that, in addition to the commonly accepted list of the Persian saints, some hymnographers, such as Theophanes Graptos and Photios, attributed the martyrdom of Great Martyr Eirene (feast 5 May) to Shapur II's persecutions in the fourth century – an attribution that was not supported by most of her *vitae* (*BHG* 252y–254c). After the ninth century, however, hymnographers' interest in the Persian martyrs began to decline.<sup>13</sup> The latter observation of Follieri is supported by other sources as well, as I shall demonstrate in the succeeding section.

The lives and martyrdoms of half of the Persian saints, listed in Table 3.1, were provided with extended notes in the *Synaxarion*, while some other lives were elaborated into more detailed hagiographical accounts (see Table 3.1 for references to *BHG*).<sup>14</sup> As Hippolyte Delehaye suggested in his publication of the Persian martyrs' acts, by the tenth century, the Greek collection of these passions occupied quite an important place in the Byzantine religious tradition and was notably more complete than what has come down to us.<sup>15</sup> The Persian saints, whose lives circulated outside the technical accounts of the *synaxaria*, may be divided into three groups based on the number of hagiographic texts dedicated to each: first, Anastasios of Persia and Akepsimas with his companions receiving the maximal number of texts; second, Akindynos with his companions and Golindouch; and, finally, Abdas and Benjamin, Abramios the Persian, Dadas with his companions, Dometios of Persia, Ia of Persia, Ionas and Barachesios, James the Persian (Intercisus), Manuel and those with him, Maruthas, Pherphouthe, Sadoth, Thekla and her companions.<sup>16</sup> One may add St Sire (m. 559, feast 6 December or 18 May), known as Shīrīn in Persian, omitted in *SEC* and *TGÉ*, whose life and martyrdom are recorded in *BHG* 1637.<sup>17</sup>

Some Persian supporting characters from hagiographic lore may have been referred to on relevant occasions as paradigmatic figures. For instance, in the *Life of Stephen the Younger* (composed in 809), Stephen called the woman helping him in the Praetorian prison ‘the new Isdandoul’.<sup>18</sup> Isdandoul (or rather Ἰσδανδούχ) was a pious woman from the *Martyrdom of Akepsimas, Joseph and Aeithalas* who fed and healed the two latter martyrs in prison.<sup>19</sup> It can also be assumed that the feminine name Ζωΐλα in a fifteenth-century list of recommended monastic names, referred to Zoila, a pious Persian woman from the *Life of St Parthenios of Lampsakos* (the saint evicted a demon from her).<sup>20</sup>

### 3.3 Churches and Relics

The well-developed hagiography of holy Persians highlights a noticeable Persian element in private religious piety and, therefore, in religious memory. Believers would read the stories of their lives and passions independently from the routine celebrations at church services. The place of the Persian saints in both official Orthodoxy and private devotional exercises can be exemplified by the presence of several churches and monasteries dedicated to them. For the purpose of this discussion, I will primarily focus on the churches in Constantinople and its immediate hinterland, as these have been better studied in modern scholarship (see Table 3.2).

All the dates in Table 3.2 are indicative of a church or monastery’s first mention or reference to the time of its foundation. Only two institutions known to me are located outside the city walls. The church of Ia of Persia (3) was situated on the Asian shore of the Bosporos, opposite Constantinople.<sup>21</sup>

Table 3.2 Churches dedicated to the Persian saints

<i>Name</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>
Akepsimas	Monastery	10th c.	isl. Chalke, Sea of Marmara
Akindynos (1)	Church	10th c.	Cpl., Deuteron
Akindynos in Keras (2)	Church	1090	Cpl., s. coast of the Horn
Anastasios of Persia	Chapel	7th c.	Cpl., Strategion
Dometios of Persia	Monastery, Church	536	Cpl., n. coast of the Horn
Ia of Persia (1)	Church	6th c.	Cpl., near the Golden Gates
Ia of Persia (2)	Church	10th c.	Cpl., Heptaskalon
Ia of Persia (3)	Church	10th c.	Bosporos, Asian shore
Ionas, Barachesios	Church	12th c.	Cpl., unknown location
James the Persian (1)	Church	10th c.	Cpl., Ta Dalmatou
James the Persian (2)	Church	10th c.	Cpl., Ta Roustikiou
James the Persian (3)	Monastery	1200	Cpl., n. coast of the Horn
Mamelchtha	Church	10th c.	Cpl., n. coast of the Horn
Manuel, Sabel, Ismael	Church	4th c.	Cpl., Pegai

The monastery of Akepsimas was located on the island of Chalke, that is, one of the Princes' Islands in the Sea of Marmara (now Heybeliada); Akepsimas, Joseph and Aeithalas were also regarded as patrons of the island itself.<sup>22</sup> Table 3.2 presents the most popular Persian saints in Constantinople: Ia of Persia (three churches), James the Persian (two churches and monastery<sup>23</sup>) and Akindynos (two churches<sup>24</sup>).

There is some scant evidence for the relics of Persian saints in Constantinople. St Ia was a Christian Roman and a civilian prisoner of war captured by the Persians and martyred after 360 during the persecution of Shapur II. Her vita survives only in Greek. Probably, her relics were brought to Constantinople soon after her martyrdom (in the fourth century?). The relics of St Ia were most likely housed in St Ia's church (1) near the Golden Gates. The church was first mentioned in the reign of Justinian I (527–565) and destroyed about or after 1204 during the Latin occupation. After 1261, St Ia's relics were transferred to the monastery of St George of Mangana. According to Ia's hagiographer Makarios of Mangana (reign of Andronikos II), the church near the Golden Gates was probably founded to house Ia's relics as her remains arrived in Constantinople. Makarios also noted that the relics had not decomposed, although, by his time, 900 years had passed after her martyrdom.<sup>25</sup>

St Anastasios († 628) was a former Persian soldier of a noble lineage who converted to Christianity and was martyred because of his insult against Zoroastrian priests. The cult of St Anastasios in Constantinople appeared in the seventh century, soon after his martyrdom. The chapel of St Anastasios the Persian by the church of St Philemon was likely erected in the seventh century and rebuilt by Eirene (780–802) and Constantine V (780–797).<sup>26</sup> Around 1200, it is very likely that Anthony of Novgorod referred to Anastasios the Persian when he reported about St Anastasios's headless body in the church of St Luke. After 1204, some saint's relics were translated to Venice (the Santa Trinità church) from Constantinople by a certain Andrea Valaraesso. Venetians experienced a wonderful scent exuded by the relic.<sup>27</sup>

St James Intercisus (the Mutilated) was a high-ranking military officer at the Persian court who converted to Christianity and was severely tortured and finally beheaded in 421 during the rule of Yazdegerd I. The head of St James the Persian probably was preserved in the Pantocrator monastery (Zeyrek Camii).<sup>28</sup> Some unspecified relics of St James may have been in the possession of the famous Eugenikos family; in his *Laudation* of St James, compiled possibly in the 1440s (BHG 773e), John Eugenikos referred to the relic as his 'much-revered ancestral inheritance'.<sup>29</sup> In the second half of the tenth century, John of Mytilene dedicated an expressive four-line epigram to James the Persian's torments.<sup>30</sup> In the eleventh century, Christopher of Mytilene praised St James's self-sacrifice in a six-line poem.<sup>31</sup>

Manuel, Sabel and Ismael were said to be three brothers from a 'noble Persian family' who came to Julian the Apostate (361–363) as envoys of the Persian king. At that time, Shapur II ruled in Iran. Their Semitic names

suggest that likely they were Arabs in the Persian service. The envoys were executed by the emperor Julian in 362. Soon after, Theodosios the Great (379–395) founded the church of Manuel, Sabel and Ismael on the site of their martyrdom outside the walls of Constantine and the saints' relics were placed there. In the eleventh century, a pilgrim reported the remains of Manuel, Sabel and Ismael were still preserved in that church.<sup>32</sup>

SS Akindynos, Pegasios, Anempodistos, Aphthonios and Elpidiphoros were high-standing courtiers and servants of Shapur II and suffered martyrdom for their Christian faith between 330 and 345. They are known from Greek hagiography only and are not found in the Syriac tradition. The relic of St Akindynos, described as his forehead encased in silver (лобъ окованъ сребромъ), was referred to by Anthony of Novgorod as being housed in the church of the holy unmercenaries Kosmas and Damian in En tois Basiliskou.<sup>33</sup>

St Dometios was a Persian who left his homeland for Byzantine Syria and adopted Christianity. In 363, during his Persian campaign, the emperor Julian sent soldiers to Dometios's cave near Cyrrihus, where the saint was martyred. The monastery and church of St Dometios of Persia were probably located in Galata, forming parts of a single building complex; the monastery was founded before 536, while the church was first mentioned in the tenth century.<sup>34</sup>

SS Ionas and Barachesios were two subjects of the Sasanian empire from the Syrian borderland; probably they suffered for their faith around 327 from the local authorities, shortly before the Great persecution under Shapur II started. The church of SS Ionas and Barachesios was first mentioned in the twelfth century, but with no information on its localisation.<sup>35</sup>

St Mamelchtha was a priestess in Artemis's temple in the Persian empire who, after embracing Christianity, was martyred by the champions of the cult of Artemis. The king of the Persians punished them for the murder. In all probability, if the vita of Mamelchtha is not a literary fiction, her martyrdom may have occurred as early as in Parthian time in a Syrian region of the Persian empire. However, her life, too, is known from a Greek hagiography only and does not feature in the Syriac tradition. The first mention of the church of St Mamelchtha on the shore of the Golden Horn opposite to Constantinople dates to the tenth century. The synaxis for her celebration took place on 5 October, probably the day when her relics were transferred to the church.<sup>36</sup>

No details are known to me about the relics of SS Akepsimas, Dometios of Persia, Ionas and Barachesios, and Mamelchtha in Byzantine Constantinople. However, one may suggest that the relics of all or some of these saints may have been kept in the churches they patronised.

It is worth noting that the *Synaxarion of Constantinople* also indicates some other churches in the city where synaxes occurred for liturgical celebrations of Persian saints' feast days. For instance, the memory of Akepsimas, Joseph and Aeithalas was celebrated in the church of Elisha (in Ta Antiochou)

and a synaxis commemorating St Golindouch took place in the church of St Tryphon near Hagia Eirene.<sup>37</sup>

The churches dedicated to the Persian saints and their holy relics cannot be fully explored here and demand a special, detailed study.<sup>38</sup> Otto Meinardus has compiled a list of the relics of the following Persian saints in the modern Greek Orthodox Church: Anastasios of Persia, Aphthonios, Elpidiphoros, James the Persian, Pegasios and finally the nine deacons martyred along with Abdas and Abdiesous. About 50 relics of these saints have been listed, which are now dispersed between dozens of monasteries and churches, with the most numerous being relics of SS Anastasios and James.<sup>39</sup> However, it is important to examine the specific time and circumstances of the discovery of the relics. Some of them may have originated during Byzantine times, while some others may have appeared later, from the second half of the fifteenth century onwards. Nonetheless, as noted earlier, the relics of Anastasios and James were venerated in Byzantine Constantinople and still are present in modern Greek Orthodox churches.

The churches and relics of the Persian saints in Constantinople can be construed, respectively, as the places of memory and the physical embodiment of the memory of early Persian Christianity. The personalities of the Persian patrons of these churches, along with their relics, which were kept both in public institutions and in private hands, undoubtedly kept alive the idea of Christian Persia in the memory of the churches' congregation and owners of the relics. The liturgical and hagiographic tradition played a vital role in conveying the actual content of the memory of the lives and circumstances of these holy Persians.

### 3.4 Private Piety

More or less explicit indications of Persian elements in private and individual piety may be observed in various sources. One significant example is the illustrated *menologia* of the tenth to twelfth centuries, which, in their textual and visual forms, provide ample material shedding light on imperial private piety. Notably, the most famous specimen of this kind is the so-called *Menologion of Basil II*, which was created around 1000. It is a collection of brief entries on saints' lives, and while only a part of the calendar is extant, it covers saints' feast days from September to February, with each entry accompanied by miniatures representing the respective saint.<sup>40</sup> The *Menologion* refers to a smaller fraction of saints listed in technical church calendars, containing only 430 entries from about 790 in the *Synaxarion of Constantinople* for the months from September to February.

The *Menologion of Basil II* refers to 20 festive days dedicated to the Persian saints (see Table 3.3). It omits only four feast days associated with the Persians, namely Dadas et al., John of Persia, Aphraates and Salamanes. Quite surprisingly the relative number of the Persian saints' days in the *Menologion* exceeds the proportion of the *Synaxarion of Constantinople* by one-third. In the *Menologion*, the number of 'Persian' entries makes up 4.6 per cent of the total, while the 'Persian' percentage in the *Synaxarion* for

Table 3.3 Persian Saints in the *Menologion of Basil II*

<i>Saint's name</i>	<i>Page No.</i>
Abdias	15
Abramios the Persian	372
Aeithalas, Apsees	236
Akepsimas, Joseph, Aeithalas	157
Akindynos, Pegasios, Anempodistos, Aphthonios, Elpidiphoros	155
Ananias of Persia	217
Anastasios of Persia	343–344
Boethazat, Sasanes	196
Dometios of Persia	89
Ia of Persia	28
James the Persian	209
John, James the Zealot	154
John, Saborios, Isaac, Papias, Onam	195
Mamelchtha	91
Maruthas	406
Miles, Ebores, Papas, Seboe	179
Nersas, Joseph	194
Sadoch	414
Sadoth	122

these months is about 3.5 per cent. This means that the *Menologion's* compiler in some cases favoured the Persian saints when selecting festive days for his version of the church calendar.

The presence of the Persian saints in private and individual piety outside the imperial palace is also evident in Byzantine versified church calendars that gained popularity in the eleventh century.<sup>41</sup> The initiator and trendsetter of such versified calendars was Christophoros Mitylenaios, a professional poet living in the first half of the eleventh century.<sup>42</sup> Christophoros Mitylenaios compiled a sort of abridged *synaxaria* in *iambics* and in *hexameters* and also in the forms of *stichera* and *kanon*.<sup>43</sup> The calendars referred to a minority of the saints, found in the *Synaxarion*, containing often only one commemoration per day with rare exceptions.<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, in his more succinct *iambic* and *hexameter* version, Christophoros completely omits Persian saints. However, in his more detailed *stichera* and *kanon* calendars, he does refer to some Persian characters (see Table 3.4). Almost a quarter of all Persian saints' days, attested in the *Synaxarion of Constantinople*, are registered in Christophoros's calendar. Only saints Anastasios, James and Symeon are indicated as Persians (to differentiate them from homonymous saints); the rest are referred to by their first names only. Christophoros's endeavour was taken up by a number of poets; one of his first followers was Theodore Prodromos, a prolific poet of the twelfth century.<sup>45</sup> Theodore Prodromos in

Table 3.4 Persian saints in the calendars of Christophoros, Prodromos and Xanthopoulos

<i>Name</i>	<i>Calendars</i>
Akepsimas	CM, Nov stich. 4, kan. 7–10; <i>ThP</i> , Nov 3; <i>XanS</i> , 3.1–2
Akindynos, Pegasios	CM, Nov stich. 3, kan. 2–6; <i>ThP</i> , Nov 2; <i>XanS</i> , 3.1–2
Anastasios of Persia	CM, Jan stich. 28, kan. 102–3; <i>ThP</i> , Jan 22; <i>XanS</i> , 5.11
Barachesios	CM, Mar stich. 28, kan. 165–7; <i>ThP</i> , Mar 29
Dometios of Persia	CM, Aug stich. 12–14, kan. 40–43; <i>ThP</i> , Aug 7
James the Persian	CM, Nov stich. 41, kan. 127–33; <i>ThP</i> , Nov 27; <i>XanS</i> , 3.16
Mamelchtha	CM, Oct stich. 6, kan 10; <i>ThP</i> , Oct 5
Manuel, Sabel, Ismael	CM, Jun stich. 17–18, kan. 58–60; <i>ThP</i> , Jun 17; <i>XanS</i> , 10.9
Symeon of Persia	CM, Apr stich. 20–21, kan. 61–63; <i>ThP</i> , Apr 17; <i>XanS</i> , 8.9

his iambic calendar reproduced exactly Christophoros's list of Persian saints. A later development of versified synaxaria may be exemplified by that of Nikephoros Xanthopoulos, a church author who was active in the first decades of the fourteenth century (d. before 1328).<sup>46</sup> Xanthopoulos referred to all but three Persian saints mentioned in Christophoros and Prodromos. Likewise, Xanthopoulos indicated the Persian origin of Anastasios, James and Symeon. Table 3.4 represents the list of the Persian saints found in the verses of Christophoros, Prodromos and Xanthopoulos.

Although Christophoros's verses were later included in liturgical *synaxaria*, it is evident that initially it was an endeavour of individual and private piety. Curiously, most Persian saints chosen by Christophoros and Prodromos for their calendars are found in the list of the known Persian patrons of churches and monasteries (see Table 3.2). The only exception is St Symeon; however, it is not impossible that a St Symeon's church actually existed in Constantinople, but not, however, recorded in the extant sources.<sup>47</sup> In any case, the coincidence of Christophoros and Prodromos's lists with that of the names of Persian church patrons suggests that the poets chose for their calendars the most popular Persian saints in the City of the time. In some sense, Christophoros and Prodromos's calendars probably reflected predominately Constantinopolitan piety. Developing this observation, also one may hypothesise that Xanthopoulos's omission of Barachesios, Dometios and Mamelchtha indicates that the churches bearing their names no longer existed in Constantinople at the turn of the fourteenth century. In any case, Xanthopoulos's calendar may have reflected the decreasing interest of the Byzantines in the Persian segment of ecclesiastical history. This observation probably finds some additional support in the subsequent examples I will discuss in the next section.

### 3.5 'Persian' Anthroponymy

Individual pious memory of the Persian saints may be traced in Byzantine name-giving practices. Table 3.5 displays the numbers of the Persian saints'

Table 3.5 Persian saints' names in anthroponymy

<i>Name</i>	<i>in PmbZ</i>	<i>in PBW</i>	<i>in PLP</i>
Abdelas	1	1	0
Akepsimas	1+1*	0	1
Aphrates	1	0	1
Azotos / Azat	1	0	0
Bata	0	0	1
Ismael	1	0	0
Miles	1	0	0
Papias	4	0	0
Pegasios	14	2	0
Saborios	1	0	0
Sadok	0	0	1
Salamanos	1	0	0
Zoilos	4	1	0

names used as baptismal or monastic names in seventh- to fifteenth-century Byzantium, which is based on the standard prosopographical lexicons *PmbZ*, *PBW* and *PLP*. The numbers marked with an asterisk (\*) indicate persons who are not registered in these prosopographical lexicons and have been added by me. I have excluded from the table the following popular Byzantine baptismal and monastic names, which belonged, according to the *Synaxarion*, also to non-Persian saints or Old Testament figures: Anastasios, Abramios, Akindynos, Anna, Ananias, Benjamin, Christina, Dometios, Eleutherios, Ionas, Isaac, James, John, Joseph, Manuel, Martha, Mary, Symeon and Thekla.

My assumption is that all or most of the names listed in Table 3.5 are baptismal or monastic names; however, one cannot exclude that some of these were foreign first names, nicknames or family names unrelated to the church calendar. I have added another Akepsimas (number marked with an asterisk), not listed in *PmbZ*: an anonymous seal of the tenth century with the image of Akepsimas, which likely belonged to a homonymous person.<sup>48</sup> Two other names from Table 3.5, Zoilos and Miles, were recorded in a fifteenth-century list of recommended monastic names;<sup>49</sup> this suggests that more monks likely bore these 'Persian' names, even though they left no traces in the sources.

It is possible that the names Abdelas (756, late eleventh, early twelfth c.), Bata (between 1320 and 1453), Ismael (907), Azotos (896), Sadok (1262), Salamanos (679) and Saborios (668) only were in use among the Orthodox or Monophysite foreigners, such as Persians, Armenians, Syrians, Arabs or Turks.<sup>50</sup> All but three of these names were recorded for the period from the seventh to the tenth centuries. Table 3.5 thus demonstrates a decrease in the popularity of the Persian saints' names through the middle and late Byzantine era.



It should be kept in mind that many Persian names from the *Synaxarion* may have sounded foreign and unappealing to the Byzantine ear and, naturally, were avoided at baptism or monastic renaming. As a result, the majority of the foreign Persian names from the church calendar are rare or not found at all in Byzantine anthroponymics. It is difficult to figure out the exact proportion of Persian saints' names among highly popular Byzantine names excluded from Table 3.5, such as Abramios, Anastasios, Akindynos and the like (to see the full list, refer to Table 3.1). However, there is some evidence that these standard Byzantine names may have been associated specifically with Persian saints.

First of all, as shown in Table 3.2, six Persian saints having standard Byzantine names – Akindynos, Anastasios, Dometios, Ionas, James and Manuel – were holy patrons of churches. Evidently, this naturally increases the possibility that at least the local parishioners adopted the names of the patron saints of these churches and, in their pious memory, associated their common Byzantine names specifically with the Persian saints.

Some additional evidence is provided by sigillography. The eleventh-century seal of Symeon *patrikios, anthypatos, vestes, judge* and *kourator* of Mytilene bears the representation of his homonymous patron saint Archbishop Symeon of Persia with his fellow martyr, the eunuch Gousthazat (Figure 3.1).<sup>51</sup> The archbishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon Symeon, along with other clerics, was martyred during the Great persecution of Shapur II in 345. The eunuch Gousthazat (Γουσθαζάτ, Ούσθαζάδης) was the tutor of Shapur II and a Christian apostate. Being impressed by the example of Symeon, he returned to the fold of Christianity and was executed by the king as well.

The images of St Akindynos of Persia are known from two eleventh-century seals, one of which was issued by Theophylaktos Dalassenos and the other one was anonymous. The first case of Theophylaktos Dalassenos confirms the idea that a saint's representations on a seal did not always coincide with the baptismal name of the seal's owner. However, the second seal,



Figure 3.1 St Symeon (right figure) and Gousthazat. Seal of Symeon *patrikios, anthypatos, vestes, judge* and *kourator* of Mytilene, DO.BZS.1958.106.5099 (courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks)

having no references to the name of its owner, probably belonged to a person homonymous with St Akindynos.<sup>52</sup>

It is likely that the unique image of St Anastasios the Persian, represented as holding the martyr's cross, is known from the seal of Nicholas, bishop of Monembasia (eleventh century); in this case again, the owner's name is not homonymous with his saint patron.<sup>53</sup>

The obverse of a presumably eleventh-century seal, issued by one Joseph, bears the image of SS Akepsimas and Joseph.<sup>54</sup> In this case, it is very likely that the seal's owner, having quite a popular name 'Joseph', associated himself specifically with St Joseph the Persian.

It is not impossible that St Elpidiphoros was represented on a seal with partly legible legends; there is no name of the seal's owner: the reverse inscription provides his high-ranking title of *protospatharios* and *strategos* of the Anatolikoi only.<sup>55</sup> It is possible that the owner's name was Elpidiphoros as well.

The examples of seals discussed in this section – those with the images of Akepsimas, Akepsimas and Joseph, Akindynos the Persian, Symeon and Gousthazat, Anastasios and Elpidiphoros – suggest two possible options for the correlation between the names of their owners and of the saint represented. First, for anonymous and homonymous seals, the owners might have been born or baptised on the feast day of the portrayed saint. Second, it cannot be excluded that the choice for a homonymous saint's representation was due to some other reason, prompting the owner to manifest his personal spiritual link with this or that saint (such as the cases of Theophylaktos Dalassenos and Nicholas bishop of Monembasia). However, in the examples of anonymous and homonymous seals already discussed, the former alternative seems to be more plausible. In any event, whatever the real motive for the choice was, it is of primary importance, in the context of my discussion, that the memory of the Persian saints circulated in the milieu of private and individual piety. Moreover, it is also possible that other common and popular Christian names, such as John, Isaac, Mary and the like, may well have referred to the homonymous Persian saints, although the traces of such a connection do not survive or are not obvious in the extant sources.

In any event, the images of these seven Persian saints (Akepsimas, Akindynos, Anastasios, Gousthazat, Elpidiphoros, Joseph, Symeon) on seals, while modest, represent a significant portion of the saints ever depicted on Byzantine seals, accounting for over 5 per cent of the total 129 saints.<sup>56</sup>

### 3.6 Conclusion: The Persian Saints Byzantinised

To sum up, the history of Christian activity and martyrdoms under the Sasanians had a profound impact on the Byzantine Church, strengthening the notion of Christian Persia. Dozens of the Persian saints' names featured

in liturgical and hagiographical traditions, with the Persian martyrs being adopted as the patrons of Byzantine Churches and their relics held in high esteem. Although the proportion of the Persians in the Byzantine list of saints was relatively small, constituting 3.5 per cent, their significance was notable. Taking into account that the Byzantine Church calendar almost exclusively operated with the information about saints from the territory of the Roman empire, the presence of Persian Christians in the calendar was quite substantial compared to other foreign saints, making them the largest group of holy men and women from abroad. The latter observation is in accord with the idea, explicitly formulated by the Council of Nicaea, that the Christian world was constituted of the Roman empire and Persia.

Interestingly, the middle and late Byzantine representations of the Persian martyrs rarely bore specific 'Persian' features. Only the iconography of St James Intercisus comprised specific 'Persian' traits, reflecting his high-profile Persian noble status; for instance, in the scene of St James's martyrdom in the *Menologion of Basil II*, the Persian king and his executioners were depicted wearing an 'Asian' attire.<sup>57</sup> Apart from St James, normally, in Byzantine iconography, the appearance of Persian martyrs was fully Byzantinised, with any cultural differences between the Persians and the Romans not being delineated.

Nonetheless, the later tradition suggests that the Byzantines remembered the Persian saints as an entity, a specific group of believers who, despite the early evangelisation of Persia by the Magi and apostles, suffered from the impiety of the later Persian kings. Approximately one-third of the vitae of the Byzantine Persian saints are known from Greek hagiography only and do not feature in Syriac texts (such as Mamelchta and Akindynos and his companions).<sup>58</sup> Consequently, the Byzantine tradition included a specific group of the 'national' Byzantine saints of Persian origin, unknown or less known in the Syriac and Armenian Christian East. Therefore, the Byzantinisation of the Persian saints, which was most evident in iconography, by no means deprived them of their original Persian 'ethnic identity', but rather marked the inclusion of the Persian as one of the elements of the Byzantine Christian identity.

The case of the Sasanian Persian saints in the Byzantine tradition clearly illustrates the basic mnemonic instruments of religious culture. Textual tradition, such as liturgical and hymnographic texts, provides elementary information about saints' names and origins, their floruit (in the liturgical year and sometimes with chronological indications) and miracles attributed to them. Different genres of hagiography present more detailed accounts of these saints. Liturgy, in this sense, was probably the most effective tool in embedding the Christian significance of Persia and the Persians in religious memory. The evident mnemonic functions can also be observed in dedicating churches and monasteries to the Persian holy patrons, venerating their relics and naming newborns and consecrated monks after them. In addition to the memory of the later Persian martyrs, similar mnemonic mechanisms,

reproduced throughout generations, fostered awareness of the Persian affiliation of biblical figures such as Daniel, Ananias, Azarias, Misael and the Magi of the Gospels (see Chapters 1 and 2).

In the context of my study, it is crucial to underscore that informal church calendars, whether created at the imperial court or written by individuals, the dedication of churches and monasteries to Persian patrons, the interest of conventional believers in the relics of the Persians and, finally, the circulation of ‘Persian’ anthroponymy highlight the notable role of Persian motifs in private piety of the Byzantines. Of course, the noted remarkable feature of Byzantine private piety was due to the well-tuned mnemonic technique of the Church, which prevented information entropy within the system.

## Notes

- 1 Gelasios, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 2.3 (Prooem. 1); Photios, *Myriobiblos*, 2:14.4–8 (cod. 88, Gelasios of Cyzicus): ‘τῶν τοῦ Ῥωμαίου κόσμου ἐπαρχιῶν καὶ Περσίδος’. For a Persian bishop at the Council of Nicaea with further bibliography, see also: Frenschkowski, ‘Christianity’, 464–467.
- 2 For the Sasanian Christians see: Garsoïan, ‘La Perse’; Chaumont, *Christianisation*; Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confines*, 119–259 (Part II, Chapters 1–5); Jullien, ‘Martyrs, Christian’; Frenschkowski, ‘Christianity’; Payne, *A State of Mixture*; Kolesnikov, ‘Топография епархий’; Morony, ‘Population Transfers’. See also some older but still important studies: Russell, ‘Christianity I’, 327 with further bibliography; Asmussen, ‘Christians in Iran’; Brock, ‘Christians in the Sasanian Empire’; Labourt, *La Christianisme*.
- 3 *Vita sanctorum Acindyri et al.* (BHG 23), 9A1–4: ‘Εἰ καὶ πρῶτοι Πέρσαι Χριστὸν ἐκ Παρθένου γεννώμενον προσεκύνησαν, δώροις τε τοῦτον ἐτίμησαν, ἀλλ’ εἰς ὕστερον οὗτοι τοὺς Χριστοῦ δούλους δι’ αὐτὸν ἀπανθρώπως ἐκόλασαν’.
- 4 Luzzi, ‘Synaxaria’; see also a useful terminological discussion in: Noret, ‘Ménologes’.
- 5 *SEC*; *TGÉ*. For the Persian martyrs in the Greek and Syriac traditions, see: Devos, ‘Martyrs persans’; Brock, *Holy Mar Ma’in*, 77–95 and especially Brock, ‘St Nikodemos’ with a pivot table of the Persian martyrs in *Συναξαρίστης* by Nikodemos Hagioreites (1749–1809), *SEC* and Syriac lists on p. 259–261. For a typology of the Persian saints’ miracles, see: Gignoux, ‘Typologie des miracles’.
- 6 *AASS*, Feb 3:178–180 and detailed explanations in Oct 8:379–380; Dimitriy of Rostov, *Книга житий*, 1:235b (19.10), 2:534–535b; Delehayé, *Actes des martyrs persans*, 445–450.
- 7 In addition to *SEC* and *TGÉ*, see also: *Il Menologio di Basilio* (Vat. gr. 1613), 122, 414.
- 8 Devos, ‘Commémoraisons’, 145–146.
- 9 *SEC*, 248.40–41: ‘Προκοπίου τοῦ ἐν Περσίδι’.
- 10 *SEC*, 318.10–13 and 317–320 (XII.17.1); *TGÉ*, 134.1–12, 136.16–18; Collins, *Daniel*, 53–59.
- 11 For numerical and statistical estimations in Byzantine hagiology, for instance, see: Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand*, 1:438–717; Halsall, *Women’s Bodies*; Cotsonis, ‘Contribution’.
- 12 Grishchenko, ‘Этнонимические прозвища’.
- 13 Follieri, ‘Santi persiani’.
- 14 Some of these detailed accounts survive exclusively in Greek, while others are borrowed from the Syriac tradition that preserves a huge bulk of information

- about the Persian saints and martyrs. The Persian saints' lives that survive only in Greek have been listed in: Brock, 'St Nikodemos'; for Greek translations from Syriac, see: Brock, *Holy Mar Ma'in*, 91. See also: Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confines*, 119–259 (Part II, Chapters 1–5); Jullien, 'Martyrs, Christian'.
- 15 Delehayé, *Actes des martyrs persans*, 405–19. For other publications of the Greek acts of the Persian martyrs, see relevant entries in *BGH* and *BGH NA* and also: Jullien, 'Martyrs, Christian'; Detoraki, 'Greek Passions'.
- 16 Cf.: Devos, 'Commémoraisons'; Detoraki, 'Greek Passions', 73–77.
- 17 Devos, 'Sainte Širin'; Devos, 'Jeune martyre'.
- 18 Auzépy, *Vie d'Étienne le Jeune*, § 61 (p. 163 and 261).
- 19 Delehayé, *Actes des martyrs persans*, 503.7 (§ 39), 514.3 (§ 56), 515.1 (§ 58), etc.
- 20 Talbot and McGrath 'Monastic Onomastics', 91.33, 100.321. The fifteenth-century list of monastic names is incorporated in the sixteenth-century manuscript Dujčev gr. 114. For Zoila, see the *Life* of St Parthenios (*BHG* 1422–23b): *Vita Parthenii*, 1353; *MAB*, 1:23 (Feb 7.1.10), 309 (Feb 7.2.10).
- 21 Kydonopoulos, 'Ο ναός της αγίας 'Ιας'; Janin, *Églises*, 253.
- 22 Janin, *Grands centres*, 73 and also: *PmbZ*, nos 24245, 25946, 28448.
- 23 Janin, *Églises*, 255.
- 24 Janin, *Églises*, 15–16, 571; Effenberger, 'Reliquientopographie', 291: the church of St Akindynos in Keras (2) on the Golden Horne situated between Odunkapı and Zindankapı. A church of St Akindynos is also attested in Trebizond (the twelfth century or later, now Kindinar Camii in the Bahçecik Mahalle): *BMTP*, 192, 209, 217 and note 217, 246, 248 and also pl. 163.
- 25 Janin, *Églises*, 74, 253; Delehayé, *Actes des martyrs persans*, 453–473, especially 472.27–29 and 472.41–43 (*BHG* 762); Brock, 'St Nikodemos', 262; Kydonopoulos, 'Ο ναός της αγίας 'Ιας'; Talbot, 'Old Wine', 24.
- 26 *Patria* (Berger), 3.17 (146–147); Berger, *Untersuchungen*, 741–742; Flusin, *Saint Anastase*, 2:381–393; Magdalino, 'Medieval Constantinople', 21 note 30; Whitby, 'George of Pisidia', 177–181.
- 27 Janin, *Églises*, 27, 492. For the intricate history of St Anastasios's head, see now: Effenberger, 'Reliquientopographie', 285–288. SS. Vincenzo e Anastasio ad Aquae Salviae in Rome and the Aachen Cathedral both claim to preserve the head of St Anastasios (Artophorion in Aachen). For the cult of St Anastasios in Rome, see: Morini, 'Monastic Life', 111–112; Lauxtermann, 'Lombard epigram'. See also: Klein, 'Byzantium in Venice', 218–219. For the saint's relics in contemporary churches, see below in this section.
- 28 Janin, *Églises*, 521; 393; Berger, *Untersuchungen*, 631; Majeska, *Russian Travelers*, 42, 94, 152, 162, 186, 289–293, 387; at the turn of the fifteenth century, an Armenian pilgrim reported about St James's relics in the monastery of St Stephen at Mangana: Brock, 'Medieval Armenian Pilgrim', 87. See also below in this section for the saint's relics in modern churches.
- 29 Hannick, 'Jacques le Perse', 282.29–31: 'Ἦπου καὶ σὺ, πανάγιον μέλος, ἡ πατρικὴ μοι καὶ πολῦτιμος κληρονομία, ὁ πολλοῦ μᾶλλον δὲ τοῦ παντός μοι τιμώμενος θησαυρός...'. The familial character of St James's cult is also confirmed by the fact that John's brother Mark of Ephesus dedicated to St James a liturgical canon and a dodecasyllabic verse (*ibid.*, 263). See also: *PLP*, nos 6189, 6193; Talbot, 'Old Wine', 25.
- 30 Hörandner, 'Miscellanea', 116 (no. 7); for the re-attribution of the poem, see: Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, 1:310–311.
- 31 *Christopher of Mytilene and John Mauropous*, 258/259 (no. 121).
- 32 *Patria* (Berger), 1.53 (30–33), 3.190 (216–217); Berger, *Untersuchungen*, 642–643; Janin, *Églises*, 322; Janin, *Constantinople*, 33, 36; Ciggaar, 'Une description', 33 (258). For the Arab subjects and allies of Shapur II, see: Shahid, *Fourth Century*, 466–467. For an attempt to contextualise the vita in the history of Byzantine-Persian relations, see: Muraviev, 'Three Martyrs'. The representations of SS Sabel

- and Ismael are known from the recently destroyed church at Palapantos in inner Chaldia, see: Bryer, 'Last Judgements', 536.
- 33 Effenberger, 'Reliquientopographie', 291, 293, 318–319: probably the same relic, with the saint's name in Greek inscribed on silver case, was kept in the church of Saint-Just d'Arbois (see also: Ebersolt, *Sanctuaires*, 138); Brock, 'St Nikodemos', 264.
- 34 Janin, *Églises*, 99–100.
- 35 Janin, *Églises*, 273; for the discussion of the martyrdom's date, see: Kolesnikov, 'Иона и Варахисий'.
- 36 Janin, *Églises*, 319; Devos, 'Commémoraisons', 146–147; Brock, 'St Nikodemos', 263. A brief unpublished vita of St Mamelchtha (BHG 2245) has recently come out with commentaries and a French translation: Lequeux, 'La passion de Mamelchta', especially 273–274 for vita's Greek text and translation.
- 37 Janin, *Églises*, 110–111, 489.
- 38 For relics in Byzantine social life, art and church tradition, see, for instance: Delehay, *Les origines*; Ebersolt, *Sanctuaires*; Wortley, *Studies on the Cult of Relics*; Kalavrezou, 'Helping Hands'; *Saints and Sacred Matter*. For a comprehensive survey of the bibliography, old and new, see especially the series of recent articles of Arne Effenberger: Effenberger, 'Reliquientopographie'; Effenberger, 'Konstantinopel als Pilgerziel'; Effenberger, 'Reliquienraub'. See also a series of important Russian publications initiated by Alexey Lidov: *Христианские реликвии*; *Eastern Christian Relics*; *Реликвии в Византии*.
- 39 Meinardus, 'A Study of the Relics', 140–141 (Anastasios), 144–145 (Aphthonios), 172 (Dometios), 174 (Elpidiphoros), 195–196 (James), 228 (Nine Deacons), 238 (Pegasios).
- 40 Manuscript: *Il Menologio di Basilio* (Vat. gr. 1613); two facsimile editions: *Menologio* (1907) and *Menologio* (2005); for the manuscript and further bibliography, see: *Menologio* (2008); Vinogradov and Zakharova, 'Василия II Минологий'.
- 41 For metrical calendars and their authors, see: Darrouzès, 'Les calendriers byzantins'; *CM*, 1:217–321.
- 42 Darrouzès, 'Les calendriers byzantins', 61–73, 83–84; Efthymiadis, 'Greek Byzantine Hagiography', 163–164. For Christophoros Mitylenaios's life and works, see: *PmbZ*, no. 21324; *PBW*, Christophoros 13102; and now also Bernard, 'Michael Psellos and Contemporaries'.
- 43 Follieri, 'Il calendario giambico'; *CM*, vol. 1.
- 44 Follieri, 'Il calendario giambico', 1:162–181.
- 45 Darrouzès, 'Les calendriers byzantins', 78–80.
- 46 *PLP*, 20826; *XanS*.
- 47 For instance, in 536, a certain monastery of St Symeon in Constantinople was referred to without specifying which of the homonymous saints was its patron (Janin, *Églises*, 479). Could it have been Symeon of Persia?
- 48 *DO Seals*, 7: no. 4.3, available online <https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1955.1.1861/view> (tenth century). For the problem of homonymy between the saints represented on seals and the owners of those seals, see: Cotsonis, 'Onomastics', 215–220.
- 49 Talbot and McGrath 'Monastic Onomastics': Ζώνλος (90.9, 94.115), Μίλης (91.15, 96.185).
- 50 See for these names: *PmbZ*, nos. 30, 20643, 23566, 6476, 6484; *PBW*, no. 20101; *PLP* nos. 24696, 93190.
- 51 *DO Seals*, 2: no. 51.5, available online at [www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1958.106.5099](http://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1958.106.5099).
- 52 Theophylaktos Dalassenos's seal: Cheynet and Vannier, *Études prosopographiques*, 84 (Dalassenos, no. 4). Anonymous seal: *DO Seals*, 7: no. 9.10, available online at [www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.3614/view](http://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.3614/view).

53 *DO Seals*, 2: no. 31.2.

54 Šandrovskaja, 'Sfragistika', 2: no. 844 (p. 151).

55 *DO Seals*, 3: no. 86.62.

56 Cotsonis, 'Contribution', 58–65.

57 *Il Menologio di Basilio* (Vat. gr. 1613), p. 209. The costumes of Daniel (*Ibid.*, p. 252), the Three Holy Youths (*Ibid.*, p. 251) and the Magi (Fig. 1.3 above) in the *Menologion* are of the standard 'Persian' type.

58 For the list of the Greek saints and vitae unknown in the Syriac tradition, see: Brock, 'St Nikodemos', 259–261.

## 4 Memorising Persia

Persian Christianity, as well as the pre-Christian piety of Persia, played an important role in the religious worldview of the Byzantines, as demonstrated in the previous chapters. However, understanding the true impact of Persia on religious consciousness requires considering the other line of the Byzantine tradition. The concept of Persia in the context of Christianity was tightly linked and interwoven with the indigenous ‘secular’ cultural heritage of Hellenic and Roman origins, which the Byzantines rigorously preserved, protected and reproduced. Two seemingly incompatible memories coexisted: the originally Semitic ‘religious’ one and the originally Greco-Roman ‘secular’ one, very often related to the same memorial events, historical figures and imaginary topography.

During the middle and late Byzantine era, historical Persia was remembered as it was construed by Greek and Roman thought.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, old Persia no longer existed during the period from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries. However, information concerning it persisted in the realm of cultural memory and was re-actualised in contemporary discourses as an element of the memorialised historical past. As the Byzantines still remembered, Persians (Πέρσαι) originated from Perses (Πέρσης), the son of Perseus and Andromeda, who was raised by Andromeda’s father, Cepheus. From Cepheus, Perses inherited the land of the Cepheneas, which later came to be known as Persia (Περσίς). Perses had a son, Achaemenes (Ἀχαιμένης), whose name became the eponym Achaemenid (Ἀχαιμενίδης).<sup>2</sup> In the plural form, ‘Achaemenid’ came to denote both the ruling dynasty of Ancient Iran and, occasionally, the Persians as a whole.<sup>3</sup> The Byzantines continued using the synonymous ancient terms Μηδία (Media) and Μηδοί (Medes), along with the standard Περσίς (Persia) and Πέρσαι (Persians). Similarly, even towards the end of the Byzantine era, the term μηδική was occasionally used as a substitute for the adjective ‘Persian’, and the verb μηδίζω expressed the idea of ‘siding with the Persians’.<sup>4</sup> Another designation for northern Persia and Persians, less frequently employed in literature, was Aria and Arians.<sup>5</sup>

Byzantines had a profound recollection of the succession order of the major Iranian kingdoms and the generic connection between them, which



included Medes, Achaemenids, Parthians/Arsakids and Sasanians. They also had comprehensive knowledge of ancient Persian geography (including the Iranian plateau, the coasts of the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf and areas up to the Indus), as well as major ancient urban centres, including Susa, Ecbatana, Rhages, Pasargadae, Ctesiphon and others.

References to Median, Achaemenid, Parthian and Sasanian Iran extended far beyond the limits of the elementary history of Ancient Greece and Rome. Memorial Persia and Persians were frequently referenced and alluded to in a huge variety of secular texts, spanning diverse genres. When discussing the role of Persia in the secular segment of the Byzantine cultural memory, it is pertinent to examine first the mnemonic practices and techniques employed to ensure the reproduction of specific information across generations. Mnemonics were an integral part of Byzantine schools, where young students were taught the ancient Greek language through grammatical and rhetoric exercises and by reading classical authors.<sup>6</sup> In this chapter, mnemonic techniques will be exemplified using more advanced and original literary texts. These texts were not only the product of the Byzantine educational system, but also pursued the goal of delineating a mandatory set of knowledge for a well-educated Byzantine.

#### 4.1 Mnemonic Tools

In attempting to reveal mechanisms of mnemonic practices, a significant source to start with is the *Myriobiblos* of Patriarch Photios (ca. 810 – after 893). This massive compendium consists of summaries of about 386 antique and early Byzantine works, grouped into 280 ‘codices’. The *Myriobiblos* was compiled, probably, between 843 and 857 (and, possibly, later revised to an extent), before Photios’s diplomatic mission to ‘Assyria’. The summaries were created to assist the author’s brother Tarasios who had not had the opportunity to read these books because of his absence from reading sessions.<sup>7</sup>

The uniqueness and outstanding value of Photios’s *Myriobiblos* for my purposes lies in the fact that it is not just a simple catalogue of books found in a personal library or read by a person. Instead, it serves as a synopsis of essential information collected from various authors for a reader’s curiosity and purposefully arranged to be memorised. Quite naturally, a great mass of information, known to us from the complete versions of the extant works, escaped the attention (or memory) of Photios for whatever reason. Photios’s focus of interest and, accordingly, the thematic content of the memorised information are very clear in his summaries. Although most works incorporate a variety of themes, in many cases, Photios spotlights one or more major subjects of his interest in his digests. From this point of view, the *Myriobiblos* was originally conceived as a private and utilitarian collection of data worthy to be remembered.<sup>8</sup>

In the Introduction to this book, I have already delved into the topic of memory and memorising as it was understood within the Byzantine tradition. The

reflections of Photios in this regard are of primary importance. Photios's centring on memory, memorising and recollection is clearly reflected, in particular, in the preface to the *Myriobiblos*. Photios maintains that his 'memory preserved' (ἡ μνήμη διέσωζε) the summaries constituting the book; the entries follow in the order his 'memory presents' (ἡ μνήμη προβάλοι) each of them. Some information may have been 'recorded from memory' (ἀπομνημονεῦσθαι) inadequately and inexactly. While it is easy to 'memorise' (μνήμη παραδοῦναι) and write down the summary of one book, it is not easy, with the time passing, to recollect (εἰς ἀνάμνησιν ἐφικέσθαι) at once the information read in many books. His collection may serve as a valuable source for Tarasios's 'basic memory and recollection' (κεφαλαιώδη μνήμην καὶ ἀνάμνησιν).<sup>9</sup> In quite a short preface (about 400 words), Photios uses the term μνήμη, meaning 'memory', and cognate words as many as seven times. Similar references to memory, memorising and recalling are scattered throughout the *Myriobiblos*.<sup>10</sup> Photios's compendium was conceived as a result of and together with it a device for *memorising* essential information.

Ancient Persia has taken an important place among the things to be memorised. Scholars have already acknowledged Photios's preoccupation with Persia in his *Myriobiblos*.<sup>11</sup> In this section, I will dwell on the issue in some greater detail. To start with, Photios was interested in the Greek traditional versions of Persian origins. He knew about the mythical origin of the Persians from Perses, son of Perseus. Furthermore, he was also curious about the rationalistic 'linguistic' refutation of the myth. According to this perspective, when pronouncing their endonym, the Persians place the stress on the last syllable, as Περσαῖ, rather than as Πέρσαι derived from Πέρσης; hence, it can be inferred that Perses cannot have been the ancestor of the Persians.<sup>12</sup>

Further on, Photios conducted a systematic exploration of all three major periods in the past history of Persia: the Achaemenid, Parthian and Sasanian eras. The *History* of Herodotus, judging by his brief and quite critical summary (cod. 60), was mostly used for outlining the chronological succession of the Achaemenid kings: Cyrus, Cambyses, Smerdis, Darius and Xerxes. For Achaemenid times, Photios considered the *Persica* by Ctesias of Cnidus as a higher authority than Herodotus. His lengthy digest of the *Persica* (cod. 72) focusses on the dynastic, political and military history of Persia from the beginning of the Persian state up to Artaxerxes II. Photios was curious about the conquests of Alexander the Great, the fall of the Achaemenids and the rise of the Hellenistic states gleaning information mostly from Arrian's works (cod. 91, 92). The beginnings of Parthian history were learned from Arrian's *Parthica* (cod. 58), and some unsystematic data on Rome's relations with Parthia were derived from the novelist Iamblichos (cod. 94), Memnon (cod. 224) and Joseph Flavius (cod. 238). For the Sasanian era, he studied Philostorgios (cod. 40), Prokopios (cod. 63), Theophanes of Byzantium (cod. 64) and Theophylaktos Simokattes (cod. 65).

A specific set of authors can be identified whom Photios considered exclusively or predominantly as a source of knowledge about Persia. These authors were Herodotus, Arrian, Prokopios, Theophanes of Byzantium, Theophylaktos Simokattes and Theodore of Antioch. Some additional information on Persia was borrowed from Appian's *Roman History* (cod. 57), Kephalion (cod. 68), Diodorus of Sicily (cod. 70, 244), Dexippos (cod. 82), Phlegon of Tralles (cod. 97), Theopompos (cod. 176), Memnon (cod. 224), Joseph Flavius (cod. 238) and Himerios (cod. 243 and 165). Of course, the *Myriobiblos* includes only a part of the books that Photios read and his 'Persian' reading list in reality may have been even longer.

Photios's focus of interest revolved mainly around the dynastic and military history of Persia. However, he is also found to be curious about other topics, especially tracing Persian influences on some neighbouring nations and territories. For instance, he delved into the Persian origins of the Cappadocian kings,<sup>13</sup> Persian connections of the Mithridatic dynasty<sup>14</sup> and the colonisation of the Red Sea by the Median noble Erythras.<sup>15</sup> In the course of reading, he learned the ancient geography of Persia and neighbouring lands, such as Ariana, Arzamon, Bactriana, Carmania, Ctesiphon, Drangiana, Ecbatana, Hyrcania, Media, Oxus, Pagasae, Parthyena, Pasargadae, Sogdiana, Susa and others. Occasionally, he paid attention to specific details, as for instance, when he noted Ktesias's estimation for the number of stations, days of travel and *parasangs* from Ephesus to Bactria and India.<sup>16</sup>

Some texts served as a source for learning about traditional Persian religion. Photios provided summaries of the polemical treatise on Zoroastrianism by Theodore of Mopsuestia (cod. 81)<sup>17</sup> and a seventh-century anonymous tract on Christian motifs in pagan traditions including Persian religiosity (cod. 170). He also explored the Mithraic cult with reference to two distinct events: one was Himerios's speech on the initiation in Mithraic mysteries in Julian's time,<sup>18</sup> and the other was the conversion of a Mithraic temple into a Christian church in Alexandria.<sup>19</sup>

Photios also takes notice of some noteworthy and peculiar facts related to the Persians and Persian life. For instance, he draws attention to incestuous marriages legalised by Semiramis and adopted by the Medes and Persians.<sup>20</sup> He also refers to the Persian festival of *μαγοφονία* ('slaughter of the magi') commemorating the end of the yoke of the magi in 522 BCE.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, Photios recounts the story of how the silkworm was introduced to Byzantium by a certain Persian who brought it from Seres during the time of Justinian I.<sup>22</sup> Photios reveals his linguistic preoccupations, particularly in his remarks about the accentuation in the Persian endonym and his reference to the Persian name *Κερμυγίων* for some Turks.<sup>23</sup>

In this connection, it is worth mentioning another curious Persian etymology by Photios in his *Contra Manichaeos*.<sup>24</sup> He argues that the name *Μάνης* (Mani) is derived from a Persian word denoting 'conversable' and 'efficacious in conversation'. Is it possible that Photios's etymology refers to

the Iranian root *mān-* ‘to think’, which was quite common in the Middle Persian languages and, in particular, produced in Pehlevi the word *mānag* [*m’nk*] meaning ‘mind’ and other derivatives?<sup>25</sup> This popular etymology of the name Mani might have been brought to the Byzantine milieu by native Persian or Armenian speakers and further reinterpreted by the Greeks as ‘efficacious in thinking’ and, further on, negatively ‘efficacious in talking’. It is unclear whether Photios himself established this etymology or reinterpreted the one borrowed from his predecessors (such as Cyril of Jerusalem).<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, Photios was especially keen on Persian etymologies.<sup>27</sup>

It is interesting to note that Photios focusses mostly on the Greco-Roman ‘secular’ memory of Persia, almost completely ignoring Judeo-Christian topics and concepts discussed in Chapter 1. As it seems, St Golindouch was the only Persian Christian who was referred to in the *Myriobiblos* by name.<sup>28</sup> Photios quotes Theodoretos of Cyrhus who credited John Chrysostom with preaching to Persian archers, resulting in the flourishing of the houses of prayer in the land that was once considered ‘barren Persia’ (κεχερσωμένη Περσίς). This elevated St John’s rank to that of the Apostles.<sup>29</sup>

In terms of the number of ‘codices’, the *Myriobiblos* consists of 56.4 per cent of Christian ‘religious’ (158 codices) and 43.6 per cent of Greek and Roman ‘secular’ works (122 codices), but in terms of volume, contrarily, ‘secular’ texts occupy 58 per cent of the entire book, while ‘religious’ ones constitute as little as 42 per cent.<sup>30</sup> It is important to emphasise that Photios’s Persia was a part of a larger thematic section dealing exclusively with ‘secular topics’ in both pagan and post-Constantine periods. Within this section, greater attention is drawn to pagan myths, ideas and customs. The overall number of ‘codices’ containing significant information on Persia makes up two dozen, that is, roughly about 10 per cent of the total number of ‘codices’ and nearly 18 per cent of ‘secular’ ones (with the exception of the ‘religious’ codices 81, 170, 273), which is a remarkably high proportion.

If we consider that Photios’s process of ‘memorising’ theological material was guided by spiritual and intellectual aspects supporting his Christian worldview and his Christian self-identification, the excessive ‘Persian’ details should be attributed rather to his mastering culture in a broader sense and reproducing ‘secular’ segments of cultural memory. His fascination with Persia reflects a similar inclination to our present-day clever reading about past events in terms of holding significance to our cultural identity. From this standpoint, Photios’s interest in Persia and Persians may not serve any direct ‘practical’ value. Instead, it directly concerns Byzantine cultural memory of the time.

Another important observation is that Photios’s fascination with, and excellent knowledge of, ancient Persia is rarely manifested in his other writings. The only exception is his *Lexicon* where Persian words and topics are relatively numerous (see the next section). A rare instance of his referring to ancient Persia is found in his homily delivered during the Council of Constantinople in 867. Photios compares the emperor Michael III (842–867) with ‘the men of yore, Cyrus and Augustus, the former ruler of the Persians, the latter of

the Romans, who left to the populace a reputation for gentleness and mercy, but, as proper reason ordains, glorying in the actions prior to the titles'.<sup>31</sup> This example is quite remarkable and instructive in three senses. First, the *Myriobiblos* clearly demonstrates that the reference to Cyrus and Augustus here was not a superficial and lightweight rhetorical gesture. Photios had a profound memory of the details of these persons' glorious lives and deeds, as the *Myriobiblos* testifies.<sup>32</sup> Second, in his public speech, Photios appeals to the *common* cultural memory that his audience surely shared with him. Third, if a Byzantine author, like Photios, makes little or no references to ancient Persia throughout his writings, it does not necessarily mean that this author's memory lacked this kind of cultural remembrances.

The *Myriobiblos* exemplifies the broader Byzantine tradition of preserving, editing and passing on the ancient heritage to future generations. As demonstrated by András Németh, a work similar to Photios, of collecting and, especially, thematically rearranging ancient wisdom, was undertaken in the tenth century by Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (913–959) through his *Excerpta*, which involved a circle of court intellectuals.<sup>33</sup> To this list, one must consider the many genuine ancient sources containing Persian motifs that circulated in many manuscripts throughout the middle and late Byzantine periods. These sources included the works of Herodotus, Aeschylus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Diodorus, Strabo, Plutarch and many others.<sup>34</sup> This enduring tradition of preserving and reproducing the works of ancient authors can be understood as a kind of mnemonic activity.<sup>35</sup>

## 4.2 Explaining Memory

As mentioned earlier, besides the *Myriobiblos*, Photios's *Lexicon* is the only one of his works that reflected to a greater extent his actual knowledge about ancient Persia. The publication of the full version of the *Lexicon* is not complete yet: the late Christos Theodoridis managed to publish its major part including entries from A to Φ.<sup>36</sup> Based on the published part of the *Lexicon*, it explains approximately 17,000 or more words and expressions, of which at least 45 entries are related to memorial Persia. While the proportion of 'Persian' entries is quite modest, their significance lies in some of Photios's linguistic interpretations, which I will delve into further in Chapter 7. The *Lexicon* contains several categories of entries: 1) Persian words, mainly from Achaemenid times, as found in the works of Greek authors;<sup>37</sup> 2) the names of Persian historical figures;<sup>38</sup> 3) Greek words and names, in the interpretation of which Persia or Persians are mentioned<sup>39</sup> and 4) proverbs referring to the Persians.<sup>40</sup> The majority of this information is included in the *Souda* lexicon, with the exception of some six entries.<sup>41</sup> It is noteworthy that the *Lexicon* focussed on the 'secular' Greco-Roman image of Persia when compared to the *Myriobiblos*.

As is believed, the *Lexicon* represents the private explanatory notes of Photios taken in the course of book reading. Thus, if the *Myriobiblos* is a

sort of a catalogue of memorised information, his *Lexicon* performed an explanatory function, reinterpreting essential keywords in contemporary terms and, therefore, incorporating them into contemporary contexts.

However, Photios's *Lexicon* as a tool for contemporary reinterpretation of cultural information is inferior in importance to the much richer manual *Souda* (tenth century). The *Souda* obviously stands as one of the most eloquent and indicative examples for my purposes.<sup>42</sup> On one hand, the *Souda* was probably the richest Byzantine repository of diverse information focussing, almost entirely, on 'ancient' information relating to cultural memory. On the other hand, as an encyclopaedia and thesaurus in terms of genre, the *Souda* represented part of a culture's mnemonic mechanism, which systematised and reinterpreted old knowledge deserving to be memorised.

The *Souda* consists of around 31,000 entries in which Persia and Persians are mentioned more than 300 times. The 'Persian' references covered the period from the ancient history of Iran and Greco-Persian relations down to the time of Emperor Herakleios (610–641). These references may be divided into the following six major classes:

- 1 Appellatives borrowed from the Persian language during Achaemenid, Parthian and Sasanian times. Some of these Persian borrowings have been collected and analysed by Bertrand Hemmerdinger.<sup>43</sup> The *Souda* directly indicates most loanwords as of Iranian origin, while a smaller fraction is not explicitly mentioned as such (the latter words are marked with an asterisk (\*) in the following list). The words of this class can be classified into the following groups:
  - a Politics and social life:
    - state administration (ἄγγαρος, ἀστάνδαι, βέρεδον, μισρράνης\*, σατράπης and σατραπεία, σελλάριος\* and others);
    - arms and armour (like ἀκινάκης, γέρρον, σάγαρις, σιβύνη and ζιβύνη, σαμψήρα);
    - religion (μάγος, μαγουσαῖοι, μαγώγ, παράδεισος\*, φρουδίγα).
    - trade, including measures and money (ἀρτάβη, ἀχάνη, δαρεικός, σίκλον, γάζα, παρασάγγης, δανάκη\*).
  - b Everyday life:
    - elements of costume, including tissues and accessories (καυνάκης, κάνδυς, κίδαρις, κύρβασις/κυρβασία, μανδύα, νιδάριον, σαράβαρα, τιάρα, φιβλατώριον, etc.);
    - food (ἄβυρτάκη);
    - household items (γέρρα);
    - medicine (πισάγας);
    - music (βάρβιτος\*).

The same category contains a particularly rare example of linguistic borrowing: the curious Pahlavi interjection and particle, μακάρι, which

meant ‘would that, if only’ (the same as εἴθε, ἤθε, ἰθύς, ὄφελον). It was used to introduce a wish that something had been so in the past or present (see also Chapter 5.3).

- c Natural objects including flora, fauna and minerals (κολόκυνθα, νάφθα, τᾶως, τίγρις\*, παμβακίς\*, πιστάκιον\* and the like).
- 2 Names of prominent Persian figures of the Median, Achaemenid, Parthian and Sasanian empires, such as Medos, Astyages the Mede, Cyrus the Great and Cyrus the Younger, Mandane, Cambyses, Hystaspes, the three Darius, Rhodogoune, Atossa, Artaphernes, Xerxes, Artaxerxes, Parysatis, Arsakes the Parthian and the Arsakids, the Sasanian kings Shapur, Peroz and the two Chosroes, Tomyris, the Persian commanders Habrokomas, Harpagos, Datis, Mardonios, Artaphernes, Artabazos and Bessos.

Here, one may add prominent personages of Iranian religion, such as Mithras, Zoroaster, Ostanes, Astrampsychos, Mani and the Chaldean Sibyl.

A handful of references to Persia-related place names may be added to this class: Ἐρυθρὰ θάλασσα (the Red Sea) and Περσικὸς κόλπος (the Persian Gulf), Ἡπειρον (Continent) and Νισαῖον πεδῖον (the Nisaeian plain in Media).

- 3 The entries dealing with personages of the Greco-Roman past who had or were supposed to have some relation to Persia: Alkibiades, Alexander, Antiochos, Aristarchos, Artemisia, Boulis, Branchidai, Charon, Demaratos, Demokedes, Democritus, Dionysios, Domitian, Epiphanius, Hermias, Herakleios, Herodotus, Hephaistion, Julian, Jovian, Justinian I, Justinian II, Hippocrates, Leonnatos, Leonides, Uranius, Tribounos, Themistocles, Xenophon and others.
- 4 The fourth class of entries comprises some notions communicating various phenomena of social and religious life, which, in the cultural memory of the Greeks and Romans, were somehow related to Persia. As a rule, these are words of Greek origin, but were believed to be associated with Persia and Persians: astronomy, sorcery (γοητεία), magic (μαγεία, μαγική), witchcraft (φαρμακεία), immortals (ἀθάνατοι), taster (ἐδέατρος), curators (ἐπιμεληταί), liver-inspecting (ἥπατοσκοπία), border guards (λιμιταναῖοι), sovereignty (βασιλεία), great king (βασιλεὺς μέγας and μέγας βασιλεὺς), medick (μηδικὴ πόα), cockerel (Περσικὸς ὄρνις), god-kindled fire (θεσπιδὰς πῦρ), sacrificing (θύειν) and others. Mostly, these are Greek names for specifically Persian concepts, allegedly borrowed or known from the Persians. In a few cases, the direct reference to Persians in the explanation is omitted but the term is described as derived from a Persian context, such as δεκατεύειν (to pay a tithe), ὀφθαλμὸς βασιλέως (king’s eye).
- 5 Rather often the *Souda* explained purely Greek concepts and words with casual references to Persia and Persians, borrowed as a rule from Ancient authors such as Adam, Anakyndaraxos, Anaximenes, Assyrians, Atrometos, Haimonios, ἀκρόδρυα, ἀλεκτορίδες, ἀναλαμβάνειν, ἀνέγνωσαν, ἀντίξοον, ἀπόβλεπτον, ἀποδασμόν, ἀπολεγόμενος, ἀπόνοια, ἄσατο, ἀσμενίζω,

αὐθιγενής, ἄχαρι, ἀχαρίστως, βομβεῖ, δατισμός, διεξιφίσω, διφροφόροι, ἐγκεκορδύλημένος, ἐγνωμάτευεν, ἐλευθέριος, ἐξελιγμῶν, ἐξπλοράτωρ, ἐπαρτήσας, εἶ, κόσμος, μετεῖναι, πῦρ and χαίρομαι.

- 6 Finally, sometimes the *Souda* defines the floruit of remarkable Greek personages through the chronology of the Persian kings or the Persian wars (Anaximenes, Chionides, Choirilos, Hellanikos, Epicharmos, Euripides, Hipys, Phrynīs and Pythagoras). Interestingly enough, biblical and Christian references to Persians are very few in comparison with those made by the pagan Greco-Romans, and include only a few individuals from the Achaemenid period, such as Darius and Haman, Xerxes, Ezra and Judith. We have already noted a similar feature in Photios's *Myriobiblos* and *Lexicon* – the former predominantly and the latter exclusively dealt with the 'secular' Greco-Roman image of Persia.

These examples indicate that the *Souda* brought together most of the old Persian notions and terminology which were of interest to educated Byzantines in the tenth century. The imaginary 'Persia' and the 'Persian' were associated with an empire as a political entity (king, warfare, etc.), a specific type of culture (clothes, food, trade, religion, magic, etc.) and national character (wisdom, nobleness, cruelty, subtlety, etc.).<sup>44</sup>

Of course, the *Souda* represented actual knowledge about ancient Persia, which was preserved in ancient sources up to the reign of Herakleios, largely in simplified, reduced and deconcretised form. Temporal distance made the image of Persia and Persians rather abstract and characterised by coarse generalisation, lacking nuance. In fact, this was not so much a historical but rather a *memorial* conceptualisation of Persia, an ideal image recollected by culture.

Overall, the case of the *Souda* demonstrates quite clearly how significant and multifaceted the role of Old Persia was in cultural memory. The specific function of the *Souda* and similar encyclopaedic texts in Byzantine culture should be kept in mind. First, such lexicons are explanatory dictionaries, which describe the lexical component of the existing language system. *Lexicon's* mixed model covers both active and passive vocabulary, including words used in antiquity and found in literary and historical works. Second, the task of such dictionaries combines both teaching samples and the conceptual and cultural content of vocabulary. In some sense, the lexicons and encyclopaedias like the *Souda* are metatexts or texts of a metasemiotic nature, which are concerned with the formation of semantic significance. The metasemiotic nature of the *Souda* and similar works made them both depositories of data, directly pertaining to the content of cultural memory, and mnemonic tools to replicate such data in cultural actuality.

The information recorded in the *Souda* has numerous parallels and intersects with the information provided by Hesychios, Photios and later lexicons and dictionaries (such as *Etymologicum Gudianum*, *Etymologicum Magnum*, *Lexicon* of Zonaras and other collections).<sup>45</sup> These Greek-to-Greek dictionaries also played the same role in preserving and reinterpreting cultural



information from the past. Besides lexicons, similar explanatory mnemonics can also be observed in other literary works produced by Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos's intellectual circle, aimed at explaining the factual and linguistic legacy of the past.<sup>46</sup> Other genres of Byzantine literature, addressing classical textual heritage, also possessed explanatory functions such as, for instance, the rich tradition of Byzantine *scholia* to ancient authors.<sup>47</sup> Interestingly enough, the Persians occasionally appeared even in *scholia* to Homer and other early classical authors.<sup>48</sup>

### 4.3 Les lieux de mémoire

Apart from textual memorising tools, an important mnemonic function was played by *places* that brought to mind, in one way or another, ancient Persia and Persians. According to the famous maxim ascribed to Pierre Nora, memory clings to places as history to events. A cultivated public space is structured by meaningful landmarks and sites of memory, which embody in their materiality the content of cultural memory and communicate syntactic connections between its elements. These can be either a historical monument proper (statue, column, civic building, church and the like) or merely a place name that functionally has replaced the lost monument. These significant landmarks operate as a kind of trigger that awakens memory and evokes stories that reveal cultural meanings. Most Persian *sites of memory* are related to Constantinople, whose topography we know better, but a smaller fraction is known from other regions of Byzantium or even outside the empire. Curiously enough, the memorable places associated with the classical image of Persia are more numerous than those related to the Old Testament figures and the evangelical Magi (see Chapter 1.8. 'Materiality of Memory'), and comparable in numbers with those concerning the Persian saints (see Chapter 3.3. 'Churches and Relics').

Most sites under discussion revolve around historical events commemorating military victories over the Persians. The forum of Strategion was known as a place where the army of Alexander the Great was stationed before his crossing over to Asia for his Persian campaign.<sup>49</sup> In a sense, it was a significant starting point from which Hellenic, Roman and Byzantine universal power began to emerge. At least in the seventh century, the memory of the significance of the site was still alive. The place of the victorious battle of Alexander against Darius III in Issus (333 BCE) was referred to by the Byzantine pilgrim Manuel Angelos (Agathangelos) in the fourteenth century.<sup>50</sup>

Persian reminiscences may well have been inspired by the famous equestrian statue of Justinian I, which topped the column standing on the Augustaion square. Prokopios describes the statue in the sense that Justinian looked towards the rising sun, directing the course of his horse against the Persians; he stretched forth his right hand towards the East, spreading out his fingers and commanding the barbarians (i.e., the Persians) to remain at home and to advance no further. The memory of the Persians addressed

by the hand of Justinian survived at least until the turn of the fourteenth century. The monument outlived the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and was destroyed by the Ottomans.<sup>51</sup> With the emergence of Islam and later with the beginning of the Turkic conquests, the monument came to be interpreted as a warning to the Islamic invaders from the East. At least the West European, Russian and Muslim travellers to Constantinople believed that the extended hand of the emperor gestured towards, and so indicated, the land of Islam.<sup>52</sup> According to al-Harawī (d. 1215), the globe in the emperor's hand was seen as a talisman protecting Christians from the Muslim invaders.<sup>53</sup>

The Constantinopolitan memorial landscape also featured some anonymous references to the Persians as an element of the Hellenic self-image, and a few of these have survived to our time. For instance, in Hagia Sophia, there was an effigy of 'the star Arcturus held by two Persian statues'.<sup>54</sup> Somewhere in Constantinople, one may have come across telamones in 'Persian' outfits, probably resembling those 'Persian statues' in Hagia Sophia.<sup>55</sup>

The Great War with the Sasanians in the times of Herakleios had long been remembered. After 792, Theosebes, wife of St Philaretos the Merciful, rebuilt the churches in Paphlagonia destroyed by the Persians.<sup>56</sup> A common interpretation that these churches were in fact destroyed by the Arabs and therefore here 'Persians' are equated to 'Arabs' seems not to be certain. Although, as some commentators note, the Byzantines of the time may have called Arab emirs 'rulers of Persia', but normally they did not confuse ethnic Persians with Arabs. The *Vita Philareti* labels the Arab invaders exclusively as Ἰσμηλίται, and there are no grounds to think that the term 'Persians' here was a metonym for 'Muslims'.<sup>57</sup>

The long-lasting memory of the notable sites of Herakleios's Persian wars is confirmed by a fourteenth-century source. In 1348–1349, the Russian traveller Stephen of Novgorod testified that, in the Sapria/Sapra burial ground, the 'bones shining white as snow' belonged to Chosroes's Persians who had perished in a naval attack on Constantinople (the siege of 626). Stephen of Novgorod, in all probability, repeated the local legend he heard from a Constantinopolitan 'tourist' guide.<sup>58</sup>

A different type of site is represented by places bearing names associated with the Persians. Apart from the churches dedicated to the Persian saints (see Chapter 3), some place names related to lay Persians. As Genesios still remembered in the tenth century, the city of Amastris was originally called Kromna; however, at some point it was renamed after a Persian woman named Amastris, the daughter of Oxyartes, the brother of Darius III.<sup>59</sup>

In Constantinople, the Hormisdas quarter (τὰ Ὁρμίσδου) was located by the sea, southwest of the imperial palace and included the church of Saints Sergios and Bakchos in its western part. Hormisdas (Hurmuzd), a brother of King Shapur II (307–379), was imprisoned by the king. However, he escaped with the help of his wife and mother and fled to Constantinople, where the emperor Constantine the Great settled him in a palace named after his name. In the time of Justinian I, the Hormisdas

mansion was incorporated into the imperial palace. Separately, Hormisdas was the founder of a Byzantine noble lineage, the members of which retained his name as a dynastic cognomen.<sup>60</sup>

The Darius quarter (τὰ Δαρείου) was likely situated to the east of the harbour of Sophia in the southeast part of the city. According to the *Patria*, Constantine I sent the patrician Darius along with other seven patricians and four magisters to wage war against the Persians of Shapur II. During their time in Persia, Constantine relocated their families to Constantinople as part of a plan to colonise the new capital. After returning from the war, Darius settled in Constantinople. Although Darius, despite his Persian name, is endowed in the legend with Roman identity, nonetheless, he had to be linked to Persia through his association with the Persian wars and his explicitly Persian name.<sup>61</sup>

The Theophobos monastery (μονὴ τῆς Θεοφοβίας), located near Ta Narsou quarter (by the Golden Horn), was founded by the famous Theophobos the Persian who was killed there in 842. Probably, the monastery was located in the home of Theophobos or on property he owned.<sup>62</sup>

A special case is represented by Trebizond preserving an unprecedentedly long memory of the local Mithraic mysteries that were tied to a specific *site of memory*. The Mithraic cult was introduced in Trebizond, probably by the Mithridatic dynasty (281–47 BCE), which extended its power over Colchis and Trebizond under Mithridates VI Eupator (120–63 BCE). The main Mithraic sanctuaries were located on Mount Minthrion or Mithros (Boztepe), and these sanctuaries were later replaced by the monasteries such as St John the Sanctifier, Panagia Theoskepastos and St Sabas.<sup>63</sup> Curiously enough, the Mithraic name of the mount survived through Byzantine times, while references to the cult of Mithras were found in the fourteenth-century lives of St Eugenios, patron saint of Trebizond. Moreover, Constantine Loukites (d. ca. 1340) and John Lazaropoulos (d. 1369) explicitly indicated that Mount Mithros derived its name from the Mithraic mysteries that had been practised there.<sup>64</sup> According to a local legend, Alexios II Grand Komnenos (1297–1330) slew a dragon near the Dragon's Fountain on Mount Minthrion.<sup>65</sup> It is very likely that the dragon legend was the result of activating quasi-Mithraic, originally Iranian motifs, deeply rooted and still operative in folk imagination. As Anthony Bryer has noted, the Mithraic cult was locally remembered as late as 1438.<sup>66</sup> It is a remarkable peculiarity of Trebizond, which, as it seems, was the only late Byzantine region where Mithraic rudiments continued to be an element of collective memory.

The Persian toponyms and artefacts, as discussed, were markers of the 'Persian' component inside the Hellenic and Roman Self. While it is not always clear how long and how comprehensibly the Persian reminiscences persisted in some of these cases,<sup>67</sup> the very presence of these places of memory in the middle and late Byzantine cultural landscape is quite noteworthy. The Persian origin of the discussed names was preserved in Byzantine

written tradition and widely available for anyone interested in exploring their historical background.

#### 4.4 Collecting to Recollect

My last example concerns a special case of mnemonics, which involves the Byzantines collecting ancient objects as diverse media preserving cultural information about the past. They collected manuscripts, civic emblemata, war trophies and Christian relics, which had practical utility, as well as a wide range of art objects, such as statuary, silver utensils, gems and panel paintings, having both aesthetic and monetary value. Collecting engaged Byzantines in an active performative interaction with the ancient, establishing a connection between the collector and a recollected past.<sup>68</sup> Curiously enough, genuine Persian objects of old may have been a part of Byzantine collections. Michael Psellos relates that the empress Theodora (1042–1056) ‘every day gloated over her thousands of *darics*, for which she had had bronze chests made’.<sup>69</sup> Unmistakably, Psellos meant here a collection of the Achaemenid gold coins, which were first introduced by Darius I (521–486 BCE) and minted by his successors in the subsequent centuries. In the tenth–twelfth centuries, the term *δαρεικός*, *daric* was considered obsolete and applied exclusively to ancient Persian coinage and never to contemporary money (Figure 4.1).<sup>70</sup>

It is extremely important for my purposes, that, as late as in the eleventh century, such ancient objects as *darics* were still available in considerable numbers at the Byzantine market. The fact that they had not been melted down for their precious metal indicates that *darics* were valued as artefacts throughout



Figure 4.1 Achaemenid gold *daric*, ca 375–340 BCE (© Classical Numismatic Group. Wikimedia Commons, GFDL, CC-BY-SA-2.5 licences)

the past centuries. It means that the owners of *darics* were curious and knowledgeable enough to place these artefacts into proper historical contexts. It was the historical context that made a *daric* more valuable and consequently very likely more expensive than its constituent gold.

One may assume that *darics* were not the only old Persian collectibles known to the Byzantines. Examining the modern museum collections, possibly some other ancient Persian objects, such as Sasanian silver (plates, bowls and ewers) and also jewellery, textiles, weaponry and the like, may have attracted Byzantine antiquarians. The mindful choice for collecting such artefacts, the material embodiments of the ancient culture of Iran, and an antiquary's emotional contemplation and meditation on them refreshed and perpetuated memory of the Persia of old and inevitably prompted the search for explanatory 'stories' revealing the true value of the collected objects.

#### 4.5 Conclusion: Epistemological Bridging

The mnemonic tools, such as texts, historical sites and toponyms, as well as artefacts related to the ancient past, served as a bridge between the actual consciousness of the mediaeval Byzantines and the ancient mentality. These tools inspired memorising and explaining obsolete events, notions, words and meanings, allowing Byzantine culture to maintain its integrity, in all its complexity and multiplicity of layers. The epistemological network of classical tradition was never forgotten or replaced with a new one, but in large part was inherited from the past, albeit revised, re-systematised and enriched with new epistemes, such as, for instance, those of biblical and Christian origin. In this sense, the Byzantine mnemonic tradition played a central role in defining the basic features of Byzantine culture that distinguished it from other cultural types of the contemporary world.

References to historical Persia from the Medes to the late Sasanians are abundant in Byzantine literature. This is not surprising, given the presence in Byzantine culture of depositories of knowledge about ancient Persia such as the *Myriobiblos* and the *Souda* and the like, as well as the continuing educational tradition, and the copying and reading of ancient authors in the original. The rich written tradition, preserving knowledge about ancient Persia, sometimes provided very detailed explanations for specific 'Persian' meanings of historical topography and the variety of material objects. At the same time, 'Persian' places of memory and artefacts vividly illustrated and tangibly corroborated the information found in the books. Textual and material objects were inextricably linked and interdependent.

An attempt at systematising 'Persian' allusions in Byzantine culture will be made next in Chapters 5 and 6. Anticipating the following discussion, it is important here to note that the set of stories, words, notions and personalities relating to ancient Persia, which were represented by the *Myriobiblos* and the *Souda*, almost completely covers the nomenclature of 'Persian' allusions in other Byzantine texts of diverse genres. By and large, the image of

memorial Persia, outlined in the *Myriobiblos* and the *Souda*, did not visibly change in its rough contours until the end of the Byzantine era. In cultural memory, it remained unaltered in its basic patterns. Even the Christian experience of the Byzantines did not significantly affect this perception, emending only, for instance, some pre-Christian assessments of ancient Persian culture such as Mithraism or magic and witchcraft, which now began to bear a clearly negative colour.

## Notes

- 1 The bibliography of the Greco-Roman and early Byzantine image of Persia is immense; see for some guidelines: Bichler and Rollinger, 'Image of Persia'; Balcer, *Ancient Persians*; Güterbock, *Byzanz und Persien*; Hutzfeld, *Das Bild der Perser*; Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom*; Georges, *Barbarian Asia*; Miller, 'Persians'; *Persia e Bizanzio*; *Persianism in Antiquity*; Dagron, 'Ceux d'en face', 211–213; Cameron, 'Agathias on the Sassanians'; Börm, *Prokop und die Perser* with further extensive bibliography; Schreiner, 'Theophylaktos Symokattes'.
- 2 See, for example: *TLG*, s.v. Ἀγαμέμνης (Kedrenos, Pseudo-Zonaras, Eustathios of Thessalonike, Kritoboulos, etc.). However, according to another genealogy, Perses was the son of Medes: Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Commentarium in Dionysii*, 394–395 (1059). See also Chapter 5.2.
- 3 See, for example: *Scholia in Dionysii*, 456 (1053); Gazes, *Epistolae*, XXV.115.
- 4 Graf, 'Medism'; *TLG*, s.v. μηδίζω (George Choïroboskos, Constantine the Porphyrogenetos, Nikephoros Basilakes, Eustathios of Thessalonike, Gennadios Scholarios). According to Benveniste, the words Μηδία and Περσίς probably were borrowed by Greek from the Iranian autonyms as early as before the end of the tenth century BCE (Benveniste, 'Relations lexicales').
- 5 Hesychios, *Lexicon*, α7214; Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Commentarium in Dionysii*, 343–344 (714), 399.4ff (1097): Ἄριοι, Ἀριανή, etc.
- 6 See, for instance: Harris, 'Institutional Settings'; Markopoulos, 'Education'; Wilson, *Scholars*; Constantinides, *Higher Education*; Cavallo, *Lire à Byzance*; Robins, *Byzantine Grammarians*.
- 7 See, for instance: Ziegler, 'Photios', 683–727; Lemerle, *Humanisme*, 179–185, 189–197; Wilson, *Scholars*, 93–111; Kazhdan, 'Photios'; Treadgold, *Nature*; Schamp, *Historien des lettres*; Schamp, *Photios*; Semenovker, *Библиографические памятники*, 47–66. In dating the compilation, I follow Treadgold's reconstruction. See also: Ronconi, 'Patriarch' and Ronconi, 'Datation' (attempts to redate); Schamp 'Photios abrégiateur' (reconsidering the number of chapters). For the alleged Photios's early life and learning in Bagdad, see: Jokisch, *Islamic Imperial Law*, 364–385; for Photios's possible travel to al-Andalus, see: Sypiański, 'Photius'.
- 8 See also: Wilson, *Scholars*, 97–98.
- 9 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 1.7, 1.8–9, 1.13, 1.14, 1.15–16, 1.19–20; Treadgold, 'Preface', 345–346: col. 1.26–27, col. 1.31, col. 2.12, col. 2.15–16, col. 2.18–19, col. 2.32–33.
- 10 For instance, on Photios's remarks on memorising and forgetting ancient textual tradition, see: Treadgold, 'Transmission of Texts'; discussion of the role of memory in learning: Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 440b.39–441a.4; see also Photios's postface (545b.1–2) confirming that his book consists of what has come to his remembrance (εις ἀνάμνησιν ἐλθεῖν). Such examples can be multiplied.
- 11 Cf.: Wilson, *Scholars*, 100; Kaldellis, 'Byzantine Role', 78–79, 83–84. See also Signes Codoñer, 'Helenos y Romanos', 440 who explained Photios's interest

- in Persia as stemming from his eagerness to learn more about the Near East in preparation for his diplomatic mission to the Caliphate. However, here I propose a different interpretational perspective to understand Photios's motivation for collecting information on ancient Persia.
- 12 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 442b.25–28 (cod. 250: Agatharchides of Cnidus). Probably, the Middle-Persian endonym Pārsīg or Pārsīk with the stress on the final syllable is meant here.
  - 13 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 6:382a–382b (cod. 244: Diodorus of Sicily).
  - 14 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 4:226a–239a (cod. 224: Memnon).
  - 15 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 7:442a–442b (cod. 250: Agatharchides).
  - 16 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 1: 45a.1–2 (cod. 72).
  - 17 See also Chapter 1.7 of this book.
  - 18 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 2:138.38 (cod. 165): ‘εἰς τὴν Μίθρου τελετὴν’.
  - 19 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 8:35–36 (cod. 258: Life of Athanasios); for more on this passage, see: Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 2:27.
  - 20 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 3:12–13 (cod. 186: Konon) and also 1:187.41–42 (cod. 81: Theodore of Antioch).
  - 21 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 1:38a.35–37 (cod. 72: Ktesias). It is possible that such a feast did really exist and its Persian name was *muwzxt-* (Sogdian) or *\*magu-žati-* (Old Iranian), see: Dandamayev, ‘Magophonia’.
  - 22 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 1:26a–26b (cod. 64: Theophanes of Byzantium).
  - 23 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 1:26a.28–30 (cod. 64: Theophanes of Byzantium). Κερμιχίων probably derives from the Middle Persian *karmir* ‘red’ and *xyōn* ‘Hun’, that is, ‘Red Huns’ (Pohl, *Avars*, 50).
  - 24 Photios, *Contra Manichaeos*, 133.30–37 (XLII): ‘Ἀηλοῖ δὲ τοῦτο περσιδι γλώσσῃ τὸν οἶον ὀμιλητικὸν καὶ πρὸς διάλεξιν δραστήριον’.
  - 25 Edel'man, *Этимологический словарь*, 5:178–192; MacKenzie, *Pahlavi Dictionary*, 53. For further examples from Sogdian, see: Gharib, *Sogdian Dictionary*, nos 5186, 5189, 5192, 5195 etc.
  - 26 Tubach and Zakeri, ‘Mani’s Name’, 272–275. Cyril of Jerusalem explained Mani’s name as ὀμιλία: Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*, 1:188 (VI, 24).
  - 27 In addition, in his *Lexicon*, Photios mentioned the Persian ‘original’ word *παρδαμάλη* for the Greek *καρδαμάλη* (Photios, *Lexicon*, κ178) and elsewhere etymologised the name of Mani, founder of Manichaeism (see Section 4.5).
  - 28 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 1:30a.32–34 (cod. 65, Theophylaktos Simokattes).
  - 29 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, 8:508b.25–31 (cod. 273).
  - 30 Ziegler, ‘Photios’, 695; Hägg, *Photios*, 7–8; Semenovker, *Библиографические памятники*, 50.
  - 31 Photios, *Homilies*, 308 (no. 18).
  - 32 Photios, *Bibliotheca*, cod. 57, 98, 189, 238, 244 (for Octavian Augustus).
  - 33 Németh, *Excerpta Constantiniana*. For a conceptual discussion of the reproduction and reinterpretation of ancient sources in middle Byzantine historical tradition, see: Jeffreys, ‘Attitudes of Byzantine Chroniclers’; Macrides and Magdalino. ‘Fourth Kingdom’.
  - 34 For the transmission and circulation of ancient texts in Byzantium, see in particular: *Byzanzrezeption in Europa*; Kaldellis, ‘Classical Scholarship’, especially, 4–9; *Textual Transmission*; Kaldellis, *Byzantine Readings*.
  - 35 For the problematisation of Byzantine attitudes towards ancient knowledge and the forms and mechanisms of preserving it, see: Wilson, *Scholars*, 136–140; Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, 44–78; Kaldellis, ‘Classical Scholarship’.
  - 36 Photios, *Lexicon*; Photios, *Lexicon* (Naber). The date of the *Lexicon*’s compilation is still controversial; most likely, Photios composed it in his youth; for instance, see: Lemerle, *Humanisme*, 185–189; Kazhdan, ‘Photios’, 13.

- 37 Photios, *Lexicon*, α95 (ἄγγαροι), α754 (ἀκινάκης), α2885 (ἀρτάβη), γ91 (γέρρα), δ56 (δαρειακὸν στατήρα), δ57 (δαρειακός), δ58 (δαρειακός), κ146 (κάνδυς), κ178 (καρδαμάλη), κ699 (κίδαρις), π218 (παράδεισος), π292 (παρασάγγης), π810 (περσικά), σ75 (σαράβαρα), σ77 (σάραπις), τ275 (τιάρα).
- 38 Photios, *Lexicon*, α54 (Ἀβροκόμας), α2998 (Ἀστάνδης), σ80 (Σαρδαναπάλλους), ε2310 (Εὐρύβατον), κ1250 (Κύρειον), μ446 (Μίθρου), ρ135 (Ροδογόνη).
- 39 Photios, *Lexicon*, α147 (ἄγει), α2533 (ἀποκουβιστᾶν), α2787 (ἀργυρόποδα δίφρον), α2806 (Ἄρης τύραννος), α2871 (ἄρρεν), α2889 (Ἀρτεμισία), α2955 (Ἀσία), γ92 (γέρροιν), γ227 (γυμνασίαρχος), δ672 (διφροφόροι), ε110 (ἐδέατρος), ε597 (Ἐλευθέριος Ζεύς), ε1571 (ἐπικεκληρυχένοι), ε2312 (Εὐρύβατος), ζ211 (ἠπειρον), κ1245 (Κυρθίλος), λ44 (λακκόπλουτον), μ381 (Μηδικὴ πόα), π1180 (προβάλλεσθαι).
- 40 Photios, *Lexicon*, ζ82–83 (Ζωπύρου τάλαντα), π167 (Πάντα λίθον κινεῖν), τ7 (τάδε Μῆδος οὐ φυλάξει).
- 41 Photios, *Lexicon*, α2533 (ἀποκουβιστᾶν), α2998 (Ἀστάνδης), γ227 (γυμνασίαρχος), κ178 (καρδαμάλη), π810 (περσικά), σ77 (σάραπις).
- 42 *Souda*; *Suda On Line*. On the significance and structure of the *Souda*, see: Lemerle, *Humanisme*, 297–299; Hunger, *Hochsprachliche Literatur*, 2:40–41; Wilson, *Scholars*, 145–147 and also Kaldellis, ‘Classical Scholarship’, 13.
- 43 Hemmerdinger, ‘158 noms communs grecs’; Hemmerdinger, ‘173 noms communs grecs’.
- 44 Interestingly, the Persian nomenclature in the *Souda* represented quite well the structure and nomenclature of the Iranian linguistic material attested in the Greek sources of classical antiquity; cf.: Schmitt, ‘Persian Loanwords’.
- 45 For a discussion of lexicons and encyclopaedic traditions, see: Hunger, *Hochsprachliche Literatur*, 2:41–50; Kaldellis, ‘Classical Scholarship’, 9–13; Dickey, *Scholarship*, 190–103; *Encyclopaedism*, and especially Part II of the book and the chapters of Paul Magdalino (‘Encyclopaedism’) and András Németh (‘Imperial Systematisation’) in 219–258; Magdalino, ‘From Encyclopaedism to Humanism’.
- 46 Németh, *Excerpta Constantiniana*.
- 47 Dickey, *Scholarship*; Kaldellis, ‘Classical Scholarship’, 13–41.
- 48 *Scolies* (Nicole), 1:173 (XIV.229): “Ἄθως ὄρος ἐν Θράκη — <...> τοῦτο δὲ διώρῳξεν ὁ Ξέρξης καταπλήξει τοὺς Ἕλληνας θέλων’.
- 49 Malalas, 146.10–16 (VIII, 1); Malalas, *Chronicle*, 102; *Chronicon paschale*, 495.13–16; Berger, *Untersuchungen*, 406; Westbrook, ‘Strategion’.
- 50 Külzer, *Peregrinatio*, 179 (Issos) and 141 (Alexandria in north Syria).
- 51 Prokopios, *De aedificiis*, 18.15–24 (I, 2, 10–12); Boeck, *Bronze Horseman*, and in particular, 85, 90–93, 141 (Constantine of Rhodes), 219–232 (George Pachymeres); Raby, ‘Equestrian Statue’.
- 52 van der Vin, *Travellers*, 2:547, 580, 589, 600–601, 671, 686, 698, 709.
- 53 van der Vin, *Travellers*, 2:536; Vasiliev, ‘Remarques’, 295. al-Harawī believed that the statue represented Emperor Constantine I.
- 54 *Patria* (Berger), 28/29.49, 116/117.96.
- 55 Bassett, *Urban image*, 74, 147–148 (no. 13 and Plate 2).
- 56 *Vita Philareti*, 116.905–907; Auzépy, ‘De Philarète’, 119. 122; *PmbZ*, 8387.
- 57 *Vita Philareti*, 62.46, 72.219. For a possible reference to the seventh-century Persian invasions in a ninth-century inscription on the walls of Ankyra, see: Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme*, 3/1:TR16 (p. 540–543).
- 58 Majeska, *Russian Travelers*, 38–39; Magdalino, ‘Constantinopolitana’, 231. For some other places in Constantinople reminiscent of the Byzantine-Persian war of 602–628, see: Berger, *Untersuchungen*, 613, 622, 725, 725–729.
- 59 Genesios, 41.45–47 (III, 5); Genesios (Kaldellis), 55 note 239.
- 60 Janin, *Constantinople*, 333–334; Berger, *Untersuchungen*, 566–568; Shahbazi, ‘Hormozd (2)’; Cosentino, ‘Iranian Contingents’, 250–251.



- 61 *Patria* (Berger), 38–39; Janin, *Constantinople*, 313; Berger, *Untersuchungen*, 220–221, 435.
- 62 Janin, *Églises*, 245–246; Berger, *Untersuchungen*, 595.
- 63 *BMTP*, 228, 231, 244–245; Karpov, *Исследования*, 50–60 and specifically on the Mithraic cult 65–66; Gordon, ‘Miθra’, 454–455 (regarding peculiar Mithraic coins from Trebizond depicting Mithras on horseback).
- 64 Loukites, *Laudatio*, 126.218–220; Lazaropoulos, *Oratio*, 220.306–310 (τελετή τοῦ Μιθροῦ); Rosenquist, ‘Mithraism in Trebizond’.
- 65 Lazaropoulos, *Oratio*, 220.303–224.363.
- 66 *BMTP*, 182, 198, 207, for more about Christian appropriation of the Mithraic sites, see: 164, 179, 213, 228, 231, 245.
- 67 It remains unclear, for instance, whether the Byzantines remembered the Persian origins of the Τζυκανιστήριον, a stadium for playing horse polo known as τζυκάνιον (Middle Persian *čawgān*); such stadiums existed in Constantinople (since the fifth century) and other Byzantine cities.
- 68 Mundell-Mango, ‘Art Collecting’; Bassett, *Urban image*.
- 69 Psellos, *Chronographia*, 2:147 (VI, 62): ‘ἡ δ’ ἐτέρα καὶ νεωτέρα δαρεικῶν ὁσημέραι μυρίων, ὧν δὴ καὶ θήκας χαλκᾶς ἐπεποίητο’.
- 70 *Etymologicum Gudianum*, 8334; *Etymologicum magnum*, 248.39–40; *Souda*, 873.

## 5 Activating memory

The special significance of Persian themes for the Byzantine intellectualised image of the historical past, as discussed in Chapter 4, has already been noted by scholars. However, a systematic analysis of ideas about ancient Persia and their stylistic and semantic functions has not yet been undertaken.<sup>1</sup> References to Persia in Byzantine literature and, especially, rhetorically saturated genres – such as prosaic and poetic *encomia*, *ekphrases*, funeral orations, epistolography, epigrams, literary historical narration and the like – are quite diverse and can be found in the writings of most Byzantine intellectuals known to us. In addition, as we shall see, ancient Persia was often alluded to in popular genres as well, suggesting it was readily understandable to little educated and probably even illiterate audiences.

This chapter investigates the representation of ancient Persia in high literary genres, and delves into the ideological discourses embodied in literature. Additionally, it will touch upon vernacular and oral textuality. The approach here is not to pursue the diachronic *Begriffsgeschichte* of reconstructing the history of the concepts, ideas and notions relating to the contents of cultural memory. Instead, my goal is to present a *synchronic typology* of major Persian *topoi* and to systematise the exceptionally rich textual evidence with a series of illustrative examples. The study of the history of notions, as it has been developed in different times by different authors, rather belongs to the realm of the ‘Intellectual history’ approach, which is quite popular now in Byzantine studies. My objective will be on developing a synchronic pattern of the most common and repetitive *topoi* that the Byzantines derived from the memory repository to make sense of reality.

My second goal is to explore the phenomenon of activating memory. Cultural memory, held within the consciousness of groups and individuals, is a repository of diverse information and meanings that resides in actual consciousness in deferred mode. When the necessity to interpret a new event arises, individuals activate deferred explanatory models from the memory repository. As we shall see, ‘Persian’ notions, stories and precedents of old often acquire the status of paradigmatic referents to moral values or common-sense prudence. They serve as tools to comprehend the present and bridge the present with the past. This highlights the phenomenon of *activating*

*cultural memory*, as individuals turn to their past memory whenever they seek abstract models to elevate the individual properties of their object or to invest events with meaning and significance. Activated memory always deals with the present and the future as both are rooted in the recollected past.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, an attempt has been made to trace potential motivations for activating memory, as well as the mechanisms of this activation. It is also important to trace how the activation of the recollected historical precedents may affect routine decision-making, addressing thus anthropological or rather psychological aspects of cultural memory's operation.

### 5.1 Rhetoric of Persia

Persian motifs found in high genres of lay literature were employed in both evaluative (negative or positive) and neutral contexts. These motifs can be categorised in the following main *topoi*. In the positive royal (imperial) contexts of encomiastic texts, the virtues of the Roman ruler are described with elaboration (ἐξεργασία), amplification (αὐξητικός λόγος), comparison (παραβολή) and syncrisis (σύγκρισις). Most often the emperor is compared with Cyrus the Great who was 'beloved by the Persians'<sup>3</sup> and 'who is all piety'.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the name Cyrus itself may have been deemed as originally Greek.<sup>5</sup> The Byzantine emperors are likened to 'the rulers of Persia' who 'in ancient times had built Susa and Ecbatana'.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, the empress is set side by side with the Massagetean queen Tomyris.<sup>7</sup> The female Italian ruler Aldruda Frangipane, Countess of Bertinoro, is likened to Rhodogoune, a war-like Parthian princess and Seleucid queen.<sup>8</sup> This conjugation of the Roman emperors with the Persian kings is quite explicable and reflects the common idea of the universal and God-given status of the Persian kingship derived from both Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions. For instance, Cyrus the Great was acclaimed by Aeschylus in 'The Persians' (767–772), Herodotus (III, 89, 3), Xenophon in his 'Cyropaedia' and other authors. At the same time, the 'religious' aspect draws on the biblical image of Cyrus the Great as God's pious elect (see Chapter 1.1).

Regarding the praise of prominent dignitaries of non-imperial standing, it might be more appropriate to liken them to the Persian kings' nobles and confidants. For example, in one and the same passage, Kataphloron compares the governor of Athens with Megabazos (the general of Darius I), Oibares (the cousin of Darius I) and Zopyros (Darius I's confidant).<sup>9</sup> In this comparison, the Byzantine emperor, therefore, is meant to be comparable with Darius himself. Later, Kataphloron returns to Persian motifs and likens the governor to Mardonios, appointed by Xerxes I as a naval commander.<sup>10</sup> In Niketas Choniates's accusatory *psogos* of Constantine Mesopotamites, there is a derisive pseudo-praise that equates the latter's closeness to the empress, in particular, to a Persian physical object, 'the pearl of Peroz ever hanging from the emperor's ear'.<sup>11</sup> Persian examples may have appeared in praising animals and physical objects, such

as the comparison of war horses with the Persian ‘Nissaiian horses’<sup>12</sup> and the semblance of Constantinopolitan public water supply to the water of the river Choaspes, which the Persian kings drank during military campaigns.<sup>13</sup>

However, Persian themes are also frequently used as negative examples. An especially popular negative image is represented by King Xerxes I. His invasion of Greece is employed either as διήγημα, comparison, or syncrisis exemplifying the attack of an arrogant and self-confident enemy.<sup>14</sup> Eustathios of Thessalonike juxtaposes the eleventh- and twelfth-century wars against the Anatolian Muslims (Ἰσµαήλ, θῆρας ἐξ Ἰσµαήλ, etc.) with the Greek campaign of Xerxes.<sup>15</sup> The Ottoman sultan Mehmed II (1444–1446; 1451–1481), conqueror of Byzantium, was commonly compared to Xerxes by contemporary Byzantine authors.<sup>16</sup>

The laudable features of the Roman emperors may have been underscored through comparing them with the habits of the Persians and, in particular, their Asian effeminacy. For instance, a syncrisis of Eustathios of Thessalonike contrasted the Roman emperor (Manuel I), who did not hesitate to walk, with the ancient Persian nobles who were expected to always ride a horse.<sup>17</sup>

However, not only outside enemies may have been likened to the evil Persian kings; Roman tyrants could be as well. The despotic, cruel and unpredictable Andronikos I Komnenos is likened to Xerxes I, who rewarded his helmsman with a golden crown, but immediately cut off his head,<sup>18</sup> and also to the ‘insane’ Cambyses II.<sup>19</sup>

Alexander the Great’s war against Darius III was a common example of victorious encounters with the barbarians, being one of the favourite *topoi*, in particular, of Niketas Choniates and Eustathios of Thessalonike.<sup>20</sup> An imperial wedding with neighbouring barbarians may be compared with the marriages between the Macedonians and the Persians after the victory of Alexander the Great.<sup>21</sup> Choniates compares the Roman civil prisoners of a recent war seized from Corinth and Thebes with ‘the Eritreans of old who were forced to serve the Persians because they were the first to attack Darius’.<sup>22</sup>

The ancient Persians were commonly associated with the negative symbol of great abundance of riches, and the arrogance stemming from it. For example, a twelfth-century poet refers to ‘The ruler of the Persians, || having even a golden beard, made of gold leaf, || praised himself to have the honour of the blessed ones’.<sup>23</sup>

Religious enmity can be associated with the pagan Persian foe in the wars of Herakleios against the Sasanians.<sup>24</sup> In this latter case, the ‘secular’ negative images of Persia often merge with the ‘religious’ Christian message.

Finally, Persia is often used, by contrast (ἐναντίον), as a commonly understood symbol denoting the substantial difference between the Hellenic Self and the barbarian Other and thus delineating the borders of the Self.<sup>25</sup>

Theodore Prodromos demonstrates an extremely interesting blend of the secular and religious imagery of the Persians, skilfully playing with positive and negative aspects associated with them. In his hymn to John II Komnenos for the feast of the Nativity, Prodromos compares the emperor to Christ in

quite an unexpected way. He conjugates the victory of John II with the events of the birth of Christ: if one star announces God's advent to the Magi, numerous stars of trophies reveal the emperor; if only three Persians worshipped the Lord's manger, all of Persia bows the neck under the emperor's feet.<sup>26</sup> Curiously enough, this trope was also used a few decades later by Euthymios Malakes, who likened the whole of Persia (i.e., Muslim Anatolia), obeying Manuel I, to the Persians who prostrated before Christ.<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, Prodomos praises the emperor Manuel I Komnenos for bringing back the enslaved Persians to the apostle Thomas, implying the Christianising of the 'infidels'.<sup>28</sup> The Persian imagery of Theodore Prodomos is abundant and diverse and deserves a special study.<sup>29</sup>

Quite curious are neutral references to Persia. I will exemplify this type with a masterful jocular wordplay of John Tzetzes in his letter to the court physician Michael. As Tzetzes notes, although histories talk much about Artaxerxes the Longhand (Artaxerxes I), however, the author is not interested in him: let the Persians and Persian scriptures praise him. Meanwhile, the author thinks that Michael deserves the nickname 'Longhand' more than the longhand Artaxerxes, because Michael's hands have stretched all the way from Adrianople to the Queen of Cities in order to gift the author with partridges.<sup>30</sup> In particular, this joke indicates how common it was to turn to Persian associations, while reflecting on the most trivial events of everyday life. However, as we shall see later, the figure of Artaxerxes I was operative not only in playful contexts, but also in quite serious ideological discourses.

The problem of activating the memorial Persian motifs in Byzantine rhetorically saturated genres merits a special in-depth study. Future research should pay special attention to the *diachronic typology*, tracing the evolution of 'fashion' for certain Persian *topoi*, the distribution of Persian themes in different genres, as well as the intertextual connections and hypertextual relations amongst contemporary writers and between the latter and the previous tradition. These and similar aspects, requiring separate meticulous and voluminous study, go beyond the focus of this book.

## 5.2 The Byzantine Achaemenids

Persia occupied an exceptional place in Byzantine models of political and ideological self-identity. Alexander the Great, having defeated the Achaemenids and conquered Persia, formed the third universal kingdom of Daniel, thus foreshadowing the future unification of the universe through the truth of Christ. From this standpoint, the Byzantine conception of supreme worldly power was rooted in Hellenistic universalism, while the deeds of Alexander constituted an important element of the Byzantine 'aetiological myth'. This myth focussed on the notion that the entire universe was absorbed through the Hellenic civilisation. The significance of Alexander's figure as an imperial archetype in the Byzantine mentality was further activated by Herakleios, a pious vanquisher of the 'infidel' Persians, who renewed

the political unity of the universe. Until the end of the empire, the image of Alexander the Great retained its archetypal status in Byzantine ideology.<sup>31</sup>

However, as influential as Alexander's ideological myth was, it was not the only way of self-description for the Byzantines. Depending on the point of view and current circumstances, alternative strategies of ideological self-identification may have emerged, once again involving Persia. Since Roman times, there emerged an idea of the bipolar structure of universal power shared between the Roman empire and that of the Persians. The Sasanian political ideology conceptualised the idea as the God-given two eyes or two luminaries of the universe, postulating thus the cosmic unity of Iran and Rome.<sup>32</sup> Peter the Patrician, a sixth-century Byzantine diplomat, ascribed to Apherban, the envoy of the Sasanian king Narseh (293–302), the following words addressed to Galerius (305–311):

It is obvious to all mankind that the Roman and the Persian empires are just like two lamps; and it is necessary that, like eyes, the one is brightened by the light of the other and that they do not angrily strive for each other's destruction.<sup>33</sup>

Theophylaktos Simokattes, in the seventh century, attributed to Khusrav II Parvez (591–628) a similar statement: 'God effected that the whole world should be illumined from the very beginning by two eyes, namely by the most powerful kingdom of the Romans and by the most prudent sceptre of the Persian state'.<sup>34</sup> Malalas, for the events of ca. 529, cited the letter of Kavad I (488–531) to Justinian I (527–565) describing the Persian king as the Sun and the Roman emperor as the Moon.<sup>35</sup>

The concept came to be shared by the Byzantines, who at some point coloured it with specifically evangelical tints, perfectly exemplifying the merging of religious and lay conceptions of Persia. In the sixth century, Kosmas Indikopleustes believed that the contemporary Sasanian dynasty is that of the evangelical Magi and now their empire 'ranks next to the Romans, because the Magi obtained certain distinctions from the Lord Christ, due to their worshipping and honouring Him'.<sup>36</sup> The idea persevered in later times, and Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos (d. 925) transposed the same bipolar scheme on the Muslim caliphate.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, the Byzantine political ideology at some point claimed direct succession from an Iranian imperial family. The famous dynastical legend attributed a royal lineage to Basil I (867–886), the founder of the Macedonian dynasty.<sup>38</sup> The 'Persian' line in the Macedonian legend has recently been discussed by Nathan Leidholm.<sup>39</sup> Leo VI the Wise (886–912), in his funeral oration for his father Basil I (888), presented the earliest version of the legend implying that Basil was a descendant of Artaxerxes I Makrocheir (465–424 BCE) through the Arsakid lineage. Leo the Wise maintains that, for a very long time, Artaxerxes was a great ruler and subjugated innumerable nations. He received the surname 'Makrocheir' ('Longhand') not because he had one

hand longer than the other, but, what seems closer to the truth, because of the very great extent of his power.<sup>40</sup> It is very likely that under ‘Arsakid’ Leo the Wise implied first of all the Parthian Arsakid, probably keeping in mind their Armenian descendants without directly indicating them.

Some decades later, the idea of Basil’s kingly lineage was further developed in the so-called *Vita Basilii*, the authorship of which is ascribed to Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, Basil’s grandson.<sup>41</sup> On his father’s side Basil I derived from the lineage of Arsakes I (247–217 BCE), great king of the Parthian kingdom; ‘the kings of the Parthians, Armenians and even Medes had to be drawn from no other race than that of Arsakes and his descendants’; Basil belonged to the Armenian branch of the dynasty, which settled in the Roman lands in the reign of the emperor Leo I (457–474).<sup>42</sup> Basil’s mother descended from Constantine the Great and Alexander the Great. Further on, the *Vita* relates about Basil’s mother who

fancied in a dream that a huge plant sprouted forth from her—just as the mother of Cyrus had seen the vine. That plant, then, stood by her house in full bloom and heavy with fruit; the large trunk that rose from the ground was of gold, while its branches and leaves were gold-like.

The dream was interpreted by an expert to mean ‘that the vision portended that a brilliant and great fortune was awaiting her son’.<sup>43</sup>

Compared to Leo the Wise, the *Vita Basilii* describes Basil’s Persian royal roots in a slightly different way, focussing on Arsakes the Parthian, at the same time establishing a certain semantic connection with the Achaemenids through the analogy with Cyrus. In the semantic structure of the story, Armenians represent ‘Christianised Persians’ in a sense, who bridged the ancient Persian and modern Roman kingship.

It is worth noting that these remarkable passages represent a typical reference to ancient Persia in Byzantine literature in the form of διήγημα (narrative) or χρεία (anecdote) elaborating the main theme. In the first case, the piece of narrative with the fictitious history of the Persian and Armenian kings imparts the *Vita Basilii*’s narration with historical credibility. However, more important for developing the *Vita Basilii*’s ideological message is the Persian syncrisis in the second passage, which, in particular, invests the mother’s dream with, as it were, ‘semantic significance’ and makes it, through analogy with a paradigmatic Persian precedent, an undeniable argument in favour of the divine destiny of Basil.

Another recension of the same legend, developed by Niketas David Paphlagon (d. after 963) and Pseudo-Symeon (late tenth century), focusses on Tiridates I (298–330), who was king of the Armenians and contemporary of Saint Gregory the Illuminator (d. 331). Meanwhile, Genesisios indicates that Basil’s ancestors include both the Parthian Arsakes I the Elder and Tiridates I, belonging to the same dynasty. The *Vita Euthymii* (920s or 930s) simply postulates the Armenian origin of Basil I.<sup>44</sup>

As Gyula Moravcsik has shown, all these variations are derived from the same original legend, which was probably fabricated by Photios in the 870s.<sup>45</sup> It would be no surprise if Photios was the first to introduce the legend of the Achaemenid and Parthian royal lineage of Basil I, considering that he was a great connoisseur and admirer of the Hellenic Persian tradition.

The ultimate aim of the earliest extant version of Leo the Wise and that conveyed by Constantine VII was to prove Basil's Persian, rather than Armenian, royal ancestry, emphasising the legitimacy of his true universal kingship, equal in cosmic status to that of the Romans, which was self-evident for a Byzantine. The Armenian storyline, which was accentuated later by Niketas David, initially served as a subsidiary and intermediate function, bridging Basil with the Persian imperial tradition of old.<sup>46</sup>

As Leidholm has shown, although only Leo the Wise directly referred to Artaxerxes I Makrocheir as a forefather of the Arsakids, the Byzantines were well aware of the Achaemenid origins of Arsakes from the classical heritage. The Byzantine tradition may have mixed Artaxerxes I and Artaxerxes II (405/4–359/8), sometimes blending their classical images; Leo's Artaxerxes combined the features of both Achaemenid kings. However, in the semantic structure of the Macedonian legend, the leading role was played by the biblical figure of Artaxerxes I, who was praised as a patron of the high priest Ezra and the governor Nehemiah.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, the combined Greco-Jewish figure of Artaxerxes I, a great militant emperor and perfectly pious builder of the world, was quite appropriate as the forefather of a Roman emperor. Artaxerxes's attributes as a conqueror, builder and virtuous emperor perfectly match the relevant heroic features of Basil I as described in Leo the Wise's oration and the *Vita Basilii*.<sup>48</sup> However, by the turn of the eleventh century, Artaxerxes I had been pushed into the shadows, probably due to the greater chronological proximity of the Parthians and the pressing political needs of establishing closer ties with the Armenian princes on the eastern borders of the empire.<sup>49</sup> Summing up the discussion of the Macedonian legend, I agree with Anthony Kaldellis's notion that the legend is an artificial ideological construct; doubting the Armenian roots of Basil I, he thinks that the emperor in reality was most likely of Roman stock.<sup>50</sup> The vision of the legend's evolution set forth above supports this idea.

In any case, taking into account the Achaemenid and Arsakid perspectives of the Macedonian legend, we can view the empress Theodora's obsession with collecting and treasuring gold *darics*, referred to in the previous chapter (Chapter 4.4), in a different light as well. The *darics* she collected may have been considered in terms of ancient Persian kingly insignia symbolising supreme worldly power and, by extension, Theodora's illustrious ancestry.

A connection between the first Achaemenid king, Cyrus the Great and Roman emperorship is implied in a curious text found in the fourteenth-century book of ceremonies conventionally ascribed to Pseudo-Kodinos. The text reflects an official prehistory of the Roman court ceremonial, which



explains the reasons for using certain old Persian pieces of ceremonial attire, such as *pilatikon*, *epilourikon*, *skaranikon*, caftan and turban and also the dragon banner in official ceremonies of the Roman court. The only reason for their ceremonial use at the Constantinopolitan court is that these garments were introduced by Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian monarchy. Cyrus, in his turn, adopted some of these insignia from the Median kings and judges, while others were influenced by the Assyrian kingdom.<sup>51</sup> This interpretation, although anachronistic for the fourteenth century, probably reflects an older tradition that conceivably was linked with the ninth-century legend of the Achaemenid origin of Basil I. A similar case is represented by a ceremonial garment known by two names, *γρανάτζα* (as an emperor's costume) and *λαπάτζας* (as courtiers' costume). According to Pseudo-Kodinos, this garment was inherited by the Byzantines from the Assyrian kings.<sup>52</sup> It is possible that the author implied the Persian intermediation here, especially if he was aware that the term *λαπάτζας* was derived from the Persian *lapācha* 'outer garment'.<sup>53</sup>

The choice of the Achaemenids as originators and forefathers, whether be it Cyrus the Great, Artaxerxes or Arsakes, for diverse aspects of Byzantine emperorship is quite remarkable in the context of this study. It demonstrates how memorial Persia, under certain circumstances, could be adopted as the Byzantine Self (Hellenic and Roman), even within the milieu of state ideology. Persian origins served as sufficient for substantiating a ceremonial practice or asserting one's right to the Roman throne. In this sense, the idea of Persian origins in statesmanship was not solely a cultural and literary phenomenon, but, due to its ideological significance, bore an important practical meaning.

An inflated interest of the Byzantines in the Achaemenids may also be detected in some other instances outside ideological discourses. Achaemenid ancestry was ascribed to Theophobos the Persian, a Khurrami leader in Byzantine service, due to his 'curved nose of Cyrus', a characteristic associated with the Persian kings.<sup>54</sup> Skylitzes mentioned the dissatisfaction of the Persians with the 'Saracen' rule, describing those who strived for Persian revival as 'Achaemenids', possibly implying the alleged Achaemenid ancestry of the Buyid dynasty, the proponents of the Persian culture in Western and Central Iran of the time.<sup>55</sup>

The subsequent destiny of the term 'Achaemenid' in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries represents a special case remarkable for understanding how cultural memory works. There were two conflicting interpretations justifying the identification of Ottomans as Achaemenids, and both of these differing versions were derived from cultural memory. Since the mid-fourteenth century, the name Achaemenid was actualised again and began to designate the Ottomans in addition to the more common *Πέρσαι*/Persians (see also Chapter 7.4) and *Τούρκοι*/Turks. Gregory Palamas, Philotheos Kokkinos, Manuel II Palaiologos and other authors referred to the Ottomans as 'Achaemenids' in their writings.<sup>56</sup> 'Achaemenids' as a designation of the Ottomans was used in spoken language too. The *primikerios* John, in

his testament (1384), complained of ‘the continuous Achaemenid inroads’ against Thasos.<sup>57</sup> The circulation of the designation ‘Achaemenid’ in spoken language is testified by Byzantine anthroponymy as well. In his anti-Muslim polemical *Dialogue*, Joseph Bryennios uses ‘the Achaemenid’ as one of the nicknames of his Muslim interlocutor, who must have been an Ottoman Turk.<sup>58</sup> The surname of Meletios, a noble Turkish convert to Christianity and John Kantakouzenos’s friend, was probably ‘the Achaemenid’; judging by this sobriquet, he was originally an Ottoman Turk.<sup>59</sup> The use of the term ‘Achaemenid’ resulted from a ‘negative’ association of the vigorous Ottoman campaigns against Byzantium with that of Xerxes I against Greece, and its contextual meaning was understandable to most Byzantines.

A wholly ‘positive’ interpretation of a semantic relationship between the Achaemenids and the Ottomans outlived Byzantium. This perspective was conceptualised (in the 1460s) by Michael Kritoboulos, who explicitly ascribed a Persian, Achaemenid origin to the ruling Ottoman dynasty. Kritoboulos went even further to revive the ancient legend about the Egyptian origin of the Greeks through Danaus and Lynceus, the Greek origin of the Persians through Perseus, and therefore establishing a common ancestry of the Greeks and the Persians, that is, the Greco-Roman Byzantines and the Achaemenid Persian Ottomans.<sup>60</sup> The ideological construction of Kritoboulos strongly resembles the legend of the Achaemenid origins of the Macedonian dynasty, which was discussed earlier in this section. It is possible that Kritoboulos, in creating a new Greco-Achaemenid genealogy for the Ottomans, had in mind a practical thought to offer his sovereign Mehmed II (1451–1481) a theoretical underpinning for a new Greco-Persian state ideology.<sup>61</sup> However, the time had changed by the late 1460s, and Islamic Constantinople needed neither ancient Persian nor Greco-Roman arguments to justify its legitimacy: Mehmed II was more inclined to develop purely Muslim ideological discourses.<sup>62</sup>

Both late Byzantine interpretations of the notion ‘Achaemenid’ made use of the common reservoir of cultural memory, allowing each author to retrieve whatever information best suited their interpretation of current events.

### 5.3 In the Vernacular

Was memorial Persia merely an antiquarian interest for the Byzantines, its re-articulation cultivated solely by a small circle of connoisseurs, or did it resonate with a broader public in their routine efforts to make sense of their surrounding reality? In other words, how operative was this element of cultural memory in the comprehension, interpretation and classification of new events and objects in routine everyday activity? It would be a mistake to suggest that the circulation of such Persian notions of old was limited to a narrow circle of high-brow men of letters and science. Several instances demonstrate that the Persian element of cultural memory was also in use in the middle and low strata of the society.

A link between cultural memory and actual linguistic practices is represented by the Pahlavi borrowing μακάρι, meaning ‘would that’.<sup>63</sup> Most likely, it was derived, possibly by the sixth century, from the Pahlavi *magar* with the same meaning. However, its semantics slightly changed in Modern Persian in which it still exists.<sup>64</sup> The *Souda* qualifies μακάρι as an ‘optative interjection [used] by the uneducated’<sup>65</sup> indicating its circulation in spoken language. In fact, μακάρι was in use throughout Byzantine times mostly in vernacular texts.<sup>66</sup> In Modern Greek, the word is found in the forms μακάρι and μαγάρι. The latter form μαγάρι probably reflects the secondary Ottoman phonetic influence and indicates that the Byzantine ear recognises the foreignness of the Pahlavi μακάρι and its sameness to the new Perso-Turkish word *magar*.<sup>67</sup> A fraction of other loanwords from ancient Persian continued to circulate widely during middle and late Byzantine times, such as κίδαρις, κολόκυνθα/κολοκύνθη/κολόκυντα, μάγος, μανδύα, νάφθα, σατράπης, τιάρα, etc. The ancient Persian etymology was firmly memorised through lexicographic and encyclopaedic tradition. The most curious of these was probably the word σατράπης, which had a wide circulation in both negative and neutral senses: on one hand, as an enemy, Asian soldier, military commander or ruler, and on other hand, as a Byzantine soldier and also terminologically, in the last quarter of the tenth century, the name of the militaries of special *tagma* and the court title of their commander.<sup>68</sup>

The usage of the above-discussed old Persian borrowings in routine spoken communication may have evoked in the Byzantine mind, in certain circumstances, the memory images of ancient Persia. The existence of such images of old Persia in popular memory is evidenced by the abundance of Persian motifs in vernacular literature.

In fact, ancient Persia featured extensively in the texts intended for the audience interested in vernacular literature. The numerous Byzantine recensions of the *Alexander Romance* and the late Byzantine *History of Belisarios* deal directly with the Greco-Persian wars of the past, and even though Persian topics would not come as a surprise in this particular context, what is truly remarkable is that there should be popular interest in Alexander and even in the less renowned Belisarios as late as the fourteenth century.<sup>69</sup> Parthians and Persians figured, though not too often, in middle Byzantine love romances.<sup>70</sup> It is quite notable that the audience of vernacular verses wished to hear about the Persians of old, having access to sufficient contextual information that would allow them to understand Persian references correctly.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, the reactivated popular memory of ancient Persia may have acquired new tones reflecting contemporary political and cultural actualities. As Corinne Jouanno has demonstrated, the late Byzantine versions of the *Alexander Romance*, compared with its older prototypes, formed a more negative image of the Persians and their king Darius, presumably projecting contemporary anti-Turkish sentiments upon the Persians of the *Romance*.<sup>72</sup> Consequently, a certain image of ancient Persia pre-existed in the cultural memory of the audience and could be modified under the influence of contemporary realities.

Most intriguingly, we find Persian motifs where they appear anachronistic and, on the basis of common sense, even out of place altogether. In the epics *Digenes Akritas*, the dowry of Digenes's bride contains the famed and marvellous 'sword of Chosroes', which seems to imply Khusrav II (r. 590–628);<sup>73</sup> in one of the epic's versions, Khusrav II appeared again along with his general Shahrwaraz (Σάρβαρος).<sup>74</sup> There is a reference to a royal tomb at Pasargadae (Πασαργάδαι and Παρασογάρδαι) in connection with the erection of Digenes's tomb;<sup>75</sup> and Darius III is mentioned along with Alexander the Great.<sup>76</sup> Finally, there are repeated mentions of Persians and Persia scattered throughout diverse versions of the epic.<sup>77</sup> The specific optics of the epic genre eliminated temporal differences in events that had been embedded in cultural memory.

#### 5.4 'Persian' Proverbs

Ancient Persia and Persians are featured in Byzantine proverbs, which are insightful and laconic traditional sayings expressing a common-sense truth. Additionally, proverbial idioms, gnomic expressions and proverbial comparisons, classified as proverbs by the Byzantines, also involve references to Persia. Proverbs constitute a genre of 'folklore', that is, sayings which circulated in oral speech, and are an important indication of the content of collective cultural memory. While insightful sayings referring to Persians or Persian contexts are not abundant (amounting to about a dozen), they are all directly linked with historical memory, as they reproduce knowledge and prejudices that were formed in ancient times. The following examples associate the Persians with simplicity in religious ritual, cruelty, personal discipline, finesse and wealth:

- 1 'Διὸς ἐγκέφαλος' ('Zeus's brain'), meaning the finest food-item, 'so say the Persians in reference to those who live luxuriously; or "king's brain"'.<sup>78</sup>
- 2 'Ζωπύρου τάλαντα' ('The scales of Zopyros') denotes the price of success. Photios and the *Souda* explain that 'Zopyros the Persian, seeking to please the king, flogged himself and removed his nose and ears; after entering Babylon and gaining trust because of his physical condition he betrayed the city. So as the result of a metaphor [the proverb] spoke of scales and balances, as if to say deeds and actions'.<sup>79</sup>
- 3 'Ἡ ἀπὸ Σκυθῶν ῥῆσις' ('A Scythian answer'), meaning a 'rude answer'.<sup>80</sup> The proverb is based on a story of Herodotus (IV.131–132): during his war against the Scythians, Darius I offered peace to the enemy. The Scythians, in response, sent Darius the gift of a bird, a mouse, a frog and arrows. According to Herodotus, the meaning of these gifts was as follows: unless the Persians became birds, mice or frogs and fled, they would be shot by Scythian arrows.<sup>81</sup>
- 4 'Μηδικὴ τράπεζα' ('A Median meal'), meant an expensive and luxurious food. The proverb is first attested in the first or second century (Dio Chrysostom and Diogenianos), and is found again in the writings of the

- patriarch Gregory II in the thirteenth century.<sup>82</sup> Michael Apostolios repeats the proverb and its explanation adding that it is ‘because the Medes [live] luxurious [lives]’.<sup>83</sup>
- 5 ‘Ὁ Πέρσης τὴν θυσίαν’ (‘A Persian [performing] a sacrifice’) denotes a sacrifice carried out in a simple way, a simple ritual and, therefore, probably, resolving a complex matter too simplistically.<sup>84</sup> The proverb alluded to Herodotus (I, 131–32), who related that the Persians, unlike the Greeks, were simplistic in their worship and did not set up statues, temples, altars, etc.
  - 6 ‘Πάντα λίθον κινεῖν’ (‘To move every stone’), meaning to search hard; the *Souda* explains: ‘When Mardonios had been defeated at the battle of Plataea, a rumour took hold that he had buried a treasure in the circuit of his tent and abandoned it. So Polycrates of Athens bought the spot and searched for a long time. As he achieved nothing, he sent and enquired at Delphi, how he might find it. They say that Apollo replied, “Move every stone!”’.<sup>85</sup>
  - 7 ‘Περσικὴ τιμωρία’ (‘A Persian punishment’) came to denote a harsh and cruel form of punishment.<sup>86</sup>
  - 8 ‘Τάδε Μῆδος οὐ φυλάξει’ (‘These the Mede will not protect’) denotes spending wealth so that the enemy does not use it for his own benefit. Photios explains that ‘During Xerxes’s invasion, the exhausted Greeks spent and expended their own monies, saying “these the Mede will not protect”’.<sup>87</sup>
  - 9 ‘Φεραύλας βληθεὶς οὐδαμῆ μετεστράφη’ (‘Pheraulas was hit with [a stone], but he never so much as turned’) denotes a person, conscientious in discharging a duty and acting in spite of obstacles. The proverb is derived from Xenophon’s story about Pheraulas, an associate of Cyrus II, who, having gone to carry out the king’s order, did not even look back when he was heavily hit on the head with a stone (Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.3.28.1).<sup>88</sup>

Some of these proverbs and idioms are found as paradigmatic references in the writings of middle and late Byzantine authors. For instance, the first proverb on my list is mentioned in commentaries on the *Iliad* by Eustathios of Thessalonike in the twelfth century;<sup>89</sup> the third is cited in the letter of Theodore, Metropolitan of Cyzicus, to the patriarch.<sup>90</sup> The most revealing is the sixth, which was quoted in a hagiography by Ignatios Deakon (ninth century),<sup>91</sup> in a legal treatise by the judge Eustathios Romaios (eleventh century),<sup>92</sup> in a high style theologo-historical narration by Nikephoros Gregoras<sup>93</sup> and, finally, in an embellished rhetorical discourse of John Eugenikos.<sup>94</sup> These examples indicate that the proverbs collected by Byzantine paroemiographers were indeed in use. By their nature, proverbs and proverbial idioms function rather in colloquial speech, and, therefore, it can be assumed that the ‘Persian’ sayings continued to be also used in oral communication of the Byzantines. The sixth proverb on my list is especially exemplary here: the variety of genres, in which the proverb is found, including hagiography and legal literature, may indicate its circulation in speech reality.

It is interesting to note, incidentally, that only a few proverbs, circulating in the Middle Greek language, were associated with other Asian neighbours of Byzantium, such as the Arabs and the Turks. Moreover, if all the ‘Persian’ proverbs address the speaker to the memorial antique past and require the knowledge of their historical contexts, the ‘Arabic’ and ‘Turkic’ ones reproduce daily common sense needing no temporarily remote literary connotations to be understood.<sup>95</sup> These imbalances emphasise that the Persian element in Byzantine culture predominantly belonged to intellectualised memory and bookish tradition, as opposed to the Arabic and Turkic elements that were associated exclusively with contemporary everyday experience.

The above-discussed ‘Persian’ proverbs seem to have disappeared from the speech reality in the Modern Greek language.<sup>96</sup> This circumstance is explicable and quite remarkable. With the transition to a new language and the break with ancient culture, it became impossible for Greek-speakers to reproduce the living memory of the Persians and Persia as a part of the Hellenic Self: ‘Persian’ maxims ceased to be entirely comprehensible to most participants in verbal communication.

### 5.5 Practicalities of Memory

One may make out typologically distinct instances of the re-actualising of memory’s Persian elements in the course of routine naming activity of the mind. An eloquent example is offered by the military term ‘Immortals’ (ἀθάνατοι, Old Pers. *anauša*?), which initially signified the Achaemenid special troops (Darius I and Xerxes I) and possibly reappeared later under the Sasanians (*zhayedān*?).<sup>97</sup> The story of the Immortal troops of the Persians was remembered by the Byzantines and was found, in particular, in Hesychios, and later in middle Byzantine time in Theophanes the Confessor, the *Souda* and an eleventh-century anonymous chronicle. Thus, one may be perfectly sure that, in the middle Byzantine literate mind, the Immortals were tightly associated with ancient Persia and the Persian military system.<sup>98</sup> The term was revived in 970 by John I Tzimiskes (969–976) who established a special elite *tagma* of the Immortals.<sup>99</sup> Later ἀθάνατοι were referred to again during the reigns of Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078), Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078–1081) and Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118).<sup>100</sup>

A Persian allusion in the *tagma*’s name is self-evident. It is worth noting here that, in Christian discourse, ‘immortal’ was a common attribute of God and of a human’s soul that reached eternal salvation (ἀθάνατος θεός, νυμφίος Χριστός, ψυχή, ζωή, βίος and the like.) However, the soldiers reactivated its ancient meaning, setting aside its lofty theological sense, and cared not about the resulting semantic conflict. What is most curious here is that again memorial Persian models were not considered alien, but rather quite appropriate for shaping the Self.

Another curious type of ‘practical’ implementation of the models, derived from cultural memory, is exemplified by Anna Komnene. According to Anna,

when Alexios I encountered the revolt of the usurper Pseudo-Diogenes, a certain Alakaseus approached the emperor and suggested, ‘imitating Zopyros, [the subject] of Cyrus’, that he would disfigure himself and, going to the usurper, would pretend that the emperor had maltreated him. Alakaseus, acting in this way, deceived Pseudo-Diogenes, captured him and brought him to Constantinople.<sup>101</sup> It is not completely clear from Anna’s narration whether Alakaseus consciously acted according to the ‘Persian’ literary model or if it was the author’s *post factum* interpretation. In any event, this case demonstrates the comprehension of a real action (whether by an actor or an interpreter) through the paradigms of cultural memory. In addition, the episode refers to the proverbial saying ‘Ζωπύρου τάλαντα’ discussed above (proverb no. 2), testifying to its prevalence among the twelfth-century Byzantines. Evidently, the story of Zopyros was quite popular in middle and late Byzantine times, being referred to more than once by authors like Constantine Porphyrogenetos, Nikolaos Kataphloron and Nikephoros Gregoras.<sup>102</sup>

## 5.6 Conclusion: Association and Function

The contents of cultural memory can be compared to a chest filled with deferred ideas and concepts. The living mind in its creative activity picks up (or activates) from the ‘memory chest’ information enabling it to comprehend reality. The more mature a civilisation is, the more profound its repository of past experience. The remembered past experience provides ready-made models for coping with the vicissitudes of reality: the culture, which is able to employ its past experience, does not have to begin all over again like a child.

The activation of the memory models occurs by way of association: new events are analogised with similar ones in the past. The precedents, discussed in this chapter, allow us to sketch out the pattern of more or less standard associations activating memory motifs related to Persia. Persian *topoi* may have been evoked from the ‘memory chest’ by either similarity-associations or contrast-associations. Similarity-associations were the most common and thematically productive.

The Persians were recalled in a positive light for their association with wealth and luxury, manliness and mastery of the martial arts, female courage, exemplary statesmanship, fidelity to obligations and high-level craftsmanship and material culture in general. The most forceful and multifaceted positive Persian associations were generated by the topics related to kingship and empire. The Roman emperors were commonly analogised with the Persian kings, especially the Achaemenids, through the distinct features of kingly perfection: courage and bellicosity, world building and organising, justice and wisdom, piety and virtue. The most often and commonly understandable association was represented by Cyrus the Great. The idea

of the Roman universal empire frequently evoked memories of the universal God-given authority of the Persian kings, which became paradigmatic for its political puissance, longevity, geographic extent, strong statesmanship, justice and piety.

Among the negative Persian associations, one can observe excessive wealth, luxury, effeminacy, undue simplicity, arrogance and self-confidence, aggressiveness, despotism and cruelty. The Byzantine victories over barbarians, especially those coming from Asia, commonly generated associations with the Persian abortive attacks during the Greco-Persian wars and Alexander the Great's campaigns against Persia. The latter associations became more in demand from the twelfth century onwards when the Anatolian Muslim adversaries came to be labelled by the Byzantines as 'Persians' (see Chapter 7.4).

Contrast-associations as a rule employed negative features of the Persian image as described: the advantages of the object under consideration may have been revealed or underscored by juxtaposing with relevant negative traits of the ancient Persians.

Associations with Persia served various functional roles in interpreting the reality. The Persian associations acted as *explanatory models* for a variety of events, situations and relationships. They sometimes included predictive elements, such as defining characteristic traits of Asian enemies, foretelling outcomes of wars against the enemy, interpreting imperial weddings with barbarians and understanding the meanings of dreams. Moreover, *explanatory models* in fact influenced a person's way of action. For instance, they played a role in establishing the Immortal troops and, possibly, in the imitation of Zopyros by Alakaseus.

Another important function of Persian concepts, which configured Byzantine ideology, consisted of the *justification* of the particular status, dignity and rights pertaining to a person or object. This is seen, for example, in the notion of universal empire or the Achaemenid origins of Basil I, Theophobos and the Ottomans.

Persian motifs were often activated as imparting *quality standards* to certain personal abilities or material objects (Megabastos and Mardonios's qualities as a commander; Nissaian horses; delicious food; sword; the Immortals). They may also have performed an *ethical didactic function*, infusing the event under the author's consideration with moral meaning, indicating good or bad morals of a person and desired or undesired models of behaviour (piety of the emperor; castigation of Andronikos I's character; Asian effeminacy; richness; cruelty; barbarism; rudeness of an answer).

Persian associations may have served as a *communicative tool* that strengthened or embellished author's main argument, such as *dampening and amplifying metaphors* wittily describing the gist of events (a person as the 'pearl of Peroz'; 'to move every stone'; obedient Persians as the Magi) or references to Persian characters or objects producing *emotional effect*, especially, in jocular contexts (Tzetzes's reference to Artaxerxes I).



Outside the range of the above-discussed Persian motifs, the Byzantine authors employed a great variety of other associations with Persia and the Persians, which sometimes may have been quite exotic and rare, in order to reveal the educational level of the agent. Evidently, the same motifs could perform differing functions in different texts depending on the context and author's intention. Associations, therefore, were of situational and optional character: not all Byzantine authors extensively used associations with Persia, which were only a small part of the huge memory repository filled with a multitude of synonymous motifs and *topoi*. Reference to Persia was always a subject of free choice. The next chapter will discuss in more detail the remarkable instance of conscious eschewing of Persian allusions (Chapter 6.2).

By and large, the memory of ancient Persia was not an assemblage of antiquarian odds and ends, but represented for the Byzantines, their *alter ego*, a part of their cultural self. They could scarcely have imagined their present intellectual being without ancient Persia, which was always present in the actuality of the Byzantine mentality (albeit in deferred mode) as a possible source for paradigmatic and explanatory associations. Byzantine Persia was always somewhere nearby and at hand, a huge reservoir of concepts, which may have been reactivated if circumstances prompted it. As shown earlier, memory of ancient Persia persisted not only among educated strata, but was also characteristic of little educated and uneducated users of vernacular texts. However, the available evidence does not enable us to reconstruct fully the contents and composition of the 'Persian part' within the memory repository of commoners.

## Notes

- 1 See, for instance: Pérez Martín, 'Reception of Xenophon'; Németh, *Excerpta Constantiniana*, passim; Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, 285, 288, 333.
- 2 On the dependence of project thinking upon the past experience, see: Frankl, *Search for Meaning*; Frankl, *Will to Meaning*; and now: Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty*, and especially 102–107.
- 3 Choniates, *Orationes*, 102.11 (or .X).
- 4 Kataphloron, *Ad praefectum Athenarum*, 148.19–20 (XXXI): 'καλὸς ὃ Κῦρε μετὰ τῆς εὐσεβείας'. For the figure of Cyrus in the middle and late Byzantine texts, see also: Pérez Martín. 'Reception of Xenophon'; Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, 85–90 and Table 2. For the roots of the Byzantine literary image of Cyrus, see: Waldenberg, *Исцопия*, 161–163.
- 5 Kedrenos, 1:251.10–11: 'οὗτος Κῦρος μὲν Ἑλληνιστὶ ἐκαλεῖτο'.
- 6 Choniates, *Historia*, 206.54–55, that is, Cyrus II; translation: Choniates (Magoulias), 117.
- 7 Anna Komnene, 367.52–53 (XII.3.8).
- 8 Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Opera minora*, 279.19–20; Eustathios of Thessalonike (Stone), 50.
- 9 Kataphloron, *Ad praefectum Athenarum*, 130.11–132.26 (XXIII).
- 10 Kataphloron, *Ad praefectum Athenarum*, 150.9–15 (XXXII).
- 11 Choniates, *Historia*, 485 (reference to Procopius, *De Bello Persico*, 1.4.10–29).

- 12 Choniates, *Orationes*, 94.11–12 (or. IX), 133.17–18 (or. XIV).
- 13 Herodotus, 1.188; Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Opera minora*, 293.23–26; Eustathios of Thessalonike (Stone), 9.
- 14 Theophanes Continuatus (Featherstone/Codoñer), 254–256 (IV.25.2–7); Skylitzes, 99.20–22; Anna Komnene, 192.72–79; Prodromos. *Historische Gedichte*, 216.71–73 (poem 5), 256.111–113 (poem 11); Choniates, *Orationes*, 103.3–4 (or. 10), 118.5–11 (or. 12); 171.19–21 (or. 16). For similar examples derived from Nikephoros Basilakes, Michael Italikos, Theodore Prodromos, Euthymios Tornikes and Michael Choniates, see: Magdalino, *Manuel I Komnenos*, 432–433; Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 285, 333. See also: Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, 87 (Table 2).
- 15 Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Opera minora*, 206–207, 272.71–76 and below 5–7, 245.32–35, 280–281; Eustathios of Thessalonike (Stone), 36, 39, 52–53, 84–85, 201.
- 16 Philippides and Hanak, *Siege and Fall*, 165 note 102, 433 note 12, 434–447, 553.
- 17 Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Epitaphios*, 66.62–63 and commentaries of Emmanuel Bourbouhakis on p. 186; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 4.3.22–23; Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 8.8.19.
- 18 Choniates, *Historia*, 259.11; reference to Herodotus, VIII, 118.
- 19 Choniates, *Historia*, 312.1.
- 20 Bryennios, *Historia*, 199.6; Skylitzes, 479.12–13; Choniates, *Orationes*, 129.6–7 (or. XIV), 171.26–28 (or. XVI) and also, Choniates, *Orationes*, 111.22–24 (or. XI, the Gordian Knot); Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Opera minora*, 227. 38–40; 261.5–12; 269.90–94 (the Gordian Knot) etc.; Eustathios of Thessalonike (Stone), 16, 31–32, 128. For more examples from the twelfth-century encomia of Nikephoros Basilakes, Michael Italikos and Euthymios Malakes, see: Shliakhtin, *From Scythians to Persians*, 155–159. For the figure of Alexander the Great in the late Byzantine encomia, see: Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, 85–91 (and Table 2), 97. A generalising study on Alexander in the Byzantine tradition see in: Kaldellis, ‘Alexander the Great’ and especially 221–231.
- 21 Choniates, *Orationes*, 41.3–4 (or. V); the same *topos* in Planoudes: Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, 179.
- 22 Choniates, *Historia*, 98.8–11; translation: Choniates (Magoulias), 57; reference to Herodotus, 6, 119. Cf.: Kaldellis, ‘Niketas Choniates’, 80 (Xenophon’s *Anabasis* as a hypotext).
- 23 Meesters and Ricceri, ‘Twelfth-Century Cycle’, 322/323. As the editors have noted, the Persian image was borrowed from John Chrysostom’s homiletical exegesis on the Epistle to the Colossians (PG, 62:350A–B). In all probability, Chrysostom borrowed the motif from a classical source. More for the Persian riches, see Section 5.4.
- 24 See for instance: Psellos, *Hagiographica*, 236–237 (‘In archangelum Michaelēm’); Downey, ‘Nikolaos Mesarites’, 893; Wilken, *The Land Called Holy*, 216–232. For the Byzantine image of Herakleios, see: Kaegi, *Heraclius* and now Sirotenko, *Erinnern an Herakleios*; Sirotenko, ‘Constructing Memory’. For the memory of Herakleios’s Persian campaigns in the later tradition, see also: Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, 1:335.
- 25 Choniates, *Historia*, 580.98–96; Kataphloron, *Ad praefectum Athenarum*, 102.1–12 (IX). See also in this regard: Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 333 (Hellas being juxtaposed with Persia).
- 26 Prodromos (Hörandner), 245.5–8 (poem 9a).
- 27 Euthymios Malakes, *Oratio*, 170.6–11; Shliakhtin, *From Scythians to Persians*, 201–202.
- 28 Prodromos (Hörandner), 517.48–50 (poem 71).
- 29 For some more instances from Prodromos, see: Shliakhtin, *From Scythians to Persians*, 62–64, 86–95; Idem, ‘Master of Castamon’. For a notable case of

- Prodromos's employing Aeschylus's *Persians* as hypotext and architext for his *Katomyomachia*, see: Marciniak and Warcaba, 'Prodromos' *Katomyomachia*', especially 102–105.
- 30 Tzetzes, *Epistulae*, 68.16–23 (XLVIII): 'αἱ χεῖρες γάρ σου τοσοῦτο μῆκος ὑπερεξήλωνται, ὡς ἐκ τῆς Αἰλίας Ἀδριανουπόλεως πρὸς τὴν βασιλίδα τῶν πόλεων ἔκταθεῖσαι ἡμῖν ὀρέξαι τοὺς πέρδικας'.
- 31 See now: Kaldellis, 'Alexander the Great', 225–231 and also Gero, 'Alexander legend'; Reinink, 'Heraclius'; Jouanno, 'Alexander the Great'; for the figures of Alexander and Herakleios in the apocalyptic tradition and the exclusion of the Islamic dominion from the Four-kingdom schema, see, for instance: Reinink, 'Ps.-Methodius', 158–163 and Reinink, 'Heraclius'; for the late Byzantine ideology, see: Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, passim; Kaldellis, 'Alexander the Great', 234–236.
- 32 See also: Frenschkowski, 'Christianity', 470; Chrysos, 'Roman-Persian legal relations'; Canepa, *Two Eyes* and especially 'Epilogue'; McDonough, 'Were the Sasanians Barbarians?'
- 33 Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De legationibus*, 393.10–16. For an English translation, see: Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*, 122–123.
- 34 Simokattes, 169.19–23 (IV, 11, 2). For commentaries on this passage, see: Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*, 238.
- 35 Malalas, 378.32–35. For an English translation, see: Malalas, *Chronicle*, 263.
- 36 Indikopleustes, 393.11–14 (II, 76): 'αὕτη δευτερεύουσα μετὰ τοὺς Ῥωμαίους διὰ τὸ τοὺς Μάγους ἀξιώματά τινα λαβεῖν ἐπὶ τοῦ Δεσπότην Χριστοῦ διὰ τὴν πρὸς αὐτὸν προσκύνῃσιν καὶ τιμῇν'. On this passage, see also Chapter 1.2.
- 37 Nicholas Mystikos, *Letters*, 2.16–18 (I): Nicholas addressed to a Muslim emir: 'there are two lordships, that of the Saracens and that of the Romans, which stand above all lordship on earth, and shine out like the two mighty beacons in the firmament'.
- 38 For the up-to-date discussion of the image of Basil I in the Byzantine ideology with further bibliography, see: Markopoulos, 'Μεταμορφώσεις'; Greenwood, 'Basil I' and now Kaldellis, *Romanland*, 191–195.
- 39 Leidholm, 'Artaxerxes'.
- 40 Leo the Wise, *Epitaphium* (Antonopoulou), XIV.130–139 and Leo the Wise, *Epitaphium* (Vogt/Hausherr), 44.23–46.5: 'ἔλκουσι γὰρ τοῦ αἵματος τὰς πηγὰς ἐκ τῶν Ἀρταξέρξου ναμάτων, ὃς ἐπὶ μῆκιστον χρόνου βασιλείῳ κράτει ἐμεγαλύνθη καὶ πλείστα ὄσα τῶν ἐθνῶν πεποιήτο ὑποχείρια, ᾧ καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐξάιρετον ἐπάνωμον ἔδοσαν τὸν Μακρόχειρα ὀνομάσαντες, εἰ καὶ δοκεῖ τισὶ ταύτην λαβεῖν τὴν κλῆσιν, ὅτι διὴ θατέρα τῶν χειρῶν συνέβαινε πλεον τετάσθαι· ἀλλ' οἷ γε ἀκριβέστερον περὶ τοῦτου σκοπήσαντες, οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ τῆς χειρὸς μεγέθους, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν ἐπὶ πλείστον τῆς δυναστείας ἔκτασιν τὸ Μακρόχειρ καλεῖσθαι φασὶ προσλαβεῖν, ὃ καὶ δοκεῖ μᾶλλον ἀληθείας ἐγγύτερον'. For the date of the oration, see: Markopoulos, 'Μεταμορφώσεις', 962–963. For important additional contextualising remarks, see: Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, 1:206–212.
- 41 Vryonis, 'Vita Basili'; Kazhdan, 'Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos', 137–144; Leidholm, 'Artaxerxes', 447–448; Calofonos, 'Dream Narratives', 98–101.
- 42 Theophanes Continuatus (Ševčenko), 10–15 (2).
- 43 Theophanes Continuatus (Ševčenko), 30.8–9 (8). This is the reference to Herodotus, I, 108; the dream was seen by Astyages the Mede and concerned his daughter Mandane and her son Cyrus the Great. For oneirocritical contexts, see also: Calofonos, 'Dream Narratives', and especially 101–102.
- 44 Niketas David, *Vita patriarchae Ignatii*, 118–121 (LXXXIX–XC); Pseudo-Symeon, 688.22–689.8; *Vita Euthymii*, 5.23–32 (translation: p. 4); Genesios, 76.1–4 (IV, 24); Genesios (Kaldellis), 94 and notes 424–425. For more details about these versions, see: Greenwood, 'Basil I', 454–455 and important additional remarks in Kaldellis, *Romanland*, 193–194.

- 45 Moravcsik, ‘Sagen und Legenden’, especially 66–69; Markopoulos, ‘Μεταμορφώσεις’, 962; Vryonis, ‘Vita Basilii’, 56–59; see in addition: Tobias, *Basil I*, 12–20.
- 46 Gilbert Dagron understands the legend’s meaning similarly: it was an Achaemenid ancestor who justified Basil’s royal status (Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 36–37). Dagron provided a detailed analysis of the implications of the Macedonian legend for the Byzantine imperial ideology and self-representation, although he did not problematise its Persian motifs: Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 192–219.
- 47 Synkellos, *Ecloga*, 343.7–9; Leidholm, ‘Artaxerxes’, 454–467. For the classical image of Artaxerxes I, see, for instance: Herodotus, VI, 98; Diodorus XI, 69–77; Pollux, *Onomastikon* 2.151, and a synopsis in: Schmitt, ‘Artaxerxes I’. For Artaxerxes II, see, for instance: Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, Ctesias, Plutarch’s *Artaxerxes*, and also a synopsis in: Schmitt, ‘Artaxerxes II’.
- 48 For more on the specific features of the idealised official image of Basil, see: Vryonis, ‘Vita Basilii’, 70–76; Leidholm, ‘Artaxerxes’, 467–459; Eshel, *Concept*, 86–138. Cf.: Kaldellis, *Romanland*, 191–193.
- 49 The Armenian perspective of the Macedonian legend has been elaborated in detail in Armenian and Byzantine scholarship; see now with further bibliography: Greenwood, ‘Basil I’, 459–466. For additional bibliography concerning Basil I’s ancestry and the Perso-Armenian legend, see also: *PmbZ*, nos 832, 4362, 4664.
- 50 Kaldellis, *Romanland*, 194–195.
- 51 Pseudo-Kodinos (Macrides et al.), 148–151, 357–358. For these elements of costume, see: Parani, *Reality of Images*, 69, 85 (σκαράνικον), 118–121 (ἐπιλούρικον) and Dawson, *By the Emperor’s Hand*, 95–96 (ἐπιλούρικον), 198 (σκαράνικον), 97–98, 200–201 (φακεωλῆς). See also: Parani, ‘Cultural Identity’, 106–108. Πιλατῆκιον remains unidentified; Pseudo-Kodinos describes it as ‘strips of cloth with gold wire embroidery’: Pseudo-Kodinos (Macrides et al.), 135 note 348, 148.10–12 and also 141, 145. The etymologies of πιλατῆκιον and σκαράνικον remain unclear.
- 52 Pseudo-Kodinos (Macrides et al.), 164–167 and note 449. For the shape and cut of γρανάτζα/λαπάτζας, see: Cvetković, ‘Прилог проучавању византијског костима’; Dawson, *By the Emperor’s Hand*, 207–208 and 146 (plate 23). See also: Parani, ‘Cultural Identity’, 106–107.
- 53 Hemmerdinger, ‘158 noms communs grecs’, 31 (no. 4). See also the Appendix to Chapter 7.
- 54 Genesis, 39.90–93; for contexts and further references, see: *PmbZ* 10596, 11770.
- 55 Skylitzes, 333.1 (XIII, 15).
- 56 Palamas, *Epistula ex Asia*, V.13: ‘Ἀχαμενίδαις, οὓς νῦν Τούρκους καλοῦμεν’; Philotheos Kokkinos, *Encomium Gregorii Palamae*, XXIV.4, XCVIII.15–19; Manuel II Palaiologos, *Dialogue*, 6.17.
- 57 *Actes du Pantocrator*, 99.12 (no. X). For more vernacular associations between the Achaemenids and the Ottomans, see: Kastritsis, ‘Alexander Romance’, 245–248.
- 58 Joseph Bryennios, *Διάλεξις*, 158–195. The Muslim interlocutor’s name was Ismael, he originated from Laodikeia in Phoenike and was a Muslim scholar (p. 158.15–18; *παλασιμάνης* ← Pers. *dānīshmand*), however, according to the epilogue, the mother of Ismael was ‘Roman’, that is, Christian Greek (194.914: ‘ἡ ἐμὴ μήτηρ ῥωμαία ἦν’). Ismael’s nickname ‘Achaemenid’ and his mother’s Greek identity unmistakably indicate that Joseph implied his Ottoman and perhaps Anatolian affiliation. However, Joseph’s localisation of Laodikeia in Phoenike (Epiros) seems illogical in this context.
- 59 Kantakouzenos, *Apologiae*, 2.6–18.
- 60 Kritoboulos, *Historia*, 15.23–16.7 (I, 4, 2); cf.: Herodotus, II, 91; VI, 53; VII, 61, 150. Of course, the Egyptian origin of the Persians was remembered not

- only by Kritoboulos; see for instance a fourteenth-century astrological treatise: Kunze, 'Die anonyme Handschrift', 360.1–4 (XXI). For the Egyptian roots of the Persians, see also Chapter 1.1 and 1.7.
- 61 For other links between the Greco-Roman legendary tradition and the Ottomans, established by Kritoboulos (such as with Alexander the Great and Trojans), see: Kritoboulos, *Historia*, 48\*–67\* (Reinsch's introduction with analysis); Reinsch, 'Einleitung'; Reinsch, 'Learned Historian'.
- 62 See, for instance: Imber, *Ottoman Empire*, 125–127; Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 151–154; Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs*, 21–28.
- 63 Hesychios, α1850, ε794, η217, ο1955; Photios, *Lexicon*, ο707; *Souda*, ο994.
- 64 For Pahlavi, see: MacKenzie, *Pahlavi Dictionary*, 53: *magar* 'perhaps, lest'. Cf.: Modern Persian *مگار* *magar* 'unless, except, if it is not, is not it, perhaps', etc. (Mu'in, *Farhang*, 4:4324). Hemmerdinger is hardly right in believing that the word was borrowed after the seventh century: Hemmerdinger, '158 noms communs grecs', 28 (no. 5).
- 65 *Souda*, ο 994: 'τὸ δὲ μακάρι τῶν ἀπαιδευτῶν εὐκτικὸν ἐπίρρημα'.
- 66 See for instance: *Ptochoprodromos*, IV:248–14 (p. 152), IV:420 (p. 162); *TLG*, s.v. (Michael Glykas, *Bellum Troianum*, Marinos Phalieros, *Chronicon Toccorum*); Kriaras, *Epitome*, s.v.; Du Cange, *Glossarium*, 839 (μαγάρι), 853 (μακάρι).
- 67 Andriotes, *Ετυμολογικό λεξικό*, 193–194; Redhouse, *Lexicon*, 1956 (مگر *meger*).
- 68 *Tacticon Scorialensis*, 271.22, 273.28 and Oikonomidēs's commentary on 304, 333; Auzépy, *Vie d'Étienne le Jeune*, 193 and note 69.
- 69 *Alexanderroman* (β); *Pseudo-Callisthenes*; *Belisarios* (Gemert-Bakker); Follieri, 'Belisario'. For more on the *Alexander Romance* and bibliography, see: Moennig, 'Alexander the Great'; *Alexander Literature*.
- 70 Jouanno, 'Barbares'.
- 71 For the audience and reception of vernacular literature with an up-to-date bibliography, see: Cupane, 'Audience and Reception'; Roilos, 'Audience'; Agapitos, 'In Rhomaian, Frankish and Persian Lands', 296–330.
- 72 Jouanno, 'Persians in Alexander Romances'.
- 73 *Digenes Akritas* (Trapp), 224–225 (E 1070, G.IV 912, Z.V 2230); *Digenes Akritas* (Jeffreys), 120 (G.IV 912), 318 (E 1080). For more on the image of the barbarians in the *Digenes Akritas*, see: Jouanno, 'Digenis'.
- 74 *Digenes Akritas* (Trapp), 349 (Z 4173).
- 75 *Digenes Akritas* (Trapp), 326 (E 1671); cf.: *Digenes Akritas* (Jeffreys), 360 (E 1671). Pasargadae, the Achaemenid capital city, was abandoned since the time of Alexander the Great. The idea of a royal tomb in Pasargadae, as it seems, was popularised in the Byzantine vernacular by the *Alexander Romance*.
- 76 *Digenes Akritas* (Trapp), 332–333 (G 3228/G.VII 90, Z 3898); cf.: *Digenes Akritas* (Jeffreys), 206 (G.VII 90). For Alexander the Great in Greek popular imagination with further bibliography, see: Kyriacou, *Warrior Hero*, especially 85–89.
- 77 *Digenes Akritas* (Trapp), 383 (Index).
- 78 *Souda*, δ1204, for an English translation, see: *Suda On Line*; Apostolios, 2:368 (VI. 19).
- 79 Photios, *Lexicon*, ζ83 (with the reference to Kratinos and Theopompos); the proverbial idiom refers to the siege of Babylon by Darius I (Herod. III.150–160); *Souda*, ζ158 (translation of David Whitehead, see: *Suda On Line*, s. v.); Chrysokephalos, 2:170 (IV.32) with wrong interpretation; Apostolios, 2:437 (VIII.35). Another proverbial saying concerning Zopyros is attested by Apostolios, 488 (X.14): 'Κρείσσω Ζώπυρος ἑκατὸν Βαβυλώνων', that is, 'Zopyros is better than a hundred Babylons' (Apostolios's explanation of the saying closely follows Plutarch, *Moralia*, 173.A.11).

- 80 *Souda*, η11; Chrysokephalos, 2:216–17 (VIII. 22): ‘Τὴν ἀπὸ Σκυθῶν ῥῆσιν’; Apostolios, 2:438 (VIII. 39): ‘Ἡ ἀπὸ Σκυθῶν ῥῆσις’.
- 81 For more details about this episode, see: West, ‘Scythian Ultimatum’.
- 82 Gregory of Cyprus, *Paroemiae* (*Mosq.*), 2:122 (IV. 32); see also: Gregory of Cyprus, *Paroemiae*, 1:368 (III. 2).
- 83 Apostolios, 2:527 (XI. 43): ‘ἄβροδίατοι γὰρ οἱ Μῆδοι’.
- 84 Chrysokephalos, 2:193 (VI. 43).
- 85 Hesychios, *Lexicon*, π390; Photios, *Lexicon*, π167; *Souda*, π222 (Πάντα κινήσω πέτρον) and π223 (Πάντα λίθον κινεῖν); for the translation of π222, see: *Suda On Line*, π222 (Πάντα λίθον κινεῖν); as Robert Dyer explains, the proverb, probably, refers to the board-game of *pestoi* (see also π1384) and the explanation in π222 is wrong. The proverb is found in Pausanias and Eudemos of Argos (see *TLG*).
- 86 Chrysokephalos, 2:202 (VII. 9).
- 87 Photios, *Lexicon*, τ7; the entry repeated in: *Souda*, τ16; for an English translation, see: *Suda On Line*, s. v.; according to David Whitehead, the correct version is, probably, οὐ λαφύξει, that is, ‘will not gorge on’ (*Suda On Line*, s. v.). However, such a correction does not appear to be strictly necessary.
- 88 Apostolios, 2:708–709 (XVII.81). For more proverbs and pithy maxims referring to the Persians or Persian contexts, see, for instance: Apostolios, 2:497 (X.42), 2:554 (XII.49), 2:598–599 (XIII.85), 2:682 (XVI.81); Arsenios, *Apophthegmata*, 2: 2:406 (VII.48b, from Epiktetos), 2:589 (XIII.51k, from Diogenes Laertios).
- 89 Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Commentarii ad Iliadem*, 2:735.20.
- 90 Darrouzès, *Épistoliers*, 333.20–21 (Theodore’s Epistle 19).
- 91 *Life of Tarasios*, XIII.20 (p. 85).
- 92 *Peira*, 74.1.12.
- 93 Gregoras, 2:986.12 (XX.6): about his debates with the pro-Palamites who ‘move every stone against us’.
- 94 John Eugenikos, *Ad Constantinum Palaeologum*, 1:128.13–14.
- 95 See, for instance: Krumbacher, *Sprichwörter*, 91 (no. 51), 122 (no. 51), 182: ‘Γέροντα Σαρακηνὸν γράμματα μὴ μαθαίνεις’; Krumbacher, *Sprichwörter*, 99 (no. 41), 124 (no. 70), 195: ‘Σαρακηνὸς εἰς τὸ ὀσπίτιν σου καὶ ἐσὺ, ὅπου θέλεις, γύρευε!'; Kurtz, *Planudes*, 45 (no. 256): ‘Σαρακηνοί, εἰς Χάλεπ’ ἐκεῖνοι πάντοτε ἐκεῖ ἦσαν’. For the affinity of a Byzantine and a Turkish proverb, see: Krumbacher, *Sprichwörter*, 107–108 (no. 16), 126 (no. 95), 211: ‘Ὁ λύκος τὸ μαλλὶν ἀλάσσει, τὴν δὲ γνώμην οὐκ ἀλάσσει’ and ‘Kurt saçını değiştirir, huyunu değiştirmez’ or ‘Kurt mizacını değil saçını değiştirir’.
- 96 See, for instance: Negris, *Proverbs*; Karagiorgos, *Proverbs*.
- 97 Herodotus, VII. 83, 211; VIII. 113; Schmitt, ‘Immortals’; Charles, ‘Immortals’.
- 98 Hesychios, α1531 (mistakenly defined as a ‘cavalry *tagma*’); Theophanes, 1:86; *Souda*, α707; *Historia imperatorum*, lines 3047–3049.
- 99 Leo the Deacon, *Historia*, 107.12, 132.18, 133.23–134.1 and possibly 149.4–5, 156.17–18; *Tacticon Scorialensis*, 271.2, 273.25.
- 100 See for instance: Attaleiates (Kaldellis/Krallis), 384/385, 444/445 (reign of Michael VII), 558/559 (reign of Nikephoros III Botaneiates); Bryennios, *Historia*, 265.15–267.11 (reign of Michael VII); Anna Komnene, 263.90; Kazhdan, ‘Athanatoi’.
- 101 Anna Komnene, 290–292 (X.4.1–5) and 290.2–4: ‘ὁ δὲ τὸν ἐπὶ Κύρου Ζώπυρον μμησόμενος τὸν ἐκεῖνον τρόπον ὑπέθετο πρὸς τὸν αὐτοκράτορα’. In fact, Zopyros was the confidant of Darius I (see above note 79). Probably, Anna followed here Gregory of Nazianzus’s interpretation: *Contra Julianum* (2), 677.15.
- 102 Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De sententiis*, 297.8; Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De virtutibus*, 2:13.10; Kataphloron, *Ad praefectum Athenarum*, 132.25 (XXIII); Gregoras, *Historia*, 1:497.10, 2:582.7–10.

## 6 Vicissitudes of wisdom

In Greco-Roman antiquity, there existed a long-standing tradition associating the emergence of Hellenic wisdom with Egyptian, Phoenician, Chaldean and Persian civilisations. The Greeks and Romans particularly believed that Persian wisdom was one of the important sources of their knowledge of the spiritual and physical fabric of the world. The idea of the Persian roots of Hellenic wisdom has long been problematised in the classic book *Les mages hellénisés* by Joseph Bidez and Franz Cumont.<sup>1</sup> One of the main contributions of this study lies in the reconstruction and systematisation of the Greco-Roman views pertaining to the Persian elements in Hellenic wisdom. Since at least the second half of the fifth century BCE, probably beginning with Xanthus the Lydian, an older contemporary of Herodotus, there began forming the image of Zoroaster, the magi (Magousaeans) and some other Persian teachers as the founders of Hellenic knowledge. A series of Greek and Latin pseudepigrapha was ascribed to Zoroaster, his patron Hystaspes and also Ostanes, a magus from amongst Zoroaster's heirs. These pseudepigrapha covered a wide range of subjects including philosophy, gnosticism, medicine, a variety of divination practices, astrology, alchemy, diverse types of magic, and the study of various natural phenomena such as properties of flora, fauna, minerals, etc. The Persian magi, known for transmitting Zoroaster's wisdom through subsequent generations, were believed to have taught philosophy to renowned figures such as Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus and Plato. In the pagan Greco-Roman tradition, the ethno-cultural affiliation of Zoroaster and the magi was not quite certain and varied among different authors. It fluctuated between the Persian, Egyptian, Babylonian and Chaldean affiliation with the prepotency of Media, Persia or Bactria, especially, in regards to Zoroaster's connection to King Hystaspes who was commonly identified as a Median or Persian king.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter focusses on the memory of the Persian roots of Hellenic wisdom in middle and late Byzantine thought. The Byzantine perception of Persian motifs in the philosophical, scientific and 'occult' traditions represents a specific and quite complex mode of utilising cultural memory. Dealing with Persian motifs in scientific texts sometimes differed significantly from those discussed so far. Moreover, the utilisation of Persian motifs varied in different

genres and authors, especially in contrasting ‘technical’ scientific and occult texts, on the one hand, and original theologo-philosophical works penned by intellectuals, on the other.

## 6.1 Practical Wisdom

Byzantine civilisation inherited a rich tradition of practical wisdom from Greco-Roman antiquity, under which I understand here empirical sciences, medicine and the so-called ‘occult’ knowledge. The memory of Persian roots of practical Hellenic wisdom did not disappear during the middle Byzantine era. This is especially true for ‘occult’ knowledge and activities related to prognostication (such as astrology and diverse types of divination) and performative manipulation with matter (such as alchemy and other magic practices which sought to change the physical world and humans). These practices played an important role in Byzantine society, influencing many aspects of life from solving everyday issues by private individuals to making political decisions by public institutions.<sup>3</sup>

The Persian founders of the astrological, alchemic and magical traditions were referred to in the writings of historians and scientists such as Kosmas of Maiouma (eighth century), Hamartolos (ninth century), many entries of the *Souda*, Kedrenos (eleventh century), Michael Glykas (twelfth century) and other authors.<sup>4</sup> In the fourteenth century, Theodore Meliteniotes (d. 1393) described the origins of astronomical science and referred to Zoroaster and his successor Ostanēs (Ὀτάνης) in the long list of the progenitors of astronomy.<sup>5</sup> A fifteenth-century manuscript (1478) titled ‘Ὄνόματα τῶν χρυσοποιητῶν’ listed those ancients who were believed to be able to turn matter into gold, referring in particular to Sophar in Persia and Ostanēs from Egypt.<sup>6</sup>

The treatises and more or less extensive pieces of information ascribed to Zoroaster, Ostanēs and other ancient Persian teachers circulated in the middle and late Byzantine copies of popular early works. These works included those by Pedanius Dioscorides (first century), Plutarch (second century), Diogenes Laertios (third century), Tatian (second century), the alchemist Zosimos of Panopolis (fourth century), Kosmas of Maiouma and others.<sup>7</sup>

Original compilations of middle and late Byzantine authors, dealing with astrology, dream interpretation, alchemy and varieties of magic, extensively employed the information ascribed to ancient Persian teachers.<sup>8</sup> Several practical guides on astronomical prognostication and philosophical treatises found in late Byzantine manuscripts were ascribed to Zoroaster.<sup>9</sup> The approach to dealing with old Persian wisdom in ‘technical’ texts can be exemplified by the *Geoponika*, a comprehensive compilation of ancient agricultural works and a product of the intellectual circle of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos. The *Geoponika* lists Zoroaster among ‘diverse ancient authors telling about agriculture, caring for plants, sowing and many other useful things’.<sup>10</sup> It includes more or less extensive passages with recommendations to farmers ‘from Zoroaster’ including astronomy (1.7: lunar movement); astrological



dependencies in agriculture (1.8: variety of topics; 5.46: grapes; 7.5–6: wine); prognostics (1.10: rising of Sirius; 1.12: 12-year cycle of Jupiter; 2.15: crops); semi-magical practices (10.83: barren trees); pharmacology (13.9.10: scorpions; 13.16: beetles); omens (11.18: roses); and natural sympathy and antipathy (7.11: wines; 15.1: variety of animals, birds, plants and more).

Throughout the Byzantine era, dream interpretations were closely associated with the ancient Persians. The famous *Oneirokritikon* of Achmet cites a certain Bahram (Βαράμι) as one of its sources, described as a dream interpreter of the Persian king Shahinshah (Σαανισάβ), thus referring to the Sasanian empire. Although both Bahram and Shahinshah were most likely fictional figures, the content of some ‘Persian’ interpretations leaves no doubt that the *Oneirokritikon* drew information from originally pre-Islamic Persian sources.<sup>11</sup> Popular ‘dream-keys’ were often ascribed to Astrampsychos, known either as a Persian magus of the fourth century BCE or as an Egyptian sage of the third century BCE.<sup>12</sup> The *Sortes Astrampsychi*, a popular divination book, remained in circulation in middle and late Byzantine times, and it can be found, in particular, in a number of thirteenth- to sixteenth-century Byzantine manuscripts.<sup>13</sup>

The ancient Persian expertise in predictive techniques remained in demand until the end of Byzantium. In the first half of the fifteenth century, the *Oraculum Chosrois*, ascribed to the Sasanian king Khusrav II (590–628), continued to generate interest and circulate among readers. The *Oraculum* represents an extract from Theophylaktos Simokattes’s *History* and appears in the manuscripts as a standalone oracle predicting future wars between Persia and the Roman empire and, finally, the subsequent prosperity of the Romans.<sup>14</sup> The interest in the oracle of the late Byzantine readership was probably inspired by the ‘Persian’ affairs of the time, that is, the Ottoman conquests, while its credibility was warranted by its ‘Persian’ origin.

Along with references to the ancient Persian authorities, the middle and, especially, late Byzantine texts abound with references to Persian sources, implying in most cases the New Persian tradition. These instances are related rather to the contemporary impact of the living Persian culture of the time and will be discussed in their appropriate place in Chapter 7.

The original Byzantine ‘technical’ texts leaned heavily on the ancient Hellenic tradition and borrowed a great deal of Persian (or pseudo-Persian) information. Remarkably, the Persian content was incorporated into the medieval Byzantine tradition by way of direct *adoption* that kept it completely or nearly unchanged. This method of incorporation stands in contrast to the mechanisms of *association* described in the previous chapter. Ancient practical wisdom, including its ‘Persian’ elements, never ceased to be present in Byzantine knowledge due to its *instrumentality* and constant demand in daily activities. The Persian instrumental motifs in Byzantine practical wisdom constituted a specific part of cultural memory, which circulated in Byzantine culture in ever actualised mode needing no special means to be reactivated. It was instrumentality that made this specific part of cultural

memory *extratemporal*, seen not just as a relic of the past but as an ever-relevant scientific truth.

## 6.2 Psellos and the Persian

However, it appears that Zoroaster and the magi's heritage was completely ousted from mainstream theologo-philosophical thought,<sup>15</sup> and came to be confined within the realm of 'occult' practices and sciences. An illustrative example in this regard is Michael Psellos (d. ca. 1078), the first Byzantine thinker to attempt to master and rethink the entirety of Hellenic wisdom, encompassing both positive and arcane aspects prevalent in Byzantine culture. It is important that Psellos viewed Hellenic wisdom as a comprehensive system of knowledge, extending beyond the traditional Byzantine intellectual pursuits (theology/philosophy, jurisprudence, rhetoric, literature and history) to encompass 'occult' knowledge as a fully integrated element of the intellectual environment.<sup>16</sup> Given his attempt at restoring the epistemological status of the occult, one might expect from Psellos an explicit reflection on the traditional status of Zoroaster and the magi as pioneers of knowledge.

However, Psellos's attitude to Persian wisdom and generally to the Persians was quite problematic. Psellos was assumed to be well-informed about the ancient history of Persia, which is quite natural for a Byzantine intellectual; however, his references to the Persians were unsystematic and cursory. His writings contain more or less sketchy references to the biblical story of the Jews' return from the Babylonian exile under Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes,<sup>17</sup> and to the evangelical Persian Magi.<sup>18</sup> He also indicates the Four kingdom conception (the Assyrian, Median and Persian, Macedonian and Roman empires)<sup>19</sup> and mentions the Achaemenid kings, the Greco-Persian wars and the wars of Alexander the Great.<sup>20</sup> He describes briefly but accurately the Sasanian wars in his *Historia Syntomos* from the time of Severus Alexander to Herakleios.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, he is aware of some customs of the Persians, such as their veneration of fire and avoidance of extinguishing it with water.<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, Psellos rarely connects Hellenic wisdom with Persian sages, with only two notable mentions of Zoroaster. In the first case (*Encomium for My Mother*), Psellos indicates that he has read Zoroaster's writings amongst all other Hellenic and barbarian books,<sup>23</sup> thus, in particular, confirming that Zoroaster was a must-read author for a Byzantine intellectual. In the second instance, Psellos praises Zoroaster as a pioneer and self-taught man of wisdom, but unambiguously identifies him as an Egyptian.<sup>24</sup> Psellos was preoccupied with demonology and magic and, especially, with theurgy as the most superior and perfected form of magical operations. He was focussed on philosophical and practical Platonism, with special emphasis on the *Chaldean Oracles*, which he viewed as a product of Chaldean or Assyrian wisdom, which was not, in his view, identical with the Persian tradition.<sup>25</sup> Despite the

traditional mixture of ‘Chaldean’ and ‘Persian’, which had existed in Hellenic intellectualism since the earliest stages (see Chapter 1), Psellos clearly differentiated one from another.

In general, Psellos, whose superb awareness of ancient traditions is beyond any doubt, was indifferent to the Persians and their role in world history. Psellos’s mentions of Persians often attest a mocking and derogatory tone. For instance, in a letter he unfavourably notes that the kings of Persia delayed bonding with their newborn infants in case they died and, thus, they missed much parental joy;<sup>26</sup> and in another letter, he notes that ‘the Persians, when victorious, utter shrill howls like women’.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, in his indictment against Patriarch Michael Keroularios († 1059), Psellos refers to the patriarch’s confident soothsayer who was Persian by blood. Psellos highlights that despite the soothsayer’s utter ignorance, he gained prestige at the court of the patriarch due to his Persian origin only. Curiously enough, it is not the prognostic activity that Psellos reproaches, but rather the Persian rogue’s unawareness of the ‘principles of divination’ (μαντείας εἶδος).<sup>28</sup> Psellos, thus, directly associates Persian diviners with ignorance and fraud.

Psellos uses Persian references almost exclusively as paradigmatic historical associations for clarifying his main statement, mostly in the way of dampening or amplifying metaphors. The reason for Psellos’s distancing himself and the entire Greek tradition from Persian roots remains unclear and I hesitate to provide a definitive interpretation. One possible explanation could be that Psellos was a well-informed witness of the ‘Persian’ conquests of the eleventh century that deprived Byzantium of Asia Minor and evidently had personally encountered nomadic and semi-nomadic ‘Persian’ conquerors. The personal, most likely, negative experience he derived from these encounters may have prompted him to re-appraise Persian components in his individual variation of cultural memory. However, antipathy to everything Persian may seem bizarre in the special case of Psellos who had encyclopaedic ambitions and was explicitly interested in the origins and limits of Hellenic thought.

Nonetheless, by and large, such a disinterest in Persia was typical for a well-educated Byzantine. Some thinkers may have been neutral towards Persian topics, touching on them only if necessary and showing no special affection towards ancient Persia; this was exemplified by Theodore Metochites. Others, akin to Psellos in their intellectual outlook, systemically eschewed references to Persia in Hellenic contexts, such as John Italos, Eustratios of Nicaea and Nikephoros Choumnos.

Other Byzantine thinkers, expounding on theologo-philosophical matters, did not ask about the origins of positive ‘scientific’ knowledge as such and, quite logically, normally did not problematise the foreign origins of Hellenic wisdom. In Byzantine scientific and theologo-philosophical literature, Persian motifs featured persistently in occult and exact sciences and appeared in high-profile analytical texts mostly as common associations with various functions (see Chapter 5), which were characteristic of a range of literary genres.

### 6.3 Plethon's Wisdom

George Gemistos Plethon (ca. 1360–1452), an outstanding thinker whose works directly and indirectly influenced the subsequent development of the European intellectual tradition, actualised the half-forgotten and neglected motifs of Persian wisdom in an amazing and rather unexpected way. Plethon, without questioning the truth of monotheism as such, sought to overcome the simplified monism of contemporaneous monotheistic religions and introduce a more complex theosophy (or theologo-philosophic concept) of the noumenal world. Platonic philosophy was taken as a starting point and a theoretical underpinning in constructing a new theory of the world unseen and seen, which considerably deviated from Christian orthodoxy. Plethon put forward a multilevel model that, in contrast to Christianity, Islam or Judaism, extensively conceptualised the plurality of individual spiritual entities (or powers) within the universe. These entities were in constant interaction with each other and with man in a much more articulated manner.

Plethon's epistemological approach also led to conflicts with the dominant forms of monotheism. Performing a sort of 'historico-genetic' analysis of the available philosophical tradition, he pursued the search for primordial wisdom. This wisdom's extreme antiquity would serve as an assurance of its closest proximity to the Source of all thoughts, ensuring its truth remained unclouded by the misconceptions of later generations. Such a primordial truth was identified as being located outside the scope of Semitic biblical spirituality, namely, in the doctrine of the most ancient Persian sage Zoroaster. He believed that the teachings of Pythagoreanism, Platonism and subsequent Greek tradition traced their roots back to Zoroaster's doctrine. Plethon advocated a return to this primordial philosophy, away from the later 'sophists' (i.e., Christian thinkers) who contaminated the initial truth.

Although Christian theology was not alien to the Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions as such, Christian orthodoxy could accept neither Plethon's interpretation of Platonic cosmology (especially because it conflicted with Aristotelianism), nor epistemological procedures leading him to impart Platonism with the status of a sacred and primordial wisdom. Plethon sought to describe the world as it truly was, not fearing his own discoveries, even if they came into conflict with the prevailing views of his society. In this sense, Plethon possessed exceptional intellectual honesty and audacity. His personal spiritual search led him to formulate elements of a new monotheistic (or henotheist) religion with its own theology and liturgy, which set it apart from Christianity, Islam or Judaism.

### 6.4 Reassembling Zoroaster

An analysis of the theosophy of Plethon goes far beyond the scope of my research. Scholars have actively discussed Plethon's contribution to Byzantine and Renaissance intellectualism for about 200 years, resulting in numerous

monographs, book chapters and hundreds of special articles, to which the reader can refer for further details.<sup>29</sup> My focus here will be solely on the ‘Persian’ motifs in the heritage of the great thinker and their significance for the reconstruction of the content and mechanisms of Byzantine cultural memory.

Plethon stands out as the first thinker who not only problematises but also conceptualises the old idea of Persian wisdom as a source and integral part of indigenous Greek thought in his search for the universal, primordial and perennial doctrine. According to Plethon, of all those men of wisdom whose names ‘we can remember’, Zoroaster was the oldest (and, therefore, the most truthful) sage, philosopher and interpreter of the true teaching and also the oldest and the best legislator.<sup>30</sup> Among sages and legislators, only the Brahmans of the Indians, the magi of the Medes and the Kouretes of the Greeks (the priests of Dodona) were comparable in their antiquity to Zoroaster but they lived after him.<sup>31</sup> The teachings of Zoroaster, the Kouretes, Pythagoras and Plato, being as old a doctrine as the world and having existed from time immemorial among men, corresponded to common ideas (ἐννοιαὶ κοιναί), which were inspired by the gods and shared by most men of wisdom.<sup>32</sup> Plato received Zoroaster’s teaching by way of the Pythagoreans who learned it, in their turn, from the magi.<sup>33</sup> The status of Zoroaster as a primordial teacher in religious philosophy and law is justified by the fact that he lived 5000 years before the Trojan War.<sup>34</sup> In other accounts, Plethon dates Zoroaster’s life to 5000 years before the return of the Heraclids, thus, making him younger by some decades.<sup>35</sup>

Plethon classifies different wisdom traditions based on their ‘ethnic’ (or rather locative) affiliations, including the Medes, the Persians, the Indians, the Egyptians, the Iberians, the Greeks, the Hyrcanians, the Thracians and the Romans.<sup>36</sup> Zoroaster is identified as a teacher to the Medes or the Persians, as Plethon states: ‘Zoroaster was the most splendid interpreter of the divine and of most other noble things for the Medes, the Persians and the majority of other ancient [people] in Asia’.<sup>37</sup> The perennial teaching of Zoroaster reached Greeks and other nations including, in particular, Egyptians through the mediation of the magi who were followers of Zoroaster. The magi once were called ‘Medes’, as well as in other instances, were considered to be Medes or Persians.<sup>38</sup>

Postulating Zoroaster’s role as a primordial teacher of the true doctrine, Plethon ascribes to the Persian teacher some basic ideas developed in the most important and detailed expositions of his philosophy, the *Book of Laws* and the *Chaldean Oracles* (more precisely, in explanatory commentaries on the latter *Ἐξήγησις εἰς τὰ αὐτὰ λόγια*<sup>39</sup>). In the *Book of Laws*, as noted, Zoroaster is considered the progenitor of legislation. Moreover, Plethon explicitly formulates his epistemological strategy explaining his choice of Zoroaster: although people are not atheists, their beliefs differ, being more or less close to the true doctrine, which has always existed and never changed;

this doctrine is that of Zoroaster, with which the philosophy of Pythagoras and Plato is in harmony.<sup>40</sup>

The significance of Zoroaster's teaching for Plethon's theosophy is discussed in Ἐξήγησις on the *Chaldean Oracles*. The origin of some key points is ascribed to Zoroaster and his magi disciples. The magi taught about the immortality of the human soul and its reincarnation.<sup>41</sup> Developing the idea of the triadic configuration of being, Plethon maintains that Zoroaster divides existing things in three: Horomazes (Ahura Mazda, Hurmuz) preponderates the first part and is called 'Father' in the *Chaldean Oracles*, Arimanes (Angra Mainyu, Ahriman) represents the last part, while Mithras stands in the middle and is called the 'Second Intellect'.<sup>42</sup> The first being is eternal, the second is in time, but eternal, while the third is in time and mortal.<sup>43</sup> In the latter passage, Plethon emphasises that Zoroaster and Plato are in accord on these ideas.

At least twice, Plethon's emphasis on the Persian roots of his theosophy can be demonstrated in his unique approach to titles. The reference to Zoroaster is found in the title of a work only, but not in its text. In such a way, he marked the authorship of the *Chaldean Oracles* providing it with the title *Μαγικὰ λόγια τῶν ἀπὸ Ζωροάστρου μάγων* ('Magian Oracles of the Magi, Followers of Zoroaster').<sup>44</sup> Thus, Plethon was the first in the Greek tradition to explicitly attribute the authorship of the *Chaldean Oracles* to Zoroaster and his immediate followers; this highlighted the text's status as a primordial source and significantly removed its Christian associations.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, the authorship of Zoroaster may well have been inspired by Constantine Porphyrogenetos who, quoting Nicholas of Damascus, referred to some *Oracles of Zoroaster* (Ζωροάστρου λόγια).<sup>46</sup> The title of another treatise *Ζωροαστρείων τε καὶ πλατωνικῶν δογμάτων συγκεφαλαίωσις* ('A Summary of the Doctrines of Zoroaster and Plato') emphasises both Zoroaster's authorship of the doctrines discussed and the accord between the teachings of Plato and Zoroaster.<sup>47</sup>

## 6.5 Hellenic Persia

What is remarkable in the context of a cultural memory study, Plethon explicitly typifies the wisdom of Zoroaster and the magi on Hellenic soil as part of a Greek 'national' tradition. The proem of the *Book of Laws* implies that the theology of Zoroaster and Plato speaks about the same deities that were known to the ancestral Greeks (τοῖς πατρίοις τοῖς Ἑλλησι) under traditional Greek names.<sup>48</sup> Further on in the *Book of Laws*, Plethon justifies the choice of Persian wisdom as a starting point for his reconstruction of the true doctrine by putting forward two arguments: the first one, already familiar to us, is the primordially and accuracy of Zoroaster's teaching, while the second refers to its indigeneity. He maintains that the Zoroastrian teaching 'outweighs all the other doctrines in accuracy and is also [our] native one and

of ours' (ἀκριβεία τε τῶν ἄλλων ἀπασῶν πλεονεκτοῦση δοξῶν, καὶ ἅμα πατρίῳ καὶ ἡμῖν οὐσίῃ).<sup>49</sup>

It is notable in this context that the only remark by Plethon concerning the Persian language, which may be understood as his interest in 'real' Persia, is also derived from an old Hellenic source. Plethon speaks about 'the Sun that in Persian is also called "Cyrus" (Κῦρος)'.<sup>50</sup> This erroneous etymology appeared first in classical authors (Ctesias, Plutarch) and was well-known to the Byzantines, being referred to, for instance, by Eustathios of Thessalonike.<sup>51</sup>

One could deduce that, according to Plethon's perspective, the historical and intellectual 'Persian' is not alien to the historical and intellectual Hellenic, that is, to the indigenous and native tradition. Such reasoning can only be explained by the activity of Byzantine cultural memory, which had shaped the Hellenic Self as a complex phenomenon encompassing inherent Persian elements. It was cultural memory that enabled Plethon to equate and join 'national Hellenic' with 'Persian', the 'Pythagoreans' with the 'magi' and Plato with Zoroaster. For the Byzantine mentality, under certain conditions, 'Persian' can be perceived as an integral part of the Hellenic Self. As I have endeavoured to illustrate in the preceding chapters, this perception of the 'Persian' was reinforced by Christian interpretations of the Old Testament and evangelical Persians, and the destiny of the Persian Christians under the Parthian Arsakids and the Sasanians. Additionally, Plethon's conceptualisation of Persian wisdom might have encompassed traditional Christian elements, particularly emphasising the wisdom of the Persian Magi who were the first to proclaim the universal truth to mankind.<sup>52</sup>

## 6.6 Was Zoroaster a Jew or a Muslim?

However, doubts about the Hellenic origin of Plethon's Zoroaster arose as early as during the lifetime of his younger contemporaries. Gennadios (George) Scholarios accused Plethon of being closely associated with a foreigner from whom he borrowed blasphemous ideas including, in particular, those about Zoroaster. In his two famous letters repudiating Plethon's heresy, Scholarios speaks about a Jew, Elissaios by name, who was the reason behind Plethon's moral decline.<sup>53</sup> Elissaios was a Jew but in fact a pagan polytheist; he was an expert in Averroes and other Persian and Arabic interpreters of Aristotle. Elissaios enjoyed great influence at the court of the Ottomans ('barbarians'); he ended his life in fire; Plethon stayed with Elissaios for a long time and benefited from his knowledge; the latter introduced to Plethon the doctrines of Zoroaster.<sup>54</sup> In other words, Scholarios sought to prove that the theosophy of Plethon was inspired by the Jewish and Muslim traditions, alien to Christian orthodoxy and to indigenous Greek heritage as well.

Scholarios's expertise is still topical: modern scholars have been searching for putative extraneous sources for Plethon's religious and legal ideas. Since it is evident that Plethon's doctrine comprised nothing specifically Jewish or Judaic, the search for the roots has led towards the Islamic intellectual milieu,

being stimulated by and relying on the vague remarks of Scholarios about Elissaios's Ottoman connections. In 1858, Charles Alexandre put forward a hypothesis, in his introduction to the *Book of Laws*, suggesting that Plethon, through his association with Elissaios, spent some time at the Ottoman court, in Adrianople/Edirne, which he left 'sans doute après la disgrâce et la mort de ce juif'.<sup>55</sup> In 1874, Fritz Schultze took Alexandre's assumption as a proven fact and added that Elissaios was executed by burning before 1393 and soon afterward Plethon left for Mistra.<sup>56</sup> In the 1920s, Franz Taeschner turned into an established fact Plethon's sojourn in Bursa or Adrianople along with Elissaios between 1380 and 1393. Taeschner made the first systematic attempt to discover Islamic elements in Plethon, endowing Elissaios with the function of 'Mittelsmann' between the Muslim East and the Byzantine West. Taeschner suggested several points of parallelism between Islam and Plethon's ideas: fusion of religion, ritual and law; Plethon's lunar calendar; Plethon's 'sect' in Mistra resembling dervishism; Zoroaster as an 'archaising' umbrella term for the ideas borrowed from the Islamic space. Felix Klein-Franke, having summarised Taeschner's observations, suggested that Plethon's short note on the early stages of the Arabic conquests was another indication of his interest in Islam.<sup>57</sup> Based upon the alleged Elissaios–Plethon connection, Henry Corbin suggested that it was the platonising Ishrāqī movement of the followers of Shihāb al-Dīn-i Suhrawardī-yi Maqtūl (d. 1191) in Muslim Anatolia, which may have prompted Plethon, through Elissaios, to bring together the names of Plato and Zoroaster and contributed to his platonising theosophy in general.<sup>58</sup> Finally, more recently, Niketas Siniosoglou has revisited one of Taeschner's ideas and observed ideological and institutional parallels with the ideas and practices of the Ottoman Sūfī teacher Bedreddin (d. 1420) and his disciple Börklüce Mustafa (d. ca. 1417).<sup>59</sup>

Evidently, Scholarios's account is not sufficient for either reconstructing Elissaios's biography, or postulating Plethon's 'Islamic experience'. Moreover, Scholarios's portrayal of Elissaios seems to have been a speculative construct in his polemical rhetoric, which mixed truth with at best half-truth.<sup>60</sup> However, the most intriguing feature is that Elissaios did really exist and, according to Efraim Wust, very likely was identical to Elisha ha-Yevani, that is, Elisha the Greek – a Jewish pharmacist, physician and philosopher, a contemporary of Plethon (second half of the fourteenth century), living in the Ottoman sultanate. Tzvi Langermann has reconstructed the personality of Elisha with some new details. Elisha ha-Yevani possessed knowledge of Arabic, Persian, Greek, Hebrew and probably Latin: he demonstrated excellent first-hand knowledge of the Arabic Peripatetic tradition (including Averroes); he utilised a Persian work on medical formulary by Najīb al-Dīn al-Samarqandī (d. 1222); he cited Greek technical terms; and he drew on Western sources as well. Importantly, Langermann's study of his unpublished philosophical treatise from a Moscow manuscript has demonstrated that Elisha ha-Yevani was a dedicated Aristotelian and displayed no traces of Ishrāqī philosophy, epistemology or its distinctive logic.<sup>61</sup> This information concerning Elisha



matches perfectly Scholarios's Elissaios, but at the same time gives a clear idea of how Scholarios may have distorted the facts for the sake of polemics.<sup>62</sup>

One may also add some further associations of Plethon with the Jews: he acknowledged once his learning (*πεπύσμεθα*) about some points of Averroes's philosophy from 'the wisest of the Italians and the Jews';<sup>63</sup> he made use of the Hebrew astrological tradition;<sup>64</sup> and he penned a summary of Jewish history.<sup>65</sup>

However, returning to putative Islamic influences, it is important not to exclude *a priori* the impact of the outer intellectual spaces, which comprised Jews, Latins and Muslims and had no clearly marked or impregnable boundaries. This is especially true for ethnically heterogeneous and multilingual societies in the Byzantine and post-Byzantine lands.<sup>66</sup> For instance, quite credible parallelism with the Muslim tradition has been suggested by François Masai who noted in passing that Plethon's conceptions of determinism and individual responsibility may have been inspired by similar Islamic ideas.<sup>67</sup> Further on, Taeschner may have been right in observing the inseparable unity of Plethon's theology and legislation reflecting a similar Muslim attitude to the Divine Law.

One may also add that Plethon's quest for a primordial common religion brings to mind the standard Islamic doctrine claiming that the prophet Muḥammad restored the primordial truth of Abraham, which had been revealed by God before the Judaism of Moses and the Christianity of Jesus.<sup>68</sup>

Finally, probably, Plethon's connection with Suhrawardī's theosophy should not be completely ruled out (even if Elisha ha-Yevani cannot be credited for it), for there is too striking a conceptual affinity between the two thinkers: both appealed to Platonism, both vigorously attacked Aristotelianism, both joined Plato and Zoroaster and both claimed to revive primordial and common Persian wisdom.<sup>69</sup> A mere word about another person's experience may have prompted Plethon to take the next step in his quest.

However, *comparaison n'est pas raison*: on the basis of available sources, the noted parallels can hardly be interpreted for certain as influences of or direct borrowings from the Muslim or Jewish intellectual milieu.

## 6.7 More on Byzantine 'Persianism'

The proven evidence is that the indigenous Greek tradition adequately accounts for Plethon's conceptualisation of Zoroaster and the magi, and their impact on Hellenic thought. Starting with Milton Anastos, most scholars concur that the Persian motifs present in Plethon's writings were drawn from ancient Greek sources, still remembered in Byzantium.<sup>70</sup> When referencing Zoroaster and the magi, Plethon most likely drew upon old Greek authorities (primarily Plutarch). He seemingly lacked direct access to the genuine Zoroastrian tradition or any other non-Greek records of ancient Persian wisdom.<sup>71</sup>

Curiously enough, Plethon showed clear interest in Persian history beyond philosophical contexts, although his historical writings were not numerous. In particular, the memorial ancient Persia was one of his foci in his *Opuscula de historia Graeca* summarising Diodorus of Sicily and Plutarch.<sup>72</sup> He also epitomised the history of the Assyrians and the Medes from Diodorus of Sicily.<sup>73</sup> Ample associations with Greek-Persian and Roman-Persian political affairs are found in Plethon's *Advisory Address to the Despot Theodore on the Peloponnese*.<sup>74</sup> Plethon also authored a short summary the *Reges Assyriorum, Medorum et Persarum*.<sup>75</sup> Plethon's interest in the political history of ancient Persia would be quite explainable and expectable due to his attention to the figures of Zoroaster and the magi. Evidently, both in terms of the political and spiritual history of Persia, Plutarch stood out as one of his preferred authors.

What is especially important in my context, the Persian motifs of Plethon did not go beyond the set of ideas embedded in the Greek tradition and therefore in his own cultural memory. It had nothing in common with the so-called 'orientalism', as some scholars argue.<sup>76</sup> Plethon's 'Persianism' was also not merely an homage to a fashionable fascination with ancient Persia, a trend scarcely present in Byzantium. Rather, his 'Persianism' was gleaned from the Byzantines' common memory of the 'Persian' roots of Hellenic wisdom.

## 6.8 Conclusion: Instrumentality and Neglect

The instances of utilising cultural memory described in this chapter can be summarised in three major types. First, ancient elements in practical wisdom, being a part of cultural memory about past experience, preserved their ever-active status in the Byzantine intellectual milieu due to their *instrumentality*. While drawing upon the wisdom of ancient Persian teachers, a Byzantine was focussed primarily on its practical value as a manual for diverse practices. At the same time, the ancient Persian provenance of these pieces of information reinforced the prevailing awareness in the Byzantine mentality of the Persian roots of the Hellenic and Roman traditions. The phenomenon of Byzantine 'occultism' provides an important argument for the notion that Oriental, especially Persian, motifs in Byzantine culture extend beyond mere superficial exoticism. Instead, they delve into the epistemological layers of the Greco-Roman civilisation.

The second type is represented by the complex case of Plethon's theosophy. One can probably discern several modes of dealing with cultural memory in Plethon's thought. *Similarity-association* models may be suggested for Plethon's initial reflections on the parallels between Plato and Zoroaster, which may have become the starting point of his theosophy. His allusions to the ancient history of wars with Persia in his *Advisory Address to the Despot Theodore* can be qualified as paradigmatic or explanatory associations. However, his theosophy most vibrantly exhibits the instrumental attitude to Persian motifs: Plethon adopts the teaching of Zoroaster *instrumentally* as

an ultimate truth and extratemporal model of the universe. Moreover, the most important distinctive feature setting Plethon apart from other Byzantine scientists and intellectuals is that he not only activates the Persian elements of memory, but breathes new life into them, evolving them into a truly original and coherent theosophical conception.

Finally, the third type is exemplified by Michael Psellos who either consciously avoided or watered down the associations with memorial Persia. Psellos, pursuing such a strategy, was not the sole Byzantine intellectual to do so. The noted neglect of the Persian element may be explained, in particular, as a thinker's focus on actual consciousness and knowledge, where the associations with ancient Persia seemed distant and inconsequential. Such focussing on actuality was (and sometimes still is) characteristic of the true philosophers, preoccupied more with the living present and living self rather than the ancient origins of the present. This likely distinguished the true philosopher Psellos from the true theosophist Plethon.

## Notes

- 1 Bidez and Cumont, *Mages hellénisés*.
- 2 Jackson, *Zoroaster*, 226–273 (Appendix V); Vasunia, *Zarathushtra*; Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom*, 126–150; de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 22–38; Kingsley, 'Iranian Themes'; Stausberg, *Faszination*, 9–13; Frenschkowski, 'Christianity'; for more general socio-cultural contexts, see: Dihle, *Fremden*, 105–121; *Persianism in Antiquity* and here Strootman and Versluys, 'From Culture to Concept' with extensive bibliography. For Egyptian wisdom, see: Festugière, *Hermès*; Festugière, *Hermetisme*; Fowden, *Hermes*; Bull, *Hermes*.
- 3 See, for instance: Magdalino, *Orthodoxie*, 13–14.
- 4 Kosmas of Maiouma, *Fragmentum*, 120–121; Kosmas of Maiouma, *Commentarii in Gregorii Nazianzeni*, Varia 2.1–2, 52.27–33 line 69–72; Hamartolos (de Boor), 1:11.2–11, 1:12.10–13.3, 1:74.4–10; Kedrenos, 1:29.19–30.5, 1:73.4–14; Glykas, *Annales*, 243.20–244.14; *Souda*, α4257 (Ἀστρονομία), γ365 (Γοητεία), ζ159–161 (Ζωροάστρης, Ζωρομάσδρης), μ9 (Μαγεία), μ13 (Μαγική), μ28 (Μάγοι), μ29 (Μαγώγ), ο710 (Οστάναι), π1367 (Πέρσαι) and also α2723 (Αντισθένης). For these passages, see also: Cumont and Bidez, *Mages hellénisés*, 1:175–178, 2:17–20, 2:60, 2:271–275.
- 5 Meliteniotes, *Tribiblos*, 1:96.61–63. See commentaries on this passage in: Bidez and Cumont, *Mages hellénisés*, 2:269–270.
- 6 CAAG (*Texte grec*), 1:25.9–11; BNF, grec 2327, fol. 195v. The personality of Sophar the Persian (Σοφάρ and Σωφάρ) still remains enigmatic: CAAG (*Texte grec*), 2:120.20–121.4; Boyce, *History of Zoroastrianism*, 3:564 note 248.
- 7 Bidez and Cumont, *Mages hellénisés*, 2:67–70, 70–80, 208–226, 243–245, 271–275, 293–296, 299–301, 322–323.
- 8 CAAG (*Texte grec*), 1:42–43, 2:120–133, 3:261–267, 3:351–352; Bidez and Cumont, *Mages hellénisés*, 2:317–320, 323–325, 329–336.
- 9 See, for instance: CAAG (*Texte grec*), 2:192–195 (14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> cen.); BNF, gr. 2286 (14<sup>th</sup> cen.), fol. 109–109v (rising of Sirius) and 109v–110 (brontology); BAV, Barb. gr. 168 (16<sup>th</sup> cen.), fol. 1–8 (gnosticism).
- 10 *Georponika*, 1.1 (p. 3.5–8): 'τὰ διάφοροι τῶν παλαιῶν περί τε γεωργίας καὶ ἐπιμελείας φυτῶν καὶ σπορίμων καὶ ἐτέρων πολλῶν χρησίμων εἰρημένα'. For Persian wisdom in the *Georponika*, see: Bidez and Cumont, *Mages hellénisés*, 2:173–197;

- on the *Geoponika* in general, see also: Lemerle, *Humanisme*, 288–292; Hunger, *Hochsprachliche Literatur*, 2:273–274.
- 11 Achmet (Drexl), 2.25–3.11; Mavroudi, *Dream Interpretation*, 43–51 (with a differing interpretation of Σαανισῶν). Achmet's Σαανισῶν parallels the twelfth-century Byzantine transcription of Per. *shāhanshāh* 'king of kings' as Σαῖσῶν by Anna Komnene and Σανισῶν by John Kinnamos (see: *TLG*, s.v.).
  - 12 Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, 2:256–263.
  - 13 Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, especially, 79–82. For more about late Byzantine texts ascribed to Astrampsychos with further bibliography, see: Costanza, 'Rolling dice', 436 and note 18.
  - 14 My thanks are due to András Kraft for providing comprehensive information about the *Oraculum Chosrois* and its manuscripts: Vindob. theol. gr. 203, fol. 306v and Hunger and Lackner, *Katalog*, 3/3:13 (a mid-fourteenth-century codex); Marc. gr. Z. 575, fol. 84 and Mioni, *Codices Graeci*, 2:483 (manuscript dates to 1426); Simokattes, 216.21–217.6 (15.5–7). There are also two sixteenth-century manuscripts of the *Oraculum*: Vindob. suppl. gr. 172, fol. 39v–40; Hafniensis gr. 2147, fol. 12–12v.
  - 15 For significant clarifications regarding the challenges of using the term 'philosophy' in the context of Byzantine thought, see: Gutas and Siniosoglou, 'Philosophy'.
  - 16 For some principal recent works on Psellos's writings and bibliography, see: Moore, *Iter Psellianum*; Walter, *Psellos*; Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 191–224; Kaldellis, *Argument*; Lauritzen, *Chronographia*; Pietsch, *Chronographie*; Papaioannou, *Psellos*; Volk, *Medizinische Inhalt*; *Reading Psellos*; Jeffreys and Lauxtermann, *Psellos*; Bezobrazov and Lyubarsky, *Две книги* (with references to Russian scholarship); see also: Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons* (commented translations); *Psellos on literature and art* (commented translations); Magdalino, *Orthodoxie*, 92–96 and Magdalino and Mavroudi, 'Introduction', 30–35 (Psellos's complex attitude to occult sciences); Duffy, 'Lonely Mission'; Duffy, 'Magic' (magic and therapy); Lauritzen, 'Neo-Platonic Mysticism' (esoterism); Merianos, 'Alchemy', 245–247 (alchemy).
  - 17 Psellos, *Poemata*, 9–11 (poem 1); Psellos, *Theologica I*, 447.69–72.
  - 18 Psellos, *Theologica II*, 20.113–114.
  - 19 Psellos, *De omnifaria doctrina*, 89 (§ 178); Psellos, *Poemata*, 322.638–646 (poem 53); Psellos, *Oratoria*, 92.150–151 (orat. 25).
  - 20 Psellos, *Theologica I*, 156.37–42; Psellos, *Hagiographica*, 234.57–67, 255.625, 279.210–211; Psellos, *Orationes forenses*, 94.2565–2566 (or. 1); Psellos, *Orationes panegyricae*, 11.218–230 (or. 1).
  - 21 Psellos, *Historia Syntomos*, 26 (§ 40), 28 (§ 43), 30 (§ 47), 34 (§ 53–54), 36 (§ 55), 38 (§ 56), 40 (§ 57–58), 46–48 (§ 63–64), 60 (§ 74), 62–64 (§ 76). See also an extensive passage on Khusrav and Herakleios: Psellos, *Hagiographica*, 235–237 (or. 5).
  - 22 Psellos, *Philosophica*, 81.25–29 (after Plutarch).
  - 23 Psellos, *Encomium in matrem*, 29.1809–1810.
  - 24 Psellos, *Orationes forenses*, 134.248–251 (or. 3): 'Ζωροάστρην τὸν Αἰγύπτιον'.
  - 25 For the *Chaldean Oracles* and the role of Psellos in its transmission tradition, see: des Places, *Oracles chaldaïques*; *Chaldean Oracles* (Majercik); Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles*; for the Byzantine contexts, see: Burns, 'Chaldean Oracles'; Athanassiadi, 'Psellos and Plethon'.
  - 26 Psellos, *Epistulae*, XXX.128.20–28; Papaioannou, *Psellos*, 198. For the letter's summary and bibliography, see: Jeffreys and Lauxtermann, *Psellos*, 387.
  - 27 Psellos, *Epistulae*, CIV.400.4: 'ἀλλὰ Πέρσαι νικῶντες, ὄζῳ καὶ γυναικῶδες ἐπολολύζουσι' (2:822). For the letter's summary and bibliography, see: Jeffreys and Lauxtermann, *Psellos*, 262.

- 28 Psellos, *Orationes forenses*, 97.2657–2664. For the analysis of the passage, see: Costanza, ‘Omoplatoscopia’, 60–61 and also Costanza, ‘Due Incipit’, 610; Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 95; Magdalino, *Orthodoxie*, 103. Another soothsayer, reproached by Psellos in the same passage, was of ‘Illyrian’ origin. According to Psellos, the Persian was an expert in *omoplatoscopia* (scapulimancy), that is, divination by shoulder bone.
- 29 Scholarly literature on Plethon is enormous, see, for instance: Masai, *Pléthon*; Woodhouse, *Plethon*; Blum, *Plethon* (with a German translation of a series of Plethon’s works on p. 93–195); Couloubaritsis, ‘La métaphysique de Pléthon’; Medvedev, *Гуманизм* (with a Russian translation of Plethon’s *Book of Laws* and *De virtutibus* on p. 220–300); Tambrun, *Pléthon*; Siniossoglou, *Platonism* (with helpful bibliography); Hladký, *Plethon* (with helpful bibliography). For Plethon’s anti-Aristotelianism, see: Bydén, ‘Anti-Aristotelianism’; Bydén, ‘Plethon’. For a collection of Plethon’s references to Zoroaster and Persian wisdom with important commentaries, see: Bidez and Cumont, *Mages hellénisés*, 2:251–262. For a summary of the debates on Plethon’s attitude to Christianity, see: Hladký, *Plethon*, 269–285; for Plethon’s paganism, see: Siniossoglou, *Platonism*, 148–160, 163–199, etc.; Siniossoglou, ‘Plethon, Scholarios’, 650–651. For direct and indirect influence of Plethon on the Renaissance thought, see: Knös, ‘Pléthon’, 153–184; Hankins, *Platon*, 2:436–440; Stausberg, *Faszination*, 83–92; Hanegraaff, ‘Pagan’, 41–43; Celenza ‘Platonic Philosophy’, 79–81.
- 30 Plethon, *De legibus*, 30 (I.2), 252 (III.43): ‘ἓνα δὴ ἄνδρα ἀρχαιότατον τῶν γε ἐν μνήμῃ’ and ‘δογματῶν τῶν γε ὀρθῶν ἐξηγητῆς ἐστὶν ὁ παλαιότατος’; Plethon, *Contra Scholarii*, 4.30–34 (5.19–23). For early Christian and late Antique contexts, see: Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 66–80.
- 31 Plethon, *De legibus*, 30 (I.2.49–52); for the context of these statements, see: Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 326–327; Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 85–91. Plethon acknowledged that there had been teachers and legislators before Zoroaster, like Menes in Egypt; however, their doctrines were imperfect.
- 32 Plethon, *De legibus*, 252 (III.43.136–148); Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 355; Siniossoglou, *Platonism*, 179 (‘Zoroaster is not the initiator of these doctrines but their ancient and most prominent mediator’) and also 282; Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 80–81, 117, 184–185.
- 33 Plethon, *Contra Scholarii*, 4.20–5.11 (5.9–34); Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 284–285; Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 81–83.
- 34 Plethon, *Oracula Chaldaica*, II.34.20–21; Plethon, *Contra Scholarii*, 5.1–3 (5.25–26), in both cases with a reference to the famous passage of Plutarch on Zoroaster and his religion (*De Iside*, 369d–e).
- 35 Plethon, *De legibus*, 252 (III.43.150–151). The return of the Heraclids (Ἡρακλειδῶν κάθοδος) occurred 328 years before the Olympiads in 1103 BCE, while the Trojan War was believed to have happened in 1184 BCE: Kuzenkov, *Хронологические системы*, 28, 53, 57, etc. (Trojan War) and 801, 845, 855 (the return of the Heraclids); for Plethon’s dating of the return of the Heraclids to 1103 BCE, see: Tihon, ‘Astronomy of Plethon’, 113. For more on the universal chronological conception of Plethon, see: Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 82–85.
- 36 See for instance: Plethon, *De legibus*, 252–254 (III.43). See also: Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 65; for more details on Plethon’s attitude to ethnicity and his ‘nationalist’ preoccupations, see: Siniossoglou, ‘Nationalism’.
- 37 Plethon, *De legibus*, 30 (I.2.37–41): ‘...Ζωροάστρην, Μήδοις τε καὶ Πέρσαις καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τοῖς πλείστοις τῶν πάλαι κατὰ τὴν Ἀσίαν, τῶν τε θεῶν καὶ ἄλλων καλῶν τῶν πλείστων ἐπιφανέστατον γενόμενον ἐξηγητήν’.
- 38 Plethon, *De legibus*, 30 (I.2.51): ‘Μάγους Μήδων’; many times, Plethon calls the magi ‘οἱ ἀπὸ Ζωροάστρου μάγοι’: Plethon, *Oracula Chaldaica*, I.t.1, II.1.1, II.14.34; Plethon, *Ad Bessarionem I*, 459.8–9. See also: Plethon, *Contra Scholarii*, 5.23–24.

- For the Persian identity of Zoroaster, see also interpretations of Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 66. For the role of ethnonyms in the argumentation of Plethon, see: Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 106–111.
- 39 Plethon, *Oracula Chaldaica*, II. For Tambrun-Krasker's French translation, see: Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 96–104. For the set of problems concerning Plethon's interpretation of the *Oracula* and further bibliography, see: Burns, 'Chaldean Oracles', 165–176; Athanassiadi, 'Psellos and Plethon', especially 247–251.
  - 40 Plethon, *De legibus*, 256 (III.43.190–198); Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 356; Anastos, 'Calendar', 281–289.
  - 41 Plethon, *Oracula Chaldaica*, II.1; Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 54; Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 96.
  - 42 Plethon, *Oracula Chaldaica*, II.34.8–14; Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 103. This passage is a reproduction (loose in some points) of Plutarch (*De Iside*, 369d–e). I excluded Plethon's cryptic statement, which suggests that Horomazes is three times larger and maintains his distance from the Sun, whereas Mithras, who follows Horomazes, is two times larger. For an effort to clarify Plethon's assertion using Plutarch and to provide a coherent interpretation of it, see also: Bidez and Cumont, *Mages hellénisés*, 2:254; Hladký, *Plethon*, 61–63. In any case, this vague passage suggests that there is no reason to exaggerate the significance of the solar cult in Plethon's theological system (Medvedev, 'Solar Cult').
  - 43 Plethon, *Oracula Chaldaica*, II.34.17–21; Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 59; Anastos, 'Calendar', 280–281, 289; Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 103–104.
  - 44 Plethon, *Oracula Chaldaica*, I.t; Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 95. Zoroaster's authorship of the *Chaldean Oracles* is referred to again in: Plethon, *Contra Scholarii*, 5.32–33.
  - 45 Siniosoglou, *Platonism*, 72.
  - 46 Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De virtutibus*, 1:348.18; Bidez and Cumont, *Mages hellénisés*, 2:81–82; Vasunia, *Zarathushtra*, no. 371. Bidez and Cumont, and also Corbin hypothesised that the Persian origin of the Chaldean oracles could have been postulated in Greek antiquity long before Plethon: Bidez and Cumont, *Mages hellénisés*, 1:161–162; Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, 2:32–34. For some conceptual reasons, see: Siniosoglou, *Platonism*, 215–216. Had Plethon not attributed the Chaldean Oracles to Zoroaster's Magi, interest in Zoroaster might never have reached such fervour. In this sense, Plethon's influence impacted the entire Western European philosophical tradition, including figures like Friedrich Nietzsche; see, for instance: Stausberg, *Faszination*, 80, 83–92.
  - 47 Plethon, *De legibus*, 265–269; Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 319. For the repertoire and typology of Plethon's references to Zoroaster, see also: Stausberg, *Faszination*, 42–44, 57–82.
  - 48 Plethon, *De legibus*, 2 (Proem.1–4). For the translation of this important passage and its interpretation, see: Couloubaritis, 'La métaphysique de Pléthon', 139; Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 151–152.
  - 49 Plethon, *De legibus*, 256 (III.43.198–199); Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 356; Stausberg, *Faszination*, 74–75.
  - 50 Plethon, *De legibus*, 280; Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 25.
  - 51 Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Opera minora*, 68.50–53 (V). For Ctesias and Plutarch's references, see: Schmitt, 'Cyrus'. For the etymology of Cyrus/Kuruš 'to bestow care', see: Tavernier, *Iranica*, 528–530 (5.5.1.34). Cf. Burns, 'Chaldean Oracles', 166.
  - 52 In this connection, see also: Hanegraaff, 'Pagan', 34–35.
  - 53 Scholarios, *Ad Theodoram*; Scholarios, *Ad Josephum*. For an English summary and contexts, see: Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 357–360.
  - 54 A detailed analysis of Scholarios's story, see in Hladký, *Plethon*, 191–195 and now Mariev, 'Elissaios'.
  - 55 Alexandre, *Notice préliminaire*, VI.

- 56 Schultze, *Plethon*, 23–31.
- 57 Taeschner, ‘Beitrag’, 38–39; Taeschner, ‘Vermittler’, especially 104–111; Klein-Franke, ‘Pletho’, 2–3; for corrections to Klein-Franke’s edition of the note, see: Dedes, ‘Handschriften’, 66–67. Most of Taeschner’s observations, as well as Klein-Franke’s conclusion, can barely be accepted as decisive evidence in favour of Plethon’s dependence on Islamic models. For a critique of Taeschner’s observations, see: Masai, *Pléthon*, 56–57; Anastos, ‘Calendar’; Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 26, 71–72.
- 58 Corbin formulated this idea in 1964 and expounded on it in greater detail in 1971: Corbin, *Philosophie islamique*, 285–286; Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, 2:31–34. Corbin’s suggestion was supported by Shlomo Pines: Masai, ‘Averroisme’, 445. For further developments of Corbin’s idea, see: Tardieu, ‘Lecteur des oracles’, 141–148; Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 91–94; Athanassiadi, ‘Psellos and Plethon’, 148–150.
- 59 Siniosoglou, ‘Sect and Utopia’, 51–55; Siniosoglou, ‘Plethon, Scholarios’, 649.
- 60 Masai, *Pléthon*, 57–60; Hladký, *Plethon*, 195–196; Stausberg, *Faszination*, 40–41; for the discussion of the historicity of Scholarios’s Elissaios with important additional bibliography, see also: Siniosoglou, ‘Sect and Utopia’, 41–51.
- 61 Wust, ‘Elisha the Greek’ (the first special study on Elisha the Greek/Elissaios, unavailable for me); Langermann, ‘Science’, 443–445, 452–453; Langermann, ‘Tajriba/Nissayon’, 154–158; Mariev, ‘Elissaios’, 61–62 (on Elisha’s medical treatise *Mafteah Harefuah*); David, ‘Genizat Yerushalayim’, 302–303 (on the manuscripts of Elisha’s *Grabadin medicinarum*); Idel, ‘Prisca Theologia’, 143–145 (some additional remarks on the personality of Elisha); cf.: Bowman, ‘Romaniote Jewry’, 130; Bowman, *Jews of Byzantium*, 162.
- 62 Mariev, ‘Elissaios’, 64–69 (a ‘fictional dimension’ is rightfully discerned in Scholarios’s account of Elissaios).
- 63 Plethon, *Contra Scholarii*, 3 (4.27–30). It should be noted that, as Georgios Steiris has shown, Plethon possessed only elementary and indirect knowledge of Arabic philosophers (Steiris, ‘Arabic philosophy’, 309–314).
- 64 Tihon, ‘Astronomy of Plethon’, 111–112; Plethon, *Manuel d’astronomie*, 5–13, 250–263; Tihon, ‘Jewish astronomy’ especially 116.
- 65 Plethon, *Iudaica*.
- 66 For Jewish communities in the Balkans and the Aegean until the twelfth century, see: Panayotov, ‘Jewish communities’.
- 67 Masai, *Pléthon*, 239 note 1; Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 72. See also: Mamalakis, Πλήθων, 238. For opposite arguments, see: Anastos, ‘Calendar’, 299–303.
- 68 See, however, for a different interpretation contextualising Plethon’s logic in the late antique and early Christian tradition: Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 60–63. See also in this connection an important remark of Siniosoglou: ‘it is the result of [Plethon’s] transferring to epistemology a principle of Platonic ontology, namely that phenomena are preceded by their essence, imperfection by perfection, error by truth’: Siniosoglou, *Platonism*, 180–181.
- 69 A commonality between Suhrawardī and the *Chaldean Oracles* in their symbolism of light and fire may have been another argument prompting Plethon to ascribe the *Oracles* to Zoroaster (Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 94). Maria Mavroudi, while contextualising the Arabic translations of Plethon’s works carried out by the Ottoman Turks, discusses a strong fascination with the Neoplatonic tradition (as translated into Arabic), Suhrawardī’s texts and magical practices within the Ottoman sultanate of the mid-fifteenth century: Mavroudi, ‘Pletho’, 189–196. For the collection of Plethon’s texts in Arabic, see also: Nicolet and Tardieu, ‘Pletho Arabicus’. For a contrasting perspective regarding the potential connection between the Ishraqī ideas and Plethon’s concepts, see: Hladký, *Plethon*, 196–199.
- 70 Anastos, ‘Calendar’, 270–303. For further elaboration of arguments supporting the native origins of Plethon’s Persianism, see also: Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 48–61; Siniosoglou, *Platonism*, 215ff; Hladký, *Plethon*, 199–204.

- 71 Bidez and Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés*, 1:161–162, 2:252; Stausberg, *Faszination*, 1:44–69.
- 72 Plethon, *Opuscula*; Diller, ‘Pletho and Plutarch’; Hansen, ‘Herodotean Malice’; Amendola, ‘Rewriting Greek History’.
- 73 Diller, ‘Autographs of Pletho’, 36 (Plethon’s autograph in Marc. gr. Z. 406, fol. 94–114).
- 74 Plethon, *Ad Theodorum*, 116–118, 127–128; for valuable commentaries, see: Tambrun, *Pléthon*, 118–120.
- 75 Plethon, *Reges*, fol. 16v lines 17–24; Knös, ‘Pléthon’, 107–108.
- 76 Burns, ‘Chaldean Oracles’; compare with a more cautious and sophisticated approach of Hanegraaff, ‘Pagan’, 36–39, who posits that, concerning Plethon and his purported connections with Elisha, ‘Platonic Orientalism could function as a privileged medium enabling “discursive transfer” across the boundaries of all the three great scriptural traditions’ (p. 37).



## 7 Iranian actualities

So far, the present study has exclusively focussed on the problems of cultural memory and various types of memory's re-actualisation in diverse areas of intellectual and social life. The idea, or rather the ideas, of ancient Persia, as elements of Byzantine cultural memory, continued to serve as a significant source for explanatory associations. This final chapter explores an essentially different subject related to *medieval* Iran and the Iranians, and New Persian culture, which existed concurrently with middle and late Byzantium.

A key aspect of Byzantine historiosophy centred around the concept of a direct connection and continuity between Median, Achaemenid, Parthian and Sasanian Persia. As a result of the disruption caused by the Muslim conquest, the concept of Persia in the Byzantine mentality was cast into the shadow of the Islamic caliphate. Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to reduce Byzantine knowledge of Iran exclusively to the references to memorial Persia. Information about the New Persian world is abundant and varied, yet it remains fragmentary and dispersed across diverse textual genres, lacking substantial conceptualisation and systematisation. The discussion of the traces of New Persian culture in Byzantium begins with examining the changes in the latter's geographical image of the Iranian world in the eighth to tenth centuries. Furthermore, the physical presence of the Persians in the Byzantine world and their varied contribution to Byzantine culture and intellectualism will be analysed. Finally, the chapter will demonstrate how Persian influences initiated further significant changes in the Byzantine world image.

### 7.1 Khorasan

After the Islamic conquests and the collapse of the Sasanian empire, the term 'Persia' continued to be used as a geographical notion to refer to the Iranian part of the caliphate and, later, the Seljuk and Mongol domains. However, it ceased to be a politonym as there was no political entity that could be called Persia (Iran) in the centuries that followed the Muslim conquests. At this point, an interesting innovation emerged: from the time of Theophanes the Confessor, the Byzantines used the term 'Khorasan' for contemporary Persia. The term is found in the sources in the variant

forms Χοροσάν, Χορασάν, Χωρασάν, Χωροσάν, Χωρεσάν and so forth, and Χωροσανῖται for people living there.

The Greek Χορασάν corresponds to the Persian term *Khurāsān* (خراسان) indicating a vast and predominately Persian-speaking region, from the eastern end of Western Persia ('Irāq-i 'Ajam) up to the Indus Valley, Sindh, the Syr Darya river and Khutan in the north and east. The origin of the term can be traced back to Sasanian times, which signified 'the land where the sun rises' (Old Persian *xvar-āsāna* 'the sun rising'). Soon, after the Muslim conquest of Iran, the term Khorasan acquired a new cultural and political meaning. It was now considered the cradle of Persian national revival, where the New Persian language and literature emerged. Various Persian local dynasties, notably the Samanid amirs in Bukhara (819–1005) identified themselves as the 'rulers of Khorasan' (sing. *amīr-i Khurāsān*).

Interestingly, in Neo-Persian culture, Khorasan replaced the old political and geographical endonyms *Īrān* and *Īrānshahr*,<sup>1</sup> which were now exclusively reserved for references to both epic and historical Achaemenid and Sasanian Persia. In Muslim literature in Arabic and Persian, culturally and politically, contemporary Iran was known predominantly as Khorasan. The term *Iran* as a political endonym of the Persians (or at least some of them) was reintroduced into actual nomenclature as late as in the sixteenth century by the Safawids and it was endowed with new ideological contents.<sup>2</sup>

Following the terminological shift in Persian self-description as discussed above, Byzantine authors also adopted the designation of the Iranian cultural and political space as Χορασάν and the representatives of the New Persian culture as Χωροσανῖται. Interestingly enough, the predominant spelling variants of the Byzantine Χορασάν were derived not from the East Persian phonetics (pronounced as *khuroson*), but rather from its West Persian variant (*khorasan*). This was likely due to the mediation of Syriac authors of the time, who were familiar with the term and used spellings close to that of Western Persia: ܚܘܪܫܐܢ / ܚܘܪܫܐ / ܚܘܪܫܐܢ / ܚܘܪܫܐܢ (*hōrāsān*, *hōrāsān*, *hōrāsān*).<sup>3</sup>

The geographical localisation of Khorasan in Byzantine texts underwent slight changes in the course of time. The earliest author to mention Khorasan was Theophanes the Confessor in his entry for the year 692/693, discussing the conquest of the region by the Arabs. He localised the geographical area by precisely defining 'Khorasan' as 'inner Persia', and accurately describing Abū Muslim himself and his Χωροσανῖται, in the course of the Abbasid revolution, as hailing from 'the most eastern part of Persia'.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, Theophanes distinguished 'Persia' as a generic term and also as a name for the western part of Iran, and 'Khorasan', as a *species*, designating Persia's eastern part. As seen from the context, for Theophanes the term was new and needed explanation.

Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, in his *De administrando imperio*, first echoes Theophanes in explaining Khorasan as 'inner Persia'.<sup>5</sup> He is the only Byzantine author who refers to the contemporaneous Samanid state in

Khorasan (819–999).<sup>6</sup> However, when referring to these recent events, he uses Khorasan as synonymous with Persia.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the imperial diplomatic protocol in the *De cerimoniis aulae Byzantinae*, concerning the reception of the envoys from abroad, probably sets apart Persia and Khorasan as two different regions from where embassies could arrive.<sup>8</sup> In the *De cerimoniis* (II, 15), one also finds *χοροσαγγόριον*, a curious term possibly used for a kind of fabric or dress decorated with a gryphon and eagle, peculiar to or imported from Khorasan.<sup>9</sup>

Tenth- and twelfth-century authors fluctuated between specific and broader meanings of Khorasan.<sup>10</sup> For instance, John Skylitzes maintains that, in the time of Emperor Theophilos (829–842), the famous commander Manuel fought for the fortress *Χωροσᾶν*, probably implying some East Iranian stronghold. Elsewhere he defines the leader of the opposing Asian troops, fighting in the eastern borders of the empire (September 1048), as a ‘Khorasanian’ (*Χωροσάντης*).<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Skylitzes and Bryennios use the term ‘Persia’ to refer to the Ghaznavid possessions in Eastern Iran.<sup>12</sup> In the twelfth century, Anna Komnene designated all the possessions of the Great Seljuks as Khorasan, equating it to Persia. She used the terms Persia, Persian state and the like sparingly, instead opting for the term Khorasan when wishing to indicate geographical Iran.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly enough, during that time, the *ethnic* designation Khorasanians (*Χωροσανῖται*) obtained a synonymous variant, Khorasmians (*Χοράσμιοι*), which probably was regarded as an old, *scientific* counterpart of the neologism.<sup>14</sup>

This evolution from a narrower to a broader understanding of Khorasan is quite understandable: for ninth-century Byzantines, it was a novel term in need of precise localisation, while eleventh- and twelfth-century texts followed the proper Oriental (Persian, Arabic, Syriac) usage of the time. This postulated Khorasan as the cultural and political core of the Persian-speaking part of the Islamic world and as a contemporary substitute for ancient *Īrān* and *Īrānshahr*. Thus, current political and cultural developments in Eastern Iran, and the emergence of a New Persian civilisation, did not go unheeded by the Byzantines.

As shown by Nicholas Morton, the notion of Khorasan, as a remote eastern part of Persia, was adopted by Crusader authors (Corosanum, Corrozanam, Chorozaïm and the like). At the same time, Khorasan could have been associated with the land of Turks, who worshipped the god of the Turks. The kings of Khorasan highly trusted sorcerers and soothsayers. Moreover, in the Latin tradition, ‘Corosanum’ may have acquired an eschatological connotation being analogised with the New-Testament Chorazin.<sup>15</sup>

## 7.2 The Byzantine Persians

For the time immediately after the Islamic conquests, Byzantine sources preserved some information about the physical presence of the Persians in the territory of the empire. The largest number of Persians is recorded during

the seventh to ninth centuries. Due to the thematic specifics of the sources, we have more information about three categories of the Byzantine Persians: (1) soldiers and especially high-ranking officers; (2) members of the Byzantine bureaucratic elite; and (3) intellectuals and clerics.

In the seventh and eighth centuries, a notable group of Persians occupied high-ranking and middle-ranking positions in the empire's military and civil administration.<sup>16</sup> In 663, during the Italian campaign of Constans II (641–668), a certain Saburrus (Shapur) was at the head of the army of 20,000 men and fought against the Lombard Duchy of Benevento; however, he was defeated at Forino and fled to Naples. His name is known from a Latin source only, and it is in all probability identical to the Greek Σαπώρης, Σαβώριος, Σαβόριος and the like derived from the Middle Persian *Shābuhr*.<sup>17</sup>

Another Shapur (Σαβώριος) served as *strategos* of the Armeniakon *theme* during the reign of Constans II. Theophanes directly indicated his Persian descent calling him Περσσογενής ('of Persian origin'); he rebelled against the emperor in 667/668.<sup>18</sup>

The eunuch Stephen the Persian was a prominent figure in the court of Justinian II (685–695 and 705–711), holding the titles of *logothetes*, *sakellarios* and possibly *praipositos* and being in charge, in particular, of the state treasury and, at the end of his career, supervising the construction of the Triklinos in the imperial palace. He was extremely arrogant and cruel, deserving general hatred. In 695, the rebel mob burned Stephen alive in the Forum Bovis.<sup>19</sup>

The *protasekretis* Hamazaspes (Ἀμαζάσπης) headed the imperial chancery and sided with the iconoclastic policy of Leo V the Armenian in 814–815.<sup>20</sup> The name Ἀμαζάσπης is derived from the Middle Persian *Hamāzāsp* 'one owning warhorses' and was commonly used among the Persians and also the Armenian nobility.<sup>21</sup> It remains therefore unclear whether the *protasekretis* Hamazaspes was of Iranian or Armenian descent.

Seals provide additional information about the Iranians holding positions in the state hierarchy during the seventh and eighth centuries. A certain Rostom (Ῥωστόμ) was a high-ranking *patrikios* in the eighth century.<sup>22</sup> The ἀπὸ ὑπάτων Chosroes (Χοσρόης) identified himself as 'the slave of the Mother of God' in the seventh century, and his rank may have been associated with the military function of *dux*.<sup>23</sup> A certain Ardashīr (Ἄρτασήρ) held the prestigious rank of *protospatharios* in the eighth century.<sup>24</sup> Another individual named Chosroes (Χοσρόης) held the title of *patrikios*, and two seals dating from the eighth or ninth century bear its evidence.<sup>25</sup> The *spatharokandidatos* Leo the Persian was a mid-ranking court dignitary in the eighth or ninth century.<sup>26</sup>

Some seals do not indicate the official title of the owner, but they likely belonged to low-ranking military or civil officers. One individual named Shapur (Σαπούρ) is known from a bilingual seal dated from the seventh century, and it laconically defines him in Greek as a God's slave.<sup>27</sup> The seal of Shāpērōzān (Σαπεροζάν) does not indicate the social standing of its owner, but only asks Christ to come to the aid of His servant (seventh or eighth

century).<sup>28</sup> Probably there was one more person bearing the same name Shāpērōzān, who preferred an alternate Greek spelling Σαχπεροζάν; he asked for aid from the Mother of God (in the first half of the eighth century).<sup>29</sup> The social standing of a certain Rostomios (Ροστόμιος) is unknown (seventh or eighth century).<sup>30</sup> The peculiarity of these seals lies in the fact that most of them do not indicate the ethnicity of their owners. Therefore, it is conceivable that some of the listed persons were actually Armenians or Georgians by descent.<sup>31</sup>

One should probably include numerous references in the sources to the Mardaites, an enigmatic Christian warrior people who lived in the south-eastern border of the empire and were, at one point, resettled across the Byzantine provinces. The Mardaites' Iranian stock has been suggested by scholars, but it remains unproven to date.<sup>32</sup>

Some of the Persian newcomers were intellectuals and clerics, and some of them achieved career heights in Byzantium. Around 655/656, a certain Persian doctor (Πέρσης τῷ γένει) unsuccessfully treated a sick presbyter in Constantinople and received an enormous amount of money as payment: almost two golden *nomismata* and as many tips.<sup>33</sup>

The eminent theologian and ecclesiastic Michael Synkellos (760/761–843) was born in Jerusalem to a Christian family.<sup>34</sup> According to his own confession, Michael Synkellos was Iranian by origin and, consequently, his parents were Persian Orthodox Christians.<sup>35</sup> In Jerusalem, he received a profound Greek education and later became a monk at the Lavra of St Sabas. Evidently, he also acquired Arabic literacy, dominant in the Middle East of the time, and authored a Greek translation of some Arabic works of Theodore Abū Qurra.<sup>36</sup> Michael Synkellos moved to Constantinople in 813 and occupied a prominent position among iconophile church intellectuals. Since 815, he suffered much from the iconoclast imperial authorities. After the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843, he was appointed the abbot of the Chora monastery and became *synkellos* to the patriarch Methodios.<sup>37</sup>

Curiously, in the eighth century, there is notable evidence of Persian monks being active in the Lavra of St Sabas in Jerusalem. Apart from Michael Synkellos, two other Persian monks of the Lavra of St Sabas are known by name: Christopher (martyred in 778)<sup>38</sup> and Ader / Ἄδερ (eighth century).<sup>39</sup> The presence of the native Persians in the Lavra of St Sabas may well have affected the linguistic situation there. The Lavra's monk St Theodore of Edessa (eighth or ninth century) 'by his innate talent spoke Greek, Syriac and Ishmaelite [that is, Arabic – *Author*], and additionally, the Persian language'.<sup>40</sup>

Another prominent man of pen and ink and an older contemporary of Michael Synkellos was possibly of Persian origin as well. The scientist and astrologer is known to us under the names Stephen the Philosopher or Stephen the Persian (d. after 800), who once identified himself as 'having come from Persia'.<sup>41</sup> He was born probably in Baghdad, where he was active as a scientist for some time, and, in the second half of the eighth century, found himself

in Constantinople. If he really was of Iranian origin, it is not unreasonable to assume that he belonged to the community of Greek-speaking Christian Persians. He probably authored Greek treatises on mathematics, astronomy and astrology, as well as a horoscope of Islam (an ‘astrological political history’); he was a devoted defender and Christian apologist of the science of astrological prognostication.<sup>42</sup> Evidently, Stephen, like Michael Synkellos, in his early life mastered both Greek and Arabic literacy and extensively used information derived from Arab sources in his Greek works. The life paths of Stephen and Michael follow a remarkably similar trajectory: both received Greek and Arab education<sup>43</sup> outside Byzantium and eventually ended up in Constantinople, where they became part of the intellectual elite’s circle.

It appears that until at least the turn of the ninth century, a discernible group of Christian Persians existed who, despite living under Muslim rule, cherished the tradition of Greek education. In this connection, in addition to Michael Synkellos and Stephen the Persian, one may recall another great Greek-speaking scholar of the same region and era, John of Damascus (d. ca. 750) who mastered Hellenic religious and lay wisdom and, in the second half of his life, like Michael, pursued asceticism as a monk at the Lavra of St Sabas. Although scholars commonly ascribe Arabic or Syrian origin to John of Damascus, his ethnicity remains uncertain.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, John of Damascus’s belonging to the circle of Greek language-oriented Persian believers is quite possible. Could the individuals discussed above be the descendants of the ‘Roman’ (non-Syriac) Christians of the Sasanian empire?

Important evidence of Byzantium-oriented Persian believers is provided by the case of Khurdād, son of Hurmuzd-Āfarīd, a Persian of modest standing, who came to Constantinople from Iran for study. We know about Khurdād from a grave-stone inscription on the lid of a Byzantine-style sarcophagus. The latter was found in 1964 in the Çapa district of Istanbul, during the excavations by M. Nezih Fıratlı at the site of a Byzantine cemetery, not far outside the walls of Constantine the Great (see Figure 7.1). The inscription is in the New Persian language and in Pahlavi script and has been deciphered by the exertion of a number of scholars in the 1960s–1990s. The final interpretation

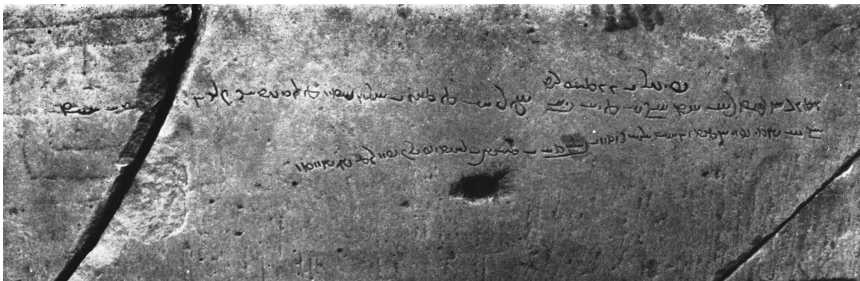


Figure 7.1 Tomb inscription of Khurdād in Constantinople (after Bogoliubov, ‘Пехлевийская надпись’, p. 93)

of the inscription, which has not been challenged to date, is offered by François de Blois in 1990:<sup>45</sup>

‘[line 1] *in gōr xurdād pusar i hurmuzd-āfarīd rā ast, ki-š xuḏā bi-āmurzā, az mān i ērānšahr, az rūstā čālakān (?), az dih xišt (?),*

[line 2] *ki yak sāl ba ummēd u xwāštārī-kardan i bār xuḏā i masīh i rāst u pērōz ba rūm andar būd’.*

Translation: ‘This tomb belongs to Khurdād, son of Hurmuzd-Āfarīd, – on whom, oh Lord, mayst thou have mercy! – from the country (lit. ‘house’) of Īrānshahr, from the district of Chālakān (?), from the village of Khisht (?), who dwelt for one year in Byzantium in hope and studious desire for the Lord Christ the just and victorious’.<sup>46</sup>

The inscription provides evidence of Persian immigration to Byzantium for religious reasons. Khurdād, who came to Byzantium to study Christian education, most likely was bilingual, retaining his Persian mother language while studying in Greek. Khurdād lived in Constantinople for one year until his passing away; it remains unclear whether he was a temporary visitor or settled there permanently, though the latter option is more probable. The use of the Pahlavi script suggests that Persian Christians probably favoured it over Arabic script due to the latter’s obvious Islamic connotations. The quality of the inscription’s Persian language and rather skilful script suggests that there existed a group of Persian-speaking Christians in Constantinople who commissioned the tomb and to whom the Persian commemoration was intended.<sup>47</sup>

The tomb and therefore Khurdād’s floruit may be dated only hypothetically approximately to the time span between the first half of the eighth and the end of the tenth century. The earlier part of this time interval would make Khurdād and his circle of Persian believers contemporaneous to Stephen the Persian, Michael Synkellos and the Persian monks of the Lavra of St Sabas. If Khurdād lived in the second half of the ninth or the tenth century, it means that he and his fellows must be rather grouped with the subsequent waves of Persian immigration discussed below.

### 7.3 Theophobos, the Pharganoi and Others

The tide of Persian immigration began to decline in the first decades of the ninth century. A kind of final act of the Persian large-scale resettlements is represented by the cases of Theophobos the Persian along with his Khurrami soldiers and the resettlement of the Pharganoi.

The Khurramis (Pers. *Khurramī* or *Khurramdīnī*) confessed a form of Iranian religion that incorporated certain elements of Semitic monotheism, and fought fiercely against the Abbasid authorities for many decades.<sup>48</sup> The defeat of the rebellion of the Khurrami leader Bābak Khurramdīn (d. 838) forced thousands of them to take flight to Byzantium around 834. Their leader Theophobos (identical to Naṣr of Muslim sources or, more probably, Naṣr’s son) was favourably accepted by Emperor Theophilos

and was promoted to *patrikios* and *strategos*.<sup>49</sup> The second wave of the Persian refugees reached the empire in 837. As a result, the total number of Persian soldiers in the Byzantine army may well have been as high as 30,000. Theophobos himself and his Khurrami warriors embraced Christianity and were incorporated into the army as a special *τάγμα Περσικόν*. The Persians under the command of Theophobos participated in many military campaigns as elite forces and were easily recognisable on the battlefield due to their distinctive red uniform. Theophobos died in 839/840 or 842 either falling in battle with the Muslims in Cilicia or being suspected by Theophilos of infidelity and murdered on the emperor's orders. After the death of Theophobos, the Persian *tagma* was split up into separate *τοῦρμα Περσῶν* of up to 2,000 men, which were distributed among the themes; these Persian *tourmai* still existed in the tenth century.<sup>50</sup>

Byzantine sources probably reflected some demographic aftereffects of the mass immigration of the Khurramis who eventually were dispersed throughout the empire. It is possible that some Persian courtiers of the third quarter of the ninth century were the descendants of the Persians of Theophobos. Two Persian courtiers, Eulogios the Persian<sup>51</sup> and Apelates the Persian<sup>52</sup>, supported the usurpation of Basil I in 867. The emperor Michael III was assassinated by the conspirators in his bedchamber. Soon after that, Eulogios requested 'in his own language' from the *hetairiarches* Artabasdos to open the palace gates for Basil.<sup>53</sup> Judging by the wording of Symeon Logothete, Eulogios the Persian spoke to Artabasdos in Persian, and there are no substantive reasons to interpret Symeon's evidence otherwise. It remains unclear whether Artabasdos, who bore a Persian name that was also common among Armenians, was an Iranian by blood or a Persian-speaking Armenian.<sup>54</sup> Based on the names of these three persons, one may speculate that Eulogios and Apelates, having standard Greek names, were second-generation Persians, while Artabasdos, bearing an Iranian name, may have been a first-generation newcomer.

A special case is represented by the Pharganoi (Φαργάνοι), palace elite troops of foreigners, which constituted a section of the imperial *hetaireia*. It is a fair certainty that, due to quite precise phonetic affinity, Φαργάνος (sometimes Φάργανος) denoted a person from Farghāna (Fergana), a region in the Transoxian part of Khorasan, which at that time was populated mostly by the non-Muslim Sogdians and Islamised Tājiks, as well as some Turks.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, as it seems, Φαργάνοι were very likely Eastern Iranians who originated from the region of Farghāna. The Pharganoi as a military *tagma* were referred to in the manuals for court ceremonies of Philotheos (second half of the ninth century) and Constantine Porphyrogenetos (mid-tenth century). The Pharganoi were a part of middle- and lower-ranking *hetaireia* and were equipped with swords and shields. A person wishing to enter the Pharganoi had to pay 6 pounds of gold, and in return, would receive a salary of 12 *nomismata*. Naturally, the Pharganoi, as well as other soldiers of the *hetaireia* corps, were exempted from military conscription. They were also



involved in military campaigns overseas. The barbarian *tagma* of the Pharganoi may have been under the command of either a barbarian or a native Roman officer.<sup>56</sup> As it seems, Iranian natives from Farghāna first appeared in the empire by the mid-ninth century at the latest. Narrative sources mention the *protospatharios* and *protovestiaros* Theophanes Pharganos, a high-ranking commander and courtier during the reign of Michael III (842–867), famous for his strength and courage. Theophanes Pharganos was on bad terms with the powerful *logothetes* Theoktistos and had to defect to the Muslims in 844 because of the enmity of the latter. Later Theophanes came back to the empire and, in 855, took part in the brutal murder of Theoktistos.<sup>57</sup>

The East Iranian mercenaries from Farghāna probably first made their appearance in the Near East in the first half of the ninth century. This occurred after the non-Muslim principality of Farghāna was absorbed by the Samanids of Khorasan (819), a Tājik dynasty that achieved the Islamisation of the Transoxian Iranians. The Farghāna soldiers, along with other troops of Transoxiana, played an important part in the Abbasid army during the first half of the ninth century, and in particular, under the caliphs al-Ma'mūn (813–833) and al-Mu'taṣim (833–842).<sup>58</sup> One may suggest that the Byzantine Pharganoi were those warriors who for one or another reason migrated from the Caliphate to Byzantium. However, another, more preferable explanation is that the Pharganoi arrived in Constantinople via the Crimea, as part of the Sogdians that rejected the Islamic regime. These Sogdians left their homeland and settled in or frequented the North Black Sea region.

The Crimea, situated on the northern margins of the empire, served as the place where the Byzantines directly contacted the Sogdians for an extended period. The Sogdians were excellent merchants and, towards the end of the seventh century, founded the city of Sougdaia (Sughdāq, Sudak), an important centre of trans-Eurasian trade. It may be possible that from the second half of the eighth century, the Sogdian presence in Sougdaia and neighbouring regions was reinforced by those fleeing the Islamic conquests from Iranian Transoxiana. Based on archaeological evidence, the population of Sougdaia was predominantly Christian, and at the latest in the eighth century, the Orthodox bishopric of Sougdaia was established there; the city actively engaged in trade with Byzantium in the eighth–ninth centuries.<sup>59</sup>

Interestingly enough, the evidence of the establishment of the Sogdian colony in the Crimea and the Pharganoi's appearance in Constantinople chronologically coincide with the introduction to Byzantine craft and art of some pre-Islamic Persian elements, which were especially characteristic for the Sogdians. One notable example is the representation of the *sīmurgh* (Middle Persian *senmurv*) on Emperor Theophilos's tower (no. 16) in Blachernae, which has recently been discussed in detail by Neslihan Asutay-Effenberger.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, some kinds of Byzantine silk production from around the seventh century exhibited similarities to the Sogdian *zandanījī* textiles and used Sogdian decorative motifs including *sīmurgh*. Very likely, these textiles originated from weaving centres in Byzantium or in Constantinople

itself.<sup>61</sup> It is easy to hypothesise that originally such decorative types and textiles were introduced to Byzantium by the Sogdian craftsmen from the Northern Black Sea or even by the Sogdian immigrant artisans who settled in Byzantium.

Sources generally do not provide evidence about the presence of the Persian soldiers and civil dignitaries in the subsequent century with probably one notable exception. The *protospatharios* and *hypatos* Sergios commissioned an astrolabe and had it inscribed with a prose statement indicating the date as July 1062, alongside a poetic epigram. The epigram explicitly indicates his Persian origin (Περσῶν γένους Σέργιος), while the prosaic inscription, in particular, represents him as a ‘scientifically versed’ man (ἐπιστήμων).<sup>62</sup> Given his name, he was likely a Christian. His titles *protospatharios* and *hypatos* indicate his very high standing as a court dignitary, chief military commander, or provincial governor.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, the Kurds can be referred to as a distinct group within the Byzantine Persians. They are an Iranian ethnic group, distinct from Persians. However, during the Middle Ages, they adopted Persian language and culture. Throughout the Middle Ages, Western Kurds occupied a vast region in the east of Asia Minor and Greater Armenia. The presence of Kurds in the Byzantine empire can hardly be doubted, but practically no information on them can be found in Byzantine sources. It is possible that Kurds were among the Persians of Theophobos in the ninth century.<sup>64</sup> The only direct reference known is provided by Pontic sources. In December 1344, the *Acts of Vazelon* mentioned a certain landowner Κοῦρτος who sold his parcel to the Vazelon monastery.<sup>65</sup>

Curiously enough, we find three distinctly Persian names in Pontic sources. Two individuals lived in the thirteenth century and held high positions in the imperial fiscal office. Ἀλέξιος Πακτιάρης, likely deriving his byname from the Persian بختیار *bakhtiyār*, meaning ‘fortunate’ or ‘wealthy’, served as δημοσιακὸς ἄρχων in 1225.<sup>66</sup> Μιχαὴλ Κασσιμπούρης held the role of πράκτωρ βασιλικὸς in the 1270s or 1280s.<sup>67</sup> The Persian name *Bakhtiyār* and the ancient Iranian word *pūr* پور, meaning ‘son’, as seen in the byname Κασσιμπούρης, were not commonly used in the anthroponymics of the Persian Muslims of the time. It is plausible that both names could have originally been associated with a Kurd, a Zoroastrian, or a Christian from Iran. Considering the positions of Πακτιάρης and Κασσιμπούρης in the fiscal office, which necessitated Greek literacy, it is likely that they were descendants of Iranian immigrants who settled in Trebizond and possessed sufficient wealth to offer quality education for their offspring. The Persian name Χουμαίαις (← همای *humāy* ‘Pandion hali-aëtus’) belonged to a *paroikos* of the Soumela monastery (1364), who may also have been a Kurd, a Zoroastrian, or a Christian Persian.<sup>68</sup>

It is obvious that the Islamisation of Iran caused a strong rejection on the part of the local Iranian population.<sup>69</sup> Evidently, the observed increase in the number of Persians in Byzantine society from the seventh to the tenth century reflected a wave of emigration from the Muslim territories of those

Iranians who chose to seek refuge in Byzantium instead of undergoing forced Islamisation.<sup>70</sup> It is also possible that most Byzantine Persians of the seventh–tenth centuries were in fact Iranian Christians who were unwilling to remain under the authority of the Islamic state. In any case, most examples, described above, directly prove the Christian identity of the Byzantine Persians. Of course, literary sources and seals reflected only partially the real extent of Persian immigration being almost exclusively focussed on the persons of dignity and title. Much less is known about Iranian commoners who left their homes and settled in Byzantium under the pressure of Muslim conquerors. Nonetheless, it should be noted that it is Byzantine sources that provide some tangible information concerning the demographic repercussions following the establishment of the new Islamic regime in Western and Northern Iran and Central Asia.

#### 7.4 The Anatolian Persians

By the twelfth century, the terms Persia and Persians underwent further transformation as the Byzantines began to label the Muslim conquerors of Anatolia, who had established themselves in Asia Minor by the end of the eleventh century, as ‘Persians’. The subject has already been discussed in more detail previously, so here I will address it only briefly. The Byzantines systematised national categories according to the geographical locus of a nation’s habitat rather than along linguistic lines. This feature of the Byzantine epistemology led to the paradoxical application of the name ‘Persians’ to the contemporary Anatolian Muslims, who consisted of the majority of the Turkic nomadic and Persianate sedentary groups and the minority of the ethnic Persians proper.<sup>71</sup> While Byzantines were aware of the ‘northern’ Scythian/Hunnic/Turkic origin of the Anatolian Turks, they referred to them predominantly as ‘Persians’ in part because Persia was where they had formerly resided in and originated from.

Starting with the twelfth century, this *locative* logic prompted Byzantine authors more and more often to analogise the Seljuk invasions to the Achaemenid wars (including those of Alexander the Great) and, respectively, the invading Muslims to the ancient Persians and the lands under Islamic control to Persia. The contemporary events triggered cultural memory, prompting Byzantine authors to seek explanatory models (see Chapter 5.1 and 5.6). The conjunction of locative descriptive patterns and explanatory memory associations, each working in its own way, secured the conceptual link between the Muslims of Asia Minor and the Persians.

In the twelfth century, it is speculated that the Byzantines’ ascribing of Persian identity to Anatolian Muslims impelled the latter, and especially Persian-speaking intellectuals within Anatolian ruling courts, to begin active formation of their own image as heirs to the age-old Iranian tradition.<sup>72</sup> The growing process of Persianisation in the Anatolian Muslim mentality possibly did not remain unheeded in Byzantium.

In addition, the Byzantine conviction in the Persian identity of Muslim Anatolia during the twelfth through most of the fourteenth century, was reinforced by the huge and culturally influential presence of real Persians, and specifically Khorasanians, in the urban societies of Muslim Anatolia. Until the second half of the fourteenth century and probably even later, Persian was the main spoken language of the sedentary Muslims not only at ruling courts, but also in all strata of urban population. Persian circulated among nomadic Turks as well; however, it is impossible to judge the extent of its influence among them. The predominance of the Persian language and culture among the Anatolian Muslims substantiated their Persian affiliation in Byzantine thinking.<sup>73</sup>

Byzantine literature clearly reflected this image of Muslim Anatolia as a Persian space on many occasions. In one instance, Eustathios of Thessalonike assigns the names of ‘New Persia’ and ‘the European land of the Persians’ (νέα Περσίς, γῆ Εὐρωπαϊά Περσῶν) to the areas around Thessalonike, on account of the fact that they had been densely populated by Anatolian Muslim captives and newcomers, who presumably mostly were Turks by blood and language.<sup>74</sup> ‘Persia’ and ‘Persians’ here were not merely rhetorical allusions to the antique concept of a barbaric alien established in the heart of the Roman homeland (though this memorial tint may also have been at play). More importantly for us, it seems that the Byzantine mentality perceived Anatolian Muslims as the real Persians. Anatolia was regarded as Persia, inhabited by Persians speaking the Persian language,<sup>75</sup> living in Persian luxury,<sup>76</sup> sending Persian envoys and gifts,<sup>77</sup> and having the Persian army and arms,<sup>78</sup> customs,<sup>79</sup> costumes,<sup>80</sup> architecture and art.<sup>81</sup>

Particularly illustrative is the example of the Mouchroutas hall in the Great palace of Constantinople, located on the westerly side of the Chrysotriklinos. The name Μουχρουτᾶς is cognate with τὸ μουχρούτιον (‘clay drinking bowl’), a word commonly used in the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, derived from the Arabic مقراة *miqrā(t)*, signifying ‘dish or cup for a guest’.<sup>82</sup> The semantics of the Μουχρουτᾶς probably suggested its function as a recreation hall. Around 1203, Nicholas Mesarites describes it as having been constructed by Persian craftsmen, decorated both externally and internally in the Persian style, and notably frescoed inside with the images of the Persians wearing their costumes (probably, a so-called princely cycle imagery).<sup>83</sup>

What is especially perplexing is that the term Περσική γλῶσσα (‘Persian language’) denoted both Persian and Turkic in the writings of Byzantine authors from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. This is evident from the famous passage of John Tzetzes discussing greetings in foreign languages.<sup>84</sup> Very likely, Byzantine authors, in this case, followed the well-known pattern of Ῥωμαϊκή γλῶσσα (‘Roman language’), traditionally signifying both Latin and Greek. As a result, textual references to the use of the ‘Persian language’ may well have been quite ambiguous. Whether it was Persian or Turkic can be clarified only occasionally from the general context of the narration (see also Sections 7.6 and 7.7). Such a practice of assigning one name to two

different languages was a distinct feature of the Byzantine mentality, which is, as far as I know, untypical for other contemporary cultures.<sup>85</sup>

Here lies another paradox: whereas in the case of Khorasan, the Byzantine tradition mirrored real information coming from the East, the terminological use of ‘Anatolian Persians’ seems to have been a specifically Byzantine innovation. It was an innovation because the Anatolian Muslims, despite their Persianate mentality and the prevalence of Persian culture and language in sedentary areas, themselves never dared to call their states ‘Iran’, but instead qualified their homeland as Rūm (i.e., Ῥωμανία, Byzantium).<sup>86</sup>

The identification of ethnic Iranians in the empire’s population from the second half of the eleventh through the fifteenth century poses significant methodological challenges due to the Byzantines’ blending of Anatolian Turkic and Persian identities. Primary sources from that time abundantly referred to ‘ethnic Persians’ who were naturalised in Byzantium. Moreover, it is obvious now that the Persian population of Muslim Asia Minor was in fact quite significant, especially in the cities.<sup>87</sup> However, when Byzantine authors refer to the ‘Persian’ origin of a person, it remains unclear how this should be interpreted in our modern terms. It is uncertain whether the person was an ethnic Persian, or a Turk, or a Persianate Turk.<sup>88</sup> However, in some rare cases, it can be argued that the source evidence implies precisely an ethnic Iranian. Several such examples will be examined in Sections 7.6 and 7.7.

### 7.5 Persian Visitors

The Persian presence in Byzantium also encompasses foreign visitors who had no intention of changing their Muslim faith or permanently settling in the empire. Byzantium, in both Islamic and Christian realms, was deemed one of the wonders of the world, a hub of beautiful, amazing and useful things. Constantinople held perennial allure for foreigners, including Muslims from Asia.<sup>89</sup> Sources provide some information on such Iranian travellers, most of whom were intellectuals and visited Byzantium for scholarly pursuits.

‘Alī-yi Harawī (d. 1215) was a renowned geographer, mystic and magician, born in Mosul to a family originating from Herat in Khorasan. He travelled to various regions such as Syria, Egypt, Sicily and Byzantium. During his travel outside Constantinople, ‘Alī-yi Harawī referred to the cathedral church in Nicaea. In Constantinople, he found acceptance in the court of Emperor Manuel I Komnenos. During his time in Constantinople and its immediate neighbourhoods, he documented significant sites, including the tomb of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, Maslama’s mosque with the tomb of a descendant of Ḥusayn b ‘Alī, obelisks at the Hippodrome, the column with the equestrian statue of Justinian, the column of Theodosios, a Pharos in the Hippodrome, the Horologion with figures showing up at every hour and a talisman in the form of three bronze horses. He referred to St Sophia, other bronze and marble statues, columns and talismans. ‘Alī-yi Harawī’s travelogue was compiled in Arabic. He was known for inscribing his name on

objects all over the places he visited. He died in Aleppo and his tomb there has survived until today.<sup>90</sup>

Muḥammad b. Najīb Bakrān from Khorasan (most likely from Tūs) was an Iranian geographer who, in 605/1208–1209, compiled a map of the world on cloth and supplied it with a concise textual introduction titled *Jahān-nāma* (*The Book of the World*). Muḥammad-i Bakrān's textual introduction has survived, unlike his map. In particular, the introduction discusses in some detail the main sources of information used for drawing the map. The author notes that extremely useful for him was the treatise with a map he found in the archive of the late Sharaf al-Dīn Ṭūsī, in which the longitudes and latitudes of cities and seashores with geographical distances, and also the exact location of mountains, seas and islands were recorded with exceptional precision. According to Muḥammad-i Bakrān, this geographical manuscript with maps was brought by Sharaf-i Ṭūsī from Constantinople: 'The original manuscript was obtained from a library in a Byzantine city known as Constantinople. It was obtained by cunning, as it was strongly guarded and not accessible to all. Among the kings of Byzantium, there was a great emperor named Constantine, from whom the city derives its name. He was a great admirer of various sciences and searched for them. [He] supplied a group of men of skill with a stipend and travel allowance and dispatched them to all over the world, so that they discovered this information through investigation and presented it to him; and he recorded [this] in books and placed [the books] in the library'.<sup>91</sup>

Evidently, the cited passage implies a geographical work, which was produced at the court of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos and is unknown to us. The treatise contained detailed maps that specified with high precision the longitudes and latitudes of cities and seashores and the like and also geographical distances. It is obvious that Muḥammad-i Bakrān confused the two namesakes, that is, Constantine the Great and Constantine the Porphyrogenetos.<sup>92</sup>

Regarding the visitor to Constantinople, Sharaf-i Ṭūsī, the only information known about him is that he was an Iranian mathematician who lived in the twelfth century and visited Aleppo (Ḥalab) before 604/1207–1208.<sup>93</sup> It seems that at some point he found himself in Constantinople, probably before the Crusader invasion in 1204, and stole Constantine Porphyrogenetos's geographical book from a library. The case of Sharaf-i Ṭūsī represents important evidence: in the twelfth century, Constantinople was esteemed as a repository of extremely valuable and unique scientific information, with the Greek language of this information not posing a barrier to interested Persians.

A special case is represented by an intriguing and enigmatic precedent concerning the presence of a group of Sūfīs in the Byzantine imperial palace under the rule of the emperor John VI Kantakouzenos (1347–1354). According to Nikephoros Gregoras, in the early 1350s, some barbarians at the court of John Kantakouzenos were constantly engaging in noisy processions, sang and danced in a ring and cried out odes and hymns to Muḥammad.

Evidently, these barbarians were Anatolian Muslims and more precisely the adepts of the Mawlawī order of whirling dervishes, the followers of the famous Iranian Sūfī teacher Jalāl al-Dīn-i Rūmī (1207–1273).<sup>94</sup> Gregoras's story offers a bizarre and not fully explicable example of the presence in Constantinople of urban Anatolian Persians, or at least Persian speakers: since the predominant Muslim population in Asia Minor was Persian and the Mawlawī *samā'* ritual was performed exclusively in Persian and Arabic. Evidently, the mid-fourteenth-century Constantinopolitans had a chance to get acquainted with the Iranian mystical tradition first-hand.

In 1374, another Persian intellectual, the prominent theologian and encyclopaedic author Sharīf-i Jurjānī (1340–1413), possibly visited Byzantium (*bilād al-rūm*, unless *Muslim Rūm* was meant here) on his way from Cairo back to his native Jurjān. As Maria Mavroudi suggests, his theological image of Christianity may well have been influenced by his probable visit to the Byzantine lands.<sup>95</sup>

These Persian visitors represented a potential source of information about New Persian culture for interested Byzantines. However, these Persian travellers to Byzantium were vastly outnumbered by those Iranian intellectuals who sought and found jobs in Constantinople as physicians, magicians and scientists. The discussion of these Iranian intellectuals will be covered in detail in their appropriate section later on.

## 7.6 Listening Persian, Speaking Persian

In previous discussions, the connection between cultural memory and Ancient and Middle Persian lexical borrowings in Greek has already been addressed. Words like the interjection *μακάρι*, meaning 'would that' and a series of other words and names continued to be in use, and their Persian origin was remembered well by the Byzantines (see Chapter 5.3). Regarding the living New Persian language, its presence in Byzantium had a more complex fate: until the thirteenth century, its traces in Byzantine life are very rare, but in the fourteenth century, Persian, as it were, bursts into Byzantine culture.

During middle Byzantine times, we have limited and fragmented information regarding the use of and interest in the living Persian language, unlike the presence of ancient, memorial Persian elements. One prominent example stands out in the work of the polymath Photios, who was not only attentive to everything Persian, but also took interest especially in the Persian roots of Greek words more than any other Byzantine writer.<sup>96</sup> In his *Lexicon*, Photios discusses the rare usage of the word *παράδεισος* ('paradise') by Attic comic authors, who employed it as an appellative implying 'paradisiac fellow' in the sense 'stupid fellow' (*οἱ παράδεισοι*); in conclusion, he remarks that originally this is a Persian word, which the Persians pronounced as *φάρδασι*.<sup>97</sup> The word *παράδεισος*, meaning 'garden, park', was an old borrowing from the Old Persian *parayadām*,<sup>98</sup> known since Xenophon, and later, due to the Bible,

coming to signify the Jewish and Christian paradise.<sup>99</sup> The word was not very common in Parthian and Sasanian times, being, for instance, attested in the form *pardēz* (*prδyz*) in Sogdian.<sup>100</sup> The problem with Photios's explanation is that the initial [φ] and accentuated ending [i] in his transcription of the Persian original reflect phonetic and morphological features distinctive to New Persian. Evidently, φαρδαισί corresponds to the New Persian فردوسی *firdawsī* 'paradisiac, heavenly man', in which the original initial [p] passed into [f] under the influence of Arabic, and the accentuated suffix [-i] forms substantivised adjective.

In a word, Photios concocted a New Persian translation for the specific meaning of παράδεισος as 'paradisiac fellow'. Photios's etymology leaves the impression that he, knowing no Persian, contacted a Persian native speaker to find out where this strange meaning of παράδεισος came from. This observation may be important as evidence for the spread of the New Persian language by the mid-ninth century, possibly among Western Persians of the time.

Photios likely gained native-speaker expertise for his etymologies, in particular, from the local Byzantine Persians. Another interesting case is represented by Photios's contemporary Eulogios, who spoke 'in his own language', that is, Persian, to Artabasdos (see Section 7.4). This episode deserves more detailed consideration. First, if Eulogios was a first-generation Persian newcomer, his knowledge of Persian is of no surprise. However, Eulogios and Apelates the Persian may have belonged to the progeny of the Persians of Theophobos. If Eulogios really was a descendant of the Byzantine Persians, his efficiency in spoken Persian is quite remarkable indicating that the second-generation Persians may have retained their native language. Second, the question arises: in which particular Persian language did Eulogios speak? Taking into consideration the peculiarities of Photios's etymologisation of οἱ παράδεισοι, one may suggest that Eulogios, as well as other Byzantine Persians in the mid-ninth century, spoke a form of the New Persian language.

The prevalence of the New Persian language in Constantinople during Photios's times might be confirmed also by Khurdād's tomb inscription, provided its date predates the tenth century. Moreover, the inscription suggests the existence of a community of New Persian speakers within the city (see Section 7.3).

On some special occasions, foreigners were required to use their own language. The Constantinopolitan court protocol prescribed acclamations in other languages for several ceremonies, symbolising the unity of peoples under the shadow of the imperial power.<sup>101</sup> According to the *De Cerimoniis* of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (tenth century), during some palace ceremonials, certain words and phrases had to be pronounced in barbaric languages, in particular, Latin, Gothic and Hebrew.<sup>102</sup> The *De Cerimoniis* does not specifically refer to the acclamations of the Pharganoi; however, it is quite possible that they, along with all other barbarians, also acclaimed, using



their own language (most likely Sogdian or Persian). Speaking in Persian, as it seems, was implied during sumptuous and sophisticated receptions of Persian envoys.<sup>103</sup>

Persian speech was probably heard in acclamations in the Constantinopolitan court in the fourteenth century. According to the ceremonial manual by Pseudo-Kodinos, the exclamation ‘Many years!’ took place in foreign languages during dominical feasts including Christmas, Epiphany and probably Palm Sunday, the Resurrection of Christ and Pentecost.<sup>104</sup> In particular, Pseudo-Kodinos maintains that on the twenty-fourth of December, during the Christmas Eve festivals, the Vardariotai guards would exclaim ‘in the language of their ancient homeland, that is, in Persian (Περσιστι)’.<sup>105</sup> It is also plausible that ‘Persian’ was used amidst ‘barbarian’ acclamations during other similar festivals. While one cannot rule out the possibility that ‘Persian’ here implies Turkic, however, considering that the Vardariotai of that time were Anatolians and Persian was the official language of the Anatolian Muslim courts, it is more likely that the language of the acclamations was Persian.<sup>106</sup>

The latter observation finds support in available evidence from the realities of fourteenth-century Byzantium, which reflects the prevalence of Persian among Anatolian immigrants. For instance, in February 1374, a certain individual named Antonios subscribed his refutation of the Latin faith in Persian using Arabic script (Figure 7.2). Whether Antonios was of Anatolian Turkic or Persian origin is uncertain, but he chose to express himself in Persian when asked to confirm his statement in writing in the language he knew best.<sup>107</sup> In normalised form the reading of his inscription is as follows:

+ اندون مسلمان شد مرده باور کردم با دلم بخدا

‘Andūn. The Muslim has passed away, I have believed with my heart in God’. Here ‘Andūn’ represents a Persian spelling of his name Antonios.

Moreover, as I have discussed in more detail elsewhere, beginning with the late thirteenth century onwards, the practical knowledge of foreign

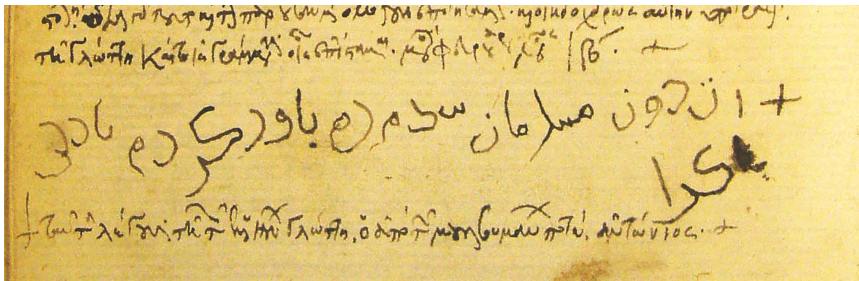


Figure 7.2 The Persian signature of Antonios/Andūn (after Mitsiou and Preisser-Kapeller, ‘Übertritte’, plate 5)

languages spread out of the small circle of non-Greek native speakers and became rather common among native Byzantines.<sup>108</sup> Some native Byzantines were known to have practised the ‘Persian language’, which could have denoted both Anatolian Turkic and Persian proper (see also Section 7.4). In particular, noting that the *megas domestikos* and later the emperor John Kantakouzenos spoke ‘Persian’, I hesitated to definitively determine which language it was, Turkic or Persian.<sup>109</sup> Now I am inclined to believe that Kantakouzenos, when he boasted of his knowledge of ‘Persian’, meant the Persian language proper, not Turkic. The reason is that, while being able to directly communicate with Anatolian Muslims in their own ‘Persian’ language, Kantakouzenos confessed to using an interpreter’s services in negotiations with the ‘Scythians’ (spring, 1324).<sup>110</sup> If Persian was prevalent in Anatolia including commoners, it was little known among the Turks of the North Black Sea region who spoke almost exclusively Turkic. This is why Kantakouzenos was unable to understand them. Therefore, in some instances when late Byzantine sources refer to speakers of ‘Persian’, they very likely mean the Persian language proper, not Turkic.<sup>111</sup>

The latter observation suggests that some other persons described as connoisseurs of Persian by Kantakouzenos practised the Persian language. Among them could have been Maurommates, the native of Philadelphia, who was sent by Kantakouzenos to his ally emir Umur-bek, and the general John Vatatzes, who had friendly terms with the Turkic emirs of western Anatolia and spoke Persian.<sup>112</sup> In addition, it is possible that the brothers Basilikos mastered Persian. They were courtiers of the Seljuk sultan and emigrated to Byzantium shortly before 1262. One of them, named Basil, was reported as being well-versed in ‘Hagarene letters’.<sup>113</sup>

It is also highly probable that Greek interpreters, who worked in the Byzantine and Ottoman chanceries, were experts in the Persian language along with Turkish and possibly Arabic. Theologos Korax, a native of Philadelphia, moved from Anatolia to Constantinople shortly after 1402 and became an interpreter of ‘Turkish’ at the imperial palace.<sup>114</sup> Michael Pylles was a Greek from Ephesus and served as a secretary at the Ottoman court in Adrianople.<sup>115</sup> Both of them, being chancery officers and translating and compiling documents, very likely mastered Persian, which at that time was one of the main languages of the Ottoman chancery and diplomacy.<sup>116</sup>

In fourteenth-century Byzantium, there was a curious attempt at linguistic systematisation through the astrological affinity of major languages of the Byzantine universe. An anonymous treatise from that time, titled *De planetarum patrociniis* (Monac. gr. 287), outlined this concept. It maintains that Saturn had influence over the Egyptian and Hebrew languages, Mars over Persian, the Sun over the Frankish language and partially over Greek. Mercury controls the Turkic and Khazar languages, participating with the Sun in the Greek language (Figure 7.3). Interestingly astrologically Greek

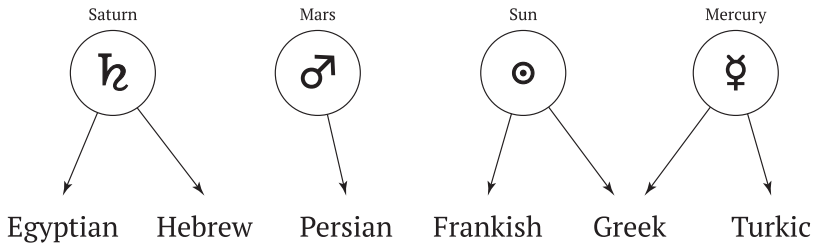


Figure 7.3 Astrological classification of languages (drawing: Oyat Shukurov)

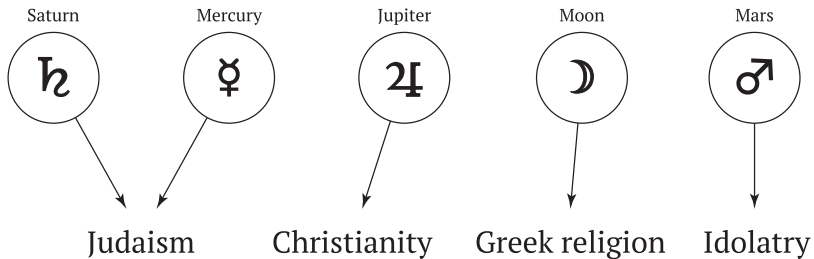


Figure 7.4 Astrological classification of religions (drawing: Oyat Shukurov)

is close to the Frankish and Turkic languages, and these three oppose Asian languages (Egyptian, Hebrew, Persian).<sup>117</sup>

Curiously, according to the *De planetarum patrociniis*, the astrological value of world religions does not completely align with the linguistic systematisation. According to this treatise, Saturn and Mercury are associated with Judaism, Jupiter with Christianity, Mars with idolatry and the Moon with the Greek religion. Consequently, the Persian language is astrologically associated, through patronage of Mars, with idolatry, likely referring to Zoroastrianism (Figure 7.4).<sup>118</sup>

However, the differentiation of Persian and Turkic in the astrological linguistic classification, as well as the above-discussed examples of circulating Persian in Byzantium, does not change the fact that Byzantines do not seem to have distinguished in daily life between Turkish and Persian, sometimes mixing them. It was Laonikos Chalkokondyles (d. ca. 1470), compiling his *History* during the early decades of the Tourkokratia, who finally brought clarity to this traditional ambiguity of the terms Περσική γλῶσσα and Περσιτί. Laonikos Chalkokondyles demonstrated an exceptional interest in foreign languages and made a series of thoughtful observations concerning the linguistic map of the neighbouring world.<sup>119</sup> Throughout his descriptions of neighbouring nations and tribes, he provides information about their languages. He finally finds out that Turkic is different from Persian and is spoken in Ottoman Anatolia, while Persian is spoken mostly in Iran.<sup>120</sup>

During the twelfth–fifteenth centuries, the Greek language incorporated many dozens of Persian words. While some of these words were borrowed from the Arabs, a greater number were acquired from Anatolian Muslims. It is challenging to determine with certainty the fraction of loanwords resulting from direct contacts of the Byzantines with the Persian culture. Nonetheless, I thought it appropriate to list Persian borrowings in the Appendix to this chapter.

The status of the Persian language increased dramatically after the thirteenth century for at least two reasons. First, it was a result of the rise in the Byzantine consciousness of the cultural status of the Ottomans, who not only were turning into a powerful political force, but were also rapidly developing their own deeply Persianate civilisation. Second, the rise in status was facilitated by the rediscovery of Persian science by the Byzantines, a topic that will be explored in the next section.

## 7.7 New Persian Wisdom

The *Persophonia* observed among both native and foreign Byzantines in fourteenth-century Constantinople, along with the case of the Mawlawī Sūfīs chanting Persian hymns in the imperial palace, as previously discussed in Sections 7.5 and 7.6, should be considered within the broader context of the growing influence of Persian culture on Byzantine intellectual life, a trend that commenced in the eleventh century. The impact of New Persian culture is particularly pronounced in the late Byzantine scientific tradition.

### 7.7.1 *The Persian and Persian-speaking Intellectuals*

A remarkable Persian presence in the Byzantine intellectual milieu is traceable throughout the middle and late periods. As already noted (Section 7.2), a Persian doctor and two prominent Persian Christians, Stephen the Persian and Michael Synkellos, moved to Constantinople from the East in the seventh–ninth centuries. During the tenth century, Genesios, discussing ninth-century events, noted that ‘the Persians, having been dispersed to various lands, some were adept at astronomy, preferring this to all the other sciences and arts as it had been developed to be quite exact’.<sup>121</sup> It appears that Genesios’s observation suggests the possibility that Persian diviners could have also been encountered in Byzantium.

Beginning with the mid-eleventh century, there was a noticeable increase in references to Persian astrologers and diviners in Constantinople, reflecting the growing significance of contemporary Oriental wisdom in Byzantium.<sup>122</sup> For instance, a Persian soothsayer, expert in divination by shoulder bone (*omoplatoscopia*), was a confidant of Patriarch Michael Keroularios († 1059).<sup>123</sup> Michael Psellos mentioned Persians among his foreign students.<sup>124</sup> As Paul Magdalino suggests, a certain Telmouses (Τελμουσης), a fellow astrologer of Symeon Seth, may have been a Persian or an Arab by

origin.<sup>125</sup> The only surviving Byzantine astrolabe (and probably one of the world's oldest) was commissioned by *protospatharios* and *hypatos* Sergios, a Byzantine Persian (1062). Sergios's inscription on the astrolabe, quite surprisingly highlighting his Persian origin, alongside the device's eastern design, hints at a connection with Persian scholarship and craftsmanship in Western Iran of the time (see Section 7.3).<sup>126</sup>

Beginning with the second half of the thirteenth century, sources refer to the presence of Persian experts in Byzantium more and more frequently, albeit sometimes rather vaguely. The monk Arsenios, in 1265/1266 (6774 of the Byzantine era), translated a treatise on geomancy by Shaykh al-Zanāī (*Zavātī*) from Persian. He was likely a Persian by origin, or a Persianate Turk or a Persian-speaking Greek from Anatolia; otherwise, it is difficult to explain his Persian literacy.<sup>127</sup> In the second half of the thirteenth century, Manuel Bryennios (d. ca. 1340) learned astronomy and mathematics from a savant, who 'came from a distant land, from Persia' (most likely Iran, but also Anatolia should not be ruled out) where these sciences were better developed.<sup>128</sup> According to Börje Bydén's plausible suggestion, another famous intellectual Maximos Planoudes (d. ca. 1305), who was Bryennios's close schoolmate, may have learned the specific Persian form of Indian numerals from a Persian teacher as well.<sup>129</sup> At the beginning of the fourteenth century, according to Gregoras, Emperor Andronikos II (1282–1328) was attended by three Persian physicians and prescribed a diet; the emperor, however, could not resist indulging in the heavy foods he preferred.<sup>130</sup> The most explicit and remarkable testimony of the presence of numerous Oriental astrologers in Byzantium comes from Constantine Akropolites (d. before 1324). In a letter, probably addressed to Theodora Raoulaina (d. 1300), he refers to some 'people from foreign lands who have come to live among us' and who are arrogant towards local Byzantine scholars, 'declaring that they know great things about future events, and indulging in absurd predictions, presumably according to scientific principles'.<sup>131</sup> There could be little doubt that the Persian astrologers are implied here.

Moreover, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Byzantine medical elite included Muslim physicians who supervised Constantinopolitan hospitals. A certain Arab Ibrāhīm (*Σαρακηνὸς Ἰβραῖμ*) was *aktouarios* of the Mangana Xenon and imperial chief physician (*basilikos archiīatros*).<sup>132</sup> In his *Cribratio Alkorani*, Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) mentions encountering a 'most learned and most eminent of the Turks' ('doctior et maior inter Teucros'), during his visit to Constantinople in 1437–1438. As Nicholas explains, this eminent Turk was in charge of hospitals in the Byzantine part of Constantinople ('supremus praeerat hospitalibus'). The Turk was secretly taught in the Gospel of John at Pera by the local Latins and had plans to visit the pope in Rome. However, during his inspection of the Constantinopolitan hospitals, he caught the plague and died. According to Miller, the 'Turk' may well have been *aktouarios* (director) of the Mangana Xenon.<sup>133</sup> In specific Nicholas's terminological usage, 'Teucus' can be understood as a general term

for the local Anatolian or Balkan Muslims. In light of the role of Persian science and intellectuals in late Byzantine culture, one may hypothesise that the head of the Constantinopolitan hospitals could have been in fact a Persian physician from Iran, or Anatolia, or the Muslim Balkans. It should also be added that in the West-European usage, since the early Crusades, the terms 'Turk' and 'Persian' were synonymous and interchangeable.<sup>134</sup>

The number of Asians involved in Byzantine practical sciences during the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries was unprecedentedly high. A rare surviving piece of evidence sheds light on how a foreign professional may have applied for a job in Byzantium. This evidence comes in the form of a treatise on the astrolabe with the dedicatory *prooimion* compiled by Shams-i Bukhārī, a Khorasanian, employed as an astrologer at the Ilkhanid court. Shams-i Bukhārī was identical to the Iranian astrologer Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Alī Kh<sup>w</sup>āja al-Wābkanawī al-Munajjim, who originated from Wābkana (Wābkand), a town near Bukhara.<sup>135</sup> The *prooimion* dedicates the treatise to a Byzantine emperor, presumably Andronikos II Palaiologos.<sup>136</sup> Many features of the rhetorical imagery of the *prooimion* provide enough evidence that it must have been authored by a person of Perso-Arabic culture. It is not completely clear whether Shams-i Bukhārī himself, having mastered some literary Greek, compiled the treatise or whether some of his Byzantine pupils translated it.<sup>137</sup> Based on the *prooimion*'s contents, Shams-i Bukhārī most likely visited Constantinople and presented an exquisite astrolabe to Andronikos II as a gift, along with a treatise describing it. Taking into account the purely personal tone of Shams-i Bukhārī's dedication, he appeared to have sought a personal favour from the emperor and perhaps aspired to a position at the court or some other reward.<sup>138</sup> It is unclear, however, whether or not, as the result of his double gift, he stayed at the Constantinopolitan court for an extended period of time.

As we have seen, Shams-i Bukhārī was not the only Persian intellectual serving (or just searching for employment) in Constantinople of the time. His presence raises the possibility that the Persian intellectuals came to Constantinople from Iran rather than from less sophisticated Muslim Anatolia. However, it is also worth noting that starting from the last decades of the thirteenth century, Muslim Asia Minor experienced an influx of Khorasanians from the Ilkhanid empire, which created tensions with the local Persian-speaking community.<sup>139</sup> Some of these Ilkhanid Khorasanians, as well as Western Persians, may well have ended their journeys in Constantinople.

During the same period of Andronikos II's reign, not only were Persian scholars welcomed in Constantinople, but the Greeks also sought opportunities in the Persian East. An exemplar figure is Gregory (George) Chioniades, a Byzantine scholar and cleric born in Constantinople in the mid-thirteenth century, where he received his education. The chronology of Chioniades's biography is approximate and purely hypothetical. Around the 1290s, Chioniades, desiring to learn the [Persian] language, which was essential

for studying medicine and which could be learned in Persia only, headed to the East. He went first to Trebizond, where he enlisted the support of the Trapezuntine emperor (presumably John II Grand Komnenos, r. 1280–1297), and then travelled to Persia, most likely to Tabriz. In Persia, he was captivated by the flourishing field of astronomy/astrology and became a student of the prominent Persian astronomer and courtier, Shams-i Bukhārī (as mentioned earlier). Chioniades returned to Trebizond before 1301, where he stayed for some time, and then proceeded to Constantinople. Chioniades visited Tabriz again and became the Orthodox bishop of the city around 1305. He likely traveled extensively in the Muslim Near East spending considerable time among the Persians, Chaldeans (in Mesopotamia?) and Arabs. Chioniades had learned Persian and Arabic and translated into Greek a number of works on astronomy and medicine, showing a better command of the Persian language than Arabic. He deserves credit for his contribution to teaching sciences in Constantinople and Trebizond and thus disseminating Persian wisdom. However, sometime between 1302 and 1308, he was suspected by the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate of heterodoxy, leading to publicise his confession of faith to prove his Orthodoxy, which anathemised those who believed in dependence on astrological prediction, fatalism and the superiority of Chaldean theology. He vehemently dissociated himself from sympathies towards Hellenic paganism, Judaism and Islam. During the later period of his life, he resided in Trebizond, returning around 1315, and died as a hieromonk in the monastery of St Eugenios before 1330.<sup>140</sup>

The influence of Chioniades on Byzantine science was outstanding. He left behind an astronomical school in Trebizond, in which his pupil Manuel (d. before 1346), a priest from Trebizond, taught mathematics and astronomy. The famous ephemerides for Trebizond for the year 1336, accompanied by astrological prognosis, were probably compiled by Manuel of Trebizond. Possibly Manuel of Trebizond knew Persian and was able to use Persian scientific literature in its original language.<sup>141</sup>

During the first decades of the fourteenth century, Trebizond emerged as an important centre of learning, attracting scholars from Constantinople, including George Chrysokokkes, a renowned physician, geographer and astronomer, who was active around the middle of the fourteenth century. Chrysokokkes was born in Constantinople, and at some point he went to Trebizond and became a pupil of Manuel of Trebizond. According to Anne Tihon, the underage emperor Manuel II Grand Komnenos, who was eight or nine years old and ruled from January to September 1332, patronised Chrysokokkes's work. Around 1347, Chrysokokkes returned to Constantinople and published *Ἐξήγησις εἰς τὴν Σύνταξιν τῶν Περσῶν* (*An explanation of the Syntaxis of the Persians*), which was based on Chioniades's astronomical treatises and gained great popularity.<sup>142</sup> George Chrysokokkes probably mastered the Persian language.<sup>143</sup>

Besides Chioniades and Chrysokokkes, another prominent figure seeking wisdom in Trebizond was Andrew Libadenos (d. ca. 1361) who was

born in Constantinople and came to Trebizond for study. The Trapezuntine *protovestiaros* Constantine Loukites (d. 1340), originated from Macedonia and first educated in Constantinople, was a close friend of Chioniades and, being the undisputed leader of the local intellectuals, undoubtedly profited from the Persian wisdom of Chioniades and his admirers.<sup>144</sup>

Evidently, Persian influence on Byzantine science during the turn of the fourteenth century should not be limited to the activities of a few individuals like Chioniades. It was very likely that there were more scholars involved in transmitting Persian knowledge into the Byzantine world, although their names might not have been preserved in extant sources.<sup>145</sup> A few decades before Chioniades's travel to Persia, Arsenios translated the Persian treatise of al-Zanātī. Additionally, we have records of at least two other translators from Persian during the mid-fourteenth century: George Choniates, who translated a Persian treatise on antidotes,<sup>146</sup> and Constantine Meliteniotes, who rendered another Persian work on antidotes into Greek.<sup>147</sup> Both physicians were repatriates from Anatolia. George Choniates came from the famous Anatolian city of Chonai, which had been taken by the Muslims shortly after 1204, while Constantine Meliteniotes came to Constantinople from Melitene, conquered by the Turks as early as 1101. Greek repatriates from Muslim Anatolia, being natural bilinguals, may have contributed to the transmission of Persophone science into Byzantine space.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, in addition to known and unknown Byzantines who served as intermediaries, it is evident from the case of Shams-i Bukhārī that the Persian scientists who settled in Byzantium may have also played a significant role.

### 7.7.2 *Andronikos II and the Persian*

As Paul Magdalino has shown, during the second half of the thirteenth century, Byzantine intellectuals endeavoured to work towards the restoration of the 'national' heritage in its diverse manifestations and, in particular, the rediscovery and revaluation of the scientific tradition inherited from antiquity. It was an extensive process involving the most prominent intellectuals of the time. The decisive role in the success of the intellectual revival was played by the imperial court and especially by Andronicus II and his *meγas logothetes*, Theodore Metochites. The scientific revival focussed on mathematics, astronomy and astrological prognostication.<sup>149</sup> Curiously enough, the cases discussed in the previous section clearly indicate that the peak of the influx of Persian intellectuals into Constantinople, as well as the time of introducing Persian astronomy and astrology to Byzantium by Persian-speaking Greeks like Gregory Chioniades can be traced back to the reign of Andronikos II (that is, approximately between the 1280s and 1320s). Andronikos II also commissioned translations of Oriental medical works.<sup>150</sup> However, the interest in Persian wisdom and Persians may well have started sometime earlier under Michael VIII Palaiologos (1259–1282). The earliest Persophone in my list is the monk Arsenios, who compiled his translation of al-Zanātī in 1265/1266;



it is remarkable that Arsenios was also indirectly connected to Andronikos II, then a child of six or seven years, through the latter's mother Empress Theodora, who commissioned the translation.<sup>151</sup>

The interest in Persian science and the availability of Persian original texts in the mid-thirteenth century Constantinople could have been induced by establishing the direct diplomatic contacts between Constantinople and Ilkhanid Iran in the 1260s. One important event that may have contributed to this cultural exchange was, as Maria Mavroudi suggests, the marriage of Maria Palaiologina Diplovatatzina, illegitimate daughter of Michael VIII, to Abaqa-Khan (1265–1282). In her voyage to Iran in 1265, Maria was accompanied by numerous attendants and servants, both clerics and lay, headed by the learned Euthymios, the Greek Orthodox patriarch of Antioch, Sarghis, the Armenian bishop of Erzincan, and Theodosios Villehardouin, the archimandrite of the Pantokrator monastery in Constantinople. Upon her coming back to Constantinople – probably around 1295, as Dimitri Korobeinikov has shown – Maria became active there as a benefactress and was reverently nicknamed by her compatriots, Lady of the Mongols and the Empress of the East. She retained her old high-profile contacts at the Ilkhanid court for a long time after leaving Tabriz. Maria seems to have been a well-educated woman (for instance, in Tabriz, she taught Christianity to the young prince Baydu) and not foreign to the culture, as her charity in Constantinople attests. In addition, it is very likely that some learned Byzantines stayed in Tabriz among her attendants. These observations suggest that Maria of the Mongols might have facilitated or even initiated the influx of information about the achievements of Persian science of the time.<sup>152</sup>

The boom of interest in Persian wisdom under Andronikos II finds an unexpected confirmation in a curious Persian account found in *As'ila-wu ajwiba-yi Rashīdī* ('Rashīd's questions and answers'), which was composed by the famous Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍl-Allāh Hamadānī (1247–1318). Rashīd al-Dīn was a historian, physician and intellectual, serving as Ilkhanid vizier from 1298 to 1316.<sup>153</sup> This voluminous work, completed in 1310/1311 (710 H), is based on a collection of letters between Rashīd al-Dīn and prominent scholars from the diverse regions of the Islamic world. The scholars sent challenging questions on matters of science, human existence and God to Tabriz, seeking elucidation from the vizier. Among the intellectuals sending their queries was a Byzantine Christian from Constantinople. Rashīd al-Dīn responded to his seven questions in considerable detail. The 'Byzantine' queries concern medico-philosophical and theological matters and are preceded by an important introduction that explains the context of communication between Rashīd al-Dīn and the Byzantine. The 'Byzantine' section of the treatise was first introduced, published (in a facsimile edition) and analysed by Zeki Velidi Togan. Togan translated the Introduction in full and the questions and answers partially into Turkish and English.<sup>154</sup>

The Byzantine sender, whose original Greek name is omitted in a lacuna, is identified in the title of the 'Byzantine' section as 'the chief of sages and

physicians Frankish Sage' (*malik al-ḥukamā wa al-aṭibbā ḥakīm-i farangī*).<sup>155</sup> 'Frankish', in the Persian usage of the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries, designated 'Byzantine' as a synonym for 'Rūmī', which was less precise, indicating both Anatolian Muslims and Byzantine Christians.<sup>156</sup> 'Frankish Sage', which is referred to further on in the text, was a nickname under which this Byzantine was known in Tabriz during that era (*ma' ruf ba ḥakīm-i farang*).<sup>157</sup> His Persian title 'the chief of sages and physicians' seems to be an exact translation of the two Greek titles ὕπατος τῶν φιλοσόφων and ἀκτουάριος.<sup>158</sup>

The Introduction of the Byzantine section appears to be an extensive quotation from the letter of the Frankish Sage to Rashīd al-Dīn, compiled in the first-person singular. The Frankish Sage recounts that he was previously kindly received and tutored by Rashīd al-Dīn, and some of the scientific information he acquired was translated into Greek (*zabān-i yūnānī*) and 'sent to [a lacuna for the name], who was the emperor of Constantinople, the capital of the country of Greece' ([...] *pādshāh-i Quṣṭanṭīniya ki dār-ul-mulk-i bilād-i Yūnān ast*).<sup>159</sup> As Togan has convincingly suggested, it was Andronikos II who was meant under 'the emperor of Constantinople'. Further on, the Frankish Sage recounts that he posed some challenging scientific questions, to which his compatriot scholars could not find satisfying answers. He then confirmed that Rashīd al-Dīn's responses would be translated into Greek and sent to Andronikos (again a lacuna in place of the name) for the benefit of the people of that country.<sup>160</sup> Consequently, as Dimitri Gutas has assumed, one may think that the questions and answers of the Byzantine section were finally translated into Greek and sent to Andronikos II.<sup>161</sup>

As Togan and Jamil Ragep have suggested and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim has cautiously supported,<sup>162</sup> it would be tempting to identify the Frankish Sage as Gregory Choniades. However, I hesitate to share this opinion, as well as to attribute the identity of the Frankish Sage to any known Byzantine high-ranking intellectual of the time. The Introduction clearly points to the high official standing of the Frankish Sage in Constantinople and gives the impression of his special intimacy with Andronikos II. Based on what is known about the life of Choniades, who was more welcome in Trebizond than in Constantinople, he is unlikely to meet these criteria.

In any case, Rashīd al-Dīn's account provides additional evidence of high-profile scientific contacts between Constantinople and Tabriz in the times of Andronikos II and the latter's pursuit and direct involvement in employing Persian wisdom for the revival of Hellenic sciences. In addition, it is possible that, apart from Choniades, some high-ranking Byzantine officials studied in Tabriz and took part in scientific communication with Iranian scholars.

### 7.7.3 Persian References

The Byzantines likely familiarised themselves with the outcomes of New Persian intellectual activity well before they discerned the distinctions between Arabic and Persian subcultures within the Islamic world. For

centuries, Greeks attributed the translated texts to Arabic solely due to the source language, barely realising that some of them were the Arabophone works produced by the New Persian culture thriving in Khorasan. We should not be too hard on them for their ‘ignorance’: as, for a long time, modern scholarship did not discern the revival of specifically Persian traditions within the Islamic cultural milieu, kept often under the common veil of Arabic.

Indeed, there are no surviving Greek translations directly from Persian before the thirteenth century. However, from the tenth century onwards, Byzantine intellectuals increasingly referred to Persian knowledge and intellectuals. Some documented instances of New Persian wisdom are found in Byzantine writings from the tenth century, in translations from Arabic, such as Achmet’s *Dreambook*. The earliest Greek translations of the Persian Jew Māshā’ llāh (ca. 810), a famous astrologer, are dated to around 1000.<sup>163</sup> The first translation of Apomasar’s (Abū Ma’ shar, d. 886) astrological texts from Arabic was made around 1015.<sup>164</sup> In the eleventh century, Symeon Seth, in his *Syntagma de alimentorum facultatibus*, referred to Persian wisdom, acknowledging that ‘many scholars, not only Hellenes, but also Persians, Hagarenes (Arabs) and Indians, wrote on the properties of foods’.<sup>165</sup> The classification of wisdom as Hagarene here was quite untypical for Byzantine writings; one cannot preclude that Seth meant generally ‘Muslims’ under ‘Hagarenes’, thus contrasting pre-Islamic Persians, and Muslim Arabs and Persians. However, elsewhere in the same treatise, Seth again refers to a Persian scientist implying the Persian scholar Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakarīyā al-Rāzī (d. ca. 935) writing in Arabic.<sup>166</sup> Likewise, an alchemist in an eleventh-century manuscript described specific Persian methods of copper colouring,<sup>167</sup> possibly alluding to the contemporary New Persian tradition. The revival of Byzantine astrology (and relevant exact sciences) in the eighth–twelfth centuries, as Paul Magdalino has demonstrated, stemmed from the influence of the contemporaneous Perso-Arabic scientific tradition.<sup>168</sup> However, certainly at that time, knowledge of Arabic (as well as Syriac, Latin and Slavonic) was quite common in Constantinople, unlike the Persian language.

From the thirteenth century onwards, we observe a rise in references to the Persian origin of translated or paraphrased Eastern texts, coupled with a decline in references to Arabic (Ἄραβος, Σαρακηνός). These were treatises in astronomy and astrology, alchemy, medicine, pharmacology and various kinds of magic. In some cases, the translation from Persian is explicitly indicated as ‘ἐκ Περσικῆς κοιμισθεῖσαι καὶ ἐξελληνισθεῖσαι’,<sup>169</sup> ‘ἐμετεγκομίσθησαν ἐκ τῶν Περσῶν εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα’,<sup>170</sup> ‘μετηνέχθη δ’ ἐκ τῆς τῶν Περσῶν διαλέκτου’,<sup>171</sup> ‘ἐρμηνευθεῖσα ἐκ τῆς ἰατρικῆς τέχνης τῶν Περσῶν’<sup>172</sup> and the like. More frequently, Greek authors gave generalising references to the Persian origin of information like ‘οἱ τῶν Ἀράβων καὶ Περσῶν ἐπιστήμονες’,<sup>173</sup> ‘ἐκ τῶν Περσῶν’, ‘τῶν Περσῶν’, ‘Περσῶν’, ‘Περσικός’, ‘κατὰ Πέρσας’<sup>174</sup> and sometimes more specifically like ‘Πέρσου φιλοσόφου’,<sup>175</sup> ‘λέγουσιν οἱ Πέρσαι’<sup>176</sup> and others. Sometimes, the Persian derivation may have turned into an identifier of a

distinct, and probably superior, type of knowledge or scientific tool, such as seen in cases like the ‘syntaxis of the Persians’, ‘palmoscopy of the Persians’, ‘Persian astrolabe’, ‘Persian clock’ and the like.<sup>177</sup> In all these instances, a direct translation from Persian or a secondary usage of Persian sources may have been implied. Although the stated Persian identity of a text could have been fictitious,<sup>178</sup> this by itself is a remarkable testimony of the importance and popularity of Persian scientific production of the time.

Some Persian authors were referred to by name, such as, for instance, the astrologer Abū Ma‘shar-i Balkhī; the physician, philosopher and alchemist Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Rāzī (d. ca. 935);<sup>179</sup> the physician and philosopher Ibn-i Sīnā (980–1037);<sup>180</sup> and the astronomers ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shirwānī (fl. 1100), ‘Abd al-Raḥmān-i Khāzinī (first half of the 12th cen.), Naṣīr al-Dīn-i Ṭūsī (1201–1274) and Ḥusām-i Sālār (prior to 1320).<sup>181</sup> Najīb al-Dīn Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. ‘Umar al-Samarqandī (d. 1222), an influential Iranian medic writing in Arabic who authored a number of works, was referred to in the fourteenth-century Greek translations of some of his treatises.<sup>182</sup>

In the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Persian intellectuals gained prominence, overshadowing Arabs and the Arabic tradition. The monk Arsenios defines al-Zanātī, writing in Arabic and most probably a Berber, as a Persian philosopher.<sup>183</sup> Gregory Chioniadēs relates that the Persians count years according to the moon, and begin the year with the month of *Muḥarram* (Μουχαράμ), determining the month by seeing the new moon. In this passage, Chioniadēs specifically refers to his contemporary Muslim Persians, ascribing to them a Semitic calendar system, only to further specify that the fire-worshipping Persians have a solar year.<sup>184</sup> Curiously enough, Chioniadēs’s accentuation of Μουχαράμ (as well as of other Muslim months) is Persian, but not Arabic. In Arabic, the stress falls on the second-to-last syllable.<sup>185</sup> Given the favourable reception of Iranian science by the Byzantines as discussed earlier, the ‘Persianisation’ of Arabophone wisdom appears quite natural. The Byzantine tradition distinctly mirrored the flourishing of New Persian culture in Ilkhanid Iran.

#### 7.7.4 *Byzantine Science Orientalised*

It is, of course, far too early to make any definite conclusions about the content, quantity and ratio of scientific texts across disciplines transferred from Persia into Greek science. Many ‘Persianate’ works are still unpublished and even unidentified, as they are scattered across hundreds of manuscripts from the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries.<sup>186</sup> A systematic effort to identify and catalogue them is yet to begin. One conceptual challenge arises from the fact that scholars, with few exceptions, still do not problematise the difference between ‘Arabic’ and ‘Persian’ in Byzantine scientific translations and paraphrases. Instead, they tend to categorise both under the general label of ‘Arabic science’. However, as shown earlier, the Byzantines did

draw a distinction between the Arabic and Persian affiliations of a source text, even if they occasionally erred in favour of both sides. The difference between Arabic and Persian did matter, as Byzantine thought categorised foreign intellectual and material objects based on their ethno-geographical provenance.<sup>187</sup>

Given the present state of knowledge, it seems that the Byzantines were mostly interested in New Persian texts related to astronomy and astrology, mathematics, astro-medicine,<sup>188</sup> medical diagnostics, pharmacology and botany,<sup>189</sup> alchemy, dream interpretation and certain types of instrumental and prognostic magic.<sup>190</sup> In addition, as discussed earlier, Rashīd al-Dīn evidenced the interest of the Byzantines in Persian natural philosophy and theology. The impact of Persophone science is most clearly visible in the Byzantine astronomical and medical traditions. New, refined methods of calculating celestial coordinates were adopted and finally prevailed, at the turn of the fourteenth century. Likewise, medical science acquired new methods of diagnosing and treating diseases, along with new recipes.

In the course of several decades after the appearance of Persian wisdom within the Byzantine scientific milieu, not all Byzantine intellectuals welcomed the new trends. Most prominent intellectuals, such as Theodore Metochites (d. 1332), Constantine Akropolites (d. before 1324), Nikephoros Gregoras (d. before 1361) and others in their more or less lengthy and clear statements, defended the superiority of the indigenous Hellenic tradition over Persian science.<sup>191</sup> However, as demonstrated by Alberto Bardi, beginning in the mid-fourteenth century, Persian wisdom, at least in respect of astronomy and mathematics, was absorbed by Byzantine scholarship and adopted as normative knowledge suitable for teaching in private and public schools.<sup>192</sup> This transformation was the result of the textual activity (authoring, scribing, glossing) of several prominent Byzantine scholars such as Chrysokokkes, Isaac Argyros (d. 1375), John Abramios (d. after 1390s), Theodore Meliteniotes (d. 1393), John Chortasmenos (d. before 1439), Bessarion (d. 1472) and others, including anonymous authors.<sup>193</sup>

A new significant feature in the evolution of Byzantine science can be observed in the late thirteenth century as Persian culture sparked the interest of native Byzantines in Oriental languages, especially in Persian. Unlike previous times, when translations were exclusively provided by natural bilinguals, now native Greeks began to actively learn foreign languages. Besides Chioniades, probably two other native Byzantines, Manuel of Trebizond and George Chrysokokkes, managed to learn Persian well to be able to understand relatively complicated scientific texts. If the interest of such persons in Oriental scientific wisdom may not appear unusual and exotic for a Byzantine, their activity as consumers of foreign literature in its original language exemplifies a cultural phenomenon that was rather rare among the Byzantines.

The unprecedented spread of Persian technical knowledge among Greek intellectuals is testified by new developments in the Byzantine scientific

tradition. One notable feature is the increasing use of untranslated Arabic and Persian original terminology, which was first observed around the turn of the fourteenth century. In Greek texts related to astronomy/astrology and medicine, foreign terminology often remained untranslated, even in those cases when it was not a translation, but an original work by a Greek author.<sup>194</sup> Logically enough, the latter new trend led to the emergence of the new genre of Arabo-Persian to Greek scientific lexicons. A few of them contained Arabographic source words, but in most cases, Arabic or Persian terms were written in Greek characters.<sup>195</sup>

The intensive scientific contacts between the Byzantine world and Ilkhanid Persia visibly transfigured the Hellenic scientific landscape: new features can be observed in its content, methodology, terminology and even genre structure. The cultural meeting between Byzantium and Iran, centred on sciences, led to the remarkable Orientalising of Hellenism, or in other words, considering the Persian roots of Ancient Greek wisdom, its secondary Persianisation.

#### 7.7.5 *Persian Moralising*

The Byzantines, in their eagerness to obtain sciences, were virtually indifferent to another important component of New Persian wisdom, epic, moralistic and lyrical storytelling in prose and verse, which probably constituted one of the most prominent contributions of the Iranian genius into world culture. There are only a few exceptions to this general rule. First, the most remarkable exception is represented by the collection of moralistic tales the *Book of Syntipas*, which is based on the popular motif of the Seven Wise Masters, prevalent in the West and the Orient, and embodied in the Persian *Sinbād-nāma*. The *Book of Syntipas* was rendered from Syriac by Michael Andreopoulos from Melitene (end of the eleventh century), who explicitly indicated its Persian primary source authored by a certain Mousos the Persian.<sup>196</sup> The key characters of the *Syntipas* are the king Cyrus and his chief philosopher and his son's tutor, Syntipas; the action takes place in Persia. The *Book of Syntipas* demonstrates one of the dominant types of cultural transfer, an *exotic complementation*: the plot and its key characters are new and foreign to the Byzantine cultural space, conferring a manifestly exotic flavour to the narration.<sup>197</sup>

Another example of Persian moralising belongs to John VI Kantakouzenos, who in his 'History' reflected on the ambivalent personality of Anne of Savoy, who ruled from 1341 to 1347 in Constantinople as regent for her son John V Palaiologos. Kantakouzenos defines her character traits by quoting a Persian proverb: 'I heard a Persian proverb speaking about woman's nature correctly and wisely: it is said that even if a woman's head has risen to the clouds, nevertheless she remains tied to the earth'. Kantakouzenos further explains its meaning: even if a woman reaches the top of judgement, greatness and courage, she will remain tied to her natural passions.<sup>198</sup> Of course,

the latter instance is less substantial compared to the *Syntipas*, but both indicate a different source of information, distinct from the scientific texts, from which the Byzantines acquired Persian wisdom.

### 7.8 A Persian Gazetteer

Perhaps the strongest argument in favour of Byzantine, and especially late Byzantine interest in contemporaneous Persia, is provided by practical geographical knowledge, which considerably emended the Byzantine onomastic conventions. The Byzantines had accumulated profound knowledge of actual Persian topography. While data from historiography and other high genres had a rather narrow geographical horizon that rarely went beyond the empire's borders, Byzantine science, especially through astrological chorography, provided information on the eastern parts of the *oikoumene* stretching as far as India. Below I will outline the extent of Byzantine knowledge based on texts of different genres including astrological ones.

Although astrology and astrological chorography were specific scientific genres, they enjoyed popularity among Byzantine intellectuals and the broader public.<sup>199</sup> For the purpose of this discussion, I will set aside purely astrological aspects which could be a topic for a separate study in the future.<sup>200</sup> Instead, it is sufficient to note here that astrological works differentiated between Persia and Khorasan, assigning to them different zodiac signs and planetary rulers.<sup>201</sup> Probably the earliest astrological account to contain an up-to-date geographical image of Persia in general and Khorasan in particular can be found in the tenth- or eleventh-century Greek translation of the treatises of Apomasar (Abū Ma'shar Ja'far al-Balkhī). Apomasar hailed from Balkh in Khorasan, and was a renowned astronomer and astrologer who wrote in Arabic. He could be considered a Persian 'nationalist' of sorts.<sup>202</sup> Apomasar and later astrological treatises of the eleventh to fifteenth centuries referred to many new place names relevant to contemporary Persia.

In the following list, I include those New Persian place and ethnic autonyms that were referred to in historiography and other narrative texts, as well as in astrological horoscopes and explanatory narratives written for the general public. I have omitted antique terms like Media, Massagetae, Hyrcania and the like, which were unknown to Neo-Persian culture. In addition to the place names in the Iranian lands proper, the list includes some New Persian geographical terms for the regions and localities outside Greater Iran (see Figure 7.5).

Ἀδραϊγάν, τό (Ἐδροηγάν, Ἀδραβίγανον, Ἀνδροπαρκάνη etc.) [7th–8th cen.] – Ādharbāyagān (آذربایگان). – *TLG*, s.v. Ἀδορβαδιγανον (Pseudo-Methodios, Nikephoros I, Theophanes, Constantine Porphyrogenetos, Kedrenos); *CCAG*, 12:137.10

Ἀμούλ, Ἀμούλ, τό [14th cen.] – Āmul (آمل). – *CCAG*, 4:127.4; Chioniades (Pingree), 186.10–12.

Αρταβίλης, ὁ [15th cen.] – of Ardabīl (اردبیل). – Chalkokondyles, 2:220.26, 221.8.

Ἀσπαχῶν *see* Σπαχῶν

Ἀχουάζ, τό [14th cen.] – Ahwāz (اهواز). – CCAG, 5/3:132.10

Βαγδάδ, τό (Βαγδᾶ, Βογδάδα, Παγδάτι etc.) [8th–9th cen.] – Baghdād (بغداد). – TLG, s.v. Βαγδάδ (Theophanes, Leo Choïrosphaktes, Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *Digenes Akritas*, Theophanes Continuatus, Skylitzes etc.); CCAG, 1:130.29–30 (defined as a Syriac name)

Βοχαρά, ἡ (\*Μπουχαρά, \*Πουχάρα) [14th cen.] – Bukhārā (بخارا). – CCAG, 5/3:131.26; Chionïades (Pingree), 36.5 (adjective Πουχάρης), 306.2 and 310.30 (adjective Μπουχαρή)

Δελεμίκης, ὁ (Δελεμῖται, Διλυμνῖται) [10th cen.] – of Daylam (ديلم). – Theodosios Diakonos, line 940; Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De cerimoniis* (Reiske), 511.4, 593.1–3; CCAG, 4:127.1

Καπούλ, τό [14th cen.] – Kābul (کابل). – CCAG, 5/3:131.25 (probably mistakenly Κάπουλ).

Κερμάν, τό (Κερδάν, Καραμάνων) [14th cen.] – Kirmān (کرمان). – CCAG, 4:127.3, 5/3:131.21, 131.25

Κουλάνη *see* Χιλάν

Κουρτιστάν, τό [14th cen.] – Kurdistān (کردستان). – Lampros, ‘Τραπεζουντιακόν ωροσκόπιον’, 40.31; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 395

Κοχστάν, τό [15th cen.] ← Kūhistān (کوهستان), ‘mountain, mountainous region’, today Dagestan (?). – CCAG, 2:129.27–28: εἰς τὸ Κοχστάν, ὅς ἐστι τόπος τῶν Τούρκων

Κώμη, τό [14th cen.] – Qum (قم). – CCAG, 5/3:131.29

Μάρρουν, Μαλδούτ, τό [14th cen.] – Marw (مرو). – CCAG, 4:127.1, 5/3:131.14

Μουκάν, τό (Μουκᾶν, Μουγάν, Μουκᾶ) [14th cen.] – Mughān (مغان). – Lampros, ‘Τραπεζουντιακόν ωροσκόπιον’, 41.1; CCAG, 5/3:131.9, 131.13

Πάλχ, τό [14th cen.] – Balkh (بلخ). – CCAG, 2:123.9 (adjective Παλχιώτης), 5/3:131.4, 131.26.

Πατύλη, τό [15th cen.] – ‘region of Baghdad’ ← Bābil (بابل) and Bābilistān (بابلستان); originally Syriac ܒܒܠ. – CCAG, 12:137.10, 138.27, 141.8, 145.13

Πάρσις (Φάρση), ἡ [13th cen.] – Pārs/Fārs (پارس/فارس). – CCAG, 8/3:175.19, 176.2, 12:137.10

Πουρζάν, τό [14th cen.] – Jurjān/Gurgān (جرجان/گرگان). – CCAG, 5/3:131.9

Ρέ, τό [11th cen.] (ancient Ραγαί) – Ray (ری). – Kedrenos, 2:580.14; Skylitzes, *Historia*, 453.5; Skylitzes Continuatus, 177.2–6; CCAG, 4:127.4, 5/1:144.5, 5/3:131.29, 132.4

Σαμαρχάνδη, τό (Συμαρκατ, Σαμαρχάντ, Σεμαρχάνιν) [14th cen.] – Samarqand (سمرقند). – Vindobonensis medicus gr. 21, fol. 146r (adjective Συμαρκατί); *Kleinchroniken*, 1:111.7.2 (no. 12, II); Doukas, 91.19 (XV, 6): μητρόπολις Περσίας; Chalkokondyles, 1:60.6, 1:98.3, 1:102.5, 1:105.16–20, 1:107.9–17, 1:108.2, 1:110.5, 1:118.8–119.15, 1:156.2–157.12, 2:146.1



Σιζιστάν, τό [14th cen.] – Sijistān/Sīstān (سیستان / سجستان). – CCAG, 5/3:131.25, 7:96.19

Σίνδα, ἡ [14th cen.] – ‘Sindh’ ← Sind (سند). – CCAG, 5/3:132.7, 132.13 (ἡ τῶν Σίνδων χώρα)

Σουγδία, Σουγδαῖα, ἡ [8th cen.] – today Sudak ← Sughd (سغد) ‘Sogdia’. – TLG, s.v. Σουγδαῖα

Σπαχάν, τό (Ἀσπαχᾶν, Σπάχαις, Σπαχίνιον, Σπαχᾶ) [11th cen.] – Isfahān (اسفهان). – TLG, s.v. Ἀσπαχᾶν (Kedrenos, Skylitzes, Nikephoros Bryennios, Zonaras, Anna Komnene), CCAG, 4:127.5, 5/3:131.10, 10:143.24

Σταχάν, τό [14th cen.] – possibly Istakhr (استخر and اصطخر). – CCAG, 5/3:132.4

Ταβρίζιον, τό (Ταβρέζιον, Ταυρέζ, Ταυρές, etc.) [11th cen.] – Tabrīz (تبریز). – TLG, s.v. Ταβρίζιον (Kedrenos, Skylitzes, Nikephoros Bryennios, Chioniades, Michael Panaretos, Chalkokondyles, *Chronica breviora*); Lampros, ‘Τραπεζουντιακόν ωροσκόπιον’, 39.18; Diller, ‘Byzantine Lists’, 30.19, 31.25; Ebersolt, ‘Itinéraire’, 223–224

Ταπαραστάν, τό [14th cen.] – Ṭabaristān (طبرستان). – CCAG, 5/3:132.15

Ταχαρωστάν, τό [14th cen.] – Takhāristān (تخارستان). – CCAG, 5/3:131.25–26

Τζινιστάν, τό [14th cen.] – ‘China’ ← Chīnistān (چینستان). – CCAG, 5/2:13 (f. 232)

Τουπάτ, τό [11th–12th cen.] – ‘Tibet’ ← Tūbbat (توبت) and Tibbit /Tabbat (تبت). – Seth (Langkavel), 66.20–22. For the Persian term for Tibet, see: Dehkhodā, s.v. تبت; Narshakhī (Frye), 134 (commentaries in note 178)

Τούς, τό [14th cen.] – Ṭūs (طوس). – CCAG, 5/3:131.18

Φαργάνοι, οἱ [9th cen.] – of Farghāna (فرغانه). – TLG, s.v.; see also Section 7.3

Φάρση *see* Πάρσις

Χαμαδᾶν, τό [14th cen.] – Hamadān (همدان). – CCAG, 5/3:131.5

Χασάς, τό [15th cen.?] – Khūzistān (خوزستان). – CCAG, 4:127.6

Χαταῖα, ἡ (Χατάια, τά, Χεταῖοι, οἱ) [14th cen.] – Khitāy (ختای) ‘China’ ← Uighur *kytai*. – Chioniades (Pingree), 40.29ff; Panaretos, 108.36; CCAG, 1:85.3, 86.6, 86.16, 86.24; Chalkokondyles, 1:118.11–21, 120.6, 129.17–18, 135.3–9, 153.6–10, 154.14; see also: Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 35, 403

Χεσίη, ἡ [15th cen.] – Kēsh/Kīsh (کیش) and Kash (کش). – Chalkokondyles, 1:119.15–20, 120.1–3, 130.10, 136.13, 151.16, 152.4, 154.15, 159.1; for etymology, see: TLG, s.v. Χεσίη: ‘Kesh (= Shahrisabz, birthplace of Timur)’

Χηντουστάνη, Ἰνδουστάνη, τό [15th cen.] – ‘India’ ← Hindūstān (هندوستان). – CCAG, 11/2:120.5, 12:139.20, 144.7

Χιλάν, τό (Χιλουάν, Κοιλάνη) [14th cen.?] – Gilān (گیلان). – CCAG, 4:126.12; Lampros, ‘Τραπεζουντιακόν ωροσκόπιον’, 41.1

Χοροσάν, ὁ, τό [9th cen.] – Khurāsān (خراسان). – TLG, s.v.; CCAG, 4:126.10, 5:131.14, 7:96.19, 12:137.11; see also Section 7.1



Figure 7.5 New Persian place names in Byzantine sources (cartography: Oyat Shukurov)

Admittedly in certain instances, the above-mentioned place names and ethnic terms appear in translations or paraphrases of Arabic and Persian source materials. Some of the terms listed are encountered in texts of different narrative genres and were rather prevalent. Additionally, some other geographical and ethnic terms were featured in 'technical' genres, such as textual production of the imperial court and scientific ('occult') texts. However, it is worth adding that the function of the listed New Persian terms may have gone beyond the narrow interest of astronomers/astrologers since they were not the result of blind imitation of the underlying Persian source texts. The topographic horizon of the *Horoscope for Trebizond* (1336/1337), which was addressed to the everyday needs of the local politicians, craftsmen and merchants, besides Trebizond, focusses exclusively on the Orient and specifically Western Iran.<sup>203</sup> The case of the *Horoscope for Trebizond* thus highlights the practical significance of New Persian geography, or at least its part, in the Byzantine world picture.

What is important is that some geographic localities, well-known since antiquity, acquired their Persianate duplets, such as Χηντουστάνη and Ἰνδουστάνη for India, Τζινιστάν and Χαταΐα for China, and Παύλη for the region of Baghdad. The group of Persianate place names also includes Τουπάτ for the modern region of Tibet or a city within it. The place name was referred to by Symeon Seth who, following the Persian (or Arabo-Persian) tradition, remarked that the finest quality musk 'is found in a city situated to the east of Khorasan and called Tibet'.<sup>204</sup> This remains the sole reference to Tibet in Byzantine tradition, as far as I know. Therefore, at a certain point, the Byzantines began calling some distant geographical locations in the East using New Persian terms.

The Byzantines largely disregarded the new toponymics of urban centres and socio-political formations emerging in the regions under Islamic control. The only exception, as we have seen, was made for the New Persian culture, which brought about a significant shift in the traditional Byzantine world picture. Some reasons for this shift were discussed in Section 7.7: the expansion of the horizon of geographical knowledge towards Iran was closely linked to the dissemination of Persian science.

## 7.9 Continuity of Persias

The idea of a connection between the ancient and contemporary Persians featured in Byzantine political thought during the middle Byzantine period and beyond, although it was not fully explored or detailed. The author of the tenth-century account of Theophobos's affairs remembers well the Achaemenid and Sasanian customs of royal succession and anticipates their continued validity among contemporary Iranians:

Now, it is inviolable law for the Persians that no one may be their ruler unless he be of royal lineage; but on account of the continuous wars

and displacements here and there, their royal race had died out, driven off by the Hagarenes...<sup>205</sup>

The author of the account perceives the Muslim conquests as having caused a rupture in standard practices, thereby implying a direct cultural and blood connection between the customs of the ancient and contemporary Persians.

Another example demonstrates the Byzantines' keen awareness of the ethno-cultural shifts in Asian politics over the past centuries. In the eleventh century, in a brief passage, John Skylitzes aptly encapsulated a *longue durée* trend in Persian political and cultural self-determination:

The Persian race having had the office of ruler stolen away from it by the Saracens never ceased to be indignant and bear a grudge against them on this account. [The Persians] were ever on the lookout for the opportunity and means of striking down those who held power over them, in order to restore their ancestral rule.<sup>206</sup>

Skylitzes grasped the very essence of the Arab-Iranian civilisational rivalry: as a matter of fact, the Persians had long harboured aspirations of restoring Iran's former glory, and the first practical steps in this direction were taken in ninth-century Eastern Iran. This pursuit of Iran for cultural originality continued throughout the Middle Ages. Skylitzes's expertise on the essence of events in the East is perceptive and accurate. Once again, he establishes a direct cultural and ancestral connection between the ancient and contemporary Persians.

The twelfth-century Byzantines believed that Anatolian Muslims were heirs and continuators of the ancient Persians. Eustathios of Thessalonike concisely summarises the origins of the Islamised 'Persians', linking them with pre-Islamic Sasanian Iran:

nations descended from Hagar intermingled with the Persian one, mixed together into one as it were, and combining into a league, intruded into Roman affairs, and with only a little incitement, arrived on our doorstep, and they insinuated themselves into our territory, and eventually reached into our innermost parts.<sup>207</sup>

Elsewhere the same author addressed a rhetorical question to the Anatolian Seljuk sultan as an Achaemenid king: 'Do you wish, O Perses, to be joined in friendship?'<sup>208</sup>

Likewise, the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Byzantines cultivated the idea of continuity between the Persians of the past (including those of the twelfth century) and the Ottomans, as has been already discussed in Chapter 5.2.

The sense of continuity between ancient Persia and contemporaneous Iran may also be discerned in the late Byzantine scientific texts. References to ancient Persian authorities, such as Zoroaster (see Chapter 6.1), as well as to contemporary New Persian scholars, appear in the texts of the same genre, forming part of the same discourse.<sup>209</sup> In this sense, quite telling is the example of the popular *Kyranides*, a late Antique compendium of magical properties of diverse animate and inanimate objects and their creative powers, which, as a *texte vivant*, was undergoing constant editorial intervention and reworking throughout the centuries. The authorship of a part of the *Kyranides*, as well as of some individual recipes and recommendations, were ascribed to the legendary Persian king Kyranos.<sup>210</sup> This figure not being tied to a particular time period, may have been perceived by the late Byzantine audience either as an ancient Persian king or as a coeval of the reader.

The idea of the unity of all Persian cultural types, spanning the Achaemenids to the present-day Persians, was undoubtedly driven by the explanatory functions of cultural memory. Cultural memory, through its associations, provided models for categorising new political, social and intellectual phenomena emerging in Iran. The notable feature of most cases explored in this chapter resides in the fact that memory associations not only offered explanatory analogies but also effectively typified these phenomena. In this sense, New Persians and New Persian culture were integrated into the Four-kingdom schema as a continuation of the pre-Islamic Persian types.

The notion of continuity between Old and New Persians can also be observed in Byzantine art. The scene of the adoration of the Magi in the fourteenth-century church of St Nicholas Orphanos in Thessalonike represents the Magi, in accordance with standard iconography, wearing 'Persian' small caps and mantles (see Chapter 1.8). However, a stable boy of the Magi, keeping their horses in the background, is dressed in 'contemporaneous' Persian attire, including a turban and a robe.<sup>211</sup> In the fourteenth-century miniatures of the Venice manuscript of the *Alexander Romance*, the Persians of Darius are depicted wearing 'contemporaneous' Persian turbans, caftans and robes.<sup>212</sup> In both cases, painters 'updated' the appearance of ancient Persians to align with the contemporary fashion of Muslim Persians, thus affirming the persistence of Persian identity across the ages.

Although the Byzantines acknowledged this continuity by linking Old and New Persians, this *a priori* knowledge was never conceptualised or turned into a self-contained topic for research and reflection among Byzantine intellectuals.

### 7.10 Conclusion: Degrees of Persianisation

Persia and the Persians maintained a continuous presence in the Byzantine social and political milieu throughout the middle and late periods. However, the measure and typology of the New Persian impact differed at different times. From the seventh to the ninth centuries, Byzantium experienced mass

migrations of the Persians fleeing Islamisation. In the tenth to eleventh centuries, the Persian ethnic presence in the empire diminished. However, starting from the twelfth century onwards, the role of the Anatolian and later Ilkhanid Persians was steadily increasing.

In the middle Byzantine period, the presence of Persian ethnicity had limited impact on the recipient culture. Most outcomes of Persian culture of the time were acquired under the common label of 'Arabic'. However, a notable transformation took place in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. A substantial influx of Anatolian Muslims and Ilkhanid Persians occurred,<sup>213</sup> coinciding with a robust scientific exchange between the Byzantine world and Iran.

Beginning at the turn of the fourteenth century, Persian culture gained multifaceted importance to an unprecedented scale. Both politicians (such as Kantakouzenos) and scientists (such as Chioniades) managed to learn the Persian language and put it into practice in their daily activities. The Persian language was now frequently heard in Constantinople, even within the imperial palace, due to the influx of Persian-speaking newcomers and visitors. The Persianisation of the intellectual landscape particularly impacted Byzantine exact and practical sciences, which underwent substantial methodological and structural evolution.

Another fundamental change occurred in the Byzantine topographic image of the world. The fact is that new political and confessional geographical partitions, along with the associated toponymic nomenclature stemming from the establishment of the Islamic world, did not significantly change the core of the Byzantine image of the *oikoumene*. Continuous use of traditional geographic names by the Byzantines had nothing to do with 'archaisation': for a Byzantine, the world had obtained its names long ago and there were no serious heuristic reasons to revise its habitual nomenclature.<sup>214</sup> The only major exception from this general rule was made for the contemporaneous toponymy of Iran. First, since the eighth or ninth century, the term Khorasan was adopted, while later on dozens of Persian toponyms entered Byzantine usage. The noted phenomenon may be qualified as a form of Persianisation of the Byzantine intellectual landscape, a trend that especially intensified during late Byzantine times.

The observed Persianising tendencies highlight another important feature. The Byzantine mentality clearly distinguished between religious and cultural facets of human existence and, unlike contemporary knowledge, hardly appreciated any connection between religious and cultural types. The Byzantines did possess a general term for Muslims as a group of believers sharing specific religious dogmas (Μουσουλμάνοι, Άγαρηνοί). However, unlike our perspective, they lacked a general political term for the Islamic world as a cultural unity. Persian cultural elements were adopted as a product of the Persian national genius, regardless of the religious affiliation prevalent in contemporaneous Iran. It was not religion but culture that predominated in the Byzantine perceptions of Persia.

# Appendix

## A list of some remarkable New Persian borrowings

The following section represents a concise inventory of Persian borrowings in the Middle Greek language. The collection and description of Persian loanwords in Middle Greek has been addressed in a number of studies.<sup>215</sup> However, not all etymologies proposed in these publications can be endorsed. In the following list, I will incorporate only those that seem credible or established.<sup>216</sup> The square brackets following the lemma provide the date of the earliest appearance of the word (or one of its variants) in Greek sources.

The present list comprises solely words that were in common usage, excluding technical scientific terminology (mostly astronomical/astrological and medical). As recent studies show, technical borrowings from Persian were abundant in late Byzantine astronomical and medical literature. Most of them were in fact originally Arabic words adopted by Persian science (see Section 7.4). Nonetheless, there are instances where authentic Persian vocabulary can be encountered, such as remarkable references to old Persian names for months in astronomical treatises: Φαρουαρτῆς (فروردین), Ἀρτιπέεστ (اردیبهشت), Χορτάτ (خرداد), Τυρμά (تیرماه), Μερτάτ (مرداد), Σαχριοῦρ (شهریور), Μέχερμα (مهرماه), Ἀπάνμα (آبانماه), Ἄδερμα (آذرماه), Δῆμα (دیماه), Πεχμάν (بهمن) and Ἀσφνάρημτ (اسفندارمذ).<sup>217</sup> In most cases, derivatives of the headwords are not included.

ἀμυραχούρης, ὁ [13th cen.] – ‘chief stable master’ ← Ar. and Per. امیر آخر *amīr-ākhūr* and امیرآخور *amīr-ākhūr*. – Zervan, *Lehnwörter*, 13–14.

ἀμυρτζαντάριος, ἀμηρτζαντάριος, ὁ [14th cen.] – ‘commander of bodyguards’ ← Pers. *amīr-jāndār* امیرجاندار. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 267, 404; cf. Zervan, *Lehnwörter*, 14.

Ἀτζάμοι, οἱ [15th cen.] – ‘Persians’ ← Pers. ← Arab. عجم *‘ajam* ‘non-Arab’, ‘Persian’ – an old name employed by Arab Muslims to refer to the Iranians of the central and eastern parts of the Caliphate. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 52, 391.

ἄχούριω, τό [11th cen.] – ‘stable’ ← Pers. آخر *ākhūr* and آخور *ākhūr*. – LBG, 253.

βάμβαξ, ὁ, ἡ; παμβακίς, ἡ; βαμβάκιον, τό [9th–10th cen.] – ‘cotton’ ← dialectal Pers. پنبک *pambak*. – Zervan, *Lehnwörter*, 22; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 404.

διφθέριν, τεφτέρι, τό [14th cen.] – ‘account book, inventory’ ← Pers. دفتر *daftar*. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 330–331, 405.

ζάμβαξ, ὁ [9th–10th cen.] – ‘jasmine, jasmine oil’ ← Pers. زنبک *zanbak* or its Arabised form زنبق *zanbaq*. – LBG, 640.

ζάριν, τό [14th cen.?] – ‘dice’ ← Pers. زار *zār*. – Zervan, *Lehnmörter*, 53.

ζαρκοῤ(ς), ὁ [15th cen.] – ‘felt hat worn under some other headgear’ ← Pers. *zīrkulāh* from زیر *zīr* ‘under’ and کلاه *kulāh* ‘hat, cap’. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 317–318, 345, 405; Zervan, *Lehnmörter*, 53–54.

ζαρκοῤς, ὁ [15th cen.] – ‘a person wearing very expensive headgear’ ← Pers. زرینکلاه *zarrīnkulāh*. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 317–318, 406; Zervan, *Lehnmörter*, 53–54.

ζαρταλοῦ, ζαρταλοῦδι, τό [12th cen.] – ‘apricot’ ← Pers. زردالو *zardālu*. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 324–325, 407.

ζατρίκιον, τό [8th–9th cen.] – ‘chess’ ← Pers. شترنج *shatranj*. – Germanos, *Oneirocriticon*, 437.70; CCAG, 11/1:182.16 (Apomasar); Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 345, 407; cf. Zervan, *Lehnmörter*, 54.

ζιλίν, τό [15th cen.] – ‘cover, mat’ ← Pers. زیلو *zīlū*. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 407.

ζουλάπιον, τζουλάπιον, τό [8th–9th cen.] – ‘syrup’ ← Pers. جلاب *julāb* ← Pers. *gulāb* گلاب ‘rose-water, a purgative’. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 407.

καββάδιον, καβάδιον, τό [9th cen.] – ‘caftan, upper dress’ ← Pers. قبا *qabā*. – Zervan, *Lehnmörter*, 56.

καμουχᾶς, χαμουχᾶς, ὁ [14th cen.] – ‘brocade, damask’, ← Pers. کمخا *kamkhā*. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 313–314, 407; Zervan, *Lehnmörter*, 204.

καρβάνιον, τό [10th cen.] – ‘caravan’ ← Pers. کاروان *kārwān*. – LBG, 764.

λαπάτζας, ὁ [14th cen.] – ‘outer garment’ ← Pers. لپاچه *lapācha* and لپاچه *labācha*. – Dehkhodā, s.v.; LBG, 916; see also Chapter 5.2.

μαϊτάνιν, τό [14th cen.] – ‘square, marketplace’ ← Pers. میدان *maydān*. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 327–328, 408; Zervan, *Lehnmörter*, 109–110.

μαχάριν, τό [14th cen.] – ‘camel’s bridle’ ← Pers. ماهار *māhār*. – Zervan, *Lehnmörter*, 114–115.

μενερός [11th cen.] – ‘violet, crimson’ ← Pers. بنفشه *bunafsha*. – LBG, 998.

Μουγούλοι, Μουγούλαι, οἱ [13th cen.] – ‘Mongols’ ← Pers. tribal name مغول *mughūl*. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 397.

μουζακίτζης, ὁ; μουζάκιον, τό [10th cen.] – ‘boots’ ← dialectal Pers. موزک *mūzak* and Pers. موزه *mūza*. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 344, 408.

Μουσουλμάνος, ὁ [12th cen.] – ‘Muslim’ ← Pers. مسلمان *musulmān* and *musalmān*. The word *musulmān* is likely a New Persian creation, derived from the Arabic substantivised active participle مسلم *muslim*; the word is first attested in the earliest specimens of New Persian literature, such as the poetry of Rūdakī (d. ca. 941) and the *Ta’rikh-i Ba’lamī* (10th cen.) – Anna Komnene, XIV.3.7.15 (p. 437), XIV.6.1.7 (p. 447); *Ganjoor* s.v.; Dehkhodā, s.v.; cf. Zervan, *Lehnmörter*, 119.



νανοῦχα, ἡ – ‘ajowan seeds (carum copticum)’ ← Pers. نان خواه *nānkh<sup>w</sup>āh*. – LBG, 1066 (semantics corrected).

νάργης, ἡ – ‘narcissus’ ← Pers. نرگس *nargis*. – LBG, 1066.

νεράντζα, ἡ [12th cen.] – ‘orange’ ← Pers. نارنج *nāranj*. – LBG, 1075.

παζάριον, τό [14th cen.] – ‘market’ ← Pers. بازار *bāzār*. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 328, 409.

πάμβαξ *see* βάμβαξ

παπούτζιον, τό [12th cen.] – ‘footgear’ ← Pers. پاپوش *pāpūsh*. – LBG, 1204; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 316, 398, 409.

παρτζᾶς [12th cen.] – ‘in rags?’ ← Pers. پارچه *pārcha*. – LBG, 1240.

πασίας, πασείας, ὁ [14th cen.] – ‘leader, commander’ ← Pers. پاشا *pāshā* contraction of پادشاه *pādshāh* ‘king’. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 213, 389, 402; Zervan, *Lehnwörter*, 132–133.

πασμαγάνδιον, \*πασμαγᾶδιον, τό [8th cen.] – ‘mount’s sweat-blanket with woollen pad’ ← Pers. پشمگند *pashmāgand*. – Dehkhodā, s.v.; LBG, 1243, 1519 (σαγματοπασμαγᾶδιον).

πεξεστάνιον, τό [15th cen.] – ‘drapery market’ and generally ‘marketplace’ ← Pers. بزستان *bazistān*, in which بز ‘cloth’ is Arabic and the suffix ستان is Persian. Cf. Ott. bezistān and بدستان *bedestān* – Dehkhodā, s.v. بزستان; cf. Zervan, *Lehnwörter*, 134–135.

πενίδιον, τό [13th cen.] – ‘barley sugar candy’ ← Pers. پانید *pānīd*. – LBG, 1256.

σαλχαδάης, ὁ [10th–11th cen.] – ‘year ruler’ ← Pers. سالخده *sālkhudāh*. – LBG, 1525.

σαμουντάνιν, τό [15th cen.] – ‘candlestick’ ← Pers. شامدان *shāmdān*. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 319, 409; Tihon, ‘Horloge persane’, 523–524.

σαντράτζ, τό or ὁ [15th cen.] – ‘chess’ ← Pers. شترنج *shatranj*. – Zervan, *Lehnwörter*, 156; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 345.

σαραπτάρης *see* σιαραπτάρ

σαραχόριδες, οἱ [15th cen.] – ‘chief stable masters’ ← Per. سر آخر *sar-ākhur* and سر آخور *sar-ākhūr*. – Zervan, *Lehnwörter*, 157.

σελάρτιος, ὁ [11th cen.] – ‘commander’ ← Pers. سالار *sālār*. – LBG, 1537.

σενδές [10th cen.] – ‘brocade, very fine silk fabric’ ← Pers. سندس *sundus*. – Dehkhodā, s.v.; LBG, 1540.

σερράγιον, τό [15th cen.] – ‘palace’ ← Pers. سرای *sarāy*. – LBG, 1542.

σιαραπτάρ, σιαραπτάρης, ὁ [15th cen.] – ‘cup bearer’ ← Pers. شرابدار *sharābdār*. – Zervan, *Lehnwörter*, 157; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 51.

σιαχρούχ, τό or ὁ [15th cen.] – ‘checkmate’ in the text of Doukas ← Pers. شاه رخ *shāhruk* ‘when the king and a rook are attacked by the same piece’. – Doukas, 16.10 (p. 99.31–33); Utas and Dabīrsiāqī, ‘Chess’; Zervan, *Lehnwörter*, 162; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 345 n. 193.

σικκτάριδες, οἱ [15th cen.] – ‘weapon bearers’ ← Pers. سلاحدار *silāhdār*, in which سلاح ‘weapon’ is Arabic. – Zervan, *Lehnwörter*, 164.

σπαχίδες, οἱ [15th cen.] – ‘cavalrymen’ ← Pers. سپاهی *sipāhī* ‘trooper, cavalrymen’. – Zervan, *Lehnwörter*, 174–175.

σωσάνιον, τό [12th cen.] – ‘breastplate’ ← Pers. جوشن *jawshan* and *jūshan*. – LBG, 1734.

τάμπεζιν, τό [15th cen.] – ‘tightrope walker’ ← Pers. جانباز *jānbāz*. – Zervan, *Lehnmwörter*, 179.

ταρκάσιον, τό [14th cen.] – ‘quiver’ ← Pers. ترکش *tarkash*. – Zervan, *Lehnmwörter*, 180–181.

τασιμάνης, ταλασιμάνης, ό [14th cen.] – ‘Muslim scholar’ ← Pers. دانشمند *dānishmand* ‘scholar, wise man’. – LBG, 1744.

τάσιον, τό [15th cen.] – ‘basin, bowl’ ← Pers. تشت *tasht*. – LBG, 1744.

τεφτέρι *see* διφθέριν

τζάργα, τζάρχα, ή [11th cen.] – ‘crossbow’ ← Pers. چرخ *charkh*. – Dehkhodā, s.v. چرخ; LBG, 1772, 1774; Zervan, *Lehnmwörter*, 183–184.

τζακάλη, ή [11th cen.] – ‘jackal’ ← Pers. شغال *shaghāl*. – LBG, 1772–1773.

τζαμαντουός, τζαμανδᾶς, ό [13th–14th cen.] – ‘suitcase, chest for storing clothes’ ← Pers. جامه‌دان *jāmadān*. – LBG, 1773; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 318–319, 410.

τζαούσιος, ό [12th cen.] – ‘messenger’, a military rank ← Pers. چاوش *chāwush* ← Sogdian. – LBG, 1774; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 333–334, 410.

τζουβάλιον, τό [13th–14th cen.] – ‘sack’ ← Pers. جوال *juwāl*. – Zervan, *Lehnmwörter*, 188.

τζουλάπιον *see* ζουλάπιον

τζόχα, τζόχα, ή [12th cen.] – ‘broadcloth’ ← Pers. جوقه *jūqa* and جوخه *jūkha*. – Zervan, *Lehnmwörter*, 189–190; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 314, 411.

τζοκάνιον, τό [8th–9th cen.] – ‘polo game’ ← Pers. چوگان *chawgān* and τζοκανιστήριον for ‘polo playing field’. – LBG, 1779.

τιμάριον, τό [15th cen.] – ‘benefice’ ← Pers. تیمار *tīmār* ‘care, military pension’. – Zervan, *Lehnmwörter*, 190 (τιμαράτος – ‘owner of a *timar*’).

τουκάνιν, τό [15th cen.] – ‘shop’ ← Pers. دکان/دوکان *dūkān*. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 330, 411.

Τουρκομάνοι, οί [12th cen.] – ‘Turkmen’ probably from Pers. ترک مانند *turk mānand*, ترک مانا *turk-mānā* ‘resembling a Turk, looking like a Turk’. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 401.

τοῦφαξ, ό [15th cen.] – ‘gun, musket’ ← Pers. تفنگ *tufang*. – Zervan, *Lehnmwörter*, 192.

τραχανόν, τό [15th cen.] – ‘bread and curd chowder’? ← Pers. ترخوانه *tarkh‘āna*. – Dehkhodā, s.v. ترخینه and ترخینه; Redhouse, *Lexicon*, 531 (ترخانه); LBG, 1797.

φαρδαισί [9th cen.] – ‘paradisiac, heavenly man’ ← Pers. فردوسی *firdawsī*. – Photios, *Lexicon*, π218, see also Section 7.6.

φύλιν, τό [15th cen.] – ‘elephant’ ← Pers. فیل *fīl*. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 411.

χαβιάριον, τό [12th cen.] – ‘caviar’ ← Pers. خاویار *khāwyār*. – LBG, 1970–1971; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 325, 411.

χαμουχᾶς *see* καμουχᾶς

χανακάς, ό [15th cen.] – ‘inn, house, or room for rent’ ← Pers. خانقاه *khānaqāh*. – Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 329–330, 411; cf. LBG, 1980.

χάνδαξ, ó [10th cen.] – ‘ditch, trench’ ← Pers. خندق *khandaq*. – Zervan, *Lehmvörter*, 205.

## Notes

- 1 Daryae, ‘The idea of Ērānšahr’; Daryae and Rezakhani, *From Oxus to Euphrates*, 7–10.
- 2 The bibliography related to the topics discussed here is extensive; for some guidelines, see: Bosworth, ‘Khurāsān’; *Greater Khorasan*; Shakūrī, *Khurāsān*; Shukurov, *Хорасан*, in particular p. 25 note 26 for the etymology of Khorasan; Yarshater, ‘Persian presence’, especially 74–85; Savant, *New Muslims*, 9–11, 233–234; Krawulsky, ‘Wiederbelebung’.
- 3 Costaz, *Dictionnaire syriaque-français*, 410. For an early Syriac usage, see for instance: *Chronicon ad A.C. 1234*, 1:273.28, 316.22, etc.
- 4 Theophanes, 1:366.27 (ἡ ἔσω Περσίς, ἡ λεγομένη Χωρασάν) and also 484.6 (ἐνδοτέραν Περσίδα), 424.12–22 (ἐκ τῶν ἀνατολικωτέρων μερῶν τῆς Περσίδος). See also: Kedrenos, 1:773.11 (the same as Theophanes, 1:366.27).
- 5 Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De administrando*, 22.63–64 (ἐνδοτέραν Περσίδα, τὴν καλουμένην Χωρασάν, the same as Theophanes, 1:484.6).
- 6 Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De administrando*, 25.77–79: ‘But now, again, owing to the impotence of the commander of the faithful at Bagdad, the emir of Persia, or Chorasán, has become independent’ (p. 109).
- 7 Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De administrando*, 25.67 (τὴν Περσίαν, ἤγουν τὸ Χωρασάν) and 25.79.
- 8 Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, 384–385 (II, 47) giving the Greek text reprinted from *De cerimoniis* (Reiske). A new edition of chapters I.77–82 of the *De cerimoniis*: Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De cerimoniis* (Dagron et al.).
- 9 Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, 580–581 (II, 15). Cf.: Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De cerimoniis* (Reiske), 2:685 (commentaries of Reiske); Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, 580 note 4.
- 10 Theophanes Continuatus (Featherstone/Codoñer), 170 (Theophilos, 25); Kedrenos, 2:579.10.
- 11 Skylitzes, 70.10–11, 453.1. For Manuel, see: *PmbZ*, no. 4707 and *PBE*, s. v. Manuel I.
- 12 Bryennios, *Historia*, 89–91; Skylitzes, 443.
- 13 Anna Komnene, VI, 12 (the possessions of the Seljuk sultan Malik-Shāh in 1092); XI, 4, 6–9, XIV, 4, XV, 1, 6 (the possessions of the Great Seljuks).
- 14 This shift in usage did not reflect the rise in Khorasan of the Kh<sup>w</sup>ārazmian dynasty (1070s–1231), which gained international fame as late as in the second half of the twelfth century: Skylitzes, 443.4, 447.10, 462.64; Bryennios, *Historia*, 89 (I.7); Kedrenos, 2:567.4, 572.2, 591.7; Kinnamos, 183.9. For Χωρασμίνη and Χωράσμοι as an element of memorial Persia, see for instance: Stephen of Byzantium, 5:108.16–21 (Χωρασμίνη), 118.8–11 (Χωραμναίον).
- 15 For more details, see: Morton, *Encountering Islam*, 124–125.
- 16 Some information on the Persians in the Byzantine army has been summarised in: Cosentino, ‘Iranian Contingents’, 255–257; Nazarov, ‘Персидские иммигранты’.
- 17 Paul the Deacon, 189–190 (V, 10); *PmbZ*, no. 6478; Cosentino, ‘Iranian Contingents’, 255; Stratos, *Byzantium*, 3:212. The Middle Persian *Shābuhr* means ‘king’s son’ (Justi, *Namenbuch*, 284–287).
- 18 Theophanes, 348.29–349.2; 350.9–27; *PmbZ*, no. 6476; Cosentino, ‘Iranian Contingents’, 255; Stratos, *Byzantium*, 3:236–247; Treadgold, *History*, 320; Nazarov, ‘Персидские иммигранты’, 207. It is possible that these two Shapurs (*PmbZ*, nos 6478 and 6476) were one and the same person.

- 19 *PmbZ*, no. 6931; Cosentino, 'Iranian Contingents', 255; *ODB*, 3:1955; Stratos, *Byzantium*, 5:67–68, 72–73; Treadgold, *History*, 333–337.
- 20 *PmbZ*, no. 1865/corr.
- 21 Schmitt, *Personennamen*, 101 no. 202 (hmz'sp); Justi, *Namenbuch*, 124–125.
- 22 Zacos and Veglery, no. 2343; *PmbZ*, no. 6429/corr. Ῥωστώμ derives from the Middle Persian *Rōdstahm* or New Persian *Rustam*, the name of the famous Iranian epic hero (Justi, *Namenbuch*, 262–266).
- 23 Zacos and Veglery, no. 2891: 'Κοσορόου ἀπὸ ὑπάτων, δούλου τῆς Θεοτόκου'; *PLRE*, 3:308; Cosentino, 'Iranian Contingents', 255.
- 24 Zacos and Veglery, no. 3078: 'Ἀρτασήρ πρωτοσπαθαρίω'; *PmbZ*, no. 645; Cosentino, 'Iranian Contingents', 255; Justi, *Namenbuch*, 34–36.
- 25 Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, 563 (2): 'Χοσρώη πατρικίω'; Rancheenko, 'Каталог мливиждовулов', no. 436: 'Χοσρώου πατρικίου'; *PmbZ*, nos. 1074–1075 suggesting that these two seals belonged to the same person; Cosentino, 'Iranian Contingents', 255.
- 26 Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, 690 (Persos): 'Λέοντι σπαθαροκανδιδάτω τῷ Πέρσῳ'; *PmbZ*, no. 4401; Cosentino, 'Iranian Contingents', 255.
- 27 Zacos and Veglery, no. 979A: 'Σαβοῦρ δούλου τοῦ Θεοῦ'; *PmbZ*, no. 6477; Cosentino, 'Iranian Contingents', 255; Nazarov, 'Персидские иммигранты', 207.
- 28 Zacos and Veglery, no. 684 A: 'Χριστὲ βοήθει Σαπεροζάν τῷ σῶ οἰκέτῃ'; *PmbZ*, no. 6506; This is a compound Middle and New Persian name, grammatically a patronymic, comprising two elements Shā / Shāh 'king' and Pērōz 'victorious' and denoting 'the son of Shāpērōz'; for the name Pērōzān, see: Justi, *Namenbuch*, 250.
- 29 Zacos and Veglery, no. 684 a. b: 'Θεοτόκε βοήθει Σαχηπεροζάν'; *PmbZ*, no. 6483; Cosentino, 'Iranian Contingents', 255; Nazarov, 'Персидские иммигранты', 207.
- 30 Zacos and Veglery, no. 3046; *PmbZ*, no. 6430. Phonetically, Ῥωστώμιος sounds similar to the New Persian name.
- 31 For the Armenians in the Byzantine military service, see: Dédéyan, 'Soldats de Byzance'. For the Persian names of Armenian nobility, see, for instance: Greenwood, 'Basil I', 449–452.
- 32 Cosentino, 'Iranian Contingents', 256; Cvetković, 'Settlement of the Mardaites'.
- 33 *Miracles of St Artemios*, 138 (a golden *semisis*, a golden *trimisis* and four *keratia*) and commentaries on 264; *PmbZ*, 10693.
- 34 *PmbZ*, no. 5059.
- 35 *Life of Michael the Synkellos*, 44.16–17 (Περσογενής δὲ ὑπῆρχεν ἐκ προγόνων, καθὼς αὐτὸς ἐν ταῖς αὐτοῦ ἐπιστολαῖς διαγορευὼν γράφει), 44–48 (on Michael's pious parents). Some authors' suggestion that what Περσογενής actually means is of Arabic origin appears to be groundless: Kolia-Dermitzaki, 'Michael the Synkellos', 627; Mavroudi, 'Greek Language', 310.
- 36 Abū Qurra, *Epistola*, 1504D: 'Ἀραβιστὶ μὲν ὑπὸ Θεοδώρου τοῦ τὸ ἐπίκλην Ἀβουκαρᾶ, τοῦ Καρῶν ἐπισκόπου γεγονότος, ὑπαγορευθεῖσα, διὰ δὲ Μιχαὴλ πρεσβυτέρου, καὶ συγκέλλου ἀποστολικοῦ θρόνου μεταφρασθεῖσα'.
- 37 *PmbZ*, no. 7627.
- 38 *PmbZ*, no. 1102.
- 39 *PmbZ*, no. 86; Ἄδερ ← Persian *Ādhar* or Middle Persian *Ādhur* 'fire'?
- 40 *Life of Theodore of Edessa*, 84 (LXXXI): 'εὐφυῶς γὰρ ὠμίλει τὴν τῶν Ἑλλήνων τε καὶ Σύρων καὶ Ἰσμηλιτῶν πρὸς δὲ καὶ Περσῶν γλῶσσαν'. For more details on Theodore of Edessa and his *vita*, see: Griffith, 'Theodore of Edessa'.
- 41 Stephen the Philosopher, *De arte mathematica*, 182.2: 'ἐγὼ δὴ ἐκ Περσίας τῇ εὐδαίμονι ταύτῃ πόλει ἐπιφοιτήσας' – Stephen the Philosopher writes about himself, implying Constantinople under 'that fortunate City'.
- 42 On Stephen the Persian (or rather Pseudo-Stephen?) and his writings, see: Magdalino, *Orthodoxie*, 17–32; Magdalino, 'Astrology', 203; Pingree, 'Classical

- and Byzantine Astrology', 238–239; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 302–305; Gutas, *Greek thought*, 16, 180–181, 184; cf. *PmbZ*, no. 7014.
- 43 It may be noted that the knowledge of Arabic was rather common among the Persians of all social strata: in the ninth century, the Persians of Theophobos spoke to the Muslim enemy soldiers in Arabic (Genesios, 48.51–52: 'δηκούτιστοιή Σαρακηνική γλώττη πρὸς αὐτοὺς τῶν Περσῶν καθ' ὁμιλίαν οἰοῖνε σπενδομένων'; Theophanes Continuatus (Featherstone/Codoñer), III.32.2–3 (p. 184): 'γλώττη πως τῇ Σαρακηνῶν τὸν Περσῶν ὄμιλον σπένδεσθαι'; Skylitzes, *Historia*, 76.78: 'γλώττη πως ἦσθετο τῇ Σαρακηνῶν').
- 44 *PmbZ*, 2969/corr.
- 45 de Blois, 'Middle-Persian Inscription' with complete anterior bibliography. I thank Alberto Bernard for drawing my attention to this inscription.
- 46 de Blois, 'Middle-Persian Inscription', 216–218.
- 47 See historical and sociological commentaries on the inscription in: Bogoliubov, 'Пехлевийская надпись'.
- 48 Spuler, *Iran*, 55–65; Crone, 'Korramis' with further bibliography. Pers. *خرم khurram* means 'cheerful, gay, happy' and *خرمدين khurram-din* 'happy, joyous religion'.
- 49 *PmbZ*, no. 8238. The Byzantine name Θεόφοβος could have been a Greek translation of an original Persian name with the first element *khudā* (Justi, *Namenbuch*, 176–177) or *yazdānīzād* (Justi, *Namenbuch*, 145–149).
- 50 For more details and bibliography, see: Signes Codoñer, *Theophilos*, passim and especially 139–180; Treadgold, *Byzantine Revival*, 285–329; *PmbZ*, nos. 8237, 10524, 10543, 10545, 10552; see also no. 8238 and *DO Seals*, 5: no. 108.1 (seals of Theophobos).
- 51 *PmbZ*, no. 21780.
- 52 *PmbZ*, no. 20543 and also 572, 576, 20543, 5905: 'Ἀπελάτης ὁ Πέρσης' and 'ὁ τοῦ Πέρσου'.
- 53 Symeon Logothete, 259.491–493 (CXXXI, 53): 'Εὐλόγιος δὲ ὁ Πέρσης ἐλάλησε τῇ αὐτοῦ γλώττη Ἀρταβάσδω ἑταιρειάρχῃ, ὡς ὁ Μιχαὴλ ξίφει ἔτελεῦτησε, καὶ ἀνοιξὸν τὸν βασιλέα'.
- 54 *PmbZ*, no. 20627. Ἀρτάβασδος derives from the Middle Persian *artawazdah* 'one offering pious worship'.
- 55 The suggestion that the name Φαργάνοι could have been a modified form of the eleventh-century Φαράγγοι, that is, Varangians (Kazhdan, 'Hetaireia') appears to lack substantial evidence: first, such phonetic transformations in foreign ethnonyms were not typical for Middle Greek; second, the mid-ninth century is too early a date for the establishment of the Varangian imperial life-guard in Byzantium. For the early penetration of the Rhos in Byzantium and the earliest references to the Varangian life-guard (end of the tenth century), see, for instance: Blöndal, *Varangians*, 32–52.
- 56 Oikonomidès, *Listes de préséances*, 176.30, 327; Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, 576.7–9 (II, 15), 661.1 (II, 44), 693.3–5 (II, 49), 698.1 (II, 50); for additional references in narrative sources, see: *PmbZ*, nos. 30185, 30718. For administrative, economic and military contexts, see: Karlin-Hayter, 'Hétérierque'; Haldon, *Warfare*, 125, 259; Haldon, *Praetorians*.
- 57 *PmbZ*, no. 8150/corr.
- 58 Balādhuri, *Futūh*, 431 and Balādhuri, *Origins*, 2:205 (English translation):  
... صار جَلَّ شهود عسكره من جند اهل ماوراء النهر من السغد و الفراعنة و الاشروسنة و اهل الشاش و غيرهم.  
See also: Spuler, *Iran*, 72–86 (for the Farghāna principality), 129; Spuler, 'Farghānā'; Bosworth, 'Farḡāna'; Bosworth, 'Military Organisation', 148.
- 59 de la Vaissière, *Sogdian traders*, 242–249 and especially 245–246 (for Christians of Sougdaia); Soucek, 'Sughdāk'; Aibabin, *Этническая история*, 194–207

- (archeological findings). For Byzantine-Sogdian contacts in pre-Islamic times, see also: Pohl, *Avars*, 50–52.
- 60 Asutay-Effenberger, ‘Theophilos-Türme’; Asutay-Effenberger provides a detailed description of the tower, and develops an alternative interpretation linking the representation of the *śimurgh* with the activity of Theophobos at Theophilos’s time.
  - 61 Compareti, ‘Mutual Exchange’, 875–889 and especially 875–877; Compareti, ‘Sogdian Colonies’, 156–160. For ‘Sasanian’ motifs in Byzantine silks in the eighth–ninth centuries, see also: Walker, *Exotic Elements*, 23–37.
  - 62 For the astrolabe’s inscriptions, see: Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme*, 2:Me52 (p. 223–224). Andreas Rhoby refers to some mid-eleventh-century seals that may have belonged to the same Sergios (p. 224). See also Section 7.7.1.
  - 63 Paul, ‘Historical figures’, 108–109 (no. 15); *ODB*, 963–964, 1748.
  - 64 Signes Codoñer, *Theophilos*, 141–142, 170.
  - 65 *AVaz*, no. 100.21–22; *PLP*, no. 13606. For commentaries, see: Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 259.
  - 66 Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 275, 277, 397.
  - 67 *PLP*, no. 11369; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 258, 275, 277, 394.
  - 68 *PLP*, no. 30930; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 268–269, 403.
  - 69 For Sasanian nobility immediately after the Muslim conquest, see, for instance: Zakeri, *Sāsānid Soldiers*, 102–112.
  - 70 Similarly, during the seventh and eighth centuries, the Islamic conquests provoked a considerable Greek immigration from the Near East to Italy: Cosentino, ‘Ecclesiastic Life’, 77–78; Morini, ‘Monastic Life’, 112. Curiously enough, the significant migration of the Muslim Persians, including Khorasanians, to Egypt is attested for the ninth century: Reinfandt, ‘Iranians’.
  - 71 For a similar application of the ethnonym ‘Persians’ to Anatolian Turks by early crusader authors, see: Morton, *Encountering Islam*, 123–124.
  - 72 For more details, see important studies discussing the Persianisation of the state ideology and cultural self-identity of the Muslims of Rūm at the end of the twelfth century: Yalman, ‘From Plato to the *Shāhnāma*’ and especially 131–138; Yalman, ‘Cosmic Ruler’ and especially 162–167.
  - 73 Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 11–42; Shukurov, ‘Magnitude’ with further bibliography. See also: Balivet and Lessan Pezechki, ‘Conquête ottomane’.
  - 74 Eustathios of Thessalonike. *Oratio N’*, 247.9–248.36
  - 75 Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 42.1 (Ἀνδραχμῶν Περσικῶς ὀνομασμένον), for an English translation, see: Kinnamos (Brand); Pseudo-Kodinos (Macrides et al.), 154.8–9 (κατὰ τὴν πάλαι πάτριον καὶ τούτων φωνήν, ἦτοι Περσιστί); Pseudo-Kodinos (Verpeaux), 210.7–8.
  - 76 Pachymeres, 1:313.17–18 (τρυφὴν Περσικὴν); 1:185.2 (Περσῶν πλοῦτον).
  - 77 Pachymeres, 1:149.15–16 (Περσῶν πρέσβεις καὶ δῶρα).
  - 78 Anna Komnene, 405.21–22 (XIII.8.2: ‘βέλος περσικόν’ – ‘Persian arrow’); Choniates, *Historia*, 1:69.23 (‘τοξότης Πέρσης’ – ‘Persian archer’).
  - 79 Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 22.16–17 (γνώμαι Περσῶν).
  - 80 Choniates, *Historia*, 1:197.95 (‘στολαὶ Περσικαί’ – ‘Persian garments’), Gregoras, 1:555.14–17 (‘Περσικὴ ἢ στολή’ – ‘Persian garment’).
  - 81 Mesarites (Heisenberg): 44.27–35 (‘Μουχρουτᾶς χειρὸς ἔργον Περσικῆς’ – ‘Mouchroutas is the work of a Persian hand’).
  - 82 See: *TLG*, s.v. μουχρούτιον, μουχρούτινος (‘made of clay’), μουχρουτοσκοῦτελα (‘a variety of ceramic ware’); Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 319, 408.
  - 83 Mesarites (Heisenberg), 44–46 (§ 27–28); Asutay-Effenberger, ‘Muchrutas’; Walker, *Exotic Elements*, 144–164.
  - 84 Hunger, ‘Epilog’, 304–305; for commentaries, see: Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 49–51.

- 85 Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 45–53; for the language (or languages) of the Byzantines, see also: Koder, ‘Identitätsmerkmal’, 10–16.
- 86 Shukurov, ‘Christian Elements’.
- 87 Shukurov, ‘Magnitude’, 149–160.
- 88 For a detailed discussion of the ‘Persian’ immigrants in late Byzantine demography, see: Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*.
- 89 For Constantinople as a cultural attraction for neighbouring Asians, see: Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 216–220. Especially well-studied are the travels of West Europeans and Eastern Slavs: Majeska, *Russian Travelers*; Ciggaar, *Western travellers*; van der Vin, *Travellers*. For Asian travellers, see, for instance: van der Vin, *Travellers*, Ebersolt, *Constantinople byzantine*; Vasiliev, ‘Remarques’; Miquel, *Géographie humaine*; Berger, ‘Sightseeing’; Hillenbrand, ‘Muslim Views’. For Chinese travellers, see, for instance: de la Vaissière, ‘Maurice et le Qaghan’; Basso, ‘Viaggiatori cinesi’; Thurin, ‘China’; Schreiner, ‘Chinesische Beschreibung’.
- 90 Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishārāt*, 56–57; van der Vin, *Travellers*, 1:163–164, 2:534–537; Herzfeld, *Matériaux*, 1/2:262–268; Meri, ‘Ziyāra’, 526; Sourdél-Thomine, ‘al-Harawī’; Hillenbrand, ‘Muslim Views’, 79.
- 91 Bakrān, *Jahān-nāma*, 2r.22–2v.5:  
این نسخه از کتاب خانه بدست آمد در شهر روم کی آنرا قسطنطنیه خوانند و بحیثها بدست آمد کی بدان ضبط می کرده اند و بهر کسی نمی داده و از ملوک روم پادشاهی بزرگ بوده است کی اورا قسطنطنین می گفته اند و این شهر را بدو باز خوانده است و نوعی عظیم بوده است بر انواع علوم و طلب آن و جمعی را از اهل هنر نفقه و خرج راه داده است و باطراف عالم فرستاده تا این معانی بتحقیق معلوم کرده اند و بنزدیک او آورده و او در کتب ثبت کرده و در کتاب خانه نهاده
- 92 Cf. Bakrān, *Jahān-nāma*, 14–15 (commentaries of Yuri Borschhevski).
- 93 Qiftī, *Tarikh al-Hukamā*, 426.
- 94 Gregoras, 3:202.12–203.4 and my comments in: Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 375–376; Shukurov, ‘Appropriation’, 180–181.
- 95 Mavroudi, ‘Pletho’, 195–196, cf. van Ess, ‘Jorjāni’.
- 96 See Chapter 4.1–2.
- 97 Photios, *Lexicon*, π218: ‘ἔστι δὲ τοῦνομα Περσικὸν καὶ λέγεται φαρδαισί’.
- 98 Boucharlat, ‘Parayadām et paradis’ (Avestian *pa’ri-daēza*).
- 99 Gen. 2.8: ‘παράδεισος ἐν Ἐδεμ’; see also: Hemmerdinger, ‘158 noms communs grecs’, 21 (B.I.6).
- 100 Gharib, *Sogdian Dictionary*, 7130 (p. 285).
- 101 Shukurov, ‘Missionism’, 146–149.
- 102 For the Latin language, see: Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, 11.25–12.1 (I, 1), 21.8 (I, 1), 27.1 (I, 1), 69.18–22 (I, 9), 136.10–13 (I, 32), 212.10–12 (II, 50), 369.7–370.13 (I, 74), 431.14 (I, 94), 744.7–8 (II, 52); for Gothic and Hebrew, see: *Ibid.*, 381–386 (II 92).
- 103 Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, 398–410 (I, 89–90), 684–686 (II, 47).
- 104 This can be deduced from the following passage: Pseudo-Kodinos (Macrides et al.), 166.9–14.
- 105 Pseudo-Kodinos (Macrides et al.), 154.7–9 and also 102.1–3 (on the origin of the Vardariotai).
- 106 Cf.: Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 48–53, 129, 172–173. For the Vardariotai, see also: Cvetković, ‘Вардариоти’.
- 107 For more details, see: Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 373–374.
- 108 Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 359–380.
- 109 Kantakouzenos, 2:408.3, 2:552.20, 3:66.5–7.
- 110 Kantakouzenos, *Historia*, 1:192.11–12: ‘διὰ τινος ἀπεκρίνατο τῶν διγλώσσων ὁ βασιλεύς’ (‘the emperor answered through one of the bilinguals’).

- 111 Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 359–380 and index (Persian, language).
- 112 Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 365, 367–368.
- 113 Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 121–122, 242, 363; Shukurov, ‘Appropriation’, 176.
- 114 Doukas, 22.7 (p. 161.19–20), 28.1 (p. 229.21); Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 363.
- 115 Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 364.
- 116 See, for instance: Peacock, *Islam, Literature and Society*, 147–188; Markiewicz, *Crisis of Kingship*, 153–154, 229–233, 282; Markiewicz, ‘Persian Secretaries’.
- 117 *De planetarum patrociniis*, 7:96.16–17, 97.27–28, 98.5–6; 98.31–32; for some more details, see also: Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 48–49.
- 118 *De planetarum patrociniis*, 7:96.17–18, 97.11, 97.28, 98.28, 99.10.
- 119 For more details, see: Shukurov, ‘Language Multiplicity’. Arno Borst was the first to provide commentary on the linguistic passages of Chalkokondyles: Borst, *Turmbau*, 1:313.
- 120 Chalkokondyles, 1:156.18–157.1. See now an English translation: Chalkokondyles, (Kaldellis).
- 121 This passage pertains to the early career of Theophobos, who was first traced by the Persians through divination somewhere in Byzantium: Genesios, 39.70–75 (III, 4). See a similar story in: Theophanes Continuatus (Featherstone/Codoñer), 160 (III, 20)
- 122 For more details, see: Magdalino, *Orthodoxie*, 104–107.
- 123 Psellos, *Orationes forenses*, 97.2657–2664; Costanza, ‘Omoplatoscopia’, 60–61. On the same passage, see also Chapter 6.3 with further bibliography. Cf. Pietrobelli and Cronier, ‘Arabic Galenism’, 304–306.
- 124 Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη*, 5:508.14–17; Jeffreys and Lauxtermann, *Psellos*, 153–154 (C 2).
- 125 Pingree, ‘Indian and Pseudo-Indian’, 192.9; Magdalino, *Orthodoxie*, 102–103.
- 126 See also Section 7.4. The astrolabe is preserved in Brescia, at the Museo Civico dell’Età Cristiana. For the astrolabe’s description, see: Dalton, ‘Byzantine astrolabe’; King, *Astrolabes*, 220ff; Tihon, ‘De même’, 284.
- 127 CCAG, 4:43, 51 (ποίημα Πέρσου φιλοσόφου τοῦνομα Ζανατῆ); Mavroudi, *Dream Interpretation*, 408–409 note 64; Magdalino, *Orthodoxie*, 149. See also Greek excerpts from al-Zanāṭī’s astro-medical treatises in fifteenth-century manuscripts: CCAG, 4:33, 118–119 and 4:58, 145–146. Shaykh Abū ‘Abd-Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-Zanāṭī (12th cen.?) wrote in Arabic; therefore, Arsenios used a Persian translation of his work, see: Savage-Smith and Smith, ‘Islamic Geomancy’, 213.
- 128 Metochites, *Poems*, 26.600–610 (Poem 1). For an annotated English translation, see: Metochites, *Poems* (Transl.), 69–70. For a detailed analysis and contextualisation of the passage, see: Bydén, *Metochites*, 249–251 and also Magdalino, *Orthodoxie*, 148; Mavroudi, ‘Occult Science’, 66; Constantinides, *Higher Education*, 96. There are no grounds to doubt the Persian origin of Manuel Bryennios’s teacher, since Metochites unambiguously states his ethnic background and the foreign nature of his knowledge in relation to the Byzantine tradition.
- 129 Bydén, *Metochites*, 250 and on the Persian style of numerals p. 241–242 note 74; Magdalino, *Orthodoxie*, 148.
- 130 Gregoras, 1:554.14–19.
- 131 Constantine Akropolites, *Epistulae*, 156.9–13 (no. 60): ‘ἀλλ’ ἵνα μὴ τῶν τινας ἐξ ἄλλοδαπῆς ἐπιδημούντων ἡμῖν... τῶν ἡμετέρων κατοφρυῶνται σοφῶν, μεγάλα περὶ ἐσομένων εἰδέναι ἐπαγγελλόμενοι καὶ κατ’ ἐπιστήμην δῆθεν τερατευόμενοι’. Constantinides, *Higher Education*, 109; Magdalino, *Orthodoxie*, 149; Tihon, ‘Astrological Promenade’, 276–277 (English translation). See also: Bydén, *Metochites*, 251–252. For Theodora Raoulaina, see: *PLP*, no. 10943.



- 132 Vatic. gr. 299, fol. 374.22–23; Kousis, ‘Quelques considérations’, 209; Miller, *Hospital*, 150 and 249 note 56; Congourdeau, ‘Médecine byzantine’, 223.
- 133 Nicholas of Cusa, *Cribratio Alkorani*, 3 (p. 6.2–9); Miller, *Hospital*, XVII–XVIII; Congourdeau, ‘Médecine byzantine’, 223.
- 134 Morton, *Encountering Islam*, 120–124, 128–129, 144, 157–158.
- 135 *PLP*, no. 24782; Ragep, ‘Shams’.
- 136 For detailed analyses of *proomion*, see: Fisher, ‘Arabs, Latins and Persians’, 168–176.
- 137 Kaldellis has also noted a foreign sound of the treatise, stating that the language and imagery of the translation are not Byzantine: Kaldellis, ‘Translations into Greek’, 414.
- 138 Fisher, ‘Arabs, Latins and Persians’, 174.
- 139 Shukurov, ‘Magnitude’, 151–157.
- 140 *PLP*, nos 24782, 30814; *ODB*, 1:422–423; Chrysokokkes’s summary of the biography of Chioniadēs: Lambros, ‘Τα υπ’ αριθμόν’, 334–336; Usener, ‘Ad historiam’, 356–357. See also: Papadopoulos, ‘Χιονιάδου ἐπιστολαί’; Westerink, ‘La profession de foi’; Kaldellis, ‘Translations into Greek’, 415–416; Karpov, *История*, 583–584; Magdalino, *Orthodoxie*, 149–150; Bydén, *Metochites*, 244–245; Pingree, ‘Chioniadēs’; Tihon, ‘Astrological Promenade’, 274–275 (alternative interpretation of Chrysokokkes’s text); Haramundanis, ‘Chioniadēs’; Ragep, ‘Shams’; Mercier, *Almanac*, 15–16; Bouras-Vallianatos, *Innovation*, 143, 167 (translation of a Persian antidotary). For the Orthodox bishopric of Tabriz, see: Preiser-Kapeller, ‘Civitas Thauris’, 271–276. Compare with some recent attempts to revise the traditional chronology of Chioniadēs’s biography: Pérez Martín, ‘Chioniadēs’ and Pérez Martín, ‘Pédiasimos’ and especially Kafasis, ‘From Tabriz’, 246–252.
- 141 *PLP*, no. 16679; Lambros, ‘Τα υπ’ αριθμόν’, 334–335; Usener, ‘Ad historiam’, 356; Pingree, ‘Chioniadēs’; Mercier, *Almanac*, 15–16; Tihon, ‘Astrological Promenade’, 278; Bydén, *Metochites*, 244–246, 249 note 93;
- 142 *PLP*, no. 31142; *ODB*, 1:453–454; Tihon, ‘Astrological Promenade’, 279–280; Bydén, *Metochites*, 243–245; Lampsides, ‘Chrysococcis’, 253 with anterior bibliography, and also: Lampsides, ‘Χρυσοκόκκης’; Kunitzsch, ‘Fixsternverzeichnis’; Karpov, *История*, 584. For Manuel III, see: Panaretos, 78.31–36.
- 143 Kousis, ‘Quelques considérations’, 208; Congourdeau, ‘Médecine byzantine’, 228.
- 144 Karpov, *История*, 564–569; cf. Kafasis, ‘From Tabriz’, 253.
- 145 Tihon, ‘Astrological Promenade’, 274; Bydén, *Metochites*, 250, 261–262; Pirtea, ‘From Lunar Nodes’.
- 146 Kousis, ‘Quelques considérations’, 208–209; *PLP*, no. 31233. However, it cannot be ruled out that the manuscript’s ‘Choniatēs’ was merely a misspelling of ‘Chioniadēs’ (Gutas, ‘Arabic into Byzantine Greek’, 254).
- 147 Kousis, ‘Quelques considérations’, 211–220 (edition and commentaries); *PLP*, no. 17855; Touwaide, ‘The Jujube Tree’, 83; Bouras-Vallianatos, *Innovation*, 143 note 15.
- 148 For more details about the well-documented phenomenon of the δίγλωσσοι (‘double-tongued’, ‘speaking two languages’) in late Byzantium see: Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 359–380 and also Shukurov, ‘Appropriation’, 175–176.
- 149 Magdalino, *Orthodoxie*, 150–162. For important remarks on the mathematization of astronomy and occult sciences in the Iranian tradition since the eleventh century, and especially under the Ilkhans, see: Melvin-Koushki, ‘Mathematicalization’. This trend in Iranian scholarship affected the Byzantine tradition.
- 150 Kousis, ‘Quelques considérations’, 206.

- 151 CCAG, 4:51.
- 152 Mavroudi, 'Exchanges', 65; Mavroudi, 'Islamic Divination', 327 note 79. For the factual and cultural contexts of the life and deeds of Maria, the Lady of the Mongols, see: Runciman, 'Ladies'; Teteriatnikov, 'Nun Melania'; Talbot, 'Building Activity', 334–336; Talbot, 'Female Patronage', 272; Korobeinikov, 'Ilkhans', 386–392, 406–412; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 82–84, 240–241.
- 153 Rashīd al-Dīn, *As'ila-wu ajwiba*; for Rashīd al-Dīn's biography with an up-to-date bibliography, see now: Brack, 'Rashīd al-Dīn'.
- 154 Togan, 'Cultural relations' (with a facsimile of the entire 'Byzantine' section from the Ayasofya manuscript no. 2180, fol. 264v–286v). For a modern critical edition of the treatise, see: Rashīd al-Dīn, *As'ila-wu ajwiba*, 2:52–94. Turkish and English translations of the Introduction: Togan, 'Cultural relations', 4–5 and 11–12, respectively. See also: Gutas, 'Arabic into Byzantine Greek', 258 (summary of the questions); Yoeli-Tlalim, *ReOrienting*, 112–115 (with a partial English translation of the Introduction, which is not devoid of some inaccuracies).
- 155 Rashīd al-Dīn, *As'ila-wu ajwiba*, 2:52.1.
- 156 Shukurov, 'Crypto-Muslims', 138–139.
- 157 Rashīd al-Dīn, *As'ila-wu ajwiba*, 2:52.1, 52.5, 54.24, 66.24, 68.19, 69.19, 70.19, 71.15, 74.15.
- 158 The Arabo-Persian '*malik of*' something or some people was a standard model for forming court titles: *malik al-umarā*, *malik al-shu'arā* and the like.
- 159 Rashīd al-Dīn, *As'ila-wu ajwiba*, 2:52.9–10. Curiously enough, the traditional term 'Rūmī', used to denote the Byzantine language, nationality and state, is entirely substituted here by 'Greek'.
- 160 Rashīd al-Dīn, *As'ila-wu ajwiba*, 2:52.17–18.
- 161 Gutas, 'Arabic into Byzantine Greek', 258.
- 162 Togan, 'Cultural relations', 15; Ragep, 'Shams', 235; Yoeli-Tlalim, *ReOrienting*, 113–114.
- 163 Pingree, 'Māshā'llāh', 236–242.
- 164 For Apomasar's works in Arabic, Greek and Latin, see: Pingree, 'Abū Ma'shar'; Mavroudi, *Dream Interpretation*, 7–8 note 29. For the repertoire and date of these Greek translations, see: Abū Ma'shar (Pingree), V–VIII; Pingree, 'Classical and Byzantine Astrology', 227 note 2.
- 165 Symeon Seth (Langkavel), 1.1–3.
- 166 Symeon Seth (Langkavel), 72.8–10; Pietrobelli and Cronier, 'Arabic Galenism', 293–294.
- 167 CAAG, 3:346–348.
- 168 Magdalino, *Orthodoxie*, 86–87, 110–111.
- 169 Marc., gr. V. 008 (coll. 1334), fol. 138r.
- 170 Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Phillipps, 1562 (158), 1, fol. 80r.
- 171 CCAG, 2:123.
- 172 Ideler, *Physici et medici*, 2:305–306 (XI).
- 173 Chioniades (Pingree), 36.19–20.
- 174 Such instances are abundant; see Indexes for CCAG, vol. 1–12 (Persae, Persicus, Persis).
- 175 CCAG, 3:7 (fol. 18).
- 176 CCAG, 5/3:41 (fol. 152).
- 177 Costanza, 'Due Incipit', 606–617; Delatte, *Anecdota*, 263–271; Philopon, *Astrolabe*, 80–82; Tihon, 'Horloge persane'; Fisher, 'Arabs, Latins and Persians', 168–170 (Shams-i Bukhārī's treatise on astrolabe).
- 178 For the fictitious Persian astrologers Achmet the Persian and Πάλχος (that is, Balkhī), see: Pingree, 'Historical Horoscopes', 501–502; Pingree, *Astral omens*,

- 75–76; Pingree, ‘Classical and Byzantine Astrology’, 230; Pingree, ‘Abramius’, 204; Pingree, ‘Māshā’ llāh’, 238.
- 179 *Raze Logos*, 3 (title), 3.19: Ραζή; Kousis, ‘Quelques considérations’, 206–207.
- 180 See, for instance: Ideler, *Physici et medici*, 2:286: ‘σοφωτάτου παρὰ μὲν Ἰνδοῖς Ἄλλη Ἐμπνι τοῦ Σινᾶ ἦτοι Ἄλλη υἱοῦ τοῦ Σινᾶ, παρὰ δὲ Ἱταλοῖς Ἀβτζιανοῦ’. Plausibly, Avicenna is given this ‘Indian’ identity here because he lived in Central Asia, on the extreme east of the Iranian world on the borders of the Indian cultural space. This medical treatise referring to Avicenna might well have been a translation from Italian. For Greek translations of Avicenna, see also: Kousis, ‘Quelques considérations’, 207; Congourdeau, ‘Médecine byzantine’, 225; Bouras-Vallianatos, *Innovation*, 34.
- 181 Ἀλῆ Ἀβδουλουκαρεῖμ, Ἀβδουλαχμάνης ὁ Χαζήνης, Νασύρη Χοντζᾶ and Χουσύμης Σαλάρ: Usener, ‘Ad historiam’, 338.4–10; CCAG, 1:89, 5/3:146; Chioniades (Pingree), 50, 52; Ragep, ‘Tūsi’; Kennedy, ‘Survey’, 130 (no. 32).
- 182 Gutas, ‘Arabic into Byzantine Greek’, 253–254; Cronier, ‘Traductions grecques’, 156–157, 168–169; Cronier, ‘Copiste’. His name was transliterated in Greek as Νετζηπουντιν Συμαρκατι ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Ἀλῆ. I hesitate to identify two other Persian astrologers Μασήρης ὁ Πέρσης and Μουχαμάτης ὁ Παλχιώτης (Muhammad-i Balkhī), translated into Greek: CCAG, 2:123–130, 5:53–54 (fol. 260r).
- 183 See also Section 7.7.1 and Savage-Smith, ‘Geomancy’, 999 on the possible Berber origin of al-Zanātī. However, there is a possibility that the *nisba* Zanātī is derived from the Persian village of Zanāt in the Khuzestan region of Iran, situated not far from Ahwaz. In the latter case, he would indeed be of Persian origin, and the judgments made by Byzantine authors would be accurate.
- 184 Chioniades (Pingree), 42.28–44.7; see also: CCAG, 1:34 (Plut., 28, cod. 14, fol. 275r) and CCAG, 5/1:54 (Biblioteca Angelica, gr. 29, fol. 266v).
- 185 Chioniades (Pingree), 60.5–23, 76.27–29, etc.; all terms for the Arabic months are given with Persian accentuation: Ραμπσουάλ (50.33), Σαφάρ (240.28), Ραντζάπ (134.27, 142.8–12, 162.24, 308.19), etc. Cf. Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 357 note 239.
- 186 For general surveys of Byzantine translations from Arabic and Persian, see, for instance: Gutas, ‘Arabic into Byzantine Greek’; Mesis, ‘Traduction’; Nicolaidis, *Science*, 109–113; Kaldellis, ‘Catalogue of translations’: Section ‘Translations from Arabic’.
- 187 Shukurov, ‘Appropriation’, 173–177.
- 188 Pingree, ‘Abramius’; Pingree, ‘Chioniades’; Pingree, ‘Abū Ma’shar’; Pingree, ‘Māshā’ llāh’; Tihon, ‘Tables astronomiques’; Tihon, ‘Horloge persane’; Tihon, ‘De même’, 285–287; Tihon, ‘Jewish astronomy’; Tihon, ‘Astronomy’; Bydén, *Metochites*, 241–262; Magdalino, ‘Astrology’, 205–206; Pirtea, ‘From Lunar Nodes’, 353–365; Kaldellis, ‘Translations into Greek’, 411–418.
- 189 Kousis, ‘Quelques considérations’; Gutas, ‘Arabic into Byzantine Greek’; Congourdeau, ‘Médecine byzantine’; Touwaide, ‘The Jujube Tree’, 83–84; Touwaide, ‘Arabic into Greek’, 206–208; Touwaide, ‘Arabic medicine’; Bennett, *Medicine and Pharmacy*, 121–139; Bouras-Vallianatos, *Innovation*, 9, 13, 42, 142–143, 167; Bouras-Vallianatos, ‘Cross-Cultural Transfer’.
- 190 Mavroudi, *Dream Interpretation*, 392–429; Mavroudi, ‘Exchange’; Mavroudi, ‘Islamic Divination’.
- 191 Tihon, ‘Astrological Promenade’, 277–278; Bydén, *Metochites*, 251–257; Pirtea, ‘From Lunar Nodes’, 340; Kafasis, ‘From Tabriz’, 245–246.
- 192 Bardi, *Persische Astronomie* and also Bardi, ‘Reception’; Bardi, ‘Paradosis’, 252–256.
- 193 Bardi, *Persische Astronomie* and also Bardi, ‘Paradosis’; Bardi, ‘Tradizione’; Pingree, ‘Abramius’; Pingree, ‘Māshā’ llāh’, 238.

- 194 Kousis, 'Quelques considérations', 211–217 (treatise of Constantine Meliteniotes) and commentaries on p. 219; Pingree, 'Indian and Pseudo-Indian', 189; Touwaide, 'Translation'; Touwaide, 'The Jujube Tree', 84–86; Bardi, 'Arabic and Persian Terminology'; Cronier, 'Traductions grecques', 158–160; Miguet, 'Traduction grecque', 132–133; Pérez Martín, 'Chioniades', 499.34; Lendari and Manolessou, 'Language of Iatrosophia', 91–93. For using other Oriental textual elements like stand-alone Arabic characters (in addition to transcribed original Arabo-Persian technical terms), see: Cronier, 'Copiste', 282–291.
- 195 See, for instance: Delatte, 'Lexique'; Lundström, 'Ett persiskt-grekiskt'; Thomson, *Textes grecs*, no. 10, 139–168; Gutas, 'Arabic into Byzantine Greek', 254; Touwaide, 'Arabic medicine'; Touwaide, 'Arabic into Greek', 212–214; Touwaide, 'Lexica medico-botanica'; Kaldellis, 'Catalogue of translations'.
- 196 *Syntipas*, 2.3 (Περσῶν τοὺς σοφοὺς λογογράφους), 3.8–9 (προϊστόρησε Μούσος ὁ Πέρσης). Mousos the Persian is identical with Mūsā b. 'Isā Kisrawī, the possible translator of the original story from Pahlavi to Arabic in the first half of the ninth century. There exists a later Byzantine paraphrase of the *Syntipas*. See: Beck, *Volksliteratur*, 46 with relevant bibliography; Perry, 'Book of Sindbad'; for Mūsā-yī Kisrawī specifically, see: Rosen, 'Худай-намэ', 167–171. For a detailed discussion of the origins and literary value of the *Syntipas*, see now: Toth, 'Authorship'; Toth, 'Syntipas'.
- 197 Shukurov, 'Appropriation', 168–173.
- 198 Kantakouzenos, *Historia*, 2:48.11–18; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 367.
- 199 Magdalino, *Orthodoxie*; Magdalino, 'Astrology'.
- 200 CCAg, 5/2:138 (14th cen.), 5/3:131 (14th cen.), 9/1:160 (15th cen.); see also 'Αἱ χῶραι συνοικειούμεναι τοῖς ἰβ ζῳδίοις', in *Anecdota astrologica* (Ludwich), 112–119 and Appendix 3 in Vettius Valens (Pingree), 392–395; Bouché-Leclercq, 'Chorographie', 343–350. For some preliminary notes, see: Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 39–40; Pirtea, 'From Lunar Nodes', 362–364.
- 201 See, for instance: CCAg, 4:126.4–5 (Περσία), 126.9–10 (Χωροσᾶν).
- 202 For Apomasar, see also Section 7.7.3.
- 203 Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 341–343 and more details in: Shukurov, 'Horizons'.
- 204 Seth (Langkavel), 66.20–22: 'Τοῦ μόσχου διάφορα εἶδη ἐστίν, ὧν ὁ κρείττων γίνεταί ἐν πόλει τινὶ τοῦ Χωροσᾶν ἀνατολικωτέρα λεγομένη Τουπάτ' (editor's reading emended). For the biography and works of Seth, see now: Cronier et al. 'Galien en procès'.
- 205 Theophanes Continuatus (Featherstone/Codoñer), III.19.15–18 (p. 158, transl. 159). See also a similar statement in: Genesisios, 37.20–28; Genesisios (Kaldellis), 50 (English translation).
- 206 Skylitzes, *Historia*, 332–333, 442–443; Skylitzes (Wortley), 315, 417.
- 207 Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Opera minora*, 235.10–13; Eustathios of Thessalonike (Stone), 184 (English translation).
- 208 Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Opera minora*, 282.20; Eustathios of Thessalonike (Stone), 55 (English translation). On the continuity between the ancient Persians and the Anatolian Muslims, see also: Shliakhtin, *From Scythians to Persians*, 64–67.
- 209 See also: Mavroudi, 'Exchange', 68–70; Bydén, *Metochites*, 262.
- 210 *Kyranides*, 14.3. Cf. Mavroudi, 'Occult Science', 74.
- 211 Tsitouridou, *Νικόλαος Ορφανός*, 88 and ill. 20; IMA, System No. 468.
- 212 *Alexander Romance*, Venice Hellenic Institute, Cod. gr. 5, *passim*, for instance, see: fols. 78r (bottom), 79r, 79v, 83v (top), 84v, etc. For more on 'Persian' motifs in Byzantine art, see: Vryzidis, 'Of Texts and Objects'.
- 213 Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*.
- 214 Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 11–27.

- 215 The most detailed studies with further bibliography: Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*; Schmitt, 'Byzantinoiranica'; Zervan, *Lehnwörter*; Hemmerdinger, '158 noms communs grecs'; Hemmerdinger, '173 noms communs grecs'; Shukurov, *Byzantine Turks*, 388–412 (Etymological Glossary).
- 216 For instance, the Persian etymologies of μούντζα, σαρλίδες, σκαραμάγγιον, τζόκος (119, 158, 167, 188) from Zervan, *Lehnwörter* are not included in the present list.
- 217 Pingree, 'Indian and Pseudo-Indian', 189; Bardi, 'Arabic and Persian Terminology', 75–76.

# A Greco-Iranian epilogue

The transmission of ancient cultural heritage did not cease throughout Byzantine history. Intellectual and cultural gaps from the seventh to the ninth centuries should not be overestimated and, obviously, ought to be re-evaluated. Culture and intellectualism may flourish in a wealthy country only as the volume of cultural production is proportional to the availability of resources and financial support. While the seventh and eighth centuries saw challenging times for the Byzantines marked by a severe economic crisis and the total insufficiency of funds in the imperial and church treasuries and in private hands, it does not mean that the reproduction of cultural memory stopped and there was a civilisational chasm leading to a complete fracture with tradition.

The idea of Byzantine cultural and intellectual decline, popular among scholars, is often illustrated by the remarks of the Muslim scholar al-Jāhīz (868/869), who draws a contrast between the ancient Greeks and the Byzantines. al-Jāhīz argues that the Byzantine Christians and ancient Greeks are two distinct entities, suggesting that the former have little connection with ancient Greek science, culture and religion.<sup>1</sup> This judgement of al-Jāhīz is commonly interpreted as the objective evidence of a bystander confirming cultural rupture between Byzantine and old pagan Hellenic traditions at least between the seventh and eighth centuries. However, modern interpreters rarely pay due attention to al-Jāhīz's further reasoning, which emphasises unbroken continuity between old and new Hellenic traditions: the Byzantines, he says, 'appropriated the books of the Greeks' and 'claimed that the Greeks were but one of the Byzantine tribes', or in our terms, that the Byzantines insisted on their genetic unity with the Hellenes of old and adopted the Hellenic intellectual heritage as their own. Judging by al-Jāhīz, the Byzantines of the time quite specifically reflected on their inextricable link with the Hellenic past. The cultural rupture between the seventh and ninth centuries should not be exaggerated.

The rapid rise of textual and art activity under the Macedonian dynasty, coinciding with the gradual restoration of economic strength, evidences that the connections with the past Greco-Roman and early Christian experience were not cut or drastically degraded. The survival and even flourishing of the image of ancient Persia in middle and late Byzantine tradition is a strong

argument for the continuity between the early and middle Byzantine periods and against overstressing cultural degeneration.

### E.1 A Gateway to the Orient

The case of the Persian presence in Byzantine culture shows that the major phenomena of Byzantine consciousness should be studied in the inseparable bundle of the 'religious' and 'secular' aspects of Byzantine intellectuality and social practices, which the Byzantines themselves did not divide. Persian motifs in both Byzantine religious and secular traditions had a solid factual basis yielding rich and well-elaborated cultural contexts, packed with meaningful stories, experiences, associations and sensations, which indissolubly linked Persia with the Hellenic and Roman national past. Unlike the Western and Slavic Christian traditions, the memory of ancient Persia became an indispensable part of the Byzantine mentality. The Ancient Persia of the Byzantines, in this sense, contributed to shaping collective and personal identity. The Persian elements of cultural memory, both religious and lay, were permanently active and at hand, affecting the perception of reality, and thus configuring the Byzantine future.

Over the centuries, the conceptual centrality of Persian motifs in theology, philosophy and science (including occult practices) led to the semantic equalisation of 'Persian' with 'Hellene'. The most notable examples of this equalisation can be seen in the text and iconography of the *Story of Aphroditianos*, the hagiography and iconography of the Sasanian martyrs and the theosophy of Gemistos Plethon. The Persian elements were Hellenised inasmuch as they were perceived as important components of the Hellenic Self.

The case of Persia, as an element of memory, demonstrates that the core of cultural memory is quite resilient to change. Something created in the past does not necessarily get changed over time. As a rule, people continue to use their memories of old stories in conventional ways and traditional contexts. However, there could be some exceptions: for instance, one may note a certain mismatch between the evolutionary curves in differing images of Persia. Unlike the biblical and lay images of Achaemenid and Parthian Persia that remained mostly unchanged, the memory of the Sasanian martyrs gradually faded across the centuries. The political changes and temporal distance reduced the significance of the Sasanian experience for the Byzantine mentality. The practical knowledge of contemporaneous New Persia, being rather positive in nature and becoming more ample and precise in the course of the twelfth–fourteenth centuries, overshadowed the traumatic memory of Sasanian times.

Starting with the ninth century, the rise of the neo-Persian culture did not go unnoticed. The Byzantines accumulated information, albeit succinct, about the new Persian world in eastern Iran. Later on, the Byzantines qualified Anatolian Muslims as Persians, due to specific locative principles of ethnological classification, the prevalence of Persian culture there and

also the analogising effects of Byzantine cultural memory. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were marked by the rise of a powerful intellectual wave from Iran, pouring into Byzantine science. The Byzantines rediscovered actual Persia and endeavoured to learn the revived Persian wisdom. However, at that epoch, Byzantines obtained from Persians not only practical wisdom but also knowledge of the Persian language. Gemistos Plethon, whose formation as a thinker took place in the 'Persianate' intellectual environment of Constantinople, cardinally re-thought the role of the ancient Persian roots of Hellenic wisdom and endowed Hellenised Zoroaster with the status of the founder of his eternal and universal theosophy. Probably, it was the 'Persian scientific renaissance' of the early Palaiologan era that paved the way for Plethon's intellectual experiment. Not long before the death of the great tradition of classical Hellenism in the mid-fifteenth century, Hellenic wisdom met the living Iranian spirit again, thus completing the historical loop that lasted over two millennia.

I suggest that the Persian elements in Hellenic self-identity played the role of a gateway, akin to Heidegger's concept of clearing, allowing the information to flow from Persian, Arabian and Turkic Orient into Byzantine culture. These internal Persian elements kept the Byzantines receptive and sensitive to the new information coming from the Orient. The Persian heritage provided the Byzantines with a common ground with their Oriental neighbours. Persian heritage enabled the Byzantines to place easily the phenomena coming from the Orient into their own network of associations and analogies present in their cultural memory.<sup>2</sup> The high level of openness of Byzantine intellectualism to Persian culture in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was due to the presence of this gateway to the East, fuelled by cultural memory.

## **E.2 More than One Persia**

In terms of the Byzantine mentality proper, there seems to have existed more than one Persia: theological and ecclesiastical Persia, philosophical and scientific Persia, literary Persia and political Persia, that is, rather multiple *Persias*.

Quite symptomatically, Byzantines adopted the term Khorasan, which was the new Persian autonym, but they were not curious about why Persian practices of self-description had changed. The Byzantines showed little interest in correlating Khorasan with Περσίς/Persia of the ancient Persian kings and that of thirteenth-century Persian Anatolia, and in understanding the relationships between these phenomena. It is unclear to what extent the Byzantines correlated Khorosanitai and Persians of Anatolia with the Persian Magi and the producers of ancient Persian wisdom.

Of course, as discussed in Chapter 7.9, all Persian types explicitly or implicitly were implied to have a common civilisational background. The Achaemenids of Herodotus and Xenophon, the Persians of the Old and New Testaments, the Khorosanitai, the Persians of Anatolia and the producers of old and new Persian science were considered elements of the same



Persian ethnic substratum. The differing traits of Persian intellectualism like religious knowledge and piety, love for philosophical wisdom and exact sciences and, at the same time, cruel rejection of the Christian truth and obsession with dubious astrology, alchemy and magic were acknowledged as stemming from the same Persian national spirit. However, the generic links between diverse guises of Persia, albeit sometimes referred to in more or less detail, were never problematised and conceptualised by Byzantine intellectuals. The diverse images of the Persian remained unmerged, forming a single image and were never re-thought as an integral whole. The multicoloured image of Persia remained too complex, fragmented and contradictory. Compared to the Byzantine images of the Arabs, Turks, Slavs and Latins, the phenomenon of Byzantine Persia represents a much more multifarious and ambiguous image.

By the way, the noted lack of a holistic comprehension of the Persian phenomenon in Byzantine intellectualism is one of the decisive reasons why modern scholarship has overlooked or underestimated the presence of Persia in middle and late Byzantine mentality and culture.

However, let us not be unfair to the Byzantines for their inability or rather unwillingness to construct an uncontradictory concept of Persia. The fact is that the diverse Persian images exemplify well the coexistence of conflicting discursive strategies in the Byzantine mentality. These conflicting strategies in the interpretation of the world were never reduced to a common denominator. The Byzantine way of describing things appears to be essentially *multilinear*, in contrast with our current *unilinear* descriptive habits. This remarkable feature represents a serious obstacle to our attempts to explain Byzantium in a consistent way by means of analytic methodologies and to construct a unified and homogenous *scientific* image that would be free of contradictions. The Byzantine mentality seems to be less concerned with contradictions in its world-image, and instead prefers paralleling differing explanatory approaches freely, even if they appear to be mutually exclusive from the standpoint of our understanding of *common sense*. Probably, this essential *multilinearity* imparted sustainability and plasticity to Byzantine culture, which enabled it to revive more than once in the course of one and a half millennia.

In any case, the accusation of indifference to the outside world, typically levelled against the Byzantines, is exaggerated at best. As the case of Persia testifies, the Byzantines *did* receive and accumulate information from beyond the borders; however, they handled and systematised that information in ways that modern scholarship may least expect.

### E.3 Byzantine Persia and the Modern Iranian Identity

The Christian universal historiosophy accumulated and systematised information about ancient Persia that was known to the Jews, Greeks and Romans, merging it into a single discourse. The Byzantine Christians saw the history of Iranian antiquity as an integral whole, as a continuous unfolding of the

fate of the Persian nation, subdivided into periods under the rule of different Persian dynasties: the Medes, Achaemenids, Parthians and Sasanians. The Macedonian (Hellenistic) period was viewed as a temporary break in the Persian continuity, serving more as a bridge between the Achaemenid and Parthian dynasties rather than a significant diving point. However, it should be kept in mind that the Byzantine image of Persian history is a purely speculative construct, necessitated, in particular, by the Christian historiosophy of the Four Kingdoms.

The bulk of textual information about the ancient Iranian world up to the time of the Islamic conquest, available to modern scholars, is in the Greek language, having been preserved by Byzantine intellectuals who transmitted ancient Greek written heritage to us. Those parts of the antique heritage that medieval Byzantine intellectuals considered unimportant or undeserving for some reason are lost to us forever.

Therefore, it was the Byzantines who laid the foundation for the modern scholarly history of the Medes, Achaemenids, Parthians and Sasanians, which is seen, following the Byzantines, as an integral whole. The successive dynastic periods suggested by the Byzantines constitute the basic periodisation of the ancient history of Iran in modern scholarship. Modern scholars see the history of Ancient Iran through the lens of the Byzantines who partially preserved old and created new systematising narratives about the Iranian past. Thus, the modern image of Ancient Iran is heavily Hellenised, Romanised and Byzantinised.

Moreover, this image has formed the basis of modern Iranian national self-identity. Since the Qajars in the nineteenth century, the originally Greco-Roman concept of ancient Persia with its successive ruling dynasties came to be adopted by Iranian cultural memory proper as its own reminiscence of the Iranian past. This newly formed remembrance was supported by numerous monuments and archaeological findings from Iranian antiquity, which were extensively studied by European scholars under the patronage of the Qajars. Over the course of the twentieth century, modern Iranian self-identity fully assimilated the Hellenic image of Persia, which now has entered Iranian, Dari Afghan and Tajik textbooks as a standard self-description version of the ancient history of the Iranian peoples.<sup>3</sup>

Eventually, the Byzantine memory of Persia became Iranian.

## Notes

- 1 For an English translation of al-Jāhīz and commentaries, see: Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 86–87.
- 2 Shukurov, 'Byzantium and Asia'.
- 3 For more about ancient and modern Persian identity, see for instance: *Iranian identity*; Daryaei, 'Memory and History'; Coloru, 'Once were Persians'; Lerner, 'Ancient Persianisms'; Strootman and Versluys, 'From Culture to Concept', 11–16. Tajik cultural memory has adopted these 'Hellenic' ideas under the influence of Russian scholarship in the second half of the twentieth century.

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- ИРАИК – *Известия Русского археологического института в Константинополе*.



*ПС* – Палестинский сборник.

*ПСТГУ* – Православный Свято-Тихоновский гуманитарный университет.

*ПЭ* – *Православная энциклопедия*, 60 vols (Moscow: Православная энциклопедия, 2000–).

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Note: 'f' stands for 'figure', 'n' for 'note', 't' for 'table'

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