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## AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CATALOGUE IN GEORGE THE MONK'S CHRONICLE\*

**Abstract.** In Book I of George the Monk's *Chronicle* we read a long chapter dedicated to Alexander the Great, which includes an extensive section on his encounter with the Brahmins and the description of their customs. In particular, George the Monk follows the first part of the treatise *De Gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus* by Palladius, of which he provides almost *verbatim* excerpts. Thereafter, we find an ethnographic section devoted to the customs of the Seres, the Bactrians, the Chaldeans, the Gelae, the Britons, and the Amazons. The aim of this study, therefore, is to explore the reception of Greek ethnographic literature in the erudite compilation of George the Monk.

**Keywords:** George the Monk, universal chronicle, Brahmins, barbarian populations

From the ancient world we have several Graeco-Roman texts on the lifestyle of barbaric populations<sup>1</sup>. The Greeks and the Romans reflected extensively on the traditions of *alien* peoples and interpreted them from their point of view. Geographers and ethnographers like Herodotus, Strabo, Diodorus Siculus and Plinius – just to mention some famous names – had devoted long chapters of their works to the description of areas such as Persia, Bactria, India and the Caucasus, and to the habits of their inhabitants. The Graeco-Roman ethnographic production, in particular, left a long lasting legacy to the following late antique, Byzantine and medieval tradition. This article focuses mainly on the reception process of the immense quantity of ethnographic material of Greek origin concerning the community of the Brahmins and other ethnic groups in one of the Byzantine

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<sup>1</sup> The relevant literature on this subject is very extensive. Essential are the works of F. HARTOG, *Le miroir d'Hérodote. Essai sur la représentation de l'autre*, Paris 1980 and *Mémoire d'Ulysse. Récits sur la frontière en Grèce ancienne*, Paris 1996. See also B. GATZ, *Weltalter, goldene Zeit und sinnverwandte Vorstellungen*, Hildesheim 1967; J. ROMM, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought*, Princeton, NJ 1992; P. CARTLEDGE, *The Greeks. A Portrait of Self and Others*, Oxford 2002; *Greeks and Barbarians*, ed. T. HARRISON, Edinburgh 2002 [= ERAW]; E.S. GRUEN, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*, Princeton, NJ–Oxford 2011 [= MCL]; K. VLASSOPOULOS, *Greeks and Barbarians*, Cambridge 2013; E. JENSEN, *Barbarians in the Greek and Roman World*, Indianapolis 2018.

chronographies. The text that will be here analysed is the *Brief Chronicle* (*Chronikon Syntomon*) by George the Monk<sup>2</sup>, a work written in the 9<sup>th</sup> century as a sort of “monastic chronicle”, according to A. Kazhdan’s definition<sup>3</sup>. George the Monk was acquainted with the Greek texts, but the information he provides derives from Christian sources<sup>4</sup>, as Byzantine chroniclers used to do<sup>5</sup>. In his work, Book I is the preface to the actual chronicle – which extends from Book II to Book IX according to C. De Boor’s reconstruction<sup>6</sup> – and contains the long chapter 19 which focuses on the history of Alexander the Great: here there is an extensive description of the lifestyle of the Brahmins and of other barbaric populations, the Seri, the Bactrians, the Chaldeans, the Gelae, the Britons, followed by the mythical Amazons<sup>7</sup>. These contents were later synthetically reproduced and reprocessed in the universal chronicles by George Cedrenus (11<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>8</sup> and Michael Glycas (12<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>9</sup>.

### The island of the Brahmins

The information in George the Monk’s passage on the Brahmins’ lifestyle appears as an epitomized reproduction of the first part of the treatise attributed to Palladius, *De gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus*<sup>10</sup>. It is a short treatise from the late antiquity, probably composed at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century by Palladius, bishop

<sup>2</sup> *Georgii Monachi Chronicon*, vol. I, ed. C. DE BOOR, P. WIRTH, Stuttgartiae 1978 [= BSGR] (cetera: GEORGIUS MONACHUS). On the compilation of George the Monk’s *Chronicle*, see H. HUNGER, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, vol. I, München 1978, p. 347–351; E.M. JEFFREYS, *Malalas in Greek*, [in:] *Studies in John Malalas*, ed. E.M. JEFFREYS, B. CROKE, R. SCOTT, Sydney 1990 [= BAus, 6], p. 245–268, especially p. 261–262; D.E. AFINOGENOV, *Some Observations on Genres of Byzantine Historiography*, B 62, 1992, p. 13–33; R. SCOTT, *Byzantine Chronicles*, MChr 6, 2009, p. 31–58, especially p. 45–46; W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, New York 2013, p. 114–120; L. NEVILLE, *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing*, Cambridge 2018, p. 87–92.

<sup>3</sup> A. KAZHDAN, *A History of Byzantine Literature (850–1000)*, ed. C. ANGELIDI, Athens 2006, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> As to George the Monk’s knowledge of scriptural and patristic texts, see W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle...*, p. 117. On the method of the Byzantine chroniclers, who in compiling their chronicles derived their material from the Church Fathers and ecclesiastical sources, see the remarks in the introduction of *The Chronography of George Synkellos. A Byzantine Chronicle of Universal History from the Creation*, ed. W. ADLER, P. TUFFIN, Oxford 2002, p. LX–LXII. Also, as an example of John Malalas’ use of sources, see the study by E.M. JEFFREYS, *Malalas’ Sources*, [in:] *Studies...*, p. 167–216.

<sup>6</sup> Following the subdivision of the books in C. DE BOOR’s edition, the first part corresponds to Book I; the second part comprises Books II–VII; the third consists of Books VIII and IX, which are, however, the most extensive. On the subdivision of the contents of the *Chronicle*, see W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle...*, p. 118.

<sup>7</sup> GEORGIUS MONACHUS, I, 19 (p. 35, 6 – p. 39, 10).

<sup>8</sup> *Georgii Cedreni Historiarum Compendium*, vol. I, ed. L. TARTAGLIA, Roma 2016, p. 299–302.

<sup>9</sup> *Michaelis Glycae Annales*, rec. I. BEKKER, Bonnae 1836 [= CSHB], p. 269–270.

<sup>10</sup> PALLADIUS, *De gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus*, ed. W. BERGHOF, Meisenheim am Glan 1967 [= BKP, 24] (cetera: PALLADIUS).

of Helenopolis<sup>11</sup>. However, this section differs from Palladius' text because it provides new elements. This is the beginning of George the Monk's narration<sup>12</sup>:

Ὅς γε καὶ μέχρι τῶν ἐνδοτᾶτων Ἰνδῶν καὶ τοῦ κυκλοῦντος πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ὠκεανοῦ μεγάλου ποταμοῦ καὶ τῆς μεγίστης νήσου τῶν Βραχμάνων φθάσας, ὧν καὶ τὸν θαυμάσιον καὶ ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον βίον καὶ τὴν εἰς τὸν πάντων θεὸν εὐσέβειάν τε καὶ λατρείαν μεμαθηκῶς ἐξεπλάγη πάνυ καὶ ἡγάσθη τῆς τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐκείνων ἀκροτάτης φιλοσοφίας. ἐν ᾧ τόπῳ καὶ στήλην στήσας ἐπέγραψεν· ἐγὼ μέγας Ἀλέξανδρος βασιλεὺς ἔφθασα μέχρι τούτου. ἐν ἐκείνῃ γὰρ τῇ νήσῳ κατοικοῦσιν οἱ λεγόμενοι Μακρόβιοι. ζῶσι γὰρ οἱ πλείους αὐτῶν περὶ τὰ ρν' ἔτη διὰ τὴν πολλὴν καθαρότητα καὶ εὐκρασίαν τοῦ ἀέρος καὶ ἀνεξερεῦνητον θεοῦ κρίμα, ἐν ᾗ πάλιν οὐδέποτε ὁπώρα παντοία λείπει τὸν ὅλον χρόνον, ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἐν ταύτῳ ἢ μὲν ἀνθει, ἢ δὲ ὀμφορίζει, ἢ δὲ τρυγᾶται, καὶ γε καὶ τὰ μέγιστα Ἰνδικὰ γίνονται κάρυα καὶ τὰ δυσπόριστα ἡμῖν καὶ πανεπέραστα ἀρώματα καὶ ὁ μαγνήτης λίθος.

He reached the furthest parts of India and the Great Ocean which encircles the world, and in it the great isle of the Brahmans. He discovered their wonderful, even superhuman, way of life, their reverence and worship of the God of all things, by which he was very impressed, admiring the heights of philosophy which these men had reached. He set up a pillar in that place with the following inscription: "I, Alexander the Great, reached this place". In that island live the so-called Long-lived Ones. Most of them live on the age of 150 because of the pure and well-balanced atmosphere and the undiscoverable judgement of God. In that place every kind of fruit is in season all year round, inasmuch as while one is in flower, another is ripening and another is ready to harvest. The large Indian nuts grow there, and the spices which we love so much and which are so hard to obtain, and the stone called magnet.

The most remarkable element in this passage is the mentioning of an island of the Brahmans, while the first part of Palladius' *De gentibus Indiae* indicates that the Brahmans live in India and in Serica by the river Ganges<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, Palladius states that his information on the Brahmans derive from a Theban man of law<sup>14</sup> who had visited India and had reached the island of Taprobane<sup>15</sup>. The Theban had provided the following information about this island: this is where the Macrobian live<sup>16</sup> and it is also the seat of the Great King of the Indians<sup>17</sup>; in the nearby islands there is a special magnetic stone<sup>18</sup>; five long rivers flow there<sup>19</sup>; the production

<sup>11</sup> On the date and history of the text of Palladius' *De gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus* see Alexander der Grosse und die "nackten Weisen" Indiens, ed. M. STEINMANN, Berlin 2012 [= KPh, 4], p. 42–49. Cf. *Alexandre le Grand et les Brahmanes. Palladius d'Hélénopolis. Les Mœurs des Brahmanes de l'Inde, suivie de Correspondance d'Alexandre et de Dindime (Anonyme)*, ed. P. MARAVAL, Paris 2016, p. IX–L.

<sup>12</sup> GEORGIUS MONACHUS, I, 19 (p. 35, 6–21). Translation in R. STONEMAN, *Legends of Alexander the Great*, London–New York 2012, p. 30–31.

<sup>13</sup> PALLADIUS, I, 1.

<sup>14</sup> PALLADIUS, I, 3.

<sup>15</sup> PALLADIUS, I, 4.

<sup>16</sup> PALLADIUS, I, 4.

<sup>17</sup> PALLADIUS, I, 4.

<sup>18</sup> PALLADIUS, I, 5.

<sup>19</sup> PALLADIUS, I, 6.

of fruit is incessant<sup>20</sup>; the tall Indian nut trees grow there<sup>21</sup>; finally, the inhabitants of the island feed on milk, rice, fruit and use the skins of local sheep as clothes<sup>22</sup>.

If we compare the information provided by George the Monk with the text of Palladius, we can see how the former has excerpted the latter. The element which mostly stands out in his version is the fact that he places the Brahmans on an island which is not mentioned by Palladius, but which is clearly to be identified with Palladius' Taprobane<sup>23</sup>. This geographical displacement is important because it is often reported in the medieval tradition<sup>24</sup>. For instance, we find it in the Byzantine re-writing of the *Alexander Romance*, the so-called recension  $\epsilon$ <sup>25</sup>, which can be dated back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century<sup>26</sup>. This Byzantine version of the *Romance* presents the episode of Philon, a friend of Alexander, who explores an island which is placed right opposite the easternmost limit of the territory reached by the Macedonian king<sup>27</sup>. When Philon is back, Alexander decides to visit the island where he meets some naked men who direct him to the island of the blessed<sup>28</sup>. This episode in the recension  $\epsilon$  was then re-worked in the later recension  $\gamma$ <sup>29</sup>, in which we also find the interpolation of Palladius' treatise.

In general, the passage from George the Monk – although not original because of its derivation from Palladius – is interesting because it is a synthesis of all the necessary ethnographic information on the island where the Brahmans live. Specifically, George the Monk provides a list of features about the territory, the people and the animals that live there. His narration follows an old model of Greek

<sup>20</sup> PALLADIUS, I, 6.

<sup>21</sup> PALLADIUS, I, 6.

<sup>22</sup> PALLADIUS, I, 6.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. R. STONEMAN, *Naked Philosophers: the Brahmans in the Alexander Historians and the Alexander Romance*, JHS 115, 1995, p. 99–114, especially p. 107, n. 52.

<sup>24</sup> The island of the Brahmans can be found in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury (12<sup>th</sup> century), in the *Speculum historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais (13<sup>th</sup> century), and in the *Polychronicon* of Ranulf of Higden (14<sup>th</sup> century). See M. STEINMANN, *Eine fiktive Depesche der Gymnosophisten an Alexander den Großen: die Epistula Bragmanorum ad Alexandrum als Einleitung zu einer moralisch-ethnographischen Epitome*, CM 66, 2015, p. 221–242. See also my forthcoming article *The Brahmans' Utopia from the Greek Sources to John of Salisbury's Policraticus*, IGr 15, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Concerning the location of the Brahmans' utopian community on an island, see C. JOUANNO, *Des Gymnosophistes aux Réchabites: une utopie antique et sa christianisation*, AC 79, 2010, p. 53–76, especially p. 60–61. See also M. STEINMANN, *Eine fiktive Depesche...*, p. 226–227. See the island's description in the edition of the recension  $\epsilon$  *Anonymi Byzantini Vita Alexandri Regis Macedonum*, 30–31, ed. J. TRUMPF, Stuttgartiae 1974 [= BSGR], p. 104–109 (cetera: *Vita Alexandri*).

<sup>26</sup> J. TRUMPF, *Alexander, die Bersiler und die Brüste des Nordens*, BZ 64, 1971, p. 326–328 demonstrated that the recension  $\epsilon$  dates back to the early 8<sup>th</sup> century. For the dating of the recension  $\epsilon$  see the introduction by R. STONEMAN, in *Il Romanzo di Alessandro*, vol. I, ed. R. STONEMAN, T. GARGIULO, Milano 2012, p. LXXX. See also C. JOUANNO, *Naissance et métamorphose du Roman d'Alexandre*, Paris 2002, p. 339.

<sup>27</sup> *Vita Alexandri*, 30, 1–3.

<sup>28</sup> *Vita Alexandri*, 30, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Il Romanzo di Alessandro*, II, 35a, 1, vol. II..., p. 225–227.

ethnographic literature. In fact, the first part of Palladius' treatise is already organized as an ethnographic account which reports a journey made by a third character who narrated his experience to the author. George the Monk's summary lists all the *cultural markers* that refer to the divide between the Graeco-Roman civilized world and far off populations. If we follow the sequence of information in George the Monk's text, we find a series of *topoi* on India and its peoples that not only Palladius but several earlier Greek authors had already used<sup>30</sup>. To recapitulate, we can notice that:

- a) the longevity of the Macrobian is a quite common trait attributed to the populations of India<sup>31</sup> and Ethiopia<sup>32</sup>;
- b) the constant production of any kind of fruit as a typical element of the Indian territory – with special reference to the habitat of the Brahmans and the food they eat<sup>33</sup> – appears in the *Alexander Romance*<sup>34</sup>;
- c) the production of nuts and spices and the presence of a magnet in India are details that already appear in the passages attributed to Ctesias' *Indika*<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> The Graeco-Roman sources on the Brahmans are in *Fontes historiae religionum Indicarum*, ed. B. BRELOER, F. BÖMER, Bonnae 1939 [= FHR, 7]. The main studies on the Greek sources are by R. STONEMAN: *Who Are the Brahmans? Indian Lore and Cynic Doctrine in Palladius' De Bragmanibus and its Models*, CQ 44, 1994, p. 500–510; IDEM, *Naked Philosophers...*; IDEM, *Alexander the Great. A Life in Legend*, New Haven–London 2008, p. 91–102.

<sup>31</sup> STRABO, *Geography*, vol. VII, *Books 15–16*, XV, 1, 34, trans. H.L. JONES, Cambridge–London 1930 [= LCL, 241] (cetera: STRABO); DIO CHRYSOSTOM, *Discourses 31–36*, XXXV, 21, vol. III, trans. J.W. COHOON, H. LAMAR CROSBY, Cambridge–London 1940 [= LCL, 358]; LUCIAN, vol. I, *Longaevi*, 5, trans. A.M. HARMON, Cambridge–London 1913 [= LCL, 14], p. 224–225. The data are collected in P. SCHNEIDER, *L'Éthiopie et l'Inde. Interférences et confusions aux extrémités du monde antique (VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C. – VI<sup>e</sup> siècle après J.-C.)*, Rome 2004, p. 100–102.

<sup>32</sup> *Herodoti Historiae*, III, 23; III, 97; III, 114, vol. I–II, ed. H.B. ROSÉN, Stuttgartiae–Lipsiae 1987–1997 [= BSGR] (cetera: HERODOTUS); ATHENAEUS, *The Learned Banqueters*, vol. VI, *Books 12–13.594b*, XIII, 20, 566 c, trans. S. DOUGLAS OLSON, Cambridge, Mass. 2010 [= LCL, 327]; PHILOSTRATUS, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, vol. II, *Books 5–8*, VI, 4, trans. F.C. CONYBEARE, Cambridge–London 1911 [= LCL, 17]; CAIUS PLINIUS SECUNDUS, *Naturalis Historia*, VI, 190, vol. I, ed. L. IAN, C. MAYHOFF, Lipsiae 1970 [= BSGR] (cetera: PLINIUS). Data collected in P. SCHNEIDER, *L'Éthiopie et l'Inde...*, p. 100–102.

<sup>33</sup> See PLUTARCHUS, *Moralia*, 332B, vol. II, ed. W. NACHSTÄDT, W. SIEVEKING, J. TITCHENER, Lipsiae 1935 [= BSGR] (cetera: PLUTARCHUS); *Flavii Arriani Quae extant omnia*, vol. I, *Alexandri Anabasis*, VII 2, 4, ed. A.G. ROOS, Lipsiae 1967 [= BSGR]; *Flavii Arriani Quae extant omnia*, vol. II, *Scripta minora et fragmenta, Indica XI*, 8, ed. A.G. ROOS, Lipsiae 1968 [= BSGR]; *Porphyrus philosophi platonici opuscula selecta, De Abstinencia IV*, 17, 4–5, rec. A. NAUCK, Hildesheim 1963 [= BSGR] (cetera: PORPHYRIUS); *Refutation of All Heresies*, I, 24, 1, ed. M.D. LITWA, Atalanta 2016 [= WGRW, 40] (cetera: *Refutatio*).

<sup>34</sup> See the extended tale of the recension  $\beta$  in *Der griechische Alexanderroman. Rezension  $\beta$* , III, 5–6, ed. L. BERGSON, Stockholm–Göteborg–Uppsala 1965.

<sup>35</sup> CTÉSIAS DE CNIDE, *La Perse. L'Inde. Autres fragments*, F 45, 6; 28; 47, ed. D. LENFANT, Paris 2004 [= CUF.SG, 435] (cetera: CTESIAS).

The successive section in George the Monk's work then further follows the first part of Palladius' *De gentibus Indiae*<sup>36</sup>. Here the habits of the Brahmins are described: they lead a very simple life, naked, in contact with nature and with no possessions; they have neither gold, nor silver, nor do they breed animals or cultivate the land, they have no houses, no iron, no fire, they eat no bread nor wine nor meat<sup>37</sup>. The text stresses twice that they celebrate and worship God<sup>38</sup>. Then their peculiar sexual habits are mentioned, according to which they mate with women only during the summer months and plan births with a limit of two children<sup>39</sup>. Finally, the text mentions the monstrous creature that haunts the waters of their river: the Odontotyranos, and the huge wild animals that live in the deserts, the elephants, the snakes, the scorpions, the ants<sup>40</sup>.

Regarding George the Monk's synthesis on the life of the Brahmins, it is worth mentioning that the Graeco-Roman sources providing information on the image of this community are numerous and cover a long period of time starting from the Hellenistic authors who considered them as symbols of oriental wisdom<sup>41</sup>. Among the Church Fathers<sup>42</sup> – and Palladius is one of them – they are mentioned as positive models of asceticism<sup>43</sup>.

### The ethnographic survey

After the section devoted to the Brahmins, George the Monk's account catalogues several different populations and describes their peculiar habits. We find the Seres, the Bactrians, the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, the Gelae, the Britons and the Amazons. In this part the chronicler explicitly declares that his source is Caesarius of Nazianzus, brother of Gregory<sup>44</sup>. In particular, the account of George the Monk

<sup>36</sup> PALLADIUS, I, 11–15.

<sup>37</sup> GEORGIUS MONACHUS, I, 19 (p. 35, 21 – p. 36, 9).

<sup>38</sup> GEORGIUS MONACHUS, I, 19 (p. 35, 24 – p. 36, 1; 8–9).

<sup>39</sup> GEORGIUS MONACHUS, I, 19 (p. 36, 9 – p. 37, 6).

<sup>40</sup> GEORGIUS MONACHUS, I, 19 (p. 37, 7–22).

<sup>41</sup> K. KARTTUNEN, *Greeks and Indian Wisdom*, [in:] *Beyond Orientalism. The Work of Wilhelm Halbfass and its Impact on Indian and Cross-Cultural Studies*, ed. E. FRANCO, K. PREISENDANZ, Amsterdam–Atalanta 1997, p. 117–122.

<sup>42</sup> Many passages by Christian authors on the Brahmins are collected in my article *The Lifestyle of the Brahmins in the Refutatio omnium haeresium*, Huma 76, 2020, p. 57–82.

<sup>43</sup> See for instance the commentary to chapter 24 of Book I in the *Refutatio omnium haeresium* by J. FILLIOZAT, *La doctrine des brâhmanes d'après saint Hippolyte*, RHR 130, 1945, p. 59–91. Cf. B. BERG, *Dandamis: an Early Christian Portrait of Indian Asceticism*, CM 31, 1970, p. 269–305.

<sup>44</sup> Although Gregory of Nazianzus actually had a brother named Caesarius, the work *Questiones et responsiones* – the source of George the Monk – is attributed to the latter only in the title that has come down to us, and it is therefore a pseudo-epigraphic text. See PSEUDO-KAISARIOS, *Die Erotapokriseis*, ed. R. RIEDINGER, Berlin 1989 [= GCS] (cetera: PSEUDO-KAISARIOS), p. 9. On the problem of the identity of 'Pseudo-Caesarius' see I. PERCZEL, *Finding a Place for the Erotapokriseis of Pseudo-Caesarius: A New Document of Sixth-Century Palestinian Origenism*, ARAM.P 18, 2006, p. 49–83.



contains an almost literal quotation from the chapter 108 of the *Quaestiones et responsiones* by Caesarius<sup>45</sup>, who summarizes a long passage from the work *Against Fate* (*Κατὰ Είμαρμένης*), or *Liber legum regionum*, by Bardesanes of Edessa<sup>46</sup> that describes the specific norms of the lifestyle of various barbaric peoples<sup>47</sup>. This is the indirect source of the section on the barbaric peoples in the *Chronicle* of George the Monk. Additionally, the same contents of Bardesanes' passage are quoted more extensively in the *Praeparatio Evangelica* by Eusebius of Caesarea, which is the main source to reconstruct the lost Greek text of Bardesanes<sup>48</sup>.

Chapter 108 of Caesarius' *Quaestiones et responsiones* is dedicated to the refutation of the theory that events in human life do not happen by the determination of the constellations or fate<sup>49</sup>. Caesarius rejects this thesis by demonstrating that various peoples are not forced by astral conjunctions to make certain life choices<sup>50</sup>, but are guided by their free will<sup>51</sup> which determines their customs (*nomoi*)<sup>52</sup>. In this regard, it should be noted that Caesarius reworks the text of Bardesanes, following the same arguments against the theory that fate has any influence on human beings<sup>53</sup>. In Bardesanes' work, the main interest focuses on the habits that regulate the life of cultures far from the Christian world, to show how free will, and not astral influence, is decisive. On the basis of this acquisition and intellectual foundation, Bardesanes reviews the customs of numerous peoples located far from the *oikoumene*. The same interpretative model, together with the same expository scheme, reaches as far as George the Monk's ethnographic survey.

<sup>45</sup> PSEUDO-KAISARIOS, 108, 26–73.

<sup>46</sup> Bardesanes' fragments with commentary can be found in *The Book of the Laws of Countries. Dialogue on Fate of Bardaisan of Edessa*, ed. H.J.W. DRIJVERS, Assen 1965. See also BARDESANE, *Contro il fato. Κατὰ Είμαρμένης*, ed. I. RAMELLI, Roma–Bologna 2009 (cetera: BARDESANE). On Bardesanes' thought, see A. CAMPLANI, *Bardesane et les Bardesanites*, AEPHE V 112, 2003–2004, p. 29–50.

<sup>47</sup> PSEUDO-KAISARIOS, 108–111.

<sup>48</sup> The text of Eusebius with the Italian translation can be found in BARDESANE, *Contro il fato...*, p. 511–530. On Eusebius as a source of Bardesanes' text see BARDESANE, *Contro il fato...*, p. 257–265, and also I. RAMELLI, *Bardesane e la sua scuola tra la cultura occidentale e quella orientale: il lessico della libertà nel Liber Legum Regionum*, [in:] *Pensiero e istituzioni del mondo classico nelle culture del Vicino Oriente. Atti del Seminario Nazionale di Studio, Brescia 14–16 ottobre 1999*, ed. R.B. FINAZZI, A. VALVO, Alessandria 2001, p. 237–255.

<sup>49</sup> The title of chapter 108 is: Περὶ σεβασμάτων Ἑλληνικῶν καὶ ὅτι οὐ κατὰ ἀστρολογίαν ἢ εἰμαρμένην τινὰ συμβαίνει ἡμῖν. "On the cults of the Greeks and on the fact that everything does not happen to us in accordance with astrology or fate".

<sup>50</sup> PSEUDO-KAISARIOS, 108, 31–35; 47–49; 55–58; 73–75.

<sup>51</sup> See the passage in PSEUDO-KAISARIOS, 108, 31–35, which tells about the "self-determination" (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον) of each person that cannot be constrained by the "necessity" (ἀνάγκη) of the stars.

<sup>52</sup> PSEUDO-KAISARIOS, 108, *passim*.

<sup>53</sup> On the question of free will in Bardesanes' *Against Fate* see the observations of I. RAMELLI in BARDESANE, *Contro il fato...*, p. 61–93. See also H.J.W. DRIJVERS, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, Assen 1966 [= SSN, 6], p. 103–104.

The value of this ethnographic section lies above all in the method used by George the Monk to synthesize his model: the compilation clearly shows the choice of listing in brief the most relevant aspects of the customs of a number of foreign peoples. If we compare his text with that of Caesarius, we can see that there are some differences: a) in his ethnographic survey George the Monk has completely eliminated the references to the question of astral influences on human life; b) the peoples listed are fewer in number than those presented in chapter 108 of Caesarius' work<sup>54</sup>. It is evident that George the Monk's selection was determined by his idea of composing a chronicle, and not a doctrinaire work like that of Caesarius. George the Monk's catalogue of the barbarian peoples begins with a repetition of the same statement in Caesarius' text: *in every land and in every nation there is either a written law-code or customary usage*<sup>55</sup>. Subsequently, in the survey of George the Monk – as in Caesarius' passage – the word *nomos* is repeated every time the customs of a different population are introduced. Evidently, the primary purpose of such a repetitive formulation is to illustrate the different way of life of other cultures by giving numerous examples. It should also be noted that the list of the customs of the barbarian populations is built on the assumption that these habits are exceptional, abnormal and opposite to the norms of Western civilisation.

## The Seres

In George the Monk's ethnographic survey the first mention is for the Seres<sup>56</sup>:

ὦν πρόωτοι Σήρες οἱ τὸ ἄκρον τῆς γῆς οἰκοῦντες νόμον ἔχουσι τὸ πατρῶον ἔθος μὴ πορνεύειν ἢ μοιχεύειν ἢ κλέπτειν ἢ λοιδορεῖν ἢ φονεύειν ἢ κακουργεῖν τὸ σύνολον.

First among these are the Seres, who live on the edge of the earth: they have a written law incorporating ancestral custom, which forbids adultery and traffic with prostitutes, thefts, slander, murder and every sort of crime.

The population of the Seres is not often mentioned in the Greek sources. What we learn is that they lived on an island in the Red Sea<sup>57</sup>, or around the Caspian Sea<sup>58</sup>, or in India<sup>59</sup>. They belonged to the same race as the Ethiopians, or they were

<sup>54</sup> Chapter 108 from the *Quaestiones et responsiones* also mentions the Medes, the Indians, the Germans, who are not listed in the passage I, 19 of George the Monk's *Chronicle*.

<sup>55</sup> GEORGIUS MONACHUS, I, 19 (p. 38, 2–4): ἐν γὰρ ἐκάστη χώρᾳ καὶ ἔθνεσιν ἐν τοῖς μὲν ἔγγραφος νόμος ἐστίν, ἐν τοῖς δὲ ἢ συνήθεια. Translation by R. STONEMAN, *Legends...*, p. 32.

<sup>56</sup> GEORGIUS MONACHUS, I, 19 (p. 38, 5–7). Translation by R. STONEMAN, *Legends...*, p. 32.

<sup>57</sup> See *Pausaniae Graeciae Descriptio*, VI, 26, 9, ed. M.H. ROCHA-PEREIRA, Lipsiae 1973–1981 [= BSGR] (cetera: PAUSANIAS).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. DIONISIO DI ALESSANDRIA, *Descrizione della Terra abitata*, 760, ed. E. AMATO, Milano 2005 (cetera: DIONYSIUS PERIEGETA).

<sup>59</sup> STRABO, XV, 1, 37; PLINIUS, VI, 87.



Scythians mixed with Indians<sup>60</sup>. We also learn that they lived a long life because they reached the age of 130<sup>61</sup>, or 140<sup>62</sup>, or lived longer than 200 years<sup>63</sup>; they were also able to produce garments with multi-coloured threads<sup>64</sup> which they traded<sup>65</sup>. Ammianus' description of the Seres<sup>66</sup> is especially remarkable because it attributes to them several features that the Graeco-Roman authors had already assigned to the Brahmans, as in Palladius' treatise: they are peaceful, do not use weapons, and live like wild animals far from other human beings; their sky is sunny and their climate pleasant; they have plenty of trees whose fruits after soaking become fluffy and are transformed into silk.

In George the Monk's text the characteristics attributed to the Seres place them among those populations that Christian authors admired because their customs were "naturally" good<sup>67</sup>.

### The Bactrians and the Brahmans

Later, in the same passage we are introduced to the Bactrians and the Brahmans. The latter are mentioned again here because George the Monk reproduces the contents of chapter 108 of Caesarius' work. This is what the author writes about them<sup>68</sup>:

νόμος δὲ καὶ παρὰ Βακτριάναις ἦτοι Βραχμάναις καὶ Νησιώταις ἢ ἐκ προγόνων παιδεία τε καὶ εὐσέβεια μὴ κρεοφαγεῖν ἢ οἰνοποτεῖν ἢ λαγνεύειν ἢ παντοῖαν κακίαν διαπράττεσθαι διὰ πολλὸν φόβον θεοῦ καὶ πίστιν

There is a law also among the Bactrians or Brahmans and Islanders; it consists of an education and religious practice focused on the ancestors, and forbids the eating of meat, the drinking of wine, lechery and all other kinds of evil, the sanction being their fear of and trust in God.

These populations, as the Seres, are presented in very positive terms. It was quite common among the Greek<sup>69</sup> and Christian authors<sup>70</sup> to describe the Brahmans

<sup>60</sup> PAUSANIAS, VI, 26, 9.

<sup>61</sup> STRABO, XV, 1, 34.

<sup>62</sup> PLINIUS, VII, 2, 27.

<sup>63</sup> STRABO, XV, 1, 37.

<sup>64</sup> DIONYSIUS PERIEGETA, 752–757; PAUSANIAS, VI, 26, 6–8. See also *Publi Vergili Maronis Opera*, *Georg.* II, 121, rec. R.A.B. MYNORS, Oxonii 1969 [= SCBO]; *Ammiani Marcellini Rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt*, XXIII, 6, 67, vol. I, ed. W. SEYFARTH, Lipsiae 1978 [= BSGR] (cetera: AMMIANUS).

<sup>65</sup> PLINIUS, VI, 20, 54; VI 21, 88; AMMIANUS, XXIII, 6, 68.

<sup>66</sup> AMMIANUS, XXIII, 6, 67–68.

<sup>67</sup> See the description of the Seres in Bardesanes' work: BARDESANE, p. 512.

<sup>68</sup> GEORGIUS MONACHUS, I, 19 (p. 38, 7–11). Translation by R. STONEMAN, *Legends...*, p. 32.

<sup>69</sup> See STRABO, XV, 1, 59 quoting Megasthenes, in *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, 715, F 33, ed. F. JACOBY, Leiden 1923–1958 (cetera: *Die Fragmente*) and STRABO, XV, 1, 65, quoting Onesicritus, in *Die Fragmente*, 134, F 17a. See also PORPHYRIUS, *Abst.* IV, 17, 5.

<sup>70</sup> *Refutatio*, I, 24, 1; CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS, *Stromata. Buch I–VI*, III, 7, 60, vol. I, ed. O. STÄHLIN, Lipsiae 1906 [= GCS] (cetera: CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS).

as vegetarians and non-drinkers<sup>71</sup>. In George the Monk's successive words, however – but we find the same information also in Bardesanes' quotation provided by Eusebius<sup>72</sup> –, other Indians appear who are murderous and commit every type of crime, they even devour the foreigners who happen to go there<sup>73</sup>. This type of representation reproduces a typical scheme of Greek ethnographic literature which often attributes to the same population commendable and noble qualities as well as terrible and disgusting habits. It is worth remarking here that Herodotus himself attributed wild customs to the Indians<sup>74</sup>, while Ctesias defined them as extremely honest<sup>75</sup>.

### The Chaldeans and the Babylonians

The list of the customs of foreign populations continues with the Chaldeans and the Babylonians about whom we learn that<sup>76</sup>:

Χαλδαίοις τε καὶ Βαβυλωνίοις μητρογαμείν, ἀδελφοτεκνοφθορεῖν καὶ μαιφονεῖν καὶ πᾶσαν θεοστουγῇ πράξιιν ὡς ἀρετὴν ἀποτελεῖν, κἂν πόρρω τῆς χώρας αὐτῶν γένωνται.

The Chaldeans and the Babylonians have different customs again, involving marrying their mothers, sibling infanticide, murder and all practices hateful to God: they regard these things as virtuous, even if they are far from their own country.

Here the description of the Chaldeans and the Babylonians is thoroughly negative due to their terrible customs. This is in line with the tradition of the Christian apologists who discredit them because they are considered champions of idolatry for their interest in astrology<sup>77</sup> and every kind of divination<sup>78</sup>, activities which question the belief in a single god<sup>79</sup>. To this purpose, we may mention, for instance, the criticism of Aristides of Athens<sup>80</sup>. In the older Greek tradition, the Chaldeans are often described as the inventors and best experts of astronomy<sup>81</sup>, but this attribute

<sup>71</sup> PALLADIUS, II, 45–47.

<sup>72</sup> BARDESANE, p. 513; 523.

<sup>73</sup> GEORGIUS MONACHUS, I, 19 (p. 38, 11–15).

<sup>74</sup> HERODOTUS, III, 98–101.

<sup>75</sup> CTESIAS, F 45, 16.

<sup>76</sup> GEORGIUS MONACHUS, I, 19 (p. 38, 15–18). Translation by R. STONEMAN, *Legends...*, p. 32.

<sup>77</sup> CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS, I, 16, 74. Cf. THÉODORET DE CYR, *Thérapeutique des maladies helléniques*, vol. I, ed. P. CANIVET, Paris 1958 [= SC, 57].

<sup>78</sup> CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS, VI, 16, 143.

<sup>79</sup> See the refutation of the astrological knowledge of the Chaldeans in *Refutatio*, IV, 2–3. On the controversy against the worship of many gods practiced by the Chaldeans, see ARNOBIO DI SICCA, *Difesa della vera religione contro i pagani*, IV, 13, ed. B. AMATA, Roma 2012.

<sup>80</sup> ARISTIDE, *Apologie*, II, 2; III, 2; VII, 4, ed. B. POUDERON, M.-J. PIERRE, Paris 2003 [= SC, 470].

<sup>81</sup> STRABO, XVI, 1, 6. See also *Diogenis Laertii Vitae Philosophorum*, vol. I, *Libri I–X*, I, 1, 6, ed. M. MARCOVICH, Stuttgartiae–Lipsiae 1999 [= BSGR]. Moreover, it is interesting that LUCIAN,

is not always a negative one. For instance, Diodorus Siculus praises the Chaldeans for their wisdom, as they are great scholars, famous for being excellent astrologers and well acquainted with the art of divination that they have practiced since their young age with their fathers<sup>82</sup>.

In the long quotation from Bardesanes' *Liber* in Eusebius' *Praeparatio evangelica*, the crime of incest with the mothers is attributed to the Persians and the Magi<sup>83</sup>. In general, the motif of incestuous relations with mothers, sisters, or daughters among the Persians and other Eastern peoples takes on a negative connotation among both Greek<sup>84</sup> and Christian writers<sup>85</sup>. On this regard, it must be added that the anomaly of sexual customs in George the Monk's passage is a sort of *leitmotiv* that appears repeatedly in the peoples he mentions.

## The Gelae

After the Chaldeans we find the description of the Gelae (Γηλαίοι). They are characterized as a community where male and female roles are reversed<sup>86</sup>:

ἄλλος δὲ παρὰ Γηλαίους νόμος γυναῖκας γεωργεῖν καὶ οἰκοδομεῖν καὶ τὰ ἀνδρῶν πράττειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ προνεύειν ὡς ἂν βούλωνται μὴ κωλυόμεναι παντελῶς ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνδρῶν αὐτῶν ἢ ζηλούμεναι. ἐν αἷς ὑπάρχουσι καὶ πολεμικώταται καὶ θηρώσαι τὰ μὴ λίαν ἰσχυρότατα τῶν θηρίων. ἄρχουσι δὲ τῶν οἰκειῶν ἀνδρῶν καὶ κυριεύουσι.

Among the Gelae is customary for the women to work the fields, build houses, and do all kinds of men's work, and also to prostitute themselves to whomever they like, without any objection or envy from their husbands. Some of these women are very warlike and will hunt animals, at least those that are not too fierce. They are rulers of their household and dominate their husbands.

In this kind of description, we find the constructed image of a utopian community where women are dominant because they have the power. This feature is part of the popular way in which Greek ethnography represented Eastern populations as a "reversed world". Such stereotype is confirmed by the sources that place the

vol. V, *Astrologia*, 36, 8, trans. A.M. HARMON, Cambridge–London 1936 [= LCL, 302], writes that the Babylonians are expert astrologists.

<sup>82</sup> *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica*, II, 29, vol. I, rec. L. DINDORF, F. VOGEL, Stuttgartiae 1964 [= BSGR] (cetera: DIODORUS).

<sup>83</sup> BARDESANE, *Contro il fato...*, p. 513; 523.

<sup>84</sup> See PLUTARCHUS, 328 C, that mentions the custom of marrying mothers among the Persians. Cf. HERODOTUS, III, 31.

<sup>85</sup> MINUCIUS FELIX, *Octavius*, 31, ed. J. BEAUJEU, Paris 1964 [= CUF.SL]; TERTULLIEN, *Apologétique*, 9, 16, ed. J.P. WALTZING, <sup>2</sup>Paris 1961 [= CUF].

<sup>86</sup> GEORGIUS MONACHUS, I, 19 (p. 38, 18–24). Translation by R. STONEMAN (with one minimal change), *Legends...*, p. 32–33.

Gelae among the Scythians<sup>87</sup> and the information from Diodorus Siculus who reports that women among the Scythians are as strong as men and are expert warriors<sup>88</sup>. To give some further examples on this theme, we read in Strabo that among the Siginni, a population that live in the Caucasus, women are able to drive war chariots and choose their partners<sup>89</sup>. Still Strabo narrates that among the Indians the care of the king is committed to women who participate in hunting and military campaigns<sup>90</sup>. We could mention here several other examples, but it suffices to point out that Graeco-Roman literature shows a great number of oriental queens who play a role usually attributed to men<sup>91</sup>: the most famous are Semiramis<sup>92</sup>, Nitocris<sup>93</sup>, Atossa<sup>94</sup>, Artemisia<sup>95</sup>.

### The Britons

The text by George the Monk introduces then the inhabitants of Britain who are characterized by very open sexual behaviours, so much so that<sup>96</sup>:

ἐν δὲ Βρεττανία πλείστοι ἄνδρες μᾶ συγκαθεύδουσι γυναῖκι καὶ πολλαὶ γυναῖκες ἐνὶ ἔται-  
ρίζονται ἀνδρί, καὶ τὸ παράνομον ὡς νόμον καλὸν καὶ πατρῶον πράττουσιν ἀζήλωτον καὶ  
ἀκώλυτον.

In Britain many men sleep with a single woman, and many women with a single man, and they regard what is immoral as moral and ancestral custom, and do so without arousing objection or envy.

This tradition of the sharing of women among the Britons is already in Cassius Dio<sup>97</sup> and in Caesar<sup>98</sup>. It must also be added here that another testimony of the

<sup>87</sup> In HERODOTUS, IV, 102; 108; 109 this population is called Γελωνοί and lives by the Scythians. In STRABO, XI, 5, 1, they are called Γῆλαι and Σκύθαι (Scythians).

<sup>88</sup> DIODORUS, II, 44.

<sup>89</sup> STRABO, XI, 11, 8.

<sup>90</sup> STRABO, XV, 1, 55.

<sup>91</sup> See in this regard the extensive study on warrior-queens in *De mulieribus* by D. GERA, *Warrior Women. The Anonymous Tractatus De Mulieribus*, Leiden–New York–Köln 1997 [= Mn.S, 162].

<sup>92</sup> Semiramis, queen of the Assyrians, is described as a conqueror and skilful military leader: HERODOTUS, I, 184; CTESIUS, F 6b; DIODORUS, II, 5–20.

<sup>93</sup> Nitocris, queen of the Assyrians after Semiramis, ordered numerous fortifications to defend the city of Babylon: HERODOTUS, I, 185–187.

<sup>94</sup> Atossa, queen of the Persians, advises her husband Darius to lead an expedition against Greece: HERODOTUS, III, 134.

<sup>95</sup> Artemisia, queen of Caria, is an ally of Xerxes during the war against the Greeks, and is his best general: HERODOTUS, VII, 99; VIII, 68–69; 87–88; 101; 107.

<sup>96</sup> GEORGIUS MONACHUS, I, 19 (p. 38, 24 – p. 39, 3). Translation by R. STONEMAN, *Legends...*, p. 33.

<sup>97</sup> DIO CASSIUS, *Roman History*, vol. IX, *Books 71–80*, LXXVII, 12, 2, trans. E. CARY, H.B. FOSTER, Cambridge–London 1927 [= LCL, 177].

<sup>98</sup> GAIVS IVLIVS CAESAR, *Commentarii*, vol. I, *Commentarii Belli Gallici*, V, 14, 4, ed. A. KLOTZ, Lipsiae 1952 [= BSGR].

atypical habits of the Britons, like common property and their eating men's and dogs' meat, can be found in the pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*<sup>99</sup>. This is not surprising considering that the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* also report another long quotation from the same passage of Bardesanes' *Liber legum regionum*<sup>100</sup>, which is the source for Caesarius' text.

## The Amazons

At the end of the ethnographic section, George the Monk provides a description of the Amazons<sup>101</sup>:

Ἀμαζόνες δὲ ἄνδρας οὐκ ἔχουσιν, ἀλλ' ὡς τὰ ἄλογα ζῶα ἅπαξ τοῦ ἔτους περὶ τὴν ἔαρινὴν ἰσημερινὰν ὑπερόροιοι γίνονται καὶ μιγνύμεναι τοῖς γειτνιῶσιν ἀνδράσιν ὡς πανήγυριν τινα καὶ μεγάλην ἑορτὴν τὸν καιρὸν ἐκείνον ἡγοῦνται. ἔξ ὧν καὶ κατὰ γαστρὸς συλλαβοῦσαι παλινδρομοῦσιν οἴκαδε πᾶσαι. τῷ δὲ καιρῷ τῆς ἀποκυήσεως τὸν μὲν ἄρρενα φθείρουσιν, τὸ δὲ θῆλυ ζωογονοῦσι καὶ τιθηνοῦσιν ἐπιμελῶς καὶ ἐκτρέφουσιν.

The Amazons have no husbands, but like wild animals they cross their borders once a year, at the spring equinox, and have intercourse with the neighbouring men, making a kind of huge party and festival out of it. Then when they have conceived, they all go home again. When they have given birth, they kill all the male children, but preserve the female ones and nurse them with every attention until they grow up.

The most interesting element of this survey on the customs of barbaric peoples is the fact that it ends with a mythical community. Herodotus was the first to report the story of these mythical female warriors<sup>102</sup>. Later, they became the object of a large literary production covering several centuries which has reproduced the same *topoi*: their ability in warfare, the free choice of their partners and their raising daughters<sup>103</sup>. The tradition on the anomalous sexual behaviour of the Amazons continues among the Christian authors and, as we have seen, is also reproduced by the source of George the Monk.

<sup>99</sup> *Die Pseudoklementinen*, vol. I, *Homilien*, XIX, 19, 7, ed. B. REHM, G. STRECKER, Berlin 1992 [= GCS, 42].

<sup>100</sup> *Die Pseudoklementinen*, vol. II, *Recognitiones in Rufins Übersetzung*, IX, 24, ed. B. REHM, G. STRECKER, Berlin 1994 [= GCS, 51].

<sup>101</sup> GEORGIUS MONACHUS, I, 19 (p. 39, 3–10). Translation by R. STONEMAN, *Legends...*, p. 33.

<sup>102</sup> HERODOTUS, IV, 110–117.

<sup>103</sup> On the mythical tales about the Amazons, see L. HARDWICK, *Ancient Amazons – Heroes, Outsiders or Women?*, GR 37, 1990, p. 14–36; E. FANTHAM et al., *Women in the Classical World. Image and Text*, New York–Oxford 1994, p. 128–135; J. BLOK, *The Early Amazons. Modern and Ancient Perspectives on a Persistent Myth*, Leiden 1994 [= RGRW, 120]; A. MAYOR, *The Amazons. Lives and Legends of Warrior Women across the Ancient World*, Princeton 2014.

### Method and scope of the ethnographic *excursus*

If we consider the whole section that is devoted to the customs of the Brahmans and of other barbaric peoples (I, 19) in the *Brief Chronicle* by George the Monk, we can notice that, although the contents are scarcely original, the author freely rearranged his two sources Palladius and Caesarius<sup>104</sup>.

The most significant aspects that explain the reasons for George the Monk's selection of ethnographic material are the structure and the aims that characterize the literary genre of the Byzantine chronicles. The stereotypes already codified in the late antique literature on barbarian peoples became common and transmissible heritage in the texts of Byzantine scholars, who reproduced the available documentary material mainly derived from the works of early Christian writers. In this process of rewriting, which can be understood as a "culture of the sylloge", according to the definition formulated by P. Odorico<sup>105</sup> and adopted by P. Manafis with regard to the *Excerpta Constantiniana*<sup>106</sup>, the sources are summarized and reworked to the point of producing new, quite autonomous texts. The *excursus* contained in Book I, chapter 19, of George the Monk's *Chronicle* – in turn imitated in the chronicles of George Cedrenus and Michael Glycas – explicitly reveals this method of appropriation of already existing texts.

The compilation of the ethnographic survey by George the Monk constitutes a significant testimony of the reception in Byzantine literature of what had been elaborated in late antiquity about barbarian peoples. George the Monk's text shows how erudite Byzantine chronographies had inherited a tradition that interpreted the customs of foreign peoples as *exempla*<sup>107</sup>, in order to show alien worlds to Western civilisation. The narrative of the *Chronicle* appears as a scanty list of information about barbaric peoples, but it is evident that the selection of the material highlights the "oddities" of the way of life of *other* peoples. In this regard, it is worth remarking that among the customs described some space is given to sexual habits, starting with the Brahmans who live on an island and continuing with the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, the Gelae, the Britons and the Amazons. This recurring theme shows how sexual behaviour is one of the strongest *cultural markers*

<sup>104</sup> George the Monk adheres to the chroniclers' method of rewriting by paraphrasing or copying texts of earlier authors: on this practice see R. SCOTT, *Byzantine...*, p. 33–34; E.M. JEFFREYS, *The Attitudes of Byzantine Chroniclers towards Ancient History*, B 49, 1979, p. 199–238, especially p. 207–209.

<sup>105</sup> P. ODORICO, *La cultura della Συλλογή*: 1) *Il cosiddetto enciclopedismo bizantino*. 2) *Le tavole del sapere di Giovanni Damasceno*, BZ 83, 1990, p. 1–21; IDEM, *Cadre d'exposition/cadre de pensée – la culture du recueil*, [in:] *Encyclopedic Trends in Byzantium?*, ed. P. VAN DEUN, C. MACÉ, Leuven–Paris–Walpole 2011 [= OLA, 212], p. 89–107.

<sup>106</sup> P. MANAFIS, *(Re)writing History in Byzantium. A Critical Study of Collections of Historical Excerpts*, Abington–New York 2020, p. XXII. The work *Excerpta Constantiniana* is a 10<sup>th</sup> century anthology of Greek excerpts on ancient history, of which only four volumes are preserved.

<sup>107</sup> On the use of *exempla* in George the Monk's *Chronicle*, see Ja. LJUBARSKIJ, *George the Monk as a Short-Story Writer*, JÖB 44, 1994, p. 255–264.



that Western civilisation – starting with the Greeks – used for centuries to define the *otherness* of distant cultures<sup>108</sup>. George the Monk's account represents one step in a long process of re-elaborations of cultural models produced by Greek ethnographic literature – although mediated through the works of Christian authors such as Bardesanes and Caesarius – which applied its interpretative perspective to *other* peoples, distant in time and space.

The most significant aspect of this ethnographic section is the criterion followed by George the Monk in inserting it within the chapter dedicated to Alexander the Great. The plausible reason for this choice lies in the fact that this section is placed immediately after the episode of Alexander's arrival on the island of the Brahmans, who are presented as a people living according to extraordinary customs. Alongside this motif, a catalogue of other peoples with singular customs follows in the text. The result is a significant ethnographic picture, where the populations described are found on the margins of what the Greeks called *oikoumene*, in places located in lands to the far East or West of the central Mediterranean area<sup>109</sup>. George the Monk's rewriting, which reproduces earlier sources, shows how deeply rooted the same cultural model was. Therefore, the choice of connecting the ethnographic *excursus* to the episode of Alexander's expedition to the furthest borders of the East does not seem accidental. The account on the customs of the Brahmans and other barbaric peoples takes on the function of illustrating different rules of life compared to the world known to the Greeks, and later to Western civilisation in general.

Looking at the whole of Book I of George the Monk's *Brief Chronicle*, the order of contents shows what must have been the criterion for including a section on the customs of the barbarians. Book I constitutes a sort of preamble to the chronicle itself<sup>110</sup>. In this order the topics are: the genealogy of Adam; the kings of the Assyrians; Pharon, king of the Egyptians; Pelops, king of the Peloponnese; the foundation of Rome and the story of Romulus and Remus; the deeds of Alexander the Great where the ethnographic *excursus* in question is inserted. The facts narrated in Book I have been chosen and collected according to the criterion that they have no bearing on the history of the Jews<sup>111</sup>, which is dealt with in Book II. On the

<sup>108</sup> On this issue, see the remarks of C. TUPLIN, *Greek Racism? Observations on the Character and Limits of Greek Ethnic Prejudice*, [in:] *Ancient Greeks West and East*, ed. G.R. TSETSKHLADZE, Leiden–Boston–Köln 1999 [= Mn.S, 196], p. 47–75, especially p. 57–60.

<sup>109</sup> It should be noted that already in Bardesanes' text, quoted by Eusebius, the Britons appear together with a long series of Eastern peoples (cf. BARDESANE, *Contro il fato...*, p. 525).

<sup>110</sup> In the preface to his *Chronicle*, George the Monk specifies how his topics are arranged indicating that they are divided into three parts. See n. 6.

<sup>111</sup> The problem faced by Byzantine chronographers who had to arrange and reconcile the events of a "sacred" history, i.e. the narration of the biblical texts, with those of secular history has been underlined by J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *The Chronicle and Other Forms of Historical Writing in Byzantium*, MChr 10, 2015, p. 1–22, especially p. 2.

whole, the events of Book I precede the chronicle itself, which is told in a sequence of stories leading from the creation of Adam, through the lives of the Jewish patriarchs, to the foundation of the Christian empire under Constantine, and beyond. From this point of view, the *Chronicle* of George the Monk follows the typical expository scheme of universal history directed by a divine plan<sup>112</sup>. We could say that the contents of Book I constitute a primordial history, a narration that has no connection to recorded time, in which historical and mythical characters coexist at the same time<sup>113</sup>, and in which the forms of Christianised civilisation are not yet established. This same context of distance from the order of history and of civilisation, also includes geographically distant populations. In conclusion, Book I of George the Monk's *Chronicle* shows how the vertical line of time, marked by the succession of kings, is complemented by a horizontal line of space which is characterized by the overview of different peoples and their customs.

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 4.

<sup>113</sup> For instance, it may be noted that in the genealogies of kings in Book I, some characters belong to Greek mythology, such as Perseus, son of Zeus, or Pelops, and others to Roman mythology, such as Romulus and Remus.

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