THE BYZANTINE PERCEPTION OF INDIA IN LATE ANTIQUE LITERARY SOURCES

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

The Byzantine Perception of India in Late Antique Literary Sources

This study focuses on the Byzantine perception of India according to the descriptions found in a selected group of late antique literary sources. Belonging to diverse literary genres and describing different aspects of India in relation with their own literary contexts, these sources can to a large extent reflect the Byzantine attitude toward such a remote geographical location. By placing the Byzantine sources in question within a framework that stretches from Antiquity as far as the Middle Ages, this study aims at observing the literary depictions of India in the Byzantine era and understanding the Byzantine perception of this land. Thus, it analyzes the impact of classical (Greco-Roman) literary modalities, Christian discourse, and commercial networks between the Byzantine Empire and India on the Byzantine ethnographical and geographical perception of India.

ÖZET

Geç Antik Dönem Yazınsal Kaynaklarında Bizans'ın Hindistan Algısı

Bu çalışma geç antik döneme ait bir grup yazılı kaynakta yer alan tanımlara/anlatımlara dayanarak, Bizans'taki Hindistan algısı üzerine yoğunlaşmaktadır. Farklı edebi türlere ait olan ve Hindistan'ın farklı özelliklerini kendi edebi bağlamlarına göre anlatan bu kaynaklar Bizans'ın böylesine uzak coğrafi bir bölgeye karşı tutumunu büyük ölçüde yansıtabilirler. Söz konusu tarihi kaynakları antik dönemden Orta Çağ'a uzanan bir araştırma sistemi içerisine yerleştiren bu çalışma, Bizans dönemi yazınsal kaynaklarının Hindistan tasvirlerini incelemeyi ve böylece Bizans'ın Hindistan'ı algılayış biçimini anlamayı amaçlar. Böylece bu çalışma klasik dönem (Yunan ve Roma) edebi modellerinin, Hristiyan söylem biçimlerinin ve Hindistan ile Bizans İmparatorluğu arasındaki ticari ilişkilerin Bizans'ın etnik ve coğrafi olarak Hindistan'ı algılayışı üzerindeki etkisini analiz eder.

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In memory of my late grandmother

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Byzantine Empire interacted with diverse cultures throughout its long history. With changing borders and neighbors over time, the nature of communication with "the Others" eventually gained new forms. The newcoming *ethnoi* from the Balkans as well as the emergence of the Arabs and Turks brought new elements that mixed up with the already-existing cultural patterns of the Byzantines. The number of similar examples can be increased but a sort of change in the Byzantine attitude to the developments taking place around its borders would always be observable. Recent studies on the Byzantine perception of "the Others" are mostly centered around the peoples and places with which the Byzantine Empire had physical contact, and with good reason—such interactions were the ones which had a direct impact on Byzantine culture and politics, and left their marks on many written sources that allow these studies.[1] However, these studies fail to shed light on an ignored aspect of the Byzantine perception; namely, the Byzantine perception of distant places and peoples. The present thesis aims at understanding the Byzantine perception of India; a place that was far away from the confines of the Byzantine Empire and a culture that had almost nothing in common with the cultural values of the Byzantines. Accordingly, it hardly finds a place in major literary sources and official documents.

* In this study, I use the latinized versions of the names for people and places that were mentioned in primary sources written before the fourth century AD. Greek transliteration is used for the names of people and places that are found in sources from the post-fourth century period.

[1] For some studies on the Byzantine perception of its neighboring cultures, see Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity*; Briscoe, "Rome and Persia: Rhetoric and Religion," 129-154; Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views of Islam," 217-234; Christides, *The Image of the Pre-Islamic Arab in the Byzantine Sources*; Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins*; Durak and Jevtic (eds.), *Identity and the Other in Byzantium*.

Nevertheless, the Byzantines naturally had a conception of the earth extending all the way to the farthest regions as far as India.

Perceptions do not necessarily require material relations and physical interaction in each case. Other components like myths, imaginations, hearsay, fables and fabricated stories shine out as the degree of communication with the object of perception decreases. However, India is a strange case where fact and fiction always went hand in hand even though the interaction between India and the Mediterranean world increased from the Hellenistic era onwards. While the knowledge about this land increased especially through commercial relationships and developing geographical knowledge in general, the impact of tales and unreal information on its perception never disappeared. Because the Byzantines often described the other ethnic groups in accordance with traditional ethnographical patterns, their perception of India in late antiquity contained more than what the Byzantines knew about India through physical interaction and contemporary geographical knowledge.

Recent studies on the interaction between the Byzantines and the Other(s), mostly tackle with the questions that are related to Byzantine identity and the role of the Other(s) in its formation.[2] In 1998, Angeliki Laiou and Hélène Ahrweiler edited a volume titled *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*,[3] which examines how the Byzantinized ethnic groups, such as Serbs and Muslims, were integrated into Byzantine culture by focusing on the active role of the center in this process. Concerning the Near Eastern societies and their late antique Roman identity, in 1993 Fergus Millar published a large-scale survey on Syria, Palestine, and Arabia

[2] Durak and Jevtic, "Identity and the Other in Byzantine Studies: An Introduction," 10. For a discussion about recent studies on ethnicity and culture in the late antique period, see Mitchell and Greatrex, "Introduction."
[3] *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, eds. Ahrweiler and Laiou.

under the Roman Empire.[4] In 2000, another extensive publication edited by Stephen Mitchell and Geoffrey Greatrex came out of a conference held in Swansea on the same subject, titled *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity*.[5] The studies in this volume are mostly concerned with the common perceptions and experiences, which designated ethnic identities and determined their formation in late antiquity, by focusing on certain ethnic and religious groups, such as Avars, Jews, and pagans, of the late antique world. In a recent study on Byzantine historiography, Anthony Kaldellis draws attention to the continuation of Greco-Roman ethnographic and geographical modalities in the works of late antique historians, who described the Persians and the Huns with the "notion" of barbarian, following the Greco-Roman tradition.[6] Their view of the world was based on the distinction between the Byzantines/Romans and barbarians in order either to marginalize the latter for praising Roman virtues or to introduce barbarians as a "mirror" for criticism of the Byzantine/Roman culture.[7] Similarly, Dimiter Angelov points out the Byzantine disinterest in the life beyond the borders of the empire by highlighting the influence of classical geography on the content of what he calls "academic geography" as the curriculum of geography in Byzantium was based on the works of Eratosthenes (d. 194 BC), Strabo (d. ca. AD 64), Ptolemy (d. AD 168), Pliny the Elder (d. AD 79)

[4] Millar, *The Roman Near East*.
[5] *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity*, eds. Mitchell and Greatrex.
[6] Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity*, 1-25.
[7] Concerning the utilization of "the Other" in order to criticize the historian's own culture without being openly critical, Kaldellis draws attention to how Priskos avoids dehumanizing the Huns by describing their society and manners. Additionally, Priskos attributes criticizing speeches to barbarian foes of the empire. Similar methods were used by Prokopios and Agathias too. For a longer discussion of the subject, see Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity*, 11-25. The ethnographical and geographical digressions in the literary works of the period gradually decreased until the seventh century, when they were totally omitted from the narrative. Indeed, the wide circulation of chronicles from the late antique period onwards and their preference over histories point to a gradual decrease of interest in cultures and peoples in favor of a focus on events, Kaldellis, 38.

and Dionysius Periegetes (second century AD).[8] Due to the presence of such great authors as well as the existence of long ethnographical excursuses in their works, a topic like the perception of India in Greco-Roman culture is more traceable compared to the Byzantine period. The depiction of India based on accounts of classical authors was recently subjected to an extensive research by Grant Parker, who investigates the development of the Greco-Roman discourse of India in detail.[9] Covering the period from antiquity as far as the Roman period, Parker's study sheds light on many aspects of the Byzantine perception of India that was conditioned by the previous Greco-Roman tradition.

The present study takes up from where Parker left off as it focuses on the late antique period and with good reasons. The period in question produced a group of sources which fall under the category of "popular geography" that for the first time challenged the dominance of the traditional patterns in geography.[10] These are the *vita* of Saint Makarios of Rome, the *Byzantine Alexander Poem*, two commercial itineraries titled *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* and *Ὁδοιπορία ἀπὸ Ἐδὲμ τοῦ παραδείσου* (The Way from the Land of Eden), and lastly the *Christian Topography* of Kosmas Indikopleustes. Such sources diverged from the mainstream literature that was mostly conditioned by the Greco-Roman modalities and motifs; yet, this is not an obstacle for their informative value. They refer to religion, society, commerce and politics as well as many other aspects of Byzantine culture in their own way. A recent study by Felix Racine looking into a group of apocryphal texts from late antiquity already indicated a gradual shift in the ethnographical and geographical

[8] Angelov, "'Asia and Europe Commonly Called East and West'," 47. For a discussion of the Byzantine disinterest in geography and lack of geographical theory in the Byzantine sources, see Magdalino, "Constantine VII and the Historical Geography of Empire," 23-26.
[9] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*.
[10] Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, 28.

patterns in religious sources because of the rising Christian values in this period.[11] Likewise, a newly published volume, edited by K. Durak and I. Jevtic, contains two significant studies by Maja Kominko and Pamela Armstrong that deal with the issue of Byzantine ethnography with a specific interest in changing ethnographical modalities in the late antique period.[12] While Kominko discusses the change through the disappearance of classical ethnographical modalities in Byzantium, such as monsters and marvels attributed to the cultures at the fringes of the earth,[13] Armstrong explains a similar phenomenon by giving the example of the dog-headed saint Christopher and the place of his cult in Byzantine culture. In parallel with these recent studies, the sources in question reflect the Byzantine conception of India in a context where new values of late antique Byzantine culture and old patterns of classical ethnography and geography intersect.

The *Alexander Romance* is a fictional account of the life and deeds of Alexander the Great. The original Greek text was probably composed in the third century AD by the so-called *Pseudo-Callisthenes*. Structured around the basic historical events during the reign of Alexander, it initiated the invention of a

[11] Racine, "Geography, Identity and the Legend of Saint Christopher," 105-125; Racine, *Monsters at the Edges of the World: Geography and Ethnography under the Roman Empire*.
[12] Kominko, "Changing Habits and Disappearing Monsters – Ethnography between Classical and Late Antiquity," 53-71; Armstrong, "Ethnicity and Inclusiveness in the Development of Religious Cults: Saint Christopher the Dog-Headed and Saint George," 71-83.
[13] In her study, Kominko makes a distinction between the West, where interest in fantastic human races continued to exist throughout the Middle Ages, and Byzantium, where she observes a decline in the discussion of monstrosity and marvels by the Greek authors. Although she does not fully reject the existence of some interest in fantastic races in Byzantium, she underlines the lack of sources pointing to this phenomenon, except classical sources that continued to be used in Byzantium. Thus, she brings forward some possible causes to explain their ignorance by the Byzantines such as the difficulty in explaining these races; their disruption of the unity of humankind; the difficulty in explaining the genealogy of these races in the historical framework going back to Noah. Introducing a group of Byzantine sources in which monsters and marvels play an important role in relation with India, the present study offers such sources that Kominko seeks in order to detect the place of monsters and marvels in Byzantine culture. Although they are not enough to meet this deficit of sources in this respect – and Kominko's hypothesis could still be true to a certain extent – their use in the present study will partly explain how monsters were perceived in Byzantium in relation with the Byzantine perception of India. For Kominko's views on this subject, see Kominko, "Changing Habits and Disappearing Monsters – Ethnography between Classical and Late Antiquity," 67-71.

legendary persona around the figure of Alexander and mythical events that practically substituted the historical account of the life and deeds of Alexander in the Middle Ages. Just like Alexander himself conquered a great part of the known world in his lifetime, the *Alexander Romance* conquered the literary world of the late antique and medieval periods. The work was translated into Latin, Armenian, Coptic, and Syriac from late antiquity onwards; in the Middle Ages, there was at least one version of the *Alexander Romance* in every vernacular European language.[14] The emphasis in this research will be put on a poetic Greek version titled the *Byzantine Alexander Poem.* The poem is the longest text found in manuscript *Marcianus Graecus 408*, which was produced, according to the date mentioned in the closing verses, in 1388. Aerts take this year as the date of copying of an original text, which must have been composed earlier in the Laskarid Empire of Nicaea. In particular, the potential analogy between the conquests of Alexander and the restoration of the Byzantine Empire in 1261 under Michael VIII – an inspiring event for the composition – as well as the references to the Turks and Armenians, who were more relevant actors during the Nicene Empire than in the year 1388, justify ascribing the composition of the poem to an earlier date.[15] Even though the text is obviously out of the chronological boundaries of this research, it was based upon α- and β-recensions, the two earliest Greek versions of the *Alexander Romance*.[16] Hence, the foundational late antique version of the legend lying indeed at the core of this later version makes it highly relevant to the time period under consideration. In other respects, being a Byzantine literary production, it can concurrently point to the insertion of various

[14] For an introductory survey of various versions of the Alexander legend in the Christian East, see Gero, "The Legend of Alexander the Great in the Christian Orient."
[15] Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Byzantine Alexander Poem*, 8-9.
[16] Jouanno, "The Persians in Late Byzantine Alexander Romances: A Portrayal under Turkish Influences."

Byzantinized motifs into the text. Thus, it reflects a change in the treatment of a much older legend in the Byzantine mentality as a Byzantinized version of an earlier source. The traces of Christian mentality in the text are the most obvious indicators of such an "evolution." In his analysis of the text, Christensen draws attention to various verses that explicitly highlight the religious perspective of the author,[17] e.g. the verses 4444-4445: ἀλλ' ὃ μὴ βούλεται θεός, ἄνθρωπος οὐκ ἰσχύει // γνῶσις οὐδέποτ' ἐνεργεῖ Προνοίας μὴ θελούσης (nothing can man do without God's will, nothing can be known without the will of Providence).[18] Similarly, the word Πρόνοια (divine providence) is utilized with a specifically Christian connotation in the verses 687, 4729, 4887, 4891, 5497. In the verses 4725-4726, the accusatives "δέησιν" and "θεὸν τὸν ἐφορῶντα κόσμον" are related to the Christian conception of prayer and the Christian god, who is referred to as the creator of the cosmos. Christensen's assumption of a clerical background for the author, based on the author's knowledge of the works of Gregory of Nazianzus and his vocabulary because of the utilization of the word θεολόγος,[19] is not on firm grounds, and not accepted by Aerts.[20] Yet, such evidence is more than enough to indicate the Christian influence on the text regardless of the authorship. Moreover, the utilization of Georgios Monachos (in verses 1181-1185; 1609-1689; 4799-4870; 6056-6069), Zonaras (3772-3780), and "Revelationes" of Pseudo-Methodius (in the part about the enclosure of unclean nations) suggests that the Byantinization of the *Alexander Romance* was not peculiar to this fourteenth-century copy but probably was an earlier phenomenon which gradually increased its influence.[21] Because of its comparative and extensive scope,

[17] Christensen, "Die Vorlagen des byzantinischen Alexandergedichts."
[18] Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Byzantine Alexander Poem*, 177 (my own translation).
[19] Christensen, "Die Vorlagen des byzantinischen Alexandergedichts," 42.
[20] Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Byzantine Alexander Poem*, 26.
[21] Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Byzantine Alexander Poem*, 26-27.

the present research will also take into consideration different versions of the text at necessary points.

The *Alexander Romance* was the most popular and beloved literary work of the Byzantines from the fifth century onwards (regardless of its authorship and sources).[22] Alexander's representation in Byzantine culture extended from a figure of the ideal ruler and the ideal hunter-warrior to a martyr – since he unjustly died at a time when he was close to satisfying his desires completely.[23] This rooted place of Alexander the Great in Byzantine culture cannot be considered independently from his journey to the limits of the earth. There are plenty of references to geography, topography, culture, peoples and, of course, the marvels of India in the *Alexander Romance* which must have also influenced the Byzantine geographical and ethnographical perception of such places. In a short introductory article, Jeremy McInerney discusses the informative value of the *Alexander Romance* regarding shared features and motifs between this text and narrative sources about Alexander; especially the account of Arrian. The stories concerning the birth of Alexander, utilization of letters as narrative techniques, the story of Indian Amazons and Gymnosophists are some remarkable themes that the romance tradition shared with narrative sources like that of Arrian, the author of the most well-known account of

[22] There is also another fourteenth-century manuscript, *Hellenic Institute Codex Gr. 5*, which is the most precious and eloquent example of this tradition with approximately 250 illustrations. The manuscript passed to the Ottomans after the capture of Trebizond, where it was quite likely produced. In addition to its materializing the interest shown to the Alexander Romance by the Byzantines with its luxurious style, its illustrations demonstrate the Christianization of Alexander's image with the combination of the Hellenistic pictorial tradition with images of Alexander in the oral and literary tradition of the Byzantines. Galavaris, "Alexander the Great Conqueror and Captive of Death: His Various Images in Byzantine Art," 14. For more detailed information about this copy, see Trahoulia, "The Venice Alexander Romance: Pictorial Narrative and Art of Telling Stories;" Kastritsis, "The Trebizond Alexander Romance (Venice Hellenistic Institute Codex Gr. 5): The Ottoman Fate of a Fourteenth-Century Illustrated Byzantine Manuscript."

[23] Galavaris, "Alexander the Great Conqueror and Captive of Death: His Various Images in Byzantine Art," 13; For more information on the admiration of Byzantine emperors to Alexander as the ideal ruler, see Gleixner, *Das Alexanderbild der Byzantiner*.

the life and deeds of Alexander.[24] Thus, the *Alexander Romance* definitely functioned as an important element in shaping the Byzantine imagination of peoples and places that they read from this work.

The *vita* of Saint Makarios of Rome is an interesting Byzantine hagiography that brings together the features of religious *vita* and travel writing in its plot. The version of the *vita* published by Vassiliev was based on two manuscripts from Moscow that can be dated to the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. Additionally, the story of Makarios was also contained in several manuscripts in the Vatican (codex Vat. Gr. 824/1072/1190; Vat. Pal. 269) and one in Torino (116 c. V. 7).[25] Although these manuscripts can be dated from the eleventh through the fifteenth century, the story has its roots in a much earlier date, which makes it chronologically relevant to the present research. The absence of the Saracens in the lands described in the *vita* like Syria, Palestine and Persia, and the reference to the death of Julian the Apostate (d. 363 AD) by Saint Mercurius (according to legendary belief) imply the pre-Islamic era – probably sometime around the fifth and sixth centuries – as the date of the composition of the original story. Especially, the Muslim occupation in the Middle East and Persia would have been noticeable in a post-seventh century plot.

The story consists of two parts; the peregrination of three monks – named Theophilos, Sergios and Hygieinos – from the Asklepios Monastery in Syria in order to observe the limits of the earth. While the account of the earlier part of their journey is a typical pilgrimage to the Holy Land, they shift their route to east as far as India and even farther. In the second part of the story, the flashback to the life of Saint Makarios demonstrates his own journey to the easternmost point of the earth in

[24] For more information on parallel aspects between the *Alexander Romance* and Arrian, see McInerney, "Arrian and the Greek Alexander Romance."
[25] Vassiliev, "Preface," 38.

search of Paradise in his youth. In the description of both journeys, a good deal of information concerning India's topography, natural life, social organization and its geographical meaning to the Byzantines comes out. Particularly, the conception of a terrestrial Paradise somewhere in the east, and the account of marvelous creatures and peoples of India along with its extraordinary environment go beyond the main purpose of such a religious *vita* and reflect various thoughts – factual and imaginary. It also contains direct reference to Alexander the Great: the monks encounter the arch of Alexander with an inscription from the mouth of Alexander that gives directions of the path leading to daylight, symbolizing the cave of Makarios or the closest path to Paradise.[26] In a more general sense, the *vita* highly draws upon materials from the *Alexander Romance* in terms of the places visited and fabulous creatures encountered by the monks.[27] Accordingly, such cross-textual connections suggest that the treatment of India in the *vita* was the outcome of a more general perception of India rather than an isolated literary creation.

The *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* is a geographical treatise describing the lands from east to west. The *Expositio* was discovered in the seventeenth century by Franciscus Juretus (1553-1626) from whom it passed to Jacobus Gothofredus, the first person to publish a critical edition of the text in 1628. The loss of the original text causes certain problems concerning its language and authorship. Yet, the consensus among scholars today is that the text was written by an author whose mother tongue was *koine* Greek but who also spoke vulgar Latin since it includes a

[26] The episode about the arch of Alexander cannot be found in α- and β-recensions but in the ε-recension, which can be dated to the late seventh century. For a discussion on the origin of this episode in different recensions of the Alexander Romance, see Gero, "The Alexander Legend in Byzantium: Some Literary Gleanings," 86-87.
[27] For a brief discussion of the episodes from the *Alexander Romance* that recur in the *vita* of Saint Makarios, see Pfister, "Episoden des Alexanderromans in christlichen Texten," 572-573.

considerable amount of Greek words transliterated into Latin.[28] Contextualizing the description of certain cities or provinces like Rome, Gaul and Nisibis in other late antique accounts, Grüll assumes the date of composition to be sometime during the years AD 350-362.[29] Because of the commercial focus and function of the text, the anonymous author himself is thought to have been a merchant; moreover, the peculiar interest of the author in describing Syrian cities suggests that he was of Syrian origin.[30] The *Expositio* can be categorized as a text of commercial geography because it never gives descriptions in more detail than what is immediately related to the author's peculiar interest in trade and the superficial outlook that resulted from it. Compared to earlier Roman geographers like Pliny and Strabo, the geography of the *Expositio* remains very simple and depthless. Grüll classifies the accuracy of the geography of the text in four degrees from the most detailed and accurate (Alexandria, Antioch, Rome) to the most legendary and fabulous (India). Although the fictional and legendary part of the text can be related to the author's ignorance in a quite simplistic fashion, the legends and marvels in the text acquire a different connotation reflecting the Byzantine perception of India if read in relation to the other sources in question.

The *Ὁδοιπορία ἀπὸ Ἐδὲμ τοῦ παραδείσου* (The Way from the Land of Eden) is a much shorter version of the *Expositio* with which it intersects on the description of similar lands in a parallel order. The text survives in five different manuscripts,

[28] Grüll, "Expositio totius mundi et gentium. A Peculiar Work on the Commerce of the Roman Empire from the Mid-Fourth Century – Compiled by a Syrian Textile Dealer?" 630. For further literature about the language of the text, see Klotz, "Über die Expositio totius mundi et gentium," 97–127; Sinko, "Die *descriptio orbis terrae*, eine Handelsgeographie aus dem 4. Jahrhundert," 531–571.
[29] Grüll, 630.
[30] Grüll, 634. For a discussion of the origin of the author of the text, see Martelli, *Introduzione alla «Expositio totius mundi»: Analisi etnografica e tematiche politiche in un'opera anonima del IV secolo*; Rougé, *Expositio totius mundi et gentium. Introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et commentaire*.

four Greek and one Georgian, and was composed in approximately the same date when the *Expositio* was produced. Its earliest copy in *Ms. Add. 3675* is dated to the end of the twelfth century.[31] The latest discovered copy of the text, which is a seventeenth-century Greek text, was published by Nina Pigulevskaia in 1951.[32] The *Odoiporia* does not intend to introduce lands within a commercial framework like the *Expositio* since there is no emphasis on trade or commercial activities on the lands that are described in the text; yet, its description of places from east to west probably points to long-distance trade routes actively used between the fourth and sixth centuries. The similarity between the two texts was so high that historians first thought it to be the Greek source used by the author of the *Expositio* but the *Odoiporia* is too short to be "the source" for a text in the length of the *Expositio*.[33] Unlike the *Expositio*, the influence of Christianity in the description of peoples and places is more transparent. The opening lines of the text concerning the marvelous nations of India and the lands beyond in the east reflect the use of similar descriptions with the *Expositio* in a clearly identifiable Christianized context.

The last Byzantine source dateable to the same time interval is the *Christian Topography* of Kosmas Indikopleustes. The work survives in three different copies from Rome, Florence and Sinai: *Codex Vat. Gr. 699* (9th century), *Laurentianus Plut. IX.28* and *Sinaiticus 1186* (10th century), respectively. The text was probably written in the sixth century in Alexandria. Although Kosmas Indikopleustes (meaning the

[31] For the earliest edition of the text based on just twelfth- and thirteenth-century Greek manuscripts by Alfred Klotz, see Klotz," Ὁδοιπορία ἀπὸ Ἐδὲμ τοῦ παραδείσου ἄχρι τῶν Ῥωμαίων," 608-610.
[32] The present study utilizes the seventeenth-century copy published by Pigulevskaia. Yet, this version lacks the description of the Land of Eden and its inhabitants which is contained in Drakoulis' edition that combines all five versions. Hence, this more overreaching edition of the *Odoiporia* is also taken into consideration in the interpretation of the text. For the version published by Pigulevskaia, see Pigulevskaia, "Die Ὁδοιπορία ἀπὸ Ἐδὲμ τοῦ παραδείσου," 323; for Drakoulis' edition with his commentary, see Drakoulis, "Οι Οδοιπορίες ἀπὸ Ἐδὲμ τοῦ παραδείσου ἄχρι τῶν Ῥωμαίων και οι πρώιμοι βυζαντινοί δρόμοι του μεταξιού."
[33] Pigulevskaia, *Byzanz auf den Wegen nach Indien*, 100-101.

person who sailed to India) is the name that was identified with this work, Wanda Wolska-Conus set forth "Konstantinos of Antioch" as the real composer of the *Christian Topography*.[34] What is surely known about the author is his voyages as far as India probably for commercial purposes as he gives a particular account of India in the eleventh chapter of his book, besides the references he makes to India in recounting his cosmological and geographical views that cover the greater portion of the work. Kosmas' cosmological views conditioned by Christian theology, as he explains them throughout the text, offer a theoretical framework that clarifies the ascription of a religious meaning to many other contemporary sources. Especially, the use of the tabernacle model in the formation of the terrestrial sphere is the ultimate expression of the Christian geographical system in which India functions as a border zone between Paradise and earth. Another important aspect of the work is its addition of illustrations and sketches drawn by Kosmas himself on his manuscript.[35] All three copies of the original sixth-century work contained various illustrations such as the world map (Vat. gr. f. 40v), the ark of the covenant (Vat. gr. f. 48r) and various models of the tabernacle (Vat. gr. f. 39r; 46v; 49r).[36] Especially, the earth

[34] Brubaker, "The *Christian Topography* (Vat. gr. 699) Revisited: Image, Text and Conflict in Ninth-Century Byzantium," 5. For a detailed discussion concerning the name of the author, see Wolska-Conus, "Stephanos d'Athènes et Stephanos d'Alexandrie: Essai d'identification et de biographie," 5-89; for the discussion concerning the Alexandrian origin of the author, see Anastos, "The Alexandrian Origin of the '*Christian Topography'* of Cosmas Indicopleustes," 73-80.

[35] Indikopleustes, *Christian Topography*, xi. For illustrations of Vat. gr. 699, see Stornajolo, *Le miniature della Topografia Cristiana di Cosma Indicopleuste: Codice Vaticano Greco 699*; for the selections from Sinai. gr. 1186, see Weitzmann and Galavaris, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Illuminated Greek Manuscripts, vol. 1: From the Ninth to the Twelfth Century*, 52-65, Figs. 123-83.

[36] It should be noted that these illustrations are updated reproductions by miniaturists and scribes of the later periods. Especially, the ninth century was a period identified with the utilization of imagery for the promotion of Orthodoxy against heresy. Because the defeat of Iconoclasm was still fresh – and so not obvious yet – at the time, many self-justifying and exegetical images accompany the canonical Orthodox texts to which the *Christian Topography* of the Nestorian Kosmas did not belong. However, the production of the tabernacle by Moses on the order of God as narrated by the Old Testament attracted the iconophile parties in the eighth and the ninth centuries. Being the only Byzantine text that is concerned with the tabernacle and devoted images to it, the ideological climate attached increased the popularity of the work despite its unorthodox words. When Photios criticizes the work for its vulgar expressions, simple scientific theories and fables, he skips over the section in which Kosmas discusses the tabernacle and Old Testament narratives. For a detailed discussion on this subject, see

map is a unique piece for the first chapter of this research since there is almost no other cartographic evidence left from the Byzantines. Kosmas' views concerning a flat earth were quite likely marginal even in his own time – as the work was also not very popular except its revival in the ninth century in relation with the religious polemics (discussed in the footnotes below) – but interestingly his account of India was probably the most factual among all the Byzantine sources mentioned so far. Except the interpretation of the eastern regions in relation with certain biblical motifs like Paradise and paradisiacal rivers, he avoided mentioning any monsters and marvelous populations in India. Lastly, his explanation of the commercial network on the Erythraean Sea illuminates how the Roman trade network continued its significant function in the Byzantine period and its impact on the Byzantine perception of India.

Regarding the ancient Greek sources, the *Histories* of Herodotus and *Indica* of Ctesias are two major works to focus on. It is, of course, possible to find references to India by many other ancient authors and philosophers but the more detailed explanations by Herodotus and Ctesias about certain aspects of this land put their accounts at the center of this research as the starting point of many geographical and ethnographical notions about India in the late antique literary tradition.[37] While Herodotus focused more on the ethnographical elements, Ctesias recorded interesting notions about the natural realm and wonders concerning India. From the Roman period, there are a series of significant sources that are useful for the purpose of the

Brubaker, "The *Christian Topography* (Vat. gr. 699) Revisited: Image, Text and Conflict in Ninth-Century Byzantium," 9-17. For the criticism of Kosmas by Photios, see Photios, *The Library of Photius*, vol I, 31-32.

[37] For the views of Greek authors on India, see Arora, *Greeks on India: Scylax to Aristoteles*; Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction*. For India in Herodotus, see Karttunen, "The Ethnography of the Fringes," 457-474. For the fragments of Ctesias in the *Bibliotheke* of Photios, see Photios, *The Library of Photius*, 92-119; Bigwood, "Ctesias' Indica and Photius;" Stronk, "Ctesias of Cnidus, a Reappraisal," 25-58.

present research for two reasons: on the one hand, they convey the accounts of Hellenistic authors like Megasthenes, Onesicritus and Nearchus who visited and wrote on India, on the other hand, they reflect the contemporary Roman view of India. *Indica* of Arrian, *Geographica* of Strabo and the *Natural History* of Pliny the Elder were probably among the most recognized literary pieces in the Roman era as well as the Middle Ages. Additionally, a first-century trade itinerary titled *Periplus Maris Erytraei* contains valuable insights about India with an emphasis on its commercial role. Having a similar content and style with the *Expositio* and partly with the *Odoiporia*, it allows for a comparative analysis of the changes and continuities in the commercial relationships between India and the Mediterranean world from the Roman to the Byzantine period – as well as the impact of any potential change related to such commercial ties on the perception of India. Lastly, there are a few literary and cartographic sources from the European Middle Ages that will be used in order to show not just the background but also the aftermath of late antique Byzantine notions about India. Regarding the cartographic material, the famous medieval *mappae mundi* have a prominent place especially for the first chapter of this research concerning geography. Both the sources utilized in the creation of *mappae mundi* and their illustration of India in a specific way create a strong analogy between them and the Byzantine sources. Similarly, the legend of Prester John is a well-known medieval story that centered around the depiction of India in Greco-Roman and Byzantine sources. Thus, it represents – and arguably revives – many aspects of the Byzantine perception of India during late antiquity in a different context and timeframe.

The utilization of many such Greco-Roman sources points to an important feature of the late antique period; namely, its transitional nature between antiquity

and the medieval Christian era.[38] As Christianity gradually penetrated into the heart of Mediterranean societies in this period, the Greco-Roman values were still present in early Byzantine culture. Geography, ethnography, philosophy, politics and art were undergoing a process of transformation from the ancient thought system to a religiously conditioned medieval thought system. The Byzantine perception of India in the late antique period indeed represents the coexistence of old and new values in the ethnographic and geographical notions of the Byzantines. Thus, the Byzantine perception conveyed by a series of late antique sources, which share a lot with the earlier Greco-Roman sources on the same subject, reveals the continuous belief in many ancient notions, either factual or imaginary, in Byzantine culture in this period. In addition to transmitting ancient values and intersecting with the past knowledge, the Byzantine sources in question also carry the potential to reflect diverse viewpoints as they each fall under the category of a different literary genre – one hagiography, one romance, two different commercial treatises and a comprehensive work on geography and cosmology. Yet, as it will be seen, they almost converge on giving a consistent definition of India.

In terms of method, this study initially draws on close a reading of the literary sources in question. For this purpose, the passages that are directly or indirectly related to India and its description in diverse ways are closely analyzed throughout this work. Secondly, as it can be understood from the inclusion of a set of Greco-Roman and Western medieval sources, this study contextualizes its primary sources within a framework that stretches from antiquity as far as the Middle Ages; thus, it deals with the question of the perception of India in the Byzantine period with an

[38] For further studies on the late antique period, see Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*; Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*; Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*.

extensive and sophisticated approach. Likewise, the utilization of information extracted from these sources, which offer irrelevant contexts from each other and belong to separate literary genres, also underlines the broad perspective of this study. Lastly, with its specific focus on commercial relations between the Byzantine Empire and India in late antiquity, this study passes beyond the realm of geography and ethnography – two most popular themes in discussions about perceptions of the Others – and focuses on other dynamics that had an important role in the formation of the Byzantine perception of India such as trade and religion.

The core of this study is comprised of two main chapters (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3) that respectively focus on geography and depictions of India in the sources under discussion. Chapter 2 is mainly concerned with the location of India as it was described from antiquity up until the Byzantine era, making use of diverse literary and cartographic sources as well as focusing on the agency of religion in the formation of the Byzantine perception of the location of India. In Chapter 3, the focus shifts to how India was described in relation with its natural realm, marvelous and monstrous species, and its social structure in relation with the place of Christianity in it. It should be noted as a disclaimer that even though the perception of India in Byzantine culture can specifically be discussed within a religious or commercial context, the present thesis is concerned with a grey area where different types of information about India deriving from the classical past, Christian discourse and commercial networks coalesce. Based on a group of primary sources, which belong to different literary genres, the present study aims at providing a comprehensive and sophisticated analysis of the Byzantine perception of India in late antiquity.

CHAPTER 2

WHERE WAS INDIA?

This chapter focuses on information regarding the geographical location of India in the sources under discussion. Thoughts about the geographical features of lands and are important in the comprehension of the general attitudes to lands and peoples. Regarding the Byzantine perception of India in late antiquity, the location of India within the wider geographical and cosmological framework of the late antique period takes precedence over other themes concerning its geography. India was considered to occupy the remotest corner of the world according to its representation in most of Greco-Roman literary sources. While this notion did not totally disappear in the Byzantine period, it gained new forms under the influence of Christian legends about the existence of Paradise somewhere in the east in the terrestrial sphere. Becoming apparent in the late antique Byzantine sources for the first time, such Christian legends continued to color the perception of India until the end of the Middle Ages. In this respect, the present chapter will discuss the Byzantine perception of India concerning its geographical location with an emphasis on the ancient background of this perception. Using the information on this subject in the late antique sources in question, the following analysis aims at answering the question, where was India?

2.1. Pre-Byzantine discourses on the geographical location of India

Early geographical writings of Greeks were based on journeys of individual travelers through land or sea.[39] These early travelers were not close enough to great

[39] Cole, "'I Know the Number of the Sand and the Measure of the Sea': Geography and Difference in the Early Greek World," 203.

Hellenistic and Roman geographers in terms of the scope of their geographical observations. Lacking detailed information concerning lands and peoples, these earliest travel writings, called *periploi*,[40] can be dated as early as the sixth century BC and provide glimpses of early geographical notions when geography was not an esteemed discipline among Greeks yet. Euthymenes of Massalia, who sailed down the Western African Coast, is the first known composer of a *periplos* in the sixth century BC.[41] However, references to India first appear in similar type of works written not much after that of Euthymenes; Scylax of Caryanda and Hecateus of Miletus (550-476 BC) made references to India and its geographical location which were based on such journeys. The Greek explorer Scylax sailed down the Indus River by the order of the Achaemenid king Darius around the late sixth and the early fifth century. Although the original account of his travels is not extant today, it was one of the main sources concerning India that was used by later Greek and Hellenistic authors. Hecateus and Herodotus are two early authors who based their account of India on Scylax' journey and made him known to later generations. As Herodotus did not even travel as far as India, Hecateus conducted a land journey – even though most of the *periploi* at the time were based on seafaring – that obviously did not extend to India.[42] Therefore, the influence of Scylax on the account of India in his *Περίοδος γῆς* cannot be underestimated. The highly regarded position of Scylax as the author of the most valid account on India among these early authors

[40] The word derives from the ancient Greek word *πειρπλεῖν* meaning to sail around, or to voyage.
[41] Cole, "'I Know the Number of the Sand and the Measure of the Sea': Geography and Difference in the Early Greek World," 203.
[42] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 15. Experience of land travel gave his work a more ethnographical character which mostly elaborates on populated landscapes, contrary to the emphasis put on distances between coastlines and ports in sea *periploi*. Cole, "'I Know the Number of the Sand and the Measure of the Sea': Geography and Difference in the Early Greek World," 203.

can be understood from a reference to his journey to India in a passage written by Herodotus:

> But as to Asia, most of it was discovered by Darius. There is a river, Indus, second of all rivers in the production of crocodiles. Darius, desiring to know where this Indus empties into the sea, sent ships manned by Scylax, a man of Caryanda, and others whose word he trusted; these set out from the city of Caspatyrus and the Pactyic country, and sailed down the river toward the east and the sunrise until they came to the sea . . . [43]

The passage from the *Histories* demonstrates how Scylax provided an influx of information not just for the Greeks but also the Persian, who were living much closer to India and exchanged with them culturally and economically. It is not very clear whether Euthymenes, Scylax and Hecateus are the pioneers who created the nucleus for the development of the "science of geography" among Greeks; yet, their accounts are clearly significant for being the earliest examples of geographical writing. Indeed, Phoenicians, Egyptians and Persians probably managed distant voyages beyond the Mediterranean Sea earlier – and more frequently – than Greeks. However, the abovementioned accounts of these early explorers proved that Greeks were indeed the ones, who kept record of their voyages and paved the way for a geographical discourse to flourish in the following centuries.[44] Scylax specifically is one step ahead of the other names because "it is with Scylax of Caryanda that the history of Greek Indography concretely begins, for it is in connection with him that we find the first explicit reference to India."[45]

[43] Herodotus, *Histories*, 243.
[44] Dueck and Brodersen, *Geography in Classical Antiquity*, 53.
[45] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 14.

The second book of *Περίοδος γῆς*, which was devoted to Asia and Africa, contained Hecateus' references to India, which now survive only in fragments in the *Ethnica* of Stephanus of Byzantium. In his description of Indian lands, Hecateus assigns the last place to the territory of the Opiae, an Indian *ethnos* living along the Indus river. According to this definition, the land to the east of them was bare desert.[46] Hecateus' mention of a desert as the easternmost land piece points to the very early form of a discourse concerning the location of India in literary sources for centuries.[47] India was the easternmost edge of the *oikoumene* according to the geographical framework in the minds of early voyagers and explorers. Especially, the maintenance of the parallel thoughts concerning its geographical location until the Middle Ages in diverse contexts proves the existence of a rooted geographical discourse in this respect. Evidences demonstrate that Hecateus did not only place India at the easternmost edge of the earth in his book, but also had a map of the earth on which India was placed as in the way it was described in the written material. The earliest example of a Greek map was attributed to Anaximander of Miletus (c. 610-546 BC), who drew a map of the inhabited earth on a metal plate called *pinax* in the sixth century BC.[48] Hecateus' map was possibly an improved form of Anaximander's map – a circle-shaped land mass encircled by the surrounding *Oceanus*; in it, India lies at the easternmost edge of Asia, one of the three continents according to his geographical division of the earth in antiquity. Although maps were not commonly used and became part of the essentials of teaching geography until the

[46] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 19.
[47] It is highly probable that there were earlier voyagers like Scylax who regarded India as the eastern limit of the inhabited earth. As stated earlier, Egyptian, Phoenician or Achaemenid voyagers in the southern seas may have initiated this discourse which was later imported by the Greeks.
[48] Cole, "'I Know the Number of the Sand and the Measure of the Sea': Geography and Difference in the Early Greek World," 204.

explorations of Alexander from the fourth century onwards,[49] the map of Hecateus might have still had a function in the representation of geographical ideas like the location of India in the abovementioned spot.

India in the *Histories* of Herodotus is discussed with a much elaborate fashion compared to Hecateus' *periplus*; yet, he did not talk about geography and culture of India as much as he narrated Persians, Scythians or Egyptians. Herodotus' views concerning the geographical location of India generally accords with what is found in the *Περίοδος γῆς*. In this opening paragraph of Indian part of his narrative, he recapitulates the geographical significance of India that was already stated by Hecateus:

> All to the east of the Indian country is sand; among all men of whom hearsay gives us any clear knowledge the Indians dwell farthest to the east and the sunrise of all the nations of Asia; for on the eastern side of India all is desert by reason of the sand.[50]

In addition to pointing to the existence of a bare desert in the east of India like Hecateus, he also refers to India as *ἐσχάτη τῶν οἰκεομενέων* (the extremity of the inhabited world).[51] By utilizing the Greek word *ἔσχατος*, which means "extremity" – of the land in this context – Herodotus indeed laid the foundations of the most important element in describing not just geography but also environment, culture and society of India; India represented the extreme of human life in diverse ways for

[49] Cole, "'I Know the Number of the Sand and the Measure of the Sea': Geography and Difference in the Early Greek World," 206.
[50] Herodotus, *Histories*, 127.
[51] Herodotus, *Histories*, 133.

centuries as will be observed in the following chapters on different aspects of this land.

The last important account that is shaped around the parallel geographical discourse was written by a Cnidian physician named Ctesias, who was a contemporary of Herodotus. According to his life account told by Diodorus, he was captivated as a prisoner of war in order to be taken to Persia where he entered the service of the king Artaxerxes II Memnon (r. 404-358 BC) because of his medical skills. Therefore, this suggests his long sojourn in Persia in the court of the king. As there is no evidence pointing to his travel to India,[52] his narrative of India titled *Indica* probably relied on Persian sources, besides his own experience of encountering Indian cultural elements in Persia[53] His focus on natural history diverged from more ethnographical approach of Herodotus whereas the geographical location of India according to his account was also in line with the discourse of his time. According to a fragment from the now lost work in Photios' *Bibliotheke*, he says that "no men live beyond India,"[54] without making any reference to a desert or a terrestrial end-point.[55] However, it would not be irrelevant to attribute the same geographical conception which regarded India near a mysterious desert stretching as far as the surrounding ocean to Ctesias – as Nichols' commentary on this fragment suggests.[56] In other words, Ctesias repeated nothing other than what had already been described by Scylax, Hecateus and Herodotus earlier.

[52] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 31.
[53] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 33.
[54] Ctesias, "The Indika," 47.
[55] Maybe, it is simply lost if any further explanation was given in his book; yet, the issue is cut short in this fragment which continues with explanation of physical environment and climate of the region.
[56] Nichols, *Ctesias on India*, 94.

Although various distinctions can be observed between the writings of the authors mentioned so far, the consensus in placing India at the easternmost end of the inhabited world is easily noticeable in the geographical paradigm of the time. The preservation of the same geographical discourse despite stylistically diverging literature – and different approaches to the issue – demonstrates highly regarded, if not totally accepted, status of this model among Greeks. On the one hand, the abovementioned Greek authors influenced each other in giving value to similar patterns as Scylax provided the firsthand account of India to be used by Hecateus and Herodotus. On the other hand, the Persian culture was probably another major source of information on India that contributed to spread, or maybe the first emergence of this discourse among Greeks. This Persian influence is observable in the background of the composition of the works mentioned so far. As Scylax' voyage itself was part of a preliminary preparation for a Persian campaign to Asia,[57] Herodotus refers to the Persians among his sources on India more than once throughout his work.[58] Additionally, Ctesias also composed his account of India in relation with his long stay in the Persian court where he perceived India from a Persian point of view. Ctesias potentially encountered many travelers and merchants, who peregrinated between the two territories as well as heard oral versions of famous Indian epics circulating in Persia.[59] Moreover, he might have witnessed diverse animal species, plants and commercial goods that were brought to Persian court from India. Despite other Greek sources were potentially utilized by Ctesias, the Persian influence on his perception of India is undeniable. Lastly, the critical role of Persian sources in

[57] It should be kept in mind that India described by these authors basically corresponds to the Indus Valley, the western part of the sub-continent.
[58] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 23. He uses the term "ώς Πέρσαι Φασί" when he refers to Persian sources.
[59] Nichols, *Ctesias on India*, 22-23.

acquiring information about India manifests itself also in the lack of any commercial connection between Greeks and Indians at the time. As this connection would rise to occasion in the Roman and Byzantine period, the intermediary role of Persia in the exchange with India probably had a decisive role in the perception of India for Greeks in this period. The common element for the sources that shaped the Greek conception of India was their reliance on observation. In other words, Scylax and Persian sources, on which the discourse concerning the location of India was based, were highly esteemed for they were written by the individuals, who had been in this region. Similarly, the same framework continued in the Hellenistic and the Roman period as the credibility of an account of India on its authorship rather than its factuality for most of the cases.[60]

2.2 The geographical explorations in the Hellenistic era

Macedonian campaigns to Asia in the fourth century BC opened a new phase for the geographical, and ethnographical, knowledge of the earth for Greeks. Regarding the influx of information on the unknown lands and peoples after Alexander, the conquest of the earth by the Macedonians can also be labelled as the discovery of the earth.[61] The main body of information about his campaign to India comes from almost contemporary accounts of Onesicritus, Nearchus and Megasthenes (who will be sometimes referred as "Alexander historians" in general through the following pages), which were partially preserved in the works of later Roman authors like Arrian, Strabo and Pliny. Therefore, the way the Macedonians perceived the geographical location of India can be observed from these later accounts. The impact

[60] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 65.
[61] Gehrke, "The 'Revolution' of Alexander the Great: Old and New in the World's View," 91.

of Alexander's discoveries on the perception of the India as the easternmost edge of the *oikoumene* is one of the most critical points in order to understand the changing and continuing geographical motifs between the pre-Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic geographical outlook. A reference by Arrian based on Alexander historians gives clues about their perception of the place.

> This sea, I tell you, will prove to be joined to the Hyrcanian sea; for the great sea encircles all the land…, just as all of Asia is in fact becoming ours, and the boundaries of our empire here are becoming those which the god set for the entire continent.[62]

When Alexander was trying to convince his soldiers to pass beyond the Hyphasis River, he demonstrates the influence of earlier geographical conceptions in his mind as he seems to equalize conquering the eastern part of the earth with the conquest of India according to this passage.[63] As the Ganges River mentioned in the previous part of the passage was not known to Greeks before, the eastern sea that he mentions is nothing other than the surrounding ocean that Greeks already knew. In a similar way, the hesitation of the Macedonian soldiers in going further inland might have had its roots in the idea of being at the edge of the inhabited world as well as the Greek tales about the wild creatures.[64] The earlier references to India mostly turned around the Indus River, which was discovered by Scylax, and Indian peoples who live close to it. Thus, despite the new knowledge of the Ganges River extended the Greeks' geographical scope further to the east, the general geographical framework seems the same regarding the location of India. Although Arrian's account is one of the most well-known narrative of the Macedonian campaign to India, it cannot be

[62] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander, vol. II*, 87.
[63] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 36.
[64] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 37.

taken for granted in each case. Yet, his account faced no opposing views from other Roman geographers, who relied on similar Hellenistic sources like Arrian.

Alongside the increasing topographical focus on the geographical description of India, the systematic development and spread of geographical maps occurred in the Hellenistic period. Maps circulated widely for the education purposes and popular use within the Greek world during the Hellenistic period.[65] This development in the use and function of maps is clearly tied to the bulk of topographical and geographical data coming after the conquest of such distant places by Alexander.[66] However, just like the increasing topographical knowledge of India did not erase the ancient discourse, maps were shaped around the similar geographical perception of its location. The world map of Eratosthenes is a breakthrough compared to earlier attempts of drawing the terrestrial sphere on a two-dimensional surface. His focus on space, not in relation with human societies but as a natural phenomenon, was a new perspective for his time and arguably labels him the father of geography. Eratosthenes worked on the measurement of the earth and tried to put it on a flat surface by making use of the Greek mathematical and astronomical knowledge as well as the new influx of information mostly coming from the bematists, whose task was basically to measure the distances during the expedition of the Macedonian army. [67] As shown in the Figure 1, India is in a rhomboidal shape defined by eastern and southern seas with the Indus River laying in the west and Taurus mountain chain by the north in the world map of Eratostheens.[68]

[65] Dilke, *Greek and Roman Maps*, 30-31; Aujac, Harley and Woodward, "The Growth of an Empirical Cartography in Hellenistic Greece," 157-158.
[66] Dicks, *The Geographical Fragments of Hipparchus*, 30-31.
[67] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 52; Dicks, *The Geographical Fragments of Hipparchus*, 31.
[68] Bianchetti, "The 'Invention' of Geography: Eratosthenes of Cyrene," 147.

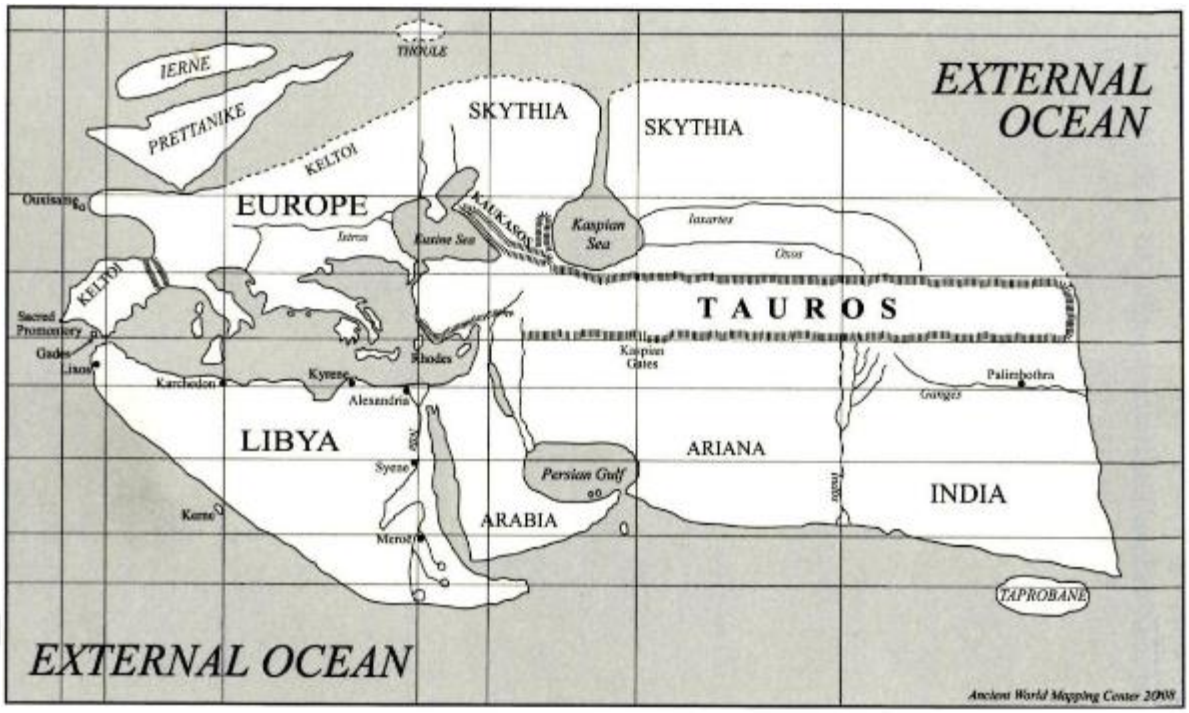

Fig. 1 A conjectural rendering of the world map of Eratosthenes, 220 BC
Source: *A Literary and Historical Atlas of Asia*, 1912

Despite there is no reference to an eastern desert by Eratosthenes, India still lies at the easternmost point of Asia just before the surrounding ocean in his geographical framework. There is also a small island named Taprobane just at the southern tip of India. The significant role of Taprobane in the Roman and Byzantine era will be discussed in detail but the earliest mention of the island by Onesicritus, who probably relied on what he heard of it in India, indicates that it was also another Hellenistic geographical exploration.[69] Similarly, the Ganges River and the land stretching further to the east of the Indus can be observable on the map of Eratosthenes.[70]

[69] Schwarz, "Pliny the Elder on Ceylon," 27.
[70] Compared to the model of Hecateus' map in which India is mostly the land mass around the Indus river after which a desert and ocean comes, there is a more sophisticated model based on both impressions of Macedonians as well as their testimonies about the further lands of India based on the second-hand information that they seem to have collected there.

Based on the geographical framework, it is possible to generalize that India was considered to lie at the easternmost edge of the *oikoumene*. The geographical scope and knowledge of Greeks extended with Alexander's campaign, but it did not bring enough information that could break ancient misconceptions about the geography and races of India. Regarding the central role of Alexander in the narratives about India in the Roman and Byzantine period, the perception of India in the Hellenistic era stands as an important milestone in the conveyance of many ancient notions as well as the addition of the new ones.[71]

2.3 The Byzantine perception of India's location

There are two critical changes that occurred in the late antique period and changed the perception of the geographical location of India: the rise of Christianity and the direct interaction with India through commercial activities. Both dynamics gave rise to new interpretations on the physical sphere and familiarized distant parts of the earth, like India, to the Mediterranean societies more. As Christian literary and cartographic sources reflect the influence of Aramaic religious scriptures on the perception of India in the Byzantine society, the sources, which were related to the commercial links between the Romans/Byzantines and Indians, illustrate the impact of the exchange with India on its depictions.

The *vita* of saint Makarios of Rome is the first religious source, whose depiction of India shapes around the Christian religious conception. Indeed, it depicts India at the easternmost edge of the *oikoumene*, after which no populated region can be found, just like the way it was perceived in antiquity. However, Christianity did

[71] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 59.

not ignore the land beyond India devoid of sophisticated descriptions nor called it basically unknown. Instead, it introduced the notion of Paradise, which was considered to exist near the eastern borders of India. In other words, Christianity brings its own interpretation of the East and shaped the content of many Byzantine and western medieval literary and cartographic sources. In the *vita* of Makarios, this Christian notion of India in relation with Paradise is treated through the story of the adventurous peregrination of three monks from the Asklepios monastery in search of this sacred place. In the beginning of the story, one of the monks, named Theophilos, expresses his intention to travel to this terrestrial Paradise to his brothers in the following way:

> Brothers, I wish to walk the years of my eternal life until where I see the sky ends since they say that it stands on an iron pillar.[72]

The meaning of "οὐρανός" might also mean heaven rather than sky in a Christian context. As course of their journey demonstrates, their desire in finding the limits of the earth result from a desire to find Paradise. Following their agreement on setting on this journey together for this common purpose, they start their travel by visiting Jerusalem. Then, they crossed Persia in order to reach India where they hoped to reach their destination. Throughout their journey, they faced many dangers and difficulties related to the strange nature of this land. After all difficulties, they meet a saint, named Makarios of Rome, who lived in a cave in an unpopulated region. According to the narrative, saint himself also set on a journey in his youth in order to

[72] Vassiliev, "The Life of Saint Makarios of Rome," 135. "ἤθελον, ἀδελφοί, τὰ ἔτη ζωῆς μου περιπατεῖν ἕως οὗ ἴδω ποῦ ἀναπέπαυται ὁ οὐρανός, ἐπειδὴ λέγουσιν ὅτι ἐπὶ στύλου σιδηροῦ ἀναπέπαυται" (my own translation)

reach Paradise that the three monks were burning with a desire to access. It is a common hagiographical theme in which a pious Christian individual is burning with the desire to see heaven and god. Yet, a physical journey in search of Paradise in the known geographical regions introduces the belief in the idea of a nonspiritual, physical sacred place rather than a spiritual journey, which is a very common theme in hagiographies.

> …and someone appeared to me at one night and said: Do not be tempted to sin and do not dare passing through this land. And I said; Why, my Lord; and he told me: Twenty miles away from here, behind the iron and copper walls lies Paradise where Adam and Eve once dwelt and the sky rests above the paradise in the east. God put cherubim (cherubs) and turning fiery scimitar(s) (a broad sword) just outside Paradise to guard the wooden road of eternal life. Cherubim were like human from feet to the belly and had chest of a lion and some other form of head…[73]

This passage in which saint Makarios explains the moment he was precluded from passing to sacred land, clearly demonstrates that Paradise here is not an allegorical word describing a spiritual dimension; but it is a place that lies, probably at the end of Indian land, somewhere in the east. According to the story, it is not possible to set foot on this land since no mortal can see the dwelling of mighty beings, Paradise. The passage doesn't clearly describe the location of Paradise, but it indicates that it was located where the sky (arguably, the earth) ends in the east.

[73] Vassiliev, "The Life of Saint Makarios of Rome," 152-153. ". . . καὶ διὰ νυκτὸς ἐφανερώθη μοι λέγων τις· μὴ θελήσῃς πειράζειν τόν σε κτίσαντα, οὐ δυνήσῃ γάρ ἔτι διελθεῖν τὸν τόπον τοῦτον. κἀγὼ εἶπον· ἵνα τί, Κύριε μου;καὶ λέγει μοι·ὡς ἀπὸ μιλίων εἴκοσι τῶν ὧδε ἔστιν τὸ τεῖχος σιδηροῦν καὶ ἕτερον χαλκοῦν καὶ ἔσωθεν τούτων ἔστιν ὁ παράδεισος ὅπου ἦν ποτε Ἀδὰμ καὶ Εὔα, καὶ ἄνωθεν τοῦ παραδείσου κατὰ ἀνατολὰς ὁ οὐρανὸς ἀναπέπαυται. ἔξωθεν δὲ τοῦ παραδείσου ἔταξεν ὁ θεὸς τὰ χερουβὶμ καὶ τὴν φλογίνην ῥομφαίαν τὴν στρεφομένην φυλάττειν τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς. εἰσὶ δὲ τῇ ἰδέᾳ τὰ χερουβὶμ ἀπὸ μὲν τῶν ποδῶν ἕως τοῦ ὀμφαλοῦ ἄνθρωποι καὶ τὸ στῆθος λέοντος καὶ ἡ κεφαλὴ σχῆμα ἄλλο καὶ. . ." (My own translation).

Although this *vita*, compared to the other literary sources, offers the least sophisticated description of Paradise, mostly because of its literary style,[74] the way India (and Paradise) is treated points to two significant aspects of this text. First, the *vita* is sticking to the entailment of first-hand observation for the description of India. The critical function of first-hand observation for the validity of information in works talking about India can be understood in the frequent reference to Scylax' account of India before the Hellenistic era; the firsthand accounts on India, which Ctesias probably encountered in Persia; and the utilization of accounts of Alexander historians in the following centuries.[75] Thus, this phenomenon was still significant in the accounts of India in the sixth-century Byzantine world.[76] In its description of India, the source of information is the monks who travelled to this land. Another example in this manner comes from the sixth-century *Christian Topography* of Kosmas Indikopleustes, whose own experiences in India formed his account of India. Therefore, the composition of the *vita* in a framework that combines the features of religious vita and travel writing can be related to the influence of this traditional literary approach in narrating India.

The second significant feature of this hagiography is the inclusion of motifs coming out of the *Alexander Romance* and the Christian worldview. The *vita* indeed brings together the motifs related to the adventure of Alexander in India and the concept of Paradise in one plot. Other than similarities between the depictions of environment, animal species and marvels of India, which will be discussed separately

[74] While the beneficial function of hagiographies in reflecting social, economic, political and many other aspects of life of the Byzantine Empire is recognized by scholars, the amount of such information is limited because of highly religious concern behind composition of hagiographies. For more information on Byzantine hagiographies, see Efthymiadis, *Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*.
[75] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 118-119.
[76] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 104.

in the following pages, there is also a direct reference to him such as the arch of Alexander, which the monks encounter and immediately recognize.[77] The Christianization of Alexander himself does not take place in the plot even though his journey in India was interpreted in a way that transforms his purpose of conquering the world into a Christian tale in various versions of the *Alexander Romance*.

In the *Alexander Poem*, the attribution of Paradise to India is not openly stated but can be inferred from the description of a holy land beyond the Ganges by Dandamis, who was the chief of the Brahmans whom Alexander met in India in the poem. In later parts of the third book where Alexander's meeting with Brahmans is narrated, the naked-wise Dandamis exposes the divine nature of the land on which they live.

> "Nothing four-footed belongs to us, nor any iron nor grain,
> nor houses, nor gold nor swords,
> nor silver, nor lead, nor a cake, nor any wine.
> We do not wear clothes, and never eat flesh,
> We don't have any urge for joy
> nor complete the tillage of the soil
> but we have the best fresh air,
> it is well-temperate, wet and full of sweet smells,
> and it is devoid of every sickness and corruption;
> We also have the light, the sun, stars and the moon;
> Whenever we are hungry, we go to branches of trees and eat their fruits;
> They always give birth to these fruits of the moon.
> While some blossom, others become unripe in these trees,
> Some others gather the best fruits from us.
> We also have the river Euphrates,[78]
> and when we are thirsty, we go to the river to drink,

[77] Vassiliev, "The Life of Saint Makarios of Rome," 142.

[78] The reference to the Euphrates river in this passage seems as a later insertion during the Byzantine era. Just like mention of the Armenians and Turks among the enemies of Alexander, depiction of the Euphrates in this context derives from the assimilation of the text by addition of anachronistic motifs that come out of the Byzantine tradition. As the questions around the geographical descriptions of four biblical rivers will be discussed in the following pages, a confusion of the Euphrates with one of the rivers in India is not a common phenomenon; yet, what is common is the modification of the plot in Alexander tales in the Middle Ages as happens here.

then we glorify the creator with the most joy.[79]

As these verses reveal the unworldly life that the Brahmans experience on such a land, the physical location of their territory according to the following passage, implies the presence of a fabulous territory like the one in the *vita* of saint Makarios of Rome. Dandamis warns Alexander:

> The histories tell us that
> the Ganges river is dangerous and hard to pass.
> Wild crocodiles live there,
> they are big enough to drink water as untiredly as strong elephants;
> Besides, huge dragons which size seventy cubits
> and show a horrible stoutness,
> dwell in these lands;
> As such, they prove the glory and wisdom of the creator.[80]

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[79] Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Byzantine Alexander Poem*, 189-190.
"οὐδὲν οἴκων ἐποικοδομοί, χρυσός οὔκουν, οὐ ξίφος,
οὐκ ἄργυρος, οὐ μόλυβδος, οὐκ ἄρτος, οἶνος οὔπω.
Οὐκ ἔχομεν ἱμάτιον, οὐδὲ κρεωφαγίαν,
οὐδὲ τῶν πρὸς ἀπόλαυσιν ἔχομεν συντεινόντων
ἢ συντελούντων μάλιστα τῶν πρὸς τὴν γεωργίαν,
ἀλλ' ἔχομεν τὸν κάλλιστον ἀέρα καὶ γλυκώδη,
τὸν εὔκρατον καὶ κάθυγρον καὶ πλήρης εὐωδίας,
τὸν πάσης ἀρρωστίας τε φθορᾶς ἀπηλλαγμένον·
ἔχομεν φῶς, τὸν ἥλιον, ἀστέρας καὶ σελήνην·
πρόσπεινοι δ' ὅταν γένωμεν, ἐν κατακόμοις δένδροις
ἐκεῖσε πορευόμεθα τρώγοντες καρποὺς τούτων·
κύουσι γοῦν αὐτὰ καρποὺς ἀεὶ σελήνης γέννᾳ.
Ἐν τούτοις ἄλλο μὲν ἀνθεῖ, θάτερ ' ὀμφακιάζει,
ἄλλο τρυγᾶται παρ ' ἡμῶν ἔχον καρποὺς καλλίστους.
Ὡσαύτως ἔνεστιν ἡμῖν ὁ ποταμὸς Εὐφράτης,
καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐρχόμενοι πίνομεν οἱ διψῶντες,
δοξάζοντες τὸν πλαστουργὸν μετ' εὐφροσύνης πλείστης."
[80] Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Byzantine Alexander Poem*, 191.
" Ἱστορικοὶ δὲ λέγουσι τὸν ποταμὸν τὸν Γάγγην
εἶναι δυσπεραιότατον καὶ κινδυνώδη τοῦτον.
Ὀδοντοτύραννος ἐκεῖ θηρίον ἐφιζάνει,
λίαν πολὺ τὸ μέγεθος, ὥστε πιεῖν ἀκόπως
ἐλέφαντα τὸν ἰσχυρὸν ὅλον ἐξ ὁλοκλήρου·
οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ δράκοντες μέγιστοι πρὸς τοῖς τόποις
πήχειν ἑβδομήκοντα τὸ μῆκος κατοικοῦσι,
τὸ πάχος φρικωδέστατον καὶ φοβερὸν δεικνύντες,
δόξαν ἐκδιηγούμενοι τοῦ Πλαστου καὶ σοφίαν." (My own translation).

The emphasis put on the impossibility of passing beyond the Ganges River to the notion about Paradise as it might lie beyond this river, which is at the eastern boundaries of India. However, there are some medieval versions of the same story in which Paradise is more directly treated in the story. In the Middle Ages, there were indeed almost two separate Alexander, one historical and the other legendary; and the latter, ironically, was more respected and talked about.[81] This legendary figure of Alexander was commonly talked in relation with the stories about Paradise.

According to a twelfth-century Latin version, Alexander, after conquering all India, comes to a broad river, which he learns to be the Ganges or Phison, streaming from Paradise of Pleasure. After passing the river with difficulty, Alexander and his soldiers found a walled city, but they could not find the entrance. Then inhabitants of the city send a small precious stone with a message saying that the gem would diminish Alexander's desires of conquering the world and make him to leave their city. The meaning of the jewel and message was explained to Alexander by an old man. He said that the city was abode of the souls positioned on the confines of the world and the inhabitants were awaiting the day of their judgment and resurrection in peace and silence.[82] There is also a thirteenth-century French vernacular version of a similar story where Alexander reaches the banks of the Ganges – this time associated with Geon which was one of the four great rivers of Paradise – and convinced to return by an old man protecting the entrance.[83] There are also German and Italian versions of similar stories in which Alexander struggles to enter the terrestrial Paradise which he found at the eastern edge of India beyond the Ganges. These

[81] Esposito, "A Mediaeval legend of the Terrestrial Paradise," 194.
[82] Esposito, "A Mediaeval legend of the Terrestrial Paradise," 195-198.
[83] Esposito, "A Mediaeval legend of the Terrestrial Paradise," 199.

versions of the adventures of Alexander in India occupied a central place among various versions of the *Alexander Romance* circulating in the Middle Ages. They all made references to a holy land at the end of India just like the monks in the *vita* of Makarios were not allowed to set foot on the sacred territory on the same spot.[84] Twelfth-century Latin version was indeed adapted from a Jewish original version, which is dated to centuries earlier.[85] Thus, it is possible to say that the connection between Alexander's desire to reach the limits of the earth and the Christian concept of Paradise in the easternmost edge of the earth emerged in literary works even before the Middle Ages.

When it comes to late antique Byzantine trade itineraries, they also contained similar descriptions concerning Paradise, interestingly, with more elaborate explanations.[86] In the sixth-century trade itinerary titled *Ὁδοιπορία ἀπὸ Ἐδὲμ τοῦ παραδείσου* (The Way from the Paradise of Eden), a list of regions from east to west is described. Yet, the surprising aspect of the text is the starting point of the list, Edem which is the very Paradise that is discussed so far.

> The distance from Edem until the land of Brahmans is seventy days along the river called Phison and from the land of Brahmans until that of Ebelat (Evilat) is another seventy-day journey.[87]

[84] Esposito, "A Mediaeval legend of the Terrestrial Paradise," 203.
[85] Esposito, "A Mediaeval legend of the Terrestrial Paradise," 198.
[86] The commercial relationship between India and the Byzantine Empire will be discussed with regard to its influence on these mythical descriptions of the location of India, and also the contextualization of such mythical descriptions in a wider context stretching from the most fabulous accounts to practical type of information about India. So, these itineraries will be discussed there again.
[87] Pigulevskaia, *Byzanz auf den Wegen nach Indien*, 323. "Ἀπὸ Ἀδὰμ ἕως Δραγμὰν μοναὶ ἑβδομήντα παρὰ τὸν ποταμὸν τὸν λεγὸμενον Φυσὼν καὶ ἀπὸ Δραγμὰν ἕως Ἐβηλὰτ μοναὶ ο." (My own translation).

The listing of land routes from east to west goes as far as Constantinople which is followed by Rome as the last destination. And the text ends with the following sentence:

> (this is) The end of the road from Eden of Paradise.[88]

The Land of Eden itself was also described in a marvelous manner at the beginning of the text. According to this description, the inhabitants of this region are called *Makarinoi*.[89] Pigulevskaia argued that the Makarinoi of the *Odoiporia* are identical with the people named *Camarini* in another trade itinerary titled *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*. The opening lines of this second text starts with the description of people who are living a fabulous life and the list of nations from east to west is almost similar to the one in the *Odoiporia*: the land of Camarini, or Makarinoi of the *Odoiporia*, is followed by the lands of Brahmans, Eviltae, Emer, Nebus and – after a few others – India.[90] All these marvelous nations were living a life similar to the one that was explained to Alexander by Dandamis concerning the Brahmans in the *Alexander Poem*. In the *Odoiporai,* σπείρειν (sowing) and θερίζειν (reaping) start in the land of Evilat,[91] which comes after that of the Brahmans (Brahmans). Signs of worldly life in the form of political institutions first emerge somewhere much further than the land of the Brahmans, in Nebus, where a ruler was found for the first time according to the description in the *Expositio*. Combining all these descriptions of the

[88] Pigulevskaia, *Byzanz auf den Wegen nach Indien*, 323. "Τέλος τῆς ὁδοιπορίας τῆς Ἐδὲμ τοῦ παραδείσου." (My own translation).
[89] Drakoulis, "Οι Οδοιπορίες ἀπὸ Ἐδὲμ τοῦ παραδείσου ἄχρι τῶν Ῥωμαίων και οι πρώιμοι βυζαντινοί δρόμοι του μεταξιού," 18.
[90] Woodman, *Expositio totius mundi et gentium,* 26-28.
[91] Pigulevskaia, "Die Ὁδοιπορία ἀπὸ Ἐδὲμ τοῦ παραδείσου," 323.

holiness of the lands occupied by the Camarini (in the *Expositio*) or Makarinoi (in the *Odoiporia*), Brahmans and many others, the impact of the notion of Paradise on the description of the social structure of India can be observed. The interpolation of this discourse even into such commercial itineraries which served sailors, traders and merchants,[92] is likely to confirm the existence of various source(s) conveying, and preserving, this type of vague geographical narratives.

The *Christian Topography* of Kosmas Indikopleustes sets a different stage for the display of discourses about the terrestrial Paradise; a sixth-century book dedicated to the description of geography and cosmology. Regarding the infusion of this motif of Paradise even in the abovementioned commercial accounts, which would be expected to ignore such imaginary and non-practical thoughts, the central role of Scriptures in the geographical and cosmological narrative of the *Christian Topography* leads to an expectation of more elaborate descriptions of Paradise from its content. Kosmas rejects the spherical world model, which had been accepted since antiquity, and claims that the shape of the world has already been revealed to people in the shape of the tabernacle of Moses by God.[93] According to this model, the earth is a flat shaped rectangular land mass which was surrounded by an ocean. Accordingly, the easternmost land of the earth is the land of silk which lies at the remotest part of Indies.[94] As there is trace of neither any extraterrestrial land nor its legendary inhabitants in this description, Kosmas goes further to claim that there is no Paradise on the earth.

[92] Pigulevskaia, *Byzanz auf den Wegen nach Indien*, 108.
[93] Brubaker, "The *Christian Topography* (Vat. gr. 699) Revisited: Image, Text and Conflict in Ninth-Century Byzantium," 5.
[94] Indikopleustes, *Christian Topography*, 47; Pigulevskaia, *Byzanz auf den Wegen nach Indien*, 108.

> Yet if Paradise did exist in this earth of ours, many a man among those who are keen to know and enquire into all kinds of subjects, would think he could not be too quick in getting there: for if there be some who to procure silk for the miserable gains of commerce, hesitate not to travel to the uttermost ends of the earth, how should they hesitate to go where they would gain a sight of Paradise itself?[95]

Relying on this quote, Pigulevksaia states that Kosmas did not believe in the existence of the Land of Eden on the earth, and regarded China as the easternmost land before the great eastern ocean.[96] Although this passage is likely to affirm Pigulevskaia's evaluation of Kosmas' views on Paradise, a thorough analysis of his geographical ideas rather suggests that Kosmas indeed believed in the presence of Paradise somewhere not far away from the inhabited earth.

Kosmas' description differs from the others not in rejecting the existence of a terrestrial Paradise but putting it in an unreachable spot. Unlike the Paradise of the *Odoiporia* which is less than a three hundred-day journey away from India, or that of the Alexander tradition which located it just beyond the Ganges, Kosmas considered Paradise as a territory on the other side of the surrounding ocean.

> We have said that the figure of the earth is lengthwise from east to west, and breadthwise from north to south, and that it is divided into two parts : this part which we, the men of the present day, inhabit, and which is all round encircled by the intermedial sea, called the ocean by the Pagans, and that part which encircles the ocean, and has its extremities bound together with those of the heaven, and which men at one time inhabited to eastward, before the flood in the days of Noah occurred, and in which also Paradise is situated.[97]

[95] Indikopleustes, *Christian Topography*, 47.
[96] Pigulevskaia, *Byzanz auf den Wegen nach Indien*, 107-8.
[97] Indikopleustes, *Christian Topography*, 33.

Thus, Kosmas' description of Paradise seems to be influenced more from the Scriptures than Alexander's tales. The connection between the *vita* of saint Makarios and the *Alexander Romance* has been mentioned already. In the *Expositio* and *Odoiporia*, the description of people who live in and close to Paradise also intersect with the motifs found in the *Alexander Romance* with more elaborate descriptions. Kosmas' own voyages to many distant places as far as India might have met the requirement of first-hand observation in describing India and diminished – if not totally neutralized – the influence of legends that were shaped around the personality of Alexander. Kosmas avoided making any references to Indian fables related to Alexander tales nor cited other sources of tales like Ctesias, Herodotus or Megasthenes. Whereas the 'scientific' nature of his work[98] – despite attaching a flat surface to the earth – blocked an explicit depiction of Paradise on the terrestrial sphere, the greater impact of Jewish and Christian Bible on his work[99] is likely to enforce the placement of Paradise somewhere in his geographical model. However, Kosmas does not only draw attention with this idiosyncratic interpretation of Paradise based on the Scriptures, but also with offering the Byzantine version of a common western medieval cartographic discourse; namely, showing Paradise on a map.

2.4 India on maps

Evidences for the use of geographical maps in the Byzantine Empire mostly come from the early and late periods. These evidences demonstrate two main functions of maps in late antiquity: an ideological and educational tool. Regardless of either

[98] Kominko, "New Perspectives on Paradise–The Levels of Reality in Byzantine and Latin Medieval Maps," 150.
[99] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 105.

function, it is possible to see the impact of the discourse about India on maps from Byzantine and medieval period.

There are two important late antique panegyrics in which maps play a significant role. In a public speech delivered in the late 290s, Eumenius, a rhetorician and professor in Maenianae School in Autun, talks about a world map. He states the advantage of the visual representation of lands and distances through maps for students compared to other means used for geographical education.[100] According to another example coming from the fifth century, a student of Julius Honorius composes a geographical book based on his teacher's comments on a map that their school had. A similar view about the importance of better comprehension of the shape of the continents/lands can be found in the *Periegesis* of Dionysius of Alexandria, a very widely cited and commented geographical work by the Byzantines.[101]

> I will talk about the shape of every continent,
> so that without seeing, you can have a simple view of it,
> and then you would be honored and respected,
> when you tell each thing to someone who doesn't know these things.[102]

Such references surely say a lot about the educational function of maps – as well as the importance of learning the geographical zones correctly – in late antique world. However, the same speech that Eumenius delivered, reveals their function in for the

[100] Lozovsky, "Maps and Panegyrics: Roman Geo-Ethnographical Rhetoric in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages," 169.
[101] Racine, "Geography, Identity and the Legend of Saint Christopher," 106.
[102] Periegetes, *The Description of the Known World*, 17.
"Νῦν δέ τοι ἠπείρου μυθήσομαι εἶδος ἁπάσης,
ὄφρα καὶ οὐκ ἐσιδών περ ἔχρις εὔφραστον ὀπωπήν·
ἐκ τοῦδ' ἄν γεραργός τε καὶ αἰδοιέστερος εἴης,
ἀνδρὶ παρ ἀγνώσσοντι πιφαυσκόμενος τὰ ἕκαστα." (My own translation).

ideological purposes. In his speech, he touches upon the critical role of maps in demonstrating the accomplishments of the Roman emperors through representation of their dominion; in other words, they visually illustrate the Roman idea of conquest of geographical space.[103] Another evidence in the form of poem makes the propaganda of the Byzantine Emperor Theodosius with reference to a world map. According to the poem written during his reign, the emperor Theodosius – either the first or the second – orders the production of a world map that must show all the regions and sea.[104] As the poem praises the emperor's power and wisdom which exceeded the earthly sphere, the map, similarly, symbolizes the dominion of imperial power reaching to the four corners of the earth.[105] The aftermath of the order of Theodosius is a mystery. Yet, there are remaining examples of the maps that survived from the Roman period and which were widely used in the Byzantine Empire: the world map of Ptolemy and the famous Roman road map called *Tabula Peutingeriana*.

The account of the genuine maps, which were drawn by Ptolemy himself, in *Geographia* is ambiguous since there are only copies drawn by different persons in later periods. yet, there is a scholarly consensus in favor of Ptolemy's own production of a world map that accompanied the text.[106] Byzantine knowledge of Ptolemy can be detected in the references to him by Photios and Psellos from ninth century onwards. The earliest manuscript copy of *Geographia* is from the thirteenth century and contains a world map drawn by Agathodaemon of Alexandria who

[103] Lozovsky, "Maps and Panegyrics: Roman Geo-Ethnographical Rhetoric in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages," 169-170.
[104] Lozovsky, "Maps and Panegyrics: Roman Geo-Ethnographical Rhetoric in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages," 172.
[105] Lozovsky, "Maps and Panegyrics: Roman Geo-Ethnographical Rhetoric in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages,", 173.
[106] Brown, *The Story of Maps*, 74.

probably produced it according to the geographical description of the world in the work itself.[107] Maximos Planoudes' (1260-1310) account of acquiring a manuscript of *Geographia* gives insights about the interest of Byzantine intellectual circles in the map of Ptolemy. While Planoudes' copy did not possess a map, except some remarks of Agathodaemon on his map, the Emperor Andronikos III articulated his wish to acquire one copy of the book with maps after he learnt about Planoudes' celebration of his new manuscript.[108] The Emperor's wish came true when a copy of the work was presented to him by the Patriarch of Alexandria. A third evidence is another contemporary manuscript copy of *Geographia* which belonged to Nikephoros Gregoras, who is credited with drawing a world map that was based on the model in *Geographia*.[109] The circulation of such versions of maps which derive from the one included – or described – in the masterpiece of Ptolemy and the references to his work in the corpus of Photios may be taken as important – if not sufficient – indicators of the utilization of the map by the Byzantines for ages.

The world map of Castorius, or the so-called *Tabula Peutingeriana*, is a late antique world map that was based on the Roman itinerary maps of the first century AD.[110] There are different views on the dating of its original version, ranging from the early fourth to the early fifth century, as the earliest extant copy is dated to the thirteenth century. Talbert tries to contextualize the Peutinger Map along with three late Roman/early Byzantine maps which were discussed here as well: a first-century map that was commissioned by Vipsanius Agrippa; a third-century map mentioned by Eumenius in his public speech; and a fourth-century map commissioned by the Emperor Theodosius. According to this, the map has made use of existing

[107] Bagrow, *History of Cartography*, 36.
[108] Bagrow, *History of Cartography*, 36.
[109] Bagrow, *History of Cartography*, 36.
[110] Talbert, *Rome's World: The Peutinger Map Reconsidered*, 162.

cartographic sources. Talbert dates the Peutinger Map to sometime during the tetrarchy of Diocletian in the 300s.[111] Although the land routes and travel networks displayed on the map suggest a practical function to the map, its value and elaborate style negate such a practical use; the map is more likely to have been an object of display and propaganda as seen in the previous examples.[112] Regardless of its function and meaning, the map was among the very few cartographic remains that can be associated with the late antique Byzantine period.[113]

The last group of Byzantine cartographical evidences is comprised of the maps, which combined religious – Christian – discourse with secular geographical knowledge. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Kosmas is unique in offering a world map that can be regarded among such maps. There are abundant surviving examples of medieval world maps, the so called *mappae mundi*, from the fourth to the fifteenth century.[114] All these maps are of monastic origin[115] and they melted religious views and geographical knowledge in the same pot; but it is very hard to find their counterparts in the Byzantine context except the one in Kosmas' work and a sixth-century floor mosaic in the Byzantine church of Saint George in Jordan, also known as the Madaba map.[116] Combining all these different types of maps and literary references to the cartographic tradition in Byzantium, what do Byzantine cartographic evidences say about the particular types of attributions to India concerning its geographical location?

Regarding the Byzantine interest in the *Geographia* of Ptolemy, the work might be expected to influence their view of India. According to Agathadaemon's

[111] Talbert, *Rome's World: The Peutinger Map Reconsidered*, 133-139.
[112] Talbert, *Rome's World: The Peutinger Map Reconsidered*, 144.
[113] Magdalino, "Constantine VII and the Historical Geography of Empire," 25.
[114] Bagrow, *History of Cartography*, 45.
[115] Bagrow, *History of Cartography*, 43.
[116] Magdalino, "Constantine VII and the Historical Geography of Empire," 25.

version of Ptolemy's map, India is neighbored by China from the eastern side. Besides, the old model in which a land mass surrounded by an ocean cannot be linked to the geographical model found in these later versions. However, this does not mean that the earlier versions of the map of Ptolemy illustrate the similar image. As Bagrow states, thirteenth-century version of *Geographia* that Planudes possessed, is a cumulative text which extended with alterations and additions that came through centuries after Ptolemy.[117] Therefore, a more accurate image of India in this later versions have been the result of updated geographical knowledge inserted in the text; thus, it would be highly anachronistic find a direct analogy between late antique and late Byzantine copies of *Geographia* and Ptolemy's map. In this respect, the Peutinger map represents late antique geographical tradition regarding the literary works of the period.[118] In the map, whose eastern portion is shown in the Figure 2, India stands at the easternmost spot with its two characteristic rivers: the Ganges flowing through east and the Indus pouring into the Southern Sea. The land of Evilat (Damirice), which comes after the land of Brahmans in the *Odoiporia*, lies in the northwestern side of the Ganges, near the source of the river.[119] Despite the map does not specify it, the Brahmans should be expected to live somewhere in the east of Damirice, near the mouth of the Ganges. The map contradicts with the topographical description of Alexander tradition in placing cities like Taxila at further northern region. It does not make sense to see Alexander advance such further in east where the city of Taxila appear on the map.

[117] For a discussion on the original form of the world map of Ptolemy, see Bagrow, *The Origin of Ptolemy's Geographia.*
[118] Pigulevskaia, *Byzanz auf den Wegen nach Indien*, 75.
[119] Pigulevskaia, *Byzanz auf den Wegen nach Indien*, 103.

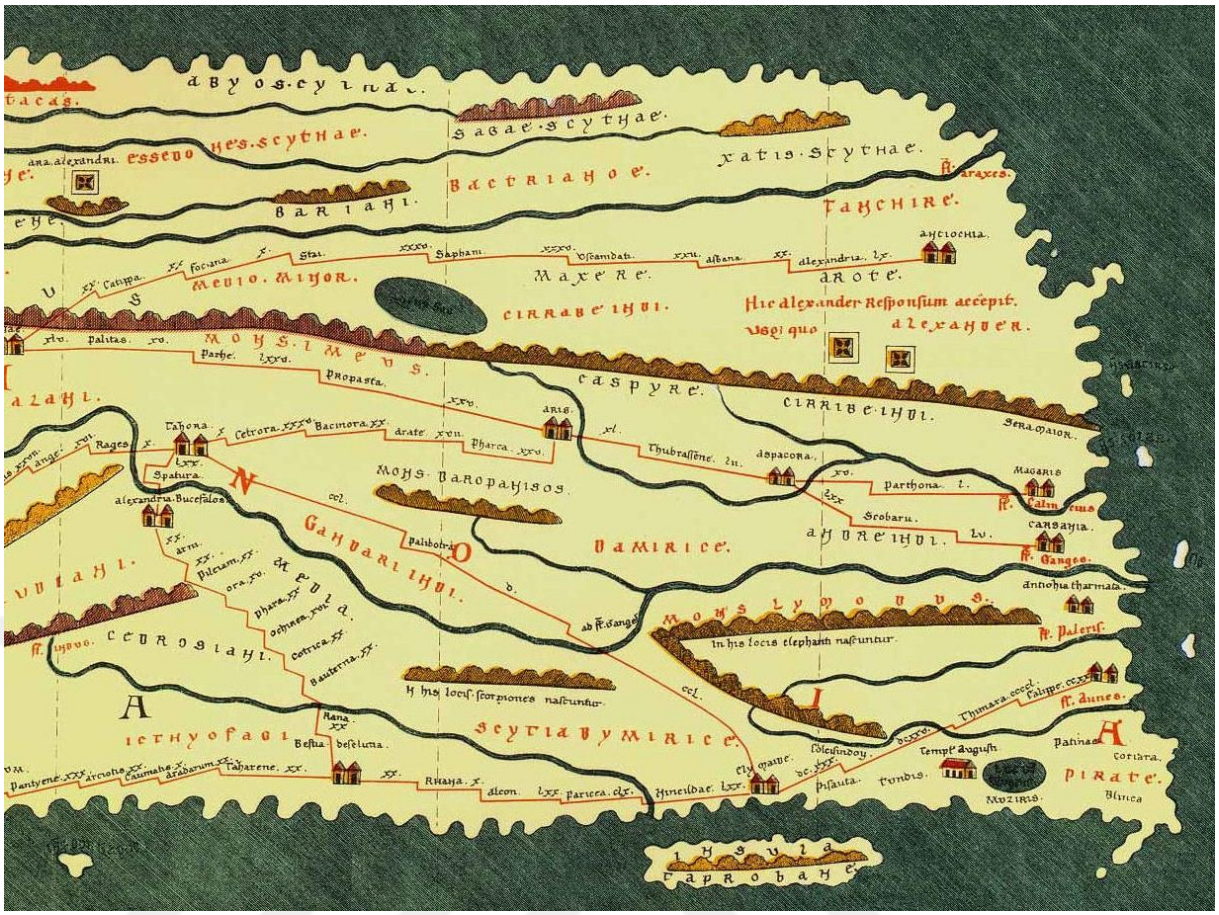

Fig. 2 The depiction of the eastern part of the earth on the Peutinger map
Source: *Rome's World: The Peutinger Map Reconsidered*, 2010

According to this model, except a few small islands, there is no indication of land beyond India. China is included among the Indian lands under the name "Sera Maior" at the north of the Ganges. The map may reflect the earlier version of Ptolemy's map, especially, regarding the depiction of the eastern regions. Unlike the Byzantine version of *Geographia*, its Arabic counterparts may suggest analogy between Ptolemy's geography and the *Tabula Peutingeriana*. In the rectangular world map in the newly discovered *Book of Curiosities*, compiled around the eleventh century, a more authentic version of Ptolemy's map can be found.[120] The Mountain of the Moon at the southern edge of the world and the island of Jewel at

[120] Rapoport and Savage-Smith, "The *Book of Curiosities* and a Unique Map of the World," 131.

the eastern edge beyond India are probably two main Khwarazmian additions; the remaining model is considered to come from Ptolemy's topographical and geographical descriptions.[121] Contrary to thirteenth-century depictions in Byzantine maps, China lies on the north of India like in the Peutinger map. Thus, both the Tabula Peutingeriana, and probable earlier versions of the map of Ptolemy set up a substructure appropriate for more religious depictions of Indi. In other words, the existence of such maps along with abovementioned literary works does not necessarily negate the discourses turning around the location of India; they excluded any land mass to the east of India as well as provided visual image of an eastern world that overlaps with many motifs found in the literary works in question.

As it can be understood from Photios' comment on the work, his geographical views were marginal even for the Byzantines. In this respect, his assumption of a flat world based on his interpretation of the tabernacle model did not reflect the general geographical view of the Byzantines. Yet, his description of the location of India compared to other contemporary sources does not seem marginal at all. When the visual representation of the flat space in his version of the world map is considered, he dealt with the perception of the location of India in relation with the thoughts about Paradise in a way that matched with the Byzantine standards at the time. As demonstrated in Figure 3 below, Kosmas included a map of the flat earth and the Land of Eden in his work.

[121] Rapoport and Savage-Smith, "The *Book of Curiosities* and a Unique Map of the World," 137.

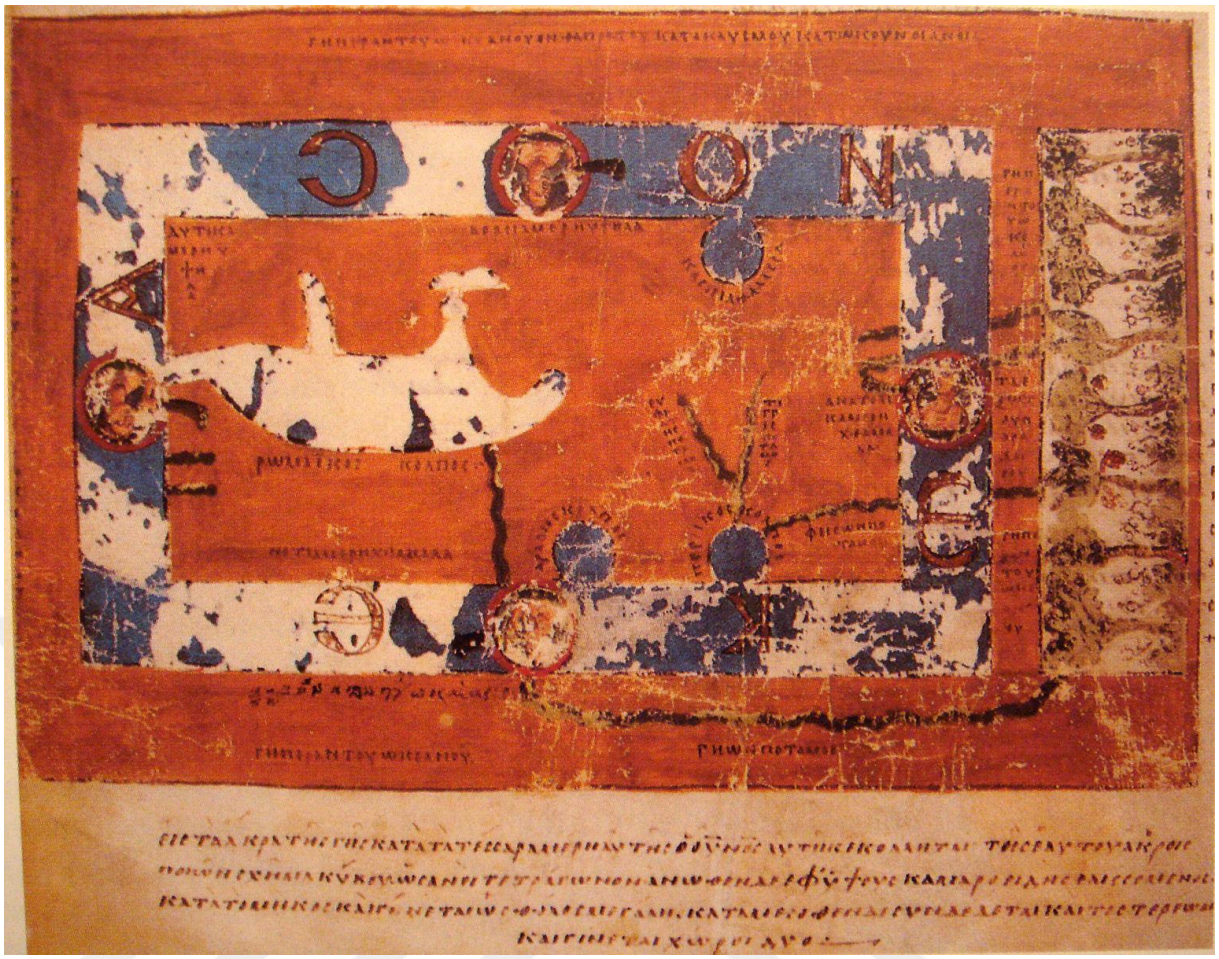

Fig. 3 The map of the earth and the Land of Eden according to Kosmas' description
Source: *Codex Vat. Gr. 699*, 9th century

In parallel with his description, Kosmas locates India at the easternmost edge of the *oikoumene* which was separated from Paradise by the eastern ocean. The land of Eden can be distinguished at the right side of this rectangular model, and the four biblical rivers, which pour into the earth from Paradise, connect two land masses to each other. Inclusion of these rivers in his map seems contradictory to his views about the impossibility of the existence of Paradise on the earth. However, Kosmas comes up with a solution to avoid such a contrast. While he directly associates the rivers with Paradise, he assumes that they are connected to Paradise from beneath the earth. According to this formula, what are known as the springs of these rivers are

just the spots where they resurface on the earth.[122] Yet, Kosmas was not the first to give this explanation about the nature of biblical rivers on the earth. Just like the idea of a terrestrial paradise predates Kosmas' map, the conception of biblical rivers flowing beneath the ocean into the earth were also articulated by some Christian writers of earlier generations like Ephrem, probably the first writer to picture biblical rivers in this manner. Moreover, the fifth-century church history of Philostorgius contains an analogous model. As he introduces the similar underground route, through which the rivers were connected to Paradise,[123] he adds two further phenomena that strengthen the paradisiacal nature of these rivers. The growth of a holy fruit/flower named *caryophyllon* along the banks of the Phison – which he associates with the Indus – and the recovery of patients with violent fever after bathing in the waters of the Phison are two further implications of the divine source of these rivers.[124] As it can be seen in Kosmas' map, the Geon river, which was mostly associated with the Nile, reaches the earth from the south whereas the Phison, the so-called Ganges, pours into the earth from the eastern side.[125] However, Kosmas confuses the Indus with the Ganges river, and calls it the Phison.[126] He quotes from Genesis where he says that the Phison passes through the land of Evilat, an Indian region full of gold.[127] According to the description of this land of Evilat in the *Odoiporia*, *Expositio* and the map of Castorius – as well as the depiction in the map of Kosmas – the Ganges is the most probable candidate to represent the Phison. In the Byzantine version of the Alexander Poem, the warning to Alexander by the

[122] Kominko, "New Perspectives on Paradise–The Levels of Reality in Byzantine and Latin Medieval Maps," 147.
[123] Philostorgius, *Church History*, 45.
[124] Philostorgius, *Church History*, 46.
[125] Kominko, "New Perspectives on Paradise–The Levels of Reality in Byzantine and Latin Medieval Maps," 147.
[126] Indikopleustes, *Christian Topography*, 366.
[127] Indikopleustes, *Christian Topography*, 372.

Brahmans about the impassibility of the Ganges river may derive from a similar connection between the Ganges and the Phison. Similarly, the representation of this river in medieval versions of the *Alexander Romance* attributes to it a similar meaning.

Even though Kosmas confuses the Indus and Ganges, he avoids a bigger confusion; namely, attributing an eastern source to the Nile.[128] Indeed, Kosmas also attributes an eastern source to the Nile, the Geon, but not a terrestrial source but a paradisiacal one. According to his map, the Nile resurfaces in Ethiopia and flows to the north; thus, the first spot it appears on the earth lies in in the south of Africa. However, there was an ancient assumption of an eastern (more specifically, an Asiatic) connection to the Nile,[129] and this may have well given the grounds for the association of biblical rivers to an eastern paradisiacal source. In his *periplus*, which is the earliest of its kind, Euthymenes of Massalia connected the Nile to an Asiatic river in the sixth century BC,[130] and this conception survived into the Hellenistic era.

When Alexander noticed the existence of great numbers of crocodiles in the Indus River and the growth of beans on the banks of the Acesines river, he thought that he had discovered the source of the Nile because he witnessed the same two phenomena in Egypt; he was so excited that he even wanted to write about his discovery to his mother Olympias.[131] According to Arrian, he ordered the preparation of a fleet to return to Egypt by the way of river until he learned from the locals that the Indus pours into the Great Ocean and had nothing to do with the

[128] Kominko, "New Perspectives on Paradise–The Levels of Reality in Byzantine and Latin Medieval Maps," 146.
[129] Gehrke, "The "Revolution" of Alexander the Great: Old and New in the World's View," 86.
[130] Dueck and Brodersen, *Geography in Classical Antiquity*, 52.
[131] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander vol. II*, 103.

Nile.[132] Nearchus relates the same story by presenting the Acesines river as the assumed source of the Nile because of the crocodiles and the Egyptian beans.[133] This ambiguity concerning the source of the Nile is one of the mysterious themes that various authors touched upon – just like the location of India and beyond it. Kosmas' depiction of these rivers in relation to Paradise arguably suggests a different interpretation of this ancient thought.

The spread of the same cartographic discourse beyond Byzantine borders and into later periods compensates the lack of cartographic evidence from the Byzantine Empire, other than that of Kosmas. These maps are basically called *mappae mundi*, world maps which were generally made by or for members of the church.[134] *Mappae mundi* functioned as inventories of geographical information deriving from the Bible and combined with the ancient and contemporary geographical discourse.[135] Both the biblical and the ancient geographical discourse seen in these maps propose a close connection with the late antique Byzantine geographical view which was connected to the same tradition. There are many surviving *mappae mundi* that were produced between the eighth and fifteenth centuries,[136] and three of them are very famous with regard to their size and elaborate descriptions: the Beatus map from Iberia, the Ebstorf map from Germany and the Hereford map from England. The different regions where these maps were produced offer a separate context for each

[132] Arrian talks about a Homeric belief that the Nile rises from India, flows through a vast desert and there it loses its name. When it reappears in a civilized region, it starts to be called as the Nile. According to Arrian, this thought combined with the similarities of the rivers Alexander discovered, led him to this induction.
[133] Bucciantini, "Geographical Description and Historical Narrative in the Tradition on Alexander's Expedition," 101.
[134] Kaneko, "From Space of the World to the Space of the Local: The Two Maps of Thomas Elmham," 76.
[135] Kaneko, "From Space of the World to the Space of the Local: The Two Maps of Thomas Elmham," 76.
[136] Bagrow, *History of Cartography*, *45.*

map, but they all converge on reflecting the religious perception of the edges of the *oikoumene* in a similar fashion to the content of the abovementioned sources.

In the eighth-century Beatus map, shown in Figure 4, there is a noticeable emphasis on rivers compared to its equivalents. The little attention given to the details in the map does not suggest any practical usage of it by maritime voyagers, but the connection of these rivers to the eastern end of the world, which is located at the top of the map, recommends the possibility of the author's intention to imply the paradisiacal nature of the Iberian land by showing the rivers in this land on a map demonstrating Paradise at the eastern end.[137]

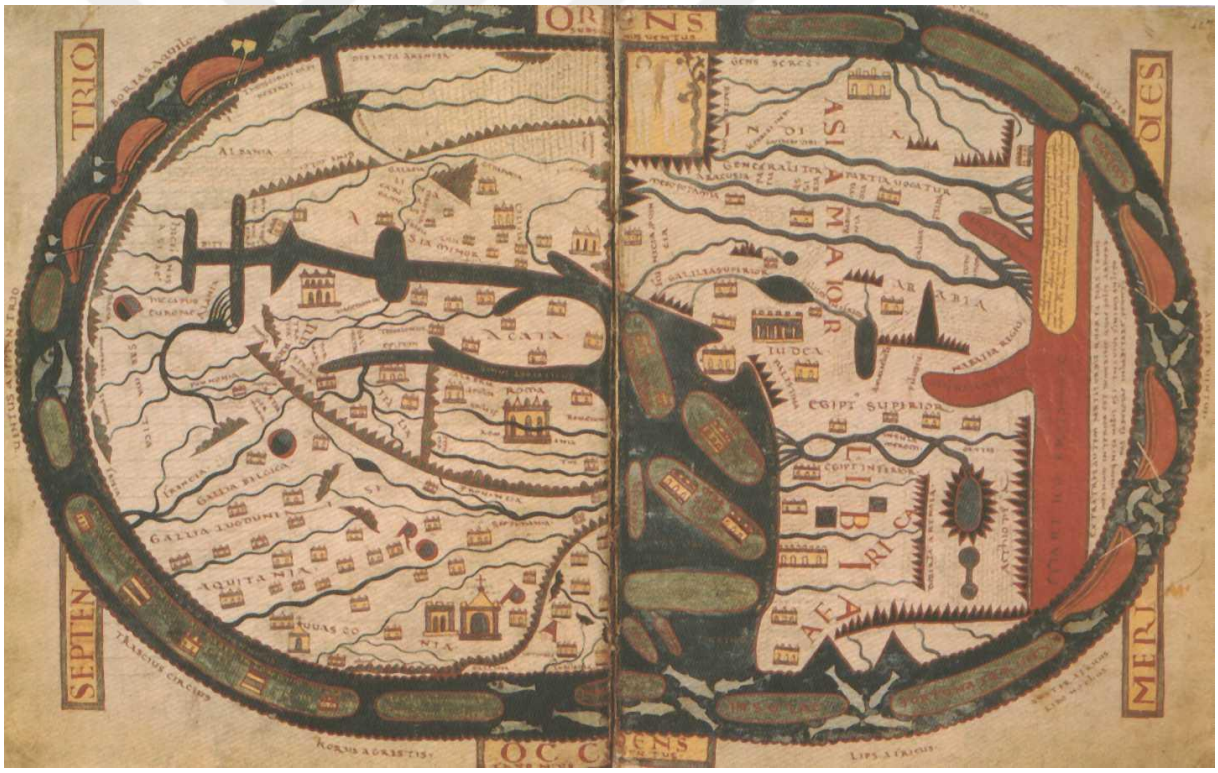

Fig. 4 The Beatus Map from the thirteenth century
Source: *Ordo orbis terrae,* 2002

[137] Goetsch, "World Maps and Waterways: Place and Space in the Beatus *Mappaemundi*," 200.

The rectangular image of Adam and Eve standing naked symbolizes the Land of Eden at the eastern edge of India, and the rivers connecting to this rectangular spot cannot be anything other than the four rivers of Paradise. The ancient conception of the surrounding ocean is preserved on the map and Paradise is not beyond the ocean as Kosmas suggested but just near India in the terrestrial sphere. The Beatus map is considered as the most influential medieval map which left its mark on medieval cartography,[138] and the recurrence of a similar model in other *mappae mundi* – with less emphasis on rivers – verifies this assumption.

The Ebstorf map was produced by Gervase of Ebstorf in the first quarter of the thirteenth century. The map conforms to the previous one in depicting the same mentality whereas it is significant in terms of its visual richness. With respect to the edges of the earth, there are images of monsters and uncivilized humans.[139] As in the Beatus map, Paradise, which was again symbolized with the naked figures of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit, stands just at the top on the eastern borders of India. Similarly, the earth is also surrounded by an ocean. Just like the Beatus map, Jerusalem is put exactly at the central point of the map in accordance with the biblical description.[140] However, the Ebstorf map is significant not only in being a vivid example of this Christian geographical discourse of depicting Paradise in the East and Jerusalem in the center but also containing the elements from Alexander tales. The account of the nations which Alexander enclosed behind the Caspian Gates is included almost in all versions of the Alexander romances and the Ebstorf

[138] Kominko, "New Perspectives on Paradise–The Levels of Reality in Byzantine and Latin Medieval Maps," 150.
[139] Schmieder, "Edges of the World – Edges of Time," 8.
[140] While Kosmas' map does not specify Jerusalem according to the Christian Scriptures, the sixth-century Madaba map reflects an earlier representation of the same conception in the Byzantine sphere by placing Jerusalem at its center even though it was not a world map but of the Middle East.

map clearly illustrates the Caspian Gates with the enclosed nations behind it.[141] Thus, the geographical content of the map comes from the ancient and medieval authors like Pliny, Solinus and Isidore whereas the marvels are the result of the combination of Christian discourse and narratives of Alexander's campaigns.[142] This structural framework is not particular to the Ebstorf map since both the Beatus and Hereford maps share elements of the same traditions; yet, the strong emphasis put on marvels in the Ebstorf map may highlight the role of Alexander's legends relatively.

When it comes to the Hereford map, it shines out with its unique size as the largest extant example of *mappae mundi*. Being contemporary with the Ebstorf map, it was produced in the Hereford Cathedral in England. Like the previous two maps, it locates India at the easternmost edge of the earth and specifies Paradise in a small circular box at the top as the surrounding ocean is also kept at its place. It contains illustrations of humans and animals on its surface even though not as elaborate as in the Ebstorf map and also reflects the influence of classical itineraries more than the other two in addition to the Christian influence.[143]

It is possible to increase the number of medieval maps by focusing on different examples as well as diverse copies of the three maps which reflect the most important recurring patterns encountered in the majority of *mappae mundi*. Yet, the ultimate expression of medieval maps can be found in these three maps: the division of the world into three continents as Asia, Africa and Europe; the surrounding ocean; India as the easternmost region of the known earth; Paradise next to the eastern side of India, standing at the top of the map; and illustrations of some marvelous animal and human species. The attribution of a practical function to such

[141] Schmieder, "Edges of the World – Edges of Time," 8.
[142] Bagrow, *History of Cartography*, 43.
[143] Thrower, *Maps and Man: An Examination of Cartography in Relation to Culture and Civilization,* 32.

maps is difficult since they contain a considerable number of marvelous elements and were very limited regarding the representation of geographical and topographical features. For example, the Hereford map is considered to have helped pilgrims by giving them an idea about their route even though there were more specifically designed maps to guide them.[144] Yet, their function in conveying the biblical perception of the earth and its visual representation can be grasped from their monastic origin as well as the infusion of religious motifs at the heart of their framework. It very hard to solve the secret behind the major function of these map beyond this general assumption: either educational, devotional or decorative.

In the context of present research, maps reveal a visual form of information akin to Byzantine literary evidences on the geography of India. Just like many ancient sources explained the background of the Byzantine perception of India's location, its penetration in different genres like late antique and medieval maps prove the strength of this perception. It would not be wrong to say that the depiction of India according to diverse Byzantine literary works as well as Byzantine and western medieval cartographic evidences forms somehow a consistent image and description.

2.5 The impact of trade on the perception of India

Trade is the last important dynamic that should be taken into consideration for a better understanding of the Byzantine perception of India regarding its geography. The sources in question were evaluated in relation with the ancient geographical knowledge, Christian discourse and Alexander tradition. Yet, commercial relations between the Byzantine/Roman world and India should be addressed for

[144] Thrower, *Maps and Man: An Examination of Cartography in Relation to Culture and Civilization,* 34.

comprehending the coexistence of legendary notions about the location of India in a time period when the two worlds connected to each other within an actively functioning commercial framework. The economic implications of commercial relations with India are not a concern of the present research by itself. Instead, characteristics of the commercial network between the Byzantine Empire and India will be discussed around three themes so that the impact of the material relations with India on the Byzantine geographical perception can be understood: firstly, the emergence and rise of trade between India and the Mediterranean world; secondly, the volume of trade with India during the late antique period; lastly, the geographical extension of this "eastern" trade.

Trade relationships between the Mediterranean world and India would be expected to have processed actively after the establishment of Hellenistic culture, which connected India and the Greek world to each other. However, Alexander historians are silent about commercial activities with India.[145] Most of the information concerning commercial relationships come from the Roman historians like Pliny, Strabo and Ptolemy, and from the famous Roman commercial itinerary, the *Periplus maris Erythraei*, indeed.[146] The Macedonian rulers of Egypt were closely interested in the ports of East Africa for their commercial role at the end of the fourth century BC but the communication between these ports and India was not yet quite frequent at the time.[147] Firm commercial ties between the Red Sea ports and India were established probably after the exploration of the monsoon wind system by Eudoxus of Cyzicus in approximately 120 BC, during the reign of Ptolemy VIII (d. 116 BC).[148] While Strabo cautiously attributes the discovery of monsoon winds to

[145] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 172.
[146] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 172.
[147] Charlesworth, *Trade-Routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire*, 59.
[148] Schwarz, "Pliny the Elder on Ceylon," 29;

Eudoxus, the author of the *Periplus* credits a sea-captain named Hippalus, who was considered to be the captain of Eudoxus' ship, with the first sea voyage via the use of the monsoon wind.[149] Regardless of the name behind its exploration, direct trade between the African coasts and India started at the end of the second century. Consequently, the hitherto intermediary role of the Arabs, whose land provided Indian and Greek merchants, declined by the direct sailing to India thanks to the knowledge of the monsoon wind. However, the evidences suggest that the peak of trade with India was reached during the first two centuries AD. After gaining control of the eastern trade, the Roman emperors provided the security of this commercial network by providing the security of the regions around the Red Sea through the suppression of the potential Arab and Ethiopian raids.[150] Therefore, the political stability and investments that came with the Roman rule were the forces that carried commercial activities with India further. It is possible to see the volume of the Indian trade that demonstrates its vitality for Roman political life in the passages from the *Natural History* of Pliny.[151] When he describes the sea route from Egypt to India in his sixth book, Pliny claims that Roman imports from India never fell below fifty million *sestertii* for each year,[152] while the general volume of total imports from Arabia, China and India reached one hundred million *sestertii* annually.[153]

Regarding the impact of trade on the communication between the Romans and Indians, Strabo and Pliny wrote about the exchange of embassies between the Romans and the Indians. Strabo only mentions the embassies sent to the Emperor Augustus by a certain Indian king, named Pandion or Porus, in the first century.[154]

[149] Strabo, *The Geography vol. I*; Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 87.
[150] Charlesworth, *Trade-Routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire*, 60.
[151] Marcotte, "The Indian Ocean from Agatharchides of Cnidus to the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*," 179.
[152] Pliny, *The Natural History vol. II*, 417.
[153] Pliny, *The Natural History vol. IV*, 63.
[154] Strabo, *The Geography vol. III*, 97.

Pliny gives a more vivid account of the exchange of embassies in relation with commercial activities.[155] However, this time ambassadors were not from mainland India but from the small island at the south of India, called Taprobane/Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka). Pliny records an embassy that came to Rome from this island during the principate of Claudius (r. AD 41-54). According to the story, a freedman of Annius Plocamus, who was a nobleman holding the right to collect the taxes from the Red Sea area at the time, was sailing around Arabia. When he was carried by storms as far as Ceylon, he was received with hospitality in this island. The freedman's introduction of the Romans to the king of the island found a reply from him with sending of four envoys to Rome. According to Pliny, these envoys contributed a lot to the Roman knowledge of the island of Ceylon.[156] In other testimonies form the Pali literature, some subjects of King Bhatikabhaya were sent to the Roman territories in search of red coral around a time a little earlier than Pliny's account.[157] The dating of these embassies to the first century is an important indicator of the lively commercial activities in the Erythraean Sea.

Regarding the trade-routes to India, the most sophisticated information comes from the commercial treatise titled *Periplus maris Erythraei*, which was composed as the outcome of these busy commercial activities in the first century. Pliny describes the main ports from the Red Sea as far as Muziris, the most important commercial port on the southwestern coast of India in the first and second century. According to his explanation, Roman merchants were not sailing beyond Muziris, to the eastern coast of the sub-continent. When Strabo complains about the ignorance of a few

[155] Strabo refers to the Indian embassies that were sent to the Emperor Augustus in the same passage where he complains about the ignorance of Roman merchants. Yet, he does not specify any commercial purpose attached to the embassies.
[156] Pliny, *The Natural History vol. II*, 403.
[157] Schwarz, "Pliny the Elder on Ceylon," 37.

Roman merchants, who had sailed as far as the Ganges without keeping an account of their journeys, he similarly points to the absence of Roman merchants in the eastern regions of India as well as the limited knowledge about the inner regions of India.[158] Thus, Strabo seems to agree with Pliny in limiting the voyages of Roman merchants to the western coasts of India.

The *Periplus* is a more sophisticated account of the Roman trade of the first and the second centuries compared to the accounts by Strabo and Pliny due to its specific focus on practical information on trade. The text lists the eastern commercial ports stretching from Egypt and Red Sea ports as far as India. There were four major commercial centers/ports at the western banks of India, which are described in detail: Barbarikon, Barygaza, Muziris and Nelcynda respectively from north to south. The northern ports of Barbarikon and Barygaza were the first stops of the Roman merchants after they reached India. They mostly exported Chinese silk, lapis lazuli, nard, clothes (or different types of textiles) and pepper from these ports. In their journey to these ports, Roman ships sailed with loads of wine, slaves and textiles in order to be sold to various profitable markets at these ports and the regions around.[159] The anonymous author also points to the profit that the Roman merchants made due to the higher value of Roman silver and gold over the local currency. In the southern ports of Muziris and Nelkynda, some precious stones like pearls, diamonds as well as ivory and tortoise shells, in addition to high amount of pepper and malabathron, were imported by Roman merchants.[160]

After describing the island of Tabrobane, which he thought to extend further to northeast than the reality, the author mentions some important eastern ports as far

[158] Strabo, *The Geography vol. III*, 97.
[159] Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 75-81.
[160] Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 85.

as the Ganges river like Argaru, Sopatma, and a port at the mouth of the Ganges in northeast.[161] He also talks about an island called Chryse, next to the Ganges inside the ocean. Its significance in terms of commercial activity was its possession of tortoise shell, which was exported in high amounts. Yet, its geographical location in this itinerary proposes a more significant feature to it as it was described as ἐσκχάτη τῶν πρός ἀνατολὴν μερῶν τῆς οἰκουμένης (the easternmost extremity of the inhabited world).[162] Given the fact that the author places Thina (China) at the northernmost point beyond the island of Chryse, the geographical description of the easternmost part of the earth according to the *Periplus* is very similar to ones found in the Tabula Peutingeriana and early version of the map of Ptolemy. The author articulates that it is impossible to know the lands in the north beyond China because "extreme storms and cold which were caused by some divine power of gods, do not allow the exploration of the further regions."[163] This pattern was mostly attributed to the easternmost edge in the sources in question, while the author of *Periplus* seems to be devoid of any curiosity concerning what lies beyond the ocean in the east, and touches upon the ambiguity concerning the northernmost regions that lie beyond China.

The absence of Roman merchants in the eastern coast of India seems irrational concerning the huge amounts of Chinese silk being imported by the Romans. However, the transportation of goods from the eastern to the western coast of India by the local forces clarifies this ambiguity. Goods were brought to Barygaza by land through two major inland trade centers, Tagara and Paithana.[164] Similarly, Chinese goods were brought to India either through the land route from Bactria (the

[161] Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 89-91.
[162] Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 90.
[163] Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 91.
[164] Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 83.

so-called Silk Route) or via the Ganges River back to the western coast.[165] The description of huge amounts of imported western goods on the eastern coast of India, along the ports of Kamara, Poduke and Sopatma, as well as the flow of Roman cash originating from Egypt into this region imply the existence of a colony of Westerners in this region.[166] The archaeological findings of many Roman potteries[167] contribute to the truth value of such an assumption. Yet, the existence of such a colony indicates neither trade of Chinese, and other far-eastern, goods to the east coast of India by the Romans, nor forwarding of goods from the eastern ports all the way to Egypt; but the Westerners were probably involved in the transfer of goods from eastern to western ports of India, where Roman merchants imported them all the way to Egypt.[168] Some Chinese records dated to the Antonine Period demonstrate visits of a few individual merchants from Ta-ch'in (the Chinese naming of the Roman Empire) but combined with the other textual and archaeological evidence it is hard to assume an established direct contact between the Romans and China.[169]

The description of trade routes and the activities of Roman merchants in Indian ports by Pliny and Strabo, thus, intersect with the *Periplus* on limiting the Roman commercial journeys to the western coast of India. The author of the *Periplus* also mentions a Roman merchant colony in Arikamedu, a port-city on the southeastern bank of the mainland India. However, these merchants were also involved in the inland transfer of goods that came from the east to the western coast, where they were picked up by the Roman merchants.

[165] Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 26.
[166] Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 89
[167] Young, *Rome's Eastern Trade*, 31.
[168] Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*.25
[169] Young, *Rome's Eastern Trade*, 34.

While the first two centuries were the peak period of this commercial network, the following century seems to be a period of decline for Rome's eastern trade. The impact of the civil wars and economic crisis in the third century on the Indian trade – as well as the rise of unrest and banditry in Egypt due to burdensome tax regulations in the same period – were the most noticeable causes of this decline. Compared to the earlier and later periods, there is also a sharp decline in the archaeological findings from Red Sea ports (such as Myos Hormos and Berenike, where ceramic and numismatic evidences cease to be found around this time) and South India where no Roman coins are found to be dated to the third century.[170] However, the beginning of the Byzantine era marks the re-establishment of active trade network with India. The re-installation of order during the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine the Great alongside the re-establishment of Roman currency and monetary reforms, like the introduction of the gold solidus by Constantine, are some important developments that revived the eastern trade.[171] Numismatic evidence form the sub-continent itself is adherent to this picture as great numbers of coins that were found in Sri Lanka belong to the reigns of Constantine I, Constantius II, Valentinian I and Theodosius I. Combined with the evidence coming from Red Sea ports, they demonstrate the revival of commercial activities between India and the Byzantine Empire during the fourth and fifth centuries.[172] However, Indian ports and the Erythraean Sea were not solely dominated by Roman/Byzantine merchants after the third century since the Persians highly engaged in Indian trade during the absence of the Romans.[173] The *Expositio* is poor in providing the details of trade during this period but only highlights the significance of Greater India (meaning the mainland

[170] Young, *Rome's Eastern Trade*, 82-83.
[171] Young, *Rome's Eastern Trade*, 86.
[172] Young, *Rome's Eastern Trade*, 87.
[173] Ghosh, "Maritime Trade between the Persian Gulf and West coast of India," 133.

India) as the center of import for silk and various goods. Although the passage on the Greater India in the text is not aiming to give glimpses of the trade routes in the fourth century, it still implies the continuing intermediary role of India for the import of Chinese silk by Byzantine merchants, who did not sail beyond the western coast of India. It is possible to increase the number of evidences demonstrating the active trade contact between India and the Byzantine Empire in the late antique period. Another evidence for the continuing commercial relations with India comes from the *Digest* of the emperor Justinian – sixth-century compilation of all Roman laws up to the time of Justinian I. In a passage that shows the following list of articles subject to duty upon their entry into Alexandria, it is possible to observe many goods that were probably imported from India.

> Types of goods liable to ***vec***tigal: cinnamon; long pepper; white pepper; pentasphaerum leaf; barbary leaf; costum; costamomum; nard; stachys; Tyrian casia; casia-wood; myrrh; amomum; ginger; malabrathrum; Indic spice; galbanurn; asafoetida juice; aloe; lycium; Persian gum; Arabian onyx; cardamonurn; cinnamon-wood; cotton goods; Babylonian hides; Persian hides; ivory; Indian iron; linen; all sorts of gem: pearl, sardonyx, ceraunium, hyacinth stone, emerald, diamond, sapphire, turquoise, beryl, tortoise stone; Indian or Assyrian drugs; raw silk; silk or half-silk clothing; embroidered fine linen; silk thread; Indian eununchs; lions; lionesses; pards; leopards; panthers; purple dye; also: Moroccan wool; dye; Indian hair.[174]

It should be noted that not all the products labelled 'Indian' should be considered to come from India. For example, there is no valid evidence that can show the trade of eunuchs from India to Byzantium in the sixth century. Likewise, some products, which were originally imported from Arabia and Africa, might have been considered to come from India because of the so-called confusion between India and these parts

[174] Watson, *The Digest of Justinian* vol III, 407.

of the world as it will be discussed in the following pages. However, this passage still demonstrates the influx of goods from India into the Byzantine Empire passing through Egypt and Alexandria. From this list, raw silk, pepper, myrhh, Indic spice, ivory, gems, tortoise stone can be considered among the goods that were quite likely obtained from India.

In the eleventh book of the *Christian Topography*, which was dedicated to the description of the Indian natural environment and the commercial significance of India and Taprobane, Kosmas focuses on the western coasts of the sub-continent as the important trade centers. The central role of southern ports like Muziris and Nelcydna in the Roman period seems to have shifted to the northern ports. In the ports of the southwestern coast, the island of Taprobane, Orrhotha, Calliana and Sibor were some noticeable trade centers which probably replaced the once-busy port of Barygaza in this region.[175] Especially, the island of Taprobane occupies a central place in Kosmas' account in terms of its pivotal role for all the eastern trade extending as far as the Red Sea in the west and Tzinista in the east.[176] Products like silk, aloes and sandalwood were brought to Taprobane from the Far East and they were passed to the Malabar (western) coast, where they were accessed by western merchants.[177] The *Periplus* focuses on the inland transfer of goods from the eastern to the western coasts of the sub-continent, whereas Kosmas attributes this function to Ceylon. It is ambiguous whether the Chrtistian community living in Taprobane according to Kosmas was involved in the transfer of goods from Tabrobane to the Malabar coast. Yet, it is obvious that they were not involved in any commercial voyage beyond the island in the east.

[175] Indikopleustes, *Christian Topography*, 367.
[176] Indikopleustes, *Christian Topography*, 365.
[177] Indikopleustes, *Christian Topography*, 366.

The outline of commercial relations between India and the Byzantine/Roman world according to these late antique sources is surely not enough to understand the complexity of trade networks in the Erythraean Sea. Especially, the active involvement of the Sassanids and the transformation of the Persian Gulf into an alternative commercial hub to the Red Sea region require a comprehensive analysis of these phenomena. Yet, since such an analysis would exceed the purpose of the present research, as stated earlier, it is more important to interpret the Byzantine communication with India in relation to the common perception of this region in many sources mentioned so far.

According to this picture, the waters between India and Ceylon roughly marked the farthest destination of foreign merchant ships. There were trade colonies in the eastern coast of India during the Roman era as well as a Christian merchant colony in the Byzantine period in Taprobane. However, their function was more of an intermediary in conveying the goods coming from the farthest east to the western coasts of India – and maybe providing a settlement for merchants in order to wait until the monsoon wind to blow westwards. Even though various goods coming from the eastern ports of India and China such as silk were imported by western merchants, the absence of the Byzantines in the regions beyond this imaginary border is almost a consensus on which scholars agree today.[178] It is not clear if the reason for this was the unfamiliarity of western merchants with the seas beyond this spot or needlessness of voyage to further east when local commercial craft functioned efficiently. The author of the *Periplus* mentions local ships, called *sangara* (very big canoes), which were designed in a way to pass through the narrow channels between the southern tip of India and the northern tip of Ceylon.[179] It is possible to find

[178] Whitehouse, "Sassanian Maritime Trade," 45.
[179] Indikopleustes, *Christian Topography*, 89.

parallel opinions about the waters in the east of India in a non-western source from the same time period. In the late fourth century, a Buddhist monk named Fa-Hien (Faxian) went to India in order to visit holy Buddhist temples. After finishing his pilgrimage in the island of Taprobane, he looked for a merchant ship to return to China through the eastern coast of India. When Fa-Hien embarked on a merchant ship which was as big as to carry 200 men at once, their ship was carried to an island (modern-day Java) by a great wind in the beginning of their journey and it took months for them to reach the first piece of land that belonged to the House of Tsin.[180] This Chinese account is valuable in terms of reflecting an image where local commercial ships were active in the eastern sea beyond India as well as the difficulty of the navigation of this sea in the sixth century. Therefore, the requirement of special naval equipment to sail beyond Taprobane and dangers of the sea might have been influential in the absence of the Romans and Byzantines in this area for centuries.

[180] Fa-Hien, *Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, 111-112.

CHAPTER 3

DEPICTIONS OF INDIA

The discussion about the Byzantine perception of India in this chapter basically turns around the representation of the natural environment and social realm of India in the relevant sources. The previous chapter offered information on the evolution of thoughts about the geographical location of India in parallel with the changing geographical discourse and consolidating Christian worldview during late antiquity. Similarly, the Greco-Roman and Byzantine cultures produced diverse narratives concerning the internal structure of India. In this respect, there are three significant themes that should be discussed in order to draw a complete picture of India: the natural environment of India; marvels and monsters of India; social structure and Christianity in India. Through the investigation of these themes, the chapter will tackle with the question, what did exist in India?

The first two sections are going to illustrate the interconnection between imaginary geographical/cosmological views about India – such as the one about Paradise – and the extraordinary depictions of the Indian world. The third section with its ethnographic focus will ultimately explain how the Byzantines conceived Indian social structure in relation with, on the one hand, monsters and marvels dwelling on this land and, on the other hand, Christianity which had its influence as far as this remote corner of the *oikoumene*. With a similar methodological approach as in the previous chapter, these points will also be discussed in the context of depictions found in earlier Greco-Roman and later medieval sources, not without good reasons. It will be shown that the fables about Indian monsters and pseudo-human races, as well as the exaggerated descriptions about the natural environment

of India originated from the identical ancient accounts that contained the geographical lore about the location of India. Similarly, the legends of Apostle Thomas and Prester John will demonstrate the revival of ancient modalities concerning Indian society within a Christian context.

3.1 Environment

The most widespread notion about the natural environment of India is related to its extreme conditions and abundant resources. The association of certain exotic animal and plant species with India in ancient accounts maintained itself in the Byzantine sources to a large extent. Even if not as detailed as the narratives of Greco-Roman geographers, the literary sources and trade itineraries under discussion conform to the past accounts in that respect. Similar description of the environment of India in ancient and Byzantine accounts was not only the catalyst of the survival of the ancient imagination in Byzantine culture but it also set the ground for the continuation of a popular confusion regarding the geographical locations of Ethiopia and India.

In his superficial look into the environment of India, Herodotus also referred to a few well-known features associated with Indian environment. He mainly emphasized the massive size of the creatures and fertility of nature which supplied the Indian people with their necessities without requiring much labor.[181] On this matter, the abundance of gold in India was probably the first thing that drew his attention. Especially, the method used by the Indians in order to acquire gold surprised Herodotus: Indian gold was either dug out of the ground by gold-digging

[181] Karttunen, "The Ethnography of the Fringes," 464.

ants, which were so big that he compared them to foxes, or by certain rivers as great amounts of gold were carried down to the valleys from the mountains each in definite seasons.[182] Additionally, trees provided Indians with both ripe fruits and the high-quality wool of which their garments were made according to Herodotus.[183] The most reasonable cause for such abundance and generosity of environment was the extreme weather conditions according to the Greeks at this period as Herodotus also compares the warmer weather of India with the moderate climate of Hellas in order to give a reason for the extraordinary nature of India in his narrative. Ctesias' account accords with that of Herodotus in many ways except it offers more detailed information concerning the natural environment and the marvels of India because of his medical background that directed his focus onto natural history more than ethnography.[184] Ctesias repeats both extreme climate and abundant natural resources – like gold and silver – in India. India, according to Ctesias, was so hot that the sun was ten times bigger than the normal size in some regions.[185] The river named *Spabaros* (meaning "the bringer of all good things"), which carries amber and many other precious things, and trees with huge sweet fruits are just a few generous favors of nature that provided Indians with all the necessities for their livelihood. In addition to marvelous animals (which will be specifically discussed in the following section), he described the animals that were identified with India in an exaggerated way like elephants that destroy walls; dogs that can fight with lions; and monkeys with ridiculously long tails. The mainstream Roman authors mostly describe Indian nature according to accounts of the Hellenistic authors. The topographical focus of the Alexander historians – compared to the earlier cosmological focus of ancient

[182] Herodotus, *Histories*, 133.
[183] Herodotus, *Histories*, 135.
[184] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 29.
[185] Ctesias, "The Indika," 47

geographers/authors – and the discovery of further regions in the east of India increased the knowledge about the rivers, mountains, forests known to the Romans. Arrian, Strabo and Pliny all mention names of newly discovered rivers unknown to Greeks before the Hellenistic era such as the Ganges, Hydaspes, Hypasis etc. Regarding the exotic animals of India, the Roman authors introduced elephants, monkeys, tigers, lions, various types of dogs within a more realistic context compared to the exaggerations of Herodotus and Ctesias; yet, the multitude of these species as well as their unusually massive size were still the most definitive features utilized in these sources.[186]

The discussion about the commercial network between the Roman Empire and India in the previous chapter already implied the significant role of the natural resources of India in turning it into a center of export. In the *Periplus*, the greater emphasis goes onto the rivers of India as the anonymous author writes that "all over India there are large numbers of rivers with extreme ebb-and-flood tides."[187] The great number of rivers point out the fertility of the soil. The higher percentage of raw materials among the exports of India mentioned in the *Periplus* are the outcome of this natural richness.[188] The importation of animals from India and the Far East was exceptional and conducted through land-routes in case of trade of certain Asiatic/Indian animals like tigers, rhinoceros and Indian parrots.[189] Plant-products, however, were of greater importance for either their consumption as luxury products or for medical purposes. The exportation of aromatics and spices was directly related

[186] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 44.
[187] Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 79.
[188] Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 39
[189] Indian ivory was one of the key animal products which were imported in greater quantities than Indian elephants – from which ivory was acquired. For a detailed discussion on the trade of ivory and similar animal products, like tortoiseshell, from India, see Warmington, *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India*, 146-170.

to the generous offers of the natural environment of India and consolidated the belief in the abundance and hypertrophy of the Indian nature for the Romans. In addition to the influence of the products imported from India, Parker draws attention to the role of popular thinking that falsely attributed certain products to India even though they were not Indian in essence. Especially, spices were subjects of such false associations. The term *spica Indica* in an Apician recipe might have signified a label rather than a source of certain products.[190] Various spices and aromatics like myrrh, ginger and cinnamon are the most common goods that were falsely attributed to India.[191] Such products falsely associated with India should have also contributed to the perception of the natural environment of India as an extreme case, while at the same time such perception of its nature gave way to the monopolization of some products under the name of India even though they were not objects of trade with India.

In Byzantine literary sources, the climate, trees, mountains, rivers, plants, and animals appear in a similar way, yet in more allegorical contexts. For example, India in the *vita* of Makarios also has an extraordinary natural world that offers an ideal space for the plot of the story. It can speculatively be interpreted as the burdensome path that leads to Paradise. On their way, the monks encounter the pond of judgement where sinners were punished, a man enchained between two mountains, and sinners being punished by dragons. Regarding the traditional imagination about its nature, India seems to be the most convenient place on the earth to locate such scenes related to the Christian myths about the judgement day. Just like Arrian intentionally described the natural world in a way that highlighted the hardships

[190] Parker, *The Making of Roman India,* 189.
[191] Bianchetti, "The 'Invention' of Geography: Eratosthenes of Cyrene," 187.

which the Macedonians faced during their stay in India in order to praise his hero Alexander, the extraordinary environment of India accommodates all these oddities for the sake of the plot of this hagiography. Most of the regions that the monks passed were mountainous and precipitous which showed the unsuitability of India for travel. When the monks were resting on the banks of a river, they described the place in the following manner:

> And the stars were brighter than the sky and that sun was seven times hotter than this and the trees were bigger and blooming and had thick foliage whether fruitful or not, and the hills were higher and well-shaped, and all that land was two-faced, fiery and milky.[192]

The passage is like a short epitome of the Greco-Roman attitude as the bigger size of the sun evokes the very early reference of Ctesias to its massive size in India. The fertility of nature appears when they can only find necessary sustenance from the waters of many rivers and fruits from huge trees. Whenever they eat fruits from a tree and drink from a different river, an unprecedented satisfying taste meets them each time. Similarly, in the dialogue between Alexander and Dandamis, the latter explains how Brahmans sustained their life without working as they ate from trees and drank from the rivers. Dandamis ridicules the futility of Alexander's mortal desires because nature supplies men with all necessities. This perception of the earthly life in the thoughts of the Brahmans was generally introduced as the lifestyle of all marvelous Indian peoples living in the easternmost regions by the anonymous author of the *Expositio*. He similarly explains a self-sufficient system of life during

[192] Vassiliev, "The Life of Saint Makarios of Rome," 148. "καὶ οἱ ἀστέρες τοῦ οὐρανοῦ λαμπότεραν εἶχον λαμηδόνα καὶ ὁ ἥλιος δὲ ἐκεῖνος θερμότερος ἦν τούτου ἐμπαπλάσιον καὶ τὰ δένδρα ἐκεῖνα παμμεγεθέστερα καὶ εὐθαλῆ καὶ δεσύκομα εἴτε εὔκαρπα εἴτε ἄκαπρα, καὶ τὰ ὄρη ἐκεῖνα ὑψηλότερα καὶ εὐειδέστερά εἰσιν, ἡ γῆ πᾶσα ἐκένη δυπρόσωπός ἐστι." (My own translation).

which they totally rely on the trees and rivers for daily sustenance as well as benefiting from the rich grants of nature like gems collected from rivers.

Regarding the relationship between the natural resources of India and its significant role as a hub of trade, the accounts of Byzantine authors describe a similar scenario to that of the Roman authors. As the Indian land provides all sorts of necessities which were exported to the outside world according to the *Expositio*, Kosmas reflects the identical opinions concerning the fruitful regions of India and Taprobane. Interestingly, the fifteenth-century Byzantine historian Laonikos Chalkokondyles (d. 1470 AD) also puts emphasis on the commercial centrality of India because of its rich natural resources due to its natural wealth in his *Histories*. He discusses the multitude and size of some commercial products such as fifteen-cubit long wheat, millet and barley, and the unusual length of reeds produced in this land.[193] Even though Chalkokondyles excluded stories about the marvels and monsters of India from his account, India's extraordinary natural environment was regarded worthy for the content of this historical account. Makarios Melissenos' sixteenth-century compilation of the so-called *Chronicon Minus* of the fifteenth-century Byzantine historian and bureaucrat Georges Sphrantzes (d. 1477/8)[194] also

[193] Chalkokondyles, *The Histories*, 269.

[194] The present study utilizes Bekker's nineteenth-century edition of the so-called *Chronicon Maius*, which is no longer accepted as the authentic work of Sphrantzes, but a sixteenth-century compilation by Makarios Melissenos, the metropolitan of Monemvasia (d. 1585), who is generally referred to as *Pseudo-Sphrantzes* and dismissed as a forger today. Nevertheless, besides Sphrantzes' *Chronicon Minus*, Melissenos used the accounts of George Akropolites, Nikephoros Gregoras, Pseudo-Dorotheos of Monemvasia and a group of other sources in composing his work; arguably, he might have also used an expanded (but now lost) version of the *Chronicon Minus* of Sphrantzes. Therefore, references to India and the story of Ephraem in India (summarized in the following footnote) that were included in Bekker's edition are found valuable for the purpose of this study even if they were not originally narrated by Sphrantzes himself. In either case, whether narrated by Sphrantzes or imported from other late Byzantine source(s) by Melissenos, these references are still valuable in conveying traces of the late antique Byzantine depiction of India that found their way into the late Byzantine literary sources. Accordingly, the other reference to Melissenos' text in the closing lines of the following section should also be read in the same context. Jeffreys and Kazhdan, "Melissenos, Makarios," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1335-1336.

makes references to some commercial goods that India exported.[195] Similar to Chalkokondyles, he describes very big Indian nuts, spices, aromatics and precious stones that were found in great size and quantity there. Regardless of the authorship and the context, the most fixed opinion that almost never changed concerning India was about its environment. Apparently, neither the Christian worldview nor increased commercial relations seem to have had a major effect on the representation of India's natural realm in the literary sources. In different literary contexts and time frames, the natural environment was depicted with an emphasis on abundance, multitude, and hypertrophy.

This rooted depiction of Indian environment also has a critical role in the comprehension of the confusion between India and Ethiopia. Even though the confusion indeed concerns the geographical location of these two places, the huge factor of the similarities in their natural realms necessitates the treatment of the topic under this section. The confusion probably had its roots in antiquity as both Herodotus and Ctesias compare India and Ethiopia in terms of the climate, skin color of people, animal and plant species as well as some shared marvelous and monstrous races. Herodotus' distinction of the Ethiopians who dwelt in Libya and Ethiopians of Asia[196] and the attribution of an Asiatic source to the Nile were probably related to the ancient notion about the separation of Asia and Libya by the Nile. According to this, Ethiopia, which lies on the east of the Nile, belongs to Asia rather than Africa. Alexander solved part of the riddle by discovering the irrelevance of the Nile to any

[195] Pseudo-Sphrantzes, "Annales," ed. Bekker, 207-208. The author mentions India as he narrates the story of an Iberian slave from barbarian origin. According to the story that is narrated by old Ephraem, the slave himself, he was sold to a Persian merchant. His master took him with himself for a long commercial journey to India. After spending a while in India, Ephraem escapes his master and witnesses various marvels of this land, including impassable lands, the island of the long-lived who lived for 150 years, abundance of the natural environment and various monster species.
[196] Herodotus, *Histories*, 123.

of the rivers in India. However, while knowledge about India was gradually increasing from Alexander's time to the second century AD, this new bulk of data ironically gave rise to the accumulation of further parallels between the two countries.[197] Features like the river regimes, climate and animal species in India were explained in reference to those in Ethiopia for a long time. The rhetoric also continued in the Byzantine sources. When Kosmas described Indian animals, he drew an analogy between India and Ethiopia concerning the inhabitation of species like the rhinoceros, taurelaphos, giraffe and hippopotamus in both countries.[198] The commercial contact and religious missions to Africa and Asia are some other factors that can be discussed in relation with the confusion. The development of the Erythraean Sea commercial network created a maritime unity from the Red Sea ports as far as India.[199] In the *Expositio,* India was divided into three as Greater India, Lesser India and Axum. The division of India as Citerior and Ulterior by the Ganges as the border was indeed a common phenomenon as Axum might have referred to the region from the west of Indus until Persia according to this formulation.[200] However, the great sea distance between Greater India and Axum in the *Odoiporia* suggests Ethiopia as the name behind Axum. The same division applies to the geographical description of the *Periplus*. In the first century BC some inscriptions demonstrate the addition of the title "commander (or overseer) of the Indian and Erythraean Seas"[201] to the authority of the *epistrategos* of Thebaid (Egypt). There is no equivalent Byzantine administrative title that shows a geo-political unity – possibly, due to the

[197] Schneider, "The So-called Confusion between India and Ethiopia: The Eastern and Southern Edges of the Inhabited World from the Greco-Roman Perspective," 189.
[198] Indikopleustes, *Christian Topography*, 352-362.
[199] Schneider, "The So-called Confusion between India and Ethiopia: The Eastern and Southern Edges of the Inhabited World from the Greco-Roman Perspective," 199.
[200] Woodman, *Expositio totius mundi et gentium,* 52.
[201] Marcotte, "The Indian Ocean from Agatharchides of Cnidus to the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*," 173.

involvement of the Persians in the administration of this commercial hub – but these commercial Byzantine sources reflect traces of a similar perception of the Erythraean Sea basin.[202] Other than commercial sources, late antique ecclesiastical sources also contain ambiguous references to India and Ethiopia. Eusebius refers to the Ethiopian and Indian ambassadors whom Constantine the Great received, and Rufinus refers to the embracement of Christianity by the Indian king. They either confused the two countries or conceived two integrated and close cultural units. As Schneider clarifies, our tendency "to analyze the phenomenon with the criteria of rightness and accuracy"[203] derives from our modern conception of space. However, what is referred to as "confusion" most of the time is indeed a different form of knowledge that is strange to our geographical perception. It likely reflects a tendency to explain what is unknown (India) in relation to what is more familiar (Ethiopia). Thus, the parallel representation of the environments of India and Ethiopia in the sources was apparently the most effective dynamic behind the "confusion."

3.2 Marvels and monsters of India

The perception of monsters and marvels of India has a long and fluctuating history starting from the pre-historic period. Since their earliest appearance in literary sources, they occupied the fringes of the earth – and more specifically India. The phenomenon did not disappear in the Byzantine era; yet, monsters and marvels as the most distinctive features of these places acquired new connotations in the Christian Byzantine context of the late antique period. There are three critical matters in order

[202] Marcotte, "The Indian Ocean from Agatharchides of Cnidus to the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*," 180.
[203] Schneider, "The So-called Confusion between India and Ethiopia: The Eastern and Southern Edges of the Inhabited World from the Greco-Roman Perspective," 197.

to understand the association of India and imaginary creatures in the Byzantine context: the genesis of Indian races; their meaning in Byzantine sources vis-à-vis the new geographical perception of India; and their transmission into the Middle Ages through the agency of the Byzantines.

The imagination of monsters dwelling at the fringes of the earth can be dated back to as early as the Homeric legends and Greek tragedies. When Greek travelers like Scylax and Hecateus tried to make sense out of the geographies that they described in their *periploi*, they inevitably composed their account in the context of this earlier tradition which linked certain continents and countries with the realm of gods. As Cole points out, the tendency to characterize Asia with monsters occurs in various Greek tragedies such as *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus. Guiding Io in her journey to the remotest corners of Asia, Prometheus advises her to be careful with dangerous creatures like Gorgons, one-eyed Arimaspian, sharp-beaked griffins and watchdogs.[204] The identification of such monsters and fabulous creatures with Asia in the Greek poetic tradition paved the way for the formation of preconceptions in the minds of early travel writers who consistently characterized Asia – and more specifically, India – with its monsters and wonders. After their penetration into the more informative – non-poetic – narratives of Herodotus and Ctesias, their popularity in literary works gradually increased to such a point that a new literary phenomenon emerged by the third century BC: the collections of marvels which were compiled from the passages in historical, but mostly, geographical works.[205] However, there is a distinction between marvels deriving from geographical works and the ones in

[204] Cole, "'I Know the Number of the Sand and the Measure of the Sea': Geography and Difference in the Early Greek World," 203.
[205] Dueck and Brodersen, *Geography in Classical Antiquity*, 64.

earlier ancient literary poems is the former's dependence on observation instead of total fantasy.[206]

Out of many Greek and Hellenistic authors, Wittkower gives the greatest share in the spread of marvelous races to Ctesias and Megasthenes, whose initiation of monstrosity in India had its ramifications going deep into as late as the Middle Ages.[207] Wittkowers' focus on Ctesias and Megasthenes actually proposes the continuity of descriptions from Greek antiquity into Hellenistic and Roman era. Ctesias' fame as the father of Indian marvels – as Parker implies – attached to him a bad reputation in the Roman period. Roman Indography mostly relied on Megasthenes while Ctesias failed to receive enough attention.[208] However, Pliny was an exception in this respect because he composed his *Natural History* without any critical interpretation and included many of the marvels that derived from Ctesias whose marvels thereby persevered for centuries until the Middle Ages. Ironically, the Roman authors who relied on Alexander historians happened to include some of the marvels that were actually imported from Herodotus and Ctesias, e.g. gold-digging ants and griffins that guarded gold on the mountains.[209] Despite their direct access to the sub-continent, Alexander historians ironically added new marvels and monsters into their accounts of India instead of completely erasing such stories. Races like Indian gigantic men, the Enotocoitae who had ears hanging down to their feet, Hyperboreans who live to a thousand were introduced by Megasthenes and Onesicritus for the first time. Just like the marvels of Herodotus and Ctesias derived from Persian sources, Scylax and earlier Greek tales, such new additions could have

[206] Dueck and Brodersen, *Geography in Classical Antiquity*, 64.
[207] Wittkower, "Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters," 163.
[208] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 57.
[209] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander vol. II*, 15; Strabo, *The Geography vol. III*, 117.

been related to Indian myths that influenced their accounts. The strongest evidence for this argument comes from Megasthenes' reference to Indian philosophers as the source of information concerning some legendary creatures such as enormous winged scorpions.[210]

Did Alexander historians who had observed the Indian world closely preserve accounts of marvels and monsters in order to keep consistency with the past? According to a recent study, Megasthenes spared considerable space for the marvels in his account because "marvels carried the sense of disturbing and threatening: by this interpretation, marvels in post-Alexander accounts of India served as a justification for the failure of the Seleucids to conquer what had by now become the Mauryan Kingdom."[211] Similarly, Arrian criticizes Callisthenes for including many marvels in his works such as divine parental lineage attributed to Alexander.[212] As the official historian in Alexander's entourage,[213] Callisthenes might have preserved marvels to glorify the deeds of Alexander in his military campaigns. Indeed, neither case is connected to very firm causes and requires much evidence to become sound. Yet, Wittkower's emphasis on Ctesias and Megasthenes as two milestones for the transmission of Indian marvels to later centuries relies on plenty of literary evidence.

The impact of popular beliefs on the unwillingness of Roman authors to exclude marvels and monsters from their account cannot be underestimated. However, there was also an ideological dimension to their placement in India. By pushing them to the remotest corners of the known earth, authors like Strabo, Pliny and Mela praised Roman ideological values. The presence of all these monstrous

[210] Wittkower, "Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters," 162
[211] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 45.
[212] McInerney, "Arrian and the Greek Alexander Romance," 427-8.
[213] Said, "Myth and Historiography," 212.

races outside of the Roman domain could justify – and rationalize – the absence of Roman rule in such distant places. Roman ideology equalized the known world and the borders of the empire because they had the vision to dominate all the known world.[214] As a contemporary of the emperor Augustus, Strabo reflected this "global" vision in his work. He argues that these remote regions are indeed part of the empire but "are not worth the cost of occupation."[215] Because the Romans "possess the choicest and the best-known parts of it (the world),"[216] the obedience of these monstrous races seemed satisfactory to Roman glory. Polybius also draws a similar vision much earlier than Strabo as he says that Rome ruled "the known parts of the world."[217] The division of *orbis terrarium imperium* into imperially organized territories and *externae gentes* "who were subjects but not usually worth annexing"[218] renders the institutional presence of Roman rule unnecessary in these remote parts of the world. When the emperor Augustus claims "to have extended the empire's influence to the limits of the known world"[219] and counted India among the imperial provinces, he must have not meant the physical presence of the Romans there but the obedience of Indians. Moreover, Strabo pushed away some races such as the Hyperboreans in northern Europe, All-Ears and Horse-Feet in Germany that were in/around the Roman dominion;[220] instead, he possibly included them in his list of Indian races in order to comply with this ideological framework. The claim here is not Strabo's belief in Indian marvels nor his intention to make his readers accredit them. In the opening pages of his narrative of India, he even warns the reader about

[214] Wells, 5-13. in Racine, *Monsters at the Edges of the World: Geography and Ethnography under the Roman Empire*, 23 pp.
[215] Whittaker, *Frontiers of The Roman Empire*, 16.
[216] Strabo, *The Geography vol. III*, 295.
[217] Polybius, *The Histories vol. II*, 3.
[218] Whittaker, *Frontiers of The Roman Empire*, 17.
[219] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 211.
[220] Racine, *Monsters at the Edges of the World: Geography and Ethnography under the Roman Empire*, 41

the importance of caution in the reception of sources about India.[221] When the intensity of marvels particularly in the section on India is contextualized into his ideological vision, the maintenance of the integrity of "the marvelous" and India in the Roman perception was not only a cultural but also a political discourse that penetrated into the content of literary works. Besides the collection of marvels and monsters that belonged to the different parts of the world in one spot by Pliny and Strabo, they also referred to the extinction of monstrous creatures after the establishment of Roman rule. Both related the termination of traditional monstrous practices of Gallic tribes to their conquest by the Romans.[222] Therefore, Roman authors created a negative correlation between the eradication – and marginalization of monsters – and the development of a Roman identity by "collecting practices that were un-Roman and branding them as monstrous."[223]

The inclusion of marvels in an unorthodox source like *the Periplus* brings into the mind question whether the anonymous author of this commercial geographical treatise had the same ideological outlook with the abovementioned Roman authors. Because the text is designed to describe the Erythraean commercial ports as far as India, the author would be expected to avoid from including such elements in his work. Yet, the anonymous author did not totally ignore this popular theme. In his translation, Casson ignores providing a literal translation of the passage concerning the anonymous author's view about the inner regions of India.

> The hinterland that lies beyond towards the east contains many barren areas, great mountains, and wild animals of all kinds—leopards, tigers, elephants,

[221] Strabo, *The Geography vol. III*, 73-78.
[222] Strabo, *The Geography vol. III*, 295; Pliny 30.13
[223] Racine, *Monsters at the Edges of the World: Geography and Ethnography under the Roman Empire*, 45.

> enormous serpents, hyenas, and a great many kinds of monkeys, as well as a great many populous nations up to the Ganges.[224]

He talks about the inland area that lies to the southeast of the key port-city Barygaza, which was on the northwestern coast of India. The barren (ἐρήμους) areas and great mountains do not just define the habitat of wild animals but also monsters which the word "θήριον" signifies. The translation of "κυνοκέφαλοι" as monkeys would be an anachronistic interpretation in most cases if the text in question has an ancient or medieval origin like the *Periplus*. The utilization of the word here points to a monstrous race that was highly believed to exist in antiquity and the Middle Ages, the dog-headed men. Therefore, the regions where Roman merchants did not visit were either blocked territories by divine forces or desolate places occupied by wild animals or "monsters." The absence of Roman merchants at inland areas is a parallel anecdote with classical Roman ethnography which "could not acknowledge contact with remote lands on account of their uselessness."[225] Especially, the use of such an image by the author who himself probably visited India, makes this anecdote more valuable. All Roman authors wrote about Indian marvels and monsters from a distant point of view, without personally travelling to this place. Interestingly, a text relying on personal observation and practical use like the *Periplus* discusses the characteristics of India with the identical classical Roman attitude towards non-Roman/barbarian "Others" as any type of contact and exchange with monstrous races of India is not permitted in the framework of the text. In other words, India is divided into two as a more civilized commercial region visited by the Romans and a wild territory occupied by monsters.

[224] Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 83.
[225] Racine, "Geography, Identity and the Legend of Saint Christopher," 118.

After the rise of Christianity in late antiquity, the approach to monsters and marvels in India that can be observed in the literary sources underwent a change. The association of monsters with India in Byzantine and medieval sources indeed shows an alteration in the attitude towards remote places and monsters vis-à-vis the Greek and Roman literary descriptions. The universal claim of Christianity did not match with the classical/ancient attitude, which pushed the monsters to the edges of the earth. While the exclusion of remote places and monstrous races in the Roman ideological view was rationalized with a stamp of uselessness put on such places, Christianity felt a need to provide explanations for any oddities in these places. Many of missionary narratives demonstrate how "Christianity was able to expand its network of sacred sites beyond the confines of its sacred texts, to the edges of the known world."[226] When Plutarch criticized ancient authors for crowding unknown lands into the margins of their map and describing them as "ἄνυδροι καὶ θηριώδεις (barren and full of wild beasts)" in his life of Theseus, he probably wished to find an inclusive approach which was characterized in such missionary narratives much later.[227] The best expression of this new perception can be found in the words of St. Augustine and a few apocryphal acts in which monsters play an unexpectedly active role.

When Augustine tried to reconcile Christianity with monstrous races at the fringes of the earth, he relied on the authority of the Bible in order to attach meaning to their existence.[228] His main concern was the origin of these monstrous races as he wondered if they really belonged to the stock of Adam or Noah.

[226] Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, 28.
[227] Plutarch, "Theseus," 2.
[228] Wittkower, "Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters," 167.

> Therefore, since we cannot deny that these are descended from one man, such is the case with any races whatsoever that are reported to have deserted, as it were, by their divergent physical types, the normal path of nature that the majority and , in fact, nearly all men follow. If these people are classified among rational and mortal animals, then we must admit that their stock is descended from that same single first father of all mankind, always providing that the tales told about thee diverse characteristics of these races and their great differences from one another and from us are authentic. For if we did not know that apes and long-tailed monkeys and chimpanzees are not human beings but beasts, those same natural historians who take pride in curious lore might with unscathed vanity foist them upon us as divers distinct tribes of men. Even if we grant, however, that the creatures of whom such marvels are recorded are men, what I God willed to create some races of this sort expressly to prevent us from thinking that the wisdom by which he moulds the forms of men was at fault in the case of monsters as are duly born among us of human parents, as if it had been the craft of an un-skilled artisan? It should not then seem to us unnatural that, even as there are certain monsters among individual races of men, so also within the human race as a whole there may be certain monstrous tribes.
>
> Let me then tentatively and guardedly state my conclusion. Either the written accounts of certain races are completely unfounded or, if such races do exist, they are not human; or, if they are human, they are descended from Adam.[229]

Augustine proposes three different scenarios in order to deal with stories about these monsters: such marvels and monsters probably never existed; if these monsters really lived, they should be nothing other than animals; lastly, if these monsters really lived and are not of animal origin, then they quite clearly descended from Adam. Thus, Augustine regards all Indian tales of wonders and wild beasts as parts of God's plan. How representative of Byzantine mentality was Augustine's interpretation of monstrosity? Firstly, the centrality of the Bible in his interpretation increases its value in reflecting the Byzantine attitude towards the same issue. Secondly, Augustine wrote during the late antique period, the time when all Byzantine sources in question were also produced in relation with the parallel Christian dogmas found

[229] Augustine, *City of God* vol. V, 49.

in Augustine's book. Because the Byzantine depiction of monsters is mostly detected from limited evidences coming from a group of literary sources, it is hard to find the Byzantine version of such detailed interpretations akin to Augustine's commentary. Yet, Augustine's views do not show any contradiction with the framework in any Byzantine literary sources in this respect. The descriptions in hagiographies, romances and trade itineraries under discussion intersects with the framework of Augustine. Lastly, when Augustine's interpretation juxtaposed with certain apocryphal acts and the works of some Christian authors, the representative value of his thoughts regarding the general Christian view of monstrosity and marvels of India gets higher. In his highly influential masterpiece *Etymologies*, Isidore allocates some space to marvels and monsters just like many Christian authors of the Middle Ages. There, he also reflects similar views with Augustine as he simply says that "monstrosities are part of the creation and not *contra naturam*."[230]

The Christian missionary narratives signify a relative embracement of monsters and offer supportive narratives to the Augustinian perception of the monstrosity in India. Cameron states that "the popularity and influence of the apocryphal narratives was so enormous and so widespread at all levels" and this surely introduced them as the most important "contributors to the early Christian world-view."[231] The influence of such text during the second and third century can also be understood from their translation into many languages from Greek to Latin, Coptic and Syriac. Moreover, Cameron underlines that the number of authoritative texts were not enough to overshadowing impact "on the proliferation of the sub-apostolic "acts" and other such writings"[232] by the early centuries of Christianity. So,

[230] Wittkower, "Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters," 168.
[231] Cameron, *Christianity and The Rhetoric of Empire*, 90.
[232] Cameron, *Christianity and The Rhetoric of Empire*, 90.

people possibly esteemed such texts as much as other canonical texts at this period. The legend of the St. Christopher is one such apocryphal narrative which was studied closely by Felix Racine in relation with changing Christian attitude towards monstrosity. The legend actually derives from a group of hagiographical narratives which Racine calls "the Christopher corpus."[233] Especially, the *Acts of Andrew and Mathias*, and the *Acts of Andrew and Bartholomew* have very related plots with the story of St. Christopher. All three stories share in the conversion of members of monstrous races into Christianity. The martyrdom of a Christian soldier in the early fourth century was the historical event behind the emergence of the legend and became the subject of the apocryphal acts.[234] According to the story, Reprebus was a captive of war from the land of Cynocephali and integrated into the Roman army. After learning the Roman language, he started to feel sorry for the Christians under the persecution of the Emperor Decius. The story continues with the conversion of Christopher (the name he acquired after his baptism) in Antioch and his capture by the soldiers of the emperor. Christopher was tortured and prosecuted publicly but never denounce his belief.[235] The story became such famous that it even inspired visual decoration in some churches in addition to its canonical place in the Christian literary tradition. In the reign of Justinian, a dog-headed saint from the land of Cynocephali was depicted on an icon in the St. Catherine Monastery at Mount Sinai.[236] Additionally, there was another church in Bithynia that was dedicated to him in the late fifth century. Armstrong underlines that "his dog-headed attribute was not a feature of his cult after the Early Christian period probably because of language

[233] Racine, "Geography, Identity and the Legend of Saint Christopher," 111.
[234] Woods, "St. Christopher, Bishop Peter of Attalia, and the Cohors Marmaritarum: A Fresh Examination," 181.
[235] Racine, "Geography, Identity and the Legend of Saint Christopher," 115.
[236] Racine, "Geography, Identity and the Legend of Saint Christopher," 104.

problems or a failure to understand the meaning of Cynocephalos.[237] Yet, existing literary and archeological evidence point to the emergence of the cult around a dog-headed holy figure.

In the *Acts of Andrew and Matthias*, Mathias goes to the land of cannibals, but he was captured by the inhabitants who wanted to eat him. Yet, Andrew suddenly came to his rescue and saved Mathias. Then, after he enclosed the town with fires, he slayed great number of the cannibal townsmen, unless they converted to Christianity. Moreover, he built a church in the town where he preached to new converts about the religion and his coming back.[238] The *Acts of Andrew and Bartholomew* has a similar plot with the previous ones with the exception of the encounter of the apostles with only one dog-headed inhabitant instead of the residents of a whole city. The dog-headed man named Abominable was baptized by the apostles and named Christianus. When the apostles were captured and tortured by the citizens, the monstrous persona of Christianus comes out and massacres the citizens as the protector of the apostles. The story continues with the revival of the Christian self of cannibal saint who acted as the servant of God.

In every story, the significant element is the conversion of members of monstrous tribes into Christianity. These stories signify the clear contradiction between Christianity and the classical geographical discourse: while the former tended to push back monstrous races to the edges of the earth, Christianity, unlike the former, does not only bring monsters within the Roman world, but also civilizes them. [239] With her specific focus on the development of the cult of St. Christopher

[237] Armstrong, "Ethnicity and Inclusiveness in the Development of Religious Cults: Saint Christopher the Dog-Headed and Saint George," 74.
[238] Racine, "Geography, Identity and the Legend of Saint Christopher," 112.
[239] Racine, "Geography, Identity and the Legend of Saint Christopher," 116.

and St. George, she points to how St. Christopher "emerged from the ends of the earth to become adopted without prejudice as the personal cult figure of soldiers, for which the survival of his icons are testament."[240] Racine interprets these acts in relation with the late antique identity crisis in the Roman world. According to this view, the barbarian presence in the Roman world since the fourth century onwards "blurred the distinction between who was Roman and who was not."[241] More importantly, the spread of Christianity outside of the imperial borders as far as Persia, India and Ethiopia necessitated a new approach to describe new lands and people. The legend of Christopher implies military expansions into remote places occupied by monsters. Similarly, the other two stories took place outside of the Mediterranean world: the north of Black Sea in the *Acts of Andrew and Matthias*, and Parthia in the *Acts of Andrew and Bartholomew*. Treadgold suggests that it was the zeitgeist of late antiquity that affected emperors and saints to have an inclusive idea of what it could mean to be "Roman." Thus, emperors were eager "to conquer foreign lands and the missionaries were ready to exploit opportunities to convert foreigners."[242] Consequently, missions of apostles to the countries of monstrous people and their embracement by Christian saint demonstrate the thoughts of St. Augustine about the potential kinship between men and monstrous people in operation.

India was handled by the apostle Thomas, whose mission will be discussed in the following section, but these stories too influenced the perception of India in late antiquity regarding the association between India and monstrosity. The universal

[240] Armstrong, "Ethnicity and Inclusiveness in the Development of Religious Cults: Saint Christopher the Dog-Headed and Saint George," 79.
[241] Racine, "Geography, Identity and the Legend of Saint Christopher," 117.
[242] Treadgold, "The Formation of a Byzantine Identity," 325.

claim of Christianity that drew the exiled monstrous races at the fringes of the earth to the center,[243] indeed softened the attitude towards the monstrosity of India. Especially, both Dog-headed man and men-eater races that were in the center of apocryphal narratives, were always considered as Indian races in Greco-Roman and Byzantine sources. Thus, the achievement of Christianity in challenging to the marginalization monstrosity through its evangelical narratives might have potentially affected the notion of India per se.[244]

The second great success was the ability of Christian saints/apostles to tame monsters. In all three acts, cannibals were converted to Christianity and became part of social order.[245] The only contact between monsters and civilized men took place when Alexander encountered them centuries ago. However, the treatment of monsters in this encounter was clearly antagonistic as Alexander deals with monstrous races by locking them behind the Caspian Gates. Additionally, many Indian wild beasts and monsters were either weapons of enemy in the war against Macedonians or inhabitants of certain parts of India where the Macedonians stayed away from. The Byzantine Alexander Poem contains the names of many such races – which might differ in various other versions of the story.[246] But Most of them, including the Byzantine version, include κυνοκέφαλοι among the races such as Γώγ (Gog), Μαγώγ (Magog), Ὄνους σύν Τρικεράτῳ (Three-horned asses), "ταῦτα τὰ μιαρώτατα καὶ πλήρης ἀσεβείας ἔθνη (and many other stained and deviant races)."[247] While Alexander handled the situation by keeping them away from the civilized world, Christian saints superseded him by being able to tame and assimilate them.

[243] Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 59.
[244] Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, 28.
[245] Racine, "Geography, Identity and the Legend of Saint Christopher," 120.
[246] Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Byzantine Alexander Poem*, Vol. II, 582-583.
[247] Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Byzantine Alexander Poem*, 221.

The ability to tame wild animals was indeed a common practice attributed to Christian holy men in hagiographies. One of the common themes is the companionship of wild beasts to the saint who lives in the wilderness. In the *vita* of Makarios, the monks who visited the saint were terrified when they noticed two lions approaching to the cave of the saint.[248] Makarios summons the lions "τεκνία μου καλά (my good children)" because they were already tamed by him. In the *Spiritual* Meadow of John Moschos, there are examples of hermits feeding lions into their caves.[249] Such relationships between holy men and wild beasts are examples of what Talbot calls "peaceful encounters"[250] which describes contexts in which wild beasts totally obey to the saints at the end. There are also antagonistic contexts where saints had to deal with these wild beasts with force, an analogous situation to the apocryphal acts. When the hermit Sabas the Great enters the cave of a huge lion in Palestine, he had to calm this furious beast by singing psalms.[251] A parallel example can be found in the journey of three monks. Whenever they encounter a wild animal on their journey, they summoned God to their help and were immediately rescued. Such, they eluded enormous dragons, venomous vipers, and many other beasts. The moral of such stories is obviously the charisma of the saint who has the power to domesticate wild beasts; a reflective charisma of Adam before the Fall when all wild beasts were subjected to him in Paradise.[252] Thus, the ability of Christian heroes to convert dog-headed Reprebus, Abominable and other monstrous people in the Christopher corpus functions also in the relationship between non-imaginary creatures/animals and saints. In that sense, the connection between dog-headed men

[248] Vassiliev, "The Life of Saint Makarios of Rome," 153.
[249] Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, chapter 2, 18, 163, 167.
[250] Talbot, "Caves Demons and Holy Men," 715.
[251] Talbot, "Caves Demons and Holy Men," 715.
[252] Talbot, "Caves Demons and Holy Men," 715.

and missionary impulse does not alone imply a change of perception towards India but also the pure presence of Christian saint in wild environments might highlight a different look at India's excessive and dangerous space.

The noticeable position of Cynocephali at the target of missionary narratives, as the most vivid representative of eastern monstrous races,[253] directs attention to their literary origin. In antiquity, the only zoocephalic race that was attributed to Asiatic societies was dog-headed man as there are no lion- or horse-headed monstrous race in Asia. The influence of some Asiatic myths about the intercourse of a female and a dog or a wolf as the origin of some nations, might have played role in the association of Cynocephali mostly with Asian regions.[254] Ctesias gives a good description of these monsters. Cynocephali of Ctesias dwelt in on the mountains around the Indus river. The information he gives is very detailed and complicated as well. According to this, they do not bath; they are very skilled in using arms but never fight, they live in caves with a life span of 170 to 200 years. They also sell the fruit named *siptachora* and purple dye to Indian king in great amounts each year.[255] Herodotus' account of Cynocephali was mostly continuation of the descriptions of a similar monstrous race in the writings of Hesiod, Aeschylus and Aristophanes; whereas Ctesias' elaborated description of their habitat "launched the millenary career of the Indian Cynocephali."[256] Although they were always considered as monsters, a certain degree of social organization had often been attached to this race. Even the Cynocephali in Christopher corpus were called as tribes or inhabitants of towns. Herodotus' more anthropological outlook did not leave a place for

[253] Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 61.
[254] White, *Myths of the Dog-Man*, 18.
[255] Ctesias, "The Indika," 53-55.
[256] White, *Myths of the Dog-Man*, 48.

Cynocephali in India, but he put Cynocephali and Acephaly (headless men) in Libya.[257] Pre-Hellenistic definitions of Cynocephali are the result of the popular geographical knowledge that placed these poetic creatures at the unknown spots of the earth. Ctesias' and Herodotus' descriptions of Cynocephali have foothold in such a meaningful context where they must have utilized and interpreted certain sources in favor of highlighting this race. Ctesias' agency in transmitting the definition of Cynocephali verifies the responsibility that Wittkower attributed to him. Strabo do not mention Cynocephali whereas Pliny talks about them as "the Dog-milkers, who have dogs' heads" and lived in Ethiopia.[258]

The land of Cynocephali that was mentioned in Christopher corpus does not have any connection with India. Yet, most of the contemporary Byzantine sources as well as later medieval sources maintained the ancient tradition and placed them in India. The *vita* of Makarios is one such source which overlaps with apocryphal acts both in terms of time and genre. In the very early phase of their journey in India, the monks get to the land of dog-headed people. A very short passage about the encounter and their lifestyle reveals some prominent features attributed to this race.

> …we came to the land of dog-headed people; and while we walked through them, they gazed at us with wonder; but they did not do any harm to us at all. These naked men were settled under the land with their wives and children as occupied a hole under a rock like wild animals.[259]

[257] Herodotus, *Histories*, 395.
[258] Pliny, *The Natural History vol. II*, 483.
[259] Vassiliev, "The Life of Saint Makarios of Rome," 139. "ἤλθαμεν εἰς τήν χώραν τῶν κυνοκφάλων· καὶ διοδευόντων ἡμῶν ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν ἐθαύμαζον βλέποντες ἡμᾶς καὶ τρανῶς προσεῖχον ἡμῖν, οὐδὲν δὲ ἠδίκουν ἡμᾶς. κατὰ τόπον δὲ ἐκάθηντο σὺν γυναιξὶν καὶ τέκνοις γυμνοὶ ἕκαστος ἔχων φωλεὸν ὑποκάτω πέτρας ὡς ἄγρια θηρία." (My own translation).

According to this description, they lacked civilized norms like clothes, house and probably talking. Some animals they encounter represented the divine power of God such as dragons punishing the sinners or a dove showing the right path to the monks. Interestingly, Cynocephali play no threatening role as opposed to many other beasts of India. After Augustine himself, early Christian commentators often connected monstrous races with Cain, the disobedient son of Noah.[260] According to this interpretation, Cynocephali are "the descendants of disobedient offspring of the Biblical Noah" [261] who are bounded with the curse of Cain. Because the intention of monks is not a missionary attempt but to reach at Paradise according to the plot, their part in the story might have been short. Another explanation can be the influence of monks whose presence calmed down these monsters. In either way, the emphasis put on their being harmless in the *vita* can be linked to their obedience to the power of religion in the early Christian literary context. Their depiction in the Alexander Poem has a different sound. Even though the Byzantine Alexander Poem contains some Christian and Byzantine elements – as mentioned so far – the confinement of Cynocephali behind the Caspian Gates by Alexander seems to contradict with the discourse about embracement of monsters. However, the lines following the list of the locked nations in the poem clarify the new context in which the marginalization of Cynocephali fits. After Alexander locks Cynocephali and all other monstrous races, he immediately expels the Turks and Armenians. This passage in the poem signalizes a new tendency in Byzantine ethnography: namely, the monstrosity that was attributed to India, was utilized to distinguish the contemporary enemies of the empire in later centuries. In his *Historia*, George Pachymeres talks about the

[260] Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 31.
[261] White, *Myths of the Dog-Man*, 30.

invasion of Anatolia by the Mongols, whom he calls *Tocharioi*.[262] When Mongols attacked the Turks, the Byzantines were also alarmed about a potential confrontation with Mongols who were known to them only through rumors. The most wide-spread rumor was, of course, the monstrosity that was ascribed to them at the time.

> This great nation was unknown until that time; they were said to be dog-headed by many people, and it was heard that they had unutterable way of life, inasmuch as they were believed to be cannibals.[263]

The information about the Mongols derived from what had been heard of them at the time of Ioannes Doukas according to Pachymeres. The significance of this passage is the utilization of the word "κυνοκέφαλοι" and "ἀνθρωποφαγεῖν" in order to compensate the Byzantine lack of knowledge about them with the well-known patterns which had been utilized to describe various eastern nations like the Indians or Scythians. The name "*Tocharioi*" or "*Atarioi*" to define the Mongols was used by some other Byzantine authors too. In antiquity, it was used in order to describe Scythian tribes living on the borders of the Bactrian Kingdom close to India. Pachymeres probably used this name in order to describe the distinct lineage of Mongols from other Scythian tribes like Cumans because he thought that the Mongols came from regions further to the east.[264] Given the fear of the brutality of Mongols, this formulation might have eased the attribution of cannibalism and dog-headedness to these Asiatic people. It would not be wrong that the disappearance of the universal claim of Christianity in the Middle Ages led to a shift in the perception

[262] Pachymeres, *Relations Historiques*, 181.
[263] Pachymeres, *Relations Historiques*, 187. "Τόσον ἦν ἄδηλον ἕως τότε τὸ ἔθνος· παρὰ πολλοῖς δ' ἐλεγοντο κυνοκέφαλοι καί γε διαίραις ἀπειρημέναις ἠκούντο χρώμενοι, ὥστε καὶ ἀνθρωποφαγεῖν ἐπιστεύοντο." (My own translation).
[264] Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity*, 160.

of Cynocephali along with other monstrosities in East. Both the fourteenth-century Alexander Poem and the thirteenth-century history of Pachymeres verify this argument. The domesticable Cynocephali in the Christopher corpus and the harmless Cynocephali of the early Christian period transforms into a symbol of brutality because of the tendency to characterize the threats against the Byzantine Empire had at this historical period.

In the Middle Ages, Cynocephali were also the subject of religious paradigm in *mappae mundi* just like the Christian re-interpretation of geographical space was illustrated with an emphasis on the centrality of Jerusalem and the location of Paradise in East. Among its many other traits, Pischke calls Ebstorf Map a zoological handbook for its illustration of animals as well as mythical life forms in its content. It illustrated the figures of cannibals, the Ichtiophagi (Fish-Eaters), Panotii (All-Ears), huge dragons and along with many exotic Asiatic animals.[265] Similar figures can be found in the Hereford and Beatus maps which relied on the same literary tradition.[266] The Christian discourse dominant in these maps introduce these monsters, which can be generally called "Plinian Races" as Friedman does,[267] in accordance with Augustinian formulation. Especially the illustrations of the Fall of the Man from Paradise in the same spot, where these monsters appear on the map, remind the curse on these races.[268]

The other monstrous elements in the *vita* of Makarios were the men-eater races and legendary creatures such as Unicorns and Centaurs. Herodotus talks about

[265] Pischke, "The Ebstorf Map: tradition and contents of a medieval picture of the world," 157-158; For a detailed investigation of these races: Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 16-18.
[266] Brown, *The Story of Maps*, 43.
[267] Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 5.
[268] Pischke, "The Ebstorf Map tradition and contents of a medieval picture of the world," 156.

a dialogue between certain Greeks and Darius: When the Greeks rejected Darius' request to eat their own parents, he pointed out to a certain Indian tribe called Callatiae who eat their own parents. Ctesias gives man-eating practice to a beast called martichora instead of a human group. Pliny also talks about martichora which he probably imported from Ctesias. Marthicora had a human face, tail of a snake and size of a lion.[269] In the *vita*, as soon as the monks encounter a group of people with a weird look, the first thing they thought was the threat of being eaten by them. In a late reference, Glykas, whose description of India is indeed a repetition of late antique stories, talks about "ἄνθρωποι ἀνθροπους ἐσθίοντες" (men-eaters) who live in the inner lands of India.[270] Therefore, the act of "τό ἀνθρωποφαγεῖν" might not be necessarily associated with a particular race such as Cynocephali but was surely a general term defining the monstrosity in India.

When they encounter Unicorn and Centaurs, they immediately recognized these creatures. The rooted position of these creatures in Greco-Roman legends probably made their exclusion from Indian environment inevitable.

> And we also saw many creatures, whose names we did not know, and we discovered Monoceros (Unicorn) and Centaurs and Leopards and all the other creatures in great numbers were on the land…[271]

Indeed, the legend of Unicorn possibly developed in the Indian mythology. There are Indian coins that bear the illustration of a Unicorn from the fourth and the third

[269] Ctesias, "The Indika," 49.
[270] Glykas, *Annales*, 270.
[271] Vassiliev, "The Life of Saint Makarios of Rome," 140. "εἴδομεν δὲ καὶ θηρία ἕτερα πολλὰ ὧν τὰ ὀνόματα οὐκ οἴδαμεν καλέσαι, ἐγνωρίσαμεν δὲ μονοκέρωτας καὶ ὀνοκενταύρους καὶ λεοπάρδους καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα ὅσα ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, . . ." (My own translation).

century BC.[272] The legend spread to the Mediterranean cultures around the same period and was used as illustration in many Byzantine churches through the description of them as given by Ctesias.[273] As an example of the artistic representation of Unicorn in the Byzantine art can be found at the Great Palace in Constantinople, it also became an established artistic model in the Western art as late as Renaissance.[274] There is also a late reference to an Indian monster called "ὀδοντοτύραννον" in the accounts of both Glykas and Sphranzes.[275] This was a "ἀμφιβίος μέγιστος" which was able to swallow an elephants and block the passages over the rivers.[276]

The number of monsters and imaginary creatures of India can be increased. The content of many Greco-Roman sources which were maintained in the Byzantine literary corpus could potentially extend the Byzantine imagination. Additionally, various literary sources from later periods – like Glykas and Pseudo-Sphrantzes – can reveal further examples. The ancient background of monsters in Greek verse and its development into being the subject of ideological and religious thoughts explain the continuity of similar themes in different contexts for centuries. Similarly, the change in the perception of India can be grasped from the same angle. When the softer approach of Christianity to monstrosity is contextualized into the new geographical thoughts of Paradise and paradisiacal rivers, the Christian influence on the perception of India shown in the previous chapter becomes more visible. As for Paradise, it is hard to observe the level of belief in the existence of such races in India. Yet, their inclusion in apocryphal narratives, hagiographies and the *Alexander*

[272] Tagliatesta, "Iconography of the Unicorn from India to the Italian Middle Ages," 176.
[273] Tagliatesta, "Iconography of the Unicorn from India to the Italian Middle Ages," 178.
[274] Tagliatesta, "Iconography of the Unicorn from India to the Italian Middle Ages," 178-179.
[275] Glykas, *Annales*, 270; Pseudo-Sphrantzes, "Annales," 209.
[276] Glykas, *Annales*, 270.

Romance tells much about their popularity. Additionally, the attribution of monstrous features to the enemies of the empire in the *Alexander Poem* and the *Historia* of Pachymeres implies the considerable belief in such themes.

3.3 Social structure and Christianity in India

The social outlook of India in sources is the ultimate phase of the integrated approach that includes society, culture, religion, politics, trade in order to give a feasible account of the Byzantine perception. There are two critical points in this context: First is about the notions concerning Indian peoples from antiquity onwards; secondly, the presence of Christianity/Christians in India. The former theme will bring out the emergence of very primitive thoughts – and imaginary attributions – that derived from the lack of observation about peoples of India, and their penetration, as much as it happened, into later narratives. This is also important in making sense out of the coexistence of humans and monsters in India. In the previous chapter, the presence of Christians in India during the late antique period has already been demonstrated due to the Erythraean commercial networks. Yet, there are two further themes about Indo-Christians. Firstly, the coming of Christianity in India with the arrival of the apostle Thomas. Secondly, there is a medieval legend about Christians of India which was formed around the persona of the so-called Prester John of India. Although the story of Prester John does not fit in the chronological scope of the present research, it is still worthy of observation for both its potential connection to the Thomas tradition and the parallel descriptions of India in this legend and late antique sources.

The descriptions of Indians in the earliest accounts turned mostly around their uncivilized social structure, overcrowded population, and their physical features such as life span or skin color. Herodotus gives the most extensive ethnographical account of India for the pre-Hellenistic era. He describes three different types of social groups, each with their own customs. He first talks about sedentary Indians who live on the river marshes. They build ship, eat fishes and wear clothes; these were probably the people who lived in the Indus valley which was the only familiar part of India to Greeks at the time. The eastern parts of India were occupied by people who "are nomads and eat raw flesh."[277] That was the cannibalistic Paadaei tribe who eat their relatives alive. There are also black-skinned Indians "who kill no living creature, nor sow, nor are wont to have houses; they eat grass…"[278] These people have intercourse openly like animals and prepare themselves to death when they feel ready. He finishes with the warlike Indians who were living in territories near Bactria. These people were all speaking different languages and possessed different traditions. Ctesias affirms Herodotus regarding the population of Indians and adds some naked black men called Pygmies in the ethnic list given by Herodotus.[279] He mentions certain people who live up to 200 years thanks to the special influence of Indian natural realm. Probably the most apparent image coming out of these descriptions is the lack of social organization and civilized customs in India. Especially, his emphasis on the immoral behaviors like public-intercourse or cannibalism might have been intentional exaggerations to polish the gap between the *nomoi* of Hellas and the fringes of the earth.[280]

[277] Herodotus, *Histories*, 127.
[278] Herodotus, *Histories*, 129.
[279] Ctesias, "The Indika," 47-50.
[280] Karttunen, "The Ethnography of the Fringes," 459.

Alexander brought new information about the existence of political organization and cities in India. When Herodotus talks about their obedience to Persian king Darius, he does not go further into political organization of Indian locals. Yet, Alexander found many local Indian rulers with whom he allied in the city of Taxila, in modern-day Afghanistan. Thus, the institutional identity of India as a political force was first discovered by Alexander. The most influential contribution of Alexander historians to the knowledge about peoples of India is actually the story of Brahmans which is noticeable almost in every work as late as the Middle Ages. It is almost impossible to find any reference to Indian sages or Brahmans in pre-Hellenistic Greek sources.[281] Herodotus' naked Indian tribe living in harmony with nature might give glimpses of Brahmans' lifestyle but their introduction in an immoral context makes it hard to establish an analogy between the two. In the Middle Ages, the Brahmans, or the so-called Gymnosophists, were described as the naked philosophers who spent their days by looking at the starts and living by the fire.[282] Such information derived from two sources: Alexander historians whose descriptions of Brahmans existed in the works of Roman authors and the Alexander Romance. Megasthenes, Onesicritus, Nearchus and Aristobulus all mentioned Brahmans in their works. Nearchus and Megastheens provide an inner division among these philosopher class: There were those who advised to the king, and probably lived in the city; second group was the ascetic philosophers, whom Megasthenes calls Sramans.[283] Onesicritus was the contemporary of Alexander who claims to have sent to Mandanis by Alexander.[284] This account of his visit, which

[281] Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, 251-2.
[282] Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 12.
[283] Stoneman, "Naked Philosophers: The Brahmans in the Alexander Historians and the Alexander Romance," 102.
[284] Brown, "A Megasthenes Fragment on Alexander and Mandanis," 134.

accordingly took place outside of Taxila, was probably a fictionalized version of Alexander's visit. Aristobulus also conveyed his experience in Taxila where he saw some philosophers whom he thought to be Brahmans.[285] The references to existence of the philosophers, either in the city of Taxila or outside, strengthens the historicity of Brahmans apart from their well-known confrontation with Alexander. The confrontation of Alexander with Dandamis was also introduced by Alexander historians. Megasthenes' Dandamis scoffs at Alexander and his mortal desires whereas Onesicritus draws a more peaceful picture where he praises Alexander.[286] The authenticity of this meeting between Alexander and the chief of Brahmans cannot be proven; so, does a distinction between Megasthenes' and Onesicritus' narrations in terms of reflecting the truth. Moreover, Stoneman goes further to argue that any Indian ascetic might have said similar things to Alexander. On that basis, there are arguments about the possibility that the Brahmans mentioned by Megasthenes, as well as those seen by Aristobulus in Taxila, might have been Hindu or Jain.[287] The speculations about the origin of Indian philosophers and distinction between Brahmans, Hindus, Jains and many others require a separate research. However, the recognition of Brahmans as the wise man of India applies to Byzantine context as well. Stephanus of Byzantium gives a relatively detailed description of Brahmans in his *Ethnica*.

> The wisest of Indian nations are called Brahmans. Hierocles says that "the tribe of Brahmans was considered the most esteemed people among all; these men of philosophy and lovers of the gods most of the time sit under the sun.

[285] Stoneman, "Naked Philosophers: The Brahmans in the Alexander Historians and the Alexander Romance," 107.
[286] Brown, "A Megasthenes Fragment on Alexander and Mandanis," 134.
[287] Stoneman, "Naked Philosophers: The Brahmans in the Alexander Historians and the Alexander Romance," 108-9.

> They do not eat meat of any kind; live under open air; honor the truth; and wear clothes linen from rocks.[288]

The emphasis on their wisdom and marvelous lifestyle has its counterparts in descriptions of the *Odoiporia* and *Expositio* as already shown. There are more than sixty direct references to India regarding its geography or ethnography in the *Ethnica* but Stephanus almost did not include any of those marvelous races that is seen in these two works. Only the ἀνθρωποφάγοι (men-eater) and Brahmans found place in his collection of the names of ethnic people and places. Stephanus' work was probably not very popular in the Byzantine literature. It was used as a reference work by Constantine VII and Eustathios in later periods.[289] Yet, this situation does not decrease the value of his work in demonstrating the irony about the coexistence of monstrosity and wisdom as characteristics of Indians in the Byzantine perception. Although Brahmans do not appear in *vita* of Makarios, living in the open air and nakedness were still elements of Indian social pattern. In the *vita* of Makarios, the description of an Indian tribe that the monks come across conform to this notion.

> After leaving the city (Ctesiphon) behind, we crossed Persia in four months and reached at India. Then, we encountered an Indian tent lying on the west of that city and Indian people pursued us. These people here do not have cities, but tents on land.[290]

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[288] Stephanos of Byzantium, *The Ethnica*, 184. "Βραχμᾶνες Ἰνδικὸν ἔθνος σοφώτατον, οὓς καὶ Βράχμας καλοῦσιν. Ἱεροκλῆς δ' ἐν Φιλίστορσί Φησι "μετὰ ταῦτα σπουδῆς ἄξιον ἐνομισθη τὸ Βραχμάνων ἰδεῖν φῦλον, ἀνδρῶν φιλοσόφων καὶ θεοῖς φίλων, ἡλίῳ δὲ μάλιστα καθωσιωμένων· ἀπέχονται δὲ σαρκοφαγίας πάσης καὶ ὑπαίθριοι τὸν ἀεὶ χρόνον βιοτεύουσι καὶ ἀλήθειαν τιμῶσιν, χρῶνται δὲ ἐσθῆτι λινῃ τῇ ἐκ πετρῶν·" (My own translation).

[289] Diller, "The Tradition of Stephanus Byzantius," 333.

[290] Vassiliev, "The Life of Saint Makarios of Rome," 137. "καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῆς πόλεως διωδεύσαμεν καὶ διὰ μηνῶν δ' περάσαντες τὴν χώραν τῶν Περσῶν εἰσήλθομεν εἰς τὴν χώραν τῆς Ἰνδίας καὶ εἰσελθόντες εἰς μίαν σκηνὴν τῶν Ἰνδῶν τὴν παρακειμένην ἐπὶ δυσμὰς ἐδίωξαν ἡμᾶς οἱ ἄνδρες τῆς Ἰνδίας· οὐ γὰρ ἔχουσι πόλιν, ἀλλὰ σκηνὰς κατὰ τόπον." (My own translation).

The passage is more reflective of Herodotean conception of India with an emphasis on tent-dwelling custom, absence of cities and the increasing monstrosity in place of social organization through the east. The nudity of Indians was also touched upon in relation with a group of naked people who attacked the monks in addition to some hermaphrodite people whom they see in the same tent-dwelling area. As Treadgold states, the pejorative meaning of the term "barbarian" maintains itself in the Byzantine ethnographical thinking but its application to different "Others" implies changing connotations of this word in different contexts.[291] According to this, barbarism of the Persians, which is mostly an ideological attribution, differs from that of the people living at the fringes. Therefore, the direct contact with the Indians, either through the agency of Alexander or through commercial and religious contact, did not wiped out the thoughts about naked people, people without dwelling and so on.

What about the change in the perception of social structure in India after the coming of Christianity? The abovementioned depictions given have their roots in mostly pre-Christian ethnography. Impact of Christianity on the ethnographical perception of Indians in the eyes of the Byzantines was less though. Christianity set its foot on the land very early and the rooted commercial activities between the two countries were the most important dynamic in the access of Christianity to this distant region. Indeed, even before the spread of Christianity, the presence of Roman communities in India through trade activities can be observed from sources. The reference to a Roman merchant colony at Arikamedu has already been mentioned in the previous chapter. Additionally, the *Tabula Peutingeriana* illustrates a *templum Augusti* at Muziris, which was probably built for a colony in this port town. The

[291] Treadgold, "The Formation of a Byzantine Identity, 319.

central role of the island in accommodating the foreign merchants can be seen in the account of fourth-century journey of the Buddhist monk Fa-Hien. travels to India through land. When he reaches Taprobane, the importance of trade for the island is the first thing that caught his attention. Fa-Hien speaks of the influx of great number of people from different countries after the knowledge about the island increased due to its international commercial ties.[292] He does not specifically refer to a Christian community whereas he encountered

The founder of Christianity in India was the apostle Judas Thomas. According to *the Acts of Thomas,* The Apostles divided the countries among themselves before departing for their missionary journeys. When India fell to the apostle Thomas after the lot, he was not happy with the result as he responded to the mission with the following words:

> I have not strength enough for this, because I am weak. and I am a Hebrew: How can I teach the Indians?[293]

His response to the idea of travelling to India implies the strange nature and geography of India in his mind. The hesitation of this ambitious devotee towards India strengthens the potential impact of monstrosity, marvels and barbarism on the perception of India. As Jesus encourages Thomas to take on the task, he also finds the way to send Thomas to India. Jesus sold him to an Indian merchant named Habban who was looking for a skillful carpenter to take with himself to India.[294] His acts in India do not contain stories of monsters and marvels like those of Andrew,

[292] Fa-Hien, *Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, 101.
[293] Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, 17.
[294] Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, 20.

Bartholomew and Mathias. Thomas' India also lacked any topographical information that other Greco-Roman sources offer, and it appears as "a perfectly normal-looking country – except for the miracles introduced by the apostle."[295] Just like the conversion of monsters into Christianity created a shift in their perception, the introduction of India in this way can be speculatively interpreted as a positive depiction of India by the embracing perspective of Christianity. Moreover, Thomas' deeds in India indicates that distant countries like India and Persia "were no longer playground of Alexander but of Thomas and Bartholomew in their own apocryphal Acts."[296] Eusebius narrates the story of a certain Pantaenus who set on a missionary journey from Egypt to India in the early third century.[297] Surprisingly, Pantaenus surprisingly encounter an already-established Christianity in India after his arrival. Pantaenus explains by himself that the religion should have reached at India by the way of Mesopotamia and first found a place among the Jewish – commercial – diaspora in India.[298] In the geographical list of the *Odoiporia*, the anonymous author do not miss to refer these Christians in India.

> The seashore from Diva until the Great India takes six months. Here dwell Christians and Greeks. From India until Axum is another six-month journey and the journey from Axum to the Smaller India takes a five-moth journey through the Erythraean Sea. There are also Christians and Greeks in this region.[299]

[295] Racine, "Geography, Identity and the Legend of Saint Christopher," 109.
[296] Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, 28.
[297] Eusebius, *The Church History*, 185.
[298] Seland, "Networks and Social Cohesion in Ancient Indian Ocean Trade: Geography, Ethnicity, Religion," 386.
[299] Pigulevskaia, "Die Ὁδοιπορία ἀπὸ Ἐδὲμ τοῦ παραδείσου," 323. "ἀπὸ Ἀβὰ παραπλέει τὸν αἰγιαλὸν καὶ ἔρχεται εἰς τὴν Ἰνδίαν τὴν μεγάλην πλέων μῆνας ζ. εἰ δὲ Χριστιανοὶ καὶ Ἕλληνες. ἀπὸ Ἰνδίας εἰς Ἀξομίαν παραπλέει μῆνας ζ καὶ ἀπὸ Ἀξομίας παραπλέει τὴν Ἐρυθρὰν θάλασσαν. ἔρχεται εἰς τὴν Ἰνδίαν τὴν μακρὰν διὰ μηνῶν ε· εἰσὶν δὲ καὶ Ἕλληνες καὶ Χριστιανοὶ." (My own translation).

The geographical description of places like Diva and Lesser India is not very easy to grasp. Pigulevskaia takes Diva as the name of the island which Kosmas called with its other name, Taprobane.[300] Christians of Great India were those living on the sub-continent whereas those of Smaller India should be newly Christianized people living in Ethiopian and southern Arabian cities. Kosmas also mentions the inhabitance of Persian Christians on the island of Taprobane, who had their church, presbyter appointed from Persia, deacon and necessary ecclesiastical ritual.[301] While Kosmas' Christians were in Taprobane and of Persian origin, a Byzantine origin might be suggested for the Christians of the *Odoiporia*. The expression of "Χριστιανοί (Christians)" and "Ἕλληνες (Greeks)" separately instead of a term like "Greek Christians" might imply some converted Indians. Such a scenario would also increase the historicity of Thomas the Apostle or further Christian missions to India. However, the separate references could derive from the distinction between Christian Greeks and pagan Greeks – whose number must have been still much higher than Christian in late antiquity. If the second, more possible, scenario was the case, these mainland Christians mentioned in the *Odoiporia* probably should have been small commercial communities.

The Christians of Ethiopia who were mentioned by the church historian Rufinus probably belonged to the similar diaspora communities extending from Ethiopia as far as western India. Rufinus narrates the story of two brothers named Frumentius and Aedesius who were shipwrecked on the waters of the Axumite Kingdom during their return journey from India.[302] The story continues with the elevation of the ambitious brothers to the service of the Ethiopian king and their

[300] Pigulevskaia, *Byzanz auf den Wegen nach Indien*, 73.
[301] Indikopleustes, *Christian Topography*, 365.
[302] Rufinus, *History of the Church*, 393-395.

deeds to improve the condition of Christianity in this region. In the church history of Philostorgius, there is the story of Theophilus the Indian who set on a mission to churches on Red Sea ports and the Western Indian Ocean as the envoy of Constantius II (r. 337-361 AD) around the fourth century.[303] Although the mission of Theophilus to check the standpoint of churches in these regions vis-à-vis the imperial theology reflects an official characteristic behind itself, these trade diasporas were not formal organizations at all but a form of social network which was established out of a social cohesion among people who lived away from home.[304] Combining all these evidences that can be dated from the first to the sixth century, one can infer that the story of Christianity in India was the result of a co-functioning of commercial and missionary activities. [305] Even if the historicity of Judas Thomas the Apostle cannot be proven easily, the legend should be read as the embodiment of this process. However, the popularity of the apocryphal acts might have fostered the recognition of these Christians dwelling in India as the fruits of Thomas' mission. This is, of course, a speculative inference but the medieval legend of Prester John peculiarly underlines such a connection. The representation of the so-called Prester John as the mighty Christian ruler of India carries the reflections of the early adventures of Christianity in India. Moreover, the description of India in his letter is an epitome of diverse accounts from almost all epochs: Greek, Hellenistic, Roman and Christian.

The earliest manuscript of the letter of Prester is from the second half of the twelfth century and an earlier date does not make sense since the letter was sent to

[303] Philostorgius, *Church History*, 22, 40-42.
[304] Seland, "Trade and Christianity in the Indian Ocean during Late Antiquity," 642.
[305] Seland, "Networks and Social Cohesion in Ancient Indian Ocean Trade: Geography, Ethnicity, Religion," 385-386.

Manuel I Komnenos, who reigned from 1143 onwards. He introduces himself as presbyter, which has a much stronger meaning than an ordinary ecclesiastical title in the context of the letter because he also calls himself "lord of lords,"[306] which indeed reminds one of an epithet from the *Revelation*.[307] The letter gives a very detailed introduction of the Christian kingdom in India which John rules with all the marvels and riches of India under his command. This detailed description of India served the hostile and ideological purpose of the letter as it targeted the Byzantine emperor, the Pope and the Christian rulers of Europe. In the opening sentences of the letter, he manifests his insolent attitude towards the Byzantine emperor, whom he calls "the governor of Greeks."[308]

> Of course we are only human and take it in good faith, and through our delegate we transmit to you some things, for we wish and long to know if, as with us, you hold the true faith and if you, through all things, believe our lord Jesus Christ. While we know ourselves to be mortal, the little Greeks regard you as a god, while we know that you are mortal and subject to human infirmities.[309]

His intention was to invite Manuel a major domo in his court and announce his plans for a visit to the Holy Sepulcher at the head of a strong army that he describes in detail. The depiction of India in the letter highlighted his strength over Manuel and challenged the enemies of Christianity; namely, Muslims. According to this, India possessed all the riches and marvels of the earth. The natural resources of India provided all kinds of precious stones and gems with which they lived in abundance and raised the strongest armies. He puts emphasis on the Ydonus river, which flowed

[306] Jubber, "Translation of the Original Latin Letter of Prester John," 155.
[307] Helleiner, "Prester John's Letter: A Mediaeval Utopia," 47.
[308] Jubber, "Translation of the Original Latin Letter of Prester John," 155.
[309] Jubber, "Translation of the Original Latin Letter of Prester John," 155.

out of Paradise and carried down all precious gems to be collected. There were not just exotic animals like elephants, camels, hippopotami, snakes and panthers but also marvelous creatures like horned men, satyrs, dog-headed men, giants, one-eyed men, cyclopes, phoenix and many others – as well as nations like Amazons and Bragmani (Brahmans). Yet, the realm of John was not vulnerable to harms of any poisonous animal nor monster.[310] These richest and most populous people of the earth, were also matchless in moral and military virtues as he says that "neither thief nor plunderer is found among us, nor does a flatterer…"[311] The reference to St. Thomas occurs in various places in the letter. He, first, talks about the shrine of Thomas, who rests in the farthest India where the sun rises. This was the eastern limit of John's rule in India. His palace, as well as many other buildings, were in the likeness of the palace which Thomas previously planned for the Indian king. Lastly, Johns counts the name of the Patriarch of St. Thomas among many archbishops in his entourage. Therefore, the letter was not only the embodiment of the traditional notions about India but also a manifestation of the Christian community that was established by the apostle Thomas in this respect. However, this could be so only if Prester John himself really existed.

The consensus is that the letter, and so the figure of Prester John, was a total fabrication for contemporary political purposes. There are speculations on the authorship and the original language of the letter. The anti-Byzantine attitude as well as the ideological purpose of the letter directs to the western origin of an original Latin text. There are certain textual investigations that pointed out the name of Archbishop Christian of Mainz for potential authorship because of his command of languages, his ecclesiastical identity and his connection to the German imperial court

[310] Jubber, "Translation of the Original Latin Letter of Prester John," 156.
[311] Jubber, "Translation of the Original Latin Letter of Prester John," 157.

of Frederick Barbarossa.[312] To some other researchers, the author was a western cleric living in the Near East and aimed at reconciling the opposing factions in Europe. Whatever the name behind its composition, a Latin original letter written in the West for political purposes against the Muslim threat in the Middle East is almost certain. The background events that led to the composition of the letter as well as the political context prove the forgery.

Helleiner talks about two twelfth-century reports recording the arrival of a mysterious person from the Christian Church in India, who visited Constantinople and Rome; according to these documents, he introduced himself as the prelate in charge of the shrine of Thomas.[313] In 1145, the people in Europe received the news about the victory of a Christian ruler, known as Presbyter Johannes, in Central Asia over a Muslim ruler. The messenger of this news was the bishop of Gabala in Syria, one of the lands conquered by the Crusaders. His actual purpose of visit was to report the bad news in the Holy Land to the Pope and European rulers. He, probably, took up the news about the victory of the so-called Prester John among the Nestorians in Syria in order to encourage German and Frankish rulers to engage in military attempts to the Holy Land.[314] Especially, the recent loss of Edessa into the hands of Muslims required another Crusade which could be arranged as long as the balance of power among European rulers could be established.[315] The encouraging news about the advancement of Prester John at the head of a strong army to the Holy Land should have triggered the fellow-Christian rulers to join him in his battle against infidels. The composition and the circulation of the letter in the 1160s was the embodiment of this ideological purpose. Historically, the defeat of a Muslim ruler in

[312] Ramos, *Essays in Christian Mythology*, 35.
[313] Helleiner, "Prester John's Letter: A Mediaeval Utopia," 51.
[314] Rachewiltz, *Prester John and Europe's Discovery of East Asia*, 9.
[315] Helleiner, "Prester John's Letter: A Mediaeval Utopia," 51.

Central Asia is confirmed by the contemporary Muslim and Chinese sources.[316] The catalyst was indeed the defeat of the Seljuk sultan Sanjar by an Asian ruler named Yeh-lü Ta-shih in 1141. There are different opinions about the evolution of the name of this pagan ruler into Johannes during the emergence of this legend. Helleiner speculates about the potential assimilation of the title "gür-khan" into Johannes among the Nestorian Christians since Yeh-lü Ta-Shih is phonetically not even close to Johannes.[317] Rachewiltz brings forward another possibility that this Yeh-lü might have been favored, and protected, by Christianity even if he was himself a pagan. This policy might have fostered the Nestorians of Central Asia to give him the Syriac version of the name John "Yuhunan" which means "protector of the religion."[318]

The victory of Yeh-lü Ta-Shih is one individual event that fostered the composition of the letter. However, the description of India in the letter in parallel with the classical and medieval encyclopedic knowledge demonstrate the connection between the perception of India in the Mediterranean world and the effectiveness of the letter. The author combines a group of classical, Hellenistic, Greek and Roman texts in a popularizing way that will personify the already-existing imaginary thought in the minds of people. The author does not hesitate to bring together even pre-Herodotean marvels like satyrs and phoenix with those of Christian myths about Paradise and St. Thomas. They created a very splendid image that offered all the necessary elements at once: a strong oriental monarch, the wealth and abundance of India, virtuous and marvelous Christians of India. The emergence of the name of St. Thomas in a few different spots in the text proves the author's awareness of the association between Thomas and Indian Christianity. It would not only increase the

[316] Helleiner, "Prester John's Letter: A Mediaeval Utopia," 52.
[317] Helleiner, "Prester John's Letter: A Mediaeval Utopia," 52.
[318] Rachewiltz, *Prester John and Europe's Discovery of East Asia*, 6.

authenticity of the Christian people of India in Europeans' mind but also attach a noble lineage to John and his office. Moreover, the repetition of the apostle's name in the letter implies the presence of a strong belief in the historicity of Thomas the Apostle in the Middle Ages. Thus, the (potential) myth of Thomas, ironically, secures the position of another myth about Prester John. The letter was culturally successful if not politically because the targeted crusade never happened. Pope Alexander regarded the letter with such high esteem that he even sent an embassy to Prester in 1177 but they mysteriously disappeared and were never heard of again in any source.[319] However, this did not bring an end to the rumors about Prester John that continued in different contexts throughout the Middle Ages. In 1217, the Franks in Palestine were excited about the news of Prester John advancing from the east in order to join the Fifth Crusade. The victory of the Mongol prince Küchlüg, who was a Nestorian, over Muslims might have been the real reason behind these rumors. There was also some other news under the king David of India, who was associated with the son or grandson of John. The ramification of the legend went so deep that it was even touched upon by William of Rubruck, whose account was accepted as a highly trustable and valuable ethnographical observation of Asian societies before Marco Polo.

[319] Rachewiltz, *Prester John and Europe's Discovery of East Asia*, 6.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The Byzantine perception of India in late antiquity points to a different form of knowledge and thought system than our present-day criteria in assessing an alien culture and country. Without asserting a claim based on any research or data, I cautiously assume that, even today, the popular thinking about India and its culture still contains many misbeliefs and might make false attributions to India. In addition to its exotic climate and environment that may look strange to someone living in a developed European country, various cultural practices and living conditions (especially in rural areas) in India arguably introduce it as one of the strangest countries of the world if not the most. In this respect, the bizarre profile of what is referred to as the Byzantine perception that came out of an analysis of a set of sources on the geography and ethnography of India in this study is almost an expected picture. According to this view, India is the easternmost edge of the *oikoumene* beyond which no human beings live. To the east of India, however, lay Paradise which was prophesied in the Old Testament. With respect to its natural conditions and social structure, the Byzantines seem to credit many old tales about the existence of marvelous races, monstrous species, and uncivilized tribes that had had long been associated with India since antiquity.

As the scope of this study has so far demonstrated, there were four important dynamics in the formulation of the Byzantine perception of India: the classical Greco-Roman geographical and ethnographical modalities; the Alexander tradition that spread through legendary tales about the Macedonian king and his achievements; Christianity; and, lastly, the interaction between the Mediterranean world and India

through the agency of trade. Each source under discussion in the present study highlights the impact of at least one of these four components on the Byzantine perception of India without negating the significant role of other factors. While depictions of India found in religious sources might specifically reflect its perception in a Christian context, the perception of a Byzantine merchant would naturally be conditioned by the image of India as it was described in commercial sources. Therefore, the author of the *vita* of Makarios of Rome and a merchant using the *Expositio* might have had slight differences in their perception of India.

Apprehension of the Greco-Roman patterns in the depiction of India is almost obvious in every Byzantine source that could overlap with various ancient works in picturing India around similar motifs. The depiction of India as *ἐσχάτη τῶν οἰκεομενέων* and as the land of marvels and monsters somehow continued into the Byzantine period. The mystery about the impact of this early picturing of India during the pre-Hellenistic era on the motivation of Alexander to campaign against India will probably never be solved. Yet, writings about India obviously assisted the development of historiography by opening the discussions about the reliability of sources on India as the findings of this study partly demonstrate. The approach of authors to the marvels and tales about India reflected the validity of the accounts of Roman authors. However, the influence of these elements on the perception of India was so strong that they could never be omitted from even the most objective or "scientific" geographical or ethnographical accounts. Many fictional motifs were kept in the contents of the earlier works up until the late antique period because of either popular thinking, source problems, ideological reasons, or mere misbelief. Therefore, it should be noted for one last time that what is found in Byzantine sources was not a set of inherited literary patterns, which were fabricated by their

predecessors. Instead, they were still under the influence of traditional ethnographical and geographical patterns, which were tangible indicators of how earlier generations perceived India. The great interest of the Byzantines in the *Alexander Romance* – as well as the influence of the romance tradition in the content of a famous hagiographic work like the *vita* of Makarios of Rome – also points to the effect of classical knowledge on their perception of India. Although the earliest version of the romance dates to late antiquity, it was a legendary tale that actually originated in the lifetime of Alexander the Great and was esteemed even in late Byzantium.

The changing force of Christianity in the perception of India shows itself in the emergence of a concept of the terrestrial Paradise. Regardless of literary genres of the relevant Byzantine sources, the concept of Paradise comes in sight in all of them. The origin of the belief in the presence of a sacred (and maybe promised) land in the terrestrial sphere according to the Aramaic religions would be the topic of an extensive theological research based on a set of Judeo-Christian texts. However, it would not be wrong to assume a link between the ambiguity of the knowledge about India since antiquity and the placement of these religious myths in India. This link was important in changing some of the Greco-Roman ethnographic and geographic modalities. With the belief in the presence of Paradise in/near the borders of this land, India arguably acquired a positive connotation; the increasing number of references to marvelous nations in the *Periplus*, the *Expositio* and the course of journey of the monks in the *vita* of Makarios provide evidence in support of this argument. Moreover, St. Augustine's interpretation of the monstrosity, the missions of early Christian apostles to monstrous races as well as the mission of St. Thomas the Apostle in India are all indicative of a new form of approach in describing the

extreme social and environmental conditions in India – compared to the strictly marginalizing approach of Greco-Roman ethnography. Especially, through trade network on the Erythraean Sea, the influence of Christianity on the sub-continent as well as the direct access of Christians to India became more prominent. However, as demonstrated in the last section of the second chapter, these commercial interactions did not bring out an influx of information that could have erased the superstitious beliefs in Paradise and marvelous races. Moreover, it enabled the cultivation of a new legend about St. Thomas, who also reached India through commercial networks. Because the commercial relationships between India and the Byzantine Empire, which continued until the seventh century, were limited to the exchange with western commercial ports of India, the erroneous perception of the easternmost regions never completely changed by the observation through commercial interactions. In this respect, the mysterious location of China is not represented in the further east of India in almost any of the relevant sources; China (referred to as Tzinitza/Sera Maior/the land of silk) was believed to lie to the north of India.

Regarding its findings on the depiction of India in the geographical and ethnographical outlook of the Byzantines in late antiquity, the present study is intended to contribute to our knowledge of the Byzantine perception of "the Others" in the early period of its history. As a matter of fact, it can never be known what passed in the mind of a Byzantine merchant, a pious Christian or a Byzantine intellectual, who studied all ancient texts, when they each heard the word "India." The corresponding depictions in the contemporary Byzantine sources analyzed so far point to a similar perception at a certain degree, even if not in a great deal. The revival of almost identical patterns in the description of India in relation with the legend of Prester John for ideological purposes in the Middle Ages demonstrated

how deep the ramifications of this perception went beyond the borders of the Byzantine Empire and the late antique period. Bringing the issue of the Byzantine attitude to "the Others" regarding a culture as alien as India to the attention of the academic world, this study carries the potential to be extended further in scope considering the presence of many literary and western cartographic sources about India from the Middle Ages. Further to that, a comparative research on the perceptions of India and Africa in Byzantine sources would also make a lot of sense when the rich information on Africa/Ethiopia in late antique secular and ecclesiastical histories is taken into consideration. Besides Byzantine sources, Syriac and Coptic sources from the late antique world would also tell us more about India in this period and surely enlarge the extent and content of future studies on this topic.

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