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Theoretical Approaches to the Byzantine Outsider

> "Thorby, every excessively clannish culture – and I know of none more clannish than this – every such culture has the same key word in its language . . . and the word is 'people' however they say it. It means themselves. 'Me and my wife, son John and his wife, us four and no more' – cutting off their group from all others and denying that others are even human. Have you heard the word 'fraki' yet?"
>
> "Yes. I don't know what it means."
>
> "A fraki is just a harmless, rather repulsive little animal. But when they say it, it means 'stranger'."
>
> "Uh, well, I guess I am a stranger."
>
> "Yes, but it also means you can never be anything else. It means that you and I are subhuman breeds outside the law – *their* law."[1]

We are all outsiders. With its intended echoes of Thomas Jefferson's inaugural speech as President of the United States of American in 1801,[2] when cities in both the United States and the United Kingdom ring to cries of 'Black Lives Matter' and some statues of historical personages are toppled,[3] we should consider how our study of history relates to the current-day reality on the streets.

1 Robert A. Heinlein, *Citizen of the Galaxy* (Harmondsworth, 1972), 83. This science-fiction novel, which I read when I was about 12 (a birthday present from my sister, for after all, the personal is political), was my first overt awareness of being an outsider or stranger—and my first encounter with what social anthropologists *do*.

2 "We are all republicans: we are all federalists." *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Volume 33: 17 February to 30 April 1801* (Princeton, 2006), 148–152.

3 See https://www.blacklivesmatter.com (last accessed 12 May 2025) for the movement's own website; various news reports covered the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol in June 2020 (with a Byzantine connection, as Colston Hall in the same city is held to be an example of British Byz-

Note: This paper is dedicated to the memory of Ruth J. Macrides (1949–2019), scholar, friend, and teacher.

I am indebted to the support of Prince Mohammad bin Fahd University, Al Khobar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the CORE (Humanities and Social Sciences) Department for their support in the writing of this paper. This paper was first delivered orally at the International Conference "Marginalization and subculture groups: Prostitutes, actors and tavernkeepers in Byzantium," at the Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies in the University of Vienna in May 2019, which was something of a home-coming for me as I spent a most profitable year 1987–1988 working on my thesis with ready access to the Byzantine Subject Library in the department. That year the advertising campaign for Vienna's Tourist Board had been "Wien ist anders." For me, Vienna was indeed different as the first place I lived in a German-speaking environment. Returning after so many years, Vienna was still 'different' (and in different ways), but it remains *gemütlich*.

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The street, here of course is the *Mesē.* Byzantium, especially for English speakers raised in countries that never formed part of the 'Byzantine Commonwealth,'[4] or never belonged in the realm of Christian Orthodoxy (save for small communities of immigrants and even smaller communities of converts), is easily construed and constructed as the ultimate 'other.' There is nothing, save basic common humanity, the theory goes, to unite the Byzantines with their modern commentators.[5] Whilst on one level this is true, it tends to hide the real nature of what we are attempting to discuss.

As humanists, it is best to start with the words that we might use to describe these 'others': 'strangers,' 'foreigners,' 'outsiders,' 'different,' 'not like us.'[6] Such words and terms—indeed, a plethora of them—exist in Byzantine Greek, and my PhD thesis[7] sought to unravel and explain all these various terms, when they were used, and most importantly, why they were used. My source texts were the well-known historical writings of the 11th and 12th centuries: Psellos's *Chronographia*, Komnene's *Alexiad*, and Choniates's *Narrative*.[8] At the start, my *Doktorvater* Paul Magdalino was concerned that these sources were too well-known and that nothing new could be said about them. My approach was decidedly qualitative rather than quantitative. I did not count the occurrences of each of the words. Rather, I was interested in the context: why did the three authors term a group of people *Tourkoi* [Turks], then *Persai*

antine buildings) and the report on the BBC website, dated 18 June 2020, about the fate of the statue of Cecil Rhodes in Oriel College Oxford: "Oxford college wants to remove Cecil Rhodes statue", *BBC News* (https://www.bbc.com/news/education-53082545, last accessed 12 May 2025).

4 Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500–145*3 (London, 1971); Dimitri Obolensky, *Six Byzantine Portraits* (Oxford, 1988).

5 Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington, D.C., 1982), 16–17 and 22; Alexander P. Kazhdan and Ann Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkley, 1985), 167–196.

6 In German, such terms might be: Fremde, Ausländer, Außenseiter, Anderer; in French: étranger, autre, ceux d'enface. All languages have similar ranges of words, covering different yet overlapping categories of the 'other.'

7 Dion C. Smythe, *Byzantine Perceptions of the Outsider in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries: A Method*, PhD Thesis (St. Andrews, 1992).

8 Michaelis Pselli, *Chronographia*, ed. Diether Roderich Reinsch, 2 vols., Millennium Studies 51 (Berlin, 2014); Michael Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers: The Chronographia of Michael Psellus*, trans. E. R. A. Sewter (Harmondsworth, 1966); Michael Psellos, *Leben der Byzantinischen Kaiser (976–1075) Chronographia*, trans. Diether Roderich Reinsch, Sammlung Tusculum (Berlin, 2015). Anna Comnenae Alexias, eds. Diether Roderich Reinsch and Athanasios Kambylis, CFHB 40/1–2 (Berlin, 2001); Anna Komnene Alexias, trans. Diether Roderich Reinsch, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 2001); Anna Comnène, *Alexiade*, ed. and trans. Bernard Leib (Paris, 1967), with a fourth index volume prepared by Paul Gautier (Paris, 1976); Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena*, trans. E. R. A. Sewter (Harmondsworth, 1969); *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, ed. Jan-Louis van Dieten, CFHB 11/1 (Berlin, 1975); *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, trans. Harry J. Magoulias (Detroit, 1984).

[Persians], then *Hagarenes* [the latter emphasizing their descent from Hagar and so their status as Muslims], often within a single story or anecdote?[9]

There are two fundamental ideas that must be noted here. Any discussion of outsiders or subgroups can be understood only in terms of the relationship between the defining in-group and the defined out-group. This is a social relationship of power, expressed as a vector (in the terms developed by Foucault)[10] by the élite of the outgroup. This aspect of outsider study is accepted across the field.

The second fundamental, accepted within the field but less well understood by those working in other, though related, fields, is that the status of outsider is not permanent. An individual's roles and statuses change through time. This notion tends to cause a 'brain freeze,' so I would ask you to consider the prime example, perhaps, of the "prostitute . . . and tavernkeeper in Byzantium": the Empress Theodora, consort-empress of Justinian I. Screeds have been written about Theodora, her role in the policies of Justinian's reign, and the veracity or trustworthiness of the sources from which we learn what we know about her. The simple point that I wish to make here is merely that the primary sources seem agreed that Theodora came from low if not to say infamous origins, yet she rose to become the wife of a powerful emperor, intent on *renovatio*.

Part of the attraction of Byzantium as an object of study is that, while it appears rigid, hierarchical, and controlled, yet it seems that all these regulations against social mobility could be overcome by a set of circumstances or a forceful individual with drive and determination (examples from the Middle Byzantine period are Basil I the Macedonian (867–886) and Michael IV the Paphlagonian (1034–1041), though they are not limited to these two). This two-sided appeal of Byzantium is repeated to an extent in the two-sided nature of the insider/outsider division. It is true that it is easier to see this appeal when one is not directly affected by it—if one is always cast into an outsider role and is therefore always deracinated from one's society and culture, then it has a more direct impact on lives and psyche. Even if one were to lay aside one's privilege, the very fact of 'laying it aside' means that it can be taken up again, at will.

The portmanteau nature of the terms 'outsider' and 'stranger' amongst others means that the range of literature that could be considered germane is exceptionally large. Many previous articles and books on [social] outsiders or strangers focused on one specific outgroup or ethnicity; they did not consider their group in relation to other similar groups nor did they explicitly explain how the group was defined. This is what I

9 I began my research focusing exclusively on 'ethnic' outsiders. When it became clear that ethnic categories were perpetually fluid, I expanded the categories of outsider to account for the treatments in the sources. This led eventually to the four-fold categories of analysis: outsiders by ethnicity, by gender, by religion, and by *taxis* (social and ultimately economic class).

10 Robert Wuthnow, James Davidson Hunter, Albert Bergesen, and Edith Kurzweil, *Cultural Analysis: The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michael Foucault and Jurgen Habermas* (Boston, 1984); David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford, 1995).

seek to do here: establish a valid and coherent theoretical framework for thinking about social outsiders.

The concept of intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989,[11] did not inform my doctoral research on Byzantine Outsiders. Intersectionality seeks to identify the various categories of identity that every person unites in their own person. Intersectionality proposes (sometimes very forcibly) that these categories of identity can be nested within a single individual and that these categories of identity establish rankings of social privilege and social discrimination.[12] The central point of intersectionality as I understand it is that these various identity-categories are not added one on top of another; rather we should think of them multiplying each other (this is not a perfect analogy, but it gives substance to the intent).[13] Its roots lie in third-wave feminism. First-wave feminism focused on suffrage; second-wave feminism focused on equality in the workplace and reproductive rights. Third-wave feminism has developed with the greater involvement and participation by women of colour and women from ethnic minorities in Western countries, but also the input of women from the so-called Third World. These women offered a critique of feminism, pointing out that gender was not the sole axis upon which discrimination acted.[14] Intersectionality now connects with feminism of the fourth wave, as issues of homosexuality and transsexuality are brought into the analysis.

Intersectionality puts forward the idea that people belong to different groups at the same time: ethnicity, gender/sex/sexuality, class, nationality/citizenship, ability/body-type and religion. For sociology with direct access to their subjects of study, certain of these categories are more accessible to researchers (sexuality being the most problematic characteristic for historians).[15] The origins of intersectionality in the United States have meant that issues of 'race' (as understood in the USA) have figured large in the articulation of the framework. This has also led to certain assumptions in the analytical framework that are not useful for historians, leading to some heated

11 Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139–168 (http://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/uchclf1989&div=10, last accessed 12 May 2025) and "Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later," 2017 (https://www.law.columbia.edu/pt-br/news/2017/06/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality, last accessed 12 May 2025).

12 "What is Intersectionality and Why is it Important?" (https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/what-is-intersectionality-explained, last accessed 12 May 2025).

13 Kimberlé Crenshaw, "The urgency of intersectionality" (https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the _urgency_of_intersectionality, last accessed 12 May 2025).

14 Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill, "Theorizing difference from multiracial feminism," *Feminist Studies* 22 (1996): 321–331; Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, 3rd edition (New York, 2014).

15 Dion C. Smythe, "In denial: Same-sex desire in Byzantium," in *Desire and Denial*, ed. Liz James (Aldershot, 1999), 139–148.

critique.[16] Even though the idea developed in the United States, where participation in popular religious observance is higher than in Western European countries, the role of religion as a marker of belonging versus outsiderness has been downplayed in much of the sociological writings, for all that historically Black churches in the USA have been *loci* for female empowerment.

Unavailable to me in Saudi Arabia, Roland Betancourt published a monograph that overtly engages with the intersectionality of sexuality, gender, race, and religion in Byzantium.[17] In a book of five chapters with introduction and epilogue, Betancourt discusses Mary of Egypt (the repentant prostitute with hair so long in the desert that the narrator was unable to tell whether the hermit was male or female; hair length will return as a theme later in this paper); the sexual consent of the Theotokos; the sexual shaming of Theodora empress-consort to Justinian; 'transgender' monks (these are people born women but who for a variety of reasons join a monastery and life the religious life dressed as men—often therefore assumed to be eunuchs; their various life histories mean that 'transgender' might not be the correct description); a more explicitly queer reading of the images of Doubting Thomas as expressing same-sex desire; and the Ethiopian eunuch encountered by St Philip and converted to Christianity as the nexus of racial and sexual otherness.

When I first began thinking about the 'other', so many years ago, three articles started my thinking about the issue. These three seminal articles point to the differing, though not mutually exclusive ways in which the notion of the 'outsider' or 'stranger' may be approached: Robert S. Lopez's "Foreigners in Byzantium," Evelyne Patlagean's "Byzance, le barbare, l'hérétique et la loi universelle," and Hans-Georg Beck's "Formes de non-conformisme à Byzance."

Dating from ten years before I started my own research, Lopez's article on "Foreigners in Byzantium"[18] considers the stranger and foreigner to Byzantium. In this "sketch of a possible book"[19] (as he puts it), he discusses how one might approach the question of who belongs to Byzantium, and who does not. He develops the idea by

16 These are (a) a determinist or reductionist tendency to see people as demographic categories and not as individuals—Lisa Downing, "The body politic: Gender, the right wing and 'identity category violations'," *French Cultural Studies* 29/4 (2018): 367–377; (b) its use as a tool in opposition to other feminist theories and approaches—Barbara Tomlinson, "To tell the truth and Not Get Trapped: Desire, Distance and Intersectionality at the Scene of Argument," *Signs Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38/4 (2013): 993–1017; and (c) antisemitism—"Opinion – I'm Glad the Dyke March Banned Jewish Stars," *The New York Times*, 27 June 2017 (https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/27/opinion/im-glad-the-dyke-march-banned-jewish-stars.html) (last accessed 12 May 2025).

17 Roland Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender and Race in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2020).

18 Robert S. Lopez, "Foreigners in Byzantium," in *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 44 [=*Miscellanea Charles Verlinden*] (Brussels, 1974): 341–352; reprinted as paper 14 in *Byzantium and the World Around it: economic and Institutional Relations* (London, 1978).

19 Lopez, "Foreigners in Byzantium," 352.

saying that the point under discussion is one of citizenship (so the question is really "who were not Byzantines"). Having focused on the idea of 'citizenship,' he asks the question: how one might gain such citizenship?[20] Lopez notes that Zachariae von Lingenthal is silent on the idea of Byzantine citizenship, and then suggests that the principle may have worked both ways: citizens paid taxes, so people who paid taxes were citizens and people who did not pay taxes were not citizens.[21] Lopez recognises that this overly legalistic approach cannot be supported by the sources, as only one cadaster survives, and so he appears to abandon it in favour of more traditional ideas of Roman citizenship, maintaining that they still held sway in Byzantium. If one lived within the territory of the empire and lived as a Roman (was enrolled [in the army] or paid taxes), then one was a Roman.[22] This, according to the Romans, and indeed according to Lopez, was the ideal. The frontier was static and rigid; the boundary was known to and recognised by all. However, even in the case of an obvious and physical boundary such as Hadrian's Wall at the northern reaches of Britannia, more recent scholarship suggests that this was a border zone rather than a singular linear frontier of division between 'us' and 'them.'[23] Ideologically, of course, there was a frontier of the mind: here, on our side, were the Romans, cities, law, and civilisation; there, across the frontier, was under the sway of the barbarians, no laws, no cities, only forest or desert, and so little civilisation that even intelligible language was lacking. Extracting comments about the barbarians from writings by emperors or chroniclers is an easy sport; Lopez comments "we know that the Byzantines came close to the Chinese in looking at foreigners with utter contempt."[24] Yes, they did; but Byzantine civilisation was not a monolith, and this was not the only attitude towards foreigners or 'the outsider.'

Dealing with what foreigners could do in Byzantium, Lopez turns to the merchants or traders. The comparison here with Imperial China seems most apt: "medieval Byzantium, like mandarin China, gradually dulled the edge of its keen merchant

20 Lopez, "Foreigners in Byzantium," 341.

21 Lopez, "Foreigners in Byzantium," 341–342.

22 Thus the Constitutio Antoniniana of Caracalla [Marcus Aurelius Antonius] in 212, according to which anyone living within the boundaries of the Roman Empire was a *de facto* Roman citizen, though this constitution too had a fiscal element, positing that citizens lived within the empire and thus paid taxes. This contrasts with the classical Athenian tradition, where despite lengthy residence in the polis, one remained a resident alien—a φίλος—and nothing more, never moving to the status of citizen. Cf. Dion C. Smythe, "Citizenship and belonging: A view from Byzantium", in *Citizenship in Antiquity: Civic Communities in the Ancient Mediterranean* edited by Jakub Filonik, Christine Plastow, and Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz (London, 2023), 707–714.

23 Stephen Johnson, *Hadrian's Wall* (New York, 2004); David J. Breeze and Brian Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall,* 4th ed. (London, 2000). The recent views that the wall would have been plastered and then painted white re-enforces the idea that it was a statement of power and control, if not strictly intended to function as a physical fortification.

24 Lopez, "Foreigners in Byzantium," 342.

and maritime class through a combination of conservatism, *hybris* [sic], and neglect."[25] However, foreign traders came to Byzantium, and residential warehouses or *mitata* were created in the capital to house—and probably to control—them. As Venice moved from being a dependency or colony of sorts to being independent in the late 11th century (and of course Byzantium's nemesis by 1204), the *mitata* of Venice in Constantinople became less a place where the Byzantine authorities could control foreign merchants and more of a compound of expatriates with extra-territorial rights, rights upheld by the representative powers of the Italian trading city-states.

Lopez usefully suggests three lines of attack: foreigners (what I term 'outsiders by ethnicity') should be considered as a group, rather than being split up into their various ethnic sub-groups, as done previously. The focus on fiscal status (did the person pay taxes?) and the legal contrast between citizen and foreigner could be productive if the sources were available, but they are not. Lopez recommends a focus on the words used in the sources to negatively portray *xenoi* (foreigners or strangers—and so the term was also applied to Byzantines who moved from the provinces to Constantinople) and points out that it is easy to find such negative stereotypes in the cultural production of any society.[26]

Patlagean's article[27] switches the focus from Byzantine strangers (outsiders) to 'strange Byzantines' (these are Byzantines with strange beliefs or habits, but also provincials who have moved to the City). She uses sociological ideas of 'the other' to explore Byzantine society and culture, seeking to establish what made it tick. Patlagean's goal therefore is to establish what was "la romanité chrétienne de Byzance."[28] One might assert that this is the goal of all Byzantinists. Patlagean looks at grids of consumption[29] (the French *consummation* contains the word-play on 'consumption' and 'consummation' absent in English). Relying heavily on Mary Douglas's ideas of purity, cleanliness, and dirt,[30] Patlagean presents a quadrant of "other humanities": wild savages, near to beasts; non-Christian barbarians; Christian barbarians; and finally, dualist heretics. Eating meat places one on the grid: meat may be eaten but it should be

25 Lopez, "Foreigners in Byzantium," 345.

26 Lopez, "Foreigners in Byzantium," 351–352.

27 Évelyne Patlagean, "Byzance, le barbare, l'hérétique et la loi universelle," in *Ni Juifs ni Grecs. Entretiens sur le racisme, sous la direction de Léon Poliakov* (Paris, 1978), 81–90; reprinted as paper 15 in *Structure sociale, famille, chrétienté à Byzance* (London, 1981).

28 Patlagean, "Le Barbare et la loi," 81.

29 This concern with food in Byzantium has received attention in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, 1987).

30 Patlagean, "Le Barbare et la loi," 81, and note 5 cites Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1966); See Peter Brown, "Learning and Imagination" in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London, 1982), 13 for the acceptance of the utility of Douglas's work in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies.

cooked; only barbarians eat raw meat.[31] Rejecting all meat-eating, however, raises the possibility that one is not a true Christian but rather a dualist heretic. Here we see one of the strongest differences between Byzantium and the concept of intersectionality developed by sociology in the context of modern-day United States and increasingly applied to countries in the developing world. In Byzantium, religion was an important vector in individual and social [self-]conception and understanding.

In contrast to Lopez's article, Patlagean suggests that the outsider may be an insider; indeed, her final conclusion suggests that, paradoxically, the furthest outsider is the greatest insider (monks, whose consumption of meat is heavily restricted though specifically not completely prohibited).[32] Rather than just foreigners, for Patlagean considerations of the Byzantine Outsider or Other must consider the Byzantine heretic. The rules that govern or at least seek to regulate interactions here between the Byzantines and the non-Byzantines are social norms, so not laws that will be found in civil or canon law codes and not the subject of law cases (even if Byzantine sources of such law cases were more helpful than they are). Patlagean presents a sliding scale of 'otherness,' with two mutually exclusive fixed points: the Byzantine One and the Byzantine Other.[33]

Beck's article[34] continues the religious theme begun by Patlagean but begins with the Act of Conformity of the English Elizabethan Settlement. Expanding beyond the specific historical situation of 1558 (Act of Supremacy) and 1559 (Act of Uniformity), Beck identifies the use of ideas of 'conformity' in sociology. What enforces norms of conformity is the consensus of the dominant elite. The difficulty here for historians is that we usually cannot identify these norms directly, and often we think we know who formed the dominant elite but frequently cannot prove it. Even as the conformity of the Elizabethan Settlement found, legal enforcement to conform by attending Easter Communion in the parish church was met with resistance and in English terms, the religious and legal category of non-conformist was born. Attempts at enforcing conformity are met with resistance. Non-conformity may develop into a revolutionary struggle; it may remain as critique of the system with reform as its goal; or, in destabilising Christian terms, it may take the form of a withdrawal from society: "un «depart», une sorte d'anachorèse."[35]

31 Tilahun Bejitual Zellelew, "The Semiotics of the 'Christian/Muslim Knife': Meat and Knife as Markers of Religious Identity in Ethiopia," *Signs and Society* 3/1 (2015): 44–70.

32 Patlagean, "Le Barbare et la loi," 87.

33 Patlagean, "Le Barbare et la loi," 81. On the notion of grid (if not group) in this context, see also Mary Douglas, *In the Active Voice* (London, 1982), 190–192 and 205–208 and Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London, 1973), 82–84.

34 Hans-Georg Beck, "Formes de non-conformisme à Byzance," *Bulletin de la Classe des Lettres at de Sciences Morales et Politique,* Académie Royale de Belgique, série 5, 65 (1979): 313–329.

35 Beck, "Formes de non-conformisme à Byzance," 314.

Beck states bluntly that, following this line of enquiry, we must know "quelles sont les normes de conduite determinantes de la société byzantine."[36] Were they 'Roman-political' or 'Christian-Orthodox' or 'Greek-cultural'? The response at present seems to be that they were all three (Roman, Greek, Christian), or any mixture of the three in infinite combination. Beck posits a "trickle down" for the attitudes of the dominant elite, though without proving this "politics of deference."[37] But he recognises that the attitudes of the elite and the non-conformists that opposed them will have changed through time. The example that Beck uses for the outer sign of nonconformity in Byzantium is hair-length for men. Hair should not be too long, but the example of the emperor Theophilos (829–842) shows there is a 'too short.' In the 1960s it was about hippies (long hair and beards) and skinheads (clean shaven with a 'number 1' or 'number 2' cut); now it might be the hipsters from Hoxton in London and the 'natural hair' arguments in the United States.[38] The general rule in Byzantium seems to have been that hair for men was worn relatively long (perhaps as the buffer layer for armoured helms).[39] Suspicion was aroused only when the hair reached below the shoulders and the man presented a feminine appearance—was this nonconformity or extravagant display?[40] For monks and clergy, short hair indicated too many visits to the barber (shades of the contemporary Covid-19 'lock-down hair do')[41] and therefore an un-Christian concern with personal adornment and 'care of self.' Long hair may be an outward sign of worldly extravagance; it may be a sign of assumed asceticism; or it may be a sign of real dissent—revolutionary, reformist, or passive removal from Christian society, either as monk (good) or as heretic (bad).

Taken together, these three articles provided me with the basis for the theoretical approach to study Byzantine outsiders. This theory includes foreigners, and treats them as a common group, not divided into ethnic components. Fiscal considerations

36 Beck, "Formes de non-conformisme," 314. To Patlagean, this is her *romanité chrétienne de Byzance*; Patlagean, "Le Barbare et la loi," 81.

37 "[C]elles qui calquent les modèles des dirigeants, parce qu'ils désirent eux-même être de leur nombre un jour ou l'autre." Beck, "Formes de non-conformisme," 314.

38 A related issue for men in Byzantium is the question of beards. Prior to the reign of Heraklios in the 7th century, beards were less common; after the reign of the Golden African, it became more usual for 'entire men' (i.e. those who were not eunuchs) to sport a beard. In the late 12th century and later, the eunuch declined in popularity as 'the perfect servant' and with it the distinction between eunuchs and the 'bearded' and the privilege that went with it.

39 "En gros, on peut dire qu'à Byzance, en general, les cheveux des hommes n'étaient pas tondus à ras." Beck, "Formes de non-conformisme," 317. It seems that Theophilos, suffering male-pattern baldness perhaps, ordered all the men to have #1 haircuts.

40 Beck, "Formes de non-conformisme," 317. Beck also recounts the story of Phrangopoulos (Beck, "Formes de non-conformisme," 318–319), whose long hair appeared to cause his molestation of the deacon's daughter. Parallels exist with Procopios' description of the hairstyles of the circus factions: *Procopius, The Anecdota or Secret History*, trans. H. B. Dewing, *Procopius 6* (London, 1960), vii:8–10, 78–80; Procopius, *The Secret History*, tr. G. A. Williamson (Harmondsworth, 1966), 72.

41 See https://www.miamiherald.com/news/coronavirus/article242025651.html (last accessed 12 May 2025).

might be useful, but the sources are lacking. The stereotype of Byzantium having nothing but distain for foreigners has evidence in the sources, but it is not the whole story; Byzantine attitudes to foreigners are more complicated. My theoretical approach must deal with Byzantine strangers (so external outsiders) but also with 'strange Byzantines' (internal outsiders). It perforce must deal with the religious realities of Byzantium, as well as the more traditional views of Roman (or Greek) versus barbarian; and with terms like 'barbarian' it must often address questions of language.[42] Overall it is an issue of mentality. We must consider what was the "Christian Romanness of Byzantium" and the dominant elite who formulated, expounded, and disseminated it. Rather than what these outsiders actually were, both Patlagean and Beck focus on the outward and visible signs of dissent recorded by our sources: these were what enabled the sources to portray these individuals as deficient, as outsiders.

1 Rule of Threes

Theoretical approaches to the 'issue' of Byzantine outsiders come under three headings: (i) approaches relating to our sources-texts; (ii) approaches relating to sociology-anthropology; and (iii) approaches relating to 'identity politics' (prostitutes, actors, and tavernkeepers). It serves to consider each of these in turn.

1.1 Approaches Relating to Source-Texts

In part because these considerations are so fundamental to our work and research as historians, it is often the case that these issues are not reviewed 'in the cold light of day' and given full consideration. As Byzantinists our source materials are often both textual and material. Other papers in this volume take a more overt art-historical approach, so I shall not venture opinions to be contested here. We are concerned with the meaning of our source-texts. Within the Byzantine context, these sources could be literary, documentary, or legal (using the terms broadly). Whilst other contributors to this volume have followed the 'legal path,' in my prior research (having considered using legal sources and rejecting them) I took the path of 'literary sources.' The main examples I have used and continue to use are the high-level Atticising texts of middle Byzantine historiography.

42 On Anna Komnene's attitude to Hellenising the tongue of outsider barbarians, see her description of John Italos, Alexiad V, viii.7–8; Leib 2:36–7, 19 and 28. She also describes how, if he was bested in an argument, he would assault and pull the beard of his opponent.

There are many different approaches to literary texts which researchers have found productive. I have found the construct theory of Jakobson's speech-event[43] most useful. It is true that I am clearly a product of my education and *alma mater*: I use theoretical approaches when they help me understand and explain what I think is going on in my sources and what is represented in those sources. We must remain as true as possible to the words of the text on the page, but I have no difficultly in drawing in ideas from different schools of literary criticism when they help in the essential business of explaining our texts.

Jakobson identifies six elements involved in any speech-event (he speaks of an oral speech-event, but it applies equally well to written communication).[44] The three core elements are: originator (speaker, author), text (utterance, communication, the text *als Ding*), and receiver (hearer, audience, readership). These three entities, however, do not exist in a vacuum. There is the occasion (contact) when the communication takes place between the originator and the receiver. All three entities share some common environment that permits the communication to be understood (this could be 'the swirl of Orthodox Christian Roman-ness' that made up Byzantine culture [described by Patlagean *supra*], and which is to an extent a closed book to us). There is the shared code of language and register (rhetoric and word choice) which enables the communication to take place. The six items of the Jakobson speech-event (author, text, audience, occasion, culture, and code) allow analysis where each of the six may be the focus of attention. Different schools of literary criticism have emphasized each item over others. This need not detain us here; the Jakobson speech-event provides a framework to consider the text in depth and in context. It enables us as historians to delve deeper into the meaning of the texts that survive (text survival is a consideration that always underpins our source-criticism, even if it is often not overt and if we rarely discuss the lacunae, i.e. the texts that do not survive, rather than our understanding of the texts that do survive).

We must pay close attention to our sources. As there may be no reality to the 'outsider quality,' we must understand and explain the full intention of the sources—both the author's intention to the extent that it can be retrieved and the linguistic and literary context in which the text was created, was transmitted, and to an extent survives. Few if any sources survive authored by the social outsiders studied in this volume. We look at these people through the lenses of sources written by persons inimical in varying degrees to them. This is the challenge. Is this any different from the 'history written by the victors'? For all that, I remind my readers that my three core texts (Psellos, Komnene, and Choniates) were written by, in effect, 'outsiders,' whose political lives had ended in failure, to echo Enoch Powell's aphorism of 1977, thus giving them the opportunity to write their memoires, justification, and analyses (the three

43 Terence Hawkes, *New Accents: Structuralism and Semiotics* (London, 1977), 83, citing Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: linguistics and poetics," in *The Structuralists: From Marx to Levi-Strauss*, eds. Richard T. de George and M. Fernande (New York, 1972), 353.

44 Jakobson, "Closing Statement," 353.

works in question are varying combinations of these types, as well as purporting to be 'histories' in the Classical Greek tradition of historiography).[45]

We seek to establish 'as it really was' (a good German historical tag for a paper prepared for Vienna). This means careful attention to what our sources say and how they say it both lexically and rhetorically. There is no simple checklist we can use to establish the 'correct reading.' What is clear, however, are some basic ground rules. The sources do not speak for themselves; we must articulate them and work out what they say, more importantly what they mean, and why they say it in that particular way. We cannot use our sources as 'quarries'; a quick and dirty search in TLG for instances of the terms we think denote our prostitutes, actors, and tavernkeepers results only in a quick and dirty history. Full-blown analysis of signified and signifier may lead us too far from the historical realities, but we must pay full attention to what is said in our sources, how it is said, and what it really means. This is the hard work of history. It means treating texts (our sources) seriously.[46]

1.2 Sociological Approaches

Considerations of Byzantine society, even (or especially) in Constantinople, the large-scale imperial capital, requires a sociological approach, rather than those derived from social anthropology. This suggests a *Gesellschaft* rather than a *Gemeinschaft* society, to use Tönnies's terms. Thinking about it more deeply, however, the educated, articulated elite of Byzantium may have formed a small, interrelated 'village community', embedded within the metropolitan society.

Much of the sociological writing and theorizing about the outcast, the outlaw, or the outsider derives from work done in the United States in the years immediately following the end of the Second World War (for the USA, 1941–45). An underlying current of thought was the desire to return to the social situation before the war; there had been disruption and dislocation of lives and communities, with men joining up to serve in the forces and women joining the work force (the so-called 'Rosie the Riveter' effect). Sociologists in the United States were charged—overtly or implicitly by the government agencies funding research—with discovering why the dislocation continued, why people maintained their dislocated state and rejected the return to the *status quo ante*. This is not to say of course that all the demobbed soldiers, sailors, and

45 Herbert Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche Profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (Munich, 1978), vol. 1, 377; Cyril Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome* (London, 1980), 245.

46 Margaret Alexiou, "Literary Subversion and the Aristocracy in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: A Stylistic Analysis of the Timarion (ch.6–10)," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 8 (1982–83): 29–45; Ruth Macrides and Paul Magdalino, "The architecture of ekphrasis: construction and context of Paul the Silentiary's poem on Hagia Sophia," *BMGS* 12 (1988): 47–82; Margaret E. Mullett, "Dancing With Deconstructionists in the Gardens of the Muses: New Literary History vs?," *BMGS* 14 (1990): 258–275.

airmen refused to return to their home-towns; but a significant percentage did not, and they were joined by a percentage of the women who had broken free from the constraints of small-town, mid-western life (these characterisations are broad-sweep and stereotypes but, as with all stereotypes, they contain some grains of truth). The theories in vogue then (in the late 1940s and 1950s) postulated that 'something' had happened to the actors involved (those who had gone off to war or work and opted to refuse to return to their situations *ante bellum*); the job of sociologists was to find the aetiologies of this 'deviant' behaviour and to cure them, to allow and encourage a return to 'the old normal.' The focus was on those seen to be 'abnormal,' those rejecting the social norms or those rejected by 'normal society' who in the dislocation of wartime had found new ways to be themselves. The failure of the 1950s attempt in the United States at a return to a largely mythical 'golden age' of stay-at-home wives living in high-consumer suburban sub-divisions with white picket fences, and the rise of the 1960s counter-culture (and to an extent that counter-culture becoming 'main-stream') raised questions in the minds of researchers about why some actions breaking norms invited sanctions, whilst others—apparently of similar weight—were ignored or at times even lauded. This division did not existed only in the United States nor only in the 1950s. 'Blue-collar theft,' the theft of materials, tools, or time from the factory-floor or 'the job,' was and to a large extent still is regarded as a crime worthy of summary dismissal from employment; 'white-collar crime'—siphoning off funds from the books to private accounts, or 'liberating' office supplies—is not treated with the same severity. Further, the sentencing and penalties are not commensurate: blue-collar crimes carry incarceration sentences; white-collar criminals are often sentenced to open prisons or non-custodial penalties.

Even when the 'norm-breaking' is not criminal, there were different responses to contravention of the norms. This is changing now (eighty years later), but still in Western society there is a complex of negative associations around having and displaying a tattoo. The 'biker gangs' that arose on the coasts of the US after the wars in the 1940s (WWII), 1950s (Korea), and 1960s (Vietnam) have now disappeared or have been transformed into something very different, but there remains a degree of American antipathy to the 'biker' (motorcyclist), who is somehow regarded as an 'outlaw', even though the only 'unAmerican activity' is the choice of the motorbike over the motorcar.

The crucial development here comes from ideas around Becker's view of the 'outsider.'[47] Described as "not a theory in the full-blown sociological sense", it focuses on the relational aspect of the status of 'outsider.' 'Outsiders' (those individuals cast into

47 Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1973), 9; see also Erich Goode, "On Behalf of Labeling Theory," *Social Problems* 22 (1974–1975): 570a–571b; John Hagan, "Labelling and Deviance: A Case Study in the 'Sociology of the Interesting'," *Social Problems* 20 (1972–1973): 447b–448a; and Alexander Liazos, "The Poverty of the Sociology of Deviance: Nuts, Sluts and Preverts [sic]," *Social Problems* 20 (1972–1973): 103–120.

the outsider role) are needed by the dominant elites of societies to bolster and re-enforce the 'in-group' sense of the dominant culture; 'we' become 'we' by having an 'other' or outgroup (you, they) against which to contrast ourselves. The most significant part of Becker's view is that the outsiders themselves need not have done anything to be cast into the outsider role, nor indeed do they need to 'be' anything, i.e. to have any essential characteristic that defines them as individuals. Outsider status is ascribed to them unrelated to any essential characteristics or any actions, and they must live with the consequences dictated by the dominant élite. The Becker 'theory' provides three elements: there is nothing intrinsic to the outsider; the outsider role is dictated by the dominant elite of the society; the outsider role is most important as a way of policing and re-enforcing the boundaries of any society—it is the way 'people like us' are separated from 'people *not* like us.'

The large volume of 'literary' sources from Byzantium coupled with the fact that there is no intrinsic quality of 'outsiderness' attributable to those individuals in our sources who are cast into the outside role means that there is a large number of possible 'outsiders' in the sources. Therefore, it is necessary to attempt some categorization to manage the richness. I stress again that this is a strategy to manage the phenomena in our sources, not one that has real descriptive meaning in the real world. I have devised four categories of analysis for outsiders: outsiders by ethnicity, outsiders by religion, outsiders by gender, and outsiders by *taxis*.[48]

Looking at foreigners, barbarians created the first category: 'outsiders by ethnicity'. All the different ethnicities identified by the Byzantine writers can be placed together here, up to and including 'barbarians.' Whilst in Classical Athens the categories of 'citizen' and 'barbarian' may have been binary opposites, it is clear that the Byzantine understanding of ethnic difference existed on a spectrum that changed with time. All barbarians were equally non-Byzantine, but some barbarians were more equal than others, and that specific position changed for specific ethnicities in specific times.

Outsiders by religion covers difference between pagans and Christians in the early period; between Christians and Muslims (whether Arabs or Turks) for all the contacts with Islam; between Christians and the resident Romaniote Jews of the Byzantine Empire; with Western Christians increasingly distinct after 1056 and the Great Schism; as well as other non-Chalcedonian Christianities to the East, and finally the various heresies with which Byzantium contended (often cast into the mould of the familiar dualist heresies known from Mani onwards). Ascribing dualist heretical beliefs was an easy and frequently-used way for Byzantine authors to discredit someone.

48 By *taxis* I mean social and economic position. Social advancement in Byzantium was by education. Acquiring an education required access to funds, either from one's family or from a patron. I have decided to use *taxis* rather than 'class' to avoid confusion with the term as used in Marxist analysis; for fuller explanation, see Dion C. Smythe, "Outsiders by *Taxis*: Perceptions of Non-conformity in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Literature," in *Conformity and Non-Conformity in Byzantium*, ed. Lynda Garland, Byzantinische Forschungen 24 (Amsterdam, 1997), 229–250.

The issue of gender as a marker of outsiderness should not be unexpected. Though numerically a raw majority, still the limitations and restrictions placed on women in Byzantium reduced women's opportunities, as the focus of this volume clearly implies. Additionally, within Byzantium the gender system was not binary—at least not totally. To describe eunuchs as a 'third sex' (or gender) is to overstate the Byzantine understanding; the Byzantines knew of and used eunuchs, but largely they saw them as men, even if as 'different men.'[49]

The fourth category is outsiders by *taxis*. By using this category, I have sought to account for material wealth as a means of access to education. Initially, I did not intend it to mean 'class' in the Marxist sense, hence the neologism. Social mobility in Byzantium was controlled by education. To gain more than the basic education—i.e. to have access to the education that would confer social mobility—required money to pay for education, which would probably require relocation to Constantinople (except for the study of law, which could be undertaken in Beirut in the Late Antique/Early Byzantine period). It could be achieved by gaining a patron, of course, and this is how many non-elite Byzantines joined the elite.

These categories of analysis are exactly and merely that: categories for analysis. When linked to specific real Byzantines in our sources, they are all problematic. They are not and cannot be absolute. As mentioned earlier, Theodora, wife of Justinian, would be an outsider by gender because she was a woman. But as the consort of the *autokrator* she was clearly an insider and privy to the secret deliberations at the highest levels—as recorded by Procopios. In part, for the Theodora known to us from Procopios, this is the problem; Procopios, in his treatment of Theodora in *The Secret History*, clearly felt that there was something 'wrong' (unRoman, unByzantine) in a woman having such power over Byzantine men. The same is true for Psellos describing the personal rule of Zoe and Theodora.[50] Having denounced the reign of Michael V,[51] Psellos

49 Kathryn M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago, 2003); Kathryn M. Ringrose, "Living in the shadows: eunuchs and gender in Byzantium," in *Third Sex, Third Gender*, ed. Gilbert Herdt (New York, 1994), 85–109; Shaun F. Tougher, "Byzantine Eunuchs: An overview with special reference to their creation and origin," in *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (London, 1997), 168–184; Shaun Tougher, "The Aesthetics of Castration: The Beauty of Roman Eunuchs," in *Castration and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Larissa Tracy (Cambridge, 2013), 48–72; Shaun Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society* (London, 2008); Shaun Tougher, "Eunuchs in the East, Men in the West? Dis/unity, Gender and Orientalism in the Fourth Century," in *East and West in the Roman Empire of the Fourth Century An End to Unity?*, eds. Roald Dijkstra, Sanne van Poppel, and Daniëlle Slootjes (Leiden, 2015), 147–163; Shaun Tougher, "Two Views on the Gender Identity of Byzantine Eunuchs," in *Changing Sex and Bending Gender*, eds. Alison Shaw and Shirley Ardener (New York, 2005), 60–73.

50 *Chron.*V, 26, ed. Renauld, 1, p. 117–178.

51 *Chron.*V, 15, ed. Renauld, 1. p. 95.

continues by describing the joint reign of the women in very positive terms.[52] It seems, at least to me, only that after painting such a glowing portrait of rule as it should be that Psellos suddenly realises what he has done and begins to back-track in a serious way. They ruled, but they ought not to have done, and their officials realised that their actions had to be above reproach, not because it was the right thing to do but because they knew that there would be a reckoning of their conduct when once again the reins of power were in the hands of a male *basileus*.[53] The category of outsider by gender ('woman') is problematic because it may be combined with other statuses that belong clearly to the inside elite. This is the very issue that intersectionality seeks to address in analysis. Anna Komnene was certain of her own insider status as the first-born porphyrogenite of the legally married couple Alexios Komnenos and Eirene Doukaina (Anna stresses the legality of her parents' marriage in *The Alexiad*, so it appears to have been a current issue for her).[54] She expected to succeed her father as first-born child and as wife of the Caesar Constantine Doukas. Constantine died, of course; John Komnenos was born; Anna's marriage to Nikephoros Bryennios took her too far from the charmed inner circle. Her brother's succession and her botched *coup d'état* resulted in her house arrest in the Theotokos Kecharitomene monastery (nunnery) founded by her mother as a retirement home for distressed gentlewomen. Anna Komnene began her life as a charmed insider, acclaimed along with her betrothed as the heirs to the emperor. Changes in her life's course and then her actions in seeking to supplant her brother resulted in her exclusion from power and influence, as she was left scratching a pen in the guttering lamp light.

I stress here that these four categories of analysis are porous and not distinct one from another. It is possible to be assigned to more than one category at a time, and in the course of one's life (or even in the course of one's appearance in one particular source) an individual may move from one category to another or through a multiplicity of combinations of sources. It is not neat and tidy. The categories may change as the career line of the individual develops, as was the case of John Axouch, the son of a Muslim captive who became John Komnenos's childhood companion, and who—when the emperor was planning on giving all his sister's estates to Axouch—proved himself to be more Byzantine or family-minded than either John (as *autokrator* and *basileus* the ar-

52 *Chron.*V, 26, ed. Renauld, 1, p. 117, lines 3–6.

53 *Chron.*V 26, ed. Renauld, 1, p.117, lines 2–6, faithful; 1, p. 117–118, lines 7–11, fearful that they will be called to account.

54 *Kata nomou* in *Alexiad* II vii 7; Leib 1, p. 87, line 17; Sewter, 91 for Alexios and Eirene; *Alexiad* Prooimion iii 1; Leib 1:5,8; Sewter, 18 for Anna and Nikephoros Bryennios. These are two mentions out of twenty-six uses of the word "law" in the *Alexiad* (laws of God, laws of the church, law of history), so it is unwise to construct too heavy an edifice. It should be noted that when Alexios moved to the Great Palace after the coup, he resided in the Boukoleon, whilst Eirene (aged only 15) remained in the lower palace with her sisters, her mother, and her paternal grandfather, the Kaiser John Doukas: Alexiad III, i 5; Leib 1, p. 105, lines 20–24; Sewter, 105.

chetype Byzantine) or Anna.[55] In addition to the personal histories of the individuals, however, the particular needs of the narrative accounts can also determine the roles into which groups of characters are cast. It is important to remember that though they appear 'real' in the sources, these categories are constructs, either by the authors or by us, as we who attempt to interpret completely and fully the categories of outsiderness.

Just as there are four categories of outsider, so sociological theory suggests that there are five modes of interaction between groups within society: annihilation (the infamous war of all against all); segregation (the enforced separation of distinct social groups; in the Early Modern Period following the example of Venice this would be the ghetto; in the Medieval period—either East or West—it is more the self-selecting congregation of similar groups in certain streets and alleys [Coppersmiths' Quarter, the booksellers, the Jewry]);[56] stratification: placing certain outsider groups in perpetually inferior social positions; assimilation: absorbing outsider groups into the mainstream society so that they disappear (traditionally the American melting-pot model); and finally, pluralism: no distinction in rights and no penalties, but the groups remain distinct.[57] As with the categories of outsider, these five categories of interaction are not mutually exclusive.

All are found within Byzantium in the 11th and 12th centuries, though the 'war of all against all' is found on the battlefield, whilst pluralism is less well-developed, though in the religious accommodations for the Anglo-Saxons of the Varangian Guard in Constantinople, using their own liturgy in their own church, it appears to have at least one standard-bearer. And specific groups of outsiders could and did move from one category to another. Sometimes this appeared to be an upward trajectory, but on other occasions there would be back-tracking, perhaps in response to political affairs in the wider world. The matrix of four-by-five (outsider categories of by ethnicity, religion, gender, and *taxis* by the five interaction types) allows us to manage and analyse the various interactions between Byzantine elites and social outsider groups.

The Madrid Skylitzes manuscript is the unique survival of an illustrated (with 574 images) middle Byzantine history or chronicle.[58] The text survives in about twenty manuscripts and is itself not outstanding. It is a 'profane' history, in that it deals with Byzantine history from 811 to 1057, i.e. it a self-conceived continuation of Theophanes

55 Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. van Dieten, p. 11, lines 81–84.

56 In the case of the tanners, this segregation was sometimes enforced because of the noxious effluent attached to their profession; the argument still rages over whether Jews were *required* to live in certain areas of Constantinople, or whether there was a desire among them for close proximity.

57 Brewton Berry and Henry L. Tischler, *Race and Ethnic Relations*, 4th ed. (Boston, 1978), 91.

58 Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis Istorion*, Codex Vitr. 26–2 National Library, Madrid. André Grabar and Manoussos Manoussacas, *L'illustration du manuscript de Skylizes de la bibliothèque nationale de Madrid*, Bibliothèque de l'institut hellénique d'études byzantines et post-byzantines de Venise 10 (Venice, 1979); Vasiliki Tsamakda, *The Illustrated Chronicle of Ioannes Skylitzes in Madrid* (Leiden, 2002), esp. 5–7 and 17; Elena Boeck, *Imagining the Byzantine Past: The Perception of History in the Illustrated Manuscripts of Skylitzes and Manasses* (Cambridge, 2015).

the Confessor, rather than a 'sacred history' beginning with the Creation and working through biblical history to contemporary events.[59] Compared with Psellos, Komnene, or Choniates, Skylitzes shares more 'chronicle-like' features than full-blown literary history, the claims in his *proiomion* to value objectivity over *enkomion* and *psogos* (though obviously he knows these terms and their place in 'history') and to avoid painting in only black (bad/negative) or white (good/positive) notwithstanding.[60] Events tend to follow in chronological sequence, with a jumble of significant and trivial events. The text is thin on motivation and lacks the 'thick description' of Psellos, Komnene, or Choniates. The main part of the text was composed in the 1070s, with a continuation, covering 1057–1079, added after 1100 when Ioannes Skylitzes retired from public life.[61] There are problems with using the illuminated Madrid Skylitzes, not least because it may be an 'outsider' production made in Sicily, possibly in Messina in the monastic workshops of San Salvatore with 'Greek hands' and 'Italian hands' in the third quarter of the 12th century, rather than in Constantinople.

Folio 208v shows an interaction between two of the possible outsider categories: a Byzantine woman and Varangian barbarians in a single cartoon strip of two frames.[62] The left image on folio 208v shows the first dramatic action of the story. A rather 'fine figure of a woman' is shown killing a prone man with a spear. The woman is demurely dressed in a long, long-sleeved tunic, with a pale blue overmantel and a red veil but without jewels or signs of status. She has speared (rather decisively and effectively, it has to be said) a heavily-bearded man. The dying man (bleeding profusely from the wound to his right lung) is dressed in a rust-coloured tunic that comes to his knees and dark brown leggings or boots. He has dark-brown hair and a full beard. The image shows what is happening (the woman killing the man) but the caption is required to explain how things have come to such a dramatic pass. The inscription reads: "the woman, attacked by a barbarian and killing him." On the right, the dramatic narrative is concluded in the second picture. The same woman—at least she is dressed in the same clothes—is shown facing and accepting bundles from a group of men who are dressed in a similar fashion to the dying man of the previous image. They, too, have full beards and good heads of dark brown hair all heavily bearded and like the original antagonist rather 'shaggy' in their hairstyles.[63] The in-

59 Herbert Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literature der Byzantiner,* vol. 1: *Philosophie, Rhetorik, Epistolographie, Geschichtsschreibung, Geographie* (Munich, 1978), 389; Tsamakda, *Illustrated Skylitzes in Madrid*, 5 and 22–23.

60 Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literature,* 390.

61 Tsamakda, *Illustrated Skylitzes in Madrid*, 22–23.

62 Assigned to the 'western' group painter B1: Tsamakda, *Illustrated Skylitzes in Madrid*, 234 and 389.

63 Kathleen Corrigan, *Visual Polemics in the Ninth-Century Byzantine Psalters* (Cambridge, 1992), especially for the discussion of the portrayal of John the Grammarian in the Khludov Psalter, where the identification is made between iconoclasts and those who crucified Christ. The Patriarch John the Grammarian is shown with an impressive if unruly punk hair-do.

scription here reads: "The Varangians give the assaulted woman all of the goods of the attacker."[64] The Skylitzes text provides a fuller explanation:

> In that same year [1034] something else worthy of note took place. There were some Varangians dispersed in the Thrakesian theme for the winter. One of the Varangians, coming across a woman of the region in the wilderness alone, put the quality of her virtue to the test. When persuasion failed he resorted to violence, but she seized his Persian-type short sword, struck the barbarian in the heart, and promptly killed him. When the deed became known in the surrounding area, the Varangians held an assembly and crowned the woman, presenting her with all the goods of the violator, whom they threw aside, unburied according to the law concerning assassins.[65]

Image and text make clear what is going on; this is Byzantium's '#metoo' moment. The woman is not named in the text; she is merely "a certain woman of southern Hellas." I intentionally chose this portrayal of a woman from near the bottom of the Byzantine social hierarchy. Out walking in the fields, she is accosted by the single man, who attempts to rape her. She, with great presence of mind, wrests his spear (or sword) from him (for he is a soldier) and stabs him in the chest, and he dies. The group of men in the second frame are his squad-mates, but they are having nothing to do with what he did. Rather than seeking vengeance for his death, they tumbled his corpse into a ditch without the benefit of Christian burial. His buddies further gather together all his possessions and present them to the woman as blood-money. The Varangian attempted to do her wrong by assaulting her virtue; she protected herself, even using his weapon against him.[66] The Anglo-Saxon soldiers, known for bravery and loyalty, recognised the virtue of the unnamed woman. Neither the single Varangian nor the group of Varangians are shown armed, especially not with the 'double-headed axe' which was said to be their weapon of choice in the 11th and 12th centuries. Interestingly, though the text mentions the Persian-type sword the woman used to kill the assaulting Varangian, the artist has provided her with a rather more likely long spear with which to dispatch her assailant. In their publication of the manuscript, Grabar and Manoussacas remark that the image displays "type physique particulier des Varangues."[67] This "particular type" is difficult to establish. The barbarians or

64 Tsamakda, *Illustrated Skylitzes in Madrid*, 234.

65 *Skyltizes*, ed. Thurn, p. 394, lines 70–77, There may be some play on words as 'crowned' carries connotations of being married. Something might be said about the use of the word "crowned" for what the Varangians did to the woman of virtue.

66 The text speaks of a short Persian sword, but the images have spears. A possible 'queer reading' presents itself here: the woman used his weapon (his spear) against his attempt to use his weapon (his penis) against her.

For a similar play on words, see the bag and staff of Basil the Macedonian, discussed in Shaun Tougher, "Michael III and Basil the Macedonian: just good friends?," in *Desire and denial in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Aldershot, 1999), 149–158.

67 Grabar and Manoussacas, *L'illustration du manuscript*, 107. Tsamakda states: "The artist in an attempt to distinguish the Varangians from the other nations, gave them a curiously swarthy facial appearance, instead of a fair complexion." Tsamakda, *Illustrated Skylitzes in Madrid*, 234.

Varangians are shown with long straight noses (but then, so do most other people in the illuminations). Their hair is dark—much darker than the pigment used for 'normal' Byzantines—but not particularly long, and their beards are full and untrimmed. However, without the benefit of the captions, these 'Varangian' barbarians—in this period from Scandinavia or England—could be any barbarian mercenaries.

What I wish to stress here is that even in the visual realm, when one would assume that it was easy to see 'difference,' difference is not absolute but made manifest by comparison: not 'these are outsiders and they look different' but 'these are outsiders because they look different from people like us—the insiders.' And the difference is not absolute. The Varangians were mercenaries, and so were 'almost Byzantines—but not quite.' Their actions—as a squad, though obviously not the actions of the one—were honourable and laudable. They lived within the empire and served the emperor; they acted as honourable Romans should. The woman, by contrast, was a Byzantine, but so lowly so as not really to count. However, though a lowly woman she possessed the male quality of *andreia*, "bravery," a quality that Anna Komnene was at some great pains to impute to her own mother Eirene Doukaina. So outsider women, whether the lowest of the low (so low as to lack a name) or the helpmeet of the best of emperors (so no real outsider), shared in the same laudable quality. Now clearly Anna Komnene's praise of her own mother and wife of her father had a different agenda than Skylitzes's recording of a little short story about goings-on in the provinces—a story that may serve rather as light relief. Certainly, this is a personal interpretation, but the detailed reading required to work out what is going on in relation to outsiders in these literary texts forces an ever-closer engagement with the sources and what they might or could mean. For historians, this is only to our benefit.

The Madrid Skylitzes is unique and is worthy of study for its singularity. However, its provenance from outside the Byzantine Empire and the presence of five 'western group' artists from a total of seven means that it cannot be regarded unequivocally as a statement of 'Byzantine culture.' The variance between what is said in the text, what is said in the captions, and what is said in any labels in the illustrations shows that the interrelationship between the texts (Skylitzes, additional Byzantine historical texts, the titles and any labels) and the image are anything but straight forward. Suggested origins for the manuscript are also complex. Tsamakda postulates a lost Constantinopolitan model, fashioned at 1118 to allow for material from Zonoras to be incorporated. She adds an intermediate copy produced in Norman Southern Italy. She suggests there may have been additional illuminated manuscripts of Psellos and Zonoras, none of which survives and of which there are no mentions in the sources. Beck's thesis is of a unique creation in Palermo. The Madrid Skyltizes lets us see how some of Byzantine 'outsiders' may have been represented, but it does not provide a structure or methodology for examining the idea of Byzantine social outsiders in a more rigorous way. I went looking for outsiders in the Madrid Skylitzes with my four categories (ethnicity, gender, religion, and *taxis*) already in mind. For the period under discussion, it was easy to find outsiders by ethnicity, by gender, and by class;

examples of 'outsiders' by religion (primarily the iconoclasts) and by orientation (arguably, at least, with Basil I and John the son of Danielis undergoing *adelphopoiia*) can be found elsewhere in the manuscript.[68]

The hidden hand in all of this are the elites (it is probably best to think of more than one elite: the warrior-aristocracy, the educated lawyer bureaucrats, the secular clergy, and the monastic clergy. Cheynet's analysis of power and rebellions has shown that there was no "civil aristocracy" in competition with a "military aristocracy."[69] We cannot define the elite or elites of Byzantium. Similarly, we cannot define or isolate the mentalities of those elites. However, it is certain that there were shades of meaning as the culture and norms was articulated by various authors of the surviving literary sources. One problem is, of course, that they did not think that they were writing an exposition of the mentality of the dominant elite, and so this mentality has to be garnered from between the lines, not read explicitly. Almost inevitably the authors ensure they themselves are included within the dominant elite. How the elites implemented the norms that enforced these notions of outsider and insider is really unknown. We do not really understand these various processes in our own society, so it is little surprise that Byzantine norms are closed to us.

My studies involve the high-level literary productions from the top of metropolitan society. This volume seeks to address any counter-cultures that developed at the bottom of society. Actresses, tavernkeepers, and prostitutes were seen as occupying the lowest levels of society—little better than the barbarians who would be excluded from Byzantine society. But the life of St. Mary of Egypt, even if not of St. Mary Magdalene, treated in another paper in this volume, shows that by redemption even prostitutes could rise to the pinnacle of Byzantine society. But what of counter-culture's production? I think 'literary' productions or even written texts using less 'high-flown' Greek than the 'Atticising' Greek of the histories, written by people from the lowest levels of society (the actresses, tavernkeepers and prostitutes) are unlikely (though never say 'never'). Small-scale material evidence might be a more productive area to investigate—amulets, perhaps, or pottery vessels or shards. Foucault theorises that any force emanating from the top of society will be met by an equal and opposite vector of resistance. Our search therefore should be engaged in finding evidence of those vectors. Such counter or sub-cultures normally exist to provide recognition (of self) and protection. They are exceptionally difficult to recognise in our contemporary societies; it may be impossible to recognise them in Byzantium. The counsel is probably that we should be on the look out for them, more in hope than expectation.

68 For example, Theophilos, iconoclasts and iconodules Grabar and Manoussacas, *L'illustration du manuscript de Skylizes*, 43 and figure 44 (folio 49a); and for Danielis, her son John, Basil I and adelphopoiia, see Grabar and Manoussacas, *L'illustration du manuscript de Skylizes*, 59 and figure 88 (folio 85).
69 J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestation à Byzance 963–1250* (Paris, 1990).

2 Conclusion

Migrants surround us. Assimilation to the culture of the dominant elite represents one strand, pluralism with the acceptance and valuing of difference another. There are vectors of resistance: the traditions and habits of the religion in the old country should be maintained; the historical development of the society has embedded structural racism and people protest that 'Black Lives Matter' (and this in turn prompts a slew of counter-resistance that 'Blue Lives Matter' and 'White Lives Matter'). These are issues in our societies today. Does Byzantium provide an example of how human societies attempted to deal with these problems in the past? The answer, I think, is 'yes.'

Yet we must be very aware of the historical specificity of the Byzantine examples. However, we may look at how the Byzantines can be seen to have divided their outsiders up into categories. We may use the four-by-five-fold analysis to see how the Byzantines tried to interact and use the same types to model how modern societies do or might treat interactions with outsiders. Does Byzantium provide the answer? No, it does not. Is there only one viable answer? That too is most unlikely. As Cyril Mango tells us, the Byzantines often would begin with the Homeric questions: "Who are you and where are you from?"[70] Such questions are very familiar to Black people or ethnic minorities in the UK: "Like everyone with an immigrant background, I have often been asked where I am from. On giving the correct answer – London, England – I am met with the inevitable follow-up. Where are you from originally?"[71]

Sometimes in response to this negative reception, people assert that only they can tell their own history: so only Orthodox Christians can explain the history of Orthodox monasticism; only ethnic Greeks can adequately explain the medieval history of Greece that is Byzantium. This runs counter, however, to the whole concept of historical empathy; we seek to understand and explain.

This volume identifies three sub-groups of outsiders: tavernkeepers, actors, and prostitutes. We may deal with these three sub-groups, but we must always retain the idea that they overlap as categories (most especially that actors and tavernkeepers may have also been assumed to have been prostitutes) and also that there are other categories of outsider with which they should be considered in analysis. I have dealt with the question of whether they would have had self-generated writings or 'tellings' that expressed their own sub-cultures. I suspect that they would have done, but that it may have been oral not written down. If it did exist, then it seems not to have come down to us. It is impossible for us to articulate their own sub-culture as they saw, experienced, and expressed it. Byzantium does provide an example—an example rather than a model though—of how one society in the past has grappled with the interaction with outsiders, both true foreigners migrating into the metropolitan heartland

70 Cyril Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome* (London, 1980), 3.

71 Rafael Behr, *Politics: A Survivor's Guide* (London, 2023), 45.

from abroad, but also these 'strange others,' people who are clearly 'people like us' but who in surprising ways are *not* like us when they move from the provinces to Constantinople. We have before us an example of a complex society with a major urban metropolitan centre that managed the interactions with outsider groups in different ways. The past is a foreign country. We cannot follow Byzantium as a model; however, it provides an example that we can learn from carefully and rigorously, understanding our sources clearly and fully, and finally explaining our findings clearly to our fellow citizens.

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