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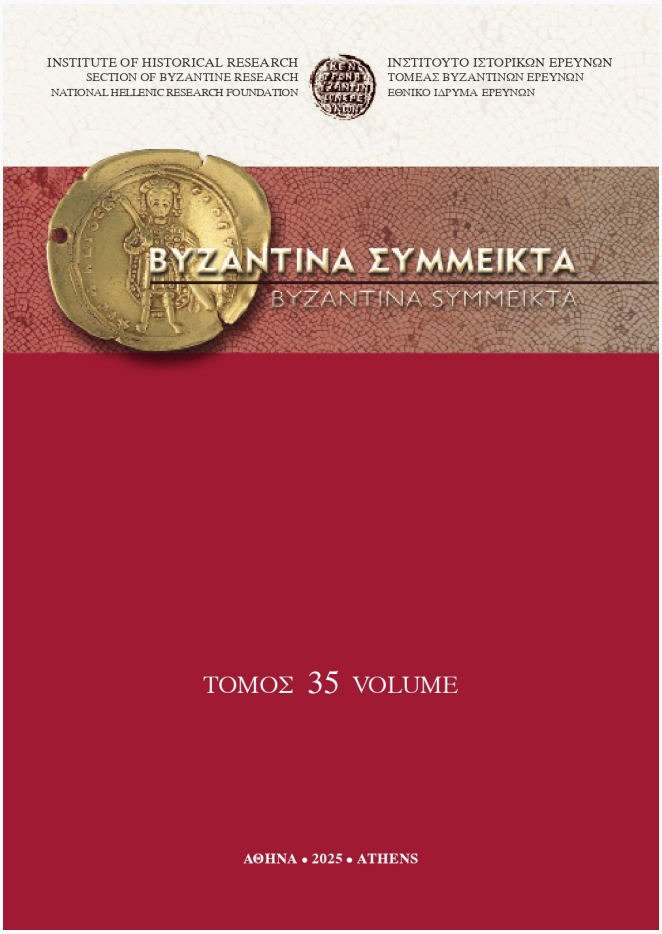

Eurasian land routes and the development of hesychast psycho-physiological techniques in the thirteenth Century:

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Eurasian Land Routes and the Development of Hesychast Psycho-physiological Techniques in the Thirteenth Century: New Perspectives on Byzantine Orthodoxy and the Global Middle Ages

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Chrysovalantis Kyriacou

Eurasian Land Routes and the Development of Hesychast Psycho-physiological Techniques in the Thirteenth Century: New Perspectives on Byzantine Orthodoxy and the Global Middle Ages

Mādhavacandra's *Amṛtasiddhi*, the earliest Yoga manual in Sanskrit, was probably composed in the Deccan Plateau of Southern India sometime during the second half of the eleventh century CE and certainly before 1160, when the earliest dated manuscript was copied[1]. This important text pays particular attention to breathing control (*prānāyāma*)[2], the alpha and omega of *haṭha* Yoga[3]. Around two centuries later, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), the great Sufi master of Ikonion (Seljuk Konya), taught his students to control their breath at all times[4]. Not long after Rūmī, another Sufi master, the Persian 'Alā al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 1336), instructed his disciples to sit cross-legged when reciting the Muslim confession of faith (*shahāda*)

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1. J. Mallinson – P.-D. Szántó, *The Amṛtasiddhi and Amṛtasiddhimūla. The earliest texts of the Haṭhayoga Tradition*, Pondicherry 2021, 3.

2. *The Amṛtasiddhi*, 116-118, 130-131; cf. G. Feuerstein, *The Encyclopedia of Yoga and Tantra*, Boston – London 2011, 276-277, s.v. Prānāyāma.

3. According to Feuerstein, *The Encyclopedia of Yoga and Tantra*, 147 (Hatha-Yoga), *haṭha* implies a positive approach towards the body and also has "a deeper, esoteric significance. Thus, its two component syllables, *ha* and *tha*, are frequently explained as standing for the microcosmic sun and moon respectively, while *yoga* is the union between these two psychoenergetic principles".

4. Jalal al-Din Rumi, *The Masnavi (Book Two)*, trans. J. Mojaddedi, Oxford – New York 2007, 5.

and to control their breath, causing "the energy of the word '*Allāh* to reach their heart and burn all desires contained therein"[5]. Other Sufi teachers in Central Asia and Anatolia during the thirteenth and fourteenth century focused on the navel as a key centre for meditative breathing[6]. Sometime before Simnānī, the Kabbalist Rabbi Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia (d. *post* 1291) –a Spanish Jew who wandered in the Near East, Greece, Italy and Sicily– associated the meditative pronunciation of the Hebrew letters with divine power, providing instructions on respiration[7]. And in the Eastern Christian tradition this is how Gregory of Sinai (d. *c.* 1346), a key figure of pre-Palamite Hesychasm on Mount Athos, taught less experienced monks to pray:

> ... ἀπὸ μὲν πρωΐας καθεζόμενος ἐν σπιθαμιαίᾳ καθέδρᾳ, ἄγξον τὸν νοῦν ἐκ τοῦ ἡγεμονικοῦ ἐν καρδίᾳ, καὶ κράτει αὐτὸν ἐν αὐτῇ, κύπτων δὲ ἐμπόνως, καὶ τὰ στέρνα, ὦμους τε καὶ τὸν τράχηλον σφοδρῶς περιαλγῶν, ἐπιμόνως κράζε νοερῶς, ἢ ψυχικῶς τὸ, Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με· εἶτα διὰ τὸ στενὸν καὶ ἐπίπονον, ἴσως καὶ ἀηδῶς ... μεταλλάττων τὸν νοῦν εἰς τὸ ἕτερον ἥμισυ, λέγε· Υἱὲ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐλέησόν με· καὶ πολλαχῶς λέγων τὸ ἥμισυ, συνεχῶς οὐκ ὀφείλεις ἐκ ῥᾳθυμίας μεταλλάττειν αὐτά ... κράτει δὲ καὶ τὸν ἀνασπασμὸν τοῦ πνεύμονος, ἵνα μὴ ἀδεῶς πνῇς· ἡ γὰρ αὔρα τῶν πνευμάτων ἀπὸ καρδίας ἀναδιδομένη, σκοτίζει τὸν νοῦν καὶ ῥιπίζει τὴν διάνοιαν ἐκεῖθεν αὐτὸν ἀπείργων, καὶ ἢ αἰχμάλωτον τῇ λήθῃ παραδίδωσιν, ἢ ἄλλα ἀντ᾽ ἄλλων μελετῶν αὐτὸν παρασκευάζει ...[8].

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5. J. J. Elias, Sufi *Dhikr* between meditation and prayer, in: *Meditation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. H. Eifring, London 2013, 195-196.

6. J. S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford 1971, 202, 206-207 (n. 2), 268 (n. 1); A. Rigo, Gregorio il sinaita, in: *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition*, ed. C. G. Conticello – V. Conticello, v. 2, Turnhout 2002, 100-101; S. Bashir, Movement and stillness: the practice of Sufi *dhikr* in fourteenth-century Central Asia, in: *Meditation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, 203-204.

7. Abraham Abulafia, The Light of the Intellect, in: *Pray without ceasing. The way of the invocation in World Religions*, ed. P. Laude, Bloomington, Indiana 2006, 28-30; cf. G. Scholem, *Major trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York 1995, 126-129 (biography), 139 (breathing control and Yoga).

8. Gregory of Sinai, *Περὶ ἡσυχίας καὶ περὶ τῶν δύο τρόπων τῆς προσευχῆς*, in: PG 150, col. 1313AB; English translation by D. Balfour, The works of Gregory the Sinaïte (ΣΤ΄), *Θεολογία* 54 (1983), 156, 160. Although Balfour renders ἡγεμονικὸν as "brain", I would suggest translating it as "rational part of the soul". Some ancient philosophers (e.g., Plato and perhaps also Cleanthes and Posidonios) located the rational part of the soul in the

Scholars have long pointed out similarities between Yoga and the "psycho-physiological" instructions concerning the Jesus Prayer in Byzantine Orthodox Hesychast asceticism during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries[9]. It was these very practices that instigated opposition by Barlaam of Calabria (d. 1348) in 1337, who criticised and mocked Hesychast monks as ὀμφαλοψύχους, "men with their souls in the navel", ultimately leading Gregory Palamas (d. 1357) to defend them in his *Triads*[10]. In defending Hesychasm and the Hesychasts Palamas drew a distinction between the unknowable and imparticipable divine essence and the manifested and participable divine energies, a teaching that was rejected by the anti-Palamites as the basis of polytheism[11]. As noted by John Meyendorff (1926-1992), "whatever may have been its origin, the [praying] method was known very widely throughout the monasteries, and it was interpreted in a way that conformed completely with the spiritual tradition of the East: Barlaam of Calabria was practically the only man who attacked it; on that point he was disavowed by Akindynos and the later anti-Palamites"[12].

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head, see: P. A. Meijer, *Stoic Theology. Proofs for the Existence of the Cosmic God and of the Traditional Gods, including a Commentary on Cleanthes' Hymn on Zeus*, Delft 2007, 114.

9. For the term "psycho-physiological", see A Monk of the Eastern Church [L. Gillet] – K. Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, Crestwood, New York 1987, 107-109.

10. E.g., Gregory Palamas, *Λόγοι ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχαζόντων*, ed. P. K. Chrestou, Thessalonike 1999, 116.I.2.11, 222.II.1.1, 224.II.1.2. English translation of ὀμφαλόψυχοι by J. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans. G. Lawrence, Crestwood, New York 1998, 46, whose study on Palamas (originally published in French in 1959) is a classic. From recent bibliography, see the comprehensive, well-referenced and balanced chapter by I. Polemis, The Hesychast Controversy: Events, Personalities, Texts and Trends, in: *A Companion to the Intellectual Life of the Palaeologan Period*, ed. S. Kotzabassi, Leiden – Boston 2023, 345-398 (esp. at 349-351 on "navel-gazing").

11. On Hesychasm and its opponents see also the chapters by A. Rigo (Gregory of Sinai), R. E. Sinkewicz (Gregory Palamas), J. Nadal-Cañellas (Gregory Akindynos), and Y. Spiteris – C. G. Conticello (Nicholas Cabasilas), in: *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition*, 35-410.

12. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 25; cf. 140: "It is important to notice that none of these works of Palamas contain any reference to the breathing method; he only talked about it in order to defend it against Barlaam". For similar views, see: D. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West. Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*, Cambridge – New York 2004, 235; J. Nadal-Cañellas, *La résistance d'Akindynos à Grégoire Palamas. Enquête historique, avec traduction et commantaire de quatre traités édités récemment*, v. 2, Leuven,

Unlike thirteenth– and fourteenth-century Byzantine monks, the Assumptionist scholar Martin Jugie (1878-1954) viewed the bodily aspects of the Jesus Prayer with suspicion. Jugie, the "inventor of Palamism" as a heretical category[13], argued in 1931 that "la fausse mystique a commencé à pénétrer dans le monachisme byzantin à l'époque où le schism était virtuellement accompli, c'est-à-dire pendant la période qui va de Photius à Michel Cérulaire"[14]. "Palamite mysticism" was, thus, for Jugie nothing else but a symptom of the spiritual corruption of Eastern Christianity after the so-called "schism of 1054". How different was the perception of the Jesuit Irénée Hausherr (1891-1978), for whom Hesychast prayer instructions paralleled Ignatius Loyola's (d. 1556) *Spiritual Exercises* and for whom "les initiateurs du movement hésychaste étaient trop au fait de la tradition pour tomber dans cette erreur", namely to attribute "une efficacité infaillable" to their prayer method[15]! Hausherr's seminal studies on the origins and development of the Hesychast prayer bring to the fore Gregory of Sinai's Byzantine sources, which we will discuss below[16].

Probably the first scholar to associate Hesychasm and Yoga techniques was the Romanian historian of religion Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) in 1936. Eliade was strictly interested in the technical similarities between the two traditions[17]. A comparative perspective was also followed by the Orientalist

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28-103; N. Russell, The Hesychast Controversy, in: *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, ed. A. Kaldellis – N. Siniossoglou, Cambridge 2017, 497-501.

13. N. Russell, *Gregory Palamas and the Making of Palamism in the Modern Age*, Oxford 2019, *passim*, but note the author's observation (at 7) that Jugie "was not seeking to undermine contemporary Orthodoxy's esteem for Palamas. He believed that Palamas' ideas had been quietly abandoned after his death and had long since become a dead letter ... His ultimate purpose was to persuade the Orthodox to submit to the magisterium of the Roman Church as the only infallible guide to truth".

14. M. Jugie, Les origines de la méthode d'oraison des hésychastes, *EO* 30 (1931), 185.

15. I. Hausherr, Les grandes courants de la spiritualité orientale, *OCP* 1 (1935), 133; cf. I. Hausherr, Les Exercises Spirituels de Saint Ignace et la méthode d'oraison hésychaste, *OCP* 20 (1954), 7-26; A. Rigo, La spiritualità bizantina e le sue scuole nell'opera di Irénée Hausherr, *OCP* 70 (2004), 203.

16. I. Hausherr, *La méthode d'oraison hésychaste*, Rome 1927; I. Hausherr, *Noms du Christ et voies d'oraison* (OCA 157), Rome 1960.

17. M. Eliade, *Yoga: essai sur les origines de la mystique indienne*, Paris 1936, 86-88. An expanded version of this book was published in Paris in 1954 and was translated in

Ranieri Gnoli in his essay on Hesychasm and Yoga (1953), which suggested the transmission of meditative practices from the Hindu-Buddhist world to the Islamic Near East and from there, through cultural agents like Abulafia and Gregory of Sinai, to Mount Athos and Western Europe[18].

Since then, much ink has been spilled comparing the similarities and differences of Yoga, Sufism, Kabbalah and Hesychasm, and debating over the question (and direction) of possible inter-faith influences. It is beyond the scope of the present article to provide a comprehensive literary survey or to offer an exhaustive analysis of each and every element in these meditative currents. It should be noted that many studies reflect the tendency to approach these traditions as concrete and well-defined systems, paying less attention to internal polyphony (e.g., the plurality of praying routines in Hesychasm), and the historical context(s) and geographical routes of the transmission of ideas and practices in the medieval period[19].

English as M. Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, trans. W. R. Trask, Princeton, New Jersey 1969, 63-65, 410.

18. R. Gnoli, Hesychasm and Yoga, *East and West* 4 (1953), 98-100.

19. Examples include: A. Bloom, *L'esicasmo yoga cristiano*, Naples 1955 (an Orthodox comparative perspective on Hesychasm and Yoga); S. H. Nasr, The Prayer of the Heart in Hesychasm and Sufism, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31 (1986), 195-203 (a comparative examination of the two traditions); Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 139-140 ("... any connection between [the Jesus Prayer] and Hindu *yoga*, which some people have tried to establish, could only have been indirect and fairly remote. But it does seem extremely probable, if not certain, that there was some Islamic influence; the parallels between the Moslem *dhikr* and the method of Nicephorus are too striking, and personal contacts –journeys of monks to Palestine and Egypt, and the Moslem occupation of Asia Minor– were too frequent for it to have been possible for such similar religious phenomena to have existed at the same time without mutual influence"); A. Rigo, Le origini delle tecniche psicofisiche d'orazione del Cristianesimo bizantino, in: *Estética y religión. El discurso del cuerpo y los sentidos*, ed. A. Vega – J. A. Rodriguez Tous – R. Bouso, Barcelona 1998, 257-266 (traces the origins of the Hesychast method of prayer in the interaction of Muslim, Jewish and Christians in Asia Minor); M. Vâlsan, *Sufismo ed esicasmo. Esoterismo islamico ed esoterismo cristiano*, ed. C. Mutti, Rome 2000 (an esoteric view of Sufism and Hesychasm); C. Greppi, *L'origine del metodo psicofisico esicasta. Analisi di un antico testo indiano: l'Amṛtakuṇḍa,* Rome 2008 (a Sanskrit text that might have reached Byzantine Hesychasts through translations by Sufi scholars); M. Balivet, *Islam mystique et révolution armée dans les Balkans ottomans. Vie du cheikh Bedreddîn le "hallaj des Turcs" (1358/59-1416)*, Piscataway, New Jersey 2011, 33, 59 (n. 49) (leaves open the possibility of Sufi assimilation of Hesychast practices and language in

Solving the complex riddle of Byzantine monastic changes and inter-faith encounters behind the Jesus Prayer method spreading in thirteenth-century Byzantium would require an entire volume. This exploratory study is both a starting point and a potential map for this greater journey, sketching a methodological framework and posing *desiderata* for future research. It presents some preliminary thoughts around the transmission and appropriation –from the Hindu-Buddhist world to Central Asia, the Near East, and Byzantium– of meditative bodily techniques that involved respiratory control. Possible connections between Eastern (Hindu-Buddhist, Sufi, Kabbalist and Byzantine Orthodox) and Western meditative practices (e.g., in the case of Rhineland mystics) need to be addressed in a separate study[20]. It should be clarified beforehand that even if these meditative

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the early fifteenth century for the purpose of proselytisation); M.-H. Congourdeau, Cultural Exchanges between Jews and Christians in the Palaeologan Period, in: *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures*, ed. R. Bonfil – O. Irshai – G. G. Stroumsa – R. Talgam, Leiden – Boston 2012, 719-720 (points out similarities between Gregory of Sinai/Gregory Palamas and Abraham Abulafia); L. Kamperidis, Ἡσυχασμὸς καὶ Σουφισμός, *Θεολογία* 84 (2013), 209-236 (sees Hesychasm and Sufism as mutually exclusive systems in fourteenth-century Asia Minor); E. Hisamatsu – R. Pattni, Yoga and the Jesus Prayer—A Comparison between aṣ̣tānga yoga in the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali and the Psycho-Physical Method of Hesychasm, *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 28 (2015), 55-75 (traces superficial similarities between Yoga and Hesychasm); R. Grierson, "We believe in your Prophet": Rumi, Palamas, and the Conversion of Anatolia, *Mawlana Rumi Review* 2 (2011), 96-124 (suggests parallels and dissimilarities between Sufism and Hesychasm). Generally on cultural exchanges between the Hindu-Buddhist and the Greek worlds in Antiquity, see T. McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought. Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies*, New York 2002.

20. Important work has been done already on Meister Eckhart (d. *c.* 1328): A. Wilke, Kritik des Vergleichs Meister Eckhart und Samkaracarya, *Asiatische Studien* 48 (1994), 1389-1396; G. Feuerstein, Meister Eckhart – Mystic or Yogin?, in: *The Essence of Yoga: Essays on the Development of Yogic Philosophy from the Vedas to Modern Times*, eds G. Feuerstein – J. Miller, Rochester Vermont 1997, 436-481; A. Ignat, Humility in the writings of Meister Eckhart and Gregory Palamas, *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 2 (2011), 22-42; Y. Schwartz, Meister Eckhart and Moses Maiomonides: from Judaeo-Arabic Rationalism to Christian Mysticism, in: *A Companion to Meister Eckhart*, ed. J. M. Hackett, Leiden – Boston 2013, 389-414; J. Cooper, The pathless path of prayer: is there a meditation method in Meister Eckhart?, in: *Meditation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Eifring, 123-135; S. Zarrabi-Zadeh, Comparative Mysticism and the Problem of Interpretation:

currents sometimes appear to superficially overlap, they are considered and discussed here as different traditions, though without necessarily being sharp-edged systems. More specifically, the article aims at charting the channels (political, economic, cultural, religious, and social) that made such interactions possible, offering suggestions as to why spiritual mentors like Rūmī, Abulafia and Gregory of Sinai sought similar paths to the divine in the same chronological period and broader geographical region. Hesychasm, therefore, is examined as part of a bigger picture, finding its place in the labyrinth of global developments and interconnected nods –a nexus weaved by the threads of mobility, agency and interaction– which characterise the recent turn of scholars to the "Global Middle Ages"[21].

The cataclysmic expansion of the Mongols in the thirteenth century produced a domino effect that enhanced human mobility and inter-faith encounters. Their hordes conquered Isfahan in 1237, sacked Tiflis in 1238, burned Kiev in 1240 and pillaged Bagdad in 1258[22]. In the 1240s and 1250s the Mongols invaded the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum and Northern Syria, capturing or destroying Theodosioupolis (Erzerum), Ikonion and Aleppo and bringing Anatolia and the Near East under their sphere of influence[23].

These victories gave rise to the Mongol Khanate in modern Iran, Iraq

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Rumi and Meister Eckhart, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 26 (2015), 287-306; S. Zarrabi-Zadeh, Sufism and Christian Mysticism: The Neoplatonic Factor, in: *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. L. Ridgeon, London - New York 2020, 330-342.

21. E.g.: *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Global Medieval Life and Culture*, 3 vols, gen. ed. J. Salisbury, London - New York 2008; J. Le Goff, *Must we divide History into periods?*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise, New York 2015; C. Holmes – N. Standen (ed.), *The Global Middle Ages* (= *Past & Present* 238, Issue Supplement 13 (2018); E. Hermans, *A Companion to the Global Early Middle Ages*, Amsterdam 2020; G. Heng, *The Global Middle Ages: An Introduction*, Cambridge 2021; S. Oldenburg – K. M. S. Bezio (ed.), *Religion and the Medieval and Early Modern Global Marketplace*, London - New York 2021; H. Young – K. Mudan Finn, *Global Medievalism: An Introduction*, Cambridge 2022; *Global Byzantium: Papers from the Fiftieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. L. Brubaker – R. Darley – D. Reynolds, London – New York 2022; D. Heng, *Southeast Asian Interconnections: Geography, Networks and Trade*, Cambridge 2023.

22. T. May, *The Mongol Empire*, Edinburgh 2018, 107-108, 112, 166-167, 334.

23. T. May, Mongol conquest strategy in the Middle East, in: *The Mongols' Middle East. Continuity and Transformation in Ilkhanid Iran*, ed. B. De Nicola – C. Melville, Leiden - Boston 2016, 13-37.

and Azerbaijan –the Ilkhanate (1260-1335). Its vast territory was inhabited by Persians, Turks, Arabs, Armenians, Kurds and Georgians, and it was the home of Muslims, Christians (East/West Syrian and Byzantine Orthodox), Jews, Zoroastrians and Buddhists[24]. Although Muslim rule after the seventh century had severely weakened Buddhist presence in Central Asia, the coming of the Mongols in the thirteenth century marked a revival. Hülegü Khan (r. 1260-1265), who favoured the Tantric Tibetan schools, supported the founding of Buddhist shrines and opened his court to Tibetan, Kashmiri and Indian monks. The pro-Buddhist policy of Ilkhanid rulers lasted until the conversion of Ghazan (r. 1295-1304), Hülegü's great-grandson, to Islam, which sparked anti-Buddhist persecution (e.g., destruction of Buddhist shrines and monasteries) and Islamisation[25].

However, during the nearly four decades of the Buddhist revival, scholars and spiritual teachers of different faiths had the opportunity to engage themselves in peaceful dialogue and debate with each other. A good example is Simnānī's forced disputation with Buddhist monks in the Ilkhanid summer camp in 1288[26]. Rashīd al-Dīn (d. 1318), a Persian-born Jew from a family of physicians, converted to Islam and served the Ilkhanids from various posts (including that of the vizier), finding the time to compose voluminous historical, theological and philosophical works. Although Rashīd al-Dīn refuted Buddhism, he respected and praised Tantric Buddhism, incorporating a version of the Buddha's life in his *History of India*[27]. Translations of the Sanskrit *Amṛtakuṇḍa* into Persian and later into Arabic (the first of the four completed *c.* 1212), became a vehicle for the transmission of yogic, primarily breathing, techniques into Islam and from there, as argued by Caterina Greppi, into Byzantine Hesychasm[28].

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24. J. Brack, Rashīd al-Dīn: Buddhism in Iran and the Mongol Silk Roads, in: *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, Intellectuals*, eds M. Biran – J. Brack – F. Fiaschetti, Oakland, California 2020, 215; May, *The Mongol Empire*, 223-225.

25. Brack, Rashīd al-Dīn, 215-216.

26. Brack, Rashīd al-Dīn, 217.

27. Brack, Rashīd al-Dīn, 217-229.

28. C. W. Ernst, The Islamization of Yoga in the *Amrtakunda* Translations, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 13 (2003), 199-226; Greppi, *L'origine del metodo psicofisico esicasta*; C. W. Ernst, A fourteenth-century Persian account of breath control and meditation, in: *Yoga in Practice*, ed. D. Gordon White, Princeton, New Jersey – Oxford 2012, 133-139; J.

Meditative wisdom and technique travelled. They used the Eastern and Western Imperial Highways (*shah-rah-i sharqi* and *shah-rah-i gharbi* respectively) –along which there existed at least seven Buddhist shrines– that connected the key cities of Balkh, Sultānīyeh, Tabriz and Ikonion. Tabriz, the largest city in Persia and a major (if not *the* major) political, economic and cultural centre, was also connected to Isfahan, Kirman, Shiraz, Hurmuz and the Persian Gulf. To the north-west, the road passing from Tabriz was linked, through the Armenian highlands and the mighty Pontic Alps, to Trebizond, the window of the Christian world to the Ilkhanate[29]. Provided that mountain passages were accessible, a slow-moving caravan would have needed around 100 days to cover the distance between Trebizond and Tabriz, while the maritime journey from Trebizond to Constantinople would have lasted between 5 days and a month, depending on weather conditions[30].

Wisdom and technique might have profited from diplomatic contacts and the forging of alliances. Emperor Alexios II of Trebizond (r. 1297-1330) maintained good relations with the Ilkhanids as their client and Mongols or Georgians with Mongol names were established in Trebizond[31].

Dupuche, Tantri aspects of *Hawdmā' al-hayāt* ("The Pool of the Water of Life"): an Arabic text developed from Hindu Sources, *The South Asian Journal of Religion and Philosophy* 1 (2019), 1-22.

29. D. Jacoby, Late Byzantium between the Mediterranean and Asia: trade and material culture, in: *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557). Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture*, ed. S. T. Brooks, New York - London 2006, 24; R. Prazniak, Ilkhanid Buddhism: traces of a passage in Eurasian history, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56 (2014), 658, 653; B. Dashdondog, The Black Sea slave trade in the 13th-14th century that changed the political balance in the Near East, *Golden Horde Review* 7 (2019), 283-294. On the Crimean Peninsula as a contact zone between Mongols and Byzantines, see: S. G. Bocharov, Between the Mongols and Byzantium. The incorporation of the Crimean Peninsula into the State of the Golden Horde, in: *Migration and Identity in Eurasia: From Ancient Times to the Middle Ages*, ed. V. Cojocaru – A.-I. Pázsint, Cluj-Napoca 2021, 269-284.

30. M. Koromila, *Η Μαρία των Μογγόλων*, Athens 2008, 132-133, 135. On the caravan route between Tabriz and Trebizond in the nineteenth century, see: Anonymous Correspondent [D. A. H. Wright], Trebizond and the Persian transit trade, *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 31 (1944), 289-301.

31. R. Shukurov, *The Byzantine Turks, 1204-1461*, Leiden - Boston 2016, 256, 258, 263-268, 282-283, 303, 314, 357; S. P. Karpov, *Ιστορία της Αυτοκρατορίας της Τραπεζούντας*, trans. E. Krichevskaya – A. Eustathiou, Athens 2017, 419-420.

Traces of Mongol-named "Scythians" are also found in fourteenth-century Constantinople, Thrace and Crete, while a certain "Father Mongol" (Παπαμουγοὺλ) seems to have been a priest or monk of Turkish or Mongol origin[32]. Tabriz, the heart and crossroads of the Ilkhanate, had a Byzantine Orthodox community with a local bishop, the first of whom was George-Gregory Chioniades (d. *c.* 1320), appointed by the emperor and synod of Constantinople in the late 1290s. Chioniades received his surname –alluding to the enigmatic Jewish-Muslim group of Chiones encountered by Palamas in the fourteenth century– after studying astronomy at the famous observatory of Marāgha, close to Tabriz, around 1295/1296[33].

Some thirty years before Chioniades' scientific journey to Marāgha, around 1265, Michael VIII Palaiologos (r. 1261-1282) sent from Constantinople his young illegitimate daughter, Maria (d. 1325), to marry Hülegü, so as to seal his alliance with the powerful khan. Maria arrived to the Ilkhanid court only after Hülegü's death, marrying instead Abaqa (r. 1265-1282), Hülegü's son and successor. During the seventeen years of her stay in the Ilkhanate, until Abaqa's death, Maria remained Christian and even founded an Orthodox church in Tabriz. She eventually returned to Constantinople and became a nun. Her Mongol experience accompanied her in the memory of later generations, being the renovator of the "Virgin of the Mongols" (Παναγία ἡ Μουχλιώτισσα) nunnery in Constantinople[34].

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32. Shukurov, *The Byzantine Turks*, 93, 178; cf. 232 (a reference to what was probably a Mongol shaman in late thirteenth-century Constantinople). A certain Μουγούλης appears in the πρακτικὸν of πρωτοκυνηγὸς John Vatatzes (1334) from the Acts of Lavra: *Actes de Lavra III* [Archives de l'Athos 10], ed. P. Lemerle – A. Guillou – N. Svoronos – D. Papachryssanthou, Paris 1979, no 122.18,42.

33. H. Usener, *Kleine Schrifften*, v. 3, Leipzig 1914, 323-371; J. Preiser-Kapeller, *Civitas Thauris*. The Significance of Tabriz in the spatial frameworks of Christian merchants and ecclesiastics in the 13th and 14th centuries, in: *Politics, Patronage and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th-15th Century Tabriz*, ed. J. Pfeiffer, Leiden-Boston 2014, 271-276. For a recent exploration of the identity of the Chiones (with rich bibliography), see: E. Katafylis, Boundary-building and socio-religious identity: Chiones and their debate with Gregory Palamas, in: *Identities, Boundaries and Connectivities in the Late Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Mediterranean: Reception and Reality*, ed. C. Kyriacou – C. Dendrinos, Berlin (in preparation).

34. Georges Pachymérès, *Relations historiques*, v. 1, ed. A. Failler [CFHB 24/1], Paris 1984, 235.III.3; N. Teteriatnikov, The place of the nun Melania (the Lady of the Mongols)

Despina Khatun, as Maria was respectfully called by her subjects in the Ilkhanate, must have had some knowledge of the Buddhist traditions and practices, since the Ilkhanid summer camp near Lake Van was close to a number of Buddhist shrines flourishing during the period of Buddhist revival preceding Ghazan's reign[35].

Wisdom and technique also wore the dusty shoes of the refugee and the wandering mystic. Facing internal conflict and the imminent tsunami of a Mongol attack against Balkh (1220), five-year old Rūmī and his family emigrated from Balkh to Samarkand (*c.* 1212/1213) before finding a new home in Ikonion around 1229. Bahā' Walad (d. 1231), his father, was a Sufi master who founded a school at Ikonion, enjoying the support of the local Seljuk ruler. Shams-i Tabrīzī (d. 1248), Rūmī's reverend mentor, came from Tabriz. The two men met for the first time in 1244; according to some accounts, their encounter occurred outside a caravanserai at Ikonion[36]. The city was also one of the places where 'Ibn Arabī (d. 1240), the great Andalusian Sufi, taught between 1205 and 1221[37]. Ikonion and its Sufi masters attracted believers of other religions as well. Rūmī is reported by Aflākī (d. 1360), his hagiographer, to have been visited by Orthodox monks and Jewish rabbis; some of these visitors were so much impressed by him that ultimately became his disciples. According to the same source, Rūmī meditated at St Chariton's (or "Plato's" in Aflākī) monastery near Ikonion, and he was allegedly praised by the abbot as equal to the prophets of the Old Testament[38].

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in the Deesis Program of the Inner Narthex of Chora, Constantinople, *CahArch* 43 (1995), 163-184; E. C. Ryder, The Despoina of the Mongols and her patronage at the church of the *Theotokos ton Mougoulion*, *Journal of Modern Hellenism* 27 (2009-2010), 71-102; Preiser-Kapeller, *Civitas Thauris*, 271-272; R. Prazniak, *Sudden Appearances: The Mongol Turn in Commerce, Belief, and Art*, Honolulu 2019, 55-77.

35. Prazniak, *Sudden Appearances*, 67-68.

36. A. Iqbal, *The life and work of Jalal-ud-din Rumi*, Islamabad 1991, 48-61, 108-116; J. Mojaddedi, Introduction, in: Jalal al-Din Rumi, *The Masnavi (Book Two)*, xx-xxi.

37. Balivet, *Islam mystique*, 6-11.

38. Aflākī, *Les saints des derviches tourneurs*, v. 2, trans. C. Huart, Paris 1922, 67-70, 96, 111-112; cf. 358-359; A. Rigo, Jalâl ad-dîn Rûmî e l'abate di S. Caritone, in: *Östliches-Westliches. Studien zur vergleichenden Geistes-und Religionsgeschichte-Hommage an Cyrill J. C. von Korvin-Krasinski*, ed. M. Sladek, Heidelberg 1995, 173-194; Balivet, *Islam mystique*, 16-24; Grierson, "We believe in your Prophet", 102-104.

From Ikonion it was easy for wisdom and technique to continue their journey into Byzantine territory. Ikonion and the Laskarid capital (1204-1261) of Nicaea were connected by a road passing from Philomelion, Amorion and Dorylaion. Provided that the roads were open and safe, it would be possible for the traveler from Tabriz to pass from Theodosioupolis, Sebasteia and Ankyra on the way to Nicaea. From Sebasteia one could travel towards the Cilician coast through Caesarea and Melitene, ultimately reaching the port of Aigae[39]. The sea was also a gateway into the Byzantine world. Under Theodore II Laskaris (1254-1258), the port of Smyrna was open to luxury commodities –along with people and ideas– from Egypt, India and other parts of the East[40].

The crucial zone of interaction, however, was most probably inland, as suggested by developments in medicine and pharmacology. In Laskarid Nicaea the Byzantine physician and pharmacologist Nicholas Myrepsos, active around the mid-thirteenth century, collected recipes for remedies from Galen, as well as from Italian, Persian and Arab experts. This practice, which embraced the translation of Arabic medical texts, continued in Palaiologan Constantinople by John Aktouarios (d. *c.* 1330), the aforementioned George-Gregory Chioniades, Constantine Melitiniotes (d. 1307) and others. Perhaps the Mongol sack of Bagdad in 1258, on the eve of the Byzantine re-conquest of Constantinople in 1261, facilitated the transmission of medical and pharmacological knowledge[41]. Much like Byzantium, the Seljuk Sultanate

39. The Sufi master Dīn Rāzī Dāya (d. 1256), who taught a meditative practice similar to that of Simnānī, was active in Caesarea (1221) and Melitene (1234), see: Rigo, Gregorio il sinaita, 100. There is vast bibliography on the Byzantine road system of Asia Minor. The reconstruction above depends on the following studies: A. Avramea, Land and Sea Communication, Fourth-Fifteenth Centuries, in: *The Economic History of Byzantium*, v. 1, ed. A. E. Laiou, Washington, D. C. 2002, 75-76; K. Belke, Transport and Communication, in: *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia from the end of Late Antiquity until the coming of the Turks*, ed. P. Niewöhner, Oxford 2017, 31 (map); K. Belke, Roads and routes in northwestern and adjoining parts of central Asia Minor: from Romans to Byzantium, with some remarks on their fate during the Ottoman period up to the 17th century, *Gephyra* 20 (2020), 79-98, noting (at 87) that the Seljuks "developed [their] own lines of communication, which to a great extent followed the routes established by the Romans and the Byzantines".

40. Jacoby, Late Byzantium between the Mediterranean and Asia, 20.

41. D. Benett, Aristotle and the Caliph's dream. Aspects of medical translations, in: *Medical books in the Byzantine world*, ed. B. Zipser, Bologna 2013, 82-83, 90-93;

was a place where being learned was highly appreciated as an expression of a civilised and noble character[42].

What is of particular interest is that in the 1320s John Aktouarios wrote a treatise *On Psychic Pneuma*, exploring the circulation of air in the human body (*pneuma*, πνεῦμα) and its effect on physiology. John's treatise, building on Galen and the earlier Byzantine and Arabic traditions, addressed the monk Joseph the Philosopher (d. *c.* 1330) in Latin-ruled Ithaca, something that reflects the increased interest of educated Byzantines (monks included) in science and philosophy, placing under the microscope respiration and theories of psycho-somatic unity. John's argument was that a healthy life was the *sine qua non* for spiritual purification and contemplation[43]. For Galen, whom John had studied, the outer air entering the lungs becomes vital air (*ζωτικὸν πνεῦμα*) as is heated inside the body, ultimately reaching the brain, where it becomes psychic air (*ψυχικὸν πνεῦμα*), affecting the nerves and producing sensation and voluntary motion[44]. While John accepted Galen's theory, he stressed the role of digestion in the production of *pneumata* and seems to have considered psychic air as the very "vehicle"

P. Bouras-Vallianatos, *Innovation in Byzantine Medicine. The Writings of John Zacharias Aktouarios (c. 1275-c. 1330)*, Oxford 2020, 9. On the dialogue between Byzantine and Jewish pharmacology, *Collecting Recipes. Byzantine and Jewish Pharmacology in Dialogue*, ed. L. Lehmhaus – M. Martelli, Boston – Berlin 2020.

42. D. Gutas, *Η αρχαία ελληνική σκέψη στον αραβικό πολιτισμό. Το κίνημα των ελληνοαραβικών μεταφράσεων στη Βαγδάτη κατά την πρώιμη αββασιδική περίοδο (2ος-4ος/8ος-10ος αιώνας)*, trans. M. Makri, Athens 2001, 245. On Byzantine-Arabic translations, see: M. Mavroudi, Exchanges with Arabic writers during the Late Byzantine period, in: *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, ed. Brooks, 62-75 (of particular importance for the period under consideration); M. Mavroudi, Translations from Greek into Latin and Arabic during the Middle Ages: searching for the classical tradition, *Speculum* 90 (2015), 28-59; M. Mavroudi, Byzantine translations from Arabic into Greek: old and new historiography in confluence and in conflict, *Journal of Late Antique, Islamic and Byzantine Studies* 2 (2023), 215-288. On Byzantine-Persian intellectual contacts, see: R. Shukurov, *Byzantine ideas of Persia, 650-1461*, London - New York 2024, 146-168.

43. Bouras-Vallianatos, *Innovation in Byzantine Medicine*, 139-184.

44. Galen, *On respiration and the arteries*, ed.-trans.-comm. D. J. Furley – J. S. Wilkie, Princeton, New Jersey 1984, 3-39, 73-133; Bouras-Vallianatos, *Innovation in Byzantine Medicine*, 187.

of the soul[45]. It is true that John's scientific analysis does not exactly echo the biblical perception of the heart employed by Gregory of Sinai, among other ascetic writers; yet, both Gregory and John considered inhaled air as contributing to spiritual health[46].

We can now return to Bithynia. Just 12 km southeast of Chalcedon rises Mount Auxentios, a Late Antique monastic centre, partly revived by Michael VIII to commemorate the liberation of Constantinople from the Latins[47]. Mount Auxentios belonged to what Raymond Janin (1882-1972) called "la banlieue asiatique de Constantinople"[48], a bastion of several Hesychast monks of the second half of the thirteenth century. Two noteworthy examples are Nikodemos, the first of Palamas' mentors on Mount Athos, and Neilos from Italy, a spiritual instructor to Theoleptos, later metropolitan of Philadelphia in Lydia (1283/1284-1322) and an important representative of Hesychast spirituality[49]. Between 1275 and 1282 Mount Auxentios became a hub for persecuted monks and clerics opposing Michael VIII's pro-Western policy. Neilos, Theoleptos (at the time a young married deacon), Nikephoros the Hesychast (an Italian who became a Hesychast ascetic on Mount Athos and was exiled by the emperor in Asia Minor), and the Athonite Akakios (later Patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople between 1289-1293 and 1303-1309) were all members of the Auxentian

45. Bouras-Vallianatos, *Innovation in Byzantine Medicine*, 186, 191-194, 203.

46. On the biblical concept of the heart, see J. Gather, *Teachings on the prayer of the heart in the Greek and Syrian Fathers. The significance of body and community*, Piscataway, New Jersey 2014, 45-59.

47. *ODB*, v. 1, entry Auxentios, Mount (A. M. Talbot).

48. R. Janin, La banlieue asiatique de Constantinople. Étude historique et topographique (I), *REB* 22 (1923), 281-283.

49. Νικηφόρου τοῦ Χούμνου Ἐπιτάφιος εἰς τὸν μακάριον καὶ ἁγιώτατον μητροπολίτην Φιλαδελφείας Θεόληπτον, in: *Ἀνέκδοτα. Anecdota graeca e codicibus regiis*, v. 5, ed. J. F. Boissonade, Paris 1833, 217-220; Gregory Palamas, *Λόγοι ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχαζόντων*, ed. Chrestou, 118.I.2.12, 296-298.II.2.2, 298.II.2.3, 336-337.II.2.25; Philotheos Kokkinos, *Λόγος ἐγκωμιαστικὸς εἰς τὸν βίον τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ*, ed. P. K. Chrestou, Thessalonike 2009, 78.14, 80.15, 84.21; Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 17-20, 25-26. On Theoleptos, see also: Gillet – Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 56-59; Theoleptos of Philadelph[ia], *The Monastic Discourses*, ed. R. E. Sinkewicz, Toronto 1992; A. Constantinides Hero, *The Life and Letters of Theoleptos of Philadelphia*, Brookline, Massachusetts 1994, 12-13.

circle of Hesychast anti-unionists[50]. Among these, Akakios-Athanasios was a leading personality. During his patriarchate, he embodied Hesychast spirituality not simply as "an exclusively esoteric and subjective practice [but as] a general movement of reform based on maximalism and Christian purity"[51], expanding patriarchal jurisdiction over the monasteries of Athos, which was formally affirmed by Andronikos II's (r. 1282-1328) chrysobull in 1312[52].

From Palamas' *Triads* we learn that at least two Hesychast masters of the late thirteenth century came from Italy: Neilos and Nikephoros the Hesychast[53]. Palamas relates that Nikephoros, whose instructions on prayer were severely criticised by Barlaam, had come to Athos from Italy, having

50. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 20-26; A. M. Talbot, *The Correspondence of Athanasius I Patriarch of Constantinople. Letters to the Emperor Andronicus II, members of the imperial family, and officials*, Washington, D. C. 1974, xvii; J. L. Boojamra, *Church reform in the Late Byzantine Empire. A Study for the Patriarchate of Athanasios of Constantinople*, Thessalonike 1982, 40; Constantinides Hero, *The Life and Letters of Theoleptos*, 12-13.

51. Boojamra, *Church reform*, 161.

52. Boojamra, *Church reform*, 154. On Patriarch Athanasios' pastoral guidance to the Christians of Asia Minor (1303), see: D. E. Kalomoirakis, Ὁ Οἰκουμενικὸς Πατριάρχης Ἅγιος Ἀθανάσιος Α΄ καὶ ἡ διδασκαλία του πρὸς κατοίκους τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας κατὰ το 1303, *Δελτίο Κέντρου Μικρασιατικών Σπουδών* 8 (1990), 23-50. On Andronikos II's involvement in the visual rhetoric of the Protaton, see: A. Vasilakeris, Οι τοιχογραφίες του Πρωτάτου και το πρόσωπο του αυτοκράτορα, *ΔΧΑΕ* 34 (2013), 117-128. On the Protaton frescoes as a reflection of spiritual regeneration under Patriarch Athanasios and Emperor Andronikos II, see: D. E. Kalomoirakis, "*Πρωτάτου Ἱστόρησις*": εἰκόνα ἀρχέτυπη καὶ ὁμολογιακὴ τῆς καθολικότητας τῆς ὀρθοδόξου χριστιανικῆς ἱεροκοσμικῆς ἀνθρωπολογίας καὶ πολιτογραφίας, in: *Μαργαρίται. Μελέτες στη μνήμη του Μανόλη Μπορμπουδάκη*, ed. M. S. Patedakis – K. D. Giapitsoglou, Sitia 2016, 138-188. Other Hesychast monks associated with Auxentios were Athanasios Lepentrinos and perhaps also Seliotes, Elias and Gabriel, see: Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 25-26; Chrestou, Εἰσαγωγή, in: Gregory Palamas, *Λόγοι ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχαζόντων*, 19-22.

53. Gregory Palamas, *Λόγοι ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχαζόντων*, 118.I.2.12. Neilos of Auxentios might be the same as Neilos of Sicily mentioned by George Pachymeres, *Χρονικόν*, v. 1, ed. Failler, 289.III.21, διδάσκων γλισχρεύεσθαι καὶ προμηθεῖς εἶναι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους περὶ τὴν δόσιν. According to Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 26, Pachymeres was hostile to reforms inspired by the monastic principle of "love of poverty" (φιλοπτωχία) promoted by Neilos and later by Patriarch Athanasios.

renounced the Latin faith. On Mount Athos, Nikephoros had learned from his own spiritual mentors the art of ἡσυχία, inner quietness. Wishing to help less experienced monks to achieve concentration in prayer, Nikephoros suggested a way or method (τρόπον ὑποτίθεται)[54]. In Nikephoros' treatise *On vigilance and guard of the heart* we find references on breathing that seem to echo Philistion of Locri's view that the heart warms the air circulating in the body, which is then refreshed by the lungs. Nikephoros instructed his disciples to sit and concentrate in prayer by focusing on the rhythm of respiration, since the inhaled air reaches the heart through the nose and lungs. The whole process of uniting mind and soul in the heart is compared to the joyful return of a traveler to his home, children and wife[55]. Nikephoros and, perhaps, Neilos as well, did not bring the psycho-physiological method from the West, but immersed themselves into the pre-existing Hesychast tradition already cultivated in the East. Around the same period, Abraham Abulafia, who "established ecstatic Kabbalah as one of the leading schools of Jewish thought in the Apennine peninsula and in Sicily for some centuries", created a synthesis based on various meditative traditions, both Western and Eastern. Between 1274 and 1279, namely during Michael VIII's persecution of Hesychast anti-unionists, Abulafia lived in Greece, teaching the works of Maimonides (Moshe ben Maimon, d. 1204) in Patras, Thebes and Euripos[56]. According to Moshe Idel, "Abulafia uses Greek words in his works, maybe even more than all the Kabbalists put together"; something which suggests that he might have been influenced by

54. Gregory Palamas, *Λόγοι ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχαζόντων*, 296-298.II.2.2.

55. Nikephoros The Monk [Hesychast], *Λόγος περὶ νήψεως καὶ φυλακῆς καρδίας*, in: PG 147, col. 945-966 (at 963-964). On Philistion of Locri (fourth century BCE) and Nikephoros, see: Rigo, Gregorio il sinaita, 105. Philistion's view, argues Rigo, might have reached Nikephoros through Late Antique ecclesiastical authors (e.g., Gregory of Nyssa and Theodoret of Cyrus). Although Rigo (at 102) identifies Nikephoros with the homonymous monk tried by the papal legate Thomas Agni and imprisoned in Cyprus, the two Nikephoroi must have been different persons: E. Ragia, The Laskarids and the rise of the Palaiologoi: historical memory between reality and legend in Asia Minor and Constantinople, in: *Identities, Boundaries and Connectivities*, ed. Kyriacou – Dendrinos (in preparation).

56. M. Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy, 1280-1510. A Survey*, New Haven, Connecticut 2011, *passim* (quotation at 89; stay in Greece at 31); S. Bowman, Survival in decline: Romaniote Jewry post-1204, in: *Jews in Byzantium*, ed. Bonfil – Irshai – Stroumsa – Talgam, 116; Congourdeau, Cultural Exchanges, 718.

contemporary Hesychast practices spreading among Orthodox Christian monastics in Byzantium at the time[57].

Not long after Neilos from Italy, Nikephoros the Hesychast and Abraham Abulafia, there came Gregory of Sinai, a native of Koukoulon near Klazomenae outside Smyrna. Young Gregory was taken captive during a Turkish raid, in the 1280s or early 1290s. Following his ransoming by pious Christians, Gregory travelled to Cyprus, where he became a novice under a local solitary. He later entered the Sinaitic community, where he cultivated the practical dimension of Orthodox asceticism, through austere fasting, vigils, praying with the Psalter, studying the Scriptures, participating in the liturgy, copying manuscripts and working at the monastery's kitchen and bakery. The jealousy of his fellow-monks forced Gregory to leave Sinai. He visited the Holy Land as a pilgrim and, together with his friend Gerasimos of Euripos, took a ship to Crete. It seems that Gregory and Gerasimos were seeking a spiritual instructor to initiate them into the life of ascetic contemplation (θεωρία). They became disciples of Arsenios, a Hesychast living close to Kaloi Limenes on the southern coast of Crete. According to Gregory's *Life* –written by his disciple Kallistos, one of the Hesychast patriarchs of Constantinople (1350-1353 and 1354-1363)– it was in Crete, not on Sinai or in the Holy Land, that Gregory first received instructions (e.g., on pure prayer, guard of the mind, and vigilance) that shaped his asceticism and teachings on Hesychasm[58].

A critical reading of the *Life* is necessary. As a skillful hagiographer, Kallistos exaggerates by presenting Gregory to have introduced Hesychast practices on Mount Athos, while he remains silent on the circle of Nikephoros the Hesychast and other local predecessors[59]. From what we have seen so far, it seems that the transmission and appropriation of meditative practices

57. M. Idel, The Kabbalah in Byzantium: preliminary remarks, in: *Jews in Byzantium*, eds Bonfil – Irshai – Stroumsa – Talgam, 675; Congourdeau, Cultural Exchanges, 719-720.

58. Kallistos, *Βίος καὶ πολιτεία τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Γρηγορίου τοῦ Σιναΐτου*, in: *Άγιος Γρηγόριος ο Σιναΐτης. Η δράση και η συμβολή του στη διάδοση του ησυχασμού στα Βαλκάνια. Η σλαβική μετάφραση του Βίου του κατά το αρχαιότερο χειρόγραφο*, ed. A. Delikari, Thessalonike 2004, 312-319.

59. Kallistos, *Βίος καὶ πολιτεία τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Γρηγορίου τοῦ Σιναΐτου*, 319-338; D. Balfour, Saint Gregory of Sinai's Life Story and Spiritual Profile, *Θεολογία* 53 (1982), 50-52.

mainly followed the land routes reaching Athos through the Ilkhanate, the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum and Bithynia. Although Orthodox monasticism in the Holy Land and Sinai remained very much alive in the late thirteenth century[60], the vast body of evidence on the journey of meditative wisdom and technique in the Byzantine world comes primarily from central and western Eurasia (Persia, the Black Sea region, Asia Minor and the Balkans). Already in the 1150s, Neophytos from Cyprus (d. 1219/1220), who later became a recluse monk outside Paphos, had difficulty in finding a spiritual mentor both in the Holy Land and his own island, and intended to seek an elder on Mount Latros in Asia Minor[61]. The leaders of the Hesychast group of thirteen monks incarcerated and executed by the Latins in Cyprus in 1231 came as refugees from Kalon Oros in Asia Minor[62]. And Sabbas the Young (d. 1349) –an itinerant Athonite monk who visited Cyprus, the Holy Land and Sinai in the early fourteenth century– does not seem to have acquired instructions on Hesychasm in these areas[63]. Contacts and exchanges between

60. On late thirteenth-century Sinai, the main source is the *Life* of Gregory of Sinai cited above. On the Holy Land, especially in the Crusader period, see: A. Jotischky, *The Perfection of Solitude: Hermits and Monks in the Crusader States*, University Park, Pennsylvania 1995; J. Pahlitzsch, *Graeci und Suriani im Palästina der Kreuzfahrerzeit. Beiträge und Quellen zur Geschichte des griechisch-orthodoxen Patriarchats von Jerusalem*, Berlin 2001; J. Pahlitzsch, Mediators between East and West: Christians under Mamluk Rule, *Mamluk Studies Review* 9 (2005), 31-47; J. Pahlitzsch, Networks of Greek Orthodox Monks and Clerics between Byzantium and Mamluk Syria and Egypt, in *Everything is on the Move. The Mamluk Empire as a Node in (Trans-)Regional Networks*, ed. S. Conerman, Bonn 2014, 127-143; B. Hamilton – A. Jotischky, *Latin and Greek Monasticism in the Crusader States*, Cambridge 2020. On the flourishing of Orthodox monasticism in the vicinity of Antioch during the tenth and eleventh centuries, see J. Glynias, Byzantine Monasticism on the Black Mountain West of Antioch in the 10th-11th centuries, *Studies in Late Antiquity* (2020), 408-451.

61. Neophytos the Recluse, *Τυπικὴ Διαθήκη*, in: *Ἁγίου Νεοφύτου σωζόμενα ἔργα*, online ed. I. E. Stephanes, Thessalonike 2018, 16, available at <https://www.stneophytos.org.cy/index.php/ekdoseis/syggrammata-agiou-neofytou/13-ekdoseis/121-agiou-neofytou-syggrammata-tomoi-a-st> (last accessed: 13 December 2023).

62. On the Kantara monks as Hesychasts, see: *Confession of faith of the Monks of Kantara and a synaxary on their memory*, in: C. Kyriacou, *Orthodox Cyprus under the Latins, 1191-1571: Society, Spirituality and Identities*, New York - London 2018, 233-237; cf. 8-12, 43-46 (discussion and earlier bibliography).

63. Philotheos Kokkinos, *Βίος καὶ πολιτεία τοῦ ἁγίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Σάββα τοῦ Νέου*, in: *Φιλοθέου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως τοῦ Κοκκίνου ἁγιολογικὰ ἔργα*, ed. D. G. Tsames, Thessalonike 1985, 161-325.

Orthodox Christianity in the Near East and spiritual currents coming from Central/Western Eurasia must have certainly taken place[64]; yet, the primary zone of interaction passed through the Ilkhanate and Seljuk territory.

Various forms of the Jesus Prayer, which seem to have involved a plurality of bodily techniques (including genuflection, the *orans* posture and psalmody), existed well before the thirteenth century and will not be discussed here at length[65]. What was radically new was neither the Hesychasts'

64. *Balamand* 147, a thirteenth-century Arabic Christian illuminated codex containing the hagiographical tale of Barlaam and Joasaph (a Christian retelling of the Buddha story), was probably the product of a scriptorium in Northern Syria or Northern Mesopotamia, namely Ilkhanid territory: R. E. Sminé, The miniatures of a Christian Arabic *Barlaam and Joasaph*: *Balamand* 147, *Parole de l'Orient* 18 (1993), 171-229. Generally on *Barlaam and Joasaph*, see: R. Volk, From the desert to the Holy Mountain: the beneficial story of *Barlaam and Ioasaph*, in: *Fictional Storytelling in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean and Beyond*, eds C. Cupane – B. Krönung, Leiden – Boston 2016, 401-426. On the links between Tabriz and East/West Syrians during this period, see Preiser-Kapeller, *Civitas Thauris*, 264-269, 281, 291. On the renewed interest in the religious and political symbolism of the *Barlaam and Joasaph* tale during the thirteenth and fourteenth century (including the adoption of the monastic name "Joasaph" by Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos, Palamas' patron and a Hesychast theologian on his own merit), see C. J. Hilsdale, Worldliness in Byzantium and beyond: reassessing the visual networks of *Barlaam and Ioasaph*, *The Medieval Globe* 3 (2017), 57-96.

65. H. Rydell Jonsén, The early Jesus Prayer and meditation in Greco-Roman philosophy, and S. Seppälä, Meditation in the East Syrian tradition, both in: *Meditation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Eifring, 93-106 and 107-121 respectively. From earlier bibliography, see also: Hausherr, *Noms du Christ*; Gillet – Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 23-41. On the invocation of God's name in the Old Testament, see: A. Paparnakis, *Ἡ ἐπίκληση τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη*, Thessalonike 2006. On the Office of the Hours as an expression of ceaseless prayer (cf. 1 Thess. 5:17), see: P. I. Skaltsis, *Ἡ παράδοση τῆς κοινῆς καὶ τῆς κατ' ἰδίαν προσευχῆς, μὲ εἰδικὴ ἀναφορὰ στὸ 'Ωρολόγιο τοῦ Θηκαρᾶ*, Thessalonike 2008. On bodily postures during prayer in communal and private worship, see also: Gregory of Sinai, *Περὶ ἡσυχίας καὶ περὶ τῶν δύο τρόπων τῆς προσευχῆς*, 1317BC; P. Trembelas, *Ἡ γονυκλισία ἐν ταῖς Κυριακαῖς*, Athens 1948; S. C. Gilchrist, *The orans posture in Early Christianity: a study of the body in worship* (unpublished PhD thesis), The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago 1992; S. S. Despotis, *Η Αποκάλυψη του Ιωάννη, το βιβλίο της προφητείας. Λειτουργική και συγχρονική ερμηνευτική προσέγγιση της Αποκάλυψης του Ιωάννη*, v. 1, Athens 2008, 138-173; R. Hvalvik, Praying with outstretched hands: nonverbal aspects of Early Christian prayer and the question of identity, in: *Early Christian Prayer and Identity Formation*, eds R. Hvalvik – K. O. Sandnes, Tübingen 2014, 57-90; D. Th. Hatjilazarou, Η καταγωγή και η σημασία του παλαιοχριστιανικού

bodily posture nor their control of breathing, but the fact that, sometime before Gregory of Sinai, Hesychast spiritual guides –much like Buddhist, Sufi, or Kabbalist authors around the same period– began to write treatises with more or less similar instructions concerning the psycho-physiological method. The first of these texts was a treatise on prayer attributed to Symeon the New Theologian (d. 1022), but most probably written by an anonymous author (perhaps Nikephoros the Hesychast or a certain Philotheos of Sinai) around the late twelfth or early thirteenth century and regarded by later Hesychasts as authentic[66]. Both "Deutero-Symeon" and Nikephoros the Hesychast were forerunners of Gregory of Sinai[67]. But the mixed medium for

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συνθρόνου, *ΔΧΑΕ* 40 (2019), 17-28; N. P. Frangakis, Θεολογία και οικονομία στην ακολουθία του εσπερινού της γονυκλισίας της Πεντηκοστής (unpublished MA dissertation), Aristotle University of Thessalonike 2022. Maximos of Kausokalybia (d. 1362/1363) showed fervent devotion to Christ and the Theotokos, living for large periods of his monastic career as a nomad in the tradition of holy fools; K. Ware, St. Maximos of Kapsokalyvia and Fourteenth-Century Athonite Hesychasm, in: *Καθηγήτρια. Essays presented to Joan Hussey for her 80th birthday*, ed. J. Chrysostomides, Camberley 1988, 409-430.

66. Published and discussed by Hausherr, *La méthode d'oraison hésychaste*. See also: Jugie, Les origines, 179-185; J. Darrouzès, La citation dans l'opuscule *De custodia cordis*, in: Syméon le Nouveau Théologien, *Chapitres théologiques, gnostiques et pratiques* [SC 51], Paris 1957, 116-119; Gillet – Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 43-49; Sinkewicz, The teaching of Theoleptos, in: Theoleptos of Philadelph[e]ia, *The Monastic Discourses*, 33-34; Rigo, Gregorio il sinaita, 91-101. As noted by Polemis, The Hesychast Controversy, 380, the treatise and person of Symeon were attacked by the anti-Palamite Nephon during the controversy over Palamite Hesychasm in the fourteenth century. See Demetrios Kydones [Nephon Hypopsephios], *Κατὰ τοῦ Παλαμᾶ*, in: PG 154, col. 837D-839A: Ἵνα ὡς ἐν κεφαλαίῳ τὰ τοῦ Παλαμᾶ ἄνωθεν ἀρξάμενοι, δείξωμεν συντόμως, ὅτι τὴν μὲν ὕλην τῆς αἱρέσεως οὐκ ἐπενόησε πρῶτος Παλαμᾶς, ἀλλὰ πρὸ πολλῶν χρόνων παρὰ τοῖς λεγομένοις Ἡσυχασταῖς ὡς ἐν μυστηρίῳ τὰ τῆς αἱρέσεως ταύτης ὑπεψιθυρίζετο. Καὶ δῆλον ἐξ ὧν Συμεών τις, τῆς Ξηλοκέρκου ἐπιλεγομένης ἡγούμενος, ὃν καὶ θεολόγον νέον ἐπέγραψαν οἱ τῶν τοιούτων μύσται καὶ μυσταγωγοί, ἐν ἄλλοις μὲν αὐτοῦ συγγράμμασι πολλὰ βέβηλα καὶ βλάσφημα συνεγράψατο.

67. Rigo, Gregorio il sinaita, 91-106. Pseudonymity facilitated the legitimation of a teaching. Note, however, the remarks by B. M. Metzger, Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972), 7, 14, 22: "When a given author was held to have been in personal contact with an apostle, Tertullian apparently saw no difficulty in regarding the work as essentially that of the latter ... Much more often than malevolence were love and respect the motives that prompted the production of pseudonymous works. For example, the desire to honor the founder of a philosophical school prompted the Neo-

the transmission of this method –a combination of the *viva voce* relationship between spiritual elder and disciple, together with the use of written manuals on prayer– was revolutionary[68]. In the words of Dirk Krausmüller, who follows Hausherr, these Hesychast authors "wished through their teachings to make available such experiences to the average monk"[69].

The "popularisation" of the psycho-physiological method among Byzantine Orthodox monastics in the latter half of the thirteenth and the early fourteenth century largely resulted from the transition from orality to literacy. While earlier teachings on the Jesus Prayer passed orally from master to disciple, thus being restricted within narrow monastic audiences, "Deutero-Symeon", Nikephoros the Hesychast and Gregory of Sinai discovered exciting new possibilities for spiritual regeneration offered by the technological means of the written word. This development might be associated with the improvement of literacy level of Athonite monks between around 1150 and 1250, a tendency that continued for more than a century until around 1370 and might have been partly the result of educated refugees gathering on the Holy Mountain from Latin –and Turkish– occupied areas[70].

Pythagoreans to attribute their treatises to Pythagoras himself, who had lived many centuries earlier ... If, indeed, an entire book should appear to have been composed in order to present vividly the thoughts and feelings of an important person, there would not seem to be in this circumstance any reason to say that it could not be divinely inspired".

68. In this respect, the connection with Symeon the New Theologian could not be more fitting; cf. A. Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis. The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography*, Crestwood, New York 2005, 185: "The Christian monastic tradition has an experiential connection with the divine light, although it is difficult to know when this began. Eastern mystics rarely spoke about their experiences and even more rarely wrote about them. The first saint to speak explicitly about his ecstatic experience of the divine light was Symeon the New Theologian in the tenth/eleventh century".

69. D. Krausmüller, The rise of hesychasm, in: *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, v. 5, ed. M. Angold, Cambridge 2006, 103; Hausherr, *La méthode d'oraison hésychaste*, 127-129.

70. N. Oikonomides, Mount Athos: levels of literacy, *DOP* 42 (1988), 174-175; G. Cavallo, *Ἡ ἀνάγνωση στὸ Βυζάντιο*, trans. S. Tsochandaridou – P. Odorico, Athens 2008, 168-169. We may wonder whether the coming of refugee monks enhanced the plurality of praying practices on Mount Athos, thus contributing to the passage from orality to literacy, so as to "standardise" such traditions.

The significance for the transition from *viva voce* to the written word has been examined by the Jesuit scholar Walter J. Ong (1912-2003). As Ong notes, writing interiorises "precision and analytic exactitude ..., makes possible increasingly articulate introspectivity ... [and] develops codes in a language different from oral codes in the same language"[71]. The passage from orality to literacy enabled Hesychast masters from "Deutero-Symeon" to Palamas and his successors to reflect on the place of the body in prayer, to refine the psycho-physiological method, to forge a sense of shared identity among Hesychast monastics through oral and written codes, and to add a theological depth with an "analytic exactitude" to Hesychast practices. Had the Hesychasts not been aware of similar meditative writings in other religious traditions, such a transition might not have taken place during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

A number of *desiderata* remains to be explored:

1. To what extent did contemporary developments and inter-cultural exchanges in the fields of medicine and pharmacology influence Hesychast perceptions on respiration and the heart?
2. Is it possible to trace the direct or indirect influence of Hesychasm on the work of Abraham Abulafia (e.g., through the investigation of Greek terminology in his writings)? Did Jewish mystical currents exercise their influence on Hesychasm?
3. What does a systematic and comparative examination of Hesychast and Sufi ascetics in thirteenth-century Asia Minor reveal about inter-faith communication and exchanges?
4. What was the role of Trebizond and the Black Sea region in the circulation and appropriation of meditative wisdom and technique?
5. To what extent did new currents of meditative wisdom and technique from Central/Western Eurasia reach Orthodox monks in Syria, the Holy Land and Egypt?
6. Were Christian communities in Tabriz (West/East Syrian and Byzantine Orthodox) part of the channel for the transmission of meditative practices from Buddhism, Islam and Judaism to Christianity?
7. To what extent did differences in the socio-cultural background of

71. W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word*, London – New York 2002, 101-103.

Byzantine monastics affect their reception of thirteenth-century Hesychasm?

8. Given the many points of contact between Byzantine Orthodoxy and other religious traditions, why did most opponents of Hesychasm and Palamite theology not criticise the appropriation of bodily techniques (e.g., navel-gazing) that might have been received from other religious cultures?
9. Did inter-faith encounters in the East influence the emergence of mystical currents in the West or the opposite?
10. A brief survey of the main representatives of meditative wisdom and technique in Central/Western Eurasia suggests that many of them were the victims of war, persecution and social unrest. Can we argue that their dynamic turn to the inner self and the divine reveals common patterns in their psychological profile and mentality?
11. What evidence is there for the development of different psycho-physiological praying methods within the whole corpus of Byzantine sources on Hesychasm?[72]
12. Given the presence of Bogomil communities across the *Via Egnatia* and the Valley of Pelagonia, to what extent and in what ways did Central/Western Eurasian practices influenced both Bogomils and Hesychasts[73]?

We hope that scholars will turn their attention to these questions in the future, examining Hesychasm not simply as a Byzantine phenomenon, isolated from global developments, but as a movement born within specific historical contexts and shaped both locally and globally through human mobility, interaction and agency.

By drawing a broad panorama of the political, economic, cultural, religious and social channels for the transmission of meditative wisdom and technique in the thirteenth century, this exploratory (and by no means

72. See texts discussed by Polemis, The Hesychast Controversy, *passim*, and the hitherto unpublished sources collected in I. Polemis (ed.), *Theologica varia inedita saeculi XIV. Georgius Pelagonius, Adversus Palamam-Anonymus, Adversus Cantacuzenum-Prochorus Cydones, De lumine thaborico*, Turnhout 2012.

73. On the geography of the Bogomils, see R. Mihajlovski, Bogomils on Via Egnatia and in the Valley of Pelagonia: The Geography of a Dualist Belief, *BSl* 72 (2014), 152-170.

exhaustive) study examined aspects of Byzantine Hesychasm from a global perspective. The proposed reconstruction of the main land routes that made possible the circulation of ideas and practices began with Tabriz and continued with the northwest caravan route to Trebizond. Alternatively, the movement from Tabriz eastwards had Ikonion as a key destination. From Ikonion meditative currents could easily penetrate into Nicaea and Mount Auxentios, continuing to Constantinople, Mount Athos and other monastic centres in mainland and insular Greece. The second half of the thirteenth century and especially the years of persecution of the anti-unionists by Michael VIII (1275-1282) must have contributed to the formulation of Hesychast identity and practices, by bringing Hesychasts from different areas closer and in proximity to the routes described above. This period coincided with the Buddhist revival in the Ilkhanate (1260-1295), before the persecution of Buddhism by Ghazan. The improvement of the level of literacy on Mount Athos by 1250 was another important landmark, which explains why Hesychast masters chose to write prayer treatises in an attempt to expand their circle and restore spiritual health in Byzantine society. If many of the monks and laypeople attracted to Hesychasm were indeed suffering members of society –refugees, former captives, outcasts and people with loose or no family bonds– we can easily understand why prayer and the psycho-physiological method proposed by Hesychast masters offered to them not only an escape from harsh reality[74], but also spiritual comfort, inner peace and, above all, hope and the power to move on.

74. As argued by S. Ramfos, *Τὸ ἀδιανόητο τίποτα. Φιλοκαλικὰ ῥιζώματα τοῦ Νεοελληνικοῦ Μηδενισμοῦ. Δοκίμιο φιλοσοφικῆς ἀνθρωπολογίας*, Athens 2010.

Ευρασιατικες Χερσαιες Οδοι και η Αναπτυξη Των Ψυχοσωματικων Τεχνικων του Ησυχασμου κατα τον 13ο Αιωνα: Νεες Προσεγγισεις Στη Βυζαντινη Ορθοδοξια και Τον Μεσαιωνα Στην Προοπτικη Της Παγκοσμιοτητας

Η πρωιμότερη πραγματεία στα σανσκριτικά με οδηγίες για την εκτέλεση ασκήσεων διαλογισμού Γιόγκα είναι η *Amṛtasiddhi* του Mādhavacandra, η οποία χρονολογείται κατά το δεύτερο μισό του 11ου αιώνα και σίγουρα πριν από το 1160. Ο 13ος αιώνας σηματοδοτεί την περίοδο διάχυσης τεχνικών διαλογισμού με έμφαση στη ρύθμιση της αναπνοής, διά μέσω του μογγολικού Ιλχανάτου προς την Κεντρική Ασία και την Ανατολία. Ο εξισλαμισμός της πραγματείας *Amṛtakuṇḍa* φαίνεται ότι επέδρασε καθοριστικά στην υιοθέτηση και προσαρμογή των ινδο-βουδιστικών τεχνικών αναπνοής στο πλαίσιο του Σουφισμού και της Καμπάλα. Η παρούσα διερευνητική μελέτη εξετάζει το ταξίδι των εν λόγω τεχνικών από την Νοτιοανατολική Ασία στις μεσογειακές ακτές, επιχειρώντας να ανασυνθέσει τις πιθανές διαδρομές που ακολουθήθηκαν, αλλά και την ενδεχόμενη επίδρασή τους στην ήδη προϋπάρχουσα –και δυναμικά αναδιαμορφούμενη κατά τον 13ο και 14ο αιώνα– παράδοση του Ησυχασμού στη Μικρά Ασία και τον Άθω. Το άρθρο ολοκληρώνεται διατυπώνοντας μια σειρά από *desiderata*, τα οποία παραμένουν ανοιχτά για περαιτέρω διερεύνηση.