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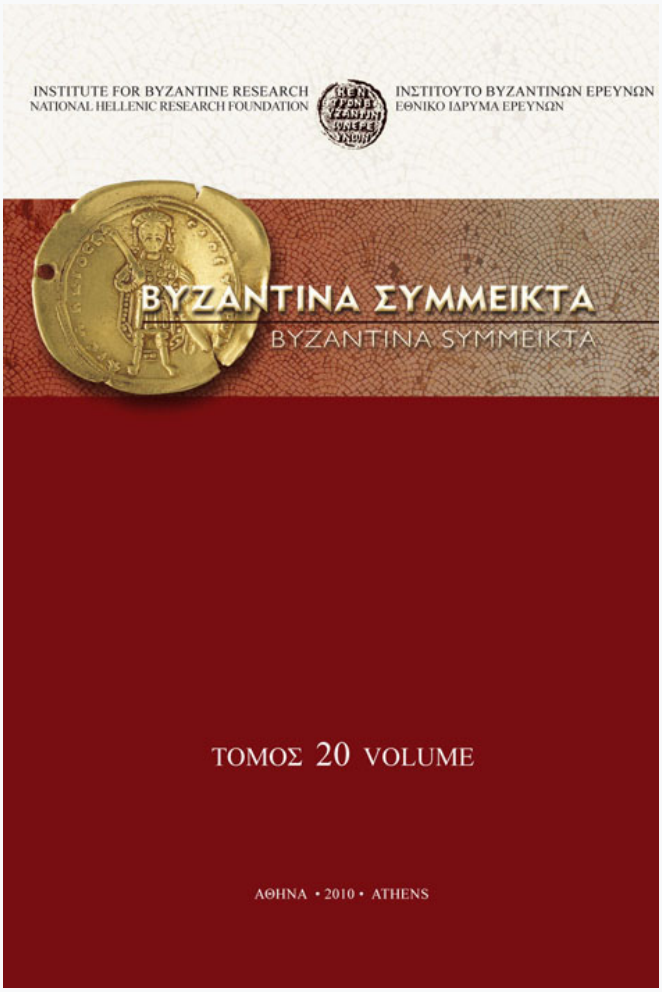

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Maria LEONTSINI

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Ch. Stavrakos (ed.), Πρακτικά του Α΄ Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου Σινο–Ελληνικών Σπουδών «Σχέσεις Ελληνικού και Κινεζικού κόσμου», 2-4 Οκτωβρίου 2004, Ιωάννινα 2008, 299 σ. και πίν. [Proceedings of the 1st International Congress for Sino-Greek Studies, "Relations between the Greek and Chinese World", 2-4 October 2004, Ioannina 2008, 299 pp. and plates. ISBN missing].

This volume contains the proceedings of a symposium held in the University of Ioannina in 2004 on "Relations between the Greek and Chinese World". As stated by the chairman of the organizing committee Professor M. Kordoses in his introductory note to the volume, these proceedings are a contribution to furthering our knowledge of relations between the Greek world and China. This –for the Greek world and the Mediterranean in general– extremely remote area extending far beyond India (which until recently was considered the easternmost country to maintain contacts with the Greeks) appears in these proceedings to share intimate bonds with the Byzantines, maintaining specific contacts through trade or individual and group journeys to the East on certain occasions, whether in the service of diplomacy or under pressure of raids or religious persecution. Through the study of literary sources and other less accessible texts as well as a variety of artifacts and archaeological findings, this volume makes it clear that there existed at various moments of the past at least a mutual awareness and even official transactions between the two Worlds. The seventeen papers included in the proceedings focus on various research issues of recent decades and reveal new scholarly approaches concerning Greek contacts with the world of the Far East, a field that has been embraced by specialists in the history of the East and of Byzantium.

It is notable that the Roman Empire, or at least its Eastern provinces, was originally known in Chinese as Ta-ch´in (meaning Great China) and afterwards as Fu-lin, a standard official term in use at least by the 9th c. This period marked the end of the first phase of contacts cultivated with the Byzantine Empire (7th-8th c.), during which ties were developed between at least its eastern regions and China and the Byzantine state and its capital recognized as territorial entities in the Chinese sources. The information provided by the Eastern sources, especially those from China, is significant, particularly after the 6th c., as it offers various insights –though few very specific references–, that can be aligned with the elliptical reports offered by the Byzantine texts. Of course, the enrichment of our knowledge resulting from investigation of the Chinese sources, as pointed out in many studies in the volume, will require even greater expert analysis in the future, as evidenced by professor M. Kordoses himself, a scholar specializing in Byzantine-Chinese relations. The first paper of the volume: "Étapes mésopotamiennes sur la route de la soie" (pp. 1-26) by A. Bousdroukes, explores the significance of the Silk Road, which traversed the region of northern Mesopotamia, and two other southern routes and their role in land communications between China and the Mediterranean Sea during Late Antiquity. Furthermore, when considering the routes recorded in the western sources from the 2nd to the 6th c. and the descriptions of journeys via the Tigris and Euphrates found in the Chinese chronicles, the author concludes that the river routes could indeed be associated with the "Sea", west of which according to Chinese sources, extended the territory of Ta-ch´in, as suggested by professor M. Kordoses[1]. Another region referred to also as Ta-ch´in is presented in the next paper of the volume by S. Kordoses: "Το Ta-ch´in της Βακτρίας" (pp. 27-35, English summary pp. 36-37). Although, as already mentioned, Ta-ch´in literally signified "Great China", the Ta-ch´in of Bactra is different from the one already known; in any case, it is certain that this name indicated regions inhabited by Greeks. A third identical instance

1. M. Kordoses, *China and the Greek world. An introduction to Greek–Chinese Studies with special reference to the Chinese Sources. I. Hellenistic–Roman–Early Byzantine period (2nd c. B.C.– 6th c. A.D.),* Thessaloniki 1992 (Historicogeographica Meletemata 2) [= pp. 143-254 of "Graecoindica–Graecoserica", the second fascicle of the 3rd volume of the journal *Ιστορικογεωγραφικά* (Ioannina–Thessaloniki 1991), reprinted with the original pagination and with an addition of an index and a contents page, esp. pp. 208-210].

is contained in a Chinese administrative document describing the Chinese protectorates (the Pei-t'ing and the Ngan-si, 7th c.) in Central Asia. A sub-periphery of the second, named Ta-ch´in, is located, according to the writer's analysis, near Bactra (Balkh), a region occupied by Greek populations since the times of Alexander the Great and later during the era of the empire of the Seleucides, which may have been re-Hellenized by Byzantine prisoners transferred there during the Byzantino-Persian wars.

The paper by S. Euthymiades, «Ανεπίδοτη (;) επιστολή νεστοριανού από το Τουρφάν (Κινεζικό Τουρκεστάν) προς βυζαντινό αξιωματούχο» (pp. 39-47, English summary pp. 36-37), offers a new interpretation on the handling of issues concerning the Christian communities outside the Roman Empire, based on a letter written in Syriac by a member of the local community of the Church of the East, comprising the metropolitan sees of Sogdiane, Transoxiane, India and China. This letter belongs to the Berlin collection of Syrian manuscripts and is dated to the late 10th-early 11th c. On paleographical grounds the editor M. Maróth suggested that it was a draft letter by someone communicating with the Byzantine court. The letter was among the excavation findings of a monastery in the region Turfan (Chinese Turkestan) and appears to have been addressed to a Byzantine official, a fact that presupposes a broader exchange of letters. This practice was well known in Byzantium, where eminent personalities were correspondents of foreign leaders or senior officials. The next study by G. Kuluras, «Η Άπω Ανατολή στο έργο του Γεωργίου Γεμιστού Πλήθωνα "Διόρθωσις ἐνίων τῶν οὐκ ὀρθῶς ὑπὸ Στράβωνος λεγομένων"» (pp. 49-57, English summary p. 58), focuses on Georgios Gemistos Plethon's treatise on Strabo, composed in 1439. According to this treatise the regions inhabited by Sinae and Seres were located in the East, beyond India. Plethon's claim that nothing new had been written about the Eastern Ocean in his times, despite the publication of the travels of known navigators a century earlier, cannot be true; this view must be due to Plethon's rigid commitment to ancient beliefs and to the skepticism with which he viewed the geographical knowledge of his own time.

The next communication by V. Christides, "Once again the transmission of Chinese naval technology to the Arabs: Primitive propel rockets" (pp. 58-66, 6 figs.), deals with the extensive descriptions of Greek fire found in Arabic sources, when Byzantine literature remained silent on the subject.

Information provided by Ibn al-Manqali and some other Arabic sources on explosives or protective fireproof garments shows the evolution of these defensive and offensive devices and techniques. The most advanced military practices were applied in mounting rockets on Arab warships, some of which, in all probability, copied Chinese naval practices. These complex weapons were based on Chinese technology as indicated by the instructions preserved in an anonymous Arabic text. Another topic dealing with new content and quality in the variety of contacts with China is presented by R. C. Müller in his survey of traveler's texts from the 12th through the 16th c.: "Between Orient-ation and re-Orient-ation – Western European travelers to the East and the unchanging image of China in the West during the 16th century" (pp. 67-88). Müller outlines the European image of China, initially formulated in travel books that appeared from the Renaissance onwards and then flourished with the increase in Eastern products traded in the West.

The study by J. Stanley-Baker, "Modes of cultural expression gleaned from archaeological evidence of Sino-Hellenic contacts. Framing some questions" (pp. 89-126, appendix, plates and figs), searches the links between the cultures of Ancient Greece, Mesopotamia and Ancient China and proposes possible counterparts between Early Christian and Chinese development of thought and art. The next paper by Y. Kadoi, "The palmette and the lotus: the decorative interaction between Greece and China along the Silk Road" (pp. 127-142, 10 figs), examines possible stylistic relationships in artistic decorative motifs selectively adapted in Byzantium and China. K. Papapavlou, in her paper «Ελληνικά ίχνη στην τέχνη του Δρόμου του Μεταξιού και συναφείς παρατηρήσεις» (pp. 143-166, English summary pp. 151-152, 28 figs), deals with a similar theme, examining a number of artifacts that indicate the influence of Greek motifs in Chinese art. Early Christian art, Coptic art and Byzantine art were possibly transmitted through the cultures situated along the Silk Road. On the other hand, sporadic finds of Chinese porcelain and fragments of marble in the Peloponnese (Corinth and Methoni) testify to the trade in luxury items from China to the West during the Late Byzantine period. The multifarious cultural impact of intercourse between East and West are the subject of the next study by A. Karamanou: «Έμμεσες ελληνικές επιρροές στην τέχνη της Κίνας μέσω της Κεντρικής Ασίας» (pp. 167-182, English summary pp. 174-176, 9 figs). The indirect influences of Greek art in China were reinforced from the 7th to the

14th c. The art of Gandhara evolved further in the direction of North-Western China between 3rd c. BC and 5th c. AD. Indications of the extent of these relationships are provided by the statue of a Byzantine envoy, unearthed in the burial complex of the third emperor of the T΄ang dynasty (7th-9th c.), the Byzantine coins found in China and the two-way influences that appear to have existed during the early period of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Instances of Asiatic iconographic elements found in some cases of post-Byzantine art of the School of Northwest Greece, perhaps due to the location of the region between East and West and the tendency towards exoticism found in Byzantine art from the 14th c. onwards are examined by Ch. Merantzas in his chapter: «Η παρουσία ασιατικών εικονογραφικών στοιχείων στο πολιτισμικό περιβάλλον της επονομαζόμενης "Σχολής της ΒΔ Ελλάδας". Το ζωγραφικό θέμα της *materia informis*» (pp. 183-212, English summary p. 207, 8 figs).

In the following paper, «Η φανταστική επίσκεψη του Μεγάλου Αλεξάνδρου στην Κίνα σύμφωνα με το περσικό ρομαντικό έπος Iskandarnama (Βιβλίο του Αλεξάνδρου)» (pp. 213-220, Appendix pp. 221-222, English summary p. 223), E. Venetis explores new directions of research on the presentation of Alexander's the Great fictitious visit to the Land of China in the *Iskandarnama*, the Persian-Central Asian legendary romance based on a variety of oral and written legendary traditions for his life developed in the Middle East and Central Asia during the Hellenistic, Late Antique and Islamic periods. The next paper, by J. Xu, "Notices of Roman-Byzantine World in Ancient Chinese sources" (pp. 225-234), offers an outline of the ancient geographical terminology and names relating to the Byzantine Empire recorded in the Chinese historical narratives between the 3rd c. BC and 5th c. AD. In his contribution, «Βυζάντιο και Κίνα των T΄ang. Γεγονότα και "συμπτώσεις"» (pp. 235-250, English summary pp. 251-252), M. Kordoses focuses on the bilateral contacts between Byzantium and China, evidenced by the frequency of embassies between the two sides and the finds of coins and imitations of coinage. Byzantine embassies to China sent by the emperors of Constantinople between the 6th and 8th c. and attested in Chinese sources are corroborated by the Byzantine (and Byzantine imitations of) coin finds in China and the quite accurate information reaching China on geographical and religious matters concerning the West. These data reflect diplomatic, commercial

and cultural exchanges with China at a time when Byzantium was availed of very substantial military power and managed to confront with relative effectiveness the Arab expansion. Moreover the interaction between the two worlds strengthened the communications between Nestorians and China. These trends were particularly marked in the period up to the restoration of Orthodoxy in Byzantium (843 AD) and the persecution of Manicheans and other religions in China; both sides' religious policies present remarkable similarities in the mid-ninth century and had a catalytic effect on the imposition and predomination of homogeneous religious observance in, simultaneously, the East and West.

The next study, by Z. Xu-shan, "Gan Ying's Notice of a Greek Myth in his Mission to Ta-ch´n" (pp. 253-259, 2 plates) examines traces of the ancient myth of the sirens preserved in Chinese narratives from the 5th to 7th centuries dealing with a Chinese envoy's trip to Rome in the 1st c. AD. The repeated mentions of this legendary adventure during the voyages in the Sea of Ta-ch´in is an interesting instance of the use of an ancient Greek legend in the East over several centuries. The next study, by E. Giannakes, «Η Κίνα στο έργο του Άραβα ιστορικού Mas'ūdī (893-956 μ.Χ.)» (pp. 263-279, English summary pp. 277-278, one map), reviews the evidence found in two extant works of Mas'ūdī on China. As Giannakes points out, legendary and historical narratives on geography and genealogy, and information on China's dynasties, administration, culture, religion, technical skills and social hierarchies are treated by Mas'ūdī in comparison with other contemporary empires.

The volume concludes with the contribution of Ch. Stavrakos, "The Elephant: a rare motif on the Byzantine lead seal *ἐπὶ τῶν βαρβάρων*" (pp. 281-299, 5 plates). Stavrakos examines the iconographic motif of an elephant depicted on a Byzantine seal that belonged to an official under the title *ἐπὶ τῶν βαρβάρων* (lit.: 'in charge of the barbarians'), as an emblem preferred by the owner of the seal (11th c.). By analyzing the various uses of the term barbaros/barbaroi, which at some time became established as a name referring to the ancestry of a known figure and owner of an aristocratic mansion in 10th c. Constantinople, and examining depictions of elephants in known imperial silks, the author concludes that this pictorial theme, among other non-religious symbols, may be linked to the seal's owner's responsibilities regarding the guidance of foreign legations and visitors or

the control of a military garrison, or even duties regarding the supervision of imperial parks with wild animals in the area of Constantinople. The preference for these motifs became more marked in this period of ongoing and intensive exchanges with the world outside Byzantium, and themes and motifs of foreign derivation became a feature of Byzantine society.

The studies contained in this volume highlight the two-way contacts of Byzantium with the Far East and remind us that this is a fascinating subject for bilateral exploration by scholars of Byzantine and Chinese history and archaeology as well as for multi-disciplinary research by experts in the fields of historical geography and art history. The varied perspectives of the symposium certainly offer fruitful ground on which to continue further exploration in the field of Greek and Chinese interaction. The studies also contain numerous references and information not previously available and offer answers, albeit tentatively, on questions relating to the origin, wanderings or final destinations of individual people and populations and their thoughts, ideals, and beliefs, as well as the provenance and circulation of artifacts and technical achievements. All these historical movements and exchanges were dependent on the geo-political stability of these two great empires and the shifting balances and conditions prevailing in the space between them.

Maria Leontsini
Institute for Byzantine Research/NHRF