

## Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 28 (2018)

BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA 28



### Imagining the Communities of Others: The Case of the Seljuk Turks

Aleksandar JOVANOVIĆ

doi: [10.12681/byzsym.14403](https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.14403)

Copyright © 2018, Aleksandar Jovanovic



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

#### To cite this article:

JOVANOVIĆ, A. (2018). Imagining the Communities of Others: The Case of the Seljuk Turks. *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 28, 239-273. <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.14403>

INSTITUTE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH  
SECTION OF BYZANTINE RESEARCH  
NATIONAL HELLENIC RESEARCH FOUNDATION



ΙΝΣΤΙΤΟΥΤΟ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ  
ΤΟΜΕΑΣ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ  
ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ



# BYZANTINA ΣΥΜΜΕΙΚΤΑ

BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA

ΤΟΜΟΣ 28 VOLUME

ALEKSANDAR JOVANOVIĆ

IMAGINING THE COMMUNITIES OF OTHERS:  
THE CASE OF THE SELJUK TURKS

ΑΘΗΝΑ • 2018 • ATHENS

ALEKSANDAR JOVANOVIĆ

IMAGINING THE COMMUNITIES OF OTHERS:  
THE CASE OF THE SELJUK TURKS\*

Introduction: Identity and Byzantine Historiography

When William of Tyre introduced the Roman general Tatikios into his story of the First Crusade, he wrote: *adjunxerat se etiam nostrorum castris quidam Graecus, Tatinus nomine, imperatoris familiaris admodum, vir nequam et perfidus, nares habens mutilas in signum mentis perversae*<sup>1</sup>. William's negative depiction of Tatikios is perhaps unsurprising, as the emperor's "close confidant" followed the crusaders until the city of Antioch only to withdraw at the critical moment and leave them to fight the Seljuk Turks on their own. What might come as a surprise is that William missed the opportunity to highlight Tatikios's origins. This is a striking omission to us, modern readers, who usually view Tatikios as a Turk<sup>2</sup>. When we look at the sources, however, be it of Latin or Byzantine provenance, we find no reference to Tatikios's Turkish background whatsoever. The only source that

---

\* I thank the journal's two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful suggestions that contributed to this article.

1. *Willelmi Tyrensis Archiepiscopi Chronicon*, ed. R. B. C. HUYGENS, 2 vols [Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis II.24], vols. 38 & 38a, Turnholt 1986; transl. according to E. A. BABCOCK, *William Archbishop of Tyre A History of Deeds Done beyond the Sea*, New York 1943, 150: *A certain Greek, Taticius by name, a close confidant of the emperor, had joined our camp. He was wicked and treacherous man, whose slit nostrils were a sign of his evil mind.*

2. For example, see G. MORAVCSIK, *Byzantinoturcica*, v. 2, Leiden 1983, 225, 305; C. M. BRAND, The Turkish Element in Byzantium, Eleventh-Twelfth Centuries, *DOP* 43 (1989), 1-25.

deals with his background is *The Alexiad*, in which Anna Komnene clearly states that γενναιοτάτος ὦν καὶ ἀκατάπληκτος ἐν μάχαις, οὐκ ἐλευθέρας μὲν ὦν τύχης ἐκ προγόνων καὶ γὰρ ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ Σαρακηνὸς ὦν ἐκ προνομῆς περιῆλθε τῷ πρὸς πατρὸς ἐμῶ πάππῳ Ἰωάννῃ τῷ Κομνηνῷ<sup>3</sup>. Even here in Komnene’s work, there is no evidence here of Tatikios’s Turkish origin. All that we learn is that his father was a *Saracen* captured by Ioannes Komnenos, whose career in the army, as far as we know, likely ended with the dethronement of his brother Isaakios Komnenos in 1059<sup>4</sup>. Over the course of Ioannes’s career, the Turks were not a major threat to the empire, but the Saracens were, therefore explaining Komnene’s depiction of Tatikios’s origins. More importantly, their Roman compatriots certainly perceived Tatikios and his father as Saracens—that is Arabs and on top of that Muslims, not Turks. This would then be the reason why William of Tyre did not link Tatinus’s oath breaking to his Turkish background. For William, Tatikios was no Turk at all.

Paying closer attention to the ethnonyms employed by medieval historiographers to name foreign peoples is, however, not just a matter of historical accuracy but can also further our understanding of how different cultures around the Mediterranean conceptualized identity. As Anthony Kaldellis argues “no single rigid definition will cover all ethnic groups in history: some factors will inevitably be more important for one group than for others”<sup>5</sup>. Thus, for William of Tyre, Tatikios is a *Graecus* since this specific ethnonym was used to denote the Byzantines in Latin sources. This fact, however, is more telling about how Latin Europeans imagined communities of others and themselves than it is about the ways in which these *Graeci* perceived themselves. They were, of course, Romans. And yet, descriptions of foreigners such as the one discussed above tell us a great deal

---

3. *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, ed. D. R. REINSCH – A. KAMBYLIS [CFHB 40], Berlin–New York 2001, iv.4. 5-8:127; transl. according to E.R.A. SEWTER, *Anna Komnene The Alexiad*, ed. P. FRANKOPAN [Penguin Classics], London 2009, 115: *The latter was a valiant fighter, a man who kept his head under combat conditions, but his family was not free-born. His father was in fact a Saracen who fell into the hands of my paternal grandfather John Comnenus when he captured him on a marauding raid.*

4. On Ioannes Komnenos and his career see: K. ΒΑΡΖΟΣ, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, v. 1, Θεσσαλονίκη 1984, 49-57, n. 6.

5. ANTHONY KALDELLIS, The Social Scope of Roman Identity, *ByzSym* 27 (2017), 175.

about the ways in which medieval authors and their respective audiences thought of themselves and their communities of compatriots<sup>6</sup>.

In this paper, I examine primarily Byzantine conceptions of the Seljuk Turks' and Turkish nomads' communities in Asia Minor from the 11th to the mid-13th century. By developing a vocabulary with which to address the Seljuk and other Turks, Byzantine historiographers left us with telling traces of how they perceived belonging to a social and political community in the world around them. Such information, I suggest, broadens our understanding of the Roman imagined community in light of Byzantine authors' understandable lack of theoretical engagement with *romanitas*. Byzantine authors did not after all dwell on their own nationhood since this matter was more or less clear to members of the Roman polity. Historiographers, however, did explain who these foreigners were and how they encountered the Roman nation. Thus, while the Seljuk Turks were not overly preoccupied with their Persian-/Turkish-ness, putting instead "the emphasis on the dynasty, rather than the land"<sup>7</sup>, Byzantine historians developed a strict system of naming the Seljuk and other Turkish societies according to their own understanding of identity and belonging<sup>8</sup>. By comprehending Byzantine naming patterns of the Seljuk Turks, we learn two important things about the medieval Romans. First, Byzantine historiographers employed specific names for their neighbours, whom they would always address by their national names, and not by the names of rulers and dynasties. This very fact is telling about the Byzantines' conception of nationhood: nations are built

---

6. For the liveliness of the 'other' in Ancient historiography see: F. HARTOG, *Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, transl. J. LLOYD, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1988. Socio-political descriptions and cultural stereotypes about nomadic communities established in classical antiquity echoed all the way to Byzantine historiography via late antique works of history.

7. D. KOROBENIKOV, *Byzantium and the Turks in the Thirteenth Century*, Oxford 2014, 109.

8. For the Seljukid dynastic titular and identity constructs see: KOROBENIKOV, *Byzantium and the Turks*, 96-110 and D. KOROBENIKOV, 'The King of the East and the West': the Seljuk Dynastic Concept and Titles in the Muslim and Christian Sources, in: *The Seljuks of Anatolia: Court and Society in the Medieval Middle East*, ed. A. C. S. PEACOCK and S. N. YILDIZ, London-New York 2013, 68-90. For the Seljuk Turks' self-perception and naming practices as well as that of other Muslims see: A. BEIHAMMER, *Byzantium and the Emergence of Muslim-Turkish Anatolia ca. 1040-1130*, London-New York 2017, 33-36.

around people and not individual sovereigns<sup>9</sup>. Second, Byzantine historians conceptualized shifts in identities. As we will see, they were able to argue that one *becomes* or *stays* Roman, Persian, or Turkish. The very possibility, however rare, of naturalization and integration into a different national group allows us to make more sense of Byzantine *romanitas*. For let us not forget, Roman identity, since the early days of the Republic, stemmed from Roman citizenship more than one's location of birth. Oftentimes we have seen people born in the city of Rome itself, who were not citizens at all, while people in Roman colonies were born Romans<sup>10</sup>. As Anthony Kaldellis puts it, "a number of primary sources do suggest that the Romans of Byzantium [same as those before the 4th century CE] viewed themselves as an ethnic or national community defined on the one hand by cultural traits such as language, religion, customs, food, and dress, and on the other by belonging to a specific named polity (the *πολιτεία* of the Romans) in which they were shareholders"<sup>11</sup>. It was these cultural traits and a willing allegiance to the *polity of the Romans* that made one Roman rather than an exclusive sanguine connection to the earlier inhabitants of Rome.

While marking the distinction between socio-cultural and political traits, which usually go hand-in-hand in the sources when one's nationality is described, I also introduce a third element to the Roman perception of identity: background (or origin). One's background is tied to one's perceived *race*, what is often called *blood*, and is not defined by traits that Kaldellis referred to as ethnic or national which can be *learned*. Based on these learned traits, and not necessarily *racial* connections, "Romans," Clifford Ando ascertains, "understood political belonging principally on a contractualist model: it was voluntary assent to the normative strictures of the community and collaboration in matters of shared utility that made one Roman"<sup>12</sup>.

---

9. For the first three centuries of the empire see: C. ANDO, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 2000, 44-46.

10. On Roman law and the position of Roman citizens vis-à-vis the rest see: C. ANDO, *Law, Language, and Empire in the Roman Tradition*, Philadelphia 2011, 1-18.

11. KALDELLIS, *The Social Scope* [as in n. 5], 200.

12. C. ANDO, *Roman Social Imageries: Language and Thought in Contexts of Empire*, Toronto 2015, 88. While Ando's analysis of political thought and language focuses on the pre-*Constitutio Antoniniana* Roman Empire, his conclusions are applicable for the post-212 proclamation of citizenship to all free men of the Roman Empire; albeit, in a changed

Stemming from the contractualist, that is socio-political conceptualization of identity and belonging, “[the] phrase *Romanos fieri*, ‘to become Roman,’ likewise appears to be a term of art in Roman public law, being used already in this form by Ennius [3rd–2nd century BCE]. It is clearly not metaphorical. It reveals, rather, the importance as well as the limits of consent to law in Roman conceptions of political belonging”<sup>13</sup>. Instead of thinking that the Medieval Romans were not able to imagine a political identity larger than their immediate community’s, it makes more sense to perceive Medieval *romanitas* as a direct legal, political, and cultural continuation and evolution of Roman practices since the days of the Republic.

The concept of an imagined political community, which “is [defined as] imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”<sup>14</sup>, was introduced by Benedict Anderson and originally exclusively focused on the rise of nationalism associated with nation-states in the 18th and 19th centuries. Recently, in Byzantine scholarship more than a few authors have engaged with the idea of Roman identity as a national imagined community. In so doing, scholars have focused mostly on examining imagined communities in Byzantine literature since, as Roderick Beaton has argued, “a prime site where that ‘imagining’ takes place must be that community’s literature”<sup>15</sup>. Writing about the Byzantine literature, Anthony Kaldellis, Dimitris Krallis, and Leonora Neville have emphasized the importance of *belonging* to a Roman people and living in a Roman state. In *Hellenism in Byzantium* and *The Byzantine Republic*<sup>16</sup>, Kaldellis demonstrates how the Byzantine

---

ambiance where only *Romanitas* mattered. For *Constitutio Antoniniana* and its significance for the empire see: O. HEKSTER, *Rome and Its Empire, AD 193-284*, Edinburgh 2008, 45-55; ANDO, *Law, Language, and Empire*, 19-36.

13. ANDO, *Law, Language, and Empire* [as in n. 10], 91.

14. B. ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London–New York 2006, 6.

15. R. BEATON, ‘Antique Nation? ‘Hellenes’ on the Eve of Greek Independence and in Twelfth-Century Byzantium, *BMGS* 31 (2007), 78.

16. A. KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of the Greek Identity and the Reception of Classical Tradition*, Cambridge 2008; A. KALDELLIS, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome*, Cambridge, MA–London, UK 2015.

Romans saw themselves and their state by examining the literary production, governing practices, and the role of public consensus in the empire. Another study aiming at unearthing the essences of *romanitas* in middle Byzantine literature is Theodora Papadopoulou's *Συλλογική ταυτότητα και αυτογνωσία στο Βυζάντιο*, in which the author traces elite and popular self-perception<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, Leonora Neville and Dimitris Krallis traced the concept of *romanitas*, in their studies of Nikephoros Bryennios and Michael Attaleites, respectively, revisiting the ways in which Byzantines conceptualized their Roman past and how citizens of the empire structured their memories of a common Roman past<sup>18</sup>. Going back even further in time, Clifford Ando examines the first three centuries of the Roman imperial era and looks at the ways in which the state obtained support from the provincials through regular communication between the centre and the provinces<sup>19</sup>. By focusing on the Roman state's efforts to maintain the non-Roman populace's support, Ando's research outlines processes of Romanization that explain how a hellenophone Roman Empire was established, as well as underpins the analyses of the aforementioned Byzantinists.

Moving away from Byzantine lands and into the outside world, A. Kaldellis, offers a survey of Byzantine sources from the 6th to the 15th

---

17. Θ. ΠΑΠΑΔΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, *Συλλογική ταυτότητα και αυτογνωσία στο Βυζάντιο*, Αθήνα 2015. Somewhat in contrast to Kaldellis, Krallis, and Neville, Papadopoulou argues that modern notions of nationalism do not correspond to pre-modern Byzantine society. The author still pushes forward an argument about a collective *romanitas* that leaves the chambers of palatial saloons and is omnipresent. In other words, the author does not argue for Medieval *romanitas* as a sort of top-to-bottom imposed communal identity.

18. L. NEVILLE, *Heroes and Romans in the Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios*, Cambridge 2012; D. KRALLIS, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline in Eleventh Century Byzantium*, Tempe 2012. On the rise of history writing since the 11th century see MAGDALINO and MACRIDES, The Fourth Kingdom and the Rhetoric of Hellenism, in: *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. P. MAGDALINO, London-Rio Grande 1992, 117-56. On the history writing elites' vis-à-vis commoners' perceptions of the Roman past in Byzantium see: D. KRALLIS, *Imagining Rome in Medieval Constantinople: Memory, Politics, and the Past in the Middle Byzantine Period*, in: *How the Past was Used. Essays in Historical Culture*, ed. P. LAMBERT and B. WEILER, London 2017.

19. C. ANDO, *Imperial Ideology* [as in n. 9].



centuries that provide us with ethnographic information on the peoples Romans of Byzantium encountered<sup>20</sup>. Kaldellis focuses on foreigners in Byzantine literature to demonstrate how authors' decisions to write (or not) about their neighbours affects our own judgement of the Medieval Romans. Following these approaches, I hope to demonstrate that the historiographical coupling of ethnonyms as markers of specific nations offers us significant insight into Byzantine conceptions of belonging to an imagined community. By dwelling on the importance of ethnonym selection, I revisit the erroneous traditional view that Byzantine historiographers were incapable of presenting foreign peoples and polities based on contemporary socio-political realities<sup>21</sup>. According to that much-abused perspective, Byzantine

---

20. A. KALDELLIS, *Ethnography after Antiquity: Foreign Peoples and Lands in Byzantine Literature*, Philadelphia 2013.

21. Kaldellis in *Ethnography after Antiquity*, 3, has shown how Procopius' selection of ethnonyms and characterization of nations did not correspond to the prescribed instructions of Ptolemy's theory of climates. For a different approach to ethnonyms and Byzantine literature as a whole see: R. SHUKUROV, *The Byzantine Turks*, Leiden–New York 2016. In *The Byzantine Turks*, Shukurov argues that “[n]ormally Byzantine authors, describing their own or someone else's homeland, paid little attention to the ethnic or religious affiliation of the population, while at the same time emphasizing the “cultural” advantages or disadvantages (virtue, education) associated with a particular locality. Geographical locus by itself, especially its spatial characteristics, predetermined the qualities of its inhabitants. Unselfconscious and subconscious geographical determinism, rooted in ancient tradition, seems to have been functional in the worldview of the Byzantines.” (SHUKUROV, *The Byzantine Turks*, 21). By arguing that the Medieval Romans were not overly concerned with political realities of the time but rather rooted their own ethnographic writing in mimicking ancient models, Shukurov concludes that generic ethnonyms Skyth, Turk, and Hun became synonyms for such people as Cumans, Mongols, and Pechenegs, while the generic ethnonym Persian encompassed the Turkomans and Skytho-Persians (SHUKUROV, *The Byzantine Turks*, 37-44; 86-96). By drawing from Moravcsik, Shukurov offers a survey of ethnonyms employed by Roman authors in general, without engaging with the genre of the sources he examines. In contrast to Shukurov's claims, I specifically focus on the historiographical use of ethnonyms. I offer a reading of ethnonyms that markedly differs from the ossified theory of climates. I pay special attention to the historical context in which each ethnonym was employed in order to outline the system of nomenclature that was to become proprietary of the Byzantine historiography's rhetorical staging of truth-telling. By showing the liveliness of Byzantine historiographic ethnonymic practices, I hope to ascertain that Byzantine history writers' *Weltanschauung* was very much rooted in vivid contemporary political realities.

historiographers were mainly concerned with using appropriate classical ethnonyms and cultural stereotypes inspired by the theory of climate when they were forced to name contemporary peoples rooted in nomenclature<sup>22</sup>. Instead, I argue that Byzantine historiographers deployed specific classical and vernacular ethnonyms to name foreigners on the basis of the political realities of the times in which they wrote. By showing that historiographers carefully and accurately named their contemporaries, I suggest that the Byzantines also cared about their own contemporary belonging to the Roman nation. Looking specifically at the Seljuk polities, which began to interact with the Romans in the 11th century and ceased to exist before the end of the 13th century, allows us to get a holistic image of how the Byzantines envisioned communities that developed and stopped to exist during the empire's *longue durée*<sup>23</sup>.

---

22. The theory of climate, mostly known from Claudius Ptolemy's *Geography* (2nd century CE), was a fixed system of geographical division of the earth based on seven climate zones that affect individuals' and groups' social and cultural practices and characteristics. For the theory of climate see: E. HONIGMANN, *Die sieben Klimata und die ΠΟΛΕΙΣ ΕΠΙΣΗΜΟΙ: eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte der Geographie und Astrologie im Altertum und Mittelalter*, Heidelberg 1929; L. BAGROW, *The Origin of Ptolemy's Geographia*, *Geografiska Annaler* 27 (1945), 320-29; J. EVANS, *The History and Practice of Ancient Astronomy*, New York-Oxford 1998, 95-97.

23. Because the Romans themselves perceived the Seljuk Turks as a polity and culture very distinctive from that of the Ottomans, I focus solely on historiography that covers the history of the Seljuk Turks and not the one of the Ottoman Empire that came into the picture well after the subjugation of the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum to the Mongol Empire in the mid-13th century. On the history and cultur of the Seljuk states see: C. CAHEN, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey: A General Survey of the Material and Spiritual Culture and History, c.1071-1330*, transl. P. M. HOLT, Harlow 2001; S. VRYONIS, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*, Berkeley 1971; *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society, and Culture*, ed. C. LANGE and S. MECIT, Edinburgh 2012; A. C. S. PEACOCK and S. N. YILDIZ, *The Seljuks of Anatolia*: [as in n. 8]; and A. C. S. PEACOCK, *The Seljuq History: A New Interpretation*, London 2013. On the interrelations of the Byzantines and the Seljuk Turks see: BEIHAMMER, *Byzantium and the Emergence* [as in n. 8], and KOROBEINIKOV, *Byzantium and the Turks* [as in n. 7].

### Naming the Seljuk and Other Turks in Byzantine Historiography

At an imperially-organized feast in Dorylaion, Manuel I Komnenos received a poem that praised his efforts to re-fortify the city<sup>24</sup>. This encomium, which focused on imperial endeavours, notes that the *Persians* continuously raided and occupied Dorylaion until Manuel himself came to expel them and rebuild the city. The Persians in this case were Turkish nomads. Since the purpose of encomiastic literature is to present an imperial endeavour or victory as an absolute triumph, rhetoricians usually employed the ethnonym Persians to mark with one broad brush-stroke both Seljuk Turks of Rum and random Turkish nomads inhabiting the Seljuk-Byzantine borders. By using pompous classical ethnonyms, the encomiasts' duty to praise the emperor was facilitated, for it was always more flattering to defeat the Persians than border Turkomans. Thus, in Byzantine rhetoric, the employment of ethnonyms was not based on socio-political or cultural predicaments of the adversary; rather it stemmed from the need to find a generic category that would allow rhetoricians to extoll imperial accomplishments. But how do we know that these Turks were nomads and not the sedentary Seljuk Turks? The poem itself simply refers to all the Turks as Persians. Luckily for us, Ioannes Kinnamos –a historian who praised Manuel (much as a court rhetorician would)– offers more contextualized information by writing that *τότε δὲ Πέρσαι ἀμφὶ δισχίλιους περὶ ταύτην νομάδες ὡς ἔθος ἐσκήνον*<sup>25</sup>. Seeking to convince his readership about the credibility of his argument, Kinnamos needed to offer a narrative that used factual information. In this case, we learn that the Persians, namely the Seljuk Turks of Rum, had settled roughly two thousand nomads in the environs of Dorylaion.

Byzantine historiography, following the models of the Classical Greek and Roman historiographic tradition, took pride in promoting the concept of *truth-telling*. In this way, Byzantine historiography was different from rhetoric which was used to subjectively praise or blame somebody<sup>26</sup>. This

24. F. SPINGOU, A Poem on the Refortification of Dorylaion, *ByzSym* 21 (2011), 138-167.

25. *Ioannis Cinnami Epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum*, ed. A. MEINEKE [CSHB], Bonn 1836, 295.5-6; transl. is my own: *then the Persians settled about two thousand men around this [field], nomads by nature*.

26. On truth-telling as a persuasive technique in Byzantine historiography: S. PAPAIOANNOU, The Aesthetics of Historiography: Theophanes to Eusthatios, in: *History as*

is not to say, of course, that the Byzantine ‘engaged’ historiography had no agenda and was in no way distorting, omitting facts that did not correspond with the image of the period an author wished to forge for posterity<sup>27</sup>. It does tell us, however, that this “truth,” as Neville argues, “was displayed through composition of persuasive rhetoric. Good historical narrative needed to be persuasive, meaning that the audience had to be convinced through force of presentation that the author’s claims were true”<sup>28</sup>. Moreover, while the language was often archaizing and the guidelines of rhetoric were followed by historiographers much as they were by court encomiasts, the content was rooted in present realities of the Roman Empire. In forging the image of truthfulness, historians had to come up with their own ways of presenting real life opponents and allies of the Roman Empire that would avoid direct essentialization of a foreign political entity. Having exact and distinctive names for such entities was a major step taken towards composing a persuasive narrative. This ‘factual’ information provided the author with credibility, although, of course, other authors might have a different truthful rendering of the same story. Niketas Choniates, for instance, presents the reconstruction of Dorylaiaon as a game of wits between Manuel and the sultan of the Persians, Kilic Arslan II<sup>29</sup>. To truthfully present his narrative to his audiences, Choniates does not mention that it was the nomads who

---

*Literature in Byzantium: Papers from the Fortieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. R. MACRIDES, University of Birmingham, April 2007, Surrey, England, 2010, 3-24; also, on rhetorical practices including the truth in historiography: A. J. WOODMAN, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography*, Portland 1988; M. J. WHEELDON, ‘True Stories’: The Reception of Historiography in Antiquity, in *History as Text: the Writing of Ancient History*, ed. A. CAMERON, Chapel Hill 1989, 33-63; M. MULLETT, Novelisation in Byzantium: Narrative after the Revival of Fiction, in: *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honour of Roger Scott*, ed. J. BURKE et al., Melbourne 2006, 1-28. On different techniques used by historians *vis-à-vis* rhetoricians to depict emperors in Byzantium see: A. ANGELOV, In Search of God’s Only Emperor: *Basileus* in Byzantine and Modern Historiography, *Journal of Medieval History* 40 (2014), 123-141.

27. On engaged historiography see: D. KRALLIS, Historiography as Political Debate, in: *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, ed. A. KALDELLIS and N. SINIOSOGLOU, Cambridge 2017, 599-614.

28. NEVILLE, *Heroes and Romans* [as in n. 18], 33.

29. *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, ed. J.-L. van DIETEN [CFHB 11], Berlin-New York 1975, 295.

inhabited the area, but the subjects –*ergo* Persians– of the sultan of the Persians, who had an excuse to send an embassy to Manuel asking him to withdraw. With these examples, drawn from Kinnamos and Choniates, we see that Byzantine historians employed specific naming patterns that were passed on from one historiographer to another as a way to create a common consensus about their works' objectivity and truthfulness. Whether their narratives told the same version of a truthful story is another question. Common historiographic nomenclature of foreigners, like *mimesis* of ancient models, developed as a model worth following in accomplishing historians' task of persuading their audiences to find their work of history credible.

Encountering the Seljuk Turks in the first decades of the 11th century, Byzantine authors had to come up with appropriate names for these newcomers and develop a stable set of ethnonyms in doing so. Following the battle of Manzikert in 1071, after these newcomers started conquering and settling traditional Byzantine lands in Asia Minor, the Seljuk Turks and other Turkish nomads became a political reality in the life of the empire<sup>30</sup>. From then on, many authors writing in the late 11th and first decades of the 12th century offer us short accounts of the Seljuk Turks' history and background. These authors reused existing, and introduced new, ethnonyms in labelling different groups of Turks. To differentiate between specific groups and polities of the Turks, Byzantine historiographers adopted both already existing vernacular and classicizing ethnonyms, such as Turk and Persian, as well as borrowed terms for other languages, such as Turkoman<sup>31</sup>. By making recourse to a rich palette of ethnonyms, these writers sought to accurately mark the new socio-political communities with which they came into contact. Taking a closer look at the labeling of Turkish communities by authors from Michael Attaleiates in the later 11th century to George Akropolites in the second half of the 13th, we can more clearly comprehend the ways in which Byzantine historiographers conceptualized Turkish ethnicity in the years preceding the emergence of the Ottomans.

---

30. For the post-Manzikert relations of the Seljuk Turks and the Byzantines see: BEIHAMMER, *Byzantium and the Emergence* [as in n. 8], 169-386.

31. On the origins of the terms Turks and Turkomans in Byzantine literature see: SHUKUROV, *The Byzantine Turks* [as in n. 21], 401.

My goal is to examine the deployment of classicizing and vernacular ethnonyms for the naming of the Seljuk Turks in the works of Byzantine historians by avoiding the prevailing binary thinking which divides ethnonyms into strictly classicizing (Persians and Huns) and contemporary (Turks and Turkomans). This binary division predisposes us to regard Byzantine historiography as mechanic imitation of the Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman Greek works of history, achieved by applying a classical ethnonym to a contemporary peoples, simply according to their coincidental geographical location in order to achieve classicizing standards. In this schema, through the interchangeable employment of classicizing and contemporary ethnonyms, the latter explains the former<sup>32</sup>. While I do not contest the convenient classical echoes of ethnonyms such as Persian or Skyth –eternal enemies of the Greeks and the Romans– I propose an approach that is less concerned with the antiquity of an ethnonym and more invested in looking at the variety of ethnonyms used to describe a single ethnicity<sup>33</sup>. I suggest that such a focus will allow us to conceptualize the Byzantine historians' layered conceptions of socio-cultural and political identity. In Medieval Greek –much as in Modern Greek, or any other language really– ethnonyms developed a social life of their own. An ethnonym used to denote subjects of the Achaemenid Empire in the 5th century BCE, reinvented itself several times to denote other *persianite* polities that had their own distinctive social and cultural structures. The situation is similar in Modern Greek, for example, where *classical* ethnonyms such as *Γάλλος* and *Ελβετός* are used to denote citizens of modern nation-states without making any connection to pre-Roman Gallic or Helvetic tribal communities that have once inhabited the area. While we can make learned connections between modern France and pre-Roman Gaul, just like Roman encomiasts did with the Persians,

---

32. For instance, see K. DURAK, Defining the 'Turk': Mechanisms of Establishing Contemporary Meaning in the Archaizing Language of the Byzantines, *JÖB* 59 (2009), 65-78.

33. On stereotypes and socio-political characteristics associated with the ethnonyms deployed in Byzantine historiography see: A. BEIHAMMER, Strategies of Identification and Distinction in the Byzantine Discourse on the Seljuk Turks, in: *Visions the of Community in Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World*, ed. W. POHL et al., 800-1100, London–New York 2012, 499-510.

in an everyday communication no average Greek speaker would seriously consider the *classicizing impulses* when pronouncing the toponym *Γαλλία*.

Rather than following classical paradigms or ossified social and racial stereotypes, I argue that ethnonyms in Roman historiography from the 11th to the 13th centuries had a social life of their own. By looking at the ethnonyms' *socio-political traits*, I suggest that the term Persian was employed only in cases when it referred to a *persianized* polity –the Great Seljuks and subsequently the Seljuks of Rum– that is, those polities that the Byzantines perceived as *Persianite*<sup>34</sup>. On the other hand, the term Turk was used to express the ethnic, or crudely put, 'racial', origins of any Turkish entity regardless of its socio-cultural or political affiliations and allegiances, ergo, regardless of a person's nationality. The name Turk could therefore refer to the predecessors of the Seljuks, Turkish emirates and beyliks in Asia Minor, as well as some Roman citizens of the Byzantine Empire. Standing in sharp contrast to the deployment of Persian to mark the Turks who adopted Persian civilizational values and served one of the Turkish *Persianite* dynastic states, the vernacular ethnonym Turkoman was employed exclusively to denote nomadic Turkish communities that inhabited the border regions of the Sultanate of Rum, and with whom the Byzantines were in direct contact, especially from the reign of Alexios I Komnenos<sup>35</sup>. In order to recognize the more nuanced ethnographical constructions in Byzantine historiography, I suggest that the ethnonyms Persian and Turkoman are used in order to mark a socio-political identity of a community, while the term Turk is used

---

34. The Byzantines perceived societies and polities as Persian based on these states' Persian practices. For example, in the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum histories, as well as official documents, were written in Persian (KOROBENIKOV, *Byzantium and the Turks* [as in n. 7], 22-35) and Persian polities have retained Persian governing practices in conjunction with the broader Islamic governing traditions introduced by the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates in Persia (KOROBENIKOV, *Byzantium and the Turks*, 84-90; Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence* [as in n. 8], 70-74). For Seljukid naming patterns based on Persian and Islamic traditions see: R. SHUKUROV, AIMA: The Blood of the Grand Komnenoi, *BGMS* 19 (1995), 176-78.

35. On the Turkomans and their habitats in the border zone of the Seljuk state see: D. KOROBENIKOV, How 'Byzantine' were the Early Ottomans? Bithynia in ca. 1290-1450, in: *Osmanskij mir i osmanistika: sbornik statej k 100-letig so dnja rozhdenija A. S. Tveritinovoj (1910-1973)*, Moskva 2010, 224-230.

to denote a racial belonging to Turkic peoples since the later 11th century<sup>36</sup>. Stemming from this then, a Turkoman, a Turkish nomad, could never be a Persian, a member of the Seljukid state, nor could a Persian ever be a Turkoman.

### Overview of the Sources

Having outlined the main functions of ethnonyms in Byzantine historiography, I suggest that we take a closer look at the works of history from the late 11th to the 13th centuries and examine what they tell us about the Seljuk Turks and other Turkish communities. In this paper, I will follow the sources chronologically and begin with an overview of the sources with *History* by Michael Attaleiates, composed in the later 11th century and covering affairs for the period from 1039 to 1080<sup>37</sup>. To introduce the Turks into the narrative of *The History*, Michael Attaleiates provides his readers with a brief pre-history of the Seljuk Turks that refers to their Central Asian Nephthalite Hunnic origins and their conquest of Persia:

Οὔννοι Νεφθαλίται, Περσῶν ὄμοροι, οὓς τῆς Περσίδος ὁ Γάγγης ἀποτειχίζει ποταμός, τέσσαρσι πρὸς τῷ ἡμίσει μιλίοις τὸ εὖρος ἀποτεινόμενος, ἐν τοῖς στενοτέροις αὐτοῦ διαβήμασι διαπεραιωθέντες τὸν ποταμόν, ἡγεμόνος αὐτοῖς ἀνέώξαντος τὴν ὁδόν, ὃς προειλημμένος καὶ ταπεινῇ τύχῃ συμπεπορισμένος καὶ δουλικῇ, μετὰ τελευτὴν τοῦ κρατοῦντος δεσπότης τῆς Περσικῆς γέγονεν ἐγκρατῆς<sup>38</sup>...

36. In earlier Byzantine historiography, before the Turks settled the Byzantine lands, this ethnonym stood for other Turkic and Finno-Ugrian peoples, most notably the Hungarians, who are called *Τούρκοι* even by Ioannes Zonnaras in the 12th century.

37. On Michael Attaleiates's life and political career in the 11th century see: D. KRALLIS, *Michael Attaleiates* [as in n. 18].

38. *Michaelis Attaliatae Historia*, ed. Eu. TSOLAKIS (CFHB 50), Athenis 2011, 35. 18-24; transl. according to A. KALDELLIS and D. KRALLIS *Michael Attaleiates The History*, Cambridge, MA-London 2012 [Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library], 77: *During those same years, the Nephthalite Huns, neighbors of the Persians, who are separated from the land of Persia by the Ganges River, which is four and a half miles wide, crossed the river at its narrowest crossing point, when their leader showed them the way. This man, though he had previously been the captive and came from humble and servile origin, became the lord of Persia after the death of its ruling despot...*



While Attaleiates's introduction to the Seljuk Turks is rather short and his information about Central and South Asia a bit convoluted, the author nevertheless had his facts right when it came to Tughrul-beg's conquest of Persia. Once Persia was conquered, the Seljuk sultans of the Persians are treated as Persians by Attaleiates, while the ethnonyms are only employed to denote the racial composition of the sultan's armies and Turkish subjects and the Turks' Central Asian origins. When connecting the Turks to the Huns, Attaleiates relies on existing ethnographic traditions and information found in the Roman Empire<sup>39</sup>. He argues that the Turks are the Nephthalite Huns based on geographic and ethnographic information the Byzantines possessed about the lands of the Turks before the 11th century. For instance, the author writes: *ἔφθη... ὁ τῶν Περσῶν ἀρχηγός, σουλτάνον οἶδε τοῦτον ἢ ἐκείνων καλεῖν φωνή, καὶ φύλακας ἐγκαταστήσαι Τούρκους ἱκανοὺς μετὰ καὶ Διλιμιτῶν*<sup>40</sup>. He then narrates the formalization of relations between the sultan of the Persians and the Romans and remarks that *τὸ δὲ ληστροικὸν τῶν Οὐννων οὐκ ἔληγε τῆς ἐπιδρομῆς καὶ ἡ σκῆψις τοῦ σουλτάνου ὅτι τινὲς τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς ληστείας οὐδ' αὐτῷ γνωσκόμενοι...*<sup>41</sup>. In the first case, we have a ruler of the Persians, their language, which is Persian, and a garrison comprising of two races: the Turks and the Dilimnites (an Iranian peoples from Daylam region). So even though the employment of the ethnonyms is intertwined, they are carefully associated with specific socio-cultural and political categories. That is, Persians are the people who owe their (supposedly willing) political allegiance to the ruler of Persians and who share common Persian traditions and manners (or at least what was considered Persian at the time by the Byzantines). On the other hand, the Turks are the people who are of Turkish ancestry

39. For Nephthalite Huns in earlier Byzantine historiography as well as in Attaleiates's work see: KALDELLIS, *Ethnography after Antiquity* [as in n. 20], 17-20, 114.

40. *Michaelis Attaliatae Historia*, 115.17-20; transl. according to KALDELLIS and KRALLIS, *Michael Attaleiates* [as in n. 38], 271: *the leader of the Persians, whom they call sultan in their language, arrived [...] to establish a good-sized garrison of Turks there together with Dilimnitai.*

41. *Michaelis Attaliatae Historia*, 37. 6-9; transl. according to KALDELLIS and KRALLIS, *Michael Attaleiates The History*, 81: *the raiding did not stop because of the Huns' rapacious nature, though the sultan excused himself by saying that not even he knew the identity of these plunderers...*

and may or may not be members of a *persianized* community (although in this case they are). This differentiation is telling since it suggests to us that the author did not use the ethnonym Turk interchangeably with the name Persian. Attaleiates's perception of other peoples' ethnicity and nationality is therefore more complex than that. He does not conveniently deploy classicizing ethnonyms along with contemporary ones to achieve the expected standards of classicizing history; if that were the case, why would he be using any vernacular ethnonyms in the first place? In the *History*, we see that the Huns continued raiding Roman lands without the sultan's permission. The ethnonym Huns is therefore employed here to designate the nomadic Turks who crossed the Ganges River (so says Attaleiates) with the 'Persian' sultan-to-be. These Turks followed the sultan but were not under his direct control, fully maintaining their Turkic social customs. Attaleiates never labels them as Persians.

While Attaleiates introduces the Nephthaites Huns, i.e. the Turks, but briefly, Ioannes Skylitzes's *Synopsis Chronike* written in the late 11th century<sup>42</sup> and covering the period before Manzikert, i.e. 811-1057, provides readers with a more elaborate study of the Seljuk Turks. In it he describes them and their trajectory from Central Asia to the Near East:

τὸ τῶν Τούρκων ἔθνος γένος μὲν ἐστὶν Οὐννικόν, οἰκεῖ δὲ τὰ προσάρκτια τῶν Καυκασίων ὄρων πολυάνθρωπόν τε ὄν καὶ αὐτόνομον καὶ ὑπ' οὐδενὸς ἔθνους ποτὲ δουλωθέν. τῆς δὲ τῶν Περσῶν ἀρχῆς εἰς Σαρακηνοὺς διαλυθείσης, καὶ τῆς τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἐπικρατείας μὴ μόνον Περσίδος καὶ Μηδίας καὶ Βαβυλῶνος καὶ Ἀσσυρίων κυριευούσης, ἤδη δὲ καὶ Αἰγύπτου καὶ Λιβύης καὶ μέρους οὐκ ὀλίγου τῆς Εὐρώπης, ἐπέπερ ἔτυχον ἐν διαφόροις καιροῖς ἀλλήλων καταστασιάσαντες καὶ ἡ μία καὶ μεγίστη αὕτη ἀρχὴ εἰς πολλὰ διηρέθη μέρη, καὶ ἄλλον μὲν ἀρχηγὸν εἶχεν ἡ Ἰσπανία, ἄλλον δὲ ἡ Λιβύη, ἄλλον δὲ ἡ Αἴγυπτος, ἄλλον δὲ ἡ Βαβυλῶν, ἕτερον

42. For Ioannes Skylitzes's life and writing see: E.-Σ. ΚΙΑΠΗΔΟΥ, *Ἡ Σύνοψη Ἱστοριῶν τοῦ Ἰωάννη Σκυλίτζη καὶ οἱ πηγές της (811-1057)*, Ἀθήνα 2010; J.-C. CHEYNET, Introduction: John Skylitzes, the Author and His Family, and B. FLUSIN, Ioannes Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historion*, in: *John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057*, transl. and comm. J. WORTLEY, Cambridge 2010, ix-xi, xii-xxxiii. For narratives about Turkish ethno-genesis in Byzantine historiography see: A. BEIHAMMER, Die Ethnogenese der seldschukischen Türken im Urteil christlicher Geschichtsschreiber des 11. und 12. Jahrhunderts, *BZ* 102 (2009), 589-614.

δὲ ἡ Περσίς, καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους μὲν οὐχ ὁμονόουν, μᾶλλον μὲν οὖν καὶ προσεπολέμουν οἱ γειτονοῦντες, ἀρχηγὸς Περσίδος καὶ Χωρασιμίων καὶ Ὠρητανῶν καὶ Μηδίας ὑπάρχων Μουχοῦμετ κατὰ τοὺς χρόνους Βασιλείου τοῦ βασιλέως, ὁ τοῦ Ἰμβραήλ, καὶ πολεμῶν Ἰνδοῖς καὶ Βαβυλωνίοις καὶ κακῶς ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ φερόμενος, ἔγνω δεῖν πρὸς τὸν ἄρχοντα Τουρκίας διαπρεσβεύσασθαι καὶ συμμαχίαν ἐκεῖθεν αἰτήσασθαι<sup>43</sup>.

Skylitzes carries on his introduction of the Turks by revealing the intentions of the leader of the Seljuk Turks, and explains:

ἐκπέμπει πρὸς αὐτὸν τοὺς τρισχιλίους, ἀρχηγὸν ἔχοντας Ταγγρολίπηκα Μουκάλετ υἱὸν Μικεήλ, ἅμα καὶ ἐλπίσας, ὡς εἶπερ οὗτοι δυνηθεῖεν ἀποκρούσασθαι τοὺς ἐπεμβαίνοντας τοῖς Σαρακηνοῖς, ῥᾶστά τε τὴν τοῦ Ἀράξιδος ποταμοῦ γέφυραν τὴν κωλύουσαν Τούρκους ἐς Περσίδα ἰέναι, ἅτε πεπυργωμένην οὖσαν ἔνθεν κἀκεῖθεν καὶ φρουροῖς πάντοτε φυλαττομένην βατὴν θήσουσι περιελόντες τὰς φρουράς, καὶ ὑποχείριον αὐτῷ ποιήσουσι τὴν τῶν Περσῶν χώραν<sup>44</sup>.

---

43. *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. H. THURN [CFHB 5], Berlin–New York, 1973, xxi.9. 2-17: 442-443; transl. according to J. WORTLEY, *John Skylitzes A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, Cambridge 2010, 416-417: *The Turkish people are Hunnic by race, living to the north of the Caucasus mountains, populous and autonomous, never enslaved by any other nation. Once domination of the Persians had passed to the Saracens, the Saracens went on to rule over not only Persia and Medea and Babylon and Assyria, but also Egypt and Libya and a considerable part of Europe. Then it came about in various circumstances that they rose up against each other and that one great empire was torn into many segments. Spain had one ruler, Libya another, likewise Egypt, Babylon and Persia. And these neighbours did not share a common mind but rather waged war on each other. He who was the ruler of Persia, the Khorasians, the Oretanes, and the Medes in the time of emperor Basil was Mouchomet, son of Imbrael. Waging war against the Indians and Babylonians and getting the worst of it in battle, he decided that he should treat with the ruler of Turkey, requesting some allied forces from that source.*

44. *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, xxi.9. 20-26: 443; transl. according to WORTLEY, *Skylitzes*, 417: *He sent three thousand men under the command of Tangrolipex Moukalet, son of Mikeel to Mouchoumet. He did this in hope that, if they succeeded in repelling the enemies of the Saracens, they would quite easily render passable the bridge over the river Araxes (which was preventing the Turks from entering Persia since it had guard-towers at either end and it was always watched by guards). After doing away with its garrison, they could subject the land of the Persians to his rule.*

The scheme of the Turkish tribal leader worked and after fierce battles with the forces of Mahmud of Ghazna: *αὐτοὶ κύριοι τῆς Περσίδος ἐγένοντο, τὸν Ταγγρολίπηκα σουλτάνον ὀνομάσαντες, τουτέστι παντοκράτορα καὶ βασιλέα βασιλέων*<sup>45</sup>. In the narrative, Skylitzes offers his readership an opportunity to learn about the Turks' pre-history as well as about their conquest of Persia and Mesopotamia and their battles against the Arab and Persian lords in these regions. In so doing, the author distinguishes between Seljuk Turks' early days in the steppes of *Turkia* and their subsequent state as masters of Persia. Furthermore, the Persians themselves are distinct not just to the nomadic Turks but to sedentary Saracens of Baghdad (i.e. Babylonia) who had previously ruled, so tells us Skylitzes, over Persia. Thus, the author of the *Synopsis Chronike* allows us to better understand not only the history of the Turks, but the history of Iran and Mesopotamia. In doing so, he employs specific ethnonyms to denote distinct communities defined by their sociocultural practices and allegiances. We therefore encounter Saracens who rule over Iran and Mesopotamia, and Arabs in Assyria and Phoenicia. Finally, Skylitzes wishes for his readers to understand how the Turks gradually came to clash with the Romans by looking at their pre-history in Central Asia and their history in Persia. I suggest that with Skylitzes's account, we come across an elaborated version of the naming pattern first used by Attaleiates. Attaleiates explains that the Turks are of Hunnic origins and maintains the use of both 'Turk' and 'Hun' to designate both Turkish raiders and those soldiers in the employ of the Persian sultan. On the other hand, Skylitzes goes a step further to make the necessary (and apparently to the Byzantines of the period, clear) connection between the Turks and the Hunnic race. He does this by noting that the Turks come from a larger Hunnic group of people not dissimilar to the Hungarians. Here, we see that Hun becomes a general term used to denote several different ethnic groups that Romans understood to be related. In other words, the Turks are but a people of the Hunnic race and are distant relatives to other Hunnic peoples that the Romans have dealt with in the past. Furthermore, Skylitzes's extensive account allows us to see

---

45. *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, xxi.9. 76-78: 445; transl. according to WORTLEY, *Skylitzes*, 419: *Thus [the Turks] became masters of Persia, naming Tagrolipex sultan; that is absolute ruler and king of kings.*

how historians perceived the Seljuk *persian* conquest as an integral part of Persian history, while the Seljuks' *turkish* prehistory is left behind them in Central Asian *Tourkia*, which Tughrul-beg and his Seljuks have abandoned in order to govern persian territories from within Persia and away from their ancestral lands. According to Skylitzes' account, we see that ὃς πάσας τὰς ἀρχὰς τοὺς ἐγγχωρίους ἀφελόμενος εἰς Τούρκους μετήνεγκε καὶ τὴν Περσίδα πᾶσαν πρὸς αὐτοὺς διένειμεν, ἐς τὸ παντελὲς κατασπάσας καὶ ταπεινώσας τοὺς ἐγγχωρίους<sup>46</sup>. By dismissing the previous administrators of the Persian state and investing his own men with offices of importance, Tughrul-beg, according to Skylitzes's interpretation, did not destroy the Persian state, but rather became a new ruler of this polity. In so doing, he also promoted his own men to positions that were already there as part of the Persian governing apparatus. By adopting *persianate* political and social practices, the Turks of Tughrul-beg themselves became persians in Byzantine history writing. It was precisely because the Seljuk dynasty was treated as a new persian authority by the Romans that Skylitzes felt the need to emphasize that Tughrul-beg replaced the existing governors with the new ones. Furthermore, the fact that the Seljuk Turks relocated their whole government from Central Asia to Persia made it easier for Roman historiographers to treat the Seljuks as a *Persianate* dynasty. Finally, the Seljuk sultans did not rule the Turks living in *Tourkia*, but rather Iranians, Arabs, and those Turks who had emigrated from Central Asia to Iran and westwards.

Taking the ethnographic narrative directly from Skylitzes' account, late eleventh- and twelfth-century authors such as George Kedrenos, Ioannes Zonaras, and Nikephoros Bryennios prove that the concept of the Seljuk *persianization* was accepted amongst Roman historiographers. Starting with the period covered by Attaleiates' work, but written well into the 12th century, Nikephoros Bryennios's *Material for History* adjusts Skylitzes' account of the early Seljuk history in order to show how the Turks were able to triumph over the Saracens because of the latter's constant civil wars

---

46. *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, xxi. 9.69-71:445; transl. according to WORTLEY, *Skylitzes*, 419: *He relieved all indigenous governors of their commands and transferred them to Turks, among whom he divided all of Persia, entirely crushing and humiliating the people of the land.*

and the use of mercenaries in their armies<sup>47</sup>. Thus, Bryennios adapted the story to fit his own purposes of lamenting the state of Byzantine affairs via proxy in order to avoid criticizing his own polity<sup>48</sup>. In *Material for History* Bryennios maintains Skylitzes's account of Tugrhul-beg's rise to power but also explains that *πάσας οὖν τὰς ἀρχὰς τῶν Περσῶν καὶ Σαρακηνῶν ἀφελόμενος εἰς Τούρκους μετήνεγκε καὶ τὴν Περσίδα πᾶσαν αὐτοῖς καθυπέταξεν*<sup>49</sup>. This sentence added to Skylitzes' story of the Turks shows that the Romans clearly distinguished between different *ἔθνη* surrounding the lands of the Romans, even though these lands might be under the rule of a single polity as was the case with the Seljuk Empire. What is more, we see all historians marking a clear distinction between different *islamicate* nations. In *Material for History*, Bryennios uses the ethnonym Persians in order to relate official affairs between the Byzantine state, or for that matter anybody else, and the Persian polity –the Great Seljuk Empire. Thus, in the story of Roussel de Bailleul's betrayal of the Romans, Bryennios informs his audience that:

*Πέμπας τοίνυν πρότερον πρέσβεις, ὕστερον καὶ αὐτὸς παρεγένετο εἰς τὸ τῶν Τούρκων στρατόπεδον καὶ τῷ Τουτᾶχ συγγενόμενος καὶ πίστει λαβὼν ἀπήει ἐπὶ τὸ φρούριον ὑποσχόμενος ἥξειν εἰς νέωτα. Ὁ δὲ στρατοπεδάρχης πυθόμενος τὴν τοῦ Οὐρσελίου πρὸς τὸν Τουτᾶχ ἀφιξίν ἐξέπεμψε καὶ αὐτὸς πρέσβεις καὶ δῶρα πολυτελῆ τῷ Τουτᾶχ καὶ φιλίας αὐτῷ ἀνεμίμνησκε τῆς βασιλείας Ῥωμαίων πρὸς τὸν κρατοῦντα Περσῶν*<sup>50</sup>.

47. For detailed interpretation of Bryennios's engagement with Skylitzes's narrative see: NEVILLE, *Romans and Heroes* [as in n. 18], 65-67.

48. On the concept of 'autoethnography by proxy' practiced since Late Antiquity see: KALDELLIS, *Ethnography after Antiquity* 53.

49. *Nicephori Bryennii Historiarum libri quattuor*, ed. P. GAUTIER [CFHB 9], Brussels 1975, i. 9.28-31:95; transl. is my own: *all the power of the Persians and the Saracens went into the hands of the Turks, and these occupied all of Persia*.

50. *Ibid.*, ii.21.9-15:187; transl. is my own: *having initially sent messengers, [Roussel] eventually came to the military camp of the Turks and met with Tutash. Having taken oaths he left the camp swearing that he will present himself next year. The [Roman] stratopedarches, having learned about Roussel's visit to Tutash, sent messengers and valuable gifts to Tutash and reminded him of the friendship between the Empire of the Romans and the rulers of the Persians*.

Bryennios tells us that the soldiers encountered in the camp by Roussel were Turks and not ethnic Persians nor Saracens. When the Roman *στρατοπεδάρχης* reminds Tutush and his Turks about the ‘friendship’ between the Romans and these Turks’ lord, the author employs the ethnonym Persian to denote the people with whose polity the Romans had diplomatic relations and to which Tutush owed political allegiance. While Tutush’s army is comprised of Turks, who are most likely not accustomed to Persian customs, this army’s ruler is called the lord of the Persians, since he himself, as well as the state administration, are Persian in both political and cultural practices. The ethnonym Turk, unlike the term Persian which stems from social and political traits, is employed exclusively to refer to garrisons, troops, and individuals when emphasizing their racial background. For example, in his subtle critique of the mercenary armies on which the Byzantines of the later 11th century started relying more and more<sup>51</sup>, Bryennios tells a story of Alexios and Isaakios Komnenos dining with a friend around Nikomedia when

*ξυνέβη Τούρκους περί που διακοσίους κατιέναι ἐπὶ προνομῆ, οἱ καὶ διώδευον τὴν ὁδὸν ἐπὶ τὰ πρόσω σπεύδοντες καὶ μηδένα λόγον τῶν κατὰ πάροδον Ῥωμαίων ποιούμενοι. Ἀγρότης δέ τις ἄροτριῶν αὐτοὺς θεασάμενος καὶ οἰηθεὶς τοῦ μέρους εἶναι τῶν προκληθέντων, ἐφώνει καὶ αὐτοὺς ἐκάλει καὶ τὸν μέγαν δομέστικον ἐπιδεικνύειν ἐπηγγέλλετο<sup>52</sup>.*

The Turks described in this story had nothing to do with the sultan of Persia, especially in the mind of the protagonist of this story –a villager– who was accustomed to the sight of Turkish mercenaries and simply mistook the raiding party for Alexios Komnenos’s soldiers. By calling these raiders Turks –a racial marker that denotes no specific political allegiance– the author conveyed a clear message to his audience about the ethnic makeup of

51. On Bryennios’s opinion of mercenaries as one of the main causes for the empire’s misfortunes see: NEVILLE, *Heroes and Romans* [as in n.18], 63-74.

52. *Nicephori Bryennii Historiarum libri quattuor*, ii.9.7-12:159; transl. is my own: *it happened that about two hundred Turks came down to raid. They were passing down the road from afar in haste that they did not make any account of the Romans who were along the way. But a villager ploughing his land saw them and since he thought they were here [to fight] on the side of the invitees [Alexios and Isaakios Komnenos], he called out for them and invited them over. Then he pointed out to them where the megas domestikos [Alexios] is.*

the mercenaries in question. The Turks could have been raiders, mercenaries of the Persian sultan, troops serving the emperor of the Romans, or soldiers under the command of a prominent individual and state official such as Alexios Komnenos in the story of a confused villager.

While Byzantine authors were always aware of the Seljuk dynasty's acculturation into the Persian social, cultural, and political sphere, these very same historians did not shy away from using the vernacular ethnonym Turk to denote specific subjects of the sultan who were of Turkish origins. A reading of Anna Komnene's *The Alexiad* offers further insights into Byzantine deployment of the two ethnonyms. While the sources analyzed so far focus on pre-twelfth-century history, *The Alexiad* relates events that unfold in the last two decades of the 11th and the opening two decades of the 12th century<sup>53</sup>. At this time, the Seljuk Turks had become a permanent political reality, while simultaneously in Asia Minor local Turkish communities were becoming more politically active and diverse. Such diversity is represented mainly by the rise of local potentates, independent from the Seljuk sultan in Persia. By taking a closer look at Komnene's work, we see that she makes a clear differentiation between the *persianized* Seljuk Turks of Iran and the autonomous Turkish emirates of Asia Minor. On the one hand, the ethnonym Persian is employed by Komnene exclusively when referring to the Great Seljuk Turks or their individual representatives in Asia Minor, while such independent entities of Tzachas, Süleyman ibn-Kutlumuş, and Ebu'l-Kasım are labelled as Turkish. For example, while narrating the early days of what is to become known as the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum in Asia Minor, the main *persianized* power in the region during the second-half of the 12th century, Anna writes: τὸν τὴν Νίκαιαν φρουροῦντα, ὃν ἡ συνήθεια μὲν τῶν Περσῶν σατράπην ἀποκαλεῖ, οἱ δὲ νῦν τὰ Περσῶν φρονοῦντες Τοῦρκοι ἀμῆρὰν ὀνομάζουσι, τὸν Ἀπελχασίμ<sup>54</sup>. Here, Komnene informs readers that she and other historians were aware of the process of *persianization* taking place among some Turks. She therefore makes a clear reference to a specific group

53. On life and work of Anna Komnene see: L. NEVILLE, *Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian*, Oxford 2016.

54. *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, vii.7.4. 7-10:222; transl. is my own based on SEWTER, *Anna Komnene, 202: Apelkhasem, the governor of Nikaia, commonly called satrap by the Persians and emir by the Turks, who now think as Persians*.



of Turks who were in the process of acculturating into a universe of Persian customs. From a Byzantine perspective, these Turks were becoming Persian nationals. At the same time, Anna remembers the Turkish origins of the masters of Persia and a great part of Asia Minor. Ebu'l-Kasım, mentioned by Komnene, was a general of Süleyman ibn-Kutlumuş, an outcast member of the Seljuk dynasty and a founder of the *persianized* Sultanate of Rum. Thus, Anna rightly notices that Süleyman ibn-Kutlumuş's Turks have adopted Persian customs in their gradual state-building process. In contrast to "the Turks, who now think as Persians"<sup>55</sup>, emirs such as Tzachas, who owed no allegiances to the Seljuk dynasty and who was not particularly engaged with Persian customs and practices, are always labeled as Turks. The ethnonym Persian was never applied to such men or groups. As for the Great Seljuks, they are always marked as Persians in the *Alexiad*, since in the eyes of the Byzantines they had long become fully *persianized*. The name Turk, in the *Alexiad* and in the works of history studied here, is employed to mark one's 'racial' background which the Romans understood well, regardless of these Turks' sedentary or nomadic way of life. For example, a messenger sent by the sultan named Siaous in the *Alexiad*, τοῦ δὲ μητρόθεν μὲν ἐξ Ἰβήρων εἶναι λέγοντος, τὸν δὲ τούτου πατέρα Τοῦρκον ἀνομολογοῦντος<sup>56</sup>. Thus, a subject of the sultan, who would most likely be considered Persian, was of mixed origin and Komnene uses terms Iberian and Turk (not Persian) to describe Siaous's racial background.

Based on the sources covered so far, I suggest that those individuals and groups of Turkish origins, who were the sultan of the Persians' subjects but do not represent the sultan and the state directly (soldiers, merchants, immigrants), are consistently called Turks. By defining them in this way, Byzantine authors ensured that readers understood the exact background of a person or group. On the other hand, the subjects of the Seljuks collectively and those individuals representing the Seljuk state, regardless of their ethnic background, are always labeled as Persians since they were an integral part of a Persian polity and nation. Put simply, from a Byzantine point of view, the

---

55. Ibid.

56. *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, vi.9.4. 9-10:188; transl. according to SEWTER [see n. 3], *Anna Komnene, 171: his mother, he said, was from Iberia, although he did admit that his father was a Turk.*

Seljuk conquest of Iran had become a Persian matter. Thus, an ambassador sent to the Byzantine Empire could have been of Turkish, Arab, or Persian ethnic background but his nationality and all that this term encompasses was perceived as nothing but Persian since he owed his allegiances to the Persian state.

In contrast to the formative period of Turkish polities in Asia Minor of the 11th and the first half of the 12th century, the second half of the 12th and the 13th century are marked by the rise and fall of the Sultanate of Rum, which had become a separate polity from that of the Great Seljuks. The Seljuk rulers of Rum maintained the system of their greater cousins, which included *persianiate* practices and customs<sup>57</sup>. Here, I explore the ethnonyms Persian, Turk, and Turkoman in the historiographical works of Ioannes Kinnamos, Niketas Choniates, and George Akropolites. At the time when these three authors wrote their works (from the later 12th through the 13th centuries), the Sultanate of Rum had become the sole relevant *persianized* Seljuk polity in the Near East, while the Sultanate's borders were inhabited by Turkish nomadic tribal communities more or less independent from the sultan at Ikonion. In order to differentiate between these Turkish nomadic communities and the Seljuk polity, Kinnamos and Akropolites use the term Persian to denote the Sultanate of Rum, while deploying the ethnonym Turkoman for the nomadic Turks. Here, the difference between the ethnonyms Turkoman and Persian lies in the exclusive use of the term Turkoman to mark Turkish nomads, while the ethnonym Persian exclusively refers to *persianized* Turkish communities<sup>58</sup>.

We first turn to Choniates who represents Seljuk-Byzantine relations as a game of wits between the emperor and the sultan. To develop his storyline, Choniates engages the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum and uses the ethnonyms Persian and Turk interchangeably depending on which aspect of one's identity he wishes to highlight. In any case, Choniates deploys the term Persian when he writes of the sultan and the state he rules; while surprisingly enough he occasionally uses the term to denote certain Turkic border groups who might or might not have owed their allegiances to the

---

57. For readings on the Seljuk polity in Asia Minor see footnote 23.

58. For differences between the Turkomans and the Turks see: KOROBENIKOV, 'How Byzantine' [as in n. 35], 224.

sultan at Ikonion. In doing so, Choniates potentially left enough room for rhetorical naming practices to come to the fore (since it was always better to defeat the Persians than random Turkomans). While Choniates dwells mostly on the *Persianite* state of the Seljuk Turks in Asia Minor, he does mention the Danishmendid dynasty centred in Eastern Anatolia. To differentiate between the people of the Sultanate of Rum and those of the Danishmendid state, Choniates employs the ethnonym Perso-Armenian (*Περσαρμένιος*) for the latter<sup>59</sup>. By coming up with an ethnonym to name a specific *persianized* Turkish polity that was not Seljuk, Choniates follows the tradition in Roman historiography of not naming the states by their rulers or dynasties, but rather by the people who dwell in them collectively. We see here that while the Seljuk dynasts themselves emphasized their own family name when thinking of their polity, Byzantine authors never developed such a taste. Rather, they adhered to their ethnographic traditions, which referred to national collectives as wholes. Never do we read of the Seljuk sultanate or the Komnenian empire, but always about the polity of the Persians and the Romans respectively. This naming pattern developed by Byzantine historiographers allows us to understand the importance that belonging to a community larger than that of immediate familiars, townsmen, and associates for the Byzantine *Weltanschauung*. From the Byzantine point of view, the *πολιτεία* of the Romans was surrounded by other, rather specific, *nations*, not by *rulers* or *dynasties*.

While Choniates dwells exclusively on the affairs of the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum, Kinnamos and Akropolites expand their accounts to include borderland nomadic Turkish communities.<sup>60</sup> In his narrative, Kinnamos clarifies the ethnonym Turkoman by providing readers with a short description of their ways in which he writes: *οὐπω γὰρ γεηπονικοῖς ἐνησκημένοι ἔργοις γάλακτός τε ἀπερρόφουν καὶ κρεῶν ἐσιτοῦντο, κατὰ τοὺς Σκύθας*<sup>61</sup>. Offering a bit more elaborate definition of the Turkomans,

59. *Nicetae Choniatae Historia* (ed. van DIETEN [n. 29], 18.15; 18.19; 19.18.

60. On Turkomans and the border system of the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum see: KOROBEINIKOV, How 'Byzantine' [see n. 35], 224-230; KOROBEINIKOV, *Byzantium and the Turks*, [see n. 7], 271-281; A. C. S. PEACOCK, The Seljuk Sultanate of Rum and the Turkoman of the Byzantine Frontier, 1206-1279, *Al-Masaq: Journal of Medieval Mediterranean* 26 (2014), 267-287.

61. *Ioannis Cinnami Epitome* [as in n. 25], 9. 6-7; transl. is my own: *still untrained for work in the field, they drink milk and eat meat, like the Skyths*.

in the *History*, while writing about the flight of Michael Palaiologos to the Seljuk Turks, George Akropolites informs us about the territory they occupied: ἐπεὶ γὰρ οὗτος ἐν τοῖς οἰκίμασι τῶν Τουρκομάνων ἀφίκετο—ἔθνος δὲ τοῦτο τοῖς ἄκροις ὄρειοις τῶν Περσῶν ἐφεδρεῦον<sup>62</sup>. Further into the passage, Akropolites clarifies that these nomadic Turks were not members of the Seljuk state, but rather that they profited from the Sultanate's downfall: καὶ τοῖς ἐκ πολέμων σκύλοις εὐφραινόμενον, καὶ τότε δὴ μᾶλλον, ὅποτε τὰ τῶν Περσῶν ἐκυμαίνετο καὶ ταῖς ἐκ τῶν Ταχαρίων ἐφόδοις συνεταράττετο<sup>63</sup>. These three examples showcase the difference that Akropolites and Kinnamos draw between nomadic Turks, called Turkomans, and the sedentary ones, the Persians<sup>64</sup>. Neither author felt he had to explain in any detail where the difference between the two lay. This lack of explanation, I suggest, is evidence that any reader or listener of the period who had obtained a Byzantine higher education was aware of the difference between the Turkomans and the Persians, as much as an average reader of *The New York Times* in the U.S.A or *Καθημερινή* in Greece today would be aware of the difference between the national ethnonyms Saudi and Qatari, for instance, without requiring any further explanation that both Saudi and Qatari nationals and dynasties are members of the Arab world.

What is more, in *The History*, Akropolites uses the ethnonym Turk exclusively when it denotes Turkish racial origins of groups or individuals. We thus hear of Turks in Byzantine service when the author seeks to emphasize their Turkish origins and not their belonging to a certain cultural, civilizational, or even linguistic community. For instance, in the record of the battle of Vodena in 1257, Akropolites informs us that Michael

---

62. *Georgii Acropolitae Opera*, vol. 1, ed. A. HEISENBERG, Stuttgart 1978<sup>2</sup>, 136. 6-7; transl. according to R. MACRIDES, *George Akropolites The History*, Oxford 2007, 315: *He came to the dwellings of the Turcomans. This is a people who occupy the furthest boundaries of the Persians.*

63. *Georgii Acropolitae Opera* I, 136. 14-16; transl. according to MACRIDES, *George Akropolites*, 315: *rejoice in booty from wars; this especially at the time when Persian affairs were agitated and thrown into confusion by the Tatar attacks.*

64. Other than these ethnonyms, Akropolites employs such names as Muslims and Hagarenes to denote Muslims in general for the Seljuk polity as well as for the caliph in Baghdad [for more on Akropolites' naming practices see: A. JOVANOVIĆ, *Opis i imenovanje Turaka*, *Zbornik radova Matice srpske za klasične studije* 15 (2013), 189-209].

Palaiologos παραδίδωσι γοῦν αὐτὸν Τούρκῳ τινί, καὶ ὃς πεφόνευκε τοῦτον<sup>65</sup>. The next mention of this ethnonym is found in Akropolites's enumeration of the emperor's armies shortly before the battle of Pelagonia where ἦσαν δὲ οὗτοι οἱ μὲν ἐκ Σκυθῶν οἱ δὲ ἐκ Τούρκων<sup>66</sup>. From these two examples we understand how the ethnonym is used, but I suggest that we take a closer look at the last appearance of the ethnonym Turk in the *History*, when Akropolites describes one of the Roman generals by stating ὁ Ῥιμψᾶς Νικηφόρος, ἐκ Τούρκων ἔλκων τὸ γένος, ὀρθοδοξότατος δὲ γεγεννημένος Χριστιανός<sup>67</sup>. In the first two instances, Akropolites employs the ethnonym Turk to emphasize one's Turkish ethnic origins, regardless of whether the individual in question was a member of a *persianized* Seljuk society, or a Turkish nomadic community. The third instance, however, relates to a Roman general who was of Turkish background. Here, the ethnonym Turk is employed to denote one's race. Nikephoros Rimpsas is Roman socially, culturally, and politically. From Akropolites's account, we do not learn anything about this man's customs and habits, most likely because there was nothing extraordinary to report on that front. The man was Roman.

It is also worth noting that both Kinnamos and Choniates mention the origins of Ioannes and Alexios Axouch by calling them "of Persian descent"<sup>68</sup>. Interestingly enough, if we look at the content of Kinnamos's *Epitome* and Choniates's *History* we can begin to understand the importance of Ioannes Axouch's emphasized Persian rather than Turkish origin<sup>69</sup>. While Axouch became one of the leading Byzantine officials during the reign of Ioannes II Komnenos and the early years of Manuel I Komnenos, Kinnamos questioned

65. *Georgii Acropolitae Opera* I, 148. 10-11; transl. according to MACRIDES, *George Akropolites*, 330: *he handed him over to a Turk, and he killed him.*

66. *Georgii Acropolitae Opera* I, 169.3; transl. according to MACRIDES, *George Akropolites*, 360: *some were Scyths, others were Turks.*

67. *Georgii Acropolitae Opera* I, 170. 24-171.1; transl. according to MACRIDES, *George Akropolites*, 361: *Nikephoros Rimpsas, who drew his descent from Turks but had become a most orthodox Christian.*

68. *Ioannis Cinnami Epitome* [as in n. 25], 5.21; *Nicetae Choniatae Historia* [as in n. 29], 9.17.

69. On the Axouch family in Byzantium see K. M. ΜΕΚΙΟΣ, *Ὁ μέγας δομέστικος τοῦ Βυζαντίου Ἰωάννης Ἀξουῆχος καὶ ὁ πρωτοστράτωρ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ Ἀλέξιος*, Ἀθῆναι 1932. More broadly on the Turks in Byzantine service, as well as Turkish Romans, see BRAND, *The Turkish Element in Byzantium, Eleventh-Twelfth Centuries* [as in n. 2], 1-25.

the family's allegiances to the Empire, suggesting lingering Seljuk affinities. Choniates, on the other hand, makes a case that the Axouch family was faithful to the Byzantines. The very fact, however, that he addressed the question of their allegiance raises the question of Ioannes Axouch's Persian origins. Both Kinnamos and Choniates do so, I suggest, because the Axouch originated from the *persianized* Seljuk polity, but also because labelling one as Persian made the discussion of allegiances more effective than simply marking one as a Turk, since Persian suggested a direct political and cultural connection to the Seljukid state in particular, rather than the Turkish race at large. In contrast to the Persian origins of the Axouch family, Akropolites's deployment of the name Turk is used to emphasize the Turkish origins of a Roman citizen whose allegiances are otherwise never questioned.

#### Romanos fieri in Byzantium

The cases of the Axouch family and Nikephoros Rimpas introduce yet another question regarding Byzantine perceptions of identity: can one become Roman? Scholars have pointed out the relevance of the *Romanos fieri* concept in Classical Roman political and social thought<sup>70</sup>. The examples of the Axouchs and Nikephoros Rimpas, as well as those of Turks becoming Persians, help us better understand the way in which Byzantines envisioned the process of *becoming* members of a larger imagined community. When looking specifically at the ethnonyms employed to name the peoples we nowadays label as Turks, we see that the Byzantines did not simply conceptualize themselves as a community of the Romans formed around socio-cultural and political traits, but that they applied the very same to others as well. From the example of the Seljuk Turks, we have seen that authors like Anna Komnene were aware of the gradual *persianization* of the Turks. Anna therefore informs us that οἱ δὲ νῦν τὰ Περσῶν φρονοῦντες Τοῦρκοι<sup>71</sup> established themselves in the city of Nikaia. This brief offhand remark suggests that Byzantine social and political thought allowed one to *become* a member of a distinct community much as one could do the same in Classical Roman contexts. Anna Komnene's word choice when she tries to define the cognitive process of starting to think, feel, and behave

70. Ref. ANDO, *Law, Language, and Empire*, 1-18.

71. *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, iv. 4.7. 8-9:222 (*the Turks, who now think as Persians*).

as a member of a community is telling about the Byzantine perspective on adopting socio-cultural and political traits of a nation. To define the act of ‘thinking’ like somebody she employs rather deliberately the participle of the verb *φρονεῖν* and not any other verb that might denote ‘thinking’ such as *νοεῖν* or *(γι)γνώσκειν*. *Φρονεῖν* suggests mindful thinking by virtue of listening and feeling, distinct from thinking by envisioning which is better expressed by *νοεῖν*<sup>72</sup>. It is exactly through the action of mindful feeling, and not through envisioning or observing, that one adopts social and political values of a nation and melds into a specific national mindset. In this sense, Komnene’s Turks did not only think as Persians, but they felt like Persians by adopting Persian values to really become Persians. Thus, we can easily translate this excerpt as “the Turks, who now think and feel as Persians”.

Roman concepts of *belonging* and *becoming* reveal yet another trait of Byzantine identity to us: ‘blood’ did not matter much in one’s *Romanitas* or, for that matter, *Persianness*. It was social and political norms that determined whether one was a member of a national community<sup>73</sup>. A Turk could become a Persian nationally and socio-culturally. On the other hand, not once have we seen a Persian becoming a Turk. One could not simply become a Turk, at least according to the Byzantine sources, because a Turk was solely a ‘racial’ category and not a national one. For one to have a national identity, one needed to be a member of a polity –that is, a state that the Byzantines would deem civilized based on its laws, customs, history, way of life. The Byzantines, however, never thought of the Turks as having a civilized state. As opposed to the Turks, Persian polities were deemed civilized societies, much like the Byzantines’ own Roman *πολιτεία*<sup>74</sup>. Thus,

---

72. On the meaning of *φρήν* in Ancient Greek texts see: S. D. SULLIVAN, *The Original Meaning of Phren, Psychological Activity in Homer: A Study of Phren*, Ottawa 1988, 34-47. On the specific differentiation between cognitive processes behind *φρονεῖν* and *νοεῖν* see: L. CANDIOTTO, *Nous e phren: conoscenza intellettuale, razionalità discorsiva e saggezza erotica in Socrate e Platone*, in: *La notion d'intelligence (noûs-noeîn) dans la Grèce antique. De Homère au Platonisme*, ed. F. STELLA, *Methodos: savoirs et textes* 16 (2016).

73. For the Byzantines’ employment of individual’s foreign background as a means to ridicule them but in no way contest their *Romanness*, see the example of Servlias in: P. MAGDALINO, *Byzantine Snobbery*, in: *The Byzantine Aristocracy, XI to XIII Centuries*, ed. M. ANGOLD, Oxford 1984, 61-62.

74. For Byzantine perceptions of foreign nations that had a *πολιτεία*, i.e. were deemed as civilized, see KALDELLIS, *Ethnography after Antiquity* [as in n. 20], 14-25.

it seems that having a polity was a prerequisite for one's membership into a specific imagined community. For instance, both Kinnamos and Choniates mention the case of Romans living around the lake of Pousgouse. According to Choniates, these Christians have associated with the Seljuk Turks economically so much as to start hating their own compatriots. Choniates concludes that *οὕτω χρόνω κρατυνθὲν ἔθος γένους καὶ θρησκείας ἐστὶν ἰσχυρότερον*<sup>75</sup>. Kinnamos is sure to pass the judgement on these Romans who betrayed their own race for economic benefit and says that *χρόνω γὰρ δὴ καὶ ἔθει μακρῶ Πέρσαις τὰς γνώμας ἀνακραθέντες ἦσαν*<sup>76</sup>. Both authors emphasize that these Romans betrayed their own race and religion for adopting foreign customs. Kinnamos goes as far as to say that they were single-minded with the Persians, thus clearly indicating that they were at war with the Romans same as the Seljuk *Persianite* polity. One's willing allegiance to a polity was the first step in becoming its member. The second step was somewhat harder, since one had to adopt the language, customs, dress, and other socio-cultural traits to truly be recognized as a member of a community of Romans or others. As difficult as it was to become a member of a distinct community, it is significant that the Romans, be it those of Ennius's or Komnene's times, remained comfortable with the idea of *becoming Roman*.

The case of a Roman general *ὁ Ῥιμψᾶς Νικηφόρος, ἐκ Τούρκων ἔλκων τὸ γένος, ὀρθοδοξότατος δὲ γεγεννημένος Χριστιανός*<sup>77</sup>, that we encounter in Akropolites's narrative, aptly demonstrates the Romans' lack of interest in the relationship between 'race' and ethnicity or nationality. We learn from Akropolites that a person of Turkish blood has become a Roman politically (by fighting for his Roman compatriots) and socio-culturally (by becoming a righteous Christian). For one could not become a Roman simply by being politically tied to the empire; instead, one had to adopt Roman customs in order to become a Roman. By becoming a *rightful Christian*, Nikephoros fulfilled one of the criteria of socio-cultural identity.

75. *Nicetae Choniatae Historia* [as in n. 29], 37. 21-22; transl. according to H. J. MAGOULIAS, *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates*, Detroit 1984, 22: *thus custom, reinforced by time, is stronger than race and religion*.

76. *Ioannis Cinnami Epitome* [as in n. 25], 22. 16-17; transl. is my own: *with long pass of time and [adoption of] customs, these [Romans] shared the opinions of the Persians*.

77. See p. 265 and n. 67.



But becoming a Christian was not the sole criterion in being accepted fully into the Byzantine Roman community<sup>78</sup>. However, in the case of becoming a Roman of Turkish background, converting to Christianity was the first clear step in the long process of socio-cultural naturalization<sup>79</sup>. Once he became a Christian, our general also had to adopt the language, the culture, dress, food, and other habits to be deemed worthy of *romanitas*. In contrast to Nikephoros, as Akropolites informs us, mercenaries in the Roman army of Turkish origin are simply called Turks; they have not become Romans even though they served in the Roman army. Significantly, these Turks in Roman service, while they did contribute to the empire's safety, did not participate in the Roman polity as others did. Thus, when Akropolites describes how Michael VIII Palaiologos was elected emperor, he provides us with details about all the participants:

καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ἠρωτοῦντο Ῥωμαῖοι, καὶ ἀπαξάπαντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ὡς ἐξ ἐνὸς στόματος τὸν Κομνηνὸν Μιχαὴλ ἐθέλειν εἶναι ἔλεγον τῶν πραγμάτων κηδεμόνα καὶ φροντιστήν, καὶ ὡς οἰκεῖον δεσπότην ἔχειν αὐτόν. καὶ τὸ Λατινικὸν δὲ φύλον ἐρωτηθὲν οὐ πολλῆς ἐδεήθη τῆς ἀποκρίσεως, ἀλλ' εὐθὺς τὸν Κομνηνὸν Μιχαὴλ ἐζήτουν καὶ οὗτοι ἀρχηγὸν ἀπάντων τελεῖν. ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ τὸ Σκυθικὸν ἤρροντο γένος, οὐ βαρβαρικῶς ἀπεκρίνοντο ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἑλληνικῶς τε καὶ συνετῶς, καὶ οὐ κρείττονα ἄλλον εἰδέναι δισχυρίζοντο εἰς τὸ ἀρχεῖν ἀπάντων τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ Μιχαήλ<sup>80</sup>.

78. For Byzantine perception of foreign Christian people as essentially non-Roman and barbarian, see: A. KALDELLIS, Did the Byzantine Empire have “Ecumenical” or “Universal” Aspirations?, in: *Ancient States and Infrastructural Power: Europe, Asia, and America*, ed. C. ANDO and S. RICHARDSON, Philadelphia 2017, 272-300; especially 276-282 which refers to the Bulgarian case; for the Bulgarian case also see: KALDELLIS, *Ethnography after Antiquity*, [as in n. 20], 126-136.

79. For other instances of Turks' baptism and naturalization see: BRANDT, The Turkish Element in Byzantium [as in n. 2], 12, 16, 17; MACRIDES, The Byzantine Godfather, *BMGS* 11 (1987), 139-162.

80. *Georgii Acropolitae Opera* I, 158, 9-21; transl. according to MACRIDES, *George Akropolites*, 344: *First, Romans were asked and, altogether in unison, as if with one voice, they said that they wanted Michael Komnenos to be guardian and caretaker of affairs, and to have him as their own master. The Latin race, when asked, did not need much time to answer but they also immediately asked for Michael Komnenos to be leader of all. But when the Scythian race also was asked, they answered not in a barbarian tongue but in Greek and intelligibly, and they affirmed that they knew of no one better than Michael Komnenos to govern all.*

From this excerpt, we see that, as Mark Bartusis has argued, “mere residence in the Empire never made one a ‘Roman’. Only acculturation, with the adoption of Orthodox faith, the Greek language, and Byzantine dress and manners, could do this. Many foreigners, especially Latins, made the transition after a generation or two”<sup>81</sup>. We also see here that these permanent non-Roman residents of the Byzantine Empire had, in fact, a say in its affairs. However, to be able to meaningfully partake in Roman affairs, non-Roman residents of the empire had to be settled as an organized community within the Roman boundaries of the polity<sup>82</sup>. The Turkish mercenaries, apparently, did not have any lands or property on Byzantine soil and were not taxed by the state, at least not as a community of Turks with its allocated lands by the state. For these reasons the Turkish troops had no say in imperial elections. The Cumans, which Akropolites labels exclusively as Skyths, on the other hand, had been settled in the Byzantine Empire since the 13th century and had legal status in the polity as a separate community (if we are to trust Akropolites’s account, they were well on their way to becoming fully romanized). Thus, it was even possible for a community to have a collective say within the Roman polity and yet not to be deemed Roman based on the group’s socio-cultural traits. Unlike the Turks, though, the Cumans of Akropolites’s narrative, however distinct from Romans, had no other state to which they owed allegiance save for the Roman polity. They were not simply hired as mercenaries from the lands beyond Byzantium, but they lived on Byzantine soil. It is pertinent to note that the Byzantines did not necessarily coerce people into becoming Romans. What is more, we see individuals such as Nikephoros Rimpsas or Ioannes Axouch becoming Romans more often than entire communities of non-Romans. For it was surely easier for individuals to adopt ethnic and national traits of the Romans than it was for an entire group of people coming into the Roman lands with their own habits and customs<sup>83</sup>. The other group mentioned by

---

81. M. C. BARTUSIS, *Late Byzantine Army: Arms and Society, 1204-1453*, Philadelphia 1997, 196-197.

82. On the Latins in Byzantine army of the Nicaean period and their land holdings, as well as the settling of Cumans by Ioannes III Vatazes on Roman soils see: BARTUSIS (as in previous note), 26-30, 158-159, 196-197.

83. Examples of the planned settlement of foreigners in Roman lands with a potential intention of romanization was not seen very often. However, when it did happen, the

Akropolites are the Latins. The author here deploys the name Latins, and not Italians, Germans, or even Franks, to denote the European Catholics in Roman lands. I suggest that we should perceive the name Latin as a 'racial' category, much as we did the term Turk. Specific European nationalities, on the other hand, correspond to such ethnonyms as Persian and Turkoman.

## Conclusion

The deployment of ethnonyms associated with specific *socio-political traits*, was a peculiar characteristic of Byzantine historiography. The use of classical ethnonyms to denote contemporaneous peoples based on coincidental geographical habitats, on the other hand, was a trait of encomiastic literature, as seen in the numerous works of the Komnenian court rhetoric. Other than being one of historiography's distinct markers, the *socio-political valence* of ethnonyms, allows us to gain a better perspective of how the Romans conceptualized identity. Byzantine writers of history used the ethnonyms Persian and Turkoman to refer to different societies that we, from today's perspective, would simply label as Turkish or Turkic. Furthermore, the unique deployment of the ethnonym Turk shows us how historians understood the distinction between 'blood' and 'race' on the one hand and political or cultural allegiance on the other. Thus, a Turk (that is, somebody of Turkish 'race'), could be Persian (Great Seljuk or a Seljuk of Rum), Turkoman, or even Roman (Nikephoros Rimpsas). This peculiarity in the system of naming the Turks helps us understand the Byzantines' notions of race, ethnicity, and nationality. For the Byzantines, the traits that determined which nation one belonged to were based on a set of socio-cultural and political characteristics.

The precise use of ethnonyms in Byzantine historiography suggests that authors went far beyond the simple use of classicizing language in their descriptions of foreign peoples. Byzantine historians were, I suggest, keenly aware of both the socio-cultural and political qualities in one's identity. This

---

attempted Romanization would not simply occur by settling people in Roman lands; rather, these people had to be acculturated as Romans. For instance, see KALDELLIS, *The Social Scope* [as in n. 5], 182, for an example of organized settling of Iranian warriors who were to be integrated into the Roman army and who also married Roman women to facilitate their romanization.

approach to naming foreign peoples according to their political affiliations, as well as socio-cultural characteristics, in turn, sheds light on Byzantine authors' keen interest in depicting the 'other' in a more nuanced and specific manner, outside the "distorting mirror" of pre-established classical models.<sup>84</sup> The detailed information and explanations Byzantine historians provide for the communities of others thus serve as a mirror reflecting the Romans' own ideas of what it takes to be a member of their own community. The qualities Byzantine authors ascribed to *romanitas* become clearer when set against an array of socio-political and cultural traits that corresponded to specific ethnonyms employed to describe the Turks. *Romanitas* was a term that signified one's 'race' (just as ethnonym Turks does) and as well as nation (same as the name Persian) –thus, it was loaded with socio-cultural and political qualities. One could retain the race but lose their political Romanness, as we have seen on the example of the Romans around lake Pousgouse, who remained Romans by race but lost their political *Romanitas* once they joined the Seljuk Turks and started appropriating different aspects of Persian culture. These lapsed Romans were going through the similar process, albeit as a collective, much as Nikephoros Rimpsas became Roman, in spite of being of Turkish race. Thus, according to Byzantine historians, individuals and groups would still retain the 'racial' features obtained at birth even as they changed their socio-cultural and political identities. By examining Byzantine writers' conceptualization of communities of the 'other' in closer detail, we release the Byzantines from the shackles of a sterile and supposedly mindlessly reproduced classical antiquity that we have ourselves imposed on them and gain a clearer comprehension and better appreciation for the layered construction of their own political and social *romanitas*.

---

84. For the perception of Byzantine literature as ossified monolith rooted in mimicking classical models at the expense of political realities, for example, see: C. MANGO, *Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 21 May 1974*, Oxford 1975.

ΟΙ ΦΑΝΤΑΣΙΑΚΕΣ ΚΟΙΝΟΤΗΤΕΣ ΤΩΝ ΑΛΛΩΝ:  
Η ΠΕΡΙΠΤΩΣΗ ΤΩΝ ΣΕΛΤΖΟΥΚΩΝ ΤΟΥΡΚΩΝ

Στα τέλη του 11ου αιώνα οι βυζαντινοί ιστοριογράφοι άρχισαν να χρησιμοποιούν μια σειρά κλασικών και λαϊκότροπων εθνωνυμιών σε μια προσπάθεια να περιγράψουν τους Σελτζούκους Τούρκους, οι οποίοι εγκαταστάθηκαν σταδιακά στην Μικρά Ασία και γρήγορα έγιναν οι κύριοι εχθροί της Βυζαντινής Αυτοκρατορίας στην Ανατολή. Μελετώντας τα κλασικά και σύγχρονα εθωνύμια σε ιστοριογραφικά έργα της περιόδου από τα τέλη του 11ου αιώνα μέχρι το μέσον του 13ου αιώνα, υποστηρίζω ότι η εξέλιξη και χρήση των όρων *Πέρσης*, *Τούρκος* και *Τουρκομάνος* ήταν ριζωμένες περισσότερο σε προσπάθεια απεικόνισης σύγχρονων πολιτικών πραγματικοτήτων παρά στη μίμηση κλασικών προτύπων. Με αυτή την εργασία εξετάζω, λοιπόν, πως αυτά τα εθωνύμια, όταν χρησιμοποιούνται στην ιστοριογραφία, αντικατοπτρίζουν τον τρόπο με τον οποίο οι Ρωμαίοι του Μεσαίωνα αντιλαμβάνονταν τόσο τη δική τους όσο και την ταυτότητα των άλλων.

