

SCANDINAVIAN JOURNAL
OF
BYZANTINE
AND
MODERN GREEK STUDIES

- Charis Messis & Ingela Nilsson*
9 **The *Description of the catching of siskins and chaffinches* by Constantine Manasses: Introduction, Text and Translation**
- Tristan Schmidt*
67 **Constantinople and the Sea: Narratives of a Human-Nonhuman Ecosystem?**
- Fabio Acerbi & Michele Trizio*
105 **Uprooting Byzantium. Ninth-Century Byzantine Books and the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement**
- Nikolas Hächler*
155 **Heraclius as a demented ruler? A note on the significance of medical knowledge in patriarch Nicephorus' *I breviarium***
- Sylvain Destephen*
173 **Nothing and No One? Stephanus of Byzantium on Northern Europe**
- Per-Arne Bodin*
197 **Kaleidoscopic reception: An essay on some uses of Kassia**
- 221 **Review Essays**
- 285 **Book Review**

Nothing and No One? Stephanus of Byzantium on Northern Europe

Sylvain Destephen

It was only during the reign of Augustus that the Romans finally reached Northern Europe. According to his brief political autobiography, handed down to us via a few Latin and Greek inscriptions in Anatolia, Augustus considered the Elbe River as the extreme limit of his rule in Europe. He also mentions that a Roman fleet sailed to the lands of three peoples, namely the Cimbri, Charydes and Semnones, all of whom had sought alliances with Rome.¹ At this time, these peoples were settled between the mouth of the Elbe (North-West Germany) and the peninsula of Jutland (continental part of Denmark). Augustus insisted on the fact that before him no Roman had ever reached these remote regions. He clearly refers to a land and sea expedition in 5 AD, which was led by Tiberius, his son-in-law and heir.² In 83 AD, Agricola, governor of Roman Britain and Tacitus' father-in-law, defeated the Caledonians led by Calgacus at the battle of Mons Graupius, an unknown mount whose precise location in northern Scotland is still much debated among scholars. After this decisive victory, a Roman fleet was able to circumnavigate what is now Scotland to ascertain that Britain was indeed an island.³ Although the military campaigns of 5 and 83 AD represented the most northerly Roman advances in Europe, both expeditions had no territorial consequences as the Roman troops rapidly

¹ *Res gestae divi Augusti* 26.2.4.

² Velleius Paterculus 2.106.3; Pliny the Elder 2.167; Cassius Dio 55.28.5. See Grane 2007, 193–195; Grane 2013, 35–38; Mata 2017; Díaz 2019, 147–152.

³ Tacitus, *Agricola* 38.7. However, according to the historian Cassius Dio 66.20.2, the circumnavigation took place in 79 AD, that is to say during the reign of Titus, emperor Vespasian's elder son and first successor.

retreated to more southerly regions, that is to say to the mouth of the Rhine and Solway Firth respectively. Whilst these military interventions were relatively brief, the literary and archaeological data referring to them show the extent to which the Romans were prepared to go in order to gain control over these regions.

This interest, albeit limited, is also confirmed by the Graeco-Roman geographical sources. Contacts with Northern Europe considerably increased in Late Antiquity with the expansion first of Germanic and then Slavic populations in Central and Southern Europe. The settlement of these peoples led to a kind of *rapprochement* between the Northern sphere and the Mediterranean, particularly in the fifth-sixth centuries when the Germanic kingdoms became more stable. That said, it is important to note how the coming of these new peoples did little to renew the interest of the Byzantines in these migrants. If anything, their arrival spurred the Byzantines to cocoon themselves ever more within their Greek heritage. The example of the scholar Stephanus of Byzantium, whose *Ethnica* represent an extended repertoire of names of peoples and places, is a case in point. This erudite contemporary of the emperor Justinian (527-65) crystallises the Byzantine paradox of both political confrontation and cultural indifference with regard to the peoples of Northern Europe. Despite the similarity of terms, Stephanus of Byzantium's *Ethnica* do not address the problem of ethnicity in early Byzantium.⁴ While "Romanness" and the claim to universalism it implies were used by Justinian as ideological weapons to justify the conquest of the previously Roman West and eradicate the Vandals and Ostrogoths as well, Stephanus of Byzantium was indifferent to both notions: his scholarly interest in classical literature led him to map a cultural and anachronistic world that was centred on the Aegean. As a consequence, he was uninterested in Roman history and was indifferent to the rest of the world, especially northern Europe.

⁴ On ethnicity in early Byzantium, see Kaldellis 2019, 52–55.

The Limitations of Late Antique Culture

Since the Graeco-Latin sources were geographically centred on the Mediterranean and the neighbouring regions, such as the Near East or the Caucasus, Northern Europe only occupied a marginal position in them.⁵ Therefore, the world stretching beyond this cultural and political sphere was only occasionally included in classical and post-classical literature. Nevertheless, ethnographic and geographical investigation was part and parcel of Greek culture, appearing as early as the fifth century BC with Hecataeus of Miletus' *Periegesis* ("the journey around the earth/world").⁶ Even though mostly known through some three hundred brief fragments and short quotations, the *Periegesis* focused on the Middle East and also included neighbouring peoples, who were distinct from the Greeks, such as the Scythians, the Nubians or the Indians. In the same way, Herodotus' *Histories* ("investigations/inquiries"), written in the mid-fifth century BC, founded a historiographical tradition in which foreign populations could find their place in a narrative that was nevertheless centred on the Greek world. The conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great in the late fourth century BC led to a considerable expansion of Greek geographical knowledge of the East. However, it was not until the Roman conquests, mainly at the time of Julius Caesar and his adoptive son Augustus, that Western and Central Europe were really integrated into the Graeco-Roman world. Political control and scientific development went hand in hand, as it appears in geographic treatises written in Greek and Latin during the High Empire (first to third century AD). Moreover, through the development of a universalist ideology, not only did the Romans tend to consider their empire as a perfect, finite world, such an ideology also led them to dramatically underestimate their neighbours. They were well aware of

⁵ During the High Empire, geographic information on Northern Europe, written in Greek and Latin, were mainly provided by Pomponius Mela, Pliny the Elder, Tacitus and Ptolemy. Texts have been gathered and commented on by Alonso-Núñez 1988, 48–59; more briefly Whitaker 1980, 221–223; Dilke 1984; Chekin 1993, 490–491. See also Blomqvist 2002, 41–43, on ancient lore regarding the Baltic Sea.

⁶ Only the Latinised form for the names of people and places has been used.

peoples living beyond their borders, but the further away these peoples lived, the more the Roman knowledge and interest in them declined.

Consider, for instance, Ptolemy's *Geography*. Composed around 150, it is the most extensive geographical work of Antiquity. Compared to Strabo, another famous geographer of Antiquity and contemporary of Augustus, Ptolemy abandoned the ethnographic and historical aspects of traditional geography and proposed to Graeco-Roman scholars the most complete gazetteer possible of all the places in the known world. Clearly less literary and much more austere than Strabo's *Geography*, Ptolemy's is, on the other hand, much more systematic and precise.⁷ Its scientific value is obvious to modern readers, but the information transmitted was sometimes anachronistic or false. Moreover, toponyms that were related to territories located outside the Roman Empire are rare. Mention of places associated with Hibernia (Ireland), Caledonia (Scotland), Greater Germania (Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark) and Sarmatia (North-East Europe) are scarce. According to our count, out of a total of about 6,300 places with their geographical coordinates, only about 250 are situated in this vast European area. Since this large section was located well beyond the Roman frontier it was poorly known by Ptolemy and his successors. By way of comparison, Asia Minor, which had long since been integrated into the Graeco-Roman world, boasts twice as many place names even though it represented a much smaller area. Scotland represents the first remarkable case of a growing ignorance of ancient geographers of the lands beyond their borders. While England and Wales, that formed the Roman province of Britannia, are correctly oriented North-South, Scotland, which was only briefly occupied under the Flavian emperors in the 80s–90s AD, was oriented East-West.⁸ A second case is provided by Sarmatia, where only peoples and natural elements (mountains and rivers) are indicated, while the very rare urban settlements are located towards the Danube and the Black Sea, closer to the Graeco-Roman world itself.

⁷ As an introduction read the edition of Claudius Ptolemy's *Geography* by Stückelberger & Graßhoff, 9–27; Aujac 2012³, 13–17.

⁸ Bekker-Nielsen 1988, 157; Jones & Keillar 1996.

Under such circumstances it is hardly surprising how ancient geographers remained so ignorant of Northern Europe. Not only was Northern Europe far from the Mediterranean, it was situated outside a sphere where the circulation of people and ideas had led to a remarkable accumulation and aggregation of knowledge throughout Antiquity. However, data collection in itself was only part of the problem, another issue was how the data, once collected, was then transmitted and used. Here the Late Antique period played a pivotal role in the selection and reuse of sources from Greek and Roman times. The literature of Late Antiquity is marked by two major characteristics. On the one hand, its classicism encouraged contemporary Late Antique authors to seek inspiration and expression in earlier authors, who were considered to be unsurpassable models. On the other hand, Late Antique literature was focused on recapitulating knowledge with a strong tendency to select, gather and classify ancient works according to the aesthetic, historical or scientific value attributed to them. The taste for classicism and recapitulation that permeated Late Antique writers resulted in a production that mixed intertextuality and encyclopaedism, quotation and erudition. In the field of science, whose boundaries with literature were much less rigid than they are today, Late Antiquity constituted a tremendous period for compilations and abridgments, manuals and lexicons.⁹ Some texts were short and provided basic knowledge to a more or less literate public, others were much more ambitious and extensive, which increased the risk of loss, amputation or shortening of the work over time. It is therefore wrong to consider Late Antiquity as a period of predominantly abridged writing and the simplification of knowledge, since the smaller works had a materially better chance of surviving than the larger ones. However, content did matter much more than size in the conservation and transmission of scholarly works.

The age of Justinian was the last epoch to cling on to classical models. Thereafter, no other era did as much to preserve and transmit the vast and prestigious cultural heritage that was to be found within ancient Greek literature. The natural linguistic evolution also led Late

⁹ On the “epitomization” of Late Antique literature, see Banchich 2011 (for historical sources); Felice Sacchi & Formisano 2022 (broader perspectives).

Antique scholars to write works that listed and explained old forgotten words whose precise meaning had become obscure. The feeling of losing contact with the past explained this cultural effort, which resulted in less consideration of the immediate context and a harking back to a previous era that was considered gone. As a result, it is tempting to think that while the Mediterranean world underwent important political and cultural changes, the production of knowledge faltered, or even took a hesitant step back. The geographical works of this period, such as the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a late antique map conserved in a 12th-century copy, the various itineraries and cosmographies that have been preserved, provide little new material, and are even much poorer than Ptolemy's *Geography*.¹⁰ The irruption of Germanic and then Slavic peoples into the Mediterranean world was not accompanied by a surge of works devoted to these peoples and their regions of origin, but rather by a form of cultural withdrawal.

Here, in an attempt to maintain the understanding of past works and, more broadly, of the classical cultural heritage as a whole, Late Antique scholarship made use of lexicography. As we have already said, this phenomenon, which was also present in the Latin-speaking part of the Roman world, led to the writing of numerous glossaries and lexicons in Late Antiquity. The philological dimension of Late Antique knowledge is also evident in other fields, such as the history of Roman institutions with the antiquarian works of John the Lydian, a high-ranking official based in Constantinople.¹¹ The latter was a contemporary of Peter the Patrician.¹² Less of a philologist and more of a technocrat, Peter the Patrician was personally interested in the history of the palatine administration, which he knew first hand. Indeed, for a quarter of a century under Justinian he held the position of Master of the Offices, one of the most important posts in home and foreign affairs. He wrote an entire treatise in which

¹⁰ See Altomare 2013 on geographical and cosmographical knowledge in the two linguistic halves of the Late Antique Roman world. On the posterity of Ptolemy's *Geography* in Byzantium, read Chrysochoou 2014.

¹¹ As an introduction to John the Lydian and antiquarianism in the age of Justinian, see Maas 1992.

¹² Feissel 2020.

official ceremonies, especially imperial ones, were recorded so that the protocols could be reproduced later. This strong interest in traditions and the past reveals how it was felt necessary to preserve such traditions in a context of change. The political upheavals caused by multiple invasions, the collapse of the Western Roman Empire and Justinian's unsuccessful and costly reconquest of it, all fuelled the winds of nostalgia.

Stephanus of Byzantium and Conservative Antiquarianism

The scholarly effervescence that manifests from the third century onwards can also be seen in the multiplication of local histories – known as *Patria*– at a time when the institutional uniformity caused by Diocletian and Constantine's reforms led to the disappearance of local idiosyncrasies. Mostly composed in Greek verse, the *Patria* gathered information about the origins, traditions, cults and history of a single city, regardless of its importance. The literary and local dimension of the *Patria* reveal how authors were basically aiming to compose texts that would highlight and glorify a city's prestige within the late Roman Empire, referring to its historical and mythical past.¹³ Composed only by poets and grammarians, the *Patria* represent a literature of intertextuality and erudition *par excellence*. Produced by the cultural elite for the political elite, the *Patria* effectively represented the same milieu. The patriographic output was highly scholarly and sophisticated, requiring a substantial historical, mythographic and poetic culture in both author and reader alike. Although the *Patria* offer a lot of information about local history, it is a history that is largely dominated by legends, gods and heroes. Erudition and poetry were an expression of both a socio-cultural self and a claimed attachment, sincere or not, to the classical heritage. Needless to say, such a cultural background was shared by a shrinking number of individuals.

Compilatory and lexicographical erudition was also highlighted in Late Antiquity by the *Ethnica* of Stephanus of Byzantium.¹⁴ Active at

¹³ Focanti 2016; Focanti 2018a; Focanti 2018b.

¹⁴ The full title, known by the header of book XIV conserved in *Coislinianus* 228, a 12th-century manuscript, is much longer: *On the names of cities, islands, peoples,*

the beginning of the sixth century, this poorly known Greek-speaking grammarian, based in Constantinople, composed a 60-volume work which dealt with the names of peoples associated with any given place. The original work is definitively lost, but a long abridgement, dedicated to the emperor Justinian, was made by a certain Hermolaus, another grammarian who was slightly posterior to Stephanus of Byzantium.¹⁵ Stephanus' *Ethnica* were abridged no less than three times in the Byzantine period, and the actual work at our disposal is a mere alphabetical list of about 3,600 toponymic entries with the ethnicity of each. The author found information on some cities in the contemporary *Patria*. For instance, the anonymous *Patria* of Constantinople were used to write the entry on Byzantium. Because of their local and scholarly character, one can assume that other *Patria* were read and reused by Stephanus, but most of these details have disappeared through the successive abridged versions. A discreet but fortunately preserved detail reveals that Stephanus belonged to this Constantinopolitan scholarly milieu. Writing a brief entry – at least in the actual version – on a small island situated in the Sea of Marmara, Stephanus of Byzantium states that it was the property of the “very famous and very wise” Peter the Patrician.¹⁶ Such discreet praise – unique in the entire work – was perhaps a personal expression of gratitude to a powerful patron and protector.

Heavily dependent on earlier Greek scholarly literature, Stephanus of Byzantium was more interested in the location and origin of Greek cities, than the Roman ones. He established an extraordinary repertoire of place names of the world known by the Greeks, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the island of Ceylon. Stephanus of Byzantium's world corresponded more or less to the world mapped by Ptolemy in the mid-second century or the *Tabula Peutingeriana* in the fourth

demes and gods, their same-names, name-changings and those coming from names of peoples, places and foundations. In Greek: Περὶ πόλεων, νήσων τε καὶ ἐθνῶν, δήμων τε καὶ τόπων καὶ ὁμωνυμίας αὐτῶν καὶ μετονομασίας καὶ τῶν ἐντεῦθεν παρηγμένων ἔθνικῶν τε καὶ τοπικῶν καὶ κτητικῶν ὀνομάτων. See Billerbeck 2008.

¹⁵ *Suidas*, E 3048. Therefore, the present version is not the abridgment once composed by Hermolaus as it actually derives from three later Byzantine epitomes (Bouiron 2022, 16, 42–44, 56–58, 63–65).

¹⁶ Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnica*, A 163, vol. 1, 116.

century.¹⁷ Stephanus' geographical lore did not include the progress made in the sixth century in the knowledge of East Africa or Central Asia. The toponyms listed by Stephanus of Byzantium refer mainly to elements of human geography. One finds villages, territories, civic or ethnic subdivisions such as tribes and demes, as well as peoples, fortresses, ports, more rarely sanctuaries and oracles, but above all one finds cities. Out of a total of approximately 3,600 entries, about 2,400 correspond to cities. Consequently, regions of the ancient world that were not organised according to the Graeco-Roman civic system, such as Northern and North-Eastern Europe, are clearly under-represented. The *Ethnica* also indicate elements of natural geography such as islands, rivers, seas, gulfs, springs, mountains, hills, plains, etc.

Despite his encyclopaedic aims, Stephanus of Byzantium drew on literary and scientific texts, but ignored administrative documentation. Whilst we still have at our disposal a remarkable gazetteer of all the cities and provinces included in Justinian's empire with the *Synekdemos* of Hierocles,¹⁸ the *Ethnica* offer a picture of the ancient world that was decidedly backward-looking and not contemporary with the author. A close look at the place-names listed by Stephanus of Byzantium reveals that he referred to places that did not exist at the same time and some of them were fictitious. The "uchronic" aspect of the *Ethnica* can be explained by the nature and date of the sources they used. Margarethe Billerbeck, the chief editor of the text, has listed all the authors used by Stephanus of Byzantium and counted nearly 260 historians and chroniclers, poets and playwrights, grammarians and lexicographers, travellers and geographers, philosophers, and orators.¹⁹ Despite the large variety of sources used by Stephanus of Byzantium, he had a particular interest in poetic and ancient sources, since two thirds of the authors were active before the Christian era. In other words, the *Ethnica* relied mainly upon information provided by ancient Greek sources, even very ancient ones, because they were considered more accurate, being imbued with a kind of linguistic truth. In Stephanus' work, scholarly and

¹⁷ As an introduction to the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, see Talbert 2010.

¹⁸ Hierokles, *Synekdemos*.

¹⁹ Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnica*, vol. 5, 169–172.

literary quotations from ancient and prestigious works were considered more important than systematic in-depth investigation. Conversely, the classical tradition of geographical and ethnical *autopsia* heralded in Greek literature by Herodotus and pursued until the sixth century by Procopius seems to be absent.

The geographical and chronological distribution of cities listed in the *Ethnica* expresses a backward-looking cultural choice. In spite of his encyclopaedic character, Stephanus of Byzantium appears to have selected testimonies according to their antiquity and prestige. Nearly all of the poets, playwrights and orators quoted by him are the great authors of the archaic and classical periods. The overemphasis on ancient Greek literature led to an under-representation of Greek literature of the imperial period, and greater still, of the Late Antique period. Historical truth was clearly less important than the antiquity and prestige of the reference. The *Ethnica* are emblematic of Late Antique literature, which was passionate about recapitulating lore and multiplying references. Intertextuality and the imitation of ancient models then took the form of a lexicographical investigation coupled with an anachronistic evocation of the Greek world. In the *Ethnica*, Roman realities are, quite strikingly, almost absent, as are recent historical or literary sources. Even for a region lying at the heart of the ancient world such as Asia Minor, the western regions of it, from Troad to Lycia, were over-represented since they were the most ancient Hellenised parts of Asia Minor and therefore the most present in the works of ancient and prestigious Greek authors, whilst the central and eastern regions were almost absent because they were associated with Hellenistic and Roman sources. Indeed, the silence is even greater for places associated with the Roman Empire. Stephanus of Byzantium's world was a literary one rather than a geographical universe, and conservative antiquarianism was much more valued than scientific accuracy.

The *Ethnica*'s literary dimension is striking when their author indicates the foundation of certain cities. His explanations on the origin of a city were primarily mythological as he favoured literary and scholarly sources over historical narratives and administrative documents. Gods and goddesses, heroes and nymphs, Amazons and participants in the

Trojan War, as well as their abundant and fictitious descendants, became the founders and foundresses, often eponymous, of many cities. Using legends as a way to explain toponymy was, in fact, something that went back to the origins of Greek literature. A classical myth also added an ancient, prestigious and Greek dimension to numerous, obscure and indigenous cities. A second type of foundation was constituted by an etiological narrative. Where the origin and name of a city were unknown, Greek scholars, of whom Stephanus of Byzantium was an heir, would propose an explanation by means of etymology. A legendary event was invented by a writer to explain the name of the city and give it a Greek character and origin. The more well-founded historical foundation stories are less well attested since, as we have already stated, the author was more interested in mythographic literature than historical reality. The entry on Actium, for example, mentions the temple of Apollo, but says nothing of the decisive battle that paved the way for the Augustan Principate in 31 BC.²⁰ The *Ethnica* associate very few cities with the actions of Roman emperors. However, Stephanus of Byzantium was loyal to the Empire, since his work was favoured by Peter the Patrician and its abridged form was dedicated by Hermolaus to Justinian.

The author was, naturally, a man of his times. This remark may seem quite paradoxical since we have already insisted on the predominantly anachronic, even “uchronic”, character of the information provided by the *Ethnica*. However, the inclination for literary antiquarianism and the recapitulation of ancient lore dominated the literary production of Late Antiquity. In fact, with his cultural, compilatory and backward-looking conservatism, Stephanus of Byzantium was perfectly in tune with the scholarly production of his time.²¹

Stephanus of Byzantium on Northern Europe

Since Stephanus focused on the Mediterranean, and more particularly on the archaic and classical Greek world rather than the Hellenistic and Roman world, his philological geography gave little space to regions

²⁰ *Ibid.*, A 177, vol. 1, 126.

²¹ Billerbeck & Zubler 2007, 32–35.

considered peripheral, since they were rarely mentioned in Greek literature. Northern Europe, which was never politically or culturally integrated into the Greek world, was among those geographical regions considered secondary. In the case of the European continent, this northern periphery can be synthetically divided into three main areas: first the British Isles, then Germania and Scandinavia, and finally East Europe. Unlike the Mediterranean, these northern regions had a particularly small number of urban settlements that might be considered as cities: only half a dozen.²² By comparison, Stephanus of Byzantium listed about 45 cities in Ionia, 70 in Lycia and 110 in Caria. Since the civic organisation, as a typically Greek institutional model, had no equivalent in the British Isles, Germania, Scandinavia and East Europe, its absence was an indication of the non-Greek, even uncivilised character of Northern Europe as a whole.²³

Since Stephanus of Byzantium considered local peoples as essentially organisational units – a substitute for almost non-existent cities – the political geography in this part of Europe was portrayed in an ethnic way. Some peoples were large enough to be divided into sub-groups, such as the Arimaspi, Karambyki and Tarkini, who were thought to be part of the Hyperboreans, or the Sarmatians, who were associated with the much larger group of the Scythians.²⁴ Peoples occupied spaces that were never clearly defined nor always specified by a toponym. For instance, the Alamanni were considered neighbours of the Germans (but not as Germans themselves, which is quite surprising), whilst the Sarmatians were indicated as living in Sarmatia, but this region was neither delimited nor specified by any human settlement or natural

²² Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnica*, A 271, vol. 1, 182 (Amisa in Germania, close to the river Ems); Γ 46, vol. 1, 414 (Gelanoi in Sarmatia, possibly located in central Ukraine); I 77, vol. 2, 286 (Iuerne located in South Ireland but without any certainty); Λ 72, vol. 3, 224 (London in Britain rather than Lincoln); Σ 39, vol. 4, 140 (Sammion also in Britain, maybe close to the island of Man); T 15, vol. 4, 252 (Tamyrake in Sarmatia, nowadays in Crimea).

²³ In the third century BC, Polybius 2.17 already depicted the Celts living in the Po Valley as deprived of permanent settlements and ignorant of any science or art.

²⁴ Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnica*, A 423, vol. 1, 252; K 72, vol. 3, 34; Σ 73, vol. 4, 150; T 31, vol. 4, 262.

element.²⁵ At best the author mentioned in another entry that Sarmatia had a part in Europe and suggested that another part lay in Asia.²⁶ The mention of the Alamanni is interesting because it reveals the author's capacity, even partial, to adapt his work to Late Antique realities and not limit himself to the corpus of classical literary works. The Alamanni formed a powerful tribal confederation that appeared in the Greek and Latin sources in the third century AD when the emperor Caracalla launched a military operation on the Rhine; the Alamanni continued to gain in importance during Late Antiquity.²⁷ About the same time, the Goths appeared north of the Black Sea, the Saxons at the mouth of the Elbe and the Franks north of the Rhine. Although all three peoples are mentioned in the *Ethnica*, the entries are extremely concise.²⁸ In an indirect way, Stephanus of Byzantium took into account the new (geo) political reality and transposed it into his lexicographical geography, but without always associating it with any author considered prestigious enough to be quoted, as he usually did for the representatives of classical Greek literature.

The natural geography of Northern Europe was not entirely absent from Stephanus of Byzantium's *Ethnica*. However, it mainly took the shape of large-scale geographical elements such as islands and rivers, and more exceptionally mountains, such as the legendary Rhipaia mountains situated among the Hyperboreans and where the Ancients located the source of the Danube.²⁹ In the case of the British Isles, Stephanus of

²⁵ *Ibid.*, A 192, vol. 1, 136; Σ 73, vol. 4, 150.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, T 15, vol. 4, 252.

²⁷ The oldest mention is transmitted by the historian Cassius Dio 77.13.4.

²⁸ Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnica*, Γ 104, vol. 1, 434; Σ 57, vol. 4, 144; Φ 97, vol. 5, 48. In the last mention, the Franks are regarded as a people living in Italy, but this huge error probably derives from the fact that some unknown Byzantine scribe probably misread the name Gaul while making a copy of the *Ethnica*: ΓΑΛΛΙΑC would have mistakenly become ΙΤΑΛΙΑC (Bouiron 2022, 703). One can add that northern peoples like the Scythians or the Goths might have been associated with the biblical Gog and Magog in Late Antique Christian historiography. See Kominko 2019, 66–67.

²⁹ On the Danube and the Rhipaia mountains: Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnica*, Δ 14, vol. 2, 10; P 35, vol. 3, 120. Regarding the Germanic tribe living close to the Rhine, see *ibid.*, P 26, vol. 3, 120.

Byzantium indicated several islands, but he had difficulty in counting them and distinguishing them from one another, to the point of devoting three separate entries to Hibernia because of three different spellings of the same name,³⁰ or of considering Albion and Britain as two different regions.³¹ The island of Bourchanis (now Borkum) was mistakenly located on the coast of Celtic Gaul, when it was actually located off the coast of Germania, in the archipelago of East Friesland.³² Just as the political or human geography of this part of Europe was considerably simplified or misunderstood by Stephanus of Byzantium due to the paucity of available and reliable sources, natural geography underwent the same process of terminological (over)simplification. For this reason, the author never associated any sea, gulf or cape with Northern Europe, nor did he associate with it any anchorages, plains, hills, peaks, etc., whereas he frequently mentioned all these elements when he described the Greek classical world. Geographical indeterminacy was more cultural indifference than scientific ignorance: it manifested the fierce conservative, almost reactionary Hellenocentrism of Stephanus of Byzantium and the Constantinopolitan scholarly circles to which he belonged.

In these circumstances, the author's knowledge of and interest in geography diminished the further he moved away from the Greek world and especially from the corpus of Greek sources considered classical and valued in the educational system and by the social elite of Late Antiquity. However, Stephanus of Byzantium did not express any depreciatory judgement on the peoples living in Northern Europe. That being said, the minor importance he attached to them and the virtual absence of any civic structures clearly revealed his lack of interest in regions and populations which he deemed to be culturally and politically underdeveloped.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, I 38, I 76, I 77, vol. 2, 272, 286. See also Freeman 2001, 115–6; Bouiron 2022, 351, 529–530, 536–537.

³¹ Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnica*, A 197, vol. 1, 138; Π 235, vol. 4, 94. See Bouiron 2022, 404–405, 459–462, 638–639.

³² Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnica*, B 152, vol. 1, 372

Within the structure of the *Ethnica*, Northern Europe seems to be occupied only by remote, disorganised and worthless peoples. The latter were only known through authors whose prestige was due to their antiquity rather than their veracity or accuracy. For instance, when Stephanus of Byzantium mentions the Hyperboreans, he draws his information from several Greek authors according to the quotations he made: the historian Protarchus, the poet Antimachus of Colophon (unless it was the poet Callimachus whose name has been heavily damaged by the manuscript transmission), the historian and geographer Damastes of Sigeion and the historian Hellanicus of Lesbos.³³ With the exception of Protarchus, who was active in the first century BC, the authors belonged to the fifth-fourth centuries BC, a period considered to be the golden age of classical Greek literature by Late Antique writers. Stephanus of Byzantium's philological interest led him to focus on ancient and prestigious authors, who were likely to offer lexical variants of the same ethnonym. Historical topicality and scientific accuracy were less important than the originality and preciousness of the literary reference. Besides, the "hyperboreal" world was summed up by the *Ethnica* as a succession of two or three peoples occupying a territory dominated by the north wind and covered by eternal snow. Stephanus of Byzantium, unlike Diodorus Siculus,³⁴ a Greek historian who was active in the first century BC, did not associate this country with nineteen-year night cycles. On the contrary, he stated that in the Hyperborean regions, where the island of Thule was located, days lasted twenty hours in summer and nights only four, and the reverse in winter.³⁵ These extreme natural conditions altered local populations' human aspect, since the Hyperboreans are said to be neighbours of a people who are half man and half dog.³⁶ Although cross-breeds already appear in Hecataeus of Miletus' *Periegesis*, such hybrid human races are actually quite rare in the Late Antique literature. As Maja Kominko has recently and rightly pointed out: "There was a consensus that extreme climates produce

³³ *Ibid.*, Y 37, vol. 4, 374. See also Dion 1976, 148–151; Bouiron 2022, 699–701.

³⁴ Diodorus Siculus 2.47.

³⁵ Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnica*, Θ 54, vol. 2, 246.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, E 14, vol. 2, 216.

inhabitants bestial in manner and appearance, because excess distorted the body and the mind”.³⁷

Clearly, Stephanus of Byzantium portrayed Northern Europe as a geographical backdrop, a human backwater far removed from the centre of his world, which was Mediterranean and more specifically Greek. Known through Greek sources written in the classical period that had been transmitted mostly in the form of lexicons and compilations, Northern Europe represented a sort of “hyper-periphery”, shrouded in a veil of mystery and ignorance. Stephanus of Byzantium composed his cultural and lexical geography skilfully and although his philological research was predominantly antiquarian, and anachronistic, it was not devoid of cultural and political value judgments.

Conclusion

Stephanus of Byzantium was a scholar and a grammarian, but he was not a historian or a geographer. It is therefore pointless to criticise him for not mentioning events that took place at the time of the emperor Justinian or regions within his empire. In all likelihood, one of Justinian’s chief ministers was probably the sponsor or recipient of the *Ethnica*, perhaps both. The interest of this monumental work, preserved only in an abridged, yet impressive form, lies in its selection and use of sources from a philological perspective. The enormous list of toponyms and ethnonyms compiled by Stephanus of Byzantium reveals the deep attachment of the Constantinopolitan elites of Late Antiquity to classical Greek literature. Known directly or more often through epitomes and compilations, this literature constituted the distinctive cultural treasure of the Late Roman and Early Byzantine elites. The main interest of the *Ethnica* was to display a literary and “uchronic” geography centred on the Greek world, more precisely on the Aegean and adjacent areas. The antiquity and prestige of literary references also reflected a political and cultural conservatism as well as a certain element of nostalgia. At a time when Greek cities had been totally deprived of their traditional marks of autonomy (civic coins, local legislation, municipal

³⁷ Kominko 2019, 54.

magistracies, local cults), becoming nothing more than administrative cogs within the Roman machine, the *Ethnica* exhumed references and legends associated with ancient and sometimes long-dead cities. The contemporary Greek city had become a cultural reference to a vanished world. In these conditions, the barbaric non-Greek world, even if it was Roman, aroused very little interest for Stephanus of Byzantium and the scholarly circles he frequented.

The *Ethnica*'s overemphasis on the classical Greek literary heritage discreetly expressed a depreciatory view of the rest of the world, especially of Northern Europe, which was almost beyond Stephanus of Byzantium's cultural and mental perimeter. This devaluation by silence or omission is astonishing given the fact that the peoples of central and northern Europe were now moving ever closer to the Mediterranean world. Indeed, it was during Late Antiquity that the Germanic kingdoms settled within the late Western Roman Empire and kept close, sometimes conflicting, relations with Justinian's empire. The contrast with two of Stephanus of Byzantium's contemporaries, who were much more interested in contemporary reality, such as the Byzantine historian Procopius on Thule and above all the Gothic historian Jordanes on *Scandza*, is therefore particularly striking.³⁸ However, as we have already said, one cannot expect a Constantinopolitan grammarian to share the same interests in recent or past events as any regular historian might, for the simple reason that his focus of interest lay in the eternal and manifold splendours of the Greek language.

³⁸ Alonso-Núñez 1987; Goffart 2005, 386–393; Sarantis 2018, 366–368; Van Nuffelen 2019, 47–49. On the information and sources of Jordanes on Scandinavia, and particularly in the Heruli, see Brandt 2018, 8–12, 54–55. One cannot discard the possibility that both Procopius and Jordanes relied upon the same unknown source regarding Scandinavia according to Mecella 2022, 191–192. Ivanišević & Kazanski 2010 have investigated the Heruli's settling down within the Roman territory. The strengthening of relations between the Mediterranean and Scandinavia from the reign of Septimius Severus (193–211 AD) onwards, and even more so during Late Antiquity, was also marked by an increasing circulation of Roman coins in this part of Europe. See Lucchelli 1998, 138–146; Bursche 2002.

But would it be correct to affirm that Stephanus of Byzantium was only interested in literary and philological antiquarianism, when he established his long lists of ethnonyms, most of which came from classical and sometimes post-classical Greek sources? Although it is true that the author belonged to a highly educated and politicised milieu centred on Constantinople, it is equally true that the literary production in the age of Justinian was not strictly limited to the capital, which attracted the most ambitious and talented writers and scholars.³⁹ A good example is Cosmas Indicopleustes, who was a contemporary of Stephanus of Byzantium. Beginning his life as a merchant, only to become a monk, Cosmas wrote a *Christian Topography*, which was partly based upon his personal experiences. Describing people and places around the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, Cosmas casually mixed up trade routes and pilgrimage paths, as he made multiple references to both historical and biblical sources. That said, once retired to a cloister in the Sinai, Cosmas could not have had the private libraries of Constantinople at his disposal, nor would he have had access to the abundant literary sources that were still available to the public. Early Byzantine encyclopaedism obviously required a very large array of texts as it aimed at selecting, collecting, and organising them in order to produce impressive and massive works like the *Ethnica*. As Rosa Maria Piccione rightly pointed out twenty years ago, late antique encyclopaedism was not a neutral, intellectual discipline, since authors wanted to reshape the material transmitted by previous authors and centuries in a certain way.⁴⁰ In the early sixth century, two generations or so after the fall of the western Rome empire, past imperial and classical culture were reformulated in Constantinople according to the new political agendas of the emperors such as Anastasius and Justinian. Whereas the pagan historian Zosimus focussed his narrative on Rome and its pillage by the Ostrogoths as a remembrance of the historical centre of the Roman world,⁴¹ two decades later Stephanus of Byzantium paid much less attention to Rome and the Roman West. Therefore, one has to ask whether Stephanus deliberately

³⁹ Rapp 2005, 393–394.

⁴⁰ Piccione 2003, 47–48.

⁴¹ Kruse 2019, 33–35.

decided to diminish or downplay the Roman ethnonyms in his *Ethnica* as they belonged to an irremediably lost world. Clearly, he preferred to link the high-brow Constantinopolitan culture to that of the Greek classical sources. In doing so, seen from the court milieu the Roman West began to vanish and northern Europe almost fell into oblivion.

Bibliography

Sources

- Cassius Dio, *Histories*. Ed. U. P. Boissevain, *Cassii Dionis Cocceiani Historiarum Romanarum quae supersunt*. 5 vols. Berlin 1895–1931.
- Claudius Ptolemy, *Geography*. Ed. A. Stückelberger & G. Graßhoff, *Klaudios Ptolemaios Handbuch der Geographie: griechisch-deutsch. Einleitung, Text und Übersetzung, Index*. 2 vols. Basel 2006.
- Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library*. Ed. P. Bertrac et al., *Diodore de Sicile: Bibliothèque historique*. 17 vols. Paris 1973–.
- Hierokles, *Synekdemos*. Ed. E. Honigmann, *Le Synekdemós d’Hiéroklos et l’opuscule géographique de Georges de Chypre*. Brussels. 1939.
- Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*. Ed. Karl Mayhoff, *C. Plini Secundi naturalis historiae libri XXXVII*. 6 vols. Leipzig 1892–1909.
- Res gestae divi Augusti*. Ed. J. Scheid, *Res gestae divi Augusti. Hauts faits du divin Auguste*, Paris 2007.
- Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnica*. Ed. M. Billerbeck et al., *Stephani Byzantii Ethnica*, 5 vols. Berlin/Boston 2006–2015.
- Suidas*. Ed. A. Adler, *Suidae Lexicon*. 4 vols., Leipzig 1928–1938.
- Tacitus, *Agricola*. Ed. A. J. Woodman & C. S. Kraus, Cambridge 2014.
- Velleius Paterculus, *Histories*. Ed. W. S. Watt, *Velleius Paterculus, Historiarum Libri Duo*, Stuttgart 1998.

Literature

- Alonso-Núñez, J.M. 1987. “Jordanes and Procopius on Northern Europe” *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 31, 1–16.
- 1988. “Roman Knowledge of Scandinavia in the Imperial Period” *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 7, 47–64.
- Altomare, B.M. 2013. “Géographie et cosmographie dans l’Antiquité tardive: la tradition grecque et les modèles latins” *Dialogues d’histoire ancienne* 39, 9–34.
- Amden, B. et al. (eds) 2002. *Noctes Atticae. 34 Articles on Greco-Roman Antiquity and its Nachleben*. Copenhagen.
- Aujac, G. 2012³. *Claude Ptolémée: astronome, astrologue, géographe. Connaissance et représentation du monde habité*. Paris.

- Banchich, T.M. 2011. “The Epitomizing Tradition in Late Antiquity”, in Marincola (dir.) 2011, 305–311.
- Bekker-Nielsen, T. 1988. “Terra incognita: the subjective geography of the Roman Empire”, in Damsgaard-Madsen, Christiansen & Hallager (eds) 1988, 148–161.
- Billerbeck, M. & C. Zubler 2007. “Stephanos von Byzanz als Vermittler antiker Kulturgeschichte”, in Fellmeth *et al.* (eds) 2007, 27–42.
- Billerbeck, M. 2008. “Sources et techniques de citation chez Étienne de Byzance” *Eikasmos* 19, 301–322.
- Blomqvist, J. 2002. “The Geography of the Baltic in Greek Eyes from Ptolemy to Laskaris Kananos”, in Amden *et al.* (eds) 2002, 36–51.
- Bouiron, M. 2022. *Stéphane de Byzance. Les Ethniques comme source historique. L'exemple de l'Europe occidentale*. Turnhout.
- Brandt, T. 2018. *The Heruls in Scandinavia*. Unpubl. PhD, Copenhagen.
- Bursche, A. 2002. “Circulation of Roman Coinage in Northern Europe in Late Antiquity” *Histoire & Mesure* 17, 121–141.
- Chekin, L.S. 1993. “Mappae Mundi and Scandinavia” *Scandinavian Studies* 65, 487–520.
- Chrysochoou, S.A. 2014. “Ptolemy’s Geography in Byzantium”, in Xanthaki-Karamanou (ed.) 2014, 247–271.
- Cruz Andreotti, G. (ed.) 2019. *Tras los pasos de Momigliano. Centralidad y alteridad en el mundo greco-romano*. Barcelona.
- Dagron, G. & B. Flusin (eds) 2020. *Constantin VII Porphyrogénète. Le Livre des cérémonies*. Vol. 1. Paris.
- Damsgaard-Madsen A., E. Christiansen & E. Hallager (eds) 1988. *Studies in Ancient History and Numismatics Presented to Rudi Thomsen*. Århus.
- Díaz, P.C. 2019. “Nivium ut turbo montibus celsis. Los bárbaros hiperbóreos, entre la curiosidad, el desprecio y el temor”, in Cruz Andreotti (ed.) 2019, 147–169.
- Dilke, O.A.W. 1984. “Geographical Perceptions of the North in Pomponius Mela and Ptolemy” *Arctic* 37, 347–351.
- Dion, R. 1976. “La notion d’Hyperboréen. Ses vicissitudes au cours de l’Antiquité” *Bulletin de l’Association Guillaume Budé* 2, 143–157.

- Durac, K. & I. Jevtić (eds) 2019. *Identity and the Other in Byzantium. Papers from the Fourth International Symposium Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium*. Istanbul.
- Feissel, D. 2020. “Les extraits de Pierre le Patrice dans le *De cerimoniis*», in Dagron & Flusin (eds) 2020, 64*–70*.
- Felice Sacchi, P. & M. Formisano (eds) 2022. *Epitomic Writing in Late Antiquity and Beyond. Forms of Unabridged Writing*. London.
- Fellmeth, U. et al. (eds) 2007. *Historische Geographie der Alten Welt. Grundlagen, Erträge, Perspektiven. Festgabe für Eckart Olshausen aus Anlass seiner Emeritierung*. Hildesheim.
- Focanti, L. 2016. “The *patria* of Claudianus (FGrHist 282)” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 56, 485–503.
- 2018a. *The Fragments of Late Antique Patria*. Unpubl. PhD, Groningen.
- 2018b. “Looking for an Identity. The *Patria* and the Greek Cities in Late Antique Roman Empire” *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 96, 947–968.
- Freeman, P. 2001. *Ireland and the Classical World*. Austin.
- Goffart, W. 2005. “The Jordanes’s *Getica* and the Disputed Authenticity of Gothic Origins from Scandinavia” *Speculum* 80, 379–398.
- Gonzalez Sanchez, S. & A. Gugliemi (eds) 2019. *Romans and Barbarians Beyond the Frontiers: Archaeology, Ideology and Identities in the North*. Oxford.
- Grane, T. 2007. *The Roman Empire and Southern Scandinavia: A Northern Connection! A re-evaluation of military-political relations between the Roman Empire and the Barbaricum in the first three centuries AD with a special emphasis on southern Scandinavia*. Unpubl. PhD, Copenhagen.
- 2013. “Roman imports in Scandinavia: their purpose and meaning?”, in Wells (ed.) 2013, 29–44.
- Ivanišević, V. & M. Kazanski 2010. “Justinian’s Heruli in Northern Illyricum and Their Archaeological Evidence” *Stratum* 5, 147–57 (text in Russian, abstract in English).
- Janniard, S. & G. Greatrex (eds) 2018. *Le monde de Procope. The World of Procopius*. Paris.
- Jones, B. & I. Keillar 1996. “Marinus, Ptolemy and the Turning of Scotland” *Britannia* 27, 43–49.

- Kaldellis, A. 2019. *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium*. Cambridge (Ma)/London.
- Kominko, M. 2019. “Changing Habits and Disappearing Monsters: Ethnography between Classical and Late Antiquity”, in Durac & Jevtić (eds) 2019, 53–70.
- Kruse, M. 2019. *The Politics of Roman Memory. From the Fall of the Western Empire to the Age of Justinian*. Philadelphia.
- Lucchelli, T.M. 1998. *La moneta nei rapporti tra Roma e l'Europa barbarica: aspetti e problemi*. Florence.
- Maas, M. (ed.) 2005. *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*. Cambridge Univ. Press.
- 1992. *John Lydus and the Roman Past: Antiquarianism and Politics in the Age of Justinian*. London/New York.
- Marincola, J. (dir.) 2011. *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*. Chichester.
- Mata, K. 2017. “Of Barbarians and Boundaries”, in Gonzalez Sanchez & Gugliemi (eds) 2019, 8–33.
- Mecella, L. 2022. “Procopius’ sources”, in Meier & Montinaro (eds) 2022, 178–193.
- Meier, M. & F. Montinaro (eds) 2022. *A Companion to Procopius*. Leiden/Boston.
- Piccione, R.M. 2003. “Scegliere, raccogliere e ordinare. La letteratura di raccolta e la trasmissione del sapere”, *Humanitas* 58, 44–63.
- Rapp, C. 2005. “Literary Culture in the Age of Justinian”, in Maas (ed.) 2005, 376–397.
- Sarantis, A. 2018. “Procopius and the different types of northern barbarian”, in Janniard & Greatrex (eds) 2018, 355–378.
- Talbert, R.J.A. 2010. *Rome’s World: The Peutinger Map Reconsidered*. Cambridge.
- Van Nuffelen, P. (ed.) 2019. *Historiography and Space in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge.
- 2019. “Beside the Rim of the Ocean: The Edges of the World in Fifth- and Sixth-Century Historiography”, in Van Nuffelen (ed.) 2019, 36–56.
- Wells, P.S. (ed.) 2013. *Rome beyond Its Frontiers: Imports, Attitudes and Practices*. Portsmouth (RI).

- Whitaker, I. 1980. "Tacitus' *Fenni* and Ptolemy's *Phinnoi*" *The Classical Journal* 75, 215–224.
- Xanthaki-Karamanou, G. (ed.) 2014, *The Reception of Antiquity in Byzantium, with Emphasis on the Palaeologan Era*. Athens.