

Georgios Pachymeres between Ethnography and Narrative: *Συγγραφικαὶ Ἱστορίαι* 3.3–5

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GEORGIOS PACHYMERES' *Συγγραφικαὶ Ἱστορίαι* records the reigns of Michael VIII Palaiologos and his son Andronikos (i.e. the years 1260–1307).¹ In Book 3, after the latest chapter in Michael VIII's embarrassing transactions with Patriarch Arsenios, Pachymeres² shifts his attention to the Emperor's eastern policies (chapters 3–5), namely his diplomatic relations with the Τόχαροι (the Mongols) and the Αἰθίοπες (the Mameluks).³ Recounting the embassies of the

¹ On the period, see D. J. Geanakoplos, *Emperor Michael Palaiologos and the West, 1258–1282* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1959); A. E. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins: the Foreign Policy of Andronicus II, 1282–1328* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1972); L. Mavromatis, *Οἱ πρῶτοι Παλαιολόγοι. Προβλήματα πολιτικῆς πρακτικῆς καὶ ιδεολογίας* (Athens 1983); and D. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium: 1261–1453*² (Cambridge 1993). On the chronology of Pachymeres' *History*, see recently S. Efthymiadis and A. Mazarakis, "Questions de chronologie sur Ramon Muntaner (ch. 234) et Georges Pachymères (XIII, 27–38): la prise de Phocée et de Thasos en 1307," *Nea Rhome* 5 (2008), forthcoming.

² For an evaluation of Pachymeres' overall oeuvre, see S. Lampakis, *Γεώργιος Παχυμέρης πρωτεύδικος καὶ δικαιοφύλαξ* (Athens 2004). See also the Introduction in Failler's edition (*infra*, n.4) and A. Failler, "Chronologie et composition dans l'Histoire de Georges Pachymère," *REByz* 39 (1981) 145–249. Further bibliography in H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* I (Munich 1978) 453.

³ Historical information on the treatment of these two peoples in Byzantine historiography is gathered in F. Uspensky, "Byzantine Historians on the Mongols and on the Egyptian Mamluks" [in Russian], *Vizantijski Vremennik* 24 (1923–1926) 1–16, esp. 7–8. On the Black Sea peoples in particular see A. E. Laiou, "On Political Geography: the Black Sea of Pachymeres," in R.

latter to Constantinople, Pachymeres tells the strange story of a Cuman slave who, though being himself supposedly ἀσύνετος, “devoid of intelligence,” rose to power and became the Sultan of his former masters, the ἄγαν συνετοί and sophisticated Ethiopians. Subsequently, this white, warlike Cuman, now paradoxically King of the dusky, languid Ethiopians, bamboozles the Byzantine Emperor by sneaking Scythian slaves from the Euxine into Egypt. With his newfound army the ex-slave sweeps away with ruthless force τὰ κατὰ Συρίαν (ch. 5) and wreaks havoc in the empire. Midway through this engrossing narrative, which towards the end breaks into pathetic and irate lamentation for Byzantine losses in the Near East (καὶ νῦν κείται μὲν ἡ περιφανὴς Ἀντιόχεια ... θρηνεῖ Λαοδίκεια ... τὰ μεγάλα τῶν Ἰταλῶν ἄστεα ὡς οὐδ’ ἂν ἦσαν λογίζονται, etc.), Pachymeres digresses on a pedestrian ethnographic comparison of “Scythians” and “Ethiopians” (ch. 3). In this section, Pachymeres conceptualizes the differences between the two peoples in terms of binary oppositions, which relate physique (black/white, soft/hard, etc.) with character (vehement/indolent, brave/cowardly, etc.), thus venturing a physiological account of their natural and psychological traits. This digression, itself quite strange, as we shall see, despite all its traditional overtones, is followed by an even stranger chapter on a *curiosum* (ch. 4: περὶ καμηλοπαρδάλεως, ὁποῖόν ἐστιν), which at first sight rings like an intemperate afterthought.

Chapters 3–5 of Book 3, therefore, constitute quite an assortment of historiographical elements, at least on the surface: they combine paradoxography with ethnography; “tragic,” rhetorically heightened and sentimental style with dry, “scientific” physiology; anecdotal gossip with consequential political discourse. In this paper, we shall try to make sense of this section of Pachymeres’ *Συγγραφικαὶ Ἱστορίαι*, to see how its disparate elements come together, by (a) restoring some of its cultural background, focusing mainly on Pachymeres’ departures from the classical tradition; and (b) attempting connections and associations between the various narrative

Beaton and C. Roueché (eds.), *The Making of Byzantine History. Studies dedicated to Donald M. Nicol* (London 1993) 94–121.

components. The peculiarities of the ethnographic digression in ch. 3, we shall argue, the extent to which this passage evokes but also undermines classical patterns and motifs, are at the core of this section. The very elements in Pachymeres' account which appear the most extraneous and digressive may well be the ones that encapsulate the political punch of his discourse. This paper, therefore, will connect Pachymeres' ethnology with *narrative*, that is, the historian's overall historiographical and political agenda. It is hoped that this analysis will contribute to our understanding of Pachymeres' elaborate and "obscure" style of writing.

The crucial passage reads:⁴

τὸν δὲ γε τῶν Αἰθιοπῶν σουλτὰν ἄλλη τις χρεία τῷ βασιλεῖ σπέν-
δεσθαι κατηνάγκαζεν· ἐκ Κομάνων γὰρ ὧν ἐκεῖνος, εἷς τῶν εἰς
δουλείαν ἀποδεδομένων, τὸ γένος ἐζήτει κατ' αἰτίαν συνετήν ὅτι καὶ
ἐπαίνων ἐγγύς. τὰ γὰρ ἀντικρὺ ἀλλήλων κλίματα τῆς γῆς, τό τε
βόρειον καὶ τὸ νότιον, ἐμφύτοις τισὶ δυνάμεσιν ἐπὶ τε σωματικῇ καὶ
ψυχικῇ διαθέσει ἀντιπεπόνθασιν, ὥσπερ δῆτα καὶ κρᾶσσειν, ἐν αἷς οὐ
μόνον ζῶων ἀλόγων πρὸς ὅμοια ζῶα διαφορὰς εὗροι τις ἐμφανείς,
ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ἀνθρώπων· βορείους γὰρ τὰ ζῶα λε-
λεύκωται, νοτίους δὲ μεμελάνωται· ἀνθρώποι δὲ ἐν μὲν βορείους
ἀσύνετοι, ἄλλως δὲ καὶ μόλις λογικοὶ καταλαμβανόμενοι, ἐν οἷς οὐ
λογικὰ ἐπιστήματα, οὐ μαθήματα φυσικὰ, οὐ γνώσεις, οὐ φρόνησις, οὐ
περὶ τὸν βίον οἰκονομία καὶ τεχνῶν ἐργασίαι καὶ τὰλλα οἷς τῶν
ἀλόγων ἀνθρώποι διαστέλλονται, ὁρμᾶς μέντοι παραβόλους καὶ
πρὸς μάχην ἐτοίμους ἔχοντες, ὡς ἐτοίμως ὁρμήσοντες, ἦν τις ἐπο-
τρύνει, παρὰβολόν τι καὶ βακχικὸν θύοντες ἐπ' ἀλλήλοις καὶ τῷ Ἄρει
σπένδοντες. ἐν δὲ νοτίους τοῦναντίον ἅπαν· ἐκεῖνοι γὰρ εὐφρεῖς μὲν
ἄλλως καὶ ἄγαν συνετοὶ καὶ ἄριστοι τὰ εἰς πολιτείαν καὶ τέχνας καὶ
λογικὰ μαθήματα καὶ βουλὰς ἐφ' ἐκάστῳ, νωθοὶ δὲ τὰ εἰς ὁρμᾶς καὶ
μαλακοὶ πρὸς μάχας καὶ ἀπραγμοσύνη μᾶλλον συζῶντες, ὀλίγα ἔχειν
ἢ πολλὰ πολυπραγμονοῦντες αἰρούμενοι. τούτων δὲ τὸν ἥλιον αἰτι-
άσαιτ' ἂν τις φυσικευόμενος, τῷ μὲν ὀμιλεῖν ὀλίγα καὶ πρὸς ὀλίγον
οὐ μετρίως θερμαίνοντα τὸν ἐγκέφαλον, ὅθεν καὶ ἡ εὐφροσύνη προσ-
γίγνεσθαι πέφυκε, τὸ δὲρμα δὲ συμπλοῦντα ἀπεργαζόμενον τοῖς
μέλεσι τὴν στερεότητα, ἐπὶ δὲ θάτερα τῶν μερῶν τῷ ἐπὶ πλέον ὀμιλεῖν

⁴ *Georges Pachymères, Relations historiques I*, edition, introduction, notes A. Failler, transl. V. Laurent (CFHB 24.1 [Paris 1984]) 237. All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.

θερμαίνοντα μὲν εἰς εὐφύϊαν, ἔκλυτον δ' εἰς ἀνδρίαν ἀπεργαζόμενον τὴν ὀλομέλειαν τῶν σωμάτων· συμμετατίθεσθαι γὰρ τοῖς σώμασι τὰς ψυχὰς ὁ φυσικὸς λόγος δίδωσι.

A different need forced the Sultan of the Ethiopians to come to terms with the Emperor. For being of Cuman descent he was one of those who had been given over into slavery and thus sought after his race for an understandable and well nigh laudable reason. For the opposing climates of the globe, the north and the south, on account of certain innate qualities, are ranged in antithetical manner by the physical and mental disposition as well as by the temperaments they are conducive to, whereby one might mark significant differences not only amongst senseless animals of the same species, but also amongst men. In northern regions, animals have white hides, whereas in southern regions they are dark. Men in northern regions are devoid of intelligence, in some cases being found to be barely rational. Amongst them there are no intellectual sciences, no studies of nature, no knowledge, no thought, no organisation of everyday life or practice of arts or other things whereby men distinguish themselves from irrational beasts. Rather, they have an uncontrollable and ever-ready inclination to battle, are keen to rush forward against one another, if anyone spurs them on, like reckless Bacchants in pursuit of sacrifice or libation-bearers of Ares. In southern regions, however, the case is the opposite. For the men there are noble and very wise, and excellent in political science and the arts and intellectual pursuits and deliberations on every matter. But they are slow of impulse and soft in battle, living in inertia and choosing to have less rather than plenty through exertion. Taking physical phenomena into consideration,⁵ one might name the sun as the cause of this. In the first case, the sun has little contact and only for a short time, not warming the brain in the right measure, whereby nobility of nature is wont to arise, but rather causing the skin to harden and producing rigidity in the body's members. In the second case, however, through greater contact with the body's members the sun warms the brain to nobility, but reduces virility in the body's members overall. For natural law enjoins that souls share the changes undergone by bodies.

⁵ Literally "to speak in the language of natural philosophers," cf. LSJ s.v. φυσικεύομαι.

Let us begin by examining Pachymeres' ethnic terminology. Such onomatological archaism as employed here by Pachymeres is common in Byzantine historians. By "Scythians" Pachymeres means peoples of the Eurasian steppe, mainly the Cumans.⁶ Of such Cuman origin were the slaves (*mameluks*), who originally formed the guard of the Ayyubid Sultan of Egypt and later took control of the country to create the Mameluk sultanate of Egypt under Sultan Baybars (1260–1277).⁷ By "Ethiopians" the historian refers to the dark-skinned races of northeastern Africa, now under Mameluk rule. In his generic usage of the terms—"Scythian" to encompass the nomadic tribes beyond the Sea of Azov and "Ethiopian" to include both the mixed Nilotic type and the Negroid living along the Nile and spreading from the μεσόγαια of Libya to the Arabian peninsula (Diod. 3.8.1–2)—Pachymeres is in line with the most authoritative ancient sources, for instance Strabo (1.2.27).⁸

For a Greek, the Ethiopians were a race of black skin, flat nose, thick lips, and curled, woolly hair.⁹ The curliness of their hair was caused by heat (Arr. *Ind.* 6.9). The same cause accounts for the shape of their legs: [Arist.] *Probl.* 909a; [Verg.] *Moretum* 35; Petr. *Sat.* 102.15.

The image and character of the Scythians, too, as presented

⁶ On the Cumans, see A. Savvides, "Οι Κουμάνοι και το Βυζάντιο: 11^{ος}–13^{ος} αιώνας μ.Χ.," *Byzantina* 13 (1985) 937–955; I. Vasary, *Cumans and Tatars. Oriental Military in the Pre-Ottoman Balkans* (Cambridge 2005).

⁷ On the Mameluks (Μαμελοῦχοι), a people of Cuman origin, who ruled over Egypt from 1260–1517, see D. Ayalon and P. M. Holt, "Mamlūks," *Encycl. of Islam*² 6 (1987) 314–331. On their diplomatic correspondences with Byzantium: P. Schreiner, "Byzanz und die Mameluken in der 2. Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts," *Der Islam* 56 (1979) 296–304.

⁸ The evidence is carefully compiled in F. M. Snowden, Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity. Ethiopians in Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1970) 1–21. Fragments of ancient "horographical" and ethnographical works on Egypt and Ethiopia are collected by Jacoby, *FGrHist* 608a–673, on Scythia 841–844.

⁹ Diod. 3.8.2: χροάεις εισι μέλανες, ταίς δὲ ιδέαις σιμοί, τοίς δὲ τριχώμασιν οὔλοι. Compare also Herodotus' description of the *Egyptians* as μελάγχροες ... καὶ οὐλότριχες (2.104).

by Pachymeres (especially their prowess in war and their proverbial virtuosity in horse riding and archery), as well as the unforgiving harshness of their land, are also traditional: see, e.g., the Σκυθικοὶ λόγοι in Herodotus (Book 4) and the Hippocratic *De aëre aquis et locis* 18–22, etc.¹⁰ Pachymeres, though, is more forthcoming on the Scythians' ἦθος than their physical appearance: one major physical detail with bearing on character, which prevails in accounts of Scythian peoples, but is curiously omitted in Pachymeres, is τὸ πυρρόν (Hippoc. *Aër.* 20), generally a sign of πανουργία.¹¹ Another divergence may be noted between Pachymeres and the classical tradition: while Pachymeres stresses the thickened skin of the Scythians and the στερορότης of their limbs as natural products of the cold, the Hippocratic author (*Aër.* 19) emphasizes, on the contrary, for the same exact reason, their ὑγρότης, their πιμελή and ψιλὴ flesh and their παχέα and σαρκώδεα εἶδεα: the perceived dryness of the Scythians is the result not of nature, but of a custom, according to which the Scythians cauterize their bodies, to remove the excess of moisture and to render them better braced, nourished, and articulated (*Aër.* 20). In his interest to present the Scythians as warlike and fearsome as possible, Pachymeres disregards the fact that νόμος, after all, is just as decisive a determinant of φύσις and ἦθος as the climate, a central argument in the Hippocratic treatise.

Generally, however, and despite small incongruities in mat-

¹⁰ See, amongst the vast bibliography on the Scythian nation, D. Braund (ed.), *Scythians and Greeks. Cultural Interactions in Scythia, Athens and the Early Roman Empire* (Exeter 2005), with references to earlier works. On Herodotus' Σκυθικὸς λόγος specifically, see F. Hartog, *Le miroir d'Hérodote. Essai sur la représentation de l'autre* (Paris 1980) 23–51; and S. West, "Scythians," in E. J. Bakker et al. (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Herodotus* (Leiden 2002) 437–456, with references to earlier literature. The Scythian segment in *De aëre* has also attracted much scholarly attention: see A. Ballabriga, "Les eunuques Scythes et leurs femmes," *Méris* 1 (1986) 121–138; E. Lieber, "The Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places* on Cross-dressing Eunuchs: 'Natural' yet also 'Divine'," in R. Wittern and P. Pellegrin (eds.), *Medizin der Antike I Hippokratische Medizin und antike Philosophie* (Zurich/New York 1996) 451–476.

¹¹ [Arist.] *Phgn.* 812a6: οἱ πυρροὶ ἄγαν πανούργοι ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τὰς ἀλώπεκας.

ters of detail, there is little doubt that Pachymeres aspires to register his narrative in the context of ancient physiological theory, more specifically in the adjoined fields of humoural ethnology¹² and physiognomics: for τὸν ἥλιον αἰτιάσαιτ' ἄν τις φυσικευόμενος cf. Galen's φυσικευόμενοις τοῖς φιλοσόφοις (*Adv. ea quae a Juliano*, XVIII 256.4 K.). Terms like δύναμις (“power, faculty”), διάθεσις (“disposition”), εὐφυΐα (“balanced disposition, good nature”) and, of course, κρᾶσις (“temperament”) are keywords of a discipline that combines acute medical observation and ethnographical empiricism with ideology and prejudice,¹³ thus putting under systematic study the correlation between climate, topography, diet, and body chemistry, on the one hand, and human character and behaviour, on the other. What we are dealing with is a hodgepodge of such disparate elements as ethnography, astrology, biology, humoural theory, philosophy, even social engineering and politics, first amalgamated into a single coherent system by Aristotle and his school.¹⁴ Although physiognomics owed much to Hippocratic and other pioneers and did not reach its true apogee until Late

¹² On the history of ancient ethnography, see K. E. Müller, *Geschichte der antiken Ethnographie und ethnologischen Theoriebildung* (Wiesbaden 1972–1980).

¹³ Physiognomical writings are collected in R. Foerster, *Scriptores Physiognomnici Graeci et Latini* (Leipzig 1893). The best comprehensive study of the evidence is E. C. Evans, *Physiognomics in the Ancient World* (Philadelphia 1969). Most fruitful has been the study of the interrelation between physiognomics and social engineering: see M. M. Sassi, *The Science of Man in Ancient Greece* (Chicago 2001); T. S. Barton, *Power and Knowledge: Astrology, Physiognomics, and Medicine under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor 1994); and M. W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton 1995).

¹⁴ On Aristotle's ethics and its associations with biology and medicine, see W. Jaeger, “Aristotle's Use of Medicine as Model of Method in his Ethics,” *JHS* 77 (1957) 54–61; J. Longrigg, “Medicine and the Lyceum,” in P. J. van Eijk et al. (eds.), *Ancient Medicine in its Socio-cultural Context II* (Amsterdam/Atlanta 1995) 431–445; M. López-Salvá, “Hippokratische Medizin und Aristotelische Handlungsphilosophie,” in Wittern and Pellegrin, *Medizin* 203–216; and R. Bolton, “The Material Cause: Matter and Explanation in Aristotle's Natural Science,” and P. J. Van der Eijk, “The Matter of Mind: Aristotle on the Biology of ‘Psychic’ Processes and the Bodily Aspects of Thinking,” in W. Kullmann and S. Föllinger (eds.), *Aristotelische Biologie* (Stuttgart 1997) 97–124 and 231–258.

Antiquity—first with Galen¹⁵ and Polemon (II A.D.) and then with Adamantius (IV A.D.)¹⁶—it was the Peripatetics who first gave physiognomics a sound syllogistic foundation as inductive inference from signs (δει γὰρ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀφανῶν τοῖς φανεροῖς μαρτυροῖς χρῆσθαι, Arist. *Eth.Nic.* 1104a13–14),¹⁷ an ἐνθύμημα ἐκ σημείων (*An.pr.* 70a2).¹⁸ The ethnological physiognomics practiced by Pachymeres in 3.3–5, that is, inferring ἦθος from racial type, was one of three main physiognomical methodologies in Antiquity (the others being zoological analogy and ἐκ τῶν ἡθῶν τῶν ἐπιφαινόμενων, cf. [Arist.] *Phgn.* 805a18–32). Ethno-physiognomics was arguably less arbitrary than the other two (see the criticism of the author himself, *Phgn.* 805b1–27), but no less schematic and biased.

In the last sentence of the passage, Pachymeres clearly reformulates the discipline's basic axiom: συμμετατίθεσθαι γὰρ τοῖς σώμασι τὰς ψυχὰς ὁ φυσικὸς λόγος δίδωσι.¹⁹ Body and soul exist in harmony and “sympathy”; the movements of the first affect the second and vice versa. The fact that Pachymeres connects ἦθος with climate bespeaks also his grasp of the other foundational principle, that environmental and overall geographical conditions determine both health and “character”

¹⁵ See G. E. R. Lloyd, “Scholarship, Authority and Argument in Galen's *Quod animi mores*,” L. Garcia Ballester, “Soul and Body, Disease of the Soul and Disease of the Body in Galen's Medical Thought,” and J. Pigeaud, “La psychopathie de Galien,” in P. Manuli and M. Vegetti (eds.), *Le opere psicologiche di Galeno. Atti del terzo colloquio galenico internazionale* (Pavia 1988) 11–42, 117–152, 153–183.

¹⁶ On Polemon see S. Swain (ed.), *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam* (Oxford/New York 2007). A study of physiognomics in Byzantium is, so far as I know, still a *desideratum*.

¹⁷ On ancient sign inference in general, see J. Allen, *Inference from Signs. Ancient Debates on the Nature of Evidence* (Oxford 2001).

¹⁸ For the *genera* likely to yield physiognomical information, see [Arist.] *Phgn.* 806a26 ff.

¹⁹ Compare, apart from Galen, Arist. *An.pr.* 70b6–8: τὸ δὲ φυσιογνωμονεῖν δυνατόν ἐστιν, εἴ τις δίδωσιν ἅμα μεταβάλλειν τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ὅσα φυσικά ἐστι παθήματα, and [Arist.] *Phgn.* 805a1–2: ὅτι αἱ διάνοιαι ἔπονται τοῖς σώμασι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν αὐταὶ καθ' ἑαυτὰς ἀπαθείς οὐσαι τῶν τοῦ σώματος κινήσεων.

(ἦθος), because they bear directly on the humoural chemistry of the human body (Hippoc. *Aër.* 1). This chemistry, and thus health, relies on the balance of opposites (cf. Pachymeres' ἀντιπεπόνθασιν): first, the four elemental conditions (hot/cold, moist/dry), and then the four χυμοί (“humours”) phlegm, blood, yellow and black bile.²⁰ This balance is secured by the temperate and timely change of seasons (Hippoc. *Nat.hom.* 7).

	Cold	Warm	Moist	Dry	
Phlegm	•		•		Winter
Blood		•	•		Spring
Yellow bile		•		•	Summer
Black bile	•			•	Autumn

Table 1: The Hippocratic Theory of Humours,
as expounded in *Nature of Man*

Pachymeres' discussion, therefore, reflects traditional ethnological principles. The historian adopts an absolute binary model of symmetrical opposition between North and South. He regards Scythia and Ethiopia as opposites in terms of both geography and people's ethos. Northerners are strong and reckless in battle, but barely logical and not at all civilised. Southerners on the contrary are soft (μαλακοί may also mean “cowardly”²¹) but εὐφυεῖς; sluggish, but intelligent and endowed with the highest qualities of culture. Northerners may be veritable Bacchants, worshippers of Ares with no γνώσις or φρόνησις, but should they have a leader, they are unstoppable in battle. Southerners may be masters of the political game, but given a choice, they will sit back and do nothing.

In ancient geographical accounts, as in Pachymeres, Scythia and Ethiopia constitute the utmost boundaries of mankind in

²⁰ Cf. Hippoc. *Nat.hom.* 4. Alcmaeon of Croton, fr. 4 D.-K., even used political terminology to denote balance (ισονομία) and imbalance (μοναρχία). On the theory of humours see P. Demont, “About Philosophy and Humoural Medicine,” in P. J. van der Eijk (ed.), *Hippocrates in Context. Papers read at the XIth International Hippocrates Colloquium* (Leiden 2005) 271–286.

²¹ Thuc. 6.13: ὅπως μὴ δόξει, ἐὰν μὴ ψηφίζηται πολεμεῖν, μαλακὸς εἶναι.

North and South, just as India and Iberia determine East and West. In Strabo, Scythians and Ethiopians are ἀντίποδες ἀλλήλοις (1.1.13).²² The contrast between Scythians and Ethiopians, on the basis of pairs such as cold/hot, rough/soft, and fierce/spiritless, constitutes a κοινὸς τόπος trickling down the whole body of Greek literature from Hesiod on.²³ F. M. Snowden identifies three different motives behind this τόπος:²⁴ (a) to present the Ethiopians as examples of anthropological or geographical “others” with reference to Greeks; (b) to account for racial diversity; (c) to express the conviction that race is inconsequential, because all men have been created equal, κατ’ εἰκόνα καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν τοῦ Θεοῦ. None of these seems to apply exactly in the case of Pachymeres. Unlike, for instance, Herodotus, he does not make explicit comparisons between “self” and “other”; although he does explicate the natural causes of the Scythian/Ethiopian antithesis, Pachymeres does not care to embark on a long-winded discussion of racial diversity; and he is definitely not delivering a Sunday sermon. We need to follow the threads of the narrative and understand the divergence of his own account from the general norm, in order to fathom, to whatever extent this is feasible, Pachymeres’ own motives.

What, then, is peculiar in Pachymeres’ ethno-physiognomical digression? It is certainly not the sharp antithesis between Ethiopia and Scythia per se (that in itself is neither rare nor inexplicable). Neither is the image of Scythian fierceness. This last feature may not be painted in particularly bright hues by ancient sources, where Scythian traits are usually interpreted as

²² See also Ephorus *FrGrHist* 70 F 30a and 30b, especially the latter, quoted by Cosmas Indicopleustes, the most important Byzantine geographer (the word ἀντίκειται here is particularly weighty). On the notion of the antipodes in Antiquity, see G. Moretti, *Gli Antipodi. Avventure letterarie di un mito scientifico* (Parma 1994) esp. 17–48.

²³ For all the evidence, see Snowden, *Blacks* 171–177. Despite the fact that in the traditional book division a whole book separates the Αἰγυπτιακὸς from the Σκυθικὸς λόγος in Herodotus, it is clear that there also the two are symmetrical. See J. Redfield, “Herodotus the Tourist,” *CP* 80 (1985) 97–118, esp. 106–109.

²⁴ Snowden, *Blacks* 172.

signs of σκαιότης, ἀγριότης, and κακότης,²⁵ and, although respected, the Scythians are hardly ever “honoured,” as in Pachymeres (ἐτίμων τὸ Σκυθικὸν Αἰθίοπες, ch. 3 [p.237.25]); however, the Byzantine historian does not deviate much from the norm here. It is rather the Αἰθιοπικὸς λόγος that strikes us as odd: the warmth of praise Pachymeres bestows upon the Ethiopians, the vehemence of his endorsement, and of course the transfer to them of much that in other sources is reserved for peoples living in different geographical regions. All in all, Pachymeres’ earnest attempt to *appreciate* his North and South subjects, not as extremes with reference to a *tertium comparationis*, as in most ancient sources, but as symmetrical opposites, balancing each other with their pros and cons, does not seem to have an exact ancient analogue. Let us examine these traits more closely.

In the physiognomic corpus, intelligence is not a quality often ascribed to Ethiopians or Asians as a whole. The physiognomic characteristics attributed to them cannot be conducive to the development of a very sophisticated civilisation. In Ps.-Aristotle *Physiognomonica* (807a12–33), people like the Ethiopians, as ἄγαν μέλανες and τρίχας σφόδρα οὐλας ἔχοντες, are δειλοί;²⁶ but, *pace* Pachymeres, being δειλοί such peoples are automatically disqualified from being εὐφυεῖς at the same time. In fact, the εὐφυής constitutes the *mean* between such extreme types as the Scythian and the Ethiopian, cf. [Arist.] *Phgn.* 807b12–19:

εὐφυοὺς σημεῖα σὰρξ ὑγροτέρα καὶ ἀπαλωτέρα, οὐκ εὐεκτικὴ οὐδὲ πιμελώδης σφόδρα· τὰ περὶ τὰς ὠμοπλάτας καὶ τράχηλον ἰσχνότερα, καὶ τὰ περὶ τὸ πρόσωπον, καὶ σύνδετα τὰ περὶ τὰς ὠμοπλάτας, καὶ τὰ κάτω ἀφειμένα· εὐλύτα τὰ περὶ τὰς πλευράς· καὶ τὸν νῶτον ἀσαρκότερος· τὸ σῶμα λευκέρυθρον καὶ καθαρὸν· τὸ δερμάτιον λεπτόν, τριχωμάτιον μὴ λίαν σκληρὸν μηδὲ λίαν μέλαν, ὄμμα χαροπὸν, ὑγρόν.

The signs of a man with good natural disposition are flesh rather moist and soft, not overly conditioned or overly fat. Around the shoulder-blades and the neck, he is rather lean, as he is around the face, while around the shoulder-blades, again, he is well-set

²⁵ [Polemon] *Phgn.* 8 (I 393 Foerster).

²⁶ See also [Polemon] *Phgn.* 6, 8, 56 (386–388, 392–397, 410 F.).

and his lower parts are more relaxed. His loins are loose and his back is not too fleshy. His body is of a rosy complexion and clear. His skin is thin, with hair not excessively hard or black. His eyes are bright, moist.²⁷

Indeed the *communis opinio* on Ethiopians is that they were savage rather than cultured. The account in Diodorus (3.8.1–6), for example, is damning. Ethiopians are wild and beastly, not so much in their spirit as in their way of life. They live in squalor, usually naked, covering only their private parts or using makeshift garments. They have no sense of social solidarity; they display no signs of “civilised life” (βίος ἡμερος). The dissonance of this image with Pachymeres’ seasoned politicians, sensible governors, and excellent artists and thinkers is remarkable.

In the end, Pachymeres’ Αἰθιοπικὸς λόγος is striking above all for one absolutely fundamental reason: in its rather over-enthusiastic reassessment of the Ethiopians and its strict binary structure (the *tertium comparationis*, we repeat, seems strangely absent), the passage seems to disregard the most essential principle underpinning Greek physiological theory, the Doctrine of the Mean.²⁸ For a fairly well-informed commentator and teacher of Aristotle,²⁹ this is certainly odd. Even if Pachymeres is not known to have been error-free in his Aristotelian read-

²⁷ Compare [Polemon] *Phgn.* 57 (411–412 F.).

²⁸ The best relevant study is T. Tracy, *Physiological Theory and the Doctrine of the Mean in Plato and Aristotle* (The Hague 1969).

²⁹ Apart from a general synopsis of Aristotle’s philosophy, Pachymeres wrote commentaries on a fair number of Aristotelian works: see E. Pappa, “Die Kommentare des Georgios Pachymeres zum Organon,” in *Lesarten. Festschrift für A. Kambylis* (Berlin/New York 1998) 198–210, and *Georgios Pachymeres. Philosophia. Buch 10. Kommentar zur Metaphysik des Aristoteles* (Athens 2002); K. Oikonomakos, *Γεώργιος Παχυμέρης Φιλοσοφία. Βιβλίον ἐνδέκατον. Τὰ ἠθικά, ἤτοι τὰ Νικομάχεια* (Athens 2005); and P. Golitsis, “Un commentaire perpétuel de Georges Pachymère à la Physique d’Aristote,” *BZ* 100 (2007) 637–676. For a speculative reconstruction of Pachymeres’ teachings on Aristotle, see P. Golitsis, “Georges Pachymère comme didascale. Essai pour une reconstitution de sa carrière et de son enseignement philosophique,” *JOBG* 58 (2008) 53–68.

ings,³⁰ disregarding the Doctrine of the Mean is too serious an omission to have been made entirely by accident.

Ancient ethnology and ethno-physiognomics are without exception predicated on the Doctrine of the Mean:³¹ ἔλλειψις and ὑπερβολή balance each other around a μεσότης.³² Whether they recognized three (Aristotle), five (Parmenides, Posidonius), or six (Polybius) geographical zones, all major Greek geographers and ethnologists accepted the notion of εὐκρασία. Significantly, this notion is also implied in the ancient geographer whose work, along with Strabo's, had perhaps the most currency in Pachymeres' cultural environment,³³ Claudius Ptolemy.³⁴ All ethnology founded on the theory of humours regards the North and the South (the ἀρκτική ζώνη and the τροπική ζώνη) as extremes surrounding a μεσότης, the εὐκρατος ζώνη of the Mediterranean. Aristotle located all positive traits of character around this basin; the *locus classicus* is in *Pol.* 1327b20–36:³⁵

σχεδὸν δὴ κατανοήσειεν ἄν τις τοῦτό γε, βλέψας ἐπὶ τε τὰς πόλεις τὰς εὐδοκίμουσας τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ πρὸς πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην, ὡς διείληπται τοῖς ἔθνεσιν. τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐν τοῖς ψυχροῖς τόποις ἔθνη καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν Εὐρώπην θυμοῦ μὲν ἐστὶ πλήρη, διανοίας δὲ ἐνδεέστερα καὶ τέχνης, διόπερ ἐλεύθερα μὲν διατελεῖ μάλλον, ἀπολίτευτα δὲ καὶ τῶν πλησίον ἄρχειν οὐ

³⁰ See for instance the review of Oikonomakos by B. Bydén, *JOBG* 58 (2008) 261–263.

³¹ Most important here is [Polemon] *Phgn.* 5–6 and Adamantius *Phgn.* 2.31–32 (382–388 F.). Galen, too, applying the notion of κρᾶσις to ethnology, believes that the best-tempered (or blended) person is one who represents the absolute mean between extremes—thinness and fatness, softness and hardness, warmth and cold. See Evans, *Physiognomics* 25–26.

³² See the discussion in Posidonius fr.49 Edelstein-Kidd, preserved by Strabo.

³³ See Laiou, in *The Making of Byzantine History* 95.

³⁴ See W. Hübner, “The Ptolemaic View of the Universe,” *GRBS* 41 (2000) 59–93, esp. 71 ff.

³⁵ Some discussion of this passage in reference to Pachymeres is attempted in S. Lampakis, “Υπερφυσικὲς δυνάμεις, φυσικὰ φαινόμενα καὶ δεισιδαιμονίες στὴν ἱστορία τοῦ Γεωργίου Παχυμέρη,” *Symmeikta* 7 (1987) 77–100, at 92.

δυνάμενα· τὰ δὲ περὶ τὴν Ἀσίαν διανοητικὰ μὲν καὶ τεχνικὰ τὴν ψυχὴν, ἄθυμα δέ, διόπερ ἀρχόμενα καὶ δουλεύοντα διατελεῖ· τὸ δὲ τῶν Ἑλλήνων γένος, ὥσπερ μεσεύει κατὰ τοὺς τόπους, οὕτως ἀμφοῖν μετέχει. καὶ γὰρ ἔνθυμον καὶ διανοητικόν ἐστίν· διόπερ ἐλεύθερόν τε διατελεῖ καὶ βέλτιστα πολιτευόμενον καὶ δυνάμενον ἄρχειν πάντων, μᾶς τυγχάνον πολιτείας. τὴν αὐτὴν δ' ἔχει διαφορὰν καὶ τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἔθνη πρὸς ἄλληλα· τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἔχει τὴν φύσιν μονόκωλον, τὰ δὲ εὐ κέκρται πρὸς ἀμφοτέρως τὰς δυνάμεις ταύτας.

Now this [the natural character of the ideal citizen] one might almost discern by looking at the famous cities of Greece and by observing how the whole inhabited world is divided up among the nations. The nations inhabiting the cold places and those of Europe are full of spirit but somewhat deficient of intelligence and skill, so that they continue comparatively free, but lacking in political organization and capacity to rule their neighbours. The peoples of Asia on the other hand are intelligent and skilful in temperament, but lack spirit, so that they are in continuous subjection and slavery. But the Greek race participates in both characters, just as it occupies the middle position geographically, for it is both spirited and intelligent; hence it continues to be free and to have very good political institutions, and to be capable of ruling all mankind, if it attains constitutional unity. The same diversity also exists among the Greek races compared with one another: some have a one-sided nature, others are happily blended in regard to both capacities. (transl. Rackham)

Examined closely, Pachymeres' discourse does not seem compatible with Aristotle's tripartite model. Aristotle's *διανοητικὰ καὶ τεχνικὰ τὴν ψυχὴν* may seem analogous to Pachymeres' formulations, but in fact it allows for much less than the Byzantine historian's immoderate superlatives do (*ἄριστοι, ἄλλως καὶ ἄγαν συνετοί*). Moreover, although Pachymeres does openly recognize that the Scythians constitute an *ἔλλειψις* regarding the degree of sunshine warming their brains (ch. 3 [p.237.19–20]: *οὐ μετρίως θερμαίνοντα τὸν ἐγκέφαλον*), it is by no means obvious whether the prepositional *ἐπὶ πλέον* used of the Ethiopians means "more than the Mean" (thus being an *ὑπερβολή*) or simply "more than the Scythians," thus in effect *constituting a Mean*. Finally, and most tellingly, Pachymeres uses a catchword *εὐφυσίς*, which, as we saw above, is taboo in ethno-physiognomical theory for any nation that *ἔχει τὴν*

φύσιν μονόκωλον and is used only for those that εὖ κέκρωται. One wonders whether what we have here is simply a case of sloppy verbal overcompensation or whether one can read more into it.

Aristotle's *Politics* is an attempt to conceptualize the marking differences between Greeks and other nations. As such it is naturally biased. It seems conceivable that Pachymeres' binary pattern represents an attempt for an objective, non-self-referential discussion along the lines of the second part of *Airs Waters Places*.³⁶ Indeed, the Hippocratic author, dividing the globe in two continents in lieu of the usual three, compares "Europe" and "Asia" (Ethiopia being part of the latter) in a manner quite reminiscent of Pachymeres and seemingly with the same approving tone as regards Asia. His comparison is underscored by a double conviction, which seems to approximate that of Pachymeres fairly closely: (a) that the two continents are opposites; and (b) that everything in Asia is superior to anything in Europe, because of the balanced cycle of the seasons (12.1–3):

βούλομαι δὲ περὶ τῆς Ἀσίας καὶ τῆς Εὐρώπης δεῖξαι ὁκόσον διαφέρουσιν ἀλλήλοις ἐς τὰ πάντα καὶ περὶ τῶν ἐθνέων τῆς μορφῆς, τί διαλλάσσει καὶ μηδὲν ἔοικεν ἀλλήλοισι ... τὴν Ἀσίην πλείστον διαφέρειν φημὶ τῆς Εὐρώπης ἐς τὰς φύσεις τῶν ξυμπάντων τῶν τε ἐκ τῆς γῆς φυομένων καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. πολὺ γὰρ καλλίονα καὶ μείζονα πάντα γίνεται ἐν τῇ Ἀσίῃ ἢ τε χώρα τῆς χώρας ἡμερωτέρη καὶ τὰ ἥθεα τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἡμερότερα καὶ εὐορηγότερα. τὸ δὲ αἴτιον τούτων ἡ κορήσις τῶν ὠρέων, ὅτι τοῦ ἡλίου ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἀνατολέων κείται πρὸς τὴν ἠῶ, τοῦ τε ψυχροῦ πορρωτέρω· τὴν δὲ αὔξησιν καὶ ἡμερότητα παρέχει πλείστον ἀπάντων, ὁκόταν μηδὲν ἢ ἐπικρατέον βιαίως, ἀλλὰ παντὸς ἰσομοιρίῃ δυναστεύῃ.³⁷

³⁶ For a full discussion of the work see J. Jouanna, *Hippocrate II.2 Airs, Eaux, Lieux* (Paris 1996) 7–82; and his *Hippocrates* (Baltimore/London 1999): on the Hippocratic corpus, 56–71, 373–416; on health, sickness, and nature, 323–347; on the influence of the environment on human nature, 210–242; on ethnography, 217–224.

³⁷ Cf. also *Aēr.* 16.1: περὶ δὲ τῆς ἀθυμίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῆς ἀνανδρείας, ὅτι ἀπολεμώτατοι εἰσι τῶν Εὐρωπαϊῶν οἱ Ἀσιηνοὶ καὶ ἡμερότεροι τὰ ἥθεα.

Now I intend to compare Asia and Europe, and to show how they differ in every respect, and how the nations of the one differ entirely in physique from those of the other. I hold that Asia differs very widely from Europe in the nature of all its inhabitants and of all its vegetation. For everything in Asia grows to far greater beauty and size; the one region is less wild than the other, the character of the inhabitants is milder and more gentle. The cause of this is the temperate climate, because it lies towards the east midway between the risings of the sun, and farther away than is Europe from the cold. Growth and freedom from wildness are more fostered, when nothing is forcibly predominant, but equality in every respect prevails. (transl. Jones)

Pachymeres' insistence on the effects of sunshine on the brain and his apparent neglect of the role of the cardiovascular system is evidence that he may be choosing to follow the encephalocentric tradition of Alcmaeon of Croton, Anaxagoras, and the Hippocratic doctors, rather than the cardio-haemocentrism encountered in Plato and in Aristotle's biological works.³⁸ This increases the possibility that Pachymeres reproduces Hippocratic models, but we should not be precipitous. For only on the face of it does the Hippocratic author operate on the notion of an *absolute* opposition between Europe and Asia; consequently, it cannot be argued that Pachymeres found in Hippocrates an ethnographic model that circumvents the Doctrine of the Mean.

The Hippocratic author's discourse, too, is clearly governed by the principle of proper mixture, *κρήσις*, which of course requires tripartite structures, hence the Mean. He may recognize only two continents, apparently going against the grain; he may be working on a binary pattern comprising two sets of opposites (north/south, east/west); but he can never be oblivious to that sense of symmetry and balance that produces the optimum result. The Hippocratic author's general work pattern is

³⁸ Gal. *De usu partium* (I p.15.2–5 Helmreich): ὁ μὲν γὰρ τὴν καρδίαν, ὁ δὲ τὰς μὲνινγας, ὁ δὲ τὸν ἐγκέφαλον ἐν ἑαυτῷ φησὶν ἔχειν τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἡγεμονοῦν. See P. Manuli and M. Vegetti, *Cuore, sangue e cervello. Biologia e antropologia nel pensiero antico* (Milan 1977) 9–27, 29–44; J. Rocca, *Galen on the Brain. Anatomical Knowledge and Physiological Speculation in the Second Century A.D.* (Leiden 2003) 17–48.

to set out general rules, only to qualify them in due course with the necessary nuances and exceptions. The universal law of difference between Europe and Asia is multiply compromised in what follows; in fact, in some cases, to the point of total contradiction. “Europe” and “Asia” are multifarious in climate and environment. Seven different regional varieties with wide variations between them render the postulation of a single, homogenous “Europe” rather strained (*Aër.* 24). Asia, too, may be less heterogeneous, but it is not uniform. We should be observant enough to see that the privileged characteristics mentioned above do not apply in an undifferentiated and unqualified manner to the whole of Asia, but to the region situated *midway* between the heat and the cold (so 12.19–45). This is a part which, as far as its moderate nature is concerned, has all the qualities of spring season, the yearly cycle’s *μεσότης*. The language here is emblematic of the Doctrine of the Mean.

It is unfortunate that, while the *paradosis* preserved four whole chapters on Scythia, the Egyptian part of *De aëre*, at the beginning of ch. 13, has been lost. However, there are clear indications in what remains that the Egyptians must have been treated as the *foil* of the Scythians. This symmetry between the two peoples can only mean that as the Scythians represent the *ὑπερβολή* of North, the Egyptians stand for the *ὑπερβολή* of South. The overall affinity between Egyptians and Scythians, an affinity *in extremis*, relies on the lack of seasonal variation in both regions, one of which is “oppressed” by extreme cold, the other by heat (18.1–5):

περὶ δὲ τῶν λοιπῶν Σκυθέων τῆς μορφῆς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἑαυτοῖσιν εἰκόασιν, καὶ οὐδαμῶς ἄλλοισιν, ὡς τὸς λόγος καὶ περὶ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων, πλὴν, ὅτι οἱ μὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ θερμοῦ εἰσι βεβιασμένοι, οἱ δ’ ὑπὸ τοῦ ψυχροῦ.

As to the physique of the other Scythians, in that they are like one another and not at all like others, the same remark applies to them as to the Egyptians, only the latter are distressed by the heat, the former by the cold.

Homogeneity of appearance among Scythians and Egyptians is proof that these peoples are not subjected to tempered seasonal change; hence they do not live in the most *εὐκράτοι* regions of Asia and Europe. In places where violent seasonal change occurs, great diversity of physical appearance is usually

the result (24). Uniformity of seasons does not allow proper *κρᾶσις*, whereas a correct cycle establishes equilibrium, with one season balancing the other.³⁹ Any deviation from this cycle would have unhealthy repercussions: seasonal uniformity fosters corporal humidity, which leads to reduced physical fitness. So much for European vehemence! In fact, judging by the example of the *Σαυρομάται* (17), we may suspect that the Hippocratic author regards the warlike character of Scythians, just as much as *τὸ ἀναλκῆς* of Asians, as more the result of *νόμος* than of *φύσις* (see the famous discussion at 16 on the effect of despotism on Asian *ἦθος*). As we said, *νόμος* as determinant is something that Pachymeres chooses to ignore.

The Hippocratic author's insistence on the extremes of each continent corresponds to the polarised geographical schematic by which he organizes the globe and which he puts in effect in the first part of the treatise (North/South, East/West). This schematic serves him best in order to show the defining role played by both climate and *νόμος* on the *ἦθος* of men. Finally, it allows him to locate the best possible condition, which is that part of Asia that is exposed to the eastern currents and whose climate is moderate and well-mixed. "Excellence" can only be fostered *ἐν μεσότητι*. If Pachymeres' model is un-Aristotelian, it is ultimately un-Hippocratic as well.

One may suggest a number of explanations for Pachymeres' "unorthodoxly" positive ethnological evaluation of the Ethiopians, at the extreme of southern heat, which contradicts most ancient authorities. One certainly is the conceptual and discursive merger of "Ethiopian" and "Egyptian," which transposes onto the former the general admiration enjoyed by the latter among the Greeks. Much of what Pachymeres has to commend regarding the Ethiopians definitely comes from the tradition of *Αἰγυπτιακοί*, not *Αἰθιοπικοὶ λόγοι*. Just as "Ethiopian" is used as a generic ethnological term to include all the people of the Mameluk sultanate, similarly the information on the culture of Ethiopians is perhaps reprocessed in a scrambled fashion to comprise the cultural glamour of the Egyptians.

³⁹ See Tracy, *Physiological Theory* 57.

Another plausible reason may also be the differing attitudes of certain Byzantine sources towards the Ethiopians. The journeys of Cosmas Indicopleustes in the kingdoms of Axum and Nadulis, and the fact that the Ethiopians were allies of the Byzantines in controlling the eastern routes, led to a favourable image of the Ethiopians in early Byzantium and beyond, despite the occasional imputation of Ethiopian demonology. The “blameless Ethiopians” of Homer (*Il.* 1.423), with their dignity, continence, wisdom, and astrological learning, became symbols of Christianity’s ecumenical mission.⁴⁰

But a third, more nuanced process may be in play, which need not exclude the previous two, a process which touches upon the workings of Pachymeres’ own historical narrative. At first glance, one may be misled into believing that the praise of the Cuman-descended Ethiopian Sultan’s σύνεσις and the εὐφύια of the people he now rules may constitute implicit praise of the Emperor’s policies and the Empire’s new friends. The Sultan acts συνετῶς by seeking the Emperor’s alliance. The Ethiopian embassy to Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos, whose main objective is to obtain permission for imports of slaves from Scythia, is the direct result of Byzantium’s renewed prestige after the recapture of Constantinople. The Byzantines control the Hellespont once again: anybody who wants to do business with the Euxine has to procure for himself “New Constantine’s” consent (τοῦτο δὲ ποιεῖν μὴ ἀξιούντας τὸν βασιλέα ἀμήχανον, p.237.30; hence κατηνάγκαζεν at 237.2).

Much of this is of course true, but all in all Pachymeres is far from praising Michael VIII’s policies towards the barbarians. Failing to foresee the ramifications of his decision—in fact, failing to display the necessary φρόνησις on this particular βουλή (recall the terms of Pachymeres’ Ethiopian encomium)—the

⁴⁰ *ODB* II 733 s.v. “Ethiopians.” On the importance of the Ethiopians in the early Byzantine view of the world see G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth. Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton 1993), esp. 109–116. On Cosmas’ *Christian Topography*, a seminal work for Byzantine geography, see W. Wolska-Conus, *Recherches sur la Topographie Chrétienne de Cosmas Indicopleustès* (Paris 1962). For the text: W. Wolska-Conus, *Cosmas Indicopleustès. Topographie chrétienne I–III* (Paris 1968–1973).

Emperor allowed the Ethiopians to import Scythian mercenaries through the Euxine. Egyptian intelligence was supplemented with Scythian valour. What has this generated? Not peace, as the Emperor had hoped, but disaster, as the Ethiopians turned against their Byzantine allies.

As we hinted at the beginning, Pachymeres treats the antithesis between Ethiopians and Scythians with a view to a paradox, whose consequences for the Empire were grievous. How could it have come about in the first place that brawn overcame brains? A warlike, brute Cuman was first enslaved to the sluggish Egyptians (*brains overcome brawn*) and then became their Sultan because the Egyptians *appreciated* his valour: *brains offset their shortcomings by accepting brawn in power*. It seems reasonable to suggest that Pachymeres' ethnological model eschews traditional tripartite structures, in order to underscore even more emphatically the constructive outcome of the merger—the *κράσις*, for that matter—between two barbarian nations, otherwise imperfect on their own. Sultan Baybars' *acquired σύνεσις* is the supreme exemplar of this novel, ominous balance: from two diametrical opposites stems the most beautiful harmony (*ἐκ τῶν διαφερόντων καλλίστην ἁρμονίαν*: Heraclitus fr.8 D.-K., quoted by Aristotle *Eth.Nic.* 1155b4, a work which Pachymeres commented upon, cf. n.29). Bipolarity, therefore, is essential rhetorically and narratologically; that it may contradict classical ethnology is immaterial.

Pachymeres directs pungent criticism at Michael VIII's policies towards the barbarians, inasmuch as they have failed to anticipate the potentially explosive effects of merging brains with brawn. This is where the so-far-absent “we,” the elusive *tertium comparationis* of traditional ethnological models, comes into play, belatedly but all the more forcefully because of that. The positive attributes of North and South have come into perfect counterpoise and by so doing they have created a new formidable enemy—essentially, a new *μεσότης*, to displace the old one from its traditionally controlled territories. “We,” the Greeks, who should, supposedly, have possessed superiority over both extremes, allowed this to take place *ταῖς ἡμετέραις ἀβουλίαις ἢ κακονοίαις ἢ αὐτονόμοις ὀρμαῖς καὶ ὀρέξεσιν*. The language is resonant of caustic and excruciating reversal: if the Ethiopians have *intelligently* infused themselves with the

positive qualities of the Scythians (ch. 5, p.241.8–9: θαρρούντας, ἀνδρίζεσθαι), the Greeks, it appears, have been infected by their shortcomings: ἀβουλία (absence of correct political deliberation), κακόνοια (malice), and above all ὀρμή and ὄρεξις, selfish, irrational impulse and desire.

This is the yardstick whereby the detailed description of the giraffe (ch. 4) inserted between the historical parts proper (ch. 3 and 5), should be read. Such indulgent attention to a gift donated by the Ethiopian Sultan to the Emperor, and that in the midst of a fairly grim account of territories lost, may seem like vintage historiographical ἀκρισία, lack of judgment, (or ἀκρασία, intemperance!), on the part of Pachymeres,⁴¹ who arguably cannot resist the attractions of a *curiosum*. Nonetheless, in the face of what follows, the digression on the giraffe reeks of bitter sarcasm:

ὁ δὴ καὶ πολλάκις γεγονὸς ἔγνωμεν, ἐκείθεν μὲν τῶν χαρισμάτων πρὸς βασιλέα διαπεμπομένων, ἐντεῦθεν δ' ἀνοιγομένης σφίσι τῆς πρὸς ἐκείνους κελεύθου ... τοῦτο [ἢ καμηλοπάρδαλις], ὡσεὶ τι τέρας, ἐκείθεν πρὸς βασιλέα διακομισθέν, ἐκάστης θέαμα ἦν καὶ τρυφή τοῖς ὀρώσι δι' ἀγοράς ἐλκόμενον (ch. 3, p.239.3–5, 26–28).

We have learned that this in fact has also happened a number of times, from there the gifts sent to the Emperor, from here the way opened for them towards the Scythians ... And this giraffe, like a sort of monster, sent over to the Emperor from there, was a spectacle and a delight to onlookers every single day, as it was being dragged through the market place.

In its own way, this assorted beast may symbolise the very kingdom of the Mameluks, a curious blend of nations and idiosyncrasies, a τέρας in its own right.⁴² If so, such use of zoological allegory here would be extremely interesting.

⁴¹ Pachymeres' account does not seem dependent on Cosmas Indicopleustes 11.4. On animals as gifts exchanged between the Byzantines and their neighbours, see N. Drocourt, "Les animaux comme cadeaux d'ambassade entre Byzance et ses voisins," in B. Doumerc and Chr. Picard (eds.), *Byzance et ses périphéries, Hommage à Alain Ducellier* (Toulouse 2004) 67–93, esp. 70.

⁴² I owe this point to Professor Kaldellis.

Pachymeres does try to be fair: the Emperor may have consented to the Ethiopian alliance out of geopolitical considerations (δοκήσει τοῦ συνοίσειν τοῖς ἡμετέροις: ch. 4, p.241.1–2), but cheap, childish ploys like donating *τέρατα* (amidst many other *χαρίσματα*, which reached the capital not once but *πολλάκις*) were no mean bait, apparently. Michael’s lack of both foresight and a strong hand in dealing with the barbarians (apparently because he underestimated the threat they posed, compared with enemies in the West), for all his intent to foster peace, proved “immensely disastrous” (*ἐξ μέγιστον ἐλυμήνατο*: p.241.3). The Tochars (Mongols) and, of course, the Seljuks are *ante portas*. The Emperor is employing towards them a policy of condescending appeasement, arranging marriages and dispatching splendid gifts (*δουλικαῖς ὑπελεύσει κήδη ποιούντες καὶ δωροφορῶντες συχνάκις τὰ κάλλιστα τε καὶ μέγιστα*)—including a daughter *ἐκ σκοτίων σπερμάτων*. The result of this appeasement policy is that the Tochars managed through “friendship” to get their hands on what *προσταλαιπωρῶντες πολέμῳ μόλις ἂν ἐκτῶντο* (ch. 5, p.243.4–10). Further along in the narrative (ch. 22) Pachymeres will elaborate on Michael VIII’s blameworthiness for the loss of Asia Minor: pernicious social policies (heavy taxation as a means to subdue the border population’s rebellious tendencies); bad choices of imperial dignitaries to be sent to the eastern border; above all, however, the erroneous conviction that Asia Minor, being “just around the corner” (*ὡς ἐπὶ θύρας οὖσαν*) would be readily recoverable *ὅτε δὴ καὶ θελήσοι* (“whenever he would feel like it”). Evidently, the more Pachymeres foregrounds the marshaled strength of Michael’s enemies, the more catastrophic appears the Emperor’s supercilious attitude towards those enemies and those who could foil them. After all, patronizingly, Michael VIII *ἐπὶ τοῖς δυσικοῖς πᾶσαν εἶχεν τὴν ἀσχολίαν τὰ ἐν ποσὶ καταπροϊέμενος* (“was completely occupied with the West, utterly neglecting what was right at his feet”).

Scholars have long noted Pachymeres’ interest in Asia Minor and the Black Sea, as well as his overall ethnographic curiosity. They have also remarked that for all of his impressively accurate observations on these regions, his interest in the West was rather perfunctory and generally limited to the nexus of Byzantine-Western relations. The most useful insight to bear in

mind, however, is that for Pachymeres geography, hence ethnography as well, was political.⁴³ Pachymeres had an eye for ethnographic detail, but also, certainly, the uncanny ability to weave such observation into an intricate and sophisticated fabric of internal and international complexities. That Byzantine historiography tended to reserve ethnographic observations mainly for relatively unknown “barbarian” nations; or that Pachymeres, born and raised in Nicaea, identified the Empire exclusively with the East⁴⁴ and granted rather limited scope to the West⁴⁵—these go only half way toward explaining the measure of respect Pachymeres bestows upon the Empire’s enemies in the East. Pachymeres’ eastward gaze derived from his reading of the historical tides, a reading which gainsaid that of the Emperor: whereas Michael VIII still considered the West as the major threat to the integrity of the Empire and mustered his political efforts around thwarting Charles of Anjou or the Greek sovereigns of Epirus, Pachymeres realised that the growing power of the Mongols and the Seljuks would sooner rather than later have to be reckoned with and that alliances with those and other eastern nations were short-sighted, extemporaneous solutions likely to cause more mayhem than they could possibly avert. This realisation is given programmatic significance in the proem of Pachymeres’ work, a passage which Ruth Macrides recently called “the finest piece of historical analysis by any Byzantine writer.”⁴⁶ Pachymeres cannot be more explicit: the reason for the gradual decline of the Empire was nothing other than the abandonment of the Eastern border.

Pachymeres’ narrative in 3.3–5 is ultimately a cautionary tale, a warning of worse things to come and a desperate call for

⁴³ See Laiou, in *The Making of Byzantine History* 94–121, and her “Italy and the Italians in the Political Geography of the Byzantines,” *DOP* 49 (1995) 73–98.

⁴⁴ Laiou, *DOP* 49 (1995) 80.

⁴⁵ Laiou, in *The Making of Byzantine History* 96.

⁴⁶ R. Macrides, “The Historian in the History,” in C. N. Constantinides et al. (eds.), *Φιλέλλην. Studies in Honour of Robert Browning* (Venice 1996) 205–224, at 210.

a stronger hand:⁴⁷ “we are still holding back the audacity of the Tochars, but not with audacious force (Τοχάρων δὲ τοῦ θράσους καὶ ἔτι ἀνέχομεν, οὐ δυνάμεσιν οὐμενοῦν θαρσαλέαις, ch. 5, p.243.3–4). The ethnological digression provides the perspective, which the Emperor should have had but did not have in his dealings with those nations: awareness of the historical momentum created by a series of dangerous alliances and a mutual empowerment between barbarian nations enclosing the Empire into an ever-tightening grip. Pachymeres was not interested to observe every last shred of ethno-physiognomical accuracy in his account: he did not hesitate to deviate from standard ethnological models, because *narrative*, not ethnology was his main concern. I believe that for all the inaccuracies, for instance, in Pachymeres’ Aristotelian works, the departures from the classical tradition in this passage are neither ignorant nor accidental. Pachymeres manipulates his sources with “surgical” readjustments mainly of phrasing—consequential enough to make a difference but not brash enough to be immediately spotted. Overemphasising Ethiopian sophistication, investing the Ethiopians with traits pertaining to the Mean, may have been ethnologically inaccurate, but it was narratologically expedient. In the light of the historical end result, it made perfect sense.⁴⁸

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⁴⁷ For the viewpoint of modern historians on the issue, see Nicol, *Last Centuries* 80–81; and A. Ducellier, “L’abandon de l’Asie par Byzance: de sens des mots à la réalité des choses,” *BF* 25 (1999) 15–45. For the different, more positive appraisal of Michael VIII in Nikephoros Gregoras’ work, see V. Georgiadou, *Ἡ εἰκόνα τῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς ἐξουσίας καὶ ἡ ἰδεολογία τῆς Βυζαντινῆς ἱστοριογραφίας* (diss. Univ. Athens 1997).

⁴⁸ I am indebted to Professors Stephanos Efthymiadis, Anthony Kaldellis, and Dr. Christos Simelidis, for their helpful comments and encouragement. The suggestions, bibliographical and other, by the editorial board and the anonymous referee of *GRBS* were also invaluable. Special gratitude is due to Professor Efthymiadis for his help with Uspensky’s Russian among so many other things.