

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES AND THE TIME AND PLACE OF AUTHORSHIP OF THE *HISTORIA IMPERATORUM*

ABSTRACT: The article looks at the problem of the date and place of provenance of the anonymous Byzantine world chronicle better referred to as the *Historia Imperatorum*. In particular it notes the possibilities arising out of the use of a late mediaeval unit of measure, the *cafiz*, and judges these in relation to further evidence that is forthcoming from the chronicle. It concludes by pointing out the problems in any determination of time and place, as well as suggesting further avenues of research toward the specification of both.

KEY-WORDS: *Historia Imperatorum*, date and place of composition, *cafiz*.

RESUMEN: El artículo estudia el problema de la fecha y lugar de composición de la crónica bizantina anónima conocida como *Historia Imperatorum*. Tiene en cuenta, de forma especial, las posibilidades que ofrece el empleo de una unidad de medida medieval tardía, el *cafiz*, y las analiza en relación con otros datos que aparecen en la crónica. Concluye apuntando los problemas que conlleva la determinación del lugar y fecha, así como sugiriendo nuevas vías de investigación para la determinación de ambos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Historia Imperatorum*, lugar y fecha de composición, *cafiz*.

In his study of the anonymous and undated Byzantine-style chronicle that will in time be better referred to as the *Historia Imperatorum*, Praechter pointed out the potential significance in its use of the *cafiz* as a unit of measure. This was in place of the standard Byzantine measure in the text that the

Historia Imperatorum had used at that particular point as its source, namely the twelfth-century *Chronicle* of Manasses¹. At point was the conversion of the 1, 2 and 12 *medimna* of wheat that were sold for one *hyperpyron*, respectively, at the accession of Nicephorus II Phocas as emperor, later as part of his measures to alleviate hunger, and previously in the previous reign of Basil I, when the same measure that Nicephorus took had been taken by Basil I. These values are stated in the *Historia Imperatorum* to amount to 2, 4 and 16 *cafiz* respectively. There are as a matter of fact two matters of interest here in respect of the use of the “Spanish unit of measure of the *cafiz*” as Praechter refers to it on the basis of Du Cange’s well-known glossary. One is the importance itself of its use in the *Historia Imperatorum*, while the other is the inconsistency in the rates of conversion, with the third figure, as one may have noticed, not conforming to the correspondences of the first two. Drawing attention to the potential value of this point in helping to date the work, but also in helping to identify its place of authorship based on a knowledge of the domain of circulation of the *cafiz*, Praechter also confessed to a lack of expertise on such a specialized point. Indeed, he called for the future input here by someone better qualified than he, yet this is a call that has been left unheeded ever since.

We begin with the latter point, and with the conclusion that the inconsistency is evidently the result of two different sources having been used in succession for the same account by the writer of the *Historia Imperatorum*. Praechter believed that the *Chronicle* of Manasses was the source of the entire text in point in this portion of the *Historia Imperatorum*, yet this applies only to the opening section, as we shall here show by comparing the two accounts. We present in what follows the relevant text of the *Historia Imperatorum*, which has never been published according to the form given here. This is the more original form to be found across the many variants of the work, with a later reworking that is of no real use here, on account of the forms to which the unit of measure has been subjected to change, having long been available in print². The text is derived from *Codex 596* of the State

¹ K. PRAECHTER, «Eine vulgärgriechische Paraphrase der *Chronik* der Konstantinos Manasses», *BZ* 4 (1895) [272-313] pp. 292-293. Beginning with this study and well into until more recent times (ditto the work of Moravcsik, on which see below), the *Historia Imperatorum* was known as the “the Prose Paraphrase of the *Chronicle* of Manasses”. The inaccuracy in the use of this term becomes apparent from, amongst other places, the present study.

² This later reworking, derived from *Paris. Gr.* 1708, was published as an extension to the *Chronicle* of George the Monk in volume 110 of the easily accessible *Patrologia Graeca*, which is a reprinting of the Muralt’s St. Petersburg edition of George the Monk from a few years pre-

Library of the city of Bern, which is the manuscript that until now has been the most favored for study of the *Historia Imperatorum*, beginning with Praechter himself, and it has been reproduced with the minimum of rectification to its Greek. There follows in turn the corresponding passage from the *Chronicle* of Manasses.

Περὶ τοῦ λιμοῦ τοῦ γενομένου ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει, μεγάλου καὶ ἰσχυροῦ, καὶ ἀσπλαχνία τοῦ Φωκᾶ.

Κατὰ δὲ τοὺς καιροὺς τοῦ βασιλέως Φωκᾶ ἐγένετον εἰς τοὺς ῥωμαίους λιμὸς μέγας. καὶ ἀπέθνησκεν ὁ λαὸς ἀπὸ τὸ κακὸν τοῦ λιμοῦ καὶ πανταχοῦ ἦτον θλίψις καὶ στενοχωρία, καὶ ὄδυρμὸς καὶ κλαυθμὸς ὅτι οὐδὲ δύο καφίζια εὐρίσκοντο εἰς τὸ ὑπέρπυρον. Ἦκουσεν δὲ ταῦτα ὁ Φωκᾶς καὶ ἐλυπήθη πολλὰ καὶ τάχα ἤθελεν νὰ ποιήσει καλὸν εἰς τὸν λαόν του. καὶ ὤρισεν νὰ ἀνοίξουσιν τὰ μαγαζία τῆς μέσης καὶ νὰ πουληθεῖ τέσσαρα καφίζια εἰς τὸ ὑπέρπυρον. Τόσον ἦτον ἀφιλότιμος καὶ ταῦτα ἐκεῖ ὅπου ἦταν χιλιάδες μαγαζία γεμάτα σιτάρια ἀπὸ τὸν καιρὸν τῆς εὐθυρίας. Καὶ οὐδὲν ἐμμήθει τὸν μακεδόνιον τὸν Βασίλειον τὸν μέγαν καὶ ἀληθινὸν βασιλέα.

Περὶ τῆς εὐσπλαχνίας βασιλέως Βασιλείου τοῦ μακεδόνο.

Οὗτος γὰρ ὁ Βασίλειος εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ αὐτοκρατορίαν καὶ τὸν καιρὸν εἰς τὴν ἑορτὴν τοῦ πάσχα ἐκαβαλίκευσεν μὲ τοὺς στρατηγοὺς καὶ ἄρχοντας λαμπροφορέμενοι ἔσω εἰς τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολιν. Ἦτον δὲ καὶ τότε μέγας λιμὸς καὶ ὡς ἐδιέβενεν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐστράφη καὶ εἶδεν κοδέσποτας ἀνθρώπους καὶ ἱερεῖς ὅτι ἰστήκοντο μαυροφορέμενοι καὶ πολλὰ θλιμμένοι. Ἠρώτησεν δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς, διὰ ποίαν ἀφορμὴν οὐδὲν ἐλαμπροφόρεσαν καὶ ἐκεῖνοι νὰ ποιήσωσιν τὴν ἀνάστασιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Καὶ ἀπηλογήθησαν ὅτι τί θέλουσιν λαμπροφορεῖν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ὅπου δὲν εὐρίσκουσιν ν' ἀγοράσουσιν ψωμὶν διὰ νὰ φᾶσιν. Καὶ ὡς ἤκουσεν τοῦτο ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐδάκρυσεν καὶ ἐλυπήθη ἔσω ἢ ψυχὴ του καὶ ὤρισεν καὶ ἤνοιξαν τὰ βασιλικὰ μαγαζία καὶ τῶν πραγματευτᾶδων καὶ διελάλησεν νὰ πουληθοῦν δέκα ἕξ καφίζια εἰς τὸ ὑπέρπυρον καὶ οὕτως ἔλυσεν τοῦ λιμοῦ τὴν ἀνάγκην καὶ τὴν στενοχωρίαν τοῦ λαοῦ³.

λιμὸς ἐβόσκετό ποτε τὴν ὑπὸ τοὺς Ῥωμαίους
καὶ τῆ πυράγρα τοῦ κακοῦ τὸ πλῆθος ἠναλγοῦτο
καὶ πάντες ἀπωδύροντο τὸ τῆς ἐνδείας βέλος·
χρυσίνου γὰρ ὁ μέδιμνος μόλις ἀπημπολεῖτο.

vously. The passage of interest to us (*ibid.* cols. 1205, 1208), includes alterations to the terminology of the units of measure and the correspondences in the exchange rates (which are of no interest to us in the present article).

³ *Cod. Bernensis* 596, ff. 205v-206r.

ἀνέβη ταῦτα πρὸς Φωκᾶν, ὁ δ' ἤλγησεν ἀκούσας
καὶ τὸ κακὸν ἰάσασθαι δῆθεν παραζηλώσας
τὰς δημοσίας ἀπαντλεῖν κελεύει σιτοθήκας
καὶ δύο τοῦ νομίσματος σιτοπωλεῖν μεδίμνους.
οὕτω Φωκᾶς σμικροπρεπῶς τὸ πρᾶγμα διετίθει,
καὶ ταῦτα χιλιάσιτα πλουτῶν σιτοδοχεῖα
κατάφορτα τοῖς βάρεσι καὶ σίτοις βεβυσμένα,
ἐξ ὧν ἀπεθησαύρισαν αἰ πρὶν εὐετηρία,
μὴ τὸν πολὺν Βασιλείον ἐζηλωκῶς ἐν τούτῳ,
τὸν ὄντως βασιλεύτατον, τὸν ἐκ Μακεδονίας,
ὅστις ἰδὼν κατώδυνον τὸ Βυζαντίων πλῆθος
καὶ τὸν λιμὸν παραίτιον εἶναι μαθὼν τοῦ πένθους
ἐντέχνως ἀντετάξατο πάθει τῷ δυσπαλαίστῳ,
ἀντιπαλαμησάμενος γενναίως τῷ γενναίῳ
καὶ φθείρας θῆρα τὸν βαρὺν πνιγμοῖς βιαιοτέροις·
δώδεκα γὰρ τὸ νόμισμα τὸ χρύσειον μεδίμνων
ἐκέλευσεν ἀντάξιον εἶναι τοῖς σιτωνοῦσι⁴.

It should be evident from this comparison, that while Manasses is clearly the source for the first section of the text of the *Historia Imperatorum*, he is obviously not the source for the second. In spite of this being the case, the question naturally presents itself why the difference should exist at all, given that, despite different sources having been used, it would be expected of the writer of the *Historia Imperatorum* to have harmonized the disparate claims in order to present a unified account. Indeed, one would initially be inclined to ascribe the discrepancy to scribal error, from whatever point in the history of the chronicle's circulation, were it not for the fact that elsewhere in the *Historia Imperatorum* another such inconsistency emerges, which similarly deals with weights and measures. The matter in point relates to the Byzantine emperor Theodosius II's purchase of the apple in the well-known account involving the empress and Paulinus. In the *Historia Imperatorum* this is said to occur in exchange for 'two litres of gold', whereas the Byzantine chronicles on this matter speak of either 100 gold pieces (in the case of the late-eleventh century *Chronicle* of Cedrenus) or 150 gold pieces (in the sixth-century *Chronicle* of Malalas and the seventh-century *Paschal Chronicle*). Here however, in contrast to the passage on Nicephorus II, Praechter well noticed that

⁴ *Constantini Manassis Breviarium Chronicum*, recensuit Odysseus Lampsidis, pars prior, Athens 1996, pp. 308-309, verses 5714-5734.

the account as a whole derives from no one Byzantine source in particular. It certainly did not come from the early ninth-century *Chronicle* of Theophanes, which Praechter had identified as the source of the *Historia Imperatorum* for this general portion of its account, yet it had similarities with various points in a range of Byzantine chronicles⁵. As in the case of the second part of the account on Nicephorus above, the source here as well appears to be some lost Byzantine chronicle that was used by the writer of the *Historia Imperatorum* throughout the length of his work, as a supplement to both Manasses and Theophanes. This conclusion, however, derives from an examination of the *Historia Imperatorum* as a whole, and as such is a matter that will need to be left for appropriate consideration elsewhere.

We turn now to the matter of the importance itself in the use of the term *cafiz*. The unit in question, of Arabic origins, is known especially for having acted as a general measure of dry capacity in Spain from the thirteenth century to more recent times. In addition, it circulated at various periods, from late mediaeval times right through in some cases to present times, in places as far apart as southern Italy, Rhodes and Cyprus. Its precise value has been established, and as one would expect, it showed differing local values across its domain of use, even within the Iberian peninsula itself⁶. In terms of the places in its circulation of interest to us, these of course have to be the two east Mediterranean Greek islands of Rhodes and Cyprus, it being highly unlikely that a work of such a traditional nature as the *Historia Imperatorum* would have been authored in the West (though this is a possibility that cannot altogether be ruled out, given the cautious nature of our conclusions, as we shall see). Here we may point out a point of special interest matter in relation to the *cafiz*, namely that the *Historia Imperatorum* is one of only two Greek literary sources which mention this term, the other case being, most notably, the *Chronicle* of Makhairas, which was written in Lusignan Cyprus at or just after the year 1432⁷.

This being so, we ought then to look for other points in the *Historia Imperatorum*, which may potentially act to supply us with further information

⁵ PRAECHTER, *op. cit.*, p. 279-284, for discussion of the entire passage, as well as its publication.

⁶ E. SCHILBACH, *Byzantinische Metrologie*, München 1970, pp. 133ff, 137ff in particular, in terms of Rhodes and Cyprus. There is no evidence for the use of this measure elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean, not even in Constantinople. On the unit in general, see for example F. B. PEGALLOTI, *La Pratica della Mercatura*, ed. by A. Evans, Cambridge (Ma) 1936, p. 408 (index).

⁷ Cf. G. KRIARAS, *Λεξικὸ τῆς Μεσαιωνικῆς Δημόδοις Γραμματείας*, vol. 8, Θεσσαλονίκη 1982, p. 125 for the Greek sources in the use of the term.

that may be indicative of the place of writing of this work. Indeed Praechter did point to just one such point, which is in fact the only immediately evident one in the entire work. This is to be found in the *Historia Imperatorum* at the point when it speaks of the figure of Alexander the Great, in text that is otherwise totally derived from the *Chronicle* of Manasses, and where the author makes the added point, in respect of this source, that Alexander “built the city of Alexandria that lies nearby”⁸. Rhodes and Cyprus do of course lie pretty much as close as one can get to Alexandria in terms of the Greek world, and Cyprus clearly emerges as the more likely possibility given its size and greater importance in the said period. Here we ought as well not to ignore, that the *Historia Imperatorum* made use of at least three separate sources, and so a library of some importance must have been available to the unknown writer of the work. It follows therefore, that for such material to have been at his disposal, the writer could not have been writing outside some major cultural centre, such as existed for example in Cyprus during Lusignan times.

Nonetheless there are real problems in too readily accepting the conclusion that Cyprus was, in all likelihood, the place of authorship of the *Historia Imperatorum*. To begin with, there is the lack of any obvious signs of Cypriot idiom, of which the *Chronicle* of Makhairas is by contrast characteristically replete. In addition, the phrase on Alexandria in fact begs the point of what the unknown author meant by the term “nearby”. Finally, as we have already pointed out, the *Historia Imperatorum* made use of a lost Byzantine source throughout its length, and the nature of this use suggests that there is a real possibility that the comment on Alexandria is just one such borrowing, and not a personal contribution by the author of the *Historia Imperatorum*⁹. Indeed, this possibility, namely that “nearby city” is actually the wording of the source of the *Historia Imperatorum*, ought not be surprising after taking account of the numerical discrepancy that the author of the *Historia Imperatorum* left in his work, on account of the use of the two separate sources for the account on Nicephorus we saw above. All these points taken together thus raise the problem of whether the use of the term *cafiz*, and the vaguely

⁸ PRAECHTER, *op. cit.*, p. 293: Οὗτος ἐκτίσεν καὶ τὴν κειμένην ἐγγίστα τὴν μεγάλην Αἰγύπτου πόλιν Ἀλεξάνδρειαν.

⁹ The material in the *Historia Imperatorum* over and above what derives from known sources includes not only passages of some notable length, but also additions of one sentence in length, and their content is too specific to derive from anywhere other than a written source. See for example PRAECHTER, *op. cit.*, p. 299, n. 1, most basically, yet very indicatively.

supportive evidence on Alexandria, are enough to ascribe to Cyprus the place of authorship of the work.

In suggesting a date for the *Historia Imperatorum*, Praechter put forward the twelfth, or more likely the thirteenth century, on the basis of the author's intent on using the vernacular, a form of Greek that came into active prominence at precisely this time. In addition, there is the fact that the work concludes with events of the late eleventh century, about which Praechter made the cautious assumption that someone writing at a date considerably later than this would have extended history to cover newer times¹⁰. Also on the basis of language, and more particularly on the basis of his wide experience with the Greek vernacular, the scholar Valetas made the calculated guess that the work dates from “around the year 1480”, and indeed that it had been written in Constantinople¹¹. Here indeed we need to point out, that out of an enormous manuscript tradition of no fewer than 35 manuscripts, not a single manuscript derives from Byzantine times, and indeed the earliest may well derive from no earlier than the turn of the sixteenth century¹². What however also needs to be pointed out is that, as was established by Praechter himself, the complex manuscript tradition of the work, which is characterized by forms of notable variation between them, was already apparently widely developed by this time. Indeed, on the basis of comparison with its established sources, readings across the tradition of the *Historia Imperatorum* suggests that the ultimately original form of the text has not survived, not even in the versions of the work that are definitely more original in form, such as in the case of the Bern manuscript we reproduced above¹³.

All the above leads to the conclusion that further statements on the place and time of origin of the *Historia Imperatorum* need to await a comprehensive palaeographic and textual study of the work, and more particularly, its specialized linguistic analysis. This last in particular is very important, since if indeed there is a Cypriot connection to the work, or indeed a Rhodian

¹⁰ PRAECHTER, *op. cit.*, pp. 292-293. Kriaras, rather superficially, accepts a twelfth-century date, evidently on the basis of these arguments.

¹¹ G. VALETAS, *Ιστορία της Δημοτικής Πεζογραφίας*, Θεσσαλονίκη 1947, p. 486.

¹² G. MORAVCSIK, *Byzantinoturcica. Die Byzantinischen Quellen der Geschichte der Türkenvölker*, Berlin 1958² (repr. Leiden 1983), vol. 1, p. 295 for a statement on the manuscript tradition of the *Historia Imperatorum*, outdated, but still as good as any today. *Cod. Marc. Gr.* 608, which was prominently included by Praechter as a manuscript of the chronicle (*op. cit.*, p. 274; also pp. 300, 306-307) and which has been securely dated to the 1430s, is not a representative of the *Historia Imperatorum*.

¹³ PRAECHTER, *op. cit.*, pp. 299-300, 304 (in particular).

one, evidence for this will undoubtedly emerge from any linguistic evaluation. For this however to take place, the language of the original, which has not survived, has first to be established, yet this calls for all the work necessary towards an edition first to take place. The fact is however, surprising though as it may seem in our time, that in the case of the *Historia Imperatorum*, even a comprehensive listing of all the relevant manuscripts has still to be made. The value of a linguistic survey is also evident on the matter of the time of writing. Take for example the *Historia Imperatorum*'s use of the term "Tartar", in preference to the term "Scyth" of the source (whether it be the *Chronicle* of Manasses or that of Theophanes), which on the basis of existing knowledge for its use in Greek, suggests chronological margins between the mid-thirteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries¹⁴. We may in fact well suggest on the basis of this, that the evidence in general points to a date for the work from sometime "around" the fourteenth century. As to the place of writing, Cyprus remains as an obvious possibility, but much, much more evidence needs to be found before such a proposition can be accepted with any measure of certainty.

Needless to say, a more detailed assessment of the *Historia Imperatorum* overall will certainly repay the determined student of Byzantine letters.

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¹⁴ MORAVCSIK, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 247. The term "Tartar" or "Tartaria" is to be found at numerous points along the length of the *Historia Imperatorum*.