

The emperor, the sultan and the scholar: the portrayal of the Ottomans in the *Dialogue with a Persian* of Manuel II Palaiologos

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To the memory of my uncle Noyan Altınorak

This article will attempt to offer the first literary analysis of the Dialogue with a Persian of Manuel II Palaiologos. Despite its rich theological and literary material, this work has largely been neglected by scholars. However, the Dialogue deserves to be studied for its literary merit and not merely as a historical source. After a brief overview of the contents and background of the Dialogue, this study will focus on its literary features, especially on the vivid character portrayal of the Ottomans and the emperor himself.

Keywords: Manuel II Palaiologos; dialogue; Byzantine literature; Byzantine anti-Islamic treatises; Bayezid I

In June 1391, just a few months after his accession, the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaiologos (1350–1425) was compelled to assist the Ottoman sultan Bayezid on a campaign. The campaign, which took place between June 1391 and January 1392, was directed against the Turkish emirates in the Black Sea region. Furthermore, sultan Bayezid, who was bent on uniting the Anatolian territories under his rule, also intended to force Kadı Burhan-al-din, the Mongolid ruler of the Eretna emirate, to give up his designs on these lands.¹ Thus, Manuel II left his capital on 8 June and spent several months fighting for the Ottomans. In his eight surviving letters from this campaign, Manuel complained about the difficulties of warfare, the harsh conditions of the Anatolian topography, the scarcity of the provisions and the humiliation he felt at being obliged to serve his enemies.² Manuel declared to his correspondent and beloved former mentor Demetrios Kydones that Bayezid had significantly consolidated his power in Anatolia through the campaign – and in a twist of irony – he, the Byzantine emperor,

1 The most detailed study of this campaign is E. A. Zachariadou, 'Manuel II Palaeologus on the strife between Bayezid I and Kadi Burhan al-Din Ahmad', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43 (1980) 471–81. This study also makes excellent use of Manuel's letters from the period to illuminate the conquests that took place during the campaign. Henceforth, Zachariadou, 'Strife'.

2 See Letters 14 to 21 in *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus*, ed. and trans. G. T. Dennis (Washington, D. C. 1977). Henceforth, Manuel's letters will be cited by their numbers.

had contributed to this Ottoman success.³ After the campaign, the Ottoman army retreated to Ankara to spend the winter there. In Ankara, the Byzantine emperor was hosted by a scholar of Islamic theology, a *müderriş*, and spent many nights conversing with him about Christianity and Islam. It was based upon these conversations that Manuel composed his famous *Dialogue with a Persian*.⁴

Manuel's decision to pen a lengthy literary/theological work based upon these conversations is not a surprising one as he was a prominent writer of his period and a prolific one too. Although the majority of modern scholars mainly know Manuel's letter collection, his *Funeral Oration* and the *Dialogue on Marriage with the Empress Mother* (all of which have been translated into English), the remainder of Manuel's oeuvre is not as well known.⁵ However, in addition to these aforementioned works, the emperor also wrote poems, prayers, sermons, rhetorical exercises, orations, ethico-political works and theological treatises. None of these have been translated into English, while some still remain unpublished.⁶ Thus, as an author, Manuel still largely remains a neglected figure. Despite the bulk and variety of his oeuvre, only a few of his works have been studied, and mostly for historical purposes, that is, in order to gain 'information' about the politics of the period and Manuel's policies as emperor.⁷ While his writings indeed constitute invaluable sources for the study of the period, Manuel deserves attention not only as an emperor but

3 The Ottomans conquered Osmaniç and Kırkdilim: see Zachariadou, 'Strife', 477. For Manuel's remarks, Letter 19, lines 34–8, 'ἀντὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων κινδύνων καὶ πόνων καὶ συχῶν ἀναλωμάτων, ἃ πολλὴν αὐτῷ (Bayezid) παρεσχέκοντο ῥοπήν κατὰ τῶν πολεμίων χρηματίζων ὁμολογεῖ....'

4 The work has been edited twice, Manuel Palaeologus, *Dialogue mit einem Perser*, ed. E. Trapp (Vienna 1966) and K. Förstel, *Dialoge mit einem Muslim*, 3 vols (Würzburg- Althernberg 1993–96), with some minor emendations to the Trapp edition and with a German translation. As it is the more accessible version, the Trapp edition will be relied upon in this article. Henceforth, cited as *Dialogue with a Persian*. Although the work consists of twenty-six dialogues, since the work is formed of consecutive dialogues and thus forms one coherent, unified work, I will refer to the text as *Dialogue*, and not *Dialogues*.

5 Manuel Palaeologus, *Dialogue with the Empress Mother on Marriage*, ed. and trans. A. Angelou (Vienna 1991) and Manuel Palaeologus, *Funeral Oration to His Brother Theodore*, ed. and trans. J. Chrysostomides (Thessalonike 1985). Henceforth, *Dialogue on Marriage* and *Funeral Oration*.

6 A list of Manuel's complete oeuvre is given in Ch. Dendrinou, *An Annotated Critical Edition (editio princeps) of Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus' Treatise On the Procession of the Holy Spirit* (PhD dissertation, University of London, 1996) 430–45.

7 While his monograph on Manuel is a masterly historical study, John Barker also uses only some of Manuel's works in order to retrieve information about the period, ignoring their literary aspects. See J. W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus (1391–1425): A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship* (New Brunswick 1969). Henceforth, Barker, *Manuel II*. Similar approaches to Manuel's oeuvre can be seen in G. T. Dennis in his introduction to Manuel's letters and *The Reign of Manuel II Palaeologus in Thessalonica (1382–1387)* (Rome 1960), as well as several articles by Stephen Reinert, collected in S. Reinert, *Studies on Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman History* (Farnham 2014). Finally, a recent PhD dissertation, F. Leonte, *Rhetoric in Purple: the Renewal of Imperial Ideology in the Texts of Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos* (PhD dissertation, Central European University, 2012), deals with imperial ideology in several of Manuel's texts and discusses how Manuel attempted to proliferate political messages through his works and literary networks.

also as an author. His works are not only significant historical sources but are also fine specimens of Byzantine literature. In other words, Manuel's works merit discussion as literary artefacts.⁸ Among this vast oeuvre, the *Dialogue with a Persian* especially stands out as a remarkable literary work on account of several features.

The exact composition of the *Dialogue with a Persian* is unclear, but evidence points to the years 1392–1399.⁹ As the work is quite long – 300 pages in modern editions – and as Manuel often revised his works extensively before their 'publication', it is quite possible that the work remained in progress for a long period of time, perhaps even several years. At any rate, the manuscript evidence indicates that it was completed by 1399, before Manuel embarked on his celebrated journey to Western Europe (1399–1402). Thus, the work was composed at most within a few years span of the winter of 1391, when Manuel claims to have held the conversations with the *müderris*. The *Dialogue* is available in two editions. The first one was published by Erich Trapp in 1966, while Karl Förstel introduced some minor amendments to the Trapp version in 1993–1996, also providing a German translation of the entire work.¹⁰ The seventh dialogue has been respectively translated into English and German by Theodore Khoury, W. Baum and R. Senoner.¹¹

The *Dialogue* acquired fame in 2006 when Pope Benedict XVI quoted a line from the seventh dialogue in his Regensburg lecture, relying on Khoury's translation. However, until now, the *Dialogue* has not attracted a lot of scholarly attention apart from a few exceptions. Erich Trapp worked on several linguistic aspects of the dialogue.¹² Michel Balivet has devoted an article to the identity of the *müderris* in the work, while two articles by John Demetrapoulos and Ioannis Polemis have dealt with some of the theological aspects of the work.¹³ Finally, in another article, Stephen Reinert deals with the *müderris* and Manuel's representation of himself as the winner of the debates.¹⁴

8 In my doctoral dissertation, S. Çelik, *A Historical Biography of Manuel II Palaiologos (1350-1425)* (PhD dissertation, The University of Birmingham, 2016), I have attempted to write a new biography of Manuel, focusing on him as an author and a personality. I have worked on the complete literary, philosophical and theological oeuvre of the emperor, arguing for his literary merit. I am currently preparing my dissertation for publication as a monograph.

9 *Dialogue with a Persian*, *55–6.

10 See note 4 above.

11 *Entretiens avec un Musulman, 7e controverse*, ed. and trans. Th. Khoury (Paris, 1966) and *Kaiser Manuel II Palaiologos: Dialog Über den Islam und Erziehungsratschläge*, trans. W. Baum and R. Senoner (Vienna 2003).

12 E. Trapp, 'Der Sprachgebrauch Manuels II in den Dialogen mit einem 'Perser'' *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 16 (1967) 189–97.

13 J. A. Demetrapoulos, 'Pope Benedict XVI's use of the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaiologos' dialogue with a Muslim muteritzes', *Archiv für Mittelalterliche Philosophie und Kultur* 14 (2008) 264–304 and I. Polemis, 'Manuel II Palaiologos between Gregory Palamas and Thomas Aquinas', in M. Knežević (ed) *The Ways of Byzantine Philosophy* (Alhambra, CA 2015) 353–60. Henceforth, Demetrapoulos, 'Pope'.

14 S. Reinert, 'Manuel II Palaeologus and his Müderris', in *The Twilight of Byzantium*, eds. S. Ćurčić and D. Mouriki (Princeton 1991) 39–51, repr. in Reinert, *Studies on Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman History* (Farnham 2014) study IX. Henceforth, Reinert, 'Müderris'.

Apart from these, despite its rich historical, theological and literary content, the *Dialogue* is often discussed by merely repeating basic historical information found in other secondary literature.¹⁵ This article will attempt to discuss several prominent literary features of the work, especially focusing on Manuel's self-representation and his portrayal of the Ottomans in the dialogue. As such, the article will attempt to offer the first study of the *Dialogue with a Persian* from a literary point of view.

The Byzantine tradition of writing polemical treatises against Islam had emerged in the eighth century as a response to the rise of Islam, and can be traced throughout the centuries.¹⁶ Although the corpus of these works is large, some notable works include those of John Damascus (8th c.), Niketas Byzantios (9th c.), George Monachos (9th c.), Zigabenos (12th c.) and Niketas Choniates (12th c). Byzantine anti-Islamic works had their roots in the *Adversus Iudaeos* literature, which were works written against Jews and Judaism. Like the *Adversus Iudaeos* texts, anti-Islamic works were not composed as comparative studies of Christianity and the opposing religion, but in order to utterly refute Islam and to vindicate Christianity. Thus, both the anti-Jewish and anti-Islamic texts were composed with the sole goal of establishing the superiority of Christianity.

As in the case of the *Adversus Iudaeos* texts, anti-Islamic works could also be composed as dialogues, as a debate between a Muslim and a Christian, or between multiple collocutors. The debates would invariably end with the victory of Christianity. Although Byzantine authors discussed a variety of topics in these anti-Islamic works, ranging from the life of the Prophet Mohammed to the origins of Islam, polygamy and the authenticity of the Quran, Islam was never accurately represented. Instead, the authors would insert rather fanciful stories about Islam and its traditions. As such, the information offered by the authors of anti-Islamic works is not reliable and cannot be used to reconstruct Islam. Likewise, starting with John Damascus, several authors,

15 Barker points out that he had not been able to consult the work at the time of the publication of his monograph, Barker, *Manuel II*, 97. For several references to the *Dialogue*, see A. Karpozilos, 'Byzantine apologetic and polemic writings of the Palaeologean epoch against Islam', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 15 (1970) 213–48; E. Trapp, 'Quelques textes peu connus illustrent les relations entre le Christianisme et l'Islam', *Byzantinische Forschungen* 29 (2007) 437–50; M. Balivet, 'Rhomania byzantine et Diyar-ı Rum turc: une aire de conciliation religieuse (XIe-XVe siècles)', in M. Balivet (ed), *Byzantins et Ottomans: relations, interaction, succession*, (Istanbul 1999) 111–17; A. Ducellier, *Chrétiens d'Orient et Islam au Moyen Age, VIIe- XVe siècle* (Paris 1966) 90–106; Ducellier, 'L'Islam et les musulmanes vus de Byzance au XIVe siècle', *Byzantina* 12 (1983) 95–134; E. A. Zachariadou, 'Religious dialogue between the Byzantines and Turks during the Ottoman expansion', in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, eds. B. Lewis and F. Niewöhner (Wiesbaden 1992) 289–304, repr. in Zachariadou, *Studies in Pre-Ottoman Turkey and the Ottomans* (Aldershot 2007) study II.

16 The following discussion is based upon Trapp's introduction, *Dialogue with a Persian*, *13–35; Th. Khoury. *Les théologiens Byzantins et l'Islam: texts et auteurs (VIIIe-XIIIe siècles)*. (Louvain and Paris 1969); A. Cameron, *Arguing It Out: Discussion in Twelfth -Century Byzantium* (Budapest 2016), especially 120–35 (henceforth, Cameron, *Arguing it Out*) and A. Karpozilos, 'Byzantine apologetic and polemic writings of the Palaeologean epoch against Islam', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 15 (1970) 213–48; Th. Khoury. *Polémique Byzantine contre l'Islam; VIIIe-XIIIe siècles*. (Leiden 1972).

such as Niketas Byzantios and Zigabenos, also represented Islam not as a religion on its own right, but rather as a Christian heresy. Byzantine authors did not conduct in-depth studies of Islam and its various aspects but usually re-cycled the 'distorted' information found in earlier and contemporary anti-Islamic texts. As such, these texts did not engage objectively with Islam, but rather attempted to refute and sometimes even ridicule it.

The tradition of Byzantine anti-Islamic literature did not emerge as an isolated genre but as a response to the rise of Islam and was closely connected with the increase in Byzantine-Muslim contacts. For instance, the Seljukid conquests and conversions to Islam in the twelfth century led to a great increase in the production of these texts. Similarly, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the rapid Ottoman conquests, increasing conversions to Islam and face-to-face contacts between the Christians and the Muslims again led to a proliferation of such anti-Islamic works. One such notable example is that of Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century. When captured by the Ottomans, he held debates with the Ottoman audience on Islam and Christianity, later writing works based on these discussions.¹⁷ Most crucially, Demetrios Kydones, also the former teacher and a close friend of Manuel II, translated into Greek Ricoldo di Monte Croce's *Contra Legem Saracenorum*, an important anti-Islamic Latin treatise. Manuel II's maternal grandfather John VI Kantakouzenos also wrote anti-Islamic works relying on this Greek translation of Ricoldo di Monte Croce's *Contra Legem Saracenorum*.¹⁸ During the late fourteenth century and mid-fifteenth century, many people among Manuel's literary circle, such as Makarios Makres and Joseph Bryennios, also wrote anti-Islamic works.¹⁹

Manuel's *Dialogue with a Persian* fits in well with the broader framework of Byzantine anti-Islamic works. Like them, it was composed not as a comparative study of Islam and Christianity, but as a refutation of the former. The majority of the topics discussed by Manuel, such as the life of the Prophet Mohammed, polygamy, violence in religion and the Islamic perception of Trinitarian theology, were quite commonplace in other anti-Islamic works. As is the case for other such works, Manuel also does not represent Islam accurately, but weaves many spurious stories into his discussions. Finally,

17 Kantakouzenos' work, consisting of four apologies and four orations, is found in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 154, cols. 371–692 and Kydones' translation of Ricoldo di Monte Croce's *Contra Legem Saracenorum* in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 154, cols. 1035–1170. On Kantakouzenos' work, see also K. P. Todt, *Kaiser Johannes VI Kantakouzenos und der Islam. Politische Realität und theologische Polemik im palaiologenzeitlichen Byzanz* (Würzburg-Altenberge 1991). See also W. Eichner, 'Accounts of Islam', in A. Cameron and R. Hoyland (eds), *Doctrine and Debate in the East Christian World* (Farnham 2011) 109–72, 115, points out that Kantakouzenos' knowledge of Islam seems to be solely based on Kydones' translation of Ricoldo, and shows no dependence on earlier Byzantine anti-Islamic literature.

18 See footnote 24 below.

19 However, these works are dated later than the *Dialogue with a Persian*. See A. Argyriou, *Macaire Makrès et la polémique contre l'Islam* (Vatican City 1986) 239–330 for the treatise of Makres. See A. Argyriou, 'Ἰωσήφ τοῦ Βρυεννίου μετὰ τίνος Ἰσραηλιτοῦ Διάλεξις', *Ἐπετηρίς Ἐταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν* 35 (1966–1967) 141–95 for the dialogue of Joseph Bryennios.

as was the case with other anti-Islamic or *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues, in Manuel's work, too, Christianity utterly prevails.

Although the *Dialogue with a Persian* does not show strong textual parallels or influences of the specimens of former anti-Islamic literature, the works of Kydones and Kantakouzenos were crucial to Manuel's dialogue. It has been demonstrated that the work of Kantakouzenos relied very heavily on Kydones' translation of Ricoldo. In turn, Manuel seems to have relied, to a degree, on Kantakouzenos' work.²⁰ Not only does Manuel's discussion of the life of the Prophet Mohammed display remarkable similarities to that of Kantakouzenos, but also several textual parallels between the works can be attested concerning the discussions of pleasure, the arc of Noah, polygamy and violence in Islam.²¹ Furthermore, the emperor also acknowledges Kantakouzenos' work in the preface, recalling him as 'our blessed grandfather the emperor'.²² Apart from Kantakouzenos, Manuel betrays only very few parallels with other anti-Islamic works.²³ Instead, the emperor chiefly relies on the four gospels, the psalms and the Church Fathers in his arguments. As such, despite being part of the much wider anti-Islamic polemical tradition, Manuel's dialogue does not display strong influences from the earlier Byzantine polemical writings, but stems from a new line of Byzantine treatises generated by Kydones' translation of Ricoldo di Monte Croce.²⁴

Albeit relying partially on Kantakouzenos, Manuel's work differs from that of his grandfather through its richer content and wider scope of argumentation. The discussions in the *Dialogue with a Persian* are much more wide ranging: the nature of angels, paradise, rationality in men and animals, the life of the Prophet Mohammed, Trinity, Christology, icons and the lives of the apostles.²⁵ For instance, although Manuel relies on Kantakouzenos and the Kydones translation of Ricoldo for the discussion of the Life of the Prophet, his own discussion is much more detailed and extensive.²⁶ Similarly, the discussions of rationality in men and animals, and icons are absent in Kantakouzenos and Kydones. Most importantly, several of the topics discussed by Manuel in the *Dialogue with a Persian* are not attested in any other work. In this regard, the most prominent theme is the discussion of the nature of the angels, where Manuel represents Islam as viewing the angels as mortal and corruptible – an argument attested neither in Byzantine, nor in Islamic sources. Other such topics are a tale of Enoch and Elias, the discussion of

20 This has been studied in detail and demonstrated by Trapp, see *Dialogue with a Persian*, *66–86. For several textual parallels with Kantakouzenos, identified by Trapp, *Dialogue with a Persian*, 29, 33, 34, 51, 52, 54, 79, 134.

21 *Dialogue with a Persian*, *66.

22 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 6. 'ὁ θεϊότατος πάππος ἡμῶν, ὁ πάντ' ἄριστος καὶ θαυμάσιος βασιλεύς...'

23 Once with Niketas Byzantios and a few times with John Damascus, see *Dialogue with a Persian*, 58 and 195–6.

24 *Dialogue with a Persian*, *66.

25 *Dialogue with a Persian*, *62–84, for an extensive summary of these discussions.

26 *Dialogue with a Persian*, *66.

rationality in animals and the so-called Islamic belief of Mohammed as the Paraklete.²⁷ Therefore, although most of the topics in the *Dialogue with a Persian* were very common in the anti-Islamic literature, in a few instances, Manuel does introduce new discussions.

Finally, unlike other specimens of the anti-Islamic polemical texts, the topics discussed in the *Dialogue with a Persian* are not limited to the defence of Christian dogma. Manuel also touches upon other issues such as choice (προαίρεσις), free-will, desire and the changeability of fortune; questions in which he displays a continuous interest throughout his lifetime. In the 1410s, these topics would constitute the central questions of his ethico-political works, namely the *Foundations of Imperial Conduct* and the *Seven Ethico-Political Orations*.²⁸

In the *Dialogue with a Persian*, while discussing Christianity, as mentioned above, Manuel draws upon the Byzantine theological and patristic literature. As such, his theological arguments are not ‘original’. However, while Manuel cannot be considered a theologian of the calibre of John Damascus and his likes, it is also unfair to label his reliance on the existing theological literature as a sign of ‘unoriginality’. It was on the contrary, the norm to refer to the Fathers and other theological works; this was not perceived as ‘unoriginality’ by the Byzantines, but as operating within the framework of the theological traditions.²⁹ Manuel’s aim in composing the *Dialogue* was not to come up with new arguments but to produce a detailed apology of Christianity vis-à-vis Islam. Unlike the modern reader, the emperor’s audience did not expect new arguments from the work. Finally, as Erich Trapp also pointed out, Manuel was not a mere compiler, but added new dimensions to the polemic against Islam; as mentioned previously, the work does discuss several topics that are not attested in other works.

The *Dialogue with a Persian* consists of twenty-six dialogues; the collocutors are Manuel II and the anonymous *müderris*. An audience made up of the *müderris*’ intellectual circle and Manuel’s entourage is also present, possibly along with some Ottoman individuals who wished to hear the discussions. Although the *müderris* is not named, the emperor describes him as an old scholar who had just arrived from Babylon. As he had recently arrived, he was greatly honoured amongst the Ottomans; the emperor claims all

27 *Dialogue with a Persian*, *86.

28 I have discussed these aspects of Manuel’s thought in my doctoral dissertation. See note 8 above.

29 Furthermore, proposing new theological arguments could be dangerous. The author could be accused of ‘innovating’ (καινοτομία). For instance anti-Palamites such as Barlaam, and later Prochoros Kydones were accused of ‘innovating’ and condemned by the Church. On the other hand, Palamas, who had actually also raised new debates was accepted as producing valid arguments. See G. Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz. Der Streit um die theologische Methodik in der spätbyzantinischen Geistesgeschichte (14/15 Jhr.)* (Munich 1977) 80–1. Another such case is Gregory of Cyprus, who had argued for an eternal manifestation of the Spirit by the Son and had thus raised a new point. However, as he had provided the Orthodox with a strong argument against the Latins, his interpretation was accepted as being valid. See A. Papadakis, ‘The Byzantines and the rise of Papacy: points for reflection (1204–1453)’, in M. Hinterberger and C. Schabel (eds), *Greeks, Latins, and Intellectual History 1204–1500*, (Leuven 2011) 19–42 and in the same volume, T. Kolbaba, ‘Repercussions of the second Council of Lyon (1274): theological polemic and the boundaries of Orthodoxy’, 43–68.

judges and teachers of Islamic wisdom hung upon his words. He was called *mouteritzes* (μουτερίτζης), which Manuel explains, was an epithet of precedence and honour. It thus can be concluded that the emperor's collocutor was an Islamic theologian of high standing. Throughout the dialogues, there are hints that he has command of both Persian and Arabic. Moreover the *müderriş* is sometimes summoned by the dignitaries of Ankara, suggesting that he was held in great esteem. Finally, Manuel points out that he had two sons who were old and knowledgeable enough to aid their father in the debates.³⁰

Based upon the above-mentioned information, Balivet has attempted to identify the Islamic scholar in question, suggesting Hacı Bayram Veli and Şemsettin Fenari as the two most likely candidates.³¹ Plausible and convincing as these hypotheses are, unfortunately as yet, it is not possible to reach a definitive conclusion. However, there is also no valid reason for being sceptical about whether this *müderriş* actually existed and whether these conversations really took place. Although the emperor clearly expanded upon and modified the actual debates, the liveliness of the character portrayal and the existence of several discussions that are not attested in any other Byzantine or Latin source, such as the tale of Enoch and Elias, Mohammed as the Paraklete, the corruptible nature of the angels, the story of Ashoka and the column, make it likely that the conversations had indeed taken place.³² Finally, the increasing contacts between the Byzantines and the Ottomans prepared the ground for such exchanges, the most prominent example being that of the aforementioned Gregory Palamas in the 1340s, who had held debates about Islam and Christianity with an enthusiastic Ottoman audience.³³

The *Dialogue with a Persian* is clearly modelled as a Platonic dialogue. Dialogue was a widespread and popular literary form in Byzantium throughout the centuries.³⁴ Several prominent examples in this vast corpus are the works of John Damascus (8th c.), Soterichos Panteugenos, Eustratios of Nicaea, Theodore Prodromos (all 12th c.), George Scholarios (15th c.) and the two well-known satires, the *Timarion* (12th c.) the *Journey of Mazaris to Hades* (15th c.).³⁵ Byzantine dialogues built on the heritage of Ancient

30 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 5 and 8.

31 M. Balivet, 'Le soufi et le basileus: Hacı Bayram Veli et Manuel II Paléologue', *Medievo-Graeco* 4 (2004) 19–31.

32 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 86.

33 See A. Philippides-Braat, 'La captivité de Palamas chez les Turcs, dossier et commentaire', *Travaux et Mémoires* 7 (1979) 109–22. Henceforth, Philippides-Braat, 'La captivité de Palamas'.

34 A recent volume, A. Cameron and N. Gaul (eds), *Dialogues and Debates from Late Antiquity to Late Byzantium* (London and New York 2017), deals extensively with various types of dialogue in Byzantium and offers case studies of many prominent dialogues. Henceforth, *Dialogues and Debates*. For dialogue' especially in the twelfth century, see Cameron, *Arguing it Out*, 10–52.

35 Many of these works have been studied in *Dialogues and Debates*, see note 34 above. On the *Timarion* and *Mazaris*, see also D. Krallis, 'Harmless satire, stinging critique: notes and suggestions for reading the *Timarion*', in D. Angelov and M. Saxby (eds), *Power and Subversion in Byzantium, Papers from the 43rd Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, March 2010*, (Farnham 2013) 221–45 and L. Garland, 'Mazaris' journey to Hades: further reflections and reappraisal', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 61 (2007) 183–214.

Greek and Hellenistic dialogues, the two most prominent models being Lucian and Plato. Furthermore, dialogue was frequently employed by Byzantine authors while composing works on complex philosophical and theological issues. Similarly, dialogue was a very popular stylistic choice in polemical texts composed against Jews, Latins, Armenians and Muslims. As such, the times in which philosophical and theological debates were most in evidence also witnessed an upsurge in the production of dialogues. Such an increase can be observed in the twelfth and fourteenth- fifteenth centuries when theological debates were intensified both with the Latins and the Muslims.³⁶ Thus, Manuel's decision to compose an anti-Islamic treatise in the form of a dialogue was influenced by a well-established Byzantine dialogical tradition. Furthermore, as a literary form, dialogue was flexible; it allowed authors to accommodate various discussions, interactions between the collocutors and sometimes even humour. In the *Dialogue with a Persian*, Manuel, too, relies on the dialogue form to blend theological discussions, amusing everyday life scenes and jokes between the discussants.

While Byzantine authors imitated the Lucianic dialogue for satirical works, Plato would be the preferred model for theological and philosophical discussions, as is the case of Manuel's *Dialogue with a Persian*. While composing dialogues modelled on the Platonic tradition, Byzantine authors could adopt Plato's methods of philosophical inquiry and employ the Platonic dialogue model as a literary ploy, as well as combining both these aspects. In the *Dialogue with the Persian*, Manuel, too, employs the Socratic *elenctic* method, that is, to guide and to refute the arguments of the opponent through questions.³⁷ However, although the emperor's style of philosophical discussion resembles that of the Platonic dialogues, ultimately he chiefly employs the Platonic model as a literary ploy.³⁸ The opening of the *Dialogue with a Persian* is not *ex abrupto*, but highly resembles the introductory scenes of the Platonic dialogues. Several Platonic dialogues start with a collocutor asking Socrates' opinion on a philosophical question, usually while they are sitting among a group of friends, be it in a symposium or near a fresh spring. Manuel's *Dialogue*, too, starts as the two collocutors and several other people are sitting by a fireplace after dinner, when the *müderri*s asks the emperor to satisfy his curiosity about Christianity. Furthermore, Platonic modes of address such as 'ὦ βέλτιστε' or 'ὦ ἀγαθέ' are sprinkled throughout the entire work. Although at times the discussions become long monologues on the part of Manuel, many quick 'question and answer' sections found in the text closely resemble the style of Plato. Finally, as in the case of many Platonic dialogues, the *Dialogue with a Persian* is in reported speech, making Manuel both a speaker and the narrator. The emperor, who seems to have truly appreciated Plato as an author, also wrote two other dialogues based on the Platonic

36 Cameron, *Arguing it Out*, 64 and 132–33.

37 For the depiction of Socrates in Platonic dialogues, see R. Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge 2002) 42–3, 185 and C. T. Brickhouse and N. D. Smith, *Plato's Socrates* (New York 1994) 3–16.

38 For the uses of the Platonic dialogue by Byzantine authors as a literary ploy, E. Kechagia-Ovseiko, 'Plutarch's dialogues: beyond the Platonic example', in *Dialogue and Debates*, 8–19, especially 8–10.

model, the *Discourse to Kabasilas* (1387) and the *Dialogue on Marriage with the Empress Mother* (c. 1396).³⁹ However, the vividness, the flow and the lively character portrayal of the *Dialogue with a Persian* surpasses these two shorter works by far.

The lively conversational style, the witty literary allusions and the representation of the characters in the dialogue arguably make the *Dialogue with a Persian* the most remarkable of Manuel's works. While analysing the work one has to bear in mind that the emperor did not write it as a transcription of the conversations or as documentary evidence of his sojourn in Ankara. Therefore, one should not expect to find a depiction of 'reality' or an extremely faithful report of the debates that took place. First of all, this blurred line between 'reality' and fiction is prevalent in most of the other Platonic dialogues in Byzantium; we cannot use these texts to reconstruct real life dialogues.⁴⁰ Furthermore, while parts of these discussions in the *Dialogue with a Persian* may have indeed taken place, and some of the everyday life scenes Manuel scattered across the work probably did indeed stem from his actual experiences, the *Dialogue with a Persian* is mostly fiction; a fictionalized, modified and embellished version of the actual conversations. This is also plainly evident from Manuel's representation of himself and Christianity as the utterly prevailing side; the *müderris* never makes a sound argument, quotes the Quran or another Islamic theology text. The painstaking and lengthy argumentations on Manuel's part also indicate that the emperor expanded upon and modified whatever actual discussions might have taken place.

Its 'fictional' qualities should not detract from the value of the work but rather enhance it as a complex, multilayered literary work. First of all, producing a faithful, minutely accurate narration of the actual debates was not the purpose of the work; this was not Manuel's intention. Instead, the emperor penned the *Dialogue* to produce a defence of his Christian faith vis-à-vis Islam, adding to the line of polemical treatises that were highly 'fashionable' among the literati of the period. There is nothing surprising in the fact that Manuel, himself very much interested in theology, chose to join this intellectual trend; neither is it strange that he represented himself and Christianity as the winning side. What is remarkable is the style of the work as a lively Platonic dialogue, adorned with amusing anecdotes about the relationship between the emperor and the *müderris*.

All these features of the *Dialogue* are a stark contrast to the styles of other such contemporary theological treatises, even if they were also written in the form of a dialogue. For instance, there is no attempt at characterization in the anti-Islamic dialogue of Manuel's contemporary Joseph Bryennios, while the latter's other dialogue with a Latin only

39 The *Discourse to Kabasilas* is edited as Letter 67 in Manuel's letter collection. On the dialogic aspects of the *Dialogue on Marriage*, see F. Leonte, 'Dramatisation and narrative in late Byzantine dialogues: Manuel II Palaiologos on Marriage and Mazaris' Journey to Hades', in *Dialogues and Debates*, 220–36.

40 See P. Andrist, 'Literary distance and complexity in Late Antique and early Byzantine Greek dialogues Adversus Iudaeos', in *Dialogues and Debates*, 43–64, for this observation. For fiction in Byzantium, especially in hagiography, see Ch. Messis, 'Fiction and/or novelisation in Byzantine hagiography', in S. Efthymiadis (ed), *The Ashgate Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, vol. 2 (Farnham 2014) 313–42.

has a brief exchange of greetings in the beginning, but still, has no real character portrayal. Similarly, another member of Manuel's literary circle, Demetrios Chrysoloras, authored a theological dialogue between the then deceased Demetrios Kydones, Neilos Kabasilas and himself. This work does have some attempt at characterization in the case of Kydones. In one instance, he is represented as lamenting his unpopularity and getting angry when refuted. However, apart from this brief instance, there is really no characterization of the collocutors; although the names of the speakers are indicated, their voices cannot be distinguished from each other.⁴¹ The dialogue of Gregory Palamas, also based on real experiences and actual debates like that of Manuel, also has no attempt at character portrayal.⁴² However, in his own work, Manuel seems to have attempted to enhance the literariness of his dialogue, engaging his audience by delighting them with his character portrayals and the witty anecdotes he scattered across the work.⁴³ On the basis of its vivid character portrayal and other literary features, it can be argued that the *Dialogue with a Persian* is a notable and distinct work in Late Byzantine literature.

The two chief collocutors in the work are Manuel and the *müderris*, with occasional remarks from the audience. Unsurprisingly, it is Manuel who emerges as the undisputed winner of each debate; Christianity is continuously vindicated against Islam. Moreover, while Christianity is expanded upon, Islamic theology is not really discussed in detail; the *müderris* does not even once quote the Quran or refer to the opinions of Islamic scholars. Thus, the emperor very openly represents himself as the intellectually superior party. Moreover, the *müderris* and the Ottoman audience are represented as acknowledging Manuel's intellectual superiority. It is the *müderris* who first approaches the emperor to converse, claiming that he had never met with a Christian who could completely satisfy his curiosity. This serves as a hidden eulogy for Manuel, who albeit graciously tried to decline the offer, will shortly do what all the others failed to do, to

41 For the edition of the dialogue of Joseph Bryennios, see note 19 above. The dialogue with a Latin is found in *Ἰωσήφ Μοναχοῦ τοῦ Βρυεννίου*, ed. E. Voulgares, 2 vols, (Leipzig 1768, Thessalonike 1991). See V. Pasiourides. *An Annotated Critical Edition of Demetrios Chrysoloras' Dialogue on Demetrios Kydones' Antirrhetic Against Neilos Kabasilas* (PhD dissertation, University of London, Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, 2013), especially 28 for the editor's comments.

42 Palamas' dialogue is edited in Philippides-Braat, 'La captivité de Palamas'.

43 Many of Manuel's works were performed in a *theatron*, which can be traced through both internal and external evidence. Trapp raises the question whether the *Dialogue with a Persian* was performed or not, *Dialogue with a Persian*, *54–5. I believe that Manuel must have intended it for wider circulation since this was his aim in his other works. Moreover, the prose rhythm of the *Dialogue* also suggests to me, that Manuel intended it to be performed in a *theatron*, as in the case of many of his other writings. Finally, there are frequent summaries and reminders of previous debates in the work, which again seem to be indicative of an oral performance, which would perhaps take place in several consecutive gatherings. For *theatron* in Late Byzantium see, I. Toth, 'Rhetorical theatron in late Byzantium: the example of Palaiologan imperial orations', in *Theatron, Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalters*, ed. M. Grünbart (Berlin and New York 2007) 429–48. For a discussion of the performance of dialogues, see N. Gaul, 'Embedded dialogues and dialogical voices in Palaiologan prose and verse', in *Dialogues and Debates*, 184–202.

convince the *müderris* of the worth of Christianity.⁴⁴ Throughout the dialogue, the *müderris* is represented as being the one who is excited and overjoyed by the debates, coming very early each morning to Manuel's chambers. He is moreover unable to sleep at night since he ponders the arguments with such intensity. He is depicted as being so enthusiastic about the emperor's conversation that he threatens to kill the roosters since they announce the arrival of morning, hence the end of the debate.⁴⁵ The audience is also depicted as showering praise on the emperor; at one point some audience members even cling, albeit kindly, to Manuel's cloak to prevent him from leaving.⁴⁶

In contrast, Manuel is full of self-control concerning the debates, as graciously accepting to converse only in order to please and enlighten his host. While Palamas and Kantakouzenos also claim that they were approached by the Muslims and agreed to 'enlighten' them, Manuel's self-representation as a sought-after teacher of Christianity goes beyond these examples.⁴⁷ The emperor neither shows any sign of excitement or passion concerning the debate, nor any curiosity about Islam. This great contrast between Manuel and the *müderris* serves to highlight the intellectual superiority of the emperor, as well as his 'cultural' superiority as a calm, restrained Christian freed from the almost childish excitement and curiosity of his Ottoman opponent. In the dialogue, Manuel adopts the role of Socrates.⁴⁸ He is the one who is approached to enlighten the collocutors and is clearly in control of the discussions. Like Socrates, all participants look up to him; employing sometimes the *elenctic* method, he undoes all counter arguments. Finally, significantly, Manuel represents himself as operating alone and unaided in the debates, while the *müderris* gets help from his two sons and the audience, even gathering in private to prepare in advance and switching to Arabic or Persian when they wish to discuss amongst themselves, so as to avoid being recorded by the translators.⁴⁹

While Manuel depicts the *müderris* as a learned and amiable man, nevertheless the latter never succeeds in undermining the arguments of the emperor. His part of the dialogue is also far shorter than that of Manuel. Indeed, in the preface, the emperor significantly refers to him as being 'a lover of listening' (φιλήκοος), thus assigning the *müderris* a passive role even from the very beginning.⁵⁰ When compared to the figure of Manuel, he comes across almost as a young student despite his white beard. In contrast to the cool demeanour of Manuel, the *müderris* continuously blushes, is saddened by his

44 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 8. 'Καὶ Χριστιανῶν μὲν οὐδέσιν οὐδεπώποτ' ἐνέτυχον, οἱ λόγου τε μετεῖχον καὶ πείραν ταύτης τοσαύτην εἶχον, ὥστε μοί τι σαφές, καὶ οἶον ἂν βουλοίμην, δύνασθαι φράζειν.'

45 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 250.

46 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 119.

47 See Philippides-Braat, 'La captivité de Palamas', 142–145. In his apology against Islam, Kantakouzenos also claims that he wrote his work upon the request of Meletios, a monk who had converted to Christianity from Islam and had sent him a letter.

48 I believe that Manuel also represents himself as Socrates in the *Discourse to Kabasilas*. But it is the Empress Mother Helena who is given the role of Socrates in the *Dialogue on Marriage*.

49 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 94, 190 and 212.

50 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 4.

defeats and on one occasion, almost becomes tearful.⁵¹ Manuel also frequently accuses his opponent of ‘fleeing’ (φυγεῖν) when the latter tries to avoid answering the questions, sometimes openly declaring that it was not easy to defend himself against the emperor.⁵² Finally, at the very end of the work, the *müderri*s professes a wish to visit Constantinople to get better acquainted with Christianity, which serves to highlight the triumph of the emperor over his opponent and of Christianity over Islam.⁵³

Manuel’s representation of the Ottomans in the work is nuanced. He does not depict the audience as stereotypical barbarians; he furthermore provides various hints about their daily life. Although he is depicted as being intellectually inferior to the Byzantine emperor, the portrayal of the *müderri*s does not correspond to the uncivilized barbarian portrait that one would expect to find in such a work. Instead, Manuel portrays him as a learned, witty and amiable person. It is indeed possible to sense throughout the dialogue that, despite their religious differences, the emperor had enjoyed the company of his anonymous host. When the *müderri*s makes witty jokes, Manuel admits to being taken by these pleasantries and even endows his interlocutor with the quality of urbanity (ἀστειότης), often ascribed to Byzantine literati.⁵⁴

Significantly, when telling his brother Theodore, to whom the work was dedicated, that the *müderri*s did not change his faith, Manuel admits that that was to be expected since he was so old and Islam was, after all, the faith of his forefathers.⁵⁵ As such, the emperor displays a sensitive approach in the matter of faith and customs. Similarly, the Ottoman audience is depicted as being exceptionally tolerant during the religious debates, more so than Manuel himself, who at one point insults the Prophet Mohammed. It is only then that the *müderri*s becomes angry and asks Manuel to use more considerate words. Notably, this is the only time the verb ὀργίζεσθαι is used in the entire work. Immediately after, in an intimate gesture, the *müderri*s touches Manuel’s knee and consoles him by saying that friends have great licence of speech.⁵⁶ He himself is represented as being very respectful of Christianity, even claiming that Christ was his rather than the emperor’s since the latter believed Christ was crucified, while Islam argued that he directly ascended to heaven. While Manuel uses this exchange to emphasize the *müderri*s’ high regard for Christianity, it should not be considered as a purely

51 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 25, 35 and 106.

52 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 65–6, 92, 198 for a few examples.

53 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 299. Reinert takes this wish as almost a conversion to Christianity, Reinert, ‘Müderri’, 45–8. Yet, this should not be interpreted as leading to a conversion to Christianity since in his preface, Manuel explains to his brother Theodore that on account of his old age, his opponent clung to his faith like an octopus would cling to a rock, and would not relent. *Dialogue with a Persian*, 5.

54 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 50, 190.

55 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 5. ‘Τῶν ἀτοπωτάτων γάρ, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἐνόμιζεν εἶναι, εἰ ἐν οὕτω βαθυτάτῳ τῷ γήρῳ καὶ τῇ τῆς φύσεως παρακμῇ τῆς πατρῴας ἀθείας ἐκσταίη.’

56 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 71. ‘Τούτων ἀκούσας ὁ γέρον ἤπτετο μου τῶν γονάτων καὶ προσήκειν ἔρασκε τοὺς ἐκ φιλίας προθυμουμενούς περὶ τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι καὶ παρρησίᾳ χρῆσθαι πολλῇ καί, οἷς ἂν γνοίεν, συνοίσουσι. Πλὴν ὡς οἶόν τε, σοῦ δεήσομαι τῶν δακνόντων ὀνομάτων φεῖδεσθαι.’

literary portrayal since the direct ascension of Christ to heaven was indeed referred to in the Quran.⁵⁷

From time to time, Manuel still highlights the ‘otherness’ of the Ottoman collocutors. This can be observed in the few instances where a member of the audience disagrees with Manuel. Notably, Manuel refers to the audience as *theatron*, contextualizing the debates in a Byzantine framework.⁵⁸ Upon disagreement with the audience, the emperor characterizes the latter’s speech as ‘barbaric’.⁵⁹ Even in the preface, after praising the character and the learning of the *müderris*, Manuel points out that both in character and in speech, he was nevertheless a barbarian.⁶⁰ He often accuses the *müderris* of subverting the *taxis* during the course of debates, highlighting that the Ottoman scholar could not really grasp this significant Byzantine concept.⁶¹ Similarly, in an amusing passage in the *Dialogue*, while Manuel tries to demonstrate the implausibility of Mohammed being the only one to announce his own coming as a prophet, without any hints from the Old and the New Testament or the former prophets, the following exchange takes place:

‘(Manuel) Was he the only one to do so, or do any of the prophets of old agree with him?’

And he (the *müderris*) replied: ‘It was he (αὐτός) who said so.’

I said: ‘You could say he himself (αὐτότατος), if you wish to allude to the Comedian.’

‘We’, he replied, ‘do not know the Comedian...’⁶²

In Aristophanes’ *Wealth*, the deity Wealth, who has come down to earth, uses the word αὐτότατος in an amusing scene where he desperately tries to convince the others of his identity.⁶³ By alluding to Aristophanes and within the context of the Prophet’s self-acclamation, Manuel not only undermines but also ridicules the argument of his opponent; a display of wit and urbanity that would be much appreciated by his Byzantine audience but significantly is lost on his Ottoman collocutor. The emperor seems to have used this particular exchange to highlight their ‘cultural’ difference, pointing out the

57 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 146. Islam did indeed recognize Christianity and considered Christ to be a major prophet, while a *sura* of the Quran is specifically devoted to the Virgin Mary.

58 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 154–5, 188–9 and 241 for some examples of Manuel referring to the audience as the *theatron*.

59 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 22 and 290 for two such instances.

60 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 7. ‘... βάρβαρος ὅμως ἦν...’

61 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 76, 89.

62 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 54. ‘Καὶ τίς τῶν προφητῶν ταῦτα λέγει; Μωάμεθ ὁ ἡμέτερος. Μόνος ἢ καὶ τινὰς ἔχων τῶν πάλαι συμπεθεγγόμενος; Καὶ ὅς, “αὐτός” ἀπεκρίνατο. Πρόσθεθ δὴ καὶ τὸ “αὐτότατος” ἔφην, εἰ σοὶ δοκεῖ τῷ Κωμικῷ χαριζόμενος. Οὐκ ἴσμεν, ἔφην, τὸν Κωμικόν. ὄντι δὲ τηλικούτῳ προφήτῃ δεήσει γε μαρτύρων καὶ συνηγόνων;’

63 Aristophanes, *Wealth*, 83.

müderri's lack of knowledge of Greek literature. For all his good qualities, this lack sets the *müderri* apart from Byzantine literati and shows his level of erudition to be lower.

In addition to these depictions, Manuel allows glimpses into his life among the Ottomans, highlighting the hospitality of the *müderri*. In one particular instance, the emperor narrates how he had breakfast with the *müderri* on a cold and stormy winter morning:

...Someone from among his people came in carrying wood to light a great fire. He also brought a considerable amount of nuts and honey to us – such was the hospitality of the Persians. The old man, who pointed at these with his finger, started joking as on previous occasions: 'I have come to you bringing arms, with which we shall scare away the present storm.' And since I was pleased with those words, I said: 'This is well thought of, we shall not be bothered by the snow while having breakfast.' I sat down and partook in the offering, so that I did not dishonour the hosts and distributed all remainders to those standing nearby...⁶⁴

The offering of nuts and sweets that the emperor describes was indeed a mark of hospitality; for instance, Ibn Battuta was also served nuts and sweetmeats by almost all his hosts in Turkish Anatolia.⁶⁵ Manuel seems to have been intrigued by the Ottomans' breakfast habits, which he takes care to distinguish from other meals by especially referring to it as *ἄριστον*.⁶⁶ Throughout the work, Manuel often refers to the Ottomans visiting him after having had breakfast. In one case, he conveys their eagerness by remarking that they had come even before the sun's rays and even before having eaten anything, despite their custom of having breakfast before settling down to their tasks.⁶⁷ While such references serve to enrich the setting of the work, Manuel seems to have taken particular notice of the breakfast customs.

Yet another such episode is the return of Manuel and his party from the hunt with their spoils, including some wild boars. When the *müderri* jokingly asks whether they could also feast on the game meat, Manuel replies similarly:

64 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 50. 'Ταῦτα τούτου μεθ' ἡδονῆς εἰρηκότος εἰσῆει τις τῶν αὐτοῦ ξύλα τε μεγίστην ἀνάψαι πυρὰν ἰκανὰ καὶ κάρνα καὶ μέλι κομίζων ἡμῖν (τοιαῦτα γὰρ τὰ ξένια τῶν Περσῶν). Ταῦτα τοίνυν τῷ δακτύλῳ μοι δείξας ἔφη πάλιν ὁ γέρον τῶν προτέροις παραπλήσια παίζων. Ἦκω σοι κομίζων ὄπλα, οἷς τὸν ἐπιόντα χειμῶνα ἀποσοβήσομεν. Καὶ ἡσθεὶς τῷ τῶν ῥημάτων ἀστείῳ, τοιγαροῦν καταφρακτέον ἔφη, καλῶς, ὅπως ἐν τῷ ἄριστῶν μὴ ταῖς νιφάσι διανοχλώμεθα. Καθίσας δὲ καὶ τῶν ξενίων ἀψάμενος, ὅσον ἐκείνους μὴ ἀτιμάσαι, ἔπειτα τοῖς περιστηκόσι πάντα διένειμα.'

65 Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta: A.D. 1325–1354*, eds. C. Defremery and B. R. Sanguinetti, 2 vols. (Cambridge 1962) 411, 428 and 432.

66 See *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. A. P. Kazhdan, 3 vols. (Oxford 1991) 1, 170 for *ariston* in Byzantium, which is usually referred to as a morning meal as opposed to later meals. However, some authors used it in the sense of a generic meal. Here, the text makes it clear that Manuel refers to breakfast.

67 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 120 and 231, for instance,

‘Of course’, I replied to him, ‘it is possible, if they wish to taste from all, since we cannot divide the game; this is not the custom for hunters.’ I said this in jest, and I will now explain the joke. Someone from our party had hunted a big and fat wild pig with his spear and unknown to anyone had concealed it in grass, while bringing it on horseback, so that he would not be subjected to many curses and abuses, and perhaps also blows, of those who could not bear even to see pigs...⁶⁸

Manuel here is referring to Islamic dietary regulations that forbid the consumption of pork. This amusing exchange highlights the dietary and religious differences between the Byzantine party and their Ottoman hosts. Manuel also describes their Ottoman dinner in detail:

I got down from my horse and taking me by hand, the old man led me to the house, being hospitable in accordance with his customs. Torches had been lit, as well as a fire sufficient to combat the severity of winter. Near the fire, was a sizable bronze platter, full of winter fruits, adorned with bread loaves, which you recognize, those ones which are of a paper-like appearance (χαρτοειδεις) and are badly baked...⁶⁹

Manuel here is describing the custom of eating around a round bronze platter called *sini*, which functioned as a dining table.⁷⁰ The bread loaves that the emperor described seem to be the Turkish flatbread, with which both he and his brother Theodore were already familiar, thanks to their participation in Ottoman campaigns.⁷¹ In order to describe this bread, the emperor seems to have coined a new word, χαρτοειδες. Significantly, Manuel strongly hints that he did not like this bread; it was badly baked. While it is possible that Manuel did indeed dislike the flatbread, his negative

68 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 190. ‘Κάγω ταυτὸν ἐκείνῳ ποιῶν καί, μάλ’ ἔξεστιν, εἶπον, εἰ πάντων ἐθελήσαιεν ἀπογεύσασθαι, οὐδὲ γὰρ τὰ μὲν μερίζειν, τὰ δὲ μὴ θεμιτὸν θηραταῖς. Τοῦτο δὲ εἶπον παίζων, τὴν δὲ παιδιὰν ἤδη λέξω. Κάπρον τις τῶν ἡμετέρων μέγαν τε καὶ πίνονα σφόδρα δόρατι που κατενεγκὼν μηδενὸς τινος συνειδότος συρφετώδει χόρτῳ ἐλίξας, ὡς ἂν μὴ ὑπὸ τῶν μηδὲ βλέπειν χοίρους ἀνεχομένων συχνὰς ἀρὰς καὶ προπηλακισμοὺς, τυχὸν δὲ καὶ πληγὰς δέξαιτο, ἐκόμιζεν ἐφ’ ἵππου.’

69 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 190. ‘Ἡδομένων οὖν πάντων τῷ τοῦ γέροντος λόγῳ (ἀστείος γὰρ τις ἔδοξεν εἶναι) κατέβην εὐθὺς τοῦ ἵππου καὶ τῆς χειρὸς με λαβόμενος ὁ πρεσβύτης ἤγεν ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον ἐπιχωρίως ξενίσων. Δᾶδες οὖν ἦσαν ἡμέμεναι καὶ πῦρ ἰκανὸν χειμῶνος ἐλέγχειν δριμύτητα καὶ πρὸς αὐτῷ τι σκευὸς χαλκοῦν οὐ μικρόν, γέμον μὲν ὀπωρῶν τούτων δὴ τῶν χειμερίων, ἔχον δὲ καὶ ἄρτους, οὓς οἴσθα, τοὺς χαρτοειδεῖς ἐκείνους καὶ κακῶς ὠπτημένους...’

70 Bertrand de la Brocquière also describes a *sini*, calling it ‘un pié de rondeur’, while describing his own meal among the Ottomans, which consisted of bread, cheese and fruit, Bertrand de la Brocquière. *Le voyage d’outremer de Bertrand de la Brocquière*. ed. Ch. Schafel (Paris 1892) 89.

71 When Manuel says ‘the bread loaves, which you recognize’, he is directly addressing Theodore, to whom the work was dedicated.

description of it could also serve to debase Ottoman baking, thus implying a culinary and hence ‘cultural’ inferiority on the part of the Ottomans.⁷²

Another important Ottoman figure in the *Dialogue with a Persian* is sultan Bayezid, against whom Manuel seems to have had a personal hatred on account of his character. Bayezid, who became the Ottoman sultan in 1389, had many face-to-face contacts with Manuel. The Byzantine emperor had accompanied him on a campaign previously in 1390, but no details of Manuel’s experiences of this earlier encounter are known.⁷³ However, during this campaign of 1391–1392, Bayezid figures prominently in Manuel’s letters, where he is depicted quite negatively. The emperor complains how he and the other Christian lords were forced to attend drinking parties in Bayezid’s tent, lamenting that the cups of wine only filled him with more sorrow.⁷⁴ After the campaign, in 1394, the two rulers would meet in Serres. Manuel would later claim in the *Funeral Oration* that in Serres, Bayezid had intended to murder him. In 1394, right after the Serres meeting, Manuel would not obey Bayezid’s summons, thus triggering the blockade of Constantinople by the Ottomans (1394–1402).⁷⁵ Upon Bayezid’s defeat by Tamerlane in 1402, and his subsequent death, Manuel would compose a psalm and *ethopoiia*, literally celebrating his death.⁷⁶ As such, it can be said that Manuel and Bayezid had a deeper, more personal relationship of hate that transcended one that could be expected to exist between a Byzantine emperor and an Ottoman sultan.

In Manuel’s works, Bayezid makes appearances as a rash, irrational and volatile man. While these portrayals conform to the *topoi* about the Ottomans, Manuel’s detailed and extremely hostile depictions of Bayezid stand out from those of other sultans, such as Murad I and Mehmed I, with whom Manuel also had prolonged personal

72 It has been noted by several scholars that a negative description of foreign food could serve to emphasize the cultural inferiority of the consumers vis-à-vis the Byzantines. See P. Tuffin and M. Mc Evoy, ‘Steak à la Hun: food, drink and dietary habits in Ammianus Marcellinus’, in W. Mayer and S. Trziconka (eds), *Feast, Fast or Famine: Food and Drink in Byzantium* (Brisbane 2005) 69–84; C. Galatariotou, ‘Travel and perception in Byzantium’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47 (1993) 221–41 and T. Kolbaba, *The Byzantine Lists: Errors of the Latins* (Urbana 2000) especially 150.

73 See Barker, *Manuel II*, 81–2, and S. Reinert, ‘The Palaiologoi, Yildirim Bayezid and Constantinople: June 1389–March 1391’, in J. S. Langdon et al., (eds), *To Hellenikon: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis Jr.*, 2 vols (New Rochelle, NY 1993) I, 289–365, repr. in Reinert, *Studies on Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman History* (Farnham 2014) study IV, 331–32.

74 Letter 16, lines 98–104. ἴσως γὰρ φιλοτησίαν προπιεῖν πάλιν ἐθέλει καὶ βιάσασθαι πολλοῦ τοῦ οἴνου ἐμφορηθῆναι διὰ κρατήρων τε καὶ ἐκπωμάτων χρυσῶν παντοδαπῶν, τούτοις κατακοιμίζειν οἰόμενος τὴν ἐξ ὧν εἰρήκαμεν ἀθυμίαν, δι’ ὧν, ἂν εἰ καὶ εὐθύμουν, ἀνίας ἂν ἐπληρούμην.’

75 Doukas, *Historia Byzantina*, ed. V. Grecu (Bucharest 1958) 76–7 and Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *The Histories*, ed. and trans. A. Kaldellis (Cambridge MA and London 2014) 132–33. See also N. Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Latins and the Ottomans: Politics and the Society in Late Empire* (Cambridge 2009) 31.

76 These two works are found in E. Legrand, *Lettres de l’empereur Manuel Paléologue* (Amsterdam 1962) 103–104. Barker, *Manuel II*, 513–5, for English translation.

contact.⁷⁷ Furthermore, Bayezid's portrait as a volatile and aggressive person is also partially confirmed by the Ottoman chroniclers, such as Aşıkpaşazade and Neşri. While these chronicles were written much later than Bayezid's reign, and tended to criticize the sultan on account of his defeat at the Battle of Ankara and his deviation from the *gazi* norms, it is still significant that they exhibit parallels with Manuel's portrayals.⁷⁸ In the *Dialogue*, Manuel refers to Bayezid's nickname Yıldırım, meaning thunderbolt, as κερ-αυνός. He claims that the sultan received this epithet because of the swiftness of his evil actions.⁷⁹ As a criticism, Manuel constantly refers to the immoderate love of hunting of the sultan. The only full description of Bayezid in the *Dialogue* is an extremely black, almost demonic, portrait:

As an extraordinary snow fell and it was very cold, the satrap was confined at home. Being bereft of his customary hunt because of the severity of the storm, he was greatly vexed and resembled a madman. Since he could not comfort his soul which thirsted for murdering people, with animal blood, he thence drank at home, lashing out his anger on those who had by ill-fortune, offended him ever so slightly (perhaps not so slightly), sometimes insulting them and uttering blasphemies, sometimes using his sword. It seemed that, he was not able not to say or not to do something evil.⁸⁰

This description of Bayezid stands in stark contrast to the portrayal of the *müderri*, especially since the scene that immediately follows the sultan's depiction is that of the *müderri* bringing in breakfast to Manuel amidst a flurry of witty jokes. Moreover, Manuel's host expresses his delight in the fact that the storm had prevented the emperor from accompanying the sultan to the hunt; he can have Manuel to himself.⁸¹ Throughout the *Dialogue*, the *müderri* and the audience are represented as siding with Manuel against their own sultan, openly declaring their displeasure when the former is summoned to the hunt, as well as criticizing the immoderation of Bayezid. On one occasion,

77 For several such instances see, *Funeral Oration*, 132–40, *Dialogue on Marriage*, 98–101 and Letters 14 and 16.

78 Aşıkpaşazade. *Âşıkpaşazâde Tarihi (1285–1502)*, ed. N. Öztürk (Istanbul 2013) 95, and Neşri. *Kitâb-ı Cibân-nümâ*, eds. F. R. Unat and M. A. Köymen, 2 vols. (Ankara 1949–1957) 333. Henceforth, Aşıkpaşazade and Neşri. For the fifteenth-century biases of the chroniclers, see C. Kafadar. *Between Two Worlds* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1995) 60–90, and H. Lowry. *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (New York 2003) 24–8.

79 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 17, '...τὸν νῦν Χριστιανοῖς ἐπικεῖμενον ἔφουσε τὸν κεραυνὸν καλούμενον ἐκ τῆς ἰόξυττος τῶν κακῶν.' For Bayezid see, H. İnalcık, 'Bayezid I', in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, eds. H.A.R. Gibb, J. H. Kramer, E. Levi-Provencal and J. Schacht, vol. 1 (Leiden, 1986) 1117–1119.

80 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 50. 'Νιφετοῦ δὲ ἐξαισίου γεγονότος καὶ ψύχους ὅτι πλείστου εἴρκτο τε ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ ὁ σατράπης καὶ τῆς εἰωθίας ἐπὶ τὰ θηρία ἐξόδου στερόμενος τῆ τοῦ χειμῶνος δρμύτητι σφόδρα τε ἐδυσφόρει καὶ μαινομένῳ ἔωκει, καὶ ἐπεὶ μὴ αἵμασι θηρίων παρεμυθεῖτο τὴν ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους αὐτοῦ φονῶσαν ψυχὴν, ἐκένου δῆπου τὸν θυμὸν οἴκοι πίνων ἐπὶ τοὺς οὐκ ἀγαθῆ τι νύχτη σμικρὸν τι προσκεκροκότας αὐτῷ (ἴσως δὲ οὐδὲ σμικρὸν) πῆ μὲν ὡς μάλισθ' ὑβρίζων καὶ βλασφημῶν, πῆ δὲ σιδηρῷ διεργαζόμενος (οὐδὲ γάρ, ὡς ἔοικεν, οἷος τ' ἦν μὴ οὐχὶ κακῶς ἢ λέγειν ἢ ποιεῖν).'

81 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 121.

the *müderri*s even encourages Manuel to find an excuse not to go, effectively suggesting disobedience to his own ruler. While these protests of the Ottomans emphasize their high regard for Manuel's company, the Ottoman audience is significantly nevertheless represented as disapproving of their sultan.⁸²

In another such instance in the *Dialogue*, the emperor strongly contrasts the *müderri*s and his circle with the pleasure-loving court of the sultan:

... the daily hunt, the enjoyment of the dinner which follows the hunt, the crowd of mimes, choirs of flute players and singers, an entire nation of dancers, the sound of cymbals, the roaring laughter accompanying this *immoderation* (τὸ ἄκρατον)... All these are sufficient to fill the soul with foolishness...

I do not see you (the *müderri*s) having breakfast or dinner with those who are considered to be the happy (τοὺς εὐδαίμονας) people amongst you. Those people sleep, then eat once more as if in a vicious circle, their life is one of laziness and luxury, which is not suitable to men at all...⁸³

Yet at another point, the emperor again refers to the difference in the lifestyles of these two factions, when he remarks that the *müderri*s and his circle are seeking the perfect (εὐτελεῖ) and the simple (ἀπέριττον) life in order to pursue a life of philosophy.⁸⁴ While the representation of these two parties can be seen within the context of a general juxtaposition of a life of philosophy and pleasure, it seems to have been influenced by *Nicomachean Ethics*, a work in which Manuel displayed a life-long interest. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* was a popular work among the Byzantine literati, widely read and commented upon.⁸⁵ Manuel displays a particularly strong interest in this work as his *Foundations of Imperial Conduct* and *Seven Ethico-Political Orations* are solidly based upon *Nicomachean Ethics*. Moreover, some other works by Manuel, such as the *Discourse to the Thessalonians*, the *Panegyric to John V* and the *Funeral Oration*, also can be interpreted as betraying such an influence.⁸⁶ As such, it can be argued that the *Nicomachean Ethics* had greatly influenced the emperor's literary and philosophical work.

82 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 50, 120, 124–5, 250.

83 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 121. 'Οὐκ οὐδ' ἐκεῖνα παραδραμεῖν δεῖ τὴν μεθ' ἡμέραν θήραν, τὴν περὶ τὰ δεῖπνα μετὰ ταῦτα διάχυσιν μίμων τε ὄχλους καὶ αὐλητῶν συστήματα καὶ χοροὺς ἔδόντων καὶ ἔθνη ὀρχηστῶν καὶ ἡχῶ κυμβάλων καὶ τὸν μετὰ τὸν ἄκρατον προπετὴ γέλωτα, ὧν ὀλίγα ἱκανὰ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀφροσύνης ἐμπλήσειαι.... Οὐδὲ γὰρ ὄρω γε ὑμᾶς ἀρίστῳ μὲν δεῖπνα συνάπτοντας κατὰ γε τοὺς ἐν ὑμῖν εὐδαίμονας εἶναι νομιζόμενους, ταυτὶ δὲ αὐ ὑποῖς κάκεινους πάλιν ἀρίστῳ καθάπερ ἐν κύκλῳ βαδίζοντας, ὡς εἶναι σφίσι τὴν ζωὴν ἐν ἀργίᾳ καὶ χλιδῇ ἀνδράσιν οὐδαμῶς προσηκούσῃ.'

84 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 65.

85 For Aristotelian ethics in Byzantium, see C. Barber and D. Jenkins (eds) *Medieval Greek Commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics* (Leiden 2009), especially L. Benakis, 'Aristotelian ethics in Byzantium', 63-9; K. Oehler, 'Aristotle in Byzantium', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 5.2 (1964) 133-46.

86 In all these works, Manuel relies on ideas and concepts found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, such as the two categories of voluntary and involuntary actions, choice (προαίρεσις), *eudaimonia*, the importance of moderation and the various ways of life. For the impact of the *Nicomachean Ethics* on the *Seven Ethico-Political Orations*, see C. Kakkoura, *An Annotated Critical Edition of Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus' "Seven Ethico-political Orations"* (PhD dissertation, The University of London, Royal Holloway, 2013) 42-3.

Manuel's criticism of the sultan and his court in the *Dialogue with a Persian* is grounded in their immoderation, which is a crucial vice in Aristotelian ethics since Aristotle argues that virtue can be achieved by acting moderately with respect to everything.⁸⁷ In his future ethico-political works, Manuel, too, would put great stress on moderation, especially in reference to *Nicomachean Ethics*. In another instance in the *Dialogue*, an Ottoman in the audience is depicted as criticizing Bayezid for his immoderation in hunting, pointing out that the hunt is good only if practiced moderately.⁸⁸ Moreover, Manuel seems to be using *eudaimonia* here not in the general sense of happiness but as the philosophical concept of true well being, of reaching the highest form of contentment and fulfillment in life.⁸⁹ According to Aristotle, *eudaimonia* would be perceived differently by different individuals, who would then choose to follow different life styles in order to achieve it; again ideas adopted by Manuel in his own works. Two life styles stand out in Aristotle, one being the Life of Pleasure (βίος ἀπολαυστικός) and the other Life of Contemplation (βίος θεωρητικός), respectively the basest and loftiest forms, with the latter leading to true *eudaimonia*.⁹⁰ Here, Manuel's depiction of the Ottoman court, of those who are supposed to be εὐδαίμονας, seems to be corresponding to the Life of Pleasure, while the *müderris* and his circle seem to have been represented as attempting to pursue the Life of Contemplation.⁹¹ Thus, Manuel seems to have relied on an Aristotelian framework while contrasting these two factions, unsurprisingly identifying with the scholars.

The criticism of Bayezid by the *müderris* and his circle serves to further highlight their sympathy for Manuel vis-à-vis the deeply flawed sultan; the emperor is represented as being held in higher esteem by the Ottomans than their own sultan. Yet, while these depictions are literary representations fashioned by the emperor, they should not be dismissed. Although they have a negative bias towards Bayezid, it is still significant that the Ottoman chroniclers also depict him as a pleasure loving man, also adorning their narratives with tales of his volatility. Neşri calls him *tiz-nefes*, volatile, while an anonymous chronicle refers to Bayezid's wrath. In addition, both Neşri and Aşıkpaşazade narrate a curious episode. Becoming angry at the *kadis*, the judges, Bayezid ordered all of them to be burned alive, but then was persuaded otherwise on the grounds that they were scholars.⁹²

87 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, ii and vi.

88 *Dialogue with a Persian*, 94.

89 *Eudaimonia* was a philosophical term signifying a perfect state of well-being attained through virtue and reason. While *eudaimonia* was generally used by historians and the panegyrist to refer to mere 'good fortune'/'prosperity', in his ethico-political works, Manuel discusses *eudaimonia* in reference to Aristotelian Ethics, as a perfect state of well-being through virtue. Thus, for Manuel, *eudaimonia* did not mean mere 'good fortune' or 'happiness'. See also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, vii, 9–16.

90 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, vii, 4–9; I, iv, 5–6; X, vi–vii.

91 See also Manuel's *Address from a Benevolent Ruler to his Subjects*, which has a similar depiction of the *Life of Pleasure*, J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 156, cols 562–564.

92 Neşri, 363. An anonymous chronicle refers to his anger as 'gayet gazaplı idü', ('was very prone to wrath'): *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, ed. F. Giese (Istanbul 1992) 34; Neşri, 336–339; Aşıkpaşazade, 95–96.

Furthermore, in addition to chronicles, a *menakıbnâme*, Ottoman saints' life, points out that the sultan received criticism from religious sheikhs, especially concerning his drinking. According to this text, Hacı Bayram Veli—a possible candidate for the identity of the *müderris*—is reported to have proposed that taverns be built on all the four corners of the Grand Mosque in Bursa in order to encourage the sultan's visit.⁹³ Thus, while Manuel's depiction of Bayezid and the portrayal of the attitude of the Ottoman scholars too stems from his hatred of the sultan, it is also supported by the Ottoman sources. The *müderris* with whom Manuel conversed could indeed be one of those critical scholars, contributing to Manuel's obvious sympathy for him. After all, Manuel could have depicted the *müderris* as a stereotypical 'barbarian', which would also serve his literary goals. However, this nuanced, generally positive portrayal hints at genuine regard on Manuel's part. The *müderris* with whom Manuel conversed could indeed be one of those critical scholars, contributing to Manuel's obvious sympathy for him.⁹⁴

In conclusion, the *Dialogue with a Persian*, composed in the tradition of Byzantine anti-Islamic literature and Platonic dialogue, stands out among Manuel II Palaiologos' writings on account of its literary features. In contrast with other contemporary dialogues in the Byzantine anti-Islamic tradition, the emperor elegantly blends a theological treatise with a lively Platonic dialogue, vivid character portrayals, adorning the work with witty allusions and amusing everyday life scenes. A close reading of these, such as Manuel's allusion to Aristophanes' *Wealth*, or the description of the Ottoman flatbread, reveals to the reader otherwise lost meanings. Although Manuel represents himself as a paragon of learning and the winner of each debate in accordance with the tradition of the *Adversus Iudaeos* and anti-Islamic dialogues, all in all, the character portrayal in the *Dialogue* is especially noteworthy. Manuel's self-representation is vivid, detailed and clearly modelled on Socrates. Instead of a 'stereotypical' barbarian portrait, the emperor depicts the *müderris* as a charming and amiable man. He also creates a dramatic contrast between the *müderris* and his scholarly circle with that of the pleasure-loving sultan and his court, arguably relying on an ethical framework based on Aristotelian ethics. However, from time to time, he still subtly stresses the 'otherness' of the *müderris* vis-à-vis himself, a learned, calm and collected Christian emperor. Everyday life scenes in the work not only colour the dialogues, but also provide occasions for fleshing out the emperor, the *müderris* and the audience. Thus, the work reads almost like a 'novel'. As such, the *Dialogue with a Persian* of Manuel II Palaiologos deserves to be studied not only for the historical 'data' it provides but on account of its literary merit, as a notable work in Byzantine literature.

93 See M. Balivet, 'Rhomania byzantine et Diyar-ı Rum turc', 111–179; 130, who refers to the *menakıbnâme* of Hacı Bayram Veli.

94 Aşıkpaşazade, 113, also mentions Manuel as being on friendly terms with Fazlullah, the *kadı* of Gebze.