
When reference is made to certain practices of sorcery in Byzantine sources, the figure of the sorcerer is never far away. As Stéphanie Vlavianos puts it in this book: ‘Comment penser le monde de la magie sans le mage, son agent primordial?’ (p. 17). However, this is exactly what often happens in scholarship dealing with Byzantine magic. The author provides many answers to those who want to understand the Byzantine figure of the *magus* and its significance in the Christian community of Byzantium. One of the key figures that functions as a *Leitmotiv* throughout this study is Cyprian of Antioch, an ancient sorcerer who lived in the fourth c., was converted to Christianity, and died a martyr’s death.

In the first section of her comprehensive introduction, the author discusses the current state of scholarship dealing with magic and sorcery in Byzantium. Two main observations justify her own project: (i) historiographers have focused mainly on the proto-Byzantine period from the fourth to the sixth c., and (ii) the different approaches to the study of Byzantine magic that have been taken do not put the figure of the *magus* at the centre of interest. By contrast, Vlavianos grants the *magus* its rightful place at the centre of attention, since it is the unifying element of all sources dealing with magic. Furthermore, she focuses on a later period, ranging from the time of iconoclasm, which furnishes an abundance of references to magic, to the end of the eleventh c., when the figure of the *magus* moved to the background. In section 1.b, this general chronological framework, which can be divided into three separate periods, is discussed in more detail. While it becomes clear why Michael Psellos figures as its ending point, the reason of taking John of Damascus as a starting point remains somewhat obscure. Finally, in section 1.c, the author explains why the anthropology of scholars like Mauss, Godelier, Douglas and Lévi-Strauss was an important source of inspiration to her. – The second section of the introduction presents all the source material on which this book builds. In general, the sources are Christian and thus opposed to the practice of magic. The different types of sources use the figure of the *magus* to promote their own heroes in a similar fashion. Vlavianos provides a rich description and extensive discussion of the different types of sources upon which she draws. The most remarkable is manuscript iconography. In her study, the author not only discusses written sources: now and then she also takes into account the way in which sorcerers and their activities are depicted in manuscripts. A second and very important resource field is hagiography. Other sources are chronicles, juridical documents, laws etc. – The third section of the introduction is devoted to the ancient terminology that was used to denominate different kinds of phenomena connected to magic and sorcery. Again, Vlavianos provides us with a broad overview of the different Greek words, their usage and the texts in which they appear. Although I believe this discussion to be extremely useful, an appendix in which these words are listed systematically, would have been useful in order to consult their meaning, place and frequency of appearance.

The rest of the book is divided in three main parts, the first of which is entitled *Le mage, figure mise en contexte*. The second part deals with the *magus* as *figure de don*, and the third part focuses on the *magus* as *figure d’échec*. 
In the first ch. of part one, the reader is introduced to a large number of characters, both historical and legendary, both ancient and Byzantine. Firstly, the author discusses ancient figures of *magi* which reappear in Byzantine sources. Some of these figures go back to classical times and mark the very beginning of a long tradition of *magi*, such as Hermes Trismegistos, Perseus, Kirke and Farmaros, the fallen angel. Others are biblical figures such as Salomon (from the Old Testament) and Simon the Sorcerer (from the New Testament). The hagiography of proto-Byzantine times (i.e. before the eighth c.) also stages several sorcerers that live on in the later Byzantine texts. One of them is Cyprian of Antioch, the sorcerer who became a saint. After the introduction of the ancient figures, *Vlavianos* continues with the Byzantine ones. The chronological framework introduced earlier serves as her guidance. In the time of iconoclasm, the figure of the *magus* is generally associated with Judaism and iconoclast emperors. The case of John the Grammarian serves to illustrate this point. Apart from Cyprian of Antioch, John the Grammarian is a second important figure that returns on many occasions throughout the study. The author evokes the latter’s historiographical portrait as it was put forward by S. Gero, and amplifies it with a discussion of iconographic sources. In general, *Vlavianos* manages to show that the period of iconoclasm is rich in references to magic and that it created an image of the *magus* that continued to be influential in later periods. Once the controversy of iconoclasm was over, the Byzantine preoccupation with magic and sorcerers seemingly calmed down. The second time frame studied by the author runs from the year 843 until the mid-tenth c. and shows a notable decrease in new figures of *magi*. However, the established *magi* stay present in the literary, historical and cultural landscape of Byzantium. The third and final period discussed runs from the mid-tenth c. until the year 1078. *Vlavianos* observes one specific trend that defines this period: the feminization of the figure of the *magus*. The reader is introduced to several examples of female sorcerers from the tenth and eleventh c., among which the empress Zoe. – The final part of ch. one deals with general images of the *magus*, as can be found in laws, both human and divine. Here, the author explores sources in which the figure of the *magus* is not a specific individual: the source then refers to a general image, which often connects the figure of the *magus* to a certain religious or ethnic group. – In the second ch. of part one, *Le mage et ses activités*, the author introduces a system of classification based on different types of magical practices. She distinguishes five different types of magic: sympathy magic, magic of intimidation, divination, knowledge of the stars, and *farmakeia*. Although *Vlavianos* does not clarify why she focuses on those five practices in particular, she does provide an extensive discussion of all of them, with many examples. What all these types of magic, and accordingly all these types of sorcerers, have in common, is their dealing with demons. – The third and final ch. of part one deals with magical objects and the magician’s relation to them. The first object discussed is the statue. Again, the author shows a diligent preoccupation with the finesses of the Greek terminology that refers to different kinds of sculptures. Moreover, the iconoclast era is evidently a particularly interesting period to study the use of statues by sorcerers. The second object is the book. Books are an important aspect of the Byzantine image of the *magus*, but nevertheless they are not essential to the practices of the sorcerer. Through a discussion of the magical value of basins and cauldrons, *Vlavianos* finally arrives at examples of unsuspicious everyday objects, which could be magically charged to harm innocent Christians.
While the first part of the book has familiarized the reader with the most important figures of sorcerers in Byzantium and their main activities, the second part, *Le mage, figure de don*, explores different facets of the Byzantine *magus*. The first ch., *Les figures des origines et de transmission*, focuses on the *magus* as an heir of ancient traditions. In this ch., the author revisits in more detail ideas and characters introduced in the first ch. of part one. As a matter of fact, the different parts and chapters of the book can be read separately and on their own, since the recurring examples are each time reintroduced, as if the reader of a particular ch. did not read the previous ones. – While the first ch. argues that the Byzantine *magus* is often associated with Judaism, paganism and orientalism, the second focuses on his distinctive demonic features. In *À la rencontre du diable*, *Vlavianos* discusses the famous motif of the encounter with the devil, which occurs frequently in the sources of the fourth to the eighth c. and beyond. The conditions of such an encounter often correspond to a stereotypical scenario, in which the *magus* figures as a medium for arranging the encounter between the devil and a client. – The third ch. of part two explores how a chain of intertextual references is established in the sources by restaging ancient figures of *magi*. There are several possibilities of connecting to traditions of the past; sometimes, the source simply mentions ancient characters, such as Jannes and Jambres (opponents of Moses), for didactic purposes. In other instances, ancient magicians are evoked apart from their original context and compared to contemporary Byzantine figures. Finally, these contemporary figures, such as John the Grammian, become themselves a model for characters from later sources. – In the fourth ch., *Le mage face au pouvoir impérial*, the reader discovers yet another aspect of the figure of the *magus*: his ties to the Byzantine imperial court. The *magus* is generally perceived as a figure that dwells in the highest circles of power, and is often associated with iconoclast emperors. In this context, he fulfills the role of a bad counselor, an idea which is often put forward in order to interpret imperial misdeeds and poor governance. It is the qualification of imperial counselor that turns the *magus* into a *figure de don*, a feature that was rather unclear until now. It means that the *magus* is implicated in a complex system of giving and receiving; in exchange for gifts of imperial value, the *magus* guarantees the power of the emperor. However, in this respect, the *magus* is also a figure of defiance, tarnishing the imperial authority, since he can only bestow the emperor with illegitimate authority because the only true power is divine. – The last ch. of the second part of the book reveals a final characteristic of the Byzantine figure of the *magus*: its identification with the Antichrist. In this respect, the *magus* prefigures the eschatological battle between divine and evil power in his contestation of the imperial authority and the saints. Therefore, the figure of the *magus* is often evoked in Byzantine sources to exemplify the necessary evil, which is part of God’s divine plan. Thus, he functions as *révélateur du mauvais pouvoir* (p. 251) and turns those who do resist his temptations into saints.

The third and final part of the book is entitled *Le mage, figure d’échec*. If the *magus* is considered as the precursor of the Antichrist in Byzantine sources, it is to be expected that he will lose his battle against Christianity. This part of the book explores how the sources portray the *magus* as the opponent of saintly figures, who leaves the battlefield defeated. In the first ch., the relationship between the *magus* and the saint is investigated. While at first glance the line between the miracles of the saint and the sorceries of the *magus* seems rather thin, the saint always defeats the sorcerer in a battle which is settled through words. Thus, the figure of the *magus*
serves to secure the existing structures of society through his contestation of the established order and through his defeat. – But what happens next? The final two chapters of the book each discuss a different possible fate of the defeated magus. In *La conversion du mage: aveu et pénitence*, the author again turns to historical sources and observes that those do not provide a specific procedure for the conversion of sorcerers: when it comes to the integration into the Christian community, the magi are not different from any other type of heretic. – In *La mort de la figure du mage*, the final ch. of the book, both juridical and literary sources give proof of a second possibility; in case the sorcerer is not prepared to give up his former beliefs, he suffers a violent death. As Vlavianos remarks, this death is often modelled on the example of the death of Simon the Sorcerer. Another way in which the magus can ‘die’ is simply through the silent treatment; by not speaking about him anymore, the sources deny the magus further existence.

This book was written with great care and attention for detail. Through the evocation of numerous examples, Vlavianos guides the reader on a journey from one obscure figure to the next. The many sources the author used are of a varied nature and provide a rich and multifaceted image. While she takes into account both written and pictorial sources, she also involves a discussion of the original Greek terminology where necessary. Thus, this study manages to evoke a cultural phenomenon in the mind of the reader and provides him with a clear image of the Byzantine figure of the magus in all its complexity. Hence, it can be relevant for researchers in different fields who are interested in the representation of the figure of the magician between the eighth and eleventh c. While the interpretations of specific passages from hagiographical sources within the broader context of Byzantine ideas about magicians can be of interest to a literary critic dealing with hagiography, an art historian might want to read the sections dealing with the manuscript iconographies. The most obvious shortcoming is the fact that no index of names, themes or sources is provided, which makes it very difficult to navigate the primary material and/or to trace all the instances where one specific text or figure is discussed. Therefore, although I believe this comprehensive study does provide a suitable ground for further research, this practical issue could possibly diminish its potential fruitfulness. Nevertheless, *La figure du mage à Byzance* is pleasurable to read, due to the author’s smooth and agreeable French prose style. Hence, I would recommend the book, or parts of it, to anyone who is interested in one way or another in the figure of the magus in Byzantium.

Julie Van Pelt.


The study of Byzantium in China began in the 1950s. Since then, attention was increasingly paid to this topic. Particularly during the past three decades, research of world history in China was taken to a new stage: ‘Some subjects that had been just stranded at the theoretical level were deepened into details’ (Chen Zhiqiang, in his introduction to *The History of the Byzantine Empire* [in Chinese], Shanghai, Shanghai Academy of Social Science Press, 2013, p. 17), and so was also the study of Byzantine-Chinese relations. Chinese scholars not only got the possibility of effectively using first and second hand material written in other languages, but also