



## VATATZES, VASILIOS

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**VATATZES, Vasilios** (b. Therapeia, near Constantinople, 1694), Greek scholar, merchant, traveler, pioneer explorer, and diplomat.

*Life.* Vatatzes was the sixth child in his family and his father, a Greek Christian Orthodox priest, served as steward of the Aya Sofia church in Constantinople. When he was 14, he migrated from Constantinople to Moscow and became a merchant. Vatatzes visited Iran at least three times. In 1713 he traveled by ship from Astrakhan port to Darband in the Caucasus, before visiting Širvān and Čamaki (Vatatzes, *Voyages*, I, pp. 332-64). In 1716 he again went to Širvān and traveled southwards to visit Gilān (Rasht), Qazvin, Sāva, Qom, Kāšān, and Isfahan. He returned to Moscow via Ardabil, Darband, and Astrakhan (Vatatzes, 1886, I, pp. 466-856). In 1727-28 he followed the route from Moscow, Astrakhān, the Aral Sea, Khiva, Bokhara, Khorāsān ("Barbart," "Qalanqent," Mashad), Mazandarān (Sari, Balforuš), Gilān (Rasht) (Vatatzes, *Voyages*, II, pp.1-953). In this trip he met Nāder Shah for the first time. While in Mashad, Vatatzes undertook a diplomatic mission to convey orally a message on behalf of Nāder Shah to the Russian General Vasili Levasov in Rasht (Vatazes, *Persika*, p. 148). By 1732-33 he had also traveled to central and western Europe (Prussia, France, the Netherlands, England, Denmark).

After 1733 there is no concrete information about Vatatzes' life. In his *Persika* it becomes evident that he probably spent much time in the court of Nāder Shah, accumulating all necessary information before compiling Nāder Shah's biography.



*Map of Central Asia.* In 1732 Vatatzes drew a map of the Caspian and Aral Seas that he turned over to the Bodleian library. Two copies of this map are today in the British Museum (10075 *additional*). The Bibliothèque nationale holds three copies (C2206, AD109, AD109 *double*). This first empirical mapping of the region includes also the eastern Caucasus, northern Iran, Transoxania, and western [Chinese Turkestan](#). Most of the regions are presented as a shapeless vastness of desert lands. Vatatzes wrote the map in Greek and Latin, and it was drafted by the royal cartographer, John Senex. He uses only a minimal number of symbols, both in the inhabited areas and the natural environment.

*Travel account.* In the 2,000 verses of his Greek travel account titled *Periegetikon*, Vatatzes relates his travel experiences in Asian and European countries. Its manuscript tradition consists of four copies: the Lambryllos MS (Smyrna), the British Museum MS 10075, the Gedeon MS (Constantinople) and the Hidromenos MS (Corfu). Vatatzes states vaguely that he wrote it after *Persika* (1748).

This account is one of the finest examples of a first-person narrative in Greek geographical literature. Vatatzes' literary model goes back to the Greco-Roman tradition and Dionysius the Traveler (2nd cent. CE). His style and choice to produce a versified account in heroic hexameter are unusual for his time. The language and style are simple with some archaisms.

Regarding the Iranian world, Vatatzes cites his visits to Central Asia (Khiva, Bokhara) and Iran proper: Mashad, Rasht, Qazvin, Qom, Sāveh, Kashan, and Isfahan. He describes, for example, the nomadic life in Central Asia, the brightness of Bokhara, the importance of the Imam Rezā shrine in Mashad, and the glory of Safavid Isfahan (Čahār Bāg, the palace and the Naqš-e Jahān square).

*Nāder Shah's Biography.* In 1748 Vatatzes completed *Persika*, a biography of Nāder Shah in Greek. At least two MSS of the same date have been preserved: the Greek National Library MS 1861 and the Cotnari MS in Bucharest. His language and style are simple. It is a biographical text with historical and ethnographical importance.

The author probably spent considerable time close to Nāder Shah, being at his court and even participating in Nāder Shah's expeditions. Vatatzes knew Persian, and his work is important for the late Safavid period, the Afghan interlude, and Nāder Shah's reign. He includes unique information about Shah



Tahmasp and Nādir Shāh, for example, about the life of Nādir Shāh and the fatal conspiracy against Shah Tahmasp (Vatatzes, *Persika*, p. 195).

*The author's worldview.* Vatatzes was associated with the 18th-century Greek Enlightenment of the Danubian principalities. He was probably affiliated with the court of Greek Phanariot rulers, where he wrote his manuscripts or where these were reproduced *en masse* after his death. He was active in Iran at a time of increased Russian diplomacy with Iran. An admirer of Persian civilization and of Nāder Shah's rule, Vatatzes, whose works have been largely ignored by modern scholarship, is an important author for Iranian history and Hellenic-Iranian studies.

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