In the very first issue of Byzantion Nikolai Kondakov published a seminal work in the field of Byzantine dress studies, "Costumes Orientaux à la cour Byzantine" (1). Ever since, that article has been cited, but it must be acknowledged that that is rather more because of the absence of critical attention to the subject area than necessarily on account of the article's own merits. This discipline is still embryonic, yet it is now in a period of new growth, and that makes this an appropriate moment to reassess Kondakov's theories.

Kondakov's primary purpose was to attempt to define the nature of one garment referred to frequently in the Book of Ceremonies, the skaramangion. He justly observed that the skaramangion "appears to be the most popular costume in Byzantium, especially at court" (2), and yet added significantly that it "was not attributed to anyone as a costume of honour characteristic of a rank" (3). This observation bears some elaboration, for its significance has not been properly appreciated, either by Kondakov or subsequent scholars (4). The Klētōρολογιον, the earlier court manual

(1) N. P. KONDakov, Costumes Orientaux à la Cour Byzantine, in Byz., 1 (1924), pp. 7-49.
(2) Idem, p. 13.
(3) Idem, p. 11.
(4) The only researcher of the twentieth century to give extensive attention to dress has been Elizabeth Piltz, who did little to extend, or to elaborate on, prior work: Trois Sackoi Byzantins, Stockholm, 1976; Kamelaukion et Mitra : Insignes Byzantins Impériaux et Eclelésiastiques, Stockholm, 1977; Costume in Life and Death in Byzantium, in Byzantium and the North : Transactions of the Nordic research course in Byzantine art history, Uppsala, 1989, pp. 153-165; Le costume officiel des dignitaires byzantins à l'époeque Paléologue (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis), Uppsala, 1994; Middle Byzantine Court Costume, in
which formed the kernel of the *Book of Ceremonies*, first indicates this, placing much more emphasis on accessories such as torques, batons and diptychs than on dress of any sort as emblems of rank, and certainly makes no mention of this garment in its essential prescriptive passages relating to the highest ranks (5).

Still more informative passages are to be found in the *Book of Ceremonies*. For example, on the day of the Festival of Lights, after attending a service in Hagia Sophia at which he must wear a ἐδέλσιον and ἰζίτακιον, the Emperor exchanges these for a skaramangion in order to go to dinner. At the same time the Patrikioi set aside their ceremonial robes (ἀλλαλάσσωνα) in favour of skaramangia (6).

Similarly, on the Saturday of Easter the Spatharokoukoularioi and the Koukoularioi going to dinner at the imperial tables, changing out of their ceremonial robes (ἀλλαλάσσωνα), don skaramangia (6). On the same occasion as that just mentioned, the Emperor himself wears a white skaramangion with a gold border, while some “friends” also wear white skaramangia, and other “friends” coloured ones. This impression of most, or even all, of the court wearing them is explicitly repeated elsewhere in the text (5). The above case is the only instance where the colour of couriers’ skaramangia is stated. This may be because the default colour of garments in the *Book of Ceremonies* is understood to be white, or because couriers were at liberty to use whatever opulent cloth pleased them. In contrast, whenever the Emperor wears one, on all but three occasions it is specified to be either white or purple, or one of those colours with ornamentation, or highly ornate, such made with brocade cloth.

These passages suggest overwhelmingly that, rather than being an important ceremonial garment, the skaramangion was rather in effect the

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(7) *De Cer.* p. 184, l. 7f.

(8) *De Cer.* pp. 108, ll. 16f. ; 114, 13f. ; 124, 24f. ; 128, 4f. ; 159, 19 ; 149, 10 ; 170, 8.
“casual wear” of men of rank attending court, perhaps to be worn generally when no ceremonial garb (ἀλλαξάμα / allaxima) was decreed by protocol.

Mention of skaramangia also occurs in Constantine Porphyrogennétos' advice on the conduct of imperial expeditions. They are prominently featured as necessary gifts for foreign rulers, and diverse forms and qualities are catalogued (9). This source also brings to the fore an alternative use of the term. In celebrating the Emperor's return from a successful military campaign, various places on the processional route are to be hung with skaramangia (10). These might be garments, but the Book of Ceremonies makes it clearer by speaking of great skaramangia (σκαρομάγγια μέγαλα) (11). Taking these as unusually large, or perhaps particularly ornate, garments is implausible. As Haldon observes, it very much more likely means that these swathes of the ornate cloths of which such garments were made were hung (12). Such double usage of a technical term for both cloth and garment occurs often in medieval Greek (13), as well as in Arabic textile and dress terminology (14), and is also found in this period with the Byzantine technical term for a form of armour, klivanion (κλιβάνιον) (15).

Skaramangia are only rarely referred to in other middle Byzantine literature. Theophanes gives us the earliest occurrence, listing one amongst booty taken from the Persian Razastos by Emperor

(11) De Cer. pp. 571, 10 ; 14 and 572, 2f.
(13) For example orhōnē (ὀρθώνη) having a basic meaning as “fine linen” and then a woman's headdress (Digenes Akrites V, 43 ; J. Mavrogordato (ed. and tr.), Oxford, 1963 [1956], p. 144). There are also the multiple uses of savanion, vélarion and kamelauktion in De Cer.
Herakleios (16). This is an account of events of the early seventh century, and we are left with the question of whether it is a retrojection by the author. Kondakov refers to an unspecified anonymous source which he claims states that Herakleios was already in the habit of wearing skaramangia at that time. The answer to the question is very much dependant upon a confident identification of the garment and a more certain tracing of its origins.

Writing of events he may well have witnessed, George the Monk mentions skaramangion twice, both with very much the same sense of informal court dress (17). The second episode, the coronation of Basil the Parakoimomenos as Caesar, makes this particularly clear in indicating that Basil was to exchange his skaramangion for the imperial formal robe, the divêtêston. Leo the Grammarian copied these passages from the chronicle of George the Monk virtually verbatim around the middle of the tenth century (18).

Achmet, whose Dream Book may date anywhere from 813 to the eleventh century, but which was probably written in the mid-tenth century (19), mentions skaramangion three times. Significantly, he describes it each time by one slightly varying phrase or another as “the kavadiôn called skaramangion”, a point to which I shall return (20).

The only mention of a skaramangion in a source securely dated to the eleventh century is by Kedrenos, who merely copies Theophanès’ account of Herakleios’ victory (21). It would be tempting to conclude that the fact that Kedrenos can recycle Theophanès in that way may indicate

(19) S. M. OBERHELMAN, Oneirotic Literature of the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, unpublished PhD thesis, 1981, University of Minnesota, p. 64.
(20) ACIMET, Achmetis Oneiroticon, Fr. Drexl (ed.), Leipzig, 1925, p. 88-6, καβάδὶ ήτοι σκαραμαγγίαν ; 115.1, καβάδι τὸ λεγόμενον σκαραμάγγιαν and 218.13, καβάδι δεκάς σκαραμάγγιαν.
that he expected his readers still to be familiar with the term and the garment through use rather than merely as a literary reference.

A hiatus in the literary sources follows, probably largely a consequence of the triumph of Atticism in eleventh and twelfth century Byzantine literature with the resulting tendency to eschew any current terminology for contemporary artefacts in favour of antiquarian euphemisms. In that period uninformative archaic terms such as esthēs, peplos, chiton, and stolē are the preferred expressions for any sort of garment (22).

The latest mention of the skaramangion is in Pachymerēs’ encomium of Andronikos II Palaiologos written before 1308 (23). Pachymerēs goes so far as to describe this garment as one of “the highest marks of distinction amongst the Romans”. We have seen that such a characterisation does not accord with the status of the skaramangion in its tenth-century use. This indicates that Pachymerēs’ employment of the term was an antiquarian literary contrivance not based upon direct familiarity with the real garment and its context of use. Du Cange was the earliest modern scholar to note the term in his dictionary of medieval Latin wherein he asserted that it was a foul-weather garment of military men, without an explanation of why he came to such a conclusion (24). Following the lead of Du Cange, Reiske argues in his commentary to the Book of Ceremonies for the skaramangion being some variety of cloak (25). Having made this assumption, Reiske pursues a circular argument concerning Early Roman Empire period cloaks which only once refers back to the primary term. That reference is of disputed provenance, and even so provides little support for his proposition. The author of the passage complains that Tribunes were falsely adopting “certain garments” (πεψαλίματα τινά), for which he uses the term skaramangion, which were normally the

privilege of *Rhetors* in red and crimson, and of Philosophers in grey. While *perivléma* (περιβλήμα) is known at times to be the equivalent of *palla*, Latin for cloak, in the early centuries of the common era it is not usually read as being so specific (26). Reiske states the author of this complaint was a certain Basil the Presbyter writing to Gregory of Nazianzos in the fourth century (27), however it has not been possible to trace such a letter in the collections of Gregory’s correspondence. In contrast, Du Cange attributes it to a lexical manuscript by an author named Cyril (28).

The origin of the name is a crucial question for the identification of this garment. In his article, Kondakov accepts the opinion of Du Cange that the term is Persian (29). Hemmerdinger likewise lists *skaramangion* as a Persian word, repeating Phourikis’ derivation from *karmania*, a region of Persia (30). This may be true, but more evidence is required. Such arguing from resemblances in words is fraught with risk, as witness the fact that both Kondakov and Hemmerdinger equate *skaramangion* with the later term used by the *Treatise on the Offices, skaranikon*, despite a radical difference in the nature and use of the two items that is revealed by a close reading of the sources (31).

Moving on to the matter of the form of the *skaramangion*, Kondakov spends the bulk of his article seeking to identify it as an oriental “caftan à cheval”, apparently solely for the reason that the *Book of Ceremonies* says that the Emperor wears it while riding a horse on occasion (28). The number of occasions when the Emperor wears a *skaramangion* while riding is indeed the majority of those times when he goes mounted, yet it is a small fraction of the number of times he, let alone the rest of the court, is said to wear this garment. When riding but not wearing a

skaramangion, the Emperor wears a kolovion or divêtésion (33). In those rituals when a large portion of the court are mounted we also find other mounted ranks wearing kamista or spekia (34). Nowhere in his article does Kondakov define what it is that makes the skaramangion more specifically an equestrian garment than others used in precisely the same way.

Further, in his use of “caftan” Kondakov immediately finds himself on treacherous linguistic ground, for the very word is much abused in recent European usage, with no precise meaning whatsoever. This confusion suffuses all that follows, as he presents a diverse array of pictorial, sculptural and ethnographical sources, which span no less than 2500 years and usually bear no definite relation to each other, or even resemblance to one another, beyond mostly, but not always, dealing with men riding horses. In addition, he seems unaware of the group of so-called “Iranian riding coats” taken from the Late Antique cemeteries of Egypt and widely fêted around Europe in the first quarter of the twentieth century, upon which he might have founded a much more persuasive case (35). As it is, most of his early and medieval sources which have any recognisable detail show men wearing short, pull-over tunics, while his later sources are a mixture of coats and jackets of Central Asian origin, and later European garments which are only distantly related.

It seems clear that Kondakov was hampered by a narrow range of truly relevant non-literary sources to inform his speculations about the form of the skaramangion. There is a plausible candidate, albeit one which is strangely rare in Byzantine pictorial sources for a item of such evident ubiquity. It is a garment with sleeves considerably longer than the wearer’s arms. As tunics they are most familiarly and copiously depicted in the illuminated Madrid Skylitzes (ill. 1) where their use as the basic informal

(33) De Cer., pp. 80.10-23; 84.11; 86.3-4 (later in the same ritual) kolovion; 105.6 and 107.6 (same ritual); 594.2 divêtésion. The latter actually says that all are in their “regalia”, which would normally mean divêtésion for the emperor, and is more certainly so here when it is paired with the most eminent crown, the Great White stemma.

(34) De Cer., pp. 81, 12f.; 82, 2, 12.

wear of the court is well represented by the contexts, just as is indicated for the skaramangion in the literature. A very few other immediately recognisable examples occur during the middle Byzantine era in pictures of the raising of Lazarus, where one of the mourners protects his nose from the charnel stench with the sleeve of his tunic (ill. 2). Other examples do not show the sleeve covering the hand, but are recognisable from the volume of fabric bunched on the forearms (ill. 3). One of these dates from the century of composition of the Book of Ceremonies, albeit from what was at that time outside the empire (ill. 4). Yet they become quite prolific in sources of the fourteenth century. Looking further afield, the Persian antecedence attributed to the skaramangion is shared by the long-sleeved tunic in illustrations of the Sassanian era (ill. 5) (36). The erratic pattern of the Byzantine sources may be ascribed to its Persian antecedence being well known and therefore it being regarded as a foreign fashion not suitable for the idealised picture of life normally presented in upper class Byzantine art, a characteristic it would share with other items of tenth-century regalia like the paragaudion (παραγαυ¬διον), the coat (καρδάδη ν χαβάδιον), and the turban (κασοκλίσιν), all mentioned in literature of the time, including the Book of Ceremonies. The skaramangion being a garment of the court classes, it would not be expected to be found in lower class artworks such as steatite carvings, which can have more tendency to realism (37).

Further confirmation of the identification of skaramangion with a garment with very long sleeves can be found in Liutprand of Cremona's account of his visits to Constantinople, and in preceding events. Throughout Liutprand's work he frequently interpolates Greek words and phrases, both in a Greek hand and transliterated. Almost invariably he gives not merely a Latin translation of the terms given in Greek hand, but for the transliterated terms uses some qualification such as "which the Greeks call"... A notable exception to this is his use of the word scaramanga among the annual bonuses given to imperial officers (38).

(37) Ioli Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, Byzantine Icons in Steatite, Vienna, 1985, for a fine survey of this material.
Liutprand employs this term with neither precedent nor explanation. Either this is a remarkable and unique oversight compared to his previous practice, or else he has a reasonable expectation that his readers will be acquainted with the word and its significance.

Later, in *De Legatione Constantinopolitana*, when he wished to highlight the East Romans’ cultural quirks or to disparage them as manifestly effeminate he mentions three highly visible aspects (**39**). He says they are *criniti*, “hairy” (and we see from artworks that shoulder length hair was the norm for noblemen), *talari tunica induti*, “wearing ankle-length tunics” (again, well illustrated), and *manicati*, “sleeved”. This last should be understood to refer to very long sleeves, for it cannot be entertained that Byzantines, in contrast to Lombardic noblemen, were normally seen with bare arms. The Lombards’ usual garb was what an Eastern Roman of the tenth century would have called *roukhon pagenon*, a knee-length tunic with close-fitting sleeves to the wrist (**39**).

Had the qualities that Liutprand decries been entirely unfamiliar, they are likely to have struck his readers as merely quaint and improbable exoticisms. However the former reference explicitly states that Byzantine ambassadors were commonly seen as he described in Italy.

Furthermore, this familiarity came from more than merely the persons of those ambassadors from Constantinople. During the decade prior to Liutprand’s first journey to Constantinople, Emperor Romanos I had sent a remarkable cargo of gifts, in addition to military aid, to King Hugh of Italy, the very king who had been served by Liutprand’s father, and whose exploits feature largely in the *Antapodosis*. Liutprand simply describes these as “handsome presents” (**40**), while the *Book of Ceremonies* enumerates the gifts in detail, stating that there were 15 *skaramangia* amongst them (**41**). These observations should be taken, with Liutprand’s unexplained use of *skaramangum*, as leading to the conclusion that this mysterious garment is the *tunica talaris manicata*, entirely familiar to the

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**Notes**

**39** *De Legatione*, chapters 37 and 40: Becker (ed.), p. 195 and 196; Wright (tr.), p. 194 and 196.

**40** This is very well illustrated in the ninth-century fresco of a donor in the Oratory of St Benedict at Malles: M. Chatzidakis and A. Grabar, *Byzantine and Early Medieval Painting*, London, 1965, pl. 154.

**41** *Antapodosis*, book 5, chapter 14, Becker (ed.), p. 137; Wright (tr.), p. 135.

**42** *De Cer.*, p. 661, 16f.
Italians as the habitual informal attire of Constantinopolitan men of rank, just as it is portrayed so clearly in Byzantine literary sources of the ninth to eleventh centuries, and to a lesser degree in Byzantine pictorial art.

In addition to this, the evidence from Achmet, referred to above, that some skaramangia were coats (kavadi) correlates very accurately with the Persian antecedents of both the skaramangion and kavadion, and has great significance for the later development of Byzantine court regalia. Pictorial sources showing Persian and Persian-derived coats from Classical Antiquity through to the end of Late Antiquity are normally most identifiable by the fact of the coats being represented worn thrown about the shoulders like a cape (ill. 6) (\(^4\)). Such pictures also normally show the sleeves as being very long, a characteristic which they share with the surviving examples (\(^4\)). Some depicted coats have sleeves which are evidently vestigial, while others appear entirely functional. Their partial functionality is corroborated by highly informative passages describing Persian customs given by Xenophon.

\[\text{καὶ οἱ ἱππεῖς δὲ πάντες παρῄσαν καταφθαρκότες ἀπὸ τῶν ἱππῶν, καὶ διεξηκότες τὰς χεῖρας διὰ τῶν κανθάκων ὡσεὶ καὶ νῦν ἔτι διεῖσαν, ὅταν ὅρα.}\]

All the riders were present, having dismounted from their horses and put their hands through their coats (κανθάκων), as they still do now whenever in the sight of the King (\(^4\)).

And still more explicitly,

\[\text{τοῦτῳ δὲ τῷ ἐννατῷ καὶ Κύρος ἀπέκτεινεν Αὐτοκρατοράκην καὶ Μιτραῖον, ἱστὲς ὅταν τῷ Λαρείειον ἀδελφῆς... ὥσιν ἀὐτῷ ἀπαντώντες οὐ διείσαντες ἀγαθῶς τῷ κόρη, ὃ ποιμνία βασιλεία μονών ἢ δὲ κόρη ἔστι μακρότερον ἡ χεῖράς, ἐν τῇ τὴν χεῖρα ἔχων αἰνοῦρ σὸν ὅσαν ὅσαν μακροτέρου ἡ χεῖράς.}\]

(43) The Persepolis reliefs are amongst the earliest and best examples, while the latest are found on Sassanian metalwork such as pieces in the Sackler Gallery in Washington, and, within Byzantium, sixth century ivories, an Alexandrian one in the British Museum (inv. M&LA 79,12-20,1) and a Lombardic example in the Bargello Museum (inv. Brunel-Denon 19c). Veronika GEVERS-MOLNAR, The Hungarian Scnur : An Archaic Mantle of Eurasian Origin, Toronto, 1973 collects numerous examples in addition to these.

(44) BENAZETTI and DAL-PRA, p. 368, FLUCK and VOGELSANG-EASTWOOD, passim.

In that year Cyrus killed Autoboiskê and Mitraios, who were sons of the sister of Darius … because on meeting him they had not passed their hands through their korai, which they do for the king alone. The korê is longer than a sleeve, and while in it the hand can do nothing (*).

The practice of covering the hand in the presence of the ruler can be seen in both Persian and Byzantine art right up to the Madrid Skylitzes manuscript. Within the period of the Book of Ceremonies, the now lost life-size statue of King Gagik of Vaspurakan (ill. 4) shows a long-sleeved kavadion precisely, with the long, ample sleeves pulled back onto his forearms to allow him to make his donation. The reconstruction of what I suggest is a skaramangion (ill. 7) based upon a late twelfth century manuscript (ill. 3) shows both the length of the sleeve covering the hand and the bunching and drop of the sleeve on the forearm, resembling both the original manuscript and the Gagik statue.

The weight of these various pieces of evidence come together to show that while the skaramangion was a garment which could be worn while riding as Kondakov proposed, the essential characteristic that distinguished it from other tunics or coats worn on horseback is, rather, in having very long sleeves which fall beyond the wearer’s hands.

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(46) Xenophon, Hellenika, bk. 2, ch. 1, s. 8 : Krentz (ed. and tr.), Warminster, 1989, p. 70.
Fig. 1. — A courtier with his hands enveloped in the sleeves of his tunic. 
*Madrid Skylitzes*, f. 42v.
Fig. 2. — Mourner at the tomb of Lazarus muffling his face with the sleeve of his tunic, Dimysoiion codex 187, f.44v, c. 1059.
Fig. 3. — Donor with long sleeves bunched on his fore-arms, wearing the Persian ancestor of the skaranikon: frontispiece, Bodleian Rowe 6, late twelfth century.

See also illustration 7.
Fig. 4. — Model of a now lost statue of King Gagik of Vaspurakan wearing a coat with very long, full sleeves pulled back onto his forearms, early tenth century.
Fig. 5. — An Iranian bone carving of the second century showing a tunic with very long sleeves.
Fig. 6. — A fifth-century Lombardic ivory plaque showing long sleeved coats. Bargello Museum, Brunet-Denon collection.
Fig. 7. — Reconstruction of a skaramangion based upon Bodleian Rowe 6, frontispiece. See illustration 3.