

Theophylact of Ohrid: Polog Reported for the First Time in the Sources

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The intention to reveal the oldest written original record about Polog leads us to address the previous historiographic approaches regarding this issue. There is a noticeable tendency for imposing the opinion that the first preserved report about Polog originates from the beginning of the 80s of the XI century, written by the hand of the Byzantine scholar Anna Komnene, regarding the Normans' military intrusion on the Byzantine land.¹

Following the original text regarding those events, it has been confirmed that Anna Komnene is actually reporting on the Normans' conquest of the two Pologs (τοὺς δύο Πολόγους) at the end of 1082.² Some researchers consider this fact an answer to the question concerning the first preserved record about Polog in the 80s of the XI century.³ However, taking this ap-

¹ This approach was taken by even those whose specialty was the research of some periods in Polog's past. Thus, Slaveva, in the introduction of her dissertation, whose topic of research was “Diplomatic-legal monuments in Polog and the neighbouring areas in XIV century history” (СЛАВЕВА, 1980: 98), relying on Tomoski (ТОМОСКИ, 1976: 67-68), indicates that, in the part of the work where the Byzantine author Anna Komnene writes about the Norman penetration on the Balkans, there is an original record that Polog was part of those events.

² *Anne Comnène* (ed. Leib). Tome II, 1943: 22, 9-13; *Annae Comnenae* (ed. Reinsch-Kambylis). pars II, 2001: 153, 71-74. See: ПЕТРОВСКИ, 2007: 137-149 (139-143); ПЕТРОВСКИ, 2005: 130, and note 5: pg. 137.

³ СЛАВЕВА, 1980: 98. The same opinion, only a lot earlier, was held by Aleksova (АЛЕКСОВА, 1959: 218). Grujic's (ГРУЈИЋ, 1933: 34) assessment that this in-

proach leads to an enormous fallacy, not taking into consideration the period of the creation of the work of the Byzantine author. Namely, Anna Komnene cannot be accepted as the only XI century source that reports on Polog based only on the fact that she writes about events that happened before the last decade of the XI century. Although this Byzantine scholar records the events connected to Polog in the above-mentioned period, her work was created in the middle of the XII century, most probably in 1148.⁴ According to this, the earliest information about Polog originates no earlier than the middle of the XII century.

The only thing we can do is to try and find information about Polog in sources before the work of Anna Komnene, or to accept the historiographic opinion emphasizing that the original facts about Polog from this Byzantine author are not from the end of the XI century, but from the middle of the XII century.

Conducting detailed research of the sources, it seems that there are, after all, records about Polog from the end of the XI century. Thus, if the correspondance of archbishop Theophylact of Ohrid is thoroughly analysed, it may be seen that there is evidence that Polog is mentioned in his letters denoted as L 8 and L 13a.⁵ In the first letter, Polog is used with the meaning of a relative – possessive adjective, which refers to the Polog priests (τῶν Πολογιτῶν ἱερέων),⁶ whereas, in the second letter, two priests from,

formation is about the Norman invasions in this area in 1097 is fully incorrect. Miljkovic-Perpek (МИЉКОВИЌ-ПЕПЕК, 1980: 459) accepted this from him.

⁴ Cf. КРЕКИЋ in ВИНЈ III, 1966: 367. According to LJUBARSKI (*Анна Комнина*, 1965: 18-19), Anna Komnene had not yet finished her work in 1148.

⁵ Although based on the publications of ВИНЈ's III letters (pg. 292, note 195 (КАТИЧИЋ), pg. 295), in which the Macedonian Polog is mentioned, Tomoski (ТОМОСКИ, 1976: 68; the same, in *Тетово и тетовско низ историјата*, 1982: 85) it seems that an oversight is committed when it is said that it is about Polog in Albania.

⁶ The most important for clearing this up is LEROY-MOLINGHEN, 1938: 256. The same is accepted in the later publications of Theophylact's letters, see: ИБИ XXX ГИБИ IX/II, 1994, No. 12: pg. 92; *Théophracte d'Achrida*, 1986, No. 12: pg. (166) 167; ВИНЈ III, 1966: 292. In the publication of Migne (*Patrologia Graeca* 126, 1869: (515) 516), it is explained as "τῶν πολιτετῶν". МИТ-

i.e., who live in Polog are explicitly mentioned (οἱ δ' ἐν τῷ Πολόγῳ ἱερεῖς).⁷ Theophylact's first letter, denoted as L 8, is of interest to us because the second letter, L 13a, is actually a renewal of the requirements in the first letter, since they were not fulfilled. According to this, this letter is dated later than the first one, though not much later, bearing in mind the requirements in the first letter. Thus, the letter by Theophylact of Ohrid, denoted as L 8, is significant in regard to Polog being mentioned for the first time in the sources.

The letter is not dated and scientifically it is very difficult to establish exactly when it was written. Attempting to do this, at least approximately, we will discuss the oldest report about Polog in the sources. There is no doubt that the letter was written during the time Theophylact was the head of the Ohrid archbishopric, the period at the end of the XI and the beginning of the XII century. Namely, the issue concerning the confirmation of the exact time frame when Theophylact held this position has still not been answered scientifically. In any case, according to the facts based on contemporary historical research, his function as archbishop is dated closest to the time interval between 1089/90 and 1108, and at the latest, in the period between 1081 – beginning of 1082 and 1125 – 1126.⁸ The year when Theophylact wrote the letter should be set within this time frame.

There were several scientific opinions regarding the dating of the letter, opinions according to which the letter was written in the time interval

РОПОЛИТЪ СИМЕОНЪ, 1931: 200, accepted this from him, in which the term “priests from Polog” is translated as “village priests”.

⁷ This explanation was firstly put forward by LEROY-MOLINGHEN, 1938: 260. In the later publications by Theophylact of Ohrid, it is fully accepted, see *ИБИ ХХХ ГИБИ IX/II*, 1994, No. 19: pg. 100; *Théophylacte d'Achrida*, 1986, No. 19: pg. 194-195; *ВИНЈ III*, 1966: 294. Published by MIGNE (*Patrologia Graeca* 126, 1869, 525 (526)), it is explained as “τῶν πολιχνίων”. *МИТРОПОЛИТЪ СИМЕОНЪ*, 1931: 210, accepted this from him.

⁸ On the different opinions regarding the beginning and the end of Théophylact of Ohrid's service on the archbishop throne, see *МИТРОПОЛИТЪ СИМЕОНЪ*, 1931: XIII, XXXII; *ВИНЈ III*, 1966: 258, 261 (КАТИЧИЋ); *ИБИ XIX ГИ-БИ IX/I*, 1974: 5, 7 (МАСЛЕВ). Cf. ПАНОВ, 1985: 33-52, who gives a review of the older literature that deal with this issue.

between 1092/93 and 1107.⁹ A very fortunate circumstance connected with the recipient's name may help to precisely date the letter L 8. In the letter published by Lamius, and presented in the "Patrologiae Graecae", it says that the letter was sent "To the same" (τῷ αὐτῷ),¹⁰ which by itself does not help a lot in determining the recipient's address. However, the previous letter, L 7, is addressed "To sebastos John, son of the sebastokrator" (τῷ σεβαστῷ κυρίῳ Ἰωάννῃ, τῷ υἱῷ τοῦ σεβαστοκράτορος),¹¹ which leads us to believe that the phrase "τῷ αὐτῷ" in letter L 8 refers to the address of the same recipient of letter L 7.

In the later historiographical works, the opinion that prevails is that the mentioned sebastos John, son of the sebastokrator, actually refers to John Komnenos, the oldest son of sebastokrator Isaac Komnenos.¹² At the time when Theophylact sent him the letter denoted as L 8, he held the position of the Duke of Durres (Dyrrhachium).¹³ It is known that he succeeded John Doukas, who had ascended to that position after having removed the threat from the Normans.¹⁴

When sebastos John Komnenos became head of the Durres ducate at the end of 1090 and the beginning of 1091, Byzantium was facing a threat

⁹ According to MASLEV (in *ИБИ XIX ГИБИ IX/I*, 1974: 55), the letter was written earlier than 1105; Katicic (in *ВИНЈ III*, 1966: 292) dated it "around 1106-1107"; GAUTIER, (in *Théophylacte d'Achrida*, 1986: 51-52) dates it 1092 or 1093; Iliev (in *ИБИ XXX ГИБИ IX/II*, 1994: 92, note 1) dates it after the spring of 1093.

¹⁰ *Patrologia Graeca* 126, 1869: (515) 516. See also, МИТРОПОЛИТЪ СИМЕОНЪ, 1931: 200; *Théophylacte d'Achrida*, 1986, No. 12: pg. (166) 167; *ИБИ XXX ГИБИ IX/II*, 1994, No. 12: pg. 92; *ВИНЈ III*, 1966: 292.

¹¹ *Patrologia Graeca* 126, 1869: 513 (514). See also, *Théophylacte d'Achrida*, 1986, No. 11: pg. (160) 161; *ИБИ XXX ГИБИ IX/II*, 1994, No. 11, pg. 90; *ВИНЈ III*, 1966: 291.

¹² See АЦИЕВСКИ, 1994: 95-96, note 85, by indicating the researchers who promote this opinion, but also those who have different approaches regarding this issue.

¹³ It is believed that archbishop Theophylact wrote 8 (*ИБИ XIX ГИБИ IX/I*, 1974, 49 (МАСЛЕВ), or 9 letters (*Théophylacte d'Achrida*, 1986: 48-53 (GAUTIER) to sebastos John.

¹⁴ *Anne Comnène* (ed. Leib). Tome II, 1943: 115, 15-16. See: ФЕРЛУГА, 1986: 103; CHALANDON, 1971: 143; ЗЛАТАРСКИ II, 1994: 220; ΖΑΚΥΘΕΝΟΥ, 1942: 216.

from Tzachas, the Seljuk emir of Smyrna, who allied himself with the Pechenegs and fought for Constantinople by sea and land. At that time the Emperor Alexios I Komnenos sent for John, the Duke of Durres, and after he had bestowed on him the title of Grand Duke, he named him the leader of the Byzantine army to fight against Tzachas. In the meantime, he named John Komnenos administrator of the strategically significant Durres ducate, and he held this position until the middle of 1091.¹⁵ The scientific historical research has so far shown that the latter held this position only temporarily in the years 1091, 1092 and 1093.¹⁶ According to the research conducted by K. Adjievski, who relied on the reports by Anna Komnene, John Komnenos kept his position for 11 years, and the final replacement of John Doukas by John Komnenos happened in 1093.¹⁷

¹⁵ Anna Komnene reports on these events (*Anne Comnène* (ed. Leib)). Tome II, 1943: 115, 20-27; 133, 11-134, 20; 147, 16-20; *Анна Комнина*, 1965: 221; 231-232, 540, note 824 and note 828; 240 (ЛЮБАРСКИ); *ВИНЈ* III, 1966: 384, and note 30 (КРЕКИЊ). Regarding the dating, see ЗАКІΘΕΝΟΥ, 1942: 217; FERLUGA, 1986: 103; ОСТРОГОРСКИ, 1992: 432; АЦИЕВСКИ, 1994: 104. Compare with P. Gautier (GAUTIER, 1970: 5, 9-14), according to whom the replacement of the leading position in the Durres ducate happened in the spring of 1092. Also see *ИБИ XIX ГИБИ IX/I*, 1974: 51-53 (МАСЛЕВ), taking into consideration the literature offered there with different approaches regarding this issue.

¹⁶ John Komnenos did not conduct the function of a contemporary governor in the above-mentioned years continually, or in other words, the Grand Duke John Doukas returned to the position as head of the Durres ducate at least twice. This may be concluded from Anna Komnene's reports (see *Anne Comnène* (ed. Leib)). Tome II, 1943: 115, 20-27; 157, 21 (note 1) - 158, 25; *Анна Комнина*, 1965: 246, 544, note 857, 546 note 874 (ЛЮБАРСКИ)), as well as Theophylact's letter L 12 (*Patrologia Graeca* 126, 1869: 524; *Theophylacte d'Achrida*, 1986: 57, 152, 186; *ВИНЈ* III, 1966: 267, note 31 (КАТИЧИЊ)). In the later literature, this issue is especially dealt with by АЦИЕВСКИ, 1994: 94-95, note 83, 104-105; *ИБИ XIX ГИБИ IX/I*, 1974: 52 (МАСЛЕВ).

¹⁷ *Anne Comnène* (ed. Leib). Tome II, 1943: 115, 15-16). Cf. АЦИЕВСКИ, 1994: 107-108. Ferluga (ФЕРАУТА, 1986: 118) incorrectly indicates that John Doukas was the head of the Durres ducate for ten years, whereas, Chalandon (CHALANDON, 1971: 143) doubts this fact, indicating that from 1085, when John Doukas came to Durres, until his replacement, less than eleven years had passed.

John Komnenos remained at his position until Emperor Alexios I Komnenos started preparations for the defense from the Normans in the first decade of the XII century. Namely, according to Anna Komnene's reports, soon after his arrival in Thessaloniki in September 1105, the Byzantine Emperor fortified Durres and most probably at the end of 1105-beginning of 1106 he assigned Alexios, the second son of sebastokrator Isaak, as its governor.¹⁸

What is important for us is the fact that sebastos John Komnenos, being head of the Durres ducate, as its administrator (1091–1093 or up until 1095–1096), or as its governor (1095–1106), as the legal ruler of this administrative region, then, had great big power, as well as support from the central authorities in conducting certain activities he thought were necessary for the better functioning of the ducate. Holding this position, he was able to get different documents of requirements, appeals and complaints from his subordinates in the Durres ducate in the interval between 1090/1091 and 1105/1106.

According to the above-mentioned, the most extensive time interval during which sebastos John held the position as Duke of Durres is between 1090/1091 and 1105/1106. If we compare this to the period when Theophylact was on the archbishop's throne in Ohrid, it is possible to assume that the letter L 8 came into existence during any of the years in the period between 1091 and 1105.

Bearing in mind the time interval during which sebastos John conducted this function, as compared to the period when Theophylact was archbishop, the time frame in regard to the dating of the letter L 8 narrows down even more.

¹⁸ *Anne Comtène* (ed. Leib). Tome III, 1945: 65, 12-21. Also see Ana Komnina (*Анна Комнина*, 1965: 237; *ВИНЈ* III, 1966: 389-390. There are different opinions regarding when the replacement of John Komnenos occurred, whether it was after his defeat by the Serbs in 1106 (ФЕРАУТА, 1986: 118) or before that (*ИБИ XIX ГИБИ IX/I*, 1974: 52 (МАСЛЕВ), with older literature regarding this issue; АЦИЕВСКИ, 1994: 108-109, notes 124 and 126, with explanations and indications on the scientific approaches regarding the above-mentioned replacement of the head position of the Durres ducate). The opinions concerning the replacement in 1107 (ΖΑΚΙΘΕΝΟΥ, 1942: 217) or in 1108 (МИТРОПОЛИТЬ СИМЕОНЪ, 1931: 185) are considered invalid and are rejected.

If we apply the method of comparing the data that may be found in the letter and the events that took place in Byzantium during that period, it seems that we may even come closer to the relative historical truth about the exact year when the letter was written. Here we are making a reference to the intention that John Komnenos, the Duke of Durres, had to usurp the Constantinople throne, an event recorded by the Byzantine author Anna Komnene, as well as the indications for a conspiracy that existed in the text of letter L 8.

In her work “Alexiad”, in which Anna Komnene describes the events that happened in 1091, she also reports that after her father Alexios I Komnenos arrived in Philippopolis, he received a letter “τοῦ... ἀρχιεπισκόπου Βουλγαρίας” in which he was informed by the archbishop that the governor of Durres, his nephew John Komnenos, son of Isaak sebastokrator, was plotting a coup d’état over Constantinople. This was the reason why the Emperor wrote the letter inviting the sebastos to come to Philippopolis, in this way to express his loyalty to the Byzantine Emperor, as well as to rebut the accusations made regarding his name, which would show that they were not true and would prove that they were slander against him.¹⁹ Defining the precise time when this event happened would offer a *terminus post quem* when Theophylact’s letter L 8 was written, especially because of its connection to the indicated event²⁰, which will be discussed later in this paper.

Although the name of the archbishop who informed Alexios I Komnenos is not recorded by Anna Komnene, there is no doubt that the mentioned archbishop is Theophylact, knowledge enabled by the latest scientific achievements in history.²¹

¹⁹ *Anna Comnène* (ed. Leib). Tome II, 1943: 147, 17-148, 17; 150, 4-6; 150, 29-151, 16. Also see *Анна Комнина*, 1965: 240-242; *ВИНУ* III, 1966: 384-385 (КРЕКИЊ), in which there is a text about Theophylact’s denouncement, as well as the content of the Emperor’s letters written to the Duke of Durres and the citizens of Durres.

²⁰ Historiography offers two dates concerning the time this event happened: 1091 (*МИТРОПОЛИТЪ СИМЕОНЪ*, 1931: 201; *ВИНУ* III, 1966: 384 (КРЕКИЊ)); and 1093 (*Théophylacte d'Achrida*, 1986: 49-50 (GAUTIER); *ИБИ XXX ГИБИ IX/II*, 1994, No. 12, pg. 92, note 1 (ИЛИЕВ)).

²¹ *Анна Комнина*, 1965: 544, note 852 (ЛЮБАРСКИ); *ВИНУ* III, 1966: 384, note 29 (КРЕКИЊ); *Théophylacte d'Achrida*, 1986: 49.

The facts in the text in the letter L 8 may confirm that it was indeed Theophylact. In the part of the letter in which Theophylact asks the Polog priests to be released from paying certain taxes inappropriate for the clergy, it seems that he wants to indicate that by some previous unwisely act on his behalf aimed directly at harming the image of the recipient of the letter – sebastos John, he is the only one to be blamed for this.²² Namely, because of Theophylact's writing in the first person plural "if we had declined your glory and if out of imprudence we had dishonored your work" (Εἰ μὲν ἡγροικίσαμεθα τι πρὸς τὴν σὴν δόξαν ἡμεῖς, καὶ τὸ γεγονός ἀγαθὸν διὰ ἀγνωμοσύνην κατεμολύναμεν),²³ the recipient of the letter should not forget the benevolence that the church had expressed so far. It is most probable that this excursion in the letter L 8 could be connected to the events of the denunciation of the archbishop with the Emperor and to damage the reputation of John Komnene's name, who is the sender of the indicated letter. Theophylact's words are full of repentance, a feeling of guilt, even self-reprimand. This is even stronger because the anger of the Duke of Durres, sebastos John, was not aimed only towards Theophylact, but generally towards the reduction of the privileges of the Ohrid archbishopric, in this case through imposed taxes for the clergy, who, according to the church authorities, were inappropriate for the priests.

At the same time, Metropolitan Symeon pointed out that if the context of the two preceding letters, L 6 and L 7, addressed to sebastos John, is analysed and compared to the text of letter L 8, it would be possible to see that Theophylact's mood in the first two letters differs from his mood in the third mentioned letter.²⁴ This kind of conclusion may be withdrawn only if letters L 6 and L 7 had been written earlier than letter L 8. A very good tone prevails in the first two letters regarding the Duke of Durres, whereas, in the next letter, analysed above in the indicated part, there is a request for reducing the intolerance of the recipient towards the Ohrid archbishop and

²² *Théophilacte d'Acbrida*, 1986: 167, note 5 (GAUTIER); *ИБИ XXX ГИБИ IX/II*, 1994, No. 12: pg. 92, note 5 (ИЛИЕВ); ЗЛАТАРСКИ, 1994: 318.

²³ *Patrologia Graeca* 126, 1869: (515) 516-517 (518); *Théophilacte d'Acbrida*, 1986, No. 12: pg. 166-167; *ИБИ XXX ГИБИ IX/II*, 1994, No. 12: pg. 92; МИТРОПОЛИТЪ СИМЕОНЪ, 1931: 200; *ВИНЈ III*, 1966: 293.

²⁴ МИТРОПОЛИТЪ СИМЕОНЪ, 1931: 197-198. We could take the same direction in discussing the letters Theophylact sent to the Duke of Durres after letter L 8, see МИТРОПОЛИТЪ СИМЕОНЪ, 1931: 202.

his clergy by restitution of the previous *status quo* situation. This, at the same time, seems to be an attempt to put sebastos John Komnenos in a good mood, especially if we take into consideration the gift Theophylact offered the sebastos, one hundred salted fish (ἰχθύας ταρίχους ἑκατόν), no doubt caught in Lake Ohrid.²⁵

In this way we could presume the reconstruction of the events that happened before letter L 8 had been written, from the moment when Theophylact, due to unknown reasons, slandered the Duke of Durres, John Komnenos, to Alexios I Komnenos. Namely, the sebastos, having gone, as soon as possible, to visit the Emperor in Philippopolis in 1091, and managing, with his father's full support, to renew his tottering integrity in front of Alexios I Komnenos²⁶, returned to Durres and started to extract his revenge towards the head of the Ohrid archbishopric by using his creditors to increase the pressure over the clergy. Soon, there appeared serious implications over the church immunity, so the archbishop considered it his responsibility to stop it under the pretext of the dignity of the Polog priests. Taking into consideration the year when this event happened, Theophylact's defamation, the avenging reaction of the sebastos John Komnenos, as well as the requirements in letter L 8, we may believe that the letter was most probably written in the second half / end of 1091, with a time distance of several months regarding the denouncing letter written by the Ohrid archbishop and sent to the Byzantine Emperor.

If we compare the dating of Theophylact's letter (in our opinion, most probably 1091), with the time Anna Komnene's "Alexiad" was written (in 1148), it is unquestionable that letter L 8 was written by the hand of the archbishop Theophylact of Ohrid, and that at the same time it is the oldest evidence in history that proves Polog as being recorded in the historical sources.

To be more precise, regarding the dating of the first records concerning Polog in the sources, if we decide not to take 1091 as the exact year because of the different historiographical interpretations regarding the dating of the letter, we could, nevertheless, offer the first half of the last decade of

²⁵ *Patrologia Graeca* 126, 1869: 517 (518); *Théophylacte D'Achrida*, 1986, No. 12: pg. (168) 169; *ИБИ XXX ГИБИ IX/II*, 1994, No. 12: pg. 93; *МИТРОПОЛИТЬ СИМЕОНЪ*, 1931: 201; *ВИНЈ III*, 1966: 294.

²⁶ *Anne Comnène* (ed. Leib). II, 1943: 149, 7-151, 16. *Анна Комнина*, 1965: 241-242.

the XI century as a period which could be connected to Polog as being reported on for the first time in the sources, and this could be found in the above-mentioned letter by Theophylact, denoted as L 8.

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