

Der den Kordax tanzt

Hommage an Johannes Koder
und seine Forschungen über Byzanz und den Balkan

herausgegeben von

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Theophylact, the Archbishop of Ohrid, and the First Crusade (1096–1099)

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The First Crusade has a great scholarly significance from a number of viewpoints of the medieval history of Europe and the Balkans. In one of our earlier papers, included in the edited volume published on the occasion of Johannes Koder's 75th birthday¹, we focused on the issue of how the city of Ohrid and the *Via Egnatia* were affected by the First Crusade according to Western sources.² However, in the treasure trove of information found in the preserved letters to/from Theophylact, the Archbishop of Ohrid, there are rare fragments about the passing of the crusaders through Macedonia or, more specifically, through some of the eparchies of the Ohrid Archbishopric. This information is all the more important bearing in mind that it was from Ohrid that Theophylact observed the situation on a broad territory during the crusaders' passage. Those were impressions and observations of a representative of Byzantium's highest ecclesiastical stratum. Bringing the information in the letters to/from Theophylact, as Byzantine sources, in connection with the already analysed Western sources is seminal as by doing so a comprehensive picture is put together in the interpretation of the available sources that largely concern Ohrid/Macedonia and the First Crusade.

We are now going to focus on probably the earliest piece of information in Theophylact's letters directly connected with the passing of the crusaders of the First Crusade through the eparchies of the Ohrid Archbishopric. Addressing the bi-

¹ Space, Landscapes and Settlements in Byzantium. Studies in Historical Geography of the Eastern Mediterranean Presented to Johannes Koder, ed. A. KÜLZER, M. ST. POPOVIĆ (*Studies in Historical Geography and Cultural Heritage* 1). Vienna–Novi Sad 2017.

² T. FILIPOSKI, The *Via Egnatia*, Ohrid and the First Crusade (1096–1097) according to Western Sources, in: Space, Landscapes and Settlements in Byzantium. Studies in Historical Geography of the Eastern Mediterranean Presented to Johannes Koder, ed. A. KÜLZER, M. ST. POPOVIĆ (*Studies in Historical Geography and Cultural Heritage* 1). Vienna–Novi Sad 2017, 113–130.

shop of Kitros (today Palio Kitros, Northern Greece)³ in writing, after a certain break in their communication, in a significantly large part of his letter Theophylact elaborates the two reasons that led to the hiatus. The first reason was “the passing of the Franks or the encroachment or I don’t know how else to call it, which affected us so strongly that we even lost sense of ourselves.” The second reason was that Theophylact was unable to find a messenger he could trust to send his letters. He explains that people wish to receive letters everyday, but, when it comes to sending and delivering letters to those they wrote the letters for, they are so incompetent as though their hands are tied. “But since we have already grown accustomed to the Franks’ evildoing and bear what they do easier than before – because time is a good teacher of everything – we are sometimes our own masters.” Theophylact then goes on to report that he eventually managed to find a safe letter deliverer and tells the bishop who he is.⁴

Scholars have been absolutely right to date the letter to 1097.⁵ It was undoubtedly written towards the end of the passing of several crusader armies through Macedonia or immediately afterwards. As it is assumed that some of the last crusader armies, led by Duke Robert of Normandy and Count Stephen of Blois and Chartres, passed by Ohrid and through Macedonia in April 1097, the letter was probably written at about that time.⁶

In his letter to the bishop of Kitros, in which he states his reasons for having to suspend temporarily his written communication with him, Theophylact shares information about the conduct of the crusaders (Franks) as they passed by Ohrid and elsewhere in Macedonia. What strikes the eye is that Theophylact is uncer-

³ P. SOUSTAL, mit Beiträgen von A. PÜLZ und unter Mitwirkung von M. ST. POPOVIĆ, Makedonien, südlicher Teil (*Tabula Imperii Byzantini* 11), 573–576 (headword Kitros).

⁴ Théophylacte d’Achrida, *Lettres*. Introduction, texte, traduction et notes par P. GAUTIER (*CFHB* 16/2). Thessalonique 1986, 302–305 (in the following: Theophyl. Achr., Ep.); *Grčki izvori za bālgarskata istorija* IX/2. Sofija 1994, 132f. (in the following: *GIBI*). Theophylact uses the term “Franks” to refer in general to the population of the Western European countries, largely the Normans and the other medieval ethnic groups of France, Germany, Italy, etc., of whose members the crusader army consisted of.

⁵ Theophyl. Achr., Ep. 302. Radoslav Katičić needlessly suggests a broader chronology for the letter dating it to 1096–1097. Cf. *Vizantiski izvori za istoriju naroda Jugoslavije* I–IV, VI. Beograd 1955–1986, III 271 (in the following: *Viz. Izv.*).

⁶ FILIPOSKI, *The Via Egnatia* 113f., 121, 130; K. GAGOVA, *Krāstonosnite pohodi i Srednovekovna Bālgarija*. Sofija 2004, 23.

tain how to define the crusaders' temporary presence, whether as *passing* (what it was initially meant to be) or *encroachment, advance* (what it eventually turned out to be). In any case, the way Theophylact reports about the events needs to be brought in connection with the Western authors' information on the conflicts that the crusaders had on their way with the Byzantine army and their mercenaries⁷ or with the information on the looting that the crusaders did.⁸

Theophylact's letter reveals that during the crusaders' passing (1096–1097), the situation in Ohrid and beyond was unfavourable mostly in terms of the fact that the people's movement was restricted and the Macedonian cities grew increasingly deficient of material and human resources.

In regard to the second reason, Theophylact's inability to find a safe and trustworthy letter deliverer, although it was a technical reason, it directly stemmed from and represented a consequence of the first reason – the crusaders' encroachment. The circumstances were such that during those several months of the crusader armies' passing the circulation of letters was either riddled with difficulties or discontinued altogether. That is why Theophylact, although mildly, reproaches nonetheless the people he maintains correspondence with saying that, while being fond of receiving letters, they find it hard to respond owing to the unstable security situation. However, he did have understanding for their actions. In the context of that understanding and finding of excuses, he stresses that by the time of the writing of certain letters they have learned to endure more easily than before the evildoing of the Franks (crusaders) because, he says, time is the teacher of everything. More specifically, the reference here is to the relatively short period of time during which the crusader armies passed through Macedonia and to the fact that, while in the beginning (autumn of 1096) they were not accustomed to and were probably surprised by the crusaders' hosti-

⁷ K. ADŽIEVSKI, Prvot krstonosen pohod i Pelagonija. *Godišen Zbornik na Filozofskiot Fakultet na Univerzitetot „Sv. Kiril i Metodij“* 19 (45) (Skopje 1992) 73–81, here 75f.; T. S. ASBRIDGE, *The First Crusade: A New History*. Oxford 2004, 105; M. BOŠKOSKI, *Makedonija vo XI i XII vek – nadvorenšni upadi na teritorijata na Makedonija*. Skopje 1997, 141–148; FILIPOSKI, *The Via Egnatia* 116–120; GAGOVA, *Krāstonosnite pohodi* 22, 32; R. GRUSE, *Istorija na Krāstonosnite pohodi i Ierusalimskoto kralstvo*. Tom I, čast I. Sofija 2008, 122; G. OSTROGORSKI, *Istorija Vizantije*. Beograd 1959, 342.

⁸ ASBRIDGE, *The First Crusade* 106; BOŠKOSKI, *Makedonija* 151–159; GAGOVA, *Krāstonosnite pohodi* 19, 28.

lities, by the time the passing of the crusader armies was over (spring of 1097), Theophylact and the population of Macedonia had grown used to what they were doing.

It is about this part of Theophylact's letter that B. Panov offers a completely different interpretation. In his opinion, although the Franks are mentioned in the context of the crusaders' passing, the part of the letter where it is stressed that Theophylact and the population of Macedonia grew accustomed to the hostilities and endured the evildoing more easily than before refers in fact to the Normans' invasions of the 1080s.⁹ We believe that this claim is groundless. For unknown reasons, when quoting the whole letter, the aforementioned scholar omits the preceding sentence¹⁰, in which Theophylact mildly reproaches the people he maintains correspondence with for wanting to receive letters and for not doing enough to arrange the sending of letters back. It is only now that the sentence comes about their having grown accustomed to the Franks' hostilities and their being capable of coping better than before with these people's evildoing, which mostly refers to the difficulties that appeared with the circulation of letters. In other words, we believe that the reference here is to a shorter period of time, probably of several months, during which Theophylact and the people he found it necessary to exchange letters with were unable to communicate in writing as often as they used to or at all.

Citing the same information of the letter elsewhere, B. Panov completely arbitrarily assumes that when the Franks are mentioned only the Norman crusaders should be implied. And so without reference to any sources, he concludes that the crusaders led by Bohemond "looted and killed in Ohrid and the neighbouring areas," about which, he says, a number of Latin authors, some of whom were direct participants in the campaign like Peter Tudebode, also wrote.¹¹

While on the one hand the author rightfully appears to be abandoning his earlier expressed opinion that when Theophylact says that the people became accustomed to the Franks' hostilities and endured their evildoing more easily than be-

⁹ B. PANOVA, Teofilakt Ohridski kako izvor za srednovekovnata istorija na makedonskiot narod, in: *Srednovekovna Makedonija 2*. Skopje 1985, 5–446, here 362, n. 420.

¹⁰ PANOVA, Teofilakt Ohridski 362.

¹¹ B. PANOVA, Ohrid i Ohridsko vo periodot na razvieni ot feudalizam, in: *Ohrid i Ohridsko niz istorijata I*. Skopje 1985, 199–268, here 213f.

fore he in fact has the Normans' invasions of the 1080s in mind, on the other hand this author offers again new considerations that cannot be underpinned with any sources. First of all, when the Franks are mentioned in Theophylact's letter, it is not clear at all if he meant only the Norman crusaders or some other Western crusader army. Moreover, in the academic community there is a prevailing opinion that the crusader army led by Bohemond did not pass anywhere near Ohrid and the surrounding areas, neither did it affect the city in any way.¹² That is why citing information from Theophylact's letter and certain non-existing information by Western authors in order to prove that the crusaders led by Bohemond looted and killed in Ohrid and the neighbouring areas appears utterly arbitrary and fully in contradiction to the available sources.¹³

In another letter that Theophylact wrote to the bishop of Devol about the successfully completed Christianisation of certain Armenians, especially intriguing is the part where Theophylact thanks the bishop for having sent/given as a present to the Archbishopric his only horse although he was robbed by his "supposed friends".¹⁴

The presented piece of information in the academic community was enough for some to assume that the "supposed friends" were in fact the crusaders. According to some scholars, during their journey, the supposed friends, or the crusaders, looted the Devol bishopric and Ohrid's surrounding area.¹⁵ M. Boškovski fully accepts this assumption and goes on to claim that through the Byzantine piece of information we learn how the crusaders treated the residents of Ohrid and the surrounding areas, focusing thereby on the part of the source where details are provided of the passing of the crusader army led by Raymond of Toulouse.¹⁶

¹² ADŽIEVSKI, Prvot krstonosen pohod 78; ASBRIDGE, *The First Crusade* 105f.; BOŠKOSKI, *Makedonija* 133–136; FILIPOSKI, *The Via Egnatia* 113–115; GAGOVA, *Krāstonosnite pohodi* 19.

¹³ FILIPOSKI, *The Via Egnatia* 114f.

¹⁴ Theophyl. *Achr.*, Ep. 178–181.

¹⁵ Mitropolit SIMEON, *Pismata na Teofilakta Ohridski, arhiepiskop bālgarski. Sbornik na BAN XXVII/15* (Sofija 1931) 1–280, here 206f., n. 1; *Viz. Izv.* III 272, n. 53.

¹⁶ BOŠKOSKI, *Makedonija* 156. We have already said that the army led by Raymond of Toulouse, when moving along the *Via Egnatia* (Dyrrhachion–Pelagonia), probably passed by Ohrid. However, there is no information about it in the reports of the main source on this campaign (Ray-

It appears that the dating of the letter is very problematic. The proponents of the thesis that the handing of the horse over happened during the crusaders' passing/encroachment understandably date the letter to 1096–1097, while P. Gautier dates it with some reserve to 1093–1094.¹⁷ According to I. G. Iliev, the letter cannot be dated accurately.¹⁸

A question emerges of whether there are enough substantiated arguments to assert that the "supposed friends" were the crusaders and to consequently date the letter to 1096–1097, particularly taking into consideration that the claim is not at all tenable that the aforesaid piece of information reportedly discloses how the crusaders behaved towards the residents of Ohrid and the surrounding areas. This is definitely not the impression one gets and such a conclusion cannot be drawn. The claim that this piece of information in fact implies how the crusaders led by Raymond of Toulouse behaved appears not to be substantiated and acceptable enough, either.

Among Theophylact's letters that have not been accurately dated there is one part of which may be brought in connection with the passing of the crusaders. In this letter that Archbishop Theophylact sent to the anonymous son of the Byzantine *sebastokrator* (Isaac), who is usually identified as John Komnenos, the governor (*doux*) of Dyrrhachion, the calamity having befallen the Devol bishopric and the devastation wreaked by the "dreaded vandals" is described. This is why help is sought from the anonymous addressee – the governor of Dyrrhachion.¹⁹

According to E. Koycheva, the "dreaded vandals" that Theophylact mentions and that made the population of the Devol bishopric flee are the crusaders and the Devol bishopric just happened to be on their route.²⁰ Bearing this in mind, it transpires that the letter should in fact be dated to 1096–1097.

mond of Aguilers), nor is there any information about how the crusaders behaved towards the residents of Ohrid. Cf. FILIPOSKI, The *Via Egnatia* 115–118.

¹⁷ Theophyl. Achr., Ep. 178.

¹⁸ *GIBI* IX/2, 95, n. 1.

¹⁹ Theophyl. Achr., Ep. 202–205.

²⁰ E. KOJČEVA, *Pärvite krästonosni pohodi na Balkanite*. Sofija 2004, 61. When the letter is quoted, a certain imprecision can be noted. While the letter to the governor of Dyrrhachion is largely correctly cited, in the end a sentence has been inserted and made to appear as though a genuine part of it. It was in fact taken from another letter addressed to the bishop of Devol, which, however, is not quoted.

On the other hand, some scholars believe that the letter should be dated to about 1107 and that it was written during the Normans' last advance into the Balkans (1107–1108) led by Bohemond of Taranto.²¹ This would mean that the description in the letter pertains to a later event and that the "dreaded vandals" were in fact the Normans and not the crusaders.

Among scholars there are also other completely opposing views on the dating of the letter. According to P. Gautier, the letter should be dated to 1092–1093,²² while I. G. Iliev allows for a fairly long time span when dating it, which is the period when, according to him, a governor of Dyrrhachion was John Komnenos (1092–1106).²³

Although he allows for a longer time span, I. G. Iliev's opinion appears quite intriguing with a correction though to the period during which, he believed, the aforementioned member of the Komnenos family served as governor of Dyrrhachion. In fact, this is an issue about which scholars have long had conflicting opinions. We find the opinion according to which John Komnenos uninterruptedly filled the office of permanent governor of the theme of Dyrrhachion from 1095/1096 to 1105/1106 to be the most acceptable.²⁴

If this opinion is justifiably accepted, in which case I. G. Iliev's view needs to be corrected, the suggestions that the letter was sent to John Komnenos either in 1092–1093 or in 1107 should perhaps be discarded, because someone else was governor of Dyrrhachion at that time. In the light of this, E. Koycheva's theory, according to which in a fairly large part of the letter the crusaders' actions in the Devol bishopric are in fact described, becomes more relevant. In other words, it is becoming somewhat clearer that in 1096–1097, when several crusader armies passed through Macedonia, John Komnenos had already been assigned governor of Dyrrhachion.

In analysing this issue, a question is posed of whether the "dreaded vandals" that ravaged the Devol bishopric, mentioned in the undated letter to the governor of Dyrrhachion, are in fact the "supposed friends" that plundered, men-

²¹ Viz. Izv. III 295, n. 218.

²² Theophyl. Achr., Ep. 202.

²³ *GIBI* IX/2, 102, n. 1.

²⁴ K. ADŽIEVSKI, *Pelagonija vo sredniot vek (od doseluvanjeto na Slovenite do pagjanjeto pod turska vlast)*. Skopje 1994, 103–109.

tioned in Theophylact's letter to the bishop of Devol?²⁵ Is this in fact the same event and are these two seemingly different groups of people in fact the crusaders? It is genuinely hard to answer these questions. However, a certain amount of probability does exist.

If we suppose that it was the crusaders that ravaged the Devol bishopric, a very complex question emerges of which one of the crusader armies could have done it? It appears that the severe consequences, probably of the passing of the crusaders, described in the letter, should be restricted to the Devol bishopric because Theophylact seeks help from the governor of Dyrrhachion only for this bishopric and not for any other and not for Ohrid. E. Koycheva decided to quote the letter in the context of the passing of the crusader army led by Bohemond without clarifying though if the described state was the immediate consequence of this army's passing.²⁶

We learn from the sources that the next very large crusader army led by Raymond of Toulouse crossed the distance from Dyrrhachion to Constantinople by land. The main part of the army most probably moved along the chief route of the *Via Egnatia*, the most significant road at the time. We have already discussed elsewhere what difficulties the crusader army faced, while crossing this distance. It is believed that they were ambushed and attacked by Byzantine soldiers and mercenaries, as described by the Western authors, in retaliation for the looting and ravaging that they did as they passed mostly to make up for their shortage of food.²⁷

On the other hand, it seems that in order to pass through the Devol bishopric, some crusaders had to turn off the main route of the *Via Egnatia*. As the army was very large, some of them probably took the less important road along the Devol river and it was because of this that the Devol bishopric became so affected. However, this opinion has to remain in the realm of assumptions as no evidence whatsoever has yet been found in the sources.²⁸

²⁵ See footnote 13.

²⁶ KOJČEVA, Pärvite krästonosni pohodi 61.

²⁷ BOŠKOSKI, Makedonija 145, 156; FILIPOSKI, The *Via Egnatia* 116–120.

²⁸ GRUSE, Istorija na Krästonosnite pohodi 122, thinks that the army led by Raymond of Toulouse, moving through Macedonia by land from West to East, passed through Devol, Pelagonia, Ostro-

On the other hand, only in Fulcher of Chartres's description of the passing of the crusader army led by Duke Robert of Normandy and Count Stephen of Blois and Chartres is the Daemonis river (perhaps the Devol river) mentioned, which could lead one to think that at least a part of the army was to blame for the atrocities described in the aforementioned letter on a broader territory of the Devol bishopric.²⁹ However, scholars rightfully remark that in reference to this crusader army the Western sources report only about its passing through Macedonia, while providing no information whatsoever about any clashes between the crusaders and the Byzantine troops or about any looting that the crusaders might have committed.³⁰ It is worth noting though that the description that Fulcher of Chartres gives seems fairly credible.

We may conclude that if the hardships the Devol bishopric might have suffered were caused by any of the crusader armies that passed through the Balkans, then it is more probable that it was the army led by Bohemond or parts of the army led by Raymond of Toulouse that did it. It is least probable that the hardships were caused by the army led by Robert of Normandy and Stephen of Blois and Chartres.

However, it is important to note that in 1105/1106 the second son of the *sebastokrator* (Isaac), Alexios Komnenos, succeeded his brother John as governor (*doux*) of Dyrrhachion.³¹ Hence, the possibility exists that Alexios Komnenos could have also been the anonymous addressee of the letter. If that is the case, more relevant becomes the opinion of those who date the letter to about 1107 and bring it in connection with the advance of the Normans of 1107–1108.³²

Most reports of the events related to the First Crusade by contemporary and later Byzantine authors are insufficiently detailed. An exception in this regard is Anna Komnene, the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) and the author of the *Alexiad*, in which among other things she

vo, Voden (Edessa), Ser (Serres), Thessalonica and Christopol (Kavala). However, it remains uncertain what sources he bases his claim on.

²⁹ FILIPOSKI, *The Via Egnatia* 120f., 125–130; GAGOVA, *Krăstonosnite pohodi* 23. Some scholars have a different opinion according to which the Daemonis river is in fact the Shkumbin river.

³⁰ BOŠKOSKI, *Makedonija* 157.

³¹ ADŽIEVSKI, *Pelagonija* 108f.

³² *Viz. Izv.* III 295, n. 218.

writes about what they experienced during the crusaders' passing through Byzantium and in general about the relations between Byzantium and the crusaders during her father's reign. For the most part, her accounts of the events, which are from a broader perspective, coincide with and confirm Theophylact's more specific accounts.³³

³³ Annae Comnenae Alexias, ed. D. R. REINSCH, A. KAMBYLIS (*CFHB* 40/1-2). Berlin-New York 2001, 438-447. Cf. also: *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena*. Translated from Greek by E. R. A. SEWTER. London 1969, 308-368; *Viz. Izv.* III 392f. Interestingly, in the *Alexiad*, the author uses the terms "barbarians", "Latins", "Celts" and "Franks" to refer to the crusaders, that is, the members of the crusader armies in Byzantium.

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