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Under a Heavy Foreign Yoke: The Charge of Latin Oppression in Byzantine Letters after the Fourth Crusade

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Introduction

The 1204 fall of Constantinople to the knights of the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204) was followed by the rapid conquest of most of the former core territories of the Byzantine Empire, both in Europe and in Asia Minor. The newly established Latin Empire and its vassal fiefs, like the Duchy of Athens and Thebes or the Principality of Achaëa, organized their territories according to the Western European feudal norms. The resulting social order was alien to Byzantine traditions in many respects, the upper strata of local societies were largely occupied by Western settlers, and the Orthodox majority became second-class citizens compared to the Catholic minority, leading to numerous grievances among the native populations.

In my paper, I am analysing the portrayals of Latin oppression, be it real or perceived, in the letters of three influential Byzantine Orthodox metropolitan archbishops of the decades following 1204: Michael Choniates, John Apocaucus and Demetrius Chomatenus. The three authors, who knew each other personally, offer remarkable data on elite Byzantine perceptions of the abuses committed by the new order, while providing insight into the similarities and differences of the lived experiences of leading Byzantine intellectuals in the era.

Michael Choniates on Western Autocracy in Attica

In a letter to Euthymius Tornices, Michael Choniates praises his friend for the achievement of having guided noble young children into the light through the Italian and discussion-hating tyranny.¹ The use of the term discussion-hating (μισολόγον) for the governmental system in the Duchy of Athens and Thebes invokes certain entrenched stereotypical images. The Greco-Roman image of the barbarian traditionally included the lack of education, being uncivilised and hostile towards culture, at the very same time affirming perceived Greco-Roman cultural superiority by comparison.²

Such an interpretation is supported by the claim that Tornices educated the local Byzantine youth notwithstanding the rather sorry attitudes of the government, which seems to point well beyond a mere aversion to discussions involving public affairs, which could be another interpretation. Therefore, an intellectual boundary between the Latins and the Byzantines is firmly established, with a definite advantage for the latter side.

However, it is also important that Western rule over the territory is described as tyranny, invoking disturbing images of abuses against its mainly Byzantine subjects. The subjugated majority society of the area is portrayed as the victims of their Western minority rulers, who appear as despotic. Meanwhile, their Byzantine subjects, by their mere victimhood and the lack of any references to similar autocratic tendencies, are implicitly suggested to be better in their attitudes towards governance, allowing the audience to perceive another

1 “... τοὺς εὐγενεῖς τόκους ἐξάγειν εἰς φῶς διὰ τὴν ἰταλικὴν καὶ μισολόγον τυραννίδα, πρὸς ἡμᾶς ὑπεκτιθεταί, ὅσα καὶ βραχυτάτοις”. In Foteini Kolovou (ed.), *Michaelis Choniatae Epistulae*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin – New York 2001, 162.

2 Anthony Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity: Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature. Empire and After*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2013, 10-11.

boundary between the two communities, with the Byzantines occupying the higher ground in this case too.

In another letter, addressed to his nephew, Nicetas (not to be confused with the younger brother of the archbishop of the same name), Choniates wonders why his nephew and certain others hold to Athens, ironically suggesting that they may regard the honey-sweetened juice of Mount Hymettus as the sweetest lotus. It is followed by the complaint that even that juice has turned to the opposite because of the rather bitter Italian tyranny. Choniates closes his train of thought with another rhetorical question, asking what the tyranny of Peisistratus, the one of the Thirties, or the one of the Macedonians is in comparison to that of the Latins.³

These words, of course, should not be understood as an advocacy for democracy from the side of Choniates. Byzantine political ideology was highly critical towards democracy, regarding it as a flawed system, prone to cause mob rule and social upheaval.⁴ However, Byzantine political thinking made a clear distinction between benevolent monarchy and tyranny, praising the former as the optimal form of governance and shunning the latter as an abuse of power. In that, it relied on the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, while it also presented a tendency of labelling disliked foreign rulers as tyrants.⁵

3 “... εἰς τοῦναντίον, οἶμαι, μεταπεποιῶται παρὰ τῆς ἐπιπεσοῦσης τῶν πρόποτε πικροτέρας τυραννίδος ἰταλικῆς.” In F. Kolovou (ed.), *Michaelis Choniatae Epistulae*, 218.

4 For Byzantine views on democracy, see Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium*, Oxford 1976, 305-06; Vasileios Syros, “Between Chimera and Charybdis: Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Views on the Political Organization of the Italian City-States”, in *Journal of Early Modern History* 14 (2010), 451-504, 456; Dimiter Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium (1204-1330)*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2007, 200-202.

5 D. Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium (1204-1330)*, 245-246.

Besides, the word *tyrannos* (τύραννος) had a connotation of power of illegitimate source (for instance, rebellion against the lawful emperor), and also kept its ancient semantics, referring to a ruler, just like the terms *anax* (ἄναξ) and *basileus* (βασιλεύς) but with a special secondary meaning, referring to the harshness of the rule.⁶ Therefore, the comparison of Latin rule over Athens with former, infamous tyrannies that ruled over the ancient city in the past most probably serves the aim to brand the governance of Othon de la Roche (1205–1225), duke of Athens and Thebes.

The reference to the mountain of Hymettus, the range separating Athens from the inner parts of Attica, the classical *Mesogeia*,⁷ similarly signifies the classical erudition of Choniates. In Greek mythology, the Hymettus was proverbially known for its abundant and excellent quality honey, and that symbolism of the mountain survived until the end of the Byzantine Empire.⁸ Choniates also uses this connotation in his epistle.

The source also suggests differences between the Byzantines and the Latins. Italian rule is condemned as tyranny, suggesting an oppressive government, while the Byzantines are the ones suffering the abuses committed by this system. The nature of this alleged tyranny is not described, just like the attitudes of the local Byzantine population towards autocratic political systems.

The former omission allows the possible audience to freely imagine the presumably abhorrent governance of the Latin elite. But the latter

6 Aneta Ilieva, *Frankish Morea (1205-1262). Socio-cultural Interaction between the Franks and the Local Population*, Historical Publications 9, S. D. Basilopoulos, Athens 1991, 119.

7 Johannes Koder, "Hymettos", in Johannes Koder – Friedrich Hild, *Tabula Imperii Byzantini*, vol. 1, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien 1976, 174.

8 Andreas Rhoby, *Reminiszenzen an antike Stätten in der mittel- und spätbyzantinischen Literatur. Eine Untersuchung zur Antikenrezeption in Byzanz*, Peust & Gutschmidt Verlag, Göttingen 2003, 219-220.

one, combined with the bitterly condemning verdict of archbishop Choniates, a member of the local Byzantine community, gives the impression that the oppressed majority would perform better in case its members governed the territory, exacting a less harsh rule. Comparing the two ethnic groups mentioned in this letter, the Byzantines seem to be more temperate in their attitudes towards power, more modest and less prone to abuses than the Latins.

A rather similar expression appears in another letter of Choniates addressed to Theodore I Lascaris (1205-1222). Choniates praises the *archon thematikos* and *sebastos* Chalcutzes, coming from Euripus on the island of Euboea and a Latin-hater, but very friendly towards the Roman state. Still unable to bear the *hybris* of Latin tyranny, he renounced all his belongings, children, homeland, relatives, and chose to depart and risked living somewhere under the rule of the Roman state, rather than staying in the tyrannised homeland and under the Latin hand.⁹

The letter is a recommendation of the refugee Chalcutzes to the emperor. One of its devices is stressing the loyalty of Chalcutzes towards the Byzantine Empire, but his generalised hatred towards the Latins is also underlined. As the emperor cannot be regarded an unjust or unscrupulous ruler, who prefers persons based upon their utility and not caring about their human qualities, the hatred of Chalcutzes, this very strong negative emotion, must be justified for a certain degree and not merely mitigated by his love for the ‘Roman’ Empire.

An indeed, Choniates describes that Chalcutzes has left behind all his belongings and his family because of his inability to tolerate the *hybris* of Latin tyranny anymore and his desire to live under Roman rule. Such sacrifices made by the refugee for these reasons point to a

9 “... ἀνὴρ μισολατίνος εἶπερ τις ἄλλος καὶ τῇ ῥωμαϊκῇ πολιτείᾳ εὐνούστατος· ὃς οὐχ οἷός τε ὄν καὶ εἰσέτι τῆς λατινικῆς τυραννίδος τὴν ὕβριν βασιτάζειν, χαίρειν ἐάσας κτήσιν παντοῖαν.” In F. Kolovou (ed.), *Michaelis Choniatae Epistulae*, 223.

very strong attachment to the Byzantine state on the one hand, but also to a rather harsh Latin autocracy on the other, which was also characterised by extreme arrogance, *hybris*.

It is suggested that the Empire of Nicaea, under a Byzantine government regarded as legitim, should be free, in strong contrast to the island of Euboea, ruled by Latins who usurped control over it, where tyranny holds sway. Therefore, a strong dichotomy is implied between the Byzantine elite of Nicaea, whose rule is free and legitimate, and the Latin elite of Euboea, whose rule is tyrannical and illegitimate.

Meanwhile, the Latins of Euboea are also branded by their boundless arrogance. Such a trait is not mentioned regarding the Nicaeans, who, already standing in contrast to the Latins with respect to tyranny, are easily supposed to be better than the Westerners in this regard too by the audience.

However, it is not the sole version of the story of the refugee archon. In his letter to patriarch Michael Autorianus of Constantinople (1206-1212), Choniates depicts another negative image of perceived Latin autocracy, through another account of the story of Chalcutzes. The archbishop laments that on the island of Euboea, the *pansebastos* Chalcutzes, whom Choniates calls the best among the archons of Chalcis in Euboea, was subject to the common adversity and went under the very heavy yoke of Italian tyranny.¹⁰ When he could not bear this tyranny anymore, he escaped to Nicaean territory, and Choniates asks the patriarch to aid the unfortunate aristocrat.

As Kolovou states, both letters were written in the period between 1208 and 1212, just like a third one, that recommends Chalcutzes to the archbishop of Crete, Nicholas, without mentioning his anti-

10 “... ἐχρήσατο τῇ κοινῇ συμφορᾷ καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ τὸν βαρύτερον τῆς ἰταλικῆς τυραννίδος ὑπέδν κύφωνα.” In F. Kolovou (ed.), *Michaelis Choniatae Epistulae*, 224.

Latin sentiments or even his name.¹¹ This period correlates with major changes in the history of Euboea. In 1205, the island was conquered without any resistance by Boniface of Montferrat, king of Thessalonica. Boniface donated the island to Jacques d'Avesnes, who in turn parted the island among three Veronese noblemen.

These three major vassals, Ravano della Carcere, Pecoraro and Giberto, ruled the island from the death of d'Avesnes in 1206 to 1209, when Ravano achieved sole control. Under Ravano, Venetian influence gradually strengthened, and after his death in 1216, the island was parted between the inheritors of the three original triarchs and the Republic of Venice, while the new triarchs accepted the suzerainty of the Serenissima, establishing *de facto* Venetian rule over Euboea.¹²

These events, resulting in drastic changes in the governance and power-relations of the island, must have been sufficient to convince a Byzantine aristocrat to choose immigration to Roman territory. Choniates also states that it is better to choose the life of a wanderer without fear than being the slave of barbarian brutality at home,¹³ invoking another powerful image of oppression and absence of civilisation.

Choniates designates Chalcutzes as a person hailing from Euripus in his letter to Theodore I Lascaris but identifies him as an *archon* from Chalcis when writing to patriarch Autorianus. Here Choniates

11 See F. Kolovou (ed.), *Michaelis Choniatae Epistulae*, 130. The omission of these details from the letter to archbishop Nicholas is probably connected to the fact that the island was under Venetian rule and, if the letter was intercepted, the consequences could have been very serious for both sender and addressee. Besides, the bearer must have been capable of giving these crucial pieces of information.

12 Johannes Koder, *Negroponte. Untersuchungen zur Topographie und Siedlungsgeschichte der Insel Euboea während der Zeit der Venezianerherrschaft*, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien 1976, 45-46.

13 "... μάλλον ἐλόμενος ἔλκειν βίον μετανάστην σὺν ἀδείᾳ ἢ οἴκοι δουλεύειν βαρβαρικὴν θηριότητα." In F. Kolovou (ed.), *Michaelis Choniatae Epistulae*, 225.

clearly demonstrates his classical erudition. Euripus and Chalcis are the very same settlement. Chalcis was the original name of the town, but, from the 6/7th centuries, it fell from use, and after that the town was known as Euripus, and the name Chalcis was used only in a classicising context.¹⁴

Turning towards the image of the Latins in the second account of the story, it is notable that tyranny is stressed once again, but this time not the image of *hybris*, but that of a yoke accompanies the charge. Being a powerful symbol of servitude, it greatly stresses this aspect of Latin rule, which could have been the more outrageous regarding the fact that an *archon* had to suffer such an abusive regime.

As Chalcutzes escaped from this Latin tyranny to the Empire of Nicaea, the Nicaean system of governance is supposed to be considerably better. It all points to a marked difference between the Latins, who establish tyrannical rule comparable to a yoke, and the Byzantines, who organised a state in Nicaea where such abuses are thought to be absent.

Tyranny also appears in another context. In a letter to George the *sebastos*, who can be identified as Georgios, archbishop of Corcyra and the nephew of Choniates,¹⁵ Michael Choniates exclaims how much the Romans were enriched in bad things. It was not enough to be under the tyranny of foreigners and to be appointed to the rank of slaves, but to so much pain of their wounds, this one adds more, who is allegedly a compatriot, whose very person's flame ran over great parts of Hellas and the Peloponnesus before the Italian onslaught,

14 Johannes Koder, „Euripos“, in Johannes Koder – Friedrich Hild (ed.), *Tabula Imperii Byzantini*, vol. 1, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien 1976, 156-158, 156.

15 Hans-Georg Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich*, vol. 2, Beck, München 1977, 702.

and the brands burn after the attack.¹⁶ Later in the same letter, he expounds how the Italians besieged the city of the tyrant of Nauplia.¹⁷

The tyrant of Nauplia referred to in the letter can be identified with the infamous Byzantine magnate, Leo Sgurus,¹⁸ *de facto* ruler of the North-eastern Peloponnesus and later the third son-in-law of the dethroned ex-emperor Alexius III Angelus (1195-1203). Sgurus took hostage and later, while he was already under Latin siege in the Acrocorinth, the citadel of Corinth, murdered the son of Georgios the *sebastos*, merely for breaking a glass at his table while serving the dishes.¹⁹ The boy was a relative of Choniates, and it is worth to mention that Choniates himself was threatened by Sgurus in 1204, when the magnate tried to attach Attica to his domains, and the besieged city of Athens was successfully defended against him by the archbishop.²⁰

Therefore, Choniates had more than enough personal motivation to display the imminent defeat of Sgurus in the hands of the Latin forces as a rightful judgment over him for his actions. At the very same time, the author is maybe using an ancient *topos* for the events. Barbarians had been portrayed in Greco-Roman culture as the tools of divine punishment since Classical Antiquity.

16 “Οἱμοι, ὅτι ἐπλουτίσθημεν ἐν τοῖς κακοῖς. Οὐκ ἀπέχρησεν ἡμῖν τὸ ὑπ’ ἀλλοφύλων τυραννεῖσθαι καὶ ὡς ἐν ἀνδραπόδων μοίρα τάττεσθαι, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τὸ τόσον ἄλγος τῶν ἡμετέρων τραυμάτων καὶ ὁ τάχα ὁμοεθνῆς οὗτος προστίθησιν, οὐπερ ἡ φλόξ μὲν πρὸ τῆς ἰταλικῆς ἐφόδου τὰ πολλὰ τῆς Ἑλλάδος κατενεμήσατο καὶ Πελοποννήσου, οἱ δ’ ἄνθρακες μετὰ τὴν ἔφοδον ἐπικάουσι.” In F. Kolovou, *Michaelis Choniatae Epistulae*, 139.

17 “... τῶν καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἐκκλησιῶν ἀπεληλάμεθα, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦτο γε τὸ μέρος πολὺ τοῦ Ναυπλιώτου τυράννου διήνεγκαν Ἴταλοι καὶ ὅσον θανάτου, καὶ τούτου βιαίου, διοίσει φυγή.” In F. Kolovou (ed.), *Michaelis Choniatae Epistulae*, 139.

18 For a summary of the activities of Leo Sgurus, see A. Ilieva, *Frankish Morea (1205-1262)*, 108-134.

19 Anthony Kaldellis, *The Christian Parthenon. Classicism and Pilgrimage in Byzantine Athens*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009, 164.

20 For the conflict between Choniates and Sgurus, see Judith Herrin, *Realities of Byzantine Provincial Government: Hellas and Peloponnesos, 1180-1205*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 29 (1975), 253-284, 265-266.

Even more remarkable is the circumstance that Choniates suggests that Sgurus is partly responsible for the quick capitulations of the inhabitants of Attica, Boeotia, and Chalcis to the crusaders, because he was a worse tyrant than the Latins, who are judged in comparison to him.

Evidence for that is that nobody from cities, which are serving to the Italians, escaped to him – that is, to Sgurus –, who hails from the same people, because this meant nothing else but fleeing from smoke and falling into fire.²¹

The reasons behind the relative swiftness of the Latin conquest following the Sack of Constantinople in the Aegean are still vehemently debated by historians, most of them seeing it as a result of demoralisation caused by the shock of the fall of the capital.²² The Byzantine contemporaries themselves tended to explain it with divine punishment for their own grave sins.²³ In the case of the letter of Michael Choniates, as he writes about the events in Central Greece and the Peloponnesus, the concept of sin dominates his description, but the main blame is on Leo Sgurus, and implicitly on his loyalists, whose evil deeds made his rule less acceptable for the Byzantine population than the Latin domination. This interpretation provides at least an excuse for the behaviour of common Byzantine citizens.

Besides, the Latins are portrayed as noticeably more civilised and more Roman-like than Sgurus, who is once again branded a tyrant. However, these qualities are relative, bearing any meaning only

21 “Τεκμήριον δέ· ἀπὸ τῶν δουλουμένων τοῖς Ἰταλοῖς πόλεων οὐδεὶς ὡς ὁμοφύλῳ τῷ τοιῷδε προσπέφευγε. Τοῦτο γὰρ οὐδὲν ἦν ἄλλ’ ἢ φεύγοντα καπνὸν ἐμπίπτειν πυρὶ.” In F. Kolovou (ed.), *Michaelis Choniatae Epistulae*, 139.

22 Michael Angold, *Greeks and Latins After 1204: The Perspective of Exile*, in Benjamin Arbel – Bernard Hamilton – David Jacoby (eds.), *Latins and Greeks in the Eastern Mediterranean After 1204*, Frank Cass, London 1989, 63-86, 66-67.

23 Ruth Macrides, *1204: The Greek Sources*, in Angeliki Laiou (ed.), *Urbs Capta. The Fourth Crusade and its Consequences. La IVe Croisade et ses conséquences. Réalités Byzantines* 10, Lethielleux, Paris 2005, 141-150, 146.

by comparison. The Latins are not civilised and ‘Roman’ enough to qualify as real Roman *archontes*, being under their rule is still servitude (δουλεία).

John Apocaucus and Latin Tyranny

The metropolitan archbishop of Naupactus, John Apocaucus also discussed the problem of perceived Western tyranny in his epistles. In one of them, written to the Epirote ruler, Theodore I Comnenus Ducas (1215-1230), at the end of 1224, who is represented as the awaited liberator of the Romans and triumphant over the Latins, Apocaucus voices his hopes that Theodore, whom he calls emperor, may end the Italian tyranny that scourges the Romans, banishing the Italian cloud like the Sun.²⁴

Tyranny receives the epithet Italian once again, just like in the letters of Choniates discussed earlier. The image of the Italian cloud suggests threat and even impending catastrophe, underlying the idea that Roman statehood and society are gravely endangered by Westerners. Not only is the imperial title used for Theodore I in the letter, but he is also paralleled with one of the main traditional symbols of the Byzantine emperor, the Sun itself.²⁵

The difference between Latin and Byzantine rule is quite clearly defined by Apocaucus. The former is branded as tyranny and even associated with a generalised threat to the well-being of the Byzantines. The latter, embodied by the victorious Theodore I, is portrayed as a

24 “... ὁμάλιζε τοὺς ὄχθους, ὁπόσους ἡμῖν ἰταλικὴ τυραννὶς ἐπεβόθρευσεν ... ὁ τούτων τῶν ἡμερῶν καὶ τῆς ἐνεστῶσης γενεᾶς ἥλιος, ἃς καταφωτίζων μὴ λίπης, ἕως ἅπαν διαλύσεις νέφος ἰταλικόν.” In Nicholas A. Bees (ed.), *Unedierte Schriftstücke aus der Kanzlei des Johannes Apokaukos des Metropolitens von Naupaktos in Aetolien*. Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher 21 (1974), 57-160, 131.

25 Michael Grünbart, *Formen der Anrede im byzantinischen Brief vom 6. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert*. Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien 2005, 144-145.

liberation, and the dismantling of Latin rule by him is compared to the Sun vanquishing dark clouds. It all gives the impression of a great difference in attitudes towards power and the well-being of those governed, granting the upper hand to the Byzantine side.

This is not the only occasion when Apocaucus complains about Italian tyranny. In a letter written to the patriarch, that is, Germanus II (1222-1240), he recalls how Germanus ceased to communicate with him after becoming a patriarch. Furthermore, he states that it was maybe a consequence of the chasm that Italian tyranny dug for them, which was very deep from both sides.²⁶ Besides remembering the patriarch to his less than friendly silence, which is a cliché of Byzantine epistolography,²⁷ Apocaucus immediately offers an excuse for his correspondent.

Moreover, Italian tyranny is charged with the digging of a deep chasm between the author and the addressee. It is a clear reference to the fact that the Latin Empire separated the State of Epirus and the Empire of Nicaea from each other, hindering communication between the citizens of the two Byzantine successor-states. In addition to this, the contemporary audience could easily think that this hindrance of communication between the two states was connected to the fact that both were treated as possible threats by the Latin Empire, serving as means to sabotage their possible cooperation against the conquerors.

With this short sentence, Apocaucus also implies that the real conflict is not between Epirus and Nicaea, but between the Latins and these two states, suggesting a common cause for the two successor-

26 “... ἴσως διὰ τὸ μεταξὺ ἀμφοτέρων χάσμα πολυβαθές, ὅπερ Ἰταλικὴ τυραννὶς ἡμῖν ἐπεβόθρευσεν.” In N. Bees (ed.), *Unedierte Schriftstücke aus der Kanzlei des Johannes Apokaukos des Metropoliten von Naupaktos in Aetolien*, 112.

27 Margaret Mullett, *The Classical Tradition in the Byzantine Letter*, in Margaret Mullett – Roger Scott (eds.), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*. University of Birmingham Thirteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, 1979. Centre of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, Birmingham 1981, 75-93, 79.

states, that is, defeating the Latins, while devaluating their rivalry at the same time. Through this formulation, the tyranny of the Latins does not remain an abstract vision of an oppressive system, but an insight is offered into its foreign policy, inhibiting communication between its enemies, logically to inhibit their cooperation against it. Such behaviour could be a legitimate practice by a threatened state, but the Western regime in Byzantine lands is called a tyranny, while Epirus and Nicaea are not, and there is no mention about them following a similar practice.

Condemnation of Western attacks and rule over the Byzantines also appear in more poetical forms, accompanied by the idea of revenge. In another letter to Theodore I Comnenus Ducas, whom he addresses as emperor, Apocaucus presents the case of a pious monk, who was knocked out of his *kellion* by the cruel peg of the Latin abuse.²⁸

The monk mentioned by Apocaucus can be identified with the *hieromonachos* Ioannicus.²⁹ The equation of his ill-treatment by the Latins with being knocked out by a cruel peg, on the first hand, is a possible playful reference to a fragment of Aristophanes from the Merchant Ships (Ολκάδες),³⁰ while, on the other hand, an effective device of the suggestion of violence to the audience. The charge that a monk, who is presumably a very pious person, was ejected from his humble cell (*kellion*) by the Latin abuse, doubtlessly brands the behaviour of the Latins as rightless. Moreover, Ioannicus, the victim, is supposed to be morally superior to his abusers.

28 “Εξέκρουσε τοῦ κατ’ αὐτὸν ἀγιωτάτου κελλίου, δέσποτά μου καὶ βασιλεῦ, καὶ γυμνὸν καὶ ἀπέριττον, καὶ τὸν ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν ἐνδέξιον πατέρα μου, τὸν Στεϊρίου, ὁ τῆς λατινικῆς ἐπηρείας βίαιος πάσσαλος.” In N. Bees (ed.), *Unedierte Schriftstücke aus der Kanzlei des Johannes Apokaukos des Metropolitens von Naupaktos (in Aetolien)*, 139.

29 N. Bees (ed.), *Unedierte Schriftstücke aus der Kanzlei des Johannes Apokaukos des Metropolitens von Naupaktos (in Aetolien)*, 221.

30 Aristophanes, Fragmentum 421: “παττάλους ἐγκρούειν”. In Theodor Kock (ed.), *Comicorum Atticorum fragmenta*, vol. 1, Teubner, Leipzig 1880, 501.

It is an important circumstance that there is no mention of the Latin authorities reacting to the abuse, but it is Apocaucus who petitions for the displaced monk at Byzantine authorities. It supports an interpretation that the Latin authorities did not care about the abuse, or it even happened by their order. Both are characteristics of autocratic systems, in which members of the elite can violate the rights of other citizens with impunity or it is the regime itself that harasses innocent people for dubious reasons. Meanwhile, the petitioned Epirote government, by the very fact of the petition, is supposedly inclined to help the mistreated Ioannicus.

Regardless of the reasons behind the forceful eviction of Ioannicus, a strong boundary is established between him, an innocent Byzantine violated in his basic rights, and the depraved Latins, who evicted him from his cell, just like between the Epirote court inclined to justice and the Latin regime with its oppressive tendencies.

It was not the last letter of Apocaucus addressed to Theodore I Comnenus Ducas. Another one of them defined Italian oppression similarly by one of the negative traits often attributed to it by 13th-century Byzantines. The archbishop claims that God has crushed the molars of the anthropomorphic lions through Theodore, and Apocaucus wishes that God may make them absolutely disappear, so that the emperor may have good fame until the times are recorded, and Apocaucus may shake off the obedience of the harmful bond and achieve his former unenslaved freedom in the next step. He wishes that the churches and cities and all that belong to the Empire receive clearing and sanctification instead of the Italian defilement.³¹

31 “... ἀλλὰ συνέθλασε διὰ σοῦ ὁ θεὸς τὰς μύλας τῶν ἀνθρωπομόρφων τούτων λεόντων καὶ εἰς τὸ παντελὲς αὐτοὺς ἀφαντώσειεν, ἵνα σὺ μὲν τὴν εὐφημίαν ἔχῃς εἰς αἰῶνας ἀνάγραφτον, ἐγὼ δὲ τὸ ὑπήκοον τοῦ κακοποιοῦ δεσμοῦ ἀνεθῶ καὶ τὴν προτέραν ἐλευθερίαν εἰς τὸ ἐξῆς ἀδούλωτον ἀπολήψωμαι. γένοιτο ταῦτα καὶ τῆς ἰταλικῆς μιαρίας καὶ ναοὶ καὶ πόλεις καὶ τῆ βασιλεία ὅσα ὑπήκοα τὴν κάθαρσιν καὶ τὸν ἁγιασμὸν ἀντιλάβοιεν.” In N. Bees (ed.), *Unedierte Schriftstücke aus der Kanzlei des Johannes Apokaukos des Metropolitens von Naupaktos (in Aetolien)*, 128.

Apocaucus here designates Western rule not by name, but by one of its perceived major characteristics, that is, its brutality, calling it Italian. The image becomes even more vivid by mentioning anthropomorphic lions facing Theodore I and God, which are clearly equivalents of the hated Latins. The lion had already been traditionally a symbol of ferocity and cruelty in Byzantine culture,³² strengthening the invocation of Latin brutality, while partly dehumanizing the Western conquerors at the same time.

As they are depicted as similar to wild animals, humans in their appearance only, extreme acts of violence are justified sanctions against them, represented by the metaphor of crushing their molars and making them completely disappear (suggesting that the Epirote ruler ruthlessly wiped them out after defeating their forces). This justification becomes the more pronounced by the claim that God himself assisted Theodore in crushing the molars of those Latin lions, attributing their utter demise to divine support.

The claims that Theodore Comnenus Ducas and his Byzantine forces obviously assisting him were justified in their countenance against the Latins and were favoured by God in their fight also show them being much better than the Latins in this respect, devoid of Latin brutality. The boundaries implied by the source are presented in the fields of tendencies for animalistic brutality, right to violence against the other party and divine favour. In all three cases, it is the Byzantine party is suggested to have a higher standing.

32 Tristan Schmidt, *Protective and Fierce: The Emperor as a Lion in Contact with Foreigners and his Subjects in Twelfth and Early Thirteenth-Century Byzantine Court Literature*, in Kirsty Stewart – James Moreton Wakeley (eds.), *Cross-Cultural exchange in the Byzantine World, c. 300–1500 AD*, Peter Lang, Oxford – Bern – Berlin Bruxelles – Frankfurt am Main – New York – Wien, 159-174, 167-168.

Demetrius Chomatenus and Frankish Despotism

Another remarkable personality of the contemporary Epirote ecclesiastical elite besides John Apocaucus was Demetrius Chomatenus, archbishop of Ochrid, who had also written about Latin oppression against Byzantines. In one of his letters, he discusses the question of the acceptability of following the Latin habits in difficult times.³³ He refers to the Athonite monk, Gregory Oecodomopolus, who was asked to judge in a case presenting this very problem, and who turned to the expertise of Chomatenus to help him decide it.

Until the Latin invasion of the Roman territories, in one of the monasteries of Athus, Greek and Iberian, that is, Georgian, monks lived together, following the rules of the founding father of the monastery, differing only in their languages. But the Latin power and the division caused by it made their community collapse.³⁴ The detail that Georgian and Greek monks lived together makes it clear that Ivron is the Athonite monastery in question.³⁵

Even the very beginning of the story sets up a tendentious narration. The lives of the monks are presented as ones living up to the Orthodox monastic ideals. But Chomatenus writes that it was the state of affairs until the Latin invasion, strongly suggesting that it had unfortunately changed after the foundation of the Latin Empire. And indeed, it is stated that the Latin power and the internal conflict generated by it

33 “Περὶ τοῦ, εἰ χρὴ συγκοινωνεῖν τοῖς περιτραπεῖσιν ἐν καιρῷ δυσχερείας καὶ προσελθοῦσιν Λατίνοις καὶ τοῖς τούτων ἔθεσι κοινωθήσασιν.” In Günter Prinzing (ed.), *Demetrii Chomateni Ponemata Diaphora*. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin – New York 2002, 198.

34 “Μέχρι μὲν οὖν τῆς τῶν Ἰταλῶν κατὰ {τῆς} τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐπιδρομῆς τῶν μὲν ἄλλων πάντων ἐκοινώνουν ἀλλήλοις μετιόντες τὴν ἀσκητικὴν διαγωγὴν οἱ Γραικοὶ τε καὶ Ἰβηρες, τοῦ τῆς μονῆς πατρὸς τοῖς τύποις ἐπόμεινοι, μόναις δὲ ταῖς γλώσσαις μεμερισμένοι ἐτύγγανον, ἀφ’ οὗ δὲ ἡ Λατίνῃ ἐξουσία καὶ τὸ διαληφθὲν ὑφ’ ἑαυτὴν ἐποιήσατο, τὰ τῆς κοινωνίας αὐτῶν συνεσχέθησαν.” In G. Prinzing (ed.), *Demetrii Chomateni Ponemata Diaphora*, 198.

35 Donald M. Nicol, *The Despotate of Epirus*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1957, 81.

undid this idyllic state. Latin rule, as an abstract, malevolent force, appears as a cause of division within Byzantine society, which destroys a faithful Orthodox monastic community.

As Chomatenus states, many violent acts were committed by the agents of the Italian Church to make all the priests and monks in the conquered Byzantine lands come under the power of the Roman pope, and, as a consequence, to mention his name on the occasions, when the memory of the archbishops is used to be remembered at the altar, and to follow the habits of the Roman Church.³⁶

In this presentation, the Latins attempt to coerce the Greek clergy into joining the Catholic Church, and they easily turn to violence to achieve their goals, committing numerous violent acts against their seemingly peaceful victims. It all fits well to the traditional image of the persecutors of Christians, while suggesting that Catholics neither have valid arguments nor practice Christian morality, and that is why they persecute those who reject their credo.

It is worth mentioning that Chomatenus chose an interesting solution to describe those practices of the Catholic Church that the Orthodox perceived as erroneous. He comments on the Catholic habits in general and brings only one into the limelight: that is, the question of papal primacy. As the letter states it, the Georgian monks of the community did not withstand force, but, caring little, disgracefully went to Thessalonica, to the cardinal³⁷ of the Roman

36 “Πολλὴν μὲν γὰρ προέθεντο βίαν οἱ τῆς Ἰταλικῆς ἱερατείας προϊστάμενοι, ἵνα τὸ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἅπαν ἱερατικὸν τε καὶ τὸ μοναχικὸν ὑποκλίνωσι τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τοῦ πάππα τῆς Ῥώμης, ὥστε καὶ ἀναφέρειν ἐκεῖνον ἐν τοῖς καιροῖς, καθ’ οὓς εἰώθασι μνήμην τῶν ἀρχιερέων οἱ τοῦ βήματος τίθεσθαι, καὶ τοῖς ἔθεσι τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἐκκλησίας ἀκολουθεῖν.” In G. Prinzing (ed.), *Demetrii Chomateni Ponemata Diaphora*, 198.

37 The cardinal in question is most probably Benedict of S. Susanna, who participated in the debates about the Union of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches that were held in the Latin Empire between 1205–1207 and visited Thessalonike in autumn 1205 and at the end of 1206. G. Prinzing (ed.), *Demetrii Chomateni Ponemata Diaphora*, 134.

pope and subjected themselves to the will of the Pope, following the Latin habits.³⁸

The archbishop of Ochrid contrasts the behaviour of the Georgian monks with the attitudes of all those Orthodox who resisted the Latin demands. Persons blessed and worthy of numerous *encomia* did not obey the lawless violence of the Latin rule to change the holy habits of the Orthodox believers. But, giving up their bodies to ill-treatment and spitting upon what was inflicted to them, to avoid becoming traitors of the habits of their fathers, these brilliant martyrs brilliantly shined with their preference. And, stresses Chomatenus, as it is well-known for the readers, for the ones who fight in a way pleasing to God, for the ones who kept the faith, the wreath of righteousness will be weaved.³⁹

The argumentation of Chomatenus here seems to follow a strong tradition within Byzantine heresiology. That is, first the author describes the practice he deems religiously problematic, then he attempts to demonstrate its erroneous nature.⁴⁰ As Chomatenus was a canon jurist and an authority on theological issues, writing with a didactic aim, it was probably a deliberate solution. Beyond this, he draws a strong dichotomy between bodily and spiritual well-being,

38 “Ἄλλ’ οἱ γε Ἰβηρες μοναχοί, τῆ βία μὴ ἀντιστάντες, ὡς θέμις, μηδὲ μικρόν τι μελήσαντες, εἷξαντες δὲ ἀγεννῶς τῷ τῶν Ἰταλῶν ἐπιτάγματι καὶ τῷ τοῦ πάππα καρδινάλιῳ προσελθόντες ἐν Θεσσαλονίκη διαγόντι, ὅλους ἑαυτοὺς τῷ θελήματι τοῦ πάππα παρέδωκαν καὶ τοῖς Λατινικοῖς ἠκολούθησαν ἔθεσιν”. In G. Prinzing (ed.), *Demetrii Chomateni Ponemata Diaphora*, 199.

39 “Ὅθεν φαμέν, ὡς μακαριστοὶ καὶ πολλῶν ἄξιοι ἐγκωμίων, οἱ τῆ ἀθέσῳ βία τῆς Λατινικῆς ἐξουσίας εἰς γε τὴν μετάθεσιν τῶν καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἱερῶν ἐθῶν οὐδαμῶς ὑπετάγησαν, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἑαυτῶν προδόντες εἰς κάκωσιν σώματα καὶ τὰ αὐτοῖς ὑπάρχοντα διαπτύσαντες, ἵνα τῶν πατρίων ἐθῶν προδοταὶ μὴ γένωνται, μάρτυρες τῆ προαιρέσει λαμπροὶ λαμπρῶς ἀνεφάνησαν, οἷς, εὖ οἶδαμεν, οὕτω θεαρέστως ἠγωνισμένοι καὶ τὴν πίστιν τετηρηκόσιν ὁ τῆς δικαιοσύνης πλακῆσεται στέφανος.” In G. Prinzing (ed.), *Demetrii Chomateni Ponemata Diaphora*, 200.

40 Averil Cameron, “How to Read Heresiology?”, in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33 (2003), 471-492.

emphasizing that the martyrs suffered in their body, but their souls deserved the wreath of righteousness.

As he uses the word martyrs and closes his train of thought with a paraphrase from 2Tim,⁴¹ in which the author appears in the process of evaluating his life at its end, his text suggests that the faithful he mentions were murdered for their resistance. It increases the dramatic effect, and the supposedly theologically educated audience of the letter most probably recognised the paraphrased text of the New Testament.

Chomatenus is adamant in his verdict. It is impossible for the Greek monks the commune in anything with the Georgian ones, and with all of those who share their opinion, as they had intercourse with the Italian habits and dogmas, which were rejected by the Orthodox Church. This harsh judgement can only be annulled if the Georgians repent their sins, deny the Catholic creed, and accept the Orthodox credo once again, because the Orthodox Church follows the habit of philanthropy.⁴²

41 2Tim 4,6-8: “As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” I quote the Bible in English according to the New Revised Standard Version: Bruce Manning Metzger (ed.), *The Bible. New Revised Standard Version with the apocrypha*, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, 1989.

42 “Καὶ τοίνυν ἀποφαινόμεθα, ὡς οὐκ ἐξόν ἐστὶν ἐν οὐδενὶ κοινωνεῖν τοὺς Γραικοὺς τοῖς Ἰβηρσι μοναχοῖς, καὶ ὅσοι τούτοις ὁμόφρονες, ὡς ἀναμαξαμένοις τῶν Ἰταλικῶν ἔθων τε καὶ θρησκευμάτων, ὅσα τῆς καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἁγίας ἐκκλησίας γεγόνασιν ἐκβλητα... εἰ μὴ ποτε (δεῖ γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο προσθεῖναι διὰ τὸ φιλόανθρωπον ἔθος τῆς ἐκκλησίας) μετανοήσαντες οἱ οὕτω παρανομήσαντες καὶ νηστείας καὶ δάκρυσι καὶ ταῖς εἰς τὸ θεῖον δεήσεσι τῶν ἐκεῖθεν κηλίδων καλῶς καθηράμενοι καὶ οἷς ἐμολύνθησαν ἀπὸ καρδίας ἀποταξάμενοι, πρὸς τὰ ἔθη τε καὶ διδάγματα τῆς καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἁγίας ἐκκλησίας παλινοδρομήσουσιν.” In G. Prinzing (ed.), *Demetrii Chomateni Ponemata Diaphora*, 200-201.

Stressing the error of the Georgian monks and complete repentance as the only way of their readmission into the Orthodox Church and the Iviron monastery is probably not only a matter of ‘heterodoxy’. The Byzantine culture of Orthodoxy traditionally tended to link heresies not only to base morals but also to political disloyalty.⁴³ The communion of the Georgians with the Catholic Church could have been interpreted by contemporary Byzantines as a compromise of their loyalty to the defunct Byzantine Empire, pledging their allegiance to two foreign powers at the same time: the Papacy and the Latin Empire.

Here it should be noted again that papal primacy is the sole ‘problematic’ Catholic dogma that Chomatenus explicitly mentions, otherwise writing on Latin habits in general. As the themes of domination and oppression are very emphatic in the text, the political dimension of heresy may be implicitly present, emphasized by the reference to papal primacy.

In the case of the references to philanthropy and repentance as reasons behind a possible redemption for the ‘apostate’ monks, the case is far clearer. The pure love of God for mankind was a core tenet of Byzantine Orthodoxy and it preached that every good Christian thrives to emulate this love in his life towards others. In a strong connection to this concept, the Orthodox Church had a special function as a place of healing for errand souls, and every spiritual malady, even apostasy could be cured in this ‘hospital’. The only important conditions were the acknowledgement of the sin committed and the due repentance for it.⁴⁴

43 Paul Magdalino, *Orthodoxy and Byzantine Cultural Identity*. In Antonio Rigo – Pavel Ermilov (eds.), *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Byzantium. The Definition and the Notion of Orthodoxy and Some Other Studies on the Heresies and the Non-Christian Religions*, Università degli Studia di Roma “Tor Vergata”, Roma 2010, 21-40, 29.

44 Demetrios J. Constantelos, *Poverty, Society and Philanthropy in the Late Medieval Greek World*, Aristide D. Charatzas, New Rochelle 1992, 40.

So, the opportunity for redemption offered by Chomatenus is far from an individual opportunity, but very much a reiteration of an important teaching of the Orthodox Church. This, with the description of Catholic abuses, suffered by the peaceful Orthodox believers, at the very same time underlines the moral superiority of Orthodoxy over Catholicism and the Byzantine followers of the former over the Latin followers of the latter. That moral superiority represents itself as Catholic Latins turn to violence and other devices of coercion to force their own faith upon the Orthodox Byzantines, who do not harm their abusers, but adamantly oppose their attempts. The Byzantine ethnicity of the latter group is stressed by the fact that the monks who resisted Latin pressure are designated as Romans, while the apostates are identified as Georgians.

Despite the efforts of Chomatenus, it seems that the verdict did not reach its goal, falling on deaf ears. Until the Epirote conquest of the Chalcidice-peninsula, the monasteries of Athus officially existed under the ecclesiastical control of a Latin bishop, whose see can be identified as Sebastia or Samaria. The monasteries all refused to accept the jurisdiction of the Catholic bishop – except Iviron.⁴⁵

Conclusion

The letters analysed above present us with descriptions of alleged Latin abuses, which are various in their subjects, yet bound together by the superimposed theme of oppression. Choniates, Apocaucus and Chomatenus lived through a tumultuous period after 1204. The Byzantine Empire fragmented, age-old social norms ceased to govern the lives of Greek-speaking communities in the newly established Latin Empire, forcefully replaced with Latin laws and habits.

45 John Fine Jr., *The Late Medieval Balkans. A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1987, 79.

Moreover, most members of the former Orthodox Byzantine elite in Latin-occupied territories experienced downward mobility. It all explains very well the charges of Latin oppression voiced by the three archbishops. Although it means that their claims must be treated with caution, they are important and authentic representations of Byzantine elite intellectual reactions to the new order established by the Crusaders in the former core of the Byzantine Empire.

Abstract

Unter einem schweren fremden Joch: Der Vorwurf der lateinischen Unterdrückung in byzantinischen Briefen nach dem vierten Kreuzzug. Der Artikel beschäftigt sich mit den Repräsentationen der lateinischen Herrschaft über die ehemaligen byzantinischen Länder nach dem vierten Kreuzzug in den Briefen von drei byzantinischen Intellektuellen und Erzbischöfe: Michael Choniates, Ioannes Apokaukos und Demetrios Chomatenos. Die drei Autoren bieten bemerkenswerte Daten über die Wahrnehmung der byzantinischen Eliten über die von der neuen Ordnung begangenen Missbräuche und geben gleichzeitig einen Einblick in die Ähnlichkeiten und Unterschiede der gelebten Erfahrungen führender byzantinischer Intellektueller der Ära.



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