

ГЛАСОВИ И СЛИКЕ

ОБЛИЦИ КОМУНИКАЦИЈЕ
НА СРЕДЊОВЕКОВНОМ БАЛКАНУ
(IV–XVI ВЕК)

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MODES OF COMMUNICATION
IN THE MEDIEVAL BALKANS
(4TH TO 16TH CENTURIES)

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ΤΟΥΤΟ ΜΟΙ ΤΕΛΕΣΟΝ –
“TAKE CARE OF THIS FOR ME”
OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE COMMUNICATION
IN THE LETTERS OF THEOPHYLACT
OF OHRID*

Τοῦτό μοι τέλεσον καὶ πᾶν ἀπέχω τὸ ὀφειλόμενον – “Take care of this for me, and I will release you from any debt.” With these final words in a letter to his former pupil Niketas the deacon, the nephew of metropolitan Leo of Chalcedon,¹ Theophylact of Ohrid concludes his list of instructions about a sensitive operation of intercession with a high-ranking official of the Komnenian court. The mission was conceived as a complex, carefully orchestrated system of chain-transmitting a piece of sensitive information – a multistage process that would involve no less than two intermediaries and another two covering letters. Rather surprisingly, the entire process, whose main agent was to be the deacon Niketas, was presented as an insignificant favour, “bereft of any difficulty, as becomes a father who truly spares his child’s strength”.² It would be the least that a former student could do for his spiritual father to pay back a debt that could, admittedly, never be paid in full. It is hard to believe, however, that for a young Niketas this complex and demanding mission could have been merely a dutiful “favour bereft of any difficulty”.

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1 See *Gautier* II, N° 84, p. 443.27–28. For more details and the context of the letter to Niketas the deacon (of whom little specific information is known), see n. 92.

2 Ὅρας τὸ τῆς διακονίας ἐπίταγμα πάσης ἀπηλλαγμένον βαρύτητος καὶ πατρὶ προσῆκον ὄντως φειδομένῳ παιδὸς δυνάμειως (Ibid.).

A letter as the mouth

Theophylact's letter to the deacon Niketas – whose key words are highlighted in the title of this paper – provides a characteristic example of the mechanism of written and oral communication in the Byzantine Empire of the early Komnenian period. In fact, written correspondence – praised elsewhere by Theophylact as “a gift from God” (Θεοῦ φιλοτίμημα) that allows us to “talk to our friends like friends and to address our lords like servants from afar... [using] a letter as the mouth”³ – for the learned Byzantine epistolographer and his no less erudite correspondents represents both less and more than the spoken word. More, because a letter of this kind is, presumably, almost always a highly self-aware and responsible representative of its genre, to which it owes the entire traditional arsenal of expressive devices, *topoi* and *linguo-stylistic* tools. It is a literary piece par excellence, often written with the expectation of being read publicly in front of a suitable auditorium (the so-called *theatron*)⁴ and exposed to the praises and criticisms of colleagues and the academic public, as well as of being closely read under the magnifying glass of philological analysis, and often of being published in an epistolographical anthology – if not even blessed with the posthumous fame of the canonical text intended for future students of rhetoric schools.⁵ Due to all these concerns, Byzantine literary missives are at the same time less than the spoken word, or even a letter in the usual sense of the word, which would be closer to the understanding and taste of the modern reader.⁶ It is, above all, a text

3 *Gautier* II, N^o 10, p. 161.1–6: Εὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεὸς ὁ δοῦς ἡμῖν τὰ τε ἄλλα τῆς αὐτοῦ ἀγαθοχυσίας φιλοτιμήματα καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰ γράμματα, δι' ὧν καὶ φίλοι φίλους προσαγορεύομεν καὶ δοῦλοι δεσπότης διὰ μακροῦ προσφθεγγόμεθα... ἐγὼ στόματι τῶ γράμματι κέχρημαι... (from a letter to John Komnenos, the *doux* of Dyrrachion and son of *sebastokrator* Isaac Komnenos).

4 *Hunger*, *Reich der Neuen Mitte*, 341; *Mullett*, *Aristocracy and Patronage*, 173–201.

5 *Mullett*, *Theophylact*, 37–43; see also *Eadem*, *Classical Tradition*, 75–93; *Eadem*, *Writing in early mediaeval Byzantium*, 156–185 at 173.

6 The existence of this kind of correspondence – as a literary genre *sui generis* – should not obscure the fact that by far the greatest part of routine correspondence on all levels of the Byzantine society, including its elite, was stylized in the un-

that is difficult to read, interlaced with learned rebuses in the form of countless direct and indirect allusions to classical mythology,⁷ ancient Greek authors, and the Bible. Its language is a more or less ostentatious form of the Attic dialect of the 5th and 4th centuries BC (which Theophylact admittedly uses with superb skill and agility). So how to navigate the Scylla and Charybdis of style and circumvent the traps of the genre? Or how, by bold and ironical toying with its own inherent limitations, to reduce correspondence – since it often represents a casual exchange between friends or close associates – to the measure of original, oral communication between two people? How could the literary, archaized shell, inevitably burdened by the classic, exemplary and monumental (that is “memorial”, intended to last eternally) transmit a fugitive, quick and urgent message or simply a genuine, human one, free from any formal concerns? Theophylact of Ohrid proves himself a master of using this traditional medium of “address from afar”, which in his hands manages to become a truly original substitute for the “mouth” or spoken word – either as a greeting, courteous welcome, verbal deference to a secular ruler or spiritual brother, or as an encouragement, reprimand, innocent chit-chat, an expression of genuine joy or sorrow or, finally, as a request for intercession with influential court officials – “taking care” of one pressing problem or another.

With its multi-layered language, style and content, Theophylact’s correspondence can be used to illustrate various phenomena in the Byzantine society, which are not necessarily tied to the Komnenian era. One of these phenomena is the formation of private partnerships between individuals or families with the aim of achieving various social influences and positions.

pretentious, middlebrow register of everyday vernacular, with no other intention than to convey a specific and ephemeral message, see *Hunger*, *Literatur I*, 221–222.

7 Thus, the letter to the deacon Niketas begins by evoking the myth of Antilochus, a Homeric hero who sacrificed his life to save his elderly father Nestor, King of Pylos (cf. *Od.* IV, 188 sqq.; *Pindar*, *Pyth.* VI, 28–42). “I, your father”, Theophylact continues, “however, do not call upon you to face danger, but to do me a harmless favour” (Ἐγὼ δέ σε οὐ πρὸς κινδύνου ὁ σὸς καλῶ πατήρ, ἀλλὰ πρὸς διακονίαν ἀκίνδυνον, loc. cit. p. 441.1–5). Cf. the same mythological exemplum used in the letter *Gautier II*, N° 99 (to Michael Pantechnes, another eternally “indebted” former disciple).

One of the better-known forms of private partnership with the aim of public engagement is reflected in the institution of the *oikos*, which is to a considerable degree attested in the sources, leading to this institution's increased visibility.⁸ However, private partnership with the aim of not only securing individual rise on the social ladder but also of safeguarding achieved positions was a phenomenon that encompassed all segments of life in the Byzantine Empire. It was equally manifested on all levels of military, political and church organization. This phenomenon was based on the fact that the life of an individual in the Byzantine society did not depend solely on his/her background and familial ties to the more prominent representatives of Byzantine noble houses, viz. the members of the ruling elite: the sources provide enough evidence to conclude that the inclusion of individuals of different social standings – high as well as low – into certain interest groups rested on the widespread practice of *recommending someone for something*. This practice was certainly only one of the results of the fact that neither honorary dignities (titles) nor offices were hereditary in the Byzantine Empire, which not only made the formation of aristocracy difficult but also made the position and future of an individual and their family uncertain. Hence, it was personal connections – those based on friendship no less than those rooted in kinship – that allowed an individual to climb the social ladder, be promoted in a certain profession and keep the achieved social and professional positions; personal connections could also save an individual from the ruler's ire or help remove obstacles that an official might face while doing his job.

The phenomenon of private partnership is well-documented in the letters of Theophylact of Ohrid.⁹ With a few exceptions, these letters date from the second period of Theophylact's public activity, which is tied to his work as the head of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. The two most important phases in Theophylact's professional career – the Constantinopolitan and the Ohrid stage – are separated by a

8 *Magdalino*, Byzantine aristocratic *oikos*, 92–111. In its general meaning, *oikos* should be understood as a household that includes blood relations and clients, servants, immovable assets etc.

9 On his network of correspondents, see *Mullett*, Theophylact, 163 sqq.

clear line, usually dated to the early 1090s.¹⁰ However, these two periods defy a more accurate chronological-prosopographical analysis, in some details resulting in an often vague, although generally rounded and consistent, picture of Theophylact’s public activity as a teacher of rhetoric, tutor of the emperor’s son, court panegyrist and finally high-ranking church dignitary.

Between the Doukai and the Komnenoi

The last third of the 11th century was marked by the rise of a number of aristocratic families of older or more recent lineage, which had, in the decades of the serious internal and external crisis, managed to climb their way to the top of the Empire’s administrative and military pyramid, founding relatively stable dynastic families along the way. Owing to their political ability and ambition to rule, two houses became particularly prominent: the Doukai and the Komnenoi. Ever since their first joint appearance on the historical stage at the end of the sixth decade of the 11th century, their complex relations were characterized by a paradoxical blend of fervent rivalry and pragmatic openness to compromise and cooperation in their common interest.¹¹

Theophylact’s youth and schooling were spent during the reign of Michael VII (1071–1078), the second emperor from the Doukas dynasty. Born in Euboea to a family wealthy enough to provide its sons with an education in the capital, Theophylact Hephaistos (c. 1050–after 1107, or after 1126) came to the City, where he, as a student of an unknown educational institution under the auspices of the Patriarchate (but certainly non-theological), studied the trivium (grammar, rhetoric and dialectics).¹² This was the same higher-education institution where he would go on to work as a teacher of rhetoric,¹³ following in

¹⁰ See n. 31.

¹¹ For more details, see *Todorović*, Teofilakt Ohridski, 447–464.

¹² *Gautier* I, 22.

¹³ The title *μαῖστωρ τῶν ῥητόρων* (“master of rhetoricians”) appears to relate to the management of the literary chair at the school of rhetoric, *Gautier* I, 24. On somewhat different understanding of the notion, see *Mullett*, *Disgrace*, 209 n. 48; *Eadem*, *Imperial Vocabulary*, 364; *Eadem*, *Theophylact*, 233 and n. 50.

the footsteps of Michael Psellos (1018–c. 1078 or after 1081), his most influential teacher, to whose memory he would remain faithful even in his later years.¹⁴ Psellos, friend and confidant of the first and tutor of the second emperor of the ruling dynasty, seems to have been the person that introduced the talented provincial into the circle of aristocratic patrons at the Doukas court, recommending him to his own imperial benefactors.¹⁵ In all probability, this was also the period when Theophylact met Maria of Alania (c. 1050–after 1103), the beautiful and well-educated wife of Michael VII. The imperial patronage of a person of similar sensibility and intellectual affinity would prove fateful for the future court career of the young teacher of rhetoric. In the years when the influence of the aged Psellos must have faded due to his fall from grace in the final years of Michael's reign, Maria of Alania remained a loyal protector and benefactor of young Theophylact, whose appointment as the deacon of Hagia Sophia bears evidence to his steady advancement on the social ladder.¹⁶ There is no doubt that his career continued its uninterrupted upward path during the reign of Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078–1081), usurper of the imperial throne and the second husband of Maria of Alania.¹⁷ The new marriage initially placated the empress's fears for the fate of Constantine Doukas (c. 1074–1095/1097), her four-year-old son from her marriage to Michael VII.¹⁸ However, the purple-born prince was soon deprived of imperial insignia and his hereditary rights were denied in favour of one of Botaneiates' relatives.¹⁹ Fearing for her son's fate in the precarious environment of court intrigues and dynastic upheavals, the empress

14 Cf. *Gautier* II, N^o 27, p. 219.4–6; see also N^o 132, an affectionate consolation of Psellos' brother (anonymous and otherwise unknown), occasioned by the death of his great sibling (in 1078, according to *Gautier*; yet see *Mullett*, Theophylact, 48 n. 196).

15 *Polemis*, Doukai, N^o 12, pp. 29–30, 33; N^o 14, pp. 43–45.

16 *Gautier* I, 23.

17 *Skylitzes Continuatus*, 181–182; *Bryennios* III 25, pp. 253–255; *Alexias* III 2, 3, pp. 90–91; *Zonaras* XVIII 19, p. 722; *Constantinus Manasses*, p. 356.6568–6571; *Ephraem Aeniensis*, p. 128.3454–3455. See *Leib*, Nicéphore III Botaniatès, 129–140.

18 *Polemis*, Doukai, N^o 23, pp. 60–63.

19 *Alexias* II 2, 1, p. 57.

entered secret negotiations with the two most prominent members of the Komnenoi – Isaac (c. 1050–1102/1104) and Alexios,²⁰ both celebrated generals who had served under multiple emperors, including Botaneiates himself. Using Isaac’s familial ties with Maria (one of her Alan relatives was married to the older Komnenos),²¹ the brothers made a secret pact with the empress, which would soon lead to Alexios’ adoption,²² an energetic military offensive of the two brothers and,²³ finally, the toppling of Botaneiates and the enthronement of a new basileus from the house of Komnenos – Alexios I (1081–1118). For Maria of Alania, this turnaround meant, above all else, the defence and re-establishment of the dynastic rights of Constantine Doukas, who was (in line with the covert agreement) raised to the rank of Alexios’ co-ruler. The ruling alliance of the two families was thus formally sanctioned at the highest level, giving the Komnenian usurper a much-needed veil of legitimate succession and the young Doukas claimant a no less important pretence of equal participation in supreme power. It is difficult to doubt that the ex-basilissa could have also harboured some more intimate ambitions about a possible third imperial marriage (these hopes would have been encouraged by her rather certain extramarital affair with the younger Komnenos brother).²⁴ Any such plans – if they indeed existed – had to be abandoned in the higher interest of inter-familial consensus, which meant that Alexios’ legitimate wife from the Doukas lineage, Eirene Doukaina (c. 1066–1123/33), a great-niece of the first emperor of the dynasty,²⁵ was to be immediately crowned

20 *Mullett*, *Disgrace*, 210.

21 *Bryennios* II 1, p. 143.10–13; *Alexias* II 1, 4, p. 56.

22 *Alexias* II 1, 5, p. 56. *Bryennios* (IV 2, p. 259.16–18), less convincingly, moves the adoption at the beginning of the reign of Botaneiates, synchronizing it with Alexios’ appointment to the Domesticate of the West (1078).

23 *Alexias* II 4, pp. 61–65.

24 *Gautier* I, 63–64. According to Polemis (*Doukai*, 70), Eirene’s position was initially threatened by the “highly suspicious attachment of her husband to the ex-empress Maria”. See *Hill*, *Alexios Komnenos*, 44; *Eadem*, *Actions Speak Louder Than Words*, 55 (“certainly betrayed wife”). See *Alexias* III 1, 2, pp. 87–88. On Anna Dalassena’s attempts to instrumentalize Maria in undermining Doukas connections, see *Runciman*, *End of Anna Dalassena*, 517–524.

25 *Bryennios*, *Praef.* 9, p. 67.12–18; III 6, pp. 219–223; III 13, p. 235.27–30. See *Cha-*

augousta and thereby made equal in ruling rights with her Komnenos husband.²⁶ The Komnenos-Doukas dynastic pact was thus doubly ensured. Maria of Alania was forced to withdraw from the public stage, taking the vow at some point²⁷ but nonetheless keeping her contacts with the court as well as the favour of the emperor, who entrusted the education of his firstborn daughter Anna (betrothed to Constantine on her birth)²⁸ to no other than the ex-basilissa.²⁹

Thus, the reign of Alexios I Komnenos began with a hard-fought compromise between the two most powerful families of the day. Many conflicting interests were aligned through the merging of the most vital elements of both family traditions and their functional blending and incorporation into the political organism of the new regime. Not even the stubborn and relentless resistance of Anna Dalassene (c. 1025–1100/1102), the influential “mother of the Komnenoi”, which was based on the narrow interests of the Komnenian clan, or the occasional plots of one family fraction or another within the alliance could meaningfully shake or disrupt this stable trend of partner cooperation and balanced participation in power, which at least partially satisfied the political ambitions of both sides.³⁰

landon, Alexis Comnène, 33; *Polemis*, Notes, 68–69; *Idem*, Doukai, N° 26, p. 70; *Barzos*, Γενεαλογία, N° 15, p. 88.

26 *Bryennios* III 6, p. 221; *Alexias* III 2, 7, p. 92–93; *Zonaras* XVIII 21, p. 733.4–6.

27 Having previously obtained a written confirmation providing not only safety for her son and herself, but also a co-emperorship for Constantine, see *Alexias* III 2, 3, p. 90; III 4, 6–7, p. 97; *Zonaras*, XVIII 21, p. 733.14–19; *Skylitzes Continuatus*, 182.12–13. See *Gautier* I, 56, 64–65. In keeping with her chief thesis on the disgrace of the ex-basilissa as a “gradual” (multiyear) process, Mullett (*Disgrace*, 205, 207, 211) has reservations about the full-status monachization that would ensue immediately after Maria’s withdrawal from the court. According to *Zonaras* (XVIII 21, p. 733.19–21), Constantine would have fallen into disgrace at the same time his mother took the veil; but a twelfth-century historian surely telescopes two distinct events separated in time – Constantine’s demotion could only have taken place after 1087.

28 *Alexias* VI 8, 3, pp. 184–185; *Zonaras* XVIII 22, p. 738.12–15. See *Buckler*, *Anna Comnena*, 40–41.

29 *Alexias* III 1, 4 (46–48), p. 88.

30 *Chalandon*, Alexis Comnène, 33.

As an intellectual adoptee of the empress from the ruling house of Doukas and a part of her “royal appurtenance”, Theophylact had no trouble adapting to the new environment of the Komnenian court. In any case, his public activity in the first Komnenian decade, which preceded the ecclesiastical part of his career (up to c. 1088–1092),³¹ unfolded in two distinctive milieus: academia and the court. There is no doubt that he never left his post as teacher of rhetoric at his school. Teaching remained his main calling throughout the secular part of his public activity. His engagement at the court was a natural result of his close ties to the ex-basilissa, who at some point (in the mid-1080s) decided to entrust the education of the young prince, heir presumptive and future son-in-law to the emperor, to her learned protégé. Thus Theophylact, not unlike his teacher Psellos at the peak of his own career, found himself in the privileged role of imperial tutor, which would allow him to – in addition to his old connections to the ruling house of Doukas – establish and consolidate a number of new links with the most prominent members of the Komnenian nobility.

Almost everything we know about Theophylact’s public activity in the 1080s, during the prosperous years of social recognition and stable advancement under the patronage of the court, is based on indirect evidence collected from two court orations given in front of an elite audience from the ranks of the Doukai and the Komnenoi. The content, tone and peculiar role assigned by the speaker to himself provide an eloquent testimony of the author’s twofold client position, as well as of the general situation at the Komnenian court, where both families long enjoyed equal status and influence.

Delivered c. 1085/1086 in front of the highest representatives of the house of Doukas, the *Address to Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, traditionally known as *Paideia basilike* (“Imperial Institution”), a blend of panegyric and princely mirror dedicated to his imperial student Constantine Doukas (with a lengthy praise in honour of his

31 No consensus has been reached on the beginning of Theophylact’s mandate as the Archbishop of Ohrid. The dating of the beginning of his service ranges from 1088 to 1092, see *Gautier*, *Épiscopat*, 165: “soit en 1088, soit en 1089”; cf. also *Gautier* I, 33–35; *Harvey*, *Land*, 144: “some time between 1088 and early 1092”; *Mullett*, *Theophylact*, 43: “some time around 1090.”

mother Maria of Alania), reveals Theophylact in the role of a grateful subject and confident mentor, who measures his words of praise with unparalleled tactfulness, carefully combining them with the truisms of pedagogical preaching.³²

A major turnaround of far-reaching consequences both for the situation at the court and for the general relations between the two co-ruling families – and indirectly for Theophylact’s fate – was the birth of Alexios’ son John on 13 September 1087. This event brought a deep shift and fundamentally undermined the delicate balance in the relationship between the Doukai and the Komnenoi. The birth of a legitimate heir of the Komnenian bloodline altered the position of the incumbent claimant to the throne.³³ Constantine’s hereditary prerogatives soon passed on to Alexios’ biological heir, and Theophylact’s *Address to Alexios Komnenos*, a *basilikos logos* in praise of Alexios the basileus, most likely delivered on 6 January 1088 on the Feast of the Epiphany,³⁴ slightly less than four months after John’s birth – this time in front of a Komnenian audience – clearly shows that the shift must have had a fundamental impact on the court career of the orator, which hitherto rested mainly on his close connections with the top-ranking members of the house of Doukas. Like the *Address to Constantine Doukas* which, reminding the prince of his duty as a ruler, never mentions the name of Constantine’s co-emperor Alexios (or the prince’s fiancée, Anna), in his encomium to Alexios the author simply ignores Constantine and the Doukas family, instead glorifying the ruling and diplomatic credentials of the Komnenian peacemaker and then – in an almost abrupt rhetorical apostrophe – suddenly calls upon him to raise little John to the rank of co-ruler and not to delay the in-

32 *Gautier* I, or. 4, pp. 177–211 (review of the earlier releases on pp. 48–49). See the standard report in *Leib*, Παιδεία βασιλική, 197–204.

33 Alexias VI 8, 4–5, pp. 185–186; *Zonaras* XVIII 22, p. 739.3–6. In any case, Constantine remained a fiancé of Anna Komnene until his death (c. 1095/96), see *Zonaras* XVIII 22, p. 738.15.

34 *Gautier* I, or. 5, pp. 213–243. The *Address to Alexios Komnenos* was previously published separately in *Gautier*, Discours, 93–130 (the arguments in favour of the proposed date of the speech’s delivery are considered in the commentary on pp. 93–108). See *Anastasi*, Sul logos basilikos di Teofilatto, 358–362.

fant’s imperial investiture.³⁵ The final part of the oration is a praise of Anna Dalassene, the real co-participant in supreme power,³⁶ which is difficult to interpret in any different light than as an astute rhetorical turn meant to underline the natural continuity of three generations of the ruling house, sanctioning its old dynastic aspirations in line with the old plan of the “mother of the Komnenoi”.

The external circumstances of Theophylact’s life and professional career and the possible novelties imposed by the changed situation at the court can only be speculated about based on indirect indications, mostly drawing on his two imperial panegyrics and their general character. First of all, these two speeches testify that Theophylact’s position as a respected and sought-after court orator had been secured and unchallenged at least since the mid-1080s and probably even longer. On the other hand, as the person to whom the Doukai had entrusted such an important pedagogical task in the mid-1080s (at the time when their youngest member was still seen as a serious pretender to the throne), Theophylact proved capable of adapting to the new dynastic trends at the Komnenian court, turning to the “victorious” side. And this side would, in turn, know how to put his talents to good use in the following years.

Despite not dedicating a single word to Maria of Alania and her son in his panegyric to Alexios (their presence in the audience should not be automatically discarded), Theophylact’s relationship with the former empress-consort essentially remained unchanged and, like before, marked by a deep closeness and understanding. Maria, who was no stranger to the treacherous turns of fate, seems to have been understanding of the delicate position of her former protégé and the new commitments he would have had to face in the altered distribution of power. Their later contacts, dating from the period of Theophylact’s

35 Τί μὴ τὸν βασιλέα υἱὸν καὶ βασιλέα γνωρίζεις, ἀλλ’ ἀναδύῃ τὴν ποθομένην ἀνάρρησιν; (“Why dost thou not recognize thy emperor son as an emperor, but delayst the desired proclamation?” *Gautier* I, or. 5, p. 235.10–11).

36 Theophylact likens Alexios and his mother to “two great lights fixed in the firmament of the empire” (*Gautier* I, or. 5, p. 241.3–4), developing a highly contrived image of a “second and new Creation” (with a verbatim allusion to Gen 1:16–17). See *Hill*, *Alexios Komnenos*, 50–51; *Eadem*, *Imperial Women*, 90.

ecclesiastical service, clearly bear evidence to a lasting and untarnished mutual affection. At least one cordially written letter to the ex-basilissa confirms this.³⁷ Theophylact's Commentaries on the Gospels and the Minor Prophets were written at the urging of Maria of Alania, although the creation of this work is difficult to date accurately, as it could have been written both before and after his arrival in Ohrid.³⁸

Archbishop under Alexios Komnenos

It is difficult to conclusively infer the reasons that could have led Alexios Komnenos to entrust governance of an important and sensitive ecclesiastical see to the eminent teacher of rhetoric, a person who had never had a chance to prove himself a capable administrator at any responsible position in the state apparatus. In any case, it seems that the emperor's motives should not be judged from a simplified and one-sided perspective.

Since the birth of John Komnenos had removed the need for the services of a court tutor to young Constantine, Theophylact was discharged from the post that must have encouraged his hopes for a more serious court career – perhaps in the mould of Psellos' role at

37 *Gautier* II, N^o 4. Here we learn of Maria's stay on the Princes' Islands, where the ex-basilissa had an estate (according to a sentence in the *Address to Constantine Doukas*, *Gautier* I, or. 4, p. 191.4 sq.). Theophylact tried to visit her during his return journey to Constantinople from Nicomedia (where he had gone for unknown reasons and at an unknown time), but the boat could not dock due to a storm (see n. 73). In another letter (*Gautier* II, N^o 107) Theophylact warmly thanks the despoina – most likely Maria of Alania (although she could also be Eirene Doukaina or Anna Dalassene), *Mullett*, *Disgrace*, 202 n. 7, 207; also *Eadem*, *Theophylact*, 188; *Gautier* I, 66) – for having visited him while he was seriously ill (in Ohrid?). *Mullett* warns that a certain pragmatic aspect to these ties should not be neglected either (“Yet in maintaining links with Maria, he was no less politic”, *Mullett*, *Disgrace*, 210; see *Eadem*, *Byzantium*, 13, 21).

38 The Commentaries on Mark and Luke from the Vindob. theol. gr. 90 (ff. 1^r–502^r, 2nd half of the 13th c.) are preceded by a four-line iambic lemma (f. 157^r; not necessarily authored by Theophylact): Τῆς βασιλίσσης ἐννόημα Μαρίας | ψυχῆς ἀληθῶς ἔργον εὐγενεστάτης | ὁ δὲ τρυγῆσας τοὺς μελιρρύτους λόγους | Θεοφύλακτος ποιμενάρχης Βουλγάρων (“The invention is one of the empress Maria, | a design of the truly noblest spirit; | whilst he who has collected these honey-flowing discourses | is Theophylact, the archpastor of the Bulgarians”). Cf. *Hunger – Kresten*, *Katalog*, 165.

the Doukas court.³⁹ Theophylact’s old links with the Doukai were not the best of recommendations in the new distribution of power and so his panegyric in honour of Alexios should also be seen in light of the author’s need to remove any existing doubts about his loyalty to the Komnenian court.

The wise Alexios, aware that his autocracy had yet to be fully consolidated, did not grant the orator’s appeal to immediately promote his purple-born son into an equal co-ruler, but he did allow the court panegyrist to be the first to announce a new, revised agenda of the Komnenian dynastic policy.⁴⁰ In any case, the basileus knew how to best

39 According to his wise piece of didactic advice offered in the *Address to Constantine Doukas*, a good basileus “will invite to his court those more quick-witted than him, and dust off many of those who in muted voices lecture brats” (πάντα τὸν ἑαυτοῦ συνετώτερον εἰσκαλέσει πρὸς τὰ βασιλεία καὶ πολλοὺς ἐκ τῆς γωνίας ἀνασπάσει πρὸς τὰ μειράκια ψιθυρίζοντας, *Gautier* I, or. 4, p. 203.27–29). One of these remarkable people would have of course been the orator himself, whose talents – until they were put to a worthy use at the imperial court – lay dormant in the shadowy corners of a schoolroom: “They are the friends to whom [a basileus] will entrust governance of cities, of course only after having convinced himself that they would govern them well” (Τούτους μέντοι τοὺς φίλους ἐπιστήσει ταῖς τῶν πόλεων διοικήσεσι, πάντως πειρᾶν [sic] λαβῶν αὐτῶν ὅτι καλῶς ἐπιστήσονται, *Ibid.*, 203.30–32). Alexios was perceptive enough to pick up on this last piece of advice, interpreting it, of course, in his own original way.

40 John Komnenos was crowned as his father’s co-ruler at some point between 1 September and 15 November 1092 (probably on 1 or 13 September, his birthday), at the age of five; *termini post* and *ante quem* were determined based on documents in Regii Neapolitani Archivi, Monumenta edita ac illustrata V, esp. 146 N^o 457 (15 November) and 174 N^o 467 (1 September), cf. *Barzos*, *Γενεαλογία*, N^o 34, p. 204 (the author opts for 1 September, the beginning of the official year). There is no doubt that the ground for John’s coronation was prepared through a series of military-political successes, which ultimately consolidated Alexios’ reputation as the god-given rescuer of the Rhomaic state – this is particularly true of his triumph against the Pechenegs on 29 April 1091 and the re-conquest of the coast of Asia Minor, along with the major islands, executed by John Doukas and Constantine Dalassenos in 1092/1093, *Gautier*, *Défection*, 215–227; *Frankopan*, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in Byzantium*, 400–401. However, the founding of the Komnenian dynasty led to a series of conspiracies over the following years. The most serious among them was the one led by Nikephoros Diogenes in 1094, which was particularly sensitive due to the tacit involvement of the ex-basilissa and her son, Alexias IX 8, 2, p. 275; *Leib*, *Basileus ignoré*, 356–359; *Idem*, *Complots*, 256; *Mullett*, *Disgrace*, 205–206; *Frankopan*, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos*, 259.

award his somewhat fickle subject for doing him a valuable intellectual favour. Alexios Komnenos understood better than anyone else that the considerable talents of his courtier deserved to be put to more serious use than composing occasional declamations in praise of one court clique or another or intellectual tutorship of disinherited pretenders to the throne. An act of imperial largesse was to follow soon thereafter. An illustrative example of Alexios Komnenos' diplomatic skills, it could also be understood as a carefully measured combination of award and warning. Governance of the Archbishopric of Ohrid demanded, due to its special historical and strategic importance, a much higher degree of responsibility than any other ecclesiastical district of the time.⁴¹ Faced with this double-edged honour – honourable exile, as he personally saw it – Theophylact turned to his influential friends, the eminent addressees of his first “ex Ponto” epistles, filled with deep anguish and disappointment with the “barbarian” milieu where he had found himself, pleading with them – “with extraordinary naïveté”, to borrow P. Gautier’s phrase⁴² – to do whatever they could to intercede on his behalf and try to arrange his return to the Queen of Cities.⁴³ Of course, all of these pleas would remain unheeded. Over the ensuing years, the refined intellectual and courtier would be gradually transformed into a pragmatic church operative and field agent willing to put his talents in the service of the specific needs of pastorship.⁴⁴ Despite incessant complaints, laments and grumbles, Theophylact’s diligent service as the head of the Archbishopric of Ohrid shows that

41 *Angold*, Church and Society, 160. It should be borne in mind that only the archbishoprics of Ohrid and Cyprus enjoyed autocephaly and were under the direct jurisdiction of the basileus, which made their status special and privileged, *Ibid.*, 158, 168, 174, 519; *Gautier* II, N° 82, p. 437.33–34.

42 “par une singulière naïveté”, *Gautier* I, 28.

43 *Gautier* II, N° 5, 6, 7. Mullett rightly warns that the general tone of the three “arrival-in-the-see-letters” was equally shaped by genuine feelings and the concerns of genre and style: “Nothing can be learned from them about actual conditions in Ochrid or Theophylact’s actual reactions to what he found; his reactions were determined before he reached Ochrid, and the need to establish his credentials as unchanged is clear” (*Mullett*, Theophylact, 146).

44 *Angold*, Church and Society, 160 sq.

in time he acclimatized to the local population and this, in the cultural sense, underdeveloped provincial environment.⁴⁵

My lord and protector

Whatever motives might have guided Alexios Komnenos when he appointed Theophylact as the head of the Ohrid church – certainly the most important Byzantine institution in the Balkans – it is difficult to interpret this appointment as anything else but that Theophylact had successfully ingratiated himself to the Komnenoi. In order to improve his new professional position and fulfil the duties it imposed, he could now employ his personal connections with both the Doukai and the Komnenoi, as well as with the members of their respective clans. He also contacted his close friends and allies who had not been born into the Empire’s political and social elite, but were close to it on account of the offices they held. His letters show that the language and style which he used to address his correspondents depended on the degree of personal closeness, as well as on the addressee’s social rank. When addressing high officials, who usually had familial ties with the dynasty, his tone was more formal and markedly servile, and his style affected and full of allusions and metaphors that make it difficult for the modern reader to decipher the content of a letter. In contrast, a more genuine tone conveying specific contents can be observed in letters addressed to his intimate friends. Theophylact addresses high-ranking correspondents by using polite and subservient phrases such as “my holy lord”, “my most excellent lord and protector”, “my gracious lord” etc.⁴⁶ in an effort to get them interested in the difficulties he was fac-

45 See e.g. *Gautier* II, N^o 5. Of course, Theophylact’s laments should also be understood as an expression of the snobbery of a City’s intellectual who was neither able nor willing to identify with the provincial milieu where he would spend the rest of his life. For a definition of Byzantine snobbery and several examples, see *Magdalino*, *Byzantine Snobbery*, 58 sq.

46 δέσποτά μου ἄγιε, *Gautier* II, N^o 4, 9, 13, 54, 64, 66, 73, 124; ἄγιε πάτερ καὶ δέσποτα, N^o 83, 90; ἄγιέ μου αὐθέντα, N^o 5, 89; ἄγιέ μου αὐθέντα καὶ ἀντιλήπτορ, N^o 12; πανσέβαστέ μου αὐθέντα, N^o 18, 126; πανσέβαστέ μου ἀντιλήπτορ, N^o 8, 10, 24, 61; πανσέβαστέ μου αὐθέντα καὶ ἀντιλήπτορ, N^o 11, 12; πανσέβαστέ μου αὐθέντα καὶ μέγιστε ἀντιλήπτορ, N^o 118, 119; πανσέβαστε παμμέγιστέ μοι ἀντιλήπτορ, N^o 79;

ing and secure their protection or intervention. His pleas are mostly concerned with the protection of the archbishopric's revenue, which meant that he was asking well-positioned officials for protection from tax collectors (*praktores*). Except generalized expressions of discontent due to the environment in which he was forced to live, in these *official* letters Theophylact does not usually include more private details about himself. Using metaphors and showing his excellent knowledge of classical antiquity, Theophylact appeals to eminent dignitaries in a bid to get these holders of political (either military or administrative) power or the emperor's kinsmen to use their influence and help him to solve a specific problem he has encountered in running the Church of Ohrid. The fact that his surviving correspondence includes letters sent to both the Doukai and the Komnenoi, as well as to other prominent members of their clans, indicates that Theophylact had become sufficiently close to the ruling elite even before he took up the important position of the archbishop of Ohrid, and that he tried to use these connections – with more or less success – when facing challenges brought by his position in the Ohrid diocese. Although most of his official letters were addressed to those distinguished persons who, owing to their offices, could act on behalf of the archbishop, they evidently included some to whom Theophylact was attached by a more genuine affection. One of these was, for instance, the Grand Domestic Adrian Komnenos, Emperor Alexios' younger brother.

Adrian is the person who would, after the withdrawal of Maria of Alania,⁴⁷ take over the role of Theophylact's most influential patron at the court. The reasons why it was this Komnenian figure that became Theophylact's main protector at the top of the Komnenian court are impossible to uncover. The beginnings of their relationship are also

παμμέγιστέ μου αὐθέντα καὶ ἀντιλήπτορ, № 22, 23; μεγαλεπιφανέστατέ μοι (ἐν Κυρίῳ υἱέ καὶ) αὐθέντα, № 16, 20, 43, 81, 86, 92, etc. Cf. *Mullett*, Theophylact, 169–170. On the usual forms of address in letters, see *Grünbart*, Formen der Anrede im byzantinischen Brief vom 6. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert.

47 The ex-basilissa's withdrawal was a gradual process that took several years (after *Mullett*, see n. 26) and was finally completed by 1088, the year of Theophylact's encomium to Alexios and the unofficial promulgation of the new dynastic agenda marked by the decisive domination of the Komnenian bloodline.

unknown. The controversial episode of the intrafamilial row of 1094 between the Komnenos brothers was instigated by a letter from the archbishop of Ohrid – who at that time could have been only Theophylact. According to Anna Komnene,⁴⁸ this contentious missive accusing the young son of sebastokrator Isaac, John Komnenos (1073–?),⁴⁹ the *doux* of Dyrrachion, of conspiring against his uncle Alexios led to Isaac’s bitter attack against Adrian: the older brother seems to have blamed the younger for having maliciously manipulated the inexperienced John.⁵⁰ Although the details of the conflict remain unknown (the quarrel was immediately appeased owing to Alexios’ conciliatory response), it seems plausible to assume that Adrian’s plaidoyer – whatever its specific content might have been – must have included an implicit or explicit justification of the archbishop’s act that had directly led to the unfortunate dispute: in any case, Adrian and Theophylact must have ended up on the same side and, as “allies”, equally borne the brunt of Isaac’s allegations. This indirectly bears evidence to the close relationship and coordinated actions of the Ohrid archbishop and his Komnenian patron.⁵¹

Adrian Komnenos is the addressee of Theophylact’s letter roughly dated to 1088/1089 which he wrote shortly after taking up office in Ohrid.⁵² Despite hiding behind metaphors and using an extensive comparison with Heracles and his servitude with Omphale, the queen of Lydia, the tone and content of his letter to the Grand Domestic

48 Alexias VIII 7, 3 – 8, 4, pp. 252–255.

49 Alexias VIII 7, 3 (20–21), p. 252 (μειράκιον ἦν ὁ Ἰωάννης).

50 *Gautier* I, 35–36; *Mullett*, Theophylact, 7, 75, 86 n. 37; *Frankopan*, Imperial Governors, 92 sqq.; *Idem*, Kinship, 15 sqq.

51 *Mullett*, Theophylact, 213–214.

52 *Gautier* II, N^o 5. From 1086 to 1091 the sources mention that Adrian Komnenos was focused on the Balkans in his activities as the Grand Domestic – the territories that were either part of or in the neighbourhood of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. Hence, Theophylact could have had a twofold reason to write to Adrian Komnenos shortly after his appointment as the archbishop of Ohrid: he was both a member of the imperial family with whom he had a closer relationship and an official that happened to be tied by his military function to the area under Theophylact’s jurisdiction. On Adrian Komnenos, see *Skoulatos*, Personages, N^o 3, pp. 5–8; *Barzos*, Γενεαλογία, N^o 16, pp. 114–117.

clearly show that Theophylact had a more honest and open relationship with this member of the imperial dynasty. Although Adrian was around ten years younger than Theophylact, at the beginning of his letter the archbishop subserviently shows deference to the esteemed addressee: “My holy lord, if your highness has forgotten my humble person and does not wish to know how we are, then that is another of my woes”; and then: “But if you still hold me in your memory and ask of my situation, hear me out a bit, and when you have learned the news, infer what I have left unsaid.” Having informed him of his misfortune of having been appointed the archbishop of Ohrid and removed from the capital, Theophylact ends his letter with a dramatic plea: “Free me from this humiliating enslavement, you who are able to do so, or I will die on you before the hour that the Lord has given me, of bitterness, I, the son who has done nothing worthy of the father. That would be unedifying for me and shameful for those who allow it.”⁵³ Of course, Adrian could not help him in this, but Theophylact certainly trusted him and saw him as his protector. For this reason he appealed to Adrian on other occasions,⁵⁴ asking him to intervene in favour of the Archbishopric of Ohrid, openly and clearly explaining the difficulties he was facing.⁵⁵ Their friendship meant that, in a later letter, Theophylact felt at liberty to openly ask Adrian Komnenos to intercede on his behalf with his brother, Emperor Alexios.⁵⁶

Judging by the number of surviving letters, one of Theophylact’s more important correspondents from the Komnenos family seems to have been the abovementioned John Komnenos, the son of the sebastokrator Isaac, Emperor Alexios’ elder brother. To this member of the dynasty Theophylact sent at least nine letters, which are roughly dated by P. Gautier to the period 1092–1093.⁵⁷ These were the years

53 *Gautier* II, N° 5. pp. 143.1–4, 6–8; 145.38–41.

54 These letters cannot be accurately dated, but the publisher proposes the time-frame of 1097–1104, *Gautier* II, N° 79, 85, 89, 98.

55 *Gautier* II, N° 85, 98.

56 *Gautier* II, N° 89. The publisher has not offered a more precise dating of the letter, allowing the possibility that it was written in 1096–1104. This letter to Adrian Komnenos will be discussed below.

57 *Gautier* II, N° 10–12, 19, 22–24, 26, 61. On John Komnenos, see *Skoulatos*, *Personnages*, N° 87, pp. 135–138; *Barzos*, *Γενεαλογία*, N° 23, pp. 134–144.

when John Komnenos replaced his relative and namesake John Doukas as the *doux* of Dyrrachion.⁵⁸ Protecting the interests of the archbishopric, Theophylact naturally had official contacts with the holder of one of the most important military offices in the Balkans, whose competences often included those that stemmed from civilian duties.⁵⁹ His correspondence with John Komnenos did not go beyond the official framework and Theophylact persistently approached him with the following problems: troubles he encountered from *praktor* Iasites;⁶⁰ reducing tax levies for priests in Pologos;⁶¹ the appointment of the bishop of Diabolis/Devol;⁶² then on behalf of his protégé Michael Beses Lampenos, who was involved in a lawsuit;⁶³ and concerning the unforgiving recruitment of soldiers in the theme of Ohrid, reducing the number of church *paroikoi*;⁶⁴ regarding the village *Ekklesiai* (?) which had been taken away from his jurisdiction, as well as a house in Thessalonike, which the archbishop had used;⁶⁵ and finally regarding the slanders caused by Theophylact's quarrels with tax officials about the archbishop's right to use Lake Ohrid.⁶⁶ Theophylact's letters illustrate his reliance on the *doux* of Dyrrachion and the emperor's close kinsman, as well as his subjugation to this official. Hence, his letters

58 The period spent by John Komnenos at the position of *doux* of Dyrrachion is unclear. He is believed to have been appointed in the spring of 1092 and to have kept this position until 1096; the Iviron Act of 1103 (see n. 32) shows that John still held this office in 1103. For the main prosopographical information, see *Skoulatos*, *Personnages*, N° 87, pp. 135–138; *Barzos*, *Γενεαλογία*, N° 23, pp. 134–144; *Gautier* II, N° 48–53.

59 *Actes d'Iviron* II, N° 51 (1103); 52 (1104). The importance of the post of the *doux* of Dyrrachion is attested by the fact that Alexios I Komnenos repeatedly bestowed it on his close blood relatives – John Doukas, John Komnenos, and then John Komnenos' brother Alexios, or his relatives through marital ties.

60 *Gautier* II, N° 11.

61 *Gautier* II, N° 12, 19.

62 *Gautier* II, N° 22.

63 *Gautier* II, N° 23.

64 *Gautier* II, N° 24.

65 *Gautier* II, N° 26. The publisher is unsure if this letter was addressed to John Komnenos; for more details, see *Ibid.*, p. 53.

66 *Gautier* II, N° 61. The publisher assumes that the addressee of this letter was John Komnenos.

have an official tone, full of respect and deference, and the appellations are reduced to variations of the phrases “my most excellent (lord and) protector”,⁶⁷ “my holy lord”,⁶⁸ “my holy lord and protector”⁶⁹ etc. We also learn that Theophylact’s sycophancy towards the eminent and powerful official could be accompanied by gifts: on one occasion, for instance, the archbishop tried to win his patron’s attention by sending a load of a hundred dried fish.⁷⁰ The authority of John Komnenos over the archbishop of Ohrid was indubitable, although Theophylact also tried to protect his own in his letters, allowing himself to patronizingly reprimand the much younger yet politically stronger correspondent: “Let me scold you a little, although that does take courage...”⁷¹ However, Theophylact’s rare outpours of daring never went beyond the allowed limitations, as evidenced, among other things, by the friendly letter he sent to his benefactress Maria of Alania while she was staying at the Princes’ Islands. We learn that the archbishop needed to go to Nicomedia for some reason and that he was unable to visit her on his return to Constantinople due to unfavourable winds.⁷² When somewhat later he tried to arrange this visit from the capital, it was not only the south wind that prevented him but also the “sebastos and praitor of Dyrrachion” (John Komnenos?) who was tasked with supervising him and who did not allow him to make the journey to the island and visit Maria of Alania. Unfortunately, the reasons for this veto remain unknown to us, but the letter itself suggests that they were very familiar to both Maria of Alania and Theophylact.⁷³

67 *Gautier* II, N^o 10, p. 161.7 (πανσέβαστέ μοι ἀντιλήπτορ); N^o 12, p. 167.1 (πανσέβαστέ μου ἀθέντα καὶ ἀντιλήπτορ).

68 *Gautier* II, N^o 11, p. 165.28 (ἀθέντης μου); p. 165.39 (ἄγιόν μου ἀθέντην).

69 *Gautier* II, N^o 12, p. 167.9 (ἄγιέ μου ἀθέντα καὶ ἀντιλήπτορ). See n. 46.

70 *Gautier* II, N^o 12, p. 169.33.

71 *Gautier* II, N^o 12, p. 167.16–17. John Komnenos is believed to have been born in late 1073, *Barzos*, Γενεαλογία, N^o 23, pp. 134–144.

72 See n. 37.

73 *Gautier* II, N^o 4, p. 139.34–36. The letter opens several questions: first, there is no accurate dating as the editor, P. Gautier, leaves the date unspecified, while R. Katičić believes that it was written after 1095, *Vizantijski izvori* III, 270–271; second, the “sebastos and praitor of Dyrrachion” was probably the doux of Dyr-

And while it was only official correspondence that tied him to John Komnenos, Theophylact’s relationship with Komnenos’ namesake and predecessor at the position of the doux of Dyrrachion seems to have been closer. There are two extant letters sent by Theophylact to John Doukas, Empress Eirene’s brother, at the time when he served as the *megas doux* of the navy.⁷⁴ Full of flattery and Biblical quotations, the letter welcoming John’s appointment to this high military office gave Theophylact an opportunity to openly *recommend* his relatives in his native Euboea to the high official. Urging his close patron to continue doing good deeds in the future, the archbishop declares that the *megas doux* would make him most happy if he graced his relatives in Euboea by “advocating for them in all matters”. His close relationship with John Doukas allowed Theophylact to dispense with any coyness and openly ask him to show “those in Hellas” how highly he valued him.⁷⁵

All connections are valuable

A markedly open tone characterizes the letters that Theophylact sent to his friends – members of the same social class from which he

rachion John Komnenos, but it is unclear if he was appointed to this office only once or multiple times (although we do know that he took up the post in the spring of 1092 and that he held it in 1103; for more details, see *Gautier* II, 48–53); the reason for Theophylact’s journey to Nicomedia is also unclear, although information about his supervision in Constantinople and the veto of the visit to Maria of Alania suggest that the archbishop had, for some reason, fallen from grace or was treated as suspect. According to Angold, Theophylact was invited to the City to explain himself concerning the contentious missive associated with the alleged conspiracy of the doux of Dyrrachion (see n. 50). Although the archbishop supposedly managed to avoid being rebuked, the young Komnenos nonetheless prevented his visit to Maria (*Angold*, *Church and Society*, 164). Angold’s scenario, built on the liberal assumption of the long-standing and growing antagonism between the two men, does not have enough grounds in the contents and general tone of Theophylact’s correspondence with John Komnenos (which is in terms of volume surpassed only by that with Michael Pantechnes, the archbishop’s closest friend).

74 *Gautier* II, N° 8, 17. In the spring of 1091 or 1092 John Doukas was appointed a *megas doux* and deployed against Tzachas, the emir of Smyrna who had occupied the islands in the Aegean.

75 *Gautier* II, N° 8, p. 155.30–33.

had himself come. These are persons close to the court or the ruler, whose influence stemmed from their offices rather than birthright, which put them in close proximity to the emperor and his family members or high-ranking dignitaries. Many of them were Theophylact's former students: Nicholas Mermentoulos, the Grand droungarios of the Watch; Nicholas Anemas and John Opheomachos, both of whom held high governing positions in the Balkans (the former in the army and the latter in the administration);⁷⁶ Niketas the deacon, the nephew of the metropolitan of Chalcedon; John Attaleiates, the protonotarios and doux of Attaleia; and a series of other prominent and well-positioned persons from the church, military or bureaucratic establishment of the early Komnenian state. Two of them belong to the smallest circle of Theophylact's closest friends.⁷⁷ One is Gregory Kamateros, nobelissimos, protasekretes and secretary (hypogrammateuon) to Alexios Komnenos,⁷⁸ who was married to a highborn lady from the Doukas family, an ambitious and comparatively unscrupulous homo novus whose stellar career eventually brought him the titles of sebastos and logothete of the sekreta. The other is a figure which in many aspects stands out among the alumni of Theophylact's school of rhetoric: Michael Pantechnes, proximos, proedros and finally aktouarios, emperor's personal physician.⁷⁹ It was by no means an accident that the largest number of surviving letters from Theophylact's collection was addressed to Pantechnes. These mostly brief and brilliant compositions reveal a very intimate, almost fatherly tone, at times concerned

76 *Gautier* II, 39–40, 97.

77 “Personal cell”, after *Mullett*, Theophylact, 179–184.

78 In this capacity Kamateros interrogated Nikephoros Diogenes, the conspirator of 1094, Alexias IX 8, 1, p. 275.56–58. See n. 40.

79 About the profession of aktouarios, see *Grumel*, Profession médicale, 42–46 at 45. Among the literary compositions of Michael Italikos (d. before 1157), professor of rhetoric, philosophy and medicine (“didaskalos iatron” = aktouarios?) at the Patriarchal School, finally metropolitan of Philippopolis, there is a monody occasioned by the death of Michael Pantechnes, perhaps a predecessor in the same medical post. Two critical editions of the monody are released in the same year: *Crisuolo* (ed.), *Discorso*, 593–634, monody at 628–634; and *Gautier* (ed.), *Michel Italikos*, III.1–115.8. See *Mavroudis*, *Μιχαήλ Ἰταλικός*, 29–44.

and at times tinged with mock-reproach,⁸⁰ free of the formal constraints and rhetorical clichés that burden most of Theophylact’s correspondence – nonchalant and casual even in the rare occasions when the archbishop was focused on a serious request for intercession on his behalf at the highest level. There is yet another imperial physician who joined the circle of Theophylact’s closest correspondents: it is Nicholas Kallikles, mostly known for being, along with Pantechnes, one of the three palace doctors who, according to Anna Komnene, were by Alexios’ deathbed on 15 August 1118, exchanging professional opinions and suggestions in the long hours of the emperor’s agony (Kallikles’ proposal, although isolated and ultimately rejected, was seen by Anna as particularly medically astute).⁸¹ A brilliant stylist, the author of many fine works of poetry (including the epitaph for Kamateros, whom he survived), perhaps even the famous pseudo-Lucianic dialogue *Timarion* (the authorship of which is admittedly unclear),⁸² Kallikles – judging by a handful of surviving letters headed by his name – was a person with whom Theophylact shared the same sense of humour as well as some peculiar interests (in the fields of medicine and pharmacology), borrowing scholarly books from him and taking advantage of his influential connections at court when needed. Finally, it is impossible not to mention Demetrios (Hephaistos), Theophylact’s younger brother, the only member of his immediate family of whom we know a bit more, precisely owing to the information contained in their correspondence.⁸³ The beloved brother was a trusted and courageous mes-

80 The teacher often bemoans the student’s “negligence” and “forgetfulness”, which are reflected in the decreased frequency of their correspondence, wondering – with a routine reference to a Biblical or mythological exemplum – what he had “done wrong”, how he had “offended” his addressee to be punished by his long silence (cf. *Gautier* II, N^o 93; cf. also N^o 17 – this time the addressee is the sebastos John Doukas, Empress Eirene’s brother).

81 Alexias XV 11, 2–3, pp. 494.40–495.57.

82 *Mullett*, Theophylact, 77, 183. The thesis of Kallikles’ authorship was stated for the first time by R. Romano in the preface to his critical edition: *Pseudo-Luciano*, *Timarione*, 25–32. Romano is also the latest publisher of Kallikles’ poetic legacy: *Nicola Callicle*, Carmi. There is also an earlier edition by *L. Sternbach*, *Nicolai Calliclis carmina*, 315–392.

83 *Gautier* II, N^o 133, 134 (Demetrios’ name is also mentioned *passim* in many oth-

senger and envoy who never faltered, not even when facing the Vardar River in flood, crossing it in a tiny dinghy in the midst of winter.⁸⁴ Educated in the City's schools and a student of Theophylact's friends and close correspondents Niketas, deacon and didaskalos of Hagia Sophia, and Theodore of Smyrna, "Consul of the Philosophers", Demetrios went on to have a successful career (although, admittedly, there is no specific information about it), making many friends and protectors among senators and prominent persons at the court. In one of Theophylact's letters to Maria of Alania we learn of the ex-basilissa's special affection for Demetrios: Theophylact reminds her of an unfulfilled promise that she had once given to his younger brother.⁸⁵ As long as his public career was tied to the capital and palace circles, Demetrios remained the most reliable and committed advocate of Theophylact's interests at the court – often, as we have seen, personally delivering his brother's missives and no doubt those sent to Ohrid by Constantinopolitan correspondents. Demetrios was also a respected member of an intellectual circle (possibly under the patronage of Maria of Alania, although this can only be speculated about), which must have also included some of the mentioned persons close to Theophylact. At some point (probably in the mid-1100s) Demetrios permanently settled near his brother, a decision that could have been the result of the first symptoms of a serious illness (tuberculosis): Theophylact's letters offer a distressing testimony to its galloping progress, unsuccessful attempts to treat it and the tragic finale (c. 1106/1107). The death of his beloved brother marked the beginning of one of the deepest personal crises in Theophylact's later years, otherwise full of tribulations and "waves of troubles".⁸⁶

er letters). On Theophylact's hypothetical brother John (*Gautier I*, 15–16), whose existence Mullett rejects, see *Mullett*, Theophylact, 93.

84 *Gautier II*, N° 110, p. 531.19–22.

85 *Gautier II*, N° 4, p. 141.53–54.

86 *Gautier I*, or. 31, p. 233.16–17 (ἀλλεπάλληλα κύματα). Theophylact composed two monodies to mark Demetrios' death (*Gautier I*, carm. 14, 15, pp. 369–377; cf. also *Gautier II*, N° 121, 122). Was Demetrios the "eunuch brother" whom Theophylact defends from malicious slander in his dialogue-plaidoyer *In Defence of Eunuchs* (*Gautier I*, or. 7, pp. 287–331)? That depends on the interpretation of the

Theophylact’s correspondence bears evidence to the complex mechanisms of this privileged form of intellectual communication, which included the subtlest registers of linguo-rhetorical stylization, always firmly in the service of the given situation, person or social status of the addressee, as well as the specific purpose of the missive. A much smaller part of Theophylact’s collection consists of letters that were not driven by any other need but the pure, unselfish wish to nurture a friendship. They are usually stylized in the form of witty and ingenious stylistic exercises composed with the sole aim of making the addressee – usually one of his former students – nostalgically reminisce of the carefree days spent together at intellectual symposia in Theophylact’s school of rhetoric. There is little doubt that his correspondents, the archbishop’s spiritual children, happily exchanged these innocuous texts as a kind of “coded mail” understood only by the select few initiated into the secrets of the art of oration. For the sensitive and hypochondriac Theophylact, whose self-confidence had been shaken over the long years of his intellectual exile to a “barbarian” and non-Grecophone environment, this kind of erudite correspondence represented a great solace and confirmation of his own intellectual vitality. The bulk of his correspondence, however, consists of letters written with the direct purpose of solving a practical, urgent problem in Theophylact’s daily life. The archbishop seems to have deftly manipulated the complex network of his correspondents, interweaving many diverse threads, always handling them tactfully, in measured moves, cautiously setting in motion and animating one influential addressee after another and, in some particularly difficult situations, even several at once.

One of the most troublesome and essentially insoluble problems that would permanently mark the service of the Ohrid archbishop was his relationship with tax officials, a certain Iasites being particularly

word “brother”, which could have certainly had a metaphorical meaning and referred to one of Theophylact’s spiritual brothers – for instance one of the contemporaneous bishop-eunuchs (such as the bishop of Kitros mentioned in the *Defence*, *Gautier* I, or. 7, p. 297.5), who could be Theophylact’s addressee in *Gautier* II, N° 14, 52, 113, 121. Cf. *Mullett*, *Theophylact*, 197; *Messis*, *Public hautement affiché et public réellement visé*, 62; *Krsmanović – Todorović*, *O Teofilaktovoj Odbra-ni evnuštva*, 96.

noteworthy among them. Admittedly, it would be unwise to make any hasty judgments about the activities and true motives of this rather vague and tendentiously portrayed person, who in Theophylact's letters almost emerges as an archetypal evil spirit. Recent research⁸⁷ has shed more light on the specific circumstances of the long economic and fiscal crisis that marked the last decades of the 11th century. The defeat at Manzikert (1071) led to the permanent loss of large territories in Asia Minor, which had always provided the foundation of the Empire's economic stability. Pecheneg invasions and conflicts with the Normans and Serbs in the 1090s and early 1100s put a new, unplanned burden on the state purse. Alexios' internal policy, which had concentrated the Empire's entire economic and financial power in the hands of a small aristocratic class recruited from the ranks of the privileged ruling families, led to the gradual impoverishment of the state purse, resulting in increasingly drastic fiscal measures. Viewed in this context, the actions of local tax collectors (regardless of the ever-present possibility of abuse) essentially only followed the instructions of the highest state organs, whose stringent tax policy could not be avoided by wealthy church estates either.⁸⁸ Theophylact's struggle with the field officials who directly implemented these unpopular state-wide measures, forced by the wider foreign-policy and economic crisis – one of these imperial officials was the notorious Iasites – therefore has all the characteristics of a Quixotic fight against the inescapable inevitability of historical developments. At the first glance, the ornate Biblical rhetoric of Theophylact's letters does not seem to leave room for Iasites and his assistants to be seen as anything else but the incarnation of primeval evil.⁸⁹ An unbiased reading, however, demands a cautious critical approach in order to avoid a simplified, romanticized picture of a heroic struggle between a lone champion of the righteous cause – a

87 *Harvey*, Land, 139–154. The old doctoral thesis by D. Xanlatos still retains its seminal significance: *Xanlatos*, Beiträge zur Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte Makedoniens im Mittelalter; see also *Idem*, Θεοφύλακτος ὁ Βουλγαρίας, 228–240.

88 *Kazhdan – Epstein*, Change in Byzantine culture, 59.

89 *Mullett*, Theophylact, 131 n. 239. Cf. *Gautier* II, N° 79, p. 419.8 sq. Theophylact's opinion of local tax collectors is aptly illustrated by the bitterly ironic pun δῆμοσιος δῆμιος (“tax collector-executioner”), *Gautier* II, N° 94, p. 479.8.

spiritual shepherd and defender of his wretched flock – and his Manichaean enemies, “wolves” and heartless tormentors on the opposite side. The fact that the huge energy and authority of an archbishop and a whole army of his influential patrons yielded no more than modest and short-term results – as well as the unusual fact that the author of the letters (regardless of the conventional formulas of modesty) always resorts to the humiliating act of imploring, almost never acting as an independent lord or judge, a maker of sovereign decisions, which would have befitted the competences of the head of an important and affluent diocese – suggests that Theophylact’s efforts to resist the tyranny of the tax system, embodied in the praktor Iasites and his entourage, were predestined to fail. His appeals were directed to the address that, by default, was least capable of hearing and heeding them.

The letters offer only a fragmentary insight into some (chronologically confusing) stages of Theophylact’s struggle against local tax collectors. The most relevant among them is certainly the episode with the village of Ekklesiai in the Vardar valley, the church estate that had provided the archbishop with a refuge in times of grave trials and tribulations or creative solitude. Ekklesiai was also the last residence of the ailing Demetrios, whom his caring brother had moved to the banks of the Vardar to avoid the unhealthy climate of Ohrid. Iasites’ efforts to update the list of church assets with the aim of removing the village from the administration of the church would spark a sweeping campaign of the Ohrid archbishop, leading him to activate some of his most influential connections.⁹⁰ This example reveals some of the typical features of Theophylact’s strategy, whose roundabout trajectory and transmission of the initial impulse into multiple directions – like a chain start of several billiard balls in one go – aimed to mobilize as many potential associates as possible.

90 The Ekklesiai case had a precedent in the episode with an anonymous eunuch (nicknamed “Scylla or Charybdis”), Iasites’ predecessor in the attempt to usurp the same church property (*Gautier* II, № 31, p. 233.17–18; perhaps the same person as the licentious eunuch of the iambic invective *Gautier* I, carm. 13, pp. 367–369). V. Zlatarski once believed – with little grounds – that the said eunuch is in fact “no one but Iasites himself”, *Zlatarski, Istoriia na bŭlgarskata dŭrzhava*, 285.

Driven by these troubles, the archbishop appealed to John, the secretary of the sebastos George Palaiologos, informing him of the current situation and the dishonourable intentions of Iasites the taxman and entreating him to intercede on his behalf with his superior. In addition, Theophylact tells the secretary that he had already written of the matter to the sebastos and protostrator Michael Doukas (whom he describes as “our shared lord”), because his son Constantine Doukas had been appointed the governor of the Vardar region,⁹¹ which meant that the control over the praktores who encroached on the interests of the archbishopric belonged to Constantine’s official duties. So, Theophylact first wrote a now lost letter informing the new governor’s father, his own patron, pleading with him to *recommend* him to his son in this matter and even explaining how he could practically help him: by not sending officials to make the land survey. We can but assume that the father forwarded the plea to his son and backed Theophylact and so Constantine Doukas arranged the matter to suit the archbishop rather than the state purse. For his part, the secretary of George Palaiologos also lent his support to Theophylact, as evidenced by the archbishop’s letter addressed personally to Palaiologos, in which he warmly thanks him for the (at least temporary) resolution of the issue of the village in favour of the church.⁹²

91 The function of Constantine Doukas is unspecified, since Theophylact only states: τῷ τοῦ πανσεβάστου ἀθέντου ἡμῶν υἱῷ ἢ περὶ τὸν Βαρδάριον ἀρχὴν νῦν ἀνετέθη (*Gautier* II, N^o 88, p. 461.18–19).

92 *Gautier* II, N^o 126. Another characteristic example of his roundabout strategy involving multiple actors and the complex mechanism of a “chain reaction” is found in the quoted letter *Gautier* II, N^o 84, addressed to his former student Niketas, the nephew of metropolitan Leo of Chalcedon (see the beginning of this paper). Here Theophylact informs the protostrator Michael Doukas, Empress Eirene’s brother, that he had violated one of the church canons (the specific nature of the violation remains unknown). Niketas received detailed instructions about this sensitive operation: of the two enclosed letters (neither has survived), one needs to be delivered to Michael’s mother Maria of Bulgaria, who had already taken the vow and was expected to protect the canons and warn her son not to violate them; the other letter was addressed to Michael himself – Niketas was instructed to also give this letter to the protostrator’s mother, who would then personally deliver it to her son. Finally, the former student was not to forget that he was long indebted to his teacher: this small favour (despite his teacher’s warm assurances, the task must have been an uncomfortable one for the young Niketas) was an opportunity to pay back the student’s old debt to the teacher. Theophylact

Like on many similar occasions, Constantine Doukas’ appointment to his new office was followed by an “adventus” letter, deviating from the usual genre conventions only in an unexpected and somewhat inappropriate reference to the Ekklesiai case followed by a blunt plea in this regard – clear indicators of the archbishop’s impatience after the exhausting struggle that had, until then, remained futile.⁹³ Like John Komnenos before him, Constantine Doukas was also presented with “a token package of fish unworthy of [his] highness”.⁹⁴

The arrival of Constantine Doukas to the Vardar area is also referenced in the interesting and unusually lengthy letter to Theophylact’s former student Gregory Kamateros.⁹⁵ Veiling this cheerful and ironic epistle behind the mask of a quasi-rhetorical play on various mythological topics, Theophylact – by no means accidentally – attunes his lyre to suit the taste of his addressee, an alumnus of his school of rhetoric, now a prosperous careerist Kamateros. The latter’s appointment to the rank of nobelissimos and protoasekretes was an opportunity for the former mentor to offer a multitude of honey-mouthed blessings (which, of course, would not fail to include the emperor’s name as well). In any case, there is a fairly conspicuous absence of the issue that preoccupied Theophylact at the time. Rather surprisingly, the increasingly influential Kamateros was on this occasion spared any instructions about the pressing Ekklesiai case and the usual appeals were replaced by a multitude of compliments, congratulations and harmless “coded tittle-tattle”, humorously disguised in mythological allusions. What could have been the reason for this change? The answer to the riddle lies in a slightly earlier letter sent to the same person but written in a very different tone.⁹⁶ It reveals Theophylact in a defensive role, as his correspondent seems to have reacted more sharply to the teacher’s urging: the ambitious and wary Kamateros is likely to have seen it as

was often rather direct and persistent in reminding his former students of “debts” to their old mentor, cf. *Gautier* II, N^o 99 (to Michael Pantechnes); 104 (to John Attaleiates).

93 *Gautier* II, N^o 118; *Mullett*, Theophylact, 212.

94 *Gautier* II, N^o 119, p. 551.1–2.

95 *Gautier* II, N^o 127.

96 *Gautier* II, N^o 38.

pressure to act *in violation of the law*.⁹⁷ Theophylact had, no doubt, again insisted on averting the land survey and asked for another, more energetic round of intercession at the highest level, counting on the growing reputation of his former pupil (and maybe even overestimating his influence), which – as intimated between the lines of Theophylact’s second, markedly mollifying letter to Kamateros – seems to have exhausted the student’s goodwill and gone beyond his unconditional readiness to return the old “debt” to his teacher. The failure to convince Kamateros could perhaps explain the simultaneous appeal to George Palaiologos and the circle of Constantine Doukas.

Theophylact’s correspondence also reveals that tax officials could sometimes recruit members of his Slavic flock, especially those who had once been chastised by the archbishop for their immoral ways (such as the debaucherous hieromonk mentioned in the letter to John Komnenos),⁹⁸ or for embracing heretical views (probably local Bogomilism).⁹⁹ One of these malcontents was the Ohrid paroikos Lazaros, who had managed to free himself of the yoke of serfdom by joining forces with the local praktores after they bribed him with gifts of clothing and food,¹⁰⁰ thereby acquiring a local ally in their struggle against the archbishop of Ohrid. Theophylact’s long and detailed letter to the panhypersebastos Nikephoros Bryennios, the husband of Anna Komnene, bears evidence to his growing distress due to the joint campaign of the praktores, probably Iasites and his clique, and paroikos Lazaros, their most loyal ally among the local population. The praktor’s intention was to make the archbishop cede a church asset (most likely again the village of Ekklesiai) in Lazaros’ favour. To this end they resorted even to the most preposterous of slanders, which unfortunately even reached the emperor’s ears. Would the basileus believe the absurd al-

97 Ibid., p. 261.27–29.

98 *Gautier* II, N° II, p. 163.8 sq.

99 *Mullett*, Theophylact, 59 n. 251; 127 n. 225. *Obolensky*, Bogomils, still occupies a seminal place in the vast bibliography on the Balkan Bogomilism. Among the other key monographs, the following are also to be mentioned: *Runciman*, Medieval Manichee; *Ivanov*, Bogomilski knigi i legendi; *Angelov*, Der Bogomilismus; *Idem*, Bogomilstvoto v Bŭlgaria; *Paraskevopoulou*, Some Aspects.

100 *Gautier* II, N° 89, 96 (to Nikephoros Bryennios); 98 (to Adrian Komnenos).

legation that the Ohrid archbishop had personally committed an act of arson, deliberately setting the paroikos' house on fire? Or the claim that he had amassed vast wealth and was swimming in luxury, like the satraps of Persia?¹⁰¹ Theophylact pinned all his hopes on the panhypersebastos's goodwill to intercede on his behalf and clear his name to the emperor, who would certainly not allow ancient imperial charters that had long vouched church ownership over the contentious estate to be violated that easily.¹⁰² The gravity of Lazaros case and the archbishop's distress caused by this flood of defamation is also illustrated by the fact that, this time, it was not enough to alert only one high-ranking court dignitary close to the basileus. The same cause would lead Theophylact to appeal to his strongest connection at the very top of the Komnenian pyramid of power: Adrian, the emperor's brother.¹⁰³ The letter to the younger Komnenos is another detailed report about his Ohrid troubles and the false allegations of paroikos Lazaros, the purported victim of the arson. The praktor (Iasites?) was intending to send to the City a delegation of several bribed villagers from the church estate (Ekklesiai?) led by Lazaros and instructed to win the emperor's favour by slandering Theophylact and thus finagle the suspension of decrees concerning the said estate. The archbishop trusted that the basileus would not believe these lies and convict one of his subjects before hearing his defence, and ultimately refuse to annul old imperial decisions based on a libellous dispatch.¹⁰⁴

101 *Gautier* II, N^o 96, pp. 485.46–47, 487.64 sq.

102 These are a treaty on exchange (ἀνταλλαγῆς ἔγγραφα), a chrysobull and imperial charter (βασιλικὸν σημείωμα), mentioned in the letter to Adrian Komnenos, *Gautier* II, N^o 85, p. 447.32–36.

103 *Gautier* II, N^o 98. In a slightly earlier letter, *Gautier* II, N^o 89, Theophylact had already complained to Adrian of the machinations of two unnamed Bulgars – one of whom could have been the paroikos Lazaros. This time he again entreats his patron to intervene with his brother and defend him from malicious libels. On the archbishop's quarrel with paroikos Lazaros, see also *Filiposki*, *Dispute*, 97–106.

104 *Gautier* II, N^o 98, p. 505.84–91. Problems with malicious rumours concerning the same or a similar case are the subject of an earlier letter to the same addressee, the Grand Domestic Adrian Komnenos (it is hard to tell if the unnamed estate is again the Vardar village of Ekklesiai or a church plot in Ohrid, the seat of the archbishopric). Theophylact's enemies (Iasites? Lazaros?) had grown bold and in-

All connections are valuable. Kamateros' example shows that, if need be, Theophylact would not hesitate to remind his former students again and again of their old and presumably unpayable debts to their teacher and spiritual father – sometimes admittedly overestimating their true powers at a given point in time. The fact that there is nothing unexpected in his appeals to the emperor's brother or brother-in-law – persons whose close daily contacts with the emperor would have provided ample opportunity for a candid exchange of information, suggestions and requests, including those related to extra-institutional interventions at the monarch's discretion – makes all the more interesting Theophylact's requests of similar favours (or those concerning the same issues) from court officials – his former students – whose professional work at the court specifically limited their contacts with the holders of supreme power. Their communication with the basileus must have, by the very nature of their offices, had a fundamentally different character than the kind of conversations that only the emperor's close relatives could have allowed themselves. Court etiquette and irreconcilable class differences could have, in such cases, become a serious obstacle for any open or unaffected kind of communication, even for the mere flow of information. How do we, for example, picture a situation in which the emperor's physician – whom the slipper-shod and crownless monarch had kindly graced with a few moments of informal conversation after a routine examination or treatment – manages to divert a suitable chat about the emperor's painful joints or indigestion to the archbishop of Ohrid and his troubles with tax officials? What again would have been the reaction of the shrewd and witty Alexios, whose manner, according to his daughter Anna, was always characterized by wise reticence and

creasingly brazen. And although the basileus has already rejected their request, they have no regard for the imperial will. Not even in his most difficult moments does the author forget to include grand metaphors from his usual arsenal of classical myth: the emperor's decisions are like Penelope's web – what is woven during the day is at night unravelled by deceit and lies; the archbishop's enemies are multiplying like the heads of the Lernaean Hydra, another Iolaus is needed to help cauterize her severed necks; therefore Theophylact leaves his fate to God, the basileus and his high protector, the only person who can bolster him in his weakness, *Gautier II*, N° 85.

tactfulness interlaced with a refined irony and succinct comments?¹⁰⁵ Judging by the vague and ineffective responses of high-ranking court officials, Alexios seems to have always ultimately left his archbishop to fend for himself and single-handedly solve his never-ending problems, although he certainly never unnecessarily added to his troubles (choosing to disregard the absurd allegations of Theophylact’s enemies), but also never doing anything to truly mitigate or remove them.

Having in mind the peculiar position of a court physician, Theophylact is especially interested in corresponding with two of his former students whose calling allowed them daily access to the basileus’s bedchamber and bedside. It would, however, be unfair to Theophylact to see his letters to Nicholas Kallikles and Michael Pantechnes,¹⁰⁶ personal physicians to Emperor Alexios, solely in the service of a limited, pragmatic purpose. They are above all sincere and non-hypocritical outpours of affectionate friendship. However, their main tone – although fundamentally different to that of official missives to high-ranking patrons from the ruling family – is inevitably dictated by the same, well-known requests for help and intercession, the bothersome companions of Theophylact’s everyday life in Ohrid. The appeals are now only more direct, explicit and firmer, because they are addressed to trusted correspondents, unconditionally willing to support their teacher’s cause, even when circumstances refuse to go in their favour.¹⁰⁷

In a letter to Nicholas Kallikles,¹⁰⁸ written while the defamation affair was at its peak, the old teacher of rhetoric does not fail to depict his ongoing troubles in vivid phrases, using the usual form of a myth-

105 Cf. e.g. Alexias X II, 2, p. 317.28–29 (ἀστειζόμενος ὁ βασιλεύς); also XII 9, 7, p. 383.39–41. Alexios’ irony could sometimes reach theatrical, spectacular-macabre proportions, like in his “harmless joke” with the mock Scythians, *Ibid.*, VIII 2, 3, p. 239.10–15 (ἦπιος γέλως φόβῳ συμμεμιγμένος).

106 For a full prosopographical account, see PBW: Nikolaos 109 and PBW: Michael 135.

107 *Obolensky*, *Six Byzantine Portraits*, 55–56.

108 *Gautier* II, N° 94. The letter is titled “To the same” and follows a letter addressed to Nicholas Kallikles. According to *Gautier* II, 478 n. 1, there is “no doubt” that the addressee was Michael Pantechnes. Mullett sees no reason to interpret it like this, *Mullett*, *Theophylact*, 330.

ological riddle which the well-educated addressee would have had no trouble deciphering (like the mythological Alcmaeon, Theophylact is also forced to wander from one place to another: tax collectors-executioners¹⁰⁹ are driving him out of Ohrid to Pelagonia... so may Kallikles' kindness wash over him like the life-saving waters of the river Achelous, which finally allowed Alcmaeon to rest...).¹¹⁰ As for specific instructions, however, Kallikles would receive them from the letter deliverer, Theophylact's brother (Demetrios?). The exact nature of these instructions unfortunately remains unknown, but it is easy to imagine. And just like this brief missive ends with an emphatic rhetorical call to the former student to become the teacher's Paeon (Παιήων), the divine healer of the Homeric epic,¹¹¹ another letter to the same addressee likens Kallikles to Asclepius himself, since only he, the palace physician, could find a cure for Theophylact's troubles.¹¹² And these were multiplying at an alarming pace: besides the Ekklesiai, a threat now loomed over another church property, the archbishop's "houselet" in Thessalonike.¹¹³ In all likelihood, this letter was written in Ekklesiai, beside Demetrios' bedside, as its last sentence – poignant and painfully sincere despite all its mannerist stylization – reads: "My brother sends his regards, but from Taenarus, descending through it to Hades accompanied by consumption..."¹¹⁴

Demetrios' illness was probably the reason behind Theophylact's increased interest in medical literature, as evidenced by a short and informal request to Kallikles to borrow a few medical books of the Galenic and Hippocratic corpus.¹¹⁵ This letter, which should be dated to

109 See n. 89.

110 Theophylact could have had Apollodorus, *Bibl.* III, 7, 5 for his source of the myth of Alcmaeon.

111 *Loc. cit.* p. 479.15; cf. *Gautier* II, N^o 48, p. 295.12 (to Michael Pantechnes); also *Gautier* II, N^o 76, p. 10. Paeon is mentioned in *Il.* V, 401 and 899–900.

112 *Gautier* II, N^o III, p. 535.7.

113 οἰκίδιον, *Ibid.*, p. 535.11.

114 Ὁ ἀδελφός μου προσαγορεύει σε, ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ Ταινάρου, δι' οὗ πρὸς τὸν ἕδην κατάγεται τῇ φθίσει χειραγωγούμενος, *Ibid.*, p. 535.23–24.

115 The letter opens with expressions of gratitude for Kallikles' involvement in the matters of Ekklesiai and the house in Thessalonike. The poem 3 thanks an un-

the same period (1106/1107), is also interesting because its last sentence contains a recommendation for the deliverer, an unknown relative of Theodore of Smyrna (Theophylact’s old colleague and Psellos’ successor as “Consul of the Philosophers”). The practice of recommending someone was, of course, hardly unusual in societies such as the Byzantine, where climbing all levels of the social pyramid depended to a great extent on familial or friendship ties among more or less influential officials. For example, in a letter to Gregory Kamateros (1093?), Theophylact acts as the patron of Psellos’ grandson, recommending his reportedly “unfortunate” protégé¹¹⁶ (who also delivered the letter) for some lucrative position, probably in court administration. Of essential importance here is the fact that the advocate of Theophylact’s interests is an influential court official. The decisive factor in the selection of associates was the physical proximity to the imperial retinue and the basileus himself, while professional status per se was relevant only insofar as it allowed closer and more intimate contact with the emperor. Therefore, there is nothing surprising in the recruitment of yet another palace doctor in the matter concerning the relative of Theodore of Smyrna: Michael Pantechnes, the most frequent and, after his brother Demetrios, closest correspondent of the archbishop of Ohrid. Like in many other situations, Theophylact mobilized more than one connection at once, on this occasion also counting on Pantechnes’ help.¹¹⁷ However, the letter to Michael Pantechnes is a curious missive in many respects.

known addressee (no doubt Kallikles) for having sent him medical books, *Gautier* I, *carm.* 3, p. 351. On Theophylact’s medical interests, see *Kazhdan*, *Image*, 43–51 at 44; *Leroy-Molinghen*, *Médecins*, 483–492; cf. *Timplallexi*, *Medizinisches*, 51, 55, 69, 96, 202. On the impact of Galenism in the Byzantine world, see *Nutton*, *Galen in Byzantium*, 171–176 at 176.

116 *Gautier* II, N^o 27 (πικρᾶς δὲ πειραθείς τῆς τύχης, συμφορᾶ κέχρηται, p. 219.9–10).

117 *Gautier* II, N^o 114. The same person – the relative of Theodore of Smyrna – delivered both letters. In all probability, both were sent on the same occasion as part of the same “mail package” (cf. *Mullett*, *Theophylact*, 138, 338–339).

Between goodwill and capability

The close relationship of the correspondents, unparalleled in the rest of the corpus, this time results in a completely unexpected effect, which could be described as an ironic subversion of the very genre of *systatike* – letter of recommendation.¹¹⁸ Whether driven by purely stylistic motives or reasons of a different, non-literary kind, this immanent self-destruction of the genre seems unusually modern – if not postmodern – and certainly much closer to the sensibility of the contemporary reader than the majority of letters from Theophylact’s collection. “You are the reason for my troubles” – this unexpected turn replaces customary greetings at the beginning of Theophylact’s “paradoxical” letter to Pantechnes; yet any doubts about the author’s good intentions and cordial feelings are immediately dispelled, revealing that it was a simple rhetorical joke hiding behind the alleged reprimand: “Since it has not gone unnoticed that an all-round fine and noble man such as yourself is unreservedly loyal to me, some continue to knock on the gates of my idleness¹¹⁹ hoping to awaken it so that it may lead them to you. In my habitual indolence and deep conviction that you cannot do as much as most of them think you can, at first I hesitate to indulge them. But, since they keep pressing me with all they’ve got, I yield and promise that I will, on their behalf, write to your illustrious self. One of these is he who delivers this letter penned by my humble hand and who professes to be a relative of the most wisdom-loving and most sapient Smyrnaios. If you can help him in any way, glory to Him who has given you power to be useful; if not – glory to Him in any case. As for yourself, you bear no culpability, because you wish well on everyone, but your goodwill cannot keep up with your capabilities.”

The letter is a veritable tour de force of ironically distorting the very foundations of its own genre and even the elementary purpose of a letter of recommendation as such, systemically undermining and deconstructing all of its pillars. The cynically exaggerated self-portrait of

118 Mullett, Theophylact, 136–137.

119 ἀπραγμοσύνη, more specifically: “affinity to an apolitical life”, “inactivity”.

the author of the letter presents him as a person essentially uninterested in playing the role of recommender and character witness, which he takes up with unconcealed spiritual reluctance. All those petty acts of kindness are nothing but tiresome disruptions of his idleness (which – as an “institution” – itself does not escape ridicule). For his part, the unidentified protégé is portrayed as an annoying and importunate person whom Theophylact would prefer to avoid, if only he were not too indolent and weak to resist his entreaties. A particularly sophisticated ambiguity lies in the carefully stylized turn: “... who professes to be a relative...” with the ironical note of mock-doubt in the authenticity of the credentials of the person who claims to be a relative of Theodore of Smyrna. The aspirant is, thus, just one of many who ostensibly bother the archbishop every day, citing their real or purported kinship with one public figure or another close to Theophylact. One may wonder what the chances of the deliverer of such a “bellerophon letter” were. The ironic use of ceremonious titles, which sound comical in the low “gossipy” register of this epistolary joke, serves the purpose of deliberately ridiculing protocol etiquette, for instance: *lamprotes*, which humorously alludes to Pantechnes’ social rise, in a rhetorical opposition with *tapeinotes* – an auto-ironical antithesis to the previous, meant to underscore the author’s forced social isolation rather than his monastic humility (a similar purpose is shared by the grand epithets *philosophotatos* and *pandexios* used to describe Theodore of Smyrna). Eventually, the letter’s finale is nothing but a bitter ridicule of the addressee’s power and real influence.

We could be tempted to read Theophylact’s anti-letter to Pantechnes – a moment of unaffected sincerity and freedom¹²⁰ – as a kind of implicit vengeance against the genre, and through it the entire network of correspondents in which the author was fatefully entangled,

120 Cf. *Gautier* II, N^o 102, where Theophylact expresses twofold feelings – joy and deep concern – about Pantechnes’ appointment as a court physician. With the usual irony characteristic of his exchanges with this correspondent, this letter of congratulations is in itself a kind of implicit subversion of its own genre: a paradoxical congratulation which is also an “expression of condolences”. His own experience allowed the Ohrid archbishop to sincerely sympathize with the fate of his younger colleague, who had the same controversial privilege of being a trusted associate of Emperor Alexios Komnenos.

both caught in it and depending on it in his daily life. The letter to Pantechnes casts a shadow on the seriousness and plausibility of the archbishop's rhetorical laments in his official letters. Evidently, the contents of many of Theophylact's epistles revolve around the same, rather limited number of topics: Ekklesiai, Iasites, paroikos Lazaros, the house in Thessalonike. The author tirelessly reiterates them by varying them in the high registers of literary-linguistic stylization and, as is his custom, disproportionately loads them with heroic analogies from the Biblical and classical repertoire. His psychological focus on a few obsessive topics – their relative, partially private and ephemeral, importance no doubt exaggerated by rhetorical means – calls for a more cautious approach to Theophylact's epistolary opus as a highly peculiar source of historical and prosopographical material. The documentary value of the letters of the archbishop of Ohrid (like most Byzantine epistolographers) can be measured only by carefully dismantling their literary medium and constantly having in mind their subjective, all too human perspective.

Therefore, it is reasonable to question the extent to which Theophylact's letters were an expression of the real troubles he was facing or rather a wish to draw attention to himself in his written communication with powerful dignitaries. The content of his letters, fraught with the problems he was struggling with, leads the modern reader to believe that the position of the archbishop of Ohrid was at least uncomfortable, if not worse. This impression, however, could not be entirely realistic, as this post certainly secured Theophylact's existence in the ruling – and hence in many respects privileged – class of the Empire. Was the archbishop, in his appeals to high-ranking officials and persistent lamentations, often exaggerated and veiled in rhetorical and intellectual displays of virtuosity, building and defending his authority, tirelessly underscoring the importance of his official position? He must have been aware of the fact that Alexios Komnenos had reduced him to a loyal subject whose governance of the Ohrid church could not hamper the general interests of the Empire. Thus deprived of a true initiative, Theophylact of Ohrid had no choice but to occasionally – yet only in letters to close friends, who belonged to the same social

class where he could be more open and did not need to flatter others – ridicule the unpleasant fact that he and his friends were, despite the seeming prominence of their positions, mere underling officials in the Empire of the Komnenoi and the Doukai.

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ТОУТО МОΙ ΤΕΛΕΣΟΝ – „СРЕДИ МИ ТО” СЛУЖБЕНА И ПРИВАТНА КОМУНИКАЦИЈА У ПИСМИМА ТЕОФИЛАКТА ОХРИДСКОГ

Писма Теофилакта Охридског су оставила значајна сведочанства за илустрацију феномена приватног удруживања појединаца и породица. Реч је о појави која показује да деловање појединца у византијском друштву није зависило само од његовог порекла или родбинске повезаности са угледнијим представницима византијских аристократских породица, односно са припадницима владајуће елите: извори су оставили довољно сведочанстава која показују да је укључивање појединаца различитог социјалног статуса – било угледног, било ниског – у одређене интересне групе почивало на широко упражњаваном обичају препоручивања некога за нешто. Тај обичај је несумњиво био само једна од последица чињенице да се ни почасна достојанства (титуле) ни положаји у Византији нису наслеђивали, што није само отежавало образовање аристократије него је неизвесним чинило положај и будућност како појединца, тако и његове породице. Отуд су личне везе – у једнакој мери оне засноване на пријатељству, а не само на орођавању – омогућавале појединцу успон у друштву, напредовање у оквиру одређене професије, очување стечене друштвене и професионалне позиције.

Кореспонденција охридског архиепископа на више начина илуструје феномен приватног удруживања и употребу личних веза у службеној комуникацији. У раду су анализирана писма која показују на који начин је Теофилакт Охридски језик и стил својих писама прилагођавао кореспондентима, водећи рачуна о њиховом друштвеном рангу, политичком утицају, рођачким

везама са царем и другим члановима породица Комнина и Дука. Анализирана су и писма која је Теофилакт размењивао са својим присним пријатељима, неретко бившим ученицима, од којих је у више наврата тражио да искористе своје положаје и интервенишу у корист охридске архиепископије. Посебно је истакнуто једно писмо које је Теофилакт упутио свом пријатељу Михаилу Пантехнису (*Gautier* II, № 114), које баца посебно светло на целокупну службену кореспонденцију охридског архиепископа.

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