«The Sons of Hagar» in Archbishop Eustathios’ The Capture of Thessaloniki: Some Evidence Concerning Late Twelfth Century Byzantine-Turkish Relations

MERIANOS Gerasimos

http://dx.doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.923

Copyright © 2014 Gerasimos MERIANOS

To cite this article:

The Capture of Thessaloniki (Ευσταθίου τοΰ Θεσσαλονίκης συγγραφή της είθε υστέ­ρας κατ’ αυτήν αλώσεως...), Eustathios’ account of the conquest of his archbishopric by the Normans of Sicily (1185), constitutes a significant historical source for the period 1180-1185, which supplements the corresponding chapters from Niketas Choniates’ History (Χρονική Διήγησις). In this work Eustathios depicts not only the capture and occupation of his see, but he also offers valuable information about the events prior to the disaster.

Therefore, it is not surprising that in The Capture of Thessaloniki there are some references concerning the Seljuk Turks, which illustrate certain aspects of the later

* Special thanks are due to Taxiarchis Kolias (Professor, University of Athens, and Director of the Institute for Byzantine Research [IBR] / National Hellenic Research Foundation [NHRF]) and to Nikolaos Moschonas (Research Professor, IBR / NHRF) for their useful comments and suggestions.

1. EUSTATHIOS OF THESSALONIKI, “Αλώσις, ed. St. KYRIAKIDIS (with an Italian transi, by V. ROTOLO) Eustazio di Tessalonica, La espugnazione di Tessalonica [Testi e Monumenti, Testi, 5], Palermo 1961. Due to the absence of a shorter title, a conventional one for this work is usually employed; the complete and very extensive heading constitutes probably a short presentation of the contents (H. HUNGER, Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner, vol. 1, Munich 1978, 427). Generally on this work, see ibid., 426-429.


twelfth century Byzantine-Turkish relations. Eustathios’ remarks are valuable, as he outlines to some extent the new balance of power that emerged after two catalytic events: the military defeat of Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180) by the Seljuk Turks at the battle of Myriokephalon (1176), which diminished Byzantium’s military prestige; and Manuel I’s death (1180), which signalled a period of political instability for the Byzantine Empire. In order to be precise, it must be stressed that Eustathios’ allusions to Seljuk Turks are meagre; in fact, there are only three relating to them throughout the text, not all being of equal importance for our purpose. However, this key text,


5. The reference to a group serving on the Norman side generally named «the Saracens» (EUSTATHIOS, Άλωσις, 136.26: τῶν Σαρακηνῶν) is beyond the purpose of this paper, since the name ‘Saracens’ is used very broadly and, therefore, provides us with no evidence for their exact origin. Of course, they could have been Arabs from Sicily. On the term «Saracens», see G. MORAVCSIK, Byzantinoturcica, II: Sprachreste der Türkvölker in den byzantinischen Quellen, Berlin 1958, 268, 359-360; D. F. GRAF - M. O’CONNOR, The Origin of the Term Saracen and the Rawwâfâ Inscriptions, Byzantine Studies / Études Byzantines 4, 1977, 52-66; P. THORA, Sarazenen, Lexikon des Mittelalters 7, 1995, 1376-1377; A. G. C. SAVVIDES, Η γνώση των Βυζαντινών για τον τουρκόφωνο κόσμο της Ασίας, των Βαλκανίων και της Κεντρικής Ευρώπης μέσα από την ονοματολογία, in Ν. G. MOSCHONAS (ed.), Η επικοινωνία στο Βυζάντιο, Athens 1993, 711-727, esp. 721; IDEM, Some Notes on the Terms Agarenoi, Ismaelltai and Sarakenoi in Byzantine Sources, Byzantion 67, 1997, 89-96, esp. 94-96.

6. The first reference to the Turks occurs when Eustathios mentions the conspiracy, encouraged by the late Emperor Manuel I’s daughter Maria and her husband Renier-John of Montferrat, against Alexios Komnenos the protosebastos (πρωτοσέβαστος). Alexios the protosebastos was the favourite of Maria-Xene of Antioch, Manuel I’s spouse and head of young Emperor Alexios III’s regency council. The conspiracy was revealed and many of Alexios’s enemies escaped, preferring exile (EUSTATHIOS, Άλωσις, 18.28-22.5: Κ. ΝΙΚΕΤΑΣ ΧΩΝΑΤΩΣ, Χρονική Διήγησις, 230-938; See C. M. BRAND, Byzantium confronts the West, 1180-1204, Cambridge, Mass. 1968, 34). Among Alexios’s enemies was ... ο καλός Λαπαρδάς, ο πάνσοφος τά στρατηγικά, δν ίέρακα δια τής φρονήσεως και το κατά πράξιν οξυπετές ο των Τούρκων σουλτάν όνομάζειν επέκρινεν (EUSTATHIOS, Άλωσις, 22.5-7). Obviously, Eustathios refers to the Seljuk Turks indirectly here, in connection with the Seljuk Sultan of Ikonion Kilic Arslan II’s praise of the Byzantine general Andronikos Lapardas. This allusion, however, has some significance, since Eustathios chooses to extol the worthy general’s abilities with the nickname that a non-Byzantine gave him, may be because the praise of the foe is more valuable than that of the friend. It is worth mentioning that Andronikos Lapardas had fought against the sultan in the disastrous, for the Byzantines, battle of Myriokephalon as one
even though sparsely, proffers the chance to take a glance at late twelfth century Byzantine-Turkish relations and assemble the additional information from it.

Two passages in particular are quite enlightening about the Turkish meddling in Byzantine political life during the reign of Andronikos I Komnenos (1183-1185). In the first of them, the Turks are mentioned among those who suffered from the «inhuman» (απάνθρωπος) Andronikos I. He was a cousin of Manuel I, who was brought to the limelight by the opposition against the regency of the Empress Maria-Xene of Antioch, Manuel I's second wife and mother of the underage Emperor Alexios II (1180-1183). In 1182, Andronikos overthrew the empress, but his successful uprising was marked by the massacre of the Latins in Constantinople, led by his inciting. He became regent for Alexios II, and soon after his coronation as co-emperor (1183), he had young Alexios strangled, remaining thus, the sole sovereign ruler. Eustathios states that Andronikos desired to be the only survivor, an obsession instigated by his suspicious nature, which made him assume that all men coveted becoming emperors in opposition to him.

Καὶ οὖτω μὲν κατὰ πάντων αὑτὸς ἦσαν δὲ οἶδ᾽ ὅτι πάντες ἰππειδικές ἐκεῖνον πρὸς γέ τῷ μίτῳ. Μισοῦσι αὐτοὺς γὰρ ἐφιλομηνίαν ἀντιμετέχειν, οὐκ εὐαγγελικῆς [cf. Matt. 5,44] μὲν, κατὰ βασιλικὴν δὲ ἐκεῖνο παράδειγμα. Καὶ συλλεγέντες τῇ ἠμένῃ πρὸς τί ἐν δρᾶν θέλονταν καὶ ἀπετέλεσαν τοὺς καταράζοντες. Ἡσαν δὲ ἐν τοῖς δράεσιν πρὸς ἁμαρ-

7. EUSTATHIOS, Άλωσις, 54.16.
8. Ibid., 54.21-23.
9. Ibid., 54.29-56.3.


9. EUSTATHIOS, Άλωσις, 54.21-23.
10. Ibid., 54.29-56.3.
Therefore, the Turks, «the Sons of Hagar» (οι πίς Ἀγαρ) in Eustathios’ own words, were active in the resistance against Andronikos I, because they had been harmed by him and they had also been touched by the sufferings of the people of Nikai and Prousa. It can be observed here that Eustathios names the Turks as «the Sons of Hagar», or «Hagarenes» (των Άγαρηνών), something common, given that Christian writers employed the term ‘Hagarenes’ to denote the Arabs and therefore the Turks.

It is noteworthy that Eustathios presents the resistance against Andronikos I, the Byzantine emperor, as almost justified, even by the infidel Turks. This should not be astonishing, since Eustathios supported the previous regime of Manuel I both ideologically and politically, and condemned Andronikos’ reformations, which were against the nobility. Therefore, although those who had been harmed by Andronikos had also the ability to hate, it was after all his own behaviour that had prompted this situation of hatred, according to Eustathios. He disapproves of Andronikos so evidently that he does not hesitate to admit that the Turks did not attack urged by rapacity or instigated by other stereotypic barbaric attitude, but on account of suffering because of him. On many occasions Eustathios had praised the military campaigns of Manuel I against the Turks, which were above all justified, but in the case of the usurper Andronikos even the enemy had the right to defend himself. Nevertheless, the fact that Eustathios composed his account of the sack of Thessaloniki before February 1186, shortly after the liberation of the city, must be taken into consideration. In the meantime, Andronikos I Komnenos had been overthrown by Isaac II Angelos (1185-1195, 1203-1204), and undoubtedly Eustathios felt the urgent need to disrupt the

11. Ibid, 56.21.
14. For the mood in Eustathios’ orations concerning Manuel’s offensives against the Turks during the later part of his reign, see P. MACDOUGAL, The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143-1180, Cambridge 1993, 455, 463-464. The value of Eustathios’ panegyrics as a historical source, concerning the wars of the first three Komnenos emperors against the Seljuk Turks, is demonstrated in A. F. STONE, Stemming the Turkish Tide: Eustathios of Thessaloniki on the Seljuk Turks, Bsl 62, 2004, 125-142.
15. KAZHDAN - FRANKLIN, Studies, 136.
bonds with the previous regime. This fact partly explicates Eustathios' hostile stance towards Andronikos I throughout The Capture of Thessaloniki.

Undoubtedly, a meticulous interpretation of the afore-mentioned passage reveals a situation closer to reality. Subsequent to the death of Manuel I, the Byzantine throne suffered from violent and frequent changes, offering the opportunity to the Turks to occupy parts of the borderlands in Asia Minor, taking advantage of this state of strife; soon after Manuel’s decease, the Seljuk Sultan of Ikonion Kilic Arslan II’s (1155-1192) troops captured Sozopolis, sacked Kotyalon and besieged Attaleia. Apart from this, rebellions were spreading out in Asia Minor, often backed by Turkoman (Turkish nomadic tribesmen) troops that always sought the opportunity to loot, a situation which deteriorated during the reign of Isaac II Angelos.

More specifically, Andronikos’ measures against the aristocracy caused a rebellion in Asia Minor (1184), which was formed around the cities of Lopadion, Nikaia and Prousa. The rebels were so determined in their resistance that they asked the Turks to assist them. Finally, Andronikos managed to suppress the revolt, but he retaliated against these insubordinate cities savagely. Seen in this perspective, Eustathios’ passage is very eloquent about the situation in Asia Minor during the reign of Andronikos I.

The next reference concerning the Seljuk Turks is strongly related to the one formerly mentioned. According to Eustathios, «those who had been harmed» (οι βλάβεντες εκείνοι) by Andronikos were «numerous» (πολλοί), «various» (ποικίλοι), and «spoke many languages» (πολύγλωσσοι), counting amongst them members of the aristocracy:

...ούτοι δή καί οίσι δέ άλλοι εν όμοίοι κακοί ήσαν ἐπρέσβευσαν παρά πολύων των μέγιστα δυνάμεις περί τά της έωας λήξεως καί τά εσπερία. Καί οἱ μέν τόν σουλτόν ἔρεθισαν τά πλείω, προϊσχόμενοι είς δυσωπία τού βραχύβιου βασιλέως 'Αλεξίου θάνατον, ωπερ ώφειλε πιστά διά τον πατέρα Μανουήλ ό των 'Άγια-

17. NIKETAS CHONIATES, Χρονική Διήγησις, 262.9-14. Cf. VRYONIS, The Decline, 127; BRAND, Byzantium confronts the West, 48.
18. VRYONIS, The Decline, 127-129.
20. EUSTATHIOS, Άλωσις, 56.11-16.
GERASIMOS A. MERIANOS

He notes that these refugees had visited Ikonion—as well as Antioch, Jerusalem, and several other Western courts—and had attempted to rouse Sultan Kilic Arslan II to action, reminding him that he owed loyalty to Manuel I and to his short-lived son Alexios II.

C. M. Brand states that this passage brings to light the fact that Manuel I, at the end of his life, had asked the sultan—along with the rulers of Antioch and Jerusalem—to guarantee support for his son23. First of all, he bases his interpretation of the passage on the fact that Manuel and Kilic Arslan preserved their old friendship despite the events before and after Myriokephalon. According to Brand, even the Turkish attack on the city of Klaudiopolis in Asia Minor, which Manuel saved from almost certain capture (1179)24, must have been launched by Turkomans, and not by the Sultanate of Ikonion; this opinion alludes both to the facts that the Turkomans were responsible for many raids in the Byzantine soil and that the Sultan of Ikonion, as he exercised little control over them, was guiltless25.

Manuel, being aware of the decline of his health, and hence his imminent death, attempted as a last resort to obtain support for his son from these foreign powers in particular. It is not known what Manuel had proffered the sultan and the crusading rulers in return for their assurances, but Brand deems that he may have made proposals which would suit their interests. That is, in the sultan’s case, either reciprocal guarantees about the Turkish succession, or an agreement concerning frontiers or territory26. Furthermore, Niketas Choniates, according to Brand27, partly confirms the

22. Ibid., 56,25-58.4.
23. BRAND, Byzantium confronts the West. 27: Byzantine refugees believed that they had the right to appeal to Turkish and Latin lords against Alexi’s murderer, an assumption which suggests that during his final months Manuel had proffered the sultan and the crusading rulers in return for their assurances, but Brand deems that he may have made proposals which would suit their interests. That is, in the sultan’s case, either reciprocal guarantees about the Turkish succession, or an agreement concerning frontiers or territory. Furthermore, Niketas Choniates, according to Brand, partly confirms the
sultan’s obligations to support Alexios, as he mentions that one of the several false Alexios IIs visited Ikonion in 1192 to request Kilic Arslan’s assistance and support. The usurpation of Andronikos proffered an excuse for Turkish aggression, as a number of pseudo-Alexios IIs emerged along the borders claiming the Byzantine throne and they were endowed with unofficial Turkish support28. This particular pretender accused the sultan of being ungrateful to his father and reminded him of the benefits that his father had bestowed upon him; the sultan, in the beginning, treated him with great honour29. Brand interprets this incident to the extent that the certain pseudo-Alexios «... demanded Turkish support as due him under the terms of the old agreement»30. Brand, plausibly, underlines the fact that Eustathios records requests of aid from the Byzantine refugees to several Western rulers, but none of them is said to owe support to Alexios, like the lords of Ikonion, Antioch and Jerusalem owed31. Moreover, it is apparent that not only Manuel was aware of the precarious reign that he was bequeathing to his son; as P. Magdalino comments on an Eustathios’ oration delivered in 1179-118032: «The whole tone of this text is one of anxiety at the fact that the empire was held together by one man and its future rested on the survival of one tender lad»33. From this point of view, his son’s marriage to Agnes-Anna, the daughter of King Louis VII of France (1137-1180), his daughter Maria’s marriage to Renier-John of the House of Montferrat, and the gesture of reconciliation with his cousin and enemy Andronikos, denote Manuel’s measures to secure young Alexios’ throne34. Thus, an additional diplomatic effort to obtain the sultan’s support for his successor would not be improbable. Although Brand’s interpretation of Eustathios’ passage gives the impression of being reasonable enough, one is not able to confirm the existence of an agreement between Manuel and the rulers of Antioch, Jerusalem and Ikonion concerning the

28. ANGOLD, Byzantine Empire, 275. On pseudo-Alexios IIs, see Κ. VARZOS, ‘Η μεγαλοστοίχια τῶν Κομνηνῶν, vol. 2 [Βυζαντινά Κείμενα καί Μελέται, 20Β], Thessaloniki 1984, 471-481.
29. ΝΙΚΕΤΑΣ ΧΩΝΙΑΤΕΣ, Χρονικά Διήγημα, 420.13-34.
30. BRAND, Byzantium confronts the West, 27.
31. Ibid.
33. MAGDALINO, Manuel I, 464.
34. ANGOLD, Byzantine Empire, 263; MAGDALINO, Manuel I, 100ff.
support of Alexios II. Furthermore, certain points of his analysis, such as the suggestion that Manuel’s diplomatic efforts must have been influenced by the fact that he and Kilic Arslan preserved ties of friendship despite Myriokephalon, appear unrealistic; and so seems the argument that because the Turkomans were behind the attack on Klaudiopolis, “… Manuel may have held Kilidj Arslan guiltless of their deed”\textsuperscript{36}. The friendship between two medieval rulers does not necessarily dictate their policy, nor can one believe that the Seljuks of Ikonion, even in the case that their control over the Turkomans was loose, did not have any interest in the pressure that the nomads were exerting on the Byzantines. The Turkish tribes were keeping the Byzantines occupied and were also pushing their ravages deeper into Byzantine soil, contributing to a form of inevitable conquest\textsuperscript{37}.

Then what is the true meaning of the envoys’ visit to Ikonion that Eustathios records? Even though Brand’s analysis has certain merits, it seems more feasible that there existed no special agreement to support Alexios II, and these Byzantine representatives just sought to obtain the sultan’s aid against Andronikos I. Eustathios most likely declares that the three states of Ikonion, Antioch and Jerusalem owed loyalty to Manuel I and his son, because all three of them had accepted Byzantine suzerainty in the past: Ikonion particularly, in 1161-1162\textsuperscript{38}, although, after the defeat of the Byzantine army in Myriokephalon, these bonds of loyalty would have been theoretical\textsuperscript{39}. Furthermore, Turkish troops served in the Byzantine army\textsuperscript{40}, an


\textsuperscript{36} BRAND, Byzantium confronts the West, 26.


\textsuperscript{38} JOHN KINNAMOS, 'Επιτομή, ed. Α. MEINEKE, Ioannis Cinnami Epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comneno gestarum [CSHB], Bonn 1836, 204.22-208.16; NIKETAS CHONIATES, Χρονική Διήγησις, 118.29-121.22; Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d’Antioche (1166-1199), ed. and French transl. J.-B. CHAROT, vol. III, Paris 1905, 319; DÖLGER - WIRTH, Regesten, nos. 1444, 1446. Cf. MAGDALINO, Manuel I, 76-78; VRYONIS, The Decline, 122.

\textsuperscript{39} LILIE, Byzantium and the Crusader States, 229. Antioch had recognized Byzantine suzerainty in 1159 (JOHN KINNAMOS, 'Επιτομή, 181.6-183.6, 185.20-186.16, 199.6-8; DÖLGER - Wirth, Regesten, no. 1430) and Jerusalem probably in 1171 (JOHN KINNAMOS, 'Επιτομή, 280.11-13; Eustathios, Λόγοι, 213.82-215.23 [= REGEL, Fontes, 39.9-40.20]; DÖLGER - WIRTH, Regesten, no. 1502). See LILIE, Byzantium and the Crusader States, 177-178, 206-209, 229; MAGDALINO, Manuel I, 67f.

\textsuperscript{40} ANGOLD, Byzantine Empire, 190; KAZHDAN - EPSTEIN, Change, 173; W. F. KADIG, Jr., The Contribution of Archery to the Turkish Conquest of Anatolia, Speculum 39/1, Jan. 1964, 96-108, esp. 107-
indication of cultural contact, and the sultan was indeed powerful enough to support the refugees both with military aid and funding in their cause. This would not be unprecedented, since at times the Byzantines involved foreign rulers in their domestic rebellions.  

In conclusion, the above-mentioned passages, although scanty, suggest the rise of Seljukid power in Asia Minor, subsequent to the battle of Myriokephalon. In *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, Eustathios, as he was not in favour of Andronikos I Komnenos and intended to disassociate himself from the usurper’s regime, censures Andronikos’ actions alone for the increase of Turkish aggression. However, he is hardly convincing, as the «Sons of Hagar» evidently exploited the political unrest within the Byzantine Empire after Manuel I’s decease, meddling in uprisings, and backing aspiring usurpers. Hence, the examined references of Eustathios to the Turks supplement other primary historical sources and adduce information about a decisive development: the growing Turkish interference in Byzantium’s internal affairs. The Sultanate of Ikonion was not regarded any more as a «vassal» state; it was treated as a potential ally in order to prevail within the Byzantine Empire.

