

## Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας

Τόμ. 12 (1986)

Δελτίον ΧΑΕ 12 (1984), Περίοδος Δ'. Στην εκατονταετηρίδα της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας (1884-1984)



Θεοφύλακτος Εξκουβίτωρ και το στεφανωμένο του πορτρέτο. Ένας ιταλός επαναστάτης του όψιμου 10ου αιώνα

*Nikos OIKONOMIDES*

doi: [10.12681/dchae.951](https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.951)

### Βιβλιογραφική αναφορά:

OIKONOMIDES, N. (1986). Θεοφύλακτος Εξκουβίτωρ και το στεφανωμένο του πορτρέτο. Ένας ιταλός επαναστάτης του όψιμου 10ου αιώνα. *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*, 12, 195-202. <https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.951>



# ΔΕΛΤΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ

## Theophylact Excubitus and his Crowned "Portrait": An Italian Rebel of the Late Xth Century?

Nikos OIKONOMIDES

Δελτίον ΧΑΕ 12 (1984), Περίοδος Δ'. Στην εκατονταετηρίδα της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας (1884-1984)•  
Σελ. 195-202

ΑΘΗΝΑ 1986

## THEOPHYLACT EXCUBITUS AND HIS CROWNED "PORTRAIT": AN ITALIAN REBEL OF THE LATE Xth CENTURY?

The purpose of this short paper is to draw attention to three very peculiar seals of the Harvard University collections and to propose a tentative interpretation of the group. All three seals belong to one and the same person, but come from two different boulloteria; all three are decorated with a profile bust, which is in itself rare in Middle-Byzantine art<sup>1</sup>, but which, in this particular case, seems to have been perceived as a portrait of the owner, and thus changed whenever the owner changed rank, or aspirations. And all this may tentatively be related to events that took place in Byzantine Southern Italy at the very end of the Xth and the beginning of the XIth cent.

a) The first variant is represented by two specimens.

D.O. 55.1.3661. Diam. 24 mm. Broken at one end of the channel, chipped (Fig. 1a).

D.O. 58.106.3826. Diam. 24 mm. Largely obliterated on both sides (Fig. 1b).

Unpublished.

Obv. Inscr. of four lines. Border of dots.

EKCV/RITV / CΦΡΑΓIC/MA

Rev. In center profile bust of a beardless man, turned to right. He has curly hair and wears a dress, probably a chlamys, with elaborate drapery. Around it, circular inscr.: THEOFILACTΘ. Border of dots.

Ἐκκυβίτου σφράγισμα Θεοφιλκτου

b) The second variant is known to me from one copy only.

D.O. 58.106.5510. Diam. 26 mm. Partly obliterated (Fig. 1c).

Unpublished.

Obv. Inscr. of four lines. Border of dots.

EKCU/RITU / CΦΡΑΓIC/MA

Rev. In center, profile bust of a beardless man, turned to right. He

1. Profile busts disappear from coins after the VIIth cent. (Ph. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, London 1982, p. 25) and are extremely rare on Byzantine seals. But, of course, they survive in other kinds of art, especially on works inspired by antique models: for example: A. Cutler, *The Mythological Bowl in the Treasury of San Marco*, Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History, Studies in Honor of George C. Miles, Beirut 1974, pp. 235-254, esp. 240-241; A. Goldschmidt - K. Weitzmann, *Die byzantinische Elfenbeinskulpturen I*, Berlin 1930, nos. 1, 6, 21, 27, 41, 53, 82, 85, 98; II, no. 240; etc.



Fig. 1. The three seals of Theophylact excubitus (Dumbarton Oaks Collection: a. 55.1.3661, b. 58.106.3826, c. 58.106.5510).

wears a covered crown, made of dots and pellets and having triangular protrusions along its periphery. He wears a heavily decorated dress – or a dress covered with jewels. Around it, circular inscr.: ΤΗΕΦΙΛΑΚΤΟΥ. Border of dots.

Ἐκσουδίτου σφράγισμα Theofilactou

The above two variants of the seal come from two successive boulloteria. As usual<sup>2</sup>, the craftsman who fabricated the second one, tried to imitate the first as faithfully as possible: same general disposition, same distribution of the letters, same distancing, etc.

The inscription gives a correct Greek verse of twelve syllables, in the so-called iambic trimeter. But it is correct only if the two sides of the seals are read in the above order, with the caesura after σφράγισμα and the accent of Θεοφυλάκτου falling on the penultimate. This means that we have here a case, practically unique in Byzantine sigillography, in which the pictorial decoration of the seal is relegated to the reverse, while the obverse is occupied by a linear inscription. Two explanations can be proposed for this peculiarity: that the owner of the seal wanted his name to appear around the bust, obviously because he considered it as being his own portrait; or because the bust, surrounded by the name, appeared already on another sealing device of his own (say, his ring) and he wanted to have the same composition appear without alteration on his lead seal. Or, for both the above mentioned reasons.

This inscription is written with mixed Greek and Latin characters. In variant *a*, Latin influence appears on the obverse, where the sound “ou” is rendered by a latin “V”, while all other letters are Greek. This inconsistency is corrected on variant *b*, where a byzantine “U” has replaced the latin “V” rendering thus the obverse “Greek only”. This remark shows clearly that variant *b* was carved after variant *a*, by someone familiar with the Greek language and Greek spelling. The name of the reverse is written out entirely in Latin characters, except for the final ligature ϝ (ou), which is Greek: this appears on both variants. One possible hypothesis, in keeping with the ones expressed above, would be that Theophylact, a Latin-speaker himself, possessed a ring with the circular inscription *Theophylacti*, all in Latin, but had to replace the last letter with a Greek ο on his boulloterion in order to give to his name the genitive ending, necessary for understanding the whole inscription.

Be that as it may, the inscription on both variants of the seal is the same. In corrected Greek, it reads as follows:

Ἐκ<κ>ουδίτου σφράγισμα Θεοφυλάκτου

2. N. Oikonomides, The “Usual” Lead Seal, DOP 37 (1973), pp. 147-157.

This is the seal of Theophylact *excubitus*<sup>3</sup>.

The mixture of Greek and Latin scripts points clearly to southern Italy as the place where these seals were carved. And, in spite of its peculiarities, the epigraphy of our specimens allows us to date them to the very late Xth or the first half of the XIth century. Consequently, we may conclude that this Theophylact, undoubtedly a Latin-speaker himself, occupied the post of *excubitus* of Longobardia, and headed this contingent in the province some time in the X/XIth century: he was thus a person second in importance only to the katepano of Italy<sup>4</sup>. He may well have been an immigrant to Byzantine territory since we know of one more case where the *excubitoi* (of Hellas) were placed under the orders of a foreign noble who had come to Byzantium<sup>5</sup>. But he may as well have been a native Italian, who rose in rank in the provincial army.

The same sequence (variant *a* precedes variant *b*) can be postulated on the basis of the iconography, which has for us much greater importance. The bust of variant *a* goes undoubtedly back to a classical prototype: something like the curly-haired busts of Hermes, that we know from Roman intaglios<sup>6</sup>, or the similar busts of caesars Marcus Aurelius or Gordianus as depicted on coins and medallions<sup>7</sup>. But in variant *b* we see substantial iconographic changes which may well have motivated the manufacture of the second boulloterion of Theophylact: this same bust is now represented wearing a crown and a different dress.

3. The spelling ἐκσούβιτος (latin: *exubitus*) instead of ἐκκοούβιτος appears several times in Lupus Protospatharius (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum V*, Hannover 1844, pp. 56, 57) and in documents of the Byzantine and Norman periods (e.g. F. Trinchera, *Syllabus graecarum membranarum*, Naples 1865, p. 317, of the year 1193; *Codice diplomatico barese I* (1897), no. 25, pp. 42-44, of the year 1063). It also appears on VIIth and VIIIth cent. seals: G. Zacos, A. Vegliery, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, Basel 1972, nos. 1630A, 1837.

4. Vera von Falkenhausen, *La dominazione bizantina nell'Italia meridionale dal IX all' XI secolo*, Bari 1978, pp. 133-134.

5. E.g. the well known case of Peter, nephew of the emperor of Francia and king of Germania (i.e. emperor Otto II?), who was appointed for life by Basil II as head of the *excubitoi* of Hellas. See G. Litavrin, *Sovety i rasskazy Kekavmena*, Moscou 1972, pp. 280-282, 583-584. This happened in 979; eleven years later a *Petrus excubitus* was killed in Italy (Lupus Protospatharius, p. 56), and left descendants in Bari (mentioned in 1002/3: *Codice diplomatico barese IV* (1900): *Le pergamene di S. Nicola di Bari, periodo Greco*, ed. F. Nitti di Vito, p. 17). Could this have been the same person who was transferred to Italy together with his troops? I venture this hypothesis because from 990 onwards the *excubitoi* are mentioned regularly in south Italian documents, while they disappear from the Balkans.

6. G. M. A. Richter, *Catalogue of Engraved Gems, Greek, Etruscan and Roman* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), Rome 1956, nos. 291, 292.

7. J. Kent, B. Overbeck, A. Stylow, *Die römische Münze*, München 1973, nos. 311, 314, 449, etc.

The crown is made of a decorated circlet, upon which rest several triangular gables and which is surmounted by an arch. It is similar to several representations of crowns, mainly crowns of Western European rulers, such as Theodatus (535-536), Athalaricus (525-534), Agilulfus (591-615), Boson of Burgundy (878-887), etc.<sup>8</sup>. The triangular gables are also known in Byzantine and Western crowns of emperors of later times<sup>9</sup> and become a characteristic of crowns of lesser rulers, such as dukes, in Western Europe<sup>10</sup>. Of course, it would be extremely hazardous to draw any conclusions as to the rank of the crowned person on the basis of our seal. And, in any case this is not important for our purposes. What is important, is that Theophylact felt obliged to modify his seal, in order to reflect a "promotion" of the person represented on it; and, in order to better show that change of rank, he also changed the garments of the person represented, from the classical chlamys to a more elaborate dress that is reminiscent of the imperial loros (without being one)<sup>11</sup>: this change of dress was obviously related to (and imposed by) the change of rank that was symbolized by the coronation.

The coronation of a Roman bust? It is not necessarily all that absurd: it is well known that medieaval men used or copied ancient gems in their own seals, and, when part of the seal, they considered them as representing a new person: it could be a saint; but it could also be a living person; e.g. Charlemagne had himself represented by a gem with the head of Zeus<sup>12</sup>. In the case of our seal, the bust should represent a real, living person, since there is a change in rank. Who might he be?

The obvious explanation is that it is Theophylact himself. For it is hard to imagine that he would have represented another person, on his seal initially without any sign of rank (so, this person was not his sovereign) and later with crown. The fact that Theophylact's titles have not been affected by the "coronation" of his effigy can be explained if one supposes that the "crown" came from an authority other than the Byzantine emperor and his representative, the katepano, who appointed the commanding officer of the Italian excubitoi. With the German emperors and the Arabs, not to speak of the

8. E. Piltz, *Kamelaukion et mitra*, Stockholm 1977, illustrations nos. 2, 12, 37, 50.

9. *Ibid.*, nos. 55, 90. The crowns of empresses always displayed such triangular gables.

10. Lord Twining, *European Regalia*, London 1967, pp. 140 ff. and pl. 53a. They appear, though, in English coins of the VII/VIII cent.: for example, Ph. Grierson, *Monnaies du Moyen Age*, 1976, 48.

11. Cf. Ph. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, p. 177 (and many representations, e.g. no. 934); Piltz, *op. cit.*, illustrations nos. 43, 44 etc.

12. E. Kittel, *Siegel*, Braunschweig 1970, p. 191 ff.: W. Ewald, *Siegelkunde*, München 1969, pp. 183-185, 186 (non resemblance of portraits).

innumerable local potentates, and the Pope, Xth and XIth cent. Italy was the place par excellence where authorities could overlap.

It is very dangerous to propose identifications merely on the basis of a first name, even a fairly uncommon one such as Theophylact. But I suppose that a person ambitious enough to represent himself with a crown, may have left some traces in history. So I tried Italy before and after the year 1000. I did not stop at the famous Tusculani Theophylacts, who became Popes Benedict VIII (1012-1020) and IX (1032-1049), in spite of the fact that at least the first of them was raised to the pontificate from the rank of simple layman<sup>13</sup>: It is assumed (because of lack of information?) that they spent all their lives in Rome or nearby. But there is another Theophylact, who lived and participated in public life in the heart of the Byzantine katepanate, approximately at the time that we are interested in. This is what Lupus Protospatharius tells us about him.

11 June 982: the city of Bari was handed over to the well known patricius and katepano of Italy, Kalokyros Delphinas<sup>14</sup>, by two brothers, Sergius and Theophylact<sup>15</sup>. It is clear that when Delphinas arrived in Italy, the two brothers were in control of Bari; and the very fact that the chronicler mentions that they “delivered” it (possibly, but not necessarily, treacherously) to the Byzantine katepano, shows that the empire’s control over the city was, for a moment at least, shaky, if not utterly non-existent. That problems existed at that time in Italy can also be seen from the fact that next year the katepano made campaigns against Ascoli and Trani<sup>16</sup>. Anyway, we would expect the two brothers, who sided openly with the Byzantines, to get remuneration. Sergius was promoted protospatharius but on 15 February 987 he was killed by the inhabitants of Bari<sup>17</sup> –presumably as a “collaborator” of the Byzantines. The administration’s retribution for the events of 987 seems to have come in 988-989. But in the middle of Saracen attacks, troubles continued throughout the katepanate. Two *excubiti* were killed by local rebels in 990 (Peter) and 997 (Theodore). The capital city of Bari itself barely escaped being treacherously delivered to the Saracens by a local Christian potentate from Oria, called

13. F. K. Herrmann, *Das Tuskulaner Papsttum (1012-1046)*, in *Päpste und Papsttum* 4, Stuttgart 1973 (information about the famous family before the XIth cent. and bibliography).

14. Falkenhausen, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-87.

15. Lupus Protospatharius, p. 55: *tradita est Barus manu Calochiri patritii qui et Delfina, a duobus fratribus Sergio et Theofilacto*.

16. Lupus Protospatharius, p. 55; and a document issued by Kalokyros himself: summary and bibliography in Falkenhausen, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-184.

17. Lupus Protospatharius, p. 56: *occisus est Sergius protospatarius a Barenisibus*.

Smaragdus (998). Then the new katepano arrived in 999: Gregory Tarchaneiotēs who took by force in the same year the fortress of Gravina (to the South-East of Bari) and made Theophylact prisoner (*comprehendit Theophylactum*); then he pushed further west, arrested Smaragdus on July 11 of the year 1000, and eventually occupied (among other towns and fortresses) Tricarico and Pietrapertosa. In the winter 1001/1002, he was busy reorganizing the pacified region<sup>18</sup>. It is obvious that by the year 999, Theophylact had taken an anti-Byzantine stand.

In order to understand what provoked Tarchaneiotēs' activities, one has to turn to some documents which this katepano issued in the years 999-1001/2: in May 999, he granted privileges to the archbishop of Bari and saw to repairing the walls of the city<sup>19</sup>; in November 999, he granted a monastery of Taranto to a spatharocandidatos because he had fought against the Saracens and had remained faithful to the emperor<sup>20</sup>; during the winter 999/1000, he confirmed the privileges and property rights of Monte Cassino over lands situated in the north of the katepanate (Lesina, Ascoli, Canosa, Minervino, Trani)<sup>21</sup>; in the meantime, Theophylact was arrested in Gravina. In the summer of the year 1000, Tarchaneiotēs headed west, arrested Smaragdus and went to Pietrapertosa, from which he expelled the rebel Lucas and his partisans, who constituted a "party" among the permanent inhabitants of this castle and who had previously overrun the whole region<sup>22</sup>. Then he re-established the property rights, which had been upset by the rebels<sup>23</sup>. The conclusion is easy to draw: profiting from the menace of the Saracens –and, eventually, in col-

18. All this information comes from Lupus Protospatharius, p. 56.

19. Document summarized by Vera von Falkenhausen, *op. cit.*, p. 187, no. 27.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 187-188, no. 28.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189, nos. 29, 30.

22. The story of Lucas, the rebel, is revealed in a document of Gregory Tarchaneiotēs known from a XVIIIth cent. copy (ed. A. Guillou - W. Holtzmann, *Zwei Katepansurkunden aus Tricarico, Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 41 (1961), pp. 18-19). It seems clear to me that an error has been introduced in the text during the process of copying; as it is printed, it reads: (Lucas) τὴν κατάκτησιν εἶχεν ἐν τῷ καστελλίῳ Πετραπερτούσα, which, in spite of its linguistic peculiarity (in Greek κατάκτησις does not normally go with the verb ἔχω), has been understood as saying that Lucas conquered Petrapertousa; and it was surmised that he must have done so with the help of Arabs. I believe that instead of κατάκτησιν, one should read κατοίκησιν: κατοίκησιν ἔχω is a very common Byzantine expression designating one's permanent residence. Apart from the correctness of the Greek, this hypothesis is supported by another phrase in the same document, mentioning Lucas's συνοικήτορες καὶ ὁμόφρονες (persons who resided in the same town and had the same ideas as Lucas). Thus Lucas appears as a simple local rebel.

23. Guillou - Holtzmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 27 ff., 18-19; cf. Falkenhausen, *op. cit.*, pp. 187, 189, nos. 26 and 31. I think that the proposed date (998) of document no. 26 should be changed. 998 is

laboration with them— local lords had rebelled against the Byzantine authorities and tried to take control of lands belonging to pro-Byzantine neighbours. To quell the rebellion, the katepano distributed privileges to those who remained faithful and led his army against the rebels. As soon as the empire's control was re-established, law and order was reinstated and land was returned to its lawful owners, who also happened to be those who had adopted a pro-Byzantine attitude in those troublesome times. One of these rebels was Theophylact, who made his last —and unsuccessful— stand at Gravina.

The owner of our seal could be this same Theophylact: same name, same region, same time; the office of excubitus may have been given to him at the time when he was still a partisan of Byzantium; and he may have assumed a kind of crown when he rebelled, to show that he was independent and that he had a second allegiance (to the German emperor?). But, of course, all this, in spite of its likelihood, is sheer hypothesis and should be treated as such: our information deriving from the seal is solid; our information about the south Italian Theophylact and the rebellion of 998-1000 is fairly solid. But the link between the two is admittedly weak, although fascinating. Is there a better solution?

*Montreal*

*N. OIKONOMIDES*

not only before Gregory Tarchaneiotes's arrival in Italy, but also is based on very fragile evidence: the document of 1023 quoted for this purpose (Guillou - Holtzmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28) says (a) that the monk Kosmas installed poor farmers on the monastery's land; (b) that he had been doing that since the times of Tarchaneiotes, who recognized by a document that these peasants belonged to the monastery; (c) that the whole operation had started 25 years before 1023. Even if we suppose that the figure of 25 years is not an approximation, we have to admit that it refers to the foundation of the village, not Tarchaneiotes's document, which should be placed close to no. 31 of 1000/1, i.e. after Byzantine authority was properly re-established in the region.