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## THE REVOLTS OF THE VARANGIANS IN CONSTANTINOPLE: TWO INCIDENTS AT THE PALACE

**Abstract.** This article deals with the revolts staged by the Varangians at the imperial palace in 1068 and 1078. The first part of the article focuses on the revolt at the beginning of Romanos IV Diogenes's reign as described by the Continuator of Skylitzes. The detailed analysis of the chronicler's account of the Varangians' uprising in 1068 offers a new perspective on the relevant passage in his work. It reveals important details regarding the sources of the account in question, including its relationship with the works of Psellos and Bryennios. The author argues that the Varangians were not hostile to Romanos IV Diogenes at the beginning of his reign and that the Continuator of Skylitzes misplaced the relevant story in his narrative. The information he provided was indebted to Psellos and Bryennios. The second part of the article is devoted to the last revolt which the Varangians raised in April–May 1078. Analysis of the accounts of three historians: Michael Attaleiates, Continuator of Skylitzes, and Nikephoros Bryennios, supports the conclusion that the Continuator of Skylitzes and Bryennios recounted the first part of the story while Attaleiates (and partially the Continuator of Skylitzes) reported its end.

**Keywords:** Varangians, Constantinople, revolt, Continuator of Skylitzes, Attaleiates, Nikephoros Bryennios

Katakalon Kekaumenos wrote in his *Advice and Anecdotes* that *the Emperor who sits in Constantinople always wins*<sup>1</sup>. Kekaumenos employed these lines as a moral warning for his family. As he mentioned earlier *if someone should revolt, and declare himself emperor, don't enter into his plot but leave him*<sup>2</sup>. Kekaumenos

<sup>1</sup> ΚΕΚΑΥΜΕΝΟΣ, *Consilia et Narrationes*, ed. Ch. ROUECHÉ, London 2013: ὁ γὰρ ἐν Κωνσταντινου πόλει καθεζόμενος βασιλεὺς πάντοτε νικᾷ (<https://ancientwisdoms.ac.uk/library/kekaumenos-consilia-et-narrationes/>, [15 VIII 2024]).

<sup>2</sup> ΚΕΚΑΥΜΕΝΟΣ, *Advice and Anecdotes*, ed. Ch. ROUECHÉ: Ἐάν τις μουλευσῆ καὶ βασιλέα ἑαυτὸν ἐπιφημίζη, μὴ ἔλθῃς εἰς βουλήν αὐτοῦ ἀλλ' ἀπόστηθι ἐξ αὐτοῦ.

wrote his work at a time when the advice on how to survive the revolt was particularly valuable. This period was filled with particularly disastrous rebellions that changed the role of mercenaries. The issue of rebellions in the political history of Byzantium has so far been dealt with in only a few works. Focusing on various aspects of the problem, such as usurpations or the decline of the Byzantine army between 1060 and 1081, these works have paid little attention to the rebelling mercenaries and have not displayed much interest in the role of the Varangians<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, what follows below is a contribution to a relatively unexplored topic that certainly deserves a detailed discussion: the Varangians' revolts and their role in the contest of power<sup>4</sup>. One of the most significant changes in the nature of the rebellions in the eleventh century concerned mercenaries' interference in the process of transferring power. The Varangians played a role in a number of power transfers, especially those between the death of Michael V in 1042 and the rise of Alexios I Komnenos in 1081<sup>5</sup>. Despite the recent works by Anthony Vratimos and Leonora Neville covering the mercenaries and civil wars of the 1070s<sup>6</sup>, the Varangians revolts at the palace remain barely studied.

The focus of this article is only on two incidents which, while involving the Varangians, took place at the imperial palace in the 1060s and the 1070s. Looked at from a wider perspective, the following analysis concerns the interrelationship between the emperors and the mercenaries living in Constantinople, as well as beyond the city's borders. The first part of the article deals with the issue of the Varangians' revolt against Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes. The topic raises many questions, such as whether the Varangians turned against Romanos IV Diogenes, on 1 January, 1068. After highlighting the sources which the Continuator of Skylitzes used while writing his account, I discuss in detail the last revolt staged by the Varangians within the imperial palace in April–May 1078.

<sup>3</sup> J.-Cl. CHEYNET, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)*, <sup>2</sup>Paris 1996 [= ByzSor, 9], p. 339–344; Γ. ΛΕΒΕΝΙΩΤΗΣ, *Το στασιαστικό κίνημα του Νορμανδού Ουρσελίου στην Μικρά Ασία (1073–1076)*, Θεσσαλονίκη 2004, p. 143–192; J. SHEPARD, *The Uses of the Franks in Eleventh-century Byzantium*, ANSt 15, 1992, p. 275–305, see p. 299–304; reprinted [in:] *Byzantine Warfare*, ed. J. HALDON, <sup>2</sup>London–New York 2016, p. 189–222, see p. 213–218; D. KRALLIS, *Serving Byzantium's Emperors. The Courtly Life and Career of Michael Attaleiates*, Cham 2019 [= NABHC], p. 139–188; A. KALDELLIS, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood. The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 AD to the First Crusade*, Oxford 2017, p. 256–260.

<sup>4</sup> R. SCHEEL, *Skandinaviern und Byzanz. Bedingungen und Konsequenzen mittelalterlicher Kulturbeziehungen*, Göttingen 2015 [= HSem, 23], p. 171–182; S. JAKOBSSON, *The Varangians. In God's Holy Fire*, Cham 2020 [= NABHC], p. 83–87; G. THEOTOKIS, *The Rus'-Varangian Guard in Byzantium*, [in:] *Byzantium and Kievan Rus'*, ed. G. KARDARAS, Athens 2020, p. 57–73.

<sup>5</sup> J.-Cl. CHEYNET, *Pouvoir et contestations...*, p. 55–103, 352–358; A. KALDELLIS, *How to Usurp the Throne in Byzantium: The Role of Public Opinion in Sedition and Rebellion*, [in:] *Power and Subversion in Byzantium*, ed. D.G. ANGELOV, M. SAXBY, Farnham–Burlington 2013, p. 43–56.

<sup>6</sup> A. VRATIMOS, *The Identification of the Scythians in the Service of Romanos IV's First Expedition to Anatolia*, BSl 67.1/2, 2009, p. 191–198; L. NEVILLE, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-century Byzantium. The Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios*, Cambridge 2012, p. 63–74.

### Did the Varangians turn against Romanos IV Diogenes, on 1 January, 1068?

On 1 January, 1068, Romanos Diogenes married Empress Eudokia Makrembolitissa and was made emperor. The Continuator of Skylitzes recounted the Varangians' role in the events that took place at the palace during that day:

Immediately there was a great uproar among the Varangians who, contrary to what had been collectively decided by everyone else, refused to acclaim him. Her son Michael appeared before them along with his brothers and announced that the event had taken place with their approval. They came round right away and with loud, piercing cries they too acclaimed him<sup>7</sup>.

The Varangians' hostile attitude toward Romanos IV Diogenes remained unknown to all contemporaries. One of them, Psellos, was in the palace at the time and offered a detailed account of the transfer of power from Eudokia Makrembolitissa to Romanos Diogenes. However, he made no mention of any conflict between the guards and the emperor. Attaleiates, who stated somewhat ambiguously that Romanos Diogenes *had ascended to the Capitol bearing arms, in such a way that her sons did not find out*<sup>8</sup>, also did not report any resistance of the Varangians to the proclamation of the new emperor. As has long been known, the work of the Continuator of Skylitzes is based primarily on the *History* of Attaleiates. However, Attaleiates said nothing of the Varangians' revolt and the Continuator of Skylitzes reported it in his account of the events that unfolded that night at the palace. After referring to the revolt, the chronicler instantly returned to Attaleiates's text. Thus, he followed *History* both before and after the passage about the Varangians<sup>9</sup>. Why did he modify Attaleiates's version? How reliable is the Continuator of Skylitzes's evidence? What is the primary source of the latter's account of the revolt?

The Continuator of Skylitzes's view of the Varangians' conduct at the palace has received relatively little attention. In the first publication devoted exclusively to the Varangians in Byzantium, V.G. Vasilevskii regarded the Continuator of Skylitzes's ambiguous statements as reliable, but he doubted that the chronicler correctly

<sup>7</sup> SKYLITZES CONTINUATUS, *Η συνέχεια τῆς χρονολογίας τοῦ Ἰωάννου Σκυλίτζη*, ed. E. TSOLAKES, Thessalonica 1968 (cetera: SKYLITZES CONTINUATUS), p. 124.3–7: Γίνεται παραυτίκα τάραχος παρὰ τῶν Βαράγγων πολὺς μὴ ἀνεχομένων εὐφημῆσαι αὐτὸν παρὰ τὰ κοινῇ δόξαντα. Ἐπιφανεῖς δὲ αὐτοῖς ὁ ταύτης υἱὸς Μιχαὴλ σὺν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς γνώμη αὐτῶν ἀπαγγέλλουσι γενέσθαι τὸ γεγονός, καὶ αὐτίκα μετατραπέντες μεγάλαις καὶ διατόροις φωναῖς αὐτὸν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἀνηγόρευσαν; *Byzantium in the Time of Troubles. The Continuation of the Chronicle of John Skylitzes (1057–1079)*, trans. E. McGEER, J. NESBITT, Leiden 2020 [= MME, 120], p. 81.

<sup>8</sup> MICHAELIS ATTALEIATAE, *Historia*, ed. E. TSOLAKES, Athens 2011 [= CFHB, 50] (cetera: MICHAELIS ATTALEIATAE, *Historia*), p. 80.20–21; MICHAEL ATTALEIATES, *The History*, trans. A. KALDELLIS, D. KRALLIS, Cambridge–London 2012 [= DOML, 16], p. 185.

<sup>9</sup> SKYLITZES CONTINUATUS, p. 124.8–9: Ὡς δ' οὖν ἐφάνη ἐκ τούτου, {ὥς} οὐ μάτην ἠλπίκασιν ἐπ' αὐτῷ οἱ πολλοί. The Continuator of Skylitzes' adapted the next words of Attaleiates: καὶ ὥς τὰ πράγματα ἔδειξαν, οὐ πάνυ μάτην ἠλπίκασιν οἱ πολλοί (MICHAELIS ATTALEIATAE, *Historia*, p. 80.22–23).

recounted the Varangians' role in the story. Vasilievskii also noted that the Continuator could have borrowed it from unknown sources<sup>10</sup>. Later research into this issue did not try to question the plausibility of the Continuator of Skylitzes's statements. Sigfús Blöndal and Benedikt S. Benedikz speculated that Romanos IV Diogenes was very unpopular with the mercenaries, so from this they drew the conclusion that the Varangians started the rebellion in Constantinople. The Varangians, claimed these scholars, showed *uncompromising loyalty to the legitimate heirs of the emperor to whom they had originally taken oaths of loyalty*<sup>11</sup>. The account in question has recently been argued as reliable by Anthony Kaldellis, according to whom the Varangians objected to the acclamation of Romanos IV Diogenes, defending the rights of Doukas' sons<sup>12</sup>. In this context, Blöndal and Benedikz supposed that the Varangians were *suspicious that the favor they had enjoyed under the reign of Constantine X might not be theirs during the reign of Romanos IV Diogenes*<sup>13</sup>.

The interpretations of the Continuator of Skylitzes's remarks about the Varangians cannot be fully understood unless more is known with regard to the scholarly insight into the sources on which the account was based. As has been mentioned above, where the description of the so called revolt of the Varangians within the palace is concerned, the Continuator of Skylitzes's text significantly differs from the *History* of Attaleiates in its view of the beginning of the reign of Romanos IV Diogenes. The question of why the Continuator of Skylitzes gave such prominence to his account of the Varangians' revolt is quite complex. It is obvious that he could not have found it in the *History* of Attaleiates. However, although our sources say nothing of the revolt of the mercenaries on 1 January, 1068, both Psellos and Bryennios wrote about the Varangians' involvement in the conspiracy against the return of Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes to the palace after the battle of Mantzikert. It comes as a surprise that Attaleiates made no mention of their role in the conspiracy. Thus, from where did the Continuator of Skylitzes learn about it?

Analysis of other accounts, such as Psellos's *Chronographia* and Bryennios's *Material for History*, can help us shed some light on the Continuator of Skylitzes's remarks. According to all contemporary sources, Eudokia Makrembolitissa and Michael VII were acting together after the disappointing news of the defeat of Romanos IV Diogenes at Mantzikert<sup>14</sup>. Attaleiates reports that Eudokia invited the *kaisar* John Doukas with his sons to the palace, where *they all of a sudden proclaimed her first-born son, whom she brought forth from her marriage with*

<sup>10</sup> В. Г. ВАСИЛЬЕВСКИЙ, *Варяго-русская и варяго-английская дружина в Константинополе XI и XII веков*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Труды*, vol. I, Санкт-Петербург 1908, p. 333–334.

<sup>11</sup> S. BLÖNDAL, B. BENEDIKZ, *The Varangians of Byzantium*, Cambridge 1978, p. 112.

<sup>12</sup> A. KALDELLIS, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood...*, p. 240.

<sup>13</sup> S. BLÖNDAL, B. BENEDIKZ, *The Varangians of...*, p. 113.

<sup>14</sup> J.-Cl. CHEYNET, *Intrigues à la cour de Constantinople: le délitement d'une faction (1057–1081)*, [in:] *Le saint, le moine et le paysan. Mélanges d'histoire byzantine offerts à Michel Kaplan*, ed. O. DELOUIS, S. MÉTIVIER, P. PAGÈS, Paris 2016 [= ByzSor, 29], p. 71–84.

*Doukas – emperor and despot*<sup>15</sup>. Attaleiates therefore notes that *her plan for her husband's disowning and pursuit turned against her*<sup>16</sup>. However, Anthony Vratimos has recently argued that it is highly unlikely for Eudokia to have harboured such plans<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, when in October 1071 Romanos IV Diogenes's letter arrived in Constantinople, the *kaisar* John Doukas and his sons used the Varangians to proclaim Michael VII the sole emperor, and they deposed Eudokia. While Attaleiates offered no comments on the Varangians' participation in these events, Psellos provided a longer account of the contest for power during the last days of October. Of particular importance here are Psellos's remarks concerning the mercenaries' reaction to the Doukai's conspiracy at the palace:

Then, on the advice of his cousins, the Caesar's sons, he won over to his allegiance the palace guards. (These men are, without exception armed with shields and the *rhomphaia*, a one-edged sword of heavy iron which they carry suspended from the right shoulder). Well, the guards banged on their shields all together, bawled their heads off as they shouted their war-cry, clashed sword on sword, with answering quells, and went off in a body to the emperor, thinking he was in danger. Then, forming a circle about him, so that no one could approach, they carried him off to the upper parts of the palace<sup>18</sup>.

Although Psellos was highly rewarded for helping the Doukai to take power for Michael VII, he did not refrain from revealing important details regarding the uprising of the Varangians. In particular, he wrote that he was together with Eudokia at a time when the Varangians rebelled against her:

Meanwhile those who were with the empress and I was one of that number not knowing what was happening, were almost petrified with fear. We thought that terrible things were about to befall us. The empress did indeed lose her nerve, and pulling her veil over her head she ran off to a secret crypt below ground. While she was hiding in the depths of this cavern, I stayed by the opening that led to it<sup>19</sup>.

In his *Material for History*, Bryennios almost verbatim copied the passage about the Varangians from Psellos's *Chronography*. To enhance a brief story about the Doukai, Bryennios made some small changes to the *Chronography*, of which he made extensive use:

<sup>15</sup> MICHAELIS ATTALEIATAE, *Historia*, p. 130; MICHAEL ATTALEIATES, *The History*, trans. A. KALDELLIS and D. KRALLIS, p. 307.

<sup>16</sup> MICHAELIS ATTALEIATAE, *Historia*, p. 130; MICHAEL ATTALEIATES, *The History*, trans. A. KALDELLIS and D. KRALLIS, p. 307.

<sup>17</sup> A. VRATIMOS, *Eudokia Makrembolitissa: Was she Implicated in the Removal of her Husband, Romanos IV Diogenes from Power?*, REB 71, 2013, p. 277–284, see p. 282.

<sup>18</sup> MICHAELIS PSELLI, *Chronographia*, VII, 149, ed. D. REINSCH, Berlin 2014 [= Mil.S, 51] (cetera: MICHAELIS PSELLI, *Chronographia*), p. 274–275; *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers. The Chronographia of Michael Psellus*, trans. E.R. SEWTER, Harmondsworth 1966 [= Pcl, L169], p. 359.

<sup>19</sup> MICHAELIS PSELLI, *Chronographia*, VII, 150, p. 275; *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers...*, p. 359.

Those who were around the Caesar [i.e., the Varangians], after they suddenly beat their shields, and shouted barbaric war cries loudly, and clashed their axes against one another, and gathered themselves together, they moved towards the chamber of the empress. When she heard the tumult and the loud noise, she no longer held back, but, after she took off the cover from her head, she rushed into an underground, like a cave, place. And while she had entered the burrow, the others [the guards] had positioned themselves around its entrance, shouting loudly and transmitting enormous fear towards her. And she would have nearly died, if the Caesar, entering <there>, had not relaxed much of her fear. At least then, he advised her to leave the palace so as not to have an incurable suffering from the guards<sup>20</sup>.

It may be of some importance to say here that Bryennios added little to Psellos's words. Furthermore, Bryennios made use of these very words and the particulars of the Varangian uprising. Bryennios may also have presumed some 'loyalty' of the Varangians, as no mercenaries' rebellion was heard of between 1081 and 1130 (he started working on the *Material for History*<sup>21</sup> in 1120). With regard to the last days of October 1071, the 'loyalty' of the Varangians was far from clear. Both Psellos and Bryennios could have suggested something about the relationship between the Doukai and the Varangians. However, later readers of the *Chronography* could have been made to view the revolt of the mercenaries as resulting from earlier disagreements between Romanos IV Diogenes and the Varangians<sup>22</sup>. The Continuator of Skylitzes, who was clearly and importantly one of those readers, wrote that Psellos took the leading role in Eudokia's deposition in October 1071, of which – the Continuator added – *he boasts himself in one of his own writings*<sup>23</sup>. Some passages of the Continuator's work are clearly based on the *Chronography*<sup>24</sup>. In his edition of the *Chronography*, Eudoxos Tsolakes expresses the opinion that the *Chronography* remained an important source for the Continuator of Skylitzes<sup>25</sup>. However, Warren Treadgold has more recently contended that the chronicler *avoided using*

<sup>20</sup> NICÉPHORE BRYENNIOS, *Histoire*, ed. P. GAUTIER, Bruxelles 1975 [= CFHB, 9] (cetera: NICÉPHORE BRYENNIOS, *Histoire*), p. 123.23 – 125.7; A. VRATIMOS, *Eudokia Makrembolitissa...*, p. 277–284, see p. 280–281.

<sup>21</sup> L. NEVILLE, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-century Byzantium...*, p. 16; W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, Basingstoke 2013, p. 347, n. 22.

<sup>22</sup> The relationship between Romanos IV Diogenes and the Varangians during the latter's final campaign remains largely uncharted due to a paucity of available sources. In particular, Byzantine sources do not record the participation of the Varangians in the battle of Mantzikert (G. THEOTOKIS, *The Campaign and Battle of Manzikert 1071*, Leeds 2024, p. 120). Subsequent accounts by Arab historians about the Rus' involvement in this battle and their casualties may be credible, yet the question remains unresolved (C. HILLENBRAND, *Turkish Myth and Muslim Symbol. The Battle of Manzikert*, Edinburgh 2007, p. 58–66). If, indeed, some of the Varangians participated in this battle, it seems that they sustained such significant losses that even those who survived did not join Romanos IV Diogenes' army upon his return from captivity.

<sup>23</sup> SKYLITZES CONTINUATUS, p. 152.23–24; *Byzantium in the Time of Troubles...*, p. 129.

<sup>24</sup> SKYLITZES CONTINUATUS, p. 118.14–18, 118.18 – 119.4, 154.25 – 155.3.

<sup>25</sup> SKYLITZES CONTINUATUS, p. 72–74.

it because he disliked its author so much<sup>26</sup>. Nonetheless, the Continuator of Skylitzes seems to have made extensive use of the *Chronography* in constructing his narrative of the reigns of Eudokia, Romanos IV Diogenes, and Michael VII. In fact, his account of the revolt of the Varangians at the beginning of Romanos IV Diogenes' reign is very similar to corresponding passages in the *Chronography*. Some of the phrases, such as 'loud' and 'piercing cries', were borrowed from Psellos. It is noteworthy that, upon reexamination of Psellos' account of Eudokia's final days, the Continuator of Skylitzes placed the revolt of the Varangians at the beginning of Romanos IV Diogenes' reign<sup>27</sup>.

| Skylitzes Cont.,<br>p. 124.3–7.  | Psellos, VII, 149–151,<br>p. 274–275.   | Bryennios, I, 20,<br>p. 123.12–125.7.   |
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| <p>Γίνεται παραντίκα τάραχος παρὰ τῶν Βαράγγων πολὺς μὴ ἀνεχομένων εὐφημησαὶ αὐτὸν παρὰ τὰ κοινῆ δόξαντα. Ἐπιφανεῖς δὲ αὐτοῖς ὁ ταύτης υἱὸς Μιχαὴλ σὺν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς γνώμη αὐτῶν ἀπαγγέλλουσι γενέσθαι τὸ γεγονός, καὶ αὐτίκα μετατραπέντες μεγάλαις καὶ διατόροις φωναῖς αὐτὸν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἀνηγόρευσαν.</p> | <p>149. [...] τοὺς περὶ τὴν αὐλὴν φύλακας οἰκειοῦται. τοῦτο δὲ τὸ γένος, ἀσπιδηφόροι σύμπαντες· καὶ ῥομφαίαν τινὰ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὤμου ἑτερόστομον καὶ βαρυσίδηρον ἐπισειόντες· κτυπήσαντες γοῦν τὰς ἀσπίδας ἀθρόοι· καὶ ἀλαλάξαντες, ὅσον ἐχώρουν αἱ κεφαλαί, τὰς τε ῥομφαίας πρὸς ἀλλήλας συντρίψαντές τε καὶ συνηχίσαντες, ἐπὶ τὸν βασιλεύοντα ὡς κινδυνεύοντα συνανίσαι· καὶ χορὸν περὶ αὐτὸν ἐλίξαντες ἀθιγῶς, ἐπὶ τὰ ὑψηλότερα τῶν ἀνακτόρων ἀνάγουσιν.</p> <p>150. [...] οὐδὲ καθεκτὴ ἦν· ἀλλὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς περιελομένη τὸ κάλυμμα, καταταίνει δρόμον ἐπὶ τι σπήλαιον ἄδυτον· καὶ ἡ μὲν ἐδεδύκει τῷ φωλεῷ· ἐγὼ δὲ περιεστήκειν τὸ στόμιον, οὐκ ἔχων ὅ τι γενοίμην· οὐδ' ὅποι τραποίμην.</p> | <p>20. [...] τοὺς περὶ τὴν αὐλὴν φύλακας εὐθὺς οἰκειοῦται· τοῦτο δὲ τὸ γένος ὠρμητο ἐκ τῆς βαρβάρου χώρας τῆς πλησίον ὠκεανοῦ, πιστὸν δὲ βασιλεῦσι Ῥωμαίων ἀρχήθην, ἀσπιδηφόρον ξύμπαν καὶ πέλεκύν τινὰ ἐπὶ ὤμων φέρον.</p> <p>Οἱ δὲ περὶ τὸν καίσαρα κτυπήσαντες τὰς ἀσπίδας ἀθρόοι καὶ βαρβαρικὸν ἀλαλάξαντες τὰς τε ῥομφαίας πρὸς ἀλλήλους συντρίψαντές τε καὶ συγκροτήσαντες περὶ τὴν βασιλίδος ἐχώρουν σκηνήν.</p> <p>[...] οὐδὲ καθεκτὴ ἔτι ἦν, ἀλλὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς περιελομένη τὸ κάλυμμα ἐπὶ τι οἴκημα ἄδυτον ἐμφορὸς σπηλαίῳ ἐξώρμα, καὶ ἡ μὲν ἐδεδύκει τῷ φωλεῷ, οἱ δὲ περιεστήκεισαν τὸ στόμιον ἀλαλάζοντες καὶ φόβον μέγιστον αὐτῇ ἐπισειόντες, καὶ μικροῦ ἂν ἐτεθνήκει...</p> |

<sup>26</sup> W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine...*, p. 338.

<sup>27</sup> In fact, the Continuator of Skylitzes invented this mini-revolt, which in his imagination ended very quickly. It is of particular interest to note that the Continuator of Skylitzes dealt with the purported resistance of the Varangians, incorporating Psellos' statements in a manner that was reflective of his own perspective.

## The last revolt of the Varangians

Attaleiates reported another curious incident regarding the Varangians' conduct at the palace. After his description of the end of Nikephoros Bryennios's revolt, he noted that Botaneiates *offer thanks and please God through his overwhelming munificence and the demon begrudging the virtuous could not bear to behold such happiness prevailing among people and so he planned*<sup>28</sup>. These people were the mercenaries who unexpectedly attacked Emperor Botaneiates in around April–May 1078<sup>29</sup>. Attaleiates did not explain why these warriors were involved in the uprising. If we accept the veracity of Attaleiates' account of the various rebellions against Botaneiates as presented in the section of his narrative dedicated to this topic, which claims:

He spurred within the raging spirits of the foreign men who guard the palace an evil impulse and an audacity full of murder and savagery. Around dusk, while holding, according to tradition, their shields and weapons and presenting themselves in tight formation before the ruler, they rushed against him with a great and murderous charge, burning with rage, as he was leaning out over them from one of the elevated and exposed passageways of the palace. Some, using bows, shot arrows at him, while others attempted to climb the stairs that led up to him and forced the ascent with their swords and much pushing and jostling. It was at that moment also that one of the secretaries who was standing beside him was struck in the neck by the point of an arrow and forthwith ended his life in excruciating pain. The emperor was unprepared because of the sudden and unexpected nature of the attack, and did not have a strong enough force at hand to suppress it. Yet, as he was used to hand-to-hand combat and the confrontations of war, he did not panic and did not consider fleeing, as anyone else would surely have done if he were being shot at on all sides. Gathering his wits, he defended himself valiantly along with a few others who were present, fighting with disciplined order and fearless purpose. He pushed those inhuman barbarians away from the stairs – they were burning with unjust wrath and were already thoroughly drunk, as it was late in the evening, when they lose the ability to think on account of their excessive guzzling of unmixed wine, for they cannot drink enough of that – and, with his irresistible force, hurled them to the ground on their necks and heads. But they became utterly shameless and were contending over who would do the most abominable injury to God. But slowly the Romans who made up the emperor's guard gathered and battle was joined lasting a long time, whereupon the barbarians had the worst of it. Still they resisted, using their own ramparts as a kind of fort – for an elevated citadel in the palace is set aside for the habitation – until, worn out by the emperor's strength and skill, they put an end to their mischief and asked for forgiveness, and then they found that the emperor's lenience inclined in their favor<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> MICHAELIS ATTALEIATAE, *Historia*, p. 226.80.20–21; MICHAEL ATTALEIATES, *The History*, trans. A. KALDELLIS and D. KRALLIS, p. 537.

<sup>29</sup> J.-Cl. CHEYNET, *Pouvoir et contestations...*, p. 86; A. KALDELLIS, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood...*, p. 267–268; Sz. WIERZBIŃSKI, *U boku bazyleusa. Frankowie i Waregowie w cesarstwie bizantyńskim w XI w.*, Łódź 2019 [= BL, 37], p. 184–191.

<sup>30</sup> MICHAELIS ATTALEIATAE, *Historia*, p. 226–227; MICHAEL ATTALEIATES, *The History*, trans. A. KALDELLIS and D. KRALLIS, p. 538–541.



Attaleiates, however, directs greater attention to the emperor's benevolence towards these rebels. In particular, he posits that Botaneiates was not inclined to inflict punishment upon all the Varangians:

In this way, then, did he defeat this plot too with the courage that God inspired in him. He did not seek the punishment of the entire unit of the barbarian guards, but rather took pity on them as they were imploring him and kept their eyes lowered to the ground, deeming them worthy of compassion. He corrected their thinking with his prudent advice, explaining to them that not even many myriads of men would be able to topple him, if they sought to do so, given that he had received his authority from God. Some of them, who were seen to reject his attempt to improve them and were convicted by their own compatriots as well as by the judgment and the inquiry conducted by the emperor, after they were threatened in the right way, he cast out and assigned to guard certain forts. With such honorable exile did he punish the thoughtless among them<sup>31</sup>.

In the texts quoted above, particular attention is paid to the emperor's bravery<sup>32</sup>. It is known that during the revolt, one of the secretaries standing beside Botaneiates was killed. Attaleiates did not mention the secretary's name, nor did he explain why the man had been killed. Revealing the Varangians' culpability, the chronicler said nothing of the motives for their involvement in the described events. Instead, he informed his readers of the death of the *hypertimos*, a monk named Michael, pointing out that *the killing of the secretary, in fact, presaged his own death*<sup>33</sup>. Attaleiates provided no adequate details to determine the monk's part in the events, but his testimony does not seem indicative of the monk's participation in the Varangians' uprising against Botaneiates<sup>34</sup>. The context in which the *History's* account was placed does not suggest any connection between the monk Michael and the Varangians. In recounting the Varangians' revolt, the Continuator of Skylitzes reported a similar incident pertaining to Emperor Botaneiates. Here is how the incident was depicted:

Bryennios' brother was killed in Byzantium by the Varangians. When Bryennios rebelled and the Varangians outside the City sided with him, the Varangians in the palace picked one of their comrades and sent him to his fellow countrymen in an effort to persuade them to abandon the rebel and support the emperor's cause. After being discovered and seized, the

<sup>31</sup> MICHAELIS ATTALEIATAE, *Historia*, p. 227–228; MICHAEL ATTALEIATES, *The History*, trans. A. KALDELLIS and D. KRALLIS, p. 541.

<sup>32</sup> MICHAELIS ATTALEIATAE, *Historia*, p. 32.12–5.8, 44.26 – 45.3; D. KRALLIS, *Serving Byzantium's Emperors...*, p. 203.

<sup>33</sup> MICHAELIS ATTALEIATAE, *Historia*, p. 228.7–14; MICHAEL ATTALEIATES, *The History*, trans. A. KALDELLIS and D. KRALLIS, p. 541.

<sup>34</sup> A. Kaldellis argues that Psellos was not the 'Michael of Nikomedeia', who Attaleiates says died in 1078 (see A. KALDELLIS, *The Date of Psellos' Death, Once Again: Psellos Was Not the Michael of Nikomedeia Mentioned by Attaleiates*, BZ 104, 2011, p. 651–663, see p. 662).

man was subjected to a brutal interrogation and revealed everything that had been disclosed to him. He had his nose cut off, suffering this outrage at John's hands. The barbarian did not meekly accept the indignity inflicted upon him, but murdered John as he was going out of the palace, slashing him with the knives which those people carry. The Varangians rose up against the emperor and tried to get their hands on him, but when the emperor's soldiers deployed for battle against them, they turned to supplication and after making their peace with the emperor they received his pardon<sup>35</sup>.

Although the Continuator of Skylitzes repeated Attaleiates's phrases, he must also have had an independent knowledge of the respective facts. Integrating Attaleiates's account of the Varangians' rebellion against Botaneiates into his own narrative, the Continuator of Skylitzes shortened it significantly. On the one hand, he borrowed Attaleiates's final statements regarding the emperor's attitude toward the Varangians, preserving the structure and chronology of the direct source. Following Attaleiates, he wrote about the Varangians' behaviour at the palace after the defeat of Nikephoros Bryennios's rebellion, yet he omitted Attaleiates's following story concerning the death of the *hypertimos*, the monk Michael. On the other hand, in his description of the Varangians' revolt, he also showed a profound knowledge of the nature of the conflict between the mercenaries and the emperor. The first part of the Continuator of Skylitzes's passage can be taken to complement the conclusion that the Varangians' riot within the palace had special causes connected with John Bryennios.

It is also significant that, unlike Attaleiates, the Continuator of Skylitzes outlined the different stages of the revolt. Pointing out the long-term conflict between the Varangians and John Bryennios during Nikephoros Bryennios's rebellion, he treated the events at the palace in April–May 1078 as the climax of this conflict. It is worth mentioning that similar information, coupled with the supporting evidence of the various causes for the Varangians' revolt against Botaneiates, can be found in the chronicles of George Hamartolos and John Zonaras<sup>36</sup>. There is no reason to doubt that Zonaras had direct knowledge of the work of the Continuator of Skylitzes directly. The author of the Continuation of George Hamartolos, in turn, knew the Continuator of Skylitzes only through Zonaras.

<sup>35</sup> SKYLITZES CONTINUATUS, p. 181.9–21; *Byzantium in the Time of Troubles...*, p. 181.

<sup>36</sup> *Georgii monachi, dicti Hamartoli, Chronicon ab orbe condito ad annum p. chr. 842 et a diversis scriptoribus usq. ad ann. 1143 continuatum*, ed. E. DE MURALT, Sankt-Petersburg 1859, p. 897; IOANNIS ZONARAE, *Annales*, vol. III, ed. M. PINDAR, Th. BÜTTNER-WOBST, Bonn 1897, p. 722.

| Scylitzes Continuatus,<br>p. 181.9–21.   | Ioannis Zonarae, III,<br>p. 722.   | Georgii Monachi, <i>Chronicon</i> ,<br>ed. E. de Murlat, p. 897.  |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Ἀναιρεῖται δὲ καὶ ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ Βυζαντίῳ παρὰ τῶν Βαράγγων. <u>Τοῦ γὰρ Βρυεννίου ἀποστατήσαντος</u> καὶ τῶν ἐκτὸς Βαράγγων ὁμοφρονησάντων αὐτῷ οἱ ἐν τῷ παλατίῳ Βάραγγοι ἕνα τινὰ ἐαυτῶν ἐπιλεξάμενοι πρὸς τοὺς ὁμοέθνοους ἀποστέλλουσι, ἀξιούντες ἀφείναι μὲν τὸν ἀποστάτην, φρονῆσαι δὲ τὰ τοῦ βασιλέως. Γνωσθεὶς δὲ καὶ κρατηθεὶς ἐτασθεὶς τε σφοδρῶς πᾶσαν ἀνεκάλυψε τῶν μηνυθέντων τὴν δῆλωσιν, στερεῖται δὲ καὶ τῆς ῥίνος, παρὰ τοῦ Ἰωάννου ταύτην λωβηθεὶς. Ὅθεν καὶ μὴ πράως ἐνεγκῶν τὴν ὕβριν ἦν πέπονθεν ὁ βάρβαρος, ἀναιρεῖ τὸν Ἰωάννην ἐξιόντα τοῦ παλατίου, μαχαίραις ἐθνικαῖς κατακόψας αὐτόν. Ἐπανεστήσαν δὲ καὶ τῷ βασιλεῖ οἱ Βάραγγοι καὶ διαχειρίσασθαι αὐτὸν ἔσπευδον. Ἀντιταξαμένων δὲ τούτοις τῶν τοῦ βασιλέως εἰς ἰκετείας ἐτράποντο καὶ τὸν βασιλέα ἐξίλωσάμενοι <u>συγγνώμης ἔτυχον</u></p> | <p><u>καὶ ἡ μὲν τοῦ Βρυεννίου εἰς τοῦτο τέλος κατήνησεν ἐπανάστασις</u>, ἐπανεστήσαν δὲ καὶ οἱ Βάραγγοι κατὰ τοῦ βασιλέως, ἀνελεῖν αὐτὸν μελετήσαντες, <u>ἀντιταξαμένης</u> δ' αὐτοῖς χειρὸς ἐτέρας Ῥωμαϊκῆς, εἰς ἰκεσίαν ἐτράποντο καὶ <u>συγγνώμης ἐπέτυχον</u>.</p> | <p><u>καὶ ἡ μὲν τοῦ Βρυεννίου εἰς τοῦτο τέλος κατήνησεν ἐπανάστασις</u>. Ἐπανεστήσαν δὲ καὶ οἱ Βάραγγοι κατὰ τοῦ βασιλέως ἀνελεῖν αὐτὸν μελετήσαντες, <u>ἀντιταξαμένης</u> δ' αὐτοῖς χειρὸς ἐτέρας Ῥωμαϊκῆς, εἰς ἰκεσίαν ἐτράποντο καὶ <u>συγγνώμης ἐπέτυχον</u>.</p> |

If Attaleiates did not mention the killing of John Bryennios, then what the source on which the Continuator of Skylitzes relied was. According to G.G. Litavrin, there were two separate revolts of the Varangians. Litavrin argues that the first part of the Continuator of Skylitzes's account pertains to the revolt of the 'external Varangians' during Bryennios' rebellion, and that only the second part of his remarks should be regarded as relating to the Varangians' revolt<sup>37</sup>. Jonathan Shepard follows Litavrin in concluding that *in fact, these were two separate incidents*<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> Г.Г. ЛИТАВРИН, *Византия, Болгария, Древняя Русь (IX–начало XII в.)*, Санкт-Петербург 2000, p. 280.

<sup>38</sup> J. SHEPARD, *The English and Byzantium: A Study of their Role in the Byzantine Army in the Later Eleventh Century*, T 29, 1973, p. 53–92, see p. 67.

However, Litavrin's observations are not supported by the context in which the account of the Continuator of Skylitzes was placed. This scholar's interpretation is therefore very arbitrary. The Continuator of Skylitzes never signalled that the Varangians had staged two revolts, and his account focused only on details explaining how the Varangians' rebellion against Botaneiates was possible. However, the crucial information regarding the relations between the Varangians and John Bryennios was provided by Nikephoros Bryennios. It is also interesting to note that, when describing John Bryennios to the mercenaries, Nikephoros Bryennios made the following remarks:

| Scylitzes Continuatus, p. 181.9–21.  | Bryennios, III, 5, p. 217–218.  |
|--|---|
| <p>Ἀναρρεῖται δὲ καὶ ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ Βυζαντίῳ παρὰ τῶν Βαράγγων. Τοῦ γὰρ Βρυεννίου ἀποστατήσαντος καὶ τῶν ἐκτὸς Βαράγγων ὁμοφρονησάντων αὐτῷ οἱ ἐν τῷ παλατίῳ Βάραγγοι ἕνα τινα ἑαυτῶν ἐπιλεξάμενοι πρὸς τοὺς ὁμοέθνους ἀποπέλλουσιν, ἀξιοῦντες ἀφεῖναι μὲν τὸν ἀποστάτην, φρονῆσαι δὲ τὰ τοῦ βασιλέως. Γνωσθεὶς δὲ καὶ κρατηθεὶς ἔτασθεὶς τε σφοδρῶς πᾶσαν ἀνεκάλυψε τῶν μὴνυθέντων τὴν δῆλωσιν, στερεῖται δὲ καὶ τῆς ῥίνος, παρὰ τοῦ Ἰωάννου ταύτην λωβηθεὶς. Ὅθεν καὶ μὴ πράως ἐνεγκῶν τὴν ὕβριν ἦν πέπονθεν ὁ βάρβαρος, ἀναρρεῖ τὸν Ἰωάννην ἐξίοντα τοῦ παλατίου, μαχαίραις ἐθνικαῖς κατακόψας αὐτόν. Ἐπανέστησαν δὲ καὶ τῷ βασιλεῖ οἱ Βάραγγοι καὶ διαχειρίσασθαι αὐτὸν ἔσπευδον. Ἀντιταξαμένων δὲ τούτοις τῶν τοῦ βασιλέως εἰς ἰκετείας ἐτράποντο καὶ τὸν βασιλέα ἐξιλωσάμενοι συγγνώμης ἔτυχον.</p> | <p>Οὕτω βραχὺς διήλθε καιρὸς καὶ τῶν βαρβάρων τις τῶν πελεκηφόρων, οἷς ἡ τῶν βασιλείων πεπίστευτο φυλακὴ ἐν Ὀδρυσσοῖς ἐφοῖτα πρὸς τὴν πάλαι μὲν Ὀρεστιάδα καλουμένην, νυνὶ δὲ Ἀδριανούπολιν, ὅς καταλύσας ἐν τινὶ πανδοχείῳ, ἐπειδὴ ἰκανῶς οἴνου ἐνεφορεῖτο, ἀπεφοίβαζε τὰ ἐντὸς ὡς πεμφθεὶ πρὸς τοῦ λογοθέτου δόλω μετελθεῖν καὶ ἀνελεῖν τὸν Βρυέννιον. Μηνυθέντων δὲ τούτων τῷ Βρυεννίῳ, ὁ βάρβαρος εὐθὺς ξυλλαμβάνεται καὶ πρὸς ἐξέτασιν ἤγετο καὶ εἶθ' ἐκὼν εἶτε ἄκων ξυνετίθετο ταῦθ' οὕτως ἔχει. Τὴν ῥίνα οὖν αὐτοῦ προστάξας τηθηναὶ ὁ Βρυέννιος Ἰωάννης πρὸς τὸν ἀδελφὸν εὐθὺς ἐξέπεμψε γράμματα πρὸς ἀποστασίαν αὐτὸν ἐρεθίζοντα</p> |

The Continuator of Skylitzes and Nikephoros Bryennios presented one version of the conflict between the Varangians and John Bryennios. However, upon describing John's motivation in detail (using words similar to those used by the Continuator of Skylitzes), Bryennios offered no further account of the events that unfolded in the spring of 1078. Contrary to the Continuator of Skylitzes, he made no reference to any incident at the palace. There are small differences between the two authors. Nikephoros Bryennios focused on the plan of John Bryennios's murder, adding that the events he recounted took place in Adrianople, where Varangians were sent from Constantinople<sup>39</sup>. It is hard to explain why the Continuator of Skylitzes and Nikephoros Bryennios have similar readings. Bryennios wrote his

<sup>39</sup> NICÉPHORE BRYENNIOS, *Histoire*, III, 5, p. 217–218.

*Material for History* shortly after the Continuator of Skylitzes, but he showed no familiarity with the latter's work<sup>40</sup>.

Moreover, Bryennios also did not read the *History* by Attaleiates<sup>41</sup>. As Warren Treadgold has recently noted, some similarities between Bryennios and the Continuator of Skylitzes (first implied by Paul Gautier<sup>42</sup>) are very trivial<sup>43</sup>. On the other hand, in his account of Isaac Komnenos' reign, Bryennios used a version of the Skylitzes's *Synopsis*<sup>44</sup>. Treadgold claims that this version ended with the year 1059<sup>45</sup>. However, this view is difficult to accept. First, among the numerous manuscripts found in the Skylitzes's *Synopsis* there is no version that ends with 1059<sup>46</sup>. It is very unlikely that such a version (supposedly available for Bryennios in the 1120s) would have left no traces in the manuscript tradition.

Second, if we take into account the fact that Bryennios read the part of the Skylitzes's *Synopsis* dated to 1059, then this continuation can be ascribed exclusively to the work of the Continuator of Skylitzes<sup>47</sup>. Therefore, Bryennios could have used the manuscript of Skylitzes's *Synopsis* and his continuation. Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that the circumstances of John Bryennios' death were well known to his family. In his *Material for History*, Bryennios dealt at length with the actions taken by John Bryennios during his brother's rebellion. Although his work was not finished, references to his family were the core of his information about the rebellion against Botaneiates<sup>48</sup>.

Based on the detailed analysis of primary sources, I have arrived at the conclusion that the Varangians' disloyalty, displayed at the palace in 1078, was not long-lasting. The circumstances of their riot within the palace were completely reversed in the events of Nikephoros Bryennios's rebellion. In this context, the Continuator of Skylitzes and Bryennios presented us with the first part of the story, and Attaleiates (and partially the Continuator of Skylitzes) reported its end. According to the Continuator of Skylitzes's testimony, the Varangians killed John Bryennios *as he was leaving the palace*<sup>49</sup>. After his murder, the Varangians attacked Botaneiates and his men in the palace. The conflict seems to have escalated because of the presence of John Bryennios. Nikephoros Bryennios reported that Botaneiates had put

<sup>40</sup> L. NEVILLE, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-century Byzantium...*, p. 46–48; EADEM, *A History of the Caesar John Doukas in Nikephoros Bryennios' Material for History?*, BMGS 32, 2008, p. 168–188.

<sup>41</sup> W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine...*, p. 348.

<sup>42</sup> NICÉPHORE BRYENNIOS, *Histoire*, I.1; SKYLITZES CONTINUATUS, p. 155.15.

<sup>43</sup> W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine...*, p. 348, n. 27.

<sup>44</sup> NICÉPHORE BRYENNIOS, *Histoire*, I, 1–10, p. 75–99.

<sup>45</sup> W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine...*, p. 348.

<sup>46</sup> IOANNIS SCYLITZAE, *Synopsis historiarum*, ed. H. THURN, Berlin 1973 [= CFHB, 5], p. XX–XIX; C. HOLMES, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976–1025)*, Oxford 2005 [= OSB], p. 75–80.

<sup>47</sup> Ε.Σ. ΚΙΑΠΙΔΟΥ, *Ἡ πατρότητα τῆς Συνέχειας τοῦ Σκυλίτζη καὶ τὰ προβλήματα τῆς. Συγκλίσεις καὶ ἀποκλίσεις ἀπὸ τῆ Σύνοψη ἱστοριῶν*, ΕΕΒΣ 52, 2004–2006, p. 329–362, see p. 350.

<sup>48</sup> L. NEVILLE, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-century Byzantium...*, p. 56–57.

<sup>49</sup> SKYLITZES CONTINUATUS, p. 181.9–21; *Byzantium in the Time of Troubles...*, p. 181.

an end to the confiscations and persecution which the Bryennios's family had been subjected to<sup>50</sup>. As John Bryennios's return to the palace must have been a painful experience for the Varangians, any favours he may have received from Botaneiates would have been deeply resented by the 'palace' Varangians who had not forgotten the wrongdoing they suffered at the hands of Bryennios's family. John Bryennios was murdered by the same Varangian who had his nose cut off by John's order. This act of vengeance did not put an end to the conflict, but only served to intensify it, provoking further action against the emperor.

In conclusion, the two incidents involving the Varangians in the palace can be distinguished by their different natures. The first incident demonstrated the Varangians' loyalty to the emperor, a tradition that began with the rebellion in Constantinople in 1042. In contrast, the second incident pertained to a direct conflict with the emperor. Although the instances of conflict between the Varangians and the emperor were not common, the incident during the reign of Nikephoros III Botaneiates illustrates the varying strategies employed by these soldiers in dealing with discontent or even rebellion. It is regrettable that Byzantine authors present us with only the macro-level of these conflicts, not without a degree of fiction as in the case of the Continuator of Skylitzes. Consequently, the microstructure of these incidents, their direct participants, and their subsequent impact on the functioning of Varangian units remain poorly understood.

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<sup>50</sup> NICÉPHORE BRYENNIOS, *Histoire*, IV, 13–14, p. 279–280.

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