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JOHN THE SCYTHIAN – A SLAYER OF USURPERS AND THE ISAUURIANS*

John the Scythian¹ one of the chiefs of the Byzantine army in the eighties and nineties of the 5th century, is mentioned in sources in the context of three events, which took place in 482 and in the years 483–488 and 492–498. What is significant, these events were not part of the struggle of the Byzantine Empire with external enemies, but in the fight against usurpers and peoples living in its territory.

There is no information about the life of John prior to 482. It can only be presumed that until that point, his career had developed along a military path, because it is hard to imagine that he could be made the *magister militum* or *comes militaris* in 482 without prior military and commanding experience, which also suggests that he was not a youngster at the time of the nomination. Therefore, he must have been born around the year 450. It is unknown who his parents were. His alias, the Scythian (Σκύθης), points to his barbaric origin. However, it is difficult to determine his ethnicity precisely, because various peoples in Byzantine sources were referred to as Scythians².

The first mention of John the Scythian appears in the text of John of Antioch. The historian writes that Emperor Zeno sent none other than John the Scythian and Moschianus³ to fight against Theodoric Amal, the leader of the Goths

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¹ Basic information about John – PLRE II, p. 602–603 (s.v. *Ioannes Scytha* 34); C. BEGASS, *Die Senatsaristokratie des oströmischen Reiches, ca. 457–518. Prosopographische und sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, München 2018, p. 165–166.

² For more on this ethnonym: H. WOLFRAM, *Historia Gotów*, trans. R. DARDA-STAAAB, I. DĘBEK, K. BERGER, Warszawa–Gdańsk 2003, p. 29; cf. E.W. BROOKS, *The Emperor Zenon and the Isaurians*, EHR 8, 1893, p. 223, n. 92.

³ *Ioannis Antiocheni Fragmenta quae Supersunt Omnia*, 236, rec. S. MARIEV, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 2008 [= CFHB, 47] (cetera: JOHN OF ANTIOCH), p. 434; cf. *The Chronicle of Marcellinus. A Translation and Commentary (with a Reproduction of Mommsen's Edition of the Text)*, a. 482, ed. B. CROKE, Sydney 1995 [= BAUS, 7] (cetera: MARCELLINUS COMES); *Chronique de Michel le Syrien: Patriarche*

who had been plundering Macedonia and Thessaly. He describes them as strategists (*strategoï*). They were to replace Sabinianus, the *magister militum per Illyricum*, executed by order of the emperor⁴. It is believed that John may have been appointed as the *magister militum per Illyricum* while Moschianus became the *comes rei militaris*. However, it may also have been the other way round. When commenting on this situation, E.P. Glušanin stated that Zeno, thus, reverted to promoting barbarian chiefs with no influence to important military positions⁵. What is known about the actions of John the Scythian and Moschianus is that they could not stop Theodoric from capturing and plundering Larissa⁶. In 483, Zeno reached an agreement with Theodoric, who regained the position of the *magister militum in praesenti* and the title of a patrician, and in 484, he became the consul. His people could settle in Dacia and Moesia Inferior. Although the campaign against Theodoric probably did not bring John the Scythian any great successes, it certainly did not compromise him. He did not lose the imperial trust if soon afterwards, in 483⁷ or 484⁸, the emperor entrusted him with the position of the *magister militum per Orientem*, which was stripped from Illus after the latter had refused to release the imperial brother, Longinus. The emperor then expelled the people connected to Illus from Constantinople and transferred their property to Isaurian cities. Perhaps Trocundes, Illus' brother⁹, was among those removed from the city. Illus staged an open rebellion against the emperor¹⁰ and on 19 July 484, he declared Leontius as the emperor (shortly before his ascension, Leontius had held the post of the *magister militum per Thracias*)¹¹. Zeno entrusted John the Scythian with the task of suppressing the revolt of Illus and

Jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1198), vol. II, (*livre VIII–XI*), IX, 6, ed., trans. J.-B. ШАВОТ, Paris 1901. On Moschianus – PLRE II, p. 766 (s.v. *Moschianus* 1).

⁴ JOHN OF ANTIOCH, 236, p. 434. Cf. M. WILCZYŃSKI, *Germanie w służbie zachodniorzymskiej w V w. n.e.*, Oświęcim 2018, p. 423–424. On Sabinianus – PLRE II, p. 967 (s.v. *Sabinianus Magnus* 4).

⁵ Е.П. ГЛУШАНИН, *Военная знать ранней Византии*, Барнаул 1991, p. 153.

⁶ MARCELLINUS COMES, a. 482.2.

⁷ E.g. H. ELTON, *Illus and the Imperial Aristocracy under Zeno*, B 70, 2000, p. 399; R. KOSIŃSKI, *The Emperor Zeno. Religion and Politics*, Cracow 2010, p. 147.

⁸ E.g. M. SALAMON, *Pamprepiusz z Panopolis – pisarz, profesor, polityk, obrońca pogaństwa w cesarstwie wschodnim*, [in:] *Studia Classica et Byzantina. Alexandro Krawczuk oblata*, Kraków 1996, p. 182; K. FELD, *Barbarische Bürger. Die Isaurier und das Römische Reich*, Berlin 2005 [= *Mil.S.*, 8], p. 269.

⁹ E.P. ГЛУШАНИН (Е.П. ГЛУШАНИН, *Военная...*, p. 153), who thinks that Trocundes was not in Constantinople at that time, is inclined to believe that news of this may have prompted him to resign from serving the emperor and join his brother.

¹⁰ On the conflict between Zeno and Illus, see: M.J. LESZKA, *Kilka uwag na temat Illusa Izauryjczyka w latach 479–484*, M 42.1/2, 2007, p. 103–105.

¹¹ While Leontius came from Dalisandus in Isauria, there is no certainty that he was of Isaurian origin. Sources mention his Syrian origin. His career was of a military nature. For Leontius, see: PLRE II, p. 670–671 (s.v. *Leontius* 17); A. KIEL-FREYTAG, *Betrachtungen zur Usurpation des Illus und des Leontius (484–488 n. Chr.)*, ZPE 174, 2010, p. 291–301; C. BEGASS, *Die Senatsaristokratie...*, p. 175–177.

Leontius. Considering that John was the commander-in-chief of the Byzantine forces in the area where the uprising broke out, the emperor's decision is not surprising. Interestingly, Theodoric Amal, the recent opponent of John, participated in this operation for some time. However, according to John of Antioch, the emperor supposedly turned Theodoric back when the latter arrived in Nicomedia¹². The emperor's decision was motivated by his fear that Theodoric would not behave loyally, which could mean joining the rebels or looting the Byzantine lands. It cannot be ruled out that the emperor was afraid of the lack of cooperation between Theodoric and John. Another version of Theodoric's participation in the expedition against Illus and Leontius is presented in Theophanes' *Chronographia*. He claims that the Goth turned back only after Illus and Leontius had taken refuge in the fortress of Papyrion¹³. John the Scythian supposedly continued its siege after the departure of Theodoric. It seems that in this case, more credibility should be given to the account of John of Antioch, who describes the dismissal of Theodoric in more detail. An argument in support of John's account is also a lack of reference to this expedition in the work of Ennodius, the author of *The Panegyric in Honor of King Theodoric*¹⁴.

After the dismissal of Theodoric, the forces sent against Illus and Leontius were strengthened by a unit of the Rugii, which was commanded by Armenarius, son of Aspar (a key figure in the political life of the empire during the time of Marcian and Leon). Reinforcements were also sent by sea. They were headed by an otherwise unknown John (who, at one point, had supposedly been around Basiliscus, the brother of Empress Verina) and Paul, the *sacellarius*¹⁵.

The decisive battle between John the Scythian's army and the rebels probably took place in mid-September 484¹⁶. The exact place where the battle was fought is unknown. Some researchers suggest that it happened near Antioch¹⁷, but most

¹² JOHN OF ANTIOCH, 237.4; cf. 237.6 (this refers to the dismissal of Theodoric's troops and installing the Rugii; this situation supposedly unfolded after the rebellion leaders had taken refuge in Papyrion). The contradiction between the two references of John of Antioch may only be apparent. Theodoric's dismissal did not necessarily mean that some of his people did not participate in the expedition and it is them who are referred to in passage 237.6. After dealing the final blow to Illus and Leontius' forces, their presence was no longer required.

¹³ THEOPHANES, *Chronographia*, AM 5977, rec. C. DE BOOR, Lipsiae 1883 [= CSHB] (cetera: THEOPHANES), p. 131; cf. *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius with Scholia*, III, 27, ed. J. BIDEZ, L. PARMENTIER, London 1898 (cetera: EVAGRIUS).

¹⁴ EUNODIUS, *Panegyricus dictus Theodorico regi*, ed. F. VOGEL, [in:] MGH.AA, vol. VII, Berolini 1885, p. 203sq. Cf. *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284–813*, trans. C. MANGO, R. SCOTT, ass. G. GREATREX, Oxford 1997, p. 202, n. 6.

¹⁵ JOHN OF ANTIOCH, 237.

¹⁶ On dating this battle – M.J. LESZKA, *The Career of Flavius Appalius Illus Trocundes*, Bsl 71, 2013, p. 57.

¹⁷ PLRE II, p. 602; K. TWARDOWSKA, *Rzymski Wschód w latach 395–518*, [in:] *Świat rzymski w V wieku*, ed. R. KOSIŃSKI, K. TWARDOWSKA, Kraków 2010, p. 111; P. CRAWFORD, *Roman Emperor Zeno. The Perils of Power Politics in Fifth-century Constantinople*, Barnsley–Havertown 2019, p. 198–199.

likely, it was fought somewhere in Isauria¹⁸ or around Seleucia¹⁹. The only available information on its location comes from the statement made by Joshua the Stylite:

John hit them [Illus' men – MJL] hard and destroyed the bulk of their army... Being unable to resist attack, (the conspirators) took the remnant of their force and fled to a secure and well-supplied fortress...²⁰

It can be presumed that in this battle, John's opponents lost most of their strength and the ability to act effectively. John of Antioch reports that when Leontius – who did not take part in the battle – received the news of its outcome, despite having another 2,000 soldiers, selected the most loyal of them and ordered the rest to take shelter in remote places²¹. Leontius and Illus locked themselves in the fortress of Papyrion, to which access was extremely difficult²². Joshua the Stylite wrote, with some exaggeration, that there was *only one possible way of ascent to it, and that was too narrow for even two people to go up together*²³.

According to Theophanes, Trocundes, Illus' brother, was entrusted with the task of enlisting barbarians into their army²⁴. For a while, the rebels still entertained the hope – which was supposedly fueled by Pamprepus, Leontius' *magister officiorum*, a poet and philosopher – that thanks to his effective action, they would regain the initiative in the struggle with the imperial forces²⁵. However, the mission failed. Trocundes was captured by John the Scythian's people and executed on his order²⁶. Trocundes' death seems to date to the middle of November 484²⁷. John the Scythian, wanting to break the spirit of the besieged, probably made sure that the news of it reached Papyrion as soon as possible. However, in the face of

¹⁸ G. DOWNEY, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*, Princeton–New Jersey 1961, p. 495–496, n. 105; R. KOSIŃSKI, *The Emperor...*, p. 149.

¹⁹ R.C. MCCAIL, *P. Gr. Vindob. 29788C: Hexameter Encomium on an Un-named Emperor*, JHS 98, 1974, p. 54.

²⁰ *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, 17, trans. et praef. F.R. TROMBLEY, J.W. WATT, Liverpool 2000 [= TTH, 32] (cetera: JOSHUA THE STYLITE), p. 15.

²¹ JOHN OF ANTIOCH, 237.5.

²² For more on the fortress, see: J. GOTTWALD, *Die Kirche und das Schloss Paperon in Kilikisch-Armenien*, BZ 36, 1936, p. 86–100; F. HILD, H. HELLENKEMPER, *Kilikien und Isaurien*, Wien 1990 [= TIB, 5], p. 374–375.

²³ JOSHUA THE STYLITE, 17, p. 15.

²⁴ THEOPHANES, AM 5976. It is difficult to say who the chronograph is referring to by using the term 'barbarians'. However, this bears no significance from the perspective of the situation, because the mission was unsuccessful.

²⁵ THEOPHANES, AM 5976.

²⁶ THEOPHANES, AM 5976.

²⁷ M.J. LESZKA, *The Career...*, p. 56–57.

the tragic information, the defenders of the fortress did not surrender but turned their frustration against Pamprepius, the unfortunate poet, who was executed²⁸.

The imperial troops besieged the fortress of Papyrion for another four years (until 488). Did John the Scythian stay around the fortress all this time and directly command the imperial forces besieging it? The description of the siege containing unique information relayed by Joshua the Stylite gives the impression that John supervised it until the final success, although it is not stated expressly that John was present at the capture of Leontius and Illus²⁹. John of Antioch presents an interesting episode from the siege:

While the armies were encamped opposite each other, Illus and John the Scythian came into friendly conversation (καὶ ἐς λόγους φιλιους συνῆλθον), and John sent a note to Zeno reminding him of his former good will, but as this accomplished nothing they again took to arms³⁰.

This account, if considered true, seems to suggest that John the Scythian and Illus had already known each other (which is not surprising, considering, on the one hand, the role Illus had played in Zeno's rule, and on the other, the advancing career of John). Otherwise, it would be difficult to imagine that the good relations they had, as John of Antioch emphasizes, were established during the siege. It seems that while there can be doubts about the "friendly conversation" – after all, the blood of Trocundes, the brother of Illus, was on the hands of John the Scythian (let alone the fact that John incessantly conducted military operations against Illus, remaining loyal to the emperor), it is likely that John enabled Illus to communicate with the emperor. He did so not so much out of sympathy for him, but in the hope that there would be an agreement between them, which would end of the siege, reducing unnecessary costs and time lost. If John the Scythian indeed counted on this development, he must have been disappointed, similarly to Illus, the main interested party. Zeno did not intend to negotiate with his former general. He wanted his ultimate demise. In the face of this attitude from the emperor, the siege continued.

It is difficult to date the events described above. John of Antioch places them after the appointment of Longinus, Zeno's brother, as the consul. He also notes the

²⁸ More on this subject: M. SALAMON, *Pamprepius...*, p. 191; K. FELD, *Pamprepius. Philosoph und Politiker oder Magier und Aufrührer*, [in:] *Gelehrte in der Antike. Alexander Demandt zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. A. GOLZ, A. LUTHER, H. SCHLANGE-SCHÖNINGEN, Wien 2002, p. 269, 277, n. 66.

²⁹ JOSHUA THE STYLITE, 17, p. 15–16. He mentions John's efforts to conquer the fortress and his anger at the impossibility of conquering it. The fortress did not fall for a long time, and when it did, it came as a result of betrayal. It is worth emphasizing that Joshua is the only author who writes about the emotions of John the Scythian.

³⁰ JOHN OF ANTIOCH, 237.7, p. 439.

rebellion of Theodoric Amal and the battles of the Rugii with the forces of Odoacer³¹. Longinus was appointed the consul for the year 486³² whereas Theodoric's rebellion dates back to 486³³, and the Rugii's battles with Odoacer's forces to 487³⁴. Assuming that John of Antioch presents these events in chronological order, Illus' attempt to communicate with Zeno through John the Scythian might have taken place around the year 487. However, there is no certainty, because the information about Longinus, Theodoric and the Rugii is entwined in the story of what was happening in the besieged fortress. It is preceded by the mention of the death of Verina (nine days after the siege had begun), Marsus' death³⁵ (thirty days into the siege) and the desperation of the besieged after the external fortifications of Papyrion were broken. The previously quoted paragraph on negotiations directly refers to this last event. What seems certain about this situation is that negotiations had not been conducted until the end of 484 (after the death of Trocundes and Pamprepius, when hopes of fending off the imperial forces had been dispelled).

The sources do not mention the presence of John the Scythian when the fortress was seized. It happened as a result of betrayal. The one who surrendered the fortress, according to Theophanes³⁶, was Trocundes' brother-in-law. However, the chronograph does not give his name. Other sources report that Indacus Kottounes³⁷ was supposedly the traitor, so perhaps he was the brother of Trocundes' wife, who remains unnamed. No source states directly that Indacus Kottounes was Trocundes' brother-in-law. This view is an attempt to reconcile the source traditions indicated above. Some sources feature the plot of betrayal without specifying the person(s) who committed it³⁸. Other sources note the seizure of Papyrion without giving any details³⁹.

³¹ JOHN OF ANTIOCH, 237.7.

³² M.J. LESZKA, *Dzieje Longina, brata cesarza Zenona*, [in:] *Hortus Historiae. Księga pamiątkowa ku czci profesora Józefa Wolskiego w setną rocznicę urodzin*, ed. E. DĄBROWA, M. DZIŁSKA, M. SALAMON, S. SPRAWSKI, Kraków 2010, p. 656.

³³ P. HEATHER, *Goths and Romans 332–489*, Oxford 1991, p. 304–305; R. KOSIŃSKI, *The Emperor...*, p. 177; M. WILCZYŃSKI, *Germanie...*, p. 425.

³⁴ R. KOSIŃSKI, *The Emperor...*, p. 177–178.

³⁵ More on ex-consul Marsus – PLRE II, p. 728–729 (s.v. *Marsus 2*).

³⁶ THEOPHANES, AM 5980. E.W. BROOKS, *The Emperor Zeno...*, p. 229; reasons for betrayal – N. LENSKI, *Assimilation and Revolt in the Territory of Isauria, from the 1st Century BC to the 6th Century AD*, JESHO 42, 1999, p. 253. Cf. THEODOR ANAGNOSTES, *Kirchengeschichte, Epitome*, 438, ed. G.C. HANSEN, Berlin 1995 [= GCS.NF, 3] (Trocundes' wife was supposedly behind the betrayal) – cetera: THEODOR ANAGNOSTES.

³⁷ JOHN OF ANTIOCH, 237.10.

³⁸ E.g. JOSHUA THE STYLITE, 17, p. 16. The following authors recognized Indacus Kottounes to be Trocundes' brother-in-law: E.W. BROOKS, *The Emperor Zeno...*, p. 229; W.D. BURGESS, *Isaurian Facions in the Reign of Zeno the Isaurian*, L 51, 1992, p. 878.

³⁹ E.g. MARCELLINUS COMES, a. 488.1.

As previously mentioned, the sources indicate that John the Scythian was active in the early days of the siege of Papyrion. His constant presence around the blockaders, and for a long four years at that, was not necessary considering that there was virtually no threat from the besieged. As the *magister militum per Orientem*, he could have entrusted the command of the siege to one of his subordinates and occasionally inspected it.

As it was in the case of Trocundes, and later some leaders of the Isaurian insurgence, John is not indicated as the one who captured Leontius and Illus and ordered their execution. Joshua the Stylite writes that the decision about their execution was made by the emperor himself⁴⁰. By contrast, John Malalas claims that this decision was made by the administrator of Isaurian Seleucia⁴¹. Other sources only relay the end of the siege and the execution of Illus and Leontius⁴². This leads us to the conclusion that John the Scythian did not play an important role in this event.

John's role in the suppression of the Isaurian uprising

After his participation in suppressing the revolt of Illus and Leontius, John the Scythian does not appear in the sources until the Isaurian uprising in the beginning of Anastasius' rule.

The uprising in Isauria began shortly after Anastasius took power⁴³. It is not clear, however, when exactly it broke out. Most likely, it was not provoked by Anastasius' ascension to the throne itself⁴⁴. More probably, it was a consequence of imperial repressions against the Isaurian elite, which were a response to the

⁴⁰ JOSHUA THE STYLITE, 17, p. 16. The repressions also affected other allies of Illus and Leontius who were in the fortress.

⁴¹ *Ioannis Malalae chronographia*, XV, 14, rec. J. THURN, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 2000 [= *CFHB*, 35] (cetera: JOHN MALALAS).

⁴² THEODOR ANAGNOSTES, 437; THEOPHANES, AM 5980, p. 133.

⁴³ For more on the Isaurian uprising see: C. CAPIZZI, *L'Imperatore Anastasio I (491–518). Studio sulla sua vita, la sua opera e la sua personalita*, Roma 1969, p. 94–99; N. LENSKI, *Assimilation...*, p. 428–430, 440–441; A.D. LEE, *The Eastern Empire: Theodosius to Anastasius*, [in:] *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. XIV, ed. A. CAMERON, B. WARD-PERKINS, M. WHITBY, Cambridge 2000, p. 52–53; K. FELD, *Barbarische...*, p. 332–335; M. MEIER, *Anastasios I. Die Entstehung des Byzantinischen Reiches*, Stuttgart 2010, p. 75–84.

⁴⁴ This is the belief of the following authors, among others: J.B. BURY, *History of the Later Roman Empire from the Death of Theodosius I. to the Death of Justinian*, vol. I, New York 1958, p. 423; E. STEIN, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, vol. II, *De la disparition de l'Empire d'Occident à la mort de Justinien (476–465)*, Paris–Bruxelles–Amsterdam 1949, p. 83; Ю. КУЛАКОВСКИЙ, *История Византии*, vol. I, London 1973, p. 463; F.K. HAARER, *Anastasios I. Politics and Empire in the Late Roman World*, Cambridge 2006, p. 23–24, n. 66. That it broke out following the expulsion of the Isaurians from Constantinople – THEOPHANES, AM 5985, p. 137; EVAGRIUS, III, 35 (confusing Longinus of Cardala with Zeno's brother).

riots that had occurred in Constantinople in 491⁴⁵ as well as other actions that had affected wider groups of the Isaurians⁴⁶. Anastasius had ordered the destruction of the Papyrion fortress and deprived Isauria of the 1,500-pound “dotation” in gold, which it had received annually since 484. Such behavior of the emperor could have aroused the dissatisfaction of the Isaurians. It seems that if the uprising had broken out before the unrest in Constantinople, the emperor would not have decided to free the Isaurians living in the capital, and above all, the dignitaries associated with the previous ruler. Their experience in state service as well as their wealth and authority naturally predestined them to assume the position of the rebellion’s leaders. It is highly probable that when Anastasius allowed the Isaurians to return to their lands, he did not know that an uprising would break out there. In my opinion, this event occurred at the beginning of 492, shortly before or soon after their return⁴⁷.

Among the leaders of the uprising were Longinus of Cardala⁴⁸, Linginines⁴⁹, Conon, son of Fuscian⁵⁰, two Athenodoruses⁵¹, and Longinus of Selinus⁵². They gathered considerable forces, comprised of both Isaurians and Romans, although their number, set by John of Antioch at 100,000 and by Theophanes at 150,000,

⁴⁵ On the riots, see: F.K. HAARER, *Anastasius I...*, p. 22–23, 225; P. FILIPCZAK, *Julian, prefekt Konstantynopola*, [in:] *Hortus Historiae...*, p. 667–683. JOHN OF ANTIOCH (239.3) wrote that Anastasius, thinking that the riots were the result of an Isaurian plot, ordered them to leave Constantinople while allowing them to keep their rank and property. After they delayed following his orders, he took more decisive steps. He expelled Longinus, brother of the Emperor Zeno, to Tebaida, and his mother, wife and daughter to a monastery at Brochthi in Bithynia. Longinus of Cardala and Athenodorus, an outstanding member of the senate, as well as many other Isaurians were deprived of their property and banished to Isauria. Cf. THEODOR ANAGNOSTES, 446.21–22; EVAGRIUS, III, 29; IOANNES ZONARAS, XIV, 3.21–22, vol. III, rec. T. BÜTTNER-WOBST, Bonnæ 1897 [= CSHB].

⁴⁶ It must have started some time after the Constantinople riots, which are dated between May (Anastasius began his rule on April 11) and late August (or December) 491. On dating this event – P. FILIPCZAK, *Julian...*, p. 479.

⁴⁷ See MARCELLINUS COMES, p. 107.

⁴⁸ JOHN OF ANTIOCH, 239.5; THEOPHANES, AM 5985, p. 137–138. For more about him, see: M.B. LESZKA, M.J. LESZKA, *Longinus of Cardala. Leader of Isaurian Revolt (492–497)*, [in:] *Within the Circle of Ancient Ideas and Virtues. Studies in Honour of Professor Maria Dzielska*, ed. K. TWARDOWSKA, M. SALAMON, S. SPRAWSKI, M. STACHURA, S. TURLEJ, Kraków 2014, p. 391–398.

⁴⁹ He was Illus’ half-brother. He held the office of the *comes et praeses Isauriae*. His name appears in different versions – Longinines, Lilingis, Ninilingis, Lingis, Illoulingis. Perhaps he was confused with Indes. On this topic see: F.K. HAARER, *Anastasius I...*, p. 24, n. 68. Basic information on this figure – PLRE II, p. 683–684 (s.v. *Lilingis*).

⁵⁰ For more about Conon, the former bishop of Apamea, see – PLRE II, p. 306–307 (s.v. *Conon* 4).

⁵¹ One was a senator and the son-in-law of the patrician John – PLRE II, p. 178–179 (s.v. *Athenodorus* 2; here mistakenly referred to as son of John). What we know about the latter is that he was a different person from the former and that he participated in the Isaurian uprising – PLRE II, p. 179 (s.v. *Athenodorus* 3).

⁵² On Longinus of Selinus – PLRE II, p. 688 (s.v. *Longinus of Selinus*).

is definitely exaggerated⁵³. The rebel troops plundered a number of cities in the provinces bordering on Isauria.

In response to these events, Anastasius sent troops to Isauria, headed by John the Scythian and John Gibbo⁵⁴. The choice of the protagonist of this article as one of the commanders of the expedition is not surprising. He had relevant experience in conducting operations in Isauria during the fight against the usurpation of Illus and Leontius, and above all, he most likely was still the *magister militum per Orientem*. The first clash between the rebels and the imperial forces occurred in Phrygia at Cotyaeum (today Kütahya)⁵⁵. The Isaurians, despite their strength in numbers⁵⁶, were defeated, suffering major losses. Among the victims was Linginines, one of the leaders of the uprising⁵⁷. John of Antioch notes that the battle at Cotyaeum was directly commanded by John the Scythian (along with John Gibbo, who is also mentioned in this role). After the battle, the Isaurian troops withdrew to their own territory. The Byzantines allowed them to do that, which means that despite the defeat, the Isaurian forces may have still been considerable and could have retained their combat value. Theophanes writes that the Byzantines could have finished off their opponent had they not focused on looting⁵⁸. Unlike Theophanes, John of Antioch mentions the fact that the Byzantines pursued the Isaurians all the way to Taurus, but, presumably, without any great success, since it was only noted that the Byzantine army stopped to winter at the foot of Taurus.

The lack of discipline in the Byzantine army, which Theophanes mentions, would not speak well of its commanders, including John the Scythian. However, it is hard to believe that experienced commanders would have made such a mistake. It seems more likely that, having their forces weakened during the battle and being aware of the great numbers of the defeated Isaurians, the Byzantine commanders opted not to pursue the final defeat of their enemy and only controlled their retreat from a safe distance.

⁵³ JOHN OF ANTIOCH, 239.5; THEOPHANES, AM 5985, p. 137 (this author claims that the insurgent forces were comprised of barbarians); cf. MARCELLINUS COMES, a. 492; EVAGRIUS, III, 35; JOHN MALALAS, XVI, 3; JORDANES, *Romana*, 355, ed. T. MOMMSEN, [in:] *MGH.AA*, vol. V.1, Berolini 1882; THEODOR ANAGNOSTES, 448. On John Gibbo – M.J. LESZKA, *Jan Kyrtyos – pogromca Izauryjczyków*, [in:] *W kregu antycznych politei. Księga jubileuszowa ofiarowana Profesorowi Janowi Ilukowi*, ed. W. GAJEWSKI, I. MILEWSKI, Gdańsk 2017, p. 206–213.

⁵⁴ The sources (THEOPHANES, AM 5985–5986; JOHN MALALAS, XVI, 3) also mention *comes scholarum Diogenianus* (known as Diogenes), a relative of the Empress Ariadne, as one of the leaders.

⁵⁵ On Cotyaeum – K. BIELKE, N. MERSICH, *Phrygien und Pisidien*, Wien 1990 [= *TIB*, 7], p. 154.

⁵⁶ According to John of Antioch, the Byzantine forces totaled 2,000 soldiers and were comprised of the Huns, Goths and Bessis, among other tribes (JOHN OF ANTIOCH, 239; JOHN MALALAS, XVI, 3). As aptly noted by F.K. HAARER (*Anastasius I...*, p. 24, n. 69), pointing to such a great disproportion of strength was intended to emphasize the uniqueness of the Romans' victory. The issue of dating this battle – E.W. BROOKS, *The Emperor Zeno...*, p. 234; F.K. HAARER, *Anastasius I...*, p. 25, n. 73.

⁵⁷ JOHN OF ANTIOCH, 239.5; THEOPHANES, AM 5985, p. 138.

⁵⁸ THEOPHANES, AM 5985, p. 138.

According to Theophanes, the Isaurians used the delay of the Byzantine forces to prepare for further combat. They supposedly strengthened the fortresses in Taurus, which guarded access to their lands. The next episode in the war between the imperial forces and the Isaurians took place the following year at Claudiopolis⁵⁹. This fortress was taken by a unit commanded by Diogenianus, and later was besieged by the Isaurian forces. The siege lasted long enough for the Byzantines to start facing a shortage of food. John Gibbo and his people came to their rescue. He managed to cross the mountains unnoticed and perform a surprise attack on the besiegers. His forces were supported by Diogenianus' soldiers. The Isaurians were caught between two fires. The battle ended with the complete success of the imperial party⁶⁰. It was then that Conon, one of the leaders of the rebellion, was fatally wounded⁶¹. Theophanes assesses the battle of Claudiopolis as a great victory⁶². While the Byzantine chronograph has the right to such an assessment, it should be noted that the victory certainly did not have a major impact, since the uprising lasted for several more years, which was partly enabled by the mountainous terrain⁶³. The Isaurians held on to strongholds that were difficult to conquer. Longinus of Selinus played a significant role at that time, supplying his fellow men with food through the port of Antioch. The sources do not provide details on the battles conducted over those several years. Only the closing moments caught their attention.

Another episode related to the participation of John the Scythian in the fight against the Isaurian insurrection is recorded in 497⁶⁴. At that point, John besieged Longinus of Cardala in an unnamed Isaurian fortress. The siege ended with the success of the imperial army. Longinus of Cardala and Longinus of Selinus along with their comrades were captured. Among them were probably both Athenodoruses. According to Theophanes, John the Scythian ordered the beheading of Longinus and one of Athenodoruses, and had their heads sent to Constantinople, where they were displayed in a hippodrome during races while the captured and shackled Isaurians were walked around. Next, the heads of Longinus and Athenodorus were put up in Sycae, which supposedly pleased Constantinopolitans⁶⁵. Evagrius Scholasticus describes this event as follows:

⁵⁹ On Claudiopolis – F. HILD, H. HELLENKEMPER, *Kilikien...*, p. 307–310.

⁶⁰ A description of the Claudiopolis campaign – THEOPHANES, AM 5986, p. 138.

⁶¹ THEOPHANES, AM 5986, p. 138; cf. JOHN MALALAS, XVI, 3 (this author, however, links this episode to the battle of Cotyaeum).

⁶² THEOPHANES, AM 5986, p. 138.

⁶³ The issue of the duration of the Isaurian uprising is debatable. In this matter, the sources are rather divergent, pointing to the years 495, 497 or 498. On this topic – F.K. HAARER, *Anastasius I...*, p. 26, n. 77.

⁶⁴ Considering the account of MARCELLINUS COMES (a. 497), who mentions the apprehension of Athenodorus, although omitting Longinus, this event should be dated to the summer of 497.

⁶⁵ THEOPHANES, AM 5988, p. 139–140. EVAGRIUS (III, 35) mentions Longinus and a Theodore (most likely, Athenodorus – J.B. BURY, *History...*, p. 433; P. ALLEN, *Evagrius Scholasticus the Church Histo-*

the heads of Longinus and Theodore were sent to the emperor's city by John the Scythian. The emperor fixed these on poles and set them up at the place called Sycae, which lies opposite the city of Constantine, a pleasing sight for the Byzantines in return for the troubles they had suffered from Zeno and the Isaurians.⁶⁶

Longinus of Cardala and Athenodoruses' death did not end the uprising. Its final act took place in 498 and is connected to John Gibbo. It was then that Longinus of Selinus was captured in Antiochia ad Cragum by *comes* Priskos⁶⁷. On the order of John Gibbo, Longinus was transported to Constantinople. He was accompanied by Indes, another of the leaders of the uprising, who had probably been captured by John himself⁶⁸. In the capital, the prisoners were displayed to the people.

John the Scythian presumably either did not participate or did not play a vital role in the last stage of the war against the Isaurians. The Byzantine forces were commanded by John Gibbo and he should be credited with the final defeat of the insurgents.

Regardless of the role played by John the Scythian at the end of the Isaurian war, the Emperor Anastasius highly appreciated his merits in suppressing the uprising, which was expressed by appointing him the consul of the year 498⁶⁹.

It is not clear when John the Scythian ceased to be the *magister militum per Orientem*. J. Martindale⁷⁰ points to the year 498, that is, the end of the war against the Isaurians. There are other possibilities. The next *magister militum per Orientem* traceable in the sources is Areobindus (503)⁷¹ and it cannot be ruled out

rian, Louvain 1981, p. 155) – however, he believes that this happened after the battle of Cotyaeum and that Longinus was the brother of the Emperor Zeno. MARCELLINUS COMES (a. 497) reports on the capture of Athenodorus, who was subsequently beheaded and his head was displayed at the gates of Tarsus. He further informs about the capture of Longinus of Selinus in 498, who was supposedly taken to Constantinople, where he was shown to the public. He was said to have died of torture in Nice. The thread of the fate of the two Athenodoruses is analyzed by F.K. HAARER (*Anastasius I...*, p. 26, n. 80 – according to the researcher, the head of one of Athenodoruses was sent to Constantinople, and the other, to Tarsus).

⁶⁶ EVAGRIUS, III, 35 (trans. – *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, ed., trans. M. WHITBY, Liverpool 2000 [= TTH, 33], p. 180).

⁶⁷ MARCELLINUS COMES, a. 498. Contrary to Theophanes' account, Longinus of Selinus was not captured along with Longinus of Cardala. On Antiochia ad Cragum – F. HILD, H. HELLENKEMPER, *Kilikien...*, p. 191–193. On the suppression of the uprising also see *Victoris Tunnunensis Chronicon*, a. 495, [in:] *Victoris Tunnunensis Chronicon cum reliquiis ex consularibus caesaragustanis et Iohannis Biclarensis Chronicon*, ed. C. CARDELLE DE HARTMANN, Turnhout 2001 (cetera: VICTOR TUNN.); JOHN MALALAS, XVI, 3.

⁶⁸ EVAGRIUS, III, 35. On Indes – PLRE II, p. 591 (s.v. *Indes*).

⁶⁹ His colleague in the West was Paulin. Cf. THEOPHANES, AM 5988, p. 140; *Codex Iustinianus*, V, 30, 4; X, 19, 10, rec. P. KRUEGER, Berolini 1906; MARCELLINUS COMES, a. 498; VICTOR TUNN., a. 498.

⁷⁰ PLRE II, p. 602, 1291.

⁷¹ PLRE II, p. 1291.

that John held this position until that time. In 503, the war with Persia resumed, prompting Anastasius to make a change. Perhaps John, due to his age or health condition, was unable to command efficiently. Naturally, this is only a hypothesis.

Family

What we learn about the consulate of John in 498 is the last piece of information regarding his career, which can be found in sources. Theophanes⁷² mentions John in the context of his family connections. He was supposedly the grandfather of the titular consul (ex-consul) John⁷³, who was in the service of Emperor Justinian. His father, or the son-in-law of John the Scythian, would be Rufinus, whose career begins in the sources in 502⁷⁴. Later, Rufinus was the *magister militum per Thracias*, *magister utriusque militiae*, and a patrician. His brother Timostratus was the *dux Osrhoene* between 503–506 and the *dux Mesopotamiae* in 527, among others⁷⁵. Rufinus and Timostratus' father was said to be Silvanus⁷⁶, known for his good relations with the Persian ruler Perozes (459–484). It suggests that John the Scythian married off his daughter, unknown by name, to a representative of a family belonging to the Byzantine elite of the last decades of the 5th century, whose members, including John's son-in-law, would pursue their careers also in later periods. The fact that Theophanes, or rather the author of the source from which he drew, found it worth mentioning that John the Scythian was the grandfather of ex-consul John demonstrates that he recognized him as an important figure whose actions were long remembered.

Based on the sources, the military career of John the Scythian lasted 16 years. He spent less time defending the borders of the empire and more fighting (often, victoriously) against usurpers and peoples who either had lived in its territory for centuries (the Isaurians) or sought a place to settle there (the Ostrogoths), and whose status kept changing from ally to enemy. John, as evidenced by his nickname, came from a barbarian people, but this did not prevent him from serving the emperor loyally and building his position in the circles of the empire's elite.

Translated by Katarzyna Szuster-Tardi

⁷² THEOPHANES, AM 6020, p. 176.

⁷³ PLRE III, p. 625–626 (s.v. *Ioannes* 7).

⁷⁴ On the career of Rufinus, see PLRE II, p. 954–957 (s.v. *Rufinus* 13).

⁷⁵ PLRE II, p. 1119–1120 (s.v. *Timostratus*).

⁷⁶ PLRE II, p. 1011–1012 (s.v. *Silvanus* 7).

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Abstract. The paper is devoted to John the Scythian – one of the chiefs of the Byzantine army in the eighties and nineties of the 5th century. Based on the sources, the military career of John the Scythian lasted 16 years. He spent less time defending the borders of the empire and more fighting (often, victoriously) against usurpers and peoples who either had lived in its territory for centuries (the Isaurians) or sought a place to settle there (the Ostrogoths), and whose status kept changing from ally to enemy. John, as evidenced by his nickname, came from a barbarian people, but this did not prevent him from serving the emperor loyally and building his position in the circles of the empire's elite.

Keywords: John the Scythian, Leontius, Illus, Byzantine army, Isaurians

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