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Manuel I Komnenos, the Maiandros campaigns of 1177-8 and Thessaloniki

The orations of Eustathios of Thessaloniki in praise of the incumbent emperor, Manuel I Komnenos, provide us with a great deal of historical information which is not recorded elsewhere, even by the two major historians for the reign, John Kinnamos¹ and Niketas Choniates². It has already been suggested that two of these speeches allude to a possible brief naval intervention in the combined German-Venetian siege of Ancona in 1173, and, perhaps more probably, to a Sicilian Norman shipwreck off the Balkan peninsula in the same year; these suggestions have been published elsewhere³. It seems reasonable to assume that the remaining direct and indirect panegyrics would probably also provide historical information complementary to that preserved in the two historians.

This paper will consider the information which may be extracted from two of these other orations, published for the first time by W. Regel at the close of the last century. The first of these, no. IV, is datable from two considerations: Regel's oration no. II seems to refer to the same events, and, secondly, it contains what seems to be a reference to the emperor's period of terminal illness (March-September 1180)⁴. Therefore it seems reasonable to argue for a date of early 1180 for this speech. The second speech is addressed to the Grand Hetaireiarch John

1. All page references are to the Bonn edition, ed. A. Meineke, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, Bonn, 1836.

2. Ed. J.-L. Van Dieten as *Choniatae Historia*, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae*, 2 vols, Berlin and New York, 1975.

3. In "The amphibious serpent - Manuel I Komnenos and the Venetians", in *Byzantinische Forschungen* 24, 1997, pp. 251-8, and "A Norman Shipwreck in 1173", in *Thesaurismata* 27, 1997. The speeches referred to are nos. VI (pp. 92-125) and III (pp. 24-57) in W. Regel, *Fontes Retum Byzantarum I*, St Petersburg 1892.

4. Choniates 220.

Doukas, was delivered to him in Thessaloniki, and is datable to late 1179; it should postdate Eustathios' address to Agnes of France in summer 1179, but should belong to a time before he had journeyed back to Constantinople in 1180 to witness the heir Alexios' betrothal festivities. The events surrounding the emperor's advance on Claudiopolis of early 1179 are still therefore of interest at this time. The two speeches are useful in that they support the notion, which I shall outline below, that Manuel ordered the refortification of Thessaloniki's by then dilapidated defences in late 1179; furthermore the second, no. II, refers back to Eustathios' inaugural oration as metropolitan in Thessaloniki. Not only this, but this second oration enables us to establish a putative chronology for Manuel's campaigns of the late 1170s along the River Maiandros (the modern Büyükenderes) in Asia Minor. However, though due reference will be made to this speech to John Doukas, I shall be drawing in the main, for the purposes of this paper, on the first speech, the oration to the emperor of 1180 (no. IV). To summarise: this speech reveals not only that Manuel ordered the refortification of Thessaloniki, but that he had Turkish prisoners of war settled around that city and elsewhere in the Balkans, and it supplements the account in Niketas Choniates of the emperor's 1178 (it will be argued) advance on Panasion and Lakerion on the upper reaches of the Maiandros.

The best place to begin is a passage from this 1180 oration, the fifth paragraph (Regel, *Fontes* p. 62 line 19) which reveals that our rhetor is talking about Thessaloniki ("the metropolis of the Thessalians") rather than Constantinople (this is Regel 63/4-14):

And there are not only these things, of which the nearest year is the father, but the present time knows well that under the imperial hand that crown of cities is always tended, just as a girl is watched over by the eye, and as it has been changed from not formerly being such to a strong city, and in this way all of the parts which former times had laid low were set upright, and all the parts which had in other ways been brought to old age were restored so that they flourished again, and have bloomed youthfully; and it knows that the people of this city no longer risk being blown down by mighty winds, as one might say, all together, and that it remains steadfast in

temperate windlessness, its experience being as if it had been shaken up and thrown into confusion; but he came near, and commanded the tempest to become stilled into the air.

These lines supply a time frame for the emperor's deeds, "of which the nearest year is the father" (63/4) —in other words the emperor carried out his beneficence for Thessaloniki within the last year. If this speech really can be safely dated to 1180 (and this seems a reasonable assumption), this suggests a date of 1179 for the emperor's actions. Through them "all of the parts which former times had laid low were set upright, and all the parts which had in other ways been brought to old age were restored so that they flourished again". The words to me strongly suggest, bearing in mind that the emperor is also described as a "protector of the city" (alongside a personage "outside life" who must be the patron saint of Thessaloniki, St. Demetrios, 62/22-24), a refortification of the run-down defences of Thessaloniki. These defences have been the subject of archaeological study, and a brief history of them has been made⁵. However, these two speeches provide the only evidence of which I am aware that a systematic refurbishment of Thessaloniki's defences was made in 1179. The Doukas speech confines itself to a single phrase, τὴν πολιουχίαν ταύτην (Regel, *Fontes* 16/22), but this is surely a reference to the same thing. This speech says that this defence work took place at the time the rhetor first came to Thessaloniki (16/20-1). Biographical considerations suggest that this in turn took place in 1179; so, even should the reference to the emperor's illness in the 1180 oration not be to the final phase which carried him away, we have corroborating evidence for a date of 1179 for the refortification.

The second and third passages which merit examination also refer to a historical event not alluded to in Niketas Choniates (who is our sole source for the events of late 1176 on). Here are excerpts from the twentieth and sixteenth paragraphs of the 1180 speech respectively. First, 78/22-79/8 in translation:

For the time prior to the recent felling of the barbarians was not long, and the Thessalians saw all of the sowings of men,

5. M. Phountoukou, in *I Thessaloniki* 1, pp. 111-57.

whom the womb of Hagar, filled with successions of them, produced themselves, driving them into the middle of our land, beast men, giants and men looking at blood; and we made a vacuum appear among them in the land of the barbarians, an approach of the inhabitants of the land so that they became our own and a transplanting proper for the emperor, the fine farmer; and God, as we have said, filled our land with such fine fruit. And the land of the Italians, which received Greeks long ago was named *Magna Graecia*; that land neighbouring, which was ours, and another, which was foreign, everywhere in those lands of Europe, into which the Agarene tribe has been sown, a man who was eloquent would have named the new Persia and the European land of the Persians; in this way they have been inserted between us, most of them unwilling, but many willingly changing and leaving their homes.

It is to be noted that it was customary for twelfth-century writers to refer to the Turks as “Persians” (for whom Eustathios often uses the metaphor of beasts), so that what we have here is very likely to be the rhetor’s description of the settlement of Turkish prisoners of war around Thessaloniki (and elsewhere in Europe). The same thing is described in 73/9-25:

And this has now been thought so, as by me, wishing it to be so, and the shrewd listener has gone over it closely using fine logic, but I belong to that plain, by my reckoning, into which recently the sheaves harvested from among the enemies of God in the war were spread, from which some, heaped into a pile, appeared supine as a shining harvest, whereas others were threshed on a threshing floor by those men and horses, which went over them and ground them down. It was the plain in which formerly and without fear they had ground down the things of the Romans, harvesting them, but it held them in retribution for their bolder roaming, for they paid with their fall in a heap, so that they might never go forth from the land they desired, but it itself might receive their leaps and fallings, and the land which had often ceased from experiencing hardship

might cease living, and the land which formerly cooled down in soft living might embrace them with its coolness, and they might learn, what kind of caltrops the imperial land would bristle with for the enemy and entangle them as they ran so that they fell. And there were such sheaves and fellings from the imperial farmer, one innovating amazingly here by sowing in well-watered places...

The imagery by which the Turkish enemy are “reaped”, “sown” or “transplanted” is typical of the imagery of Eustathios and the time. Presumably the hardships which the rhetor describes are those imposed upon the frontier lands by their Turkic invaders throughout the earlier part of the Comnenian epoch. It would seem that Eustathios is confusing these invaders, that is, the Turkic Cumans and Pechenegs, with the Seljuk Turks and Türkmén of Asia Minor who were later settled there. It seems logical to assume, then, that the European lands other than the Thessalonian plain in which Turks were settled which Eustathios alludes to above are these lands on the eastern Danube frontier.

This latter passage will continue, in the following paragraphs, with a description of the way in which the Turkish enemy was slain in battle and their corpses were strewn into a river; at 74/20, 76/6 and 79/26 this river is named as the famous Maiandros of Phrygia. Therefore we can connect the settlement of Turkish prisoners of war around Thessaloniki with Manuel’s Maiandros campaigns of the 1177-79 period. It seems best next to turn to Niketas Choniates’ account of this campaigning, in particular his account of Manuel’s advance on Panasion and Lakerion on the upper Maiandros. The episode in which a Turkish army laden with booty was caught on return from its raiding at a bridge between the fortresses of Hyelion and Leimocheir by the emperor’s nephew John Vatatzes is related at some length by Choniates at pp. 192-94. Eustathios was obviously impressed by this episode, for he sees fit to recycle the imagery of Turks drowning in the Maiandros, describing it as a second Acheron or Kokytos (both mythical rivers of the underworld), in the context of praising Manuel’s separate advance on Panasion and Lakerion (it will be argued that this took place in the next campaigning season). To give the paragraph of Choniates dealing with this latter episode:

In addition to this exploit, the emperor, firm in his resolve to accomplish another, marched first against the Turks encamped in Lakerion and then against Panasion. Successful in driving the Turks out of Panasion, he then pursued those in Lakerion. Before entering the lands where their enemy was encamped, he dispatched Katides of Laodikeia to reconnoiter the Turkish positions and report with all speed what he had observed. As the emperor was rushing to seize the Turks as booty for the taking and easy prey, Katides frightened them off by telling them of the emperor's arrival. Thus provoked, Manuel flew into a rage and decreed the ablation of his nose as punishment. The emperor did not hesitate for a moment but hastened on without engaging the foe⁶.

This account is followed by Choniates' account of another campaign against the Turks, this time under the generalship of Andronikos Angelos, at Charax in Phrygia. Although Angelos took a few shepherds and their flocks captive, he later fled, leaving these captives behind. Therefore it seems best to assume that the booty referred to in the final paragraph of the 1180 oration came rather from the emperor's advance on Panasion. This is what is said in that oration (79/9-30):

But these things were seen by us recently and caused us amazement, but the things at which we were now amazed enriched us much more with their magnificence; for it is possible for the victory here to be found to be many-formed. We have those living independently in no way lesser than those men either in number or in the ability to boast of their race; we have those who have captured them and are witnesses of the imperial trophies; we have those who fell, rather the land of those men has them, but we have the ability to boast highly about them; we have those fleeing headlong; if not in our hands now, we will however have them after a little while, if they will change from fleeing to standing still. There lies in addition

6. p. 195, as translated by H. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, Detroit, 1984.

to them as such things a certain progeny, which we have attacked, for it was necessary that they suffer so, and their multitude of animals, some of them driven away, as many as feet aid, but others lain low on the ground and covering it, all those which it was not possible to use for this purpose, in order that the barbarian race might be hard-pressed in both ways, for whom they both no longer existed and did not do good service, even though they were able. There lies in addition the wealth from that source, for the enemy crowd, visiting often, did not fall like tent-dwellers, nor were they equipped in a well-girded fashion as cheaply and lightly-equipped travellers, but many were the unmarked ones among them, and many also were the ones having the distinguishing mark of the symbol. And not only are they stripped of the wealth of their souls for us, but also of their possessions. And the stream of the Maiandros also made us rich, like some Paktolos with things sought for from that source, and these things are swept along and result in the beauty with which it is distinguished, but this wealth is non-metallic and does not suffer fatigue, and it is easy to attain.

This passage specifies the type of booty taken; livestock rather than precious metals, and captives. The passage also suggests more booty was taken than might be expected from tent-dwellers and that the enemy did not travel lightly. A reading of lines 78/5-7 suggests that among the captives were women and children. All this points to a Turkish settlement, even if the settlement probably was of the nature of a large encampment of Türkmen tent-dwellers (see Regel, n. II, 17/21-24), and this in turn supports the idea that this booty was taken at Panasion.

The 1180 speech and the 1179 John Doukas speech are helpful in supplementing Choniates in one further way. They help us to establish a chronology for the Maiandros campaigns. If Thessaloniki was refortified in 1179, then the John Doukas speech, which mentions this happening at the time of Eustathios' arrival, belongs to later in 1179. Now this speech mentions that the emperor "ran around the tent-dwellers" "the year last year" (17/21-24). Therefore his advance on Panasion and Lakerion belongs to 1178. It now remains to fit the Leimocheir and Charax episodes into the chronological framework. Admittedly this cannot be

done with any real certainty, as Chalandon and Magdalino, the two major secondary authors to deal with the reign of Manuel, point out⁷. However, the Leimocheir episode is related in Choniates' history immediately after his account of the violation of the 1176 peace treaty Manuel made with the Seljuk sultan Kilidj Arslan in the aftermath of the military disaster at Myriokephalon in Anatolia; Choniates also says that at that time "in no wise could he justify his setting out against the enemy"⁸; one is therefore inclined to date the Leimocheir episode to the 1177 campaigning season, as it occurred in response to the need to take precipitate action (one might concede that the violations of the treaty could have taken place in 1178 rather than 1177; but weighing against this is that it is the implication in Choniates that these violations occurred in response to Manuel's own failure to demolish the fortress of Dorylaion, one of the terms of the treaty). The Charax campaign of Andronikos Angelos is a little harder to date, but it is related immediately before an account of the emperor's advance on Claudopolis, which has been dated, on the strength of its mention in an unpublished Lenten homily of Eustathios, to early 1179⁹. The historian relates that this advance took place "not long afterwards"¹⁰. In the balance, then, since we can be fairly sure that the emperor had already made a campaign in 1178 against the Turks, we might put a tentative date of later in 1178 to the Charax campaign. Charax is within the upper reaches of the Maiandros valley, so we now have a tentative chronological framework for all three Maiandros campaigns; Leimocheir, 1177, Panasion and Lakerion, 1178, and Charax, later 1178, the date for Panasion being the most certain, but the other two dates being reasonable guesses.

It remains to comment on Manuel's policy of settling prisoners of war in different parts of the empire. Such captives provided a ready-

7. F. Chalandon, *Les Comnène: Jean II Comnène (1118-1143) et Manuel Comnène (1143-1180)*, Paris, 1912, pp. 513-4; P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180)*, Cambridge, 1993, p. 99.

8. p. 192.

9. P. Magdalino, *Empire*, p. 99, n. 299; he refers us to *Escorialensis graecus*, Y-II-10, fol. 367 r-v. The 1180 Lenten homily was published by Tafel in his edition of Eustathian *Opuscula* (Frankfurt am Main, 1832), so this Lenten homily must belong to 1179.

10. p. 197.

made fighting force, whom Manuel would support by granting them the tax-receipts of fiscal land, a unit of land used in this way known as a *pronoia*. Magdalino suggests that our Turkish prisoners of war were indeed supported in this manner¹¹. This seems eminently reasonable. These Turkish prisoners of war seem to have been settled in areas where they could be used to defend the empire specifically against the Cuman threat, which had menaced as recently as 1161¹².

Study of the 1180 imperial oration and 1179 John Doukas oration of Eustathios of Thessaloniki has therefore been fruitful from the historical perspective. In the light of what the scrutiny of the these orations has revealed, it would be surprising if similar information of historical value could not be discovered in his other orations.

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11. Magdalino, *Empire*, pp. 175-6.

12. Kinnamos, pp. 201-2.