SKLAVINIAI AND ETHNIC ADJECTIVES:
A CLARIFICATION

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Abstract: It has been recently claimed that the first reference to *Sklavinia* as a territory inhabited primarily by Slavs is to be found in Theophanes Confessor. A particular passage in Theophylact Simocatta in which the word appears has been supposedly mistranslated. In reality, the passage in question contains a reference to *Sklavinia* at least 150 years older than the *Chronographia* of Theophanes.

Key words: Theophylact Simocatta, Slavs, Sklavinia, Vita Willibaldi.

SKLAVINIOS Y ADJETIVOS ÉTNICOS:
UNA CLARIFICACIÓN

Resumen: Recientemente se ha afirmado que la primera referencia a Sklavinia como un territorio habitado principalmente por los eslavos se encuentra en Teófanes Confesor. Un pasaje en particular en Teofilacto Simocatta en el que aparece la palabra ha sido, supuestamente, mal traducido. En realidad, el pasaje en cuestión contiene una referencia a al menos 150 años más antigua que la de Teófanes Chronographia.

Palabras clave: Teofilacto Simocatta, eslavos, Sklavinia.

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Having prepared for some time for the trip, Bishop Willibald of Eichstätt finally departed in 722 for the Holy Land in the company of his father and brother. According to Hugeburc of Heidenheim, who wrote the bishop's biography half a century later, Willibald embarked at Syracuse and "reached the city of Monemvasia, in the land of Slavinia (et inde navigantes, venerunt ultra mare Adria ad urbem Manafasiam in Slawinia terrae)" most likely in 723 (*Vita Willibaldi* 93; English translation by C. H. Talbot, from Noble and Head 151)[1]. Hugeburc's use of the word *Slawinia* is the first instance in Latin of a specific name for the "land of the Slavs"[2]. In a somewhat different form (*Sclavinia*), the term appears in slightly later sources of the Carolingian age to refer to territories within the Empire, which were inhabited by Slavs (Bertels 160-161)[3]. Hugeburc could have hardly invented the word, which later entered the specialized language of the Carolingian chancery. If taking at face value her claim that she wrote the biography of Willibald "in dictation from his own mouth" one would have to admit that *Slawinia* was the bishop's word (*Vita Willibaldi* 86; English translation from Noble and Head 143-144)[4]. He in turn may have learned it (or rather the original form *Sclavinia*) in Constantinople, during his sojourn in the City on his return trip from the Holy Land (Ronin 440). The term was certainly in use in Byzantium shortly after AD 800, as attested by the Latin translation of the letter Emperor Michael II sent to Louis the Pious to justify his attachment to iconoclasm: "de Asiae et Europae partibus, Thraciae, Macedoniae, Thessaloniae, et circumiacentibus Sclaviniis" (Concilia 477)[5].

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[1] The *terminus post quem non* for the composition of Hugeburc's work is the date of her death, 786 (Bischoff 387-388; Gottschaler 5-101; Leonardi 23-26). For Willibald's pilgrimage, see Guth 13-28, and McCormick 129-134.

[2] The passage has therefore been interpreted as evidence of the presence of the Slavs in southern Greece (Huxley 9, McCormick 131 and 508). According to Chrysos 130, "Sclavinia" (*Slawinia*) is an adjective modifying the noun *terra*. However, there is no grammatical case concord between dative *terrae* and nominative *Slawinia*. *Slawinia* is therefore not an adjective, but a noun, and a more accurate translation of *in Slawinia terrae* is "in the land (called) Sclavinia".

[3] See, for example, the imperial *formulae* from the court of Louis the Pious (*Formulae* 314) in which *Sclavinia* appears in a list of names including Francia, Burgundy, and Italy).

[4] This remains true even when one accepts the views of more recent studies, which treat Hugeburc not as a stenographer, but as an imaginative author who employed the modesty topos so dear to the hagiographic genre as a narrative strategy (Leonardi 23-26).

[5] That the word appears in the plural indicates that in the mind of the Byzantine emperor there was more than one "land of the Slavs" at any given time.

In Greek, the term is employed many times in the Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor, which was finished in the early 810s (Theophanes Confessor 347, 364, 430, and 486)[6]. Theophanes used both the singular and the plural forms of the word to refer to a territory against which the Byzantine emperors Constans II, Justinian II, and Constantine V launched military expeditions. In at least one case, the *Sklaviniai* in question are located in Macedonia, while in another, the term is clearly employed for what seems to be a territory under imperial rule (Theophanes Confessor 430 and 486)[7]. In 810, Emperor Nicephorus I ordered Christians from all the provinces of the Empire to move into the *Sklaviniai* (Theophanes Confessor 486). This strongly suggests that in the early ninth century, shortly before Theophanes finished the manuscript of his chronicle, the meaning of the word *Sklavinia* has changed to refer to a territory (recently) conquered and incorporated into the Empire. That, in fact, is the meaning of the word in Ignatius the Deacon's *Life of Gregory of Dekapolis*, written around 855. According to Ignatius, at some point during his long sojourn in Thessalonike between 835 and 841, St. Gregory left the city together with a young disciple and went to a *Sklavinia* in the hinterland. He returned quickly after foreseeing a great deal of bloodshed and unrest to be caused, for reasons that remained unknown, by the exarch of the *Sklavinia* (Makris 110 and 28-29, for the date of the composition)[8]. That leaders of *Sklaviniai* such as the exarch mentioned by Ignatius the Deacon were in the service of the emperor results from the fact that long before embarking on the mission to Moravia together with his younger brother Constantine, St. Methodius is said to have served as archon of a *Sklavinia* (Kronsteiner 48; Nasledova 87).

However, the term *Sklavinia* was by no means an invention of the ninth century. Before Theophanes, the word appears in the text of the *Miracles of St. Demetrius*, in a homily of Book I concerning the 586 siege of Thessalonica by 100,000 Sclavenes and other barbarians under the orders of the Avar ruler. That ruler is said to have "gathered all the ferocious tribes of the Sklavinias (τὴν ἄπασαν τῶν Σκλαβηνιῶν θρησκείαν καὶ θηριώδη φυλήν) –for the whole nation took orders from him– mixed them with some other barbarians of different

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[6]   For the date of the Chronicle, see Whitby 9 and Mango/Scott, lxii.
[7]   For Sklaviniai in the Balkans, see Antoljak 9-13, Litavrin 1984, 193-203, and Babić 29-35.
[8]   For the location of the *Sklavinia* mentioned in the Life of Gregory the Decapolite, see Tsorbazoglou 128-129. For the political meaning of the word, as employed by Ignatius, see Georgiev 59-62.

nations and ordered them to undertake an expedition against the God-protected city of Thessaloniki" (Lemerle 1979, 134)[9]. Archbishop John of Thessalonica wrote the homilies in Book I of the *Miracles of St. Demetrius* at some point during the first decade of Emperor Heraclius' reign (Lemerle 1981, 44 and 80; Macrides 189; Whitby 1988, 116)[10]. His mention of Sklavinias would thus be two centuries older than Theophanes'. However, according to Paul Lemerle, the word Σκλαβηνιῶν in the tenth-century manuscript Vaticanus graecus 797 is a corrupted form of Σκλαβηνῶν, in which case the tribes in questions would be "of the Slavs", and not "of the Sklavinias"[11]. There is in fact no other mention of Sklavinias in the *Miracles of St. Demetrius*. Moreover, Paul Lemerle's ammendation makes much more sense in the light of Archbishop John's concept of "nation" (ἔθνος) and "tribe" (φῦλον). To him, the Slavs, whom he always called Σκλαβίνοι or Σκλαβηνοί, but never Σκλάβοι, were an ἔθνος with many tribes, all of which were called in 586 to participate in the attack on Thessalonica[12].

Is then Evangelos Chrysos right when claiming that *Sklavinia* appears "in no Greek source of the sixth or the seventh century" (Chrysos 126)? To be sure, his claim refers primarily to a passage in Theophylact Simocatta's *History* concerning the military situation on the Lower Danube in the summer of 602, right before the revolt of Phocas:

> As summer was hastening on, word reached the emperor Maurice that the Chagan was cunningly providing a respite for warfare so that when the Roman troops were wandering at random, he might in a surprise move assault the vicinity of Byzantium. Therefore he ordered the general [Peter, the emperor's brother] to leave Adrianopolis, and commended him to make the crossing of the Ister. And so Peter prepared to move camp against *the horde of the Sklavinia* (ὁ μὲν οὖν

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[9] For the date of the siege, see Barišić 57-67; Skedros 129; Iliadi 57-60; Živković 20-21; Curta 2011, 17.

[10] Speck 275, 512, and 528 has unconvincingly argued against Archbishop John's authorship.

[11] Lemerle's ammendation is based on the later manuscript transmission, namely on the twelfth-century Greek manuscript 1517 in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. It remains unclear what the corresponding readings are in the other manuscripts of the *Miracles of St. Demetrius*. At any rate, Chrysos 126 is wrong when claiming that "Σκλαβηνιῶν is not attested at all in the manuscript tradition of the Miracula".

[12] Similarly, the unknown author of Book II, who wrote in the late seventh century, used "Sclavenes" as an umbrella-term for a multitude of tribes, some of which he knew by name: Drugubites, Sagudates, Belegezites, Baiunetes, and Berzetes (Lemerle 1979, 179-180; Curta 2004, 522).

Πέτρος κατὰ τῆς Σκλαυηνίας πληθύος στρατοπεδεύσθαι) (293; English translation from Whitby and Whitby 217).

Chrysos, following Carl de Boor, the nineteenth-century editor of Theophylact's *History*, took the word Σκλαυηνίας to be not a noun, but an adjective modifying the noun πληθύς (Carl de Boor, in Theophylact Simocatta 345; Chrysos 125-126). He therefore endorsed Mary and Michael Whitby's translation of κατὰ τῆς Σκλαυηνίας πληθύος as "against the Sclavene horde" Besides relying on the authority of Carl de Boor, Chrysos's main argument is that "the adjective *sklavinios* is known also from the Old Slavonic version of the *Vita Methodii*", the second chapter of which contains the phrase *knyazhenie slavensko*. This, according to Chrysos (and Radoslav Katičić, who apparently translated the text to him into Byzantine Greek) must correspond to the Greek phrase Σκλαυηνία αρχή (Chrysos 126 n. 8). Leaving aside the unwarranted assumption that the *Life of Methodius* is not an original work in Old Church Slavonic, but a translation from Greek –an assumption not supported by any shred of evidence and contrary to everything that has so far been written on the *Life of Methodius* by generations of scholars (Dvornik, Ondruš, Petkanova, Birnbaum)– it is significant that Chrysos could not find a single text in Greek in support of his idea that the word Σκλαυηνία is an adjective[13]. For at a closer look, it appears that no such adjective exists in the (medieval) Greek language. When in need to refer to the quality of being "Slavic" medieval authors writing in Greek used instead σκλαυήνικος, σκλαβινικός, or σκλαβικός. For example, when referring to the boats the Slavs used to attack Thessalonica, the unknown author of Book II of the *Miracles of St. Demetrius* wrote of σκλαβικῶν νηῶν (Lemerle 1979, 177). According to the equally unknown author of the early seventh-century military treatise known as the *Strategikon*, in order to be efficient Roman units of light infantry needed to have short lances, like those of the Slavs, λαγχίδια Σκλαβινίσκια (Dennis and Gamillscheg 422)[14]. Both Leo the Wise and Constantine Porphyrogenitus wrote of Slavic people as Σκλαβικὰ ἔθνη (Dennis 470; Moravcsik 138 and 140)[15]. In the late eleventh-century *Life of St. Clement of Ochrid* attributed to Theophylact of Ochrid, the letters invented by Constantine-Cyril to render the sounds of

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[13] Specifically on the issue of *knyazhenie slovensko* and its interpretation in relation to the political meaning of the term *Sklavinia*, see, more recently Cheshmedzhiev 3-19.
[14] For "Slavic lances", see Kolias 188, Shuvalov 256, and Kardaras 192.
[15] Constantine Porphyrogenitus also employed the form σκλαβήνικος (Moravcsik 122).

Old Church Slavonic are called σθλοβενικὰ γράμματα (Iliev 82 and 70-71, for authorship and date)[16].

None of those terms appear in Theophylact Simocatta's work. As a matter of fact, there is no adjective derived from the noun Σκλαυηνοί/Σκλαβηνοί, which is commonly translated into English as "Slavs"[17]. Wherever Theophylact needed an adjective modifying a noun, he preferred to use Σκλαυηνοί/Σκλαβηνοί in attributive genitive. "Hordes of Slavs (πλήθη Σκλαυηνῶν)" appear many times in the *History*, but there is no Slavic horde (Theophylact Simocatta 52, 53, 226, 232, etc.). Moreover, the term πληθύς (or its equivalent πλῆθος, more often used in plural form) meaning "multitude" is commonly translated as "horde" when in the company of an attributive genitive referring to the Slavs, to barbarians, or to enemies, in general (Theophylact Simocatta 253, 271, and 293 for hordes of barbarians; Theophylact Simocatta 293 for hordes of enemies)[18]. Nowhere in Theophylact's *History* is any noun for "multitude" accompanied by an adjective derived from an ethnic name. The horde against which Peter prepared to move camp were therefore not Slavic, but of (or in) the *Sklavinia*[19].

This interpretation is substantiated by the evidence of the textual context. According to Theophylact, Peter was about to cross the Danube, as the following paragraph explains that a *scribo* appointed by Emperor Maurice was to furnish ferry boats to the Roman army under Peter's command, "so that they might cross the river (ὅπως τὸν ποταμὸν διανήξονται)" (Theophylact Simocatta 293; English translation from Whitby and Whitby 217). The attributive genitive of the plural

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[16] *Long Life of St. Clement of Ochrid* II 7, ed. Ilia Iliev, in *Byzantinobulgarica* 9 (1995), p. 82 and 70-71 (for authorship and date). Three hundred years earlier, Pope John VIII (872-882) called the same letters *Sclaviniscae*, an adjective most likely borrowed from Greek. See John VIII, *ep*. 255, ed. Erich Caspar, in *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Epistulae 7 (Berlin, 1928), p. 223.

[17] However, Theophylact did employ adjectives derived from other ethnic names. There are such things in his *History* as Hunnic curtains (ἀμφίθυρον Οὐννικὸν, Theophylact Simocatta 215) and Avar songs (Ἀβαρικὰ ᾄσματα, Theophylact Simocatta 238). Among the Scythian nations (ἐν τοῖς ἔθνησι τοῖς Σκυθικοῖς) the Avars are said to be the most adept tribe (Theophylact Simocatta 259).

[18] Peiragastus, the Slavic ταξιάρχος who attacked Peter's army in 594, is specifically said to have been "the tribal leader of that barbarian horde (φύλαρχος δὲ οὗτος τῆς πληθύος ἐκείνης τῶν βαρβάρων)" (Theophylact Simocatta 252; English translation from Whitby and Whitby 184. For Peiragastus, see Curta 2001, 104-105 and 327.

[19] This is precisely how the sentence in question was translated into German by Schreiner 209: "gegen das Heer in Sklavinien". For a similar Russian translation, see Ivanov 41.

noun for "barbarians" is also used to refer to the land across the river Danube as separate and different from the land of the Romans (Theophylact Simocatta 295)[20]. In other words, the name of the land across the Danube from the Roman provinces in the Balkans is the "land of Slavs", or *Sklavinia*. As Gennadii Litavrin has long noted, this appears to be a name on a par with such notions employed by ancient Greek or Roman ethnographers as Scythia, Germania, or Sarmatia, all of which had no clear definition in either territorial or political terms (Litavrin 1984, 195). In any case, Theophylact's *Sklavinia* has no political, but only territorial sense: the horde against which Peter was preparing to move was that of a particular territory inhabited by Slavs, and not an army of an organized polity established by Slavs in that region across the Danube.

Despite Evangelos Chrysos's claims to the contrary, therefore, Theophylact Simocatta is the first author to have used the term *Sklavinia* with the meaning "land of the Slavs", and he did so more than a century before Hugeburc of Heidenheim and Theophanes Confessor. Theophylact finished his *History* in ca. 630, for the last events mentioned in his work are Heraclius' victory over Rhazates in 627, the death of Khusro II, and the conclusion of peace with Persia in the following year. He is often compared to George of Pisidia or the author of the *Chronicon Paschale*, for having composed substantial parts of his narrative in the optimistic mood of the late 620s, after Heraclius' triumph (Olajos 1981, 417-424; Olajos 1981-1982, 41; Olajos 1988, 11; Whitby 1988, 39-40). It has also been suggested that, since his *History* focuses exclusively on the Balkans and the eastern front, Theophylact's goal was to explain the events of 626 in the light of Emperor Maurice's policies in the Balkans and the East (Curta 2001, 56). Beginning with Book VI of his work, he relied on what Hans Wilhelm Haussig once called the *Feldzugsjournal*, a campaign diary written at some point after Phocas' accession of 602 by a participant in Priscus' and Peter's campaigns against the Slavs and the Avars (Haussig 296; for Theophylact's use of the campaign diary, see Curta 2001, 56-59). Some have even suggested that for the chapters VIII 5.5 to VIII 7.7 narrating the events of 601 and 602, particularly Phocas' revolt of November 602, Theophylact may have used reports of surviving participants, such as Godwin, general Peter's second-in-command. Indeed, Godwin is the one

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[20] The Romans cross the same river when returning "to their own territory (εἰς τὴν ἑαυτὸν)" (Theophylact Simocatta 293; English translation from Whitby and Whitby 217). In Theophylact's mind, the river clearly separates the "land of the Slavs (barbarians)" from the "land of the Romans".

who "crossed the river [Danube], destroyed hordes of enemies in the jaws of the sword, secured a large body of captives, and acquired great glory" (Theophylact Simocatta 217; see Olajos 1988, 152). Could then the use of *Sklavinia* at VIII 5.10 be attributed to Godwin, Theophylact's alleged source? In my opinion, the answer must be negative for a variety of reasons. First, this is the only instance of *Sklavinia* not only in the chapters believed to have been based on interviews with Godwin, but also in the entire work of Theophylact. Second, when in need to refer to the lands across the Danube in which the soldiers in Peter's army were ordered to pass the winter of 602/603, Theophylact employed a periphrasis, ἐν ταῖς τῶν Σκλαυηνῶν χώραις (Theophylact Simocatta 293)[21]. Irrespective of the bombastic style of his narrative, Theophylact's choice of a periphrasis at this point cannot be just as a way to avoid repetition of the word *Sklavinia*[22].

Why then did he use the word at VIII 5.10? An attentive examination of the entire passage covering the events of the summer of 602, up to the order of the emperor to his troops to spend the winter in the lands of the Slavs (VIII 5-8 to VIII 6.1) shows that Theophylact was at pains describing three different movements of armies and peoples in relation to the river Danube, which he viewed as separating the Empire from the barbarians. On one hand, Peter's troops under the command of Godwin crossed the river against the Slavs, taking large numbers of captives with which the Romans wanted to return to the Roman provinces in the Balkans, but "Godwin for a time prevented them from doing this" (Whitby and Whitby 217). Meanwhile, the qagan of the Avars dispatched an army "to destroy the nation of the Antes, which was in fact allied to the Romans" (Whitby and Whitby 217). It remains unclear whether the Avar army moved along the left or the right bank of the river Danube. Given that Godwin and his troops were still north of the river, it is possible that the Avars moved along the southern bank, through what was theoretically Roman territory. That much results from the description of the third concomitant movement of people: "In the course of these very events, large numbers defected from the Avars and hastened to desert to the emperor" (Whitby and Whitby 217)[23]. Furthermore, the expedition of the

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[21] It is important to note for the argument I make here that those were the "land*s* of the Slavs", in the plural, while *Sklavinia* is in the singular.

[22] For Theophylact's bombastic style, see Olajos 1982, 160; Curta 2001, 57 with n. 50.

[23] This interpretation is substantiated by the fact that defectors are said to have gone to the emperor, not to Peter (or his deputy, Godwin). They are also not said to have crossed the Danube on ferry boats, as Peter's troops had just done in the opposite direction. For the Avar expedition against the Antes, see Litavrin 1999, 568-578.

Avars against the Antes is specifically attributed to the Chagan's reaction to the "Roman incursions" (Whitby and Whitby 217)[24]. In other words, in response to the Roman attacks on the Slavs, the Avars decided to attack the traditional allies of the Romans farther to the east. The Chagan regarded the Slavs north of the Lower Danube as his subjects, even if he had previously agreed to treat the Danube "as intermedium ($\mu\varepsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\tau\eta\varsigma$) between Romans and Avars" and to allow the Romans "to cross the river against the Sclavenes"[25]. From a Roman point of view, therefore, a distinction needed to be made between those barbarian lands which were under the direct rule of the Chagan, and the territory which, though theoretically under Avar rule (at least in the eyes of the Chagan), was effectively controlled by more or less independent Slavs. Both were on the other side of the Danube, in contrast to the "land of the Romans" to the south from that river. In the context of the account of the events of the summer of 602, Theophylact needed something to draw a sharp distinction between them. It was from the lands under the direct rule of the Chagan that those Avars came, who would later defect to the Romans. Conversely, it was against the territories controlled by independent Slavs that the Roman troops moved under the command of Godwin. "Hordes of barbarians were surging around the land on the opposite bank of the Ister ($\tau\grave{o}$ $\pi\lambda\acute{\eta}\theta\eta$ $\beta\alpha\rho\beta\acute{\alpha}\rho\alpha\omega\nu$ $\pi\varepsilon\rho\iota\kappa\upsilon\mu\alpha\acute{\iota}\nu\varepsilon\iota\nu$ $\tau\grave{\eta}\nu$ $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha\nu$ $\tau\grave{\eta}\nu$ $\dot{\alpha}\nu\tau\acute{\iota}\pi\varepsilon\rho\alpha\varsigma$ $\tau o\tilde{\upsilon}$ $\H{I}\sigma\tau\rho o\upsilon$)" (Theophylact Simocatta 293: English translation from Whitby and Whitby 218). Godwin's operations of 602, however, were directed only against one of those hordes, namely that from *Sklavinia*, "the territory of the Sclavenes" in which the Roman troops would soon be ordered to spend the winter.

Theophylact Simocatta's use of the word *Sklavinia* –the first such instance in the literature written in Greek– is nothing more than a narrative device, the role of which is to focus his audience's attention upon a particular part of the barbarian lands north of the river Danube in the context of a paragraph covering the rather complicated events of the summer of 602. Instead of an attributive genitive, such as commonly used in his work to refer to the quality of being Slavic, Theophylact invented a name for the land of the Slavs derived from the very name he used for them in the *History*. The territorial meaning of the word was linked to, and in fact limited by the specific circumstances described in the

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[24] Theophylact Simocatta, *History* VIII 5.13, English translation by Whitby and Whitby, p. 217.

[25] Those were the terms of the peace of 598 (Theophylact Simocatta 273; English translation from Whitby and Whitby 201). See also Curta 2001, 105.

paragraph in which it was used. Theophylact did not employ any other, similar names of barbarian territories or lands derived from ethnic names. There is no Avaria and no Tourkia in Theophylact's *History*. That there is instead a *Sklavinia* is largely due to his peculiar style and narrative strategies. It may well be that Theophylact did not in fact invent the word, and that the term was already used occasionally at the time to refer loosely to the lands inhabited by Slavs. However, it is only in the early ninth century that the territorial meaning was firmly established, thus allowing a shift towards a political interpretation, as the "lands of the Slavs" began to move inside the Empire.

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