

ROUSSEL'S DECISIVE VICTORY AGAINST THE BYZANTINES AT THE SANGARIOS RIVER (1074)

Antonios Vratimos
Sakarya University, Turquía

Abstract: The battle at the river of Sangarios, near the bridge of Zompe, is generally treated in the framework of the internal uprisings and rebellions that marred the empire in the eleventh century. However, it was more decisive than that of Mantzikert (1071) in the sense that the victory of the Frankish chieftain Roussel drastically diminished the numbers of the imperial armies, leaving the easternmost provinces open to constant raiding and unrestrained plundering by the Seljuk Turks. In this paper, I reconstruct the deadly battle through the texts of the Greek historians Attaleiates and Bryennios and try to throw light on the reason for this defeat. There are data to suggest the possibility that Nikephoros Botaneiates – the future emperor – betrayed his fellow commander, the caesar John Doukas.

Keywords: Sangarios River - Bridge Zompe - John Doukas - Botaneiates - Bryennios - Attaleiates.

LA VICTORIA DECISIVA DE ROUSSEL EN CONTRA DE LOS BIZANTINOS EN EL RÍO SANGARIOS (1074)

Resumen: La batalla en el Río Sangarios, cerca del Puente Zompe, es generalmente tratada en el contexto de levantamientos internos y rebeliones que desmoronaron el imperio en el siglo XI. Sin embargo, fue más decisiva que la de Mantzikert (1071) en el sentido de que la victoria del jefe Franco Roussel hizo disminuir seriamente la cantidad de los ejércitos imperiales, dejando a las provincias más orientales abiertas para ataques constantes y permanentes saqueos por parte de los Turcos Selyúcidas. En este documento reconstruyo la batalla mortal a través de los textos de los historiadores griegos: Ataliates y Brienio; y trato de esclarecer la razón de esta derrota. Existe evidencia que sugiere la posibilidad de que Nicéforos Botaniates- el futuro emperador- traicionó a su compañero comandante, el César Juan Ducas.¹

1 I am grateful to Padua Borbarán who translated my abstract into Spanish.

Palabras Claves: Río Sangarios - Puente Zompe - Juan Ducas - Botaniates
- Brienio - Ataliates.

Recibido: 14.10.2021 - Aceptado: 05.11.2021

Correspondencia: Antonios Vratimos
Email: vratimos@sakarya.edu.tr
Sakarya University. Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.
Department of History.
54187 - Esentepe - Sakarya - Turkey
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5908-4494

Introduction

Shortly after Romanos IV Diogenes' defeat by Alp Arslan at Mantzikert in AD 1071, the Byzantines had to deal with a new menace: the Frankish leader Roussel de Bailleul, whose revolt paved the way for a series of revolutionary insurrections that paralysed the government machinery. His profile and role in the state's political affairs have been examined to a satisfactory extent, but no in-depth study of the decisive battle at the Zompe Bridge between the imperial and the Latin² armies has yet been conducted. The imperial army was crippled so badly by this battle that the empire would never again revert to its previous status. The eastern defence was left to decay, while Anatolia was subjected to tremendous raids. According to Speros Vryonis (1971: 103-104), the defeat at Mantzikert was what facilitated the establishment of the Seljuk Turks beyond the borders of the empire. Jean-Claude Cheynet (1980: 431) is of the view that five to ten per cent of the army was eventually lost. Even if his estimations are slightly lower than the actual casualties, Cheynet has shown that the imperial manpower did not shrink as much as we believed. One of the most significant parallels between the two battles (at Mantzikert and the Zompe Bridge) is the betrayal and capture of the two commanders-in-chief, Diogenes and the caesar John Doukas. The impact, mostly of the second battle, was terrible, given that the numerical strength of the Byzantines was seriously reduced, rendering the army incapable of defending the border provinces from attacks. The situation is vividly illustrated in the sources of Michael Attaleiates and Anna Komnene. Their accounts of the revolts of Botaneiates and Bryennios (they arose almost

2 On how Greek historians used the names of Franks, Normans, or Latins, see Kazhdan, 1984: 83-92; and Shepard, 1993: 276-278. The career of Roussel in Byzantium is discussed in Leveniotis, 2004: 74-76.

simultaneously towards the end of 1077) are important for understanding the extent of this disaster. Let us first go over to Attaleiates' *Historia* and listen to his account of the efforts of Botaneiates against the Turks over that period of time:

“While the invasions of the Turks were still at their apex and wars flared up fervently from every place, he himself (i.e. Botaneiates) courageously and bravely withstood them; and the powerful [spirit of] courage with which he had armed himself against them did not emanate from weapons or from large numbers of soldiers, for they all had been already overwhelmed and had been subdued from the ongoing raids, slaughters, and defeats; and, moreover, they did not respond to his summons due to fear. However, he pinned all hopes on the power of God” (156.23-157.1).³

The battle at the Zompe Bridge had left fewer troops available for the defense of Anatolia. Botaneiates could not count on the remaining army that consisted of demoralised soldiers completely unable to protect the acritic provinces from Turkish incursions. Anna Komnene (the author of the *Alexiad*) paints an even worse picture of the condition of the armed forces in that period:

“In this part, the Roman Empire had reached the lowest point, given that the eastern armies had been scattered in every direction by the expansion of the Turks who had seized almost everything, namely all places lying between Euxeinos Pontos (i.e. the Black Sea) and Hellespont (i.e. the Dardanelles), the Aegean and Syrian Seas, the Saros (modern Seyhan) and the other [rivers], particularly the ones which flow through Pamphylia and Cilicia, emptying into the Sea of Egypt. This was the condition of the armies in the East, whereas the ones in the West had assembled around Bryennios, leaving the Roman empire with a limited recruitment and small forces. Some *Athanatoi*⁴ had been

³ Since there are no essential alterations between the editions of Pérez Martín and Tsolakis, the first will be preferred in this study. Translation of passages into English is mine.

⁴ The *Athanatoi* (Immortals) was an elite military unit founded by the emperor John Tzimiskes and reorganised by Nikephoritzes, when serving as minister in the reign of Michael VII Doukas.

summoned there [to fight], but they had only recently grasped sword and spear [for the first time]; some soldiers from Choma; and a certain Celtic (i.e. Frankish) squadron that was comprised of a few men only” (1.4.4.36-47)⁵.

Michael VII Doukas' serious difficulties to assemble a large army led him to cooperate with several Turkish chieftains in order to take Roussel de Bailleul into custody. Likewise, Bryennios and Botaneiates, shortly afterwards, asked for Turkish assistance to rise in arms against the government of Michael VII. The above-quoted excerpts from two different accounts, which, we must note, do not copy down material from each other, confirm the historian Bryennios' reference to the rebellion of Roussel as “the greatest of all uprisings” (209.3-4). Although some scholars treat this statement as an hyperbole (e.g. Simpson, 2000: 192), it provides, nonetheless, a clear picture of the military breakdown in Asia Minor.

Sources

The most detailed account of the battle under discussion is provided by the eleventh-century lawyer and historian Michael Attaleiates, and by the twelfth-century general, politician, and historian Bryennios. The career of Attaleiates took off in the reign of Diogenes, when he was awarded the rank of *patrikios*. He did not fall into disfavour under Michael VII. Perhaps, the young emperor promoted his loyal courtier to proconsul (Treadgold, 2013: 314), and assigned him the compilation of the *synopsis* of Roman law, widely known as *Ponema Nomikon*. Bryennios was married to Anna Komnene (she was the eldest child of Alexios I). It was suggested to him by his mother-in-law, the empress Irene Doukaina, to write a historical account of the rise and rule of Alexios I. Both historians were able to consult official documents, and could further appeal to direct participants. As concerns Botaneiates' role in the battle, their statements do not accord with each other; and the reason must be sought in their motives. Attaleiates, as the two prefaces of his work show, composed the *Historia* with the purpose of praising Botaneiates and preserving the past for the generations to come. Bryennios' *Hyle Historias*, on the other hand, is treated as an eulogy of the families of the Doukai, the Bryennioi, and the Komnenoi. Thus, the two authors write from different viewpoints, but have as common point their focus on military events. This may properly explain the difference of their stories in length, characters, and detail.

Attaleiates does not have much interest in relating how the battle unfolded

⁵ There are some occasions in the texts of Komnene and Bryennios where the term Celts is preferred to Franks (see Neville, 2008: 184).

and progressed. The whole narrative centres on one person, the general – and future emperor – Botaneiates. It begins with the strategy session between the two commanders and a strikingly extensive analysis of Botaneiates' advice to John Doukas. By characterising the advice as excellent, Attaleiates wants the reader to believe that had John Doukas listened to Botaneiates, he would have defeated his opponent. After the outcome of the battle, which began with John Doukas' offensive, the author closes the section with Botaneiates' safe escape from the field of action. It is true that Attaleiates' attitude towards Botaneiates is very positive throughout the *Historia* where he is presented as an exemplary governor and ideal strategist. It must not, therefore, come as a surprise that the author tries to exonerate his hero from any responsibility, laying the blame for the defeat squarely on the caesar. Today there is no doubt that these references to Botaneiates are later insertions and, as such, two versions of the text should have existed (Krallis, 2012: 142-157). It remains unknown, however, whether these insertions changed the former narrative structure and, if so, then to what extent; but since Attaleiates is guided by personal bias, we must treat his story with great caution.

Bryennios, on the contrary, deals with the actual battle, detailing carefully all its phases: the line-up of the two forces with the defection of the mercenary Franks to Roussel; the stout resistance of the encircled Varangians under John Doukas; the retreat of Botaneiates with the rearguard; and the sound defeat of the Byzantines. Bryennios, thus, offers a more balanced and elaborate account of the fateful event; but this alone is not good enough reason to give credence to his writings. It has been argued that Bryennios drew upon a text, lost today, that covers the history of the period from John Doukas' point of view⁶. Hence, he is criticised for having written a family and dynastic propaganda (Vryonis, 1992: 131). Although he modified his source to make John Doukas look good (for instance, he has him battle, whilst encircled, with outstanding bravery and remarkable courage)⁷, his story is considered consistent and coherent (Neville, 2012: 58-59). Contrary to Attaleiates who writes to subvert Psellos' narrative, articulating his own views⁸, Bryennios is not motivated by the same desire. In fact, he was not acquainted with Attaleiates' laudatory account of Botaneiates (Treadgold, 2013: 348). One would expect Bryennios to be severely critical of Botaneiates who defeated the rebel Bryennios (his homonymous grandfather) and put an end to his designs on the imperial crown; but this does not happen.

6 Neville, 2008: 168-188, esp. 184; Neville, 2012: 46-59, esp. 50.

7 Bryennios, 171.11-12.

8 Krallis, 2006: 167-171; Krallis, 2012: 79-81.

As Leonora Neville argues (2012: 135), Botaneiates “appears reasonable at all times”. In the same line of argumentation, Antonio Carile (1968: 434) points out that Bryennios describes with no resentment the scene of his grandfather’s presence before the victor Botaneiates. Not only does he stress the latter’s pity on the blinding of his rival claimant, but also refrains from openly linking him with this punishment. He only says that Alexios Komnenos handed Bryennios over to Boril – one of Botaneiates’ most trusted people – who carried out the blinding sentence at Philopation (Bryennios, 283.18-19). In general terms, the judgmental attitude of Bryennios towards the characters of the *Hyle Historias* can be described as quite subtle. This is clearly echoed in the section covering Diogenes’ reign. It is based upon Psellos’ *Chronographia*, but Bryennios does not share the polemical stance of his source against this emperor⁹. He restricts himself to merely stating that Diogenes tried to restore the state’s affairs, but lacked skills and knowledge on how to accomplish this (143.1-4).

No comparative study of the two accounts has as yet been done. Attaleiates fashions a quite different presentation of the battle. He shifts from the council of war between the two fellow commanders to the defeat and capture of John Doukas, portraying him as the sole responsible for the dreadful outcome. The gaps in his narrative and his overall treatment of Botaneiates affect drastically the accuracy and veracity of his own version of the event¹⁰. Bryennios is more informative, providing an erudite commentary on the battle. In his capacity as a military man, he was well aware that if an army does not retain integrity and cohesion, defeat should be considered inevitable. In this light, if his major aim was to exculpate the caesar, his reference to the desertion of the Franks would be quite enough, as we will discuss later. Instead, he blames Botaneiates only. Bryennios’ account offers the opportunity to cross reference several points we shall see in the *Historia* of Attaleiates. It can thus be used as a firm footing on which to construct a clear understanding of the battle as well as of the key role of the leading participants.

9 Neville, 2008: 173-174; Neville, 2012: 46.

10 Modern historians concur that Attaleiates’ *Historia* lacks objectivity in the sections devoted to Botaneiates, either before or after he occupied the throne (Pérez Martín, 2002: XL; Tsolakis, 2011: XXXIX; Markopoulos, 2003: 217-220; Treadgold, 2013: 317; Kazhdan, 1984: 24; Krallis, 2012: XXXIV).

Decision for military action

Attaleiates opens the relevant section by painting a sorrowful picture of the acritic provinces that had been left in a state of chaos (173.23)¹¹. The dramatic situation forced Michael VII to take measures by sending off Isaac Komnenos with Roussel against the enemy plunderers¹². The campaigning army had been at Ikonion where unknown reasons, Attaleiates states (135.17-136.18), caused a quarrel between the two commanders. Roussel mustered his 400 Franks and left to reach Melitene, where he scored a victory over a group of Turks. In the meantime, Isaac arrived at Caesarea and, during nightfall, launched a surprise attack against another group of Turks, but his force was devastated. Isaac was taken into captivity, but ransomed for a sum of gold. According to Bryennios, Roussel rose in rebellion at Caesarea, and thence he fled to Sebasteia (147.15-149.9)¹³. The differences in the narratives of the two historians make it hard to reach a solid conclusion. It is a rather interesting conundrum why the Frankish leader did not choose to go to the theme of Armeniakon where his compatriots had been posted since the first phase of their service at Byzantium – this was approximately in the middle of the eleventh century¹⁴. Matthew of Edessa, the Armenian chronicler, reports that, at that time, a battle was fought somewhere near Asmosaton between Brachamios and T^ornrik, the lord of Sasun. Brachamios was reinforced by 800 Franks under a count named Rmbaghat. The latter was captured and a good many of his countrymen were killed. It has been assumed that the name of Rmbaghat may be a corruption of Roussel (Dostourian, 1993: 138, 321, note 6). But this is a groundless assumption¹⁵.

11 Also, Bryennios, 145.20-147.2. An even more vivid picture of the situation is found in the *Synopsis Chronike* of Skoutariotes (Sathas, 1894: 169.1-7).

12 The date of Komnenos' military campaign is hard to define. Cheynet (1990: 79, note 1), proposes the autumn of 1072 or most likely the spring of 1073.

13 We should say here that Bourdara (1984: 42) and Simpson (2000: 193-194), adopt the account of Attaleiates uncritically. The same view is endorsed by Leveniotis (2004: 109, note 30), who accepts Attaleiates' historical accuracy due to his chronological proximity to the battle. Bryennios (145.15-21) gives a more informed account of Roussel's revolt, the place where the Byzantines set camp and the condition of Caesarea after the city was struck by an earlier large earthquake. But this point cannot be pressed any further.

14 On the reasons, see Shepard, 1993: 287-288; Magdalino, 1997: 30-31.

15 Shepard (1993: 276) surmises that there might have been other brilliant Frankish leaders in the service of the Byzantine army who, nevertheless, did not attract the attention of contemporary writers, for they remained loyal to the legitimate government.

Thus, after the terrible incursions of Turkish intruders into Anatolia, a new problem came up: that of the rebel Roussel who made inroads to receiving tax revenues from the locals in Galatia and in Lykaonia (Bryennios, 167.3-6). The writer presents this as the reason for a new campaign which, however, was not ordered by the emperor. The courtier Nikephoritzes drafted that plan, wishing to stop John Doukas' acute influence on Michael VII¹⁶. Perhaps, John Doukas became aware of the scheme; hence he proposed his elder son, Andronikos, be his substitute. Only after the emperor's strong insistence, he agreed to conduct the campaign in person (167.7-169.2). Contrary to Bryennios, Attaleiates says nothing about Roussel. He reports that this military operation was executed to protect the easternmost lands from the Seljuks. This claim contradicts another statement of his that Michael VII "preferred the Turks to devastate the Roman land, rather than this Latin (i.e. Roussel) to settle somewhere and repulse their raids" (146.23-25). Later, Attaleiates will make one more statement in a quite similar manner: "While reports were arriving, announcing that the Turks were overrunning Chalcedon and Chrysopolis, coming very close to the land [of the capital] for first time, they (i.e. the reports) did not create any disturbance, or confusion, but he (i.e. the emperor) remained indifferent, as though it were an alien country" (147.16-19). Such contradictions not only weaken the stance of Attaleiates, but prove that Michael VII's main priority was indeed to eliminate the threat of Roussel, ignoring the Turkish menace completely.

The actual battle

On crossing Bithynia and learning that Roussel had set camp at the sources of the Sangarios, as Bryennios states, the caesar continued his march forward through Dorylaion. Attaleiates has the caesar learn of Roussel's location after arriving at Zompe¹⁷ but before crossing the bridge¹⁸. It seems that the decision of the Frankish chieftain to encamp there was not accidental but a well drafted strategic plan to prevent his enemy from receiving reinforcements¹⁹. This may

16 On the relationship between uncle and nephew, see Polemis, 1968: 42-43.

17 According to Ramsay (2010 [1890]: 197), the bridge lies over the Sangarios River about sixty miles south-west of Ankara. Blöndal (1978: 115, note 1) is of the view that it was by the lake of Sophon (modern Sapanca).

18 Bryennios, 169.2-5; Attaleiates, 136.21-26. Dorylaion was the second base (*aplektion*) on the route for armies marching eastwards and was the gathering point for the Opsikian and Thrakesian armed forces (Bury, 1911/1912: 220-222; Huxley, 1975: 90, 92).

19 This conclusion may be extracted from an earlier passage where Attaleiates states: "After crossing the river of Sangarios by the bridge called Zompe, the emperor

explain Roussel's hastiness to reach his destination before the Byzantine army (Attaleiates, 137.1). Attempts for a peace agreement followed, but they fell to the ground. Attaleiates attributes their failure to John Doukas whose delegates humiliated the Frank²⁰. Skylitzes Continuatus says nothing about humiliation. He reports that Roussel rejected all proposals for amnesty and forgiveness due to his conceit and the large army he commanded²¹. On the present occasion an encounter was inevitable. The armies lined up facing each other. John Doukas was in the centre with the Varangians. Andronikos – his son – commanded on the left wing. The right one answered to a Frank named Papas and the western mercenaries. Botaneiates was at the head of the rearguard that was comprised of Phrygians, Lykaonians, and Thrakesians²². Roussel also divided his army in two (Bryennios, 169.18-21). The fighting began when the caesar tried to cross the bridge and fall upon his opponents; and this is how the description reads in the *Historia*²³:

“His fellow general was the *kouropalates* Nikephoros Botaneiates, a man of glorious lineage, whose military nobility descended from his ancestral past, surpassing and exceeding everybody in strength and courage; and one of the most famous men over the entire East for the grandeur of his family and the abundance of his wealth. He advised him not to cross the river but to await the remaining units. The caesar could soothe the barbarian (i.e. Roussel) with promises before his crossing, or Roussel could traverse the bridge and meet with [an attack] while unready, or the caesar could attack him with much readiness after his reinforcement by the remaining units; but without paying heed to this excellent advice, the caesar crossed the river arduously due to the bridge's slippery surface; and at once he advanced against the foes, although he was in a state of confusion. After having

[Diogenes] started mustering his remaining forces” (109.7-9).

- 20 Peace negotiations are recorded by Attaleiates (137.1-8) and Skylitzes Cont. (158.7-11). Bryennios mentions nothing about them.
- 21 Skylitzes Cont. (158.7-11). Roussel's extreme self-confidence is mentioned by Anna Komnene too (1.1.2.30).
- 22 For Ahrweiler (1966: 279) the Phrygians and Lykaonians are identified with the Chomatenoi.
- 23 Bourdara (1984: 43) and Polemis (1965: 67) expressed the opinion that the battle took place in the summer of 1074.

deployed his army against the foes, he thought that he subdued them and turned them to flight, but he faced a war tougher than he expected. This was because Roussel, after falling upon him with his special units, defeated him by open force, and he captured him with his own hands. The remnants [of the army] scattered and fled in disgrace. And this is how Roussel prevailed in the combat” (137.11-25).

The presence of Botaneiates in the rear of the Byzantine army is mentioned by Bryennios, Attaleiates, and also by Skylitzes Continuatus (158.12-13). Of the three, the latter two historians have him as John Doukas' fellow commander. But it is only Attaleiates who absolves Botaneiates of guilt for the outcome of that battle. Yet, his account is not devoid of inconsistencies, which begin with Botaneiates' suggestion of enticing Roussel with promises before undertaking any military action. Attempts for peace had been made already²⁴, and there is no indication that Botaneiates suggests a new round. Likewise, the possibility that Roussel might try to cross over the Sangarios raises questions. It may not be a coincidence that this experienced commander chose the opposite bank of the river to set camp. That would give him a strategic advantage against John Doukas. The conclusion may be extracted from the chronicle of Zonaras who states: “When Roussel learned of this (i.e. the caesar's expedition), and before the caesar crossed over the Sangarios, he took possession of it and encamped against him” (710.4-6). On this basis, it is not unreasonable to surmise that the Byzantine defeat gives Attaleiates an opportunity to characterise the advice of Botaneiates as excellent. He does not say, however, why the caesar ignored it and proceeded to battle, while he was in a state of confusion. Perhaps this was because the troops did not have a proper rest after the difficulties they endured in crossing the slippery bridge²⁵. When the attack was made and the Frankish troops fled, John Doukas thought that he had won; but then he was charged by the picked units of Roussel. Attaleiates

24 Peace overtures with a plan of postponing the battle for tactical reasons are recommended in military textbooks (see Dennis, 2010: 18.468-469, par. 91; Dennis, 1981: 370.39-42, par. 3; Dennis, 1984: 120). But this does not seem to apply to our case, given that the battle began, as says Attaleiates, with the caesar's attack. If this is the most effective way to silence the fighting zeal of the Franks through the gradual shortage of victuals, much the same can be said for the Byzantines who had the numerical superiority, and their need for water and food supplies was even greater.

25 Tsoungarakis, 1996: 90-95 par. 27 (the relevant passage has been translated into English by Vyrionis, 2003: 41).

– as indicated by the infinitive *τρέψαι* (to turn to flight) – implies that the Franks drew their opponents farther away from their lines. This manoeuvre of feigned retreat was a normal characteristic of Turkish nomads. In the eleventh- and twelfth-century sources, there exists no documentation that the tactic was followed by the Franks. A sole exception is the battle of Artah in 1105, but the factual accuracy of this detail is strongly disputed (e.g. Smail, 1995: 79, note 1). Let us pass to Bryennios and see how he handles the matter of this battle:

“When they had not been far from each other, the mercenaries and their enemies already began to converse between themselves; and everyone following the mercenary Papas at once went over to their enemies; and, fighting side by side, they both attempted to encircle those who were with the caesar, while Roussel who had [with him] the picked forces [...], since the barbarians (i.e. Varangians?) held up the attack, a strongly contested fight followed with many losses on both sides. After the lances of both [opponents] broke in pieces, they [went on] killing each other, battling hand-to-hand with naked swords” (169.21-171.2).

Roussel directed the major attack against the western mercenary forces of the imperial army with him marching behind the first squadron. This phase of the battle is entirely missing in Attaleiates’ text. The lacuna in the *Hyle Historias* does not help identify with precision the barbarians whom Bryennios refers to, but they probably were the Varangians in John Doukas’ army. They continued fighting determinedly until surrounded by the Frankish troops of Roussel and Papas. Doubtlessly, this happened because the soldiers of the rearguard, who ought to repulse the outflanking attack, remained motionless. It was only then that the Varangians broke and took flight. No tactical information is provided in the *Historia* of Attaleiates who simply says that Roussel emerged victorious from this battle. The historian closes the section with a reference to the fate of Botaneiates: “The aforesaid fellow general, with fearless and undaunted spirit, returned to his own place and quarters with those around him” (137.25-27). It is unclear, though, whether the entire rearguard or a cohort of his bodyguards is meant.

On the same issue, Nikephoros Bryennios, whose account is balanced by a wealth of historical detail, writes:

“Whereas those events were happening, the man (i.e. Botaneiates), who had been assigned the [leadership of the] rearguard, ought to have helped, when he noticed that the mercenaries had defected to the opponents and were hastening to encircle the phalanx under the caesar’s command. After gathering his forces together he retreated, though he was a man with courage bold, as he had proved in many [cases]. The barbarians (i.e. Franks) grasped the chance, and easily surrounded the ones following the caesar. By hitting and being hit, the barbarians (i.e. Varangians) around him resisted [the attack] for some time. Soon, they were embarrassed by observing some of the enemy to attack them from the front and some others to come from the rear. But the caesar, staying fearless, bolstered their morale. As long as they had strength, they fully resisted [the attack]; but when a part of them had been subdued and were no more able to defend the attackers, whilst most of them had been killed, the caesar, who had not at all set out to flee, was brought into captivity. Next, those around Andronikos, being outnumbered by their opponents, turned to flight” (171.3-16).

Leonora Neville puts the blame for the defeat on the shoulders of Papas²⁶. The excerpt above, though, may also reveal another dimension of the outcome: the Franks, after their defection, made an attack on the imperial centre, attempting to encircle John Doukas’ division. Their attempts met with success only when Botaneiates withdrew from the scene of hostilities. As a result, the Varangians were attacked in front and rear. Until that crucial moment, the outcome of the battle was in the balance, despite the fact that the losses from both sides were heavy. It is, thus, the role of Botaneiates that calls for further examination.

A treacherous retreat?

It has been suggested that Botaneiates’ old age may have been responsible for his withdrawal from the scene of action (Krallis, 2012: 147); but this does not explain why he made this decision, while the battle was still raging. Also, we have Attaleiates’ testimony that Botaneiates had been militarily active and kept on fighting against the Seljuks until he took the throne of Byzantium (see above, 156.23-157.1). Thus, his age has very little or nothing to do with this. The reason for his withdrawal may, thus, be sought elsewhere. There are some

26 Neville, 2008: 177; Neville, 2012: 50; Leveniotis, 2004: 127.

details that point to an act of betrayal. The first is found in the section devoted to the rebellion of Bryennios²⁷. Attaleiates narrates Roussel's failure to escape from prison and meet Botaneiates, who then was in his hometown at Lampe²⁸. We should say here that the great majority of his fellow-Franks had sided with the rebel Bryennios²⁹. Slightly afterwards every Frank from Botaneiates' army deserted to Bryennios³⁰. Roussel was a striking exception. His plan to move to Lampe implies some acquaintance between the two men who presumably had met each other in the past.³¹ Though the precise reason cannot be conclusively clarified, they probably shared a common interest in ousting Michael VII from power. We learn from Attaleiates (152.19-21) that Roussel was kept in a dark tower, entirely isolated from the outside world. It is sensible to assume that he was not in a position to follow the political developments in the capital, given that different alliances or loyalties could have been formed in the period of his imprisonment. But how sure was he that Botaneiates would not hand him over to the emperor? This rather strengthens the possibility that the two men shared a mutual trust and had agreed on a plan against the government.

Another crucial detail emerges from the chronicle of Skylitzes Continuatus which is an abridged summary of Attaleiates' account of the battle, and it goes as follows:

“After crossing over the river with the remaining troops, the caesar and his fellow general, Nikephoros Botaneiates, instantly collided (προσέβαλε) in battle with Roussel. Being unable to

27 There is an ongoing debate as regards the precise date of Bryennios' revolt. Bourdara (1984: 52) and Cheynet (1990: 83) have expressed the view that it occurred in November 1077. Karayiannopoulos (1993: 590) theorises that it took place towards the beginning of 1077, and preceded Botaneiates' revolt.

28 Attaleiates, 182.16-19. Polemis (1997: 437, note 368), puts Roussel's effort to join Botaneiates towards the end of 1077. Attaleiates' information is also given by Skylitzes Cont. (175.8-10). The latter, however, does not share the enthusiasm of Attaleiates for Botaneiates (see more by Lounghis, 1993: 170-171; Karpozilos, 2009: 320). At Lampe there was Botaneiates' *oikos* where, as Whittow (1995: 62) maintains, he “spent part of the 1070s, an exile from Constantinople, power and office”.

29 Attaleiates, 175.20-22; Skylitzes Cont., 172.25-27; Byennios, 269.10-12.

30 Bryennios, 275.15-16; Komnene, 1.6.1.90-91. Yet, neither author explains why they did so.

31 Krallis (2019: 8) claims that Roussel had acquaintance with Attaleiates, too, and the two men knew each other from Diogenes' military campaigns, when Attaleiates served as a judge of the army.

drive back the Frankish attack, the entire Roman army took flight. The caesar fell into the hands of Roussel while many others faced the same fate. It was only Botaneiates with some more who ran away” (158.12-17).

The central focus of the translated passage is the structure of the first sentence which has two subjects (i.e. the caesar and Bonaneiates), though the verb is in the third person singular (προσέβαλε, clashed, collided). Syntactically, a verb may be placed in singular when it refers to the closest of two or more singular subjects (Goodwin, 1977: 198, par. 901). Here, the subject closest to the verb is Botaneiates. However, it is undeniable that προσέβαλε refers to the caesar³². If Skylitzes Continuatus is “careful and meticulous in his work”, as the editor of the text, Professor Eudoxos Tsolakis, maintains (1968: 98), his wording can be taken as an act of betrayal: Botaneiates left the caesar exposed to the attack of Roussel, although the military textbooks prescribe that the rearguard has to follow the front line at a distance of a bowshot (McGeer, 1995: 42, par. 5.67-69).

It would be useful to conclude this section of the article with a remark that may be of some interest. This is not the sole occasion that Botaneiates excited suspicion of his behaviour. The reason why he did not follow the campaign in 1071 is not given in the *Historia*, but in the chronicle of Skylitzes Continuatus who writes that Diogenes “dismissed Nikephoros Botaneiates and such others as suspects, but took along perfidious and malicious [men]” (143.17-19). Was he under suspicion only because his name was among the ones who had been suggested to succeed on the throne the dead Constantine Doukas, the emperor prior to Diogenes (Attaleiates, 73.8-9), or he had been participant in a plot to undermine the reigning emperor? Bryennios claims that Botaneiates had been preparing to revolt since some time ago (237.17-239.1). In every case, he had to wait ten more years to win the race for the throne by force of arms.

To summarise: the significance of the battle at the Zompe Bridge has been underestimated by modern historians who basically treat it as minor repetition of Mantzikert with fewer casualties for the Byzantines (e.g. Leveniotis, 2004: 126); but it is more of a turning point than we believe. Roussel's victory led to

32 We must say that in only one manuscript (the codex Marcianus) the singular προσέβαλε is emended by προσέβαλον. This manuscript, though, contains numerous modifications which seem to alter the initial text in ways that may have corrupted the meaning. In his introduction to the text, Tsolakis (1968: 34-38) notes several of them.

the ultimate decline of the military themes, which consequently resulted in the permanent loss of Byzantine influence in Asia Minor. The major discrepancy between Attaleiates and Bryennios' accounts is associated with the reasons for that defeat. Nicoletta Duyé forms the view that there was connivance between Roussel de Bailleul and the *protovestēs* Basil Maleses [Attaleiates claims that Basil was captured during John Doukas' retreat (138.20-21)], and she raises a question mark about John Doukas' role in that battle. This is probably because the latter had been undermined by the scheming eunuch Nikephoritzes³³. The role, however, of Botaneiates did not command extensive attention in modern scholarship. The withdrawal of the rearguard during the battle is indeed an act of betrayal. Bryennios, with his military knowledge and experience, makes it clear when he writes that Botaneiates "ought to help" (δέον βοηθεῖν) the front line by preventing the encirclement of the troops by the caesar. His decision to sit out of the confrontation between the two armies surprised the soldiers and broke their morale, which surely is a decisive ingredient for victory. Although we lack stronger evidence to arrive at a definite conclusion, the supposition of Botaneiates' plotting role in the battle for private ambitions and aspirations is entirely plausible.

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33 Duyé, 1972: 177. Apart from Duyé, Cheynet (2016: 81) remarks in passing that the caesar's attitude towards Roussel is ambiguous.

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