

BYZANZ
UND DAS ABENDLAND VII.
Studia
Byzantino-Occidentalia



BYZANZ UND DAS ABENDLAND VII.
STUDIA BYZANTINO-OCCIDENTALIA

Antiquitas • Byzantium • Renascentia XLII.

Herausgegeben von

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Eötvös-József-Collegium
2021

Byzanz und das Abendland VII. Studia Byzantino-Occidentalia

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Budapest 2021

Der vorliegende Band konnte im Rahmen des Nationales Forschungs-, Entwicklungs- und Innovationsbüro – NKFIH-Forschungsprojekts „Társadalmi kontextus a szövegkritika tükrében: Bizáncon innen és túl“ (NN 124539) realisiert werden.



Verantwortlicher Herausgeber:
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Anschrift: ELTE Eötvös-József-Collegium
H-1118 Budapest, Ménesi út 11-13

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A nyomdai munkákat a CC Printing Szolgáltató Kft. végezte
1118 Budapest, Rétköz u. 55. A/fsz. 2.
Törvényes képviselő: Szendy Ilona

ISBN: 978-615-5897-43-6
https://doi.org/10.37584/BuA_7
ISSN: 2064-2369

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Ábel Török

A Byzantine Epic in the Chronicle of Morea The Heroic Deeds of sir Geoffroy de Briel*

Introduction

The study examines the origins and characteristics of a unique Byzantine “epic” in the *Chronicle of Morea*: a description of the Battle of Pelagonia and the exploits of Sir Geoffroy de Briel. Although the professional literature concurs that the episode is likely to be based on folk poetry and oral tradition, many questions (concerning literary crosstalk, intertextual connections, the author’s intentions, etc.) remain unanswered. The study examines the person of Sir Geoffroy de Briel and the possible intertextual relations of this epic, and analyses the Hungarian role in the Battle of Pelagonia.

Although there is consensus between researchers of the topic that the Geoffroy de Briel episode may have folkloric origins, a number of questions, regarding the literary allusions, the intertextual connections and, not least, the authorship and poetic intentions of the author are unclear. Accordingly, one of the fundamental questions of my thesis is: why and how did this early example of the emerging vernacular Greek literature find its way into a chronicle of the history of the Frankish kingdom of Morea? What literary, and in connection with that, what social-historical influences might lie behind it?

* My research was supported by NKFIH NN 124539 (Textual Criticism in the Interpretation of Social Context: Byzantium and Beyond) and by the ÚNKP-20-1 New National Excellence Program of the Ministry for Innovation and Technology from the source of the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. László Horváth for his invaluable support, as this study could not have been completed without his professional guidance. I would also like to render special thanks to Dr. Tamás Mészáros, Dr. Zoltán Farkas and Dr. Imre Kőrözs for their valuable comments. During my work I used the following edition of the *Chronicle*: SCHMITT, J., *The Chronicle of Morea – A History in Political Verse, Relating the Establishment of Feudalism in Greece by the Franks in the Thirteenth Century*. London 1904.

The presence and role of Hungarian archers is one of the most disputed historical elements of the battle of Pelagonia as it is depicted in the *Chronicle of Morea*. The description is not corroborated by any other historical source, so it can be rightly suggested that it may be related to the folkloric nature of the battle narrative, which includes a heroic poem. In modern literature, the prominent role of the Hungarians in the battle of Pelagonia – and thus in the attempts of Byzantine restoration – has been the subject of debate between Jenő Darkó and Gyula Moravcsik. In my thesis, therefore, besides evaluating the previous arguments, my principle aim is to answer the question: why do the Hungarians appear in the poem in the way they do? To what extent does the historical reality correspond to poetic representation?

In the following, I will first briefly present the history and sources on the battle of Pelagonia, then I will move to the person of Geoffroy de Briel and the possible literary parallels of the heroic poem written about him, and lastly, I will discuss the Hungarian aspects of the battle of Pelagonia.

The battle of Pelagonia: its history and sources

The battle of Pelagonia, which took place in 1259, was an historic event of particular importance in the fate of the Byzantine Empire. The armies of the Empire of Nicaea defeated the combined forces of William II of Villehardouin, Michael II (the Despot of Epirus), and Manfred of Sicily. Michael Palaiologos in his triumph, thus destroyed his strongest opponent, the strong and wealthy Principality of Achaia, and paved the way for the recapture of Constantinople and the restoration of the empire. The sources that remain from the battle are controversial, making it difficult to determine what actually happened in the field at Pelagonia (or indeed, if it took place at all). In the following, I will compare the major sources on the battle, which also nuance the source value, historical credibility and literary character of the *Chronicle of Morea*.

The battle is also reported by Georgios Acropolites in his Χρονική συγγραφή. However, the events recorded in his work, which follows the historiographical tradition of Byzantine scholarly language, do not correspond at all to those described in the *Chronicle*.¹ In his account of the battle, the Nicaean units struck the enemy several times rather than attacking once and overwhelming them: for example, when the aforementioned were watering their horses or

¹ Acropolites 79–82. The edition used: HEISENBERG, A. (ed.), *Georgii Akropolitae Opera*. Leipzig 1903. Second edition, revised by WIRTH, P, Stuttgart 1978.; SHAWCROSS, T., *The Chronicle of Morea – Historiography in Crusader Greece*. Oxford 2009, 74–75.

were going on their way, they were robbed of their supplies.² According to Acropolites, the army of Michael II was driven to utter despair by this harrying: the ruler of Epirus fled to Prilep with his troops, but when he arrived, his soldiers were scattered, leaving every man to fend for himself. Likewise, Michael, his son and some of his men fled on horseback under the cover of night, and as soon as the commanders learned it, they followed his example. According to Acropolites, even the Achaean forces were scattered: William of Villehardouin was found hidden in a haystack, and his bravest man, Geoffroy de Briel (ὁ τῆς Καριτάνας Ἰοφρέ), was captured.³ The victory of the Nicaeans that we read of here is not the shining victory perceived by the author – or authors – of the *Chronicle of Morea*, yet Acropolites claims: τοιαύτην γοῦν νίκην οἱ τῶν ἡμετέρων ... κατωρθώσαντο ὥστε τὴν αὐτῆς φήμην εἰς πάντα τῆς γῆς περιεῖναι τὰ πέρατα· ὀλίγας γὰρ τοιαύτας νίκας εἶδεν ὁ ἥλιος (§81).

The *Chronicle of Morea*, on the other hand, presents the defeat much more favourably and with heroic sympathy for the Principality of Achaia: not only does it exaggerate the size of the Nicaean army, but it does not even mention the presence of Manfred of Sicily; moreover, it justifies Michael's escape through the tricks of a Nicaean double agent.⁴ The *Chronicle* clearly seeks to portray the battle – the *de facto* destructive defeat – as dignified, almost highly commendable.⁵

The reason for the difference in sources may simply be sympathy and bias arising from different political attachments, but the situation is perhaps more complicated. Georgios Pachymeres, a historian representing the next generation of Byzantine scholars, knows of the Nicaean double agent mentioned in the *Chronicle* and claims that Michael II fled because of him. He even defends William of Villehardouin, writing about how, after the defeat, the prince fairly handed over the ransom imposed on himself and his companions for freedom, and claims that if the Pope had not released him from his oath of allegiance, he would not have violated the conditions later.⁶ Pachymeres' historical work is distinctly closer to the text of the *Chronicle*. The fact that the two works were created almost contemporaneously may also have contributed to the latter.

I myself agree with those who, behind the diversity of sources, surmise the specific poetic aims of the author of the *Chronicle of Morea*: the poet wanted

² Georgios Acropolites does not mention the Hungarian archers. See also: Acropolites 79–82.

³ Acropolites 81.

⁴ H 3593–3670; H 3637, 3965–3975; H 3712–3946.

⁵ SHAWCROSS (n. 1) 75.

⁶ Pachymeres 30–32. The edition used: FAILLER, A. (ed.) – LAURENT, V. (transl.), *Georges Pachymères: Relations Historiques*. Paris 1984.

to record the heroic deeds of Sir Geoffroy de Briel, and create a unique, independent epic in the *Chronicle*.⁷

The role of the heroic ideal in Byzantine literature

Many of the works of Byzantine historians are imbued with the need for an “heroic ideal”, the roots of which are closely intertwined with the Crusades.⁸ Through the triumphs over the Saracens, several Anatolian families became wealthy and their influence increased. As a result of the successes a sort of noble self-consciousness developed in the members of these families, the fertile medium of which was a series of victories on the battlefield.⁹ By recording their actions, these families served their own clearly-conceived interests.¹⁰ These records also influenced contemporary historical works and heroic poems: it became increasingly common for the members of the nobility to be described as heroes who boldly risked their lives and to fight duels with a dreaded enemy, and to detail their exploits (such as the courageous deeds and exemplary character).¹¹

Perhaps the most famous duel of the age, fought by Theodore I Laskaris of Nicaea and the Seljuk Sultan, Ghiyath al-Din Kaykhusraw at the battle of Antiochia ad Maeandrum in 1211, is recorded in the chronicle of Georgios Acropolites.¹² In his version of the duel, the sultan knocks his opponent out of the saddle in the same way that Sir Geoffroy de Briel does the count of Carinthia in the *Chronicle of Morea*, and the emperor’s horse falls (like that of the count of Carinthia).¹³ Descriptions of such duels are generally of little

⁷ SHAWCROSS (n. 1) 76.

⁸ GLENCROSS, M. J., La littérature française du Moyen Âge vue par quelques historiens de l’époque romantique. *Revue d’Histoire littéraire de la France* (1993) 191–206, especially 199.

⁹ KYRIAKIDIS, S., Accounts of Single Combat in Byzantine Historiography. *Acta Classica* 59 (2016) 114–136, especially 114.

¹⁰ CHEYNET, J. C., L’aristocratie byzantine VIIIe–XIIIe siècle. *Journal des Savants* 2 (2000) 281–322.

¹¹ KYRIAKIDIS, S. (n. 9) 114–115; KAZHDAN, A. – CONSTABLE, J., *People and Power in Byzantium*. Washington D.C 1982, 110–111; MARKOPOULOS, A., From Narrative Historiography to Historical Biography. New Trends in Byzantine Historical Writing in the 10th/11th Centuries. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 102 (2009) 697–715.; KAZHDAN, A., Aristocracy and the Imperial Ideal. In: ANGOLD, M. (ed.): *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries*. Oxford 1984, 43–57.; KAZHDAN, A. – FRANKLIN, S., *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. Cambridge 1984, 39.

¹² Acropolites 10; See also: MACRIDES, R. (transl.), *George Akropolites: The History*. Oxford 2007, 131; For further reading on the battle: OSTROGORSKY, G., *Geschichte des byzantinischen Staates*. München 2003, 355.

¹³ H 4022.

interest in terms of the real events of the battle, and barely credible (as the comparison of these two examples illustrates), their purpose being to create the heroic ideal mentioned above rather than to give an accurate and detailed account of what occurred.¹⁴ Such and similar episodes in a poetic (or prose) historical work each afforded the author an opportunity to spotlight his hero and meet the readers' expectations of an heroic ideal.¹⁵ On the other hand, these episodes also emphasize the contradiction between the interests of nobility and the real task of a leader: the behaviour of the "hero" (that is, to lead his troops into battle) is contrary to the established Byzantine military doctrine, which obliges the commander to follow the course of the battle from a safe distance in order to give appropriate instructions based on what has happened.¹⁶

This medieval heroic ideal appears in the *Chronicle of Morea* in the form of Geoffroy de Briel. Fifteen of the nearly one hundred and fifty lines depicting the battle of Pelagonia detail Geoffroy's heroic exploits alone, but the knight also appears in fourteen additional lines.¹⁷ Thus, about one-fifth of the events of the battle consists of his deeds. According to manuscript *H*, Geoffroy attacked the enemy squadron that William claims he feared the most – the Germans – practically single-handed.¹⁸ The knight knocked the count of Carinthia out of his saddle almost without resistance and killed him, before dispatching his two relatives. He then pulled out his sword, throwing away his broken spear, and mowed down the other German knights "like hay in the field" (ὡς χόρτον εἰς λιβάδι v. 4029).¹⁹ Seeing his bravery, the Sebastocrator runs almost desperately to the archers (γοργὸν σπουδαίως ἐκεῖ ἔδραμεν v.

¹⁴ ΚΥΡΙΑΚΙΔΗΣ (n. 9) 131.

¹⁵ ΚΥΡΙΑΚΙΔΗΣ (n. 9) 131.

¹⁶ ΚΥΡΙΑΚΙΔΗΣ (n. 9) 131.

¹⁷ *H* 3950–4091; *H* 4018–4032; *H* 4010, 4011, 4040, 4041, 4058, 4059, 4061–4063, 4066–4069, 4075.

¹⁸ *H* 3997.

¹⁹ The count of Carinthia, Ulrich III, actually ruled until 1269 and probably did not take part in the battle of Pelagonia. According to the editor of the New Greek edition of the *Chronicle*, Πέτρος Π. Καλονόρος, the count of Carinthia mentioned here is a character of imagination, and the choice of name can be justified with its resemblance to the word "Καρυταινά". (GEANAKOPOLOS, D. J., *Greco-Latin Relations on the Eve of the Byzantine Restoration: The Battle of Pelagonia – 1259. Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7 [1953] 99–141, especially 124; LURIER, H. E., *Crusaders as Conquerors – The Chronicle of Morea*. New York – London 1964, 189.); *H* 4020–4024. It is worth noting that the ὡς χόρτον εἰς λιβάδι image is also a popular element of Byzantine love poems. For example: Ἡ ἀγάπη σου ἔναι τρυφερὴ σὰν χόρτον εἰς λιβάδι. (*Carmen amatorium vulgare*: PCP 48 (54) [2]; VASSIS, I.: *Initia Carminum Byzantinorum*. Berlin 2012, 291.)

4035), instructing them to destroy the “dragon” (ὁ δράκοντας ἐκεῖνος v. 4040) who ruthlessly decimates their forces, even if they have to destroy their own troops, the Germans along with him. The archers soon decide the outcome of the fight – not by killing many enemies, but by rendering *one certain knight* incapable of fighting. The decisive turning point of the battle is clearly that moment when the wounded Geoffroy de Briel surrenders himself to the enemy. William watches desperately and rushes to the aid of his nephew, but all too late – his troops, *whether they want to or not*, are no longer able to influence the outcome of the battle (ἠθέλαν κι οὐκ ἠθέλαν v. 4084). As soon as the hero falls, defeat is inevitable.

Geoffroy de Briel was in every way the perfect man to personify the “hero”: as the eldest grandson of Geoffroy I de Villehardouin, he was the only male member of his generation who could boast of being a direct descendant of the one-time glorious lord of Morea. His origins (which could even have entitled him to the throne of Morea) and his disagreements with William all provided an exemplary basis for his role as a “hero” in the *Chronicle of Morea*.²⁰

Possible literary parallels to the “heroic poem” of the Chronicle

The events of the battle of Pelagonia are detailed in lines 3950–4091 of manuscript *H*. In this episode of almost one hundred and fifty lines, many features of the language and narrative of the *Chronicle* appear, from repetitive formulas to poetic analogies.

Repetitive formulas are very common in the verses of the *Chronicle of Morea*. If the whole work is analysed in half lines, it can be seen that thirty-five percent of the total text is a repetitive section.²¹ Although the most common phrase – which appears a total of sixty-two times in the *Chronicle*: ὁ πρίγκιπας Γουλιάμος – is missing from the relevant section of manuscript *H*, it occurs in the two “extra” lines of manuscript *P* (v. 4017). The second most frequently repeated element of the *Chronicle*, which also confirms the importance of the person of Geoffroy de Briel, occurs a total of forty-four times in the text: ὁ ἀφέντης τῆς Καρύταινας (an additional twenty-one times as Καρύταινου, seventeen times as Μισίρ Ντζεφρὲς ἐκεῖνος, eight times as ἐκεῖνος ὁ Μισίρ Ντζεφρὲς, thus ninety occasions in total), of which seven times in the description of the

²⁰ SHAWCROSS (n. 1) 74.

²¹ JEFFREYS, M. J., *The Chronicle of the Morea – A Greek Oral Poem*. In: BERZA, M. – STĂNESCU, E. (eds.), *Actes du XIVe Congrès International des Études Byzantines II (Bucarest, 6-12 Septembre 1971)*. Bucarest 1975, 153–158, especially 154.

battle of Pelagonia.²² In comparison, it is worth noting that Homer's most common heroic formula, πολύμητις Ὀδύσσευς, occurs in a total of eighty-one times in his epics.²³ Another frequently repeated formula is μετὰ τὰ φουσσᾶτα ὅπου εἶχε, which occurs twenty-seven times in the full text of the *Chronicle*, and once in the description of the battle of Pelagonia (v. 3955); οὕτως τὸν ὠνομάζαν ἐκείνον is repeated eighteen times (v. 4030) and twelve times the τί νὰ σᾶς λέγω τὰ πολλὰ (v. 4055) formula.²⁴

In addition to their "Homeric" characteristics, these repetitions enrich the literary analysis of the text with an important new aspect: by recognizing the presence of formulas, we also discover why the *Chronicle* differs from other sources in describing historical events. The question may arise of whether the *Chronicle of Morea* should be read as an historical work or as a national epic of the Frankish knights of the Peloponnese. Jeffreys posits that the latter is the correct approach.²⁵

The many, often repetitive formulas may clearly indicate that the text originally spread through an oral tradition. A direct reference to this can be read in the text of the *Chronicle*: ἐπεὶ πολλοὶ ἀπὸ ἀφήγησες ἐκείνων τῶν παλαιῶν, ὅπου ἦλθασιν μετὰ ἐκεινῶν, ἐπρόκοψαν μεγάλως (H 1354–1355).

However, the description of the battle of Pelagonia is remarkable not only because of the formulas, but also because of the possible textual crosstalk and literary parallels. Some hypothesize that the excerpt may refer to an epic poem that specifically focuses on the person of Geoffroy de Briel, but that has not survived as far as we currently know.²⁶ In the following, I will briefly demonstrate the possible literary parallels between the heroic poem and the battle scene of the *Chronicle*, and then focus my analysis primarily on two Byzantine poems, the *Achilleid* and the *Trojan War* (Ὁ Πόλεμος τῆς Τρωάδος).²⁷

²² The formula does not always cover the person of Geoffroy, as the *Chronicle* also mentions the previous lord of Karytaina. H 4011, 4018, 4041, 4059, 4063, 4068, 4075.

²³ JEFFREYS (n. 21) 155.

²⁴ JEFFREYS, M. J., Formulas in the Chronicle of the Morea. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 27 (1973) 163–195, especially 168–181.

²⁵ JEFFREYS (n. 24) 191–192.

²⁶ JEFFREYS, M. J., The Chronicle of Morea: Priority of the Greek Version. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 68 (1975) 304–350, especially 336.

²⁷ Shawcross and Magdalino also mention that the *Achilleid* may be paralleled with the heroic poem: SHAWCROSS (n. 1) 74; MAGDALINO, P., Between Romaniae: Thessaly and Epirus in the later Middle Ages. In: ARBEL, B. – HAMILTON, B. – JACOBY, D. (eds.), *Latins and Greeks in the Eastern Mediterranean after 1204*. London 1989, 87–110

In the description of the battle of Pelagonia, a characteristic image emerges, familiar since antiquity and widespread in Byzantine poetry: encouraging his soldiers, William says that by the grace of God, the enemy troops will be crushed and victory won, and others will be caught as “a falcon catches the bird of prey” (ὡς φάλκονας περδίκιν v. 4006). In verse 562 of the Oxford version of the *Achilleid* (hereinafter “AO”), Achilles also kills three hundred of his enemies in just such way (ὡς ἰέραξ τὰ περδίκια).²⁸ The difference between the Greek words used for *falcon* is not disturbing at all, as the word φάλκος appears two lines below in the *Achilleid*, and the whole image appears four times in the text as a whole with the two words alternating.²⁹ The image also appears in the longest poem by another Byzantine poet, Christopher of Mytilene (Χριστόφορος Μυτιληναῖος – ὡς ἰέραξ τις πέρδικας συλλαμβάνει), and it is also included in the *Trojan War*, which was written more or less contemporaneously with the *Chronicle* (v. 8218).³⁰ The Διγενῆς Ἀκρίτης also compares the boy preparing for battle to a falcon (δέξει τὸ σὸν γεράκιν), and in a later line the bird of prey appears once again here (πότε, γεράκιν μου καλόν, τὰς πτέρυγας ἀπλώσεις, καὶ κυνηγήσεις πέρδικα).³¹ Another well-known image emerges in William’s speech: while encouraging the warriors, he says that it would be disgraceful if the world thought that they “escaped like a woman” (νὰ φύγωμεν ὡς γυναῖκες v. 3981). Cowards also ran like women at the time of Hesychius of Jerusalem (ἔσονται οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι ὡς γυναῖκες ἐν φόβῳ).³²

Based on my research, the text of the *Achilleid* can be related to the battle scene of the *Chronicle* not only due to the battle description of lines 555–590 of the Oxford version, but also based on its general vocabulary and the expressions used.³³ The Neapolitan version of the *Achilleid* (hereinafter “AN”) shows, for example, perhaps the most characteristic expression of the *Chronicle*: τοὺς

²⁸ The edition used: SMITH, O. L. (ed.), *The Oxford Version of the Achilleid*. København 1990.

²⁹ AO 93, 259, 278, 562.

³⁰ Εἰς τὸν ἀράχην 53. (The edition used: E. KURTZ [ed.], *Die Gedichte des Christophoros Mytilenaios*. Leipzig 1903, 84; KAZHDAN, A., Christopher of Mytilene. In: KAZHDAN, A. P. [n.3] 442.) The image of the falcon and the prey bird has been present in Greek literature since Hesiod (Hes. *Op.* 202–212). Among other things, one of Aesop’s tales, *The Falcon and the Nightingale*, presents this topos. *The Trojan War* (The edition used: JEFFREYS, E. – ΠΑΡΑΤΗΜΟΡΟΥΛΟΣ, Μ. [eds.], Ὁ Πόλεμος τῆς Τρωάδος, Athens 1996.)

³¹ Digenes Acrites 902, 944–945. The edition used: ALEXIOU, S. (ed.), Βασιλείος Διγενῆς Ἀκρίτης (κατὰ τὸ χειρόγραφο τοῦ Ἐσφοριᾶ) καὶ τὸ ἄσμα τοῦ Ἀρμούρη. Athens 1984.

³² Hesychius 28, 56–57. The edition used: FAULHABER, M. (ed.), *Hesychii Hierosolymitani interpretatio Isaiæ prophetæ* (CPG 6559). Freiburg im Breisgau 1900.

³³ Cf. n.19.

ἐκατέκοφτεν ὡς χόρτον εἰς λιβάδι.³⁴ The author of the *Achilleid* uses this image three times (v. 220, 995, 1397), once with a particularly strong poetic voice (ἐὰν ἔχουν πέτρας σώματα, ὡς χόρτον νὰ τοὺς κόψω, AN 220).³⁵ Elsewhere, during a battle, an Achilles-like knight attacks his opponent in the same way as Sir Geoffroy attacks the leader of the Germans: stabbing him straight in the chest with his spear (AN: δῶκεν τὸν στὸ στήθος κονταρέαν v. 1005; H: στὸ στήθος τὸν ἐβάρεσεν v. 4022). This kind of quick and concise description of a duel has been common since antiquity, and it occurs several times in the novel about Alexander the Great by Pseudo-Callisthenes.³⁶

In addition to the matching phrases, the same formulas appear in the two poems, such as “διὰ νὰ τὸν πολεμήσουν”, which occurs both in the *Achilleid* and in the description of the battle of Pelagonia.³⁷ It is not only the match of the term that is interesting, but also the textual context of the usage. In the *Achilleid*, the enemies of Achilles set out to collide with the hero, just as in the *Chronicle of Morea* the enemy sets out for William’s army. In the lines of the *Achilleid* one can discover the same utterances referring to oral poetic roots as in the *Chronicle*: λέγω σας (AO 286, 566), λοιπὸν τί λέγω τὰ πολλὰ (AO 705) and ὡς τὸν εἶδεν καὶ τὸν ἐγνώρισεν (AO 289, H 4060). The common formulas may even suggest that oral poetry may have been a living tradition in Morea, all the more so because, although we do not know the exact date of their creation, the two works were written more or less contemporaneously.

Among the general similarities in the texts, the wording related to the persons of Achilles and Geoffroy de Briel stands out. The texts refer to both the hero and the knight as θαυμαστός ἐκεῖνος (AO 36, 623; H 4067) who act wisely (ὡς φρόνιμος, AO 109; H 4013), and both are referred to as “dragons”: Achilles by Πάντουρκλος (δράκοντα περικαλεῖς, AO 664, or in general characterization Ἀχιλλεύς, ὁ θαυμαστός, ὁ δράκος, AN 1849), Geoffroy by the Sebastocrator (ὁ δράκοντας ἐκεῖνος, v. 4040). The protagonist of the *Achilleid* appears in the same role as Geoffroy de Briel in the battle of Pelagonia: a noble hero who

³⁴ It is perhaps worthy to compare this line to the work of the Byzantine historian Ioannes Zonaras (c.1074–1159) entitled *Ἐπιτομὴ Ἱστοριῶν*, as this rare image can also be found in one of the battle scenes in his first book: τοὺς Ἀσσυρίου ὡς χόρτον συνέκοψαν. Zonaras III. 13. The edition used: BÜTTNER-WOBST, T. (ed.), *Ioannis Zonarae epitomae historiarum libri xviii*. Leipzig 1897.

³⁵ AN 220, 995, 1397. The edition used: SMITH, O. L. – AGAPITOS, P. A. – HULT, K. (eds.), *The Byzantine Achilleid: The Naples Version*. Wien 1999.

³⁶ *Historia Alexandri Magni* 844, 1655, 2925. The edition used: HOLTON, D. (ed.), Διήγησις τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου. *The Tale of Alexander. The Rhymed Version*. Thessalonice 1974.

³⁷ AO 91; H 3957.

defends his homeland.³⁸ A coincidental textual match between the descriptions of the two heroes seems improbable.

The text of the *Chronicle* can not only be associated with the *Achilleid*. The language and wording of the *Trojan War*, which was written more or less contemporaneously, suggests that the work may have been somehow related to the *Chronicle of Morea* (possibly relationship of common oral origin – and thus traditional Byzantine heroic poetry – or the two authors influenced each other). The great poem, which deals with the history of the Trojan war, also resembles to the *Chronicle* in its vocabulary, formulas and images. For example, many fights are described similarly to Sir Geoffroy's duel, which shows a match not only in their content but also in their wording (it is enough to think only of the term ἔδωκε κονταρέαν, which occurs eight times in the poem).³⁹ In a particular verse, one of the heroes of antiquity strikes his rival above his shield, precisely as Sir Geoffroy does: καὶ κονταρέα τὸν ἔδωκεν ἀπάνω εἰς τὸ σκουτάριον (v. 3046). Here, too, the opponent falls from his horse several times, as does the lord of Carinthia (v. 3739, 6918, 10752). The description of the greatest Trojan hero is similar to that of the Frankish knight: as in the *Achilleid*, he has a permanent attributive here too: Ἀχιλλεύς ὁ θαυμαστός (for example v. 6825). In both works, the soldiers unconditionally obey their commanders: as the Hungarians, without question, “acted as they were commanded” (ὡς ὠρίστησαν, οὕτως καὶ τὸ ἐποιήσαν, H 4051), the myrmidons also immediately complied with Achilles' command (ὡσὰν τοὺς τὸ ἐπαράγγειλεν, οὕτως καὶ τὸ ἐπόικαν v. 9744), and slaughtered the “Persians”.⁴⁰ The similarities of the expressions and vocabulary of the two works could still be listed at length.

In the text of the *Trojan War*, the criteria of orality also appear more emphatically than in the *Achilleid*. One can read several times the poetic question also posed in the battle of Pelagonia: τί νὰ σὰς λέγω τὰ πολλά; (v. 523, 7430) and the λέγω σας formula, too (fe. v. 8214).

The similarity of formulas, vocabulary, mode of expression and storytelling clearly suggest that the works mentioned above were somehow related. Each was born at more or less the same time and deal with a similar topic, in a similar way. There may be two reasons for this: either a traditional oral poetry with a very strong voice and character existed in the Byzantine Greek

³⁸ LASSTHIOTAKIS, M., Achille et Digénis : réflexions sur la fonction de quelques épisodes et motifs acritiques dans l'Achilleïde. In: Pouderon, B. (ed.), *Les Personnages du roman grec. Actes du colloque de Tours, novembre 18-20, 1999*. Lyon 2001, 373–392, especially 385.

³⁹ *Trojan War* 3738, 3749, 4068, 4529, 5062, 6916, 9432, 10751.

⁴⁰ τοὺς Πέρσιαις ἐγυροῦσαι v. 9745.

territories from which these poems may have evolved (this assumption may be supported by the fact that the same similarities appear in different genres – heroic poems, love poetry), or the authors of the *Chronicle* and the other two works were in direct contact with each other's works. It is perhaps unnecessary to distinguish between these two possible causes.

We can add to the above that the fifteen lines detailing the heroic deeds of Geoffroy de Briel reflect a clearly established, "literary" structure. The hero is the first to face the enemy alone (the motif is repeated in the *Achilleid*). His brief combat with the most dreaded soldier is reminiscent of the typical duel descriptions of the age (see the above-mentioned excerpt from the chronicle of Acropolites and many verses of the *Trojan War*), and it is the sight of his heroic deeds that encourages his allies who together enthusiastically rush to his aid in slaughtering the enemy – the latter is the topos of a commander fighting valiantly with his subordinates to prove the virtues and legitimacy of the local nobility.

The role of the Hungarian troops at the battle of Pelagonia

One of the most controversial historical elements of the battle of Pelagonia is the presence and role of Hungarian archers, which is closely related to the literary form of the battle's description, including the heroic poem analysed above. Did Hungarian auxiliaries take part in the battle at all? And if that is true, did the downpour of arrows really clinch the conflict, by raining a bloodstorm (ζάλην, P 4043) upon the forces of the Principality of Achaia? First of all, I will analyse the text of the *Chronicle*.

When the Sebastocrator saw that the Germans were "scattered and scolded" (ἐσπάραξαν κι ἀπήρασι τὸ κρότος v. 4034) as a result of Geoffroy de Briel's attack, he hastily dashed to the Hungarians (γοργὸν σπουδαίως ἐκεῖ ἔδραμεν ὅπου ἦσασιν οἱ Οὐγγοὶ v. 4035) and ordered them to target the enemy squad mixed with the allied Germans. The Hungarians then slaughtered all the horses and riders of the Franks and Germans with the help of the Cumans mentioned in passing (ὄλους τοὺς ἵππους καὶ φαρία τῶν Φράγκων κι Ἀλλαμάνων, ὅλα τὰ ἐκατασφάξασιν v. 4056–4057). As a result of their action, the feared leader of the squad, Geoffroy de Briel, also fails. After the knight surrenders to the Sebastocrator (v. 4066), the battle seems to be decided finally: William rushes to the knight's help, but too late – defeat is inevitable because of the Hungarian arrows.

The Greek version of the *Chronicle* does not mention precise numbers, but the French version does: it claims that three hundred Germans, one thousand

five hundred Hungarians, six hundred Serbs, a large number of Bulgarian cavalry and even more significant infantry, and two thousand light-armed Cuman warriors supported the Nicaean Empire.⁴¹ However, the data offered by the *Chronicle* can hardly be correct: in describing the enemy forces lined up in the battle of Pelagonia, it probably exaggerates in order to portray the Frankish defeat in a better light.

The primary reason for the controversy is that historians of the age do not mention the presence of Hungarians at the battle of Pelagonia at all. Georgios Pachymeres only speaks of “Scythians and Persians” (i.e., Cumans and Turks) supporting the Nicaean army, while Georgios Acropolites mentions Scythians, Turks, and Greeks who preferred archery to other armed forces (οἷς καὶ μάλλον ἢ τοξεία τὸ ἐπιτήδευμα) – the latter probably refers to the Greeks living in Philadelphieia, who were famous for their talented archers.⁴² While we know that the term “Turks” may have been applied to Hungarians in several Byzantine historic works (for example, in the works of Ioannes Zonaras who lived a century or two before the events of the *Chronicle*: ὁ βασιλεὺς δῶροις τοὺς Τούρκους ἔπεισε τοὺς περὶ τὸν Ἰστρον, οἳ καὶ Οὐγγροὶ καλοῦνται), it is unlikely that this name would have been used by historians to refer to Hungarians when describing the battle of Pelagonia.⁴³ The authors who refer to the Hungarians as Τούρκοι lived long before the time of Acropolites and Pachymeres, and belonged to a closer literary circle that shared the same literary influences, so the source of this designation is to be found not in the vernacular, but rather in literature.⁴⁴

In the modern literature, Jenő Darkó was a dedicated advocate of the prominent role played by the Hungarians in the battle of Pelagonia. Based on two later sources that attest to the presence of Greek auxiliaries in Hungary in 1260, Darkó claims that the Greek soldiers were sent to Hungary by Michael VIII Palaiologos in return for the decisive role played by the Hungarians in the battle of Pelagonia. Darkó goes so far as to say that “the famous battle of Pelagonia ended in victory for the Nicaean–Hungarian troops” and that “the fortunate collaboration of both powers (i.e. the Nicaean Empire and Hungary) crushed all the enemy’s efforts, thus opening the way to Constantinople for

⁴¹ B §270.

⁴² Pachymeres 31; Acropolites 81; MACRIDES (n. 27) 362.

⁴³ DARKÓ, E., *A magyarokra vonatkozó népnevek a bizánczi íróknál*. Budapest 1910, 4–5; Zonaras XVI. 12.

⁴⁴ DARKÓ (n. 43) 6.

the Nicaeans.”⁴⁵ Gyula Moravcsik questions this: according to him, even if there had been Hungarian auxiliary troops present at the battle of Pelagonia, there could not have been many because then the Byzantine sources would also mention them.⁴⁶ Referring to his own study, he adds that the source to which Darkó refers is from the eighteenth century.⁴⁷

The presence and role of the Hungarians at the battle of Pelagonia is therefore moot. Considering that the *Chronicle* – as Jeffreys suggests – is not primarily a historical work, but a kind of national epic of the Moreot Franks it was, therefore, not intended to provide accurate data, and regarding the fact that no other source mentions Hungarian auxiliaries, their presence in battle is indeed questionable. Jenő Darkó’s statement – which is based on the report in the *Chronicle* – that the arrows of the Hungarians brought victory to the Nicaean Empire is completely unprovable and even unfounded.⁴⁸ The purpose of such a prominent presence of archers is rather to emphasise the heroism of Geoffroy de Briel. As invincible supporting characters, the Hungarians reinforce the importance of the actions of the true protagonist, the knight. Among the nations involved in the battle, the reason for the Hungarians being singled out is perhaps the clichéd image of their ancestors of yore, a literary topos (*A sagittis Hungarorum libera nos, Domine!*)

Although the original version of this famous saying appears in a codex from the archives of the diocese of Modena (*Ab Ungerorum nos defendas iaculis!*), the Hungarians appear in Byzantine sources as a fearsome, legendary people.⁴⁹ A monk named Gregorios, who lived in the 10th century, wrote the following of the Hungarians in his work *The Life of Basileios*: τῶν Οὐγγρῶν οὖν ἔθνος διὰ τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν καθεκάστην τὰ δυτικά μέρη ληλατοῦν [...] δι’ ἣν αἰτίαν τὰ παμμίαρα ἔθνη ταῦτα καθ’ ἡμῶν τῶν χριστιανῶν στρατευόμενα κονιορτοῦ δίκην συνεχῶς κατευδοῦνται καὶ τὰ δυτικά μέρη ἀπόλυσιν ἐξερχόμενα; [...] ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ὁρῶ σήμερον, ὅτι κατὰ τὴν ὥραν ταύτην οὗτοι οἱ παμμίαιοι Οὐγγροὶ διαπερᾶσαι πειρώμενοι τὸν Δάνουβιν ποταμὸν ἀπεπνίγησαν ἐν τοῖς ρείθροις

⁴⁵ DARKÓ, E., *Byzantinisch-ungarische Beziehungen in der zweiten Hälfte des XIII. Jahrhunderts*. Weimar 1933, 16, 54.

⁴⁶ OSTROGORSKY, G., *A Bizánci Állam története*. Budapest 2003, 357. (Ostrogorsky’s book was published in Hungarian with notes by Gyula Moravcsik.)

⁴⁷ MORAVCSIK, Gy., Inscription grecque sur le triptyque de Grenoble. *Études Hongroises* 13 (1953) 193–203; OSTROGORSKY (n. 12) 403; See also: GEANAKOPOLOS (n. 19) 124.

⁴⁸ JEFFREYS (n. 24) 191–192.

⁴⁹ Diocesan Archives of Modena, O.I.4. *codex*; HALMÁGYI, M., A magyarok nyilaitól... – Egy kósza idézet nyomában. *Aetas* 22/3 (2007) 142–147, especially 147.

αὐτοῦ, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν οἰκονομία Θεοῦ καταλειφθέντες ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς τὴν χώραν αὐτῶν διὰ κενῆς, καὶ τοῦ λοιποῦ σέσωκεν ἡμᾶς ὁ Θεὸς ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτῶν διὰ σπλάγχχνα ἐλέους αὐτοῦ.⁵⁰

In a letter to the Emperor Manuel in 1173, the Byzantine chronicler Constantinos Manasses describes the Hungarians as follows: ἔθνος εὖιππον, εὖοπλον, σιδηροφόρον, κατάφρακτον, Ἄρεϊ κάτοχον, μυριοπληθές, μυριάνθρωπον, ἔθνος ὑπὲρ τὴν ψάμμον εἰς πλῆθος, ὑπὲρ τοὺς Τριβαλλοὺς καὶ Δάκας καὶ Γήπαιδας τὸ θυμοειδὲς καὶ ἐμπειροπόλεμον, τὴν τόλμαν ἀνίκητον, τὸ θράσος ἀκάθεκτον, τὸν θυμὸν ἀνυπόστατον, ἔθνος αὐτόνομον, ἀδούλωτον, ὑψαυχενοῦν, φιλελεύθερον, αὐταρχούμενον. [...] φιλεῖ δὲ ὑπ οὐδενὸς τῶν ἀπανταχῆ κρατούντων φορολογεῖσθαι, ἄνετον δὲ καὶ αὐθέκαστον ἐκ τοῦ παντὸς αἰῶνος διήρκεσε· τὸ τε γὰρ πλῆθος αὐτοῖς ὑπὲρ τὰς λειμονίους βοτάνας, αἱ χεῖρες ἀγαθαὶ τὰ πολέμια, δορατοφόροι, ὀπλιτοπάλοι πάντες καὶ χαλκοθώρακες· αἴγλη δ' οὐρανὸν ἰκάνει κορυθῶν ἀπὸ λαμπομενάων καὶ ἡ ἵππος θυμικὴ καὶ γενναία· καὶ πολὺ τὸ περὶ τὴν μάχην ἀνδρικὸν καὶ ὀξύρροπον. ἄλλ' ἦν ὅτε τὸ φῦλον τοῦτο τὸ μυριάριθμον καὶ φρικαλέον ἦν ἀκουσθῆναι καὶ εἰς ὀμαιχμίαν ἐλθεῖν φοβερώτερον.⁵¹

The examples above confirm that the fighting prowess of the Hungarians and the expertise of their archers were commonly known and respected in Byzantine territories. It is possible, therefore, that the author of the *Chronicle of Morea* did not highlight this nation in the lines describing the battle of Pelagonia because of its decisive role in the battle, but in order to make the heroic fall of Sir Geoffroy de Briel more glorious by invoking an ancient respect for the Hungarians, the memory of which may still have lived as a literary topos in the minds of the Greeks of the time.

Conclusion

In my opinion, we can posit that the description of the battle of Pelagonia in the *Chronicle of Morea* (Τὸ Χρονικὸν τοῦ Μορέως) should be considered a heroic poem rather than an historiographical source. The various elements – the course of the battle, the description of the feared German and Hungarian troops fighting on the side of the Nicaean Empire, the emphasis on the monumentality

⁵⁰ See also: MORAVCSIK, GY., *Az Árpád-kori magyar történet bizánci forrásai*. Budapest 1988, 28–29. See also: ZÓLYOMI, Zs., *Magyar harcmódor az Árpád-korban bizánci források alapján. Hadmérnök VI/1 (2011) 320–339, especially 328.*

⁵¹ The edition used: KURTZ, E. (1905) *BB 12*. See also: MORAVCSIK (n. 50) 158. and ZÓLYOMI (n. 50) 332.

of the battle – all serve the same purpose: the poet, in keeping with the leit-motif of the age, sought to elevate the person of Geoffroy de Briel to heroic heights. The literary and social-historical starting point for this is clearly that the audience and the nobility of the age explicitly demanded the imaging of the heroic ideal and the singing of valiant deeds: this was precisely the intention of the writer. This interpretation not only resolves, but also justifies the striking differences between the *Chronicle of Morea* and contemporary scholarly historical works, and provides an answer to the representation and prominent role of the Hungarians in the battle.

Our statements, and the heroic poetic character of the excerpt are supported by the language of the *Chronicle*. The repetitive formulas, the turns of phrase suggesting oral origins and the strong poetic imagery clearly demonstrate that the author was not trying to create a work of historiography, but rather a kind of Frankish national epic. And the thriving chivalric culture of Morea, the Principality of Achaia, provided a fertile medium for such poetic endeavours.

On the basis of the literary parallels found and presented above, it can be considered proven that the fragment containing the heroic deeds of Geoffroy de Briel is certainly related, both in its subject matter, vocabulary and idiom, to the *Achilleid* (Διήγησις περὶ τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως) and the *Trojan War* (Ὁ Πόλεμος τῆς Τροάδος), which were written more or less contemporaneously and in the same area. The two possible reasons for the striking literary parallels – the strong-voiced oral poetry of the Greek-inhabited areas and the direct contact between the authors – need not necessarily be separated.

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