



Theotokis, G. (2012) 'Bohemond of Taranto's 1107-8 campaign in Byzantine Illyria – can it be viewed as a Crusade?'.
Rosetta **11**: 72-81.

Rosetta **11**: 72-81.

http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/Issue_11/theotokis.pdf

Bohemond of Taranto's 1107-8 campaign in Byzantine Illyria – Can it be viewed as a Crusade?

Georgios Theotokis

University of Notre Dame

On the 9th October 1107, Bohemond the Count of Taranto and eldest son of Duke Robert Guiscard, crossed the Adriatic Sea to attack the Byzantine Empire and besieged the Illyrian city-port of Dyrrachium for almost a year. Three years before, having been released from captivity by the Seljuks of Melitene, he had returned to his crusader principality of Antioch only to find his troops hard-pressed by the Byzantine Army. What followed was a decision that was to have a significant impact, not only on Norman-Byzantine relations, but also on the whole controversy between the Eastern and Western churches. Bohemond took the decision to return to Europe and raise an army for a new Crusade, this time not against the Muslims of the Holy Land, but rather in the words of Anna Comnena against the 'pagan, who was helping pagans wholeheartedly', the Emperor Alexius Comnenus. Bohemond's expedition can be seen as an important and early example of a crusade's manipulation towards political objectives against fellow Christians, anticipating by a century the deviation of the Fourth Crusade in 1204.

This paper will address a number of issues: whether modern historians can characterise Bohemond's expedition in 1107-8 as a crusade; what were the deeper political reasons that drove the Count of Taranto to invade Illyria; what was the pretext that Bohemond used to escape to France and preach for his imminent expedition and, more importantly, what was the terminology which the sources use to record his appeals? How did this relate to that of the First Crusade ten years earlier? How and to what extent did the people of France, Italy and Germany respond to his call? Was he able to forge any important alliances?

We know little of Bohemond's whereabouts in Italy during the second half of 1105, but it seems very likely that his intentions were to raise an army of

volunteers and mobilize powerful allies before he embarked on his quest across the Adriatic. Pope Paschal II (1099-1118) seemed like an obvious ally, along with Philip of France and Henry of England, but how fruitful did his journey through Italy and France prove to be? Bohemond remained in Southern Italy, probably at Taranto or Bari preparing his fleet, from the early months of 1105 until sometime in the early autumn, most likely in September,¹ when he departed for Rome. Paschal was a Crusading enthusiast and he, like others, held the Byzantine Emperor responsible for the misfortunes of the 1101 Crusade. This sentiment of anger and frustration of the Latins, seen through the writings of Ekkehard, Bernold of Constance, Fulcher of Chartres, Orderic Vitalis, William of Tyre, Albert of Aachen and a number of others, found its scapegoat in Alexius Comnenus and we can be almost certain that Pascal would have shared their view despite the, more or less, conciliatory attitude of his predecessor, especially if we bear in mind the famous denunciation of Alexius by bishop Manasses of Barcelona at the Papal court in 1102.² But we may ask ourselves what actually convinced Pascal to give his blessing to Bohemond's ideas of an expedition against the Empire? For this, we have to turn to Orderic Vitalis who is the only source that refers to the presence of a supposed son of the deposed Byzantine Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes (1068-71) along with a number of nobles in Rome.³ This is important in the sense that we see Bohemond using the same pattern of earning a 'blessing' for his expedition as his father had done twenty-five years before, during the papacy of Gregory VII, in an expedition when the 'fideles Sancti Petri' of Robert Guiscard had been given an absolution from their sins to 'restore Michael VII to the Byzantine throne'.⁴

¹ *Anonymous Barenses, Chronicon, RIS, v. 151, a.c. 1105.*

² Ekkehardus Uraugiensis abbas, *Hierosolymita*, V, i, pp.29-32, 37-8; Bernold of Constance, *Chronicon*, M.G.H., V. 466; Fulcherius Carnotensis, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, ed. Heinrich Hagenmeyer, Heidelberg 1913, p.521; *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. M. Chibnall, (6 vols.), Oxford 1969-80, X. 19; William of Tyre, *A History of the Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, tr. and ed. by E. Atwater Babcock and A.C.Krey, New York 1976, XI, pp. 79-80, 460-2, 470-1; Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana, History of the Journey to Jerusalem*, ed. and tr. by S. B. Edgington, Oxford 2007, VIII. 45-6, pp.634-6; See also: J.G. Rowe, 'Paschal II, Bohemund of Antioch and the Byzantine Empire', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 49 (1966-67), pp.170-6.

³ Orderic Vitalis, XI, p.71.

⁴ *The Register of Pope Gregory VII, 1073-85*, tr. H.E.J. Cowdrey, Oxford 2002, 8.6, pp.371-2.

According to Bartolf of Nangis, the continuator of Fulcher of Chartres writing in Syria around 1108-9, who is our only source for this event, Paschal gave Bohemond the banner of St-Peter.⁵ Further, Bruno, bishop of Segni, a Cluniac and a bishop who had escorted Urban II in his visit to France in 1095-6, thus being experienced enough in inspiring the masses about a new Crusade, was appointed as Papal legate to preach for the upcoming campaign against Byzantium in France along with Bohemond himself.⁶ With his prestige and morale boosted by Paschal's endorsement of his campaign, Bohemond stayed in the Eternal City at least until mid-November 1105,⁷ and then departed for France where he hoped, first and foremost, to recruit the bulk of his followers through the launching of an unprecedented anti-Byzantine propaganda campaign, and also to secure the alliance of the French and English Crowns. We do not know whether Bohemond managed to recruit any followers in Italy, simply because no primary sources mention any of his preaching in between his leaving Rome and entering France, but it does not seem impossible that he took advantage of the dissatisfaction of a large number of Lombards from northern Italy who had taken part in the 1101 crusade.

According to Orderic Vitalis, who is writing around the mid-1130s, before setting out for France Bohemond had already sent envoys to Henry I of England (1100-1135) 'notifying him that he wished to cross the sea to visit his court.'⁸ Henry was, of course, quite suspicious about Bohemond's visit to his country to enlist men for his crusade, especially during a turbulent period when his preoccupations lay across the Channel and against Robert Curthose. Thus, Henry sent a discouraging letter back to Bohemond

⁵ Bartolf of Nangis, *Gesta Francorum Iherusalem Expugnatium*, RHC Hist. Oc., 65, III, p.538; this is the only western source that includes this significant detail and Rowe expressed some serious doubts about its reliability, although Yewdale included it as it is. See: Rowe, 'Paschal II', p.180; Yewdale, R.B., *Bohemond I, Prince of Antioch*, Amsterdam, 1970, p.108; for more on Bartolf of Nangis, see: Cahen, C., *La Syrie du Nord a l'Epoque des Croisades*, Paris 1940, p.11; Runciman, S., *A History of the Crusades*, 3 vols., Cambridge 1951-54, vol. I, p.329.

⁶ *Chronica monasterii Casinensis*, MGH, SS, vol. 34, IV, p.438 ; Suger, Abbot of St-Denis, *Vie de Louis VI le Gros*, ed. Henri Waquet, Paris 1929, p.48.

⁷ On the 18th November we find Paschal issuing a privilege in favour of a Church at Bari, requested by Bohemond. See: *Patrologia Cursus Completus, series Latina*, ed. J.P.Migne, vol. 163, col. 178; Riley-Smith erroneously mentions that Bohemond met the Pope at a council held at Poitiers: Riley-Smith, J., *The Crusades*, London 1987, p.90.

⁸ Orderic Vitalis, XI, p.68.

suggesting that the latter should come to Normandy, before Easter, and he would meet him there,⁹ although the meeting did not take place. In March 1106, Bohemond was in the Limousin fulfilling a vow he had made to St. Leonard, the patron saint of prisoners, while a prisoner himself in the hands of the Seljuks of Melitene, and sometime later he requested an audience from Philip of France concerning a possible marriage between him and Philip's daughter.¹⁰ The marriage took place at Chartres right after Easter, while during Lent Bohemond had been travelling around France spreading his anti-Byzantine propaganda in an attempt to recruit as many followers as possible. Some Latin chroniclers attest that he went far into the south-west of France and even to Spain,¹¹ important centres of recruitment for a Crusade, accompanied by bishop Bruno of Segni to add a more religious tone to his appeal, before returning to Apulia in August 1106.

Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to determine how many recruits Bohemond eventually managed to draw to his Crusade, with the Anonymous of Bari estimating the total of men, both infantry and cavalry, at around 34,000.¹² Other Latin sources like Fulcher of Chartres give a number of 5,000 horse and 60,000 infantry,¹³ William of Tyre talks about the same number of cavalry but notes a figure of 40,000 foot,¹⁴ while Albert of Aachen puts the figures up to 12,000 cavalry and 60,000 infantry.¹⁵ But the fact that he had won the alliance and ample support of the King of France by taking into marriage his eldest daughter was something remarkable for a knight who had once been a poor and landless noble from Southern Italy. Orderic Vitalis narrates that in most of the places Bohemond visited in France he was greeted with the greatest enthusiasm and he had the chance to exhibit a number of religious relics he had brought with him from the Holy Land.

⁹ Orderic Vitalis, XI, p.68.

¹⁰ Orderic Vitalis, XI, p.70; Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, tr. E.R.A. Sewter, London 2003, XII, i, p.369; Romualdus Salernitatis, *Chronicon, RIS*, vol. 7, a.c. 1106; William of Tyre, Book XI, I, p.460.

¹¹ Ekkehardus Uraugiensis abbas, *Hierosolymita*, ed. Heinrich Hagenmeyer, Tubingen, 1877, p.293; See also: Yewdale, *Bohemond I*, p.112.

¹² *Anonymous Bareses, Chronicon, RIS*, v. 151, a.c. 1107.

¹³ Fulcherius Carnotensis, p.521.

¹⁴ William of Tyre, XI. 6, p.471.

¹⁵ Albert of Aachen, X. 40, p.754.

A fundamental question about Bohemond's expedition which has led to debate among historians is whether the prince of Antioch was indeed planning to attack Alexius in the Balkans instead of taking his raised troops back to Antioch, meaning that the Pope had actually given his blessing for an attack against Byzantium, or he simply manipulated the Pope into endorsing his supposed crusade but he, instead, went through with his ambitions.¹⁶ But first we have to examine what the primary sources tell us about this. Anna Comnena narrates Bohemond's flight from Laodicea, in Syria, on a bireme, transported inside a coffin to escape the Byzantine blockade and him emerging from the dead on the island of Corfu only to send a defiant message to Alexius Comnenus stating the purpose of his trip back home.¹⁷ Anna is surely exaggerating at this point and she is not well informed about Bohemond's whereabouts in Italy and France, so we cannot rely solely on her testimony. Anna's argument, however, is supported by a number of Latin sources, namely Ekkehard, Albert of Aachen, the author of the *Historia Belli Sacri* and the Anonymous of Bari, who note that Bohemond's purpose in coming to Italy and France was to raise troops to invade the Empire.¹⁸

Concerning Bohemond's tour of France, both Anna Comnena and Orderic Vitalis write about him inciting hatred among the French population in the cities he visited, not only by accusing Alexius Comnenus of being 'a pagan who was helping pagans wholeheartedly', as Anna Comnena twice notes in her twelfth book, but also through the parade of the supposed son of the

¹⁶ Tyerman, C., *God's War, a New History of the Crusades*, Harvard Massachusetts 2006, pp.261-2; Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, p.90; Ralph-Johannes Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States*, Oxford 1994, p.74; Rowe, 'Paschal II', pp.165-202; J. Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusades*, London 2006, pp.88-92; Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, II, p.48; Yewdale, *Bohemond I*, pp.106-14; Flori, J., *Bohémond d'Antioch, Chevalier d'Aventure*, Paris 2007, pp.266-72, especially pp.275-77; Angold, M., *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204*, London 1997, p.164; France, J., *The Crusades and the Expansion of Catholic Christendom, 1000-1714*, London 2005, p.102; W.B. McQueen, 'Relations between the Normans and Byzantium, 1071-1112', *Byzantion* 56 (1986), pp.458-62.

¹⁷ *Alexiad*, XI. xii, pp.367-8.

¹⁸ Ekkehard, *Hierosolymita*, p.293; Albert of Aachen, IX. 47, p. 702; *Anon. Bar. Chron.*, a.c. 1105; *Historia Belli Sacri*, R.H.C. Occ., III, pp.228-9; Rowe argues about how useful and reliable Ekkehard's and Albert's accounts are. See: Rowe, J.G., 'Paschal II', pp.176-7.

Emperor Romanus and a number of Byzantine nobles, as noted by Orderic.¹⁹ Even if we remain sceptical about Anna Comnena's impartiality, Orderic's writings certainly ring true even if they were written three decades after the events. Also, it is known through modern research that Bohemond distributed copies of the *Gesta Francorum*, a famous eye-witness source for the events of the First Crusade, in which he had inserted a passage suggesting that the Emperor had promised him the lordship of Antioch, in an obvious attempt to advertise his Crusading achievements, attract more followers and display the 'wickedness' of Emperor Alexius.²⁰ But even though Bohemond's real objective was Constantinople, he would have presented the expedition to his audience as a pilgrimage to Jerusalem after the Byzantine Empire had been 'pacified' as I will prove further on.

Concerning the aforementioned debate, J.B. Rowe argues that while Bohemond was in Rome he may well have received the 'vexillum Sancti Petri' for a crusade against the Muslims and not against the Byzantines and while preaching for the crusade in France, Bohemond struck out on a policy of his own, with Bruno of Segni simply being powerless to speak up.²¹ Rowe's main argument of the supposed manipulation of the crusade for personal ambitions is built on the impartiality and reliability of the primary sources. He dismisses Ekkehard, Albert of Aachen and the Anonymous of Bari's testimonies as 'brief and, therefore, limited in their usefulness to us',²² while the *Historia Belli Sacri* is labelled as 'a mishmash of dubious value'.²³ Unfortunately, the length of this paper does not allow me to examine and challenge Rowe's arguments. This has already been done by W.B. McQueen, but the very useful conclusion that I have drawn from this debate is that the historical value of a number of contemporary primary sources should not be underestimated, especially when

¹⁹ *Alexiad*, XII. i, p.371; Orderic Vitalis, XI, p.71. Although Orderic does not specify which son it is.

²⁰ A.C. Krey, 'A Neglected Passage in the *Gesta* and its Bearing on the Literature of the First Crusade', in: *The Crusades and Other Historical Essays: Presented to D.C. Munro*, ed. by J.L. Peatow New York 1927, pp.57-78.

²¹ This is highlighted mostly in pp.182, 186-7.

²² Rowe, 'Paschal II', pp.176-7.

²³ Rowe, 'Paschal II', p.178.

the combination of a relatively large number of them points a certain argument.

To understand why Bohemond would have taken this decision to launch an expedition against Byzantium we must bear in mind that he had left his territories in Syria under serious pressure from the Imperial forces and the neighbouring Seljuks of Aleppo and he resorted to coming back to France and Italy to raise more troops for his campaign which, initially, might indeed have been in Antioch and not Illyria. But from a strategic point of view, if Bohemond had taken his newly recruited army back to Antioch he certainly would not have achieved much. Even if he had managed to expand his principality of Antioch, he would have come under immense pressure from the Emperor with the Byzantine resources in manpower and money far outnumbering what the Normans could put in the field. Bohemond must have been perfectly aware of that, thus, more wisely he thought that he had to strike at the root of all his troubles in Syria, meaning Alexius himself and attempt to replace him with a more sympathetic Emperor - a plan very similar to that of the Fourth Crusade.

If we turn to the main theme of this paper, whether Bohemond's expedition to Byzantine Illyria was, indeed, a Crusade, once again we must examine what evidence we have from the primary sources and compare the different views of modern historians. We have already seen that the 'vexillum Sancti Petri' was given to Bohemond while on his visit to Rome, as noted by Bartolf of Nangis, and since the Pope was not to preach to the masses as ten years before, a papal legate was directed to accompany the Count of Taranto in his journey to France. Unfortunately, the only references we have about the terminology used to identify the campaign of 1107 comes from the Council of Poitiers which was held on 26th June 1106, where Bruno presided while Bohemond attempted to recruit followers. This comes from the testimonies of Suger, the Abbot of St-Denis, who was an eyewitness of the events and Orderic Vitalis who, even though he wrote about Bohemond's tour of France

three decades later, was very likely present as well.²⁴ The main theme of the language used in both of our accounts is the Holy city of Jerusalem, with Bohemond preaching movingly ‘ad invitandum et confortandum sancti sepulchri viam’ (for the calling and the encouragement of the road to the Holy Sepulchre).²⁵ But what is interesting at this point is that Orderic Vitalis goes further on and writes about Bohemond who ‘urged all who bore arms to attack the Emperor with him, and promised his chosen followers wealthy towns and castles. Many [...], taking the Lord’s cross, left all their belongings and set out on the road for Jerusalem.’²⁶ Whether this statement about the attack on the Empire was made under the advantage of hindsight we cannot be certain, but Orderic Vitalis’ reliability is difficult to question.

From the evidence that we have mentioned so far, we can conclude that Bohemond’s expedition was a Crusade for it was preached as a *via sancti sepulchri*, the banner of St. Peter was provided and a papal legate was sent to preach and inspire the masses. Whether or not Pope Pascal had given his full support for this campaign can be debated and all depends on whether we think that the primary sources are credible enough or should be dismissed because they provide information based on hindsight. Christopher Tyerman and Ralph-Johannes Lilie are two of the ‘moderates’ who, even though they believe that Bohemond’s official strategy for the 1105-6 period was a campaign against Alexius Comnenus, seriously consider the possibility that Pascal might not have approved Bohemond’s plans.²⁷ On the other side is J.B. Rowe who, as I have already mentioned, firmly believes that the Pope had given his apostolic blessing to a Crusade against the Muslims, and had no idea whatsoever about Bohemond’s ambitions for a deviation of the campaign, with Bruno of Segni being powerless to restrain the Count of Taranto from launching his anti-Byzantine propaganda while touring around France. And to build his arguments, Rowe dismisses a large number of, mainly Latin, sources.

²⁴ Suger, Abbot of St-Denis, *Vie de Louis VI le Gros*, ed. Henri Waquet, H. Paris 1929, pp.44-50; Orderic Vitalis, XI, pp.68-70.

²⁵ Suger, p.48.

²⁶ Orderic Vitalis, XI, p.70.

²⁷ Tyerman, *God’s War*, pp.261-2; *The Invention of the Crusades*, London 1998, p.13; Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States*, p.74.

But I will follow the large number of historians like Sir Steven Runciman, Jonathan Riley-Smith, John France, R.B. Yewdale and M.J. Angold, who believe that this Crusade was, indeed, an expedition against the Byzantine Empire all along, and that Pascal did favour Bohemond's ambitions.²⁸ The official Norman policy which aimed to break the power of the eastern Empire and replace Alexius with a more sympathetic Emperor became the policy of Rome as well and, thus, a Crusade was unleashed.

A military expedition against a Christian state, however, was not a new idea and to understand its manipulation for political purposes we have to go back to the ideological reforms of Gregory VII in the 1070s, a period dominated by the struggle between Rome, Germany and the Normans. Already in February of 1074 Pope Gregory had called upon William I of Burgundy for help against Robert Guiscard, specifically directing the 'fideles sancti Petri' towards a campaign to 'bring the Normans to peace and then cross to Constantinople to bring aid to Christians',²⁹ although that campaign failed to materialize. Was Pascal reviving similar plans to 'pacify' the Byzantines, or even unite the two Churches under Rome as it was implied in Gregory's *Register*,³⁰ and then proceed to the Holy Sepulchre? It seems likely.³¹ In 1080, the Pope had offered Robert Guiscard and his 'fideles sancti Petri' absolution from sins for their campaign to restore Michael VII to his throne, thus fully justifying the invasion of Byzantine Illyria in 1081.³² In the same year, under the pressure of political events in Germany, Gregory recruited the vassals of St-Peter against Henry IV 'for we desire to set him entirely in the bosom of blessed Peter and to arouse him especially to his service.'³³ The Gregorian reforms had set a dangerous precedent for the politics between Rome, Germany and Byzantium and we need to ask ourselves whether the political climate in Rome in this period was ripe for advocating an attack on Byzantium. Reading through the

²⁸ See previous note.

²⁹ *The Register of Pope Gregory VII, 1073-85*, 1. 49, pp.54-5.

³⁰ *The Register of Pope Gregory VII, 1073-85*, 2. 37, pp.127-8.

³¹ H.E.J. Cowdrey, 'Pope Gregory VII's "Crusading" plans of 1074', in *Outremer*, ed. by B.Z. Kedar, H.E. Mayer, R.C. Smail, Jerusalem 1982, pp.30-1.

³² *The Register of Pope Gregory VII, 1073-85*, 8. 6, pp.371-2.

³³ *The Register of Pope Gregory VII, 1073-85*, 9. 3, pp.401-2.

accounts of the vast majority of contemporary Latin chroniclers, we can say that the westerners held the Byzantines responsible for the hardships of the First Crusade and of the 1101 expedition that perished in its early stages. To what extent the Papacy shared this mounting antipathy for the Byzantines and their ruler is a difficult question to answer, but the incident with Manasses of Barcelona in the summer of 1102, when the latter denounced Alexius in the Papal Court, and the arrival of Bohemond and Daimbert, the deposed Patriarch of Jerusalem and a man with strong anti-Byzantine feelings, leave little room for doubt. This military campaign was, certainly, a turning point in the history of the crusades. For Bohemond, it was the fulfilment of his ambitions and the answer to the desperate situation of his principality in Antioch. But for Pascal it was a gamble that he was later to regret.