



Joseph Tarchaneiotes and the Battle of Mantzikert (AD 1071)*

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ABSTRACT

The absence of the magister Joseph Tarchaneiotes – one of the key persons involved in the events that led to the fateful battle of Mantzikert in 1071 – affected its outcome to a significant extent. This article elucidates his role in Romanos IV Diogenes's last campaign in Asia Minor. As I demonstrate, the magister intentionally fled from the scene. Yet, his action seems to have been entirely irrelevant to the internal machinations of the Doukai. Two more issues will also be considered and precede the matter of Tarchaneiotes's withdrawal: a) the time he was despatched to Chliat; and b) the ethnic composition of the troops under his command. Close inspection shows that his despatch from the bulk of the army took place earlier than was previously considered possible; and that his troops consisted of Armenians. In essence, our knowledge of Tarchaneiotes in medieval literature is restricted to those three issues.

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In AD 1068, Romanos Diogenes, a soldier by profession, was put on the throne to replace the dead Constantine X Doukas (r. 1059–1067). His first two military campaigns against the Seljuks met with some success, but nothing decisive. In 1071, he launched his third and last campaign to recover possession of the forts to the north of Lake Van, which were now held by the Turks. Alp Arslan (r. 1063–1072) was making inroads on the Syrian lands when he received word that Diogenes was advancing towards the Anatolian border. He instantly marched to the scene with a force numerically inferior to that of Diogenes. Upon arriving at Theodosiopolis, the Franks of the Latin chieftain, Roussel de Bailleul, and the Scythians were sent off to take Chliat. Later, a second group, under the command of the magister Joseph Tarchaneiotes, was despatched. Diogenes, after reducing the city and the fort of Mantzikert, advanced to Chliat to rejoin the force already there. It was at this time that foragers brought news of the approach of the advance body of Alp Arslan's army. Diogenes recalled the Franks and Tarchaneiotes, but there was no reply. He disdained to await their return and gave the signal for a full-scale attack. On Friday, 26 August, the rival forces were confronted near Mantzikert – the key stronghold that commanded entrance to the heartlands of the empire. The Byzantines were tricked by the Seljuks' feigned retreat and suffered a sound defeat, while the emperor himself was taken captive to the sultan. The Battle of Mantzikert is a turning point in Byzantine history, as it paved the way for the systematic conquest of Anatolia by the Seljuk Turks,

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which resulted in the establishment of the Sultanate of Rum. Whereas many papers have been produced on the subject, there are still issues that have not yet been solved satisfactorily. Partial, or conflicting, evidence is a further obstacle to undertaking more thorough research. Since the preliminaries and the battle consist of several phases divided into sequential stages, each requires independent treatment and an in-depth analysis. This would allow us to construct a clearer picture of the fateful days in the summer of 1071.

The magister Tarchaneiotes and the role he played in the events associated with the battle of Mantzikert are discussed over the course of this study. We learn from Attaleiates, a direct participant in all three of Diogenes's Anatolian campaigns, that Joseph Tarchaneiotes had been entrusted with a force that made up the majority of the Byzantine army, and consisted of soldiers fighting on the front line.¹ Diogenes was left to confront the sultan with troops less than half the strength of those he sent away. The desertion of Roussel de Bailleul with his valiant mounted warriors and of Tarchaneiotes with the elite corps of the army may be the barometer of the encounter. Their absence from the battlefield had a profoundly negative effect on the morale of the troops that remained with Diogenes. The focus of attention is on Tarchaneiotes, since he was the one who summoned Roussel and agreed with him to disobey the imperial order.

Except for some archaeological findings,² very little is known other than that he took part in the 1071 campaign. All information about him may be extracted from the examination of three issues: a) when he was despatched to join the mercenary forces at Chliat; b) what the ethnic composition of the troops under his command was; c) whether or not he received an order to join his troops with the bulk of the army at Mantzikert and, if so, how he responded to this. The loosely related three points, if seen in their interdependence, can inform a narrative that may illuminate Tarchaneiotes's role at the battle. My aim is to provide such a synthesis and clarify some conflicting interpretations and scholarly impasses. The confusion emerging from these problems is reflected in modern attempts to explain his absence from Mantzikert. Though his absence itself is not disputed, his motivation and the time he left Chliat have led historians to adopt divergent views.³ In essence, it is the contradiction of views that is at issue in this article. It is here proposed that Tarchaneiotes was not despatched to Chliat with Russians. As to whether he departed from Chliat on hearing of Alp Arslan's attack against Diogenes, my suggestion is that he committed an act of betrayal, which, however, seems to be completely irrelevant to

¹The most recent critical edition of the text is quoted in this article: Michaelis Attaliatea, *Historia*, ed. Eudoxos Th. Tsolakis [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, volume L] (Athens: Academia Atheniensis, 2011), pp. 115.25–116.2, hereafter Attaliatea (translation of all passages from Greek is my own). On the historian's critique of Joseph Tarchaneiotes's sending off to Chliat with the best corps in the army, see Antonios Vratimos, "Two Remarks on Michael Attaliatea's Account of the Preliminaries to the Battle of Mantzikert", *Symbolae Osloenses* 91 (2017): 159–69, pp. 161–3. I would like to thank the two anonymous readers for their valuable comments and suggestions.

²On the seal material concerning Tarchaneiotes, see Ioannes Leontiades, *Die Tarchaneiotai: eine prosopographisch-sigillographische Studie* (Thessaloniki: Center for Byzantine Studies, 1998), pp. 41–5.

³For example, see Speros Vryonis, Jr, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1971), p. 99; and Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025–1204: A Political History* (London: Longman, 1984), p. 22, who argue that Joseph Tarchaneiotes did betray Diogenes. An opposite opinion is held in Jonathan Shepard, "Byzantinorussica", *Revue des Études Byzantines* 33 (1975): 211–25, pp. 220–2, and in David Nicolle, *Mantzikert 1071: The Breaking of Byzantium* (Oxford: Osprey, 2013), pp. 55–6. Other commentators on the battle do not take a definite stance on this issue. See John Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars: Battles and Campaigns of the Byzantine Era* (Stroud: Tempus, 2001), p. 120; and Alfred Friendly, *The Dreadful Day: The Battle of Mantzikert, 1071* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), p. 177.