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**THE LIFE OF ST. SABAS THE YOUNGER AS A SOURCE FOR THE HISTORY OF THE CATALAN GRAND COMPANY**

The *Life and Conduct of Our Holy and God-Bearing Father St. Sabas the Younger* [henceforth, *Life of St. Sabas the Younger* or *Life*,<sup>1</sup> written by Philotheos Kokkinos, patriarch of Constantinople (1353-1354/5; 1364-1376), is a piece of Byzantine hagiography from the fourteenth century which, in spite of its religious character, is a valuable source for the history of the Catalan Grand Company, Roger de Flor's famous band of Spanish mercenaries hired by the Byzantine emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282-1328) to fight the Turks in Anatolia. However, this aspect of the *Life* has usually been neglected by historians who have studied the Catalan presence in Byzantium and Greece during the fourteenth century. A remarkable exception is Angeliki E. Laiou, who uses this testimony for her study of the Catalan campaigns against Mount Athos (in the Chalkidike peninsula) and Thessaloniki in a book which is the standard reference for Andronikos II's period (220—223). Nevertheless, being the Byzantine emperor's foreign policy — and not the adventures of the Catalan Company — the aim of her research, she does not fully exploit the evidence found in the *Life*. This is also the case of Mirjana Zhivojinovic' in her study on the life of Archbishop Daniel II, abbot of the Serbian monastery of Chilandar in Athos during the Catalan campaigns of 1307-1309 (254, 258). As for Antoni Rubió i Lluch and R. M. Dawkins, they seem to ignore the existence of Philotheos Kokkinos' work.<sup>2</sup> A revision of the *Life of St. Sabas*

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<sup>1</sup> References to the *Life of St. Sabas the Younger* are by page and line of the Papadopoulos-Kerameus' edition, listed in Works Cited.

<sup>2</sup> See A. Rubió i Lluch's and R. M. Dawkin' articles, listed in Works Cited.

*the Younger* as a source for the history of the Catalan Grand Company is therefore necessary.

St. Sabas, born in Thessaloniki around 1283, entered the Holy Mountain of Athos, which from the late tenth century had been the most important center of Eastern monasticism, approximately at the age of 18 (199, 1.18). Seven years later, his life changed because of the "Italians who had come from Sicily" (210, 1.16), as the *Life* calls the soldiers of the Catalan Company because they had been fighting until the Peace of Caltabellotta (1302) for Frederick III of Sicily against Charles II of Anjou.

After the assassination of their leader Roger de Flor near Adrianople in 1305, the Catalans, who laid the blame for this murder on the Byzantines, raided the surrounding countryside of the Kallipolis peninsula — their base of operations — for two years (1305-1307). In 1307 they moved west and, as the *Life* says, "they destroyed Thrace without mercy, like a hurricane" (210, 11.17-18). After this, the Catalans "hurried up to overrun immediately the Macedonians, having Thessaly itself already in their minds" (210, 11.28-29).

As A. Laiou remarks, "the Catalan campaign in Macedonia had two related main objectives: the conquest of Thessaloniki and the creation of a kingdom of Macedonia, with its capital at Thessaloniki. At the same time, the Catalans planned to attack and plunder the monasteries of Mount Athos, which were famous for their wealth" (220). They occupied Kassandreia, in Chalkidike, at the neck of the Kassandra peninsula, and put their operational base there.<sup>1</sup> From this city they made incursions into the west on Thessaloniki and into the east on the Holy Mountain. Their first attack on a monastery in Athos — the Serbian cloister of Chilandar — took place in the early summer of 1307 (Laiou 221).

According to the *Life*, Andronikos' first concern was to protect the Holy Mountain, since he thought that the salvation of the Empire depended on the "choir of saints" living there. Being unable to defend the monks with the help of an army, "he wrote a letter to them at once in his own hand" (210, 11.4-5), probably in 1307 (Laiou 220). He was worried not only about the

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<sup>1</sup> On the demographic consequences which the Catalan campaign, had in the population of the Chalkidike peninsula, see P. Karlin-Hayter's article in Works Cited.

anchorites, who practised ascetism alone or in pairs in the Holy Mountain, but also about many monks who lived together in various communities. Some monasteries were not fortified at all, while others could be taken easily by the enemy "because of the ruinous state of their walls and the scarce number of their inhabitants." In order to prepare the defense of Mount Athos, the emperor ordered all these monks either to move into the well fortified monasteries or to take refuge in the closest cities if they wished (211, ll.5-11). According to the *Life*, some monks preferred "to remain [in their huts and their monasteries] and die" rather than "get away and save their lives." But others left their fellows in tears and sought refuge in the nearby fortified cities and islands (211, l.13-212, l.2). One of these monks was, in fact, Sabas' spiritual father. Being old and ill, he went to the monastery of the Mother of God in Thessaloniki (212, ll. 3-9).

Sabas did not return "to his native city of Thessaloniki for the duration of the Catalan attack on Mount Athos," (Laiou 352), but remained in the monastery of Vatopedi, at the mid-point of the northeast coast of the Mount Athos peninsula (212, ll.11-12; 215, ll.10-11). He missed his spiritual father very much and wished to join him in Thessaloniki, but he was afraid at the thought of seeing his parents and his friends from childhood again (212, l.11-213, l.27). His doubts vanished when he heard that the "Achaemenids" (i.e., the Catalans, compared to Darius and Xerxes) had ravaged Macedonia and were already plundering the neighbourhood of Thessaloniki (213, l.32-214, l.5). Land communications between this city and Mount Athos had been cut by the enemies and there was no possibility for Sabas to visit his spiritual father. A voice coming from the bottom of his heart told him to go to Jerusalem and he set sail immediately (page 215.25-31). He went to Cyprus across the Aegean sea and for a long time — about twenty years, according to A.-J. Festugière (237) — he wandered around Palestine, Sinai, Syria, Egypt, the Aegean islands, the Peloponese and Hellas, always admired for his extreme ascetic practices. But on his way back to the monastery of Vatopedi in Athos he met the Catalans again.

After two years in the Peloponese, "Sabas," — Philotheos Kokkinos says — "visited Athens, which was admired in Antiquity because of its wisdom. However, he could not see the much celebrated wonders of this city — on the contrary, only a

barbarian language and way of life instead of the old glory of the past and the golden generation of wise men" (290, l.30-291, l.2). This is a reference to the Catalan rule over Athens. After the battle of Halmyros in 1311, the Frankish domination of this city came to an end and the Catalan Grand Company settled in the Duchy of Athens for almost eight decades, until 1388. When Sabas visited Athens in the last years before Andronikos II's fall (1328) the *lingua franca* had been already replaced by the *bell catalanesch* of Ramon Muntaner. But, as the *Life* shows, the Catalans could not change neither the poverty of the city nor the ignorance of the inhabitants (Setton 216-260).

We can thus conclude that the interest of the *Life of St. Sabas the Younger* as a source for the history of the Catalan Grand Company in the Eastern Mediterranean is double: On one hand, it provides information about the beginning of the Catalan campaign against Mount Athos and Thessaloniki and about the preparation of the Byzantine defense (1307-1308), thus completing the evidence of the best source for the Catalan attacks on the Holy Mountain, the Serbian *Life of Archbishop Danilo*. On the other hand, it clearly brings out the cultural decline of Athens under the Catalan rule almost twenty years after the departure of Saint Sabas from Athos in 1308. Whereas the first piece of information is relatively well known, the second seems to have been neglected by historians of the Catalan Duchies of Athens and Neopatras to the best of my knowledge.

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