

871–873: Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos on the Revenge of Soldanos of Bari

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Abstract: The article deals with a passage in Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos' *De administrando imperio* that contains a rather idiosyncratic description of the conquest of Muslim-ruled Bari and its aftermath. Complementing southern Italian Latin-Christian as well as Arabic-Islamic texts on the end of the emirate in the early 870s, Constantine's version highlights the contribution of Byzantine forces, claims that Louis II of Italy and the Langobard nobles of southern Italy were outwitted by the *amīr* Sawdān, and presents the entire reconquest of Bari as the successful re-integration of a lost city into the Eastern Roman Empire. Engaging with the narrative's sources and parallel evidence, the article reveals the constructed bias of a passage that may, nonetheless, shed additional light on Christian–Muslim relations in southern Italy of the late ninth century.

Source

Constantine VII, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Gyula Moravcsik, trans. Romilly James Heald Jenkins, Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967, cap. 29, pp. 127–135. Translation slightly revised by Zachary Chitwood. A parallel version of the episode is found in the *Vita Basilii: Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur liber quo Vita Basilii imperatoris amplectitur*, ed./trans. Ihor Ševčenko, Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter 2011, cap. 56–58, pp. 202–211. Important differences between the two versions are noted below.

Καὶ τὸ μὲν κάστρον Βάρεως καὶ τὴν χώραν καὶ τὴν αἰχμαλωσίαν πᾶσαν ἀνελάβετο ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ῥωμαίων, τὸν δὲ Σολδανὸν καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς Σαρακηνοὺς ἀνελάβετο Λοδοῖχος, ὁ ῥῆξ Φραγγίας, καὶ ἀπήγαγεν αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ κάστρῳ Καπύης καὶ ἐν τῷ κάστρῳ Βενεβενδοῦ. Καὶ οὐδεὶς αὐτὸν εἶδεν γελῶντα.

Εἶπεν δὲ ὁ ῥῆξ, ὅτι· «Εἴ τις μοι τὸν Σολδανὸν μετὰ ἀληθείας ἀναγγείλῃ ἢ ὑποδείξῃ γελῶντα, δώσω αὐτῷ χρήματα πολλά.» Καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδεν τις αὐτὸν γελῶντα, καὶ τῷ

The emperor of the Romans took the city of Bari, the country and all the prisoners, while Louis, the king of Francia, led off Soldanos and the remaining Saracens to the city of Capua and the city of Beneventum.¹ And no one saw Soldanos laughing.²

Then the king said: “If anybody in all truthfulness tells or shows me Soldanos laughing, I will give a lot of money to him.” After some time someone saw him laughing

¹ This episode is introduced in the *Vita Basilii* with a sentence highlighting the entertaining nature of the story: “Ofttimes History (ἡ ἱστορία) delights in embellishing her discourse and capturing the minds of her listeners through stories told by way of digression.” See: *Vita Basilii*, ed./trans. Ševčenko, cap. 56, lines 1–3, p. 202 (EL: Greek text), p. 203 (EN: English translation).

² The *Vita Basilii*, ed./trans. Ševčenko, cap. 56, line 5, p. 202 (EL), p. 203 (EN), notes that this period of captivity lasted two years.

ρήγι Λοδοίχῳ ἀπήγγειλεν. Ὁ δὲ προσκαλεσάμενος τὸν Σολδανὸν ἠρώτησεν αὐτόν, ποίῳ τρόπῳ ἐγέλασεν. Ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· «Ἄμαξαν εἶδον καὶ τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ τροχοὺς κυλιόμενους, καὶ τούτου χάριν ἐγέλασα, ὅτι καὶ ἐγὼ ποτε κεφαλὴ ἐγενόμην, καὶ ἀρτίως εἰμὶ ὑποκάτω πάντων, καὶ πάλιν δύναται ὁ Θεὸς ὑψῶσαί με.» Καὶ ἀπὸ τότε προσεκαλεῖτο αὐτὸν ὁ Λοδοίχος εἰς τὴν τράπεζαν αὐτοῦ, καὶ συνήσθιεν αὐτῷ.

Οἱ δὲ ἄρχοντες τῆς Καπύης καὶ Βενεβενδοῦ ἤρχοντο πρὸς τὸν Σολδανὸν ἐρωτῶντες αὐτὸν περὶ ἰατρειῶν καὶ θεραπειᾶς ἀλόγων καὶ λοιπῶν ὑποθέσεων, ὡς γέροντα καὶ πεπειραμένον. Ὁ δὲ Σολδανὸς πανοῦργος ὢν καὶ σκολιὸς εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς, ὅτι· «Πρᾶγμα θέλω εἰπεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, καὶ δέδοικα τοῦ μὴ παρ’ ὑμῶν κατάδηλον γενέσθαι πρὸς τὸν ῥῆγα, καὶ ἀπολέσω τὴν ἑμαυτοῦ ζωὴν.» Οἱ δὲ ὥμοσαν αὐτῷ, καὶ θαρρήσας εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς, ὅτι· «Ὁ ῥῆξ ἐξορίσαι θέλει πάντας ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ μεγάλῃ Φραγγίᾳ, καὶ ἐὰν ἀπιστῆτε, ἐκδέξασθε μικρόν, καὶ γὰρ πληροφορῶ ὑμᾶς.»

Καὶ ἀπελθὼν εἶπεν πρὸς τὸν Λοδοίχον, ὅτι· «Οἱ ἄρχοντες τοῦ τόπου τούτου κακοὶ εἰσιν, καὶ σὺ οὐ δύνασαι κυριεῦσαι τὴν χώραν ταύτην, ἐὰν μὴ ἀφανίσῃς τοὺς δυνατοὺς, τοὺς ἀντιπίπτοντάς σε· ἀλλὰ δέσμευσον τοὺς πρῶτους τοῦ κάστρου, καὶ ἀπόστειλον αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν χώραν σου, καὶ τότε, ὡς θέλεις, οἱ λοιποὶ ὑποταγήσονται σοι.»

Καὶ ὅτε παρέπεισεν αὐτόν, ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὴν βουλὴν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὥρισεν γενέσθαι ἀλύσεις σιδηρᾶς εἰς τὸ ἐξορίσαι αὐτούς, ἀπῆλθεν ὁ Σολδανὸς καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς τοὺς ἄρχοντας, ὅτι· «Ἀκμὴν οὐ πιστεύετε, ὅτι ὁ ῥῆξ ἐξορίστους ὑμᾶς ποιεῖ, καὶ παντελῶς ἐξ ἀνθρώπων γίνεται τὸ μνημόσυνον ὑμῶν; Ὅμως εἰ θέλετε τελείως πληροφορηθῆναι, ἀπελθόντες θεάσασθε, τί ἄρα ἐργάζονται πάντες οἱ χαλκεῖς τῇ προστάξει τοῦ ῥηγός. Καὶ εἰ οὐχ εὗρητε αὐτοὺς ἐργαζομένους τὰς ἀλύσεις καὶ τὰ δεσμά, γινώσκετε, ὅτι πάντα τὰ παρ’ ἐμοῦ λαλούμενα ὑμῖν ἐστὶν ψευδῆ·

and reported it to King Louis. He then summoned Soldanos and asked him why he had laughed. And he said: “I saw a cart and the wheels on it turning round, and it was due to this that I laughed, because I was once at the top and am now lowest of all, but God can lift me up again.” And from then on Louis would summon him to his table and eat with him.

And the nobles of Capua and Beneventum began to go to Soldanos and ask him about the treatment and care of livestock³ and other matters, since he was aged and experience. And Soldanos, being cunning and crooked,⁴ said to them: “I would like to say something to you, but I fear of being betrayed by you to the king and that I shall lose my life.” But they swore to him, and taking heart he said to them: “The king desires to exile all of you to Great Francia, and if you don’t believe it, wait a little, and I will satisfy you.”

And he [Soldanos] departed and said to Louis: “The nobles of this place are evil, and you cannot rule over this country unless you do away with the powerful men who oppose you; bind the foremost men of the city and send them off to your country, so then, as you desire, the rest will submit themselves to you.”

When he had prevailed upon the king to carry out his plan and Louis ordered that iron chains be made for their banishment, Soldanos went off and said to the nobles: “Do you still not believe that the king is going to make you exiles, and that your memory will entirely vanish from among men? However, if you will be completely sure, go and see what all the smiths are making by order of the king. And if you do not find them making the chains and fetters, know that everything I have told you false; but if I speak the truth, look to your salvation

³ Soldanos’ expertise in animal husbandry is not mentioned in the *Vita Basilii*.

⁴ The *Vita Basilii*, ed./trans. Ihor Ševčenko, cap. 57, lines 1–2, p. 204 (EL), p. 205 (EN), adds that he was “privy to Punic wiles” (δόλων Φοινικικῶν οὐκ ἀμέτοχος).

εἰ δὲ ἀληθεύω, φροντίσατε τὴν σωτηρίαν ὑμῶν καὶ ἐμὲ εὐεργετήσατε, τὸν τὰ χρηστὰ καὶ σωτήρια ὑμῖν βουλευσάμενον.»

and reward me for having given useful and salutary advice to you.”

Οἱ δὲ ἄρχοντες πεισθέντες τῷ τοῦ Σολδανοῦ λόγῳ, θεασάμενοι δὲ καὶ τὰς ἀλύσεις καὶ τὰ δεσμά, τελείαν πληροφορίαν ἔλαβον, καὶ ἔκτοτε ἐμελέτων τὴν ἀπώλειαν τοῦ ῥηγὸς Λοδοῖχου. Ὁ δὲ ῥῆξ ταῦτα πάντα ἀγνοῶν ἐξῆλθε πρὸς τὸ κυνηγῆσαι. Ὑποστρέψαντος δέ, οἱ τοῦτου ἄρχοντες ἐκράτησαν τὸ κάστρον, μὴ ἑάσαντες αὐτὸν εἰσελθεῖν. Ὁ δὲ ῥῆξ Λοδοῖχος τὴν τῶν ἀρχόντων ἔνστασιν θεασάμενος, εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν χώραν ὑπέστρεψεν.

The nobles obeyed the word of Soldanos, and when they had seen the chains and fetters, they were completely satisfied, and thereafter began to devise the destruction of King Louis. The king, in ignorance of all this, went out hunting. But when he came back, his nobles had taken possession of the city and did not allow him to enter. King Louis, seeing himself thus opposed by the nobles, went back to his own country.

Οἱ δὲ ἄρχοντες εἶπον πρὸς τὸν Σολδανόν· «Τί ἄρα θέλεις ἡμᾶς ποιῆσαι σοι περὶ τῆς γενομένης εἰς ἡμᾶς παρὰ σοῦ σωτηρίας;» Ὁ δὲ ἡτήσατο ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ χώρᾳ ἀπολυθῆναι αὐτόν, καὶ τοῦτου γενομένου, ἀπῆλθεν ἐν Ἀφρικῇ εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν αὐτοῦ χώραν. Μὴ ἐπιλαθόμενος δὲ τῆς ἀρχαίας αὐτοῦ κακίας ἐστρατοπέδευσεν, καὶ ἦλθεν μετὰ δυνάμεως ἐν Καπύῃ καὶ ἐν Βενεβενδῷ πρὸς τὸ πολιορκῆσαι καὶ ὑποτάξαι αὐτούς.

The nobles said to Soldanos, “What, then, would you have us do for you, in return for the salvation wrought for us by you?” And he asked that they release him to his own country, which he did, and he went off to Africa,⁵ to his own country. But, mindful of his ancient malice, he made an expedition and came with a force to Capua and to Beneventum, to lay siege to and subdue them.

Οἱ δὲ τὰ τοιαῦτα κάστρα κρατοῦντες ἀπέστειλαν πρέσβεις πρὸς τὸν ῥῆγα Λοδοῖχον ἐν Φραγγίᾳ, ἵνα ἐλθὼν συνεπαμύνηται αὐτοῖς κατὰ τοῦ Σολδανοῦ καὶ τῶν Ἀφρικῶν. Ὁ δὲ ῥῆξ Λοδοῖχος ταῦτα μαθὼν καί, ὥνπερ ἐποίησεν τρόπον ὁ Σολδανός, πείσας καὶ τοὺς ἄρχοντας, ὅτι· «Δεσμίους μέλλει ὑμᾶς ὁ ῥῆξ ἐν Φραγγίᾳ ἐξορίσαι», ἀντεδήλωσεν αὐτοῖς, ὅτι· «Καὶ ἅπερ ἐποίησα πρότερον εἰς ὑμᾶς, μεταμέλημαί, ὅτι ἔσωσα ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐχθρῶν ὑμῶν, καὶ ἀνταπεδώκατέ μοι πονηρὰ ἀντὶ ἀγαθῶν, καὶ καθὼς ἐδιώχθην παρ’ ὑμῶν, ἀρτίως χαίρω ἐπὶ τῇ ἀπωλείᾳ ὑμῶν.»

The rulers of these cities sent envoys to king Louis in Francia, asking him to come and help them fight against Soldanos and the Africans. But king Louis, when he heard of it, having learnt how Soldanos had acted in persuading the nobles that “the king purposes to send you in chains to banishment in Francia,” declared in answer to them: “I repent my former conduct toward you, when I saved you from your enemies, and you returned me evil for good, and as I was cast out by you, now I rejoice at your destruction.”

Τότε ἀπορήσαντες ἀπὸ τοῦ ῥηγὸς Λοδοῖχου, ἀπέστειλαν πρέσβεις πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα Ῥωμαίων τοῦ δοῦναι αὐτοῖς βοήθειαν καὶ λυτρώσασθαι τοῦ τοιοῦτου κινδύνου. Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς ὑπέσχετο βοηθῆσαι αὐτοῖς. (...) πτοηθεὶς ὁ Σολδανός τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως

Then, having failed with King Louis, they sent envoys to the emperor of the Romans [Basil I], asking that he should give them aid and deliver them out of this danger. The emperor promised to aid them. (...) Soldanos, dreading the powers of the

⁵ In the *Vita Basilii*, ed./trans. Ihor Ševčenko, cap. 58, line 3, p. 208 (EL), p. 209 (EN), Soldanos’ home country is Carthage.

κατερχομένην δυναστείαν, ὑπέστρεψεν εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν χώραν. Καὶ ἔκτοτε καὶ μέχρι τοῦ νῦν καὶ οἱ τῆς Καπύης καὶ οἱ τῆς Βενεβενδοῦ εἰσὶν ὑπὸ τὴν ἐξουσίαν τῶν Ῥωμαίων εἰς τελείαν δούλωσιν καὶ ὑποταγὴν διὰ τὴν εἰς αὐτοὺς γενομένην μεγάλην ταύτην εὐεργεσίαν.

emperor that were coming upon him, withdrew to his own country. And from that time until this day the men of Capua and the men of Beneventum have been under the authority of the Romans in perfect servitude and subjection, for that great benefit which was done to them.

Authorship & Work

[§1] Born in 905 to emperor Leo VI (r. 886–912) and Zoe Karbonopsina (d. after 919), Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (r. 913/945–959) was nominally sole ruler in 913 at the age of eight, but was kept from power by the patriarch Nicholas Mystikos (sed. 901–907/912–925) and emperor Romanos I Lekapenos (r. 920–944). Constantine thus dedicated much of his time to literary activities and became an important proponent of a Byzantine intellectual movement traditionally designated as “encyclopedism,” which was focused on the systematic collection and evaluation of ancient knowledge.⁶ Among other works, he (or, more likely, a ghostwriter) composed: a hagiographic biography of his grandfather Basil I (r. 867–886) known as the *Vita Basilii*; a compilation on imperial ceremonies and protocol (*De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*); a treatise on provincial government (*De thematibus*); and a handbook on foreign policy dedicated to his son Romanos II (r. 959–963), the so-called *De administrando imperio*.

[§2] Constantine’s accession to power eventually took place in 945, after the sons of Romanos I Lekapenos had neutralised their father and Constantine led a successful counter-revolt against them. Constantine VII was not only an exceptional emperor because of his enormous investment in culture and education, but also because of his active diplomacy with great parts of the wider Mediterranean world, including the Umayyads of al-Andalus, the Ottonians, and Ol’ga of Kyiv (r. ca. 945–964), and his legislation which aimed at limiting the predations of the “powerful” (*dynatoi*) on the lower social classes. His military campaigns against Ḥamdānīd Aleppo and Crete did not extend Byzantine power. He died in 959.⁷

Content & Context

[§3] The passage forms part of a work written in Greek (Πρὸς τὸν ἴδιον υἱὸν Ῥωμανόν), but usually known by its Latin title “On the Administration of the Empire” (*De administrando imperio*). The materials which formed the basis of the text were probably written between 948 and 952 by Constantine VII as a kind of mirror for princes for his son Romanos II (r. 959–963).⁸ According to Otto Kresten, it is plausible that Basil Lekapenos, an illegitimate son of Romanos I Lekapenos and the emperor’s chamberlain (παρακοιμώμενος), commissioned a *Reinschrift* of these materials. This *Reinschrift*, or a copy thereof for Basil’s personal library, stood at the origins of *Cod. par. gr.* 2009, which was copied in the second half of the eleventh century and served as the basis for the modern edition.⁹ Whatever the precise circumstances of its transmission, the fact that the text has such a limited textual remit—the Paris manuscript is the

⁶ Though commonly employed in Byzantine Studies until the last part of the twentieth century, the term “encyclopedism” has since then increasingly fallen out of favour, due *inter alia* to its implied focus on the mere collection of material, thereby downplaying the creative act of systemization and commentary. See especially the critique of Odorio, *Cultura*.

⁷ Hunger, Konstantin VII.; Demosthenous, Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos.

⁸ Constantine VII, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Moravcsik, trans. Jenkins, pp. 11–12.

⁹ Kresten, *Σπαράγματα διαφορά*; Shchavlev, *Treatise*.

only witness from the Byzantine period—strongly suggests that its composition and use was limited to the imperial court and library.¹⁰

[§4] The work deals with all contemporary neighbours of the Byzantine Empire in the tenth century. It begins with the Pechenegs, the Rus', the Bulgarians, Turkic groups, the Khazars, and then turns to the sphere of Muslim rule. A chapter on Muḥammad leads over to the Fāṭimids and an overview on early Arabic-Islamic history on the basis of the Chronicle of Theophanes (d. 818), ending with the Umayyads. The latter's establishment on the Iberian Peninsula after the so-called 'Abbāsid revolution forms the introduction to chapters on the Umayyads of al-Andalus. From there, Constantine turns to the Carolingians of Italy, the Langobards, the history of Venice, and then delves into the Slavic history of the Balkans, eventually returning to the Pechenegs and the region of the Black Sea.

[§5] The passage quoted above is taken from chapter 29, which deals with the region of Dalmatia and the people inhabiting it (Περὶ τῆς Δελματίας καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ παρακειμένων ἔθνων). Constantine's historical overview begins with the settlement of Dalmatia under Diocletian (r. 284–305), shortly touches upon the late Roman and Avar history of the region, and eventually discusses its Slavic population. The story about Soldanos is only connected to this larger context because of Constantine's claim that the "Saracens" who eventually took Bari, had initially raided the Dalmatian coast. After relating the anecdote at the centre of this article, Constantine gives an overview on the main Dalmatian cities of Ragusa, Spalato, Tetrangourin, Decatera, and Diadora. The ensuing chapter then deals in more detail with the Slavic history of Dalmatia.

[§6] In the passage, Constantine VII describes the rise and fall of the emirate of Bari, established around 847 by Muslim raiders and eventually destroyed in 871 by a joint Byzantine-Carolingian force.¹¹ According to Constantine's false chronology, the emirate of Bari only came into being during the reign of Basil I (r. 867–886) when three "Saracens from Africa" (Σαρακηνῶν ἀπὸ Ἀφρικῆς) named Soldanos (Σολδανός), Saba (Σάβα), and Kalphus (Καλφοῦς) attacked the cities of Butova, Rossa, Decatera, and Ragusa in Dalmatia with thirty-six vessels. When the Ragusans appealed for help to the emperor, the Saracens moved farther south and took hold of Bari. There Soldanos established his rule and "was for forty years master of all Langobardia as far as Rome."¹² On the initiative of the Byzantine emperor, Louis II of Italy (r. 839/840–875 as king of Italy, 844–875 as king of the Langobards, 855–875 as Roman emperor), the pope, Croat as well as Serb and Zachlumian chiefs, and other groups from the Dalmatian coast joined forces with the Byzantine army and eventually conquered Bari.

[§7] Whereas the Byzantine emperor retook control of Apulia, Soldanos and his retinue were captured by Louis II, who allegedly promised to reward anyone seeing the *amīr* laughing. When Soldanos finally did so, Louis II summoned him to understand the reason for his mirth. Soldanos replied that he had lost his power, but that God would be able to raise him up again. According to Constantine, Louis took this conversation as a starting point to build up amical relations with his prisoner, whereas Soldanos started to sow the seeds of discord between the Carolingian king of Italy and the nobles of Benevento and Spoleto. He claimed vis-à-vis the nobles that the king wanted to banish them to Francia, while simultaneously convincing the king that the nobles were planning a rebellion against him. When the nobles of Benevento locked Louis II out of the city during a hunting trip, the king understood that he was not wanted anymore. Thankful to the *amīr* for freeing them from Carolingian encroachment, the

¹⁰ Mondrian, Lecture.

¹¹ Jäckh, 840–866: al-Balāḍūrī; Musca, *L'émirato di Bari*.

¹² Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Moravcsik, trans. Jenkins, cap. 29, p. 128 (EL), p. 129 (EN).

Beneventan nobles set Soldanos free. He returned to North Africa, only to attack Capua and Benevento as soon as he had reached safety.

[§8] When this happened, the Langobard rulers of these cities asked for Louis' help once again, but were rebuffed when the king understood that they all had fallen prey to an intrigue organised by Soldanos. In their desperation, the Langobards turned to the Byzantine emperor Basil I, whose promise to intervene supposedly so frightened Soldanos that he gave up his campaign and left the Beneventans and Capuans in peace from that moment onwards. Thanks to this, the people of Capua and Benevento became and remained loyal subjects of Constantinople.

Contextualization, Analysis & Interpretation

[§9] The following paragraphs will put Constantine's anecdote of Soldanos' revenge on Louis II and the nobles of Benevento into context by contrasting Constantine's depiction of the Muslim capture of Bari with contemporary Latin-Christian and Arabic-Islamic accounts (§§10–12), by pointing out the diversity of relations maintained by Muslims attached to Bari with the surrounding Christian societies (§13), and by juxtaposing Constantine's account of the fall of Bari to alternative evidence in Latin-Christian sources (§14). This serves as a starting point to examine why Constantine VII chose to depict Louis II as a rather naïve ruler outwitted by his cunning captive (§§15–21), before evaluating what the anecdote can actually tell us about the history of Muslim Bari and its surroundings (§§22–24).

[§10] The fall of Bari and its *amīr* ended a Muslim effort to stabilise a small polity in Apulia. Aside from Constantine VII's *De administrando imperio*, contemporary Latin-Christian sources such as Erchempert's "History of the Langobards" (*Historia Langobardorum*), the "Chronicles of Monte Cassino" (*Cronicae Sancti Benedicti Casinensis*), the "Annals of St. Bertin" (*Annales Bertiniani*), and the "Chronicle of Salerno" (*Chronicon Salernitanum*) report that this polity served as a base for raids into the surrounding region during the 850s and 860s, including the vicinity of Naples, Conza and parts of the Terra di Lavoro, Ascoli and the monastery of San Vincenzo, and the *castrum* of Venafro. They shed additional light on the efforts of Louis II to fight against the Muslims of Bari, thereby interfering in a political landscape characterised by continuous strife between different Langobard princes. In this situation, it was mainly the monasteries that wished for the ordering force of a Carolingian emperor from northern Italy.¹³

[§11] Constantine speaks of a joint capture of Bari by Soldanos, Saba, and Kalphus. This description is contradicted by the contemporary Erchempert and the Arabic-Islamic historiographer al-Balāḍurī (d. 279/892), who attribute the conquest to a person called Calfo by Erchempert and Ḥalfūn al-Barbarī by al-Balāḍurī. According to Erchempert, these "Saracens" had been stationed as auxiliary troops around Bari with the permission of Radelchis I of Benevento (r. 839–851) and the reigning Langobard *gastaldus* Landulf I.¹⁴

¹³ *Annales Bertiniani*, ed. Waitz (MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. 5), a. 842, p. 28; a. 843, p. 30; a. 844, p. 30; a. 846, p. 34; a. 847, p. 35; a. 848, p. 36; a. 852, p. 42; a. 853, p. 43; a. 856, p. 47; a. 860, p. 54; a. 866, p. 81; a. 869, p. 98–99, 105–106; a. 871, p. 117–118; Erchempert, Piccola Storia, ed. Berto, cap. 17, p. 114; cap. 18, p. 116; cap. 20, p. 120; cap. 29, pp. 134–136; cap. 33, p. 142, all passages conveniently put together under https://saraceni.uni-koeln.de/wiki/Historia_Langobardorum_Beneventanorum; Kreutz, *Before the Normans*, pp. 37–38; Gantner, *Freunde Roms*, pp. 244–271.

¹⁴ Erchempert, Piccola Storia, ed. Berto, cap. 16, p. 112: "Hiis quoque diebus Pando [Landulf I] quidem Barim regebat, qui iussis optemperans Radelgisi, Saracenorum phalangas in adiutorium accitas iuxta murum urbis et oram maris locavit commorandas. Hii autem, ut sunt natura callidi et prudentiores aliis in malum, subtilius contemplantes munitionem loci, intempesta noctis, chisticolis quiescentibus, per abdita loca penetrant urbem, populumque insontem partim gladiis trucidarunt partim captivitati indiderunt. Supradictum vero proditorem gentis et patrie variis multisque suppliciis debachantes, postremo, ut vere dignum fuit, marinis sugillarunt gurgitibus. Quo comperto Radelgis, quia eos urbe nullatenus evellere quibat, cepit tamen quasi familiares amicos excolere et

[§12] According to Constantine, Soldanos conquered and then ruled Bari for forty years, during which he built a palace for himself. In this way, Constantine described the process of Muslim establishment in Bari as a straightforward affair, which it was not. According to al-Balāḍurī, a failed attempt at conquest at the hands of a certain Ḥabla preceded the conquest by Ḥalfūn, who took Bari in the early part of the caliphate of al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–247/847–861). He was succeeded by Mufarraġ b. Sallām, to whom al-Balāḍurī attributes the erection of forts and a Friday mosque, i.e. military and religious infrastructure, and the first attempt to seek official recognition in Egypt. Al-Balāḍurī ends with Sūrān or Sawdān, who, after several complications, eventually received official recognition from Baghdad.¹⁵ Al-Balāḍurī’s list is partly confirmed by the *Cronicae Sancti Benedicti Casinensis*. According to its list of “Saracen rulers” (*reges Saracenorum*) in southern Italy, Ḥalfūn (*Calfon de Barim*) ruled five years and five months, Sawdān seventeen years.¹⁶ Sawdān’s name, transcribed “Saugdan” by Erchempert, “Seodan” in the *Cronicae Sancti Benedicti Casinensis*, “Satan” (!) or “Sagdan” by the *Chronicon Salernitanum*, and “Soldanos” (Σολδανός) by Constantine,¹⁷ is probably not to be misunderstood as the title “sultān,” which only came into use in the tenth century to designate persons of authority and then became especially prominent under Salġūq influence.¹⁸

[§13] Bari’s relations to surrounding and visiting Latin Christians were not only characterised by violence, but evolved in a political landscape riven by tensions. Since the early 840s several Langobard rulers had employed Muslim mercenaries to bolster the forces needed for constant infighting.¹⁹ According to Erchempert, Siconulf of Salerno (r. 832–839) recruited Muslim fighters from al-Andalus (*Hismaelitas Hispanos*) around 843 to counter the Muslim forces that his rival Radelchis of Benevento had recruited from North Africa (*Agarenos ... Libicos*).²⁰ According to the *Chronicon Salernitanum*, the princes Sico II (r. 851–853) and Petrus (r. 853) of Salerno even honourably received a high-ranking envoy sent by Sawdān from Bari to Salerno (*unum eminentissimum Agarenum fuisset missus a Satan domino*), and even allowed him to stay overnight in the episcopal residence.²¹ The “Itinerary of the Monk Bernard” (*Itinerarium Bernardi monachi*) claims that the pilgrim Bernard was in fact received courteously in Bari where he wished to obtain travelling documents to travel to Egypt around 870.²²

[§14] Constantine claims that “the city of Bari and the country and all the prisoners were taken by the emperor of the Romans (...).” However, this depiction is not confirmed by contemporary Latin sources on the conquest of Bari in 871. Erchempert and the *Cronicae Sancti Benedicti*

ad suum adiutorium sensim provocare; ac primum castrum Cananense una cum Urso filio suo illis destinavit oppugnandum. Confestim igitur intimatur hoc Siconolfo; perstatim mora seposita eos debellaturus properavit atque super eos audacter irruens, cunctos, qui fugere nequiverant, armis stravit tantoque victoriae potitus est tropheo, ut ex innumerabili acie paganorum vix pauci elapsi essent, qui urbem residuis casu pereuntium explicarent. Rex vero eorum Calfo nomine solus cum dedecore fugiens, equo in itinere iam fesso ammisso, tandem valde lassus plantis propriis urbem introgressus est.”; Jäckh, 848: Decision; Health, Third/ninth-century Violence.

¹⁵ Al-Balāḍurī, *Kitāb Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. de Goeje, § 274–275, pp. 234–235; al-Balāḍhurī, *Origins of the Islamic State*, trans. Hitti, pp. 371–372; Jäckh, 840–866: al-Balāḍurī.

¹⁶ *Cronicae Sancti Benedicti Casinensis*, ed. Berto, lib. III, cap. 10, pp. 52, 54: “Reges Saracenorum Calfon de Barim (...) V et menses V (...); Seodan (...) XVII (...).”

¹⁷ *Cronicae Sancti Benedicti Casinensis*, ed. Berto, lib. III, cap. 10, pp. 52, 54; *Chronicon Salernitanum*, ed. Westerbergh, cap. 81, p. 80; *ibid.*, cap. 106–107, pp. 106–107; Erchemperto, *Piccola Storia*, ed. Berto, cap. 33, p. 142.

¹⁸ Kramers et al. Sultān, p. 849.

¹⁹ Jäckh, 848: Decision.

²⁰ Erchemperto, *Piccola Storia*, ed. Berto, cap. 17, p. 114; Jäckh, 848: Decision, §§ 6–7.

²¹ *Chronicon Salernitanum*, ed. Westerbergh, cap. 99, p. 100; Kreutz, *Before the Normans*, p. 40.

²² Bernardus, *Itinerarium*, ed. Migne (MPL 121), cap. 2, col. 569: “De monte autem Gargano abeuntes, per centum quinquaginta milliaria venimus ad civitatem Barrem Saracenorum, quae dudum ditioni subiacebat Beneventanorum. Quae civitas, supra mare sita, duobus est a meridie latissimis muris munita; ab aquilone ver mari prominet exposita. Hic itaque petentes principem civitatis illius, nomine Suldantum, impetravimus cum duabus epistolis omne navigandi negotium.”

Casinensis attribute the conquest of Bari to Louis alone,²³ whereas the *Chronicon Salernitanum* has Louis II claim in a letter to Basil I that he and a Slavic fleet, not the delayed Byzantine fleet, had taken Bari.²⁴

[§15] It is obvious that Constantine’s knowledge about the internal history of Bari does not accord with what Latin-Christian and Arabic-Islamic sources tell us, most of which were contemporary to the events in question. Against this backdrop, we must ask ourselves whether or to what degree we can regard his story of the interaction between Louis II, Sawdān, and the nobles of Capua and Benevento as based on authentic historical events. For while all Latin-Christian sources dealt with so far mention that Louis captured Sawdān and had trouble with the Beneventans, none of them relates a similar anecdote.

[§16] Constantine does not mention his sources in the chapter in question, but implies that he was drawing back on his internal knowledge of previous imperial campaigns by his grandfather Basil I, about whom he also wrote a biography, the *Vita Basilii*, around 950. This biography forms part of the so-called “Continuation of Theophanes” (*Theophanes Continuatus*), a collection of imperial biographies commissioned by Constantine VII and written by persons at or associated with the imperial court.²⁵ Consequently, it comes as no surprise that the *Vita Basilii* contains a similar story that only differs in small details, which have been marked in the footnotes to the source excerpt above: it does not mention Soldanos’ expertise in animal husbandry, but adds that he was from Carthage, that he was “privy to Punic wiles” (δόλων Φοινικικῶν οὐκ ἀμέτοχος), and that his captivity lasted two years.²⁶ On the whole, the information in the *Vita Basilii* seems to have used the same materials collected for the *De administrando imperio*, but the former was written in a loftier style and with a sharper focus on glorifying Basil I.²⁷

[§17] The comparison above with contemporaneous source material in Arabic and Latin has shown that both versions of the story of Soldanos in the *De administrando imperio* and the *Vita Basilii* are problematic and, in some instances, demonstrably false. As with the historiography produced by Constantine VII and his circle more generally, one of the main purpose of these texts was to legitimatise and indeed whitewash the history of the dynasty’s founder, Basil I, a

²³ *Cronicae Sancti Benedicti Casinensis*, ed. Berto, lib. I, cap. 10, p. 12: “Et ecce congregitur cum Saracenis, tropeum primitus bellicans sumpsit ex eis victoriae ac demum omnia illorum capiens castra. Sole tantum illis civitates remanserunt, Barim scilicet necnon atque Tarantum. Nam omnium quidem eorum gloria, munitissima capta est urbs Materia, quaeque igne ferroque ad nichilum redacta est.”; Erchemperto, *Piccola Storia*, ed. Berto, cap. 33, p. 142: “Post hec itum est Oream urbem sicque itidem reversus est Beneventum atque, annitente sibi dextera superna, cum iam ad extremitatem maximam pervenissent Saraceni, misso exercitu, Barim cepit, capto in ea Saugdan effero rege cum aliis nonnullis satellitibus suis.”

²⁴ *Chronicon Salernitanum*, ed. Westerbergh, cap. 107, pp. 115–116: “Hiis igitur super hoc ita prelibatis, ostupescimus in his que serenitas tua prosequitur, dicens suis, id est Grecis, Barim ex parte sua debellantibus et elidere decertantibus, nostros vel solum intuitos vel prandiis dissolutos nullum auxilium prestitisse, hac ideo civitatem ipsam capi omnino minime potuisse, cum nostri sive intuendo tantum sive prandendo sive aliud quid agendo Barim tamen licet perpauci et finetenus impugnasse et ope divina cepisse noscantur. Vestri autem sicut bruchi pre multitudine apparentes, et sicut locuste primum impetum dantes, eo ipso quo conatum suum in prima fronte monstraverunt, pussil- lanimitate superati, protinus infirmati sunt, ut more locustarum repente quidem salierint, sed confestim fatigati quasi a nisibus volandi deciderint, ac per hoc neque intuendo neque prandendo neque bellando quibuslibet insignibus triumphis monstratis, motu subitaneo et clandestino recesserint, et inefficaces, nonnullis e contra christianis solummodo captivatis, ad propria repedaverint.”; *ibid.*, pp. 117–118: “Non enim congrue gestum est, ut eisdem Sclavenis nostris cum navibus suis apud Barim in procintu comunis utilitatis consistentibus et nichil adversi sibi aliunde imminere putantibus, tam impie domi sua queque diriperentur, sibi que contingerent, que si prenoscerent, nequaquam prorsus incurrerent.”

²⁵ Schreiner, *Theophanes Continuatus*; Hoof, *Among Christian Emperors*.

²⁶ *Vita Basilii*, ed. Ševčenko, cap. 53, pp. 190–195.

²⁷ On the relationship between the *DAI* and the *Vita Basilii*, see Komatina, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, pp. 60–61.

usurper whose ascension to the imperial throne was highly controversial, especially with regard to his role in the murder of Michael III (r. 842–867). In addition, we see in the episode concerning Soldanos a well-known phenomenon in Byzantine historiography, namely the tendency of historians to invent or embellish information about their subjects that, in their opinion, would have reflected their character.²⁸ Thus, this specific story about Soldanos should be read less as a collection of facts and more as a literary construction of a foil to Basil I and the East Romans more generally.

[§18] The story related both in the *Vita Basilii* (as part of the “Continuation of Theophanes”) and the *De administrando imperio* emphasises Byzantine strength and efficiency in bringing peace to loyal subjects. It opposes this positive picture of Byzantine rule to the naïveté of a Frankish king and Langobard nobles, who fell prey to the wiles of their captive enemy. By contrast, the anonymous Byzantine emissary sent by Basil I managed to trick Soldanos, and sacrificed himself to announce to the nobles of Capua and Beneventum that East Roman help was on the way. The narrative obviously wishes to teach a message rather than to give a historical account of the aftermath of the conquest of Bari. The *Prosopography of the Middle Byzantine Period* (PmbZ) summarises:

“The version D[e] A[dministrando] I[mperio]/Theoph. cont. shows a striking literary interest in the pronounced deceitfulness of S. (Theoph. cont. V, 295,2: πανοῦργος ὢν καὶ δόλων Φοινικικῶν οὐκ ἀμέτοχος), and in general, of course, everything serves to stylise Basileios I, who alone succeeded in expelling S. in the end.”²⁹

[§19] Constantine’s wish to glorify his grandfather Basil I does not fully explain, however, why Louis II is depicted as such a naïve ruler, unable to see through the intrigues of the captured *amīr* of Bari and incapable of controlling the equally naïve Langobard nobles. One could suppose that the “slandering” of Louis II has to do with a generally hostile attitude toward the Carolingian family, to which Louis II belonged. However, *De administrando imperio* is, in fact, rather favourably disposed towards the Carolingians. Although Byzantine emperors of the early ninth century probably regarded Charlemagne as a Frankish upstart who had illegitimately usurped the imperial throne, Constantine does not polemicise against Charlemagne,³⁰ and draws a very positive picture of Bertha of Tuscany (d. 925) and Hugo of Arles (r. 903–947 as count of Arles and Vienne, 926–947 as king of Italy), important political figures of Carolingian descent in early tenth-century Italy.³¹ Against this backdrop, Louis II’s negative image must be explained differently.

[§20] Byzantine–Carolingian tensions involving Louis II began with an agreement between Louis’ II father Lothair I (r. 840–855) and the emperor Theophilos (r. 829–842), who, shortly before his death in 842, promised to give his daughter in marriage to Louis II. Until 853, however, Louis II seems to have repeatedly postponed the marriage. At the beginning of the 850s, he then entered a form of concubinage with Angilberta from the north Italian Supponid family, a relationship which was officially recognised as full-fledged matrimony in 860. According to the *Annales Bertiniani*, this seems to have produced considerable indignation on

²⁸ Lilie, *Reality and Invention*, esp. pp. 168–176, who terms this phenomenon “characterization by deeds.”

²⁹ PmbZ, lemma 6833 “Soldanos” (<https://telota.bbaw.de/pmbz/scripts/browse.xql?id=6833>): “Die Version DAI/Theoph. cont. zeigt ein auffälliges literarisches Interesse an der ausgesprochenen Hinterlist des S. (Theoph. cont. V, 295,2: πανοῦργος ὢν καὶ δόλων Φοινικικῶν οὐκ ἀμέτοχος), und generell dient natürlich alles der Stilisierung Basileios’ I., dem allein es am Ende gelungen sei, S. zu vertreiben.”

³⁰ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Moravcsik, trans. Jenkins, cap. 26, p. 108 (EL), p. 109 (EN).

³¹ On Hugo and Bertha: Constantine VII, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Moravcsik, trans. Jenkins, cap. 26, pp. 108–112. Also see: König, 906: Bertha of Tuscany’s Correspondence.

the Byzantine side and to have contributed to giving Louis II a negative image in later Byzantine writing such as *De administrando imperio*.³² Notwithstanding this, diplomatic relations seem to have been upheld in the 850s and 860s and were not overly tense.³³

[§21] When Basil I toppled Michael III in 867, Carolingian–Byzantine relations moved in a new direction.³⁴ Louis II and Basil I eliminated obstacles that had impeded cooperation earlier. They immediately sought cooperation, first by planning a new marriage alliance involving Louis’ daughter, then by taking steps to jointly go against the emirate of Bari.³⁵ Soon, however, tensions rose again. Basil I does not seem to have been prepared to accept Louis II as an equal in terms of imperial dignity, whereas Louis felt betrayed by Basil I, whom he accused of a lack of support when his land force, possibly cooperating with a Slavic—not Byzantine—fleet, took Bari in 871.³⁶ Louis vented his indignation in a letter to Basil I, treating the Byzantine emperor as an inferior. In this letter, he described *his* version of how the capture of Bari had taken place and even accused the Byzantine court of having obstructed the supporting Slavic fleet.³⁷

[§22] This letter probably cooled off relations considerably. However, there are also other factors that explain why Carolingian–Byzantine relations became less intensive. The main military reason for cooperation had been resolved by eliminating the Muslim presence in Bari. Moreover, in the immediate aftermath of the seizure of Bari, Louis II seems to have been taken captive for a brief time by the duke of Benevento—a fact not mentioned by Constantine VII—and then returned dishonoured to the north—a fact recorded by Constantine VII.³⁸ Against this backdrop, it seems likely that Constantine, rather than sympathising with Louis II’s difficulties in southern Italy, put to writing his personal grudge against the Carolingian king by portraying him as particularly naïve in his treatise on government.

[§23] In the anecdote, this naïveté plays out in Constantine’s depiction of the close relations between Louis II and the Langobard nobles on the one side, Soldanos on the other. Louis II actually seems interested in personal exchange, whereas Soldanos is sought by the Langobard nobles because of his age and experience, particular in matters of treating livestock, possibly horses—a detail missing in the *Vita Basilii*. All this implies a degree of interreligious familiarity, which—this should be emphasised—is not condemned by the Byzantine emperor. In this regard at least, Constantine’s account does confirm what contemporary Latin sources from southern Italy report on the interaction between Muslim Bari and its Christian environment. Although condemning Muslim raids and attacks, all sources illustrate that southern Italy was not marked by a clear Christian–Muslim divide, but by Christian–Muslim military cooperation, occasionally diplomacy, and—as in the case of Soldanos—even personal exchange.

[§24] This should not obfuscate the fact that all sources in question generally represent Sawdān as a treacherous and perfidious person.³⁹ Constantine explains that he martyred the emissary sent by the Langobard nobles to Constantinople when the emissary informed them about the imminent arrival of Byzantine military support.⁴⁰ The *Itinerarium Bernardi monachi* claims

³² *Annales Bertiniani*, ed. Waitz (MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. 5), a. 853, p. 43: “Greci vero non minus contra Ludowicum, filium Lotharii, regem Italiae, concitantur propter filiam imperatoris Constantinopolitani ab eo desponsatam, sed ad eius nuptias venire differentem.”

³³ Gantner, Kaiser Ludwig II. von Italien und Byzanz, pp. 104–105.

³⁴ Drocourt, Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations, p. 53.

³⁵ Gantner, Our Common Enemies.

³⁶ Eickhoff, Seekrieg, pp. 215–220.

³⁷ Ludovici II. imperatoris epistola, ed. Henze (MGH EPP 7, Karol. aevi 5), pp. 391–392; *Chronicon Salernitanum*, ed. Westerbergh, cap. 107, pp. 107–121, here: 116–118; Nerlich, Gesandtschaften, pp. 45–47, 283–285.

³⁸ Gantner, Kaiser Ludwig II. von Italien und Byzanz, pp. 109.

³⁹ Drocourt, Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations, p. 58 FN 128.

⁴⁰ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Moravcsik, trans. Jenkins, cap. 29, pp. 132–134.

that the pilgrim Bernard was received courteously in Bari and obtained travelling documents to journey to Egypt. These, however, eventually turned out to be invalid in Alexandria.⁴¹ The *Chronicon Salernitanum* plays with the phonetic similarity between “Sawdān” and “Satan,”⁴² whereas the eleventh-century Jewish “Chronicle of Ahimaz” depicts him as unfaithful in his negotiations with his neighbours.⁴³

[§25] An analysis of Constantine’s anecdote on the revenge of Soldanos of Bari thus presents us with a fabricated narrative that came into being in an intellectual environment intent on glorifying the feats of Emperor Basil I. Although Constantine VII did not think badly of the Carolingian dynasty in general, we can assume that Louis II’s hesitancy to enter into a marriage alliance with the imperial court and his vituperative letter to Basil I stood at the basis of Constantine’s decision to depict the Carolingian king, but also the Langobard nobles, as naïve rulers unable to prevent a Muslim captive from wreaking havoc in southern Italy. At the same time, Constantine’s narrative obfuscates to a certain degree that Byzantine support during the seizure of Bari had been lacking—at least according to the account of Latin sources. In this way, Constantine VII was able to claim that only Byzantine rule could bring peace and stability to Apulia. In fact, from the late ninth century until the Norman conquest in 1071, Bari served as residence to the *strategos* (στρατηγός) of Langobardia, and then to the *katepano* (κατεπάνω) and *doux* (δούξ) of Italia.⁴⁴ Although Constantine obviously subordinated historical facts to the argument he wished to make, the anecdote of Soldanos’ revenge does point to interreligious relations that went beyond the exchange of military services and blows. Louis II’s interest in Soldanos, and the Langobard nobles’ almost cordial relationship with him when it came to agriculture and animal husbandry (or horses), illustrates that there were topics which interested both Christians and Muslims and enabled them to interact with each other on a basis that transcended religious boundaries. Religious difference, we may note, is a topic that is not really addressed by Constantine VII.

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⁴¹ Bernardus, *Itinerarium*, ed. Migne (MPL 121), cap. 2, col. 569: “De monte autem Gargano abeuntes, per centum quinquaginta milliaria venimus ad civitatem Barrem Saracenorum, quae dudum ditioni subiacebat Beneventanorum. Quae civitas, supra mare sita, duobus est a meridie latissimis muris munita; ab aquilone ver mari prominet exposita. Hic itaque petentes principem civitatis illius, nomine Suldanum, impetravimus cum duabus epistolis omne navigandi negotium.”; *ibid.*, cap. 6, col. 570: “adivimus principem Alexandriae, cui ostendimus epistolam quam nobis dedit Suldanus: quae nihil nobis profecit, licet omnes illius epistolas dixerit se non ignorare.”

⁴² *Chronicon Salernitanum*, ed. Westerbergh, cap. 99, p. 99.

⁴³ Musca, *L’émirato di Bari*, pp. 79–81.

⁴⁴ Falkenhausen, *Städte im byzantinischen Italien*, pp. 404, 408; Lavermicocca, *Bari bizantina*.

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