THE SIEGE OF ZEMUN IN 1165 AND A GESTURE OF POWER OF MANUEL I KOMNENOS[*]

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In memory of Bogdan-Petru Maleon

Nicetas Choniates: …I will repay you by giving you back the past you have lost…
Baudolino: But maybe my story has no meaning.
Nicetas: There are no stories without a meaning.
And I am one of those men who can find it even where others fail to see it.
Afterwards the story becomes the book of the living,
like a blaring trumpet that raises from the tomb those who have been dust for centuries…
Still it takes time, you have to consider the events, arrange them in order,
find the connections even the least visible ones.
(Umberto Eco, *Baudolino*, Harvest Books, 2002, p. 19)

The struggle for Sirmium and for the city of Zemun during the Byzantine-Hungarian wars received significant attention from two of the most important Byzantine authors of Manuel Komnenos' reign, John Kinnamos and Nicetas Choniates. Nicetas Choniates' version of the events includes a spectacular episode occurred at the beginning of the siege of Zemun. According to Choniates the emperor, mounted on his horse, stroke the city gates with his spear. The paper tries to understand the episode's significance from the chronicler's perspective and to suggest the meaning of the gesture by comparing it with other similar deeds of the Middle Ages.

Keywords: Manuel Komnenos, Byzantine-Hungarian relations, Zemun, siege, gestures of power.

The starting point of the present paper is an episode related to the Hungarian struggle for power at the beginning of the second half of the 12th century. In spring 1165, King Stephen III launched an attack against Byzantine Sirmium defended by Stephen IV a pretender to the crown of St. Stephen who, for a brief period, occupied the throne with the support of Manuel I Komnenos[1]. The expedition

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proved to be a success. Stephen III conquered Zemun[2] by treason while his rival was poisoned by his followers. Furthermore, according to the chronicle of John Kinnamos, Stephen IV's body was left outside the city's gates and was refused a proper burial. Eventually the former king was buried in the Church of St. Martyr Stephen[3].

The Byzantine reaction to such events was quick and decisive[4]. Manuel I directed his armies against Zemun in a campaign analyzed by Ferdinand Chalandon, Ferenc Makk and Paul Magdalino[5]. The main byzantine chroniclers John Kinnamos[6] and Nicetas Choniates offer a detailed account on the causes of the war, on the preparations and on the pursuit of events and both of them exalt the deeds and the bravery of the emperor during the campaign.[7] Along with such common narrative details there are also differences between the two testimonies and Choniates, for instance, is the only one who mentions an interesting episode occurred at the beginning of the siege.

Choniates opens his relation underlining the contrast between the emperor's expectations and the behavior of his former subjects. According to the historian of Chonai, Manuel I was in hope for a quick surrender of the city once he and his troops appeared at the town's gates. In this point Choniates diverge from Kinnamos' version who states that the Hungarians prepared an attack but retreated hastily in great disorder once they saw the emperor leading his soldiers[8]. Thus, the frightening of the enemy as an imperial attribute is mentioned by Kinnamos but

[1] For Stephen IV's short reign (five months) in the context of Byzantine-Hungarian relations see Ferenc Makk, *The Arpads and the Comneni. Political Relations between Hungary and Byzantium in the 12th century*, Budapest, p. 83–86. For the fights which preceded the siege of Zemun, *ibidem*, p. 89–91.

[2] For the strategic significance of this city in the 12th century see Jovanka Kalić, "Zemun u XII veku", *Zbornik Radova Vizantoloskog Institut* 13, 1971, p. 27–56.

[3] *Ioannis Cinnami Epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis Gestarum*, ed. August Meineke, Bonn, 1886, p. 238–240 for the Hungarian siege of Zemun; cf. John Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenos*, transl. by Charles M. Brand, Columbia University Press, New York, 1976, p. 179–80. The poisoning of the Stephen IV was analyzed by Stephanos Efthymiadis, "Nicetas Choniates and Ioannes Kinnamos: the poisoning of Stephen IV of Hungary (13 april 1165)", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 101, 2008, 1, p. 21–28.

[4] Nicetas Choniates, *Historia,* ed. Jan Louis Van Dieten, Berlin–New York, 1975, p. 128; cf. Niceta Coniata, *Grandezza e catastrofe di Bisanzio*, I (Libri I–VIII), introduzione Alexander Kazhdan, testo critico e commento di Ricardo Maisano, trad. Anna Pontani, Milano, 1994, p. 305; *O City of Byzantium. Annals of Nicetas Choniates*, translated by Harry J. Magoulias, Detroit, 1984, p. 73.

[5] Ferdinand Chalandon, *Jean I Comnène et Manuel Ier Comnène*, Paris, 1912, p. 481–85; Ferenc Makk, *The Arpads and the Comneni. Political Relations between Hungary and Byzantium in the 12th century*, Budapest, p. 91–92; Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180*, Cambridge, 1993, p. 80.

[6] For Kinnamos' version see *Ioannis Cinnami Epitome*, p. 241.

[7] For a parallel with the *topos* of warrior-emperor in the narratives related to John II Komnenos' reign see Ioannis Stouraitis, "Narratives of John II Komnenos' wars: comparing Byzantine and modern approaches", in Alessandra Bucossi and Alex Rodriguez Suarez (eds.), *John II Komnenos, Emperor of Byzantium. In the Shadow of Father and Son*, London-New York, 2016, p. 22–36.

[8] *Ioannis Cinnami Epitome*, p. 241.

seem to be denied by Choniates who only points to the defenders' stubbornness to resist. For the latter, the garrisons and the people of Zemun not only refused to submit but they fortified all the entrances, started to launch javelins, arrows and stones against the Byzantines and, as venomous snakes, they begun to taunt the emperor and his soldiers[9].

Such behavior is a common place used by Choniates' in his history. For instance, during the siege of Vakha the besieged insulted the emperor John II Comnenos, his wife and his daughters; during the Egyptian campaign of 1169 the Muslims of Damietta also used insults against the Byzantines while later on the rebels of Nicea used derision against the emperor Andronicus I Komnenos[10]. However, the siege of Zemun may be considered as a special case if we take into account the textual strategy used by Choniates. The historian labels the defenders as asps and snakes, true incarnation of evil but also an allusion to the infamous act of poisoning Stephen IV. In Choniates' views there was a causal link between the dishonorable crime, the treachery which enabled the Hungarian to conquer Zemun, and the refuse to surrender at the imperial request. The allusion to Psalm 140 (*Deliver me, O Lord, from Evil Men*) was a literary figure of speech meant to depict the besieged as the incarnation of evil. The act of poisoning was followed by poisoned words directed against the emperor and his troops[11].

In contrast with poisoning and treachery, labeled as specific to women behaviour, the Byzantine historian constructed an ideal image of a warrior sovereign, who combines courage, military prowess and masculinity. The central piece of such ideal portrait is in Choniates' text a spectacular gesture made by the *basileus* at the beginning of the siege. According to the chronicler, Manuel I on his horseback launched an individual charge against the city gates striking them at full speed with his spear[12].

The episode seems, indeed, to be very unusual. It looks more like a typical individual attack of a Western knight eager to prove his courage and to gain fame.

[9] Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, p. 133–134; Niceta Coniata, *Grandezza e catastrofe*, p. 302–304; *O City of Byzantium*, p. 76; as Harry J. Magoulias pointed out, the sentence is an obvious reference to Psalm 140: "They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's, and under their lips is the venom of asps".

[10] For the quoted episodes see Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, p. 23, 163 and 283; Niceta Coniata, *Grandezza e catastrofe*, I, p. 54 and 372; II, p. 142–144.

[11] For the use of animals by Choniates as metaphors to depict the enemy see Alexander Kazhdan, Simon Franklin, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the eleventh and twelfth Centuries*, London-Paris, 1984, p. 267; the topic was developed by Anthony Littlewood, "Vegetal and Animal Imagery in the History of Niketas Choniates", in M. Grünbart (ed.), *Theatron. Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelater*, Berlin–New York, 2003, p. 223–258. For the use of Psalms by Choniates in the narration of Manuel Komnenos deeds se Alicia Simpson, *Niketas Choniates. A Historiographical Study*, Oxford, 2013, p. 150, 152. The author emphasises that the literary allusions and the comparisons of the emperor with biblical or mythological heroes produce "an ironic effect thus subtly criticizing the emperor".

[12] Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, p. 134: Πρῶτος τοίνυν ὁ βασιλεὺς τῷ τῆς μιμήσεως ὁμοίῳ διερεθίζων τοὺς ὑπ' ἐκεῖνον κατὰ τῶν τῆς πόλεως πυλῶν τὸν ἵππον ἐφίησι καὶ μέσον αὐτῶν τὸ δόρυ ἤλασεν ;cf. Niceta Coniata, *Grandezza e catastrophe*, p. 133–134. For the translation of the Greek text I am indebted to my colleague Ovidiu Olar.

Attacking individually a well defended city gate without any support from his troops seems more a reckless decision or at least an exaggerated gesture of audacity[13]. The text seems to point towards the first option but even in this case it raises several questions. Do we have to deal with an imagined episode aimed to add a heroic aura to emperor deeds? Or, on the contrary, Choniates simply describes an authentic episode? If the last answer is correct we have to ask what meaning was attached to the spear strike by the performer and how such act was understood by the witnesses. All in all, was the siege of Zemun an exemplary moment, a sort of God's judgment aimed to underscore the virtues and, respectively, the sins of the two camps? There are no easy answers to such questions. It is certain though that in his description of the Byzantine-Hungarian war of 1165, Choniates used a wide range of literary stratagems aimed to underline the emperor's triumph[14]. Also, one should keep in mind that, after the fall of Constantinople in 1204, Choniates revised his history and, in this respect, Alicia Simpson pointed out that critics directed to Manuel I are to be found precisely in the last version of the chronicle. Thus we have to ask if such *post factum* judgment influenced somehow the account of the siege of Zemun[15].

At first glance the answer seems to be negative. However, Choniates' text is much less apologetic than Kinnamos' version[16]. Indeed Choniates' narrative is not focused on emperor's deeds. On the contrary, he insists on several details which cast lights and shadows on the Byzantine-Hungarian war. For instance, it is mentioned an episode about a woman killed by her husband to avoid a rape by Byzantine soldiers; also, there are mentions of a pro-byzantine faction in the city which sent day by day information to the emperor's camp during the siege. Last but not least, Choniates gave a full account of Andronicus Komnenos dexterity in

[13] Sometimes the Byzantine chronicles underlined the opposition of the Byzantine subjects towards the audacity of some emperors in battles. For instance, John II Komnenos intention to lead an attack against a Pecheneg camp was denied by his counsellors (*Ioannis Cinnami Epitome*, p. 8); similarly Manuel's decision to attack Zemun from an assault tower encountered strong opposition from his subjects and eventually the emperor abandoned the idea (*Ioannis Cinnami Epitome*, p. 241).

[14] Alicia Simpson, "Niketas Choniates: the Historian", in Alicia Simpson, Stephanos Efthymiadis (eds.), *Niketas Choniates. A Historian and a Writer*, Geneva, 2009, p. 13: "the story narrated by Niketas in his history is complex and multifaceted. It largely consists of stories within stories, revolving in a periphery around the protagonists, some adventurous, erotic or heroic, others comedic, pathetic and abhorrent". See also in the same volume Anthony Kaldellis, "Paradox, Reversal and the Meaning of History", p. 75–99 (especially p. 75) and Stephanos Efthymiadis, "Greek and Biblical exempla in the service of an artful writer", p. 101–119.

[15] Alicia Simpson, *Niketas Choniates*, p. 16–17. There are no less than three versions of Choniates' work: a short version, an appendix written after 1204 which insists on the fourth crusade and its consequences and a revised version written in Nicaea ten years after the loss of Constantinople. For the idealization of Manuel's early reign and the contrast with the subsequent period see Alicia Simpson, *Niketas Choniates. A Historiographical Study*, Oxford, 2013, p. 151.

[16] For the differences between the two Byzantine authors with special focus on Byzantine-Hungarian relations see Alicia Simpson, *Niketas Choniates. A Historiographical Study*, p. 221.

handling the siege machines[17]. In opposition, Kinnamos' account is longer, his succession of events slightly different, and, more important, Manuel I is the main actor of the war while his cousin and rival Andronicus is seldom mentioned[18]. There are also serious differences between the two chroniclers[19] concerning the prelude of the war. Analyzing the main reason of the conflict i.e. the poisoning of Stephen IV, Stephanos Efthymiadis noticed both the synthetic version of Choniates' text on the issue as well as the ironies directed against the emperor and his protégé[20]. According to Efthymiadis, Choniates' version is an "intriguing narrative", an *exemplum* with a strong moral purpose.

As I already mentioned there are also divergences related to the description of the siege. Choniates' text is more concise and the emperor's role is emphasized only in respect with the charge against the city's gate. The act seems carved out of a novel of the Round Table. In front of the castle of Grail, both Lancelot and Perceval are tempted to use their weapons in order to enter. Perceval strikes so hard with his sword the gate of the Grail castle, that „the world seems to end" *(Qu'il samble que li siecles fine)*[21]. The sword breaks into two and the knight is admonished by a *prud'homme,* who tells him that the violent gesture attracts the prolongation of the Grail quest by another seven years. In a similar manner, in *La Queste de Saint Graal,* Lancelot tries to use his weapon against the lions which guard the entrance to the Grail castle, but he is admonished by a celestial voice, who chastises his audacity. According to the heavenly messenger, Lancelot placed more confidence in his valor and in his weapons than in almighty God. Thus, the voice implies than the knight's courage was stronger than his faith.[22] The conclusion of the aforementioned episodes is quite clear: at the gates of the Grail

[17] Nicetas Choniates, *Historia,* p. 134. For Andronikos' depiction in Choniates as a perpetual source of trouble but also as a very skillful character see Alicia Simpson, *Niketas Choniates. A Historiographical Study*, p. 160.

[18] *Ioannis Cinnami Epitome*, p. 246; cf. John Kinnamos, *Deeds*, p. 185.

[19] For the outbreak of the war the differences between Kinnamos and Choniates are insignificant. For instance, Kinnamos indicates the Church where was buried Stephen IV while Choniates mentions the name of the killer and the method of poisoning. The killer poisoned the bandages used by Stephen IV to poultice a wound. For the use of Kinnamos text by Choniates see Vasile Grecu, "Nicétas Choniates a-t-il connu l'histoire de Jean Kinnamos?", *Revue des études byzantines* 7, 1949, p. 194–204. Alicia Simpson, "Niketas Choniates", p. 28. Stephanos Efthymiadis, "Nicetas Choniates and Ioannes Kinnamos", p. 28 considers that both authors used a source which is now lost. But see also Alexander Kazhdan, "Esce raz o Kinname i Nikita Honiate", *Byzantinoslavica* 24, 1963, p. 4–31, who considers that the similarities are limited only to the reign of John II Komnenos.

[20] Stephanos Efthymiadis, "Nicetas Choniates and Ioannes Kinnamos", p. 23 and p. 26–27. The author proposes an explanation for Choniates' interest in giving a full account of the poisoning of the Hungarian pretender.

[21] Gerbert de Montreuil, *La Continuation de Perceval,* edité par Mary Williams, 1.1, Paris, 1922, p. 7, vers 168–173. For the Arthurian episodes in which the hero hits the castle gate, I owe a great deal of gratitude to Cătălina Gîrbea.

[22] *La Queste del Saint Graal,* ed. Albert Pauphilet, Paris, 2003, p. 253.

castle the use of weapons is illegitimate.[23] The idea resembles very much a *topos* from the pages of the chronicles of the crusades: a just cause implies trust in God's help rather than in one's own strength.

But this conclusion cannot be applied to the episode whose protagonist is Manuel Komnenos. Not only the weapon is a different one, a spear instead of a sword, but the stake of the episode seems entirely different. In contrast to the mentioned Arthurian deeds, the emperor's strike has nothing illegitimate about it. It seems to be a message addressed by military means to those behind the walls. Choniates seems to suggest that the refuse to open the gates and to surrender was an act of defiance aimed to contest the imperial authority. In such context the spear's strike is a reply, a symbolic gesture which underscores the imperial anger and anticipates the future punishment. In opposition with the aforementioned Arthurian novels, when the use of weapon put an end to a conflict, the spear's strike anticipates the incoming violence.

This kind of message could be found in some other medieval episodes. Narrating the siege of Constantinople by the Bulgarians in the year 813, the chronicle of Theophanes reminds a gesture of the khan Krum, labelled as "the new Sennacherib". Krum marched in front of the walls of Constantinople, from the Gate Blachernae to the Golden Gate, namely from one end to the other of the terrestrial line of fortifications. Such parade was followed by "demonic" sacrifices in front of the city walls and by an unusual demand made by Krum. The Khan asked that his spear will be affix to the Golden Gate by the emperor. Because Leon V refused to obey, Krum was eventually content to retreat into his tent.[24] For good reason, the entire episode was interpreted as an attempt to put *basileus* Leon V, who barely took the throne[25], in a difficult position, and the demand to affix the spear to the Golden Gate as a symbolic act by which the emperor would have bowed before the power of the Bulgarian khan.[26] By comparing the khan with the king of Assyria, Senacherib, Theophanes seems from the very start to suggest that, despite the disproportion of forces, the assault attempt over the imperial capital was foredoomed to fail. Even if the succession of events differs from the account of

[23] See the analysis made by Cătălina Gîrbea, "Chevalerie, adoubement et conversion dans quelques romans du Graal", in *Chevalerie et christianisme aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles),* Martin Aurell et Cătălina Gîrbea (eds.), Rennes, 2011, p. 179–199.

[24] *Theophanis Chronographia,* ed. C. de Boor, Leipzig, 1883, p. 503; cf. *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine and Near Eastem History, AD 284–813,* transl. by Cyril Mango and Roger Scott with the assistance of Geoffrey Greatrex, Oxford, 1997, p. 686.

[25] Florin Curta, "Qagan, Khan or King? Power in Early Medieval Bulgaria (seventh to ninth century)", in *Text, Context, History and Archaeology. Studies in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages,* ed. by Victor Spinei, București-Brăila, 2009 p. 393: „Krum may have well moved freely in 813 under the very walls of Constantinople (...) in order to make the Byzantine emperor Leo V lose face publicly".

[26] Panos Sophoulis, *Byzantium and Bulgaria 775–831*, Leiden-Boston, 2012, p. 252: „the *khan* is reported to have requested the emperor to affix his spear to the Golden Gate, no doubt as a symbolic act of submission to Bulgar power".

Senacherib's attack of Jerusalem in the Old Testament, the Bulgarian siege of 813 ended, indeed, in failure. The Bulgarian khan retreated but only after he had devastated the surroundings of the imperial capital. A comparison with the Byzantine siege of Zemun underlines a couple of notable differences. Krum does not strike the city gate himself, but he asks the emperor to affix his spear. Moreover, the gesture was claimed after the khan's armies paraded in front of the capital's walls, an element missing in the case of the siege of Zemun.

At the opposite extremity of Europe, a similar gesture was made by the future emperor Louis the Pious in the year 801, in front of the walls of Barcelona. According to the poem of Ermoldus Nigellus, at a certain point during the siege, Charlemagne's son threw stoutly his spear against the fortress. The force of the fling was so great, that the spear fastened into the „wall marble". Frightened by the arm who accomplished such a strike, „the Moors", who were already willing to surrender because of the casualties and the hunger, decided unanimously to capitulate.[27] Far from being, as the Italian historian Aldo Settia considered[28], a high-minded gesture of defiance and, at the same time, a confession of weakness in front of a fortress which he had decided to take, Louis' spear strike seems to be the decisive element which turn the balance of war. According to the poet's views, the Prince's military virtues are those which, eventually, subdue the "Moors" headstrongness and compel them to capitulate. The episode of Louis the Pious' spear strike has much in common with Manuel's attitude in front of the gates of Zemun, even if there is also a significant difference. The Franks succeeded in their attempt to convince the Muslims to surrender Barcelona, while the Byzantines were forced to continue their siege[29].

Another example could be found from the second half of the 14th century. During the "crusade" of Amadeus of Savoy, one of his knights, Guillelmus de Grandissono, made a *chevauchée* in front of the walls of Anchialos. The text is

[27] *Monumenta Germaniae Historica,* ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, *Scriptores,* vol. II, Hannover, 1829, p. 476r. *Tum rex ipse pius crispans hastile lacerto,/Inque urbem adversam conpulit ire celer. Hasta volans media ventis se contulit urbi/Marmore subjecto figitur acta nimis.Hoc signo Mauri turbate corde pavore/Mirantur ferrum, plus iacientis opus./Quid facerem' Iam rex aberat, iam pugna tepebat;/Maurorum primos abstulerat gladius/Tandem iam victi nimium belloque fameque,/Consilio unanimi reddere castra volunt.*

[28] Aldo A. Settia, *Rapine, assedi, battaglie. La guerra nel medioevo,* Roma, 2002, p. 176: "un orgoglioso gesto di sfida che e, nello steso tempo, una confessione di impotenza contro una fortezza decisa ad arrendersi soltanto per fame". For an analysis of the siege of Barcelona in 801 see Richard L.C. Jones, "Fortifications and Sieges in Western Europe c. 800–1450", in *Medieval Warfare. A History,* ed. by Maurice Keen, New York and Oxford, p. 167–168.

[29] There is also another one: Louis was not mounted when he launched the spear against the walls. The reason is obvious. Such manner of combat was not invented yet. See Jean Flori, "Encore l'usage de la lance. La technique du combat chevaleresque vers l'an 1100", *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* XXXI, juillet-septembre 1988, p. 217–219 who points out that Louis technique in using the spear could also be found in the Bayeux tapestry illustrating the battle of Hastings.

very brief but it could be argued that Guillelmus intended to openly defy the defenders who refused to surrender[30].

Finally, a mounted sovereign who strikes with his spear the gates of a fortress appears in the pages of the Moldavian chronicle attributed to Grigore Ureche in relation with a Moldavian siege of Lviv in 1509. The text mentions that "[the Moldavians] burning and pillaging the country, began the siege of Lviv, where they battered the city walls, and they were very close to take it. And voivode Bogdan III alone struck with the spear the gate of Lviv, and the sign of his blow can be seen even today. The Poles themselves acknowledge the fact and moreover confess that the story is entirely true"[31]. We ignore how many sources were used by Ureche in the description of the Moldavian expedition in Poland, but the moment which individualize the campaign – the blow at the gate of Lviv, – are not to be found in any Polish or other Moldavian contemporary narrative sources which recounts the episode[32]. The chronicler's mention that „The Poles themselves acknowledge the fact and moreover confess that the story is entirely true" suggests a Polish information that however might be an oral one. The episode has many similarities with Manuel I gesture at Zemun the only difference consisting in the epilogue. Bogdan III of Moldavia was forced to retreat while in the Byzantine case the siege was, in the end, successful.

All the aforementioned gestures with all the similarities and differences are a part of a symbolic arsenal attached to the medieval war. Many episodes narrated by the medieval chroniclers seem to suggest that the clash of weapons was doubled by a clash of gestures and words.

Choniates' history makes no exception. The siege of Zemun is only one of the many episodes aimed to give meaning to the text. Emperors or simple warriors used during the battles words or gestures aimed to strengthen a particular idea, to emphasize a certain significance of the event. Sometimes such acts seem easy to understand. It was the case of the faint attack on the city of Sozopolis in Pamphylia, a stratagem aimed to lure the garrison outside the city walls[33]. In other

[30] F. Bollati di Saint Pierre, *Illustrazioni della spedizione in Oriente di Amedeo VI (il Conte Verde)*, Torino, 1900, p. 119: "dominus Guillelmus de Grandissono equitauit cum armis ante castrum Aquille, in quo dominus Anthonius vicecomes de Mediolano captus tenebatur". For the identification of „Aquille" with Anchialos see Octavian Iliescu, *A stăpânit Dobrotici la gurile Dunării?*, "Pontica", IV, 1971, p. 371–377.

[31] Grigore Ureche, *Letopiseţul Ţării Moldovei*, ed. by P. P. Panaitescu, Bucureşti, 1958, p. 138–139; cf. Nicolae Costin, *Letopiseţul Ţării Moldovei de la zidirea lumii până la 1601 şi de la 1709–1711*, ed. C.A. Stoide şi I. Lăzărescu, Iaşi, 1976, p. 149: „şi bătând cetatea Liovului câteva dzile, nu o au dobândit, iar multă avere au luat dentr-însa şi singur Bogdan vodă au lovit în poartă cu sulița". The episode is mentioned by Maria Magdalena Székely, "Un gest de putere al lui Bogdan al III-lea și semnificația lui", in *Putna, Ctitorii ei și lumea lor*, București, 2011, p. 99–106 but the analysis was focused on another gesture of power the sack of Rohatyn and the capture of the city church's bell.

[32] For a full analysis of the episode see Ovidiu Cristea, "Glasul lăncilor: pe marginea unui gest de putere al lui Bogdan al III-lea", *Analele Putnei* X, 2014, 1, p. 203–214.

[33] Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, p. 13; *Grandezza e catastrofe*, p. 32–34.

cases the besiegers used ignominious means to undermine the moral of the defenders. For instance emperor Andronicus Komnenos took Euphrosina, the mother of the future emperor Isaac II Angelos, as a human shield in order to compel the defenders of Nicaea to surrender[34]. On other occasion the besiegers were satisfied to point out their superiority. It was the case of an attack of a Norman fleet led by Maione of Bari who launched golden arrows against the palace of Blacherne[35].

There were also some situations when an individual duel intended to decide the outcome of a war. Such was the fight between the Byzantine Eustrathios and the Armenian Constantine during the siege of fortress Vakha[36]. However, for the siege of Zemun the meaning of Manuel's gesture is much difficult to guess. It is striking that the strike in the city gate is ignored by John Kinnamos an author who praised any of the emperor's actions. This omission casts some doubts on the veracity of the event. Moreover, the doubts are strengthened by the fact that Choniates fails to elaborate on the episode and the gesture seem to have no serious consequences for his following narration. It may be simply assumed that it was a sort of challenge used by the emperor following a custom of Western knights. The spear as the weapon *par excellence* of the horsemen was generalized around mid-11th century[37] and Manuel Komnenos seemed to have been very founded on it. For instance, Choniates mentions that during a joust between Byzantines and Latins in Antioch[38], the emperor and his subjects mastered the spear namely against those who considered themselves masters of such weapon. The joust of Antioch underscored not only that the spear was the favorite weapon of Latin knights but also that, in their turn, the Byzantine used it skillfully. For Choniates, the Byzantine success in the aforementioned joust[39] was a solid proof that the Western perceptions of Byzantines as effeminate and unworthy warriors was wrong and that the emperor and his followers were as worthy as the Latins in the use of spear.

In a similar vein may be read the gesture of Manuel I in front of Zemun's gate. It was a challenge made in Western style aimed to put in contrast the courage of the Byzantine commander with the cowardice and lack of virtues of the

[34] Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, p. 282–283; *Grandezza e catastrofe*, p. 140–142.

[35] Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, p. 99; *Grandezza e catastrofe*, p. 226. For this episode see Ovidiu Cristea, "O „joacă" siciliană: supremaţie maritimă şi prestigiu în Mediterana secolului al XII-lea", in *Vocaţia Istoriei. Prinos profesorului Şerban Papacostea*, Ovidiu Cristea and Gheorghe Lazăr (eds.), Brăila, 2008, p. 221–235.

[36] Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, p. 23–25; *Grandezza e catastrofe*, p. 54–58.

[37] Jean Flori, "Encore l'usage de la lance", p. 213–240.

[38] Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, p. 108: Ὁρῶν δὲ τὸ ἐκ τῶν Λατίνων ἐκεῖσε στρατιωτικὸν μέγα τῷ δόρατι ἐγκαυχώμενον καὶ τῷ τούτου ἐνδεξίῳ φυσῶν ἀγκωνίσματι παιδιᾶς ἡμέραν συνθηματίζεται δι' ἀσιδήρων δορατισμῶν; *Grandezza e catastrofe*, p. 246.

[39] For the difference between *tornemen*, a group combat and *dzoustra,* an individual combat, (words derived from Old French torneimen and jost) see *Sports* (authors Apostolos Karpozilos and Anthony Cutler) in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, III, New York-Oxford, 1993, p. 1939–1940.

besieged. The latter were depicted as effeminates who refused the combat and took shelter behind the walls. Even worse, in their defense they seem to rely not on weapons but on dirty words and obscene gestures. Choniates' text seems to suggest a reversal of the Western cliché who depicted the Byzantines as feeble and pitiful warriors[40].

Eventually, Manuel I's gesture is a sort of "monologue" which received no reply from the enemies. It is another argument to reinforce the conclusion that the war of 1165 was directed against a worthless foe who used in his combat poison, treachery, obscene words and gestures as weapons. If we put the episode in the wide context of Manuel I's Hungarian policy the spear strike in the gate of Zemun – eventually a gesture of no consequences – suggests the failure of the emperor's attempts to transform Hungary in a Byzantine satellite[41].

[40] For other "reversals" see Anthony Kaldellis, "Paradox, Reversal and the Meaning of History", p. 75–99.

[41] Ferenc Makk, *The Arpads and the Comneni*, p. 80–82.