Lilingis, the Bastard Half-Brother of Illus

Mirosław J. Leszka

University of Łódź, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Institute of History, Department of Byzantine Studies, ul. Kamińskiego 27a, 90-219 Łódź, Polska/Poland, miroslaw.leszka@uni.lodz.pl

Follow this and additional works at: https://digijournals.uni.lodz.pl/sceranea

Recommended Citation

Leszka, Mirosław J. (2021) "Lilingis, the Bastard Half-Brother of Illus," Studia Ceranea. Journal of the Waldemar Ceran Research Centre for the History and Culture of the Mediterranean Area and South-East Europe: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 32.
DOI: 10.18778/2084-140X.11.32
Available at: https://digijournals.uni.lodz.pl/sceranea/vol11/iss1/32

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Arts & Humanities Journals at University of Łódź Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studia Ceranea. Journal of the Waldemar Ceran Research Centre for the History and Culture of the Mediterranean Area and South-East Europe by an authorized editor of University of Łódź Research Online. For more information, please contact journals@uni.lodz.pl.
Lilingis, the Bastard Half-Brother of Illus*

**Abstract.** The paper is devoted to Lilingis – one of the leaders in the Isaurian uprising against emperor Anastasius I. He was Illus’ half-brother. Illus was an Isaurian who, aside from Zeno, played the most important role in the life of the Byzantine state in the 470s and 480s. It is possible that from 484, Lilingis held the position of the Isaurian comes and was so successful at it that he probably retained it until the end of Zeno’s reign and gained authority among his tribesmen, which resulted in his participation as one of the leaders in the Isaurian uprising. Lilingis was co-commander in the first rebel clash with the emperor’s forces at Kotyaeum (492). He met his death in the battle.

**Keywords:** Lilingis, Illus, emperor Zeno, emperor Anastasius I, Isaurians

The reign of Emperor Zeno¹, who originated from Isauria, was a time when the Isaurians achieved considerable influence, both in the army and in the administration of the Byzantine Empire. Such a statement may give the impression that the sources provide plentiful information about a number of figures originating from Isauria. This is not the case. On the pages of the works of Byzantine historians, we can find only a dozen or so figures of Isaurian origin, active during the reign of Zeno and soon afterward². Generally, there is rudimentary information about them, and we have a more complete, though not necessarily a full dossier, only about a few of them. Lilingis is one of these dozen or so Isaurian figures that we do find in the sources. He certainly cannot be counted among the Isaurians about whom we have considerable knowledge³. The source references concerning

---


³ The basic information about this figure – W. Ensslin, *Ninilingis*, [in:] *RE*, vol. XVII.1, Stuttgart 1936, col. 632; *PLRE* II, p. 683–684 (s.v. Lilingis); C. Begass, *Die Senatsaristokratie des oströmischen*
him oscillate practically around several episodes in his life, namely, his origin, his role in suppressing the usurpation of Illus and Leontius (484), and his participation in the revolt of the Isaurians against Emperor Anastasius, which broke out in 492. The purpose of this text is to analyze the source references concerning Lilingis and attempt to define his role among the Isaurian elite of Zeno’s time and the beginning of Anastasius’ reign.

The name of the protagonist of this article appears in the sources in different variants, namely: Lilingis, Longinine, Lingine, Lingis, Ninilingis, Lingis, Ninigius. It appears that a preference should be given to the version given by Marcellinus Comes, the author who wrote closest to the time of the figure we are interested in here.

We know neither when nor where Lilingis was born (except that it happened somewhere in Isauria). However, we do have interesting references in two sources that speak about his parents, although not directly. John of Antioch and the Book of Suda inform us that Lilingis was Illus’ half-brother, born out of wedlock. Illus was an Isaurian who, aside from Zeno, played the most important role in the life of the Byzantine state in the 470s and 480s. In the course of his career spanning more than a dozen years, which can be traced in the sources, he served as magister officiorum, magister militum per Orientem, was the consul of the year 478, and a patrician. He was involved in filling the imperial throne, although he did not pursue it himself. For a time, he was the most important, albeit difficult, ally

---

11 Ioannes Antiochenus, Fragmenta, 214.2.
12 Ioannes Antiochenus, Fragmenta, 237.2.
14 Ioannes Antiochenus, Fragmenta, 237.2; Suidae lexicon, p. 471, B 279.
of Emperor Zeno, and the grey eminence of the Byzantine court. He ended his career, as well as his life, as a mortal enemy of his Isaurian kin\textsuperscript{15}. From the accounts of John of Antioch and the Book of Suda, it appears that Lilingis and Illus had one father, about whom, however, we know nothing. Lilingis’ mother was a concubine or mistress of Illus’ father, not even mentioned by name. We do not know whether Illus was an older or younger brother of Lilingis. It should be noted that Lilingis’ half-brothers were also Appalius\textsuperscript{16} and Trocundes\textsuperscript{17}, who were Illus’ brothers. We do not have any information regarding Lilingis’ relationship with his half-brothers.

As for the date of Lilingis’ birth, there are no clues. He appears in the sources in the year 484 as a leader entrusted by Emperor Zeno with the responsible task of suppressing the revolt of Illus. Hence, he must have been an experienced man, having held other positions before. If so, he was born at least in about 450; in 484, therefore, he would have been a man over thirty years old. By comparison, Illus, his half-brother, appears in the sources ten years earlier, in 474, when Zeno put him in command of a division of troops tasked with stopping Theodoric Strabo’s Goths operating against the empire in Thrace\textsuperscript{18}. He also does not appear to have been a man without experience at the time. It is presumed that Illus had spent some time in Constantinople and he had had some experience in the service of the state. An inscription from Cilicia dating to 458 or 473 referring to an Illus who was μεγαλοπρεπέστατος κόμες and πατήρ πόλεως Ελαεουσσα-Σεβαστη\textsuperscript{19} may provide some clue in this regard. The title μεγαλοπρεπέστατος κόμες was typical of late 5\textsuperscript{th}-century provincial administrators. With a high degree of probability, the Illus from the inscription can be identified with the later \textit{magister officiorum}. The name \textit{Illus} is rare, and the inscription comes from a period when he may have already been an adult (this is important when dating the inscription to 458) and from an area that was associated with Isauria. It is worth noting that until 474, Illus’ career developed without Zeno’s support\textsuperscript{20}. It is possible that he owed its first stage to his father’s influence, although there is no source evidence for this. His father’s influence could also explain that Lilingis, too, began to perform some function, probably in the army. It cannot be ruled out that his father looked out for his illegitimate offspring.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item On this subject, see C. Begass, \textit{Die Senatsaristokratie}..., p. 81.
\item Ioannes Antiochenus, \textit{Fragmenta}, 233.
\item M.J. Leszka, \textit{Illus Isauryczyc wobec uzurpacji Bazylikosa}, AUL.FH 80, 2005, p. 47.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
In 483 or 484, Emperor Zeno stripped Illus of his position of *magister militum per Orientem*, after the latter refused to surrender his brother Longinus to the emperor. The emperor then expelled people from Constantinople who were associated with Illus, and gave their property to the Isaurian cities. Trocundes, Illus’ brother, may have been among those removed from the City. Illus decided to openly rebel against the emperor and led to the proclamation of Leontius as emperor on July 19, 484, who shortly before his ascension, had held the position of *magister militum per Thracias*. Zeno opted for an armed showdown with his opponent even before the latter led to the imperial proclamation of Leontius. Then, at the very beginning of the action, Emperor Zeno made Lilingis one of the leaders (besides Conon, son of Fuscianus), commanding the troops sent to suppress Illus’ revolt. It is not clear what position he was then given. John of Antioch, indeed the only source that mentions it, describes him as a strategist, which may have meant *magister militum*. This is how S. Markov understands it. Other authors consider it doubtful and indicate that at that time, he held the office of *comes et praeses Isauriae / comes Isauriae*. It is known that in the hands of this dignitary there was both civil and military power. Thus, Lilingis, while holding this office, was able to conduct military operations against Illus. It should be noted that the last *comes*

---

26 Ioannes Antiochenus, *Fragmenta*, p. 435. It cannot be excluded that the emperor entrusted him with the post of *magister militum in vacans*. Certainly, it was not the position of *magister militum per Orientem*, because John the Scythian held it at the time. It is not out of the question that John of Antioch used the term στρατηγὸς to describe a leader without knowing what position he actually held. It should be noted, however, that for the period of the 4th and 5th centuries, John uses the term to refer to persons who were *magister militum* (e.g. Jordanes – 231; Cottonenes –237.6; Patricius – 242.3; Cyril – 242.18), sometimes giving the full name of the position (233: Οτι ἐπὶ Ζήνωνος τοῦ βασιλέως Θεοδώριος ὁ Τριαρίου τὴν στρατηγίδα τῶν Θρᾳκίων).
of Isauria recorded in the sources before 484 was Aetius (in 479)\textsuperscript{29}. The question of whether Lilingis commanded an army by virtue of his position as \textit{comes} or \textit{magister militum} cannot be resolved unequivocally given the existing state of the sources. The only thing that remains beyond discussion is the fact that in 484, he must have had prerogatives that entitled him to command an army. It is worth noting that Zeno, entrusting him with the task of fighting Illus, must have had confidence in him. This may mean that, despite family ties, Lilingis was on precarious terms with his half-brother. The emperor must have been aware of the nature of Illus’ relationship with Lilingis and may have known him personally from before his great career began\textsuperscript{30}.

We know nothing about Lilingis’ participation in the battles against the rebels. The main role in suppressing the usurpation was played, as we know, by John the Scythian\textsuperscript{31}. One thing that seems certain about Lilingis’ role in suppressing the usurpation is that he did not fail the emperor’s trust since, at the end of the latter’s reign, he held the office of administrator of Isauria\textsuperscript{32}.

Lilingis next appears in the sources only in connection with the Isaurian uprising\textsuperscript{33}. Emperor Anastasius, the successor to Emperor Zeno, continued to take action against the Isaurians in 491, after he had consolidated himself on the throne, which ultimately led to the outbreak of discontent and an open armed revolt. Lilingis joined the uprising, if he was not one of its initiators. He was among its leaders, along with Longinus of Cardala, Conon – son of Fuscian, two Athenodors, and Longinus of Selinus\textsuperscript{34}. At the very beginning of their anti-imperial activities, the rebelling Isaurians managed to assemble a sizable force, consisting of both Isaurians and Romans. John of Antioch estimates them at 100,000, while Theophanes at 150,000. Both numbers are certainly greatly exaggerated\textsuperscript{35}. Rebel troops

\textsuperscript{29} PLRE II, p. 20 (s.v. Aetius 4). It should be noted that there is no complete certainty that he held this office.
\textsuperscript{32} Theophanes, AM 5985, p. 138. Theophanes mentions Lilingis as administrator of Isauria at the will of Emperor Zeno when describing the outbreak of the Isaurian uprising at the beginning of Anastasius’ reign. It does not make it possible to determine from when he held this office, nor whether he held it at the outbreak of the uprising or was deprived of it shortly before that event.
\textsuperscript{34} Ioannes Antiochenus, Fragmenta, 239.5; Theophanes, AM 5985, p. 137–138.
\textsuperscript{35} Ioannes Antiochenus, Fragmenta, 239.5; Theophanes, AM 5985, p. 137 (this author states that the uprising forces were comprised of barbarians); cf. Marcellinus Comes, Chronicon, a. 492;
plundered a number of cities in the provinces bordering Isauria. In response to these events, Anastasius sent troops to Isauria at the head of which he put John the Scythian and John Kyrtos\(^36\). The first clash between the rebels and the imperial forces occurred in Phrygia at Kotyaeum (today Kütahya)\(^37\). Despite having greater numbers\(^38\), the Isaurians were defeated, suffering significant losses. Among the casualties was Lilingis\(^39\). The Isaurian troops retreated to their own territory after losing the battle, without resistance from the imperial troops, which may mean that despite the setback, the Isaurian forces were still considerable and that they retained combat value. Theophanes writes that the imperial forces could have finished off the defeated enemy had they not been busy collecting spoils\(^40\). John of Antioch, unlike Theophanes, mentions that the imperial army pursued the Isaurians as far as Taurus, but as we can presume, without major success, because he only notes the fact that at the foot of Taurus, they stopped for the winter layover.

Broadly speaking, that was how this stage of the insurrection (in which Lilingis took part) transpired. As I have mentioned earlier, he became one of its leaders and, what is important, co-commander of the insurgents’ forces\(^41\). This shows that he was respected among his peers and had military experience, which is consistent with what we know about him in the context of the events of 484. This is unequivocally pointed out by Jordanes, who states that Lilingis distinguished himself among the Isaurians both in war and in council\(^42\).


\(^{37}\) On Kotyaeum, see K. Bielke, N. Mersich, Phrygien und Pisidien, Wien 1990 [= TIB, 7], p. 154.

\(^{38}\) According to John of Antioch, the imperial forces numbered about 2,000 soldiers. Among them were reportedly Huns, Goths, and Beses (Ioannes Antiochenus, Fragmenta, 239.5; Ioannes Malalas, Chronographia, XVI, 3). F.K. Haarer aptly points out (Anastasius I…, p. 24, note 69) that emphasizing such a great disproportion of forces is intended to highlight the uniqueness of the Roman victory. The question of dating the battle – E.W. Brooks, The Emperor Zenon and the Isaurians, EHR 8, 1893, p. 234; F. Haarer, Anastasius I…, p. 25, note 73.

\(^{39}\) Ioannes Antiochenus, Fragmenta, 239.5; Theophanes, AM 5985, p. 138.

\(^{40}\) Theophanes, AM 5985, p. 138.

\(^{41}\) Lilingis’ role as commander of the rebel troops is explicitly mentioned by Theophanes (Theophanes, AM 5895, p. 138), who mentions that he was assisted in this task by Athenodorus and Conon. Cf. Ioannes Antiochenus, Fragmenta, 239.5.

\(^{42}\) Jordanes, Romana, 355.
Lilingis participated as co-commander in the first rebel clash with the emperor’s forces at Kotyaeum. As mentioned earlier, the Isaurians, despite outnumbering the imperial forces, were defeated, suffering major losses. Lilingis met his death in the battle. It surely must have affected the morale of the Isaurians, especially since he was reportedly the first to die in it, which contributed to the victory of the Byzantine forces. Contrary to Jordanes’ opinion, the defeat at Kotyaeum—in fact, the only battle of his career that we know of in which he commanded—does not speak well of his leadership talents, but it is probably a testimony to his personal valor and accords well with the opinion about him found in The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor; the Byzantine chronicler describes him as a bold, daring man. On the other hand, Marcellinus Comes characterizes Lilingis as slow on foot but the keenest horseman in war. The slowness must have been the result of a disability. This is explicitly stated by John Malalas when he refers to him as χωλός (crippled, lame).

Our knowledge of Lilingis—an illegitimate child, a man who, despite his physical infirmities, seems to have played a significant role in the Isauria of the 480s and early 490s—is not considerable. It is possible that from 484, he held the position of the Isaurian comes and was so successful at it that he probably retained it until the end of Zeno’s reign and gained authority among his tribesmen, which resulted in his participation as one of the leaders in the Isaurian uprising.

Translated by Katarzyna Szuster-Tardi

Bibliography

Primary Sources

The Chronicle of Marcellinus, trans. et comm. B. Croke, Sydney 1995 [= Byzantina Australiensia, 7].

43 Ioannes Antiochenus, Fragmenta, 239.5; Ioannes Malalas, Chronographia, XVI, 3.
44 Ioannes Antiochenus, Fragmenta, 239.5; Theophanes, AM 5985, p. 138; Jordanes, Romana, 355; Marcellinus Comes, Chronicon, a. 492; Ioannes Malalas, Chronographia, XVI, 3.
45 Marcellinus Comes, Chronicon, a. 492; cf. Ioannes Malalas, Chronographia, XVI, 3.
46 Theophanes, AM 5985, p. 138: ἀνὴρ θρασύτατος. This character trait of Lilingis could have been paired with impulsiveness (βίαιος) attributed to him in the Book of Suda (Suidae lexicon, p. 471, B 279).
48 Ioannes Malalas, Chronographia, XVI, 3.


Ioannis Antiocheni Fragmenta quae Supersunt Omnia, rec. S. Mariev, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 2008 [= Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, 47].


Jordanes, Romana and Getica, trans. P. van Nuffelen, L. van Hoof, Liverpool 2020 [= Translated Texts for Historians, 75].


Theophanes, Chronographia, rec. C. de Boor, Lipsiae 1883.

Secondary Literature


Bielke K., Mersich N., Phrygien und Pisidien, Wien 1990 [= Tabula Imperii Byzantini, 7].


Feld K., Barbarische Bürger. Die Isaurier und das Römische Reich, Berlin 2005 [= Millennium-Studien, 8], https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110927405


Miroslaw J. Leszka
University of Lodz
Faculty of Philosophy and History
Institute of History
Department of Byzantine Studies
ul. Kamińskiego 27a
90-219 Łódź, Polska/Poland
miroslaw.leszka@uni.lodz.pl

© by the author, licensee University of Lodz – Lodz University Press, Lodz, Poland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)