

WAR WRITING IN MIDDLE BYZANTINE
HISTORIOGRAPHY.
SOURCES, INFLUENCES AND TRENDS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines literary and cultural influences upon descriptions of warfare in Byzantine historiography, focusing on events of the ninth to twelfth centuries. Its main aim is twofold: to account for the appearance in historiography of more 'heroic' accounts of battle from the late tenth century, and to identify the sources Middle Byzantine historians employed for military events, particularly since this material appears to have had a significant role in the aforementioned development. Study of Middle Byzantine historical works grants insight into general features of war writing. Moreover, it also reveals much about the working methods of historians and the written sources they employed for military episodes. These sources, now lost to us, are determined to have primarily been campaign reports and biographical compositions. Once an understanding of the nature of such texts is reached, one may demonstrate that they presented their military subject according to contemporary ideals of valour and generalship. It is suggested that the appearance of promotional literature of the military aristocracy in the tenth century was instrumental in the development of a more 'heroic' form of war writing, with Homeric-style descriptions of battle, cunning military stratagems, and courageous displays more evident in historiography from this time.

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INTRODUCTION

With the appearance of the *Histories* of Herodotus ‘all history was military history’.¹ Arnaldo Momigliano decreed that from this time ‘wars remained the centre of historiography’.² Charles Fornara speaks of Thucydides perfecting ‘the war monograph’ implicit in Herodotus,³ though Tim Rood determines that historians often ‘did not distinguish between war monographs and other forms of contemporary history writing’.⁴ Lucian of Samosata, the famed sophist of the second century A.D., considered true the old saying of Ionian philosopher Heraclitus, that “war is the father of all things”, since at one stroke it has begotten so many historians’.⁵ This sentiment is evident through Late Antiquity and persisted in much of the historiography of the Byzantine Empire. Indeed, the eleventh-century writer Michael Psellos conceded to his reader that he did not have time ‘to tell of the armies and camps, the skirmishes and battles, and all the other minor points in which the careful historian is accustomed to indulge’.⁶ Psellos is seen to apologize for the lack of military detail in his work, such was the established presence of war in Greek historiography in the classical mould.

This thesis explores the presentation of warfare in historiography of the tenth to early thirteenth centuries, the period generally classified as Middle Byzantine. The study is limited by practical considerations, and extending the scope would perhaps be more

¹ Kiesling (2003): 88-89.

² Momigliano (1960): 21-22.

³ Fornara (1983): 32. For discussion of war in Herodotus and Thucydides see Cobet (1986).

⁴ Rood (2007): esp. 151.

⁵ ἀληθές ἄρ’ ἦν ἐκεῖνο τό “Πόλεμος ἀπάντων πατήρ”, εἴ γε καὶ συγγραφέας τοσοῦτους ἀνέφυσεν ὑπὸ μιᾷ τῇ ὀρμῇ (Lucian: §2; trans. 5).

⁶ Τὰ μὲν οὖν ἐφεξῆς πάντα διεξιέναι, ἕκαστόν τε ἐξακριβοῦσθαι ἀφ’ οἷων ἀρχῶν εἰς οἷα τέλη κατήνησε, συντάξεις τε καταλέγειν καὶ στρατοπεδείας, ἀκροβολισμούς τε καὶ ἀμιμαχίας καὶ τᾶλλα ὅποσα εἰθίσται λέγειν τοῖς ἀκριβέσι τῶν συγγραφέων (Psellos, *Chronographia*: I, 152 [LXXIII]; trans. 191).

foolhardy than ambitious. A survey of historians writing after c.1220 is certainly warranted, but changes in warfare and culture call for a separate study. By contrast, the great historians of Late Antiquity have been subject to many studies probing their autoptic ability, source material, coverage of wars, battle descriptions and general value as military historians. This is particularly true of fourth-century Latin historian Ammianus Marcellinus, with Norman Austin and Gary Crump leading the field in this regard.⁷ In respect of military content, Procopius, the sixth-century historian of Justinian's reign, is well served by the recent studies of Philip Rance and Conor Campbell Whately.⁸ Theophylact Simocatta, a historian of the first half of the seventh century, is the subject of comprehensive works by Michael Whitby and Therese Olajos, with both addressing the issue of Theophylact's military sources.⁹

Theophylact is generally regarded as the last great classicizing historian of Late Antiquity. Thereafter, the traditional historical work dominated by military events all but disappears. While this may be a matter of source survival, it is more likely to be a result of the sustained period of Arab dominance following Heraclius' reign. The general decline in military interest resulted in changes in literary attitudes. Michael Whitby observed that 'patrons were not interested in commissioning embarrassing narratives of defeats', while audiences had little interest in reading such texts.¹⁰ The next known major historical works appear in the early ninth century - the

Chronographia of Theophanes Confessor and the *Breviarium* of the Patriarch

⁷ Naudé (1959); Chalmers (1960); Alan Cameron (1964); Rowell (1964); N. J. Austin (1972a); idem (1972b); idem (1979); Crump (1975); Blockley (1977); idem (1988); Sabbah (1978): 572-588; Matthews (1989): 279-303; Barnes (1998); Den Hengst (1999); Trombley (1999); Kagan (2006); G. Kelly (2008).

⁸ Hannestad (1960); Kaegi (1990); Rance (2005); Whately (2009).

⁹ Olajos (1988); Michael Whitby (1988).

¹⁰ Michael Whitby (1992): 72-73; Averil Cameron (1992): 84-85; Kazhdan (1995a): 5; Shepard (2003a): 102-103.

Nikephoros. Theophanes employed many sources for the conflicts of the previous two centuries, material which James Howard-Johnston, Veselin Beševliev, Paul Speck, Ilse Rochow and Cyril Mango and Roger Scott have made convincing efforts to identify.¹¹

The principal reason for beginning with historical works of the mid-tenth century is the significant change in focus and style which may be observed from this time. This development is best seen in the transition from historical works of the reign of the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos and those which followed thereafter. The *Vita Basilii*, a life of the Emperor Basil I written c.950, is very different to the *History* of Leo the Deacon, composed in the last decade of the tenth century. Alexander Kazhdan, for example, observed ‘a clear contrast’ in the portrayals of the protagonists of both works.¹² While greater emphasis is placed on Basil’s exhibition of traditional, pacifistic imperial virtues, Leo dwells on the military prowess of his subjects, the emperors Nikephoros II Phokas and John I Tzimiskes. Furthermore, while the *Vita Basilii* presents a reasonably balanced appraisal of Basil’s life and deeds, Leo’s *History* is dominated by military events, marking a return to the war-dominated historiography of the sixth and early seventh century. Of particular concern to this study is the manner in which descriptions of military encounters change in historiography. Accounts of battles and sieges in the *Vita Basilii* do not typically form major narrative episodes. The reader is afforded little tactical insight and particular feats tend to be ignored in favour of a brief overview of the engagement. Leo the Deacon, by contrast, provides detailed narratives of sieges during the reign of

¹¹ Beševliev (1971a); Proudfoot (1974); Speck (1975); idem (1978): esp. 389-397; idem (1981); idem (1988); Conrad (1990); Rochow (1991): esp. 44-51; Howard-Johnston (1994); idem (2010), *passim*; Mango (1978); Mango & Scott (2007): lii-xcv.

¹² Kazhdan & Constable (1982): 110-111; Kazhdan (2006): 139.

Nikephoros Phokas and of battles during that of John Tzimiskes, often describing individual heroics and evoking a better sense of carnage. The shift is arguably more pronounced in the *Synopsis Historion* of John Skylitzes, written in the late eleventh century, though chronicling the events of 811-1057. Once he reaches the reign of John Tzimiskes, Skylitzes' descriptions of battle suddenly echo those of Leo the Deacon, exhibiting a vivid style and detail hitherto unseen in the *Synopsis Historion*. While such complex and exciting accounts of battle remain infrequent in Skylitzes' chronicle even after this section, they consistently feature in the historical works of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. Many of these texts can be categorized as what Kazhdan termed 'chivalresque historiography',¹³ though we shall prefer the term 'heroic historiography', perhaps more apt given the obvious influence of Homer.¹⁴

Kazhdan attributes the increased military interest in Middle Byzantine historiography to the accession of soldier emperor Nikephoros II Phokas in 963, with the new ruler bringing the ideals of the military aristocracy into the milieu of the imperial court and the wider elite.¹⁵ This is true in respect of audience interests and the anticipated virtues of the protagonists, yet it does not take into account the influences and inspirations behind the transformed battle descriptions of the period, nor the sources these historians employed. Accounts of military actions in Middle Byzantine historiography, and the factors instrumental in their composition, constitute the central focus of this thesis.

¹³ Kazhdan (2006): 273-294.

¹⁴ The term 'heroic historiography' was employed in a very different context by Boedeker (2001), though in this argument also Homeric epic is a key influence.

¹⁵ See in general Kazhdan (1983a); idem (1984a).

It is only in the last decades of the twentieth century that Byzantine warfare has emerged as a specialist subject.¹⁶ John Haldon continues to be at the forefront of this movement. His research spans the elite regiments of the sixth to tenth centuries,¹⁷ military lands,¹⁸ equipment,¹⁹ attitudes towards war,²⁰ army administration²¹ and logistics.²² Perhaps Haldon's most notable contribution is his *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World 565-1204*, an exhaustive study of all aspects of Byzantine warfare during the specified period.²³ Warren Treadgold is the author of a number of studies on the administration, composition and organization of the Late Roman and Byzantine army, making extensive use of statistical data.²⁴ The varied studies of Walter Kaegi include offerings on military unrest and the Byzantine notion of strategy.²⁵ Edward Luttwak's *Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* is an ambitious examination of Byzantine strategy, tactics and diplomacy, though it is hampered by its derivative nature.²⁶ Certain studies are period specific. A number of articles on warfare of the Late Roman and Early Byzantine period may be found in the second volume of *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*.²⁷ In 1995 Eric McGeer published a study of the Byzantine expeditionary army of the tenth century, analyzing composition, tactics and campaign procedure.²⁸ Hans-Joachim

¹⁶ This brief paragraph is by no means exhaustive. For a more comprehensive overview of the history of scholarship on Byzantine warfare see the introductory section of Haldon (2007).

¹⁷ Haldon (1984).

¹⁸ Ibid (1989); idem (1993). Cf. Magdalino (1997).

¹⁹ Haldon (1975); idem (2002b).

²⁰ Idem (1992). For further discussion on this controversial subject see Kolia-Dermizake (1991); Laiou (1993); Oikonomides (1995); Kolbaba (1998); Dennis (2001a); Treadgold (2006); Stephenson (2007).

²¹ Haldon (2000).

²² Idem (1997a); idem (2006).

²³ Idem (1999).

²⁴ Treadgold (1980); idem (1992); idem (1995).

²⁵ Kaegi (1964a); idem (1981a); idem (1983).

²⁶ Luttwak (2009).

²⁷ Sabin, van Wees & Whitby (2007).

²⁸ McGeer (1995a).

Kühn's work on the Byzantine army of the tenth century is particularly useful for its discussion of command structures and elite regiments.²⁹ John Birkenmeier's study on the army during the Komnenian period (c.1081-1180) fills an important gap, though its worth to specialists has been questioned.³⁰ Mark Bartusis' study of the Late Byzantine army (c.1204-1453), for some time the only work of its type, has now been challenged by the recent monograph of Savvas Kyriakidis.³¹ There are also important studies on particular aspects of Byzantine warfare and its military institutions, including equipment,³² the navy,³³ fortifications,³⁴ and administration.³⁵

Very few studies discuss issues relating to the presentation of warfare in historiography. As John Haldon rightly endorses technology – specifically, computer modelling programs – as the best means of advancing our knowledge of military logistics,³⁶ it is important still to clarify our understanding of historical texts, which remain the basis of any research into Byzantine military operations. Perhaps most relevant to our study in this respect is the approach of examining Byzantine warfare in theory and practice; that is, comparing historical narratives of military operations with the guidance of military handbooks. As Alphonse Dain has demonstrated, the tradition of Byzantine military theory owed much to the great Classical and

²⁹ Kühn (1991).

³⁰ Birkenmeier (2002), subject to critical reviews from Bartusis (2004); Kaldellis (2005).

³¹ Bartusis (1992); Kyriakidis (2011).

³² Koliass (1988); Dawson (1998); idem (2002); idem (2007).

³³ Ahrweiler (1966); Pryor & Jeffreys (2006).

³⁴ Ahrweiler (1960a); Foss (1982); Foss & Winfield (1986).

³⁵ Ahrweiler (1960b); Hohlweg (1965); Oikonomides (1972); idem (1974); idem (1976); Cheynet (1991).

³⁶ The 'Medieval Warfare on the Grid: The Case of Manzikert' project at Birmingham and Princeton, co-ordinated by John Haldon and Vince Gaffney, seeks to use agent-based models, digital terrain mapping and simulation to investigate the logistics involved in the ill-fated march of the imperial army to Manzikert in 1071. The fruits of the project will soon be realized – for its progress see Haldon, Gaffney, Theodoropoulos et al (2011, last accessed 7/2012). For related discussion see the papers in Haldon (2005). The application of computer simulation and gaming principles in a bid to reconstruct ancient battles is advocated by Sabin (2007).

Hellenistic Greek commentators on warfare, Aeneas Tacticus, Aelian and Onasander being perhaps the most influential.³⁷ The first great treatise in the Byzantine tradition³⁸ – the *Strategikon* of the Emperor Maurice – has been employed by Philip Rance, Michael Whitby and Walter Kaegi to elucidate the precepts and tactics described by Procopius, Theophylact Simocatta and Theophanes respectively.³⁹ After a long period of apparent lack of interest,⁴⁰ we observe a fresh concern for military science in the tenth century, as a number of new manuals appear, including the *Taktika* of Leo the Wise, the *Praecepta Militaria* of Nikephoros II Phokas and the *Parangelmata Poliorketika* of Heron of Byzantium.⁴¹ George Dennis, Eric McGeer and Denis Sullivan have shown that the procedures and tactics outlined by many such works correspond closely with those described in contemporary historiography, with the militaristic *History* of Leo the Deacon serving as a particular point of reference.⁴² While such research confirms the relevance of the military manuals and the accuracy of descriptions in historical works, its worth in relation to our study becomes all the more significant when we consider an observation of Catherine Holmes. Holmes proposes that protagonists in historical literature may have been consciously shown to adhere to the precepts of theoretical handbooks, in order to impress upon readers the

³⁷ For discussion of Byzantine military manuals see Dain (1967); more recently, McGeer (2008); Sullivan (2010b).

³⁸ Three minor works of one Urbikios, drafted c.500 for the Emperor Anastasius, may be counted among ‘Byzantine’ military handbooks – see Förster (1877): esp. 467-471; Greatrex, Elton & Burgess (2005); Rance (2007b).

³⁹ Rance (1993); idem (2007a); Michael Whitby (1988), *passim*; Kaegi (2003): 115-118, 129-130, 161-168. For a more general study of Maurice’s tactical precepts which complements these works, see Mazzucchi (1981).

⁴⁰ This would depend on whether we place the compendium of military treatises attributed to Syrianos Magistros to the mid-sixth century or the mid-ninth, with scholars increasingly showing a preference for the latter. See Baldwin (1988); Zuckerman (1990); Lee & Shepard (1991); Cosentino (2000); Rance (2007a).

⁴¹ See below, 309-310 for discussion and references.

⁴² Dennis (1997a); McGeer (1991); idem (1995a); idem (1995b); Sullivan (1997); idem (2003b); idem (2010a).

extent of the individual's military ability and brilliance.⁴³ The notion that Byzantine military theory may have influenced the writing of contemporary military accounts, and that in turn audience expectations were formed by such handbooks, is an important aspect of chapters four and five of this thesis.

The approach to military accounts adopted in this thesis is one rarely applied to Byzantine historiography, primarily because it was only recently popularized in a study by Ted Lendon on Hellenistic and Roman literature. Lendon is of the opinion that 'ancient conventions of battle description are products as much of culture as of observation'.⁴⁴ It is suggested that battle descriptions were driven by 'conscious intellectual decisions' – that is to say, cues taken from literary models and sources – and 'unconscious cultural decisions' – 'deep-seated inherited convictions about what factors were decisive in battle, what details ought to be related, and how the narrative of events should be structured'.⁴⁵ The only comparable study of Middle Byzantine battle description was conducted by Stamatina McGrath. McGrath, comparing the accounts of a battle described by both Leo the Deacon and Skylitzes, suggests that any differences may be attributed to the contrasting values, level of understanding and editorial decisions of the two historians.⁴⁶ A more comprehensive application of the 'cultural approach' to a Byzantine text was carried out by Conor Campbell Whately in his thesis on the battle descriptions of Procopius.⁴⁷ Whately reminds us that Procopius' scenes of battle reflect the values and interests of his audience as well as those of the author. Our study necessitates different considerations and is not

⁴³ Holmes (2005): 278-289. This is an argument reminiscent of that of Adrian Goldsworthy (1998) in relation to the depiction of Julius Caesar in his *Commentarii*. For the literary cliché of the Roman general, see Rosenstein (1990): 114-152.

⁴⁴ Lendon (1999): 273-274.

⁴⁵ Ibid: 275.

⁴⁶ McGrath (1995).

⁴⁷ Whately (2009).

intended to be as meticulous in its dissection of battle accounts, favouring instead a comparative study of historiography to acquire a general sense of trends and developments in war writing in the Middle period.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, my approach is fundamentally similar and concedes a debt to Whately's excellent chapter on the theory of describing battle in Antiquity.⁴⁹ Whately likewise stresses the importance of military theory in shaping battle descriptions, though for now I wish to consider a particular perceived influence on Byzantine accounts of battle: the Hellenistic rhetorical textbooks known as the *progymnasmata*.

Rhetoric in Byzantium is the subject of a seminal study by George Kustas and a more recent collective volume of papers edited by Elizabeth Jeffreys.⁵⁰ In addition to these, Herbert Hunger devotes considerable attention to rhetoric in his discussion of Byzantine literature.⁵¹ While little is known about the education of most authors discussed in this thesis, the many that pursued a higher education would have been taught rhetoric.⁵² A key part of the rhetorical curriculum was the *progymnasmata*, preliminary exercises in rhetoric which set the student on the path to composing a literary work.⁵³ The *progymnasmata* credited to fourth-century sophist Libanius of Antioch offer a collection of exercises in prose composition for the benefit of students.⁵⁴ Equally influential were the four Hellenistic treatises on *progymnasmata*

⁴⁸ For the merits of comparative study of Byzantine literature, see most recently Magdalino (2002): esp. 175.

⁴⁹ Whately (2009): 57-124.

⁵⁰ Kustas (1973); E. Jeffreys (2003b).

⁵¹ Hunger (1978): I, 65-196.

⁵² For useful discussion of the education and reading of the Middle Byzantine literati, see Browning (1962a); N. G. Wilson (1983): 136-208; Markopoulos (2008).

⁵³ Gibson (2004). See Schissel (1934); Hunger (1978): I, 92-120; Schouler (1995) for Late Antique and Byzantine collections of *progymnasmata*, as well as epitomes, commentaries and scholia. For recent affirmation that the Hellenistic treatises on *progymnasmata*, along with the handbook of Menander Rhetor, were the most influential works of rhetorical theory in Byzantium however, see E. Jeffreys (2008): 828-829.

⁵⁴ See Kennedy (1983): 150-163.

attributed to the sophists Aelius Theon, Hermogenes, Aphthonius, and Nicolaus.⁵⁵ Of particular relevance are sections on *ekphrasis*, a mode of vivid description with the figurative intent of bringing the subject before the eyes of the reader or listener.⁵⁶ The guidance of the *progymnasmata* is discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, though it should be noted that they recognized *ekphrasis* had a place in historiography, and that war, battle and equipment provided suitable candidates in this regard.⁵⁷ The sophists encourage a number of literary models for budding writers to follow, with Homer and Thucydides chief among these paradigms.

Homer was basic reading for any educated Byzantine, and Agne Vasilikopoulou-Ioannidou and Robert Browning have demonstrated the great appreciation for ‘the Poet’ in Byzantium.⁵⁸ This fondness is especially evident in the Middle period, where the heroic climate was conducive to an epic-Homeric revival.⁵⁹ One observes the first signs of this in the second half of the tenth century,⁶⁰ though renewed interest in Homer is most apparent under the Komnenian dynasty in the twelfth century.

Relevant works include John Tzetzes’ *Homeric Allegories*, an introduction to the

⁵⁵ Clark (1957): 177-212; Kennedy (1983: 52-73); Webb (2001); Heath (2002-2003) provide an overview of known rhetorical treatises from the late Hellenistic period. In the view of George Kustas (1973: 22 n.1), ‘the influence of the *progymnasmata* is hard to overestimate. Practically all the genres of Byzantine literature are affected by them: homilies, letters, histories, and so on’. For the value and influence of the *progymnasmata* in Byzantium, Aphthonius in particular, see *ibid*: esp. 5-26; Hunger (1978): I, 74-132, 170-178; Kennedy (1983); Conley (1986); Hock & O’Neil (1986): esp. 212-216; Morgan (1998): 198-226; Russell (1998); Browning (2000): esp. 860-681; E. Jeffreys (2008); Schiffer (2010).

⁵⁶ For *ekphrasis* see most recently Webb (2009).

⁵⁷ See below, 213-218.

⁵⁸ Vasilikopoulou-Ioannidou (1971-1972); Browning (1975); *idem* (1992); Pontani (2005): 159-182.

⁵⁹ See Kaldellis (2007): 225-316; Bazzani (2007): esp. 222-225.

⁶⁰ Theodosios the Deacon’s *Capture of Crete*, a panegyric written to commemorate the capture of the island by Nikephoros Phokas in 961, and the *History* of Leo the Deacon frequently reference Homer and are clearly inspired by the *Iliad* with regard to their larger-than-life heroic warriors and descriptions of epic battles. Further discussion and references may be found in chapters one and five of this thesis.

Iliad;⁶¹ the first extant Byzantine scholia on the *Iliad* by one Isaac Komnenos;⁶² a more comprehensive commentary on the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* by Eustathios of Thessaloniki;⁶³ and Constantine Manasses' paraphrase of the Trojan War.⁶⁴ Theodore Prodromos, court poet to the Emperor John II Komnenos, experimented with the hexameter verse of Homeric epic in several compositions hailing the martial prowess of his imperial subject.⁶⁵ Homeric references and allusions also abound in historiography of the period, not least the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene – a 'prose *Iliad*' for Alexios according to one scholar⁶⁶ -, the *Hyle Historias* of Nikephoros Bryennios, and the *Chronike Diegesis* of Niketas Choniates.⁶⁷ Indeed, Marina Bazzani has spoken of 'the limit between history and epic [becoming] blurred, and historical narrations sometime[s] resembling] a sort of fabulous epic account'.⁶⁸ Anthony Kaldellis linked the reignited interest in Homer to the military aristocracy's need for heroic models.⁶⁹ He affirms that Homer 'was in the air, fuelling a shift in values among rulers and writers'.⁷⁰ It is the precise nature of this shift, which can be rooted to the mid-tenth century, which we must now consider.

⁶¹ See Morgan (1983); Budelmann (2002).

⁶² Pontani (2008).

⁶³ See most recently Høgel (2009). For general discussion of the Byzantine commentaries on Homer, see Hunger (1978): I, 34-35; II, 58-67; Browning (1992): 140-144; Budelmann (2002); Kaldellis (2009a): 29-36.

⁶⁴ Constantine Manasses, *Chronike Synopsis*: vv.1108-1470. See also Nilsson (2004): 18-34.

⁶⁵ Theodore Prodromos: III, VI, VIII.

⁶⁶ Kaldellis (2009a): 21-22.

⁶⁷ For Anna, see Katicić (1957); Dyck (1986). For Bryennios, see Carile (1968); idem (1969). For Choniates, see Maisano (2000).

⁶⁸ Bazzani (2007): 223.

⁶⁹ This accords with the musings of Felix Budelmann, who proposed that the Byzantines were more engaged with ancient texts than we might suppose. 'They knew that Homer had died a long time ago. But much more than we today, they felt that the gap could sometimes be bridged, and felt that the ancient material was still alive' (Budelmann 2002: 164).

⁷⁰ Kaldellis (2009a): 21-22.

As Ted Lendon has demonstrated, Homer was a significant influence on Greco-Roman military ideas and historiography.⁷¹ For soldiers throughout the ages, Homer presented models of courage and generalship styles.⁷² Moreover, Homer also offered models for how a historian might present commanders and how he might describe battle. As has been shown by scholars such as Joachim Latacz, Hans van Wees and Oliver Hellmann, Homer frequently ‘zooms-in’ during his battle scenes, electing to follow the struggles of prominent individuals rather than describe the general scope of battle.⁷³ Homeric battle is also replete with gore and violence, descriptions which, if not entirely realistic, provide stylistic flourish and, more significantly, underline the heroic ethos on display.⁷⁴ This mode of battle description had been imitated by Procopius in the *Gothic* section of his *Wars*,⁷⁵ and we see it frequently in Middle Byzantine historiography from the time of Leo the Deacon. The heroic aspirations of the aristocracy were thus complemented by the epic inclinations of historians.

The key exemplar of battle *ekphrasis* cited by the *progymnasmata* is Thucydides, particularly his accounts of the siege of Plataea and the naval battle at the Great Harbour of Syracuse.⁷⁶ This recommendation raises the complex issue of *mimesis* in Byzantine literature; in our case, classicizing historians seeking to emulate the style of past authors or perhaps even lifting descriptive phrases and whole passages near-

⁷¹ Lendon (2005). Aelian (1.1) recognized Homer among the first writers on tactics, an observation which may have inspired Eustathios of Thessaloniki to comment similarly (*Commentaries on the Iliad*: II, 588.15-20; III, 449.2-5).

⁷² See Edwards (1985). This matter is discussed in chapters four and five of this thesis.

⁷³ For this tendency of Homer, and Homeric battle description in general, see Kirk (1968): esp. 111-112; Latacz (1977): esp. 68-95; van Wees (1986): esp. 286; idem (1988): 3-7; idem (1994); idem (1995): esp. 166-167; Hellmann (2000): esp. 90-169; Albracht (2006): esp. 54-55.

⁷⁴ Salazar (2000); Neal (2006a).

⁷⁵ Whately (2009): 248-308.

⁷⁶ Aelius Theon: 68; trans. 11. Thucydides: 3.21 (Siege of Plataea); 7.40-44, 7.70-71 (Battle at the Great Harbour of Syracuse).

verbatim.⁷⁷ The tendency of Byzantine historians to use archaizing ethnic labels for foreign peoples (Turks are often called Persians, western Europeans Kelts, etc.)⁷⁸ becomes problematic when historians write of the tactics and general customs of foreign nations conforming with traditional stereotypes, and do not show particular awareness of the current military practices of these peoples.⁷⁹ We must also be wary of anachronistic, non-technical military terminology.⁸⁰ For now, however, I wish to discuss a more significant concern: that some battle descriptions in Middle Byzantine historiography may be modelled on, or perhaps even copied from, writers of Antiquity. Is Cyril Mango correct to question the integrity of historical texts on the basis of such classical affectation?⁸¹

The great historians of Antiquity served as a natural point of reference for Byzantine historians. Much is lost of the *Constantinian Excerpta*, a tenth-century compilation of extracts from historians of Antiquity including Thucydides, Herodotus, Xenophon, Polybius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Diodorus Siculus, Cassius Dio, Procopius and Agathias. The compendium was divided into fifty-three sections, with roughly half of the titles known from surviving material.⁸² Headings of relevance include ‘Turning defeat into victory’ (Περὶ ἀνακλήσεως ἥττης); ‘Victory’ (Περὶ νίκης); ‘Defeat’ (Περὶ ἥττης); ‘Commanding armies’ (Περὶ στρατηγημάτων); and ‘Battle’ (Περὶ συμβολῆς πολέμων). While it is probable that the work served a practical function, Bernard Flusin believes that the passages filed under these sections were intended to provide

⁷⁷ The classic article is Hunger (1969-1970); also idem (1981). Diether Reinsch (2010) provides a good overview of the scholarly debate surrounding *mimesis* (and/or *imitatio*) in Byzantine literature. The terminology is discussed by Rhoby & Schiffer (2010).

⁷⁸ See most recently Durak (2009).

⁷⁹ See, for example, Bachrach (1970).

⁸⁰ For discussion of the problem of uncertain designations for troop types in general medieval military studies, see Morillo (2001).

⁸¹ Mango (1975).

⁸² Büttner-Wobst (1906).

models for current and future historians to imitate.⁸³ It would be futile to comment on the ultimate success of the *Excerpta*; the content of the sections on war is unknown, and an attempt by Alphonse Dain to identify the fragments which made up ‘Περὶ στρατηγημάτων’ is questionable.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the very existence of a convenient handbook providing historical models for writing about war reveals much about Byzantine attitudes towards literary *mimesis*. Since the scholarly debate surrounding *mimesis* in historical accounts of warfare is particularly insightful in respect of historiography of Late Antiquity, we shall begin discussion there.

Steven Runciman observed the ‘special admiration’ the Byzantine historian had for Thucydides.⁸⁵ In the late nineteenth century, Hermann Braun noticed Thucydidean imitation in Procopius’ narrative of the plague which ravaged Constantinople in 542,⁸⁶ and also in Procopius’ accounts of the sieges of Amida, Edessa and Rome, which all bear the influence of Thucydides’ narrative of the siege of Plataea.⁸⁷ Both Braun and Max Brückner suggested that Procopius’ imitation of Thucydides resulted in distortion and fabrication, a view which continues to influence certain scholars, evident in Brent Shaw’s remark that ‘most of Procopius’ accounts of sieges and set battles [are] dependent on rhetorical devices and images adopted from earlier historians’.⁸⁸ Procopius is not considered to have been alone in this respect.⁸⁹ Gyula

⁸³ Flusin (2002): 553-558. Cf. Lemerle (1986): 323-332, esp. 331-332.

⁸⁴ Dain (1967): 364.

⁸⁵ Runciman (1995): 59. Diether Reinsch, who charts the general interest in Thucydides at Byzantium, concurs: ‘(Thucydides) was the linguistic and conceptual model for Byzantine historical writers from the beginning to the end of the Byzantine Empire, albeit with varying intensity’ (Reinsch 2006: 756).

⁸⁶ Such imitation also accorded with the recommendations for models of *ekphrasis* by Aelius Theon (68).

⁸⁷ Braun (1886): 191-195, 207-211. See Averil Cameron (1964) for the particular significance of Thucydides’ accounts of the plague and the siege of Plataea in Byzantine historiography.

⁸⁸ Brückner (1896): 7-16; Shaw (1999): 133.

⁸⁹ Hermann Peter (1897: 296, 307) classified battle descriptions among the adornments of classicizing historiography, where truth is sacrificed for adherence to rhetorical conventions.

Moravcsik, however, has argued that Procopius and his contemporaries' use of classical models need not impair their credibility as historians, showing that military accounts reminiscent of episodes related by Thucydides and Herodotus are consistent with contemporary practice.⁹⁰ Katherine Adshead demonstrates that Procopius' account of the siege of Rome, while similar to Thucydides' record of the siege of Syracuse, employs more sophisticated and contemporary terminology in an attempt to highlight Procopius' own craft and perhaps best his ancient counterpart in narration and content.⁹¹ This is symptomatic of Procopius' general approach. Averil Cameron considers the *Wars* to be 'self-consciously Thucydidean', though observes significant departures from this model.⁹² Roger Blockley and Barry Baldwin similarly insist that while the historians Dexippus and Priscus imitate the style of Thucydides' account of the siege of Plataea, borrowing constructions and even phrases, their records are nevertheless compatible with siege warfare of their own day.⁹³ Blockley's admonition is crucial: 'Verbal imitation by itself is no proof of historical unreliability'.⁹⁴ This is true of historiography of all periods.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Moravcsik (1966). Averil Cameron (1985: 40) also demonstrates this for Procopius' description of Berber camel tactics, a passage verbally reminiscent of Herodotus' *Histories*. See also Reinsch (2006): 769-772; Aerts (2003): 93-96, who show that Procopius' account of the Constantinople plague, while borrowing linguistically from Thucydides, remains independent and adapts the story to his own situation.

⁹¹ Adshead (1990): 95-104. In another article Adshead (1983) adopts a similar line with Agathias' use of Thucydides, suggesting he used Thucydides as a historical framework but worked independently within this.

⁹² Averil Cameron (1985): 37-46.

⁹³ Blockley (1972): esp. 22; Baldwin (1980): esp. 53-55. Also idem (1981b).

⁹⁴ Blockley (1972): 26.

⁹⁵ Fourteenth-century emperor John VI Kantakouzenos is seen to draw upon Thucydides for his description of pestilence, though these verbal loans do not diminish his credibility nor restrict the presence of his own observations. See Hunger (1976); T. Miller (1976). Even after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the historian Cristoboulos of Imbros employed Thucydides' narrative of the siege of Plataea in writing his account of the fall of the Byzantine capital, though he was careful to ensure all references to fortifications and technology were up-to-date and accurate. See Reinsch (2006): 764-767.

Be the model Thucydides or another writer, Paul Magdalino was correct to note that ‘the imitation of ancient models and the use of clichés were not proof that an author had nothing to say’.⁹⁶ C. B. Hase, editor of Leo the Deacon, observed that the tenth-century historian invariably imitated his sixth-century counterpart, Agathias.⁹⁷ Such *mimesis* does not necessarily render Leo’s testimony inaccurate, for he adapts Agathias’ account to reflect present circumstances.⁹⁸ While there is still need to assess *mimesis* in battle description on a case-by-case basis, we may conclude in principle that the incorporation of descriptive elements from texts of Antiquity is no obstacle to historical credibility.

Mimesis had long been a part of Greco-Roman historiographical tradition.⁹⁹ Indeed, imitation in literature was prominent in almost all cultures until the late eighteenth century.¹⁰⁰ Particularly relevant to our study is a recent debate about Anglo-Saxon warfare. Richard Abels has shown that the eleventh-century writer John of Worcester lifted his account of a particular engagement almost word-for-word from Roman historian Sallust.¹⁰¹ Abels and Stephen Morillo view such literary practice with suspicion, decreeing that any parts bearing an obviously classical influence should be discarded: ‘The legacy of Antiquity on the study of medieval military history is that of a distorting lens that imposes apparent continuity on changed reality’.¹⁰² For ‘distorting lens’, see Mango’s ‘distorting mirror’ in relation to Byzantium;¹⁰³ the concern over classicizing in historiography is remarkably similar. Bernard Bachrach

⁹⁶ Magdalino (1983): 328.

⁹⁷ Hase (1828): 397; Hunger (1978): I, 370.

⁹⁸ Sullivan (1997); idem (2000): esp. 18. See also McGeer (1995b).

⁹⁹ Russell (1999); Clark (1957): 144-176.

¹⁰⁰ See Nilsson (2010).

¹⁰¹ Abels (1991).

¹⁰² Abels and Morillo (2005): quote at 13.

¹⁰³ Mango (1975).

argues that it was not ‘misleading’ to contemporary audiences if a famous commander was presented ‘undertaking military operations within a framework that betrays the influence of Roman behaviour upon these leaders’.¹⁰⁴ The notion of the subject being presented through the model of a classical episode relates to an important argument of Anthony Kaldellis’ in regard to the classicizing tendencies of Procopius.

There are various reasons as to why a Byzantine historian borrowed from an ancient author – to embellish their text, show their learning, highlight the splendour of their own account.¹⁰⁵ Averil Cameron suggests that in doing this Procopius was not plagiarising, but rather taking advantage of continuity in certain aspects of warfare, in order to give his work ‘the required classical tinge’; it would have been impossible to describe something like a great siege in classicizing language without acknowledging similar instances in ancient historiography.¹⁰⁶ Kaldellis goes further than Cameron. He suggests that classical culture fuelled Procopius’ ‘objectives, outlook and modes of expression’. Procopius’ use of Thucydidean narrative strategies is shown to be particularly evident in his accounts of battle. As Jacqueline De Romilly has shown that the corresponding pre-battle speeches of opposing commanders in Thucydides indicate how each perceived the situation and essentially won or lost the encounter,¹⁰⁷ Kaldellis demonstrates that Procopius’ technique of describing battle using speakers as ‘literary vehicles of military analysis’ is ‘entirely Thucydidean’.¹⁰⁸ We should not discount the possibility of another historian employing Thucydides or another

¹⁰⁴ Bachrach (2007), esp. 175-184, quote at 191. For a similar view see Lavelle (2010): 269-273.

¹⁰⁵ See Bartusis (1995).

¹⁰⁶ Averil Cameron (1985): 39. This is particularly true of siege warfare, where certain motifs recur in Greek historiography – in addition to the accounts based on Thucydides’ siege of Plataea, discussed above, see Paul (1982).

¹⁰⁷ De Romilly (1956): esp. 138-150.

¹⁰⁸ Kaldellis (2004): esp. 24-37. Whately’s analysis of Procopius’ pre-battle speeches (2009: 137-142, 208-213) has lent further credence to this suggestion.

historian similarly. Leo the Deacon, for example, appears to craft an episode around a narrative model offered by Agathias.¹⁰⁹ We must also consider the many studies proposing that Procopius' use of Thucydides and also Herodotus enabled him to make subtle critiques of the Emperor Justinian through classical allusions.¹¹⁰ The utilization of such a literary technique is unlikely to have been limited to Procopius. Indeed, it is suggested here that Procopius himself was employed as part of John Kinnamos' efforts to rework his material and denigrate the commander John Doukas.¹¹¹ It should therefore be stressed that *mimesis* in Byzantine historiography, and in accounts of war in particular, could be expressed in more intricate ways than mere copying, and it is in our interest to recognize these classical frameworks when they appear in order to comprehend the greater significance underlying the historian's presentation.

As Byzantine historians took models and descriptive phrases from older historians, it is probable that they culled information from more recent texts. This is something Whately did not consider for Procopius, who wrote within close proximity to many of the events he describes, and was an observer of many battles. Yet most authors of the Middle period were writing about wars and campaigns which occurred many decades earlier and did not witness their participation. This gap has led to suggestions that a number of historians employed lost written sources closer to the events in question. For the earlier period Michael Whitby has hypothesized the existence of a military narrative employed by Theophylact Simocatta.¹¹² James Howard-Johnston makes the case that Theophanes' account of Heraclius' campaign of 627-628 against the

¹⁰⁹ See below, 57-60.

¹¹⁰ Bormann (1974); Aristotelous (1980); Cresci (1986); idem (1986-1987); Pazdernik (2000); idem (2006).

¹¹¹ See below, 129-138. For the influence of Procopius in the later period in general, see Kalli (2004): 3-4, 149-168.

¹¹² Michael Whitby (1988): 94-105.

Persians was drawn from an official narrative written by court poet George of Pisidia within months of the event.¹¹³ Skylitzes is the subject of much speculation on his lost written sources. Chief among these are a number of pieces of what we may collectively term ‘aristocratic promotional literature’ – that is, eulogistic biographical texts concerned with the military actions of famous soldiers. This area is led by Jonathan Shepard, who argues for Skylitzes’ use of lost sources dedicated to two generals of the mid-eleventh century, Katakalon Kekaumenos and George Maniakes.¹¹⁴ Following this, Catherine Holmes has proposed that Skylitzes also employed a source favourable to the tenth-century warlord, Bardas Skleros.¹¹⁵ Related to these texts from the aristocratic milieu are the cluster of apparent works chronicling the deeds of the Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas and his family, material thought to have been used by Skylitzes and Leo the Deacon in particular.¹¹⁶ The similarities between these two writers has also led Anthony Kaldellis to conclude that there existed a lost commemorative narrative of one of John Tzimiskes’ campaigns, a work which both historians consulted and rendered slightly differently.¹¹⁷ Another recent hypothesis which may relate to the sources employed by Leo the Deacon is that of Marc Lauxtermann, pertaining to Theodosios the Deacon’s apparent use of dispatches in order to write his poem commemorating Nikephoros II Phokas’ capture of Crete, an event covered by Leo.¹¹⁸ Progressing to historiography of the twelfth century, we encounter a number of similar arguments. In line with the scholarship of Shepard and Holmes, Leonora Neville suggests that historian Nikephoros Bryennios

¹¹³ Howard-Johnston (1994).

¹¹⁴ Shepard (1975-1976); idem (1977-1979); idem (1992b).

¹¹⁵ Holmes (2005).

¹¹⁶ Hirsch (1876): 50-51; Tinnefeld (1971): 108-110; Morris (1988); idem (1994); Ljubarskij (1993a); Markopoulos (1983): esp. 284; idem (1988); idem (2003a): 187-189; idem (2003b): 187-188, 195-196; idem (2004b): 89-90; idem (2004c): 4-6; idem (2009a): 703-705; Kazhdan (2006): 167, 273-274.

¹¹⁷ Kaldellis (forthcoming).

¹¹⁸ Lauxtermann (forthcoming).

employed a memoir of the influential general John Doukas.¹¹⁹ Bryennios is also credited as the shadow author of the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene in a highly controversial study by James Howard-Johnston. Therein, it is suggested that Bryennios compiled a large dossier of material prior to his death, which Anna edited into a history of her father's reign.¹²⁰ Finally, the convergence between historians John Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates, and also the encomiasts of the emperors John II and Manuel I Komnenos, has led Paul Magdalino and Michael Jeffreys to suggest that the historians and encomiasts made use of common sources, probably official bulletins issued following campaigns.¹²¹

The attempt to determine the sources of a historical narrative – Quellenforschung – has long been a contentious exercise.¹²² Jakov Ljubarskij was a particularly staunch critic of efforts to identify the material employed by Theophanes, a task which, in his eyes, effectively reduced Theophanes to little more than a compiler of material from a dossier. Ljubarskij refers to a form of 'extreme source criticism' which compelled Paul Speck and James Howard-Johnston to invent 'phantom sources' and even reject the authorship of certain writers. Ljubarskij is concerned that we risk neglecting the author's individuality by 'striving at all costs to disintegrate the works of Byzantine writers and deprive them of authors'.¹²³ Still, this view did not stop Ljubarskij from himself indulging in speculation about lost sources.¹²⁴ It is not about denying the individuality and contribution of the author, but acknowledging that historians

¹¹⁹ Neville (2008).

¹²⁰ Howard-Johnston (1996).

¹²¹ Magdalino (1993a): 434-488; M. Jeffreys (2011).

¹²² For salient comments see Morley (1999): 49-91. For Quellenforschung in relation to Byzantine texts see Moravcsik (1958): I, 185-200.

¹²³ Ljubarskij (1998): esp. 9-10.

¹²⁴ See Ljubarskij (1993a), where he makes the case for numerous sources employing biographical material pertaining to the Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas.

removed from the military events they describe would seek detailed information from authoritative sources – dispatches, official accounts, and memoir-like literature.

Plagiarism, to impose the modern concept, was rife in historiography. Albert Brian Bosworth demonstrates that historians of Antiquity followed their sources ‘with commendable fidelity’.¹²⁵ Roger Scott suggests that the Byzantines attached great significance to adhering to their original material; for chroniclers in particular, ‘plagiarism was a virtue’, and lent credence to their histories.¹²⁶ To this end any alteration had to be subtle,¹²⁷ but adaptation was a significant part of the process. Bosworth observed that ancient historians, while keeping to the facts of their sources, nevertheless gave the material ‘a new spin’, emphasizing aspects hitherto less prominent and imparting their own brand of rhetoric. We may extend such a principle to Byzantine historiography, wherein Ingela Nilsson similarly regards ‘plagiarism’ as a process whereby the writer reworks the historical material, ‘[leaving] room for a certain adaptation of sources, creation of personal bias, and (to varying degrees) personal interpretation of history’.¹²⁸

With this in mind, the first chapter of this thesis examines a number of historians of the Middle Byzantine period and the sources they may have employed for military events. Our notion of what sources these historians used is formed by their own statements as well as hypotheses formulated by modern scholars. The works and personalities discussed include the *Vita Basilii*, Leo the Deacon, Michael Attaleiates,

¹²⁵ Bosworth (2003).

¹²⁶ Scott (2006a): esp. 30; idem (2006b): 52-55.

¹²⁷ See Maisano (1987): 227-248.

¹²⁸ Nilsson (2006a): 51. Theophanes represents a good case in point, as Ljubarskij (1995) and Scott (2006b) have shown. This is true also of western chroniclers: ‘Using an eclectic approach and selecting their sources and themes through prisms of interest, ideology, or just prejudice, medieval chroniclers left for the critical modern historian the challenge to discern those agendas and selection codes’. (Menache 2006: 345).

Skylitzes, Anna Komnene, John Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates.¹²⁹ The insight and understanding provided by these studies enables us to determine the manner in which Middle Byzantine historians appear to have reworked their military material in order to fulfil the demands of their historical programme.

Having examined select techniques of historians, we may explore the types of written material which would have been available to them. Chapters two and three are concerned primarily with reports and bulletins sent to inform Constantinople of the progress of an expedition. The only specific study on bulletins is an outdated but still useful article by Veselin Beševliev, though relevant discussion is provided by Michael McCormick and James Howard-Johnston.¹³⁰ Private written correspondence and letters sent to foreign courts reporting military successes are also surveyed, since they align closely with official bulletins and may have provided another means for historians to learn of military events. To test the practicalities of such assertions, the final part of the chapter discusses documentation and archival practices in Byzantium, questioning if military reports would have been maintained and thus if they were accessible to historians. Chapter three demonstrates the probable use of bulletins by expanding on the argument that such documents served as common sources for the encomiasts and historians of the reigns of John II and Manuel I Komnenos. The evidence may not point to the direct use of dispatches by John Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates – or at least not the same as those used by contemporary encomiasts – but there is certainly much to suggest an official tradition preserving common details about campaigns, which can only have stemmed from bulletins.

¹²⁹ Discussion of the extensive scholarship on these authors appears in the appropriate place; here it is only necessary to cite the general studies of Byzantine literature and historiography undertaken by Karl Krumbacher (1897) and Herbert Hunger (1978), along with the more period-specific publications of Apostolos Karpozilos (2002) and Alexander Kazhdan (1999, 2006), which are of considerable value.

¹³⁰ Beševliev (1974); Howard-Johnston (1994); idem (2010), *passim*; Lee (2007): 38-40.

Chapter four explores aristocratic promotional literature, a lost body of memoir-like works which appear to have been a favourable source for historians describing wars and campaigns. The evidence and aforementioned arguments for these works is discussed. The literary tradition behind the appearance of biographical compositions and ‘the autobiographical impulse’ in Byzantium are investigated.¹³¹ Finally, potential features of aristocratic promotional literature are suggested, a delicate exercise based on the purported fragments preserved in extant historiography, wider literary developments, and cultural trends. It is proposed that such works presented the subject as a brave combatant as well as a skilled commander, principally through his use of innovative stratagems and his textbook application of military theory. This mode of presentation, coupled with an anecdotal style of storytelling which drew influence from popular Hellenistic collections of stratagems, are deemed defining features of aristocratic promotional literature and regarded as their possible contribution to Byzantine historiography.

The fifth and final chapter of this thesis addresses the appearance of ‘heroic historiography’ in the latter half of the tenth century. The features which defined this type of history – chivalrous conduct, appreciation of military virtues, single combat, heroic last stands, endurance, displays of personal heroics – are discussed. Such ideals were inspired by the reading of Homer; this was true also of the new style of describing battle, with an emphasis on individual heroics and gory bloodshed. We note the oral tales popular along the eastern borderlands since the early tenth century, the most famous example being the epic poem *Digenes Akrites*. It is suggested that these tales, which espoused aristocratic heroic values and almost certainly celebrated great generals, were key to the development of aristocratic promotional literature.

¹³¹ Angold (1998); idem (1999).

The appearance of such works alongside ‘heroic historiography’ in the mid-tenth century cannot be considered coincidental. It was the literary expression of aristocratic values which precipitated the aforementioned developments in descriptions of war and battle in Middle Byzantine historiography.

This thesis has two primary functions: to discuss and account for the appearance of ‘heroic’ battle narratives and values in historiography from the late tenth century; and, since they appear to have had a significant role in this development, to identify and partially reconstruct the sources Middle Byzantine historians may have employed for military events. Such an investigation also yields observations about eyewitnessing and the transmission of news about campaigns, areas hitherto overlooked in the field of Byzantine studies. The thesis is above all an examination of how the Byzantines wrote about warfare.¹³² To this end it is both necessary and important to reach beyond our designated period, not only for examples which contribute to our discussion, but also to demonstrate consistency and change in Byzantine war writing. Aside from Adolf Stender-Peterson’s thesis arguing that the medieval Scandinavian sagas derived a preference for tales of military trickery from Byzantine anecdotal tradition, there have been no real attempts to define a ‘Byzantine style’ of writing about warfare.¹³³ This thesis, along with the aforementioned study of Conor Campbell Whately on Procopius’ battle descriptions, begins the process of developing a cultural understanding of accounts of war in Byzantine literature.

¹³² It is for this reason that non-Greek sources of the period, while useful in corroborating or contradicting accounts at various points, are not discussed at length in this thesis.

¹³³ Stender-Peterson (1934): 77-90; also R. Cook (1986).

CHAPTER I. MIDDLE BYZANTINE HISTORIANS AND THEIR SOURCES
FOR MILITARY EVENTS

Transparency with regard to sources employed was not a trait frequently exhibited by Ancient Greek historians, and their Byzantine counterparts followed suit in this respect. A preference for autopsy and questioning of eyewitnesses is generally stated by authors, though this professed line of inquiry is often questionable. It is a literary device, one which enables the writer to position themselves in the tradition of Thucydides and assure their audience that only the most trustworthy forms of research were employed. Ancient writers generally did not disclose a reliance on written material, a reticence also evident in Byzantine historical writing but one unlikely to have extended to actual research methods; indeed, there are instances where we can identify the use of another extant historical work which the historian does not acknowledge. Consequently, scholars have postulated the use of other written sources now lost to us, arguments which will be discussed. Investigation of the working methods and content of select historical works of the Middle period permits us to not only consider what sources historians and chroniclers may have consulted, but how these authors shaped this material to their own style and purposes. Seven major works of the period are examined here – the *Vita Basilii*, the *History* of Leo the Deacon, the *History* of Michael Attaleiates, the *Synopsis Historion* of John Skylitzes, the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene, the *Epitome* of John Kinnamos, and the *Chronike Diegesis* of Niketas Choniates. Subsequent chapters complement this section with further study of the probable underlying sources and their use by historians.

I. Historical Method and Authorial Concerns

It is instructive to begin with a look at the research methods of ancient historians. As Middle Byzantine historians worked within this tradition, it is unsurprising to find echoes of Thucydides and Polybius in their approach. Yet the method statements of Polybius at least appear suspect, and as the centuries progress significant changes in research practices further undermine the logic on display. By the Middle Byzantine period, there can be little question that historians were merely paying ‘lip service’ to the methods advocated by ancient writers, raising real questions about how much trust we should place in their stated research methods.

Source Citation and Research Ideals in Classical and Hellenistic Historiography

While Herodotus attributes particular information to sources, there is some debate as to whether these citations are accurate or merely sources invented to elicit credibility.¹³⁴ Regardless, Herodotus is not especially precise, citing only two individual informants.¹³⁵ Thucydides is more vague still, a reticence which has been seen as a result of his desire to inspire confidence through narrative homogeneity, with source identification otherwise undermining the sense of objectivity.¹³⁶ Simon Goldhill considered that ‘the most persuasive rhetorical device in Thucydides’ armoury...is the direct expression of uncontested and enumerated fact’.¹³⁷ While

¹³⁴ For the suggestion that Herodotus’ citations are fictitious, see Fehling (1989). This controversial view has been rejected by Schepens (1980): 33-93; Hornblower (1987): 13-25; Gould (1989): 136-137, 151-152; Shrimpton (1997); Griffiths (2006): 136-140.

¹³⁵ Archias of Sparta (Herodotus: 3.55); Thersander of Orchomenus (ibid: 9.16).

¹³⁶ Parry (1972); Marincola (1997): 9; Gribble (1998): 45 n.34.

¹³⁷ Goldhill (2002): 43.

Latin historians were at times more inclined to name specific sources,¹³⁸ the Greek historiographical tradition generally favoured Thucydides' approach.

Discussion of sources in classical historiography was typically confined to *prooimia* or passages devoted to research methods and practices. In these statements we observe a particular preference for autopsy and investigation of oral accounts stemming from eyewitnesses.¹³⁹ Herodotus famously asserts that 'ears are less trustworthy than eyes', believing oral reports to be suitable only when autopsy was unavailable.¹⁴⁰ Thucydides discloses that he based his account on his own observations as well as what others had seen.¹⁴¹ Polybius continued to champion autopsy and personal inquiry, stressing that dependence on the former minimized the exaggeration and distortion endemic in the accounts of others.¹⁴² While written material was merely overlooked by Thucydides, its use is roundly condemned by Polybius. He considers the reading of books to be the weakest form of research, that requiring the least amount of industry and time.¹⁴³ Such vehement views led Charles Fornara to conclude that 'the investigation of oral tradition remained the essential method of the historian from Herodotus through Polybius to Ammianus Marcellinus'.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Marincola (1997): 78-79.

¹³⁹ See Schepens (1980); Hartog (2005).

¹⁴⁰ ὅτα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποισι ἐόντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν (Herodotus: 1.8.2). For Herodotus' historical method see Lateiner (1989), with his reliance on oral tradition discussed by Evans (1991): 89-146; Murray (2001).

¹⁴¹ τὰ δ' ἔργα τῶν πραγθέντων ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ παρατυχόντος πυνθανόμενος ἠξίωσα γράφειν, οὐδ' ὡς ἐμοὶ ἐδόκει, ἀλλ' οἷς τε αὐτὸς παρῆν καὶ παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσον δυνατόν ἀκριβεῖα περὶ ἐκάστου ἐπεξελθῶν. ἐπιπόνως δὲ ἠύρισκετο, διότι οἱ παρόντες τοῖς ἔργοις ἐκάστοις οὐ ταῦτ' ἀπερὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ἔλεγον, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐκατέρων τις εὐνοίας ἢ μνήμης ἔχοι (Thucydides: 1.22.2-3).

¹⁴² Polybius: XII.25e.1-25h.4. Also XX.12.8 for the preeminence of the eyewitness over hearsay.

¹⁴³ Ibid: XII.26d.3-27.6. See in general Pédech (1964); Sacks (1981) for discussion of Polybius' thoughts on historical method.

¹⁴⁴ Fornara (1983): 30. See also Lacroix (1951): 224-227.

Greek historians of Antiquity did utilize some documentary material, which may be defined as ‘something written, inscribed, engraved, etc., which provides information or serves as a record’.¹⁴⁵ Herodotus explicitly refers to a written source only once,¹⁴⁶ though various financial and administrative documents are alluded to, while official campaign records from the Persian archives, written itineraries and inscriptions also appear to have been consulted.¹⁴⁷ Thucydides does not mention written documents in his methodological statements, but nevertheless includes two treaties,¹⁴⁸ and may have employed other written material besides.¹⁴⁹ Even Polybius, the staunchest critic of the use of written accounts, concedes that a historian must compare their facts with written documents,¹⁵⁰ and reveals that he took his figures for the forces of Hannibal from a stele erected by the Carthaginian near Cape Licinium.¹⁵¹

Still, the balance is heavily tipped in favour of oral testimony. Arnaldo Momigliano traced the ‘paramouncy of oral evidence’ to Herodotus, though Simon Hornblower contests this view, observing that Herodotus never explicitly affords primacy to oral accounts.¹⁵² Thucydides displays a similar apathy in respect of documentary sources. It is generally considered that the two historians rarely quote documents or reference written material on account of a lack of relevant documentation and poor archival

¹⁴⁵ *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*: I, 719b, definition 3.

¹⁴⁶ Herodotus: 6.137.1.

¹⁴⁷ How & Wells (1964): 51-152; Lateiner (1989): 92-108; O’Toole (1991-1992); Rhodes (2007): 58.

¹⁴⁸ Thucydides: V.23-24, 47. See Gomme (1973): 606-607, 680-682; Hornblower (1987): 87-90; Shrimpton (1997): 101; Smarczyk (2006); Rhodes (2007): 58-60.

¹⁴⁹ For summary of the arguments and for bibliography, see Marincola (2001): 63-65.

¹⁵⁰ Polybius: XII.25e.1, XII.27.5, XII.28a.3-7.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*: III.33.5-18, 56.2-4. Elsewhere, Polybius claims to have examined inscribed treaties between Rome and Carthage (III.21.9-26.7) as well as an admiral’s dispatch preserved at the prytaneum at Rhodes (16.15).

¹⁵² Momigliano (1966a): 135; Hornblower (2002): 374.

practices.¹⁵³ In respect of campaigns, for example, P. J. Rhodes determines that documents might record statistics, but not particular events of an expedition.¹⁵⁴ It is telling that most documents apparently consulted by Herodotus were of Egyptian or Persian origin, cultures with a strong archival tradition.¹⁵⁵ Records and record-keeping were products of largely literate societies, not one like Classical Greece, chiefly reliant on oral tradition.¹⁵⁶

The situation changed during the Hellenistic period, as improvements in archives and libraries allowed for more convenient consultation of written material.¹⁵⁷ Rosalind Thomas notes an ‘increasing respect’ for written documents from the early fourth century B.C., with developments of interest to historians – foreign treaties, military actions – more frequently committed to writing and preserved.¹⁵⁸ Fornara draws special attention to the Romans’ ability to access written information, including military dispatches and senatorial decrees.¹⁵⁹ Latin and Greek historians, particularly those writing about events already described by their predecessors, gradually came to favour written material.¹⁶⁰ Livy claimed greater confidence in his account from Book VI onward as he could now draw upon written records, ‘the only trustworthy place for the preservation of the memory of events’.¹⁶¹ Similarly, Diodorus Siculus commends

¹⁵³ Momigliano (1966b): 213-216; Finley (1985): 15-16; Grant (1995): 34-36; Marincola (1997): esp. 99-107. For the difficulties of speaking of an organized archive of written documents in the city states of Ancient Greece, see R. Thomas (1992): 34-94.

¹⁵⁴ Rhodes (2007): 56-57. Cf. Hornblower (1987): 39-40, who argues for Thucydides’ potential use of written reports filed by commanders.

¹⁵⁵ Burn (1984): 597-598; Finley (1985): 33-35.

¹⁵⁶ On this point see R. Thomas (1992).

¹⁵⁷ Jacob (1996).

¹⁵⁸ R. Thomas (1992): 83-93; Rhodes (2007): 64.

¹⁵⁹ Fornara (1983): 56-57.

¹⁶⁰ Schepens (2007).

¹⁶¹ ...litterae...una custodia fidelis memoriae rerum gestarum... (Livy: VI.1.2-3).

Rome for its ability to supply him with written material.¹⁶² Seemingly at odds with this sentiment is Polybius, who disparaged fellow historian Timaeus for his use of written sources.¹⁶³ F. W. Walbank proposes that Polybius had little access to documents, and made sparing use of them.¹⁶⁴ Marie Laffranque, however, considers Polybius' protests to not be in keeping with the preference for written information in the Hellenistic period, contesting that Polybius drew more from written sources than he would have the reader believe.¹⁶⁵ As a writer of contemporary history, Polybius may have felt obligated to follow publicly the research methods outlined by his model, Thucydides.¹⁶⁶ Study of Byzantine historians shows that Polybius was certainly not the only historian to place himself in this literary tradition and profess a questionable obedience to the Thucydidean mode of inquiry.

The Use of Written Sources in Byzantine Historiography: Adherence and Change

The appearance of Eusebius' *Vita Constantinii* in the fourth century A.D. was instrumental in the development of a new branch of historical writing, known as ecclesiastical historiography.¹⁶⁷ The work is also notable for its unabashed inclusion of entire documents and excerpts from earlier sources.¹⁶⁸ The form of the *Vita Constantinii* is unique, though one suspects that the obvious influence here is

¹⁶² ἀφορμῇ δὲ πρὸς τὴν ἐπιβολὴν ταύτην ἐχρησάμεθα μάλιστα μὲν τῇ πρὸς τὴν πραγματείαν ἐπιθυμίᾳ, δι' ἣν πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις τὸ δοκοῦν ἄπορον εἶναι τυγχάνει συντελείας, ἔπειτα καὶ τῇ ἐν Ῥώμῃ χορηγίᾳ τῶν πρὸς τὴν ὑποκειμένην ὑπόθεσιν ἀνηκόντων. ἡ γὰρ ταύτης τῆς πόλεως ὑπεροχὴ, διατείνουσα τῇ δυνάμει πρὸς τὰ πέρατα τῆς οἰκουμένης, ἐτοιμοτάτας καὶ πλείστας ἡμῖν ἀφορμὰς παρέσχετο παρεπιδημήσασιν ἐν αὐτῇ πλείω χρόνον (Diodorus Siculus: I.4.2-5).

¹⁶³ The polemic in Polybius' criticism should be taken into account – see Sacks (1981): 32-99; Schepens (1990).

¹⁶⁴ Walbank (1972): 82-84.

¹⁶⁵ Laffranque (1968).

¹⁶⁶ For the possible belief of Thucydides that written material was largely irrelevant to contemporary history-writing, see Marincola (1997): 105-107; Rood (2006): 236-237.

¹⁶⁷ See Averil Cameron (1997); idem (2000). Cf. Barnes (1989).

¹⁶⁸ See Barnes (1981); Jones & Skeat (1954): 194-200.

biography, authors of which, striving to display impartiality, emphasized their use of documents to gain credibility.¹⁶⁹ In any case, subsequent church historians Sozomen and Socrates followed Eusebius in his preference for erudite research and source citation.¹⁷⁰ The Byzantine chronicle tradition, thought to have been influenced by ecclesiastical historiography, adopted the practice of including official documents verbatim and borrowing liberally from earlier compositions.¹⁷¹ Classicizing Byzantine historians continued to follow Thucydides in stressing that they relied on autopsy and eyewitness informants, with specific citations rare. Yet these programmatic statements seem formulaic, representative of an historical ideal rather than the practical reality.

James Howard-Johnston is critical of those who maintain that Byzantine historians did not make extensive use of official documents. Such a consensus, he decrees, ‘flies in the face of common sense’.¹⁷² The administration of the state yielded many documents of historical interest, stored, albeit imperfectly, in departmental archives.¹⁷³ The notion that these depositories were regularly consulted by historians is affirmed by a tendency to employ or even quote documents and written material in classicizing Byzantine historiography. From the earlier period, we may cite the apparent use of documentary sources and the inclusion of whole letters,¹⁷⁴ treaties¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ Cox (1983): 60-63.

¹⁷⁰ Momigliano (1966b): 216-217; Rohrbacher (2002): 154-155, 161.

¹⁷¹ Roger Scott (1992) suggests that John Malalas made frequent use of diplomatic dispatches and documents for his detailed discussions of foreign affairs during the 520s and early 530s. See also E. Jeffreys (1990): 200-216. For documents contained within the seventh-century *Chronicon Paschale*, see M. & M. Whitby (1989): xx-xxi; Howard-Johnston (2010): 37-58.

¹⁷² Howard-Johnston (1983): 242-243; idem (2001): 319 n.55.

¹⁷³ See below, 190-207 for discussion of archives and document storage.

¹⁷⁴ See, in general, Lee (1993): 37.

¹⁷⁵ Chrysos (1976).

and diplomatic reports¹⁷⁶ in the historical works of Priscus,¹⁷⁷ Malchus,¹⁷⁸ Menander Protector,¹⁷⁹ Procopius,¹⁸⁰ Agathias,¹⁸¹ and Theophylact Simocatta.¹⁸² Potential use of written material among historians of the Middle period will be discussed, though it will suffice here to note two examples. Niketas Choniates discloses that he will cover the reign of John II Komnenos briefly as he was not an eyewitness to events, and assures the reader that he related only what he had heard from contemporaries.¹⁸³ The indication is that Choniates relied on autopsy and oral accounts for the subsequent portions of his history, but this is not the case. He refers to the account of the fall of Thessaloniki in 1185 written by the Archbishop Eustathios, and it is evident that he based his own narrative of this episode on said composition.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, Niketas is shown to have drawn upon the writings of his brother Michael, and was probably also familiar with the *Epitome* of John Kinnamos.¹⁸⁵ This dependency on written accounts contradicts the preliminary statement of Niketas, which is little more than an attempt to present himself as an inquiry-based historian in the tradition of

¹⁷⁶ Diplomatic reports preserved in sixth-century historical works are discussed in Treadgold (2007): 256-258, 264-269.

¹⁷⁷ Blockley (1985): 68-69.

¹⁷⁸ Heather (1991): 236.

¹⁷⁹ Baldwin (1978a): 104, 109; Blockley (1985): 18-20; and, most recently, Angold & Whitby (2008): 839.

¹⁸⁰ It is thought that Procopius employed documents from the archives, even though he quotes none verbatim – see Averil Cameron (1985): 156; Greatrex (1998): 63-64; Treadgold (2007): 218.

¹⁸¹ Averil Cameron (1970: 39-40) notes that Agathias ‘tends to state documented information where he had it’.

¹⁸² Michael Whitby (1988: 95-97, 316-321) is not altogether convinced that Theophylact Simocatta made extensive use of documents for his historical work, suggesting that any which may feature were probably copied directly from his base sources. More recently, however, James Howard-Johnston (2010: 143-145), despite citing Whitby, is convinced that Theophylact reproduced documents verbatim, including some letters.

¹⁸³ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 4.76-80.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*: 296-308. For Choniates’ use of Eustathios’ work see most recently Simpson (2004): 209-212.

¹⁸⁵ For Niketas’ reliance on his brother Michael Choniates, see Rhoby (2002); Simpson (2004): 215-218. For Niketas’ reliance on Kinnamos, see Grecu (1949).

Thucydides.¹⁸⁶ Similar is Anna Komnene, whose *Alexiad* appears to include four official documents in their entirety, despite the historian not drawing explicit attention to such texts in her ‘method chapter’.¹⁸⁷ It is suggested that Anna was strongly influenced in her decision to include documents by ecclesiastical historians such as Eusebius.¹⁸⁸ Anna follows Thucydides in stressing a dependence on oral correspondence, though Roger Scott suggests that such indicators of continuity were merely superficial, with biographer-historians such as Plutarch more instrumental models for the *Alexiad*.¹⁸⁹ Byzantine historians were inspired by their ancient counterparts, but we have noted their capacity to stray from tradition. A discreet willingness to take advantage of written material was one such departure.

Conclusion

Momigliano considered the study of written records ‘an exceptional occupation for Greek and Roman historians’.¹⁹⁰ He refers only to those of Antiquity, but even this view is contentious given the proposals that certain writers from the time of the third century B.C. suppress a reliance on written sources. The shadow of Thucydides, and his preference for autopsy and oral testimony from eyewitnesses, loomed large, his impact profoundly felt among subsequent writers of contemporary history. Historians of the Middle Byzantine period generally present themselves as disciples of

¹⁸⁶ Maisano (1994a: 402-403) argues that Choniates relied upon written sources for the first eight books of his *Chronike Diegesis*. For a similar view see Simpson (2004): 203-204.

¹⁸⁷ Anna Komnene: III.4.4-8 (chrysobull for Anna Dalassene); III.10.3-8 (letter to Henry IV of Germany); VI.5.10 (chrysobull for the Venetians); XIII.12 (Treaty of Devol). For further discussion, see Howard-Johnston (1996): 278-279; Buckler (1929): 234-239.

¹⁸⁸ Lieberich (1900): esp. 20; Grigoriadis (1998): 38-39.

¹⁸⁹ Scott (1981). It should also be noted that Agathias and possibly Leo the Deacon employed Diodorus Siculus as a model, and thus may have felt more encouraged to consult written material (see Averil Cameron 1970: 57-58).

¹⁹⁰ Momigliano (1966a): 135.

Thucydides in respect of their research methods,¹⁹¹ similarly neglecting to cite sources for specific events, perhaps in order to inspire trustworthiness through a uniform narrative. The reality however was very different, with clear evidence for the use of written material by Anna Komnene and Niketas Choniates. Having read Polybius, Byzantine classicizing historians would have been mindful that a reliance on written sources was not considered 'proper', and thus the general secrecy surrounding the use of written material in historiography persisted. This reticence, combined with the lack of source citations, makes it difficult to identify the sources historians employed. Conversely, it also permits scholars to hypothesize the use of written material even by historians who do not list texts and documents among their sources. These methodological issues are paramount as we progress to discussion of the potential sources Middle Byzantine historians employed for military events.

¹⁹¹ See Grigoriadis (1998): 41; Aerts (2003): 93.

II. The *Vita Basilii*

The *Vita Basilii* is a eulogistic biography of the Emperor Basil I, commissioned and perhaps even written by his grandson, the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos, in the mid-tenth century.¹⁹² The work is often thought of as the fifth book of six in the *Theophanes Continuatus*, a volume of separate histories compiled c.963 and covering the period 813-960. Around the time the *Vita* was published, the *Basileiai* of the courtier Genesisios appeared. Genesisios' work chronicles the period 814-886, and, since it too was part of Constantine VII's historical programme, one observes many similarities in the accounts of the reign of Basil, presumably indicative of a common source.¹⁹³

The *Vita Basilii* has been the subject of much study relating to its genre and the presentation of both Basil and his ousted predecessor Michael III.¹⁹⁴ The *Vita* has also been mined by J. G. C. Anderson and Norman Tobias for its information on campaigns conducted by Basil and his subordinates, though Tobias gives little thought to the provenance of this military content, persisting only with the reconstruction of events.¹⁹⁵ Romily Jenkins considered that 'much painstaking, and comparatively speaking, honest work' went into the *Vita Basilii*'s accounts of Basil's campaigns,¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Ševčenko (1998). As the production and form of the *Vita* is discussed in chapter four (285-286) we will not concern ourselves with such matters here.

¹⁹³ First observed by Hirsch (1876): 229-230. For the relationship between the two texts see Kaldellis (1998): ix-xiv, where it is suggested that the similarities may have been a consequence of Genesisios' dependency on the *Vita Basilii*. This contradicts the views of Franjo Barišić (1958) and Athanasios Markopoulos (2009b), who persuasively argue that Genesisios wrote first. For detailed discussion on the ties between Book IV of the *Theophanes Continuatus* and the *Vita Basilii*, see Varona (2009).

¹⁹⁴ See, for example, Adontz (1933a; 1934); Jenkins (1948); Moravcsik (1961); Maguire (1983): 91-93; Dagron (1984): 74-97; Markopoulos (1994): 160-164; Kazhdan (2006): 137-144.

¹⁹⁵ Tobias' work (2007) fills an obvious void - Basil's foreign policy did not generally concern Albert Vogt (1908) in his influential monograph on Basil's reign. The articles by Anderson (1896; 1897) remain useful for reconstructing Basil's campaigns.

¹⁹⁶ Jenkins (1954): 29.

and on this point Arnold Toynbee was in general agreement.¹⁹⁷ Further investigation is necessary to test the validity of these claims.

Historical Method

Indication of the research undertaken by the author of the *Vita Basilii* is found in the narrative. The preface to the *Theophanes Continuatus* notes: ‘You have gathered together material partly from works written down here and there by some authors, and partly from oral tradition’.¹⁹⁸ To what extent this statement applies to the historical method of the *Vita Basilii* is unclear; scholarship is increasingly moving towards distinguishing the first four books of the *Theophanes Continuatus* from the *Vita Basilii*.¹⁹⁹ We may, in any case, postulate a similar research programme behind the latter text, which interrupts its coverage of Basil’s eastern campaigns to discuss narrative approach and source material:

Let no one wonder or cavil if we have reported such momentous events succinctly or in barest outline, as if in a rapid survey. On the one hand, our narrative has imitated, as it were, the speed of those actions and has been for that very reason so simple and cursory – for, indeed, those <strongholds> were then conquered, and those missions accomplished, in less time than it takes now to tell the tale. On the other hand, because the long years that have already elapsed here, so to speak, blurred the details of these deeds, silencing <what happened> in between, and

¹⁹⁷ Toynbee (1973): 594.

¹⁹⁸ τὰ μὲν ἐκ τῶν γεγραμμένων σποράδην τισί, τὰ δὲ ἐκ τῶν ἀκοῆ παραδεδομένων συνηθροικῶς (*Theophanes Continuatus*: 4.21-5.2. Greek text taken from the revised *prooimion* found in Ševčenko 1998: 82.37-39, trans. 85).

¹⁹⁹ Ševčenko (1998: 87-89) determined that the preface only applied to the four-book *Theophanes Continuatus*. The forthcoming CFHB critical editions, which offer separate publications of the *Vita Basilii* and *Theophanes Continuatus* (Books I-IV and VI), suggest that we should move away from the traditional six-book idea popularized by the CSHB edition of Immanuel Bekker.

because we lack the knowledge needed both to give an account of the various orders of battle, methods of attack, extension or contraction of phalanx formations, and to tell what opportune uses were made of military stratagems, it has been impossible for us to devote much time to single points, or, so to speak, lovingly linger over them, all of which are devices used to draw out the story. As for the things whose credibility does not rest on evidence, even if they perchance are passed on by word of mouth, we do not want to accept them merely on faith, to avoid the appearance of offering the emperor a fictitious narrative of deeds that never happened; all the more so, because in his lifetime he himself plainly frowned upon fawning flattery uttered for the sake of currying favour. We who have neither the ability nor the leisure to commit to writing what is a matter of universal agreement can hardly be expected to indulge in long disquisitions about what is controversial.²⁰⁰

The *Vita Basilii* generally summarizes campaigns, even those involving Basil. The above admission suggests there were two reasons for this. The first argues that the campaigns were as described - swift and often consisting of little more than the capture of fortresses. It seems that the author had no desire to write dramatic accounts of siege warfare, and his audience little interest in reading them. The siege

²⁰⁰ Εἰ δὲ συντόμως τε καὶ ψιλῶς τὰ οὕτω μεγάλα οἰοεὶ κατ' ἐπιδρομὴν ἀπαγγέλλομεν, μηδεὶς θαυμάζετω, ἀλλὰ μηδὲ ἐγκαλείτω. ἅμα γὰρ τὴν ταχύτητα τῶν πράξεων ἐκείνων μιμεῖσθαι ἢ διήγησις ἔοικεν, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὕτως ἐστὶν ἀπλῆ τε καὶ ἐπιτρέχουσα· θάπτον γὰρ ἠρέθη τότε ἐκεῖνα καὶ <τὰ> τῶν πράξεων ἔλαβε τὴν συντέλειαν, ἢ νῦν ἀπήγγελλται. ἄλλως τε καὶ ἐπεὶ ὁ χρόνος ἤδη ρεύσας διὰ μέσου πολλὸς τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα τῶν ἔργων διὰ τῆς μεταξὺ σιγῆς οἷον ἡμαύρωσεν, καὶ οὔτε παρατάξεων τρόπους οὔτε προσβολῶν ἐφόδους οὔτε φαλάγγων ἐκτάσεις καὶ συστολάς οὔτε στρατηγημάτων ἐπικαίρους χρήσεις εἰδέναι καὶ ἀπαγγέλλειν ἔχομεν, οὐκ ἔστι περὶ τὰ κατὰ μέρος ἐγχρονίζειν καὶ οἷον ἐμφιλοχωρεῖν, ἐξ ὧν πλατύνεται τὸ διήγημα. τὰ δὲ ἀμάρτυρον ἔχοντα τὴν πίστιν, εἰ καὶ λέγεται πολλάκις, ἀλλ' ἡμεῖς ἀβασανίστως προσδέχεσθαι οὐ βουλόμεθα διὰ τὸ μὴ δόξαι πεπλασμένην μὴ γεγονότων πραγμάτων διήγησιν ἀνατιθέναι τῷ βασιλεῖ, μάλιστα ὅτι οὐδ' ἐκεῖνος ἔτι ζῶν τὰ πρὸς χάριν θωπευτικῶς ὑποτρέχοντα ῥήματα ἐφαίνετο προσιέμενος. οἱ δὲ μηδὲ τὰ παρὰ πάντων ὁμολογούμενα δυνάμενοι ἢ σχολάζοντες παραδοῦναι γραφῇ, σχολῇ γ' ἂν περὶ τὰ ἀμφίβολα τὸν λόγον ἀπομηκύνοιμεν (*Vita Basilii*: §47.1-20; trans. 167-169).

descriptions of Leo the Deacon indicate that this state of affairs would soon change dramatically, though this development is discussed in its proper place.²⁰¹ The author of the *Vita* also insists that detailed knowledge about campaigns was lacking, as many years had elapsed since the reign of Basil. There is also a suggestion that certain information, perhaps overly favourable to Basil, was considered suspect, and subsequently omitted. *Prima facie*, it would appear that the author of the *Vita Basilii* did not have access to extensive written material on the military ventures of Basil's reign. It is however possible that the author is excusing a lack of interest in military exposition; he might also be addressing concerns that he indiscriminately included all eulogistic stories about his subject, a defence later made by Anna Komnene when writing her *Alexiad*.²⁰²

The military content of the *Vita Basilii* is at least unlikely to derive entirely from oral sources. In the passage quoted above, the author indicates that he was wary of accepting oral evidence 'without examination' (ἀβασανίστως). While the passage recalls the famous admonition of Thucydides, the author of the *Vita Basilii* may actually be alluding to the greater authority of written sources. Joseph Genesios, writing around the same time, insists that he relied exclusively upon oral accounts: 'I have now undertaken the complex task of writing...by listening both to men who lived then and who have some limited knowledge of what transpired and to oral traditions that have come down from that time'.²⁰³ How literally one should take this

²⁰¹ See below, 51-57.

²⁰² For further discussion on the ambiguity in this passage of the *Vita Basilii*, see van Hoof (2002): 165-166. Anna Komnene's tendency to interrupt her account and assure the reader of her impartiality and the veracity of her text is discussed below, 103-109.

²⁰³ ὅθεν καὶ γὰρ νῦν τὴν περὶ τούτων γραφικὴν σπουδὴν πολυτρόπως ἀνηρημένος, ἔκ τε τῶν τότε βεβιωκότων καὶ ἀμωσγέπως εἰδόντων ἔκ τε φήμης δῆθεν δραμούσης ἠκουτισμένος (Genesios: pr.10-12; trans. 3).

statement is contestable,²⁰⁴ though in any case the extensive time passed since Genesis came to write about these events raises serious doubts. Therefore, while at least one historian of the court of Constantine VII presented his historical investigation in the Thucydidean tradition of interviewing eyewitnesses and acquiring information orally, the reality, as the *prooimion* to *Theophanes Continuatus* and the method passage of the *Vita Basilii* suggest, was almost certainly very different.

Sources for Military Narratives

If Romily Jenkins accepted the *Vita*'s claims that information on Basil's campaigns was lacking, we must conclude that he merely gained the impression that extensive research was undertaken from the actual accounts of military operations conducted by Basil and his subordinates. Suggestions as to the written sources behind these accounts are not lacking. Cyril Mango postulates the existence of a lost encomium of Basil I, the hypothesized common source used also by Genesis.²⁰⁵ Yet a lost encomium of Basil I would not account for all episodes described by the *Vita Basilii*, not least those expeditions involving only Basil's subordinates. Mango further discerned a 'selective use' of archival material, namely inventories and diplomatic reports, though was less certain about the origin of the *Vita*'s accounts of Basil's wars. The frequent lists of minor forts captured,²⁰⁶ Mango considers, 'points to a factually circumstantial source rather than a rhetorical encomium',²⁰⁷ that Constantine VII was able to locate at least one detailed report of a triumph held by Basil I in 878 may

²⁰⁴ Kaldellis (1998: 3 n.1) notes that 'ἀκούειν' might mean 'reading' rather than 'listening', and thus Genesis could here be referring to textual research, and not, as Ljubarskij (1997) determines, purely oral sources.

²⁰⁵ Mango (2011): 10-11. See also Alexander (1939), where it is suggested that the funeral encomium for Basil delivered by his son Leo VI was consulted by the author of the *Vita Basilii*.

²⁰⁶ For example, *Vita Basilii*: §40.19-21, 43-45; §46.35-38.

²⁰⁷ Mango (2011): 11-13.

suggest that records of imperial campaigns were also available.²⁰⁸ This idea tallies with that of Mark Whittow, who suggests - without elaboration - dispatch origins for the *Vita*'s accounts of Basil's campaigns.²⁰⁹ Whittow's proposal, however, is inconsistent with the claims of the author of the *Vita* to be lacking military details and accurate dates: '...because the exact date of each deed was not known, [the wars of Basil] have been recounted in one sequence in the present account'.²¹⁰ The problem is underlined by Paul Lemerle, who has shown the chronology of the *Vita Basilii* to be particularly suspect in regard to Basil's wars against the Paulicians.²¹¹

Nevertheless, when we consider the detail provided for certain episodes, and the unlikelihood of oral sources, Mango and Whittow are surely correct to suggest that the author had written accounts at his disposal. The independent actions of the admirals Niketas Ooryphas and Nasar against the Arabs of Sicily and Crete, related with command perspective and extensive detail, are suggestive of post-campaign reports filed by these generals.²¹² Another commander subject to a lengthy narrative is Andrew the Scythian, *domestikos ton scholon* under Basil and victor over an Arab army at Podandos near Tarsos. Upon his return to Constantinople, Andrew was not rewarded but slandered to the emperor by jealous men who accused him of cowardice

²⁰⁸ Constantine VII, *Text C*: ll.724-807 describes a triumph held by Basil I upon his return from Tephrike and Germanikeia. John Haldon (1990: 54-55, 58) suggests that information offered by Constantine in his treatises on imperial expeditions may have derived from official records of Basil's campaigns: 'These may have been official accounts preserved in the palatine archive, perhaps intended originally for the glorification of the emperor; or accounts extracted from some now-lost encomiastic compositions'.

²⁰⁹ Whittow (1996a): 356.

²¹⁰ εἰ δὲ μὴ σνημιμένοι τοῖς χρόνοις ἀλλήλαις αἱ πράξεις ἐτύγχανον, ὥσπερ οὖν ἡ διήγησις, ἀλλ' ὅμως ἐπεὶ ὁ ἐκάστης πράξεως ἀκριβῆς ἠγνοεῖτο χρόνος, διὰ τοῦτο μίαν κατὰ τὴν ἀπαγγελίαν τάξιν ἐδέξατο ἅπαντα (*Vita Basilii*: §71.29-33; trans. 247).

²¹¹ Lemerle (1973): 96-108.

²¹² *Vita Basilii*: §§52-55, §§60-61 (Ooryphas); §§62-65 (Nasar). For these actions, and discussion of Basil's western policy in general, see Tobias (2007): 124-128, 153-201. The author omits a number of actions performed by independent generals – including Andrew the Scythian and Nikephoros Phokas – known from other sources. See again *ibid*: 130-133, 140-141.

for not pressing on to capture Tarsos. Having been dismissed from command, Andrew was replaced by Stypeiotes, who is shown to be a foolish and inexperienced general in the subsequent account of his own attempt to take Tarsos, suffering a disastrous defeat through his negligence.²¹³ Alexander Kazhdan proposed that the author of the *Vita Basilii* drew upon an oral or written hagiographical source, which apparently related Andrew's success, showed him to be the victim of an injustice, and presented his replacement as inept in the field.²¹⁴ Cyril Mango recently dismissed Kazhdan's hypothesis without further consideration,²¹⁵ though the intense piety displayed by Andrew, which sees him weep upon receiving a letter from the emir of Tarsos blaspheming against the Virgin Mary, and consequently invoking her assistance, is difficult to otherwise explain if it did not originate in a semi-hagiographical source. Invective against Stypeiotes alongside this praise is extremely consistent with 'historical hagiography' of the late ninth and early tenth century.²¹⁶

A strong candidate for an informed written source is the lengthy narrative of the defeat of the Paulician heretic Chrysocheir and his subsequent death, which, Mango opines, 'reads as if it were due to an eyewitness'.²¹⁷ Genesisios' account of the same events, which is remarkably similar, is thought by Lemerle to have been drawn from the testimony of a witness, 'peut-être au rapport d'un officier, qu'il [Genesisios] aurait pu consulter dans les archives du Palais'.²¹⁸ Only a participating officer could have

²¹³ *Vita Basilii*: §§50-51. According to another source, Symeon the Logothete (132.25; 133.3, 6-10), Andrew was removed because Theodore Santaberenos, a court favourite of Basil, accused him of siding with Basil's son, Leo, in a dispute against his father. It is subsequently revealed that he was reinstated following Stypeiotes' defeat.

²¹⁴ Kazhdan (1993).

²¹⁵ Mango (2011): 13.

²¹⁶ See below, 280-285.

²¹⁷ Mango (2011): 13; *Vita Basilii*: §§41-43. For discussion of this campaign see Kaegi (1981a): 281-282; Tobias (2007): 111-114.

²¹⁸ Lemerle (1973): 98. Genesisios: IV.35-36.

furnished details on the dispute between the soldiers of the Charsian and Armeniakon themes, the tactical dispositions which brought victory in the battle, and the pursuit and slaying of Chrysocheir by one Poulades, complete, in both accounts, with speech elements. Genesisios and the author of the *Vita Basilii* clearly consulted a common source, though the *Vita* extends the account to relate Basil's reaction to receiving the head of Chrysocheir. He shot three arrows into it, fulfilling an earlier promise he had made to God prior to the expedition, and disclosed at the beginning of the *Vita*'s account of this campaign. The bookending of the expedition with a tale confirming God's support for Basil, a theme consistent with the propaganda of his reign,²¹⁹ indicates that the original source was a commemorative written account of the expedition, perhaps based on dispatches and eyewitness testimony but crucially not neglecting Basil and the divine cause of victory over a heretical enemy. Even if the elements concerning Basil, not present in Genesisios' account, were invented by the author of the *Vita Basilii*, then Lemerle's suggestion of an official report written by an officer serving in the expedition is the only plausible alternative.

The Campaigns of Basil I: Panegyric and Distortion

There can be few doubts that the author of the *Vita Basilii* drew upon encomiastic material from Basil's lifetime or possibly more detailed dispatches, as Cyril Mango suggests. If the *Vita Basilii* derived from an encomium of Basil, praise of the emperor and the glossing over of his failures is to be expected.²²⁰ Basil is the focalizer for many of his campaigns, and there are numerous episodes attesting to his commitment and heroism. In the narrative of Basil's eastern campaigns of 871-873, it is reported

²¹⁹ See Moravcsik (1961).

²²⁰ For such recommendations, see Menander Rhetor, *Peri Epideiktikon*: 368.3-8. The potential influence of Menander's treatise on imperial orations on the format of the *Vita Basilii* is discussed by van Hoof (2002).

that the emperor ordered the construction of a bridge over the swollen Euphrates, joining his soldiers in the endeavour, lifting with ease what it otherwise took three soldiers to carry.²²¹ A very similar tale features in the *Taktika* of Leo VI, confirming that the story predated the *Vita Basilii*, and strengthening the notion that it was propagated nearer to Basil's lifetime. Leo's additional note that Basil saved many soldiers from great danger during the crossing indicates that the original episode may have been even more generous in its praise of the emperor.²²² A comparable sense of commitment is observed in the *Vita Basilii*'s report of Basil's campaign in northern Syria in 877-878. While traversing rough terrain around Kallipolis and Padasia, Basil led by example, dismounting and proceeding on foot through the narrow passes.²²³ References to Basil's military prowess are surprisingly few, though an abstract one is observed in the account of the attack on Melitene in 873:

[Basil] made a show of bravery, so that not only those under him, but also the enemy were astounded by his courage and fortitude. For he engaged the enemy with prudence and vigour, revealed high spirit in deeds, and distinguished himself in acts of daring, showed courage and imperturbability in the very midst of danger, and amidst much slaughter was the first to turn back the enemy.²²⁴

²²¹ *Vita Basilii*: §40.1-15.

²²² 'We recall that our ever-memorable father and emperor Basil did this when he was on campaign against Germanikeia in Syria. He arrived at the river called Paradeisos and stationed himself in the middle of it with lamps, and in his presence and in safety the entire army under his command made the crossing easily and securely. He frequently gave a hand and, by himself, saved several soldiers from great danger' (Leo VI, *Taktika*: §9.14; trans. 159).

²²³ *Vita Basilii*: §48.5-8.

²²⁴ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν ἐπεδείξατο, ὡς μὴ μόνον τοὺς ὑπ' αὐτόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς πολεμίους περιφανῶς ἐκπλαγῆναι τὴν ἀνδρείαν αὐτοῦ καὶ εὐχέριαν. ἐμφρόνως γὰρ ἅμα καὶ νεανικῶς προσμίξας τοῖς πολεμίους καὶ κατὰ χεῖρα γενναῖος φανεῖς καὶ τόλμη διαφέρων καὶ παρὰ <τὰ> δεινὰ ὀρώμενος εὐθαρσῆς τε καὶ ἀκατάπληκτος, πρῶτος τοὺς ἀντιτεταγμένους ἐτρέψατο φόνῳ πολλῶ (ibid: §40.21-30; trans. 145).

The deeds attributed to Basil here are non-specific, and the praise rather standard for a soldier emperor, rather suggestive of encomia.²²⁵

Another element of this pro-Basil slant is that setbacks suffered by the emperor appear to be played down. According to the *Vita Basilii*, Basil abandoned a siege of the Paulician capital of Tephrike in 871 because the defences of the city were too strong.²²⁶ However, the hostile *Chronicle* of Symeon the Logothete alleges that Basil was defeated in many battles outside the city, and would have been captured had he not been saved by one Theophylact Abastakos.²²⁷ This historicity of this report is just as questionable, for this rendition of Symeon's chronicle was favourable to the Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos, and Abastakos happened to be Romanos' father.²²⁸ Paul Lemerle prefers the account of Symeon, though Tobias employs evidence from Arabic sources which suggests that Basil at least conducted a disciplined withdrawal.²²⁹ More intriguing is the decision of Genesisios to include reports of Chrysocheir's damaging counter-raids the following year and Basil's failed negotiations, a set of events viewed by Mango as 'inglorious' to Basil and perhaps for this reason omitted from the *Vita Basilii*.²³⁰ When Basil besieged Melitene in 873, he was again frustrated in his efforts, with the *Vita Basilii* asserting that the imperial army forced the defenders to retreat within the city before Basil, observing the

²²⁵ Jenkins (1954) proposes that the *Vita Basilii* drew upon a number of ancient texts, many now lost, so it may be the case that there are classical models for some of Basil's purported feats. Certainly, later individuals were written about in similar fashion by authors seeking to lavish praise upon their subjects. Basil partaking in heavy labour to encourage his troops is reminiscent of the conduct of Nikephoros II Phokas at Antioch in 968 (Leo the Deacon: 74.12-15), which, translators Talbot & Sullivan note, is in itself similar to an episode in the *Vita of St. Nikon* (§35.24-25), where the saint carries stones to the site of a proposed new church to encourage the people of Sparta to supply building materials. Imperial panegyrics boasted that Manuel I Komnenos had physically contributed to the construction of new fortifications at Dorylaion and Soublaion – see in general Stone (2003).

²²⁶ *Vita Basilii*: §37.

²²⁷ Symeon the Logothete: 132.7.

²²⁸ See Kazhdan (2006): 162-170.

²²⁹ Lemerle (1973): 103; Tobias (2007): 108-111; *Byzance et les Arabes*: II.1, 33-34.

²³⁰ Genesisios: IV.35-36. Mango (2011): 12-13; Tobias (2007): 111-112.

strength of the defences, again elected to withdraw.²³¹ According to Arab sources, however, Basil was defeated in battle and lost an important commander.²³² These accounts are difficult to reconcile; one suspects the *Vita Basilii* of reporting a version of events distorted in favour of the emperor. Lemerle argues that the *Vita*'s account of the siege of Tephrike originates from a source close to the emperor, which knew he had in fact retreated to Constantinople in defeat.²³³ Possibly the ultimate source of this information were dispatches sent to the capital, intended to cover up the emperor's failure. That the reason given for Basil abandoning the sieges of Tephrike and Melitene is the same, and that the *Vita* proceeds to list minor fortresses taken by Basil upon his return march in both instances, as though to ease the sense of failure,²³⁴ perhaps suggests a deliberate strategy on the part of Basil and his publicists. The tendency to exaggerate victories and play down defeats was practised in all imperial propaganda; Basil was no different in this respect.

Conclusion - The Hand of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos

While the author of the *Vita Basilii* undoubtedly made use of written material for relating military campaigns, we should note that he did not simply follow his sources, and clearly shaped parts to exploit the mid-tenth century context and benefit Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos.²³⁵ This is most evident in the account of Basil's

²³¹ *Vita Basilii*: §40. See Tobias (2007): 121-123, where the *Vita*'s account of the siege is described as 'garbled'.

²³² *Byzance et les Arabes*: II.1, 6.

²³³ Lemerle (1973): 103. Lemerle was less convinced of the *Vita*'s narratives of Basil's later campaigns in the east, observing a confusing list of names and places, and opining that Constantine VII and his researchers had been unable to secure official documents and first-hand testimony (ibid: 107).

²³⁴ See Anderson (1896).

²³⁵ The work was intended in part to bolster the legitimacy of Constantine VII by highlighting the greatness and noble lineage of his grandfather Basil, the founder of the Macedonian dynasty (see Markopoulos 1994: 160-164). For example, Kazhdan (2006: 143) observes the topicality of the agrarian issues discussed in the *Vita Basilii*, with similar concerns prevalent during the reign of Constantine VII.

eastern campaign of 877-878.²³⁶ The emperor, struggling to capture Hadat, inquired as to why the city was so confident in its defence. He was told that one of the city's holy men had decreed that Hadat would fall only to 'another man of your kin, Constantine'. When Basil pointed out that he had a son with that name, the informant explained that the Constantine in question would be a later descendant of Basil. The prophecy apparently came to pass, as 'in our own day' Constantine brought about 'the utter destruction of the inhabitants of Hadat'.²³⁷ This statement may refer to Leo Phokas' capture of the city in 947/948, though it is more likely to hint at the destruction of Hadat by Leo's brother Nikephoros in 957.²³⁸ In any case, it is undoubtedly apocryphal, a prophecy inserted by the author with the insinuation that the deeds of Constantine VII surpassed even those of his grandfather. While such an insertion does not render invalid our observations about sources consulted by the author, it is our first encounter with Ljubarskij's 'individuality of the historian', establishing an important theme for the remainder of the chapter.

²³⁶ For this campaign see Tobias (2007): 130-138.

²³⁷ "οὐχ ὑπὸ σοῦ" τοῦ νῦν πολιορκουίντος αὐτοῦς, ἀλλ' ὑφ' ἑτέρου τινὸς "τῶν κατὰ γένος σοι προσηκόντων, Κωνσταντίνου καλουμένου," πεπρωμένον εἶναι τὴν τοιαύτην ἀλῶναι πόλιν...καὶ γὰρ ἐκείνου μὴ δυνηθέντος τότε τὴν πόλιν ἐλεῖν, νῦν ἐπὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων χρόνων Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ τῆς πορφύρας βλαστός, ὁ Λέοντος μὲν τοῦ σοφωτάτου υἱὸς ἐκείνου δὲ υἱώνος, τὸ τοιοῦτο προτέρημα ἀπηνέγκατο καὶ ἐπεγράφη τῷ κατορθώματι τῆς παντελοῦς ἀπωλείας τῶν οἰκούντων τὴν Ἄδατα (*Vita Basilii*: §48; trans. 171-175). In his critical apparatus, Ihor Ševčenko notes similarities to a prophecy given in the *Vita of St. Luke of Steiris* (60.3-9), where the saint predicts that Crete would be taken by an emperor named Romanos, though he was apparently referring to the future Romanos II rather than the current ruler, Romanos I Lekapenos. It is possible the author of the *Vita Basilii* was inspired by such predictions.

²³⁸ Mango (2011): 8-9. For the destruction of Hadat in 957, see *Byzance et les Arabes*: II.2, 361-362.

III. The *History* of Leo The Deacon

Born c.950 in Asia Minor, Leo was educated in Constantinople and rose to the position of deacon in the palace under the Emperor Basil II. Aside from his participation in a disastrous campaign led by Basil, little is known of Leo's career, though he is believed to have drafted his history around 995.²³⁹ The *History* covers the period 959-989, though events after 976 are related in telescoped fashion, with the reigns of Nikephoros II Phokas and John I Tzimiskes of primary interest.

Perhaps our lack of information on Leo has contributed to a relative dearth in studies, at least outside of Russia.²⁴⁰ In 1965 a biography of Leo was attempted by Nicholas Panagiotakes.²⁴¹ General insight is provided by Herbert Hunger and especially Apostolos Karpozilos in their encyclopaedic volumes on Byzantine literature.²⁴² Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis Sullivan offer salient discussion of Leo and his work in their English translation of the *History*.²⁴³ In recent decades, study has tended to focus on Leo's role as a military historian. Denis Sullivan and Eric McGeer have established the technical authenticity of Leo's military accounts through comparison with military handbooks of the tenth century.²⁴⁴ Alexander Kazhdan classified Leo's work as 'chivalresque historiography' and drew attention to the primacy of military virtues and the heroic presentation of great warriors.²⁴⁵ Athanasios Markopoulos

²³⁹ For fuller attempts at a biography see Panagiotakes (1965); Kazhdan (2006): 278-282.

²⁴⁰ I refer here to the scholarship of Mikhail Sjuzumov (1916), Alexander Kazhdan (1961) and Jakov Ljubarskij (1991). Not being familiar with Russian I am dependent on other works summarizing the main arguments of these scholars.

²⁴¹ Panagiotakes (1965).

²⁴² Hunger (1978): I, 367-371; Karpozilos (2002): 476-508.

²⁴³ Talbot & Sullivan (2005): 9-50.

²⁴⁴ McGeer (1995a); idem (1995b); Sullivan (1997); idem (2010a).

²⁴⁵ Kazhdan (2006): 273-287.

followed a similar line in his study of gender in the *History*,²⁴⁶ while Lars Hoffmann has explored the various ‘command speeches’ (the *logos parakletikos*) related by Leo, asking to what extent they were influenced by rhetoric.²⁴⁷ Our primary concern here is with scholarship of the sources which may have been employed by Leo.

λέγεται and φασί(ν): Determining Leo’s Use of Oral Sources

While most classicizing historians rarely cite their sources, among those of the Middle period Leo is perhaps the most reticent in providing details of his historical method and source material. In his opening section, Leo, referencing Herodotus, remarks that he will write about events ‘that I saw with my own eyes...and those that I verified from the evidence of eyewitnesses’.²⁴⁸ The claim to have relied on autopsy and eyewitness testimony recalls the research methods of Thucydides; Leo acknowledged this tradition to gain credibility for his work, but in truth was reliant largely on the testimony of others, not having attended any campaigns conducted by Nikephoros II Phokas or John I Tzimiskes.

Leo’s use of oral information provided by eyewitnesses is perhaps attested by his consistent use of λέγεται (‘it is said’) and φασί(ν) (‘they say’) when presenting information. There are fifty-two such instances in total, as Talbot and Sullivan have observed.²⁴⁹ Many appear in relation to military episodes, such as when Leo describes heroic individual prowess²⁵⁰ and lists figures of those wounded, captured or

²⁴⁶ Markopoulos (2004a).

²⁴⁷ Hoffmann (2007).

²⁴⁸ τὰ δὲ τούτων ἐχόμενα, καὶ ὅσα ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ αὐτὸς τεθέαμαι (εἴπερ ὀφθαλμοὶ ὄτων πιστότεροι, καθ’ Ἡρόδοτον), τὰ δὲ καὶ πρὸς τῶν ἰδόντων ἠκριβώσα, ταῦτα καὶ δώσω γραφῆ (Leo the Deacon: 5.19-22; trans. 58).

²⁴⁹ Talbot & Sullivan (2005): 14.

²⁵⁰ Leo the Deacon: 10.23 (Nikephoros II Phokas); 81.17 (the taking of Antioch); 97.6 (John Tzimiskes); 107.19 (the *stratopedarches* Peter); 109.21 (Bardas Skleros); 123.18 (Leo Phokas).

killed in battle.²⁵¹ Others recur in digressions and snippets about enemy customs;²⁵² amidst prophecies foretelling the murder of Nikephoros II Phokas;²⁵³ as Leo is describing historical events predating his scope;²⁵⁴ and when he relates the deaths of certain rulers and commanders.²⁵⁵

Talbot & Sullivan view Leo's use of λέγεται and φασί(ν) when relating controversial accounts of how emperors died as an attempt to distance himself from the accuracy of such reports. Other usage is thought to reflect what Leo considered to be dubious information, or testimony he derived via oral transmission. This is consistent with the views of D. A. Pauw, who proposed three reasons for the use of λέγεται by historians of Antiquity: because specific sources were lacking; a feeling of uncertainty; or to subtly denigrate an individual.²⁵⁶ Such a modern way of thinking, however, may fail to understand why classical historians employed λέγεται. Brad Cook has argued that Plutarch's use of λέγεται was not to signal his doubt about a particular part of the text, but, conversely, to assure his readers that he was using information from an established tradition. Thus, when Plutarch uses λέγεται in describing how Alexander was the first man to charge the Thebans at Chaeronea, he does so to emphasize the accuracy of the report, not to indicate scepticism on his part.²⁵⁷

²⁵¹ Ibid: 105.4; 111.2; 134.7; 155.8.

²⁵² Ibid: 24.21 (on Cretan beliefs); 27.12 (on Cretan wealth); 103.18 (on the Mysians, or Bulgarians); 129.21 (on the Istros, or Danube); 130.9 (on the Danube); 149.24, 150.23, 151.22, 152.2 (on the customs of the Rus').

²⁵³ Ibid: 64.13; 83.2; 85.23.

²⁵⁴ Ibid: 63.2 (of past defeats suffered by the Byzantines in Bulgaria); 104.18 (of past victories over the Bulgarians).

²⁵⁵ Ibid: 30.2, 31.2 (the suspicious circumstances surrounding the death of the Emperor Romanos II); 46.13 (the death of Marianos Argyros); 78.10 (the death of the Bulgarian ruler Peter); 177.4, 177.8 (John Tzimiskes potentially poisoned).

²⁵⁶ Pauw (1980): esp. 84.

²⁵⁷ B. Cook (2001). Similarly, Henry Westlake (1977) suggests that λέγεται does not always indicate doubt on Thucydides' part, but can simply mark his repetition of a tradition or even his use of a written source.

Perhaps we should view Leo's use of λέγεται and φασί(ν) similarly. Thus, rather than interpreting Leo's use of λέγεται and φασί(ν) for events surrounding the divine intervention of Saint Theodore at the Battle of Dorostolon as expressions of uncertainty, it is surely more apt to suggest that Leo was actually reinforcing the historicity of these miraculous events.²⁵⁸ The same may be said for Leo's use of 'it is said' and 'they say' in relation to the miraculous *keramion* ('holy brick') and the bleeding icon of Beirut.²⁵⁹ Possibly Leo precedes mention of numbers and heroic feats with λέγεται and φασί(ν) in anticipation that these are the very sort of elements which people tend to doubt. Unlike Plutarch, Leo does not cite his sources at all, so there is no cause to suggest that use of λέγεται and φασί(ν) refers to information derived orally rather than from written accounts.²⁶⁰ Indeed, that λέγεται and φασί(ν) represent the norm rather than the exception makes it all the more plausible that Leo was calling upon these terms to reinforce the veracity of the text, and allay the suspicions of his readers. Use of λέγεται and φασί(ν) therefore does not automatically denote oral information, least of all that which Leo considered suspect. We cannot discount the possibility that he was drawing upon written material in such instances.

Leo's Sources for Military Operations

Much scholarship has concerned Leo's alleged use of lost written sources. Mikhail Sjuzjumov, followed by Alexander Kazhdan, proposed that Leo's fondness for Nikephoros II Phokas compelled him to use a source favourable to the emperor and his family. This pro-Phokas material is discussed later in the thesis, though it may be

²⁵⁸ Leo the Deacon: 153.22 (Theodore's appearance); 154.2 (the soldiers in the camp claiming never to have seen this soldier prior to the battle); 154.9 (the vision experienced by a nun in Constantinople, wherein she saw the Virgin instructing Theodore to go to the aid of John Tzimiskes).

²⁵⁹ Ibid: 70.18 (how the imprint on the *keramion* came to be); 166.23 (miracle attributed to the icon of Beirut); 166.24 (the icon again).

²⁶⁰ Lateiner (1989): 93 notes that Herodotus' vague use of λέγεται may refer to written sources.

noted that Athanasios Markopoulos, Jakov Ljubarskij and Rosemary Morris have been among the subsequent proponents of the hypothesis.²⁶¹ Similar is Jean-Claude Cheynet's suggestion that the Parsakoutenoi, relatives of the Phokas family, may have supplied Leo with first-hand information, since they, like Leo, were probably from the Thrakesian theme in Asia Minor.²⁶² Herbert Hunger's suggestion that Leo employed official documents is pertinent in relation to military dispatches, but difficult to substantiate in respect of articles such as letters and speeches, given the hazards of attributing such rhetorical devices to anything other than Leo's hand.²⁶³

Any argument for Leo's sources for the campaigns of Nikephoros II Phokas must take into account Marc Lauxtermann's suggestion that Theodosios the Deacon, who drafted a commemorative poem celebrating Nikephoros' capture of Crete from the Arabs in 961, drew, in part, on military dispatches.²⁶⁴ Lauxtermann, noting two references to the Emperor Romanos II receiving progress letters from Nikephoros,²⁶⁵ proposes that Theodosios made use of such dispatches. It is suggested that Theodosios drafted a canto upon the arrival of each bulletin to Constantinople.²⁶⁶ Therefore, while the *Capture of Crete's* descriptions of battle remain rather

²⁶¹ Sjuzumov (1916); Kazhdan (1961); idem (2006): 273-274; Ljubarskij (1991); idem (1993a); Markopoulos (1988); idem (2003a); idem (2009a); Morris (1988); idem (1994).

²⁶² Cheynet (1986): 303 n.43.

²⁶³ Hunger (1978): I, 367; cf. Hoffmann (2007). There is a suggestion that Leo may have located at least one of his pre-battle speeches in another source - see Talbot & Sullivan (2005: 16 n.49).

²⁶⁴ Lauxtermann (forthcoming): chapter 10. The *Capture of Crete* was a historical epic comparable only to the works of seventh-century poet George of Pisidia in Byzantine literature, and both authors may have shared techniques in the type of military material they consulted - see Howard-Johnston (1994). Intriguingly, Theodosios was clearly familiar with George's works. On this point, see Pertusi (1959): 17; Panagiotakes (1960): 19-23.

²⁶⁵ Theodosios the Deacon: ll.273-305 (ἐπιστολὴν...εἶχεν ἐσφραγισμένην); ll.588-609 (τὸ γράμμα).

²⁶⁶ This practice accords with the tendency of Michael Italikos to practice something similar with dispatches from the army of John II Komnenos. See below, 219-220.

abstract,²⁶⁷ beneath Theodosios' fancy the outline of historical events may follow the dispatches of Nikephoros Phokas.

Modern analyses of the conquest of Crete have struggled to reconcile the Byzantine sources chronicling the event.²⁶⁸ Book VI of *Theophanes Continuatus*, while surviving incomplete, offers enough to suggest the author was not merely following the dispatches of Nikephoros. While Theodosios the Deacon notes the shortages which plagued Nikephoros' army over the winter of 960-961,²⁶⁹ only *Theophanes Continuatus* and the short chronicle of the *Vaticanus gr. 163* mention the good counsel of the *parakoimomenos* Joseph Bringas, a powerful eunuch at court who persuaded the Emperor Romanos to immediately send provisions.²⁷⁰ Since *Theophanes Continuatus* precedes its account of the expedition with Bringas giving an impassioned speech to the senate advocating the need for such a campaign, it is thought that the chronicler adopted a pro-Bringas slant.²⁷¹ Leo the Deacon, however, does not mention shortages and suffering among Nikephoros' army. Furthermore, in contrast to *Theophanes Continuatus*,²⁷² Leo omits the convening of the imperial fleet near Ephesos and Nikephoros' reconnaissance efforts, beginning his narrative with Nikephoros' arrival on Crete. *Theophanes Continuatus* and Theodosios assert that Phokas met no resistance,²⁷³ though Leo relates that Nikephoros was greeted by a large enemy force which he routed.²⁷⁴ As surprise seems to have been key to

²⁶⁷ See Criscuolo (1979); Kazhdan (2006): 274-277.

²⁶⁸ Panagiotakes (1960): 33-88; Christides (1984): 172-191; Tsougarakis (1988): 58-74.

²⁶⁹ Theodosios the Deacon: ll.779-790.

²⁷⁰ *Theophanes Continuatus*: 478-480; *Vaticanus gr. 163*: 98.

²⁷¹ *Theophanes Continuatus*: 474-475. For discussion see Markopoulos (2004c): 1-6.

²⁷² *Theophanes Continuatus*: 475-477.

²⁷³ *Theophanes Continuatus*: 476; Theodosios the Deacon: ll.59-107.

²⁷⁴ Leo the Deacon: 8.

Nikephoros' expedition, Leo's report of a battle on shore is rather improbable.²⁷⁵

Furthermore, it is unlikely that Theodosios would neglect to describe this battle had he known of it. The evidence points towards the source of Leo the Deacon inventing or at least embellishing an engagement and glossing over difficulties which afflicted the expeditionary army. This is suggestive of a source which exaggerated the success of Nikephoros and played down any sense of failure.

Perhaps the most striking point of divergence between Theodosios and Leo the Deacon is the fate of the veteran Nikephoros Pastilas, commander of the forces of the Thrakesian theme in western Asia Minor. According to Theodosios, Pastilas died valiantly when his scouting force was ambushed, inspiring his troops to rally and drive the Arabs into the mountains.²⁷⁶ According to Leo the Deacon's more critical account of the incident, Pastilas neglected orders from Phokas to be vigilant as he and his band began consuming the fruits of the island, falling prey to indulgence. When ambushed, Pastilas resisted bravely, but, due to being bloated and intoxicated, he and his men were butchered and dispersed.²⁷⁷ Lauxtermann thinks the portrayal a consequence of Leo using Pastilas to cast Phokas in a positive light, and of Theodosios' concern to offer a more 'patriotic' account. One might add that the version of events reported by Theodosios was more suited to a dispatch which sought to reassure the emperor, and not worry him with incidents of indiscipline. Possibly Leo the Deacon had access to 'unofficial' testimony, though given that he appears to employ an episode related by his model Agathias as a template, as shown below, it would seem that this presentation of Pastilas' conduct owed much to Leo's own

²⁷⁵ Tsougarakis (1988): 64-65. Cf. Panagiotakes (1960): 48-49, where the possibility of a small encounter is not ruled out.

²⁷⁶ Theodosios the Deacon: ll.867-914.

²⁷⁷ Leo the Deacon: 9-10.

design. In any case, Dimitris Tsougarakis questions the accuracy of Leo's account, while Lauxtermann considered Theodosios more reliable since he apparently drew from official material.²⁷⁸ Basic similarities between the narratives of Leo and Theodosios suggests the slight possibility that Leo culled selectively from the same source, though the use of a pro-Phokas composition is more probable, with Leo inserting his own discourse, taking descriptive passages from sixth-century historian Agathias, and adjusting parts to suit his historical design.

The next major campaign described by Leo is Nikephoros' conquest of the Arab strongholds of Cilicia over the course of 964 and 965.²⁷⁹ Nikephoros was forced to abandon an initial siege of Tarsos due to its impressive defences and, according to Leo, the failure vexed Nikephoros all winter: 'He considered the matter a disgrace...for when he had previously been a general and was later proclaimed *domestikos ton scholon*, he had destroyed untold numbers of cities, plundered them and reduced them to ashes'.²⁸⁰ Lars Hoffmann proposes that Leo believed Nikephoros to have softened since becoming emperor, with the failure at Tarsos evidence that his generalship skills were no longer as potent.²⁸¹ This argument fails to convince, as Hoffmann overlooks that Nikephoros' initial assault on the Cretan capital Chandax also failed, and, as at Tarsos, he was forced to wait until the following spring for better fortune.²⁸² Since Leo draws attention to the discipline, perceptiveness and strategic nous of Nikephoros in his accounts of both the Crete and Tarsos campaigns,

²⁷⁸ Tsougarakis (1988): 60.

²⁷⁹ Leo the Deacon: 51-61. For discussion see Canard (1951): 820-823; Apostolopoulou (1982); Garrod (2008): 136-138.

²⁸⁰ καὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα προπηλακισμὸν καὶ ὕβριν ἄντικρυς ἐλογίζετο, καὶ ὄνειδον ἀνεξάλειπτον, εἰ Νικηφόρος ὢν ὁ Φωκᾶς, καὶ πρῶην ἐν στρατηγοῖς τελῶν, καὶ αὐθις ἀναρῆθεις Δομέστικος τῶν σχολῶν, τότε μὲν μυριάδας πόλεις κατέσκαψε καὶ δηώσας ἠθάλωσε (Leo the Deacon: 55.7-56.3; trans. 104).

²⁸¹ Hoffmann (2007): 125-126.

²⁸² Leo the Deacon: 16, 24.

it cannot be sustained that he adjusted his presentation of the emperor. The consistency strengthens the logic for Leo's continued use of a source favourable to Phokas.

There are problems however in arguing for Leo's consistent use of a comprehensive biographical source for Nikephoros' campaigns. Perhaps the biggest obstacle is the glaring omission of the sack of Aleppo, capital of the empire's chief enemy, the Hamdanid emir Sayf al-Dawla.²⁸³ Surprisingly little is reported of this important expedition of 962 in Byzantine sources,²⁸⁴ though, given that Theodosios the Deacon proposed commemorating the campaign in a similar fashion to the *Capture of Crete*, it is probable that there existed material for consultation, at least for contemporary writers.²⁸⁵ William Garrod suggests that Leo would have been well-informed about this campaign on account of his proposed pro-Phokas source, but chose to overlook it so as not to diminish the accomplishment of conquering Crete.²⁸⁶ One may counter this argument by asking why Leo would pass over the opportunity to ascribe another spectacular success to his beloved Nikephoros. Furthermore, Leo appears to have had considerable difficulty locating knowledgeable sources on some of Nikephoros' later campaigns. Two eastern expeditions of 966 and 968 have been conflated, with a narrative of the emperor's acquisition of the *keramion* clumsily inserted.²⁸⁷ On a related note, while it is suggested below that Leo was well-informed about John Tzimiskes' Bulgarian campaign of 971, his record of Tzimiskes' eastern expeditions

²⁸³ See in general Canard (1934); idem (1951).

²⁸⁴ Skylitzes (252-253) briefly mentions the sack of Aleppo, though the most detailed Greek narrative is offered by *Vaticanus gr. 163*: 22.

²⁸⁵ Theodosios the Deacon: pr.7-10. For general discussion of the Aleppo campaign, see Canard (1951): 805-817; Bikhazi (1981): 848-868.

²⁸⁶ Garrod (2008): 132-135, where the general importance of the sack of Aleppo is stressed.

²⁸⁷ See Schlumberger (1890): 704-706; Talbot & Sullivan (2005): 119-125.

between 972 and 975 is blighted by conflation, inaccuracies and chronological errors.²⁸⁸

Problems extend to Leo's coverage of subordinate generals performing independent military operations. Thus we learn very little of the efforts of the eunuch Nicholas at the Battle of Alexandretta in 971,²⁸⁹ while John Tzimiskes' bloody triumph at Adana in 964,²⁹⁰ the conquest of Cyprus by Niketas Chalkoutzes in 965²⁹¹ and the actions of Nikephoros' nephew Bardas Phokas in Arab Armenia in 967 are omitted entirely.²⁹² Only two campaigns conducted by subordinates of Phokas and Tzimiskes are related in extensive detail: Manuel Phokas' failed expedition to Sicily in 964²⁹³ and Bardas Skleros' victory over an army of Rus' and Pechenegs in Thrace in 971.²⁹⁴ Gustave Schlumberger observed that Leo was not particularly conversant with Manuel's expedition, especially given that Leo implies a date of 966 rather than the established date of 964.²⁹⁵ The negative appraisal of Manuel for indiscipline recalls the presentation of Pastilas, and, coupled with the recurrent theme of fickle fortune,²⁹⁶ indicates that Leo again shaped the original account to his own interests. John Skylitzes' account of Bardas Skleros' victory at Arcadiopolis is believed to have been culled from a source favourable to Skleros, and, while there are minor differences

²⁸⁸ See Dölger (1932); Canard (1950); Grégoire (1966): 164-172; Walker (1977).

²⁸⁹ Leo the Deacon: 103. See Walker (1972) for the significance of Nicholas' actions.

²⁹⁰ Skylitzes: 267-268. The battle is also described in Arabic and Syriac sources, though in more subdued terms - Bar Hebraeus: 169-170; Ibn Miskawayh: 216-217; Yahya Ibn Said: 793-794. For discussion of Tzimiskes' campaign, see Canard (1951): 818-819.

²⁹¹ Skylitzes: 270. Paul Lemerle (1972: 153-154) remarks that the casual treatment of this event in the sources suggest it was a fairly straightforward and low-key campaign. For a similar view see Kyrris (1984): 170-172.

²⁹² Recorded solely by Armenian historian Stephen of Taron: 132.

²⁹³ Leo the Deacon: 65-67; Skylitzes: 267. For discussion of this expedition see Gay (1904): II, 290-291.

²⁹⁴ Leo the Deacon: 107-111; Skylitzes: 288-291.

²⁹⁵ Schlumberger (1890): 461 n.1; Dölger (1932): 290 n.1. For Manuel's relationship with the emperor see Cheynet (1986): 306 & n.53.

²⁹⁶ For fortune and fate in Leo see Talbot & Sullivan (2005): 16-19; Hinterberger (2010).

between the two accounts, that provided by Leo the Deacon derived from a source not dissimilar, perhaps the initial dispatches of Skleros or even the proposed official narrative of Tzimiskes' campaign, discussed below.²⁹⁷

Leo's ignorance of campaigns which occurred within three decades of him writing his *History* casts doubt on his claims to have conversed with eyewitnesses, and supports the suggestion that mention of λέγεται does not always signify oral testimony. Leo does not disclose his material, though it is probable that he did make use of compositions favourable to Nikephoros Phokas, which embellished the emperor's successes and suppressed events that might cast a poor reflection upon him. Gaps and errors in Leo's knowledge of certain major campaigns indicate however that he had only a limited amount of detailed and accurate material at his disposal. In sum, Leo's sources must remain an area of supposition and uncertainty.

Mimesis in Leo's Accounts of Battle

One can be reasonably sure that Leo subjected whatever sources he did employ to substantial edits and alterations in accordance with his own historical programme. Leo's long-recognized imitation of sixth-century historian Agathias is particularly evident in his descriptions of battle.²⁹⁸ His sketch of the undermining of the walls of the Cretan capital Chandax is modelled in part on Agathias' account of a similar

²⁹⁷ Catherine Holmes (2005: 272-276) observes slight differences in the presentation of Skleros and also in numbers, with the pro-Skleros source of Skylitzes seemingly exaggerating the success of the commander. Leo's account strikes us as more realistic, attributing the victory to tactical manoeuvres rather than the individual heroics of Bardas Skleros and his brother Constantine. It is also shorter, omitting Skleros' initial actions within Arcadiopolis and John Alakasseus' preliminary skirmish with a Pecheneg force. However, it is possible these parts featured in Leo's original source, and that he condensed and simplified his narrative since Skleros and this engagement were not key concerns. Indeed, some rather clumsy editing may be suspected in this instance, as Leo does not actually mention Arcadiopolis in his narrative; in the account of Skylitzes, the name of the town is stated only once, but it is in the opening sections otherwise glossed over by Leo.

²⁹⁸ Hase (1838): 397; Hunger (1978): I, 370; Karpozilos (2002): 492-501.

procedure,²⁹⁹ while the record of Nikephoros Phokas' preparations for a proposed campaign against Tarsos and the emirate of Aleppo in 963 draws upon Agathias' description of Narses' training exercises.³⁰⁰ Yet, as Denis Sullivan has shown, the prop-and-burn technique was regularly utilized in tenth-century warfare, and Leo recognizes the need to adapt Agathias' account to reflect the present circumstances.³⁰¹ Borrowing from past works in this instance served to highlight the reading of the author and add stylistic flourish to the text. Leo opts for weather metaphors when describing bombardments of arrows and stones, mirroring the technique of Agathias and Homer.³⁰² Thus we find imagery such as 'arrows poured down like hail'³⁰³ and 'arrows fell like *snowflakes in winter*',³⁰⁴ a metaphor taken from Homer.³⁰⁵ At two points Leo lifts the phrase 'lost much blood and was stricken by many arrows' from Dionysius of Halicarnassus; once to describe the fate of Nikephoros Pastilas on Crete, and again to render the plight of Sviatoslav on the plain of Dorostolon.³⁰⁶ The statement simply conveys that these warriors had toiled in battle and were afflicted by many wounds. Recognition of such *mimesis* in Leo's descriptions of battle reveals

²⁹⁹ Leo the Deacon: 25.19-26.8; Agathias: I.10. See Hase (1838): 417.

³⁰⁰ Leo the Deacon: 36.2-9; Agathias: II.1.1-2. See Talbot & Sullivan (2005): 87 n.5. For discussion of the exercises mentioned, see McGeer (1995a): 197-198, 217-222.

³⁰¹ Sullivan (1997); idem (2000): esp. 18; also McGeer (1995b). It should also be noted that Kaldellis (1999b: 229 n.51) decrees Leo to have 'christianized' the preface of Agathias in the process of adapting it, confirming that Leo did not copy Agathias without careful deliberation.

³⁰² καὶ ἄλλα ἐπὶ τούτοις· ἅπαντά τε τὸν μεταξὺ ἀέρα ἐπεκάλυπτον τῇ συνεχείᾳ, ὥσπερ ἀλλήλοις ξυμπεφυκότα. εἶκασεν ἂν τις τὸ χρῆμα νιφετῶ μεγάλῳ ἢ χαλάζῃ πολλῇ ξὺν βιαίῳ πνεύματι καταρραγείῃ (Agathias: III.25.1); νιφάδες δ' ὡς πῖπτον ἔραζε, ὡς τ' ἄνεμος ζαῆς νέφεα σκιδόντα δονήσας ταρφείας κατέχευεν ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ (Homer, *Iliad*: 12.156-158).

³⁰³ δεινῆς δὲ μάχης ἀναρραγείσης, καὶ δίκην χαλάζης τῶν βελῶν καταφερομένων (Leo the Deacon: 8.7-8; trans. 61-62).

³⁰⁴ καὶ δῆτα τῆς μάχης ἀναρραγείσης ἦν ὄρᾳν ἔργα χειρῶν καὶ τόλμης γιγνόμενα ἐμπλεα, πολλαχῇ τῶν δοράτων ἀκοντιζομένων, καὶ τῶν βελῶν δίκην χειμερίων νιφάδων ἐκπεμπομένων, καὶ θαμινὰ τῶν λίθων τῶν πετροβόλων ὀργάνων ἀφιεμένων, καὶ ταῖς ἐπάλλεσι προσαρασσομένων (Leo the Deacon: 15.19-23; trans. 68).

³⁰⁵ ὡς τε νιφάδες χιόνος πίπτωσι θαμειὰ ἡματι χειμερίῳ (Homer, *Iliad*: 12.278-279).

³⁰⁶ Ἐξαίμιος... καὶ καταβελῆς (Dionysius of Halicarnassus: II.42.5, in relation to Mettius Curtius); ἔξαίμιος τε καὶ καταβελῆς ἐγγένοι (Leo the Deacon: 10.6-8, trans. 63, for Pastilas); ἔξαίμιος γεγονὼς καὶ καταβελῆς (ibid: 155.6-8; trans. 198, for Sviatoslav).

relatively little about Leo's general construction of military episodes and possible influences in this respect. However, since Leo was obviously familiar with Agathias, it is reasonable to posit that the sixth-century historian was among these models.³⁰⁷

The chief protagonist of Agathias' history, Narses, appears to have served as a model for the presentation of Nikephoros II Phokas' generalship. Where Agathias relates the aforementioned undermining method employed by the Byzantines at the siege of Cumae, he also describes the general Narses carefully examining the fortress, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and deciding on the best course of action,³⁰⁸ Leo affords a similarly measured approach to Nikephoros II Phokas at the sieges of Chandax and Mopsuestia.³⁰⁹ The antithesis of Narses is the Heruli Fulcaris, whom Narses acknowledges as a brave but foolish general, impetuously charging the enemy and fighting in the front line. Such a custom resulted in Fulcaris being surrounded by the Franks and making a courageous yet foolhardy last stand.³¹⁰ Agathias asserts that Fulcaris should have first sent scouts to ascertain the plans of the enemy,³¹¹ a convention followed by Leo the Deacon, who occasionally remarks what a commander *should* have done to avoid disaster.³¹² When the news was brought to Narses, he bemoaned the death of Fulcaris, and that his admonition towards caution had been disregarded. He then gave a speech to his men, in which he acknowledged the setback and asserted that Fulcaris would not have perished if he had followed his advice.³¹³ This episode is extremely reminiscent of Leo the Deacon's account of the death of Nikephoros Pastilas on Crete. Like Fulcaris, Pastilas ignored the guidance of

³⁰⁷ For discussion of Agathias' descriptions of battle, see Whately (2009): 108-114.

³⁰⁸ Agathias: I.10.

³⁰⁹ Leo the Deacon: 10-12, 16 (Chandax); 52-53 (Mopsuestia).

³¹⁰ Agathias: I.14.3-15.5; IV.16.8-10.

³¹¹ Ibid: I.14.4.

³¹² Leo the Deacon: 9.13-18 (of Nikephoros Pastilas); 66.19-67.2 (of Manuel Phokas in Sicily).

³¹³ Agathias: I.15.10-16.10.

his commander, and, upon learning of his death, Nikephoros Phokas criticized the negligence of Pastilas in a speech to his officers.³¹⁴

Conclusion

Leo's claims concerning autopsy and eyewitnesses appear to have little substance. Though we cannot draw any firm conclusions about his sources, it is probable that he had access to some written reports of campaigns, in particular material favourable to Nikephoros II Phokas. Leo adapted this material to suit his main themes, employing complex *mimesis* in the style of Procopius' use of Thucydides to this effect. As we come now to examine John Skylitzes and a mooted source he may have shared with Leo the Deacon – an official narrative of John Tzimiskes' Balkan campaign of 971 – we discern yet more about Leo's handling of his material.

³¹⁴ Leo the Deacon: 12-13.

IV. John Skylitzes, the *Synopsis Historion* and the Lost Source for John Tzimiskes' Balkan Campaign of 971

John Skylitzes, a high-ranking official from western Asia Minor, is thought to have drafted his *Synopsis Historion* towards the end of the eleventh century.³¹⁵ The chronicle covers the years 811-1057, continuing where Theophanes left off. In recent times, our general understanding of Skylitzes' approach and working methods has been elucidated by the studies of Catherine Holmes and Eirini-Sophia Kiapidou.³¹⁶ At the heart of their discussion is the issue of Skylitzes' source material, which has been the subject of much debate among scholars over the past century.³¹⁷

Skylitzes' Sources

The *prooimion* of Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historion* offers some details about his material and approach. Skylitzes immediately professes a preference for the method of George Synkellos and Theophanes, 'men [who] carefully read through the history books, making a summary of them in simple, unaffected language'.³¹⁸ To this end Skylitzes claims to have read numerous historical works, the identity of which we will consider shortly. He also added anything he learned 'from the mouths of sage old men',³¹⁹ though it was clearly written material which made the greatest contribution to the *Synopsis Historion*.

³¹⁵ For biographical studies see Holmes (2005): 80-91; Cheynet (2010).

³¹⁶ Holmes (2005); Kiapidou (2010). See also Flusin (2010).

³¹⁷ See Holmes (2005): 91-119 for an overview of the arguments for Skylitzes' sources.

³¹⁸ ἐπιστατικώτερον τὰς ιστορικὰς ἐπιδραμόντες βίβλους καὶ συνοψίσαντες λόγῳ μὲν ἀφελεῖ καὶ ἀπεριέργῳ (Skylitzes: 3.9-10; trans. 1).

³¹⁹ προσθέντες δὲ καὶ ὅποσα ἀγράφως ἐκ παλαιῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐδιδάχθημεν (ibid: 4.49; trans. 3).

Skylitzes lists a number of historians, some whose works are known to us, a number whose compositions are lost.³²⁰ Skylitzes employed Genesisios and *Theophanes Continuatus* for the period 811-948,³²¹ though his sources after this time are no longer extant. Catherine Holmes' analysis of Skylitzes' use of *Theophanes Continuatus* for the reign of Romanos I Lekapenos shows that Skylitzes adhered closely to his original source, suggesting that other written texts he utilized were copied without any great changes, and thus precipitating the reconstruction of lost compositions underlying Skylitzes' digest of historical texts.³²² It has been suggested that Skylitzes consulted the pro-Phokas source ('Source B') of Leo the Deacon, together with a source hostile to Nikephoros Phokas and favourable to John Tzimiskes ('Source A'), possibly emanating from ecclesiastical circles.³²³ Skylitzes' source for the reign of Basil II may have been a biographical work composed by one Theodore of Sebasteia.³²⁴ Angeliki Laiou proposed that Skylitzes employed an ecclesiastical source for his narrative of the reigns of Romanos III and Michael IV.³²⁵ In particular, scholars have advocated Skylitzes' use of aristocratic promotional literature; that is, eulogistic biographical compositions concerned with important generals.³²⁶ We have discussed the pro-Phokas material and will examine Skylitzes' use of aristocratic promotional literature in chapter four. Dissecting Skylitzes' coverage of the reign of Basil II is

³²⁰ The authors are Theodore Daphnopates; Niketas the Paphlagonian; Joseph Genesisios; Manuel; Nikephoros the Deacon from Phrygia; Leo of Asia; Theodore, bishop of Side; Theodore, bishop of Sebasteia; Demetrius, bishop of Kyzikos and the monk John the Lydian. For attempts at identification see Hirsch (1876): 356-375; Panagiotakes (1996): 238-240; Tsamakda (2002): 23-24, 37-41; Markopoulos (2003a): 193-194; Flusin (2010): xv-xxiii.

³²¹ These were not the only historical works Skylitzes consulted for the earlier period – see Hirsch (1876): 362-364.

³²² Holmes (2005): 125-152.

³²³ The standard arguments are Sjuzumov (1916); Kazhdan (1961). See also Morris (1988).

³²⁴ Panagiotakes (1996). Cf. Holmes (2005): 96-99, who argues that Theodore may have been the author of another text entirely.

³²⁵ Laiou (1992a): esp. 172.

³²⁶ Shepard (1975-1976); idem (1977-1979); idem (1992); Holmes (2005): 120-298.

unnecessary, given the peerless work of Catherine Holmes in this area.³²⁷

Consequently, we will focus here on the most recent argument pertaining to Skylitzes' source material, a study which clarifies the methods of Skylitzes and Leo the Deacon and also explores religious overtones in historical accounts of warfare.

The Lost Source for John Tzimiskes' Balkan Campaign of 971

The record of John Tzimiskes' reign in the historical works of Leo the Deacon and Skylitzes is dominated by his campaign against the Russian prince Sviatoslav of Kiev in 971.³²⁸ John Haldon determined that Leo offers a personal eyewitness account, though there is no indication that he participated in the expedition.³²⁹ More persuasive is the suggestion of Gyula Moravcsik, who proposed that a war diary ('Kriegstagebuch') may have been consulted by Leo.³³⁰ A similar idea was put forward by James Howard-Johnston, who suggests that Leo used a set of campaign dispatches.³³¹ Paul Stephenson supposed that orators may have produced poems based on 'official victory bulletins' which recorded the major events of the campaign.³³² Most recently, Anthony Kaldellis, observing considerable similarities between the accounts of Leo and Skylitzes, argues that the original source was a lost literary narrative of the campaign, written upon the emperor's return.³³³ Kaldellis' principal hypothesis is difficult to argue against. Though Skylitzes possibly cites Leo

³²⁷ Holmes (2005).

³²⁸ Almost a third of Skylitzes' coverage of Tzimiskes' reign is concerned with this event - *ibid* (2005): 110-111. For discussion of the campaign see Stokes (1961); *idem* (1962).

³²⁹ Haldon (2001): 100.

³³⁰ Moravcsik (1958): I, 336, 399. See also Dölger (1932): 288.

³³¹ Howard-Johnston (2001): 302-303.

³³² Stephenson (2000): 52-53.

³³³ Kaldellis (*forthcoming*). Terras (1965: 396) linked the common source of Leo and Skylitzes to this campaign, but did not build on this observation.

the Deacon among his sources,³³⁴ it is generally thought that he did not draw upon Leo for his record of the period c.960-c.989.³³⁵ So while their narratives of Tzimiskes' campaign of 971 converge on many points, it is unlikely that Skylitzes employed Leo's *History*; rather, the pair must have utilized the same original source.

Working from the probability that Skylitzes and Leo the Deacon used a common source for their narratives of Tzimiskes' campaign of 971, certain differences in presentation must be addressed. Kaldellis notes that Leo was prone to inserting archetypal features of classical historiography, such as speeches and digressions, and so may have embellished the original source with rhetorical elements which do not appear in Skylitzes' account.³³⁶ Kaldellis however overlooks two episodes which are difficult to attribute to authorial preference. The first of these, which features only in Skylitzes, relates how a group of Byzantine foragers were surprised and defeated by a Russian force scouring for supplies along the Danube. An infuriated Tzimiskes blamed the leaders of the fleet, and threatened them with death if they showed such negligence again.³³⁷ The second event – the death of Tzimiskes' cousin John Kourkouas³³⁸ during the siege of Dorostolon – is related by both Leo and Skylitzes, though very differently. Leo reports that Kourkouas had overindulged at lunch, and rode out foolishly against a Russian sally only to be thrown from his horse and

³³⁴ Among his sources Skylitzes (3.28) lists a 'Leo of Asia', who many believe to be Leo the Deacon – see Panagiotakes (1996): 238-240; Markopoulos (2003a): 193-194; Flusin (2010): xvi.

³³⁵ For comparison and discussion of the accounts of Leo and Skylitzes, see Morris (1988); idem (1994); Ljubarskij (1993a); McGrath (1995); Holmes (2005): esp. 224-228, 272-276.

³³⁶ List of speeches: Leo the Deacon: 105.9-15 (Sviatoslav's ultimatum to Sviatoslav); 105.17-106.16 (Tzimiskes' response to Sviatoslav); 106.18-107.6 (Sviatoslav's response to Tzimiskes); 130.19-131.12, 131.19-132.14 (Tzimiskes' two-pronged address to his troops); 151.12-21 (Sviatoslav's advice at the Rus' war council). For Leo's speeches in general, see Hoffmann (2007): 130-134. For Skylitzes' tendency to omit such rhetorical elements, see in general Holmes (2005): 120-170.

³³⁷ Skylitzes: 302.

³³⁸ For this individual see McGrath (1996): 169-170.

brutally killed.³³⁹ Skylitzes, by contrast, records the valiant end of a brave officer, whose death helped save Byzantine siege engines.³⁴⁰ Perhaps Kaldellis is satisfied with the earlier conclusions of Stamatina McGrath. McGrath does not doubt the historicity of the naval incident, but nevertheless cannot account for its ‘surprising’ omission from Leo’s narrative. McGrath supposes that Skylitzes’ presentation of this episode offers insight into the purpose of his work, which may have sought to illustrate the consequences of carelessness in war.³⁴¹ The problem with this theory is that Leo the Deacon was also concerned with offering models of military behaviour for readers to avoid, as the fate of Nikephoros Pastilas demonstrates.

Reasons of censorship and ‘patriotism’, also put forward by McGrath, cannot be responsible; if this were the case, Leo would surely not have reported such an embarrassing end for Tzimiskes’ cousin, John Kourkouas. The account of a bloated Kourkouas being hewn to pieces is very much at odds with Skylitzes’ heroic tale of a man who died valiantly defending siege machines. McGrath attributed the difference to Skylitzes’ habit of superimposing standardized heroic behaviour, eliminating examples of improper behaviour by Byzantine officers.³⁴² Yet if Skylitzes’ distortion of Kourkouas’ death was part of a process to eliminate all instances of foolish generalship from his chronicle, then why are such mishaps reported elsewhere in the *Synopsis Historion*?³⁴³ Catherine Holmes, following McGrath’s conclusions,

³³⁹ Leo the Deacon: 147-148.

³⁴⁰ Skylitzes: 304.

³⁴¹ McGrath (1995): 157-158.

³⁴² Ibid: 158-159.

³⁴³ I will cite merely two examples here. Skylitzes (203-204) records Leo Phokas’ humiliation at the river Acheloos in 917, where the *domestikos*’ decision to refresh himself backfired after his horse bolted off without its rider. The Roman troops, seeing the horse and thinking their general dead, retreated, leading to a spectacular reverse and Bulgarian victory. Another instance can be seen in Skylitzes’ record of Manuel Phokas’ Sicilian expedition in 964. Manuel is said to have been young and rash, better suited to the ranks rather than command. His ignorance and impetuosity, Skylitzes continues, led to Manuel getting his entire force destroyed (ibid: 267). It is surely no coincidence that

considered Kourkouas' heroic representation to be indicative of Skylitzes' wish to provide models of aristocratic valour in the Balkans, reflecting concerns of the 1090s. By this hypothesis, Skylitzes emended this section because one Gregory Kourkouas was *doux* of Philippoupolis at the time he was writing, and it was thus considered imprudent to discuss an inept ancestor meeting with disaster in the Balkans.³⁴⁴ The suggestion is compelling, but whenever Skylitzes seeks to uphold military reputations, omission, rather than alteration, is typically his preferred approach.³⁴⁵

The situation recalls the contrasting portrayals of the demise of Nikephoros Pastilas given by Theodosios and Leo the Deacon. We argued in that instance that Leo deviated from the official line, and in John Kourkouas' case it is implausible that Tzimiskes would permit the public disclosure of the humiliating death of an imperial relation. The general tendency of Skylitzes not to stray too far from his sources supports this idea.³⁴⁶ Leo may have drawn upon eyewitness testimony to supplement his primary source. Such informants would explain how Leo was aware of the misconduct and incompetence of Kourkouas throughout this campaign. For Leo alone asserts that Kourkouas had suffered for his drunken plundering of churches in Bulgaria, a revelation which has no place in Skylitzes' narrative.³⁴⁷ Earlier in his history, Leo describes how Tzimiskes sent Bardas Skleros to Thrace, since the

these disasters involved the Phokades, a family often criticized by Skylitzes. Rather than Skylitzes wanting to trim all instances of poor conduct by Roman commanders in his work, it appears he was merely selective in which episodes he chose to maintain and which to omit.

³⁴⁴ Holmes (2005): 223-224.

³⁴⁵ Marianos Argyros is perhaps the most obvious example of this. With the Argyroi still influential during Alexios' reign (Alexios' one-time fiancée was an Argyros – see Cheynet 1990: 269), Marianos' entire role in the rebellion of Nikephoros II is omitted. That Argyros is said to have sided with a scheming eunuch like Joseph Bringas (see Markopoulos 2004c), who Skylitzes portrays in a very negative light, and was apparently killed by a plant pot or tile thrown by a woman, is hardly something the family would have been pleased about (Leo the Deacon: 45-46). Leo's account of Argyros' embarrassing demise is corroborated by the contemporary *Theophanes Continuatus* (438.13-14).

³⁴⁶ Holmes (2005): 120-170.

³⁴⁷ Leo the Deacon: 147-148.

previous commander there, John Kourkouas, had ‘turned to immoderate indolence and drink, and handled the situation in an inexperienced and stupid manner’.³⁴⁸ One might argue that Leo deliberately flipped the heroic perception of subordinates who died in battle in order to suit a historical programme which generally endorsed a more responsible mode of generalship.³⁴⁹ Working against this hypothesis, however, is Leo’s praise of the imperial guardsman Anemas, who was slain in battle after a heroic last stand.³⁵⁰ This inconsistency indicates that Leo had reason to condemn the conduct of Pastilas and Kourkouas, rather than merely subvert their actions for literary purposes.

While we may speculate that Skylitzes was more faithful to Kaldellis’ proposed common source, he also was not averse to slight adjustments and minor additions. At one point in the narrative of the campaign, Skylitzes remarks that the Byzantines were confident for a coming battle, ‘knowing that they had God on their side, He who has no wish to come to the aid of princes with unclean hands, but always helps the victims of injustice’.³⁵¹ This statement must refer to Tzimiskes’ role in the murder of Nikephoros II Phokas;³⁵² such an admission of guilt had no place in a narrative propagated by the imperial court and can only have been added by a later hand. This statement and the inconsistencies noted above are problematic to say the least, but Kaldellis’ argument for an official campaign narrative is nevertheless persuasive, given the broad similarities across both accounts, and, more significantly, the divine

³⁴⁸ Ἰωάννου Μαγίστρου, ὃ Κουρκούας ἐπάνυμον, ἐς ῥαστώνην καὶ πότους, παρὰ τὸ εἰκὸς, ἀποκλίναντος, ἀπείρως τε καὶ ἀμαθῶς κεχρημένου τοῖς πράγμασι (ibid: 126.10-20; trans. 173-174).

³⁴⁹ See below, 361-365.

³⁵⁰ Leo the Deacon: 152-153; Skylitzes: 308. On Anemas, see Miles (1970): 83-84; McGrath (1996): 101.

³⁵¹ εἰδότες δ’, ὅτι καὶ θεὸν συλλήπτορα ἔξουσιν, οὐ τοῖς ἀδίκων χειρῶν ἄρχουσι φιλοῦντα, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἀδικουμένοις διὰ παντὸς ἐπαρήγειν (Skylitzes: 299.36-40; trans. 285).

³⁵² See in general Ljubarskij (1993a); Morris (1994).

assistance which allegedly swung the final battle at Dorostolon in favour of the Byzantines.

Divine Assistance in the Record of Tzimiskes' Campaign

One reason for suspecting an official source is the religious overtones evident in both accounts of the campaign. Before departing from Constantinople, Tzimiskes visited the city's most venerated ecclesiastical sites and offered prayers to Christ and the Virgin³⁵³ which were seemingly answered at the second Battle of Dorostolon. With the struggle undecided, a sudden wind and rainstorm blew dust in the faces of the Russians, just as a figure astride a white horse, thought to be the military martyr, Theodore Stratelates, broke the enemy lines, leading the Byzantines to victory.³⁵⁴ Upon his return to the capital, Tzimiskes refused to mount the golden chariot prepared for his triumph, and instead placed upon it an icon of the Virgin.³⁵⁵

This presentation was intended to emphasize Tzimiskes' piety and that the campaign enjoyed divine favour.³⁵⁶ Both accounts reveal that Tzimiskes requested the aid of Theodore Stratelates prior to battle, and used icons of the saint for protection.³⁵⁷ Theodore, however, does not act of his own accord. On the night prior to the battle, a Constantinopolitan woman (Leo suggests she was a nun) is reported to have experienced a vision, wherein she saw the Virgin summoning Theodore, and urging

³⁵³ This is standard practice. Constantine VII's record of imperial expeditions (*Text B*: ll.86-90) reveals that an emperor's last duty prior to leaving the capital was to visit the churches to pray. Alexios I, like Tzimiskes, prayed at the church of the Mother of God at Blacharnae before departing the city for Thessaloniki in 1107 (Anna Komnene: XIII.I.2).

³⁵⁴ Leo the Deacon: 153-154; Skylitzes: 308-309.

³⁵⁵ Leo the Deacon: 158-159; Skylitzes: 310. For triumphs in this period see McCormick (1986): 155-176.

³⁵⁶ McCormick (1986): 170-171; Stephenson (2000): 52-53. For Tzimiskes' piety see Patlagean (1989): 355-357; Pentcheva (2006): 34-35.

³⁵⁷ Leo the Deacon: 154.6-9; Skylitzes: 308.15-17.

him to assist John in battle.³⁵⁸ By acting as intercessor, the Virgin confirms the legitimacy of the expedition.³⁵⁹ Recognition of the Virgin's role is evident in the celebratory triumph, as Tzimiskes gives pride of place to the captured icon of the Theotokos, placing it atop of the insignia of the Bulgarian ruler.³⁶⁰

There are several innovations here, not least the appearance of Theodore Stratelates. Nature mysteriously conspiring in favour of the Byzantines during war was not new.³⁶¹ Dorostolon, however, marks the first instance of a saint physically participating in battle in Byzantine historiography.³⁶² A closer reading suggests that bold tactical manoeuvres were instrumental to Byzantine success,³⁶³ and Kaldellis is correct to deem the account a 'literary elaboration of the belief that the battle was won

³⁵⁸ ὁ σὸς παρὰ τὸ Δορύστολον Ἰωάννης, κύριε Θεόδωρε, Σκύθαις μαχόμενος, ἄρτι περιστατεῖται δεινῶς. ἀλλ' εἰς τὴν ἐκείνου σπεῦσον βοήθειαν. εἰ γὰρ μὴ προφθάσης, ἐς κίνδυνον αὐτῷ τελευτήσῃ τὰ πράγματα (Leo the Deacon: 154.9-22; trans. 198). The phrasing of Skylitzes (308.19-309.25; trans. 292) is slightly different: 'Theodore, sir; John, my [friend] and yours, is in distress; go quickly to his assistance'.

³⁵⁹ The image of Mary surrounded by military saints was extremely prominent in contemporary Roman art, an example being the ivory diptych at Palazzo Venezia, which may have provided inspiration for those composing the report of the Dorostolon campaign (see Pentcheva 2006: 82-97). Niketas Choniates (*Chronike Diegesis*: 190.92-191.8) describes the dream of a man named Mauropoulos, wherein an icon of the Virgin Kyriotissa urged, in vain, the military saints to go forth and aid the Emperor Manuel I. That Manuel lost the Battle of Myriokephalon the following day suggested that divine favour had deserted him. For discussion of this incident, see also Pentcheva (2006): 68-69.

³⁶⁰ For innovations in the ceremony, see McCormick (1986): 171-174. Praise of the Theotokos during a triumph was not new. Constantine VII (*Text C*: ll.726-736, 779-794) records vigils to churches and thanksgiving to the Virgin in a triumph of Basil I. Skylitzes (364.80-83) also states that Basil II celebrated a triumph in Athens in 1018, where he offered thanks for his victory to the Virgin and adorned her church with splendid offerings before returning to Constantinople. For further discussion of this occasion, see Kaldellis (2009b): 81-91, esp. 89-91.

³⁶¹ For references to divine storms aiding the Byzantines during Heraclius' battles with the Persians, see Howard-Johnston (1994): 81-82.

³⁶² Walter (2003): 292.

³⁶³ McGrath (1995: 160-163) and Haldon (2001: 103-104) suggest that the Romans' feigned retreat to a wider plan gave them a tactical advantage, whilst Tzimiskes' cavalry charge, recorded by Leo the Deacon, was decisive. That Tzimiskes, like Theodore, rode a white horse (albeit at his triumph) may be significant. For the general symbolic importance of the rider astride a white mount, see Kintzinger (2003): esp. 323-325. Hoffmann (2007: 135 n.136), discussing the appearance of the Stratelates, observed possible origins in the Book of Revelations, where the rider of a white horse is synonymous with conquest and victory (*Rev.*: 6.2, 19.11-16).

(partly) through saintly intervention'.³⁶⁴ Tzimiskes' publicists, composing an official account of the campaign, exaggerated the perceived intervention of Theodore to better serve Tzimiskes and his claim to divine favour.³⁶⁵

The choice of saint was deliberate. Theodore Stratelates was a relatively new entrant into the fraternity of military saints, having emerged as a distinct figure from Theodore Tiron by the late ninth century.³⁶⁶ It is suggested that the creation of the Stratelates cult was fuelled by the military aristocracy, who demanded a patron similar in social status and rank, rather than the lowly Tiron, generally associated with foot soldiers.³⁶⁷ By having a popular saint strongly linked with the elite class intervene on horseback, the source reflected contemporary ideals.³⁶⁸ It also offered Tzimiskes the opportunity to popularize Theodore's cult, and his success may be measured by the development of Euchaneia, the burial place of Stratelates.³⁶⁹

Kaldellis suggests a classical model behind the literary development. He notes that the episode echoes the intervention of the Dioskouroi at the early fifth-century B.C.

³⁶⁴ Kaldellis (forthcoming)

³⁶⁵ Stephenson (2000): 52-53; also McGrath (1995): 161-163. Failure could have been disastrous for Tzimiskes: as Treadgold (2006: 227-228) notes, defeat by a foreign army often implied that God no longer approved of the emperor in question.

³⁶⁶ For the cult of the two military saints, Theodore Tiron and Theodore Stratelates, see Cheynet (2003b); Walter (2003): 44-66. Walter alternatively proposes that the model for the Stratelates was not Tiron, but rather a third saint Theodore – Theodore Orientalis.

³⁶⁷ Grotowski (2010): 119. For Theodore Tiron's links with poorer foot soldiers in this period, see Kazhdan (1983b): 544-545.

³⁶⁸ Further evidence of this may be seen in the potential shame of the Byzantines in not being able to defeat a people who had yet to master fighting on horseback (Leo the Deacon: 140-141). Even if Leo the Deacon added this element of his own accord, it demonstrates the social values of the late tenth-century military aristocracy. For while the contribution of the infantry was greatly valued at most times, and especially during this period (see in general McGeer 1995a: 202-211, 272-280; Haldon 1999: 193-200, 217-225), the aristocracy were not expected to fight among them given their social standing.

³⁶⁹ Oikonomides (1986: 331) proposes that the subsequent creation of a bishopric at Euchaneia may have been influenced by the events of 971. It is known that the tomb of Theodore Stratelates was a popular place of pilgrimage in the eleventh century – see Malamut (1993): 42.

Battle of Lake Regillus, as recorded by Dionysius of Halicarnassus.³⁷⁰ The sequence of events is unquestionably similar. Dionysius relates that after the battle a fruitless search was made for the two men, leading people to conclude that the helpers were in fact the gods Castor and Pollux. An almost identical process of realization is reported in Leo the Deacon with regard to the involvement of the Stratelates.³⁷¹ And just as the Romans erected the Temple of Castor and Pollux in gratitude, Tzimiskes ordered Theodore's church at Euchaneia be rebuilt, and the town be renamed Theodoroupolis.³⁷² The renaming was quite exceptional; such an honour was usually reserved for emperors.³⁷³ Skylitzes further notes that the second Battle of Dorostolon occurred on Theodore's feast day, echoing Dionysius' revelation that the anniversary of the battle would also mark the annual commemoration of the Dioskouroi. Kaldellis concludes that 'the original source formatted its account to the aetiological, monumental, and festal aspects of Lake Regillus, adapting them to the changed religious circumstances of the tenth century'.³⁷⁴

³⁷⁰ Dionysius of Halicarnassus: 6.13. For further instances of the Dioskouroi intervening in Greco-Roman historiography, see Pritchett (1979): 11-46; Hornblower (2001): 140-147.

³⁷¹ Leo the Deacon: 154.1-9.

³⁷² Skylitzes: 309.29-33, contra Leo the Deacon (158.1-2), who asserts that Tzimiskes changed the name of Dorostolon to Theodoroupolis. It is generally considered that Leo was mistaken, and Skylitzes correct – see Oikonomides (1986): 330 n.10. For a different view, see Hutter (1998) and Stephenson (2003a: 65), who both note the finding of a seal of a *strategos* of Theodoroupolis at Preslav, seemingly supporting the testimony of Leo the Deacon. On Theodore's association with Euchaneia, see Walter (2003): 55-57.

³⁷³ See McCormick (1986): 171. Earlier in the campaign, the conquered Preslav was renamed Ioannoupolis after the emperor (Leo the Deacon: 138.16-19; Skylitzes: 298.9-11). Stephenson (2000: 53) asserts that by renaming towns, Tzimiskes was clearly determined to exploit his victory to maximum political advantage. The long-term resonance of his actions however is questionable. When Preslav was lost and recaptured by the Byzantines in 1000, the name Ioannoupolis was forgotten; sources merely refer to it as Preslav once more - see Oikonomides (1983): 4-5.

³⁷⁴ Kaldellis (forthcoming). I am unconvinced by Kaldellis' suggestion that Skylitzes' double use of the term *ἐπικουρία* to characterize the intervention of Theodore alluded to the very name of the Dioskouroi; at 300.56, Skylitzes also uses *ἐπικουρίαν* in relation to the emperor's dispatch of elite reinforcements to aid his troops at the first Battle of Dorostolon.

Tzimiskes' publicists may also have drawn upon more contemporary models. There was a Christian precedent for this sort of saintly intervention, as Kaldellis recognizes.³⁷⁵ The fourth miracle of the eighth-century source celebrating Theodore Tiron includes the tale of a nun who envisioned a mounted Theodore actively defending his burial place of Euchaita from an Arab attack.³⁷⁶ As the work continued to be read in tenth-century Byzantium,³⁷⁷ the image of a Theodore battling on horseback would have been embedded in the Byzantine consciousness long before 971. Even the divine intervention of the Stratelates in some capacity was not entirely novel. Henri Grégoire drew attention to a similar tale in the *Vita of Saint Basil the Younger*, wherein it is reported that the holy general Theodore Spongarios - who Grégoire believes to be Theodore Stratelates - led the Byzantines against those Rus' who invaded Paphlagonia in 941.³⁷⁸ Closer yet to Tzimiskes' time, there is a fourteenth-century reference to Stratelates joining with fellow military saints George and Demetrios along with the archangel Michael to aid Nikephoros Phokas in his capture of Crete.³⁷⁹ The actions of the Dioskouroi at Lake Regillus may have

³⁷⁵ Kaldellis cites the example of the Battle of the Frigidus in 394, where, according to the testimony of fifth-century author Theodoretos of Kyrros, the saints Philip the Apostle and John the Evangelist appeared before Theodosios I on white horses and renewed his spirits, with Theodosios eventually triumphing after a wind blew dust in the faces of the enemy (Theodoretos of Kyrros: 5.24).

³⁷⁶ Delehaye (1909): 196-198. Zuckerman (1988) has convincingly argued for a date of 753 for the attack. For further discussion see Walter (2003): 46-48.

³⁷⁷ The Theodore Tiron text was revised by the military commander Nikephoros Ouranos during the reign of Basil II – see F. Halkin (1962).

³⁷⁸ Grégoire (1938): 292-300. For discussion, see Walter (1999): 176 n.56. Grégoire suggests that this account inspired the twelfth-century *Russian Primary Chronicle* (72), which lists a 'Theodore Stratelates of Thrace' among the Byzantine commanders. These references to Theodore are noted by Shepard (1974: 16), who suggests that there may have been a literary source which mentioned Theodore's help in 941. Grégoire proposes that behind Theodore is one of Romanos Lekapenos' commanders, Theophanes, who was banished and replaced in legend by the Stratelates. The reference to Theodore's apparent Thracian origins is puzzling, though Grotowski (2010: 101-102) links this with the later translation of Stratelates' relics to Serres from Euchaneia. A further possibility is that the Rus' associated this Theodore with Thrace because of his perceived involvement in the 971 expedition. See Shepard (1974): 16, for discussion of Russian awareness of Byzantine supernatural aid.

³⁷⁹ See Walter (2003): 133 & n.157. A tenth-century provenance for the story is probable when one considers the personal piety of Nikephoros Phokas (Morris 1988: 102-105; Sullivan 2011), and also the

provided a suitable literary template, but Kaldellis overlooks more current developments. There was a growing propensity to attribute military success to saintly intervention in mid tenth-century Byzantium, which manifested itself most explicitly in the official account of Tzimiskes' campaign in Bulgaria.

The motif of the military saint intervening in battle astride a white steed persisted in Byzantine literature.³⁸⁰ According to the *Synopsis Historion*, the Bulgarians, having besieged Thessaloniki in 1040, were driven off when the defenders sallied forth, with many Bulgarians witnessing the martyr Saint Demetrios leading the charge on horseback.³⁸¹ Another source asserts that the enemy commander Alousianos neglected to construct a proper siege camp, ensuring his tired army was quickly overcome.³⁸² Official origins for Skylitzes' version of events are all the more likely when we consider that Thessaloniki was then under the command of Constantine, nephew of the reigning emperor, Michael IV the Paphlagonian.³⁸³ Moreover, Michael spent time at Thessaloniki in the final years of his life, frequently visiting the tomb of Demetrios in the hope of being relieved of his pains.³⁸⁴ Demetrios had famously

various legends and accounts of the conquest of Crete, ranging from the novel late-eleventh century testimony of Attaleiates (163-166) to tales from Venetian Crete (Maltezou 1998: 234-235, 239-240). It is also consistent with Phokas' decision to found a church in honour of Theodore Stratelates at Constantinople - see Oikonomides (1986).

³⁸⁰ Walter (1999): 176-177 & n.58; idem (2003): 64; Grotowski (2010): 103 n.154 for examples. A similar tradition also existed in western Europe, and became particularly popular from the time of the First Crusade - see Holdsworth (1996): 117-118; MacGregor (2003).

³⁸¹ Skylitzes: 413-414.

³⁸² Kekaumenos: 160-162. Paul Lemerle (1960: 67) rightly considers the account of Kekaumenos to be the more realistic of the two.

³⁸³ Fine (1983: 205-206) has suggested that Alousianos may have been a Byzantine agent who intentionally lost the battle; if so, an official account would be all the more creative in its efforts to disguise the fiasco.

³⁸⁴ Skylitzes: 408.51-53. We might also cite in this context the opening of a mint at Thessaloniki under Michael IV, which Hendy viewed in the context of the Bulgarian revolt. However, the *histamenon* thought to have been produced there bears the image of the archangel Michael rather than Saint Demetrios (Hendy 1970; Grierson 1993: II, 720-723).

intervened to save Thessaloniki before, during the Avar siege of 586,³⁸⁵ but the events of 1040 mark the first instance of the saint physically assisting his beloved city, a development linked with the description of Theodore Stratelates riding to the aid of Tzimiskes.³⁸⁶ Like Tzimiskes, Michael IV had been involved in the death of his predecessor and faced challenges to his rule.³⁸⁷ The report of Saint Demetrios' appearance helped demonstrate the divine approval of the reigning emperor.

*The Marian Icon and Public Ceremony in the Account of Tzimiskes' Campaign*³⁸⁸

The use of a further classical allusion in the proposed source served to underscore another of its primary themes. Michael McCormick observed hints of Plutarch's *Camillus* in accounts of Tzimiskes' triumph. Like Camillus, Tzimiskes is offered a chariot drawn by four white horses; yet while the Roman statesman became vainglorious with victory, Tzimiskes refused to mount the chariot, instead affording precedence to the icon of the Virgin by placing it within. This literary construction likens Tzimiskes to a great hero of Antiquity, while illustrating his superior character.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁵ See Lemerle (1979b) for the miracle and commentary.

³⁸⁶ It is intriguing that Skylitzes (413.20-21) describes Demetrios 'making safe the path' (τὴν πορείαν προομαλίζοντος) for the Romans, a quotation from Isa. 40:3 which also appears in Leo the Deacon's narrative of the Bulgarian campaign of John Tzimiskes - Leo the Deacon (129.7), quoting Ps. 5:8, Isa. 40:3, and/or 1 Thess. 3:11: τὴν ὁδὸν κατευθύνοντα (per Talbot & Sullivan 2005: 175 n.8). The second of Constantine VII's military orations likewise implores God to dispatch an angel to protect the army along its route (Constantine VII, *Address of the Emperor Constantine VII to the Strategoi of the East*: 8.53-56).

³⁸⁷ For Skylitzes' account of the reign of Michael IV, see Laiou (1992a); Sklavos (2006): 115-118.

³⁸⁸ The Virgin was always an important figure for Byzantine soldiers, but her importance intensified in the tenth century. On the development of the cult of the Theotokos in Byzantium, see Pentcheva (2006): 11-35; and for Mary's association with war in Byzantium, *ibid*: 61-103. For Mariolatry among the tenth-century Byzantine military, see also Weyl Carr (1997): 90.

³⁸⁹ McCormick (1986): 173-174. Leo the Deacon: 158.6-7; Skylitzes: 310.55-57; Plutarch, *Camillus*: VII.1.

The occasion marked the first use of a Marian icon in a public ceremony, another innovation intended to emphasize Tzimiskes' gratitude to the Theotokos.³⁹⁰ The display may have inaugurated renewed use of Marian icons by campaigning emperors.³⁹¹ According to Michael Psellos, Basil II stood against the pretender Bardas Phokas at Abydos in 989 grasping the icon of the Virgin as the rebel charged, only to suddenly fall from his horse and die. Against the probable scenario that Bardas was poisoned by his cupbearer,³⁹² Psellos credited the victory to the Theotokos,³⁹³ and it may be that this was the official line of Basil II.³⁹⁴ The worth Tzimiskes placed in the acquisition of holy artefacts is attested by accounts of his subsequent campaigns in the east. Leo the Deacon describes Tzimiskes' discovery of the sandals of Christ and the hair of John the Baptist, along with an icon of the crucifixion of Christ.³⁹⁵ In his correspondence with Armenian ruler Ashot III, Tzimiskes draws particular attention to these relics.³⁹⁶ Matthew of Edessa's chronicle also contains a letter the emperor sent to the Armenian *vardapet* Leon, inviting him to come and witness 'a splendid celebration in honour of the sandals of Christ and holy

³⁹⁰ Angelidi & Papamastorakis (2005): 212-213; Pentcheva (2002): 29-31; idem (2006): 34-35, 53-54, 190-191. The icon is usually identified as the *Hodegetria*, though there is some speculation that it may have been another type of Marian icon (Weyl Carr 2000: 332). For discussion of the *Hodegetria*, see Wortley (2005): 172-174.

³⁹¹ Despite Psellos' protestation that emperors habitually carried the icon of the *Theometer* with them on campaigns, his description of Romanos III Argyros bringing the object to war represents the first time a specific Marian icon is carried into battle (Psellos, *Chronographia*: I, 38-40 [X-XI]; Pentcheva 2002: 32-33). Pentcheva (2001: 204-208) charts the frequent use of Marian icons by soldier emperors from the mid-eleventh century onwards.

³⁹² Skylitzes: 336-338. Leo the Deacon (174-175), writing under the watch of Basil, states that Bardas fell suddenly from his horse and was decapitated. For discussion, see Kaldellis (1999a): 64 n.144.

³⁹³ 'For my own part, I prefer to express no opinion on the subject and ascribe all the glory to the Mother of the Word' (Psellos, *Chronographia*: I, 11 [XVI]; trans. 36). For discussion see Kaldellis (1999a): 62-66.

³⁹⁴ In support of this one might cite a special issue of a silver *miliaresion* to commemorate the victory, with the bust of the Virgin *Nikopoios* on the obverse, once dated to the reign of Basil II (Grierson 1963; idem 1993: II, 600, 611). More recently, however, a revised dating to the end of Basil's reign has seemingly invalidated this potential evidence (Pitarakis & Morrisson 2001; Pentcheva 2006: 75).

³⁹⁵ Leo the Deacon: 165-166.

³⁹⁶ Matthew of Edessa: 32-33. For the relics mentioned in the letter see also Adontz (1965): 141-147.

hair of John the Baptist'.³⁹⁷ Furthermore, Leo the Deacon reveals that the sandals were placed in the church of the Virgin of the Pharos, the typical depository for Passion relics,³⁹⁸ while the hair strand and icon were kept in the church of the Saviour at the Chalke Gate.³⁹⁹ Tzimiskes enjoyed a strong connection with this particular place of worship;⁴⁰⁰ by placing relics in a church he renovated, he created an implicit link between military success and his personal piety. The parading of the Marian icon upon his triumphant return from Bulgaria should be viewed similarly.

In these activities Tzimiskes followed the tenth-century trend of imperial relic hunting.⁴⁰¹ Tzimiskes' immediate predecessor, Nikephoros II Phokas, is reported to have recovered part of the apparel of John the Baptist⁴⁰² and the *keramion* from Syria.⁴⁰³ The acquisition of relics provided visible evidence of divine favour for the regime.⁴⁰⁴ While this concept extends to the physical showcasing of the Marian icon of Tzimiskes, the object was not a holy relic. Certainly, there is no evidence of a Tzimiscean equivalent of the *Narratio de imagine Edessena* which celebrated the passage of the *Mandyllion* from Edessa to Byzantium in 944,⁴⁰⁵ or the sermon on the

³⁹⁷ Matthew of Edessa: 33-34. On the various relics of John the Baptist and their value, see Kalavrezou (2004): 67-79; Wortley (2004): 145-153, esp. 152, where the inconsistencies in Tzimiskes' claims and the reports of Leo the Deacon and Skylitzes are discussed. On account of the dual testimony of Leo the Deacon and the Ashot letter, Denis Sullivan (2011: 399-400) believes that Tzimiskes acquired the hair of John the Baptist, against Skylitzes' assertion that it was Nikephoros Phokas (Skylitzes: 271.62-63).

³⁹⁸ On the church of the Virgin of the Pharos, see Kalavrezou (2004): 55-57; Pentcheva (2006): 30. For Constantine VII's record of the relics of the Passion stored in the Pharos, see Constantine VII, *Address of Constantine VII to the Strategoi of the East*: 8.23-31.

³⁹⁹ Engberg (2004) suggests, albeit without much foundation, that Tzimiskes may also have installed the Mandyllion in the Church at the Chalke Gate.

⁴⁰⁰ Mango (1959): 149-152.

⁴⁰¹ On the capture of Christian relics in Byzantium, see Barker (1993): 48-49; James (2001). For the growing relic cult from the tenth century, see Morris (2003): 249-253; Klein (2006): 91-94.

⁴⁰² Skylitzes: 254.50-52.

⁴⁰³ Leo the Deacon: 70-71.

⁴⁰⁴ James (2001): 128; Mergiali-Sahas (2001); Morris (2003): 249-250; Kalavrezou (2004): 54.

⁴⁰⁵ *Narratio de imagine Edessena*. For further discussion see Guckin (2009): esp. 154-181.

translation of the *keramion* by Nikephoros II Phokas.⁴⁰⁶ Neither text relates significant details about the military events leading up to the capture of the relics, but they were, nevertheless, officially commissioned pieces, intended to commemorate occasions of symbolic importance and underline the legitimacy of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos and Nikephoros II Phokas respectively.⁴⁰⁷ Rosemary Morris encapsulates the process:

The very recording of a ceremonial often indicates not only that there was something special about it, but that the author of the record had some important points that he wanted to make about its instigator. The record of the ceremonial could be just as pregnant with political messages as the celebration itself.⁴⁰⁸

The concluding account of Tzimiskes' triumphant return, with pride of place given to the icon of the Virgin, should be seen in such terms.

Conclusion

Official commemorative narratives of campaigns were not unknown in Byzantium. Victories won under Anastasius were commemorated in panegyrics and epic poems, now largely lost.⁴⁰⁹ Prose accounts of particular campaigns do not seem to have been among these celebratory literary works, though it is possible that such texts are also

⁴⁰⁶ *Homily on the Translation of the Holy Blood and the Keramion*. For discussion see F. Halkin (1963); Sullivan (2011).

⁴⁰⁷ Sullivan (2011): 405-408.

⁴⁰⁸ Morris (2003): 253.

⁴⁰⁹ For the notion of a lost panegyric work celebrating Anastasius' victory over the Blemmyes in southern Egypt, see Vasiliev (1950): 285-286, 286 n.49. For the *Persica* of the Egyptian poet Colluthus of Lycopolis, commemorating Anastasius' triumph over the Persians, see Alan Cameron (1969): 108; McCormick (1986): 64 n.100. Another poet, Christodorus of Coptus, drafted the *Isaurica*, a six-book composition on the Isaurian War – see Dihle (1994): 601-602. Anastasius' court panegyrists, Procopius and Priscus, similarly praised their subjects' military accomplishments. For these individuals and literary works of Anastasius' reign in general, see Nicks (2000): esp. 185-186, 190-194; E. Jeffreys (2006): 131; Haarer (2006).

lost.⁴¹⁰ The first known ‘official history’ of a war may have appeared a generation later. John Lydus, by order of the Emperor Justinian, penned a brief work chronicling the 529-533 war against Persia.⁴¹¹ James Howard-Johnston hypothesized that dispatches formed the basis of a lost ‘official history’ of Heraclius’ campaign against the Persians of 627-628, composed by George of Pisidia, traces of which may be observed in the *Chronographia* of Theophanes Confessor.⁴¹²

In spite of problems, Kaldellis’ argument for a lost narrative of John Tzimiskes’ Balkan campaign of 971 in the tradition of these works is attractive. The role afforded to the Virgin and Saint Theodore is indicative of an official tradition, and bulletins cannot have recorded Tzimiskes’ triumph. Kaldellis has speculated that the work may have been intended as a ‘Tzimiscean response’ to Theodosios the Deacon’s *Capture of Crete*. As Lauxtermann thought Theodosios to emulate the poetry of George of Pisidia, we might ponder if the campaign narrative of Tzimiskes similarly found a literary model in George’s probable history of Heraclius’ final Persian offensive.⁴¹³ Stylistic differences aside (George’s narrative was probably a verse-

⁴¹⁰ Greatrex (1998: 75-76) suggests that the historians of Justinian’s reign deliberately played down Anastasius’ successes against the Persians so as to make those of Justinian seem more impressive. It may have been that the suppression or even eradication of works commemorating Anastasius’ achievements was part of this process. Howard-Johnston (1995c: 166 & n.13) argues that Joshua the Stylite used an official documentary source for his account of Anastasius’ counteroffensive of 503-504, a document which may have been later used by Theophanes. The lost history of Eustathios of Epiphania chronicled Anastasius’ Persian wars up to the Persian siege of Amida in 503, at which point it ends abruptly; the work however begins with events from Adam and the fall of Troy, and was thus not a monograph of a particular campaign or war.

⁴¹¹ ‘[Justinian] also bade me to write the history of the war which he had successfully conducted against the Persians’ (John Lydus: III.28; trans. 177). See also Maas (1992): 33; Treadgold (2007): 258-264. Averil Cameron (1985: 156 n.35) postulates the existence of a detailed ‘official’ historical account. Michael McCormick (1986: 64 & n.100), however, considers that John Lydus’ work may have been panegyric.

⁴¹² Howard-Johnston (1994).

⁴¹³ Evidence suggests that George’s work was widely distributed in the Near East and continued to circulate for some time, being also employed by the Armenian historians Sebeos and Movses Daskhurantsi - see Howard-Johnston (1994): 77-78; idem (2002); idem (2010): 83-84, 95-96, 124-125, 288-295. The fragments preserved in the tenth-century encyclopaedic *Suda*, different to those in

prose hybrid), the basic concept of a commemorative dispatch-based history may have resonated with a soldier emperor who sought a fitting testament to his deeds and a valuable propaganda tool.⁴¹⁴

It is maintained here that the report of the divine intervention of Theodore and Tzimiskes' subsequent triumph originated in an official account of the campaign. While not the first historical account of warfare to incorporate religious elements,⁴¹⁵ it does represent the first extant example in Byzantine historiography of a saint physically intervening to assist an emperor-led army in pitched battle. As such scenes are more common in the following centuries, it would appear that this apparent innovation of Tzimiskes and his publicists served as inspiration to later rulers and writers, and marked a significant development in the Byzantine approach to composing accounts of battle.

Theophanes, suggest an independent witness to George of Pisidia's work. For these fragments see Pertusi (1959): 276-307.

⁴¹⁴ In measuring the enduring influence of George we must also recall the lavish praise of Psellos, who likened George's poems to those of Euripides – see Colonna (1953).

⁴¹⁵ Michael Whitby (1998: 194-195) cites the example of Theophylact Simocatta, but notes that the portrayal of Heraclius' campaigns against Persia were 'the most spectacular example of the mobilisation of Christian fervour' to date. See Mary Whitby (1998): 253-225; Bergamo (2008); Sarris (2011): 245-258; Stoyanov (2011): 25-44.

V. The *History* of Michael Attaleiates

Born in the early 1020s in southern Asia Minor, Michael Attaleiates was an influential judge in Constantinople before being promoted to *patrikios* and military judge (*krites tou stratopedou*) under Romanos IV Diogenes in 1068. Attaleiates accompanied the imperial army on expeditions against the Turks in this capacity, and was present at the infamous defeat at Manzikert in 1071. Attaleiates continued to enjoy favour under Romanos' successor Michael VII Doukas, during which time he began writing his *History*, a work documenting events from the mid-1030s - when Attaleiates first arrived in Constantinople – to shortly before his death in 1080.⁴¹⁶

Attaleiates did not command extensive attention in modern scholarship until the 1960s, when Eudoxos Tsolakis published a number of articles on Attaleiates and his work.⁴¹⁷ In 1981, revisions to the biography formulated by Tsolakis were offered by Paul Gautier in an article on a monastic document drafted by Attaleiates.⁴¹⁸ Shortly after Alexander Kazhdan explored the social and political views of Attaleiates,⁴¹⁹ and it would be almost two decades before Athanasios Markopoulos followed up on a similar theme with his look at the portrayal of man in the *History*.⁴²⁰ In between, Italian scholars Carlota Amande and Lia Raffaella Cresci examined the literary composition of the *History*, focusing on its mix of history and encomium.⁴²¹ Inmacolada Pérez Martín contributed a new edition of the *History* in 2002, along with a commentary and an introductory study on Attaleiates and his work.⁴²² Since then,

⁴¹⁶ For fuller biographies of Attaleiates see Pérez Martín (2002): xxv-xxxiii; Krallis (2006): 34-92.

⁴¹⁷ Tsolakis (1965); idem (1969); idem (1970).

⁴¹⁸ Gautier (1981).

⁴¹⁹ Kazhdan (1984c): 23-86.

⁴²⁰ Markopoulos (2003b).

⁴²¹ Amande (1989); Cresci (1991); idem (1993).

⁴²² Pérez Martín (2002).

the research of Dimitris Krallis has transformed the way in which we understand Attaleiates. By reading Attaleiates' *History* through the lens of 'history as politics', Krallis has shown how Attaleiates constructed his work in view of contemporary concerns, seeking to present his own ideas of how the empire might improve its dire situation while promoting his suitability as an advisor.⁴²³

Krallis' reappraisal of the *History* calls for a fresh look at Attaleiates' record of the campaigns of Romanos Diogenes. Attaleiates has often been mined for this rich material, above all for his account of the Battle of Manzikert.⁴²⁴ In this section we consider to what extent Attaleiates' record of his time on campaign can be considered an eyewitness account, in light of Krallis' research and in view of the practical restrictions imposed by sole reliance on autopsy.

The Limits of Autopsy in War: Attaleiates' at Hierapolis

In the tradition of Thucydides, Attaleiates stresses in his *prooimion* that he relied on what he had seen and experienced.⁴²⁵ What distinguishes Attaleiates from the majority of historians of the Middle period is that he was involved in a number of the campaigns he describes, namely those conducted by Romanos IV Diogenes along the eastern frontier. Prior to recounting his experiences on an expedition of 1068,

⁴²³ Krallis (2006), where one may find a fuller bibliographic review. Krallis' book, adapted from his doctoral thesis, appeared too late for consultation.

⁴²⁴ Cahen (1934); Janssens (1968-1972); Vryonis (1971): 96-103; idem (1992); idem (1998); idem (2001); idem (2003b); idem (2005); Cheynet (1980); De Vries - van der Velden (1997); Vratimos-Chatzopoulos (2005).

⁴²⁵ *περὶ ὧν οὐκ ἀκοῆ καὶ μύθοις ἐτέρων παρέλαβον, ἀλλ' ὧν αὐτὸς αὐτόπτης καὶ θεατῆς ἐχρημάτισα* (Attaleiates: 6.1-3). Even when recounting the events of his early years Attaleiates places great significance on his historical role as an eyewitness - see Krallis (2006): 53-55.

Attaleiates asserts that what follows is written entirely from autopsy, not hearsay.⁴²⁶

Is Attaleiates merely giving the impression of being an eyewitness, in order to boost his own credentials, or can we observe substance in his claims?

We begin with an episode from Attaleiates' record of operations in northern Syria in 1068. During his account of fighting at Hierapolis, Attaleiates centres his observations on an engagement outside the camp, in which the Arabs battled the elite *tagma* of the *scholae*, a brief struggle which resulted in many Byzantine losses. In a rare instance of personal reflection, Attaleiates remarks:

At that time I did not fear for my life so much as I acknowledged the full extent of the cowardice, of the stupidity, and of the debasement of the Romans. For while the Romans underwent such destruction in front of their military camp, none of the other detachments and none of the officers moved to help them, as they all remained motionless tending to their daily affairs as though they were encamped on friendly soil.⁴²⁷

Attaleiates was able to observe this engagement at close quarters because it occurred near the main camp, where a non-participant such as he would have been stationed. For Speros Vryonis to state that 'much of what [Attaleiates] writes is the product of his rich personal experience as a direct participant in these battles' takes Attaleiates'

⁴²⁶ Εἰ δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ ταῦτα συγγράφων τῶν ἐκ προκρίσεως αὐτῷ συνεπομένων ἐτύγγανεν καὶ τὰς τοῦ στρατοῦ διευθετῶν ὑποθέσεις ἐν κρίσεσι, πάντως ἂν οὐκ ἐξ ἀκοῆς ἀλλ' ἐξ αὐτοπτίας τὰ καθεξῆς παραδώσει διὰ γραφῆς τοῖς μετέπειτα (Attaleiates: 78.7-10).

⁴²⁷ Τότε τοῖνον κάγω οὐ τοσοῦτον ἀπέγνων τὴν ἑμαυτοῦ σωτηρίαν ὅσον τὴν τῶν Ῥωμαίων κατέγνων δειλίαν ἢ ἀπειροκαλίαν ἢ ταπεινότητα, τοσαύτης γὰρ γενομένης καταφορᾶς καὶ ἥττης τῶν Ῥωμαίων πρὸ τῆς παρεμβολῆς, οὐδεὶς τῶν λοιπῶν λόχων καὶ λοχαγῶν εἰς ἄμυναν διηρέθιστο, ἀλλὰ πάντες ἔνδον καθήμενοι ἕκαστος τὸ οἰκεῖον ἔργον, ὡς διὰ φιλίας γῆς ἐνσκηνοῦμενος (Attaleiates: 85.20-25). For further discussion of these events, see Vratimos-Chatzopoulos (2005): 163-164.

credibility as an eyewitness to an improbable degree.⁴²⁸ His role was that of a judge and advisor, not a soldier,⁴²⁹ and there is nothing to suggest that Attaleiates ever enjoyed an appreciable view of battle unless it encroached upon the marching column or, more often, the main camp.

The limits imposed upon Attaleiates' autopsy in this instance highlight a key facet of eyewitness testimony of battle. John Keegan's influential 'face of battle' approach, which sought to establish the experience of the individual combatant, speaks of 'the personal angle of vision', noting the physical obstacles which might impair one's perception in battle.⁴³⁰ This hindrance to providing a balanced and informed account of one's experience was recognized even by the Ancients. Thucydides questioned how someone could truly know what happened in a night battle, conceding that even in daylight one 'knew little of what went on beyond his own immediate surroundings'.⁴³¹ Similarly, in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, the Athenian king Theseus questioned Adrastus, king of Argos, about one's capacity to observe in battle:

The enemy they encountered in the battle, the spear from which each received his wound - these are useless tales for listeners and speakers, [the notion] that any man standing in battle, when spears are hurtling before his eyes, should declare for certain who each champion is. I could not...trust those who dared speak of such

⁴²⁸ Vryonis (2003a): 18-19.

⁴²⁹ Contra Ljubarskij (1996: 443-444), who believes that Attaleiates depicts himself as a 'bold warrior'. How one would reach this conclusion is unclear.

⁴³⁰ Keegan (1976): 128-133.

⁴³¹ ἐν μὲν γὰρ ἡμέρα σαφέστερα μὲν, ὁμῶς δὲ οὐδὲ ταῦτα οἱ παραγεγόμενοι πάντα πλὴν τὸ καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἕκαστος μὸλις οἶδεν· ἐν δὲ νυκτομαχίᾳ, ἢ μόνῃ δὴ στρατοπέδων μεγάλων ἔν γε τῷδε τῷ πολέμῳ ἐγένετο, πῶς ἂν τις σαφῶς τι ᾔδει; (Thucydides: VII.44.1). The problem of persons having differing viewpoints of the same incident, depending on what they elected to observe, is noted at *ibid*: VII.71.3.

things; for when a man is face to face with the enemy, he could hardly see what he is supposed to.⁴³²

At Hierapolis, Attaleiates was a mere observer, but his field of vision could not have been much clearer than that of a soldier. Catherine Hanley's thoughts on the eyewitness to medieval battle are applicable to this context also: 'Anyone observing a battle would see, firstly, a confused mass of struggling men, fighting with very little sense of order or discipline; if he continued to watch, his eye would be caught by one or more individuals, and he would begin to focus on them'.⁴³³ Was the defeat of the *tagmata* outside Hierapolis truly 'the most important event' of the 1068 campaign, as Antonios Vratimos-Chatzopoulos maintains,⁴³⁴ or does the incident merely seem such because it was one of the few events Attaleiates could clearly recount having seen it first-hand?

Attaleiates' Experience at the Battle of Manzikert

One discerns similar restrictions in Attaleiates' perspective of the defeat at Manzikert in 1071. Attaleiates was among many in camp confused as to why a small force under Nikephoros Bryennios had been attacked by a large number of Turks.⁴³⁵ He was only able to ascertain what became of the supporting force led by Nikephoros Basilakes

⁴³² ὅτω ξυνέστη τῶν δ' ἕκαστος ἐν μάχῃ
ἢ τραῦμα λόγχης πολεμίων ἐδέξατο.
κενοὶ γὰρ οὗτοι τῶν τ' ἀκουόντων λόγοι
καὶ τοῦ λέγοντος, ὅστις ἐν μάχῃ βεβῶς
λόγχης ἰούσης πρόσθεν ὀμμάτων πυκνῆς
σαφῶς ἀπήγγειλ' ὅστις ἐστὶν ἀγαθός.
οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην οὔτ' ἐρωτῆσαι τάδε
οὔτ' αὖ πιθέσθαι τοῖσι τολμῶσιν λέγειν·
μόλις γὰρ ἂν τις αὐτὰ τὰναγκαῖ' ὄρᾶν
δύναται' ἂν ἐστὼς πολεμίους ἐναντίος (Euripides, *Suppliant Women*: ll.847-856).

⁴³³ Hanley (2003): 117-118.

⁴³⁴ Vratimos-Chatzopoulos (2005): 184.

⁴³⁵ Attaleiates: 114-115.

when a report reached the camp, along with wounded troops.⁴³⁶ We learn that the emperor left the camp to investigate these developments, but since Attaleiates merely documents that the army returned at sunset, we may surmise that he did not accompany the party.⁴³⁷ Attaleiates' description of the Turkish attack on the camp that evening illustrates other facets of the eyewitness account of battle: psychological insight and evocation of the senses.⁴³⁸ Attaleiates vividly describes the sleepless night the camp endured as a result of the harassment of the Turks: 'There was an extraordinary fear and ill-omened utterances and a mixed cry and unintelligible sound and everything was filled with noise and danger. And everyone wished to die rather than experience such times. Not to behold this was considered a blessing'.⁴³⁹

With regard to how the eventual battle unfolded and progressed, we may apply the label of eyewitness to Attaleiates only sparingly. For events beyond the camp, Attaleiates was clearly reliant on the testimony of others. Citing the treachery of Diogenes' rival Andronikos Doukas as a key factor in the collapse, Attaleiates notes that this version of events was that provided by 'most people' (οἱ πολλοὶ πληροφοροῦσιν ὅτι...)⁴⁴⁰ As the army poured back into the camp, Attaleiates bemoaned the lack of an 'informed statement' (λόγος οὐδεὶς ἀπηγγέλλετο καίριος).⁴⁴¹ In the absence of official word, Attaleiates heard only conflicting rumours from those fleeing from the battle: 'some' said that the emperor had stood firm and routed the

⁴³⁶ Ibid: 115-116.

⁴³⁷ Ibid: 116.

⁴³⁸ See in general Keegan (1976); Kagan (2006): esp. 61-62; Harari (2008). Emily Albu (2005) draws particular attention to the strong emotional and psychological aspects of the 'eyewitness' testimony of the *Gesta Francorum*.

⁴³⁹ Τότε δὴ τότε καὶ φόβος ἐξάισιος καὶ λόγος ἀπαίσιος καὶ βοή συμμιγῆς καὶ ἄσημος κρότος καὶ πάντα μετὰ θορύβων καὶ κινδύνων ἐδείκνυτο καὶ πᾶς τις θανεῖν ἐπεθύμει μᾶλλον ἢ τοιοῦτον ἰδεῖν καιρὸν καὶ τὸ μὴ κατιδεῖν ὡς εὐτυχῆς ἐνομίζετο καὶ τοὺς μὴ τοιοῦτον ἰδόντας ὡς εὐτυχεῖς ἐμακάριζεν (Attaleiates: 116.25-117.3; trans. 232).

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid: 120.6-13.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid: 120.21-23.

barbarians, ‘others’ that he had been killed or captured, while ‘yet others made other assertions’, suggesting that victory changed hands until many of the Cappadocians standing with the emperor began to flee.⁴⁴² Attaleiates is attempting to convey the chaos of these desperate moments; Patrick Walsh identified the narrative device employed – reports of different but simultaneous actions by a number of groups – as the ‘division of crowds’, observing that the technique was ‘especially frequent in scenes of disorder and confusion’.⁴⁴³ Presumably seeking more reliable testimony, Attaleiates waited until the imperial horsemen returned, but they had not seen the emperor.⁴⁴⁴ He encouraged the retreating soldiers to turn back, but once the Turks drew near the encampment Attaleiates thought of little other than salvation and fled back to Constantinople by way of Trebizond, offering little detail about his journey.⁴⁴⁵

Attaleiates’ view at Manzikert was again that of a camp-follower, able to observe events in and around camp, but forced to rely on hearsay and reports for actions further afield. Though present, he struggled for accurate information as to the fate of the Byzantine army, and probably only pieced together the course of the battle once he returned to Constantinople. Indeed, being only a few kilometres away from the action afforded Attaleiates no clearer consensus than Michael Psellos, who writes of survivors and messengers trickling into the capital in the days after the battle, each

⁴⁴² τῶν μὲν λεγόντων ἰσχυρῶς ἀντιπαρατάξασθαι τὸν βασιλέα μετὰ τῶν ὑπολελειμμένων αὐτῷ καὶ τοὺς βαρβάρους τρέψασθαι, τῶν δὲ σφαγῆν ἢ ἄλωσιν καταγγελλόντων αὐτοῦ καὶ ἄλλων ἄλλα συναιρόντων καὶ παλίντροπον ἑκατέρου μέρους τὴν νίκην καταλεγόντων ἕως ἤρξαντο καὶ τῶν σὺν αὐτῷ Καππαδοκῶν πολλοὶ κατὰ μοίρας τινὰς ἐκεῖσε ἀποφοιτῶν (ibid: 120.23-121.1; trans. 235).

⁴⁴³ Walsh (1961): 185-186. Walsh was discussing the use of this literary technique in relation to Roman historian Livy but Andreola Rossi (2004: 143-145) notes its presence in other narratives of war, including Greek texts.

⁴⁴⁴ Τὸ δὲ μετὰ τοῦτο καὶ τῶν βασιλικῶν ἱπέων πολλοὶ μετὰ τῶν ἵππων ἐπαναστρέφοντες μὴ ἰδεῖν τὸν βασιλέα τί γέγονεν ἐρωτώμενοι ἀπεκρίναντο (Attaleiates: 121.3-5). See Cheynet (1980: 428-429) for possible identification of these ‘imperial’ troops.

⁴⁴⁵ Attaleiates: 119-121, 124. John Keegan (1976: 45-52) notes that the view of the soldier (i.e. active participant) will always focus on his personal survival in dangerous situations.

offering a different report on the fate of the emperor.⁴⁴⁶ In this respect, Attaleiates' account perfectly conveys the sense of panic and confusion among the imperial army as the battle unfolded. When compared with the later account of Nikephoros Bryennios, who seems far more interested in upholding the reputation of his homonymous grandfather, one can appreciate all the more the unique experience provided by Attaleiates' civilian observer.⁴⁴⁷ The value attached to his record is summed up by Carole Hillenbrand, who judged Attaleiates to be 'the most precious account of all' sources on the Battle of Manzikert.⁴⁴⁸

Attaleiates' Sources and Access to Privileged Information

While Attaleiates relied to a considerable degree on his own autopsy, he was not quite the 'Autopsiefanatiker' that Athanasios Markopoulos considers him to be.⁴⁴⁹

Attaleiates had little choice but to rely on oral and written sources for information on events he did not personally witness. In the case of the Battle of Manzikert, Attaleiates was dependent on informants for events he had not directly observed. His knowledge of Romanos' heroic actions in the field and subsequent time in captivity,

⁴⁴⁶ Psellos, *Chronographia*: II, 162-163 (XXIII).

⁴⁴⁷ Bryennios: 104-120. Bryennios must have drawn upon first-hand testimony, either a written account or a story passed down through his family. Speros Vryonis (1992: 131) concluded that Bryennios was writing 'a family and political pamphlet on the battle'. Jonathan Shepard (1975: 221-222) describes Bryennios the Elder as 'a first-hand, if biased, informant', critical of Romanos Diogenes, but seems to prefer him over Attaleiates nonetheless.

⁴⁴⁸ Hillenbrand (2007: 17). It had not always been thus. Claude Cahen (1934) observed apparent inaccuracies which led him to favour Arabic sources for reconstructing the events of 26th August 1071. Antonio Carile (1968; idem 1969) inclined towards the account of Bryennios, asserting that Attaleiates' partiality towards his patron Nikephoros III Botaneiates led the historian to taint his battle narrative with unfounded accusations against Bryennios. Yet Vryonis has disproved the arguments of Cahen and Carile and championed the pre-eminence of Attaleiates in a series of works (1971: 96-103, esp. 100-101 n.109; idem 1992; idem 1998; idem 2001; idem 2003b; idem 2005). Modern scholarship tends to follow Vryonis (Janssens 1968-1972; Cheynet 1980; Vratimos-Chatzopoulos: 48-51), though not all are convinced: Jonathan Shepard (1975: 222-223) viewed Attaleiates as a fierce apologist of Romanos IV, deeming the historian to be 'far from objective', and, like Carile, finding Bryennios' narrative 'more precise and plausible' in terms of its exposition of tactical manoeuvres.

⁴⁴⁹ Markopoulos (1988): 229. Ruth Macrides (1996: 209-210) dismisses Markopoulos' claim.

for example, is thought to have been taken from a letter the emperor sent his wife Eudokia, recounting his troubles.⁴⁵⁰ Throughout Attaleiates' record of Romanos' campaigns, there are frequent mentions of confidential plans, the activities of distant forces, and the movements of the enemy, demonstrating the extent of his wider knowledge. His position as *krites tou stratopedou* would have afforded him insight into the workings of military command.⁴⁵¹ During the campaign of 1069, for example, Attaleiates was apparently among a council Romanos Diogenes convened in order to discuss his plans.⁴⁵² Admittedly we cannot be certain that this participation was indicative of regular practice.⁴⁵³ Though Romanos may have valued Attaleiates' opinion,⁴⁵⁴ there is evidence to suggest that Attaleiates was not always privy to Romanos' decision-making.⁴⁵⁵ Yet even if he was at times shut out of planning sessions, there can be little question that Attaleiates was well-equipped to write about

⁴⁵⁰ Attaleiates: 120, 121-124. Use of the letter is suggested by Vryonis (2001); idem (2003b). Receipt of such a letter in Constantinople is confirmed by Michael Psellos: *καὶ ὥσπερ αὐτάγγελος τοῦ μετὰ τὸ ἀτύχημα εὐτυχήματος τῆ βασιλίδι καθίσταται γράμμασι τῆς ἰδίας χειρὸς ἃ συμβεβήκοι τούτῳ σημειωσάμενος* (*Chronographia*: II, 164 [XXVI]).

⁴⁵¹ For Attaleiates' status in the army, see Haldon (2002a). His presence in the camp alone would have been a useful conduit to important information from command – see in general on this point Harari (2007b).

⁴⁵² Attaleiates: 96-99.

⁴⁵³ While Speros Vryonis Jr. (1992: 130) asserts that Attaleiates participated in all Romanos' war councils throughout the campaign of 1071, Antonios Vratimos-Chatzopoulos (2005: 201, 219-230) is unconvinced that the council of 1069 was anything other than a one-off. The author later appears to contradict himself however, opining that after 1068 Romanos no longer consulted his generals, only his judges (*ibid*: 237).

⁴⁵⁴ Romanos is said to have personally persuaded a reluctant Attaleiates to accompany him on his 1069 campaign, offering him the title of *patrikios* as incentive (Attaleiates: 93-94). We should likewise note however that Romanos impelled Michael Psellos to join him for the same campaign (Psellos, *Chronographia*: II, 159-160 [XV-XVI]). Vratimos-Chatzopoulos (2005: 200-201) proposes that Romanos realized the strategic and tactical failures of his last campaign, and therefore was seeking reliable advisers to avoid making similar errors on his new expedition. It is also suggested that Attaleiates' hesitancy may be attributable to his desire to monitor his property and estates, or, more likely, because he was irked at not having been consulted at any time on the previous campaign.

⁴⁵⁵ Vratimos-Chatzopoulos (2005: 223-224) astutely observes that Attaleiates' obvious ignorance as to why Romanos later reneged on his acceptance of the historian's advice at the aforementioned meeting may be attributed to Attaleiates being part of a different section of the army at the time the emperor made his final decision. As Attaleiates (99-100) is unsure as to why this decision was made, he credits the change to misfortune (*ἀκλήρῖα*), a rather rare occurrence in a work which generally strives for causation. On this point, see Krallis (2006): 191-192.

imperial campaigns. He consistently makes reference to reports and messages as a source of information for distant events,⁴⁵⁶ and his judicial position probably afforded him access to administrative documents such as muster rolls, inventory lists and post-action reports.⁴⁵⁷ Not since Ammianus Marcellinus and Procopius had a Roman historian enjoyed such close proximity with central command.⁴⁵⁸

Influences on Attaleiates' Record of the Campaigns of Romanos IV Diogenes

One cannot isolate Attaleiates' experiences on campaign from the rest of his *History*. In respect of the eyewitness chronicles of the First Crusade, Yuval Noah Harari and Elizabeth Lapina have demonstrated that the records might be strongly influenced by the ideals of the author and his subsequent experiences, and adapted to a more conventional historical narrative model.⁴⁵⁹ This is true also of Attaleiates. Modern

⁴⁵⁶ Attaleiates: 80.3-7, for word (λόγος) reaching the emperor of the Turkish attack on Neokaisarea in 1068; 92.4-9 for rumour (φήμη) reaching the emperor at Tysarium that the *syntagmatarch* left to guard Melitene had allowed the enemy to pass through to Amorion unscathed; 95.4-6 for word (φήμη) reaching the emperor at Larissa that a group of Turks was pillaging land nearby; 100.13-18 for rumour (φήμη) reaching the emperor that the force he left under Philaretos Brachamios at Melitene had suffered a great defeat, later confirmed by the appearance of survivors in Romanos' camp; 105.12 for word (φήμη) reaching the emperor of the defeat and capture of Manuel Komnenos in 1070; 114.22-24 for mention of word (φήμη) reaching the camp at Manzikert that a Turkish force was attacking foragers; 116.7 for news (ἀγγελία) reaching the camp of Basilakes' capture; 124.5-8 for Attaleiates hearing (ἀντήκοοι) a report (φήμη) whilst at Trebizond that Romanos had been set free and was mustering troops along the eastern frontier.

⁴⁵⁷ See Pérez Martín (2002): xlii n.127, for the suggestion that Attaleiates may have accessed documentary sources through his office. Warren Treadgold (2007: 218) speculates that Procopius, as one involved in military administration, may have had access to statistical documents and used them in the composition of his *Wars*. For military rolls (*stratiotikoi katalogoi*), see Lemerle (1979a): 144.

⁴⁵⁸ For both historians see in general Austin (1983). For Procopius' sources of knowledge, see Averil Cameron (1985); Kaegi (1990): esp. 56. For Ammianus Marcellinus' informed view of operations, see Austin (1979): esp. 92-116; Matthews (1986). Kimberly Kagan (2006: 43) notes Ammianus 'being part of the senior decision-making process (or seeing events from that perspective) provides a much more useful framework for understanding combat than simply being an eyewitness'. This may apply to any eyewitness historian recounting campaigns.

⁴⁵⁹ Harari (2004b); Lapina (2007). Relevant studies on eyewitnessing in western medieval and Early Modern literature include Guenée (1980): 77-78; Beer (1981); Morse (1991); Adorno (1992); Damian-Grint (1999); Frisch (2004).

scholarship generally affirms that Manzikert was not a military disaster,⁴⁶⁰ but one would be forgiven for thinking this reading Attaleiates' account. 'For what could be more piteous...than for the whole Roman state to be seen as ruined, and the empire as all but collapsing?'⁴⁶¹ This sentiment is understandable given that Attaleiates was imperilled⁴⁶² and lost close friends in the struggle.⁴⁶³ But more than this, the failure was compounded by subsequent events: civil war, the death of Romanos, the catastrophic reign of Michael VII Doukas, and the collapse of the eastern defences against the Turks.⁴⁶⁴ Thus when Attaleiates writes of the empire's ruin at Manzikert, he does so with the torrid aftermath in mind.

Other factors may be at work in Attaleiates' reflections on Manzikert. With Nikephoros Botaneiates his patron, it has been suggested that Attaleiates deliberately portrayed Nikephoros Bryennios the Elder, a rival of Botaneiates, as cowardly; however, a closer reading of the text reveals that Attaleiates actually defends Bryennios from such criticism.⁴⁶⁵ Another potential influence is Attaleiates'

⁴⁶⁰ Cheynet (1980).

⁴⁶¹ τί γὰρ ἐλεεινότερον...ἅπαν ἀνάστατον τὸ Ῥωμαϊκὸν καθορᾶσθαι καὶ βασιλείαν ἐν ἀκαρεὶ κατανοεῖν συμπεσοῦσαν; (Attaleiates: 121.10-15; trans. 235).

⁴⁶² In a monastic document of c.1077, Attaleiates attests to his lasting relief of being saved 'from accursed hands during wars against the Persians' (*Rule* of Michael Attaleiates for his Almshouse in Rhaidestos and for the Monastery of Christ *Panoiktirmon* in Constantinople: 85.1123-1127; trans. 355). Evidently, the traumatic experience remained with him for the rest of his days. See also Alexander (1962): 356-357; Krallis (2006): 84.

⁴⁶³ Attaleiates: 167. See Cheynet (1980): 430, 436-437; Kazhdan (1984c): 48-49, 50; Krallis (2006): 84-91, 138-151 for discussion of these individuals and Attaleiates' social circle in general. *Skylitzes Continuatus* (167), perhaps mindful of the rather personal nature of this account, removes this section when paraphrasing Attaleiates' account of the campaign.

⁴⁶⁴ For an overview of events in the decade following Manzikert see Angold (1997): 115-135.

⁴⁶⁵ Carile (1969); Shepard (1985): 220-223. Kazhdan (1984c: 65) likewise believes that Attaleiates is directly criticizing Bryennios here. For the rebuttal of these arguments, see Vryonis (1992): 128-131. This is not to say that Nikephoros Bryennios the Elder is not viewed negatively in subsequent passages of the *History* - see Cresci (1993): 82-83. A detailed comparison of Attaleiates' views on Botaneiates and Bryennios may be found in idem (1991): 200-218. A number of scholars have argued that Attaleiates deliberately constructed his account of Michael VII's reign in order to glorify Botaneiates, adopting the *Vita Basilii* and its contrasting portrayals of Michael III and Basil I as a model - see

attachment to Romanos Diogenes.⁴⁶⁶ Jonathan Shepard is of the opinion that Attaleiates writes as a ‘passionate apologist’ for Romanos, seeking to justify his questionable decisions at Manzikert ‘to vindicate the fallen emperor’s memory’.⁴⁶⁷ Vratimos-Chatzopoulos concurs, observing that Attaleiates rarely criticizes Romanos for military errors.⁴⁶⁸ Krallis traces the root of Attaleiates’ portrayal of Romanos to current arguments at court. According to this view, Attaleiates’ *History* is conceivable only as a response to the *Chronographia* of Michael Psellos, a work which portrayed Romanos as an ineffective ruler and commander, practically justifying his overthrow by Psellos’ benefactor, Michael VII Doukas.⁴⁶⁹ So, while Psellos conveniently ignores the treachery of Michael’s cousin Andronikos Doukas, instead attributing the defeat to Romanos,⁴⁷⁰ Attaleiates emphasizes the betrayal as a key reason for the collapse. Psellos bemoans the futility of Romanos’ campaigns, but Attaleiates shows that they were moderately successful in reconstituting the army and making some valuable defensive gains.⁴⁷¹ I am less convinced by Krallis’ argument that Attaleiates sought to counter Psellos’ claims that Romanos was impervious to advice,⁴⁷² but the idea of a dialogue between the two works is attractive. Attaleiates’

Amande (1989): 268-271; Markopoulos (2003b): 226-227. Attaleiates’ apparent fondness for Botaneiates has recently been called into question however by Krallis (2006: 227-240).

⁴⁶⁶ Krallis (2006): 219-220.

⁴⁶⁷ Shepard (1985): 220-223.

⁴⁶⁸ Vratimos-Chatzopoulos (2005): esp. 32-40.

⁴⁶⁹ Krallis (2006): 127-203, esp. 157-173.

⁴⁷⁰ Psellos, *Chronographia*: II, 161-162 (XIX-XXII).

⁴⁷¹ See in general Vratimos-Chatzopoulos (2005).

⁴⁷² Krallis (2006: 137, 167-169) suggests that Psellos was present and ‘likely defeated’ by Attaleiates’ argument during a council on the 1069 campaign, and that Psellos’ frustration may be seen in his account of the Manzikert campaign, where Romanos is depicted as arrogant and impervious to advice. Krallis argues that Attaleiates’ account of the council may have been meant to show that this was not the case, and also serve as a painful reminder to Psellos of his failure at the meeting. Yet I would argue against Psellos’ presence at this meeting, since Attaleiates states that only military judges were present. Furthermore, it seems that Romanos forced Psellos to accompany him not because he valued his advice, but rather because he did not trust him. Psellos professes in a letter only to assisting in the construction of siege machines, and his decision to leave the campaign early at Caesarea after a

conscious effort to vindicate Romanos' decisions and consistently highlight his bravery and generalship at Manzikert is perhaps best understood when viewed as a response to Psellos' criticism of the emperor.

We must also consider Krallis' suggestion that Attaleiates endeavoured to display his wisdom to show prospective emperors that he could be of great use as an advisor.

According to Krallis, the *History* 'was ultimately a billboard on which the author advertised his skills as a political analyst'.⁴⁷³ Attaleiates' experience in the service of Romanos Diogenes was critical in this respect. Attaleiates may only insert himself into the narrative to indicate that he had witnessed, heard about, or participated in an event, or that he had advised the emperor,⁴⁷⁴ but each incident assumes added significance when viewed in light of Krallis' proposal. Let us consider Attaleiates' most notable role in the text, at the war council convened by Romanos in 1069.

While most judges concur with Romanos' idea that the army should march homeward, Attaleiates is the sole dissenting voice, contending instead that the army should press on and take a number of border fortresses.⁴⁷⁵ Unlike his fellow judges, Attaleiates is no mere 'yes man' who puts his own interests first. He appears, in short, perfect advisor material.⁴⁷⁶ Romanos might reject Attaleiates' plan, but the historian's foresight is seen in the campaign of 1071, where Chliat and Manzikert, two key border fortresses, were the principal objectives. By Attaleiates' account, the

thoroughly unpleasant experience seems to confirm his dispensable role. For these events see Snipes (1981).

⁴⁷³ Krallis (2006): 339.

⁴⁷⁴ Vryonis (1992): 129.

⁴⁷⁵ Attaleiates: 96-99. For discussion see Vratimos-Chatzopoulos (2005): 247-248.

⁴⁷⁶ Attaleiates' decision to portray himself as a wise advisor is observed by Ljubarskij (1996): 443-444.

expedition failed due to disloyalty and misfortune; the strategy was always a sound one.⁴⁷⁷

Conclusion

Attaleiates' narrative of the campaigns of Romanos IV Diogenes, while built on a foundation of personal experience, is shaped by various factors: a desire to vindicate Romanos against the criticism of Psellos, frustration at subsequent events in the years following Manzikert, and a professional need to give evidence of his ability to provide sound guidance. Averil Cameron similarly observed that another historian involved in the events of his history – Procopius – often distorted reality for reasons of political or personal bias:

The value of Procopius as an eyewitness...is the most deceptive aspect of all; it depends totally on his subjective impressions, the quality of his observation, what he thought important and the purpose to which he put the information he collected. There is no such thing as completely objective reporting and we certainly shall not find anything like it in the work of Procopius.⁴⁷⁸

Attaleiates' descriptions of battle can read like those of an eyewitness participant. He conveys the chaos of defeat and the restricted 'personal angle of vision' in his narrative of the Battle of Manzikert, while recollection of emotions and sensory aspects heightens the personal nature of the account. Yet recollection is itself a problem. Unless he maintained a journal of his time on campaign,⁴⁷⁹ Attaleiates, like

⁴⁷⁷ On this point, see Krallis (2006): 325-328.

⁴⁷⁸ Averil Cameron (1985): 12-13.

⁴⁷⁹ Attaleiates' statement (5-6) that he began writing his history whilst involved in military operations might suggest that he made notes of his experiences on campaign with Romanos – see Krallis (2006):

most recalling an experience in war, was suspect to failing memory and the subconscious distortion of events.⁴⁸⁰ Yuval Noah Harari's conclusions on eyewitnesses to battle writing of their experiences are pertinent:

The field of vision is always narrow, hence an eyewitness can never see (or hear, or smell) *all* the facts. Because the emotional turmoil of combat plays havoc with one's sensory input, an eyewitness can never see the facts *objectively*. The passage of time between witnessing the event and giving an account of it ensures that an eyewitness will never *remember* the facts correctly.⁴⁸¹

Attaleiates was, first and foremost, a historian. Parts drawn from first-hand observation must be understood in the wider context of the *History*, taking into account the historical setting as well as the personality and intent of the author.⁴⁸²

These sections, guided by personal bias and subsequent knowledge, cannot be isolated purely as accounts of Attaleiates' personal experiences on campaign.⁴⁸³

23-24. For the notion that Procopius maintained a journal during his time on campaign with Belisarius, which he later consulted when writing the *Wars*, see Averil Cameron (1985): 12-13, 136, 148, 236.

⁴⁸⁰ Carl von Clausewitz (1832: 109-110) noted such deficiencies in the testimony of a military memoirist: 'We also admit that a good memory can be a great help; but are we then to think of memory as a separate gift of the mind, or does imagination, after all, imprint those pictures in the memory more clearly? The question must be left unanswered, especially since it seems difficult even to conceive of these two forces as operating separately'. See Fussell (1975); Harari (2008) for the problems associated with recollections of war in military memoirs of modern times. Woodman (1988: 15-23) employs such eyewitness accounts of war to highlight the difficulties facing Thucydides in his attempts to reconstruct military engagements. For general studies on the problems associated with remembrance of an event, see Felman & Laub (1992); Schacter (1996); Eakin (2000).

⁴⁸¹ Harari (2009): 215. The italics are Harari's.

⁴⁸² This seems to be true of most reflective eyewitness works in medieval literature. Studying eyewitness accounts of three sieges – Acre, Constantinople (1453), and Granada – Cyril Aslanov (2009) concludes that while each retain a nucleus of eyewitness testimony, it is often mingled with or even replaced by rhetorical or poetic amplification, and laden with classical allusions.

⁴⁸³ The comments of Harari (2007a: 303) made in relation to medieval and Renaissance military memoirs, similar in that they too represent eyewitness accounts of war composed at a later stage, are insightful: 'Since they are conscious retrospective attempts to shape the narrative of war, and since they suffer not only from the pitfalls of memory but also from the benefits of hindsight, they tend to be factually less reliable than diaries, letters, and administrative documents created in the midst of war'.

Faithful autoptic testimony was probably not required of Attaleiates. Polybius, Attaleiates' historical model,⁴⁸⁴ judged fellow chronicler Timaeus to be ill-equipped for the task of history writing because he lacked political and military experience:

It is impossible for a man with no experience of warlike operations to write well about what happens in war...as nothing written by mere bookworms is blessed with experience or vividness, their works also are of no practical value.⁴⁸⁵

Polybius suggests that a historian need not have seen every engagement that he wrote about, but required experience of warfare in order to write about military operations convincingly.⁴⁸⁶ Greek historiography may have ruled that if a writer had been involved in war at any time, his word was deemed more believable, more trustworthy.⁴⁸⁷ If so, Attaleiates gained leverage from having been on campaign, with readers perhaps more inclined to consider him a certified authority in military matters as a result. The tenth-century encyclopaedic work, the *Suda*, describes Procopius 'as Belisarius' secretary and attendant during all the events, wars, and deeds he

⁴⁸⁴ Krallis (2006): 102-126.

⁴⁸⁵ Ὅτι οὔτε περὶ τῶν κατὰ πόλεμον συμβαινόντων δυνατόν ἐστι γράψαι καλῶς τὸν μηδεμίαν ἐμπειρίαν ἔχοντα τῶν πολεμικῶν ἔργων οὔτε περὶ τῶν ἐν ταῖς πολιτείαις τὸν μὴ πεπειραμένον τῶν τοιοῦτων πράξεων καὶ περιστάσεων. λοιπὸν οὔτ' ἐμπείρους ὑπὸ τῶν βιβλιακῶν οὔτ' ἐμφαντικῶς οὐδενὸς γραφομένου συμβαίνει τὴν πραγματείαν ἄπρακτον γίνεσθαι τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσιν· εἰ γὰρ ἐκ τῆς ἱστορίας ἐξέλθοι τις τὸ δυνάμενον ὠφελεῖν ἡμᾶς, τὸ λοιπὸν αὐτῆς ἄζηλον καὶ ἀνωφελὲς γίνεται παντελῶς (Polybius: XII.25g; trans. IV, 381, with amendments). For discussion, see Walbank (1972): 72-74.

⁴⁸⁶ 'It is difficult, perhaps, to have taken a personal role...in every kind of event, but it is necessary to have had experience of the most important and those of regular occurrence' (Polybius: XII.25h.6; trans. IV, 383). Lucian (§§29, 37) concurred with Polybius in this respect, asserting that the ideal historian should have experience as a soldier.

⁴⁸⁷ Yuval Noah Harari (2004a: 32-33) observes this phenomenon also in relation to Renaissance military memoirs: 'Manipulations of authority characterize most Renaissance memoirists for whom the eyewitnessing-truthfulness connection is important. They very often emphasize their status as eyewitnesses of certain events to gain authority, which they then utilize to speak authoritatively on completely different matters'.

recorded'.⁴⁸⁸ It is generally acknowledged however that Procopius only accompanied Belisarius until 540;⁴⁸⁹ his continued status as an eyewitness must have been assumed on the basis of his previous experiences.⁴⁹⁰ A measure of first-hand experience thus helped convince audiences of the credence and expertise of the historian. Even today, scholars are influenced by the very presence of Attaleiates on Romanos' campaigns. Krallis asserts that 'Attaleiates had witnessed Doukas' treachery on the field of battle',⁴⁹¹ but nowhere does he claim to have personally seen the incident. Though the distinction between participation and autopsy may be vague, the benefit of personal experience to the perceived authority of a historian is clear.

⁴⁸⁸ γέγονεν ἐπὶ τῶν χρόνων Ἰουστινιανοῦ τοῦ βασιλέως, ὑπογραφεὺς χρηματίσας βελισσαρίου καὶ ἀκόλουθος κατὰ πάντας τοὺς συμβάντας πολέμους τε καὶ πράξεις τὰς ὑπ' αὐτοῦ συγγραφείσας (*Suda*: Pi, 2479).

⁴⁸⁹ Averil Cameron (1985): 13-15; 135-136, 193-198, 202-203; Rance (2005); Treadgold (2007): 184-185, 215-216.

⁴⁹⁰ It is possible that these observers were also influenced by Procopius' opening statements, where he claims to have been 'especially competent to write the history of these events...because it fell to his lot, when appointed advisor to the general Belisarius, to be an eyewitness of practically all the events to be described' (Procopius, *Wars*: I.1.3; trans. 5).

⁴⁹¹ Krallis (2006): 77-78.

VI. Anna Komnene and the *Alexiad*

Anna Komnene, born in 1083 to parents Alexios I Komnenos and Eirene Doukaina, is perhaps most notable in the political sphere for a failed attempt to install her husband, Nikephoros Bryennios, as emperor in place of sibling John II Komnenos in 1119.⁴⁹² It was probably upon the death of Bryennios in 1137 that Anna retired to the *Kecharitomene* monastery in Constantinople, and there she finished the project her husband had begun: a history of the reign of her father entitled the *Alexiad*. As Anna appears to have been writing with awareness of the Second Crusade, it is probable she finished not long before her death c.1153/1154.⁴⁹³

Anna has long intrigued modern scholars, and our understanding of her historical method and the purpose of the *Alexiad* has advanced considerably since Georgina Buckler's seminal monograph of 1929.⁴⁹⁴ One prominent branch of study is concerned with Anna's depiction of the First Crusade,⁴⁹⁵ and related to this are several articles which interpret Anna's account of said enterprise as a response to Manuel Komnenos' handling of the Second Crusade.⁴⁹⁶ Barbara Hill and Thalma Gouma-Peterson have investigated Anna's social status and gender issues in the *Alexiad*.⁴⁹⁷ Peter Frankopan has analyzed the accuracy of the *Alexiad* and endeavoured to explain Anna's presentation of particular individuals and events.⁴⁹⁸ Diether Reinsch has contributed studies on various aspects of the text, including its literary qualities.⁴⁹⁹ Finally, there is James-Howard Johnston's controversial thesis on the composition of

⁴⁹² For these events see Hill (2000).

⁴⁹³ For Anna's death see Browning (1962b).

⁴⁹⁴ Buckler (1929).

⁴⁹⁵ France (1984); Shepard (1988); idem (1997); Frankopan (2002a); idem (2012).

⁴⁹⁶ R. D. Thomas (1991); Magdalino (2000b); Stephenson (2003c).

⁴⁹⁷ Hill (1996a); idem (1996b); Gouma-Peterson (1996); idem (2000); Smythe (2006).

⁴⁹⁸ Frankopan (1996); idem (1998); idem (2004); idem (2005); idem (2006); idem (2007).

⁴⁹⁹ Reinsch (1989); idem (1996); idem (1998).

the *Alexiad*, which inspired responses from Ruth Macrides and Jakov Ljubarskij contesting his arguments and making the case for Anna's originality.⁵⁰⁰

Our discussion of Anna draws upon this scholarship and contributes to the debate over her sources, which demand further clarification. Anna is by far the most revealing of the Middle Byzantine historians in respect of sources employed, digressing into a broad discussion of her material in Book XIV of the *Alexiad*. The purpose and substance of this extraordinary 'method chapter' have perhaps yet to be realized. Only by unravelling the layers of rhetoric may we attempt to determine the sources which were employed by Anna Komnene.

Anna's Discussion of her Sources

We begin with what Anna herself says about her sources. She explains that some of her material was 'gathered in a number of ways from the emperor's comrades-in-arms, who transmitted to us information about the progress of the wars through certain carriers'.⁵⁰¹ While E. R. A. Sewter and Peter Frankopan translate *διὰ τινῶν πορθμέων* as 'beyond the straits', I have favoured the interpretation of Ruth Macrides,⁵⁰² which seems more accurate given the use of *διὰ τινῶν*. Similar is the German translation of Diether Reinsch, who renders the phrase as 'auch auf verschiedene Weise'.⁵⁰³ The difference is not hugely significant; Anna is

⁵⁰⁰ Howard-Johnston (1996); Macrides (2000); Ljubarskij (1998): 16-19; idem (2000b); Reinsch (2000).

⁵⁰¹ τὰ δὲ καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ξυστρατευσαμένων τῷ αὐτοκράτορι, ποικίλως περὶ τούτων μανθάνουσα καὶ διὰ τινῶν πορθμέων εἰς ἡμᾶς διαβιβαζόντων τὰ τοῖς πολέμοις συμβεβηκότα (Anna Komnene: XIV.7.5.43-45; trans. 421, with amendments).

⁵⁰² Macrides (2000): 70.

⁵⁰³ 'Einen Teil der Fakten also kenne ich, wie gesagt, aus eigener Anschauung, anderes wieder habe ich von denjenigen erfahren, die den Autokrator auf seinen Feldzügen begleitet haben, wobei ich mich darüber auch auf verschiedene Weise durch Gewährsmänner informiert habe, welche uns die Kriegsergebnisse übermittelten' (Anna Komnene: German trans. 502).

undoubtedly referring to written material coming into her possession. James Howard-Johnston considered that Anna's use of *ποικίλως* and *διὰ τινῶν πορθμέων* in this passage might be discreet references to the purported dossier of material compiled by her husband Nikephoros Bryennios, discussed below.⁵⁰⁴ The documents in question are likely to have derived from Alexios' reign. Anna earlier recounts the bravery of one Aspietes in battle 'according to a report distributed at that time', which appears to confirm that she was not consulting current material.⁵⁰⁵ Athanasios Kambylis thought the aforementioned passage about Anna's sources to refer to 'Boten, von kaiserlichen Offizieren vom Schlachtfeld nach Constantinople gesandt'.⁵⁰⁶ Frankopan writes of Anna drawing upon, and adding to, 'campaign records' for coverage of Alexios' wars with the Normans.⁵⁰⁷ Howard-Johnston reached a similar conclusion: 'Written materials, produced by commanders in the field or senior officials in Constantinople, with the aid of their subordinate staffs, were the most useful sources from which to form the military and diplomatic core of [Anna's] history'.⁵⁰⁸

Anna then appears to elaborate upon this written material as well as divulging other sources of information:

My material...has been gathered from insignificant writings, absolutely devoid of literary pretension, and from old soldiers who were serving in the army at the time that my father seized the Roman sceptre, who fell on hard times and exchanged the turmoil of the outer world for the peaceful life of monks. The writings that came into my possession were written in simple language without

⁵⁰⁴ Howard-Johnston (1996): 280 n.47.

⁵⁰⁵ ὡς ἡ φήμη τὸ τηνικαῦτα ἐκίρυττε (Anna Komnene: XII.2.1.92-95).

⁵⁰⁶ Kambylis (1975): 143.

⁵⁰⁷ Frankopan (2006): 166-167.

⁵⁰⁸ Howard-Johnston (1996): 290.

embellishment; they adhered closely to the truth, were distinguished by no elegance whatever and were composed in a manner lacking style and free from rhetorical flourish. The accounts given by the old veterans were, in language and thought, similar to the writings, and I based the truth of my history on them, checking and comparing what I had written against what they had said, and what they told me with what I had often heard, from my father in particular and from my uncles both on my father's and on my mother's side.⁵⁰⁹

The 'writings' (ξυγγραμμάτων), while similar to the accounts of retired veterans, clearly represent a distinct body of material. Anna may be referring to the field dispatches alluded to in the preceding section, or perhaps memoirs, as suggested by Frankopan.⁵¹⁰ That Anna had bulletins and dispatches in mind is supported by a reference to this sort of material within close proximity of this section. Anna's digression on her sources interrupts discussion of the exploits of Eustathios Kamytzes, charged by Alexios to deliver a bulletin to the people of Constantinople. While it is not stated that Kamytzes read from a written document, Anna notes that Kamytzes 'gave an account of what had happened, as we have described it',⁵¹¹ indicating that she may have consulted a record of his speech for her account of Alexios and

⁵⁰⁹ ἃ δὲ συνειλόχουν τῆς ἱστορίας, ἴστω Θεός, ἴστω ἢ ὑπερκόσμιος μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐμὴ δεσπότης, ἀπὸ τινῶν συνελεξάμην ξυγγραμμάτων ἀχρείων καὶ ἀσπουδῶν παντάπασι καὶ γερόντων ἀνθρώπων στρατευσαμένων κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ, καθ' ὃν οὐμὸς πατήρ τῶν σκήπτρων Ῥωμαίων ἐπέληπτο, χρησαμένων δὲ συμφοραῖς καὶ μετασηματισθέντων ἀπὸ τῆς κοσμικῆς τύρβης εἰς τὴν τῶν μοναχῶν γαληνιαίαν κατάστασιν. τὰ γὰρ εἰς χεῖρας ἐμὰς ἐμπεσόντα συγγράμματα ἀπλᾶ μὲν ἦσαν τὴν φράσιν καὶ ἀπερίεργα καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐχόμενα καὶ οὐδὲν τι κομψὸν ἐπιδεδειγμένα οὐδὲ ῥητορικὸν ὄγκον ἐπισυρόμενα, τὰ δὲ παρὰ τῶν γεραιτέρων ἐκδιηγούμενα τῆς αὐτῆς ἦσαν καὶ λέξεως καὶ διανοίας τῶν συγγραμμάτων ἐχόμενα· καὶ ἐτεκμηράμην ἐξ αὐτῶν τὴν τῆς ἱστορίας ἀλήθειαν, συμβάλλουσα καὶ παρεξετάζουσα τὰ παρ' ἐμαυτῆς ἱστορούμενα πρὸς τὰ παρ' ἐκείνων λεγόμενα καὶ τὰ παρ' ἐκείνων πρὸς τὰ παρ' ἐμαυτῆς, ἅπερ αὐτὴ ἐξ αὐτοῦ τὸ τοῦμοῦ πατρός καὶ τῶν πρὸς πατρός καὶ μητρός ἐμοὶ θεῖων ἠκηκόειν πολλάκις. ἀφ' ὧν ἀπάντων τὸ τῆς ἀληθείας ἅπαν σῶμα συνεξυφαίνεται (Anna Komnene: XIV.7.7.64-78; trans. 422 with alterations).

⁵¹⁰ Frankopan (1998): 13 n.31.

⁵¹¹ ὁ μὲν γὰρ διηγήσατο τὰ συμπεπτοκότα, καθάπερ εἶπομεν (Anna Komnene: XIV.7.8.81-82; trans. 422).

Kamytzes' actions against the Turks.⁵¹² The comment about the 'ξυγγραμμάτων' adhering to the truth is puzzling, since we might ask how Anna would have otherwise learned of 'the truth' beyond her sources. Anna says similar of the accounts of veterans, explaining how she checked them against what she had already written and heard about from other sources. As Kambylis and Julian Chrysostomides have recognized, this is reminiscent of the working method of Thucydides, unwilling to accept his first source for an event, 'the accuracy of each being checked by the most severe and detailed methods possible'.⁵¹³ We should thus view such statements as rhetorical, a reflection of Anna's general concerns vis-à-vis historical accuracy.

The accounts of old veterans who entered the monastic sphere require clarification. Kambylis proposes that Bernard Leib's French translation of the *Alexiad* – and by extension the English translations of Sewter and Frankopan – is incorrect to link 'ἀχρείων καὶ ἀσπουδῶν παντάπασι' with 'ξυγγραμμάτων'. Kambylis instead connects the adjectives to the veterans, so that we are to understand them as 'insignificant and completely uneducated'.⁵¹⁴ While this reading might be more accurate, it also creates problems: a cursory reading of the *Alexiad* shows that the individuals who provided Anna with information must have been relatives of her father and his leading generals – hardly 'insignificant' therefore, and likely to have been literate. Anna may claim low status for her informants to lend credibility to her narrative, with the sense also that her simplistic written material ensured greater

⁵¹² Ibid: XIV.5-6.

⁵¹³ παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀκριβεῖα περὶ ἐκάστου ἐπεξεληθὼν (Thucydides: I.22). Kambylis (1975): esp. 144-145; Chrysostomides (1982: 33-34).

⁵¹⁴ Kambylis (1975): 144 n.5.

veracity. Frankopan observes that the admission ‘does little to enhance their reliability’,⁵¹⁵ though it may have proved more persuasive with contemporary readers.

Kambylis’ interpretation of this passage is more consistent with Anna’s often misconstrued general message regarding her sources. Howard-Johnston determined that the accounts of veterans to which Anna refers were in fact memoirs, with Frankopan similarly describing them as written ‘recollections and musings’.⁵¹⁶ Ferdinand Chalandon even suggested that the retired soldiers documented their experiences at Anna’s behest.⁵¹⁷ There is no reason to think that the tendency of soldiers to author or commission (auto)biographical works was unusual and performed only at Anna’s insistence.⁵¹⁸ More importantly, it may be doubted that Anna is referring to written testimony at all in this section. Returning to our earlier point, it is improbable that soldiers without any education could have drafted memoirs. Furthermore, Anna only asserts ‘I gathered [my information] from...’ (ἀπό τινων συνελεξάμην...) old soldiers who served under Alexios – one cannot automatically draw a link with ξυγγραμμάτων, which is obviously referring to a different source of information. Indeed, in translating the text into German, Reinsch interpolated ‘[aus Erzählungen]’ before ‘von alten Soldaten’, confirming our inability to draw anything conclusive from Anna’s text. Reinsch’s insistence that the two modes of information were separate results in an intriguing reading of another part of the same passage. What Sewter and Frankopan render as ‘the accounts (τὰ...ἐκδιηγούμενα) given by the old veterans were, in language and thought, similar to the writings (τῶν συγγραμμάτων)’, Reinsch translates thus: ‘Die mündlichen

⁵¹⁵ Frankopan (1998): 13.

⁵¹⁶ Howard-Johnston (1996): 275; Frankopan (1998): 13.

⁵¹⁷ Chalandon (1900): xii.

⁵¹⁸ See chapter four of this thesis.

Erzählungen der alten Soldaten waren in Sprache und Gedanken von derselben Qualität wie die schriftlichen Berichte'.⁵¹⁹ Evidently, Reinsch considered 'τὰ...ἐκδηγούμενα' to refer explicitly to oral accounts. Perhaps this is too great an assumption, but one must wonder why Anna says nothing of the testimony provided by veteran soldiers taking written form. Mention of these accounts being similar in 'λέξεως καὶ διανοίας' to the aforementioned writings does not necessarily identify them as written texts, for, as shall be discussed, the συγγραμμάτων were probably written in the vernacular. The notion that Anna is describing oral accounts is lent further credence by her declaration that she compared her own history with what the veterans 'had said' (τὰ λεγόμενα).

Autopsy, Eyewitnessing and Veracity

Anna supports her claim to have spoken to survivors of Alexios' reign by stressing at several junctures that there were many eyewitnesses to the events she describes. Her portrait of Robert Guiscard concludes: '...as I have often heard many say'.⁵²⁰ The description of Guiscard's siege of Dyrrachion in 1081 is interrupted by the statement 'according to the person who told me', indicating an oral eyewitness informant.⁵²¹ Similar may be said for the rebel Rhapsomates, with Anna's judgments based on 'what I heard about him'.⁵²² At one point, Anna explains that 'there are men still alive today who knew my father and tell me of his deeds'. Their contribution to the substance of the *Alexiad* was 'not inconsiderable': 'for one reported or recalled to the best of his ability one fact, while another told me something else – but there was no

⁵¹⁹ Anna Komnene: German trans. 503.

⁵²⁰ ὡς πολλῶν λεγόντων πολλακίς ἀκήκοα (Anna Komnene: I.10.4.50).

⁵²¹ ὡς ὁ ταῦτα διηγησάμενος ἔλεγεν (ibid: IV.5.1.78; trans. 117).

⁵²² ὡς ἔγωγε περὶ τούτου ἤκουον (ibid: IX.2.2.52-53). For further discussion see Beaton (1986b).

discrepancy in their accounts'.⁵²³ The validity of this statement is suspect, not least since Anna admits to encountering contrasting evidence.⁵²⁴ Accounting for the Empress Maria's continued presence in the palace after the abdication of her husband Nikephoros III Botaneiates, Anna opines:

For my own part, I am in any case naturally averse to making things up or to inventing stories about history, although I know the custom is widespread, especially among the jealous and spiteful...I have heard many others speak of these things with differing accounts, as some interpreted the events of that time in one way, and others in another; each followed their own inclination, influenced by sympathy or hatred, and I saw that they did not all share the same opinion.⁵²⁵

It is realistic to assume that Anna received conflicting accounts for other parts of the *Alexiad* also. Her bold claim to the contrary is presumably an attempt to follow Thucydides and convince readers of the veracity of her content through a homogeneous narrative.

References to eyewitnesses appear rather sporadically, and it is improbable that these represent the only such instances where Anna derived information from an eyewitness. Anna's frequent reminders that her account could be corroborated by

⁵²³ εἰσὶν οἵτινες εἰς τὴν τήμερον περιόντες καὶ τὸν πατέρα τὸν ἐμὸν ἐγνωκότες καὶ τὰ κατ' αὐτὸν ἀφηγοῦμενοι, ἀφ' ὧν καὶ οὐκ ὀλίγα τῆς ἱστορίας ἐνταυθοῖ συνηράνιστο, ἄλλων ἄλλο τι διηγουμένων καὶ μεμνημένων ὧν ἕκαστος ἔτυχε καὶ πάντων ὁμοφωνούντων (Anna Komnene: XIV.7.4.20-24; trans. 420-421).

⁵²⁴ So Anna offers two reports of how the monk Raiktor claimed to be the deposed emperor Michael VII Doukas, deeming one version of events to be more convincing than the other (ibid: I.12.6-11).

⁵²⁵ ἐγὼ γὰρ καὶ ἄλλως φύσει τὸ λογοποιεῖν καὶ καινὰ τινα ἀναπλάττειν ἀποστρέφομαι εἰδυῖα τοῦτο σύνηθες εἶναι τοῖς πολλοῖς, καὶ μᾶλλον ὀπιηνίκα ὑπὸ φθόνου καὶ χαιρεκακίας ἀλίσκοιντο...καὶ πολλῶν μὲν καὶ ἄλλων περὶ τούτων λεγόντων ἀκήκοα καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους διαφορομένων, τῶν μὲν οὕτως, τῶν δὲ οὕτως ἐκλαμβανομένων τὰ τότεπραχθέντα, ἐκάστου πρὸς τὴν ἰδίαν τῆς ψυχῆς κατάστασιν καὶ ὡς πρὸς αὐτὴν εὐνοίας ἢ μίσους εἶχε, καὶ οὐ πάντας τῆς αὐτῆς ἐώρων γνώμης (ibid: III.1.4.42-53; trans. 80).

eyewitnesses can be attributed to a concern that some might doubt her credibility, most obviously because of the glowing portrayal of her father. This fear is explicitly acknowledged in the opening to her work: ‘Someone might conclude that in composing the history of my father I am glorifying myself; the history, wherever I express admiration for any act of his, may seem wholly false and mere panegyric’.⁵²⁶ Anna inevitably dispels these accusations, noting, in a passage taken straight from Polybius, her role as an impartial historian who is able to praise her enemies and censure kin where necessary.⁵²⁷ A crucial part of ensuring accuracy, Anna continues, was consulting ‘the evidence of the actual events and of eyewitnesses’.⁵²⁸ This establishes an immediate link between eyewitness testimony and veracity. Subsequent mentions of Anna being informed by individuals involved in the events related should be viewed in this context.

Anna’s self-doubt about her portrayal of Alexios is evident throughout the *Alexiad*.⁵²⁹ Edward Gibbon observed ‘the perpetual strain of panegyric and apology’ which leads us ‘to question the veracity of the author’.⁵³⁰ Having described her father’s heroic escape from the Battle of Dyrrachion, Anna recognizes a concern that the whole episode may seem too fantastic to some:

Often, in my desire not to incur suspicion, in the composition of my history I hurry over affairs that concern [Alexios], neither exaggerating nor adding my

⁵²⁶ ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ἐκείνου πράξεις προελομένη συγγράφειν δέδοικα τὸ ὑφορμοῦν τὲ καὶ ὑποτρέχον, μὴ ποτε λογίσαιτό τις τὰ τοῦ ἐμοῦ πατρὸς συγγράφουσαν τὰ ἐαυτῆς ἐπαινεῖν, καὶ ψεῦδος ἅπαν δόξη τὸ τῆς ἱστορίας πρᾶγμα καὶ ἐγκώμιον ἄντικρυς, εἴ τι τῶν ἐκείνου θαυμάζοιμι (ibid: pr.2.2.28-32; trans. 4).

⁵²⁷ Ibid: pr.2.3.37-42; Polybius: I.14. For recognition of the link, see Chrysostomides (1982): 37-39, 43-44 n.20.

⁵²⁸ τῶν ἐωρακότεων τὰ πράγματα αὐτοῦς τὲ καὶ τὰ πράγματα μαρτυραμένη (Anna Komnene: pr.2.3.44-45; trans. 4).

⁵²⁹ For another such instance not quoted here, see ibid: I.16.9. Anna is similarly concerned about appearing to overstate the greatness of her grandmother, Anna Dalassene – see ibid: III.8.

⁵³⁰ Gibbon (1776-1788): III, 69.

personal observations. I wish I were detached and free from this feeling that I have for him, so that seizing on this vast material I might demonstrate how much my tongue, when released from all restraint, could delight in noble deeds. But the natural love I have for him overshadows my personal wishes: I would not like the public to imagine that I am inventing marvels in my eagerness to speak about my own family.⁵³¹

These concerns over acceptance are repeated near the close of the work:⁵³² ‘I chose to write the truth about a good man, and if that man happens to be the historian’s father, then let his name be included...If this [work] proves that I love my father as well as truth, I do not fear criticism that I have suppressed the facts’.⁵³³ Anna earlier concluded her account of Alexios’ actions against heretics upon a similarly defensive note: ‘Let no one find fault with the history, as though it were corrupt. There are plenty of people living today who are witnesses to what I have described, and I could not be accused of lying’.⁵³⁴ Again Anna stresses the link between truth and

⁵³¹ μηδὲ γὰρ βουλομένη τὴν ἱστορίαν ὑποπτον θεῖναι πολλάκις παρατρέχω τὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μήτε αὐξάνουσα μήτε πάθος περιτιθεῖσα. εἶθε γὰρ ἐλευθέρα ἦν τοῦ πάθους τούτου τοῦ πατρικοῦ καὶ ἀπόλυτος, ἵνα καθάπερ ὕλης ἀμφιλαφοῦς δραξαμένη τὴν σοβάδα γλῶσσαν ἐνεδειξάμην, ὀπόσιν ἔχει περὶ τὰ κατὰ τὴν οἰκείωσιν. ἐπηλυγάζει δέ μου τὸ πρόθυμον ἢ φυσικὴ στοργή, μὴ πως δόξαιμι τοῖς πολλοῖς ὑπὸ προθυμίας τοῦ λέγειν περὶ τῶν κατ’ ἐμαυτὴν τερατολογίας παρέχειν ὑπόληψιν. καὶ γὰρ ἂν πολλαχοῦ τῶν κατορθωμάτων τῶν πατρικῶν μεμνημένη καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτὴν ἀπεστάλαξα ξυγγράφουσα τὲ καὶ διηγουμένη, ἐν ὁποίοις κακοῖς περιπέτωκε, καὶ οὐδ’ ἄνευ μονωδίας καὶ θρήνου τὸν τόπον παρῆλθον (Anna Komnene: IV.8.1.74-84; trans. 125-126).

⁵³² Also, in Book XII (ibid: XII.3.4.9-10; trans. 338), Anna states: ‘Let no one suspect that I lie about the emperor - for I am speaking the truth’ (μηδ’ ὡς καταψευδομένην τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος ὑφοράσθω· τὰ γὰρ ἀληθῆ λέγω).

⁵³³ ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ τάληθῆ προειλόμην ξυγγράφειν καὶ περὶ ἀνδρὸς ἀγαθοῦ· εἰ δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν ξυμβέβηκεν εἶναι καὶ πατέρα τοῦ ξυγγραφέως, τὸ μὲν τοῦ πατρὸς ὄνομα προσερίφθω ἐνταῦθα καὶ κείσθω ἐκ τοῦ παρέλκοντος...εἰ δ’, ὅπερ εἶπον, καὶ φιλοπάτορας ἡμᾶς συναποδείκνυσιν ὁ καιρὸς οὗτος, οὐ παρὰ τοῦτο τὰ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐπηλυγάζαι τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων μεμνήμερον (ibid: XV.3.4.40-56; trans. 438, with amendments).

⁵³⁴ καὶ μὴ τις ἐπιμεφέσθω τὴν ἱστορίαν ὡς δῆθεν δωροδοκοῦσαν τὴν συγγραφὴν· τῶν γὰρ νῦν ὄντων μάρτυρες εἰσὶ πολλοὶ τῶν ἀφηγουμένων, καὶ οὐκ ἂν ψευδηγορίας ἀλοίημεν (ibid: XIV.9.5.10-12; trans. 429).

eyewitnessing. Such statements are designed to convince the reader of the veracity of the account, rather than provide an earnest reflection of Anna's sources.

So obsessed is Anna with the primacy of autopsy that she offers the following to reassure her audience: 'Most of the time, we were ourselves present, for we accompanied our father and mother'.⁵³⁵ Since Anna was born in 1083, it is unlikely that her father dragged her along on expeditions prior to 1099, during which time he was most active as a soldier.⁵³⁶ Family members are said to have joined Alexios during his campaign against Bolkan of Dalmatia in 1094; however, only the Empress Eirene is mentioned.⁵³⁷ This is true also of Alexios' expedition to the Balkans in 1105, with Anna praising her mother for accompanying Alexios.⁵³⁸ When news of Bohemond's invasion reached Constantinople in 1107, Alexios set off, seemingly taking only Eirene with him.⁵³⁹ The only evidence for Anna venturing outside the capital alongside her father is her comment on the great structures of Philippopolis, in the context of Alexios' campaign of 1114 against the Cumans: 'I myself saw traces of them when I stayed there with the emperor for some reason or other'.⁵⁴⁰ The fact that Anna is rather cryptic as to when and why she visited the town instills doubt as to whether we should link the occasion with this particular campaign, though intriguingly the historian John Zonaras mentions that Eirene and the women of the

⁵³⁵ τὰ μὲν γὰρ πλείω καὶ ἡμεῖς συνῆμεν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ τῇ μητρὶ συνειπόμεθα· οὐ γὰρ ἦν τὸ ἡμέτερον τοιοῦτον οἶον οἰκουρικὸν καὶ ὑπὸ σκιάν καὶ τρυφὴν στρεφόμενον (ibid: XIV.7.4.24-26; trans. 421).

⁵³⁶ That said, the young daughters of Manuel Komnenos joined their father on campaign for short periods of time - see Anderson & Jeffreys (1994): 187-188.

⁵³⁷ Anna Komnene: IX.5.1-3.

⁵³⁸ Ibid: XII.3.

⁵³⁹ Ibid: XIII.1.4-7. Eirene's presence on these campaigns was quite extraordinary – see Hill (1997): 91-92.

⁵⁴⁰ ὧν ἴχνη κατέλαβον καὶ αὐτὴ μετὰ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος ἐπιδεδημηκυῖα <εἰς> τὴν πόλιν κατὰ χρεῖαν τινά (Anna Komnene: XIV.8.2.37-39; trans. 424).

court accompanied Alexios to Thrace in 1113, and stayed by his side until he progressed to Philippopolis the following spring.⁵⁴¹

Even if the women in Alexios' life did join him on campaign, the likelihood of them witnessing military actions is remote. Alexios only permitted the pregnant Eirene to join him in 1105 'because there was as yet no danger and the moment for battle had not arrived'.⁵⁴² In the spring of 1108, Eirene was sent back to Constantinople as Alexios marched to the western Balkans to meet Bohemond.⁵⁴³ In 1113, Eirene returned to Constantinople once Alexios set out to relieve Nicaea.⁵⁴⁴ Upon word of the imminent arrival of Turkish forces near the emperor's camp in 1116, Alexios quickly sent Eirene back to Constantinople.⁵⁴⁵ Once he reached Nikomedia, Alexios sent for the empress once more, but only 'until he heard of barbarian incursions and decided to leave'.⁵⁴⁶ Anna's field of direct vision would thus have been limited to Constantinople. Her most notable appearances in the text - during accounts of the pending execution of Michael Anemas and the death of Alexios - occur within this space.⁵⁴⁷ And though she would have been present when the First Crusade passed through the city, there are serious questions as to what a girl of fourteen years might have seen, and, furthermore, what she would have recalled of the incident some fifty

⁵⁴¹ Zonaras: III, 18.26.9-10.

⁵⁴² τὸ δέ τι καὶ ἐν τῷ ἀκινδύνῳ τῶν πραγμάτων ἔτι καθεστηκότων καὶ μήπω καιροῦ πολέμων ἐπιδεδημηκότος (Anna Komnene: XII.3.9.65-67; trans. 340).

⁵⁴³ Ibid: XIII.4.1.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid: XIV.5.2.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid: XV.2.1-2.

⁵⁴⁶ μέχρις ἂν τὰς τῶν βαρβάρων ἐφόδους ἐνωτισθεῖς ἐκεῖθεν ἀπᾶραι βουλευθείη (ibid: XV.3.1.90-91; trans. 436).

⁵⁴⁷ See James Howard-Johnston (1996): 264-269: 'There is nothing to indicate that [Anna] ventured much, if at all, outside the natural settings of her life, the Komnenian family and its affinity, the court and Constantinople, during Alexios' lifetime, when she was a free agent. It may therefore be inferred that her first-hand knowledge of the events of the period was largely, if not entirely, confined to those that occurred within these metropolitan milieu' (quote at 264-265).

years later. Therefore, while Anna bills herself as an important eyewitness to lend greater credence to her narrative, the reality was very different.⁵⁴⁸

Anna's Alleged Conversations with Veteran Soldiers: Some Problems

Anna's claim to have derived much of her information from oral correspondence with veteran soldiers of Alexios' reign is undermined by practical considerations. The conditions of her apparent exile after an abortive coup against her brother John II Komnenos⁵⁴⁹ would seem to contravene any notion that she conversed with such individuals:

Not even the least important people are allowed to visit us, neither those from whom we could have learnt news they had heard from others, nor my father's most intimate friends. For thirty years now, I swear it by the souls of the most blessed emperors, I have not seen, I have not spoken to a friend of my father; many of them of course have passed away, but many too are prevented by fear because of the change in our fortunes. For the powers-that-be have condemned us to this ridiculous position so that we might not be visible, and also so as to be a pitiful spectacle for the masses.⁵⁵⁰

The question that arises from this lamentation is how Anna could have conducted interviews with those who participated in Alexios' wars. We might speculate that

⁵⁴⁸ Frankopan (2002a: 64) comments that Anna's claim to have been an eyewitness 'can only apply to a handful of the episodes which appear in the text'.

⁵⁴⁹ For these events, see Hill (2000).

⁵⁵⁰ καὶ οὐδὲ τοῖς ἀφανεστέροις ἐξέσται τῶν ἀνθρώπων παρ' ἡμᾶς φοιτᾶν, μὴ ὅτι γε δι' ὧν μανθάνειν εἴχομεν, ἄπερ παρ' ἄλλων διακηκούτες ἐτύγγανον, καὶ τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς οἰκειοτάτοις. εἰς τριακοστὸν γὰρ τοῦτο ἔτος, μὰ τὰς τῶν μακαριωτάτων αὐτοκρατόρων ψυχάς, οὐκ ἔθεασάμην, οὐκ εἶδον, οὐχ' ὠμιλήκειν ἀνθρώπῳ πατρίῳ, τοῦτο μὲν τῶν πολλῶν ἀπερρηκώτων, τοῦτο δὲ τῶν πολλῶν ἀπειργομένων τῷ φόβῳ. καὶ τούτοις γὰρ ἡμᾶς κατεδίκασαν οἱ κρατοῦντες τοῖς ἀτοπήμασι μὴδὲ θεατοὺς εἶναι, ἀλλ' ἐστυγημένους τοῖς πλείοσιν (Anna Komnene: XIV.7.6.56-64; trans. 422).

monks were excluded from this purported ban, with Buckler otherwise finding Anna's alleged capacity to communicate with former soldiers 'not easy to explain'.⁵⁵¹ Yet the truth is perhaps more straightforward. One suspects that Anna, wallowing in self-pity,⁵⁵² exaggerates the conditions of her 'exile' at the *Kecharitomene* monastery, which does not appear to have been as restrictive as she maintains.⁵⁵³ It is probable therefore that she had greater freedom to meet survivors of her father's reign than she would have the reader believe.

There is another significant obstacle to accepting Anna's claims to have derived information from the oral testimony of eyewitnesses. It is generally thought that Anna began working on her history c.1143,⁵⁵⁴ as she notes that she collected the bulk of her evidence during the reign of Manuel.⁵⁵⁵ By this time, however, most of the men who served Alexios, and feature prominently in the *Alexiad*, had died.⁵⁵⁶ Anna claims that she heard much from her uncles on both sides.⁵⁵⁷ Yet we know that George Palaiologos, Nikephoros Melissenos, and John and Michael Doukas had died

⁵⁵¹ Buckler (1929): 43.

⁵⁵² See, for example, Anna Komnene: VI.8.2. For discussion of this aspect of the *Alexiad*, see Buckler (1929): 35-46; Maltese (1987); Quandahl & Jarratt (2008).

⁵⁵³ Numerous sources attest to Anna's interactions with the outside world during her apparent period of exile. An encomium Michael Italikos was commissioned to write for Anna's mother Eirene, probably c.1128, notes the presence of Anna among his audience (Michael Italikos: 151.12-13); Italikos later wrote a prologue to Anna's will, in c.1135, confirming close relations (ibid: 106.1-109.14). George Tornikios' epitaph for Anna describes how she gathered a number of scholars to her circle, discussing philosophy and commissioning commentaries on Aristotle. Mention of the death of Anna's mother places this development some years after John II's accession (George Tornikios: 283.9-301.19). In c.1139, Theodore Prodromos wrote to Anna bemoaning his financial plight (Theodore Prodromos: XXXVIII). For Anna's surroundings at the *Kecharitomene* monastery, see Gautier (1985): esp. 136-139.

⁵⁵⁴ Frankopan (1998): 12. Anna is thought to have died in 1153 – see Browning (1962b): 4.

⁵⁵⁵ ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ τὰ πολλὰ τούτων συνελεξάμην, καὶ κράτιστα ἐπὶ τοῦ μετὰ τὸν ἐμὸν πατέρα τρίτου τὰ τῆς βασιλείας σκῆπτρα διέποντος (Anna Komnene: XIV.7.5.47-49). The view that Manuel may have relaxed the restraints placed upon Anna was put forward also by Chalandon (1900): x-xi; France (1984): 20. For Anna writing during the reign of Manuel, see Magdalino (2000b): esp. 15.

⁵⁵⁶ This concern is likewise raised by Frankopan (1998): 75.

⁵⁵⁷ ...καὶ τὰ παρ' ἐκείνων πρὸς τὰ παρ' ἐμαυτῆς, ἅπερ αὐτῆ ἐξ αὐτοῦ τὸ τοῦμοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τῶν πρὸς πατρὸς καὶ μητρὸς ἐμοὶ θείων ἠκηκόειν πολλάκις (Anna Komnene: XIV.7.7.76-78).

by 1136, probably earlier.⁵⁵⁸ Alexios' brothers Isaac and Adrian Komnenos passed much sooner, prior to 1105.⁵⁵⁹ Only Alexios' youngest brother, Nikephoros, may have still been alive after 1136, though very little is known of his career, and the very fact that he is mentioned only once suggests Anna did not rely on him for information.⁵⁶⁰ These observations may be applied to other figures who feature prominently in the *Alexiad*. Nikephoros Katakalon Euphorbenos, Anna's brother-in-law and close associate of Nikephoros Bryennios, died within a few years of Alexios Komnenos.⁵⁶¹ Eustathios Kamytzes is another who appears among the deceased in the *typikon* of the monastery of Christ Pantokrator, drafted in late 1136.⁵⁶² We may conjecture that very few of Alexios' key subordinates would have survived the reign of John II Komnenos. Anna admits as much in her *proomion*, where she relates that the 'fathers and grandfathers of some men alive today saw these things'.⁵⁶³ This would be a peculiar thing to say had the 'fathers and grandfathers' been around when

⁵⁵⁸ The *typikon* of the *Pantokrator* monastery, issued in October 1136, lists these men among the dead for whom prayers ought to be said (*Typikon* of the Emperor John II Komnenos for the Monastery of Christ *Pantokrator* in Constantinople: ll.230, 233-235; Gautier 1969: 253-254). Polemis (1968: 66-70) puts the date of John Doukas' death at any time between 1110 and 1136, such is the paucity of evidence. Nikephoros Melissenos passed in November 1104 (Papachryssanthou 1963: 252). Intriguingly, both Michael and John Doukas died as monks, the latter having taken the name Antonios when he entered the Theotokos *Evergetis* monastery c.1110 (Kouroupou & Vannier 2005: 13 & 14; with discussion at 53-54, where Michael Doukas' death is dated c.1110-1115; *Typikon* of Timothy for the Monastery of the Mother of God *Evergetis*: ll.1346-1347; Gautier 1982: 10-11). For the sake of completion we should mention Michael Taronites, who married Alexios' sister Maria in 1061 (Bryennios: 85.18-20). This in any case would suggest a date of death not too long into the twelfth century, though his exile for his role in the revolt of Nikephoros Diogenes against Alexios in 1094 confirms that he would not have been close to Anna (Anna Komnene: IX.8.4).

⁵⁵⁹ Papachryssanthou (1963); *Typikon* of the Emperor John II Komnenos for the Monastery of Christ *Pantokrator* in Constantinople: ll.220, 227; Gautier (1969): 249, 253; also Kouroupou & Vannier (2005): 55-56, 61-62. The pair also became monks towards the end of their lives, with both taking the monastic name John.

⁵⁶⁰ Kouroupou & Vannier (2005): 65-66.

⁵⁶¹ Theodore Prodromos: II.18-19; *Typikon* of the Emperor John II Komnenos for the Monastery of Christ *Pantokrator* in Constantinople: l.226; Gautier (1969): 252-253.

⁵⁶² *Typikon* of the Emperor John II Komnenos for the Monastery of Christ *Pantokrator* in Constantinople: l.249; Gautier (1969): 256-257.

⁵⁶³ ἐνίων γὰρ τῶν νῦν ὄντων ἀνθρώπων οἱ μὲν πατέρες, οἱ δὲ πάπποι ἐγένοντο οἱ τούτων συνίστορες (Anna Komnene: pr.2.3.45-46).

Anna was writing. A similar state of affairs is presented in the aforementioned passage where Anna laments her inability to converse with the friends of her father, conceding that ‘many of them have passed away’. Admittedly she also affirms that others were still alive, but we should give serious consideration as to the capacity in which they served under Alexios as well as the strength of their memories in old age.

On account of the number of deceased and Anna’s apparent exile, Buckler concluded that Anna collected all her first-hand testimony *before* her father’s death, almost three decades before she began work on the *Alexiad*.⁵⁶⁴ Kambylis similarly suggested that Anna may have immediately transcribed conversations between her father and George Palaiologos.⁵⁶⁵ Yet there is nothing to suggest that Anna contemplated a historical work prior to the death of Nikephoros Bryennios in c.1138.⁵⁶⁶ Anna cites Nikephoros’ inability to complete a chronicle of her father’s life as her reason for undertaking the project.⁵⁶⁷ If one is unconvinced by this motive, the cluster of studies which identify parts of the *Alexiad* as a response to Manuel’s handling of the Second Crusade and indeed her nephew’s reign in general firmly place the genesis of the work long after Alexios’ death.⁵⁶⁸ Anna herself explains that Alexios would condemn her mother’s requests for historians to write of his struggles, a stance which presumably dissuaded his daughter from conceiving such a project within his own

⁵⁶⁴ Buckler (1929): 232.

⁵⁶⁵ Kambylis (1975): 143.

⁵⁶⁶ Chrysostomides (1982): 33.

⁵⁶⁷ Anna Komnene: pr.3.

⁵⁶⁸ R. D. Thomas (1991); Magdalino (2000b); Stephenson (2003c).

lifetime.⁵⁶⁹ Consequently, Buckler’s argument appears unsound, and her conclusion that Anna’s sources were ‘almost exclusively oral’ unmerited.⁵⁷⁰

Alexios Komnenos as a Source for the Alexiad

I see no reason for Frankopan to doubt Anna’s claim to have recalled stories she had heard in the company of her family:⁵⁷¹ ‘Above all I have often heard the emperor [Alexios] and George Palaiologos discussing these matters in my presence’.⁵⁷² Anna reveals that the story of Alexios’ return journey with captive Nikephoros Bryennios the Elder was one she had ‘heard...many times’.⁵⁷³ In relating the Battle of Dristra,⁵⁷⁴ Anna digresses after describing a blow Nikephoros Diogenes dealt a pursuing Pecheneg:

In later years we have heard Alexios tell that story; never, he said, had he seen such agility and speed of hand. “If I had not been holding the standard that day”, he went on, “I would have killed more Scythians than I have hairs on my head” – and he was not bragging...when the conversation and the subject of discussion compelled it, he would sometimes tell of his adventures to us, his relatives, in our own circle, especially if we put much pressure on him to do so.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁶⁹ Anna Komnene: XV.11.1.

⁵⁷⁰ Buckler (1929): 231. The same may be said for John France’s suggestion (1994: 110-111) that for much of the work, Anna ‘probably relied on the recollections of elderly people’.

⁵⁷¹ Frankopan (1998): 14.

⁵⁷² μάλιστα δὲ καὶ αὐτοπροσώπως περὶ τούτων διηγουμένων πολλάκις ἤκουον τοῦ τε αὐτοκράτορος καὶ Γεωργίου τοῦ Παλαιολόγου (Anna Komnene: XIV.7.5.45-47; trans. 421).

⁵⁷³ ταῦτα ἐγὼ ἐκείνου διηγουμένου πολλάκις ἤκουον (ibid: I.6.9.85-86).

⁵⁷⁴ For discussion of the battle see Chalandon (1900): 114-117.

⁵⁷⁵ καὶ ὡς τοῦ βασιλέως ἐν ὑστέροις χρόνοις διηγουμένου ἠκούομεν, οὐδέποτε τάχος τοιοῦτον ἢ περιδεξιότητα ἀνδρὸς ἐθεάσατο, καὶ ὡς, “εἰ μὴ”, φησὶν, “ἐγὼ τὴν σημαίαν κατεῖχον κατ’ ἐκείνην τὴν ἡμέραν, ὑπὲρ τὰς ἰδίας τρίχας πλήζας ἂν Σκύθας ἀνεῖλον”, οὐ περιαιτολογῶν. τίς γὰρ τοσοῦτον εἰς ἔσχατον ταπεινότητος ἦλασεν; ἀλλὰ γὰρ ὁ λόγος καὶ τῶν πραγμάτων ἢ φύσις αὐτὸν ἠνάγκαζε καὶ τὰ κατ’ αὐτὸν πρὸς ἡμᾶς κυκλόθεν τοὺς οἰκείους αὐτῷ ἐνίοτε ἐκλαλεῖν καὶ ταῦτα παρ’ ἡμῶν πολλὰ

Frankopan has ‘serious reservations’ against accepting such conversations as a source. While I would concur with his concerns over the accuracy of their recollections, it is to be expected that Alexios and his colleagues exaggerated and embellished their feats. With regard to Anna’s account of the Battle of Kalavrye, where the young Alexios defeated the army of the rebel Nikephoros Bryennios the Elder, Charles Oman remarked: ‘No doubt she accurately put down her father’s account of his doings, and we are really reading Alexios’ version of his fight’.⁵⁷⁶ This observation could be extended to all of Anna’s records of her father’s battles. Frankopan’s qualms as to how often, and indeed *why*, Alexios and George Palaiologos would reminisce about old battles are unnecessary. According to Michael Psellos, the Emperor Isaac I Komnenos would entertain the court ‘with stories of the old times, recalling all the witty sayings of...Basil (II) the Great’.⁵⁷⁷ The popularity of the anecdotal tradition at this time is evident in the works of Kekaumenos and Nikephoros Bryennios.⁵⁷⁸ Evidently, there was a culture of relating war-themed anecdotes in Middle Byzantium.⁵⁷⁹

It is telling that Anna rarely cites her father as a source for specific episodes, and in the aforementioned instance where she does, she stresses that Alexios’ heroics could be corroborated. Having related how her father slew a pursuing Pecheneg, Anna notes: ‘Nor was he the only one to be killed by the emperor; according to the

βιαζόμενον· πρὸς δὲ τοὺς ἔξωθεν οὐδείς τῶν ἀπάντων ἤκουσεν ὑπέρκομπόν τι τὸν αὐτοκράτορα διηγούμενον (Anna Komnene: VII.3.11.37-45; trans. 145-146).

⁵⁷⁶ Oman (1924): I, 226 n.1. For the battle see Tobias (1979).

⁵⁷⁷ κατεῖχέ τε ἡμᾶς ἄχρις ἐσπέρας, ἀρχαῖά τε διηγούμενος καὶ ὅποσα ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐκεῖνος Βασίλειος ὁ τοῦ Ῥωμανοῦ παῖς ἐπικαίρως ἐφθέγγετο (Psellos, *Chronographia*: II, 130 [LXXVI]; trans. 323). Upon his death, Isaac’s father Manuel entrusted his sons to the care of Basil, so it is highly likely that Isaac heard these stories from the man himself during his formative years (Bryennios: 75.9-13).

⁵⁷⁸ See Howard-Johnston (1996): 282-288 for Bryennios; Roueché (2002) for Kekaumenos; idem (1988) for the tenth-century development of stories and storytellers in Byzantium. The anecdotal tradition is also discussed below, 306-315.

⁵⁷⁹ Relevant is the discussion of McGeer (1995a): 191-194.

testimony of those present, others met the same fate'.⁵⁸⁰ After she describes Alexios' expedition to Dalmatia to establish solid defensive measures, Anna insists that the operation was more demanding than her brief report suggests: 'My account might sound as if these measures were simple, but many eyewitnesses, still alive today, bear evidence to the strain caused by that tour on the emperor'.⁵⁸¹ By citing the testimony of participants as her source, rather than Alexios himself, Anna elicits greater admiration for her father's labours.⁵⁸² Therefore, while Anna asserts that her father was an important source of information, she is reluctant to attribute specific information to him, lest readers doubt the accuracy and impartiality of the testimony. This correlates with Anna's declaration that she collected much of her evidence during the reign of Manuel, 'at a time when all the flattery and lies about his grandfather had disappeared...no one makes the slightest attempt to over-praise the departed, telling the facts just as they are and describing things just as they happened'.⁵⁸³ The reader is thus assured that Anna's sources possessed no particular allegiance towards Alexios.

Though it is implausible to attribute all of Anna's comprehensive information about Alexios and his campaigns to his oral testimony,⁵⁸⁴ her claim to have listened

⁵⁸⁰ οὐκ αὐτὸν δὲ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄλλους, ὡς οἱ τότε συμπαρόντες διενίσταντο, ἀνεῖλεν (Anna Komnene: VII.3.11.32-33; trans. 195, with amendments).

⁵⁸¹ ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν λόγος ῥαδίαν ἴσως τὴν τοιαύτην οἰκονομίαν τοῖς ἀκροαταῖς παρίστησιν· ὅποσον δὲ τὸν ἰδρῶτα ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ τῷ τότε ὑπέστη, μαρτυροῦσι πολλοὶ τῶν τότε παρόντων καὶ εἰσέτι καὶ νῦν περιόντων (ibid: IX.1.2.15-18; trans. 237).

⁵⁸² This mode of seeking believability through witnesses other than the chief protagonist is exhibited also with George Palaiologos. Whilst narrating Alexios' rapid campaign against the Pechenegs in 1091, Anna explains that she 'learned' (μανθάνω) about George Palaiologos' angry reaction at not having been involved, a response which 'eyewitnesses' – and not Palaiologos – 'related to us' (οἱ γὰρ συμπαρόντες ἡμῖν διηγοῦντο) (ibid: VIII.2.5; trans. 218).

⁵⁸³ ὅτε καὶ πᾶσα κολακεία καὶ ψεῦδος τῷ πάππῳ αὐτῷ συναπέρρευσε, πάντων τὸν ἐφιστάμενον μὲν θρόνον κολακευόντων, πρὸς δὲ τὸν ἀπερρηνηκότα μηδὲν τι μὲν θωπείας ἐνδεικνυμένων, γυμνὰ δὲ τὰ πράγματα διηγουμένων καὶ αὐτὰ λεγόντων ὡσπερ ἐσχήκασιν (ibid: XIV.7.5.49-52; trans. 421).

⁵⁸⁴ It is unlikely that there existed polished narratives of Alexios' campaigns for Anna to consult. Had Alexios' achievements been richly documented, there would have been little need for Anna to compose

attentively to the recollections of her father and George Palaiologos is perhaps the most convincing of all those concerning unwritten correspondence. How these accounts were rendered by the time Anna came to draft the *Alexiad* is another matter entirely, with inaccuracies inevitable when working from recollection. Whilst relating the trouble caused by philosopher John Italos, for example, Anna laments that she might have named his followers, ‘if time had not dimmed my memory’.⁵⁸⁵

Anna’s Use of Written Sources

Thus far we have proposed that Anna probably recalled stories of her father and George Palaiologos, but could not have collected extensive material by conducting personal interviews with survivors of Alexios’ reign. Consequently, we must conclude that Anna made considerable use of written material, more than she would have the reader believe. Certainly, she was familiar with Psellos’ *Chronographia*,⁵⁸⁶ and on several occasions she references the *Hyle Historias* of Nikephoros Bryennios.⁵⁸⁷ The ‘ξυγγραμμάτων’ mentioned by Anna have already been discussed, and may refer to dispatches and/or memoirs. Chalandon suggests that correspondence between Alexios and his subordinates, such as the letter Leo Kephalas sent to Alexios

the *Alexiad*. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that Anna did not possess a full account of her father’s life and deeds. Anna says the following of the decision to blind the rebels Nikephoros Diogenes and Katakalon Kekaumenos after their revolt, for which they had been pardoned by the emperor: ‘These events have been the subject of controversy ever since. Whether the emperor was informed of the plan by them and then gave his consent, or was himself the author of the whole idea, God alone knows. For my part, I have been unable so far to discover anything for certain’ (ibid: IX.9.6; trans. 257). Anna is to be commended for linking Alexios at all with the blinding (Chrysostomides 1982: 38), but there is an obvious sense of convenience in that she is apparently ill-informed on a matter which would paint her father in an unfavourable light. It may be speculated that she knew more about these events than she would have us believe.

⁵⁸⁵ εἰ μὴ ὁ χρόνος με τὴν μνήμην ἀφείλετο (Anna Komnene: V.9.4; trans. 151, with amendments). Of course, memory failure in this particular instance may be a device to avoid naming particular individuals, but it remains a legitimate concern of an elderly author.

⁵⁸⁶ Linnér (1983).

⁵⁸⁷ Anna Komnene: pr.3, I.1.3, I.4.2.

whilst besieged at Larissa,⁵⁸⁸ may also have been among this material.⁵⁸⁹ The *Alexiad* certainly appears to contain a number of complete documents, including two chrysobulls, a letter Alexios sent to Henry IV of Germany, and the treaty of Devol agreed with Bohemond in 1108.⁵⁹⁰ Frankopan has questioned how Anna could have gained direct access to written material given her apparent exile,⁵⁹¹ though the inclusion of these documents surely confirms that her ‘seclusion’ is greatly exaggerated.⁵⁹² On the basis of Anna’s claim to have collected evidence during the reign of Manuel, both Chalandon and John France have argued that any restrictions placed upon Anna were relaxed following the death of John II, enabling her to scour the archives and access texts and documents.⁵⁹³

Anna is surprisingly well-informed on events in Italy as well as the movements of the Norman army prior to Guiscard’s Dyrrachion campaign of 1080-1081, as Graham Loud has shown.⁵⁹⁴ Ostensibly, this can be explained by Anna ascribing the account to an envoy of the bishop of Bari, said to have accompanied the expedition.⁵⁹⁵ Anna asserts that this correspondence was verbal in form (ὡς ἔλεγε), though we should be wary of such statements in the *Alexiad*.⁵⁹⁶ Roger Wilmans proposed that the individual from Bari supplied Anna with a written account, one which also formed the

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid: V.5.3-4.

⁵⁸⁹ Chalandon (1900): xii-xiv.

⁵⁹⁰ Anna Komnene: III.4.4-8 (chrysobull for Anna Dalassene); III.10.3-8 (letter to Henry IV of Germany); VI.5.10 (chrysobull for the Venetians); XIII.12 (Treaty of Devol). For further discussion, see Chalandon (1900): xii-xiv; Buckler (1929): 234-239; Howard-Johnston (1996): 278-279; Frankopan (1998): 14, 72-73.

⁵⁹¹ Frankopan (1998): 13 n.31; idem (2002a): 73 n.29.

⁵⁹² Anna’s inclusion of these texts may be linked with the concern of biographers such as Eusebius to employ official documents in order to gain credibility. See Cox (1983): 60-63.

⁵⁹³ Chalandon (1900): x-xi, xii-xiii; France (1984): 20.

⁵⁹⁴ Loud (1991).

⁵⁹⁵ συνῆν δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ ὁ ταῦτα μοι διηγούμενος Λατῖνος, ὡς ἔλεγε, πρέσβις τοῦ ἐπισκόπου Βάρεως πρὸς τὸν Ῥομπέρτον ἀποσταλείς, καί, ὡς διεβεβαιοῦτο, σὺν τῷ Ῥομπέρτῳ <περὶ> τὴν τοιαύτην διέτριβε πεδιάδα (Anna Komnene: III.12.8.80-83).

⁵⁹⁶ Frankopan (1998): 73 n.99.

basis of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* of contemporary Norman historian William of Apulia.⁵⁹⁷ Chalandon concurred,⁵⁹⁸ though Marguerite Mathieu and Emily Albu argue that Anna and William used similar but ultimately different sources.⁵⁹⁹ Jakov Ljubarskij and Peter Frankopan, however, have demonstrated links between the two accounts, observing similarities in content and even the direct translation of exact phrases and sentences from the Latin. The difficulty with this hypothesis is that Anna shows no evidence of understanding Latin; indeed, the opposite is true.⁶⁰⁰ Given this, Frankopan postulates that Anna had access to a Greek source which, while based on William, contained many mistakes, contradictions and chronological errors. The intermediary is suggested to have been Nikephoros Bryennios, though there is nothing to indicate that he had any more knowledge of Latin than his wife.⁶⁰¹

Frankopan is influenced in this idea by James Howard-Johnston, who controversially argues that Anna drew from a large dossier compiled by Bryennios.⁶⁰² Howard-Johnston insists that the detailed campaign narratives of the *Alexiad* could not have been produced by a Constantinople-bound princess, and must surely have stemmed from a 'latterday Procopius' or retired soldier, identified as Nikephoros Bryennios. Upon Bryennios' death in 1138, his literary project was apparently incomplete, and so Anna picked up the mantle, essentially acting as editor and polisher of:

⁵⁹⁷ Wilmans (1849).

⁵⁹⁸ Chalandon (1900): xii; idem (1907): I, xxxviii-xl.

⁵⁹⁹ Mathieu (1961): 38-46; Albu (1975): 83-86; idem (2001): 135 n.55.

⁶⁰⁰ Anna confesses to having difficulty pronouncing the names of Crusader leaders (X.10.4) and later complains of having to write them (XIII.6.3).

⁶⁰¹ Frankopan (1998): 75-83; citing Ljubarskij (1964): 112-113.

⁶⁰² Howard-Johnston (1996). Howard-Johnston will advance his views in a forthcoming article, perhaps undeterred by the criticism of other scholars. Chalandon (1900: xi-xii) had earlier proposed that Bryennios supplied Anna with information about the First Crusade and Alexios' expedition to Philippopolis in 1114.

... a large dossier of notes, some stored in files, others worked up into preliminary drafts, others transmitted into more or less polished prose. The material was, on this hypothesis, only half-digested and the story which it told episodic at best. Much remained to be done to turn it into connected, homogeneous, high-style classicizing history.⁶⁰³

The suggestion has not been well received. Ruth Macrides proposes that Anna's focus on military affairs merely placed her in the tradition of classicizing historians, and, moreover, in the epic, Homeric style which characterized twelfth-century descriptions of warfare.⁶⁰⁴ Vlada Stanković shows that Anna did not simply copy Bryennios, but adjusted his presentation in order to fulfil her own objectives.⁶⁰⁵ Diether Reinsch disproves Howard-Johnston's claim that the anecdotal narrative episodes in the *Alexiad*, similar to those of the *Hyle Historias*, serve as evidence of Bryennios' authorship; indeed, Anna adds one of her own such stories to Bryennios' narrative of the capture of his homonymous grandfather by Alexios Komnenos.⁶⁰⁶ John Pryor observes that Anna's description of a naval battle between the Normans and the Venetians 'bears the literary imprint of Bryennios', but it is to be expected that Anna would have been influenced by her husband's style.⁶⁰⁷ Indeed, the key strand on which Howard-Johnston's theory comes undone is that Anna frequently mentions and praises the *Hyle Historias*; this tendency contradicts any notion that she suppressed Bryennios' contribution.⁶⁰⁸ Admittedly, Anna does not cite the provenance of all her information, such as the various official documents she quotes,

⁶⁰³ Howard-Johnston (1996): 277-278.

⁶⁰⁴ Macrides (2000); also Ljubarskij (2000b).

⁶⁰⁵ Stanković (2007a).

⁶⁰⁶ Reinsch (1996); idem (2000): 97-101.

⁶⁰⁷ Pryor & Jeffreys (2006): 409-410 & n.14.

⁶⁰⁸ Reinsch (2000): 98.

but, as Reinsch asserts, there was little need to emphasize the authenticity of such texts.⁶⁰⁹ While I have argued above that Anna omitted or concealed her informants in certain cases, there is no logical reason why she would deliberately omit the origin of official documents. In short, Howard-Johnston's hypothesis that the *Alexiad* is essentially the work of Nikephoros Bryennios cannot really be sustained.

Anna as a Military Historian

The very notion of crediting the *Alexiad* to a soldier stems from a prejudice that a woman could not have been responsible for the comprehensive, informed narrative of military events.⁶¹⁰ This observation could be extended to any 'armchair historian'; certainly, lack of a military education and combat experience did not prevent Agathias and Leo the Deacon from writing dense narratives of campaign and battle. Anna was exposed to a military culture at court, and her personal fascination with warfare is evident in her focus on the 'new' marching formation her father devised during the return march from Philomelion in 1116,⁶¹¹ as well as lengthy *ekphraseis* on siege machinery and the crossbow.⁶¹² Denis Sullivan reveals Anna's descriptions of siege warfare to be replete with technical knowledge and comparatively more impressive than those of her recent historiographical peers.⁶¹³ Sullivan determines that Anna

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid: 98.

⁶¹⁰ While Charles Oman did not question the authorship of the *Alexiad*, his famous quip that Anna 'for a lady, had a very fair grasp of things military' is more than a little condescending (Oman 1924: I, 226 n.1). For discussion of gender as an obstacle to acceptance of Anna in modern scholarship, and further references, see Frankopan (2002a): 61, 72 nn.12 & 13.

⁶¹¹ Anna Komnene: XV.3-7. For discussion of this formation, which Anna claims was inspired by her father's reading of the Hellenistic manual of Aelian, see Bennett (2001).

⁶¹² Anna Komnene: X.8.6, for the famous digression on the crossbow (*tzangra*). For further discussion of the technical aspects of this passage, see Koliass (1988): 245-253; Nishimura (1988): 433-434. Kelso (2003) discusses artillery as a classicizing digression, while Den Hengst (1999) explores the specific case of Ammianus Marcellinus and his digressions on siege engines.

⁶¹³ Anna's naval terminology was understandably more problematic, with archaic terms inconsistently employed – see Pryor & Jeffreys (2006): 409-410.

possessed a knowledge of these matters from the military treatises, which afforded her greater comprehension of her complex narrative sources.⁶¹⁴ By Anna's admission, this material was written by military men, apparently in a low-style, which betrays a practical purpose and is extremely suggestive of the vernacular.⁶¹⁵ We should not seek to find linguistic identifiers of such material within the *Alexiad*, since Anna herself wrote in a high style⁶¹⁶ and almost certainly reworked her written sources extensively. There is an intriguing instance where Anna retains the vernacular, quoting in the 'common idiom' a popular song about Alexios, which she then 'translates' into pure Greek, presumably for reasons of consistency and so her audience could better comprehend it.⁶¹⁷ While one finds nothing like this in a military context, there is a peculiar use of an army colloquialism during the account of the victory of Nicholas Maurokatakalon over a Pecheneg force in 1087. Anna includes the phrase 'τὸν οὐτῶσὶ καλούμενον κοπὸν' (translated by Sewter and Frankopan as 'hacked off'), which, she explains, 'was an expression known to soldiers'.⁶¹⁸ The most plausible explanation for the inclusion of this phrase is that Anna came across the saying in her source material, probably a campaign report. It was through such documents and her own learning that Anna was able to write convincingly about military events, despite having no direct experience of war.

Conclusion

Some would deprive Anna of a great literary achievement. Yet there is likewise a danger of going too far in her defence, as evidenced in Jakov Ljubarskij's claim that

⁶¹⁴ Sullivan (2010a): 56.

⁶¹⁵ See Beck (1971): 27; Beaton (1987): 9-10; Kazhdan & Epstein (1985): 84. For the growth of vernacular literature in this period, see Beaton (1988).

⁶¹⁶ Still, Anna occasionally employs terms not of Attic Greek derivation – see Buckler (1929): 488-497.

⁶¹⁷ Anna Komnene: II.4.9.

⁶¹⁸ λέξις δὲ αὕτη συνήθης τοῖς στρατιώταις (ibid: VII.1.1.16-17).

Anna wrote ‘for the most part, from memory’.⁶¹⁹ The extensive detail of Anna’s narrative, along with her own statements about her sources, argue against such a suggestion. Anna’s ‘Methodenkapitel’⁶²⁰ is replete with enough inconsistencies to suspect the presence of rhetorical elements, though we cannot doubt her basic claim to have derived information from those soldiers at the centre of the events described. John France and Peter Frankopan insist that Anna called upon the testimony of her father’s generals in some shape or form.⁶²¹ Nikephoros Bryennios,⁶²² George Palaiologos,⁶²³ John Doukas⁶²⁴ and Tatikios⁶²⁵ have all been suggested as possible informants. Frankopan considers it ‘clear’ that Anna had access to a ‘substantial military archive’.⁶²⁶ Written accounts – *ξυγγραμμάτων* – mentioned by Anna almost certainly included memoirs and dispatches. James Howard-Johnston viewed Anna’s detailed narrative, and the shifting perspectives between commanders in the field, to be suggestive of the use of post-action reports.⁶²⁷ Furthermore, we should not entirely

⁶¹⁹ Ljubarskij (2000b): 176.

⁶²⁰ Kambylis (1975): 134.

⁶²¹ France (1984): 23; Frankopan (2002a): 64-65.

⁶²² Chalandon (1900): xi-xii.

⁶²³ Ibid: xi-xii.

⁶²⁴ Frankopan (2002a: 64-65) asserts that Doukas provided Anna ‘with a substantial amount of material which appears in the *Alexiad*’. See also Appendix I.

⁶²⁵ It has been suggested that Tatikios was one of Anna’s chief informants, furnishing reports on the passage of the Crusaders which formed the basis of Anna’s account of the expedition, in particular the siege of Antioch. For this view, see Chalandon (1900): xvii; Buckler (1929): 231 n.8; Runciman (1951): 224-225; Shepard (1988): 196-197; Lilie (1993): 35-37; Frankopan (2002a).

⁶²⁶ Frankopan (2009a): xix.

⁶²⁷ ‘The sometimes arbitrary shifts between viewpoints which take place in the course of the narrative of a given episode are probably best explained as reflecting editorial transitions from source to source, each with its own particular perspective. In most cases, the viewpoints are those of different commanders in the field...or alternate between such commanders and the imperial authorities scanning the world around Constantinople...Since the narrative is normally densely packed with the sort of detailed information which can only be conveyed in writing and since the material normally seems to have an official character, it can safely be inferred that prominent among the sources used for the military and diplomatic history in the *Alexiad* were those which were obviously useful for writers of contemporary history from the time of Julius Caesar to the present, namely state (and possibly private) papers. Adopting this as a working hypothesis, it is possible to identify a wide range of official sources underlying the *Alexiad*’s text, chiefly military dispatches, ambassadors’ reports, official correspondence and position papers’ (Howard-Johnston 1996: 279-280).

discount Anna's claim to have heard oral accounts. She appears to recall tales told by her father and George Palaiologos. It is also plausible that she remembered conversations with her husband Nikephoros Bryennios. And while many key participants may have passed away by the time Anna began to research her work, their descendants could have supplied Anna with material. Leo Kamytzes was an important figure during the reign of Manuel I Komnenos,⁶²⁸ while Constantine Kamytzes was married to Maria Komnene, daughter of Theodora,⁶²⁹ who was the sister of Anna Komnene; Anna may have gained information about Eustathios Kamytzes via this route. There is evidence from council edicts that two of Anna's cousins – Constantine and Adrian Komnenos, sons of Alexios' brother Isaac – were still alive as late as 1147 and 1157 respectively.⁶³⁰ While we cannot prove that Anna conversed with any of these individuals, or indeed other descendants of protagonists in the *Alexiad*, the connections were clearly not lost on her, given her aforementioned statement that the 'fathers and grandfathers of some men alive today saw these things'.⁶³¹ Anna's extended family would have provided a logical conduit to useful information.

Anna appears to have been a synthetic historian of considerable skill, culling from a raft of different sources and testimonies. Frankopan speaks of Anna's ability to draw from 'a rich tapestry of witnesses to events'.⁶³² Indeed, whilst relating the Battle of Dyrrachion, Anna refers to the 'vast material' (ὄλης ἀμφιλαφοῦς) at her disposal.⁶³³ Inevitably, however, Anna was better informed about certain events than she was

⁶²⁸ Stiernon (1965): 233, 240.

⁶²⁹ Theodore Prodromos: LXIV.

⁶³⁰ For Constantine, see *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*: V, 307; for Adrian, see *Πατριακὴ Βιβλιοθήκη*: 317.

⁶³¹ Anna Komnene: pr.2.3.45-46; trans. 4.

⁶³² Frankopan (2002a): 64-65.

⁶³³ Anna Komnene: IV.8.1.77.

others, and her narrative is not especially balanced and consistent in its portrayals.⁶³⁴

John France's summation of Anna's record of the First Crusade may be applied to the *Alexiad* as a whole: 'Anna's account...is very inconsistent - sometimes she is well informed, at other times quite the opposite. This reflects both the limited source material available to her and the way in which she selected information in order to make her case'.⁶³⁵

⁶³⁴ See Appendix I.

⁶³⁵ France (1984): 32.

VII. The *Epitome* of John Kinnamos and the *Chronike Diegesis* of Niketas

Choniates

Born around 1140, John Kinnamos may have served as a soldier⁶³⁶ before acting as secretary (*grammatikos*) to the Emperor Manuel I Komnenos. His *Epitome*, written c.1180, begins at 1118 with the accession of John II Komnenos and probably concluded with the death of Manuel Komnenos. The surviving version, however, ends abruptly, prior to the Battle of Myriokephalon in 1176.⁶³⁷ Carl Neumann's late-nineteenth century study on Kinnamos has been complemented by Jakov Ljubarskij's article on Kinnamos as a writer, while Paul Stephenson has explored Kinnamos' presentation of John Komnenos' Hungarian campaign of 1127-1129.⁶³⁸ Aside from these, specific studies on Kinnamos are woefully lacking.

Kinnamos' contemporary, Niketas Choniates, has fared better in modern scholarship. Born around 1160 in Phrygia, Niketas, whilst still a young man, was sent to Constantinople to complete his education. Having served as governor of Philippopolis around the time of the Third Crusade, Choniates held a variety of civil posts for the remainder of the century. After the fall of Constantinople in 1204, he eventually settled in Nicaea, where he lived until his death c.1216.⁶³⁹ Niketas began production on his *Chronike Diegesis*, which covered the period 1118-c.1207, during

⁶³⁶ See Neumann (1888): 93-95, 98-99. There is little basis for this claim.

⁶³⁷ Brand (1974): 1-11 remains a solid overview of Kinnamos.

⁶³⁸ Neumann (1888): 78-102; Ljubarskij (2000a); Stephenson (1996). Useful also is Hunger (1978): I, 409-415.

⁶³⁹ For fuller accounts of Niketas Choniates' life and works, see van Dieten (1971): 1-55; Simpson (2004): 14-24.

the 1190s at the latest. It is thought that he originally completed the work prior to 1204, but continued to revise the entire text for the rest of his days.⁶⁴⁰

Any study of Niketas Choniates owes a debt to editor Jan Louis van Dieten, responsible also for a biographical study of Choniates and a closer look at his correspondence and orations.⁶⁴¹ The diverse scholarship of Riccardo Maisano on Niketas ranges from discussion of his source material to his use of Homeric allusions.⁶⁴² The numerous studies of Alexander Kazhdan on Choniates include articles on Choniates' terminology of warfare.⁶⁴³ Historical causation in the *Chronike Diegesis*, and Choniates' thoughts on the collapse of Byzantium, are the subject of articles by Jonathan Harris.⁶⁴⁴ Antony Littlewood's research into Niketas' use of vegetal and animal imagery is particularly useful for understanding metaphors in his descriptions of battle.⁶⁴⁵ Yet it is Alicia Simpson who has done most to advance our understanding of Niketas Choniates and his work in recent times.⁶⁴⁶ In 2009, Simpson, along with Stephanos Efthymiadis, edited a volume of papers on Niketas and his literary output, continuing the revival of scholarly interest and shedding further light on Choniates' values, interests and working methods.⁶⁴⁷

The near-contemporary texts of Kinnamos and Choniates are ripe for comparative study. Vasile Grecu argues that Choniates was familiar with Kinnamos, electing to limit coverage of an event if Kinnamos had dealt with it comprehensively and in an

⁶⁴⁰ Simpson (2004): 25-63; idem (2006) presents the previous scholarship of van Dieten on the production of the *Chronike Diegesis* and contributes further insight.

⁶⁴¹ van Dieten (1971).

⁶⁴² Maisano (1993); idem (1994a); idem (1994b); idem (1998); idem (2000).

⁶⁴³ Kazhdan (1994); idem (1995c); idem (1997b). Also idem (1990); idem (1995b).

⁶⁴⁴ Harris (2000); idem (2001).

⁶⁴⁵ Littlewood (2007).

⁶⁴⁶ Simpson (2004); idem (2006).

⁶⁴⁷ Simpson & Efthymiadis (2009).

acceptable fashion, or expand and change details if he felt an imbalance needed to be addressed.⁶⁴⁸ Paul Magdalino's study of Manuel I Komnenos discerns a number of similarities between Choniates and Kinnamos, suggesting common sources, most probably bulletins or encomiastic material.⁶⁴⁹ With Magdalino's hypothesis discussed in relation to imperial campaigns in chapter three, we focus here on historical portrayals of two important commanders who served under Manuel Komnenos – John Doukas and Andronikos Kontostephanos. Though we observe a reliance on the testimony of participants and written accounts, we also see how each historian shaped this material to their own purposes.

The Sources of Kinnamos and Choniates for Military Campaigns

Both Kinnamos and Choniates are rather coy in respect of their sources. Describing John II Komnenos' conquest of Cilicia in 1138-1139, Kinnamos expresses dissatisfaction with his material: 'But to record these matters in detail exceeds, I think, our undertaking. It was my purpose to speak of the present events in summary, because I was not an eyewitness, nor did I receive a faithful account of them'.⁶⁵⁰ The legitimacy of this statement is contestable - it is possible that Kinnamos effectively glossed over John's achievements so as not to risk overshadowing those of his beloved Manuel. This idea is supported by Choniates, who offers a more detailed narrative of John's campaigns and suggests, by contrast, that sources for these events were not lacking: 'Since I was not an eyewitness of that which I have recorded, I

⁶⁴⁸ Grecu (1949): esp. 201-202. Cf. Maisano (1994a); Simpson (2004): 206-209. Stephanos Efthymiadis (2008), for example, has shown Choniates to have elaborated upon Kinnamos' account of the poisoning of King Stephen IV of Hungary.

⁶⁴⁹ Magdalino (1993a): 413-488.

⁶⁵⁰ ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν πρὸς ἀκρίβειαν ἱστορεῖν ὑπόσχεσιν οἶμαι ὑπερβαίνει τὴν ἡμετέραν. ὥς γὰρ ἐν κεφαλαίῳ προὔκειτό μοι περὶ τῶν παρόντων εἰπεῖν, ἅτε μὴδὲ αὐτοπτήσαντι ταῦτα μὴδὲ τὸ πιστὸν ἐντεῦθεν λαβόντι (Kinnamos: 20.19-22; trans. 25).

could not describe these events extensively but have set down what I heard from those contemporaries who personally knew the emperor and who escorted him on his campaigns against the enemy and accompanied him into battle'.⁶⁵¹ Simpson notes that these interviews must have been conducted when Choniates began conceiving of his historical work during the 1180s, as veterans of John's campaigns could not be expected to have lived past the year 1200.⁶⁵² The statements made by Kinnamos and Choniates are in any case somewhat rhetorical, as neither historian was present at the majority of military events they describe for the reign of Manuel, and yet they do not make similar statements.

In such instances, there can be little question that the testimony of soldiers was again sought by Kinnamos and Choniates. Charles Brand speculates that Kinnamos may have employed simple accounts drafted by soldiers, yet, like Chalandon, is convinced that Kinnamos gathered most of his information from autopsy and the oral reports of participants and eyewitnesses.⁶⁵³ More has been said of Choniates. While Kazhdan was convinced of Choniates' use of archival documents,⁶⁵⁴ Chalandon and Maisano are less sure.⁶⁵⁵ More recently, Simpson asserts that Choniates made 'comparatively little use' of the archives, citing dating errors and his vague coverage of diplomatic affairs.⁶⁵⁶ On the basis of Choniates' claim to have interviewed eyewitnesses to John's campaigns, Simpson proposes that Choniates also spoke to individuals who

⁶⁵¹ οἷα καὶ ἡμῶν μὴ τὰ τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἐπὶ τῷδε παρειλημμένα συγγραφομένων κἀντεῦθεν μὴδ' ἐπιτάδην ἐχόντων ταῦτα διεξιέναι, ἀλλ' ἄπερ εἰς ἀκοὴν ὠτίου εἰλήφειμεν ἐκ τῶν ὅσοι τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς τὸν βασιλέα τουτοὺν ἐθεάσαντο καὶ συνωμάρτου ἐκεῖνῳ πρὸς ἐναντίους χωροῦντι καὶ τὰς μάχας συνετολύπευον (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 4.76-80; trans. 4). For the implications of this statement with regard to the composition of Choniates' *Chronike Diegesis*, see Simpson (2004): 35.

⁶⁵² Simpson (2004): 35.

⁶⁵³ Chalandon (1912): xv-xvii, who nevertheless suggests that Kinnamos made some use of archival documents; Brand (1974): 6.

⁶⁵⁴ Kazhdan (1994): xv.

⁶⁵⁵ Chalandon (1912): xxv-xxvi; Maisano (1994a): 404-405.

⁶⁵⁶ Simpson (2004): 218-219.

took part in the campaigns of later emperors, speculating that these men would have been high-ranking officials rather than the rank-and-file soldiery.⁶⁵⁷

The Historical Record of John Doukas' Expedition to Italy, 1155-1156

Kinnamos' account of the doomed Italian expedition of 1155-1156 forms a central episode of his history.⁶⁵⁸ Brand speculates that Kinnamos may have been an eyewitness to these events, but this is improbable given the author's age at the time (about twelve). More likely is Brand's alternative suggestion: that one of the commanders involved, John Doukas,⁶⁵⁹ was Kinnamos' informant, and that some written source 'should confidently be hypothesized'.⁶⁶⁰ Andrew Stone similarly asserts that Kinnamos 'must have interviewed survivors' of the expedition.⁶⁶¹ The account provides a thorough itinerary of Doukas' movements and extensive detail on the actions conducted by the commander.⁶⁶² Topographical exposition is uncommon but the natural defences of Mottola are vividly described.⁶⁶³ Detail of military operations is, in at least two instances, extensive. The Roman battle line at Trani is outlined: Cumans and infantry archers were positioned in front, while half the cavalry took the centre, and Doukas commanded the rear with Cumans and the remainder of the cavalry. In the ensuing battle, the archers broke quickly while the centre was

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid: 219-221. Herbert Hunger (1978: I, 432) also suggests that veteran officers were among Choniates' informants.

⁶⁵⁸ For the campaign and Manuel's policy towards Italy in general, see most recently Tolstoy-Miloslavsky (2008).

⁶⁵⁹ For John Doukas' military career and his involvement in Apulia, see Stone (1999): esp. 150-154.

⁶⁶⁰ Brand (1974): 230 n.30. Brand states of Kinnamos: 'If he did not participate in this expedition, he had available an unusually complete and reliable source, whether a written memoir or living persons' (ibid: 228 n.9). While Kinnamos (5.6-9) does reveal that he accompanied the emperor on campaign from a young age, he says nothing of the campaigns of Manuel's subordinates.

⁶⁶¹ Stone (1999): 152-153

⁶⁶² For an outline of the campaign and Doukas' involvement, see Chalandon (1912): 363-370.

⁶⁶³ Kinnamos (152) describes inaccessible ravines and streams protecting Mottola on each side.

forced back, leaving Doukas and the heavy infantry to stem the tide.⁶⁶⁴ Furthermore, in the narrative of the siege of Brindisi, the process of undermining a stone wall is carefully described.⁶⁶⁵ Kinnamos' account also offers some remarkably specific numbers: at Trani, the nobleman Richard of Andria is accompanied by thirty-six knights;⁶⁶⁶ nine men are said to have led the Italians at Bosco;⁶⁶⁷ Doukas commands only fourteen ships at Brindisi, and seizes four belonging to the enemy;⁶⁶⁸ the engagement with three hundred enemy infantry at Barletta results in the loss of only one mercenary cavalryman on the Byzantine side;⁶⁶⁹ and the confrontation at Bosco leaves four of Doukas' men dead for two of the enemy.⁶⁷⁰ This knowledge could only have been imparted by one who participated in the expedition and was involved in the command process.

The focalizer throughout Kinnamos' account of the expedition is most often John Doukas, indicating him as the primary informant. Michael Palaiologos⁶⁷¹ was co-commander, but aside from his early acquisition of Bari, we do not hear of him at length until mention of his illness, tonsure, and subsequent death.⁶⁷² Having seized Bari, Palaiologos combined his forces with those of Doukas, and thereafter assumes a secondary role in the narrative. When the army is divided, the narrative follows Doukas' operations, and we hear nothing of Palaiologos' experiences while stationed

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid: 143-144.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid: 164. Elaborate descriptions of undermining are common in Byzantine historiography - see Agathias: I.3; Leo the Deacon: 25-26; 52-53.

⁶⁶⁶ Kinnamos: 144.12-13.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid: 149.16-17.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid: 162.23-163.1; 163.13-15.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid: 142.6-17.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid: 148.16-18.

⁶⁷¹ For this individual see Hörandner (1974): 503.

⁶⁷² Kinnamos: 151.

at Bari.⁶⁷³ This might be understandable if Palaiologos were subordinate to Doukas, but this was not the case; having become a monk, Palaiologos continued to issue orders to Doukas, implying his seniority in the partnership.⁶⁷⁴ Though Niketas Choniates does not describe the expedition in detail - perhaps because Kinnamos had already done so - he does offer more information about Palaiologos' actions. The revelation that Palaiologos constructed a stone wall around Bari may hint at the general's activities during Doukas' aforementioned absence.⁶⁷⁵ Choniates also adds that Palaiologos was relieved of his command for being meddlesome, and wasteful with money.⁶⁷⁶ While the accuracy of this report may be questioned, it nevertheless confirms that the historian had access to a different perspective on the campaign.⁶⁷⁷

Describing a small clash at Barletta, Kinnamos can almost be seen to apologize for his narrow viewpoint - 'as to the other Romans there I am unable to say how each fared in valiant deeds' – as he describes Doukas charging the enemy and, 'they say' (φασιν), sending more than thirty to the ground.⁶⁷⁸ Doukas' brilliance as a general and gallantry in combat are demonstrated at several points in the narrative. At Monopoli, Doukas charged the enemy with just thirty men.⁶⁷⁹ Doukas rouses the courage of his men against a larger enemy force at Bosco, and, when pressed, mounts a desperate

⁶⁷³ Ibid: 145-150. Palaiologos is not the only commander to be marginalized in Kinnamos' narrative. Shortly before Palaiologos' death, Manuel sent another fleet to Italy, with John Angelos in overall command, though nothing else is said of this force (ibid: 148). We know only that the party joined up with Doukas on account of a later reference, where Angelos is mentioned during the narrative of the defence against the Sicilian relief force at Brindisi. Even then, however, we follow only the naval operations of Doukas; there is no discussion of the actions of the land force led by Angelos (ibid: 162).

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid: 151.

⁶⁷⁵ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 91.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid: 94.

⁶⁷⁷ Chalandon (1912: xxix-xxx) opines that Choniates was 'très insuffisamment renseigné' on operations in Italy during the reign of Manuel. Supporting Kinnamos' testimony is contemporary Theodore Prodromos, whose epitaphs for Michael Palaiologos confirm that Michael became a monk following an illustrious military career, dying shortly after (Theodore Prodromos: LXVI-LXVII).

⁶⁷⁸ ἔνθα Ῥωμαίοις μὲν τοῖς ἄλλοις οὐκ ἔχω λέγειν ὅπως ἐκάστῳ ἀνδραγαθίσασθαι ἐξεγένετο (Kinnamos: 142.6-15; trans. 111).

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid: 146.

charge, putting the enemy to flight.⁶⁸⁰ At Brindisi, Doukas' outnumbered force attack the Sicilian fleet by sea and land and win a great victory.⁶⁸¹ Admittedly, his are not the only feats of individual prowess described.⁶⁸² At various times there are references to single combat.⁶⁸³ Perhaps Kinnamos invented these incidents, inspired by the heroic tone of Procopius' record of conflict in Italy, evidently the model for this section of the *Epitome*.⁶⁸⁴ But if these episodes reflect actual events, it is quite possible that they were mentioned in reports filed by Doukas, given that generals were encouraged to make a record of particular deeds of valour so that soldiers might later be rewarded by the emperor.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid: 149-150.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid: 162-164.

⁶⁸² In the encounter at Bosco, it is stated that two anonymous Alans performed nobly, in addition to many Romans (ibid: 148.20-22); during the siege of the town, two of Doukas' guardsmen made a bold attempt to burn the gates, but having failed were forced to retreat, somehow avoiding an aerial bombardment (ibid: 149.4-12). Amid the assault on Monopoli, one soldier, Hikanatos, speared a troublesome defender and roused his comrades, enabling the Romans to almost take the town (ibid: 155.13-156.6). Credit is also given to another of Doukas' soldiers, Skaramankas, who fell during the repulse of the Sicilian fleet at Brindisi. Kinnamos writes that Skaramankas prevented an enemy ship from fleeing at the cost of his life, not unlike the famed Kynegiros, who perished in similarly heroic fashion at the Battle of Marathon (ibid: 163.17-164.3, echoing Herodotus: 6.114). In the final battle at Brindisi, the soldiers Ioannikios Kritoples and Bairam are commended for their actions at the head of a Georgian and Alan skirmishing unit, which inflicted casualties upon the Sicilian rearguard before returning safely to Byzantine lines (Kinnamos: 167.4-12).

⁶⁸³ Before Brindisi, one Thomas, from Antioch, fought a resident, Angelo, in single combat – a joust is described - with the clash and slight wounds suffered by each man carefully detailed (ibid: 159.18-160.15). Elsewhere, Kinnamos is more ambivalent: again at Brindisi, it is reported that one unnamed mercenary emerged to challenge one of the enemy in single combat, though nothing appears to have come of his offer (ibid: 168.8-11), while Kinnamos notes that several Romans leapt out in front of their lines and displayed marvellous feats during an encounter, without delving into any specifics (ibid: 153.9-12).

⁶⁸⁴ See below, 134-136 for the argument that Procopius served as Kinnamos' literary model. For the Homeric tone of Procopius' *Gothic Wars*, see Whately (2009): 256-261. Jacqueline Rosenblum (1972: 221) suggested the possible influence of western interest in heroism for these sections of the *Epitome*.

⁶⁸⁵ In an oration to the troops of the east, Constantine VII advised his commanders to keep 'written records' (ἐγγράφως) so that he could reward those picked out for commendation, even common soldiers (Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos, *Military Oration of the Emperor Constantine VII*: 399.82-96).

Only with the arrival in Italy of the Emperor Manuel's cousin, the *meγas doux* Alexios Komnenos Bryennios, does the narrative seem less focused on Doukas. This ambiguity, however, may have been deliberate, intended to lessen Doukas' role in the imminent failure of the expedition. Bryennios is criticized for not doing as commanded by the emperor and assembling a force prior to his arrival at Brindisi.⁶⁸⁶ In the final summary, Bryennios is lambasted by Kinnamos for not bringing fresh troops as the emperor ordered.⁶⁸⁷ Blame is apportioned to everyone and everything – with the notable exception of Doukas. Thus ally Robert of Bassonville abandons the Byzantines, while the knights of Ancona are depicted as fickle mercenaries, leaving the employ of Doukas when their excessive pay demands are rejected.⁶⁸⁸ As King William of Sicily converged on Brindisi, it is noted that the Byzantine army had been decimated by the desertion of its Norman contingents.⁶⁸⁹ The Byzantines fight bravely, but the superior numbers prove too much.⁶⁹⁰ Conspicuous by his absence in this final stage of operations is Doukas; as the chief source of Kinnamos' account, it would seem that he blamed certain parties and a lack of manpower for the failure of the expedition.

Kinnamos does not appear to have been entirely privy to the command process at this stage. In discussing the advance of William of Sicily on the Byzantine forces stationed at Brindisi, Kinnamos remarks that bad advice and, 'I think' (οἶμαι), the inevitability of defeat dissuaded the Byzantines from engaging William's fleet before the king arrived with his land army. By choosing to engage both at once, Kinnamos

⁶⁸⁶ Kinnamos: 165.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid: 169.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid: 165.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid: 167.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid: 168.

decrees, they encouraged disaster.⁶⁹¹ Kinnamos' view was probably not too dissimilar to the official line, which would have almost certainly disregarded any suggestion that Manuel had not provided enough manpower and resources for the expedition.

Magdalino viewed Kinnamos' decision to blame John Doukas and Alexios Komnenos Bryennios as a response to criticisms voiced over the viability of the campaign and Manuel's Italian policy in general. The pair are deemed responsible not just for the defeat, but also for ruining a fresh offensive by making unauthorized promises to William concerning a peace agreement whilst in captivity.⁶⁹² Yet Kinnamos' rhetoric fails to completely shroud the underlying viewpoint of John Doukas, who contended that he was waiting for further troops to arrive, and consequently postponed battle until the last possible moment. Stone recognizes 'ambivalence' in the way Kinnamos presents Doukas, at times a superb tactician and at others incompetent.⁶⁹³ This can only be explained by Kinnamos failing to reconcile his eagerness to extricate Manuel from blame with his considerable reliance on Doukas' testimony.

Kinnamos may be seen to shape his material and subvert the image Doukas attempted to present. The letter which Doukas purportedly sent to Manuel, asking for more ships and men to contend with the threat of Sicily, is pivotal in this respect.⁶⁹⁴ In context and, to some extent, content, it is strikingly similar to a letter featured in Procopius' *Wars*. While besieged at Rome in 537, Belisarius purportedly wrote to Justinian requesting more troops.⁶⁹⁵ There is a clear parallel in both generals asking

⁶⁹¹ Ibid: 166-167.

⁶⁹² Magdalino (1993a): 60-61.

⁶⁹³ Stone (1999): 152-153.

⁶⁹⁴ Kinnamos: 158.9-159.7.

⁶⁹⁵ Procopius, *Wars*: V.24.1-17. The legitimacy of Belisarius' letter is questionable. The letter contains Procopius' usual language and rhetoric, though this alone would not be enough to condemn the legitimacy of the letter, given the possibility that Procopius himself, as Belisarius' personal secretary, may have penned it (Treadgold 2007: 184-185, 216). More damning to its credibility is the

for aid from the emperor whilst leading expeditions in Italy. Yet just as Belisarius recognizes the fickle nature of fortune and urges that human action can also dictate the course of events – in this case an increase in men and supplies to boost the probability of a Roman victory – Doukas can also be seen to ponder the uncertainty of fate prior to writing to Manuel.⁶⁹⁶ It is apparent that Kinnamos read Procopius,⁶⁹⁷ and given that the paragraph immediately following the letter contains an obvious paraphrase from Procopius' *Wars*, there can be little doubt that he had Procopius to hand whilst drafting the narrative of Doukas' campaign in Italy.⁶⁹⁸ There is no reason to doubt that Doukas wrote to the emperor requesting aid, but it is improbable that the letter is quoted verbatim here.⁶⁹⁹

nature of the rhetoric and the image of Belisarius presented. Army numbers are non-specific and inflated, implying that they are not the calculations of the general, but rather an individual keen to exaggerate the achievements of his hero (Whately 2009: 278 n.152). Furthermore, the conclusion of the letter, which sees Belisarius questioning the backlash Justinian would face if he let his general die at Rome, is, as Averil Cameron observes, 'sheer bravado'. Cameron (1985: 148-149) is undoubtedly right to suggest that this 'outpouring...can hardly have been sent in this form'. Aid was probably requested by Belisarius – perhaps even Procopius himself drafted the request – but it is unlikely that the letter presented is that same original document. A similar letter may be found at *Wars*: VII.12.3-10, where Belisarius' lays bare to Justinian the full extent of the problems afflicting his expedition to Italy in 544. While the letter underlines the difficulties facing Belisarius and attempts to extricate him from blame for future events, it is more convincing than the earlier letter and is essentially devoid of rhetorical elements. Given these stylistic differences, and also that Procopius did not participate on this venture, it may be that this letter was not composed by his hand. Pertinent comments on speeches (a similar rhetorical exercise) in Procopius' *Wars* may be found in Kaldellis (2004): 29-34.

⁶⁹⁶ Ὁ δὲ Δούκας ὁσημέραι τὴν τύχην Ῥωμαίους προσμειδιῶσαν ὁρῶν οὐ πάνυ τι πιστεύειν εἶχεν αὐτῆ, τὴν ἀποστροφὴν ὡς εἰκὸς εὐλαβοῦμενος, μήποτε κατὰ τοὺς μοχθηροὺς (φασί) τῶν συνοδοιπῶρων ἐκ μέσης λιποῦσα τούτους ἀνακάμψῃ τῆς ὁδοῦ (Kinnamos: 158.5-8).

⁶⁹⁷ Carl Neumann (1888: 85) and Jacqueline Rosenblaum (1972: 9) propose that Kinnamos imitated Procopius' literary technique.

⁶⁹⁸ ἀλλὰ πολὺς μετ' ἐκεῖνα ἀναστρεψαμένοις ἐπιγενόμενος αἰὼν ἐνεόχμωσε τὰ πλεῖστα τῶν ὀνομάτων, ἐφ' ἕτερα ἢ παντάπασιν ἀνόμοια ἢ ὀλίγω διαφέροντα μεταθείς (Kinnamos: 159.11-13); χωρὶς δὲ τούτων καὶ μέγας αἰὼν μετὰ τοὺς ἐκεῖνα ἀναγραψαμένους ἐπιγενόμενος ἀεὶ τε συννεωτερίζων τοῖς πράγμασι τὰ πολλὰ τῶν καθεστώτων τὰ πρότερα νεοχμῶσαι ἴσχυσεν, ἐθνῶν τε μεταστάσει καὶ ἀρχόντων καὶ ὀνομάτων διαδοχαῖς (Procopius, *Wars*: VIII.1.11). The observation was made by Neumann (1888): 96; Hunger (1978): I, 414.

⁶⁹⁹ See Neumann (1888): 91-93; Chalandon (1912): xvi-xvii, for the argument that Kinnamos does not quote genuine documents and letters. Gyula Moravcsik (1958: I, 325-326) proposes that Kinnamos consulted receipts of the letter from a register.

Kinnamos constructed this letter for a particular purpose, which only becomes clear when examined alongside his evaluation of the expedition. Crucial are the words attributed to Doukas' hand near the close of the letter: 'For while it is agreed that successfully to pursue great ends with few men is more gratifying than with many, failure imports a multitude of shame, because along with defeat it also implies ignorance of strategy in the defeated, as your majesty has often taught us'.⁷⁰⁰ If we compare this to Kinnamos' musings on why the expedition failed, it is evident that Doukas' 'admission' is designed to hint at his own shortcomings and foreshadow the defeat:

So present-day men are: some survive entirely bereft of military science and bring affairs to ruin, others perchance know a part of military science but are wrong about the more important part. For strategy is an art, and one who practices it must be supple and cunning and know how to make a timely alteration at every turn of it. For there is a time when it is not shameful to flee, if the occasion allows...where success would seem more by cunning than by force, risking everything is to be deprecated. Since many and various matters lead toward one end - victory - it is a matter of indifference which one one uses to reach it.⁷⁰¹

⁷⁰⁰ τὸ γὰρ σὺν μικροῖς τὰ μεγάλα μετιέναι κατορθούμενον μὲν πλείω τοῦ σὺν μεγίστοις χαρίζεται δόξαν, ἀμαρτανόμενον δὲ πολλαπλάσιον ἐπάγεται τὸ αἰσχος, ἅτε πρὸς τῇ ἡττῇ καὶ ἀμαθίαν στρατηγικῶν ἐπιτρίβον τοῖς πταίσασιν. ὥς γε πολλάκις ἡμᾶς κράτος ἐδίδαξε τὸ σὺν (Kinnamos: 158.24-159.4; trans. 122).

⁷⁰¹ οὕτως οἱ νῦν ἄνθρωποι οἱ μὲν παντάπασιν στρατηγικῶν ἄμοιροι διατελοῦντες τὰ πράγματα σφάλλουσιν, οἱ δὲ τοῦτο μὲν τυχὸν ἴσασι στρατηγικῆς μέρος, τῷ πλείονι διαμαρτάνουσι. τέχνη γὰρ τίς ἐστὶ καὶ ἡ στρατηγία, καὶ χρὴ τὸν ταύτην μετιόντα πολυειδῆ τινα καὶ ποικίλον εἶναι καὶ πρὸς ἕκαστον ἐπικαιροτάτως τῶν ταύτης μετατάττεσθαι εἰδῶν. φεύγειν τε γὰρ ἐστὶν ὅτε χρὴ μηδὲν αἰσχυρόμενον εἰ τοῦτο διδοίη καιρός, καὶ αὖ ἀνυπόστατα διώκειν, πρὸς τὴν χρεῖαν ἐκάτερον· ἔνθα τε ἐπινοία μᾶλλον ἢ χειρὶ κατορθοῦν φαίνοιτο, παραιτεῖσθαι τὸ τοῖς ὅλοις διακινδυνεύειν. πολλῶν γὰρ τινῶν καὶ διαφορῶν πραγμάτων ἐς ἓν τι τέλος τὴν νίκην ἀγόντων, ἀδιάφορόν ἐστιν ὁποτέρῳ τις χρησάμενος ἐπ' ἐκεῖνο ἤξει (ibid: 168.22-169.10; trans. 129-130).

Doukas ultimately fails by not heeding his ‘own’ advice and trying to achieve a victory with inferior numbers,⁷⁰² which, by the theory expounded here, exposes deficiencies in a commander. When read in this light, a rousing speech delivered by Doukas to his men at Brindisi prior to the speculated arrival of reinforcements takes on added significance: ‘I have vowed, fellow soldiers, that we shall first seize victory, lest we who have hitherto born the weight of toil shall have to share the blessings of victory with those who join late in the struggle’.⁷⁰³ Observing the poor morale of his troops, Doukas contrived to produce a letter purportedly sent by Manuel, proclaiming that additional forces would arrive shortly. The model for this episode is to be found in the *Histories* of Agathias; at the siege of Phasis in 555-556, the *magister militum per Armeniam* Martin similarly feigned news of a report of reinforcements to his men, stating his wish to send the apparent aid away so that they would not take all the glory.⁷⁰⁴ Averil Cameron viewed Martin’s conduct to be ‘patently absurd’, dismissing the entire episode as an obvious invention of Agathias.⁷⁰⁵ The provenance of Doukas’ scheme is equally questionable, especially given that Kinnamos opens discussion of this particular event with λέγεται. It would appear that the incident was invented by Kinnamos to hint at Doukas’ impatience, portraying him as an over-eager general who failed to see beyond short-term success. At the conclusion of the campaign, both Doukas and Alexios Komnenos Bryennios should have recognized their inferiority and engaged the Sicilian fleet first, then withdrawn to sea and returned to land in due course. ‘But as they kept in mind the dishonour of retreat, they fell into the disgrace

⁷⁰² Ibid: 166-168.

⁷⁰³ “ἀλλ’ ἠὺχόμεν” ἔφη “ὃ συστρατιῶται, φθάσαντας ἀρπάσαι τὴν νίκην ἡμᾶς, ὡς μὴ αὐτοὶ τῶν εἰς δεῦρο καμάτων τὸ βάρος βαστάσαντες εἶτα τῶν ἐκ τῆς νίκης ἀγαθῶν καὶ τοῖς ὀψὲ πρὸς τὸν ἀγῶνα διαπαντῶσιν ἐπικοινωνεῖν ἕξομεν” (ibid: 163.5-8; trans. 125).

⁷⁰⁴ Agathias: III.23.5-13.

⁷⁰⁵ Averil Cameron (1970): 46-48.

of being destroyed with their whole force'.⁷⁰⁶ The fault for the failure was placed entirely at their feet.

Kinnamos undoubtedly relied upon the testimony of John Doukas for his record of the Italian campaign; given the extent of the detail and the critical slant, it is highly likely that this took the form of written dispatches rather than oral correspondence. It is likewise apparent that Kinnamos also followed the official line and heaped blame on Doukas and his colleague Alexios Komnenos Bryennios, distancing Manuel from responsibility. The evidence points towards a reprieve for Doukas, however. In the 1160s he played a crucial role in campaigns against Dalmatia and Hungary, and was later involved in important diplomatic missions to Palestine and Libya.⁷⁰⁷ An oration of Eustathios of Thessaloniki, whilst including only a brief summation of Doukas' time in Italy, nevertheless draws attention to the 'lake of blood' Doukas made in 'Latin land'.⁷⁰⁸ While this praise is questionable, John's rehabilitation perhaps confirms that his apparent culpability for the failure in Italy was merely for public purposes, to draw attention away from Manuel's failings.

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⁷⁰⁶ ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνοι τὴν ἐκ τοῦ ὑποχωρεῖν ὑφορώμενοι ἀδοξίαν εἰς τὴν τοῦ πανστρατι διεφθάρθαι περιπεπτώκασιν ἀτιμίαν (Kinnamos: 169.14-19; trans. 130).

⁷⁰⁷ See Stone (1999): 154-163. While there is some disagreement on the number of John Doukas' in this period, most scholars are generally in agreement that the one who served in Italy later took part in the Hungarian wars: Brand (1974): 250 n.53; Polemis (1968): 128-129; Kazhdan (1969); Karlin-Hayter (1972): 263. The fall-out from the expedition seems to have been minimal in respect of the personnel involved: Alexios Komnenos Bryennios was later part of a delegation which journeyed to Antioch in 1161, and remained *megas doux* (Kinnamos: 210).

⁷⁰⁸ Τί δέ μοι θρόμβους μὲν ἰδρώτων λέγειν αἱματηρούς, σιγᾶν δὲ τὰ αἵματα, οἷς τὴν Λατινικὴν αὐτὸς ἐλίμνασε, πολλὴν μὲν αὐτῆς καὶ νεκροῖς καταστρώσας, οὐκ ὀλίγην δὲ καὶ καταβρέξας αἵμασιν, ἐξ ὧν ἑαυτῷ στολὴν εὐδοξίας ἔχρωζε; (Eustathios, *Orations*: 198.8-11). I follow here the interpretation of Stone (1999): 151-152.

The *megas doux* Andronikos Kontostephanos is the subject of extensive coverage in the histories of both Kinnamos and Choniates, offering greater scope for discussion of sources and historical method. Comparison here is concerned with the historical record of Kontostephanos' decisive victory over a Hungarian force at the Battle of Sirmium in 1167. We cannot postulate the use of a common source. Kinnamos' account is pragmatic and succinct. Having learned details about the Hungarian army from an enemy prisoner, Kontostephanos drew up his own army; Kinnamos provides a reasonably detailed list of commanders and their units. The battle unfolds dramatically, as the initial plan of Kontostephanos fails and much of his army gives way, before the Byzantines rally with a charge, finally driving the Hungarians from the field.⁷⁰⁹ Choniates, by contrast, offers a more rounded and polished version of events. There is insight into events at the imperial camp at Sardica prior to Kontostephanos' departure, with greater attention afforded to the Emperor Manuel. The detail about Kontostephanos questioning a Hungarian captive is omitted, while the battle line and composition of the Byzantine army is related in much briefer terms. Instead, there is an episode where Kontostephanos ignores a request from Manuel to delay the battle, before rousing his troops with a speech. Choniates' narrative of the battle itself is very different in its basic outline of events. The tactics employed differ from those described by Kinnamos, while there is no suggestion of a Byzantine collapse. Finally, the aftermath is fleshed out: we are told of Andronikos' return to the capital, and the grand triumph he celebrated with Manuel to mark the victory.⁷¹⁰ The sources of the two historians may have been loosely similar in content but were obviously distinct.

⁷⁰⁹ Kinnamos: 270-274.

⁷¹⁰ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 151-158.

Kinnamos appears to have derived much of his information from Kontostephanos. The perspective offered is generally that of the general, and, perhaps more significantly, Kinnamos indicates that he was aware of Kontostephanos' thinking. So we learn that Andronikos did not consider the use of spies and scouts against the enemy useful,⁷¹¹ and that his familiarity with the Hungarian custom of placing their best troops in the front line led him to deploy his own men in the opposite fashion. Kinnamos even knows of Kontostephanos' initial plan to have his archers part to the sides once the Hungarian mass drew near, a tactic which fails in practice.⁷¹² A detailed breakdown of the Byzantine army and the personnel involved strengthens the notion that Kinnamos was privy to information from high command.⁷¹³ There is little, however, to indicate that Kinnamos relied upon the testimony of other participants. A small degree of perspective is afforded to Hungarian commander Dionysios, but it is clear that Kinnamos did not have a source from the Hungarian side, as he remarks that Dionysios fled 'in a fashion I am unable to relate'.⁷¹⁴ Kinnamos describes the brave end of Demetrios Branas, though it is unlikely Demetrios' brother George, a survivor of the battle, informed Kinnamos, given that George is alleged to have 'lacked courage for the conflict'.⁷¹⁵ More prominent is Andronikos Lampardas, whose pre-emptive charge to save Kontostephanos helped swing the battle in favour of the

⁷¹¹ Kinnamos: 270.

⁷¹² Ibid: 272.

⁷¹³ The Cumans and most of the Turks, together with lance-armed knights marched out first, followed by regiments of Byzantines commanded by Kogh Basil, Philokales and Tatikios Aspietes. Infantry mixed with bowmen and an armoured body of Turks followed, and behind them marched Joseph Bryennios and the brothers George and Demetrios Branas, as well as Constantine Aspietes the *sebastos*. Thereafter came the *chartouliarios* Andronikos Lampardas with elite Romans, Germans and Turks, and probably John Kontostephanos. In the rear was Andronikos Kontostephanos himself, with Italians and Serbs, armed with spears and wide shields (ibid: 271).

⁷¹⁴ μόλις ἐκείνου καὶ τρόπῳ ὅπερ αὐτὸς ἐρεῖν οὐκ ἔχω τὸν κίνδυνον πεφευγότες (ibid: 274.4-5; trans. 205).

⁷¹⁵ οὐκ ἐθάρρησε τὴν συμπλοκὴν (ibid: 272.18-23; trans. 204).

Byzantines.⁷¹⁶ It is said that Lampardas, along with Andronikos' brother John Kontostephanos,⁷¹⁷ distinguished themselves above all others in the battle.⁷¹⁸ This partiality towards friend and kin supports the idea that Andronikos Kontostephanos was the source of Kinnamos' information. The pragmatic narrative, restricted focus from the perspective of the commander, and awareness of the composition and deployment of the army suggests that Kinnamos employed a report drafted by Andronikos.

Choniates perhaps also relied upon Andronikos Kontostephanos for his account of the Battle of Sirmium. Prior to the battle, it is reported that Andronikos ignored letters from the emperor urging him to delay the engagement due to ominous astrological readings.⁷¹⁹ As Andronikos is reported to have hid the letter from his fellow officers, seemingly Choniates could only have learned this confidential detail from Kontostephanos himself.⁷²⁰ This idea might be supported by Choniates' account of the Battle of Myriokephalon. Here the historian discloses details about Manuel's secret plan to flee, and since Kontostephanos is said to have been shocked by the proposal, Maisano argues that it was he who informed Choniates of this incident.⁷²¹ With Kontostephanos' involvement in the attack on Damietta also described at

⁷¹⁶ Ibid: 273.

⁷¹⁷ On a related note, Kinnamos' account of John Kontostephanos' victory over a Turkish force in late 1161 is also suggestive of a report of the commander. Kontostephanos, encountering a 22,000 strong Turkish army, moved to a nearby hill, and with the support of his men charged at the Turks, who retreated under the strain of the charge. Kinnamos comments that numerous others achieved deeds worthy of mention, but it was Kontostephanos' actions which shined above all others (ibid: 200-201). It seems therefore that John Kontostephanos was the source of this report. Evidently, Kinnamos possessed testimony from the Kontostephanos brothers and was keen to describe their military feats in an appropriately grandiose manner.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid: 274.11-13.

⁷¹⁹ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 154.43-55.

⁷²⁰ Simpson (2004): 220-221.

⁷²¹ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 187. See Hunger (1978): I, 435; Maisano (1994a): 402-403.

length,⁷²² the text points towards a connection between the historian and his subject.

Kazhdan hypothesizes that Andronikos may have known Choniates personally, since the lands of the Kontostephanoi were in the valley of the Maeander River, near Chonai, the homeland of the author.⁷²³

While there can be little doubt that Choniates sought to portray Kontostephanos in a positive light, it is difficult to argue that the historian based his entire account of the Battle of Sirmium on Kontostephanos' personal testimony. The knowledge of the command process evident in Kinnamos' history is not displayed by Choniates. Had Kontostephanos provided Choniates with his recollections of the battle, we would expect more details about his own feats; moreover, there is no mention of Kontostephanos' heroic charge turning the tide of battle, as reported by Kinnamos. The lengthy speech given by Kontostephanos prior to the engagement, emphasizing Byzantine superiority over the 'barbarian' foe, is almost certainly a rhetorical invention on Choniates' part.⁷²⁴ Identifying the sole source as Kontostephanos would also not account for the prominence afforded to Manuel. The emperor converses with Kontostephanos, recommending tactics, equipment, and formations for the campaign. He also rouses his troops with a speech, promising gifts if they should be victorious; the men were moved by his words and hailed their emperor.⁷²⁵

The involvement of Manuel and the subdued role of Kontostephanos suggests that Choniates' utilized an official account of the expedition. Though not physically present at Sirmium, Manuel nevertheless plays an important part. Since Kinnamos

⁷²² Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 160-168.

⁷²³ Kazhdan (1994): xlviii-xlix.

⁷²⁴ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 154-155. Maisano (1994a): 402. For fictitious speeches of Choniates, see Simpson (2004): 233-237.

⁷²⁵ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 152.

corroborates Manuel's role in preparations, it appears that this image of Manuel as architect of the victory was widely propagated.⁷²⁶ Kontostephanos, nephew of the emperor and his most valued general, remains the subject of considerable attention in the account, and victory is rightly ascribed to him. Yet the emperor's prominent place in the subsequent triumph illustrates that he was keen to bask in the success.⁷²⁷ The triumph itself was laced with potent imagery, attested by the prominence Manuel afforded to an icon of the Virgin, placing it in a silver chariot and proceeding behind, very much like Tzimiskes.⁷²⁸ Though Manuel is reported to have dispatched a victory bulletin to the capital following the campaign,⁷²⁹ such a source obviously would not have discussed the triumph. This would suggest that the official narrative was drafted in Constantinople after the campaign. In any case, the triumphal procession underlined the significance of this victory to Manuel and his eagerness to exploit it.

That Choniates' source was an official account would also explain the seemingly sanitized report of the battle itself, which omits any mention of a momentary Byzantine collapse. Kinnamos and Choniates describe the course of the battle using their own vocabulary and style – note, for example, Choniates' customary Homeric references⁷³⁰ and his description of the armies moving back and forth 'like an undulating serpent rattling its scales', animal imagery prevalent in several of his

⁷²⁶ Kinnamos: 270.6-8. Simpson (2004: 208) overlooks that Manuel's guidance is mentioned by Choniates also.

⁷²⁷ The emperor being followed by the victorious general appears to have been an innovation – see Magdalino (1993a): 241-242. It confirms the importance afforded to Kontostephanos but likewise serves as a reminder of the pre-eminence of the emperor.

⁷²⁸ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 157-158.

⁷²⁹ Ibid: 157.48-52.

⁷³⁰ κατὰ γὰρ τὴν Ὀμηρικὴν καὶ τότε παράταξιν “ἀσπίς ἀσπίδ’ ἔρειδε, κόρυς κόρυιν, ἀνέρα δ’ ἀνήρ”, καὶ ἴσας εἶχον οἱ ἵπποι τὰς κεφαλὰς, ἔφριξε δ’ ἡ μάχη ἐγχείησι φθισίμβροτος (ibid: 156.18-20; ref. Homer, *Iliad*: 13.131, 13.339, 16.215). For Choniates' use of Homer, see Vasilikopoulou-Ioannidou (1969); Maisano (2000); Saxey (2009).

descriptive passages.⁷³¹ Thus it is all the more significant that both historians describe the Byzantine cavalry fighting in three progressive stages, using spears, swords, and maces, the lethal damage inflicted by the mace being noted in both narratives.⁷³²

Corroborative testimony of the devastating effect of the Byzantine mace against the Hungarians may be found in a near-contemporary panegyric of Eustathios of Thessaloniki,⁷³³ demonstrating that this aspect of the fighting featured prominently in official accounts of the Battle of Sirmium.⁷³⁴

The obvious problem with the hypothesis of an official account is the report of Kontostephanos ignoring the emperor's guidance to postpone battle. This episode could not have featured in an account distributed by the imperial court, and the suggestion is that Kontostephanos personally informed Choniates about the incident.

It is telling that this marks the only point where Choniates intervenes critically,

⁷³¹ κατὰ κινούμενον δράκοντα καὶ φρίσσοντα τὰς φολίδας ἐκύμαινον οἱ στρατοὶ (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 156.20-21; trans. 89). For Choniates' use of animal imagery, see Littlewood (2007): esp. 249-253 for snakes.

⁷³² ὡς οὖν ἐδέξαντο τοῦτον Ῥωμαῖοι, διαδορατισμοὶ παρ' ἀλλήλων ἦσαν καὶ ὠθισμοὶ καὶ ἀντωθισμοὶ μέχρι τινός· ἐπεὶ δὲ τὰ δόρατα κατεάγη καὶ ἦν τὸ μεταίχιμον ἀποσχεδιασθὲν εἰς φραγμὸν τοῖς τῶν κοντῶν στοιβασμοῖς, τὰς ἐπιμήκεις ἐσέπειτα μαχαίρας ἐσπάσαντο καὶ αὐθις συμπεσόντες ἐμάχοντο. ὡς δ' ἤδη καὶ αὐταὶ τὰ στόματα ἠμβλύθησαν διὰ τὸ τῶν στρατευμάτων πάγχαλκον καὶ πανσίδηρον, οἱ μὲν Παῖονες ἠμηχάνουν τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦδε μηδαμῶς κατὰ νοῦν θέμενοι ὡς ἐπιόντας αὐτοὺς Ῥωμαῖοι δέξονται, Ῥωμαῖοι δὲ μετὰ χεῖρας τὰς ἐκ σιδήρου κορύναις χειρισάμενοι (ἔθος δὲ αὐτοῖς καὶ τοιόνδε φέρειν ὀπλισμὸν, ἠνίκα ἂν εἰς πόλεμον ἴοιεν) ἔπαιον τοὺς Παῖονας δι' αὐτῶν· καὶ ἦν καίριον μάλα τὸ πλῆγμα κατὰ κεφαλῆς καὶ προσώπων γινόμενον (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 156.23-157.34); τῶν γὰρ δοράτων σφίσι κλασθέντων καὶ θρυβέντων ἤδη τῶν ξιφῶν, ταῖς κορύναις ἠλόων τοῖς κακοδαίμοσι τὰς κεφαλὰς (Kinnamos: 273.23-274.2).

⁷³³ εἰ δὲ κορύνην προβαλεῖται, ἦν σίδηρος μὲν ἐχορήγησεν, ἀνδρὸς δὲ δεξιότης εἰς τριβόλων ὀξύτητας ἐξηκάνθωσεν, ἐκτρέπονται τὸν κορυνηφόρον ἐκεῖνον οἱ Παῖονες· καὶ τὴν ξενίαν ἀπείπαντο καὶ τοὺς τε ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐλόξωσαν καὶ τὸ ὄπλον ἀπέπτυσαν καὶ ἑαυτοὺς ἀπέστρεψαν (Eustathios, *Orationes*: 211.91-95).

⁷³⁴ The use of the mace by Middle Byzantine heavy cavalry and its impact upon the enemy is attested by Nikephoros Ouranos (*Taktika*: §61.209-214; trans. 129): 'The *kataphraktoi*...will smash in the heads and bodies of the enemy and their horses with their iron maces and sabres, they will break into and dismember their formations and from there break through and so completely destroy them'. Nikephoros Phokas (*Praecepta Militaria*: §III.53-60) advises that a lance-armed cavalryman also carry a sword and additional maces, suggesting that soldiers were well aware of the tendency of arms to be broken or lost in battle. See also Kolias (1988): 173-185; McGeer (1995a): 216-217. For further discussion of Byzantine arms at the Battle of Sirmium in particular, see Birkenmeier (2002): 122.

remarking of the emperor's beliefs: 'I do not know how it was that Manuel could put his trust in the conjunctions and positions and movements of the stars, and obey the prattle of astrologers as though they were equal to judgments coming from God's throne'.⁷³⁵ The incident stands out as the only obvious criticism of Manuel in an otherwise favourable account of his conduct during the campaign. It is, however, consistent with Choniates' general presentation of the emperor, which entails denigration of Manuel's interest in occult science.⁷³⁶ Indeed, one observes a remarkably similar case elsewhere in the *Chronike Diegesis*, where Choniates blames a naval defeat suffered by one Constantine Angelos in 1154 on the emperor's steadfast belief in timing wars by astrology.⁷³⁷ Kinnamos, by contrast, attributes the defeat to the failings of Angelos, which included ignoring the emperor's advice, though this guidance concerned not attacking a greater enemy, rather than astrological portents.⁷³⁸ This advice echoes that Manuel apparently gave to John Doukas, suggesting that Kinnamos or imperial publicists may have used this line of reasoning when seeking to distance the emperor from blame for military setbacks. Manuel's interest in occult science is well attested in contemporary encomia, leading Magdalino to suggest that Kinnamos may have deliberately played down this interest so as not to discredit his subject.⁷³⁹

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to consider Choniates any more accurate than Kinnamos just because he dares to criticize Manuel. For this dislike may have

⁷³⁵ ἀπετρέπετο δὲ ὡς ἀποφράς ἢ τότε ἡμέρα καὶ ὅλως ἀξύμφορος πρὸς τὴν κατ' Ἄρεα συμβολήν, ἐπεὶ καὶ ἦν τὰς πλείστας καὶ μεγίστας τῶν πράξεων καὶ παρὰ θεοῦ τὸ πέρας κατ' εὐδοκίαν εἴτε καὶ μὴ δεχομένας ταῖς τῶν ἄστρον οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως περιπλοκαῖς καὶ ταῖς τοιαῖσδε θέσεσι καὶ κινήσεσιν ἐπανατιθεῖς καὶ τοῖς παρὰ τῶν ἀστρολεσχούντων λεγομένοις καθυπαγόμενος ἴσα ταῖς ἐκ θρανίδος θεοῦ ἀποφάσεσιν (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 154.49-55; trans. 87)

⁷³⁶ Magdalino (2006): 146-150.

⁷³⁷ Niketas Choniates: *Chronike Diegesis*: 96.

⁷³⁸ Kinnamos: 120-121.

⁷³⁹ Magdalino (2006): 145-150, 155-156.

influenced him to insert fictional elements, with Choniates not averse to overlooking historical accuracy in favour of narrative effectiveness.⁷⁴⁰ Choniates drafted several versions and revisions of his *Chronike Diegesis*, with the initial draft completed prior to 1204 and the last finished c.1215-1217. For various reasons, Choniates only added explicit criticism of Manuel in the final version, including condemnation of Manuel's belief in astrology. Whereas in the prior version Choniates drew attention to the 'thoughtless' conduct of Constantine Angelos and merely implied that Manuel was to blame, the later revision stresses Manuel's culpability and presents the expedition as a complete farce.⁷⁴¹ Another major addition was Kontostephanos' rejection of the emperor's advice prior to the Battle of Sirmium.⁷⁴² As this episode was not part of Choniates' initial account, it is doubtful that it originated in his main source for the campaign. Simpson considers it 'likely' that the insertions are based on 'information that the historian had acquired at the time of the original composition, but felt he should not include'.⁷⁴³ Whether or not the relevant information was from Andronikos Kontostephanos, or even true, is unknown. We may at least say that it was added by Choniates to discredit Manuel and his irrational belief that victory was dependent on the position of the stars, and also to give Kontostephanos greater credit for the success.

While similar, the pragmatic report of Kontostephanos rendered by Kinnamos presents a different reality to the bulletin underlying Choniates' account: the narrow perspective affords no place for the emperor; Andronikos is commended along with those closest to him; and generally the course of battle is outlined in a more realistic

⁷⁴⁰ Simpson (2009): 28-29.

⁷⁴¹ See Simpson (2004): 105-107.

⁷⁴² For the insertions, particularly those damaging to Manuel's reputation, see *ibid*: 112-115, 278-281.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid*: 208.

fashion. There is little to suggest that Kinnamos altered his original source in this instance. Choniates' use of his source for the Battle of Sirmium however is consistent with his general treatment of written material. He did not copy verbatim from the works of Kinnamos and Eustathios of Thessaloniki, but modified passages, added rhetorical elements, and manipulated content for his own purposes.⁷⁴⁴ While it is impossible to ascertain what alterations Niketas made to the original account of the battle, the addition of a section condemning Manuel's astrological interests formed part of a wider argument reflecting his criticism of Manuel and admiration for Kontostephanos.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid: 204-217.

Conclusion

In the classical tradition, historians of the Middle Byzantine period provide scant information about their source material. While Anna Komnene offers surprisingly substantial discussion of her sources, her concern for veracity leads to misgivings over her stated historical method. Yet since these authors were writing about wars in which they took no part, some having occurred decades before they were born, they must have consulted sources in a position to inform them of these events. Historians assert a preference for interviewing eyewitnesses, but this nod to Thucydides was often little more than an attempt to bolster their claims to credence. Texts and documents were in all probability chief among the sources examined by historians when seeking information on warfare - encomia, official campaign narratives, histories, reports, memoirs, biographies, and written correspondence. Of course, how these historians related this information is another matter, and the most severe obstacle in any attempt to reconstruct the underlying source. While synoptic chroniclers such as Skylitzes appear to have followed their material closely, classicizing historians such as Leo the Deacon, Anna Komnene and Niketas Choniates insisted on greater individuality, adhering to the basic historical framework of the source but ensuring it conformed to their wider historical programme. This practice invariably involved the imposition of rhetorical models, the use of *mimesis*, alteration of emphasis, subversion, omission, and perhaps even invention. Such tactics enabled historians to present something new with the information and, perhaps more significantly, with their own personal commentary, not so much through offering their own opinion, but in how events might be presented.

Having touched upon the sources consulted by historians when recounting military events, the following chapters offer more detailed examination of the various types of material potentially exploited. We begin with the most obvious way a writer might learn of distant events – dispatches and written correspondence sent from the front.

CHAPTER II. DISPATCHES, BULLETINS AND THE CIRCULATION OF MILITARY NEWS IN BYZANTIUM

The notion that the Byzantines drafted reports chronicling a particular campaign or battle is not new. In 1983 James Howard-Johnston determined that much documentary material, ‘drawn primarily from military dispatches and imperial bulletins’, lies embedded in many Byzantine texts. Howard-Johnston stated his intention to apply *Quellenkritik* to texts in order to identify the use of bulletins and dispatches, noting that others had begun to carry out similar investigations on the works of Early Byzantine historians, including Theophylact Simocatta.⁷⁴⁵ This statement presumably refers to Michael Whitby’s then ongoing research; Whitby has since proposed that dispatches do indeed underlie parts of the narrative of Simocatta.⁷⁴⁶ Howard-Johnston has fulfilled his stated intent for the seventh-century *Chronicon Paschale* and the *Chronographia* of Theophanes, as will be seen. Elsewhere, he suggests that Leo the Deacon based his narrative of Tzimiskes’ campaign against the Rus’ on a set of imperial dispatches.⁷⁴⁷ Finally, Howard-Johnston’s controversial study of the *Alexiad* alleges Anna Komnene’s use of files containing official reports and documents.⁷⁴⁸

Howard-Johnston is not alone in proposing the existence of such sources. Veselin Beševliev suggests that a number of victory bulletins were issued between the seventh and early-ninth century, and underlie the narratives of the Patriarch Nikephoros and Theophanes.⁷⁴⁹ Michael McCormick offers general thoughts on bulletins, without

⁷⁴⁵ Howard-Johnston (1983): 265 n.22.

⁷⁴⁶ Michael Whitby (1988): esp. 94-105.

⁷⁴⁷ Howard-Johnston (2001): 302-303.

⁷⁴⁸ Idem (1996).

⁷⁴⁹ Beševliev (1974).

advancing any detailed hypotheses for particular examples.⁷⁵⁰ With these musings in mind, this chapter examines campaign dispatches and bulletins, as well as other methods by which military news circulated within and beyond the Byzantine Empire. It will be shown that regular written reports from the front satisfied a public and private interest in distant military operations. The composition, form, and veracity of dispatches and bulletins will be discussed, along with the potential storage of such documents, raising the wider issue of Byzantine historians and their use of archives and documentary material. Through this insight, we may, in the following chapter, examine the extent to which two historians of the Middle Byzantine period drew upon bulletins and associated correspondence when describing imperial campaigns.

⁷⁵⁰ McCormick (1986): 192-194.

I. Military News in Byzantium – Campaign Dispatches and Bulletins

The Byzantine practice of dispatching reports following military actions maintained a long-established tradition. Simon Hornblower suggests that the written reports of generals were consulted by Thucydides,⁷⁵¹ though he has found little support with this theory; scholars doubt the existence of an ‘official record’ of the Battle of Marathon,⁷⁵² while Rosalind Thomas does not acknowledge the potential existence of such items in the largely oral society of Classical Athens.⁷⁵³ The situation becomes clearer during the Hellenistic period. At Republican Rome, campaigning consuls sent regular updates to the senate, informing them of their progress.⁷⁵⁴ With the transition to empire, generals and officials were obliged to inform the emperor of their experiences,⁷⁵⁵ and the evidence suggests this remained standard procedure in Late Antiquity.⁷⁵⁶ It was this process, and not, as Beševliev mooted, the ‘*res gestae*’ practice associated with inscriptions and epitaphs, which lay behind the Byzantine custom of sending dispatches from the field.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵¹ Hornblower (1987): 39-40.

⁷⁵² Gomme (1952): 81; Whatley (1964): 122; Hammond (1968): 47; Evans (1993): 289, 303-307; Doenges (1998): 1.

⁷⁵³ R. Thomas (1992): esp. 221-237, where it is argued that the official tradition of military victories at Athens was most probably oral rather than written.

⁷⁵⁴ For insight and examples see Norden (1920): 434-439; L. Halkin (1953): 80-87; Sherk (1974); Austin & Rankov (1995): 95.

⁷⁵⁵ Eckstein (1987) argues that generals had relative free rein during the Republican period, though this changed under the empire, where generals and provincial governors communicated with the emperor more frequently, and received *mandata* designating their duties – see Millar (1977): 207-208, 215-216, 313-341.

⁷⁵⁶ For victory dispatches from the Roman Empire of Late Antiquity, see McCormick (1986): 17-18, 39-44; Lee (2007): 38.

⁷⁵⁷ Beševliev (1974), corrected by McCormick (1977): 219 n.30.

Dispatches and Reports in Prescriptive Literature

References in a treatise on imperial military expeditions, coupled with supporting evidence, confirm the high level of correspondence between a ruler and his subordinates. Leo Katakylas' treatise on imperial campaigns records that Constantine the Great gave instructions to his representative in Constantinople to forward 'reports' (τὰ μανδάτα) received in his absence on campaign,⁷⁵⁸ and it is known that emperors received military reports from their subordinates whilst in the field.⁷⁵⁹ Katakylas' treatise also prescribes that the emperor's deputy at Constantinople write to border commanders and receive a response in turn;⁷⁶⁰ we can deduce that this practice was standard when the emperor himself was in the capital.⁷⁶¹ Supporting evidence is provided by speeches Constantine VII composed for troops serving on the eastern frontier. The first of these, thought to have followed a victorious campaign of 950, opens with an explicit reference to receipt of information:

What great things I have heard about you, and what great tidings have been brought back to me through the reports of my faithful servants, for they have given me accurate information, they have given me a true account of your valour,

⁷⁵⁸ Constantine VII, *Text B*: ll.63-64. For discussion of the exact meaning of τὰ μανδάτα in this context, see Haldon (1990): 163; also Koutrakou (1995a): 132.

⁷⁵⁹ John II Komnenos was apparently forced to abandon his siege of Shaizar on account of reports (ἀγγελίαι) that Edessa would fall to the Turks without aid (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 30.87-90), while Alexios I was at Acheloos when he received reports (λόγοις) of Cuman activity around Adrianople (Anna Komnene: X.4.1.90-92).

⁷⁶⁰ καὶ διὰ τοῦτο μάλιστα γράφειν τε συνεχῶς καὶ δέχεσθαι ἐκ τῶν ἄκρων θεμάτων, καὶ κατασκοπεῖν τὰ τῶν γειτόνων ἐχθρῶν, καὶ μανθάνειν καὶ ἀναδιδάσκειν (Constantine VII, *Text B*: ll.69-71).

⁷⁶¹ Such instructions are noted by Kekaumenos (166-168).

the...spirit you have displayed against the enemy, and how you were embroiled in combat...⁷⁶²

At the conclusion of this *logos parakletikos*, Constantine addresses his officials:

I therefore administer this oath to you in the name of God...that you will inform Our Majesty about all events...Better yet, you will keep written records, so that when you come here you may tell us, in order that we will look with favour upon the men and deem them worthy of our praises and rewards...⁷⁶³

The second of Constantine's speeches, delivered in 958 to a large army stationed near Mesopotamia, confirms that reports provided by trusted servants were the emperor's usual means of gaining information about his frontier forces: 'We have learned through dispatches from the same most illustrious men and our most worthy attendants...'⁷⁶⁴ Later in the exhortation, Constantine again reminds the troops that

⁷⁶² ... (ἀ)κούων ὑμῶν, ὃ ἄνδρες, τὴν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων μεγίστην εὐκλειαν, οὐκ οἶδα ποῖον ὑμῖν τὸν ἔπαινον ἐκ βασιλικῆς ἄρτι πλέξω τῆς γλώττης· οἷα γὰρ ἤκουσταί μοι περὶ ὑμῶν καὶ οἷα διὰ τῆς ἀναφορᾶς ἀνηγγέλη τῶν ἐμῶν πιστῶν θεραπόντων. Ἐκεῖνοι γὰρ μοι κατεμήνυσαν ἀκριβῶς, ἐκεῖνοι τὴν ὑμῶν ἀρετὴν φιλαλήθως ἐγνώρισαν, πόσῃ μὲν τὴν ἀνδρείαν, πόσῃ δὲ τὴν ὀρμὴν, πόσῃ δὲ τὴν κατὰ τῶν πολεμίων ἐπεδείξασθε γενναιότητα, καὶ ὅπως οὐχ ὡς πρὸς ἄνδρας ἦτε διαμαχόμενοι ἀλλὰ γυναικῶν, οἷον ἀθλίων, κατεπαιρόμενοι (Constantine VII, *Military Oration of the Emperor Constantine VII*: 397.1-7; trans. 117)

⁷⁶³ Ὅρκίζω τοιγαροῦν ὑμᾶς καὶ εἰς Θε(ε)ν...περὶ πάντων καταμηνῦσαι τῷ ἡμετέρῳ κράτει καθὼς ἕκαστος ἀρετῆς ἔχει καὶ προθυμίας. Μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ἐγγράφως ἀποσημῆνασθαι, ἵνα καὶ ἐνταῦθα εἰσελθόντες ἡμῖν ἀναγγείλητε, ὥστε καὶ ἡδέως αὐτοὺς ὄψεσθαι, καὶ τῶν παρ' ἡμῶν ἐπαινῶν ἀξιῶσαι καὶ ἀντιλήψεων... 'Ἀλλὰ νῦν μὲν δι' ὑμῶν δεχομένων ἡμῶν τὴν περὶ ἐκάστου πληροφορίαν, μετ' ὀλίγον δὲ οὐθ' ὑμᾶς, οὔτε τινὰς ἄλλους μάρτυρας τῶν τοιούτων, ἀλλὰ τοὺς ἡμετέρους μόνους ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔξομεν, καὶ αὐτοὶ παρόντες, αὐτοὶ τὴν ἐκάστου βλέποντες ἀρετὴν, αὐτοὶ καὶ τὰ βραβεῖα τοῖς ἀγωνιζομένοις παρέξομεν (ibid: 399.82-96; trans. 120).

⁷⁶⁴ Ἐπεὶ δὲ διὰ γραμμάτων τῶν αὐτῶν περιφανεστάτων ἀνδρῶν καὶ ἀξιολογωτάτων ἡμῶν θεραπόντων ἀνεδιδάχθημεν, ὡς ἤδη κατὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν πρόσταξιν, μᾶλλον δὲ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ νεῦσιν καὶ ῥοπήν πᾶν μὲν τὸ ἀχρεῖον καὶ πρὸς πολέμους ἀνεπιτήδειον ἀπεβάλλοντο, ὅσον δὲ γενναῖον καὶ χρήσιμον καὶ τῶν ἄλλων προκινδυνεῦον προῦκρινάν τε καὶ εἰς πολέμους ἀφώρισαν, καὶ πάσῃ ἐπιμελείᾳ καὶ σπουδῇ καὶ φιλοπόνοις ἀγρυπνίας πρὸς εὐταξίαν καὶ κατάστασιν ὑμῶν ἐχρήσαντο, καὶ μέλλουσιν οἱ τοιοῦτοι τῆς βασιλείας ἡμῶν δοῦλοι ἀναλαβέσθαι ὑμᾶς, ὡς ἤδη κατηρτισμένους καὶ ἤτοιμασμένους καὶ πρὸς ταξείδιον ἀποκινήσαι καὶ κατὰ τῶν ἐχθρῶν ὀρμῆσαι, ὅπου παρὰ τῆς βασιλείας ἡμῶν διωρίσθησαν, ἢ μὲν χαρὰ ἡμῶν εἰς τὸ ἀπειροπλάσιον ηὔξηθη (Constantine VII, *Address of the Emperor Constantine VII to the Strategoi of the East*: 3.1-12; trans. 129).

their courage and deeds would be witnessed by ‘representatives of Our Majesty who are taking my place’.⁷⁶⁵ While we cannot be sure if such imperial assessors were used to record the actions of subordinates at other times in Byzantine history,⁷⁶⁶ the speeches of Constantine VII confirm the necessity to emperors of regular reports detailing military activities in distant lands.

References to Dispatches and Reports in the Sources

Explicit references to emperors receiving a post-action report from subordinates in Byzantine literature are reasonably common. Justinian I was sent a letter recounting the events of the Battle of Callinicum by the *magister officiorum* Hermogenes,⁷⁶⁷ later, another report was sent by Hermogenes concerning a battle between Roman and Persian forces.⁷⁶⁸ Michael III received a letter from his *domestikos ton scholon* reporting that the emir of Melitene was pillaging areas of Asia Minor.⁷⁶⁹ Andrew the *stratelates*, having won a great victory over the Arabs of Tarsos, reported the success to Basil I.⁷⁷⁰ Bardas Phokas reported his success over Bardas Skleros in a letter to Basil II.⁷⁷¹ Constantine Arianites wrote to Constantine IX Monomachos documenting the disastrous loss to the Pechenegs at Diampolis.⁷⁷² Having completed his reconquest of Crete and Cyprus, John Doukas sent a ‘full report’ of the success to

⁷⁶⁵ ἔχετε τοὺς τὴν ὑμῶν κατοπομένους ἀνδρείαν τοὺς ἀντιπροσώπους τῆς βασιλείας ἡμῶν καὶ τὸν τόπον ἡμῶν ἀναπληροῦντας (ibid: 4.21-23, trans. 130).

⁷⁶⁶ Catherine Holmes (2012: 67) has intriguingly argued that Constantine was forced to send officials to keep tabs on the army since progress reports from the front were not forthcoming.

⁷⁶⁷ ὁ μάγιστρος ἐδήλωσεν τῷ βασιλεῖ Ῥωμαίων. καὶ ἐντυχὼν τοῖς γράμμασιν ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανός... (John Malalas: 18.60 [389.55-57]).

⁷⁶⁸ μήνυσις κατεπέμφθη παρὰ Ἑρμογένους (ibid: 18.65 [391.25-26]).

⁷⁶⁹ καὶ ἐπὶ τούτῳ στυγνάσαντος μὲν τοῦ πρωτονοταρίου, ἀπαγγειλαντος δὲ μετὰ κατηφείας τὴν ἐκ τοῦ δομῆστικῶν τῶν σχολῶν ἀπόκρισιν καὶ ἅμα ἐπὶ χεῖρας τὰ γράμματα φέροντός τε καὶ δεικνύοντος (*Theophanes Continuatus*: 198.20-199.3).

⁷⁷⁰ ἔγραψε δὲ καὶ τῷ βασιλεῖ δηλοποιήσας τὴν νίκην (Skylitzes: 144.43).

⁷⁷¹ Τῆς δὲ τοῦ Σκληροῦ τροπῆς ἀγγελθείσης τῷ βασιλεῖ διὰ γραμμάτων τοῦ Φωκᾶ καὶ τῆς εἰς Βαβυλῶνα ἀναχωρήσεως (ibid: 327.30-31).

⁷⁷² ὁ μὲν οὖν μάγιστρος ὑπέστρεψεν ἐν Ἀδριανουπόλει, τῷ βασιλεῖ δὲ διὰ γραμμάτων ἄγγελος τοῦ ἀτυχήματος γίνεται (ibid: 467.88-90).

Alexios I Komnenos.⁷⁷³ Michael Italikos' *basilikos logos* to John II Komnenos notes the dispatch of 'τὰ βασιλικὰ...γράμματα' disclosing news of the emperor's success in Cilicia and northern Syria in 1137-1138.⁷⁷⁴ Following Manuel I Komnenos' campaign in Serbia over the course of 1149-1150, 'he wrote a letter of good tidings to the inhabitants of the City indicating the recent achievements'.⁷⁷⁵ The same emperor, when informed of Andronikos Kontostephanos' victory over the Hungarians at Sirmium, 'communicated these cheering successes to the inhabitants of the queen of cities, [and] dispatched letters of glad tidings heralding the splendid victory'.⁷⁷⁶ In 1176, after the defeat at Myriokephalon, 'messengers were sent on ahead' to inform Constantinople of the setback.⁷⁷⁷ We will return to these references and discuss numerous others over the course of this chapter and the next.

Whenever a token of victory was dispatched to the emperor, it appears that a report accompanied the prize.⁷⁷⁸ In 552, news came from Narses at Rome recounting his victory over Totila, king of the Goths, with Totila's bloodstained robe and cap brought before the emperor.⁷⁷⁹ A decade later, news of Narses' capture of Verona and Brescia from the Goths reached Constantinople; according to one account, the keys of

⁷⁷³ τῷ αὐτοκράτορι τὰ συμπεσόντα ἅπαντα διὰ γραμμάτων δηλώσαντες (Anna Komnene: IX.2.3.79-80).

⁷⁷⁴ Michael Italikos: 248.7-8. Paul Gautier (1972: 232 n.3, 248 n.17) determined that the letter probably announced the submission of Antioch and the capture of Leo of Armenia.

⁷⁷⁵ καὶ γράμμα εὐθὺς εὐάγγελον ἐχαράττετο τοῖς τῆς πόλεως σημαῖνον οἰκητορσι τὰ ἐξ ὑπογυίου ταυτὶ κατορθώματα (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 90.2-4; trans. 53).

⁷⁷⁶ κοινούμενος δὲ τοῖς τῆς βασιλίδος οἰκήτορσι πόλεως ταῦτα δὴ τὰ εὐφρόσυνα κατορθώματα γράμματα εὐάγγελα στέλλει τὴν τροπαιουχίαν περισαλπίζοντα (ibid: 157.48-52; trans. 89).

⁷⁷⁷ προεκπέμψας δ' ἀγγέλους τὰ συμβεβηκότα ταῦτα τοῖς Κωνσταντινουπολίταις παρίστα (ibid: 191.26-33; trans. 108).

⁷⁷⁸ See, in general, McCormick (1977); idem (1986): 166-167, 190-191, on the Roman practice of commanders sending booty or some other item back to the capital with their victory letters as proof – a σύμβολον τῆς νίκης. For physical tokens providing credibility for military reports in the late medieval world, see Ong (1982): 97.

⁷⁷⁹ ἐπινίκια ἦλθον ἀπὸ Ῥώμης ἀπὸ Ναρσοῦ (John Malalas: 18.116 [415.7-11]); ἐπινίκια ἦλθον ἀπὸ Ῥώμης Ναρσῆ (Theophanes: 228.18-24). Procopius (*Wars*: VIII.33.27) reveals that the keys to Rome were sent to Justinian immediately following the city's capture, so it is probable they too were included with the dispatch.

the cities were included among the accompanying spoils.⁷⁸⁰ In 589/590, Heraclius the Elder won a victory over the Persians, and sent a number of captured items to Emperor Maurice as proof of his success; together with the haul, Maurice also received ‘the general’s missives announcing victory’.⁷⁸¹ With the Paulicians defeated and their leader Chrysocheir beheaded, ‘news was immediately sent to the emperor along with the head of Chrysocheir’.⁷⁸² Again during Basil I’s reign, we read that whilst on campaign with his son Constantine, he received ‘news of victory’ (ἐπινικίων ἀγγελίας) from troops fighting in Koloneia and Mesopotamia, along with booty and a number of prisoners.⁷⁸³ After the suppression of the rebellion of George Maniakes, a messenger was sent to the Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos with ‘news of the victory’ (τὰ εὐαγγέλια τῆς νίκης), while the commander, the *sebastophoros* Stephen, followed a few days later with prisoners and the head of Maniakes.⁷⁸⁴ We may conclude that a report detailing the success would have been delivered alongside tokens of victory.⁷⁸⁵

⁷⁸⁰ ἐπινίκια ἦλθον ἀπὸ Ῥώμης ἀπὸ Ναρσοῦ (John Malalas: 18.140 [425.29-32]); ἐπινίκια ἦλθον ἀπὸ Ῥώμης Ναρσοῦ... (Theophanes: 237.13-15).

⁷⁸¹ τὰς νικηφόρους συλλαβὰς ὑπὸ τοῦ στρατηγοῦ (Theophylact Simocatta: 3.6.5; trans. 80). Theophanes (262.10-14) records celebrations but makes no mention of any victory letter.

⁷⁸² εὐθὺς οὖν εὐαγγέλια πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα ἐκπέμπονται, μεθ’ ὧν ἦν καὶ ἡ τοῦ Χρυσόχειρος κεφαλὴ (Skylitzes: 140.36-37). The *Vita Basilii*, upon which this report of Skylitzes was based, states that the head was accompanied by ‘bearers of the good news’ (μετὰ τῶν τῆς χαρᾶς ἀγγέλων – §43.27-28). Genesis (IV.37) mentions the sending of the head but makes no mention of an accompanying report.

⁷⁸³ *Vita Basilii*: §49.15-19; Skylitzes: 143.11-14 (ἐπινικίους ἀγγελίας).

⁷⁸⁴ Skylitzes: 428.92-95. Michael Psellos (*Chronographia*: II, 6 [LXXXVI]), however, reports that the emperor was presented with Maniakes’ head *before* his army returned to the capital, suggesting that it may have accompanied the victory dispatch. Since Psellos was serving at court at this time, his version of events is perhaps to be preferred.

⁷⁸⁵ There are many instances of generals dispatching tokens to the emperor with no mention of a report. Numerous examples appear in Procopius’ *Wars*: when the general John defeated the forces of Solomon in Libya, he sent captured standards back to the emperor (IV.28.46); in 536, Belisarius sent Leuderis, commander of the Goths, to the emperor, along with the keys to the Asinarian and Flaminian Gates of Rome (V.14.15); in 547, after fitting gates to the circuit-wall of Rome on each side following its second capture, Belisarius sent the keys to the emperor (VII.24.34); following a Roman victory, four Persian standards were sent to Justinian in Constantinople (VIII.14.43). Further examples appear in Skylitzes: after his successful defence of Telouch, George Maniakes cut off the noses and ears of the enemy dead

Terminology, Delivery, and Authorship

The Byzantines do not appear to have had a specific term to denote bulletins and dispatches. The *Chronicon Paschale* uses the term ἀποκρίσεις, though σάκρα appears in the *Chronographia* of Theophanes Confessor and the ninth-century *Scriptor Incertus*.⁷⁸⁶ Theophanes, following John Malalas, also employs the term ἐπινίκια in reference to victory bulletins.⁷⁸⁷ Used more often than not, however, is simply a form of γράμμα. These dispatches were often read out before an audience in Constantinople. A bulletin of Heraclius which reached Constantinople in 628 was delivered from the ambo in the Hagia Sophia, possibly by the Patriarch Sergius.⁷⁸⁸ In later times we find the Emperor Theophilos regaling a crowd with stories of his exploits from a special platform erected before the Brazen House,⁷⁸⁹ and Eustathios Kamytzes speaking of his deeds and those of the Emperor Alexios in the Forum.⁷⁹⁰

and sent them to Emperor Romanos III (Skylitzes: 382). In approval, Romanos appointed Maniakes *katepano* of Lower Media; Maniakes later captured Edessa, and sent back to Constantinople the famed letter of Christ to the Armenian ruler Abgar (ibid: 387). After defeating a Russian army near Varna, Katakalon Kekaumenos sent 800 captives to the emperor (ibid: 433). Anna Komnene relates that her father Alexios sent the rebel Nikephoros Bryennios the Elder as a prize of war to Nikephoros III Botaneiates (Anna Komnene: I.6.7). Anna also reports that the general Kantakouzenos was keen to impress Alexios with his victory, and so he had the heads of Normans stuck on spears and delivered to the emperor, along with his most illustrious captives (ibid: XIII.6.2). Reference to Kantakouzenos sending counts and further prisoners following a subsequent victory suggests this was a favoured practice of the general (ibid: XIII.6.6).

⁷⁸⁶ See below, 184-187.

⁷⁸⁷ See references above, 155-157. For further discussion on the term ἐπινίκια in particular, see McCormick (1986): 39-40.

⁷⁸⁸ See below, 175-180 for discussion of Heraclius' dispatch. That patriarchs discussed secular military events with their flock is confirmed by the homilies of Photios on the Russian attack of 860 (Patriarch Photios, *Homilies*: 82-110) and also the sermon of Nicholas on the Arab sack of Thessaloniki in 904 (Nicholas Mystikos, *Sermon on the Sack of Thessaloniki*). For the idea that the church was responsible for the dissemination of campaign reports to their flock in the twelfth century, see Magdalino (1993a): 314.

⁷⁸⁹ See below, 160. For the Brazen House, see Mango (1959).

⁷⁹⁰ Anna Komnene: XIV.6.6.

This corroborates the thoughts of McCormick, who argues that public announcements were delivered in the Forum by the eleventh century.⁷⁹¹

Responsibility for drafting imperial dispatches and bulletins fell to imperial secretaries and officials. In a letter to the *logothetes*, Stephen Meles, sent c.1137-1138, Michael Italikos expresses his awareness that a victory letter purportedly written by the Emperor John II Komnenos was actually composed by Meles.⁷⁹² We cannot confirm that the *logothetes tou dromou* or other *logothetoi* were responsible for the composition of bulletins,⁷⁹³ though Constantine Manasses' eulogy for Michael Hagiotheodorites, *logothetes* under Manuel I Komnenos, corroborates the notion,⁷⁹⁴ while the epitaph of *logothetes* Demetrios Tornikios records that he drafted a victory letter whilst campaigning with Isaac II Angelos in the late twelfth century.⁷⁹⁵ Before him, Niketas Choniates, serving as *logothetes ton sekreton* under Isaac, appears to have composed a victory bulletin describing the emperor's successful campaign against the Vlachs and Cumans in 1187, intended for the patriarch in Constantinople.⁷⁹⁶ In 1246-1247, imperial secretary and future *megas logothetes* George Akropolites assisted in the writing of victory letters on behalf of the emperor of Nicaea, John III Vatatzes, following the acquisition of territory in Macedonia and

⁷⁹¹ For further discussion of how and where victory bulletins may have been delivered in Constantinople, see McCormick (1986): 192-194.

⁷⁹² Michael Italikos: 231-234.

⁷⁹³ D. Miller (1976) omits this function from his proposed list of duties of the *logothetes tou dromou*. Rodolphe Guiland (1971: 36) at least mentions the *logothetes tou dromou* being responsible for the dispatch of imperial directives to the provinces.

⁷⁹⁴ Constantine Manasses, *Eulogy for Michael Hagiotheodorites*: 180-181.

⁷⁹⁵ καὶ τί δεῖ τὰ πολλὰ λέγειν; Γράμματα κοσμοχαρῆ τε καὶ εὐάγγελα τοῖς ἐν ἀρχείοις καὶ τοῖς ἐν τέλει γράφειν ἐπισκῆπτει τῷ λογοθετῇ (Euthymios Tornikios: 100-102, esp. 100.25-101.2). For the campaign and Demetrios' involvement, see Darrouzès (1968): 100 n.9.

⁷⁹⁶ Niketas Choniates, *Orations and Letters*: 6-12. For discussion, see van Dieten (1971): 65-79; Wolff (1949): 184 n.43; Stephenson (2000): 292. For the duties of the *logothetes ton sekreton*, see Guiland (1971): 75-84, esp. 80-81 for Niketas Choniates.

Bulgaria.⁷⁹⁷ On the basis of this evidence, Paul Gautier determines bulletin writing to have been a regular function of the various forms of *logothetes*.⁷⁹⁸

Italikos suggests that the emperor was billed as the author of campaign dispatches, even if the reality was quite different. In 1069, Michael Psellos was entrusted with the delivery of news as he returned to Constantinople ahead of the expeditionary army. Writing to the emperor, Psellos relates that the populace was shocked by this novel mode of broadcast, since they were apparently used to the emperor himself heralding the victory or putting it to writing.⁷⁹⁹ Psellos concludes by urging Romanos to return so that he might report his deeds personally.⁸⁰⁰ That this practice was common is suggested by record of the Emperor Theophilos making ‘a speech himself on the successes of the war’ upon his triumphant return from campaign in 837.⁸⁰¹ In any case, the evidence indicates a prominent imperial involvement in the composition and delivery of dispatches.

Public and Private Interest in Military News

There are few explicit references to how a report or bulletin was received by the populace of Constantinople. The citizens of the capital are said to have been delighted with news sent by Heraclius in 626,⁸⁰² while Psellos notes the joyous reaction at court, among the clergy and indeed of the entire public to news of

⁷⁹⁷ ἐγὼ δὲ αὐτὸς ἐν τοῖς ἐπιστολιμαίοις τῶν λόγων ὑπουργοῦν, ἐκάστῳ τῶν ἀλίσκομένων ἄστεών τε καὶ χωρῶν καὶ γραφῆν ἐγχαράττων βασιλικήν (Akropolites: 79.1-3). For identification of these ‘imperial letters’ as victory bulletins, see Macrides (2007): 235 n.22. For the duties of the *megas logothetes*, see Guiland (1971): 110-115, esp. 104-106 for Akropolites.

⁷⁹⁸ Gautier (1972): 232 n.4.

⁷⁹⁹ See below, 164 n.825.

⁸⁰⁰ Psellos, *Letters*: 224-227.

⁸⁰¹ δημηγορήσας ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ τὰ περὶ τῆς ἐπιτυχίας τοῦ πολέμου (Constantine VII, *Text C*: ll.867-868; trans. 151).

⁸⁰² Theophanes: 312-313. See Mary Whitby (1998): 250-251 for the morale-boosting qualities of commemorative works chronicling military successes under Heraclius.

Romanos IV Diogenes' successes.⁸⁰³ Anna Komnene reveals that people were eager to learn of Eustathios Kamytzes' exploits against the Turks, and keener still to hear about those of the emperor. The whole city apparently buzzed with excitement over Alexios' heroics.⁸⁰⁴

These authors could be accused of exaggerating the public response, but the general interest in military events beyond Constantinople is affirmed by the case of Thessaloniki. Given its close proximity and status as the second city of the empire, it might be expected that the people of the capital had a particular concern over its welfare. Howard-Johnston has suggested that the second book of the seventh-century *Miracles of Saint Demetrios* derives much of its information from an official account of the Avar-Slav siege of Thessaloniki in 586, perhaps compiled from contemporary dispatches intended for Constantinople.⁸⁰⁵ Shortly after the Arab sack of Thessaloniki in 904, Patriarch Nicholas I Mystikos delivered a moralizing sermon on the disaster in the Hagia Sophia,⁸⁰⁶ the lack of any real detail suggests his audience were already familiar with events. Thessaloniki was again sacked in 1185, and, according to Niketas Choniates, the Emperor Andronikos I Komnenos delivered a 'public address' (δημηγορῶν) in which he played down the significance of the incident.⁸⁰⁷ For the well-educated, a counterbalance was eventually provided in the form of the Archbishop Eustathios' shocking account of the assault.⁸⁰⁸

⁸⁰³ Psellos, *Letters*: 224-227.

⁸⁰⁴ Anna Komnene: XIV.6.6-7.

⁸⁰⁵ Howard-Johnston (2010): 152-154.

⁸⁰⁶ Nicholas Mystikos, *Sermon on the Sack of Thessaloniki*.

⁸⁰⁷ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 320.88-91.

⁸⁰⁸ Leone (1964) proposed that Eustathios' *Capture of Thessaloniki* began life as a brief sermon delivered to the people of Thessaloniki in Lent 1186, before it was expanded into a literary work and suitably embellished, presumably for wider readership among the literati of the empire. This at least hints at a purpose of informing the wider population about a provincial military event.

The correspondence of two notable literati indicates a personal demand for up-to-date information on military affairs. In a letter to Andronikos Doukas, who was at that time campaigning against Romanos Diogenes, Michael Psellos attests to the great anticipation and subsequent joy at court when messengers arrived with news of Andronikos' success.⁸⁰⁹ At other times, Psellos complains that news of military enterprises was not forthcoming or appropriately relayed. Writing to Isaac I Komnenos, Psellos bemoaned that he was unable to write an encomium, since he was ignorant of the emperor's Danubian campaign.⁸¹⁰ In 1068, Psellos wrote to one Eustratios Choirospaktes, praising the reported achievements of Romanos Diogenes, but at the same time questioning why news of his successes had not been more loudly proclaimed - with a trumpet-blast - in Constantinople.⁸¹¹ In his aforementioned letter to Doukas, Psellos concludes with a request for more news after Andronikos' final victory, so that he might compose an oration for his friend upon his triumphant return.⁸¹²

Theophylact, archbishop of Ohrid, was another bureaucrat eager for news of distant events. In the summer of 1094, Theophylact sent a letter praising Gregory Taronites'

⁸⁰⁹ Τέως δὲ ἐν μετεώρῳ πάντες ἐστήκαμεν, ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρων τὰς γνώμας διηρημένοι καὶ πρὸς τὴν αὐτόθεν περιχαίροντες ἀγγελίαν· οἱ δὲ πλείους ἡμῶν καὶ φωνῶν θειοτέρων ἀκούειν ἔδοξαν, ναὶ νῆ τὴν τριπόθητόν σου καὶ μεγαλοπρεπεστάτην ψυχὴν, τὸ σὸν ἐπαγγελλομένων ὀνομαστὶ τρόπαιον καὶ κατόρθωμα (Psellos, *Letters*: 393).

⁸¹⁰ Ibid: 416-419.

⁸¹¹ Πεφυγάδευται ὁ μέγας ἐχθρὸς, ὃς ἠλπίζετο ἀντὶ μεγάλου κύματος καλύψαι τὴν γῆν. πολέμου συρραγέντος, τρόπαιον μέγα κατὰ βαρβάρων ἐστήσατε. τῶν ἐθνῶν τὰ μὲν ὑποκύπτει, τὰ δὲ πεφρίκασι, τὰ δὲ δουλοπρεπέστατα σπένδεται. τί μὴ τῶν μὲν τὴν φυγὴν, τῶν δὲ τὴν σπονδὴν δεχόμεθα, ἀλλὰ βουλόμεθα ἐν μῆσιν ὀλίγοις καὶ τὴν γῆν οὐρανὸν ἀπεργάσασθαι; πρὸ πάντων ἐπιπλήττω σοὶ τῶ φρονιμωτάτῳ. διατί, ὀηνίκα ὁ σουλτάνος τοῖς ὄλοις ἐξαπορήσας φυγῆ, ἴν' οὕτως εἶπω, τὴν οικεῖαν ἐπορίσατο συντηρίαν, τοῦ κρατίστου βασιλέως ἡμῶν τὰς συντάξεις καὶ τὰς στρατηγίας μεμαθηκώς, οὐ παραντίκα ἐβροντήσατε ἀπὸ τῶν αὐτόθεν σάλπιγγιν ἀντὶ γραμμμάτων χρησάμενοι, ἵνα πάντες τὸ ἀπροσδόκητον κατεπλάγησαν, ἀλλὰ διετέθητε ὥσπερ οὐδενὸς καινοῦ γεγονότος; πλὴν ἐγὼ πρὸς πάντας ἀντὶ πάντων ἐξήρκεσα, εἰ καὶ μου λόγος οὐδεὶς ἢ βραχὺς· μυριόγλωσσος γάρ, ἴν' οὕτως εἶπω, ὑπὲρ τοῦ αὐθέντου μου τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ ὑμῶν γίνομαι ἐν θεάτροις, ἐν συλλόγοις, ἀπανταχοῦ (Psellos, *Some Letters*: ep.25.47-61).

⁸¹² Psellos, *Letters*: 394.

martial qualities, asking to be kept informed of Taronites' progress.⁸¹³ His request was granted; Theophylact again wrote to Taronites in the summer of 1103, noting the receipt of a letter from Taronites and expressing his delight at reading of Taronites' successes in the Pontos.⁸¹⁴ It would appear that Taronites responded to Theophylact, as the bishop's next letter reveals his joy at having received further news of Taronites' victories.⁸¹⁵ Theophylact's praise of Taronites' defeat of the Franks and Turks, his role in the ransoming of Bohemond, the liberation of Greek cities from Turkish dominion and the prospective reconquest of Neokaisarea offer some insight as to events and details mentioned by Taronites. Theophylact's final correspondence to Taronites in autumn 1103 offers further praise for the general, urging him to write frequently with news of any developments.⁸¹⁶ Taronites' subsequent rebellion against Alexios and loss of command accounts for the lack of communication between the pair after this date.

Both Psellos and Theophylact had a vested interest in keeping abreast of distant developments, hoping as they were to gain favour with important individuals through praise of their achievements.⁸¹⁷ Court poet Theodore Prodromos wrote of his

⁸¹³ εἰ δὲ καὶ γράμματι δηλώσαις, χρυσοῦν ὄντως ἡμῖν ἐπισκευάσεις τὸν ὄροφον (Theophylact of Ohrid: II, 363.24-25).

⁸¹⁴ Ibid: II, 415-417, with mention of Taronites' γράμματι at 415.5. See Mullett (1997a): 396, for acknowledgement of Taronites' letter.

⁸¹⁵ Theophylact of Ohrid: II, 427-433, with reference to Taronites' earlier letter at 427.8: ὅπερ ἠγγέλη μοι. Taronites' letter is logged by Mullett (1997a): 397.

⁸¹⁶ Theophylact of Ohrid: II, 473-475. For discussion of the full correspondence between Theophylact and Taronites, see Leroy-Molinghen (1936); Mullett (1992b): 239-243.

⁸¹⁷ For the career interests of panegyrists, see Dennis (1997b): 136-137. A further example is furnished by Michael Italikos, who wrote to Nikephoros Bryennios while the latter was absent on campaign, requesting the *kaisar* maintain regular correspondence. In one letter, Italikos (141-144) commends Bryennios for frightening him with military descriptions and amusing him in other regards, continuing his praise of Bryennios' literary skills in another letter (152). In a final correspondence (153-154), Italikos expresses his clearest longing for further word from Bryennios. Italikos knew the value of maintaining important relationships, and thus his letters to Stephen Meles and John Axouch, while full of praise for the emperor's achievements and the individual contributions of the two men, end with a request that they beseech the Emperor John II Komnenos on his behalf (229-230, 231-234).

destitution during the prolonged absence of John II Komnenos, such was his reliance on imperial commissions.⁸¹⁸ In a letter to *grammatikos* Theodore Stypeiotes, who accompanied the emperor on campaign, Prodrornos bemoans that his one-time student neglected to send him details about John's victories, so that he might write of imperial glories and ease his plight.⁸¹⁹ The appeals of Psellos should probably be viewed more as a reflection of his concerns at being left ignorant of the actions of campaigning emperors.⁸²⁰ Psellos sent various letters to officials who accompanied Isaac I Komnenos⁸²¹ and in particular Romanos IV Diogenes,⁸²² anxiously inquiring as to why the army had yet to return and why certain individuals had been slow in writing to him. In 1068, Psellos sent a despairing letter begging Romanos to return from campaign;⁸²³ the following year, prior to Romanos setting off once more, Psellos requested that the emperor allow him to compose a panegyric celebrating his recent successes.⁸²⁴ That Psellos was given the responsibility of disclosing Romanos' progress on the subsequent expedition confirms that the emperor took him up on his offer. The link is apparent: in announcing Romanos' successes, Psellos likens himself to a trumpet,⁸²⁵ recalling his earlier comments to Eustratios Choiosphaktes about the

⁸¹⁸ Theodore Prodrornos: XV; XVI; XVI; XXIV; XXXVIII, LXIX; LXXI. For further discussion see Kyriakis (1974); Beaton (1987).

⁸¹⁹ Theodore Prodrornos: LXXI.1-83.

⁸²⁰ This fear of Psellos is observed in relation to Isaac Komnenos by M. Jeffreys (2010): 80-81.

⁸²¹ Psellos, *Letters*: 305-306, 485-486.

⁸²² Idem, *Scripta Minora*: II, ep.146 (to the *epi tou kanikleiou* Basil); ep.147 (to Eustratios Choiosphakes); ep.148 (to the *protoasekretis* Aristenos); ep.149 (to an anonymous *epi ton deeseon*); idem, *Some Letters*: ep. 25 (to Eustratios Choiosphaktes).

⁸²³ Idem, *Letters*: 230-232.

⁸²⁴ Idem, *Scripta Minora*: II, ep.5.

⁸²⁵ Ἴσθι μέντοι γε δέσποτά μου καὶ βασιλεῦ, ὡς ἐσείσθῃ πᾶσα ἡ πόλις τῷ μεγάλῳ σου κατορθώματι, ἐθαύμασαν δὲ σύμπαντες ὅτι μὴ τὴν νίκην ἐκόμπασας, μὴ δὲ ἦρας τῷ λόγῳ τὸ τρόπαιον, εἰ καὶ μόνος ἐγὼ σάλπιγγος μεγαλοφωνότερον πάσαις ἀκοαῖς τοῦτο διήγησα (idem, *Letters*: 224-227, at 225).

lack of fanfare for military news, and confirming that as early as 1068 Psellos was seeking to advertise himself as the emperor's chief encomiast.⁸²⁶

Theophylact's interest in military affairs was similarly driven by self-interest.

Margaret Mullett decrees that Theophylact's practice of writing to patrons congratulating them on their military success was merely him 'oiling the wheels' of a relationship.⁸²⁷ While Theophylact did not request any favours of Taronites, in other correspondence we see him operating with greater intent. In 1092, Theophylact sent a letter of congratulations to the *mezas doux* John Doukas following his reconquest of the western seaboard of Asia Minor, wishing him further glory in reclaiming Cyprus and Crete; Doukas, then stationed in Hellas, is also asked to keep watch over Theophylact's relatives in Euboea.⁸²⁸ Taronites is likewise considered among those contacts in Theophylact's network who served an important practical function.⁸²⁹

Distribution of Military News in the Provinces and Beyond

We can surmise that the provinces were also informed of major military events.⁸³⁰

George Akropolites, responsible for drafting bulletins, explains that it was 'an old custom among the emperors of the Romans, to make their own accomplishments known to those who are far away through letters'.⁸³¹ The Emperor Leo V is reported

⁸²⁶ For Psellos' general self-interest in his letters to military and civil officials, see Cheynet (1999).

⁸²⁷ Mullett (1990): 136-137.

⁸²⁸ Theophylact of Ohrid: II, 153-155, 189.

⁸²⁹ Mullett (1997a): 180-181.

⁸³⁰ James Howard-Johnston (2010: 51-52) suggests that bulletins would have been circulated among the elite in the city and provinces alike; also McCormick (1986): 234-235. For pertinent comments on the transmission of news to the provinces of Asia Minor, see Ševčenko (1980): 722.

⁸³¹ ἐγὼ δὲ αὐτὸς ἐν τοῖς ἐπιστολιμαίοις τῶν λόγων ὑπουργοῦν, ἐκάστῳ τῶν ἀλίσκομένων ἄστεόν τε καὶ χωρῶν καὶ γραφῆν ἐγχαράττων βασιλικήν· ἔθος γὰρ τοῦτο παλαιὸν τοῖς βασιλεῦσι Ῥωμαίων, δῆλα τοῖς μακρόθεν διὰ γραμμάτων ποιεῖν τὰ σφῶν αὐτῶν κατορθώματα καὶ πρὸς ἡδονὴν ἐπεγείρειν, ἧς δὴ καὶ οὗτοι διὰ τῶν ἔργων μεταλαγχάνουσιν (Akropolites: 79.1-7; trans. 232). For further discussion see Macrides (2007): 235 n.22.

to have ‘sent messages to all cities and lands’ announcing that he had inflicted a mortal arrow wound on Khan Krum and repelled the Bulgar invaders.⁸³² Following the Battle of Antioch-on-the-Maeander in 1211, Theodore Laskaris of Nicaea sent newsletters to all the ‘Greek’ provinces to announce his victory and the death of Kaykhusraw, the sultan of Rum.⁸³³ Theodore II Laskaris dispatched a bulletin to the eastern provinces proclaiming his victory over Bulgarian rebels.⁸³⁴ Even the rebel Thomas the Slav, conducting an attack on Constantinople, ‘sent out letters everywhere proclaiming that he had won a victory’.⁸³⁵

Letters and hagiographical texts originating in the provinces occasionally show an awareness of distant campaigns and battles, though, as the letters of Theophylact demonstrate, such knowledge can be attributed to means other than a dispatch. It has been speculated that a homily of Neophytos the Recluse discussing the Emperor Manuel’s loss at Myriokephalon was informed by an imperial bulletin sent to Cyprus.⁸³⁶ The eleventh-century *Vita of Saint Nikon*, written in southern Greece,

⁸³² ἐπαρθεῖς τοίνυν τῶν φρονημάτων ὁ Λέων, ὡς ὅτι αὐτὸς κατέβαλεν τὸν πόλεμον καὶ οὐχ ὁ θεός, ἐπεμψεν εἰς πάσας τὰς πόλεις καὶ χώρας σάκρας, ἀναγγέλλων ὅτι εὔρον τοὺς Βουλγάρους ἐγγὺς ὄντας τῆς πόλεως, καὶ διὰ τῆς φρονήσεως καὶ ἀνδρείας καὶ διαταγῆς μου τοξεύσας τὸν πρῶτον αὐτῶν πάντας ἀπήλασα, ὅς τις καὶ διὰ τὴν πρόφασιν ταύτην ἀποθνήσκει, ἔφη, ὁ ἐχθρὸς ἡμῶν (*Scriptor Incertus*: 348.16-22). Dölger, *Regesten*: I, no. 302.

⁸³³ As revealed in a contemporary letter of the Latin emperor Henry to the counts of Flanders: ‘Qua de causa Lascarus acrior et elatior factus misit lit[te]ras ad omnes Grecorum provincias, continentes honorem et lucrum sue victorie...’ (*Letter of Emperor Henry of Constantinople, January 1212*: ll.83-96). For discussion see Macrides (2007): 36-38.

⁸³⁴ Theodore II Laskaris: 279-282. See Macrides (2007): 235 n.22.

⁸³⁵ γράμμασιν ἐπιστέλλων τὰ ἑαυτοῦ περιγγέλλει ἀπανταχοῦ, ὡς εἶη τε νενικηκῶς, ὅπερ οὐκ ἦν (*Theophanes Continuatus*: 63.19-21). For discussion, see Lemerle (1965): esp. 258-259.

⁸³⁶ ‘In its gist, the information which Neophytos imparts almost certainly originated in the official (and heavily distorted, in terms of factual reality) version of events, which would have reached Cyprus and other provinces through imperial bulletins’ (Galatariotou 1991: 214). Paul Magdalino (1993a: 458) suggests that the newsletter may have been sent to the bishop of Paphos. Niketas Choniates confirms that Manuel sent bulletins to Constantinople, though Eustathios of Thessaloniki (*Orations*: 246.78-92) also affirms that Manuel distributed word of his successful Maeander campaign against the cities of Panasion and Lakerion in 1177-1178 further afield.

mentions the successes of Basil II against the Bulgarians, which, the author adds, ‘the story about him shows in fuller detail’.⁸³⁷ The precise nature of this ‘story’ is unknown, though it is possible that information was originally brought to the region by monks, merchants, or returning soldiers, rather than via an imperial communiqué. The Bulgarian armies of Samuel had, at one stage, pushed deep into Greece, as the *Vita* attests, so there was an obvious local interest in the war.⁸³⁸ That said, Basil journeyed to Athens in 1018 after the conclusion of the conflict; as with triumphs celebrated in Constantinople, his coming would have necessitated prior word of his achievements, suggesting that he may have dispatched bulletins to the region ahead of his visit.⁸³⁹

News might be disseminated to realms beyond the empire by mercenaries or allied troops,⁸⁴⁰ while monks could also serve as distributors of information.⁸⁴¹ Yet there are many instances of the imperial court sending official word of notable successes to

Diffusion of official news to Cyprus may also have been behind a tenth-century inscription from the remote village of Syngrasis, which attests to contemporary local knowledge of the revolt of Bardas Skleros, despite the rebellion having no direct effect on the island (Papacostas 2002).

⁸³⁷ καθὼς ἡ περὶ αὐτὸν ἱστορία πλατύτερον παριστᾷ (*Vita of St. Nikon*: §43.11-19; trans. 149).

⁸³⁸ Ibid: §40.8-10.

⁸³⁹ Skylitzes: 364. For further discussion of this occasion, see Kaldellis (2009b): 81-91. Paul Stephenson (2000: 53 n.18, 72) speculates that the story of the 1014 Battle of Kleidon, famous for the blinding of some 15,000 Bulgarian prisoners - undoubtedly an exaggeration - may have originated in a victory bulletin, and perhaps it is something such as this to which the author of the *Vita of St. Nikon* refers. For the Battle of Kleidon, see Skylitzes: 348-349. Analysis and further discussion is provided by Stephenson (2003a).

⁸⁴⁰ In his letter to King Henry II of England, Manuel I Komnenos instructed his fellow ruler to ask returning English soldiers for further details on the Battle of Myriokephalon (Roger of Howden: II, 102-104). Krinije Ciggaar (1961) suggests that Varangian guardsman Eindredi the Young informed an Old Norse miracle which relates the destruction of the Flemish regiment in 1094/1095 in battle against the Cumans, since the Varangian Guard probably fought alongside them. For further examples of Varangian veterans transmitting information concerning Byzantine military actions, see idem (1980). This mode of transmission is also discussed by Stender-Peterson (1934): esp. 77-90; R. Cook (1986): esp. 74-89.

⁸⁴¹ One such case is that involving the French monk and chronicler Ademar, who appears to have relied upon St. Symeon of Trier, a monk of St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai, for information on the wars of Basil II, among other events in the Byzantine Empire (Wolff 1978: esp. 143-144). For general discussion of the role of monks in information transmission between Byzantium and the west, see Ciggaar (1996); Harris (1999).

foreign rulers.⁸⁴² Beševliev proposed that the report in the *Royal Frankish Annals* of the arrow wound inflicted upon Khan Krum by Leo V and the Bulgar leader's subsequent flight probably derives from imperial dispatches.⁸⁴³ A letter to Louis the Pious offers an account of the rebellion of Thomas the Slav, presumably serving as a counterbalance to that propagated by Thomas himself.⁸⁴⁴ The *Annals of Saint Bertin* note that Louis received another imperial letter c.839 reporting successes achieved by the armies of the Emperor Theophilos.⁸⁴⁵ Leo, metropolitan of Synada, was stationed in Italy when he wrote to Nikephoros Ouranos to congratulate him on his success against the Bulgarians in 997, noting that word had reached his ears and even those in

⁸⁴² See, in general, Dölger & Karayannopoulos (1968): 90-93 for discussion of the *Auslandsbriefe*; also Shepard (2005): 177-178. It is worth noting that Constantinople likewise received official dispatches from foreign powers. The *Vita of St. Symeon Stylites the Younger* attests that following the Battle of Chalcis between the Lakhmids and the Ghassanids in 554, a victory bulletin (ἐπινίκια) was dispatched by the Christian Ghassanid *foederati* to Byzantine Antioch (Shahid 2009: 214-216). Closer to the period under discussion, the Venetians, following their victories over the Normans, sent full reports to the Emperor Alexios, and were handsomely rewarded for their efforts (Anna Komnene: IV.2.6; VI.5.9).

⁸⁴³ At Michahel imperator Bulgaros bello adpetens haud prosperis successibus utitur ac proinde domum reversus deposito diademate monachus efficitur; in cuius locum Leo, Bardae patricii filius, imperator constituitur. Crumas rex Bulgarorum, qui Niciforum imperatorem ante duos annos interfecit et Michahelem de Moesia fugavit, secundis rebus elatus cum exercitu usque ad ipsam Constantinopolim accessit et iuxta portam civitatis castra posuit. Quem moenibus urbi obequitantem Leo imperator eruptione facta incautum excepit et graviter vulneratum fugiendo sibi consulere ac patriam turpiter redire coegit (*Annales Regni Francorum*: 139). For this observation, see Beševliev (1974): 75. Intriguingly, the fourteenth-century *Chronica Venetum* of Andrea Dandolo (140) is aware, like contemporary Byzantine sources (see below, 185-187), that Leo announced the victory to the people of Constantinople (Leo Armenus...cum Crimino duce non verens bello inire, Deo favente victoriam consecutus est, Constantinumque filium suum consortem decrevit). According to Panos Sophoulis (2011: 33), 'this may suggest that copies of the *sacra* were also distributed to the west, particularly to those areas that were still under nominal Byzantine authority, such as Venice'. Sophoulis' observation supports the idea that Leo sent official word to the west depicting himself as the heroic victor over Krum and his Bulgar hordes.

⁸⁴⁴ *Letter of Michael II to Louis the Pious*: 476-478. For discussion, see Lemerle (1965): 258-259; Kaegi (1981a): 261-262.

⁸⁴⁵ Venerunt etiam legati Grecorum a Theophilo imperatore directi, Theodosius videlicet Calcedonensis metropolitanus episcopus et Theophanius spatarius, ferentes cum donis imperatori dignis epistola; quos imperator quinto decimo Kalendas Iunii in Ingulenheim honorifice suscepit. Quorum legatio super confirmatione pacti et pacis atque perpetuae inter utrumque imperatorem eique subditos amicitiae et caritatis agebat, necnon de victoriis, quas adversus exterarum bellando gentes caelitus fuerat assecutus, gratificatio et in Domino exultatio ferebatur; in quibus imperatorem sibi subiectos amicabiliter Datori victoriarum omnium gratias referre poposcit... (*Annales Bertiniani*: 19-20). See Shepard (1995b).

France and Spain.⁸⁴⁶ In 975, John Tzimiskes wrote to King Ashot III of Armenia, boasting of how he invaded Palestine, reclaimed holy relics, and was intent on regaining Jerusalem.⁸⁴⁷ Perhaps the most famous example is that of King Henry II of England, who received a letter from Manuel I Komnenos providing an account of the Battle of Myriokephalon.⁸⁴⁸

There appears to have been considerable convergence between information disclosed to foreigners and imperial bulletins, which should be expected given that the department of the *dromos* was responsible for correspondence with foreign lands as well as the provinces.⁸⁴⁹ The *Chronicle of Fredegar*, thought to have been composed by a Burgundian Frank in the mid-seventh century, offers an extraordinary description of the Emperor Heraclius' decapitating a Persian general during the Battle of Nineveh in 627.⁸⁵⁰ John Michael Wallace-Hadrill suggests that Fredegar utilized a similar source to Theophanes Confessor.⁸⁵¹ Theophanes and the Patriarch Nikephoros, writing around the turn of the ninth century, are the first extant Byzantine chroniclers to preserve Heraclius' duel with the Persian general Rhazates, though evidently the legend must be contemporaneous with Heraclius' reign.⁸⁵² Steven Wander proposes that ambassadors of the Frankish King Dagobert brought the report back to western Europe from Constantinople.⁸⁵³ Evidence suggests that the story reached further

⁸⁴⁶ Ἦχησε τὰ ἔργα σου, θαυμάσιε στρατηγέ, κατὰ τὴν Ἰταλίαν πᾶσαν...καὶ ἀκουστά, ἃ ἐγένετο, κατ' αὐτὰς τὰς Γαλλίας, Ἰσπανίας (Leo of Synada: ep.13.1-5). For the battle in question, see McGeer (1991): 130-131.

⁸⁴⁷ Matthew of Edessa: 32-33.

⁸⁴⁸ Roger of Howden: II, 102-104. Dölger, *Regesten*: II, no. 1524.

⁸⁴⁹ See Guiland (1971): 31-45. Also Lewis (1993): 634-635 for such links in the Hellenistic world.

⁸⁵⁰ *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*: 52-53.

⁸⁵¹ Wallace-Hadrill (1962): 89.

⁸⁵² Theophanes: 318-319; Patriarch Nikephoros, *Short History*: §14.

⁸⁵³ Wander (1975). *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar* (51) affirms that Dagobert, who ruled various realms between 623-639, sent two ambassadors to Heraclius who returned home with a peace agreement.

afield still. The *Chronica Muzarabica*, a chronicle of Spain written in the mid-eighth century, relates Heraclius' feat independently of Fredegar.⁸⁵⁴ The precise details of the encounter differ across the various accounts, but this does not detract from the sense that the episode stemmed from official propaganda, with western Europe informed through Heraclius' court or perhaps by imperial letters.

Additional examples of this phenomenon may be cited. The near-contemporary *Scriptor Incertus*, like western chronicles, reports that Leo V shot Krum with an arrow, suggesting this was the official version of events propagated within the Byzantine Empire.⁸⁵⁵ Jonathan Shepard viewed written reports to foreign rulers as an 'offshoot' of domestic propaganda, presenting battles and campaigns in a favourable light.⁸⁵⁶ This is particularly evident with Tzimiskes' letter to Ashot of Armenia, which McCormick classified as a 'victory bulletin'.⁸⁵⁷ Paul Walker, reconstructing the chronology of the campaign from Arabic sources, determined Tzimiskes' claims to have pressed on to Palestine and threatened Jerusalem to be false.⁸⁵⁸ Walker does not doubt the authenticity of the letter,⁸⁵⁹ but argues that the fictional parts were propaganda, aimed to impress the Armenians by highlighting Byzantium's commitment to the Christian cause.⁸⁶⁰ While victories were magnified, defeats were

⁸⁵⁴ *Corpus Scriptorum Muzarabicorum*: I, 17.

⁸⁵⁵ See below, 185-187.

⁸⁵⁶ Shepard (2005): 179-180.

⁸⁵⁷ McCormick (1986): 195-196.

⁸⁵⁸ Walker (1977): 313-324. Starr (1936: 94-95) already decreed that the furthest south Tzimiskes reached was Sidon, despite the emperor's claims to the contrary in his letter. Walker however was the first to offer a convincing argument as to why Tzimiskes exaggerated his feats.

⁸⁵⁹ Walker (1977: 320) maintains that the letter was probably taken from the Armenian royal archives.

⁸⁶⁰ For the increasing importance of the Christian Armenian and Iberian potentates to Byzantium in the tenth century, and the relations between the various parties, see Whittow (1996a): 310-321; Shepard (2001): 22-34. Whittow (1996a: 356-357) argues that the correspondence may have been designed to encourage Armenians to join the war effort, with the letter presenting a fantastical vision of what might be possible if the Armenians assisted Byzantium. Tzimiskes had received 10,000 troops from Ashot to participate in the campaign (Matthew of Edessa: 27-28), and may well have exaggerated his gains in order to encourage further assistance. Indeed, Shepard (1988: 111-112) likened Tzimiskes' apparent

played down; in his letter to Henry, Manuel places a surprisingly positive spin on the defeat at Myriokephalon, drawing attention to his own heroic effort and the favourable treaty agreed with the sultan. As the following chapter shows, the report was probably not too dissimilar to that Manuel offered his own subjects.⁸⁶¹

Accounts of Campaign and Battle in Private and Diplomatic Correspondence

Discussion of letters detailing military events raises questions over exposition, particularly important when we consider that diplomatic correspondence would probably have been copied, stored, and potentially available for consultation to historians.⁸⁶² Margaret Mullett stresses that narrative was typically ‘outside the limits’ of the genre of letter writing; ‘thus’, Mullett decrees, ‘we do not go to the Byzantine letter for a description of the Battle of Manzikert’.⁸⁶³ By the Palaiologan era, it is suggested that Byzantine letters progressed; hence Manuel II Palaiologos describes his latest campaign, ‘something inconceivable to a Middle Byzantine letter-writer’.⁸⁶⁴

exploitation of the Christian desire to gain Jerusalem to Alexios’ appeal to the west for military aid in the late eleventh century. On the importance of Armenians to Byzantium’s military arm, see Charanis (1963): 32-34; Kazhdan (1984b): 441-445; McGeer (1995c); Garsoïan (1998): esp. 61-66; Dédéyan (1999). The eleventh-century Armenian historian, Stephen of Taron (134-135), reveals how important the Armenian troops were during Tzimiskes’ Bulgarian war, perhaps an indication of why the emperor was keen to strengthen ties.

⁸⁶¹ Jonathan Shepard (2003a: 94-94) notes that visiting foreigners of renown were probably also offered the ‘official’ line about military events. He cites the example of Liudprand of Cremona, who reports that Constantinople was saved from the Rus’ in 941 by the intervention of the Lord, who calmed the sea, thus aiding Byzantine efforts to destroy their enemy with Greek fire (*Antapodosis*: V.16). Liudprand was obviously repeating what he had heard at the imperial court.

⁸⁶² It is unclear whether historians had access to older private letters, since we have little evidence to inform us of the fate of letters in Middle Byzantium. Of the collections that survive, Mullett (1997a: 41-43) finds that some seem to have been preserved because of their subject matter, while others were seen as impressive works of a noted writer.

⁸⁶³ *Idem* (1981): 82.

⁸⁶⁴ *Ibid*: 88-89. The general value of Byzantine letters as sources of historical information has been questioned, among others, by Dennis (1977): xix; *idem* (1988).

Close analysis of the letters of Manuel II suggests Mullett overstates the extent of his campaign description. In a letter to Nicholas Kabasilas of autumn 1391, Manuel acknowledged Kabasilas' request for information on the expedition against the Turks in Asia Minor, but thought it better to converse with Kabasilas upon his return, given that he had only depressing things to report.⁸⁶⁵ Manuel was more forthcoming with Demetrios Kydones in a letter from the same campaign, complaining about the camp site, his surroundings, the winter conditions and the illnesses ravaging his army.⁸⁶⁶ However, Manuel still bemoaned his inability to write a thorough account of his experiences, not wishing to elaborate further as he considered the letter already long enough.⁸⁶⁷ Manuel mentions that he 'could also enumerate other difficulties, [though] the rules of letter writing exclude [this]'.⁸⁶⁸ The rules of letter writing, such as they were, bore heavily on Manuel's mind when drafting his correspondence. Writing to Constantine Asanes whilst on the same campaign, Manuel states: 'I know very well the kind of letter you love to receive...lengthy letters full of lengthy reports'.⁸⁶⁹ It appears the emperor could not supply Asanes with the information he requested because of the limitations of the literary genre. A follow-up letter to Kydones perhaps best expresses these difficulties. Manuel again laments the hardships facing his army, 'all of which call for a historian, not a letter writer'.⁸⁷⁰ Manuel's accounts within his letters amount to little more than a list of complaints about the rigours of war, barely

⁸⁶⁵ Manuel II Palaiologos: ep.15.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid: ep.16.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid: ep.16.84-97.

⁸⁶⁸ τὰ τε ἄλλα ὅσα τε ὁ νόμος εἶργει τῆς ἐπιστολῆς ἀριθμεῖν καὶ ὅσα γε (ibid: ep.16.64-68; trans. 46). It should be noted that this letter is considered by editor George Dennis (1977: 48 n.1) to contain a surprising amount of information.

⁸⁶⁹ τὰ δὲ ἐστὶ μακρὰ τε γράμματα καὶ μακρᾶς διηγήσεσι κεχρημένα (Manuel II Palaiologos: ep.18.2-7; trans. 54).

⁸⁷⁰ ἱστορικοῦ δεομένοις, οὐκ ἐπιστέλλοντος (ibid: ep.19.4-8; trans. 56).

different to those written by Nikephoros Ouranos some four hundred years prior.⁸⁷¹

There is nothing to suggest that the aforementioned letters of Gregory Taronites to Theophylact of Ohrid were any more substantial; they need not have consisted of anything other than a general overview of Taronites' accomplishments.

Foreign correspondence dealing with military events may have offered more extensive coverage of military episodes. Mullett has proposed that diplomatic letters were more functional and succinct,⁸⁷² though coverage and detail will have varied depending on the subject and relations with the recipient. Tzimiskes' letter to Ashot contains little strategic or tactical detail; his concern rather is to present an overview of territorial acquisitions and material gains designed to appeal to Armenia's common Christianity. By contrast, Manuel Komnenos' letter to Henry II of England describes the unfolding of the Battle of Myriokephalon, with Manuel endeavouring to protect his own reputation in the face of the defeat.⁸⁷³ Even so, Manuel does not go into extensive detail; he refers Henry to returning English soldiers should the monarch wish to know 'all the circumstances in the order in which they happened'.⁸⁷⁴ Indeed, it has been suggested that envoys to foreign rulers may have delivered an oral message quite different to the content of the letter, intended to provide greater detail.⁸⁷⁵ This is relevant also in relation to domestic letters, since they too could be

⁸⁷¹ *Épistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle*: 217-248, esp. 244-247. For discussion see McGeer (1995a): 339-340; Mullett (1996a): 49-50. The Byzantines followed a long tradition of corresponding to friends whilst on campaign. Cicero vividly described his progress in Cilicia in his letters to colleagues at Rome, which Mary Beard (2007: 187-188) considered to represent 'the only day-to-day first-person account of campaigns to have survived from antiquity'. For further discussion of Cicero's correspondence see idem (2002).

⁸⁷² Mullett (1992a): 212-216.

⁸⁷³ For the links between Manuel and Henry, see Vasiliev (1929-1930).

⁸⁷⁴ 'Gratum autem habuimus, quod quosdam nobilitatis tuae principes accidit interesse nobiscum, qui narrabunt, de omnibus quae acciderant, tuae nobilitati seriem' (Roger of Howden: II, 104; trans. 239-240).

⁸⁷⁵ Shepard (2005): 176-177.

supplemented by an oral report given by the carrier.⁸⁷⁶ In his final missive to Gregory Taronites, Theophylact mentions that he had been told of Taronites' achievements by one Theodosios, presumably a member of Taronites' entourage who carried a letter to Theophylact.⁸⁷⁷ Such a practice counteracted the limitations epistolary standards imposed upon including an abundance of detail in civil correspondence.

Conclusion

There is substantial evidence to support the idea that dispatches and bulletins detailing a battle or campaign were routinely sent to Constantinople and the provinces. Letters to foreign peoples chronicling military events corroborate notions of officially-produced accounts, though such diplomatic correspondence may only have been of limited use to historians searching for comprehensive accounts of military operations. Private individuals eager for the same sort of information were also forced to rely upon imperial dispatches, as the confines of a personal letter did not allow for detailed exposition. Bulletins and dispatches operated under very different guidelines in respect of their coverage of warfare. Discussing their function and features should give us a better idea of what information might have been presented to historians and chroniclers.

⁸⁷⁶ Mullett (1989): 181-182; idem (1992a): 212-216; idem (1997a): 36-37. The Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos (*Letters*: 58-61) treats letters and unwritten messages as complementing one another. Messengers had a similar function in the medieval west - see Crosby (1936).

⁸⁷⁷ Ἀκούω δὲ ἐκάστοτε αἰεὶ μοι ταῦτα τοῦ Θεοδοσίου διηγουμένου γλώττη εὐγνώμονι μὲν, ἐλαττουμένη δὲ τῆς ἀξίας εὐφημίας τῶν ἔργων, ὃς σύνεστιν ἡμῖν τὰ μέγιστα χαριζόμενος (Theophylact of Ohrid: II, 475.46-48). For Theodosios' role, see Mullett (1997a): 372.

II. Campaign Dispatches and Bulletins – Content and Veracity

A dispatch mentioned briefly in an influential article by Veselin Beševliev would eventually be recognized as the only firm example of a complete campaign report preserved in Byzantine historiography.⁸⁷⁸ Beševliev's call for 'besondere Untersuchung' into a victory bulletin of the Emperor Heraclius, featured in the *Chronicon Paschale*, was duly taken up by James Howard-Johnston. His research into the bulletin, together with other references, permits us to make some general observations about the composition and content of campaign dispatches.

Heraclius' Victory Bulletin in the Chronicon Paschale

The *Chronicon Paschale*, a chronicle of world history from Creation to the author's present day (c.630), appears to quote verbatim a campaign dispatch (ἀποκρίσεις) sent from the field by Heraclius, and read from the ambo in the Hagia Sophia in May 628.⁸⁷⁹ The bulletin opens with a biblical quotation, instantly establishing a triumphant religious tone. The following passage – heralding the demise of the Persian ruler Khusro II and the crowning of his son Kavad Shiroe - heightens the pious sentiment by attributing this turn of events to God. It is revealed that following a harsh winter Heraclius was able to make contact with an ambassador of the new Persian king and begin peace negotiations. Detail, including the movements of the Byzantine army and the names and rank of individuals from both sides, is extensive. The peace process is charted at length; copies of the correspondence between Shiroe

⁸⁷⁸ Beševliev (1974): 77-78.

⁸⁷⁹ *Chronicon Paschale*: 727-734. Dölger, *Regesten*: I, no. 192.

and Heraclius are said to have been appended to the dispatch.⁸⁸⁰ The text concludes with a note that the army was venturing homeward.

It is unclear why the author of the *Chronicon Paschale* included this particular dispatch in its entirety. The likelihood of it being the only such document available to the anonymous chronicler is remote, since the aforementioned dispatch includes a reference to an earlier missive chronicling events from mid-October 627 to mid-March 628.⁸⁸¹ Evidently, Heraclius made a habit of informing Constantinople of his progress throughout his major expeditions against Persia.⁸⁸² Furthermore, it is apparent that the author of the *Chronicon Paschale* examined and included other official records and letters, suggesting ready access to documentary material.⁸⁸³ A lack of source material therefore cannot be the answer. The author of the *Chronicon Paschale* was primarily interested in events which had a direct effect on Constantinople, the siege of 626 being a particularly good example.⁸⁸⁴ The successful conclusion of Heraclius' long war with Persia was momentous, heralding the end of a serious threat. Not only was it worth recording in full, but audiences would surely have wished to read about the emperor's defining achievement in detail.

No battles are described in the dispatch of the *Chronicon Paschale*; rather, it is diplomacy which dominates proceedings. However, this was merely one of a number of dispatches from Heraclius' reign; James-Howard Johnston has convincingly

⁸⁸⁰ For this correspondence, and an attempt to reconstruct it, see Oikonomides (1971). For other memoranda and documents referred to in this dispatch, see Howard-Johnston (2010): 49 n.25.

⁸⁸¹ *Chronicon Paschale*: 729.15-18.

⁸⁸² Walter Kaegi (2003: 73) muses that Heraclius 'probably' issued bulletins from the time of his first imperial campaign.

⁸⁸³ See M. & M. Whitby (1989): xx-xxi; Howard-Johnston (2010): 37-41, 45-52, 55-58. Also Scott (1981): 17-20.

⁸⁸⁴ M. & M. Whitby (1989): xxv-xxvi, 167 n.452; Howard-Johnston (2010): 54-55. For local interests influencing historiography in general, see Michael Whitby (1992): 70.

demonstrated that a number of other reports underlie the narrative of Theophanes Confessor, with long descriptions of campaigning and military operations generally more predominant.⁸⁸⁵ The text is very specific and detailed in regard to persons, locales, and chronology, while exposition on military matters – command decisions, army movements, composition, tactics – is extensive. This information can only have derived from dispatches not dissimilar to that preserved in the *Chronicon Paschale*. Indeed, Howard-Johnston believes there is ‘little doubt’ that the earlier dispatch referred to by Heraclius, covering the events of the winter campaign of 627-628, underlies the corresponding narrative of the *Chronographia* of Theophanes. Theophanes himself notes that Heraclius sent a progress report to Constantinople whilst at Amida in March 626, containing news of his operations since the start of the campaign.⁸⁸⁶ Heraclius was well aware of the value of public announcements, and probably issued many documents and proclamations to serve a variety of needs.⁸⁸⁷

Style and Content

The value of the *Chronicon Paschale* for the study of military dispatches is difficult to measure. Howard-Johnston feels it gives us a ‘full, unabridged, undoctored example

⁸⁸⁵ The content in question is Theophanes: 306-314, 317-327. For discussion and analysis, see Howard-Johnston (1994): 67-69; Kaegi (2003): 100-191.

⁸⁸⁶ ἐντεῦθεν καὶ γράμματα πρὸς τὸ Βυζάντιον ὁ βασιλεὺς ἠδυνήθη ἀποστεῖλαι καὶ τὰ καθ’ ἑαυτὸν πάντα δηλῶσαι καὶ χαρὰν πολλὴν ἐμποῖῃσαι τῇ πόλει (Theophanes: 312.30-313.2). For this dispatch, see Howard-Johnston (1994): 70. Walter Kaegi (2003: 127, 129-130, 131-132, 156), perhaps influenced by Howard-Johnston, also hypothesizes that much of Theophanes’ account of Heraclius’ Persian campaigns derives from reports issued by Heraclius.

⁸⁸⁷ For Heraclius’ eagerness to exploit public ceremonies and announcements, see Howard-Johnston (1999): 36-39; Kaegi (2003): 62-64. It is speculated that Heraclius and his publicists issued many documents to this effect. Strategios’ infamous account of the Persian capture of Jerusalem in 614 may have deliberately exaggerated events in order to shock the Christian world. See in general Schick (1995): 33-39; Stemberger (1999); Stoyanov (2011): 11-24. The lost history of Theophilus of Edessa included a rather fantastical and entertaining account of the 626 siege of Constantinople which, Howard-Johnston (2010: 203-204) suspects, was originally an ‘elaborate piece of misinformation’ manufactured and disseminated by imperial officials soon after the Persian withdrawal, intended to cause dissension among the Persian ranks. Kaegi (2003: 172) speculates that Heraclius may have also promulgated bulletins within Persian territory during his final campaigns to cultivate support.

of an imperial dispatch from the field', and thus equips the historian with indicators for locating dispatch-based material in other texts.⁸⁸⁸ McCormick likewise suggests general content and features of a victory bulletin on the basis of Heraclius' effort. They might begin with biblical citations,⁸⁸⁹ and then proceed with a precise narration of facts, including specific dates, places and names.⁸⁹⁰ Michael Whitby, however, warns that the bulletin of Heraclius may not be representative of standard dispatches, since the emperor himself was involved and narrating events for public proclamation. He concludes that in any report, the general would have 'at least summarized the actions of different parts of the army and made the most of any successes'.⁸⁹¹

Whitby's caution may be prudent. From the example of the *Chronicon Paschale*, Howard-Johnston anticipated all dispatches to possess standard traits of document-based information – lucid, concise exposition and plain, emotionless language.⁸⁹² Yet Michael Italikos confirms that dispatches were not always drafted with little thought for style. Having heard the bulletin recounting the accomplishments of John II Komnenos, Italikos lavished praise on the writing skills of shadow author Stephen

⁸⁸⁸ Howard-Johnston (2010): 69.

⁸⁸⁹ The use of biblical quotations and language in the bulletin of Heraclius aligns well with the substance of homilies. Both required widespread understanding, and it is thought that biblical references better resonated with the general audience than classical allusions, which were generally kept to a minimum in sermons (Cunningham 1990). The links between homilies and bulletins may go deeper still. Magdalino (1993a: 314) suggests that clergy of the twelfth-century were charged with not reading out the original bulletins they received, but paraphrasing them into homilies for their wider audience. It has also been suggested that some military accounts may have been brief sermons fashioned into more elaborate literary pieces for greater appreciation. Leone (1964) proposed that Eustathios' *Capture of Thessaloniki* began life as a brief sermon delivered to the people of Thessaloniki in Lent 1186, before it was expanded into a literary work for wider readership among the literati of the empire. Vasiliev (1925: 93) has similarly speculated that the homilies of Photios on the Russian siege of Constantinople in 860 were originally much briefer sermons given in the Hagia Sophia, before being fashioned into literary pieces. For related discussion see Antonopoulou (1997): 43-44.

⁸⁹⁰ McCormick (1986): 195-196.

⁸⁹¹ Michael Whitby (1988): 97.

⁸⁹² Howard-Johnston (2010): 300. Simon Hornblower (1987: 40) similarly proposed that 'dryness, occasional triviality [and] would-be comprehensiveness' may have been the defining features of the lost genre of ancient military reports.

Meles, suggesting that bulletins could be appreciative literary works in their own right.⁸⁹³ Theodore Prodromos likewise hailed Meles as a superb orator and fine writer.⁸⁹⁴ While flattery may be suspected, there is independent evidence to suggest that Meles was a man of literature.⁸⁹⁵ Furthermore, Constantine Manasses praises the *logothetes* Michael Hagiotheodorites for his eloquence in describing the victories of Manuel Komnenos.⁸⁹⁶ Therefore, it may be that dispatches and bulletins were, at various times, more polished than that of Heraclius would suggest.

There is another issue with thinking the dispatch of the *Chronicon Paschale* to be representative of all bulletins. The document is concerned with diplomatic developments and the rigours of campaigning, while potential dispatches underlying the narrative of Theophanes appear to have provided a solid overview of the campaign. Set-piece sieges and battles are absent; the notable exception is the Battle of Nineveh, essentially formed of the battlefield heroics of Heraclius.⁸⁹⁷ While it is thought that Theophanes summarized and abridged his military information, major battles and sieges were unlikely to have been substantially reduced.⁸⁹⁸ Exciting narratives of battles and sieges may have become more prominent in dispatches of the Middle period. In his letter to Stephen Meles, Michael Italikos describes the audience being enthralled by stories of ‘battle lines, invasions, attacks on barbarian cities, the capture of countless peoples, how each of them fled headlong, how [John Komnenos]

⁸⁹³ Michael Italikos: 233.1-13.

⁸⁹⁴ Theodore Prodromos: LXIX.1-17. See also Hörandner (1974): 111.

⁸⁹⁵ See Mercati (1925).

⁸⁹⁶ Constantine Manasses, *Eulogy for Michael Hagiotheodorites*: 180-181.

⁸⁹⁷ Theophanes: 318-319. See below, 368-371.

⁸⁹⁸ Howard-Johnston (2010): 278, 283-284

pursued and dispersed their ranks'.⁸⁹⁹ This indicates a greater focus on fighting and thrilling anecdotes in the bulletins of John II Komnenos than those of Heraclius. Supporting this notion is Manuel Komnenos' letter to King Henry II, which focuses on the heroics of the emperor at Myriokephalon rather than provide an overview of the full course of the campaign.⁹⁰⁰ With the military aristocracy of the Middle period favouring exciting military accounts and reports of individual heroism, it may be that bulletins of the later period adopted a different focus to those of Heraclius' day.⁹⁰¹

Veracity in Imperial Bulletins and Dispatches

As the official line of the state, bulletins required careful management: success was to be exploited, defeat played down, and the emperor was to be presented throughout in panegyric tones.⁹⁰² A timely bulletin allayed fears and boosted an emperor's popularity, though even if the emperor had suffered a defeat, it was nevertheless crucial to suppress destructive rumours and initiate a programme of damage limitation.⁹⁰³ The turbulent events following the Battle of Manzikert illustrate that chaos could prevail without official word, as civil war erupted from the confusion surrounding the fate of Romanos IV Diogenes.⁹⁰⁴ Similarly, rumours of Theophilos'

⁸⁹⁹ τὰς παρατάξεις, τὰς εισβολάς, τὰς καταδρομάς τῶν βαρβαρικῶν πόλεων, τὰς ἀλώσεις τῶν μυρίων ἔθνῶν, ὡς οἱ μὲν ἔφρευγον προτροπάδην, ὁ δὲ καταδιώκων ἐκλόνει τὰς τούτων φάλαγγας (Michael Italikos: 232.1-20).

⁹⁰⁰ See below, 249-259.

⁹⁰¹ See below, 267-378.

⁹⁰² Howard-Johnston (1994): 67. Kaegi (2003: 156), discussing Heraclius' campaign bulletins, notes that such items cannot be considered 'objective archival documents'. See Appendix II for strong evidence to this effect presented by Ammianus Marcellinus.

⁹⁰³ A prescriptive text of the early tenth century recommends that deputies in Constantinople counter malicious rumours about the welfare of the emperor and his army by inventing positive reports, such as that a message had been brought by a member of the imperial expedition, in order to suppress any 'disorder' (τὰς παραχὰς) (Constantine VII, *Text B*: ll.77-79). See also Howard-Johnston (1994): 70.

⁹⁰⁴ Psellos, *Chronographia*: II, 162-163 (XXIII).

death at the Battle of Anzen in 838 led to some at Constantinople wanting to proclaim a successor.⁹⁰⁵

When military success was not forthcoming, exploiting any tangible achievements in the field became all the more necessary.⁹⁰⁶ Victory could be won by many means in Byzantium, with the mantra of Anna Komnene telling: ‘When danger hangs over us, being unable to make a frontal assault, we change our tactics and seek to conquer without resorting to warfare... Victory means the same thing always, but the means by which generals attain it are varied and of intricate patterns’.⁹⁰⁷ Consequently, any apparent triumph over the enemy might be exploited with public displays and announcements. The ideological dimension of the prolonged war with Islam between c.863-959 saw particular importance lent to propaganda and public celebrations of victory.⁹⁰⁸ In 956 Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos awarded a triumph to the *strategos* Basil Hexamilites for an amphibious victory off Tarsos, which, while relatively insignificant, was nevertheless a welcome reprieve after a succession of

⁹⁰⁵ *Theophanes Continuatus*: 136; *Bar Hebraeus*: I, 136; *Byzance et les Arabes*: I, 154-160.

⁹⁰⁶ Michael McCormick (1986: 40-44) has shown that Theodosios I, in the aftermath of the Battle of Adrianople, issued many victory bulletins for relatively minor successes, seemingly to restore confidence in imperial rule.

⁹⁰⁷ ὥσθ’ ὀπόταν κίνδυνος ἡμῖν ἐπικρέμαται ἀπὸ <τοῦ> κατὰ πρόσωπον προσβαλεῖν, τότε τρόπον ἕτερον τὸν πόλεμον μεταχειρίζομεθα καὶ ἀμαχεὶ τῶν ἐχθρῶν κρατεῖν ἐπειγόμεθα... ὥστε τὴν μὲν νίκη μίαν εἶναι, τοὺς δὲ τρόπους, δι’ ὧν αὕτη τοῖς στρατηγοῖς περιγίνεται, διαφοροὺς τε καὶ ποικίλους τὴν φύσιν (Anna Komnene: XV.3.2.13-25; trans. 437).

⁹⁰⁸ It is worth noting that this was the case for both sides. Henri Grégoire (1952) has drawn attention to an official communiqué relating how Thessaloniki fell to Arab forces in 904, intended for the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, and later employed by the historian al-Tabari. Howard-Johnston (2010: 131-132, 391-392) names al-Tabari among Arabic authors who drew upon official bulletins, and builds a strong case for a campaign account compiled by al-Mutanabbi, the court poet of Hamdanid emir Sayf al-Dawla, to commemorate a particularly successful raid on Byzantine Anzitene in 956. It is proposed that the final work resembled a concise prose account of the campaign replete with precise details about military operations (a victory bulletin) embellished by a commemorative poem of al-Mutanabbi (Howard-Johnston 1983: esp. 241-245). Such a work, perhaps one of many commissioned by Sayf al-Dawla, should undoubtedly be viewed as propaganda in the war between Sayf and the armies of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos, as much an ideological contest as one fought on the battlefield. On this last point see Shepard (2001).

defeats suffered by his principal eastern forces.⁹⁰⁹ Though a relationship between triumphs and victory bulletins cannot be assumed, we might recall that the Emperor Theophilos is said to have made a speech about his successes upon his triumphal return from campaign.⁹¹⁰

Yet even militarily successful rulers resorted to exaggeration in their dispatches. Michael Italikos stressed that the feats accomplished by John II Komnenos surpassed any achieved by previous emperors and those recorded in books: ‘compared to those [victories] of today they are actually reduced to nothing, and if we compare their number and size, they appear few and insignificant’.⁹¹¹ Italikos may embellish the facts, but then it is probable the bulletin did also. After all, it was important for an emperor succeeding a successful ruler to ensure that his deeds surpassed those still fresh in the memory. The problem is highlighted in a letter of Leo of Synada, sent to Nikephoros Ouranos following his victory over the Bulgarians in 997. Leo tells Ouranos to pay little heed to those playing down the success. ‘My elders... will claim that they saw and their elders will boast what they heard...’⁹¹² The successes his ‘elders’ recall are no doubt those of Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes.⁹¹³ The burden posed by famous predecessors would have necessitated exaggeration and distortion in imperial bulletins, so as to dispel any sense of inadequacy.

⁹⁰⁹ *Theophanes Continuatus*: 452-453. See also McCormick (1986): 165-166.

⁹¹⁰ Constantine VII, *Text C*: ll.867-868.

⁹¹¹ ἐκεῖνα γὰρ πρὸς τὰ νῦν συγκρινόμενα εἰς τὸ μηδὲν ὡς ἀληθῶς κατακλείεται καὶ τὰ πλήθη πρὸς πλήθη καὶ τὰ μεγέθη πρὸς μεγέθη εὐαρίθμητα καὶ μικρὰ καταφαίνεται (Michael Italikos: 232.7-9).

⁹¹² Τί τούτου μείζον ἐξηκοντούτης ἐγὼ τυγχάνων ἢ εἶδον ἢ ἤκουσα; Ἄλλ’ οἱ πρὸ ἐμοῦ φήσουσιν ὡς εἶδον, οἱ δὲ πρὸ ἐκείνων ἀχρήσουσιν ὡς ἤκουσαν – αὐτοὶ δ’ οἱ γέροντες, οἱ ψυχρολόγοι, οἱ μυθολόγοι οἰήσονται σὺν τῇ κορύζῃ χάναι καὶ φάναι· μὴ ἐμβλέψαι εὐχομαί τ[ι] τούτων ἢ αὐτὸ τὸ μηδὲ ὄν γενέσθαι (Leo of Synada: ep.13.4-9; trans. 23).

⁹¹³ Leo of Synada was sixty at the time, so he too would have been familiar with the accomplishments of Basil’s predecessors. This makes it all the more likely that he was seeking to reassure Ouranos.

Defeats represent a more complex case. Jonathan Shepard accuses imperial bulletins of ‘playing loose with the truth’, but concedes that they rarely concocted ‘sheer fantasy’.⁹¹⁴ The assertion is questionable. While it was unwise to dwell on unsuccessful endeavours in bulletins,⁹¹⁵ major defeats were disclosed to the public, as the case of Manuel and the Battle of Myriocephalon demonstrates. The various accounts of the encounter are discussed in the following chapter, though it may be said that the bulletin almost certainly put a positive slant on events. According to Niketas Choniates, Manuel claimed to have forced the sultan to a treaty under his terms, a boast also made in the emperor’s letter to Henry II of England. Given that the same letter draws attention to the military heroics of Manuel, we may surmise that the official account presented something of a personal triumph.⁹¹⁶ There was almost certainly a precedent for this sort of manipulation in state media. Kaegi postulates that lost bulletins played down Heraclius’ hasty retreat from the Persians in 625, whilst at the same time exaggerating the emperor’s personal role in stemming the Persian advance.⁹¹⁷ Shifts of focus, distortion, and the suppression of embarrassing elements were undoubtedly common in imperial bulletins.⁹¹⁸

The ‘sheer fantasy’ Shepard speaks of (turning defeat into victory) was not unknown. One treatise recommends that deputies in Constantinople invent ‘positive reports’ about imperial messages arriving with members of an imperial expedition, to combat

⁹¹⁴ Shepard (2003b): 10.

⁹¹⁵ Howard-Johnston (1994): 71.

⁹¹⁶ See below, 249-259.

⁹¹⁷ Kaegi (2003): 131-132. It may have been the case that Heraclius’ publicists operated similarly during the early defeats against Islam (see *ibid*: 248-249, 256).

⁹¹⁸ Howard-Johnston (2010): 422-423.

‘indifference’ or worse, ‘disturbances’.⁹¹⁹ *Theophanes Continuatus* relates that the rebel Thomas the Slav ‘sent out letters everywhere proclaiming he had won a victory’, a premature and ultimately false claim.⁹²⁰ Nevertheless, the letters did gain Thomas some temporary support, and it is testament to the pretender’s propaganda that some historical works may be seen to preserve aspects of Thomas’ account alongside the official record.⁹²¹ In the case of rulers proper, concocting lies may not have been feasible without jeopardizing prestige. The inhabitants of Constantinople were apparently not always easily led: according to Theophanes, in 809 the Emperor Nikephoros I attempted to convince the citizenry that he was celebrating Easter in the camp of the defeated Bulgar khan Krum via sworn dispatches (σάκραις), the suggestion being that few were fooled by his claims.⁹²²

The use of falsified dispatches is perhaps best demonstrated by the Emperor Constantine V. Veselin Beševliev has shown that a number of dispatches charting Constantine’s campaigns in Bulgaria underlie the narratives of Theophanes and the Patriarch Nikephoros. While Nikephoros presents Constantine as successful in his endeavours, Theophanes offers a different version of events, whereby Constantine was partly successful but was ultimately powerless to prevent Bulgar raids against Thrace. That Nikephoros was using official press releases for this part of his

⁹¹⁹ ἐστὶν ὅτε καὶ πλάττειν ἀγαθὰς φήμας ὡς κελεύσεως ἐλθούσης πλὴν ἀορίστως, ἢ καὶ ἄλλως ἀπὸ τινος τοῦ λαοῦ ἐλθόντων, τῶν μὲν τὴν ῥαθυμίαν, τῶν δὲ τὰς ταραχὰς παύοντα (Constantine VII, *Text B*: ll. 77-79; trans. 87).

⁹²⁰ γράμμασιν ἐπιστέλλων τὰ ἑαυτοῦ περιαγγέλλει ἀπανταχοῦ, ὡς εἶη τε νενικηκῶς, ὅπερ οὐκ ἦν (*Theophanes Continuatus*: 63.19-21).

⁹²¹ See Lemerle (1965): esp. 258. The official record damning Thomas’ insurrection, thought to have been written by one Ignatios the Deacon is discussed by Treadgold (1988): 244-245.

⁹²² Theophanes: 485.12-14. Dölger, *Regesten*: I, no. 369. Theophanes, who disliked Nikephoros (see Tinnefeld 1971: 74-78), believes Nikephoros deceived his subjects, since it was practically impossible for him to travel such distances in the stated period of time. Panos Sophoulis (2011: 190) suggests that Nikephoros probably captured another fortified encampment but exaggerated his achievement to extract maximum political benefit from an otherwise uneventful campaign. For discussion of the campaign in general, see Treadgold (1988): 157-159; Sophoulis (2011): 188-191.

Breviarium is seemingly confirmed by a passage in another of his works, the theological discourse entitled *Antirrheticus*. Here Nikephoros, apparently free from censorship concerns, writes: ‘whilst what [Constantine V] may have done was minor and not particularly noteworthy, from the letters he addressed to the inhabitants of the capital it became apparent that he was the servant and bedfellow of the openly-proclaimed lie’.⁹²³ Thus Constantine was apparently willing to publicize fabricated accounts of his campaigns, though in doing so he too ran the risk of losing the trust of his subjects.

Reaching firm conclusions regarding the accuracy of these reports is somewhat hazardous, since Theophanes and Nikephoros bore an obvious dislike for the iconoclast Constantine.⁹²⁴ Nonetheless, the strong sentiments of the iconodule historians provides the best evidence for the misuse of victory bulletins. The anti-iconoclast *Scriptor Incertus de Leone Armenio*, thought to have been written in the 820s,⁹²⁵ reports that the Bulgar ruler Krum died suddenly in mysterious circumstances in April 814, before setting out against Constantinople. Emperor Leo V, however, was of the belief that he, not God, had bested the enemy, and dispatched victory messages (σάκρας) announcing that he had encountered the Bulgars near the capital and repelled them through his bravery, mortally wounding Krum with an arrow.⁹²⁶ Leo probably made regular use of bulletins: Panos Sophoulis proposes that historical accounts of Leo’s subsequent victory over the Bulgars near Mesembria later that year

⁹²³ Εἰ δέ τι μικρὸν καὶ οὐ πᾶν ἀξιόλογον ἔδρασε, καθὰ γε ἡμῖν ἐκ τῶν γεγραμμένων αὐτῷ πρὸς τοὺς ἐνηλιτισμένους κατὰ τὴν βασιλεύουσαν, ἀναλεξάμενοις ἔγνωσται· ἐν οἷς πολλὰ κατακομπάσας ὁ τοῦ ψεύδους ὑπηρέτης καὶ σύντροφος (Patriarch Nikephoros, *Antirrheticus*: 508 col. 72).

⁹²⁴ Tinnefeld (1971): 60-74; Beševliev (1974): esp. 74-77, 81, 82-83; also idem (1971a); idem (1971b).

⁹²⁵ See Ševčenko (1992b): 280 n.3; Markopoulos (1999): 261. For the most recent discussion of the text, see Sophoulis (2010).

⁹²⁶ *Scriptor Incertus*: 348.16-22. For discussion of these events and the author’s possible reliance on an official communiqué, see Beševliev (1974): 75; Treadgold (1988): 201-207; Sophoulis (2011): 264.

derive from ‘official sources commissioned by the government soon after the event’.⁹²⁷ The author of the *Scriptor Incertus* overlooks this victory of Leo, drafting a work which Markopoulos termed ‘une sorte de pamphlet contre cet empereur’.⁹²⁸

The hesitancy of the *Scriptor Incertus* to follow the official line is seen also in its earlier account of the Battle of Versinikia. Theophanes writes that the *strategos* of the Anatolikon, the future Leo V, wisely exhorted Michael I Rangabe to attack the Bulgars, but was foolishly overruled by advisors of the emperor.⁹²⁹ Since this report is favourable to Leo, Kaegi suspects that Theophanes was ‘repeating the contemporary official account’.⁹³⁰ Whilst the *Scriptor Incertus*’ narrative of the Battle of Versinikia does not, as *Theophanes Continuatus* might,⁹³¹ accuse Leo of deceiving and deserting the emperor, it nevertheless mentions the Anatolikon troops (those under Leo’s command) neglecting to aid their comrades of the Macedonian theme and abandoning the field.⁹³² The hero is John Aplakes, *strategos* of Macedonia, who heroically engaged the enemy only to be isolated and killed. David Turner suspects that the original source of this account was ‘probably an official document’,⁹³³ though the focus on Aplakes and the absence of Leo argue against this. Rather, it is apparent that the *Scriptor* presents an ‘unofficial’ account of the battle, as at one point the work lambasts attempts, probably from Leo’s camp, to blame the

⁹²⁷ Sophoulis (2007-2008); idem (2010): 36-37.

⁹²⁸ Markopoulos (1999): 259.

⁹²⁹ Theophanes: 500-502.

⁹³⁰ Kaegi (1981a): 250.

⁹³¹ *Theophanes Continuatus*: 14-15, where an account favourable to Leo is also offered.

⁹³² *Scriptor Incertus*: 333-339. For discussion of the battle see Bury (1923): 352-353; Alexander (1958): 113-125; Treadgold (1988): 186-188; Sophoulis (2011): 234-245.

⁹³³ Markopoulos (1999: 259) determined that the author of the *Scriptor Incertus* probably had access to archives, particularly those of the patriarch of Constantinople.

terrain for the inability of the Anatolikon troops to support those already engaged.⁹³⁴

Again then the *Scriptor Incertus* appears to disregard the official version of events propagated by Leo V, though this is more a reflection of the author's dislike for the iconoclastic emperor than his concern over untruths in Leo's reports.

Veracity in the Dispatches of Subordinate Generals: David Komnenos and the Sack of Thessaloniki, 1185

Subordinate commanders also exaggerated their achievements and individual contribution in victory dispatches, while shifting responsibility and altering the course of events when relating setbacks.⁹³⁵ David Komnenos, commander of Thessaloniki during the Sicilian attack of 1185, is accused of exaggeration and falsification in his dispatches to Andronikos I Komnenos, contributing significantly to the city's eventual downfall.⁹³⁶ According to the bishop Eustathios, David exploited any success, however minor, and painted a false picture of the situation. After his men captured a lowly enemy soldier, David had the captive dressed up and paraded through the city, as though he was of great standing. David then 'wrote to the emperor that the battle was going well for us'.⁹³⁷ Soon after there was another foray, with two horses and a soldier's headgear seized; again the booty was showcased to the public as though it was a substantial prize. 'Our wretched leader wrote again to the emperor that we were

⁹³⁴ Turner (1990): 189-193, esp. 191-192. For the contrasting view, see Rochow (1991): 315-316; Sophoulis (2011): 33-34. By contrast, it is thought that Theophanes employed an official account issued by Leo, wherein Leo is presented assisting Aplakes – *ibid*: 21-22, 242.

⁹³⁵ See Appendix III for further discussion of personal interest in military reports.

⁹³⁶ Alexander Kazhdan (& Constable 1982: 150) determined much on the basis of the reports of David Komnenos: 'The information sent by provincial governors and their staff to Constantinople was frequently influenced by private interests and was therefore inaccurate, false, or biased'.

⁹³⁷ καὶ γραφὴ εὐθὺς τοῦ καὶ στρατηγοῦ καὶ δουκὸς εἰς τὸν βασιλέα, ὡς εὐτυχῶς ἡμῖν τὰ εἰς μάχην φέρεται (Eustathios, *Capture of Thessaloniki*: 68.19-26; trans. 69).

prospering in war'.⁹³⁸ Finally, an encounter between two enemy horseman and more than ten Byzantines took place. 'Again there was a third report to the emperor, which read "Thanks to your Majesty's supplications and the Imperial good fortune, we have been victorious in the third battle" – although I cannot say who it was that we had conquered'.⁹³⁹ Eustathios explains that Komnenos had originally wanted to dispatch one missive covering these three incidents, but was dissuaded by his dislike for the Emperor Andronikos, which fuelled paranoia over his position. Consequently, he resolved to persuade Andronikos that the city was safe, and did not require any assistance, be it weaponry, supplies or manpower.⁹⁴⁰ The emperor had sent an army to aid Thessaloniki, but because he believed the lies of David, the relief force did not get involved.⁹⁴¹ The situation is summarized by the irate Eustathios:

What he wrote was false, and benefited only himself. It could not be tested, because no one knew what he was writing, and so none could speak, or dared to speak; and so he continued to persuade the emperor of this, to our misfortune. He was so concerned to inspire the emperor with confidence that we would come to no harm because he needed to remain in sole charge of our affairs, and he had to prevent the leadership being given to any one else to save the situation.⁹⁴²

⁹³⁸ καὶ γράμμα πάλιν τοῦ δυσσαριστέως παρὰ τὸν βασιλέα, ὡς εὐτυχοῦμεν τὰ κατὰ πόλεμον (ibid: 68.26-32; trans. 69).

⁹³⁹ καὶ πάλιν ἀναφορὰ εἰς τὸν βασιλέα τρίτη, ὡς "τῆ βασιλικῆ εὐχῆ τε καὶ εὐτυχίᾳ νενικήκαμεν καὶ τὸν τρίτον πόλεμον", οὐκ οἶδα τίνων περιγενομένοι (ibid: 70.1-7; trans. 71).

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid: 70.7-23.

⁹⁴¹ Ibid: 72.10-16.

⁹⁴² ψευδῆ μὲν γράφων πρὸς τὸ εἰς τὸν μόνον συνοῖσον καὶ ἀνεξέλεγκτα, ὅτι μηδὲ ἦν τις ὁ εἶτε εἰδὼς ἄπερ ἔγραφεν εἶτε λαλῶν εἶτε λαλεῖν τολμῶν, πείθων δὲ ἐκεῖνον οὐκ εὐτυχῶς ἡμῖν. πεπραγμάτετο γὰρ θάρρος ἐμβαλεῖν τῷ βασιλεῖ περὶ ἡμῶν, ὡς οὐκ ἂν τι κακὸν ποθεν πάθοιμεν, ἵνα κεφαλὴ μόνος αὐτὸς ἐπίσταιτο τοῖς ὧδε καὶ μὴ τινὶ ἐτέρῳ ἐπιτραπεῖη τὰ τῆδε, οἷω περισώσασθαι ταῦτα (ibid: 70.24-29; trans. 71).

Eustathios cannot hide his anger at the man who abandoned Thessaloniki to its fate, though his testimony is rendered more believable by his formerly close relations with David Komnenos.⁹⁴³ Presumably David offered a very different interpretation of events, though it is not preserved in the historical record; Niketas Choniates, employing the account of Eustathios, similarly lambasts the *doux* for his ineptitude and lack of courage in the face of the attack.⁹⁴⁴

Conclusion

Dispatches and bulletins inevitably presented a distortion of the facts, such as they are known. Successes were exploited and exaggerated, while defeats were played down, attributed to certain individuals or causes, or even transformed into victories. Content may have varied from an overview of a campaign, such as that offered by Heraclius in the *Chronicon Paschale*, to detailed descriptions of battles and sieges, perhaps more suited to the interests of the Middle Byzantine military aristocracy. These aspects should be kept in mind when searching for such underlying material in historical works. For now, however, it is necessary to determine how much of this material would have been available to Byzantine historians.

⁹⁴³ Angold (1995): 181.

⁹⁴⁴ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 297-298.

III. Campaign Dispatches and Bulletins – Form and Archiving

Before assessing the use of bulletins by historians, we must clarify to what extent the transmission of information about military events in Byzantium took the form of a written report. We frequently read that an emperor ‘heard’ or ‘learned’ about an event, and that ‘news’ or ‘word’ (invariably λόγος, φήμη, or ἀγγελία) was reported; the source of the information, much less how it was transmitted, is often undisclosed.⁹⁴⁵ To assume that a written dispatch was the source in all instances is hazardous.⁹⁴⁶ Rather, relevant references to information transmission should be examined on a case-by-case basis before one arrives at such a conclusion.⁹⁴⁷ This

⁹⁴⁵ Lee (1993): 147.

⁹⁴⁶ In some instances it is quite clear that the source of information was something other than a certified report from a commander. Following the defeat to the Pechenegs at Diampolis in 1049, Constantine Arianites retreated to Adrianople before sending details of the disaster to Constantine IX; the emperor, however, is said to have ‘known something of what had happened prior to the letter’ (Skylitzes: 467.88-93; trans. 436). With armies sometimes in full flight for days following a defeat, a general was not always able to dispatch swift word to the emperor; Howard Johnston (2010: 288) observes that ‘a halt was a first precondition for the production of a dispatch’. Theophilos learned of the sack of Amorion from his returning ambassadors to the caliph (*Theophanes Continuatus*: 129-131; Skylitzes: 78.38-41) while Constantine IX’s official news channels again failed him only a year after Diampolis, when he apparently only learned of the loss at Diakene from those who had fled the battle and had returned to Constantinople (Skylitzes: 469.62-63). Perhaps the most famous example is the chaotic scene painted by Psellos after the Battle of Manzikert: in the days following, numerous messengers trickled into Constantinople, each with a different tale to tell (Psellos, *Chronographia*: II, 162-163 [XXIII]). The *droungarios* Adrian, sent to aid the besieged Syracuse in 878, officially learned of the fall of the city ten days after from soldiers returning to the Peloponnese (*Vita Basilii*: §§69-70). For informal channels of information diffusion, such as pilgrims, clerics, merchants, mercenaries, and deserters, see Lee (1993): 161-165; Austin and Rankov (1995): 83-86.

⁹⁴⁷ We should be wary of historians inventing the transmission of information for dramatic purposes. Margaret Mullett (1992a: 205-210) observes that Anna frequently focuses on the reception of letters or reports, and in particular Alexios’ reaction to them, for dramatic effect. Thus Alexios remains calm upon receiving word that Bohemond had crossed the straits, while those around him panic (Anna Komnene: XII.9.6); in a later scene, Alexios rises from his bed only when a third blood-stained courier enters his tent, declaring the Turks to be at hand (ibid: XV.2.1-2). A stark contrast to Alexios’ capacity to receive reports and respond accordingly is served by Andronikos I Komnenos, who, if Niketas Choniates is to be believed, dismissed alarming reports from messengers proclaiming that towns and provinces were under attack (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 320-321). For the *Kaiserkritik* aspect here, see Simpson (2009): 21-22. Similarly, Michael III is said to have been handed a written report on the hostile activities of the emir of Melitene whilst watching a race, only to berate his attendant for disturbing his enjoyment (*Theophanes Continuatus*: 198-199). Attaleiates, critical of Michael VII Doukas, relates how the emperor barely reacted to reports of Turkish encroachment near

process owes much to Doug Lee's work on strategic intelligence, where he is careful to question the probability of information transmission and the capacity of the historian to be aware of such matters.⁹⁴⁸

The Nature of Information Transmission and Written Reports

Jonathan Shepard suggests that intelligence and diplomatic reports, similar types of documents to military reports, may not have been committed to writing.⁹⁴⁹ He cites three reasons for this. The first is the lack of evidence to suggest that imperial envoys presented anything other than an oral account of their experiences upon their return to Constantinople. In pressing contexts, military reports may have been transmitted on a purely oral basis. The *taktika* attest that commands entrusted to officers before battle were frequently written,⁹⁵⁰ but once battle unfolded it would have been difficult to maintain written communication. This is perhaps evident in Leo the Deacon's account of the Battle of Arcadiopolis. Having asked John Alakasseus to scout the enemy and provide him with a 'full report' (πάντα διαγγέλλειν), Bardas Skleros

Chalcedon and Chrysopolis, 'remaining unmoved as though it was a foreign country which was suffering' (Attaleiates: 147.14-19). The evidence therefore suggests that an emperor's reaction to military reports and news in general could act as a contrivance for a historian to depict their subject in a particular fashion.

⁹⁴⁸ Lee (1993).

⁹⁴⁹ Shepard (1995a): 113-115. Lee (1993: 38-39), by contrast, believes that many diplomatic reports would have taken the form of written accounts to be housed in the government archives. For discussion of diplomatic and intelligence reports in the Late Roman and Byzantine world, see Lee (1986); idem (1993); Austin & Rankov (1995); Shepard (1995a).

⁹⁵⁰ The *Strategikon* of Maurice (§VII.A.4.6-8) reveals that 'written orders' (τὰ ἐγγράφως...μυνδάτα) should be communicated by officers to each individual *tagma* prior to battle. Leo VI (*Taktika*: §XII.80) notes that orders and commands for battle should, if possible, be given to each *turmarch* 'in writing' (ἐγγράφως). Leo (§XX.220) further recommends that orders for naval captains be written and sealed, to ensure that they did not fall into enemy hands. Finally, the *De Re Militari* (§32.4-15) advises that daily duties, for scouts and protectors of foragers in particular, be clarified 'in writing' (ἐγγράφως).

deployed his troops for action once he had heard Alakasseus' response (τῶν...λόγων διακούσας) – the indication being that the message was transmitted orally.⁹⁵¹

When longer distances are involved, the situation becomes more complex. Explicit references to rulers demanding a commander explain his actions in person are rare,⁹⁵² and logic dictates that it was not practical for a general to leave his post during an ongoing conflict. Furthermore, an emperor could just as easily gain an insight into proceedings and make decisions via letter.⁹⁵³ It may have been the prerogative of the commander to decide how the news should be delivered. Having proved unsuccessful in his mission to drive the Arabs from Crete, the *protospatharios* Photeinos is said to have himself reported the failure of the expedition to the Emperor Michael II.⁹⁵⁴ Conversely, the opportunity to personally regale the emperor with tales of one's military success presented a useful conduit to praise and favour. Upon Michael V Kalaphates' accession, Katakalon Kekaumenos arrived back from Sicily, bringing word of his skillful defence of Messina.⁹⁵⁵ Michael VIII Palaiologos, describing his service for Nicaean emperor John III Doukas Vatatzes, notes that he informed his master about his deeds upon his return. 'There was nothing that did not deserve to be recounted...the emperor listened with pleasure to reports of my achievements'.⁹⁵⁶

⁹⁵¹ Leo the Deacon: 109.2-11.

⁹⁵² Alexios sent a letter to his nephew John, the *doux* of Dyrrachion, requesting him to come in person and render an account of the affairs of his province in preparation for a campaign against the rebel Bolkan of Dalmatia. This, however, was rather exceptional in that John was suspected of rebellion, and the request thus appears to have been more a test of his loyalty (Anna Komnene: VIII.7.4). As an aside, we may note that John appears to have reported a defeat to Bolkan to the emperor in person (ibid: IX.4.6-5.1).

⁹⁵³ This matter also benefits from discussion of post-campaign investigations – see below, 200 n.1002.

⁹⁵⁴ *Theophanes Continuatus*: 76-77.

⁹⁵⁵ Skylitzes: 419.55-56.

⁹⁵⁶ οὐ γὰρ ἦν ὃ μὴ τῶν ἀξίων ἀκοῦσαι, καὶ ἡδυνθῆναι ἤκουε περὶ ἡμῶν πραττόντων βασιλεὺς τηνικαῶτα (*Typikon* of Michael VIII Palaiologos for the Monastery of St. Demetrios of the Palaiologoi-Kellibara in Constantinople: 451; trans. 1243).

The personal mode of reporting success or failure thus clearly had some appeal, and may have substituted for written correspondence in some instances.⁹⁵⁷

The oral military report should not however be afforded primacy, for the examples cited earlier in this chapter confirm that written dispatches were regularly sent from the front to keep the emperor abreast of distant military developments. When Anna Komnene writes of commanders such as George Palaiologos, Leo Kephalas, John Doukas, Landulph and Eustathios Kamytzes sending military reports to her father Alexios and receiving correspondence in turn, she refers to written accounts - *διὰ γραμμάτων*, *διὰ γραφῶν*, or similar forms.⁹⁵⁸ In other instances Anna relates that Alexios demanded to be kept informed of military developments via letter (*διὰ γραφῶν*).⁹⁵⁹ Drawing upon other sources, the many allusions to written intelligence reports⁹⁶⁰ and instances of rulers writing to campaigning generals and provincial

⁹⁵⁷ Generals are known to have reported personally to their superiors. Having been defeated by Abul-Aswar, emir of Dvin, outside Tivion, Constantine Iassites and his servant Constantine the Alan fled to Ani, where they personally reported the disaster to the *domestikos ton scholon* Nicholas. The news was in turn related to Constantine IX, and Iassites and Nicholas were relieved of their commands (Skylitzes: 438).

⁹⁵⁸ Anna Komnene: IV.I.1.19-21, IV.II.1.65-66 for Palaiologos keeping the emperor informed of Robert Guiscard's siege of Dyrrachion via letter; V.5.3-4 for Leo Kephalas, governor of Larissa, sending letters to the emperor keeping him informed of Bohemond's siege of the city; IX.2.3.79-80 for the *meGas doux* John Doukas sending a written report to the emperor following the reconquest of Crete and Cyprus; XIII.7.2 for letters from the admiral Landulph accusing the *meGas doux* Isaac Kontostephanos and his brother of being neglectful in guarding the straits of Lombardy against Norman convoys; XIV.5.1.83-87 for Alexios receiving a letter from Kamytzes detailing the Turkish attack on Nicaea. An earlier example dates from Nikephoros III Botaneiates' reign - when Kyzikos fell to the Turks in 1080, Anna relates that a letter from the town bore the news (II.3.2.63-65).

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid: XI.9.2.54-61 for Alexios insisting the young Bardas and Michael keep him informed by 'secret letters' of events whilst on campaign with Manuel Boutoumites in Cilicia; XII.8.1.42-47 for Alexios wanting his namesake, the *doux* of Dyrrachion, to immediately send him letters informing him of any developments vis-à-vis Bohemond's invasion; XV.2.5.58-61 for the emperor instructing Leo Nikerites to guard Lopadion against Turkish attacks and to report back to him any developments through letters.

⁹⁶⁰ Shepard (1995a) is in little doubt that some intelligence reports were put to writing. He cites an example: in the inventory for the 911 expedition to Crete, it is noted that the *strategos* of the Kibyrrheots was to obtain 'a true report' (*ἀληθὲς μανδάτον*), seemingly written, while the *archontes* of Cyprus was also to gather reports (*μανδάτα*) from his spies (Constantine VII, *De Ceremoniis*: I, 657)

commanders – be it to issue orders⁹⁶¹ or perhaps offer their own expertise on a particular matter⁹⁶² - not to mention the survival of tens of thousands of lead seals,⁹⁶³ further attest to a culture of regular written correspondence between the emperor and his subordinates.

Thus, Shepard's first concern over the format of diplomatic and intelligence reports, once modified to our argument, can be dispelled. His other two reservations are more readily dismissed. Shepard's notion that reports contained potentially important and sensitive information does not apply to our topic. His final proposal - that the carriers

⁹⁶¹ Some isolated examples may first be cited. Basil I furnished further instructions to his admiral Nasar when he requested information from the emperor about military operations (*Vita Basilii*: §63.17-20). Skylitzes frequently records John Tzimiskes (287.83-85, 288.10-12, 291.5-8) and Constantine IX Monomachos (424.65-71, 439.91-94, 450.6-16, 457.31-458.36, 467.96) giving orders to their generals via letters. The *Alexiad* contains many references to Alexios sending letters to his commanders containing instructions. This usually amounts to little more than the standard *διὰ γραμμάτων* (VIII.3.4.89-97; X.2.7.77-83; XI.3.1.42-44; XI.9.3.67-71; XII.8.1.42-47; XIII.1.4) or *διὰ γραφῆς/γραφᾶς* (III.9.3.15-25; IV.4.1.85-90; VIII.7.4; XII.3.1.69-71) and related terms, though occasionally we see more specific reference to the correspondence taking the form of written instructions - *διὰ γραφῶν παρεκελεύσατο* (X.9.2.72-78) or *χρηματίζοντα διὰ γραμμάτων* (XIV.5.4.24-31). When George Monomachatos was sent back to govern Dyrrachion by Nikephoros III Botaneiates, he received 'written orders' (*τὰς...προστάξεις ἐγγράφως*) with regard to his office (I.16.3.69-75). Paul Stephenson (2000: 145-146) supposed this reference 'confirms that a confidential dossier existed which outlined the principal duties of the provincial commander'. The Emperor Manuel wrote to Andronikos Kontostephanos with orders pertaining to the latter's campaign against the Hungarians in 1167 and the siege of Damietta in 1169; on both occasions he was allegedly ignored (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 154.43-55; 164.48-61).

⁹⁶² The exhortations of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos serve as an excellent example of this, and attest to a history of written correspondence between both parties: 'Many times through written memoranda (*ἐγγράφων ὑπαναγνωστικῶν*) have we roused you to courage, very often we have given you our guidance, yet we have no surfeit of communication with you' (Constantine VII, *Address of the Emperor Constantine VII to the Strategoi of the East*: 1.33-35; trans. 128). Illustrative examples may also be found in the *Alexiad*. Alexios gives advice by letter to the Albanian commander of Dyrrachion, Komiskortes, following a defeat (Anna Komnene: IV.8.4.32-33). Later, he corresponds with John Doukas via letter during the latter's siege of Mitylene, offering advice on how Doukas might best take the city (*ibid*: IX.1.5-6). Finally, as Isaac Kontostephanos continued to flounder in the wake of Bohemond's invasion, Alexios sent him a map of the Lombardy straits, and 'guidance in writing' (*ὑποδείξας ἐν γράμμασι*) for how best to attack the Normans at sea. As a result Kontostephanos was successful (*ibid*: XIII.7.4.71-78). Another example may be found in the *Epitome* of John Kinnamos, where it is said that Constantine Angelos, uncle of Manuel I Komnenos, was given 'written advice' (*γράμμασι τε παρεγγυωμένου*) from his nephew exhorting him not to attack King William of Sicily's fleet. Constantine ignored the advice and was defeated (Kinnamos: 120.11-121.10).

⁹⁶³ See Mullett (1989): 183.

of the information may not have been able to write – again is of limited relevance to our argument. Literacy among lower-class soldiers varied wildly,⁹⁶⁴ though just one of Robert Browning’s literacy classifications – those able only to read, sign their names and perhaps write simple messages⁹⁶⁵ - would be perfectly sufficient for most troops, not expected to write any reports beyond perhaps a few brief correspondences passed during battle. Leo VI recommends that *turmarchs* – divisional commanders - be able to read and write, the *hypostrategos* in particular, as it is he who would assume command duties should anything befall the *strategos*.⁹⁶⁶ Otherwise, such men would not have been entrusted to write progress reports. The task fell to the appointed general, usually a member of the military aristocracy, whose literary interests need no further elucidation.⁹⁶⁷ Even if he were unable to write the report, a secretary or member of staff could surely be expected to do so on his behalf.⁹⁶⁸

Military Documentation in Byzantium

Military operations almost certainly entailed a mass of written correspondence and administrative records.⁹⁶⁹ Thematic officials such as the *chartoularioi* and the *protonotarioi* were responsible for documentation at a provincial level, including troop registers and inventories,⁹⁷⁰ while we can surmise that the complex logistics of

⁹⁶⁴ Oikonomides (1993).

⁹⁶⁵ Browning (1993): 77.

⁹⁶⁶ Leo VI, *Taktika*: §IV.45.185-188. The manual *De Velitatione* makes frequent references to *turmarchs* leading scouting parties and reporting their findings back to the general (§§VI; VII.3; IX.1-7; X.7). Specifically, they are encouraged to survey the enemy camp and make ‘an honest report’ (τὸ ἀληθὲς καταμηνῦσαι) to the general, taking into account enemy numbers, their strength, and the terrain (§XIV.3).

⁹⁶⁷ See Browning (1978a): 41-44; Mullett (1989): 162-163.

⁹⁶⁸ It is said that Leo VI’s admiral, Podaron, was illiterate, and that the emperor was forced to appoint a judge to his staff to deal with cases involving rowers (Constantine VII, *De Administrando Imperio*: §51.93-102).

⁹⁶⁹ For the importance of literacy in relation to campaigning see Browning (1978a): 41-42; Holmes (2002b): 2.

⁹⁷⁰ For thematic administration see in general Kaegi (1982): 98-111; Haldon (1997b): 208-253.

grand campaigns necessitated extensive, largely statistical, documentation.⁹⁷¹ Firm evidence is lacking, but John Haldon's analysis of documents concerning expeditions to Crete and southern Italy in the first half of the tenth century is suggestive. These materials, found in chapters forty-four and forty-five of the *De Ceremoniis* of Constantine VII, consist of inventory lists of men and resources and the expenditure involved, but their appearance is an intricate web carefully untangled by Haldon. He convincingly argues that the Cretan lists do not represent complete original documents, but rather abridged inventories pieced together from the archives of various departments of government.⁹⁷² We may infer that the records proper held more detailed information than is presented in the *De Ceremoniis*, and, further, that this mass of administrative paperwork was required for all major campaigns. Haldon also proposes that the document listing items needed for the expedition to southern Italy in 934-935 was updated upon the completion of the mission.⁹⁷³ If this is the case, the inventory would represent evidence of the state's interest in documenting the consequences and results of major operations.

The most notable surviving examples of military and diplomatic documentation are found in works associated with Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos.⁹⁷⁴ It has long been acknowledged that chapters forty to fifty-seven of the second book of the *De Ceremoniis* draw upon several administrative documents,⁹⁷⁵ including the

⁹⁷¹ See Haldon (1997a); idem (1999): 139-189 for the logistics involved.

⁹⁷² Haldon (2000): esp. 243-256, 264-268. For discussion of documentation relating to provincial fiscal matters in Byzantium, highlighting the departmental nature of record-keeping, see Svoronos (1959): esp. 57-63.

⁹⁷³ Haldon (2000): 257.

⁹⁷⁴ Toynbee (1973: 602-603) thought both the *De Administrando Imperio* and the *De Ceremoniis* to be comprised of a set of files, a collection of documents which Constantine was apparently never able to fashion into an orderly literary work. For the documentary nature of the *De Ceremoniis*, see Bury (1907).

⁹⁷⁵ Bury (1907): 223-227.

aforementioned inventories for the failed Cretan expeditions of 911 and 949, as well as that for operations in southern Italy in 934 and 935.⁹⁷⁶ Similarly, the *De Administrando Imperio* is thought to contain numerous official documents, including intelligence and diplomatic reports.⁹⁷⁷ Beyond these we possess little documentation from the Middle Byzantine period, let alone texts relating to military affairs.⁹⁷⁸

Military Documentation and the Archives

Can we attribute the dearth of surviving documentation to Byzantine archival practices? The state archives, long lost, have been discussed in a number of period- and departmental-specific contexts,⁹⁷⁹ though we await the sort of comprehensive studies undertaken for ancient depositories.⁹⁸⁰ It is thought that government archives were improved from the fourth century,⁹⁸¹ and were perhaps at their most substantial over the following three hundred years.⁹⁸² Warren Treadgold is convinced that in the centuries following Heraclius' reign the government continued to maintain official records, while generals and other officials kept writing reports for their superiors, which were filed in the archives.⁹⁸³ Arnold Toynbee did not doubt that the archives contained a 'continuous series' of documents detailing the functions of the army.⁹⁸⁴ According to Christopher Kelly, a constant flow of documents, including reports from

⁹⁷⁶ The documents are also discussed by Treadgold (1992): 100-141.

⁹⁷⁷ For discussion of these documents and Constantine's sources for the *De Administrando Imperio* in general, see Toynbee (1972): 599-600; Treadgold (1992): 93-100; Whittow (1996a): 229-241, 244; Howard-Johnston (2001).

⁹⁷⁸ The problem is discussed by Whittow (1996a): 1-3.

⁹⁷⁹ For the period from the third to the sixth century, see C. Kelly (1994); for the late period, see Oikonomides (1985); idem (1997). For an overview of archival material concerning diplomacy, see Dölger & Karayannopoulos (1968): esp. 11-20; Beihammer (2008).

⁹⁸⁰ See, for example, Posner (1972); Sherk (1969); Schwirtlich (1981); Culham (1989).

⁹⁸¹ Lee (1993): 33-34; Millar (1977): 259-268; idem (1982): 18.

⁹⁸² Bury (1911): 7-9; C. Kelly (1994).

⁹⁸³ Treadgold (1992): 78-79; idem (2007): 348-349.

⁹⁸⁴ Toynbee (1972): 577-578, 600-601.

imperial agents in the provinces, were summarized and filed, while copies of replies or instructions were kept.⁹⁸⁵ Mark Whittow adopts a similar stance, identifying surviving lead seals as ‘the ghosts of vanished archives’, and arguing that archives were kept by departments of state, housing, among other items, diplomatic papers and military lists and reports from across the empire.⁹⁸⁶

Others, however, using works associated with Constantine VII as a barometer, are less sure. Ihor Ševčenko was not convinced that Constantine had abundant archival materials at his disposal; rather, he suggests that information was sparse and in some cases, entirely lacking.⁹⁸⁷ He cites as example Constantine’s difficulty in finding material on imperial expeditions, with the work of Leo Katakylas found not in the palace, but in the library of a monastery.⁹⁸⁸ Toynbee similarly considered Constantine’s inability to locate documents relating to the genesis and development of the themes for the *De Thematibus* indication that ‘such documents were not to be found – and this because there had not ever been any’.⁹⁸⁹ The composition of the *De Administrando Imperio* is a particular point of discussion. James Howard-Johnston, contesting Ševčenko’s comments, attributes the long-recognized inadequacies of the *De Administrando Imperio*⁹⁹⁰ to the failings of Constantine VII during the process of transcription, rather than to the department of the *Dromos*, which, he believes, kept much fuller and more accurate documents.⁹⁹¹ Howard-Johnston proposes that chapters twenty-seven to forty-six of the work represent four dossiers commissioned

⁹⁸⁵ C. Kelly (1994): 164-165.

⁹⁸⁶ Whittow (1996a): 1-3.

⁹⁸⁷ Ševčenko (1992a): 189-193.

⁹⁸⁸ Constantine VII, *Text C*: ll.24-39.

⁹⁸⁹ Toynbee (1972): 577-578, 600-601. For a similar view on a lack of material for the *De Thematibus*, see Huxley (1980): 31-32.

⁹⁹⁰ For the shortcomings of Constantine’s information, see also Beaud (1990): 553, 558.

⁹⁹¹ Howard-Johnston (2001): 319 n.55.

by Leo VI, which Constantine merely updated and partially expanded.⁹⁹² In the view of Jonathan Shepard, however, the vague and repetitive nature of the *De Administrando Imperio* does not support the idea of a collection of materials ‘amounting to a coherent historical synthesis’. Consequently, he concludes that extensive internal memoranda and narratives on foreign relations ‘were most probably not to be had in Byzantium’, with Constantine instead forced to rely on a mixture of old accounts and contemporary oral reports – essentially, whatever was available.⁹⁹³ There is a fundamental divergence between Howard-Johnston’s belief that ‘the collective memory had to be accurate (so written down) and accessible (so stored in a functioning archive)’,⁹⁹⁴ and Shepard’s doubts that the Byzantines even committed reports to writing, let alone maintained vast organized archives.

The Preservation of Campaign Accounts: Purposes and Problems

Extent of the archives aside, there can be little question that certain documents were granted long-term storage. Those pertaining to foreign relations, such as official letters (both outgoing and incoming),⁹⁹⁵ treaties,⁹⁹⁶ and border agreements⁹⁹⁷ were almost certainly copied and kept, so that they might serve as a point of reference in ongoing relations and future exchanges.⁹⁹⁸ Documents concerning legal matters

⁹⁹² Ibid.

⁹⁹³ Shepard (2003a): 109-112. Also idem (1985); idem (2004).

⁹⁹⁴ Howard-Johnston (2001): 319 n.55.

⁹⁹⁵ For the suggestion of a register of high-level outgoing imperial communications on the basis of evidence in the *Alexiad*, see Kresten (1997): 31-37 & n.78, 43, 53.

⁹⁹⁶ For the storage of treaties, see D. Miller (1971): 71-73.

⁹⁹⁷ Shepard (2005): 182.

⁹⁹⁸ Idem (2003a): 112-113; idem (2005): 180-181, 185-186. On the evidence of the *De Administrando Imperio*, Howard-Johnston (2001: 308-310) considered that the department of the *Dromos* ‘kept a reasonably well-ordered archive’, which contained information valuable for planners of foreign policy. In the sixth-century context, see Lee (1993: 35-40), though it is suspected that the tradition went back further and so, we may surmise, continued thereafter.

would have also been stored for much the same reason.⁹⁹⁹ Haldon speaks of ‘a literate and record-keeping administration, which depended upon the transmission of vital information in written form’, not just between officials, but from one generation to the next.¹⁰⁰⁰ But what of campaign dispatches and bulletins, intended to keep people abreast with current developments? Such documents were undoubtedly necessary for investigations into battlefield conduct¹⁰⁰¹ and major defeats,¹⁰⁰² but these procedures would have been conducted quickly and swiftly. What purpose might narrative records of campaigns serve for future reference?

Walter Kaegi is alone in postulating one idea: ‘Surviving records of older campaigns probably helped the Byzantines to calculate the logistical needs of contemporary campaigns’.¹⁰⁰³ While the empire’s enemies might change, geography was constant, and thus accounts of previous expeditions might prove useful to military planners:

We have no precise knowledge of how long older records and plans were kept, but some knowledge survived of aborted as well as unsuccessful military expeditions and invasions. That does not mean that the results of earlier experiences were always communicated to those who were responsible for planning and calculating the needs for the latest military operations. There

⁹⁹⁹ Morris (1985b): 140-141.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Haldon (2008): 542.

¹⁰⁰¹ Constantine VII (*Military Oration of the Emperor Constantine VII*: 399.82-96) recommends that written accounts of military actions be made by his agents so that specific deeds may be recorded and duly rewarded with honours and titles.

¹⁰⁰² The inquiry into the loss at Callinicum in 531 is discussed in Appendix III. Other inquiries are known, though documents are not mentioned in these proceedings. Following the failure of an expedition to Italy, the Emperor Basil I investigated the circumstances of the campaign; when he discovered that one of the leaders, Procopius, had perished because of a rift with his co-commander, Leo, he dismissed the latter (*Vita Basilii*: §66). An inquiry took place following the defeat to Symeon’s Bulgarians at Acheloos in 917 (Skylitzes: 204-205). Romanos III held a thorough inquiry into his disastrous Syrian campaign in 1030 (Psellos, *Chronographia*: I, 39-40 [XI]). Following a crushing defeat to the Hungarians in 1156, Michael Gabras and Michael Branas were called before the emperor to explain their conduct during the battle (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 132-133).

¹⁰⁰³ Kaegi (1993): 40.

probably was no systematic culling of surviving materials, but some traditions and reports survived, accurate or inaccurate as they might be.¹⁰⁰⁴

Kaegi's hypothesis is certainly plausible, but not entirely convincing. He speculates that old reports may have been of particular use to non-campaigning emperors with little experience, but appears indecisive in his conclusion that what rulers learned from the 'oral or written reports of others' is 'hard to judge and may have been extensive'.¹⁰⁰⁵ Kaegi is more specific in a subsequent study, proposing that Heraclius may have benefited from 'historical records on warfare with the Persians'. Kaegi hypothesizes that the 'writings' consulted by Heraclius during the winter of 621-622, mentioned by George of Pisidia as part of the emperor's military preparations on the eve of his Persian campaign, may have been earlier tracts and memoranda about military scenarios and plans for invasions of Persia.¹⁰⁰⁶ However, he ultimately settles on the idea that it was military manuals, namely the *Strategikon* of Maurice, which proved most useful to Heraclius in his military planning.¹⁰⁰⁷

Military manuals were in all probability a critical influence on Byzantine generals, since there is nothing to suggest that the Byzantines consulted recent official records of campaigns for military planning. Certainly, records could not be readily accessed whilst an emperor or general was on campaign.¹⁰⁰⁸ And just as Shepard observed that the number of foreigners living and serving in Constantinople would have negated the

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ibid: 47-48.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid: 46.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Idem (1979): 224-227.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Idem (2003): 74, 101-102, 107-109, 117-118, 308-309.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Shepard (1992a: 47-48) argues that campaigning emperors were at a distinct disadvantage from those bound to the palace in that they did not have access to a mobile archive of information. Though he refers to diplomatic material, the point may be made of military items also. Intriguingly, Doug Lee (1993: 40) suggests that the growth in archiving had much to do with the lack of campaigning emperors in the wake of Theodosios; prior to this, the need to be mobile would have encouraged emperors to limit the quantity of paperwork they brought with them.

need for written documents charting every development and nuance of foreign rulers and lands,¹⁰⁰⁹ military expertise would have been available from veteran commanders, who could better advise an emperor or general on military matters than a specific report.¹⁰¹⁰ In addition to these concerns, a more fundamental reason for the reticence in consulting recent reports may be put forward. Shepard notes the Byzantine preference for established insight over more contemporary perspective.¹⁰¹¹ Thus, Alexios I and the *kaisar* John Doukas are said to have consulted the Hellenistic military theorists Aelian and Apollodorus,¹⁰¹² while Constantine VII recommended bringing the first-century A.D. *Strategika* of Polyainos on campaign.¹⁰¹³ The antiquarian *Taktika* of Leo VI further illustrates this mentality. In his constitution on naval warfare, Leo notes with apparent regret that he was unable to find any information on this subject in older manuals, and so was forced to draw upon the thoughts of his own commanders.¹⁰¹⁴ This logic seems to have been entrenched in Byzantine military thinking. Though Nikephoros II Phokas produced a manual entirely reflective of current practice, he still felt it necessary to explain why the formations and tactics of Alexander the Great were no longer practical in the current climate of warfare, in order to justify his departure from tradition.¹⁰¹⁵

¹⁰⁰⁹ Shepard (2005): 187-188. For examples, see idem (1992a): 61 & n.81, 82.

¹⁰¹⁰ Austin and Rankov (1995: 119-120) likewise doubted the potential of dispatches being used for strategic ends by later emperors: 'Indeed, with the exception of itinerary-type material, the older the information...the less valuable it would have become for military purposes'. They argued that reports or memoirs might have provided rough guidance, but in any case were secondary to the recommendations of experienced advisors.

¹⁰¹¹ Shepard (1995a): 108. Cyril Mango's observation (1975: 14-15) that Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos favoured the older authors Strabo and Stephanus Byzantinus over information provided by his commanders and other agents when compiling the *De Thematribus*, a book on the provincial themes, is of great relevance here.

¹⁰¹² Anna Komnene: XV.3.6; Psellos, *Chronographia*: II, 181 (XVI).

¹⁰¹³ Constantine VII, *Text C*: II.198-199. For discussion of Polyainos see below, 306-315.

¹⁰¹⁴ Leo VI, *Taktika*: §XIX.3-8.

¹⁰¹⁵ Nikephoros II Phokas, *Praecepta Militaria*: §I.65-74. See also McGeer (1995a): 182.

While Shepard spoke in relation to prescriptive literature, the notion is perhaps true also of prose military literature.¹⁰¹⁶ Though well outside our period, the Emperor Julian's expedition against Persia in 363 provides an excellent example of the influence of classical accounts on contemporary military thinking. Kaegi has suggested that Julian may have consulted lost writings (τὰ συγγράμματα) of his uncle Constantine the Great on fighting the Persians, mentioned solely in the sixth-century *De Magistratibus* of John Lydus.¹⁰¹⁷ The exact substance of Constantine's writings is unknown, though given that he was merely planning for an expedition against Persia in 337, we may presume that they consisted of plans and advice rather than his own experiences. Kaegi eventually determines that Julian's strategy was 'the product of the consultation of many writings',¹⁰¹⁸ and it has long been argued that historical accounts of the campaigns of Alexander the Great and Trajan were among these.¹⁰¹⁹ In one oration, Julian relates that he always took with him 'a narrative of a campaign composed long-ago by an eyewitness', partly for advice, but also so that he might emulate the deeds described.¹⁰²⁰ Julian describes how, at one momentous point in the campaign, he read an account of Crassus' defeat at Carrhae to his officers, which served as a warning not to repeat the same mistakes,¹⁰²¹ the suggestion being that the aforementioned accounts covered much older events. Indeed, Ammianus Marcellinus relates that Julian read Polybius and was inspired to attack the gate of Pirsibora with

¹⁰¹⁶ Theophylact Simocatta, for example, relates that Emperor Maurice's brother-in-law, Philippikos, studied Scipio's campaigns against Hannibal (I.13-2-4). Kaegi (1990: 66) suggests that Procopius may have been read by soldiers of the tenth and eleventh century purely to delight in the stratagems of Belisarius, and while a more current general than Scipio, he nevertheless predates the period by several centuries. For the didactic element of Procopius' *Wars*, see Whately (2008).

¹⁰¹⁷ John Lydus: 3.33.34.

¹⁰¹⁸ Kaegi (1981b).

¹⁰¹⁹ Kaegi (1964b): esp. 34-35; Baldwin (1978b); Lomas Salmonte (1990); Lane Fox (1997).

¹⁰²⁰ ἀλλὰ καὶ στρατευομένων μοι ἔν γέ τι πάντως ἔπεται οἷον ἐφόδιον τῆς στρατείας πρὸς αὐτόππου πάλαι ξυγκείμενον (Julian: 3.124A-D; trans. 329).

¹⁰²¹ Ibid; Libanius, *Orations*: 18.53; 18.72; 18.233.

only a small group of men, just as Scipio Aemilianus did at Carthage.¹⁰²² There is thus little to suggest that Julian was informed by near-contemporary military reports, but much to advocate his consultation of historical accounts.¹⁰²³

It is possible that statistical information may have been more useful to military planners, but we should note that the inventory documents in the *De Ceremoniis* are preserved only because they were considered useful to a contemporary author with a particular interest in seaborne expeditions.¹⁰²⁴ Otherwise, such records may well have been lost, discarded or perhaps even scraped clean for recycling purposes.¹⁰²⁵

Howard-Johnston considered it ‘unlikely’ that pragmatic campaign documentation, including ‘reports from subordinate commanders’, would be maintained for an extensive period of time.¹⁰²⁶ In general terms, Kelly questioned if the state would have held onto any documents once they had served their purpose.¹⁰²⁷ Rosalind Thomas argued that administrative documents in the Ancient world were ‘probably’ destroyed as soon as they served their immediate function.¹⁰²⁸ Richard Britnell, speaking of medieval archives in general, considered it ‘rational to destroy many

¹⁰²² Ammianus Marcellinus: XXIV.2.14-17. See Lendon (2005): 290-309 for discussion of Ammianus likening the deeds of Julian to past heroes, suggesting that the emperor was frequently seeking to emulate them.

¹⁰²³ Kaegi (1964b). The approach attributed to Basil I in the *Vita Basilii* (§72.10-14; trans. 249) perhaps encapsulates the general attitude of soldier emperors: ‘At times he could explore the customs, lives, statecraft and military exploits of generals and emperors and after careful scrutiny, would choose the best and the most praiseworthy among these and would strive to emulate them in his own deeds’.

¹⁰²⁴ It is possible that these documents were intended to serve as an accompaniment to Constantine VII’s treatises on imperial military expeditions, but the most convincing scenario is that the *parakoimomenos* Basil Lekapenos compiled the material in light of the projected expedition to Crete in 960, which, prior to Constantine’s death, it seems he was scheduled to lead. See Haldon (2000): 236-238, 265-268; Treadgold (1992): 142-144. For the most recent affirmation that Lekapenos was involved in the production of the *De Ceremoniis*, see Featherstone (2004): 118-119. For Basil Lekapenos in general see Brokkaar (1972).

¹⁰²⁵ We know that the Byzantine administration used both paper (originally eastern from the mid-eleventh century, progressing to the western sort after 1204) and parchment for its archives – see Dölger & Karayannopoulos (1968): 27-28.

¹⁰²⁶ Howard-Johnston (1994): 69-70.

¹⁰²⁷ C. Kelly (1994): 166.

¹⁰²⁸ R. Thomas (1992): 53-55.

records once the operation to which they related had been accomplished'.¹⁰²⁹ It is perhaps unrealistic to expect that thousands of military reports would have been housed in an organized fashion for centuries.¹⁰³⁰ Such practicalities should be borne in mind when discussing the use of these documents by historians.

Archival Documents, Military Reports and Byzantine Historiography: Suitability of Purpose

We have noted instances where historians use or quote official documents. The majority of these are treaties and letters, which were almost certainly more accessible than military accounts. At all times, written reports of many types – military, diplomatic, those containing strategic intelligence – would have been filed by generals, envoys, spies and other imperial agents.¹⁰³¹ This glut of information posed great difficulties to a historian undertaking research. If reports were archived, they must have been almost impossible to index with any accuracy, especially if, as Shepard suggests, the date on reports may have been limited to the date of the month and/or the year of indiction.¹⁰³² It is apparent that certain historians had problems locating precise dates for military events: the author of the *Vita Basilii* protested that 'the exact date of each deed was not known',¹⁰³³ while lacunae in the *Alexiad* imply that Anna Komnene sought chronological details after completing her work, the

¹⁰²⁹ Britnell (1997): 186.

¹⁰³⁰ Of course, there may also have been practical reasons as to the lack of data, such as rot and damage caused by fire or other disasters. On this point, see Britnell (2007); for an example, see Lee (1993): 35-36.

¹⁰³¹ Christopher Kelly (1994: 164-165) speaks of 'a government heavily dependent for its operation on written reports, records and instructions'. For intelligence gathering in military contexts, see Dvornik (1974); Dagron & Mihăescu (1986): 248-254; Lee (1993): esp. 170-182.

¹⁰³² Shepard (1995a): 111-113; idem (2005): esp. 187-188.

¹⁰³³ ...ἄλλ' ὁμως ἐπεὶ ὁ ἐκάστης πράξεως ἀκριβῆς ἠγνοεῖτο χρόνος (*Vita Basilii*: §71.29-33; trans. 247).

suggestion being that they may not have been present in her original material.¹⁰³⁴ A related concern is voiced by Treadgold, who speculates that Byzantine historians did not make extensive use of the archives because all but the most recent material would have been hard to consult, given that the Byzantines perhaps lacked an efficient filing system.¹⁰³⁵ Therefore, locating older documents must have required extensive time and effort.¹⁰³⁶ Moreover, it is important to note that the idea of keeping records for the benefit of historians is a modern conception.¹⁰³⁷ Nikos Oikonomides regarded the Byzantine archives as being well kept ‘for practical – and not for historical – purposes’.¹⁰³⁸

This all points to a limited window for a historian or chronicler to consult a report or bulletin. Proposed campaign narratives which made use of dispatches, such as those perhaps commissioned by Heraclius and John Tzimiskes, were drafted in the years immediately following the event. At the other end of the spectrum, we might cite Anna Komnene, who could have drawn upon campaign reports as late as seventy years after the fact. Dynastic stability, time to peruse the archives, and, possibly, the earlier information-gathering efforts of her husband could account for Anna’s good fortune.¹⁰³⁹ Others writing long after events do not appear to have benefited from similar access. By Howard-Johnston’s hypothesis, Theophanes did not have direct

¹⁰³⁴ Ljubarskij (1998): 19. The many chronological errors in the *Alexiad* support this hypothesis – see Frankopan (1998).

¹⁰³⁵ Treadgold (2007): 365; C. Kelly (2004): 117-120. The problem of finding information in archives without the aid of an alphabetical index was prevalent in the medieval west also - see Clanchy (1993): 168-169.

¹⁰³⁶ These problems would have been exacerbated by the complex archival system in place at Constantinople, with document depositories spread across the various bureaus. John Haldon (2000: 243-256), for example, argues that the redactor of the inventory list for the Cretan expedition of 911 made several errors as he did not have before him documents from certain departments.

¹⁰³⁷ See in general Clanchy (1993).

¹⁰³⁸ Oikonomides (1997): 196-197.

¹⁰³⁹ See above, 97-124.

access to the dispatches of Heraclius, but rather knew them from his source: a contemporary history drafted by Heraclius' contemporary George of Pisidia.¹⁰⁴⁰ Similarly, Theophanes and also the Patriarch Nikephoros are not thought to have directly consulted reports for their narratives of the 717-718 siege of Constantinople, instead employing a lost historical work, believed to have been completed in the early 720s, as an intermediary source.¹⁰⁴¹ Nikephoros enjoyed better fortune in consulting victory reports Constantine VI sent to Constantinople during his wars with the Bulgars,¹⁰⁴² but only a few decades had passed since these were drafted. If not preserved by a historian, accounts of campaigns and battles sent from the front may have been either lost to the archives or destroyed before too long.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Howard-Johnston (1994).

¹⁰⁴¹ Idem (2010): 259, 306-307. For a different view on this lost source, see Afinogenov (2002).

¹⁰⁴² Patriarch Nikephoros, *Antirrheticus*: 508 col. 72. For discussion of probable bulletins issued by Constantine VI and used by chroniclers, see Sophoulis (2011): 16-17.

Conclusion

Though bulletins and dispatches may have been subject to poor and short-term archiving, this chapter argues that they were regularly circulated and later consulted by Byzantine historians. Since historians wrote predominantly about warfare, it is logical to think that prose reports made by those present in the field would have held considerable appeal. The following chapter, which investigates the links between the historical works of Kinnamos and Choniates and contemporary encomia, examines the argument that dispatches and bulletins may explain the many common elements of these sources.

CHAPTER III. BETWEEN ENCOMIA, HISTORIOGRAPHY AND

BULLETINS: THE CAMPAIGNS OF THE EMPERORS JOHN II

KOMNENOS AND MANUEL I KOMNENOS

Orations and poems addressed to the emperor, typically delivered in the aftermath of major events, are often thought to reflect the official line of the imperial court.¹⁰⁴³

General observations must be tentative, given that encomia praising Nikephoros II Phokas, John I Tzimiskes and Basil II have almost certainly been lost.¹⁰⁴⁴ While the poems produced by John Geometres and John of Melitene extol the martial prowess of Phokas and Tzimiskes and list their conquests,¹⁰⁴⁵ it might be expected that panegyrists commemorated individual campaigns, sieges, and battles in more detail. Nonetheless, surviving encomia from the tenth and eleventh centuries do not permit thorough reconstruction of military operations.¹⁰⁴⁶ In 901-902, Arethas of Caesarea delivered a number of orations to Leo VI, embellishing minor triumphs while omitting major disasters. None of these divulge many details about campaigns, perhaps inevitable given that Leo did not lead them personally, and was praised for his wisdom and piety rather than his skills in war.¹⁰⁴⁷ Leo's paranoia about his lack of military prowess perhaps manifests itself in the funeral oration he composed for his father Basil, which draws surprisingly little attention to Basil's campaigns and martial skill.¹⁰⁴⁸ If there had been greater focus on military actions in encomia of the great

¹⁰⁴³ Morris (2003): 243-244.

¹⁰⁴⁴ The probability of lost panegyrics from the reign of Nikephoros is noted by Cheynet (1990): 190.

¹⁰⁴⁵ See Lauxtermann (1998); idem (2003a); Kazhdan (2006): 249-252; van Opstall (2008)

¹⁰⁴⁶ For an overview of developments in imperial panegyric during this period, see Stone (2011).

¹⁰⁴⁷ For the orations see Arethas of Caesarea: II, 1-48, with further discussion in Jenkins, Laourdas & Mango (1954): 12-14. As Shaun Tougher (1997a: 164-193) demonstrates, it is incorrect to say that Leo had no interest in war, but the fact remains that his propaganda could not and did not cultivate the image of a warrior ruler.

¹⁰⁴⁸ *Basil I Funeral Oration*. For discussion see Adontz (1933b).

soldier emperors, then this was no longer the case by the mid-eleventh century.¹⁰⁴⁹ Michael Psellos praised Constantine IX Monomachos largely for his unwarlike virtues and victories achieved principally through diplomacy,¹⁰⁵⁰ while the orations of John Mauroπους to the same emperor heralded ‘bloodless’ triumphs over barbarians and rebels alike.¹⁰⁵¹ Psellos’ compositions for Romanos IV Diogenes are more belligerent in tone, focusing on Romanos’ physical prowess and soldiering, but still do not provide details of military actions.¹⁰⁵² Orations survive from the reign of Alexios Komnenos,¹⁰⁵³ but only from the period prior to his notable successes, and consequently are rather subdued. That of Theophylact of Ohrid, delivered in 1088, praised Alexios’ martial prowess though heralded the peace he achieved with the Turks and Pechenegs. John the Oxite, writing two years later, went so far as to criticize Alexios’ operations, counting the cost of the emperor’s unsuccessful campaigning.¹⁰⁵⁴ Though Manuel Straboromanos commended Alexios’ ‘restoration’ of the empire in a speech delivered after 1103, it is little more than a list of conquered peoples and territories.¹⁰⁵⁵

¹⁰⁴⁹ For developments in the imperial image, see Kazhdan (1983a): esp. 20-21; idem (1984a): 48-51; Dennis (1997b): 135.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Psellos, *Orations*: 1-106 (Or.I-VII). See Chamberlain (1986): esp. 19-20; Stone (2011): 177-179.

¹⁰⁵¹ Lefort (1976). See also Stephenson (2000): 111-112.

¹⁰⁵² Psellos, *Orations*: 175-186 (Or.XVIII-XXI).

¹⁰⁵³ It seems others have been lost – see Theophylact of Ohrid: I, 217; Manuel Straboromanos: 181. See also Gautier (1965): 181 n.11. George Tornikios (233-235) mentions there being a vast number of orators (μύριοι ῥήτορες) at the court of Alexios. For discussion of the poems of Stephen Physopalamites, one of which concerned Alexios’ capture of a Norman-occupied fortress, possibly Kastoria, see Mullett (1996b): 371-373.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Theophylact of Ohrid: I, 113-117; John the Oxite: 29-37. For discussion see Mullett (1996b): 367-370; Frankopan (2008): 72-89.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Manuel Straboromanos: 190-191. For discussion of Alexios’ presentation in contemporary panegyric, see Mullett (1996b).

The vague and abstract nature of these orations suggests that audiences would have been familiar with the events discussed.¹⁰⁵⁶ Yet it cannot be maintained that encomiasts glossed over military operations because people already knew of them. Certainly, there is no indication that the lack of lengthy descriptions of warfare in encomia was attributable to the rules of panegyric; examples from Late Antiquity demonstrate that colourful *ekphraseis* of war were not unknown in the genre.¹⁰⁵⁷ One suspects it is simply that the aforementioned surviving panegyrics date from times when authors and/or emperors were not particularly eager (nor indeed able) to propagate a martial image, and thus declined to provide lengthy accounts of military actions. Such content is evident once more in encomia from the reigns of John II and Manuel I Komnenos, owing perhaps as much to good fortune in survival than to the increasing militarization of the imperial image or changes in literary practice.¹⁰⁵⁸

Modern historians have encouraged reading these encomia alongside Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates to better understand the imperial image projected during the period.¹⁰⁵⁹ Michael Jeffreys recently described the output of twelfth-century poets Theodore Prodromos and ‘Manganeios Prodromos’ as ‘versified press-releases’, a means of communicating important news to a broad audience. Their works served a similar function to bulletins, though we might postulate a closer relationship still. Paul Magdalino has shown there to be considerable concurrence between details provided by ‘Manganeios Prodromos’ and John Kinnamos on the campaigns of

¹⁰⁵⁶ Shepard (2005): 179-180. The importance of narrative to a speech had long been contested, with a number of older commentators arguing that it was unnecessary since the facts would be known to the audience in advance (Heath 1997: 105-106).

¹⁰⁵⁷ See Russell (1998): 39-40 for examples. For military interest in imperial panegyric of Late Antiquity, see Lee (2007): 40-42.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Admittedly, encomia of the twelfth century appear longer and more developed than those of earlier periods – see Magdalino (1993a): 247-248.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Ibid; M. Jeffreys (2011).

Manuel Komnenos.¹⁰⁶⁰ Consequently, it is thought that the two authors consulted the same sources: prose bulletins, or ‘press releases’.¹⁰⁶¹ This practice was not new: Michael Psellos similarly sought material from high-placed sources to enable his writing of an encomium for Romanos Diogenes. While encomium need not be as comprehensive as history,¹⁰⁶² good panegyric required historical investigation to determine truth and accuracy.¹⁰⁶³ Embellishment was inevitable, but complete fabrication was unlikely, given that listeners and readers may have participated in the events described.¹⁰⁶⁴ Bulletins served as attractive sources in this respect, not least since they ensured encomiasts conformed to the official version of events.¹⁰⁶⁵

Our possession of two historical narratives and an abundance of encomiastic sources covering the reigns of John II and Manuel I Komnenos presents us with a unique opportunity. Shared content points towards a common source, almost certainly contemporary bulletins. Analysis of the sources sheds light on the content and purpose of imperial dispatches, as well as providing additional insight into the working methods and objectives of John Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Magdalino (1993a): 442-453.

¹⁰⁶¹ M. Jeffreys (2011): esp. 27-29.

¹⁰⁶² A thirteenth-century panegyrist maintained that encomium should be briefer than a historical narrative, though Dimiter Angelov (2007: 60-61) contests this statement, arguing that encomiasts generally wrote something akin to ‘official biographies’ of the emperor.

¹⁰⁶³ Russell (1998): 39.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Dennis (1997b): 137.

¹⁰⁶⁵ The link is all the more tangible when we recall that Choniates occasionally composed victory letters and bulletins, with the example of thirteenth-century imperial secretary Manuel Holobolos perhaps providing further evidence of the link between writers of bulletins and orators. Holobolos accompanied the Emperor Andronikos II on campaign to Asia Minor in 1284. On account of a letter which Patriarch Gregory of Cyprus sent to Andronikos, requesting that Holobolos become a messenger of imperial victories, Dimiter Angelov (2007: 44-45, 46 n.51) speculates that Holobolos was charged with writing bulletins for Andronikos, none of which survive.

I. Military Description in Encomia

Byzantine encomia generally adhered to the guidelines of popular rhetorical handbooks and exercises from Antiquity. The fourth-century rhetorician Menander Rhetor is credited with two treatises on epideictic (display) speeches, with one discussing the imperial oration, or *basilikos logos*.¹⁰⁶⁶ Menander continued to be consulted by Byzantine encomiasts well into the Late period.¹⁰⁶⁷ If not Menander, then instructional guides of a similar nature formed an important part of the rhetorical curriculum in Byzantine education.¹⁰⁶⁸ Equally influential were the four Hellenistic treatises attributed to the sophists Aelius Theon, Pseudo-Hermogenes, Aphthonius, and Nicolaus on *progymnasmata*, preliminary exercises in numerous areas of rhetoric, including encomium.¹⁰⁶⁹ The *progymnasmata* credited to fourth-century sophist Libanius of Antioch, whose works were well-known to the Byzantines, collected actual exercises in prose composition for learning purposes.¹⁰⁷⁰ While Byzantine encomiasts were not bound to Hellenistic principles, these treatises and exercises (or derivatives of) remained essential reading.¹⁰⁷¹ Consequently, it is important to consider what these treatises have to say about exposition of military affairs.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Menander Rhetor, *Peri Epideiktikon*. For Menander's life and teachings see Heath (2004).

¹⁰⁶⁷ Angelov (2007): 51-56.

¹⁰⁶⁸ See above, 9-10 for bibliography.

¹⁰⁶⁹ See above, 9-10 for bibliography.

¹⁰⁷⁰ See Kennedy (1983): 150-163.

¹⁰⁷¹ This cursory look at the background to oratory and encomium is not intended to be exhaustive, and does not take into account important models from Antiquity, such as Isocrates, Demosthenes and Themistius (see Kennedy 1997: 15-18; Russell & Wilson 1981: xi-xxxiv). For a study of standard influences and models on rhetoricians of the thirteenth century, unlikely to differ much from those of the preceding period, see Angelov (2007): 51-64.

Menander Rhetor

Menander, asserting that ‘courage reveals an emperor more than do other virtues’, encouraged panegyrist to precede an account of their subjects’ actions during peace with those in war.¹⁰⁷² The author should describe the topography and geographical features of the regions where the campaigns and battles took place, while ambushes organized and foiled by the emperor are also to be mentioned. One set of prescriptions is particularly significant:

You will also describe infantry battles, the equipment of cavalry for battle, and the engagement of a whole army against a whole army... There are many such things in the historians, in the Persian wars in Herodotus, in the Peloponnesian war in Thucydides, in Theopompus’ *Philippica*, and in Xenophon’s *Anabasis* and *Hellenica*. You should also describe the emperor’s own battles, and invest him with all impressiveness and knowledge, as Homer does for Achilles, Hector, and Ajax. You should also describe his armour and his campaigns, dwelling on the display of prowess and combat.¹⁰⁷³

¹⁰⁷² ...γνωρίζει γὰρ βασιλέα πλέον ἢ ἀνδρεία (Menander Rhetor, *Peri Epideiktikon*: 372.25-31; trans. 85).

¹⁰⁷³ διαγράψεις δὲ ἐν ταῖς πράξεσι ταῖς τοῦ πολέμου καὶ φύσεις καὶ θέσεις χωρίων ἐν οἷς οἱ πόλεμοι, καὶ ποταμῶν δὲ καὶ λιμένων καὶ ὄρων καὶ πεδίων, καὶ εἰ ψιλοὶ ἢ δασεῖς οἱ χῶροι, καὶ εἰ <λεῖοι ἢ> κρημνώδεις. ἐκφράσεις δὲ καὶ λόχους καὶ ἐνέδρας καὶ τοῦ βασιλέως κατὰ τῶν πολεμίων καὶ τῶν ἐναντίων κατὰ τοῦ βασιλέως· εἶτα ἔρεῖς, ὅτι σὺ μὲν τοὺς ἐκείνων λόχους καὶ τὰς ἐνέδρας διὰ φρόνησιν ἐγίνωσκες, ἐκεῖνοι δὲ τῶν ὑπὸ σοῦ πραττομένων οὐδὲν συνίεσαν. καὶ μὴν καὶ πεζομαχίας ἐκφράσεις καὶ ἰπέων διασκευὰς εἰς ἵππομαχίαν καὶ ὅλου στρατοπέδου πρὸς ὅλον στρατόπεδον μάχην, ἥδη δὲ πού καὶ ναυμαχίαν, εἰ γένοιτο· οἷα πολλὰ παρὰ τοῖς συγγραφεῦσιν, ἐν τοῖς Μηδικοῖς παρὰ Ἡροδότῳ, παρὰ Θουκυδίδῃ πάλιν ἐν τοῖς Πελοποννησιακοῖς, καὶ παρὰ Θεοπόμπῳ ἐν τοῖς Φιλιππικοῖς καὶ Ξενοφῶντι ἐν τῇ Ἀναβάσει καὶ τοῖς Ἑλληνικοῖς βιβλίοις. καὶ μὴν καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ βασιλέως ἐκφράσεις μάχας καὶ μεριθήσεις ἅσασαν ἰδέαν καὶ ἐπιστήμην, ὡς Ἀχιλλεῖ, ὡς Ἔκτορι, ὡς Αἴαντι περιτίθησιν ὁ ποιητής. διαγράψεις δὲ καὶ πανοπλίαν βασιλέως καὶ ἐπιστρατείας, ἐπιτείνας μὲν τῷ καιρῷ τῆς ἀριστείας καὶ τῆς συμπλοκῆς, ὅταν βασιλέως ἀριστείαν ἐκφράζη (ibid: 373.16-374.6; trans. 87).

Menander recommends that military operations undertaken by the emperor be related in great detail. That the encomiast is advised to look to Thucydides and Xenophon for descriptions of battle suggests that an encomium could resemble a historical account. Byzantine panegyrists similarly consulted prose narratives – almost certainly dispatches and bulletins - for inspiration as well as information. Menander’s emphasis on the physical prowess and courage of the emperor is reflected in Byzantine encomia of the twelfth century, a reflection also of the preoccupation of bulletins with the courageous feats of the emperor.

Progymnasmata

The fifth-century sophist Nicolaus observed that by his day encomium was no longer limited to a single form, but included speeches of arrival, addresses to officials, and funeral orations; he declines to cover these individually, instead disclosing only that appropriate for beginners.¹⁰⁷⁴ Encomia celebrating a ruler or his return from campaign are not specific topics for discussion, but there are nevertheless stipulations in the Hellenistic treatises on the *progymnasmata* which may be applied to military-themed compositions.

The central element in any encomium were the actions of the subject, liable to include deeds in war. Pseudo-Hermogenes writes: ‘Most important are deeds...for example, having chosen a soldier’s life, what did he accomplish in it?’¹⁰⁷⁵ Relevant also are the musings of Aelius Theon, the earliest of the Hellenistic commentators:

¹⁰⁷⁴ Nicolaus: 47, 49; trans. 155-156.

¹⁰⁷⁵ τὸ δὲ κυριώτατον αἱ πράξεις...οἷον στρατιωτικὸν βίον ἐλόμενος τί ἐν τούτῳ κατέπραξε (Pseudo-Hermogenes: VII.7; trans. 82).

Actions are praised on the basis of the occasion and whether someone did them alone or was the first when no one else acted, or did more than others or with few helpers or beyond what was characteristic of his age or contrary to expectation or with toils or because they were done very easily or quickly.¹⁰⁷⁶

We might apply this guidance to individual feats of valour in battle, especially when we come to observe the attention drawn to Manuel Komnenos' heroics at the age of twenty-two in panegyric literature.

Panegyrics of the twelfth century can be highly descriptive in the episodes they choose to focus on. *Ekphrasis*, a rhetorical technique of description which endeavoured to bring the scene before the eyes of the audience, was seen to have a function in encomium, as Pseudo-Hermogenes explains: 'You should know that some of the more exact teachers do not make *ekphrasis* an exercise, on the grounds that it is already included in...encomium; for there too, we describe places...and actions and persons'.¹⁰⁷⁷ Scenes of war were considered favourable subjects. Aelius Theon suggests objects such as weapons, armour and siege engines, citing Thucydides' description of the preparation of a siege engine.¹⁰⁷⁸ Thucydides was considered useful for a number of other models for *ekphraseis*: naval battles, cavalry encounters and sieges, in particular his account of the siege of Plataea, known to have served as a

¹⁰⁷⁶ ἐπαινεταὶ δὲ εἰσὶν αἱ πράξεις καὶ αἱ διὰ τὸν καιρὸν, καὶ εἰ μόνος ἔπραξέ τις ἢ πρῶτος, ἢ ὅτε οὐδεὶς, ἢ μᾶλλον τῶν ἄλλων, ἢ μετ' ὀλίγων, ἢ ὑπὲρ τὴν ἡλικίαν, ἢ παρὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα, ἢ μετὰ πόνων, ἢ ὅσα ῥᾶστα ἢ τάχιστα ἐπράχθησαν (Aelius Theon: 110.21-25; trans. 51).

¹⁰⁷⁷ Ἴστέον δέ, ὡς τῶν ἀκριβεστέρων τινὲς οὐκ ἔθηκαν τὴν ἔκφρασιν εἰς γύμνασμα ὡς προειλημμένην καὶ ἐν μύθῳ καὶ ἐν διηγήματι καὶ ἐν τόπῳ κοινῶ καὶ ἐν ἐγκωμίῳ· καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖ, φασίν, ἐκφράζομεν καὶ τόπους καὶ ποταμοὺς καὶ πράγματα καὶ πρόσωπα (Pseudo-Hermogenes: X.7; trans. 86). For *ekphrasis* in encomia, see most recently Webb (2009): esp. 78-81.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Aelius Theon: 118-119; Thucydides: 4.100. On a related note, it is possible that such guidance contributed to the preponderance of digressions on siege equipment in classicizing Byzantine historiography. See Kelso (2003); Sullivan (2010a).

point of reference for Byzantine historians.¹⁰⁷⁹ Yet to write one's own *ekphrasis* of a war was an important exercise for a rhetorician. Aelius Theon provides a brief overview of the process:

In an *ekphrasis* of a war we shall first recount events before the war; the raising of armies, expenditures, fears, the countryside devastated, the sieges; then describe the wounds and the deaths and the grief, and in addition the capture and enslavement of some and the victory and trophies of others.¹⁰⁸⁰

This summary, applicable to most accounts of a war, is expanded somewhat by Libanius, whose *progymnasmata* include a model description of an infantry battle. Having mentioned the composition and deployment of both armies, the writer should progress to the action, describing those killed, the wounds they suffered, and the weapons employed.¹⁰⁸¹ These elements - the gore in particular - feature in battle descriptions of the Middle Byzantine period.¹⁰⁸² Byzantine historians and rhetoricians gained experience in writing battle accounts through such exercises, in conjunction with their reading of Homer and historical works from Antiquity. Menander insists that the author of a *basilikos logos* 'describe...the engagement of a whole army against a whole army', leading Ruth Webb to conclude that '*ekphraseis* of battles and military actions had a role in epideictic'.¹⁰⁸³ This notion is affirmed by study of

¹⁰⁷⁹ Aelius Theon: 68. For discussion of this in relation to historians of Late Antiquity see above, 14-15.

¹⁰⁸⁰ ἐπιχειρήσομεν δὲ τὰ μὲν πράγματα ἐκφράζοντες ἕκ τε τῶν προγιγνομένων, καὶ ἐκ τῶν συμβαινόντων τούτοις, οἷον ἐπὶ πολέμου διεξελευσόμεθα πρῶτον μὲν τὰ πρὸ τοῦ πολέμου, τὰς στρατολογίας, τὰ ἀναλώματα, τοὺς φόβους, τὴν χώραν δηουμένην, τὰς πολιορκίας, ἔπειτα δὲ τὰ τραύματα καὶ τοὺς θανάτους καὶ τὰ πένθη, ἔφ' ἅπασι δὲ τῶν μὲν τὴν ἄλωσιν καὶ τὴν δουλείαν, τῶν δὲ τὴν νίκην καὶ τὰ τρόπαια (Aelius Theon: 119.14-21; trans. 46). The same is suggested by Pseudo-Hermogenes: X.2-4; Aphthonius: XII.1-2.

¹⁰⁸¹ Libanius, *Progymnasmata*: 428-431.

¹⁰⁸² See below, 335-344.

¹⁰⁸³ Webb (2009): 158-159. Menander even uses the term *ekphrasis* twice during the passage in question.

twelfth-century panegyric commemorating the successes of John II and Manuel I Komnenos.

II. The Historical Record of the Campaigns of the Emperor John II Komnenos

The rhetors Michael Italikos, Theodore Prodromos and Nikephoros Basilakes composed a number of panegyrical works during the reign of John II Komnenos.¹⁰⁸⁴

Through comparison with the historical record, as well as other sources, one is able to establish the presence of a common source, unquestionably official material. This not only allows us to identify important strands of the record of campaigns, but also gain further insight into the approach and method of Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates.

Encomiasts Seizing upon Bulletins: The Example of Michael Italikos

Michael Jeffreys has argued that Theodore Prodromos may have pioneered the genre of the ‘versified press release’, a process which involved taking a prose ‘press release’ – typically a dispatch – and reworking it into verse, allowing for communication of imperial news to a wider audience.¹⁰⁸⁵ Prodromos’ oration recounting John II Komnenos’ expedition to Cilicia and northern Syria in 1137-1139 is cited as an example of this, though letters of Michael Italikos regarding the same campaign better demonstrate how prose bulletins could be seized upon by orators for a different mode of broadcast. In his letter to Stephen Meles praising the *logothetes* for the bulletin heralding the achievements of John, Italikos reveals that the words of Meles still resonated within him as he mounted a platform, and, in his capacity as *didaskalos tou apostolou*,¹⁰⁸⁶ ‘made [Meles’] words drift over the crowd’.¹⁰⁸⁷ This process is described in Italikos’ letter to *megas domestikos* John Axouch:

¹⁰⁸⁴ For Nikephoros Basilakes, see Browning (1962a): 181-184. For Theodore Prodromos, see Hörandner (1974): 21-35.

¹⁰⁸⁵ M. Jeffreys (2011): esp. 27-28.

¹⁰⁸⁶ The *didaskalos tou apostolou* was a cleric who taught at the Patriarchal School of Constantinople. On the *didaskaloi* see Angold (1995): 91-98. For the Patriarchal School, see Browning (1962a).

Then, carried away by delirium from hearing [about the campaign], and, since I am *didaskalos*, I jumped on my platform, and submerged everybody in the flow of my words: I celebrated the struggles of the emperor and told my audience of how he attacked the Cilicians, how he has submitted all of Syria, how the brilliance of your spear reduced the Kelts to ash in Syria.¹⁰⁸⁸

In his *basilikos logos*, Italikos again champions his role as herald of John Komnenos' accomplishments. He tells of how he shook the eardrums of the crowd.¹⁰⁸⁹ As John captured towns of Syria, Italikos described his battles, drawing many listeners to his platform.¹⁰⁹⁰ Prior to this latest conflict, he had celebrated John's wars against the Pechenegs, Hungarians and Turks in similar fashion.¹⁰⁹¹ Perhaps this praise also took the form of prose and verse compositions, now lost, to which Italikos refers in the oration, though he also discloses that he often informed large groups of John's progress.¹⁰⁹² One may deduce that Italikos heard the original bulletin and was then charged with rewording it and distributing the message to larger audiences.¹⁰⁹³

¹⁰⁸⁷ Ἐναύλους τοίνυν ἔχων τὰς τοιαύτας ἐγὼ φωνὰς καὶ προσιζήσασαν τὴν ὄλην ἀρμονίαν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, ἀνῆλθον ὡς εἶχον εὐθὺς ἐπὶ τοὺς τῆς διδασκαλίας ὀκρίβαντας καὶ ὧν ἐνεφορήθη λόγων πρὸς ἄλλους ἐπλήρουν καὶ μετωχέτευον τὰ σὰ ρεύματα ἐπὶ τὸν λαόν, διακόνῳ τῇ γλώσσει χρώμενος. καὶ τότε οἶδα τοῖς σοῖς λόγοις καλλωπισάμενος καὶ ἔδοξα τότε κομψότερός τε καὶ ῥητορικώτερος ἢ τὸ πρότερον (Michael Italikos: 233.14-20).

¹⁰⁸⁸ αὐτίκα γοῦν πρὸς τὴν ἀκοὴν ἐνθουσιάσας καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἀναπηδήσας ὀκρίβαντας – διδάσκαλος γάρ εἰμι – πᾶσαν κατακλύζω ψυχὴν τῷ τοῦ λόγου ρεύματι, τοῦ βασιλέως τοὺς ἀγῶνας δημηγορῶν καὶ τοῖς περιεστηκόσιν ἀφηγοῦμενος ὅπως Κιλικῶν ἐπέβη, ὅπως Συρίαν ὄλην κατεδουλώσατο, πῶς ὑπερέσχε τοῦ δόρατος ὑμῶν ἢ ἀστραπῆ τῆς μελίας τῶν ἐν Συρίᾳ Κελτῶν (ibid: 229.21-230.4).

¹⁰⁸⁹ Ibid: 246.12-25.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Ibid: 256.12-257.15.

¹⁰⁹¹ Ibid: 267.17-268.4.

¹⁰⁹² Ibid: 268.5-9.

¹⁰⁹³ See Magdalino (1993a): 313-314. We might infer a similar process in Michael Psellos' claim that the achievements of Romanos IV Diogenes had been proclaimed with little fanfare, as he put forward his own case for serving as herald of these feats (see above, 162-165).

The Campaign against the Pechenegs, 1121-1122

Since encomia composed prior to 1130 have not survived, we are reliant on Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates for the first half of John's reign. Their accounts of John's victory over the Pechenegs at Beroe in 1122 possess many similarities.¹⁰⁹⁴ Both mention the efforts of the emperor to win over Pecheneg chieftains, though only Choniates describes the full extent of John's trickery, a stratagem which involved seducing the chiefs through lavish gifts so that the emperor might sow dissent and divert focus while he committed his troops to battle.¹⁰⁹⁵ In an oration of 1143, Michael Italikos mentions that John made use of a 'splendid ruse' (καλὴν ἐξαπάτην) against the 'Scythians', likening it to God's deception of King Ahab of Israel.¹⁰⁹⁶ This is probably a reference to the actions described by Choniates, though a quick perusal of the life of Ahab does not yield anything remotely similar.¹⁰⁹⁷

The full extent of John's deceit is perhaps revealed by the Armenian Basil bar Shumana, bishop of Edessa, who, it is said, was present during these events and drafted an account, apparently preserved verbatim in the thirteenth-century chronicle of Michael the Syrian. The Pechenegs are said to have come to Constantinople and agreed peace with John, who allowed them to dwell on Roman land. John, however, 'availed himself of cunning', and swiftly ordered that the thousands of new arrivals be detained. On that same day, he marched to battle.¹⁰⁹⁸ We might reconcile Basil's testimony with that of Choniates by suggesting that the ones who made agreements

¹⁰⁹⁴ For the battle of Beroe, see Chalandon (1912): 48-51.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 14.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Michael Italikos: 284.28-285.1.

¹⁰⁹⁷ III *Kings* 16.29-22.39; II *Chronicles* 18. Possibly Italikos merely intended to make a general reference to God using an anonymous prophet to fool Ahab into condemning himself to divine judgment; the arrogant king was later enticed by God to give battle, unaware that he would perish (III *Kings* 22). For discussion of these events, see Niditch (1993): 35-37.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Michael the Syrian: III, 207.

with John and whom he later detained were those he tempted with gifts. It seems that John employed diplomacy to divide the enemy and afford him the element of surprise. His skill in deceit appears to have been a significant aspect of post-battle reports.

Description of the battle itself varies, influenced by the rhetoric of Choniates and Kinnamos. Choniates, for example, pays greater attention to tactics, elucidating how the Pechenegs deployed their wagons in a circle and left gaps at certain points, enabling them to retreat when hard pressed.¹⁰⁹⁹ Yet, despite these differences, the basic outline of the battle is essentially the same: following a fierce engagement, the Pechenegs retreat within their wagon laager, which the Byzantines eventually breach through an assault by the Varangian Guard.¹¹⁰⁰ These concurrences would suggest that a common source underlies the accounts of Kinnamos and Choniates.

That this underlying source was originally a bulletin or commemorative account is indicated by a number of elements. Choniates includes several details which reflect favourably on John Komnenos. So we are told that the emperor ‘provided assistance all the while to his beleaguered troops’,¹¹⁰¹ and that he was ‘valiant and a cunning tactician by nature...the first to execute the instructions he gave his generals and soldiers’.¹¹⁰² It is John who devises the plan to break the Pecheneg lines, and he who

¹⁰⁹⁹ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 15. Basil of Edessa, whose account of the battle is preserved by Michael the Syrian (III, 207), notes that the Pechenegs, according to custom, surrounded their camp with wagons, forming a defensive wall. Basil further states that Pecheneg wives and children would accompany their men everywhere, confirming that they would have been present.

¹¹⁰⁰ Kinnamos: 8; Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 16.

¹¹⁰¹ καὶ αὐτὸς δὲ βασιλεύς, τοὺς ἐταίρους ἔχων μεθ’ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ὅσον περὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος φυλακὴν ἀποτέτακτο, αἰεὶ πῶς ἐπεβοήθει τοῖς κάμνουσι μέρεσιν (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 14.68-15.70; trans. 10).

¹¹⁰² Ἦν οὖν τῆνικαῦτα τὸν Ἰωάννην ὄρᾶν σοφὸν τι χρῆμα τοῖς ὑπ’ αὐτὸν καθιστάμενον· οὐ γὰρ ἀγαθὸς μόνον καὶ ποικίλος τὸ ἦθος ἐδείκνυτο σύμβουλος, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρῶτος παρεῖχε πέρατι ὀπόσα στρατηγοῖς καὶ τάγμασιν ὑπετίθετο (ibid: 15.83-86; trans. 10).

leads them into the struggle ‘like an unbreakable wall’. The attention drawn to John’s religious fervour is very much indicative of an official tradition:

His behaviour on the battlefield gave witness to his great piety: whenever the Roman phalanxes were hard pressed by the enemy...he would look upon the icon of the Mother of God and, wailing loudly and gesturing pitifully, shed tears hotter than the sweat of battle. It was not in vain that he acted thus; donning the breastplate of the power from on high, he routed the Pecheneg battalions just as Moses had turned back the troops of Amalek by raising his hands.¹¹⁰³

This element is not preserved by Kinnamos, something we might view in light of Paul Stephenson’s proposal that Kinnamos occasionally restrained his coverage of John Komnenos so that his deeds did not overshadow those of Manuel Komnenos.¹¹⁰⁴

Such reasoning might also account for Kinnamos hinting at some dissension in the Byzantine ranks. According to him, the Byzantines did not agree with their leader’s plan to march against the Pecheneg wagons on foot; only the axe-wielding Varangians indulged his bold scheme.¹¹⁰⁵ Commanders were not encouraged to expose themselves to danger, and so it is to be expected that John Komnenos’ subordinates would have attempted to dissuade him.¹¹⁰⁶ Their concerns may have been heightened by the injury the emperor suffered, with Kinnamos reporting that an arrow struck John

¹¹⁰³ τὸ δὲ δὴ καινὸν καὶ πολλὴν ἐκείνῳ μαρτυροῦν τὴν εὐσέβειαν, ὅποτε τῶν Ῥωμαίων αἱ φάλαγγες ἔκαμνον ἐπιβριθόντων τῶν πολεμίων καὶ συμπιπτόντων παραβολώτερον, τὴν τῆς θεομήτορος εἰκόνα παρεστῶσαν ἔχων, μετ’ οἰμωγῆς ἐμβλέπων, ἔλεεινοῖς τοῖς σχήμασι θερμότερα τῶν ἐναγωνίων ἰδρώτων κατέλειβε δάκρυα. καὶ ἦν οὐκουν εἰς κενὸν διαπραπτόμενος οὕτως, ἀλλ’ ἐκ τοῦ μάλα αὐτίκα τὴν ἐξ ὕψους θωρακίζόμενος δύναμιν τὰς Σκυθικὰς ἐτροποῦτο παρεμβολάς, ὡς Μωϋσῆς πρότερον τῆ τῶν χειρῶν ἐκτάσει τὰς Ἀμαληκίτιδας ἴλας ἐνέκλινεν (ibid: 15.86-93; trans. 10).

¹¹⁰⁴ Stephenson (1996).

¹¹⁰⁵ Kinnamos: 8.

¹¹⁰⁶ See below, 353-355.

in the foot early in the contest.¹¹⁰⁷ Choniates oddly overlooks this event, but it is mentioned in imperial panegyric.¹¹⁰⁸ Michael Italikos' oration for Manuel Komnenos recalls 'the Scythian arrow which pierced the foot' of his father John.¹¹⁰⁹ The encomium Nikephoros Basilakes composed in honour of John Axouch devotes considerable attention to the occasion when his subject rushed to the side of the Emperor John, who had been afflicted with a foot wound whilst leading the infantry guardsmen into battle against the 'Scythians'.¹¹¹⁰ Writing c.1159, 'Manganeios Prodromos', encomiast of Manuel Komnenos, recalls how John 'made an assault against the Scythians and soaked his sandal with his heel's honourable blood'.¹¹¹¹

Though Basilakes' encomium was written at least fifteen years after the battle, there is no reason to doubt that the dramatic incident was prevalent in contemporary reports of the battle, especially given that Axouch was John's most trusted servant.¹¹¹² Michael Italikos, for example, was certainly familiar with Axouch's contribution to the emperor's successes beyond the Danube.¹¹¹³ It is surprising that Choniates omits the episode, given his favourable portrayal of Axouch and the stress placed upon his close relationship with John Komnenos.¹¹¹⁴ Such discrepancies between the reports of Choniates and Kinnamos suggest that by the late twelfth century there existed a number of accounts of the Battle of Beroe which stemmed from an official tradition but had since been distorted. In support of this theory we may cite the actions of John

¹¹⁰⁷ ὅτε καὶ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς βέλει τὸν πόδα ἐπλήγη (Kinnamos: 8.2-3).

¹¹⁰⁸ See below, 335-338 for the importance attached to wounds in official accounts.

¹¹⁰⁹ τὴν ἀκίδα τὴν Σκυθικὴν, ἣ τῷ ποδι τοῦ βασιλέως ἐμπέπηκτο (Michael Italikos: 285.1-2).

¹¹¹⁰ πόδα τετρωμένον being just one of several references (Nikephoros Basilakes: 89.6-91.12).

¹¹¹¹ ὃς τότε πρῶτος ὄρμησε κατὰ Σκυθῶν ἐκείνων

καὶ πέδιλον ἐφοίνιξε λύθρῳ ταρσοῦ τιμίῳ (Manganeios Prodromos: 8.123-124; trans. Jeffreys).

There is also mention in the same poem of John being the first man to take booty – a Pecheneg male child – encouraging others to follow suit. Perhaps this incident also stemmed from official tradition.

¹¹¹² See Brand (1989): 4-6 for the close relationship between the two men.

¹¹¹³ Michael Italikos: 229.1-18.

¹¹¹⁴ For Niketas Choniates' portrayal of Axouch, see Maisano (1998).

Kommenos' brother, the *sebastokrator* Andronikos Komnenos. Michael Italikos' epitaph for this individual, probably composed in the early 1130s, pays tribute to the role Andronikos played at the Battle of Beroe, relating how, when the battle seemed lost, Andronikos berated a standard bearer, ordering him to hold the banner aloft.¹¹¹⁵ This sort of bravado would have been well-placed in contemporary accounts of the battle alongside the heroic actions of the emperor and Axouch.

We may conclude by saying that the historical record of the Battle of Beroe appears to derive from an official bulletin and associated encomia, which drew attention to the piety and heroism of John Komnenos as well as the contribution of leading notables, including John's brother Andronikos Komnenos and close companion John Axouch. Since John held a triumph¹¹¹⁶ and instituted an annual holiday in celebration of his victory,¹¹¹⁷ it is extremely likely that the victory would have been commemorated with panegyric works, and the key episodes remembered for many years in Constantinople and beyond.¹¹¹⁸

The Kastamon Campaign of 1132 and John's Mariolatry

That John's piety and in particular his Mariolatry formed an important strand of his propaganda is affirmed by accounts of the triumph he celebrated following the capture

¹¹¹⁵ Michael Italikos: 83.17-24.

¹¹¹⁶ τὸν μέγιστον ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐαλωκόσιν ἐκεῖνον θρίαμβον (Michael Italikos: 285.2-3).

¹¹¹⁷ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 16. The juridical text, the *Ecloga Basilicorum*, written in 1142, attests to the existence of a holiday celebrating the victory over the Pechenegs, which, it has recently been argued, can be dated to 20th-26th April 1122. See Ivanov & Lubotsky (2010).

¹¹¹⁸ Basil of Edessa's account also states that the emperor dismounted and ordered his fellow troops to do likewise, leading them into battle on foot (Michael the Syrian: III, 207). The key role of the Varangians in this battle is strongly alluded to in the Nordic *Heimskringla* saga of the period. The saga also notes that John led from the front. See Dawkins (1937); Blondal (1978): 148-153; Ciggaar (1961): esp. 53-55. It was presumably Varangian veterans of the battle who were ultimately responsible for this transmission of information.

of Kastamon in 1132.¹¹¹⁹ Court poet Theodore Prodromos composed several pieces to mark the great occasion,¹¹²⁰ the first triumphal procession of the Komnenian period to be recorded in detail.¹¹²¹ In a lengthy composition, Prodromos sets the tone by remarking that John's bloodless conquest of Kastamon was a sign that God approved of his endeavour.¹¹²² Prodromos stresses that the army triumphed over the enemy by placing its trust in the Theotokos.¹¹²³ Theodore, along with Kinnamos and Choniates, reports that an ostentatious, silver-plated chariot was prepared for the emperor.¹¹²⁴ John, however, ignored the public pleas to mount the chariot, choosing instead to walk ahead of it whilst grasping a processional cross.¹¹²⁵ Prodromos was dismayed by the emperor's decision,¹¹²⁶ so much so that one poem is little more than a petition for John to bow to public clamour.¹¹²⁷ The emperor instead afforded primacy to an icon of the Theotokos, placing it upon the chariot.¹¹²⁸ Niketas Choniates is emphatic as to John's reasoning: 'To her as the unconquerable fellow general he attributed his victories'.¹¹²⁹ Michael Italikos likewise notes that the *Theopaida* accompanied John in the procession as 'the architect of the victory'.¹¹³⁰ While there are strong parallels

¹¹¹⁹ For records of the campaign see Kinnamos: 13.9-15; Choniates: 18.70-76; Theodore Prodromos: III-IV.

¹¹²⁰ Though his are the only efforts to survive, by his own admission Prodromos was merely one among many rhetors participating with contributions in prose and verse (Theodore Prodromos: VI.98-104).

¹¹²¹ Magdalino (1993a): 240-241.

¹¹²² Theodore Prodromos: IV.91-100.

¹¹²³ οὐ γὰρ ἐθάρρησε χρησιμοῖς οὐδὲ λοξαῖς μαντείαις,
ἀλλὰ τῆς θεομήτορος τῆ θεία συμμαχία
καὶ τῆ πρὸς τὸν παντάνακτα πίστει τοῦ βασιλέως (ibid: IV.157-159).

¹¹²⁴ Ibid: VI.57-97.

¹¹²⁵ Ibid: VI.152-172.

¹¹²⁶ Ibid: V.41-50.

¹¹²⁷ Ibid: V. Also IV.251-260.

¹¹²⁸ Paul Magdalino (1993a): 425 speculates that John may have brought this icon on campaign with him. It is possible that it was the same icon of the Virgin he had at the Battle of Beroe.

¹¹²⁹ τὰς νίκας ὡς συστρατηγέτιδι ἀμάχῳ ἐπιγραφόμενος (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 18.78-19.97; trans. 12).

¹¹³⁰ τὴν ἔξαρχον τῆς νίκης Θεόπαιδα τῷ βασιλεῖ συμπομπεύουσιν (Michael Italikos: 285.12-14).

with the triumph celebrated by John Tzimiskes,¹¹³¹ whereas Tzimiskes followed the chariot on a white horse, John Komnenos went before it on foot, making him appear more modest still. Consequently, Kinnamos is perhaps correct to assert that the episode was something ‘not previously witnessed since [the time of] the Herakleians and Justinian’.¹¹³² Both he and Choniates clearly drew upon an official record of the triumph, if not the encomia of Theodore Prodromos. Evidently, religious militancy was an important strand of John’s propaganda, just as it was of many soldier emperors of the preceding centuries.¹¹³³

The Campaign in Cilicia and Northern Syria, 1137-1139

Upon John Komnenos’ return from a prolonged campaign in Cilicia and northern Syria in 1139,¹¹³⁴ Michael Italikos prepared a *basilikos logos* to commemorate the emperor’s success. Given that Italikos refers therein to imperial letters sent from the front,¹¹³⁵ we may surmise that the historical content of the oration, if not the rich classical references and allusions, derived from the bulletin(s).¹¹³⁶ Through comparison with Choniates and Kinnamos, and the encomia of Nikephoros Basilakes and Theodore Prodromos also composed to mark John’s return, one may attempt to reconstruct the official record of the campaign and determine the extent to which the aforementioned historians adhered to it.

¹¹³¹ See Magdalino (1993a): 240-241.

¹¹³² θαῦμά τε ἦν Βυζαντίοις ὄρᾶν, ὅπερ οἶμαι οὐπω μέχρι καὶ τότε κατεῖδον ἐξ ὄτου Ἡράκλειοι καὶ Ἰουστινιανοὶ τὴν Ῥωμαίων διεῖπον ἀρχὴν (Kinnamos: 13.15-14.2; trans. 20).

¹¹³³ See above, 68-79.

¹¹³⁴ For discussion, see Lilie (1993): 103-134; Harris (2003): 80-85.

¹¹³⁵ τὰ βασιλικὰ γράμματα (Michael Italikos: 248.7-8).

¹¹³⁶ That said, *synkrisis* with Alexander the Great is prevalent throughout both orations of Basilakes and Michael Italikos, as observed by Paul Magdalino (1993a: 432). This might suggest that such allusions and imagery formed part of the original dispatches, substantiating the notion that the bulletins of Stephen Meles could be appreciated beyond their factual content.

Italikos begins with a recollection of John's campaign against the Armenians in Cilicia. Like Kinnamos and Choniates, Italikos briefly mentions the conquest of Tarsos, Adana and Mopsuestia, but makes a set-piece of the thirty-five day siege of Anazarbos. The accounts differ in certain respects. Italikos is the only writer to refer to the defenders setting fire to the town, while Choniates discloses that a band of Turks sent ahead of the main Byzantine army were routed by the Armenian garrison. That said, all the commentators mention that the defenders attempted to burn the Byzantine siege machines, but were ultimately thwarted by the Byzantines surrounding the devices with brick wall defences. From this point, they again pounded the city into submission with bombardments of stones.¹¹³⁷ This aspect of the siege most probably derived from the dispatch relating events in Cilicia. Given the lack of coverage of other sieges, it may be that the emperor's publicists opted to focus on the most gruelling siege of the first stage of the campaign.

The effectiveness of siege artillery in this expedition, and indeed in other campaigns conducted by John Komnenos, is a prominent feature in encomia and historical narratives. George Dennis and Paul Chevedden have noted the devastation wrought by Byzantine stone-throwing counterweight trebuchets, a recent development in warfare.¹¹³⁸ Theodore Prodromos' epitaph for the emperor recalled him as one who 'brought down walls and demolished cities' with his many siege engines.¹¹³⁹ In celebrating John's capture of Kastamon in 1132, Theodore commended the emperor for electing to destroy the fortifications of the enemy rather than risk his troops in an

¹¹³⁷ Michael Italikos: 254.5-255.8; Nikephoros Basilakes: 60.5-62.5; Kinnamos: 17-18; Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 25-27. Armenian historian Gregory the Priest (241) notes that John invested Anazarbos for thirty-five days during which time he 'battered its walls with his catapults'.

¹¹³⁸ Dennis (1997b): 138-139; idem (1998): 110-113; Chevedden (1999): esp. 92-93, 104; Birkenmeier (2002): 182-205.

¹¹³⁹ τείχη καθήρουν καὶ κατήρειπον πόλεις (Theodore Prodromos: XXV.65-72).

assault.¹¹⁴⁰ The second capture of Kastamon in 1135 is described in similar terms: Prodromos writes that John bombarded the city with ‘a hailstorm of stones’ until it capitulated.¹¹⁴¹ During the same campaign Gangra was subjected to similar treatment, with John unleashing a barrage of stones against the city.¹¹⁴² According to Choniates, artillerymen specifically targeted the houses, weakening the resolve of the inhabitants.¹¹⁴³ Prodromos has the emperor assume an active role, helping load a stone onto a trebuchet.¹¹⁴⁴ John’s Mariolatry recurs at this point. Prodromos explains that the emperor had initially heeded the guidance of the Virgin to leave Gangra, so insulted was she by the blasphemous words of the leader of the city.¹¹⁴⁵ Upon his eventual return, John prayed to the Theotokos, acknowledging her assistance in past victories and imploring her to aid him once more. The Virgin appeared to answer his prayer by guiding the stone he himself placed on the trebuchet to a direct hit; before long, the Turks relinquished control of the city.¹¹⁴⁶ Nikephoros Basilakes, the only commentator to cover the 1137 siege of Tarsos in any detail, describes how the city defences were destroyed by an incessant bombardment of huge stones launched by trebuchets - an ‘extraordinary artificial hailstorm’¹¹⁴⁷ - prompting the capitulation of the inhabitants.¹¹⁴⁸ Choniates records John using trebuchets to destroy the

¹¹⁴⁰ ἔθνεα δ’ ἔνδον ἔην εὖ εἰδότα δηϊοτήτος
πολλὰ μάλ’, ὅσσα πόλιν θ’ ἅμα πλῆσε, πλῆσε δὲ κρημνὸν
πετρήεντα, πλῆσε δὲ τείχεα πίσυρα πάντα.
πρὸς τόσον οὖν πτολίεθρον ἰὼν τότε, κοίρανε γαίης,

τήνδε περιφραδέως ἐσκέψαο μῆτιν ἀρίστην (ibid: III.65-69; 68-77 describes the use of siege machines in capturing the city, as noted also by Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 18.73-74).

¹¹⁴¹ χαλαζοβόλει δέ τε πέτρους (Theodore Prodromos: VIII.59-73). For discussion of the technical terms employed by Prodromos, see Hörandner (1974): 242-243.

¹¹⁴² Theodore Prodromos: VIII.74-94, 118-145.

¹¹⁴³ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 20.

¹¹⁴⁴ Theodore Prodromos: VIII.170-185.

¹¹⁴⁵ Ibid: VIII.45-60.

¹¹⁴⁶ Ibid: VIII.146-259.

¹¹⁴⁷ The meteorological imagery used by Prodromos and Basilakes to describe the aerial bombardment is derived from Homer, and appears elsewhere in Byzantine historiography – see above, 58-59.

¹¹⁴⁸ ἀμήχανον χάλαζαν τεχνητήν (Nikephoros Basilakes: 56.17-59.21).

fortifications of the Euphrates fortress of Piza in 1138.¹¹⁴⁹ Crusader historian William of Tyre describes a heavy bombardment of Antioch.¹¹⁵⁰ After departing Antioch the emperor unleashed another barrage against Shaizar, an event reported in non-Greek sources also. Syrian soldier Usamah ibn Munqidh notes in his memoirs that the stones of ‘huge trebuchets’ destroyed whole buildings and inflicted gruesome injuries.¹¹⁵¹ William of Tyre supports this testimony, reporting that the volleys of stones ‘shook the towers and walls and even the houses of the people within’.¹¹⁵² John’s trebuchets were evidently a formidable weapon, and given the many sieges he conducted it is to be expected that these devices featured frequently in his dispatches and thus caught the eye of panegyrists and historians writing about John’s wars.

After capturing Anazarbos and receiving the submission of Prince Raymond of Antioch – an episode prominent in all the sources - John, now allied with Antioch and Edessa, set out for northern Syria in the spring of 1138.¹¹⁵³ The great booty acquired from towns captured along the Euphrates – Bazaah in particular – is likely to have been emphasized in John’s original dispatches, given that it is mentioned in all accounts.¹¹⁵⁴ Less apparent is the siege of Aleppo. This enterprise is rather glossed over, and its failure attributed to a lack of supplies and water, which, we might imagine, reflected the official line.¹¹⁵⁵ According to Italikos, John considered Aleppo

¹¹⁴⁹ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 27 -28.

¹¹⁵⁰ William of Tyre: II, 670-671.

¹¹⁵¹ Usamah ibn Munqidh: 143-144; Kamal ad-Din, ‘La chronique d’Alep’: 677-678.

¹¹⁵² Hic demum machinis congrua provisione dispositis, turres ac menia et infra muros civium domicilia gravium immissione molarium incessanter concutiunt et crebris ictibus et vicaria immisorum cautium repetitione non sine multa inhabitantium strage funditus deiciunt, in quibus erat defensionis spes maxima, edificiorum munimina (William of Tyre: II, 674.23-30; trans. II, 94-95).

¹¹⁵³ For John’s dealings with Antioch, see Lilie (1993): 120-125, 298-308; Parnell (2010): esp. 151-154.

¹¹⁵⁴ Kinnamos 19; Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 27-28; Michael Italikos: 261.24-262.10; Nikephoros Basilakes: 64.23-65.7.

¹¹⁵⁵ Kinnamos: 19; Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 28.

not worth the effort of a prolonged siege,¹¹⁵⁶ while Basilakes suggests that John was content with a mere show of military might.¹¹⁵⁷ The subsequent siege of Shaizar posed a similarly difficult problem for John's publicists. Byzantine commentators present an incessant barrage from the stone-throwing devices, forcing the emir of the town to seek an agreement with the emperor.¹¹⁵⁸ Satiated with rich gifts, John left Shaizar.¹¹⁵⁹ According to William of Tyre, however, John's hand was forced by the idleness of the Crusader princes Raymond of Antioch and Joscelin II of Edessa. Frustrated by the slow progress, a disillusioned John agreed to the peace overtures of the emir.¹¹⁶⁰ Ralph-Johannes Lilie suspects the truth was a combination of various disruptive elements.¹¹⁶¹ We might note also that Byzantine accounts of John's triumphant entry into Antioch following the siege of Shaizar¹¹⁶² fail to mention the purported riot which caused the Byzantines to swiftly depart.¹¹⁶³ Most probably it was considered prudent among John's staff to omit all references to discord with his

¹¹⁵⁶ Michael Italikos: 262.5-263.1.

¹¹⁵⁷ Nikephoros Basilakes: 65.32-66.10.

¹¹⁵⁸ Niketas Choniates is among the few to describe an initial engagement before the city, with the victorious imperial army driving a number of the enemy into the nearby river. Basilakes corroborates this report, noting that the river ran red with the blood of the defenders. By arraying his troops according to their ethnicity – Macedonians, Pechenegs, western Europeans – John inspired fear in the defenders and compelled them to retreat within the inner wall. The Byzantines attacked, with Choniates summarizing the action thus: 'For many days there were hand-to-hand combats, clashes and battles, duels between the best, flight and retreat, and pursuit on both sides' (Choniates: 30.76-78; trans. 17-18). These irregular skirmishes between the Byzantines and the defenders are confirmed by Usamah ibn Munqidh (122, 143-144). The missile bombardment seems to have occurred in unison with these attacks, since Usamah describes fighting taking place in the breaches created by the Byzantine siege engines.

¹¹⁵⁹ Kinnamos: 19-20; Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 29-31; Michael Italikos: 263.1-265.10; Nikephoros Basilakes: 66.9-68.9.

¹¹⁶⁰ William of Tyre: II, 675-678. For William's slant on the expedition, see Lilie (1993): 284-297; Harris (2003): 81-83.

¹¹⁶¹ Lilie (1993): 126-128; Harris (2003): 84-85. Various sources hint that John departed because of news of other cities being attacked by the Turks (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 29-31; Michael the Syrian: III, 425) or the imminent arrival of a relief force (Kamal ad-Din 'La chronique d'Alep': 678).

¹¹⁶² Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 31; Michael Italikos: 265.18-266.29; Nikephoros Basilakes: 46.14-17, 69.6-72.22.

¹¹⁶³ William of Tyre: II, 676-681. For discussion see Lilie (1993): 128-130.

Crusader allies, along with any suggestion that he was responsible for the failure of the sieges of Aleppo and Shaizar.

The presentation of a united front against the forces of Islam may be seen as part of the triumphant Christian tone of contemporary encomia, with Magdalino identifying a distinct ‘holy war’ sentiment.¹¹⁶⁴ Perhaps the most explicit realisation of the ‘Crusader’ ideal is found in the oration of Nikephoros Basilakes, where he praises the emperor for opening up the route to Jerusalem for pilgrims.¹¹⁶⁵ Also ripe for exploitation was the acquisition of sacred objects.¹¹⁶⁶ Among the great prizes bestowed upon John at Shaizar, none was more valued than a ruby cross, which, according to Choniates, had been seized from the Byzantine camp at the Battle of Manzikert.¹¹⁶⁷ Both Basilakes and Michael Italikos assert that the cross was crafted by order of Constantine the Great, one who conquered by the sign of the cross, confirming that the trophy was a symbol of divinely-sanctioned victory.¹¹⁶⁸ Accounts of John’s preceding campaigns indicate that this intensification of the religious element was a natural progression from the tone of earlier dispatches.¹¹⁶⁹

A number of striking concurrences confirm Paul Magdalino’s proposal that there existed an official record of John’s 1137-1139 campaign.¹¹⁷⁰ Inevitably, however, not

¹¹⁶⁴ Magdalino (1993a): 420.

¹¹⁶⁵ Nikephoros Basilakes: 56.10-16.

¹¹⁶⁶ While Michael Italikos mentions that John seized relics when he captured the Armenian ruler Leo and his family (256.1-5), oddly he does not specify what they were; according to Gregory the Priest (241), a ‘holy icon of the Theotokos’ was among the items taken back to Constantinople. This is consistent with John’s personal faith so it is unusual that his encomiasts did not draw attention to the object.

¹¹⁶⁷ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 30.1-31.7. Nikephoros Bryennios (119) notes only one specific object taken by the Turks at Manzikert – a famous pearl called ‘The Orphan’.

¹¹⁶⁸ Michael Italikos: 264.10-265.10; Nikephoros Basilakes: 67.13-68.9. Kinnamos (20) also notes the legend that Constantine ordered the cross to be made.

¹¹⁶⁹ Indeed, Wolfram Hörandner (1974: 242) describes one of Theodore Prodromos’ earlier works marking John’s capture of Kastamon and Gangra (VIII) in 1135 as ‘kreuzzugartige’ in tone.

¹¹⁷⁰ Magdalino (1993a): 432.

all commentators used the information in the same fashion, and may even have sought supplementary material. We have noted that Basilakes is the only writer to afford extensive coverage to the siege of Tarsos. Theodore Prodromos largely ignores the siege of Shaizar,¹¹⁷¹ preferring instead to elaborate upon the crossing of the Euphrates and the actions against Ferep and Aleppo.¹¹⁷² Michael Italikos devotes two sections to the feats of the ‘lion cub’ Alexios, John’s son and co-emperor, who led an independent action against Ankyra¹¹⁷³ and later supported his father in the capture of Gastounai.¹¹⁷⁴ Alexios is omitted entirely from all other accounts of the campaign.¹¹⁷⁵ Given that Italikos’ oration seems to have followed that of Basilakes, it may be that he focused on other aspects of the expedition to make his work unique and perhaps attract the attention of another potential patron in Alexios.¹¹⁷⁶ Magdalino considers the possibility that John’s panegyrists employed supplementary sources, though ultimately explains the differences as ‘divergences in aesthetic and even ideological interpretation, reflecting some sort of ongoing debate among the intellectual elite’.¹¹⁷⁷

¹¹⁷¹ Oddly Shaizar is mentioned only fleetingly in Prodromos’ letter to Theodore Stypeiotes, who participated in the expedition as imperial secretary (Theodore Prodromos: LXXI.25).

¹¹⁷² Ibid: XI.51-60.

¹¹⁷³ For the identity of this Ankyra, see Gautier (1972): 251 n.32; Lilie (1993): 118 & n.88.

¹¹⁷⁴ Michael Italikos: 251.19-252.14, 258.13-259.9.

¹¹⁷⁵ Also missing from most sources are the actions of another of John’s sons, Manuel. The oration Italikos composed for Manuel’s accession to the throne in 1143 confirms that in 1138 the then twenty-year-old Manuel participated in battles in Cilicia as well as the sieges of Aleppo and Shaizar, his spear shining more brilliantly than all others (ibid: 286.1-9). Orators may have been concerned to recall his deeds lest they overshadow those of his father.

¹¹⁷⁶ For the competitiveness between Basilakes and Italikos, see Garzya (1973). By contrast, Italikos and Prodromos appear to have been close associates, with Italikos providing his friend with geographical material for describing John’s campaigns (Michael Italikos: 64.1-65.19, 99.1-101.8, 237.1-238.13). Dimiter Angelov (2007: 56-57) affirms that literati from the reign of Andronikos II Palaiologos took an active interest in each other’s orations, which might have led to differentiation in order to appear distinct.

¹¹⁷⁷ See Magdalino (1993a): 432-433, for discussion of further differences in the orations of Basilakes and Italikos concerning style, imagery and emphasis. Riccardo Maisano (1994a: 391-393) highlights the tendency of encomiasts and historians to embellish geographical aspects of John’s campaigns. Nikephoros Basilakes (55.11-12) recalls the pass of Thermopylae in his description of the route through Cilicia, while Niketas Choniates (*Chronike Diegesis*: 21.57-60) alone asserts that John passed

It is difficult to extend such an explanation to Kinnamos and Choniates, who wrote decades later. These historians lack some details provided by the encomiasts, though include others which are unique. The capture of Vahka, referred to fleetingly by Theodore Prodromos,¹¹⁷⁸ becomes a significant narrative episode in Choniates' *Chronike Diegesis*. Choniates reports that the Armenian Constantine, commander of the fortress, reviled the emperor and challenged one of his troops to single combat. To face him the officers selected Eustratios, a soldier of the Macedonian regiment. Eustratios withstood the violent attacks of the Armenian until he split the 'Hectorian' shield of his opponent in two, leaving the humbled Constantine to retreat back within the fortress. The emperor bestowed many gifts upon Eustratios, and within days Vahka was captured.¹¹⁷⁹ Lilie questioned the accuracy of this section, deeming it to be 'heavily laden with rhetoric'.¹¹⁸⁰ Stephanos Efthymiadis interpreted the duel as 'a kind of Homeric fictionalization'.¹¹⁸¹ Yet rather than accuse Choniates of inventing this episode, we might suppose that Eustratios was among the participants of the expedition whom Choniates mentions in his *prooimion* as having interviewed. Admittedly we should not overstate the 'unofficial' information that might have been available to Kinnamos and Choniates; had, for example, the pair known of the discord

through the Cilician Gates. Maisano rightly notes that this was unlikely, given that these areas were then controlled by the sultan of Ikonion. Maisano attributes the confusion to contemporary rhetoric, with Choniates apparently elaborating upon the descriptions of Italikos and Basilakes, though the inconsistency suggests that the original bulletin merely emphasized the difficulty of the route, with the various authors adding their own spin and exaggerating John's troubles with references to ancient sites. In support of this hypothesis we may cite the letter Italikos sent to Theodore Prodromos, listing geographical information about southern Anatolia and Syria from a number of ancient authors (Michael Italikos: 99.1-101.8). Presumably this was because Theodore was preparing a work on John's military activity in the region, and required archaic information for rhetorical purposes rather than accuracy.

¹¹⁷⁸ The Vachenoi, almost certainly residents of Vahka, are mentioned by Theodore Prodromos among John's conquests in a letter to Theodore Stypeiotes (Theodore Prodromos: LXXI.24).

¹¹⁷⁹ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 22-25.

¹¹⁸⁰ Lilie (1993): 125 n.117. Its dating is also suspect – see *ibid*: 118 n.93.

¹¹⁸¹ Efthymiadis (2009): 38.

between John and his Crusader allies, they would surely have mentioned it.¹¹⁸² Even so, that Choniates was compelled to supplement his narrative with other material is supported by Kinnamos, who abruptly concludes his own account of the campaign with a note that he was unable to record the particulars of the emperor's actions against the Turks of Ikonion, since he lacked 'a faithful account of them'.¹¹⁸³ Again the official record of a campaign led by John is preserved in large part by Kinnamos and Choniates, but evidently the redaction consulted was not wholly satisfactory, forcing the latter to seek information from alternative sources.

Choniates' use of other material is all but confirmed by his account of John's expedition against Neokaisareia in 1139-1140. As a contemporary oration of Theodore Prodromos bemoans the severe winter which forced John to abandon his projected siege of Neokaisareia,¹¹⁸⁴ Kinnamos and Choniates also stress the poor conditions as the reason behind John's failure.¹¹⁸⁵ The widespread reports of the heroic performance of the young Manuel at Neokaisareia, discussed below, confirms the notion of a common source. Yet, at the outset of the campaign, Choniates describes how the Emperor John had become increasingly 'unremitting and imperious...as though he had forgotten or was unaware that the Romans had spent three years fighting in the east'. The troops are said to have felt a fierce hatred towards John, since many had not been allowed to return to their homesteads in between campaigns. The emperor acknowledged their complaints, but did little to

¹¹⁸² Lillie (1993): 126-127, 281.

¹¹⁸³ ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν πρὸς ἀκρίβειαν ἱστορεῖν ὑπόσχεσιν οἶμαι ὑπερβαίνει τὴν ἡμετέραν. ὡς γὰρ ἐν κεφαλαίῳ προὔκειτό μοι περὶ τῶν παρόντων εἰπεῖν, ἅτε μὴδὲ αὐτοπήσαντι ταῦτα μὴδὲ τὸ πιστὸν ἐντεῦθεν λαβόντι (Kinnamos: 20.19-22; trans. 25). Various sources report that John attacked the Turks of Ikonion upon his return journey through Anatolia, an act of reprisal for raids on Byzantine Bithynia in his absence (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 31; Michael Italikos: 267.3-14; Theodore Prodromos: XI.56-60, 81-100; Gregory the Priest: 242).

¹¹⁸⁴ Theodore Prodromos: XIX.21-111, 181-191.

¹¹⁸⁵ Kinnamos: 21-22; Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 34-36.

address their grievances.¹¹⁸⁶ This discord is not mentioned by any other source. The likelihood is that Choniates learned of the restlessness from a participant,¹¹⁸⁷ perhaps the same informant who briefed him on events at Vahka.

Conclusion

Analysis of the accounts of campaigns conducted by John II Komnenos reveals a strong reliance on the official tradition originally propagated in imperial bulletins. These dispatches drew particular attention to the emperor's tactical ability and siegecraft, as well as his courage and piety. While contemporary encomia appear to reflect the official line, there are signs that the official tradition had become distorted when Kinnamos and Choniates came to pen their works. It was perhaps for this reason that the more industrious Choniates appears to have sought information from other sources. Contributions from outside the official record are not apparent in Choniates' accounts of John's earlier campaigns, undoubtedly because few soldiers who participated in these operations would have been alive at the time Choniates was gathering his research. It is only with coverage of John's campaigns from 1138 onwards that one observes Choniates occasionally drawing upon alternative sources. This tendency of supplementing the official record with additional material continues with Choniates' accounts of Manuel's campaigns.

¹¹⁸⁶ καὶ ἡ μὲν ἐκ θεσπισμάτων βασιλείων συνήγετο, αὐτὸς δὲ κατὰ τοῦτο τὸ ἔργον ὡς οὐδέποτε τοῖς στρατευομένοις ἀσυγγνώμων ἔδοξε καὶ βαρὺς καὶ τὸ πλέον μηδὲ μέτρα ἐκστρατείας εἰδῶς, ὡς εἴπερ ἐλάθετο ἢ οὐκ ἐνόησεν ὡς τρισσὸν ἔτος ἐν τοῖς ἐξοίσι πολέμοις Ῥωμαῖοι διήνεγκαν... (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 33.61-83; trans. 19-20).

¹¹⁸⁷ Simpson (2004): 219-220.

III. The Historical Record of the Campaigns of Manuel I Komnenos

While the campaigns of John II Komnenos have hitherto not been subject to a comparative study of the historical and encomiastic sources, the same cannot be said of expeditions conducted by his son Manuel. Paul Magdalino initially speculated ‘the close connection between epideictic rhetoric and narrative history of the period’ to be ‘crucial to their interpretation’,¹¹⁸⁸ following up his observation with a detailed study of Manuel’s presentation in the sources.¹¹⁸⁹ Magdalino’s research showed substantial convergence between the historiographical sources and encomia from Manuel’s reign, ‘in ways which suggest a common fund of official information’.¹¹⁹⁰ In this section we discuss the record of Manuel’s major campaigns, employing Choniates and Kinnamos alongside the most prolific panegyrist of the period, ‘Manganeios Prodromos’.¹¹⁹¹ It is in these accounts we observe the most striking parallels between history and encomia, and gain insight into the line of official bulletins.

Manuel at the Siege of Neokaisareia, 1140

Manuel makes an immediate impression in the historical record, where he is introduced as a twenty-two year-old in the service of his father at the siege of Neokaisareia in 1140.¹¹⁹² Both Kinnamos and Choniates relate how the young Manuel broke ranks to engage the enemy, earning a mixed response from the

¹¹⁸⁸ Magdalino (1988): 176 n.12.

¹¹⁸⁹ Idem (1993a): esp. 413-488.

¹¹⁹⁰ Ibid: 442.

¹¹⁹¹ The poems of ‘Manganeios’ were once attributed to Theodore Prodromos, though modern scholarship views them as two separate figures. See Hörandner (1975); Kazhdan (1984c): 87-93; Beaton (1987); E. & M. Jeffreys (2001): 101-102. It has been speculated that ‘Manganeios’ served as the emperor’s correspondent from imperial campaigns during the 1150s, which would again reinforce the link between writers of encomia and bulletins (Anderson & Jeffreys 1994). For discussion of how the encomiasts of John’s reign fared under Manuel, and which panegyrists Manuel favoured, see Stanković (2007b).

¹¹⁹² For this campaign, see Chalandon (1912): 176-180.

emperor. According to Kinnamos, John made a public show of lambasting Manuel's recklessness, but was privately thrilled by his son's heroic deeds.¹¹⁹³ Choniates, by contrast, reports that John publicly rewarded his son, but later punished him in private, forbidding Manuel to act this way in future.¹¹⁹⁴

One suspects that Choniates may be correct in this instance, since Theodore Prodromos' oration marking John's return celebrates Manuel's heroism, recalling how the youngster was able to put the 'Persian' forces to flight merely by shouting.¹¹⁹⁵ A *basilikos logos* delivered by Michael Italikos shortly after Manuel's accession in 1143 lingers on the precocious martial talents of the new emperor.¹¹⁹⁶ Italikos recounts how Manuel, seeing the imperial troops routing at Neokaisareia, launched himself into the midst of the Turks, saving the army through his courage.¹¹⁹⁷ These references indicate that Manuel's exploits were stressed in imperial dispatches, the high point of an otherwise disappointing campaign. A precedent had been set for how Manuel would conduct himself in battle and how his actions would be presented in dispatches and encomia.

*The Campaign against Ikonion, 1146*¹¹⁹⁸

Manuel's military prowess is consistently praised in accounts of his campaign against the Turkish sultanate of Ikonion in 1146. Having abandoned the idea of a siege,

¹¹⁹³ Kinnamos: 21-22. Kinnamos remarks that Manuel was not yet eighteen at this point in time, an error which should perhaps support our preference for Choniates' version of events.

¹¹⁹⁴ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 35.

¹¹⁹⁵ Theodore Prodromos: XIX.73-81, 142-151. 'Manganeios Prodromos' (2.79-80) says the same of Manuel in a more general context - και καταπλήττων, ὃ φασιν, αὐτοβοεῖ καὶ μόνον, τοὺς ἐμπεσόντας αἰφνηδὸν τοῦ κράτους σου τῷ ξίφει. Also *ibid*: 27.29, where Manuel is said to defeat opponents merely by roaring (ὁ μόνοις τοῖς βρυχήμασι νικῶν τοὺς ἀντιπάλους).

¹¹⁹⁶ Michael Italikos: 282-284.

¹¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*: 286-287.

¹¹⁹⁸ See Appendix VI for discussion of visual depiction of events of this campaign, supporting the notion that certain episodes featured in an imperial bulletin.

Manuel departed, conducting a fighting withdrawal through enemy territory. Events from this phase of the campaign provided much material for Manuel’s encomiast ‘Manganeios Prodromos’ and also John Kinnamos. The commonalities are almost certainly a result of the pair following the cue of the original dispatch. The official line appears eager to show that Manuel threw himself into the midst of the enemy, fuelled by a desire to impress his new western wife.¹¹⁹⁹ According to Kinnamos, Manuel ignored the pleading of his colleagues and charged the enemy, claiming that ‘a yearning for valiant deeds draws me completely to itself’.¹²⁰⁰ He rushed a contingent of five hundred Turks, slaying many with his lance.¹²⁰¹ Manuel scoffed at the urgings of one Poupakes to think of his well-being, arguing that ‘it was impossible for him to flee without lasting disgrace’.¹²⁰² While his officers wished to erect a fortified camp when surrounded by the Turks, Manuel did not want to be hemmed in, and so heroically repelled the enemy.¹²⁰³ ‘Manganeios Prodromos’ echoes these claims, expressing astonishment that Manuel alone had been able to repulse forty men.¹²⁰⁴ Manuel is said to have launched six assaults against the enemy, putting them to flight each time; one suspects that Kinnamos is chronicling such instances whenever he writes of Manuel’s daring.¹²⁰⁵ ‘Manganeios’ also relates that Manuel

¹¹⁹⁹ Kinnamos: 47.5-10.

¹²⁰⁰ “...με ἢ τοῦ ἀνδραγαθίζεσθαι ἐπιθυμία δεινῶς ἐφ’ ἑαυτὴν ἔλκει” (ibid: 49.5-21; trans. 46, with amendments).

¹²⁰¹ Ibid: 50.3-7.

¹²⁰² οὐ γὰρ ἐξῆν αὐτῷ μὴ οὐχὶ σὺν ἀτιμίᾳ τοῦ λοιποῦ διαδρᾶναι (ibid: 50.14-51.7; trans. 47, with amendments).

¹²⁰³ Ibid: 55.17-56.18.

¹²⁰⁴ Σὺ δὲ πρὸς τεσσαράκοντα καὶ τούτους ὀπλισμένους
... καὶ γὰρ οἱ τεσσαράκοντα φεύγουσι σὲ τὸν ἕνα (Manganeios Prodromos: 25.36-51).

¹²⁰⁵ Πρῶτον φασὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τὸν ἕξ ἐν τοῖς τελείοις·
καὶ σὺ τοῖς Πέρσαις προσβαλὼν ἐν προσβολαῖς τοσαύταις
καὶ τοσαυτάκις εἰς τροπὴν ἐκείνους ἀποκλίνας
νικητικὸν καὶ τέλειον τὸ στέφος ἀνεδήσω (ibid: 25.62-65).

was urged to withdraw by his men after the third attack, but instead boldly advanced, a scene reminiscent of those described by Kinnamos and also Choniates.¹²⁰⁶

A focal point of both accounts is the wound suffered by Manuel. Whilst fighting, Manuel received an arrow to the heel, a wound which, at the time, apparently gave him little trouble,¹²⁰⁷ but, as ‘Manganeios Prodromos’ illustrates, became a recurrent feature in imperial panegyric. In his encomium celebrating this campaign, ‘Manganeios’ devotes considerable attention to Manuel’s injury, noting how the blood stained the emperor’s footwear.¹²⁰⁸ He describes how the unseen Turk, like a snake lurking in thick reeds, pounced to ‘bite’ Manuel in the heel.¹²⁰⁹ This image of the Turks in hiding is consistent with the general depiction of the sultan as a coward, shirking from Manuel’s attempts to face the imperial army in the field.¹²¹⁰ Perhaps more significantly, the metaphor of the enemy as a snake attacking the heel is used

¹²⁰⁶ Μετὰ τὴν τρίτην προσβολὴν καὶ τὴν αἰχμαλωσίαν, τὸ κράτος ὑποστρέψαι σου πᾶς ὁ στρατὸς ἡξίου· σὺ δὲ προεῖπας ὡς Δαυὶδ, “Πορεύσομαι καὶ ἄλιον” καὶ πορευθεὶς συνέτριψας τὸν ἀλαζόνα Πέρσην, καὶ τρέψας τοῦτον εἰς φυγὴν ὑπέστρεψας ἐνδόξως (ibid: 25.101-105). Niketas Choniates (*Chronike Diegesis*: 53.38-43) reports that Manuel ignored the advice of his men to turn back at Philomelion following his foot injury, discussed below. Magdalino (1993a: 443) is inclined to link the testimony of Choniates and ‘Manganeios’ in this instance.

¹²⁰⁷ Βέλος ἀφείξ ἄκρου τυγγάνει τοῦ ποδὸς ὀπισθεν, ἔνθα μετὰ τὰ σφυρὰ ἐπὶ πτέρναν ἢ φύσις ἀναχωροῦσα τὴν ἐξοχὴν ποιεῖται (Kinnamos: 61.23-62.9). The arrow wound is also mentioned by Niketas Choniates (*Chronike Diegesis*: 53.36-38), where it is described as afflicting the soul of Manuel’s foot: τὸν τοῦ ποδὸς ἐτοξεύθη ταρσὸν...ἐν δὲ τῷ ἀνατραπήναι τὸ βέλος ἐπαφέντος κατὰ τοῦ πέλματος. One suspects that the heel placement offered more heroic parallels for panegyrists.

¹²⁰⁸ Manganeios Prodromos: 25.23-35. This is very reminiscent of George of Pisidia’s presentation of the Emperor Heraclius, who also suffered a wound to his heel during a campaign and stained his purple boots over the course of the campaign (George of Pisidia: *Exp. Pers.*, §I.163-252). For further discussion see Mary Whitby (1994): 204-205 & n.41; idem (1998): 255-257.

¹²⁰⁹ Εἰς δασυτάτην κάλαμον κρυπτόμενος ὡς ὄφις ἐτήρησε τὴν πτέρναν σου λαθὼν ὁ θῆρ ὁ Πέρσης, καὶ πτερνοδῆκτης γίνεται καὶ βάλλει σου τὴν πτέρναν (Manganeios Prodromos: 25.11-13)

¹²¹⁰ καὶ τούτου χάριν ἔγραψας τῷ βασιλεῖ, σουλτάνε, γενέσθαι προθυμότερος ἐπὶ τὸ πολεμῆσαι· καὶ συμβαλὼν καὶ συμπλακεὶς καὶ γνοὺς αὐτοῦ τὸ κράτος ἐγένου προθυμότερος μᾶλλον ἐπὶ τὸ φεύγειν (ibid: 25.66-70). Complementing ‘Manganeios’, Kinnamos (46.4-19, 58.19-59.4) notes that the emperor wrote to the sultan and sent messages reproaching him for his reluctance to fight.

also by Nikephoros Basilakes in relation to the same injury suffered by Manuel's father in battle with the Pechenegs;¹²¹¹ this parallel between father and son, while never explicitly acknowledged, cannot have been lost on observers. Manuel is directly compared with Philip of Macedon, who was wounded in the heel on campaign and hobbled during his triumphant return; Manuel, by contrast, did not wish to earn public sympathy and thus mustered the strength to walk without obvious sign of discomfort, displaying his humility.¹²¹²

As Magdalino and Michael Jeffreys have observed, the historical record of Manuel's campaign against Ikonion suggests it was largely intended as a show of force, designed to impress Manuel's new German wife, Bertha-Eirene of Sulzbach, and show that he was a capable warrior emperor.¹²¹³ This notion is affirmed by 'Manganeios Prodromos', who opines that Manuel had left the city an emperor but returned as βασιλεὺς and στρατηγός.¹²¹⁴ Nevertheless, one suspects that the chief reason for Manuel's publicists choosing to focus on the individual contribution of the emperor was to gloss over the fact that the expedition had been a failure. The formidable defences of Ikonion, combined with notice of the coming of the Second Crusade, provided cause for Manuel abandoning his siege.¹²¹⁵ To this end, it is Manuel's fighting withdrawal and affliction that commands the attention of Kinnamos and 'Manganeios Prodromos'. This heroic strand, which Manuel almost certainly

¹²¹¹ οἱ μὲν γὰρ ὡς ὄφεις τὴν πτέρναν ἐκαιροφυλάκησαν... (Nikephoros Basilakes: 89.16-17).

¹²¹² Manganeios Prodromos: 25.202-226. That memory of Manuel's heroic wound lingered for some time is affirmed by a panegyric composed several years later, wherein 'Manganeios' again lavishes praise on the emperor's feet, noting that Manuel's purple shoes had become more bloodstained over time (ibid: 4.708-711).

¹²¹³ Magdalino (1993a): 443, 448-450; M. Jeffreys (2011): 30.

¹²¹⁴ Ἀποδημήσας βασιλεὺς μόνον ἐκ βασιλίδος
καὶ βασιλεὺς καὶ στρατηγός ἐκεῖθεν ἐπανῆλθες,
καὶ στρατιώτης ἰσχυρὸς λαμπρῶς ἀνδραγαθήσας (Manganeios Prodromos: 25.79-81).

¹²¹⁵ Kinnamos: 45.15-21.

conveyed in bulletins and which encomiasts in turn propagated, followed his youthful heroics at the siege of Neokaisareia.

Comparison with ‘Manganeios Prodromos’ also demonstrates that an official account was not Kinnamos’ sole source for the 1146 campaign. A section accusing the esteemed John Axouch of cowardice is unlikely to have appeared in a public document, and its consistency with Kinnamos’ later comments about Axouch leading a failed expedition to Ancona corroborates the notion that Kinnamos had access to a source hostile towards Axouch.¹²¹⁶ A snippet about Manuel’s uncle, the *sebastokrator* Isaac, intending to usurp the imperial throne had no place in a bulletin, and Kinnamos’ use of λέγεται indicates that this information derived from another source.¹²¹⁷ Finally, there are details about problems in the camp which were not pertinent to disclose to the public. When many units refused to obey orders, Manuel issued commands to the unruly regiments. He punished those who remained defiant but others still paid little attention to his directives.¹²¹⁸ This honest appraisal echoes Choniates’ comments about discontent in the army of John II, and made the emperor appear weak. Such controversial details suggest that the two historians supplemented the official record with details provided by other sources, presumably eyewitnesses and retired soldiers.

*The Campaign against the Hungarians and Serbs, 1150-1151*¹²¹⁹

Manuel’s expedition against Serbian rebels and their Hungarian allies in 1150 offered a number of episodes ripe for exploitation in encomia and historiography. According

¹²¹⁶ Ibid: 51, 101-102. See also Magdalino (1987); Maisano (1998).

¹²¹⁷ Kinnamos: 53. For this Isaac see Magdalino (1993a): 193-195.

¹²¹⁸ Kinnamos: 54, 56-57.

¹²¹⁹ See Appendix VI for discussion of visual depiction of events of this campaign, supporting the notion that certain episodes featured in an imperial bulletin.

to Kinnamos, when Manuel reached the Danube he found that the imperial fleet had yet to arrive. Rather than wait, Manuel fearlessly led the crossing on a small wooden skiff, towing his horse by its bridle.¹²²⁰ This feat is also the subject of much praise by ‘Manganeios Prodromos’, who favourably compares Manuel’s feat to that of Xerxes in bridging the Hellespont. ‘Manganeios’ corroborates the statements of Kinnamos, noting how Manuel took to a small craft while dragging horses on either side – ‘just like a common soldier’.¹²²¹

The primary focus of accounts is again Manuel’s military prowess. Kinnamos relates how Manuel, with only his relatives John Doukas and John Kantakouzenos for company, raced to the aid of certain units of his vanguard who were in distress. Having engaged the enemy, Manuel reportedly (Kinnamos uses λέγεται, possibly indicating misgivings) felled fifteen with a single spear thrust, putting down forty in total.¹²²² The engagement progressed until Manuel fought an individual duel with the giant enemy commander, the *grand zupan* Bakchinos, which ended with Manuel hacking off the arm (or hand) of his opposite number.¹²²³ In a panegyric written within two years of the campaign, ‘Manganeios Prodromos’ recalls how Manuel ‘bravely engaged the giant’ in Serbia, risking his life for the Roman cause.¹²²⁴ There is a suggestion in the poem – not noted in the historical record – that Manuel received a nick to a finger, with ‘Manganeios’ mentioning the bloodied hand of Manuel

¹²²⁰ Kinnamos: 113-114.

¹²²¹ σὺ δὲ μονήρους ἐπιβάς μονοστελέχου πλοίου
... ἵππους ἐξ ἐκατέρωθεν ἐκ τῶν πλευρῶν τοῦ πλοίου
ἐφέλκων οὕτως ὡς κοινὸς ὁ θαυμαστὸς ὀπλίτης (Manganeios Prodromos: 2.126-2.140; trans. Jeffreys).

¹²²² Kinnamos: 109-110.

¹²²³ Kinnamos: 111-112; Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 93.

¹²²⁴ αὐτότατος τῷ γίγαντι γενναίως συνεπλέκου,
ἀνδρὶ μεγέθει καὶ χειρὶ καὶ τόλμῃ περιφήμῳ,
αὐτὸς προθύων ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ Αὐσόνων γένους,
καὶ μάρτυς ἐθειλοῦσιος καὶ θῦμα χρηματίζων (Manganeios Prodromos: 4.296-307).

alongside his previously bloodied sandals.¹²²⁵ In a subsequent encomium ‘Manganeios’, asking what type of crown he should craft for Manuel, decides upon one fashioned with blood-coloured rubies, apt given that Manuel had worn such a thing at Ikonion and on the mountaintop, where like David he battled Goliath.¹²²⁶ This is almost certainly a reference to the two wounds suffered by Manuel in engagements against the Turks and Serbs.¹²²⁷

Another aspect of the accounts of Kinnamos and Choniates corroborated by ‘Manganeios Prodromos’ is the role of John Kantakouzenos in the tussle.¹²²⁸ Kinnamos reveals that the emperor’s nephew lost two fingers during the fierce fighting.¹²²⁹ It seems that ‘Manganeios’ drafted a poem upon Kantakouzenos’ return extolling his efforts. Contra Kinnamos, ‘Manganeios’ reports that Kantakouzenos lost

¹²²⁵ Δός μοι φιλήσαι δεξιάν, ὧ δεξιῆ στρατάρχα,
 ἥτις ἀντηγωνίσαστο πρὸς Παίονα τοσοῦτον.
 ...Ὡς εἶθε μοι καθήμαξα τὰ χεῖλη τῆ χειρὶ σου
 ἔτι σταζούση πάνσεπτον ὑπὲρ Αὐσόνων αἶμα,
 ἥτις Αὐσόνων μαχητῶν ἀνέπαυσε τὰς χεῖρας,
 ἥτις ζηλοῦσα τοὺς ταρσοὺς τοὺς ἐρυθροπεδίλους,
 καὶ τοὺς δακτύλους ἔδειξεν αἰμοβαφεῖς ἐν μάχαις,
 μονονουχὶ κραυγάζουσα τοῖς ἀριστεύμασί σου,
 τὸ τὸν ἐρυθροδάκτυλον ὑποδεδύσθαι πρέπειν
 καὶ πέδιλον κοκκοβαφὲς καὶ πορφυρῶδες ἄνθος (ibid: 4.366-379).

¹²²⁶ ποῖον σοι πλέξω στέφανον καὶ προσαρμόσαιμί σοι;
 Ἐκ λυχνιτῶν αἰμοειδῶν, ὁποῖον σοι καὶ πάλαι;
 Ναὶ μέντοι, προσαρμόζοντα καὶ τοῦτον ἐφευρίσκω·
 πολλάκις ἀνεδήσω γὰρ καὶ στέφανον τοιοῦτον,
 ἐν Ἰκονίῳ πρότερον, εἶτ’ αὖθις ἐν γηλόφῳ
 ὅτε Δαυὶδ τῷ Γολιάθ ἐκείνῳ συνεπλάκης,
 ἀγχεμαχῶν οὐ σφενδονῶν, ῥώμῃ χειρῶν καὶ τόλμῃ (ibid: 7.584-591).

The biblical motif of Manuel besting Goliath is repeated in another composition:

τὸν ὑψηλὸν γὰρ Γολιάθ, τὸν πρὶν μεγαλαυχοῦντα,
 ὁ βασιλεὺς σου σήμερον κατέρραξε, καθεῖλε,
 κἂν φιλανθρωπευσάμενος ἀφῆκεν ἐν τοῖς ζῶσιν (ibid: 49.315-317).

¹²²⁷ In a piece written to commemorate the campaign of 1150, ‘Manganeios’ refers to the famous mountain of Serbia which felt the wrath of Manuel (ibid: 27.8-11). Mentions of hills and mountains in another contemporary poem about the battle confirms that it took place on high ground (ibid: 49.304-308, 320-321).

¹²²⁸ For this individual, who perished at the Battle of Myriokephalon in 1176, see Nicol (1968): 4.

¹²²⁹ Kinnamos: 110-112; Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 92.

just one finger on his left hand;¹²³⁰ ‘Manganeios’ however contradicts himself in a later work, lamenting that an ‘Illyrian’ knife removed ‘the fingers’ from Kantakouzenos’ left hand.¹²³¹ ‘Manganeios’ alone mentions a sword cut to the thigh Kantakouzenos sustained during the fighting, again holding the recipient up favourably against Philip of Macedon, whose leg wound seemed trifling by comparison.¹²³² Another facet of the engagement not featured in the historical texts but stressed by ‘Manganeios’ is that Kantakouzenos was equipped with only a blunt instrument during the fighting – a *ρόπαλον* or *κορύνην*, which can mean mace, though is more likely to refer to a club or staff, given that Kantakouzenos is said to have attacked the enemy ‘without weapons’ and ‘unarmed’.¹²³³ Possibly Kinnamos overlooked additional aspects of Kantakouzenos’ endeavours – his thigh wound and lack of a weapon – so as not to detract from the heroics of Manuel during the same episode.

That the same moments of the expedition – Manuel’s crossing of the Sava, his routing of enemy contingents and him besting Bakchinos in single combat – are stressed by Kinnamos and ‘Manganeios’ all but confirms that the pair followed the same official tradition, almost certainly originating in a campaign bulletin. The dispatch also drew attention to the exploits of Manuel’s niece’s husband, John Kantakouzenos, who

¹²³⁰ Ἐκτεινε χεῖρα μοι λαιάν, τὴν ἔκτομήν μοι δεῖζον·
ἀσπάζομαι τὴν ἐν αὐτῇ τραυματισθεῖσαν χεῖρα,
γεραίρω καὶ τὸν δάκτυλον ἐκεῖνον τὸν τμηθέντα (Manganeios Prodomos: 49.212-216).

‘Manganeios’ notes also that he was not alone among the rhetors moved to write about Kantakouzenos’ sufferings in battle.

¹²³¹ Ἰλλυρικὴ μάχαιρα κατέκοπτέ με,
καὶ χεῖρα λαιὰν ἐστέρει τῶν δακτύλων,
καὶ μικρὸν ἐσπάραττεν ὅστέου μέχρι (ibid: 99.12-16; trans. Jeffreys).

¹²³² Ibid: 49.259-281.

¹²³³ Ἐγὼ σου καὶ τὸ *ρόπαλον* τιμῶ καὶ μεγαλύνω (ibid: 49.220-225); ἄοπλος εἰσέβαλλε τοῖς ὀπλισμένοις, μόνην κορύνην ἀντὶ τοῦ ξίφους ἔχων (ibid: 97.21-22); πρὸς οὐ μετρητοὺς γυμνομαχῶν Δαλμάτας (ibid: 99.1-5). This contrasts somewhat with the account of Kinnamos, who records Kantakouzenos attempting to spear Bakchinos.

served as Saul to Manuel's David, killing thousands while his master slaughtered tens of thousands.¹²³⁴ It is important to note however that Kantakouzenos' feats are only extolled by 'Manganeios' in poems specifically dedicated to Kantakouzenos or his wife. As is consistent with his general presentation, Kinnamos is ultimately concerned with ensuring Manuel was the main hero and at no risk of being upstaged.

Further Military Actions, c.1147-1180

The historical record of Manuel's reign accords with the encomia in other instances. Two contemporary poems of 'Manganeios Prodromos' present the Second Crusade as a great threat to Constantinople and see the flash flood which depleted the host of King Conrad III as divine justice.¹²³⁵ This sentiment is to an extent expressed by Choniates, though he subverts the official tradition favourable to Manuel and adopts a stance more sympathetic to Conrad.¹²³⁶ Inevitably, it is Kinnamos who adheres closest to 'Manganeios' and the encomiastic material.¹²³⁷ Jason Roche feels that Kinnamos' presentation reflects his direct use of encomia, though Michael and Elizabeth Jeffreys suspect that 'the imperial equivalent of press releases were available to all three writers'.¹²³⁸ The same may also be true of Manuel's recapture of Kerkyra from the Sicilians in 1149. As Kinnamos laments the passing of the emperor's brother-in-law Stephen Kontostephanos,¹²³⁹ both Theodore Prodromos and 'Manganeios Prodromos' bemoan the martyr's death of the *meGas doux* Stephen in a

¹²³⁴ Οὕτως αὐτὸς ὡς ὁ Σαοὺλ ἀπέκτεινας χιλίους,
ὁ δὲ κρατῶν ὡς ὁ Δαυὶδ κατέβαλε μυρίους (ibid: 49.311-312).

¹²³⁵ Ibid: 20, 24.

¹²³⁶ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 60-71.

¹²³⁷ Kinnamos: 67-89. See Roche (2008a): esp. 57-93.

¹²³⁸ E. & M. Jeffreys (2001): esp. 103 n.7.

¹²³⁹ Kinnamos: 96-98; trans. 79. Kinnamos relates that Kontostephanos selflessly ordered his officers to keep the news of his mortal injury from the army, lest they lose heart at a pivotal stage of the siege. He commends the 'expressions of a spirit manly and wholly warlike and patriotic'.

series of poems.¹²⁴⁰ According to Kinnamos, when Manuel came to prosecute the siege, he had to be restrained from personally leading the assault, though later took up a shield to deflect enemy projectiles.¹²⁴¹ Manuel's heroic conduct is also attested by Theodore Prodromos in a composition to mark the emperor's triumphant return.¹²⁴² Again, Choniates is not as complimentary. In his account Manuel plays the role of encouraging commander, while it is a heroic soldier, Poupakes, who upstages the emperor. Choniates further undermines Manuel's achievement by mentioning discord between the Byzantines and their Venetian allies, noting how they mocked Manuel by placing an Ethiopian on the imperial ship at Euboa and acclaiming him emperor.¹²⁴³ While the two parties eventually agreed an amnesty, it seems improbable that Manuel would let this humiliation be known in the public bulletin he is reported to have sent to Constantinople prior to his eventual return from campaign.¹²⁴⁴

While there is a lack of surviving encomia for the period 1160-1173,¹²⁴⁵ it would appear that historians continued to utilize official material for events. We have speculated that this was the case for Choniates' account of the Hungarian campaign of 1167.¹²⁴⁶ Andrew Stone also observes striking similarities between Kinnamos' account of Manuel's involvement in the siege of Zeugminon in 1165 and comments

¹²⁴⁰ Theodore Prodromos: XLVIII-LI; Manganeios Prodromos: 60.67, 60.74, 60.207.

¹²⁴¹ Kinnamos: 99-101.

¹²⁴² Theodore Prodromos: XXX.47-119. Poems XXXI-XXXIII are hymns composed over the course of 1149-1150 praising the same campaign. 'Manganeios Prodromos' does not disclose much about this action. The most substantial reference in his corpus is that to Manuel's siege of a fortress which 'rose beyond the clouds', noting the use of 'strange...ladders supported on watery foundations' (4.264-295; trans. Jeffreys). This is almost certainly a reference to a device described by Choniates. Manuel is said to have set up a huge wooden scaling ladder in the shape of a tower, propped up by his ships. It later collapsed, sending many men to their deaths. 'Manganeios' conveniently omits this tragic incident (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 82-85).

¹²⁴³ Ibid: 77.13-88.48.

¹²⁴⁴ Ibid: 90.2-91.8.

¹²⁴⁵ For discussion see Magdalino (1993a): 454-456.

¹²⁴⁶ See above, 139-147.

made by Eustathios of Thessaloniki in a later oration.¹²⁴⁷ Kinnamos speaks of his ‘astonishment at many things done at this siege’, adding: ‘I would scarcely believe those who reported the emperor’s daring if I had not been present as a witness of what happened’.¹²⁴⁸ Yet the key events involving Manuel are strikingly formulaic; battling on through a leg injury, and being dissuaded by his officers from scaling a siege tower. This tale is not dissimilar to that recorded in Kinnamos’ earlier account of the siege of Kerkyra, which might suggest the continuation of the historian’s use of official material, supplementing his own autopsy. That Kinnamos uses λέγεται when describing how Manuel protected a Byzantine archer with his shield lends further credence to this notion.¹²⁴⁹

Though Kinnamos’ work ends c.1175, thereafter Choniates continues, in principle, to follow the official line in his accounts of Manuel’s campaigns. The Lenten orations of Eustathios of Thessaloniki and Euthymios Malakes, delivered in 1176, dwell on Manuel’s rebuilding of the dilapidated fortresses of Dorylaion and Soublaion in Phrygia, presenting Manuel as planner, warden and even labourer.¹²⁵⁰ It is suggested that Choniates’ reporting of Manuel’s refortification programme, replete with rhetorical language and similar praise, may well have derived from such panegyric

¹²⁴⁷ Stone (2001): 231-233. Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Orations*: 265-267; also 211-212, 271.

¹²⁴⁸ ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ ἄλλα μὲν τῶν εἰς ἐκείνην τετελεσμένων θαυμάζειν ἔχω τὴν πολιορκίαν, τὴν γε μὴν τοῦ βασιλέως τόλμαν, εἰ μὴ παρῶν ἐτύγχανον τῆδε τῶν πραττομένων αὐτόπτης γινόμενος, σχολῆ ἂν ἀφηγουμένοις ἐπίστευσα (Kinnamos: 241.15-18; trans. 181-182).

¹²⁴⁹ Kinnamos: 245.2-5. Despite this apparently being an eyewitness account, Kinnamos also appears to resort to literary borrowing, with one incident involving a woman heckling Byzantine troops during the siege highly reminiscent of a scene in Leo the Deacon’s account of the siege of Chandax in 960 (Leo the Deacon: 24.17-25.8; Kinnamos: 246.2-10). For this observation see Ljubarskij (2000a): 169 n.20.

¹²⁵⁰ Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Orations*: 17-45, esp. 41-42; Euthymios Malakes: 527-535. A verse poem about Manuel’s rebuilding of Dorylaion similarly affords the emperor the role of placing the first stone and encouraging his men to follow suit (*Anonymous Poem on the Refortification of Dorylaion*: ll.46-53). For discussion of the poem and possible authorship see Spingou (2011).

literature or a common bulletin source.¹²⁵¹ In particular, Choniates' accounts of major campaigns conducted by Manuel in 1175 and 1179 bear close witness to the encomiastic tradition. The incident of Manuel discarding a peach and riding out to meet a Turkish attack in 1175 is described by both Malakes and Choniates.¹²⁵² Konstantinos Bones and Magdalino argue that the writers were employing a common source, most probably a bulletin.¹²⁵³ An oration delivered by Eustathios of Thessaloniki in 1180 refers to a forced march where the emperor joined his men in going without food or rest, almost certainly the same march to relieve Claudiopolis described by Choniates.¹²⁵⁴

The Battle of Myriokephalon, 1176

The record of the defeat of Manuel's army at Myriokephalon represents an interesting case.¹²⁵⁵ Choniates offers the only substantial account of the battle, with parts suggestive of the use of official material.¹²⁵⁶ We are told that the emperor led a charge against the enemy and managed to slip through, because he was 'protected by

¹²⁵¹ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 150, 176-177. For the parallels see Wirth (1962); Stone (2001): 242-243; idem (2003).

¹²⁵² Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 177.

¹²⁵³ Bones (1941-1948): 716. Magdalino (1993a): 457-458 notes that the two writers connect the 'peach' incident with different aspects of the rebuilding of Dorylaion and Soublaion, which raises questions about how Choniates learned of this 'official information'. If distorted, it would corroborate our suggestions about the official record of John II Komnenos' reign, though one would expect Choniates to be better informed about a more contemporary event. Possibly he just linked it with the refortification of Dorylaion for narrative purposes, as is suggested by Simpson (2004): 214-215. Stone (2003): 197-199 plausibly argues that Choniates merely conflated the rebuilding of Dorylaion and Soublaion.

¹²⁵⁴ Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Orations*: 184.78-89; Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 197-198. For recognition of the link and the date see Magdalino (1993a): 99 & n.299; Stone (2001): 248-250. Wirth (1957) also discusses the Claudiopolis campaign, suggesting that Choniates was dubiously informed about these events.

¹²⁵⁵ For discussion of the battle see Chalandon (1912): 460-466, 498-518; Wirth (1957); Lilie (1977); Hendy (1985): 146-154; Haldon (2001): 139-144; Birkenmeier (2002): 131-133.

¹²⁵⁶ Simpson (2004: 213-214) proposes that Choniates 'relied heavily' on official bulletins and newsletters for his account of the battle.

God who long ago had screened David's head on the day of battle'.¹²⁵⁷ Later in the battle, the emperor is reported to have defeated several Turks who tried to capture him, fighting his way through another eager cluster of the enemy.¹²⁵⁸ Other sources corroborate that Manuel attempted to salvage his reputation by focusing on his own heroic efforts in official reports. Writing within three years of the disaster at Myriokephalon, the Cypriot monk, Neophytos the Recluse, dwells on Manuel's heroic behaviour in the battle. Distraught at seeing his men cut down, Manuel charged at the Turks, protected throughout by God. As a result, the emperor was able to slay many and escape unscathed. Intriguingly, comparison is again made with the warrior ruler David and his imperiousness in battle.¹²⁵⁹ Catia Galatariotou asserts that this information 'almost certainly originated in the official (and heavily distorted) version of events', which reached Cyprus through an imperial bulletin.¹²⁶⁰ As presented here, the defeat at Myriokephalon is transformed into something of a personal victory for the emperor. That this was the intent of official accounts of the battle is supported by Eustathios of Thessaloniki, whose oration of 1180 describes how Manuel heroically drove off countless waves of Turks at an unspecified battle, which various commentators have pinpointed as that fought near Myriokephalon.¹²⁶¹ While manuscripts break off prior to his account of the campaign, Kinnamos foreshadows the expedition earlier in his history. Indeed, it seems all but certain that Kinnamos was a survivor of the battle. At one point he speaks of finding Manuel's deeds

¹²⁵⁷ πλὴν καὶ οὕτω παρὰ δόξαν τὰς τῶν βαρβάρων διέδρα λαβὰς, ὑπὸ θεοῦ φρουρηθεὶς τοῦ καὶ ἐπὶ κεφαλῆν πάλαι Δανιδ ἐν ἡμέρᾳ πολέμου ἐπισκιάζοντος, ὡς αὐτός φησιν ὁ φιλόψαλμος (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 182.52-183.84; trans. 103).

¹²⁵⁸ Ibid: 184.9-185.51.

¹²⁵⁹ Ἐδίδαξε γὰρ αὐτοῦ ὁ Θεὸς κατὰ τὸν θεῖον Δαβὶδ χειρὰς εἰς πόλεμον καὶ ὑπερασπισμὸν σωτηρίας τοῦτω ἐβράβευσε καὶ ἡ δεξιὰ αὐτοῦ τοῦ βασιλέως ἀντελάβετο καὶ ἔθετο ὡς τόξον χαλκοῦν τοὺς βραχίονας καὶ ἀσθενεῖς τοὺς ἀντιπάλους, ἀπέδειξε καὶ ἰσχυρῶς καὶ γενναίως μεταξὺ τῶν τουρκικῶν παρατάξεων συνεστρέφετο (Neophytos the Recluse: 45-46; trans. Galatariotou 1991: 214).

¹²⁶⁰ Galatariotou (1991): 206, 213-215.

¹²⁶¹ Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Orationes*: 182-183. See Kazhdan (1984c): 126; Magdalino (1993a: 458, 464); Stone (2001): 251.

unbelievable; that is, until he witnessed them first hand. ‘I was by chance surrounded by the foe and observed from close at hand the emperor resisting entire Turkish regiments. But the history will describe this at the right moment’.¹²⁶² Kinnamos can only be referring to the Battle of Myriokephalon. He appears to do so again whilst describing the visit of Sultan Kilij Arslan II to Constantinople in 1161-1162.

Kinnamos notes that years later the Roman army ‘came near a great disaster, save that in warfare the emperor was there seen to surpass the bounds of human excellence’.¹²⁶³ These thoughts confirm that Kinnamos’ lost account of the battle would have followed a similar path of presenting the emperor as a courageous warrior, a shining light in the defeat.¹²⁶⁴

These conclusions are supported by descriptions of the battle in letters drafted for foreign rulers. Shortly after the battle, Manuel sent ambassadors to King Henry II of England with a written account, preserved by the contemporary English chronicler, Roger of Howden. Manuel quickly offers excuses, revealing that dysentery ravaged

¹²⁶² ἕως εἰς ὄψιν ἦλθέ μοι τὰ τοῦ πράγματος ἐν μέσοις καὶ αὐτῶν πολεμίοις οὕτω τυχὸν περιειλημμένῳ κὰκ τοῦ σχεδὸν ὄρωντι τὸν αὐτοκράτορα τοῦτον φάλαγξιν ὄλαις ἀντικαθιστάμενον Περσικαῖς. ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν κατὰ καιρὸν ἡ ἱστορία διηγήσεται, τὸ δὲ νῦν τῶν προτεθέντων ἐχώμεθα (Kinnamos: 192.12-22; trans. 147, with amendments).

¹²⁶³ τύχη τέ τιτι δυσχωρίαῖς ἐμπεσὸν τὸ στρατιωτικὸν τῶν ἐπὶ δόξης τε ἀποβεβλήκει πολλοὺς καὶ μεγάλου ἐγγὺς ἦλθε κακοῦ, εἰ μὴ βασιλεὺς ἐνταῦθα ἀνθρωπίνης ὄρον ἀρετῆς τὰ πολέμια παρελθὼν ὄφθη (ibid: 207.2-8; trans. 157).

¹²⁶⁴ Kinnamos’ account of the preliminary stages of the campaign makes no hint of the ‘Crusade’ rhetoric which pervaded the encomia of Malakes and Eustathios from the spring of 1176, when optimism was great. The absence of this aspect from favourable accounts suggests it was quietly suppressed, understandable given that the ideology of ‘holy war’ could not be reconciled with Manuel’s subsequent failure. Indeed, the notion is positively undermined by Choniates, who relates the dream of a man named Mauropoulos, of which Manuel was apparently informed prior to the campaign. In the dream, the man heard a voice from an icon of the Virgin asking the military saints George and Theodore to aid Manuel, but neither was willing to do so (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 190-191). That the tale is extremely reminiscent of a dream relating to the campaign of John I Tzimiskes in 971 suggests the episode may have been adapted by Choniates in order to denigrate Manuel. For relevant discussion of the ‘holy war’ aspect of Manuel’s campaigns in this period see Chalandon (1912): 503-506; Lillie (1977); Magdalino (1993a): 463; Stone (2001): 244-246, 257-258; idem (2003): esp. 185-186.

his army, ‘greatly weakening’ his forces prior to the battle.¹²⁶⁵ Having been set upon by many Turks, Manuel was unable to aid his troops as the siege train extended for ten miles due to the narrow passage. While many Byzantine troops were lost in the chaos, Manuel, ‘hedged in on every side...inflicting wounds and receiving wounds in turn’, persevered until ‘by the benign aid of God we reached the open ground’.¹²⁶⁶ Manuel rallied his guard and fought to the main body of the army. At this point, Kiliç Arslan, seeing that Manuel was not broken by the defeat, apparently sued for peace, promising to consent to every demand of the emperor. Manuel agreed a treaty with the sultan, ‘confirmed by oath beneath our standards, and granting to him our peace’.¹²⁶⁷ This last section is very similar to that which apparently concluded Manuel’s letter to Holy Roman Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa, parts of which are preserved in the thirteenth-century chronicle, the *Annales Stadenses*. After offering the obligatory introductions to the letter, the chronicler skips to relate the end: ‘The sultan...sent envoys requesting peace, confirmed under the imperial banner, and swore an oath to serve us’.¹²⁶⁸ The authenticity of this letter is supported by its

¹²⁶⁵ “Amplius autem dum adhuc propriam regionem peragraret, antequam barbarorum alius adversus nos militaret in bellis adversarius, aegritudo difficillima, fluxus ventris, invasit nos, qui diffusus per agmina imperii nostri pertransibat, depopulando et interimendo multos, omni pugnatore gravior. Et hoc malum invalescens maxime nos contrivit”.

¹²⁶⁶ “At vero imperium nostrum tot et tantis consertum barbaris, saucians sauciatumque, adeo ut non modicam in eos moveret perturbationem, obstupentes perseverantiam ipsius, et non remittebatur, bene juvante Deo campum obtinuit”.

¹²⁶⁷ “...suscepit Soltani deprecationem, et foedera et juramenta peracta sub vexillis nostris, et pacem suam ei dedit” (Roger of Howden: II, 102-104; trans. 237-240). Dölger, *Regesten*: II, no. 1524.

¹²⁶⁸ Eodem tempore Manuel Graecorum imperator, bellum contra soldanum habuit, de quo imperatori scripsit, salutatione sic posita: *Manuel in Christo Deo fidelis imperator, porphirogenitus, divinitus coronatus, regnator, potens, excelsus et semper augustus et Romanorum moderator magnificus, nobilissimo et gloriosissimo regi Alemanniae et imperatori et dilecto fratri, imperii nostri salutem et fraterni amoris affectum*. Et in fine epistolae sic: *Sultanus imperio nostro se dedit et missis legatis misericordiam postulavit, fecitque imperio nostro ominium, et iuramento pollicitus est servire nobis contra omnem hominem cum exercitu suo, ita ut sit amicorum nostrorum amicus et inimicorum inimicus*. Hanc epistolam imperator suscepit scriptam aureis litteris (*Annales Stadenses*: s.a. 1179, 349.11-35). The correspondence between Manuel and Barbarossa is discussed by Kresten (1992-1993): esp. 107-110.

parallels with the letter to Henry, confirming that in correspondence with foreign rulers Manuel indicated that it was the sultan, and not he, who sued for peace.

Lilie saw Manuel's correspondence with Henry as an attempt to mitigate the loss, possibly even to turn it into a victory.¹²⁶⁹ There are parallels between this letter and the accounts of Neophytos the Recluse and Eustathios of Thessaloniki, as well as parts of Choniates. All concur that Manuel, with the aid of God, fought heroically to extract himself from danger. Both Choniates and the letter refer to wounds suffered by Manuel during the fighting, as well as the dysentery which plagued the imperial army. Consequently, Riccardo Maisano suspects that Choniates consulted the letter sent to Henry, or at least a document like it.¹²⁷⁰ Choniates himself concludes his account with mention of the emperor sending messengers to relay the news to Constantinople. It is said that after describing the carnage, Manuel 'extolled the treatises made with the sultan, boasting that these had been concluded beneath his own banner'.¹²⁷¹ This account corresponds with the letters sent to Henry and Barbarossa, wherein Manuel purports that it was the sultan who sued for peace under Manuel's terms. Given that he does not present Manuel as being able to impose his demands, Choniates evidently did not make extensive use of this particular version of events.¹²⁷² Magdalino is not convinced however that Manuel's dispatch represented the only official account of the Battle of Myriokephalon.¹²⁷³ Choniates discloses that

¹²⁶⁹ Lilie (1977): 264, 267.

¹²⁷⁰ Maisano (1994a): 403.

¹²⁷¹ προεκπέμψας δ' ἀγγέλους τὰ συμβεβηκότα ταῦτα τοῖς Κωνσταντινουπολίταις παρίστα, νῦν μὲν ταυτοπαθῆ πως ἑαυτὸν Ῥωμανῶ τῷ Διογένει κατονομάζων, ἐπεὶ καὶ οὗτος ὁ βασιλεὺς κατὰ τῶν Τούρκων ἐξενεγκῶν ποτε πόλεμον τό τε πολὺ τῆς στρατιᾶς ἀπεβάλετο καὶ αὐτὸς συλληφθεὶς ἀπήχθη αἰχμάλωτος, νῦν δὲ τὰς μετὰ τοῦ σουλτάν σπονδὰς ὑπεξ αἴρων καὶ κάτωθεν τῆς ἑαυτοῦ σημαίας μεγαλορρημονῶν αὐτὰς περατῶσαι, ἀνέμω ἀναπεπταμένης καὶ πρὸς τὸ τῶν ἀντιπάλων ἀφορώσης μέτωπον ὡς φόβον ἐμπίπτειν καὶ τρόμον αὐτοῖς (Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 191.26-33; trans. 108).

¹²⁷² Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 189-190.

¹²⁷³ Magdalino (1993a): 458-459.

in the same report the emperor compared his plight to that of Romanos Diogenes, who had also suffered a heavy defeat to the Turks. Manuel does not mention Romanos in his letter to Henry, though the reference may have been lost on the English king. We cannot rule out that Choniates himself drew the comparison, but an earlier reference in encomia to Manuel as a ‘new Diogenes’ suggests that the emperor may not have objected to being equated with such an esteemed warrior.¹²⁷⁴ Possibly Manuel was seeking to soften the blow by prompting people to recall a more catastrophic defeat.¹²⁷⁵ This comparison may have been deemed more important in relation to the populace of Constantinople than Henry II or even the people of Cyprus. Therefore, while we cannot speak of a single official account of the Battle of Myriokephalon, it is evident that the official line involved Manuel extricating himself from blame and stressing his own personal heroics, consistent with his presentation in records of earlier battles.

It seems Niketas Choniates did not make extensive use of the official record of the battle. He reveals that a Turkish peace embassy came to Manuel before any fighting, promising to acquiesce to the emperor’s wishes. Manuel was entreated by his senior soldiers to welcome this agreement, but their wise guidance was overlooked. When Kilij Arslan perceived that Manuel was intent on war, he began occupying the defiles at Tzivritze, waiting for the Roman army to pass through after leaving Myriokephalon. Manuel, however, failed to take due precaution, which included sending men ahead to disperse the enemy. Worst of all, he ignored warnings and

¹²⁷⁴ καὶ ταῖς χερσὶ ταῖς κραταιαῖς αὐτὸς ἐμεγαλοῦργεις,

ὡς πρὶν ἐκεῖνος ὁ Φωκᾶς, ὡς Διογένης νέος (Manganeios Prodromos: 25.87-88). The *Timarion*, produced in the mid-twelfth century, depicts the ‘famous’ Romanos Diogenes as a tragic figure lamenting his misfortune (*Timarion*: ll.549-556).

¹²⁷⁵ Modern commentators have observed similarities between the two campaigns and battles – see Vryonis (2005).

pushed on through the narrow defile, leading his army into an ambush.¹²⁷⁶ By contrast, both Neophytos and Manuel's letter to Henry assert that the enemy suddenly fell upon the imperial army, the indication being that Manuel could do little about it. Given that Byzantine instructional manuals encourage reconnaissance to avoid falling prey to ambushes in defiles, one suspects that Choniates was not alone in being sceptical of the official rhetoric.¹²⁷⁷ William of Tyre, writing within a decade of the battle, notes that the loss was a consequence of the army 'incautiously trusting themselves headlong to dangerous narrow passes already seized by the enemy'. Still, William attributes this error to the 'imprudence of the imperial officers' rather than to Manuel, which is consistent with his generally sympathetic portrayal of the emperor.¹²⁷⁸ The Cardinal Boso, who wrote his *Life* of Pope Alexander III c.1180, supports the testimony of Choniates. According to this account, the sultan beseeched Manuel to leave in peace, offering him gifts and even volunteering his services whenever the emperor required them. Manuel however rejected this offer, stating he would only commit to peace if given Ikonion. When Manuel came to enter the narrow pass, he did so with 'too little forethought, rather carelessly and rashly'. After the mass slaughter of Byzantine soldiers, the sultan took pity on Manuel and allowed him to go free with gifts, including a captured cross.¹²⁷⁹ The similarities with

¹²⁷⁶ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 179.40-180.80.

¹²⁷⁷ See, for example, *De Re Militari*: §§7; 14; 15; 18; 19; 20.

¹²⁷⁸ *Dicitur autem suorum ducum, qui preibant agmina, magis imprudentia quam hostium viribus id accidisse. Nam cum patentes ampleque vie ad producendas acies et sarcinarum moles commodius trahendas et impedimentorum omne genus subvehendum, quod et numerum excedere dicebatur et mensuram, non deessent, incaute nimis in periculosas locorum angustias precipites se dederunt, ubi nec hostibus, qui loca eadem iam occupaverant, dabatur resistere nec referendi vices copia ministrabatur* (William of Tyre: II, 976.1-977.32; trans. II, 414-415). Lilie (1977: 266) maintains that William was well-informed but still considers his report to be highly contradictory.

¹²⁷⁹ *Liber Pontificalis*: 435-436; part. trans. 100-101. The Norman monk Robert of Torigny, who also wrote his chronicle within a few years of the battle, suggests that the cross was not reclaimed until the emperor's campaign against the Turkish cities on the Maeander in 1178. Robert refers to the sultan of Ikonion as having been successful the previous year, though since his dating is suspect here it is apparent that Robert must be referring to the events of 1176. That the campaign is presented as one of

Choniates' account are numerous. Hans Kap-Herr, followed by Ferdinand Chalandon, postulated that Boso and Choniates employed the same written source.¹²⁸⁰ The learned Boso was clearly well-informed,¹²⁸¹ though his main source could not have been an official correspondence sent from Constantinople.¹²⁸² A western European involved in the expedition at a high level may have served as his informant, though given the favourable presentation of Kilij Arslan one might postulate that Boso's version of events reflected that which a delegation from the sultan brought to Friedrich Barbarossa, testimony which, the *Annales Stadenses* confirms, 'reported the opposite' to the letter Manuel composed for Barbarossa.¹²⁸³ It is implausible to think that Choniates had access to the exact same source; more likely, this sort of information was widely distributed, an 'unofficial' narrative to counter the distorted version of events propagated by the imperial court.¹²⁸⁴

retribution, and the sultan is even said to have vacated Ikonion in his retreat, suggests that this information originated in an imperial letter to Normandy in which Manuel stressed that the setback at Myriokephalon had been avenged: Manuel imperator Constantinopolitanus vindicavit se hoc anno de Solimano Iconii, qui anno superiori illum fugaverat, et multos de militibus suis ceperat, insuper et crucem dominicam ei abstulerat. Manuel enim imperator fugavit eum, et multos de militibus eius cepit, et ipse Solimanus urbem Iconii vacuam reliquit (Robert of Torigny: s.a. 1179 [editor alters to 1178], 527.55-58). For Manuel's campaign of 1178, see Stone (1997).

¹²⁸⁰ Kap-Herr (1881): 130; Chalandon (1912): xxv-xxvi, 508.

¹²⁸¹ Ellis (1973): 1-39.

¹²⁸² It has been argued that at least part of Boso's account derived from an official letter from Constantinople – see Kresten (1992-1993): 79 n.58. Manuel had written to Alexander in January 1176 reporting his military activities of the previous year. The emphasis appears to have been placed on the rebuilding of Dorylaion which, it was suggested, helped make safe the pilgrim route to Constantinople (*Epistolae Alexandri III. Papae*: no. 385). For discussion see Stone (2003): 185.

¹²⁸³ Sed prius legationem sultani acceperat, contraria nunciantis (*Annales Stadenses*: s.a. 1179, 349.19-20). Michael the Syrian (III, 371), a contemporary of these events, records that Kilij Arslan sent tokens of victory to the caliph of Baghdad and the sultan of Khorosan, so it is perhaps to be expected that written communiqués were sent far and wide. His account also supports the notion that the precious cross and other riches were plundered by Turcomans, only to be later recovered by Manuel at great cost. Michael adds that it was the emperor who first brokered peace talks, with the sultan only too happy to negotiate (III, 370-371). Lilie (1977: 267) maintains that Michael's account was inaccurate and lacking in precise detail, though it would seem that he was informed from a Turkish perspective rather than a Byzantine one.

¹²⁸⁴ We should also mention here the report of Romuald, archbishop of Salerno, who again wrote within a few years of the battle. His account is, in the main, very similar to that given by Boso, with

Three episodes in Choniates' account, detrimental to Manuel, are not corroborated by other sources. When Manuel discovered that the water he was about to drink was tainted with the blood of his own men, one man apparently commented that the emperor had often sipped from a bowl of Christian blood in exploiting his subjects. The same individual again reproached the emperor shortly after. With Manuel encouraging his troops to save spilled coins, the man criticized the emperor for not giving the money to his men before, and urged him to retrieve the gold himself if he was as brave as he claimed.¹²⁸⁵ Choniates also reports a major incident in the imperial camp that evening. The emperor apparently expressed a wish to secretly flee to secure his own safety, abandoning his men to death. His followers, not least Andronikos Kontostephanos, were dismayed by this, believing that the emperor had lost his mind. An unnamed soldier shamed Manuel into staying with an impassioned speech:

Are you not the one who has squeezed us into these desolate and narrow paths, exposing us to utter ruin, the one who has ground us as though in a mortar between these cliffs falling in upon us and the mountains pressing down upon us? Would not our crossing these rough and harsh paths be the same thing as passing through the valley of weeping and the mouth of Hades? What charge can we bring against the barbarians for investing these narrow, rugged, and winding

Manuel said to have rejected the initial overtures of the sultan though eventually forced to come to terms, managing to regain the captured cross through the negotiations (Romuald of Salerno: s.a. 1175 [obviously incorrect], 442). His additional comments - that the humiliation was God's judgment for Manuel sabotaging the proposed marriage between his daughter Maria and King William II of Sicily in 1172 - would not have been part of the original source but nevertheless provide an intriguing insight into how Manuel's defeat was received in some parts of the west, and perhaps help to explain why Manuel's official account did not find its way into all chronicle sources of western Europe.

¹²⁸⁵ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 185-186.

places and ensnaring us? And now will you deliver us over to the enemy like sheep for slaughter?¹²⁸⁶

These episodes, inviting criticism of Manuel, have been cited as evidence for Choniates' use of 'unofficial' information. Herbert Hunger determined these revelations to derive from participants interviewed by Choniates.¹²⁸⁷ Riccardo Maisano also postulates that Choniates relied on a participant for information, probably Andronikos Kontostephanos, whose position in the rearguard would have afforded him a good observation point.¹²⁸⁸ Yet because these episodes mock Manuel's famed heroic prowess, and intimate that he exploited his people and cared little for them, there is a suspicion that they may have been invented by Choniates for reasons of *Kaiserkritik*. Magdalino notes that the anecdotes about drinking water and campaign treasure allow Choniates to express 'indirect criticism'.¹²⁸⁹ Jakov Ljubarskij has taken this further, suggesting that these parts were invented by Choniates for the purposes of irony or, and perhaps more significantly, censuring Manuel.¹²⁹⁰ The notion is supported in the first instance by Choniates criticizing the emperor's zealous taxation of his subjects elsewhere.¹²⁹¹ One must favour Ljubarskij's idea for the simple reason that common troops were unlikely to have rebuked the emperor. The unnamed men are little more than a mouthpiece for

¹²⁸⁶ “οὐχι σύ” φησιν “ὁ διὰ τῆς ἐρήμης ταύτης καὶ στενῆς ὁδοῦ ἐκθλίψας ἡμᾶς καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν διηθήσας, ἢ μαλλον οἶονεῖ τινι ὄλμῳ ἐκπιέσας τοῖς συμπίπτουσι τούτοις σκοπέλοις καὶ τοῖς πεσοῦσιν ἀτεχνῶς ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς ὄρεσι; τί ἡμῖν καὶ τῇ κοιλάδι ταύτῃ τοῦ κλαυθμῶνος καὶ τῷ στομίῳ τοῦ ἄδου ἄντικρυς καὶ τῷ παρελθεῖν τὰς ἀνωμάλους ταύτας καὶ τραχείας τροχιάς; ἢ τί ἴδιον ἐπάγειν τοῖς βαρβάροις ἐπὶ κλημα εἶχομεν, οἱ τοὺς χώρους τούτους τοὺς στενοὺς τε καὶ βιαίους καὶ σκολιοὺς περικαθίσαντες ἡμᾶς ἐσαγήνευσαν; καὶ νῦν ὅπως καταπροδίδωσ ὡς πρόβατα σφαγῆς τοῖς ἐχθροῖς;” (ibid: 186.79-187.18; trans. 105-106).

¹²⁸⁷ Hunger (1978): I, 435.

¹²⁸⁸ Maisano (1994a): 402-403. See also Simpson (2004): 220-221.

¹²⁸⁹ Magdalino (1993a): 8-9. Cf. Lamma (1957): 280.

¹²⁹⁰ Ljubarskij (2004); idem (2005): esp. 108-109.

¹²⁹¹ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 204.79-2. For Niketas' critique of financial policy, particularly that of Manuel, see Simpson (2004): 97-104.

Choniates' own opinions, enabling him to criticize the emperor indirectly.¹²⁹²

Andronikos Kontostephanos' primary function in proceedings, just as in his previous appearances, is to upstage Manuel and serve as Choniates' model hero. He is not to be seen as an informer, but rather as a key weapon in Niketas' *Kaiserkritik*.

We have seen in the first chapter that Choniates may have invented episodes in order to denigrate Manuel, and there is every possibility that he continued this practice here. There were undeniably official accounts of the Battle of Myriokephalon in which Manuel's personal contribution was stressed, and the conclusion distorted into something of a Byzantine victory. Choniates appears to have followed this line to some extent, but he subverts the encomiastic material, suggesting that Manuel had been inept in his planning and cowardly in the field. This process involved consultation of 'unofficial' sources, such as the testimony of participants, though invention allowed Choniates to better manipulate his account to the needs of his historical programme.

¹²⁹² Simpson (2004): 98-99, 233-237. When Manuel was initially writing under the Emperor Alexios III, a relative of the Komnenoi, Choniates could not be seen to openly criticize Manuel. The final version of his history is more explicit in its criticism of Manuel's policies – see *ibid*: 112-115, 122-133.

Conclusion

The historical record of Kinnamos and Choniates for the reigns of John II Komnenos and Manuel I Komnenos shows a dependence on the official line offered by bulletins and encomia. Possibly the material for John's rule was truncated because he did not interest the historians as much as Manuel, but by their own admission they were better informed about military operations conducted under Manuel's watch. Greater access to participants may have been one reason for this, though comparison with encomia suggests that Kinnamos and Choniates derived much of their information from official records of Manuel's campaigns. While direct use of encomia is possible, the concurrences are not thought to be a consequence of this. Panegyrists such as 'Manganeios Prodromos' occasionally mention events, such as naval victories over Sicily, otherwise overlooked by historians.¹²⁹³ Due to differences in approach, Michael Jeffreys, following Peter Wirth, believes it 'safer to assume' that the historians and encomiasts were using a common source – reports issued by the army. While a panegyrist like 'Manganeios Prodromos' latched upon these immediately, it is thought that Kinnamos probably consulted 'an official dossier of reports' decades after the fact.¹²⁹⁴ Ljubarskij speculates that there may have been 'a sort of Gemeingut'; that is, a collection of stories about the emperor which circulated in Constantinople.¹²⁹⁵ Yet, as Paul Magdalino shows, there are discrepancies which contradict the idea that the encomiasts and historians were employing the exact same sources. In Kinnamos' case, it is considered that the author did not have access to an organized dossier, but inconsistent accounts which he struggled to reconcile.

Magdalino concludes that 'neither the encomiasts nor the historians inspire much

¹²⁹³ Magdalino (1993a): 57 & n.107, 443-444.

¹²⁹⁴ Wirth (1976): 36-39; M. Jeffreys (2011): 29.

¹²⁹⁵ Ljubarskij (2000a): 169.

confidence in the existence of a coherent official record of events'.¹²⁹⁶ Magdalino's suggestion is supported by study of John's campaigns, which demonstrates that the official record was distorted by the time Kinnamos and Choniates came to write their historical works. The shared content across encomia and historiography can only have derived from official information, though the particular documents or even informants consulted by the writers cannot have been the same.

As Magdalino notes, Kinnamos adheres more closely to the encomia of Manuel, which is to be expected given his greater admiration for the emperor. That Kinnamos himself was not responsible for such embellishment is seen in a passage where he objects to Manuel's bold conduct in battle, opining that it bordered on reckless.¹²⁹⁷ Kinnamos alludes to the court orators who boasted of Manuel's deeds. He initially found reports of the emperor alone putting thousands of armoured troops to flight 'unbelievable', and confesses to being rather sceptical upon hearing Manuel's actions extolled at court. That was, of course, until Kinnamos himself witnessed the emperor engaging whole contingents of Turks, in what appears to be a veiled reference to the Battle of Myriokephalon.¹²⁹⁸ If we are to believe that Kinnamos' initial suspicions about the encomiasts at court represent something more substantial than the 'truth'

¹²⁹⁶ Magdalino (1993a): 445-446, 477.

¹²⁹⁷ See below, 359-361.

¹²⁹⁸ ταῦτα ἐμοί γε εἰς ἀκοὴν πίπτοντα ἦττον ἀληθῆ ἐδόκει, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ τὰ Φωκᾶ καὶ Τζιμισκῆ ἔργα τῶν οὐ λίαν ἀρχαίων τούτων αὐτοκρατόρων, ἢ εἴ τινες ἄλλοι παρ' αὐτοὺς ἐπ' ἀνδρεία ὄνομα ἔσχον. εἶναι γὰρ πέρα πίστεως, ἀνδρὸς ἐνὸς ὄλας ἠττηθῆαι χιλιάδας καὶ δόρατι ἐνὶ μυριοπληθεῖς καταγωνίζεσθαι πανοπλίας. ὅθεν εἰ καὶ ποτε ταῖς βασιλείοις ἐπιχωριάζων ἀυλαῖς τὰ τηλίκαι τῶν ἔργων ἀποθροιάζοντων ἀκήκοα τῷ βασιλεῖ, ἰλιγγιῶν τοῦ συλλόγου ἀπεπήδων. φύσει γὰρ πρὸς κολακείαν ἄξεστον ἐμπέφυκέ μοι τὸ ἦθος, καὶ οὐκ ἂν οὐδὲ ῥῆμα σμικρὸν ἐκὼν ἰέναι προείμην ὅτι μὴ σὺν ἀληθείᾳ καὶ στόματι ἐλευθέρῳ. τὰ δὲ τοιαῦτα τοῖς ἐν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς ἀεὶ πρὸς τοῦ δόμου καὶ τοῖς ἐν τέλεσι καταχαρακτηρίζεσθαι εἶον, ἕως εἰς ὄψιν ἦλθέ μοι τὰ τοῦ πράγματος ἐν μέσοις καὶ αὐτῷ πολεμίοις οὕτω τυχὸν περιειλημμένῳ κάκ τοῦ σχεδὸν ὄρωντι τὸν αὐτοκράτορα τοῦτον φάλαγγιν ὄλαις ἀντικαθιστάμενον Περσικαῖς (John Kinnamos: 192.3-22; trans. 146-147).

topos of historiography,¹²⁹⁹ then his time on campaign may have moved him to employ official accounts and focus on the martial prowess of Manuel.

There are sections where Choniates' account better corresponds with the encomiastic material, particularly for the latter part of Manuel's reign. Magdalino determines Choniates to stray from the official line only when critical of Manuel's conduct, but this notion warrants clarification.¹³⁰⁰ We have speculated that parts containing the most severe criticism of Manuel may be fictitious material inserted by Choniates. The historian possibly had actual sources revealing Manuel's rashness at Myriokephalon, but one sides with Ljubarskij in finding the anecdotes exposing Manuel's cowardice and greed suspect. A large-scale defeat offered ripe opportunity for Choniates to indulge in *Kaiserkritik*. By following the line of the encomiastic material, Choniates could subvert – even 'destroy'¹³⁰¹ – the traditional image of Manuel when the occasion permitted.

A final word ought to be said of the depiction of Manuel Komnenos' military virtues in panegyric. From his first appearance on the historical stage, Manuel is presented as a fearless warrior. Magdalino observes that more space is devoted to domestic matters in orations delivered after 1173, perhaps reflecting the fact that Manuel campaigned less frequently after 1160.¹³⁰² Nevertheless, his martial prowess remained a central element in panegyric. In an oration of 1176, Eustathios of Thessaloniki lingered on the emperor's loss of blood as his chain mail rubbed against his skin, continuing a celebration of Manuel's blood loss present in encomia

¹²⁹⁹ Ljubarskij (2000a: 169) maintained that Kinnamos was merely pretending to take issue with the rhetoric at court.

¹³⁰⁰ Magdalino (1993a): 442-443, 457-458.

¹³⁰¹ Ibid: 478-479.

¹³⁰² Ibid: 457.

composed thirty years earlier.¹³⁰³ Both Magdalino and Stone have observed that encomiasts did not necessarily write as imperial mouthpieces, and what they chose to include or emphasize was left to their own discretion.¹³⁰⁴ This may be so, but these authors evidently drew upon common material which gave shape to an imperial image. Thus, in the case of Manuel, his actions as a youth at Neokaisareia set a precedent for his own behaviour as well as his presentation as a fearless warrior in future encomia.

The idealisation of *andreia* was stronger perhaps than it had been in encomia for Manuel's father and grandfather.¹³⁰⁵ Orations from the first half of Alexios' reign do not dwell on his military prowess, yet it would appear that his skills in war were more appreciated as his rule progressed.¹³⁰⁶ Euthymios Zigabenos' dictionary of heresies, the *Panoplia Dogmatike*, is preceded by a prose encomium which praises, among other things, Alexios' capacity for war. The image of Alexios as a designer of novel siege engines, and as a reader of ancient siege manuals, accords with statements made by Anna Komnene about Alexios consulting the *Taktika* of Aelian and creating unique devices to assist in the siege of Nicaea in 1097.¹³⁰⁷ Zigabenos also praises Alexios for his ability as a military strategist, an image of the emperor which persisted well into the twelfth century.¹³⁰⁸ Absent is the motif of Alexios as a warrior, which is

¹³⁰³ Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Orations*: 44.75-91.

¹³⁰⁴ Magdalino (1993a): 479; Stone (2001): 256-257.

¹³⁰⁵ Magdalino (1993a): 448-449.

¹³⁰⁶ Margaret Mullett (1996b: 388-390) determines that victory imagery became more pronounced later in Alexios' reign. See also Magdalino (1993a): 419.

¹³⁰⁷ πολεμικῶν στρατηγημάτων εὐβουλίαι, γνωμῶν ὑποθήκαι, καὶ μηχανημάτων ἐπίνοιαι, μηδὲν ἐλαττούμεναι πολλάκις τῶν Ἀρχιμήδους καὶ Παλλαμήδους (Euthymios Zigabenos: 20). Anna Komnene: XI.2.1, XV.3.6. For further discussion see Mullett (1996b): 373-376.

¹³⁰⁸ Eustathios of Thessaloniki (*Orations*: 241.23-30) recalled Alexios as one who would overcome the odds by changing his strategy and resorting to hit and run tactics: καὶ μοι τοῦ λόγου παράδειγμα καὶ ὁ μακαριστὸς ἐν βασιλεῦσιν Ἀλέξιος, ὃς ἐν στρατηγίαις, εἴ που μὴ ἐπιτυχῶς αὐτῷ ἢ τοῦ πολέμου σχοιή ῥοπή, ὅποια μυρία συμπίπτει, ἀλλὰ τὴν νίκην ἐτέρως ἐξ ὑποστροφῆς λαμπροτέραν διετίθετο μετατάττων τὸ στράτευμα. Λέοντος καὶ τοῦτο ἀρετή, ὃς οὐκ ἄν ποτε μελετήσῃ δρασμὸν ἀνεπίστροφον,

not explicit until the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene. As this text was written in the mid-twelfth century, possibly as a response to Manuel's propaganda, there is a suspicion that Anna may have been influenced by contemporary martial values in presenting her father in this way. Yet, as the final chapter of this thesis demonstrates, this presentation could not have been entirely a consequence of Anna's design, given that she at times censures Alexios for such behaviour, suggesting a conflict with her original sources. For Anna, Alexios was a skilled technician, a brave warrior, and a cunning strategist. When we consider that many encomia from Alexios' reign have been lost, it is probable that Anna's perception of her father was ultimately not far removed from that which developed in the latter half of his reign.

Further evidence of the importance Alexios placed in warrior prowess is seen in the *Mousai*, words of advice he is alleged to have left to his son John. Alexios praises John's expertise in battle, asserting that 'when you chance to ride out armed on horseback, you immediately drive the Kelt into a panic'.¹³⁰⁹ Magdalino determines that the emphasis on martial virtues in panegyric became more pronounced in John's reign.¹³¹⁰ We have seen a particular focus on John's ability as an expert in siege warfare, expounding upon a strand of his father's presentation in panegyric.¹³¹¹ Yet John's *andreia* is also stressed. His heroism in leading his troops and being wounded at the Battle of Beroe is the obvious example in Byzantine literature. William of

ἀλλά, τὸ θαυμασιώτατον, λόχη μὲν κρυπτοῦση περιτυχῶν ἔρωμενέστερον ἑαυτὸν εἰς δρόμον ὑπάγει, φωτὶ δὲ θεαθεῖς οὐκ ἂν οὕτω ποιεῖν ἀνάσχοιτο, ἀλλὰ τοῦ βασιλικοῦ καλοῦ γίνεται.

¹³⁰⁹ ῥώμης ἔχεις εὖ, καὶ δι' ἀλκὴν σοὶ κλέος
καὶ πεῖρα πολλῶν καὶ μαχῶν ἐμπειρία
καὶ μοι κινεῖς εὖ καὶ φέρεις τὴν ἀσπίδα
ὥμοις παρ' ἀμφοῖν οἶον οὐδεὶς Αὐσόνων·
καὶ που μεθ' ὀπλῶν ἐξελαύνων ἱππότης
τὸν Κελτὸν εἰς ἔκκληξιν ὠθεῖς εὐθέως (*Mousai*: II.60-65; trans. Jordan & Roueché).

¹³¹⁰ Magdalino (1993a): 418-420.

¹³¹¹ Dennis (1998: 108-110) makes the point that John was able to exploit improvements in the design and operation of stone-throwing devices made under Alexios.

Tyre, surely drawing on an official Byzantine tradition, describes John's exploits at the siege of Shaizar, noting that 'he roused [his troops'] valour by his example and fought valiantly, that he might render others more courageous for the fray'.¹³¹² The attention drawn to John's effort and endurance is entirely consistent with the image offered in contemporary panegyric.

It is important to conclude that the military image of an emperor in panegyric tallied with the particular features of his wars or campaigns. It was perhaps inappropriate to dwell on Alexios' heroics amidst the succession of defeats he suffered in the first half of his reign. As Alexios matured and took a more cautious approach, evident in his defeat of the Normans in 1108 not by open battle but by frustrating the enemy, he forged a reputation as an expert strategist.¹³¹³ John's campaigns were dominated by siege warfare, which accounts for his depiction as a destroyer of fortresses in encomia. His son Manuel was also a 'destroyer of cities',¹³¹⁴ and his easier victories, such as that won over Cilicia in 1158-1159, were praised for a lack of bloodletting.¹³¹⁵ Manuel's individual displays of daring are a recurring feature, but when these were not performed the panegyrists would merely find something else to exploit. The admonitions of Menander show that highlighting strengths had always been a fundamental feature of encomia. While the mood of heroism was strong in the twelfth

¹³¹² Urgebat dominus imperator, sicut vir erat magnanimus, studio fervente propositum et propositis braviis adolescentium glorie cupidos ad certamina et congressus Martios accendebat animos, lorica quoque indutus et accinctus gladio, casside caput tectus aurea, mediis inmixtus agminibus nunc hos, nunc illos sermonibus hortatur congruis, nunc exemplo tanquam unus e popularibus provocat et instat viriliter, ut alios ad instandum reddat animosiores. Sic igitur vir egregia animositate insignis sine intermissione discurrens, estus belli a prima diei hora usque ad novissimam sustinens nichil sibi quietis ut vel cibum sumeret indulgebat, sed aut hos qui machinis deservebant ut frequentius aut directius iacularentur ammonebat, aut his qui in conflictibus desudabant addebat animos, per vicarias successiones vires reparans et pro deficientibus recentes subrogans et integris contatibus validos (William of Tyre: II, 674.31-765.45; trans. II, 95).

¹³¹³ See below, 358.

¹³¹⁴ *Anonymous Poem on the Refortification of Dorylaion*: 162.14; Euthymios Malakes: 555.18-24.

¹³¹⁵ See, for example, Manganeios Prodromos: 8, 34.

century, we should not be misled by the vast amount of surviving panegyric from the reign of Manuel. The warrior emperor image was evident to a degree during the rule of his grandfather Alexios, and it is realistic to think that it was propagated by the publicists of prolific soldier emperors Nikephoros II Phokas, John I Tzimiskes and Basil II, just as it was for the successful campaigner Heraclius centuries before. The final two chapters will demonstrate that the return of the warrior ideology in imperial bulletins and panegyric, not to mention historiography, was brought about by the spread of aristocratic military values to Constantinople as early as the mid-tenth century.

CHAPTER IV. PROMOTIONAL LITERATURE OF THE MIDDLE

BYZANTINE MILITARY ARISTOCRACY

The prominence of certain aristocratic individuals and families in Byzantine historiography of the tenth and eleventh centuries has encouraged a number of arguments for the existence of promotional literature pertaining to these subjects. These hypothetical works are now lost, but it is suggested that traces may be observed in surviving histories, such as those written by Leo the Deacon and Skylitzes. As a potentially significant source for historians of the period, these lost biographical compositions warrant close study. Thoughts shall be offered as to their genesis, content, and purpose, which will in turn elucidate how historians may have used this material. By understanding the social milieu from which works concerned with the lives and deeds of heroic generals emerged and seemingly thrived, we may account for why historians favoured them as sources. This chapter collates the evidence and theories and examines this potential body of literature, previously considered only in isolation, as a whole.

I. Aristocratic Promotional Literature in Byzantium (c.900-c.1100)

Family names only appeared in Byzantium in the early ninth century, though they quickly became essential to aristocratic identity and social status.¹³¹⁶ As the Byzantines gained the upper hand in the war against Islam, a number of military families based in Asia Minor were able to accumulate wealth, power and prestige at the head of Byzantium's armed forces. Representatives of two of the most powerful lineages of the tenth century – the Kourkouai and the Phokades – used military success as a platform to the imperial throne, and the struggle for supremacy among the empire's leading generals would become a consistent theme in Byzantine politics until the end of the eleventh century.¹³¹⁷ Against this backdrop, the allure of promotional literature to the military aristocracy is clear. By documenting their noble character and accomplishments, competing factions could show themselves to be worthy of acclaim and favour – even of the imperial throne itself.¹³¹⁸

Though promotional works associated with the military aristocracy are no longer extant, a number are alluded to in surviving historical works, while cases have been made for the existence of others. We begin by examining ideas built on the basis of the limited evidence, before progressing to more complex hypotheses formed without an obvious point of reference.

¹³¹⁶ Patlagean (1984); Stephenson (1994); Cheynet (1996); Kazhdan (1997a); Kountoura-Galaki (2004).

¹³¹⁷ The political situation is analyzed by Ostrogorsky (1971); Morris (1976); Cheynet (1990); Whittow (1996a): 335-357; Holmes (2005).

¹³¹⁸ Cheynet (1986): 190; Markopoulos (2003a): 194-196.

References and Allusions to Aristocratic Promotional Literature in Middle Byzantine Historiography

The tenth-century chronicle, *Theophanes Continuatus*, directs the reader to an eight-volume work which documented the deeds of John Kourkouas, *domestikos ton scholon* for over two decades under the Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos.¹³¹⁹ Little is known of the work or its author, Manuel, though Athanasios Markopoulos has postulated that the book portrayed Kourkouas as an ideal military man.¹³²⁰ It can be dated to c.945-962, since the author of the sixth book of *Theophanes Continuatus* was writing c.963.¹³²¹ After disappearing from the annals following John Kourkouas' dismissal from office in 944, it is only from 955 that the Kourkouas family returned to prominence, with new *domestikos ton scholon* Nikephoros Phokas promoting Kourkouai to military commands.¹³²² It is probable that the text was commissioned around this time, with the interests of the Kourkouai best served by extolling the virtues of their most famous son.¹³²³

¹³¹⁹ οἱ δὲ λαμπρῶς ποθοῦντες καὶ θέλοντες μαθεῖν τὰς τοῦ Ἰωάννου Κουρκούα ἀριστείας καὶ συγγραφὰς εὐρήσουσιν ἐν ὀκτῶ βιβλίοις ἐκτεθείσας παρὰ Μανουὴλ πρωτοσπαθαρίου καὶ κριτοῦ (*Theophanes Continuatus*: 427.20-428.2). Derivative of this is Skylitzes' reference: ὅτω δὲ βουλητὸν τὰς ἐκείνου μαθεῖν ἀριστείας, ζητησάτω τὴν πονηθεῖσαν βίβλον παρὰ τινος Μανουὴλ πρωτοσπαθαρίου καὶ κριτοῦ (ἐν ὀκτῶ γὰρ βιβλίοις ἐκεῖνος τὰ τοῦτου ἀνδραγαθήματα συνεγράψατο), καὶ ἐξ αὐτῆς εἴσεται, οἷος ἦν ὁ ἀνὴρ τὰ πολεμικά (Skylitzes: 230.33-37). Holmes (2005: 132-133) discusses the slight differences between the two references.

¹³²⁰ Markopoulos (2004-2005); Kazhdan (2006): 273. Both scholars suggest that the author may be identifiable with the Manuel (Μανουὴλ οἱ Βυζάντιοι) mentioned in the preamble to Skylitzes' chronicle (3.27).

¹³²¹ In addition to the works cited in the previous footnote, see Hirsch (1876): 272; Whittow (1996a): 344.

¹³²² By 956, John Kourkouas' great-nephew John Tzimiskes appears to have been made *strategos* of Mesopotamia – see Canard (1951): 791; Howard-Johnston (1983): 266-267 n.27; McGeer (2003): 123. In 963 he was promoted to the post of *domestikos ton scholon tes anatoles* (Leo the Deacon: 44; Skylitzes: 267). Romanos Kourkouas, son of John Kourkouas, is noted as an important eastern commander (*stratelates*) in 963 alongside Tzimiskes (Skylitzes: 256).

¹³²³ For the Kourkouas family, see Charanis (1963): 36-37; Cheynet (1990): 216. For the prominent involvement of the Kourkouai in the eastern offensive between 926 and 944, see Runciman (1929): 135-150; Canard (1951): 731-753; Whittow (1996a): 317-321.

The great Phokas clan, linked to the Kourkouai by marriage, became increasingly relevant from the late ninth century with the emergence of Nikephoros Phokas the Elder, *domestikos ton scholon* under Basil I and Leo VI.¹³²⁴ By 963, the family had a representative on the throne - Nikephoros II Phokas - and, following his murder in 969, waged an intermittent war for rule of the empire until the death of Nikephoros' nephew Bardas in 989.¹³²⁵ Though the family became largely inconsequential after this time, references from texts of the late eleventh century attest to the enduring popularity of Nikephoros II Phokas and the celebration of his deeds in literature. The *Historia Syntomos*, a world chronicle thought to have been written by Michael Psellos, states: 'About the Emperor Nikephoros Phokas many detailed writings have been published both by contemporaries and by authors shortly after, and whoever read them will know how many things were achieved by this man as an individual and as emperor'.¹³²⁶ According to Jakov Ljubarskij, we should read this as a reference to separate biographical works celebrating the deeds accomplished by Nikephoros first as a commander and then as emperor.¹³²⁷

Probably contemporaneous with the *Historia Syntomos* was the *History* of Michael Attaleiates. The deeds of the Phokas family, Attaleiates relates, continued to be 'well-

¹³²⁴ Grégoire (1953).

¹³²⁵ The resentment of the Phokades, and the circumstances surrounding Nikephoros' murder are explored in Morris (1994). For the rebellion of Bardas Phokas during the 980s, see Forsyth (1977): 370-462; Kamer (1986): 67-91; Cheynet (1990): 31-33; Whittow (1996a): 361-373; Treadgold (1997): 513-519; Holmes (2005): esp. 240-298, 450-461. The brief revolt in 1022 of Nikephoros Phokas, son of Bardas Phokas, and Nikephoros Xiphias, *strategos* of the Armeniakon, is analyzed by Kamer (1986): 137-145; Cheynet (1990): 36-37, 333; Holmes (2005): 515-525.

¹³²⁶ Ὑπὲρ τοῦ βασιλέως Νικηφόρου τοῦ Φωκᾶ πολλοὶ τῶν κατ' ἐκεῖνον καὶ τῶν [οὐ] μετ' οὐ πολὺ ὕστερον διεξοδικὰ συγγράμματα ἐκδεδώκασιν καὶ ὁ ἀναγινώσκων ἐκεῖνα εἴσεται, ὅποσα ὁ ἀνὴρ οὗτος ἔν τε ἰδιώτου σχήματι ἔν τε βασιλείᾳ κατώρθωκεν (Psellos, *Historia Syntomos*: 98.82-85; trans. 99). The issue of authorship of the *Historia Syntomos* is discussed in Papaioannou & Duffy (2003).

¹³²⁷ Ljubarskij (1993a).

known and much talked of'.¹³²⁸ The author boasts that reigning emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates could claim descent from Nikephoros II Phokas, and, in turn, from Constantine the Great and the Roman Fabii family.¹³²⁹ Attaleiates notes that he learned of the noble ancestry of Nikephoros Phokas in 'an old book'.¹³³⁰ Markopoulos speculates that this text may have been one of the works alluded to in the *Historia Syntomos*. No extant work links Phokas to Constantine and the Fabii, while Attaleiates' fantastical digression on Nikephoros' capture of Crete in 960 does not accord with other surviving accounts of the expedition.¹³³¹ Attaleiates declines to recount further accomplishments of Phokas, since 'all prose works and poems are full of them'.¹³³²

The extensive and often favourable coverage afforded to the Phokas family in historiography of the tenth and eleventh centuries has led to many arguments in favour of the use of pro-Phokades sources. Several scholars have mooted the existence of a 'Chronicle of the Phokades', perhaps used by Leo the Deacon and Skylitzes.¹³³³ Markopoulos and Apostolos Karpozilos have demonstrated that a number of narrative sources composed in the 950s and 960s probably also made use

¹³²⁸ τὰ μὲν τοῦ γένους τῶν Φωκάδων, ὅσα γε ἴκει κατὰ τὰς προσεχεῖς ἡμῶν γενεάς, περίφημά τε καὶ περιβόητα καὶ μαρτυρεῖ τούτοις τά τε τῶν ἄνωθεν διηγήματα καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς κύρις Νικηφόρος ὁ Φωκάς (Attaleiates: 162.23-26).

¹³²⁹ Attaleiates: 158-167. See Kazhdan (1984c): 27-32; Markopoulos (2003b): 218-219.

¹³³⁰ βιβλίον τινὸς παλαιᾶς (Attaleiates: 159.18-22). Editor Inmaculada Pérez Martín (2002: 313-314) paid little heed to this, believing that Attaleiates probably crafted this elaborate genealogy himself since he was so familiar with Roman history. Attaleiates' admiration for Republican Rome is discussed by Krallis (2006).

¹³³¹ Tsougarakis (1988): 63-74.

¹³³² Τῶν δὲ λοιπῶν αὐτοῦ προτερημάτων ποιεῖσθαι κατάλογον περιττὸν πάντως τῇ παρουσίᾳ γραφῆ, πλήρης γὰρ τούτων πᾶσα γραφὴ τε καὶ ποίησις (Attaleiates: 166.22-23).

¹³³³ Hirsch (1876): 50-51; Tinnefeld (1971): 108-110; Hunger (1978): I, 369; Roueché (1988): 127-128; Morris (1988): 206; idem (1994); Markopoulos (2003a): 187-188, 195-196; Kazhdan (2006): 167, 273-274.

of pro-Phokades material, including two biographies of Nikephoros II Phokas.¹³³⁴ The military manual, the *De Velitatione*, was probably compiled during the 970s and clearly emanated from the Phokas family circle. The anonymous author,¹³³⁵ working at the behest of the late Nikephoros II Phokas,¹³³⁶ eulogizes the military feats of Nikephoros and his father Bardas, as well as Constantine Maleinos, a member of a family with strong ties to the Phokades.¹³³⁷ The author appears to refer to pro-Phokas works where he neglects to describe the deeds of Nikephoros, ‘since there are so very many of them and they are so well known’.¹³³⁸ The *De Velitatione*, it seems, was intended not only as a treatise on border warfare, but also as a promotional tool for the Phokades, an explicit reminder of their great deeds at a time when they were still vying for the throne. ‘Le *De Velitatione*’, decreed Jean-Claude Cheynet, ‘est un traité dédié à la gloire d’une famille, les Phokas’.¹³³⁹ It was merely one among many works which celebrated the lives and military successes of the Phokas clan.¹³⁴⁰

¹³³⁴ Ljubarskij (1993a); Markopoulos (1983): esp. 284; idem (1988); idem (2003a): 187-189; idem (2004b): 89-90; idem (2004c): 4-6; idem (2009a): 703-705; Karpozilos (2002): 358-364, 399-400.

¹³³⁵ It has been speculated that the author was Nikephoros’ brother Leo Phokas. See Dennis (1985): 139-140; Dagron & Mihăescu (1986): 171; Cheynet (1986): 305.

¹³³⁶ McGeer (1995a): 173-178.

¹³³⁷ For ties between the Phokas and Maleinos families, see Kaplan (1981): 145; Hild & Restle (1981): 224-226; Saunders (1982); Kamer (1986): 133-134; Cheynet (1986): 309-315; idem (1990): 214-215, 268; Stephenson (1994): 196-197; Holmes (2005): 333-335; Laiou (1998).

¹³³⁸ οὗ τὰς ἀριστείας, καθ’ ὃν ἐστρατήγει καιρόν, συγγράφειν ἢ ἀπαριθμεῖσθαι ὀχληρὸν ἔσται τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσι διὰ τε τὸ ὑπερβάλλον πλῆθος καὶ τὸ παρὰ πολλῶν γινώσκεισθαι (*De Velitatione*: pr.7; trans. 149). Use of such material would not only account for the favourable portrayals of Nikephoros and Bardas, but also the lengthy digression on the military activities of Nikephoros Phokas the Elder (ibid: §XX.2-5). For these actions see also *Byzance et les Arabes*, II.1: 84-85, 137-140; Grégoire (1953); Cheynet (1986): 293-295; Dagron & Mihăescu (1986): 165-169.

¹³³⁹ Cheynet (1986): 312. See also Dagron & Mihăescu (1986): 165-169, where it is noted that parts of the manual are evocative of the tone of an epic family poem.

¹³⁴⁰ Relevant also is the widespread ‘cult’ of Nikephoros which developed following his death, stemming from adoration for his piety, his treatment of the poor, and his military ability. See below, 295-296.

While Skylitzes has been shown to have relied heavily upon Genesios and *Theophanes Continuatus* for his account of the period 811-c.948, his sources for events after this date are no longer extant.¹³⁴¹ Though Skylitzes lists a number of authors in his preface – some known, others not – it is clear that he does not list all his sources.¹³⁴² Speculation that Skylitzes utilized one such unspecified work - a pro-Phokas source - has encouraged suggestions that other aristocratic compositions underlie the *Synopsis Historion*.¹³⁴³

Jonathan Shepard has published several studies concerning Skylitzes' coverage of Katakalon Kekaumenos, a prominent general of the mid-eleventh century. The first of these is chiefly concerned with Kekaumenos' actions in Armenia between 1045 and 1047;¹³⁴⁴ another study examines his defence of Messina in 1042,¹³⁴⁵ while a subsequent article explores other aspects of Kekaumenos' presentation, including his involvement in the war against the Pechenegs and the rebellion of Isaac Komnenos in 1056.¹³⁴⁶ The highly detailed narrative of Kekaumenos' military activities, which compliments the general for any success or extricates him from blame in the event of defeat, leads Shepard to conclude that Skylitzes employed an autobiography of Katakalon Kekaumenos. Shepard proposes that the laudatory work was written

¹³⁴¹ Hirsch (1876): 356-375; Flusin (2010): xviii-xx.

¹³⁴² For discussion of the authors cited in Skylitzes' *prooimion* see Panagiotakes (1996): esp. 239-240; Cheynet & Flusin (2003): xii-xiv; E. Jeffreys (2003a): 209-210; Holmes (2005): 91-99, 121-125, 548-550; Kazhdan (2006): 273; Markopoulos (2009a): 708-709; Flusin (2010): xiii-xxiii.

¹³⁴³ Hirsch (1876): 356-375; Sjuzumov (1916); Morris (1988): 85-86; Ljubarskij (1993a): 252-253; Kazhdan (2006): 273-274; Flusin (2010): xx-xxi.

¹³⁴⁴ Shepard (1975-1976).

¹³⁴⁵ Idem (1977-1979): 155-159.

¹³⁴⁶ Idem (1992b).

between 1057 and 1060.¹³⁴⁷ Kekaumenos may have embarked on the project to highlight his contribution to Isaac Komnenos' rise to the throne, or perhaps even to convince Isaac's successor, Constantine X Doukas, that he was worthy of reward.¹³⁴⁸

Shepard argues for Skylitzes' use of another biographical source alongside the Kekaumenos text: a text dedicated to George Maniakes, who was appointed supreme commander in southern Italy in 1035.¹³⁴⁹ This source is purported to have related how Maniakes defeated Arab armies at Remata and Troina and captured thirteen settlements on Sicily, before he was twice removed from command because of the machinations of political rivals, leaving him with no choice but to rebel against Constantine IX Monomachos in 1042.¹³⁵⁰ Shepard speculates that the source was a political 'pamphlet', focused primarily on the events of 1040-1043, and intended to lambast Maniakes' political enemies as much as commend his own achievements.

Shepard's ideas gave rise to further arguments for aristocratic promotional literature embedded within Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historion*. Stephen Kamer first speculated that Skylitzes may have used a biography of the infamous tenth-century warlord, Bardas

¹³⁴⁷ Idem (1977); idem (1992b): 176-178. In a new article, Shepard (forthcoming) brings together these arguments.

¹³⁴⁸ Idem (1992b): 178-179. By 1060 Katakalon Kekaumenos had become a monk, and wrote to Michael Psellos at the imperial court, seemingly requesting assistance with the non-payment of his salary to which he, as *kouropalates*, was entitled. We lack the original request, though Psellos' reply encouraged Kekaumenos to take up the matter with the Emperor Constantine (Psellos, *Scripta Minora*: II, 91.20-92.24 [ep.59]). A follow up letter from Psellos (ibid: II, 168.13-169.12 [ep.141]) reveals that Kekaumenos had dispatched a servant to entreat the emperor and the patriarch in Constantinople, but had apparently failed in his efforts. Another letter (ibid: II, 43.15-46.12 [ep.30]) confirms that Kekaumenos resided at a monastery in Koloneia, situated in northeast Asia Minor. It is unknown whether Isaac or Constantine initially withheld Kekaumenos' pay, though Shepard is tempted to draw a connection between Katakalon's retirement to the monastery, the loss of his stipend and the composition of a laudatory biography (Shepard 1992b: 179 n.25).

¹³⁴⁹ Shepard (1977-1979).

¹³⁵⁰ For these events see Von Falkenhausen (1967): 89-92; Felix (1981): 206-210; Cheynet (1990): 57-58.

Skleros.¹³⁵¹ Charlotte Roueché independently came to the same conclusion, observing that passages highlighting the military genius of Skleros might derive from ‘an account of his life’.¹³⁵² Catherine Holmes has since considerably expanded upon this hypothesis, arguing that Skylitzes employed a pro-Skleros source extensively for his account of the sustained rebellions of Bardas Skleros and fellow general Bardas Phokas (976-989). As with George Maniakes, the encomiastic source attempts to mitigate Skleros’ responsibility for rebellion by stressing the disdain with which he was treated by the *parakoimomenos* Basil Lekapenos, effective regent for the young emperor Basil II.¹³⁵³ Holmes suggests that the text was written c.990, to remind the state that Bardas and his family might still be of use following the failure of the revolt.¹³⁵⁴

We conclude this overview of Skylitzes’ material with another observation initially put forward by Charlotte Roueché, and again expanded by Catherine Holmes: that Skylitzes utilized a record of the deeds of the general Eustathios Daphnomeles in his account of the Bulgarian wars of Basil II.¹³⁵⁵ Daphnomeles’ daring and cunning is evident in an episode recounting how he crept into the stronghold of the hardy Bulgarian nobleman Ibatzes and blinded him.¹³⁵⁶ If this anecdote did derive from a

¹³⁵¹ Kamer (1986): 31-32, 406-407 n.134.

¹³⁵² Roueché (1988): 127-128. Related to this is a proposal by Rosemary Morris, who discussed the existence of a ‘Skleroi chronicle’, possibly used by Armenian historian Matthew of Edessa. Morris considers the idea of a provincial source emanating from Anzitene in southern Armenia, a one-time power base of Bardas Skleros (Morris 1994: 207 n.28). For Byzantine Anzitene and its links to Skleros, see Howard-Johnston (1983): 248-250; idem (1995a): 93; Bivar (1986).

¹³⁵³ For Basil Lekapenos, see Brokkaar (1972).

¹³⁵⁴ Holmes (2005): 255-297.

¹³⁵⁵ Roueché (1988): 127-128; Holmes (2005): 228-233.

¹³⁵⁶ Skylitzes: 360-364.

pro-Daphnomeles source, it would, as Roueché mused, suggest that promotional literature was exploited even by lesser military aristocrats.¹³⁵⁷

Heroic Tales of the Doukas Family

As a pre-eminent family in late eleventh-century Byzantium, it is hardly surprising that the Doukai were immortalized in oral tales and literature. Michael Psellos, writing c.1080, wrote of the Emperor Constantine X Doukas:

His family, as far back as his great-grandfathers, had been both distinguished and affluent, the sort historians write of in their works. Certain it is that to this very day the names of the celebrated Andronikos, of Constantine...are on everybody's lips – all relatives of his, some on the paternal, others on the mother's side.¹³⁵⁸

The enduring popularity of Andronikos Doukas and his son Constantine, embroiled in rebellions against the state in the early tenth century, is thought to have inspired many frontier oral tales and epic poems.¹³⁵⁹ The poem *Digenes Akrites* was probably committed to writing in the first half of the twelfth century, and the numerous mentions of the Doukas name in the poem have been attributed to the relevance of the family at this time.¹³⁶⁰ In support of this argument Roderick Beaton cites the Lucianic satire, *Timarion*, produced around the same time as *Digenes Akrites*; the work mentions the Doukai among the ancestors of one of its principal characters, the *doux*

¹³⁵⁷ Little else is known of Daphnomeles but that in 1029 he was one of many Balkan commanders exiled for plotting to remove the Emperor Romanos III Argyros (ibid: 376-377). Given that other promotional texts have been viewed as appeals for a reprieve in the wake of rebellion and disfavour, perhaps we might view this one similarly.

¹³⁵⁸ τὸ μὲν ἄνω γένος ὅσον εἰς προπάππους ἄβρόν τε καὶ εὐδαιμον καὶ ὅποιον αἱ συγγραφαὶ ἄδουσι· διὰ στόματος γοῦν καὶ μέχρι τοῦ νῦν ἅπασιν ὁ Ἀνδρόνικος ἐκεῖνος, καὶ ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος, καὶ ὁ Πανθήριος, οἱ μὲν ἐξ ἄρρενος γένους, οἱ δὲ ἐκ θήλειος τούτῳ προσήκοντες, οὐδὲν δὲ ἔλαττον αὐτῶ καὶ τὸ προσεχές (Psellos, *Chronographia*: II, 140 [VI]; trans. 333, with amendments).

¹³⁵⁹ For these individuals see Polemis (1968): 16-25.

¹³⁶⁰ Beaton (1996a): 335-336; also Mavrogordato (1956): lxvi-lxvii.

of Thessaloniki.¹³⁶¹ While this argument is valid, it is important to stress that the *Digenes Akrites* acquired its original form in oral songs related along the eastern frontier from the tenth century. There can be little question that the early Doukai inspired some characters and scenarios in the poem. In the Escorial version, the eponymous Digenes is said to have descended from the Doukai;¹³⁶² the Grottaferrata redaction claims that Digenes was related to one Constantine Doukas on his mother's side.¹³⁶³ George Huxley argues that Andronikos Doukas served as a prototype for Digenes' maternal grandfather, living in exile on the frontier for rebelling against the emperor.¹³⁶⁴ Successful warriors and popular in the eastern provinces, Andronikos and Constantine Doukas were suitable subjects for the popular ballads of the frontiersmen. It is thought that *Digenes Akrites* and another poem from that time, *The Sons of Andronikos*, derive from oral stories about Andronikos and Constantine.¹³⁶⁵ The testimony of Michael Psellos confirms that such stories continued to be transmitted in the late eleventh century. Anna Komnene also boasted of her mother Eirene being of famous descent, 'for her family derived from the famous houses of Andronikos and Constantine Doukas'.¹³⁶⁶ While the Doukai of the late eleventh century are unlikely to have descended directly from Andronikos and Constantine,

¹³⁶¹ The *Timarion* notes that the *doux* of Thessaloniki descended from the 'famous Doukai, a family whose name... has been spread by the lips of many across the sea from Italy and the race of Aeneas to Constantinople itself' (γενῶν φερομένων καὶ βασιλέων ἐξ αἵματος κατιοῦσαν καὶ τῶν θρυλλουμένων Δουκῶν οὖσαν ἀπόγονον - ἠρωϊκὸν δέ, ὡς οἶσθα, τὸ γένος τοῦτο καὶ ὡς ἐξ Ἰταλίας καὶ τῶν Αἰνειάνων μεταβὰν πρὸς τὴν Κωνσταντίνου πολλοῖς ὑπομιθυρίζεται: *Timarion*: ll.210-231; trans. 47). For this passage see M. Alexiou (1982-1983): 39-40. Nikephoros Bryennios (67-69) similarly claims that the first Doukas came from Rome to Constantinople and was appointed *dux* of the city by his cousin, the Emperor Constantine the Great; hence the development of the name 'Doukas'. For discussion of the proclaimed ancestry of the Doukai, see Polemis (1968): 3.

¹³⁶² *Digenes Akrites*: E136-137

¹³⁶³ *Ibid*: GI.267.

¹³⁶⁴ Huxley (1974): 323-324.

¹³⁶⁵ Grégoire (1933a): esp. 48-63; idem (1933d): 390-396; Polemis (1968): 14-15; Beck (1971): 57-97, esp. 57-62; Pertusi (1970): 507-514; Oikonomides (1979): 396, 379-380.

¹³⁶⁶ τὸ γένος περίβλεπτος, εἰς Ἀνδρονίκους ἐκείνους καὶ Κωνσταντίνους τοὺς Δούκας ἀναφέρουσα τὴν τοῦ γένους σειράν (Anna Komnene: III.3.3.16-18; trans. 85).

they evidently exploited the popularity and heroic reputation of the Doukas name to support their claim to greatness.¹³⁶⁷

Pro-Doukas prose literature may also have been known in the late eleventh century. Leonora Neville has argued for a source detailing the life of the *kaisar* John Doukas, uncle of the Emperor Michael VII. It is suggested that traces of this work may be observed in the *Hyle Historias* of Nikephoros Bryennios, where an intimate knowledge of Doukas' life and career is displayed. Neville proposes that Bryennios employed a written text because of stylistic and narrative shifts (including inexplicable use of the first-person) in the narrative, as well as a more classicizing vocabulary in those parts of the text where John is the subject.¹³⁶⁸

Conclusion

References in the historical works of the Continuator of Theophanes, Michael Attaleiates and Michael Psellos confirm that aristocratic generals of the Middle Byzantine period were the subject of literary compositions, and the convincing arguments put forward by scholars suggest that such works served as useful sources for historians and chroniclers. Further consideration shall be given to their composition and content, though having established their existence, it is first necessary to examine the literary developments behind the appearance of biographical aristocratic texts.

¹³⁶⁷ Polemis (1968): 6-15.

¹³⁶⁸ Neville (2008). In her forthcoming monograph on Bryennios and his work, Leonora Neville argues for the historian's use of another memoir-like source with George Palaiologos as its subject. It is suggested that this source may also have been employed by Anna Komnene.

II. Aristocratic Promotional Literature and Greco-Roman Biography

The promotional literature of the military aristocracy was almost certainly influenced by recent trends in hagiography and historiography, as well as older models and conventions of the always flexible Greco-Roman biographical tradition. We observe here how literary developments paved the way for biography of a secular nature, which the aristocracy exploited to full effect.

Modern historians have great difficulty defining classical and Hellenistic biography as a unique literary genre.¹³⁶⁹ It has been observed, for example, that from the outset ‘biography and panegyric were interwoven’.¹³⁷⁰ Arnaldo Momigliano questioned how one might distinguish biographies from the Hellenistic political histories which took the form of a monograph about an individual.¹³⁷¹ Richard Burrige similarly describes biography as ‘a flexible genre, influenced by both historiography and encomium’.¹³⁷² This observation would remain true of political biography into the last phases of its secular use in Late Antiquity.¹³⁷³ Political biography gradually gave way to philosophical and religious biography from the third century, and this newfound interest in the ‘holy man’ would contribute significantly to the shift of the biographical genre into hagiography in subsequent centuries.¹³⁷⁴

¹³⁶⁹ Leo (1901); Stuart (1928); Dihle (1956); Momigliano (1971).

¹³⁷⁰ Hägg & Rousseau (2000): esp. 15-16.

¹³⁷¹ Momigliano (1971): 63, 82-83.

¹³⁷² Burrige (2001): 373-374. A similar view is expressed by Patricia Cox (1983: 54-55), who noted that biographies of the Classical period ‘do not fit the abstract formulations’.

¹³⁷³ Averil Cameron (1997); idem (2000). Cf. Barnes (1989).

¹³⁷⁴ Cox (1983); Averil Cameron (1997); A. Wilson (1998); Efthymiadis et al (2011). For the influence of classical biography on hagiography, see Bartelink (1986); Delehay (1991). Cf. Swain (1997): 27-29, 36.

Biography, Hagiography and 'Semi-Secular Hagiography', c.550-c.900

Prior to the rise of Islam there does appear to have been an interest in commemorating the military achievements of private individuals in literature. Corippus' *Iohannis*, an epic Latin poem in eight books, celebrates the campaigns conducted by the general John Troglita in North Africa during the 540s. Both Wilhelm Ehlers and Averil Cameron maintain that Corippus had access to informed sources, with the latter suggesting that John Troglita supplied Corippus 'with military details and personal history, and sought epic heroization' in return.¹³⁷⁵ In the later period, we will observe that 'epic heroization' of successful generals is achieved via the literary models of Homer and classical historiography.

Research into the sources employed by seventh-century historian Theophylact Simocatta suggests the use of biographical compositions. Michael Whitby has argued that Theophylact employed a military narrative detailing the feats of Priscus, son-in-law of the Emperor Phokas.¹³⁷⁶ Whitby further determines that Theophylact consulted a similar source for wars on the eastern frontier, one describing the deeds of Heraclius the Elder, father of the Emperor Heraclius.¹³⁷⁷ James Howard-Johnston took the source to be a 'dispatch-based military history', similar to the work linked to Priscus.¹³⁷⁸ Whitby's observation that the hypothetical text presented military anecdotes and Heraclius' 'courageous and cunning tactics' suggests a work firmly in the mould of aristocratic promotional literature in content and purpose.

¹³⁷⁵ Ehlers (1980): 117; Averil Cameron (1984): 175.

¹³⁷⁶ Michael Whitby (1988): 94-105.

¹³⁷⁷ Ibid: 230-233, 280-286.

¹³⁷⁸ Howard-Johnston (2010): 143-144. Frenzo (1988) considered that the praise of Heraclius the Elder and references to his exploits might imply a kind of 'panegyric by indirection', but Efthymiadis (2010: 176 n.24) is unconvinced.

From the seventh century hagiography became the dominant form of biography in Byzantium, and when secular biography does eventually reappear, it is inevitable that it drew inspiration from hagiography. Since hagiography was the most important type of life narrative in Byzantium, Martin Hinterberger argues for a strong influence on autobiography and biography.¹³⁷⁹ Indeed, there has been debate in recent scholarship as to whether Byzantine saints' lives represent a 'genre littéraire ou biographie historique'.¹³⁸⁰ While it is unnecessary to discuss this issue here, we should note an increasing tendency in the ninth century for saints' lives to exhibit a more secular ideology.¹³⁸¹ The *Vita Ignatii* of Niketas David Paphlagonian, which relates the life of the Patriarch Ignatios, has defied straightforward classification. It is sometimes considered a work of historiography and classical encomium, with the polemic against Ignatios' rival, Photios, exceptional in hagiography.¹³⁸² The *Vita Euthymii* of the early tenth century, charting the life of the Patriarch Euthymios, is similarly regarded as different to conventional hagiography, resembling more a historical chronicle.¹³⁸³ Paul Alexander classified these works as 'semi-secular hagiography' (the label 'historical hagiography/biography' has also been used¹³⁸⁴), and viewed the secularization of hagiography as a crucial stage in the eventual appearance of secular biography proper.¹³⁸⁵ This process intensified from the mid-tenth century, with a

¹³⁷⁹ Hinterberger (2000): 145.

¹³⁸⁰ Odorico & Agapitos (2004). Lennart Rydén (2004: 49) disagreed with the latter notion; he argued that 'historical biography' suggested 'a complete and true portrait' of the subject, something to which hagiographers did not conform.

¹³⁸¹ Eftymiadis (2011).

¹³⁸² Alexander Kazhdan (2006: 90-102) interprets the *Vita Ignatii* as the 'reinvention of the pamphlet', infusing encomium with invective. See also Symeon Paschalidis in reference to a lost work of Niketas David which expanded upon the *Vita Ignatii*: 'In this manner the field of hagiography made its triumphant entrance into the field of historiography, abandoning its status as an autonomous literary genre and assuming a perhaps more trustworthy genre, that of historical biography' (Paschalidis 2004: 173).

¹³⁸³ Kazhdan (2006): 103-111.

¹³⁸⁴ Paschalidis (2004): 161-162.

¹³⁸⁵ Alexander (1939): 202-206.

decline in the presentation of the ‘classic’ saint in hagiography and an increasing secularization evident.¹³⁸⁶

It is perhaps on account of these developments that some scholars have hypothesized the existence of secular biographies as early as the late ninth century. Patricia Karlin-Hayter proposed that the tenth-century *Basileiai* of Genesisios and *Theophanes Continuatus* may have employed biographies of important figures of the ninth century,¹³⁸⁷ an argument which has not met with universal approval.¹³⁸⁸ Athanasios Markopoulos thought it ‘somewhat easy’ to determine that these historians drew upon lost biographies, insisting that secular biographies were ‘inconsistent’ with literary practices prior to the mid-tenth century. He instead favours Juan Signes Codoñer’s idea that the passages derived from ‘un-contextualized excerpts’ which were favourably disposed towards the subject in question.¹³⁸⁹

Signes Codoñer and Anthony Kaldellis do not, however, dispute the proposal of Henri Grégoire which inspired Karlin-Hayter: that Genesisios and the Continuator of Theophanes consulted semi-hagiographical texts dedicated to two generals, Theophobos and Manuel the Armenian.¹³⁹⁰ Theophobos, a Kurdish rebel who came into imperial service in 834 and converted to Christianity, was prominent during the reign of Theophilos.¹³⁹¹ Reportedly murdered, Theophobos’ body was claimed by the

¹³⁸⁶ Magdalino (1981); Morris (1981); Oikonomides (2004); Markopoulos (2009a): 713-714. For an overview of developments in hagiography during this period see most recently Paschalidis (2011).

¹³⁸⁷ Karlin-Hayter (1971). Romily Jenkins (1954: 20-21) came to the independent conclusion that the *kaisar* Bardas may have been the subject of a panegyric work, perhaps employed in the composition of Book IV of *Theophanes Continuatus*.

¹³⁸⁸ Kaldellis (1998): xvi-xxiv, xxiv.

¹³⁸⁹ Markopoulos (2009b): 146-147; Signes Codoñer (1993-1994).

¹³⁹⁰ Grégoire (1933c): 520-524; idem (1934); Signes Codoñer (1995): 411-412, 461-467, 470-477, 487-489, 496-500, 508-510, 521-524, 531-533, 549-557, 559-574, 583-590, 652-654. While Signes Codoñer calls for a review of Grégoire’s thesis, he does not generally disagree with his suggestions. Anthony Kaldellis (1998: xxiii) determined Grégoire’s proposal to be a ‘reasonable conjecture’.

¹³⁹¹ For background see Rosser (1974); Letsios (2004).

monks of the monastery of Theophobias, with Grégoire suggesting that they concocted a legend of Theophobos' martyrdom and penned a *Vita Theophobii* in honour of the monastery's founder. Manuel the Armenian, another important general under Theophilos, was interred in his own palace, which later became a monastery. Grégoire similarly proposed that the monks of this institution produced a hagiographical account of the donor: a *Vita Manuelis*. Signes Codoñer suggests that there may have been as many as three sources describing the life of Manuel, including a hagiography and a *biografía laica*.¹³⁹²

It is suspected that a *Vita Manuelis* may be the cause of several inaccuracies in Genesis and *Theophanes Continuatus*. Warren Treadgold has shown that it is unnecessary for Grégoire to attribute reports of Manuel saving the life of Theophilos at the Battle of Anzen in 838 to the proposed *Vita Manuelis*.¹³⁹³ More difficult to reconcile are the conflicting accounts of Manuel's death. While the *Chronicle* of Symeon the Logothete states that Manuel died of wounds suffered at the Battle of Anzen, Genesis and the Continuator of Theophanes assert that Manuel died c.860. Grégoire argues that this discrepancy is the result of the latter two chroniclers deriving their information from the *Vita Manuelis*, which suppressed that Manuel had died as an iconoclast in 838 and presented him as having recovered to become a champion of the cause of icons. Corroborating this hypothesis is a *Synaxarium* compiled c.900,

¹³⁹² Signes Codoñer (1995): 521-524. While it is uncertain whether Genesis and the Continuator of Theophanes consulted these texts directly or rather used epitomes or an excerpta, we should consider that Genesis did use two contemporary saints' lives - the *Vita Nikephorii* and *Vita Ignatii* - which indicates a preference for semi-secular hagiographies as source material. See also Hirsch (1876): 127-128, 159-161.

¹³⁹³ Grégoire (1934): 188-191. Cf. Treadgold (1979): 180-182.

which reveals that Manuel died on 27th July, mere days after the known date of the Battle of Anzen (22nd July).¹³⁹⁴

The quasi-hagiographical lives of Theophobos and Manuel may represent a significant stage in the development of secular biography of military figures. We might place them in a similar tradition to the contemporary *Martyrion of Forty-Two Generals and Soldiers*, a tribute to those captured and executed following the Arab sack of Amorion in 842, which Alexander Kazhdan described as a ‘historical hagiography’. One particular rendition is concerned with the exploits of the general Theodore Karteros, providing a biographical account of his career prior to his capture.¹³⁹⁵ There may have been a cluster of semi-hagiographical texts celebrating the lives of other generals. Signes Codoñer proposes the existence of a semi-secular hagiography of Bardanes Tourkos, a commander who failed to overthrow Nikephoros I and was blinded after retiring as a monk.¹³⁹⁶ We have discussed Alexander Kazhdan’s argument for a semi-hagiographical tale of the exploits of Andrew the Scythian, a prominent commander under Basil I.¹³⁹⁷ Even when secular aristocratic biographies are first attested in the mid-tenth century, semi-hagiographical accounts continue to be popular, as evidenced with Nikephoros II Phokas.¹³⁹⁸ We may surmise that the growing concern of hagiography with important generals, coupled with the increasing secularization of such texts, represented a crucial progression in the production of secular biographical literature celebrating the careers of illustrious soldiers. The imperial exploitation of the biographical format in the mid-tenth century, combined with the emergence of successful generals wielding great political

¹³⁹⁴ Treadgold (1979): 182-183. See also F. Halkin (1954): 9-11; Signes Codoñer (1995): 508-510.

¹³⁹⁵ For discussion see Kazhdan (1986): 150-160; idem (2006): 206-209.

¹³⁹⁶ Signes Codoñer (1995): 26-27, 31-40.

¹³⁹⁷ Kazhdan (1993). The idea was recently doubted by Cyril Mango (2011: 13).

¹³⁹⁸ See below, 295-296.

influence, provided the catalyst for the widespread production of aristocratic promotional literature.¹³⁹⁹

Constantine VII, the Vita Basilii and the Revival of 'Secular Biography'

The reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos saw the production of works which marked a departure from traditional historical writing. While Byzantine historiography was hitherto known for its chronological ordering of events, historical works of the mid-tenth century favoured a biographical structure, making prominent individuals the focal point of the text.¹⁴⁰⁰ It has been suggested that the *Basileiai* of Genesios, which chronicles the period 814-886, was the first of these innovative compositions.¹⁴⁰¹ Constantine VII subsequently commissioned the *Theophanes Continuatus*, a more ambitious work also assuming a biographical format. The first four books cover events from 813-867, with the fifth book – the *Vita Basilii* – devoted to the Emperor Basil I. The new literary project enabled Constantine to afford pride of place to his grandfather. By depicting Basil as a divinely-ordained and successful ruler, Constantine could whitewash his ancestor's involvement in the murder of his predecessor Michael III, thus confirming the legitimacy of Basil and, by extension, of the reigning dynasty.¹⁴⁰²

There have been numerous attempts to define the form and literary models of the *Vita Basilii*. Paul Alexander identified the work as a fusion of secular biography and

¹³⁹⁹ It is relevant to note that some aristocratic families appear to have promoted a family member's claim to sainthood by composing a *vita* - see Talbot (1996). It is not unthinkable that a similar trend was known in regard to family members pursuing a military career.

¹⁴⁰⁰ We cannot be certain when and why this occurred, though Roger Scott (1981: 68-70) proposed that the decision of Theophanes in the 820s to treat the reigns of emperors as the basic unit of his *Chronographia* marked the first move towards the biographical in historiography.

¹⁴⁰¹ Barišić (1958); Markopoulos (2009b).

¹⁴⁰² Jenkins (1948). Cf. Agapitos (1989); Markopoulos (2002).

panegyric, drawing upon the precepts of a traditional *basilikos logos*, rhetorical elements of hagiography, and the funeral oration for Basil composed by his son, Leo VI the Wise.¹⁴⁰³ Romily Jenkins was not convinced by Alexander's suggestion that hagiography had any influence on secular biography, suggesting instead that classical models were behind the literary projects of Constantine VII.¹⁴⁰⁴ Alexander's arguments for the influence of hagiography on the *Vita Basilii* were however backed by Alexander Kazhdan, who considered the moral conflict between the hero (Basil) and the anti-hero (Michael) to be based on hagiographical models.¹⁴⁰⁵ Lieve van Hoof, finally, questions whether Paul Alexander is correct to class the *Vita Basilii* as 'biography'. She observes that the *Vita Basilii* bears resemblance to the genres of encomium, history, and biography, though settles for the label of 'encomiastic biography'.¹⁴⁰⁶

The literary influences which shaped the *Vita Basilii*, as well its very form, remain a matter for dispute. Just as Hellenistic Greek biography displayed elements of encomia and historiography, the first known work of Byzantine secular biography also exhibits signs of influence from these genres. Athanasios Markopoulos considers the *Vita Basilii* to represent 'a new type of historical writing...specifically designed for the extremely beautified career of its subject'.¹⁴⁰⁷ This new, flexible form of historiography would come to dominate Byzantine historical writing over the following centuries.

¹⁴⁰³ Alexander (1939).

¹⁴⁰⁴ Jenkins (1954).

¹⁴⁰⁵ Kazhdan (2006): 136-144.

¹⁴⁰⁶ van Hoof (2002).

¹⁴⁰⁷ Markopoulos (2009a): 702.

The Biographical Element in Middle Byzantine Historiography

The shift towards the anthropocentric in Byzantine historiography has been seen as a result of a growing interest in humanism at Constantinople, reflected also in the increasing tendency of authors to intrude into their history.¹⁴⁰⁸ Roger Scott argues that the two trends went hand-in-hand, with the biographical element forcing historians – often close to their subjects - to assert their own credentials and claims to veracity so that they might avoid accusations of bias.¹⁴⁰⁹

The preference for the biographical format is evident in the surviving historical works of the period. It is thought that the emperors Romanos I Lekapenos and Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos were the subjects of lost laudatory biographies utilized by chroniclers of the mid-tenth century.¹⁴¹⁰ While the precise content of these hypothetical works is unknown, there can be little doubt that the accession of Nikephoros II Phokas in 963 brought significant change. From this time, imperial biographers, like those of aristocratic soldiers, became obsessed with extolling the soldierly qualities of their subject, a reflection of the emergence of martial valour as the dominant imperial trait during the second half of the tenth century.¹⁴¹¹ The militaristic *History* of Leo the Deacon, in the main comprised of biographies of Nikephoros II Phokas and John I Tzimiskes, may be considered ‘heroic

¹⁴⁰⁸ See Scott (1981): 63; Ljubarskij (1996); Macrides (1996); Angold (1998).

¹⁴⁰⁹ Scott (1981).

¹⁴¹⁰ For the ongoing argument as to whether rendition ‘A’ of Symeon the Logothete’s chronicle drew upon an encomiastic biography of Romanos Lekapenos, see the various proposals of Hirsch (1876): 80-86; Hunger (1978): I, 349-350; Markopoulos (1983): 279-281; Müller (2009); and James Howard-Johnston, related by Paul Stephenson at <http://homepage.mac.com/paulstephenson/trans/logothete.html> (last accessed 4/2011). For the hypothesis that one Theodore Daphnopates was the author of a lost history of the reigns of Constantine VII and his son Romanos II, see Frei (1985); Markopoulos (1985).

¹⁴¹¹ Kazhdan (1983a); idem (1984a); Markopoulos (2009a), 697-702, 709-710.

historiography' *par excellence*.¹⁴¹² Following in this tradition perhaps was a proposed biography of Basil II, thought to have been employed by Skylitzes.¹⁴¹³

With a number of non-campaigning emperors and military setbacks in the decades following Basil's death, it is perhaps to be expected that heroism in battle and martial valour did not occupy the mind of Michael Psellos, though his *Chronographia* remains a curious mix of memoirs and imperial biography.¹⁴¹⁴ The *History* of Michael Attaleiates attests to a renewed interest in martial heroism in its records of the reigns of Romanos Diogenes and Nikephoros Botaneiates.¹⁴¹⁵ The successful rebellion of Alexios Komnenos in 1081 and his lengthy rule marked another triumph for the military aristocracy. This state of affairs is reflected in the *Hyle Historias* of Nikephoros Bryennios, a 'Familienchronik'¹⁴¹⁶ which celebrates the leading military families of the day - the Komnenoi, Bryennioi and Doukai. Perhaps the finest work of biographical history to emerge in the Middle period was the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene. Alexander considered that Anna was not writing history, but 'the *praxeis* of an Emperor'.¹⁴¹⁷ The martial culture at the Komnenian court is evident also with John Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates, who devote considerable attention to military campaigns whilst structuring their works around the lives of emperors.

¹⁴¹² Markopoulos (2003a): 186; idem (2004a).

¹⁴¹³ Panagiotakes (1996). Cf. Holmes (2005): 96-99.

¹⁴¹⁴ Pietsch (2005).

¹⁴¹⁵ Markopoulos (2003b). For Attaleiates' record of Botaneiates' early career, see Karagiorgiou (2008).

¹⁴¹⁶ Krumbacher (1897): 272.

¹⁴¹⁷ Alexander (1939): 197. Coincidentally, Plutarch seems to have been a huge influence on the *Alexiad* - see Buckler (1929): 205-206.

Conclusion

Historiography of the Middle Byzantine period was decidedly biographical in its focus and structure, and yet this does not discredit its primary function as historical writing. Romily Jenkins believes that to make a prominent personality the focal point of the narrative was a ‘perfectly legitimate form’ of Greek historiography.¹⁴¹⁸ By the same token there was, as Paul Alexander reminds us, a tendency for biographical writing to assume a historical character.¹⁴¹⁹ Skylitzes bemoans the failings of certain men who attempted to write history and failed: ‘these all set themselves their own goals: maybe the glorification of an emperor, the censure of a patriarch, or to extol a friend – each attains his own ends under the guise of writing history and every one of them falls short’.¹⁴²⁰ This statement confirms that writers of biographical compositions professed to be writing works of a historiographical nature. Among the authors mentioned we find Genesisios, a ‘Leo of Asia’ - most probably Leo the Deacon¹⁴²¹ - and Manuel, thought to be the same Manuel who authored the personal history of John Kourkouas. If this identification is correct, it is significant that the encomiastic biography of Kourkouas was viewed by contemporaries in the same vein as the historical works of Genesisios and Leo the Deacon. We might plausibly consider extant historiography to be not far removed from the lost secular ‘biographies’ of aristocratic generals; certainly, Évelyne Patlagean saw little distinction between the aristocratic propaganda of Kourkouas’ biographer and the writings of Nikephoros

¹⁴¹⁸ Jenkins (1954).

¹⁴¹⁹ Alexander (1939): 197.

¹⁴²⁰ ...οικείαν ἕκαστος ὑπόθεσιν προστησάμενοι, ὁ μὲν ἔπαινον φέρε εἰπεῖν βασιλέως, ὁ δὲ ψόγον πατριάρχου, ἄτερος δὲ φίλου ἐγκώμιον καὶ ἐν ἱστορίας σχήματι τὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἕκαστος ἀποπληροῦντες σκοπὸν πόρρω τῆς τῶν εἰρημένων θεοφόρων ἀνδρῶν ἀποπεπτώκασι διανοίας (Skylitzes: 3.19-4.39; trans. 2). See Alexander (1939): 196-197.

¹⁴²¹ See Panagiotakes (1996): 238-240; Markopoulos (2003a): 193-194; Flusin (2010): xvi.

Bryennios and Anna Komnene.¹⁴²² We should not view the promotional compositions of the military aristocracy as works which adhered rigidly to particular conventions of encomiastic biography and/or historiography. Influences were undoubtedly drawn from both.

¹⁴²² Patlagean (1979): 269.

III. Aristocratic Promotional Literature as Egodocuments¹⁴²³

The very use of the term ‘biography’ to describe the output of the military aristocracy is problematic. The sources discussed here may have invariably been family chronicles, political manifestos or pamphlets; the unifying element remains the eulogistic focus on a particular soldier or military family. Furthermore, mention of the biographical fails to acknowledge the possibility that some of the hypothetical works may have been egodocuments; that is, autobiographies, memoirs and journals.¹⁴²⁴ Unfortunately there is little to suggest the autobiographical genre ever thrived in Byzantium. Michael Angold’s study on self-penned works highlights but three substantial pieces, and only one of these, the memoirs of fourteenth-century ruler John VI Kantakouzenos, is concerned with military affairs, though it lies outside the scope of this study.¹⁴²⁵

Traces of the Autobiographical in Aristocratic Promotional Literature

Angold first observes traces of autobiography in Psellos’ *Chronographia*,¹⁴²⁶ and it is perhaps in light of this that scholars have pondered whether some soldierly works of the eleventh century were autobiographical. Shepard speculates that Katakalon Kekaumenos may have written his promotional work, proposing that he deliberately

¹⁴²³ Dutch scholar Jacques Presser defined egodocuments as: ‘...those historical sources in which the reader is confronted with an “I”, or occasionally (Caesar, Henry Adams) a “he”, continually present in the text as the writing and describing subject’. For recent discussion, see Dekker (2002a); idem (2002b); Fulbrook & Rublack (2010).

¹⁴²⁴ See Harari (2007a): 289-290. For discussion of historical military biography and memoirs, with particular attention paid to the Renaissance period, see idem (2004a).

¹⁴²⁵ Angold (1998): esp. 254-255; idem (1999): 50-59; Hinterberger (1999). Still useful are Misch (1962): 766-830; Hunger (1978): I, 165-170. For further discussion of Kantakouzenos’ memoirs, see Kazhdan (1980); Tinnefeld (1993); Nicol (1996).

¹⁴²⁶ Angold (1998): 227, 233-238.

wrote in the third person to lend an air of objectivity to his accomplishments.¹⁴²⁷ Leonora Neville, noticing remnants of the first-person relating to John Doukas in Bryennios' *Hyle Historias*, favours the possibility that Bryennios' source was a personal memoir.¹⁴²⁸ Perhaps the firmest evidence for the existence of military memoirs in the eleventh century is transmitted by Kekaumenos, whose *Consilia et Narrationes* includes an apologetic account of a revolt of 1066-1067, thought to have been penned by one of the perpetrators, Nikoulitzas Delphinas of Larissa.¹⁴²⁹ On the basis of John VI Kantakouzenos' history, and personal works of thirteenth-century ruler Michael VIII Palaiologos, Yuval Noah Harari determined that emperors and senior officials 'continued to compose memoiristic texts well into the Middle Ages'.¹⁴³⁰ Yet Harari's conclusion was based on our only examples of military memoirs, dating from the Late era. He also errs by describing Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos as a memoirist;¹⁴³¹ the emperor never went on campaign, and his treatises on imperial expeditions represent prescriptive guidebooks rather than a record of his own activity.

Typika as Military Memoirs and Aristocratic Relations with Monasteries

As success was granted by God, there appears to have been a specific outlet for the 'autobiographical impulse' to manifest itself in Byzantium – monastic foundation documents, or *typika*.¹⁴³² Angold determines that the preface to a *typikon* 'was the

¹⁴²⁷ Shepard (1992b): 175-178; idem (forthcoming). That said, Skylitzes' use of the first-person is unusually substantial in his record of Michael VI's rule, during which time Katakalon Kekaumenos was most active. See Kiapidou (2010): 461-463.

¹⁴²⁸ Neville (2008): 186-187.

¹⁴²⁹ Kekaumenos: 248-272. For discussion see Lemerle (1960): 41-56, where it is suggested that Kekaumenos located Nikoulitzas' account in a family archive. See also Roueché (1988): 128-129.

¹⁴³⁰ Harari (2007a): 291.

¹⁴³¹ Idem (2004a): 188.

¹⁴³² For *typika* in general see Galatariotou (1987a).

preferred form of autobiography in Byzantium'.¹⁴³³ Informative *typika* of military men are rare, the most famous being two composed by Michael VIII Palaiologos, which Harari considered to be military memoirs.¹⁴³⁴ In the first of these, concerning the Monastery of the Archangel Michael on Mount Auxentios, Michael is hesitant to give a complete account of his accomplishments. 'Although my majesty has spoken of them in a brief and cursory way, other writers have described them in a more deserving manner and in greater detail'.¹⁴³⁵ Michael's other *typikon*, dedicated to the Monastery of Saint Demetrios of the Palaiologoi-Kellibara at Constantinople, again acknowledges that a foundation document is not an appropriate outlet for detailed accounts of military actions. 'If I were to list our other victories such as those we gained in Europe...and in Asia...my words would be transformed into a discourse much longer than the present one'.¹⁴³⁶ It is difficult to label these *typika* as military memoirs, and Michael indicates that contemporaries shared the sentiment.

There is no real equivalent of Michael's writings in the Middle Byzantine period, but the *typikon* of the *megas domestikos*, Gregory Pakourianos, is pertinent.¹⁴³⁷ Peter Frankopan has shown the work to reveal important details about Pakourianos' military career during the early 1080s.¹⁴³⁸ The *typikon* conveys an undeniable link between the foundation of the monastery and military success, suggesting that Pakourianos

¹⁴³³ Angold (1993).

¹⁴³⁴ Chapman (1926): 167-177; Angold (1999): 53-54.

¹⁴³⁵ Τούτων τοίνυν οὕτως ἐχόντων, ὡς ἐπιτροχάδην μὲν εἴρηται τῇ βασιλείᾳ μου καὶ συνωπτικῶς, παρ' ἄλλοις δὲ συγγραφεῦσι φιλοτίμως καὶ πάνυ γε πλατικῶς (*Typikon* of Michael VIII Palaiologos for the Monastery of the Archangel Michael on Mount Auxentios near Chalcedon: 771; trans. 1216-1217).

¹⁴³⁶ Ἐτέρας δὲ νίκας εἰ καταριθμοῖμι, ἃς ἐν Μυσίᾳ μὲν τῆς Εὐρώπης μετὰ τὰς εἰρημέναις Βουλγάρους ἐνικῶμεν καὶ Τριβαλλοὺς, ἐν Ἀσίᾳ δὲ Πέρσας, καὶ τούτους κάκεινους πλειστάκις, μήκος ἂν γένοιτο λόγου μακρότερον, ἢ κατὰ τὴν παροῦσαν ὁρμὴν τοῦ λόγου (*Typikon* of Michael VIII Palaiologos for the Monastery of St. Demetrios of the Palaiologoi-Kellibara in Constantinople: 461; trans. 1246).

¹⁴³⁷ *Typikon* of Gregory Pakourianos for the Monastery of the Mother of God *Petritzonitissa* in Bačkovo. For discussion see Morris (1985a): 215-220; Angold (1993): 52, 64-65.

¹⁴³⁸ Frankopan (1996).

intended the monastery to serve as a reminder of his deeds and the glory of his family.¹⁴³⁹ In his *typikon* for the Monastery of Saint Demetrios of the Palaiologoi, Michael VIII Palaiologos recalls the piety, bravery and military expertise of his famous ancestor, George Palaiologos. Michael tells of how George was the first to erect a church dedicated to Saint Demetrios in Constantinople, later restored by the current ruler.¹⁴⁴⁰ ‘We renewed the memory of the blessed founder, our ancestor, which men had already consigned to oblivion’.¹⁴⁴¹ In this respect, the objective of the donor differed little from that of the subjects of aristocratic promotional literature. Angold observed that *typika* could be used to vindicate aristocratic ideals;¹⁴⁴² frequently read, they ‘pressed home this...subtle propaganda’.¹⁴⁴³ As the monastic foundation served as a visual reminder of an individual or family, the *typikon* was a commemoration of the founder in words. Together they served as another avenue by which the military aristocracy could ensure recognition and lasting eminence.

The monastery as a monument may have relevance to the appearance of aristocratic promotional literature. From the tenth century the aristocracy founded many new monasteries or renovated existing sites.¹⁴⁴⁴ As patrons, they were venerated in monastic liturgies.¹⁴⁴⁵ Family and collective identity are prominent in surviving

¹⁴³⁹ Angold (1999): 44-47.

¹⁴⁴⁰ This foundation of George Palaiologos is otherwise unattested; it is thought that he probably undertook the project in the early twelfth century towards the end of his career. See Dennis’ introduction to his translation (1238) for discussion.

¹⁴⁴¹ τῷ τε μακαρίτη κτήτορι καὶ ἡμετέρῳ προγόνῳ ἀποσβεσθὲν ἤδη παρ’ ἀνθρώποις τὸ μνημόσυνον ἀνανεουμένη (*Typikon* of Michael VIII Palaiologos for the Monastery of St. Demetrios of the Palaiologoi-Kellibara in Constantinople: 463; trans. 1247).

¹⁴⁴² Angold (1998): 241-243. Galatariotou (1987a: 89-107) notes the emphasis on family, titles and, to a lesser extent, wealth in aristocratic *typika*.

¹⁴⁴³ Morris (1984): 126; idem (1995): 123.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Mango (1976): 353-355; Morris (1984); idem (1985a): 215-231.

¹⁴⁴⁵ Morris (1995): 109. Though Nikephoros II Phokas forbade the endowment of new monasteries in a novel of 964, instead encouraging improvements to existing dilapidated foundations, the law does not appear to have had too great an effect - *Ius Graecoromanum*: I, 249-252. For discussion see Charanis

typika, with monasteries and churches often synonymous with a particular family.¹⁴⁴⁶ Rosemary Morris discusses monasteries acting as the focus for expressions of ‘family *esprit de corps*’, citing the example of the brothers Nikephoros and Leo Phokas and their patronage of the Lavra of Michael Maleinos on Mount Kyminas.¹⁴⁴⁷ There is evidence to suggest that the Argyros family established a burial site at the Monastery of Saint Elizabeth at Charsianon,¹⁴⁴⁸ while the Gabrades may have done the same at the Monastery of the megalomartyr George at Kheriana.¹⁴⁴⁹ Though we lack a family chronicle, Jean-Claude Cheynet observes that the commemorative lists found in various *typika*, requesting that certain family members be remembered in prayers, have ‘much in common’ with genealogical literature.¹⁴⁵⁰ An interesting parallel may be seen in the west. When the first genealogies and family histories appear in northern Europe in the mid-tenth century, a number are composed at monasteries associated with the family.¹⁴⁵¹ With the tradition of monastic chroniclers in Byzantium,¹⁴⁵² it might also be the case that some aristocratic promotional literature emerged from foundations affiliated with specific individuals and families.

We have discussed Grégoire’s ideas about ‘epic hagiographies’ of the ninth-century generals Theophobos and Manuel the Armenian, produced by monasteries closely affiliated with these individuals. Nikephoros II Phokas appears to have been the

(1948): esp. 61 n.23; Lemerle (1979a): 110-112; J. P. Thomas (1983); idem (1987): 149-157; Morris (1988): 100-106; idem (1995): 166-169; Laiou (1998): 410-411.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Galatariotou (1987a): 95-97; Talbot (1990); Morris (1985a): 217-220; idem (1995): 133-137.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Morris (1984): 122. For the relationship between the Phokas family and Michael Maleinos, see Laiou (1998).

¹⁴⁴⁸ Vannier (1975): 20, 23.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Bryer (1969-1970): 181.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Cheynet (2006c): 9.

¹⁴⁵¹ Shopkow (2003). For the emergence of the family chronicle in the west, see Génicot (1975); DUBY (1981); van Houts (1995): 33-42.

¹⁴⁵² Kazhdan & Constable (1982): 101-102. Admittedly this tradition had subsided by the tenth century – see Mango (1988-1989).

subject of similar veneration from the Great Lavra monastery on Mount Athos, which he co-founded in 964.¹⁴⁵³ A commemorative liturgical office read on 11th December (the date of his death) at the Great Lavra praised Phokas' piety and his role as a 'mighty soldier of Christ'.¹⁴⁵⁴ *Vita B* of Athanasios the Athonite, head of the Great Lavra and Phokas' spiritual father, reveals that a cook from the monastery determined Nikephoros to be a suitable intercessor to pray to, since many venerated him as a martyr.¹⁴⁵⁵ *The Apocalypse of Anastasia*, an early eleventh-century apocryphal tale in which the eponymous protagonist is given a tour of the Otherworld and encounters Phokas tormenting a troubled John Tzimiskes, has been ascribed to an Athonite monk and partisan of Phokas.¹⁴⁵⁶ The hagiographical tradition of Nikephoros Phokas which emanated from Mount Athos provides an interesting counterpart to the secular accounts of his military career, though the two may have converged.¹⁴⁵⁷

The fact remains, however, that we lack a *vita* of a secular patron like Nikephoros.

Similar is the case of the Georgian monk and soldier John Tornikios: while his

¹⁴⁵³ Dagron (2007): 151-152. For discussion of Nikephoros' piety and his wish to retire as a monk, see Morris (1988): 102-105.

¹⁴⁵⁴ στρατιώτης Χριστοῦ περιδέξιος (*Office in honour of Nikephoros Phokas*: 404.45-46). Editor Louis Petit (1904: 398-401) suggested that the canon was contemporary, and may have been composed by Theodosios the Deacon. For further discussion of the office, see also Morris (1988): 106; Laiou (1998): 403; Kazhdan (2006): 287-288.

¹⁴⁵⁵ *Vitae of St. Athanasios*: §44 (*Vita B*).

¹⁴⁵⁶ Morris (1988): 106-107, 112-113. For the *Apocalypse*, see Baun (2007), who concedes that the tale may have originated in numerous places where there was something of a 'Phokas cult' – southern Greece, Cappadocia, Macedonia or Crete. Kazhdan (2006: 204) cautiously suggested a date as early as the 980s, though Baun (2007: 17-18) suggests the second half of Basil II's reign as the date of composition. Similar is the fourteenth-century legendary Slavonic *Lay of Nikephoros and Theophano*, perhaps inspired by the apocrypha, and also thought to have earlier monastic provenance in the Byzantine Empire. For discussion see Vranoussi (1978); Kazhdan (2006): 287-289.

¹⁴⁵⁷ Nikephoros II Phokas was venerated at a number of monasteries. It has been suggested that Anatolian landowners in Cappadocia, the heartland of the Phokades, commissioned the decoration of the Pigeon House church at Çavusin, including the side-chapel adorned with a fresco featuring Nikephoros and his family, in order to commemorate the emperor's successful Cilician campaign of 965. See Restle (1967): I, 135-138; Vryonis (1971): 24-25; Kaplan (1981): 140-148; Rodley (1983): 301-339; Thierry (1985): 480-483; idem (1989): 222-223; Joliet-Levy (1991): 20-21; Oikonomides (2005): 7-8; Baun (2007): 164-167, 225-226; Walter (2003): 282-283.

military success allowed him to finance the construction of the Iviron monastery on Mount Athos, only the *vita* of his co-founders, fellow Georgians John and Euthymios, is known.¹⁴⁵⁸ Rosemary Morris determined Tornikios' life to have been 'a little too "active" to be fitted into the hagiographer's mould', suggesting that individuals such as he and Pakourianos were honoured and respected only as lay patrons.¹⁴⁵⁹

Nevertheless, there are references which should be considered. The *sebastokrator* Isaac Komnenos mentions bequeathing a book he composed to the Monastery of the Mother of God *Kosmosoteira*. 'It [contains] heroic, iambic and political verse, as well as various letters and *ekphraseis*. I do not want this to lie in an obscure place, but to be displayed often as [something to] read (in memory of me)'.¹⁴⁶⁰ We cannot discount the possibility that some of this material was autobiographical, especially since Isaac links the writings to his own memory. A *typikon* of Michael VIII Palaiologos indicates the existence of family records which emphasized piety, philanthropy and military deeds. Michael states that he will pass over his ancestry, but directs the reader to 'discourses and books composed by the learned':

For these give an account not only of their dignities and honours, the great influence they had with rulers, and how they accumulated vast riches, no less than of their combat in wartime, their generalship, and their valour, but they also

¹⁴⁵⁸ *The Vita of SS. John and Euthymios*. For Tornikios and John and Euthymios, see Adontz (1938); Tarnishvili (1964): 95-97; *Actes d'Iviron I*: 1-32; Morris (1995): 84-86. Tornikios was not the only former soldier held dear by the Iviron monastery. A Georgian calendar preserved in the *Typikon* of George Mtatsmindeli, *hegoumene* of the monastery in the mid-eleventh century, commemorates John Tzimiskes on 11th January, the date of his death. See van Esbroeck (1983), with Tzimiskes' support for the establishment outlined in *Actes d'Iviron I*: 25-32.

¹⁴⁵⁹ Morris (1995): 66, 87-88.

¹⁴⁶⁰ πρὸς ταύταις δὲ καὶ ἑτέραν βιβλὸν κατέλιπον, ἣ πόνῳ μακρῶ στιχιδίοις ἠρωικοῖς τε καὶ ἰαμβικοῖς καὶ πολιτικοῖς καὶ ἐπιστολαῖς διαφόροις τε καὶ ἐκφράσεσι συντέταχα, οὐκ ἐν ἀφανεῖ τόπῳ κείσθαι βούλομαι ταύτην, ἀλλὰ πολλὰκις ὑπενδείκνυσθαι πρὸς ἀνάγνωσιν καὶ ἡμετέραν ἀνάμνησιν τοῖς φιλοπονωτέροις τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ προστυγχάνειν βιβλοῖς καὶ ἱστορίαις ἐθέλουσιν, ἀνεκποιήτους δὲ καὶ ταύτας τῇ μονῇ εἶναι βουλόμεθα καὶ ἑσαεὶ αὐτῇ περισώζεσθαι (*Typikon* of the *Sebastokrator* Isaac Komnenos from the Monastery of the Mother of God *Kosmosoteira* near Bera: 69.6-12; trans. 844).

inform us of their erection of religious houses, holy convents and monasteries, their donation of property, their aid to the poor, their concern for the infirm, and their protection of the indigent of all sorts, and all their pious deeds which bore fruit before God.¹⁴⁶¹

We cannot know if these ‘records of the Palaiologoi’ were produced in a monastic environment, but the reference clearly attests to the existence of aristocratic genealogical literature containing details about the military careers of its subjects.

Finally, we should not overlook that many soldiers retired as monks, with John and Michael Doukas, Isaac and Adrian Komnenos, and Michael Palaiologos some of the more notable examples from our period.¹⁴⁶² During this time they were ideally disposed to write about their lives. Anna Komnene attests to the capacity and willingness of soldiers-turned-monks to recall their careers, orally at least. This is not to say that such men did not write about their deeds, especially the more illustrious and well-educated. The critical example is John Kantakouzenos, who, while not strictly retired from political affairs, wrote his memoirs as a monk. Shepard suggests that Katakalon Kekaumenos composed an autobiographical work during his monastic retirement; perhaps the tradition began much earlier.¹⁴⁶³

¹⁴⁶¹ Παραπέμποντος, ταύτην εἶ τις ζητοίη – και ὡς μετὰ τῆς κάτωθεν εὐδαιμονίας οἱ τούτου τοῦ γένους και τῷ θεῷ σπουδὴν ἔθεντο πολιτεύσασθαι ὅθεν αὐτοῖς και τὸ κληρονόμους γενέσθαι ὑπῆρξε τῆς παρ’ αὐτῷ κεκρυμμένης ζωῆς - εἰς σοφῶν λόγους και βίβλους συγγραφικὰς παραπέμνομεν; αἱ γε οὐ μόνον ἀξιώματα και τιμὰς αὐτῶν και ὡς τοῖς κρατοῦσι παρεδυνάστευον, και ὡς πλούτους μεγάλους περιβέβληντο, οὐδὲ μὴν ἀγῶνας πολεμικοὺς και στρατηγίας και ἀριστείας ἀνάγραπτα φέρουσιν, ἀλλὰ και θείων οἴκων και σεμνείων ἱερῶν και φροντιστηρίων ἐκδιδάσκουσιν ἀνεγέρσεις και κτήσεων ἀφιερώσεις και πενήτων προμηθείας και ἀσθενούντων ἐπιμελείας και παντοίων ἀπόρων προστασίας και ὅσα δὴ εὐσεβῶς ἐκεῖνοι δρῶντες ἐκαρποφόρου θεῷ (*Tyricon* of Michael VIII Palaiologos for the Monastery of St. Demetrios of the Palaiologoi-Kellibara in Constantinople: 449; trans. 1242).

¹⁴⁶² For the tendency of soldiers to retire as monks, see Haldon (1984): 326-328.

¹⁴⁶³ Shepard (1992b): 179 n.25.

Conclusion

The possibility that some aristocratic promotional literature was self-penned cannot be dismissed. Biographical works documenting military feats immediately call to mind the Hellenistic *hypomnemata* and Latin *commentarii*.¹⁴⁶⁴ Xenophon's *Anabasis* has been described as 'the prototype of commentaries on a campaign written by one of the leading generals',¹⁴⁶⁵ it is written in the third-person, attributed to a phantom author, one 'Themistogenes'.¹⁴⁶⁶ Singing one's praises was best left to others; thus Roman aristocrats often assigned a friend or client to develop their memoirs into a more polished historical account in the third-person.¹⁴⁶⁷ These concerns were probably also prevalent in Byzantium, particularly if Shepard is correct to argue that Katakalon Kekaumenos wrote his memoirs in the third-person. The extracts pertaining to aristocratic generals show an intimate knowledge which indicates their contribution in some form, be it direct authorship, or as suppliers of information. It is plausible that aristocrats, like their Roman counterparts, kept memoirs which served as raw material for polished compositions.¹⁴⁶⁸ Given that probable aristocratic promotional literature lies embedded in surviving historiography, it is feasible that some at least were intended to serve a greater literary purpose, ensuring positive representation of the subject in more general historical works.

¹⁴⁶⁴ See Bomer (1953).

¹⁴⁶⁵ Momigliano (1971): 57.

¹⁴⁶⁶ MacLaren Jr. (1934); Cawkwell (2004).

¹⁴⁶⁷ Misch (1974): I, 187-188.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Momigliano (1971): 15. Yuval Noah Harari (2004a: 37) reminds us however that memoirists were not always sincere in stating this - many regardless ended up producing what amounted to a general chronicle of their time.

IV. Biographical Compositions in Extant Historiography

The interest in influential individuals and exciting military narratives broadly accounts for the exploitation of aristocratic promotional literature in historiography of the Middle period. A more pressing issue is how the likes of Nikephoros Bryennios and Skylitzes rendered their written sources. To answer this question, scholars have examined how these historians used other sources which survive intact. We know that Bryennios made some use of the *Chronographia* of Michael Psellos and the *Synopsis Historion* of Skylitzes;¹⁴⁶⁹ as he followed them rather slavishly, Leonora Neville considers it likely that Bryennios adhered closely to the proposed composition of John Doukas.¹⁴⁷⁰

Catherine Holmes' principal methodology is similar, and entails comparison of Skylitzes' account of the reign of Romanos I Lekapenos with that of *Theophanes Continuatus*. Holmes demonstrates that Skylitzes was prone to trimming and discarding military material, imposing his rather standardized military vocabulary on descriptions of battle. Skylitzes appears to retain only the more extraordinary and exciting episodes in extensive detail. Where he adds to the original source, it is a linking phrase, explanatory statement or slight inference, rarely anything contradictory or substantial. As befitting a synoptic historian, Skylitzes, in the main, simply abridges his material, showing no obvious intent to make radical changes or additions to his source.¹⁴⁷¹

In his *prooimion*, Skylitzes notes that when using his sources he was careful to remove 'all comments of a subjective or fanciful nature...I left aside the writers'

¹⁴⁶⁹ Carile (1969).

¹⁴⁷⁰ Neville (2008): 175.

¹⁴⁷¹ Holmes (2005): 125-170.

differences and contradictions. I excised whatever I found there which tended toward fantasy; but I garnered whatever seemed likely and not beyond the bounds of credibility'.¹⁴⁷² Eulogistic biographical compositions extolling the heroic deeds of generals do not strike us as the best sources to employ in order to achieve objectivity, but they suited a contemporary interest in prosopography at the time Skylitzes was writing. Holmes argues that the great military families who comprised Skylitzes' audience wished to read about the valour and cunning of past heroes, many of whom belonged to families who remained influential during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos.¹⁴⁷³ These familial ties may have been important considerations in how Skylitzes chose to present certain individuals, yet it should be noted that any negative or positive portrayals are more likely to have been the result of his original material than his own invention.¹⁴⁷⁴ Therefore, while Skylitzes was selective with the material he included, what he does present appears to have been faithful to the original source.

¹⁴⁷² τὰς τῶν ἄνωθεν λεχθέντων συγγραφέων ἐπ' ἀκριβὲς ἱστορίας ἀναλεξάμενοι καὶ τὰ ἐμπαθῶς ἢ καὶ πρὸς χάριν λεχθέντα ἀποδιοπομπήσαντες καὶ τὰς διαφορὰς καὶ διαφωνίας παρέντες, ἀποξέσαντες δὲ καὶ ὅσα ἐγγύς ἐρχόμενα εὖρομεν τοῦ μυθώδους, τὰ δὲ εἰκότα καὶ ὁπόσα μὴ τοῦ πιθανοῦ ἀπέπιπτε συλλεξάμενοι (Skylitzes: 4.44-48; trans. 3).

¹⁴⁷³ Holmes (2005): 171-239.

¹⁴⁷⁴ See above, 63-68.

V. Features of Aristocratic Promotional Literature

The manner in which Skylitzes and Bryennios utilized their extant sources allows for tentative identification of some of the lost material they might have consulted. While we cannot completely reconstruct the underlying source, we may surmise that parts where the proposed subject features prominently derived from an aristocratic composition. We are thus able to make some broad observations about potential content and cite similarities across these types of works.¹⁴⁷⁵

Distortion and Fabrication

Distortion and invention are endemic to any encomiastic work where the subject was portrayed as an exemplary figure.¹⁴⁷⁶ According to Patricia Cox, to question the integrity of Greco-Roman biography on the basis of factual discrepancy ‘is to misconceive the literary tradition of the genre’.¹⁴⁷⁷ Pertinent also are the thoughts of Sigmund Freud: ‘Whoever turns biographer commits himself to lies, to concealment, to hypocrisy, to embellishments...biographical truth is not to be had, and even if one had it, one could not use it’.¹⁴⁷⁸ Yet it should be noted that Byzantine historians rarely offer a completely impartial version of events, regardless of their stated intentions. Nevertheless, it is useful to examine instances where aristocratic literature seems to have distorted military events, in order to understand how a subject ought to be presented.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Appendix IV offers observations on the depiction of military aristocrats in historical works which may have some relevance to the coverage offered by promotional biographical literature.

¹⁴⁷⁶ Hägg & Rousseau (2000): 14.

¹⁴⁷⁷ Cox (1983): 5. See also Momigliano (1971): 56-57 for biographers being forced ‘to resort to fiction’.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Quoted in Averil Cameron (1997): 146.

Jonathan Shepard has shown Skylitzes' coverage of Katakalon Kekaumenos to be extremely favourable, a probable consequence of Skylitzes drawing upon an encomiastic biographical source which distorted events to conceal Kekaumenos' failures.¹⁴⁷⁹ By Skylitzes' account, the Battle of Kaputru would have resulted in victory for the Byzantines had the Georgian commander Liparites not failed to carry the Turkish centre, with Kekaumenos having already successfully routed the Turkish left.¹⁴⁸⁰ This is at odds with the testimony of Armenian historians Aristakes of Lastivert and Matthew of Edessa, who insist that it was actually Liparites who upheld his part of the plan, with the Byzantines ignobly abandoning him. Consequently, the Turks overwhelmed the Iberian troops and won an emphatic victory.¹⁴⁸¹ We might expect Armenian sources – Matthew in particular – to apportion blame to the Byzantines, but the testimony of Attaleiates corroborates the notion that the Byzantines were defeated.¹⁴⁸² Where Skylitzes is more honest about defeats Kekaumenos was involved in, as with the Battle of Diakene in 1049, he nevertheless makes strenuous efforts to preserve Kekaumenos' integrity. Thus it is Kekaumenos' sound tactical advice prior to the battle which is ignored by the incompetent Nikephoros the *rektor*, and it is Kekaumenos who stands and fights when all his fellow generals flee.¹⁴⁸³ When Kekaumenos is involved in a victory, the success is usually attributed to him: while Isaac Komnenos wavers at the Battle of Hades in 1057, it is Kekaumenos who decides the encounter by routing the imperial right and

¹⁴⁷⁹ Shepard (1992b): esp. 173-174.

¹⁴⁸⁰ Skylitzes: 452-453.

¹⁴⁸¹ Aristakes of Lastivert: 69-70; Matthew of Edessa: 78-79.

¹⁴⁸² Attaleiates: 34-35. For the argument see Shepard (1975-1976): 276-279. John Haldon (2003: 47-48, 56) favours Skylitzes' account.

¹⁴⁸³ Skylitzes: 468-469. On a related note, the other Kekaumenos, in his *Consilia et Narrationes* (96-98), attributes a second defeat to the Pechenegs at Diampolis that same year to the commander, Constantine the *rektor*, deciding to commit his fatigued army to battle rather than let them rest first (see also Attaleiates: 25-27). The defeats at Diakene and Diampolis as recorded by Skylitzes and Kekaumenos are not to be conflated – for discussion of the arguments see Lemerle (1960): 39-40 n.2, 71-72.

cutting through the enemy camp.¹⁴⁸⁴ Attaleiates makes no mention of Kekaumenos, and notes only the eventual success of Komnenos' right flank.¹⁴⁸⁵ Psellos provides a different account entirely; according to him, Isaac's flanks crumbled immediately, leaving him alone in the centre, where the battle was won.¹⁴⁸⁶ The prominence and favour afforded to Katakalon Kekaumenos in these instances highlights the mandate of Skylitzes' pro-Kekaumenos source.

As Catherine Holmes has shown, the pro-Bardas Skleros document employed by Skylitzes provides further examples of the distortion, exaggeration and deception endemic in aristocratic promotional literature. Skylitzes' account of Skleros' victory at Arcadiopolis in 970, while more lucid than that provided by Leo the Deacon, appears to exaggerate the feat by quadrupling the size of the enemy force and reducing Byzantine casualties by more than half.¹⁴⁸⁷ Examples from Basil II's reign are harder to discern given the lack of corroborative Greek sources, but Arabic texts indicate that Skleros' heroic escape from Buyid captivity, as reported in Skylitzes, is probably legend; rather, it would appear he was merely allowed to leave by his hosts.¹⁴⁸⁸ Holmes determines that 'many of Skleros' claims were either extremely far-fetched or more simply blatant lies'.¹⁴⁸⁹

Our last example is the presentation of the *kaisar* John Doukas in his encomiastic source, believed to be partially preserved in the *Hyle Historias* of Nikephoros Bryennios. The Battle of Zompos, where Doukas led the imperial forces against the Norman rebel Roussel, is recorded differently by Bryennios and Attaleiates.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Skylitzes: 494-495.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Attaleiates: 41-42.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Psellos, *Chronographia*: II, 90-91 (XIII).

¹⁴⁸⁷ Holmes (2005): 272-276. Leo the Deacon: 108-111; Skylitzes: 288-291.

¹⁴⁸⁸ Holmes (2005): 276-278.

¹⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid*: 286.

According to Attaleiates, Doukas sent a delegation to Roussel, but merely treated his opposite number with contempt, encouraging the bellicose Roussel to fight. Having ignored the wise counsel of fellow commander Nikephoros Botaneiates, the *kaisar* decided to give battle only to be defeated by Roussel's army.¹⁴⁹⁰ The account of Nikephoros Bryennios divulges more details about the course of the battle proper. It is said that the mercenary Franks almost immediately defected to Roussel, with the result that Doukas was essentially surrounded. He was left further isolated when the rearguard, commanded by Nikephoros Botaneiates, left the field. Despite a heroic effort, John Doukas and his son Andronikos were eventually captured.¹⁴⁹¹ We can surmise that Bryennios, or rather his source, neglected the preliminary discussions and plans as they reflected poorly on Doukas. It may be that Attaleiates knew of the negotiations through his friend Basil Maleses, who was captured along with Doukas.¹⁴⁹² It should not be forgotten, however, that Attaleiates was writing to appease Botaneiates, and could not include anything which might tarnish the emperor's reputation. Thus it is telling that the historian gives little thought to the fighting, suggesting that an unprepared Doukas was merely overpowered by Roussel's forces. Conversely, this is where the Doukas source of Bryennios could make a greater case for its subject. The treachery of Doukas' western troops is stressed, while, most notably, Botaneiates is reported to have withdrawn with the rearguard, leaving the Doukai to fight alone. It is hardly surprising that Attaleiates omitted this development. Consequently, we should not consider Neville's pro-Doukas source to distort events any more than other records of the engagement.

¹⁴⁹⁰ Attaleiates: 136-139.

¹⁴⁹¹ Bryennios: 169-171. *Skylitzes Continuatus* (158) largely echoes the account of Attaleiates.

¹⁴⁹² Dimitris Krallis (2006: 249-250) suggests that Attaleiates' view of Roussel was 'certainly influenced' by Maleses, and regards Maleses as 'a first rate source for the *Historia*'. For Attaleiates' friendship with Maleses, see *ibid*: 138-151.

Military Episodes – Stratagems and Generalship

The fragmentary evidence analyzed below suggests that aristocratic promotional literature featured highly descriptive accounts of campaigns and battles, with emphasis drawn to the ability of the subject(s). Comparison with contemporary military handbooks reveals the strategies and tactics employed in the compositions to reflect current trends, something which would not have been lost on an aristocratic audience. Authors of soldier biographies appear to depict their subject as one who played it by the book, as it were, perhaps deeming it the best way to demonstrate the extent of his ability. And just as the manuals promote original thinking, we similarly witness moments of ingenuity and innovation.

Leo the Deacon's detailed account of the victory of Leo Phokas over the Hamdanid emir Sayf al-Dawla in 960 is suggestive of the use of an informed source keen to extol Leo Phokas.¹⁴⁹³ The positive traits attributed to Leo Phokas – courage and vigour, exceptionally good judgment, supremely clever at devising the proper course of action – support Athanasios Markopoulos' idea of the virtues esteemed in aristocratic biographies.¹⁴⁹⁴ Before Leo the Deacon describes the engagement, he provides a brief record of an earlier victory won by Leo Phokas over the Magyars.¹⁴⁹⁵ It is probable that Leo the Deacon came across this episode in the same document that chronicled Leo Phokas' victory over Sayf al-Dawla. In both instances the perilous nature of the situation is stressed – the enemy army is vastly superior in numbers, skill, arms, and morale. Nevertheless, Leo triumphs through careful planning and the springing of a

¹⁴⁹³ For accounts of the battle see Leo the Deacon: 18-24; cf. Skylitzes: 249-250; *Theophanes Continuatus*: 479; *Vaticanus gr. 163*: 98-99; Yahya ibn Said: 781-783; Ibn Miskawayh: 180-181. See also Canard (1951): 801-803; Bikhazi (1981): 844-847.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Markopoulos (2004-2005).

¹⁴⁹⁵ Leo the Deacon: 18-19. Cf. *Vitae of St. Athanasios*: §55.3-5 (*Vita A*); §20.3-5 (*Vita B*). For discussion see Moravcsik (1958): I, 555; Bouras (1981); Cheynet (1986): 301-306.

sudden, devastating attack. In both battles the cautious and tactically-aware Leo Phokas is presented as an expert practitioner of the skirmishing warfare presented in the contemporary military handbook, the *De Velitatione*. As Jean-Claude Cheynet and Gilbert Dagron have demonstrated, chapters III (on occupying difficult terrain in advance of the enemy), XXIII (on ambushing a withdrawing enemy in mountain passes) and XXIV (on night attacks) of the *De Velitatione* provide principles so similar to those followed by Leo Phokas against the Arabs and Magyars that we must wonder if his textbook victories provided the blueprint for these sections.¹⁴⁹⁶

Catherine Holmes proposes that the Bardas Skleros biographical source sought to present its subject as an expert general through his cunning and strategic awareness.¹⁴⁹⁷ Skylitzes' extensive use of the work allows us to highlight several ways in which the original author did this. The account of Skleros' victory over a combined Magyar-Pecheneg-Bulgarian force near the Thracian town of Arcadiopolis in 970 has been shown by Eric McGeer to present a perfect execution of the tactics prescribed for defeating a superior force in the military treatise, the *Praecepta Militaria*.¹⁴⁹⁸ Here Bardas Skleros' generalship and combat skills are complimented, but in other instances it is his quick thinking and innovative stratagems. At the Battle of Lapara in 976, Skleros deceived the imperial army by ordering his troops to fall upon them whilst the opposition was eating. Though the enemy stood firm initially, they were eventually unnerved by Bardas' outflanking manoeuvre and broke ranks.¹⁴⁹⁹ It is also suggested that the Skleros manifesto offered a fictitious account of Skleros' daring escape from captivity in Baghdad, apparently made possible through

¹⁴⁹⁶ Dennis (1985): 139-140, 157 n.2; Dagron & Mihăescu (1986): 165-169, 223 n.16; Cheynet (1986): 293-294, 304-305.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Holmes (2005): 260-263, 281-289, 291-293.

¹⁴⁹⁸ McGeer (1995a): 294-300.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Skylitzes: 319.

his considerable ingenuity, courage and military ability.¹⁵⁰⁰ Exhilarating stories and accounts of textbook military victories best conveyed the brilliance of Skleros.

The emphasis on exciting military episodes exhibiting the bravery and cunning of the general is also evident in material relating to Katakalon Kekaumenos. Beset by a vast Arab army at Messina in 1041, Kekaumenos delayed while the frustrated Arabs turned to drink, and consequently became careless. This was not lost on Kekaumenos, who led a charge against the unprepared enemy, and rode straight for the quarters of the enemy leader, cutting him down. To target the opposition commander was a key principle of tenth-century Byzantine military theory, with the result that the enemy would be demoralized.¹⁵⁰¹ Kekaumenos' boldness paid off as the enemy took to disorderly flight, suffering heavy losses.¹⁵⁰² The account paints a familiar picture of a skilled general pulling off a defeat through cunning and military prowess in the face of overwhelming odds.

We encounter further episodes showcasing Kekaumenos' expertise during Skylitzes' discussion of the general's tenure as governor of Ani and Iberia in Armenia.¹⁵⁰³ In 1048, Kekaumenos, having been called to assist Aaron, governor of Vaspurakan, against the incursions of the Turks, favoured abandoning the fortified camp and readying ambushes, so that they could set upon the Turks whilst they were pillaging the site. By outlining the plan, and then describing its perfect execution, the text stresses that the victory was entirely down to Kekaumenos' expertise.¹⁵⁰⁴

Significantly, whenever Kekaumenos' advice is overlooked, the Turks enjoy success;

¹⁵⁰⁰ Ibid: 332-334. For further discussion see Holmes (2005): 276-278.

¹⁵⁰¹ Nikephoros II Phokas, *Praecepta Militaria*: §§II.115-120; IV.120-123. For discussion see McGeer (1995a): 307-308.

¹⁵⁰² Skylitzes: 406-407.

¹⁵⁰³ Shepard (1975-1976).

¹⁵⁰⁴ Skylitzes: 448-449.

the momentum from the initial triumph is lost when Aaron ignores Kekaumenos' plea to attack the Turks massing for a retaliatory raid,¹⁵⁰⁵ while the inhabitants of Artze might have been spared had they listened to Kekaumenos and sought refuge within walls.¹⁵⁰⁶ The Roman-Iberian force loses the initiative because of the refusal of the Georgian noble Liparites to heed Kekaumenos' call to attack the Turks as they arrived in piecemeal fashion.¹⁵⁰⁷ This aggressive stance seems to have been a particular trait of Kekaumenos, since precisely the same advice is ignored in relation to a different enemy, the Pechenegs, at the Battle of Diakene in 1049; inevitably, the Byzantines lose the battle.¹⁵⁰⁸ We might infer that the pro-Kekaumenos source of Skylitzes sought to present its subject as an energetic leader, eager to take the fight to the enemy to avoid large-scale pitched battle.¹⁵⁰⁹

The correlation between the tactics employed by these generals and the guidance of contemporary handbooks reflects the renewed interest in military theory during this period. The Emperor Leo VI the Wise drafted an exhaustive *Taktika* which drew heavily upon the *Strategikon* of Emperor Maurice and the works of Hellenistic authors on warfare, including Onasander and Aelian.¹⁵¹⁰ Subsequent manuals, written by men with practical experience, show a greater awareness of current tactical developments. The *De Velitatione* documents the procedures for frontier warfare against the Arabs between c.840-958.¹⁵¹¹ The shift to more offensive tactics is first seen in the largely encyclopaedic *Sylloge Tacticorum*, compiled during the reign of

¹⁵⁰⁵ Such tactics are advised by Leo VI, *Taktika*: §XX.212.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Skylitzes: 449-452.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Ibid: 452-453.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Ibid: 468.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Consistency in Kekaumenos' tactics, namely that of him attacking before an enemy had chance to organize, is similarly noted by Shepard (forthcoming).

¹⁵¹⁰ Leo VI, *Taktika*; Maurice, *Strategikon*; Onasander; Aelian.

¹⁵¹¹ *De Velitatione*. See Haldon & Kennedy (1980); Dagron & Mihăescu (1986).

Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos;¹⁵¹² the relevant sections were soon reworked and expanded by the Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas in his *Praecepta Militaria*.¹⁵¹³ Instructional works on defensive (*De Obsidione Toleranda*) and offensive siege warfare (the *Parangelmata Poliorketika* by the so-called Heron of Byzantium) appeared in the mid-tenth century.¹⁵¹⁴ Imperial campaigns in the treacherous terrain of Bulgaria were covered in the treatise *De Re Militari*, thought to have been composed in the first half of Basil II's reign.¹⁵¹⁵ Finally, in the early eleventh century Nikephoros Ouranos, a leading general of Basil II, compiled a comprehensive *Taktika* which included some new content reflecting changes in warfare since Nikephoros Phokas' day.¹⁵¹⁶

While there is no evidence outside of the manuals confirming that these particular works were read by soldiers,¹⁵¹⁷ the very fact that they dealt with current circumstances and were written by men with military experience suggests that they were intended for practical application. The author of the *Vita Basilii* stressed the importance of military handbooks to those considering engaging in war: 'Were it possible for everyone to learn military science or art without study and considerable practice, authors of works on tactics who devote so much labour to this topic would

¹⁵¹² *Sylloge Tacticorum*.

¹⁵¹³ Nikephoros II Phokas, *Praecepta Militaria*. See McGeer (1995a).

¹⁵¹⁴ Heron of Byzantium, *Parangelmata Poliorketika*; *De Obsidione Toleranda*. See Sullivan (2000).

¹⁵¹⁵ *De Re Militari*.

¹⁵¹⁶ Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*. See McGeer (1995a).

¹⁵¹⁷ Intriguingly the manuals of the tenth century do occasionally show an awareness of the wider field. The *De Velitatione* (§XX.1; trans. 219) directs the reader to actions described 'in the strategical book composed by the revered and most wise emperor Leo', almost certainly a reference to Leo's *Taktika*. The following chapter (ibid: §XXI.1; trans. 225) notes that matters of siege warfare 'have been carefully and precisely explained before us by the authors of books on tactics and strategy'. The *De Re Militari* (§27.9-13; trans. 288-289) writes similarly of siege warfare: 'the ancient authorities have written excellent and very practical things in their books more scientifically and in greater detail than the present work'. In addition to ancient commentators, these may well be references to the various *poliorketika* composed in the tenth century. See Dagon & Mihăescu (1986): 226-227; Sullivan (2003a): 144-145.

be merely ranting senselessly'.¹⁵¹⁸ The military education the Emperor Basil II gave to the young John and Isaac Komnenos involved the study of *taktika*.¹⁵¹⁹ Kekaumenos advised generals to read military handbooks when not at war, and himself appears to have been familiar with such works.¹⁵²⁰ Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos instructed that military manuals (βιβλία στρατηγικά) be taken on imperial expeditions.¹⁵²¹ According to Michael Psellos, Basil II gained a knowledge of military formations partly from his own experience but also from what he had read in books (τῶν βιβλίων), presumably *taktika*.¹⁵²² Psellos also asserts that the *kaisar* John Doukas acquired a knowledge of strategy and tactics from the works of Aelian and other Hellenistic military writers.¹⁵²³ Anna Komnene similarly revealed that her father Alexios 'was not unfamiliar with the *Taktika* of Aelian'.¹⁵²⁴ With military manuals regularly consulted by aristocratic generals and emperors, accounts of textbook victories in aristocratic biographical literature were likely to find appreciation among their intended readership.

¹⁵¹⁸ τὴν δὲ πολεμικὴν ἐπιστήμην ἢ τέχνην εἰ δίχα μαθήσεως καὶ ἰκανῆς ἐμπειρίας ἐξῆν εἰδέναι τῷ βουλομένῳ, οὐκ εἶχον ἄρα νοῦν, ἀλλ' ἐλήρουν, οἱ πολλὰ περὶ τὸ μέρος τοῦτο μονήσαντες ἐν τοῖς τακτικοῖς συγγράμμασι (*Vita Basilii*: §36.18-23; trans. 135).

¹⁵¹⁹ Bryennios: 75.

¹⁵²⁰ Ὅταν δὲ σχολάσεις καὶ οὐκ ἀσχολῇ εἰς στρατηγικὰς δουλείας, ἀναγίνωσκε καὶ βίβλους, καὶ ἱστορίας, καὶ τὰς τῆς ἐκκλησίας βίβλους. καὶ μὴ εἴπης: "τίς ὠφέλεια στρατιώτῃ ἀπὸ τῶν δογμάτων καὶ τῶν ἐκκλησιαστικῶν βιβλίων;" πάνυ γὰρ ὠφελήθησιν. καὶ εἰ ἀκριβῶς προσέχεις, οὐ μόνον δόγματα καὶ ψυχοφελῆ διηγήματα καρπώσῃ ἐκ τούτων, ἀλλὰ καὶ γνωμικὰ καὶ στρατηγικά σχεδὸν γὰρ πᾶσα ἢ παλαιὰ στρατηγικά εἰσιν. ἀλλὰ καὶ γνωμικὰ καὶ ἐν τῇ καινῇ οὐκ ὀλίγα καρπώσεται ὁ σπουδαῖος. ἐγὼ γὰρ τοιοῦτον ἐφίεμαι εἶναι σε, ἵνα θαυμάζωσί σε πάντες εἰς τε τὴν ἀνδρείαν σου καὶ εἰς τὴν εὐβουλίαν σου καὶ εἰς τὴν γνῶσιν καὶ εὐγλωττίαν σου. καὶ εἰ ταῦτα ἀσπάση καὶ φυλάξεις, μακάριος ἔσῃ. ἐγὼ γὰρ συνέταξά σοι ταῦτα μὴ ὄντα εἰς ἄλλο στρατηγικὸν μηδὲ εἰς ἄλλο βιβλίον· ἐξ οἴκειού μου συλλογισμοῦ καὶ ἐξ ἀληθινῆς πείρας ταῦτα συνέταξα. ὠφελήσουσι γὰρ σε πάνυ. μέτελθε δὲ καὶ τὰς τῶν ἀρχαίων στρατηγίας· καὶ ταῦτα μὲν ἐκεῖσε οὐχ εὐρήσεις, ἕτερα δὲ τούτων κρείττονα καὶ θαυμαστά καὶ πλήρη σοφίας εὐρήσεις (Kekaumenos: 154.23-156.8). For Kekaumenos' reading see Roueché (2002): 117-123.

¹⁵²¹ Constantine VII, *Text C*: II.196-199.

¹⁵²² Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*: I, 20-21 (XXXIII).

¹⁵²³ *Ibid*: II, 181.

¹⁵²⁴ ἦν γὰρ οὐδὲ τῆς Αἰλιανοῦ Τακτικῆς ἀδαῆς (Anna Komnene: XV.3.6; trans. 439).

There is a danger of overstating the influence of established military precepts on Middle Byzantine commanders and their biographers. For advice literature of the period also encouraged the reader to break from tradition and use initiative and cunning.¹⁵²⁵ The opportunism of Bardas Skleros and Katakalon Kekaumenos is evident in the episodes mentioned above. These stories satisfied the great Byzantine fondness for trickery and the stratagem, for the surprise attack and avoidance of pitched battle;¹⁵²⁶ indeed, Everett Wheeler considered stratagems to be ‘the predominant theme of Byzantine military theory’.¹⁵²⁷ The mentality may be traced back to the cunning Odysseus in the works of Homer,¹⁵²⁸ and, to a lesser extent, the Old Testament,¹⁵²⁹ both of which constituted essential reading to educated Byzantines.¹⁵³⁰ Procopius’ *Wars* may have impressed upon Middle Byzantine writers and readers a certain military ideology and narrative style, with one twelfth-century chronicler describing the *Wars* as ‘the stratagems of Belisarius’.¹⁵³¹ A particular type of ancient military writing which collected famous stratagems – *strategemata* – was also popular. Polyainos’ *Strategika*, a collection of *exempla* of trickery and deceit in war compiled in the second century A.D., was abridged and restructured by an

¹⁵²⁵ Leo VI, *Taktika*: Ep.35; Kekaumenos: 142.11-18, 148.22-27. See in general McGeer (1995a): 193-194.

¹⁵²⁶ ‘It is by means of intelligent planning and changes <in strategy>, with regard to time...and also place, such as narrow passes, and by ambushes, by surprise attacks, and by a great variety of ways to trick the enemy, that you will achieve victory over them without actual fighting. This is absolutely essential for survival. It is by your intelligence, planning, courage, and skill that you will defeat the enemy’ (Leo VI, *Taktika*: §XII.4; trans. 217-219). See also Maurice, *Strategikon*: §§VII.1; VIII.86.

¹⁵²⁷ Wheeler (1988): 12; Kaegi (1983). See also Krentz (2000).

¹⁵²⁸ See Edwards (1985).

¹⁵²⁹ For trickery in warfare in the Old Testament, see Niditch (1993): 106-122.

¹⁵³⁰ For the Byzantine appreciation of Homer, see Browning (1975): 15-33; idem (1992); Pontani (2005): 159-182. Kekaumenos encouraged soldiers to read books of the church for ideas, insisting that almost all of the Old Testament ‘is stories of strategy’ (see above, 311 n.1520). For the Byzantine reading of the Old Testament see most recently the various studies in Magdalino & Nelson (2010): esp. 9-10.

¹⁵³¹ τὰ τοῦ Βελισσαρίου στρατηγήματα (Kedrenos: I, 649.1-3). See also Kaegi (1990): 66; Whately (2009): 168-169.

anonymous Byzantine redactor sometime between the sixth and ninth century.¹⁵³² Polyainos' work formed the basis of the so-called *Stratagems of the Emperor Leo*, preserved in the tenth-century *Sylloge Tacticorum*, while chapters 123 to 171 of the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos are also gleaned from Polyainos.¹⁵³³ Constantine VII recommended that Polyainos' work be among the books brought on an imperial expedition.¹⁵³⁴ Narrative episodes involving generals exhibiting guile and ingenuity adhere quite closely to the *strategemata* tradition. The ruse employed by Bardas Skleros at the Battle of Lapara, where he fooled his opponents into breaking for dinner and then attacked them as they ate, bears a striking resemblance to a stratagem used by Kleomenes of Sparta against the Argives, recorded in Polyainos as well as the Byzantine excerpts and the *Stratagems of Leo*.¹⁵³⁵ The discussed extracts from aristocratic promotional literature strike us as Middle Byzantine equivalents to the ancient tales of cunning collected by Polyainos.

Though we cannot discount that Skylitzes drew from his material selectively, culling the more exciting tales from longer campaign narratives, this anecdotal style typifies the mode of relating military episodes in Middle Byzantium.¹⁵³⁶ James Howard-Johnston observed the trend in relation to the histories of Anna Komnene and Nikephoros Bryennios,¹⁵³⁷ while Kekaumenos includes tales of bravado and cunning in his *Consilia et Narrationes*.¹⁵³⁸ Indeed, Paul Lemerle maintains that while most of

¹⁵³² *Strategemata in lucem prolata curis*. See also Dain (1931); Wheeler & Krentz (1994): I, xvi-xxiii; Wheeler (2010): 52-54.

¹⁵³³ See Trombley (1997): 272-272.

¹⁵³⁴ Constantine VII, *Text C*: ll.196-199.

¹⁵³⁵ Polyainos: 1.14, taken from Herodotus: 6.77-78; *Excerpts of Polyainos*: 20.1; Leo VI, *Stratagems*: 20.12.

¹⁵³⁶ See in general Roueché (1988). For Skylitzes' preference for short lively narrative episodes (*diegemata*), see Holmes (2003a).

¹⁵³⁷ Howard-Johnston (1996).

¹⁵³⁸ Lemerle (1960): 57-77; Roueché (2002); Kazhdan (1984c): 68-70.

these twenty-six stories were known to Kekaumenos through his family ties, the first – relating how Bulgarian Tsar Symeon used a cunning ruse to capture a town in Hellas in 918 – he attributes to a ‘collection of stratagems’.¹⁵³⁹ Such a modern Byzantine equivalent of the ancient *strategemata* may have also been responsible for a number of other isolated narrative episodes in Skylitzes’ *Synopsis Historion*.¹⁵⁴⁰ This anecdotal tradition stemmed in part from military men telling something akin to campfire tales. According to Michael Psellos, Isaac I Komnenos would entertain the court ‘with stories of the old times, recalling all the witty sayings of... Basil (II) the Great’.¹⁵⁴¹ Upon his death, Isaac’s father Manuel entrusted his sons to the care of Basil, so it is probable that Isaac heard these stories from the man himself.¹⁵⁴² Other traditions may also be at work. Adolf Stender-Peterson argued for the influence of the Byzantine mode of storytelling in the twelfth-century *Russian Primary Chronicle*, wherein a number of episodes concerned with tricks and stratagems may be observed. It is suggested that these ‘Varagische Kriegslistanekdoten’ were brought north by veterans of the famous Varangian Guard, or spread by traders who had come into contact with the elite company. Stender-Peterson viewed the Byzantine military anecdote as part of a wider Greco-Roman tradition going back to the stratagems collected by Polyainos.¹⁵⁴³

¹⁵³⁹ Lemerle (1960): 75-76. Kekaumenos: 182.

¹⁵⁴⁰ E.g. John Tzimiskes’ bloody victory over the Arabs at Adana in 964 (Skylitzes: 267-268); Michael Bourtzēs’ bold capture of Antioch in 969 (ibid: 272-273); Manuel Erotikos Komnenos’ defence of Nicaea against Bardas Skleros in 978 (ibid: 323); the heroic defence of Manzikert against a Turkish siege by one Basil Apokapes in 1053 (ibid: 462-464).

¹⁵⁴¹ κατεῖχε τε ἡμᾶς ἄχρις ἑσπέρας, ἀρχαῖά τε διηγούμενος καὶ ὅποσα ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐκεῖνος Βασίλειος ὁ τοῦ Ῥωμανοῦ παῖς ἐπικαίρως ἐφθέγγετο (Psellos, *Chronographia*: II, 130 [LXXVI]; trans. 323). See also Garland (1999).

¹⁵⁴² Bryennios: 75.

¹⁵⁴³ Stender-Peterson (1934): 77-90; R. Cook (1986).

The Byzantine tradition of military anecdotes, evident in the extracts of aristocratic promotional literature, owes much to the *Strategika* of Polyainos, which itself was almost certainly influenced in its anecdotal style by Hellenistic biography.¹⁵⁴⁴ The secular biographical compositions of Middle Byzantium may have followed traditional literary conventions in this respect. However, the popularity during this period of military stories showcasing textbook generalship and ingenuity attest to the influence of an aristocratic ideology, inspired by contemporary instructional handbooks and older literature, including Homer and collections of stratagems. Eric McGeer encapsulates the process, though he failed to develop his argument beyond mere observation: ‘The great popularity of the *strategemata*...combines with the tales of illustrious warriors written during the tenth and eleventh centuries...to show that the Byzantine military aristocracy was well on its way to creating its own ideals of valorous conduct and military proficiency’.¹⁵⁴⁵ The exhibition of these values distinguished the biographical compositions of the military aristocracy from the *Vita Basilii* and preceding works of ‘semi-secular’ and historical hagiography.

¹⁵⁴⁴ Pretzler (2010): 107. Everett Wheeler (2010: 21-27) argues that military treatises and exempla collections were among Polyainos’ other influences. For the anecdotal style of Hellenistic biography see Momigliano (1971): 72-76.

¹⁵⁴⁵ McGeer (1995a): 192.

Conclusion

Though we lack a surviving example of aristocratic promotional literature, a number of references confirm their existence. *Theophanes Continuatus* directs the reader to an eight-volume work documenting the career of John Kourkouas. The *Historia Syntomos* confirms that there were many books about Nikephoros II Phokas. Michael VIII Palaiologos refers to written accounts recording the military careers of his family. With this in mind, scholars have developed convincing arguments for encomiastic works detailing the feats of other aristocratic generals, including Bardas Skleros, Katakalon Kekaumenos, George Maniakes, John Doukas, and members of the Phokas family. This chapter has sought to explain the appearance of aristocratic promotional literature in terms of social and literary developments, and, for the first time, examine the potential body of work as a whole.

The appearance of aristocratic promotional literature in the mid-tenth century was a natural consequence of the rising power of commanders and new literary trends, in particular the secularization of hagiography and the use of the biographical model in historiography. The subject himself was almost certainly involved in the composition, either supplying information or writing the work himself, perhaps employing the third-person and taking the role of shadow author. It is suggested that such promotional literature was designed to glorify the subject and serve as *apologia* for rebellion, though was nevertheless edifying and, in the grand biographical tradition, provided examples for readers.

One cannot speak of an archetypal piece of aristocratic literature. We can, however, attempt a partial reconstruction of these lost sources, since Skylitzes and Nikephoros Bryennios are known to have adhered closely to their original material. In doing this,

one identifies similarities across the material and may make a number of general observations about the content, ideals and style of aristocratic promotional literature. Some notions are speculative, based on wider trends and known aristocratic values. Michael VIII Palaiologos' comment about the records of his family suggests that aristocratic literature contained accounts of 'combat in wartime, generalship, and valour', and indeed it is episodes detailing military actions which we most frequently encounter in extant historical works. Military defeats or setbacks involving the subject of the proposed work are omitted or more often distorted to ensure that he could not be blamed and at least retained his honour. The subject is frequently presented exhibiting his textbook military skills by adhering to the precepts of conventional military handbooks. Most notable are episodes where the subject shows his ingenuity by devising a cunning trick to overcome a superior enemy. These betray an influence of the *strategemata*, ancient collections of stratagems whose most famous exponent, Polyainos, continued to be read and revised in tenth-century Byzantium. This anecdotal style characterized the Byzantine mode of relating military episodes in the following centuries, seen most obviously with Kekaumenos, Skylitzes, Nikephoros Bryennios and Anna Komnene. The promotional literature of the military aristocracy may thus be seen as part of a wider movement towards the revival of secular storytelling in Byzantium, one which would not find its true expression until the appearance of fictitious romances in the twelfth century.¹⁵⁴⁶

The influence of aristocratic promotional literature is evident in its use by other historians. There could be few better informed narratives of military episodes available to a historian; furthermore, aristocratic literature provided tales which would interest and instruct the reader. The aristocratic interest in prestigious ancestry fuelled

¹⁵⁴⁶ Magdalino (1993b): 1-5; Mullett (1997a): 76-77.

the recycling of these accounts in historiography, as seen with the *Synopsis Historion* of Skylitzes. It is also important to consider the probable impact the literature of the military aristocracy had on the general style of war writing in Byzantium. The depiction of the model commander displaying his knowledge of military science and ingenuity has been noted, as has the introduction of the *strategemata*-style in historical writing. We have yet to discuss the presence of personal valour and the warrior code in aristocratic literature. The final chapter proposes that the ‘heroic historiography’ of the Middle Byzantine period, defined by its fascination with single combat and Homeric-style heroic displays, owed much to the values and ideals exhibited in the promotional literature of the military aristocracy.

**CHAPTER V. ARISTOCRATIC PROMOTIONAL LITERATURE AND
'HEROIC HISTORIOGRAPHY'**

Instances of excellent generalship and inventiveness in Middle Byzantine historiography contrast sharply with accounts of generals risking their lives in battle in the same works. These actions exemplify what Alexander Kazhdan termed 'chivalresque historiography', a moniker he applied to the epic literature of the second half of the tenth century, such as Theodosios the Deacon's *Capture of Crete* and the *History of Leo the Deacon*.¹⁵⁴⁷ 'Chivalry' calls to mind certain ideas – single combat (*monomachia*), bold displays, gentlemanly codes, mutual respect between combatants – which are indeed evident in Middle Byzantine historiography. Nevertheless, the very term chivalry, much like feudalism and crusade, is synonymous with the medieval west, and is somewhat inappropriate when applied to a Byzantine context.¹⁵⁴⁸ Consequently, the label 'heroic historiography' is preferred here, since many aspects of aristocratic martial culture ultimately derive from Homer and heroic epic. Here we examine the cues taken from epic literature and propose that it was the promotional literature of the aristocracy which brought these ideals into the historiography of the Middle period.

¹⁵⁴⁷ Kazhdan (2006): 273-287.

¹⁵⁴⁸ It should be noted that John Haldon (1999: 357 n.40) comments on the 'chivalric' aspect of Byzantine martial culture during this period, while Dimiter Angelov (2007: 196 n.70) refers to a more 'chivalric' and militarized portrait of the emperor from the late eleventh century onward. The seminal article on the militarization of the imperial image is Kazhdan (1984a).

I. Single Combat: Rivalry and Respect in ‘Heroic Historiography’

The portrayal of the rivalry between Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas in the proposed pro-Skleros source of Skylitzes serves as a suitable introduction to the conventions of Middle Byzantine ‘heroic historiography’. A review suggests that this piece of aristocratic promotional literature included heroism, respect for martial prowess, adherence to an aristocratic warrior code and single combat. The latter in particular was obviously inspired by the duels described by Homer, whose influence on aristocratic values on the field and in literature was profound.

Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas: Traces of Aristocratic Heroic Ideals

The most notable example of single combat in this period is the dramatic duel between Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas, recorded in Skylitzes’ *Synopsis Historion*. In 979, at the Battle of the river Halys, Phokas charged Skleros and struck him with his mace, causing him to lurch forward in discomfort and bringing the brief struggle to a swift end. Skleros lost the battle and fled to Baghdad, concluding a rebellion he had waged for three years since 976.¹⁵⁴⁹ It has been suggested that the clash between Skleros and Phokas was invented by Skylitzes,¹⁵⁵⁰ though Catherine Holmes asserts that the episode originated in Skylitzes’ pro-Skleros source.¹⁵⁵¹

As Skleros’ most formidable adversary, Phokas would have featured prominently in any account of the revolt. Furthermore, the two were brothers-in-law.¹⁵⁵² It has been proposed that Tzimiskes established the Skleros family as a ‘groupe des opposants

¹⁵⁴⁹ Skylitzes: 376-377.

¹⁵⁵⁰ Forsyth (1977): 384-393.

¹⁵⁵¹ Holmes (2005): 258-259, 270-272, 453-456.

¹⁵⁵² Leo the Deacon: 118; Skylitzes: 294.

habituels aux Phokas’,¹⁵⁵³ but against this one could argue that the feud did not extend beyond the two men, and never appears to have been particularly bitter. Upon hearing that Bardas Phokas had been sent against him, Skleros ‘thought that now for the first time the fight would be against a true soldier, one who well knew how to conduct military operations with courage and skill; not, as formerly, against pitiful fellows, eunuchs’.¹⁵⁵⁴ While it is possible that these are the words of Skylitzes rather than those of his source, we should note comments made by Jean-Claude Cheynet in relation to an earlier section of the *Synopsis Historion*: ‘This speech has clearly been reconstituted, but is not to be attributed to Skylitzes himself, an eleventh-century writer, since he respects the content of earlier source material used’.¹⁵⁵⁵ Disdain for eunuchs is also apparent in other sections involving Skleros, and seems to reflect the general outlook of the military aristocracy.¹⁵⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵³ Cheynet (1990): 326-329; Vlyssidou (2003).

¹⁵⁵⁴ καὶ ὁ Σκληρὸς δὲ τὴν τοῦτου ἔξοδον ἀκηκόως, καὶ νῦν πρῶτον οἰηθεὶς τὸν ἀγῶνα ἔσεσθαι αὐτῷ πρὸς ἄνδρα πολεμιστὴν καὶ φέρειν εἰδότα γενναίως καὶ τακτικῶς τὰς πολέμου στροφάς, καὶ οὐχ, ὡς τὸ πρότερον, πρὸς ἀνδράρια ἐκτετριμμένα θαλαμεύόμενα καὶ σκιατραφῆ (Skylitzes: 324.48-51; trans. 308).

¹⁵⁵⁵ Cheynet (2006b): 16 n.53.

¹⁵⁵⁶ Bardas Skleros’ chief opponent in the capital was a eunuch, the *parakoimomenos* Basil Lekapenos, who feared Skleros’ control of the eastern forces to such an extent that he apparently demoted him and appointed the eunuch Peter as commander of the eastern forces instead (Skylitzes: 314-315). This, Holmes argues, was at least the interpretation of events offered by Skylitzes’ pro-Skleros source, which attempted to justify the rebellion of its subject (Holmes 2005: 322-327). Indication of the aristocratic loathing for eunuchs may also be found in the *History* of Leo the Deacon. Having learned of Joseph Bringas’ attempts to have Nikephoros Phokas removed from command, an enraged John Tzimiskes vented his fury to his uncle: ‘[To think of] your labours and battles and prowess, while this is planned by an effeminate fellow, whose very sex is doubtful, an artificial woman who knows nothing except what goes on in the women’s quarters... For I think it is wrong, nay intolerable, for Roman generals to be led and to be dragged by the nose, hither and thither, like slaves, by a wretched eunuch from the wastes of Paphlagonia, who has insinuated himself into political power’ (Leo the Deacon: 39-40; trans. 90). While it is probable that these are the words of Leo rather than Tzimiskes, they nevertheless reflect an aristocratic mentality given the tone of Leo’s work. For discussion of the poor portrayals of eunuchs in Leo’s *History*, see Markopoulos (2004a): 14-16. Ringrose (2003: 129-131) suggests that the blacklisting of Basil Lekapenos could have much to do with general disdain for eunuchs in Byzantium. On this point see also Tougher (1997b): 173-175. For the controversial lives of Joseph Bringas and Basil Lekapenos in particular, see, respectively, Markopoulos (2004c); Brokkaar (1972). For further evidence of aristocratic hatred of powerful eunuchs, we may look to Nikephoros Bryennios,

Foreshadowing of Bardas Phokas' combat skills may be observed as early as the account of his initial revolt against John Tzimiskes in 970, which Skylitzes probably also derived from the same pro-Skleros manifesto given the perspective afforded to this individual. As Phokas fled to his fortress, a member of Skleros' retinue, Constantine Charon, caught up with the rebel but met an unpleasant end in the form of Bardas' mace. The remainder of the pursuers, seeing Charon's body, 'were so amazed at the irresistible force of the blow that they all desisted from the chase, nobody daring to go any further'.¹⁵⁵⁷ The same illustration of Phokas' prowess is evident in Skylitzes' account of Skleros' subsequent revolt. Skleros defeats Bardas Phokas in their first engagement at Pankaleia, though through no fault of Phokas' generalship; indeed, Phokas is commended for conducting an organized, fighting retreat. At this point one Constantine Gabras, a colleague of Skleros, attempted to seize Phokas, but was struck by Phokas' mace and fell from his horse.¹⁵⁵⁸ At Vasilika Therma, Bardas Phokas again accepted Skleros' invitation to do battle, and was successful in 'breaking down the ranks of the enemy with his iron mace and slaying thousands', before his men turned to flight.¹⁵⁵⁹ The presentation of Bardas Phokas as a formidable opponent made these initial victories of Skleros appear all the more impressive. By the same token, there was no disgrace in losing to such an adversary in their duel at the Halys River. The pro-Skleros source appears eager to impress

who explains that his eponymous grandfather and great-uncle John made plans against the eunuch minister Nikephoritzes as they refused 'to let a eunuch play with Roman generals' (...μη ὑπ' ἀνδρὸς ἔκτομίῳ οὕτω τοὺς στρατηγούς Ῥωμαίων ἐμπαίξεσθαι: Bryennios: 217.16-19).

¹⁵⁵⁷ ...καὶ τῷ ἀνυποστάτῳ τοῦ πτώματος ἐκκληττόμενοι πάντες ἴστων τὴν δίωξιν, μηδενὸς τολμῶντος προσωτέρω ἰέναι (Skylitzes: 293.53-294.84; trans. 280-281). Cf. Leo the Deacon: 124-125.

¹⁵⁵⁸ Skylitzes: 325.

¹⁵⁵⁹ καὶ χρόνον μὲν τινα ἀντέσχον οἱ περὶ τὸν Φωκᾶν, αὐτοῦ τούτου παριπεύοντος ἀπανταχοῦ καὶ τῆ σιδηραῖα κορύνῃ τὰς τῶν ἐναντίων ῥηγνύοντος φάλαγγας καὶ μυρίον ἐργαζομένου φόνον (ibid: 325.78-82; trans. 308-309).

upon the reader that its subject had been defeated by a man his equal in military prowess.

This appreciation of the enemy in many ways typifies ‘heroic historiography’. With military ability an esteemed virtue, even adversaries from foreign cultures could be admired and given portraits beyond that of the stereotypical barbarian. Leo the Deacon crafted a reasonably balanced image of Russian prince Sviatoslav, who, in spite of his insatiable greed and cruelty, warranted praise for his formidable reputation as a warrior.¹⁵⁶⁰ Such a layered portrayal of a foreigner was hitherto largely unknown in Byzantine historiography, though we witness a similar admiration for the Norman rebel Roussel in the *History of Attaleiates* and for Bohemond of Taranto in the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene, largely borne out of their martial prowess and ingenuity.¹⁵⁶¹ Intriguingly, Jonathan Shepard suggests that the manifesto of Katakalon Kekaumenos presented warlike Pecheneg and Arab leaders in a positive fashion.¹⁵⁶² This admiration is an inheritance of Homer, in whose eyes ‘the Trojans are as Greek and as heroic in deeds and values as their opponents in every respect’.¹⁵⁶³ While there was undoubtedly fierce rivalry among the military aristocracy, a common martial culture ensured a respect for achievements and personal prowess.

¹⁵⁶⁰ Markopoulos (2004a): 11-12; Kazhdan (2006): 285-286, 328-329. For Sviatoslav’s prowess in war, see Hanak (1995).

¹⁵⁶¹ For Attaleiates’ admiration of Roussel, see Kazhdan (1984c): 66-67; Krallis (2006): 242-254. Roussel’s career is discussed by Bréhier (1911-1912); Lebeniotes (2004). For Anna’s admiration of Bohemond, see Shepard (1988); Albu (2000). For the general appreciation of western military prowess in eleventh-century Byzantium, see again Shepard (1993).

¹⁵⁶² Shepard (forthcoming).

¹⁵⁶³ Finley (1978): 38.

Single Combat (Monomachia) in 'Heroic Historiography'

The single combat between Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas represents an aristocratic ideal. In a previous battle, Skleros did not use the devious tactics he employed against eunuch generals, but challenged Phokas to do battle, intimating an unwritten code of honour whereby like-minded and well-matched generals fought on even terms.¹⁵⁶⁴ Michael Psellos' account of the aforementioned duel is similar in this respect, as the two leaders ride out before the lines and engage in single combat 'by common consent'. The impetuous Skleros, however, 'broke the rules of this kind of fighting', striking Phokas on the head prematurely. Phokas hit back and Skleros apparently turned away, shamed by his defeat and aware he was no match for his opponent.¹⁵⁶⁵ This presentation of Skleros contradicts that of Skylitzes, underlining his pro-Skleros slant. Psellos' account may derive from anti-Skleros material and hold no greater credence, but nevertheless corroborates the idea of an aristocratic code of combat.

One can distinguish between the two types of monomachy described by Psellos and Skylitzes.¹⁵⁶⁶ While the former describes a formal duel, Skylitzes indicates that Phokas sought out Skleros in the midst of battle, with the ensuing tussle only then developing into an apparent battle-decider: '[The soldiers] preferred the matter to be

¹⁵⁶⁴ ὁ Σκληρός...καλούμενον κατασκηνώσας, εἰς μάχην τὸν ὁμώνυμον ἐξεκαλεῖτο. ἀσπασίως δὲ καὶ τούτου δεξαμένου τὴν πρόκλησιν αὐθις ἐτέρα συνίσταται μάχη (Skylitzes: 325.74-77).

¹⁵⁶⁵ Ἐθάρρησαν γοῦν ποτε πρὸς ἀλλήλους καὶ οἱ τῶν ἀντικειμένων ἡγεμόνες ταγμάτων καὶ μονομαχῆσαι ἐκ συνθήματος εἶλοντο· καὶ μέντοιγε συνελάσαντες εἰς τι μεταίχιμιον, εἶδόν τε ἀλλήλους καὶ ἐν συμβολαῖς εὐθὺς ἐγεγόνεισαν. καὶ πρῶτος γε ὁ τυραννεύων Σκληρός, οὐκ ἐπισχῶν ἑαυτὸν τῆς ὀρμῆς, ἀλλ' εὐθὺς νόμους ἀγωνίας παραβεβηκῶς, ὁμοῦ τε ἀγχοῦ τῷ Φωκᾷ ἐγεγόνει καὶ παίει τούτον ὡς εἶχε κατὰ κεφαλῆς, δυναμώσας τὴν χεῖρα τῆ φορᾷ τῆς ὀρμῆς· καὶ ὁ πεπληγῶς πρὸς τὸ ἀδόκητον τῆς πληγῆς βραχύ τι τοῦ χαλινοῦ γεγονῶς ἀκρατῆς, αὐθις συνηθοῖκει τοὺς λογισμοὺς, καὶ κατὰ ταῦτοῦ μέλους τὸν τιλήξαντα παίσας, τῆς πολεμικῆς ὀρμῆς ἔπαυσε καὶ φυγεῖν παρεσκεύασεν (Psellos, *Chronographia*: I, 6 [VIII]; trans. 31-32).

¹⁵⁶⁶ For the basic distinction see Pritchett (1985): 15-21.

decided by a contest between the commanders and, indeed thought that it would be a magnificent and astounding sight for the beholders, two men of courageous and valiant heart locked in single combat'.¹⁵⁶⁷ The epic scenario described by Psellos last graced Byzantine historiography at the turn of the ninth century, when the Patriarch Nikephoros and Theophanes wrote of a contest between Heraclius and the Persian general Rhazates at the Battle of Nineveh, which took place in 627.¹⁵⁶⁸ It is only in the 'heroic historiography' of the Middle Byzantine period that we again witness challenges to single combat in the field.¹⁵⁶⁹ In 1211, the emperor of Nicaea, Theodore I Laskaris, reputedly slayed the sultan of Rum, Kaykhusraw, at the Battle of Antioch-on-the-Maeander.¹⁵⁷⁰ While nothing as extraordinary occurs in the preceding centuries, it was apparently not for the want of trying. John Tzimiskes, concerned at the protracted siege of Dorostolon, was apparently frustrated in his attempts to bring Sviatoslav to a single contest which would decide the entire course of the conflict.¹⁵⁷¹ More purposeful was Alexios Komnenos, who accepted the challenge of a brazen Cuman warrior and drove his sword through the nomad's chest.¹⁵⁷²

Of somewhat lesser note are individual contests between regular soldiers. At the siege of Neokaisareia in 1140, the Emperor John Komnenos' homonymous nephew agreed to his uncle's request to give his horse to a Latin knight, but only on the

¹⁵⁶⁷ γὰρ δὴ καὶ ἐφαίνετο πάγκαλόν τι θέαμα καὶ κατάπληξιν τοῖς ὄρωσιν ἐπάγον ἀνδρῶν δύο μονομαχία ἐπ' εὐτολμία καὶ ῥώμῃ ψυχῆς μέγα φρονούντων (Skylitzes: 326.2-4; trans. 309).

¹⁵⁶⁸ See below, 368-371. The brief mounted contest between the eunuch Theodore Krateros and an Arab prisoner in the Hippodrome during the reign of Theophanes, described by *Theophanes Continuatus* (115-116), was more of a ceremonial occasion, an example no doubt of one of the many martial displays which graced the Hippodrome during this time.

¹⁵⁶⁹ This is not to say that single combats in battle did not occur in the preceding period. Arab historian al-Tabari (XXIX: 220) describes a duel between Niketas, count of Opsikion, and Arab governor Yazid ibn Mazyad al-Shaybani in the late eighth century. That Niketas lost probably ensured the encounter was ignored by Byzantine historians.

¹⁵⁷⁰ See below, 374-375.

¹⁵⁷¹ Skylitzes: 307-308.

¹⁵⁷² Anna Komnene: IX.4.7.

condition that the knight defeat him in single combat.¹⁵⁷³ John Kinnamos' record of the Byzantine expedition to Italy between 1154 and 1156 notes several instances of organized monomachy.¹⁵⁷⁴ Choniates reports of an organized duel between a Byzantine and Armenian during John II Komnenos' campaign in Cilicia in 1137-1138. The Byzantine soldier, Eustratios, withstood the violent attacks of the Armenian Constantine until he split the 'Hectorian' shield of his opponent.¹⁵⁷⁵ As Choniates' use of the term 'Hectorian' suggests, the inspiration for this sort of heroism, in both a literary and ideological sense, was Homer's *Iliad*.¹⁵⁷⁶

The other type of single combat in the *Iliad* is the more spontaneous encounter, where one warrior challenges another to combat in the midst of battle – the sort of clash between Skleros and Phokas as described by Skylitzes. Eric McGeer reminds us that such duels, while included to celebrate the exploits of notable warriors, are nevertheless 'typical of the many individual combats that would break out in the general melee'.¹⁵⁷⁷ One such incident may be found in Skylitzes' account of the Battle of Hades, where one Randolph the Frank sought 'somebody of rank' to fight as the imperial army fled the field. He called out Nikephoros Botaneiates, who agreed to the request, and the two contested a brief duel.¹⁵⁷⁸ We have already discussed Manuel encountering the enemy commander Bakchinos during combat and engaging him in

¹⁵⁷³ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 35-36.

¹⁵⁷⁴ Kinnamos: 159-160, 168. See above, 133 nn. 682 & 683.

¹⁵⁷⁵ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 22-25.

¹⁵⁷⁶ For single combat in the *Iliad*, see Latacz (1977): 76-77, 118-139. Frequently the arrogant Trojan proposes single combat, only for the humble Achaean to emerge victorious (Griffin 1983: 4-5; similar is true of the Roman Republic in relation to barbarians – see Oakley 1985: 407-408). On the large shields used by Homeric warriors, an indication of their physical strength, see van Wees (1992): 17-22.

¹⁵⁷⁷ McGeer (1995a): 299.

¹⁵⁷⁸ Ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ μάχῃ φασίν, ὅτι τῶν περὶ τὸν βασιλέα τραπέντων Ῥανδοῦλφος ὁ Φράγγος ἐς μέσους περιπλανώμενος τοὺς τε φεύγοντας καὶ τοὺς διώκοντας ἐζήτησε συμπλακῆναι τινὶ τῶν ὀνομαστῶν. ἐπεὶ δὲ μάθοι, ὡς Νικηφόρος δίδεισιν ὁ Βοτανειάτης, τοὺς ἄλλους καταλιπὼν ἀπήει πρὸς ἐκεῖνον, πόρρωθεν κράζων καὶ μένειν παρεγγυώμενος, δηλῶν καὶ τοῦνομα, ὅστις εἶη καὶ ἐφ' ᾧ προσκαλεῖται· ὅπερ γνοὺς ὁ Βοτανειάτης ἴστησι τὸν δρόμον, καὶ ἐγγίσαντι τῷ Ῥανδοῦλφῳ προσμίγνυται (Skylitzes: 495.59-496.69; trans. 461).

single combat.¹⁵⁷⁹ The thought-world of the military aristocracy dictated that one could achieve great renown by besting an enemy of note in a fair fight.

Conclusion - The Influence of Homeric epic

The ‘heroic historiography’ of the Middle Byzantine period is marked by its obsession with heroes and heroism, an inheritance of Homeric epic. Homer has been seen to ‘zoom-in’ during his battle scenes, electing to follow the struggles of select individuals rather than choosing to describe the general scope of battle.¹⁵⁸⁰ To some extent these contests serve as ‘highlights’ of the whole battle, though it is no coincidence that prominent persons command the author’s attention.¹⁵⁸¹ Little attention is paid to common men, those whom Odysseus considered to be ‘unwarlike, cowardly, and of no account in war or council’.¹⁵⁸² According to Hans van Wees, this emphasis was an ‘ideological projection’ of the values and beliefs of contemporary aristocrats, who claimed that their influence and power was reward for their outstanding contribution in battle.¹⁵⁸³ A man’s *arete* (excellence) was judged by the prowess and courage he displayed on the field of battle, as well as his physical might; these all constituted key elements of his *andreia* (manliness).¹⁵⁸⁴ As the Middle Byzantine elite valued the same heroic virtues, it is probable that the adoption of the

¹⁵⁷⁹ See above, 242-246.

¹⁵⁸⁰ Pritchett (1985): 7.

¹⁵⁸¹ For this tendency of Homer, and Homeric battle description in general, see Kirk (1968): esp. 111-112; Latacz (1977): esp. 68-95; van Wees (1986): esp. 286; idem (1988): 3-7; idem (1994); idem (1995): esp. 166-167; Hellmann (2000): esp. 90-169; Albracht (2006): esp. 54-55.

¹⁵⁸² δαιμόνι' ἀτρέμας ἦσο καὶ ἄλλων μῦθον ἄκουε,
οἱ σέο φέρτεροί εἰσι, σὺ δ' ἀπτόλεμος καὶ ἄναλκις
οὔτέ ποτ' ἐν πολέμῳ ἐναρίθμιος οὔτ' ἐνὶ βουλῇ (Homer, *Iliad*: 2.200-202).

¹⁵⁸³ van Wees (1995).

¹⁵⁸⁴ The secondary literature on Homeric manly virtues is extensive. See Whitman (1965); Adkins (1960): 30-60; idem (1997); Long (1970); van Wees (1992): esp. 72, 138-152; Clarke (1995); idem (2004); Graziosi & Haubold (2003).

Homeric mode of battle description in Byzantine literature was a consequence of aristocratic preferences.

II. Noble Defeat and Warrior Pride in ‘Heroic Historiography’

The heroism of a particular individual is best seen when he is faced with overwhelming odds. In the *Iliad*, Agamemnon observes that there is no glory in retreat,¹⁵⁸⁵ while Hector considered a gallant death better than a life of shame.¹⁵⁸⁶ Heroic death and, conversely, the cowardice incurred by fleeing the field, was a well-established topos in Classical Greek and Hellenistic literature.¹⁵⁸⁷ Such a mentality is evident also in the ‘heroic historiography’ of the Middle Byzantine period.

Death in Battle

Byzantine aristocrats clearly saw merit in meeting one’s end in battle. In the *Synopsis Historion* of Skylitzes, twice Bardas Phokas considers glorious death preferable to a life of ignominy and charges into the fray, on the latter occasion fulfilling his intended wish.¹⁵⁸⁸ The wry Kekaumenos opines that a general should only fear shame, and not death, on behalf of the fatherland and the emperor.¹⁵⁸⁹ The Emperor Leo VI encouraged generals ‘to show a bold front’ in the face of defeat,¹⁵⁹⁰ warning against flight for practical reasons: ‘Know that it is more beneficial to take a stand in battle and to face danger bravely fighting in the ranks than to flee and be pursued’.¹⁵⁹¹

¹⁵⁸⁵ φευγόντων δ’ οὐτ’ ἄρ κλέος ὄρνυται οὔτε τις ἀλκή (Homer, *Iliad*: 5.532).

¹⁵⁸⁶ Ibid: 22.90-114.

¹⁵⁸⁷ See Salazar (2000): 212-214.

¹⁵⁸⁸ βέλτιον εἶναι κρίνας τὸν εὐκλεῆ θάνατον τῆς ἀγεννοῦς καὶ ἐπονιδίστου ζωῆς... (Skylitzes: 326.90-94); ὁ Φωκάς τοῦ ζῆν ἀγεννώως τὸ γενναίως ἀποθανεῖν εὐγενῶως προκρίνας... (ibid: 337.11-17).

¹⁵⁸⁹ καὶ μὴ φοβηθῆς τὸν θάνατον, ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος καὶ τοῦ βασιλέως τοῦτον μέλλων λαβεῖν. φοβήθητι δὲ μᾶλλον τὸ αἰσχροῦς καὶ ἐπιπόγως ζῆν. πλὴν μὴ ἐπιρρίπτῃς σεαυτὸν ἀσκοπῶς καὶ ἀβουλήτως εἰς κινδύνους· τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν τὸ ψεκτόν (Kekaumenos: 148.19-22); στρατευθεὶς ἀνδρίζου εἰς πόλεμον, εἰ καὶ ἀποθανεῖν μέλλεις. μνήσθητι, ὅτι διὰ τοῦτο ἐστρατεύθῃς καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀθάνατος. φεῦγε δὲ ἀπὸ κατηλοπολέμου· τρωθεὶς γὰρ θανήσῃ καὶ μετὰ θάνατον ὄνειδος ἔσῃ (ibid: 226.18-22). Also ibid: 136.5-19 for further criticism of cowardice and fear.

¹⁵⁹⁰ δεῖ συμφερόντως τῶν κινδύνων κατατολμᾶν (Leo VI, *Taktika*: §XIV.19; trans. 301).

¹⁵⁹¹ συμφέρον μᾶλλον γίνωσκε εἶναι, τὸ ἐν ταῖς μάχαις ἐνίστασθαι καὶ κινδυνεύειν ἀνδρείως τὴν παράταξιν μαχομένην ἢ φυγόντας διώκεσθαι· ἐν γὰρ τῇ ἐνστάσει μᾶλλον τὴν σωτηρίαν ἐλπίζειν χρεόν, ἀλλὰ μὴ τοῖς ἐχθροῖς τὰ νῶτα διδόντας πιστεύειν τὸ σώζεσθαι (ibid: §XX.190; trans. 605).

Those who lost their lives by adhering to such principles were commended in literature. Choniates draws attention to the brave ends met by John Kantakouzenos and Manuel's brother-in-law Baldwin at the Battle of Myriokephalon.¹⁵⁹² The death of Stephen Kontostephanos at the siege of Kerkyra is highlighted by Kinnamos and the encomiasts Theodore Prodromos and 'Manganeios Prodromos'.¹⁵⁹³ Upon relating the noble sacrifice of the Cretan guardsman Anemas at the Battle of Dorostolon, both Leo the Deacon and Skylitzes laud his heroism,¹⁵⁹⁴ suggesting that the common source employed by the pair drew considerable attention to the incident.¹⁵⁹⁵ The same campaign narrative as utilized by Skylitzes appears to have presented the death of John Kourkouas, cousin of John Tzimiskes, as the noble sacrifice of a man attempting to thwart a Russian attack on a Byzantine siege engine.¹⁵⁹⁶

Brave Stands and Fighting Retreats

Those who survived battle in 'heroic historiography' only left the field if captured or if the day was completely lost, so as not to lose face. Van Wees has shown that even in Homer's world, for all the rhetoric, retreat was permitted in truly hopeless situations.¹⁵⁹⁷ Skylitzes' account of the Battle of Diakene in 1049, almost certainly culled from a work favourable to Katakalon Kekaumenos, relates how the general stayed on the field until seized by the enemy.¹⁵⁹⁸ Nikephoros Bryennios' account of the Battle of Zompos, which probably derives from a personal history of John

¹⁵⁹² Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 181, 185.

¹⁵⁹³ See above, 246-247.

¹⁵⁹⁴ Leo the Deacon: 153; Skylitzes: 308.

¹⁵⁹⁵ Paul Stephenson (2000: 52-53) proposes that the deeds of Anemas may even have been commemorated in contemporary bulletins and poems.

¹⁵⁹⁶ See above, 63-68.

¹⁵⁹⁷ van Wees (1996): 8-9, with examples. Cf. Lendon (2005): 35-36, who argues that epic 'does not decide' if running away is unheroic or not.

¹⁵⁹⁸ Skylitzes: 468-469.

Doukas, depicts the *kaisar* Doukas remaining in the field until eventually captured along with his son, Andronikos, who had bravely attempted to aid his father.¹⁵⁹⁹ Emperors were similarly keen not to project an image of cowardice in the field. Michael Psellos praised Romanos IV Diogenes for battling bravely against the Turks at Manzikert until he was eventually surrounded and captured, a version of events corroborated by Michael Attaleiates and one which may have originated in a letter Romanos sent to the imperial court.¹⁶⁰⁰ We have already discussed how official accounts of campaigns conducted by Manuel Komnenos and derivative encomia stressed Manuel's resolve and heroism as he threw caution to the wind and risked his life for glory on the battlefield, enabling him to save some face after the defeat near Myriokephalon.¹⁶⁰¹

The manner in which the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene deals with heroism and cowardice is particularly insightful. There are conventional moments of courage. At the Battle of Kalyvrae, Nikephoros Bryennios the Elder stood heroically against the Turks along with his kinsmen until they were eventually forced to surrender.¹⁶⁰² Eustathios Kamytzes gave little thought to death when set upon by Turks, fighting on until the impressed enemy compelled him to surrender.¹⁶⁰³ The case of Alexios Komnenos is more complex. While Anna is eager to show that her father was always

¹⁵⁹⁹ Bryennios: 171-175.

¹⁶⁰⁰ See above, 87-88; below, 356-357.

¹⁶⁰¹ See above, 237-259.

¹⁶⁰² ἀλλ' ὅ γε Βρυέννιος καίτοι πολλά βαρυνόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ πολέμου καὶ σὺν βίᾳ ὠθούμενος ἐδείκνυτο τὸ ἀνδρείον καὶ εὐψυχον αἰεὶ μὲν ἐπιστροφάδην τύπτων τὸν ἐπίοντα, αἰεὶ δὲ τὰ τῆς φυγῆς καλῶς καὶ ἀνδρείως διοικονομούμενος· συνήραντο δὲ τούτῳ καὶ ὁ ἀδελφὸς ἐξ ἑκατέρου μέρους καὶ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ θαῦμα τοῖς πολεμίοις ἐδείχθησαν ἡρωικῶς ἀνταγωνισάμενοι (Anna Komnene: I.6.5-6).

¹⁶⁰³ ἔνθεν τοι καὶ μικρὸν ἀναποδίσας ἐπὶ τινα δρῦν ἑαυτὸν προσερείσας καὶ τὸν ἀκινάκην σπασάμενος τὰς τε σφζούσας ἀπολωλεκῶς ἐλπίδας, ὅποσοι τούτῳ τῶν βαρβάρων συμπλακῆναι κατετόλμων, κατὰ γε κόρυθος καὶ ὄμων καὶ αὐτῶν δὴ τῶν χειρῶν παίων οὐκ ἐνεδίδου. ἐπὶ πολὺ γοῦν τοῦτον ἀντέχοντα ὀρῶντες οἱ βάρβαροι καὶ πολλοὺς κτείνοντα, πολλοὺς δὲ καὶ τιτρώσκοντα, ὑπεραγάμενοι τὴν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τόλμαν καὶ τὸ σταθρὸν αὐτοῦ θαυμάσαντες, τὴν σωτηρίαν αὐτοῦ διαταῦτα πραγματεύεσθαι ἠβουλήθησαν (ibid: XIV.5.5-6).

the last to leave the field, she nevertheless stipulates that practical concerns compelled him to depart before capture or death. Seeing his men breaking at Kalyvrae, Alexios gathered six of his guard and planned an assault on Nikephoros Bryennios; ‘if necessary they should be prepared to die’. Alexios was dissuaded by a common soldier, who convinced him that the plan was imprudent.¹⁶⁰⁴ Three years later, at the Battle of Dyrrachion, Alexios repelled Norman pursuers as he fled from the field. In his final push Alexios charged one group and drove his spear right through the chest of Robert Guiscard’s second-in-command, making a bold break for freedom.¹⁶⁰⁵ The next year, when fighting the Normans at Ioannina, Alexios ‘realized that he must look to his own safety, not to save his own life or because he was overwhelmed by fear...[but] in the hope that by avoiding danger and recovering his strength, he might resume the struggle with his Keltic adversaries more bravely another day’. Nevertheless, during flight he encountered a group of Normans and encouraged his men to join him in a ‘death-or-glory’ charge.¹⁶⁰⁶ A subsequent battle against the Normans again resulted in defeat, but Alexios lingered in the field. When down to his last few companions, ‘he judged it to be his duty no longer to expose himself to senseless risks – for when a man has no more strength to fight after a great deal of suffering, he would be a fool to thrust himself into obvious peril’.¹⁶⁰⁷ Finally, at

¹⁶⁰⁴ αἰσθόμενος δὲ διαρραγεῖσαν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ φάλαγγα καὶ ἤδη πολλαχοῦ σκεδασθεῖσαν τοὺς εὐψυχοτέρους (ἔξ δὲ ἦσαν οἱ σύμπαντες) συλλεξάμενος ἐβουλεύσατο σπασαμένους τὰ ξίφη, ἐπειδὴν ἐγγίσειεν τῷ Βρυεννίῳ, κατ’ αὐτοῦ χωρεῖν ἀναισχύντως, κἂν δεοὶ κάκεινους αὐτῷ συναποθανεῖν. ἀλλ’ ἀπεῖρξε τοῦ τοιοῦτου βουλεύματος Θεόδοτος τις στρατιώτης, ἀνὴρ τοῦμῳ πατρὶ παιδόμενος ὑπηρετήσας, ὡς ἀντικρυς παραβόλου τοῦ ἐγχειρήματος ὄντος (ibid: I.5.5; trans. 19).

¹⁶⁰⁵ Ibid: IV.6-8.

¹⁶⁰⁶ ὡς δ’ εἰς μέρη πολλὰ τὰς φάλαγγας διασπασθείσας ἑώρα, δεῖν ἐλογίσατο καὶ αὐτὸς τὸ ἀσφαλὲς ἑαυτῷ περιποιήσασθαι οὐ σώσων ἑαυτὸν οὐθ’ ὑπὸ δειλίας συγχυθεῖς, ὡς τάχα ἂν τις εἴποι, ἀλλ’ εἴ ποὺ τὸν κίνδυνον διεκφυγῶν καὶ συλλεξάμενος ἑαυτὸν αὐθις γενναιότερον τοῖς μαχομένοις Κελτοῖς ἀντικατασταίη...ἀναρρώσας γὰρ τοὺς σὺν αὐτῷ καὶ σφοδρὰν τὴν κατ’ αὐτῶν ἵππασίαν ὡς σήμερον τεθνηξόμενος ποιήσας ἢ κατὰ κράτος ἠττήσων κτείνει μὲν αὐτὸς παίσας ἕνα τῶν Κελτῶν, καὶ ὅποσοι δὲ σὺν αὐτῷ Ἄρεως ἦσαν ὑπασπισταί, πολλοὺς τρώσαντες ἐξεδίωξαν (ibid: V.4.3-4; trans. 137).

¹⁶⁰⁷ ἐπεὶ τὸ ἅπαν ἐκρεῦσαν ἤδη στράτευμα ἐθέασατο καὶ ἑαυτὸν μετ’ ὀλίγων καταλειφθέντα, δεόν ἐλογίσατο μὴ ἀλόγως ἀνθιστάμενος κινδυνεῦσαι. ἐπὶν γὰρ τις πολλὰ μογήσας μὴ πρὸς ἰσχύος ἔχει τοῖς

Dristra in 1087, Alexios stood ahead of his front line with just twenty men as his army crumbled before the Pechenegs. As he was assailed by three of the enemy, his brother-in-law, the *protostrator* Michael Doukas, remonstrated with him. ‘Why sir, are you trying to hold out here any longer? Why lose your life, without a thought for your own safety?’ When Alexios retorted that it was better to die fighting bravely than find safety, Michael persisted: ‘If you were just an ordinary soldier, those would be fine words; but when your death involves danger for everybody else, why not choose the better course?’ Recognizing that all hope had gone, Alexios heeded these words, yet he would not go with a wimper. As at Dyrrachion, the emperor rode through the Pecheneg ranks and forcibly broke through their rear, fending off any pursuer who came too close.¹⁶⁰⁸ This presentation accords with Anna’s general assessment of her father’s resilience in war towards the end of the *Alexiad*: ‘He would triumph when he fled, and when he was doing the chasing, he would conquer’.¹⁶⁰⁹

Conclusion

Anna’s record of her father’s defeats all end similarly. Alexios wishes to stand and fight, but his responsibilities as emperor and commander impel him to depart. When he does leave the field, there is time for one last show of courage, emphasizing that he did not flee headlong but made fighting retreats. That Anna Komnene persistently

ἐχθροῖς ἀντικαθίστασθαι, μάταιος ἂν ἦ<v> εἰς προὔπτον κίνδυνον ἑαυτὸν συνωθῶν... τὸ δὲ ἀναντίρρητον συνιεῖς τοῦ κινδύνου δέον ἔκρινεν ἑαυτὸν περισῶσαι, ὡς αὐθις δύνασθαι μάχεσθαι πρὸς τὸν καταγωνισάμενον καὶ ἀντίπαλος ἔσεσθαι καρτερώτατος καὶ μὴ τὸ πᾶν τῆς νίκης ἄρασθαι τὸν Βαϊοῦντον (ibid: V.4.7-8; trans. 138).

¹⁶⁰⁸ τὴν οὖν ἄμετρον φυγὴν τῶν ταγμάτων θεασάμενος ὁ πρωτοστράτωρ (αἱ φάλαγγες γὰρ ἤδη διεσπάρσθησαν φευγόντων ἀκρατῶς) “ἰνατί”, φησί, “βασιλεῦ, τοῦ λοιποῦ ἐνταῦθα πειρᾶσαι ἐγκαρτερεῖν; ἰνατί τὴν ζωὴν προδίδως ἀφειδήσας παντάπασι τῆς ἑαυτοῦ σωτηρίας;” ὁ δὲ βέλτιον γενναίως μαχομένους ἀποθανεῖν ἔφη ἢ ἀγεννές τι πεποιηκότας σωθῆναι. ὁ δὲ πρωτοστράτωρ· “εἰ μὲν τῶν κοινῶν εἷς τίς ὦν ταῦτ’ ἔλεγες, ἐπαίνου ἧς ἄξιος· εἰ δὲ ὁ σὸς θάνατος κοσμικὸν ἐπάγει τὸν κίνδυνον, ἰνατί μὴ τὸ βέλτιον αἰρή; εἰ γὰρ σωθείης, καὶ αὐθις πολεμήσων νικήσεις” (ibid: VII.3.8-12; trans. 194-195).

¹⁶⁰⁹ φεύγων ἐκράτει καὶ διώκων ἐνίκα (ibid: XV.3.3.37-38; trans. 438).

shows her father exhibiting bravery in defeat, and felt a need to offer reasons for him leaving the field, confirms that certain expectations of protagonists existed in 'heroic historiography'.

III. Blood, Wounds and Violence in ‘Heroic Historiography’

One way to show the commitment and durability of the subject was to specify wounds he suffered in combat. Gore is a common feature of historiography of the Middle Byzantine period, a reflection of religious imperial symbolism, the influence of epic literature, and of aristocratic heroic values, which, in the tradition of Homer, considered there to be honour in injuries received and inflicted in battle.

The Value of Suffering

A striking aspect of the Katakalon Kekaumenos material in Skylitzes is the detail of the ‘mortal wounds’ he incurred at the Battle of Diakene in 1049: ‘One had laid bare his skull...from the peak to the eyebrow, another on the collar had cut the neck at the root of the tongue, right through to the mouth; he had lost much blood’.¹⁶¹⁰

Knowledge of these injuries indicates Kekaumenos’ contribution; indeed, it was among the aspects which led Jonathan Shepard to conclude that Skylitzes employed a biography of the general.¹⁶¹¹ Kekaumenos endured great pain before his collapse, and he or his biographer were keen to illustrate this. A warrior fainting from loss of blood was a topos of Hellenistic literature, and conveyed to the reader the severity of the wounds and the victim’s fortitude in sustaining them.¹⁶¹² Such sentiments are seen also in a section of Nikephoros Bryennios’ *Hyle Historias* which probably derived from a source recounting the deeds of John Doukas. In the account of the Battle of Zompos, it is said that Andronikos Doukas, despite being afflicted by mortal wounds,

¹⁶¹⁰ ἔκειτο γὰρ ἄφρονος διὰ τὸ καιρίας λαβεῖν πληγὰς, μίαν μὲν κατὰ γυμνοῦ τοῦ κρανίου, πεσόντος τοῦ κράνουσ αὐτοῦ, διήκουσαν ἀπὸ κορυφῆς ἄχρι τῶν ὀφρύων, ἑτέραν δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ τραχήλου, ἔνθα περ ἡ γλῶσσα ἐρρίζωται, καὶ διατεμοῦσαν τὸν τράχηλου καὶ εἰς τὸ στόμα πεσοῦσαν, καὶ ἔξαιμος γενέσθαι (Skylitzes: 469.54-59; trans. 438).

¹⁶¹¹ Shepard (1992b).

¹⁶¹² Salazar (2000): 219.

endeavoured to rescue his father.¹⁶¹³ Receiving wounds whilst trying to save a companion or relative was a familiar scene in Greco-Roman literature.¹⁶¹⁴ In the Middle Byzantine period, as in past times, wounds and blood loss embellished a heroic display, and excused a soldier for giving up the fight.

Being able to overlook one's wounds and fight on was regarded as an equally impressive feat. Prior to the Battle of Manzikert, Nikephoros Bryennios the Elder found himself surrounded by Turks, struck in the chest with a lance and pierced in the back by two arrows. Yet the following day he reported to Romanos Diogenes 'without a thought for his wounds'.¹⁶¹⁵ Similar is the case of George Palaiologos: whilst fighting the Turks, he was struck in the head, and, though without a helmet, was 'entirely unmoved by the blow'.¹⁶¹⁶ Anna Komnene notes that Palaiologos suffered severe wounds all over his body at the siege of Dyrrachion, the worst being an arrow which lodged near his temple. Rather than retire, Palaiologos had the shaft removed, bandaged his head and threw himself back into the fray.¹⁶¹⁷ The efforts of these men did not go unnoticed. Anna defends the decision of her father to appoint the ineffectual Aspietes the Armenian as *stratopedarches* of the east, citing an occasion where Aspietes' proved his worth by killing a Norman attacker despite having a lance plunged through him.¹⁶¹⁸ Similarly, when John, nephew of Manuel

¹⁶¹³ ὁ δὲ καίτοι κατάστικτος τοῖς τραύμασιν ὧν - ἐβέβλητο γὰρ καιρίαις πληγαῖς -, περιῖει ζητῶν τὸν πατέρα... (Bryennios: 171-173).

¹⁶¹⁴ Salazar (2000): 219-220.

¹⁶¹⁵ ...ὁ δ' ἀπήει τῶν τραυμάτων καταφρονήσας (Bryennios: 111-113).

¹⁶¹⁶ γενναίως δ' ἀγωνιζόμενος, ἐπειδὴ τὴν κόρυθα ἀπεβάλλετο, πλήττεται βέλει κατὰ τὸ μέτωπον· ἀλογήσας δὲ τῆς πληγῆς παντάπασιν... (ibid: 309.10-12).

¹⁶¹⁷ Anna Komnene: IV.4.4.

¹⁶¹⁸ Ibid: XII.2.7.

Kommenos, was wounded in the eye during mock combat, the emperor promoted him to *protovestiaros* and made him *protosebastos*.¹⁶¹⁹

There was merit in a military aristocrat emphasizing his sufferings, and the same was true also of emperors. In accounts of the Battle of Nineveh, Heraclius' lip is grazed, while an arrow is reported to have scraped his ankle.¹⁶²⁰ George of Pisidia's *Expeditio Persica* describes a heel wound which hindered Heraclius, demonstrating the extent of the emperor's suffering on behalf of his empire and people.¹⁶²¹ The obvious model for this was Jesus Christ, whose graphic wounds were often a point of focus in Byzantine writing.¹⁶²² It was perceived that Christ, in turn, would favour those who fought and suffered in God's name.¹⁶²³ Around the year 900, there emerged an office on behalf of those who died in war and in captivity, which entreated Christ to look kindly on those '[who] displayed bravery to the point of death; they received wounds without mercy and maintained their courage even in captivity'.¹⁶²⁴ This sentiment was felt throughout the Middle period. A thirteenth-

¹⁶¹⁹ Kinnamos: 126.

¹⁶²⁰ Theophanes: 318-319; Patriarch Nikephoros, *Short History*: §14.

¹⁶²¹ George of Pisidia: *Exp. Pers.*, §I.163-252. For the significance of this incident, see Mary Whitby (1994): 204-205 & n.41; idem (1998): 255-257.

¹⁶²² Hatzaki (2009): 66-85.

¹⁶²³ Relevant to this argument also are the tenth-century Byzantine flirtations with declaring soldiers who died in battle to be martyrs. On this subject see Dagron (1983).

¹⁶²⁴ Συνέλθωμεν λαὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ

καὶ μνήμην ἐκτελέσωμεν

τῶν θανέντων

ἐν πολέμοις ἀδελφῶν

ἡμῶν καὶ τεθνηκότων

δεσμοῖς ἐν ἀνυποίστοις·

ὑπὲρ τούτων δυσωπήσωμεν.

Ἡρίστευσαν μέχρι σφαγῆς

οἱ δοῦλοί σου, φιλόανθρωπε·

ἐδέξαντο

καὶ πληγὰς ἀνηλεῶς

δεσμοῖς ἐγκατεροῦντες·

γενέσθω ταῦτα τούτοις

εἰς ἰλασμόν ψυχῶν, φιλόανθρωπε (*Office for the War Dead*: ll.7-19).

century oration of Niketas Choniates applies the term ‘stigmata’ to wounds suffered by the Emperor Theodore Laskaris in battle against the Turks.¹⁶²⁵

After Heraclius, there seems to have been no real conception of ‘glorious wounds’. In 811, the Emperor Staurikios died ignominiously from a spinal wound, after enduring months of pain.¹⁶²⁶ In the Middle Byzantine period, one again sees emperors endure ‘heroic’ wounds akin to those suffered by Heraclius. Anna Komnene mentions that her father Alexios received a nick to the head at the Battle of Dyrrachion, but after the engagement ‘was not troubled in the slightest by the pain’, instead grieving deeply for those soldiers who had died.¹⁶²⁷ At other times Anna shows her father giving more thought to wounds. Whilst leaving the field at Dristra, Alexios was hit on the buttock by a spear, a blow which caused tremendous pain.¹⁶²⁸ Injuries to lower parts of the body were common, or at least preferred among imperial propagandists. We have seen that John II and Manuel I Komnenos’ soldiered on despite receiving arrows to the foot, earning praise in contemporary encomia for their endurance.¹⁶²⁹

¹⁶²⁵ ζητοῦμεν καὶ τοὺς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ιδέσθαι σου μάλωπας καὶ χεῖλεσι τὰ στίγματα περιπτύξασθαι, οὐχ ὅτι παρ’ ἡμῖν τις διστάζων καὶ δίδυμος τὴν γνώμην καὶ δύσπιστος, ἀλλ’ ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἔχαιρε ψηλαφώμενος καὶ μαθητοῦ χερσὶ πολυπραγμονούμενος· ὥσπερ πρὸ μικροῦ τὴν τῆς ἱεράς σου κεφαλῆς ἐνοπτρισάμενοι κόρυθα τὰ τῆς σῆς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀγωνίας σύμβολα φέρουσαν μεθ’ ἡδονῆς ἐνηγκαλισάμεθα καὶ περιχαρῶς ἠσπασάμεθα (Niketas Choniates, *Letters and Orations*: 175.17-23).

¹⁶²⁶ Theophanes: 492-495.

¹⁶²⁷ μήθ’ ὑπὸ τῆς ἥττης μήθ’ ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλων τοῦ μόθου κακῶν τὸν νοῦν συγχυθεὶς μήθ’ ὑπὸ τῆς κατὰ τὸ μέτωπον τοῦ τραύματος ὀδύνης ὑποχαλάσας, κἄν τὰ ἐντὸς ὑπὸ τῆς λύπης τῶν ἐν τῇ μάχῃ πεπτωκότων καὶ μᾶλλον τῶν γενναίως ἀγωνισαμένων ἀνδρῶν ἐξεφλέγετο (Anna Komnene: IV.8.4.23-27; trans. 127). It is possibly this wound to which Alexios refers in the *Mousai* (II.80-81; trans. Jordan & Roueché), where the emperor relates that his ‘helmet was pierced by a Keltic spear’ (παρτυρεῖ γὰρ τὸ κράνος τρωθὲν δι’ αἰχμῆς Κελτικῆς).

¹⁶²⁸ Anna Komnene: VII.3.8-12.

¹⁶²⁹ See above, 221-225, 238-242.

Gore and Violence: Style and Significance

The emphasis on wounds forms part of a wider interest in violence and gore in Middle Byzantine battle descriptions.¹⁶³⁰ At the Battle of Arcadiopolis, Bardas Skleros was accosted by a large Russian, and struck him with such strength that he split his adversary in two. Later in the same engagement, Bardas repeated the feat, slicing through helmet and breastplate.¹⁶³¹ At Preslav, Theodosios Mesonyktes sliced off the head of a Russian.¹⁶³² Anemas cut through the neck of a Russian commander at Dorostolon, severing his head and arm.¹⁶³³ Alexios Komnenos cut off the arm of a Norman named Amiketas at the Battle of Dyrrachion.¹⁶³⁴ These select examples provide a general image of the gory scenes frequently encountered in historiography of the period.

Such violence was not unknown in descriptions of battle in Greek literature.¹⁶³⁵ Combat in the *Iliad* entails severed limbs, crushed skulls, and general bloodshed.¹⁶³⁶ Christine Salazar suggests that this technique served to make the narrative more intense;¹⁶³⁷ indeed, the *progymnasmata* recommend that writers of an *ekphrasis* of a war divulge details about slaughter and deaths, specifically to heighten the sense of vividness.¹⁶³⁸ Lucian had blasted historians who described ‘outrageous wounds and bizarre deaths’,¹⁶³⁹ though such criticism did not dissuade writers from following Homer’s lead. Walter Pohl considered ‘violent action [to be] one of the most

¹⁶³⁰ See in general Birkenmeier (2002): 206-230.

¹⁶³¹ Skylitzes: 290-291; Leo the Deacon: 110-111, who does not mention the initial act of butchery.

¹⁶³² Leo the Deacon: 135-136.

¹⁶³³ Ibid: 149; Skylitzes: 304-305.

¹⁶³⁴ Anna Komnene: IV.6.8.

¹⁶³⁵ D’Huys (1987).

¹⁶³⁶ See in general Friedrich (2003) for the types of wounds suffered in the *Iliad*.

¹⁶³⁷ Salazar (2000): 129-130.

¹⁶³⁸ τὰς σφαγὰς, τοὺς θανάτους (Pseudo-Hermogenes: X.4; Aelius Theon: 119).

¹⁶³⁹ τραύματα συνέγραψε πάνυ ἀπίθανα καὶ θανάτους ἀλλοκότους (Lucian: §20; trans. 31).

common stylistic features' in chronicles of Late Antiquity,¹⁶⁴⁰ and this is particularly evident in the *Gothic Wars* of Procopius. Walter Kaegi believes Procopius' detailed descriptions of battle wounds were a consequence of his personal involvement in the siege of Rome of 536-537, though ponders if they might also be inspired by gory injuries mentioned by past writers.¹⁶⁴¹ Brent Shaw felt the realism shown in Procopius' description of combat outside the walls of Rome to be 'unusual', not dependent on rhetorical devices or earlier historical writings like his other military set-pieces.¹⁶⁴² This is debatable, since Homer is an obvious influence, as Conor Campbell Whately has shown. Contra Salazar, who proposed that Procopius' 'wounds' were chosen merely for their uniqueness,¹⁶⁴³ Whately identified a striking feature of Procopius' battle descriptions: while one blow is usually enough to kill the enemy, Byzantine soldiers can sustain multiple hits, attesting to their greater endurance.¹⁶⁴⁴ This is also the case in Middle Byzantine historiography, where, as we have seen, Roman heroes can endure many serious wounds and still stay in the field.

Violence was not merely a stylistic aspect of battle description therefore. While heroic death in battle was the ambition of any Homeric warrior, non-fatal wounds were an adequate alternative.¹⁶⁴⁵ In the *Iliad* a hero's wounds function as a badge of honour, showcasing his bravery and endurance.¹⁶⁴⁶ Hector, Agamemnon and Achilles are all able to overlook their injuries and fight on.¹⁶⁴⁷ A warrior drenched in blood

¹⁶⁴⁰ Pohl (2006).

¹⁶⁴¹ Kaegi (1990): 73-74.

¹⁶⁴² Shaw (1999): 133.

¹⁶⁴³ Salazar (2000): 220.

¹⁶⁴⁴ Whately (2009): 256-261.

¹⁶⁴⁵ See in general Salazar (2000): 125-150; Neal (2006a).

¹⁶⁴⁶ Neal (2006b): 19-20.

¹⁶⁴⁷ Homer, *Iliad*: 7.263 (Hector); 11.264-266 (Agamemnon); 21.166-181 (Achilles).

had clear evidence of his martial prowess.¹⁶⁴⁸ Salazar has shown that this ideology does not feature in Classical Greek historiography, reappearing only in historical writing of the Hellenistic period, inspired by Alexander the Great.¹⁶⁴⁹ A Hellenistic culture of displaying one's scars and wounds as evidence of martial valour emerged.¹⁶⁵⁰ At Rome certain battle scars might even be shown publicly to advance one's political career.¹⁶⁵¹ There is evidence to suggest that scars continued to be worn as a badge of honour in Middle Byzantium. 'Manganeios Prodromos' encouraged John Kantakouzenos not to hide his mangled hand but exhibit it; his wounds are considered more valuable than any jewels, and said to cause envy among those less brave.¹⁶⁵² Leo the Deacon introduces the veteran *strategos* Nikephoros Pastilas by revealing that he 'carried on his face and chest numerous scars of sword wounds inflicted in battle'.¹⁶⁵³ That they were borne on Pastilas' face and chest confirmed

¹⁶⁴⁸ Neal (2006b): 29.

¹⁶⁴⁹ Salazar (2000): 184-208.

¹⁶⁵⁰ Ibid: 186-187, 216-217, with examples.

¹⁶⁵¹ Bragg (2008); Salazar (2000): 217-218.

¹⁶⁵² προτίθει σου τὰ πλήγματα, τὰ τραύματα μὴ κρύπτει·

ταῦτα πολυτιμότερα καὶ λίθων καὶ μαργάρων·

ταῦτα πολλοὶ ζηλώσουσι, κἄν οὐ μιμήσωνταί σε,

κἄν ἔστιν ἀπαράμιλλος ἢ πρᾶξις τῆς ἀνδρείας (Manganeios Prodromos: 49.208-211). In a later poem, 'Manganeios' reveals that John gave no thought to the wound and continued fighting, thus demonstrating his endurance: ἀφαίρεσίν τε σπαθοτμήτου δακτύλου, ὥσπερ τὸ μῆθ' ἐν ὑπενεγκῶν εὐτόνω (ibid: 97.24-25).

¹⁶⁵³ Παστιλάς...ὃς γενναῖος ὦν πολλοὺς ἀνέτλη πολέμους· καὶ πλειστάκις μὲν ἦλω πρὸς τῶν Ἀγαρηῶν, τοσαυτάκις δὲ ἐκεῖθεν διέδρα· καὶ πολλὰς οὐλὰς ἐκ τῶν κατὰ πόλεμον χαλκοτυπιῶν ἐπὶ τοῦ προσώπου καὶ τῶν στέρνων προὔβαλλετο (Leo the Deacon: 8.20-9.2; trans. 62). In his *Capture of Crete*, Theodosios the Deacon refers to the veteran Nikephoros Pastilas possessing no fear of sword 'cuts and thrusts' in battle, since he had killed many and himself been injured before:

τούτοις στρατηγὸς ἦν ἀνὴρ ὁ τὸ ξίφος

ποθῶν ὑπὲρ σοῦ καὶ προτείνων εἰς μάχην

καὶ μὴ δεδοικῶς τὴν 'τομήν' τῶν 'φασγάνων',

ὁ καὶ πρὶν εἰς ἄπληστον ἔμπεσῶν γένος

θάρσει μεγίστῳ καὶ προθυμῷ ξένη

καὶ 'δοὺς ἑαυτὸν' εἰς σφαγὴν μονωτάτως

καὶ τοὺς ἀνίππους συνταράξας βαρβάρους (Theodosios the Deacon: ll.857-864).

him to be a heroic warrior in the Homeric tradition, since wounds on the back signified that one was prone to retreat.¹⁶⁵⁴

This ideology somewhat contradicts the growing fascination with the beauty and physical appearance of soldiers in Middle Byzantium. Such idealized descriptions were problematic, however, since they risked undermining one's masculinity. Consequently, soldiers are frequently depicted in contemporary literature as being unconcerned with their physical appearance.¹⁶⁵⁵ A young Alexios Komnenos, fresh from the battlefield, refused offers to be cleaned and dressed in finer garments, claiming that physical appearance was a concern for women, not soldiers.¹⁶⁵⁶ This image of Alexios, presented by Nikephoros Bryennios, corresponds closely with one of a tarnished warrior offered by Anna during her description of the Battle of Dyrrachion. 'He was dusty and bloodstained, bareheaded, with his bright red hair straggling in front of his eyes'.¹⁶⁵⁷ Theodore Prodromos' twelfth-century romance, *Rodanthe and Dosiklis*, likewise expresses a preference for military ability over looks. The hero Dosiklis maintains that bravery, martial prowess and a bloodstained sword constituted real male beauty, and thus made him worthy of Rodanthe.¹⁶⁵⁸

¹⁶⁵⁴ Salazar (2000): 130, 156-157; Neal (2006b): 26.

¹⁶⁵⁵ Hatzaki (2009): 118-135; Laiou (1992b): 94-96.

¹⁶⁵⁶ Bryennios: 151-155.

¹⁶⁵⁷ τῷ δὲ λύθρῳ τοῦ ἰδίου πεφοινιγμένος αἵματος καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀπερικάλυπτον ἔχων καὶ τὴν πυρσὴν καὶ ἠλιῶσαν κόμην περιπλανωμένην ταῖς ὄψεσι καὶ διοχλοῦσαν αὐτόν (Anna Komnene: IV.6.8.81-84; trans. 123).

¹⁶⁵⁸ Ἄλλ' οὐδ' ἐμοὶ πρόσωπον ἠσβολωμένον,
οὐδὲ ξένη τις καὶ δυσέντευκτος πλάσις·
ἄλλως τε κάλλος ἀνδρικὸν σταθιρότης,
ἀλκὴ κραταιά, πρὸς μάχας εὐανδρία,
ἄτρεστος ἰσχύς, δεξιὰ θαρραλέα,
ἔπαλξις ἀπτόητος εἰς μάχης στόμα,
αἵμασιν ἐχθρῶν πορφυρωθεῖσα σπάθη,
ξίφος κορεσθὲν δυσμενεστέρου κρέως (Theodore Prodromos, *Rodanthe and Dosiklis*: II.251-258).

Conclusion

Physical prowess was a virtue greatly admired in Middle Byzantium. Leo the Deacon frequently stresses the great size of Byzantine and Russian warriors,¹⁶⁵⁹ while Anna Komnene describes the awe that the rebel Nikephoros Basilakes inspired in people on account of his physicality.¹⁶⁶⁰ Detailing the wounds and damage a man inflicted in battle was an obvious way of demonstrating his power and martial prowess.¹⁶⁶¹ Thus Nikephoros Botaneiates, in his duel with Randolf, and Eustratios, battling the Armenian Constantine, allegedly split the shields of their opponent in two; this kind of feat placed these men on par with the heroes of Homeric epic. It is presumably for this reason also that the more graphic wounds - severed limbs and split heads - are usually reserved for the enemy, just as they are for Trojans in the *Iliad*.¹⁶⁶² Slicing through helmets and piercing breastplates seems rather fanciful, but a measure of realism was perhaps required, since experienced soldiers among the audience would know how much damage a man could realistically inflict and sustain.¹⁶⁶³ The notion of a mace blow crushing both helmet and head, for example, may not have been far removed from the truth.¹⁶⁶⁴ Awareness of the damage wrought by an iron mace would have made the capacity of Bardas Skleros to survive such a blow from Bardas

¹⁶⁵⁹ Byzantine warriors Nikephoros II Phokas, Constantine Skleros, Theodore Lalakon, and Bardas Phokas are all said to have had enormous bodies (Leo the Deacon: 37, 110, 144-145, 174-175). Several Russian champions are also said to have had huge frames (109-110, 144). Kazhdan (2006: 329) observed that Leo was one of the first Byzantine historians to make physical prowess a virtue.

¹⁶⁶⁰ 'They do not see beyond to a man's soul, nor do they regard his virtue, but stand in awe only of his physical excellence, his daring, his virility, his speed of running, his size, and these they judge to be worthy of the purple robe and the crown' (Anna Komnene: I.7.2; trans. 24).

¹⁶⁶¹ In a Homeric context, see van Wees (1996): 38-39. For the unrealistic nature of the injuries described, see Friedrich (2003): 7-22.

¹⁶⁶² Salazar (2000): 130; Neal (2006b): 26.

¹⁶⁶³ Salazar (2000): 146. Cf. McGeer (1995a): 313.

¹⁶⁶⁴ See above, 143-144, with relevant references cited. The expectation of someone surviving a direct blow to the head from an iron mace is perhaps best demonstrated by accounts of the Battle of Antioch-on-the-Maeander, where the recovery of Theodore Laskaris from such a hit is seen as miraculous, and attributed to divine intervention. See below, 374-375.

Phokas – which, according to Psellos, usually killed a man immediately¹⁶⁶⁵ - all the more impressive.

Skleros' endurance is merely one of several ways in which wounds and violence could serve as rhetorical devices in Middle Byzantine literature. Injuries sustained in battle were worth mentioning and exhibiting. In an imperial context they enabled comparisons to Christ, an illustration of how the emperor had toiled on behalf of his people. Less noted in modern scholarship is the importance of these wounds to one's martial image, and the wearing of scars as an aristocratic badge of honour. Drawing attention to wounds received and inflicted in war allowed for obvious parallels with great warriors of mythology and Antiquity, and were thus an indispensable aspect of 'heroic historiography'.

¹⁶⁶⁵ ὁ γάρ τοι πλιγὴν παρ' ἐκείνου δεξάμενος εὐθέως ἀφῆρητο τὴν ψυχὴν (Psellos, *Chronographia*: I, 6 [VII]).

IV. *Digenes Akrites*, Frontier Songs and Aristocratic Ideals

Digenes Akrites, an epic poem relating the life and deeds of an Arab-Byzantine border lord, was probably committed to writing in the twelfth century but originated in oral tales of the tenth-century eastern borderlands.¹⁶⁶⁶ As a product of the military aristocracy, *Digenes Akrites* displays ideals and values which also appear in ‘heroic historiography’. It is suggested here that this may not have been coincidental, with frontier ballads, influenced also by Homeric epic,¹⁶⁶⁷ a plausible precursor to the promotional aristocratic literature of the tenth century.

Aristocratic Heroic Values in Digenes Akrites

Fundamental features of ‘heroic historiography’, including displays of *andreia*, single combat and violence, feature in both versions of *Digenes Akrites*. Constantine, twin brother of Digenes’ mother, accepts the offer of single combat with the Arab emir (later Digenes’ father) for the release of his sister. ‘They hacked at each other for many hours...And blood flowed over all that ground...They were covered with wounds but no one was giving way’.¹⁶⁶⁸ The Escorial version has the emir feel great guilt over his eventual withdrawal: ‘I have disgraced my army and my whole family. If only I had died today – I no longer wish to live’.¹⁶⁶⁹ Conversely, the emir claims to have single-handedly routed an entire army in his youth.¹⁶⁷⁰ His son, Digenes himself, followed his father’s lead in this respect. Having taken his prospective wife

¹⁶⁶⁶ For the historical *akritai*, see Huxley (1974); Ševčenko (1980); Haldon & Kennedy (1980); Dagron & Mihăescu (1986).

¹⁶⁶⁷ Beaton (1989): 44; Magdalino (1993b); E. Jeffreys (1998a); Bazzani (2007): 224.

¹⁶⁶⁸ ἀλλήλους ἐσυνέκοπτον ἐπὶ πολλὰς τὰς ὥρας

...τὸ αἷμα δὲ κατέρρευε τὴν γῆν ἐκείνην ὅλην

...ὀλόπληγοι γεγονάσι, μηδεὶς τροπὴν ποιῶν τε (*Digenes Akrites*: GI.113-197; trans. 13-15).

¹⁶⁶⁹ “ντρόπιασα τὰ φουσάτα μου καὶ ὅλην μου τὴν γενέαν.

Σήμερον νὰ ἀπόθανα καὶ οὐ θέλω τὴν ζωὴν μου” (ibid: E158-159; trans. 251).

¹⁶⁷⁰ Ibid: GIII.66-78.

from her family home, Digenes faced down thousands of her father's retinue, urging them to turn back. 'They were ashamed to be defeated by one man, and chose death rather than to be put to flight by him'.¹⁶⁷¹ This view was shared by Melimitzis, a notable warrior in the employ of the Amazon Maximou. When exhorted by three bandits not to tackle Digenes alone, Melimitzis scoffed: 'I would be reproved for cowardice, for being afraid of one man; and I have no wish to carry on living if I am going to be called timid'.¹⁶⁷² While no match for Digenes, Melimitzis and the soldiers of Digenes' father-in-law are to be perceived as honourable because they share his heroic ideals.

Characterized by their inability to conform to heroic conventions, it is the frontier bandits – *apelatai* – who represent the real enemy of the piece.¹⁶⁷³ At one point, Digenes' prowess is doubted by three bandits – Philopappous, Ioannakis and Kinnamos – who challenge him to single combat. Digenes urges all three to attack him at once, but they refuse. 'It is not our custom to come three against one, we who take pride, each of us, in repelling thousands...the three of us are shamed to fight against one man'. So Philopappous attacked first, but when beaten, his comrades charge simultaneously, 'not in the least ashamed despite their earlier boasts'.

Kinnamos was unhorsed and pleaded with Digenes, who assured him that it was not in his custom to strike a man while he was down.¹⁶⁷⁴ While Digenes' enemies may

¹⁶⁷¹ Ἐκεῖνοι δὲ τὴν τοῦ ἐνὸς αἰσχυρόμενοι ἦτταν
τὸ θανεῖν ἠρετίσαντο ἢ φυγεῖν ὑπ' ἐκεῖνου (ibid: GIV.637-644; trans. 105).

¹⁶⁷² “καταμεμφθῶ ὡς ἄνδρος τὸν ἕνα δειλιάσας·
καὶ ζῆν σὺκέτι βούλομαι, εἰ ἄτολμος ἀκούσω” (ibid: GVI.489-496; trans. 181).

¹⁶⁷³ As observed by Galatariotou (1987b): 44-51.

¹⁶⁷⁴ ἡμεῖς ἔθος οὐκ ἔχομεν ἐλθεῖν οἱ τρεῖς εἰς ἕνα,
οἱ θαρροῦντες μετακινεῖν ὁ καθεὶς χιλιάδας
...αἰσχυρόμεθα οἱ τρεῖς πολεμῆσαι εἰς ἕνα
...καὶ τοῦτο θεασάμενοι οἱ ἕτεροι ὡς εἶχον
καβαλλάροι ἐπάνω μου ἦρχοντο παραχρῆμα

break the rules of combat, he maintains honour by not stooping to their level. Of course, lone hero that he was,¹⁶⁷⁵ Digenes had no interest in evening the odds. ‘I have never been in the habit of performing valiant deeds with others’.¹⁶⁷⁶ As in aristocratic promotional literature, honourable warriors in *Digenes* take pride in their martial prowess, feel shame in defeat, inflict and endure pain, and adhere to rules of combat.

*Two Heroes: Digenes Akrites and Manuel I Komnenos*¹⁶⁷⁷

While *Digenes Akrites* exhibits historical elements, the eponymous hero is a superhuman creation who embodies the established aristocratic qualities of military might, independence and wealth.¹⁶⁷⁸ *Digenes Akrites* was, most probably, written in the mid-twelfth century and reflective of ‘a milieu in which not only the aristocratic exploits and values of the hero but also his genealogy and the geography of his movements were of a direct contemporary interest’.¹⁶⁷⁹ In a satirical poem of the mid-twelfth century, the poet known as Ptochoprodromos referred to Manuel as Ἀκρίτης ἕτερος and τὸν νέον τὸν Ἀκρίτην, confirming that a version of the poem existed at that time.¹⁶⁸⁰ Manuel’s reputation as a lothario, and, more pertinently, his courageous displays in battle permitted such comparisons, though it cannot be ruled out that his demeanour was inspired by Digenes Akrites.¹⁶⁸¹

μηδαμῶς αἰσχυνόμενοι, ὡς πρώην ἐκαυχῶντο (*Digenes Akrites*: GVI.192-269; trans. 165-167). Twice in the Escorial version Akrites tells Kinnamos to rise up, as he will not hit a man while he is down (E2179, E1287).

¹⁶⁷⁵ For the solitary existence of Digenes as a recurrent theme, see Magdalino (1989): 191-192; E. Jeffreys (2000): 197-198.

¹⁶⁷⁶ “Ποτέ μου οὐκ ἐσυνήθισα ἀνδραγαθεῖν με ἄλλους” (*Digenes Akrites*: E1301; trans. 335).

¹⁶⁷⁷ See Appendix VI for further links.

¹⁶⁷⁸ Huxley (1974): 317-318. For these qualities, along with the importance of family and noble birth, see Magdalino (1989).

¹⁶⁷⁹ Magdalino (1993b): 10.

¹⁶⁸⁰ Ptochoprodromos: IV.189-191, 542-544.

¹⁶⁸¹ Magdalino (1992): 203 n.45.

The martial culture at the imperial court may have intensified as a result of greater exposure to the chivalric ideals of western Europe.¹⁶⁸² Manuel remodelled elements of his army along western lines,¹⁶⁸³ and he is also known to have participated in jousts.¹⁶⁸⁴ Magdalino describes Manuel as ‘the westernizing Byzantine par excellence’, considering it ‘highly likely’ that Manuel aspired to the ideals of the westerners among his entourage.¹⁶⁸⁵ There is some suggestion that the growing western tradition of compiling written versions of oral *chansons de geste* may have inspired the production of *Digenes Akrites*, though it is more plausible that several elements conspired to bring about the project.¹⁶⁸⁶ The metre used in *Digenes Akrites* – the fifteen-syllable political verse – was more regularly employed among orators and writers during this period.¹⁶⁸⁷ The Hellenistic romance, which experienced a sudden revival in the mid-twelfth century, shares a number of similarities with the content and tone of *Digenes Akrites*.¹⁶⁸⁸ In addition to these literary elements, it is not implausible that Manuel himself inspired the production of *Digenes Akrites*.

Elizabeth Jeffreys links the literary project to military operations on the eastern frontier c.1150.¹⁶⁸⁹ It is proposed that these actions gave greater relevance to the popular stories of *Digenes*, and possibly stimulated a writer to turn the poem into a work of literature along the lines of the resurgent Hellenistic novels.¹⁶⁹⁰ While this hypothesis is contestable, there can be no question that Manuel’s campaigns in the east were undertaken in ‘the spirit of *Akrites*’,¹⁶⁹¹ earning him comparisons with the

¹⁶⁸² E. Jeffreys (1980); idem (1984): 204-210; idem (1998a).

¹⁶⁸³ Lindner (1982).

¹⁶⁸⁴ Kinnamos: 47, 125; Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 108-110. See Jones & Maguire (2002).

¹⁶⁸⁵ Magdalino (1992): 203.

¹⁶⁸⁶ E. Jeffreys (1980); idem (1993): 33-37.

¹⁶⁸⁷ M. Jeffreys (1974); E. Jeffreys (2009).

¹⁶⁸⁸ See below, 351-352.

¹⁶⁸⁹ See also M. Jeffreys (1978).

¹⁶⁹⁰ E. Jeffreys (1993); idem (1998a): 452.

¹⁶⁹¹ Ricks (1990): 7. See also Beaton (1995): 84-85.

legendary borderer. The appearance of the written *Digenes* epitomized the growing appreciation of martial valour under the Komnenian rulers.

*Songs of the Frontier, Aristocratic Promotional Literature and 'Heroic Historiography'*¹⁶⁹²

While *Digenes Akrites* was committed to writing in the mid-twelfth century, the poem almost certainly derived from oral tales disseminated on the frontier as early as the late ninth century.¹⁶⁹³ It is argued that these tales were brought to Constantinople after the Battle of Manzikert, an element of the nostalgia for the disappearing martial culture of the frontier.¹⁶⁹⁴ Very little however can be gauged of the oral tradition of frontier songs. At the beginning of the tenth century, Bishop Arethas of Caesarea wrote of 'the accursed Paphlagonians who compose songs about the feats of glorious men and who sing them for an obol from house to house'.¹⁶⁹⁵ While we cannot know precisely who these ἀγύρτας were, or what their tales consisted of, it is plausible that the ἐνδόξων ἀνδρῶν in question were soldiers of recent memory.¹⁶⁹⁶

When frontier songs first appeared, the *akritai* themselves presented obvious candidates for subjects.¹⁶⁹⁷ According to Jean-Claude Cheynet, 'clear indications permit the affirmation that the remembrance of heroes was long-lasting' in the oral

¹⁶⁹² Additional links between oral poetry and 'heroic historiography' are postulated in Appendix V.

¹⁶⁹³ Huxley (1974); E. & M. Jeffreys (1986): esp. 515-516; Beaton (1981a); idem (1981b); idem (1989): 43-51; idem (1993); Trombley (1998): 99. See also above, 275-277.

¹⁶⁹⁴ Beaton (1996a).

¹⁶⁹⁵ Τοὺς ἀγείροντας λέγει ἦτοι ἀγύρτας, ὧν νῦν δεῖγμα οἱ κατάρατοι Παφλαγῶνες ᾠδὰς τινας συμπλάσαντες πάθη περιεχούσας ἐνδόξων ἀνδρῶν καὶ πρὸς ὀβολὸν ἄδοντες καθ' ἐκάστην οἰκίαν (Kougeas 1912-1913: 239). We should not read too much into Arethas' disdain for Paphlagonians – on this point see Magdalino (1998): esp. 141-143.

¹⁶⁹⁶ For discussion of Arethas' comments, see Pertusi (1970): 502; Huxley (1974): 326-327; Ricks (1990): 8-9; Jouanno (1998): 103-104. For the enduring culture of heroic songs in Byzantium, see Beck (1971): 99 n.10; E. & M. Jeffreys (1986): 508-509; E. Jeffreys (2011b): 470-471.

¹⁶⁹⁷ See in general Grégoire (1932); idem (1933d).

songs of ninth- and tenth-century Asia Minor.¹⁶⁹⁸ We have discussed the prominence of the early Doukas family in these frontier ballads.¹⁶⁹⁹ Henri Grégoire has suggested that members of the Argyros family may have inspired the tenth-century *Lay of Armoures*,¹⁷⁰⁰ while Hans-Georg Beck links the *Lay of Theophylact* to the father of the Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos.¹⁷⁰¹ When Attaleiates writes of the deeds of the Phokades being ‘much talked of’ in his own day, it is not unthinkable that he is also referring to oral songs.¹⁷⁰² Indeed, Grégoire and Rosemary Morris have proposed the existence of a ‘Phokas cycle of songs’, inspired by the life of Nikephoros II Phokas.¹⁷⁰³ With pro-Phokas literature emerging in the mid-tenth century, it is possible that frontier songs and aristocratic biography, both concerned in principle with the celebration of heroic deeds, were closely linked, with prose historiographical literature about famous soldiers a natural progression from oral verse compositions on the same subject.¹⁷⁰⁴

Conclusion

Paul Magdalino observed the ‘common ground of epic’ which *Digenes Akrites* shared with the heroic biographies of Alexios I Komnenos by Nikephoros Bryennios and Anna Komnene.¹⁷⁰⁵ Admittedly the poem is quite distinct from ‘heroic

¹⁶⁹⁸ Cheynet (2006b): 9.

¹⁶⁹⁹ See above, 276-278.

¹⁷⁰⁰ Grégoire (1939): 241-245; Beck (1971): 52-57. The idea is based on a Cypriot rendition of the song which features the name Azgoures. For further discussion see Baud-Bovy (1938).

¹⁷⁰¹ Beck (1971): 62-63.

¹⁷⁰² See above, 270-271.

¹⁷⁰³ Grégoire (1962). The thoughts of Morris remain unpublished – see Galatariotou (1993): 53 n.45. See also Adontz & Grégoire (1935) for suggestions of songs relating to other members of the Phokas clan.

¹⁷⁰⁴ Roderick Beaton’s suggestion (1986b) that Anna Komnene may have relied on an oral folk song for her account of the rebellion of Rhapsomates on Cyprus is relevant to this argument, strengthening the links between oral tales and historiography.

¹⁷⁰⁵ Magdalino (1993a): 431; idem (1993b): 3.

historiography'. The relations between Digenes and numerous females put the poem in the realm of the classicizing romances of the mid-twelfth century, a rather sudden literary revival.¹⁷⁰⁶ The poem has been described by Roderick Beaton as 'proto-romance', an important precursor to the fully-fledged romances which followed soon after.¹⁷⁰⁷ The original form of the poem, however, may have been quite different. Henri Grégoire considered it 'by no means certain' that the original *Digenes* was a 'perfect novel of the classical type'.¹⁷⁰⁸ Beaton speculates that the exploits of Digenes Akrites may have originally been told in separate oral lays, with the Grottaferrata rendition possibly an attempt to create a coherent whole, incorporating elements from Hellenistic literary tradition.¹⁷⁰⁹ The romance genre was among these. Another was the biographical form which dominated many literary narratives of the period.¹⁷¹⁰ David Ricks, a proponent of the idea that the Escorial represents a sequence of separate poems, observed that a 'biographical tendency has crept into the interstices between poems by the time of [the Grottaferrata version]'.¹⁷¹¹ Ulrich Moennig observes that this biographical element linked *Digenes Akrites* with Pseudo-Callisthenes' *Life of Alexander*, as well the *Vita Basilii*.¹⁷¹² If this argument is correct, then two principal conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, that *Digenes Akrites* in its written form may not provide an accurate reflection of its original oral mode, which perhaps veered more towards heroic epic than romance. Therefore, frontier ballads

¹⁷⁰⁶ Beaton (1986a); idem (1989); idem (1995); idem (1996b); MacAlister (1991); S. Alexiou (1993); Magdalino (1993a): 189; E. Jeffreys (1998b). An interest in the romance genre is at least attested in the mid-eleventh century - in the will of Cappadocian aristocrat Eustathios Boilas, datable to 1059, a copy of the Hellenistic romance Achilles Tatius is recorded in his library inventory (*Will of Eustathios Boilas*: 24-25).

¹⁷⁰⁷ Beaton (1981a): 20-21; idem (1989): 44-48; idem (1993): 64-66; idem (1996b).

¹⁷⁰⁸ Grégoire (1940-1941): 92-93.

¹⁷⁰⁹ Beaton (1995): 83-85.

¹⁷¹⁰ Athanasios Markopoulos (1989) argues that the author of the Grottaferrata *Digenes Akrites* utilized, in part, lost chronicles of the ninth to twelfth centuries, which, if true, might have had a significant bearing on its literary form.

¹⁷¹¹ Ricks (1989): 200.

¹⁷¹² Moennig (1993): esp. 115.

may have been more concerned with military deeds and thus served as a more obvious influence on writers of aristocratic promotional literature. The second observation is that the process was reciprocal; as the oral songs may have influenced 'heroic historiography', the biographical principle perhaps shaped the literary form of ballads such as *Digenes Akrites*.

V. The Great Conflict of ‘Heroic Historiography’: The Battlefield Role of the General

Aristocratic notions of heroism dictated that a general partake in monomachy and risk his life on the battlefield. Such recklessness however conflicts with the theoretical role of the general, which insisted that he distance himself from the fighting. As the previous chapter has shown, the depiction of the general adhering to instructional handbooks and achieving victory through ingenious stratagems was another recurring feature of aristocratic promotional literature and ‘heroic historiography’ in general. Both styles of generalship appear to have been considered praiseworthy by the Middle Byzantine military aristocracy, but historians, conversant with military theory and perhaps lacking a true heroic mentality, favoured the more cautious approach. We will see that the image of the emperor as warrior appears to have been particularly prominent in bulletins and panegyric. The difficulty in reconciling the general as both commander and warrior in historiography had its roots in Homeric and Hellenistic attitudes towards war, and continued into the Early Byzantine period. The renewed interest in military science and the heroic values of the emerging military aristocracy resulted in the reappearance of this ideological clash from the tenth century onwards.

Theoretical Notions of Generalship in Byzantium

Byzantine military theory encouraged the general to remain aloof from the action so that he could observe the course of the battle and react accordingly.¹⁷¹³ Leo VI the Wise, following the *Strategikon* of Maurice, had clear expectations of the commander:

¹⁷¹³ The general usually took up a position in the middle of the second line (Maurice, *Strategikon*: §§III.8.16; III.15.2-3; *Sylloge Tacticorum*: §46.17). See also McGeer (1995a): 285.

Do not join in hand-to-hand fighting with the enemy; that is the role of the soldier, not of the general. But you are to make all the proper arrangements and then station yourself in a suitable location from which you can observe the troops... You should see to their needs and take steps to call up your reserves... to go to the assistance of a unit in trouble.¹⁷¹⁴

Leo later reiterates this crucial advice, this time in his own words:

At the time of battle you must devote special attention to the men doing the fighting... rather than very rashly springing into action yourself and engaging in hand-to-hand combat when the situation is not critical. It is better <for you> to refrain completely from close combat with the enemy, even if you could project the image of unlimited bravery. By engaging in combat you will not benefit your army as much as you will harm it by dying, something not unexpected in close combat... Rather, in safety keenly observe and carry out your proper task. It is then that the general is admired.¹⁷¹⁵

Reliance on the commander, was, as Eric McGeer observes, ‘the Achilles’ heel of all medieval armies, with mere word of the general’s death a psychological blow which

¹⁷¹⁴ Καὶ μὴ συμπλέκεσθαι τοῖς πολεμίοις διὰ χειρὸς. στρατιώτου γὰρ μᾶλλον ἢ στρατηγοῦ τοῦτό ἐστιν. ἀλλὰ ποιεῖν σε μὲν τὰ ἀρμόζοντα πάντα, ἐν ἐπιτηδεῖω δὲ ἴστασθαι τόπων, ὅθεν ὁρᾶν δύνασαι τοὺς τε ἀγωνιζομένους καὶ τοὺς, ὡς εἰκός, ἀμελοῦντας, καὶ ἐπεῦχεσθαι τὰ δέοντα καὶ σπουδάζειν διὰ τῶν ἐν ὑποβοηθείᾳ ὄντων συναίρεσθαι τῷ δεομένῳ μέρει, τοῦτ’ ἐστιν διὰ τῶν πλαγιοφυλάκων καὶ νωτοφυλάκων (Leo VI, *Taktika*: §XIV.3; trans. 291). Following Maurice, *Strategikon*: §§II.15; VII.B.1.

¹⁷¹⁵ Σὲ δὲ χρὴ κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τῆς μάχης προνοεῖν μᾶλλον τῶν μαχομένων, καθὼς σοὶ καὶ πρόσθεν ὑπεθέμεθα, ἢ τολμηρότερον ἄλλεσθαι καὶ ταῖς χειρσὶ συμπλέκεσθαι, ὅταν μὴ ἀνάγκης ἐστὶ καιρὸς· μᾶλλον δὲ τὸ παντελῶς ἀπέχεσθαι διὰ χειρῶν τοῖς πολεμίοις συμπλέκεσθαι, καὶ ἂν ὑπέμβλητον ἀνδρείαν ἐπιδείξῃς. οὐ τοσοῦτον γὰρ ὠφελήσεις τὸ στράτευμα μαχόμενος, ὅσον ἀποθανὼν βλάμεις αὐτό, ὅπερ τοῖς συμπλεκομένοις οὐκ ἀπροσδόκητόν ἐστιν... Μᾶλλον δὲ ἐν ἀσφαλείᾳ ὀξέως καὶ βλέπε καὶ πράττε τὰ δέοντα. τότε γὰρ μᾶλλον θαναμάζεται στρατηγός, ὅταν κατὰ τὸ ὄξυ τῆς ἀνάγκης τὰ πρόποντα διοικήσῃ, ὅτε ἐν ἀδείᾳ ὦν τὰ εἰκότα προβουλευέσθαι (Leo VI, *Taktika*: §XIV.99-100; trans. 347). Similar advice is found at *ibid*: §§XX.2; XX.153.

often led to collapse.¹⁷¹⁶ Byzantine generals were discouraged from risking their lives in battle, and yet the evidence suggests that they routinely ignored this caution.

The Active Participation of the General in Historiography: Praise and Criticism

There can be little doubt that commanders and emperors were actually prone to reckless displays in battle, primarily because historians of the period - even sympathetic ones - find difficulty in reconciling the prescribed responsibilities of a general with undisciplined bouts of boldness. The sixth book of *Theophanes Continuatus*, written in the mid-tenth century, describes the fate of the *patrikios* Leo, commander of Adrianople c.921. Though widely known as ‘Moroleon’ - foolish Leo - the author considers the name ‘Thymoleon’ - courageous Leo - to be more apt, noting that Leo had often exhibited bravery against the invading Bulgarians.¹⁷¹⁷

When Skylitzes drew upon *Theophanes Continuatus* for his corresponding account, he elected to focus on the ‘foolish’ aspect, explaining that Leo earned the moniker ‘on account of his rash impetuosity in battle’. In his ensuing narrative of the Bulgarian siege of Adrianople, Skylitzes substantiates his conclusion by stating that Leo would occasionally open the gates and charge the enemy.¹⁷¹⁸ While there is no obvious explanation as to why Skylitzes presents Leo in this way, the nicknames given by *Theophanes Continuatus* indicate that Leo’s bold conduct met with admiration and disapproval in equal measure.

¹⁷¹⁶ McGeer (1995a): 307-308. Examples of such instances are compiled by Dennis (1997a): 174-175.

¹⁷¹⁷ Τοῦ δὲ πατρικίου τοῦ οὕτως ἐπονομαζομένου Μωρολέοντος, ἢ μᾶλλον εἰπεῖν οἰκειότερον Θυμολέοντος...κρατίστου τὰ πολεμικά καὶ περιδεξίου τυγχάνοντος, ὃς πλείστας κατὰ Βουλγάρων ἀνδραγαθίας ἐπεδείξατο (*Theophanes Continuatus*: 404.18-405.10).

¹⁷¹⁸ ...Λέων, ὃν διὰ τὴν ὀξύρροπον πρὸς τοὺς πολέμους ὄρμην καὶ Μωρολέοντα ἐκάλουν (Skylitzes: 218.82-2; trans. 211). For this observation, see Holmes (2005): 151.

Perhaps the most famous instance of a historian evaluating the conduct of a general is that of Michael Psellos judging the stand of the Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes at the Battle of Manzikert. Having criticized Romanos for his ‘ignorance of generalship’ (ἀστρατήγητον),¹⁷¹⁹ Psellos, in recounting the moment when Romanos elected to remain in the field rather than flee, affords the emperor begrudging respect:

Although I cannot applaud his subsequent behaviour, it is impossible for me to censure him...His action can be interpreted in two ways. My own view represents the mean between these two extremes. On the one hand, if you regard him as a hero, courting danger and fighting courageously, it is reasonable to praise him; on the other, when one reflects that a general, if he conforms to the accepted rules of strategy, must remain aloof from the battle-line, supervising the movements of his army and issuing the necessary orders to the men under his command, then Romanos’ conduct on this occasion would appear foolish in the extreme, for he exposed himself to danger without a thought of the consequences. I myself am more inclined to praise than to blame him for what he did.¹⁷²⁰

Psellos’ criticism of Romanos’ knowledge of military science should not be considered accurate, nor indeed fair. While Psellos professed to be a military expert, he possessed no practical experience and acquired his expertise entirely from military

¹⁷¹⁹ Psellos, *Chronographia*: II, 162 (XX); also II, 160 [XVI]. For Psellos’ criticism of Romanos, see De Vries - van der Velden (1997).

¹⁷²⁰ Τὸ δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐπαινεῖν μὲν οὐκ ἔχω, ψέγειν δὲ οὐ δύναμαι, αὐτὸς τὸν ὅλον κίνδυνον δέχεται· τοῦτο δὲ μέσον ἐστὶν ἀντιρρήσεως· εἰ μὲν γὰρ ὡς φιλοκίνδυνον λογίσαιτό τις τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ ἀγωνιστὴν προθυμότατον, ἔχοι ἂν ἀφορμὰς πρὸς ἐγκώμιον· εἰ δ’ ὅτι, δέον κατὰ τὴν στρατηγικὴν ἀκρίβειαν πόρρω ἴστασθαι, πρωτοστράτηγον τυγχάνοντα τοῦ στρατεύματος, καὶ τοῖς πλήθεσιν ἐπιτάττειν τὰ δέοντα, ὁ δὲ ἀλογίστως παρεκινδύνευε, πολλὰ ἂν ἐς αὐτὸν ἀποσκώπειεν· ἐγὼ δὲ μετὰ τῶν ἐπαινούντων, ἀλλ’ οὐ τῶν αἰτιωμένων εἰμί (Psellos, *Chronographia*: II, 162 [XXI]; trans. 355-356).

handbooks.¹⁷²¹ Perhaps Psellos was swayed in this instance by guilt over Romanos' blinding and death, or by a tide of appreciation for Romanos' bravery at court, evident in his historical portrayal by Psellos' contemporary, Michael Attaleiates.¹⁷²² By the mid-twelfth century, Romanos Diogenes had become a figure of emulation for the warrior emperors of the Komnenian dynasty, worthy of mention in the same breath as a Nikephoros II Phokas.¹⁷²³ There was no sense at this point that Romanos had shown himself to be a poor general by fighting on as those around him fled.

We have seen that Anna Komnene depicted her father not shirking from the fight, but at the same time not staying in battle to the point of capture. Anna, perhaps more than any other Middle Byzantine historian, displays a clear awareness of the responsibilities of the general on the battlefield. Describing an engagement with the Cumans, Anna does not lavish praise on her father for his victory in single combat, but soberly opines: 'On this occasion he showed himself more of a soldier than a general'.¹⁷²⁴ Though Anna rarely criticizes her father, she implies that he was somewhat rash in his youth. At Dyrrachion, Alexios neglected the cautious advice of the wise George Palaiologos and instead sided with his younger officers, who preferred to do battle with Robert Guiscard.¹⁷²⁵ Prior to engaging the Pechenegs at Dristra, Palaiologos again counselled his brother-in-law towards a safer course of

¹⁷²¹ Psellos professes to being 'thoroughly conversant with the science of military tactics' (τὴν τακτικὴν ἐπιστήμην ἠκριβωκότα), and bizarrely claimed to be superior to Romanos even in this respect (ibid: II, 160 [XVI]; trans. 353). Psellos' worth to Romanos on the one campaign he did attend does appear to have been in his ability as a military engineer. Writing in 1069 to Constantine, the nephew of former patriarch Michael Keroularios, Psellos bemoaned that he was currently assisting in the construction of siege engines for the emperor (Psellos, *Letters*: 470-473; see also Snipes 1981). This is consistent with Psellos' statement in the aforementioned passage of the *Chronographia* about being skilled in building machines of war (ὅσα περὶ μηχανημάτων κατασκευᾶς).

¹⁷²² See above, 89-93.

¹⁷²³ See above, 254 n.1274.

¹⁷²⁴ ...τὴν ἡμέραν στρατιώτην μᾶλλον ἢ στρατηγὸν ἑαυτὸν ἀποδείξας (Anna Komnene: X.4.7; trans. 271).

¹⁷²⁵ Ibid: IV.5.3.

action, but was overlooked in favour of the urgings of impulsive youths. According to Anna, ‘the emperor himself loved to take risks and was naturally inclined to provoke battle; he completely ignored the arguments for restraint’.¹⁷²⁶ On both occasions the Byzantines suffered disastrous defeats, the implication being that these could have been avoided had Alexios heeded the wisdom of Palaiologos. As Alexios matured, his outlook became more pragmatic; displays of personal valour in combat are absent after 1090, and in Bohemond’s invasion of 1105-1108 we witness Alexios shunning open battle and instead opting to force the Normans into submission via a policy of containment.¹⁷²⁷ By the final book of the *Alexiad*, Anna is able to measure her father’s skills against her own expectations of a good general and soldier:

The prime virtue of a general is the ability to win a victory without incurring danger...As far as I am concerned, it has always seemed best to devise some crafty strategic manoeuvre in the course of battle, if one’s own army cannot match the enemy’s strength...There is no one method of achieving victory, nor one form of it, but from ancient times up to the present, success has been won in different ways...In the case of my father, he sometimes overcame the enemy through his military powers, and sometimes by a quick-witted move...There were times when he had recourse to stratagem, at others he entered the battle in person...If ever there was a man who had an extraordinary love of danger, it was he; and when dangers continually arose, he faced them in different ways: by marching into them bareheaded and coming to close grips with the barbarians, or on occasions by

¹⁷²⁶ ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς φιλοκινδυνότατος ὢν καὶ προαρπάζειν πεφυκῶς τὰς μάχας οὐδ’ εἰς νοῦν ὄλωσ τῶν ἀπειργόντων αὐτὸν τοὺς λόγους ἐβάλετο (ibid: VII.3.4-6; trans. 192).

¹⁷²⁷ See Birkenmeier (2002): 56-84; Theotokis (2010): 280-301. Frankopan (1998: 96-163) argues that Alexios adopted containment tactics much earlier, in 1084.

pretending to avoid conflict and feigning terror. It depended on the circumstances and the situation.¹⁷²⁸

Anna's preference for the stratagem accords with the guiding principle of Byzantine military policy, and reflects her reading of military manuals.¹⁷²⁹ While she prefers her father achieving victory by this method, she acknowledges that it was at times necessary for him to close ranks with the enemy. The two styles – the general and the soldier – were not necessarily incompatible, but in the case of Alexios we witness a clear development in the *Alexiad*, as he evolves from fearless warrior to wise commander, a change which brought him greater success and closer to Anna's idea of a good general.

The same cannot be said of Manuel I Komnenos, who, as we have seen, cultivated a propagandist image of daring heroism.¹⁷³⁰ Manuel's boldness on the return march from Ikonion in 1146 did not meet the approval of Kinnamos, his generally admiring biographer:

I dare not say whether on account of his repeated bold deeds against those barbarians he furnished them experience of his nobility and became well nigh

¹⁷²⁸ πρώτη ἐστὶν ἀρετῶν ἢ στρατηγῶν σοφία κτᾶσθαι νίκην ἀκίνδυνον...ἐμοὶ δ' ἄριστον νενόμισται καὶ τὸ ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ μάχῃ μηχανᾶσθαι τι πανοῦργον καὶ στρατηγικόν, ὅπηνίκα μὴ ἀπόχρη τὸ στράτευμα πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἐναντίων ἰσχύν...ὡς οὐκ ἄρα μονότροπος ἡ νίκη οὐδὲ μονοειδής, ἀλλὰ διαφόροις κόποις πάσαι μέχρι τῆς δευρο κατορθουμένη, ὥστε τὴν μὲν νίκην μίαν εἶναι, τοὺς δὲ τρόπους...ὁ δὲ γε ἐμὸς πατὴρ καὶ βασιλεὺς ὅπου μὲν ἀλκῇ τῶν ἐναντίων ἐκράτει, ὅπου δὲ καὶ περινοίᾳ τινὶ χρησάμενος, ἔστι δ' οὐκ ἄν ταῖς μάχαις αὐταῖς ὀξὺ τι στοχασάμενος καὶ τολμήσας τὴν νικῶσαν εἶχεν εὐθύς. ὅπου μὲν καὶ στρατηγικῶ μηχανήματι συγρησάμενος, ὅπου δὲ καὶ διὰ χειρῶν μαχόμενος, πολλὰ πολλάκις ἐξ ἀπροσδοκῆτων ἐστήσατο τρόπαια. ἦν μὲν γάρ, εἴπερ ἄλλός τις, καὶ φιλοκίνδυνος ὁ ἀνὴρ, καὶ συνεχεῖς ἦν ὅρᾶν αὐτῷ τοὺς κινδύνους ἐγειρομένους, ἀλλὰ ποτὲ μὲν γυμνῇ τῇ κεφαλῇ πρὸς τοὺτους παραπεδύετο καὶ ὁμόσε τοῖς βαρβάρους ἐχώρει, ποτὲ δὲ καὶ ἐσχηματίζετο ὑποκατακλίνεσθαι καὶ τὸν ὀρρωδῶντα ὑπεκρίνετο, ὡς καιρὸς ἐδίδου καὶ τὰ πράγματα ὑπεγύρουε (Anna Komnene: XV.3.2-3; trans. 437-438).

¹⁷²⁹ See Sullivan (2010a).

¹⁷³⁰ See above, 237-259.

unapproachable for them, or whether [it was] by Providence caring for him in ways which It understood. I myself do not consider what he did among things worthy of commendation.¹⁷³¹

There is a suggestion that Kinnamos was not alone in thinking this. At the second siege of Kerkyra in 1149, Manuel allegedly wished to lead the assault himself, and had to be forcibly restrained by his generals and relatives. Kinnamos notes that he had ‘heard some people impute the charge of rashness to [the emperor]; [Manuel] always nurtured a supreme audacity beyond [ordinary] courage’.¹⁷³² The historian does not count himself among these critics, but his earlier condemnation of Manuel’s bold conduct confirms that he shared their outlook. Kinnamos had greater appreciation for Manuel’s more cunning actions, one of which occurred during the aforementioned expedition of 1146. Manuel, seeing his army struggling against the Turks, ordered a soldier to remove his helmet and wave it around, falsely proclaiming that the sultan had been captured. The conceit rallied the flagging spirits of his troops and led them to push back the enemy. ‘Frequently thus a single clever plan succeeds over physical strength’, comments an approving Kinnamos.¹⁷³³ In his appraisal of the abortive Italian expedition of John Doukas, which came to a head when Doukas elected to give battle against the Sicilians, Kinnamos provides a rare window into his opinions on warfare. ‘There is a time when it is not shameful to flee, if the occasion

¹⁷³¹ ἐμοὶ δὲ ταῦτα διασκοπούμενῳ θαυμάζειν ἔπεισιν, ὅπως ἐν μέσῳ τηλικούτων γεγονότι κινδύνῳ οὐδὲ τετρώσθαι γοῦν οὐδὲ βεβλήσθαι ἐκείνης τῆς ἡμέρας συνέπεσεν αὐτῷ· εἴτε οὖν ἐκ τοῦ συχνὰ κατὰ τουτωνὶ τῶν βαρβάρων ἀνδραγαθίσασθαι πείραν τῆς αὐτοῦ παρασχόμενος σφίσι γυναιότητος ἀπρόσιτος μονονουχὶ τούτοις ἐγένετο, εἴτε καὶ τῆς προνοίας αὐτὸν περιεπούσης τρόποις οἷς αὕτη ἐπίσταται, λέγειν μὲν οὐ πάνυ θαρρῶ. τό γε μὴν πεπραγμένον οὐκ ἐν ἐπαινετέοις αὐτὸς τίθεμαι (Kinnamos: 51.18-52.1; trans. 47-48).

¹⁷³² ἤδη δὲ τινῶν ἔγωγε καὶ θράσους αἰτίαν προστριβόντων ἤκουσα αὐτῷ· δαιμόνιον γὰρ αἰεὶ καὶ ἀνδρείας πρόσω ἔτρεφε λῆμα (ibid: 99.15-20; trans. 81, with amendments).

¹⁷³³ οὕτω πολλάκις ἐν βούλευμα συνετὸν ὑπὲρ μυριοπληθεῖς ὤνησε χεῖρας, καὶ ἀνδρὸς ἐνὸς ἀρετῆ πολλῶν ἀσπίδων δυνατωτέρα γίνεται (ibid: 45.2-13; trans. 43).

allows...where success would seem more by cunning than by force, risking everything is to be deprecated'.¹⁷³⁴ It stands to reason therefore that Kinnamos did not always condone Manuel's daring conduct, otherwise extolled in official bulletins and encomia. Like Anna, he was fond of his subject, but this need not mean he had to share his military ideals.

The Perfect General: The Presentation of Nikephoros II Phokas and John I Tzimiskes in the History of Leo the Deacon

In contrast to Alexios and Manuel Komnenos, the historical record of the two great soldier emperors of the tenth century – Nikephoros II Phokas and John I Tzimiskes – suggests that these men rarely engaged in hand-to-hand combat. References to their daring heroics in the *History* of Leo the Deacon are very general and abstract, seemingly drawn from panegyric material. Whilst describing the siege of Chandax, Leo briefly mentions Nikephoros once spearing an enemy champion in a nondescript battle.¹⁷³⁵ A passage of general praise for Phokas insists that he led by example, and 'always used to fight in an extraordinary fashion in the van of the army'.¹⁷³⁶ Leo adds that Phokas 'was seen to be fearsome in exploits both in battle-line formation and in combat'.¹⁷³⁷ This image does not accord with Nikephoros' general presentation in Leo the Deacon's narrative however. Like his brother Leo Phokas, Nikephoros is characterized as a general who uses his cunning and knowledge of military science to

¹⁷³⁴ φεύγειν τε γάρ ἐστιν ὅτε χρή μὴδὲν αἰσχυρόμενον εἰ τοῦτο διδοίη καιρός, καὶ αὐτὸ ἀνυπόστατα διώκειν, πρὸς τὴν χρεῖαν ἐκάτερον· ἔνθα τε ἐπινοία μᾶλλον ἢ χειρὶ κατορθοῦν φαίνοιτο, παραιτεῖσθαι τὸ τοῖς ὅλοις διακινδυνεύειν (ibid: 168.22-169.10; trans. 129-130).

¹⁷³⁵ Leo the Deacon: 10-11.

¹⁷³⁶ ...ἐκτόπως αἰεὶ ἀγωνιζόμενος πρὸ τῆς φάλαγγος, καὶ κίνδυνον τὸν ἐπιόντα ὑποδεχόμενος, καὶ κραταιῶς ἐκκρουόμενος (ibid: 29.22-30.2; trans. 82).

¹⁷³⁷ φοβερὸς ἀναδειχθεὶς ἐν τοῖς κατὰ τάξιν καὶ μάχας ἀνδραγαθήμασιν... (ibid: 44.3-7; trans. 94).

triumph over the enemy.¹⁷³⁸ After seeing an initial assault on Chandax fail with heavy casualties, Nikephoros elected to weaken the city by starving it of supplies, enabling him to strengthen his siege equipment over the winter months. Come the spring, he instructed sappers to undermine a section of the wall, allowing his troops to pour in and overwhelm the inhabitants.¹⁷³⁹ Wearing down the besieged enemy through blockades and raids, and undermining sections of the fortification, were key principles extolled in Byzantine siege handbooks of the tenth century.¹⁷⁴⁰ We witness Phokas employ similar tactics against Mopsuestia, Tarsos and Antioch.¹⁷⁴¹

Similar is the portrayal of John Tzimiskes in historiography. Leo the Deacon writes of Tzimiskes' heroic tendencies in formulaic terms, in a passage Rosemary Morris believes may have derived from an imperial panegyric:¹⁷⁴² 'He had a heroic [spirit], fearless and imperturbable, which displayed supernatural courage... he was not afraid of attacking single-handed an entire enemy contingent, and after killing large numbers he would return again with great speed unscathed to his close formation'.¹⁷⁴³ Again, however, there are no extant accounts of Tzimiskes performing such feats in actual battle situations. He is presented as a skilled and methodical general in the campaign he conducted against Sviatoslav in Bulgaria. The secure siege camp which Tzimiskes erected outside Dorostolon accords with the guidance of contemporary military

¹⁷³⁸ See Howard-Johnston (1972): 273-274

¹⁷³⁹ Leo the Deacon: 7-16, 24-27.

¹⁷⁴⁰ Heron of Byzantium, *Parangelmata Poliorketika*: §§13-14, with Sullivan (2000): 182-187; Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*: §65. See also McGeer (1995b); Sullivan (1997).

¹⁷⁴¹ Leo the Deacon: 52-53 (Mopsuestia), 58-60 (Tarsos), 72-74, 81-82 (Antioch).

¹⁷⁴² Morris (1994): 209.

¹⁷⁴³ ἡρωϊκὴ γὰρ αὐτῷ ἀνεκέκρατο, ἀδεῆς τε καὶ ἀκατάπληκτος, ἐν οὕτω βραχεῖ σώματι ἀποδεδειγμένη τόλμαν ὑπερφυῆ. ἐς ὅλην γὰρ ἀντίπαλον φάλαγγα οὐκ ἀπεδειλία μόνος ὀρμῶν, πλείστους τε κατακταίνων, ἀπτερότῳ τάχει πρὸς τὸν οἰκεῖον αὐθις συνασπισμὸν διανέκαμπτε, κακῶν ἀπαθής (Leo the Deacon: 96.23-97.4; trans. 146).

manuals.¹⁷⁴⁴ Prior to the campaign, he had dispatched bilingual spies dressed in ‘Scythian’ clothing to the lands of the enemy, so that they could communicate enemy plans to the emperor.¹⁷⁴⁵ Tzimiskes’ meticulous preparations ensured that the Byzantine expeditionary force was well-supplied by the fleet, bringing grain, fodder and arms along the Danube.¹⁷⁴⁶

Tzimiskes also adhered to standard precepts in battle situations. A feigned retreat onto the wider plains of Dorostolon allowed for greater use of his effective heavy cavalry.¹⁷⁴⁷ At both battles of Dorostolon, as well as that at Preslav, Tzimiskes made the bold decision to commit his elite troops to the fray when the enemy looked to be in the ascendancy.¹⁷⁴⁸ He is portrayed as an active general, but never as a bloodthirsty warrior, as Anthony Kaldellis observes.¹⁷⁴⁹ On many occasions, Tzimiskes shouts

¹⁷⁴⁴ McGeer (1995a: 348-354) demonstrates that Tzimiskes’ siege camp at Dorostolon (described by Leo the Deacon: 142-143) corresponds to that outlined in Nikephoros Ouranos’ *Taktika* (§62.31-33) and other sources. Similar camp defences are described by Yahya ibn Said in relation to Romanos III’s Syrian campaign of 1030 - see Canard (1961): esp. 305-306. Tzimiskes clearly took great care in this regard. Leo (133) also reports that prior to advancing on Preslav, the emperor made camp on a secure hill with a river flowing past both sides, catering for defensive and living needs. Coincidentally, this corresponds to the ideal site on which to build a city – *De Re Strategika*: §11.3-9. The considerations were necessarily very similar.

¹⁷⁴⁵ Leo the Deacon: 108. This practice parallels advice in the near-contemporary *De Re Militari* (§18.22-33), where it is recommended that spies be sent among the Bulgarians, Pechenegs and Russians to find out events in their lands prior to an imperial expedition. For an eastern context, see the *De Velitatione* (§VII.2-3), which implores the general to send out merchants to make friends with border emirs, learn of the plans of the enemy and report back to the general. The Byzantines were also conscious of spies infiltrating their own camps, taking measures against such tactics: see Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*: §62.72-95; *De Re Militari*: §2.4-16. The *Vita Basilii* (§68.8-11) describes the Arabs of Syria sending a spy who dressed as a Roman and spoke the ‘Roman’ language in order to gain intelligence with a major naval expedition pending.

¹⁷⁴⁶ Leo the Deacon: 126-127. Skylitzes (295; trans. 281) notes similarly that Tzimiskes ‘gave careful attention to other preparations to ensure that the army did not go short of anything’. For the impressive logistical arrangements which fuelled imperial expeditionary forces during this period, see in general Haldon (1997a).

¹⁷⁴⁷ Skylitzes: 306-307. See Howard-Johnston (1972): 278-279.

¹⁷⁴⁸ McGeer (1995a: 318-319) notes that Tzimiskes’ decision to commit his elite reserves in these battles followed the advice of the *Praecepta Militaria* (§§II.28-37; II.63-66; IV.173-180).

¹⁷⁴⁹ Kaldellis (forthcoming). That said, I see no reason to conclude, as Kaldellis does, that Tzimiskes never actually ‘fought’ in battle. Tzimiskes played a prominent role as a frontier commander during the second half of the 950s, and Arabic sources attest to him fighting during battle. See *Byzance et les*

and rouses his men to further action, without getting directly involved.¹⁷⁵⁰ At Preslav he dismounts to lead his troops, but does not appear to fight alongside them.¹⁷⁵¹

Tzimiskes endeavours to bring liquids to his ailing troops at Dorostolon, but there is no mention of him getting his hands bloodied.¹⁷⁵² Near the conclusion of the second battle, Tzimiskes brandishes his spear and advances against the enemy, but cannot be seen to actively engage them in combat.¹⁷⁵³ In this display Tzimiskes strikes a successful balance in his generalship, calling to mind Plutarch's summation of Pyrrhus of Epirus:

While actively participating in the fight and vigorously repelling his assailants, he did not become confused in his thinking nor lose his presence of mind, but directed the battle as if he were surveying it from a distance, rushing here and there and bringing aid to those who seemed overpowered.¹⁷⁵⁴

This is a suitable comparison when we consider below that the Middle Byzantine ideal of generalship was most akin to that of the Hellenistic era.

Reckless and careless men typically court disaster in the *History* of Leo the Deacon, as is most evident with the indiscipline and demise of Nikephoros Pastilas at the siege

Arabes: II.1, 362-364, as well as Canard (1951): 778-781, 793-796; Bikhazi (1981): 779-781; Howard-Johnston (1983): 241-243; McGeer (2003): 123-134.

¹⁷⁵⁰ At the siege of Preslav twice (Leo the Deacon: 135, 137); and at the first Battle of Dorostolon (ibid: 141; Skylitzes: 299, 300).

¹⁷⁵¹ Skylitzes: 298.

¹⁷⁵² Ibid: 306. Nikephoros II Phokas' *Praecepta Militaria* (§II.11-16; trans. 23) recommends that the commander deploy close to a source of water 'lest he bring ruin on the army'. At the Battle of Levounion in 1091, Alexios Komnenos is said to have ordered peasants to bring up water to his troops, toiling under the midday sun (Anna Komnene: VIII.5.8).

¹⁷⁵³ Leo the Deacon: 153.

¹⁷⁵⁴ μάλιστα δὲ ὅτι τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τὸ σῶμα παρέχων τῷ ἀγῶνι καὶ τοὺς καθ' αὐτὸν ἀμυνόμενος ἐρρωμένως οὐ συνεχεῖτο τὸν λογισμὸν οὐδὲ τοῦ φρονεῖν ἐξέπιπτεν, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἔξωθεν ἐφορῶν διεκυβέρνα τὸν πόλεμον, αὐτὸς μεταθέων ἑκασταχόσε καὶ παραβοηθῶν τοῖς ἐκβιάζεσθαι δοκοῦσιν (Plutarch, *Pyrrhus*: XVI.7-8; trans. 397).

of Chandax. Prior to this episode, Nikephoros Phokas had instructed Pastilas to be ‘vigilant and sober’, and thereafter criticized his negligence in a speech to his officers.¹⁷⁵⁵ Leo constructed his account to emphasize two particular elements: the unerring wisdom of the commander, and the required qualities of the Roman soldier, which most certainly did not include a propensity towards indulgence and carelessness.¹⁷⁵⁶ Nikephoros Phokas’ bastard nephew, Manuel, led a Sicilian expedition to ruin, principally because he was ‘a hot-headed and self-willed man, likely to yield to thoughtless impulse’.¹⁷⁵⁷ John Tzimiskes’ cousin, John Kourkouas, rode out foolishly to meet a Russian force whilst drunk and was brutally slain.¹⁷⁵⁸ The Emperor Basil II’s Bulgarian campaign was fuelled by ‘greater anger than was proper or provident’, and ended in disaster due to logistical failings and negligence.¹⁷⁵⁹ The Byzantine army, where successful, is marked by its superior discipline and order;¹⁷⁶⁰ only when such basic principals are neglected do they come unstuck. Leo the Deacon was firmly of the belief that intelligence, discipline, and the measured application of military theory were essential to a commander’s success.

¹⁷⁵⁵ See above, 53-54. Similar sentiments are expressed by Nikephoros later in the text, in an address to his troops upon being proclaimed emperor: ‘I advise all of you...not to turn to indolence and luxury, but to be vigilant and sober and ready to meet in a well-prepared manner whatever may occur’ (Leo the Deacon: 42.15-19; trans. 92-93).

¹⁷⁵⁶ Hoffmann (2007): 113-116.

¹⁷⁵⁷ ἄνδρα θερμουργὸν καὶ ἀθέκαστον, καὶ ἀπερισκέπτῳ φορᾷ εἶκοντα (Leo the Deacon: 66.2-5; trans. 115-116). Skylitzes (267) similarly condemns Manuel’s generalship. For discussion of the disastrous campaign, see Gay (1904): II, 290-291.

¹⁷⁵⁸ See above, 63-68.

¹⁷⁵⁹ τῷ τοι καὶ θερμότερον ἤπερ ἔδει μᾶλλον κινηθεῖς ἢ προμηθέστερον (Leo the Deacon: 171.6-7; trans. 213).

¹⁷⁶⁰ Examples at *ibid*: 8.5-6, 14.8-9, 15.17-18, 22.18, 24.16-17, 59.13-14, 109.14-15, 110.11-12, 133.6, 140-141, 153.17. Leo’s references to Phokas and Tzimiskes’ training of their troops should be seen as part of this – 16 (on Crete); 36 (in Cappadocia); 50-51 (of Phokas’ household); 111, 127 (Tzimiskes preparing for the Bulgarian campaign). Nikephoros II Phokas famously chastising a soldier who dropped his shield on the march typifies the military code of Leo the Deacon’s *History* (57-58). By contrast, the ‘rash and arrogant’ (θρασεῖς καὶ ἀγέρωχοι) men of Tarsos are scolded for being ‘overconfident’ (θαῤῥαλεώτεροι τοῦ μετρίου) in pouring out of their strongly-fortified town to engage the Byzantines in pitched battle (58.20-59.2).

*The General as Warrior and Commander in Greco-Roman Culture and
Historiography*

The problem of counterbalancing reckless heroism with the principles of military theory was a perennial one in Greco-Roman literature and martial culture. The tension is first evident in Classical Greece, where the new school of military theorists who advocated military trickery clashed with hoplites who viewed guile with contempt.¹⁷⁶¹ Both of these ideals stemmed from Homer: the ‘Odysseus’ mantra favouring cunning and prudence, and the ‘Achilles’ philosophy advocating physical force and open battle.¹⁷⁶² In the Hellenistic world, the tension is more pronounced, as rulers were judged by their martial prowess and commanders expected to fight in battle.¹⁷⁶³ Homeric models compelled generals to fight and command in the field, but this was difficult to reconcile in reality.¹⁷⁶⁴ In any case, historians of the period afforded greater attention to the individual deeds of the commander, reflecting a heightened interest in his personal performance in battle.¹⁷⁶⁵ The cause of these developments was Alexander the Great, influenced in his bold behaviour by Homeric values;¹⁷⁶⁶ his desire to best enemy leaders in combat reignited the general interest in Homeric-style monomachy.¹⁷⁶⁷ Yet Hellenistic generals also wished to be good commanders, which meant following the cautious approach of contemporary military

¹⁷⁶¹ Lendon (2005): 78-90. Wheeler (1991) observes that the hoplite general showed an occasional tendency to personally participate in combat, but never to the same degree as the Homeric warrior leader.

¹⁷⁶² See Edwards (1985).

¹⁷⁶³ N. M. Austin (1986).

¹⁷⁶⁴ Lendon (2005): 143-152; Beston (2000).

¹⁷⁶⁵ Beston (2000).

¹⁷⁶⁶ See Lendon (2005): esp. 129-130, 357 n.31. For the influence of Homer on Alexander and also on general Macedonian and Hellenistic values, see Cohen (1995); Alcock (1997).

¹⁷⁶⁷ Lendon (2005): 136-138. Oakley (1985) shows that single combat reappears in Hellenistic narratives after all but vanishing during the Classical Greek period; see Wheeler (2007: 194-203) for single combat in Ancient Greek warfare. For examples of single combat in Hellenistic literature, see Hornblower (1981): 194-196.

theory.¹⁷⁶⁸ Polybius, though generally critical of commanders who endangered their lives in combat, could not hide his admiration for select individuals who embraced such risks, not least his beloved subject, Scipio Aemilianus.¹⁷⁶⁹ Indeed, monomachy has been seen as a more prominent aspect of Roman military culture than that of the Hellenistic powers, as soldiers sought to demonstrate their *virtus* (martial courage).¹⁷⁷⁰ Once more, however, this heroic ethos clashed with the predilection for *disciplina* in military theory, a strain particularly evident in Julius Caesar's *Commentaries*.¹⁷⁷¹ By the fourth century A.D., heroic leadership was common practice, with the daring exploits of Julian, striving to emulate Alexander and Scipio, symptomatic of the trend.¹⁷⁷²

Discipline and order return to the fold in the Early Byzantine period, as the *Wars* of Procopius demonstrate. Conor Campbell Whately considers the *Gothic Wars* to represent the most Homeric part of Procopius' history, with the *Persian Wars* otherwise more concerned with tactics and cohesion in battle.¹⁷⁷³ Consequently, it is in the narrative of the conflict in Italy we find heroic displays and the most famous instance of single combat by challenge in the *Wars*.¹⁷⁷⁴ Yet while *andreia* has a place, it is not something that Procopius favours in a general. During one engagement with the Goths, Belisarius took it upon himself to rush the enemy, and would have been killed had his guard not intervened. Procopius indicates he did not approve of his

¹⁷⁶⁸ See Onasander: §§XXXII; XXXIII; Polyainos: 8.1.1, where the general is advised to refrain from fighting.

¹⁷⁶⁹ E.g., Polybius: XXXV.5.1-2. See in general Eckstein (1995): 28-55.

¹⁷⁷⁰ Oakley (1985); Wiedemann (1996); Glück (1964).

¹⁷⁷¹ Lendon (1999).

¹⁷⁷² Idem (2005): 290-309. Also above, 203-204.

¹⁷⁷³ Whately (2009): 162-160. Whately later suggests (340) that this was a conscious decision of Procopius based on various similarities and connections with the *Iliad*.

¹⁷⁷⁴ For discussion see Whately (2009): 156-157, 162-169. Lendon (2005: 385 n.32) considers some of these heroic displays to represent single combats, though Whately (2009: 162-165) classifies them more precisely.

master's behaviour. 'Belisarius, though he was safe before, would no longer keep the general's post, but began to fight in the front ranks like a soldier; and consequently the cause of the Romans was thrown into great danger'.¹⁷⁷⁵ Since instances involving other generals carelessly entering the fray often result in death, Whately concludes that Procopius was not a proponent of this tactic, and listed such examples only to persuade his readers that such urgings were to be suppressed.¹⁷⁷⁶ In the main, Belisarius adheres to military theory and the Odyssean model of generalship, setting him apart from his temperamental Gothic counterparts who tend to adopt the Achilles ethos.¹⁷⁷⁷ In a speech to his fellow officers, Belisarius asserts that 'stupid daring leads to destruction, but discreet hesitation is well adapted always to save those who adopt such a course'.¹⁷⁷⁸ This is the overriding military philosophy which Procopius sought to convey.¹⁷⁷⁹

The campaigns of Heraclius against the Persians inspired heroic commemorative accounts at court, though one commentator seems to have opposed the officially-propagated image of a warrior emperor. We have mentioned the duel between Heraclius and the Persian general Rhazates, an incident first recorded in Byzantine literature c.800 but undoubtedly attributable to an earlier 'panegyric official

¹⁷⁷⁵ τότε βελισάριος, καίπερ ἀσφαλῆς τὰ πρότερα ὄν, οὐκέτι τοῦ στρατηγοῦ τὴν τάξιν ἐφύλασσε, ἀλλ' ἐν τοῖς πρώτοις ἄτε στρατιώτης ἐμάχετο· καὶ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τὰ Ῥωμαίων πράγματα ζυνέβη ἐς κίνδυνον πολλὸν ἐκπεπτοκέναι, ἐπεὶ ζύμπασα ἢ τοῦ πολέμου ῥοπή ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἔκειτο (Procopius, *Wars*: V.18.4-15; trans. 171).

¹⁷⁷⁶ Whately (2009): 294-297.

¹⁷⁷⁷ Ibid: 232-239, 297-308.

¹⁷⁷⁸ μὴ τοῖνυν ἀλογίστω σπουδῇ χρώμενοι ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς ἐσκυλευκότες φαινόμεθα, μηδὲ τῷ φιλονείκῳ τὰ Ῥωμαίων πράγματα βλάψωμεν. τόλμα μὲν γὰρ ἀμαθῆς ἐς ὄλεθρον φέρει, μέλλησις δὲ σώφρων ἐς τὸ σῶζειν αἰεὶ τοὺς αὐτῇ χρωμένους ἰκανῶς πέφυκεν (Procopius, *Wars*: II.19.10; trans. 421).

¹⁷⁷⁹ For similar conclusions see Kaegi (1990): esp. 67-68, 74-75, 83-84: 'Procopius' remarks about generalship and wars were not a turning-point in Byzantine military thought, but probably reinforced existing trends, as a reading of extant strategic and tactical treatises will confirm, in favour of caution and prudence, avoidance, whenever possible of risks of massed combat in battle, and a preference for delay and dissimulation'.

tradition'.¹⁷⁸⁰ Evidence of this may be found in the mid-seventh century Frankish *Chronicle of Fredegar*, which includes a report of Heraclius' single combat that can only have originated in tales disseminated by the imperial court.¹⁷⁸¹ According to this source, Heraclius requested the Persian ruler Khusro II fight him, only for Khusro to send one of his generals to fight in his place, a nameless 'patrician' who was beheaded by Heraclius.¹⁷⁸² The account of Theophanes is more succinct; it is said that Heraclius 'met the commander of the Persians, and, by God's might and the help of the Theotokos, threw him down'.¹⁷⁸³ The Patriarch Nikephoros relates that Heraclius took up Rhazates' open challenge to a duel, and rode forth against him. Rhazates fired off two arrows which grazed the emperor, but was wounded by one of Heraclius' bodyguards before the emperor himself speared the fallen Rhazates and cut off his

¹⁷⁸⁰ Kaegi (2003): 167. For discussion of the duel see also Trombley (2002): 246-247.

¹⁷⁸¹ See above, 169-170. In this account, Heraclius deceives his opponent, stating: 'Since we have agreed to single combat, why are those other warriors following behind you?' As the general turned his head, Heraclius quickly decapitated his opponent. The episode is strikingly similar to the duel between the Athenian Melanthus and the Boeotian Xanthus, where Melanthus remarked: 'You act unfairly to come two against one', only to drive a spear through Xanthus when he turned his head to see who was behind him (Polyainos: 1.19; trans. I, 39). The first extant recording of this legendary contest is found in the *Scholia* on Aristophanes' *Archanians*, though it is its presence in the *Strategika* of Polyainos which is more interesting, given our discussion of Byzantine anecdotes of trickery being potentially modelled on tales from the *strategemata*. The tale of Heraclius' feat as presented here represents a rare fusion of heroism and trickery.

¹⁷⁸² Egređiens cum exercito Aeraclius obuiam, legatis discurrentibus Aeraclius imperatorem Persarum nomine Cosdroe petit, ut hii duo imperatores singulare certamine coniungerent, suspensa procul uterque exercitus multitudinem; et cuius uicturia prestabatur ab Altissimo, imperium huius qui uincebatur et populum inlesum receperit. Imperatur Persarum huius conuenientiae se egressurum ad priliu singulare certamen spondedit. Aeraclius imperatur arma sumens, telam priliae et falange a suis postergum preparatam relinquens, singulare certamen ut nouos Dauit procedit ad bellum. Imperator Persarum Cosdroes patricium quidam ex suis quem fortissemum in prelio cernere potuerat huius conuenientiae ad instar pro se contra Aeraglio priliandum direxit. Cumque uterque cum aequetis hy duo congressione priliae in inuicem propinquarint, Aeraglius ait ad patricium, quem imperatore Persarum Cosdroe stemabat, dixit: 'Sic conuenerat, ut singulare certamen priliandum debuissimum confligere: quare postergum tuom alii secuntur?' Patricius ille girans capud conspocere qui postergum eius uenerit, Aeraglius aecum calcaneum uehementer uerguens, extrahens uix capud patriciae Persarum truncauit. Cosdroes imperatur cum Persis deuictus et confusus, terga uertens a suis propriis (*The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*: 52-53 trans.).

¹⁷⁸³ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἄρχοντι τῶν Περσῶν συνήνητησεν· καὶ τῆ τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμει καὶ τῆ βοηθείᾳ τῆς θεοτόκου τοῦτον κατέβαλεν (Theophanes: 318.16-23; trans. 449).

head.¹⁷⁸⁴ The accounts differ somewhat, but the shared element of Heraclius slaying the Persian commander must have originated in contemporary bulletins and official panegyric accounts. Mention of Heraclius as a ‘second David’ in the *Chronicle of Fredegar* is particularly significant, as is the identification of his opponent as ‘another Goliath’ in the mid-eighth century Iberian *Chronica Muzarabica*.¹⁷⁸⁵ Heraclius’ reign almost certainly saw the production of the David Plates, which famously depict the conflict between David and Goliath. Steven Wander proposed that the plates were commissioned in the aftermath of Heraclius’ victory over Persia and commemorated in particular his personal combat with Rhazates.¹⁷⁸⁶ This would represent one of the first notable instances of the Christianization of monomachy, the fusion of Biblical motifs with traditional epic heroic literature.¹⁷⁸⁷ Furthermore, the conflict with Persia was one of the first Byzantine conflicts to be shrouded in overtones of ‘holy war’.¹⁷⁸⁸ Visual and literary depictions of Heraclius’ duel with Rhazates wished to draw

¹⁷⁸⁴ Patriarch Nikephoros, *Short History*: §14.

¹⁷⁸⁵ Sed Eraclius exercitu adunato cum omni manu ferrea Persidam proficiscitur insequendo. Tunc Cosdro tali certionatus nuntio cum cuncto Persarum collegio obuius extitit resistendo. Denique ubi Eraclius cum Cosdro utriusque frementes uno se applicant pago, hoc pari definiunt uerbo, ut ad singulare certamen electi ex utroque exercitu belligeri deueniant duo, ut in ipsos experiant presagando quicquid in eis prospexerint discernendo, et hoc sub diu definiunt. Quorum belligerum animo uel consilio statuunt proprio, ut quidquid, ut diximus, prouentus fortune per eorum ostenderit gladios, hoc redundet in socios, qualiter ex ipsorum omnino tenerent auspicio ut regalia sine cunctatione uictori ilico mitterent uicissim colla sub iugo. Sed Cosdro more Philistinorum auctior spurium quendam, tanquam alterum Goliath, educit in prelio. Territi omnes Eraclii bellatores pedem subtrahunt retro. Tunc Eraclius de Domini confidens auxilio super eum descendens uno hostem perimit iaculo (*Corpus Scriptorum Muzarabicorum*: I, 17).

¹⁷⁸⁶ Wander (1973); idem (1975). For a similar view, see Spain Alexander (1977). For alternative interpretations, see Mary Whitby (1994), 212-215, 218-219; and Trilling (1978), who favours an earlier dating. Ruth Leader (2000: 407-415) finds problems with such historical readings of the David Plates.

¹⁷⁸⁷ For Biblical single combat see De Vaux (1972).

¹⁷⁸⁸ See above, 77-79.

parallels with the Biblical encounter between David and Goliath, at a time when the king of Israel emerged as a preferred model for Byzantine emperors.¹⁷⁸⁹

The image of Heraclius as a warrior king was not universally shared however. For George of Pisidia, Heraclius was like David, but only in the sense that he too was a saviour of his people.¹⁷⁹⁰ While there is a suggestion that some of the more action-packed parts of George's *Heraclias* are now lost,¹⁷⁹¹ it remains the case that the personal combat of Heraclius is played down by Theophanes, who is generally considered to have drawn upon an 'official history' of Heraclius' campaign produced by George of Pisidia. Mary Whitby has observed that this is the only notable individual feat of combat attributed to Heraclius, so perhaps we should not overstate the emphasis on Heraclius' heroics in the works of George of Pisidia.¹⁷⁹² In contrast to lost contemporary bulletins, which propagated the notion that Heraclius was a heroic warrior ruler, George seems more concerned to show Heraclius as a general who commanded his men with skill and precision.¹⁷⁹³ His poems attest to Heraclius' preparations, as the emperor trained his troops through mock battles¹⁷⁹⁴ and familiarized himself with military formations.¹⁷⁹⁵ Walter Kaegi has argued that the *Strategikon* of Maurice was among the material consulted by propagandists working on official accounts of Heraclius' wars, noting that stratagems and tactics employed

¹⁷⁸⁹ For Davidic kingship as a model in Byzantium, see Dvornik (1966), II: 287-288. *Synkrisis* with David intensified from the reign of Basil I – see Maguire (1983): 88-103; Magdalino (1987): 55-58; Kalavrezou (1989): 377-396; Brubaker (1999): 185-193.

¹⁷⁹⁰ Mary Whitby (1994): 212-215, 218-219. In the *Heraclias*, Heraclius is likened to other Biblical figures also, including Noah, Moses and Daniel (Frendo 1986).

¹⁷⁹¹ Pertusi (1961): 31; Wander (1975): 346.

¹⁷⁹² Mary Whitby (1994): 204-205 & n.41. Whitby concedes however that Heraclius' personal feats may have received more prominence in George's 'official history' of Heraclius' campaigns.

¹⁷⁹³ For the cultivation of this image, see idem (1998): 257-258.

¹⁷⁹⁴ George of Pisidia: *Exp. Pers.*, §II.38, 54, 56, 76-205; Theophanes: 303. For discussion of this particular aspect of Heraclius' training procedures, see Rance (2000): 223-238. Rance argues that George developed this description as he had little else of dramatic note to discuss in relation to this campaign, in which Heraclius achieved relatively little.

¹⁷⁹⁵ George of Pisidia: *Heraclias*, §II.118-121, 134-142.

by Heraclius in the works of George of Pisidia and Theophanes echo precepts of the manual.¹⁷⁹⁶ George was no soldier, so this was perhaps as much a result of his own reading as audience expectations. Like many commentators, George favoured the established motif of the general as commander, but could not deny the heroic valour of his subject.

¹⁷⁹⁶ Kaegi (2003): 115-118, 129-130, 161-168.

Conclusion

The Middle Byzantine perception of the role of the general did not differ substantially from that of the Early Byzantine period, though the origins of both lie in the Hellenistic vision of command, which perceived the commander as ‘arrayer, trickster and fighter, all at the same time’.¹⁷⁹⁷ Anna Komnene’s summation of the qualities of her father and his rival Robert Guiscard corroborate this: ‘Both leaders were prepared for all eventualities, able to comprehend at a glance every detail, acquainted with all the ruses of war; each was thoroughly familiar with siege tactics, the laying of ambushes, fighting in line of battle; in hand-to-hand combat bold and valiant’.¹⁷⁹⁸ This expectation is attributable, in large part, to the consistency of Greco-Roman military theory, with Hellenistic commentators on warfare providing the basis for the Byzantine notion of the art of war.¹⁷⁹⁹ The influence of Hellenistic culture during the Middle period further extended to historiography, and in this respect it is significant that problems in the presentation of the subject’s military abilities persisted. Bravado, as in the Hellenistic era, was fuelled by a desire to emulate the heroic deeds of Homeric epic. While some commanders risked their lives in battle, others, such as Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes, adhered more faithfully to the prescribed role of the general.

The motif of the commander as an active participant in battle appears particularly prominent in official accounts circulated in the immediate aftermath of a campaign.

Dimiter Angelov observed in relation to panegyrics of the Late period that the ideal

¹⁷⁹⁷ Lendon (2005): 303-304.

¹⁷⁹⁸ ἦσαν γὰρ ἅμω πάντα προῖδειν καὶ συνιδεῖν ἱκανοὶ καὶ πολεμικῶν τεχνασμάτων οὐδένος ἀδαεῖς, ἀλλὰ πάσαις μὲν τειχομαχίαις, πάσαις δὲ λοχίσεσι καὶ ταῖς ἐκ παρατάξεως ἀγωνίαις ἐθάδες, τὰς δὲ διὰ χειρὸς πράξεις δραστικοὶ καὶ γενναῖοι καὶ ἐχθροὶ πάντων τῶν ὑπ’ οὐρανὸν ἡγεμόνων γνώμη καὶ ἀνδρεία κατάλληλοι (Anna Komnene: V.1.3.33-37; trans. 129).

¹⁷⁹⁹ Dain (1967).

emperor was both a formidable warrior and an expert general, and such is true of earlier encomia.¹⁸⁰⁰ The official line from the courts of Heraclius and later Manuel Komnenos, propagated by bulletins and panegyric, drew attention to the fighting prowess of the rulers by detailing single combats, underlining the significance attached to the image of the warrior emperor. This is true also of the contemporary record of the victory won by Theodore Laskaris of Nicaea at the Battle of Antioch-on-the-Maeander in 1211. An oration Niketas Choniates composed to commemorate the occasion praises Laskaris' generalship (στρατηγία),¹⁸⁰¹ but the most striking aspect of his account discusses the moment Theodore personally threw down his counterpart, Sultan Kaykhusraw of Rum. Theodore was stricken but able to recover through the assistance of Christ and, once more grabbing his shield and arms, heroically attacked the mounted Kaykhusraw. Striking the legs of the horse, Theodore then drove a lance through the sultan before removing Kaykhusraw's head.¹⁸⁰² Like Heraclius and Manuel, Theodore is compared to David, who similarly slayed and decapitated his enemy in single combat.¹⁸⁰³ The immediacy of the oration confirms that Laskaris' heroics must have been advertised in bulletins issued by the court. We know from a letter of the Latin emperor of Constantinople, Henry, that such victory proclamations were dispatched to former Byzantine lands, though he was only aware that the sultan had perished.¹⁸⁰⁴ Michael Choniates, dwelling on the island of Keos, knew of Theodore's triumph; in a congratulatory letter, Michael likened the emperor to

¹⁸⁰⁰ Angelov (2007): 79, 82-83.

¹⁸⁰¹ Niketas Choniates, *Orations and Letters*: 170.17-171.2. For context and discussion, see van Dieten (1971): 161-162.

¹⁸⁰² Ibid: 171.22-172.18.

¹⁸⁰³ ἠγωνίσαστο καὶ Δαυίδ, ἀλλὰ καθ' ἐνὸς βαρβάρου τοῦ Γολιᾶθ, καὶ τούτῳ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀφελόμενος ἐν μυριάσιν ἀνδρίσασθαι ταῖς χορευτρίαις νεάνισιν ἤδετο... (ibid: 171.11-16).

¹⁸⁰⁴ 'Qua de causa Lascarus acrior et elatior factus misit lit[te]ras ad omnes Grecorum provincias, continentes honorem et lucrum sue victoriae...' (*Letter of Emperor Henry of Constantinople, January 1212*: ll.83-96).

Heraclius and Basil II, expressing amazement that ‘you slew the enemy by your own hand’ before removing the sultan’s head.¹⁸⁰⁵ Even when George Akropolites composed his history in the third quarter of the thirteenth century, Laskaris’ feat remained well-known. Akropolites discloses that the sultan struck the emperor with his mace, corroborating Niketas Choniates’ revelation that Laskaris had to be revived by some divine force. Laskaris hacked at the horse’s legs, bringing down the sultan, at which point he was decapitated by an unknown hand.¹⁸⁰⁶ Ruth Macrides suspects that the broad similarities in the accounts of Akropolites and Niketas can be attributed to Akropolites utilizing one of the aforementioned victory newsletters.¹⁸⁰⁷

When historians came to consult such official material, many found the presentation problematic. Schooled in the theoretical conception of the commander, historians take issue with the rash conduct of their subject and favour instead wisdom and cunning generalship. Yet just as emperors and aristocrats were torn between the ideals of skilled general and heroic warrior, historians admired personal valour and recognized its place in war. Furthermore, they were obliged to include courageous displays in order to satisfy the interests of their audience and, in certain cases, to conform to the Homeric tone to which they aspired. As Whately determined that the values inherent in the battle scenes of Procopius reflect those of the audience as well

¹⁸⁰⁵ ὄθεν δοκῶ μοι καὶ χάριτας ὁμολογεῖν σοὶ τὴν ἀγίαν ἐκείνου ψυχὴν ὅτι πλείους τῶν τότε πεσόντων οὐ μόνον διὰ τῶν σῶν χειρῶν ἀντικατέστρωσας πολεμίους, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὴν τοῦ δυνάστου τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀπέκοψας (Michael Choniates: ep.179.18-30).

¹⁸⁰⁶ Akropolites: 14-17; trans. 131.

¹⁸⁰⁷ Macrides (2007): 36-38. Michael Choniates, the near-contemporary Theodore Skutariotes (456) and the fourteenth-century historian Nikephoros Gregoras (I, 20-21), while largely similar to Akropolites in their accounts of the battle, add that Theodore beheaded Kaykhusraw and planted his head on a spear. Alice Gardner (1912: 83 n.1) deemed the account of Akropolites preferable in this instance, though there is no discernible difficulty in reconciling them. Given that Persian chronicler Ibn Bibi notes that the sultan spared Laskaris only to be killed by a Frank later in the engagement, Günter Prinzing (1973: 428) proposes that the death of the sultan may have been exploited to Theodore’s advantage in Byzantine propaganda. See Savvides (1981): 91-122; idem (1996) for the various accounts of the battle and the political context.

as the author,¹⁸⁰⁸ one can make a similar observation of the historiography of the Middle Byzantine period. The depiction of the heroic warrior who takes pride in his wounds and does not retreat was a reflection of social trends as well as literary developments. ‘Heroic historiography’ and *Digenes Akrites* were products of the traditions and values of the military aristocracy. The process is succinctly described by John Haldon:

Elements of the military value-system of the frontier were reproduced in a metropolitan cultural context. For the values and the interest in warfare characteristic of the provincial military elite, with its emphasis on individual bravery and heroism, personal honour and skill, was reflected in the accounts of their deeds written by the historians of the tenth and eleventh centuries... Individual combats, struggles between two heroes, challenges to resolve battles on a duel, are all motifs which reflect not only the reality of the warfare of the period along with the values of those who lead the imperial armies and the social milieu they represented, but also the evolution of a new attitude to the representation of warfare in the literature of this period, generated by the demands of the Byzantine social establishment as well as the preferred self-image of the soldiers themselves.¹⁸⁰⁹

The texts which initiated this change in historiographical trends have not hitherto been considered. The *Vita Basilii*, whilst describing campaigns undertaken by the Emperor Basil I, gives little thought to his personal military prowess, instead emphasizing more pacifist imperial virtues. Alexander Kazhdan observed ‘a clear contrast’ between the portrayals of the protagonists in the *Vita Basilii* and the *History* of Leo the Deacon,

¹⁸⁰⁸ Whately (2009): 341-343.

¹⁸⁰⁹ Haldon (1999): 244.

despite the texts being written only a few decades apart.¹⁸¹⁰ Furthermore, while the *Vita Basilii* presents a balanced appraisal of Basil's deeds in war and peace, Leo's *History* is dominated by military events. How are we to explain this development? Kazhdan attributes the shift to Nikephoros II Phokas and the ideals he brought to the throne, though Jean Claude-Cheyne has correctly argued that the aristocratic consciousness of military glory was already established by the late ninth century.¹⁸¹¹ The lost biography of John Kourkouas pre-dated Leo's *History* by at least thirty years, and while we may only speculate about its content, its eight books must have comprehensively covered Kourkouas' military activities. As a personal history of an aristocratic general, this may well have been the first work of its type. Its influences and models would have included semi-secular hagiography, heroic tales of the *akritai* and Homeric epic. The *Vita Basilii* may represent the first known work of secular biography in Byzantium, but the biography of Kourkouas appeared around the same time and, thus, the influence of the *Vita Basilii* cannot be assumed.

To return to the question of what transpired between the *Vita Basilii* and the *History* of Leo the Deacon to effect the changes, I propose that the answer lies in the appearance of Manuel's biography of Kourkouas, and other aristocratic promotional literature in the same vein, including the mooted *Chronicle of the Phokades*. When writing his history, Leo the Deacon was able to consult appropriate models in the numerous aristocratic texts circulating near the end of the first millennium. This chapter and the preceding one demonstrate that the probable content of the Phokas family chronicle and the encomiastic tales of Katakalon Kekaumenos, Bardas Skleros and John Doukas preserved in extant historical works contain many traits synonymous

¹⁸¹⁰ Kazhdan & Constable (1982): 110-111; Kazhdan (2006): 139.

¹⁸¹¹ Cheynet (2006b): 9.

with heroic literature – textbook generalship, cunning stratagems, respect for a rival, evidence of an aristocratic warrior code, monomachy, heroic deeds, and the importance attached to wounds. The values of the military aristocracy first exhibited in their promotional literature inevitably pervaded historiography once representatives of the military officer class gained the throne. By the second half of the tenth century, an interest in heroic narratives replete with Homeric-style combat and ingenious stratagems had been ignited, and it is suggested here that the emergence of aristocratic promotional literature marked the birth of the ‘heroic historiography’ which would generally characterize Byzantine historical writing in the following centuries.

CONCLUSION

Battle scenes and war narratives were part of the Byzantine consciousness, a fixture of their education and reading. Writing an *ekphrasis* of battle formed part of the rhetorical exercises of the *progymnasmata*, and associated handbooks encouraged writers to look to set-pieces described by Homer and Thucydides for inspiration. Reading of these, along with other major works of Antiquity, inevitably influenced how a historian approached the matter of writing about warfare. By their very nature therefore descriptions of battle in historiography are derivative, though we should not dismiss them as formulaic because of this. *Mimesis* might well involve the copying of descriptive passages verbatim, though this was typically done with enough care to avoid anachronisms. The intertextual relationship could be more complex. Historians could imitate a predecessor's style of battle description, or adapt certain episodes to current circumstances. We have shown that Leo the Deacon and John Kinnamos drew upon Procopius and Agathias in order to condemn particular individuals at the expense of their imperial subject. Perhaps their utilization of older models was not as subtle or brilliant as Procopius', but the templates employed satisfied their historical programme.

Another set of texts which shaped expectations for war were the military handbooks known as *taktika*. Reading of military manuals was the most appropriate means for a writer with no experience of war to familiarize themselves with the subject. The notion becomes all the more compelling when a historian demonstrates considerable technical knowledge. That most historians of the Middle period were versed in military theory is particularly evident in their conception of the role of the general in battle. Though heroic displays were mentioned, even the most partisan of historians

were critical of such conduct, preferring their chief subject to command rather than risk his life fighting, a vision of generalship garnered from military theory.

Widespread knowledge of the handbooks also offered writers a framework in which to present their subject, considering the textbook application of military principals to be the best method of demonstrating one's ability as a commander.

Historians without the benefit of autopsy – as was the case in most instances - were forced to consult oral and written sources detailing campaigns and battles. The task of identifying these is complicated by the tradition of historians not naming their sources for specific events, as well as by their standard claims to have interviewed eyewitnesses, often a rhetorical device to gain greater credence and one which is not always validated by further study. Following the initiative of other scholars, it is suggested that Middle Byzantine historians made greater use of written material than oral informants. In the case of military affairs, this material can be divided into three groups. The first category is comprised of items which disclose news about military events - correspondence and campaign bulletins. The second category consists of 'official' accounts – encomia and campaign narratives. The final group is what I have termed 'aristocratic promotional literature': (auto)biographical compositions favourable to a particular general or family.

The admonitions against *Quellenforschung* are valid, if somewhat stubborn and unrealistic. Nevertheless, one cannot simply assert the use of a certain source without making an attempt to understand that type of material. We possess only one obvious example of a campaign dispatch or bulletin, but there are references in historical works, letters, and exhortations which confirm the regular transmission of such items and give some indication as to style and content. The close relationship between

domestic bulletins and letters sent abroad can also shed light on this type of information, and is especially important to consider given that copies of correspondence may have been preserved in the archives. Indeed, it is imperative that we acknowledge the practicalities of the process, exploring why dispatches were stored in the archives, and how feasible access would have been for historians. Having undertaken this research, we can build a case for the encomiasts and historians of the reigns of John II and Manuel I Komnenos sharing bulletins as a common source, or at least following the same official line propagated by such documents.

This line of investigation is also required for aristocratic promotional literature. References in texts and documents confirm the existence of such works, while Jonathan Shepard, Catherine Holmes and Leonora Neville have constructed convincing arguments for personal histories of key personalities of the tenth and eleventh centuries. Previously considered in isolation, there is merit in studying aristocratic literature as a collective body, examining literary precedents and developments as well as other influences which led to their appearance in the mid-tenth century. These works should not be classified under a separate 'biographical' genre, but thought of as little different to surviving histories prominently structured around one or more persons.

The historian is perhaps at risk of being forgotten amidst the discussion of underlying sources. Writers do occasionally describe personal experiences in war, and study of Attaleiates' narrative of the Manzikert campaign offers insight into how external factors might influence such an account, as well as the general limitations of the eyewitness in battle. In respect of the written material they employed, historians could be expected to impart their own brand of rhetoric, embellishing accounts of

warfare with invented speeches, *mimesis*, and a variety of descriptive techniques. These additions are almost impossible to pinpoint without the original source. We can, however, make more assured observations about how historians manipulated their material in accordance with their historical programme. It is argued that John Kinnamos took a narrative of the disastrous Italian expedition of 1155-56 favourable to John Doukas and, through the use of literary devices, ensured the account ultimately undermined Doukas and supported the Emperor Manuel Komnenos. By contrast, Niketas Choniates subverted the official image of Manuel in his account of the Battle of Myriokephalon, enabling him to make indirect criticism of the emperor.

With a better understanding of written military sources, and the manner in which they were utilized by Middle Byzantine historians, we may begin to offer thoughts about content. While it is not viable to reconstruct entire lost sources, one may still attempt to determine how these sources presented individual soldiers, in order to acquire a notion of the ideology of war they promoted. Commanders might be presented as expert practitioners of military theory to demonstrate their brilliance, or perhaps even as ingenious masters of the ruse. The two strands of generalship were both encouraged by the military handbooks, and the latter in particular owed much to the Byzantine tradition of reading collections of stratagems, brief anecdotes highlighting military cunning. If ever we were to define a uniquely Byzantine style of war writing, it would be the 'stratagem' piece, a mode which seemingly developed through aristocratic promotional literature and which, as a consequence, features prominently in the second half of Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historion*.

The promotional literature of the military aristocracy inevitably exhibited their ideals. Reading of Homer and ancient literature, and the desire to emulate great soldiers,

inspired a warrior mentality unknown for centuries in Byzantium. According to this martial culture, formidable enemies were to be admired, monomachy was the ultimate test of prowess, death in battle was a glorious end, and, failing that, wounds might be worn as a badge of honour. This expectation of the aristocratic nobleman rested uneasily alongside that of the cunning and methodical general, an inheritance of the Achilles and Odysseus conflict of generalship styles which pervaded Hellenistic historiography. The Middle Byzantine general, like his Hellenistic counterpart, was expected to be arrayer, trickster and warrior, all at once. If the accounts of Bardas Skleros and Katakalon Kekaumenos fighting the enemy at close quarters in one battle and then outwitting him in another are any indication, then the promotional literature of the aristocracy did not see a conflict in presenting its subject in this fashion.

Rather, it was historians who came to consult these works, lacking practical experience and perhaps the appropriate understanding of warrior ideology, who drew attention to the contradiction, often preferring the general not to engage in combat, in accordance with military theory.

Prior to the second half of the tenth century, there had been little discernible interest in military skill and heroism in historiography since the time of Heraclius. His duel with a Persian general was a feature of campaign accounts, and one has to wait until the twelfth century and the reign of Manuel Komnenos for a similar focus on heroic prowess in bulletins and derivative material. Nevertheless, there are enough references in the *History* of Leo the Deacon and the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene to suggest that Manuel was not the first emperor of the Middle period to be presented as a warrior in panegyric. It is likely however that it was not Basil I; neither the *Vita Basilii* nor the encomium composed by Leo VI attribute great fighting qualities to this ruler. The addition of military prowess as an imperial virtue with the accession of

Nikephoros II Phokas may account for this, but developments in historiography are more complex. While the *Vita Basilii* continued the pattern of recent centuries in providing overviews of campaigns and battles, the *History* of Leo the Deacon, and historical works following it (Psellos' *Chronographia* notwithstanding), describe engagements in detail reminiscent of Homeric epic. The preponderance of heroic values was partly an inheritance of historiography from Antiquity, though the martial ideology was also very much a reflection of the mentality of the Middle Byzantine military aristocracy. While many credit Leo the Deacon as the innovator of such 'heroic historiography', it is argued here that it was aristocratic promotional literature, which appeared several decades before Leo's *History*, that revived this mode of war writing and provided models for imperial historians also writing about heroic scions of great families.

Kate McLoughlin considers 'the study of war writing [to be] a source of enhanced literary insight'.¹⁸¹² This is undoubtedly true in relation to Byzantine historiography, which followed a long Greco-Roman tradition of fixation with war. Close examination of accounts of battle in these historical works can tell us much about the writer, including his or her reading and influences, their personal experiences, and the sources they may have employed. The approach advocated by Ted Lendon and Conor Campbell Whately affirms that literary accounts of battle provide insight into general culture, as the descriptions reflect the social milieu in which they appeared. Catherine Hanley's observation that 'the knight at war and the knight in [Old French] literature are inextricably linked' may just as easily be applied to Byzantium, with the knight substituted for the aristocratic general.¹⁸¹³ The rise of the military class in the tenth

¹⁸¹² McLaughlin (2009): 1.

¹⁸¹³ Hanley (2003): 2.

century led to the creation of a body of literature which embodied their martial ideology; imperial historiography would soon follow suit.

Appendix I. The Portrayal of Subordinates in the *Alexiad*: The Example of John

Doukas

The difficulties of accepting Anna's statement about being informed by her uncles is highlighted by the portrayal of Alexios' brother-in-law, the *meγas doux* John Doukas.¹ When Doukas joins another of Alexios' relatives, Constantine Dalassenos, on a campaign against the Turkish emir Tzakhas, it is Dalassenos who is portrayed as the more vigorous and industrious commander, urging his superior Doukas to let him attack Tzakhas in spite of Doukas agreeing a ceasefire. In the event, it is Dalassenos who Anna refers to as ὁ νικητῆς, not Doukas.² Soon after in the *Alexiad*, Anna affords her father a considerable role in the capture of Mitylene on Lesbos. She writes that Alexios grew tired and frustrated by Doukas' inability to take the town. Having learned from a returning soldier that Doukas always attacked at dawn, Alexios gave orders for Doukas to wait until late afternoon to attack. By following the emperor's instructions, Doukas was eventually victorious.³ Thus Alexios, though not actively presiding over the siege, appears as the ultimate architect of the success.

Anna refers to Doukas sending a full account of his campaigns against Crete and Cyprus,⁴ and Paul Gautier thought it apparent that Anna was working not from memory but rather written or oral sources rich in historical, topographical, and prosopographical details.⁵ Yet there is no indication that Anna consulted an account overseen by Doukas. She is more concerned with the actions of the rebel Rhapsomates, with Anna noting that her judgments were based on 'what I heard about

¹ For the career of this individual see Frankopan (2002b).

² Anna Komnene: IX.1.

³ Ibid: IX.1.4-6.

⁴ τῶ αὐτοκράτορι τὰ συμπεσόντα ἅπαντα διὰ γραμμῶν δηλώσαντες (ibid: IX.2.3.79-80).

⁵ Gautier (1977): 217.

him'.⁶ Again, Doukas is forced to share the billing with a colleague, Manuel Boutoumites, who creates a bigger impression through his daring capture of the rebel.⁷ Anna concludes her account thus: 'As for Boutoumites, he returned to Doukas with Rhapsomates and the Immortals who had rebelled with him, and then made his way to Constantinople'.⁸ One would think that Boutoumites led the successful campaign, as Doukas is again marginalized.

Anna's ambiguous and muted descriptions of many of John Doukas' campaigns is curious given that he was a close relative and undoubtedly one of Alexios' most valued commanders between 1085 and 1100. Demetrios Polemis observed that the *Alexiad* is 'somewhat restrained' in its treatment of Doukas, as Anna refrains from giving him full credit for his achievements, and rarely compliments him. This judgment is borne out by close study of Anna's narrative of Doukas' military career. Furthermore, we are told little of his struggles with the Serbs whilst *doux* of Dyrrachion, suggesting that his involvement in other military actions may also have been overlooked;⁹ we cannot place him at all in the period from 1092 to 1097. Polemis proposes that Anna may have felt some resentment towards her uncle. Perhaps his career ended in the ignominy of rebellion,¹⁰ and Anna thought it unwise to mention given that it reflected rather poorly on her father. This conclusion compares favourably with Peter Frankopan's recent analysis of Anna's portrayal of the *kaisar* Nikephoros Melissenos. Frankopan determines that Anna deliberately played down Melissenos' role in military successes as part of an effort to craft a

⁶ ὡς ἔγωγε περὶ τούτου ἤκουον (Anna Komnene: IX.2.2.52-56).

⁷ Ibid: IX.2.3.

⁸ ὁ μέντοι Βουτουμίτης ἀναλαβόμενος τὸν Ῥαψομάτην καὶ τοὺς συναποστατήσαντας αὐτῷ Ἀθανάτους ἐπάνεισι πρὸς τὸν Δούκαν, καὶ οὕτως εἴσεισι πρὸς τὴν βασιλεύουσαν (ibid: IX.2.4.88-91; trans. 242).

⁹ See Frankopan (2002b): 75-90 for Doukas' activities during this period.

¹⁰ As suggested by Polemis (1968): 69 & n.13.

negative portrait of this individual, perhaps because Melissenos rebelled against his close friend Alexios, something Anna may have found too damaging to disclose.¹¹ In any case, it cannot be that sources on John Doukas' military career were lacking;¹² Frankopan, presumably on the basis of Anna's admission that she gained information from her uncles, even asserts that Doukas provided Anna 'with a substantial amount of the material which appears in the *Alexiad*'.¹³ Perhaps Anna utilized material provided by Doukas, but manipulated the information accordingly.

We cannot be certain if the minimal, negative or lukewarm portrayals of certain generals who served under Alexios are by Anna's own design or a consequence of her material. The successes of Gregory Taronites on the Black Sea coast in 1103, greatly extolled in Theophylact of Ohrid's letters to the general but mentioned only fleetingly in the *Alexiad*, could well have been marginalized and distorted so as to simplify Anna's depiction of the *doux* of Trebizond as a scheming rebel.¹⁴ By contrast, the sparse coverage of the campaigns of the *domestikos* of the west, Gregory Pakourianos, indicates that material was lacking, since Anna writes favourably of the general in the few instances he does feature.¹⁵ Such general discrepancies in Anna's portrayals suggests that she cannot have had detailed biographies of these generals, and thus

¹¹ Frankopan (2006): esp. 168-170, 183.

¹² In his own time, Doukas' deeds were heralded and widely-known. His Cretan expedition is mentioned in the *Vita of Saint Meletios the Younger*, written in 1141 (Nicholas of Methone, *The Vita of St. Meletios*: §27), while Theophylact of Ohrid sent a letter of congratulations to Doukas following the reconquest of the Aegean islands and the western seaboard of Asia Minor, wishing him further glory in his quest to reclaim Cyprus and Crete. The letter includes little real information on the campaign, but it is apparent that news of his success spread quickly, and that Doukas' contemporaries were in no real doubt as to who was the real architect of these victories (Theophylact of Ohrid: II, 153-155). For the historical context of the correspondence and discussion of Theophylact's letters as a source for the Alexian 'reconquest', see Mullett (1997a): 234; idem (1997b): esp. 240-241. For Doukas' campaigns, see Ahrweiler (1966): 182-189; Gautier (1977); Frankopan (2004).

¹³ Frankopan (2002a): 64-65.

¹⁴ Theophylact of Ohrid: II, 415-417, 433, 473-475. For discussion see Leroy-Molinghen (1936); Mullett (1992b): 239-243. For the disgrace of the Taronites family as a consequence of the rebellion, see Frankopan (2007): 30.

¹⁵ See Frankopan (1996). Anna Komnene: VI.14.3-4.

lends support to the idea that she mainly utilized dispatches recording the events of particular campaigns.

Appendix II. Distortion and Dishonesty in Imperial Bulletins: The Example of

Emperor Constantius II

Our best evidence for the manipulation of events in military reports comes from the fourth-century, specifically the *Res Gestae* of Latin historian Ammianus Marcellinus. In a fascinating critique, Ammianus chastises the Emperor Constantius and his publicists for discrediting the achievements of the *kaisar* Julian and attributing false deeds to the emperor in public announcements. Ammianus' rant appears in the context of the aftermath of the Battle of Argentoratum in 357, where Julian defeated an Alemanni army led by King Chnodomar. Rather than give praise to Julian, bulletins issued throughout the empire proclaimed that Constantius was chiefly responsible for the success. The passage is worth quoting in full:

On the successful outcome of these exploits...some of the courtiers in Constantius' palace found fault with Julian, in order to please the emperor himself, or facetiously called him Victorinus, on the ground that, although he was modest in making reports whenever he led the army in battle, he often mentioned defeats of the Germans. And between piling on empty praise, and pointing to what was clearly evident, they as usual puffed up the emperor, who was naturally conceited, by ascribing whatever was done anywhere in the world to his favourable auspices. As a consequence, he was elated by the grandiloquence of his sycophants, and then and later in his published edicts he arrogantly lied about a great many matters, frequently writing that he alone (although he had not been present at the action) had both fought and conquered, and had raised up the suppliant kings of foreign nations. If, for example, when he himself was then in Italy, one of his generals had fought bravely against the Persians, he would make

no mention of him in the course of a very long account, but would send out letters wreathed in laurel to the detriment of the provinces, indicating with odious self-praise that he had fought in the front ranks. In short, there are extant sayings filed among the public records of this emperor, in which ostentatious reports are given, of his boasting and exalting himself to the sky. When this battle was fought near Argenteratum, although he was distant forty days' march, in his description of the fight he falsely asserts that he arranged the order of battle, and stood among the standard-bearers, and drove the barbarians headlong, and that Chonodomarius was brought to him, saying nothing (Oh, shameful dignity!) of the glorious deeds of Julian, which he would have buried in oblivion, had not fame been unable to suppress his splendid exploits, however much many people would have obscured them.¹

While Ammianus Marcellinus was greatly fond of Julian, it is to be expected that non-campaigning emperors might attempt to exploit the success of subordinates for their own benefit, largely to enhance their own prestige but perhaps also because of concern of appearing inadequate in the shadow of their leading generals.² While there

¹ His tot ac talibus prospero peractis eventu, in palatio Constanti quidam Iulianum culpantes, ut princeps ipse delectaretur, irrisive Victorinum ideo nominabant, quod verecunde referens quotiens imperaret, superatos indicabat saepe Germanos. interque exaggerationem inanium laudum, ostentationemque aperte lucentium. inflabant ex usu imperatorem. suoapte ingenio nimium, quicquid per omnem terrae ambitum agebatur, felicibus eius auspiciis assignantes. quocirca magniloquentia elatus adulatorum, tunc et deinde edictis propositis, arroganter satis multa mentiebatur, se solum (cum gestis non adfuisset) et dimicasse et vicisse et supplices reges gentium erexisse aliquotiens scribens, et si verbi gratia eo agente tunc in Italia, dux quidam egisset fortiter contra Persas, nulla eius mentione per textum longissimum facta, laureatas litteras ad provinciarum damna mittebat, se inter primos versatum cum odiosa sui iactatione significans. exstant denique eius dicta. in tabulariis principis publicis condita, in quibus ambitiose delata narrandi extollendique semet in caelum. Ab Argenterato cum pugnaretur, mansione quadregesima disparatus, describens proelium aciem ordinasse, et stetisse inter signiferos, et barbaros fugasse praecipites, sibique oblatum falso indicat Chonodomarium (pro rerum indignitas) super Iuliani gloriosis actibus conticescens, quos sepelierat penitus, ni fama res maximas, vel obumbrantibus plurimis, silere nesciret (Ammianus Marcellinus: XVI.12.67-70; trans. I, 301-303).

² Lee (2007): 38-39.

is little evidence confirming that emperors continued to assume credit (to the detriment of lesser commanders) in imperial bulletins of subsequent centuries, rulers such as Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos and Manuel I Komnenos are known to have participated in triumphs granted to subordinate generals,³ which might suggest that a parallel literary practice was at times adopted by imperial publicists. In any case, the example of Constantius demonstrates that imperial victory bulletins could grossly distort the reality of events.

³ For Constantine VII, see McCormick (1986): 165-166; Shepard (2001); Holmes (2012): 67-68. For Manuel, see above, 139-147.

Appendix III. Dishonesty, Culpability and Praise in the Reports of Subordinates:

The Example of the Battle of Callinicum, 531

While Eustathios of Thessaloniki's record of the dispatches sent by David Komnenos confirm that such documents were often driven by self-interest, without the reports or even an alternative historical account favourable to David we cannot know how the governor misled the Emperor Andronikos. For insight into this practice, and indeed how military dispatches might influence the historical record, we must turn to the historiography of the earlier period; specifically, the official report of the Battle of Callinicum thought to underlie the narrative of sixth-century historian, John Malalas. There are a number of differences between Malalas' write-up of the battle and that of his contemporary Procopius, with the conduct of the general Belisarius a particular point of divergence. According to Procopius, Belisarius advised his troops that battle should be postponed, so that the festivities of Easter Sunday could be observed. His men rejected however, and it is said that their weakness as a result of fasting was a key factor in the defeat. This is not mentioned by Malalas, who portrays Belisarius as something of a peripheral figure. In Procopius' account, Belisarius dismounts and fights on foot until nightfall, at which point he escapes by boat. Malalas, however, alleges that Belisarius fled much sooner, leaving the *doukes* Sunikas and Simmas to battle the enemy alone. A contrast may also be seen in the portrayal of the Arab Arethas: while Procopius records that Arethas' division easily crumbled and thus he suspected treachery, Malalas notes that Arethas was among the few Arabs to perform admirably. Perhaps the most glaring discrepancy may be seen in the conclusion and aftermath of the battle. Malalas paints a picture of Roman victory, with the Persians pursued for two miles and the Romans returning to the field the following day to despoil enemy corpses. By Procopius' account, the Romans were forced to retreat to

an island on the Euphrates, and were only able to recover their own dead once the enemy had looted the field and departed.¹

Procopius' account is explained by his close links to Belisarius, who may have charged his personal secretary to write a report in which blame for the defeat was attributed to the overzealousness of his troops and the treachery of Arethas.² The provenance of Malalas' version of events is alluded to in his post-battle narrative.

Here it is said that the *magister officiorum* Hermogenes, having learnt what happened, informed the Emperor Justinian via letter. The emperor then dispatched to the east the former *dux* of Moesia, Constantiolus, 'to find out the truth of the battle'.³ Having interviewed the regional *exarchs* and Hermogenes, he returned to Constantinople and reported his findings to the emperor, at which point Belisarius was relieved as *magister militum per Orientem*.⁴ The account of Malalas thus appears to present the official version of events, whereby Belisarius was deemed at fault; this outcome is indirectly confirmed by Procopius, who later notes that Belisarius was removed from eastern command.⁵ Malalas either consulted the report filed by Constantiolus⁶ or the letter of Hermogenes.⁷ The link to Hermogenes is strengthened by subsequent reference to 'a report sent from Hermogenes' (μήνυσις κατεπέμφθη παρὰ

Ἑρμογένους) to the emperor about a smaller engagement at Nymphios, a document to

¹ Procopius, *Wars*: I.18; John Malalas: 18.60. For analysis of the battle, see Kavar (1957): 43-48, 55-56; Greatrex (1998): 193-212.

² For an alternative view, see Whately (2008), who suggests that Procopius presents a balanced view of the general and of this battle in particular, the result of which Whately attributes to a failure on Belisarius' part to control his men. For analysis of the role of the Arabs in this battle, see Kavar (1957): 43-48, 55-56; Shahid (1995): 134-142. Procopius similarly attempts to exonerate Belisarius for a defeat outside Rome in 537, as the general again reluctantly went to battle because of pressure from the populace and his troops (*Wars*: V.28.1-4).

³ ...γνώσθαι τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ πολέμου (John Malalas: 18.60 [389.61-62]; trans. 271).

⁴ Ibid: 18.60-18.61.

⁵ Procopius, *Wars*: I.21.2.

⁶ Contra Greatrex (1998): 195.

⁷ Averil Cameron (1985): 145-147.

which Malalas may also have had access in some form.⁸ Elizabeth Jeffreys compellingly argues that Malalas attained official documents through the office of the *comes Orientis* in Antioch, where the historian was based, and where copies of official correspondence from eastern officials were stored.⁹ Malalas' proposed use of an official report would account for the precise date (19th April, Holy Saturday), the large number of Roman personnel mentioned,¹⁰ the sizes of the Roman contingents,¹¹ and the brief, unliterary nature of the narrative¹² - all salient features of document-based information.¹³

This official version of events was no less partisan than the account of Procopius. Malalas depicts Belisarius as a coward; other commanders fare better, in particular the *doukes* Sunikas and Simmas, who stand and fight the enemy.¹⁴ Similar is Malalas' brief account of the Battle of Dara, wherein Belisarius, in contrast to Procopius' account of the same engagement, is barely mentioned; again, however, Sunikas enjoys a heroic role, defeating a Persian noble in single combat.¹⁵ Returning to Callinicum, both accounts at least concur on the discord among the various Roman forces prior to

⁸ John Malalas: 18.65 (391.25-26); trans. 273. Greatrex (1998: 195) suspects that Malalas had access to the entire document, though Elizabeth Jeffreys (1990) suggests that he may have only located a receipt of the item in the Antiochene archives, as his account of the battle is quite brief.

⁹ E. Jeffreys (1990): 209-211. For Malalas' alleged use of items from the various archives of Antioch, see *ibid*: 200-216.

¹⁰ Those mentioned include Hermogenes, Alamundaras, Arethas, Belisarius, Sunikas, Stephanus, Apskal, Simmas, Dorotheus, Mamantios, Andrazes, Namaan, Abros, and Stephanakios.

¹¹ Malalas breaks down the figures accordingly: 8000 under Belisarius, 5000 under Arethas, 4000 under Sunikas, and another 4000 under Simmas. The numbers themselves are consistent – 20,000 men for the Army of the East corresponds exactly with figures divulged by Procopius (*Wars*: I.18.5) - though they are also rounded and simplified. Whately (2009: 103) is perhaps right to suggest that they may be a product of authorial emphasis rather than official sources. For discussion of army numbers at this time, see Treadgold (1995): 44-49, 59-64.

¹² Averil Cameron (1985): 145-146, where it is conceded that this style may equally be a consequence of the chronicle tradition within which Malalas was writing. See also Whately (2009): 103-106.

¹³ Howard-Johnston (2010): 300.

¹⁴ Averil Cameron (1985): 145-147 notes that Malalas' version is distorted to favour generals other than Belisarius.

¹⁵ Procopius, *Wars*: I.13.12; John Malalas: 18.50.

the battle, with Belisarius angry at Sunikas for attacking the enemy without consulting his fellow generals.¹⁶ It seems therefore that Belisarius had many detractors among those involved in the campaign, and given that Constantiolus is only recorded as having seen Hermogenes and the other *exarchs*, it is possible that his fate was sealed by the testimonies stacked against him.¹⁷ We cannot rule out the possibility that Belisarius composed his own report – the version of events outlined in Procopius – which contradicted that of Hermogenes, who most probably based his testimony on the statements of Sunikas and Simmas; indeed, that Justinian ordered an inquiry into the battle suggests he received conflicting reports. Given the efforts of Procopius to exculpate Belisarius, and the general's subsequent dismissal, Kavar and Cameron deemed Malalas' version to be more truthful,¹⁸ but Whately and Greatrex are less convinced, the latter noting that the reports of Hermogenes will 'scarcely have been objective'.¹⁹ We may at least concur with Greatrex and say that Malalas' optimistic conclusion of the battle and its aftermath appears highly improbable. Evidently, this was a setback for the Romans, and Procopius' sombre appraisal is more honest in this respect.²⁰ Seemingly there is merit and fabrication in both accounts.

After relating the flight of various elements of the Roman army, Malalas returns to the resilient Sunikas and Simmas; having stated that the pair 'continued fighting with their army' (ἐπέμειναν μαχόμενοι μετὰ τοῦ ἰδίου στρατοῦ), Malalas describes the arrival of the Roman forces at Callinicum, following a two-mile pursuit of the Persians.²¹ These events cannot be easily reconciled. How the Roman army broke

¹⁶ John Malalas: 18.60.

¹⁷ Greatrex (1998): 194-195.

¹⁸ Kavar (1957): 43-48, 55-56; Averil Cameron (1985): 157-158.

¹⁹ Greatrex (1998): 66-67; Whately (2009): 248-249.

²⁰ Greatrex (1998): 206.

²¹ John Malalas: 18.60 (389.50-55); trans. 273.

the Persians and put them to flight is not explicitly stated, presumably because no such thing occurred. Mention of the actions of Sunikas and Simmas does not enhance our understanding of the course of the battle, for there is no direct link between the outcome of their personal duels and troop morale, as we might find in other historical accounts.²² The sole purpose of this construction is to depict the *doukes* as heroic warriors, successfully battling Persians in single combat. Hermogenes, seemingly informed by Sunikas and Simmas given the focus and detail, was clearly attempting to extricate the pair from blame. Hermogenes' preference for Sunikas is affirmed by Malalas' brief account of the Battle of Dara, probably also culled from the *magister officiorum*'s notes: Sunikas again triumphs in single combat, and his is the only personal feat described.²³

If Malalas' account of the Battle of Callinicum is considered to be largely representative of his original source, it can be concluded that Hermogenes drafted a concise report, and was concerned to put a positive slant on the outcome and extricate Sunikas and Simmas from blame. The pair, Sunikas in particular, appear to have been Hermogenes' key informants on the battle, and regardless of the truth, Belisarius' dismissal following the subsequent investigation exposed his lack of friends among eastern command. The historical record preserves Hermogenes' report as well as, it would seem, Belisarius' riposte.

²² See, for example, Leo the Deacon's account of the Battle of Arcadiopolis, where the death of a prominent Russian at the hands of Bardas Skleros demoralizes his followers and causes them to flee the battlefield (Leo the Deacon: 110-111).

²³ John Malalas: 18.50.

**Appendix IV. Historical Accounts and the Formative Years of Emperors and
Aristocrats**

Surviving sources disclose little of the education and training of prospective soldiers in Byzantium, and one suspects that even full biographies of soldiers touched only briefly on their subject's upbringing. Hagiography, a probable model for the biographical works of the tenth century, displays an inconsistency in this regard, with Béatrice Caseau-Chevallier observing that 'the space allotted to the description of a saint's childhood ranges from a few lines to a number of pages'.¹ Hagiographers of Late Antiquity were known to pass over the childhood of their subject, seemingly considering it irrelevant, and begin from an age around fourteen.² This tendency is frequently observed in secular literature. Dimitar Angelov recognized that representations of imperial childhood in encomia and historiography of the Middle Byzantine period are idealized, with common motifs and themes running throughout. Particularly relevant here are the child's education and his precocious maturity,³ both applicable also to the life of an aristocratic soldier. Physical and military education were seen as an integral part of imperial childhood by the late eleventh century, though military training had long been mandatory in the upbringing of most princes and aristocratic children.⁴ Nikephoros Bryennios records the military training afforded to Alexios Komnenos' father John and uncle Isaac when they were entrusted to the care of the Emperor Basil II as youths.⁵ In the 1080s Theophylact, archbishop of Ohrid, composed an oration to the young imperial heir, Constantine Doukas, then aged between ten and twelve. Theophylact encouraged his subject to undergo

¹ Caseau-Chevallier (2009): 162-165, esp. 162. See also Abrahamse (1979); Kalogeras (2001).

² Caseau-Chevallier (2009): 130-138.

³ Angelov (2009): esp. 105-111.

⁴ For military training in Byzantium, see McGeer (1995a): 217-222.

⁵ Bryennios: 75-77.

military training and learn from older soldiers, and praised Constantine for killing a ferocious beast during a hunting expedition.⁶ The twelfth-century panegyrics of Eustathios of Thessaloniki note that John II Komnenos educated his son Manuel in arms and tactics, just as Manuel later trained his eleven year-old son Alexios II.⁷ Such details accord with traditional rules of imperial panegyric.⁸

Demonstration of maturity at a young age in Middle Byzantine literature entailed a display of exceptional courage or an early involvement in military affairs. After briefly documenting Basil's education, the *Vita Basilii* skips ahead to the moment Basil ventured to Constantinople, to the time when he had 'reached the age of adolescence and was about to turn to more manly pursuits'.⁹ The heroism of Digenes Akrites is first seen during a hunting expedition, wherein the twelve year-old Digenes is said to have wrestled bears before tackling a great lion.¹⁰ Manuel I Komnenos initially appears in the historical record as a twenty-two year-old performing heroically in the army of his father.¹¹ Having related the education of John and Isaac Komnenos, Nikephoros Bryennios progresses to when the brothers were mature enough to enrol in the imperial bodyguard (the *Hetaireia*), as was customary for the sons of aristocratic noblemen.¹² Nikephoros Bryennios also provides some snippets about the education and training of Alexios I Komnenos and his siblings, though the first time Alexios appears as an active character in the *Hyle Historias* is as a fourteen-

⁶ Theophylact of Ohrid: I, 183, 207.

⁷ Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Orationes*: 190, 285. Michel Italikos (282-284) likewise records John's training of Manuel in war.

⁸ Menander Rhetor (*Peri Epideiktikon*: 371-372) encouraged encomiasts to describe the mental and physical education of the subject.

⁹ Ἦδη δὲ αὐ<τοῦ> τὴν παιδικὴν παραλλάξαντος ἤλι<κί>αν καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῶν μειρακίων ἐλάσαντος καὶ τοῖς ἀνδρικωτέροις καιρὸν ἔχοντος προσβαίνειν ἐπιτηδεύμασιν (*Vita Basilii*: §7.1-3; trans. 29).

¹⁰ *Digenes Akrites*: GIV; E739-791. In other Byzantine romances, such as the Byzantine *Iliad* and the *Achilleid*, the hero likewise proves his manly worth in his early teens – see Jouanno (1996): 47-49.

¹¹ Kinnamos: 21; Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 35.

¹² Bryennios: 77.

year-old eager to participate in an eastern expedition of Romanos IV Diogenes.¹³

Anna Komnene, drawing on Bryennios for Alexios' early career, does not elaborate on her father's upbringing. It may be concluded that emperors and aristocrats do not become active protagonists in historiography and epic literature until old enough to accomplish a manly deed or undertake a professional career, realistically between the ages of twelve and eighteen.

It is impossible to reach a firm conclusion on this matter since we do not learn of the formative years of probable subjects of aristocratic literature subjects such as Bardas Skleros and Katakalon Kekaumenos. Nevertheless, there is consistency in the depiction of aristocratic childhood in secular literature. The narrative often jumps from birth to education and then on to adulthood, with little in between. The *typika* of Michael VIII Palaiologos attest to a general method of describing soldierly childhood. In one, Michael briefly mentions his education and patronage under John III Doukas Vatatzes, stating: 'from adolescence as soon as I was capable I was called to bear arms'.¹⁴ In another *typikon*, Michael goes further:

From the beginning...we were raised in the imperial court so as to obtain a good education...But when we were well into our eighteenth year, as God furnished me with the strength...we were clothed with a tunic of scale armour, we placed an iron helmet on our head, and we bent our arm to hold a long spear, and we put a warrior's shield over our shoulder.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid: 103-105.

¹⁴ ἐγὼ δὲ ὡς εἰς μείρακας ἤδη πρώτως παρήγγελλον καὶ ὄπλα φέρειν ἦν ἰκανός (*Typikon* of Michael VIII Palaiologos for the Monastery of St Demetrios of the Palaiologoi-Kellibara in Constantinople: 451; trans. 1243).

¹⁵ ἐκ πρώτης γάρ, ὃ φασι, τριχὸς ταῖς βασιλείοις ἀδελφαῖς ἀνετράφημεν παιδείας ἀγαθῆς χάριν, πράγματος οὐκ εὐπορίστου, καὶ ἤκιστα χωρὶς ἰδρώτων καὶ συγχῶν καμάτων ληπτῶ. Ἦδη δὲ καὶ τὸν

In the case of aristocratic literature, it is questionable how much the reader needed to know beyond the education of the subject and the first manly deed which marked his entry into adulthood. Caseau-Chevallier attributes the rather standardized childhood of a saint in hagiography to an ‘unwritten pact’ between the author and his audience, the expectation being that readers wished only to know the signs of holiness which prefigured the saint’s path to heaven.¹⁶ It may have been that a similar tendency prevailed in historical accounts detailing the lives of soldiers and warrior emperors, as readers were keen to learn of the heroism and accomplishments of the subject.

ὀκτώκαιδέκατον χρόνον ἐλαύνοντες Θεοῦ χορηγοῦντος τὸ δύνασθαι...περιβαλόμεθα χιτῶνα φολιδωτόν, κράνος ἐκορυφώσαμεθα σιδηροῦν, δόρυ διηγκωνισάμεθα δολιχόν, καὶ ἀρεϊκίην ἀσπίδα ἐπωμισάμεθα (*Typikon* of Michael VIII Palaiologos for the Monastery of the Archangel Michael on Mount Auxentios near Chalcedon: 790; trans. 1230-1231, with amendments).

¹⁶ Caseau-Chevallier (2009): 129.

Appendix V. Repetition of Combat Scenes in Middle Byzantine Literature

The suggested influence of oral tales on aristocratic literature and by extension ‘heroic historiography’ might explain the generic nature of many scenes of combat.

Frequently in Middle Byzantine descriptions of battle limbs are sliced off, bodies severed in half, heads crushed, and torsos speared. These may have been common enough sights on the battlefield, but one suspects that the historian is often drawing on stock descriptive elements to convey the carnage of battle. *Mimesis* of phrases from classical works was one option available to writers. Leo the Deacon, for example, twice lifts the phrase ‘lost much blood and was stricken by many arrows’ (ἔξαιμος...καὶ καταβελῆς) from Dionysius of Halicarnassus, once to describe the fate of Nikephoros Pastilas, and again to render the plight of Sviatoslav at Dorostolon.¹

More striking is the repetition of combat scenes and episodes. Alexander Kazhdan’s observation that Leo the Deacon tended to repeat certain situations is true of his descriptions of combat.² Thus Leo reports that Nikephoros Phokas once thrust a spear through the chest of an enemy champion with such force that it penetrated both sides of his breastplate, emerging from his back.³ Later in the narrative, Leo writes of a very similar deed performed by Peter *stratopedarches* when battling a ‘Scythian’.⁴ Anna Komnene’s tendency to show her father conducting fighting retreats from the battlefield results in similar constructions at the battles of Dyrrachion and Dristra;

¹ Dionysius of Halicarnassus: II.42.5, in relation to Mettius Curtius. Leo the Deacon: 10.6-8, trans. 63, for Pastilas (ἔξαιμός τε καὶ καταβελῆς ἐγεγόνει); 155.6-8; trans. 198, for Sviatoslav (ἔξαιμος γεγρονῶς καὶ καταβελῆς).

² Kazhdan (2006): 286.

³ Leo the Deacon: 10-11.

⁴ Ibid: 107-108.

during both Alexios reaches safety by heroically charging the remnant of the enemy line and unhorsing an opponent.⁵

A complex case is presented by the recurrence of larger scenes, particularly those which derive from different sources. Both Leo the Deacon and Skylitzes relate an episode where the rebel Bardas Phokas, fleeing to his fortress, was accosted and heckled by the gallant Constantine Charon. After an exchange of opinions, Phokas cut down his bold pursuer and reached his destination.⁶ A very similar incident may be found in the *Vita Basilii*. As the Paulician leader Chrysocheir fled, a Byzantine soldier named Poulades caught up with him, and a conversation ensued in which Poulades affirmed his intent to catch him.⁷ Poulades proved more successful than Charon in his objective, but the basic principle of the pursued being harassed by a bold chaser features in both accounts. Strong parallels may also be seen in Skylitzes' accounts of the battles of the river Acheloos (917) and the river Halys (989).

Skylitzes provides two accounts of the encounter at the Acheloos River, which resulted in defeat for the Byzantines at the hands of the Bulgarians. According to one version, the Byzantine commander, Leo Phokas, went to clean himself at the river, but his horse bolted, riding through the Byzantine ranks. Thinking their commander dead, the men panicked and fled.⁸ Skylitzes' account of the Battle of the river Halys unfolds similarly: having been injured in his duel with Bardas Phokas, Bardas Skleros was brought down to the water to treat his wounds, but his men fled when they saw his horse run through the lines without a rider, believing Skleros dead.⁹ These

⁵ See above, 331-334.

⁶ Leo the Deacon: 124-125; Skylitzes: 293-294.

⁷ *Vita Basilii*: §43; Skylitzes: 139-140.

⁸ Skylitzes: 203-204.

⁹ *Ibid*: 326-327.

examples demonstrate a tendency for scenes, constructs and descriptions to be recycled in Middle Byzantine accounts of battle.

Literary borrowings undoubtedly contributed to this, with Homer an obvious model for gore and violence in combat. Yet it is not implausible that the repetition of certain scenarios owes something to the technique of oral composition. Bernard Fenik demonstrates that much of the *Iliad*'s battle narrative consists of an extensive, if limited, store of 'typical' or repeated details and sequences which the poet combined and altered for different effect. It is thought that these stock elements derived from epic oral poetry, which relied on repetition and emphasis for greater understanding.¹⁰ Fenik subsequently argued that a similar if less complex tradition underlined the construction of scenes in the Escorial *Digenes Akrites*. He proposes that combat in this version of the poem, often thought to be closer to the original oral composition, possesses two main characteristics: the orderly scene-drawing seen generally in the narrative; and the various single battles which are built from a stock-pile of common details. It is suggested that this style developed among the storytellers and poets of Asia Minor, just as it had in ancient Ionia and indeed across medieval Europe.¹¹

If one maintains that 'heroic historiography' was a logical progression from oral songs, it follows that some scenes of combat and descriptions of violence may also have derived from traditional oral tales. While comparison with *Digenes Akrites* can take us only so far given that the Grottaferrata in particular may have been subject to a number of literary influences, the manner in which individual combat is described certainly echoes descriptions of 'heroic historiography'. In the Escorial *Digenes*, the titular hero frequently shows his prowess by killing both man and horse, in one

¹⁰ Fenik (1968): esp. 1-8, 11, 162-163.

¹¹ Idem (1991): 57-63.

instance driving a spear through both and in another striking a sword blow which split both horse and rider down the middle.¹² Whilst fighting the Amazon Maximou, Digenes slices the head of her horse in half; in the Grottaferrata version, the head is hacked off at the neck, while another of Maximou's horses is cut in half.¹³ In 'heroic historiography' soldiers are routinely cloven and speared, while horses tend to be an unfortunate casualty.¹⁴ Constantine Skleros sliced off the head of a Russian's horse in the process of slaying its rider; Bardas Skleros cut another Russian in half.¹⁵ In his duel with Bardas Phokas, Skleros sliced off the right ear and bridle of his opponent's horse.¹⁶ Accounts of the Battle of Antioch-on-the-Maeander record Theodore Laskaris striking at the hind or front legs of the horse of his enemy, Sultan Kaykhusraw of Rum.¹⁷ One particularly vivid encounter is described by Niketas Choniates. In 1190, a huge German champion found himself surrounded by fifty Turkish soldiers. One rode out to meet the German, who sliced off the horse's two front legs with his great sword, before bringing his weapon down on the head of his opponent with such force that he cut the Turk in half and even cut through the back of his mount.¹⁸ Such an extraordinary feat would not be out of place in *Digenes Akrites*.

¹² *Digenes Akrites*: E940-942, 962-965.

¹³ *Ibid*: E1558-1559; GVI.584-589, 740-770.

¹⁴ For horses being targeted in combat, see McGeer (1995a): 311-312. The logic of such damage being inflicted is questionable when we consider an episode described by Theophanes. At the Battle of Nineveh, Heraclius' horse Dorkon was wounded in the thigh with a spear and received several blows to the face, but was unhurt on account of its sinew armour (Theophanes: 318-319). Given the heavy armour of the *kataphraktoi* horsemen of the Middle Byzantine period, the idea of slicing through a horse seems rather implausible.

¹⁵ Leo the Deacon: 110; Skylitzes: 290-291.

¹⁶ Skylitzes: 326.

¹⁷ Akropolites: 17.9-10 (hind legs – τὸς ὀπισθίους πόδας); Nikephoros Gregoras: I, 21.1-2 (front legs – τὸς ἐμπροσθίους πόδας). The difference may hint at some fabrication concerning the encounter, based on stock scenes of combat. Niketas Choniates (*Letters and Orations*: 172.7-8) suggests that the sultan's horse was struck in the lower part of the legs (ἐς κνήμας).

¹⁸ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 414-415.

It is suggested that oral compositions in the mould of *Digenes Akrites*, many praising the deeds of Byzantine generals, developed a number of typical combat scenes upon which the early promotional literature of the aristocracy drew, in turn influencing the battle descriptions of later proponents of ‘heroic historiography’ such as Leo the Deacon, Anna Komnene and Niketas Choniates. Such a proposal is not entirely novel. Roderick Beaton has suggested that Anna Komnene based her account of the revolt of one Rhapsomates on Cyprus not on a song actually commemorating this historical event, but rather a mythical tale on a similar subject, ‘to which the historical circumstances of Rhapsomates’ revolt had become...attached’.¹⁹ The suggestion therefore is that historians might have fashioned narrative episodes from elements of oral tales. Admittedly, in the absence of a cluster of surviving frontier songs the idea remains hypothetical. The probability of literary borrowing is high. The matter is also complicated by lack of evidence for oral tradition in Byzantium, as well as the mutual influence of Homer on songs and ‘heroic historiography’. The bards and poets of ninth- and tenth-century Anatolia drew upon Homeric epic for scenes of combat and violence, with biographers and historiographers following suit. It is not unthinkable that the bards, working within the same culture of aristocratic hero-worship, inspired the writers in this regard.

¹⁹ Beaton (1986a): quote at 45.

**Appendix VI. Digenes Akrites, Manuel I Komnenos and Visual Representation
of Military Victory**

Another element linking Manuel Komnenos to Digenes Akrites is visual representation of heroism and victory. The ceilings of Digenes' palace dining chambers were decorated with golden mosaics recording the triumphs of great heroes. Among the scenes were Samson's battle with the Philistines; David's duel with Goliath; the exploits of Joshua; the wars of Achilles; the deeds of Odysseus, and the triumphs of Alexander the Great.¹ Our best evidence for the prevalence of such scenes in aristocratic and royal households comes from the twelfth century. The opus sectile floor of the south church of the Pantokrator monastery, constructed during the reign of John II Komnenos, featured the same four scenes from the life of Samson which adorned the palace of Digenes.² Fragments suggest that another battle scene, possibly featuring Alexander the Great, also formed part of the decoration.³ Robert Ousterhout notes that such themes are typically associated more with Manuel Komnenos, principally because we are better informed on art from his reign.⁴ Here we observe Manuel earning a place alongside biblical and classical giants. Kinnamos relates how the *protostrator* Alexios Axouch decorated his Constantinopolitan villa not with scenes of Manuel in hunting and war, as most officials were wont to do, but with murals of the campaigns of Sultan Kiliç Arslan II.⁵ Other sources support Kinnamos' claim that Manuel's kin and other aristocrats adorned their homes with portraits of the emperor. One Leo Sikountenos of Thessaloniki depicted Manuel

¹ *Digenes Akrites*: GVII.59-101.

² Trilling (1989) suggests that scenes of Samson's life may have been found on the floor of the Great Palace, and possibly influenced similar designs in Constantinople.

³ Megaw (1963): 335-340; Ousterhout (2001): 147.

⁴ Ousterhout (2001): 148.

⁵ Kinnamos: 265-268.

alongside militaristic scenes of Joshua and Moses.⁶ The *megas hetaireiarches* George Palaiologos also decorated his monastery of the Theotokos with images of Manuel.

The surviving description details the scenes depicted:

[Manuel's] countless feats are known throughout the earth's orb, and a few of them have been represented here: how he set on fire the environs of Ikonion after forcing the entire Persian army to flee together with the chief satrap; how, while hunting unarmed, he chanced upon armed Saracens...and was wounded in the heel, yet turning round captured his assailant, but refrained from killing him; how, with a small army of Romans, he took countless captives when he joined battle with numerous attacking Ishmaelites and, all alone, put them to flight, not afraid of their swords, arrows and spears; next, how on setting forth to punish the insolent Dalmatians, he chanced upon the Paeonians, and showed his prowess in single combat by capturing the Zupan who came out against him with bared sword.⁷

⁶ *Cod. Marc. Gr. 524*: fol. 22b, no. 61 (29-30); trans. Mango (1972): 225-226. See also Magdalino & Nelson (1982): 135-137; Anne-Hunt (1984): 139.

⁷ Πλὴν ἀλλὰ τὸν κράτιστον ἐν σκηπτροκράταις
φρικτὸν Μανουὴλ βαρβάρων φυλαρχίαις
ὡς δωρεῶν θάλασσαν ἐξυμνεῖ πλέον
εἰπεῖν δοτῆρα καὶ πνοῆς αὐτῆς κρίνων,
οὗ μυρία τρόπαια γῆς ἔγνω κύκλος,
ὧν βραχέων νῦν εἰκονίσθησαν τύποι·
πῶς Ἰκονίου τὴν περιχώρον φλέγει
πᾶν περσικὸν στράτευμα συνδραμὸν τότε
τῷ σατραπάρχη συμφυγεῖν ἀναγκάσας·
πῶς Ἀγαρηνοῖς ἐντυχὼν ὀπλισμένοις
κυνηγετῶν ἄοπλος εἰσπίπτει μόνος
βάλλων δὲ τοῦτον καὶ πρὸς ἄλλον ἐκκλίνων
πτέρναν ἐπλήγη· πλὴν ἀναστρέψας φθάνει
καὶ τὸν βαλόντα συλλαβὼν οὐ κτινύει·
πῶς δ' ἀνάριθμον εἶλεν αἰχμαλωσίαν
σὺν εὐαρίθμῳ στρατιᾷ τῶν Αὐσόνων·
πολλοῖς ἐπιδραμοῦσιν Ἰσμαηλίταις
συνεμβάλων ἔστρεψεν εἰς φυγὴν μόνος,

George was undoubtedly inspired by official records of Manuel’s campaigns, discussed in chapter three. Whilst relating the return march from Ikonion in 1146, Kinnamos mentions an unarmed Manuel encountering Turks whilst hunting, being wounded in his heel, and yet still managing to capture his attacker. ‘Manganeios Prodromos’ confirms the injury, and, like Kinnamos, draws attention to Manuel besting a Hungarian commander in single combat. Lucy Anne-Hunt and Paul Magdalino propose that these images may have followed the gold mosaics depicting Manuel’s feats against ‘the barbarians’, which Choniates reveals lined the throne rooms of both the Blachernae and the Great Palace.⁸ The compiler of the dossier of synodal sessions held in 1166 confirms that a number of Manuel’s achievements were represented in rich mosaics in the throne room.⁹ Corroborative evidence is provided by Jewish traveller Benjamin of Tudela, whose itinerary records the representation of ‘battles before [Manuel’s] day and his own combats’ on the walls of the Blachernae.¹⁰ In 1172, Stefan Nemanja, ruler of Raska, beheld depictions of the recent campaign against him whilst visiting Constantinople, concurring with the version of events portrayed. According to Eustathios of Thessaloniki, the cycle offered a remarkably lucid account:

Here [Stephen was represented] leading his people to rebellion, elsewhere as a man-at-arms or a horseman, elsewhere placing his hand upon his sword,

σπάθας, βέλη, δόρατα μὴ φρίξας τόσα·
 πῶς τοὺς παροινήσαντας αἰθίς Δαλμάτας
 ἐλθὼν κολάσαι Παίοσι προστυγχάνει·
 ἀνδραγαθεῖ μόνος δε συσχὼν ζουπάνον,
 γυμνῶ κατ’ ὄψιν ἀντεπελθόντα ξίφει (*Cod. Marc. Gr.* 524: fol. 108a-b, no. 224 [148-150]; trans. Mango 1972: 227-228).

⁸ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*: 206. For discussion see Magdalino (1978): 101-102; idem (1993a): 472-475; Anne-Hunt (1984): 140.

⁹ Magdalino (1978): 106-107.

¹⁰ Benjamin of Tudela: 21; trans. 13.

repeatedly ranging his army in the open, planting ambushes, being defeated by your forces, filling the hard-trodden plain with his fugitives, and finally being enslaved.¹¹

Scenes of the emperor victorious in war were not new, and Manuel and his artists may have been inspired by such visuals in other parts of the Great Palace.¹² According to Procopius, the ceiling of the *Chalkê* entrance was adorned with mosaics depicting battles and sieges from the Italian and African campaigns of Belisarius, who in turn is shown receiving rewards from Justinian.¹³ The entire ceiling of the building of the palace known as the *Kainourgion* was covered with golden mosaics depicting ‘the Herculean labours’ of Basil I: ‘his efforts on behalf of his subjects, his exertions in warlike struggles, and the victories granted to him by God’.¹⁴ Another section of the palace, the *Kouboukleion*, appears to have been decorated with murals showing the Emperor Alexios triumphing over his Norman, Pecheneg and Turkish enemies.¹⁵ In decorating the interiors of their homes to similar effect, provincial aristocrats may have drawn upon Arabic and Turkish influences, as demonstrated by Alexios Axouch and, it is suggested, the palace of *Digenes Akrites*.¹⁶ Many aristocrats also had an affinity with Armenia, where, in the early tenth century, King Gagik of Vaspurakan erected a palace and cathedral complex on the island of Aghthamar on Lake Van and

¹¹ ὧδε μὲν ἐρεθίζοντα τὸ περὶ αὐτὸν ἔθνος εἰς ἐπανάστασιν, ἄλλοθι δὲ ὀπλίτην, ἰππότην, ἐτέρωθι δὲ τὴν χεῖρα ξίφους ἄψασθαι πλαγιάζοντα, πολλαχοῦ δὲ καὶ στρατὸν ἐξ ἐμφανοῦς τάττοντα καὶ λόχους καθίζοντα καὶ τέλος νικώμενον καὶ φυγῆς ἐμπιπλῶντα τὴν τε πεδιάδα καὶ ὄση ἀπόκροτος καὶ ἐπὶ πᾶσι δουλούμενον (Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Orations*: 217.86-218.24; trans. Mango 1972: 225).

¹² See Magdalino & Nelson (1982): 164.

¹³ Procopius, *De Aedificiis*: I.X.15-16.

¹⁴ ...προκαθήμενον ἔχων τὸν τοῦ ἔργου δημιουργὸν ὑπὸ τῶν συναγωνιστῶν ὑποστρατήγων δορυφορούμενον, ὡς δῶρα προσαγόντων αὐτῷ τὰς ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἐαλωκυίας πόλεις. καὶ αὐθις ἄνωθεν ἐπὶ τῆς ὀροφῆς ἀνιστόρηται τὰ τοῦ βασιλέως Ἡράκλεια ἄθλα καὶ οἱ ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὑπηκόου πόνοι καὶ οἱ τῶν πολεμικῶν ἀγῶνων ἰδρῶτες καὶ τὰ ἐκ θεοῦ νικητήρια (*Vita Basilii*: §89.17-24; trans. 291).

¹⁵ Magdalino & Nelson (1982): 126-129.

¹⁶ Anne-Hunt (1984): 142-145.

decorated the ceilings with triumphant scenes from the Old Testament.¹⁷ Lucy Anne-Hunt suggests that the Anatolian refugees who moved to Constantinople following the Battle of Manzikert brought with them a melting pot of eastern styles of decoration, which, combined with the growing infatuation at court with chivalric romances and martial valour, led to a rise in artistic depictions of imperial military victory in the capital.¹⁸ It was the visual complement to the ‘heroic historiography’ of the period.¹⁹

While there was a tradition of emperors emblazoning the ceilings of the palace with depictions of their wars and successes, that Manuel’s reign is the best documented period for official portraiture is unlikely to be a mere matter of source survival. Paul Magdalino sees these mosaic cycles as part of Manuel’s attempts to propagate his military achievements, going hand-in-hand with court panegyric.²⁰ Indeed, the rhetoric of one reinforced the other, with many of the scenes depicted precisely those extolled in bulletins and encomia.²¹ The murals of Digenes Akrites did not depict his own feats nor those of the emperor, but this can perhaps be attributed to modesty and the ambiguous portrayal of aristocratic-imperial relations.²² In Middle Byzantine visual propaganda, the emperor traditionally featured alongside the scenes presented in the murals of Digenes Akrites, reinforcing traditional strands of imperial authority and heroic ideology.²³ Through such cycles, rulers might embellish their achievements and enhance their legitimacy. Moreover, visual depiction of deeds

¹⁷ Thomas Artsruni: 354-358. For further discussion see Jones (1994). For potential links between the palace and *Digenes*, see Bryer (1960), later revised in idem (1993): 94-94.

¹⁸ Anne-Hunt (1984): 147.

¹⁹ The practice continued into the Late period – George Pachymeres (I, 517) notes that Michael VIII Palaiologos’ victory over the Angevins in Albania in 1281 was immortalized on the walls of the palace, though plans to do the same for his earlier deeds were not fulfilled due to Michael’s death.

²⁰ Magdalino & Nelson (1982): 166-167.

²¹ Magdalino (1993a): 473-474.

²² See Anne Hunt (1984): 144-145.

²³ Grabar (1936): 93-97.

accomplished in war offered a memory more lasting and impressive than any written commemoration might offer.²⁴

²⁴ For the practice of using visual media to commemorate victory in Late Antiquity, see Lee (2007): 42-51.

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<i>AB</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
<i>AClass</i>	<i>Acta Classica</i>
<i>AIPHOS</i>	<i>Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves</i>
<i>AncSoc</i>	<i>Ancient Society</i>
<i>Annales ESC</i>	<i>Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
<i>ANS</i>	<i>Anglo-Norman Studies</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>Byzantion</i>
<i>BalkSt</i>	<i>Balkan Studies / Études Balkaniques</i>
<i>BAR Int. Series</i>	<i>British Archaeological Reports. International Series</i>
<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
<i>BK</i>	<i>Bedi Kartlisa</i>
<i>BMFD</i>	<i>Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments</i>
<i>BMGS</i>	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
<i>BNJ</i>	<i>Byzantinisch-Neugriechische Jahrbücher</i>
<i>BSI</i>	<i>Byzantinoslavica</i>
<i>Byz</i>	<i>Byzantina</i>
<i>ByzAus</i>	<i>Byzantina Australiensia</i>
<i>ByzF</i>	<i>Byzantinische Forschungen</i>
<i>ByzSt</i>	<i>Byzantine Studies / Études Byzantines</i>
<i>ByzSym</i>	<i>(Byzantina) Symmeikta</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CCSG</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca</i>
<i>CFHB</i>	<i>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae</i>
<i>ClAnt</i>	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
<i>ClMed</i>	<i>Classica et Mediaevalia</i>
<i>CP</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>

CSHB	Corpus Scriptorium Historiae Byzantinae
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
EEBS	<i>Ἐπετηρὶς Ἑταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν</i>
GA	<i>Graeco-Arabica</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
HUS	<i>Harvard Ukrainian Studies</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JMH	<i>Journal of Medieval History</i>
JMMH	<i>Journal of Medieval Military History</i>
JÖB	<i>Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
MGH ss	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores</i>
MGH ss rer. Germ.	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum (in usum scholarum separatim editi)</i>
MM	<i>Mésogéios / Méditerranée</i>
OrT	<i>Oral Tradition</i>
PG	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca-Latina</i>
PO	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i>
PP	<i>Past and Present</i>
REArm	<i>Revue des Études Arméniennes</i>
REB	<i>Revue des Études Byzantines</i>
RESEE	<i>Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes</i>
RHM	<i>Römische Historische Mitteilungen</i>
RSBN	<i>Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici</i>
SEER	<i>Slavonic and East European Review</i>
SOSl	<i>Symbolae Osloenses</i>
TM	<i>Travaux et Mémoires</i>
VizObozr	<i>Vizantiiskoe obozrenie</i>
VizVrem	<i>Vizantiiskii vremennik</i>
WH	<i>War in History</i>
ZRVI	<i>Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta</i>

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