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Storia Militare Antica

a cura di
MARCO BETTALLI ED ELENA FRANCHI



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Direzione, Via Bosco degli Arvali 24, 00148 Roma
Contatti: direzione@nam-sigm.org ; virgilio.ilari@gmail.com

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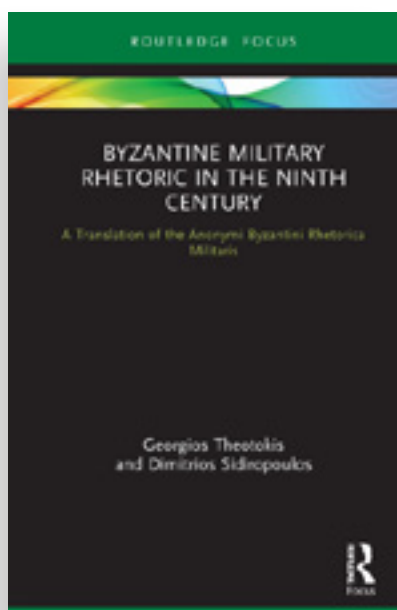
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GEORGIOS THEOTOKIS, DIMITRIOS SIDIROPOULOS,

*Byzantine Military Rhetoric
in the Ninth Century.*

A Translation of the Anonymi Byzantini Rhetorica Militaris

London-New York, Routledge, 2021. 96 p. ISBN 978-0-367-90208-7.



In the *Index Lectionum in Literarum Universitate Turicensi* of 1855 and 1856 Hermann Köchly published the *editio princeps* of a small treatise written by an anonymous which he called *Rhetorica militaris*. It is no surprise that Byzantine military technical texts were not published until modern times. Suffice to say that Maurice's *Strategicon*, the best known and perhaps most significant military manual of the Eastern Roman Empire, was first published by Johann Scheffer only in 1664, together with Arrian's *Tactica*, and *De militari scientia* by Karl Konrad Müller in 1880. Regarding the *Rhetorica militaris*, in the same year of 1855 Köchly published the text and its translation of only the first three chapters in his edition of the *De re strategica* (in *Griechische Kriegsschriftsteller*,

1855, II,2, with Wilhelm Rüstow). Since then scholars have refrained from focusing their attention on this writing until the publishing of my own edition, with Italian translation and commentary (*Siriano. Discorsi di guerra*, con una nota di L. Canfora, Bari 2010).

I am delighted that my edition has awoken the attention of scholars to this short treatise. Indeed, Syrianus' compendium had previously been studied only in its entirety, particularly due to problems concerning authorship and dating. I am also equally delighted that only 11 years later – a relatively short period of time, considering the commitment such works require and especially in comparison with the centuries that elapsed between the *editio princeps* and my edition – the English translation by Georgios Theotokis and Dimitrios Sidiropoulos will allow scholars around the world to learn more about the rhetorical section of Syrianus' compendium: reading the *Rhetorica militaris* in the «*lingua franca* of our time» (p. 55), scholars will no longer have to grapple with reading the Italian translation or test themselves directly with Syrianus' Greek text.

The authors have provided a very clear and fluent translation, which is perfectly understandable even by a non-native speaker. The style has the merit of simplifying some places where the Greek instead creates problems of understanding. For instance, at 27.1 *οὐχ ἡ τυχοῦσα ζημία*, «a non-incidentally harm», in the sense of «a harm of no small importance» becomes only «harm», where the authors prefer not to translate *τυχοῦσα*, which is indeed not immediately clear. Likewise, they translate *ἐνθύμημα* as «syllogism», simplifying the meaning of *ἐνθύμημα* as much as possible; indeed, *ἐνθύμημα* is not generically a syllogism, but specifically a figure of parallel (*σχῆμα συγκριτικόν*: see Ps.- Hermogenes, *De inventione* 3.8) invented for each exposition according to place, time, manner, person, cause, or act, and which has the function of confirming the demonstration. At 39.2-3 *τὰ θρέμματα ἡμῶν καὶ τοὺς βόας*, they translate *τὰ θρέμματα* as «animals»; in this case, the translation does not enhance the juxtaposition of *θρέμματα* and *βόας* greatly, *βόας* also being generically «animals» in addition to «cattle». A closer look, however, leads one to give *θρέμματα* the meaning of «small animal», or better «sheep»: see *LSJ*, *s.v.*, «nursling, creature, [...] mostly of tame animals, esp. sheep and goats» and *Lampe*, *s.v.*, «creature, offspring, 2. sheep». At 24.1 they translate *τὸ ἐπιχειρημάτων μόνον καὶ ἐργασιῶν καὶ ἐνθυμημάτων* as «with the use of arguments and syllogisms, as they develop», while more correctly, in my opinion, at 7.1 they interpret the tricolon *ἐπιχείρημα, ἐργασία καὶ ἐνθύμημα*

as «argument, development and syllogism» (also at 48.1). However, these are relatively insignificant details.

This book is not just a translation, as the first pages contain a long essay (pp. 1-54) on the author and his work and on the tradition of the protreptic speeches («The history of exhortation and exhortative speeches»). Readers can finally obtain a rich summary of all the problems that not only the *Rhetorica militaris*, but also the entire compendium of Syrianos poses, as well as some of the solutions to these problems.

Concerning the tradition of the protreptic speeches, here too I have reason to be pleased that my short *excursus* on the tradition of harangues in historiographical works (in «Talia Dixit» 2010, pp. 25-44) has been a starting point for a broad repertoire, which also includes Byzantine authors such as Theophylact Simocatta, George of Pisidia, and Leo the Deacon. Therefore, the section where the authors review numerous examples of the concept of «just war» in the Eastern Roman Empire is particularly noteworthy. I would make a brief observation on this point: *Sylloge Tacticorum* 1.27 cannot be considered as an independent significant piece of evidence, since here the author is paraphrasing Onasander's *Strategikos* (4.1-2, which is quoted immediately before), modernising the text as is often done and thus turning Onasander's *θεοί* into *θεός* and associating the hope of gain and profit with the just cause. Unfortunately, the English translation does not highlight the close relationship between these two texts, or rather the dependence of the *Sylloge Tacticorum* on the *Strategikos* in this context, which is instead clear if one looks at the Greek text or simply consults Alphonse Dain's edition of the *Sylloge Tacticorum*.

The introduction dedicates great attention to the question of dating, which I believe to be the most important issue regarding the compendium and probably the one that will again divide scholars in the future. The authors are firmly convinced that the work of Syrianus must be dated to the 9th century AD, so much so that they immediately highlight this fact on the title page of the book. For dating they largely rely on Philip Rance's article («Byzantinische Zeitschrift» 2007), which they consider to be «the latest academic study concerning the debate about the dating of Syrianos' compendium» (p. 6). They do not mention the doubts I expressed about this dating in my 2011 article (*Sul compendio militare di Siriano Magister*, «Rivista Storica dell'Antichità» 41, 2011, pp. 201-222), all dedicated

to the problem of dating Syrianos' compendium. Unfortunately, this has escaped the authors and has failed to be included in an albeit rich bibliography; just as Salvatore Cosentino's translation of the *Naumachiae* published in *Storia della marineria bizantina* edited by Cosentino himself and Antonio Carile (Bologna 2004, pp. 275-287), which can rightly be considered the current Italian translation, replacing Francesco Corazzini's old 1883 translation. However, this is rather connected to the limited spread of the Italian language.

Going back to the issue of dating, most of the section dedicated to this topic focuses on recounting the events of the second half of Basilius I's reign, between 875 and 886, in detail. According to the authors, these years are more suitable to define the chronological period that those suggested by Salvatore Cosentino, who more prudently hypothesized the years after the death of emperor Theophilos («Bizantinistica» 2000, pp. 273-274). The strongest, indeed the only, argument they put forward to support their hypothesis is that the compendium dedicates a section to naval warfare, which was – as the authors well demonstrate – the most common form of war in the ten mentioned years of Basil's reign, so much so that a section on naval warfare is also found in Leo VI's *Tacticae Constitutiones* (*Constitutio* XIX), a military manual composed in roughly the same cultural milieu (see p. 21). However, the authors overlook the fact that classical military literature has already dedicated specific attention to the nautical field and devotes a separate section to it located next to the chapters dealing with land battle. In the tactical manuals of tactics by Asclepiodotus, Aelian and Arrian, there are references to a nautical section, although it is unclear if it is a new work or a part of the same manual. Aelian announces a subsequent and separate work, Asclepiodotus and Arrian merely point out the two different fields in which war occurs. On the other hand, Aeneas Tacticus' *Poliorketika*, as it is handed down, is interrupted *ex abrupto* exactly in the passage of a writing regarding a nautical subject (40.8, «as I have dealt with all this, now I will speak about nautical formation. There are two ways to organize the navy ...»). It seems that this work, if it really existed, would have dealt specifically with naval tactics.

These works or parts of works (if they existed) were lost, above all because the men of letters of the East Roman Empire chose to organize all military knowledge into thematic corpora; tactics (on land and at sea), poliorketics and stratagematics. Regarding the naval section, some clues lead us to believe that there were two different *corpora*. The first, which Alphonse Dain called *Corpus nauticum*,

was not handed down, but we know of it through the paraphrase included in chapters 119-123 of Nikephoros Ouranos' *Tactica*. The other corpus, the so-called *Collectio Ambrosiana*, is the result of an operation of propaganda, sponsored by Basil Lekapenos in order to support his candidacy for the command of the expedition to Crete in 960. In this collection, we also find Syrianos' *Naumachiae*. We cannot therefore exclude that other works or sections of works concerning naval warfare actually existed but were then lost because they were assembled in a separate corpus, what Dain called *Corpus nauticum* (I would refer to my *Syrianus' Naumachiae. Tactics, Strategy, and Strategies of Composition*, «HiMA» 5, 2017, pp. 139-154).

In this direction we cannot underestimate the evidence of Leo VI *Ἦδη δὲ περὶ ναυμαχίας διαταξόμεθα, οὐδὲν μὲν ἐν τοῖς παλαιοῖς τακτικοῖς περὶ αὐτῆς κεκανονισμένον εὐρόντες· ἀφ' ὧν δὲ σποράδην ἀνέγνωμεν καὶ διὰ μετρίας πείρας τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ παρὰ τῶν πλωϊμῶν στρατηγῶν ἡμῶν ἀνεμάθομεν, τὰ μὲν πεποιηκότων, τὰ δὲ πεπονθότων, ἀναλεξόμενοι μικρά τινα καὶ ὅσον ἔμφρασιν δοῦναι ξάμενοι μικρά τινα [...] μέλλουσι ἐν ὀλίγοις διορισώμεθα* «Now we will give instructions for naval warfare, as we did not find them in the ancient tactical books, but from what we have read here and there and what we have learned from the ordinary experience of our admirals at the present time, their successes as well as their failures, we have selected a few examples, enough to give this presentation to those who aim to fight at sea». Regarding naval warfare, Leo found no precepts in the «ancient tactical books». He certainly refers here to Aelian's manual, which is his favoured «ancient tactical book», but he probably found nothing *κεκανονισμένον* in more recent authors either, since he is forced to derive these precepts from sporadic (*σποράδην*) observations and the ordinary experience of the admirals of his time. This passage only seemingly contradicts what Leo argues at XIX,59, where he cites *παλαιοί* and even *νεωτέροι* authors, since he is evidently in that case referring precisely to those sporadic (*σποράδην*) and disorganised (*κεκανονισμένον*) information mentioned at the beginning of *Constitutio* XIX. However, Leo's statement in XIX,1 could mean that Syrianos' work was subjected to a thematic selection and unification before the writing of Leo's *Tactica*, which indeed, also on the basis of the textual comparison, does not refer to the *Naumachiae*.

On the other hand, the authors do not consider the beginning of the *De re strategica*, unfortunately surviving only in its final part, which deals specifically with

πολιτεία and thus might be, precisely because of the subject matter, the most useful part for the dating of the entire compendium. For instance, when Syrianos denies the character of τέχνη and ἐπιστήμη for the νομικόν (the legislative function), he might perhaps be referring to legal controversies that developed immediately after Justinian's years and concerned some internal contradictions in the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*. In the same passage, when Syrianos refers to the variability of law on the basis of the διαθέσεις of those who legislate, he might perhaps be referring to another issue at that time being discussed by the *iuris periti*, namely the problem of the sovereign's independence before the law (Iust. 6, 23.3); in short, all issues that would seem to fit a political and philosophical-juridical climate dating back to the years following Justinian's reign, as a 2006 article by Fausto Gorla well argued (*La definizione del diritto di Celso nelle fonti giuridiche greche dei secoli VI-IX e l'Anonimo sulla strategia*, in «Aequitas. Giornate in memoria di Paolo Silli. Atti del Convegno, Trento, 11 e 12 aprile 2002», ed. by G. Santucci, Padova 2006, pp. 275-306). This essay is also unfortunately little known by Syrianos' scholars.

These notes serve not so much to support the thesis of a date different from that proposed by the two authors, but to show that the question is by no means settled. It is necessary to dwell on several elements to obtain a somewhat clearer picture, which, however, can never be definitive in my opinion.

A less experienced reader will find the concise notes at the foot of the text very useful, in line with the editorial criteria of the series, which better explain the meanings of more complicated or ambiguous terms and give reasons for many translation choices. It is a little misleading that there are more extensive commentary notes (e.g. n. 26 p. 62, n. 47 p. 67, n. 67 pp. 73-74, n. 76 p. 78), which I personally particularly appreciate, as they take inspiration from the notes in my edition: this confirms that my work has proven useful.

A more experienced reader who wishes for further insight will either have to resort again to my edition, with its possible limitations, or will have to wait for a commentary, finally available in English, by Georgios Theotokis and Dimitrios Sidiropoulos, who will surely be able to complete the excellent work already carried out in this book.



So called Missorium of Kerch, 4th century Found: Bosporan Necropolis, vault on the Gordikov estate. Near Kerch, the Crypt in the North-Eastern Slope of Mount Mithridates, 1891 This silver dish was a diplomatic gift from the Byzantine Emperor to a representative of the Bosporan government. In this fine example of the early Byzantine art traditional Classical themes are combined with a new artistic style. The vessel shows a composition typical of Roman coins: the Emperor on horseback is piercing the enemy with a spear. The rider was usually accompanied by one or several warriors and Nike crowning the winner. In contrast to the Classical composition showing the final scene of a battle, here we see the scene of triumph: Emperor Constantius II sits on a horse, triumphantly raising his spear. To emphasize the Emperor's highest rank and divine power, the artist used special pictorial devices including, for example, the distortion of proportions. The images were produced by a chisel. Part of the ornamentation is nielloed. The outer surface is gilded and a loop is soldered onto it. Hermitage Museum. Saint Petersburg. CC BY-SA 4.0 (Wikimedia Commons).

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