

# Constantinople as Center and Crossroad

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SWEDISH RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN ISTANBUL  
TRANSACTIONS, VOL. 23

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# Mediating the Eastern Frontier

## *Classical models of warfare in the work of Nikephoros Ouranos*

ANNALINDEN WELLER

For those agents of Byzantium on long-term campaign and administrative service in the contested spaces of the eleventh-century East, the experience of warfare coupled with existing outside of the Byzantine sphere was in some senses culturally traumatic. These men were removed from the social and intellectual community of Constantinople in which they had been nurtured, and were immersed in a space which was unfamiliar both culturally and environmentally and punctuated by life-threatening encounters with hostile forces.

After the collapse of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad at the beginning of the tenth century and the following realignment of local powers, including those of the Armenian and Georgian princes, Byzantine military and political authority re-expanded into the eastern part of Anatolia. Under the direction of the soldier-emperors Romanos Lekapenos, Nikephoros II Phokas, and John Tzimiskes, substantial territory to the east of the Taurus and Anti-Taurus mountains was annexed by the 970s: in 934, Melitene—which had been a key base for Arab raiding in the Anti-Taurus mountains—fell to Byzantine forces; by 965 the Cilician plain, including the ancient center of Tarsus, had been annexed; and in 969 the northern Syrian city of Antioch, long a center of Christian learning and in the tenth century part of the Hamdanid emirate of Aleppo, was reconquered by Nikephoros II Phokas.<sup>1</sup>

By the time Basil II had ascended to the throne in 976, the ‘new’ provinces in the reclaimed east were divided into three regional *katepanates*—Antioch, Mesopotamia, and Chaldea. This number would increase during his reign by the addition of the *katepanate* of Iberia (claimed via the absorption of the Georgian principality of Tao) and the *katepanate* of Vaspurakan (after the Armenian

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<sup>1</sup> J. Shepard, “Constantine VII, Caucasian Openings, and the Road to Aleppo,” in A. Eastmond (ed.), *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium* (Aldershot 2001), 19–40, suggests that this territorial expansion was conservative in speed; C. Holmes, “Byzantium’s Eastern Frontier in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries,” in D. Abulafia & N. Berend (eds.), *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices* (Aldershot 2002), 86–89, supports this conjecture and suggests that the rate of reconquest was dependent on economic and financial factors as well as the structural transformation of the Byzantine army in this period towards a more centralized force. Cf. also the article by Androshchuk in this volume.

princedom of the same name was annexed).<sup>2</sup> Each *katepanate* was under the command of a senior field officer, either a *doux* or a *katepano*, and centered on a key fortress from which that senior field officer and his garrison could exert military power. Most contemporary historians have understood this process as a transformation of the previously-extant ‘deep frontier’—the multiple layers of diffuse military presence in the contested areas of Asia Minor and the Asian hinterland of Constantinople which had existed during the previous few centuries of Arab raiding—into a more linear, ‘border-oriented’ frontier, and linked it to broader structural changes within Byzantine military organization in the tenth and eleventh centuries.<sup>3</sup> However, it is important to remember that Byzantine presence on the new frontier was not solely military, and that military administration itself was not simply a matter of defending a linear border. Borders and frontier territory, in fact, were laden with links to Byzantium’s Roman past and Byzantium’s attempts at legitimizing their authority through links to that past.

After the seventh century, Byzantine literature does not pay much attention to the ‘frontier’ as a physical barrier or as a limit to imperial rule. The concept of a physical frontier does not reemerge until the tenth and eleventh centuries. This process—the disappearance and then reappearance of physical borders to the imperium—makes broad sense in the context of rapidly shrinking physical borders in the seventh century. There was little for encomiasts or chroniclers to celebrate about the frontier from the seventh-century crisis until the tenth-century expansion. Drawing attention to the diminution of the territories under the control of the emperor would undermine the Byzantine claim of continuity with the ancient Roman Empire. A Byzantium which was not holding on to the territory of Rome is more difficult to equate with Rome.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the idea of a physical frontier dropped out of rhetoric in favor of a discourse of radiating culture and the possibility of Romanization via exposure to the *oikumene*. The geographical term *Romania* which was employed to designate the emperor’s realm extended not to a circumscribed historical territory, but to any place that the emperor’s authority could reach.<sup>5</sup>

Constantinople could remain a source of universal authority even if the ancient territory of Rome was no longer universally within the scope of Byzantine power. David Olster has argued that as the borders of the empire shrank, borders themselves became no longer central to the definition of universal empire. Instead of filling a space defined by borders (which were unstable and therefore clear *limitations* on imperial authority), the *oikumene* became a property which radiated outward from a central source of Romanity, namely Constantinople. The seventh and eighth centuries were marked by the sudden prominence of the Queen City in every literary genre:<sup>6</sup> it was the seat of culture, unconquerable, everlasting, and

<sup>2</sup> N. Oikonomides, “L’Organisation de la frontière orientale de Byzance aux X<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècles et le taktikon de l’Escorial,” in *Acts of the 14<sup>th</sup> International Congress 1971*, 3 vols., (Bucharest 1974), vol. 1, 285–302; J. Haldon, *Warfare, State, and Society in the Byzantine World* (London 1999), 84–89.

<sup>3</sup> M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* (Oxford 1996), 113–26, 165–92; J.–C. Cheynet, “La conception militaire de la frontière orientale (IX<sup>e</sup>–XII<sup>e</sup> siècles),” in Eastmond (ed.), *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium*, 57–72.

<sup>4</sup> J. Shepard, “Emperors and Expansionism: From Rome to Middle Byzantium,” in Abulafia & Berend (eds.), *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, 55–82, here 58–60.

<sup>5</sup> I. Stouraitis, “Roman Identity in Byzantium: A Critical Approach,” *BZ* 107/1 (2014), 175–220, here 189–90; for examples of this usage see *DAI* 22.22, 44.125–8.

<sup>6</sup> D. Olster, “From Periphery to Center: The Transformation of Late Roman Self-Definition in the Seventh Century,” in R. W. Mathisen & H. S. Sivan (eds.), *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot 1999), 93–101, here 94 and 100–1.

essentially Roman. In the face of a fracturing *Realpolitik* of empire, Constantinople became a bastion of historical Romanity—and a center-point from which Byzantine universal imperial ideology emerged.

This is not to say that expansionism dropped out of Byzantine imperialist rhetoric entirely along with the de-emphasis of the physical frontier in favor of the central capital city. The subjecting of peoples and the expansion of borders—however loosely defined those ‘borders’ might become—is a function of universalist rulership, and thus this theme continued to be present in Byzantine ideology even when the empire was not capable of direct expansion.<sup>7</sup> When military victories did occur—particularly military victories which led to the reclamation of previously Roman or Byzantine Roman territory, or victories over representatives of longstanding enemies, like the Muslim emirs of Aleppo and Antioch during the tenth century reconquest of the East—the rhetorical tropes which celebrated these victories reinscribed the continuity between Byzantium and Rome. Conquest became a positive virtue, and the enlargement of territory a goal.

In general, the reconquest was an attempt at a resumption of Byzantine control over areas which were remembered in Byzantine historiography and imperial ideology as being *Roman*—as belonging by rights to the empire of the *Rhomaioi*.<sup>8</sup> Its goals were to break the power of dangerous emirs in troublesome locales like Melitene or Theodosiupolis, and thus demilitarize the eastern frontier, which would make lucrative revenue from tribute, trade, and taxation possible. Thus, the conquest was oriented toward population centers with substantial trade potential,<sup>9</sup> of which the district of Antioch was perhaps the most important, comprising not only Northern Syria but the Cilician plain and its access-points through the Taurus Mountains. This newest territory had not been under direct Byzantine administration for centuries. While the empire might have recalled these reclaimed regions as being historically Byzantine, their local populations were heterodox and had been so for generations: most neither practiced Chalcedonian Christianity nor spoke Greek as their native language. Alongside a small number of Greek settlers were native Armenian, Syrian, and Muslim communities,<sup>10</sup> all of whom were embedded in a political structure of local patron-and-client systems which did not vanish when the Byzantines arrived.

Thus, despite great territorial gains, the eleventh-century Byzantine Empire in the East was faced with a significant administrative problem of governance: how could the newly-regained borderlands be integrated into the imperial system and simultaneously provide revenue from tribute and trade? The eastern frontier had to be a site where imperial ideology would become practical *Realpolitik*; authority, radiating from the center of the empire at Constantinople, had to be exercised over an area which was not well-integrated into Byzantine culture. It was a place where the tension between the internal conception of empire carried by Byzantines—their narrative of universalizing imperium—and the actual execution of imperial authority were simultaneously present.

<sup>7</sup> Shepard, “Adventus, Arrivistes and Rites of Rulership in Byzantium and France in the Tenth and Eleventh Century,” in A. Beihammer, S. Constantinou & M. G. Parani (eds.), *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean Comparative Perspectives* (Leiden 2013), 337–71, here 345.

<sup>8</sup> J.-C. Cheynet, “La conception militaire de la frontiere orientale” 57.

<sup>9</sup> J. Shepard, “Constantine VII,” 20–21.

<sup>10</sup> C. Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976–1025)* (Oxford 2006), 304–5.

The available common narrative frame for these Constantinopolitans removed from Constantinople was the Classical culture which formed the basis of Byzantine education and inflected their literary production toward citation, reference, and encoding. The Constantinopolitan-trained Byzantine official was able to select from a multitude of possible references the one which he believed would best make his point and achieve his aims; his training (for example, the *progymnasmata* exercises of Aphthonios, which demonstrate how the story of Daphne and Apollo can be both confirmed and refuted, to varying effect) would have explicitly taught him how to do so.<sup>11</sup> References to Classical culture provided a common understandable narrative framework for Byzantine experiences, and this culture was primarily expressed via writing.

Writing is a political technology.<sup>12</sup> In particular, writing which crosses multiple imperial locales, moving from provinces or borderlands to centers or vice-versa, is a political technology which both preserves and reproduces the ideologies of its authors.<sup>13</sup> Travel, and travel writing—defined broadly as writing which discusses the experience of being away from home, and thus including both epistolary documents composed by imperial agents on the frontier and other writing which details the experience of being outside of the metropole—*produces* the “rest of the world.”<sup>14</sup> i.e. it makes the illegible, the foreign, and the non-Byzantine legible and thus comprehensible to the audience at home, by providing references to a shared world of Classical referents which are controllable, relatable, and coherent.

The *doux* of Antioch and “master of the East” (c. 1000 AD), Nikephoros Ouranos, provides an example of an early eleventh century Byzantine imperial agent in the East who is consistently engaged in mediating his experience of campaigning and warfare through reference to the narrative rubric of classical models. Ouranos produced several forms of writing which can be classed as ‘about the frontier’—i.e., compositions in which he made use of his own experiences on campaign in the reconquered East. This written production is both ‘personal’—epistolary communication between Ouranos and his friends and colleagues separated from him by the distance between Antioch and Constantinople—and ‘public’, documents meant for an unspecified but still high-culture Byzantine audience, like military strategy manuals such as Ouranos’s *Taktika*—an assemblage of previous Byzantine military treatises along with some original additions written by Ouranos himself, documents meant for an unspecified but still Byzantine audience. In both ‘personal’ and ‘public’<sup>15</sup> textual production, Ouranos mediates

<sup>11</sup> R. Webb, “Praise and persuasion: argumentation and audience response in epideictic oratory,” in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium* (Aldershot 2003), 133–35.

<sup>12</sup> S. J. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago 1991), 21.

<sup>13</sup> M. Ogborn, “Writing Travels: Power, Knowledge, and Ritual on the English East India Company’s Early Voyages,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 27/2 (2001), 9–10.

<sup>14</sup> M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London & New York 1992), 5–7.

<sup>15</sup> This is a highly artificial distinction, particularly in eleventh-century Byzantine intellectual culture, where nearly all rhetorical production – including letters – was read aloud, often in public and evaluatory settings like the *theatron* (‘salon’) or the imperial court. There, its audience widened from a single recipient to a larger group of intellectuals and patrons who had come to experience the letter-writer’s rhetorical skill and ability to employ reference. This is a communal activity, and one which relies on a communal knowledge of the Byzantine ‘source canon’ – that is, Biblical and classical texts. The structure of the *theatron* provides a methodology for interpretation of the letter; a location for evaluation and interpretation of its success as a literary object and as a representation of the author’s interests, views, and ideologies. See M. Grünbart, “L’epistolografia,” in G. Cavallo (ed.), *Lo spazio letterario del medioevo. La cultura bizantina* (Rome 2004), 345–78, and P. Marciniak, “Byzantine *theatron* – a place of performance?,” in M. Grünbart (ed.), *Theatron. Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter/Rhetorical Culture in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berlin & New York 2007),

his experience of warfare through classical models. Ouranos particularly makes use of references to the Homeric epics to contextualize and communicate to his Constantinopolitan intellectual community his experience of serving the empire far away from its administrative and cultural center in Constantinople. By referencing the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Ouranos uses a common vocabulary of allusion and citation to reinforce both his position in the intellectual aristocracy of Constantinople as well as to maintain his ties to that community while in non-Byzantine space on the frontier.

Warfare was a constant and familiar companion to Byzantines. There was little time within which Byzantium was *not* at war, usually on multiple fronts, though naturally the extent and intensity of these conflicts varied. Nevertheless, warfare was present in the lives of most Byzantines.<sup>16</sup> It is unsurprising that warfare permeates Byzantine cultural production: tactical manuals, historiographies, and imperial panegyrics all address it. During the period of reconquest in the tenth century, rhetorical discussion of warfare and conquest shows a revival of borrowing of rhetorical flourishes from the Roman Principate and the Justinianic period.<sup>17</sup> Byzantines began calling themselves ‘Ausonians’ from the mid-tenth century onward, a term with overtones of imperial rule and destiny—a poetic synecdoche for ‘Italians’ and thus ‘Romans’ originating in Greek literature of the Principate.<sup>18</sup> They also referred to the peoples whom they conquered by the ancient ethnic names which were far more appropriate to the early Roman empire: i.e., the Balkan peoples were called Dalmatians and Mysians; the Arabs and then the Seljuqs, Saracens; etc. Modern scholarship has most often identified this renaming as an example of the Byzantine obsession with classicizing, the ‘calcification’ of the Byzantine worldview to a willing suppression of reality in favor of rhetorical flourishes that remembered a more stable and powerful empire.<sup>19</sup> However, in the context of imperial victories, referring to conquered peoples by the names that referred to the denizens of the reconquered territories back when they had been initially incorporated into the ancient empire helped to legitimize Byzantine conquest of the contemporary peoples who now occupied those same territories.<sup>20</sup> This is a remapping of the early Roman Empire’s provinces onto the topography of the Byzantine Empire. It is both hopeful—it looks toward a future in which the Byzantine Empire is not only in continuity with the ancient Roman Empire, but is in fact identical again with it—and engaged in using Byzantium’s Roman past to legitimize its present activities in the borderlands.

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277–85 for further discussion. I have employed this distinction between ‘public’ and ‘personal’ in this article not to privilege or isolate ‘personal’ communication but to differentiate modes of writing – the ‘personal’ mode having a specified audience and containing the writer’s own emotional and experiential account of events, while the ‘public’ mode has an unspecified audience and, while relying on the writer’s experience, employs it to construct general observations or advice.

<sup>16</sup> J. Haldon, *Warfare, State, and Society*, 234. See also A. Kolia-Dermizaki, “Byzantium at War in Sermons and Letters of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries: An Ideological Approach,” in N. Oikonomides (ed.), *Byzantium at War (9<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century)* (Athens, 1997), 213–38.

<sup>17</sup> Shepard, “Emperors and Expansionism,” 66.

<sup>18</sup> J. Geometres, *Carmina varia*, PG, 106, 902, 903, 934, 980; *Suida Lexicon*, ed. Adler, vol. 1, 417; Michael Psellos, *Poemata*, ed. Westerink (Stuttgart & Leipzig, 1992), 257–58; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn 1853), 31, 214.

<sup>19</sup> For example, P. Speck, “Further Reflections and Inquiries on the Origins of the Byzantine Renaissance,” in S. Takács (ed.), *Understanding Byzantium: Studies in Byzantine Historical Sources* (Aldershot 2003), 183–204.

<sup>20</sup> P. Stephenson, “Byzantine Conceptions of Otherness After the Annexation of Bulgaria (1018),” in D. Smythe (ed.), *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider* (Aldershot 2000), 245–57, here 253–56.



Nevertheless, warfare and combat—and their attendant violence and mortality—are not rhetorically glorified in these texts, even though Byzantine universal authority deriving from warfare is. While we do not possess a Byzantine treatise on the ideology of war, military manuals consistently refer to war as being “a great evil, the worst of all evils”<sup>21</sup> and that Byzantines ought to, in the words of Leo VI in his ninth-century *Taktika*, “always prefer peace above all else, and refrain from war,”<sup>22</sup> as war was a product of sin and the devil, and only justified when the empire needed to take up arms against those enemies who threatened it, having been incited by the evil one to invade imperial territory. Only occasionally in the middle period is the experience of combat—usually single combat, as in Leo the Deacon’s account of Theodosios Mesonyktes at the siege of Preslav (in which the young soldier mounted a siege ladder and decapitated the “Scythian” defending it, causing raucous cheering amongst his fellow-soldiers)<sup>23</sup>—treated as an occasion to be valorized, and what is being held up as desirable is not so much the act of warfare as the bravery of an individual participant. Overall, warfare was a choice of last resort—Byzantines more often chose to try to avoid a frontal assault and turned instead to diplomacy, covert action, or the bribery of other non-Byzantines to do the fighting for them.<sup>24</sup> The ideological experience of warfare was one of necessity; the personal experience of warfare could be made positive through certain acts of bravery, but the positivity of those acts are mostly visible from the outside—the response of the soldiers watching Theodosios Mesonyktes on the wall, rather than an account of Theodosios Mesonyktes’ own experience of scaling it.

Discerning these personal experiences of Byzantine warfare, and determining how they are evaluated, narrativized, and understood by those who experienced them, is more difficult. Robert Nelson’s article on the ‘art of war’ in the tenth century suggests some methods by which visual representation of warlike emperors and military saints on coinage and decorative art brought justification of war to large numbers of Byzantines,<sup>25</sup> but warfare imagery as imperial propaganda is only personal to the audience who witnesses it. The communicative experience of being at war as a Byzantine can be better located in textual production, because it is within textual production that the Byzantine expression of an authorial—and thus an experiencing—self is made visible.

Byzantines recognized the presence of a constructed authorial self in multiple literary sites, including historiographic and encomiac works. In historiographic work of the middle Byzantine period—to take an example which will be conducive to looking at textually mediated experiences of warfare—the authorial self is ‘present’; i.e., he makes visible literary choices. These choices derive from both the author’s personal circumstances and the tradition of authorial presence in historiography which originates in Herodotus and Thucydides.<sup>26</sup> Byzantine

<sup>21</sup> G. T. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, *CFHB* 25 (Washington D.C., 1985), 20–21.

<sup>22</sup> *Taktika* 2, 45; ed. R. Vari, *Leonis imperatoris Taktika*, 2 vols (Budapest 1917–22), libri I–XIV, 43.

<sup>23</sup> *Historia*, Leo the Deacon, VII:6.

<sup>24</sup> G. T. Dennis, “Defenders of the Christian People: Holy War in Byzantium”, in A. Laiou & R. P. Mottahedeh (eds.), *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World* (Washington D.C. 2001), 31–39, 37.

<sup>25</sup> R. S. Nelson, “And So With The Help Of God: The Byzantine Art of War in the Tenth Century”, *DOP* 65/66 (2012), 169–93.

<sup>26</sup> R. Macrides, “The Historian in the History”, in C. N. Constantinides et al. (eds.), *ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝ: Studies in Honour of Robert Browning* (Venice 1996), 205–24, and “Editor’s Preface” in R. Macrides (ed.), *History as Literature in Byzantium* (Farnham 2010), ix–xi; D. Smythe, “Experiencing Self: How mid-Byzantine historians presented their experience”, in C. Nesbitt and M. Jackson (eds.), *Experiencing Byzantium* (Ashgate 2013), 251–66.

authors, educated in the classical rhetorical tradition, were entirely aware of the uses of *plasma* in historiographic narrative, and as early as the Chronicle of Theophanes were employing ‘fictionalized’ or ‘novelized’ strategies of managing historical narratives and the characters—particularly emperors and other powerful men—who appear within them. As “Byzantine systems of reading and rhetorical performance were strategically open to manipulation so as to fit a variety of contexts, audiences, and arguments”,<sup>27</sup> the ‘rhetor’—the constructed self which wrote—was able to use techniques specific to Classicizing Byzantine Roman high culture to produce effects which were both literary and capable of narrativizing personal experience.

Nikephoros Ouranos mediates his experience of warfare in the East via written communication in both the ‘personal’ and ‘public’ categories, as previously mentioned: his epistolary communication contains ‘personal’, direct-address accounts of his military campaigns; and the production of his most well-known literary work, the *Taktika*, is a ‘public’ account of those experiences, as well as being a collection of previous tactical treatises. It is to the *Taktika* that we turn first, as Ouranos’s use of his own experience in preparing certain sections of this manual demonstrates one method of reifying difficult frontier encounters.

The *Taktika*, despite being composed in a direct and uncomplicated vernacular,<sup>28</sup> demonstrates Ouranos’s education and his fluent participation in the intellectual milieu of Constantinopolitan society. It was written during the period of Ouranos’s governorship of Antioch,<sup>29</sup> and is comprised of four main sections, three of which are reprisals or derivations of Byzantine and Classical military treatises—specifically the *Taktika* of Leo VI and a wide collection of ancient tacticians, summarized in epitome. The fourth section is a revised and expanded version of Nikephoros Phokas’ *Praecepta militaria*, and contains Ouranos’s primary original contribution: added to Phokas’s text are both a discussion of siege warfare and a description of the variable allegiances of the local populations of Northern Syria. These additions demonstrate that Ouranos was both making use of the tactical system outlined by Phokas and adapting it to the conditions he found while governing Antioch.<sup>30</sup>

Ouranos is translating his personal experience into a practical handbook, much as other composers of military manuals had before him. This process certainly suggests a systematic and textually mediated approach to warfare amongst the Byzantine military aristocracy,<sup>31</sup> a view of battle as something which can be

<sup>27</sup> S. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (Cambridge 2013), 55; see also I. Nilsson & C. Messis, “Byzantine Storytelling and Modern Narratology: An Introduction”, in C. Messis, M. Mullett & I. Nilsson (eds.), *Storytelling in Byzantium: Narratological Approaches to Byzantine Texts and Images* (Uppsala 2018), 1–14; A. Weller, “Ideological Storyworlds in Byzantium and Armenia: Historiography and Model Selves in Narratives of Insurrection”, in Messis, Mullett & Nilsson (eds.), *Storytelling in Byzantium*, 71–87, and *The Armenian-Byzantine Frontier: The Cultural Politics of Empire in the Medieval World* (forthcoming 2019).

<sup>28</sup> E. McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Washington D.C. 1995), 85.

<sup>29</sup> F. Trombley, “The *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos and Military Encyclopaedism,” in ed. P. Binkley (ed.), *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts: Proceedings of the Second COMERS Congress, Groningen, 1–4 July 1996* (Leiden & New York), 261–74, 269; E. McGeer, “Tradition and Reality in the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos”, *DOP* 45 (1991), 129–140, here 131; A. Dain, *La “Tactique” de Nicéphore Ouranos* (Paris 1937), 136.

<sup>30</sup> See McGeer, “Tradition and Reality”, for further discussion of Ouranos’ achievements in military strategy in the *Taktika*, as well as additional bibliography.

<sup>31</sup> McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth*, 191.

codified, taught, and executed according to a method—but it also suggests that the experience of warfare was, for men like Ouranos, something which could be translated into written form and communicated thereby to a circle of fellow-Byzantines who shared the necessary cultural background and specialized vocabulary to interpret it. The handbooks thus produced were used for the training of prospective military commanders and active soldiers—they enshrine experience and become part of the Byzantine educational tradition as much as they do the Byzantine military tradition.<sup>32</sup> In the *Chronographia*, Psellos mentions that Basil II prepared the formations of his army by “taking some from the handbooks and devising others by virtue of his own expertise,”<sup>33</sup> and Nikephoros Bryennios, describing the education of the Komnenian heirs John and Isaac, adds to a description of the teaching of the arts of war that the boys should learn “to study the *taktika* so that they would know how to deploy a phalanx and array the files, how to prepare a camp correctly and set up a palisaded encampment, and the many other things which the tactical treatises teach.”<sup>34</sup> The *taktika* as a collective mediate the experience of warfare by becoming part of the educational process of training up new generals.

This view of Ouranos’s *Taktika*—as not only a military manual but as a communicative act—is supported by Ouranos’s mining of the rich vein of encyclopedic knowledge of prior military handbooks which accompany his contributions to military strategy. Compilation literature—a literary category which encompasses manuals like Ouranos’s *Taktika*—has been described by Catherine Holmes as being an example of “political culture”; i.e., a rubric for the behavior and expectations which frame political action and ideas.<sup>35</sup> It is arguable that the sections of this *Taktika* which are taken from Classical military manuals are not haphazardly selected, but instead demonstrate Ouranos’s profound engagement with the Byzantine culture of *sylloge*, and thus with the habits of intellectual life in the Byzantine state. His selection of the compiled texts shows both his access to preserved manuscripts and his knowledge of the ultimate provenance of his citations.<sup>36</sup> Further, Ouranos himself acknowledges that the vast majority of the techniques which he has collected were obsolete.<sup>37</sup> The goal of producing compilation literature like the *Taktika* is as much about the production of political and intellectual authority as it is to provide instruction. On this base of preserved written culture, contemporary practices, like Ouranos’s analysis of the allegiances of the North Syrian local population, can be introduced and legitimated.<sup>38</sup> The production of this *Taktika* as a whole is thus demonstrably a creation of an educated and intellectually-engaged member of the Byzantine aristocracy<sup>39</sup>—and is a method by which a member of that intellectual and cultural group can

<sup>32</sup> McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth*, 192.

<sup>33</sup> Psellos, *Chronographia* 1.20–21.

<sup>34</sup> Bryennios 75.15–77.4, tr. E. McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth*, 193.

<sup>35</sup> C. Holmes, “Byzantine Political Culture and Compilation Literature in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Some Preliminary Inquiries”, in *DOP* 64 (2010), 55–80, here 55–56.

<sup>36</sup> The title of the *Taktika* as given in the *Codex Constantinopolitanus Graecae* 36 is given as “The *Taktika* or *Strategika* of Arrian, Aelian, Pelops, Polyainos, Onasander, Alkibiades, Artaxerces, Syrianos, Annibas, Plutarch, Alexander, Diodoros, Polybios, Herakleitos, Muarice, Nikephoros, and certain others, collected by Nikephoros *magistros* Ouranos from many historical [texts], as was said, with much care.” Cf. Trombley, “The *Taktika*”, 270–1, and Dain, *La “Tactique”*, 13.

<sup>37</sup> McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth*, 160–2.

<sup>38</sup> Holmes, “Byzantine Political Culture”, 62.

<sup>39</sup> Trombley, “The *Taktika*”, 271.

communicate his experiences of the frontier using signals which reinforce his membership in that group.

While Ouranos's use of written mediation of the experience of war is implicitly communicative in the *Taktika*, it is explicitly communicative in his letters. An illustrative example is found in letter 47, one of several addressed to Stephanos, the metropolitan of Nicomedia, with whom Ouranos had a longstanding friendship—the two men began writing to one another while Ouranos was working in Constantinople as the Keeper of the Imperial Inkstand, and their correspondence continued when Ouranos was assigned to the Eastern frontier. In this particular letter, which dates from Ouranos's time as *doux* in Antioch, Ouranos discusses at length the banal horrors of campaigning: the poor food and drink, the endless marching and sleepless nights, the infighting and arguing amongst the men. He gives a vivid impression of general chaos, grimly suffered through.

In order to make his lived experience of warfare accessible to Stephanos, Ouranos employs a set of Homeric references which would have been immediately recognizable to the metropolitan. Stephanos was educated in Constantinople just as Ouranos had been, and, like most of Ouranos's correspondents, was a member of a literary elite who were tied together by shared access to and understanding of such classical referents. Ouranos compares his experience of being encamped amongst his soldiers to that of the Greeks at Troy, quoting the tenth song of the *Iliad*: he is surrounded by “the noise of flutes and pipes and the din of men' even during sleep”.<sup>40</sup>

The use of the *Iliad* in describing warfare is of course not unique to Ouranos. Homer was a prescribed schoolbook text for all young educated Byzantines, and was additionally held up as a model of rhetorical excellence<sup>41</sup>—and thus the presence of quotations and allusions to Homer appearing throughout Byzantine literature is unsurprising. Homeric comparison to events and persons of the Byzantine writer's own time appears especially in sophisticated literary works, particularly in historiographies—a salient example is obviously Anna Komnena's *Alexiad*, where Alexios I's achievements in war are given a deliberate Homeric gloss, his triumphs over his foes being described as Palamedian and possessed of a *techne* like that of a Homeric charioteer.<sup>42</sup> A more contemporaneous historiography to Ouranos, Leo the Deacon's *Historia*, frequently makes use of Homeric comparisons and cites Homer by name; it has been suggested that Leo's emphasis on siege warfare and single combat may be *in imitatio* of Homer's description of the siege of Troy.<sup>43</sup> Homeric referents in descriptions of combat and warfare are familiarizing; they make particular encounters quickly and easily comprehensible to the audience of the work.

However, what is intriguing in Ouranos's Homeric reference in letter 47 is his employment of it to express an atmospheric and visceral description of campaigning: he uses it, not merely to show off his classical training or to eulogize great deeds as Anna does, or to make analogies to great historical battles as Leo the

<sup>40</sup> Ouranos, ep. 47, quoting Il. 10.13. Ouranos's letters are edited in J. Darrouzès, *Épistoliers Byzantins du X<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris 1960), 254–59. All translations AnnaLinden Weller.

<sup>41</sup> R. Browning, “Homer in Byzantium”, *Viator* 6 (1975), 14–18; E. Cullhed, “Introduction,” in Cullhed (ed.), *Eustathios of Thessalonike: Commentary on Homer's Odyssey, vol. 1: On Rhapsodies A–B* (Uppsala 2016).

<sup>42</sup> E. Quandahl & S. C. Jarratt, “To Recall Him Will Be A Subject of Lamentation: Anna Comnena as Rhetorical Historiographer”, *Rhetorica* 26/3 (2008), 301–35.

<sup>43</sup> A. Markopoulos, “Ζητήματα κοινωνικού φύλου στον Λέοντα τὸν Διάκονο,” in S. Kaklames et al. (eds.), *Ενδύμνησις Νικολάου Μ. Παναγιωτόπουλου* (Herakleion 2000), 475–93, here 488.

Deacon does, but instead as a synecdoche for his own *personal* experience.<sup>44</sup> Ouranos not only invokes a reference, he uses that reference to situate his experience inside a particular mood—a mood which he will then employ in order to draw a contrast between his current circumstances and the life he shared with his addressee while they were both in Constantinople. In doing so, his letter moves into a recognizable and common form for Byzantine epistles: the exile letter.

After the description of campaigning, the remainder of letter 47 is composed of Ouranos's reminiscences about the streets and churches of what he refers to as 'my City'—i.e., Constantinople. He calls up a sensory image of a Constantinople which he holds onto as a balm in his exile of service in the East—and while doing so, again makes use of Homeric referents, this time to the *Odyssey*. He writes:

I would not have chosen life with Calypso, rather than the smoke from Constantinople. I am absolutely possessed by the thought of the many sources of pleasure which are there on all sides: the size and beauty of the churches, the length of its colonnades and the extent of its walks, its houses and all the other things which enrich our image of Constantinople; gatherings of friends and conversation, and indeed the greatest of all—my gold-pourer, which is to say, your mouth and its flowers, the flow of graces and the waters of teaching.<sup>45</sup>

*Odyssey* imagery was popular in Byzantine epistolary in general, but finds full expression whenever there is talk of exile, particularly exile from Constantinople. *Topoi* from the *Odyssey* appear in Basil Padiadites' description of his position at Corfu, which he associates with Koryphaia; John Apokaukos refers to himself as the *planetes*, the wanderer, with Penelope waiting for him at home.<sup>46</sup> Exiles—even those merely exiled from Constantinople by virtue of their service to the empire, like Ouranos—take pains to contrast their current states with the majesty and culture of Constantinople. Their employment of Homeric references reinforces and personalizes these feelings of displacement.

Ouranos closes letter 47 by asking for prayers for his return to the Queen City, even if that return happens by means of flying through the air, as if he was a character in the *Odyssey*.<sup>47</sup> His description of the experience of warfare is framed as a contrast between his current exile and his hoped-for return to civilization. The paired *topoi* from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are employed to link Ouranos's lived experience of campaigning on the Eastern frontier to the common literary heritage he shares with his distant peers. The trauma of separation from Constantinopolitan high culture, coupled with the violence and unpleasantness of campaigning in the East, are rendered understandable and communicable by Ouranos's use of Homeric imagery.

The process of epistolary communication visible in this letter and in the rest of Ouranos's epistolary work strongly demonstrates that the day-to-day process of *living* as a source of Byzantine authority on the Byzantine frontier was something which could be usefully mediated by letter exchange. Letter exchange produced opportunities to reinforce and maintain a particularly 'Constantinopolitan' con-

<sup>44</sup> The campaign in question is Ouranos's expedition into Armenia to consolidate the lands previously belonging to David of T'ao; see Ouranos, ep. 19.

<sup>45</sup> Ouranos, ep. 47, in Darrouzès (ed.), *Épistoliers Byzantins du X<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 256.

<sup>46</sup> M. Mullett, "Originality in the Byzantine Letter," in A. Littlewood (ed.), *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music: A Collection of Essays* (Oxford 1995), 44.

<sup>47</sup> Ouranos, ep. 47, in Darrouzès (ed.), *Épistoliers Byzantins du X<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 256.

structed self which could then be employed to obtain favors, good will, and the amelioration of cultural loneliness from other constructed selves—fellow correspondents, with equal expertise—who were also placed outside of the intellectual centers at the metropole.

The Byzantines who lived and worked for imperial interests on the Eastern frontier were immersed in a culture which, while vibrant, intellectually robust, and complex, was not that of the Byzantine center. There is an intellectual strain in keeping the world closed—in preserving a culture outside of the boundaries of that culture. There is a further strain in preserving that culture under the pressures of warfare. Ouranos's use of Homeric *topoi* in his letters, taken in context with his production of military manuals like the *Taktika*, suggest that some of these pressures were mitigated by a textual reproduction of the lived experience of warfare on the frontier.