

DE VELITATIONE BELLICA AND BYZANTINE GUERRILLA WARFARE

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By the death of Emperor Herakleios in AD 641, the armies of Islam had deprived the eastern Roman Empire of its easternmost provinces, forever changing its capacity to wage war.¹ A paucity of Greek sources and scattered and difficult eastern materials have led scholars to a tenth-century Byzantine military manual known by the modern Latin title *De Velitatione Bellica*.² This manual contains a great deal of seemingly plausible advice on how to engage in low-intensity warfare along the Byzantine-Islamic frontier across the Tauros and Anti-Tauros Mountains.³ In the opening lines it purports to set down a system of skirmishing warfare (τὴν τῆς παραδρομῆς μέθοδον) but also claims that in the present it is no longer relevant since the danger of the Muslim states to the east has been broken.⁴ The author indicates that these skirmishing tactics are being written down in case they will be needed in the future.⁵ *De Velitatione* has frequently been invoked as a

¹ This article is based on: Lucas McMahon, “The Past and Future of *De Velitatione Bellica* and Byzantine Guerrilla Warfare,” MA thesis (Central European University, 2015).

² Pseudo-Nikephoros II Phokas, “On Skirmishing,” in *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, ed. and trans. George T. Dennis (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1985), proem.3–7. See also Gilbert Dagron and Haralambie Mihăescu, *Le Traité sur la guérilla (de velitatione) de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas (963–969)* (Paris: CNRS [Centre national de la recherche scientifique], 1986). For the titles of works in Greek I have attempted to follow the names applied in recent scholarship for ease of use even if some are artificial Latin translations like *De Velitatione*. When possible, references are to section numbers rather than page numbers to facilitate finding the passages in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*. I have not attempted to be entirely consistent in citing primary texts, since the editions themselves are not consistent and ease of reference is more important.

³ The terms “Arab”, “Muslim”, and “Islamic” are frequently conflated here, in full recognition that early Islamic armies were not so homogeneously Arab or even Muslim as the ninth- and tenth-century historians would have liked them to be. Even in the Abbasid period Zoroastrians were serving in the army. See, for example, *The Chronicle of Zuqin Parts III and IV, A.D. 488–775*, trans. Amir Harrak (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 206. The terms guerrilla, Vegetian, and irregular warfare are used here synonymously to refer to the sort of tactics in *De Velitatione*. For a broader recent treatment of guerrilla warfare in Byzantium see Gastone Breccia, “Grandi imperi e piccolo guerre: Roma, Bisanzio e la guerriglia II,” *Medioevo greco* 8 (2008): 49–131.

⁴ *De Velitatione*, proem.3–7.

⁵ *De Velitatione*, proem.7–12.



description of how Byzantium fought its Muslim neighbors during the so-called “dark ages” and has recently been examined for its place in the tenth century. Here I will examine the historical background to *De Velitatione*’s claims: What evidence is there for a system of warfare that seeks to defeat the enemy while avoiding facing them in risky straightforward engagement?

The historical beginning of the sort of tactics described in *De Velitatione* has received differing responses. On the one hand, Eric McGeer sees it alongside other tenth-century military manuals and as a piece that recorded the sort of tactics developed in response to Sayf ad-Daula’s raiding, whereas Catherine Holmes raises the possibility that it was a tenth-century piece of propaganda for the Phokas family.⁶ On the other hand, John Haldon and Hugh Kennedy see the tactics as applicable to a much longer period of time.⁷ While Haldon and Kennedy give some examples, their argument for this point is brief and a more systematic examination is needed. Although the material for the annual campaigns between Byzantium and the Muslim states it bordered is often late, chronologically problematic, and short on details, the campaigns themselves deserve more attention than they have been given.⁸ This short survey will provide a number of examples to demonstrate that while Byzantine eastern frontier policy is more complex than a purely defensive guerrilla strategy might suggest, some evidence does suggest that tactics akin to those in *De Velitatione* were employed during the so-called “Byzantine Dark Age.”

Vegetian tactics appeared around the time of the siege of Constantinople in 717/8. The eighth-century Armenian historian Lewond states that in the year prior to the siege of Constantinople orders were given for the population to move into fortresses following the approach of an Arab army.⁹ Byzantine forces that responded to the raid were ordered to avoid battle, but when they saw the Arab host split apart in order to raid the countryside, they could not resist the

⁶ Eric McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 172–78, 226–28; Catherine Holmes, “Byzantine Political Culture and Compilation Literature in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 64 (2010): 74–6.

⁷ Hugh Kennedy and John Haldon, “The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organization and Society in the Borderlands,” in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, ed. Hugh Kennedy (Aldershot: Variorum, 2006), 84, 97.

⁸ Chronological problems in the Muslim sources can be attributed to the beginning of the ordering of historical materials, which really only began in the 730s: Chase Robinson, *Early Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 24–25.

⁹ Lewond, *The History of Lewond, the Eminent Vardapet of the Armenians*, trans. Zaven Arzoumanian (Wynnewood, PA: St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Church, 1982), 108–9.

temptation to attack. In this, however, the Byzantine troops were driven back by Arab ambushes.¹⁰ Although this action does not appear in Greek sources, several of the salient elements of defense as presented in *De Velitatione* can be seen: The concern about being ambushed in retaliation, an attempt to take advantage of the enemy dispersing to raid, and the withdrawing of the population into fortresses.¹¹ The first Byzantine victory during the siege came with Leo sending out ships bearing Greek fire against an Arab fleet at anchor in a sheltered bay. He had received information from Egyptian deserters, took advantage of it to avoid battle, and hit his enemy when they were unprepared. Around the same time, concealed Byzantine infantry was able to attack raiding Muslims in northwestern Asia Minor at Libos and Sophon, forcing the Arabs to limit their activities in the Asian hinterland of Constantinople.¹² Curiously, this sort of warfare is described as “in the manner of the Mardaites.”¹³

While campaigns are listed as taking place almost annually, the next mention of Byzantine resistance is in 731, in which ‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. Bukht is noted as having been killed after charging into Byzantine forces after a retreat, and in the following year Byzantine forces advanced against the invading Muslims but were defeated.¹⁴ Only later in the 730s, during an attack on Synnada, does guerrilla warfare make an explicit appearance. The emir of Melitene, Mālik b. Shabīb, along with the frontier warrior ‘Abdallāh al-Baṭṭāl are listed as present, allegedly bringing some 50 000 troops. While encamped at Synnada, Byzantine soldiers surrounded them on all sides and attacked, with only some 5000 making an escape.¹⁵

In an entry dated to 735, al-Tabari reports that two raids departed that year for Byzantine territory. The leader of one, Sulaymān, departed from Mesopotamia, and the text says that when he arrived in Byzantine lands he spread out his raiding parties.¹⁶ This is notable for matching a detail in *De Velitatione* of

¹⁰ Lewond, *The History of Lewond*, 108–9.

¹¹ *De Velitatione*, 8, 9, 10.

¹² Rodolphe Guiland, “L’expédition de Maslama contre Constantinople (717–718),” in *Études Byzantines*, ed. Rodolphe Guiland (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1959), 122.

¹³ Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, 397. This note is unique to Theophanes.

¹⁴ Al-Tabari, *The History of Al-Tabari*, vol. 25, *The End of Expansion*, trans. Khalid Yahya Blankinship (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 95–96.

¹⁵ Al-Tabari, *End of Expansion*; 102; *The Chronicle of Zuqin*, 162. This event may have taken place any time between 733 and 740 and is placed by Petersen ca. 740, see Leif Inge Ree Petersen, *Siege Warfare and Military Organization in the Successor States (400–800 A.D.): Byzantium, the West, and Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 717.

¹⁶ Al-Tabari, *End of Expansion*, 111.

small parties separating out from the larger raid force and thus provides some support for the manual's claim to be preserving the past.¹⁷

The sources are relatively quiet for the middle years of the eighth century. Although they are typically taciturn when discussing frontier warfare, the Abbasid Revolution appears to have limited Muslim campaigning; Constantine V took advantage of this to dedicate his efforts to fighting the Bulgars and to making a couple of high-profile attacks on Melitene and Germanikeia. In the late 760s some further details surface with a Muslim attack on Kamakhon. While this elicits only a brief acknowledgement in Theophanes, the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* provides an extensive siege narrative. Two particularly salient details emerge from *Zuqnin's* account. The first is that the leader of Kamakhon, a certain Sergios, permitted Syriac Christians to cross the border in search of madder (ܥܘܕܝܪ) after catching some of them.¹⁸ This attests both to Roman border intelligence and its limits; individuals or small groups could evidently cross without detection, but at risk of capture.¹⁹ It also gives a glimpse into frontier life. There may have been an attempt to create something akin to a hard frontier zone, or at least one that was regularly monitored, as indicated by the apprehension of those trying to cross the frontier.²⁰ The Syriac term used by the chronicle is rather elusive but perhaps points to some degree of transhumance in the region.

¹⁷ *De Velitatione*, 10.1–48.

¹⁸ *The Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 208. Robert Payne-Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903), 440. Unfortunately, the Payne-Smith dictionary does not provide any references to other uses of the word or how the author arrived at such a precise definition as *rubia tinctorum*. This particular plant is associated with the creation of dyes: D. J. Mabberley, *Mabberley's Plant Book: A Portable Dictionary of Plants, their Classifications and Uses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 750. Harrak suggests that it was eaten by the poor and animals in times of need (*The Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 208n3). If indeed this plant was used as fodder for animals, or if ܥܘܕܝܪ is less specific than the dictionary suggests, then perhaps this is a direct reference to cross-border transhumance. Until further research can be carried out, however, nothing can be said for certain. For the siege narrative see Petersen, *Siege Warfare*, 732–738. For some of the historical problems see Michael Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in the Jibad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1996), 62–64; A. Asa Eger, *The Spaces Between the Teeth: A Gazetteer of Towns on the Islamic-Byzantine Frontier* (Yayınları: Istanbul, 2012), 80–81.

¹⁹ Nora Berend, “Medievalists and the Notion of the Frontier,” *The Medieval History Journal* 2, no. 1 (1999), 59–61.

²⁰ Hugh Kennedy and John Haldon, “The Arab-Byzantine Frontier,” 114–16 find an interesting reference in an Arabic text to jihad requirements being fulfilled if one's animals ate Byzantine grass, hinting at transhumance in the border regions. Seasonal transhumance also occurred between the Cilician Plain and the mountains in other periods, see Scott

The second interesting item from the chronicle is that during the siege a group of Arabs departed after the fortress had been besieged and moved into Byzantine lands to raid. *Zuqnin* reports that the raiders passed through difficult, arid, and mountainous terrain in order to avoid detection.²¹ Although they suffered privation, the march was successful for the raiders, who then entered the lands around Kaisareia in Cappadocia, where they apparently found a lack of resistance and available plunder. Having taken much loot, the Muslims retreated, encamped in a meadow, and set their horses to pasture but did not adequately prepare defenses. *Zuqnin* claims that they believed themselves to already be in Syria.²² According to *Zuqnin*, a Roman force allegedly composed of 12 000 cavalry just happened to stumble upon the encamped Muslim army. The chronicler then presents a scene in which the unnamed Roman commander cannot believe that the Muslim force is so vulnerable. Once the commander realizes that the situation is real he immediately occupies the pass out of the meadow. The Muslims then begin negotiations and the prisoners and the loot are given up, but during this time Roman messengers summoned a great army which surrounded the meadow and made a simultaneous night assault which destroyed the invaders and left only a few to escape to Melitene.²³

A few details from this story raise questions. *Zuqnin* has no idea where the Roman army came from, merely that it was marching from a victory. However, no other Byzantine activity is mentioned in other sources.²⁴ *Zuqnin's* information on the Roman army should be treated carefully. He is able to name the commander in Kamakhon (Sergios) and two Muslim leaders, Radād and Mālik b. Tawq, but the Roman general is never named. Given the other information, it seems plausible that if *Zuqnin* knew the general's name he would have included it and that the story of the general just happening to discover the Muslim force on his way back

Redford, "Trade and Economy in Antioch and Cilicia in the 12th-13th Centuries," in *Trade and Markets in Byzantium*, ed. Cécile Morrisson (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2012), 301.

²¹ *The Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 209–10. Presumably this raid passed through the mountains somewhere between the Halys and Euphrates rivers and the settlements of Sebasteia, Tephrike, and Tzamandos.

²² *The Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 211.

²³ *The Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 211–13.

²⁴ The siege and raid are barely mentioned elsewhere. Theophanes only states that the siege lasted for a whole summer (Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, 444) and nothing remarkable is noted in al-Tabari other than that some Muslims died in the raid (Al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. 29, *Al-Manşūr and al-Mahdī*, trans. Hugh Kennedy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 42.



from some unnamed victory is questionable. The other issue is the timing. *Zuqnin* explicitly states that the general sent for reinforcements while negotiating with the Muslims and that the troops that arrived were a substantial body broken into four divisions. The given figure of the 50 000 men on the raid is probably excessive, but the 12 000 Byzantine cavalry is not, even if it is rather on the large side.²⁵

Whether significant additional bodies of troops came or not is unknown, but another course of action is plausible. The Muslims, caught unaware, perhaps entered negotiations to buy themselves time to get their military equipment in order and prepare to break out. Presumably this is when the captives and loot were returned, but whether they were given as a bribe to let the Muslims return home or whether the precariousness of their position became evident and such additional baggage would have limited the hard fighting to come is unclear.²⁶ The Roman commander may have used the negotiations in order to buy time to get his army in place around the Muslim encampment. While the numbers are not believable, they are large enough to suggest that significant forces were present on both sides and that the mountainous terrain likely limited the ability of both groups in their search for pasturage and supplies. It seems unlikely, then, that these negotiations were carried out over the course of weeks, but rather a day or a few days. The surprise arrival of the Muslims in Byzantine territory is a good explanation for why they do not seem to have been harried in their raiding around Kaisareia. Forces were assembled during the raid and only encountered the raiders as they were returning home through the Tauros Mountains.

Once the Roman forces were in position, they attacked. Although this reconstruction of the battle is hypothetical, the surviving evidence is more easily reconstructed into an understandable battle than some other more famous clashes.²⁷ The injunctions that appeared later in *De Velitatione* seem to have been

²⁵ An estimate for the late eighth century puts total Byzantine troop numbers around 80 000 see Warren Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army 284–1081* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 67–69. John Haldon, *Warfare, State, and Society in the Byzantine World 565–1204* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1999), 81–83 is generally in agreement.

²⁶ A Roman general was criticized for allegedly accepting a bribe and diverting his army a few decades later, see Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, 451. Collusion and bribery were apparently plausible enough that Leo VI advocated leaving the property of certain Muslim border landlords alone so that they would fall under suspicion, see Leo VI, *The Taktika of Leo VI: Revised Edition*, ed. and trans. George T. Dennis (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2014), 20.22.

²⁷ Yarmūk, for example, is deeply problematic, as are the differing traditions on what happened after the Battle of the Masts in 654. The historical issues surrounding Yarmūk are highlighted (but far from solved) in David Woods, “Jews, Rats, and the Battle of

closely followed to the extent that this may have been nearly a model response. Of course, this all assumes that *Zuqnin* preserves some semblance of reliable military data. How much shadowing was conducted is unknown, but the Roman force did manage to assemble with something approaching its full strength at a point and time where the Muslims were unprepared, suggesting a degree of coordination and intelligence unless one is inclined to believe *Zuqnin*'s story that a battle-ready force just happened to stumble upon the raiders. The Byzantines also occupied the pass that the Muslims were planning to take on the way out and they may have held it successfully since those who escaped went eastward rather than south into Syria.²⁸ The Roman force also seems to have been heavily cavalry-based, something suggested by Phokas in the tenth century as ideal for fighting on the eastern frontier.²⁹ An effort to recover captives and loot taken is also noted by both Phokas and *Zuqnin*.³⁰

The success of these sorts of tactics evidently led to them being attempted again shortly thereafter. Theophanes reports a Muslim attack on the coastal fortress of Syke.³¹ Michael Lachanodrakon, then *strategos* of the Anatolikon, joined forces with the Boukellarion, the Armeniakon, and the Kibyrrhaiotai and blocked the path of the Muslims out. Perhaps having learned from the earlier defeat, the Muslim general went on the offensive. What exactly he attempted to

Yarmük,” in *The Late Roman Army in the Near East from Diocletian to the Arab Conquest*, ed. Ariel S. Lewin and Pietrina Pellegrini (Oxford: Archaeopress), 367–376. See also John Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars* (Stroud: The History Press, 2001), 58–65.

²⁸ *The Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 213.

²⁹ *De Velitatione*, 17.21–23.

³⁰ *De Velitatione*, 14.17–108. *The Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 210.

³¹ F. Hild and H. Hellenkemper, *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* 3.1: *Kilikien und Isaurien* (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1990), 421–3; Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, 445; Petersen, *Siege Warfare*, 738–39. Syke has been identified as the modern Softa Kalesi, a spectacular and well-preserved castle just east of Bozyazı on the south coast of Turkey. How this identification was made is unknown. Cyril Mango, Roger Scott, and Geoffrey Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284–813* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 616, n.1 identify this castle as Syke. They cite W. M. Ramsay, *The Historical Geography of Asia Minor* (London: John Murray, 1890), 381, which does not attempt to place the castle. This reading has been taken up elsewhere, such as in Emilie Savage-Smith, “The Book of Curiosities: An Eleventh-Century Egyptian View of the Lands of the Infidel,” in *Geography and Ethnography: Perceptions of the World in Pre-Modern Societies*, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub and Richard J.A. Talbert (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 308, n. 33. The *Digital Atlas of the Roman Empire* is less sure: “The Digital Atlas of the Roman Empire: Softa Kalesi,” created July 1, 2008, imperium.ahlfeldt.se/places/22663 [last accessed May 2015].

do is obscured by Theophanes' claim that he attacked the troops of the cavalry *themata* (the Kibyrrhaiotai not having joined forces with them) and defeated them, which then permitted the Muslims to raid and march home unmolested. Several of the same elements of the previous action are visible here, such as the Byzantine forces grouping together when they have the advantage to prevent the invaders from leaving easily and the use of the terrain. That it was ultimately unsuccessful does not detract from what was broadly a Vegetian guerrilla strategy for dealing with invaders on the mountainous frontier.

The importance of these passages for understanding Byzantine guerrilla warfare on the eastern frontier should not be understated. What *Zuqin* provides is apparently the earliest full account of tactics akin to those in *De Velitatione* being applied. Notably, it takes place a decade earlier than the commonly accepted "early" account of guerrilla tactics in the east. Mark Whittow sees the first evidence of this sort of strategy applied by Leo IV in 778 in a passage in Theophanes and then goes on to claim that this type of warfare developed into a sophisticated military doctrine in the ninth and tenth centuries.³² Breccia followed this despite noting earlier the importance of the Kamakhon raid.³³ The case of the raiding party that left the siege of Kamakhon does point to a sophisticated defensive system that seems to have already been in place at least by the middle of the eighth century.

Theophanes's account of Leo IV's orders to defend Byzantine territory in such a manner does require some explanation if the orders were not representative of a new strategy. Leo ordered his generals to avoid meeting the Arabs in the field but rather to take parties of around 3000 men to trail the Arab raiding parties so that the invaders could not raid effectively, while also burning pasturelands so that the Muslim's animals would have nothing to eat.³⁴ Other events explain Leo's strategy. In the previous year, Leo had sent a major campaign into Syria which attacked Germanikeia. Although failing to take the fortress, Michael Lachanodrakon seized the camel herds of the Caliph Mahdi's uncle and devastated the surrounding territory.³⁵ Lachanodrakon defeated the raid reported in al-Tabari

³² Mark Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium, 600–1025* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 176. Whittow's argument has been adopted in recent scholarship, see Panos Sophoulis, *Byzantium and Bulgaria, 775–813* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 145.

³³ Breccia, "Piccole guerre," 93, cf. 55–59.

³⁴ Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, 452. Ioannis Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden in der politischen und ideologischen Wahrnehmung in Byzanz (7.–11. Jahrhundert)* (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2009), 56–7.

³⁵ Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, 452.

for 777/8.³⁶ This failure is attributed to the raid commander's unwillingness to listen to his scouts. Ibn Wadhih adds that the Muslims were surrounded and defeated on this campaign.³⁷ Together this hints at guerrilla tactics and suggests that Lachanodrakon probably did not engage the raiders directly in a set-piece battle. These defeats undoubtedly undermined Abbasid prestige and forced Mahdi to respond with a major campaign against Byzantium.³⁸ Leo may have been wary about directly engaging a Muslim force sent by the caliph himself, but he may also have wished to conserve his forces. In 776/7 the ousted Bulgarian khan, Telerig, arrived in Constantinople amid unrest in the khanate.³⁹ If Leo was intending to take advantage of this by continuing his father's campaigns in Bulgaria, he never did so, but the possibility must have been kept in mind given Constantine V's long-standing strategy of breaking the Bulgar state.

Nonetheless, Constantinople must have recognized the danger to the army and the regime in directly confronting a caliphal raiding army and the possibility of continuing Byzantine intervention in Bulgarian politics and wisely chose to avoid any serious risks. Another danger came from inside, from the most experienced military man in the east. Recent history had seen military men from the provinces usurping power in Constantinople, with Leo's own grandfather taking the throne in 717 and Leo's father, Constantine, fighting a rebellious general of the Armeniakon, who actually managed to oust him from Constantinople.⁴⁰ Theophanes claims that Lachanodrakon took bribes from the

³⁶ Al-Tabari, *Manşūr and al-Mahdī*, 198. This "raid" was probably a response to Lachanodrakon's campaign, see Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence*, 72.

³⁷ Brooks, "Early Abbasids," 735.

³⁸ Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence*, 71–75. The Byzantine frontier was a source of prestige for rulers and aspiring rulers alike, see Robert Haug, "Frontiers and the Early Islamic State: Jihād between Caliphs and Volunteers," *History Compass* 9, no. 8 (2011): 638–640; Hugh Kennedy, "The Mediterranean Frontier: Christianity Face to Face with Islam, 600–1050," in *Cambridge History of Christianity: Early Medieval Christianities c. 600–1100*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 181–184. The use of the Byzantine frontier for political purposes is nicely highlighted by al-Tabari's claim that Caliph al-Manşūr planned to get the unreliable Khurasani army away from a rebellion by sending them on a raid against Byzantium, see Al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. 28, *Abbasid Authority Affirmed*, trans. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 69.

³⁹ Sophoulis, *Byzantium and Bulgaria*, 148–49

⁴⁰ Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1997), 357–59.

Muslims at Germanikeia in order to stave off his assault on the city.⁴¹ Perhaps Leo had to walk carefully around his most able general, who had recently demonstrated that his loyalty to the regime was an open question, assuming, of course, that Theophanes's claim is valid. Should Lachanodrakon's loyalty have been suspect, removing him from his post might have been dangerous to Leo, but so might have been giving him the sort of campaign army necessary to fight Mahdi's forces. Ultimately, this theory is entirely based upon one potentially spurious statement in Theophanes and precedent from earlier in the eighth century, although in this case Leo did have professional imperial troops (*tagmata*) that his grandfather and father did not have to face when attacking Constantinople.⁴² Another possibility entirely is that Theophanes' account is a reflection of an attempt by Leo to achieve military legitimacy. Like Leo VI with his military works, Constantine VII with his treatises and harangues, or Herakleios sending dispatches back to Constantinople from the east, Leo IV could have been giving orders for the purpose of making his reign known and making his concern for the provinces and the army clear.⁴³ That Theophanes happened to select a communiqué designed for those purposes that has subsequently been viewed as part of a long-term military strategy is not impossible nor is the possibility that such a dispatch could have served both military and political purposes. Nonetheless, the overall picture is one in which Leo has several convincing reasons not to take the field. This passage in Theophanes should not be seen as the creation or application of a new strategy but rather as a specific response to a particular problem that was approached in a way that made sense in the current political climate in Constantinople.

Despite these examples, good evidence of guerrilla warfare on the frontier becomes more shadowy than earlier in the eighth century. In 779/80,

⁴¹ Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, 451. This could just be an attempt by the hostile Theophanes to blacken his character, see Ioannis Stouraitis, "Michael Lachanodrakon," in *Encyclopedia of the Hellenic World*, accessed April 21, 2015, <http://www.ehw.gr/1.aspx?id=6939>. This story is, however, accepted elsewhere, see *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit* III, s.v. "Μιχαήλ 5027."

⁴² Haldon, *Warfare, State, and Society*, 78.

⁴³ John Haldon, *A Critical Commentary on the Taktika of Leo VI* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2014), 26, 73; Dagron and Mihăescu, *Le Traité*, 137–38; Eric McGeer, "Two Military Orations of Constantine VII," in *Byzantine Authors: Literary Activities and Preoccupations*, ed. John W. Nesbitt (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 115; Athanasios Markopoulos, "The Ideology of War in the Military Harangues of Constantine Porphyrogenetos," in *Byzantine War Ideology between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion*, ed. Johannes Koder and Ioannis Stouraitis (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012), 55–56.

Lachanodrakon intercepted and destroyed what is said to have been a large Muslim raiding party, but no further details are available.⁴⁴ In the following year, Eirene deployed the Asian *themata* to guard the Tauros passes.⁴⁵ What happened next is unclear. Theophanes claims that the Muslims attempted to raid and were defeated, whereas al-Tabari says that no effort was made to force the passes and the raid returned home.⁴⁶ This marshalling of the *themata* was unusual and reflects the heightened state of war between Constantinople and Baghdad in the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

In 781/2 Eirene is reported to have sent *tagmata* to Bane for the purpose of hindering the movement of Harun al-Rashid's invaders, which is a clear example of an attempt to use guerrilla tactics against a superior force.⁴⁷ An effort may have been made in 788 to repeat Lachanodrakon's 779/80 success because forces from the Opsikion and the Anatolikon were defeated by a Muslim raid at what may have been Podandos, just beyond the Cilician Gates.⁴⁸ Presumably the Byzantines had some intelligence that Harun al-Rashid had ordered a more substantial raid that year, otherwise it seems unlikely that an important section of the officer corps of two western *themata* would have been present in the Tauros Mountains and brought forces to intercept invaders.

A failed expedition of Constantine VI in 796/7 against the Muslims has the detail that he desired to bring lightly armed troops (μονοζώνων στρατιωτών) from the *themata*.⁴⁹ This may indicate an interest in mountain warfare, although *De Velitatione*'s focus is on cavalry as the main operational arm in guerrilla warfare.

From this survey of the eighth century, Byzantium was no stranger to guerrilla tactics in its fight against the Muslims. Such things appear as early as the siege of Constantinople in 717/18. The raid that broke off from the siege of Kamakhon is notable for its rather close adherence to tactics that were only written down two centuries later in *De Velitatione*. This is important, since it lends credence to the manual's own claim that it preserves a manner of fighting from

⁴⁴ Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, 453.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 455.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 455; Al-Tabari, *Al-Mansūr and al-Mahdī*, 217; Warren Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780–842* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 66–67, citing only al-Tabari and Theophanes, gives an account that includes details not found elsewhere, such as a battle taking place near Kaisareia.

⁴⁷ Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, 456; Treadgold, *Byzantine Revival*, 69.

⁴⁸ Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, 463; Mango, Scott, and Greatrex, *Theophanes Confessor*, 638, n. 1, point out that the reading of this name is uncertain. Podandos is, however, supported by Treadgold, *Byzantine Revival*, 91.

⁴⁹ Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, 471.



a past time. It also helps to situate the manual more fully in scholarly opinion. McGeer's placement of *De Velitatione* in the corpus is thus revealed to be both correct and in need of a minor qualification – *De Velitatione* may well refer to the defensive sort of warfare practiced against Sayf ad-Dawla, but it also refers to a style of war going back centuries. A study of the eighth-century campaigns also reveals that Whittow's claim that the passage in Theophanes referring to Leo IV's strategy against the Arabs as the first clear evidence of guerrilla strategy in the east is not accurate. The raid that broke off from the siege of Kamakhon predated that by a decade and seems to preserve a believable case of guerrilla tactics. A full study of the eighth-century campaigns is still needed, but this short article fills in gaps in the oft-cited article by Haldon and Kennedy in which they assert the practicality and reality of *De Velitatione* but cover too large a chronological frame to devote attention to specific campaign detail. Guerrilla tactics appear to have been employed at a level no less sophisticated than those put forth by *De Velitatione* in the tenth century, vindicating the claim in the handbook that it preserves the past.