

THE BYZANTINES IN BATTLE

Although the Byzantines were constantly under attack or under threat of attack, they regarded warfare as the least desirable method of defending themselves. Leo VI prefaced his *Tactical Constitutions* with the words: «We must always prefer peace above all else and refrain from war»¹. Instead of fighting, they chose to employ diplomacy, bribery, covert action, paying tribute, setting one tribe against another. War was the last resort. And when they did decide upon war, they sought to avoid the crush of a pitched battle. For they realized that a frontal assault carried enormous risks. The *Strategikon*, attributed to emperor Maurice (582-602), articulated this concern, «To try simply to overpower the enemy in the open, hand to hand and face to face ... is very risky and can result in serious harm». «A wise commander will not engage the enemy in a pitched battle unless a truly exceptional opportunity or advantage presents itself»².

Five hundred years later, Kekaumenos advised the commander to learn all he could about the enemy and, only after thorough investigation, line up for battle. He should weaken the enemy by tricks, machines, ambushes and, last of all, if there is no other way, engage in battle³. Leo Phokas reminded his troops that wars are won not so much by pitched battles as by cautious prudence, cunning, and timing, and he forbade any reckless charges in the open field⁴.

But, as we know, Byzantine armies did engage in regular battles. Our goal in this paper is to study the manner in which they went about it. But, reconstructing a battle from narrative sources of any period in history is a tricky enterprise, and

1. *Leonis Tacticae constitutiones: Libri I-XIV (38)*, ed. R. Vári, *Leonis imperatoris Tactica*, 2 vols, Budapest 1917-1922; Lib. XVIII, ed. R. Vári, «Böles Leo Hadi Taktikájának XVIII Fejezete», in G. Pauler-S. Szilágyi, *A Magyar Honfoglalás Kútjói*, Budapest 1900; entire text in J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca*, Paris 1857 ff, 107, 671-1094 (hereafter *LT*), Prooim. 3, lib. 2, 45.

2. *Das Strategikon des Maurikios*, ed. G. T. Dennis, with transl. by E. Gamillscheg, Vienna 1981 [*Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae* 17]; English transl. G. T. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon. Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*, Philadelphia 1984 (hereafter *SM*), 7, 1; 8, 86.

3. *Sovjety i Rasskazy Kekavmena*, ed. G. G. Litavrin, Moscow 1972, p. 27.

4. *Leonis diaconi Caloensis historiae libri decem*, ed. C. B. Hase, Bonn 1828 (hereafter *LD*), pp. 2, 3.

medieval sources are notoriously imprecise. Chroniclers seem more interested in supernatural presences appearing on the battlefield than in what actually transpired there. Victory or defeat was the result solely of one's piety or of one's sins. Chroniclers pay scant attention to terrain, armament, and tactics. Still, with patience and caution, something can be learned from narrative sources. The military manuals, on the other hand, concentrate on theory and offer the commander a series of paradigms of battle situations to ponder. Still, more often than not, they reflect actual operations in the field. I propose, then, to study what these handbooks teach about the conduct of battle and then to look at the narrative sources to see how those instructions were implemented⁵. While infantry played a very important role in warfare, especially in rugged terrain and in night battles, the sources provide significantly less information about them than about their mounted colleagues. For this reason, then, and because of the constraints of time, we will concentrate on cavalry battles, in the ninth through the eleventh centuries⁶.

One more preliminary note is called for. We must always bear in mind a matter often overlooked by scholars: the striking adaptability and flexibility manifested by the Byzantines in practical matters. The Byzantines did not always do things the same way. The manuals set rather strict guidelines, but they allowed the commander a great deal of discretion in the field. Procopius begins his account of Justinian's wars with praise for the heavily armored, mounted archer, and he ridicules those who worship more traditional practices and give no credit to modern improvements⁷. The conservative Kekaumenos counsels the general: «If you find yourself in a new situation, don't just say, the ancient military writers didn't say anything about this. You go ahead and figure out a way to deal with it. The ancients were human and so are you. If they could figure out how to deal with problems that arise, so can you»⁸. Nikephoros Phokas explicitly allows the commander to vary the number of units and the arrangement of the formation to adjust to the terrain or special circumstances⁹.

What then do the military manuals say about battle? We can confidently begin with the *Strategikon* of Maurice, which, although dealing with an earlier period,

5. For an earlier period see C. M. Mazzucchi, «Le Katagraphiae dello *Strategikon* di Maurizio e lo schieramento di battaglia dell'esercito romano nel vi/vii secolo», *Aevum* 55 (1981), pp. 111-138.

6. On the infantry, particularly in the tenth century, see Eric McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century*, Washington 1995, pp. 202-210; 257-279.

7. *Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia*, ed. J. Haury, add. et corr. G. Wirth, I, Leipzig 1963, *De bellis libri I-IV*, 1, 1.

8. Kekaumena, p. 142.

9. The *Præcepta Militaria* of Nikephoros Phokas, ed. and transl. E. McGeer in *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 12-59 (hereafter *PM*), p. 30.

gives expression to enduring Byzantine military theory and practice and was copied and paraphrased many times. The *Tactical Constitutions* of Leo VI (886-912) repeat, rephrase, and adapt the *Strategikon* to conditions in the late ninth century. The anonymous *Sylloge Tacticorum* reflects conditions later in the tenth century, as do the *De re militari* and the treatises of Nikephoros Phokas, the *Praecepta Militaria* and the *De Velitatione*¹⁰.

Before the battle the commanders were given a checklist of things to do. The men had to be selected for service, assigned to units, dekarchies, or kontoubernia, which were then made part of banda or tagmata, and so into larger units, droungoi and tourmai¹¹. The names of the units as well as their numbers varied over the centuries: Leo's *Taktika* has ten for a dekarchy and between two and four hundred for a tagma. The droungos should comprise not more than 3.000, and the tourma not more than 6.000¹². Experienced officers were assigned to the various units. The manuals also provide detailed instruction about armament and weapons¹³, as well as training and drills¹⁴. The day before battle, or on the day itself, the standards were to be blessed and religious services held¹⁵.

Before setting out on his campaign against Persia, Herakleios spent a good deal of time in training his troops, including having them take part in very realistic mock battles¹⁶. Nikephoros Phokas put his men through rigorous training on arriving on Crete¹⁷. Basil II was noted for his insistence on drilling his troops, his attention to detail, and his personal involvement in the selection and evaluation of each officer. When they complained about too much drilling and not enough fighting, he smiled and replied that if he did not keep them at it, their battles would never end¹⁸.

10. *Sylloge Tacticorum, quae olim Inedita Leonis Tactica dicebatur*, ed. A. Dain, Paris 1938; *De re militari*, ed. and transl. G. T. Dennis under the title «Campaign Organization and Tactics», *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, Washington 1985 [*Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae* 25], pp. 241-335; *De velitatione*, ed. and transl. G. T. Dennis under the title «Skirmishing», *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, pp. 137-239 (hereafter DV), and by G. Dagron and H. Mihăescu, *Le traité sur la guérilla (De velitatione) de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas*, Paris 1986, pp. 29-135. On the various military treatises, see A. Dain, «Les stratégistes byzantins», *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1967), pp. 317-392.

11. SM 7, LT 4, 1-3.

12. LT 4, 40-47; 13.

13. E. g., LT 5-6.

14. SM 3 and 6; LT 7, et alibi.

15. SM 7, 1; LT 13, 1. See also G. T. Dennis, «Religious Services in the Byzantine army», *EYAO-TIMA. Studies in Honor of Robert Taft, S. J.* [= *Studia Anselmiana* 110], Rome 1993, pp. 107-117.

16. *Theophanis Chronographia* 1, ed. C. de Boor, Leipzig 1883, pp. 303-304.

17. LD 3, 1.

18. Psellos, *Chronographia: Michele Psello, Imperatori di Bisanzio (Cronografia)*, ed. S. Impellizzeri, transl. S. Ronchey, 2 vols., Milan 1984, 1, 32-34; also ed. E. Ranauld, 2 vols., Paris 1967.

Armament and weapons are described in detail in the manuals. Lances and swords are mentioned in almost all the accounts. Most also mention heavy iron maces; the battle scenes illustrated in the Madrid Skylitzes depict the soldiers wielding maces as much as other weapons¹⁹. In 971 Theodore Lalakon killed many of the enemy with an iron mace²⁰. Well into the twelfth century we read of a great fear of Byzantine maces²¹.

The manuals insist that the army gather adequate supplies of food and water before combat²². Romanos Argyros, in 1030, did not listen to his experienced military staff who advised him not to undertake an expedition in Syria in the summer because water would be scarce and the fully armored soldiers would find the heat intolerable. But he ignored them and marched right into disaster²³. Provision was also made for bringing up water during battle²⁴. At Dorostolon, 21 July 971, when the fighting was at its most intense, the Byzantine troops, in full armor, were suffering from the heat and thirst and were beginning to weaken. John Tzimiskes ordered flasks of wine and water to be brought to them; they revived and managed to hold their own on the battlefield²⁵.

In addition, Kekaumenos insisted that the troops must be rested before any attack; the Bulgarians under Alousianos did not rest before attacking Thessalonica and were defeated²⁶. A Byzantine expedition against the Pechenegs did not stop for rest and met the same fate²⁷.

On the day before battle, the general was to gather intelligence about the enemy from spies, scouts, deserters, and prisoners²⁸. He was to make sure that the horses were watered, and that the men had a substantial meal, especially in the

19. See A. Grabar and M. Manoussacas, *L'illustration du manuscrit de Skylitzès de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Madrid*, Venice 1979; S. Cirac Estopañan, *Skylitzes Matritensis*, Barcelona 1965; A. B. Hoffmeyer, «Military Equipment in the Byzantine Manuscript of Skylitzes in Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid», *Gladius* 5 (Madrid 1966).

20. LD 9, 41.

21. In an enkomion on Manuel I Komnenos, Eustathios of Thessalonica remarks that the Hungarians fled in terror at the sight of Byzantine soldiers wielding maces: oration 35, 11-36, 14, ed. W. Regel, *Fontes rerum byzantinorum*, 1, St. Petersburg-Leipzig 1892, pp. 173-184.

22. LT 13; PM 2, 11-14.

23. *Ioannis Scyllitzae Synopsis historiarum*, ed. J. Thurn, Berlin 1973, pp. 379-380.

24. PM 1, 146-48; DV 7-10.

25. Skylitzes, p. 306. See S. McGrath, «The Battles of Dorostolon (971): Rhetoric and Reality», *Peace and War in Byzantium. Essays in Honor of George T. Dennis, S. J.*, ed. T. Miller and J. Nesbitt, Washington 1995, pp. 152-164.

26. Kekavmena, p. 160.

27. Kekavmena, p. 162.

28. LT 13; PM 4, 192-212.

morning. The customary announcements were to be made, in particular, those warning the men against stopping to loot before the final outcome of the battle.

Knowledge of the terrain was essential²⁹. The *Strategikon* cites an earlier, unknown source: «We should choose the terrain not only to suit our armament, but also with a view to the various peoples. Parthians and Gauls handle themselves well on the plains. The Spanish and Ligurians fight better in the mountains and the hills, and the Britons in the woods, while the Germans are more at home in the swamps»³⁰. Contemporary enemies are discussed in Book XI, and the commander is taught to «select open, smooth and level terrain» when fighting against the Persians and the Scythians, but rugged and difficult ground if he has to fight «the light-haired people»³¹. In Book XVIII of his *Taktika*, Leo treats of terrain in fighting the enemy of his day, and, by the very nature of things, great emphasis is placed on terrain throughout the *De Velitatione*.

The Byzantines, campaigning against the Paulicians, arrayed themselves on higher ground than the enemy, and they used this position to great advantage by giving the impression of a huge multitude on the hilltops, so that the Paulicians were frightened and fled³². At Dorostolon Tzimiskes observed that the battlefield was narrow, giving the Rhos an advantage. He ordered his men to retreat to the broader plain and then turn and hold their ground³³.

The commander had to take all these factors into account and then draw up his plans for battle. Attaliates pictures emperor Romanos Diogenes in his tent sketching out battle plans before engaging the enemy³⁴. Once it had been decided to take the field, and all the preparations had been completed, it was time to line up the army for battle. All the manuals stress what they believed and wanted to be most characteristic of the Roman armies, *εὐταξία*, good order, discipline³⁵.

The formation for battle recommended in the *Strategikon* is essentially the same as that prescribed by Leo VI (Book XII) and by the other manuals. Allowance is made for variations because of the terrain or special circumstances, but the prescribed battle formation consists of certain standard elements. The first line (*πρόμαχος*) was to be composed of three equal units, left, center, right, with the

29. *LT* 14, 4-6.

30. *SM* 8, 2, 88.

31. *SM* 11, 1, 54-57; 2, 95-101; 3, 42-44.

32. Skylitzes, p. 139.

33. Skylitzes, p. 307.

34. *Michaelis Attaliotae historia*, ed. I. Bekker, Bonn 1853, p. 113, 8.

35. E. g., *LT* 12, 1. Basil II is quoted as saying that the policy of never breaking up their formation contributed mightily toward victory, and it was his opinion that this alone made the Roman phalanxes unbeatable; Psellos, *Chronographia*, 1, 33.

lieutenant general taking his position in the middle. Deputatoi, medical corpsmen, were stationed behind them.

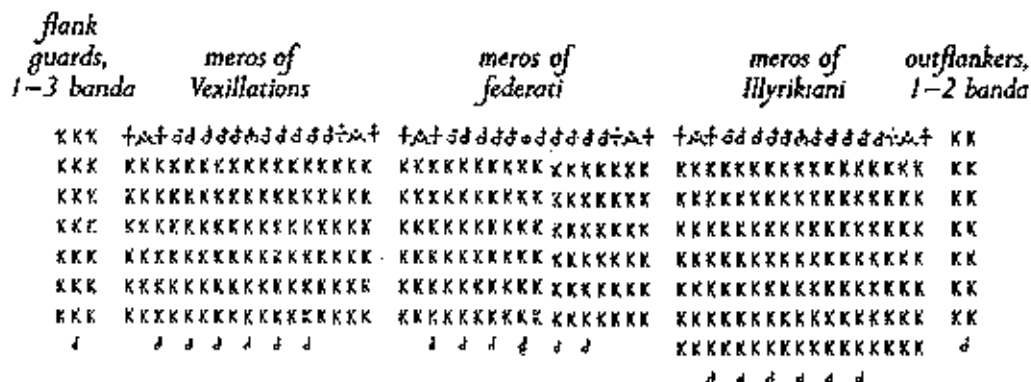
Then, and this is something the manuals strongly insist on, about a bowshot to the rear there should be a second or support line (*βοηθός*), comprised of about one third of the entire army. This line was to be divided into four units with spaces between them, i. e. three spaces. In the middle space the commanding general should take his place with his staff, along with the standard bearers and trumpeters. From there he could more easily survey the whole battlefield and, at the same time, not become directly involved in the fighting. In the spaces between the four units, one or two tagmata should position themselves thinly, so that they could quickly step aside and allow the troops of the front line to find refuge in case they had been defeated and were being pursued by the enemy. The tired enemy would then face a fresh support line. This line would also serve to deter men from the first ranks from deserting, always a distinct possibility.

Behind the second line were the baggage train and the reserve horses, and behind them the rear guard. Units assigned to set up ambushes would be stationed off to the flanks or to the rear. Off to the right were the outflankers who were to circle around the left flank of the enemy and to the left were the flank guards who were to keep the enemy from doing the same to them. If the army was smaller, the support line might be reduced to only two tagmata, if larger, a third support line might be organized. Leo's *Taktika* (Book XVIII) strongly recommends this to defend against the Arabs.

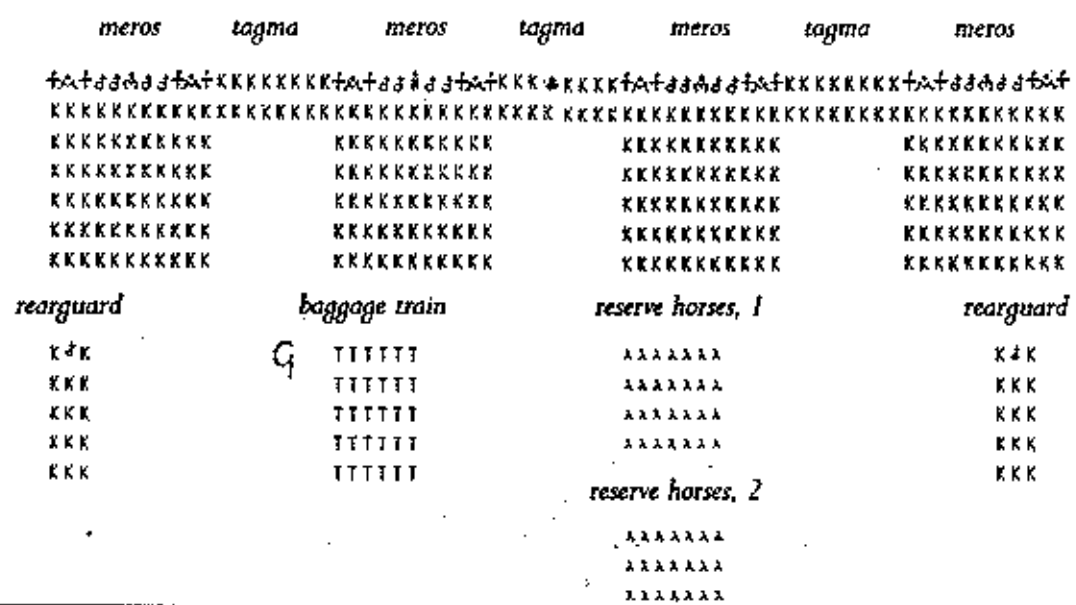
In the second half of the ninth century, the *Sylloge Tacticorum* and the *Praecepta Militaria* of Nikephoros Phokas prescribed some significant variations in forming the battle line. The first line was to be composed of three units, but the center, made up of kataphraktoi, was shaped like a blunt wedge, called a triangle by Nikephoros, and it projected ahead of the other two divisions, so that its rear rank was equal to the first rank of the right and the left. Phokas describes the kataphraktoi formation in some detail, for it was central to his tactics³⁶. It was to be twelve rows deep with each row adding two men to each side as the formation went back, increasing each row by four men. The first model he presents is one of 504 men with twenty in the first row and sixty-four in the last. Smaller formations were also envisioned, but the numbers were not as important as the pattern. The first four rows carried iron maces and charged into the enemy; the archers were in the middle. Men with lances, swords, and maces were positioned on the sides.

36. See McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, pp. 286-289.

FORMATION OF THE FIRST BATTLE LINE



SECOND, OR SUPPORT LINE



Cavalry Battle Line according to the Strategikon of Maurice
 From *Maurice's Strategikon*, Translated by George Dennis, Philadelphia,
 University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984

The second, or support line was made up of four cavalry units with the general in the middle, to which was added a third line of three units, called by the Arabic term, *saka*, and behind them were the units guarding the baggage train³⁷.

Michael Rhangabe set up his battle line in good order before charging against the enemy³⁸. In summer 917 Leo Phokas, Domestic of the Schools, assembled all the thematic and tagmatic troops in the plain of Diabasis, near the fortress of Acheloos, had them line up in formation and then advance against the Bulgarians³⁹. In 977 Bardas Phokas is recorded to have divided his forces into three units⁴⁰. He once more lined up his troops in order near Abydos, in 989, when he saw Basil II arranging his troops in formation⁴¹. When Nikephoros Phokas landed in Crete, he lined up his army in three divisions and had them advance behind the standard of the cross⁴². Before Tarsus, Nikephoros Phokas lined up his troops, with the *kataphraktoi* in the center and the archers and slingers firing from behind, while he led the cavalry on the right and Tzimiskes that on the left⁴³. In 1070 Romanos Diogenes drew up his troops in two battle lines⁴⁴. This is about the only mention in the narrative sources of the two lines required by the manuals.

Before sending them into battle, the commander was supposed to exhort his troops, and there are several accounts of such exhortations⁴⁵.

In front of the main line were stationed skirmishers, called *prokoursatores* by Nikephoros, composed of light cavalry, lancers and archers, whose assignment was to harass and shake up the enemy line and provoke them into breaking up their formation.

In campaigning against the Bulgarians, Michael Rhangabe concentrated first on skirmishing, mostly with archery, to the advantage of the Byzantines⁴⁶. Leo Phokas employed skirmishing and ambushes against the Saracens with great success⁴⁷. In 970 the Byzantine forces made great use of ambushes also against the Rhos⁴⁸. The same year, they lined up for battle against the Pechenegs, and after a series of individual combats won by the Byzantines, the Pechenegs broke ranks and

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 282-284.

38. Skylitzes, p. 6.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 337.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 321-322.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 337; cf. Psellos, *Chronographia*, 1, 33.

42. *LD* 1, 5.

43. *LD* 4, 3.

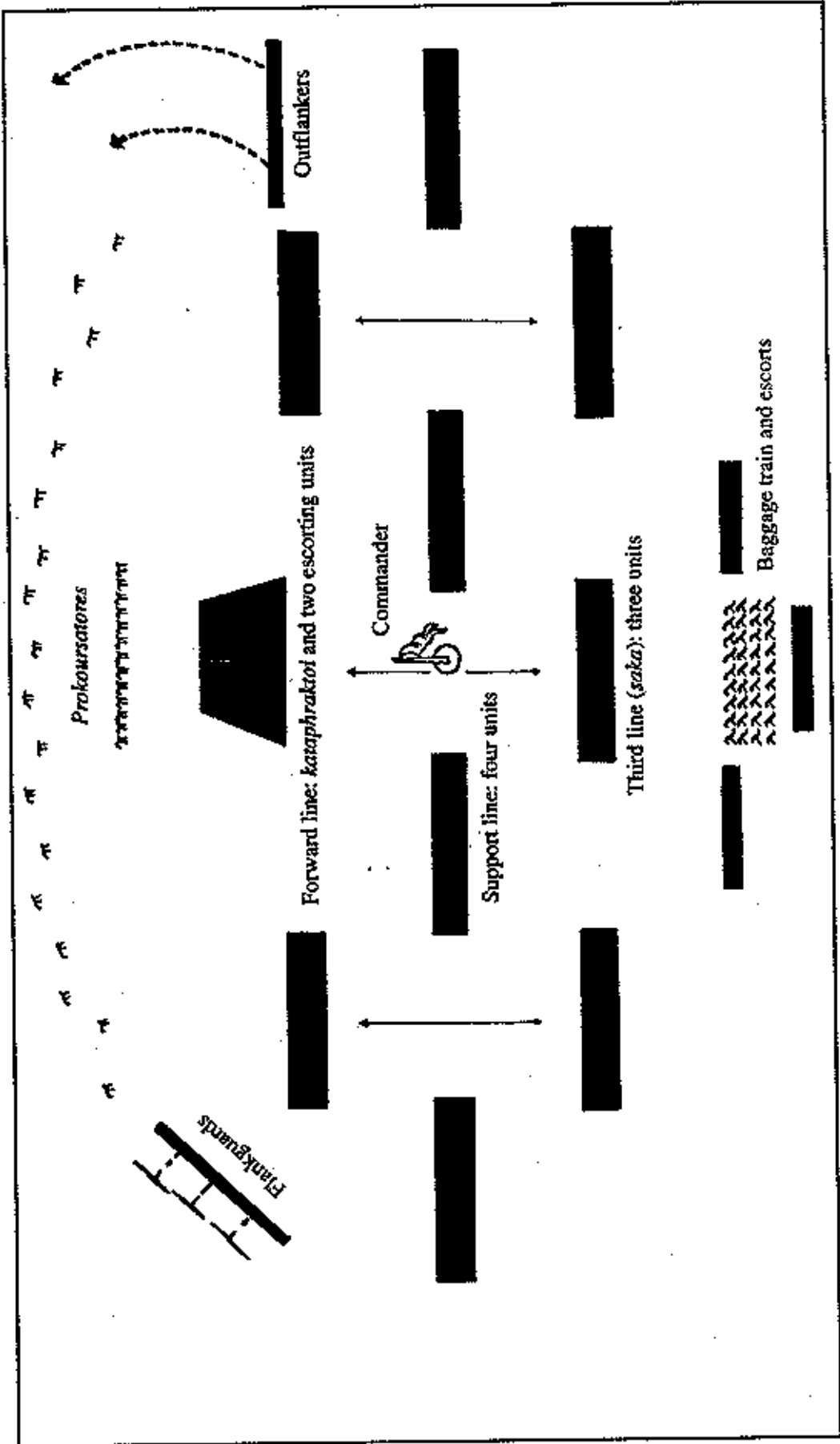
44. Attaleiates, p. 111.

45. *SM* 7, 4; Skylitzes, p. 6; 337.

46. Skylitzes, p. 6.

47. *LD* 2, 3; 2, 61.

48. Skylitzes, p. 289.



Cavalry Battle Line according to the Praecepta of Nikephoros Phokas

From Eric McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century*, Washington, Dumbarton Oaks, 1994

fled⁴⁹. In 976 Bardas Phokas pretended he was treating his soldiers to a festive dinner, leading the enemy to believe that there would be no battle on that day. So they too relaxed and enjoyed a good meal. While they were doing so, Bardas had the trumpets sounded and his men surrounded and attacked them⁵⁰. Basil II was noted for putting off a frontal attack, preferring instead to harass the enemy with stratagems and assigning light armed troops to fire at them from a distance⁵¹. With great pride Anna Komnene records the successful use her father Alexios made of stratagems and ambushes⁵².

Military authors forbid the commander to take part in the fighting himself, for if he should fall, the whole army would lose courage⁵³. Such dependence on the leader, based on a personal bond between him and his men, was the weak point of all medieval armies, east and west. The Byzantines, as well as their enemies, became demoralized when their leader fell or was rumored to have fallen. During a battle near Acheloos, on 6 August 917, the domestic got off his horse to get some water, the horse broke loose and ran through the army riderless. The men thought the domestic must have been killed and they panicked. They ceased their pursuit of the Bulgarians and turned to flight and found themselves pursued, with disastrous results⁵⁴. At Apamea, in 998, the Byzantines had won the battle and were pursuing the Arabs when their leader, Damianos Dalassenos, was killed. They suddenly became demoralized and were routed by the Arabs, who had rallied at the news⁵⁵. In 1071 the emperor wanted to get the troops who were pursuing the enemy back to camp before dark. He had the imperial banner turned around as the signal for this. But when the soldiers who had ridden ahead of the main body saw this, they thought the emperor had fallen in defeat and they raced back in disorder⁵⁶. It was precisely because of this dependence on the leader that Nikephoros Phokas ordered that the charge of the heavy cavalry should be aimed directly at the enemy commander⁵⁷. Individuals also took it upon themselves to attack the enemy leader, as Anemas attacked the Russian prince Svjatoslav, in 971, although he himself was killed in the attempt⁵⁸.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 290-291.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 319.

51. Psellos, *Chronographia*, 1, 33.

52. Anne Comnène, *Alexiade*, ed. B. Leib, 3 vols., Paris 1937-1945, 1, 1-3.

53. E. g., *SM* 2, 16.

54. Skylitzes, p. 203-204.

55. M. Canard, «Les sources arabes de l'histoire byzantine aux confins des X^e et XI^e siècles», *Revue des Études Byzantines* 19 (1961), pp. 284-314, esp. 299-300.

56. Attaleiates, pp. 161.

57. *PM* 59.

58. *LD* 9, 13.

At times, though, the commander did enter into the thick of combat. In 921, the commander of the forces in Adrianople, the patrician Leon, was noted for his sudden, swift charges against the Bulgarians and came to be known as Moroleon, stupid Leon⁵⁹. In 971 the emperor John Tzimiskes doffed the imperial insignia, grabbed a spear, spurred his horse on, and personally led his men into close combat⁶⁰. Anna Komnene portrays her father, Alexios, taking a leading part in the fighting⁶¹.

The manuals give detailed instructions on the preparations for battle and on what must be done after the battle. But they do not tell us a great deal about the actual conduct of a battle. Once the battle had been joined, it seems, there was little the commander, or anyone else, could do to control events. Each soldier was on his own and fought as best he could⁶².

After the light cavalry had completed their work of harassing and destabilizing the enemy line, the moment came for the main body to charge against the enemy. In almost all the accounts a trumpet sounds the call to battle. The advance began with a prayer as they left the camp and got their formation in order. The herald shouted out the orders for the advance, which, while first recorded in the *Strategikon*, retained their importance in subsequent centuries. «Silence. Do not fall back. Do not go ahead of the standard. Advance even with the front rank. Keep your eyes on the standard ... Soldier, stay in formation. ... Do not charge out and break ranks»⁶³.

It was of the utmost importance that the troops remain in formation until the moment of contact with the enemy. Basil II issued strict orders that no soldier should advance in front of the battle line; if anyone did so, and even if he successfully fought against the enemy, he was to be severely punished⁶⁴. One may also recall the story of the sixteen year old Manuel Komnenos who courageously charged out against the enemy, but later in the imperial pavilion was flogged with willow twigs by the emperor, his father, for being so rash and was forbidden to engage the enemy in close combat⁶⁵.

59. Skylitzes, p. 218.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 299-300; LD 9, 14.

61. *Alexiade*, 1, 5-6.

62. The comment of R. C. Smail, *Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193*, Cambridge 1956, pp. 12-13, is pertinent here: «Once [the medieval commander] had launched [his troops] into the battle, he had little or no control over them, and this limitation applied especially to the most effective troops, the mailed mounted knights. ...The result of the battle must then be left to the interplay of morale, individual prowess, and good fortune».

63. *SM* 3, 5.

64. Psellos, *Chronographia*, 1, 33.

65. *Niketas Choniates Historia*, ed. J.-L. van Dieten, Berlin 1975 [*Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae*], p. 35.

The horsemen were to advance with a precise measured gait, a trot and, above all, to stay in formation. At first they rode in extended order, about a meter apart, then when they were about a mile away from the enemy they closed ranks. The advance of the cavalry, especially of the *kataphraktoi*, was designed to completely unnerve the enemy – and it often seems to have done just that. They trotted forward deliberately, in tight formation, and in total silence. Their goal was to hit the target en masse, not as isolated individuals, like western knights. At about a bowshot from the enemy, the archers in the middle of the formation opened fire. The command to charge was given. The *dekarchs* and *pentarchs* leaned forward, covered the heads and part of the horses' necks with their shields, held their lances «high as their shoulders as the fair-haired races do», or raised their maces or swords to strike. All the while they maintained their close order trotting along in an eerie, unnatural silence.

At Dorostolon, we are told that the Byzantine troops advanced with experience and technical skill⁶⁶. Before Tarsus, the trumpets sounded and the Byzantines moved forward with incredible precision, and the entire plain sparkled with the gleam of their armor. The *Tarsiots* could not withstand so great an assault. Overwhelmed by the impact of the lances and by the missiles shot by the men behind them, they at once gave way to flight. A terrible fear overwhelmed them as they beheld so great a mass methodically advancing⁶⁷. In 1070, the Byzantine troops are mentioned as marching out in companies in good order; the emperor ordered the trumpeter to sound the charge, and the men advanced slowly in good order⁶⁸. The same year, the Turks fled when they saw the Roman phalanxes all drawn up in ordered, disciplined battle array⁶⁹.

But at times silence was not properly observed. Near Preslav John Tzimiskes ordered the trumpets to sound the call to battle, the cymbals to clash, and drums to roll, so that an incredible din burst forth as the mountains echoed the drums, the armor clashed, horses whinnied, and men shouted⁷⁰. Nikephoros Phokas ordered the drums to roll for a night attack⁷¹. In charging out to ambush the Rhos, Bardas Phokas ordered the drums to beat continuously⁷².

66. Skylitzes, p. 304.

67. *LD* 4, 31.

68. *Attaleiates*, p. 114; 126.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

70. *LD* 8, 4.

71. *LD* 1, 11.

72. *LD* 6, 13.

The moment of impact must have been terrible indeed. Nikephoros Ouranos pictures it for us. «The kataphraktoi will smash in the heads and bodies of the enemy and their horses with their iron maces and sabers; they will break into and dismember their formations and break through and so completely destroy them»⁷³.

At Dorostolon the battle went back and forth, until Tzimiskes ordered the Immortals to attack the left wing of the Rhos. They couched their spears, spurred on their horses, and charged and forced the Rhos to flee⁷⁴. The Rhos could not stand up to the Byzantine lances in a cavalry charge⁷⁵. His officers told prince Svjatoslav that their men could not stand up against the ironclad horsemen in combat⁷⁶. In 1070, the front ranks shouted the war cry and charged with their shields held before them⁷⁷.

The final phase of battle was the pursuit, about which the manuals, especially the *Praecepta* of Phokas, have much to say. They warn about the feigned flight of the enemy, their sudden turning back, their traps and ambushes. The Byzantines were to make sure that the enemy was in full flight and that there were no other hostile forces in the vicinity. Concern was constantly expressed about the soldiers stopping for booty and prisoners. All the authors view this very seriously and assign severe penalties for violators, but it was difficult to enforce. Their leaders, moreover, held out the promise of booty as an incentive to valor. The pursuit was meant to destroy the foe utterly so he would not fight again.

In a fierce battle in Thrace, the Bulgarians defeated and pursued the Byzantines. The emperor was standing with his bodyguard on higher ground and saw that the Bulgarians were very disorganized. He ordered the troops with him to attack, and they caught the Bulgarians off guard and killed and captured many⁷⁸. The sources give many other examples of the Byzantines pursuing a defeated foe or, just as often, of their being pursued.

In all discussions of warfare and of battle, two factors must be kept in mind. First, the unexpected. Despite the best organization, the best leadership, and the best laid plans, something could always go wrong: they could always meet up with δευτέρο τύχη. A change in the weather, miscalculations, failure of supplies to arrive, drought or disease, mutiny or desertion. Commanders were counseled to prepare for any eventuality but, of course, they simply could not do so, no more

73. «The *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos, Chapters 56 though 65», ed. and transl. by E. McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, pp. 79-163, c. 61, 204-214.

74. Skylitzes, p. 304; LD 8, 6.

75. LD 8, 6.

76. LD 9, 7.

77. Attaleiates, p. 114.

78. Skylitzes, p. 13.

than military commanders of any age. The second, which no textbook could teach, was the personal inspiration given by outstanding leaders, such as Constantine V, Phokas, Tzimiskes, Basil II, and others.

After the battle the army was to give thanks to God and to his saints for their victory. Tzimiskes, for example, after defeating the Rhos, in April 971, offered prayers of thanksgiving to St. George, whose feast day it was and, on his triumphal entry into the capital, gave the place of honor to an icon of Mary⁷⁹. The men were to be rewarded, or punished, for their actions during the fighting. After his victory in 971 Tzimiskes rewarded his troops with gifts and drink⁸⁰. Finally, they were to bury the dead⁸¹.

We can, I think, conclude with two very general observations. I stress the word, general, because exceptions will leap to everyone's mind. The first such observation is that the Byzantines fought their wars, especially their battles, in accord with the instructions laid down in the military manuals. The second observation, making due allowance for all sorts of unexpected and extraneous circumstances, is that when they followed the rules in the manuals, they usually won their battles.

79. Skylitzes, p. 300; 310.

80. *LD* 9, 4.

81. *SM* 7, B, 6; *LT* 14, 35.