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THE *TAKTIKA* OF LEO VI AND THE BYZANTINE EASTERN FRONTIER DURING THE NINTH AND TENTH CENTURIES^[*]

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At the outset, I would like to mention that I have already published another article on the *Taktika* in Japanese (“The *Taktika* of Leo VI and the Byzantine Eastern Frontier in his Reign,” *Mediterraneanus: Annual Report of the Collegium Mediterranistarum* 36 [2013], pp. 3–24), in which my focus was on the nature of the whole text as a military treatise, and the meaning of the chapter on the Arabs. This paper can therefore be seen to a certain extent as a revised English version of my previous article. However, recent scholarship, especially the critical commentary by Prof. John Haldon, has given further insight into the disposition of the treatise and the context in which the *Taktika* was composed. Therefore, in the present paper, taking the chapter on the Arabs as an example, I would like to study the relationship between the treatise, Leo VI as the commissioner and the actual situation of the Empire’s frontier more fully, and reveal the nature of the *Taktika* as the projection of Leo VI’s thoughts.

[1] I used the new edition by George T. Dennis, *The Taktika of Leo VI, Text Translation, and Commentary*, ed. and trans. George T. Dennis (Washington D. C. 2010), revised ed. by John F. Haldon (2014).

[2] On this classical view on Leo VI, see Georg Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte des Byzantinischen Staates* (Munich 1940, 3rd ed. 1963), Japanese translation by Hiroshi Wada, 2001, p. 327; Steven Runciman, *A History of the First Bulgarian Empire* (London 1930), p. 126; Alexander A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, 3 vols, French edition by Henri Grégoire and Marius Canard (Brussels 1935–68), vol. 2/1, p. 219. See also the summary of previous scholarship on this issue in Shaun Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI: Politics and People*, *The Medieval Mediterranean*, 15 (Leiden 1997), pp. 164–165.

[3] Gilbert Dagron and Haralambie Mihăescu, *Le traité sur la guérilla de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas (963–969)* (Paris 1986), pp. 9, 145, 152; Alphonse Dain, “Les Stratégistes byzantins,” *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1967), pp. 317–392 (pp. 354–356); Albert Vogt, “La jeunesse

ABSTRACT

Recent studies on the political and military history in the reign of Leo VI (r. 886–912) tend to emphasise his role as a central authoritative figure. However, close scrutiny on the emperor’s military treatise called the *Taktika* and collation with the actual situation offers a different picture concerning his view on the warfare in the eastern frontier. In chapter XVIII of the *Taktika* on the manoeuvres against the raiding Arabs, Leo emphasises the importance of autonomous regional defence undertaken by local forces. When understood collectively with other sources, this can be an attestation of Leo’s willingness to delegate power to potentates in order to resist the incessant raids more effectively, despite the possible centrifugal effects. This sort of interaction between the central government and the frontier can be comprehended within a broader context of the long-term continuity of the Byzantine flexible frontier policy from the ninth to the eleventh centuries.

INTRODUCTION: THE *TAKTIKA* AND THE REIGN OF LEO VI

The Byzantine military treatise known as the *Taktika* of Leo VI the Wise (r. 886–912) has a peculiar character.^[1] Written by one of the most scholarly emperors, the majority of the work’s contents are nonetheless derived from earlier materials. These especially encompass classical writings, including the *Stratēgikon* by the sixth-century Emperor Maurice, which heavily influenced the style of the *Taktika*. Nevertheless, Leo VI still introduces some fresh contemporary elements, such as the second-hand information gleaned from his entourage, and updated the contents in accordance with his own time.

Scholars hitherto have debated the nature of the treatise, and have especially discussed the subtle character of the whole text. It has retrospectively been evaluated as a mere accumulation of impractical theories, perhaps partly because Leo VI was regarded as a weak figure due to his lack of military training and experience.^[2] Alphonse Dain noted this “armchair character” in his exhaustive bibliographical study on Byzantine strategists, although he appreciated that this treatise led to the revival of the neglected genre of military science in Byzantium. Albert Vogt even insisted that Leo VI only investigated historical military forces in the *Taktika*. Gilbert Dagron also concludes that Leo VI was mediocre as a strategist, and points to his work’s omission of information on Bulgaria, which was one of the greatest threats to Byzantium at that time.^[3]

However, during the latter half of the last century, scholars began reviewing assessments of Leo VI, especially regarding military and diplomatic matters. Romilly Jenkins and Patricia Karlin-Hayter argue that sources such as the *Chronicon*

de Léon le sage," *Revue historique* 174 (1934), pp. 389–428 (p. 408).

[4] Romilly J. H. Jenkins, *Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries AD610–1071* (London 1966), pp. 198–211; Patricia Karlin-Hayter, "When Military Affairs were in Leo's Hands: A note on Byzantine Foreign Policy (886–912)," *Traditio* 24 (1967), pp. 15–40.

[5] Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI*, pp. 166–168, 203–218; Idem, "The Imperial Thought-World of Leo VI: the non-Campaigning Emperor of the Ninth Century," in *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?*, ed. Lesile Brubaker (Aldershot 1998), pp. 51–60.

[6] Karlin-Hayter, "Military Affairs," pp. 21–22; Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI*, pp. 167–172. Tougher cites Grosdidier de Maton's emphasis upon the prescriptive nature of the *Taktika*. See José Grosdidier de Maton, "Trois études sur Léon VI," *Travaux et Mémoires* 5 (1973), pp. 181–242 (p. 229).

[7] See Eric McGeer, "Military Texts," in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Elizabeth M. Jeffreys, John F. Haldon and Robin Cormack (Oxford 2008), pp. 907–914; Denis F. Sullivan, "Byzantine Military Manuals: Prescriptions, Practice and Paedagogy," in *Byzantine World*, ed. Paul Stephenson (New York 2010), pp. 149–161.

[8] Catherine Holmes, "Political-Historical Survey, 800–1204," in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, pp. 264–279 (p. 267); Paul Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantine: notes et remarques sur enseignement et culture à Byzance des origines au Xe siècle* (Paris 1971), pp. 121–346.

[9] Cf. Dain, "Les stratégistes," p. 354; Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI*, p. 168.

[10] John F. Haldon, *A Critical Commentary on the Taktika of Leo VI*, *Dumbarton Oaks Studies*, 44 (Washington D.C. 2014), pp. 9–38; Meredith Riedel, "The Sacrality of a Sovereign: Leo VI and Politics in Middle Byzantium," in *Zwei Sonnen am Goldenen Horn?*, ed. Michael Grünbart, Lutz Rickelt and Martin M. Vučetić (Berlin 2011), Band 3/1, pp. 127–135.

[11] Haldon, *Commentary*, esp. pp. 9–38; Riedel, "Sacrality." In addition, Catherine Holmes ("Byzantine Political Culture and Compilation Literature in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Some Preliminary Inquiries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 64 (2010), pp. 55–80) argues that granting of ancient wisdom could also indicate imperial authority in the Byzantine world.

[12] In this respect, the *Taktika* is comparable with other legislative activities of the same emperor. See Haldon, *Commentary*, pp. 37–38; Paul Magdalino, "The Non-Judicial Legislation of the Emperor Leo VI," in *Analecta Athenensia*

of Symeon the Logothete are harshly biased against Leo VI and cannot be taken at face value. They use a longer-term perspective to re-evaluate his reign, and argue that "failures" in his time, such as the fall of Taormina and the plunder of Thessaloniki, which had been emphasised in the previous historiography, had only a temporary effect.^[4] Regarding Leo VI's lack of involvement in military campaigns, it was emphasised that Leo chose not to do so as he tried to act as a central authoritative figure. Karlin-Hayter explains that Leo VI acted as "his own Minister for War" while Shaun Tougher, who more recently published an elaborate monograph on Leo VI's reign, further claims that this "non-campaigning" emperor tried to be like Justinian and was happy to entrust military campaigns to reliable generals, especially to magnates from the lineage of the military aristocracy, while he remained in Constantinople and effectively gave orders.^[5] The significance of the *Taktika* also seems to have been reconsidered based on these opinions on Leo himself. Within this literature, Karlin-Hayter and Tougher consider the *Taktika* to be an attestation to Leo VI's concern with contemporary military problems and external politics. Focusing on newly introduced elements and the prescriptive style of the text, they both emphasise the practical utility of the treatise. Karlin-Hayter stresses that the *Taktika* is the Byzantine version of "Standing Orders" and the "King's Regulations," while Tougher, who associates the text with the aforementioned "non-campaigning" style of Leo VI's reign, concludes that it represents his intention to deliver knowledge to his generals in the field.^[6]

However, it must be noted that such conclusions with regard to the practicality of the *Taktika* are based only upon a limited part of the treatise. The *Taktika's* aims must be judged by considering it as compiled in its entirety; contemporary elements in the treatise are quite limited, and even if they reflect the actual circumstances, the "reality" they reflect is debatable. The regulative fashion might also be only superficial one, which is possible due to the traditional pedagogic and scholarly nature of military texts in the Byzantine world.^[7] Moreover, contemporary Byzantine cultural activities focused on accumulating ancient wisdom and compiling it into works, which Paul Lemerle labels "encyclopédisme." Leo is often considered to be one of the propagators and patrons of this movement, and he himself also created other related works.^[8] Amongst these, in the text *Problemata* he answers questions by citing the *Stratēgikon* of the Emperor Maurice – the model of the *Taktika*, as mentioned above – explicitly indicating his scholarly interest in military knowledge from the past; therefore, the *Taktika* might be placed within this extended context.^[9] Thus, it is uncertain whether the *Taktika* as a whole includes "practical" intentions in terms of military affairs, as Karlin-Hayter and Tougher argue.

When considering this point, John Haldon's recent critical commentary and Meredith Riedel's article reach convincing conclusions.^[10] They plausibly argue that Leo VI's chief intention was to provide his generals with Christian moral guidance for conducting warfare. Leo stressed the importance of the role of God's favour elsewhere in the text, and gave advice on how to fight in accordance with the faith.^[11] Although not being directly applicable to the contemporary battlefield, the text was undoubtedly motivated by his consciousness of being a ruling emperor, and can be regarded as useful instruction in this sense.^[12] On the other hand, from a purely military aspect, most of the information can be evaluated as having been impractical, as it would have been obsolete or visionary. Haldon also suggests that the generals did not need to rely on the emperor's admonition as they could have had greater experience and superior techniques.^[13]

ad ius Byzantium Spectantia, Forschungen zur Byzantinischen Rechtsgeschichte, Athener Reihe ed. Spyros Troianos (Athens 1998), pp. 169–182; Sullivan, “Byzantine Military Manuals,” p. 152.

[13] Haldon, *Commentary*, p. 25. However, even though the *Taktika* might have been impractical for mature commanders for such reason, it is still possible that the text is used for the education of junior members of military aristocracy. Cf. Eric McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century*, *Dumbarton Oaks Studies* 33, (Washington D.C. 1995), pp. 191–195; Sullivan, “Byzantine Military Manuals,” p. 160.

[14] On the nature of the military information of foreign peoples in the *Taktika*, see Anthony Kaldellis, *Ethnography After Antiquity: Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature* (Philadelphia 2013), chapter 4.

[15] It has also attracted scholarly attention as a source for analysing Byzantine-Arab relations. See John F. Haldon and Hugh Kennedy, “The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries,” *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta* 19 (1980), pp. 79–116.

[16] Tougher, “Non-Campaigning,” p. 58.

[17] On this point, Gilbert Dagron argues that the warfare between the two had been “tamed”, as it had become the normal state in the borderlands. According to his article, although Byzantium and Arabs were incessantly at war, there were close connections between the two sides and interactions across the Arab-Byzantine frontier. See Dagron, “Apprivoiser la guerre: Byzantins et Arabes ennemis intimes,” in *To Εμπόλεμο Βυζάντιο (9^{ος}–12^{ος} αι.)*, ed. Kostas Tsiknakis (Athens 1997), pp. 37–49. See also Idem, “Les arabes, ennemis intimes (Xe siècle)” in Idem, *Idées Byzantines* (Paris 2012), pp. 353–386. This can be reconciled with the conclusion of the archaeological research by Alexander Asa Eger. See Alexander Asa Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier: Interaction and Exchange among Muslim and Christian Communities* (London and New York 2015).

[18] See Gilbert Dagron, “Byzantine et le modèle islamique au Xe siècle. A propos des Constitutions Tactiques de l'empereur Léon VI,” *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 122^e année, n. 2 (1983), pp. 219–243, revised version in Idem, *Idées Byzantines*, pp. 329–352; Dagron and Mihăescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, pp. 145–149.

[19] As for the chapter titles in the *Taktika*, I cite Dennis' translation.

[20] See Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI*, pp. 183–193.

Nevertheless, the fact that the *Taktika* contains contemporary military information, especially concerning warfare with foreign peoples, cannot be overlooked, even though such content exists only to a restricted extent.^[14] The discussion of warfare against the Arabs in the eastern borderland in chapter XVIII is especially noteworthy, as it includes detailed descriptions of tactics, equipment and the nature of the people and the frontier. It can therefore be considered a key source for gaining insight into the emperor's concerns, from which one can at least understand his grasp of the actual situation and what kind of practices he intended to apply in order to address it.^[15]

Concerning this point, although the works re-evaluating Leo's reign tend to emphasise the centralised character of his policy as mentioned above, close examination of this text offers a slightly different picture of the emperor's perception of frontier affairs. This is not to deny the centralised tendency of Leo's reign or his active role as a military leader. In the military sphere, this might be especially the case when it comes to large-scale military campaigns in hostile territories.^[16] For the continual warfare with Arabs in the eastern borderland, however, a different approach was more suitable due to the nature of warfare at that time, and Emperor Leo VI seems to have been well aware of this.^[17]

To investigate this, a close comparison of the tactics in the *Taktika* and warfare as depicted in other sources from Leo VI's time is required, as previous efforts to do so have been insufficient. Of course, much research on the Arabs as depicted in the *Taktika* has already been undertaken by Byzantinists, with Gilbert Dagron perhaps the most notable among them. However, while their studies address the Byzantine attitude towards the Islamic religion and their view on frontier society in detail, as indicated in the *Taktika*, there is, in my view, still a lot more to explore in terms of discussions of actual military manoeuvres, as well as how these complement other research on Leo VI's reign.^[18] Therefore, this paper reconsiders Leo VI's comprehension of and intentions towards contemporary circumstances on the eastern frontier. It does so by comparing the *Taktika's* description of his Arab-Islamic opponents to the actual historical situation on the borderlands during the ninth and tenth centuries.

1. CHAPTER XVIII OF THE *TAKTIKA* AND THE BYZANTINE EASTERN FRONTIER

The accounts of Arabs in the *Taktika* are placed in constitution XVIII, entitled “About the Practices of Various Peoples and of the Romans in Their Battle Formations,” and consisting of forty-eight paragraphs.^[19] The discussion of Arabs and other recently included elements can also be found elsewhere in the text. For example, novel institutional nomenclatures are mentioned in chapter IV “About the Division of the Army and the Appointment of Officers,” and Arabs are obviously the hypothetical enemy discussed in chapter XIX “About Naval Warfare,” perhaps as their piracy in the Aegean Sea was one of the most immediate threats at that time.^[20] Nevertheless, chapter XVIII remains the most remarkable section for information on the Arabs, as its description is the most concentrated, the best organised and also the longest.

As the title implies, the chapter is dedicated to an ethnographical account of the empire's neighbouring nations, and knowledge of peoples besides the Arabs (Saracens) depends heavily upon a sixth-century military treatise, the aforementioned *Stratēgikon* of Emperor Maurice.^[21] The entry on the Arabs occupies a significant portion of this chapter (48 paragraphs out of 150) and, of course, has no

[21] Haldon, *Commentary*, p. 333.

[22] On this classification, see Haldon, *Commentary*, p. 332.

[23] Haldon, *Commentary*, p. 332. The title of the sections is: "Λέοντος ἐν Χριστῷ βασιλεῖ αἰωνίῳ βασιλέως Ῥωμαίων πῶς δεῖ Σαρακηνοῖς μάχεσθαι."

[24] Haldon, *Commentary*, p. 332.

[25] *Taktika*, XVIII. 119, pp. 480–483: "Χαίροντες οὖν ταῖς εὐδαίαις καὶ ταῖς θερμότεραις ὥραις τότε συλλέγονται, καὶ μάλιστα θέρους, καὶ κατὰ τὴν Ταρσὸν τῆς Κιλικίας τοῖς ἐγγυφίοις ἐνούμενοι τὴν ἐκστρατείαν ποιοῦνται. τοὺς δ' ἄλλους καιροὺς μόνον οἱ ἐκ Ταρσοῦ καὶ Ἀδάνων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῆς Κιλικίας πολισμάτων τὰς κατὰ Ῥωμαίων ποιοῦνται καταδρομὰς." The author's translation, based upon a partial consultation of Dennis' translation (henceforth the same, whenever the *Taktika* is cited).

[26] See p. 18 above.

[27] *Taktika*, XVIII. 120, pp. 482–483: "Χρὴ οὖν αὐτοῖς τότε προσβάλλειν, καὶ μάλιστα κατὰ τὸν χειμῶνα ἐπὶ πραιδαν ἐξερχομένους..."

[28] *Taktika*, XVIII. 128, pp. 484–485: "Δεῖ δὲ σε, εἴ ποτε καὶ ληστείας χάριν καταδράμωσι τοῦ Ταύρου ἐντός, ἐπιτηδεύειν αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐν ταῖς στεναῖς τοῦ ὄρους τούτου διεξόδοις, ὅτ' ἂν ὑποστρέφωσι μάλιστα κεκοπωμένοι, ἴσως καὶ παιδαῖς τινὰς ζῶων ἢ πραγμάτων ἐπιφερόμενοι."

[29] Dagron and Mihăescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, p. 147; Haldon, *Commentary*, pp. 362–366.

[30] I will discuss more details on *thema* (pl. *themata*) in chapter 3 below. Note that the passages on the Arabs in the *Taktika*, XVIII do not presuppose large-scale expeditions in enemy territory, while *Taktika*, IX, which depends on the *Stratēgikon*, assumes such circumstances.

[31] For *tagmata* (sg. *tagma*), see John F. Haldon, *Byzantine Praetorians* (Bonn 1984), pp. 228–256; Idem, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565–1204* (London 1999), p. 78. Wherever the Greek term *tagma* is used in the *Taktika*, it does not stand for imperial regiments, but small army divisions consisting of 200–400 soldiers. See Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, p. 114.

[32] Haldon, *Commentary*, pp. 382–383 argues that the section is an addition to the composition on the Arabs, which originally ended in XVIII. 135. He also emphasises that no specific enemy is mentioned here, but these paragraphs are apparently composed with the Arabs in mind. In the end of XVIII. 135, Leo remarks that the following battle formations (i.e. XVIII. 136–149) can be employed "against this barbaric people (κατὰ τοῦ τοιούτου βαρβαρικοῦ ἔθνους, i.e. Arabs)." Moreover, the

precedent in the *Stratēgikon*, which was compiled before the rise of Islam. According to Haldon, the entry's composition can be divided into several parts as follows: (1) a general account of the Arabs (103–125), including a brief explanation of their history (103–104), religion (105) and practices in warfare (106–112). (2) A more detailed description of warfare, specifically regarding the eastern frontier along the Taurus and Anti-Taurus Mountains (126–135). (3) A particular recommendation of manoeuvres against Arabs, based on the *Stratēgikon* of Maurice.^[22] Amongst these, (1) exists independently, as its linguistic tone and, more remarkably, the unique title of the sections given by a copyist in the manuscript signify.^[23] Haldon claims that (1) addresses a general depiction of the Arabs not specified geographically, while (2) refers to a more particular location in the east.^[24] However, place names on the Cilician plain, such as Adana and Tarsus, from which *razzias* (raids) were launched, clearly appear in XVIII. 119, in (1):

"Then being happy with good weather and warm seasons, especially in summer, they gather together and unite themselves with the local people of Cilician Tarsus to make expeditions. In other time, only those from Tarsus, Adana and other Cilician cities make pillages against Roman territory."^[25]

Moreover the stratagem indicated in (3) is mainly applicable to situations in the east, as will be argued below. Thus, it could be said that Leo VI's particular concern when describing the Arabs in chapter XVIII of the *Taktika* was the frontier in the Eastern Anatolia, or *al-Thughūr*, although Byzantium confronted Muslims in other areas as well (e.g. Crete and southern Italy).

The concreteness of tactics is one of the most notable features of this passage, and it apparently represents the actual circumstance of the eastern borderland. Although the forgoing research underlines the initiative of central government and the emperor in the reign of Leo, as mentioned above,^[26] the descriptions of these tactics allows us a slightly different interpretation of the emperor's understanding of the frontier, as can be seen in the passages from the *Taktika* cited below:

"Therefore it is necessary to attack them when they are on expeditions for booty, especially in winter..."^[27]

"If they plunder inside the Taurus range you must deal with them in the narrow mountain path, when they are turning back and are the most fatigued, and are probably carrying some plunder, consisting of animals and materials."^[28]

As evident in the text, these lines represent strategies for guerrilla counterattacks, and are written under the assumption that the Arabs make expeditions seeking plunder.^[29] One can further explore the nature of Byzantine military actions depicted here, especially concerning those carrying out these tactics. The interceptions described here were presumably made by local commanders with the troops at their disposal, since their actions required prompt responses. This assumption is supported by the fact that only a *stratēgos* and his *thema*, i.e. local commanders and their locally based armies, appear in these sections, whereas the quote does not allude to the intervention of central government;^[30] nor does it refer to the impe-

tactics depicted here are particularly suitable for frontier conflicts (although they may be applicable in other fields), as we shall see below.

[33] *Taktika*, XVIII. 148, pp. 498–499: “κατὰ ἐν θέμα ἐκτάξας τρεῖς ποιήσεις παρατάξεις ἀνά χιλιάδων τεσσάρων...”

One might suppose that a unit consisting of 4,000 soldiers is fairly large, but the number presupposed here is far inferior to the paper strength of a *thema*. See *Taktika* IV, which is based on *Stratēgikon*. Cf. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, pp. 102–103, 110. Leo VI also concerns himself about the availability of small numbers of soldiers in his own days, along with their lack of training, *Taktika*, XVIII, 149, pp. 500–501. Dagron also remarks that this number is moderate (see Dagron and Mihăescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, p. 147). This can also be confirmed from another source: the tenth-century treatise *De Velitatione Bellica*, which presupposes a *thema* consisting of a similar number of soldiers, also considers that they fought guerrilla warfare “with only a small fighting force (μετ’ὀλίγου μαχίμου λαοῦ).” *De Velitatione Bellica*, in Dagron and Mihăescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, Pr. 3, pp. 32–35 [I have utilised Dagron and Mihăescu’s edition, but have also partly consulted “Skirmishing,” in *Three Byzantine Military Treatises, Text, Translation and Notes*, ed. and trans. George T. Dennis (Washington D.C. 1985), pp. 144–244]. I will return to this source in detail in chapter 3 below.

Moreover, this number seems to be compatible with the number of Islamic side. According to John Haldon and Hugh Kennedy, a garrison of one single city in the Islamic frontier consisted of about 4,000 soldiers. See Haldon and Kennedy, “The Arab-Byzantine Frontier,” p. 109.

[34] Haldon, *Commentary*, pp. 384–385.

[35] Walter Kaegi also makes this assumption. Walter E. Kaegi, “Confronting Islam: Emperors and Caliphs (641–c. 850),” in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500–1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge 2008) pp. 365–394 (p. 393). This view is supported by Haldon’s interpretation of the *Taktika* as Christian moral guidance and an accumulation of knowledge, rather than as a practical prescription.

[36] For the history of the development of the *Thughūr*, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. Hamilton A. R. Gibb, et al., second edition, 12 vols (1964–2004), vol. 10, pp. 446–449, entry al-*Thughūr*; Fukuzo Amabe, *State-Building and Autonomy in ‘Abbāsīd Frontiers: Ifriqiya, Thughūr, Mosul, Ṭabaristan and Sijistān*, (Tokyo 2005), pp. 156–77; Michael Bonner, “Some Observations Concerning the Early Development of Jihad on the Arab-Byzantine Frontier,” *Studia Islamica* 75 (1992), pp. 5–31; Clifford E. Bosworth, “The City of Tarsus and the Arab-Byzantine Frontiers in Early and Middle

rial *tagmata*, or mobile central regiments, which are more suitable for massive expeditions.^[31]

Furthermore, in sections 136–149 Leo VI indicates the deployment he believes to be most profitable for waging warfare against Arabs.^[32] This involves a local commander and a relatively moderate number of soldiers (4,000), as the words “deploy one *thema* and make up battle formations of up to four thousand” plainly attests.^[33] As Haldon points out, this depends on Chapter XII of the same treatise, which is based on the *Stratēgikon* of Maurice, but undoubtedly synthesises this earlier source with new information derived from field commanders.^[34] Moreover, it must be noted that these paragraphs represent Leo VI’s opinion on what is to be done on the eastern front, and here he has apparently attached greater importance to local autonomy in the defence of the Anatolian borderlands against raiding Arabs. In such a case it is also questionable whether he finds it necessary to direct these arrangements, as one might reasonably presume that such plans had been crafted during the continual conflicts with Muslims.^[35] In other words, the *Taktika* might include an aspect of the ratification of the status quo of the autonomous defence in the eastern frontier, and this could be located within the wider historical context. This must be confirmed via comparison with the actual situation at the frontier, as extracted from other sources.

2. MUSLIM INCURSIONS INTO BYZANTINE TERRITORY IN THE NINTH CENTURY

The first thing that must be addressed is the situation of the Muslims during this period. Islamic power emerged in the seventh century, and thereafter rapidly expanded into the entire Mediterranean world. It occupied parts of the most important Byzantine provinces, including Syria and Egypt. The caliphs held considerable influence over the vast Islamic world well into the first half of the ninth century under the rule of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty, and exercised a large degree of control over the warfare, or *jihād*, waged against Byzantium. Even the caliph himself occasionally campaigned with his army. However, after the latter half of the ninth century, these large-scale campaigns and attempts to attain a new permanent domain essentially came to an end, due to the decline of caliphal power and the fragmentation of the Islamic state. The last attempt to gain new territory was made by the Caliph al-Ma‘mūn in 833, when he sought to establish a foothold in the Cappadocian city of Tyana. However, his successor and brother al-Mu‘taṣim abruptly decided to retreat for unclear reasons, and never returned again. The last massive expedition by a caliph was conducted by this al-Mu‘taṣim himself in 838 against Amorion, and there were no subsequent equivalents. Thereafter, warfare became deadlocked, and a frontier zone, referred to as al-*Thughūr* in Arabic, developed remarkably along the frontier with Byzantium. A local garrison stationed there and volunteers from other parts of the Muslim territory conducted *jihād* into Asia Minor, although virtually independently. Tarsus in the *Thughūr* of Syria and Malatya in the *Thughūr* of al-Jazīra in the upper Euphrates played especially prominent roles during this period.^[36] They led campaigns more frequently during the summer than the winter and spring, and primarily intended to capture prisoners and plunder and enhance their religious prestige, rather than capture or take possession of new territory.^[37] Accordingly, a relatively moderate number of soldiers were involved in these single campaigns.^[38] These frontiersmen demonstrated their independence by exploiting the sensitive balance between the central government and the local powers, including the Tulunids.^[39] Thus, the conditions pre-

‘Abbāsīd Times,’ *Oriens* 33 (1992), pp. 268–286; Haldon and Kennedy, “The Arab-Byzantine Frontier” pp. 106–116; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. 2/1, pp. 91–187.

[37] See Qudāma b. Ja’far, *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, ed. and trans. Michail J. Goeje in, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, 6 (Leiden 1889), 199–200, 259; Dagron and Mihăescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, pp. 177–181; Haldon, *Commentary*, p. 363; Haldon and Kennedy, “The Arab-Byzantine Frontier,” pp. 115f; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. 1, p. 97.

[38] See Haldon and Kennedy, “The Arab Byzantine Frontier,” p. 109.

[39] See Amabe, *State-Building and Autonomy*, pp. 173–177.

[40] On the relation between Byzantines and Paulicians, see Paul Lemerle, “L’histoire des Pauliciens d’Asie Mineure d’après les sources grecques,” *Travaux et Mémoires* 5 (1973), pp. 1–145.

[41] Al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja’far Muḥammad b. Jarīr, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa’l Mulūk*, ed. Michail J. Goeje, et al., 15 vols (Leiden 1879–1901), III. 1414, 1419–20, 1434–36, 1447–1449. I have consulted the translation by Yar-Shater, et al., *The History of al-Ṭabarī: an Annotated Translation* (Albany NY 1989–2007).

[42] *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. I. Bekker, (Bonn 1838), p. 166: “ἀνθαδῶς τῆ τῶν Ῥωμαίων γῆ λυμαινόμενοι.”

[43] See Amabe, *State-Building and Autonomy*, p. 173. The campaign of Bughā al-Kabīr in 858/9 (Ṭabarī, III. 1436) and Waṣīf (Ṭabarī, III. 1480) was dispatched by the central government. ‘Umar and ‘Alī made a large-scale campaign in 861/2, which provoked a massive Byzantine counter-offensive campaign in the following year, but this was an exceptional case, as it had permission from the central authority. See Ṭabarī, III. 1508–9.

[44] On the Paulician war of Basil I, see Norman Tobias, *Basil I: Founder of the Macedonian Dynasty. A Study of the Political and Military History of the Byzantine Empire in the Ninth Century* (Lampeter 2007), pp. 78–114; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. 2/1, pp. 32–42.

[45] *Chronographiae quae Theophanis continuati nomine fertur liber quo Vita Basilii Imperatoris amplectitur*, ed. Ihor Ševčenko, (Berlin and New York 2011), 37, pp. 136–137: “σφόδρα παρελπίει τὰς <ὕπό> Ῥωμαίους χώρας καὶ τοὺς λαοὺς καὶ πολλοὺς τῶν ἀγροίκων καθ’ ἐκάστην αἰχμαλώτους...” Here I quote Ševčenko’s translation.

[46] Al-Ya’qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya’qūbī*, ed. Martijn Th. Houtsma, 2 vols, (Leiden 1883), 624.

supposed in the *Taktika* (i.e. a local army in the *Thughūr* conducting frequent, small-scale campaigns for pillaging, and mainly during the warm season) can indeed be clearly seen in the historical records.

More specifically, during the 850s and 860s, that is, the last years of the Byzantine Amorion dynasty, Tarsus, Malatya and their allies, the heretical Paulicians based at Thephrike, repeated these incursions into Byzantine territory.^[40] The history of al-Ṭabarī reports such campaigns during almost every year: 851/2 (summer campaign led by ‘Alī b. Yahya al-Armanī, the Amīr of Tarsus); 852/3 (summer campaign by the same ‘Alī); 853/4 (summer campaign by the same ‘Alī); 856/7 (two campaigns, including a summer campaign led by ‘Alī and a winter campaign led by ‘Umar b. ‘Abdillāh al-Aqṭa’, Amīr of Malatya); and 859/60 (summer campaign led by ‘Alī).^[41] The continuator of Theophanes also remarks that “they inflicted upon Roman territory persistently,” suggesting a continual series of raids.^[42] Although a central authority sometimes conducted these campaigns in 860s, or at least granted them permission, such activities were usually autonomous.^[43]

This trend continued into the 870s, when Byzantine rule was transferred to the Macedonian dynasty. The Paulicians, now led by Chrysocheir, constantly raided Byzantine land until the 870s, when Basil I managed to suppress them by means of large military operations, including his campaigning in person.^[44] The Paulicians occasionally threatened the Byzantines with extensive campaigns deep into Anatolia, but smaller and more frequent incursions along the frontier, seeking only plunder and prisoners, were likely of more paramount importance. One Byzantine chronicler remarks that Chrysocheir was “sorely harassing Roman territory and its inhabitants, and leading many of the countryfolk into captivity daily.”^[45] Historian al-Ya’qūbī also records the summer raid led by Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Yahyā al-Armanī in 872.^[46]

A short respite from these raids occurred in the East until c. 878, following the subjugation of the Paulicians. This was partly due to internal disturbances within the caliphates, including political relations between Caliph al-Mu’tamid (870–892) and his brother al-Muwaffaq, the de facto independence of Aḥmad b. Ṭulūn in Egypt under the nominal hegemony of the caliph and, finally, the revolt of Zanj.^[47] However, the Muslim frontier soon became active once again, even though the war consisted of nothing more than skirmishes along the frontier. A Byzantine source also reports that “Roman Borderlands were constantly [infringed upon?],”^[48] implying incessant small-scale warfare. From the Muslim perspective, Tarsus held a leading role during this series of actions, notwithstanding that the city at that time was under the suzerainty of Ṭulūnids established by Aḥmad b. Ṭulūn, a general of Turkish origin. This was because the caliph was forced to entrust the *Thughūr* to such a potentate in 878, after the city disobeyed the central authority. Al-Ṭabarī records three expeditions into the Byzantine territory under the influence of Ṭulūnids: 878 (by ‘Abd Allāh Rashīd b. Kā’ūs, Ṭulūnid Amīr of Tarsus); 879/80 (by Sīmā, dispatched by Aḥmad b. Ṭulūn); and 881/2 (by Khalaf al-Farghānī, Ṭulūnid Amīr).^[49] In 882, Tarsiotēs deposed the Ṭulūnid governor Khalaf al-Farghānī, and a eunuch named Yāzamān took advantage of the situation to gain political power. He explicitly defied Ṭulūnid authority by refusing to mention the name of Ṭulūnid amīr during prayer. Thereafter, incursions into Byzantine territory occurred autonomously.^[50] Al-Ṭabarī refers to expeditions led by Yāzamān in 885/6, 888 and 888/9.^[51] Although Ṭulūnids recovered suzerainty in the *Thughūr* in 890, frontier garrisons made continual raids into Byzantine territory. Under Ṭulūnid influence,

[47] Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. 2/1, pp. 65–70.

[48] *Vita Basilii*, 50, pp. 178–179: “καὶ πάλιν ἀπὸ τούτων αἱ τῶν Ῥωμαϊκῶν ὁρίων ἐσχατιαὶ συνεχῶς *** το.” Although Ševčenko leaves the last word “*** το” i.e. as illegible, de Boor’s “<ἐλυμαίνον>το” or “<ἐπιέζον>το” seem plausible, based upon the context.

[49] Tabarī, III, 1916–1917, 1942, 2026.

[50] Yāzamān (or Yāzmān) is said to have been loyal to the Caliphate. See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, vol. 10, pp. 306–307, entry Ṭarsūs. However, as Amabe (*State-Building and Autonomy*, p. 175) argues, Tarsus seems to have been self-reliant for the raids into Byzantine territory.

[51] Tabarī, III, 2111, 2113, 2114. Among these, 889 was a naval expedition.

[52] See Tabarī, III, 2130, 2138, 2140 and 2143. Yāzamān was killed during the campaign of 891.

[53] Tabarī, III, 2148, 2185, 2186, 2193, 2205, 2221, 2223.

[54] See p. 18 above.

[55] In addition to the expedition of Eustathios Argyros of 904, a naval expedition against Syria in 908 and a failed attempt to recapture Crete in 911 were conducted by the central government. There are also campaigns recorded in *De Administrando Imperio* and the *Taktika*. See Karlin-Hayter, “Military Affairs,” p. 30. During the preceding reigns of Michael III and Basil I, large campaigns were also conducted against the east, sometimes led by the emperors themselves, but these campaigns seem to have mainly aimed at stabilising the borderland. See Jonathan Shepard’s recent argument that Byzantine military actions up to the mid-tenth century were undertaken in a rather defensive manner (Jonathan Shepard, “Constantine VII, Caucasian Openings and the Road to Aleppo,” in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium*, ed. Antony Eastmond (Aldershot 2001), pp. 19–40; Idem, *Emperors and Expansionism: from Rome to Middle Byzantium*, in *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, ed. David Abulafia and Nora Berend (Aldershot 2002), pp. 55–82. Considering Leo VI’s recommendation of passive practices in the *Taktika*, it might be best to interpret his reign within the same context.

[56] Leo also shows an extremely reluctant attitude towards pitched battles. e.g. *Taktika*, XVIII, 59, pp. 458–459. Cf. Haldon, *Commentary*, p. 366; Karlin-Hayter, “Military Affairs,” p. 19.

Walter Kaegi points out that limited resources and fear of a military coup caused Byzantine emperors to refrain from aggressively expanding into Muslim territory. Kaegi, “Con-

these forces conducted razzias in 891, 893, 894 and 895.^[52] Changes in the political climate in 897 again brought the frontier under ‘Abbāsīd hegemony, but the caliph gained only nominal control, and the *jihād* initiatives against Byzantium came from frontiersmen. By the time the *Taktika* was composed circa 900, at least seven examples of these raids exist in the accounts of al-Ṭabarī: 897 (against Cappadocia), 898 (a naval expedition), 898/9, 899/900 (three expeditions), 900/1, 901/2 and 903.^[53] Based on this review of historical accounts, it can be verified that small-scale and frequent raids into Byzantine territory were a predominant element of the military activity of the *Thughūr* from the latter half of the ninth century to the reign of Leo VI, and evidently correspond to the accounts in the *Taktika*. Therefore, we must consider how the Byzantines addressed and reacted to these incursions.

3. BYZANTINE REACTIONS TO MUSLIM RAIDS DURING THE TIME OF LEO VI

As mentioned above, scholarship has stressed the central control over military policy by Leo VI, who stayed at Constantinople.^[54] However, as shown in the previous chapter, the situation in the east at that time seems to have needed a quite autonomous system for a long time, and this is likely to be what chapter XVIII of the *Taktika* actually reflects. Of course, large-scale raids into Muslim-controlled regions are occasionally recorded,^[55] but these were an exceptional occurrence. This may be partly because Byzantine resources were engaged against other opponents, such as the Bulgarians, leaving little remaining to dedicate to the east. Moreover, *Taktika* XVIII does not mention any military actions of such an aggressive nature, as explained above.^[56] Rather, under circumstances where opponents made continual attacks on a moderate scale in a remote area far from the centre, one can assume that prompt reactions by locally based troops were probably more effective. In fact, some information implies that these autonomous defensive operations were actually carried out by the military aristocracy, by an army of *thema*, or even by quasi-independent Armenian frontiersmen on the Byzantine eastern frontier, as discussed below. In addition, although it might not be easy to conclusively substantiate this from sources, military institutions also seem to have been arranged in order to adjust to these situations.

During the middle Byzantine period, the state was divided into military-administrative units called *themata* (sg. *thema*). Within these organisational units, a governor (*stratēgos*) supervised both civil administration and the army corps, which obviously differs from the late Roman principle of separating civil and military authority.^[57] The eastern borderland was not an exception to this. However, in addition to the *themata*, autonomous and independent small districts called *kleisourai* (sg. *kleisoura*, originally meaning “mountain path”) protected the frontier from Muslim incursions. The emergence of *themata* has elicited controversy among scholars, but a recent consensus among Byzantinists indicates that the *themata* were gradually developed from the late Roman system, and in response to continual Muslim incursions after the mid-seventh century. This occurred after the mobile forces (*comitatenses*) under the command of each *magister militum* in Armenia, Oriens, Thrace and the praesental armies retreated to Anatolia after being defeated by Muslims, and were given jurisdictions there in order to meet their logistical needs.^[58]

Around the ninth century, noticeable changes occurred in the east, as armies of *themata* and *kleisourai* directly opposed the Muslim forces there. In response to

fronting Islam," p. 394.

[57] However, this was not without precedent in the late Roman period. Civil and military authorities were combined in some exceptional regions, including Egypt and southern Asia Minor. The unification of military and civil authorities can also be seen in the Exarchates of Ravenna and Carthage created in the sixth century. See Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, pp. 67, 70–71.

[58] Regarding recent explanations for the development of *themata*, see Lesile Brubaker and John F. Haldon, *Byzantium and the Iconoclast Era (c. 680–850), a History*, (Cambridge and New York 2011) pp. 723–771; Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: the Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge 1990, 2nd ed. 1995), pp. 208–232; Idem, *Warfare State and Society*, pp. 71–74; Ralph-Johannes Lilie, "Araber und Themen. Zum Einfluss der arabischen Expansion auf die byzantinische Militärorganisation," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East III, States, Resources and Armies*, ed. A. Cameron (Princeton 1995), pp. 425–460. On the Byzantine administration in the East during the ninth and tenth centuries, see Dagron and Mihăescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, pp. 239–257; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 77–79; Nicholas Oikonomidès, "L'organisation de la frontière de Byzance aux Xe–XIe siècles et le Taktikon de l'Escorial," *Actes du XIVe Congrès international des études byzantines I* (1974), pp. 285–302.

However, for the emergence of *thema*, Constantin Zuckerman offers an alternative explanation based on sigillographic sources. He proposes that *themata* were created after the eighth century, rather than the generally accepted view of their creation after the mid-seventh century. Constantin Zuckerman, "Learning from the Enemy and More: Studies in 'Dark Centuries' Byzantium," *Millennium 2* (2005), pp. 79–135 (pp. 125–135).

[59] Although Byzantine-Arab frontier was described as no-man's land or deserted place in the sense of political vacuum, recent archaeological researches reveal that there are traces of the activities of local community, and exchange among them. See Asa Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*.

On the creation of new *themata* and other units, see Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, pp. 759–760; Haldon *Warfare, State and Society*, pp. 74–94. Regarding *kleisourai*, see also Hélène Ahrweiler, "Recherches sur l'administration de l'empire byzantin aux IXe–XIe siècles," *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 84 (1960), pp. 1–111 (pp. 81f). All the *kleisourai* were placed in the eastern frontier, with the exception of Strymon in the west.

[60] For more details, see Telemachos Lounghis, "The Decline of the Opsikian Domesticates and the Rise of the Domesticate of the Scholae," *Byzantina Symmeikta* 10 (1996), pp. 27–36.

the "regionalisation" of raids coming from Islamic territory, specific small *themata* or semi-independent subdivisions were created from larger *themata*, or were newly established in what was formerly a "no-man's-land".^[59] Some of this segmentation can certainly be perceived as an intensification of central government control, as the force of larger *themata* was thereby reduced. For instance, one typical case was the division of the Opsikian *thema* after its revolt in the middle of the eighth century.^[60] However, Haldon remarks plausibly that such small units were created and then implemented in order to increase the frontier's autonomy, especially due to the flexibility required to repulse continual raids swiftly.^[61]

Within this context, and regarding the actual function of this administrative system, one cannot overlook the role of military aristocracy as officers, who arose during the period in question.^[62] Generals such as Nikephoros Phokas, Eustathios Argyros and Andronikos Doukas were active on the eastern frontier during Leo VI's reign, and all of them came from influential military aristocratic families in Asia Minor.^[63] Of course, each had strong personal connections to their emperors, as they had served in the imperial entourage early in their lives, and later played important roles in the central government by leading imperial campaigns on behalf of the emperor, sometimes as *domestikos tōn scholōn* (i.e. supreme commander).^[64] However, one must also consider their functions on the frontier while they served as officers. During this period on the eastern frontier, such magnates primarily occupied official positions in *themata*. For example, the Phokas family was based in eastern *themata*, such as Cappadocia, Seleucia and Anatolikon, while Nikephoros was the *stratēgos* of the *thema* of Chalsianon before he was sent to southern Italy.^[65] The Doukas family was based in Paphlagonia but had also held strong influence in the East. Andronikos' son Constantine Doukas was the *stratēgos* of Charsianon before his promotion to the position of domestic of the *domestikos tōn scholōn*.^[66] As for the Argyros family, the continuator of Theophanes recounts the activities of Eustathios and his father Leo Argyros when they were local commanders in eastern *themata*. The former was likely the *tourmarches* of the *thema* of Charsianon (the commander of the subdivision of *thema*, although here described as *hyprostratēgos*, that is, sub-commander) while the latter held the same position in the *thema* of Anatolikon.^[67]

"He [Leo Argyros] was such a man that no other soldiers of his value could be found during the reign of Michael [III], to such a point that he fought with the Arabs in Tephrike many times, along with his fellow men, and made them retreat, giving death and destruction, and [they] crouched and trembled when his name was called."^[68]

"The Emperor had patrician Eustathios Argyros as sub-commander of the *thema* of Anatolikon; he was famed after his origin from the admirable and distinguished family of Argyros. He fought and repulsed sons of Ismael (i.e. Arabs) not once but many times, and he was revered for strength, firmness, sagacity, brevity, wisdom, discretion and justice. [The emperor] also had Andronikos, son of Doukas."^[69]

Naturally, we must consider that this source is critical of Michael III and favourable to Macedonian emperors, and that the description on the reign of Michael III might be an exaggeration, but nonetheless these two citations both indicate that Leo and Eustathios dealt with frequent raids by Muslim or their allies on the east-

[61] Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, pp. 78–79. Mark Whittow also explains that *themata* became more profitable for territorial defence and degraded in quality, and the *Taktika* also reflects this inefficiency. Mark Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium, 600–1025* (Berkeley and LA 1996), pp. 171–173.

[62] For general accounts concerning military aristocracy, see Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)* (Paris 1990), esp. pp. 213–221; Idem, *The Byzantine Aristocracy and Its Military Function* (Aldershot 2006); Mark Herlong, “Kinship and Social Mobility in Byzantium, 717–959,” [Ph.D. Thesis, The Catholic University of America], 1986; Spyros Stavrakas, “The Byzantine Provincial Elite: A Study in Social Relationship during the Ninth and Tenth Centuries,” [Ph.D. Thesis, The University of Chicago], 1978; Friedhelm Winkelmann, *Quellenstudien zur herrschenden Klassen von Byzanz im 8. und 9. Jahrhundert* in, *Berliner byzantinistische Arbeiten*, Bd. 54 (Berlin 1987); Luisa Andriollo, *Constantinople et les provinces d’Asie mineure, IXe-XIe siècle: administration impériale, sociétés locales et rôle de l’aristocratie* (Leuven, Paris and Bristol, CT 2017).

[63] See Ralph-Johannes Lilie, et al. (eds), *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinische Zeit*, Abt. I (641–867), *Prolegomena*, 5 vols and list of abbreviations, 1998–2002; Abt. II, *Prolegomena*, 7 vols, list of abbreviations and index, 2002–2013 (henceforth *PmbZ*), Andronikos #20405, Eustathios Argyros #21828, Nikephoros Phokas #25545; Jean-Claude Cheynet, “Les Phocas,” in Dagron and Mihăescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, pp. 289–317 (291–296); Idem, *Pouvoir et contestations*, pp. 213–221; Demetrios Polemis, *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (London 1968), pp. 16–21; Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI*, pp. 204–218.

[64] Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI*, p. 218.

[65] Cheynet, “Les Phocas,” pp. 289–301.

[66] Polemis, *Doukai*, pp. 1–12, 22–23.

[67] On Leo Argyros, see *PmbZ*, Leon Argyros #4506.

[68] *Theoph. Cont.* p. 374: “καὶ γὰρ τοιοῦτος ἦν ὁ ἀνὴρ οἷος ἕτερος ἐπὶ Μιχαὴλ βασιλέως οὐχ εὐρέθη στρατιώτης, ὡς πολλάκις τοῖς Λαγρηνοῖς τῆς Τεφρικῆς μετὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους αὐτοῦ μινύμενον εἰς τροπὴν καὶ φοροῦδον καὶ ἀπώλειαν παρέχειν, καὶ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ φημιζόμενον καταπτῆσαι καὶ τρέμειν.” Stavrakas translated ‘τοὺς ἀνθρώπους αὐτοῦ’ as ‘armed-retainer’. Stavrakas, “The Byzantine Provincial Elite,” p. 47. Here it must also be noted that when Andronikos Doukas was suspected of rebellion in 906, he fled to his fortification in Kaballa near Ikonion “with his kinsmen and servants (ἅμα συγγενεῖσι καὶ δούλοισι αὐτοῦ).” This may imply that such figures possessed armed forces loyal

ern frontier. It also explains that the two men had forces at their disposal and perhaps had the authority to make decisions independently. This is reinforced by Leo VI’s own recommendation in the *Taktika*, IV. 3 to appoint local influential men as officers under a *thema*’s commander. He seems to have recognised the value of connecting such powerful local men with the provincial military structure, and that this might be a more significant factor on the frontier, where regionalised protection was essential.^[70]

This seems to have been well practised after the reign of Leo VI. The so-called *De Velitatione Bellica (On Skirmishing)*, commissioned by the soldier emperor Nicephoros II Phokas (r. 963–969) and completed after his death, attests to similar autonomous manoeuvres. One of the aims of this treatise was to recall the previous warfare in the eastern frontier, including the time of Leo VI, undertaken by the local commanders in the east, especially by those from the Phokas family.^[71] It is particularly worth noting here that the treatise indicates such military actions were undertaken by a commander “with only a unit of *thema* at his disposal (σὺν μόνῳ τῷ ὑπ’αὐτὸν θέματος λαῶ).”^[72] Nikephoros, who was also from one of the military aristocratic families, seems to have been aware of the autonomous nature of commanders from his lineage along with others in the east.

In addition to military aristocracy, similar duties could potentially be fulfilled by others, such as Armenian potentates. The creation of a *thema* in Lykandos can be regarded as a typical process. According to Constantine VII’s *De Administrando Imperio*, Leo VI accepted offers from Armenians who had deserted to Melitene, including famous Melias the Great. He then created several frontier districts in the south-eastern borderland around 908, and under the regency of the fourth wife of Leo VI, Zoe Karbonopsina (914–919) they were later integrated into the *thema* of Lykandos governed by Melias, now promoted to *stratēgos*.^[73] The Arab geographer Qudāma b. Ja’far reports that he and the Armenians following him settled there, constructed strong fortifications and thereby played a significant role in frontier defence by causing significant damage to the Muslim raiders.^[74] This was another situation in which Leo VI evidently entrusted local potentates with autonomous regional defence.^[75]

In summary, after the latter half of the ninth century the Byzantine eastern frontier included an army assembled to allow local commanders of the military district, or its equivalent, to intercept continual Muslim incursions by acting at their own discretion with the forces at their disposal.^[76] The stratagem to be used against the Arabs described in the *Taktika* also appears to reflect and approve this autonomous defensive disposition and practice, formed over a long period, rather than military operations controlled by the central government.

CONCLUSION: LEO VI’S PERSPECTIVE ON THE EASTERN FRONTIER REFLECTED IN THE *TAKTIKA*

It is uncertain to what degree the *Taktika* is practically applicable to the actual field, and it is doubtful that it functioned as a utilitarian instruction from the centralised authoritative emperor to the field commanders. The paramount aim of *Taktika* was to compile an up-to-date volume of wisdom, which included the military science of the Roman past as well as Christian moral guidance for warfare, all of which was motivated by Leo VI’s consciousness of himself as a ruler chosen by God.^[77] The recently introduced elements in this source can also be appropriately grasped as projections of Leo VI’s perspective on the current status of the empire, the environ-

to them and acting at their disposal. See *Theoph. Cont.*, p. 372; Polemis, *Doukai*, p. 18.

[69] *Theoph. Cont.* pp. 368–369: “Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς εἶχε τῶν Ἀνατολικῶν ὑποστράτηγον Εὐστάθιον πατρίκιον, ὃς ἐκ τῆς καλλιστῆς καὶ ἀγαθῆς γενεᾶς τῶν Ἀργυρῶν ἐκπεφώνηται. ὃς τοῖς Ἰσλαμῆταις κατεστράτει καὶ ἔτρεπεν οὐχ ἅπαξ ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλάκις, ῥώμῃ καὶ ἰσχύϊ καὶ συνέσει καὶ ἀνδρίᾳ καὶ φρονήσει καὶ σωφροσύνῃ καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ τετιμημένος καὶ ἐπειλημμένος, ἔχων καὶ Ἀνδρόνικον τὸν ἐκ τοῦ Δουκός.” I have consulted the translation in Karlin-Hayter, “Military Affairs,” p. 36.

[70] *Taktika*, IV. 3, pp. 46–49; Haldon, *Commentary*, p. 146.

[71] *De Velitatione Bellica*, Pr., pp. 32–37. For the relationship between the *Taktika* and this text, see Dagron and Mihăescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, pp. 149–160; Haldon, *Commentary*, pp. 363–365.

[72] See *De Velitatione Bellica*, Pr. 3, pp. 32–35. See also *Ibid.*, XVI. 4, pp. 92–95, XVII. 2, pp. 96–97. See also Dagron and Mihăescu, *Traité sur la guérilla*, pp. 161–165.

[73] For this event's details, see Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Gyula Moravcsik, trans. Romilly J. H. Jenkins, revised edition (Washington D.C.), 50. 133–166, pp. 238–241; *De Thematibus*, ed. Agostino Pertusi (Vatican 1952), XII, pp. 75–76; Gérard Dédéyan, “Mleh le Grand, Stratège de Lykandos,” *Revue des études arméniennes* 15 (1981), pp. 73–102 (pp. 87–93); *Idem*, “Les Arméniens sur la frontière sud-orientale de Byzance, fin IXe–fin XIe siècles,” *Travaux de la Maison de l'Orient* 21 (1993), pp. 67–85 (pp. 70f); Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio: a Commentary*, ed. Romilly J. H. Jenkins (Washington D.C. 1962) (henceforth *DAI, Commentary*), pp. 190–191; Whittow, *The Making*, p. 315. See also *PmbZ*, Melias #25041. Leo VI also created a *thema* in Mesopotamia between 899 and 911. In this case, Leo VI received the Armenian potentate Manuel by bestowing a golden bull upon him, and placed another person there in the position of *stratēgos*. See *DAI*. 50. 111–117, pp. 238–239; *De Thematibus*, IX, p. 73; *DAI, Commentary*, p. 189.

[74] Qudāma b. Ja'far, 254; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. 2/1, p. 42.

[75] Runciman undertook this part of the commentary of *DAI*, and places this event within the context of a “planned expansion,” which paved the way for continued aggressive advances in the future. See *DAI, Commentary*, p. 188. However, this seems like a rather defensive practice. See n. 55 above.

[76] Thus somewhat similar situations seem to have existed on both sides. This is the very

ment surrounding his state and his idea of suitable methods for addressing them. The present study demonstrates that the new lines in the *Taktika* describing manoeuvres against raiding Arabs on the eastern frontier depict autonomous regional defence undertaken by local forces. This argument differs from previous research which emphasises the context of rule by the central government. The guerrilla strategies of these military deployments existed long before the reign of Leo VI, and sources indicate that these tactics also continued after him.^[78] The description of Leo VI can therefore be interpreted as meaning that he simply ratified the existing form of flexible response by local forces led by potentates, established over a long period of time. This indicates that Leo recognised it was both effective and indispensable to delegate power to these potentates in order to resist the incessant Arab razzias, despite the possible centrifugal effects on political and military power.

In the meantime, it is undeniable that he tried to emulate the reign of Justinian and rule as a centralised, authoritative ruler in other spheres. For the relationship between Leo and the commanders, Tougher remarks that their ties were based on friendship.^[79] But concessions to their own interests may also have been necessary to build such a relationship. It may also be true that Leo deliberately chose not to campaign in person, but in the east, this was also partly because there was no need to do so, due to the nature of the warfare. Leo seems to have appreciated the system that functioned without the presence of the emperor in person, in order to respond promptly to the existing conditions and defend the frontier without consuming much resources. The re-organisations and creations of *themata* and *kleisourai* undertaken in his reign can clearly be understood in this context.

This sort of interaction between the central government and the frontier can be reconciled with the discussion on flexible frontier practices of the empire in the tenth and eleventh centuries during the expansion, as argued most notably by Catherine Holmes.^[80] It is noted that the empire tended to entrust newly conquered territory to local potentates or reliable personnel with a large measure of authority. Thus the empire succeeded in governing the frontier with minimal resources, but this was accompanied by the risk of vulnerability to the possible rebellious attitudes of those entrusted with command of the frontier.^[81] There seems to have been a concept not unlike that of the description of the eastern frontier in the *Taktika* behind such practices. Thus, Leo VI's perspective of the east in the *Taktika* may be comprehended within the broader context of the long-term continuity of the Byzantine flexible frontier policy during the ninth to the eleventh centuries.^[82] Moreover, the *Taktika* can also be an indication that the imperial government was well aware of the importance of such practices.

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situation reflected in the epic of *Digenis Akritis* (to be precise, the first half of the epic, *The Song of the Emir* about Digenis' father, which illustrates the situation around the end of the ninth century). It depicts a Muslim emir who raids into Byzantine territory and the *stratēgos* and his family who are in charge of dealing with the situation. See *Digenis Akritis*, ed. and trans. Elisabeth Jeffreys (Cambridge 1998), G. I. 270-275, 295-300, G. II. 60-69; G. III. 66-72. Cf. Nicholas Oikonomidēs, "L'épopée de Digénis et la frontière orientale de Byzance aux Xe et XIe siècles," *Travaux et Mémoires* 7 (1979), pp. 375-397 (pp. 382-383). See also the discussions on the interactions across the frontier between the two sides in n. 17 above.

[77] See Haldon, *Commentary*, pp. 25, 37-38.

[78] Dagron and Haldon suggest that it is debatable to what extent Leo VI produces new stratagems, or whether he simply traces pre-existing approaches, but the significant part of the tactics for the Arabs are apparently the latter, as he included second-hand information from experienced generals. Dagron, "Byzance et le modèle islamique"; Idem, *Traité sur la guérilla*, pp. 145-149; Haldon, *Commentary*, p. 334. On the emergence of the guerrilla tactics, see Kaegi, "Confronting Islam," pp. 393; Haldon, *Commentary*, pp. 364-5. Although some indication of such a stratagem can be observed since the eighth century, Haldon speculates that it was regularised in the ninth century, when the creation of *kleisurai* became fully practiced. This also seems to have continued after his reign, as can be seen in *De Velitatione Bellica* mentioned above.

[79] Tougher, "Non-Campaigning"; Idem, *The Reign of Leo VI*, pp. 203-218.

[80] Catherine Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976-1025)* (Oxford and New York 2005), pp. 299-391; Eadem, "How the East Was Won' in the Reign of Basil II," in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium*, pp. 41-56; Eadem, "Treaties between Byzantium and Islamic World," in *War and Peace in Ancient and Medieval History*, ed. Philip de Souza (Cambridge 2008), pp. 141-157.

[81] This seems to have been actually the case during the collapse of the Byzantine rule in Anatolia. Recent work by Alexander Beihammer argues that the interactions with local societies were a significant factor during the Seljuk expansion into Anatolia in the eleventh century. See Alexander D. Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of Muslim-Turkish Anatolia, ca. 1040-1130* (Oxford and New York 2017).

[82] Of course, *De Velitatione Bellica* can also be placed in this context. See n. 71 above. Similar cases can also be found in *De Administrando Imperio* and *De Thematibus* concerning the reigns of Romanus I and Constantine VII. I am also preparing another paper on this.