The Taktika of Leo VI and the Byzantine Eastern Frontier During the Ninth and Tenth Centuries [*]

Kosuke Nakada

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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,’ Mediterranean: Annual Report of the Collegium Mediterraneum 36 (2015), 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.

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. 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 Strategikon 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. 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.

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


[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-juridical Legislation of the Emperor Leo VI,’ in Analecata 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. 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 just 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. 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.

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. Moreover, contemporary Byzantine cultural activities focused on accumulating ancient wisdom and compiling it into works, which Paul Lemерle labels “encyclopedisme.” Leo is often considered to be one of the propagators and patrons of this movement, and he himself also created other related works. Amongst these, in the text Problemeta he answers questions by citing the Strategikos 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. 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. 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. 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. 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.
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. 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.

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. 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.

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. 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.

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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. 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. 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 Strategikon of Emperor Maurice. The entry on the Arabs occupies a significant portion of this chapter (48 paragraphs out of 150) and, of course, has no
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 Ῥωμαίους παραδείμενον: τοῖς δὲ ἄλλοις καιροῖς μόνοι οἱ ἐκ Ταρσοῦ καὶ Ἀδάνων ἑνούμενοι τὴν ἐκστρατείαν ποιοῦνται. τοὺς ἑωράτους τότε συλλέγονται, καὶ μάλιστα θέρους, καὶ ἠγάθους τῷ ὁμοίῳ ἐπιτηδεύουσι τοὺς ἐπιτηδεύουσι μάλιστα κεκοπωμένοι, ἴσως καὶ στεναῖς τοῦ ὄρους τούτου διεξόδοις, ὅτ' ἂν 

"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.

Moreover, the forgoing research underlines the initiative of central government and the emperor in the reign of Leo, as mentioned above, 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…"

"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."

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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 ἑκάσταθεν μέδικα μαχίμου λαοῦ μετ´ολίγου μαχίμου λαοῦ." 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 theme. 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 guerre," p. 147). This can also be confirmed from another source: the tenth-century treatise De Veltitatione Bellica, which presupposes a theme consisting of a similar number of soldiers, also considers that they fought guerrilla warfare "with only a small fighting force (μετ´όλιγου μαχίμου λαοῦ)." De Veltitatione Bellica, in Dagron and Mihăescu, Traité sur la guerre, 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. 1983), 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.


Furthermore, in sections 136–149 Leo VI indicates the deployment he believes to be most profitable for waging warfare against Arabs. This involves a local commander and a relatively moderate number of soldiers (4,000), as the words ‘deploy one theme and make up battle formations of up to four thousand’ plainly attests. As Haldon points out, this depends on Chapter XII of the same treatise, which is based on the Strategikon of Maurice, but undoubtedly synthesises this earlier source with new information derived from field commanders. 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. 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 ‘Abbāsid 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’tasim abruptly decided to retreat for unclear reasons, and never returned again. The last massive expedition by a caliph was conducted by this al-Mu’tasim 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. 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. Accordingly, a relatively moderate number of soldiers were involved in these single campaigns. These frontiersmen demonstrated their independence by exploiting the sensitive balance between the central government and the local powers, including the Tulunids. Thus, the conditions pre-
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 Amorian 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 ʿAli b. Yaḥya al-Armanī, the Amir of Tarsus); 852/3 (summer campaign by the same ‘Ali); 853/4 (summer campaign by the same ‘Ali); 856/7 (two campaigns, including a summer campaign led by ‘Ali and a winter campaign led by ʿUmar b. ʿAbd ALLAH al-Aqṭa, Amir of Malatya); and 859/60 (summer campaign led by ʿAli). [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 Chrysoschier, 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 Chrysoschier was ‘sorely harassing Roman territory and its inhabitants, and leading many of the countryfolk into captivity daily.’ [45]

Historian al-Yaḥṣūbī also records the summer raid led by Muḥammad b. ʿAli b. Yaḥyā 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-Muʿtamid (870-892) and his brother al-Muwaffaq, the de facto independence of Aḥmad b. Tūlūn 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],’ 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 Tūlūnids established by Aḥmad b. Tūlūn, 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 Tūlūnids: 878 (by ʿAbd ALLAH Rashīd b. KĀĪS, Tūlūnīd Amir of Tarsus); 879/80 (by Simā, dispatched by Aḥmad b. Tūlūn); and 881/2 (by Khalaf al-Farghānī, Tūlūnīd Amir). [48] In 882, Tarsuates deposed the Tūlūnīd governor Khalaf al-Farghānī, and a eunuch named Yaẓamān took advantage of the situation to gain political power. He explicitly defied Tūlūnīd authority by refusing to mention the name of Tūlūnīd amīr during prayer. Thereafter, incursions into Byzantine territory occurred autonomously. [49] Al-Ṭabarī refers to expeditions led by Yaẓamān in 885/6, 888 and 888/9. [50] Although Tūlūnīds recovered suzerainty in the Thughūr in 890, frontier garrisons made continual raids into Byzantine territory. Under Tūlūnīd influence,
As mentioned above, scholarship has stressed the central control over military policy by Leo VI, who stayed at Constantinople. 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, but these were an exceptional occurrence. This may 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. 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. 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.

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
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.


However, for the emergence of themata, Constantin Zuckerman offers an alternative explanation based on sigyllographic 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,’ *Millenium* 2 (2005), pp. 79–135 (pp. 125–135).

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–Xe 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 Smyrnia in the west.

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-

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 tôn scholon (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 strategos of the thema of Chalasianon 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 strategos of Charsianon before his promotion to the position of domestic of the domestikos tôn scholon.[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 hypostrategos, 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]
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 λαῷ)."[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 *strategos.*[73] The Arab geographer Qudama 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-

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

[68] *Theoph. Cont.* p. 374: ‘καὶ γὰρ τούτοις ἦν ὁ ἀνήρ οὗτος ἑπί Μιχαήλ βασιλέως ἀυτοῦ εὐρύθη στρατηγεία, ὡς πολλάκις τῶν ἰμαρτυρίων τῆς Τούρκης μετὰ τούς ἀνθρώπους αὐτοῦ μηχανήματα εἰς τροφὴν καὶ φρονίδαν καὶ ἀπάταν παρέχει, καὶ τὸ οὖν αὐτὸν θηράματος καταπτήσεις 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 (δῶμα συνεχέν τε καὶ δεόλικον αὐτοῦ).’ This may imply that such figures possessed armed forces loyal
Thus somewhat similar situations seem to have existed on both sides. This is the very nature of the warfare. See n. 55 above.

188. However, this seems like a rather defensive practice. See n. 55 above.

189. See De Velitatione Bellica, Pr., p. 32–35. 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.

190. 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.


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 nature of the warfare. See n. 55 above.
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 strategos and his family who are in charge of dealing with the situation. See Digenis Akritas, ed. and trans. Elisabeth Jeffreys (Cambridge 1998), G. I. 270-275, 295-300, G. II. 60-69, G. III. 66-72. Cf. Nicholas Oikonomides, ‘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.


[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 Kaege, ‘Confronting Islam,’ pp. 593; 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.


[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.