



Warfare in the Byzantine world

Symposiarch
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Friday, April 30th, 2010

Saturday, May 1st, 2010

Sunday, May 2nd, 2010

A DUMBARTON OAKS SYMPOSIUM

War and the need to wage it, the organisational constraints it imposes, its effects on society and economy as well as its ideological justification and the debates it engenders, can be a radical force for social and political transformation. However unpleasant the effects of war, it is an undeniable fact of human history that war has been on many occasions and in many different historical contexts a powerful stimulus both to technological innovation and social and political change. The crucial role of war and its concomitants cannot be ignored in the history of any culture. Byzantium is no exception. Indeed, in many respects the history of the Byzantine state is also the history of its ability successfully to defend itself and to organise for war, for its military organisation was central both to the inflection of its social relations in general as well as to the ways in which the central government extracted and redistributed the resources available to it, whether in the form of agricultural produce or money taxes on agriculture and trade.

In its thousand years of existence - from the reign of Anastasius (491-518) until that of the last emperor, Constantine XI (1448-1453) - the Byzantine state was almost constantly at war with one or another of its neighbours. This reflected its geography and strategic situation, centred as it was on the southern Balkans and Asia Minor. It had constantly to fend off challenges to its territorial integrity from the Persian and then Arab or Turkish Islamic powers to the east, or its Balkan or central European neighbours to the north west and north. As the western and central European powers grew and matured - first in the form of

the Carolingian empire, then the German empire and the kingdom of Hungary - so Byzantine political pre-eminence came to be challenged, until by the end of the twelfth century the empire had become a second-rate state, subject to the power politics of powerful western kingdoms and the commercial strength of Italian merchant republics such as Venice, Genoa and Pisa.

Byzantium was a society in which the virtues of peace were extolled and war was usually condemned, certainly when taken for its own sake. Fighting was to be avoided at all costs. Yet the empire nevertheless inherited the military administrative structures and, in many ways, the militaristic ideology of the expanding pre-Christian Roman empire in its heyday. These tensions were overcome through the blending of Christian ideals with the political will to survive and the justification of war as a necessary evil, waged primarily in defence of the Roman world and the Orthodox faith. Late Roman and medieval Christian society in the eastern Mediterranean/south Balkan region thus generated a unique culture which was able to cling without reservation to a pacifistic ideal while at the same time legitimating and justifying the maintenance of an immensely efficient and, for the most part remarkably effective, military apparatus.

This symposium will examine some of these themes in an attempt to re-evaluate Byzantine as well as other perceptions of warfare and the military, to understand how the Byzantines organised for war, and the reasons for their success or failure.

Friday 30th April

9.30 Coffee etc.

10.00 Welcome

10.15 Introduction – John Haldon

Session 1: Background

10.30 The Big Picture: China, Byzantium and the shadow of the steppe (David Graff)

11.15 The Small Picture: Government by Exception and Exemption. Evidence from the Later Byzantine Military (Mark Bartusis)

12.00 Discussion

12.30 Lunch

Session 2: Legitimation and ideology

14.00 Fighting for peace: the legitimation of warfare (Frank Trombley)

14.45 A Conflicted Heritage: The Byzantine Religious Establishment of a War Ethic (John McGuckin)

15.30 Discussion and break

16.15 Byzantium confronts its neighbours: Islam and the Crusaders (John France)

17.00 Discussion

17.30 - 19.00 Cocktails

Saturday 1st May

08.30 Coffee

Session 3: Literary and visual representations of war

09.00 The visual representation of peace (Lioba Theis)

09.45 The Art of War (Robert Nelson)

10.30 Discussion and break

11.15 The paradoxes of heroism in Byzantium: Military saints and secular warriors (Anthony Kaldellis)

12.00 Discussion

12.30 Lunch

Session 4: The resources of warfare

14.00 Resources, warfare and the Manzikert campaign (John Haldon)

14.45 The Medieval Logistics Project: warfare on the grid (Vince Gaffney)

15.30 Discussion and break

16.15 Landscapes, movement and logistics: multi-agent systems and simulating medieval campaigns (Georgios Theodoropoulos)

17.00 Discussion

19.00 Speakers' dinner

Sunday 2nd May

09.45 Coffee

Session 5: Legitimation and ideology

10.15 War, Social Change and the Politics of Empire: Prisoners of War between Slavery and Freedom (Youval Rotman)

11.00 The face of protracted war (Walter Kaegi)

11.45 Discussion

Concluding remarks – John Haldon