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Storia Militare Antica e Bizantina (6)

a cura di
MARCO BETTALLI, ELENA FRANCHI E GIOACCHINO STRANO



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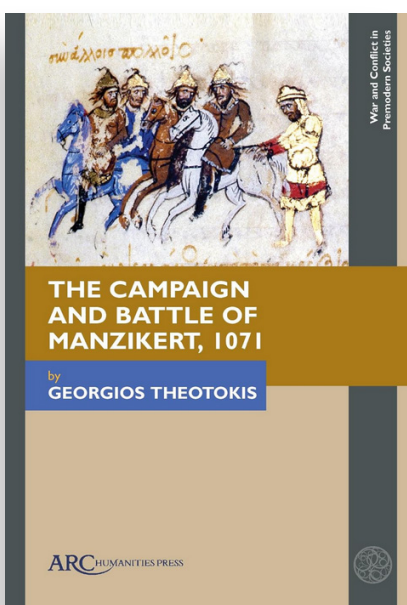


Bronze statue (2nd/3rd century AD) of the genius of a legion.
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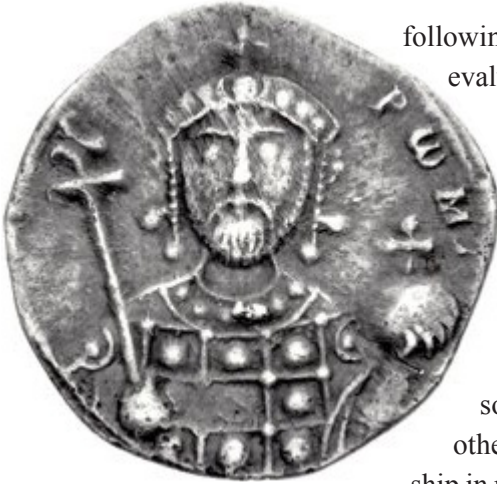
GEORGIOS THEOTOKIS

The campaign and battle of Manzikert, 1071

[War and Conflict in Premodern Societies], ARC Humanities Press 2024, 224 pp.



Despite the importance of the battle of Manzikert to so many aspects of byzantine and medieval history, there is surprisingly little written exclusively about it. John Haldon did a massive study on Byzantine logistics based on the imperial army moving to the battlefield that appeared on-line, at first, and then in print (Archaeopress, 2024). Moreover, Carole Hillenbrand wrote a book (*Turkish Myth and Muslim Symbol: The Battle of Manzikert*, Edinburgh University Press, 2007), which focuses mainly on the memory of the battle in the Turkish, Arabic, and Persian sources afterwards. Theotokis now brings us a comprehensive monograph on the battle, re-reading the sources and methodically



following all stages of the development, conduct and evaluation of this engagement.

His book consists of 7 chapters, which are further divided into sections, focusing on the sources themselves. Most of them (chapters 1-5) are dedicated to a detailed analysis of the events leading up to and culminating in the Battle of Manzikert. In particular, in chapter 1, the author skilfully presents the sources alongside the studies conducted by other scholars, drawing on secondary scholarship in multiple languages, including French, Greek, and Italian. This approach contextualizes the sources, enabling readers to evaluate their reliability. Chapter 2 ‘sets the scene’ and poses the question of whether we should consider the battle of Manzikert as a “decisive battle”. It is an interesting chapter since it includes the entire theoretical environment for approaching military events in relation to historical sources. Here the author sets up his material on the campaign and battle chapters. The next chapter (chapter 3) stays close to the sources to explore the military demography and topography of the battle. This is a difficult task – military numbers can only be a guess in medieval times – and only if utilized in combination with the recent studies of Haldon can it provide a comprehensive understanding of this pivotal battle.

Chapter 4 explores the geopolitical background of Turkish incursions into eastern Anatolia and Upper Mesopotamia and discusses how the Byzantine defensive system in Vaspourakania, which eventually became the epicenter of Seljuk incursions into central Anatolia, was compromised by Turkish advances and weakened because of the internal uprisings after Emperor Basil II’s death in 1025.

Chapters 5 and 6 follow, examining the Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes’ campaigns against the Seljuk Turks in 1068 and 1069, and finally the campaign of 1071, which culminated in the Battle of Manzikert. The author offers a captivating interpretation of a medieval battle through a detailed analysis of the battle itself, including the strategic errors made by Diogenes and a day-by-day narrative of the fighting from August 24 to 26, 1071.

Chapter 7 then delves into the aftermath of the Battle of Manzikert, as viv-

idly described by the key eyewitness, Michael Attaleiates. It also examines the reception of Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes' capture by Alp Arslan in Muslim historiography in the centuries that followed, a section that could be incorporated into the concluding chapter where this issue is discussed further.

Indeed, the book's conclusions include two distinct sections. The first poses convincingly the argument that the Battle of Manzikert should not be viewed as a military or tactical failure but rather as a strategic disaster for the Byzantine Empire. This strategic collapse granted the Seljuks a "free hand" in Anatolia for the remainder of the decade. The author also draws insightful parallels between Manzikert and the Battle of Myriokephalon, the latter marking Byzantium's final imperial attempt to reclaim central Anatolia. The second section, focusing on modern Greek and Turkish historiography, is particularly attractive and would deserve a stand-alone presentation within the book. The Greek historiographical analysis (pp. 182–187) spans from the 19th century to the 1950s, while the Turkish section extends to recent events, including presidential speeches and the construction of a commemorative mosque. Undoubtedly, this exploration underscores a crucial point: the enduring significance of Manzikert in the modern historiography of both nations. The author highlights how the battle has been portrayed by prominent historians in Greece and Turkey during pivotal moments in the formation of their respective national identities.

In summary, Theotokis' book is an invaluable contribution to the field of Byzantine military history, presenting all the interpretive tools that the historian must have at his disposal in order to thoroughly analyze a battle, from its preparation to its aftermath, combining the operational with the political and social environment that accompanies it.

EFSTRATIA (EFFIE) SYGKELLOU



Due guerrieri selgiuchidi Bassorilievo nel Museo di arte turca e islamica a Istanbul (Sultanahmet (Fatih)), Wikimedia commons.



Cristo appare a San Mercurio e a Santa Caterina di Alessandria nell'atto di calpestare Giuliano l'Apostata la cui morte, supplicata da San Basilio difronte ad un'icona di San Mercurio, fu attribuita all'intercessione del santo. Icona del laboratorio di Georgios Klontzas, Creta, ca 1560/70.
Yale University Art Gallery, ID 255. Connecticut, U. S. Wikimedia Commons

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