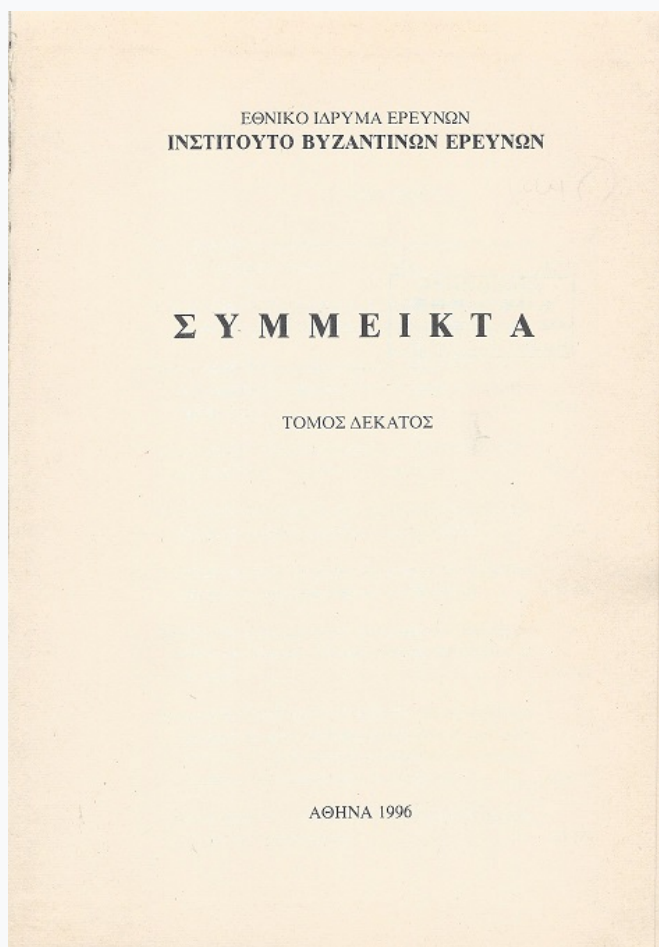


Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 10 (1996)

SYMMEIKTA 10



The Decline of the Opsikian Domesticates and the Rise of the Domesticate of the Scholae

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doi: [10.12681/byzsym.804](https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.804)

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To cite this article:

LOUNGHIS, T. (1996). The Decline of the Opsikian Domesticates and the Rise of the Domesticate of the Scholae. *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 10, 27–36. <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.804>

T. C. LOUNGHIS

THE DECLINE OF THE OPSIKIAN DOMESTICATES
AND THE RISE OF THE DOMESTICATE OF THE SCHOLAE

In this brief note I intend to put forward the hypothesis that the fate during the so-called 'Dark Ages' of the Opsikian army - 'guarded by God'-divided impressions in the mind of subsequent generations¹, but also initiated a number of crucial changes that were to regenerate Byzantine military institutions as early as in the second half of the eighth century.

At some stage not very long after the crushing of the Opsikian-supported orthodox emperor Artavasdos² and, more evidently, immediately following the mutiny of 766³ described in confused and horrified tones by

1 Literature on the Opsikion and its subdivisions. Ju. A. КУЛАКОВСКИЙ, К вопросу о феммах Византийской империи, *Izbornik Kievskij posviaščennyj, T. D. Florinskomu*, Kiev 1904, 82-118 (= IDEM, *Istoriija Vizantii III 602-717*, Kiev 1915, Exkurs IV 399-418). On the subdivision of the Optimati, IDEM, К вопросу об имени и истории фемы «Опсик», *Viz. Vrem.* 11, 1904, 49-62 (= *Istoriija Vizantii III*, Exkurs V 419-431). J. F. HAMILTON, *Byzantine Praetorians. An Administrative, Institutional and Social Survey of the Opsikion and Tagmata c. 580-900*, *Ποικίλα Βυζαντινά* 3, Bonn 1984. T. C. LOUNGHIS, A Deo conservandum imperiale Obsequium. Some Notes concerning Byzantine Field Troops during the Dark Ages, *BSI* 52, 1991, 54-60. On the themes in general, cf. the recent study of R. J. LIEKE, Die zweihundertjährige Reform zu den Anfängen der Themenorganisation im 7. und 8. Jh., *BSI* 45, 1984, 27-39 and 190-201 with the relevant bibliography. For references to the appearance of each theme see N. OIKONOMIDIS, *Les listes de préseance byzantines des IXe-Xe siècles*, Paris 1972, 348-354.

2 P. SPECK, *Artabasdos, der rechtgläubige Vorkämpfer der göttlichen Lehren*, *Ποικίλα Βυζαντινά* 2, Bonn 1981.

3 W. E. KAEGI Jr., The Byzantine Armies and Iconoclasm, *BSI* 27, 1966, 48-70, IDEM, *Byzantine Military Unrest 471-843. An Interpretation*, Amsterdam 1981, 237. Ilse ROCHOW, *Byzanz im 8. Jh. in der Sicht des Theophanes*, *BBA* 57, Berlin 1991, 106.

Theophanes the Confessor⁴, Opsikian military power began to decline rapidly. Emperor Constantine V (741-775) 'appointed generals of like mind with him, worthy executors of his evil intentions'⁵: Michael Melissenos, as commander of the iconoclastic theme of the Anatolics, Michael Lachanodracon, as commander of the equally iconoclastic theme of the Thracesians, and a third general with the ominous name of Manes, who was appointed to the command of the newly founded cavalry theme of the Bucellarii. This new cavalry unit curtailed substantially the area controlled till then by the military forces of the rebel and ostensibly orthodox Opsikian theme, which had to be not only humiliated after successive defeats in civil struggles, but also to be outranked. These initial changes took place in the fifth indiction, that is, the year 767.

One year later, in the sixth indiction, military changes had reached the imperial capital, Constantinople, which had also to acquire military commanders of the same mind as that of the emperor. Thus, the patrician Anthony was appointed *domestic of the scholae* (this is the first mention of what was later to become an illustrious institution); the magistros Peter on the other hand, according to Theophanes⁶, added his own highly-trained *tagmata* to the

and 192; EADEM, *Kaiser Konstantin V (741-775). Materialien zu seinem Leben und Nachleben*, Frankfurt a. M.- Berlin - Bern- New York - Paris - Wien, 1994, 29-30.

4. THEOPHANES, ed. DE BOOR, 437-438. Cf. also T. C. LOUNGHIS, Οι νέοι προσανατολισμοί των Ισαύρων, *Βυζαντικά* 2, 1982, 73-83 and ROCHOW, *Theophanes*, 191-192.

5. THEOPHANES, 440, l. 25-28: τῇ δὲ αὐτῇ ἐ' ἰνδικτιῶνι προβάλλεται στρατηγούς ὁμόφρονας αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς κακίας αὐτοῦ ἐπαξίους ἐργάτας. Cf. ROCHOW, *Theophanes*, 198-199. Since then, the themes of the Anatolics, the Thracesians and the Bucellarii must be considered as iconoclastic. Cf. also T.C. LOUNGHIS, *Δοκίμιο για την κοινωνική εξέλιξη στη διαρκεία των λεγόμενων «σκοτεινών αιώνων» (602-867)*, Athens 1985, 48.

6. THEOPHANES, 411, l. 5: ἰνδικτιῶνος στ'. *Ibid.*, 442, l. 24-28: καὶ ἐν μὲν τῇ πόλει δι' ἑαυτοῦ ταῦτα ἔδρα, καὶ τῶν ὁμοφρόνων αὐτοῦ, Ἀντωνίου, φημί, πατρικίου καὶ δομεστίκου τῶν σχολῶν, τοῦ Πέτρου τοῦ μαγίστρου καὶ τοῦ ἐκπαιδευθέντος ὑπ' αὐτοῦ λαοῦ τῶν ταγμάτων, ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἔξω θέμασι διὰ τῶν προρρηθέντων στρατηγῶν. Cf. ROCHOW, *Theophanes*, 202. The appearance of a δομεστικός τοῦ μαγίστρου in the year 624 (CHRONICON PASCHALE, Bonn, 714); cf. also OIKONOMIDÈS, *Listes*, 329) seems to mark the transition between the early Byzantine period, when the magister officiorum

forces of the *scholae*, in order to carry out, together with the domestic of the *scholae* Anthony, imperial duties within the City-walls, while in the outer themes similarly evil deeds were carried out by the aforementioned generals (Michael Melissenos, Michael Lachanodracon and Manes). This reveals the preponderance -if not total domination- of these three iconoclastic themes over the erstwhile mighty 'guarded by God' Opsikion, and only time would show that this was just the beginning; in the twelfth indiction (A.D. 774) another military corps known till then as the Optimati was detached from the Opsikian theme and attached by emperor Constantine V to the iconoclastic tagmata under the command of Peter the magistros⁷. The gradual dismemberment of the Opsikian theme was to reach completion, it seems, under Michael II (820-829), with the creation of the theme of Paphlagonia (detached from the Bucellarii and, partly also, from the Armeniacs); since its earliest days the Paphlagonian theme is known to have possessed warships under the command of a *katepano*⁸, a term that should be considered unique in the first half of the ninth century and substantially prior to the equally naval *katepano* of the Mardaïtes of Attaleia⁹, who, according to the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus¹⁰, was appointed by emperor Leo VI the Wise (886-912). The ships of the Paphlagonian theme together with those of the

commanded the guard units and the creation and shaping of the future Opsikion. Cf. *infra*, n. 19.

7. THEOPHANES, 446, l. 27 (the indiction) and 447, l. 19-21: *καὶ ἐπισωρεύσας τοὺς ταξάτους τῶν θεμάτων καὶ τοὺς θρακησιάνους καὶ ἐνώσας τοῖς τάγμασι τοὺς ὀτιμάτους ἐποίησεν αὐτοῖς π' χιλιάδας*. On the term *taxati*/ *taxeotae* cf. the very interesting conclusions of Martha GREGORIOU-IOANNIDOU, *Ο μόνιμος στρατιωτικὸς πυρήνας των βυζαντινῶν θεμάτων*, *Εγνατία* 2, 1990, 230-241.

8. THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS (Bonn), 123: *τὸν σπαθαροκανδιδάτον Πετρωνᾶν τοῦ ἐπονομαζομένου Καματεροῦ, μετὰ χελανδίων βασιλικοπλοῦμων καὶ τοῦ κατεπάνω τῆς Παφλαγονίας ἀπέστειλεν*. The story is repeated by CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De administrando imperio*, ch. 42, l. 23-32, ed. G. MORAVCSIK - R. J. H. JENKINS, *CFHB* 1, 182 and SKYLITZES, ed. THURN, *CFHB* 5, 73, l. 82-86, the latter not mentioning the ships.

9. Cf. L. BRÉHIER, *Les institutions de l'empire byzantin*, Paris 1949, 413. Cf. also A. SAVVIDES, *Ἡ Ἀττάλεια ὡς ἔδρα τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ ναυτικοῦ θέματος Κιβυρραιωτῶν*, *Βυζαντινὸς Δόμος* 4, 1990, 153, note 66.

10. *De Administrando Imperio*, ch. 50, l. 169 ff., 240-242; *De Cerimoniis aulae byzantinae* (Bonn), 657, 660, 668.

theme of Bucellarii were to appear in the mid-tenth century¹¹, while the Opsikian theme seems to have been transformed into a typical cavalry theme from the beginning of the ninth century onwards, with the appearance in its ranks of turmarshs¹², who were totally absent as long as the Opsikion maintained its original guard units character up to the end of the eighth century.

Thus, the process of disintegration and decline of status of the Opsikian army and territory¹³ from Constantine V to Michael II resulted in the creation of the themes of Bucellarii under a general (767), the Optimati under a domesticus (773/774) and the theme of Paphlagonia, initially under a *strategos* and a *katepano* simultaneously (826)¹⁴. In his famous treatise *De Thematibus* Constantine Porphyrogenitus asserts firstly that the theme of the Optimati had nothing in common with the other themes but was to be classified on a lower level (*οὐδεμίαν κοινωνίαν ἔχει πρὸς θέματα*)¹⁵ and, secondly, that the latter theme's commander, i.e. the domesticus, was subject

11. *De Administrando Imperio*, ch. 53, l. 523-525, 286. It seems to be beyond any doubt, that the so-called *παραγίτιζα τοῦ Πόντου* or *πλάγια τῶν Ἀρμενιάκων* (*De Administrando Imperio*, ch. 53, l. 524 and 534), together with the paphlagonian or bucellarian ships are merchant, transport or cargo ships, having no military commander, as it was the case of Paphlagonia in the early ninth century. Another *katepano* of Paphlagonia in the first half of the tenth century is to be seen in G. ZACOS - J. NESBITT, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, II, Berne 1984, no. 798.

12. The first appearance, to the best of my knowledge, of a turmarsh of the Opsikion in G. ZACOS - A. VEGLEY, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, I, Basle 1972, n° 2550. Another turmarsh of the Opsikion is mentioned by Theoph. Cont., 421, in 932. Cf. A. P. KAZDAN, Velikoe vosstaniie Vasil'ja mednoj ruki, *Viz. Vrem.* 4, 1951, 73-83.

13. The first mention of the Opsikian territory by NICEPHORUS the Patriarch, ed. DE BOOR, 36, l. 21 in terms as: *εἰς τὴν τοῦ Ὀψικίου λεγομένην χώραν* must surely be interpreted thus: 'in the territory, known in our days (during the life of Nicephorus) as the Opsikian territory' although the mention is related to the year A.D. 687, that is under Justinian II. Cf. also THEOPHANES, 364, l. 14-15: *εἰς τὰ τοῦ Ὀψικίου μέρη*.

14. A co existence of both commanders (*katepano* and general) in the late years of Michael II and the early reign of Theophilus is not to be excluded; cf. OIKONOMIDES, *Listes*, 349, note 346 and *supra*, note 11.

15. COSTANTINO PORPHYROGENITO, *De thematibus*, ed. A. PERTUSI, Città del Vaticano 1952, 69-70.

to the orders of a general (ὕπὸ χεῖρα ὧν στρατηγοῦ)¹⁶. The old but penetrating study of Ju. A. Kulakovsky on the one hand¹⁷, and the recent, extensively annotated *Three military treatises* of Constantine Porphyrogenitus by J. F. Haldon on the other¹⁸, combine to demonstrate the insignificant role played by the Optimati as well as by their domesticus during imperial campaigns in Asia Minor, something that Constantine Porphyrogenitus seems very eager to point out. The conclusion to be drawn is clear: created in or shortly before 773/4, the theme of the Optimati was, from its earliest stages, under the command of a somewhat down-graded domesticus, if compared with the past and future status of the *domestici* in the Byzantine Empire. The low-ranked domesticus of the Optimati is, accordingly, considered as a corollary to the demotion and disgrace of the Opsikian army, and so on. In the latter evaluation we have a specific example of how a fair and plausible conclusion may well lead us to misconstruing the real course of events, especially if one takes into account the fact that the two-fold dismemberment of the Opsikian theme under Constantine V into the Bucellarii under a strategos and the Optimati under a domesticus, has generally been seen as two acts independent of one another. Sometimes, however, two seemingly unrelated procedures may turn out to be very closely connected, on account of common features that may be sought in a common ancestor, in our case the Opsikion.

A lead seal in the Zacos-Veglery collection reveals the existence of a *δομέστικος τῶν Βουκελλαρίων* in the first half of the eighth century¹⁹. His name is Theophilus but, in this particular case, we may presume that the name does not provide us with evidence of any great significance. The

16. *De Thematibus*, 70.

17. KULAKOVSKY, K *voprosu o temach* (= *Istoriia Vizantii* III (cf. *supra*, note 1), 399-418.

18. CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions*, ed. J. HALDON, *CFHB* 28; cf. index s.v. ὀπτιματός and the relevant mentions.

19. ZACOS-VEGLERY, *Lead Seals*, n° 1656. Cf. HALDON, *Praetorians*, note 558. Somewhat surprisingly, Haldon rejects this date and asserts, moreover, that the Opsikion had always turmae. On the theme of Bucellarii, cf. O. SCHMITT, *Die Buccellarii. Eine Studie zum militärischen Gefolgschaftswesen in der Spätantike*, *Tyche* 9, 1994, 147-174 (only a mention in p. 173, note 223).

appearance of a domesticus of the Bucellarii much earlier than his corresponding strategos at the expense of the Opsikian theme in 767 can leave no doubt about its origins and dependency: he is to be counted amongst the Opsikian officers in the first half of the eighth century and -most importantly- the domesticus of the Bucellarii disappears for good after the promotion, shortly before 767, of the commander of the Bucellarii to the rank of strategos and his simultaneous detachment from the Opsikian theme.

Taking into account the fact that turmarshs appear in the Opsikian theme only after the end of the eighth century, one may reasonably surmise that in the first period of its existence (680-767) the Opsikion 'guarded by God' had a different internal structure from that of the other themes -something that has not been emphasized sufficiently- and this different internal structure consisted not only in the title of its commander-in-chief, but also in its division into domesticates (ostensibly old-fashioned), like those of the Bucellarii and the Optimati, and not into turmae, as, for instance, the theme of the Armeniacs, whose first turmarsh appears as early as 627²⁰.

As pointed out by Kulakovsky²¹, both themes (and institutions) of the Bucellarii and the Optimati had their roots in the period of the enlistment of Goths into the Roman forces (the Bucellarii were also Romans) from the time of the reign of the western emperor Honorius (395-423) onwards according to the historian of the fifth century Olympiodorus of Thebes²² and can be seen in the term *Γοτθογραιῖνοι*, employed by Theophanes. These *Γοτθογραιῖνοι* having settled in Bithynia, were in 715 amongst 'the law breaking military crowds of the Opsikion', who 'run through the night and breaking into the houses of citizens, committed widespread slaughter sparing no one'²³. It may not be unreasonable to assume, that these *Γοτθογραιῖνοι* c

20. THEOPHANES, 325, l. 3.

21. KULAKOVSKY, K voprosu o femach (= *Istoriia Vizantii* III), 404 and 407.

22. On Olympiodorus of Thebes cf. E. A. THOMPSON, Olympiodorus of Thebes *L'Antiquité Classique* 49, 1980, 212-231. The relevant fragments of Olympiodorus are frs. 7 and 9 (= *FHG* IV, 59); PHOTIUS, *Bibliothèque*, cod. 80, ed. R. HENRY, vol. I, 168.

23. THEOPHANES, 386, l. 5-7: *Οἱ δὲ παράνομοι λαοὶ τοῦ Ὀψικίου ἅμα τοῖς Γοτθογραιῖνοις τῇ νυκτὶ εἰς τοὺς οἴκους τῶν πολιτῶν διαδραμόντες μεγίστην εἰργάσαντο ἄλωσιν, μηδενὸς φεισάμενοι*. NICEPHORUS, ed. DE BOOR, 51, l. 23-25: *καὶ νυκτὸς ἐπιγενομένης εἰς τοὺς οἴκους τῶν πολιτῶν εἰσδραμόντες μεγίστην αὐτῶν*

715, or the *Bucellarii* and *Optimati* of gothic origin were commanded in the first half of the eighth century each by the long-established domesticus, given that in this fatal year of 715, the mutinous Opsikian army was certainly deprived of a *patricius* and *comes* as commander-in-chief²⁴, since, according to the *Life* of Germanos, patriarch of Constantinople (715-730) and former metropolitan of Cyzicus, the army of the Opsikion 'despised Anastasius the emperor'²⁵ a comment that may be connected with those of Theophanes and Nicephorus describing the Opsikian mutiny against him

Since the existence of domesticates and not of *turmae* in the ranks of the Opsikion seems to be certain, we can view the 'deliberate reforms' of Constantine V²⁶ in a somewhat different light. The most Orthodox and, since the days of Justinian II, 'guarded by God' Opsikion (by conviction hostile, of course, to the iconoclast emperors), which sometimes controlled both shores of the sea of Marmara²⁷, had to be dismantled and surrounded by other forces, loyal to the iconoclast emperors, in order to avoid likely mutinies

The Domesticate of the *Scholae* in the imperial capital appeared in 767/768, together with the *tagmata* led by the *magistros*. It was Constantinople rather than the Opsikion which acquired in the first half of the eighth

βλαβὴν εἰργάζοντο. Besides KULAKOVSKY, cf. K. AMANTOS, Γοτθοογραικοὶ-Γοτθοογραικία, *Ἑλληνικά* 5, 1932, 306 and also HALDON, *Praetorians*, 201-202

24 THEOPHANES, 383, l. 29-30. Ὁ δὲ Ἀρτεμῖος στρατηγὸς ἰκανωτάτους προβαλλόμενος εἰς τὰ καβαλλαρικά (Artemius-Anastasius appointed Leo the Isaurian to the high-command of the Anatolics and Artavasdos the Armenian to the high-command of the Armeniacs, but none was appointed by him as commander of the Opsikion which consisted mainly of infantry troops). The lack of a *patricius* and *comes* of the Opsikion in 716 is confirmed by the fact that the Opsikian soldiers revolted against Artemius and slaughtered the admiral deacon John

25 *Life of Germanos*, ed. LAMZA, §12, l. 221-222, 216 ἀπεχθάνεται μὲν Ἀναστάσιος ὑπὸ τῶν ἐκ τοῦ Ὀψικίου θεματοῦ ταξιωτῶν, a mention, which, although deriving from a later source, explains very well why Artemius-Anastasius did not place a commander to the high-command of the Opsikion

26 The term 'deliberate reforms' belongs to HALDON, *Praetorians*, 209

27 Opsikian garrisons in both shores of the Sea of Marmara (Propontis) in NICEPHORUS, ed. DE BOOR, 49, l. 5-9, in the year 713. Parallel mention in THEOPHANES, 383, l. 10-15. Cf. also the mention κομῆς τοῦ Ὀψικίου καὶ υποστρατηγοῦ Θράκης in MANSI, XI, 209

century new strong guard units, composed mostly of infantry troops²⁸. From this time onwards, the Opsikian troops were placed under the two-fold supervision of the Optimati (from the north-east) and the Bucellarii (from the east), while its southern approaches were to be guarded by the pro-Isaurian Anatolic and Thracesian troops. As the division of the Optimati was not strong enough in number, Constantine V united them with the *tagmata*, a move that was vindicated by later experience on campaigns in Asia Minor.

The creation of a new and hopefully powerful domesticated commanding imperial guard units required urgently the down-grading, if not abolition, of the old-style domesticates of the Opsikian army. Thus, in the case of the Bucellarii, the promotion of their commander to the rank of strategos²⁹ abolished *ipso facto* their older commander-in-chief, while the domesticus of the Optimati was to decline into inglorious status, according to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, his command being divided neither into *turmae* nor *drungoi* (διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸ οἰκτρότατον καὶ μήτε τούρμαις μήτε δρουγγοῖς τετιμημένον/*malim*: τετιμημένον, instead of τετιμημένον)³⁰, exactly as in the case of the Opsikian army during its early phase (680-776)³¹.

At the end of the reign of Constantine V the *scholae*, the *tagmata* and, probably, the Optimati as well, defended the capital against any rebellious attempt on the part of the severely diminished Opsikion, whose future commander, patricius and comes Petronas, would demonstrate for the last time the quality of his troops 'guarded by God': he was charged with the military protection of the Seventh Oecumenical Council, convoked by Eirene the Athenian in his seat, Nicaea in 787³², as the *tagmata* in the capital had shown iconoclast sympathies. This was the last time, to the best of my

28. LOUNGHIS, *Obsequium*, 56 and 59-60.

29. Given that the seal ZACOS - VEGLERY, *Lead Seals*, n° 1656 belongs to the first half of the eighth century indeed.

30. *De Thematibus*, 69-70.

31. Here, we have the doubtful seal of a certain Στυλιανός (or, rather, Στέφανος), δ[ρου]νγάρ[ιος] τοῦ Ὀψικίου in: K. KONSTANTIOPOULOS, *Βυζαντινὰ μολιβδόβουλλα τοῦ ἐν Ἀθήναις Νομισματικοῦ Μουσείου*, Athens 1917, n° 192 (which could be dated between 750 and 850, something that does not contradict at all our conclusions).

32. MANSI, XII, 999B; ZACOS - VEGLERY, *Lead Seals*, n° 2315.

knowledge, that the once glorious Opsikion army performed successfully on its own an imperially charged mission³³.

What must draw our attention, in my opinion, is the fact that Constantine V, in order to outrank and humiliate the dangerous Opsikian theme, created a counter force in the capital, whose commander previously had a subordinate rank in the Opsikian army. Indeed, a *patricius* and *comes* having under his orders several *domestici*, confirms John Haldon's theory, according to which the *comes Obsequii* is a genuine descendant of the late roman *comes domesticorum*. Yet the reality after 767 would have meant, firstly, that from now on the *comes* of the Opsikion would be equal in status to a *domesticus*, previously his second-in-command; secondly, that imperial power as well as the citizens of the capital need no longer fear any likely bids for power on the part of the Opsikion as in 715 and 741.; and, thirdly, that, instead of the old Opsikian hierarchy, staunchly orthodox since the times of the emperors Constantine IV, Justinian II and Artavasdos, a new domesticate commanding guards units could be counted among the supporters of the military Isaurian emperors. In other words, the military reforms of Constantine V aimed at the abolition of the long-established and potentially dangerous Opsikion, while stopping short of destroying totally its tradition, employed a part of the old-style Opsikian tradition -the domesticate- in the command of the imperial Guard. Such is almost everywhere and at any time the behaviour of great leaders: to build a new army (or fleet, according to Sir Andrew Cunningham, Commander-in-Chief of the British Mediterranean fleet in 1941) one needs only a couple of years; to build a new tradition, people need centuries' long experience. If the British στρατηγὸς τῶν καράβων (later Admiral of the fleet and First Sea lord) had read Byzantine history, he would probably have recognized in Emperor Constantine V one

33. In the third year of the reign of Leo IV (775-780), i. e. in 778, the leader of the *Opsikianoι* (no official title mentioned), together with those (generals) of the Thracesiani, the Anatolics, the Bucellarii and the Armeniacs took part in the march against Germanikeia, which resulted, as it seems, in its surrounding (THEOPHANES, 451, l. 13-17). It is difficult to conclude that Gregory of Musulakios, mentioned as leader of the *Opsikianoι* by THEOPHANES, had in his orders infantry or cavalry troops. Foot-soldiers must have participated also in this campaign 'of the five generals', amongst which the troops of the Opsikion are mentioned last.

of his noblest and, above all, like-minded (*ὁμόφρονες*) predecessors in safeguarding military tradition and in founding simultaneously a new one, in this case based on two main pillars of strength: the powerful theme of the Anatolics (sometimes also emperor-maker), to which the first Isaurian emperors had every reason to be indebted, and the domestication of the *scholae*, which albeit a creation of the early Byzantine tradition –represented till 767 by the Opsikian army– was also to have a brilliant future. Under these circumstances it is no wonder that the ‘guarded by God’ Opsikion had ended up as an ordinary theme like all the others.