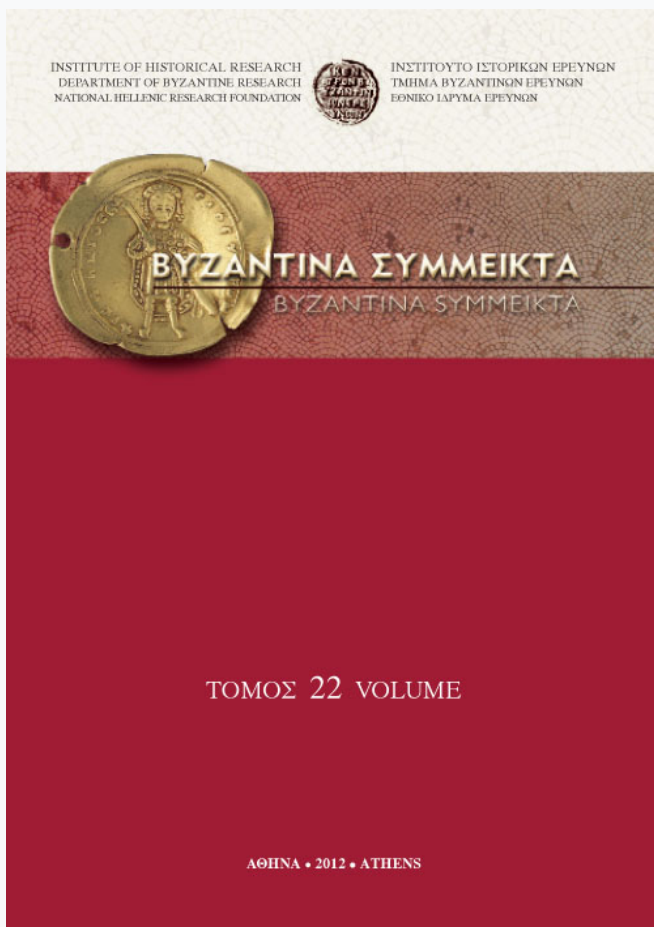


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**Book review:**Piotr L. GROTOWSKI. *Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints: Tradition and Innovation in Byzantine Iconography (843-1261)*. Translated by Richard Brzezinski. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010.

*Mamuka TSURTSUMIA*

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PIOTR Ł. GROTOWSKI, *Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints: Tradition and Innovation in Byzantine Iconography (843-1261)*. Translated by Richard Brzezinski. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010. Pp. XXV, 483. ISBN 978 90 04 18548 7

The present book is a major work by the Polish author Piotr Grotowski. He has set himself the task of ascertaining to what extent the images of warrior saints reflect the reality and how much Byzantine iconography took into account the actual changes in arms and armour. The work begins with an *Introduction* (pp. 1-18), in which the purpose of the study and the chronological limits are defined. Light is also shed on the present state of research into the cult and iconography of the holy warriors, as well as the Middle Byzantine army. In the first chapter – *Sources* (pp. 19-56), Grotowski discusses the archaeological, written and iconographic sources with which he is well acquainted and makes skilful use of them. The considerable attention given by the author to Byzantine military treatises is fully justified. In the second chapter – *Origins of the Image of the Warrior Saint* (pp. 57-123), Grotowski studies the inception and subsequent evolution of the cult of warrior saints and their typology (on foot and mounted). The third chapter – *Iconography of the Costume and Armour of the Warrior Saints* (pp. 125-312), is the longest. It contains a thorough examination of the body armour and protection for arms and legs of the saintly warriors, the types of shields (circular, oval and almond-shaped), and the costume with various insignia. In the author's conclusion, "Byzantine artists not only repeated classical iconographic motifs, but also actively introduced elements based on contemporary forms" (p. 311). In the fourth chapter – *Weapons in the Iconography of the Warrior Saints* (pp. 313-378), Grotowski reviews various types of shafted weapon (as well as war standards), edged weapon, mace

and bow. He notes correctly the particularly accurate depiction of the sword in Byzantine iconography (p. 377). In the last, fifth chapter *Equestrian Equipment* (pp. 379-398), such as stirrup, saddle with saddlecloth, horse harness and spurs are discussed. The author researches the question of horse armour and ascertains the reasons why it failed to be reflected in Byzantine iconography. These reasons are lack of iconographic tradition, the small number of cataphracts and non-existence of links between warrior saints and cataphract formations. Grotowski's observation to the effect that iconographic traditionalism allowed the introduction of new motifs within the limits of composition, without demolishing the entire structure by bringing in such elements as horse armour, is highly significant (p. 395). In the *Conclusions* (pp. 399-404) the author reviews Byzantine iconography by periods and various schools, and at the same time appraises their rendition of reality. His assertion that the further the artist (or a school of painting) was removed from the imperial centre, the less conservatism is found in his works, is justified.

It should be said unequivocally that Grotowski has good knowledge of the subject and the book is well written. Although, "the author's aim has not been to create a complete catalogue or corpus of preserved works depicting warrior saints" (p. 8), the material considered by him is impressive. Special note should be made of the fact that the author takes into account the countries of the Byzantine οἰκουμένη, where the iconographic tradition came under the influence of Byzantine art. In this respect, the material presented is unprecedented in terms of its comprehensiveness, which should be appraised as a positive example for emulation. In this, the author evinced his broad knowledge in his earlier studies as well<sup>1</sup>. Grotowski discusses in detail not only the equipment but the costume of warrior saints as well. His conclusions are basically valid, highlighting the changes in Byzantine iconography in the wake of the real changes occurring in armament as well as the cases in which reality is rendered in an idealized form.

It is natural to come across certain imprecisions and errors in a work of this scope. In some passages the author's interpretation of the text quoted is erroneous. Thus, Grotowski believes that Anna Komnene's well-known statement, *Κελτὸς γὰρ ἀνὴρ ἔποχος μὲν ἀκατάσχετος καὶ κἂν τεῖχος*

1. See P. GROTOWSKI, *The Legend of St. George Saving a Youth from Captivity and its Depiction in Art, Series Byzantina*, I (Warszawa, 2003), 27-77.

διατετορήνειε βαβυλώνιον<sup>2</sup>, refers to the Norman armour: “Normans so solidly armoured that they could break through the walls of Babylon” (p. 50, n. 135). Whereas, Anna has in mind the force of impact of a mounted Norman rather than the level of armouring. From the *Song of Roland*, where triple mail is mentioned, the author draws the erroneous conclusion that in the “West, where two or even three mail-shirts were occasionally worn” (p. 136, n. 48), for which he quotes J. France. While in that passage France explains that “it is equally unlikely that anyone would have worn three full hauberks”<sup>3</sup>. He also misinterprets A. Hoffmeyer and considers *yelman* as curve-bladed sabre: “the palash and curve-bladed *yelman* were known in Byzantium”, (p. 358, n. 195), though *yelman* is not a type of sabre but a double-edged end of a sabre. On one occasion Grotowski quotes M. Fulford, D. Sim and A. Doig, according to whom a cuirass allegedly has 40 scales or lamellae (p. 134, n. 39), which stems from a misunderstanding, for in the original the authors imply a *lorica segmentata* discovered in Corbridge, which was made of 40 large-sized elongated plates rather than scales or lamellae<sup>4</sup>. A single scale or lamellar cuirass would need many dozens (even hundreds) of scale and lamellar plates.

The following remarks refer basically to the technical characteristics of the armament – a complex question per se, about which there is so far no consensus. In Grotowski’s view, scale armour “provides good ventilation for the body” (p. 133, on p. 312, he repeats that scale was light and well ventilated). It is mail armour that is characterized by good ventilation rather than scale, whose scales are fastened to a lining, being an obstacle to ventilation. The author repeats one widespread error according to which lamellar armour is more flexible than scale, for “absence of the base material ... produces a more flexible type of armour” (p. 133, n. 35). To be sure, the rows of lamellar armour are movable but its plates are fixed immovably in the rows. On the whole it is rather rigid, protecting the body well from

2. *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, ed. D. R. REINSCH – A. KAMBYLIS [CFHB 40], Berlin 2001, XIII, 8, 3, pp. 405-406 («for a mounted Kelt is irresistible, able to bore his way through the walls of Babylon»: *Anna Komnene, The Alexiad*, transl. E. R. A. SEWTER, revised by PETER FRANKOPAN (London, 2009), 378).

3. J. FRANCE, *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades, 1000-1300* (London, repr. 2003), p. 18.

4. M. FULFORD – D. SIM – A. DOIG, The Production of Roman Ferrous Armour, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 17 (2004), 197.

arrows and thrusting weapons. In comparison with lamellar, scale armour is more elastic, as its scales are fixed (on base material) mainly on one side<sup>5</sup>. Due to its elasticity, scale armour could be long-sleeved, while the stiffer lamellar was only short-sleeved. In general, the more elastic the armour, the less its resistance to arrows and piercing blows. Mail that is more elastic is most vulnerable to such impact. In this aspect, scale armour is superior to it, while lamellar is better than the latter.

Grotowski believes that on a group of ivory triptychs of the tenth and early eleventh centuries cuirasses with directed upward plates represent scale armour rather than lamellar (p. 135, n. 44). These plates do indeed resemble scales with their characteristic central rib. However, the question cannot be definitively settled. Scale armour is not characterized by plates directed upward and such specimens have not been found anywhere. The argument that it is not lamellar because of “lack of holes for linking the lamellae” (p. 135, n. 44), is weakened if it is borne in mind that even in the case of scale armour, plates directed upward would need a rivet or some fastener so that they should be kept in place. Such fastener is lacking, which points to the master’s error. In my opinion, here the question to which the book is devoted should have come to the fore, i.e. whether this representation conforms to reality. The answer must probably be negative, for the master has confused the realities and we are faced with armour formed of scale plates, designed for ceremonial purposes with large plates and an arrangement characteristic of lamellar (generally, in comparison with lamellar, scales are smaller in size).

One of the central questions of the work under review is the problem of depicting mail armour and the existence of mail in the complex of Byzantine armament. In Grotowski’s view, mail armour was not used in Byzantium, being introduced only under the influence of the crusaders. He takes images rendered through semi-rings or rings for scale armour (pp. 154-61). In his view, mail armour, popular in the Roman army, was not produced in Byzantium because its manufacture took up much time, was heavy and less resistant to arrow and piercing blows (p. 161). None of these explanations are satisfactory: making mail was indeed time consuming, but the bulk of the work could be performed by women, to say nothing of apprentices; as

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5. A. N. KIRPICHNIKOV, *Old Russian Arms, Issue 3, Armour, Complete Set of Battle Weapons in the 9th-13th Centuries* (Leningrad, 1971), 18 (in Russian).

compared to other types of armour, mail was not so heavy (the weight of a full hauberk reaching to the knees is 12-14 kg, while short mail weighs 4-5 kg, and in this it is equivalent to scale or lamellar cuirass). As to piercing blows, mail is indeed less resistant to them, yet it has many advantages: mail is the most elastic and comfortable armour, and it protects all parts of the body; mail is more technologically advanced than scale armour and it can be repaired easily in field conditions; it can be fitted and remade easily; one can put it on and remove it without outside help. It is hard to conceive that the Byzantine army neglected such armour since the tradition of making it already existed in the empire. It is more probable that we are dealing with an iconographic problem. The problem with depicting mail did exist in Orthodox art, as the Georgian example may prove. Georgian narrative sources and documents mention mail over the centuries and are backed up by archaeological evidence, establishing the existence of mail armour beyond doubt. Nevertheless, Georgian iconography follows that of Byzantium, and mail is rendered in the shape of scales. Obviously, the matter lies precisely in the iconographic tradition rather than in the non-existence of mail armour. On p. 136 Grotowski lists the frescos of twelfth century warrior saints: St George on foot and on horseback, St Nestor, St Christopher, St Procopios, St Theodore Teron from Holy Anargyroi in Kastoria, St George from Panagia Phorbiotissa (Asinou, Cyprus) and St George from Kurbinovo (FYROM), whose armour the artist presents as closely fitting the body. Grotowski believes that here armour formed of small-sized scales is depicted (p. 135). Scale armour, with a leather or fabric backing cannot fit so closely to the body. This is feasible only in the case of mail armour (that has no lining). To account for such an outline as being due to scale armour worn over muscled cuirass (p. 136), does not seem satisfactory. As the author himself notes correctly, the manufacture of muscled cuirass must have ceased in the sixth century (p. 132), and if it was still depicted, the reason was its ceremonial nature and iconographic tradition. Had the artist wished to depict the cuirass, he would have shown it from above, which would have been more natural. In general, I do not think it right to perceive scales wherever the structure of armour is rendered through semi-rings, and especially full rings. In this connection I note G. Baranov's observation that the raised arm of St. George of Panagia Phorbiotissa still has the semi-rings directed downward,

which would be impossible in the case of scales, and therefore it points to mail<sup>6</sup>. As to the full ring, it rules out scales and must convey only mail.

Generally speaking, the perception of images is rather individual. Thus, the author believes that in Skylitzes's miniature "Thomas the Slav's horse is depicted with scale armour covering its body" (pp. 139, n. 60; 395). In my view, a studded horse is depicted here rather than the horse armour. This view is supported by the fact that the so-called scales goes nowhere beyond the outline of the horse, which should have been the case with armour.

We may be more precise in the case of *crux hastata*. Grotowski links the emergence of cross-tipped lance in Byzantine iconography to Constantine the Great's vision of a cross before the battle with Maxentius, and concludes: "Hence, the recent reconstructions of the *crux hastata* as an actual item of equipment of the Early Byzantine army should be rejected outright" (p. 337). Rejecting the existence of *crux hastata* does not seem justified. At any rate, we have the evidence of Bar Hebraeus on Georgian envoys entering Mosul in 1161 with crosses attached to the top of their spears<sup>7</sup>. Here too, iconography appears to reflect reality. Obviously, cross-tipped spears must have been created first in Byzantium and then in Georgia.

Finally, though this does not refer to any error, I shall touch on the provenance of the term *clibanarius*. Along with others, Grotowski considers that it "was probably borrowed by the Byzantines from Persian *grivpan* meaning neck protector" (p. 126, n. 4). However, there exists a different view as well, deriving the word *clibanarius* from the greek κλίβανος, oven<sup>8</sup>, used in Roman army and pointing to the situation in which a heavily armed rider found himself in hot weather<sup>9</sup>. The rider and the horse, both in heavy

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6. G. V. BARANOV, Three types of λωρίκια of Constantine Porphyrogenitus and armour of saint warriors on steatite icons from the excavation of medieval Chersonese, *Materials in the Archaeology and History of Ancient and Medieval Crimea*, Issue II (2010), 199 (In Russian).

7. *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj, the Son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician Commonly Known as Bar Hebraeus*, translated from the Syriac by ERNEST A. WALLIS BUDGE, vol. I (London, 1932), pp. 286-7.

8. A. D. H. BIVAR, Cavalry Equipment and Tactics on the Euphrates Frontier, *DOP* 26 (1972), 277-8, n. 28. The Greek word κλίβανος means a closed pot resembling an oven, in which bread was baked. J. W. EADIE, The Development of Roman Mailed Cavalry, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 57 (1967), 169.

9. P. CONNOLLY, *Greece and Rome at War* (London, 1981) 257.

armour, “were cooked alive” as it were in the scorching sun. A term of similar content was used in Persia to denote the heavy equipment of a cavalryman. A synonym of the Latin *clibanarius* was the Persian word *tanurig*, meaning “oven” and here, too, conveying the state of a heavily armed warrior in the heat<sup>10</sup>. *Tanurig*, as well as *clibanarius*, literally meant an “oven man”<sup>11</sup>. An example in support of this statement can be quoted from Georgian use. In Georgian a heavily equipped warrior and the armour of his horse and an oven are denoted by a word of the same stem: *torn-i* is armour, and at the same time *torn-e* is an oven for baking bread. A word of the same dual meaning – armour and oven – denoting a warrior mounted on an armoured horse was used in the armies of Rome and Persia. Semantically, *torni* is clearly of the same construction as *clibanarius* and *tanurig*. In imitation of Romans and Persians it became established to denote the warrior’s heavy equipment. Hence, there must be no doubt that the term *clibanarius* has originated from the greek word for oven.

Regrettably, there are a number of misprints in the book, e. g. *Baubin* instead of *Babuin* (p. 5, n. 17), *Византійская армя* instead of *Византійская армия* (p. 15, n. 57), *cotemporaneous* instead of *contemporaneous* (p. 111, n. 178), *since* is repeated twice (p. 157), *Klivanion revisted* instead of *Klivanion revisited* (p. 419), *Dithart* instead of *Diethart* (p. 420).

Notwithstanding these errors, they are all secondary and do not belittle the merit of the book. The author has coped splendidly with his task and his work shows well when and to what extent we should trust Byzantine iconography in reconstructing the arms and armour of the time under review. Grotowski’s work is a highly significant book for the study of Byzantine armament.

MAMUKA TSURTSUMIA  
Tbilisi, Georgia

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10. MANOUCHEHR MOSHTAGH KHORASANI, *Arms and Armor from Iran: The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period* (Tübingen, 2006), 277.

11. D. NICOLLE, *Jawshan, Cuirie and Coats-of-Plates: An Alternative Line of Development for Hardened Leather Armour*, in *A Companion to Medieval Arms and Armour*, ed. by D. NICOLLE (Woodbridge, 2002), 182-3. It is interesting to note that the stem *jush* of the Persian term for armour *jawshan*, in addition to “breast”, meant “heat” as well. *Ibid.*, 183, n. 24.



