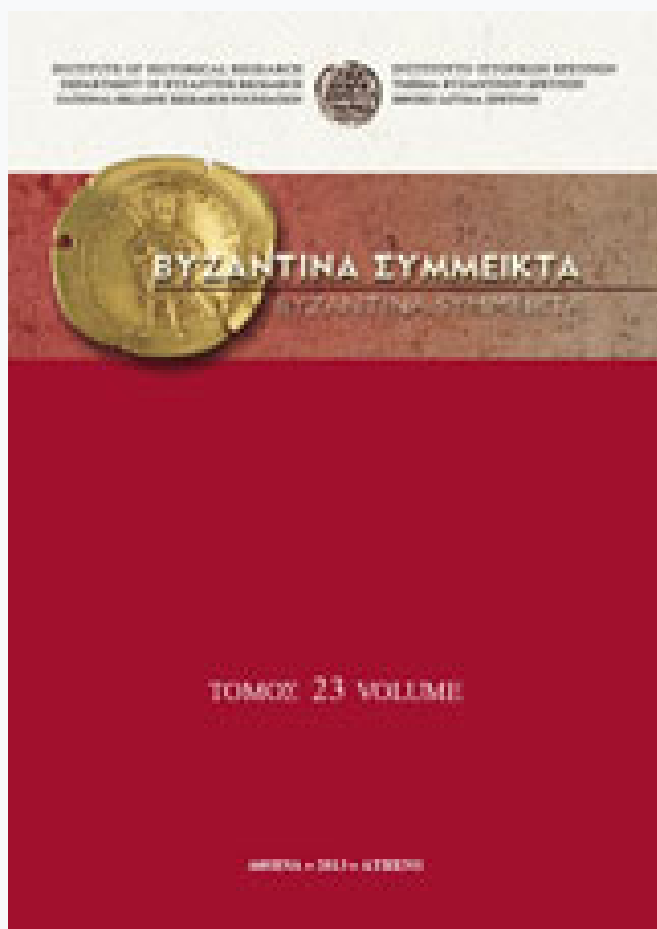


Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 23 (2013)

BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA 23



Book Review: Byzantine War Ideology between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion. Akten des Internationalen Symposiums (Wien, 19.-21. Mai 2011), Vienna 2012

Paul STEPHENSON

doi: [10.12681/byzsym.1153](https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.1153)

Copyright © 2014, Paul STEPHENSON



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

STEPHENSON, P. (2014). Book Review: Byzantine War Ideology between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion. Akten des Internationalen Symposiums (Wien, 19.-21. Mai 2011), Vienna 2012. *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 23, 381–384. <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.1153>

Byzantine War Ideology between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion. Akten des Internationalen Symposiums (Wien, 19.-21. Mai 2011), Denkschriften der philosophisch-historischen Klasse, 452. Band. Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung, Band XXX, eds. J. KODER and I. STOURAITIS, Vienna 2012. pp. 137. ISBN: 9783700173076

Religious violence has long been a subject of fascination for scholars, and the volume of studies devoted to cataloging and interpreting violent acts motivated by religion has increased greatly since September 2001. Religious violence can take many forms, as sociologists of religions such as John R. Hall have established. It may be done to the self (asceticism, mortification) or to others, to create or maintain boundaries, or to advance a truth claim. Religious violence may be committed against objects as surely as other people, within or outside the religious group. Spiritual rewards may be offered for acts of religious violence, either to individuals, for example remission of sins, martyrdom, or for the community, such as triggering an anticipated apocalypse. Religious violence may be directed inward, intended to discipline adherents to a faith, or it may be directed outwards, sanctioned on a grand scale by a legitimating authority and take the form of a righteous, sacred or holy war. This last category has proven most compelling to Byzantinists, who have sought evidence for continuity and rupture with both Roman and Hellenic thought and practice as Christianity rose and became established as the majority, then state, religion, even as they have been obliged by geography to confront the ideas and actions of neighbouring cultures, notably western Christendom (Crusade) and Islam (jihad).

The collection of essays under review fits squarely into this tradition of scholarship, devoting much space to ideas of “holy war” as they manifested in Byzantium, with some attention paid also to Islam (Kaegi, Heilo) and the West (Laitsos) and how they were perceived in Byzantium (Papadopoulou). Several

scholars pick up the term “war ideology” in their essay titles (Markopoulos, Synkellou, Makrypoulias), whereas other contributors are less comfortable with that term, and indeed with the formulation “holy war”. One of the editors, Stouraitis, has argued energetically in a paper published in the *JÖB* (2012)¹ for the validity of both formulations, revealing that his further reflections were provoked by questions raised at the conference, held in Vienna in May 2011, of which the volume under review is the formal record. (At this point the reviewer must reveal that he attended this conference at the invitation, and the expense, of the editors, but was unable to submit the paper he delivered to them for publication as it was already promised to a *Festschrift*, dedicated to Alice-Mary Talbot)².

Stouraitis’ *JÖB* paper serves as a useful coda to this volume, supplementing the shorter introduction that he co-wrote with J. Koder [Byzantine Approaches to Warfare (6th – 12th centuries). An Introduction, pp. 9-16]. This guides the reader well, highlighting key themes in the volume, including but not limited to the issue of “holy war”. Holy War is addressed directly and at length by A. Kolia-Dermitzaki (“Holy War” in Byzantium Twenty Years Later: A Question of Term Definition and Interpretation, pp. 121-132), who offers reflections on scholarship published since, and in part in response to, her monograph of 1991³, offering at first a recap of her principal findings. Focusing specifically on formulations of “holy war”, she shows that it is a category created in the modern era and reflected back onto past events, with the crusades as the defining category. There are, she shows, several uses of the “holy war” in Byzantine Greek, as there are not in Latin (of the crusades) or in Arabic (since *jihad* has a different literal meaning), but these do not correspond to the modern criteria. Moreover, Byzantinists, like the Byzantines, cannot agree on a single definition of “holy war”, and therefore a consensus can never be reached on whether it existed or not in Byzantium, although by her preferred definition and understanding, restated here after twenty years, it certainly did exist. W. E. Kaegi (The Heraclians and Holy War, pp. 17-26) reviews briefly but incisively a number of views on “holy war” in both Islam and Byzantium in the seventh century,

1. See I. STOURAITIS, “Just War” and “Holy War” in the Middle Ages. Rethinking Theory through the Byzantine-Case-Study, *JÖB* 62 (2012), 227- 264.

2. P. STEPHENSON-B. SHILLING, “Nicholas the monk, former soldier”, in: E. FISHER- S. PΑΠΑΙΟΑΝΝΟΥ- D. SULLIVAN (eds.), *Byzantine Religious Culture. Essays in Honor of Alice-Mary Talbot*, Leiden 2012, 421-438.

3. A. KOLIA-DERMITZAKI, *Ο βυζαντινός «ιερός πόλεμος». Η έννοια και η προβολή του θρησκευτικού πολέμου στο Βυζάντιο* (Ιστορικές Μονογραφίες 10), Athens 1991.

notably those published since his 2003 monograph on Heraclius⁴. His fullest critical engagement is with James Howard-Johnston and certain hypotheses advanced in his recent monograph⁵, notably whether Mu'āwiya was involved in the murder of Constans II. O. Heilo (*The Holiness of the Warrior: Physical and Spiritual Power in the Borderland between Byzantium and Islam*, pp. 41-46) addresses those who practised “holy war”. E. Synkellou (*Reflections on Byzantine War Ideology in Late Byzantium*, pp. 99-108) is concerned with war ideology in late Byzantium, offering a largely positive view.

Three papers are devoted to specific texts. A. Markopoulos (*The Ideology of War in the Military Harangues of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos*, pp. 47-56) offers careful scrutiny of two well-known harangues written for Constantine VII in 950 and 958 for delivery to troops fighting Muslims, demonstrating that the author went beyond his model, Syrianos, in emphasising religious aspects of warfare, and drew most heavily on Old Testament ideas and language in seeking to establish the latest new Constantine as a military leader chosen by God. I. Stouraitis (*Conceptions of War and Peace in Anna Comnena's Alexiad*, pp. 69-80), addresses the *Alexiad*, identifying in the daughter's writings and attempt to locate the “father's military actions in his immediate geopolitical sphere within a certain ideological schema”. Anna's position, it may be stated briefly, was to approve and justify any and all warfare in any and all of the lands that once or ever pertained to the Roman *οἰκουμένη* for the purposes, ultimately, of securing political peace. It was, therefore, representative of the viewpoint of the group of which she was a member, the twelfth-century aristocracy. Th. Papadopoulou (*Niketas Choniates and the Image of the Enemy after the Latin Capture of Constantinople*, pp. 87-98) is concerned with Niketas Choniates and his view of the enemy as an archetypal “other”, after the capture of 1204. She concludes that the enemy might be identified within as well as outside, being defined by moral characteristics and by flaws, which might earn punishment. Drawing on a range of sources by contemporaries of Choniates, most notably Euthymios Malakes, E. Chrysos (*1176 – A Byzantine Crusade?*, pp. 81-86) carefully investigates one notorious episode, the so-called Byzantine crusade of 1176, which he concludes was no crusade at all.

Three papers are focussed less directly on “war ideology”, while still addressing Byzantine war and religion, and one more (by S. Laitzos, *War and Nation-building*

4. W. E. KÆGI, *Heraclius, emperor of Byzantium*, Cambridge 2003.

5. J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses to a World Crisis. Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century*, Oxford 2010.

in Widukind of Corvey's *Deeds of the Saxons*, pp. 57-68) is not concerned with Byzantium. Ch. Makrypoulias (Civilians as Combatants in Byzantium: Ideological versus Practical Considerations, pp. 109-120) compiles very useful data relating to the role civilians played in the armed defence of cities and settlements in the early and middle Byzantine periods. P. Antonopoulos (Emperor Constans II's Intervention in Italy and its Ideological Significance, pp. 27-32) offers a short but densely argued analysis of Constans II's Lombard policy, highlighting indifference to this enterprise in Byzantine sources, which were concerned only by the possibility that Constantinople may lose status. W. Treadgold (Opposition to Iconoclasm as Grounds for Civil War, pp. 33-40) presents a perspective on the eighth century, citing evidence that rebels used imperial opposition to the veneration of icons as justification for their actions. He concludes that rebellions in 727 and 741-3 were justified by opposition to iconoclasm, thereby challenging those who question the significance of iconoclasm in the reign of Leo III. However, the greater part of his paper is devoted to identifying the author of a work used by both Theophanes and Nikephoros, which Treadgold calls the continuation of Trajan.

In sum, this is a fine and very useful collection of essays.

PAUL STEPHENSON

Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands