

Eoa kai Esperia

Vol 8 (2012)



USING ANCIENT MILITARY HANDBOOKS TO FIGHT MEDIEVAL BATTLES: TWO STRATAGEMS USED BY ALEXIOS I COMMENOS AGAINST THE NORMANS AND THE PECHENEGS

THEOCHARIS ALEXOPOULOS

doi: [10.12681/eaesperia.10](https://doi.org/10.12681/eaesperia.10)

To cite this article:

ALEXOPOULOS, T. (2013). USING ANCIENT MILITARY HANDBOOKS TO FIGHT MEDIEVAL BATTLES: TWO STRATAGEMS USED BY ALEXIOS I COMMENOS AGAINST THE NORMANS AND THE PECHENEGS. *Eoa Kai Esperia*, 8, 47–71. <https://doi.org/10.12681/eaesperia.10>

USING ANCIENT MILITARY HANDBOOKS TO FIGHT MEDIEVAL BATTLES: TWO STRATAGEMS USED BY ALEXIOS I COMNENOS AGAINST THE NORMANS AND THE PECHENEGS

During the whole of his lengthy reign, Alexios I Comnenos (1081-1118) faced multiple military threats from many different opponents that seriously threatened the cohesion and the existence of the empire. The Seljuk Turks, the Pechenegs, the Cumans, the Normans and several Turkish principalities of Asia Minor tried to exploit the dire position in which the Byzantine Empire had fallen during the fifty years that preceded Alexios reign. Alexios' campaigns against all these enemies, sometimes fought with limited resources and often having to cope with strategic disadvantage, have been sufficiently studied by modern scholars¹. This article is a result of the study and analysis of some of the stratagems cleverly used by the emperor during his campaigns and the identification of their correlation to similar stratagems as they have been recorded in Ancient sources, specifically those concerning wagons and carts². The interrelation between Ancient and Byzantine stratagems can provide useful conclusions about the theoretical military training of the Byzantine senior officials and the significance of Ancient military texts and sources in Byzantine battle theory.

Until the eleventh century, the only people using wagons as weapons of war were the Nomads, usually of Turkish origin³. For centuries, these people located

-
1. This paper is focused solely on specific military actions during the reign of Alexios I. For a detailed and thorough analysis of the campaigns and major military events of his reign, see J. F. HALDON, *The Byzantine Wars: Battles and Campaigns of the Byzantine Era*, Charleston 2000 (hereafter: HALDON, *Byzantine Wars*). Also, see J. BIRKENMEIER, *The development of the Komnenian army*, Leiden 2002, p. 56-84 (hereafter: BIRKENMEIER, *Development*).
 2. In this article, the terms "wagon" and "cart" refer to four-wheeled carts, like those used by merchants and the Nomads, rather than two-wheeled chariots, like those used in ancient times (Biblical and Homeric era) and the Celtic world, or the scythed chariots of Classical and Hellenistic times. Alexios used his wagons both as offensive as well as defensive devices, according to the specific situation and opponent.
 3. The term Nomad is usually used collectively to characterize various Hunnic tribes, the Khazar confederacy and later on the Pechenegs, the Magyars and the minor Türkmen Nomad tribes, which accompanied the early Seldjuk Turks during their invasion and occupation of Asia Minor,

at the northern and eastern borders of the empire used wagon carts for their transportation as well as for their security⁴. The Byzantine writers circumscribing the conflicts of the Byzantine army and the Nomads frequently mention the large wagon circles (or 'wagon laagers') of the latter. These were used as defensive obstacles or forts for the protection of their families and livestock and even as strongpoints which could be also used as a shelter to accomplish a reorganization of the army in case of defeat, although the wagons were vulnerable during open field fights, in which the Byzantine forces excelled⁵. As a matter of fact, the significance of the wagons for the Nomads was such that many tribes used to name themselves after them⁶.

The tactics used by the Nomad people had a great impact and influence on the way the Romans and Byzantines waged their wars. The Byzantines adopted many elements from the Nomads, both in terms of tactics and weaponry⁷. They came to terms with a different, more agile style of warfare, in which the use of light-armed cavalry played the most prominent role. The Nomad light-armed

from the middle of the eleventh century onwards. Due to time and subject limitations, this article will not analyse these tribes. For more details about these people, see S. DENIS (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, Cambridge 1990 and E. HILDINGER, *Warriors of the Steppe: A Military History of Central Asia, 500 B.C. to 1700 A.D.*, Cambridge 2001.

4. There are many references from Byzantine chroniclers and historians on the major role these vehicles played in the everyday life of these Nomads. See LEO DIACONUS, *Historiae libri decem*, ed. C. B. HASE, Bonn 1828, p. 157¹⁶⁻¹⁸ and ANNA COMNENA, *Alexias*, ed. D. R. REINSCH – A. KAMBYLIS [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 40/1], Berlin – New York 2001, p. 450⁷⁻⁸ (hereafter: ANNA COMNENA).
5. MATTHEW OF EDESSA, *Chronique*, ed. E. DULAURIER, Paris 1858, p. 200; ANNA COMNENA, p. 231⁸⁴⁻⁸⁹; p. 247⁶⁷⁻⁶⁹. Choniates and Kinnamos, while offering a vivid description of the battle of Verrhoe (1122), also make special mention of the defensive character of wagon circles used by the Pechenegs. See NICETAS CHONIATES, *Historia*, ed. J.-L. VAN DIETEN [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 11/1], Berlin – New York 1975, p. 146²⁻¹⁶¹⁴, and JOHN CINNAMUS, *Epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum*, ed. A. MEINEKE, Bonn 1836, p. 71⁵⁻⁸²².
6. I. VÁSÁRY, *Cumans and Tatars: Oriental Military in the Pre-Ottoman Balkans, 1185-1365*, Cambridge 2005, p. 8 (hereafter: VÁSÁRY, *Cumans and Tatars*); P. B. GOLDEN, *Khazar Studies: Achievements and Perspectives*, in: *The World of the Khazars. New Perspectives*, P. B. GOLDEN – H. BEN-SHAMMAI – A. RONÁ-TAS (eds.) [Handbook of Oriental Studies/Handbuch der Orientalistik, Section Eight, Central Asia, 17], Brill, Leiden – Boston 2007, p. 7-57, here p. 14, n. 33.
7. J. F. HALDON, *Some aspects of Byzantine military technology from the sixth to the tenth centuries*, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 1 (1975) 11-47; H. R. ROBINSON, *Oriental Armour*, London 1967, p. 54-56. For the impact of Pecheneg (nomad) tactics upon Byzantine military strategy and tactics, especially during the reign of Alexios I, see V. SPINELI, *The great migrations in the East and South East of Europe from the ninth to the thirteenth century*, v. I: Hungarians, Pechenegs and Uzes, Amsterdam 2006, p. 208 (hereafter: SPINELI, *Migrations*).

cavalry used the composite bow as their primary weapon and applied guerilla tactics, such as ambushes, and other stratagems in order to dominate more heavily armed opponents⁸. The lengthy campaigns and bloody battles against the Pechenegs and the Cumans during the latter half of the eleventh century and the first half of the twelfth century was the culmination of the long armed confrontation between the Byzantines and the peoples of the steppe. The defeats suffered by Alexios and his predecessors at the hands of these technologically inferior opponents had deep impact on the re-evaluation and transformation of Byzantine battle tactics⁹. The use of wagons¹⁰ in stratagems against the Normans and the Nomads, people with a vastly different military philosophy, is not

-
8. VÁSÁRY, Cumans and Tatars, p. 55-56; A. KARASULAS, Mounted archers of the steppe, 600 B.C.-A.D. 1300, Osprey Publishing, Oxford 2004. This peculiar way of fighting is vividly described in the older Byzantine military manuals and is characterized as the predominant style of fighting exercised among the earlier hunnic tribes. See MAURIKIUS, Strategikon, ed. G. T. DENNIS [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 17], Wien 1981, IV.2 (p. 194) and XI.2 (p. 360-368) (hereafter: MAURIKIUS).
 9. Alexios used nomadic guerilla tactics, probably inspired by his contacts with the Pechenegs, against his western and most dangerous foe, the Normans. Throughout the Alexiad, there are many references to stratagems and ambushes used by Alexios against the Normans, the Crusaders and sometimes even against the Pechenegs and the Cumans. He incorporated elements of the traditional fighting tactics of the Nomads in the Byzantine battle tactics and subsequently used them against his other foes. In this way he acted according to the advice of the Byzantine military manuals.
 10. The use of wagons and carts for strict military purposes and not for the transportation of supplies and military personnel and gear might sound peculiar when someone comes to terms with the Byzantine military philosophy even though there were some extraordinary cases from the early Byzantine period in which the Byzantines used the wagons as defensive stockades for the protection of the army as well as non-combat elements, no doubt imitating the practices of the Nomads. See PROCOPIUS, History of the wars, ed. J. HENDERSON, trans. H. B. DEWING [Loeb Classical Library 107], London 1924, VI.5.3, p. 328 (hereafter: PROCOPIUS). Also, see CH. DE BOOR, Excerpta historica iussu Imp. Constantini Porphyrogeniti (Excerpta de Insidiis), v. III, Berlin 1905, p. 144-145; C. MÜLLER, Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum, v. V, Paris 1873, fr. 214e.7, p. 33 (John of Antioch's description of the battle between Hunnic war bands and the Byzantine army under the leadership of Hypatios in 514-515. The Byzantines fought behind a wagon wall, probably in an effort to withstand the impact of the deadly Hunnic archery. Nevertheless, they lost the battle). Also, see V. SPINELI, The Romanians and the Turkic Nomads North of the Danube Delta from the Tenth to the Mid-Thirteenth Century, Leiden 2009, p. 221. The Latin term *carrago* (καράγος) is sometimes used in the Byzantine military manuals to describe the formation of the army's supply caravan but sometimes also has the meaning of a defensive wagon laager, such as the laagers used by the Nomads. See MAURIKIUS, XII B, 18.1-21 (p. 454-456) and XII B, 22 (p. 472); LEO THE WISE, Taktika, ed. and trans. G. T. DENNIS [Dumbarton Oaks Texts 12], Washington, D.C. 2010, IV.55, p. 62 (hereafter: LEO, Taktika).

irrelevant to the experience Alexios gained by watching and fighting these people. As we shall see, those stratagems were not simply mere inspirations of the moment or derivatives of the emperor's military knowledge and expertise, but mostly strict applications of the theories and deductions of Ancient and early Byzantine military tacticians and historians, the works of whom survived up to the middle Byzantine period, whether identical to the prototypes or as fragmentary medieval revisions.

According to the sources, Alexios Comnenos used wagons as offensive and defensive weapons against his foes in two cases. The first one was during the long and hard-fought war with the Normans, in a minor engagement that took place in 1082, outside the walls of the city of Ioannina¹¹, then at the hands of the Normans of Bohemond¹². The second one was during the skirmishing between the Byzantine and Pecheneg forces just outside the walls of the castle of Tzurulos in 1090¹³. A detailed description and analysis of those stratagems follows forthwith.

During the first event, which according to Anna Comnene took place at the spring of 1082, Alexios moved from Constantinople against Bohemond, the son of Robert Guiscard¹⁴, which had set camp outside the city of Ioannina¹⁵. On the outskirts of the city a battle took place, the outcome of which was, despite the very best efforts of Anna Comnena to conceal it, negative for Alexios¹⁶.

One major challenge faced by Alexios was the Norman heavy cavalry and specifically its famous charge, which according to Anna's own words was unrivalled and as Alexios had found out some months earlier at the battle of Dyrrachium (18 October 1081), had a crippling effect on the morale of his own troops¹⁷. The emperor knew that a direct confrontation with the Norman heavy

11. ANNA COMNENA, p. 149⁶⁴-150⁸²; WILLIAM OF APULIA, *La Geste de Robert Guiscard*, ed. and trans. M. MATHIEU [Istituto siciliano di studi bizantini e neoellenici, Testi e monumenti, Testi 4], Palermo 1961, V.6-7, p. 236 (hereafter: *Gesta Wiscardi*).

12. ANNA COMNENA, *ibid.*; BIRKENMEIER, *Development*, p. 66-67 (Birkenmeier erroneously places the event as having taken place in 1108).

13. ANNA COMNENA, p. 232¹⁸-234⁶⁹; BIRKENMEIER, *Development*, p. 75.

14. Bohemond de Hauteville. About him, see R. B. YEWDALE, *Bohemond I, Prince of Antioch*, Princeton 1917; J. G. ROWE, *Paschal II, Bohemund of Antioch and the Byzantine Empire*, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 49 (1966-1967) 165-202; J. FLORI, *Bohémond d'Antioch*, Chevalier d'Aventure, Paris 2007.

15. P. SOUSTAL – J. KODER, *Nikopolis und Kephallënia* [Tabula Imperii Byzantini 3], Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien 1981, p.165-167.

16. It seems, though, that his casualties were very light and this defeat had not any major affect upon the general course of the military operations.

17. For the battle of Dyrrachium, see ANNA COMNENA, p. 131⁶⁷-140³³; HALDON, *Byzantine Wars*

cavalry was out of question and consequently resorted to skirmishing tactics. He had noticed that such tactics were harmful and tiresome for his enemies, so he tried to even the odds by using a peculiar stratagem. He built lighter and smaller wagons than the usual ones (*ἀμάξας κουφοτέρας καὶ ἥττους τῶν συνήθων*), whose exact number remains unknown, and attached to every one of them four spears (*κόντους*)¹⁸. He also attached four foot soldiers as guards and operators of the spears to each of them. His purpose was to place the wagons in a line in front of the Byzantine formation, so that at the moment of a Norman charge, the foot soldiers would push these wagons forward and force the Normans to loosen or even break their tight formation in order to avoid them, as it would be suicidal for them to charge against/into a wall of spears¹⁹. Thus, the Byzantines would force the Normans to lose their momentum, so that

-
- p. 134-137; BIRKENMEIER, *Development*, p. 62-66. The comments of Anna Comnene about the charge of the Norman heavy cavalry and the psychological impact it had on the enemy troops (in this case the Byzantines) are worth mentioning. According to the author (ANNA COMNENA, p. 339⁴⁸⁻⁵⁸ and 405²³⁻⁴⁰⁶²⁹), the Norman knight (*Κελτὸς ἀνὴρ*) *ἐποχος μὲν ἀκατάσχετος καὶ κἂν τεῖχος διατετρήνιε Βαβυλώνιον, ἀποβεβηκὼς δὲ τοῦ ἵππου ἄθυρμα τοῖς ἐθέλουσι γίνε-ται*. For the Norman heavy cavalry, see D. NICOLLE, *The Normans*, Osprey Publishing, Oxford 1987; C. GRAVETT, *The Normans: Warrior Knights and Their Castles*, Osprey Publishing, Oxford 2007, p. 72-111; IDEM, *Norman knight AD 950-1204*, Osprey Publishing, Oxford 1993; see also R. H. C. DAVIES, *The warhorses of the Normans*, *Anglo-Norman Studies* 10 (1988) 67-82.
18. ANNA COMNENA, p. 149⁶⁴⁻¹⁵⁰⁸². Anna uses the term *κόντος* in order to describe those spears, a term usually used to manifest the spear used by the cavalry, and not the term *δόρυ* which refers to the spears used by the infantry. Alexios may indeed have used cavalry and not infantry spears on his wagons, something peculiar because the Byzantines possessed at least one specialized anti-cavalry infantry unit, the so-called *menavlatoi*. See E. MCGEER, *Μεναύλιον - Μεναυλάτοι*, *Δίπτυχα* 4 (1986-1987) 53-57 (hereafter: MCGEER, *Μεναύλιον*); IDEM, *Infantry versus cavalry: the Byzantine response*, *Revue des Études Byzantines* 46 (1988) 135-145. The *menavlatoi* are mentioned in every Byzantine military manual until the end of the tenth century but seldom in other historical sources. One question that rises is why Alexios did not use them against the vaunted Norman cavalry. Alexios repeatedly used skirmishing tactics and a variety of stratagems, but, according to Anna Comnene and other sources, he never used special infantry units against cavalry. Perhaps his troops mostly consisted of cavalry and thus it was reasonable for him to use cavalry spears. A closer look at the general actions of Alexios on the battlefield suggests that *monavlatoi* and other specialized anti-cavalry infantry units had eclipsed from the ranks of the armies of the Comnenian emperors, possibly even earlier than his reign, probably because of the high upkeep costs and the special, time-consuming training during periods of low troop availability.
19. When Alexios deployed his special wagons, perhaps he had in mind a sixth-century treatise, the so-called *Οὐρβικίου Ἐπιτήδευμα*. See G. GREATREX - H. ELTON - R. BURGESS, *Urbicius' Epit-eudema: an edition, translation and commentary*, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 98 (2005) 35-74 (p. 55-58 contain the ancient text). This treatise gives advice on how to counter the Persian heavy

they would become an easy prey for the more mobile Byzantine troops. Nevertheless, the progress of the battle did not fulfill the Byzantine expectations. The Normans, under the leadership of Bohemond²⁰, simply went around the wagons without losing their cohesion and impetus. The Byzantines lost the battle despite the personal bravery and the heroic deeds of Alexios²¹.

William's of Apulia narrative largely agrees with that of Anna Comnene, although it is considerably briefer and slightly varied²². According to William, Alexios placed the wagons in front of his camp, which faced the plain, in order to block the places suitable for the advance of the Norman cavalry²³. He does not mention any details about these wagons, but he adds the information that Alexios placed caltrops in defense of his own camp²⁴. But the most significant

cavalry by using heavy spears (*χανόνες*) attached on the ground with the help of iron nails and thus form a kind of spear wall (though it is not quite clear how these devices were exactly used). It is not improbable that Alexios had knowledge of Urbicius' devices, although in his case the army, in contrast to the armies of the sixth century, was mostly composed of cavalry. Alexios decided to place the spears on the wagons and not to fix them on the ground. It is also plausible to assume that he made some kind of combination of Ancient stratagems and the *Epitadeuma* in order to face the Norman cavalry, as also described later on in this article. LEO, *Taktika*, XI.22, p. 204, also mentions a special use of the *menavlion* as a static defensive weapon against heavy cavalry, similar in its use with that of caltrops. This special use was introduced during a campaign against the Bulgarian army in 894 by Nicephoros Phokas, the grandfather of the homonymous emperor. The *menavlion* was placed upon wooden sticks tied together in a way that resembles the Greek letter *lamda* (Λ). The whole device was similar to a tripod. Obviously, such devices had limited functionality and could only be effectively used in great numbers. It was a simple and easy way to delay the enemy cavalry attack but it could do little to repulse a well-coordinated and determined assault. It is possible that Alexios was inspired by these devices when he was looking for a way to fight the Norman cavalry (McGEER, *Μενάβλιον*, p. 54-55); IDEM, *Tradition and Reality in the Taktika of Nikephoros Ouranos*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991) 129-140 (especially 134-135); M. ANASTASIADIS, *On handling the menavlion*, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 18 (1994) 1-10.

20. It seems that Bohemond was a talented and gifted military leader, a perfect match to Alexios in terms of craftiness and deceitfulness. The Normans, contrary to the widely accepted view, made extended use of military tricks and ruses: see E. ALBU, *Bohemond and the Rooster: Byzantines, Normans and the Artful Ruse*, in: *Anna Komnene and her Times*, THALIA GOUMA-PEETERSON (ed.), New York 2000, p. 157-168.
21. ANNA COMNENA, p. 150⁸³-151¹⁶. The Norman knights charged the Byzantines, which quickly lost cohesion and turned to flight. The Byzantine casualties were very light, though, and soon Alexios was able to rally his scattered troops.
22. Gesta Wiscardii, V.4-19, p. 236.
23. Ibid., V.8-10, p. 236-237: *multiplici partem praemunit Alexius illam obice plaustorum, quam pervia planicie ad pervadendam facilem vicinia reddit.*
24. Ibid., V.11-13, p. 236-237. Anna Comnene, in contrast, places the use of caltrops in another battle fought some days later (ANNA COMNENA, p. 151¹⁶-152⁵¹).

information given by William is that the careful plan of Alexios was ruined not by the Norman cleverness and anticipation but from the fog which gave cover to the Norman flanking manoeuvres, through rough terrain, vineyards and crops²⁵.

According to Anna Comnene, during the second event, Alexios was cut off at Tzurulos²⁶ by a large force of Pecheneg warriors²⁷, without any hope of being relieved in time. So he resorted to another ruse in order to counter the numerical superiority of the Nomads. He removed from all the carriages that happened to be in the castle the pairs of the wheels along with their axes and suspended them by means of thick ropes from the outer section of the walls, leaving them to hover over the direction of the plain²⁸. The Pechenegs had set their own camp at the foothill, in order to lay siege to the castle²⁹. The next day,

25. Gesta Wiscardi, V.14-16, p. 236: *at nebula Danaum prospectus praepediente, illuc Normanni per vitibus aspera densis plenaque caretis loca pervenere latenter.*

26. About Tzurulos (modern Čorlu), a fortress city in eastern Thrace, west of Selymbria and east of Rhaidestos, see A. KÜLTZER, Ostthrakien [Tabula Imperii Byzantini 12], Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien 2008, p. 684-688; C. J. JIREČEK, Die Heerstrasse von Belgrad nach Constantinopel und die Balkanpässe, Prag 1877, p. 51, 101 (there is a mention of Alexios' stratagem). The castle was built on a hill which supervised the area and it was very difficult to lay siege on it. There was only a narrow uphill entrance.

27. For the Pechenegs in general, see P. DIACONU, Les Petchénègues au Bas-Danube [Bibliotheca Historica Romaniae 27], Bucharest 1970; SPINEI, Migrations, p. 133-227. O. PRITSACK, The Petchenegs, a case of a social and economic transformation, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 1 (1975) 211-235; A. PÁLÓCZI-HORVÁTH, Pechenegs, Cumans, Iasians: Steppe peoples in medieval Hungary, Budapest 1989.

28. ANNA COMNENA, p. 232²²⁻²⁹: *Ἀναλαβόμενος τὰς τῶν οἰκητόρων ἀμάξας καὶ ταύτας ἀφελὼν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐπικραββάτων τοὺς τε τροχοὺς καὶ τοὺς ἄξονας ἄνω κατέσχε κἄθ' οὕτως ἔξω τοῦ τείχους ἐπὶ τῶν κρηδέμων ἐφεξῆς ἀπαιωρεῖ διὰ τινων καλωδίων ἐναποδεσμουμένων ταῖς ἐπάλξεσι τῶν τειχῶν. Καὶ ἅμα τε τοῦτο ἐνενόησε καὶ εἰργάσατο. Καὶ μιᾶς ὥρας ἐναπεκρέμαντο κύκλῳ οἱ τροχοὶ μετὰ τῶν ἄξόνων ὥσπερ τινὲς ἐφεξῆς κύκλοι κείμενοι καὶ ἀλλήλοις ἐγγίζοντες καὶ τοῖς ἄξουσιν αὐτῶν ξυνδεσμούμενοι.* It is not clear whether this ruse was conceived by the emperor himself or one of his senior officers. We should always keep in mind that Anna Comnene exaggerates the exploits of her father, sometimes at the expense of the historical truth. It could even be argued that the whole narrative is fictional, an attempt on behalf of Anna Comnene to hide her father's early defeats and a chance to praise his prowess and craftiness, especially in cases when the odds were against him (her remarkable classical education and scholarliness would make such a feat quite possible). However, for reasons that shall be analyzed further below, the writer's personal opinion is that the ruse corresponds to a real event.

29. Ibid., p. 232¹⁸⁻²⁰. Contrary to their military customs and tactics, the Pechenegs set their camp on a seemingly vulnerable position downhill. This speaks volumes about the military strength of the two opponents. Obviously Alexios was heavily outnumbered and the Nomads did not regard him as a serious threat. For the nomadic guerrilla tactics in general, see D. NICOLLE, *At-*

Alexios arrayed his forces outside the castle, right in front of the points of the walls where he had posted the axes with the wheels facing the valley, where the Pechenegs had encamped. Then he ordered his men to march towards the Nomads and use skirmishing tactics in order to cause them to attack. If the Pechenegs were determined to fight the Byzantines, Alexios instructed his men to retreat orderly towards the castle, leaving a corridor in the center of their battle line for the wheels, which at the appropriate time would be left to roll down the hill. Indeed, the Byzantine plan worked and the axes with the wheels slumped and gained momentum, ultimately falling upon the Nomads which were climbing the hill on horseback in pursuit of the Byzantines. This caused confusion and many injuries, especially to the horses of the nomads, forcing them to retreat. This stratagem, although it hadn't any particular effect on the fighting capacity of the Pechenegs, clearly acted as a morale boost for the Byzantines. On the following day, the Byzantines faced again the Pechenegs in another battle and managed to break the blockade and retreat successfully³⁰.

It is very tempting to try to establish a connection between the two stratagems of Alexios Comnenos mentioned above and similar military tricks and ruses of the antiquity and the early Byzantine times. The first stratagem, the one used against the Normans, shows striking similarities to another one, used in the battle of Asculum (279 B.C.) by Pyrrhos, the king of Epirus. It has been preserved in a tenth-century Byzantine compilation of military excerpts, probably composed under the supervision of the emperor Constantine VII, which contains excerpts from the Roman Antiquities of Dionysios of Halicarnassus³¹. Although Anna characterizes the ruse of her father as a military innovation (καινόν τι), the description of the aforementioned battle won by Pyrrhos seems to contradict her in the most impressive way.

tila and the Nomad Hordes: Warfare on the Eurasian Steppes, 4th-12th Centuries, Osprey Publishing, Oxford 1990, p. 9-10, 23-25, 46, 52.

30. ANNA COMNENA, p. 234⁶⁹-235⁹⁸.

31. This compilation, broadly known as *Στρατηγίαι καὶ πολιορκίαι διαφόρων πόλεων* (*Excerpta de Strategematis or Excerpta Historica de proeliis et obsidionibus*), was edited by C. WESCHER, *Poliorcétique des Grecs*, Paris 1867, p. 283-346 (hereafter: WESCHER, *Poliorcétique*). The text of Dionysios which belongs to the partly preserved 20th book of the *Roman Antiquities* occupies pages 283-292 and has been derived from an *Athonic* manuscript located in Paris (WESCHER, *Poliorcétique*, p. xiii-xviii, 283). Henceforth Loeb's newer edition (DIONYSIOS OF HALICARNASSUS, *Roman Antiquities*, trans. E. CARY, v. VII [Loeb Classical Library 388], Cambridge 1950) shall be used to cite Dionysios' text (hereafter: DIONYSIOS). Dionysios used as his primary sources the earlier works of Hieronymos of Cardia, Timaeos of Sicily, Quintus Fabius Pictor and Lucius Cincius Alimentus, all written in Greek and now permanently lost. Unfortunately it is impossible to trace the history of the stratagem back to these sources.

During the second battle fought at 279 B.C. between the Romans and Pyrrhos at Asculum of Apoulia, located in southern Italy³², the Romans³³, looking for a solution against the menace of the elephants of Pyrrhos, which had impressed and troubled them so much during the first battle in Heracleia, positioned three hundred properly modified wagons in front of their army in order to neutralize the beasts. The Romans installed devices such as spears with sharp *sword-shaped or sickle-shaped edges* (κέστροι μαχαιροειδείς ἢ δρέπανα ὀλοσιδήρα) as well as adapted caltrops and cranes with iron grapples (καταρράκτας ἐπιρριπτοῦντας ἄνωθεν βαρεῖς κόρακας) upon the wagons. These devices could be rotated towards all directions. They also built beams on the edges of which they attached tows suffused with pitch (πίττη λελιπασμένα), which were to be ignited and used against the elephants when they were close enough. They should cause injuries on their faces and trunks and thus make them completely uncontrollable; then they would run amok doing harm to friends and foes alike³⁴. While the battle raged, Pyrrhos decided to engage his elephants in order to relieve the most hard-pressed section of his line. Upon seeing this, the Romans manned their wagons (ἐπιβεβηκότες ἀμάξαις) and moved towards the elephants³⁵. The wagons were able to halt the impetus of the beasts only for a short time. The men on the elephants threw javelins from a distance *at the crews of the wagons* and the light-armed troops escorting the elephants cut through the wattled screens surrounding the wagons (τά περικείμενα γέρρα ταῖς ἀμάξαις) and began to injure the oxen that dragged them. As a result, the wagons' crews were forced to abandon them and

32. No specific reference will be made to the disputes of the ancient sources on the outcome of the battle and the confusion between the three major battles (Heracleia, Asculum, Beneventum) Pyrrhos gave against the Romans, because this matter does not relate directly to this study. The only ancient authors to be dealt with here are Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Dio Cassius.

33. They were led by the consuls Publius Sulpicius Saverrio and Publius Decius Mus.

34. DIONYSIUS, XX.1.6-7: ἐκτὸς δὲ τάξεως τοὺς τε ψιλοὺς κατέστησαν καὶ τὰς ἀμάξας, τριακοσίας τὸν ἀριθμὸν, ἃς παρεσκευάσαντο πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἐλεφάντων μάχην. αὗται κεραίας εἶχον ἐπιβεβηκυίας στῶμιξιν ὀρθαῖς πλαγίας, εὐτρόχους, ὅπη βουλευθείη τις ἅμα νοήματι περιάγεσθαι δυναμένας ἐπ' ἄκρων δὲ τῶν κεραιῶν ἢ τριόδοντες ἦσαν ἢ κέστροι μαχαιροειδείς ἢ δρέπανα ὀλοσιδήρα ἢ καταρράκτας τινὰς ἐπιρριπτοῦντας ἄνωθεν βαρεῖς κόρακας. πολλαῖς δὲ αὐτῶν χεῖρες προσήρτηντο πυρφόροι στυππεῖα πολλὴ πίττη λελιπασμένα περὶ αὐτὰς ἔχουσαι, προεκκείμεναι τῶν ἀμαξῶν, αἷς ἐμελλον ἐστηκότες ἐπ' αὐτῶν νινες, ὅτε πλυσίον γένοιτο τῶν θηρίων, πλήσαντες πυρὸς ἐπὶ τὰς προβοσκίδας αὐτῶν καὶ τὰ πρόσωπα τὰς πληγὰς φέρειν. ἐφεστήκεισαν δὲ ταῖς ἀμάξαις τετρακύνκλοις ὑπαρχούσαις καὶ τῶν ψιλῶν συγχνοί, τοξόται καὶ χειρμάται καὶ τριβόλων σιδηρῶν σφενδονῆται, καὶ παρ' αὐτὰς κάτωθεν ἔτι πλείους ἕτεροι.

35. Ibid., XX.2.4.

to flee towards the lines of the Roman infantry, causing much confusion and disruption³⁶. The same stratagem has also been mentioned by Dio Cassius, albeit in a more synoptic version³⁷.

Some striking similarities can easily be distinguished between the stratagem of the Romans against Pyrrhos and the one of Alexios against the Normans almost 1350 years later. The wagons were used as carriers and/or base platforms for specialized weapons (beams with rotating spears etc.)³⁸, which aimed to neutralize the opponent's super weapon; in the case of Pyrrhos the war elephants and in the case of the Normans the heavy cavalry³⁹. In both cases, the wagons were placed in front of the battle lines in order to cut off the momentum of the enemy assault and were accompanied by lightly armed soldiers but failed to fulfil their purpose. At Asculum, the lightly armed foot soldiers

36. Ibid, XX.2.4-5.

37. DIO CASSIUS, *Historia Romana*, ed. U. P. BOISSEVAIN, v. I (fragments of book 10), Berlin 1895, p. 134 (hereafter: DIO CASSIUS): οἱ μὲν οὖν Ῥωμαῖοι πρὸς κατάπληξιν τὸν λόγον ἐποίησαν, ὁ δὲ Πύρρος αὐτοῖς ἐφῆκε διαβῆναι τὸν ποταμόν, μέγα φρονῶν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐλέφασιν. οἱ δὲ Ῥωμαῖοι τὰ τε ἄλλα παρεσκευάσαντο καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἐλέφαντας κεραίᾳς ἐφ' ἁμαξῶν σεσιδηρωμένας καὶ πανταχόθεν προεχούσας ἡτοίμασαν, ἵνα τοξεύοντες ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἄλλα τε καὶ πῦρ ἐμποδῶν σφίσι γίνωνται. The text of Dio Cassius is preserved word by word in the much later work of Ioannis Zonaras, *Ἐπιτομὴ Ἱστοριῶν* (IOANNIS ZONARAS, *Epitome historiarum*, ed. L. DINDORF, Leipzig 1868–1875), VIII.5.4-8. The text of Dio Cassius is considerably more brief and short in comparison to that of Dionysios, thus not providing any specific details. One interesting aspect according to Dio Cassius is that Pyrrhos eventually avoided engaging his elephants with the wagons of the Romans; information which is completely opposite to that given by Dionysios.

38. Although Anna Comnene does not provide specific information and details on how Alexios had placed the spears on his carriages or on how they were used, it is likely that this was done in a similar way to that described by Dionysios (rotating beams on which the spears were adapted). It also seems likely that the spears may have permanently been fixed, with their shafts pointing in one direction without having any major rotating capability. Dionysios, on his side, does not provide the exact number of these devices per wagon (perhaps one), unlike Anna, who states that there were four spears placed on each wagon (ANNA COMNENA, p. 150⁷⁶⁻⁸²). Unfortunately, in both cases, there is not enough information available. Therefore, any attempt to reconstruct these devices is based on assumptions.

39. Indeed, the comments made by Anna on the Norman cavalry and its unrivaled and dreadful charge (see above, n. 17) are reminiscent of the way the Romans viewed the elephants of Pyrrhos. The elephants as well as the heavy cavalry of the Normans can be regarded as super weapons of their era, used primarily to break and subsequently to disrupt and dissolve the enemy formation (their functioning is strongly reminiscent of the use of modern tanks and there is no doubt that for the ancient and medieval warriors, elephants and war horses had represented something similar, especially when, *apart from* their impressive appearance and magnitude, their strong defensive and offensive weaponry are also taken under consideration.

and the crews of Pyrrhos' elephants managed to neutralize the wagons of the Romans. At Ioannina, Bohemond's horsemen simply bypassed and overcame the wagons of the Byzantines, without losing their coherence and momentum. In conclusion, the wagons were used as static points of defense, although it seemed that they possessed at least some limited autonomy of movement⁴⁰, but failed to play an influential role in the development and outcome of the battle in both cases.

As for the second stratagem, the one used at Tzurulos, the ancient and the earlier Byzantine literature predating Alexiad contrasts two equally impressive and quite similar military tricks. The first, which also bears the greatest resemblance to Alexios' ruse, is preserved in the sixth book of the history of Procopios which describes the Gothic War. The second one is preserved in the work of Arrian *Ἀλεξάνδρου ἀνάβασις* and in the *Στρατηγήματα* of Polyainos, while descriptions of a similar stratagem have been preserved in one anonymous tenth-century military treatise and in the works of Xenophon and Dio Cassius.

Procopios states, that, in 540 during the course of the Gothic War in Italy, Velissarius' forces besieged the city of Auximon⁴¹ which was build on a steep hill, near the Adriatic coast and was the key to the conquest and occupation of Ravenna⁴². The Gothic garrison of *the* town, whose supplies were scarce, attempted everyday sorties to a nearby location, which was full of grass (*πόα*) suitable for feeding the horses. The Byzantines were lying in ambush in order to prevent the Gothic foragers from accomplishing their task and killed several of them at a time. The perplexed Goths resorted to the following ruse: they removed the wheels and the axles from the carriages located in the town and lurked awaiting the next Byzantine attack against their foraging parties. Indeed, the next day the Goths again sent their foragers downhill in order to try to collect supplies. This triggered the expected reaction from the Byzantines who rushed to the scene in order to pursue the Goths. When the Byzantines reached the middle of the distance separating them from the Goths, the Goths who were in the city let the wheels roll down the slopes. They aimed at striking the Byzantine phalanx when it was ascending the hill, at the moment when it was most vulnerable. However, as we are informed by Procopius, the wheels

40. We know that the wagons of the Romans were towed by oxen (DIONYSIUS, XX.2.5), while those of Alexios, which must have been more cumbersome, although much lighter, were pushed by foot soldiers (ANNA COMNENA, p. 150⁸¹⁻⁸²).

41. The modern city of Osimo located in the province of Ancona, 15 km south of the homonymous city.

42. PROCOPIUS, VI.24.7-10, p. 78.

rolled down the hill and stopped without doing harm to any Byzantine soldier⁴³.

This Gothic ruse also shows striking similarities to Alexios Comnenos' stratagem. These similarities seem too impressive to be a mere coincidence. *But* the stratagem of Alexios Comnenus, which replicates exactly the ineffective stratagem mentioned by Procopios which led to the Goths' failure five centuries ago, led to a success of the Byzantines. While there were no reported losses for the Byzantines who were on foot when attacked by the Goths, Alexios' army succeeded with his ruse against the Pechenegs who were on horseback⁴⁴.

Arrian, in a famous excerpt of his, which is also very similar to the incident recounted by Anna, states that during the campaign of Alexander the Great against the Triballians and various Thracian tribes in 335 B.C., the Thracians tried to block Alexander's advance in one of the passages over Haemus mountain. More specifically, they tried to scatter the dense Macedonian phalanx that was climbing the narrow passage in tied formation through the use of wagons which were pushed to descend with momentum against it⁴⁵. Their effort ultimately failed⁴⁶ but there are striking similarities between the respective stratagem used by Alexios Comnenos 13 centuries later and the incident mentioned

43. Ibid., VI.23.19-20, p. 68-70: οἱ δὲ βάρβαροι ἀρετῇ τῶν πολεμίων ἡσσωμένοι ἐπενόουν τάδε. τῶν ἀμαξῶν τοὺς τροχοὺς ξὺν μόνοις τοῖς ἄξουσιν ἀφελόμενοι ἐν παρασκευῇ εἶχον, τέμνειν τε τὴν πόναν ἀρξάμενοι, ἐπειδὴ ἀνιόντας ἤδη ἐξ τοῦ λόφου τὰ μέσα τοὺς Ῥωμαίους εἶδον, τοὺς τροχοὺς ἀφῆκαν κατὰ κορυφὴν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς φέρεσθαι. τύχη δέ τινα τούτους ξυνέπεσε τοὺς τροχοὺς ἄχρι ἐς τὸ ὁμαλὲς ἀνθρώπου οὐδενὸς ἀψαμένους ἐλθεῖν.

44. It should be recalled again that the writer takes the view that the likelihood of the ruse mentioned by Anna Comnene lacking a historical basis (that is to be, essentially, a sophisticated literary imitation of the passage of Procopius) is negligible for reasons to be discussed right below.

45. FLAVIUS ARRIANUS, *Anabasis of Alexander*, ed. and trans. P. A. BRUNT [Loeb Classical Library 236], London 1976), I.1.6-10 (hereafter: ARRIANUS). These wagons probably belonged to a trade caravan, as ARRIANUS, I.1.6 states that the mountain was called "the mountain of the traders" (ὄρος τῶν ἐμπόρων). Arrian is not a primary source for this incident as his work is largely based on the lost biographies of Alexander by Ptolemy and Aristobulus of Cassandria; see A. B. BOSWORTH, *Plus ça change.... Ancient Historians and their sources*, *Classical Antiquity* 22 (2003) 167-197 and esp. 171-172.

46. ARRIANUS, I.1.10: ...ὀλίγα ἔβλαψαν ἀπέθανε δὲ οὐδεὶς ὑπὸ ταῖς ἀμάξαις. The Macedonians who could not escape the descending wagons followed the orders of Alexander to lie down on the ground and hold their shields over them in a specific way. They had to fall to the ground and link their shields closely together, so that the wagons coming towards them would have to bound over them because of their gathered impetus and would therefore pass them without causing them any harm. This seems totally impracticable and unrealistic. Perhaps the incident was used by Arrian in order to emphasize the high discipline and fighting capabilities of the Macedonian army. About this stratagem, see E. BLOEDOW, On "wagons" and "shields": Alexander's crossing of Mt Haemus in 335 B.C., *Ancient History Bulletin* 10 (1996) 119-130. The au-

by Procopios. The main difference is that the Thracians used whole wagons while the Byzantines only used the wagons' axons and wheels. Also, in the former case the ruse resulted in a complete failure, while Alexios Comnenos' stratagem achieved a partial success. The same ruse applied by the Thracians is also mentioned in the Stratagems of Polyaeus in a considerably summarized form⁴⁷.

Of relevance to the study of ruses involving wagons is also a passage preserved in the work of an anonymous Byzantine editor of the tenth century, entitled as *Ἀωνύμου ἥτοι Ἡρώου Βυζαντίου Πολιορκητικά* (Anonymous Byzantinus or "Heron of Byzantium" Poliorcetica) or *Παραγγέλματα Πολιορκητικά* (also known as *De Strategimatibus*)⁴⁸. Within this passage, a variety of objects that can be unleashed from an elevated defensive position (i.e. a walled city) against the attacking forces that threaten it is presented in detail⁴⁹. Among other things, the author recommends caution to the besieger in case the defenders might attempt to launch heavily loaded four-wheeled car-

thor tries to approach the Thracian ruse in a pragmatic way, which as cited in the ancient text leaves many gaps, so that many questions concerning the precise manner of implementation as well as the reactions of Alexander arise. Also, see W. HECKEL, Synaspismos, sarissas and Thracian wagons, *Acta Classica* 48 (2005) 189-194. On this occasion, the author attempts to specify the exact type of the soldiers that Alexander arrayed against the Thracians and considers this as the main reason for the failure of the stratagem.

47. POLYAENUS, *Stratagemata*, ed. I. MELBER – E. WOELFFLIN, Leipzig 1887, IV.3.11 (hereafter: POLYAENUS): Ἀλέξανδρος Θρακῶν παρεσκευασμένων καταγόμευς ἀμάξας πολλὰς ἐπαφέναι τοῖς Μακεδόσι παρήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς ἐκκλίνειν μὲν ὅσας δύναιντο, εἰ δὲ καταλαμβάνοντο, καθιέντας αὐτοὺς πρὸς τὴν γῆν ὑπερτιθέναι τὰς ἀσπίδας, ὅπως συμβαίνοι φερομέναις ταῖς ἀμάξαις ὑπερηδάν. τοῦτό τοι καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ πείρᾳ γεγόμενον ἤλεγξε τοῖς Θραξίν ἄχρηστον τὴν τῶν ἀμαξῶν παρασκευήν. Quite significant here is the information that the wagons were overburdened (κατάγομοι), an information which is not provided by the text of Arrian. For an English translation, see P. KRENTZ – E. L. WHEELER, *Polyaenus: Stratagems of War*, v. I, Chicago 1994, p. 338.
48. WESCHER, *Poliorkétique*, p.197 uses the title *Ἀωνύμου ἥτοι Ἡρώου Βυζαντίου Πολιορκητικά*, while R. Schneider prefers the title *Παραγγέλματα Πολιορκητικά*: R. SCHNEIDER, *Griechische Poliorketiker, mit den handschriftlichen Bildern, herausgegeben und übersetzt*, v. II, Berlin 1908, p. 4 (hereafter: SCHNEIDER, *Poliorketiker*). *This treatise, as its title indicates*, is attributed to a certain Heron, although it is unknown whether it refers to Heron of Alexandria, or someone namesake who lived eight centuries later (known as "Heron of Byzantium").
49. WESCHER, *Poliorkétique*, p. 204²⁰-205². The text of "Heron" is contained on pages 197-279; SCHNEIDER, *Poliorketiker*, p. 12-14. Schneider uses Wescher's page numbering (204²⁰-205²). The text of *Παραγγέλματα* is contained on pages 4-109. For the most recent edition of this work, see D. SULLIVAN, *Siegecraft. Two Tenth-Century Instructional Manuals by "Heron of Byzantium"* [Dumbarton Oaks Studies], Washington, D.C. 2000 (hereafter: SULLIVAN, *Siegecraft*), p. 26-113 (*Παραγγέλματα Πολιορκητικά*) and p. 153-248 (commentary).

riages against the attackers, as mentioned in the narratives of Arrian and Polyaeus⁵⁰. It seems that there is an obvious connection between these texts. Actually, the *Παραγγέλματα* is an expanded paraphrase of an even earlier work written c. 100 AD, the *Πολιορκητικά* of Apollodoros from Damascus⁵¹. Perhaps Apollodoros issues his warning having the event of the Thracians against Alexander at the mountain Haemus in mind. The description of Apollodoros matches sufficiently with that of Polyaeus; both make reference to *heavily loaded wagons* (*καταγόμεους και φορτίους βεβαρημένοι*), in contrast to Arrian. This seems to indicate that Polyaeus apart from the text of Arrian also used the text of Apollodoros as a source for his work.

This particular stratagem seems to be quite old, as it can be traced back in Xenophon's work⁵², and it must have been often applied and therefore well known, as it has also been mentioned by Dio Cassius in his Roman History⁵³. Its frequent mention in Ancient sources and its citation in Byzantine sources

50. SULLIVAN, *Siegecraft*, p. 36, 52-5: *δεῖ τὰ ἄνωθεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐναντίων ἐπικυλιόμενα παραφυλάττεσθαι βάρη, ἅτινά εἰσι λίθοι στρογγύλοι, κίονες, τροχοί, σφόνδυλοι, ἅμαξαι τετράτροχοι φορτίους βεβαρημένοι, ἄγγεῖα.*

51. WESCHER, *Poliorkétique*, p. 139.10-11. The text of Apollodoros is contained on pages 137-193. Also, see R. SCHNEIDER, *Poliorketiker*, I: Apollodoros, Berlin 1908, p. 10. The text of Apollodoros is contained on pages 1-65 and Schneider keeps also here Wescher's page numbering. The only major difference from the corresponding above-mentioned passage of "Heron" is the addition of the characterization 'four-wheeled' to the wagons' description. Specifically for Apollodoros' treatise, see H. BLYTH, Apollodoros of Damascus and the Poliorcetica, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 33 (1992) 127-158 and D. WHITEHEAD, Apollodoros' Poliorcetica: Author, Date, Dedicatee, in: *A Roman Miscellany. Essays in Honour of Anthony R. Birley on his Seventieth Birthday*, H. M. SCHELLENBERG – V. E. HIRSCHMANN – A. KRIECKHAUS (eds.), Gdansk 2008, p. 204-212.

52. XENOPHON, *Cyrus's Anabasis*, trans. C. L. BROWNSON [Loeb Classical Library 3], Cambridge 1922, IV.2.3: *ἐπεὶ δὲ ἦσαν ἐπὶ χαράδρᾳ οἱ ὀπισθοφύλακες ἦν ἔδει διαβάντας πρὸς τὸ ὄρθιον ἐκβαίνειν, τηνικαῦτα ἐκύνιδον οἱ βάρβαροι ὁλοτρόχους ἁμαξιαίους καὶ μείζονες καὶ ἐλάτους, οἱ φερόμενοι πρὸς τὰς πέτρας παίοντες διεσφενδονῶντο· καὶ παντάπασιν οὐδὲ πελάσαι οἶόν τ' ἦν τῇ εἰσόδῳ.* This incident refers to one of the clashes of the Ten Thousand with several Carduchian tribes during their long return march from Mesopotamia in 401 B.C.

53. DIO CASSIUS, LVI.14.1-3, describes a minor engagement between the forces of Tiberius and the rebels of Dalmatia during the great rebellion of Pannonia in AD 6-9. The rebels, which had occupied an elevated fortified position, used wheels and wagons loaded with rocks against the oncoming roman soldiers: *ιδόντες δὲ τοῦτο οἱ Δελμάται ἔξω τε τοῦ τείχους ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ τοῦ κρημνώδους παρετάξαντο, καὶ λίθους πολλοὺς τοὺς μὲν σφενδόνας ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἐβαλλον τοὺς δὲ καὶ κατεκυνίδουν. ἄλλοι τροχοὺς ἄλλοι ἁμάξας ὅλας πλήρεις πετρῶν, ἄλλοι κιβωτοὺς περιφερεῖς, ἐπιχωρίως πως πεποιημένας καὶ λίθων γεμούσας, ἠφίεσαν. καὶ ταυτὰ τε πάντα ἅμα πολλῇ ὀύμῃ καταφερόμενα διεσφενδονῶντο, καὶ τοὺς Ῥωμαίους διέεσα τε ἔτι καὶ μᾶλλον ἀπ' ἀλλήλων καὶ συνήλου.*

suggest that *it was really* applied in practice and that it wasn't simply a sort of literary exaggeration aiming at an enrichment of a Byzantine historian's narrative. It is noteworthy that in almost all of its references, the stratagem involving wagons and heavy loads was used by "barbarians" against "civilized" people, Greeks, Romans and Byzantines alike, except the case of its use by Alexius. Alexius was obviously the first to use this stratagem originally conceived by "barbarians" against people of the same flock. Provided that Alexios' two stratagems were factual and not just fanciful stories of his daughter and biographer, Anna, the military brain which conceived and executed them must have had knowledge, direct or indirect, of the passages of Procopius as well as the Byzantine compendiums of Polyaeus⁵⁴ and the Byzantine version of Apollodoros' treatise on siegecraft. It seems that either Anna Comnene or her father or both of them had at least read some of those sources⁵⁵. Regarding the question of the authenticity of the facts described by Anna Comnene, there are details that advocate in favor of *their* veracity⁵⁶.

Concerning the first incident at Ioannina, the testimony of William of Apulia combined with some details from the description of Anna Comnene, such as the type of wagons, the number of arms placed on each and, last but not least, the obvious acceptance of the failure of her father's stratagem, argue in

54. The text of Polyaeus has been cited several times by later Byzantine authors. The incident with the Thracian wagons at the mountain Haemos has also been described in three Byzantine adaptations of Polyaeus which have been dated back to the late tenth and early eleventh century, are directly related to the prototype and might have been known to Alexios Comnenus, at least to some extent. The stratagem can be found on all three of them, viz. the *ὑποθέσεις ἐκ τῶν στρατηγικῶν πράξεων*, 49.2 (*Excerpta Polyaei*, in POLYAEUS, p. 489), the *Στρατηγήματα παλαιῶν ἀνδρῶν*, 47.2 (in J. A. DE FOUCAULT, *Strategemata*, Paris 1949, p. 17-66) and the *Παρεκβολαὶ ἐκ τῶν στρατηγικῶν πράξεων*, 36 (*ibid.*, p. 75-120). *ὑποθέσεις*, the earlier of the three, dated to the tenth century, were used as a model upon which the *Στρατηγήματα* (late tenth century or early eleventh) and the *Παρεκβολαὶ* (first quarter of eleventh century) were based. For an extensive analysis of the origin and citation and alteration process of these selected Byzantine excerpts which have been derived from the original text of Polyaeus and constitute a short compendium of some of the stratagems he described, see: A. DAIN, *Les cinq adaptations byzantines des "Stratagèmes" de Polyen*, *Revue des Études Anciennes* 33 (1931) 321-346; *idem*, *Les stratèges byzantins*, *Travaux et mémoires* 2 (1967) 364-365, 368-369; F. SCHINDLER, *Die Überlieferung der Strategemata des Polyainos*, Wien 1973, p. 205-225.

55. There is evidence in the Alexiad that Anna Comnene had direct knowledge of the *Taktika* (see ANNA COMNENA, p. 395⁴⁹⁻⁵⁸, in comparison with LEO, *Taktika*, XX.51, (p. 554) 119 (p. 576-578) and 136 (p. 582).

56. The author expresses his opinion concerning the authenticity of the two ancient stratagems based on the relevant articles also mentioned in n. 46 but does not try to take an absolute decision concerning their truthfulness.

favor of authenticity. Regarding the second incident at Tzurulos, the strong bias and admiration which Anna shows towards her father might lead to the premature conclusion that the incident could have been made up by her and would therefore belong to the realm of myth. However, some details of her description could lead to a contradictory assessment⁵⁷. Anna describes the injuries suffered by the horses of the Pechenegs from the impetuous impact of the wagon wheels in detail. More specifically, she states that the wheels were reaping either the front or the rear pair of the horses' legs like scythes during the riders' attempt to jump over the wheels in order to avoid them⁵⁸. Such injuries forced the animals to sit towards the part of their body that had received the blow, thereby causing the rider to fall. According to the author's opinion, this extremely vivid realistic description would only be possible by a person who participated in the battle and shared his experiences with Anna Comnene afterwards. Anna herself, who was only about seven years old when this conflict took place, admits that she incorporated in her work information drawn from eyewitnesses, old soldiers and comrades of her father, especially concerning the battles and campaigns she describes⁵⁹. Therefore, there are many chances that the incident narrated by Anna Comnena and attributed to the ingenuity and military expertise of her father and his knowledge of the antiquity might have been real.

However, if we accept the pragmatic hypostasis of the two events described by Anna Comnene and do not consider them as figments of her own imagination, the following question arises: can the conception and execution of these

57. Initially, the author himself was concerned regarding the attribution of this particular stratagem to Alexios and his undeniable military capabilities and virtues. He also considered the possibility that it could have been an outcome of the imagination of his highly educated daughter and biographer. Her great knowledge of the works of ancient authors enhances the likelihood that she could have been inspired and even been inclined to imitate and even copy some passages of ancient works that had a great impression on her (see above, n. 28). However, the fact that Anna's details have been apparently derived from tales told by eyewitnesses and differ from those of the ancient prototypes leads to the conclusion that her descriptions are based on true events.

58. ANNA COMNENA, p. 233⁵³-234⁶⁴: *...οἱ δὲ τροχοὶ μετὰ τινος ῥοίζου καὶ καταφορᾶς ἐνεχθέντες ὑπὲρ πῆχυν ἀπὸ τοῦ τείχους ἔκαστος ἐφαλλόμενοι ἅτε τῶν κυροτήτων ἑκάστου τροχοῦ ἀποκρουσθεῖσιν ἐκ τοῦ τείχους καὶ οἶον ἀποσφενδονηθεῖσιν εἰς μέσους τοὺς τῶν βαρβάρων ἱππότητας ἐξεκυλίσθησαν ῥύμην λαβόντες σφοδροτέραν. Τὸ μὲν καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀθρόας καταφορᾶς τῷ φυσικῷ πειθόμενοι βάρει, τὸ δὲ καὶ ῥοπὴν λαβόντες ἀκάθεκτον ἀπὸ τοῦ κατάντους τοῦ τόπου σφοδρῶς τε τοῖς βαρβάροις ἐνέπιπτον καὶ πανταχόθεν αὐτοὺς περιέθλιβον τὰ σκέλη τῶν ἱππῶν ὥσπερ θερίζοντες καὶ ἀμφοτέρω ἐκατέρωθεν ἀπὸ τε τῶν ἐμπροσθίων καὶ ὀπισθίων μερῶν διατεμόμενοι ὁκλάσαι τοὺς ἱπποὺς, ἐφ' ἃ μέρη τὴν πληγὴν ἐδέξαντο, κατηνάγκασαν καὶ τοὺς ἱππότητας συγκαταβαλεῖν.*

59. Ibid., p. 742-46 and 451¹⁹-453⁸⁰.

stratagems be attributed to Alexius Comnenos or were they perhaps inspired by one of his seasoned officers?

Undoubtedly, Alexios Comnenos had the ability, the military audacity, the bravery and the courage to carry out such operations. During his early military career before the resumption of the imperial power but also during the subsequent period as an emperor, he carried out several bold actions which sometimes were crowned with success and sometimes with failure. Alexios also used a number of military tricks and ruses, since he was a foremost exponent of the concept “win by any means and by any manner” either by fighting in the open field or by using trickery and cunning, as clearly shown by his actions⁶⁰. Not only Anna Comnene but also her husband Nicephoros Bryennios confirms the tendency of his father in law to resort to all kinds of tricks and ruses in order to prevail over his vastly diverse, from a military viewpoint, opponents, in his work⁶¹. The military and diplomatic skills of Alexios, though overemphasised by Anna Comnene and her husband, the *caesar*, which also belonged to the immediate family of the emperor, are *rather* indisputable for most modern scholars⁶².

What is perhaps not widely known is the fact that in most battles Alexios

60. The use of stratagems and subterfuge in order to wear a stronger opponent down and postpone the battle until the circumstances become more favorable is one of the most characteristic features of Byzantine military tradition, see: E. McGEER, *Sowing the dragon's teeth. Byzantine warfare in the tenth century* [Dumbarton Oaks Studies], Washington, D.C. 1995, p. 255. From the early Byzantine period on, the vast majority of military treatises advised and encouraged troop commanders to undertake this way of action. See: MAURIKIOS, IV.1-5, VII.A, VII.B.3-4, 14-15 and especially VIII.1-2; LEO, *Taktika*, XII.4, XII.106, XIV.40-42, 46, XVII.4, XX.11-12, 51, 106, 136; *Περὶ Στρατηγίας*, ed. G. T. DENNIS, *Three Byzantine military treatises* [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 25], Washington, D.C. 1985, p. 22¹² and 100⁵³ (*Περὶ Στρατηγίας*). In Dennis' edition, the treatise *Περὶ Στρατηγίας* is still referred to as the Anonymous Byzantine treatise on strategy. On the attribution of this work to Syrianos Magistros, see C. ZUCKERMAN, *The Compendium of Syrianus Magister*, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 40 (1990) 209-224. It cannot be considered a mere coincidence that most of the ancient military works preserved in Byzantine adaptations include ruses and stratagems, which apparently attracted the interest of the Byzantine writers.

61. The use of subterfuge and ploys in the war against the rebel Roussel de Bailleul in 1074 and against the Turks who had overwhelmed Asia Minor has been described by Bryennios. See NICEPHOROS BRYENNIOS, *Historiarum libri quattuor*, ed. P. GAUTIER [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 9], Bruxelles 1975 (hereafter: BRYENNIOS), p. 185-189 and 205-207, respectively.

62. The opinions of modern military historians on the military capabilities of Alexios differ. For example, BIRKENMEIER, *Development*, p. 81-84, does not regard him as something extraordinary although he acknowledges his abilities but others, like HALDON, *Byzantine Wars*, p.135, recognize his skills and tactics on the battlefield, while W. TREADGOLD, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, Stanford 1997, p. 611, considers him to be a military genius.

has given, whether initially as a *grand domestikos* or later as an emperor, he had highly experienced and talented senior officers, most of which belonged to his close family environment via a clever system of intermarriages, under his command⁶³. Specific mention should be made to two of them, Georgios Paleologos⁶⁴, the emperor's brother in law and Gregorios Mavrokatalon⁶⁵. Paleologos has been repeatedly characterized as *an* officer who thought and acted bravely, accomplished great deeds and was highly experienced in military affairs⁶⁶. He and Mavrokatalon also seemed to have had particular expertise in tackling with the people of the steppe⁶⁷. Georgios Paleologos and some other highly experienced veteran officers (*τινες τῶν περὶ τὰ πολεμικὰ πεῖραν ἐκ μακροῦ χρόνου ἐσχλητότων ἐπιμελῶς*) advised the young emperor to avoid a battle in open field with the Normans⁶⁸. But as the young emperor did not follow their advice, he was subsequently defeated in the battle of Dyrrachium in October 1081⁶⁹.

Alexios benefited and learned a lot from the experience of these veterans

63. In this group of senior officers can be selectively included: Alexandros Kavasilas (ANNA COMNENA, p. 126¹⁵), Tatikios, the *grand primikirios* of Turkish origin (ibid., p. 126¹⁵-127²⁰), Pakourianos, the *grand domestikos* of Georgian origin (ibid., p. 63⁵⁷⁻⁵⁸), Oumbertopoulos the Frank (ibid., p. 247⁶⁴⁻⁶⁵ and 252⁹⁵), the *caesar* Nicephorus Melissenos (ibid., p. 286⁴³⁻⁴⁴), Georgios Paleologos, who has repeatedly been mentioned in most of the battles fought by Alexios by Anna Comnene and Bryennios, Gregorios and Nicolaos Mavrokatalon (ibid., p. 210¹² and 294³²⁻³³ respectively) and others.

64. B. SKOULATOS, *Les personnages byzantins de l'Alexiade. Analyse prosopographique et synthèse*, Louvain 1980 (hereafter: SKOULATOS, *Personnages*), p. 99-105; J.-C. CHEYNET – J. F. VANNIER, *Études Prosopographiques*, Paris 1986, p. 137-141.

65. For Gregorios Mavrokatalon, see SKOULATOS, *Personnages*, p. 111-112.

66. BRYENNIOS, p. 305: *Περὶ τὰ στρατιωτικὰ πολλὴν ἐμπειρίαν κεκτημένος*; ibid., p. 307¹⁻²: *ταγματάρχης ὢν ἐμπειρότατος καὶ κατὰ χεῖρα καὶ γνώμην γενναῖος* (description of the battle against the mercenary Turkish troops of the rebel Nicephorus Melissenos in 1081).

67. ANNA COMNENA, p. 210¹¹⁻¹⁸. Anna Comnene describes the advice addressed to Alexios not to venture a cavalry attack against the fortified wagons of the Pechenegs. As Gregorios Mavrokatalon had been captured and held as a prisoner by the Pechenegs, he was aware of their war practices. The former rebel Nicephorus Bryennios, who was acting as an advisor of the Emperor after his blindness, must also have gained experience in the Petchenegs' war practises (ibid., p. 205⁶⁰⁻⁶⁴). Georgios Palaeologos was distinguished in the wars against the Normans, especially during the siege of Dyrrachium (ibid., p. 120-130).

68. Ibid., p. 129¹-130¹⁷.

69. Likewise, Alexios relied on the advice of many of the relatives and colleagues listed above (see above, n. 63) just before facing the threat of Cumans who invaded Thrace in 1084 (ANNA COMNENA, p. 286⁴²⁻⁵⁰). Prior to the decisive battle, Anna Comnene states that he asked their advice on whether to fight or to avoid a direct confrontation with the army of Cumans that outnumbered them.

who accompanied him on his campaigns. It is almost certain that he closely cooperated with some of them and consulted them when he applied these two “special” stratagems. The idea of this unusual use of wagons against the Normans and the Pechenegs might not exclusively belong to him but this matter is of little importance⁷⁰. Regardless of who had the idea to implement the two stratagems, one can draw useful conclusions about the theoretical education of the Byzantine military aristocracy, since the vast majority of senior officials who served in the Byzantine army at the time of the Comnenoi were members of large aristocratic families, most of which were interconnected through intermarriages with the imperial family. We can draw information about the theoretical military education of a senior military official and even a soldier-emperor like Alexios Comnenos from these stratagems. We can try to trace back and discern the origin and the number of written sources which formed this kind of military education. It seems that this type of training, the conduct of which we mostly ignore as there is insufficient information⁷¹ and as military schools were non-existent at those times, was based on a fairly large

70. Either way, the glory achieved through the success of such an action belonged to the emperor himself and not to one of his servants, whether the conception of the idea was his or not. However, it is equally possible that the conception of these two military tricks could have been an exclusive product of the military knowledge of Alexios, a revival of the military past adjusted to the Byzantine military needs and practices - also according to the author's point of view. It is obvious that the person who inspired these tricks had great knowledge of the ancient theorists of war, of the tactical manuals and the ancient writers in general in addition to practical military experience.

71. Very little information has been preserved on the existence of specialized teachers in charge of military education and practical military training who mainly taught the offspring of aristocratic families, which were the only ones able to financially withstand such a demanding training, during this period. The most significant information is provided by Nicephoros Bryennios, who, when referring to the military training of John and Isaac Comnenos, the father and the uncle of Alexios I Comnenos respectively, uses the archaic terms *παιδαγωγός* (pedagogue) and *παιδοτρίβης* (superintendent). See BRYENNIOS, p. 75¹⁵⁻²² *παιδαγωγούς γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἐπιστήσας καὶ παιδοτρίβας (...)* τὰ πολεμικὰ ἐκδιδάσκειν (...) τὰ τακτικὰ μελετᾶν (...) ὅσα δὲ τὰ τακτικὰ ἐκδιδάσκουσι. Michael Psellos, in his Chronography, while expressing his antipathy towards the emperor Romanos IV (1067-1071), boasts that he was far more superior than him, not only in classical culture and spirit, but also in the area which the “soldier-emperor” considered his *own specialty* per excellence: the science of *Taktika* (MICHAEL PSELLOS, *Imperatorii di Bizanzio, Cronografia*, ed. S. IMPELLIZZERI, Vicenza 1984, VII.b 16: *ὥς δέ με οἶδε τὴν τακτικὴν ἐπιστήμην ἡκριβωκότα...καὶ τᾶλλα ὅσα στρατηγικῶν εἰσι διατάξεων...*) (hereafter: PSELLOS). Some further evidence about the military training of the military aristocracy of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is given by M. BARTUSIS, *The Late Byzantine Army. Arms and Society, 1204-1453*, Philadelphia 1992, p. 207.

number of works related to military issues, original or more often adapted⁷². Concerning the stratagems analysed in this article, the passages from Procopios, Arrian, Polyaeos and Dionysios of Halicarnassus must have been used for military education purposes.

The theoretical military education seemed to be very important and widespread in the circles of the Byzantine aristocracy of the Comnenian emperors' period⁷³. The number of sources used and processed by the Byzantines, which originated from the entire spectrum of the ancient Greek (primarily) and Latin

72. Apart from the widespread military manuals and military treatises of the Byzantine period (sixth - tenth centuries) which relied heavily on respective manuals and treatises of the antiquity and in many cases copied them by word, there were several historical ancient texts that included extensive references to military conflicts, wars and stratagems, which could be used as guides for the military training of Byzantine civil and military officials, as they had been gathered in relevant collections, such as the aforementioned *Excerpta de strategematis*. Examples include the works of some ancient theorists of military art (fourth century B.C. - fourth century A.D.) the works of which were preserved and used during the Byzantine era, whether as prototypes or, more frequently, as later adaptations. Those were the results of the popular custom of Byzantine writers and scholars to compile anthologies with extracts from different authors, based on common themes, such as: the *Στρατηγήματα* of Polyaeos, the *Θεωρία Τακτική* of Aeneas Tacticus, the *τέχνη Τακτική* of Asclepiodotos (based on the lost work of Posidonius), the treatise of Aelianus Tacticus *Περὶ στρατηγικῶν τάξεων Ἑλληνικῶν* ("On Tactical Arrays of the Greeks"), as well as Arrian's "Array against the Alans" (*κατὰ Ἀλανῶν ἔκταξις*), the *Epitoma rei militaris* of Vegetius and the *Strategemata of Frontinus*, the last two in Latin. Military treatises were written by other authors, whose works are not preserved (e.g. Polybios). The emperor Constantine VII, in tenth century, considered that every emperor who departed on campaign should necessarily have the manuals of Polyaeos and Syrianus Magister with him (CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Cerimoniis aulae Byzantinae*, ed. J. REISKE, Bonnae 1860, I.467^{7ff}: βιβλία στρατηγικά, βιβλία μηχανικά, ἐλεπόλεις ἔχοντα, καὶ βελοποιϊκὰ καὶ ἔτερα ἀρμόδια τῇ ὑποθέσει, ἡγουν πρὸς πολέμους καὶ καστρομαχίας βιβλία ἱστορικά, ἐξαιρέτως δὲ τὸν Πολύαινον καὶ τὸν Συριανόν). For the use of ancient *Taktika* in Byzantium, see also W. E. KAEGLI, *Some Thoughts on Byzantine Military Strategy*, Brookline 1983, p. 1-18 (especially p. 10-13). For the Byzantine military compilations, which sometimes replicate verbatim the ancient works, particularly Polyaeos, mention has already been made above (see above, n. 54).

73. Psellos in his encomium addressed to the *caesar* John Doukas, uncle of Michael VII (1071-1078), refers to his ability in military science, stressing that this did not originate automatically or accidentally, but by studying the military tactica, the treatises on strategy and siegecraft and especially the works of Aelios and Apollodoros (PSELLOS, VIII.16: τῶν τακτικῶν βιβλίων καὶ στρατηγικῶν καὶ πολιορκητικῶν καὶ περὶ ὧσιν οἱ περὶ Αἴλιον καὶ Ἀπολλόδορον συγγράφασιν. Here probably refers to Aelianus Tacticus and not the orator Aelius Aristides). With the phrase οἱ περὶ Αἴλιον καὶ Ἀπολλόδορον συγγράφασιν Psellos probably refers to the later Byzantine compilations of these works and not the originals. This testimony of Psellos for Apollodoros reinforces the likelihood (see above p.13) sections of the work of the latter to have been known (perhaps through the *Παραγγέλματα*) to Alexios Comnenos and his mil-

(less) literature, is particularly impressive. The analysis of the two stratagems of Alexios Comnenos reveals that the Byzantines studied meticulously and applied the ancient sources in practice and that they also gave particular importance to learning and assimilating the military theory, both of ancient and medieval writers, which as a result they maintained at the highest possible level. These stratagems demonstrate that Alexios and the members of the military aristocracy of the period⁷⁴ must have had excellent knowledge of the works of the ancient historians and tacticians or at least of several ancient passages of military interest as well as of the Byzantine strategic manuals which were also based to a high extent on ancient strategic military treatises and excerpts⁷⁵.

However, one question remains unanswered. Why do these stratagems, which occur with some slight discrepancies in several ancient sources, not appear in other Byzantine sources? Was Alexios the only one who knew about the sources referring to them? Probably not. Already from the sixth century, the Byzantines had highly developed military literature. The two main reasons why similar tricks are not mentioned by the sources are the limited interest in minor matters of military nature, such as ruses or stratagems, shown in the majority of the sources following Procopios up until the advent of historians and chroniclers of the eleventh century and the extreme rarity of the special military and geographic conditions which were required in order to apply such stratagems. We should not forget that such a use of wagons on the battlefield was a last ditch effort and a product of contingency for Alexios. Therefore it is reasonable and normally expected not to have frequent references to relevant stratagems in the sources which record the campaigns of earlier or later Byzantine emperors and military commanders. The application of these stratagems indicates

itary staff. Besides that, Psellos chronologically is very close to Alexios Comnenos. Another passage from the Alexiad confirms that Alexios had good knowledge of the work of Aelianus Tacticus (ANNA COMNENA, p. 469⁸²⁻⁸³: ἦν γὰρ οὐδὲ τῆς Αἰλιανοῦ Τακτικῆς ἀδαής).

74. Indeed, these works are addressed exclusively to members of the imperial family or generals of aristocratic lineage (throughout the Komnenian period most generals were members of an established aristocratic elite). It seems quite probable that one major function of these manuals was to be a part of a conversation and exchange of opinions between the members of the imperial court about the military achievements of the ancients and the way these could be inserted in the realities of Byzantine era warfare. See D. SULLIVAN, Byzantine military manuals, Prescriptions, practice and pedagogy, in: *The Byzantine world*, P. STEPHENSON (ed.), London 2010, p. 149, 155, 160 (hereafter: SULLIVAN, Military manuals).

75. Contrary to the stratagems of Alexios, the one mentioned by Procopios (see above, p. 10-11), of which himself was an eyewitness, obviously does not derive from a study of ancient military stratagems (after all, it was applied by the Goths); however it became an example for the subsequent military men.

the high extent of adjustment displayed by the Byzantines against all kinds of military innovation, which were willing to adopt, regardless of its origin. Alexios, at least as portrayed through the written sources during the mature phase of his reign, although as a young general did not avoid errors due to his impulsivity, is a perfect example of the emperor-general, which applies ruses and uses *conventional* as well as *unconventional* warfare methods in order to emerge victorious, acting in this way in accordance with the directions given by Byzantine military manuals⁷⁶.

The Byzantine military commanders were inspired by the achievements of the Ancient strategists and they were trying to imitate their exploits while preparing to march for war. Their military manuals were more than a simple collection of written memories and events; they preserved military actions of ancient times in a way that enabled the teaching of military lessons. The Byzantines did not hesitate to adopt military tricks, tested in practice by both friends and foes. The high degree of dependence of the Byzantines on military manuals and treatises was already known; what is most impressive is their heavy reliance on these manuals. For every likely and unlikely military incident, during a battle or a campaign, the Byzantines were well equipped with written instructions from which they apparently rarely diverted⁷⁷.

Although the Byzantine Empire never formally acquired a military school for its officials, *mutatis mutandis* there was nearly nothing to envy from the corresponding theoretical military training of modern states⁷⁸. The stratagems and the ability to use any means, whether conventional or unorthodox, to achieve the objective aims, indicate a very advanced military philosophy, a product of many centuries of Greek and Roman military thinking. The high ranked

76. LEO, *Taktika*, epilogue 35, p. 628: <Δεῖ δέ σε> ὀξέως ποιητικόν τε εἶναι στρατηγημάτων καὶ ἀγγίνουν ἐν ταῖς ἐπιχειρήσεσιν ὑπάρχειν, καὶ ὅταν αὐτὸς ἐπιτίθεσθαι βούλει τοῖς πολεμίοις καὶ ὅταν ἐπιβουλεύεσθαι μέλλῃς παρὰ τῶν πολεμίων.

77. Therefore, questions about whether Byzantine officers were allowed to improvise and to what extent arise. Although improvisation constitutes an essential element for the success of any military officer or leader at any time, it is the opinion of the author that improvisation was extremely limited among the Byzantines and that in the cases when it was permissible, it was exclusively applied by military officials. We should keep in mind that very often, especially during the period before the Comnenian emperors, high ranked political officials who usually belonged to the close imperial environment and had little or no military experience undertook the leadership of Byzantine armies because of their assumed fidelity. The detailed pedantry demonstrated by the Byzantine military manuals can partly be explained by the fact that the manuals took this category of officials into consideration and were addressed especially to them.

78. Such a military school came much later, with the advent of the national states. See SULLIVAN, *Military manuals*, p. 149.

Byzantine military officials of that period (eleventh - twelfth centuries) had an excellent bibliography of military strategies and ruses at their disposal, which they used to carry out their military enterprises with advantageous conditions for themselves. As very eloquently observed by G. T. Dennis⁷⁹, when the Byzantines conducted their wars and battles by following the instructions of the military manuals, they had a good chance to defeat their opponents.

79. G. T. DENNIS, The Byzantines in Battle, in: *Το Εμπόλεμο Βυζάντιο (9ος-12ος αι.)*, N. ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΗΣ (ed.), National Hellenic Research Foundation/Institute for Byzantine Studies, Athens 1997, p. 165-178, here p. 178.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η ΧΡΗΣΗ ΑΡΧΑΙΩΝ ΕΓΧΕΙΡΙΔΙΩΝ ΣΤΡΑΤΗΓΙΚΗΣ ΣΕ ΜΕΣΑΙΩΝΙΚΕΣ ΜΑΧΕΣ: ΔΥΟ ΤΕΧΝΑΣΜΑΤΑ ΤΟΥ ΑΛΕΞΙΟΥ ΚΟΜΝΗΝΟΥ ΕΝΑΝΤΙΟΝ ΝΟΡΜΑΝΔΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΠΕΤΣΕΝΕΓΚΩΝ

Ο Αλέξιος Κομνηνός χρησιμοποίησε σε δύο συγκεκριμένα τεχνάσματά του άμαξες, καθώς και τμήματα αμαξών, όπως τροχούς και άξονες, με αρκετά περιέρρους και πρωτότυπους τρόπους, προκειμένου να επιτύχει τακτικό πλεονέκτημα στο πεδίο της μάχης. Στην πρώτη περίπτωση, σε μία ελάσσονα μάχη η οποία διεξήχθη το 1082 έξω από τα τείχη των — κατεχομένων από τους Νορμανδούς του Βοημούνδου — Ιωαννίνων, χρησιμοποίησε με μικρή επιτυχία άμαξες ως στατικά μέσα ανάσχεσης του επίφοβου βαρέος νορμανδικού ιππικού. Στη δεύτερη περίπτωση, κατά τη σύντομη πολιορκία του κάστρου της Τζουρουλού από τους Πετσενέγκους, το 1090, χρησιμοποίησε με μεγαλύτερη επιτυχία τμήματα τροχών από άμαξες κατά τέτοιο τρόπο ώστε να επιφέρει σύγχυση και αναταραχή στις τάξεις των πολυάριθμων νομάδων.

Η Άννα Κομνηνή επαινεί τα τεχνάσματα του πατέρα της και τα χαρακτηρίζει πρωτότυπα προϊόντα της στρατηγικής διανοίας του Αλεξίου. Μία προσεκτικότερη, ωστόσο, έρευνα αρχαίων στρατηγικών πραγματειών φαίνεται να τη διαψεύδει με τον πλέον εντυπωσιακό τρόπο. Τα τεχνάσματα αυτά απαντούν σε πολύ αρχαιότερους συγγραφείς, όπως ο Ξενοφών, ο Πολύαινος, ο Αρριανός, ο Απολλόδωρος, αλλά και ο Προκόπιος, και μάλιστα με εντυπωσιακές ομοιότητες. Προκύπτουν, συνεπώς, τα εξής δύο συμπεράσματα: είτε, πρώτον, η ίδια η Άννα Κομνηνή γνώριζε τα συγκεκριμένα χωρία των αρχαίων συγγραφέων και τα ενέταξε ηθελημένα, ελαφρώς παραλλαγμένα, στη διήγησή της, προκειμένου να εξυμνήσει τα κατορθώματα του πατέρα της, με συνέπεια η αυθεντικότητα τους να είναι αμφισβητήσιμη, είτε, δεύτερον, ο Αλέξιος Κομνηνός πραγματικά εφάρμοσε τα τεχνάσματα αυτά και συνεπώς είχε ο ίδιος ή οι κοντινοί του σύμβουλοι γνώση των αρχαίων αυτών κειμένων.

Η πρόσβαση σε αυτά τα έργα επιτυγχανόταν, πιθανότατα, μέσα από τις πάμπολλες επιτομές και ανθολογίες τους οι οποίες χρονολογούνται από την

βυζαντινή περίοδο. Ιδιαίτερα τα *Στρατηγήματα* του Πολυαίνου αποτέλεσαν αντικείμενο πολλών σταχυολογήσεων τόσο της ύστερης ρωμαϊκής όσο και της μέσης βυζαντινής περιόδου. Φαίνεται ότι ο συγκεκριμένος αυτοκράτορας και τα μέλη της στρατιωτικής αριστοκρατίας της περιόδου, με αυτό τον τρόπο είχαν άριστη γνώση των αρχαίων στρατιωτικών ιστορικών και αρκετών αρχαίων αποσπασμάτων στρατιωτικού ενδιαφέροντος, πέρα από τη μελέτη των βυζαντινών στρατηγικών εγχειριδίων (τα οποία άλλωστε σε συντριπτικό βαθμό στηρίζονταν σε αρχαία στρατηγικά και αποσπάσματα στρατιωτικών πραγματειών).

Ο μεγάλος βαθμός εξάρτησης των Βυζαντινών από τα στρατιωτικά εγχειρίδια και πραγματείες ήταν ήδη γνωστός αυτό που εντυπωσιάζει είναι η έκταση που είχε. Για κάθε πιθανό και απίθανο στρατιωτικό συμβάν, κατά τη διάρκεια μίας μάχης ή μίας εκστρατείας, οι Βυζαντινοί ήταν εξοπλισμένοι με γραπτές οδηγίες από τις οποίες σπανίως παρέκκλιναν. Οι υψηλόβαθμοι βυζαντινοί στρατιωτικοί εκείνης της περιόδου, είχαν στη διάθεσή τους μία εξαιρετική στρατιωτική βιβλιογραφία στρατηγικών και τεχνασμάτων, την οποία χρησιμοποιούσαν ώστε να διεξάγουν τις πολεμικές τους επιχειρήσεις με τους πλέον ευνοϊκούς, για τους ίδιους, όρους.

ΘΕΟΧΑΡΗΣ ΑΛΕΞΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ

