

The Battles of Dorostolon (971)

Rhetoric and Reality

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Byzantine chroniclers inherited the art of historiography from the Greek and Roman historians of the ancient world. Aware of the literary tradition they upheld, Byzantines wrote histories that rival in quality and content those of western medieval historians.¹ The study of Byzantine chronicles has shown them to be valuable sources of direct and indirect information,² even if their authors are often responsible for exaggeration and bias in their accounts.³ In the description of significant events, battles are especially important for the effect they had on the fortunes of the empire. Few Byzantine battle descriptions survive in detail, and those that do are often presentations of what ought to have taken place rather than a moment by moment account of what actually occurred on the battlefield. Patriotism, respect for a patron's affiliations, personal biases, and a large collection of Byzantine military manuals from which to gather information on proper battle organization may well form the backbone of Byzantine military historiography. In spite of this tendency among historians to describe military engagements in a standardized form, it is possible to extract worthwhile information from texts by close examination and comparison of descriptions. The questions to be asked should focus on what the historians have included or omitted, how they have

1. Barnes, *History of Historical Writing*.

2. For a discussion and bibliography, see Kazhdan and Constable, *People and Power*, 162-78.

3. For more extensive discussion of Byzantine historiography see Ljubarskij, "Neue Tendenzen," 560-66.

changed the events they are describing, and how the events conform to the military-manual version of battle activities.⁴

The purpose of this essay is to examine the rhetoric of battle as it appears in two Byzantine accounts: the *Synopsis Historiarum* of John Skylitzes, and the *Historia* of Leo the Deacon.⁵ The battles to be discussed took place at Dorostolon in 971, between the armies of John Tzimiskes and Svjatoslav, leader of the Rus'. Even though both authors possibly used the same original source,⁶ there are considerable differences in the presentation of the events they describe. Leo the Deacon was a contemporary of John Tzimiskes. His history covers the years 956 to 976.⁷ Leo presents the leaders of the armies in great detail. His Byzantine patriotism and personal views often direct his observations, and his chronology is not entirely reliable.⁸ Skylitzes, on the other hand, wrote his history at the end of the eleventh century. He was *kouropalates* and *droungarios tes viglas* in 1092 and had personal experience of the Byzantine military administration.⁹ His history covers the period between 811 and 1057 and is intended to continue the narratives of George the *Synkellos* and Theophanes the Confessor.¹⁰ Skylitzes' account of the battles of Dorostolon is simplified, and lacks the description of personalities characteristic in the text of Leo the Deacon. His version, however, has some details lacking in Leo's history. The differences in the presentation of the battles will be discussed with the aid of twentieth-century military historiography in an effort to distinguish historiographical models from facts.

Before studying the specific details of the battle, it is necessary to review the sequence of events. In the spring of 971, the emperor John Tzimiskes was forced to deal with the occupation of the Bulgar kingdom by the Rus'.¹¹ After preparing a large army of infan-

4. I would like to thank Dr. Eric McGeer for his very helpful suggestions on the topic of Byzantine military rhetoric and warfare.

5. Thurn, ed., Skylitzes, *Synopsis*; and Leo Diaconus (Bonn ed.).

6. The source of Skylitzes and Leo the Deacon is no longer extant. For a complete discussion of their sources see Siuziumov, "Ob istočnikac," 106-66.

7. For a detailed study of Leo the Deacon, see Panagiotakes, *Λέων ὁ Διάκονος*.

8. For a discussion of problems in the chronology of Svjatoslav's previous campaigns against Byzantium, see Stokes, "Background and Chronology," 44-57.

9. Thurn, ed., Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, vii-xi ("Introduction").

10. *Ibid.*, 3-4.

11. On the chronology of the campaign see Dölger, "Chronologie des grossen Feldzuges," 274-76.

try, cavalry, an assortment of siege equipment, and a formidable naval force, he set out to Dorostolon. Tzimiskes crossed the mountain passes to Bulgaria without harassment from the Russian army.¹² His first stop was Preslav, where after a number of confrontations, the forces of the Rus' were defeated in a bloody battle before the palace of the Bulgar king. From Preslav the Byzantine forces advanced to Dorostolon. After a three-month siege of the city, the Byzantines overpowered the Rus' troops and forced their surrender. The defeated Svjatoslav and his army were offered securities, the continuation of commercial treaties with the Byzantine empire, and provisions to return to their homeland. Byzantium's victory over the Rus' relieved the empire from the attacks of that nation for nearly a hundred years and extended Byzantine borders to incorporate the Bulgar kingdom.¹³

Before looking at the texts themselves one needs a sense of what John Keegan calls the "battle piece."¹⁴ When dealing with the past in general and military exploits in particular, authors of all historical periods are prone to impose upon the historical accounts their own collection of traditional conventions and assumptions, and tend to present the events they are narrating in a rigid, conventional form.¹⁵ Four models commonly applied to battle descriptions are: 1) uniformity of behavior, where there are no reports of cowardice or bravery in the text, only perfect obedience to the orders of the commanding officer, 2) lack of continuity in the actions described, suggesting that the author does not have all the details of the battle, 3) rigid stratification of the army into groups of warriors (infantry, cavalry) where few men, usually officers, are mentioned by name, and 4) oversimplification of the behavior of men participating in battle.¹⁶ Close examination of the texts will show that the characteristics suggested by Keegan for modern European

12. Runciman suggests that the mountain passes were left unguarded because the Rus' were dealing with Bulgar unrest in the North and could not spare any troops. See Runciman, *History of the First Bulgarian Empire*, 208-9. For a different view see Stokes, "Balkan Campaigns," 491-94. Stokes believes that Tzimiskes offered Svjatoslav a false peace treaty that gave the emperor time to cross the mountain passes unharmed.

13. Leo Diaconus (Bonn ed.), 128-59. Thurn, ed., *Skylitzes, Synopsis*, 294-309. Also Schlumberger, *Épopée byzantine*, 132-48.

14. Keegan, *Face of Battle*, 36-46.

15. *Ibid.*, 36.

16. *Ibid.*, 39.

military historiography can be applied to Byzantine texts as well. After removing the artificial model of battle description, it is possible to recover fragments of realistic accounts that are able to clarify the battle as well as provide better understanding of the author and his time.

Skylitzes' account of the initial conflict is simple and short but conveys the feel of the struggle and the unity of the Byzantine forces. The army arrived a few miles from Dorostolon. The two leaders, John Tzimiskes and Svjatoslav, spoke words of encouragement to their men in order to strengthen their spirits. As the trumpets sounded, the armies collided with equal fighting spirit. On the first assault the Byzantines broke the Rus' lines, but the Rus' responded with equal strength. The battle remained undecided for some time, until the Byzantines charged the left of the Rus' and slowed their advance. Observing the Rus' reorganizing, the emperor decided to take matters into his own hands. He sent some of his men where the battle line had been weakened by the previous assault, and himself charged against the enemy, a brave act which encouraged his army to do the same. Skylitzes mentions that victory changed sides in the battle twelve times, but the Rus' were overcome and many were killed while others were taken prisoner. Those who were able to get away escaped to Dorostolon.¹⁷

Leo the Deacon added liveliness to the battle description with a number of psychological insights. The troops were motivated by pride, among other things, and did not want to be embarrassed by losing to those they considered inferior opponents. The Rus' in their short military history were not accustomed to losing, while the Byzantines felt that they must not be defeated ingloriously by a nation accustomed to fighting on foot (obviously Leo had in mind the pride of the Byzantine army, the mounted *kataphraktai*).¹⁸ The Rus' counterattack was accompanied by the roaring of the barbarians.¹⁹ Leo added that many men fell on both sides. Here, as in Skylitzes, the emperor's presence on the battlefield and his encouraging words to the troops turned the encounter in favor of the Byzantines. The trumpets sounded, and the Byzantines ad-

17. Thurn, ed., Skylitzes. *Synopsis*, 299, lines 42-300, line 64.

18. On the organization of the Byzantine infantry in the tenth century, see McGeer, "Infantry versus Cavalry," 135-45. For the development of the cavalry in Byzantium, see Dennis, ed., *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 155, 191.

19. Leo Diaconus (Bonn ed.), 141, line 5.

vanced with a loud clamor. Leo could not hide his bias, which was expressed clearly in the language he used to describe the war cries of the Byzantines and those of the Rus'. In the first case the Byzantines attacked with a distinct battle cry. In comparison the roaring of the Rus' simply created a barbaric racket.²⁰ The same applies to Leo's perception of the battle techniques of the two armies. The Rus' attack was dominated by anger and beastlike behavior,²¹ while their adversaries moved with experience and technical knowledge.²² The Byzantines celebrated their first victory at Doro-stolon by praising the emperor. He in turn rewarded them by granting promotions in rank, providing feasts, and at the same time reminding them to fight with greater willingness.²³

The authors' accounts agree on the main points of the battle. It is evident, however, that Skylitzes is primarily concerned with the actions of the emperor as a general, while the troops fall into a secondary category. There are no accounts of the names and actions of individual officers or soldiers, and few details of the military action that made the battle a Byzantine success. Beyond the seemingly generic approach to battle description, however, Skylitzes is able to convey the power of Tzimiskes' personality and his able generalship. Leo's account, on the other hand, does not contain significantly greater amounts of information, and he is also responsible for rigid stratification of the army into one big mass led by the emperor. Leo, however, has made an extra effort to communicate a psychological background to the conflict. He attempts to explain the fear that dominated the minds of the soldiers in the beginning of the confrontation: the Rus' fearing defeat and humiliation after an impressive record of victories, the Byzantines considering the embarrassment of losing to a barbaric nation with inferior military technology. In demonstrating John Tzimiskes' able generalship, Leo also reveals the psychology of motivation that directed the Byzantine armies. Relying on Skylitzes account, one does not get a sense of why the soldiers were really fighting other than the traditional concept of loyalty to emperor and coun-

20. *Ibid.*, 141, line 13 and line 5.

21. *Ibid.*, 141, line 3.

22. *Ibid.*, 141, lines 5-6. Regarding the necessity of good order in the Byzantine army, see Dennis, ed., *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 45-47. For further discussion see Haldon, "Some Aspects of Byzantine Military Technology," 11-47.

23. Leo Diaconus, (Bonn ed.), 140, lines 14-141, line 19.

try, thus giving an almost magical quality to the ability of an emperor (or a general) to lead armies to battle. Leo, on the other hand, shows battle motivation fueled by pragmatic concerns. Beyond the basic desire to survive, soldiers fought to receive tangible rewards: higher positions in the hierarchy, greater payment, or a larger share of battle spoils. Accepting the human nature of the soldiers, Leo the Deacon offers a more realistic picture of the battle scene. He also shows that Tzimiskes was not only a good tactician, but also a good politician in his relations with his army.

Skylitzes' history has preserved an original episode from the siege of Dorostolon.²⁴ After several battles and a tight siege by land and sea, the Rus', who had sought refuge in Dorostolon, were low on supplies. On a dark, stormy night Svjatoslav sent out two thousand of his men to collect supplies in small wooden boats. On their return (presumably some time later) these men came upon a group of Byzantines who were watering the horses and collecting wood. The Rus' approached them unnoticed, killed many of them, and returned to the city unharmed. Skylitzes records that the incident angered the emperor, who blamed the leaders of the fleet for not detecting the exit of the Rus'. John Tzimiskes threatened the naval commanders with death if a similar situation were to occur.²⁵

The event is significant not only as a lesson in strategy, but also as an example of the historical evidence that can be derived from military histories. In accordance with the advice in most military treatises the emperor's tactic did not center on defeating the enemy in a single battle.²⁶ On the contrary, he attempted to break down the enemy's defenses by cutting their supplies, by using siege equipment to destroy enemy lives and fortifications, by cutting off access to the city by water, and by employing all available military technology and psychology on the battlefield. Tzimiskes' elaborate preparations before setting out on the campaign prove that he expected the conflict to be long and difficult. If Skylitzes had written his history following a standard formula for the description of military events, this anecdote would be out of place. Its presence in the history confirms that Skylitzes (and his original source) was interested in offering an accurate account of the conflict. The absence of this event from Leo's history is somewhat surprising since

24. Thurn, ed., Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 302, lines 21-41.

25. *Ibid.*, 302, lines 40-41.

26. Dain "Stratégistes byzantins," 317-93.

he usually has a more detailed account than Skylitzes. The event is uniquely fitted to the situation in Dorostolon, which required a siege both by land and by sea; it also added continuity to the story of the siege and helped explain the position of the participants. Skylitzes' presentation of the siege story offers a gem of historical fact and a possible insight regarding the purpose of the work. Skylitzes clearly means to teach his readers with this story the value of alert and vigilant warriors and the consequences of laxity in a siege. The emperor himself cannot be blamed for the incident because he was in command of the army, not the fleet. It is clear, however, that the naval officers with their careless behavior caused harm to the Byzantine camp both by losing their own men, and by allowing the reinforcement of supplies to enter the city.

If we presume that both Skylitzes and Leo the Deacon had access to approximately the same sources, patriotism may have prevented the inclusion of other embarrassing instances in both histories. For example, Skylitzes omits the unflattering story regarding an officer and relative of the emperor, John Kourkouas. Leo, on the other hand, presents Kourkouas as a drunken officer butchered in an ill-fated accident. Whether knowledge of Kourkouas' endeavors came from private sources or from the original source of the two authors is unclear. Sensing the eminent attack of the Rus' on the siege equipment that he was guarding, Kourkouas rode out with his chosen men against the enemy. Leo mentions that Kourkouas had been drunk and half asleep—it was after their midday meal. After falling in a pit, Kourkouas' horse threw him off, and he was quickly slaughtered by a throng of barbarians who mistook him for the emperor because of the excessive ornamentation of his armor. The author mentions in passing that the dead officer, Kourkouas, was known to have plundered the holy vessels of many Bulgars, and made them his personal treasure.²⁷ Apart from Leo's negative view of John Kourkouas, the episode adds information on the structure of the soldiers' lives and the dietary supplies carried by the Byzantines on their campaigns. Contrary to the advice given in some military manuals, wine seems to have been present and available to the troops.²⁸

27. Leo Diaconus (Bonn ed.), 147, lines 24–148, line 22.

28. This is not the only occasion wine was offered to Byzantine soldiers. Skylitzes mentions that wine and water were offered to the troops, see below note

With respect to the same incident, Skylitzes presents the heroic resistance of a Byzantine officer whose death led to the protection of valuable siege machines instrumental in destroying the walls and the spirits of the besieged Rus'. In Skylitzes' version Kourkouas responded quickly to the Rus' attack, riding his horse into the midst of the enemy. One of the enemy lances hit his horse, and the officer fell among the enemy. Kourkouas was murdered violently, but the Byzantines rushed against the Rus', saved the siege machines, and pushed the enemy back into the city.²⁹ In this case Skylitzes seems to have simplified the events and superimposed standardized heroic behavior. Believing that his history would record events and, at the same time, educate the reader, the author may have felt justified in eliminating examples of improper behavior (drunkenness in this case) by Byzantine officers. The death of a military leader or officer in battle, in most cases, led to the demoralization of the soldiers and retreat, as seen in numerous specific examples in the histories. Here, however, Kourkouas' men were able to hold off the Rus' attack and force their retreat into the city.

The last battle at Dorostolon is a perfect example of how facts can be extracted from models of battle rhetoric, and how these artificial models were used by the Byzantines to satisfy moral and religious needs. According to Skylitzes, Svjatoslav consulted with his officers and decided that the only honorable solution to the conflict was to meet the Byzantines on the battlefield. When the final battle commenced, the Rus' fought bravely, and the Byzantines began to falter after suffering from heat and thirst as they were heavily armed and it was the middle of the day.³⁰ Observing the situation, the emperor rushed to help with those around him, and ordered that the soldiers be brought flasks filled with a blend of wine and water to quench their thirst. As a result, the Byzantines were able to counterattack with great strength. The battle remained equal between the two armies. Perceiving the narrowness of the battlefield, the emperor instructed his generals to move back to a wider plain. Tzimiskes ordered his men to feign retreat in

30. For the supplies recommended for the army, see Dennis, ed., Maurice, *Strategikon*, 67.

29. Thurn, ed., Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 304, lines 74-85.

30. *Ibid.*, 306, lines 45-53.

hopes that the Rus' army could be deceived into a reckless advance. During this engagement one general, Theodore of Misthia, fell to the ground after his horse had been hit by a spear. A fierce battle broke out around him. Theodore defended himself by lifting a dead Rus' by the belt and using him as a shield. After a short time he was able to make his way back to the Byzantine line.³¹

In a later episode of the battle, the son of the ruler of Crete, Anemas, saw Svjatoslav fighting nearby. Riding his horse out against him, Anemas struck him in the middle of his head. The Rus' leader was saved only by his protective armor. Surrounded by many Rus', Anemas was killed after impressing the enemy with his heroic actions. At this time a windstorm rose from the south and blew directly into the eyes of the Rus'.³² Ahead of the Byzantine army everyone saw a man on a white horse breaking the front lines of the Rus' attack. The man was not seen before or after the battle, and it is said that he was Theodore, one of the martyrs,³³ and the patron saint of the emperor. The storm and the warrior frightened the Rus' who turned to the city, but found Skleros before the gates. There was a great deal of confusion on the field; as a result, many Rus' were killed both by a stampede of their own men and by the attacking Byzantines. Skylitzes records that almost all of the Rus' were wounded. Knowing that there was no other hope, Svjatoslav sought to make a treaty with the Byzantines. In the treaty the Rus' were to be permitted to return to their country with all their men. The commercial rights of the Rus' were to remain intact. A brief meeting took place between Svjatoslav and the emperor, and the war was ended.³⁴

This last battle description is startlingly powerful in both the account of Skylitzes and Leo the Deacon. The emperor's actions indicated his continuous involvement in the battle and demonstrated his military ability. Tzimiskes' strategies and the ability of

31. *Ibid.*, 307, lines 65-74.

32. *Ibid.*, 308, line 10: Skylitzes believes that the storm was divinely sent to help the Byzantines: λέγεται δὲ καὶ θειοτέρας τότε τυχεῖν τοὺς Ῥωμαίους ἐπικουρίας.

33. Both authors mention a vision seen by a woman in Constantinople the day before the battle, a vision which foretold the martyr's appearance on the battlefield. See Thurn, ed., Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 308, lines 19-309, line 25; and Leo Diaconus (Bonn ed.), 154, lines 9-22. The martyr Theodore was a well-known Byzantine military saint, Theodore Stratelates: see Delehaye, *Légendes grecques*.

34. Thurn, ed., Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 307, lines 76-309, line 43.

his army show the effectiveness of the new military training that made so many military successes possible for the next fifty years. Even at a most difficult moment in the battle Tzimiskes was able to order a delicate strategic move—the feigned retreat to a wider battlefield—which was executed perfectly in spite of the losses the Byzantines had been suffering.³⁵ But there are other Byzantine soldiers that gained recognition in this particular conflict. Theodore of Misthia and Anemas were singled out for their heroic actions and fighting ability. Their spectacular feats of bravery are described in great detail and provide a very realistic depiction of the battle. The fact that Skylitzes and Leo the Deacon disagree on the exact place where Anemas struck Svjatoslav does not particularly discredit either account. According to Skylitzes, Anemas struck Svjatoslav on the middle of the head, an admittedly difficult accomplishment for a man charging on horseback.³⁶ Leo reports that Anemas hit Svjatoslav between the neck and the shoulder, an area protected by heavy chain mail. The difference may be due to a variation in the sources or an attempt by one of the authors to make the scene even more spectacular and dramatic, while showing Anemas to be as excellent in his aim as he was in bravery. In Leo's account, Anemas was able, in a final act of heroism, to kill many Rus' before being killed himself.³⁷ Anemas' bravery in this battle is consistent with the warrior's heroic acts in an earlier part of the campaign.³⁸ Even though the mass of soldiers does not gain the acknowledgement modern military historians demand in order to verify the authenticity of a battle piece, the narratives of the battle of Dorostolon come alive with the sights and sounds of the conflict.

Skylitzes' battle chronicle ends abruptly with the resolution of the contest by divine intervention. A windstorm and the presence of the martyr Theodore on the field, just after Anemas' death, led the Byzantine army to victory. This artificial ending to the struggle is in contrast with the factual information the author has provided in previous pages, but it shows the deeply imbedded Byzantine belief that men are unable to resolve conflicts based on their virtue, strength, and wisdom alone. Divine intervention was necessary to

35. Dennis, ed., *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 99–101.

36. Thurn, ed., *Skylitzes, Synopsis*, 308 lines 5–6.

37. Leo Diáconus (Bonn ed.), 153, lines 1–8.

38. *Ibid.*, 149, lines 4–17.

alter fate and give justice to the righteous. The battle for superiority between the Byzantines and the Rus' was not only a contest to demonstrate greater strength; it was also a struggle to win a moral victory over the powers of evil—the enemies of Byzantium.

Leo the Deacon's account differs somewhat from Skylitzes' version. Although both agree on the basic events of the battle, Leo the Deacon places greater emphasis on the strategic abilities of Tzimiskes that ultimately led to the victory over the Rus'. The narrative begins with a powerful Rus' attack that destroyed many horses. Leo does not give any other excuse for the Byzantine inability to overcome the Rus' other than the enemy's strength in the field. It appears that the Rus' were adjusting to the charge of the *kataphraktoi*, and were able to slow down the advance of the mounted troops with the effective use of their archers.³⁹ Anemas' demise is significant for the impact it had on the morale of the two armies. Leo writes that the death of Anemas gave strength to the Rus' who began to attack with greater fervor, while the Byzantines retreated. At this critical moment Tzimiskes renewed the attack by placing himself in the forefront. This demonstration of fearlessness inspired the troops to stop their flight and renew their attack. Leo recognizes the Byzantine officer Bardas Skleros for his successful fulfillment of orders. Skleros cut off the Rus' return to the city causing the battle to end in the slaughter of the Rus' troops.

Leo's description differs from Skylitzes' version in including the emperor's charge just before the windstorm. Whereas Skylitzes attributes Tzimiskes' final victory at Dorostolon directly to divine intervention, Leo also gives credit to the emperor and his able generalship that redirected the Byzantine army against the enemy. At the critical moment of the battle the Byzantine troops commanded by their emperor turned their horses and charged the enemy. Just then they were aided by a divinely sent windstorm and the appearance of the martyr Theodore ahead of the Byzantine army. Both Skylitzes and Leo the Deacon relate the phenomenon in similar terms.⁴⁰ The miraculous incident resolves the violence of battle in the most acceptable way. If the Byzantine soldiers, the emperor, or the reader of the histories had any doubt of the validity of the

39. Speidel, "Catafractarii," 151–56.

40. Thurn, ed., Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 309, lines 19–25; Leo Diaconus (Bonn ed.), 154, lines 10–22.

reasons and motives that led to the war with the Rus', the divine presence, verified by the appearance of the martyr, confirmed the soundness of the Byzantine cause.

Before presenting the terms of the treaty, Leo made an attempt to understand the emotional condition of Svjatoslav. He suggested that sadness and desperation over the loss of Svjatoslav's men were replaced by a sense of responsibility and determination to protect the remainder of his army and return home. Svjatoslav's psychological profile showed a man full of dignity and pride as well as a leader with a great sense of responsibility towards his men. Svjatoslav was also shown as a shrewd politician, who although defeated, managed to negotiate the maintenance of the trade treaties between the Rus' and Byzantium. The number of dead seems exaggerated in Leo's version (Skylitzes mentions that many Rus' were killed and most of the surviving men were injured, but gives no numbers). Leo estimates that fifteen thousand Rus' died in the battle while only three hundred Byzantines were killed, although he too admits that many were wounded.

The purpose of this paper has been to examine Byzantine military historiography in light of the siege and battles of Dorostolon in 971. The study has centered on the examination of two Byzantine accounts of the battle and the differences in expression and description of the events. Putting aside the patriotic tendencies of the authors and standardized models of heroic behavior, we are able to consider the conflict in a different light. Above all the campaign was fought and won by the Byzantines based on their superiority in numbers, supplies, and military technology. We must accept that the battle scenes described real events, and helped explain the circumstances that led to the Byzantine victory. The organization, obedience, and skill of the Byzantine troops may well have been the result of the reconstruction of the army that took place under the emperors Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes and the introduction of the *athanatoi* during the latter's reign.⁴¹ Leo recorded with pride the organized advances and calculated retreats as well as the ability of the troops to attack and defeat such a respectable enemy as the Rus'. Aware of the terror the Rus' had caused the Byzantines in Constantinople,⁴² Leo emphasizes

41. Dennis, ed., *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 250, 255.

42. The vision of the woman is a clear indication of the awareness Constantin-

the ability of both armies with a distinct bias in favor of the Byzantine *taxis*. As a distant chronicler separated by one hundred years from the actual battle, Skylitzes can only see the superiority of the Byzantines as part of the divine order of the world. Both Skylitzes and Leo the Deacon reveal in their histories valuable details concerning the conflict. Leo makes the reader aware of all the sights and sounds of the battle and attempts to relay the emotional world of the participants—fear, faith, greed, and heroism. He introduces the concept that not all Byzantine officers were worthy, capable men (as in the example of John Kourkouas). Skylitzes makes a similar comment through his description of the incompetent naval officers. Both historians reveal that the relationship between the human and the divine was perceived in close personal terms and that the fate of the empire was directed by heavenly influence.

The baggage of preconceptions found in Leo the Deacon's and Skylitzes' work is not unique to these authors or to Byzantine historians in general. The nature of military historiography seems to be based on an assortment of models and assumptions difficult to remove even from contemporary reports. Much more information on the battles of Dorostolon would be required to make the accounts complete—eye witness descriptions, battle and siege plans, logistics reports, and geographical maps, to name a few. But even the present evidence in the texts offers a captivating picture of Byzantine warfare and valuable details on the battles they describe.

opolitans had of the danger from the North. Detailed descriptions in Thurn, ed., Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 308, lines 19–309, line 25; and Leo Diaconus (Bonn ed.), 154, lines 10–22.