

New Europe College Yearbook

2024-2025

Volume 1



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ISSN 1584-0298

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MILITARY TACTICS AND LITERARY STRATEGIES: STRATAGEMS, WAR WRITING, AND THE DATING OF JOHN SKYLITZES' *SYNOPSIS HISTORION*

Georgios Chatzelis

Abstract

This paper focuses on the study of three stratagems recorded in the *Synopsis Historion* of John Skylitzes, which are otherwise absent from any other independent Byzantine and foreign source. The discussion sheds light on war writing in the *Synopsis*: it examines its sources for military events, its reception of military trickery, and discusses how the latter two can result into a synthesis of the conflicting views on the dating, purpose, and methodology of the work. The paper argues that John Skylitzes drew on stratagems of antiquity to enhance the image and the legacy of aristocratic families which were central to the ruling regime at the time of the composition of the work, and envisages the *Synopsis* as an earlier history, dating to c. 1059–1067.

Keywords: *Synopsis Historion*, John Skylitzes, John Scylitzes, Byzantium, Byzantine history, Byzantine historiography, war writing, stratagems, Polyaenus, Sylloge Tacticorum, Corpus Perditum, military history, military manuals

John Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historion* is one of our major sources for the period between c. 811–1057. Despite its significance, the *Synopsis* has not been the centre of many detailed and extensive studies.¹ Recent decades have witnessed a renewed interest in the *Synopsis* with the works of Jonathan Shepard, Catherine Holmes and Eirini-Sophia Kiapidou being the most influential.² Although these contributions have shed significant light on the *Synopsis* and its author, there is still no clear scholarly consensus on various aspects of the work, including the date of its composition, its sources for military events, and its author's methods and agendas.³

The most widely accepted thesis on the *Synopsis* is that it was compiled during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118). It was partly based on lost promotional sources, probably biased historical narratives or biographies of prominent generals (e.g., of Bardas Skleros and Katakalon Kekaumenos), and their material was partly tampered by John Skylitzes, who, influenced by the political and military milieu at the time of Alexios I, aimed at demonstrating that the well-being of the military aristocracy and their loyalty to the imperial authority were central to the prosperity of the state.⁴ The alternative view sees the *Synopsis* as an earlier work, dating c. 1059–1070. It casts doubt on whether its sources are indeed promotional accounts, perceiving them as possible oral sources and well-informed but more or less neutral historical narratives. The objective record of events without particular political sympathies is envisaged as the main goal of the author, coupled with the underlining of virtues of certain generals and emperors (e.g. benevolence, justice, bravery, prudence, loyalty, martial and tactical prowess), irrespective of political affiliation, which John Skylitzes considered beneficial for the troubled times in which he wrote.⁵

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the problem of the sources of the *Synopsis*, and to discuss how this issue can result into a synthesis of the conflicting views about the dating, purpose and methodology of the work. I will focus primarily on three stratagems recorded by Skylitzes, which are otherwise absent from any other independent Byzantine and foreign source. The first two ruses were reported to have taken place during the first rebellion of Bardas Skleros against Basil II (976–1025), between 976–979, and the third during the reign of Michael IV (1034–1041).

Before we investigate Skylitzes' account of these events, it is worth looking at our earliest source for the same operations, the 10th-century history of Leo the Deacon. For the battle at Lapara, we read that Bardas Skleros

laid waste Asia for four years, ravaging the countryside with fire and destroying cities, cruelly defeating and slaughtering in a pitched battle the Roman forces that were deployed against him. [One army] was led by the *patrikios* and *stratopedarches* Peter, when battle broke out on the plain of Lapara [...] at which time even the *patrikios* Peter himself was hit by a spear and knocked from his horse, and breathed his last right in the line of battle [...].⁶

Leo the Deacon's description of the siege of Nikaia is similarly vague and brief. We are informed that "Skleros was puffed up and elated at these victories and considered himself irresistible and invincible. Thereupon, he forced Nicaea and Abydos and Attaleia to surrender, and subdued all Roman territory in Asia".⁷

Skylitzes' version of the above engagements, though later than that of Leo the Deacon, is far more detailed. For the battle at Lapara, John Skylitzes recorded that Peter the *stratopedarches* and Bardas Skleros had camped opposite one another, when the rebel "outmanoeuvred his enemy by preparing a great amount of food as though he were going to give a banquet for his army". Peter ordered his army to feast too, "thinking that he [Skleros] would not instigate a battle that day". Skylitzes then reports that "when Skleros became aware of this (he had his troops already prepared for battle), the trumpet suddenly sounded the attack and he fell on the enemy soldiers as they feasted." The imperial forces initially withstood Skleros' assault, but were soon dispersed or killed.⁸

Similarly, the siege of Nikaia is narrated in much more detail, mainly from the perspective of the besieged. We are informed of the defender's name, Manuel Erotikos, and we are given an account which suggests that the siege was by far a more daunting task for Skleros than Leo the Deacon presented it to be. We read that Manuel repelled Skleros' attempts to take the city by storm, bravely withstanding the rebel's "assault, repelling the ladders from the walls and burning the siege-engines with Greek fire." Skleros was compelled to settle for a long siege in the hopes that he would starve the garrison out. When the city's supplies were almost over, Skylitzes has it that, out of desperation, Manuel attempted to deceive Skleros with a trick. "He had the granaries of Nicaea filled with sand in secret and then a little grain was spread over the sand [...]. Then he summoned some of the enemy they had taken prisoner, showed them the granaries and sent them back with orders to report to Skleros that there was enough food for two years." The prisoners were also to disclose that Manuel was only reluctantly siding with the emperor, and that he was willing to surrender the city if the garrison and the population were allowed to leave with their weapons and moveable property. Skleros agreed and only after he had occupied Nikaia, he realized he was outwitted.⁹

The third stratagem occurred during the reign of emperor Michael IV, and more specifically in 1038 when the Arabs attempted to capture the city of Edessa by trickery. John Skylitzes is the only source to mention both the following stratagem and the siege of Edessa that year altogether. We are

informed that “twelve Arab chieftains with five hundred horses and five hundred camels carrying a thousand chests containing a thousand heavy-armed troops” arrived at Edessa. The Arabs reported to its commander, *protospatharios* Barasbatzes the Iberian, that

they were on their way to the emperor, bearing gifts, but their aim was to bring the chests into the city, let the soldiers out by night and take Edessa. The commander received the chieftains graciously and feasted them, but he ordered the horsemen and baggage to remain outside [the city]. [...] A poor Armenian [...] heard one of the men in a chest [...]. The beggar, who understood the Saracen language, ran off and reported this to the commander.

Barasbatzes excused himself from dinner, broke open the chests and defeated the concealed soldiers with the help of his garrison. He then returned to slay the chieftains, except for one, whom he mutilated and ordered to return to his country to report what took place.¹⁰

My thesis is that all three stratagems constitute an invention of Skylitzes which served both literary and political purposes. All three ruses share some common characteristics. Firstly, they constitute quite unique and extraordinary cases of military trickery and are otherwise unrecorded in Byzantine and foreign historical narratives. For example, it is difficult to explain why Leo the Deacon, a probable protégé of Basil II, failed to mention the heroic resistance of the loyalist Manuel Erotikos, since relevant military bulletins and oral accounts would have surely reached the capital, where Leo most probably resided at that time.¹¹ Secondly, they come up as independent interpolated detailed war stories within Skylitzes’ otherwise telescopic and brief coverage of military operations. Thirdly, they seem to have been copied from identical stratagems featured in histories, military manuals and compilation literature, and finally, they are recorded to have been undertaken by individuals whose families were on good grounds with the Komnenoi.¹²

In light of the above, it will be worth exploring which sources inspired Skylitzes’ stratagems. Five potential extant sources feature stories of military trickery similar to those in the *Synopsis*: the *Histories* of Herodotus (c. 430 BC), the *Stratagems* of Polyaeus (c. 160/1), the 3rd-century *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertius, the Byzantine versions of Polyaeus, such as the *Hypotheseis* (c. 850), the *Strategemata Ambrosiana* (c. 946–959) and the *Parecbolae* (late 10th–early 11th century), as well as

the *Sylloge Tacticorum*, a military manual which included a section on stratagems (c. 930–944).

The ruse of Bardas Skleros features in Herodotus, Polyaeus, its Byzantine versions (*Hypotheseis*, *Strategemata Ambrosiana*, *Parecbolae*) and in the *Sylloge Tacticorum* as a stratagem of the Spartan king Cleomenes I (c. 520–490 BC), employed against the Argives at the Battle of Sepeia (c. 494 BC).¹³ None of the wording of the above texts resembles that of Skylitzes so closely in order to be proposed as a direct source. This seems to denote that Skylitzes either reworked extensively the vocabulary of an extant source or drew the stratagem from a non-extant one. A possible source might have been the pro-Skleros account identified by Holmes.¹⁴ The closest extant version seems to be that of the *Strategemata* and the *Hypotheseis* which reads:

In a war between the Lacedaemonians and the Argives, the two armies were encamped facing each other. Cleomenes, the king of the Lacedaemonians, noticed that every command in his army was betrayed to the enemy, who acted accordingly. When he ordered his men to arms, the enemy armed also [...] when he ordered his men to rest, they did likewise. Therefore, he gave out secret instructions that, whenever he next gave public orders to take a meal, his troops should arm for battle. His public orders were as usual transmitted to the unsuspecting Argives; and when Cleomenes advanced in arms to attack them, they were easily overwhelmed, being unarmed and unprepared to oppose him.¹⁵

The stratagem of Manuel Erotikos features as a ruse of Mygdonius (an obscure figure of antiquity), Bias of Priene (fl. 6th century BC), one the seven sages of Ancient Greece, and of an anonymous, in Polyaeus, Diogenes Laertius, and in the Byzantine versions of Polyaeus respectively (*Hypotheseis* and *Strategemata Ambrosiana*). Nonetheless, in all of the above accounts the protagonist not only sprinkled a layer of wheat on top of the sand, but also fattened some mules as further proof of his city's abundance of supplies.¹⁶ John Skylitzes' version is closer to that of the *Sylloge Tacticorum* which omitted the part about the fattened animal, but attributed the whole stratagem to Merops, an obscure and unknown individual, either a figure of Greek mythology or the Sassanian king Shapur I (240–270).¹⁷ According to the version of the *Sylloge*:

Since Merops was besieged in the city of Antigonea and was short of supplies, he filled two of the largest silos with sand at night, and sprinkled

grain on top. When the enemy envoys arrived, he received them and placing them next to the mouth of the silo, he said 'Do not be deceived into thinking that we have a shortage of supplies, because as you see, we have food which can last for a very long time. In any case, if it seems good [to you], make a truce and withdraw peacefully'. When the envoys saw that, they immediately proceeded with the truce and most readily lifted the siege.¹⁸

Barasbatzes' ruse with the chests also finds an identical parallel in the *Sylloge*. It is attributed to the same obscure figure of Merops and reads:

While the same man was investing a Syrian city for a long time with no results, he lifted the siege, pretending that he made a truce with the emperor in Rome and announcing that he would send envoys with gifts shortly. Therefore, he concealed two hundred heavily armed men in an equal number of wooden baskets, loading them onto one hundred camels. He commanded the aforementioned envoys to camp in front of the walls of the city, which had been under siege shortly before, and to cajole its commander with every kind of reasoning and luxurious gifts to receive into the city the presents that were being sent to the emperor, in order to keep them safe. Afterwards Merops himself approached with his army and, at any rate, when this happened he became the master of the city because the heavily armed soldiers in the baskets emerged at around midnight and joyfully let Merops in together with all his army by lighting huge signal-fires on the towers and smashing the gates without any trouble.¹⁹

While the stratagem of the *Sylloge* is very similar in content to that of the *Synopsis*, the wording is not so identical to warrant Skylitzes' direct copying from it. The historian may have had the passages of the *Sylloge* reworked before he interpolated them into the *Synopsis*, but it is more probable that he relied on a common non-extant source.

Although there are good grounds to suggest that a pro-Skleros source was indeed employed by John Skylitzes, I do not think that this constituted the source of any of these stratagems. Bardas Skleros' ruse may seem in line with the agenda of a promotional biography, but it is hard to imagine that such an account would have mentioned Manuel's outwitting of Bardas Skleros, let alone the stratagem at Edessa, whose chronological scope exceeded Bardas Skleros' life. Similarly, I do not believe that these stratagems were part of the now lost histories possibly available to Skylitzes either (by Theodore of Sebastea, Demetrios of Cyzicus and John the Monk).

Although the content of lost sources can only be assumed, Skylitzes' ruses were attributed to individuals who were active both before and after c.1025/8 which entails that they would have appeared in more than one of these non-extant histories.²⁰ This seems unlikely though, given the uniqueness of such stratagems in Byzantine historiography. Alternatively, the evidence seems to suggest that Skylitzes copied the three ruses from a lost source which was common both to him and to the author of the *Sylloge*. This explains why all three stratagems in the *Synopsis* feature in the *Sylloge* as well, but with different wording. Most probably, Skylitzes drew on the *Corpus Perditum*, a lost 9th- or early 10th-century military manual which included an extensive section on various types of stratagems.²¹

We have established so far that Skylitzes' stratagems were most probably inspired by ruses of antiquity found in the *Corpus Perditum* and were interpolated in the *Synopsis* as independent war anecdotes. Consequently, these anecdotes must have had a message to convey, they must have served some kind of purpose or purposes in Skylitzes' historical narrative.²² Previous scholarship has demonstrated Skylitzes' significant interest in several military men, mostly from second-rate families, and his promotional representation of them, largely through entertaining anecdotes which showcased their leadership, daring, military and tactical skill. The most obvious examples are Anemas, Anthes Alyates, Nikephoros Xiphias, Eustathios Daphnomeles, George Maniakes, Basil Theodorokanos and Katakalon Kekaumenos. The current consensus is that several of these anecdotes originated from promotional sources which Skylitzes included because they promoted his agenda and/or concerned families which were prominent in the reign of Alexios I, some of them in cooperation with the regime.²³

From my point of view, Skylitzes intended to grant a more special place to Skleros, Erotikos and Barasbatzes, because, instead of attributing to them some conventional anecdote of military trickery to highlight their skills, he chose quite unique and distinguishable ruses from the authoritative classical tradition. Primarily, we can perceive this classical *mimesis* as a conscious choice on Skylitzes' part to convey political and military ideals to his fellow educated readers in a subtle way. The audience of Byzantine historical narratives was trained to recognize allusions to Greek literature and simultaneously to draw parallels between the past and present.²⁴ In this line of reasoning, Bardas Skleros featured as a second Cleomenes I on account of his military skill. The latter was among the most famous and successful Spartan generals and, interestingly enough, when he had

his co-king Demaratus (515–491 BC) overthrown, he was pardoned by the Spartans. This allusion may have built upon the pro-Skleros source which probably deemed Bardas Skleros as worthy of reconciliation with the regime of Basil II.²⁵ Likewise, the failed defender of Nikaia, Manuel Erotikos, emerged as a wise and shrewd commander equal in wisdom to Bias of Priene or to the legendary figure of Merops, both well known to imperial and aristocratic circles.²⁶ Finally, Barasbatzes' prudence to only admit the Arab chieftains inside the walls of Edessa placed him to a better place than the anonymous commander in Syria who fell for the ruse of Merops/Sapur I (as per the *Sylloge*), and featured him so good a commander who could potentially resist even the ancient Merops/Sapur I himself, and by extension the easterners, Arabs and Turks.

On a second level, these unusual stories of military trickery coupled with allusions to the classical tradition and political innuendos, probably produced a significant entertaining effect for Skylitzes' readership/audience some of whom might have been members of the aforementioned families. It could be that Skylitzes took advantage of a lack of detailed information pertaining to these operations, perhaps due to their insignificant scale or anticlimactic engagements, so as to embellish them with fascinating accounts of military trickery. This entertainment, however, does not seem to have come at the cost of the kernel of truth behind the events. After all, Bardas Skleros had indeed prevailed at Lapara and Nikaia, and while a siege of Edessa is not otherwise recorded in 1038, there were a series of them, including one in 1036. The Arab attack of Edessa in 1038 might have originally been a skirmish of a short or an easily repelled attempt.²⁷

The image of Skylitzes which emerges from our discussion is incompatible with the viewpoint that envisaged him as a detached compiler whose aim was the production of a balanced, unbiased account.²⁸ Instead, Skylitzes treated Skleros, Erotikos and Barasbatzes in a promotional way and actively enhanced their reputation and skills. Somehow, these individuals were relevant to Skylitzes' agenda. Perhaps Skylitzes perceived his historical material with the political lenses of the period in which he was writing, and his aim might have been to introduce these stratagems so as to rewrite and reclaim the past of three aristocratic families which were central to the imperial regime of his time.

The context of the reign of Alexios I fits well with our observations. Skylitzes might have preserved the promotional anecdotes of Anemas, Alyates, Xiphias, Maniakes, Theodorokanos and Kekaumenos because they were in partial cooperation with Alexios I's regime. For instance, from

the time of Alexios I we know of: a Nicholas Anemas (possibly *doux* of Skopje); an anonymous Alyates (commander of Glabinitza), and depending on the dating of the seals, perhaps an Alyates *patrikios* and a Pothos Alyates *protoproedros* and *katepano*; perhaps an Eustathios (*primikerios* and *koitonites*), Constantine (*protoproedros*) and Anonymous (*proedros*) Xiphias; a Constantine (*sebastos*), George (*protospatharios*), and Joseph (*tourmarches ton Moglenon*) Maniakes; perhaps a Tzotzikios (*kouropalates* and *doux*), Taronites (*nobellisimos*), and George (*protokouropalates*) Theodorokanos; and, finally, a Michael Kekaumenos, a military man who was entrusted with the defence of Sardis, Philadelphia, Avlona, Hierikho and Kanina, and the command of the Byzantine rear-guard in one of Alexios I's expeditions.²⁹

If our line of reasoning holds true though, we expect to find Erotikos, Skleros and Barasbatzes holding far more esteemed positions in Alexios I's regime. Indeed, Manuel Erotikos was actually a Komnenos, and a forefather of Alexios I, which very much explains Skylitzes' promotional treatment of him. In the *Synopsis*, Manuel was called *a man distinguished by birth, virtue and courage*, and, from the obscure and failed defender of Nikaia, he was reinvented to a stout guardian who, with his cleverness and skill, successfully repelled Skleros' assaults and then outwitted him with his stratagem, managing to save all of the city's garrison and citizens, and to minimize Skleros' victory. It is indicative how the image of Manuel Erotikos was progressively boosted by historians who wrote in the Komnenian period. The husband of Alexios I's daughter, Nikephoros Bryennios, referred to Manuel as the "scion of the family of the Komnenoi, who was appointed as an envoy to conclude conventions and agreements between Basil (II) [...] and the famous Bardas Skleros [...] and endeavored to reconnect the dislocated parts of the Roman Empire." No other surviving source, however, corroborates Nikephoros Bryennios' account that Manuel Erotikos assumed such extensive responsibilities. Skylitzes is equally sympathetic of Nikephoros Komnenos. His plotting with Giorgi I of Iberia (1014–1027) against Constantine VIII (1025–1028) is passed in silence, and the episode is presented as a misunderstanding greatly aggravated by the emperor's childish and irrational character.³⁰

Similarly, the Skleroi held prominent dignities and offices in the regime of Alexios I. Michael and John Skleros were probably appointed *strategos* of Peloponnesus and *doux* of Bodena and Sthlanitza, while Nikolas, Michael and Andronikos Skleros held judicial posts (*krites*, *megas droungarios*), participated in synods, were placed as chief ministers

(*logothetes tou dromou*) and were awarded the dignities of *kouropalates* and *protoproedros*. In fact, Andronikos Skleros, received by Alexios I, the greatest dignity ever bestowed to a member of the Skleros family, that of *sebastos* which was usually reserved only for members of the imperial family. Instead of featuring Bardas Skleros as a lesser figure to Bardas Phokas, betrayed by his closest associates (including his son), Skylitzes glorified the family's legacy. He underlined Bardas Skleros' disposition and tactics against the Rus (971), paid heed to the bravery of his brother, Constantine Skleros, and attributed to Bardas the stratagem at Lapara, promoting him as a shrewd general equal to the ancients and deserving of his reconciliation with the imperial family.³¹

The Barasbatzai, though less prominent a family, were most probably awarded imperial dignities by Alexios I, a known example being the *protobestes* Tornikios Barasbatzes. The Georgian families of the Barasbatzai, Tchordvanieli and the Bagratids were all related by kinship and were on good grounds with the Komnenoi. Irene of Alania, the cousin of empress Maria of Alania, was married to Isaakios Komnenos, the brother of Alexios I. What is more, David IV (1089–1125), of the same dynasty, was awarded by Alexios I the prestigious rank of *panypersebastos*, which was just below that of *kaisar* and closely reserved for members of the imperial family.³²

With the prosopographical pieces matching, one could rest the case here. Skylitzes recorded the deeds of bravery and tactical prudence of Anemas, Alyates, Xiphias, Maniakes, Theodorokanos and Kekaumenos because they were in a way favoured by the regime of Alexios I, awarded with dignities and offices, while for Erotikos, Skleros and Barasbatzes, whose families were the same as Alexios I's or part of his innermost circle, he reserved anecdotes which alluded to the authoritative classical tradition. Nevertheless, there are some inconsistencies with this line of thought. The *Synopsis* is quite sympathetic to the qualities, deeds and services of the military aristocracy, and Skylitzes' stratagems are essentially interpolated examples of idealized military conduct. Yet, the promotion of the military skills of the Skleroi, Komnenoi and Barasbatzai in the political context of Alexios I made better sense only for the ruling family which held the most significant and high-ranking military posts. The same cannot be said for the Skleroi and the Barasbatzai whose most prominent members were not employed in the army anymore.³³

Instead, envisaging Skylitzes as a protégé of both Katakalon Kekaumenos and Isaac Komnenos, and his *Synopsis* as a work written in

a time of military crisis, dynastic fluidity and uncertainty, between 1057–1067, can resolve most inconsistencies and better highlight Skylitzes' agenda. The promotion of the military skills of Komnenos, Skleros and Barasbatzes made more sense in the 1050s and 1060s, when spending for the army was reduced and military offices declined in importance, but the most prominent members of these families still pursued military careers.³⁴ Skylitzes, who backed the claims of the military aristocracy affected by these reforms, seems to have employed Constantine IX (1042–1055), Theodora (1055–1056) and Michael VI (1056–1057) as scapegoats. The historian openly blamed Constantine IX for instigating the empire's military downfall, and criticized him for extravagant spending and for the disbanding of the Iberian army. Theodora and Michael VI were scolded for being vengeful, prodigal, and for dismissing the most prominent Byzantine generals from their offices, arrogantly and unfairly, thus compelling them to rebellion.³⁵

Skylitzes' point behind his anecdotes of military trickery and valor might have been that, in the light of Turkish threat, the empire needed to employ and support emperors and commanders who were exemplary military figures and had the legacy, reputation and means to guarantee imperial prosperity (military and financial). The leading figures of Isaac's coup seem to have made the cut.³⁶ To make our case, we can begin by examining how Skylitzes' authoritative stratagems of antiquity got the message across. The forefather of Isaac Komnenos was reinvented to a stout and shrewd defender, attributed with the employment of the same ruses as distinguished figures of antiquity. Then came Nikephoros and Isaac Komnenos, and we read a story of a family of great military commanders mostly side-lined due to envy. Nikephoros prevailed against the enemy but was unfairly punished by the emperor, and the story is repeated with Isaac's illicit dismissal, followed by his rebellion.³⁷

Likewise, Skylitzes' stratagems promoted the military legacy of yet another leading family of the coup, the Skleroi. This seems in line with Romanos Skleros' career which needed political and military justification. Though Romanos was a senior commander bearing the dignity of *proedros*, much like Isaac Komnenos, he had been unwillingly dismissed by Theodora. Then he rebelled along with Isaac and was appointed commander of the right wing during the battle of Hades, only to fail at his task and to endanger the divisions of Isaac and Katakalon.³⁸ After the rebellion, Romanos Skleros was probably promoted to *stratopedarches* of the East and *doux* of Antioch, and it seems that Constantine X appointed

him *domestikos ton scholon* of the West and *doux ton Anatolikon*.³⁹ To enhance the prestige of the family, Skylitzes recorded most of the Skleroi in good light, he mentioned the brave deeds of Constantine Skleros, and featured Bardas Skleros as a second Cleomenes, a successful and shrewd general who was rightfully reconciled with public authorities. One wonders whether the Skleros-Cleomenes association, aimed by extension to justify Romanos Skleros' participation in Isaac's coup too.

Skylitzes' glorification of the military skills of Barasbatzes sits better with the extensive employment of the family and that of their close relatives, the Tzourbanelai (Tchordvani), as military officers in c. 1000–1069. From the latter period we know of Tornikios Barasbatzes as well as John, Simbatio and Apocharpes Tzourbaneles, all *protospatharioi* and *strategoï*. Another individual, Constantine Tzourbaneles probably held the dignity of *protoanthypatos* and was either *strategos* of Belegradon and/or (*doux*) of Bulgaria, possibly in the reign of Constantine X.⁴⁰ While Byzantine historians do not mention the Barasbatzai and the Tzourbanelai in the context of Isaac Komnenos' rebellion, it is probable that they backed it on two grounds. Firstly, they traditionally sided with families allied to the Komnenoi. George Barasbatzes was accused of supporting Constantine Diogenes' conspiracy (1029) against Romanos III Argyros (1028–1034), together with Samuel, Theognostos and Michael Bourtzes. Both the Diogenai and the Bourtzai remained close associates of the Komnenoi for decades. It is also worth noting that Michael Bourtzes was the same person who rebelled with Isaac Komnenos against Michael VI and was thus promoted to *strategos ton Anatolikon*.⁴¹ Secondly, Isaac Komnenos served as *katepano* of Iberia so this appointment could have facilitated his strengthening of ties with some Georgian aristocratic families.⁴² In addition, both Isaac Komnenos and Constantine X worked closely with the other relatives of the Barasbatzai and the Tchordvani, the Bagratids. Between 1057–1067 Byzantine-Georgian relations were once again amicable and both polities were fighting against the common enemy, the Turks. In 1057 Bagrat IV (1027–1072) called himself "king of the Apchazians and *nobelissimos* of the entire East", which can denote that Isaac Komnenos had ratified his predecessors' decision to award the dignity of *nobelissimos*, second highest after that of the emperor, to a Georgian king. Constantine X went a step further, awarding Bagrat IV the title of *sebastos* which, up to that point, had been reserved for the emperor, the empress and the patriarch. In addition, Bagrat IV's daughter, Maria of Alania, was betrothed to Constantine X's co-emperor, Michael Doukas, the future Michael VII

(1071–1078), further establishing Byzantium’s alliance with the Georgian kingdom.⁴³ Finally, both Byzantine and Georgian sources reveal imperial benevolence towards the Ibiron monastery, mostly ran by the Barasbatzai and the Tchordvani. A Georgian manuscript which contained the canons of the sixth and seventh ecumenical councils was updated to include prayers for various emperors among which was Isaac Komnenos. God was requested to grant him “many days and years of reign” and to “make him victorious over his Turkish enemies”. What is more, the *Vita* of George the Hagiorite and the documents of the Ibiron corroborate Constantine X’s sponsorship and protection of the Ibiron.⁴⁴

Evidence from Byzantine prosopography dating from c. 1057–1067 suggests that the promotional anecdotes of Alyates, Daphnomeles, Maniakes, Theodorokanos and Kekaumenos were relevant to Skylitzes milieu because these families were part of the extended network of Isaac I and Constantine X, and in co-operation with their regimes. In fact, the aforementioned families mostly held military offices in this period. For instance, there was a *patrikios* Leo Alyates serving as *strategos of Cherson and Sougdeia* under Isaac Komnenos (1059). We also know of Theodore/Leo Alyates *hetairiarches of the third* who was in service around that time, while a Theodore Alyates was a senior military commander and a friend of Romanos IV Diogenes (1068–1071), whose family was intermarried with the Komnenoi.⁴⁵ Along with the Barasbatzai and the Bourtzai, an Eustathios Daphnomeles participated in Constantine Diogenes’ conspiracy (1029), and was probably on good grounds with the Komnenoi too. We can also note that Alexander (*vestarches* and *strategos*) and George Maniakes, (*patrikios* and *katepano* of Vaspurakan), probably held their military offices in the period under consideration.⁴⁶ Last but not least, we know that Nikephoros (*patrikios* and *strategos*), George (*protospatharios of the Chrysotriklinos* and *strategos*), Ashot, Chatatourios (*patrikios* and *katepano* of Edessa), and Constantine Theodorokanos were also active around this period, serving in the imperial armies.⁴⁷ Similarly, in contrast to Leo the Deacon, Skylitzes might have chosen to follow a favorable account of John Kourkouas’ deeds at the siege of Dorostolon (971) because some members of the family held the dignities of *hypatos*, *patrikios* and *magistros* around c. 1040–1070. While we can perhaps envisage a military career for them, their seals do not mention an office, and clear evidence of Kourkouai holding military offices only reappears after 1080.⁴⁸

To avoid being criticized as a biased slanderer or panegyrist, Skylitzes seems to have adopted a balanced approach when he wrote about modern

figures. It was probably a deliberate literary strategy of the historian to cast his contemporaries in more modest light than their forefathers. Compared to Bardas and Constantine Skleros, Romanos Skleros' representation is more down to earth. Similarly, the portraits of Manuel and Nikephoros Komnenos were quite embellished, while Isaac's role in the rebellion was toned down in favor of Kekaumenos'. The pattern repeats itself with the Doukai. On the one hand, Skylitzes mentioned the Doukai among Isaac's prominent supporters, but without further elaboration on their role in the rebellion. Yet, he either distorted his sources or chose to follow a non-extant (pro-Doukas?) source to present the battle of Katasyrtai (917) as a Byzantine victory, and in fact one indebted to Nikolas Doukas' bravery.⁴⁹

The fact that Skylitzes employed the same strategy with regard to all the major actors of the revolt, but the exploits of the Doukai were highlighted the least, implies that though Skylitzes was originally pro-Komnenos, and pro-Keukaumenos, he settled to write a history which kept most of the leading figures of the coup happy, namely a history which ended with the year 1057, with Kekaumenos, the Doukai and the Komnenoi still in cooperation. Thus Skylitzes probably began to compile his *Synopsis* in the reign of Isaac Komnenos, but completed it in the reign of Constantine X, taking care to convey his pro-Komnenos stance in a more subtle way.

Nonetheless, Skylitzes' real sympathies are better represented in his later work, the *Epitome* (*Συνέχεια*), written in the reign of Alexios I, where the historian featured Constantine X negatively, and Isaac Komnenos in positive light, struggling to re-empower the empire.⁵⁰ One could even argue that Skylitzes' extensive use of the pro-Kekaumenos source(s), and his focus on Kekaumenos, rather than on Isaac, allowed the historian to criticize Constantine X for the side-lining of his ex-collaborators more safely and indirectly, without implicating the Komnenoi and featuring as their fervent supporter.⁵¹

The political milieu of the period justifies this approach. Political balances remained fluid in the reign of Constantine X. Isaac Komnenos and Michael VI were still alive for some time, and even though some of the Komnenoi were allegedly honored by Constantine X for the sake of their older cooperation in the coup against Michael VI, none of them seems to have held any office. Even if we dismiss Constantine X's benevolence toward the Komnenoi as pro-Doukas propaganda though, the later reconciliation of the Doukai with the Komnenoi, during the reign of Michael VII, cannot have occurred out of the blue. Skylitzes thus wrote in a political environment where the Komnenoi were mostly cut off

from important offices, but were still a threat to the Doukai as they never stopped enjoying the esteem and support of other aristocratic families, to the point that Michael VII thought it proficient to marry his wife's cousin to Isaakios Komnenos (Isaac Komnenos I's nephew) and to appoint him *domestikos ton scholon* of the East and *doux* of Antioch. It is indicative that well into the reign of Constantine X and Michael VII the rebellion of Isaac Komnenos was remembered as a cause almost collectively embraced, and as a partly justified act which aimed to remedy the improper side-lining of the military aristocracy in political matters and in the distribution of high dignities and honors. Michael Psellos, in his funeral oration for the patriarchs Michael Keroullarios and Constantine Leichoudes, described Isaac Komnenos as a competent military leader and emperor. Isaac was steadfast, famous and marvelous. His military commands (even before he became emperor) "brought honour to both his fatherland and his village". He was held in high regard by "Higher Powers" and was easily comparable "to the most important emperors of the past".⁵² The fluid political balance of the 1060s and the peculiar relationship between the Komnenoi and the Doukai, sheds light on Skylitzes' decision to stop his history in 1057, when Kekaumenos, Isaac Komnenos and the Doukai were still in cooperation. Instead, the milieu of Alexios I does not convincingly resolve Skylitzes' decision to include the reign of Isaac Komnenos in his *Epitome* but not in his *Synopsis*.

Last but not least, as already noted by other scholars, dating the completion of the *Synopsis* in the reign of Constantine X solves other discrepancies too. Firstly, by placing the work before Psellos' *Chronographia* and Attaleiates' *Historia*, one envisages the *Synopsis* as an earlier history than the latter two. This can convincingly explain why Skylitzes neither mentioned Michael Attaleiates in his preface, nor employed his *Historia* and Psellos' *Chronographia* as a source in the *Synopsis*, but did so in the *Epitome*. Accordingly, Skylitzes' citing of Psellos' historical narrative in the preface of the *Synopsis* can be perceived as a reference to *Historia Syntomos*, which better fits its characterization as a very brief account of succession of emperors. Finally, since the earliest extant manuscript of the *Synopsis* dates from the 12th century, the dignities and offices of Skylitzes (*kouropalates* and *megas drougarios* of the *Vigla*) as they appear in the title of his history may well reflect the stage of Skylitzes' career in the reign of Alexios I, rather than in the 1060s, when the *Synopsis* seems to have been completed.⁵³

Endnotes

- 1 Notable exceptions include: G. Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica I: Die byzantinischen Quellen der Geschichte der Türkvölker* (Berlin 1958), pp. 335–41; H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, vol. I (Munich 1978) 389–93; S. Antoljak, “Wer könnte eigentlich Joannes Scylitzes sein?”, in M. Berza and E. Stănescu (eds.), *Actes du XIV^e Congrès international des études byzantines*, vol. III (Bucharest 1976), pp. 677–82; W. Seibt, “Ioannes Skylitzes: Zur Person des Chronisten”, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 25 (1976), pp. 81–5; A. E. Laiou, “Imperial Marriages and their Critics in the Eleventh Century: The Case of Skylitzes”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992), pp. 165–76; N. M. Panagiotakes, “Fragments of a Lost Eleventh Century Byzantine Historical Work?”, in C. N. Constantinides, N. M. Panagiotakes, E. Jeffreys and A. D. Angelou, *ΦΙΛΕΛΑΗΝ: Studies in Honour of Robert Browning* (Venice 1996), pp. 321–58.
- 2 J. Shepard, “Scylitzes on Armenia in the 1040s, and the Role of Catacalon Cecaumenos”, *Revue des Études Arméniennes* 11 (1975–1976), pp. 269–311; “Byzantium’s Last Sicilian Expedition: Skylitzes’ Testimony”, *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici* 14–16 (1977–1979), pp. 145–59; “A Suspected Source of Scylitzes’ Synopsis Historiarum: The Great Catacalon Cecaumenos”, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 16 (1992), pp. 171–81; “Memoirs as Manifesto: The Rhetoric of Katakalon Kekaumenos”, in T. Shawcross and I. Toth (eds.), *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond* (Cambridge 2018), pp. 185–214. See also C. Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire, 976–1025* (Oxford 2005) and E.-S. Kiapidou, *Η Σύνοψη Ιστοριών του Ιωάννη Σκυλίτζη και οι πηγές της, 811–1057* (Athens 2010).
- 3 For the various problems see also A. G. K. Savvides, *Βυζαντινό ιστοριογραφικό ενδεκάπτυχο: Συμβολή για τους ιστοριογράφους και την εποχή τους* (Athens 2019³), pp. 85–116.
- 4 Holmes, *Basil II*, pp. 66–119, 216–37, 240–98; Shepard, “Memoirs”, pp. 187–90, 207–9. See also W. Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke 2013), pp. 329–33; E. McGeer, *Byzantium in the Time of Troubles: The Continuation of the Chronicle of John Skylitzes (1057–1079)* (Leiden 2020), pp. 5–28; the introduction of J.-C. Cheynet and B. Flusin in the English translation of the *Synopsis*, J. Wortley, *John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811–1057* (Cambridge 2010) ix–xxxiii; and L. Neville, *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing* (Cambridge 2018), pp. 155–7.
- 5 Kiapidou, *Σύνοψη Ιστοριών*, pp. 112–21, 126–49. See also A. Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί και χρονολόγοι*, vol. III (Athens 2009), pp. 249–55 and Treadgold, *Byzantine Historians*, pp. 334–7.

- ⁶ Leo the Deacon, *Historiae*, ed. K. B. Hase (Bonn 1828) 169, trans. A.-M. Talbot and D. F. Sullivan, *The History of Leo the Deacon* (Washington DC 2005), p. 212.
- ⁷ Leo the Deacon, *Historiae*, p. 170 (trans. Talbot and Sullivan, p. 213).
- ⁸ John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. J. Thurn (Berlin 1973), p. 319 (trans. Wortley, 303). The stratagem is not mentioned by John Zonaras, *Epitomae Historiarum*, ed. T. Büttner-Wobst, vol. III (Bonn 1897), pp. 541–2 who instead records that Peter the *stratopedarches* was not slain at the battle of Lapara but later. See also Holmes, *Basil II*, pp. 450–3.
- ⁹ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, p. 323 (trans. Wortley, 307). Also recorded by Zonaras, *Epitomae*, p. 543. For a different view on when the siege of Nikaia occurred c.f. Leo the Deacon, *Historiae*, pp. 212–3.
- ¹⁰ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, pp. 403–4 (trans. Wortley, 380). Also recorded by Zonaras, *Epitomae*, pp. 591–2. Arab sources record no siege of Edessa in 1038, they do record one in 1036 but their account is nowhere near that of John Skylitzes, see W. Felix, *Byzanz und die islamische Welt im früheren 11. Jahrhundert: Geschichte der politischen Beziehungen von 1001 bis 1055* (Vienna 1981), pp. 148–52 with G. Leveniotis, *Η πολιτική κατάρρευση του Βυζαντιού στην Ανατολή: Το ανατολικό σύνορο και η Κεντρική Μικρά Ασία κατά το β' ήμισυ του 11ου αι.*, vol. I (Thessaloniki 2007), pp. 278–9, 585–6; A. Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A. D. to the First Crusade* (New York 2017), pp. 68–9; E. Honingmann, *Die Ostgrenze des byzantinischen Reiches von 363 bis 1071* (Brussels 1935), pp. 135–9.
- ¹¹ For an overview of scholarly views on Leo the Deacon's biography and sources see Treadgold, *Byzantine Historians*, pp. 236–46; Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί*, pp. 475–501; Talbot and Sullivan, *Leo the Deacon*, pp. 9–50 and K. J. Sinclair, *War Writing in Middle Byzantine Historiography: Sources, Influences and Trends*, PhD thesis, University of Birmingham (Birmingham 2012), pp. 47–60, 150–70.
- ¹² Holmes, *Basil II*, pp. 162–70 and C. Holmes, “The Rhetorical Structures of Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historion*”, in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Rhetoric in Byzantium* (Aldershot 2003), pp. 187–200.
- ¹³ Herodotus, *Historiae*, ed. N. G. Wilson, vols. I-II (Oxford 2015) 6.77–6; Polyaeus, *Strategemata*, ed. J. Melber and E. Woelfflin (Leipzig 1887) 1.14.1; *Hypotheseis*, ed. J. Melber (Leipzig 1887) 20.1, for an English translation of both see P. Krentz and E. L. Wheeler, *Polyaeus, Stratagems of War*, vols. I-II (Chicago 1994); *Strategemata Ambrosiana*, ed. J.-A. de Foucault (Paris 1949) 20.1; *Parecholae*, ed. J.-A. de Foucault (Paris 1949), 18.1, see also 18.3; Pseudo Leo VI, *Sylloge Tacticorum*, ed. A. Dain (Paris 1938) 95.12, trans. G. Chatzelis and J. Harris, *A Tenth-Century Byzantine Military Manual: The Sylloge Tacticorum* (New York 2017), p. 113. For Byzantine adaptations of Polyaeus see F. Schindler, *Die Überlieferung der*

- Strategemata des Polyainos* (Vienna 1973) with earlier bibliography cited by him, and E. L. Wheeler, "Polyaenus: Scriptor Militaris", in K. Brodersen (ed.), *Polyainos: Neue Studien* (Berlin 2010), pp. 3–42; C. M. Mazzucchi, "Dagli anni di Basilio Parakimomenos (cod. Ambr. B 119 Sup.)", *Aevum* 52 (1978), pp. 267–316.
- 14 Holmes, *Basil II*, pp. 240–98.
- 15 Both the *Strategemata* and the *Hypotheseis* include the same uncommon verbs as John Skylitzes, ἀντιστρατοπεδεύω and ἀριστοποιέω. See Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, p. 319: ἀντιστρατοπεδεύει τοῖς ἐναντίοις, ἐμπίπτει τοῖς πολεμίοις ἀριστοποιουμένοις; Polyaenus, *Strategemata*, 1.14: ἐπολέμει καὶ ἀντεστρατοπέδευεν, ὅταν ἀριστοποιεῖσθαι κηρύξῃ; *Hypotheseis*, 20.1: ἐπολέμει καὶ ἀντεστρατοπέδευεν, ὅταν ἀριστοποιεῖσθαι κηρύξω. The translation used here is an adaptation of an older one by R. Sheperd, *Polyaenus' Stratagems of War* (London 1793), pp. 14–5 which was revised online by Andrew Smith at: <http://www.attalus.org/translate/polyaenus1A.html>
- 16 Polyaenus, *Strategemata*, 7.36; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, ed. T. Dorandi (Cambridge 2013) 1.83; *Hypotheseis*, 56.11; *Strategemata Ambrosiana*, 53.7. An abridged version is also preserved in the *Suda*, ed. A. Adler, vols. I–IV (Leipzig 1928–1935) τ1569.
- 17 M. Meulder, "Qui est le roi Mérops cité dans la *Συλλογή Τακτικῶν*", *Byzantion* 73 (2003), pp. 445–66.
- 18 Pseudo Leo VI, *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 95.4 (trans. Chatzelis and Harris, 111–2).
- 19 Pseudo Leo VI, *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 77.2 (trans. Chatzelis and Harris, 100).
- 20 Treadgold, *Byzantine Historians*, pp. 247–70.
- 21 A. Dain, *Le Corpus Perditum* (Paris 1939); A. Dain and J. A. de Foucault, "Les stratégistes byzantins", *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1967), pp. 359–91, here 353. C.f. J.-R. Vieillefond, *Les Cestes de Julius Africanus: Étude sur l'ensemble des fragments avec édition, traduction et commentaires* (Florence 1970), pp. 194–8 and L. Mecella, "Die Überlieferung der Kestoi des Julius Africanus in den byzantinischen Textsammlungen zur Militärtechnik", in M. Wallraff and L. Mecella (eds.), *Die Kestoi des Julius Africanus und ihre Überlieferung* (Berlin, 2009), pp. 85–116, here pp. 107–113.
- 22 For war writing in the *Synopsis* of John Skylitzes and the use of military manuals see S. McGrath, "The Battles of Dorostolon (971): Rhetoric and Reality", in T. S. Miller and J. Nesbitt (eds.), *Peace and War in Byzantium* (Washington DC 1995), pp. 152–63; Holmes, "Rhetorical Structures", pp. 187–200. See also G. Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals as Literary Works and Practical Handbooks: The Case of the Tenth-Century Sylloge Tacticorum* (New York 2019), pp. 88–142. For observations on anecdotes in the *Synopsis* which conveyed a moral message see Th. Sklavos, "Moralizing History: The Synopsis Historiarum of John Skylitzes", in J. Burke (ed.), *Byzantine Narrative* (Leiden 2006), pp. 110–9. For more general observations on war writing in Middle Byzantine historiography see indicatively Sinclair,

War Writing; A. Kazhdan and Ch. Angelidi, *A History of Byzantine Literature (800–1000)* (Athens 2006), pp. 273–94; L. Hoffmann, “Geschichtsschreibung oder Rhetorik? Zum logos parakletikos bei Leon Diakonos”, in M. Grünbart (ed.), *Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter* (Berlin 2007), pp. 105–39; A. Markopoulos, “From Narrative Historiography to Historical Biography: New Trends in Byzantine Historical Writing in the 10th–11th Centuries”. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 102 (2009): pp. 697–715; M. L. D. Riedel, “Historical Writing and Warfare”, in S. Foot and Ch. F. Robinson (eds.), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, 400–1400* (Oxford 2012), pp. 576–604, here pp. 576–83; R.-J. Lilie, “Reality and Invention: Reflections on Byzantine Historiography”. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 68 (2014), pp. 157–210; A. Kaldellis, “The Manufacture of History in the Later Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Rhetorical Templates and Narrative ontologies”, in S. Marjanović-Dušanić (ed.), *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies* (Belgrade 2016), pp. 293–306, and in the same volume W. Treadgold, “The Unwritten Rules for Writing Byzantine History”, pp. 276–92. See also S. McGrath, “Warfare as Literary Narrative”, in Y. Stouraitis (ed.), *A Companion to the Byzantine Culture of War, ca. 300–1204* (Leiden 2018), pp. 160–95; L. Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Material History of Nikephoros Bryennios* (Cambridge 2012); P. Buckley, *The Alexiad of Anna Komnene: Artistic Strategy in the Making of a Myth* (Cambridge 2014); L. O. Vilimonović, *Structure and Features of Anna Komnene’s Alexiad: Emergence of a Personal History* (Amsterdam 2019).

²³ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, pp. 304–5, 308, 315, 318, 348–9, 355, 361–4, 381–2, 387, 431, 403, 406–7, 425–8. See also Shepard, “Scylitzes on Armenia”; “Last Sicilian Expedition”; “Suspected source”; “Memoirs as manifesto”, with Holmes, *Basil II*, 203–39 and L. Andriollo, “Le charme du rebelle malheureux: Georges Maniakès dans les sources grecques du XIe siècle”, *Travaux et Mémoires* 21/1 (2017), pp. 1–12. See also McGeer, *Continuation*, pp. 11–2 and c.f. J.-C. Cheynet, “Jean Skylitzès, lecteur des chroniqueurs du Xe siècle”, in S. Marjanović-Dušanić and B. Flusin (eds.), *Remanier, métaphraser: Fonctions et techniques de la réécriture dans le monde byzantin* (Belgrade 2011), pp. 111–29.

²⁴ See A. Rhooby and E. Schiffer (eds.), *Imitatio – Aemulatio – Variatio* (Vienna 2010) with earlier literature cited in the volume. See also A. Kaldellis, *Byzantine Readings of Ancient Historians* (New York 2015), pp. 1–46 with L. Neville, “Singing with David and Contemplating Agesilaus: Ethical Training in Byzantium,” in S. Xenophontos and A. Marmodoro (eds.), *The Reception of Greek Ethics in Late Antiquity and Byzantium* (Cambridge 2021) 140–58. While variations of stratagems, involving food and containers are more common in Classical and Byzantine literature, the discussed ruses of Skylitzes were deliberately identical to their models in order to establish a clear connection between Byzantine and Classical figures. See S. Germanidou,

- “Μια μορφή περιβαλλοντικού πολέμου στο Βυζάντιο: Γεωργικές δολιοφθορές και αγροτικά εργαλεία ως φονικά όπλα”, *Byzantina Symmeikta* 27 (2017), pp. 145–72.
- 25 Herodotus, *Historiae*, 5.39–42, 6.61–75; Holmes, *Basil II*, pp. 278–89.
- 26 For the legacy and tradition of the seven sages and Bias of Priene in antiquity as a tricksters and wise counsellors see indicatively R. P. Martin, “The Seven Sages as Performers of Wisdom”, in C. Dougherty and L. Kurke (eds.), *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece* (Oxford 1998), pp. 108–28 and I. Konstantakos, “Amasis, Bias and the Seven Sages as Riddlers”, *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft neue Folge* 29 (2005), pp. 11–46. For Merops see Meulder, “Merops”, pp. 458–9. We do not know to whom this stratagem was attributed in the *Corpus Perditum*.
- 27 For the audience/readership of Byzantine historical narratives and entertaining elements in such texts see B. Croke, “Uncovering Byzantium’s Historiographical Audience”, in R. Macrides (ed.), *History as Literature in Byzantium* (Abingdon OX 2010), pp. 25–53; Ch. Roueché, “Byzantine Writers and Readers: Storytelling in the Eleventh Century”, in R. Beaton (ed.), *The Greek Novel AD 1–1985* (London 1988), pp. 123–33, with Holmes, *Basil II*, pp. 228–36; McGrath, “Warfare”, pp. 166–78 and Lilie, “Reality and Invention”, pp. 208–9. See also I. Nilsson, *Raconter Byzance: La littérature au XIIIe siècle* (Paris 2014), pp. 87–111, pp. 196–8 and “To Narrate the Events of the Past: On Byzantine Historians, and Historians on Byzantium” in J. Burke (ed.), *Byzantine Narrative* (Leiden 2006), pp. 47–58. For the sieges of Edessa see n.10 above. For the preservation of archival documents and military reports in Byzantium see Sinclair, *War Writing*, pp. 190–208.
- 28 C.f. Kiapidou, *Σύνοψη Ιστοριών*, pp. 134–5; Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί*, pp. 250–5.
- 29 For the Anemas family see Holmes, *Basil II*, pp. 207–8 and Ch. Stavrakos, *Die byzantinischen Bleisiegel mit Familiennamen aus der Sammlung des Numismatischen Museums Athen* (Wiesbaden 2000). For Alyates, Holmes, *Basil II*, pp. 204–6; McGeer, *Continuation*, p. 11; I. Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine Seals from Bulgaria: Byzantine Seals with Family Names*, vol. II (Sofia 2006), pp. 49–50. For Xiphias, Stavrakos, *Bleisiegel mit Familiennamen*, pp. 288–9. For Maniakes, Ch. Stavrakos, “Unpublizierte Bleisiegel der Familie Maniakes: Der Fall Georgios Maniakes”, *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 8 (2003), pp. 101–11 and c.f. Jordanov, *Seals*, pp. 272–6. For Theodorokanos, W. Seibt, “The Theodorokanoi: Members of the Byzantine Military Aristocracy with an Armeno-Iberian Origin”, *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 13 (2019), pp. 81–91. For Kekaumenos, Anna Komnene, *Alexias*, ed. D. R. Reinsch and A. Kambylis (Berlin 2001) XIII.5.1, XIII.5.7, XV.4.8.
- 30 Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, pp. 323, 355, 371–2 (trans. Wortley, pp. 306, 336, 350–1); c.f. Aristakes Lastivertc’i, *History*, trans. R. Bedrosian (New York

- 1985), pp. 29–30. Nikephoros Bryennios, *Histoire*, ed. and trans P. Gautier (Brussels 1975) 1.1.1–7. For the Armenian historian see N. S. M. Matheou, *Situating the “History” Attributed to Aristakēs Lastiverc’i, 1000-1072: The Empire of New Rome & Caucasia in the Eleventh Century*, PhD thesis, University of Oxford (Oxford 2018). See also K. Barzos, *Η γενεαλογία των Κομνηνών* (Thessaloniki 1984), pp. 38–40; J.-C. Cheynet, “L’iconographie des sceaux des Comnènes”, in C. Ludwig (ed.), *Siegel und Siegler* (Frankfurt am Main 2005), pp. 53–67, here pp. 53–5. Perhaps Skylitzes chose to refer to Manuel with the surname of his wife to downplay his sympathy for the Komnenoi. For an alternative theory see Cheynet, “Jean Skylitzès”, pp. 121–2.
- 31 Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, pp. 288–92; W. Seibt, *Die Skleroi: Eine prosopographisch-sigillographische Studie* (Vienna 1976), pp. 87–106; Holmes, *Basil II*, pp. 272–6, 456–61.
- 32 J.-C. Cheynet, C. Morrisson and W. Seibt, *Les sceaux byzantins inédits de la collection Henri Seyrig* (Paris 1991), p. 57; J. Lefort, N. Oikonomidès, D. Papachryssanthou and H. Métrévéli, *Actes d’Iviron*, vol. I (Paris 1985), pp. 2–59. For Byzantine-Georgian relations in the eleventh and twelfth century see S. Nikolaishvili, *Byzantium and the Georgian World c. 900–1210: Ideology of Kinship and Rhetoric in the Byzantine Periphery*, PhD thesis, Central European University (Budapest 2019), pp. 95–100 with Barzos, *Γενεαλογία*, pp. 67–8. For the rank of *panypersebastos* see J. Shea, *Politics and Government in Byzantium: The Rise and Fall of the Bureaucrats* (London 2020), pp. 16–7.
- 33 Some of these families, like the Anemas and the Skleroi, rebelled against Alexios I, but, depending on the exact date of composition the *Synopsis*, it is unclear whether this influenced Skylitzes’ representation of them.
- 34 For the gradual increase of civil functionaries, spending for their salaries, and the declining importance of military administration and aristocracy see more recently L. Andriollo, *Constantinople et les provinces d’Asie Mineure IXe–Xle siècles: Administration impériale, sociétés locales et rôle de l’aristocratie* (Leuven 2016), pp. 341–54 and Shea, *Bureaucrats*.
- 35 Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, pp. 476, 479, 482–4 with Kiapidou, *Σύνοψη Ιστοριών*, pp. 464–70; McGeer, *Continuation*, p. 10 and n.36. Similar sentiments are also expressed by Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, ed. E. Tzolakis (Athens 2011) 36.7–13 and Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, ed. D. R. Reinsch (Berlin 2014) VI.7–8, but the fact that John Skylitzes was probably the first historian to make such claims is significant. Nevertheless, recent scholarship mostly sees the rebellion of 1057 and the regime of Constantine X as the starting points of Byzantine military collapse, see indicatively, S. D. Hondridou, *Ο Κωνσταντίνος Θ’ Μονομάχος και η εποχή του (ενδέκατος αιώνας μ.Χ.)* (Athens 2002), pp. 307–10; S. Vryonis. “The Eleventh Century: Was There a Crisis in the Empire? The Decline of Quality and Quantity in the Byzantine Armed

- Forces”, and J. Haldon, “Approaches to an Alternative Military History of the Period ca. 1025–1071”, in V. N. Vlyssidou (ed.), *Η αυτοκρατορία σε κρίση (;): Το Βυζάντιο τον 11^ο αιώνα (1025–1081)* (Athens 2003), pp. 17–43, 45–74; Leveniotis, *Πολιτική κατάρρευση*, pp. 668–9; G. Leveniotis, “Such Carnage in One Place Had Not Occurred before in Byzantium: The Battle of Hades (20 August 1057 CE) and Its Repercussions”, in G. Theotokis and M. Meško (eds.), *War in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (New York 2021), pp. 37–65, here pp. 55–6; A. Kaldellis, *Streams*, pp. 202–38; A. D. Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of Muslim Turkish Anatolia, ca. 1040–1130* (New York 2017), pp. 53–4, 102–24; M. Whittow, “The Second Fall: The Place of the Eleventh Century in Roman History”, in M. D. Lauxtermann and M. Whittow (eds.), *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between* (New York 2017), pp. 109–26. For different views on the rebellion of Isaac Komnenos see K. Inoue, “The Rebellion of Isaakios Komnenos and the Provincial Aristocratic Oikoi”, *Byzantinoslavica* 54 (1993), pp. 268–78; J. D. Howard-Johnston, “Crown Lands and the Defence of Imperial Authority in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries”, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21 (1995), pp. 75–100, here pp. 97–99; J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)* (Paris 1996), pp. 339–58; B. Krsmanović, “Αλλαγές στη δομή της κοινωνικής κορυφής μετά την εποχή του Βασιλείου Β’”, in Vlyssidou, *Κρίση*, pp. 87–106; Y. Nezu, “The Revolt of Isaakios Komnenos: Reconsideration”, *Orient* 41 (2006), pp. 41–60; K. Mpourdara, *Καθοσώσεις και τυραννίς: Το πολιτικό αδίκημα στο Βυζάντιο (8ος-13ος αιώνας)* (Athens 2015), pp. 368–75 and A. J. Davidson, *The Glory of Ruling Makes all Things Permissible: Power and Usurpation in Byzantium, Some Aspects of Communication, Legitimacy, and Moral Authority*, PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham (Birmingham 2017), pp. 28–33.
- ³⁶ For Isaac Komnenos, his military career and his reforms see Barzos, *Γενεαλογία*, pp. 41–7; A. S. Mokhov, “Voyennaya politika Isaaka I Komnina”, *Nauchnyye vedomosti Belgorodskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Ser., Istoriya. Ekonomika. Politologiya. Informatika* 120 (2012), pp. 52–60; Kaldellis, *Streams*, pp. 219–23; M. Böhm, “Izaak I Komnen (1007–1060). Wódz, buntownik, cesarz – w poszukiwaniu jego doktryny wojennej?”, *Vox Patrum* 77 (2021), pp. 81–96.
- ³⁷ Stories of incompetence and corruption regarding Katakalon Kekaumenos and Isaac Komnenos were silenced in the *Synopsis*, see Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII.3 and c.f. Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 479.
- ³⁸ For the battle of Hades see Leveniotis, “Battle of Hades” and c.f. M. Böhm, “The Military Policy of Isaac Komnenos at the Time of Battle of Petroe (1057)”, *Open Political Science* 1 (2018), pp. 136–42.
- ³⁹ Seibt, *Skleroi*, pp. 76–85.
- ⁴⁰ For Tornikios see I. Koltsida-Makre, “New Acquisitions of Byzantine Lead Seals in the Athens Numismatic Museum Collection”, *Studies in Byzantine*

- Sigillography* 9 (2006), pp. 11–22, here 19, with earlier bibliography. For John, Simbatiōs and Apocharpēs see Jordanov, *Seals*, 59; Panagiotakes, “Fragments”, 335, n.57; and the online catalogue of the Collection of Dumbarton Oaks at <https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.2247>. For Constantine Tzourbaneles see J.-C. Cheynet, “Du stratège de thème au duc: Chronologie de l’évolution au cours du XI^e siècle”, *Travaux et Mémoires* 9 (1985), pp. 181–94, here p. 184; R. Mihajlovski, “A Collection of Medieval Seals from the Fortress Kale in Skopje, Excavated Between 2007 and 2012”, *Byzantion* 86 (2016), pp. 261–316, here p. 266. C.f. V. Laurent, “Un nouveau gouverneur de la Bulgarie byzantine: Le Géorgien Tzourbanélés”, *Buletinul Societății Numismatice Române* 92–95 (1944–1947), pp. 7–15; N. Bănescu, *Les duchés byzantins de Paristrion (Paradounavon) et de Bulgarie* (Bucharest 1946), pp. 137–9 and H.-J. Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert: Studien zur Organisation der Tagmata* (Vienna 1991), p. 232. The dignities with the prefix “proto” appeared in the reign of Constantine X, see N. Oikonomidēs, “L’évolution de l’organisation administrative de l’empire Byzantin aux XI^e siècle (1025–1118)”, *Travaux et Mémoires* 6 (1976), pp. 125–52, here pp. 125–6.
- ⁴¹ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, pp. 376–7 (trans. Wortley, 356). For the Komnenoi and the family of Diogenes and Bourtzēs see J.-C. Cheynet, “La famille Bourtzèz” in *La société byzantine: l’apport des sceaux*, vol. II (Paris 2008), pp. 353–73; Barzos, *Γενεαλογία*, pp. 61–4, 80–1, 85.
- ⁴² V. S. Šandrovskaia, “Die Bedeutung der Bleisiegel für das Studium einiger Aspekte der byzantinischen Geschichte”, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32/2 (1982), pp. 165–73, here pp. 169–70; Cheynet, “Du stratège au duc”, p. 185 and Cheynet, “Comnènes”, p. 55.
- ⁴³ Nikolaishvili, *Georgian World*, pp. 70–86. For the title of *sebastos* in this period see Shea, *Government*, p. 190 n. 49,
- ⁴⁴ George the Minor, *The Life and Citizenship of Our Holy and Blessed Father George the Hagiorite*, trans. T. Grdzelidze (London 2009), pp. 142–6; J. Lefort, N. Oikonomidēs, D. Papachryssanthou and H. Métrévéli, *Actes d’Iviron*, vol. II (Paris 1990), pp. 17–26; Nikolaishvili, *Georgian World*, pp. 20–30, 45–6.
- ⁴⁵ For Alyates see Bryennios, *Histoire*, 1.16; Attaleiates, *Historia*, 131.20–5; John Skylitzes, *Συνέχεια*, ed. E. Th. Tsolakes (Thessaloniki 1968) 153.5–9; B. Latishev, “Этюды по византийской эпиграфике”, *Византийский временник* 2 (1895), pp. 184–8; Jordanov, *Seals*, pp. 49–50. The wife of John Komnenos, Anna Dalassene, was accused as a supporter of Romanos IV Diogenes and was exiled by the Doukai probably along with her sons. For this, and for the intermarriage of the two families see Barzos, *Γενεαλογία*, pp. 51–3, 61–4, 85 with D. I. Polemis, *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (London 1968), pp. 34–7.

- ⁴⁶ Stavrakos, “Bleisiegel der Maniakes”, pp. 102–9 with Jordanov, *Seals*, pp. 272–6.
- ⁴⁷ Ashot’s seal mentions neither his dignity nor his office, but it features St. Demetrios. A military career can thus be assumed for this individual. Constantine Theodorokanos’ seal could have belonged to the same man who later attempted to counter Nikephoros Bryennios’ soldiers. For the seals of this family see Seibt, “The Theodorokanoi”, pp. 83–9 and c.f. earlier bibliography cited by him.
- ⁴⁸ See the seals of Constantine Kourkouas (hypatos), Constantine Kourkouas (patrikios) and Constantine Kourkouas (magistros) which feature the military saint St. Theodore in L. Andriollo, “Les Kourkouas (IXe–XIe siècle)”, *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 11 (2012), pp. 57–87 and Jordanov, *Seals*, pp. 239–42. C.f. McGrath, “Dorostolon”, pp. 157–9 and Holmes, *Basil II*, pp. 223–4.
- ⁴⁹ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, p. 205 c.f. Constantine VII, *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn 1838), 390.16–21; Symeon Logothetes, *Chronicon*, ed. S. Wahlgren (Berlin 2006) 135.23. M. Grigoriou-Ioannidou, “Η βυζαντινοβουλγαρική σύγκρουση στους Κατασύρτες (917)”. *Επιστημονική Επετηρίδα Φιλοσοφικής Σχολής ΑΠΘ* 21 (1983): pp. 123–48, argues that Skylitzes’ account is more credible than that of tenth-century historians, a perspective which is not shared by studies on Byzantine-Bulgarian wars though, see indicatively D. P. Hupchick, *The Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars for Early Medieval Balkan Hegemony: Silver-Lined Skulls and Blinded Armies* (Cham 2017), pp. 184–9. See also *Σύνοψη Ιστοριών*, 271–7. For a different explanation of Skylitzes’ inconsistencies in the treatment of some aristocratic families see D. I. Polemis, “Some Cases of Erroneous Identification in the Chronicle of Skylitzes”. *Byzantinoslavica* 26 (1965), pp. 74–81 and Cheynet, “Jean Skylitzès”, pp. 111–29.
- ⁵⁰ Most scholars agree that the *Epitome* was also written by John Skylitzes, see indicatively E. Th. Tsolakes, *Η Συνέχεια της Χρονογραφίας του Ιωάννου Σκυλίτζη* (Thessaloniki 1968) 77–99 with earlier bibliography; “Συνέχειας Συνέχεια”, *Byzantina Symmeikta* 25 (2015), pp. 115–42; Treadgold, *Byzantine Historians*, p. 338; Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί*, pp. 307–12; McGeer, *Continuation*, pp. 5–28. C.f. E. Kiapidou, “Η πατρότητα της Συνέχειας του Σκυλίτζη και τα προβλήματά της: Συγκλίσεις και αποκλίσεις από τη Σύνοψη Ιστοριών”, *Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών* 52 (2004–2006), pp. 329–62 and Savvides, *Ενδεκάπτυχο*, pp. 87–99 with the earlier bibliography cited by him. For the reception of Isaac I Komnenos and Constantine X Doukas in the *Epitome* see A. Kazhdan and S. Franklin, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Cambridge 1984), pp. 33–5; McGeer, *Continuation*, pp. 14–6; Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί*, pp. 314–8.
- ⁵¹ J. Shepard, “Scylitzes on Armenia”, pp. 269–83, “Suspected source”, pp. 173–5 and “Memoirs as manifesto” with Kiapidou, *Σύνοψη Ιστοριών*,

pp. 132–4 and M. Jeffreys, “Summaries of the Letters of Michael Psellos”, in M. Jeffreys and M. D. Lauxtermann (eds.), *The Letters of Psellos: Cultural Networks and Historical Realities* (Oxford 2017), pp. 197–8.

⁵² Michael Psellos, *Orationes funebres*, ed. J. Polemis, vol. I (Berlin 2014) 1.49–52, 2.11–12 with the translation and introduction of A. Kaldellis and I. Polemis, *Psellos and the Patriarchs: Letters and Funeral Orations for Keroullarios, Leichoudes and Xiphilinos* (Notre Dame IN 2015), pp. 49–162. For example, while Constantine X Doukas demanded that Catherine of Bulgaria, Isaac I’s wife, continued to be mentioned in acclamations as empress, Catherine had become a nun and she did not reside with the Doukai in the main palace. Similarly, even though Psellos and Bryennios claim that Constantine X honoured Isaac Komnenos and all his relatives, none seem to have held an important office during Constantine X’s reign. See Barzos, *Γενεαλογία*, pp. 46–7, 49–53, 67–9; Polemis, *The Doukai*, pp. 28–34 and Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 345, n.43. Another example is Manuel Komnenos, the nephew of Isaac I, we know from his seal that he was a *proderos* under Constantine X, but the seal does not mention an office. Nikephoros Bryennios argues that Manuel was following a military career under Constantine X, but other sources suggest that he came to the foreground only after Romanos IV Diogenes became emperor and promoted him. See Bryennios, *Histoire*, p. 87 and c.f. Cheynet, “Comnènes”, pp. 58–62 for Manuel Komnenos and other more obscure figure such as Constantine Komnenos.

⁵³ Kiapidou, *Σύνοψη Ιστοριών*, pp. 126–49. C.f. Treadgold, *Byzantine Historians*, pp. 331–2. It has been argued that a version of Psellos’ *Chronographia* had already been produced c. 1062, but the *Chronographia* seems to have been published and disseminated only after Psellos’ death. See Treadgold, *Byzantine Historians*, 278 and Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί*, pp. 75–84. The *Epitome* drew on both Psellos’ *Chronographia* and Attaleiates’ *Historia*, see Tsolakes, *Συνέχεια*, pp. 61–74; McGeer, *Continuation*, pp. 13–28.