

Istorija ir epigrafika

LEO VI ARABUS?

An unknown fragment from the Arabic translation of Leo VI's *Taktika**

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The aim of this article is to introduce a hitherto unknown Arabic quotation from the military manual written originally in Greek under the name of the Byzantine Emperor Leo VI (886–912). This quotation is found in the fourteenth century Arabic military treatise At-tadbīrāt as-sultāniyya fī siyāsat aṣ-ṣanā'i' al-ḥarbīyya written by a Mamlūk high ranking officer, a “colonel” Ibn Mankalī. Greek quotations and longer passages found in military manuals of the Arabs are of great importance. They allow a modern historian to evaluate Byzantine influence on Arab military thought and, moreover, occasionally give some ideas on medieval Arab military intelligence.

Introduction

Historians have traditionally pointed out that relations between Arabs and Byzantines predominantly consisted of constant wars. This image has not altered much in recent scholarship. This is generally due to the sources, which a modern historian nowadays has at his disposal.² They contain frequent descriptions of military conflicts and exchanges of embassies, that overshadow cultural contacts between these two people. On the other hand, the

* This article was first published in 1994 in the periodical “Macedonian Studies” (Austria). However, the publisher failed to send me the proof-galleys and I therefore was not able to correct the text accordingly. As a result the article appeared with many mistakes and, moreover without Greek and Arabic examples, which has forced me to consider this publication redundant. The present publication is correct and contains all the necessary examples. I have also consulted the scholarly literature published on this subject since that time and made necessary adjustments. I am grateful to the Institute of the Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy (St Petersburg Branch) and especially for the Curator of the Department of Manuscripts, Dr Margarita Vorobieva-Desiatovskaia for the kind permission to publish a fragment of the MS C 726 and Nigel Allan, who read the final version

¹ A. G. Nedvetskii, *Razvedka i kontrrazvedka v mamliuĥskom Egipte (po entsiklopedii al-Kalkashandi)* <http://nedvetsky.boom.ru/books/spies.htm>, hereafter: Nedvetskii, *Razvedka*; N. Kourtakou, “Diplomacy and espionage: their role in Byzantine foreign relations 8th–10th centuries”, *Graeco-Arabica* 6 (1995), p. 125–144.

² See the authoritative compendium: A. A. Vasil'ev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, Bruxelles, 1935–1950.

texts, which describe the Arabs' use of Byzantine military stratagems are almost unknown.³ Moreover, some of the sources contain information, which explicitly highlights the Arabs' scornful attitude towards Byzantine scientific and military achievements.⁴ However, the Arabs did not entirely reject all the merits of their neighbours and enemies. Muslim intelligence was deeply interested in Byzantine administration, military equipment, and system of recruitment and borrowed everything they regarded worth while.⁵ Traces of this interest can be seen in the scientific and military vocabulary used by medieval Arab authors, which to a great extent is based on the Greek and Byzantine military terminology.⁶ Direct information of how Arabs borrowed and consequently applied the achievements of their neighbours is rather limited. Sporadic information found in Byzantine sources allows us to suggest, that the Byzantines were trying to keep their military secrets, like the recipe of the famous "Greek fire", and did everything to prevent them being known to their enemies.⁷ The Arabs certainly translated military manuals written in Greek and Persian.⁸ However I did not come across any translations which have survived in complete form. Such translations (if they existed) were obviously rather rare, probably due to the fact that they were often made for "internal" use and therefore were not copied as frequently as translations from the Greek philosophical or medical texts.

V. Christides was the first to discover a few direct quotations from the *Naumachika* ascribed to Leo VI in a military treatise (*Al-aḥkām fī fan al-qitāl fī l-baḥr al-mulūkīya wa ḍ-dawābiḥ an-namūsīya*) also composed by Ibn Mankalī.⁹ A fragment, published in the present article has been found in another work by Ibn Mankalī: *At-tadbīrāt as-sultānīyya fī*

³ Cf. Nedvetskii, *Razvedka* and the secondary literature as cited there.

⁴ A. Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulmain* (Paris 1975), vol. 2, p. 465, note 8 and p. 468, notes 1, 2, where he quotes the Ibn al-Faḥḥ's statement about the astronomical and medical achievements of the Byzantines.

⁵ V. Christides, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca. 824): A turning point in the struggle between Byzantium and Islam* (Athens 1984), pp. 56–57, hereafter: Christides, *Conquest*.

⁶ H. Daiber, "Semitische Sprachen als Kulturvermittler zwischen Antike und Mittelalter", *ZDMG* (1986), 292–313. Cf. also the article by R. Macuch: R. Macuch, "Greek technical terms in Arabic science", *Graeco-Arabica* 1 (1982), p. 32–34. A complete list of technical terms borrowed by the Arabs see in my *Dictionary of Greek Borrowings and Loan-Words in Arabic* (in preparation) N. Serikoff, "A Dictionary of Greek Borrowings and Loan-Words in Arabic: Tasks, Methods, preliminary Results", *Graeco-Arabica* 5 (1993), p. 267–273.

⁷ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, Greek text edited by Gy. Moravcsik; English translation by R. J. H. Jenkins, London, 1962, 13.33. However, from the modern research it appears that the "Greek fire" was well known to the Arabs. Christides, *Conquest*.

⁸ A. Yunusov, "Voennaia literatura srednevekovogo Blizhnego i Srednego Vostoka", *Vostochnoe istoricheskoe istochnikovedenie i spetsial'nye istoricheskie distsipliny* 1 (1986), p. 186, note 12 with a reference to A.-V. Renaud, "De l'art militaire chez les Arabes au Moyen Age", *JA* 1842 (2), pp. 193–208, however cf. here Nedvetskii, *Razvedka*, note 14.

⁹ V. Christides, "Naval warfare in the Eastern Mediterranean (6th–11th centuries); an Arabic translation of Leo VI's *Naumachika*", *Graeco-Arabica* 3 (1984), p. 139, hereafter Christides, *Warfare*.

siyāsat aṣ-ṣanā'i' al-ḥarbīyya. From this fragment one sees that the Byzantine way of manipulating the troops during combat was well regarded by a Mamlūk high ranking officer several centuries after the death of the Byzantine military theoretician.

A comparison of this fragment with the corresponding Greek source also sheds a additional light on the translation technique applied by the Arabs while translating technical literature from Greek during the medieval period.

The author and his work

Ibn Mankalī's full name is Ġalāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad b. Niẓām ad-Dīn Mankalī Buġa al-Miṣrī, or according to other sources, Muḥammad b. Mankalī al-'Alamī an-Naṣīrī aṣ-Šamsī.¹⁰ The exact date of his birth is not known. According to some sources he may have died around 784AH/1382–1383AD.¹¹ He came from a military family. His father and grandfather were high ranking officers and Ibn Mankalī himself occupied the post of *naqīb al-ġays*¹² at the court of the Mamlūk sultān, al-Malik al-Aṣraf Ša'bān II b. al-Malik al-Amġad Ḥusayn, Naṣīr ad-Dīn (764AH/1363AD–778AH/1377AD). Ibn Mankalī wrote altogether about fifteen treatises on different aspects of the military organisation of the Mamlūk army and ways of conducting warfare. The treatise, where the quotation from the works composed under the name of Leo VI was found, is called *At-tadbīrāt as-sultānīyya fī siyāsat aṣ-ṣanā'i' al-ḥarbīyya* ('The Royal Arrangements: Regulations in the Art of War'). It was written between 769AH/1367–8AD and 778AH/1376–7AD and contains advice to the commander on how to conduct combat. The treatise appeared to be well read: even now, seven manuscript copies of this work are recorded preserved at various libraries in the East and West.¹³ Only as late as 1983 the full text of *At-tadbīrāt* was published in Iraq from the Cairo MS. The present study is based on a manuscript dating from the fifteenth century (C 726) preserved in the St Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy.¹⁴ This manuscript is clearly written, fully vocalized and contains occasional pencil notes, which belong probably to its first cataloguer, Baron V. R. Rosen.¹⁵

¹⁰ Zopoth, "Muhammad ibn Māngli. Ein Ägyptischer Offizier und Schriftsteller des 14. Jhdts.", *WZKM* 53(1957), S. 288–299; Muḥammad b. Mankalī, *Al-adilla ar-rasmiya fī l-ta'ābī al-ḥarbiya*, Maḥmūd Šayṭ Ḥaṭṭāb (ed.), Baġdād 1409/1988 § 86. Hereafter: al-Adilla.

¹¹ Al-Adilla, § 87.

¹² Al-Adilla, § 88. GAL 1 S. 136, SB 2 S. 176: "Oberst der Garde des Sultans". A more detailed description of the functions of the *naqīb al-ġays* is given by al-Qalqašandī (*Subḥ* 4 §. 22, cit. after al-Adilla, §. 88), who writes that it included providing a military escort and guarding the sultān during festivals and military campaigns.

¹³ GAL SB 2 S. 167, al-Adilla, § 100–101.

¹⁴ *Arabskie rukopisi Instituta Vostokovedeniia AN SSSR. Kratkii katalog*, A. B. Khalidov (ed.), Moscow, 1986, vol. 1, no. 10346.

¹⁵ V. R. Rosen, "Les manuscrits arabes de l'Institut des langues Orientales", *Collections scientifiques de l'Institut des Langues Orientales du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères* I, St. Petersburg, 1877, no 213. Pages (not folios) are indicated.

Arabic Text and its sources

The Arabic text

C 726, p. 53.6–54.2

وَأَمَّا مَا يَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ الْمُقَاتِلَةُ وَفَتْ الْحَرْبِ * فَيَكُونُونَ أَرْبَعَةً تُقَاتِلُ جَمِيعًا *¹⁶ * أَوْ سِتَّةَ
عَشَرَ وَالسَّتَّةَ عَشَرَ فِي الْعَدَدِ * هُوَ زَوْجُ الزَّوْجِ قَالَ ذَلِكَ لِأَوْنِ الْمَلِكِ الْيُونَانِيِّ * فِي
كِتَابِهِ الَّذِي سَمَّاهُ مَرَاتِبَ الْحَرْبِ * وَهُوَ كِتَابٌ جَيِّدٌ * يَنْبَغِي لِلْجُنْدِ أَنْ يُطَالِعُوهُ فَإِنَّ
فِيهِ¹⁷ قَانُونَ غَرِيبٌ * // فِي تَرْتِيبِ الْقِتَالِ وَمَذَلُّلٌ إِنْهُمْ لِأَوْنِ إِنْهُمْ لِلْأَسَدِ *
بِالْيُونَانِيَّةِ

Translation

“...And what an officer should do when soldiers are engaged in military action. The soldiers should be lined up **in groups of four**. These four men should fight together or **in groups of sixteen**. And each **sixteen [men]**, (if you count) should be considered as a unit: this is *zawğ uz-zawğ*.¹⁸ [This type of formation] was mentioned by the Greek King Lāwun in his book, which he called *Marātib al-ḥurūb*. This is an excellent book which military men should study, because it contains an unusual rule about battle tactics. By the way, the meaning of the name “Lāwin” in Greek is “lion”.

Greek text

The Arabic text of *At-tadbīrāt* gives a direct reference to the title of a military treatise by Leo VI: *Marātib al-ḥurūb*. This title can only be translated as ‘Tactics’, since the Arabic root رتب traditionally corresponds to the Greek τάσσω and its derivatives.¹⁹ No doubt, the title *Marātib al-ḥurūb* is non other as a shortened version of the full title of the treatise, composed under the name of Leo VI: Τῶν ἐν πολέμοις τακτικῶν σύντομος παράδοσις²⁰, commonly known as *Taktika*. However, the actual text of the *Taktika*, at least the text published in the Greek *Patrologia*, does not contain any passage which directly corresponds to the Arabic text as

¹⁶ Cod.: جمعًا

¹⁷ Cod.: فه

¹⁸ I.e. an even number yielding an even quotient when divided by an even number.

¹⁹ H. Daiber, *Aetius Arabus. Die Vorsokratiker in arabischer Überlieferung*, Wiesbaden, 1980, Nr. 1400.

²⁰ H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, München, 1978, 2, S. 331–334, general information see in A. Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, New York, Oxford, 1991, p. 2008.

cited above. Nevertheless, there are three paragraphs, where the formation of sixteen men (*or zawġ uz-zawġ* in Arabic) is mentioned. This is the reason, why the text under investigation should be carefully compared with all these paragraphs.

Taktika PG 107 p. 753CD Λεπτύονται ἤτοι μερίζονται αἱ ἀκίαι ὅταν ἀπὸ ἰστ' ἀνδρῶν τὸ βάθος αὐτῶν ἐστί, καὶ θέλεις μᾶλλον τὸ μῆκος τῶν παρατάξεων ἐκτείνειν διὰ κόμπου ἢ διὰ τὸ ἰσωθῆναι τῆ τῶν ἐναντίων τάξει.

When the depth of formation is sixteen soldiers you can make the formation shallow or divide it, especially if you wish to stretch out the battle line with the purpose of encircling the enemy battle lines or make [your own formation] equal to that of the enemy.

Taktika PG 107 p. 757A Μερίζονται πρὸς διφραλαγγίαν, ὅταν ἐπ' εὐθείας περιπατῶσι τῆς παρατάξεως καὶ ἔμπροσθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν φανῶσιν πολέμιοι, καὶ εἰ μὲν ἀπὸ ἰστ' ἀνδρῶν ἔχωσιν αἱ ἀκίαι καὶ ἤγγισαν οἱ δι: ὄψεως ἐρχόμενοι ἐχθροί, καὶ μέλλουσις ἐκ τοῦ πλησίου ἄρχεσται τῆς μάχης, παραγγεῖλει· ἀπὸ ἧ' μερίσθητε.

The formations have to divide themselves into semi-phalanxes, if the enemy gets the opportunity to surround them and appears both in front and in the rear. If the formations have in depth sixteen men – and the enemy has already appeared and wishes to engage in the battle from a close distance you should order: “double the rows into eight!”

Taktika PG 107 p. 760B Βαθύονται δὲ ἤτοι διπλοῦνται αἱ ἀκίαι, ὅταν ἀπὸ τεσσάρων ἴστανται, καὶ θέλῃς αὐτὰς διπλῶσαι καὶ πρὸς συμβολὴν ἰσχυροποιῆσαι ἀρμοζόντως τῷ βάθει τῆς παρατάξεως τῶν ἐναντίων, καὶ παραγγεῖλει· εἴσελθε. Καὶ γίνονται ἧ', εἰ δὲ θέλῃς ἰστ' ποιῆσαι πάλιν παραγγεῖλει εἴσελθε. Καὶ εἰσερχόμενοι εἰς τοὺς ἰδίους τόπους εἷς παρ' εἷς διπλοῦνται καὶ γίνονται ἰστ'.

The formation can also become deeper, i.e. doubled. Thus, when the depth of the formation is four men and you wish to double them and strengthen them for the assault, to the depth of the enemy formation, you should order “double the rows!”²¹ And the formation becomes eight men deep. If you wish to increase the depth to sixteen men, you should order again: “double the rows!” They then enter the same positions, one in front of another, and the depth becomes sixteen men.

²¹ Literally “enter!”

Analysis

The paragraphs from the Leo VI's *Taktika* as cited above, when compared with the Arabic text of *At-tadbīrāt* show that the Arab translator did not translate all of them, but prepared a kind of a digest. Here we have a type of “translation” from Greek into Arabic, when only the chief idea (or technical terms) were translated directly, while the the rest of the text was rendered quite freely, according to the interests of the author or, sometimes the tastes of the readers. This type of translation was not unusual.²² A similar example of this translation technique is offered by fragments from Leo VI's *Naumachika* found in another work by Ibn Mankalī – the already above mentioned *Al-aḥkām fī fan al-qitāl fī l-baḥr al-mulūkīya wa ḡ-dawābiḡ an-namūsīya*:

Naumachika (ed. Dain I.3,1; 5.1 cf. the Arab edition by Abd ar-Raīm 20, 21)²³

[Κατασκευασθῆναι δὲ δεῖ καὶ δρόμωνας] (صفة مراكيب ادرومنس ينبغى ان) (κατασκευάζοντας πρὸς ναυμαχίαν ... Ἐχέτωσαν δὲ καὶ πάντα πρὸς ἐξαρτισμὸν [δρόμωνος] [ἀπαράλειπτά καὶ διπλά] (عدد مضاعف العدد التي يحتاج اليها) (οἶον αὐχέννας, [κώπας] (المقاديف), σκαρμούς, [σχοινία] (الحبال) [κάρυα] (القرى) καὶ τὰ [ἄρμενα] (القلوع) δὲ αὐτῶν καὶ κεφαλάρια καὶ [κατάρτια] (الصواری) καὶ ὅποσα ἄλλα ἢ ἄλλη ἡ ναυτικὴ τέχνη πρὸς χρεῖαν ἀπαιτεῖ. Ἐχέτω δὲ καὶ [ἐκ περισσοῦ] (وفاضل من) [ξύλα τινα ἐγκόιλια] (العود المنجور) καὶ σανίδας καὶ [στυπία] (المشاق) καὶ [πίσσαν] (الزيت السائل) καὶ [ύγρόπισσον] (الزيت اليابس).

You must construct dromons²⁴ suitable for naval engagement... They should have whatever is necessary without any shortages and even with double of what is necessary, as, for example, steering oars, oars, toggles, ropes, coils, sails, architraves, masts and whatever else a naval craft requires. And let them also have extra beams and wooden planks, oakum, tar and liquid tar.

The comparison of the translation technique of the two texts, cited above allows us to suggest, that Ibn Mankalī had at his disposal not the complete translation of the Byzantine

²² N. Serikoff, “Types of medieval translations from Greek into Arabic. Ancient Greece and Byzantium through Arabic eyes”, *Byzantinoslavica* 54 (1993), pp. 198–201.

²³ Cit. after Christides, *Warfare*, pp. 139–140. The square brackets in the Greek text indicate the words which have been translated into Arabic. They are followed by the Arabic equivalents, which, being read in the Arabic sequence display the translation. The comparison shows which technical terms were omitted. Thus in the Arabic text no rods are mentioned. The القرى is obviously used for the Greek κάρυα ‘coil’.

²⁴ I.e. war-ships.

military manual, but some kind of a digest, which included practical advice concerning warfare on land and on sea. According to his own words “*this is an excellent book which military men should study*” we can assume that the digest was available to the officers and was not a secret book. Regarding the date of translation, one can suggest the last half of the 10th century,²⁵ a time of the Byzantine military activity on the *Ostfront*.²⁶

LEONAS VI ARABUS?

NEŽINOMAS FRAGMENTAS IŠ LEONO VI TAKTIKOS ARABIŠKO VERTIMO

Nikolaj Serikoff

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnio tikslas – supažindinti su iki šiol buvusia nežinoma arabiška citata iš karybos sąvado, kurio originalas, parašytas graikų kalba, priskiriamas Bizantijos imperatoriui Leonui VI (886–912). Ši citata yra XIV amžiaus arabų karybos traktate *At-tadbīrāt as-sulṭānīyya fī siyāsat aṣ-ṣanā'ī al-ḥarbīyya*, kurio autorius yra aukšto rango Mamlūkų valdininkas, „pulkininkas“ Ibn Mankalī. Arabų karybos sąvaduose aptinkamos graikiškos citatos ir ilgesnės ištraukos yra labai svarbios. Jos ne tik leidžia dabartiniams istorikams įvertinti Bizantijos įtaką arabų karybos minčiai, bet ir atskleidžia viduramžių arabų karybos laimėjimus.

Įteikta 2004 m. kovo 8 d.

²⁵ Christides, *Warfare*, p. 139 writes here: „We do not know the exact time the Arabic translation of Ibn al-Manqali (sic) was made. Ibn al-Manqali simply mentions that he read it himself. Since he lived in the thirteenth century (sic) we can only place it some time between the tenth century (the time of its composition in Greek) and the thirteenth century.“

²⁶ D. A. Zakythinos, *Byzantinische Geschichte 324–1071*, Wien–Köln–Graz, 1979, S. 199–200.