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Projektbeschreibung



Byzantine military manuals as literary tools of the elites (10th century)

The dissertation will involve a comparative analysis of four Byzantine military manuals from the second half of the 10th century: *De Velitatione Bellica* (*Peri paradromes*), *Praecepta Militaria* (*Strategike ekthesis kai syndaxis Nikeforou despotou*), *De Re Militari* (*Peri katastaseos aplektou*) and chapters 56 to 65 of Nikephoros Ouranos's *Taktika*, which are considered 'original' in terms of content. All the authors, or at least initiators, of these texts, which are now recognised in research, had held the post of *Domestikos tōn Scholōn* prior to the composition of the texts in question. As part of the so-called military aristocracy, their families belonged to the elite society of Constantinople. This gave rise to a new type of author, the 'writing general', who could draw on his valuable experience and was also mentioned in the text as the credited author. This marked a clear turning point in the context of the Middle Byzantine period, and the much-cited 'armchair general' – who had been characteristic of the research-based military manuals of that era up to that point – was superseded in this context.

Against this background, the doctoral thesis assumes that this trend shift did not come to pass arbitrarily. Instead, it is assumed that these texts, despite their primary nature as educational literature, were also intended to function as contemporary means of communication within elite circles. The primary aim of this communication was therefore to consolidate or even enhance the reputation of the generals and their families through the reception of the respective military manuals within the circle of elites, which was intended to serve as the resonance chamber for this purpose.

By assuming the role of authors, the generals became a hybrid of scholars and war veterans. This opened up a multitude of opportunities for them to write in a way that was beneficial (in the sense of the research approach chosen). They were able to establish themselves as accomplished writers by adhering to the genre conventions of the tradition-rich text type known as the military handbook. In terms of content, they were able to lend the instructions in their texts the seal of approval that comes with experience. In doing so, they could reflect on and rationalise the events of war, communicate their own expertise, and, overall, make a literary and discursive contribution to the war, but above all to their own role and importance within it.

Overall, the prosopographically motivated concept of personal enrichment through performative writing stands at the centre of this work and must be critically examined on the basis of the selected sources. The aim of the project is therefore the systematic analysis of all source material relevant to this approach, whereby corresponding literary and contextual features can also be identified with the help of a critical examination of earlier (Byzantine) military manuals.

The dissertation to expand the research into Greco-Roman and Byzantine military manuals, which has been actively pursued in recent years, by adding a cultural-historical dimension. Not only does this research approach represent the first large-scale comparative analysis of the four military manuals under consideration, by bringing the texts together on the basis of the biographical parallels of their presumed authors and drawing conclusions that also take intertextual references into account. The research approach evaluates the military manuals as testimonies to a culture of war and knowledge, but also as instances of expression within a culture of discourse, taking into account linguistic conventions and common patterns of interpretation. This is intended to further refine the reception of this text genre in research as a whole. Not least, the aim is also to develop an understanding of the Byzantine elite in the 10th century as the context in which such texts originated and found resonance.