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Clausewitz and War in Late Byzantium*

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How could the political, military, and historiographical theories of the Napoleonic-era Prussian soldier-scholar Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) possibly be of relevance for our understanding of Byzantium’s wars in the period between the Fourth Crusade and the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453? Such a question seems reasonable if one considers that the Prussian military officer participated in the French Revolutionary Wars and primarily in the Napoleonic Wars, and developed one of the most internationally renowned theoretical treatises, *On War*, based on these experiences.¹ This work, which was published after his death, in 1832, has caused a number of problems in the past regarding its interpretation, due both to the text’s complexity and its translations, and to the author’s philosophical influences.² Clausewitz’s reflective and philosophical thought process draws examples from various scientific fields, such as history, philosophy, sociology, political theory, international relations, psychology, public administration, mechanics et al. At the same time, he straddles the gap between the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the sensibilities of Romanticism, praising

* This study utilizes the recent research on warfare in Late Byzantium; it has been presented at the Conference titled “War in Byzantium and the West” held by the Hellenic Army Academy (Athens, 27 April 2012). This is the English version of the article published in *Byzantiaka* 34 (2017), 247–263.

¹ Although the work *On War* arose from the experience of the Napoleonic Wars, it essentially describes the wars before the French Revolution, that is before 1740. See H. Strachan and A. Herberg-Rothe, Introduction, in H. Strachan and A. Herberg-Rothe (eds), *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, Oxford 2007 (henceforth: *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*), p. 1–13 (henceforth: H. Strachan and A. Herberg-Rothe, Introduction), here 4–6.

² See D. Moran, *Strategic Theory and the History of War*, 2001, p. 1–17 (henceforth: D. Moran, *Strategic Theory*), here 6–7, available on the internet: <https://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Moran-StrategicTheory.pdf#zoom=100> (retrieved June 2018). H. Smith, *On Clausewitz. A Study of Military and Political Ideas*, New York 2004 (henceforth: H. Smith, *On Clausewitz*), p. 65. For the peculiarities of the text see J. W. Honig, Clausewitz’s *On War*: Problems of Text and Translation, in *Clausewitz in the Twenty First Century*, p. 57–73 (henceforth: J. W. Honig, Problems).

“...the spirit that permeates war as a whole,” “the art” of which “deals with living and with moral forces.”³ This dualistic approach to concepts and ideas⁴ which either contrast or supplement each other, such as defense and offence, risk and reward, logic and chance, passion and prudence, strategy and politics, but also the formulation of new concepts and opinions, such as the “pure” ideas, the importance of “moral” forces in war, the concept of “friction” or the opinion that war is a political tool, indicate a certain eclecticism, with which he utilizes the philosophical ideas of both earlier and contemporary political (e.g. Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Kant, Hegel) and military theorists (e.g. G.J.D. Scharnhorst).⁵

Although not a philosopher himself, he organizes his military theory with a notably unique, clearly “Clausewitzian” thought process. It is exactly this process which is at fault for the differing “interpretations” of his work, once used to boost the confidence of the German War Staff (mainly after 1871) or to justify the military theory of offense, but also for the intense criticism he was subjected to for being “responsible” for the 1st World War. Clausewitz’s work was a landmark for military writers and analysts after the 2nd World War, when it was regarded in a positive liberal light throughout Europe, Germany included.⁶ His theoretical work, independent of any ideological shadings and correlations, continues to be a tool for the analysis of war, at least on the level of strategic studies, where his theories are utilized to explain contemporary social and political conditions.⁷ Besides, he himself believed that every age has “its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions... therefore ... its own theory on war.”⁸

Such an opinion is primarily a challenge for the military historian who intends to study and analyze previous periods of war, such as that of the Medieval age. In fact, Clausewitz provides

³ H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 67–68. P. Kondyles, *Θεωρία του πολέμου*, Athens 1999² (henceforth: P. Kondyles, *Θεωρία*), p. 111–117. C. von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. & ed. M. Howard and P. Paret, New York – London – Toronto 1993 (henceforth: C. von Clausewitz, *On War*), p. 216, 97.

⁴ H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 61. D. Moran, “The Instrument: Clausewitz on Aims and Objectives in War,” in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 91–106 (henceforth: D. Moran, *The Instrument*), here 95. Idem, *Strategic Theory* 8.

⁵ For the influences on his work see H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 55–62. P. Kondyles, *Θεωρία* 117–119.

⁶ See P. Kondyles, *Θεωρία* 19–21. H. Strachan – A. Herberg-Rothe, Introduction 10. See also H. Strachan, Clausewitz and the Dialectics of War, in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 14–44 (henceforth: H. Strachan, *Dialectics of War*).

⁷ Just how topical Clausewitz is in modern times is an issue that is analyzed in the introduction and most of the articles in the collective volume titled *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century* (see above note 1).

⁸ C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 717.

scant commentary on this age. The wars of the Medieval West are described as being carried out “with feudal levies,” in a limited timeframe, in a quite primitive fashion, and with their ideological foundation being “might makes right”; “their aim was usually to punish the enemy, not subdue him” and as a result they were effected by plunder and kidnapping.⁹ For Clausewitz, the management of war by the feudal aristocracy was indicative of political weakness and, seen in this light, Medieval warfare had an unclear character. After all, he analyzed the war waged between two organized states and not between “loose unions of political forces,” the political reality of the Middle Ages. The brunt of the weight of Medieval battle was borne by the knight and not by the regular army, the most fundamental element of an organized state, according to Clausewitz. Thus, war seemed to resemble more a personal feud than a clash of competing state interests.¹⁰

Clausewitz’s identification of Medieval warfare as a sort of self-expression of a particular aristocracy seems to lead to an unrefined consideration of war, if not wholly confining it to a narrow historical analysis. At the same time, the brevity with which he states his views on the past is more likely to be due to his stance on history, rather than to lack of knowledge of the events.¹¹ The independence of the past and the gap between historical evolution and the concept of continuity permeate Clausewitz’s thought process. He examined the relationships between history and theory and between theory and practice. The belief in the value of experience against theory, along with the emergence of fixed and permanent features of strategy and their examination in the light of the age which shapes them, are landmarks for any who seek to understand the nature of the strategy being applied in every period and circumstance.¹²

Despite the fact that Clausewitz did not expound upon the strategic thought of peoples in the historical past and by extension in the Medieval age, his theoretical concepts can be utilized for their study. He himself commented that “the semi-barbarous Tatars, the republics of antiquity, the feudal lords and trading cities of the Middle Ages ... all conducted war in their own particu-

⁹ C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 709–710. See also A. J. Echevarria II, Clausewitz and the Nature of War on Terror, in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 196–218 (henceforth: A. J. Echevarria II, Clausewitz), here 206.

¹⁰ D. Moran, *The Instrument* 104. H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 201, 209, 220–222, 256.

¹¹ D. Moran (*The Instrument* 103) assumes that Clausewitz did not comment enough on Medieval war because he had not known much about it.

¹² See H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 171–184, 194–195, and mainly 182–184, 194–195. J. T. Sumida, The Relationship of History and Theory in *On War: The Clausewitzian Ideal and its Implications*, *The Journal of Military History* 65.2 (2001) 333–354, σ. 334, 346–347. P. Kondyles, *Θεωρία* 78–111.

lar way, using different methods and pursuing different aims”¹³. The acknowledgement of this particularity, which is ultimately cultural, might be the only point of agreement between Clausewitz and his critic, J. Keegan, who connected war exclusively with a people’s culture.¹⁴ Therefore, Medieval warfare, which expressed the cultural values of a particular social group, seems to have been a means of asserting their cultural claims. Though not always waged between organized states, or between “communities” or ethnic groups with distinct social, political, religious or cultural identities, it maintained its utility within the context of their intertwining political relationships.¹⁵ Within the context of including war in the expressional means of “civilized” societies, for which politics is an integral part of their social relationships in the Aristotelian sense, we can re-examine war in the Medieval West and East.¹⁶ After all, Clausewitz’s well-known position regarding the intermingling of politics and war, which has drawn intense criticism in the past for its ideological-political convictions, referring to nationalist, militarist or authoritarian templates, has different connotations today;¹⁷ the fluidity with which he uses the word “politics” in his work, despite being included within the wider issue of his use of terminology, does not disconnect war from the fact that it constitutes a “political act.”¹⁸

Additionally, the consideration of war as part of political relations (between states, for Clausewitz) emphasizes the social and economic conditions and the system of values which give meaning to the political act. Thus, warfare is inducted in the field of social activity.¹⁹ For military history, this is a groundbreaking approach to the phenomenon of war.²⁰ By formulating the

¹³ C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 708–709.

¹⁴ See J. Keegan, *Η ιστορία του πολέμου*, trans. L. Charalampides, Athens 1997. Keegan believed that the concept of culture escaped Clausewitz, who interpreted war on the basis of logic. See H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 268–269. On the two most prevalent approaches to war based on: a) logic (war is described as a rational endeavor subject to the purposes of the state) and b) culture (war is described as a system of cultural values), see J. Black, *Rethinking Military History*, London – New York 2004, p. 232–235. G. Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450–900*, London – N. York 2003, p. 6–8.

¹⁵ D. Moran, *The Instrument* 103–104. A. J. Echevarria II, *Clausewitz* 198–208, and mainly 204–207.

¹⁶ Cf. P. Kondyles, *Θεωρία* 27, 30, 34, 51, 58, 67.

¹⁷ C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 99. See also H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 98–110. D. Moran, *The Instrument* 91–106. P. Kondyles, *Θεωρία* 39–62 (unlike Smith, Kondyles does not believe that Clausewitz, in expressing the view that war is an instrument of politics, seeks the path to a moderate and humanistic policy capable of subjecting war / violence to rational control).

¹⁸ See C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 98, 99. For the term “policy” in the work *On War* see H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 98–100. J. W. Honig, *Problems* 69–72.

¹⁹ Cf. J. W. Honig, *Problems* 69. H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 70, 111–124 (with the relevant analysis).

²⁰ Of the military treatises of the historical past, only the work of Sun Zu (*The Art of War*) deals with the social effects of war.

“trinity,” the three elements (passion/violence, logic, chance) found in every aspect of social activity and inserting the concept of fluidity into warfare, it offered new analytical tools to its study.²¹ Furthermore, the multilayered, mainly triadic analysis of its basic subjects and components (soldier/army-general-politician or people-army-government or tactics-strategy-politics or tactics-strategy-war plan or even theater-ground-geography),²² aside from its utility on an operational or strategic level, ultimately concludes with its connection to the human factor. It is thus dealt with as an authentically human phenomenon, as it continues to be an act of violence, a bloodletting with massive material and ethical repercussions.²³ Entanglement in such a process, which includes the concepts of “danger, physical effort, uncertainty and chance”²⁴, requires special skills, both combative and psycho-intellectual/ethical-psychological. From the humble soldier to the highest commander, personally and collectively, the demonstration of military virtues is connected with the ability to survive on the field of battle and in the wider context of warfare. This is dominated by “friction,” a term which denotes the parameters affecting the reaction of human thought in war and signifies the disagreement between theory and practice. It is another Clausewitzian concept, which highlights the importance of the psychological factor in warfare²⁵. Clausewitz was the first military theorist to render the psychological factor central to the study of warfare.²⁶

At any rate, the human-centric approach to warfare by no means negates *On War*'s value for the analysis of the nature of strategy. The work does indeed examine conflict and the ways in which it is waged, but also insists on its conceptual investigation, which presents war as a conflict encompassing complex natural, psychological and social forces. Victory and defeat, enforcement and compromise as means for the achievement of the objective, the “disarming of the

²¹ See H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 115–124. Cf. D. Moran, *Strategic Theory* 7. P. Kondyles, *Θεωρία* 38–39 (who do not accept the correspondence of Clausewitz's "trinity" with the people-general / army-government triptych).

²² Cf. H. Strachan, *Dialectics of War* 41–42. See also H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 68, 120–123, 131–133. P. Kondyles, *Θεωρία* 38–39.

²³ See C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 83, 85, 173. For the approach to war from this point of view, see H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 69, 73–84.

²⁴ See C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 96–97.

²⁵ For “friction” see H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 77–80. B. D. Watts, *Clausewitzian Friction and Future War* [McNair Paper 52], Washington, D.C. 2004, p. 17–22. D. Moran, *Strategic Theory* 7–8. P. Kondyles, *Θεωρία* 74–76. U. Kleemeier, *Moral Forces in War*, in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century* 107–121 (henceforth: U. Kleemeier, *Moral Forces*), here 108–109.

²⁶ H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 77. See also D. Moran, *Strategic Theory* 8–9.

enemy,”²⁷ and also the dynamic factors of the campaign, defense, offence and their mutuality, the (two) forms of war, the nature of military leadership and military genius are at the center of the analysis, without the suggestion of distinct strategic models.²⁸ Therefore, Clausewitz’s work is not a “handbook” for waging war, but “a book on how one should think about war.”²⁹

It is worth noting that Clausewitz’s “preference” for the strategic value of assembly of means, numerical superiority and intensive effort, as well as his belief in the importance of the decisive battle for the overthrowing of the enemy, were products of his military experience;³⁰ He re-iterated them during the mature period of his thought process in a new theoretical context, in which war was interpreted as a “political” event within a grand historical framework without annulling established time-honored values of strategy.³¹ This, in turn, gave prominence to new analytical tools (e.g. the lessons about means and objectives or about the two forms of warfare), which connect military theory with history, anthropology and the philosophy of civilization.³² In this context, the reference to the “psychology” of strategy and the description of the qualitative features of military leadership confirm that warfare (strategy) is an intellectual and emotional “game.” The projection of the personality of the general, who combines intellectual and psychological capabilities, promotes a type of individualism, which surpasses isolated heroism and is activated in the uncertain prevailing conditions of war.³³

It is therefore clear that Clausewitz attributed to the concept of warfare that historical and cultural gravitas which renders it a (pan)human and timeless phenomenon. The study of his work is an important tool both for the approach to this historical phenomenon from a social standpoint,

²⁷ C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 85–86.

²⁸ See H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 69, 85–97, 140–168.

²⁹ D. Moran, *Strategic Theory* 7.

³⁰ See H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 154–155. For the significance of battle in Western martial culture, see J. Keegan, *Ιστορία* 643–644.

³¹ See indicatively C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 96 (the importance of fortune), 234, 236 (the importance of surprise attack in tactics), 164–165 (the importance of geographical factors), 215 (the elements of strategy), etc. Cf. C. von Clausewitz, *Principles of War*, trans. – ed. H. W. Gatzke, Harrisburg, PA 1942, p. 14–19 (the importance of terrain), 6 (the importance of reserves), 23 (the combination of tactical and strategic defense in defensive warfare); available on the internet: <http://www.clausewitz.com/mobile/principlesofwar.htm> (retrieved June 2018).

³² See P. Kondyles, *Θεωρία* 62–111. Clausewitz’s formulation of “pure / absolute” and “real” war has been the focus of analysis, and has resulted in a variety of interpretations (e.g. pure war is ideal), identifications (e.g. pure war = war of annihilation) or categorizations of wars (e.g. absolute, limited, total, true). See H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 89–92, 137–139. J. W. Honig, Problems 64–66. P. Kondyles, *Θεωρία* 21, 72–73, 76–78, 81–82, 88–111. K. von Clausewitz (sic), *Περί του πολέμου*, trans. –ed. Natasa Xepoulia, Thessaloniki 1999, p. 17–18.

³³ See H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 160–168. U. Kleemeier, *Moral Forces* 120.

and for the “self-education” of historians and military analysts in the theory of warfare. The latter, despite the particularities associated with it depending on each historical period, remains human-centric and thus both useful and relevant.³⁴ As a result, any correlation with military theory in Byzantium, while seemingly methodologically inappropriate given the timeframe of its formulation and its connotations, offers the historian of this particular period new means for the interpretation of war.³⁵ For example, the central position occupied in Clausewitz’s thought process by time and place can be utilized for the examination of certain wars of the Byzantines on a tactical and strategic level and in connection with the prevailing conditions, in order to understand not only the way in which they were carried out but also their breadth and overall significance.³⁶

Thus, the wars waged by the Byzantines after 1204 and mainly during the Palaiologan period (1261-1453) exhibited the distinct features of their established political and strategic theory, which required readjustment under the weight of new military, political and social conditions. This theory had already been formulated, mostly descriptively and empirically, in the military manuals of the middle Byzantine period.³⁷ It was also reflected in historiographical works and literature texts, whose authors interlaced political and military ideology. Accordingly, the Byzantines recognized the tragic necessity of war, all while avoiding war unless no other option was available. Enemy invasions, impudence and defiance, and the breaking of treaties and agreements were the basic causes of war, and defined the concept of “just” war, which the Byzantines waged. This form of war was commonly defensive, in that it served the restoration of order and

³⁴ Cf. H. Smith, On Clausewitz 184, 195.

³⁵ It is worth noting that few scholars have utilized Clausewitz for the analysis of war in Byzantium. See Efstratia Sygkellou, *Ο πόλεμος στον δυτικό ελληνικό χώρο κατά τον ύστερο Μεσαίωνα (13ος–15ος αι.)* [National Hellenic Research Foundation. Institute for Byzantine Research, Monographs 8], Athens 2008 (henceforth: E. Sygkellou, *Πόλεμος*). E. N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, Cambridge, MA – London 2009 (henceforth: E. N. Luttwak, *Grand Strategy*). J. T. Price, *An Analysis of the Strategy and Tactics of Alexios I Komnenos*, MA thesis, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 2005.

³⁶ Cf. H. Strachan, *Dialectics of War* 41–42. For the analysis of war based on the parameters of time and place, see E. Sygkellou, *Πόλεμος* 43–101, mainly 149–217.

³⁷ However, the analysis of strategy in Leo the Wise’s *Taktika*, contains many of the moral and psychological elements Clausewitz attributes to war that could be contrasted (e.g., the unpredictability of human nature and war, the notion of the battle in war, the importance of good strategy, the comparison of the general with the wrestler, etc.). See *The Taktika of Leo VI*, ed. G. T. Dennis [Dumbarton Oaks Texts 12], Washington, D.C. 2010 (henceforth: *The Taktika of Leo VI*), p. 576, 580, 642, 384, 572, 578, 590.

justice, and as a result the balance of power, while at the same time contributing to the defense of moral and social values, such as human life, religion, freedom and the “fatherland.”³⁸

The avoidance of war in favor of diplomacy was a trademark of Byzantine “grand” strategy, which differs from the Clausewitzian view of war as “the continuation of politics by other means” and of conflict/battle as the “central force of war.”³⁹ Similar principles were adhered to at the operational level with the avoidance of battle, the use of indirect methods such as subversion, ruses and the observation of the enemy, the preference for raids over large-scale operations, the minimization of danger and the element of surprise. The Byzantine military doctrine was maintained until 1453, and was a result not only of a wider cultural background which imbued them with unique powers of survival, but also of the political realism, with which they always evaluated their position against the enemy.⁴⁰ The limited available means imposed the avoidance of war on the Byzantines of the late period, who had to contend with a severely dysfunctional state mechanism and an extended political crisis, together with a host of external powers, often of greater strength, with which they were almost constantly at war.

Indeed, this period proved to be one of the most war-torn in Byzantine and Mediterranean history. After 1204, the Byzantines were forced to come to terms with a dramatic decrease in territory, conditions of “exile” (until 1261), but also challenges relating to their historical survival. The collapse of the status quo which had been ensured in the past by the ideology of ecumenism imposed upon the Byzantines a defensive stance and forced them to adapt to the new reality.⁴¹ The spread and consolidation of the new system of regional lordships in the former Byzantine territories was a particularity of the new, war-fueled and fluid political climate. The establishment of authority, the preservation of new conquests, and survival on every level (economic, social and cultural), were the main goals of war. Almost all the parties involved in military opera-

³⁸ For the notion of the fatherland in Late Byzantium, see Tonia Kiousopoulou, *Η έννοια της πατρίδας κατά τον 15ο αιώνα*, in Tonia Kiousopoulou (ed.), *1453. Η άλωση της Κωνσταντινούπολης και η μετάβαση από τους μεσαιωνικούς στους νεώτερους χρόνους*, Herakleio 2007, p. 147–160.

³⁹ Cf. G. T. Dennis, *Defenders of the Christian People: Holy War in Byzantium*, in Angeliki E. Laiou – R. P. Mottahedeh (eds.), *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, Washington, D.C. 2001, p. 31–39, here 37.

⁴⁰ For the theory of war in Late Byzantium, see Efstratia Sygkellou, *Reflections on Byzantine “War Ideology” in Late Byzantium*, in J. Koder – I. Stouraitis (eds.), *Byzantine War Ideology Between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion, Akten des Internationalen Symposiums, (Wien, 19.–21. Mai 2011)* [Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung 30], Wien 2012, p. 99–107.

⁴¹ As the Byzantines of the late period preferred defence as a strategic choice, its correlation with Clausewitz's position that “the defensive form of warfare is intrinsically stronger than the offensive” (C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 428) could possibly be utilized to interpret its effectiveness at the operational level.

tions in the Byzantine territories, contenders for land or rights and counterclaimants, regardless of national identity, acted within this framework. Latin and Greek lords in the Helladic region, along with Serb and Albanian minor lords, and even certain regional lords from Asia Minor all waged wars with similar objectives, albeit with different means. These were “limited” wars, clearly aligned with the goals of the feudal lordships which dominated the political landscape of the late period.

However, the conquest of enemy territory and the cessation of hostilities with negotiations, which circumscribe the concept of “limited” war according to Clausewitz,⁴² were features of almost all the wars fought in this period, whether waged by larger or smaller powers. For example, the conflict between the Angevins and the Byzantines in the 13th century was not characterized by terms of “total” war, while the military activity and presence of the former in the region of Greece (Achaia-Epirus) in the next century was a part of their wider Mediterranean policy, despite not always offering long-term advantages. Correspondingly, the Venetian military presence was the expression of an opportunistic policy, served at the strategic level by both their presence and various other means, which reinforced their position and contributed to their economic dominance of the Eastern Mediterranean. For the Venetians, military action was the result of consideration and strict meticulous strategic and tactical planning.⁴³

Additionally, the expansionist policy of the Serbs in the 14th c. did not escape the bounds of “limited” wars, with the conquest of enemy territory being a fortuitous event in service of the greater goal, the conquest of Constantinople (see the Serbian proposal for the cession of Epirus to the Venetians in exchange for naval assistance⁴⁴). For the Serbs, war was largely identified with the leader (the state) according to the feudal standards, further emphasizing the concept of the lord’s personal safety, but also that of the minor groups affiliated with him (e.g. Serbian or Albanian lords). By contrast, the Ottoman expansionist policy seems to have been closer to the Napoleonic understanding of warfare, in other words war of annihilation.⁴⁵ Extensive military

⁴² D. Moran, *The Instrument* 97. Cf. H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 89–97.

⁴³ See E. Sygkellou, *Πόλεμος* 177–185.

⁴⁴ Stefan Dusan’s aggression was a result of the inter-Byzantine conflicts for the imperial throne. His proposal to the Venetians is commented on detail by Melpomeni Katsaropoulou, *Ένα πρόβλημα της Ελληνικής Μεσαιωνικής Ιστορίας. Η σερβική επέκταση στη δυτική κεντρική Ελλάδα στα μέσα του ΙΔ΄ αι.*, PhD thesis, Aristotle University of Thessalonike 1989, p. 99–100.

⁴⁵ Cf. P. Kondyles, *Θεωρία* 66–73.

activity with the objective of disarming or defeating the enemy,⁴⁶ and its correlation with the element of violence, place Ottoman operations firmly outside the context of “limited” warfare, which the European powers of the time continued to wage.⁴⁷

Clearly, these wars were “real” wars in that they were related to the “political relations” taking shape in Southeastern Europe. Here, the entanglement of the great powers of the age increasingly came to express a “conflict of interests and activities” and reversal of previous political associations.⁴⁸ Therefore, the competition between the Latin powers in the Byzantine territories primarily served either their political survival in their place of origin (Angevins) or their economic dominance and expansion to the East (Venetians, Genoese). By contrast, the Ottoman interventions were indicative of the momentum of a consciously military expansionist political organization. At the same time, multiple military developments further introduced “political relations” into the concept of warfare. These developments were the gradual decline of the feudal-aristocratic enlistment system, the increasing use of professional mercenaries, the dynamic appearance of infantry, the gradual formation of standing armies along with the invention of gunpowder and the introduction of mobile artillery. The increasing “commercialization” of war from the 15th c. onwards led to the codification of rules of warfare, in order to confine and control violence. This fact in conjunction with declarations regarding the “just” war and the categorization of Medieval wars by Western thinkers induct the phenomenon of war into the sphere of “political communication” between peoples, and, therefore, into the “field of social existence” (Clausewitz).⁴⁹

From this point of view, the cultural factor, distinct from but related to the political factor, influences the nature and waging of war, often defining the type of strategy applied on the battlefield. Tactics of enemy attrition, which resulted in economic and psychological exhaustion rather than total annihilation, in addition to geography, availability of means (manpower – financial situation) and the (limited) scope of each war, were directly related to the martial customs of those involved. The Byzantines utilized “unorthodox” methods of warfare (subterfuge, deception, blackmail, ambushes, raids, harassment and the element of surprise). The Serbs overwhelm-

⁴⁶ C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 85–86.

⁴⁷ See E. Sygkellou, *Πόλεμος* 195–199.

⁴⁸ C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 173, 731.

⁴⁹ M. Howard, *Ο ρόλος του πολέμου στη νεότερη ευρωπαϊκή ιστορία*, trans. Herakleia Stroikou, Athens 2000, p. 24–26. P. Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans. M. Jones, Oxford 1986, p. 281–292. For the military events of the period see E. Sygkellou, *Πόλεμος* 258–259, 280, 283–284, 314, 322–327. Cf. H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 201.

ingly preferred attrition warfare, making it the dominant form of warfare in the Balkans. Accordingly, the Albanians were pioneers of “mountain” and raid-based warfare, while the Ottomans were known for including attrition into the strategy of forcing the enemy into submission.⁵⁰ Of course, a central aspect of applied strategy was the avoidance of battle.⁵¹ Even the Westerners, who would seek pitched battles as a rule, did not seem willing to become involved in such, or even in large scale operations, if they were unsure of the result. Indeed, the late Byzantine period is characterized by the rarity of large scale operations and battles.⁵² In contrast, the safe, prudent waging of war was a basic principle of the Western world, which preferred subterfuge, ruses and raids instead of conventional warfare.⁵³ Even though attrition seems to be a strategic choice in the “limited” wars of the period, defensive or offensive – a realization which refers to Clausewitz’s theory regarding the mutuality of means and ends in war – any association of them must take into consideration two basic parameters: a) the military culture of those involved (e.g. nomadic peoples, such as the Turkomans, the Ottomans, the Cumans /mountain peoples, such as the Albanians) and b) the reasoning of adaptation to the type of opponent, elements which exerted a crucial influence over the applied strategy.⁵⁴

Also, it is clear that cultural and intellectual factors permeate strategy. Clausewitz, analyzing at length the features of military leadership and presenting good generalship as an answer to chance in warfare, repeated timeless values found in medieval treatises on warfare. Despite the lack of development of any sort of military literature in Late Byzantium, the image of the general was defined based on traditional values, which were reproduced in the works of historians and scholars of the period. Thus, the ideal type of Byzantine general is intellectually and spiritually

⁵⁰ See E. Sygkellou, *Πόλεμος* 188–189, 195–196, 229–230, 265, 270–274. For “mountain” warfare, see Eadem, Ο «ορεινός» πόλεμος στη μεσαιωνική Ήπειρο: η περίπτωση της Πίνδου, *Tzoumerkiotika Chronika* 12 (2011) 99–107.

⁵¹ The modern “strategy of wearing down the enemy” refers to the maneuver-battle dipole. See H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 137–138. D. Tsirigotis, *Εναλλακτικές στρατηγικές των λιγότερο ισχυρών κρατών στο Διεθνές σύστημα των νεότερων χρόνων*, Phd thesis, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens 2007, p. 69–70. Cf. E. N. Luttwak, *Grand Strategy* 57–58, 281–287, 303.

⁵² For the factors that influenced the conduct of large-scale operations, see E. Sygkellou, *Πόλεμος* 259–264.

⁵³ See M.E. Mallett, *Mercenaries and their Masters. Warfare in Renaissance Italy*, London 1974, p. 177.

⁵⁴ For the purposes and the means of war according to Clausewitz’s theory, see P. Kondyles, *Θεωρία* 98–111. For the correlation between war and culture, see E. Sygkellou, *Πόλεμος* 334–345. E. N. Luttwak, *Grand Strategy* 11, 32, 63, 235, 340, 410, 412, 422. On the importance of knowing the enemy and its effects on the adversaries, see C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 89–90, 85–86.

gifted and adheres to the principles of Byzantine strategy.⁵⁵ Martial experience is deemed essential for success in war.⁵⁶ Prudence is of utmost importance and seems to surpass heroism, which however continues to be lauded as a military virtue. As is evident, a large number of battles were decided by the role of leadership (e.g. battle of Pelagonia, 1259).⁵⁷

Also of interest at this point is the relationship between the general and the political leadership and, by extension, the (political) purpose of the war.⁵⁸ In the late Byzantine state, the general, as a public official, served the Emperor and the uniquely Byzantine strategy of “diplomacy and peace.” Being of noble background and belonging to the imperial entourage, he was a beacon of an aristocratic understanding of warfare, which during this period was close to the Western chivalric standards.⁵⁹ In fact, when the Emperor was also a general, the association of political and military objectives was taken for granted, but encompassed diplomacy and a defensive stance, not the use of military might. In the regional lordships the general usually expressed political power or belonged to the regional aristocracy, on which the lord’s survival often depended. This situation allowed the possibility of independent management of warfare and its objective within the framework of decentralization of power. There are salient examples of Albanian regional lords and Turkish beys throughout Greece, who ensured the dominance of their racial groups and the expansionist policy of the Ottoman state by means of warfare. As for the generals of the remaining parties involved in the Byzantine territories, the Westerners (Angevins, Italians etc.) remained true to the feudal network of relations, as did the Serbs, while the Venetians emphasized the importance of professionals (*condottieri*) in war.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ See S. Kyriakidis, *Warfare in Late Byzantium, 1204–1453* [History of Warfare 67], Leiden 2011 (henceforth: S. Kyriakidis, *Warfare*), p. 69–73. Cf. C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 115–131. See also H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 160–168.

⁵⁶ See *Nicephori Gregorae Byzantina historia*, ed. L. Schopen, vol. I [Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae], Bonnae 1829 (henceforth: *Nicephori Gregorae*), p. 153. *Georgii Acropolitae Opera*, ed. A. Heisenberg – P. Wirth, v. I–II, Stuttgart 1978, v. I, p. 51. *Georgii Pachymeris de Michaelae et Andronico Palaeologis*, ed. I. Bekker, v. I [Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae], Bonnae 1835 (henceforth: *Georgii Pachymeris*), p. 323. *Ioannis Cantacuzeni Eximperatoris historiarum*, ed. L. Schopen, v. I [Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae XX], Bonnae 1828, p. 341. Cf. C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 191.

⁵⁷ See S. Kyriakidis, *Warfare* 66.

⁵⁸ Cf. C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 169 (“A commander-in-chief...must be familiar with the higher affairs of state ... must know current issues, questions under consideration, the leading personalities ...”), 734–735, 737.

⁵⁹ See *Manuelis II Palaeologi Praecepta educationis regiae*, PG 156, col. 313–384, here 376, 377. Cf. S. Kyriakidis, *Warfare* 44–60. U. Kleemeier, *Moral Forces* 116 (where Clausewitz’s general is associated with the perceptions of the bourgeoisie).

⁶⁰ See E. Sygkellou, *Πόλεμος* 330–334.

At any rate, Clausewitz's analysis of the nature of strategy allows the examination of military action, war and battle, from the viewpoint of the "moral forces," i.e. the entirety of emotional and human characteristics which comprise the image of both the military commander (military genius) and the soldier, individually and collectively (army). "Military spirit" is an antidote to the "friction" which permeates every military engagement. Individual virtues such as courage, daring, ambition, discipline, physical training, good morale and enthusiasm are the components of a battle-worthy army, which, according to Clausewitz, must also be professional.⁶¹ War experience proves that in Late Byzantium there were battle-worthy armies with the aforementioned attributes. The historians of the period speak at length in their Chronicles on the virtues of the soldiers and their leaders.⁶² The Byzantine aristocratic elite were not the only ones to display combativeness; indeed, it was also present in the mercenaries recruited by the Byzantines and the regional lords, and in the groups of locals participating in operations in their regions. Mercenaries, a common factor from the mid-14th c. onwards, contributed to the development of professionalism, an advancement observed in the Italian-dominated areas of Greece (e.g. Epirus, Corfu), while being absent from the Byzantine state. Different theories formulated at times regarding universal conscription (Thomas Magistros), the composition of the native professional army (Plethon) or the advancement of military technology (Bessarion) are connected with late period Byzantium's shortcomings in manpower, organization and technical knowledge respectively, all of which had an obvious impact on military performance.⁶³ However battles, whenever they were fought, continued to require physical strength and good morale, which in combination with military leadership and God decided the outcome of the war.⁶⁴ This triptych (God-general-morale) as a variation on Clausewitz's own (political power-general-army) is sufficient to interpret the factors of the act of war in Late Byzantium and the Medieval world, where contradictions, compromises and innovations birthed their own theory on war.

⁶¹ C. von Clausewitz, *On War* 115–131, 219–222. H. Smith, *On Clausewitz* 80–84.

⁶² See indicatively *Tò Chronikòn tou Moréως*, ed. P. P. Kalonaros, Athens 1940, col. 3156, 3254, 3292, 8952–8957, 9223–9225, etc. *Cronaca dei Tocco*, ed. G. Schirò, Roma 1975, col. 159–160, 340–348, 357–358, 949, 2344–2345, etc. *Nicephori Gregorae 552. Georgii Pachymeris 509*.

⁶³ For these theories, see *Thomas Magistri Oratio de regis officiiis*, PG 145, col. 509. S. Lampros, *Παλαιολόγεια καὶ Πελοποννησιακά*, v. III, Athens 1926, p. 309–312, 246–265 (Plethon) and *Παλαιολόγεια καὶ Πελοποννησιακά*, v. IV, Athens 1930, p. 32–45 (Bessarion), 113–135 (Plethon).

⁶⁴ Cf. *The Taktika of Leo VI* 308: «μετά γὰρ τῆς κρίσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ τῆ τοῦ στρατηγοῦ διοικήσει καὶ προθυμίᾳ τοῦ στρατοῦ ὁ πόλεμος κρίνεται».

In this transitional period, in which international treaties did not exist, while the distinction between “civilized” people and “barbarians” was still blurred,⁶⁵ it is natural for the interpretation of war to transcend the various epistemological directions. And if utilizing Clausewitz’s theory does not produce solutions, certainly the inclusion of moral and psychological parameters into the act of war offers further analytical tools to the study of the phenomenon. If, on the other hand it is focused exclusively on the examination of military events from a military point of view, then it could possibly clarify the nature of conflicts at every level of their execution (grand strategy, theater of war, operational, tactical). At any rate, for the historian, and especially for the historian of the Medieval period, Clausewitz’s positions, in addition to his theory, offer an incisive view into the complex and (pan)human phenomenon of war.

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⁶⁵ Cf. B.T. Carey – J. B. Allfree – J. Cairns, *Warfare in the Medieval World*, Barnsley 2006, p. 9.