

# Notes on the Numbers and Organization of the Ninth-Century Byzantine Army

Warren T. Treadgold

MODERN KNOWLEDGE of the organization of the Byzantine army in the ninth century derives mainly from three sources of high quality. The best known of these is the treatise of Philotheus on court ceremonial, dated in its title to the year 899.<sup>1</sup> Philotheus includes a comprehensive list of civilian and military officials, separate lists of the officers assigned to each unit, and some other information on ceremonies that can be used as evidence for the organization of the army. Another comprehensive rank list, incomplete towards its end, is the *Tacticon Uspensky*, datable to 842 or 843.<sup>2</sup> The third source is a description of the Byzantine Empire composed by al-Jarmī, an Arab official who lived in honorable captivity in the empire for some years before he was released in 845. Though this work is lost in its original form, substantial material from it is preserved in the works of the Arab geographers Ibn al-Faqīh, Ibn Khurdādhbah, and Qudāmah.<sup>3</sup> The surviving material includes a list of the military units in the Empire with their numbers of troops, and a description of the command structure of one unit with the numbers of men of each rank. Al-Jarmī's list dates from after 838, because it mentions the destruction of Amorium in that year, and almost certainly from after 839, because it does not mention the special corps of Khurramites that was abolished in late 839 when its troops were dis-

<sup>1</sup> Ed. Nicolas OIKONOMIDES, *Les Listes de préséance byzantines des IX<sup>e</sup> et X<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris 1972; cited hereafter by author's name alone) 81–235.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. Oikonomides 47–63; 45–47 for the date.

<sup>3</sup> On al-Jarmī see E. W. Brooks, "Arabic Lists of the Byzantine Themes," *JHS* 21 (1901) 67–72, and most recently A. Miquel, *La Géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du 11<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris 1967) xviii (cf. xxii on Ibn al-Faqīh, xxi on Ibn Khurdādhbah, and xxviii on Qudāmah). The relevant material from Ibn al-Faqīh is translated by Brooks 72–77 and edited by H. F. Wüstenfeld, *Jacut's geographisches Wörterbuch* II (Leipzig 1867) 863–65. The material from Ibn Khurdādhbah and Qudāmah is edited and translated into French by M. J. de Goeje, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum* 6 (Leiden 1889) 76–84 and 196–99; here and later I cite the page numbers of the translations unless otherwise indicated.

tributed among other units.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, al-Jarmī's list must be earlier than 842/3, because al-Jarmī gives the commander of Cappadocia the rank of cleisurarch, while by the time of the *Tacticon Uspensky* this rank had been raised to strategus.<sup>5</sup> These three sources, particularly al-Jarmī if he is trustworthy, provide a reasonably detailed picture of the Byzantine army in the period.

The army had two main kinds of units: the themes (θέματα), normally stationed in the provinces, and the tagmata (τάγματα), normally stationed in or around Constantinople. A tagma (unless we count the ambiguous case of the Optimates) was a military unit and nothing more. The term 'theme', in contrast, refers both to the provincial army corps and to the province in which the corps was stationed; the commander of a theme, the strategus, was both general of the corps and military governor of its province. Some provinces did not formally rank as themes and were commanded and governed not by strategi but by cleisurarchs, archons, or dukes. The Optimates, a support corps of muleteers, were usually associated with the tagmata but were stationed in a small 'theme' of their own just across the Bosphorus from Constantinople.<sup>6</sup> The following notes touch on some disputed or ambiguous points about this military organization, as a preliminary to the reconstruction of a comprehensive roll and payroll of the army.<sup>7</sup>

## I. The Tagmata Who Came to Dinner

Among the Arab writers who drew on the work of al-Jarmī, Qudāmah gives the most complete list of the numbers of troops in the different corps, including both themes and tagmata. Qudāmah's figures, covering thirteen provinces and six tagmata, range from 4000 to 15,000 men. Qudāmah lists the Optimates under

<sup>4</sup> On the abolition of the Khurramite corps see Warren T. Treadgold, "The Chronological Accuracy of the *Chronicle* of Symeon the Logothete for the Years 813–845," *DOPapers* 33 (1979) 183. For the mention of the destruction of Amorium, see Brooks (*supra* n.3) 74 and de Goeje (*supra* n.3) 198.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Brooks (*supra* n.3) 75 with Oikonomides 49.6. Though the latter entry is restored by Oikonomides, the restoration is certain, because later in the *Tacticon* (55.21) the Turmarch of Cappadocia appears among the turmarchs of strategi in the exact place he should hold according to the precedence of strategi in Philotheus (101.11 and 137.26).

<sup>6</sup> On the Optimates, see Oikonomides 339.

<sup>7</sup> The reconstruction forms part of a study, in preparation, entitled "The Byzantine State Finances in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries"; a summary was presented at the Fifth Annual Byzantine Studies Conference at Washington in October 1979.

