



Summary :

The term *akritai* designates the inhabitants along the frontiers. In military treatises of the 10th and 11th century, «akritai» was a name for the army units responsible for guarding the frontier of the Byzantine Empire in Asia Minor; they could either belong to the regular army or be drawn from the civilian people along the border, and they were supported by the Byzantine administration, either financially or through the cession of arable land. The action of these «akritai» significantly strengthened the defence of Byzantine Asia Minor. The way the «akritai» were viewed by their contemporaries is reflected in the acritic songs of the Byzantine and post-Byzantine period.

Date

7th-13th century

Geographical Location

Asia Minor

1. Historical background

The term *akrites* occurs mostly in texts dating to the middle (7th-12th cent.) and the late (12th-15th cent.) Byzantine period, and it mainly refers to the soldiers responsible for the defence of the Byzantine border in Asia Minor (the *akres*, mean. «extremity»), as well as to their commanders. It also indicated the civilian population that inhabited this border region. At least during the Middle Byzantine period, this term certainly did not denote independent local irregular troops, since the defence of the frontier was undertaken by forces of the regular army, which served there turn out of turn; and even in the Late Byzantine period, the safeguarding of the border was organized by the central administration, albeit with the indispensable participation of the local population.

During the Early Byzantine period (4th-7th cent.), the defence of the borders was entrusted to the so-called *limitanei* (from the Latin *limes*= border, frontier), i.e. troops stationed in cities or strongholds along the border, as distinct from the *comitatenses* (from the Latin *comitatus* = escort), the strike force of the Late Roman army, stationed in cities or camps of the hinterland. The division of the army into static and mobile units dates to the reforms of the late 3rd and the early 4th century and is attributed to Emperor [Diocletian](#) (284-305), or to Constantine the Great (307-337).¹

The *limitanei* consisted of infantry and cavalry units, under the command of a *dux*, while the auxiliary troops were under the command of the governors of the borderland provinces. Up to the 6th-7th cent., Asia Minor was protected (from North to South) by the borderland provinces of Armenia, Mesopotamia, [Osrhoene](#) and Syria, while frontier troops were stationed in [Isauria](#) as well, partly to guard the mountain passes from Syria into the interior of Asia Minor, but also to keep an eye on the rebellious Isaurians.

2. The transitional period (6th-7th cent.)

Unlike the *comitatenses*, the *limitanei*, apart from their salary as soldiers, were also offered land in the area where they were stationed. Therefore, parallel to their military duties, they also worked the land, thus gaining a complementary income and contributing to the agricultural production of the borderland provinces. The status of the *limitaneus*, as well as his estate, were hereditary and passed on from father to son. The military importance of these frontiersmen gradually diminished and, by the years of the Emperor [Justinian I](#) (527-565), the *limitanei* were no longer considered active soldiers, although this institution was not altogether abolished.

The presence of *limitanei* in the eastern provinces is attested until up to the second half of the 6th cent., but the turmoil caused by the Persian conquests in the early 7th cent. led to the dissolution of the defensive system of the Byzantine empire. In the 630s, following the defeat of the Persians by Emperor Herakleios (610-641) and the reconquest of the eastern Byzantine provinces, there was an



attempt to reorganize the disintegrated frontier garrisons, but this effort proved fruitless. The cause for this failure lay in the appearance of a new menace in the eastern frontier of the Empire, an enemy much more dangerous than the Persians.

In 634 the Arabs invaded the Byzantine provinces of Palestine and Syria. By 639-640 they had completed the conquest of those provinces and had invaded Mesopotamia and Egypt. The conquest of Egypt was completed in 645, while as early as 640 the Arabs had begun their incursions in Asia Minor. Over time, their raids into the Byzantine Asia Minor became recurrent.

3. The Arab threat to the Eastern frontier

Apart from the profit made from plundering, the reasons behind such almost annual Arab raids in the eastern Byzantine provinces were mostly ideological and strategic. The struggle against the infidels was a religious duty of the Muslims, while it could also be used for internal consumption, to boost the prestige of -local mostly- Arab rulers. The continuous raids and pillaging weakened the Byzantines and offered security to the borderline Muslim areas.²

Up to the early 8th cent. the raids were organised by the caliphs in order to undermine the Byzantines and to capture cities and islands that could be used as bases for further operations, the ultimate goal being the seizure of Constantinople and the conquest of the Byzantine Empire as a whole. In the late 7th and the early 8th cent. the Arab attempts at [capturing Constantinople](#) failed. Since then - and especially after the mid-9th century- their raids became seasonal³ and concentrated along the eastern border, which had now been stabilized along the line from Cilicia and the Taurus mountain chain to the Antitaurus, the west bank of the river Euphrates and the mountains of the Pontus, ending up in the Black Sea.⁴ The mountainous terrain of the eastern frontier forced invaders to use a limited number of mountain passes, most important among which were (from South to North) the Cilician Gates, the pass of Adata and the pass of Melitene.⁵

4. The defence of the frontier of Asia Minor (7th-10th cent.)

The incessant struggle on the Arab-Byzantine frontier decidedly affected the military organization of the Byzantine Empire from the 7th century onwards. Faced with incursions that often penetrated deep into Anatolia,⁶ the Byzantines were forced to disperse their troops all over Asia Minor, developing the institution of the [themes](#), an in depth defensive strategy which featured the deployment of troops in the hinterland in adequate numbers so as to repel raiders and protect the territory of each theme from being pillaged. The army was also entrusted with keeping the civilian people safe. Special officers, the *expelatores*, were sent to the residential areas of each theme that lay on the route of the raiders and coordinated the transportation of civilians to fortified cities or to the mountains.⁷

Essential to the proper operation of the system were the existence of some early warning for incoming enemy raids, the gathering of information, the dynamic reaction to small-scale incursions and the carrying out of reprisal raids in the Arab lands along the frontier. These were undertaken by the regular troops stationed in the border themes; more precisely, responsible for the above were the [tourmarchs](#) who were stationed exactly on the borderland, on the «*akres*». These are the first men that are referred to in the Byzantine sources of the 10th cent. as «*akritai*», though the term does not refer to any specific unit of these troops.

5. Tactic of the «akritai»

The task of the [kleisourarchs](#) and the *tourmarchs* was to oversee the roads that led from the Arab lands to the interior of Asia Minor and keep their superiors informed on any raids. For this reason the «*akritai*» had created a network of static observation posts (*vigles* and *kaminoviglia*) spread out over the rises of the frontier to transmit information to the [strategos](#) of the theme. Mounted scouting patrols in the lowland areas also served as a connection between these observation posts, thus strengthening the frontier surveillance system.

The soldiers of the theme manned the observation posts rotating every 15 days, while the mounted patrols were carried out by light cavalry troops, called *trapezitai* in the eastern frontier and *tassinarioi* or *tassinakia* by the Armenians. Their mission was also to



organize reprisal raids in the enemy territory and to gather information. Although the terms *trapezitai* and the *tassinarioi* do not feature in the [akritic songs](#), the term *apelatai*, another word occurring in such literary texts, is also found in the Byzantine sources of the 10th century, and it probably designates troops that belonged to the «*akritai*» in general.⁸

The *tourmarchs* of each region (who were also «*akritai*» themselves) were responsible, among others, for keeping the local civilian population safe and for keeping them off the war-zone, as well as for reinforcing the defence in case of large scale invasions. In the latter case, the *tourmarch* was supposed to follow the invaders closely while waiting for the strategos with his reinforcements. If his troops were superior in number, he would attempt to curtail the movements of the invaders and limit the extent of the plundering. Otherwise he would resort to guerrilla tactics, avoiding engaging the enemy in normal battle, and attempting to use his infantry to trap the raiders in mountainous passes and eliminate them in an ambush.

6. Gradual weakening

From the late 9th cent. onwards, compact Armenian populations began settling in the border regions of the Byzantine Empire, mostly in [Cilicia](#) and [Mesopotamia](#). These Armenians were incorporated in the defensive system of Asia Minor, forming small themes, which were called «small» or «Armenian» ones (in contrast to the older [themes](#) of Asia Minor, which were now known as «great» or «Roman» ones); these themes were entrusted with the mission of protecting the eastern frontiers. As the Armenians proved rather lackadaisical in fulfilling their duties as frontiersmen, it became customary to carefully select the persons to be sent as lookouts in the frontier (where they would remain for 30 days) and to provide them with a special salary. But still the Byzantines were not satisfied and continued relying on the *trapezitai*.

The [Arab raids](#) in Asia Minor stopped in the 960s, when the Emperor [Nikephoros II Phokas](#) (963-969) conquered Cilicia and part of Northern Syria, thereby depriving the Arabs of their bases from which they launched their attacks. In the late 10th cent. the Byzantine defensive line in the eastern frontier was mainly manned by Armenians and mercenary units of the regular army. It was organized around five large frontier divisions: Antioch, Edessa, Mesopotamia, Vaspurakan and Chaldia, under the command of [duces](#). The Byzantine expansion beyond the eastern boundaries of Asia Minor, the abatement of the threat of the Arab raids and the shouldering of the frontier defence by Armenian newcomers resulted in the weakening of the ranks of the «*akritai*», and thus of the defence of the borders, after the 10th century. Some (including certain Byzantines of the time) blame the sweeping advance of the Seljuk Turks in Asia Minor during the second half of the 11th century on the almost complete lack of military experience of those who undertook the guarding of the frontiers.⁹

7. The reconstitution of the eastern border during the Comnenid period (12th cent.)

By the 1080s, the Seljuks had captured the largest part of Anatolia, confining the Byzantine Empire to its European possessions. Thanks to the efforts of [Alexios I Komnenos](#) (1081-1118) and even more to those of his son, John II (1118-1143), the empire managed to recapture part of western Asia Minor. The most important steps towards securing the new border were taken by Manuel I (1143-1180). On his initiative, the eastern themes were reorganized, while in the 1160s he founded the theme of Neokastra, which comprised the fortresses of [Pergamon](#) and Chliara. This new theme was the first line of defence against the Seljuks in central Asia Minor and its fortifications were manned by local army units, the soldiers of which were offered land and economic benefits in return. Thus the Emperor included these new «*akritai*» in the defence of the east border; and it is not a coincidence that a eulogist of Manuel Comnenos, referring to his activity in the eastern border called the emperor a «new *akrites*».

8. The «*akritai*» during the 13th cent.

The military organization of the frontier line as consolidated by Manuel I, was continued during the period of the [Empire of Nicaea](#), the watchtower of the Byzantine rule in Asia Minor following the [fall of Constantinople](#) to the Crusaders in 1204. Although the emperors of Nicaea were on friendly terms with the [Seljuks of Iconium](#), the border of the Nicaean Empire at the Sangarios river and the valleys of the Maeander were constantly threatened by the Türkmen nomads and Seljuk war-bands not controlled by the rulers of the Iconium. To counter this threat, the emperors of Nicaea, mainly [John III Vatatzes](#) (1222-1254), took a series of measures in order to



strengthen the frontier defence, measures that provided, among others, that the inhabitants along the border would undertake military activity.

Though the emperors of Nicaea did not organize or train the population of the highland border region militarily, they did offer incentives to all who, in the face of incoming raids, chose not to flee their homes but stand and defend them. Such incentives included tax-exemptions and other privileges, while some were even offered *pronoiai*. Though the inhabitants of the region were not officially incorporated in the Nicaean army and remained farmers and stock-breeders, they were now nonetheless wholly responsible for the defence of the empire's eastern border. Furthermore, when a large number of *Cumans* (a Turkic people which inhabited areas north of the Black Sea) sought refuge in the Nicaean Empire c. 1242, John III installed some of them along the frontier east of *Philadelphia* and the Meander valley, and granted them the same privileges, thereby strengthening the defence of the frontier.¹⁰ The effectiveness of the Nicaean defensive policy can be seen in the fact that the eastern border of the empire remained virtually immune until 1261, when the Byzantines recaptured Constantinople.

9. The end of the «akritai»

After [the recapture of Constantinople](#) in 1261, the Emperors are mainly preoccupied with recapturing the European possessions of the old empire, and Asia Minor now becomes a secondary concern. In December 1261, [Michael Palaiologos](#), who had come to power in Nicaea, blinded [John IV Laskaris](#), the juvenile rightful heir to the throne. This act caused intense discontent among the acritic population inhabiting the highland region of Trikokkia, east of Nicaea, who remained loyal to the Lascarid dynasty. In early 1262, the «akritai» of Trikokkia (this place was also known as Zygos, mean. «mountain chain») [rebelled](#) against Michael VIII, whose troops barely managed to suppress the uprising.

Wishing to subdue the «akritai», but also to use them to his own advantage, the emperor introduced a number of reforms. Immediately or shortly after the end of the rebellion, he sent in Asia Minor the official Chadenos, who reorganized the «akritai» of the region: he offered them land and incorporated them in the army, where they had to serve at their own expenses, while the tax-exemptions they enjoyed were abolished. These new measures meant that, in order to add to their diminished income, these frontiersmen were also obliged to participate in the imperial campaigns conducted on European territory, as they now formed part of the regular army.

The reforms of Chadenos proved inefficient. Stripped of its defenders, the eastern frontier of the empire quickly collapsed under the pressure of the *Türkmen* raids in the 1260s. The *akritai* that did remain in their homes could not repel the invaders, while many joined forces with the *Türkmen*s. The rest withdrew towards the west, as the Byzantine-controlled territories in Asia Minor shrunk. The remnants of these «akritai» are mentioned in the sources until the 1290s. In the first years of the next century the *Türkmen*s captured the remaining Byzantine possessions in Asia Minor, and after that there is no mention to any «akritai».

10. Consequences

The presence of frontier (acritic) troops during the Early and Middle Byzantine period significantly contributed to the defence of the Byzantine territories of Asia Minor, helping the empire survive during its struggles against Persians and in the «dark centuries» that followed the capture of the Middle East by the Arabs. The strategic significance of the «akritai» during the Late Byzantine period is also evident. It is not coincidental that the Byzantine historian [George Pachymeres](#), whose work covers the events of the second half of the 13th century and the gradual loss of Asia Minor, chooses to begin with a description of the defensive system of the eastern frontier and of the progressive decline of the role of the acritic troops.¹¹

Apart from the historic importance of this institution, the legends surrounding the heroic deeds of the 9th and 10th century frontiersmen inspired the so-called [acritic songs](#), which emerge from the 11th cent. onwards and constitute the core around which the [epic of Vasileios Digenis](#), one of the greatest monuments of Byzantine folk literature, was created.



1. Pat Southern – Karen R. Dixon, *The Late Roman Army* (London 1996), 15-38. J. F. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World 565 -1204* (London 1999), pp. 67-71.
2. M. Canard, "Byzantium and the Muslim World to the Middle of the Eleventh Century", *The Cambridge Medieval History*² 4.1 (Cambridge 1966) pp. 696-697. J. F. Haldon - H. Kennedy, "The Arab - Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries", *Zbornik Radova Vizantoloskog Instituta* 19 (1980) pp. 114-115. Kennedy also argues that the small-scale summertime raids were probably armed attempts of Arab stock-breeders of the Cilician plain to take advantage of the Byzantine mountain pastures.
3. According to Arab sources, the year was divided into three raiding periods. Raids were less frequent during in the winter (late February – early March). The period between March 10 and June 10 was the springtime period of raids, while larger scale raids were organized during the summer (10 July – 8 September). M. Canard, "Byzantium and the Muslim World to the Middle of the Eleventh Century", *The Cambridge Medieval History*² 4.1 (Cambridge 1966) p. 697. A. J. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His World* (London 1973), p. 115.
4. R.-J. Lilie, *Die byzantinische Reaktion auf die Ausbreitung der Araber. Studien zur Strukturwandlung des byzantinischen Staates im 7. und 8. Jhd.* (Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia 22, München 1976), pp. 40-162. M. Canard, "Byzantium and the Muslim World to the Middle of the Eleventh Century", *The Cambridge Medieval History*² 4.1 (Cambridge 1966) pp. 696-698.
5. Hél. Ahrweiler, "L'Asie Mineure et les invasions arabes (VIIè - IXè siècles)", *Revue Historique* 227 (1962) pp. 8-9. A. J. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His World* (London 1973), pp. 108-109.
6. Apart from the large scale raids, equally destructive for the localities were small-scale incursions: these were most surprising and left the Byzantines little time to react.
7. A network of fortresses and strongholds had been created in Asia Minor between the 7th and 10th centuries to protect the local population. C. Foss - D. Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications: An Introduction* (Pretoria 1986), pp. 131-145.
8. I. I. Reiske, (ed.), *Constantini Porphyrogeniti De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae* (Bonn 1829), p. 696, 1-4: «ἐάν δε παντελώς ἐξαπορώσιν και οὐ δύνανται οὐδέ μετὰ των διδομένων αυτοῖς συνδοτῶν την ἰδίαν στρατείαν ἐξυπηρετεῖν, τότε ἀδορεύονται και δίδονται εἰς ἀπελάτας». While in the akritic songs the 'apelatai' figure as bandits and opponents of the hero, Constantine Porphyrogenetos considers them soldiers of the themes who have lost the financial means to arm themselves and participate in campaigns. Modern research considers the *apelatai* part of the *akritai*. A. J. Cappel, "Apelatai", *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 1 (New York - Oxford 1991), 127-128, identifies the *apelatai* with the *trapezitai*, without, however basing his conclusions on evidence from the sources.
9. Kekaumenos, *Strategicon*, ed. B. Wassiliewsky – V. Jernstedt, *Cecaumeni Strategicon* (St. Petersburg 1896), pp. 17, 18-26: «πόθεν σε τὰτα συμβαίνειν εἰώθεν; οἶδα γαρ, ὅτι περισσοτέρως ἐξ ἀπειρίας των ακριτῶν. ἀπειρίαν γαρ ἐχόντων της στρατηγικῆς γνώσεως και σοφίας και μη συλλογιζομένων τι ἐκ τούτου και τι ἐξ ἐκεῖνου συμβαίνειν εἰώθεν, ἀλλά ἀπείρως τὰ πράγματα διθινόντων και τοῖς βασιλεύσι τὰ προς χάριν ἐπιστελλόντων και λεγόντων, οὐ μόνον τοιαῦτα, ἀλλά και ἄλλα χεῖρονα συμβαίνουσι. ὅθεν ἐνταῦθα μεμπτεῖοι εἰσὶ και κολάσεως ἄξιοι· εἰ δε και τας ἐξ ἀνθρώπων τιμωρίας φύγωσι, την του Θεοῦ δικαιοκρισία οὐκ ἐκφεύξονται». Kekaumenos, whose work dates to c.1075, refers to the conditions prevalent on the Danube frontier.
10. M. C. Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army. Arms and Society 1204-1453* (Philadelphia 1992), pp. 26-27.
11. George Pachymeres, *Syngraphikai Historiai*, ed. A. Failler, *Georges Pachymères, Relations historiques* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 14, Paris 1984), pp. 27-35.

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	Pertusi A. , "Tra storia e leggenda: Akritai e Ghâzi sulla frontiera orientale di Bisanzio", <i>Actes de XIVe Congrès International des Etudes Byzantines</i> 1, (Bucharest 1972, 237-283

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http://www.storesonline.com/members/byzantinebooks/A0201.html	

Glossary :

	doukas (lat. dux)
Antiquity: Roman military commander who, in some provinces, combined military and civil functions. Buzantium: a higher military officer. From the second half of the 10th c. the title indicates the military comander of a larger district. After the 12th c., doukes were called the governors of small themes.	
	kaminoviglion
A watch-tower where fire or smoke signals were used to provide early warning on incoming raids.	
	kleisourarch
(and <i>kleisouriarch</i>) a Byzantine term denoting the commander of a <i>kleisoura</i> or a <i>kleisarchy</i> . These were military units responsible for the defence of mountain passes; the term is also used to desifnate an administrative unit smaller than the theme.	



pronoia

("care", "forethought") An institution that goes back to the 11th century. It refers to estates granted to a prominent military official or to the Church; it also designates in general the right of an individual of a religious foundation to receive directly from citizens of farmers whatever dues they would normally be obliged to pay to the state. The holder of a *pronoia* was called *pronoiaros*. The *pronoiai* could not be inherited by the family of military officials after their death, while when a donation was made to the Church, the *pronoia* was considered full and permanent.

strategos ("general")

During the Roman period his duties were mainly political. Office of the Byzantine state's provincial administration. At first the title was given to the military and political administrator of the themes, namely of the big geographic and administrative unities of the Byzantine empire. Gradually the title lost its power and, already in the 11th century, strategoi were turned to simple commanders of military units, responsible for the defence of a region.

tourmarch

Civilian and military commander of a *tourma*, subdivision of a *theme*.

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Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, ed. I. I. Reiske, *Constantini Porphyrogeniti De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*. Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae (Bonn 1829).

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Quotations

Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, ed. I. I. Reiske (Bonn 1829), 696, 1-4:

εάν δε παντελώς εξαπορώσιν και ου δύνανται ουδέ μετά των διδομένων αυτοίς συνδοτών την ιδίαν στρατείαν εξυπηρετείν, τότε αδορεύονται και δίδονται εις απελάτας.

Περί Παραδρομής Πολέμου («Skirmishing»), ed. G. T. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington 1985), 1, 4-17:

Τους των μεγάλων ακριτικών θεμάτων την πρόνοιαν αναδεχομένους, και υπό την αυτών επικράτειαν τας κλεισούρας έχοντας, πάση μηχανή και προθέσει και αγρύπνω επιμελεία προσήκει σπουδάζειν και αγωνίζεσθαι τας των Ρωμαίων χώρας διαφυλάττειν της των πολεμίων επιδρομής ασινείς και ανεπηρέαστους, βιγλάτορας εφιστώντας ρωμαλέους και επιτηδείους, και τας οδούς εις άκρον επισταμένους. και ει μεν όρη εισιν υψηλά και δύσβατα διορίζοντα την πολεμίαν, εν τούτοις τας βίγλας ίστασθαι. απέχειν δε τας στάσεις διά των βιγλατόρων άχρι μιλίων γ' ή δ'. και ηνίκα τους εχθρούς εξερχομένους θεάσονται, δρομαίως απέρχεσθαι εις το έτερον στασιδιον και απαγγέλλειν α εθεάσαντο, κακείνους πάλιν προς το έτερον στασιδιον σπουδή πολλή. και ούτω καθεξής μηνύεσθαι τα των καβαλλαριών στασιδια εις τους εφωμάλους τόπους ιστάμενα, και δι' αυτών αναμανθάνειν τον στρατηγόν την των εθνών έφοδον. Καρτερείν δε αυτούς ημέρας πεντεκαίδεκα εν τη των οδών φυλακή, επιφερομένους και την διαρκούσαν αυτοίς τροφήν των αυτών ημερών. ειθ' ούτως απέρχεσθαι ετέρους εις την τούτων υπαλλαγήν, καλώς αδνουμιαζομένους και ευτρεπιζομένους παρά των αρχόντων, και σώους και ανελλιπείς κατά τον τυπωθέντα αριθμόν αποστελλομένους, και μη δι' αισχρόν κέρδος οίκοι καθεζεσθαι παρά των αρχόντων αυτών εαθώσιν.



Περί Παραδρομής Πολέμου («Skirmishing»), ed. G. T. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington 1985), 2, 3-10:

Αναγκαία δε η των καμινοβιγλατόρων υπάρχει ωφέλεια. και χρη τον στρατηγόν και τούτων πολλήν ποιείσθαι την επιμέλειαν, και εν επιτηδείοις τόποις εφιστάν τα καμινοβίγλια. όπως, ηνίκα κίνησις των εχθρών γένηται, και οι βιγλάτορες ταύτης αίσθωνται διά των καμινοβίγλων, και ο στρατηγός την εξέλευσιν των εχθρών προγινώσκη, και ποίαν οδόν εξελθείν μέλλωσι, και αι χώραι δι' αυτών τε και των εκσπηλατόρων καταμηνυόμεναι, τοις οχυρώμασι καταφεύγωσι και τα τούτων θρέμματα.

Περί Παραδρομής Πολέμου («Skirmishing»), ed. G. T. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington 1985), 2, 11-31:

Εν δε ταις άκραις των Αρμενιακών θεμάτων, επει οι Αρμένιοι οι καλώς ουδέ ασφαλώς την των βιγλών εκτελούσι δουλείαν, οφειλόμενόν εστι φυλάττεσθαι τον από παλαιού κρατήσαντα τύπον εν ταις βίγλαις των Αρμενίων. και ανθρωπους επιλέγεσθαι και απογράφεσθαι επιτηδείους, λαμβάνοντας μισθόν από του στρατού επισωρευόμενον, υπέρ ων ο τοιούτος στρατός τη των βιγλών λειτουργία υπηρετείν ωφειλεν, ωσαύτως και ανώνων εκάστω μηνί την τετυπωμένην, και υπαλλάττειν αυτοούς καθ' έκαστον μήνα, και δι' αυτών τας οδούς εν αις οι πολέμιοι εξέρχονται φυλάττειν ασφαλώς. Αλλ' επει ουδέ αυτοί οι μετά μισθού και ανώνων, Αρμένιοι όντες, καλώς τη των βιγλών υπηρετούσι δουλεία, από των αποστελλομένων κατασκόπων χρη τας κινήσεις των φοσσάτων αναμανθάνειν. και τραπεζίτας επιλέγεσθαι γενναίους και ανδρείους, ους οι Αρμένιοι τασιναρίους καλούσιν, και εν ματρικίοις απογράφεσθαι, και αρχηγούς εν αυτοίς εφιστάν, οις προς τη ανδρεία και πολλή εμπειρία των οδών και των της Συρίας χωρών πρόσεστι. και τούτους διηλεκώς αποστέλλειν του κατέρχεσθαι εις τας των πολεμίων χώρας και καινοτομείν αυτάς και βλάπτειν. και ει που δυνηθώσι τινάς κατασχείν των πολεμίων, και προς τον την αρχήν διέποντα στρατηγόν αποκομίζειν, όπως δι' αυτών τας των εχθρών κινήσεις και βουλάς αναμανθάνη.

Περί Παραδρομής Πολέμου («Skirmishing»), ed. G. T. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington 1985), 7, 2-13:

Παρασκευήν δε και κίνησιν μεγάλου φοσσάτου ακούων, εν ω καιρώ μάλιστα είωθει τα μεγάλα συναθρίζεσθαι φοσσάτα, ήγουν των Αυγούστω μηνί. εν γαρ των τοιούτω καιρώ από τε Αιγύπτου, Παλαιστίνης τε και Φοινίκης, και της Κοίλης Συρίας, πλήθη ανήρχοντο εν Κιλικία, και εν ταις χώραις Αντιοχείας, του Χάλεπε, και προσλαμβάνοντες και Αραβες τω Σεπτεμβρίω μηνί την κατά Έρωμαίων εποιούντο εξέλευσιν. εν τω τοιούτω τοίνυν καιρώ, ότε η συνάθροισις του φοσσάτου των πολεμίων μέλλει γίνεσθαι, συνεχέστερον τους τραπεζίτας αποστέλλειν ήτοι τα τασινάκια, και κατασκόπους πλείστους των χρησίμων και πιστών.

Περί Καταστάσεως Απλήκτου («Campaign organisation and Tactics»), ed. G. T. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington 1985), 18, 16-21:

Έστωσαν δε και χωσάριοι πλείστοι και επιτηδείοι παρά τω της ανατολής λαώ καλούμενοι τραπεζίται, και συνεχώς άλλοι αλλαχόθι της χώρας εισίτωσαν προς το αιχμαλωτίζειν ανθρωπους, ίνα δι' αυτών ακριβώς αι των πολεμίων αναδιδάσκωνται βουλαί, είτε επισυνάγονται ή συμμάχους δέχονται, και συντόμως ειπείν, ίνα των παρ' αυτοίς μελετωμένων λανθάνη μηδέν.

Kekaumenos, *Strategicon*, ed. B. Wassiliewsky - V. Jernstedt, (St. Petersburg 1896), 17, 18-26:

πόθεν δε ταύτα συμβαίνειν είωθεν; οίδα γαρ, ότι περισσοτέρως εξ απειρίας των ακριτών. απειρίαν γαρ εχόντων της στρατηγικής γνώσεως και σοφίας και μη συλλογιζομένων τι εκ τούτου και τι εξ εκείνου συμβαίνειν είωθεν, αλλά απείρως τα πράγματα διθυνοόντων και τοις βασιλεύσι τα προς χάριν επιστελλόντων και λεγόντων, ου μόνον τοιαύτα, αλλά και άλλα χείρονα συμβαίνουσι. όθεν ενταύθα μεμπτέοι εισί και κολάσεως άξιοι. ει δε και τας εξ ανθρωπων τιμωρίας φύγωσι, την του Θεού δικαιοκρισίαν ουκ εκφεύζονται.

Kekaumenos, *Strategicon*, ed. B. Wassiliewsky - V. Jernstedt, (St. Petersburg 1896), 26, 10-12:

φύλαττε, ακρίτα, τα κάστρα και την εμπιστευθείσαν χώραν, και τοις πλησίον σου τοπάρχαις μη εμπιστεύης, ει και πάνυ ομολογούσι είναι φίλοι σου.

George Pachymeres, *Syngrafikai Historiai*, ed. A. Failler, *Georges Pachymères, Relations historiques* (Paris 1984), 27, 18 - 29, 19:



Όπως οι παλαιοί κατοχούρουν τας άκρας.

Εκείνοι τοίνυν δυοίν μέσον εχθροίν εναπειλημμένοι, εξ έω μεν Περσών, εκ δύσεως δ' Ιταλών, ου μόνον το προς τη θαλάσση, αλλά και το ανώτατον κατασχόντων, και εις στενόν κομηδή αμφοτέρωθεν καταστάντες, ως μηδ' ελευθέρως αναπνεΐν εάσθαι, τη μεν Ιταλικόν έχοντες συμμαχικόν επήεσαν Πέρσαις, τη δε Σκυθικόν προσλαβόμενοι, άρτι τότε φανέν τε και προσληφθέν, ανώθουν τους Ιταλους. Σκοπός δ' ην εκείνοις άκραις ασφαλέσι το μέσον κατοχυρούν. Και το μεν προς θάλασσαν ουκ είχαν οχυρώματι άλλω ή θαλάσση κατασφαλίζεσθαι [...] το δε προς έω οχυρούν είχαν ερμυνοίς όρεσιν, ει προλάβοιεν. Και διά ταύτα, επει ουκ είχαν άμα προς εκάτερα μάχεσθαι και ότι τα μεν προς έω όρη μέχρι πολλού ανέχοντα και το ασφαλές κατεγυνώντα τοις κατοικήσουσι, τοις Πέρσαις ουκέτι διηνεκώς προσκαταληφθέντα, προσδόκιμα σφίσι κατασχεΐν ήσαν και διά της εκείνων ασφαλείας τα οικεία ευ θέσθαι, τω δε της θαλάττης μέρει ουχ οίοι τ' ήσαν χρήσασθαι οχυρώματι πρότερον ή τους Ιταλους εκβαλείν εκείθεν, εσπένδοντο μεν πλέον τοις Πέρσαις και ανακωχήν εδίδουν τω προς εκείνους πολέμω, επήσιον τέλος τάξαντες διδόναι, ο δη και εδίδουν ουκ ες μακρόν, τοις δ' Ιταλοίς όλαις επείχον ορμαίς. Συχνοίς δε πόνοις και ακαταγωνίστοις πολέμοις ενιδρύντες, εκείνους μεν εξώσαι και, ναυσίν οικείαις παραπλέειν παρεσχηκότες την θάλασσαν, ικανήν τοις εκείσε των 'Ρωμαίων οικούσιν εδίδουν ασφάλειαν' είτα νώτα στρέψαντες, εκόντων ακόντων Περσών, όρεσιν επεβάλοντο, συχνοίς δε τοις πανταχόθεν έποικιοις και ισχυροίς κατασφαλισάμενοι, ερμυνά τείχη και οίον δυσεπιχειρήτους θριγκούς τη 'Ρωμαϊδι ταύτα κατέστησαν.

George Pachymeres, *Syngrafikai Historiai*, ed. A. Failler, *Georges Pachymères, Relations historiques* (Paris 1984), 29, 20 - 31, 20:

Όπως των εν ταις άκραις επεμελούντο ανδρών και πραγμάτων.

Ου μην δε και ατημελήτους τους προς τοις όρεσιν οικούντας είων, ως ετοιμούς μεταναστεύσοντας, εί που αμηγέπη οι εναντίοι προσβάλοιν, μηδέν έχοντας το πείθον μένειν και παρά δύναμιν, εί ποι παρείκοι, προς εκείνους ανδρίζεσθαι' αλλ' ατελείας μεν τους πάντας, προνοίαις δ' εκ τούτων τους επιδοξοτέρους και οις τολμήεν το φρόνημα γράμμασιν εδωρόντο βασιλικοίς. Και δη, του χρόνου προϊόντος, ηύξανον ταις περιουσίαις, και πλούτος επέρρει σφίσι συχνός. Παρ' όσον δ' εκείνοις ενευθηνείσθαι ξυνέβαινε τοις κατά τον βίον, παρά τοσούτον και προς τους εναντίους εθάρρουν, και πολλοίς τοις εκείθεν ετρώφων, νυκτιλοχούντες και οσημέραι την των εναντίων περικόπτοντες και τα πολλά ληϊζόμενοι' εξ ων συνέβαινε αυτοίς μεν ομόσε τοις αντιπάλοις χωρούσι προβελήσθαι των ενδοτέρω, τους δ' εξαρτωμένους τας ελπίδας εκείνων επί της οικείας διατρίβειν ανέδην και ταις οικείαις προσανέχειν φροντίσι, τους μέντοι επί των αρχών της στρατηγίας όντας, των όπισθεν ασφαλώς ως οίον τ' έχοντας, την μάχην ετέρωσε τρέπειν και μη ούσαν ταις επιθέσεσιν ερεθίζειν και φθάνειν κακώς διατεθέντας ετέρους πρότερον ή αναμένειν πάσχειν ετέρωθεν τα δεινά. Το δε σύμπαν ην κατορθούμενον, των άκρων καλώς εχουσών και μηδ' αν εί τι και γένοιτο, των εκεί καθυπειζόντων ανδρών, εί πη και αντιτείνειν τολμών οι αντικείμενοι, και ταύτα και της αρχής εγγύθεν ούσης, ανθεξούσης ετοιμού προς άπαν το αντιστησόμενον. Και τα μεν πρότερα τοιαύτα και ούτως έχοντα, μη μόνον αις ερρέθη ατελείαις τε και προνοίαις, αλλά γε και καθημεριναίς φιλοτησιαίς βασιλικαίς των τας άκρας οικούντων βρενθυνομένων και ουδέν ό τι μη πλούτου σημείον έχόντων, καντεύθεν και αρααθυμότερον μεν φυλασσόντων, θαρραλέωτερον δ' εισβαλλόντων και αντισχόντων τοις, εί πη ισχύσαιεν, κακοποιούσι τα ημέτερα.

George Pachymeres, *Syngrafikai Historiai*, ed. A. Failler, *Georges Pachymères, Relations historiques* (Paris 1984), 31, 21 - 33, 11:

Όπως, αλούσης πάλαι της πόλεως παρ' Ιταλών, εξησθένησε τα κατά την ανατολήν και περί του Χανδρηνού.

Εξ ότου δ' η Κωνσταντίνου 'Ρωμαίοις εάλω και ην απαναστρέφειν ανάγκη τη πατρίδι τα τέκνα, και πρότερον των άλλων οις ην το κρατείν, ξυνέβαινε μεν ένθεν εξασθενείν εκείνους τη διαστάσει των βασιλέων, έδει δ' εκείνοις πάντως προνοίαις, και μάλλον εφ' ω και καθ' εαυτούς ουδέν ήττον θαρροίεν, ει μηδ' άλλοθεν, αλλ' ουν νεύρα πολέμου τον σφων πλούτον έχουσιν. Αλλά χρόνω ύστερον, της βασιλείας μεταπεσούσης, Χαδηνός τις, ω δη και το της επαρχίας αξίωμα εσαύθις επέθηκεν ο κρατών, τα πολλά παρ' εκείνω δυνάμενος εξ αιτιών όσον ουκέτι ρηθησομένων [...] εκείνος τοίνυν, συμφέρον δοκεΐν εθέλων συμβουλεύειν τω βασιλεί – ο Παλαιολόγος δ' ούτος ην Μιχαήλ –, βουλήν εισάγει τήνδε και λίαν επισφαλή, ως το πράγμα εδειξεν ύστερον. Και δεχθείς ως δήθεν συμφερόντως λέγων, πέμπεται καταπράξαι α φθάσας βεβούλευται. Και δη επιστάς ταχέως τοις τόποις – ου γαρ ην προς τα επεσταλμένα βραδύνειν όλως αυτόν καταρξάμενον –, άνδρας βαθυπλούτους ευρών και κτήμασι και θρέμμασι βριθόντας, στρατεύει τούτους εκ των σφετέρων εκείνων και οις ο εκάστου βίος συνεκεκρότητο και, εις τεσσαράκοντα νομίσματα τω ενί συμποσώσας, και τούτων το πλείστον εκ των αυτου, το λοιπόν του τεθέντος τέλους, ουκ ολίγον ην, τω βασιλικώ ταμειώ εισκομίζεσθαι έταξεν. Ο και πραχθέν πρώτως, παθόντων των ανδρών α ουκ ήλπισαν πώποτε, επέκλασε τε την προθυμίαν βουλομένοις και καθυφεΐκεσαν της δυνάμεως.



George Pachymeres, *Syngrafikai Historiai*, ed. A. Failler, *Georges Pachymères, Relations historiques* (Paris 1984), 33, 12-19:

Ὅπως οἱ Πέρσαι κατέσχον τὰ τῆς Ῥωμαϊδος ὄρη.

Εντεύθεν καὶ τοῖς τῶν Περσῶν μαχίμοις καὶ οἱς ἐν μαχαίρᾳ το ζῆν, τῶν ἄλλων υποκλιθέντων τοῖς Τοχάροις, ἄρτι κατασχούσι τῆν τῆς Περσίδος ἀρχήν, συμφέρον ἐδόκει ἀφηνιάζουσι καταφεύγειν πρὸς τὰ τῶν ὁρῶν οχυρώτερα καὶ, τὰ πλησίον κατατρέχοντας, νόμῳ ληστῶν ἀποζήν. Ὁ καὶ γεγονός, συνέστησαν καθ' αὐτοῦς πλείστοι καὶ συχνάκις ἰσχυροὶ ἐπετίθεντο ἀσθενέσι γενομένοις τοῖς ἡμετέροις καὶ, περιόντες κατ' ὀλίγον ἀδυνατούντων, υπείκειν ἐποίουν.

George Pachymeres, *Syngrafikai Historiai*, ed. A. Failler, *Georges Pachymères, Relations historiques* (Paris 1984), 259, 23 - 261, 7:

Τὰ δε κατὰ τοὺς Ζυγηνοὺς, ὅπως ἀπεστάτησαν βασιλέως διὰ τὸν Ἰωάννην.

Παρ' ἣν αἰτίαν καὶ ὀλίγον ὕστερον οἱ κατὰ τῆς Νικαίας ἀκρας χωρίται, ἀγρόται μὲν ὄντες καὶ γεωργία προσέχοντες, θαρραλέοι δ' ἄλλως, πίσυνοι τόξοις, ἀμὰ δε καὶ τὰς κατὰ σφας δυσχωρίας το πιστόν ἔχοντες, ὡς οὐ ραδίως πεισόμενοι, καν τι πράττειεν, εὐρόντες ἦκοντὰ ποθεν νεανίσκον νόσω λελυμασμένον τοὺς οφθαλμοῦ, φήμης προοδεύουσης ἐκείνου παρὰ τῶν συσκευασαμένων τὸ δράμα ὡς αὐτός εἶη τὸ παιδίον ὁ Ἰωάννης, ἀπρίξ συναχθέντες ἔρχονται τούτου, ἀμὰ μὲν ὡς δεσπότην ὑπονοουμένου σφίσι, ἐφ' ὧπερ καὶ, ὅρκοις τοῖς πρὸς τὸν πατέρα πεδούμενοι, τὰς υπέρ ἐκείνου προθυμίαις ἐσφάδαζον, ἀμὰ δε καὶ ὡς ἠδικημένῳ προσαμύνοντες.

Nikephoros Gregoras, *Historia Byzantina*, ed. I. Bekker, vol. 3 (Bonn 1855), 138, 2-14:

οὐ μόνον σατράπαι καὶ ὅσοι τῶν γένει καὶ δόξῃ διαφερόντων, εἰς πλείστα τεμόντες τὴν ὅλην διέλαχον ἐπικράτειαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλοὶ τῶν ἀδόξων καὶ ἀνωρύμων ὄχλους τινὰς συρφετώδεις προσεταιρισάμενοι πρὸς ληστρῶν ἀπέκλιναν βίον, μηδὲν τόξου καὶ φαρέτρας ἐπιφερόμενοι πλέον· οἱ καὶ τὰς τῶν ὁρῶν δυσχωρίας ὑποδύμενοι συχνάκις καὶ λαθραίαις ἐχρώντο τὰς ἐκδρομαῖς καὶ τὰς ὁμόρους χώρας καὶ πόλεις Ῥωμαίων κακῶς διετίθεσαν. συνέβη γὰρ καὶ πρὸ βραχέος τοὺς τὰς ἀκρας οἰκούντας φύλακας μετανάστας ἐκεῖθεν γενέσθαι δι' ἔνδειαν τῶν ἐτησίων λημμάτων, ἀ παρὰ τοῦ βασιλικοῦ πρυτανεῖου ἐλάμβανον. ὅπερ ὡς οὐδενός ἀξίον παροραθὲν ἐν ἀρχαῖς μέγιστον ὕστερον ἔδοξε Ῥωμαίοις ἀτύχημα καὶ τῶν μάλα μεγίστων αἰτίων συμφορῶν.

Chronological Table

Early 4th cent.: The early Byzantine army is divided into strike units and frontier units (*limitanei*).

6th cent.: Gradual decrease of the military importance of the frontier units.

634: The Arabs begin launching raids in Asia Minor.

Late 7th cent. The eastern frontier is stabilized. The Byzantines develop their defensive system; creation of the first *klesourai*. The term «*akritai*» with a military meaning is probably beginning to occur by now.

Mid-9nd cent.: Large-scale, state-organized Arab raids cease. The small-scale raids continue, affecting only localities.

Late 9th cent. Armenian populations are settle along the eastern border. Gradual development of an internal defensive zone manned by Armenians.

960s: The great Byzantine counteroffensive begins in Cilicia and Syria. The Arab raids cease.

Late 10th cent. The new, more extensive eastern frontier of the Byzantine Empire become stable. The strategic importance of the «*akritai*» diminishes.

11th cent.: Decline of the defence of the east border. Asia Minor is conquered by the Seljuks.



1160s: The theme of Neokastra is created. The Byzantine defensive line in Asia Minor is fully reconstituted.

1204-1261: Reorganisation of acritic populations in the Empire of Nicaea.

c.1262: The «*akritai*» of Trikkokia rebel against Michael VIII Palaiologos. Chadenos' reforms. The «*akritai*» of Asia Minor become incorporated into the regular army and many are relocated to European territories.

1260s: The eastern frontier collapses.

Late 13th cent. The Byzantine defensive line in Asia Minor is fully disarranged. Almost whole of Asia Minor is captured by the Ottomans.