
Byzantine civilization has left a rich and varied body of historical writings. The assortment of chronicles, histories, and memoirs provides an almost unbroken narrative of the empire's history from the sixth to the fifteenth century. The early chronicles offer thin gruel to modern historians trying to form a coherent account of the "dark" seventh and eighth centuries, but by the tenth century the growing maturity and scope of Byzantine historiography allow for a more developed understanding of the dominant events and people of the time. The History of Leo the Deacon, focussing mainly on the reigns of the two great soldier emperors Nikephoros II Phokas (963-969) and John I Tzimiskes (969-976), has long been recognized as the most important source for the military and dynastic policies that shaped the course of events in the later tenth century. Strangely, however, Leo's history has long languished in an outdated edition, without an English translation, and has until now remained inaccessible to all but specialists. The appearance of this fine, meticulously annotated, translation by Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis Sullivan will be welcomed not only by Byzantinists, but perhaps even more so by students and scholars in the related fields of western medieval and Islamic history.

The History of Leo the Deacon bears all the hallmarks of the genre. The author writes in an archaic Greek full of recondite vocabulary and allusions to earlier models, particularly Procopius and Agathias. He employs rhetorical devices, notably the set speech and the excursus, to dramatize the narrative. He intends to present an orderly, connected record but often strays from his chronological line and occasionally conflates events. Leo was also writing the history of his own time, stating when he was an eyewitness or participant in the events he describes. This gives his work an authoritative immediacy and firsthand perspective; yet Leo also displays the fantastic conception the Byzantines had of the outer world, its workings and peoples. Throughout his work the classical idea of Chance and the Christian agency of Providence operate side by side, reminding readers of the uncertainty of this life and reinforcing the moralizing, instructive value not just of this history but of History itself. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Leo's history is the insight it offers into the mind of an educated Byzantine of middling social rank—what he knew, what he made of the world around him, and what he deemed useful or necessary for his and later generations to know.

All the many challenges posed by the History of Leo the Deacon are ably handled by the translators. Their introduction begins by sketching the historical background, with due emphasis on the military campaigns that set the later tenth century apart as the zenith of Byzantine power in the eastern Mediterranean. This serves to elicit the primary value of the History as a
source for the wars against the Hamdanids in Cilicia and Syria, and against the Rus in Bulgaria, but the translators also direct the reader's attention to the other significant ingredients of Leo's work. These include his sources and methods, his discussions of political and ecclesiastical affairs, comparison with other historians, and the random bits of information Leo supplies on Constantinople, natural phenomena, and on the men and women who people the text. In its thoroughness, and its integration of foreign scholarship on Leo the Deacon, the introduction gives readers new to the text the tools by which to assess its strengths and weaknesses as a historical source.

The translation itself reads well—no small feat considering the florid Greek in which Leo composed his work. Readers will be especially grateful for the annotations which explain the nuances of Leo's vocabulary and clarify the meaning of the text in many places. The discussions of chronology, technical details, and geographical references enhance the value of the translation and put the full range of Leo's work clearly before the reader. Included in the scholarly apparatus are genealogical tables, maps, and specialized indices which underline the book's usefulness to specialists and students alike.

The scholars involved in preparing this translation deserve congratulations for an impressive, immensely helpful addition to Byzantine scholarship, both as a research and teaching resource. It is worth emphasizing that it is the work of many hands. Such a collaborative undertaking, blending the philological, historical, and interdisciplinary expertise necessary to extract the full worth of opaque historical sources, should inspire similar projects focusing on the many Byzantine texts still in need of the comprehensive examination given so profitably to the History of Leo the Deacon.

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Jaroslav Folda's monumental book is another link in his life's work that has been dedicated to the research of crusader art. Besides his numerous articles on the subject, his books show systematic development, from his Crusader Manuscript Illumination at Saint-Jean d'Acre, 1275-1291 (Princeton University Press, 1976), through The Art of the Crusades in the Holy Land 1098-1187 (Cambridge University Press, 1995) and up to the current comprehensive volume, which will be a basic resource to any researcher of the crusaders. The need for such a book was evident for a considerable period of time, since only parts of the relevant period have been investigated, and no all-embracing view on the subject existed.