IN THE *CHRONOGRAPHIA*, IS MICHAEL PSELLOS’ CONCERN FOR THE ARMY ENTIRELY DISINTERESTED?

The present article analyzes Psellos’ commentary on the disarray of the Byzantine army in the *Chronographia*. The topic is examined in relation to the political circumstances of the time, and the author’s own particular situation. It is possible to conclude that much of his commentary on the military in the *Chronographia* is disingenuous and is influenced by his own position and interests.

*Key words*: Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, Military, Concern for the Army, Anthony Kaldellis.

Michael Psellos’ *Chronographia*, one of the finest works of Byzantine literature, still attracts the interest of modern scholars who try to decode the elusive meanings and motivations that may lay hidden beneath the surface of the text.\(^1\) Political unrest and endless court intrigues would induce an opinion and a commentary conducive to his own survival. Truth, in this respect, may have been subjugated and commentary may have been formed by his own interests.

It is true that government control changed hands many times after Basil II’s death (1025). Thus, Psellos had to write his book in a way that would not allow judgements to be made about his political beliefs. Above all, he had to convince his audience of the sincerity of his patriotism. His claim to be φιλορώματος and φιλόπατρις, admirer of the Romans and lover of his country [§6. 154.3, §6.190.7],\(^2\) has led Anthony Kaldellis to conclude that “the *Chronographia* is


heavily biased in favor of the military”. The present paper proposes a re-evaluation of Kaldellis’ thesis suggesting instead that Psellus is motivated solely by political interests. I am going to divide the article into two sections. In the first, I shall examine the author’s four references to the military, while in the second I shall discuss the treatment of military governors and generals in the text as well as their relationship with Psellus himself.

The first reference is found in the section of Romanos III Argyros’ rule (1028–1034). Psellus admonishes him for spending much money on building a magnificent church to the Virgin (1028–1034). Psellus, however, heavily biased in favor of the military, was there a Crisis in the Empire (1025–1034)?

It is known that in the summer of 1030 the Byzantines suffered a heavy defeat in Syria. However, neither of the contemporary Byzantine authors associates this terrible event with crisis in the army. In the Synopsis of histories, John Skylitzes infers that the defeat was attributable to lack of water sources and to dysentery. On the other hand, the Chronographia attributes failure to the emperor’s inadequacy with regard to military affairs. But if the army was not degraded at that time to justify the statement of Psellus, what purpose does it serve for him to attack Romanos’ handling of imperial funds? To answer this question we must look at the political environment prevailing in the palace.


4 The Armenian historian Matthew of Edessa testifies that 20,000 Byzantines were killed in that battle. (A. E. Dostourian, Armenia and the Crusades Tenth to Twelfth Centuries. The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa, Lanham — New York — London 1993, 51.) Though the number might be inflated, it gives us, however, a rough idea of the high losses the army of Romanos III sustained against the Arabs.


6 It should be noted here that modern scholars chronologically place the beginning of the army’s collapse not earlier than the reign of Constantine Monomachos (1042–1055). See the two papers presented at the eleventh International Symposium “The Empire in Crisis (?) Byzantium in the 11th Century (1025–1081)”, ed. V. N. Vlyssidou, Athens 2003, by S. Vryonis, The Eleventh Century: was there a Crisis in the Empire? The Decline of Quality and Quantity in the Byzantine Armed forces, 17–43; and by D. Tsougarakis, Η αντικρατορία σε κρίση και η οπτική των σύγχρονων: μία ανάγνωση των μαρτυριών, 275–290. To the above we could add the books of W. Treadgold, Byzantium and Its Army, 284–1081, Stanford U.P. 1995, 39–40; and of M. Gregoriou — Ioannidou, παρακμή και πτώση του θεματικού θησαυρού, Thessaloniki 2007, 121–123, who states that the thematic armies ceased to exist in around the middle of the eleventh century. Main advocates of the theory that there was no military crisis in that period are: J. Haldon, Approaches to an Alternative Military History of the Period ca. 1025–1071, 45–74 (this article has also been published by the eleventh International Symposium in Athens); and J.-C. Cheynet, La politique militaire byzantine de Basile II à Alexis Comnène, ZRVI 29/30 (1991) 61–74.
In book three, Psellos shows his antipathy to Romanos’ pretentious theologians and to John the Orphanotrophos, “a eunuch of bad and contemptible fortune” [§3.18.3–4]. The first are censured for superficial understanding of the Hellenic philosophical texts [§3.3], while the second for being hostile to those devoted to the study of the *paideia* of ancient Greeks [§4.14.12–15]. What they all have in common is their presence to the close circle of Romanos. The theologians, however, did not pose an immediate threat to Michael Psellos who, as has been said,7 was exceptionally tolerant of views different from his own. The same cannot be asserted for the Orphanotrophos, a monk not conforming to monastic dictates [§4.14.9–12]. According to Kaldellis, monks are treated in the *Chronographia* negatively, for “they consumed the resources of the State and gave trusting rulers false hopes”.8 But can this be the main reason behind Psellos’ aversion to the Orphanotrophos? In all likelihood, he had personally faced the Orphanotrophos’ hostility, because he too studied Hellenic *paideia*. Moreover, it may not be coincidence that his introduction to the palace court occurred when John the Orphanotrophos fell from favour. The latter emerged under Romanos III Argyros,9 but he became very powerful when Michael IV Paphlagon (1034–1041) took the throne.10 The influential monk was, therefore, a major obstacle in the path to Psellos’ political success.11

Those considerations lead us to conclude that the *Chronographia* is not really interested in Romanos’ financial or military policies. Rather, it stresses the incompetence of his consultants to detect the causes of future threats, and proposes to advertise Psellos’ skills as a philosophical court advisor (this is a feature throughout his book).

The second reference is taken from the section describing the joint rule of Zoe with Theodora (1042). The empresses, who had become very popular with both the military and civilian population [§6.1.3–6],12 are blamed for their lar-

8 Kaldellis, Argument, 88.
9 Skylitzes, 390.70–71.
10 Whereas Romanos III is strongly censured in the *Chronographia*, Michael IV is highly praised. One may infer that the author’s judgement on them relies entirely on the outcome of their military operations. The former suffered a crushing defeat in Syria, while the latter won a resounding victory in the Balkans. Such an inference is rejected by the statement of Psellos that precedes his description of the war against Bulgarians: “Νική (i.e. Michael IV) γονὸν πρὸ τῶν βασιλέων τῶν οἰκειοτάτων, καὶ τρόπαιον καὶ κατὰ συγγενείας καὶ κατὰ φιλίας καὶ καθ’ ἐαυτοῦ ἴστησιν.” [§4.43.5–7]. This statement, whose position in the text cannot be accidental, explicitly refers to the emperor’s relatives who failed to prevent him from accomplishing his plan [§4.42.7]. For Psellos, the fact that Michael IV did not listen to his brothers, and mostly John the Orphanotrophos himself, but he acted on his own decision was a determining factor in the final success of his campaign.
11 Psellos, §5.27.7, mentions that his own career advanced to the imperial *asekretai* (secretaries) when Michael V Kalaphates (1041–1042) was elevated to the throne.
12 It emerges from the account of Skylitzes, 422.12–15, that the two sisters restored order and justice in the state. Also, it must be noted that they conferred the rank of magister on the experienced
gesse to individuals, and the diversion of funds from the army to the court of the palace:

Τὰ μέντοι γε τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἄθλα καὶ οἱ τῆς στρατηγίας πόροι ἐφ’ ἐτέρους οὐδὲν δέον μετεκινοῦντο καὶ μετεπίθεντο (πλῆθος οὗτοι κολάκων καὶ ἡ τηνικαῦτα τῶν βασιλίδων δορυφορία), ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τούτοις τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος Βασιλείου τοὺς βασιλείους θησαυροὺς χρημάτων ἐμπληκότος. [§6.8]

At first sight, this reference might seem as though Psellos is expressing his genuine concern for the army. However, a closer inspection reveals some inconsistencies and ambiguities in the text which lead us to infer that his statement is evidently based on selfish motives and political calculations. These are as follow:

a) Earlier in book six, we learn that men loyal to the two sisters administered the civil and military affairs carefully [§6.2.6–11]; but later, as said above, they are criticized for the diversion of the salaries of soldiers to court officials and bodyguards. Could things have completely changed within fifty days of their joint rule?13

b) Commenting on the state affairs, Psellos claims that their situation demanded urgent attention advocating that someone with administrative experience should assume the reins of power to fend off enemy invasions [§6.10.2–8]; but further down in the text, he declares that the spirit and strength of the empire were still alive [§6.48.3–4].14

c) It raises questions that the two sisters are not included in Psellos’ critical appraisal of rulers responsible for the ruin of the state [§§7.52–57], although he considers that their era marked “the beginning of trouble” for Byzantium [§6.9.5].

Those remarks strengthen the possibility that the chief target of Psellos’ criticism is not Zoe and Theodora themselves, but the courtiers — “flatterers”, in his own word — who greatly benefited from them [§6.7.4–6]. These courtiers were appointed to direct important departments of state. Psellos, on the other hand, did not enjoy the two sisters’ favour and support,15 even though he was able to predict the outcomes of future policies (he implies that he was among the few intellectuals having the ability of prophecy (μαντεύει) [§6.7.9–13]).16 In the light of this consideration we must also see his writings on the reasons leading to the state’s disasters [§6.9]. His writings reflect those individuals who were offered government offices and received donations simply because they were skilled in soothsaying [§6.5.9–12].

and most successful general of his time, George Maniakes, and they sent him back to Sicily in order to stabilize the situation there [ibid., 422.23–26].

13 They reigned together from 21 April to 11 June. (Die Byzantinischen kleinchroniken, ed. P. Schreiner, CFHB XII/1, Vienna 1975, 142).

14 It is the section devoted to the rule of Constantine IX who benefited Psellos. (See more in Ljubarskij, Προσωπικότητα, 46–51).

15 There exists no evidence that Psellos had been promoted to a higher rank over the joint rule of Zoe with Theodora.

16 There are two more cases in the Chronographia where Psellos advertises his prophetic charisma: a) the political vicissitudes in Byzantium soon before Constantine IX’s death [§6a. 10.3–7]; and b) the appointment of Leichoudes to the patriarchal seat [§7.66.24–27].
Psellos’ commentary thus on the financial neglect of the army relies on grounds of self-interest, and would appear to designate the courtiers who had more influence at times when he had less. What should not escape our notice is that the military element had become a very sensitive matter in the period when the first part of the Chronographia was composed.\textsuperscript{17} This was because the frontier communities suffered greatly from foreign invasions, and as such they had been long discontented with each emperor’s policies.\textsuperscript{18} Through the criticism of inadequate military spending, our author is trying to attach much importance to his account, inviting also rulers to exploit his prophetic powers for their own advantage.

The third reference is excerpted from book seven where Psellos tells us that imperial supremacy rests upon three factors: the citizens, the senate, and the military. However, the rulers of his times ignored the last factor in favour of the other two:

\[\text{Έν τρείς δὲ τούτοις τῆς φυλακῆς αὐτοῦς ἰστομηνίας, δημοτικῶ πλήθει, καὶ συγκλητικῇ τάξει, καὶ συντάγματι στρατιωτικῷ, τῆς μὲν τρίτης ἤτοιν φροντίζουσι, τοῖς δ’ ἄλλοις εὐθὺς τός ἐκ τοῦ κράτους προσνέμουσι χάριτας.} \] [§7.1.9–13]

This is Psellos’ introduction to the short rule of Michael VI Stratiotikos (1056–1057) who showed marked kindness to the members of the senate and various civil functionaries, but he took no personal interest in the army [§7.2]. Psellos’ statement seems to contain a strong patriotic component, but it must be treated with caution nevertheless. That was an era when he had fallen into disgrace due to the enormous influence the monk Leo Paraspondylos exerted in the palace.\textsuperscript{19} In the Chronographia, the first signs of the author’s antipathy to Leo become evident in the reign of Theodora. The empress is criticized for not appointing as chief minister a man distinguished in speech and eloquence (presumably, the author refers to himself),\textsuperscript{20} but for selecting the incompetent Leo instead [§6a.6.7–10].\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17} It embraces the period from Basil II to the end of Isaac I Komnenos, and is believed to have been written between 1061 and 1063. J. Sylvinus, Zum Geschichtswerk des Psellos, BZ 30 (1929/30) 63 ff.; and J. Hussey, Michael Psellos, The Byzantine Historian, Speculum 10 (1935) 83.

\textsuperscript{18} The situation, which had changed since the reign of Monomachos, is vividly described by Psellos, §6.104.24–28: “...δεὶ ὄργῆς τε τὸν αὐτοκράτορα ἔχοντας (i.e. οἱ ἐν τῇ Πόλει)...καὶ τὴν προεδρίαν αὐτοῦ δισχεραίνοντας καὶ βουλομένους στρατιωτήν ἰδείν αὐτοκράτορα, σφῶν τε προκινδυνεύοντα καὶ τὰς ἐπιθρόμοις τῶν βαρβάρων ἀνείργοντα.” Attaleiates, furthermore, notifies in the section referring to the reign of Constantine X Doukas (it was the period when the first part of the Chronographia of Psellos was written): “ Ἡγείρετο γὰρ πολὺς γογγυσμός ...τῶν καταδρόμων ὀφισταμένων βαρβαρικάς διὰ τὸ μὴ κατὰ λόγον τῶν στρατιωτικῶν κατάλογων γίνεσθαι.” [Miguel Atalaias Historia, intro.-ed.-trans.-comm. I. P. Martin, Madrid 2002, 58.22–59.1 (= Attaleiates)].

\textsuperscript{19} Paraspondylos (or Strabospondylos) emerged under Michael IV Paphlagon [Skyllitzes, 479.15–17], but he disappears from the political stage over the rule of Constantine IX. Then, Theodora (1055–1056) assigned him to direct the state’s public affairs [Psellos, §6a.7.1–2], a position which he also retained in the reign of Michael VI [Skyllitzes, 486.3–4].

\textsuperscript{20} This conjecture has been formulated by Ljubarski, Προσωπικότητα, 141.

\textsuperscript{21} Neither Skyllitzes nor his near contemporary Attaleiates embrace Psellos’ view on Leo Paraspondylos. Skyllitzes, 479.15–16, portrays Leo as a person of great experience in affairs, while Attaleiates, 39.6–9, as a reputable man who executed the functions of his office in the most able way.
Psellos could not further his career as a courtier so long as Leo directed public affairs. This is strongly felt in the events relating to the military revolt of 1057 against the central government. The people involved in Michael VI’s ascension to the throne (Leo and Theodora’s consultants, we may presume) are censured in the Chronographia for taking no measures to stop the riotous army. Michael VI called a council to decide what should be done. For this reason, he assembled a good many of the previously out of favour spiritual notables — our author situates himself among them [§7.9]. The latter was given a great opportunity to undermine Leo when he was authorized to reach a diplomatic agreement with the rebel leader, Isaac Komnenos [§7.15.1–5]. According to the text, one of the conditions for Komnenos to offer surrender was the removal of Leo Paraspondylos from his ministerial office [§7.32.26–27]. In the narrative sequence, this information follows Psellos’ specific explanations to the rebel: “As to the terrible things you say that you have suffered, others are guilty of them, but not the present emperor” [§7.30.19–20]. Apparently, Psellos is inferring that the culpability is Leo’s.

Though Attaleiates says nothing of this mission, Skylitzes adds to his account a considerable detail: Psellos with his colleagues secretly approached Katakalon Kekaumenos — one of the main conspirators — and they tried to convince him to reject the emperor’s terms of agreement.

All those elements converge to the conclusion that the downfall of Leo was an act of treason aiming at helping Psellos to rise to power again. The latter utilizes a relationship with the military in order to open a new era in his own career, after the death of Constantine IX, via the removal of his political contestant, Leo Paraspondylos.

The final reference is encountered in the rule of Constantine X Doukas (1059–1067) who is blamed for diverting intended military expenditure to the giving of expensive gifts, as a means of settling international differences.

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22 Psellos, §6a.20, testifies that those people suggested Theodora to deliver the sceptre to Michael VI Stratiotikos who could not avoid being an instrument in their hands. (Also, Attaleiates, 39.12–17; Skylitzes, 480.31–40).

23 See, Skylitzes, 496.81–86. It is important to mention here that initially Psellos, §§7.15–17, had rejected Michael VI Stratiotikos’ request for fear he would be accused of treason by other courtiers. His account leaves one with the impression that Psellos was not safe at all in the current political climate.

24 We may note here that both Kaldellis, Argument, 155–160, and R. Anastasi, Studi sulla “Chronographia” di Michele Psello, Catania 1969, 128–129, limit Psellos’ hostility to Leo to the contradictory philosophical principles of the two men. Criscuolo, in his comments to the “Cronografia”, vol. 2, 421–423, asserts that Psellos’ criticism does not, in fact, apply to Leo, who was an inferior personality, but to the patriarch Keroularios. The reference of Psellos to the three kinds of soul [§6a.8] can also be seen as an attempt to deflect the readers’ attention from his own political ambition, and to turn it towards a deeper idealistic contemplation that reflects Leo’s overall behaviour. In other words, the author wishes to make clear that zealous religiosity cannot correlate with politicization.


27 In particular, Attaleiates, 62.25–26, remarks that the emperor was trying to restrain the invasions of Pechenegs with peace treaties.
The emperor, through his policy, wished to increase the revenues of the state, and thus enjoy a carefree life style. This had as a result that the military organization was undermined, while the enemy enhanced his own strength.\(^{28}\) The failure of this was due to the intransigence of the emperor with regard to the advice of his counsellors, of whom Psellos was highly placed [§7a.1.9]. In the text, Psellos shows a total disregard for flatterers or counsellors whom he considers as those who wished to increase the revenues of the state, and thus enjoy a carefree life style. This had as a result that the military organization was undermined, while the enemy enhanced his own strength.\(^{28}\) The failure of this was due to the intransigence of the emperor with regard to the advice of his counsellors, of whom Psellos was highly placed [§7a.1.9]. In the text, Psellos shows a total disregard for flatterers or counsellors whom he considers as the cause of the empire’s decline [§7a.18.4–12].\(^{29}\)

It is enlightening to bring here a detail from Attaleiates’ account: when Constantine X rose to the throne, he restored in their positions several people who had been dismissed by his predecessor, Isaac Komnenos. In this respect, we cannot exclude the possibility that a new political rivalry between Psellos and courtiers from the circle of Michael VI Stratiotikos arose again. Yet, this is nothing but a mere conjecture, because there is no further information with regard to court factions at that time. Attaleiates, moreover, points out that the nature of Constantine X’s character changed with his enthronement, because it was greatly affected by his counsellors whose self-interest dominated their behaviour.\(^{30}\) He therefore became the sole advisor of himself, though Psellos tried many times, as he claims, to amend his dogmatism [§7a. 18.12–14].

Although Psellos was highly rewarded for helping Constantine Doukas to take the crown,\(^{31}\) he failed, however, to become one of the emperor’s close confidants.\(^{32}\) Thus, his concern for the subsequent effect on the military of the government fiscal policies is laid squarely on Constantine X’s other advisors. In addition, we must take into consideration that Psellos pronounced sections of the Chronographia in the presence of Constantine X’s son, Michael VII.\(^{33}\) Therefore, his critique of Constantine X’s administration could be seen as an attempt to convince Michael Doukas of the value of his work as an objective account, thereby emphasizing his own skills as a court advisor.

\(^{28}\) Attaleiates, 60.3–11, says that Constantine weakened the military establishments of the state by withholding the payments of the soldiery, and dismissing the high-ranking officers. See also Cheynet, La politique, 69.

\(^{29}\) This may explain why Psellos praises Basil II for ignoring the counsellors’ advice.

\(^{30}\) Attaleiates, 54.17–21, 59.1–5. Ljubarskij, Προσωπικότητα, 176–177, says that this is an indirect reference to Psellos and his colleagues. His argument is based upon the statement of the Continuator of Skylitzes who fully implicates Psellos in the decline of the empire (see, Η συνέχεια της Χρονογραφίας του Ιωάννου Σκυλίτση, ed. E. Th. Tsolakes, Thessaloníke 1968). Given that this statement is located in the section relating to the rule of Michael VII Doukas, we cannot directly criticize Psellos for Constantine X’s handling of state affairs.


\(^{32}\) See, Μιχαήλ Ψελλός, Χρονογραφία, ed.-intro.-trans.-comm. V. Karalis, vol. 2, Athens 1996, 373, n. 57. He maintains that there was a distance in the author’s relationship with the emperor.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 475.
To strengthen his argument that the *Chronographia* is favourable to the military, A. Kaldellis refers to the way Psellos treats three emperors (Basil II, Isaac I, Michael IV) and several officers of the army (Bardas Phokas, Bardas Skleros, George Maniakes, Leo Tornikios). In the next pages, I am going to discuss these cases following a chronological order:

*Basil II*: His reign, as Kaldellis says, forges a pattern of rulership in the *Chronographia*. This is because Basil devoted most of his life on campaigns, and because he established a tyrannical authority based on fear rather than on benevolence. Following Kaldellis in his argumentation, we are surprised to discover that Psellos lauds Basil for more or less the same reasons he attacks Romanos IV Diogenes (1068–1071) in book seven. Diogenes too spent much of his time on battlefields, and aspired to be the undisputed emperor of Byzantium. Certain similarities between those two rulers’ personality traits have been spotted and are listed in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basil II (Book 1)</th>
<th>Romanos IV (Book 7b)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. [§3.1–4] ἐβούλετο μὲν μηδένα κοινονόν ἐχειν τῶν φροντισμάτων, μηδὲ περὶ τῶν κοινῶν διοικήσεων σύμβουλον.</td>
<td>[§11.7–8] ὃ δὲ ἐβούλετο μὲν αὕτωρχεῖν καὶ τὸ κράτος τῶν πραγμάτων ἐχειν μονόστατος</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. [§29.8–11] Αὐτὸς γοῦν ἔρχει καὶ τῶν βουλευμάτων, αὐτὸς δὲ ἀδελφός καὶ τὰ στρατόπεδα· τὸ δὲ πολιτικὸν ὦ πρὸς τοὺς γεγραμμένους νόμους…ἐκνεύρνα.</td>
<td>[§19.1–3] ᾿Ωσπερ δὲ εἰώθει ποιεῖν ἐν πᾶσι πράγμασι πολιτικοῖς τε καὶ στρατιωτικοῖς, μὴ γνῶμας παρὰ τοῦ λαμβάνειν τῶν πράξεων</td>
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<tr>
<td>[§29.11–13] οἶδεν όμως προσέχει λογίας ἀνάρτεσιν…καὶ παντάπασι καταπεφρονήκει</td>
<td>[§10.5–6] τὰ πλείω δὲ εἰρωνικός τε καὶ ἀλαζόν</td>
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These parallels are indicative of how the author’s account is affected by his political interests. He exonerates the arrogant Basil for not listening to the philosophers’ advice, but criticizes Diogenes for similar behaviour. Where is then the difference between those two cases? In the first, Psellios himself was not in the intel-

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34 *Kaldellis, Argument*, 178–185, discusses this subject in Chapter 25, Philosophy and the Throne (esp. 182–184).


36 For example, *Attaleiates*, 77.18, reports that Diogenes conducted his maiden campaign against the Seljuks in Anatolia only two months after his enthronement.
lectual environment of the imperial court, and thus may not be concerned if Basil ignored the wise people of Byzantium at that time. In the second, he was in the imperial court indeed, but not in the innermost circle of Diogenes’ advisors and consultants. We may presume that this was very annoying for such a powerful courtier who had turned out to be the most trusted confidant of Diogenes’ predecessor, Constantine X Doukas. On these grounds, one can see how the author’s own situation influenced his adverse commentary on Diogenes in the Chronographia.38

Also, we must bear in mind that Psellos judges Basil II, whom he never met, by the outcome of his policies. During his reign the Byzantine state had reached its zenith. The treasury coffer’s were overflowing and the boundaries of the state stretched from the Euphrates River to southern Italy and from the Danube to Crete and Cyprus. It was, therefore, difficult for Psellos to express an opinion against the public’s and criticize the emperor who continued to be very popular among the succeeding generations.39

Bardas Phokas, Bardas Skleros: The introduction of these two generals in the Chronographia, Kaldellis asserts, gives the impression that they would have been as successful emperors as Basil himself was. Kaldellis’ view relies on the way their physical details and martial skills are described in book one. A question that raises here is: if Basil is genuinely presented as the best ruler that the empire had ever had, then why should the Chronographia encourage his identification with Bardas Phokas and Bardas Skleros? The description of the outward appearance and valour of the two generals must not be related to the above consideration, because Psellos’ notion of humanism puts emphasis on the superiority of inner virtues over external ones.40 Especially in the case of Skleros, it is even harder to believe that he would have made an ideal ruler in Psellos’ eyes. The mentioning of Skleros’ advanced age in two successive sections of the book is noteworthy [§1.26.11, 27.7].

Michael IV: Though he was not an emperor of military background, the Chronographia treats him in a favourable light, Kaldellis maintains, because he took personal interest in the army [§4.19.20–21]. To reinforce his argument, the scholar proceeds to a comparison of Michael IV with Basil II saying that: a) both lacked Hellenic culture; and b) both indulged in pleasures before they realized the weight of the duties of a sovereign ruler.41 Yet, it is questionable how the two elements are linked with Psellos’ alleged preference for military emperors.

38 The growing arrogance of Romanos Diogenes acts as the core of the text, and reflects the author’s strong animosity towards this ruler. Ljubarski, Προσωπικότητα, 319–320; idem, The Byzantine Irony — The Case of Michael Psellos, edd. A. Avramea, A. Laiou, E. Chrysos, Byzantine State and Society, in Memory of N. Oikonomides, Athens 2003, 357–358.
39 It is also Karalis who states that Psellos idealizes Basil II mainly because he never met him (idem, Χρονογραφία, 475).
41 Kaldellis, Argument, 57, 94.
There is, in my opinion, another angle through which to understand the author’s liking for Michael IV. This is the clear sense of justice the latter had when he took control of government. Psellos points out that it was a tradition for new emperors to give titles and honours to citizens, senators, and military officers. Yet, Michael IV neither replaced the senate, nor did he promote his close friends to the highest positions, if they lacked experience [§4.10.10–17]. In the Chronographia, we learn that Theodora also ignored this tradition, and governed by a clear sense of justice during her reign in 1055–1056 [§6a.3.1–4]. The author’s commentary on the refusal of these two rulers (of both of whom he speaks in tones of praise) to follow the practices of their predecessors cannot be accidental. The answer to why this subject was of great importance for Psellos may be found in the section relating to Constantine IX who is blamed for exactly the opposite reasons: he reduced the cursus honorum [§6.29.15–21]; he promoted a great number of people to higher positions indiscriminately; and he allowed citizens of humble origin to become members of the senate. Such unfair policies were clearly an anathema to Psellos. They undermined the stability of the state and often resulted in revolutionary uprisings.

George Maniakes, Leo Tornikios: One after another, the two officers of the army rose in revolt against the central government. Kaldellis remarks that Maniakes gained the admiration of Psellos, because he possessed the skills to redeem the declining fate of the empire. Since Psellos enjoyed privileges and a rising political career in the reign of Constantine IX, it is unlikely therefore he wished a change of power to Maniakes. The latter, as all new incumbents, would apparently replace advisors and ministers with others loyal to himself. A further element that needs special attention is the author’s statement of the death of the rebel general: for some it was injustice, and for others it was not [§6.86.1–2]. Safe conclusions cannot be extracted, but what purpose does this statement serve in the text? Given the general discontent with the emperor’s unpopular measures, only some court officials would be relieved at the news of Maniakes’ death. And our author undoubtedly was one of them. For those reasons one should therefore

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42 Short references to Michael IV’s great qualities are also found in Skylitzes, 415.53–54; Attaleiates, 8.9; and Kekaumenos, Στρατηγικά, intro.-trans.-comm. D. Tsougarakis, 3rd ed., Athens 1996, 261.

43 Michael Psellos particularly mentions Pardos [§6.80.6–10] and Romanos Boilas [ibid., §6.140.13]. As to Boilas, cf. Ioannis Zonarae epitomae historiarum libri XIII–XVIII, ed. Th. Büttner — Wobst, CSHB, Bonn 1897. 645.14 (= Zonaras). Of similar interest are the cases of Romanos Skleros [Skylitzes, 427.61–63] and Nikephoros [Skylitzes, 464.13–19; Attaleiates, 25.16–17]. They both rose to high ranks simply because of their intimacy with the emperor.

44 Presumably, Psellos refers to the logothetes John [§6.177.5–6; Zonaras, 649.12–17].

45 The concern of Psellos for the proper functioning of the hierarchy system as a whole is also evident in the emphasis he places on Maniakes’ gradual promotions to general [§6.76.1–7].

46 The above consideration could also challenge Kaldellis’ assumption on why Theodora and Michael IV Paphlagon in the Chronographia are not rebuked for their pious devotion so much as other rulers, like Romanos III and Constantine IX. Cf., idem, Argument, 79, 94.

47 The reason for which Maniakes rose in revolt was his violent contests with Romanos Skleros on account of the limits of their estates [Skylitzes, 427–57–59].
separate any admiration of Psellos for Maniakes from any desire to see him assume power.

The Chronographia does not contain any favourable comments on Leo Tornikios himself, but gives a vivid description of the impact of his revolt on the citizens of Byzantium. They were dissatisfied with Constantine IX, hence they preferred to see on the throne a warlike emperor able to defend the state from external threats [§6.104.26–28]. Kaldellis assumes that Psellos too had the same wish. This assumption however does not, in fact, correspond to Psellos’ recorded pleasure at the failed revolt of Leo [§6.120.1–2]. In all probability, the expression of his feelings in the text reflects the survival of his own position.

Isaac I Komnenos: Kaldellis takes the view that Psellos treats Isaac I as the man who, after Basil II, was able to make the empire survive and flourish through a forceful military leadership. But the answer why such a view is not plausible is given, in fact, by the scholar himself:

Though an official ambassador, Psellos personally had no objection to the fall of Michael (namely, Stratiotikos) per se. However, he was worried that his open association with the Emperor’s regime would bring him into disfavor with the new military rulers, and he feared that his own enemies would seize the opportunity to destroy him.48

In other words, Kaldellis accepts that Psellos’ account of Isaac contains political rather than patriotic components. It was under his reign (1057–1059) that Psellos was recognized as a philosopher and wise counsellor [§§7.39, 42]. This can easily explain our author’s initial approval of the policy of Isaac for the state protection. The narrative becomes critical of him at the moment that he imposed strict measures on people, clerics, senators, and military officers. Psellos disagrees with the way Isaac handled the situation.49 He declares that his criticism does not actually apply to the initiatives taken, but to the timing of their implementation [§7.58.17–19]. However, there is an important detail to consider: the sudden change in the emperor’s behaviour. He became abrasive and ignored the advice of wise counsellors [§7.62.13–14], of whom Psellos was now one. On this account, the author stresses that Isaac proved inferior to his task, implying that he was not a good choice for emperor [§7.51.20–21].50

To sum up: the present paper challenges Anthony Kaldellis’ opinion on the favourable treatment of the military in the Chronographia. His argument, however, does not answer a crucial question: if “the true subject matter of the Chronographia is not the decline of the State, but the revival of philosophy”, and

48 Kaldellis, Argument, 168. More details about the relationship between the two men are found in Chapter 24, Psellos and Isaac Komnenos, 167–178.
49 Attaleiates 47.27–48.2, tells us that Isaac’s measures increased the revenues of the state without causing discontent among the citizens.
50 The administrative failure of Isaac Komnenos is also attested in the next section of the Chronographia, where it is written that one of the main concerns of the new emperor was to introduce a fair system of government [§7a.2.4].
if the book “culminates in an extravagant vindication of Psellos’ political skills”,\textsuperscript{51} then how can we presume that the author is really concerned for the army? And it is beyond doubts that the fate of the army is inextricably linked to the fate and decline of the state. Kaldellis himself maintains that the author belonged to those courtiers who exploited their rhetorical skills for their own advantage, and acknowledged that “many of his activities at court were self-serving”.\textsuperscript{52} It is, therefore, reasonable to accept that Psellos’ statements about the army were adjusted to serve the needs of the moment. In this respect, his judgement of military emperors and some court officials is made more by the influence it has on his own reputation than any true objectivity. Through his effort to convince the audience of his patriotic and altruistic motives, Psellos seems to show a genuine interest in the army. But in fact he attacks the rulers who did not fully trust his own political ability, and admonishes the courtiers who tried to undermine his career in the imperial court.

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\textsuperscript{51} Kaldellis, Argument, 59, 33.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 148.
U sredinju pažnju ovog rada jeste odnos Mihaila Psela prema vojsci, LI^NIM RAZLOZIMA?

LI PSELOVA ZAINTERESOVANST ZA VOJSKU

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UHRONOGRAPIJI UOPŠTE NIJE MOTIVISANA

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оцени ваљаност Калделизових аргумента. У првом делу рада анализира се сваки помен војске у књигама о Роману III Аргиру, Зоји и Теодори, Михаилу VI Стратиотику и Константину X Дуки. У другом делу се преиспитују Калделизови аргументи, који се заснивају на начину како су у Хронографији представљена три цара (Василије II, Михаило IV Пафлагонац и Исак I Комнин) и четири војсковође (Варда Фока, Варда Склир, Георгије Манијакис и Лав Торникије). Аутор је дошао до закључка да је сваки помен војске у Псевдовом делу нераскидиво повезан са пишчевим личним мотивом да се прикаже као најстручнији и најприкладнији дворски саветник. Показало се да су његови погледи увек у складу са његовим политичким ставовима, будући да осуђује оне цареве на које је имао врло мали утицај, док, напротив, подржава оне чије је пуно поштовање и поверење уживао.