

# FEAR – ELEMENTS OF SLAVIC „PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE” IN THE CONTEXT OF SELECTED LATE ROMAN SOURCES<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The author of the article, using contemporary interdisciplinary methods of study (including those from the field of social psychology), sets out to explain the mechanisms of fear employed by Slavs against the Roman army. The study covered 6<sup>th</sup> century historical sources depicting the fighting methods of the Slavs. A more in-depth analysis focused on the issue of fear in relation to group conformism, described in detail in *Strategikon* (the essential Later Roman military treatise).

**Keywords:** Roman Army, Strategikon, Slavs, psychological warfare

Fear has always been and probably for many years will still remain the dominant emotion accompanying troops on the field of battle<sup>2</sup>. Throughout the ages man attempted to suppress fear by various means – alcohol<sup>3</sup>, narcotics<sup>4</sup>, battle frenzy<sup>5</sup>, or by replacing it with an even stronger fear. However; nobody has yet succeeded to completely eliminate anxiety in soldiers. A trooper devoid of instincts would be little more than a soulless instrument, and although fear may lead the soldiers to become paralyzed or even flee, it is also a powerful motivator for positive results. The feeling of terror has been a constant companion to fighting men. This holds true for any historical period, regardless of available source materials or the methods employed to study the human psyche<sup>6</sup>. Soldiers of antiquity often had to face terrifying<sup>7</sup> and downright alien<sup>8</sup> foes in combat where no quarter was given. In the moments leading up to a fight men were surely anxious about

<sup>1</sup> The author presented his first considerations on the topic in a Polish paper: *Strach - elementy słowiańskiej wojny psychologicznej w świetle Strategikonu*, *Prace Historyczne* 4/2014. This article expands on the previous work with a deeper analysis covering a wider selection of sources.

<sup>2</sup> The issue of fear and panic on contemporary battlefields was analyzed by S. Konieczny, see KONIECZNY 1969 and 964. The subject was also touched upon in a more recent work: NOWACKI 2004. An excellent overview of modern psychological warfare can be found in MC 402/1 NATO Military Policy on Psychological Operations. The history of discipline was described in KENNEDY/ZILLMER 2006, 1-21.

<sup>3</sup> As far back as in ancient Egypt, see: GABRIEL 2009, 220.

<sup>4</sup> A good example is the usage of LSD in the military, see: LEE/SHLAIN, 1992. Also, see military applications of the substance from a medical point of view: KETCHUM/SALEM 2008, 412-413.

<sup>5</sup> The obvious example is the myth of the berserkers, which to this day captivates the imagination of certain servicemen. PROTEVI 2013, 132.

<sup>6</sup> An excellent opportunity for further reading is this gripping, although not flawless, piece: BESALA 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Romans understood the phenomenon of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), although we lack the methods to determine how it manifested itself in veterans. MELCHIOR 2011, 209-223.

<sup>8</sup> There are numerous studies that deal with the image of barbarians from Roman perspective; notable recent works including: FERRIS 2000 provides an extensive list of the literature on the subject and WOOLF 2011, particularly pages 32-58.

the outcome, their own instincts urging them to flee from danger<sup>9</sup>.

Although Roman military drills were supposed to help men overcome their fears by inspiring a sense of duty and teaching certain automatic reactions<sup>10</sup>, it was still a common occurrence for legionnaires to flee from the battlefield. Interestingly enough, fear itself was employed to prevent this from happening, as any units that ran away were decimated<sup>11</sup>. Applying collective responsibility established a group control mechanism, and the inevitable punishment served as additional motivation to make sure that even the faintest of heart do not turn and run<sup>12</sup>. Late Roman laws are full of provisions that encouraged very strict punishments for deserters, especially those that fled in the face of the enemy<sup>13</sup>. The existence of such laws makes it clear that our image of the Roman army is highly idealized<sup>14</sup> and that even in this well-oiled military machine there were still individuals who succumbed to terror when facing the enemy<sup>15</sup>. But would it be possible to investigate the mechanism of inspiring fear? Did the enemies of Rome make intentional attempts to evoke this feeling in the legionnaires, and if so, then by what means?

The character of ancient warfare differed greatly from the ranged engagements of the black powder era<sup>16</sup>. The focus on melee combat demanded that soldiers be determined and bold. This is evidenced by modern manuals on bayonet combat for officers training infantry recruits<sup>17</sup>. One such Polish manual published in 1943 includes the following passage:

*"The bayonet has been and will remain the last, but in mental terms the most effective weapon of an infantryman in close-quarters combat [...] a soldier is expected to rush into melee range and break the enemy's resistance with bayonet and martial skill"*<sup>18</sup>.

Analyses conducted by fighting men indicate that the opposition of a force about to receive a bayonet charge

<sup>9</sup> Fear leads to either courage or cowardice, depending on in which state we come to terms with our anxiety, KLICHOWSKI 1994, 31.

<sup>10</sup> The military drills in the Roman army were described, among others, by PHANG 2008, 37-73. The subject was also mentioned in MACMULLEN 1984, 440-56. Contemporary military training from the point of view of psychology was studied by HARTMANN/SUNDE/KRISTENSEN/MARTINUSSEN 2003, 87-98. See also an interesting piece by HALFF/HOLLAN/HUTCHINS 1986, 1131-1139.

<sup>11</sup> Decimation was first mentioned in LIVIUS II. 59. An in-depth analysis of the phenomenon was presented by PHANG 2008, 123-129. Phang emphasizes the unique character of decimation, as it was a form of collective punishment.

<sup>12</sup> This corroborates MacMullen's theses. MACMULLEN 1984, 455-6.

<sup>13</sup> See: BRAND 1968. FRESHFIELD 1947. For earlier periods KULECZKA 1974. On the issue of lawbreakers and punishments see: STACHURA 2010, particularly pages 196-200.

<sup>14</sup> Explaining why this is so would require at least a separate article. As early as in the middle ages the Roman army was already considered an unparalleled model, which should be emulated as closely as possible. A case in point would be Maurice of Orleans, who tried to organize his infantry units according to the treatise of Vegetius, and his failure to do so was blamed not on the shortcomings of the legionary system but rather on the poor quality of recruits, who could not compare to the Roman legionnaires.

<sup>15</sup> The first individual who turns and flees should be considered as the instigator, who becomes the model for the completely panicking crowd to follow. BAYLEY 1959, 129-30.

<sup>16</sup> See the classic work: DU PICQ 1868 or the study that is crucial for modern methodology of military history: KEEGAN 1976. One of the men who implemented Keegan's theses was GOLDSWORTHY 2009.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example: *Instrukcja walki bagnietem (tymczasowa)* 1925.

<sup>18</sup> *Instrukcja walki bagnietem* 1943, 5.

is usually broken even before any blows are struck. The whole affair takes place in the minds of the fighters. The confrontation is psychological and tends to be won or lost before the two sides actually engage in melee. In such circumstances the fear of dying is overwhelming, as well as the fear of any man willing to risk such confrontation without regard to their own life. Charging an enemy was often an indication of higher morale, in which case the defenders would usually turn and run before the charge hit home. In the event of a cavalry charge we should also bear in mind additional factors such as the frightening speed of the mounts, the elevated position of riders relative to foot soldiers and the noise of onrushing horses. All these affect the morale of the defenders. However, this piece will focus on infantry engagements.

During the American Civil War most hand-to-hand combats resulted in a swift rout of the less determined side. It is worth noting that the attackers would normally attempt to enhance the terrifying effect of the charge through war cries, music and the unwavering demeanor of officers leading the attack<sup>19</sup>. It would be wrong to dismiss such stratagems as simple battlefield theatrics, because very often it really was the shouting and the belligerent attitude of the enemy that caused one of the sides to retreat without a fight<sup>20</sup>. We should also remember that close combat did not usually result in heavy casualties. It was only in the final stages of each battle, i.e. during the pursuit of fleeing forces, that the losing side was massacred. This is easily explained based on our understanding of human psychology. First of all, fleeing soldiers lose any interest in fighting or even defending themselves. All heavy pieces of equipment, such as shields, were normally discarded so as not to slow the men down<sup>21</sup>. A panicking mob<sup>22</sup> is much more dangerous than an individual – innate human conformism and self-preservation instinct lead people to focus solely on getting as far away from danger as possible, without regard for their surroundings or brothers in arms. The result is that oftentimes even the units that were determined to continue fighting would be disrupted or swept away by the wave of retreating men<sup>23</sup> and fleeing soldiers would lose lives by drowning or falling off heights. These are instinctive herd-like behaviors. Accounts of ancient chroniclers are filled with mentions of routed

<sup>19</sup> The attitude of the commanding officer is one of the key factors in the field. GOLDSWORTHY 2009, 145-149 and, in contemporary context, KONARSKI 1999, 30-32.

<sup>20</sup> Compare how Tacitus describes Germanic war cries: *'Terrent enim trepidantve, prout sonuit acies, nec tam vocis ille quam virtutis contentus videtur. Adfectatur praecipue asperitas soni et fractum murmur, obiectis ad os scutis, quo plenior et gravior vox repercussu intumescat'*. [They mostly tend to shout in harsh voice, or utter broken grumbles, holding shields next to the lips so that the sound is deeper, more resonant, magnified.] TACITUS, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Soldiers of the Roman army could expect strict punishment for discarding their shield: *'...ἐνιοι δὲ κατ' αὐτὸν τὸν κίνδυνον ἐκβαλόντες θυρεὸν ἢ μάχαιραν ἢ τι τῶν ἄλλων ὀπλῶν παραλόγως ῥίπτουσιν ἑαυτοὺς εἰς τοὺς πολεμίους, ἢ κυριεῖν ἐλπίζοντες ὡς ἀπέβαλον ἢ παθόντες τὴν πρόδηλον αἰσχύνην διαφεύξεσθαι καὶ τὴν τῶν οἰκείων ὕβριν'*. [...some of them, having lost their shield, sword or other piece of weaponry, would throw themselves madly at the enemy hoping to reclaim their gear or at the least, by dying, to avoid the shame and abuse of their comrades.] POLYBIUS, VI. 37.13.

<sup>22</sup> The term "mob" is used by the author to signify a group of people galvanized into action. BAYLEY 1959, 127.

<sup>23</sup> This happened for example at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071. NIKEFOROS BRYENNOS, I, 17-18; MICHAEL ATTALATES, XX, 23-24.

troops who died while crossing rivers or swamps<sup>24</sup>, or chose to jump off a cliff<sup>25</sup>. It is completely illogical from the point of view of a single human being, but based on the observations of social psychologists<sup>26</sup> mob logic is different from that of individuals and is governed by conformism and fear. This makes fear possibly the most devastating weapon available to any commander<sup>27</sup> as it allows them to rout and eventually annihilate even a larger enemy force.

Summing up, we know that every soldier faced with the prospect of combat is anxious about fighting and fears death. This holds true even for the Roman legions, who were famous for their high morale<sup>28</sup>. Mentally weaker troopers would normally choose to flee rather than fight, unrealistically assuming that running gives better chances of survival. Forget about the level of training, the implementation of draconian punitive measures or the socialization of troopers – during any engagement both sides are naturally leaning towards retreat. The side whose soldiers are able to suppress that instinctive response longer is usually victorious. Most battles in history ended in a rout of the defeated force and singular examples of defenders choosing to fight to the last man rather than flee are remembered as legends to this day<sup>29</sup>. In spite of its own legend, the Roman army was not a flawless machine and the legionnaires serving in its ranks were regular people. What gave the legions the biggest advantage was their superior training and higher level of material culture compared to their barbarian adversaries.

The works of Roman authors provide differing depictions of the Slavs<sup>30</sup> depending on where a given piece was written as well as the authors' interests, their attitude towards the current ruler or their religious beliefs<sup>31</sup>. Most writers, with the exception of Procopius and the author of *Strategikon*, did not possess military knowledge, which makes their descriptions of the army severely lacking, being usually nothing more than a collection of very basic observations. The further from the Balkan Limes that a work originated, the more distorted the image of the Slavs became. However, we should remember that this skewed image partially reflected how an average citizen of the Empire perceived the new neighbors and their military skills.

The approach to warfare practiced by the Slavs who began invading the Roman Balkans in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century was significantly below Roman standards<sup>32</sup>. *Procopius of Caesarea* gives a rather unflattering description

<sup>24</sup> AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, XVI, 55-56.

<sup>25</sup> THEOPHYLAKTOS SIMOKATES, I.12.1-8.

<sup>26</sup> MIKA 1972, 202-26.

<sup>27</sup> See for example how Seleukos Nikator defeated the opposing army without bloodshed, POLIAJNOS, IV 9.3.

<sup>28</sup> On the subject of morale in the Roman army, see URECHE 2014, 3-7.

<sup>29</sup> At the Battle of Varna the Janissaries did not retreat from the field despite the defeat of the Turkish forces – this led Vladislaus III to charge the unit, which resulted in his demise. Obviously, the most famous example of such steadfast behavior is the one shown by Leonidas's troops at the Battle of Thermopylae.

<sup>30</sup> An extensive list of sources dealing with the period was provided by CURTA 2007, 36-74.

<sup>31</sup> In the case of Procopius, this issue was perfectly explained by CAMERON 1985, 3-19.

<sup>32</sup> On the subject of Slavic approach to military matters at the end of Antiquity, see: ZASTEROVA 1971. TYSZKIEWICZ 2007, 19-30. GROTOWSKI 2005, 9-27. WHITBY 1988, 174-176. KAZANSKI 2009, 229-237. KAZANSKI 1999, 197-236. Also, for comparison: KAZANSKI 2007, 238-252. A good overview of Slavic military history at SYVANNE 2004, 390-397.

of the equipment of Slavic warriors: 'When they enter battle, the majority of them go against their enemy on foot carrying little shields and javelins in their hands, but they never wear corselets. Indeed some of them do not wear even a shirt or a cloak, but gathering their treads up as far as to their private parts they enter into battle with their opponents'<sup>33</sup>.

The Roman historian was not alone in his opinion regarding the Slavic military, especially in terms of material culture. Several dozen years later, the military treatise *Strategikon* included a whole chapter on the fighting methods of the Slavs. The author of the work states: 'Owing to their lack of government and their ill feeling toward one another, they are not acquainted with an order of battle'<sup>34</sup>.

This depiction is consistent with the image of the Slavs presented by Roman chroniclers at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Most authors of Late Antiquity saw Slavs as typical barbarians, inexperienced in matters of war.

The work of John of Ephesus employs an interesting rhetorical device. It contrasts the military art of the Slavs from when they first appeared in the Balkans with the methods used by them in the author's times. John observes that Slavic warriors didn't use to fight in formation, choosing rather to avoid open engagements by hiding in woods. This behavior was previously emphasized by Procopius<sup>35</sup> and later in *Strategikon*<sup>36</sup>. However, John goes on to claim that the times when Slavs would shy away from fighting have already passed. He also sadly concludes that 'they learned to fight better than the Romans, although they used to be simple barbarians'. The Slavic hordes supposedly even reached the outer walls of Constantinople, which probably refers to the Long Walls<sup>37</sup>. John's description was partially influenced by the changing perception of the Slavs. Before the reign of Justinian they were dismissed as a threat to the Roman Limes, but already in the times of Maurice it was not unusual for Slavic parties to spend the winter in the Balkan provinces of the Empire. The short description provided by John of Ephesus was supposed to explain to the readers how Slavs turned from simple primitive farmers into warriors able to challenge a regular army. The claim that Slavic military skills surpassed that of the Romans is obviously an exaggeration, as was proven by the legions when Maurice redirected a portion of the Empire's military efforts to the Balkans<sup>38</sup>. Nevertheless, John's narrative accurately reflects the situation in the region in the first years of Maurice's reign<sup>39</sup>, when the European provinces were not considered a priority. As such, the fatalistic attitude expressed by the author was fully justified.

Whereas John of Ephesus lived a long way away from the Balkan provinces, the author of *Strategikon*<sup>40</sup> was probably an army man experienced in fighting the Slavs. Consequently, the treatise contains numerous observations

<sup>33</sup> PROCOPIUS, VII. XIV. 25-31. Also at: IOANNES EPHESIUS, VI. 24.

<sup>34</sup> STRATEGIKON, XI. 4.

<sup>35</sup> PROCOPIUS, VII. XIV.

<sup>36</sup> STRATEGIKON, XI. IV.

<sup>37</sup> For more on the Anastasian Wall, see CROW 1993, 109-124.

<sup>38</sup> CURTA 2007, 99-107; WHITBY 1988, 156-165.

<sup>39</sup> In AD 584, the situation turned critical; the Slavs advanced on Constantinople and the emperor was forced to intervene. THEOPHYLAKTOS SIMOKATES, I. VII. 3-6. COURTA 2007, 95.

<sup>40</sup> Many scholars believe that Emperor Maurice was the author of the treatise, AUSSARESSES 1906, 23-40.



made in the course of military campaigns. Instead of literary qualities, the author of *Strategikon* focused on crucial aspects, which could be of use to less experienced Roman commanders. While clearly emphasizing the low level of material culture of this new enemy, he also points out qualities that made the barbarians a dangerous adversary. The Slavs were supposedly equipped with poor offensive weaponry, which mostly included weapons used in times of peace (spears, bows)<sup>41</sup>, and besides their shields they wore no other pieces of armor. Procopius puts much emphasis on the topos of trousers. In the eyes of the civilized peoples this article of clothing for many ages identified its wearers as barbarians. Actually, Procopius's whole description is reminiscent of the ethnographic style of Greek narratives, which originated with Herodotus.

Meanwhile, the author of *Strategikon* draws the reader's attention to how the Slavs behaved on the battlefield. Although they fared poorly when faced with well-trained and better equipped Romans, they could nevertheless create situations where the legionnaire's discipline would break. Despite their inferior training, the poor weaponry and lack of any complex military organization, during Maurice's reign barbarians managed several times to crush Roman forces. *Strategikon* describes one of the stratagems employed by the Slavs to compensate for being outnumbered in a pitched battle in the following passage: *'They are also not prepared to fight a battle standing in close order, or to present themselves on open and level ground. If they do get up enough courage when the time comes to attack, they shout all together and move forward a short distance. If they opponents begin to give way at the noise, they attack violently...'*<sup>42</sup>

Today, such behavior would be termed as "mentally pressuring the enemy" or simply – conducting psychological warfare. The Slavs were adept at utilizing basic human instincts as well as their own "otherness". In order to fully appreciate the mechanisms, which they used against the Romans, we need to understand how Romans themselves perceived the barbarians<sup>43</sup>. Most of the Slavic warriors were armed with improvised weapons (clubs, bows, spears and axes) and carried no armor, maybe with the exception of shields<sup>44</sup>. In terms of clothing they generally wore only trousers pulled up to the waist. In theory, regular soldiers should be relatively unfazed by a similar mob. However, barbarians were seen as completely alien. These crude, brutal heathens inspired fear simply through their presence. Add to that the emotions that accompany every combat to the death. Man has a natural anxiety of that, which is incomprehensible, alien and new. On the field of battle, where terror rules supreme, this knowledge about human fears can be easily used to give advantage to one of the sides.

When a screaming rabble of half-naked Slavs armed with axes and spears stood before the Romans, the psychological impact must have been overwhelming. While raising their war cries Slavic warriors would start running towards the enemy. This was a pivotal moment for both sides (the incoming charge intensified the feeling of terror). Any

soldiers of lesser mental fortitude probably contemplated escape for a while already. Faced suddenly with an onrushing wave of terrifying, madly screaming barbarians – they resorted to their basic instincts. Some of them would turn to flee. Now, if the commanding officers failed to stop the spread of panic, then based on the theory of mob psychology it could lead to the whole army retreating, despite the fact that such a course of action would be irrational. As a result, the Slavs would no longer be faced with a well-organized and superior enemy force, but rather a mass of terrified fleeing individuals, who became an easy target. Using this simple method, the Slavs, who could not stand against a regular army, were able to force such an army to retreat without any blows being struck. However, if the enemy stood their ground: *'...if not, they themselves turn around, not being anxious to experience the strength of the enemy at close range'*<sup>45</sup>.

The Slavs did not engage the opposing force. If the attacking warriors saw that Romans kept their nerve and were ready to receive the charge, they whole barbarian line would stop short of the Roman ranks. This is understandable – a well-ordered force equipped with better weapons was too much for the Slavs to handle. Interestingly enough, this passage proves that Slavic warriors had to be trained to follow orders, otherwise it would be impossible for them to abort the charge. Although the author of *Strategikon* claims that barbarians were undisciplined and unlikely to submit to authority<sup>46</sup>, their ability to feign an attack contradicts this claim. Only a well-trained combatant would stop during a charge at the order of his superior; in most cases once troops are committed to attack there is no way to recall them. This is another of these situations where instincts take over. A charging soldier runs faster than normal in order to overcome his anxiety, his fear of dying and fear of the enemy. In the case of experienced fighters the only way to drown out these emotions is closing the distance as quickly as possible and engaging in hand-to-hand combat, where men react automatically in a way that was drilled into them during training and previous combat encounters. We should also be mindful of other factors. If a whole unit executes a charge then all soldiers are affected by conformism – they suppress any negative emotions and, empowered by group mentality, advance screaming towards the enemy. A war cry does not only affect the enemy, it also bestows on your own soldiers a feeling of strength and camaraderie, which is a significant advantage in an assault. Being able to halt the advance before the enemy's lines without engaging is the mark of highly disciplined warriors. And that is not how Slavs were represented in the chronicles of the time. It is, then, possible that the description in *Strategikon* refers to the bodyguard of the barbarian commander – these troops would be used to following orders and employing various stratagems on the battlefield.

The leaders were very well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their troops. In a pitched battle the Roman shield wall (*fulcum*)<sup>47</sup> was more than capable of stopping a disordered charge, which is exactly why Slavs chose not to follow through with the attack, as it would most likely

<sup>41</sup> This is consistent with the earlier description of John of Ephesus.

<sup>42</sup> STRATEGIKON, XI. 4.

<sup>43</sup> See footnote 4.

<sup>44</sup> See IASHCHUK, manuscript.

<sup>45</sup> STRATEGIKON, XI. 4.

<sup>46</sup> Also in the context of tribal politics. STRATEGIKON, XI. 4.

<sup>47</sup> RANCE 2004, 265–326.

end in bloody defeat. However, if the enemy refused to be intimidated into breaking ranks, they were treated to another trick devised by the barbarians: 'Often too when they are carrying booty they will abandon it in feigned panic and run for the woods. When their assailants disperse after the plunder, they calmly come back and cause them injury'<sup>48</sup>.

This approach would be highly effective in the case of the under-financed Roman army, whose soldiers at the time when *Strategikon* was written rebelled at least several times against lowering of wages<sup>49</sup>. It is hard to determine if barbarians were aware of the Empire's financial difficulties, though we should rather assume that they weren't. The methods employed by Slavs were based on observations about the human mentality and man's basic instincts. The legionnaires were after all a standing army, and regular soldiers always fight for money. Even if some ancient authors like Vegetius saw the Roman legions as proud defenders of civilization, we can assume that the main motivation to join the army was not patriotism (which, obviously, shouldn't be disregarded completely) but rather the desire to make money and provide for one's family. So if the soldiers saw the Slavs discarding valuables worth more than several year's pay, especially remembering that the wages were paid out irregularly, they would obviously stop to pick up the spoils. Once the first rank halted, those behind them would naturally rush forward to participate in the looting. As the valuables were left on the ground at random, the ordered line of Roman troops quickly dissolved into a chaotic mess, which swept up even the most disciplined individuals. The commanding officer would, of course, react, but it still would take a while before order was restored<sup>50</sup>. Roman tactics in the period required strict discipline; any breach in the shield wall could result in the disruption of the whole formation. The ruse with discarded valuables meant that Roman lines could break down in a matter of minutes. At that moment the Slavic warriors would turn back and fall on the disorganized legionnaires leading to an easy victory. What added to the loosening of discipline was the fact that Slavs were supposedly fleeing. The Romans assumed that the enemy posed no further threat and that it was safe to begin collecting the spoils.

Slavic warriors were not the only ones who employed such devious tactics. Leo the Deacon wrote that during a battle with the Arabs the defeated emir of the Hamdanids abandoned his treasury, which allowed him to retreat from the field while the Byzantine soldiers were busy gathering up the money<sup>51</sup>. This is another example of utilizing basic knowledge of human psychology in combat. Knowledge itself was obviously not enough; it was equally important to devise stratagems that would provide practical application

<sup>48</sup> STRATEGIKON, XI. 4.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example: KAEGI 1981, 68.

<sup>50</sup> An example of a similar situation from the same historical period is an incident from the Persian front. When Roman cavalry captured the Persian camp during the Battle of Solachon, even the swift and determined reaction of *strategos* Philippicus was not enough to restore discipline, which meant that a portion of the army took no further part in the fighting. Ultimately, the Romans managed to achieve victory, but at that crucial point the fate of the battle was still in the balance and it took the intervention of the supreme commander to bring the troops to order. THEOPHYLAKTOS SIMOKATES, II. 4. 1-5.

<sup>51</sup> LEONIS DIAKONIS, II. 5.

for it. The fact that Slavs made use of similar tricks is not proof of their high military skills, but rather their ability to adapt and exploit any weakness shown by the enemy. It was only by using such tactics that uncivilized barbarians could defeat superior Roman legions.

The goal of this article was to be a contributory piece. Studies dealing with the psychology of the soldiers of antiquity and early middle ages are in their initial stages, and some researchers shy away from employing study methods from the fields of social psychology and battlefield psychology. This attitude is understandable, but if we have no other means of studying the mind of ancient soldiers, it is imperative that we use any methods available. However, we should always treat the results of such studies with a healthy dose of criticism. In the case of the passages analyzed herein the situation is rather more clear-cut. Scholars agree that the author of *Strategikon* was an experienced commander, who put his practical knowledge on paper and supplemented it with theory collected from other sources. We are also not dealing with a complex study of battlefield behavior. In both described cases the Slavs exploited basic human instincts in order to rob the adversary of their advantage. Nowadays, we know more about the mechanisms that governed the actions of Roman soldiers. We've learned that if even a single individual gives in to cowardice it may lead (through conformism) to mass panic. Slavic warriors consciously attempted to put pressure on enemy units and intimidate them into fleeing without a fight. Once a single soldier broke and ran it would lead to a domino effect, forcing the whole Roman army to retreat. Barbarian tactics were based on practical knowledge and observations regarding human behaviors, which modern scholars have learned to study and categorize. A better understanding of how soldiers act on the battlefield available by employing social psychology study methods allows us to explain numerous phenomena that have previously been beyond the scope of historical research methodology.

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