



DOI: 10.18778/2084-140X.09.41

**SZYMON WIERZBIŃSKI, *U boku bazyleusa. Frankowie i Waregowie w cesarstwie bizantyńskim w XI w.* [By the Side of the Basileus. The Franks and the Varangians in the Byzantine Empire in the 11<sup>th</sup> century], Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2019 [= Byzantina Lodziensia, 37], pp. 420.**

The presented book is the newest volume of the Byzantina Lodziensia series. It was authored by Szymon Wierzbński, a Byzantinist from Łódź, a representative of the younger generation, and a researcher at the Humanities Department (Faculty of Management and Engineering Production), Łódź University of Technology. He has published several articles<sup>1</sup> and his main research area is the military forces in the Middle Byzantine period. The basis for this monograph was his doctoral dissertation supervised by a University of Łódź Professor, dr hab Teresa Wolińska, and defended at the UŁ in 2013.

The book discusses the presence of the Varangians and the Franks in the Byzantine Army or more broadly speaking, in the Byzantine Empire in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The first two chapters (ch. 1: *The Heirs to Imperium Romanum* (*Spadkobiercy Imperium Romanum*), p. 29–70 and ch. 2: *New Challenges, Old Threats* (*Nowe wyzwania, stare zagrożenia*), p. 71–86) offer an introduction to the reflections that will constitute the main subject of the book. The chapters

review the organization and makeup of the Byzantine Army but also present the debate over its size in the period preceding the times that are of primary interest to the author. These sections also characterize the standing of the empire in the international arena. In chapter 3: *Roads to Byzantium. New Drafting Areas* (*Drogi do Bizancjum. Nowe obszary zaciągu*, p. 87–126), Szymon Wierzbński moves on to the issue of the mercenaries in the Byzantine Army, establishing the territories from which they came in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (the Rus' and Scandinavia, Normandy and Southern Italia, and the British Isles). The next chapter: *The Barbarians of Ultima Thule* (*Barbarzyńcy z Ultima Thule*, p. 127–206) is devoted to the Varangian Guard and the changes to its ethnical makeup occurring in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In Chapter 5: *The Normans and "other Franks"* (*Normanie i „inni Frankowie”*, p. 207–270) the author analyzes the presence of the Normans and the so-called “other Franks” in the Byzantine Army. Chapter 6: *The Riches, Fame and Glory* (*Bogactwo, sława i cześć*, p. 271–320) elaborates on the reasons why the Varangians and the Franks decided to enlist in the Byzantine Army, and points to specific examples of the mercenaries who made a career in Byzantium (e.g. Harald Hardrada or Hervē Frankopoul). The final chapter 7: *They Have Treason in Their Blood?* (*Zdradę mają w krwi?*, p. 321–346) considers the mutual relationship between the Franks and the Varangians. It also examines the attitude of the Byzantines to the latter. The book is complemented with the Introduction (p. 1–28), Conclusions (p. 347–346), List of Abbreviations

<sup>1</sup> E.g.: *Bizantyńskie dary w pochówku łodziowym z Sutton Hoo. Próba interpretacji*, PNH 6, 2007, p. 159–172; *From pagan Vikings to milites Christi*, [in:] *Conversions: Looking for Ideological Change in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. L.P. SŁUPECKI, R. SIMEK, Wien 2013, p. 357–373; *Normans and other Franks in 11<sup>th</sup> century Byzantium: The careers of the adventurers before the rule of Alexios I Comnenos*, SCer 4, 2014, p. 277–288; *Auri sacra fames? Arabscy jeńcy wojenni jako źródło korzyści finansowej dla armii bizantyńskiej w X wieku*, [in:] *W niewoli. Doświadczenie jenieckie i jego konteksty na przestrzeni dziejów*, ed. M. JARZĄBEK, M. STACHURA, P. SZLANTA, Kraków 2019, p. 83–97.

(p. 365–368), Works Cited (p. 369–398), and indices of people, and geographical and ethnical names (p. 401).

The subject undertaken by Szymon Wierzbński is undoubtedly interesting but also difficult. Depicting the place which the Franks and Varangians had in the empire's army in the 11<sup>th</sup> century required studying a range of sources of various origin, from Greek to Scandinavian. The author typically extracted from these sources only snippets of information, which he confronted with each other, verified and matched in an attempt to put them into some kind of cohesive whole. Although in many cases, no more than approximations and guesses had to suffice, he still managed to construct a rather coherent image of the participation of the Franks and the Varangians in the mercenary forces of the Byzantium in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The author draws from a rich, representative and multilingual literature of the subject, with which he frequently and successfully debates.

Szymon Wierzbński's monograph is undeniably an interesting piece of work that inspires further discussion about the role of mercenaries in the 11<sup>th</sup>-century Byzantium.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY


WIERZBIŃSKI S., *Auri sacra fames? Arabscy jeńcy wojenni jako źródło korzyści finansowej dla armii bizantyńskiej w X wieku*, [in:] *W niewoli. Doświadczenie jenieckie i jego konteksty na przestrzeni dziejów*, ed. M. JARZĄBEK, M. STACHURA, P. SZLANTA, Kraków 2019, p. 83–97.

WIERZBIŃSKI S., *Bizantyńskie dary w pochówku łodziowym z Sutton Hoo. Próba interpretacji*, "Przegląd Nauk Historycznych" 6, 2007, p. 159–172.

WIERZBIŃSKI S., *From pagan Vikings to milites Christi*, [in:] *Conversions: Looking for Ideological Change in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. L.P. SŁUPECKI, R. SIMEK, Wien 2013, p. 357–373.

WIERZBIŃSKI S., *Normans and other Franks in 11<sup>th</sup> century Byzantium: The careers of the adventurers before the rule of Alexios I Comnenos*, "Studia Ceranea. Journal of the Waldemar Ceran Research Center for the History and Culture of the Mediterranean Area and South-Eastern Europe" 4, 2014, p. 277–288.

Mirosław J. Leszka (Łódź)\*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2643-4520>

Translated by Katarzyna Szuster-Tardi

\* University of Łódź, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Department of Byzantine History