CHAPTER ONE
WARFARE AND IMPERIAL PROPAGANDA

The inevitability of warfare

The period 1204–1453 was a time of turmoil and endless wars. This context, in which war and not peace was seen as the natural state of the numerous small political entities of the Balkans and Asia Minor, led Byzantine authors to view military conflict as something unavoidable. They also conclude that in a politically fragmented world diplomacy could not bring peace. The philosopher, author and close associate of Andronikos II, Theodore Metochites led many peace negotiations and diplomatic missions in Serbia. However, in his writings he opposes any diplomatic dealings with the Turcoman principalities in Asia Minor. He considers the Turks as a nomadic people, a fluid society, lacking any form of centralised political organisation. Had the Byzantines been dealing with a centralised state, as he argues, diplomacy could have led to a solution. However, since the numerous Turcoman principalities were small political entities, diplomatic dealings with them were of no avail.¹ In another of his works, Metochites comments that no one denies that living in peace is evidence of Christian piety. It is during peace that the rule of law prevails and the state increases its incomes and wealth.² However, war is inevitable and fighting is the result of human greed. Therefore, to achieve peace it is necessary to be ready for war, for and those who believe that they will live permanently in peace do not succeed in doing so and they either succumb to slavery or they are forced to fight wars. Metochites concludes that all people love easy profit and to gain this they carry out attacks, in particular on those whose minds are fixed on peace. Therefore, to enjoy the benefits of peace and justice it is necessary for even the civilian

¹ Metochites, Orations, 384.
population (*politikon*) to be ready to fight wars.\(^3\) That military conflict was considered inevitable, while diplomacy could not ensure peace is expressed in the writings of the monk, teacher and diplomat Maximos Planoudes.\(^4\) In the imperial oration which he compiled in 1294 for the coronation of Michael IX (1294–1320) as co-emperor of Andronikos II, Planoudes observes that the emperor should always suspect the motives of his enemies when conducting diplomatic negotiations. He adds that the emperor should possess a sizeable army, including even peasants and shepherds, a large native and mercenary cavalry force, a powerful fleet and a great military budget. Planoudes adds that the emperor should be a competent soldier, so that not only will his subjects know his virtues, but also the enemies will be astonished by his military skills.\(^5\) Like Metochites, Planoudes’ views about war and diplomacy were influenced by the conflict between Byzantium and the Turcoman principalities in Asia Minor.

The idea that the empire was surrounded by enemies and needed to be constantly ready for war and ruled by a warrior emperor is emphasised in the *Mirrors of Princes* compiled by late Byzantine authors. In 1250, the polymath clergyman and author Nikephoros Blemmydes, who was the tutor of the emperor Theodore II Laskaris, compiled his *Imperial Statue*. In this work, Blemmydes offers advice on military training and tactics, among other things. He also points out that the emperor needs to be constantly ready for war, since wars can flare up quite unexpectedly. Fighting and training in the art of war should be one of the most important activities of the emperor and his army.\(^6\) Warfare is presented as an integral part of the ruler’s life in another *Mirror of Princes* which was compiled by the monk Theognostos and was chronologically close to that of Blemmydes. Theognostos exhorts the emperor to do everything possible to avoid bloodshed. When treaties and agreements are possible, the emperor should readily undertake negotiations for concord in a spirit of charity.\(^7\) In the first decade of the fourteenth century, the philologist and teacher from Thessalonica, Thomas Magistros compiled a work in which he states that most battles

\(^3\) Metochites, *Miscellanea*, 516–520.

\(^4\) For the career of Maximos Planoudes see *PLP*, 23308.


\(^6\) *PG* 142, cols. 638–640.

\(^7\) *Theognosti Thesaurus*, J. Munitiz (ed.), (Brepols, 1979), 198.