

# Review of: "Shrewdness, coup d'œil, and genius: the cognitive attributes of the consummate general (Greek antiquity, Byzantine era, modern times)"

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Is exemplary generalship intuitive or something that can be learned? As Ami-Jacques Rapin lays out in this fascinating and illuminating essay, this question has a long vexed military thinkers— ancient and modern. The goal of the current paper is to test the assertion by the ancient Greek military historian Everett Wheeler that the Greek concept of *ἀνκῆνοια*, **defined imperfectly in the LGL as 'ready wit, sagacity, shrewdness,** finds its equivalent in the 18/19th-century French concept 'coup d' oeil, which be simply defined as 'a glance that takes in a comprehensive view.'

And yet on the first pages of this essay the readers finds the difficulty in such definite definitions for either terms. As the author establishes, *ankhinoia* can be translated in a variety of ways in English, which can shift the meaning in subtle but significant ways. Just to name a few possible meanings, it can be rendered as "sagacity", "shrewd", "quick mind", "acuteness of judgement", or plain old "intelligence". Yet, as Rapin explains, it is much more than that. It is a quality that gives the individual who possesses it the ability to see both the macro and the micro, which grants one an ability to anticipate an opponent's actions and quickly adapt. Sometimes indeed it appears more like the English 'instinct' rather than "sagacity".

Here one might wish for the author to touch on a wider range of vocabulary in ancient Greek. For instance *ὀξύς* (sharp, clever) is also deployed by Greek writers like Procopius to describe general like Belisarius and Narses, who have an intuitive skill to see through the fog of war and anticipate the enemies moves on the field of battle ( e.g., *Wars* 3.9.25, discussed in Rance, 'Narses and the Battle of Taginae', p. 426).

I would add that in Greco-Romano sources "cunning intelligence" was a stock trait (often negative) of barbarians. For instance, in the sixth-century histories of Procopius, Agathias, and Menander, the Persian shah Khusro displays one of the stock traits of a non-Roman despot in battle of cunning (or cleverness).

One quick aside, I may be wrong but I think Wheeler is sometimes misspelled in the paper as Wheller (p. 4, 12) If this is a different author, I would put the first name to avoid confusion. Moreover, In the discussion on Greek/Byzantine intellectuals, it would be helpful for the more general reader to provide the dates for the individual authors.

In the discussion on Polybius, I would add that the somewhat oppositional qualities *ankhinoia* and *tolma* balance one another, perhaps similar to how the proper combination of *thrasos/phobos* can lead one to *andreia/arete*.

As for the famous sixth-century general Belisarius, yes, Procopius depict him often as shrewd, and praises him for his *pronoia* and *ankhinoia*, which allows him to enter into battle with more confidence than his men, such as occurs frequently in his battles against the Vandals and the Goths. But sometimes, as when he lands in Sicily in 533, he is “blind” and desperate for details on the Vandals' knowledge about his plan to attack them in Africa. So, while I appreciate it stands well outside of the needs for the current essay, Procopius can show that *ankhinoia* may not be a constant virtue, but something that waxes and wanes. Like many good generals in Greek literature Belisarius depends upon both an instinctive and informative type of generalship. Put another way, while he often has the vision to see the big picture, what makes him great in Procopius' telling, is that he also sweats the details to “learn” more about the coming campaigns or his enemy. So he uses a combination of learning and instinct. The qualities of Belisarius as depicted by Procopius indeed would seem to come close to the attribute the author discusses (pg. 24) concerning Clausewitz's notion that ‘The intuition on which a general must base his decisions is not an ordinary intuition [...]. I believe it might be fruitful here or elsewhere to compare the qualities of say Belisarius with Clausewitz's and other 18th/19th century authors notions notions of coup d'oeil/genius.

Moreover, as the author points out about the later Byzantine Military treatises, the ability for a good general to seize an opportunity, is something that Procopius directly attributes to Belisarius' victory over the Vandals.

The paper is best when discussing the military thinkers of the 18th and 19th centuries. There is not much to be improved on. Here in the beating heart of the paper, Rapin provides the details and nuanced discussion of the varied forms and meaning of coup d'oeil lacking in the exploration of ἀγχινοια in some of the Greek/Byzantine texts discussed. This is because as the author so adeptly explains through-out this essay, concepts like Procopius' ἀγχινοια, Fontenelle's coup d'oeil, and Clausewitz's ‘Genius’ are notoriously difficult to pin down with precision and hence difficult to compare with one another.

To conclude, despite the minor criticisms above, I highly recommend this paper and look forward to coming back to see its development!