



Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen

Byzantine conquests in the East in the 10th century

Campaigns of Nikephoros II Phocas and John Tzimiskes as were seen in the Byzantine sources



Master thesis
Filip Schneider
s1006649
15. 6. 2018

Eternal Rome
Supervisor: Prof. dr. Maaïke van Berkel
Master's programme in History
Radboud University

Front page: Emperor Nikephoros II Phocas entering Constantinople in 963, an illustration from the Madrid Skylitzes. The illuminated manuscript of the work of John Skylitzes was created in the 12th century Sicily. Today it is located in the National Library of Spain in Madrid.

Table of contents

Introduction	5
Chapter 1 - Byzantine-Arab relations until 963	7
Byzantine-Arab relations in the pre-Islamic era	7
The advance of Islam	8
The Abbasid Caliphate	9
Byzantine Empire under the Macedonian dynasty	10
The development of Byzantine Empire under Macedonian dynasty	11
The land aristocracy	12
The Muslim world in the 9 th and 10 th century	14
The Hamdamids	15
The Fatimid Caliphate	16
Chapter 2 - Historiography	17
Leo the Deacon	18
Historiography in the Macedonian period	18
Leo the Deacon - biography	19
<i>The History</i>	21
John Skylitzes	24
11 th century Byzantium	24
Historiography after Basil II	25
John Skylitzes - biography	26
<i>Synopsis of Histories</i>	27
Chapter 3 - Nikephoros II Phocas	29
<i>Domestikos</i> Nikephoros Phocas and the conquest of Crete	29
Conquest of Aleppo	31
Emperor Nikephoros II Phocas and conquest of Cilicia	33
Conquest of Cyprus	34
Bulgarian question	36
Campaign in Syria	37
Conquest of Antioch	39
Conclusion	40

Chapter 4 - John Tzimiskes	42
Bulgarian problem	42
Campaign in the East	43
A Crusade in the Holy Land?	45
The reasons behind Tzimiskes' eastern campaign	47
Conclusion	49
Conclusion	49
Bibliography	51

Introduction

In the 10th century, the Byzantine Empire was ruled by emperors coming from the Macedonian dynasty. In modern historiography, this period is considered the apogee of Byzantine power. The economy and culture of the Empire flourished and the political and military strength allowed its ruler to expand the Byzantine territory. In 1025 with the death of the emperor Basil II, Byzantium was at its largest territorial size since the 6th century.

Expansions took place both in the Balkans and the Middle East. The biggest gains in the latter were achieved by two emperors of the second half of the 10th century – Nikephoros II Phocas (r. 963 – 969) and John Tzimiskes (r. 969 – 976). Because of their military competence and because of the internal disintegration of the Abbasid caliphate, these Emperors were able to move the Byzantine borders further eastward.

Despite the successes gained by the two emperors, there are not so many works in modern historiography concerning their rules and campaigns. Both Nikephoros II Phocas and John Tzimiskes are today overshadowed by the emperor Basil II. Especially the analysis of the eastern campaigns of the two emperors is missing in modern historiography.

Research goal of the work

In the nowadays we are able to bring judgement to the events of the 10th century. We know the consequences of each military campaign and how important they were for the development of the Empire.

The question is, however, how the Byzantines saw the events concerning their state. What was their perception on the military campaigns and did this perception developed throughout the years?

The main intention of this thesis is to analyse the military campaigns in the East led by the emperors Nikephoros II Phocas and John Tzimiskes and the achievements they gained through the primary sources. And alongside with it, I will try to analyse the Byzantine perception of these campaigns.

For the thesis, I will use the works of two Byzantine historians – Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes. As their works are the only surviving Byzantine historical works that describe the reigns of Nikephoros II Phocas and John Tzimiskes, they present the crucial sources for the purpose of the thesis. While Leo the Deacon was a contemporary of both emperors, I will

examine how he saw the events he was writing about. This perception will be compared with the one of John Skylitzes, who lived one century later. Through Skylitzes' work, I will examine how the perception of the campaigns changed over the years and how important he considered the past events.

Supposed conclusion

I suppose to find out how the eastern military campaigns were seen by the contemporary Byzantines and how the view on these campaigns changes in a later period. By comparing the sources I intend to find out how they differ and what the cause for these differences is.

During the eastern campaign, the Byzantines managed to conquer the ancient city of Antioch. Because the city was considered as important in the period before the Arab conquests, I intend to find out what was the perception of Antioch in the time of the eastern campaigns.

There are also claims in modern historiography that John Tzimiskes went as far as the Holy Land, stopping no far from Jerusalem. However, no such information occurs in the works of Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes. I will try to find out why the campaign into the Holy Land isn't mentioned in the Byzantine sources.

By having a closer look at the sources, I will analyse whether traces of propaganda can be found in them and how did the propaganda occur in the works. And, finally, I manage to find out why the East was so important to the two emperors.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter will deliver a brief history of Byzantine-Arab relations and the development of the Byzantine Empire and the Abbasid Caliphate in the 9th and 10th centuries. In the second, chapter I will introduce the persons and works of Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes as the sources for the thesis. And, finally, the third and fourth chapters will be the analysis of the eastern campaigns of Nikephoros II Phocas and John Tzimiskes.

Chapter 1 - Byzantine-Arab relations until 963

The history of relations between the Byzantine Empire and the Arab Caliphate began almost right emergence of Islam. Only a few years after the death of the prophet Muhammad in 632 the Arabs from the Arabic peninsula started the expansion to neighbouring lands, conquering large parts of the Byzantine territories in the East as well as the whole Sassanid Persian Empire. It was the beginning of a long relationship between Byzantium and the Caliphate.

This relationship affected both states in many ways. Because there were plenty of wars and struggles between the states, the most obvious are the changes in warfare. There was, however, cultural relationship as well. Both states were affecting each other in the educational exchange, architectural influences or even in the religion.

This is not a place to give a detailed description of the long-term relationship between the states. For the purpose of the thesis, this chapter will have a brief look into the political development between the two states from the beginning until the tenth century. Then it is important to look at the Byzantine state during the Macedonian dynasty and its development before 963. And finally, the last part of this chapter will deal with the development of the Arab Caliphate in the 9th and 10th centuries.

I will describe the development of Byzantine-Arab relations in a chronological order until the beginning of the reign of Nikephoros II Phocas.

Byzantine-Arab relations in the pre-Islamic era

The Arabs were well known to the Byzantines even before the Islamic conquests. Written sources provide us with evidence of active contacts between the Romans and the Arabs since the Antiquity. Just like Germanic tribes in the West, the Arabs played an active role in the life of the Empire's military affairs. For example, the emperors Probus (r. 276 – 282) or Aurelian (r. 270 – 275) commanded Arab cohorts within their armies.¹

The Arab peoples served as *foederati*² in the Roman world. Among the Arabs, the longest lasting and probably most important *foederati* for the Byzantine world were the Ghassanids. The Ghassanids were a confederation of various Arab tribes under the rule of a Ghassanid

¹ Jarmila Bednářiková (ed.). *Stěhování národů* (Prague, 2006), 355

² Foreign tribes that were settled in the Roman territory under the rule of their own leader, in exchange for military service for the Roman state and protecting the borders of the Empire. See: Foederati, in: Alexander P. Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 1 (New York, 1991), 794

king. The confederation became the *foederati* of Romans in the year 502 by an agreement with emperor Anastasios (r. 491 – 518).³ As Roman *foederati*, the Ghassanids were involved in Byzantine matters almost the whole 6th century. As military allies they were involved in the Byzantine-Persian wars, but the main goal of the Ghassanid confederation was to protect Byzantine territories from the dangers from the Arabian Peninsula, but also from Sassanids and their allies, among which the biggest enemy of the Ghassanids was an Arab confederation fighting on the Persian side – the Lakhmids.

Despite this issue, the Ghassanids served the Empire almost the whole 6th century, until the confederation was disbanded by Emperor Maurice (582 – 602). The former *foederati*, however, remained in the territory of Fertile crescent well until the Muslim expansion in the 7th century.⁴

The advance of Islam

The first thirty years of the 7th century were full of turmoil. Many events took place that changed the political, economic, cultural and religious form of the Near East, but also the history of the whole world. The consequences of these events are present also today. A new monotheistic religion spread on vast territories of the Near East – Islam.

This is not a place to examine the emergence of Islam as a religion, but it is necessary to have a view on political events of this period. The two major superpowers of the region, Byzantine Empire and Sassanid Persia, led the last, but the long and devastating war against each other since the year 602. In the beginning the Persians, had the upper hand, taking control of almost all the Byzantine territories in the East. The new Byzantine Emperor Heraclius (610 – 641), however, launched a counter-attack in the 620s and despite the threat that Persians caused to the imperial city of Constantinople in 626 in alliance with the Avars and Slavs, the Byzantines achieved a total victory in 628. After the long war, however, both Empires were economically and militarily exhausted, which had fatal consequences in the near future.

For during the war a new movement raised in the Arabian Peninsula led by the prophet Muhammad. By unification of the Arab tribes under a new religion of Islam, a new state began to emerge. In the year 634, two years after the death of Prophet Muhammad and six years after the Byzantine victory over Persia the Arabs started to attack Byzantine and Persian

³ Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the sixth century, vol. 1, part 2* (Washington, D.C., 1995) 9

⁴ For further information about the Ghassanids, see Irfan Shahîd – *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, vol. 1 and 2

territories outside the Arabic Peninsula. Led by the second Caliph ʿUmar (r. 634 – 644), they invaded the Byzantine territory, gaining victories and even sacking the city of Damascus.⁵

In hindsight, we see these first attacks on the Byzantine territory as the beginning of the great Arab conquests. However, the Byzantines saw these attacks merely as the incursion of the Arabic tribes from the desert, which the Byzantines experienced many times before.⁶ Everything changed, however, in the year 636, when the Arabs defeated a large Byzantine army in a battle near the Yarmouk River. This is considered as one of the most important battles of history, for the Byzantine army was destroyed and the Arabs conquered the eastern territories of Byzantine Empire, such as Syria, Palestine and then Armenia and Egypt.⁷ All these conquests included important cities of the East, such as Jerusalem (637), Antioch (637) and Alexandria (642).

Due to their conquest of Alexandria, the Arabs gained control over the Byzantine fleets in the city. It is remarkable that in a short period of time the Arabs were able to adopt the knowledge of ship-building and sea navigating. By this achievement the Arabs under the command of Syrian governor and later Caliph of Umayyad dynasty Mu'awiya (governor in 639 – 661, Caliph 661 – 680) became a dominant power in the Mediterranean Sea and they were able to capture islands such as Cyprus (649), Rhodes (65) and Kos (654) from the Byzantines.⁸ They were also able to attack the imperial city of Constantinople, first in 674 – 678 and later in 717 – 718. Both attempts to seize the Byzantine capital, however, failed and this put an end to the Islamic conquest. The Arabs passed from expansion towards the annual raids into Byzantine territory.

The Abbasid Caliphate

In the year 750, a coup took its place in the Caliphate. The members of the Umayyad dynasty, with the exception of Abd al-Rahman who fled to al-Andalus, were murdered and replaced by the leaders of the coup – the Abbasid family. This meant a change in the policy of the Caliphate, for during the Abbasids the Muslims became focused towards the east instead of the west as it had been during the Umayyad period. Symbolically the Abbasids abandoned the Umayyad capital city of Damascus by founding a new capital in today's Iraq – Baghdad. Baghdad became the intellectual and cultural centre of the Islamic world.

⁵ Timothy E. Gregory. *A history of Byzantium* (Oxford, 2005), 164

⁶ Sidney H. Griffin, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque* (Princeton, 2008), 23

⁷ Gregory, *A history of Byzantium*, 164 - 166

⁸ *Ibidem*, 171

The frontier between Byzantium and the Caliphate became steady during the late Umayyads and early Abbasids.⁹ A frontier zone was created in the land of Cilicia with the Taurus Mountains, leaving the whole Anatolian plateau in Byzantine hands. During the Abbasid period, the raids into Byzantine territory continued. During the reign of Caliphs such as Harun ar-Rashid (r. 786 – 809) or al-Mu'tasim (r. 833 – 842) the Arabs launched a full-scale campaigns against Byzantium, but, their goal was the gaining of booty and demonstrating the Caliphs power rather than conquering new territories.¹⁰ However, for the most part of the 8th and during the 9th century the matters between Byzantine Empire and the Muslim Caliphate remained in status quo.

This began to change in the 10th century. The Byzantine Empire, ruled by capable and strong Emperors, was growing more powerful, while the Arab Caliphate, on the other hand, began to be disintegrated into various principalities, as will be shown in the subsequent subchapters.

Byzantine Empire under the Macedonian dynasty

While the Abbasids had taken power in the East, the Byzantine Empire was in defensive. This began to change in the course of the 9th century. While the Abbasid Caliphate started to disintegrate (see The Arab World in the 9th and 10th century), the Byzantine Empire was on a way to its recovery. The disasters of previous periods marked by a collapse of Byzantine military power, the loss of vast territories in the East as well as emergence of a Bulgarian state in the Balkans and internal struggle over the veneration of icons, came to an end and the Roman state flourished in political, economic, military and cultural spheres. An important milestone in the Empire's recovery was the year 867, when Basil, the co-emperor of Michael III (r. 842 – 867) seized the throne. With the new emperor Basil I (867 – 886) the Macedonian dynasty was established that lasted for nearly 200 years.¹¹

The period of this Macedonian dynasty is considered as an apogee of Byzantine power by modern historians. At the end of this period, the Empire's territory reached its highest peak since the subjugation of western and eastern territories by Slavs, Bulgarians, and Arabs. Under these political circumstances, the Empire also flourished culturally.

⁹ Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (Harlow, 2004), 275

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 275 - 276

¹¹ Gregory, *A history of Byzantium*, 217

The political and cultural revival of Byzantium, however, did not occur without issues. In this paragraph, I want to discuss the Macedonian dynasty before the accession of Emperor Nikephoros I Phocas (963 – 969).

The development of Byzantine Empire under Macedonian dynasty

The new emperor, who became the first of the Macedonian dynasty, inherited from his predecessor the problems with the Paulicians. According to some scholars, the Paulicians were a Christian sect with, the dualistic view of the world.¹² They were able to create a state in the mid-9th century, with the capital city in Tephrike (modern Divriği, Turkey). The Paulicians were a threat for Byzantium in Asia Minor by raiding the imperial territory, until their defeat in 872 and the destruction of Tephrike.¹³ After this campaign, the Paulicians did not disappear completely, but they didn't pose a military threat to the Empire anymore.

By the destruction of the Paulician state, Basil was able to stabilise the eastern frontier against the Abbasid Caliphate. At that time an independent Armenian state occurred in the East.¹⁴ Byzantine had a friendly relation with Armenia. John Tzimiskes during his campaign even held a correspondence with the Armenian king (see Chapter 4).

During the reign of Basil's successor, Emperor Leo VI (r. 886 – 912) Byzantium experienced two great blows from the Arabs. Despite the Byzantium's victory over the Arabs in Cilicia in the year 900, in 902 the Arabs conquered Taormina, the last Byzantine stronghold on Sicily and two years later an Arab fleet under the command of Leo of Tripoli attacked and pillaged the city of Thessaloniki.¹⁵

These issues were a result of military problems in Byzantium that were caused by a war with another dangerous Byzantine enemy – Bulgarians. Their ruler Simeon (r. 893 – 927) is considered among modern scholars as one of the most dangerous enemies Byzantium had to face. He even forced the Empire to recognise his imperial title *tsar*.

The Bulgarian threat ended in 927 after a peace treaty between the emperor Romanos Lekapenos (r. 920 – 944) and the new Bulgarian ruler Peter (r. 927 – 969) that lasted for nearly forty years. The Byzantines were thus able to turn their attention to the Muslim threat. Already in 921/2, the fleet of Leo of Tripoli was defeated near the island of Lemnos, which

¹² Dualistic view of the world teaches about the creation of spiritual world by God and the visible world by the evil god. See: Tamara Talbot-Rice, *Everyday in Byzantium* (London and New York, 1967), 60

¹³ Gregory. *A history of Byzantium*, 222

¹⁴ *Ibidem*

¹⁵ Georg Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte des Byzantinischen Staates* (Munich, 1963), 214

caused the restoration of Byzantine superiority over the Aegean Sea.¹⁶ The biggest success for the Byzantine came with taking over the city of Melitene in eastern Anatolia (today's Malatya, Turkey) by the general John Kourkouas in 934. Ten years later he besieged the great city of Edessa (today Urfa, Turkey), from where he obtained an important Christian relic, the Mandyllion, a piece of a scarf with imprinted Christ's face.¹⁷

In 945, Constantine VII (r. 913 – 959) became the sole ruler, after the deposition of Romanos Lekapenos and his sons. There were some military actions in the East by the new *domestikos ton scholon*¹⁸, Bardas Phocas, who was replaced in this position in 857 by his son Nikephoros, the future Emperor. This warfare was held especially against the Hamdanids, whose territories were neighbouring with Byzantium, and their leader Sayf al-Dawla, who had sacked Aleppo only a year before Constantine's accession as will be described in more detail below.

Constantine VII died in 959 and was succeeded by his son Romanos II (r. 959 – 963). It was during his reign that *domestikos* Nikephoros Phocas began to achieve great successes in the East, achievements he continued to proceed after he became an Emperor himself in 963.

The military expansion, starting in the 9th and continuing throughout the 10th centuries brought increasing wealth not only from the booties but also from the fertile lands conquered by the Empire. However, the Byzantine Empire wasn't without internal troubles during that period. The struggle between the imperial throne and the wealthy families in the East were one of the troubling characteristics of the period.

The land aristocracy

Ninth century Byzantium witnessed the growing power of aristocratic families in the eastern part of the Empire. The survival of the state in the previous period and disappearance of the threat of conquest enabled the rise of and growing independence of some prominent eastern families. These aristocrats whether lay or ecclesiastic became known as the *dynatoi*.¹⁹

The foundation of power and income of the lay aristocrats was based on the governmental position they were holding and a salary in the form of gold and gifts that came with the

¹⁶ Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte des Byzantinischen Staates*, 230; Leo of Tripoli, in.: Alexander P Kazhdan (ed.) *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2 (New York, 1991), 1216

¹⁷ Gregory, *A history of Byzantium*, 232

¹⁸ General of the Professional army, see: *Domestikos ton Scholon* in: Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 1, 647 - 648

¹⁹ „The powerful“, see: *Dynatoi* in: Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 1, 667 - 668

position.²⁰ By the nature of the office, they can be divided into a civil and military aristocracy, with the latter having their base of power in the eastern Anatolian plateau. Those lands were not suitable for agriculture and under constant threat of Arab raids, which made them from an economical perspective insignificant. Because the taxes depended on the quality of the land, the taxes from the eastern lands were low. The aristocratic landholders, however, started to expand their lands at the expense of small landholders, who were suffering way more of the Arab raids, famines and other disasters. By this, the small peasants became dependent on the wealthy landholders, who by extending their dominion into the lands of smaller quality gained large properties of lands for a low taxation. This created a problem for the central government in Constantinople, for not only the state was losing incomes from taxes, but the eastern aristocracy became more independent from the central power.²¹

Some of the aristocratic families of eastern Anatolian plateau started to play an important role in the political life of Byzantium. Among the most important were the Phocades, the Maleinoi, the Argyroi, the Skleroi, the Kourkouai, the Doukai or the Comneni.²² Some members of these families even became emperors, especially in the 11th century members of the Doukai, the Argyroi, and the Comneni. Coming from the family of the Phocades and Kourkouai, the emperors Nikephoros II and John Tzimiskes had the background of the east Anatolian aristocracy.

Because of the extension of aristocratic lands in the East and decreasing tax income, the emperors in Constantinople took actions against the dynatoi. The emperor Romanos Lekapenos released legislations in 922 and 934 that focused against the alienation of peasant lands.

Issues concerned also the newly conquered lands in the East. By expanding the territory the eastern families tried to annex the fertile, newly conquered lands at the Empire's expense. Emperor Romanos took steps against this practice by creating *kouratoreia*, the imperial lands directly under the control of the throne, of the newly conquered lands.²³

Laws against the wealthy landowners were also issued by Romanos Lekapenos' successors. Ironically, some laws were issued by Nikephoros II Phocas, who himself came from the Anatolian aristocratic family. The laws, however, did not seek to destroy the dynatoi. The eastern Anatolian families were needed by the emperors as their member held the highest

²⁰ J.J.P. Vrijaldenhoven, *The Byzantine state and the Dynatoi: A struggle for supremacy 867 - 1071* (Mphil Thesis, University of Leiden, 2014), 30

²¹ For more information about the dynatoi, see J. J. P. Vrijaldenhoven, *The Byzantine state and the Dynatoi*

²² Mark Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium, 600 – 1025* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996), 337

²³ See: Kouratoreia in: Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2, 1156

military ranks in the Empire and provided the eastern lands with military defence. Rather the emperors in Constantinople tried to prevent the independence of these military families from the central government. This struggle, however, continued well until the fall of the Empire.

The Muslim world in the 9th and 10th century

In the time when Byzantine Empire was recovering after the "dark ages", the Abbasid Caliphate was facing many problems. The Abbasid caliphs ruling from Baghdad were losing control over the vast Muslim empire. The local dynasties grew more powerful and independent from the central power. This period also witnessed the rise of Turkish military troops and their involvement in the matters of the Abbasid state.

After the peak of the Abbasid power under the caliph Harun al-Rashid (786 – 809) many troubles occurred. The control of such a vast empire was difficult and there was no way to prevent the provinces at the periphery to break away from the central government. Harun al-Rashid tried to solve this problem by dividing the Empire between his two sons, al-Amin and al-Mamun, which however caused a civil war between the years 809 – 813, with al-Mamun prevailing.²⁴ His power, however, was not firm. The distinction from the provincial rulers and the creation new social elite group from Turkish supporters of al-Mamun created an opposition of the former elite families.²⁵

The hostility of people was deepening when Al-Mamun's successor al-Mutasim (r. 833 – 842) moved the capital of the state from Baghdad to Samarra. Samarra remained the capital of the Caliphate for half a century until the Caliph al-Mutadid (r. 892 – 902) returned to Baghdad in 892.²⁶ In the meantime, the Turkish people started to gain more and more power over the Caliphs.

Throughout the 9th century, a number of semi-independent principalities under the rule of local dynasties emerged, recognising the Abbasid superiority only in theory. Of these Saffarids in eastern Iran, Samanids in Khusaran or Aghlabids in Tunisia and Tulunids in Egypt can be mentioned.²⁷

By the beginning of the 10th century, it was obvious that the Muslim world was no longer a single political unit. The Abbasid Caliphs were acknowledged only as the heads of the

²⁴ Karen Armstrong, *Islam, A short history* (New York, 2002), 62

²⁵ Hugh Kennedy, *Caliphate: The History of an Idea* (New York, 2016), 85 - 86

²⁶ Albert Hourani, *A history of the Arab people* (London, 2010), 35 - 36

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 37

Muslim *ummah*, with symbolic and religious function.²⁸ Politically there were plenty of independent principalities. Two of them are relevant for our analysis of the relations of the Byzantines with the neighbours, the Fatimids in Egypt and the Hamdamids from Aleppo.

The Hamdamids

The Hamdamids were a Shi'i family that rose to power in the 10th century, which was a period of disintegration of the Abbasid Caliphate. The family, however, started as emirs of Mosul, from which they extended their power over Syria.²⁹ In the year 944, they captured the city of Aleppo that became their base of power. Since then the dynasty was divided into two minor ones, one of which controlled a territory in Mesopotamia with its centre in Mosul and the other controlled Syria with Aleppo as their capital.³⁰

The conquest of Syria and establishing Aleppo as a capital was the credit of the most famous Hamdamid emir Sayf al-Dawla (r. 945 – 967). By the conquest, he became the founder of the Hamdamid branch from Aleppo. Sayf al-Dawla gained a romantic reputation as a man of generosity and courage thanks to the poets of his court as al-Mutanabbi and Abu'l-Firas.³¹ Sayf al-Dawla gathered many great names of the Islamic culture at his court, despite the fact that he was occupied with wars against Byzantium.³²

In the first ten years after the conquest of Aleppo, Sayf al-Dawla was successful in his series of raids into Byzantine territory. After the year 956 however, he had to face a pressure from Byzantines led by capable commanders such as Nikephoros Phocas and John Tzimiskes, who both later became emperors.³³ In 962 the Byzantines were even able to seize Aleppo itself. Despite the fact that they withdrew, this was a huge blow for Sayf al-Dawla's prestige. After his death in 967, the Hamdamid dynasty began to decline until it finally ended in 1003.³⁴ In the period after 967, the emirate of Aleppo became only a small principality lying between two powerful rivals – the Byzantine Empire and the Fatimids of Egypt.

²⁸ Armstrong, *Islam, A short history*, 81

²⁹ Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (new Haven and London, 1985), 76

³⁰ B. Lewis (ed.). *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1986, p. 126

³¹ Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 265

³² Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 76

³³ Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 277

³⁴ Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 76

The Fatimid Caliphate

Among the principalities that arose from various Shi'ia revolts in the 10th century, the most important one was the one of the Fatimids in North Africa. During the time their domain developed into a powerful state that politically dominated the Islamic world until the arrival of the Seljuk Turks. Their intention was to replace the Abbasid Caliphate by the Fatimid one.³⁵ This was unique special for the Islamic world, for it not only openly challenged the Abbasid authority in Baghdad, but there was a Caliph in the Shi'i branch of Islam. For the first time, there were two Caliphs and caliphates that were considered the religious leader in Islam. This encouraged the emirs of Cordoba in the use of the title of Caliph for themselves.

At the beginning of the 10th century, an Ismai'li Shi'i Abdullah al-Mahdi Billah came to Maghreb and claimed to be the descendant the prophet's daughter Fatima.³⁶ Thus the new adopted the name Fatimids. They became the dominant force in North Africa, succeeding the Aghlabid rulers. In 969 the Fatimids under the Caliph al-Muizz (r. 953 – 975) conquered Egypt and established a new capital of Cairo in 973.³⁷ Al-Muizz's successor al-Aziz (r. 975 – 996) began the extension of Fatimid territories into Syria, where he confronted the forces of the expanding Byzantine Empire.

There were plenty of Shi'i dynasties ruling in the Islamic world independently of the power in Baghdad. That's why the 10th century is called the Shi'i century.³⁸ Despite the political disintegration of political power in the Islamic world, it flourished culturally. Many works of the art, literature, and philosophy arose in this period. However, it is necessary to note, that the political disunity of Islamic world ended in the 11th century by coming of the Seljuk Turks.

This was the situation in the Islamic world in the 10th century when the Byzantine emperors Nikephoros II Phocas and John Tzimiskes began to conquer the territories in the East. These successes, however, were only temporary, for the emergence of the Seljuks in the 11th century had not only impact on the Islamic world, but it changed Byzantium as well. These political and military changes had an impact on the Byzantine memory of these campaigns that will be described in the subsequent chapters.

³⁵ Amira K. Bennison, *The Great Caliphs: The golden age of the 'Abbasid Empire* (Mew Haven and London, 2009), 41

³⁶ Ibidem

³⁷ Malise Ruthven and Azim Nanji. *Historical Atlas of the Islamic World* (2004), p. 50

³⁸ Armstrong, *Islam, A short history*, 81

Chapter 2 - Historiography

Byzantine historiography varied through the ages. As the empire was developing, so were the historical writings. There are, however, some features that are typical for Byzantine historiography in general.

One of them is the necessity of having a higher education. That means that apart from literacy, the writers needed to understand the tradition of historical writing.³⁹ The literacy and education in Byzantium were more wide-spread than in the contemporary West. While in Western Europe the simple ability to read and write was a sign of a higher education reserved for some specific people, especially the clergy, in Byzantium the extensive state administration (much more extensive than contemporary bureaucracies in the Latin West) requested as many literate and educated people as possible.⁴⁰ The history writers in Byzantium, however, needed a higher education to be acquainted with the classical style and vocabulary of the ancient authors.⁴¹ While the basis of Byzantine education was the Bible and the works of Homer, historians knew and read works of their predecessor from the classical and Late Antique age. To preserve the literary purity, the writers tried to avoid modern terms, as it can be seen in the use of certain names for their neighbors and other peoples or institutions, and they avoided the terms from the Latin language that were not favored by the Greek readers.⁴²

As a typical sign of Byzantine historiography were the topics the writers were concerned with. Political events, especially the wars, and some public events involving the emperor or the highest officials and matters involving Constantinople were dominating in histories.⁴³ Many Byzantine historians were members of the high state or ecclesiastical offices that allowed them to be close to the emperor or other high officials. This advantage sometimes enables them to experience some major events themselves or to get close to people that were involved in the events. However, there was a possibility that the historian or the people that experienced the events were biased towards specific people, group or an event. This may have depended on the one's social or political background, which shaped one's perception. This may have resulted in an uncritical glorification or condemnation in the sources.

³⁹ Michael Angold and Michael Whitby, 'Historiography', in *The Oxford handbook of Byzantine Studies*, edited by Elizabeth Jeffreys (Oxford, 2008), 839

⁴⁰ Růžena Dostálová, *Byzantská vzdělanost* (Prague, 2003), 91

⁴¹ Angold and Whitby, 'Historiography', 839

⁴² *Ibidem*

⁴³ *Ibidem*

This is not the place to describe the development of Byzantine historiography. For the purpose of our research, however, it is necessary to have a look at the two Byzantine historians that will be analysed in this thesis and who were the only ones that wrote about the reigns of emperors Nikephoros II Phocas and John Tzimiskes – Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes. Because each lived in a different century, it is, therefore, necessary to place these two sources within the context of their own age and genre.

Leo the Deacon

Historiography in the Macedonian period

The period after the Arab invasions in the 630's and the end of the 8th century is considered by modern historians as the Dark Age of Byzantium. The reason for this is a lack of historical writings in this period, caused by the large number of wars with their enemies both in the east and in the west, but also by the iconoclastic movement. Historiography in this period flourished however in Syria, occupied by the Muslim Empire.⁴⁴

In the ninth century, the historical writing in Byzantium experienced a small renaissance in contrast with the previous two centuries, but the number of writings was still small in comparison with the later centuries. A true resurgence occurred in the mid-tenth century during the reign of emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913 – 959).

Constantine VII, called sometimes the Scholar emperor, was aware of the need of education.⁴⁵ Because the political development was favourable for Byzantium (see the previous chapter), he was able to support teachers and schools. Moreover, he himself composed or ordered the composition of many literary works. Worth of mentioning is the work *De administratio imperii* (Of the administration of the Empire) where he set up practical advice for ruling the state, but he also provides here information of many other nations and states known to Byzantines.

An important work for the Byzantine historiography is the Historical Excerpts. According to American scholar of Byzantine studies Warren Treadgold, Constantine VII, who composed this work, made classical historians and their works more accessible to readers and writers.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibidem

⁴⁵ Dostálová, *Byzantská vzdělanost*, 158

⁴⁶ Warren Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York and Basingstoke, 2013), 225

Another example of the historiography of the age of Constantine VII is *Vita Basilii* (the Life of Basil), a biography of Constantine's grandfather and the founder of the Macedonian dynasty emperor Basil (r. 867 – 886). One of the main purposes of the work was to legitimize the Macedonian dynasty on Byzantine throne, for Basil seized the power by murdering his predecessor, Michael III. According to Treadgold, it is not certain who wrote *Vita Basilii*, but it was written in classicizing Greek language.⁴⁷

Because of the policy of Constantine VII, Byzantine literary culture was in a resurgence that had an impact on the history writing in the subsequent period. Some historians of the 10th century tried to write more or less successfully in the classical style of the ancient writers. Among them is worth of mention Leo the Deacon, who wrote fully in the classicizing style. He wrote about the reigns of Nikephoros II Phocas and John Tzimiskes and therefore is important for our research.

Leo the Deacon - biography

Leo was born around the year 950 in the western Anatolian town of Kaloe. The town doesn't exist anymore; however, there is some information about the town extracted from Leo's narrative. The town lied southwest of a city of Philadelphia (modern Alaşehir), at the foot of Mount Tmolus (modern Bozdağ) near the valley of a Cayster river (today Küçükmenderes River).⁴⁸ Despite the small size of Kaloe, it had its own bishop that was subordinated to the metropolitan in the city of Ephesus.

Leo received his education in Constantinople, as he gives an account: "At the time I, who am writing these words, was a young man living in Byzantium (ancient name for Constantinople), as a student pursuing an education."⁴⁹ His education took place during the reign of Nikephoros II Phocas, more specifically between the years 965 – 969. According to Warren Treadgold, Leo's father, whose name was Basil, was probably a prosperous landowner that could have afforded to send his son to Constantinople for education.⁵⁰ This is disputable, because of the changes in Byzantine education system in the 10th century. The teachers received tuition from the parents of their disciples for the elementary education; however, for higher education, the emperors supported schools to prepare some students by the imperial

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 225

⁴⁸ Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 236

⁴⁹ Leo the Deacon, *The History of Leo the Deacon*, translated by Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis F. Sullivan (2005), IV, 11, 114

⁵⁰ Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 236

expense for significant offices.⁵¹ These schools served for both theoretical and practical preparation of the students for the state administration, which distinguished them from other schools, like ecclesiastical that were administered by the Church. It is not certain, however, whether Leo was already preparing himself to join the clergy in that time, but there is a possibility of him receiving his education in the Church school or a monastery.

Nevertheless, Leo was ordained a Deacon probably around the year 975, when he reached the minimum age for ordination, which for deacons was the age of 25. The deacons served as the assistants of the bishops; however, they stood at the lowest rank of clerical hierarchy below the priests and bishops.⁵²

Leo the Deacon became a member of the palace clergy in Constantinople. According to Warren Treadgold, Leo was a member of the court in 975 during the reign of John Tzimiskes.⁵³ Certainly however, he was the deacon of the imperial palace during the reign of Basil II (976 – 1025), as is stated in his work: "I myself, who tell this sad tale, was present at that time, to my misfortune, attending the emperor and performing the services as deacon."⁵⁴ The event Leo was talking here about was the disastrous campaign against the Bulgarians in 986.

It is not certain when Leo wrote his work or the date of his death. What is certain is that he didn't die before the year 995, due to his account of reparation of the church of Hagia Sofia six years after an earthquake that affected Constantinople in 989.⁵⁵ In the same paragraph, he also mentions his intention of writing about these events later, which indicated that he was writing the tenth book of his History after 995 with an intention of extending it by the reign of Basil II.

With no indication of Leo's life after the year 1000 in his work and because the reparation of Hagia Sofia in 995 being the latest event that occurred in his work, it is possible that Leo the Deacon died soon after the year 995. There is a hypothesis by Nikolaos Panagiotakes, who identifies Leo the Deacon with certain Leon Asianos, who was a bishop of Caria after the year 1000.⁵⁶ This theory is not confirmed, but it can't be rejected either as will be seen in the subsequent paragraph.

⁵¹ Dostálová, *Byzantská vzdělanost*, 158

⁵² For further information, see Deacon, in: Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 1, 592

⁵³ Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 236

⁵⁴ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, X, 8, 215

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, X, 10, 218

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 10 - 11

The History

In his work Leo the Deacon covered the events between the years 959 to 976, which is the period of the rule of Romanos II (r. 959 – 963), Nikephoros II Phocas (r. 963 – 969) and John Tzimiskes (r. 969 – 976) with brief mention about the early years of Basil II (r. 976 – 1025). As mentioned above there were indications for Leo the Deacon's intention to write more books, that would cover the reign of Basil II. The question concerns the year 959 as the starting year in his narration and the emperors whose rule he is describing.

At the beginning of the first book, Leo stated that he writes after the death of Constantine VII (r. 913 – 959) for his reign was described by others.⁵⁷ Warren Treadgold, however, has other theory of the starting point for the narrative. He states that Leo began his narrative with the reign of Romanos II because he had a favourable opinion about Nikephoros Phocas, whose military career began under Romanos II.⁵⁸ As an argument, Treadgold mentions a source of certain deacon Nikephoros that contains a period ending with the year 971 and contains the reign of both Romanos II and Nikephoros Phocas with the early reign of John Tzimiskes. However, Nikephoros the Deacon, as Treadgold states, had biases towards the Macedonian dynasty and Nikephoros II.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, because of the lack of knowledge about the author, we don't know the reason behind his opinions. A possible explanation may be that he comes from an aristocratic family hostile towards the Phocades and the Macedonian Emperors.

With a different opinion towards these emperors, Leo may have intentions of advocating the Macedonian rulers. Finally, Leo's admiration towards Nikephoros Phocas can be also the reason for the beginning in 959, for it was during the reign of Romanos II when Nikephoros started his military career and gain first great successes as the commander of the army.

Leo was a contemporary of all the emperors he is writing about, what makes him a witness of the events that occurred during that period. He states in the beginning of his work: "But I will now set down in writing subsequent events, both those that I saw with my own eyes, and those that I verified from the evidence of eyewitnesses."⁶⁰ This statement tells us two important things; that Leo was an eyewitness of some events and that he used other sources for his history. It is interesting to analyse to which events he might have been an eyewitness and to which he used other sources.

⁵⁷ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, I, 1, 57 - 58

⁵⁸ Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 239

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*

⁶⁰ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, I, 1, 58

As was already mentioned, Leo was a member of the imperial court during the reign of Basil II. By this connection to the emperor Leo the Deacon witnessed some important events himself, such as the revolts of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phocas and, as he wrote in his work, the disastrous Bulgarian campaign in 986. If we accept Treadgold's saying of Leo's presence at the imperial court in the last year of John Tzimiskes' reign (see above), he might have joined the last campaign of emperor John to the East. This wouldn't be unique; there are many examples throughout the Byzantine history of historians involved in the military campaigns. It is, however, very unlikely, if not impossible, for Leo to be an eyewitness of earlier events.

Leo was around 10 years old by the accession of Romanos II. He was a student during the reign of Nikephoros Phocas and therefore it is not possible for Leo to be an eyewitness of the emperor's campaigns. As a student in Constantinople, however, he saw the Emperor Nikephoros during a procession, as he mentioned in his text.⁶¹ Ceremonial processions, important masses in the Great Church and entertainments in hippodrome were the occasions when Leo was able to see the Emperor. It is probably the same case with Emperor John, for during his reign Leo was preparing himself for the career in a clergy.

This doubt about Leo's first-hand experiences with the events described in the book brings us to the other sources used by Leo the Deacon. These can be divided into two types: oral and written sources. It is very likely that Leo talked to the eyewitnesses and used their reports of the events described in his work. Many people that experienced the events were still alive during Leo's life, so it was possible for him to interview them. This became more likely after he became the deacon at the imperial court, for he gained access to higher officials and clergy. As for written sources, there were historiographical works of the periods Leo the Deacon was writing about. Probably the most important source for Leo was a historical work already mentioned above, that covers the period from 944 to 971. While this source is lost, there is information about it in the work of John Skylitzes. According to Warren Treadgold, the most probable candidate for the authorship of the work is a certain deacon Nikephoros.⁶² While there is no information of this Nikephoros except for that provided by Skylitzes, it is almost certain that Leo the Deacon used his work as a source. An indication for this is that Leo followed the description of the period 969 – 971 from this source, because of the favourable image of Emperor John Tzimiskes.⁶³ It is interesting that Leo agreed with this favourable

⁶¹ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, IV, 11, 113 - 114

⁶² Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 235

⁶³ *Ibidem*, 239

image of Emperor John, despite the fact that Tzimiskes murdered his predecessor and Leo's other favourite Nikephoros Phocas.

A question about the positive image of the emperors Leo was writing about comes up here. Despite his clerical background, Leo the Deacon placed a heavy emphasis on warfare.⁶⁴ Wars were the essential topics in Byzantine historiography. Nikephoros II Phocas, John Tzimiskes, and Basil II were very successful in the military affairs, both in the west as in the east. During the reign of the former two, Byzantium expanded eastward as far as the territories of Syria and Palestine. In the west, Emperor John was also successful in defeating the Rus' prince Sviatoslav (r. 945 – 972) and subjugating the Bulgarian empire. In the case of Basil II, however, Leo the Deacon mentioned his military failure against the Bulgarians led by Tsar Samuel and the subsequent uprising against the Emperor led by Bardas Phocas, a nephew of emperor Nikephoros. Basil's victory against Phocas is mentioned, but this was an internal issue of Byzantium. If we, however, accept the theory of Leo's death after the year 995 and his intention of writing more books of history, he might have witnessed Basil's first campaign in the East against the Fatimids. If we, however, accept the theory of Nikolaos Panagiotakes about Leo's life after the year 1000, it is likely that Leo the Deacon witnessed Basil's successes in the Balkans against Bulgaria and that Leo gained a positive perception of the emperor. If the positive image of the emperors by Leo the Deacon was based on their military successes, it may support Panagiotakes' theory that Leo lived after the year 1000.

Another reason for Leo's favorable image of the emperors, in this case especially of Nikephoros II, may lay in their religious policy. As a member of the clergy, Leo the Deacon may have admired Nikephoros Phocas' piety and religious devotion. The Emperor also had many friends among the monks, among which was St. Athanasios who founded the Lavra monastery on Mount Athos (eastward of Thessaloniki, modern Greece) under the patronage of emperor Nikephoros.⁶⁵ Over the time, more monasteries were founded on Mount Athos and it became the most important monastic centre for Orthodox Christianity. This achievement may be one of the reasons for Leo the Deacon's admiration of emperor Nikephoros Phocas.

As a deacon, Leo had knowledge of the ecclesiastical works. He uses references to the so-called Cappadocian Fathers of the Church, such as Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa.⁶⁶ However, the majority of his references are to the classical authors. It was quite extraordinary for a Churchman to be well educated in classical literature. There are

⁶⁴ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, 26

⁶⁵ Gregory, *A history of Byzantium*, 238

⁶⁶ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, 23 - 24

references in his work on Homer or Herodotus, as is referred his knowledge of Prokopios, Agathias, and Thucytides.⁶⁷

The knowledge of the classical authors is a consequence of his secondary education. Although Leo began to write his work as a deacon, the familiarity with classical works is reflected the most in it. He tried to revive the classical form of writing in his account concerning the contemporary history.⁶⁸

The History of Leo the Deacon affected historians of the later periods. Among the most famous was Michael Psellos in the eleventh century, who in his work *Chronographia* continued where Leo ended. For the purpose of our research, however, is the most important Psellos' contemporary, who used Leo the Deacon's *History* as one of the major sources for his own work: John Skylitzes.

John Skylitzes

John Skylitzes wrote under completely different circumstances than Leo the Deacon. In the 11th century, the Byzantine Empire went through big changes caused by both internal and foreign developments. This affected also the literary culture of Byzantium and most likely Skylitzes himself.

11th century Byzantium

For understanding John Skylitzes and his perception of the past events, it is necessary to have a look at the development of the Byzantine Empire in the 11th century. By the end of the reign of Basil II the Byzantine Empire reached its highest territorial peak since the 6th century. The Balkans and many areas in the East were under imperial control. After the death of Basil II in 1025, however, the Empire faced many difficulties, both internal and external, that changed the nature of the state.

The Emperors after Basil II were lassitude in the military matters. Because their services were no longer needed as in previous century, the military aristocracy went into decline in this period and the power was in the hands of the civil aristocracy. This group of people held important administrative offices in Constantinople for generations. The situation created

⁶⁷ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, 23

⁶⁸ Angold and Whitby, 'Historiography', 843

tensions that escalated by the plots against the throne.⁶⁹ The emperors of this period came from the civil aristocratic families, such as the Argyroi or Diogenoi.

The rule of the civil aristocracy had a huge impact on the military strength of the Empire due to neglecting its military needs.⁷⁰ Some of them tried to continue Basil's expanding policy, but not with small eagerness and with little success. The emperors focused on other things and military matters were often overlooked. Because of this neglect of Byzantine army, the emperors had to rely more on foreign mercenaries in this period.

This was the situation in the Empire when new threats appeared at the Empire's frontiers. The most serious one was in the East, where the Byzantium's border was threatened by the Seljuk Turks, who managed to take control over the Abbasid Caliphate, leaving the Caliph in Baghdad only as a symbolic figure. The military struggles with Seljuks culminated in 1071 in the Battle of Manzikert with a defeat of the Byzantine army. In the subsequent years after the battle, the Turks occupied the whole of Asia Minor.

The problems of the 11th century ended with Alexios Comnenos (r. 1081 – 1118) seizing the throne. At the end of 11th and beginning of the 12th century, emperor Alexios managed to gain some territories of Asia Minor back for Byzantium, but the Turkish presence never disappeared.

Historiography after Basil II

Despite the fact that Byzantine Empire faced many political troubles, the educational programmes were still of a very high standard. It wasn't as intense as during the period of Constantine VII but for example, during the reign of Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042 – 1055), the Emperor was involving the area of education and culture.⁷¹ Constantine IX surrounded himself by the most educated scholars of the period, such as the poet John Mavropous, jurist John Xiphilinos and a philosopher, historian and one of the most famous scholars in Byzantine history, Michael Psellos.⁷² The Emperor even refounded the University in Constantinople that included faculties of law and philosophy.

In this cultural situation, many historical works were created. The most important historian of the 11th century Byzantium was the abovementioned Michael Psellos, who in his work

⁶⁹ Michael Angold, 'Belle Epoque or Crisis? (1025 – 1118)' in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, edited by Jonathan Shepard, (Cambridge, 2009), 588

⁷⁰ Gregory, *A history of Byzantium*, 255

⁷¹ Dostálová, *Byzantská vzdělanost*, 183

⁷² Gregory, *A history of Byzantium*, 248

Chronographia continued from the year 976, where Leo the Deacon's work ended, until the year 1079. Psellos, however, made judgements of the contemporaries he was writing about, a practice John Skylitzes criticized him for.⁷³

Despite the political difficulties of Byzantium, there are plenty of historical writings being created in the 11th and 12th centuries, which is in contrast to the period of 7th and 8th centuries. For the purpose of the research, it is important to have a look at one historian, a contemporary of Psellos: John Skylitzes.

John Skylitzes - biography

In contrast to Leo the Deacon, we have a little information about John Skylitzes. Certain is that Skylitzes wrote his history during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081 – 1018). This is known due to legal documents from 1090 and 1092 in which he is mentioned.⁷⁴ His early life remains obscure. Modern historians agree, however, that he was born before the year 1050. A Byzantine historian from the 12th century, John Zonaras calls Skylitzes by the name Thrakesios, which according to Warren Treadgold refers to the theme of Thrakesios in western Anatolia as Skylitzes' birthplace.⁷⁵ Another thing that can provide us with information about his background is his surname. According to Treadgold this fact itself indicates that he came from an important family.⁷⁶ Other members from the Skylitzes family appear in the 12th century and it is possible that they were John's descendants. As an example Stephen Skylitzes, the metropolitan of Trebizond or George Skylitzes who was an imperial secretary under Manuel Komnenos (1143 – 1180).⁷⁷ Not only there is a possibility that Skylitzes family were members of the civil aristocracy in Byzantium, but there is also a chance that they were related to the Komneni family. This may be possible because the Komneni emperors were usually appointing their family members and other relatives to the important offices in the Empire.

In the abovementioned legal documents from 1090 and 1092, John Skylitzes is mentioned with a title *droungarios tes viglas*, which in that period was a title for a member of the

⁷³ Angold and Whitby, 'Historiography', 843

⁷⁴ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811 – 1057*, translated by John Wortley (2010), 9

⁷⁵ Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 329

⁷⁶ Ibidem

⁷⁷ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 10

judiciary.⁷⁸ Other known titles John Skylitzes held were *eparch* of Constantinople (supreme judge in Constantinople)⁷⁹ and *proedros* (a title indicating high rank in the office)^{80, 81}

According to Warren Treadgold, John Skylitzes' original work, a *Synopsis of Histories* that covers the period of time between 811 – 1057, was compiled sometime between 1092 and 1094, while its continuation that covers the period until the year 1079, known as *Scylitzes Continuatus*, was finished around 1105.⁸² Because of this conclusion, it can be said for sure that John Skylitzes died no earlier than the first decade of the 12th century. For our research, the most important is the first work of Skylitzes, for it covers the period of Nikephoros Phocas and John Tzimiskes.

Synopsis of Histories

The work of John Skylitzes begins with the rule of Emperor Michael Rangabe in 811 and it describes the reign of every Byzantine emperor until Michael VI in 1057. By this, the *Synopsis* was considered as a continuation of a work of Theophanes the Confessor.⁸³ As he was writing a chronicle, i.e. a summary of the main reigns of the emperors in the abovementioned period, it contained events from a period before he was born, and John Skylitzes had to use works of previous historians as basic sources for the *Synopsis*. According to Bernard Flusin, Skylitzes was a historian who created text based on other histories.⁸⁴ Here the main difference between him and Leo the Deacon can be seen; Skylitzes was not an eyewitness of the events in the tenth century and his information was based on previous works.

John Skylitzes used works of many historians as a source for the *Synopsis*; however, for the purpose of our research, it is necessary to see the sources for the reigns of Nikephoros II Phocas and John Tzimiskes. According to Warren Treadgold, John Skylitzes used the now lost work of Nikephoros the Deacon (see the chapter on Leo the Deacon) as the primary source for the chapters about the two emperors.⁸⁵ An indication may be that John's chapter on John Tzimiskes ends with the conquest of Bulgaria, which happened in 971, the year when

⁷⁸ See Droungarios tes viglas, in: Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 1, 663

⁷⁹ See Eparch of the City, in: Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 1, 705

⁸⁰ See Proedros, in: Alexander P. Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 3, (New York, 1991), 1727

⁸¹ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 9

⁸² Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 331

⁸³ Angold and Whitby, 'Historiography', 843

⁸⁴ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 12

⁸⁵ Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 333

Nikephoros' work was supposed to end. The question that comes up here is whether John Skylitzes knew the work of Leo the Deacon and if so, why he did not use it.

After the victory over Bulgaria, Skylitzes describes the years that followed very briefly in his work, ending with the death of John Tzimiskes by poison.⁸⁶ The same theory of the Emperor being poisoned occurs also in the work of Leo the Deacon.⁸⁷ One possible explanation for this can be that John Skylitzes knew the work of Leo the Deacon and had also access to it. But if this is the case, why did Skylitzes ignore the period between 971 and 976? It was the period when John Tzimiskes led the campaigns in the East against the Muslims; however, Skylitzes mentioned the campaigns in two sentences. Was Skylitzes brief about this period due to the development in the 11th century? Perhaps Skylitzes considered the events after the conquest of Bulgaria and the defeat of Rus' prince Sviatoslav as insignificant.

Another possible explanation for this might be the use of another, today lost source. According to Warren Treadgold Skylitzes used the now lost work of Theodore of Sebastea as a source for the reign of Basil II beginning in 976.⁸⁸ It is possible that Theodore mentioned the violent death of John Tzimiskes in his work as well, but this cannot be verified.

The main difference between Leo the Deacon and John Tzimiskes is in the amount of information about the reigns of Nikephoros II Phocas and John Tzimiskes. Writing a history, Leo the Deacon went into further details in his work, while John Skylitzes had to be briefer in his chronicle. This might have forced him to pick up selected accounts on the emperors' lives that he considered valid. These will be examined closer by analysing the eastern campaigns through the works of both historians.

⁸⁶ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 15, 19, 294

⁸⁷ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, X, 11, 219

⁸⁸ Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 334

Chapter 3 - Nikephoros II Phocas

In 963 the emperor Romanos II suddenly died. His sons and successors Basil II and Constantine VIII were still infants and a regent rule was needed. Later that year the *domestikos ton scholon*⁸⁹ of the East Nikephoros II Phocas married Romanos' widow Theophano and became an emperor and a protector of both child-emperors.

The international policy of Byzantium during the reign of Nikephoros II was focused on the campaigns in the East. In this chapter, I will try to analyze how these campaigns occurred in the works of Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes and how they differ. The emperor gained significant victories over the Arabs and extended Byzantine territory further eastward. Through the sources, I will try to look at the contemporary perspective of the campaign and how this perspective changed in a later period. And at last, but not least, I will analyze why the East was so important for Nikephoros II Phocas.

However, before taking a look at the campaigns during Nikephoros' rule, it is necessary to have a look at the wars against the Arabs in the period, when he served as *domestikos* under Romanos II.

Domestikos Nikephoros Phocas and the conquest of Crete

It is not known in which year Nikephoros became *domestikos ton scholon*. While Timothy Gregory mentions the year 957,⁹⁰ Jonathan Shepard claims that it was probably in 955.⁹¹ What is certain is that Nikephoros replaced his father Bardas Phocas in the office of *domestikos* of the East during the reign of Constantine VII.

In this period the Empire faced the Hamdamid emir of Aleppo Sayf al-Dawla in the East. The results of the struggles varied with one time the former had the upper hand and another time it was the latter who was gaining victories. This changed by the accession of Nikephoros as *domestikos*, who took a more aggressive stance against the Arabs.

Nikephoros Phocas gained notable success after 959 during the reign of Constantine VII's son Romanos II (959 – 963). As the first concern of the new emperor was the island of Crete, which was taken by the Arabs in 826/8 and served as a base for the Arab pirates that posed a

⁸⁹ Grand commander of the army, see *Domestikos ton Scholon*, in: Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 1, 647 - 648

⁹⁰ Gregory, *A history of Byzantium*, 234

⁹¹ Jonathan Shepard, 'Equilibrium to expansion (886 - 1025)', in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, edited by Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge, 2009), 517

great threat in the Aegean Sea.⁹² It was necessary to secure the Empire against the pirate raids that had an impact on the sea commerce and therefore on the economy of the state

The attempts of previous emperors to reconquer Crete were unsuccessful. In 960 the Byzantine armies under the command of Nikephoros Phocas landed on the island and began the conquest. The campaign in Crete was difficult and it lasted until March 961, when Nikephoros' armies conquered the city of Chandax after a long siege.⁹³

One of the reasons for the success in Crete may be that no aid to the island was provided by any of the Arab emirs from the mainland, as Byzantines were expecting. According to William Garrood, neither the Hamdamids nor the Tarsans had naval links to the island.⁹⁴ Instead, Sayf al-Dawla used the pre-occupation of Byzantines on Crete and launched a raid into Anatolia.

Emperor Romanos sent against the raiders Leo Phocas, the brother of Nikephoros Phocas and, as Leo the Deacon reported, *domestikos* of the West.⁹⁵ Leo avoided an open confrontation with Sayf al-Dawla; instead, he ambushed the emir of Aleppo in a mountain pass on his way home. Sayf al-Dawla barely escaped as noted by Leo the Deacon: "And Hamdan (as Leo called Sayf al-Dawla) himself might almost have been taken captive by the Romans... By thus diverting the attack of the Romans, who busied themselves picking up the gold, he narrowly escaped this danger with a few of his bodyguards."⁹⁶

The report of Leo the Deacon shows that the Byzantines not only defeated the Arab raiders but also were able to retrieve all to booty the Arabs had gathered. The victory over Sayf al-Dawla is mentioned both by Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes. There are, however, major differences in their accounts. While Leo the Deacon places the campaign of Leo Phocas in the time of the Cretan campaign, John Skylitzes sets it after the conquest of Crete. Both accounts state that Nikephoros Phocas stayed on the island to affirm the Byzantine rule and to secure the Crete against an Arab attack. However, according to Skylitzes, this happened despite the emperor's order to return to Constantinople and because of this disobedience, Romanos II appointed Leo Phocas *domestikos* in the East and sent him against Sayf al-Dawla. This attack, however, may confirm Leo the Deacon's statement. It is more likely that the emir of Aleppo would raid the Byzantine territories while the main Byzantine army was occupied at Crete.

⁹² Gregory, *A history of Byzantium*, 207

⁹³ Shepard, 'Equilibrium to expansion', 518

⁹⁴ William Garrood. 'The Byzantine conquest of Cilicia and the Hamdanids of Aleppo, 959 – 965', *Anatolian Studies* 58, (2008), 131

⁹⁵ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, II, 1, 71

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, II, 5, p. 75

After the conquest, Nikephoros Phocas and the main Byzantine army would be free to go and encounter the emir of Aleppo himself. Both accounts also agree that after Nikephoros' return from Crete he was appointed a commander of the eastern armies once again, which would probably not have happened if he had disobeyed the emperor. It is very likely that Skylitzes, who placed the Sayf al-Dawla's raid in the time of Nikephoros Phocas' stabilization works on Crete,⁹⁷ was mistaken in dating the campaign. It would be a risk for the emir of Aleppo to launch the raid after the successful conquest of the island, for the Byzantine forces were not tied by the campaign anymore. It is, therefore, more likely that the campaign of Leo Phocas against Sayf al-Dawla took place during the Cretan campaign.

The conquest of Crete was very significant for Byzantines. It put an end to Arab pirate raids in the Aegean Sea and the island and coast cities were able to prosper. Soon another great success for the Byzantines came.

Conquest of Aleppo

After the conquest of Crete, Nikephoros Phocas went to the East as reappointed *domestikos*. He wanted to break the Hamdamid power and thus he launched the campaigns in Cilicia and went even into Hamdamid territories, where he was able to take the city of Aleppo in December 962.⁹⁸

The conquest of Aleppo was a very significant event, comparable to the conquest of Crete. Despite the fact that Byzantine forces pillaged the city and then left, the consequences were huge. It caused an outrage in the Arab world. Riots broke out in Baghdad and the jihad was preached.⁹⁹ The consequences were worse for Sayf al-Dawla and the Hamdamids. The emir of Aleppo, who was also the champion of jihad, got his capital city conquered. His prestige and power suffered a serious blow and Sayf al-Dawla abandoned his capital and retired beyond the Euphrates.¹⁰⁰

It is therefore quite remarkable how this event is represented by the Byzantine sources. Leo the Deacon mentions the eastern campaign of Nikephoros Phocas very briefly: "...and after crossing the Bosphoros...he marched through the land of the Agarenes"¹⁰¹.¹⁰² He continued:

⁹⁷ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 12, 4, 241

⁹⁸ For details about the campaign, see Garrood. 'The Byzantine conquest of Cilicia', 132 - 135

⁹⁹ Garrood. 'The Byzantine conquest of Cilicia', 134

¹⁰⁰ Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 279

¹⁰¹ One of the terms used for Arabs, meaning that they are descendants of Hagar (therefore Hagarenes/Agarenes), who was a servant of Abraham and bore him Ishmael. See John V. Tolan, *Saracens*, (New York, 2002), 10 - 11

"So Nikephoros devastated the surrounding regions like a thunderbolt, ravaging the fields and enslaving whole towns with thousands of inhabitants. When he had destroyed everything in his path with fire and the sword, he attacked fortresses, most of which he captured at the first assault... Thus in a very short time he captured and destroyed more than sixty Agarene fortresses..."¹⁰³

This is the only account about fortresses conquered by Nikephoros Phocas in Leo the Deacon's work. The capture of Aleppo isn't mentioned there. Moreover surprisingly, Leo the Deacon did not use the sack of even for propagandistic purposes to highlight the successes of his favourite Nikephoros Phocas. The reason may be that Leo the Deacon and the contemporaries in Byzantium didn't consider this event important, for it wasn't an everlasting conquest, but a pillage of the city. The Hamdamid emirate did not cease to exist yet, despite its political weakness.

This may be the reason why Leo did not describe the campaign and sack of Aleppo with the same detail as the campaign in Crete; while in Crete Nikephoros Phocas conquered the island and the Arab pirate basin ceased to exist, in the East he pillaged the Hamdamid territory and sacked Aleppo, but he didn't overcome the lands and the emirate continued to exist. The result of this is that in the eyes of Leo the Deacon and therefore the Byzantine contemporaries the sack of Aleppo wasn't an important event, especially with the subsequent events of Nikephoros' raise to the imperial throne. Otherwise, it is unlikely that this success by Leo's favourite, Nikephoros Phocas, would not have been mentioned in his work.

John Skylitzes, on the other hand, mentions the sack of Aleppo. He wrote: "However, when Phokas arrived in Syria he put [the Hagarenes] to flight in a pitched battle and severely crushed them, repelling them into the remoter parts of Syria. He pillaged the city of Berroia,¹⁰⁴ all except the citadel..."¹⁰⁵ The account is brief, but yet, it is in contrast with Leo the Deacon who did not mention Aleppo at all. Skylitzes, therefore, was aware of the importance of the conquest of Aleppo. One hundred years after the events the consequences were well known to the Byzantines. Skylitzes and his contemporaries had to know that after the defeat at Aleppo, the Hamdamid power was in decline and at the beginning of the 11th century it ceased to exist. The Byzantine perception of the importance of the sack of Aleppo changed over the years after the consequences became obvious.

¹⁰² Leo the Deacon, *The History*, II, 9, 81

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, II, 9, 82

¹⁰⁴ Greek name for Aleppo

¹⁰⁵ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 12, 10, 243

Emperor Nikephoros II Phocas and conquest of Cilicia

In 963 while campaigning, a message reached Nikephoros Phocas that the emperor Romanos II had passed away. Phocas was proclaimed emperor by his soldiers and went to Constantinople, where he married the widow of Romanos II, Theophano. The marriage legitimised Nikephoros' accession to the throne and simultaneously he became a defender of the imperial rights of the sons of Romanos II and Theophano, Basil and Constantine.¹⁰⁶

In his international policy, the emperor Nikephoros II Phocas continued to focus on the eastern frontier of the Empire. One of his first acts was sending the new *domestikos* in the East, John Tzimiskes, towards the Cilician city of Adana.

According to William Garrood the goal of the attack on Adana was to gain control over the area and with it over the river Saros and isolating the cities of Tarsos and Mopsuestia from the rest of the Arab world in a preparation for the upcoming campaign against them.¹⁰⁷ John Tzimiskes was able to defeat the Cilician army and he took Adana. John Skylitzes describes the defeat of Cilician army as follows: "...he (Tzimiskes) encountered a considerable number of hand-picked Hagarenes gathered from all over Cilicia. He joined battle with them and thoroughly routed them."¹⁰⁸ Skylitzes continued with the description of how the Arab soldiers fled to a mountain and a battle Tzimiskes conducted with them: "He (Tzimiskes) prevailed against the foe and slew every one, for not a man got away and blood ran down the mountainside onto the plain like a river..."¹⁰⁹

Skylitzes' account of the battle may indicate its importance in the whole campaign of conquest of Cilicia. However, there is no mention of this by Leo the Deacon. He began the description of the campaign with the march of emperor Nikephoros to the East in 964. For Tzimiskes' campaign can be considered a preparation for the upcoming campaign of the Emperor himself, it may not be considered important for Leo the Deacon mentioning it. This can be used as an example of a difference in the works of Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes. While Skylitzes gives an account of the campaign as a whole, involving other people in it, Leo the Deacon focuses specifically on Nikephoros Phocas and his deeds. This may indicate that John Skylitzes was aware of the importance of the conquest for Byzantium. Leo the Deacon, on the other hand, could have seen the Cilician conquest as a great achievement of emperor Nikephoros II.

¹⁰⁶ Gregory, *A history of Byzantium*, 237

¹⁰⁷ Garrood. 'The Byzantine conquest of Cilicia', 135 - 136

¹⁰⁸ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 14, 10, 257

¹⁰⁹ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 14, 10, 257

The Emperor Nikephoros Phocas attended the campaign in 964, marching towards the cities of Tarsus and Mopsuestia. Here the sources differ. Leo the Deacon wrote that the Emperor approached Tarsus and began the siege. When he was unable to take the city for some time, emperor Nikephoros went instead to Mopsuestia, which he managed to conquer and after this, he spent the winter in Cappadocia.¹¹⁰ John Skylitzes, on the other hand, gives information that the Emperor did not attack Tarsus or Mopsuestia and after seizing smaller cities and fortresses, he withdrew to Cappadocia for a winter.¹¹¹

In the next year, according to John Skylitzes, the Emperor divided the army into two parts; one led by his brother Leo Phocas marching against Tarsus and the second under Nikephoros Phocas himself approaching at Mopuestia. While Mopsuestia, as Skylitzes reports, was taken by the Emperor, his brother suffered a setback at Tarsus and the city surrendered only after the news of the fall of Mopsuestia reached it.¹¹²

It is difficult to explain this differentiation in the sources. There is a possibility of propaganda in Leo the Deacon's account. The conquest of Mopsuestia in the source may serve to preserve the Emperor's military fame after the failed siege of Tarsus. Moreover, in contrast with John Skylitze's account Leo attributes the conquest of each city to Nikephoros II himself, which can be seen as a kind of propaganda as well.

What both sources agree on is that the city of Tarsus was conquered in 965. The city that was under Arab rule since the 7th century and that served as the basis for raids against the Empire was now in Byzantine hands.¹¹³ Thus the Byzantine conquest of Cilicia was completed.

Conquest of Cyprus

At the same time as the Cilician campaign took place, the Byzantines managed to conquer the island of Cyprus. The island was under the shared authority of both Byzantines and the Arabs since the late 7th century.¹¹⁴ This means that both nations enjoyed the benefits of the island. Despite the few attempts of one or another to gain the complete control over the island, as during the reign of Basil I, Cyprus always remained independent in the policies of both states. The conquest of Cyprus is mentioned very briefly in the Byzantine sources. The only account is given by John Skylitzes: "In that same second year of his reign Nikephoros restored the

¹¹⁰ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, III, 10, 101

¹¹¹ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 14, 11, 257

¹¹² John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 14, 12, 257 - 258

¹¹³ Shepard, 'Equilibrium to expansion', 520

¹¹⁴ Garrood. 'The Byzantine conquest of Cilicia', 137

entire island of Cyprus to Roman rule and expelled the Hagarenes from it by the hand of the patrician¹¹⁵ Niketas Chalkoutzes, the commander."¹¹⁶ No details describing the course of the Cyprian campaign occurs in the Byzantine sources. Leo the Deacon doesn't mention the conquest of the island at all. There may be two reasons for this; the first may be that the island was not conquered by Nikephoros Phocas himself. As in the case of the Cilician campaign, Leo describes only battles and conquests in which emperor Nikephoros was involved in person. He does not mention the campaign of John Tzimiskes against Adana, or involvement of Leo Phocas in Tarsus. As Nikephoros II Phocas was Leo the Deacon's favourite, he probably was not interested the successes of other commanders, considering them less important or, as in the case of Tarsus, attributed the achievements to Nikephoros II himself.

The second reason can be, as mentioned above, the status of the island before the conquest. Because of its independence, the Byzantines were already before the conquest able to use the benefits coming from the island, such as the use of its ports, as it was their own.

On the other hand, John Skylitzes was probably aware of the importance of the island. With its strategic position, it protected the Byzantine territories in the East from any naval threat by the Arabs. One hundred years after the events, Skylitzes probably recognised that the conquest of the island had been permanent, which is in contrast with contemporary conquest during the reigns of Basil I. The Byzantine Empire lost Cyprus in the 12th century to the crusaders led by Richard the Lionheart.

Nevertheless, the conquest of Cilicia and Cyprus were very important for the Byzantines, for it restored their domination over the eastern Mediterranean after three hundred years after the Arab conquest. It is quite interesting that this importance isn't reflected in the sources. Leo the Deacon probably did not recognize their importance by the contemporary point of view, especially when troubles in the East occurred during the reign of Basil II. From the perception of John Skylitzes, these achievements were only temporary, for the Byzantines lost all their newly gathered territories to Seljuk Turks after the battle of Manzikert in 1071. Nevertheless, the newly conquered lands served as the bases for the upcoming campaigns into Syria.

¹¹⁵ Dignity of high rank, in the 10th century granted to the most important governors and generals. See Patrikios, in: Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 3, 1600

¹¹⁶ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 14, 15, 259

Bulgarian question

To understand Nikephoros' foreign policy, it is necessary to look at a problem that occurred in the Balkans. The Emperor's attitude towards the Balkans may help to understand his focus in the East. After the conquest of Cilicia, the ambassadors of Bulgarian Tsar Peter (r. 927 – 969) came to Constantinople to ask for the annual tribute. Emperor Nikephoros, according to Leo the Deacon, was outraged by the request, declared war on Bulgaria and marched with the army to the borders. According to John Skylitzes, however, the reason for the campaign was the failure of the Bulgarians to protect Byzantine borders: "...he (Nikephoros II) wrote to Peter, the ruler of Bulgaria, to prevent the Turks from crossing the Danube to raid Roman land. [Peter] paid no attention to this but rather took every opportunity of doing the opposite..."¹¹⁷

Leo the Deacon wrote that the Emperor after his arrival in Bulgaria, had doubts: "...but then he (the Emperor) surveyed the region, and saw that it was densely wooded and full of cliffs...an area full of caverns of cliffs followed upon a region that was densely wooded and overgrown with bushes, and then immediately after that would be a marshy and swampy area...When the emperor Nikephoros observed this, he did not think he should lead the Roman force through dangerous regions with its ranks broken, as if he were providing sheep to be slaughtered by the Mysians"¹¹⁸ ..."¹¹⁹

Nikephoros II, therefore, sent a message to the prince of Rus' Sviatoslav with a request to attack Bulgaria in return for gifts and ranks. Sviatoslav was successful; however, after the conquest, he decided to move his domain there and the Russians became direct neighbours with Byzantines.

John Skylitzes, however, doesn't mention the Emperor's march towards Bulgaria and instead he wrote about the message to the Rus' prince immediately after the expulsion of the Bulgarian ambassadors.¹²⁰ Right after the message, however, Nikephoros continued his campaigns in the East. This suggests that the real reason for his unwillingness to participate in the Balkans was that his interest lied in expanding the imperial territory in the East.

The reason for Nikephoros' focus on the East is questionable. He came from a Cappadocian aristocratic family of Phocades.¹²¹ As mentioned in the 1st chapter, the eastern aristocratic

¹¹⁷ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 14, 20, 265

¹¹⁸ Term for Bulgarians

¹¹⁹ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, IV, 5, 111

¹²⁰ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 14, 20, 265

¹²¹ See Phokas, in: Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 3, pp. 1665 - 1666

families gained wealth by extending their lands in the East. However, there are examples of the Phocas family members that held the ranks of military commanders in the Balkans, most notably Emperor's brother Leo. Most likely the reason for Nikephoros' focus on the East was his early career. Before accession to the throne, he was *domestikos ton scholon* in the East and he spent his whole military career fighting the Arabs in the East. Leo the Deacon's account of the environment of the Balkans may indicate the perception of Nikephoros II about the peninsula. Nature and environment were alien to him and so were the Bulgarians. Because he fought his whole career against the Arabs and also because there was a peace between Byzantium and Bulgaria for almost 40 years, the Emperor did not know the ways of Bulgarian fighting.

Another reason for Nikephoros' focus on the East may lie in his piety and life devoted to the Christian faith. Most of the places important for Christians were in the East, for instance, the city of Antioch. Also as seen above, the sources give us information about receiving holy relics.

Because of Nikephoros II's interest in the East, he did not involve in the Balkans. By this, however, the situation there worsened when the Russians expanded to the Byzantine borders and began to pose a threat to the Empire. The burden of solving this danger passed on Nikephoros' successor, John Tzimiskes (see chapter 4).

Campaign in Syria

In 966 Emperor Nikephoros II launched another expedition in the East. This time he focused on Syria and in the same year he besieged the city of Antioch. The Byzantines were, however, unable to take the city so the emperor moved towards other cities and fortresses, which is mentioned both by Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes. There are, however, some major differences between the sources. The most apparent is the account of Leo the Deacon about the capture of Edessa. He wrote that the Emperor found a tile with Christ's image there: "For he heard that the image of our Savior God that was imprinted on a tile was kept in this fortified city."¹²² John Skylitzes, however, places this event in the city of Hierapolis:¹²³ "Along with him (Nikephoros II) came the tile which bore an imprint not-made-with-hands of the features of Christ our God found in Hierapolis when it was taken..."¹²⁴

¹²² Leo the Deacon, *The History*, IV, 10, 121

¹²³ Modern Manbij, Syria

¹²⁴ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 14, 15, 259

The seizure of Hierapolis by emperor Nikephoros II is mentioned also by Leo the Deacon: "After he (Nikephoros II) took the fortress of Mempteze¹²⁵..."¹²⁶ The conquest of Hierapolis thus happened according to both sources. The obtaining of the tile, however, is questionable here.

First of all, the capture of Edessa mentioned by Leo the Deacon is not mentioned anywhere else. Also, the capture of the holy image by the Byzantines happened earlier in the century. In 944 during the reign of Romanos Lekapenos, the Byzantine general John Kourkouas besieged Edessa and in return for his departure, Kourkouas received a tile with Christ's image, the Holy Mandylion, which was transferred to Constantinople.¹²⁷

It is possible that Leo the Deacon attributed Kourkouas' success to Nikephoros Phocas. Even though the Emperor conquered many cities in Syria, the failure to take Antioch might have overshadowed the successes. By attributing the gaining of the holy tile to Nikephoros II, Leo the Deacon might have had the intention of preserving the Emperor's image as a pious and powerful warrior.

John Skylitzes places the obtainment of the tile in Hierapolis. He was aware that Nikephoros II did not conquer Edessa, but according to him he obtained some Christian relics in Hierapolis, including the tile and "a lock of the hair of John the Baptist, matted with blood."¹²⁸ As Leo the Deacon and Skylitzes used probably the same source for their works, it is possible that the transferred story of Nikephoros II obtaining the tile occurred in this source.

Interestingly, Leo the Deacon attributes the conquest of Hierapolis and obtainment of the hair to John Tzimiskes: "There he attacked the fortress that is called Mempteze in Syrian tongue. After he brought it to terms by means of warfare and all sorts of siege machines, he discovered there the sandals of Christ the Savior and the hair of the holy Forerunner and Herald..."¹²⁹ This account may also indicate that the story of Nikephoros II obtaining a holy relic from Hierapolis is fabricated. As his favourite emperor, it is unlikely that Leo the Deacon wouldn't mention the conquest of Hierapolis and obtainment of holy relics by Nikephoros Phocas. It is more than possible that the conquest of Edessa in the case of Leo the Deacon is a fabricated story and John Skylitzes one century later confused the conquest of Hierapolis by John Tzimiskes to Nikephoros Phocas.

¹²⁵ Hierapolis

¹²⁶ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, IV, 10, 122

¹²⁷ Gregory, *A history of Byzantium*, 231

¹²⁸ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 14, 15, 259

¹²⁹ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, X, 4, 207 - 208

Nikephoros II conquered many other cities. John Skylitzes mentions "cities and fortresses in Cilicia, Syria and Phoenicia in Lebanon, of which the largest and most significant were Anazarbos, Adana, Mopsuestia, Tarsus, Pagras, Synnephion, Laodikeia and Aleppo, while he (the Emperor) obliged Phoenician Tripoli and Damacus to pay tribute."¹³⁰ Leo the Deacon mentions a march toward Tripoli, however, he states that the Emperor passed it and took the city of Arka¹³¹ instead.¹³²

Conquest of Antioch

In 968 Emperor Nikephoros II came back to Antioch and besieged the city again. However, the siege was so long, so the Emperor himself returned to Constantinople.¹³³ He left the siege under the command of *patrikos* Michael Burtzes and the *stratopedarches*¹³⁴ Peter, a servant in the Phocas family, with orders to keep the city blocked and to famish its inhabitants. However, after the months of siege, Michael Burtzes and Peter attacked the city and Antioch was finally captured on the 28th of October 969.¹³⁵

The sources do not agree on the way in which the Emperor Nikephoros reacted to the news of the conquest. Leo the Deacon mentioned the emperor's happiness: "At the new of its (Antioch) capture, the emperor rejoiced and offered thanks to the Almighty."¹³⁶ In contrast with this, John Skylitzes gives an account of the Emperor's ire: "Nikephoros ought to have rejoiced at the capture of such a city when he heard of it and left his own fate in the hands of God. On the contrary: it made him sick at heart. He brought charges against the camp commander and, as for Bourtzes, not only did he refuse to acknowledge his initiative and courage and grant him rewards befitting his excellence; he roundly insulted him, relieved him of his command and obliged him to remain at home."¹³⁷ The reason for Nikephoros' rage lied, according to Skylitzes, in a rumour that the emperor would die at the same time Antioch was taken.¹³⁸ However, the reason may be another.

¹³⁰ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 14, 16, 260

¹³¹ Arqa, today's Lebanon

¹³² Leo the Deacon, *The History*, IV, 10, 122

¹³³ Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte des Byzantinischen Staates*, 241

¹³⁴ A military commander, a title created for Peter, see Stratopedarches, in.: Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 3, 1966 - 1967

¹³⁵ Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte des Byzantinischen Staates*, 241

¹³⁶ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, V, 5, 134

¹³⁷ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 14, 17, 262

¹³⁸ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 14, 17, 261

Antioch was one of the most important Roman cities in the Late Antiquity. As the wealthiest city in the East, Antioch was the seat of one of the five Patriarchs. Together with Alexandria, it was the most influential Patriarchate in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. The city was seized by the Arabs in the 7th century during the conquests. The Byzantines, however, were still aware of the importance of the city. In both sources, the term "Antioch the Great" occurs.¹³⁹ Skylitzes in his criticism of Emperor's attitude towards the conquest refers to Antioch as "such a city". Leo the Deacon states: "Thus the celebrated and great Antioch was taken..."¹⁴⁰

The city of Antioch was thus seen as very important in the Byzantine eyes both in the 10th and 11th centuries. However, it might be a huge blow to the prestige and ego of Nikephoros II Phocas, that he wasn't able to take the city himself. For such pious emperor, who had a reputation of a great military commander, the capture of Antioch would have been the highlight of his campaigns. The fact that his generals succeeded in this goal while he did not, must have outraged him.

The negative attitude of Nikephoros Phocas was most probably covered up by Leo the Deacon, who personally admired the Emperor. John Skylitzes' states that emperor's behaviour created a popular outrage. This led to his murder a few weeks later after the conquest of Antioch.

Conclusion

Nikephoros II Phocas' reign was marked by extension of Byzantine territory eastward. He conquered the land of Cilicia and even the city of Antioch was taken by the Byzantines. As seen on the Emperor's attitude towards Bulgaria, the East was the place Nikephoros focused on because of his military career before ascending the throne and because of his piety, for many important Christian relics were in the East.

In some cases, the works of Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes differ in the perspective of the importance of specific events. The latter knew the long term impact caused by the events, such as the conquest of Aleppo, of which the former was not aware of in his time.

In the work of Leo the Deacon traces of propaganda can be found. He tried to depict Nikephoros II in a positive way as a pious and undefeated Emperor. He also ignores some successes that did not involve Nikephoros II personally and even attributes him some

¹³⁹ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, V, 4, 132; John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 14, 17, 262

¹⁴⁰ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, V, 5, 134

achievements made by other people, such as the conquest of Tarsus or even obtainment of the holy tile. John Skylitzes, on the other hand, is more moderate in his work, describing also the achievements earned by other generals, as the sack of Adana by John Tzimiskes.

An observation from the sources can be made that in Byzantine perception the most important achievement of the campaign was the conquest of Antioch. Leo the Deacon gives us an account on the conquest, despite the fact that emperor Nikephoros II wasn't involved in it in person. This suggests that the Byzantines saw it as an important city even in the 10th century. The name "Antioch the Great" occurs in both sources. Once the wealthiest city in the East and the seat of a patriarch, it was one of the most important cities of the Empire before the Arab conquests. As sources suggest, the Byzantine perception of Antioch did not change through the centuries.

So in the end, the main differences in the sources are in the perception of the events due to the period in which each source was written. The work of Leo the Deacon obtains some propagandistic perception of the Emperor. John Skylitzes, on the other hand, gives us a more moderate view on Nikephoros II. The attitude of both authors towards Antioch, however, suggests that the perception toward the ancient city did not change over the centuries.

Chapter 4 - John Tzimiskes

In December 969 the emperor Nikephoros II Phocas was murdered in his bedroom by a group of opponents led by John Tzimiskes. Now, this is not a place to describe the details of the coup. What is important is that Tzimiskes became the emperor after he did penance requested by the patriarch and like Nikephoros II before him, he became the guardian of the young emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII.¹⁴¹

In contrast with Nikephoros II Phocas, the eastern campaigns of John Tzimiskes are mentioned briefly in the works of Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes. The former for example dedicated only a few chapters of his tenth book to the wars in the East. John Skylitzes mentions the campaigns only in two sentences, as will be seen. Most of the accounts in both works are concerning Tzimiskes' campaign in the Balkans. The question that will be examined in this chapter is the perception of both historians towards the eastern campaigns and why it is like this.

There are claims in modern historiography that Tzimiskes' eastern campaign led him even near to Jerusalem. These claims, however, do not occur in the work of Leo the Deacon or John Skylitzes. I will try to analyse why there is no mention about the campaign in the Holy Land in Byzantine sources.

Before examining the eastern campaign, it is necessary to have a brief look at the war in the Balkans and how it may come that it overshadowed the campaigns in the East.

Bulgarian problem

John Tzimiskes like his predecessor spent most of the time on campaigns. In the beginning, the new emperor focused on the Balkans, where he needed to deal with the problem with Russians inherited after Nikephoros II (see chapter 3). This is not a place for analysis of the campaign; however, what is interesting, Tzimiskes, who came from a similar background as Nikephoros II, undertook the military action in the Balkans. The question is how come that John Tzimiskes underwent the campaign, while Nikephoros II was not interested in it (for the reasons of Nikephoros II's disinterest in the Balkans, see chapter 3).

John Tzimiskes, like his predecessor, spent his entire military career in the East and like his predecessor, he had no experiences with Bulgaria either. As will be seen later, Tzimiskes'

¹⁴¹ Gregory, *A history of Byzantium*, 240

interest lied also in the East. The new emperor was, however, in a different situation than his predecessor. While Nikephoros II declared war in the Balkans after decades of peace, Tzimiskes was forced to campaign in the Balkans because of the extension of Russian territories at the Byzantine expense.

John Tzimiskes was successful in this task. In 971 he defeated and expelled Sviatoslav from the Balkans and Byzantine Empire gained control over the whole Bulgarian territories. The success in the Balkans is the achievement for which Tzimiskes is known. The Balkan campaign occupies the largest space both in the works of Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes. Despite the fact that he spent most of his years as an Emperor campaigning in the East, the Balkan war overshadowed the upcoming successes. The question here is how did this happen.

Campaign in the East

After the success in the Balkans, John Tzimiskes was able to turn his attention towards the East. John Tzimiskes marched eastward from Constantinople. He crossed the Euphrates River and entered Mesopotamia, in 972 - 973 conquering the land as far as the cities of Nisibis (today Nusaybin, Turkey) and Mayyafariqin (Silvan, Turkey).¹⁴² A rumour occurred at that time that John Tzimiskes had the intention of attacking the capital city of the Abbasids itself – Baghdad. Instead, however, he marched southward towards Palestine. Czech historian Vladimír Vavřínek claims that because of strategic reasons like issues with supplies and a threat from the Fatimids in the south, the Emperor marched to the south.¹⁴³ It is possible that a rumour was spread to occupy the Arabs forces by concentrating their defences on Baghdad. While strengthening the defence in expectation of an attack, Tzimiskes would not have to concern of an Arab attack from the occiput.

After spending the winter of 974 – 975 in Antioch, the emperor John Tzimiskes marched with his army southward at the beginning of spring. He took the cities of Emesa and Baalbek and Damascus recognised the Byzantine supremacy and pledged to pay tribute.¹⁴⁴ Tzimiskes then turned himself to the Mediterranean coast in Phoenicia (today's Lebanon). He seized the big cities such as Acre, Beritos (Beirut) and Sidon and the only one that held on against the Byzantine was Tripoli.¹⁴⁵ Emperor John Tzimiskes, however, wasn't able to achieve more, for

¹⁴² Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte des Byzantinischen Staates*, 246

¹⁴³ Bohumila Zástěrová (ed.), *Dějiny Byzance*, (Prague, 1992), 184

¹⁴⁴ Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte des Byzantinischen Staates*, 246

¹⁴⁵ Zástěrová (ed.), *Dějiny Byzance*, 185

he died at the beginning of 976. After his reign, the new emperor Basil II inherited a strong, secured and vast Empire.

As mentioned in the beginning, despite the fact that Tzimiskes spent most of his rule campaigning in the East, it is quite problematic to analyse the campaigns from the Byzantine sources. Both Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes wrote very briefly about it. The latter wrote only two sentences: "The cities which (as we said above) had been appropriated by the emperor Nikephoros and made subject to the Romans had now kicked up their heels and thrown off Roman domination; so the emperor set out against them and advanced as far as Damascus. Some of them he won back by persuasion and negotiation, others with arms and violence; then, when he had restored everything to a state of decency, he turned back towards the capital."¹⁴⁶ No other account on the eastern campaign is put down by Skylitzes. From all the cities, he mentioned only Damascus.

Leo the Deacon gives a more extensive description of the campaign. However, it occurs only in 4 chapters of his tenth book. At the beginning of the campaign Leo wrote about the capture of three cities: "And he (Tzimiskes) captured Emet¹⁴⁷ (this is a strong and famous city) and brought it to terms, and took countless tribute; and setting forth from there he went to Miefarkim¹⁴⁸ ...then he went to Nisibis..."¹⁴⁹ Interesting in Leo's account is the mention of Ektabana: "...and then went off toward Ekbatana, 'where the palace of the Agarenes was, containing fabulous silver and gold and every sort of wealth, anxious to take it, too, by assault...But his invasion was checked by the lack of water and scarcity of provisions in the area; for the desert called Karmanitis extends through those regions..."¹⁵⁰ The city of Ektabana is today's Hamadan in Iran. It is very unlikely that Tzimiskes' main goal was so far in the East, especially when the Abbasid capital of Baghdad lied on the route. The same goes for the desert Karmanitis, today's Kerman, also located in today's Iran. It is not, however, the first time Leo the Deacon makes geographical mistakes. In the account of Nikephoros Phocas' eastern campaign, he mentions: "He (the Emperor) then departed from there and traversed the interior, called Palestine..."¹⁵¹ This account takes its place before the conquest of Edessa, which lied in northern Mesopotamia, far away from Palestine. The Karmanitis desert was also a historical region of the Persian Empire. Here the use of classical terms in Byzantine

¹⁴⁶ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 15, 21 – 22, 295

¹⁴⁷ Emet/Amida, today's Diyarbakir, Turkey

¹⁴⁸ Mayyafariqim

¹⁴⁹ Leo the Deacon, *The History*, X, 1, 203

¹⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, X, 2, 204

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*, IV, 10, 120

historiography can be seen. Persians were once greatest enemies of the Roman Empire and the Karmanitis desert of Leo the Deacon's account can refer to the fact that in that time the Arabs were the greatest enemies of the Romans in the East. Nowadays interpretation is that Leo confused Ektabana with Baghdad.

Other cities conquered by Tzimiskes mentioned in Leo the Deacon's work are Mempteze (Hierapolis), where he was supposed to obtain holy relics (see the previous chapter), and Apameia (modern Syria). Leo mentions also the tribute paid by the inhabitants of Damascus: "And after he (the Emperor) imposed specified tribute on them (Damascenes) and made them subject to the Romans..."¹⁵²

After the subordination of Damascus, Leo the Deacon mentions emperor Tzimiskes' conquests in Phoenicia: "...he took by storm Borzo, a strongly fortified city. Upon his departure from here he went on to Phoenicia and captured the fortress of Balanaiai and laid siege to Berytos..."¹⁵³ The last city Leo the Deacon mentions is Tripoli, which the emperor was unable to capture: "After he took Balanaiai and Berytos by force, he attacked Tripolis, and, since he was not able to take it with a siege attack...he left there, and, as he proceeded, besieged the coastal towns and forced them to capitulate."¹⁵⁴

It is interesting that the accounts of the campaign of John Tzimiskes are so brief. The only city mentioned both by Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes is Damascus. From all the cities taken or subordinated by the Emperor, the subordination of Damascus was probably considered the most important one. Before making a conclusion on why Tzimiskes' eastern campaign is so overlooked in the sources, it is necessary to look at the reason why he went to the East.

A Crusade in the Holy Land?

Modern historians tended to mention John Tzimiskes' campaign in the Holy Land. There were contentions according to which the Byzantine army conquered the cities like Tiberias, Caesarea, and Nazareth and even marched close to Jerusalem. This gave the Tzimiskes' eastern campaign a statute of a Crusade. This was claimed by historians like Georg

¹⁵² Ibidem, X, 4, 208

¹⁵³ Ibidem, X, 4, 208 - 209

¹⁵⁴ Ibidem, X, 4, 209

Ostrogorsky¹⁵⁵, Vladimír Vavřínek¹⁵⁶ or Timothy E. Gregory.¹⁵⁷ There is, however, no mention of this by Leo the Deacon or John Skylitzes. So where did these claims occur?

During the campaign, John Tzimiskes held a correspondence with Armenian king Ashot III. In one of the letters to the Armenian king, preserved in a chronicle of a 12th century Armenian historian Matthew of Edessa, Tzimiskes wrote about his successes in the Holy Land, before marching toward Berytos.¹⁵⁸ Nowadays, however, doubts of this "Crusade" occur.

First of all, it is a mistake to call the campaign a Crusade or a proto-Crusade. The connection of Christian faith with a war was something alien for the Byzantines. The concept of a holy war as it was known to the Christians in Western Europe and to Muslims never occurred in Byzantium. From their ideological point of view, all wars were holy because the Emperor was holy.¹⁵⁹ The wars, however, preserved their secular character and it was under the imperial ideology rather than a religious ideology that the Byzantines saw the wars. This representation of Tzimiskes' campaign as a Holy War occurred for the first time in Matthew of Edessa's Chronicle. Matthew wrote in the first half of the 12th century in the city of Edessa, the capital of the County of Edessa, one of the Crusading states created after the first Crusade. The influence of the Crusading environment was thus reflected in Matthew's work.

Apart from the ideological view of the campaign, the question of whether he actually went on this campaign in the Holy Land remains. In his article about Tzimiskes' eastern campaign, American historian Paul E. Walker had doubts about any campaign concerning Nazareth or Jerusalem. He argues that there was no time to perform it, for according to the letter, Tzimiskes went to the Holy Land in a time after the subordination of Damascus and before a march towards Berytos.¹⁶⁰

Another argument can be made by analysing Byzantine sources. As already mentioned, there is no account on the "Crusade" by Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes. It is difficult to create an argument from silence in the sources, which is, however, noteworthy in this case. For it is very unlikely that historians that mention the conquest of cities from which the Emperors obtained Christian relics wouldn't mention the capture of such cities as Nazareth or Caesarea.

¹⁵⁵ Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte des Byzantinischen Staates*, 246

¹⁵⁶ Zástěrová (ed.), *Dějiny Byzance*, 184

¹⁵⁷ Gregory, *A history of Byzantium*, 242

¹⁵⁸ Matthew of Edessa's Chronicle, trans. Robert Bedrosian, available at <http://rbedrosian.com/hsrces.html>, pp. 27 - 29

¹⁵⁹ George T. Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People: Holy War in Byzantium', in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, edited by Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh, (Washington, D.C., 2001), 34

¹⁶⁰ Paul E. Walker, 'The "Crusade" of John Tzimiskes in the light of new Arabic evidence', *Byzantion* 47 (1977), 321

All summarized, there is no real evidence for John Tzimiskes approaching towards Jerusalem. The letter to Armenian king may only indicate that it was perhaps his intention. Paul E. Walker, however, has a different opinion on Tzimiskes' intentions. He claims that threat to Jerusalem would alarm and unify the Muslim world and that would aid the Fatimids, who were expanding into Palestine at that time.¹⁶¹ This invasion would be very risky for John Tzimiskes to undergo and he, therefore, focused on Syria and Phoenicia.

The reasons behind Tzimiskes' eastern campaign

Paul Walker in his article wrote about the creation of a buffer land around Antioch that protected the city from attempts to conquer it as the main accomplishment of John Tzimiskes. This was to be a response to the siege of Antioch by the Fatimids in 971, which is mentioned both by Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes.¹⁶² By conquering the land around Antioch, and by helping the Turkish leader of Damascus, Alptikin, the Byzantines consolidated his position under the Byzantine supremacy. Thus Tzimiskes created a buffer zone between Byzantine and the Fatimid territories that served to protect Antioch.¹⁶³

Jonathan Shepard claims that one of the reasons for John Tzimiskes' campaign to the East was to rekindle loyalties of the former soldiers of Nikephoros II Phocas.¹⁶⁴ Despite the fact that Nikephoros was a capable military commander, this claim is unlikely. John Tzimiskes himself had been *domestikos* in the East, the grand commander of the eastern armies. The soldiers were most probably loyal to him, for he was successful as *domestikos*. Also considering the loss of popular support of Nikephoros II after the conquest of Antioch, the soldiers weren't probably against their *domestikos* being an Emperor.

Paul E. Walker's argument is the most likely one. Antioch was an important city in the eyes of the Byzantines (see the previous chapter) that needed to be protected. Emperor Tzimiskes might have wanted to protect it for personal reasons. If the city of such importance, that was conquered by his predecessor, whom Tzimiskes murdered, was lost during his reign, it might result in a popular outrage against him. By strengthening the city's defence John Tzimiskes would prevent the popular as well as a historical perception of himself as the Emperor who lost Antioch. He also prevented a possibility of a rebellion groomed by the supporters of Nikephoros II.

¹⁶¹ Ibidem, p. 326

¹⁶² Leo the Deacon, *The History*, VI, 8, 152; John Wortley (trans.). John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, 15, 4 – 22, 274

¹⁶³ Walker, 'The "Crusade of John Tzimisces"', 325

¹⁶⁴ Shepard, 'Equilibrium to expansion', 521

Conclusion

Despite the fact that almost half of his reign John Tzimiskes spent on the campaigns in the East, the accounts narrating these campaigns are very poor in Byzantine historiography. Both Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes wrote mostly about the Emperor's campaign in the Balkans. This is especially true for Leo the Deacon, who dedicated four books of his history to an account of the war against Sviatoslav. At the end of the war, the Balkans was under Byzantine rule.

In the East, however, John Tzimiskes did not significantly extend the Empire's territories. The only city both sources mention is Damascus, which wasn't even conquered, but only subordinated. The capture of cities like Nazareth, Tiberias, Caesarea and an approach to Jerusalem most probably didn't happen. It might have been Tzimiskes' main future goal, but because of his sudden death in 976, he was not able to fulfil the task.

And here can the answer for the perception of Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes towards the eastern campaigns of John Tzimiskes be found. Instead of the conquests, Tzimiskes' eastern campaign can be seen as a consolidation of gains achieved by Nikephoros II. He did not conquer extensive territories or any important city in the East. John Skylitzes one hundred years later was probably aware of it and therefore he didn't consider important to mention the eastern campaigns in detail.

Here the contrast with the Balkans occurs. John Tzimiskes not only expelled Russians from the Balkans, but he also annexed the territories of Bulgarian Empire. The old enemy of Byzantine Empire was defeated and the territories, lost in the 6th and 7th century, were restored under Byzantine power. The victory in the Balkans thus was seen as the greatest achievement of John Tzimiskes that overshadowed the strengthening of Byzantine positions in the East.

Conclusion

The military campaigns of Nikephoros II Phocas and John Tzimiskes in the East brought significant gains for the Byzantine Empire. There are accounts of the campaigns in the works of both Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes. There are, however, differences in both accounts towards each emperor. A noteworthy example is the conquest of Aleppo by Nikephoros II. While Leo the Deacon did not mention this achievement at all, John Skylitzes with his one century distant perception was aware of the long-term consequence caused by the conquest. Skylitzes thus had a different perception on the importance of the events of the 10th century than the contemporaries like Leo the Deacon.

In regard to Nikephoros Phocas, traces of propaganda can be found in the work of Leo the Deacon. With a favorable view of the Emperor, Leo depicted Nikephoros II in a positive view. He focused on the campaigns in which the Emperor was involved in person. The example of the conquest of Tarsus shows us that Leo even attributed some conquests to Nikephoros II, although it is doubtful that it was achieved by him. This creates a perception of Nikephoros Phocas as a fearless military leader and a great conqueror.

John Skylitzes, on the other hand, is more moderate in his account of Nikephoros II. He recognized the achievements of his military commander, as John Tzimiskes in the case of conquest of the Adana. In contrast with Leo the Deacon, who stressed the Emperor's piety, Skylitzes describes the worse side of Nikephoros II, as can be seen in the account on emperor's reaction on the conquest of Antioch.

The eastern campaign of John Tzimiskes doesn't occupy a large space in both sources. The very brief accounts may suggest that both historians were aware that Tzimiskes' campaign did not result in the conquest of large territories as in the case of Nikephoros II. Instead, Tzimiskes reaffirmed the conquests gained by his predecessor and strengthened the defence of Antioch.

The conclusion from the brief accounts of Tzimiskes' eastern campaign in both works is that his achievements there were not significant in contrast with the success in the Balkans. The conquest of Bulgaria thus overshadowed other military campaigns led by the Emperor. The most significant achievement of John Tzimiskes may be the subordination of Damascus, which is mentioned in both sources.

The greatest achievement of the campaigns in the East by Nikephoros Phocas and John Tzimiskes was the conquest of Antioch. In ancient time Antioch was one of the wealthiest

cities in the eastern provinces of Roman Empire. Later it became the seat of a patriarch. The city was important both from the imperial and religious point of view.

This Byzantine perception of Antioch did not change in the course of centuries. The Byzantine memory of Antioch as an important and great city can be observed in the works of both Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes. Both historians refer to the city as "Antioch the Great". Leo the Deacon gives a description of the conquest of the city even though it wasn't conquered by his favourite Nikephoros Phocas. It was, however, a city of such a great importance in the Byzantine thoughts that Leo needed to write about its conquest.

John Tzimiskes had to be also aware of the importance of Antioch when he spent the most years of his reign by strengthening the defence of the city. There are suggestions that Tzimiskes might have intended to conquer Jerusalem; the creation of buffer zone between the Fatimid Caliphate and the Byzantine lands around Antioch suggests that the protection of the city was at least one of his main goals.

The conclusion can be made that even three hundred years after the Arabic conquest of the Middle East, the Byzantine imperial and religious perceptions didn't change. The Byzantine perception of the cities like Antioch suggests that the memory on the Empire before 7th century was still alive in the thoughts of Byzantines. The memory on the former glory and extent of the Empire may indicate that the Byzantines saw the world under the influence of the imperial ideology.

Bibliography

Primary sources

- John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811 – 1057*, translated by John Wortley (2010).
- Leo the Deacon, *The History of Leo the Deacon*, translated by Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis F. Sullivan (2005).
- Matthew of Edessa, *Matthew of Edessa's Chronicle*, translated by Robert Bedrosian (Long Branch, N.J., 2017): <http://rbedrosian.com/hsrces.html>

Literature

- Armstrong, Karen, *Islam, A short history* (New York, 2002).
- Bednářiková, Jarmila (ed.), *Stěhovaní národů* (Prague, 2006).
- Bennison, Amira K., *The Great Caliphs: The golden age of the 'Abbasid Empire* (New Haven and London, 2009).
- Dennis, George T., 'Defenders of the Christian People: Holy War in Byzantium', in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, edited by Laiou, Angeliki E. and Mottahedeh, Roy Parviz (Washington, D.C., 2001).
- Dostálová, Růžena, *Byzantská vzdělanost* (Prague, 2003).
- Garrod, William, 'The Byzantine conquest of Cilicia and the Hamdanids of Aleppo, 959 – 965', *Anatolian Studies* 58 (2008), here 127 – 140.
- Gregory, Timothy E., *A history of Byzantium* (Oxford, 2005).
- Griffin, Sidney H., *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque* (Princeton, 2008).
- Hourani, Albert, *A history of the Arab people* (London, 2010).
- J.J.P Vrijaldenhoven, *The Byzantine state and the Dynatoi: A struggle for supremacy 867 - 1071* (Mphil Thesis, University of Leiden, 2014).
- Jeffreys, Elizabeth and Haldon, John and Cormack, Robin, (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford, 2008).

- Kazhdan, Alexander P. (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium, vol. 1* (New York, 1991).
- Kazhdan, Alexander P. (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium, vol. 2* (New York, 1991).
- Kazhdan, Alexander P. (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium, vol. 3* (New York, 1991).
- Kennedy, Hugh, *Caliphate: The History of an Idea* (New York, 2016).
- Kennedy, Hugh, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (Harlow 2004).
- Lewis, B. and Menage V.L. and Pellat Ch. and Schacht J. (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, vol. 3* (Leiden and London, 1986).
- Momen, Moojan, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven and London, 1985).
- Ostrogorsky, Georg, *Geschichte des Byzantinischen Staates* (Munich, 1963).
- Ruthven, Malise and Nanji, Azim, *Historical Atlas of the Islamic World* (2004).
- Shahîd, Irfan. *Byzantium and the Arabs in the sixth century, vol. 1, part 2* (Washington, D.C., 1995).
- Shepard, Jonathan (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, 2009).
- Talbot-Rice, Tamara, *Everyday in Byzantium* (London and New York, 1967).
- Tolan, John V., *Saracens* (New York, 2002).
- Treadgold, Warren, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York and Basingstoke, 2013).
- Walker, Paul E., 'The "Crusade" of John Tzimiskes in the light of new Arabic evidence', *Byzantion* 47 (1977), here 301 – 327.
- Whittow, Mark, *The Making of Byzantium, 600 – 1025* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996).
- Zástěrová, Bohumila (ed.), *Dějiny Byzance* (Prague, 1992).