



Summary :

On September 788, the Arabs invaded Asia Minor. The invaders clashed with the Byzantine troops from the themes of Anatolikon and of Opsikion in a battle near Kopidnadon (probably at Podandos of Cappadocia). The battle ended victoriously for the Arabs. The Byzantines were defeated with heavy losses, and tourmarches Diogenes, official of the theme of Anatolikon, was killed.

Date

September 788

Geographical Location

Podandos of Cappadocia

1. Historical framework

After the [defeat](#) by the [Arabs](#) in the summer of 782 in [Bithynia](#), the empress [Eirene Athenaia](#) was forced, at the same year, to sign a [treaty](#) with humiliating terms for the empire.¹ According to them, Byzantium was obliged to pay to the Arabs 90.000 gold pieces every April and 70.000 every June. In return, the latter were bound not to undertake their “established” [annual invasions](#) in the Byzantine territories of [Asia Minor](#).

The peace lasted for three years. In 785 the empress decided to stop the payments towards the Arabs. The reasons behind this decision were probably her conviction that the treaty was not necessary any more and her desire to get rid of its humiliating terms before proceeding to a clash with the [iconoclasts](#).² The result of this action was the reprisal of the annual Arab invasions to the borderline regions. During the summer of the same year, the Arabs invaded the [theme of Armeniakon](#), whereas in 786 the Byzantines destroyed the frontier castle of Adata that the Arabs had abandoned.

The new [caliph](#) Harūn ar-Rashīd did not show in the early years of his reign a great interest in continuing the hostilities against the Byzantine lands of Asia Minor, and the first invasions that he organized were of a small scale. However, during the summer of 788, a strong enough Arab expeditionary corps invaded through the Cilician Gates against the frontier regions of the theme of Anatolikon.³ Military [forces](#) from the [themes of Anatolikon](#) and of [Opsikion](#) hastened to withhold the invaders and, on September 788, they clashed together in the battle at Podandos, near the Cilician Gates.

2. The battle

The place where the battle took place is referred to in the sources as Kopidnadon. This name is not attested from other sources and the most likely identification is with the city of Podandos in [Cappadocia](#); Podandos was actually a town near the western exit of the passage of the Cilician Gates.⁴ It seems, thus, that the reaction of the Byzantines was immediate.

The battle ended with the victory of the Arabs. The Byzantines suffered heavy losses in both soldiers and officials of the themes. These thematic force comprised also soldiers from the [tagmata](#), who had enlisted voluntarily in these themes, after Eirene had fired them from the tagmata in 786. The most important loss for the Byzantines was, according to the sources, the death of Diogenes, of a capable and brave [tourmarch](#) of the theme of Anatolikon.

3. Consequences

The immediate consequences of the battle at Podandos and of the defeat of the Byzantines by the Arabs were not important. From the sources we can deduct that the losses of the Byzantines were great, but not dramatic. We do not have any information about extensive plundering of the region from the side of the Arabs, maybe because of the immediate reaction of the Byzantine troops. It



seems, thus, that it was yet another annual invasion of the Arabs, without any particular consequences for the populations and the lands of the region.

A more important consequence of the battle and of the defeat of the Byzantines was, judging from the sources, the death of the tourmarch Diogenes. The loss of a brave and capable officer must have weakened the army of the Anatolikon and bent the moral of the soldiers. Interestingly, according to some scholars, there was also a collateral effect of this loss: the birth of the legend of [Digenes Akritas](#), who had as its historical core and substratum the facts of the battle on September 788 and the death of the tourmarch Diogenes.⁵

1. Dölger, F., *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des Oströmischen Reiches 1* (Munich-Berlin 1924), p. 340, erroneously dates the signing of the treaty in 781.
2. Treadgold, W.T., *The Byzantine Revival 780-842* (Stanford 1988), pp 78-79.
3. Lilie, R.-J., *Byzanz unter Eirene und Konstantin VI. (780-802)* (Berliner Byzantinische Studien 2, Frankfurt am Main 1996), pp 245, 320, dates the battle in 788/9.
4. H. Grégoire, "Autour de Digénes Akritas", *Byzantion* 7 (1932), p. 287-288, was the first one to identify the unknown placename with Podandos; according to him, the name "Kopidnadon" (which does not appear in any other sources) was due to a mispronunciation of the phrase "Ko(me) Podandon" (mean. "the village Podandon")
5. However, Beck, H.-G., *Geschichte der Byzantinischen Volksliteratur* (München 1971), p. 85, questioned the origin of the akritic epic songs from the legend of the tourmarch Diogenes.

Bibliography :

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	Θεοφάνης , <i>Χρονογραφία</i> , de Boor, C. (ed.), <i>Theophanis Chronographia</i> , Leipzig 1883
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	Ostrogorsky G. , <i>Ιστορία του βυζαντινού κράτους 1</i> , Αθήνα 1978
	Beck H.-G. , <i>Geschichte der Byzantinischen Volksliteratur</i> , München 1971



	Grégoire H. , <i>Ο Διγενής Ακρίτας. Η βυζαντινή εποποιία στην ιστορία και στην ποίηση</i> , Νέα Υόρκη 1942
	Grégoire H. , "Autour de Digènes Akritas", <i>Byzantion</i> , 7, 1987, 287-302

Glossary :

	caliph
The supreme religious and political authority of Muslims, considered successor of Muhammad (Arabic: khalifa = deputy). He was the head of the Caliphate, the religious state of the Arabs.	
	tagmata (pl.)
Military units stationed in Constantinople and its outskirts during the Middle Byzantine period. The most important tagmata were that of the Scholae, the Excubitors (these originated from respective units of the Early Byzantine period and were organized into an imperial guard and a central strike force by Constantine V), the Vigilia (established by Irene the Athenian) and the Hikanatoi (established by Nicephorus I).	
	tourmarch
Civilian and military commander of a <i>tourma</i> , subdivision of a <i>theme</i> .	

Sources

Θεοφάνης, *Χρονογραφία*, de Boor, C. (ed.), *Theophanis Chronographia* (Leipzig 1883), p. 463, lines 15-21.

Quotations

Theophanes, the Byzantine chronicler, describes the battle at Kopidnadon:

Τούτω τῷ ἔτει ἐξῆλθε κούρσον τῶν Ἀράβων κατὰ Ῥωμανίας μηνὶ Σεπτεμβρίῳ, καὶ εἰσηλθεν εἰς τὸ τῶν ἀνατολικῶν θέμα, εἰς τόπον λεγόμενον Κοπιδνάδον. καὶ ἐπισυναχθέντες οἱ τῶν Ῥωμαίων στρατηγοὶ ἐπολέμησαν μετ' αὐτῶν, καὶ ἠττήθησαν, καὶ ἀπέθανον πολλοί, καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐξορισθέντων δὲ σχολαρίων οὐκ ὀλίγοι. ἔπεσε δὲ καὶ Διογένης, ὁ τῶν ἀνατολικῶν τουρμάρχης ἱκανός, καὶ τοῦ Ὀψικίου ἄρχωντες. [Αὐτὸ το ἔτος ἓνα ἀραβικὸ σῶμα ἐπιδρομέων εἰσέβαλε στο θέμα τῶν Ἀνατολικῶν το μῆνα Σεπτέμβριον καὶ ἐφτάσε στο Κοπιδνάδον. Οἱ στρατηγοὶ τῶν Βυζαντινῶν συγκεντρώθηκαν καὶ ἔδωσαν μάχη ἐναντίον τους, σὴν ὁποία ἠττήθηκαν. Πολλοὶ σκοτώθηκαν, σὺς ὁποῖους περιλαμβάνονταν καὶ ἀρκετοὶ στρατιῶτες τῶν ταγμάτων που εἶχαν ἐξορισθεῖ. Σκοτώθηκε ἐπίσης ὁ τουρμάρχης τῶν Ἀνατολικῶν Διογένης, καθὼς καὶ ἀξιωματικοὶ τοῦ θέματος Ὀψικίου.]

De Boor, C. (ed.), *Theophanis Chronographia* (Leipzig 1883), p. 463, lines 15-21.

Chronological Table

785: Empress Eirene terminates the treaty of 782. Reprisal of the annual Arab invasions to the frontier regions in Asia Minor.

786: The Byzantines destroy the frontier castle of Adata that the Arabs had abandoned.

September 788: Battle between the Byzantines and the Arabs at Podandos (Kopidnadon) in Cappadocia. Defeat of the Byzantines, death of tourmarch Diogenes.