



Summary :

On November 8, 960 a battle was joined at the narrow passes of Andrasus in Cilicia; the battle was fought between the forces of the *domestikos ton Scholon of the West* Leo Phokas, and the troops of Sayf ad-Dawlah, emir of Aleppo. The engagement resulted in an overwhelming defeat of the Arabs; the Byzantines annihilated most of the enemy forces, while the emir himself barely managed to escape.

Date

November 8, 960

Geographical Location

Andrasus of Cilicia

1. Historical context

During the reign of Romanos II (959-963) the Byzantine Empire continued to focus its foreign policy on the [struggle against the Arabs](#) on the eastern borders of [Asia Minor](#), mainly in the areas of Mesopotamia and northern Syria. The commander in this war-front was [Nikephoros Phokas](#), *domestikos ton scholon* in the East. His main opponent was the Hamdanid *emir* Sayf ad-Dawlah who from his base at Aleppo in northern Syria was the main adversary of the Byzantine Empire since the time of [Romanos I Lekapenos](#)' reign, constantly launching raids on Asia Minor. Apart from the eastern border, however, the struggle between the Arabs and the Byzantines was particularly strong throughout the Eastern Mediterranean: Arabs from Spain, using Crete as their base (they had captured the island in the mid-820s) launched raids on the coasts and islands of the Aegean, and controlled the trade sea routes to and from the East. Following his ascent to the throne, Romanos II wished to repeat his father's, Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (944-959), attempt who in 949 had organized a campaign to recapture the island. This campaign had been a total failure. In July of 960 Nikephoros Phokas, after assembling strong military forces, mainly drawn from the [themes](#) of Asia Minor, launched a new campaign against the Arabs of Crete. This had severe consequences on the region of Asia Minor, as it offered an opportunity to Sayf ad-Dawlah to launch a large [raid](#) on the interior of Asia Minor, aiming to sack fortresses and to capture prisoners by taking advantage of the absence of military forces in the area. The *domestikos ton scholon* of the West, Leo Phokas, undertook to confront the Arab threat; he was reassigned to Asia Minor by emperor Romanos II to cover the defensive vacuum in the eastern borders created by the absence of his brother Nikephoros.

2. The Battle of Andrasus

Romanos II's move did not discourage Sayf ad-Dawlah; deeming that his opponent was in a difficult position due to the insufficiency of troops, late in the summer or early fall of 960 he launched a raid on Asia Minor aiming to capture the stronghold of Charsianon. His troops numbered 30,000 men,¹ which gave him a clear numerical advantage. Leo Phokas, aware that his forces were outnumbered, avoided to face the emir in an open battle and pursued the usual [military tactic](#) in order to face the raids;² he decided to advance to the rear of the enemy and block the narrow passes at Andrasus in [Cilicia](#), which the Arabs would have to cross on their return journey. After capturing the castle of Charsianon, the Arab emir begun his return journey towards Cilicia, passing through the narrow way called Kylindros.³ The Byzantine forces awaited him there, lying in ambush on the heights flanking the pass. On November 8, 960 the expeditionary force of Sayf ad-Dawlah fell into the ambush of the Byzantines. The battle was particularly fierce and the troops of Leo Phokas won an overwhelming victory as a large part of Sayf ad-Dawlah's forces were annihilated, while the rest were taken prisoners. The emir himself barely managed to escape (the Byzantine sources mention that he dispersed his precious spoils as he was fleeing to slow down his pursuers)⁴ and returned with very few men to Aleppo.

3. Consequences

This Byzantine victory at the Straights of Andrasus was very important for the developments on the war-front against the Arabs, in Asia Minor as well as in Crete. Sayf ad-Dawlah's defeat allowed Nikephoros Phokas to continue his siege of Candia (modern



Herakleion of Crete) untrammelled, as a possible victory of the Hamdanid emir would have probably forced the Byzantine general to abandon his campaign and return to Asia's Minor front. The heavy blow the Byzantines inflicted on the Emirate of Aleppo and on Sayf ad-Dawlah was to prove catalytic in the long-term border struggle between the two sides, as the state of the emir never managed to recover so as to continue its dangerous raids into Asia Minor. In fact this defeat marks the final decline of the Hamdanid dynasty, the main enemy of the empire in Asia Minor during Romanos' reign. The Byzantine counteroffensive in the following years resulted in the temporary capture of Aleppo (February 962) and the collapse of Hamdanid power in 970, when the emirate becomes tribute to the Byzantine Empire.

1. Treadgold, W. T., *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford 1997), p. 495.
2. This tactic is described in the military manual *Περὶ Παραδρομῆς Πολέμου* and it was also adopted by the Byzantines during the emir's earlier raids into Asia Minor in 950 and 954. See Οικονομίδης, Ν., "Η ενοποίηση του ευρασιατικού χώρου", in *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους* 8 (Αθήνα 1979), p. 110. Leo Phokas had implemented the same strategy on the western front, successfully repelling the raids of the Hungarians.
3. Treadgold, W. T., *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford 1997), p. 495; Hild, F. - Restle, M., *Tabula Imperii Byzantini 2: Kappadokien* (Wien 1981), pp. 218-219.
4. Λέων Διάκονος, *Ἱστορία*, Hase, C. B. (ed.), *Leonis Diaconi Caloensis Historiae libri decem* (Bonn 1828), 22, 23-23, 5: "καὶ κἀ ν καὶ αὐ τὸ ς ὁ Χαμβδᾶ ν ἦ λω μικροῦ πρὸ ς τῶ ν Ὶ Ρωμαίων δορυάλωτος· εἰ μὴ, τῆ ν ἄ λλω ς ἄ γχίνους ὦ ν κἀ ν τοῖ ς ἄ πόροι ς ὁ ζῦ ς ἔ ννοῆ σαι τὰ δέοντα, τὸ νὸ ν ἔ πεφέρετο ἄ ργυρον καὶ χρυσὸ ν χύδην ἔ πι τῆ ς ἄ ταρπιτοῦ διασπείρειν προσέταξεν· ὃ καὶ περισπάσας τῆ ν τῶ ν Ὶ Ρωμαίων ὁ ρμῆ ν, ἄ σχοληθέντων τῆ τοῦ χρυσοῦ συλλογῆ , μετ' ὁ λίγων ὑ πασιπιστῶ ν μόγι ς τὸ ν τοιοῦ τον διαπέφυγε κίνδυνον".

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Hamdanid dynasty (Muslim Arab dynasty)

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Glossary :

domestikos ton scholon

Commander of the regiment of *scholae*. The first officer with this title appears in 767/8. In the 10th C the domesticos became very powerful among the army of the *themata*; in mid-10th C the office was divided in two, *domestikoi ton scholon* of the East and those of the West, commanders in chief of the eastern and the western provinces' army respectively.

emir

(from Arabic amir) Emir meaning "commander" or "general", later also "prince". Also a high title of nobility or office in some Turkic historical states.

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Περί Παραδρομής Πολέμου, G.T. Dennis (ed.), *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*. Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 25 (Washington 1985), pp. 3.45-55.

Quotations

The battle of Andrasus as described by Theophanes Continuatus

ὁ δὲ πατρικίος καὶ δομέστικος τῆς Ἐφῶς ἐκ προσώπου τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ πεμφθεὶς ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ διὰ τὸ μὴ εὐρεῖν τὸν ἄθεον Χαμβδᾶν ἀσκέπαστον τὴν ἀνατολήν καὶ ἐλάσαι κούρσα καὶ αἰχμαλωτίσαι καὶ πραιδεῦσαι τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν γῆν. καὶ ἐνωθεὶς τῶ στρατηγῶ Καππαδοκίας Κωνσταντίνῳ τῶ πατρικίῳ Μαλεῖνῳ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς στρατηγοῖς μετὰ τῶν ταγμάτων, καὶ τὴν ἐκστρατεῖαν τοῦ ἀλαζόνος ἐπιτυχῶν εἰς τὸν τόπον Ἀνδρασσοῦν λεγόμενον, συμβαλὼν κατὰ κράτος νενίκηκε, καὶ καταπολεμήσας καὶ εἰς φυγὴν τρέψας. ἦν τότε θεάσασθαι νεκροὺς σκυλευομένους καὶ ἀναιρουμένους τοὺς ἀλαζόνους Ἀγαρηνοὺς, καὶ εἰς φυγὴν τρεπομένους, καὶ ἐν ἀνδραπόδων λόγῳ τούτους ζωορουμένους καὶ μήτε ἀρμάτων [ἢ ἵππων] ἢ φαρίων ἢ χρημάτων ἢ συγγενῶν μεταποιοῦμένους· ἀλλ' ἕκαστος ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκείας συμφορᾶς ἑαυτὸν περιέσωζεν. τότε δὴ τότε ὁ ἀλαζὼν καὶ ὑπερήφανος Χαμβδᾶς ἐχειροῦτο σταθέντος καὶ ὀκλάσαντος τοῦ φάρα οὐ τινὸς ἐπέβαινε, εἰ μὴ ὁ μαγαρίτης Ἰωάννης ὁ ἄνθρωπος αὐτοῦ ἀποβάς τοῦ ἰδίου φάρα ἐπέδoto, αὐτοῦ κρατηθέντος καὶ τοῦ ἀλαζόνος περιωθέντος. πάντα δὲ τοῦ πολέμου κρατηθέντος λάφυρα ἅμα τῶν ζωορηθέντων ἀρνητῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς τὸ Βυζάντιον ἀπηνέγκατο καὶ ἐν τῶ θριάμβῳ ἐπόμπευσεν.

Bekker, I. (ed.), *Theophanes Continuatus* (Bonn 1838), pp. 479.15 - 480.12.

Description of the defeat of Sayf ad-Dawlah by Leo Diaconus



ένεδραις οὖν διειλήφει τὴν ὁδὸν, ἀποτόμους τὰς ἀκρωρείας προβαλλομένην, κρημνώδεις τε καὶ σηραγγώδεις ὡς τὰ πολλὰ, τὰς ὑπωρείας δὲ βαραθρώδεις τε καὶ ἀμφιλαφεῖς πρέμων τε καὶ παντοδαπῶν ιδέαις φυτῶν. ταύτη προλοχίσας ὁ στρατηγὸς καθήστο, τὴν τῶν βαρβάρων προσμένων ἐπήλυσιν. ὁ δὲ Χαμβδᾶν, τῷ τε πλήθει τῶν ἐφεπομένων καὶ ταῖς φάλαξι σοβαρευόμενος καὶ γαυρούμενος, τῇ τε τῶν λαφύρων πλησμονῇ καὶ τῇ τῶν αἰχμαλώτων ἀπαγωγῇ ἐπαιρόμενός τε καὶ βρενθυόμενος, πολλὰς κατὰ θάτερα τὰς ἐπεξελάσεις ἐποιεῖτο, ἐφ' ἵππου θηλείας καὶ μέγεθος καὶ δρόμον ὑπερφουὺς ἐποχούμενος, καὶ τῆς στρατιᾶς πη μὲν οὐραγῶν, πη δὲ προοδεύων, καὶ τὸ δόρυ σείων, καὶ ταῖς αὔραις μεθίεις, εἴτ' αὐθις μεθέλκων πρὸς ἑαυτὸν κραδαινόμενον. ἐπεὶ δὲ τὴν ἰπήλατον ὁδὸν διελθὼν ταῖς δυσχωρίαις προσέβαλλε, καὶ τοῖς στενωπῶσι καὶ ἀνωμάλοις συνειληθέντες τῶν τόπων οἱ βάρβαροι τὴν φάλαγγα διελύσαντο, καὶ ὡς πη ἔνδον ἦν ἐκάστω, κατὰ κρημνώδη διήεσαν, τηνικαῦτα ταῖς σάλπιγγι τὸ ἐνυάλιον ὑποσημήνας ὁ στρατηγὸς καὶ τῶν λόχων διαναστήσας τοὺς ἀμφ' αὐτὸν, ὑπηντίαζε τοῖς βαρβάροις. Καὶ πάντες ἐπὶ τῶν ξιφῶν εἶχον τὰς δεξιὰς, καὶ ταῦτα σπασάμενοι ἐπιστροφάδην ἔκτεινον τὸ ἀντίπαλον κεκμηκὸς τῇ ὁδοιοποιίᾳ, ἀκμηῆτες αὐτοὶ τούτῳ πελάζοντες. καὶ κἂν καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Χαμβδᾶν ἦλω μικροῦ πρὸς τῶν Ῥωμαίων δορυάλωτος· εἰ μὴ, τὴν ἄλλως ἀγχίνους ὦν κἂν τοῖς ἀπόροις ὀξὺς ἐννοῆσαι τὰ δέοντα, τὸν ὄν ἐπεφέρετο ἄργυρον καὶ χρυσὸν χύδην ἐπὶ τῆς ἀταρπιτοῦ διασπείρειν προσέταξεν· ᾧ καὶ περισπάσας τὴν τῶν Ῥωμαίων ὀρμὴν, ἀσχοληθέντων τῇ τοῦ χρυσοῦ συλλογῇ, μετ' ὀλίγων ὑπασπιστῶν μόγις τὸν τοιοῦτον διαπέφυγε κίνδυνον. λέγεται δὲ τοσοῦτον αὐτουρηθῆναι φόνον τοῦ βαρβαρικοῦ πλήθους πρὸς τῶν Ῥωμαίων κατὰ τουτονὶ τὸν πόλεμον, ὡς πολλαχοῦ τῶν χώρων ἐκείνων σωρείας ἀνθρωπείων ὀσῶν ὀραῖσθαι μέχρι καὶ νῦν. ἐπεὶ δὲ τοιοῦτοις τροπαιοῖς καὶ στρατηγῆμασι τὴν πολυάνθρωπον πληθὺν τῶν βαρβάρων ὁ στρατηγὸς ἠγωνίσαστο καὶ διέφθειρε, καὶ τὸ ὑψαύχενον τοῦ Χαμβδᾶν καὶ τετυφωμένον εἰς ἀγεννη καὶ ἀνανδρον δειλίαν καὶ φυγαδείαν κατέσπασε καὶ συνέκλεισε, τοὺς ἀμφ' αὐτὸν συναγροχῶς καὶ τὴν λείαν ἐπισυνάξας, ὅση τε ἦν βαρβαρική, καὶ ὀπόση Ῥωμαϊκὴ ἐκ τῆς προνομῆς τοῖς βαρβάροις συνήθροιστο, ταύτης τὸ πλεῖστον τῇ στρατιᾷ διένειμε· καὶ τοὺς αἰχμαλώτους ἐφοδιάσας ἐπὶ τὰ σφῶν ἦθη ἀποτρέχειν ἐξέπεμπε· τοὺς δὲ τῷ πολέμῳ ληφθέντας πέδαις ἀσφαλισάμενος τῶν Ἀγαρηνῶν, ἐπαιώνιζεν ἐπινίκια, καὶ τῇ προνοίᾳ τὰς εὐχαριστηρίους ἐσπένδeto προσευχὰς, καὶ πρὸς τὴν αὐτοκράτορα δυναστείαν ἠπειγέτο, θριαμβεύσων εἰς τὸ Βυζάντιον. ὁ δὲ στρατὸς ἐν κρότοις εἶχε τὸν στρατηγόν, ἀγάμενοι τοῦτον ὡς τὸ εἰκὸς, καὶ ἄνδρα ἐπιφημιζόντες, οἷον μὴ φέρειν ἄλλον τὴν τότε γενεάν, καὶ τῆς εὐτυχίας αὐτὸν ἐξεθείαζον, κατὰ ῥοῦν αὐτῷ προχωροῦντα τὰ τῶν πολέμων ὀρώντες ὡς μάλιστα. ὁ δὲ κατελιφῶς τὸ Βυζάντιον, ἐπεὶ μετὰ πλείστης ὀφείας καὶ μυριῶν δορυαλώτων Ἀγαρηνῶν εἰσήει, ὑπεδέχθη τε ὑπὸ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος Ῥωμανοῦ φιλοτίμως, κάπυ τοῦ θεάτρον θριαμβεύσας, τῷ πλήθει τῶν ἀνδραπόδων καὶ τῶν λαφύρων τοὺς θεωμένους ἐξέπληξεν· ἀμοιβὰς τε καὶ τιμὰς, ἀναλογούσας τοῖς πόνοις, παρὰ τοῦ κράτους ἀπέιληφεν. ἀλλ' οὕτω μὲν ὁ στρατηγὸς Λέων τὴν Ἀσίαν ἔσωσε, καταγωνισάμενος τὸν Χαμβδᾶν, φυγάδα τε καὶ ἀλήτην ἀπεργασάμενος.

Hase, C.B. (ed.), *Leonis Diaconi Caloensis Historiae libri decem* (Bonn 1828), pp. 22.2 - 24.8.

The historian Ioannes Scylitzes describes the battle of Andrasus

ἔτι δὲ τοῦ Νικηφόρου τῇ Κρήτῃ ἐνδιατριβόντος, ἵνα μὴ τὴν ἐψῶν κατατρέχοιεν οἱ τῆς ἀνατολῆς Ἄραβες, καὶ μᾶλλον Χαμβδᾶν ὁ τοῦ Χάλεπ ἀμηρᾶς, πολεμικὸς ὦν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων δραστηριώτερος, Λέοντα τὸν Φωκᾶν τὸν τοῦ Νικηφόρου ἀδελφὸν μάγιστρον τιμήσας ὁ Ῥωμανὸς τὴν τοῦ δομεστικοῦ διακονίαν διέπειν ἀπέστειλεν. οὗτος δὲ διαπεράσας καὶ τῷ Χαμβδᾶν συναντήσας ἐν τινι χωρίῳ Ἀδρασσῶ λεγομένῳ τρέπεται τοῦτον κατὰ κράτος καὶ ἀφανισμῷ παραδίδωσι, τῶν μὲν ἐν τῇ προσβολῇ πεσόντων οὐδ' ἀριθμῷ καθυποβληθῆναι δυναμένων, τῶν δὲ ἀλόντων καὶ ἐν τῇ πόλει πεμφθέντων τοσοῦτον ἦν τὸ πλῆθος, ὡς πληρῶσαι δούλων καὶ τὰς ἀστικὰς οἰκίας καὶ τοὺς ἀγροὺς. μόνος δὲ ὁ τούτων ἀρχηγὸς Χαμβδᾶν σὺν ὀλίγοις λίαν τὸν κίνδυνον διαδράς εἰς τὰ οἰκεία ἦθη ἀνεκομίσθη. εἰσελθόντα δὲ τὸν Λέοντα μάλα φιλοφρόνως ὁ βασιλεὺς ὑπεδέξατο ἐπινικίους τε θριάμβους τετιμῆκε καὶ γερῶν τῶν κατ' ἀξίαν ἠξίωσε τιμήσας καὶ προβιβάσας καὶ πάντας τοὺς σὺν αὐτῷ ἀριστεύσαντας.

Thum, I. (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum* (CFHB 5, Berlin-New York 1973), pp. 250.47-61.

Military manual of the late 10th c. which mentions the Byzantine victories against Sayf ad-Dawlah

Καὶ ὡς ἐντεῦθεν δύο κακὰ προσγένωνται τοῖς ἐχθροῖς· ἐν μὲν, ταλαιπωρηθῆναι τῷ τῶν πολλῶν ἡμερῶν διαστήματι, καταλιποῦσι τὰ τούτων ἀπληκτα καὶ τὴν εὐθειαν ὁδόν· ἕτερον δέ, τὸ καὶ ἀπώλειαν αὐτοῖς ἐπάγον, τὸ αὐτοὺς μὲν δειλανδρῆσαι καὶ ἄθυμία ὑποβληθῆναι· τοὺς δὲ <Ῥωμαίους> προθυματέρους καὶ εὐτολματέρους πρὸς τὸν κατ' αὐτῶν πόλεμον γενέσθαι. οἷον δὴ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄνω χρόνοις Ἀλὴ τῷ υἱῷ τοῦ Χαμβδᾶ ἐκ τρίτου παθεῖν συμβέβηκεν· δις μὲν ἐν τοῖς χρόνοις τοῦ αἰοιδίου καὶ τρισμάκαρος Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ Πορφυρογεννήτου βασιλέως, ἀπαξ δὲ ἐπὶ τοῦ καλοῦ βασιλέως Ῥωμανοῦ τοῦ μακαρίτου υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ. καὶ πάντες σχεδὸν τὴν τότε γενομένην πανολεθρίαν τῶν ἀρνητῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀκριβῶς ἐπίστανται.



Περί Παραδρομής Πολέμου, G.T. Dennis (ed.), *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*. Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 25 (Washington 1985), pp. 3.45-55.

Chronological Table

July 960: Nikephoros Phokas launches his campaign in Crete. Leo Phokas becomes commander of the remaining Byzantine forces in Asia Minor

Summer or fall of 960: The Hamdanid emir Sayf ad-Dawlah invades the Byzantine possessions in Asia Minor

November 8, 960: Battle of Andrasus. Leo Phokas crushes the forces of Sayf ad-Dawlah