



## Summary :

On August 15, 987 the *domestikos ton scholon* of the East Bardas Phokas rebelled against Emperor Basil II. The rebellion broke out in the theme of Charsianon at Cappadocia, and spread throughout the entire Asia Minor, coming to an end on April 13, 989 with the defeat and death of the rebel by the imperial forces at Abydus.

## Date

August 15, 987 - April 13, 989

## Geographical Location

Cappadocia

## 1. Historical context

Following the defeat of the *doukas* of Mesopotamia [Bardas Skleros](#) during the [rebellion of 976-979](#) and his flight to the court of the Arab *caliph* Adud ad-Daula, where he remained as a hostage, the true regents of the empire by the emperors [Basil II \(976-1025\)](#) and [Constantine VIII \(976-1028\)](#) remained the *parakoimomenos* [Basil Lekapenos](#), who controlled the civil administration of the state, and the *domestikos ton scholon* of the East [Bardas Phokas](#), who remained supreme commander of the army. The dominance of the two men in the political and military scene of the empire resulted in the relegation of the two emperors to a decorative role, which was not acceptable to Basil II's strong temperament. Over time, his interest in governance grew more intense along with his desire to free himself of the *parakoimomenos*' stifling guardianship. Possibly early in 986, the emperor banished Basil Lekapenos, taking the administration of state affairs into his own hands.<sup>1</sup> At the same time he wished to curtail the power of Bardas Phokas and the influence the latter exerted on the army, demoting him from *domestikos ton scholon* of the East to dux of [Antioch](#).<sup>2</sup> The emperor's defeat, however, during his campaign against the Bulgarians (August 986)<sup>3</sup> discredited him, and combined with his policy of limiting the power of the powerful representatives of the [military aristocracy](#) which he had tried to implement, brought him to dire straits. Early in January of 987, the Arabs deemed that the time was opportune to release Bardas Skleros. Phokas, having secured the support of some Arab tribes and the Armenians, old allies of his since the time of the 976-979 rebellion, invaded the Byzantine lands and, in the spring of 987, he conquered [Melitene](#), where he [proclaimed himself emperor](#). To face the usurper, Basil II reinstated Bardas Phokas to the office of *domestikos ton scholon* of the East (April-May 987), affording him the opportunity to gather a significant military force in the [theme](#) of Charsianon, where he resided.

## 2. The rebellion of Bardas Phokas

### 2.1. The outbreak of the rebellion

Following the defeat of the emperor by the Bulgarians (August 986), Bardas Phokas spent the winter in the Charsianon theme, where he made pacts with other dissatisfied nobles, like the *magistros* Eustathios [Maleinos](#), who had clashed with Basil II during the campaign against the Bulgarians, aiming to organize a rebellion against the emperor. There he was informed of Skleros' return, a formidable adversary and an obstacle to his plans. However, the reinstatement of Phokas as *domestikos ton scholon tes Anatoles* by Basil II, carried out to counter the threat of Skleros, afforded him the opportunity to go on with his plans and incite rebellion, as now he had the opportunity to amass a significant number of troops in the Charsianon theme. This, combined with the fact that he enjoyed the support of a great part of the nobility of Asia Minor,<sup>4</sup> as well as of his old ally David of Tayk, who dispatched a sizeable force of Iberian soldiers,<sup>5</sup> gave him a clear advantage vis-à-vis Skleros. Having the upper hand, in the summer of 987, Phokas entered into negotiations with him, which resulted into an alliance treaty that envisaged the partition of the empire between the two rebels. Phokas ceded to Skleros the lands of Antioch, Phoenike, Syria Koile, Palestine and Mesopotamia. On August 15, 987<sup>6</sup> Bardas Phokas proclaimed himself emperor in the estates of Eustathios Maleinos in [Cappadocia](#). In the meantime, Romanos, son of Skleros, had sought refuge to the emperor during the negotiations, possibly with the consent of his father, so as to allow him some access to the



imperial camp in case of defeat. Phokas, either because he had been informed of Skleros' double game, or because he was following his own plan, arrested him in September of 987, when Skleros arrived in Cappadocia to join forces with him, and confined him with his brother [Constantine Skleros](#) to the [fortress](#) of Tyropoios.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.2. Course and suppression of the rebellion

Bardas Phokas, having at his side the majority of the nobility of Asia Minor, by the end of 987 controlled almost the entire eastern part of the empire, reaching by the spring of 988 the coasts of Bosphorus. A detachment of his army under the [patrikios](#) Kalokyros Delphinas and his brother [Nikephoros Phokas](#) set up camp at Chrysopolis, opposite Constantinople. Basil II, finding himself in a difficult position, as the eastern army was loyal to the rebel and the troops of the west were busy dealing with the Bulgarian raids, decided to enlist the help of the Rus'. Promising the hand of his sister Anna to the ruler of Kiev Vladimir, he received from him, possibly late in spring of 988, an army of 6,000 Russian soldiers (the future [Varangian Guard](#)). Early in the summer of 988, after having transported his troops using the fleet to Chrysopolis, the emperor led a surprise attack achieving total victory over the forces of Delphinas, whom he arrested and had put to death.<sup>8</sup> In the meanwhile, Bardas Phokas together with the magistros Leo [Melissenos](#) and the rest of his army laid siege to the city of [Abydos](#) (summer of 988), which was defended by the [droungarios tou ploimou](#) Kyriakos. Basil had dispatched the patrikios Gregorios Taronites to [Trebizond](#), from where he moved against Bardas Phokas. The rebel sent against Taronites his son, Nikephoros Phokas, leading the reinforcements he had received from David of Tayk, as well as an Armenian contingent.<sup>9</sup> The imperial forces were turned to flight, but the allies of Nikephoros withdrew when they were informed of the defeat of the rebels at Chrysopolis. The final battle was joined on April 13, 989 at Abydos, where the two armies faced each other. Phokas perished during the fighting, under unclear circumstances (probably he was poisoned);<sup>10</sup> his army was defeated and disbanded by the imperial forces.

## 3. Consequences

The rebellion of Bardas Phokas clearly affected the developments on the Bulgarian front, as for nearly two years it monopolized Basil II's attention, thus allowing the Bulgarian tsar Samuel organize his state and launch raids in the western lands of empire meeting no resistance. However, the most important consequences were political. This rebellion marks the climax of a series of attempts by the then powerful noble families of Asia Minor, the [Phokas](#) and the [Skleroi](#), to take over power. Its distinctiveness as compared with the earlier rebellions (by [Bardas Phokas in 969-970](#) and [Bardas Skleros in 976-979](#)) was that for the first time the rebel leader enjoyed the support of the majority of the nobility of Asia Minor. The rebellion of Phokas was of course, like all the other revolts of this period, a movement founded on the ambitions of a single person, a leader who based his claims on the fact that his family had been intimately related in the recent past with the imperial throne. This was the first time, however, that the majority of the military nobility of Asia Minor were united, as its representatives were frustrated over the emperor's intentions to curtail their influence in the military and generally their participation in the government. Basil II's victory over Bardas Phokas heralded the end of the large-scale civil wars in Asia Minor, and vindicated the policy he had followed vis-à-vis the powerful nobility, as he did not only neutralize his most fearsome opponent, but in a single stroke achieved the submission of the entire military aristocracy, becoming the absolute ruler in the interior of the empire. After the defeat of Phokas and until his death, Basil II did not face a similar threat to his authority and was able to turn untrammelled to the wars against the empire's external enemies and engage in the reorganization of the state.

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1. Lakapenos' banishment was probably related to the fact that the *parakoimomenos*, interpreting the endeavours of the young emperor to actively participate in the administration of the state as a threat to his political power, attempted to organize a conspiracy against him. See Thurn, I. (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 5, Berlin-New York 1973), p. 335.59-63.

2. The Arab historian Yahya ibn Said is the only source mentioning that Phokas received the offices of *doukas* of the East and governor of Antioch and all provinces of East. See Forsyth, J., *The Byzantine-Arab Chronicle (938-1034) of Yahya b. Sa'id Al-Antaki* (Ann Arbor 1977). As Seibt, W., *Die Skleroi: Eine prosopographisch-sigillographische Studie* (Byzantina Vindobonensia 9, Wien 1976), p. 49, fn. 153, correctly argues there no such office existed, and it is most likely that Phokas was demoted to dux of Antioch. A different view is expressed in Kamer, S., *Emperors and Aristocrats in*



*Byzantium 976-1081* (Ann Arbor 1983), p. 72, who believes that the office mentioned by Yahya is accurate, and that Basil's intention was to strengthen Phokas' power so as to allow him to successfully defend the empire's eastern provinces while the emperor was busy with waging his war against the Bulgarians.

3. Basil II was personally in charge of his troops in this campaign. As Kamer, S., *Emperors and Aristocrats in Byzantium 976-1081* (Ann Arbor 1983), pp. 73-74, notes his intention was to win the recognition of the army, which could only come through a personal military victory.

4. As Kamer, S., *Emperors and Aristocrats in Byzantium 976-1081* (Ann Arbor 1983), pp. 79-80.

5. This is a ruler of Iberia, with whom Phokas maintained friendly relations.

6. Our two main sources on the rebellion of Bardas Phokas, Ioannes Skylitzes and Yahya, disagree on this, as the Arab historian dates the official declaration of the rebellion on September 17, 987 following the arrest of Skleros. See Ιωάννης Σκυλίτζης, *Σύνοψις Ιστοριών*, Thurn, I. (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 5, Berlin-New York 1973), p. See Forsyth, J., *The Byzantine-Arab Chronicle (938-1034) of Yahya b. Sa'id Al-Antaki* (Ann Arbor 1977), p. 430.

7. This is the name of the fortress in Skylitzes. For more detailed information on its appellation see Seibt, W., *Die Skleroi: Eine prosopographisch-sigillographische Studie* (Wien 1976), pp. 53-54.

8. Apart from Delphinas, the emperor captured other prominent nobles that had sided with Phokas, like his brother Nikephoros, which he imprisoned, and Atzypotheodoros, which he put to death.

9. This Armenian contingent consisted in a force of 1,000 horsemen under the command of two *patrikioi*, Bagrat (Pangratios) and Kordaphel, grandchildren of Ashot of Taron and sons of Bagrat; through their participation in the rebellion of Phokas they probably aimed at regaining the lands of the Armenian kingdom of Taron, which had been annexed earlier by Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas. See Adontz, N., *Études arméno-byzantines* (Lisbon 1965), p. 233.

10. Thurn, I. (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 5, Berlin-New York 1973), p. 337, mentions that Bardas Phokas fell from his horse during the charge, but no wound was later found on his body, and cites a story according to which Symeon, Phokas' trusted servant, poisoned the rebel's water at the behest of Basil II.

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## Glossary :

	<b>caliph</b>
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.	
	<b>domestikos ton scholon</b>
Commander of the regiment of <i>scholae</i> . The first officer with this title appears in 767/8. In the 10th C the domesticos became very powerful among the army of the <i>themata</i> ; in mid-10th C the office was divided in two, <i>domestikoi ton scholon</i> of the East and those of the West, commanders in chief of the eastern and the western provinces' army respectively.	
	<b>doukas (lat. dux)</b>
Antiquity: Roman military commander who, in some provinces, combined military and civil functions. Byzantium: a higher military officer. From the second half of the 10th c. the title indicates the military commander of a larger district. After the 12th c., doukes were called the governors of small themes.	
	<b>droungarios tou ploimou</b>
("droungarios of the fleet") Commander of the byzantine fleet stationed Constantinople. Droungarios tou ploimou is first mentioned in the middle 9th C (Taktikon of Uspenski).	
	<b>magistros</b>
Higher office that Philotheos in his Kletorologion places above the anthypatos. This title lost its importance from the 10th century and gradually disappeared - most probably in the middle of the 12th century.	
	<b>parakoimomenos</b>
The guardian of the imperial private chambers. This high office was given usually to eunuchs that were persons of confidence, since they could not ascend to the throne. From the 9th and up to the 11th century, this office assumed a great importance and there were παρακοιμώμενοι that played important roles in the course of the empire, such as Joseph Bringa.	
	<b>patrikios</b>
(from lat. <i>patricius</i> ) Higher title of honour, placed, according to the " <i>Tactika</i> " of the 9th and the 10th centuries, between <i>anthypatos</i> and <i>protospatharios</i> . It was given to the most important governors and generals. Gradually, however, it fell into disuse and from the 12th century did not exist any more.	



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## Quotations

### The rebellion of Bardas Phokas according to Leo Deacon

Μήπω δὲ τοῦ τοιοῦτου πάθους τελευταίως ὑπολωφῆσαντος, Βάρδας Μάγιστρος ὁ Φωκάς κατὰ τῶν κρατούντων ἐτραχηλίασε, καὶ τὴν τῆς Ἀσίας Ῥωμαϊκὴν ὑπεποιήσατο δύναμιν, καὶ κατὰ θάλασσαν ἐπίνεια καὶ πτολίσματα πλὴν Ἀβύδου εἶλε· καὶ τριῆρεις συχνὰς νεολκῆσας, ἐφρούρει τὸν τοῦ Ἑλλησπόντου πορθμόν, οὐκ ἔων τὰς φορτίδας ἀνάγεσθαι πρὸς τὴν βασιλεύουσαν· στρατιάν τε πλείστην, ἧς Λέων Μάγιστρος ὁ Μελισσηνὸς ἠγάγειτο, παρὰ τὴν ἠπειρον τῆς Ἀβύδου καθίδρυσεν, τὰς τε σφετέραις τριῆρεις φρουροῦσαν, καὶ πολιορκοῦσαν τὴν Ἀβυδον. αὐθὶς τε χάρακα καρτερόν πρὸ τοῦ Βυζαντίου ἐπὶ τοῦ τῆς Χρυσῆς πόλεως λόφου ἐπηξεν, ἵππικὴν ὅτι πλείστην καὶ πεζικὴν στειλάμενος δύναμιν· ἀρχηγούς δὲ τῆς στρατίας ταύτης τὸν τε σύναιμον αὐτοῦ τὸν Πατρίκιον Νικηφόρον, καὶ Καλοκύρην Πατρίκιον, ᾧ ἐπικλήσιν Δελφινᾶς προεστήσατο. τούτους ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ αὐθὶς Βασίλειος, μετὰ δυνάμεως ἀποχρώσας τὸν Βόσπορον περαιοθεῖς, ἐξ ἀντιπάλου μάχης ἐτρέψατο· καὶ ζωγρίας συνειληφώς, τὸν μὲν Νικηφόρον καὶ ὁμαίμονα τοῦ Φωκᾶ πεδὴτην ἀποφῆνας, εἰρκτῆ συνέκλεισε· τὸν δὲ γε Καλοκύρην τὸν Δελφινᾶν αὐτοῦ που παρὰ τὸν τῆς Χρυσοπόλεως λόφον, ἵνα καὶ ἡ σκηνὴ αὐτῶ ἐπήγνυτο, ἀνεσκολόπισεν. Βάρδας δὲ ὁ Φωκάς, τὴν ἐν Χρυσοπόλει πανολεθρίαν τῆς στρατίας διενηγηθεῖς, τὴν τε τοῦ ὁμαίμονος σύλληψιν τε καὶ κάθειρξιν, καὶ τὴν τοῦ Δελφινᾶ ἐπὶ τοῦ ξύλου προσπαττάλευσιν, τὰς περὶ αὐτὸν δυνάμεις συνηθοικῶς, εἰς Ἀβυδον κάτεισι, τό τε φρούριον τὸ ἐκεῖσε περὶ ὠμίονος πολιορκῆσαι, καὶ πρὸς τὴν Εὐρώπην διαπεράσαι, ὡς καὶ ταύτην ὑποποιήσαιο. ὁ δὲ αὐτοκράτωρ Βασίλειος, τὴν ἐν Ἀβύδῳ κάθοδον τοῦ τυράννου ἐνωτισθεῖς, τὴν περὶ αὐτὸν στρατιάν συναγροχῶς, καὶ τὰς πυρφόρους τριῆρεις ἐξαρτυσάμενος, ἀντίπαλος τούτῳ καθίσταται· καὶ, περαιοθεῖς τὸν Ἑλλησπόντον, ἐν τῷ πρὸ τῆς Ἀβύδου πεδίῳ τὴν βασιλείον σκηνὴν ἐπήξατο, ὅσημέραι τὰς φάλαγγας συντάττων καὶ ἐξασκῶν, καὶ γνωματεύων ὅπως τῷ ἀποστάτῃ ἐπέλθοι. μὲν γὰρ τοιγαροῦν τῶν νυκτῶν ἐς λόχους συντάξας τὸ στράτευμα, διὰ τῆς παρὰ θάλασσαν ἀταρπιτοῦ τοῖς ἐναντίοις ἐπέθετο, καὶ, ἤδη τῆς ἡμέρας διαφανούσης, τὰς τε τριῆρεις πάσας ἐνέπηρσεν, καὶ τοὺς ἐναντίους κατακαίνων οὐκ ἀνίει. Βάρδας δὲ ὁ Φωκάς, τῷ αἰφνιδίῳ τῆς ἀφίξεως καὶ ἐπιθέσεως τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος ἐκπλαγείς, ἀντιμέτωπος τοῦ χάρακος ἔξεισι· καὶ δῆτα κατὰ τὸ μεταίχιμον ἀντικαταστάς, καὶ τοῦ ἵππου ἀθρόον κατενεχθεῖς, ξίφει τὸν ἀχένα ἐκκόπτεται. καὶ τὸ μὲν γιγαντῶδες τούτου σῶμα κατὰ τὴν Ἀβυδον τῇ γῆ κατορῦντεται· ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ, πρὸς τὴν βασιλεύουσαν ἐκπεμφθεῖσα καὶ τῷ δορατίῳ περιπαρεῖσα, κατὰ τὰς ἀγυῖας θριαμβεύεται, καὶ τοῖς κατὰ τὴν Ἀσίαν ἐκπέμπεται στασιάζουσι. καὶ οὕτω τὰ τῆς ἀποστασίας εἰς σταθρᾶν γαλήνην μετεσκευάζετο.

Hase, C. B. (ed.), *Leonis Diaconi Caloensis Historiae libri decem* (Bonn 1828), pp. 173.12-175.5.

### The outbreak of Bardas Phokas's rebellion. A passage from the work of John Skylitzes

Οἱ δὲ τῶν Ῥωμαίων μεγιστᾶνες μηνιώντες τῷ βασιλεῖ, ὁ μὲν Φωκάς Βάρδας καὶ τινες σὺν αὐτῷ, ὅτι περ εἰς Βουλγαρίαν ἐκστρατεύσας ὑπερείδεν αὐτούς, μὴδ' ἐν Καρὸς λογισάμενος μοῖρα, ἄλλοι δὲ καὶ ἄλλοι δι' ἄλλους προπηλακισμούς τε καὶ παροινίας, ὁ δὲ μάγιστρος Εὐστάθιος ὁ Μαλεῖνος διὰ τὸ ἀτίμως ἀπὸ τῆς εἰρημένης ἐκστρατείας ἀποπεμφθῆναι, συναθροισθέντες ἐν τῷ Χαρσιανῷ, κατὰ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ ῥηθέντος Μαλεῖνου, πεντεκαδεκάτῃ τοῦ Αὐγούστου μηνός, τῆς πεντεκαδεκάτης ἰνδικτιώνος, Βάρδαν τὸν Φωκᾶν ἀνείπον βασιλέα, διάδημά τε περιθέντες αὐτῷ καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ τῆς βασιλείας γυωρίσματα.

Thurn, I. (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 5, Berlin-New York 1973), p. 332.59-67.

### The defeat of Bardas Phocas in Chrysoupolis (988)

Βάρδας δὲ ὁ Φωκάς, ὡς τὴν τοῦ Σκληροῦ ἐπάνοδον προσαγγελθεῖσαν ἐπύθετο, γράμματά τε ἐκπέμπει αὐτὰ ἐκεῖνα δηλοῦντα τὰ



ἐκείνῳ πρὸς τρόπον, καὶ ὄρκους ἐπιστοῦτο τὰς ὑποσχέσεις, «εἰ τῶν ἠλπισμένων τύχοιμεν,» λέγων, «σὺ μὲν ἄρξεις Ἀντιοχείας καὶ Φοινίκης καὶ Κοίλης Συρίας καὶ Παλαιστίνης καὶ Μεσοποταμίας, ἐγὼ δὲ ἄρχων ἔσομαι τῆς βασιλίδος αὐτῆς καὶ τῶν ὑπολοίπων ἔθνων.» δεξάμενος δὲ περιχαρῶς ὁ Σκληρὸς τοὺς λόγους, καὶ τοῖς ὄρκους θαρρήσας, ἄπεισιν ἐν Καππαδοκίᾳ πρὸς τὸν Φωκᾶν, ὡς τάχα πληρώσωσιν τὴν κοινοπραγίαν. ἐκεῖνος δὲ τοῦτον ἔνδον τῆς σαγήνης λαβὼν ἀπαμφιέννυσί τε τὰ τῆς βασιλείας παράσημα καὶ ἐς τὸ φρούριον τὸν Τυροποιὸν ἐκπέμπει, φρουρὰν οὐκ ἀγεννή περιστήσας αὐτῷ. αὐτὸς δὲ μέρος τοῦ στρατοῦ παρασχὼν Καλοκυρῷ πατρικίῳ τῷ Δελφινᾷ ἐκπέμπει κατὰ τὴν ἀντίπορθμον τῆ βασιλίδι Χρυσόπολιν. τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν ἅπαν τῆς στρατηγίας ἄγων μεθ' ἑαυτοῦ κάτεισιν εἰς Ἄβυδον, ἐλπίσας οὕτω κατεχομένων τῶν στενῶν πεπεισμένους ἐνδεία παραστήσεσθαι τοὺς πολίτας. ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς πολλὰ παρακαλέσας τὸν Δελφινᾶν ἀπαναστήναι τῆς Χρυσοπόλεως καὶ μὴ ἀντιμέτωπον τῆ βασιλίδι ποιεῖσθαι στρατοπεδείαν, ὡς οὐκ ἔπειθε, πλοῖα παρασκευάσας νυκτὸς καὶ τούτοις ἐμβιβάσας Ἰρῶς (ἔτυχε γὰρ συμμαχίαν προσκαλεσάμενος ἐξ αὐτῶν, καὶ κηδεστὴν ποιησάμενος τὸν ἄρχοντα τούτων Βλαδιμηρὸν ἐπὶ τῆ ἑαυτοῦ ἀδελφῆ Ἄννης), περαιοθεὶς μετ' αὐτῶν ἀνοήτως ἐπιτίθεται τοῖς ἐχθροῖς καὶ ῥᾶον χειροῦται. τὸν μὲν οὖν Δελφινᾶν ἐπὶ ξύλου κρεμᾶ κατ' ἐκείνον τὸν τόπον, ἐνθαπερ εἶχε τὴν σκηνὴν πεπηγμένην, τὸν δὲ ἀδελφὸν τοῦ Φωκᾶ Νικηφόρον τὸν τυφλὸν φρουρᾷ παραδίδωσι ἀνασκοποῦντι δὲ καὶ τὸν Ἀτζυποθεόδωρον κατὰ τὴν Ἄβυδον καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς τοῖς ἀλοῦσι ποιναῖς ἐπιτίθει τὰς δοκούσας ὑπέστρεψεν εἰς τὴν βασιλίδα.

Thum, I. (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 5, Berlin-New York 1973), pp. 335.71-336.2.

#### Byzantine historian John Skylitzes describes the end of Bardas Phokas's rebellion

Ὁ δὲ Φωκᾶς τὴν Ἄβυδον καταλαβὼν ἐπιμελῶς ἐπολιόρκει, ῥωμαλέως ὑφισταμένων καὶ τῶν ἔνδον τὴν πολιορκίαν, τοῦ δρουγγαρίου τῶν πλωϊμῶν Κυριακοῦ προεκεπεμφθέντος παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ τοὺς ἔνδον παραθαρρύνοντος. μετὰ μικρὸν δὲ ἐπεραιώθη καὶ Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ τοῦ βασιλέως ἀδελφός, κατόπιν δ' ἀφίκετο καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς. ὡν περαιοθέντων ὁ Φωκᾶς μέρος μὲν τῆς στρατίας προσεδρεύειν ἐπέταξε τῆ τῆς Ἀβύδου πολιορκία, αὐτὸς δὲ τοῖς λοιποῖς τοῦ στρατοῦ ἀντιπαρατάττει τοῖς βασιλεῦσι, καὶ μελλούσης ἡδὴ ἀρχὴν λαμβάνειν τῆς μάχης ὁ Φωκᾶς τοῦ ζῆν ἀγεννῶς τὸ γενναίως ἀποθανεῖν εὐγενῶς προκρίνας, τὸν βασιλέα θεασάμενος πόρρωθεν τῆδε κάκεισε καθιπταζόμενον καὶ τὰς τῶν οικειῶν διακοσμοῦντα τάξεις καὶ παραθαρρύνοντα, καὶ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν λογισάμενος, ὡς, εἰ τούτου ἐπιτυχῆς γένηται, ῥᾶον ἂν καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς καταγωνιεῖται, τὸν ἵππον μυωπίσας ῥαγδαίως ἵκετο κατ' αὐτοῦ, τὰς ἐναντίας φάλαγγας διακόπτων καὶ ἀνυπόστατος τοῖς πᾶσι φαινόμενος. ἡδὴ δὲ τῷ βασιλεῖ προσεγγίζων εὐθὺς ὑποστρέφει καὶ εἰς τινα λόφον ἄνεισι, καὶ τοῦ ἵππου ἀποβάς καὶ πρὸς γῆν ἐκτείνας ἑαυτὸν ἀπέλιπε τὴν ζωὴν, εἴτε παρὰ τοῦ τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἐν τῷ ἀτάκτως φέρεσθαι καιρίαν τυπεῖς, εἴτε καὶ ἄλλως ἀπὸ σωματικῆς ἀταξίας κατεργασθεῖς. πληγὴν μέντοι οὐδ' ὄλωσ ἐυρέθη ἐν τῷ σώματι ἔχων, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὁ λέγων λόγος δηλητηριῶ αὐτὸν ἀναίρεθῆναι κρατεῖ. φέρεται γάρ, ὅτι Συμεὼν ὁ πιστικώτατος τῶν θεραπόντων αὐτοῦ, δώροις ὑπὸ βασιλέως ἀναπεισθεῖς, φαρμάκῳ τοῦτον ἀπέκτεινεν. εἰώθει γὰρ ὁ Φωκᾶς ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις ὕδατος ψυχροῦ πρὸ τῆς συμπλοκῆς ἀπογεύεσθαι. ὁ κὰν ταύτη τῇ συμπλοκῇ ποιήσας ἔλαθε συγκαταπιῶν τῷ ὕδατι καὶ τὸ δηλητήριον. ἐπὶ πολὺν δὲ χρόνον ἐν τῷ λόφῳ κείμενος τοῦ Φωκᾶ ᾤοντο πάντες διὰ τινα σωματικὴν μαλακίαν ἀναπαύσει μικρᾷ ἑαυτὸν δεδωκέναι. ὡς δὲ ἐχρόνιζε κείμενος καὶ προσελθὼν τις νεκρὸν αὐτὸν εὗρε καὶ ἀναυδὸν καὶ διεγνώσθη τοῖς πᾶσιν ὁ τούτου θάνατος, οἱ μὲν ἀποστάται εὐθὺς εἰς φυγὴν ὤρμησαν, τὰ δὲ τοῦ βασιλέως ἐπερρώσθη στρατεύματα, καὶ ἐδίωκον ἀμεταστρεπτί, καὶ ζωγροῦνται μὲν Λέων καὶ Θεόγνωστος οἱ Μελισσηνοί, Θεοδόσιος ὁ Μεσανύκτης καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοί. οὐς μεθ' ἑαυτοῦ ὁ βασιλεὺς εἰς τὴν πόλιν εἰσαγαγὼν διὰ μέσης ἐθριάμβευσε τῆς ἀγορᾶς ὄνοις ἐφεζομένους, μόνου φεισάμενος Λέοντος τοῦ Μελισσηνοῦ. λέγεται γὰρ οὗτος ἐπὶ τῆς παρατάξεως τῷ οικείῳ ἀδελφῷ Θεογνώστῳ, ἐπιχλευάζοντι τοὺς βασιλεῖς καὶ ὕβρεις ἀπρεπεῖς ἐς αὐτοὺς ἀπορριπτοῦντι, ἐπιτιμησαί τε πολλὰ μετὰ δακρύων καὶ παρακαλέσαι παύσασθαι τῆς ἀθυροστομίας καὶ μὴ ἀναιδῶς ἐνυβρίζειν εἰς τοὺς οικειοὺς δεσπότης, ἐπεὶ δὲ μὴ ἔπειθε, καὶ τὸν σειρομάστην ἐντείνας δοῦναι τούτῳ πολλάς, ὥστε καὶ τὸν βασιλέα θεωρὸν ὄντα τῶν γινομένων ἀνειπείν πρὸς τοὺς παρόντας· «ἴδετε, ὦ οὔτοι, ἀφ' ἐνὸς ξύλου καὶ σταυρὸν καὶ πτύον.» διὰ ταύτην οὖν τὴν αἰτίαν λέγεται τῷ Λέοντι συγχωρηθῆναι τὸν θρίαμβον.

Thum, I. (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 5, Berlin-New York 1973), pp. 336.3-338.44.

#### Michael Psellos's account of Bardas Phocas's rebellion

Ὁ δὲ γέ Φωκᾶς Βάρδας τῷ βασιλεῖ Ῥωμαίων ἐπαναζεύγνυσι, καὶ τῆς τε τροπαιοφόρου ἐτετυχήκει πομπῆς, τοῖς τε περὶ τὸν βασιλέα συναριθμῶς ἐτύγχανεν ὡν. Οὕτω μὲν οὖν ἡ πρώτη τυραννὶς καταλέλυται, καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς Βασίλειος ἀπηλλάχθαι πραγμάτων ἔδοξε· ἡ δὲ δόξα αὐτῆ κατάλοις ἀρχὴ πολλῶν ὠδίνων οὕσα ἐτύγχανεν. Ὁ γὰρ τοι Φωκᾶς πρῶτα μὲν μειζόνων ἀξιωθεῖς, ἔπειτα ἐλαττόνων, καὶ αὐθις ὑπορρεούσας αὐτῷ τὰς ἐλπίδας ὀρῶν, ἅμα δὲ καὶ μὴ προδεδοκέναι τὴν πίστιν οἰόμενος,



ἐπὶ ῥητοῖς προσβάσαν καὶ φυλαχθεῖσαν, σὺν τῷ κρατίστῳ μέρει τοῦ στρατοπέδου βαρυτέραν τε καὶ χαλεπωτέραν κατὰ τοῦ Βασιλείου τυραννίδα ἀνίστησι· καὶ τὰ πρῶτα γένη τῶν τότε δυναμένων ἀναρτησάμενος, καὶ εἰς ἀντίπαλον μοῖραν ἀποκριθεὶς, στρατεύμα τε Ἰβηρικὸν ἀπολεξάμενος ἑαυτῷ (ἄνδρες δὲ οὗτοι τό τε μέγεθος εἰς δέκατον πόδα ἀνεστηκότες καὶ τὴν ὄφρυν σοβαρὰν ἔλκοντες), οὐκ ἔτι ἐν ὑπονοίαις, ἀλλὰ μετὰ τῆς βασιλικῆς τιάρας καὶ τοῦ ἐπισήμου χρώματος τὴν τυραννικὴν στολὴν ἀμφιέννυται. εἶτα γίνεται τι τοιοῦτον· πόλεμός τις ἀλλόφυλος καταλαμβάνει τὸν Βαβυλώνιον, ᾧ προσπεφυγότες οἱ περὶ τὸν Σκληρόν, ὥσπερ δῆπου ὁ λόγος ἐγνώρισε, ἀντιστρόφους εὗροντο τὰς ἐλπίδας, καὶ ὁ πόλεμος βαρὺς καὶ δεινὸς καὶ πολλῶν δεόμενος τῶν ἀντιστησομένων χειρῶν καὶ δυνάμεων· καὶ ἐπειδὴ οὐκ εἶχεν οὗτος τῷ οἰκείῳ μόνῳ στρατοπέδῳ θαρρεῖν, ἐπὶ τοὺς φυγάδας τίθεται τὰς ἐλπίδας, καὶ λύει μὲν εὐθὺς τῶν δεσμῶν, ἐξάγει δὲ τῆς φρουρᾶς, ὀπλίζει τε καρτερῶς, καὶ κατ' εὐθὺς τῆς ἐναντίας ἴσθησι φάλαγγος. οἱ δὲ, ἅτε γενναῖοι ἄνδρες καὶ μάχιμοι, καὶ τάξεις εἰδότες ὀπλιτικάς, ἐκατέρωθεν διαστάντες, εἶτα δὴ ἀθρόον ἐξιππασάμενοι καὶ τὸ ἐνυάλιον ἀλαλάξαντες, τοὺς μὲν αὐτοῦ κτείνουσι, τοὺς δὲ τρέψαντες εἰς φυγὴν, εἴτ' ἄχρι τοῦ χάρακος ἐξελάσαντες, ἄρδην ἅπαντας ἀνηρήκασιν· ἀναצעγγύντες δὲ, ὥσπερ ἐκ ταυτοῦ συνθήματος τῆς ψυχῆς, πρὸς φυγὴν ἐτρέψαντο ἑαυτούς· ἐδεδοίκεσαν γὰρ αὐθις τὸν βάρβαρον, ὡς οὐ δεξιῶς τούτοις προσενηχθόμενον, ἀλλὰ πάλιν ἐν πέδαις καθείρξοντα. Κοινῇ γοῦν ἀνὰ κράτος φεύγοντες, ἐπειδὴ πλείστον τῆς Ἀσσυρίων ἀπεληλύθεισαν γῆς, καὶ ἡ φυγὴ καταφανῆς τῷ βαρβάρῳ ἐγένετο, τοῖς ἐπιτυχοῦσι τότε τοῦ συνηθροισμένου στρατεύματος τὴν ἐπιδίωξιν αὐτῶν ἐγκελεύεται· καὶ πολὺ τι πλῆθος κατὰ νότου τούτοις συνεισπεσόντες, ἐγνώσαν ὅσῳ τῷ μέτρῳ τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων ὑστεροῦσι χειρός· οἱ γὰρ τοὶ φυγάδες ἀθρόον τοὺς χαλινοὺς στρέψαντες, καὶ ἐλάττους πρὸς πολλαπλασίους ἀγωνιζόμενοι, βραχυτέρους ἑαυτῶν τοὺς καταλελειμμένους πρὸς τὴν φυγὴν πεποιήκασιν. Ὁ μὲν οὖν Σκληρὸς τυραννεύειν τε αὐθις ὤρετο καὶ τὰς ὅλας καθέξειν δυνάμεις, ἀνακεχωρηκὸς τε τοῦ Φωκᾶ ἡδὴ καὶ πάσης τῆς βασιλείου διασκεδασθείσης δυνάμεως· ἐπεὶ δὲ πρὸς τοῖς Ῥωμαϊκοῖς ὁρίοις γενόμενος, τὸν Φωκᾶν ἐμεμαθήκει βασιλειῶντα, ἐπειδὴ οὐχ οἴος τε ἦν καὶ τῷ βασιλεῖ μάχεσθαι, τὸν μὲν καὶ αὐθις ὑβρίσας, τῷ δὲ μετὰ τοῦ ἐλάττονος προσεληλυθὼς σχήματος, ἐκείνον μὲν τῶν πρωτείων ἠξίωσε, αὐτὸς δὲ μετ' ἐκείνον ὠμολόγησε τάττεσθαι· εἶτα δὴ διχῆ διελόμενοι τὰς δυνάμεις, μακρῶ τὴν τυραννίδα εὐσθενεστέραν εἰργάσαντο. οἱ μὲν οὖν τάξεις καὶ παρεμβολαῖς ἐπεποίθεσαν, καὶ μέχρι τῆς Προποντιδος καὶ τῶν παραλίῶν ἐν ταύτῃ χωρίων κατεληλύθεισαν, ἐπ' ἀσφαλούς τοὺς χάρακας θέμενοι, καὶ μονοῦ ὑπεράλλεσθαι καὶ αὐτὴν ἐπιχειροῦντες τὴν θάλασσαν. Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς Βασίλειος τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀγνωμοσύνης κατεγνωκῶς, ἐπειδὴπερ οὐ πρὸ πολλοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν Ταύρῳ Σκυθῶν λογὰς πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐφοίτησεν ἀξιόμαχος, τούτους δὴ συγκροτήσας, καὶ ξενικὴν ἔτεραν ξυλλοχισάμενος δύναμιν, κατὰ τῆς ἀντικειμένης ἐκπέμπει φάλαγγος· οἱ δὴ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ παρ' ἐλπίδας ἐπιφανέντες αὐτοῖς, οὐ πρὸς μάχην διεγηγερέμενοι, ἀλλὰ πρὸς μέθην κατακεκλιμένοι, οὐκ ὀλίγους τε αὐτῶν ἀνηρήκασιν καὶ τοὺς καταλελειμμένους ἄλλους ἀλλαχόσε διέσπειραν· συνίσταται δὲ καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν τὸν Φωκᾶν στάσις αὐτοῖς καρτερά· Συμπαρῆν δὲ τῷ τῶν Ῥωμαίων στρατῷ καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς Βασίλειος ἄρτι γενειάζων καὶ τὴν πρὸς τοὺς πολέμους ἐμπειρίαν λαμβάνων· ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ Κωνσταντῖνος ἀπὴν τῆς παρεμβολῆς· ἀλλὰ καὶ οὗτος θώρακά τε περιβαλλόμενος καὶ δόρυ μακρὸν ἐπισείων, μέρος τῆς φάλαγγος ἦν. Αἱ μὲν οὖν τάξεις εἰσθήκεσαν ἐκατέρωθεν, ἀπὸ μὲν τῶν παραλίῶν μερῶν ἢ βασιλικῆ, ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν ὑψηλοτέρων ἢ τυραννικῆ, καὶ πολὺ μεταξὺ τὸ μεταίχιμιον. Ὁ τοίνυν Φωκᾶς, ὡς καὶ τοὺς βασιλεῖς διατεταγμένους ἐμεμαθήκει εἰς τὴν παράταξιν, οὐκ ἔτι <ἐν> ἀναβολαῖς τοῦ μάχεσθαι ἦν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκείνην κρίσιν τοῦ πολέμου δημοτελῆ ἔθετο, καὶ τῷ τῆς τύχης ἑαυτὸν ἐπέτρεψε πνεύματι· οὐ μὴ κατὰ σκοπὸν τοῖς περὶ αὐτὸν ἐποιεῖτο μάντεσιν· οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἀπειροῦντο τοῦ μάχεσθαι, τῶν θυμάτων αὐτοῖς τοῦτο διασαφούντων, ὁ δὲ ἀντεπεχειρεῖ ὅλην ἀφείς τὴν ἡνίαν τῷ ἵππῳ. Λέγεται μέντοι καὶ σημεῖα φανῆναί οἱ ἀπαίσια· ὡς γὰρ ἵππάσατο, εὐθὺς αὐτῷ διωλισθήκει ὁ ἵππος, καὶ ἐπεὶ μετέβη εἰς ἕτερον, καὶ οὗτος βραχὺ τι προεληλυθὼς ταῦτό ἐπεπόνθει· ὅ τε χρῶς αὐτῷ ἐτέτραπτο, καὶ ἀχλὺς μὲν τὴν γνώμην, δῖνα δὲ τὴν κεφαλὴν διετάραξαν. Ὡς δὲ πρὸς οὐδὲν ἐνδόσιμος ἦν, ἅπαξ ἑαυτὸν καταστήσας εἰς τὸν ἀγῶνα, ἐπειδὴ ἐνεβεβήκει τῷ μετώπῳ τῆς φάλαγγος, καὶ ἡδὴ που πλησίον τῆς βασιλείου ἐγεγόνει δυνάμεως, πεζὴν τινα περὶ αὐτὸν συλλεξάμενος δύναμιν, Ἰβήρων τοὺς μαχιμωτάτους φημί, ἀρτιφνεῖς πάντας τὸ γένειον καὶ αὐτὸ δὴ τὸ νεοτήσιον ἀποφύοντας ἄνθος, ὑψηλοὺς καὶ ἰσομέτρους ὥσπερ ὑπὸ κανόνα τὸ μέγεθος, ξίφει καθωπλισμένους τὴν δεξιὰν καὶ τὴν ὀρμὴν ἀνυποστάτους τυγχάνοντας, τούτους δὴ μεθ' ἑαυτοῦ ὑφ' ἐνὶ κινήσας συνθήματι, τῆς φάλαγγος προπηδᾷ, καὶ τὸν χαλινὸν ἐνδὸς σὺν ἀλαλαγμῷ εὐθὺς τοῦ βασιλέως χωρεῖ, τῷ δεξιῷ βραχίονι μετέωρον τὴν τοῦ ξίφους ἐπέχων λαβὴν, ὡς αὐτίκα τούτῳ τὸν βασιλέα διαχειρισόμενος. Ὁ μὲν οὖν οὕτως καὶ μετὰ τοσοῦτου θάρρους ἐπὶ τὸν Βασίλειον ἦει· ὁ δὲ προβέβλητο μὲν τῆς οἰκειᾶς δυνάμεως, καὶ ξιφηφόρος εἰσθήκει, θατέρῳ δὲ τῶν χειρῶν τὴν εἰκόνα τῆς τοῦ Λόγου μητρὸς διηγάλλιστο, καρτερώτατον πρόβλημα τῆς ἀκαθέκτου ἐκείνου ὀρμῆς ταύτην ποιοῦμενος. Ὁ μὲν οὖν, οἷα δὴ τι νέφος ἀνέμοις σφοδροῖς ἐλαυνόμενον, τὸ πεδῖον διακυμαίνων διῆει· ἐσηκόντιζον δὲ ἐς αὐτὸν οἱ ἐφ' ἐκατέρους ἐστηκότες τοῖς κέρασι, βραχὺ δὲ τι καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς Κωνσταντῖνος δόρυ μακρὸν ἐπισείων προῆει τῆς φάλαγγος. Ὡς δ' οὐ πολὺ τι ἀποσπασθεὶς τῶν οἰκειῶν δυνάμεων, ἀθρόον τῆς ἕδρας ἐξολισθήσας κατὰ γῆς ἔρριπτο, ἐπὶ τούτῳ ἄλλος ἄλλος λόγος συμφύρεται· οἱ μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀκοντιζόντων βεβλήσθαι φασι καὶ κατὰ τῶν καιρῶν τὴν πληγὴν ὑποστάντα πεσεῖν, οἱ δὲ σκότους φασὶν ἀθρόως ὑποπληθθέντα τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐκ τινος περὶ τὴν γαστέρα ταραχῆς καὶ κινήσεως, τό τε φρονοῦν ἀπολωλέκεναι καὶ τοῦ ἵππου καταπεσεῖν. Ὁ μέντοιγε βασιλεὺς Κωνσταντῖνος ἑαυτῷ τὴν τοῦ τυράννου ἐμεγαλῦχει ἀναίρεσιν· ὡς δὲ πολὺς κεκρατήκε λόγος, ἐπιβουλή τὸ πᾶν ἐγεγόνει, καὶ φάρμακον αὐτῷ κερασθὲν καὶ ποθὲν, περὶ τὴν κίνησιν ἀθρόον ἀναρραγὲν, τὸν τε φρονούντα τοῦ ἐγκεφάλου τόπον κατέλαβεν, καὶ τὴν δίνησιν ἐπεποιήκει καὶ τὴν κατάπτωσιν. Ἦν δὲ τὸ μὲν σύνθημα Βασιλείου,



ἡ δὲ ἐπίβουλος χεὶρ τοῦ τῶ τυράννῳ οἰνοχοοῦντος· ἐγὼ δὲ ταῦτα μὲν ἐν ἀδήλοις τίθημι, τῇ δὲ μητρὶ τοῦ Λόγου τὸ πᾶν ἀνατίθημι. Πίπτει γοῦν ὁ τέως ἄτρωτος καὶ ἀνάλωτος, θέαμα ἔλεεινὸν καὶ δακρῦων ἄξιον. Εὐθὺς δ' οὖν ὡς εἶδον αἱ φάλαγγες ἑκατέρωθεν, ἡ μὲν εὐθὺς διαίρεθεῖσα καὶ τὸ τῆς ὀμαιχμίας συνεχὲς διακόψασα, ὀπίσω τε ἐγεγόνει, καὶ φυγάδες ἅπαντες ὤφθησαν· οἱ δὲ περὶ τὸν βασιλέα, εὐθὺς πεσόντι τῶ τυράννῳ ἐπεισηδήσαντες, τῶν Ἰβήρων διασκεδασθέντων, πολλαῖς κοπίσι διαμελίζουσι, καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐκτεμόντες τῶ Βασιλείῳ προσάγουσιν.

Renauld, E. (ed.), *Michel Psellos, Chronographie ou histoire d'un siècle de Byzance (976-1077)* 1 (Paris 1926), pp. 10.1-17.8.

## Chronological Table

Spring of 987: Bardas Skleros proclaims himself emperor at Melitene

April-May of 987: Bardas Phokas is reinstated as *domestikos ton scholon* of the East

Summer of 987: Skleros and Phokas form an alliance

August 15, 987: Bardas Phokas proclaims himself emperor in the Charsianon theme

September of 987: Bardas Skleros is arrested by Phokas and together with his brother Constantine is confined at the fortress Tyropoios

Spring of 988: The rebels under the *patrikios* Kalokyros Delphinas camp at Chrysopolis. Basil II allies with the Rus'

Early summer of 988: Bardas Phokas lays siege to the city of Abydus

Summer of 988: Kalokyros Delphinas is defeated at Chrysopolis by the imperial forces. The rebels defeat an imperial army under Gregorios Taronites at Trebizond

April 13, 989: Bardas Phokas is defeated by the imperial army at Abydus. Phokas dies and the rebellion is suppressed