Hungarians conquered the Carpathian Basin in the late ninth century. From there they conducted numerous campaigns to both the East and West in the course of the tenth century. However, while the western campaigns are well known in the Latin sources, the attacks against the Byzantine Empire, are mentioned in few sources. In the present paper, I would like to discuss a short source detail which have not yet been connected by historians to the Hungarians of the tenth century.

Byzantine sources of the Hungarian history in the ninth-tenth centuries – thanks to the meticulous and all encompassing work of the renowned Hungarian Byzantinologist, Gyula Moravcsik – have hardly increased in number during the past decades. Recently, Ferenc Makk has collected the new sources concerning Hungarian history in the ninth-tenth centuries. He mentioned only one sentence in the work of Joannes Skylitzes that Moravcsik did not know of, which refers to tenth-century Hungarians. In 2009, István Baán drew the scholars’ attention to a

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Byzantine diploma which mentioned the destruction of Hungarian troops in the Byzantine Empire during the tenth century. The number of new details is very limited. Thus any information - even if it is very brief - serves as a valuable addition to our knowledge of Hungarians in tenth-century history.

The Byzantine army of Asia Minor proclaimed Nicephorus Phocas as emperor in 963. He told them that they should expect a serious civil war. Previously they fought bravely against Cretans, Scythians and Arabs, but they now had to fight against their countrymen. The three examples of related events were certainly known to the soldiers.

Nicephorus Phocas’ army invaded the island of Crete in the summer of 960. The besiegers conquered the capital city, Kandia, in 961. As a result of the victory, after one and a half centuries of Muslim rule, the island again fell under the control of the Byzantine Empire. Almost simultaneously, Nicephorus Phocas’s brother, Leon Phocas took a part of the Byzantine troops from the Balkans to Asia Minor. Exploiting the fact that most of the Byzantine army was on the island of Crete, Sayf al-Dawla, the prince of Hamdanids carried out more attacks against the border of the Byzantine Empire in Asia Minor. When Emperor Romanus II found out about this, he sent Leon Phocas, who previously had successfully defended the Balkans’ border of the Empire, to Asia Minor fighting against the Muslims. Leon Phocas’s troops defeated Sayf al-Dawla’s army when they returned home with booty and numerous Byzantine prisoners on 8 November 960. In the course of the attack the prince barely escaped due to his ingenuity. Subsequently Leon Phocas went to Constantinople, which held a triumph in his honor.


9 Leon Diaconi Historiae 17-24; The History of Leo the Deacon 70-76; Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis historiarum 250, 41; Jean Skylitzes Empereurs de Constantinople 211; Schlum-
Following the successful campaign against Crete, Nicephorus Phocas continued the war against the Hamdanids. As a result, the capital of Sayf al-Dawla, Aleppo fell into the hands of the Byzantines in 962 with the exception of its citadel. It appears that the fighting against Cretans and Arabs which is mentioned in Nicephorus Phocas’ speech refers to these two victorious wars. It is obvious that Nicephorus Phocas (or Leon Diaconus, who attributes the speech to him) wanted to refer to well-known, recent events in the case of the war against the Scythians.

Leon Diaconus used the Scythian name to indicate a number of peoples who lived then or at once in Scythia, north of the Danube area and the Black Sea. It was him who called the Bulgarians, the Hungarians and the Russians, and in general the peoples living in Scythia (which in some cases perhaps also included the Pechenegs) all Scythians. The question is raised, however, which of these peoples were defeated by the Byzantine soldiers?

Bulgarians cannot be identified with these Scythians. There was peace between the Byzantine Empire and Bulgaria around this time, which only ended after the Nicephorus Phocas occupied the throne. Thus it is not surprising, that the collection containing the Byzantine sources of Bulgarian history does not mention the emperor’s speech. Similarly, we know of no Russian or Pecheneg attacks in the 950s reaching the Byzantine Empire.

10 Leon Diaconi Historiae 293-306; The History of Leon the Deacon 81-82; Schlumberger, Un empereur byzantine, 155-250; Bréhier, Vie et mort de Byzance, 179-180; Ostrogorsky, Geschichte der byzantinischen Staates, 243; Freytag, Geschichte der Dynasten der Hamdaniden, 197-203.


12 Leon Diaconi Historiae 1822, 195, 10; Moravcsik, Az Árpád-kori magyar történet, 72. cf. Moravcsik, Byzantinoturcica, 2: 280.

13 Leon Diaconi Historiae 1439-10, 14312, 14315, 14412, 1454, 1489, 14811, 1499, 14911, 14913, 15217, 15223, 1539, 15312, 15314, 15319, 15324, 15416, 1552, 15510, 15618-19, 15712, etc.


NICEPHORUS PHOCAS AND THE SCYTHIANS

Therefore it is most likely that by a struggle against the Scythians we are to understand Scythian invasion which was successfully beaten back by Nicephorus Phocas brother’s Leon Phocas, according the Leon Diaconus’ work. According the unanimous opinion of historians, the same event was reported in one part of the Vita Athanasii.18 Leon Diaconus mentions that when a Scythian army crossed the Danube, Leon Phocas did not immediately enter into a battle with them because he had only a very small army, instead, he was waiting for the appropriate moment and he attacked the opposing camp at night. The Byzantine troops killed many of the Scythians, while many others were forced to flee.19 The Vita Athanasii mentions that Leon Phocas, who was the “commander of the West(ern affairs)” brought a serious defeat onto the Scythians.20 The identification of the enemy is very clear in this case. The Byzantine sources reported an ill-fated attack by a Hungarian army.21

This campaign could be identical with the Hungarian campaign which had reached the Byzantine Empire in 961.22 According to Theophanes Continuatus, Hungarian troops invaded the Byzantine Empire at the Easter of 961 (on 7 April, 961). Emperor Romanus II sent Marianos Argyros, who was the “commander of the West”, to stop the attackers. The Byzantine general defeated the Hungarians, and forced them to return home.23

However, this view is hardly tenable. Scholars probably dated the Hungarian attack to be in the year 961 because this date was written on the margin of the text in the collection of sources.24 However, it is not the date of the fight against the Scythians: it only indicates that Leon Diaconus’s second book discusses the events of 961.25 The Byzantine author only makes a brief mention of Leon Phocas’s pre-

19 Leon Diaconi Historiae 1819–1912; The History of Leon the Deacon, 71–72; Moravcsik, Az Árpád-kori magyar történet, 72.
21 Moravcsik, A magyar történet bizánci forrásai, 141; Moravcsik, Az Árpád-kori magyar történet, 74. Note 1.
vious victory as the one that reveals his courage.  However, Leon Phocas left the Balkans in 960. Romanus II sent Leon Phocas to Asia Minor, because the commander fought successfully against the Scythians. Thus, he could not be fighting the Scythians in 961 or later.

The *Vita Athanasii* mentions that Leon Phocas visited Athanasios after having brought defeat onto the Scythians. The source explains that first Athanasios met Leon Phocas, then he was tempted by the Devil for one year, afterwards he visited Nicephorus Phocas in Crete in 961. This also suggests that the campaign against the Scythians took place in or before 960 but not in 961. According to the *Vita Athanasii*, Leon Phocas fought against the Scythians as commander of the West. But in 961 it was Marianos Argyros and not Leon Phocas who occupied this position.

Thus, it is obvious that Leon Phocas cannot have been fighting against the Scythians in 961. When did, then, Leon Phocas fight against the Scythians? And who were these Scythians?

Two Byzantine authors, Theophanes Continuatus and Pseudo-Symeon mention that the Hungarians (Turks) attacked the Byzantine Empire in 959. The emperor, Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, sent Pothos Argyros, the commander of a guardian army with general of Bukellarioi, Opsikion and Thrakesion, against them. The Byzantine troops attacked the Hungarians in the night and defeated them - just like Leon Phocas’s troops in the story by Leon Diaconus. The Hungarian army was forced to return home. The details of the campaign: a night attack, the year 959, the enemies (Turks, Scythians namely the Hungarians) it creates an impression that Leon Diaconus, Theophanes Continuatus and Pseudo-Symeon reported about the same war.

Some problems, however, remain. Theophanes Continuatus only mentions Pothos Argyros but not Leon Phocas in relation with the war to the spring of 959. According to *Vita Athanasii*, Leon Phocas was the „commander of the West(ern affairs)”, but he was appointed to this rank by Romanus II, at the end of 959. Assumptions are necessary to interpret of the sources. It is presumable that since Leon Phocas fought at the eastern and western borders of the Empire in 959–960, the *Vita Athanasii* did not exactly follow the rapid changes of his titles, sometimes identifying him as commander of the West already during the spring of 959. In such a mistake, a bibliography of a saint would not be unusual to some extent. It is also possible that the Byzantine chronicles only accidentally fail to mention Leon Phocas in relation with the fight of 959 (perhaps he would be the unnamed general of Bukellarioi, Opsikion and Thrakesion). The other possibility is that the sources do not speak of the same campaign. If we accept that Leon Phocas was

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26 Cf. Leon Diaconi Historiae 10719–10894; *The History of Leo the Deacon*, 158.
29 Theophanes Continuatus, 462s–463r, 746i–5.
31 Theophanes Continuatus, 472s–7.
the commander of the West when he fought against the Hungarians (his brother, Nicephorus Phocas was the general of Anatolia at this time),\textsuperscript{32} then a Hungarian army again attempted to attack the Byzantine Empire in the beginning/early summer of 960. So Pothos Argyros and Leon Phocas defeated two different Hungarian armies using the same tactics\textsuperscript{33} on two occasions.

After Leon Phocas gained victory over the Hungarian troops (959 or 960), Emperor Romanus II sent the successful general to the eastern border of the Empire. But the Hungarian attacks did not end. Again a Hungarian army invaded the Empire in 961. Although these raids were beaten back by the Byzantine army, but Byzantine soldiers were able to experience how dangerous their enemy was. In 963 Nicephorus Phocas mentions three dangerous enemies: the Arab warriors on the island of Crete, the army of Hamdanids in Asia Minor, and the Scythians, that is the Hungarians in the Balkans. He tells the truth; Hungarian troops regularly attacked the Byzantine Empire at this time.\textsuperscript{34} Thus the short datum in speech of Nicephorus Phocas provides a piece of the colorful mosaic of the tenth-century history of the Hungarians.


\textsuperscript{33} Three Byzantine Military Treatises. Text, Translation, and Notes by G. T. Dennis. Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 25. Washington 1985, 139-140, 164-167, 190-197.

\textsuperscript{34} Cf. Ioannis Scylitzae, Synopsis historiarum, 276\textsuperscript{22}-277\textsuperscript{31}; Jean Skylitzes Empereurs de Constantinople, 232-233.; Moravcsik, Az Árpád-kori magyar történet, 69-71, 85-86.