



## Summary :

Nikephoros II Phokas was one of the most important Byzantine Emperors. A soldier and renowned general, who recovered Crete from the Arabs, he was also a member of one of the most prominent noble lineages of Asia Minor (Cappadocia). His reign marked the history of the Byzantine state due to his activity but also due to his murder from his associate and future emperor, John Tzimiskes. Nikephoros II Phokas was also renowned for his ascetic way of life.

## Date and Place of Birth

ca. 912, Cappadocia (?)

## Date and Place of Death

December 10/11, 969, Constantinople

## Main Role

Emperor (963 - 969)

## 1. Birth – Family background

Nikephoros Phokas was a member of a prominent military lineage from Asia Minor. His grandfather, [Nikephoros Phokas the Old](#) and his father [Bardas](#) both held high offices and were commanders of the Byzantine army in [Asia Minor](#). Their family belonged to the military aristocracy, which was especially powerful in [Cappadocia](#), where the [Phokas family](#) came from.<sup>1</sup> They belonged to that special group of [akritic soldiers](#) (defenders of the frontiers), which had emerged from the continuous wars with the Arabs along the eastern border of the Empire during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries: they were people who remained soldiers for their whole life. They had therefore developed a specific way of thought and behaviour, and they were particularly distinguished for their devotion to family ties, which gave their class a unique strength.

From his mother's side, Nikephoros Phokas was a descendant of another wealthy family from Asia Minor: the family of the [Maleinoi](#). Being a member of this family was even more significant, since it counted among its members the saint [Michael Maleinos](#), whose cult was quite widespread. Nikephoros, a capable and gifted warrior, showed great favour to monks and ascetics. Being deeply religious himself, he tended to approach religion from a popular rather than an intellectual point of view. So, the ties with the army and with religion that he had inherited from his family marked his entire life.

Nikephoros Phokas had a brother, Leo, who had been his closest associate throughout his life. Later on, Leo's son [Bardas](#) also became a very firm supporter of Nikephoros. Nikephoros was married twice. The name of his first wife remains unknown, but from this marriage he had a son, Bardas, who was killed in an accident. After his accession to the throne, Nikephoros married the Empress Theophano, the wife of his predecessor [Romanos II](#).

## 2. Nikephoros Phokas' military career

The activity of Nikephoros Phokas remains unknown, until his appointment by the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos as [strategos](#) of the [theme of Anatolikon](#), in the place of his father Bardas Phokas, in 945. We can assume with certainty that Nikephoros was a soldier at the eastern frontier, fighting the Arabs from a very early age, following in the footsteps of his father and family tradition.

When Constantine VII came to power as a sole emperor in 945, he showed great favour towards the Phokas family. He bestowed upon them the highest offices of the Eastern army, in his effort to diminish the power of the [Kourkouas family](#); the latter had been trusted and favoured by [Romanos I Lekapenos](#), the man who had sidestepped Constantine VII in imperial power. Therefore, Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos promoted Bardas Phokas to a [domestikos ton scholon](#) of the East and Nikephoros to a [strategos](#)



of the theme of Anatolikon in his father's place; Nikephoros' brother Leo became *strategos* of Cappadocia.

Nikephoros remained *strategos* of the theme of Anatolikon, the most important theme of the Asia Minor, for ten years, during which he fought many battles together with his father Bardas. In 954, the emperor honoured him with the titles of **magistros** and *domestikos ton scholon*. His old office of the *strategos* of the theme of Anatolikon passed on to his brother Leo, who in those ten years had had significant success against the Arabs and their most famous general, Sayf-al-Dawla.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after becoming *domestikos ton scholon*, Nikephoros Phokas began his victorious wars. In 957 he conquered the fortress of Adatas. But it was in Crete where he had his biggest military success. The Emperor Romanos II desired, like his father Constantine VII before him in 949, to restore to the Byzantine Empire this large island, which was under Arab rule for almost one and a half century. Nikephoros had a very difficult task ahead of him. In the summer of 960 he besieged Chandax, a siege which lasted nine whole months. Many times it appeared as if the Arabs would be able to repel the Byzantine army, but Nikephoros' perseverance and his abilities prevailed in the end: Chandax and the whole island of Crete fell to Byzantine hands on March 961.<sup>3</sup>

This great war for the conquest of Crete brought fame for Nikephoros Phokas. It made him the hero, who restored this large and rich island to the Empire. Along with a hero's fame, the Constantinopolitan people reserved for Nikephoros a triumphal welcome, which further increased his popularity. However, Phokas' rise in power caused envy and suspicion among the highest Constantinopolitan circles, especially the political officials of the capital, most of all the **parakoimomenos** of Romanos II, the eunuch Joseph Bringas.<sup>4</sup>

After the conquest of Crete, Nikephoros returned to Asia Minor and to his office of the *domestikos ton scholon*. At the beginning of 962 he conquered **Anazarbos**. It was the year of his greatest power and military successes. In the spring of 962 he recaptured, among others, Germanikeia and Doliche. In December of the same year, together with his relative, **John Tzimiskes**, the then *strategos* of the theme of Anatolikon, he besieged Aleppo, the capital of their most dangerous enemy in the East, the Hamdanid Emir Sayf-al Dawla.<sup>5</sup>

On March 15, 963 Emperor Romanos II died and Nikephoros Phokas turned his efforts into seizing power in Constantinople. After conspiring with the Empress and Romanos' widow Theophano, Nikephoros Phokas went to **Constantinople** in April 963 in order to celebrate in the **Hippodrome** yet another triumph of his successful wars, despite Joseph Bringas' opposition. The conflict was evidently between Nikephoros and the Empress Theophano on one side, and the eunuch Joseph Bringas and his followers on the other.

Fearing a possible increase on Nikephoros' power and popularity, Joseph Bringas attempted to arrest him (and possibly to have him killed) in Constantinople. However, with the honour of a hero, Phokas managed to secure the support of the Patriarch Polyeuktos, who helped him seek shelter in the church of **Hagia Sophia**. Joseph Bringas had no choice but to settle with Nikephoros Phokas. Phokas swore allegiance to the sons of Romanos II (the future Basil II and Constantine VIII), and he was allowed to return to Cappadocia.<sup>6</sup>

But Cappadocia and his armies there was the centre of Nikephoros' power and influence: on July 2, 963, in **Caesarea** of Cappadocia, the army proclaimed Nikephoros Phokas emperor, on the initiative of John Tzimiskes. At the same time, he managed to obtain the support of several military officials and also acquire aid from inside the capital's walls; there, his supporters, led by the Empress Theophano, the Patriarch Polyeuktos and the illegitimate son of Romanos I Lekapenos, the **parakoimomenos** Basil, managed to prevail. On August 16, 963, Nikephoros Phokas officially entered the City and he was crowned emperor. His father Bardas took the title of **caesar**, while his brother Leo became **kouropalates**. Nikephoros also gave to **Basil Lekapenos** the title of **proedros**, while John Tzimiskes became *domestikos ton scholon*.<sup>7</sup>

His marriage to the Empress Theophano, which followed soon after, was yet another means to legitimise Nikephoros' authority.<sup>8</sup> At the beginning, the Patriarch Polyeuktos had opposed to this marriage, due to the 'spiritual relation' of the couple, since it was believed that Nikephoros was the godfather of one of Theophano's sons. This obstacle, however, was soon overcome and the Patriarch



agreed to offer his blessing to this marriage, when Nikephoros' father Bardas declared that it was he who was the godfather of Romanos' young son and not Nikephoros himself. Nikephoros, from his part, swore to protect and serve the rights and interests of Thephano's sons, Basil (II) and Constantine (VIII).<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Emperor

Nikephoros Phokas continued his military expeditions even after his coronation, refusing to simply rule from the capital. He envisioned restoring to the Byzantine Empire the lost southern regions of [Cilicia](#) and Syria, while he desired to advance to Palestine, to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Since he himself came from a border region and was a military man both by nature and by family tradition, it was natural to direct all his energy to such expeditions.

In spring 965, the Emperor Nikephoros Phokas launched a new large-scale attack against the Arabs. Already from July 965 he had conquered [Mopsuestia](#) and only a month later he captured [Tarsus](#), one of the most powerful fortresses of the Hamdanids. Along with his advances from the land, in the same year, Nikephoros restored Cyprus to the Empire. This completed the reconquest of the Byzantine dominions in the sea, which had started with the conquest of Crete four years earlier.

All these military successes, secured Nikephoros Phokas' further march to the south. The sea route through Crete and Cyprus gave him the security needed in the land expeditions: the capture of the important fortress of Tarsus provided the starting point for the great campaigns against the largest cities of Syria, Antioch and Aleppo. In 966 Nikephoros Phokas began his campaign against Antioch, leading his armies there but not succeeding in conquering the city. In the same year [Hierapolis](#) also fell to the hands of the Byzantines.<sup>10</sup>

Gaining the glory of the great defeater of the Arabs and great conqueror, who was also, true to his name, victorious, Nikephoros Phokas had in the following year (967) to turn his attention to the problems in the Balkan peninsula. The Byzantine Empire had the obligation of paying tribute to the Bulgarian state, a situation deriving from the peace treaty and marriage agreement during the reign of Romanos I Lekapenos (after the death of Symeon) in 927. Certain of his power, especially after his glorious victories over the Arabs, Nikephoros Phokas arrogantly refused to pay the tribute, expelling the Bulgarian ambassadors from Constantinople. He did not consider Bulgaria a serious threat for the Empire; he believed that the great danger lay in the East. For this reason, he came to an agreement with Sviatoslav, ruler of the Rus, so that he as well, in collaboration with Byzantium, would attack Bulgaria from the north.

Therefore, Phokas continued to have his attention turned towards the eastern border, leaving the situation in the Balkans in the hands of the ambitious ruler of the Rus. This, however, caused even more problems to the Empire, since Sviatoslav quickly conquered Bulgaria and became a threat for Byzantium. Nikephoros was forced to turn to the Bulgars and ask for their help Sviatoslav. The problems that were born from this policy of Phokas were finally solved by his heir to the throne John Tzimiskes.

In the western front, Otto I, who had been crowned Emperor in Rome just a year before Nikephoros' rise to the Constantinopolitan throne, had conquered the majority of the Byzantine dominions in Italy. In order to possess the whole of Italy, Otto suggested that his son Otto (II) should be married to a porphyrogennete (born in the purple) princess of Constantinople. Nikephoros Phokas arrogantly rejected this proposal, and the bishop of Cremona Liutprand, Otto's envoy, was treated without respect and almost as a prisoner. Liutprand's report of his mission to Constantinople paints a very unflattering image of Nikephoros Phokas.<sup>11</sup>

#### 3.1. Aspects of his internal policy

Nikephoros Phokas was the first representative of the military aristocracy of Asia Minor to be crowned Emperor. As a soldier and commander of an army his whole life, he introduced a military mentality to the administration and the government. The *novellae* he issued usually dealt with the problems of military lands and the possessions of the Church, but his policy was clearly in favour of the aristocracy. While all the emperors of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, from Romanos I Lekapenos (920-944) onward, protected the small landowners from the powerful and wealthy landholders with the right of the *protimesis*, Phokas took away this right from the peasants. Thus he essentially deprived them of their ability to regain the land that they have sold in a low price (usually at a period of



famine), as was allowed by the laws of previous emperors. In order to justify his decision, Phokas argued that his predecessors showed excessive favour to the smaller landowners as a social class and thus they violated the rule of equality of all the subjects; that was what he wanted to amend with his novel.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, Nikephoros Phokas raised the minimum of the value of military lands from 4 litters (of gold) to twelve. Thus, he established a change, that had already begun, in the army's character: while in previous years the small landowners could take part in the army, during Phokas' reign, the army comprised increasingly of members of the aristocracy. The soldiers were more heavily armed, the most important being the *kataphraktoi*, whose equipment required large sums of money. These soldiers were more suited for war as it had evolved, since the battles were now mainly fought at the borders and had a regional character, instead of large-scale battles, which required a large army.<sup>13</sup>

It was evident that military expeditions were at the core of Nikephoros II's policy, and as an emperor he still kept the mentality of a military man, maintaining strong ties with his soldiers. He was accused of tolerating the inappropriate behaviour of his soldiers in the expense of civilians, without intervening to bring them to justice. His proposal to honour as martyrs of the Church the soldiers who were killed in battles against the Arabs is indicative of the bond he shared with the army. According to Dagron, Nikephoros II Phokas' policy essentially led to the creation of a military hierarchy, which eventually would override the political one. This evolution was cut short with the murder of Nikephoros and the rise to the throne of John Tzimiskes.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.2. Attitude toward the Church

Nikephoros Phokas' attitude toward the Church is marked by a seeming contradiction, which emanates from his piety and his concept of monasticism. Phokas viewed monks and monastic life very favourably, and this is evident from his friendship with [Athanasios Athonites](#). Having as a model his uncle, Michael Maleinos, Nikephoros had expressed the wish to abandon secular life and become a hermit, something that he had also promised to Athanasios Athonites. Reality forced him to postpone this plan, but he helped his friend Athanasios found a monastery in Mount Athos, which he aspired to turn into a model of monastic life in Athos.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, Nikephoros Phokas' legislation prohibited the increase of monastic fortune, the donations of land to monasteries and the founding of new monasteries.<sup>16</sup> His economic policy was clearly directed toward the needs of the army and his expeditions against the Arabs. However, his policy toward monasteries was mainly guided by his own perception of asceticism, which, in his opinion, was completely incompatible with the accumulation of earthly goods and wealth. Nikephoros firmly reproached avarice in the Church or in monks, whom he expected to be model Christians.<sup>17</sup> Thus he did not support and encourage the foundation of new monasteries, but rather the care and restoration of old temples, monasteries and hospices, and the founding of new cells and cloisters in abandoned regions, where no new land was needed.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the church in Çavouş in of Cappadocia, known as «pidgeon-hous», is also called «[church of Nikephoros Phokas](#)» because of his depiction among the surviving frescoes.

Moreover, Nikephoros requested that the soldiers killed in battle against the infidels should be made martyrs and be honoured by the Church. The Patriarch Polyektos, however, who had already disagreed with the emperor's monastic policy, took this opportunity to oppose to Phokas' demand; he invoked patristic texts, which even imposed penance to the soldier who had killed in war – the prohibition of participation to the Eucharist for a certain amount of time.<sup>19</sup>

### 4. Death

In 968, Nikephoros Phokas once again turned against Syria, in another effort to conquer Antioch. In October, his army laid siege to the city, but his forces were not adequate. That was his last military campaign. He did not participate in the attacks against Syria the following year, nor was he present when his efforts found success, in the conquering of Antioch, on 28 October 969; the *strategoï* in charge were Peter and Michael [Bourtzes](#).<sup>20</sup>

A few months later, on the night of the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 969, Nikephoros II Phokas was murdered in Constantinople.



The conspiracy against him and his murder were planned by the Empress Theophano and John Tzimiskes, who became his heir to the throne. With inside help from members of the imperial court, Tzimiskes and his followers could easily gain access to the [Great Palace](#). Nikephoros was killed in his own rooms, which he had probably built himself, possibly on the south side of a temple inside the palace, the Virgin of the Pharos.

## 5. Treatises

Nikephoros II Phokas is considered to have composed two treatises on war strategy. The first is titled *De velitatione bellica*<sup>21</sup> and was possibly written by his brother Leo Phokas.<sup>22</sup> The second one, titled *Praecepta militaria*<sup>23</sup> is without a doubt the work of Nikephoros Phokas. These treatises present the war in the eastern frontier of the Byzantine Empire, the constant conflicts with the Arabs and the relation between the soldiers and their officers.

## 5. Estimation and evaluation

Even for his contemporaries it was evident that Nikephoros Phokas differed from his predecessors to the imperial throne. His character and reign were compared to Constantine Porphyrogennetos, who was more educated and mild, and who never left Constantinople to take part in military expeditions.

Despite his undeniable military successes, Nikephoros was often viewed by Byzantine chroniclers as a tyrant, mainly because of his ecclesiastic and economic policy. In addition there is often an attempt to justify his murder by his old comrade, John Tzimiskes.<sup>24</sup>

This act of murder, however, and the way it was accomplished, combined also with the fame of the unbeatable general, rendered Nikephoros Phokas a martyr at a later time; in some regions, especially on Mount Athos, he was worshiped as a saint. This same tradition was carried also to the Slavic countries, possibly through Mount Athos.<sup>25</sup>

1. A tradition according to which the Phokas lineage descended from the Roman Flavii, who came to Constantinople as senators following Constantine I, see Bekker, I. (ed.), *Michael Attaliothae, Historia* (Bonnae 1853), p. 218, is probably an effort to present a more noble Constantinopolitan background to Nikephoros Phokas. See *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 3, pp. 1665-1666 [entry Phokas (Φοκᾶς)].
2. Ostrogorsky, G., *Ιστορία του Βυζαντινού Κράτους 2* (Athens 1997), p. 162; Dennis, G. T., *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington D. C. 1985), pp. 138-9.
3. Schlumberger, G., *Un empereur byzantin au Xe siècle: Nicéphore Phocas* (Paris 1925), pp. 25-79.
4. *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 3, pp. 1478-1479 (entry Nikephoros II Phokas).
5. Ostrogorsky, G., *Ιστορία του Βυζαντινού Κράτους 2* (Athens 1997), p. 164.
6. Leo Deacon, *Historia* II. 11, Hase, C.B. (ed.), *Leonis Diaconi Caloensis Historiae libri decem* (Bonn 1828), pp. 32-4.
7. Leo Deacon, *Historia* III. 8, Hase, C.B. (ed.), *Leonis Diaconi Caloensis Historiae libri decem* (Bonn 1828), p. 49.
8. Ostrogorsky, G., *Ιστορία του Βυζαντινού Κράτους 2* (Athens 1997), p. 165.
9. Leo Deacon, *Historia* III. 9, Hase, C.B. (ed.), *Leonis Diaconi Caloensis Historiae libri decem* (Bonn 1828), p. 50.
10. Ostrogorsky, G., *Ιστορία του Βυζαντινού Κράτους 2* (Athens 1997), p. 169-171.
11. Morris, R., "The Two Faces of Nikephoros Phokas", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (1988), pp. 83-4. For the text of the bishop





Liutprand, Liutprand of Cremona, *Relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana ad Nikephorum Phocam*, in P. Chiesa (ed), *Liutprand of Cremona, Opera Omnia* (Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 156, Turnhout 1998), σελ. 188-215.

12. Ostrogorsky, G., "The Peasant's pre-emption right", *Journal of Roman Studies* 37 (1947), pp. 117-126.
13. Dennis, G. T., *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington D. C. 1985), pp. 137-40. McGreer, E., *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Washington D. C. 1995), pp. 214-7.
14. Dagron, G. – Mihaescu, H., *Le traité sur la guérilla (De velitatione) de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas (963-969)* (Paris 1986), pp. 281-5.
15. Morris, R., "The Two Faces of Nikephoros Phokas", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (1988), pp. 102-4.
16. John Skylitzes, Thurn, J. (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae, Synopsis Historiarum* (Berlin-New York 1973), pp. 273-5.
17. Morris, R., "The Two Faces of Nikephoros Phokas", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (1988), p. 110.
18. Thierry, N., "Un portrait de Jean Tzimiskès en Cappadoce", *Travaux et Mémoires* 9 (1985), pp. 480-3.
19. Morris, R., "The Two Faces of Nikephoros Phokas", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (1988), p. 88.
20. John Skylitzes, Thurn, J. (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae, Synopsis Historiarum* (Berlin-New York 1973), pp. 272-3.
21. *De velitatione*, in Dagron, G. – Mihaescu, H. (ed.), *Le traité sur la guérilla (De velitatione) de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas (963-969)* (Paris 1986), pp. 32-135; and under the title "Skirmishing" in Dennis, G. T. (ed.), *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington D. C. 1985), pp. 146-239.
22. Dennis, G. T., *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington D. C. 1985), pp. 139-40.
23. *Praecepta militaria* in McGreer, E. (ed.), *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Dumbarton Oaks Studies 23, Washington D. C. 1995), pp. 12-58.
24. Morris, R., "The Two Faces of Nikephoros Phokas", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (1988), pp. 111-2.
25. Morris, R., "The Two Faces of Nikephoros Phokas", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (1988), pp. 112-3.

---

#### Bibliography :

	<b>Ιωάννης Σκυλίτζης</b> , <i>Σύνοψις Ιστοριών</i> , Thurn, I. (ed.), <i>Ioannis Skylitzae Synopsis Historiarum</i> , Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 5, Berlin – New York 1973
	<b>Ostrogorsky G.</b> , <i>Ιστορία του Βυζαντινού Κράτους</i> , 1-3, Αθήνα 1989, Παναγόπουλος, Ι. (μτφρ.)
	<b>Λέων Διάκονος</b> , <i>Ιστορία</i> , Hase, C.B. (ed.), <i>Leonis Diaconi Caloensis Historiae libri decem et liber de velitatione bellica Nicephori Augusti</i> , Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1828
	<b>Schlumberger G.</b> , <i>Un empereur byzantin au Xe siècle: Nicéphore Phocas</i> , Paris 1925
	<b>Djurić I.</b> , "Porodica Foka", <i>Zbornik Radova Vizantoloskog Instituta</i> , 17, 1976, 191-296
	<i>Περί παραδρομής πολέμου</i> , Dagron, G. – Mihaescu, H. (eds), <i>Le traité sur la guérilla (De velitatione) de</i>



	<i>l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas (963-969)</i> , Paris 1986
	<b>Dennis G.T.</b> , <i>Three Byzantine Military Treatises</i> , Washington D.C. 1985
	<b>Νικηφόρος Β' Φωκάς</b> , <i>Στρατηγική έκθεσις και σύνταξις Νικηφόρου δεσπότη (Praecepta militaria)</i> , E. McGreer (ed.), <i>Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century</i> , <i>Dumbarton Oaks Studies</i> 23, Washington D. C. 1995
	<b>Spatharakis I.</b> , <i>The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts</i> , Leiden 1976, <i>Byzantina Neerlandica</i> 6
	<b>Κόλιας Τ. Γ.</b> , <i>Νικηφόρος Β' Φωκάς (963- 969). Ο στρατηγός αυτοκράτωρ και το μεταρρυθμιστικό του έργο</i> , Αθήνα 1993
	<b>Petit L.</b> , "Office inédit en l' honneur de Nicéphore Phocas", <i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i> , 13, 1904, 398-421
	<b>Morris R.</b> , "The Two Faces of Nikephoros Phokas", <i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i> , 12, 1988, 83-117
	<b>Λάμπρος Σπυρίδων</b> , "Δύο εικόνες Νικηφόρου του Φωκά", <i>Νέος Ελληνομνημόνων</i> , 1, 1904, 61-2
	<b>Grierson P.</b> , <i>Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection</i> , Washington D. C. 1993
	<b>Κωνσταντίνος Πορφυρογέννητος</b> , <i>Περί βασιλείου τάξεως</i> , Reiske, J. (ed.), <i>Constantini Porphyrogeniti imperatoris de cerimoniis aulae Byzantinae libri duo, 1</i> , <i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i> , Bonn 1829
	<b>Liutprand of Cremona</b> , <i>Relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana ad Nikephorum Phocam</i> , P. Chiesa (ed.), <i>Liutprand of Cremona, Opera Omnia</i> , <i>Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis</i> 156, Turnhout 1998
	<b>Kazhdan A.</b> , "Nikephoros II Phocas", Kazhdan, A. (ed.), <i>The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> , 3, New York – Oxford 1991, 1478-1479

Webliography :

	Coinage of Nicephorus II <a href="http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/byz/nicephorus_II/t.html">http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/byz/nicephorus_II/t.html</a>
	Leo the Deacon, excerpts concerning Nikephoros Phokas <a href="http://homepage.mac.com/paulstephenson/trans/leo.html">http://homepage.mac.com/paulstephenson/trans/leo.html</a>
	Liutprand of Cremona: Report of his Mission to Constantinople <a href="http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/liudprand1.html">http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/liudprand1.html</a>
	Nikephorus II. Phokas <a href="http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/n/nikephoros_ii_v_p.shtml">http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/n/nikephoros_ii_v_p.shtml</a>

Glossary :

	<b>caesar</b> In the Roman Empire the title of Caesar was given to the Emperor. From the reign of Diocletian (284-305) on this title was conferred on the young co-emperor. This was also the highest title on the hierarchy of the Byzantine court. In the 8th c. the title of Caesar was usually given to the successor of the throne. In the late 11th c. this office was downgraded and from the 14th c. on it was mainly conferred on foreign princes.
	<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 *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.

#### kataphraktoi

Heavy armored horsemen riding armored horses. They are mentioned in Emperor Maurice's *Strategikon* in the 6th c., but in the following four centuries they are not reported. Nikephoros II Phokas organised again the corps of the kataphraktoi, which he greatly relied on; he describes it thoroughly in his military treatise *Praecepta militaria*.

#### kouropalates

A high-ranking dignity, which from Justinian I was conferred on members of the imperial family and on foreign princes. During the 11th c. it was conferred on several generals, not belonging to the imperial family.

#### magistros

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.

#### novel (novella)

Term meaning ad verbum "new decree" and used since around the 4th century in order to denote the provisions of the emperors as separate from the organized codes. They were written mainly in Greek and used extensively in the Middle Byzantine Era. Since the days of Komnenoi and after, they were replaced by other more specialized terms and they are very rare in the Late Byzantine era

#### parakoimomenos

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.

#### proedros

A high office of the Byzantine court, first known under Nikephoros II Phokas. The responsibilities of the proedros are rather uncertain. In the 11th c. the title was accorded oftenly, but it disappears after the 12th c. As an ecclesiastical office, proedros was equal to a metropolitan and was accorded to the regent metropolitan of a bishopric or a metropolitan see, until the election of a hierarch there.

#### protimesis (preemption)

The right of certain categories of persons to preemption in cases of the sale of property. According to a novel of Romanos I (934), the poor peasants who sold their land when in need, could by right of protimesis buy their land back in no high a price. This right of the small landowners was abolished under Nikephoros II Phokas.

#### strategos ("general")

During the Roman period his duties were mainly political. Office of the Byzantine state's provincial administration. At first the title was given to the military and political administrator of the themes, namely of the big geographic and administrative unities of the Byzantine empire. Gradually the title lost its power and, already in the 11th century, strategoi were turned to simple commanders of military units, responsible for the defence of a region.

## Sources

*De Velitatione*, in Dagron, G. – Mihaescu, H. (ed.), *Le traité sur la guérilla (De velitatione) de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas (963-969)* (Paris 1986), pp. 32-135; also in Dennis, G. T. (ed.), *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington D. C. 1985), pp. 146-239 (under the title "Skirmishing").

*Praecepta militaria*, in McGreer, E. (ed.), *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Dumbarton Oaks Studies 23, Washington D. C. 1995), pp. 12-58.

Liutprand of Cremona, *Relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana ad Nikephorum Phocam*, Chiesa, P. (ed.), *Liutprand of Cremona, Opera Omnia* (Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 156, Turnhout, 1998), pp. 188-215.

Reiske, J.J. (ed.), *Constantini Porphyrogeniti imperatoris de cerimoniis aulae Byzantinae I* (Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1829).

Hase, C.B. (ed.), *Leonis Diaconi Caloensis Historiae libri decem* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1828).

Thurn, J. (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae, Synopsis Historiarum* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, Series Verolinensis 5, Berlin-New York 1973).

Turdeanu, É. (ed.), *Le dit de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas et de son épouse Théophano* (Thessalonique 1976).





Grierson P., *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection* (Washington D. C. <sup>2</sup>1993).

## Quotations

### The tolerance of Nikephoros II Phokas towards the aberrations of his soldiers

Αὕτη ἡ αἰτία καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ τὰ ῥηθήσεσθαι μέλλοντα μισητὸν τοῖς πᾶσι καὶ βδελυκτὸν τὸν Νικηφόρον εἰργάσαντο. πρῶτον μὲν γάρ, ὅτε τὴν ἀρχὴν τὰ κατ' αὐτὸν ἐκινήθη, μυρίαὶ πλημμελείαις χρωμένων τῶν σὺν αὐτῷ στρατιωτῶν ἐπιστροφὴν οὐκ ἐτίθει, λέγων· «οὐδὲν θαυμαστόν, εἰ ἐν τοσούτῳ πλήθει λαοῦ ἀτακτοῦσί τινες.» καὶ αὐθις εἰσελθὼν ἐν τῇ πόλει πολλῶν καὶ διαφανῶν ἰδιωτῶν διαρπαγέντων οὐδεμίαν ἐκδίκησιν ἐποιήσατο, ἀλλὰ παρεβλέπετο τὰς ἀτοπίας, ἐνευωχούμενος ταῖς ἀσελγείαις, αἷς οἱ ἀτακτοῦντες προσκείμενοι κακῶς τοὺς πολίτας διετίθουν, καὶ ταῦτα συνεργήσαντας αὐτῷ πρὸς τῆς βασιλείας ἀνάληψιν οὐ μικρῶς.

Thurn, J. (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae, Synopsis Historiarum* (Berlin-New York 1973), pp. 273-4.

## Chronological Table

**ca 912:** Nikephoros Phokas is born in Cappadocia (?)

**945-955:** *Strategos* of the theme ton Anatolikon

**955:** Magistros; domestikos ton scholon of the East

**957:** Nikephoros Phokas captures the fortress of Adata

**Μάρτιος 961:** After a nine-month siege Crete returns to Byzantine hands

**962:** Successful campaigns in the eastern frontier: capture of the cities Anavarzos, Raban, Germanikeia, Doliche

**March 963:** Death of Emperor Romanos II

**April 963:** Triumph of Nikephoros Phokas in Constantinople. He becomes the most powerful competitor for the imperial throne

**2 July 963:** Nikephoros is proclaimed emperor in Caesarea, Cappadocia

**16 August 963:** Nikephoros is crowned in Constantinople. He marries the Empress Theophano, widow of Romanos II

**965:** Great successes in the East in Mopsouestia, Tarsos, Cyprus

**966:** Siege of Antioch. Transfer of a holy relic (Hagion Keramion, mean. the holy Tile) to Constantinople from Ierapolis

**968:** New siege of Antioch

**night of 10th to 11th of December 969:** The conspirators, led by the future emperor, John Tzimiskes, murder Nikephoros Phokas inside the imperial palace in Constantinople