

= Battle of Arcadiopolis (970) =

The Battle of Arcadiopolis was fought in 970 between a Byzantine army under Bardas Skleros and a Rus ' army , the latter also including allied Bulgarian , Pecheneg and Magyar contingents . In the preceding years , the Rus ' ruler Sviatoslav had conquered Bulgaria , and was now menacing Byzantium as well . The Rus ' force had been advancing through Thrace towards Constantinople when it was met by Skleros ' force . Having fewer men than the Rus ' , Skleros prepared an ambush and attacked the Rus ' army with a portion of his force . The Byzantines then feigned retreat , and succeeded in drawing off the Pecheneg contingent into the ambush , routing it . The remainder of the Rus ' army then panicked and fled , and suffered heavy casualties from the pursuing Byzantines . The battle was important as it bought time for the Byzantine emperor John I Tzimiskes to settle his internal problems and assemble a large expedition , which eventually defeated Sviatoslav the next year .

= = Background = =

In 965 or 966 , a Bulgarian embassy visited the Byzantine emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (r . 963 ? 969) at Constantinople to receive the annual tribute that had been agreed by the two powers as the price of peace in 927 . Phokas , flush and self @-@ confident from a series of victories against the Arabs in the East that had led to the recovery of Crete , Cyprus and Cilicia , refused to comply , and even had the envoys beat up . He followed this up with a show of military strength , by sending a small force to raze a number of Bulgarian border posts in Thrace .

It was a clear declaration of war , but Nikephoros ' forces were largely preoccupied in the East . Thus the emperor turned to the traditional Byzantine expedient of turning one of the peoples living further north , in modern @-@ day Ukraine , against Bulgaria . He sent an ambassador , the patrikios Kalokyros , to Sviatoslav , ruler of the Rus ' with whom the Byzantines had maintained close relations . Sviatoslav enthusiastically responded , and invaded Bulgaria in 967 or 968 in a devastating raid , before returning home to defend his capital against a Pecheneg attack . This forced the Bulgarian tsar , Peter I , to the negotiating table , agreeing to terms favourable to Byzantium . However , this brief sojourn also awakened in Sviatoslav the desire to conquer Bulgaria and establish his own realm there . He returned in force in July or August 969 and conquered the country within a few months .

Nikephoros ' scheme had backfired dramatically : instead of peace , a new and formidable foe had appeared in the Balkans , and a large part of the Bulgarian nobility appeared to side with the Rus ' prince . The emperor , however , was murdered in December 969 , and it fell to his successor , John I Tzimiskes (r . 969 ? 976) , to deal with the Rus ' threat . Sviatoslav now turned his sights on Byzantium , and to John 's entreaties for peace he allegedly answered that the Empire should abandon its European territories to him and withdraw to Asia Minor . Tzimiskes himself was preoccupied with consolidating his position and with countering the unrest of the powerful Phokas clan and its adherents , and delegated the war in the Balkans to his brother @-@ in @-@ law , the Domestic of the Schools Bardas Skleros , and to the eunuch stratopedarches Peter . They were to winter in Thrace and raise an army , whilst sending spies to discover Sviatoslav 's intentions .

At the news of this , a powerful Rus ' force , along with many Bulgarians and a Pecheneg contingent , was sent south over the Balkan Mountains . After sacking the last major Bulgarian stronghold of Philippopolis (modern Plovdiv) , they bypassed the heavily defended city of Adrianople and turned towards Constantinople . The size of the Rus ' army , and whether it comprised the entirety of Sviatoslav 's forces or just a division , is unclear . John Skylitzes , for instance , implies that this was the entire Rus ' army , numbering an incredible 308 @,@ 000 men , but the contemporary Leo the Deacon reports that it was a detachment of " over 30 @,@ 000 men " ; conversely , the Russian Primary Chronicle gives the entire Rus ' army under Sviatoslav at some 30 @,@ 000 , whilst numbering the Rus ' at Arcadiopolis at only 10 @,@ 000 , faced with 100 @,@ 000 Byzantines . It is clear , however , that the Byzantines were considerably outnumbered , and that the Rus ' force at Arcadiopolis included significant numbers of Bulgarians , as well as allied

contingents of Pechenegs and " Turks " (i.e. Magyars) .

= = The battle = =

Skleros then quickly assembled a force of ten to twelve thousand men and set out to meet the Rus ' . The two armies met near Arcadiopolis (modern Lüleburgaz in Turkish Thrace) , some 80 km west of Constantinople . The two primary accounts on the Byzantine side differ on the preliminaries of the battle : Leo the Deacon reports that Skleros sent a scouting detachment ahead under the patrikios John Alakaseus , and then gave battle after only a day , but the later chronicle of Skylitzes reports that for a few days , Skleros with his men remained within the walls of Arcadiopolis as the Rus ' encamped nearby , and refused to come out and meet them in battle despite their repeated challenges for him to do so . According to Skylitzes , the Rus ' quickly became convinced that the imperial army was too afraid to face them ; consequently they roamed about the countryside plundering , neglected their camp defences and spent their nights in heedless revelry .

Skleros eventually set out from the city , and divided his forces into three groups : two divisions were placed in ambush on the wooded sides of the road leading towards the Rus ' camp , while another , probably some 2 @,@ 000 ? 3 @,@ 000 men , was placed under himself (or Alakaseus in Skylitzes ' account) and went forth to attack the Rus ' host . The Byzantine detachment quickly came into contact with the Rus ' army , and charged the Pecheneg contingent . The Byzantines executed a gradual orderly retreat , turning at intervals to charge back at the pursuing Pechenegs , who had thus become separated from the main body of the Rus ' army . This conflict was fierce and bloody , taxing the discipline and endurance of the small Byzantine force . According to Leo the Deacon , at one point one of the Pechenegs charged Bardas himself and delivered a sword blow on his helmet , which was deflected by the metal without doing harm . Bardas ' young brother Constantine came to his rescue , killing the Pecheneg .

When the two opposing forces reached the place of the ambush , Bardas ordered the trumpets blown and the two concealed Byzantine divisions attacked the Pechenegs from the flanks and the rear . Cut off from aid and surrounded , the Pechenegs began to panic and flee . One of their leaders tried to rally his men , but he was attacked by Bardas Skleros himself , who killed him with a single sword @-@ blow that reportedly cut him in two from his head down to the waist , through the Pecheneg 's helmet and cuirass . The loss of the Pecheneg commander turned the battle into a complete rout , and panic spread to the Bulgarian contingent following behind the Pechenegs , which also suffered heavy casualties in the general chaos . The Byzantine casualties in the battle were low (Skylitzes speaks of 25 dead and Leo of 55) although they lost many horses to the Pecheneg arrows , while the losses of the Rus ' force , although certainly lower than Leo 's claimed 20 @,@ 000 , were still significant , probably running into several thousands .

= = Aftermath = =

The Byzantines were unable to exploit this victory or pursue the remnants of the Rus ' army , since Bardas Phokas rose in revolt in Asia Minor . Bardas Skleros and his men were consequently withdrawn to Asia Minor , whilst Sviatoslav restricted his forces to the north of the Balkan Mountains . In the spring of the next year , however , with Phokas ' rebellion subdued , Tzimiskes himself , at the head of his army , advanced north into Bulgaria . The Byzantines took the Bulgarian capital Preslav , capturing the Bulgarian tsar Boris II , and confined the Rus ' in the fortress of Dorostolon (modern Silistra) . After a three @-@ month siege and a series of pitched battles before the city walls , Sviatoslav conceded defeat and abandoned Bulgaria .