



Good day Worthy Knights,

In this part 44, the Battles of Constantine, 3 of 4: Adrianople and Hellespont (Wikipedia)

ADRIANOPOLE

Background

The Battle of Adrianople was fought on July 3, 324. Constantine had, in 316 defeated Licinius at the Battle of Cibalae and conquered from him all the Balkan Peninsula, with the exception of Thrace. A peace had been arranged but the relationship remained uneasy.

By 324 Constantine was ready to renew the conflict and when his army, in pursuit of a raiding Visigothic or possibly Sarmatian force, crossed into Licinius' territory an opportune casus belli was created. The reaction of Licinius to this incursion was overtly hostile and this induced Constantine to go on to the offensive. Constantine invaded Thrace. His army was smaller than that of Licinius, but it contained many battle-hardened veterans and, as he had control of the Illyrian region, the finest quality of new recruits.

The Battle

Licinius encamped his army in a strong position near Adrianople (Hadrianopolis), the major city of inland Thrace. Constantine advanced eastward from Thessalonica until he came to the Hebrus River, on which Adrianople stands, and set up his own camp.

Licinius arranged his battle line, of 200 stades (150m) in length, in a strong position between a height overlooking the town and the confluence of the Hebrus with a tributary. The two armies remained in position for a number of days before battle was finally joined, when Constantine took the initiative by crossing the river against a well-prepared and positioned enemy having superior numbers.

Constantine used a ruse to get his troops across the Hebrus. Having noticed a suitable crossing point where the river narrowed and was overlooked by a wooded hillside, he ordered material and ropes to be conspicuously assembled at another place on the river, well away from his chosen crossing, to give the impression that he intended to build a bridge to cross there.

On the wooded hillside, he secretly assembled 5,000 foot archers and a force of cavalry. He then led his cavalry over the river crossing at the narrows, and fell on the enemy unexpectedly. The surprise attack was a complete success and the remainder of his army then crossed at the same point. With his position on the river outflanked, Licinius' withdrew his forces and took up a defensive position on higher ground. However, this gave Constantine the initiative once more, and his attack was again successful. What followed, in the words of the historian Zosimus, was "a great massacre": Licinius' army, according to Zosimus, received losses of 34,000 dead.

During the onslaught, Constantine directed the guard of his overtly Christian standard, the Labarum, to move it to any part of the field where his troops seemed to be faltering. The appearance of this talisman emboldened his own troops and dismayed those of Licinius. Constantine, who had been slightly wounded in the thigh, halted his attack at sunset and

darkness allowed Licinius and the remains of his force to withdraw to Byzantium, the coast, and the safety of his fleet. The battle was one of the largest of the 4th century. Though Zosimus attributes the success of the Constantinian forces to the courage and martial prowess of Constantine himself, whom he alleges to have led the cavalry in person in the charge which broke Licinius' defences, other contemporary accounts ascribe his success to the discipline of the troops and Constantine's felicitas, his 'good fortune'.

Aftermath

Following the battle at Adrianople, Constantine moved to besiege Byzantium. At this point in the campaign, control of the narrow waters separating Thrace and Asia Minor became of the utmost importance to both emperors. Constantine's son Crispus commanded his navy in a struggle with the larger fleet of Licinius.

HELLESPONT

The Battle of the Hellespont, consisting of two separate naval clashes, was fought in 324 between a Constantinian fleet, led by the eldest son of Constantine I, Crispus; and a larger fleet under Licinius' admiral, Abantus (or Amandus).

Background

Following his defeat at Adrianople, in Thrace, Licinius and his main army fell back to the city of Byzantium. Licinius left a strong garrison in Byzantium but ferried the greater part of his troops across the Bosphorus to the Asian shore. To maintain his force in Byzantium, and to secure his line of communication between Asia Minor and the city, retaining control of the narrow waters separating Thrace from Bithynia and Mysia now became imperative for Licinius.

Constantine, if he wished to cross to Asia in order to destroy Licinius' means of further resistance, had to gain control of the sea crossings. Licinius' main army was on the Bosphorus to cover this crossing point whilst the bulk of his navy was moved to cover the Hellespontine narrows. He also assembled a second military force, under his newly elevated co-emperor Martinian, at Lampsacus on the Asian shore of the Hellespont.

The Battle

While Constantine was directing the siege of Byzantium, Crispus led a force of 80 vessels into the Hellespont. Abantus opposed him with a superior fleet of 200 ships. However, the size of the Licinian forces worked against them within the confined waters of the strait. Crispus was able to use his more compact squadrons to outmanoeuvre his opponent's unwieldy armada and sink many of the Licinian warships.

Abantus then withdrew to the eastern end of the Hellespont to regroup his forces. Crispus augmented his fleet with reinforcements brought in from the Aegean Sea and the two fleets met again on the following day. The second clash was fought near Gallipoli; a storm blew up which, fortuitously for Crispus, wrecked many of the Licinian vessels on the shore. Abantus' ship was sunk and he only managed to save himself by swimming ashore. All but four of the ships of the Licinian fleet were wrecked, sunk, or captured.

Aftermath

This naval victory allowed Constantine to move his army across to Asia Minor, using a fleet of light transports to avoid Martinian's forces. Once Licinius knew of the destruction of his navy he withdrew his forces from Byzantium.

