

= Battle of Solachon =

The Battle of Solachon was fought in 586 CE in northern Mesopotamia between the East Roman (Byzantine) forces , led by Philippicus , and the Sassanid Persians under Kardarigan . The engagement was part of the long and inconclusive Byzantine ? Sassanid War of 572 ? 591 . The Battle of Solachon ended in a major Byzantine victory which improved the Byzantine position in Mesopotamia , but it was not in the end decisive . The war dragged on until 591 , when it ended with a negotiated settlement between Maurice and the Persian shah Khosrau II (r . 590 ? 628) .

In the days before the battle , Philippicus , newly assigned to the Persian front , moved to intercept an anticipated Persian invasion . He chose to deploy his army at Solachon , controlling the various routes of the Mesopotamian plain , and especially access to the main local watering source , the Arzamon river . Kardarigan , confident of victory , advanced against the Byzantines , but they had been warned and were deployed in battle order when Kardarigan reached Solachon . The Persians deployed as well and attacked , gaining the upper hand in the centre , but the Byzantine right wing broke through the Persian left flank . The successful Byzantine wing was thrown into disarray as its men headed off to loot the Persian camp , but Philippicus was able to restore order . Then , while the Byzantine centre was forced to form a shield wall to withstand the Persian pressure , the Byzantine left flank also managed to turn the Persians ' right . Under threat of a double envelopment , the Persian army collapsed and fled , with many dying in the desert of thirst or from water poisoning . Kardarigan himself survived and , with a part of his army , held out against Byzantine attacks on a hillock for several days before the Byzantines withdrew .

= = Background = =

In 572 the Byzantine ruler Justin II (reigned 565 ? 578) refused to renew the annual payments to Sassanid Persia that had been part of the peace agreement concluded by his uncle , Justinian I (r . 527 ? 565) and the Persian shah Khosrau I (r . 531 ? 579) in 562 . This marked the culmination of the progressive deterioration of Byzantine ? Persian relations over the previous years , which manifested itself in diplomatic and military manoeuvring in their geopolitical periphery . Thus the Byzantines initiated contacts with the Central Asian Göktürks for a joint effort against Persia , while the Persians intervened in Yemen against the Christian Axumites , allies of Byzantium . Justin furthermore regarded the annual tribute as an indignity unworthy of Romans , and used the outbreak of a major revolt in Persian Armenia in 571 ? 572 as a pretext for refusing to continue the payments .

Justin 's refusal was tantamount to a declaration of war , the fourth fought between the two great powers of Late Antiquity in the 6th century . After initial Persian successes such as the capture of Dara , the conflict proved inconclusive and became a drawn @-@ out affair , with Byzantine victories followed by Persian successes , intermittent negotiations , and temporary truces . In 582 , Maurice (r . 582 ? 602) , who had served as a general in the war , ascended to the Byzantine throne at Constantinople ; by that time , the Persians had gained the upper hand in Mesopotamia through their capture of Dara in 574 , while the Byzantines prevailed in Arzanene .

= = Initial moves and dispositions = =

Following the failure of another round of peace negotiations , about which little is known , Maurice appointed his brother @-@ in @-@ law Philippicus as the commander @-@ in @-@ chief for the Mesopotamian front (magister militum per Orientem) in 584 . Philippicus raided the region around the major Persian fortress of Nisibis in 584 , while in 585 he raided in Arzanene . The Persian commander , Kardarigan ? " black hawk " , an honorific title rather than a proper name ? responded with an unsuccessful siege of Philippicus ' main base , Monokarton .

In spring 586 Maurice rejected new Persian proposals involving the conclusion of peace in exchange for renewed payments in gold . The contemporary historian Theophylact Simocatta reports that Philippicus ' army was eager to confront the Persians in battle , and the Byzantine

commander marched south from his base at Amida , crossed the Arzamon river (modern Zergan in south @-@ east Turkey and north @-@ east Syria) to its eastern bank and advanced some 15 kilometres (9 @-@ 3 mi) east to the plain of Solachon , where he pitched his camp . This position , south of the fortresses of Mardes and Dara , allowed Philippicus ' army to control the passage of the Arzamon river and forced the Persian army under Kardarigan to advance across the waterless plain , away from their supply routes , before meeting the Byzantine force .

On the Persian side , Kardarigan was also eager to fight and confident of victory . He arranged to be escorted by many camels carrying water for his troops in case the Byzantines refused to engage but continued to block access to the Arzamon , and had allegedly prepared iron bars and chains for the prisoners he would take . His movements , however , were detected when the Byzantines ' Arab foederati captured a few of his men , allowing Philippicus to prepare his forces . This early warning was of particular importance since Kardarigan intended to attack on Sunday , a day of rest for the Christian Byzantines .

= = Battle = =

Both armies appear to have been composed exclusively of cavalry , comprising a mix of lancers and horse @-@ archers , possibly with a few cataphract units included . When Philippicus ' scouts reported the Persians ' approach , he positioned his men on elevated ground facing the direction from which the Persian army advanced , with his left flank protected by the foothills of Mount Izalas . The Byzantines appear to have been arranged in a single battle line with three divisions . The left division was commanded by Eiliphredas , the dux of Phoenice Libanensis , and included a Hunnic contingent of horse @-@ archers under Apsich . The centre was commanded by the general Heraclius the Elder , later Exarch of Africa and father of Emperor Heraclius (r . 610 ? 641) , while the right wing was commanded by the taxiarchos Vitalius . This arrangement was also adopted by the Persians as soon as they came into view of the Byzantine army . On the Persian side , the right division was under Mebodes , the centre under Kardarigan himself , and the left wing under Kardarigan 's nephew , Aphraates . Unlike the Persian general , Philippicus remained with a small force at some distance behind the main battle line , directing the battle .

After a short halt to leave their baggage train behind and form a battle line the Persian army quickly advanced on the Byzantines , shooting arrows as they approached . The Byzantines responded in kind and then sallied forth to meet the oncoming enemy . On the Byzantine right Vitalius was quickly victorious , his heavy cavalry breaking through the Persian flank and pushing his opponents to the left behind their own main line . At this point , however , disaster threatened as many of Vitalius ' troopers broke formation and headed towards the enemy camp , intending to loot it . Philippicus , however , saw what had happened and reacted quickly . He gave his distinctive helmet to one of his bodyguards , Theodore Ilbinus , and sent him to rally the cavalry on pain of punishment by the army commander himself . The ruse worked : the men recognized the helmet and returned to order just in time to stop the Persians , who had regrouped in the centre and were pushing the numerically inferior Byzantines back .

To counter this , Philippicus ordered the men of the central division to dismount and form a shield @-@ wall with their lances projecting from it (the fulcum formation) . It is not clear what happened next , but apparently the Byzantine archers shot at the Persians ' horses , breaking their momentum . At the same time , the Byzantine left managed to launch a successful counter @-@ thrust which drove back the opposing Persian right in disarray . Soon the Persian right broke and fled , pursued by the Byzantines . With both wings having disintegrated , the Persian centre was now subjected to an attack from the reformed Byzantine right , which drove them towards the area once occupied by the Persian right . Outnumbered and attacked from several sides , the Persians soon began to break and flee .

The defeated army suffered greatly , not only from the Byzantine pursuit , but also due to lack of water : before the battle , Kardarigan had ordered the water supplies poured to the ground , trying to make his men fight harder to break through the Byzantine army and reach the Arzamon . In addition , the surviving Persians were refused entry into Dara since , according to Simocatta , Persian

custom forbade entrance to fugitives . Simocatta also narrates that many Persians died of thirst or from water poisoning when they drank too much water from wells after their ordeal . Kardarigan himself had managed to find refuge on a nearby hilltop with a small detachment and withstood several Byzantine attacks . Finally , after three or four days , the Byzantines , not aware that the enemy commander was there , abandoned the effort . Kardarigan thus escaped , although his men suffered further casualties in the process , up to a thousand according to Simocatta , from Byzantine patrols .

= = Aftermath = =

Following the battle Philippicus rewarded the soldiers who had distinguished themselves and divided the spoils of the defeated Persians among them . He then proceeded to invade Arzanene again . However , his attempt to capture the fortress of Chlomarion was thwarted when Kardarigan arrived with reinforcements . The Byzantine army retreated to the fortress of Aphumon , fighting rear @-@ guard actions with the shadowing Persians .

The victory of Solachon allowed the Byzantines to regain the upper hand in the region of the Tur Abdin and , in its aftermath , they began to re @-@ establish their control over the region around Dara . The war continued for a few years without a decision until the revolt of Bahram Chobin caused the rightful Persian shah , Khosrau II (r . 590 ? 628) , to find refuge in Byzantine territory . A joint expedition restored him to his throne and a peace treaty was concluded in 591 that left most of Armenia in Byzantine hands .