

= Battle of Constantinople (922) =

The Battle of Constantinople was fought in June 922 at the outskirts of the capital of the Byzantine Empire , Constantinople , between the forces of the First Bulgarian Empire and the Byzantines during the Byzantine ? Bulgarian war of 913 ? 927 . In the summer the Byzantine Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos sent troops under the commander Saktikios to repel another Bulgarian raid at the outskirts of the Byzantine capital . The Byzantines stormed the Bulgarian camp but were defeated when they confronted the main Bulgarian forces . During his flight from the battlefield Saktikios was mortally wounded and died the following night .

The Bulgarians , who by 922 were in control of most of the Balkans , continued to ravage the Byzantine countryside virtually unopposed . However , they lacked the maritime power to conduct a successful siege of Constantinople . The subsequent attempts to negotiate a Bulgarian ? Arab alliance for a joint assault of Constantinople were discovered by the Byzantines and successfully countered . The strategic situation in the Balkans remained unchanged until both sides signed a peace treaty in 927 , which recognized the imperial title of the Bulgarian monarchs and the complete independence of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as an autocephalous Patriarchate .

The primary sources for the battle are the continuation of George Hamartolos ' Chronicle and John Skylitzes ' Synopsis of Histories .

= = Background = =

During his short reign the Byzantine emperor Alexander (r . 912 ? 913) provoked a conflict with the Bulgarian monarch Simeon I (r . 893 ? 927) . Simeon I , who had long harboured ambitions to claim an imperial title for himself , took the opportunity to wage war . With the Byzantine Empire in disarray following Alexander 's death in June 913 , the Bulgarians reached Constantinople unopposed and forced the regency of the infant Constantine VII (r . 913 ? 959) to recognize Simeon I as emperor (in Bulgarian , Tsar) . Following a palace coup in 914 , the new Byzantine regency revoked the concessions to the Bulgarians and summoned the whole army , including the troops in Asia Minor , to deal with the Bulgarian threat once and all . In the decisive battle of Achelous in 917 the Byzantine forces were completely annihilated , leaving the Bulgarians in charge of the Balkans . Their annual campaigns reached the walls of Constantinople and the Isthmus of Corinth . All subsequent attempts to confront the Bulgarian army at Katasyrtai , Aquae Calidae and Pegae ended in defeat .

Despite his military supremacy over land , Simeon I was aware that he needed naval assistance in order to seize Constantinople . In 922 he clandestinely sent envoys to the Fatimid caliph Ubayd Allah al @-@ Mahdi Billah in Mahdia to negotiate the assistance of the powerful Arab navy . Simeon I proposed to divide equally all spoils ; the Bulgarians were to keep Constantinople and the Fatimids would gain the Byzantine territories in Sicily and South Italy .

= = The battle = =

To distract the Byzantine attention from the secret negotiations with the Arabs , in the summer of 922 the Bulgarians launched a campaign in Eastern Thrace . They captured and garrisoned a number of fortified towns in the region , including Bizye . In June they reached the outskirts of Constantinople and burned the Palace of Theodora , situated on the shores of the Golden Horn .

In response , emperor Romanos I Lekapenos (r . 920 ? 944) summoned the commanders of the tagmata on a feast and urged them to confront the Bulgarians . The following day one of them , Saktikios , led the assault against the Bulgarians . While most of the Bulgarian soldiers were dispersed to loot the countryside , the Byzantines attacked the Bulgarian camp and slaughtered the few defenders left there . When the main Bulgarian forces were informed about the attack , they headed back to the camp to engage the opponents . In the ensuing heavy struggle the Bulgarians prevailed and forced the Byzantines to flee despite the personal courage of Saktikios , who the Byzantine chroniclers claim to have " killed many " . During the flight , the horse of Saktikios got

stuck in the mud of a river and the Byzantine commander was wounded in the seat and the thigh . His soldiers managed to free the horse from the mud and to bring him to the Blachernae alive . Saktikios was laid in the Church of St. Mary of Blachernae , where he died the following night .

= = Aftermath = =

After the victory Simeon I sent letters to the Ecumenical Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos and Romanos ' co @-@ emperor Constantine VII to propose peace negotiations . However , his intention was to prolong the negotiations until the return of his envoys to the Fatimids . While Simeon I and Nicholas Mystikos exchanged letters the military actions continued . In a few weeks the Bulgarian army captured Adrianople , the most important city in Byzantine Thrace . The fall of Adrianople raised fears in Constantinople that a Bulgarian assault of the city was imminent . The Byzantines tried to intimidate Simeon I by threatening to incite the Magyars , the Pechenegs and Kievan Rus ' to attack Bulgaria from the north @-@ east , as they had done in the war of 894 ? 896 . Simeon I knew that these were empty words because the Byzantine Empire was in no position to carry out these threats .

In the meantime , the Bulgarian envoys received a warm welcome by al @-@ Mahdi . The Fatimid caliph accepted the Bulgarian terms and sent his own emissaries to Simeon I. However , on the way back their ship was captured by the Byzantines , who managed to outbid the Bulgarians and distract a Fatimid attack . The Bulgarians remained in control of most of the Balkans , annexing Byzantium 's ally Serbia in 924 , but without naval support were unable to launch a decisive attack on Constantinople . The war continued until the death of Simeon I in 927 , when his son Peter I (r . 927 ? 969) concluded a peace treaty with the Byzantines , who recognized the imperial title of the Bulgarian monarchs and the complete independence of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as an autocephalous Patriarchate in return for most of Simeon I 's conquests in Thrace after 917 .