

= Bessas ( general ) =

Bessas ( Greek : ?????? , before 480 ? after 554 ) was an East Roman ( Byzantine ) general of Gothic origin from Thrace , primarily known for his career in the wars of Justinian I ( reigned 527 ? 565 ) . He distinguished himself against the Sassanid Persians in the Iberian War and under the command of Belisarius in the Gothic War , but after Belisarius ' departure from Italy he failed to confront the resurgent Goths and was largely responsible for the loss of Rome in 546 . Returning east in disgrace , despite his advanced age he was appointed as commander in the Lazic War . There he redeemed himself with the recapture of Petra , but his subsequent idleness led Justinian to dismiss him and exile him to Abasgia .

= = Origin = =

According to the contemporary historian Procopius of Caesarea , Bessas was born in the 470s and hailed from a noble Gothic family long established in Thrace , belonging to those Goths who had not followed Theodoric the Great when he left in 488 to invade Italy , then held by Odoacer . Procopius remarks on his fluency in Gothic , but another contemporary writer , Jordanes , claims that he hailed from the settlement of Castra Martis , comprising Sarmatians , Cemandrians and certain of the Huns ( *Getica* 265 ) . This evidence has been variously interpreted , with most modern commentators leaning towards a Gothic identity . Nevertheless , according to Patrick Amory , it is impossible from the sources at hand to draw any definite conclusion about his ethnicity . Amory maintains that Bessas was a typical example of the " blurry ethnographic identity " evidenced in 6th @-@ century Balkan populations , especially among the military .

= = Career in the east = =

Very little is known of Bessas ' early life and career : he joined the imperial army in his youth and according to Procopius was already " experienced in war " by 503 , when the Anastasian War with the Sassanid Persians broke out . He took part in the war as an officer , but nothing is known of his service there . On the other hand , he is probably to be identified with a comes of the same name who was addressed in a letter of the bishop Jacob of Serugh ( d . 521 ) . If this identification is valid , then Bessas was a ( probably moderate ) Monophysite .

Bessas reappears in 531 , during the Iberian War against Persia , when he was appointed dux Mesopotamiae , with Martyropolis as his base . In this capacity , Bessas led 500 cavalry against the Persian force guarding the same frontier sector , comprising 700 infantry and cavalry under the generals Gadar and Yazdgerd . The Byzantines engaged the Persians in battle on the banks of the Tigris and routed them , killing Gadar and taking Yazdgerd captive . Bessas then raided the province of Arzanene and returned to Martyropolis . In retaliation for this Byzantine success , the Persian shah Kavadh I sent against Martyropolis a large army commanded by three senior generals , Bawi , Mihr @-@ Mihroe and Chanaranges . The Persians besieged the city through the autumn , digging trenches and mines , but the garrison , under Bessas and Bouzes , held firm . Finally , the approach of winter , the arrival of large Byzantine forces at nearby Amida , and the news of the death of Kavadh forced the Persian commanders to raise the siege ( in November or December ) . Soon after their withdrawal , a force of Sabir Huns , who the Persians had hired as mercenaries , invaded Roman territory and raided as far as Antioch , but Bessas caught one of their raiding parties and destroyed it , capturing 500 horses and much booty .

= = Actions in Italy = =

In 535 , Bessas was appointed as one of Belisarius ' lieutenants ( along with Constantine and Peranius ) in the expedition against the Ostrogothic kingdom of Italy . He accompanied Belisarius in the early stages of the campaign , from the recovery of Sicily to the siege of Naples , and was present at the latter 's fall in November 536 . From there the Byzantine army advanced on Rome ,

which it captured without a fight . Belisarius sent Constantine and Bessas to capture various outlying towns , but when he learned that the new Gothic king , Witiges , was marching on Rome , he recalled them . Bessas tarried for a while near the town of Narni , which controlled the direct route from the Gothic capital , Ravenna , over the Apennines to Rome , and there met and defeated the Gothic vanguard in a skirmish .

During the year @-@ long siege of Rome by the Goths , Bessas commanded the troops at the Porta Praenestina gate and distinguished himself in a number of skirmishes . Nothing is known of his role in the subsequent events until 540 , except that it was probably at about this time that he was raised to the rank of patricius . In early 538 , Bessas had protected Belisarius when the general Constantine tried to kill him during a dispute , but by 540 , when Belisarius was preparing to enter Ravenna under pretense of accepting the Gothic offer to become Emperor of the West , he clearly felt that Bessas could not be trusted , and sent him , along with other troublemaking generals such as John and Narses , to occupy remote locations in Italy .

Following the departure of Belisarius in mid @-@ 540 , Bessas remained in Italy . Justinian did not appoint an overall commander to replace Belisarius , and as a result the various Byzantine generals left in Italy failed to co @-@ ordinate their actions . Instead of subduing the last remnants of the Ostrogoths in northern Italy , they retreated to the safety of various fortified cities , allowing the Goths to gather around a new leader , Ildibad . Ildibad marched on Treviso and routed a Byzantine force under Vitalius , whereupon Bessas advanced with his troops to Piacenza . In late 541 , after Totila had become king of the Goths , Bessas and the other Byzantine commanders assembled in Ravenna to co @-@ ordinate their efforts , but the imperial troops were repulsed from Verona and defeated at Faventia by Totila 's Goths . The Goths then invaded Tuscany and threatened Florence , held by the general Justin . Bessas , along with John and Cyprian , marched to Justin 's aid . The Goths retreated before the Byzantine reinforcements , but as the latter pursued , the Goths fell upon them and drove them to flight . After this new defeat the Byzantine commanders dispersed again to various cities and abandoned each other to his fate . Bessas withdrew with his forces to Spoleto .

Nothing is known of his activities from then until early 545 , by which time he was the garrison commander of Rome . Along with the general Conon he was responsible for the city 's defence during the siege by Totila in 546 . During the siege he restricted himself to passive defence , refusing to sally forth from the walls even when Belisarius , who had returned from the east and landed with reinforcements at the nearby Portus Romanus , ordered him to do so . As a result , Belisarius ' attempts to succour the beleaguered city failed . Procopius heavily criticizes Bessas for his conduct during the siege . He neglected of the civilian population of the city and enriched himself by selling the starving populace the grain he had hoarded at exorbitant prices . The civilians were so exhausted by famine that when he finally allowed those who wanted to leave the city to do so , many simply died on the wayside , while others were killed by the Goths . Finally , he proved negligent in the conduct of the defence , and allowed security measures to grow lax : guards slept at their posts , and patrols were discontinued . This allowed four Isaurian soldiers to contact Totila , and on 17 December 546 , the city was betrayed to the Goths . Bessas managed to escape with the greater part of the garrison , but the treasure that he had amassed was left behind for the Goths to enjoy . Following his dismal performance in Italy , Bessas was apparently recalled to Constantinople .

= = Return to the eastern front and command in Lazica = =

Bessas re @-@ appears in 550 , following the failure of a large Byzantine army under the magister militum per Armeniam Dagisthaeus to capture the strategic fortress of Petra in the ongoing war with the Persians over Lazica ( western Georgia ) . To general surprise ? and considerable criticism , in view of his advanced age and failure at Rome ? Justinian named Bessas as Dagisthaeus ' successor and entrusted him with the conduct of the war in Lazica .

Bessas first sent an expeditionary force to suppress a rebellion among the Abasgians , who neighboured Lazica to the north . The expedition , under John Guzes , was successful , and the Abasgian leader Opsites was forced to flee across the Caucasus to the Sabir Huns . In spring 551 ,

after a long siege and thanks largely to his own perseverance and bravery , the Byzantines and their Sabir allies ( some 6 @, @ 000 troops ) captured Petra . A few Persians continued to resist from the citadel , but Bessas ordered it torched . Following his victory , he ordered the city walls razed to the ground .

If the capture of Petra redeemed Bessas in the eyes of his contemporaries , his subsequent actions tarnished it again : instead of following up his success and capture the mountain passes connecting Lazica with the Persian province of Iberia , he retired west to the Roman provinces of Pontica and busied himself with its administration . This inactivity allowed the Persians under Mihr @-@ Mihroe to consolidate Persian control over the eastern part of Lazica . The Byzantine forces in Lazica withdrew west to the mouth of the Phasis , while the Lazi , including their king Gubazes and his family , sought refuge in the mountains . Despite enduring harsh conditions in the winter of 551 ? 552 , Gubazes rejected the peace offers conveyed by envoys from Mihr @-@ Mihroe . In 552 , the Persians received substantial reinforcements , but their attacks on the fortresses held by the Byzantines and the Lazi were repulsed .

Bessas reappears in the campaign of 554 , when he was appointed joint commander in Lazica with Martin , Bouzes and Justin . Gubazes , though , soon protested to Justinian about the incompetence of the Byzantine generals . Bessas was dismissed , his property was confiscated , and he was sent in exile among the Abasgians . Nothing more is known about him thereafter .