

= Michael Lachanodrakon =

Michael Lachanodrakon (Greek : ?????? ?????????????? ; died 20 July 792) was a distinguished Byzantine general and fanatical supporter of Byzantine Iconoclasm under Emperor Constantine V (r . 741 ? 775) . As a result of his iconoclast zeal , in 766 he rose to high office as governor of the Thracesian Theme , and instigated a series of repressive measures against iconophile practices , particularly targeting the monasteries . A talented general , he also led a series of campaigns against the Arabs of the Abbasid Caliphate before being dismissed from office in about 782 . Restored to imperial favour in 790 , he fell at the Battle of Marcellae against the Bulgars in 792 .

= = Persecution of the iconophiles = =

Nothing is known of Lachanodrakon 's origins and early life . He receives a very negative treatment in the historical sources , which were written after the final defeat of Byzantine Iconoclasm ; some refer to him solely as ho Drakon (? ?????? , " the Dragon " , alluding to his surname and the Biblical Beast) . Their profoundly iconophile perspective means that reports of his actions , especially those relating to the suppression of icon worship , are potentially untrustworthy .

At the Council of Hieria in 754 , Constantine V had declared the adoration of icons to be a heresy , and had thereby elevated iconoclasm to official imperial policy . No persecution of iconophiles was launched at first , but iconophile resistance grew , until from 765 on , Constantine began persecuting iconophiles , and especially monks . The discovery of a wide @-@ ranging iconophile plot against him involving some of the highest civil and military officials of the state in 766 provoked an extreme reaction . Patriarch Constantine II and other officials were deposed , jailed , publicly humiliated , and finally executed , replaced by new , uncompromisingly iconoclast officials . In addition , the veneration of sacred relics and prayers to the saints and the Virgin Mary were condemned .

By 763 or 764 , according to the iconophile Life of St Stephen the Younger hagiography , Lachanodrakon had already distinguished himself by his iconoclast fervour . On the emperor 's orders , he led a group of soldiers on an invasion of the Pelekete monastery on the Propontis , where he arrested 38 monks and subjected the remainder to various tortures and mutilations . After burning down the monastery , he took the 38 captives to Ephesus , where they were executed . In 766 / 767 , as part of the emperor 's reshuffle of the senior echelons of the Byzantine Empire , Lachanodrakon was rewarded with the important post of strategos (military governor) of the Thracesian Theme , and given the rank of patrikios and imperial protospatharios according to his seal . He soon began a harsh repression of the monasteries and iconophiles . According to Theophanes the Confessor , in 769 / 770 he summoned the monks and nuns of his theme to Ephesus , gathered them in the city 's tzykanisterion and forced them to marry , threatening them with blinding and exile to Cyprus if they refused . Although many resisted and " became martyrs " in Theophanes 's words , many complied . Later reports of exiled monks in Cyprus becoming Arab captives seem to partly corroborate this story . Theophanes reports further that in 771 / 772 , Lachanodrakon dissolved all monasteries in the theme , confiscated and expropriated their property , and sent the proceeds to the emperor , who replied with a letter thanking him for his zeal . Lachanodrakon allegedly had relics , holy scriptures , and monks ' beards set on fire , killed or tortured those who venerated relics , and finally prohibited the tonsure . Although highly embellished , these reports probably reflect actual events . At any rate , by 772 , according to historian Warren Treadgold , Lachanodrakon seems to have succeeded in " eradicating monasticism within his theme " .

= = Military activities = =

Lachanodrakon was also a capable general , winning fame for his campaigns against the Abbasids on the Byzantine Empire 's eastern frontier . During the reign of Constantine V 's son Leo IV (r . 775 ? 780) he seems to have been the most prominent military commander , repeatedly leading expeditions comprising troops from several themes against the Arabs .

The first such expedition occurred in 778 when , preempting an anticipated Arab raid , Lachanodrakon led a large army against Germanikeia . Although the city did not fall (Theophanes claims that the Arab commander bribed Lachanodrakon) , the Byzantine army defeated a relief force , plundered the region , and took many captives , mostly Jacobites , who were then resettled in Thrace . In 780 , Lachanodrakon ambushed and defeated an Arab invasion in the Armeniac Theme , killing the brother of the Arab commander Thumama ibn al @-@ Walid . The Arab historian al @-@ Tabari records that in 781 Lachanodrakon forced another Arab invasion , under ' Abd al @-@ Kabir , to withdraw without battle , although Theophanes ascribes the success to the sakellarios John . In 782 , however , he was defeated by the Arab general al @-@ Barmaqi during a large @-@ scale invasion led by the future caliph Harun al @-@ Rashid (r . 786 ? 809) , losing some 15 @ , @ 000 men according to Theophanes . In the aftermath of this defeat , and likely because of his iconoclast past , he was apparently removed from his command by the iconophile empress @-@ regent Irene of Athens .

Lachanodrakon reappears in 790 , when the young emperor Constantine VI (r . 780 ? 797) conspired to overturn the tutelage of Irene . The general was sent by Constantine to the Armeniac Theme to secure the allegiance of its soldiers . Constantine succeeded in toppling his mother in December 790 ; it was probably then that Lachanodrakon was rewarded with the supreme non @-@ imperial title , that of magistros . According to the account of Theophanes , he participated in the imperial campaign against the Bulgars in 792 that led to the disastrous defeat at the Battle of Marcellae on 20 July , where he was killed . The history of John Skylitzes records his death in the Battle of Versinikia , again against the Bulgars , in 813 , but this is clearly an error .