

= Battle of Akroinon =

The Battle of Akroinon was fought at Akroinon or Akroinos (near modern Afyon) in Phrygia , on the western edge of the Anatolian plateau , in 740 between an Umayyad Arab army and the Byzantine forces . The Arabs had been conducting regular raids into Anatolia for the past century , and the 740 expedition was the largest in recent decades , consisting of three separate divisions . One division , 20 @, @ 000 strong under Abdallah al @-@ Battal and al @-@ Malik ibn Shu 'aib , was confronted at Akroinon by the Byzantines under the command of Emperor Leo III the Isaurian (r . 717 ? 741) and his son , the future Constantine V (r . 741 ? 775) . The battle resulted in a decisive Byzantine victory . Coupled with the Umayyad Caliphate 's troubles on other fronts and the internal instability before and after the Abbasid Revolt , this put an end to major Arab incursions into Anatolia for three decades .

= = Background = =

Since the beginning of the Muslim conquests , the Byzantine Empire , as the largest , richest and militarily strongest state bordering the expanding Caliphate , had been the Muslims ' primary enemy . Following the disastrous Battle of Sebastopolis , the Byzantines had largely confined themselves to a strategy of passive defence , while the Muslim armies regularly launched raids into Byzantine @-@ held Anatolia . Following their failure to capture the Byzantine capital , Constantinople , in 717 ? 718 , the Umayyads for a time diverted their attention elsewhere . From 720 / 721 , however , they resumed these expeditions in a regular pattern : each summer one or two campaigns (pl. ?aw? 'if , sing. ?? 'ifa) would be launched , sometimes accompanied by a naval attack and sometimes followed by winter expeditions (shaw?t?) . These were no longer aimed at permanent conquest but rather large @-@ scale raids , plundering and devastating the countryside and only occasionally attacking forts or major settlements . The raids of this period were also largely confined to the central Anatolian plateau (chiefly its eastern half , Cappadocia) , and only rarely reached the peripheral coastlands .

Under the more aggressive Caliph Hisham ibn Abd al @-@ Malik (r . 723 ? 743) , the Arab raids became more large @-@ scale affairs and were led by some of the Caliphate 's most capable generals , including princes of the Umayyad dynasty , such as Maslama ibn Abd al @-@ Malik or Hisham 's own sons Mu 'awiyah , Maslama and Sulayman . Gradually , however , the Muslim successes became fewer , especially as their resources were drawn into the mounting conflict with the Khazars in the Caucasus . The raids continued , but the Arab and Byzantine chroniclers mention fewer successful captures of forts or towns . Nevertheless , in 737 a major victory over the Khazars allowed the Arabs to shift their focus and intensify their campaigns against Byzantium . Thus in 738 and 739 Maslamah ibn Hisham led successful raids , including the capture of the town of Ancyra . For the year 740 , Hisham assembled the largest expedition of his reign , placing it under his son Sulayman .

= = Battle = =

According to the chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor , the invading Umayyad force totalled 90 @, @ 000 men . 10 @, @ 000 lightly armed men under al @-@ Ghamr ibn Yazid were sent to raid the western coastlands , followed by 20 @, @ 000 under Abdallah al @-@ Battal and al @-@ Malik ibn Su 'aib who marched towards Akroinon , while the main force of some 60 @, @ 000 (this last number is certainly much inflated) , under Sulayman ibn Hisham , raided Cappadocia .

The Emperor Leo confronted the second force at Akroinon . Details of the battle are not known , but the Emperor secured a crushing victory : both Arab commanders fell , as well as the larger part of their army , some 13 @, @ 200 men . The rest of the Arab troops managed to conduct an orderly retreat to Synnada , where they joined Sulayman . The other two Arab forces devastated the countryside unopposed , but failed to take any towns or forts . The Arab invasion army also suffered from severe hunger and lack of supplies before returning to Syria , while the 10th @-@ century Arab

Christian historian Agapius records that the Byzantines took 20 000 prisoners from the invading forces .

= = Effect and aftermath = =

Akroinon was a major success for the Byzantines , as it was the first large scale victory they had scored in a pitched battle against the Arabs . Seeing it as evidence of God 's renewed favour , the victory also served to strengthen Leo 's belief in the policy of iconoclasm that he had adopted some years before . In the immediate aftermath , this success opened up the way for a more aggressive stance by the Byzantines , who in 741 attacked the major Arab base of Melitene . In 742 and 743 , the Umayyads were able to exploit a civil war between Constantine V and Artabasdos and raid into Anatolia with relative impunity , but the Arab sources do not report any major achievements .

The Arab defeat at Akroinon has traditionally been seen as a " decisive " battle and a " turning point " of the Arab ? Byzantine wars , causing the slackening of Arab pressure on Byzantium . Other historians however , from the early 20th century Syriac scholar E.W. Brooks to more recent ones such as Walter Kaegi and Ralph Johannes Lilie , have challenged this view , attributing the reduced Arab threat after Akroinon to the fact that it coincided with other heavy reversals on the most remote provinces of the Caliphate , which exhausted its overextended military resources , as well as with internal turmoil due to civil wars and the Abbasid Revolution . As a result , the Arab attacks against the Byzantine Empire in the 740s were rather ineffectual and soon ceased completely . Indeed , Constantine V was able to take advantage of the Umayyad Caliphate 's collapse to launch a series of expeditions into Syria and secure a Byzantine ascendancy on the eastern frontier which lasted until the 770s .

In the Muslim world , the memory of the defeated Arab commander , Abdallah al Battal , was preserved , and he became one of the greatest heroes of Arab and later Turkish epic poetry as Sayyid Battal Ghazi .