

= Basiliscus =

Basiliscus (Latin : Flavius Basiliscus Augustus ; Greek : Βασίλειος) (d . 476 / 477) was Byzantine Emperor from 475 to 476 . A member of the House of Leo , he came to power when Emperor Zeno had been forced out of Constantinople by a revolt .

Basiliscus was the brother of Empress Aelia Verina , who was the wife of Emperor Leo I (457 ? 474) . His relationship with the Emperor allowed him to pursue a military career that , after minor initial successes , ended in 468 , when he led the disastrous Roman invasion of Vandal Africa , in one of the largest military operations of Late Antiquity .

Basiliscus succeeded in seizing power in 475 , exploiting the unpopularity of Emperor Zeno , the " barbarian " successor to Leo , and a plot organised by Verina that had caused Zeno to flee Constantinople . However , during his short rule , Basiliscus alienated the fundamental support of the Church and the people of Constantinople , promoting the Miaphysite christological position in opposition to the Chalcedonian faith . Also , his policy of securing his power through the appointment of loyal men to key roles antagonised many important figures in the imperial court , including his sister Verina . So , when Zeno tried to regain his empire , he found virtually no opposition , triumphantly entering Constantinople , and capturing and killing Basiliscus and his family .

The struggle between Basiliscus and Zeno impeded the Eastern Roman Empire 's ability to intervene in the fall of the Western Roman Empire , which happened in early September 476 . When the chieftain of the Heruli , Odoacer , deposed Western Emperor Romulus Augustus , sending the imperial regalia to Constantinople , Zeno had just regained his throne , and he could only appoint Odoacer dux of Italy , thereby ending the Western Roman Empire .

= = Origins and early career = =

Likely of Balkan origin , Basiliscus was the brother of Aelia Verina , wife of Leo I. It has been argued that Basiliscus was uncle to the chieftain of the Heruli , Odoacer . This link is based on the interpretation of a fragment by John of Antioch (209 @. @ 1) , which states that Odoacer and Armatus , Basiliscus ' nephew , were brothers . However , not all scholars accept this interpretation , since sources do not say anything about the foreign origin of Basiliscus . It is known that Basiliscus had a wife , Zenonis , and at least one son , Marcus .

Basiliscus ' military career started under Leo I. The Emperor conferred upon his brother @-@ in @-@ law the dignities of dux , or commander @-@ in @-@ chief , in Thrace . In this country Basiliscus led a successful military campaign against the Bulgars in 463 . He succeeded Rusticius as magister militum per Thracias (464) , and had several successes against the Goths and Huns (466 or 467) .

Basiliscus 's value rose in Leo 's consideration . Verina 's intercession in favour of her brother helped Basiliscus ' military and political career , with the conferral of the consulship in 465 and possibly of the rank of patricius . However , his rise was soon to meet a serious reversal .

= = Disastrous expedition against the Vandals = =

In 468 , Leo chose Basiliscus as leader of the famous military expedition against Carthage . The invasion of the kingdom of the Vandals was one of the greatest military undertakings recorded in the annals of history , a combined amphibious operation with over ten thousand ships and one hundred thousand soldiers . The purpose of the operation was to punish the Vandal king Geiseric for the sacking of Rome in 455 , in which the former capital of the Western Roman Empire had been overwhelmed , and the Empress Licinia Eudoxia (widow of Emperor Valentinian III) and her daughters had been taken as hostages .

The plan was concerted between Eastern Emperor Leo , Western Emperor Anthemius , and General Marcellinus , who enjoyed independence in Illyricum . Basiliscus was ordered to sail directly to Carthage , while Marcellinus attacked and took Sardinia , and a third army , commanded by

Heraclius of Edessa , landed on the Libyan coast east of Carthage , making rapid progress . It appears that the combined forces met in Sicily , whence the three fleets moved at different periods .

Ancient and modern historians provided different estimations for the number of ships and troops under the command of Basiliscus , as well as for the expenses of the expedition . Both were enormous ; Nicephorus Gregoras speaks of one hundred thousand ships , the more reliable Cedrenus says that the fleet that attacked Carthage consisted of eleven hundred and thirteen ships , having each one hundred men on board . The most conservative estimation for expedition expenses is of 64 @, @ 000 pounds of gold , a sum that exceeded a whole year 's revenue .

Sardinia and Libya were already conquered by Marcellinus and Heraclius , when Basiliscus cast anchor off the Promontorium Mercurii , now Cap Bon , opposite Sicily , about forty miles from Carthage . Geiseric requested Basiliscus to allow him five days to draw up the conditions of a peace . During the negotiations , Geiseric gathered his ships and suddenly attacked the Roman fleet . The Vandals had filled many vessels with combustible materials . During the night , these fire ships were propelled against the unguarded and unsuspecting Roman fleet . The Roman commanders tried to rescue some ships from destruction , but these manoeuvres were blocked by the attack of other Vandal vessels .

Basiliscus fled in the heat of the battle . One half of the Roman fleet was burned , sunk , or captured , and the other half followed the fugitive Basiliscus . The whole expedition had failed . Heraclius effected his retreat through the desert into Tripolitania , holding the position for two years until recalled ; Marcellinus retired to Sicily , where he was reached by Basiliscus ; the general was , however , assassinated , perhaps at the instigation of Ricimer , by one of his own captains ; and the king of the Vandals expressed his surprise and satisfaction , that the Romans themselves would remove from the world his most formidable antagonists .

After returning to Constantinople , Basiliscus hid in the church of Hagia Sophia to escape the wrath of the people and the revenge of the Emperor . By the mediation of Verina , Basiliscus obtained the Imperial pardon , and was punished merely with banishment to Heraclea Sintica , in Thrace .

= = Rise to power = =

In 471 and 472 , Basiliscus helped Leo I to get rid of the Germanic influence in his court , helping in the murder of the Alan Magister militum Aspar . The death of Aspar caused a revolt in Thrace , led by the Thracian Ostrogoth Theodoric Strabo , and Basiliscus was dispatched to suppress the revolt , something he successfully did with the aid of his nephew Armatus . In 474 he received the rank of caput senatus , " first among the senators " .

At the death of Leo , Zeno , who was a " barbarian " of Isaurian stock , but at the same time son @-@ in @-@ law of Leo , ascended to Emperor , after a short reign of his own son Leo II (474) . The " barbarian " origins of the Emperor caused antipathy towards Zeno among the people of Constantinople . Furthermore , the strong Germanic portion of the military , led by Theodoric Strabo , disliked the Isaurian officers that Leo I brought to reduce his dependency on the Ostrogoths . Finally , Zeno alienated his fellow Isaurian general Illus , who was bribed by Basiliscus . In the middle of the conspiracy was Verina , who fomented a popular revolt against the Emperor . The uprising , supported by Theodoric Strabo , Illus and Armatus , was successful , and Verina convinced the Emperor to leave the city . Zeno fled to his native lands , bringing with him some of the Isaurians living in Constantinople , and the Imperial treasury .

Basiliscus was then acclaimed as Augustus on 9 January 475 at the Hebdomon palace , by the palace ministers and the Senate . The mob of Constantinople got its revenge against Zeno , killing almost all of the Isaurians left in the city .

In the beginning , everything seemed to go well for the new Emperor , who even tried to set up a new dynasty by conferring the title of Augusta upon his wife Aelia Zenonis and creating his son Marcus , Caesar , and later Augustus ; however , due to his mismanagement as emperor , Basiliscus quickly lost most of his supporters .

= = Rule = =

== Corruption and the fire of Constantinople ==

The most urgent problem facing the new Emperor was the scarcity of resources left in the imperial treasury . Basiliscus was forced to raise heavy taxes , and to revert to the practice of auctioning the offices , obviously causing a diffuse discontent in the population . He also extorted money from the church , with the help of the Prefect Epinicus , Verina 's long @-@ time favourite .

Early in his reign , Constantinople suffered a massive fire , which destroyed houses , churches , and completely incinerated the huge library built by Emperor Julian . The fire was seen as a bad omen for the rule of Basiliscus .

== Tensions with his collaborators ==

Basiliscus had relied on the support of some major figures of the court in his bid for power . However , he quickly lost most of them . First , Basiliscus alienated his own sister Verina 's support , executing the Magister Officiorum Patricius . Patricius was the lover of Verina , and the empress had planned to raise him to the imperial rank and to marry him : the very revolt against Zeno had been organised to make Patricius emperor . Basiliscus , however , had out @-@ witted his sister , and , after the flight of Zeno , had the ministers and the Senate choose him , and not Patricius , as Emperor . Basiliscus ordered the death of Patricius , as the officer was a natural candidate to overthrow the new Emperor ; as a consequence , Verina later intrigued against Basiliscus , because of her lover 's execution .

Also , Theodoric Strabo , whose hatred of the Isaurian Zeno had compelled him to support Basiliscus ' revolt , left the new Emperor 's side . Basiliscus had in fact raised his own nephew Armatus , who was rumoured to be also the lover of Basiliscus ' wife , to the rank of magister militum , the same that Strabo held . Finally , the support of Illus was most likely wavering , given the massacre of the Isaurians allowed by Basiliscus .

== Religious controversies ==

In that time , the Christian faith was shaken by the contrast between Miaphysites and Chalcedonians . These were two opposing christological positions ; the Chalcedonians claimed that Christ had both human and divine natures , while the Miaphysites claimed he had only one single united nature . The Council of Chalcedon , convoked by Emperor Marcian in 451 , had ruled out Miaphysitism , with the support of the pope in the West and many bishops in the East . However , the Miaphysite position was still strong : the two Miaphysite Patriarchs Timothy Aelurus of Alexandria and Peter the Fuller of Antioch were deposed .

From the beginning of his rule , Basiliscus showed his support for the Miaphysites . Zacharias Scholasticus reports how a group of Egyptian Miaphysite monks , having heard of Emperor Leo 's death , had moved from Alexandria to Constantinople to petition Zeno in favour of Timothy , but at their arrival in the capital , they found the newly elected Basiliscus instead . The Magister Officiorum Theoctistus , the former physician of Basiliscus , was the brother of one of the monks , so the delegation obtained an audience with Basiliscus , and , with the support of Theoctistus and of the Empress , they convinced Basiliscus to recall from exile the banished Miaphysite Patriarchs .

Basiliscus re @-@ instated Timothy Aelurus and Peter the Fuller to their sees , and by persuasion of the former issued (9 April 475) a circular letter (Enkyklikon) to the bishops calling them to accept as valid only the first three ecumenical synods , and reject the Council of Chalcedon . All bishops were to sign the edict . While most of the Eastern bishops accepted the letter , Patriarch Acacius of Constantinople refused , with the support of the population of the city , clearly showing his disdain towards Basiliscus by draping the icons in Hagia Sophia in black .

== Fall and death ==

Soon after his elevation , Basiliscus had despatched Illus and his brother Trocundus against Zeno , who , now in his native fortresses , had resumed the life of an Isaurian chieftain . Basiliscus , however , failed to fulfill the promises he made to the two generals ; furthermore , they received letters from some of the leading ministers at the court , urging them to secure the return of Zeno , for the city now preferred a restored Isaurian to a Miaphysite whose unpopularity increased with the fiscal rapacity of his ministers .

During his operations in Isauria , Illus took Zeno 's brother , Longinus , prisoner and kept him in an Isaurian fortress . Because he thought he would have great influence over a restored Zeno , he changed sides and marched with Zeno towards Constantinople in the summer of 476 . When Basiliscus received news of this danger , he hastened to recall his ecclesiastical edicts and to conciliate the Patriarch and the people , but it was too late .

Armatus , as magister militum , was sent with all available forces in Asia Minor , to oppose the advancing army of the Isaurians , but secret messages from Zeno , who promised to give him the title of magister militum for life and to confer the rank of Caesar on his son , induced him to betray his master . Armatus avoided the road by which Zeno was advancing and marched into Isauria by another way . This betrayal decided the fate of Basiliscus .

In August 476 , Zeno besieged Constantinople . The Senate opened the gates of the city to the Isaurian , allowing the deposed emperor to resume the throne . Basiliscus fled to sanctuary in a church , but he was betrayed by Acacius and surrendered himself and his family after extracting a solemn promise from Zeno not to shed their blood . Basiliscus , his wife Aelia Zenonis and his son Marcus were sent to a fortress in Cappadocia , where Zeno had them enclosed in a dry cistern , to die from exposure .

Basiliscus had ruled for twenty months . He is described by sources as a successful general , but slow of understanding and easy to deceive .