



Summary :

A rebellion of the *komes* of Opsikion Artavasdos/Artabazos against Emperor Constantine V Kopronymos, which was met with a short-lived success. It broke out at Dorylaeum in the summer of 741 and in June 27 of the same year Artabasdus was proclaimed emperor of the Romans. Constantine V's entry into Constantinople in November 2, 743 marked the definitive suppression of the civil conflict between the various imperial forces that supported the two opponents.

Date

June 741-November 743

Geographical Location

Dorylaeum, Constantinople

1. Historical context

1.1. General

The reign of [Leo III the Isaurian](#) (717-741) was a period of political stability. Before that, however, from 695 onwards, the empire was tested by successive feuds between contenders to the throne, who in many cases were general in the themes of Asia Minor; this was because, among other factors, the criterion for an emperor's endurance on the throne was his ability to protect Asia Minor from the [Arab raids](#). Through the clash of the contenders close ties and enmities developed between the [strategoi](#) of the themes and their subordinate soldiers. Under these circumstances, the [themes](#) of Asia Minor played an active role in politics. Cooperation between the themes was the result of the rapprochement of their *strategoi*, which was defined by their loyalty (or lack thereof) to the emperor and concomitantly to the imperial policy on various issues. During the reign of Leo II the [theme of Opsikion](#) was on the side of the defeated political camp, for Theodosios III, an emperor elevated to the throne by the Opsikians, was deposed by Leo, the *strategos* of the [theme of Anatolikon](#), with the support of [Artabasdus](#), strategos of the [theme of Armeniakon](#).¹ Those from the theme of Anatolikon were considered to be most loyal to the dynasty of the former general and emperor.

1.2. The circumstances

When Leo III passed away in 741 and co-emperor [Constantine V](#) succeeded him on the throne, it was deemed that central power had been weakened. The Arabs resumed their pillaging incursions in Asia Minor for the first time after ten years, and contenders to the throne emerged in the interior of the empire. They were the protagonists of the movements that had brought Leo III to power but lacked dynastic rights, as did the late emperor, but, as it would become apparent, they were highly ambitious persons. The first to challenge the rightful successor was the son-in-law of Leo III,² the [patrikios](#) Artabasdus, [comes](#) of Opsikion and [kouropalates](#). In 741 the patrikios Artabasdus was komes of the Opsikion theme but his influence extended also into the Armeniakon theme, due to his Armenian descent, as well as because he had earlier been strategos of that theme. After the death of Leo III, cooperation between the Armeniakon and Anatolikon themes flagged, while there was increased collaboration between the Opsikion and Armeniakon themes, as well as between the Armeniakon and the European 'Thrakoon' theme, which was under the command of one of Artabasdus' sons. On the other side, in the context of Artabasdus' rebellion, cooperation between the themes of Anatolikon and of [Thrakesion](#) was intensified.³

2. The rebellion of Artabasdus



2.1. The outbreak of the rebellion

Following the death of Leo III on June 18, 741,⁴ while Constantine V was on his way through the Opsikion theme to face an Arab invasion, he was unexpectedly attacked by the komes of Opsikion, patrikios Artabasdōs at [Dorylaeum](#); he was defeated and sought refuge at [Amorion](#), possibly on June 22. Artabasdōs was proclaimed emperor by his army, while his collaborators in Constantinople, the patrikios and [magistros](#) Theophanes Monotes and the [silintarios](#) Athanasios, spread the rumour that Constantine V was dead; on June 27, 741 they proclaimed Artabasdōs emperor, who, as kouropalates, was the de jure successor of the late emperor. It is thought certain that in late July Artabasdōs was still in Constantinople. He was crowned emperor of the Romans by Patriarch Anastasios. He enjoyed the support of the Opsikion and of the Armeniakon themes, which he had commanded in the past, as well as of the theme of Thrace, which was made responsible for the defence of Constantinople, under the leadership of his son, patrikios Theophanes Monotes. In the meantime Constantine V had managed to win over the Anatolikon and gain the support of the Thracesian theme, and of its strategos Sisinnios. He attempted to chase Artabasdōs to Chrysopolis, but the rebel managed to enter Constantinople, thus the military operations were postponed for the next campaign period.

2.2. Reign of Artabasdōs

Artabasdōs as well as his supporters ceased to uphold the [iconoclastic reformation](#).⁵ The new emperor minted coins, associated his first-born son to the throne (most probably in the spring of 742, when he had become firmly established) and appointed his second-born [Niketas](#) strategos of the Armeniakon theme and [monostrategos](#) of the themes of Asia Minor, i.e. supreme commander of all the thematic armies. On December 10, 741 Pope Zacharias formally recognized Artabasdōs. At the same time, the deposed Isaurian, Constantine V, had become an independent ruler in Asia Minor – he even maintained diplomatic relations with Constantinople. During this period the Arabs resumed their raids in Asia Minor.

2.3. Outbreak and unfolding of the civil conflict

The first surprise moves by Artabasdōs in June 741, carried out with the support of the Opsikion, Armeniakon and Thrakoon theme, did not secure him complete supremacy over Constantine V, who managed to escape to Amorion, seat of Leo III in the past; from there he organized his efforts to seize the throne back. Constantine he enjoyed the support of the two thematic armies of Asia Minor: of the Thracesian theme, commanded by strategos Sisinnios, and that of the Anatolikon theme, commanded by Constantine himself. Artabasdōs' rebellion became a fierce power struggle that implicated the empire's troops into a bloody civil war, which costed the lives of many soldiers.

In May 742 the first battle took place; it was fought between the Opsikians under Artabasdōs and the Anatoliks under Constantine V close to [Sardis](#). This engagement ended with Artabasdōs' defeat and retreat as far as [Kyzikos](#). On August 742 at Modrine of [Bithynia](#), general Niketas, leading the Armeniakos, was defeated too although he enjoyed numerical superiority over his opponents, Constantine V and strategos Sisinnios, who were leading the armies of the Anatoliks and the Thracesian respectively. Now the road to Constantinople lay open. On September 742, general Sisinnios transported his forces through [Abydos](#) to the European coast and laid siege to the capital, cutting off lines of communication with Adrianople to the north; at the same time, the naval [theme of Kibyrrhaiotai](#), which had now joined Constantine V's camp, blockaded the city by sea. There is no information on any operations in Europe, or in general on the implication of the theme of Thrace in the conflict. As soon as the blockade of the capital was arranged, Constantine V camped outside the city walls, and his first action was to show himself to the citizens who believed him dead, coursing the distance from the gate of Charsion to the Golden Gate.

2.4. Suppression of the rebellion

The efforts of the besieged to brake through were met with failure. We are informed that the ships in Artabasdōs' disposal were burned down during these attempts and that many of his soldiers were captured. At some point Artabasdōs fought with Constantine V outside the gate of the [land wall](#), but he was defeated and retreated to the besieged city. As was to be expected, gradually the siege was causing a famine. A year after its commencement, the prices of foodstuffs had become astronomical; there were deaths because



of the famine, and people started abandoning the city.⁶ Then strategos Niketas crossed to Asia Minor, and rallied his men that had scattered after his defeat at Modrine. But Constantine caught up with him and leading the Anatolikon and a contingent of the Thracasian army he pursued him as far as [Nicomedia](#), where he decisively defeated and arrested him, breaking the morale of the rebels besieged in the capital. Constantine returned to Constantinople and challenged Artabasdos to save his son. The rebel did not react. At midday of November 2, 743 Constantine stormed the city, thus regaining his throne.⁷ Artabasdos fled to Asia Minor accompanied by a small retinue of Opsikians. Constantine V chased him down and finally arrested him at the castle of Poutzana at Bithynia, located south of Nicomedia and [Nicaea](#), where he had found refuge. The suppression of the rebellion was sealed with the punishment of its leaders: Patriarch Anastasios was pilloried and flogged in the [Hippodrome](#); Artabasdos and his sons Nikephoros and Niketas were blinded, while the other protagonists of the movement were mutilated (their hands and legs were cut off).⁸

3. Consequences

The most important consequence of Artabasdos' rebellion was the civil war fought between the troops of the themes of Asia Minor; this was a protracted conflict with a heavy blood toll, especially for the camp of the Anatoliks, although the fighting was restricted to northwest Asia Minor. Taking advantage of the internal political instability in Byzantium, the Arabs returned to the fore resuming their pillaging raids into Asia Minor immediately after Leo III's death and for the entire duration of the conflict between Artabasdos and Constantine V. It has been argued that the establishment of the [Boukellarion theme](#) should be dated to 743 and should be considered as a punishment of the rebellious Opsikion theme. This view rests on the fact that the new theme included lands taken from Opsikion, resulting in the weakening of the older theme. The victory of the iconoclast Constantine V also signalled the triumph of Iconoclasm, which during this period is beginning to acquire a new ideological foundation and supporters among the soldiers of the themes of Asia Minor. Furthermore, it led to the firm establishment of a dynasty on the Byzantine throne for the first time after a long period in which the hereditary status of the office had become inconsequential.

1. The Greek sources use the name Αρταύασδος; the Arab sources describe him as Artabasdos and the Armenian ones as Artavas. According to a single piece of evidence he was a Syrian, but he was most likely a Hellenized Armenian, and thus as most recent scholars believe this name is a Hellenized form of the Armenian one. Other variant forms found in the secondary literature are Artabazos and Artavausdos.
2. On Artabasdos' relation to the family of Leo III (the Isaurian) -he had married Anna, Leo's daughter- see, for instance, Θεοφάνης, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. DeBoor, Ch., vols. I- II (Leipzig 1883), p. 386. 17-19, 395.10-12, and Βίος Μιχαήλ Συγγέλου, *The Life of Michael the Synkellos*, ed. Cunningham, M.B. (Belfast 1991), p. 108.
3. It has been argued that the cause of Artabasdos' rebellion was his opposition to Leo III's religious reforms; see Κουντούρα-Γαλάκη, Ελεονώρα, *Ο βυζαντινός κλήρος και η κοινωνία των σκοτεινών αιώνων* (Αθήνα 1996), pp. 133, 139, 140; Kountoura Galake, Eleonora, «The Armeniac Theme and the Fate of its Leaders», in *Η Βυζαντινή Μικρά Ασία (6ος-13ος αιώνας)* (ΕΙΕ/ΙΒΕ-Κέντρο για τη Μελέτη του Ελληνισμού «Σπύρος Βρυώνης», Αθήνα 1998), pp. 27-38; Rochow, Use, *Kaiser Konstantin V (741-775); Materialien zu seinem Leben und Nachleben* (mit einem prosopographischen Anhang von Ludwig, Claudia, Rochow, Use und Lilie, R.J.), (*Berliner Byzantinistische Studien 1*, Berlin 1994). The officials of the empire, people loyal to Leo III, had cooperated with the emperor and the patriarch of Constantinople Anastasios to help the implementation of the iconoclastic policy. Those who disagreed were removed from office. Leo III and the generals of the themes most certainly were in agreement. At any rate, there are no references to the supposed opposition of the komes of the Opsikion Artabasdos. It is thought that he later joined the iconodule camp, when he revolted against the fervent iconoclast Constantine V; Santoro believes that he relied on his alliance with the iconodules and later rewarded them, see Santoro, A.R., *Byzantium and the Arabs during the Isaurian Period 717 - 802, A.D.* (New Brunswick 1978), p. 237; on the contrary, Speck doubts Artabasdos' implemented a iconophile policy, even after his ascent to the throne, a view which is not considered very convincing, see P. Speck, *Artavasdos, der rechtdubige Vorkämpfer der göttlichen Lehren: Untersuchungen zur revoke des Artavasdos und ihrer Darstellung in der byzantinischen Historiographie* (*Ποικίλα Βυζαντινά 2*, Bonn 1981) and the book review by W. Treadgold στην *American Historical Review* 88.1 (Febr. 1983), pp. 94-5. In this entry we follow the prevailing view.
4. In 741, or 742 according to most scholars following the dating of the Greek sources. Ostrogorsky, G., "Die Chronologie des Theophanes im 7. und 8. Jahrhundert", *Byzantini-Neugriech.* 1930), pp. 1-56, convincingly argues for the year 741; in this he is followed by Speck, P., *Artavasdos, der rechtdubige Vorkämpfer der göttlichen Lehren: Untersuchungen zur revoke des Artavasdos und ihrer Darstellung in der byzantinischen Historiographie* (*Ποικίλα Βυζαντινά 2*, Bonn 1981), who enriches the arguments (drawing on Latin and Arab sources and testimonies included in short chronicles). Belke, K. - Mersich, N., *TIB 7*, and Belke, K., *TIB 9*, Kaegi, W.E., "The Byzantine Armies and Iconoclasm", *Byzantinoslavica* 27 (1966), pp.



48-78, and Kaegi, W.E., *Byzantine Military Unrest 471-843, an Interpretation* (Amsterdam 1981), pp. 239-244, as well as more recent scholars also agree on this. Rochow, Use, "Bemerkungen zur Revoke des Artabasdos aufgrund bisher nicht beachtet Quellen", *Klio* 68 (1986), pp. 191-198, validly argues that Artabasdos remained on the throne for more than two years.

5. In 741 the official state ecclesiastical policy had been imposed, however, the subjects of the European provinces remained iconophiles. Furthermore, the majority of the people that had embraced iconoclasm retained their doubts with respect to the correctness of renouncing the icons, above all the soldiers of the themes that defended iconoclasm during the reign of Leo III irrespective of their personal beliefs, see. Kaegi, W.E., "The Byzantine Armies and Iconoclasm", *Byzantinoslavica* 27 (1966), pp. 48-78. At any rate, Artabasdos from the start became the leader of the iconophiles and restored the icons with the support of the up to then iconoclast patriarch of Constantinople Anastasios. Speck, P., *Artavasdos, der rechtdubige Vorkämpfer der gottlichen Lehren: Untersuchungen zur revoke des Artavasdos und ihrer Darstellung in der byzantinischen Historiographie* (*Ποικίλα Βυζαντινά* 2, Bonn 1981), argues that there was no restoration of the icons under Artabasdos. Santoro reckons that he relied on the help of the iconodules and then rewarded them; see Santoro, A.R., *Byzantium and the Arabs during the Isaurian Period 717 - 802, A.D.* (Rutgers University - The State University of New Jersey New Brunswick, Ph.D., 1978) (University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA 1982), p. 237. Most scholars, however, are positive that Artabasdos annulled the iconoclastic reform.

6. See Θεοφάνης, *Theophanis Chronographia* I- II, ed. De Boor, Ch.(Leipzig 1883), p. 419.10-25: the siege, p. 419.25-30, 420.1-5: the famine.

7. Earlier secondary literature held that the rebellion spanned the period between 742 and 743. Speck, P., *Artavasdos, der rechtdubige Vorkämpfer der gottlichen Lehren: Untersuchungen zur revoke des Artavasdos und ihrer Darstellung in der byzantinischen Historiographie*, (*Ποικίλα Βυζαντινά* 2, Bonn 1981) argues that Artabasdos' ascent to the throne occurred in 741 (together with Ostrogorsky, G., "Die Chronologie des Theophanes im 7. und 8. Jahrhundert", *Byzantini-Neugriech. Jahrbuch* 7 (1930), pp. 1-56) and that his downfall came in 743; he questions, however, the dating of the military operations in this year. See also Rochow, Use, "Bemerkung zur Revoke der Artabasdos aufgrund bisher nicht beachteter Quellen", *Klio* 68 (1986), pp. 191-198. O Kaegi, W.E., *Byzantine Military Unrest 471-843, an Interpretation* (Amsterdam 1981), pp. 239-240, dates the rebellion to 741-742. This view cited here rests on the fact of the famine, whose impact, if we accept that it unfolded during the two-month siege (early September 742 or 743 - November 3, 742 or 743), appears inordinate. It is thought reasonable that the siege lasted longer. Santoro, A.R., *Byzantium and the Arabs during the Isaurian Period 717-802, A.D.* (New Brunswick 1978), p. 240, and Παπαρρηγόπουλος, Κ., *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού έθνους 4: από Ιουστινιανού μέχρι Λέοντος Γ'*, pp. 384-386, accept that a two-month siege brought about famine, given the importance of Balkan produce for the alimentation of the population (Santoro) or because of Artabasdos' failure to import provisions into the capital from the Aegean islands (Παπαρρηγόπουλος). The Latin sources provide support for 743, and not 742, as the year in which the rebellion was suppressed; more specifically we read, among else, that "Artabasdos lasted" until that year; we also have two further pieces of information: from the *Βίος του Μιχαήλ Συγκέλλου*, where it is said that Artabasdos reigned for two years and four months, and from the *Πάτρια Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*, where it is mentioned that he remained in power for three years; see Speck, *ibid.* and Rochow, *ibid.* p. 197.

8. Immediately after his defeat of Artabasdos, Constantine V successfully faced the rebellion of patrikios Sisinnios, general of the Thracian theme, and sentenced him to blinding.

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Glossary :

	comes
1. A title in the Roman and the Byzantine Empires, designating an official with political but mostly military jurisdiction. Especially the <i>comes Orientis</i> held the position corresponding to that of a vicar in Early Byzantine period. In the years of Justinian I, the comes in head of wider provinces assumed political and military powers, while in the Middle Byzantine period the Opsikion theme was one of the few themes which was the jurisdiction of a comes instead of a strategos. 2. A nobility title in medieval Europe.	
	kouropalates
A high-ranking dignity, which from Justinian I was conferred on members of the imperial family and on foreign princes. During the 11th c. it was conferred on several generals, not belonging to the imperial family.	
	magistros
Higher office than Philotheos in his Kletorologion places above the anthypatos. This title lost its importance from the 10th century and gradually disappeared - most probably in the middle of the 12th century.	
	monostrategos
A term used in Byzantine sources to denote a theme's general when the latter, apart from leading his own troops, also took command of neighbouring themes, either to better organise defence in a broad front or to conduct offensive operations under a unified command.	
	patrikios
(from lat. <i>patricius</i>) Higher title of honour, placed, according to the " <i>Tactika</i> " of the 9th and the 10th centuries, between <i>anthypatos</i> and <i>protospatharios</i> . It was given to the most important governors and generals. Gradually, however, it fell into disuse and from the 12th century did not exist any more.	
	silintarios, silentiarios
The silentiarios or silintarios (from the Latin <i>silentium</i>) in the Early Byzantine period was official responsible for secure order in and silence in the palace. After the 6 th c their role decreased and the title of silentiarios became ceremonial.	
	strategos ("general")
During the Roman period his duties were mainly political. Office of the Byzantine state's provincial administration. At first the title was given to the military and political administrator of the themes, namely of the big geographic and administrative unities of the Byzantine empire. Gradually the title lost its power and, already in the 11th century, strategoi were turned to simple commanders of military units, responsible for the defence of a region.	

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Quotations

The famine in Constantinople consequence of the siege:

[...] ἐγένετο δὲ λιμός ἰσχυρά ἐν τῇ πόλει, ἔστε πρᾶθῆναι τὸν μόδιον τῆς κριθῆς νομισμάτων ἰβ, τοῦ δὲ ὀσπρίου ἰθ, τοῦ δὲ κέγχρου καὶ τοῦ λουπίνου νομισμάτων ἦ, τὸ δὲ ἔλαιον ε λίτραι τοῦ νομίσματος, καὶ ὁ ἕξστης τοῦ οἴνου σημισίου· τοῦ δὲ λαοῦ θνήσκοντος, ἠναγκάσθη Ἀρταύασδος ἀπολύειν αὐτοῖς πρὸς τὸ ἐξέρχασθαι τῆς πόλεως· ἐπιτηρῶν δὲ τὰ πρόσωπα τοῖς μὲν ἐκώλυεν· ὅθεν τίνας ἐκώλυσαν τὰ ἑαυτῶν πρόσωπα καὶ γυναικειῖαν στολὴν περιεβάλλοντο, οἱ δὲ μοναδικὸν σχῆμα καὶ τριχίνην στολὴν· καὶ οὕτως ἠδύνατο λαθεῖν καὶ ἐξελεῖν.

De Boor, Ch. (ed.), *Theophanis Chronographia I* (Leipzig 1883), σελ. 419-420.

How long did Artabasdōs reign?

Ἀρτάβασδος δὲ, ὁ τυραννήσας τὸν καβαλλῖνον καὶ κρατήσας χρόνους τρεῖς καὶ τυφλωθεὶς, ἀκίνητα κτήματα [...]



Patria Constantinopoleos, Preger, Th. (ed.), *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanorum* II (Leipzig 1907; repr. New York 1975), p. 239.63.

Artabasdos's punishment

ἐκτυφλώσας γὰρ τὸ τῆς αὐτοῦ ἀδελφῆς Ἄννης σύζυγον, τὸν ὀρθοδοξότατον ἀνακτα Ἀρτάβασδον τοῦνομα, ἐν ὑπερορίᾳ κατεδίκησεν ἐν τῇ προλεχθείσῃ μονῇ σὺν τῇ συζύγῳ καὶ τοῖς αὐτοῦ ἐννέα παισίν...

Cunningham, M.B. (ed.), *The Life of Michael the Synkellos* (Belfast 1991), σελ. 108.10-11.

Chronological Table

June 18, 741: Death of Leo III

Between June 18 and June 27, 741: Constantine V is defeated at Dorylaeum by Artabasdos (leading the army of the theme of Opsikion). Artabasdos is proclaimed emperor at Dorylaeum

June 27, 741: Artabasdos is proclaimed emperor at Constantinople

December 10, 741: Artabasdos is recognized by pope Zacharias

May 742: Artabasdos (leading the Opsikion army) is defeated at Sardis by Constantine V (leading the army of the theme of Anatolikon)

August 742: *Strategos* Niketas (of the theme of Armeniakon) is defeated at Modrine by Constantine V (theme of Anatolikon) and *strategos* Sisinnios (theme of Thrakesion)

Late summer of 742 – fall of 743: Constantinople is besieged and blockaded by the forces of the themes of Thrakesion, of Anatolikon and of the Kibyrrhaiotai

Before November 2, 743: *Strategos* Niketas regroups his forces at Chrysopolis. *Strategos* Niketas (of the theme of Armeniakon) is defeated and arrested by Constantine V (leading the army of the theme of Anatolikon and part of the army of the theme of Thrakesion) at Nicomedia

November 2, 743 (midday): Constantine V storms and captures Constantinople. He regains his throne

November 2, 743 Artabasdos flees. Artabasdos is arrested at the castle of Poutzana (in the theme of Opsikion) by Constantine V