Authoring : *Kamara Afroditi*
Translation : *Καμάρα Αφροδίτη*

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Summary :

In 311 A.D. Constantine and Licinius were co-emperors, the former in the West and the latter in the East. Each one's ambition was to become sole emperor and they pursued their goal by undermining one another. Their strife ended in two wars, one in 314 in Italy and a second one in 323, from which Constantine emerged as victor.

Date

314, 323 AD

Geographical Location

Italy, Hadrianople, Asia Minor

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1. The civil strives after the death of Galerius

Constantine's way to the imperial throne and the recreation of an empire governed by a single emperor, after the Tetrarchy instigated by Diocletian (284-305), was copious and bloody. The period after the death of Galerius, Diocletian's successor, was marked by a series of civil wars aiming at supremacy. Constantine, who had succeeded his father Constantius Chlorus at the government of Britain almost with a cue in 306,[1] deliberately pursued the formation of family ties with the emperor Maximian[2] and his son Maxentius by marrying at a second wedding the former's daughter, Fausta. After Galerius' death in 311, there were three remaining candidates for the throne: Valerius Licinianus or Licinius -whom Galerius had appointed his co-emperor, and governor of Illyricum, Thrace and the Danube provinces-, Galerius' nephew Maximinus Daia -whom his uncle had appointed Caesar in 305 in charge of the eastern part of the empire- and Constantine. However, Maxentius had also aspirations to the throne, and he probably had bitter feelings for being left out -and perhaps rightly so.[3] With Maximian's death Maxentius turned openly against Constantine, whom he accused as a murderer and rebel, ordering the erasion of his name from all the inscriptions of Italy at least.

In order to face Maxentius successfully, Constantine joined sides with Licinius, since the territories which Maxentius had taken over belonged technically to him. Licinius, however, could not deal with the usurper at that point, as he was preoccupied with the defection of Maximinus Daia in the East. The arrangement between Licinius and Constantine was sealed with an engagement, that of Licinius with Constantine's half sister, Constantia.

After a victorious advance in Italian territories, Constantine met finally Maxentius in battle on February 28th, 312, at the Milvian Bridge, outside Rome. Shortly before this decisive battle, Constantine saw the famous vision of “in this you win”, which is considered as the incentive for his conversion to Christianity.[4] After the battle and the death of Maxentius, Constantine remained sole master in Europe, although the Italian territory, which he had freed from the usurper, belonged to Licinius.

2. Constantine and Licinius as co-emperors

The two augusti initially seemed to be on good terms, despite the agreement between Licinius and Maximinus in 312 on the Bosporus, after which the latter continued to govern the eastern provinces, to persecute the Christians and to treat the subjects with violence. In the spring of 312 Maximinus broke this agreement, crossed the Bosporus and conquered Byzantion and the surrounding areas. Licinius, who already discussed with Constantine the possibility of issuing a decree of religious tolerance, moved against him and crushed Maximinus. After his victory he entered Nicomedia triumphantly and on the 13th of June of the same year he issued the edict of religious freedom thus giving the Christians the chance to express their faith publicly. The edict is known under the name “Edict of Milan”, since it was in that city that its content had been agreed upon between Constantine and Licinius.[5] The latter had thus taken under his control the entire eastern part of the empire. In order to eliminate every bit of resistance by Maximinus' supporters he imposed a regime of terror and started executing ministers of his usurper predecessor, as well as members of the latter's family. He didn't show respect not even to the widow of Galerius and daughter of Diocletianus, Valeria, and his mother, Prisca, who were

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executed.

3. The first clash

When he secured his power in the East, Licinius started plotting against Constantine. However his plot was revealed, but Constantine avoided taking further measures. In the beginning of summer 314 Licinius took one more provocative action against his co-emperor. He ordered that all statues of Constantine in Aemona (modern Ljubliana), a city right on the western borderline of his territory, should be destroyed. Constantine considered this provocation as the proclamation of war and returned from Gaul, where he was stationed with his entire army. The battle took place at Cibalis, in the valley of river Sarros, on the 8th of October.[6] Constantine won and forced Licinius to sign a peace treaty and to adhere to him all his Balkan possessions, but he acknowledged his supremacy on Asia, Egypt and Libya. Fearing a new provocation by Licinius, Constantine transferred his capital to the east, from Sirmium to Serdica (modern Sofia).

4. The second clash

For a few years the relations between the two emperors remained on a fragile balance. In 320, however, Licinius showed again a provocative behaviour. Despite the edict of tolerance which he had signed together with Constantine, he took some anti-Christian measures, by abolishing councils in his area of jurisdiction and by removing bishops and clerics from their positions. The answer of Constantine was immediate and well-targeted: he abolished the tradition of appointing one consul from the East and one from the West, he proclaimed as consuls for the year 320 himself and his first-born son Crispus, whereas in the next year he proclaimed as consuls his two sons, Crispus and Constantine, still a minor. At the same time he ordered the construction of a huge war fleet, which he aimed at using against his rival. Licinius, on the other hand, prepared also his army and fleet. However, until 322 the two enemies waited for an instigation to start the war.

The pretext was given when Constantine, in the course of a military expedition against the Sarmatians, led his troops to Thrace. Licinius marched against him with a large army, consisting mainly of inhabitants of Asia Minor and Syria. The battle took place at the outskirts of Hadrianople on the 3rd of July 323. Despite his defeat Licinius used Byzantion as a defense point and proclaimed his rival destitute from imperial power. Constantine waited patiently in Hadrianople until his fleet came. The next stage of the war took place at the Sea of Marmara. Constatine's fleet under the leadership of Crispus, after a battle which lasted for two days, crushed the fleet of Licinius, led by Avantos, and headed towards the city of Byzantion. Licinius, terrified, crossed over to the Asian shores. Constantine pursued him and achieved another great victory in Chrysoupolis (modern Üsküdar) on the 18th of September. Licinius then fortified himself in his capital, Nicomedeia, but Constantine's final victory was imminent and Licinius' wife persuaded him to surrender. In fact she went to her half-brother herself in order to mediate for the clauses of the surrender. Constantine accepted the surrender of his rival and deported him in Thessalonica; he also deported his prime minister, Marcus Martianus, to whom Licinius had conferred the title of Augustus, to Cappadocia.

Yet, Constantine's respect for his rivals lasted only for a few months. Under undefined conditions the two men were executed shortly afterwards.

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1. In fact it was the army which proclaimed Constantine caesar. Constantine accepted the proclamation and announced it to Galerius, which was not happy at all, but avoided taking measures against such a popular officer. During the six years of his governorship in Britain, Constantine built a reputation for the strength of his character, at times becoming a model of morality and at times reaching bestiality, in order to maintain order and the Roman power.

2. Maximian, under the instigation of Diocletian, had abdicated in 305, but two years late he revoked his abdication and entered the political arena again.

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3. Maxentius' father, Maximian, committed suicide in 311, after a failed effort to turn the legions of Gaul against Constantine. However, since 306 Maxentius had undertaken the title of Princeps Romanorum, thus maintaing the supremacy in Italy at least.

4. For the vision of the cross and the conversion of Constantine to Christiantiy see Eus., *Eccl.Hist.* I.26-27 and Lactantius, *De Mort.Pers.*44. See also Nicholson, O., “Constantine's vision of the Cross”, *Vigiliae Christianae* 54.3 (2000), pp. 309-323.

5. For the edict of Tolerance see Eus., *Eccl.Hist.* 10.5 and Lactantius, *De Mort.Pers.*48. See also MacMullen, R., *Christianizing the Roman Empire* (New Haven 1984) and Barnes, T.D. *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge Mass.1981).

6. See Alföldi, M.R., “Die Niederenmeler “Kaiserfibel”: zum Datum des ersten Krieges zwischen Konstantin und Licinius”, *BJ* 176 (1976), pp. 183-200. Also Di Maio, M.-Zeuge,J.-Bethune, J., “The Proelium Cibalense et Proelium Campi Ardiensis: the First Civil War of Constantine I and Licinius I”, *Ancient World* 21 (1990), pp. 67-91.

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Quotations

The Edict of Milan

Ἤδη μὲν πάλαι σκοποῦντες τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς θρησκείας οὐκ ἀρνητέαν εἶναι, ἀλλ᾽ ἑνὸς ἑκάστου τῇ διανοίᾳ καὶ τῇ

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βουλήσει ἐξουσίαν δοτέον τοῦ τὰ θεῖα πράγματα τημελεῖν κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ προαίρεσιν ἕκαστον, κεκελεύκειμεν τοῖς τε Χριστιανοῖς τῆς αἱρέσεως καὶ τῆς θρησκείας τῆς ἑαυτῶν τὴν πίστιν φυλάττειν· ἀλλ᾽ ἐπειδὴ πολλαὶ καὶ διάφοροι αἱρέσεις ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἀντιγραφῇ, ἐν ᾗ τοῖς αὐτοῖς συνεχωρήθη ἡ τοιαύτη ἐξουσία, ἐδόκουν προστεθεῖσθαι σαφῶς, τυχὸν ἴσως τινὲς αὐτῶν μετ᾽ ὀλίγον ἀπὸ τῆς τοιαύτης παραφυλάξεως ἀπεκρούοντο.
ὁπότε εὐτυχῶς ἐγὼ Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ Αὔγουστος κἀγὼ Λικίννιος ὁ Αὔγουστος ἐν τῇ Μεδιολάνῳ ἐληλύθειμεν καὶ πάντα ὅσα πρὸς τὸ λυσιτελὲς καὶ τὸ χρήσιμον τῷ κοινῷ διέφερεν, ἐν ζητήσει ἔσχομεν, ταῦτα μεταξὺ τῶν λοιπῶν ἅτινα ἐδόκει ἐν πολλοῖς ἅπασιν ἐπωφελῆ εἶναι, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐν πρώτοις διατάξαι ἐδογματίσαμεν, οἷς ἡ πρὸς τὸ θεῖον αἰδώς τε καὶ τὸ σέβας ἐνείχετο, τοῦτ᾽ ἔστιν, ὅπως δῶμεν καὶ τοῖς Χριστιανοῖς καὶ πᾶσιν ἐλευθέραν αἵρεσιν τοῦ ἀκολουθεῖν τῇ θρησκείᾳ ᾗ δ᾽ ἂν βουληθῶσιν, ὅπως ὅ τί ποτέ ἐστιν θειότητος καὶ οὐρανίου πράγματος, ἡμῖν καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ὑπὸ τὴν ἡμετέραν ἐξουσίαν διάγουσιν εὐμενὲς εἶναι δυνηθῇ. τοίνυν ταύτην τὴν [ἡμετέραν] βούλησιν ὑγιεινῷ καὶ ὀρθοτάτῳ λογισμῷ ἐδογματίσαμεν, ὅπως μηδενὶ παντελῶς ἐξουσία ἀρνητέα ᾖ τοῦ ἀκολουθεῖν καὶ αἱρεῖσθαι τὴν τῶν Χριστιανῶν παραφύλαξιν ἢ θρησκείαν ἑκάστῳ τε ἐξουσία δοθείη τοῦ διδόναι ἑαυτοῦ τὴν διάνοιαν ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ θρησκείᾳ, ἣν αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἁρμόζειν νομίζει, ὅπως ἡμῖν δυνηθῇ τὸ θεῖον ἐν πᾶσι τὴν ἔθιμον σπουδὴν καὶ καλοκἀγαθίαν παρέχειν· ἅτινα οὕτως ἀρέσκειν ἡμῖν ἀντιγράψαι ἀκόλουθον ἦν, ἵν᾽ ἀφαιρεθεισῶν παντελῶς τῶν αἱρέσεων, αἵτινες τοῖς προτέροις ἡμῶν γράμμασι τοῖς πρὸς τὴν σὴν καθοσίωσιν ἀποσταλεῖσι περὶ τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἐνείχοντο καὶ ἅτινα πάνυ σκαιὰ καὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας πραότητος ἀλλότρια εἶναι ἐδόκει, ταῦτα ὑφαιρεθῇ καὶ νῦν ἐλευθέρως καὶ ἁπλῶς ἕκαστος αὐτῶν τῶν τὴν αὐτὴν προαίρεσιν ἐσχηκότων τοῦ φυλάττειν τὴν τῶν Χριστιανῶν θρησκείαν ἄνευ τινὸς ὀχλήσεως τοῦτο αὐτὸ παραφυλάττοι. ἅτινα τῇ σῇ ἐπιμελείᾳ πληρέστατα δηλῶσαι ἐδογματίσαμεν, ὅπως εἰδείης ἡμᾶς ἐλευθέραν καὶ ἀπολελυμένην ἐξουσίαν τοῦ τημελεῖν τὴν ἑαυτῶν θρησκείαν τοῖς αὐτοῖς Χριστιανοῖς δεδωκέναι, ὅπερ ἐπειδὴ ἀπολελυμένως αὐτοῖς ὑφ᾽ ἡμῶν δεδωρῆσθαι θεωρεῖ ἡ σὴ καθοσίωσις καὶ ἑτέροις δεδόσθαι ἐξουσίαν τοῖς βουλομένοις τοῦ μετέρχεσθαι τὴν παρατήρησιν καὶ θρησκείαν ἑαυτῶν, ὅπερ ἀκολούθως τῇ ἡσυχίᾳ τῶν ἡμετέρων καιρῶν γίνεσθαι φανερόν ἐστιν, ὅπως ἐξουσίαν ἕκαστος ἔχῃ τοῦ αἱρεῖσθαι καὶ τημελεῖν ὁποίαν δ᾽ ἂν βούληται [τὸ θεῖον]. τοῦτο δὲ ὑφ᾽ ἡμῶν γέγονεν, ὅπως μηδεμιᾷ τιμῇ μηδὲ θρησκείᾳ τινὶ μεμειῶσθαί τι ὑφ᾽ ἡμῶν δοκοίη. καὶ τοῦτο δὲ πρὸς τοῖς λοιποῖς εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον τῶν Χριστιανῶν δογματίζομεν, ἵνα τοὺς τόπους αὐτῶν, εἰς οὓς τὸ πρότερον συνέρχεσθαι ἔθος ἦν αὐτοῖς, περὶ ὧν καὶ τοῖς πρότερον δοθεῖσιν πρὸς τὴν σὴν καθοσίωσιν γράμμασιν τύπος ἕτερος ἦν ὡρισμένος τῷ προτέρῳ χρόνῳ, [ἵν᾽] εἴ τινες ἢ παρὰ τοῦ ταμείου τοῦ ἡμετέρου ἢ παρά τινος ἑτέρου φαίνοιντο ἠγορακότες, τούτους τοῖς αὐτοῖς Χριστιανοῖς ἄνευ ἀργυρίου καὶ ἄνευ τινὸς ἀπαιτήσεως τῆς τιμῆς, ὑπερτεθείσης [δίχα] πάσης ἀμελείας καὶ ἀμφιβολίας, ἀποκαταστήσωσι, καὶ εἴ τινες κατὰ δῶρον τυγχάνουσιν εἰληφότες, τοὺς αὐτοὺς τόπους ὅπως ἢ τοῖς αὐτοῖς Χριστιανοῖς τὴν ταχίστην ἀποκαταστήσωσιν οὕτως ὡς ἢ οἱ ἠγορακότες τοὺς αὐτοὺς τόπους ἢ οἱ κατὰ δωρεὰν εἰληφότες αἰτῶσί τι παρὰ τῆς ἡμετέρας καλοκἀγαθίας προσέλθωσι τῷ ἐπὶ τόπων ἐπάρχῳ δικάζοντι, ὅπως καὶ αὐτῶν διὰ τῆς ἡμετέρας χρηστότητος πρόνοια γένηται. ἅτινα πάντα τῷ σώματι τῷ τῶν Χριστιανῶν παρ᾽ αὐτὰ διὰ τῆς σῆς σπουδῆς ἄνευ τινὸς παρολκῆς παραδίδοσθαι δεήσει· καὶ ἐπειδὴ οἱ αὐτοὶ Χριστιανοὶ οὐ μόνον ἐκείνους εἰς οὓς συνέρχεσθαι ἔθος εἶχον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἑτέρους τόπους ἐσχηκέναι γινώσκονται διαφέροντας οὐ πρὸς ἕκαστον αὐτῶν, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸ δίκαιον τοῦ αὐτῶν σώματος, τοῦτ᾽ ἔστιν τῶν Χριστιανῶν, ταῦτα πάντα ἐπὶ τῷ νόμῳ ὃν προειρήκαμεν, δίχα παντελῶς τινος ἀμφισβητήσεως τοῖς αὐτοῖς Χριστιανοῖς, τοῦτ᾽ ἔστιν τῷ σώματι [αὐτῶν] καὶ τῇ συνόδῳ [ἑκάστῳ] αὐτῶν ἀποκαταστῆναι κελεύσεις, τοῦ προειρημένου λογισμοῦ δηλαδὴ φυλαχθέντος, ὅπως αὐτοὶ οἵτινες τοὺς αὐτοὺς ἄνευ τιμῆς, καθὼς προειρήκαμεν, ἀποκαθιστῶσι, τὸ ἀζήμιον τὸ ἑαυτῶν παρὰ τῆς ἡμετέρας καλοκἀγαθίας ἐλπίζοιεν. ἐν οἷς πᾶσιν τῷ προειρημένῳ σώματι τῶν Χριστιανῶν τὴν σπουδὴν δυνατώτατα παρασχεῖν ὀφείλεις, ὅπως τὸ ἡμέτερον κέλευσμα τὴν ταχίστην παραπληρωθῇ, ὅπως καὶ ἐν τούτῳ διὰ τῆς ἡμετέρας χρηστότητος πρόνοια γένηται τῆς κοινῆς καὶ δημοσίας ἡσυχίας. τούτῳ γὰρ τῷ λογισμῷ, καθὼς καὶ προείρηται, ἡ θεία σπουδὴ περὶ ἡμᾶς, ἧς ἐν πολλοῖς ἤδη πράγμασιν ἀπεπειράθημεν, διὰ παντὸς τοῦ χρόνου βεβαίως διαμείναι. ἵνα δὲ ταύτης τῆς ἡμετέρας νομοθεσίας καὶ τῆς καλοκἀγαθίας ὁ ὅρος πρὸς γνῶσιν πάντων ἐνεχθῆναι δυνηθῇ, προταχθέντα τοῦ σοῦ προστάγματος ταῦτα τὰ ὑφ᾽ ἡμῶν γραφέντα πανταχοῦ προθεῖναι καὶ εἰς γνῶσιν πάντων ἀγαγεῖν ἀκόλουθόν ἐστιν, ὅπως ταύτης τῆς ἡμετέρας καλοκἀγαθίας ἡ νομοθεσία μηδένα λαθεῖν δυνηθῇ.

Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 10.5.

Chronological Table

311: Death of Galerius. Licinius, Maximinus Daia and Constantine are candidates for succession. Alliance between Licinius and Constantine against Maximinus Daia and Maxentius

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312: Constantine and Licinius issue the Edict of Milan, offering religious freedom to the citizens of the empire, especially the Christians

312-314: Stability between Constantine and Licinius

314, early summer: Licinius orders the destruction of all the statues of Constantine in the city of Aemona at the western frontier of his dominion. Constantine views the destruction as casus belli

314, October 8: Battle between Licinius and Constantine at Cibalis, at the valley of Sarros. Licinius retreats from the Balkans

320: Anti-christian action by Licinius forces Constantine to stage a coup.

320-322: Both sides organise their land and naval forces

323, July 3: Battle between Licinius and Constantine at Hadrianople. Licinius is defeated and returns to Byzantium

323, end of summer: Naval battle at the Sea of Marmara. Licinius' fleet, under the command of Avantus, is crushed by Constantine's fleet which is under the command of his son, Crispus

323, September 18: Victory of Constantine over Licinius at Chrysoupolis. Licinius flees to Nicomedeia

323, early October: Licinius surrenders and is exiled to Thessaloniki