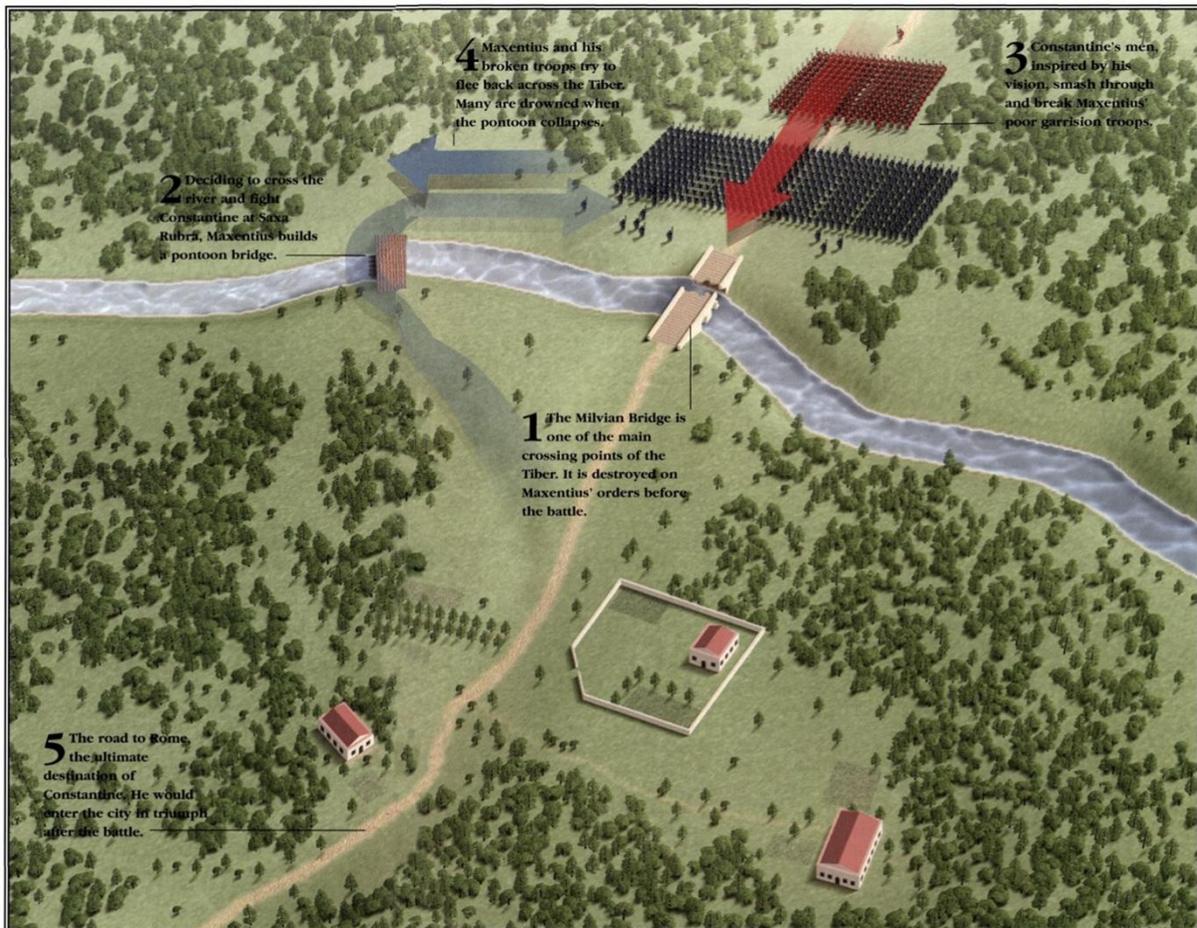




Good day Worthy Knights

In this part 8, you will be presented with the military aspects of the Battle and its aftermath.



It was expected that Maxentius would remain within Rome and endure a siege, as he already had successfully employed this strategy during the invasions of Severus and Galerius.

He had already brought large amounts of food to the city in preparation. Surprisingly, he decided otherwise and met Constantine in open battle. Ancient sources about the event attribute this decision either to divine intervention (e.g., Lactantius, Eusebius) or superstition (e.g., Zosimus).

Inside Rome the oracle had told Maxentius that on that particular day, the enemy of Rome would die. Assuming that the enemy of Rome was Constantine and not himself Maxentius moved his troops across the Tiber River on a wooden pontoon-like bridge built to replace the Milvian Bridge that he had destroyed to stop Constantine.

They also note that the day of the battle was the same as the day of his accession (October 28), which was generally thought to be a good omen. Lactantius also reports that the populace supported Constantine with acclamations during circus games, though it is not clear how reliable his account of the event is.

Maxentius chose to make his stand in front of the Milvian Bridge, a stone bridge that carries the Via Flaminia road across the Tiber River into Rome (the bridge stands today at the same site, somewhat remodelled, named in Italian Ponte Milvio or sometimes Ponte Molle, soft bridge).

With reference to the wooden bridge, the sources vary as to the nature of the bridge central to the events of the battle.

Zosimus mentions it, vaguely, as being a wooden construction others specify that it was a pontoon bridge; sources are also unclear as to whether the bridge was deliberately constructed as a collapsible trap for Constantine's forces or not.

Holding it, was crucial if Maxentius was to keep his rival out of Rome, where the Senate would surely favour whoever held the city.

The next day, the two armies clashed, and Constantine won a decisive victory.

The Maxentius' Scouts were too slow and by the time Maxentius and his army reached Saxa Rubra, Constantine and his army had departed and positioned themselves on the hills of the via Flaminia in order to flank Maxentius's army to force them against the river.

The dispositions of Maxentius may have been faulty as his troops seem to have been arrayed with the River Tiber too close to their rear, giving them little space to allow re-grouping in the event of their formations being forced to give ground.

Already known as a skilful general, Constantine first launched his cavalry at the cavalry of Maxentius and broke them.

Constantine's infantry then advanced. Most of Maxentius's troops fought well but they began to be pushed back toward the Tiber River.

Maxentius decided to retreat and make another stand in Rome itself; but there was only one escape route, via the wooden bridge. Constantine's men inflicted heavy losses on the retreating army.

Finally, the temporary bridge set up alongside the Milvian Bridge, over which many of the troops were escaping, collapsed, and those men stranded on the north bank of the Tiber were either taken prisoner or killed.

Maxentius' Praetorian Guard seems to have made a stubborn stand on the northern bank of the river. Maxentius was among the dead, having drowned in the river while trying to swim across it in a desperate bid to escape or, alternatively, he is described as having been thrown by his horse into the river.

Lactantius describes the death of Maxentius in the following manner: "The bridge in his rear was broken down. At sight of that the battle grew hotter. The hand of the Lord prevailed, and the forces of Maxentius were routed. He fled towards the broken bridge; but the multitude pressing on him, he was driven headlong into the Tiber."

Aftermath

Constantine entered Rome on 29 October 312.

He staged a grand *adventus* in the city, and was met with popular jubilation.

Maxentius' body was fished out of the Tiber River and decapitated. His head was paraded through the streets for all to see. After the ceremonies, Maxentius' disembodied head was sent to North Africa (now Tunisia), the main supply of grains to Rome and Italy, which gave no further resistance or uprisings. The battle gave Constantine undisputed control of the western half of the Roman Empire.

Following the battle, Constantine ignored the altars to the gods prepared on the Capitol to receive sacrifices appropriate for the celebration of his victorious entry into Rome, and the new emperor instead went straight to the imperial palace without performing any sacrifice.

He chose to honour the Senatorial Curia with a visit, where he promised to restore its ancestral privileges and give it a secure role in his reformed government: there would be no revenge against Maxentius' supporters.

Maxentius was condemned to *damnatio memoriae*, all his legislation was invalidated and Constantine usurped all of Maxentius' considerable building projects within Rome, including the Temple of Romulus and the Basilica of Maxentius.

Maxentius' strongest supporters in the military were neutralized when the Praetorian Guard and Imperial Horse Guard (*equites singulares*) were disbanded. Constantine is thought to have replaced the former Imperial Guards with a number of cavalry units termed the *Scholae Palatinae*.

