ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΜΕΙΖΟΝΟΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΥ

Authoring : *Vougiouklaki Penelope*
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Summary :

Member of the dynasty of the Grand Komnenoi and emperor of Trebizond (1417-1429). In 1396 Alexios IV was made co-emperor and he assumed power in 1417. In 1429 he was murdered by members of the local aristocracy during the rebellion of his son John, the future John IV Grand Komnenos.

Other Names

Date and Place of Birth

1382, Trebizond

Date and Place of Death

1429, Achanti of Pontos

Main Role

Emperor of Trebizond (1417-1429)

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1. Biography

Alexios IV Grand Komnenos was born on 19 January 1382 in Trebizond.[1] He was the son of Manuel III Grand Komnenos (1390-1417) and Koulkahad (renamed Eudokia), daughter of David VII, king of Georgia (1318-1360). In 1395 he married Theodora Kantakouzene, with whom he had four daughters[2] and three sons: Alexander and the future emperors John IV (1429-1458) and David (1458-1461). His daughters' names remain unknown, except Maria Grand Komnene, wife of the Byzantine emperor, John V Palaiologos (1425-1448) and Irene Grand Komnene, wife of the Serbian despot Đurađ Brancović (1427-1456). In 1395 he was already co-emperor and he became emperor of Trebizond after his father's death in 1417.[3]

In 1429 Alexios was murdered by his son's supporters in the area of Achanti, near the town of Trebizond. He was buried at the monastery of Theotokos Theoskepastos and later his relic was moved to a magnificent tomb, built by John IV at the back of the Bema of the temple of the Panagia Chrysokephalos. After the Greek campaign in Asia Minor, Alexios IV's remains were transferred to Greece and placed in the monastery of Panagia Soumela in the Macedonia region.

2. Dynastic conflicts

Some time before 1427, while John was co-emperor, he attempted to dethrone his father Alexios IV. Written sources indicate that he intended to murder his parents, but his efforts were thwarted by the people and members of the aristocracy.[4] After this unsuccessful attempt, John fled to Georgia, where he married the daughter of the Georgian king Alexander (1413-1443).

During his absence from Trebizond, his younger brother Alexander (1413-1443), second son of Alexios IV, was made co-emperor; it was this action that turned John against his father for a second time. In this second effort, John had the military support of the Georgian king, and he was joined by the Kabasitai and the Scholarios family; the two aristocratic families were often present in the political scene of Trebizond, constantly striving to obtain more power.

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John was also discretely supported by Genoa.

In 1427 John moved from Georgia to the area of Kaffa, where he remained for a short while, trying to gain support from Genoa. However, the Genoese did not wish to aid him officially, despite the fact that they offered him a heavily armed ship. John boarded this ship in 1429 in Agios Phokas, with a plan to arrest the emperor.

However, the archontes executing the plan did not follow his orders and murdered Alexios IV Grand Komnenos, who at the time was awaiting his son's military forces in Achanti. John entered the city of Trebizond immediately after his father's murder and was crowned emperor. His first act was to severely punish his father's murderers and to bury Alexios IV with suitable honours.

3. Imperial patronage

Alexios IV Grand Komnenos (1417-1429), like his predecessors, was the benefactor of many monasteries and churches. In 1427 he built a tower in the courtyard of the monastery of St Sophia and he restored the monastery of St George Peristereotes; with a chrysobull he issued with his son John, he also gave land and paroikoi to the monastery of the Panagia of Pharos. In 1426 he confirmed the right of the monastery of St Dionysios in Mount Athos to receive the annual sum of 1000 silver coins directly from the monastery of Chaldos and not from the imperial treasury, as was the practice until then.[5] A depiction of the emperor had survived until recently in the chapel of the tower that he had build in the monastery of St Sophia.

4. Foreign policy

During his reign, Alexios IV Grand Komnenos was confronted by the Genoese, who were fighting an economic war with the Empire of Trebizond, since his father's reign (Manuel III 1390-1417). Facing a possible Genoese attack, Alexios signed a treaty in 1418 and was forced to offer compensation for the destruction of Genoese possessions within the lands of the Empire. In his diplomatic relations with Muslim and Christian rulers of his time, Alexios IV managed to secure the territories of his Empire against external threats, by continuing his grandfather's policy (Alexios IV Grand Komnenos 1349-1390) of marriages between other rulers and the female members of the dynasty of Grand Komnenoi. He allied himself through marriage with the Turcoman rulers Jihan Shah of the Mauroprobatades and Ali Beg of the Asproprobatades, with the Serbian despot Đurađ Brancović (1427-1456) and with the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaiologos (1425-1448).

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1. See Σαββίδης, Α., «Αλέξιος Δ' Μέγας Κομνηνός», *Εγκυκλοπαιδικό Προσωπογραφικό Λεξικό Βυζαντινής Ιστορίας και Πολιτισμού* 1 (Athens 1996), p. 246.

2. It is probable that the emperor had an illegitimate daughter, Valencia, who married Niccolo Crispo, duke of the Archipelagon and *archon* of Santorini. This opinion is supported by Varzos. See Βαρζός, Κ., «Η μοίρα των τελευταίων Μεγάλων Κομνηνών της Τραπεζούντας», *Βυζαντινά* 12 (1983), pp. 269-289, especially p. 269.

3. According to the Spanish traveller Pero Tafur, Manuel III's death was caused by his son Alexios IV. See Letts, M. (ed. - trans.), *Pero Tafur, Travels and adventures 1435-1439* (London 1926), pp. 116, 130, 138, 150· Vasiliev, A.A., "Pero Tafur, a Spanish traveller of the fifteenth century, and his visit to Constantinople, Trebizond and Italy", *Βυζάντιον* 7 (1932), pp. 75-122· Vasiliev, A.A., "A note on Pero Tafur", *Βυζάντιον* 10 (1935), pp. 65-66. Bryer also poses some questions concerning Manuel's relationship with his son Alexios IV, based on the accounts of Tafur and Clavijo. See Bryer, A., "The faithless Kabazitai and Scholarioi", in Moffatt, A. (ed.), *Maistor. Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning (*Byzantina Australiensia 5, Canberra 1984), reprint in *People and Settlement in Anatolia and the Caucasus, 800-1900 (*Variorum Reprints Collected Studies, London 1988), pp. 309-327, especially p. 315-318.

4. See Bryer, A., "The faithless Kabazitai and Scholarioi", στο Moffatt, A. (ed.), *Maistor. Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning (*Byzantina Australiensia 5, Canberra 1984), επανεκτ. στο *People and Settlement in Anatolia and the Caucasus, 800-1900* (Variorum Reprints Collected Studies, London 1988), pp. 309-327, especially p. 318.

5. See Bryer, A. – Winfield, D., *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos I* (Dumbarton Ooaks Studies 20, Washington D.C. 1985), p. 327.

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Glossary :

archon

Term that designates a governor in general. When it is not used in a technical sense, it denotes members of the aristocracy, high officers of the byzantine empire and it is even used for independent princes.

bema

The area at east end of the naos in Byzantine churches, containing the altar, also referred to as the presbetery or hierateion (sanctuary). In these area take place the Holy Eucharist.

chrysobull

(gold seal) Imperial document of the Byzantine state which was so named because it bore the gold seal of the emperor.

paroikos

(Byz.) Dependent peasants, usually on estates of large landowners or on ecclesiastical estates.

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Chronological Table

1382: Birth of Alexios

1395: Marriage to Theodora Kantakouzene

1396: Alexios becomes co-emperor

1416: Privileges bestowed upon the monastery of St Dionysios in Mount Athos

1417: Alexios IV Grand Komnenos becomes sole emperor

After 1417: John – the future John IV Grand Komnenos – becomes co-emperor

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1418: Peace treaty with the Genoese

Before 1427: Unsuccessful conspiracy organised by John / John flees to Georgia

Before 1427: Alexander becomes co-emperor

1427: Military expedition against Alexios IV organised by his son John

1429: Alexios is murdered by members of the local aristocracy, during the revolt of his son John / John IV is proclaimed emperor in Trebizond.

Auxiliary Catalogs

Catalogue of the emperors of Trebizond

Alexios I (1204 -1222)

Andronikos I (Gidon) (1222 - 1235)

John I (Axouchos) (1235 -1238)

Manuel II (1238 -1263)

Andronikos II (1263 -1266)

George (Planos) (1266 - 1280)

John II (1280 -1285)

Theodora (1285)

John II (again 1285 - 1297)

Alexios II (1297 -1230)

Andronikos III (1330 -1332)

Manuel II (1332)

Basil (1332 -1340)

Eirene Palaiologina (1340 - 1341)

Anna (Anachoutlou) (1341-1342)

John III (1342-1344)

Michael (1344 -1349)

Alexios III (1349 - 1390)

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Manuel III (1390 -1417)

Alexios IV (1417 - 1429)

John IV (1429 - 1458)

Alexios V (1458)

David (1458-1461)